

# CITY OF AUSTIN PARKS, RECREATION, AND FORESTRY DEPARTMENT

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2019 Annual Report



# **PARKS, RECREATION, AND FORESTRY DEPARTMENT**

## **500 NE 4 AVENUE AUSTIN, MN**

### **MISSION**

The Austin Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department creates community through people, parks, and programs. We strengthen community image and sense of place, support economic development, safety and security, promote health and wellness, foster human development, increase cultural unity, protect environmental resources, facilitate community problem solving, and provide recreational experiences.

### **PARKS, RECREATION & FORESTRY ACCOMPLISHMENTS for 2019**

- Completed C.I.P. projects:
  - Metal roofing on a number of pavilions throughout various parks.
- “Community Pride” clean-up day continued as a week-long volunteer effort, providing volunteers greater scheduling flexibility.
- December 2019, we submitted our Tree City USA application for the 40<sup>th</sup> year.
- Forestry crew & operators removed 243 trees and stumps; pruned 118; planted 39 boulevard trees, and planted 10 in various parks.
- Had a new small pavilion constructed (by Riverland construction trades class students, under the supervision of their instructor) near the dam on East Side Lake.
- Installed new equipment and poured-in-place injury-prevention surfacing under it at Shirley Theel Memorial Park.
- Planted 4 replacement honorary trees at Lions Park.
- Added mulch around all trees along the Tree Trek at East Side Lake.
- Planted 4 trees with SUA along the southeast border of Todd Park.
- Power 96 Home & Vacation Show in Packer Arena.
- Cedar River Rabbit Club continues to host their rabbit show at Packer Arena.
- There were 3 bouts in Packer Arena hosted by the MN Southbound Rollers.
- The Welcome Center hosted the Taste of Nations at Packer for the first time at this venue.
- The department/City host Section and Sub-section tournaments each year at Todd Park and Riverland Baseball Complex as well as several invitational tournaments.
- Continue to collaborate with organizations for the betterment of the Community as our Department takes pride in serving the community’s needs and wants.
- Added a new park bench along Queen of Angels via private request and related donation.
- Added IOOF plaques to a number of previously donated and installed benches.
- Added (seasonal) portable restrooms at the outdoor rinks located at Kaufman and Galloway, as well as at Skinner’s Hill.
- Applied for funding from Hormel Foundation to replace nine scoreboards at Todd Park complexes. Approved to replace in 2020.
- Applied for funding top add to curling equipment for Packer Arena leagues. Approved for purchasing in 2020.
- Saw to it that the lighted “Austin” sign near the Nature Center is repaired and operational.
- Met with DNR and Mower County Soil and Water regarding getting trout stocked in Wolf Creek within Todd Park. This is slated to happen twice within 2020.

## **EQUIPMENT PURCHASED IN 2019**

- Replaced #48 1-ton truck (after it was totaled in a traffic mishap) with a used, outgoing unit from AU.
- Ordered new boom truck in March 2019, and it finally arrived in February 2020.
- Pursued the necessary resources and got approved to purchase an additional 6-foot mower (w/cab enclosure), deck, and snowblower for 2020.

## **PARKS, RECREATION & FORESTRY GOALS FOR 2020**

- Continue to assess our park system to add upgrades:
  - Continue to upgrade playgrounds.
  - Continue to replace sand in non-flood areas under play equipment with wood fiber or other options which meet ADA.
- Continue to adapt recreation programming to changing needs and trends for youth and adults.
- Embrace new ideas and have an open mind on change.
- Be a good steward of the environment - partner with others.
- Request to carry-over funding from our 2019 projects which were started and not completed.
- Complete several CIP projects for 2020 and continue to plan for future projects that enhance APR park system.
- Implement a Master Plan for Parks, Recreation, and Trails.
- Construct planned pickleball courts at Rotary Park.

## **CREW**

Forestry Crew - The forestry crew performs the maintenance on all trees in boulevards and parks in the city of Austin. They remove and trim trees which block the view of street signs and also those in preparation for street construction. They are amongst the first to get called in following (tree) storm damage on boulevards, clearing the way of City trees, limbs, and branches which may have fallen, thus obstructing streets, driveways, and sidewalks. The team grinds all of the tree stumps and cleans up shrubs and trees from the City's right-of-way areas. Letters are mailed (from APR Department) to private property owners, instructing them of need to do the same to dead, dangerous, and/or diseased trees. This crew also works with other maintenance staff within our park system with mowing, hauling from the garbage routes, flooding rinks, and other work as necessary.

