



Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant Application Narrative Project Justification and Support

Hofma Park and Preserve is an important park in Northwest Ottawa County and is located within the Muskegon Metropolitan Statistical Area. The Park and Preserve provide a wide range of recreation experiences and preserves a large block of natural land in a growing area. The park offers a great blend of active recreation including sports fields and passive recreation including trails and boardwalks through woods and wetlands adjacent to Pottawattomie Bayou.

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund has a long history of assisting communities in preserving their best natural assets and making them available for public recreation. The proposed expansion of Hofma Park and Preserve adheres to the Trust Fund goals exceedingly well in that it will provide very high quality resource based recreation opportunities. The Michigan Natural Features Inventory identified Pottawattomie Bayou as "exceptionally significant" as a Great Lakes Coastal Marsh and "notably significant" as a Dry-Mesic Southern Forest.

In 2014, the MNRTF funded a 40 acre acquisition and phase 1 development is now being proposed along with another 115 acre donation that was received in 2015. This centrally located park will benefit from an exterior parking lot that allows direct connections to the trails within the park and the adjacent 30+ miles of non-motorized pathway, the regional Idema Explorer's Trail and the international U.S. Bicycle Route 35.

Justification and Support for this development application can be found on pages 135, 151, 152, 162-166 of the 2020 Multi-Jurisdictional Community Parks and Recreation Plan. A sub-plan known as the Hofma Vision is incorporated by reference.



Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant Application Narrative Project Description

The proposed development includes hiking trails, an elevated boardwalk, and an observation deck within the 566 acre Hofma Park and Preserve. This park is within the Muskegon Metropolitan Statistical Area and guarantees continued public access, protects Pottawattomie Bayou, Alder Creek, and the Lower Grand River Watershed; and, ensures that this unique environment is protected in perpetuity.

The Michigan Natural Features Inventory classifies this land as having a Very High Probability of Biological Rarity. The MNFI's Elemental Data identifies species of flora and fauna listed as Endangered, Threatened, and of Special Concern including the Peregrine Falcon, Eastern Box Turtle, and Bald Eagle. The ecology of this Park can support these species.

A portion of the proposed development includes trails within a defunct tree farm. This donated/inherited tree farm is an ecological dead zone comprised of mostly non-native evergreens that are diseased or dead. Significant removal of these trees is required to allow a natural environment to thrive. Included within this proposal is a wide swath of land on either side of the hiking trails to be removed on the Witteveen property. Along the Witteveen trails there will be native trees and pollinator fields planted. This will begin the removal process and enable a phased approach to reviving the ecological dead zone.

Within the Wolfe property, which was acquired through a 2014 MNRTF grant, the trails will thoughtfully weave through the existing forested areas to protect as many significant natural features and valuable natural resources as possible. This new trail will lead to an Observation Deck to admire a primitive Hemlock Grove too.

Specifically, the development celebrates universal design, including 2 miles of 8 foot wide trail, 625 feet of 10 foot wide boardwalk, and a 400 square foot Observation Deck. It will provide the community with access to view and enjoy a unique landscape through nearly 7 miles of non-motorized trail, floating bridge, and boardwalk for pedestrians.



Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant Application Narrative Natural Resource Access and Protection

The proposed development in the Hofma Park and Preserve is an important aspect of the Township's Park and Recreation Plan and the Hofma Vision. It will also be the first substantial development in the Park since a 1989 Bond Fund grant was awarded. The size of the park has increased by 155 acres (37.7% increase in overall size) since that time. Development of the site is necessary to keep pace and ensure public access continues to be provided for hiking, wildlife viewing, fishing and other active and passive outdoor recreation; particularly within the new land that has been incorporated.

The site has good populations of wildlife typical to the area including deer, fox, rabbits, turtles, birds, squirrels, raccoon, etc. In addition, the Michigan Natural Features Inventory Elemental Data for Ottawa County documents confirmed sightings of rare and endangered species, which include:

- 2018, Peregrine Falcon, Endangered Status (Ranked S3 for Rare or Uncommon, 2 occurrences).
- 2018, Eastern Box Turtle, Special Concern Status (Ranked S2/S3 for Rarity and Other Factors Making it Vulnerable, 6 occurrences).
- 2017, Bald Eagle, Special Concern Status, with 9 occurrences.
- 2017, Blanchard's Cricket Frog, Threatened Status (Ranked S2/S3 for Rarity and Other Factors Making it Vulnerable, 4 occurrences).
- 2016, Virginia Bluebells, Endangered Status (Ranked S1/S2 for Critically Imperiled and Extreme Rarity, 5 occurrences).

Hofma Park and Preserve include Great Lakes Coastal Marshes and the Michigan Natural Features Inventory identifies this area as a "High Probability" for Biological Rarity and has an Ecological Values of 14 and 24. As for wetlands, Township-wide there are 2,770 acres of Great Lakes Coastal Marsh and 351 acres (12.6%) are within the Hofma Park and Preserve.

The wetland areas associated with Pottawattomie Bayou, the Hofma Park and Preserve, and Great Lakes Coastal Marshes include vegetation such as: quaking aspen, elderberry, spicebush, cinnamon fern, sensitive fern, shield fern species, boneset, joe pye-weed, and reed canary grass. Upland forest areas contain: eastern white pine, black cherry, red maple, northern red oak, deer tongue grass and bracken fern. Upland pine plantation areas contain hemlock, black cherry, and Virginia creeper, while the upland field include smooth brome grass, big bluestem, panic grass, pearly everlasting, and white oak saplings.

Continued preservation of this native habitat is paramount to protecting and encouraging the recovery of these species. The local ecology of this Park provides prime habitat to enable their recovery, which is confirmed by the attached letter from the Ottawa County Parks Natural Resources Management Supervisor.