INYO COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION



STATE OF THE PARKS

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State of the Inyo County Parks and Campgrounds

As Inyo County citizens and leaders, we are the stewards of an extensive network of County parks and campgrounds. We are fortunate to be able to boast that we live where others come to play, but along with bragging rights comes the responsibility to care for our County facilities. This report will serve as a baseline for formulating a long-term plan to continue to care for and improve these valuable assets for all to enjoy.

Our goal is to develop a plan that is reasonable and achievable based on a common philosophy to guide us as we prioritize both capital and maintenance projects. A review of our recreation facilities and the time required to maintain them juxtaposed with the current staffing levels amplifies the notion that the task at hand is quickly overwhelming without a common philosophy and guiding principles. Without those, deciding on future staffing levels, prioritizing projects to tackle, and chasing grants and other resources is the equivalent of climbing a very tall ladder only to find that it is leaning against the wrong wall (Stephen R. Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People).

Therefore, after a brief review of our recreational facilities, current staffing levels and recently completed and ongoing projects, including ideas for the current fiscal year appropriation of \$250,000, we introduce the recommended Statement of Philosophy for Park Maintenance and Improvement. The balance of the report is a menu of future projects and potential resources to discuss under the light of the Statement of Philosophy, which is intended to inform the development and execution of a long-term park improvement plan.

Inyo County Facilities

With the Sierra Nevada on the west and the White Mountains on the east, changing to the Inyos as you head south and ending in unique rock formations as you near Death Valley, Inyo County's natural beauty is astounding. Making things even more fascinating is our cultural history full of Wild West stories and colorful characters. Each campground and park has its own, distinctive history and geology providing the opportunity to emphasize unique scenery while developing an Inyo County brand for the park system as a whole.

- Tecopa Hot Springs Park This park was built on popular hot springs on the edge of Death Valley. Snow Birds escaping cold winters have descended on the hot springs in large numbers starting in the 1970s. While its popularity dipped in later years, it seems to have been rediscovered in recent years by a new generation. The campground has 200 sites and is run by a concessionaire. The County is responsible to maintain the small park, which includes a youth playground in front of the Tecopa Library.
- Diaz Lake Named for the family who owned the land as a cattle ranch in the 1860s, this park is the gateway to all of the Owens Valley parks for visitors from the south. This park is very popular with tourists and locals who utilize it for both day use and overnight stays. The campground is approximately 140 acres with 200 campsites that

- accommodate everything from tents to large RVs. It features an 80 acre lake, with seasonal motorized boat use, an ADA fishing dock, and boat launching facilities. The lake is periodically stocked with fish by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- Portagee Joe Campground The name is a reminder of the people who came to the
 valley as sheepherders, miners, ranchers, and farmers, and whose descendants are still
 here. Sitting at the foot of the Alabama Hills, it provides travelers a less extreme stay
 after leaving Death Valley. It is a small park that is very quiet and intimate with 22
 campsites. It is nestled between the Alabama Hills and the town of Lone Pine. The
 entrance to the park is from Tuttle Creek Road which forms a part of the Alabama Hills
 Scenic Route.
- **Spainhower Park (Lone Pine Park)** Historically, this park had a strong connection to the military, with a US Navy jet in the park for many years. That prominent place has faded over the years, and the space was converted to tennis courts. The park sits on the north end of the community and is a gathering place for residents and a beautiful stop for travelers needing a meal and rest from the road.
- Independence Park This is a small park on the south end of town that is primarily used as a rest stop by Highway 395 travelers. The green setting and view of the rugged mountains and high desert valley is very refreshing.
- Independence Creek Campground Several bedrock mortars can be found along the creek, which testify to the area's use by Native Americans in the past. Ranchers drove cattle and sheep through the area on what is still a legal driveway, though rarely used. It is located on the edge of the town of Independence. It is a small campground of about 20 acres with 29 campsites. The Eastern California Museum is a quarter of a mile away and there is a trail that connects the museum to the campground and provides access to the bedrock mortars.
- Dehy Park This park has an historic railroad connection. It was the home of the Slim Princess Engine #18 until it was restored and moved to the Eastern California Museum. Now it now houses a railroad boxcar. This park is used by some travelers as a rest stop, and it is heavily used by local community members for a variety of events and festivals throughout the year.
- Taboose Creek Campground Taboose is a plant root, used in Native American food. The park sits at the edge of a highly visible black lava flow and is surrounded by varicolored cinder cones of old volcanic activity. These rock formations make the location geologically interesting and unique. The campground sits west of Highway 395, and north of Independence in an open area on Taboose Creek with spectacular views in all directions. The creek provides good fishing and the open land is very attractive to OHV users. The campground covers 15 acres with 36 campsites.