Mowing Crew - The mowing crew has a huge responsibility with 1,580-plus park acres, 52,800 linear feet along trails, in addition to flood areas (1,125 acres - as weather and ground conditions permit), the library, arenas, and senior center.

Not long after the grass-growing season ends, following parks winterizing and parks clean-up, the parks crew digs into their winter-season work of removing snow (as weather dictates) from 16 miles of city sidewalks, which include the library, Town Center, both arenas, and Mill Pond path. Parking lots snow removal includes parts of City Hall, Jay C. Hormel Nature Center, the parks shop, and the outdoor rinks. The majority of City trails do not have winter maintenance; however, when deemed necessary to use a path to get to another area to plow, paths are cleared. The parks crew is also called upon by the street department to assist them with plowing or hauling snow.

Mechanic - The Parks Department mechanic does everything from major overhauls on engines and transmissions, to tune ups on weed eaters. He also assists with mowing and removing snow as

necessary. The Parks mechanic keeps equipment for parks crews running smoothly and on schedule. The majority of his work is performed at the central garage building.

Park Maintenance/Equipment Operators & Construction - They have their hands full keeping the park system healthy and usable for the public. Buildings are constructed and maintained by this crew; they're truly jacks of all trades. During the summer months, one individual, who is a certified pool operator, is pulled from parks duties to prep and maintain the municipal pool(s). During certain projects, his time is split. Equipment operators also assist the tree crew when they are removing trees or grinding stumps.

Flower Crew - Temporary/seasonal employees are hired for the growing season to water and care for the city's flowers. Duties include caring for the plantings within existing hanging flowerpots, and within ground planters in public areas, including the library building, municipal building, and Sterling medians. The total of hanging flower baskets in 2019 was 248. The plantings arrangements were the same as most years.

Seasonal Crews - This sizeable group includes all of extra summer help who operate equipment such as the smaller mowers weed eaters; also included in the group are the weed inspector, the landscaper/planter, the ball diamond maintenance crew, summer recreation instructors and officials, and pool staff. Extensive parks maintenance and programming are made possible with the assistance of the department's seasonal staff. The winter staff are just as important in assisting with staffing the needs at the arenas, as well as the warming houses for outdoor rinks and the sledding hill, plus others for winter recreation programs.

## NOTES

- Members from all City departments meet monthly as a safety committee to help solve dangerous issues. They strive to put together policy to ward off workplace injuries.
- There were 183 weed orders processed, and of those orders 88 were billed to the property owner. If the bills were not paid, they were assessed to the property taxes of the respective owners.
- There were 83 garden plots rented within the Community Gardens in 2019 (4 were unavailable due to a street/sewer project which ran through a portion of the garden plots.)
- The Parks crew were involved with the preparation and clean-up for the July 4 Festival celebration as well as many of the other community-driven events. This can involve cleaning, moving the and set-up of the show-mobile, benches, and picnic tables, hanging flags, and much more. During the summer, when the Concert in the Park band plays, a member from the Parks crew hauls the equipment for each event.
- The Parks department maintains the library grounds as well as inside repairs of that facility.
- The City Archery Deer Hunt was offered this past fall for the third consecutive year. The season ran mid-October through late-December. Nearly 140 deer have been collectively harvested in Austin over the course of these three seasons.

The Parks and Recreation Department also worked and continues to work with other government departments as requested as follows:

Street Department - Remove tree stumps and trim trees for street projects. Drive trucks for snow removal. Operate boom truck for hard-to-reach heights in the arenas during maintenance and in other areas of the city.

