



General

This section provides the basic information about the park or trail and the organizations responsible for it.

Last Update: June 28, 2019 15:42:56

GMRPTC Park/Trail ID#: 18-009D

Park or Trail Name: Jay C. Hormel Nature Center

Park or Trail Type: City Park

District: 6

Regional Designation Status : Regionally Designated

Evaluation Score :

Park/Trail Address: 1304 21st St NE

City: Austin

Zip: 55912

Latitude: 43.6796067

Longitude: -92.9397386

Location Description: The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center, established in 1971, is the gem of the city of Austin's park system. Located in the NE corner of town, the 518-acres of prairie, forest, and wetlands offer visitors opportunities to explore over 11 miles of trails and discover numerous species of plants and animals, many of which are now rare in the area. In 2017, a nearly 15,000 square foot Interpretive Center was opened to expand environmental education opportunities including programming and interactive exhibits. Annually, education programming reaches over 13,000 participants of which 4,000 are local students. We estimate over 50,000 visitors enjoy the center and trails each year.

Maps of Park/Trail:

Description: Rack brochure with trail map.

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Trail_Map_901674.pdf

Facility Website: <http://www.hormelnaturecenter.org>

Lead Applicant Organization : City of Austin

Lead Contact Person: Luke Reese

Lead Contact Title: Nature Center Director

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Joint Applicant #1: City of Austin

Upload Resolution: http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/GMRPTC_resolution_fdb13e.pdf

Joint Applicant #2: NA

Joint Applicant #3: NA

Joint Applicant #4: NA

Other project supporters : The Hormel Foundation, Discover Austin, Austin Chapter of the Izaak Walton League, Austin Audubon, Austin Area Foundation, Austin Public Schools, Mower Soil & Water Conservation District

Description

Regional Significance Statement: The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center (HNC) is comprised of more than 500 acres and is among the largest and most important blocks of contiguous habitat in the surrounding area. Educational programming at the HNC reaches more than 13,000 participants annually. With restored tallgrass prairie, wetland, savanna, and high quality forest, the HNC provides a beautiful setting for birding, canoeing, hiking, cross-country skiing, nature observation, photography and art, and much more.

Site Map uploads:

Description: Boundary Map

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Map -- Boundary_dcfdfc.pdf

Description: Facilities Map

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Map -- Facilities_623039.pdf

Description: Infrastructure Map

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Map -- Infrastructure_ee7fcb.pdf

Description: Land Use Maps

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Map -- Land Classification_3e78f9.pdf

Description: Trails & Bridges Map

Classification: Natural Resource Based Regional Park

Overview/Description of Park or Trail: The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center (HNC) restores and protects land so children, families, and the general public may learn about the natural world. Educational programs are divided into three pillars: outdoor, environmental, and conservation. We expose children and families to the natural world, teach them how those processes work, and encourage them to explore opportunities in their daily lives to leave the planet a better place.

In practicing what is preached, the HNC works to protect water, soil, vegetation, and wildlife. This tradition began in 1927 when Jay Hormel began planting trees to combat agricultural forest loss. In 1971, the City of Austin acquired 123 acres of the Hormel family's arboretum to found the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center. Initial work focused on prairie and wetland restoration, trail construction, and building an interpretive center. Next, education programming became the focus.

In the mid-1980s, environmental education programs were aligned to state science standards. Austin K-7th grade students and other local schools visit annually. Recently, demand has grown regionally with more student attendance from Albert Lea, Rochester, and other out-of-county schools. Program topics include: senses, soil, water, adaptation, ecology, and more. Throughout the year, HNC hosts free family and senior community programs. More than 30 summer classes are offered for all ages, with scholarships available.

The original 123-acre landbase now 518 acres with over 10 miles of trails supports hiking, cross-country skiing, birding, wildlife viewing, photography, canoeing, and kayaking. Like the landbase, the personnel, programming, and facilities have grown. The HNC employs four permanent full-time and two permanent part-time employees, two interns (one annual and one seasonal), and utilizes 15 summer mentees (ages 13-18) and over 80 volunteers.

To meet the growing demand for programming, the City of Austin partnered with the Hormel Foundation, the Friends of the Hormel Nature Center (FoHNC), and Hormel Foods Charitable Trust to complete a \$6.8 million interpretive center in 2017. The building features habitat exhibits, educational animals, an early childhood area, a natural history resource library, two classrooms, and a multipurpose room. The older Ruby Rupner Auditorium is used for community programs, special events, and private rentals.