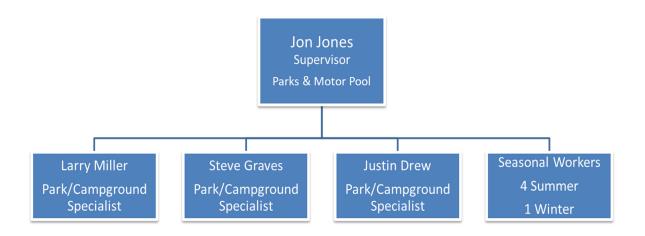
- Tinnemaha Creek Campground Tinnemaha was named after a local Native American leader. In the 1800s the area was a flourishing farm called Red Mountain Fruit Ranch. Remnants of the orchards, building foundations, and the stone entrance pillars are still visible within the boundaries of the park. The campground is about 4 miles north of Taboose Creek Campground and is set in open, rolling country sheltered behind Poverty Hills. It covers 25 acres and has 35 spaces.
- **Mendenhall Park** While the park is adjacent to Highway 395, the focus of the park is local sports activities, with Little League fields, and two playground facilities. This park provides the residents of Big Pine with a much needed sports complex. Occasionally, this park has been used as a staging area for emergency responders.
- Baker Creek Campground The park has a varied topography with rock formations and mature trees. The sight and sound of cascading water is almost everywhere in the park which is covered with lush tree and vegetative covering. The well-stocked ponds and streams provide good fishing. This is also a popular location for birders. This campground covers about 25 acres and has 43 campsites.
- Izaak Walton Park This park is all about fish, specifically native Brown Trout. In 1913, Izaak Walton penned "The Complete Angler," one of the most reprinted books in the history of British letters. During the 1940s and 50s, the Izaak Walton League became active in Bishop, and in the 1950s, LADWP leased this land to the Bishop Izaak Walton League in its quest to protect and enhance upland game species of the region. Over the years, it has become a popular place for family barbeques, parties, weddings and other special events.
- **Starlite Park** This park was developed as part of a new subdivision. Planning regulations included recreational space, providing adult and youth activities. This was done successfully with a tennis/basketball court and a youth playground. The main users of this park are residents of the subdivision.
- Millpond Recreation Area It is a regional park facility with a pond which was once the site of an old sawmill. The physical remnants of the site's historic past contribute to its ambiance. The pond is a central feature of the facility and many activities revolve around it. It is a large park on 125 acres and located adjacent to a concessioner run campground. It is one of the most heavily used facilities that is enjoyed by both locals and visitors.
- Pleasant Valley Campground The name evokes a peaceful and relaxing image. It is a
 rustic, quiet campground along the Owens River and includes spawning grounds for the
 native Brown Trout. The Department of Fish and Wildlife maintains a spawning channel
 for the trout in an old oxbow of the river immediately upstream from the campground.
 It is located on the north end of Bishop on the Owens River, just below Pleasant Valley
 Dam. It has 30 acres and 75 campsites.

Inyo County's 11 campgrounds and 7 parks span 250 miles from Tecopa to Bishop. The 11 campgrounds have over 900 campsites that serve approximately 40,000 users annually. Concessionaires operate 4 of these while the other 7 are operated by county staff. Additionally, there are 7 County Parks that cover more the 450 acres. Maintaining and improving such a large system requires substantial effort and resources.

Field Staff and Current Duties

Field staff includes the County Park Supervisor (who also manages the County Motor Pool), three full-time Park/Campground Specialists, and 5 seasonal workers; 4 in the summer and 1 in the winter. The summer seasonals maintain grounds and facilities, keeping them clean and safe for our visitors and citizens. The winter seasonal assists with repair and construction with the objective of completing larger projects during the winter when there are fewer visitors.