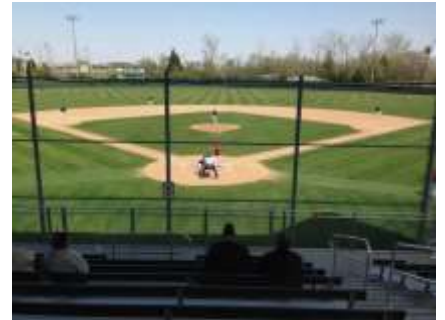
Austin Utilities - AU assist the Parks Department when as they trim trees around high voltage lines and by offering safety training for the tree crew when it comes to working around high voltage lines. The tree crew, in turn, assist them by chipping brush piles resulting from easement trimmings.

Mower County Highway - APR has, on an emergency-only basis, gone out to rural areas to assist in trimming back trees at site-obstructed intersections.

Austin Public Schools - APR has helped seed and level turf as well as trim and remove trees. This is a symbiotic relationship, so there is mutual aid to best utilize all playing fields and properties.

## **FACILITIES**

Riverland Baseball Complex- (April-October) Home to the Riverland Blue Devils, Club League, PHS/Lyle, Austin High School Varsity, Junior Varsity, A, B & C, American Legion, VFW, Austin Youth Baseball, Austin All-Star BB, and Hispanic League. In 2005, three fields were ready for play along with having the concession and restroom building up and running. In 2006, the new stadium on field number one was completed. The fourth field was renovated and usable. This complex has two lit fields: the stadium field (number one) and the original college field (number two).



RCC had 82 scheduled games, 1 Chevy Youth Baseball clinic, practice hours are in addition, All Stars 14AAA state qualifying tournament, and the MSF State 14AAA and 15AAA/AA tournaments in 2019.

Todd Park Softball Complex- (April-October) There are eleven fields combined between the north and south complexes. Field number ten, a pony baseball field, and field eleven, a softball field, are located on the east side of the north complex. Field number seven, a pony baseball field, is located within the 5-Diamond complex. Todd Park Complex users include



Park and Recreation youth & adult teams, Girls Fast Pitch softball, Austin Jr & High School, Pacelli/Lyle High School, Austin Youth Baseball, ARC Softball, Austin All-Star BB, and Minnesota State High School League for Sections 1A, 1AA, 1AAA & 1AAAA. There were 36 HS section fastpitch games played, 5 invitational and youth state tournaments, Youth softball and baseball clinics and baseball tryouts. There were 56 HS & JH games, 275 Adult SB & Kickball games, 10 dates for Special Olympics & 110 tee ball, peewee ball, 5-pitch & youth baseball games. This does not include the practice dates.

Todd Park Soccer Complex- (April-October) This complex has a total of six fields. These fields were largely funded by a Hormel Foundation grant. Users include Park and Recreation leagues, Austin Youth Soccer Club Teams, Middle School, Riverland College, community and Hispanic Men's league. There were 84 scheduled uses for leagues. This does not include unscheduled use for team practices. There was one week-end-long event with games played September 2 and 3.

Municipal Pool - (June 10-August 16) The City offers a 50-meter, ten-lane pool with concession area and bathhouse. The pool has a separate diving well with one 1-meter and one 3-meter diving board in addition to a 16-ft climbing wall. The Tot pool with a new bounce 4-seat Tot swing and splash pad are also separate to aid in safety of the little ones. In 2018 two new slides were added to the

main body of water, (1) 159-ft open flume, and (1) 60-ft speed. They still leave plenty of room to swim!

	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>
Tags/ Admissions:	\$56,736	\$49,015
Swim lessons:	482	434
Pool attendance:	11,762	10,078
Doggie dip:	66 (dogs)	Discontinued
Family Fun Night	383 (cold)	475
Water Exercise	51 (3 classes)	21 (3 classes)



Isaak Walton Cabin - Acquired in the fall of 1996, this year-round facility continues to be used for rentals and in-house programs. The building was utilized on 95 dates, with 75 of them being rentals in 2019.

Veterans Pavilion - (April 15-October 15) This spectacular addition to the park system was ready for public use June 1, 2002. In 2019, there were 49 rental dates and 8 community functions. (A sewer line improvement project prohibited rentals from July 22 through August 8.)

Park Pavilion Rentals - (April 15-October 15) In 2010, the board approved charging a rental fee for park pavilions which are fully accessible and have electricity.