Once strictly an Austin gem, the HNC has become a regionally important destination. Similar facilities Quarry Hill Park/Nature Center, River Bend Nature Center, Oxbow Park, Eagle Bluff ELC, and Forestville State Park are over 40 miles away. HNC's growing importance has spurred a partnership between the city, the FoHNC, and local organizations to serve the increased number and diversity of visitors.

Now, HNC must reach beyond local funding sources. In 2017 and 2018, the DNR awarded the FoHNC nearly \$500,000 in grants for habitat restoration. A regionally significant designation will further legitimize the HNC as a regional draw when applying for future grants for projects that may include: building an amphitheater, adding/repairing asphalt trails, creating nature play pockets, repairing/replacing bridges, and constructing a group campground. Finally, the HNC looks forward to utilizing the GMRPTCs expertise with planning, implementation, and outcome evaluation to ensure optimal results.

Total Acreage or Mileage : 518

Acquisition and Development Status: Existing Park of Trail

Describe land acquisition status: Acquired with other parcels of interest.

Percentage of land acquired: 67

Development status: Some development, but more proposed

- New facilities proposed
- Existing facilities to be upgraded

Regional Context : The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center is located in the City of Austin, Minnesota, which is within Mower County, approximately 100 miles south of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and 12 miles north of the Iowa border. Austin is an easily accessible community being 20 miles east of I-35 and also along the 1-90 corridor. Hormel Foods Corporation is the largest employer with their corporate headquarters, factory, and SPAM Museum all located within the City. Austin is also home to the Hormel Institute, a leading cancer research institution operated by the University of Minnesota with significant support from the Mayo Clinic. Austin has consistently been recognized as a top place to reside and continues to make strides on improving the quality of life for the area, including supporting the JCHNC on many levels.

In relation to other Nature and Education Centers within the region, there are few opportunities and those that do exist have a unique set of offerings differing from those at the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center.

Regional Map uploads:

Description: From Master Plan.

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Regional_Context_00d841.JPG

Site Information

This section provides an overview of existing and proposed site facilities and general site characteristics

Existing Facilities

- Walking Trails (paved)
- Hiking Trails (natural)
- Biking Trails (paved)
- Cross-country Skiing Trails
- Canoeing Facilities
- Visitor Center
- Nature Center/Interpretation Trails
- Restrooms/sanitation building
- Roads and Parking Areas

Proposed Facilities

- Group campsites

Other camping-related facilities

Toilets Water pump Storm Shelter

- Picnicking and picnic shelters
- Walking Trails (paved)
- Biking Trails (paved)
- Play areas, with an outdoor theme

Existing Facilities Other Information

Interpretive center

Auditorium

Maple syruping shack

Log cabin

Observation tower

Proposed Facilities Other Information

Amphitheater

DC Fast Charge EV station

Signage

Observation points

General Site Characteristics

The physical record in the local landscape begins around 500 million years ago, when much of Minnesota was covered by water and the sedimentary rock layers that lie under the region were formed. Although the area that is now the JCHNC was not directly covered by glaciers during the most recent ice advances, previous ice sheets/glacial periods left glacial till deposits. Importantly, near the end of the most recent glacial period, an intense glacial cold had pronounced effects across this landscape (the glacier front was just a few miles to the west).

Tundra and permafrost conditions persisted, and periglacial processes during this period resulted in mass erosion. Hilly landscapes were subjected to vigorous episodes of weathering, downslope migration of sediments, and leveling as materials were loosened and moved, providing the JCHNC with Dobbins Creek and the mostly flat topography.

Glacial boulders lie scattered across the landscape. We honor this period with the Big Gneiss Rock at the trailhead, a frequent place to see friends meeting and kids and adults alike climbing and sitting.

Prior to European settlement, Mower County was part of the Dakota homeland. There were no permanent settlements, but the area was used as a hunting ground.

Maps later created, identified this area as primarily prairie and oak openings/barrens. These habitats required frequent fire. Native people likely used fire on the landscape to help hunt game, create desired habitat, and ease travel.