Parks and Campgrounds Field Staff



Put another way, 6.25 FTEs are maintaining 14 facilities in the second largest county in the State, which covers over 10,000 square miles. The team provides basic maintenance and repairs along with capital projects when time allows. When equipment or infrastructure fails or inclement weather causes safety issues, daily maintenance is sacrificed. In order to formulate a plan going forward, it is important to see how the current staffing and workload breaks down. The table below is the result of a short time study that was extended mathematically to represent a year. It is an abbreviated summary of timesheets, detailed by task, that each field employee completed.

Field Staff Duties

Tasks	Hours	FTEs
<u>Landscape Maintenance</u> – mowing 450 acres, fertilizing, tree trimming, removing leaves, weeding, maintaining and replacing grass & plants	3,944	1.9
<u>Janitorial</u> – clean restrooms and replace supplies, trash collection	3,324	1.6
<u>Equipment Maintenance</u> – sprinkler systems, lighting, playground equipment, fire rings, mowers, tractors, etc.	1,210	.58
<u>Building and Structure Maintenance</u> – painting, plumbing, repairs, signage maintenance, road maintenance, water systems	504	.24
<u>Customer Service</u> – provide camper assistance, answer phone calls, patrol campsites	2,172	1.04
<u>Administration</u> – paperwork, travel time, sick leave, vacations, scheduled breaks	1,860	.89
TOTAL	13,014	6.25

The conclusion is that there is no excess capacity to execute a plan that includes capital improvements or enhancements unless we eliminate some nagging problems that continue to take unplanned time and compromise efficiency such as broken water pipes or failing equipment.

Currently, staff is analyzing new organizational structures for the Parks and Recreation department. Preliminary discussions are leaning towards a proposal to add a position and divide the department into a grounds maintenance division and a repairs and capital projects division. The plan will be refined as the overarching philosophy and long term plan for recreation facilities becomes clearer.

Completed and Ongoing Projects

When it comes to County services, it is tempting to focus on what is not getting done because we provide a huge range of services with relatively few employees. Parks and Campgrounds is no exception, so before we move into a discussion about future projects, highlights of recently completed projects and ongoing projects are listed below.

<u>Completed Projects</u>: In recent years, the County has made several improvements to parks and campgrounds. Advances have also been made in the way services are provided to the public. Some examples follow.

Disk Golf course at Millpond is complete and heavily used.

- Irrigation systems at Millpond and Mendenhall Park were rebuilt.
- Fertilizer injection system installed at Millpond and Diaz Lake so nutrients are now distributed through the sprinklers rather than being manually distributed freeing up staff time for other projects.
- Vault toilet at Pleasant Valley Campground was moved to protect the facility from erosion of the river bank during heavy rains.
- Water well, solar well house and an Old West style water tank were installed at Taboose Creek.
- Vintek cash and credit card machines are now installed at all campgrounds except Independence Creek and Portagee Joe's.
- New security cameras have been placed at several facilities to provide security from theft and vandalism.
- Reserve America campground reservation system is now utilized. This required campsites to be moved, defined, numbered and mapped.
- Equipment storage vaults were installed at Diaz Lake and Millpond.

Ongoing Projects: Some notable projects that are scheduled to be completed this year follow.

- Water system at Diaz Lake plans are in engineering and grant application is due in January 2020. Funds are per capita allocation from Prop 68.
- Non-motorized boat launch at Diaz Lake with disabled launch plans are 90% complete and project is expected to be done this year. This project is funded by a grant from California Department of Boating and Waterways.
- Dog Park at Spainhower Park the plans are substantially complete and completion is expected this summer. Funding is appropriated in the current budget.
- Remodel one restroom at Pleasant Valley and two at Diaz Lake (entrance and campground) – approximately 40% complete.
- Installation of recycling trash cans at all locations approximately 60% complete.
- Reroofing projects countywide: Millpond baseball dugouts, restroom, and shade cover on beach; Izaak Walton Park Restroom, Dehy Park restroom, Independence Park restroom, Diaz lake office and entrance restrooms.

Recommended for Fiscal Year 2019-20 Appropriation (\$250,000): During the 2019-20 Budget Hearings, a \$250,000 transfer into the Parks Rehabilitation Trust was approved. Preliminary feedback regarding the best use of this money can be divided into two categories: projects with an immediate and noticeable impact and support for long-term improvements. Of course, other ideas will be welcome during the workshop.