	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	
<b>Todd Park</b>			
Northwest Pavilion	43	34	Rentals
Northeast Pavilion	28	23	Rentals
South Pavilion	19	22	Rentals
<b>Lions Park</b>			
West Pavilion	8	16	Rentals
East Pavilion	30	30	Rentals
<b>Horace Park</b>			
Horace Pavilion	3	5	Rentals
<b>Lafayette Park</b>			
Lafayette Pavilion	20	16	Rentals
<b>East Side Lake</b>			
Gazebo	7	6	Rentals
<b>Shirley Theel</b>			
Memorial Pavilion	<u>15</u>	<u>10</u>	Rentals
	<b>173</b>	<b>162</b>	



**Total Rentals**

Outdoor Rinks - The outdoor skating rinks in the community generally open from Christmas break through the end of February; weather permitting. Supervised warming houses with land and hockey rinks are located at Kaufman and Galloway. The outdoor rinks were open from December 28, 2018 to March 11, 2019. The total attendance logged at Kaufman, Skinner's Hill, and Galloway were 470 participants.

Riverside Arena and Packer Arena - These facilities are city-owned, managed by the Park and Recreation Department and maintained by the Austin Street Department. APR schedules ice time and supervisory staff at both facilities. Use includes that for Austin Youth Hockey, Austin High School, Riverside Figure Skating Club, private rentals, stick time, and public skate. Tables, chairs, and riser are available for rental for private events which are located off premises.

**Ice Hours Used by the following groups:**

	<b><u>'18 Riverside</u></b>	<b><u>'18 Packer</u></b>	<b><u>'19 Riverside</u></b>	<b><u>'19 Packer</u></b>
Youth Hockey	224	284	205	272.75
AHS Boys & Girls	225.25	11.5	199.75	16 (no JV teams)
Riverside Skate Club	109.5	4	139	9
Public Skate Hours	110.5	43.5	137.25	50.25
Stick Time Hours	66.75	8	124	6.25
Private Ice Rentals	158.25	10.5	94.75	7
Summer camps	58.75	-	95.25	-
Austin Bruins (practices)	204.25	7.5	176	3
Bruins (game hours)	148	-	120 (1/1-12/31)	

**Park & Rec Program Participant numbers:**                      **2018**                      **2019**

Skills & Drills (Mites – Bantams)	68	59
3 on 3 Hockey (Mites – Bantams)	121	143 (spring and fall)
Learn to Play Hockey – New in 2016	40	59
Learn to Skate; 1 session in '18	50	86 (2 sessions in '19)
Curling	27	49
Street Hockey new in '18	14	-
Public Skate	2,479	2,888
Stick Time	575	717

Riverside Arena - is the home of the Junior Hockey team, the Austin Bruins. The owners are Craig Patrick and Mike Cooper; the team's Head Coach is Steve Howard; the Assistant Coach is Keenan Kelly; and Associate Head Coach/Goaltender Coach is Al Rooney. The Austin Bruins have developed a great fan base offering some exciting hockey games since their first season began in the fall of 2010.



February 2, 2019 marked the ninth year of "Paint the Rink Pink" a fundraiser by the Bruins giving funds to the Hormel Institute for breast cancer research. During the season which ran September 2018 through March 2019, they played 29 home games.

**Dryland Events:**

Riverside Arena -

Figure Skate and Youth Hockey season registration - 3 days

Packer Arena -

- 4-H Rabbit Show - 2 days with set up and show
- Home and Vacation Show - 5 days with move in and out
- Taste of Nations - 2 days with set up and event
- Park & Recreation youth archery - 2 days/week, June-July
- Rain location for Park & Recreation youth tennis
- Roller Derby league April-September (included 3 bouts)



## DEPARTMENT SUPPORT FOR AREA ASSOCIATIONS

Austin Youth Football - APR transports equipment and accepts completed registration forms.

Hockey Association - APR rents them ice at both Riverside and Packer Arenas, and they utilize ice on outside rinks as well. The Association runs the concession stands in both arenas, and they further assist the department through the use of their equipment for APR “learn-to” programs. They have also purchased the rink divider boards, which are used with the Mite program as well as 3-on-3 programs.

Baseball Association - APR accepts registrations, lays red rock on the infields, maintains fences, and other duties. The Association runs the concessions at RCC, which has also contributed to much in terms of upgrades and additional maintenance at the fields. This complex benefits from many volunteer hours, which helps to contribute to its success; it would be difficult to operate within budget without their assistance.