Following European settlement, lands were cleared of trees, wetlands were drained, and some streams were straightened in order to cultivate the land. Permanent roads were established. Unplowed areas were grazed. Overgrazing and cultivation led to the loss of many native plants and the loss of habitat for native wildlife.

Born in 1892, it was during Jay Catherwood Hormel's childhood years that he noticed the effects man was having on the land. After leaving college in 1914 to work for the Hormel Company, he decided to take action to protect and preserve the land. It was at this time in 1927 that Jay C. Hormel began planting a remarkable 200,000 trees on the land.

In 1954, Jay C. Hormel passed away and the management of the land as a private arboretum ended. Forests went unmanaged and were used as private hunting land. In 1971, the City of Austin acquired 123-acres and established the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center. Early developments focused on establishing a pond, building an interpretive center, restoring prairies and improving trails. Additional lands were acquired, more prairies restored, and new trails installed. The sugar shack, observation tower, auditorium, and log cabin were built. In just the last few years, a new interpretive center was completed, which included an 80-kW photovoltaic system and geothermal heating and cooling.

Site characteristics uploads:

Description: Images

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Key_Site_Characteristic_dbd473.pdf

Trends/Public Values

Public Involvement Summary : PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Multiple engagement strategies were implemented throughout the course of this project timeline with the intent of gathering information from the surrounding community regarding the current state of the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center. The City of Austin and the surrounding community were asked to participate in a public online survey, as well as, engage in public open house meetings. These engagement strategies were integrated into the design process so the surrounding public could share their stories, voice their true feelings, and express the value that is placed on the JCHNC both locally and regionally.

Aside from public meetings and the online survey, additional engagement strategies included providing hard copy survey cards at various local establishments throughout Austin. Included in these establishments were: the Austin Public Library; the Parks, Recreation, and Forestry office; the

local Coffee Shop; and the JCHNC lobby.

Congruently, bookmarks were created and distributed alongside the survey cards. With the intent of reaching the largest demographic possible, an email blast was also created and distributed throughout the community in order to promote awareness of the online survey and the status of the project itself.

The results collected provided information that, compounding on previous notions, suggested that the JCHNC is truly a local and regional asset. Through a wide variety of engagement strategies, the design team was able to collect over 200 online and hardcopy survey responses. These questions and their results are displayed on upcoming pages to further convey the success that this integration of community engagement had on the final outcome of the Master Plan design and report.

Public Involvement Support Material Uploads:

Description: Public engagement section from Master Plan.

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Public_Engagement_84d9fc.pdf

Regional Demographic Information : According to the Austin Minnesota Comprehensive Plan, 2016 the City of Austin is projected to grow at a pace slightly higher than that of Minnesota. The senior portion of the population is projected to increase to nearly 25-percent of the City's population by 2035. The City is predominantly self-identified as white with more than 16-percent of Austin residents identifying with Hispanic ethnicity. This is higher than Minnesota, with roughly 5-percent of residents indicating Hispanic ethnicity. Average incomes are projected to increase. In addition, Austin Public Schools recent demographic review indicates nearly 51-percent of students are non-white, an increase of 35.5-percent since 2001.

The aging and diversification of Austin is an important factor in the future of the community and must be addressed as programs and facilities are developed at JCHNC. By working with various organizations in the community and the school district, real and perceived barriers (to accessibility, communication, cultural, and others) can be addressed.

Goals and initiatives, as described later in the report, should be reviewed with this lens of demographic change as implementation efforts move forward.

Regional Demographic Uploads:

Description: Demographics section from master plan.

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Demographics_bc7c7d.pdf

Public Health Values:

- Promotes physical activity
- Connects people to the outdoors
- Encourages social interaction

Public Health Values Additional Information : Most visitors to the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center get in some physical activity by taking a walk, running/jogging, crosscountry skiing, snowshoeing, or canoeing/kayaking. Walkers, runners, and joggers have many options in the community of Austin. Outdoor activity participants choose to come here to be connected to the outdoors. Others visit the nature center to participate in classes with friends or family members. They volunteer here to both give back and connect with other like-minded volunteers. The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center's trails and activities promote a social and physical lifestyle outdoors.

Public Health Values Support Material Uploads:

Description: Uses from public survey.