Recommendations for immediate impact projects:

- Replace the Gazebo at Spainhower Park.
- Railroad theme stage at Dehy Park.
- Redo the ballpark at Mendenhall Park.
- Repair and reroute electrical lines at Mendenhall Park.

• Remove the old barbeque and replace the well house at Izaak Walton Park.

Support for long-term improvements:

- Set aside for grant matches.
- Use for deferred maintenance such as tree maintenance, re-roofing structures; or repair or replace water lines.

<u>Statement of Philosophy for Park Maintenance and Improvement:</u>

As we move from information to action, agreeing on a Statement of Philosophy is the critical next step before developing an executable work plan and allocating the appropriate resources. Therefore, we ask your Board to consider the following, or a similar Statement of Philosophy, including Guiding Principles, for providing direction in decisions related to funding levels, staffing levels and project choices moving forward.

The Guiding Principles are presented in order of importance and projects will be prioritized accordingly. For example fixing water systems that are constantly breaking will be higher priority than beautiful entrance signs. Threats to health and safety will always be dealt with immediately and are therefore not listed as one of the guiding principles. A sample Statement of Philosophy is provided below.

Inyo County Statement of Philosophy for Park Maintenance and Improvement

Inyo County Parks and Recreation provides a critical role in enhancing the well-being and quality of life of our residents and visitors by creating safe, inviting and beautifully maintained parks and campgrounds. Inyo County leaders and staff will use the following guiding principles to prioritize tasks and projects while striving for excellence in County park and campground operations and maintenance.

Guiding Principles:

- Fix or replace things that will result in less long-term maintenance and free up time
 for better park and campground care. This includes items such as tree maintenance
 and replacement, major repairs and replacement of water systems, and re-roofing
 structures that are constantly being repaired.
- Customer enhancements complete visible projects that make the parks and campgrounds more attractive and/or convenient for users. Examples include uniform signage with a County branding scheme, more attractive and inviting entrances to parks and campgrounds, dumpster enclosures and new playgrounds.
- 3. Non Critical Infrastructure and deferred maintenance such as paving roads, developing day use areas, and adding footbridges.
- 4. Available funding complete high priority projects when grants or other funding is available. Increase priority to meet grant restrictions and deadlines. Staff will be vigilant in researching grants and applying for funding that will solve identified issues and enhancements, but will not create new projects solely because there is grant

funding available. When recommending grants, staff will prioritize based on the criteria above when multiple grants become available concurrently.

Potential Future Projects

Once the Statement of Philosophy is adopted, potential projects will be sorted and prioritized into an action plan. The list of potential projects is presented as Appendix A. It is an extensive list that is intended to be separated from this report and used as a working guide to be prioritized, executed and serve as a benchmark for future progress. This list was started in 2018 and was updated for this report with some projects moving to completed or in process and some new ones added. In 2018, there was a rough financial estimate to complete all projects of \$3.6 million. That appears to be a low estimate and with the new additions and growth in pricing of materials and labor, the estimate is probably closer to \$5 million. As projects and priorities become more clearly defined, so will this number.

Regardless, it is a big number and not achievable with current staffing and budget resources. Therefore, this discussion would not be complete without considering what additional financial and human resources might be available. While the list below is not comprehensive, it is a start.

Potential Resources

Human Resources:

- Internship program This would be an opportunity for local youth to gain job skills and provide a valuable service to the County.
- California Conservation Corps Can be unreliable because firefighting is priority, so nonurgent capital projects or maintenance projects such as picnic table restoration and maintenance would be ideal.
- Prisoners Experience shows that they are an excellent resource when they are available.
- WRAP Workers
- Campground Hosts

Financial Resources:

- Grants Besides the Per Capita allocation that staff is currently working on, Prop 68 has
 a competitive grant that staff will pursue when the application period opens.
 Department of Boating and Waterways has been a source for the Diaz Lake boat ramp
 and has potential for other projects. Staff is researching other possibilities.
- Raise Fees
- Explore implementing Transient Occupancy Tax on overnight camping this would help cover the burden campers put on our systems such as solid waste, roads and maintenance of the campgrounds they use. This will require Board approval and a vote of the people.

Inyo County has a tremendous asset in its recreation facility system that we are all committed to maintaining and enhancing. It is anticipated that this report will serve as a reference and provide the basis to adopt a common philosophy for a comprehensive park and campground improvement plan that will be reasonable and achievable for many years to come.