Austin Youth Soccer - They continue to help with improvements to the soccer fields and with growing the game in the Austin area.

Spruce Up Austin - APR assists in ordering materials, plantings, and watering trees so that this group can continue to raise funds to beautify City green spaces. They have many volunteers who help to maintain many City parks and green spaces, and they also help to educate the community regarding the benefits of trees to the environment.

Austin Disc Golf Association - Continue working with them on the courses in Todd Park and Driesner Park. They have received many accolades on this course and are ranked in the top five in the state. The association is an active group who help to maintain and improve the two courses in Austin.



## PARKS

Bustad	14th Ave SW	Ballfield, playground
Bandshell Community	9th Place SW	Bandshell, sledding, play equipment, Veterans Pavilion, trail
Cullen	11th Ave SW	Playground equipment
Decker	6th Ave NE	Basketball, playground
Driesner North	Oakland Pl SE	Playground
Driesner South	Oakland Pl	Playground, shelter without electricity, 18-holes disc golf, trail
East Side Lake	Oakland Pl NE	Boat landing, fishing dock, playground, pavilion, gazebo, restrooms, Tree Trek, trail
Galloway	2nd Ave SW	Hockey & land rinks, warming house, playground
Honor Guard	8th St. NE	Resting bench, passive
Horace Austin	N Main St	Municipal pool, play equipment, skate park, fishing pier, access to Mill Pond & trail
Kaufman	11th Ave SE	Hockey & land rinks, warming house, play equipment



Lafayette	S Main St	Ball field, playground, restrooms, shelter w/electricity & trail
Lions Park	Oakland PI NE	Play equipment, restrooms, two shelters w/electricity, volleyball court & trail
Murphy Creek	7th Street NW	Play equipment, basketball, gazebo & trail
Jay C. Hormel Nature Center	1304 21st St NE	X-country skiing, restrooms, walking trail, interpretive center, Ruby Rupner Auditorium, log cabin
Northwest	13th Ave NW	Ball field, play equipment, shelter w/o electricity
Orchard Creek	16th Ave SW	Play equipment, basketball and gazebo w/electricity
Rotary Centennial Park	8th Ave SE	Horseshoe courts (across the Street), basketball courts, play equipment, two gazebos, restrooms with solar energy & trail
Sherman	6th Ave NW	Ball field, basketball, play equipment
Shirley Theel	400 25th St SW	Soccer field, ball field, play equipment, restrooms, pavilion & walking trail
South Grove	4th Drive SW	Ball field, basketball, play equipment, shelters & trail
Sterling	5th Ave SW	Playground equipment
Sutton	Oakland PI SE	Playground, shelter w/o electricity & trail
Todd	21st Ave NE	Ball fields, playgrounds, restrooms, shelters w/electricity, volleyball courts, disk golf course, soccer fields & trail
Whittier	3rd Ave SE	Greenway, natural habitat
Wildwood	16th Ave NW	Play equipment, natural habitat, trail
Worlein	606 NW 1 Dr	Benches, passive

## RECREATION

City recreation is responsible for planning, promoting, and organizing a comprehensive recreation program for all ages. The philosophy is to provide for the citizens of Austin the most complete recreation programs possible for the greatest number of people at the lowest price. Please keep in mind that programing for children and adult sports are for the most part self-supporting.

<b>SELF-SUPPORTING PROGRAMS</b>	2019	2018
<b><u>WINTER/FALL PROGRAMS</u></b>		
K - 6 <sup>th</sup> Grade Basketball	97	53
Archery League, ages 9-18 (Wed & Thurs) - 24 max	24	17
Dome Baseball ages 7-12	75	62
<b><u>SUMMER RECREATION</u></b>		
Golf, ages 6 and up	36	25
Water, Nature & Adventure (playground)- 12 max	12	12
Shake, Rattle & Read (playground) - 12 max	12	12
Track, ages 5 - adult	38	35
Tee Ball, 4-year olds	48	31
Tee Ball, 5-year olds	40	28
PeeWee ball, 6 & 7 year-olds	56	56
Youth Softball, ages 7-11	17	35
Soccer, ages 4-13	114	82
Tennis, ages 4-11	28	31