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Uses_11c314.pdf

Economic Development/Tourism Opportunities : The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center has

consistently been ranked the #2 attraction in the City of Austin behind the SPAM Museum. We are conveniently located adjacent to Interstate 90 and are easy to find. The city is working on an exemption to MN DOT regulations that would allow us to place wayfinding signs on I-90. Tour groups and out-of-town school groups frequently visit JCHNC and the SPAM Museum on their trips to Austin. These visits are coordinated with Discover Austin, the local convention and visitors bureau. In the fall of 2019, the City of Austin will host the governor's pheasant opener. JCHNC will host the lunch the day of the opener. JCHNC is a place that many visiting Austin choose to visit. We hope to add a DC fast charging EV station that will encourage EV users to stop and explore for an hour or two while charging their cars.

Economic Development/Tourism Opportunities Support Material Uploads:

Description: 2019 Discover Austin brochure

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Discover_Austin_708be0.pdf

Recreational Trends Information : In 2005, Richard Louv strongly made the case that children need to play in nature. He coined the phrase, nature deficit disorder. According to the "Nature and Nurture: Trends in Recreation" article by Emily Tipping in the publication RECREATION MANAGEMENT, recreation managers have listened to Mr. Louv's argument. Playground designs have added elements that give them natural feels. Nature-based parks are adding elements that encourage children to explore and have fun in nature. A part of this master plan looks at that trend as well. We do well to actively encourage kids that participate in our programs to engage and play in nature. Our best asset to passively encourage that is our large boulder that kids climb on. We envision a series of nature play pockets along trails that have play opportunities tied to themes identified in our indoor interpretation.

Recreational Trends Support Material Uploads:

Description: Article from RECREATION MANAGEMENT by Emily Tipping

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Rec_Trends_e586e5.pdf

Classification Details

Natural Resource Based Regional Park Classification.

Criteria 1: Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience:

The HNC provides a variety of high-quality recreation experiences. The 10+ miles of trails running through wetlands, prairies, and forests are well kept for walking, jogging, hiking, birdwatching, nature viewing, photography, geocaching, and meditating. (It turns out that the HNC is even a popular spot to play Pokmon GO.) During the winter, the HNC uses the Ginzugroomer to pack and track trails for classic and skate cross-country skiing. The sides of trails are left open for snowshoers. For visitors without their own equipment, the HNC rents skis and snowshoes. In fact, an Austin resident makes an annual donation to ensure that childrens equipment rental only costs \$1. Dobbins Creek runs through the HNC to East Side Lake, and summer visitors can rent canoes and kayaks to paddle down to the lake and back. For those new to canoeing and kayaking, we also offer the opportunity to paddle on the pond. Bicycling is not allowed on most HNC trails, with the exception of a stretch of paved trail connecting the city to the HNC and then running along HNCs southern boundary. During the summer of 2018, this trail will be connected to the Shooting Star State Trail.

HNC staff also provides a variety of other recreational opportunities through their programming. Nature Play Afternoons get kids and families outdoors regularly during the summer. They are filled with free activities and programming, including canoeing and kayaking, archery, pond scooping, netting butterflies, and self-guided trail activities. Summer Adventure Programs also offer participants the opportunity to learn about nature photography, bicycling, fishing, canoeing, monarch tagging, and many other related topics. Other recreational events and activities include

Halloween Warm-Up, Christmas Crafts, maple syruping, Nature Art and Community Talent Shows, trail runs, a ski race and adventure race, access vehicle tours, and much more.

Criteria #1 Images

http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/18-009D/Criteria_1_Images_fd7389.pdf

Criteria 2: Preserves a Regionally-Significant and Diverse Natural or Historic Landscape

In 1927, Jay C. Hormel began planting more than 200,000 trees surrounding his estate northeast of Austin. Forty-four years later, the City of Austin purchased 123 acres of Jay Hormels arboretum to create a nature center. During the following decades, the landbase grew to its current 518 acres by following a mission to restore the land to the way it might have once been. Prairie restoration, invasive species removal, prescribed fire, and tree planting have increased HNCs flora and fauna diversity. Animals are drawn to Dobbins Creek, the pond, prairies, marshes, and forests, where visitors are able to observe, photograph, and study.

The HNC is home to an ~27-acre remnant prairie. Remnant tallgrass prairie on the lowan Surface is exceptionally rare (~