Appendix A Listing of Potential Park Projects by Location

Universal Improvements:

Signage

Create an Inyo County brand for parks and campgrounds by creating a uniform design that displays the same logo, lettering, information and colors at the entrance of each facility. Also provide directional signs from highway 395 to the park entrances to reduce confusion in finding parks.

Information Kiosks

Create uniform information stations with QR scans where guests can learn about the immediate facility and all County facilities and other interesting County attractions.

Tree Maintenance

Universal tree maintenance is overdue and once performed, will free up staff time since maintenance is done as needed on individual trees.

Dumpster Enclosures and Recycling Services

Dumpsters are unsightly out in the open.

Re-roof Structures

Almost all structures in the park system are in need of re-roofing: ball field dugouts, shade structures, office/maintenance structures and restrooms.

Adjust Campsites

All campsites need to be between 20 and 50 feet from water banks for safety and environmental purposes. Leases with LADWP indicate distance requirements.

Replace Playground Equipment

Replace equipment with updated models that meet current standards

Diaz Lake Campground - 200 campsites on approximately 140 acres

Replace Water System

The system is old and breaks often. Currently, there is not potable water. Frequent breaks in the irrigation system required frequent, unplanned staff time that could be better used on improvements.

Restrooms/Showers

Rehab both restrooms and add showers.

Add Vault Toilet

The North side of the park needs restroom facilities

New Gazebo

This area is heavily used for group activities. It is worn out and needs to be replaced.

Fish Cleaning Area

This is a valuable amenity that is heavily used

Beach Day Use Area

Needs rehabilitation

Remove Bulrush

Lake access is impeded by the overgrowth of bulrush. The disabled fishing platform has become inaccessible.

Improve Roads

Repave or rehabilitate with surfaces that will be easier to maintain and mitigate dust

Portage Joe Campground - 22 Campsites

Foot Bridges

One additional foot bridge would provide better access to restrooms that are located north of the channel.

Shade Structure

The day use area that was created by converting campsites would greatly benefit from a shade structure to add comfort and relief from the direct sun.

Independence Creek - 29 campsites on approximately 20 acres

Footbridges

Footbridges over the creek are a nice feature of this park that are near the end of life and need to be replaced.

Campsite tables

Tables need to be repaired. Replacing with more sturdy tables would be better.

Concrete Fires Rings

Metal barbeques should be replaced

Fish Cleaning Area

This is a valuable amenity that is heavily used

Vintec Machines

Automated fee collection stations have been installed in most County campgrounds

Star Park

This project is in process. Concrete telescope pads have been installed and car barriers and signage are being worked on currently.

Taboose Creek - 36 campsites on approximately 15 acres

Day Use Area Development

Current day use areas are underdeveloped and need shade structures

Fish Cleaning Area

This is a valuable amenity that is heavily used

Footbridges

Footbridges over the creek are a nice feature of this park that are near the end of life and need to be replaced.

OHV Signage and Way Finding

OHV usage in increasing in this campground and users and the environment would greatly benefit from directional signs and way finding.

Tinemaha Creek - 35 campsites on approximately 25 acres

Day Use Area Development

Current day use areas are underdeveloped and need shade structures

Water Tank Tower

There is a new well drilled that needs a water tank and solar powered well house.

Footbridges

Footbridges over the creek are a nice feature of this park that are near the end of life and need to be replaced.

Road Repairs

Roads are dusty and have potholes that need to be repaired

OHV Signage and Way Finding

OHV usage in increasing in this campground and users and the environment would greatly benefit from directional signs and way finding.

Baker Creek - 43 campsites on approximately 25 acres

Water Tank Tower

There is a new well drilled that needs a water tank and solar powered well house.

Footbridges

Footbridges over the creek are a nice feature of this park that are near the end of life and need to be replaced.

New Paths and Trails

An integrated trail system where connect different areas of the park. This is important because vault toilets are not evenly distributed.

Pleasant Valley - 75 campsites on approximately 30 acres

Day Use Area at Dam

Developing the dam area so people using the trial above the dam for biking, walking and fishing would have a place to congregate and picnic would add tremendous value.

Tree Planting

Trees that were destroyed during the fire need to be replaced

Walk in tent sites

This would be an excellent location to accommodate hikers passing through the area.