Archery Lessons, ages 9-18	24	12
Archery League, ages 9-18	16	10
Ellis Summer Swim '19 - shared registration with Com. Ed	24	39
<b><u>YOUTH VB, WRESTLING &amp; GFP</u></b>		
Girls and Boys Volleyball Club, U12 - U18		25
Victory Volleyball	9	6
Austin Youth Wrestling, grade K-6	45	58
MSF Volleyball Tournament	54	49
<b><u>SPECIAL EVENTS</u></b>		
Shamrock Open-NYWA Wrestling Qualifier	197	240
Noon Kiwanis Track Meets (both cancelled due to storms 2019)	0	342
Family Fun Night at the Pool	475	383
<b><u>ADULT PROGRAMS</u></b>		
Dome Flag Football	73	97
Softball Leagues (no fall league in '19)	334	394
Kickball League	103	66
Volleyball Leagues, Winter	51	59
Volleyball Leagues, Fall	49	52
Sand Volleyball League, Summer (no summer league in '19)	0	25



## **JAY C. HORMEL NATURE CENTER**

The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center, which began in 1971, is made up of 529 acres of restored and remnant prairie, hardwood forest, wetlands, and meandering streams. It is located in western Mower County on the northeast corner of the city of Austin. The nature center provides opportunities for viewing birds and wildlife as visitors walk, run, or ski the over ten miles of trail. Thousands of students and other visitors participate in nature-themed programs annually.

### **JAY C. HORMEL NATURE CENTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2019**

- Completed the master plan for the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission for a Regionally Significant Park Designation and for guidance on future projects.
- Designated as Regionally Significant by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission, which will allow us to apply for Legacy funding from the state for future projects.
- Worked with the Mower SWCD and others to host the We Are Water MN traveling exhibit from April 27-June 16.
- Applied to the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) to receive Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) money to fund the second intern and a new naturalist position for three years. The project was selected to receive \$225,000 and is pending legislative approval.
- Worked with Austin Audubon on their Bird City MN application. Austin was officially designated as a Bird City Minnesota in October.
- Fundraised to purchase tools and supplies to take over management of the 3 Honeybee hives.
- With funding from the Friends of the Hormel Nature Center, upgraded the telescope, building, and grounds at the Sola Fide Observatory.
- Participated in the first Statewide Star Party which was organized by the Bell Museum in St. Paul.
- The Friends of the Hormel Nature Center purchased an 11-acre parcel adjacent to the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center and donated it to the City to grow the land base for the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center.
- The Friends applied for and were awarded ~ a \$300,000 project to the DNR's Conservation Partners Legacy grant.
- Hosted the luncheon immediately following the Governor's Pheasant Opener.
- The Halloween Warm-up and Thanksgiving Feast continued as usual. We brought back the Water Festival in honor of the We Are Water MN exhibit. We hosted Christmas in the NE.
- Held the Dammen Adventure Race. This was a team race where parents and children could compete as a team to complete a series of challenges across the nature center. Participation was on par with the first year.
- Added native seed collection to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum.
- Summer Adventure Program scholarships continued to be provided to Austin area youth through funding from private donations, Austin Audubon, Izaak Walton League, and the Friends of the Nature Center.
- Staff provided themed natural history programs during Mower County Fair week.

- “Thursday Nature Play” featured free family programs and activities six Thursday and one Saturday during the summer.
- Summer senior specials continued to be offered with nature related themes. Access vehicle tours were part of those programs.
- The staff continued to provide quality environmental education programs for pre-K-12<sup>th</sup> grade students of Austin and nearby schools.
- The Hormel Foundation continued to subsidize Mower County students attending school field trips at the JCHNC.
- “What’s New in Nature?” weekly radio program continued.
- Replaced 1/3 of the cross-country skis and boots to change over to the NNN binding standard. Belita Schindler continued to subsidize the ski and snowshoe rental.
- Phase 1 of Conservation Partners Legacy habitat restoration continued by treating invasive species re-sprouts and completing prescribed burns.
- The phase 2 legacy grant work continued in 2019. Prescribed burns, invasive re-sprout treatment, and wetland restorations were the focus of work.
- Continued the Kevin Dammen summer mentorship program. A total of 27 mentees, ages 13-18, assisted staff with running programs, canoe/kayak rentals, and nature play days. The mentees put in collectively over 1,190 hours of work.
- Employed two interns for the full year in 2019.