Repair Bridge

This old bridge survived the fire, but needs repairs and updates

Road Repairs

Roads are dusty and have potholes that need to be repaired

Lone Pine Park

Dog Park

Plans for the dog park are almost complete, including moving and upgrading the water lines to the park. This project is expected to be completed within the fiscal year.

Irrigation and Turf Replacement

Lines need to be repaired or replaced. The system leaks and needs frequent repairs resulting in unplanned loss of productivity for other maintenance and upgrade projects. Once the irrigation is done, turf needs to be replaced.

Tennis Court Surface and Lighting

Lighting needs to be upgraded and converted to dark sky lighting. Minor surface repairs are needed to the courts.

Gazebo

The gazebo is completely worn out. It is heavily used and needs to be replaced with a new structure, including lighting and electrical outlets.

Barbeque Pits

Pits need to be upgraded and replaced

Lighting

Lights needs significant repairs and upgrades, including dark sky compliance.

Creek Repairs

The sharp bend in the creek has been contained with k rails, but a pond would be more attractive and provide a place for kids to wade.

Independence Park

Restrooms

Facilities need to be rehabilitated and upgraded.

Parking

Currently, the only parking is on the street. Creating head-in parking would add value.

Tables

Concrete tables would be a nice feature for people traveling through town that need to stop for rest and a meal.

Lighting

Dark sky lighting would make the park more visible to travelers.

Dehy Park

Box Car Stage

Using the existing railroad box car, create a stage for local events around the railway theme.

Improvements Across the Creek

The footbridge was replaced, so now it would be valuable to make improvements near the existing horseshoe pits.

Restrooms

Restrooms are old and dilapidated, needing to be replaced or updated.

lighting

The community has voiced a desire to convert the lighting to dark sky compliant and add two additional lights.

Mendenhall Park

Irrigation

Controls need to be upgraded for grassy areas and ball field

Little League Field

Field needs to be completely redone. It needs to be leveled, new infield and outfield dirt applied and turf re-installed.

Delineation Parking

Clearly defined parking will improve safety and enhance entries and exits.

Remove Light Poles

Old poles need to be removed and replaced with dark sky lighting

Drinking Fountains

Old drinking fountain needs to be replaced and additional fountains should be considered.

Isaac Walton Park

Restrooms

Repair or replace and modernize bathrooms

Turf

Turf needs replacement

Old Barbeque Grill

Needs to be removed.

Wellhead Dog House

This structure needs to be rebuilt to protect it from the elements.

Starlight Park

Delineation Parking

Clearly defined parking will improve safety and enhance entries and exits.

Millpond Recreation Area

Vehicle Delineation

The barrier for motorized vehicles needs to be replaced for most of the park. This includes the borders for driveways, roads and parking lots. There are numerous areas with no barriers present. Vehicle traffic needs to be restricted to designated areas.

Restrooms

Replace restroom with a modern facility that will accommodate heavy usage.

Repair Septic

The current leach field needs to be fixed along with the sewer lines. Piping is old and deteriorating and the leach field needs to be updated to meet regulations. This should be done in conjunction with replacing restrooms.

Roads

All roads are in a state of disrepair and need to be repaved or graveled.

Horseshoe Pitches

Horseshoes has declined in popularity, so most of the 50 horseshoe pitches should be removed and those remaining should be upgraded. Additionally, the lights should be repaired, replaced or removed.

New Ball Courts

Ball courts should be analyzed and changed to support modern community needs. For example, Bocce Ball or Pickle Ball courts might be popular. Community workshops would be a good way to inform this decision

Beach Shade Structures

The existing shade structures have been repaired numerous times, are near the end of their useful lives and should be replaced.

Resurface Tennis Courts

Based on community use and demand, courts should be resurfaced or replaced with something that is more in demand.

Trails

The size and location of this park make pathways with way finding signs and exercise stations ideal.

Replace Trees

Old trees that are at the end of their life need to be replaced

Soccer

The County could use another soccer field and the Millpond would be a good location.

Turf

Consider replacing or aggressively rehabbing the turf on all ball fields and in other locations throughout the park.

Pond

The pond needs aquatic vegetation removed and the intake needs to be cleared and rehabilitated.

Stage/Amphitheater

This is a great location for festivals and concerts and a permanent stage or amphitheater would support these activities.