## GOALS FOR THE JAY C. HORMEL NATURE CENTER IN 2020

- Complete our first Grant Application to the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission for a group of projects totaling between \$800,000 and \$1,000,000 that include repairing and extending paved handicap accessible trails, repairing or replacing bridges over Dobbins Creek, building an outdoor amphitheater for outdoor programming, nature play development and a fast-charging EV station.
- Pending legislative approval of funding of the LCCMR legislation, hire a 2<sup>nd</sup> naturalist.
- Apply for the DNR’s *No Child Left Inside* grant to replace the remaining cross-country skis.
- Begin planning for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center in 2021.
- Offer these significant events: Thanksgiving Feast, Eco Blitz: Pollinator Week, Halloween Warm-up, Dammen Adventure Race, Nature Art Show, and Christmas in the NE.
- Continue to offer and facilitate environmental education and outdoor education programs for students, pre-K through college.
- Continue with the Thursday Nature Play for families and Senior Summer Specials, along with our Summer Adventure Programs.
- Continue with nature themed programs during the Mower County Fair.
- Apply to the Hormel Foundation to continue to subsidize Mower County students to visit the nature center with their schools for only \$1.
- Burn prairie as needed.
- Plant trees to promote forest health.
- Administer the Conservation Partners Legacy Grants that the Friends received for prairie restoration, wetland restoration, and invasive species removal.

- Recruit more volunteers to act as guides in the new interpretive center.
- The nature center will be open 9:00 am- 5:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday, with staff and volunteers or mentees, and on Sunday we will be open 1:00-5:00 p.m. with one staff person and volunteers or mentees.
- Begin offering private viewings at the Sola Fide Observatory.
- Canoe and kayak rental will again be offered 7 days a week in 2020.
- Continue to work with Mower SWCD, CRWD, and the Izaak Walton League to promote soil and water health.
- Continue with the Kevin Dammen summer mentorship program.

## FACILITIES

Interpretive Center - Features the exhibit display area with live animals, nature games, preschool play area, a natural history resource library and conference room, two classrooms that can be opened up as one large space, and multipurpose room for renting skis or holding messy classes. The classrooms and resource room are also available to rent when not being used for nature center programming.



### Auditorium, Conference Room, and Classroom rentals:

These facilities are used for free public programs, community education programs, conferences, private parties or meeting, and special events.

### **Rentals Used by the following groups:**

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2016</u>
Private:	128	86	85	58
Conservation/City:	35	31	20	17
<b>Total:</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>75</b>

## RECREATION

### Hiking, Cross-Country Skiing, Snowshoeing, Wildlife Viewing, and Nature Photography

The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center has over ten miles of trails. There is also a 1/4-mile handicapped accessible trail. Two wheelchairs are available for the public to use during the visitor center hours. Superior wildlife viewing and nature photography opportunities can be found all year on the Nature Center's trail. The trails are groomed for cross-country skiing in the winter.



Canoe, Kayak, Cross-Country Ski and Snowshoe Rentals - Enjoy youth and family canoe trips with Nature Center staff. Canoe and kayak rentals are available on Dobbins Creek to East Side Lake or on the Nature Center pond. Cross-country ski or snowshoe rental is available during winter. We provide free skiing or snowshoeing on Thursday afternoons from 3:00-6:00 p.m. in January, February, and March for adults and children.



### **EDUCATION BIRDS OF PREY**

- The Barred owl and our two Red tail hawks were utilized in 121 *programs with well over 2,900 total participants* in 2019. Our three birds of prey are on permanent display daily for all visitors to see. The two red tail hawks and owl have permanent injuries and are non-releasable.
- The Hormel Nature Center also provides triage/primary care for raptors/birds of prey. Eight birds were cared for and either were treated and released, died, or transported to the University of Minnesota Raptor Center.

### **SPECIAL EVENTS, PROGRAMS, & SCHOOL GROUPS**

School Programs - Environmental education programs are offered to all ages with an emphasis on grades K-7. Environmental field trip curriculum includes: stream/pond ecology, maple syruping, prairie ecology, seasons, senses, soil critters, raptors, habitat, nature's adaptations and more. The fee for the field trips has been reduced for Austin and Mower County schools thanks to the Hormel Foundation grant.

Youth & Family Summer Adventure Program - Get out and discover nature by canoeing, kayaking, hiking, birding, nature photography and more with the staff. The classes are fee based on expense. Scholarships for reduced fees or free classes are available due to funding by private donors, organizations, and the Friends of the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center.



Summer Nature Play Afternoons - Families discover nature with free canoe and kayak rentals, pond scooping for aquatic critters, netting butterflies and dragonflies, archery, self-guided trail activities and nature programs. This free program ran on specified afternoons in June, July and August from 1:00-4:00 p.m.

Summer Senior Specials - This offers seniors, 55 and older, 7 free nature programs, a short tour of the trails on our two access vehicles, coffee, and a cookie.

Trail Access Tours - Visitors may enjoy the nature center trails with a free tour on an access vehicle with a volunteer driver during the spring, summer, and fall. The tours are for mobility challenged people and their families. The date and time need to be scheduled ahead. A minimum four-day notice for the requested tour is required for scheduling a driver.

Halloween Warm-Up - The enchanted forest comes alive with bats, trolls, owls, and witches. Every ten minutes, a group of 25 are led into the boo'tiful forest to meet the assorted spirits that reside there. Established in 1983 this annual event is co-sponsored with Matchbox Children's Theater and is intended for children ages 4-11. Tickets are sold offsite in September at Super Fresh Produce and Bakery.

*Crafts of Christmas Past* - Enjoy the holiday spirit. Join the Nature Center staff as you make your very own Christmas wreaths and hand dipped beeswax candles. Three classes are offered with fee based on material expense.

*Ruby Rupner Nature & Community Programs* - Features such performers as folksingers, storytellers, musicians, naturalists, staff and other guest speakers. Free programs are provided by an endowment fund from the Friends of the Nature Center along with other donated dollars.



*Eco Blitz:*

This is a free, family-friendly series of special events celebrating the importance of humans' interactions with their ecosystems. In 2019, we returned to the Water Festival theme. 2020's theme will focus on pollination. It is fun and educational. The week-long event features guest presenters, classes, workshops, and service projects.

*Thanksgiving Feast* - Established in 2002, the Friends of the Nature Center host an annual banquet, entertainment and auction as a fundraiser. The primary purpose of the fundraiser is to support the internship program.



*Sola-Fide Observatory* - Visitors see the moon, planets, and stars through a 18" reflector telescope. Free programs are held on specified Saturday evenings during the year. The City of Austin has owned and operated this facility since 1991.





## PARKS, RECREATION, AND FORESTRY DEPARTMENT

### STAFF

Kevin Nelson	Director
Randy Hofner	Park Supervisor
Tricia Branden	Park and Recreation Clerk
Patti Hamilton	Administrative Assistant
Riley Donovan	Recreation Supervisor
Luke Reese	Director/Naturalist
Julie Champlin	Nature Center Assistant
Sydney Weisinger	Nature Center/Teacher Naturalist

### PARK BOARD

Ward Halvorson	Chairperson
Helen Jahr	Vice Chairperson
Nick Johnsen	Member
Deedee Marx	Member
Chris Grev	Member
Jeff Austin	City Council
Don Fox	School Board

### PARK CREW

Michael Goetz	Park maintenance/Equipment operator
Lynn Thompson	Park maintenance/Equipment operator
Dayton Kehret	Park maintenance/Equipment operator
Terry Corkill	Park maintenance/Equipment operator
Greg Bell	Pool maintenance/Park maintenance
Tim Rodgers	Park maintenance/Facility technician
Spencer Wolner	Construction maintenance
Neal Goergen	Mechanic
Andrew Jensen	Tree trimmer/Chipper operator
Jon White	Tree trimmer/Chipper operator



Trees are a good investment of our public dollars. In Indianapolis, each dollar invested in the city's community trees yielded \$5.55 in benefits.  
State of Indiana DNR, 2008