

PART I – Chapter 5: PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The provision of adequate open space and the opportunities for a broad range of recreational and leisure activities are an essential ingredient for any community's quality of life. This is especially true for Johnson County, which prides itself for having a nationally recognized County Park system operated by the Johnson County Park & Recreation District.

Created in 1955, the County Park & Recreation District manages approximately 9,779 acres of parkland. Sixty-five percent (65%) of this parkland, approximately 6,321 acres, is located in the unincorporated area and the remaining 39%, approximately 3,458 acres, is located within the incorporated area of the County.

In addition to the parks operated by Johnson County, there are numerous parks located within the 20 municipalities in the County. Combined, these municipal parks total over 8,280 acres. Most of these municipal parks are neighborhood or community oriented, primarily serving nearby residents. Additionally, there are a variety of private recreational facilities within the County including golf courses, athletic fields, swimming pools, and tennis courts.

In contrast, the parks operated by the County Park and Recreation District are more regional or sub-regional in scale, serving residents countywide. A summary of all the parkland and recreation facilities operated by the County Park and Recreation District within both the unincorporated and incorporated areas of the County is available in the County Park and Recreation District's long-range plan, *Legacy Plan*. Adopted by the County

Park and Recreation District in August 2015, the *Legacy Plan* replaces *Map 2020*, adopted in 2001, as the District's "official guide for the future acquisition and development of existing and proposed parkland and recreation facilities."

The District's recommendations in the *Legacy Plan* have been considered in the preparation of this Plan. The information in this *Legacy Plan*, including the identification of existing and proposed parks, was integral to the development of the recommendations in this Plan for where and how future development near these amenities should occur.

The following summary is limited to the park and recreation facilities available within and generally to the unincorporated area and to the recommendations contained in the *Legacy Plan* relevant to the unincorporated area.

1.0 UNINCORPORATED AREA PARK FACILITIES

The following is a summary of Johnson County Park & Recreation District facilities available within the unincorporated area.

Heritage Park is a regional park dedicated in 1981. Located between 159th Street, 175th Street, Lackman Road, and Pflumm Road, it contains approximately 1,240 acres, and has facilities that include:

- a. Lighted football/soccer fields
- b. Lighted baseball and softball fields
- c. Picnic areas and shelter houses

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- d. 18-hole golf course & driving range
- e. 45-acre fishing and boating lake
- f. Equestrian trails (planned)
- g. Marina
- h. Playgrounds
- i. Concession areas
- j. Accessible walking and jogging trails
- k. Bicycling trails



Heritage Park

2. **Kill Creek Park** is a regional park dedicated in 2001 and is located adjacent to the east side of the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant. The park's main entrance is on Homestead Lane about one-quarter mile south of 115th Street. This park contains over 907 acres and has amenities that include:
 - a. Swimming beach
 - b. 26.5-acre lake
 - c. Marina
 - d. Picnic areas and shelters
 - e. Playground
 - f. Equestrian trails
 - g. Accessible walking and jogging trails
 - h. Bicycling trails
 - i. Nature trails
 - j. Adventure center and challenge course
3. **Sunflower Nature Park** is a sub-regional park located adjacent to the north boundary of the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant at 103rd Street and Edgerton Road. This park contains approximately 57 acres and has facilities that include:
 - a. Baseball and softball fields
 - b. Picnic area and shelter house
 - c. Playground
 - d. Fishing pond
 - e. Accessible walking, jogging and nature trail
4. **Camp Branch Glade Park** is a sub-regional park dedicated in 2015 and located near 175th and Nall Avenue. It contains approximately 58 acres and remains largely undeveloped with facilities that include:
 - a. Natural areas for bird watching
 - b. Natural surface trails for hiking and equestrian activities
5. **Big Bull Creek Park and Big Bull Creek Streamway Park Sites (Future)** were acquired by funding approved by County voters in 1998. Located partially within the east side of the city of Edgerton, the park contains a total of approximately 1,933 acres - 150 acres are within the city of Edgerton and the remaining approximately 1,783 acres are within the unincorporated area. Planning for the future development of the park began in 2015.
6. **Cedar Niles Park Site (Future)** is located in an area along and near 135th Street and Cedar Niles Road and currently includes approximately 955 acres of undeveloped land. The *Legacy*

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Plan calls for the development of a regional park at the site. The Prairie Center operated by the Kansas Department of Wildlife is located directly to the west across Cedar Niles Road and the Olathe Prairie Center Park is adjacent to the east.

7. **Camp Branch Park (Future)** is approximately a 236-acre tract of undeveloped land located in the rural southeast area of the County. The site is approximately one mile east of Nall Avenue and north of 183rd Street, bounded on the east by the Mission Road and bisected by Camp Branch Creek. Planning for the future development of this future park is underway.
8. **Ernie Miller Park** located at 909 North K-7 Highway in the City of Olathe, is a nature preserve containing approximately 116. The park is bisected by Little Cedar Creek and the facility has three miles of nature trails, including a quarter mile ADA accessible trail. The Ernie Miller Nature Center includes a gift shop, interpretive displays, meeting rooms, an amphitheater, picnic shelter, and parking for 51 vehicles.



9. **Stilwell Community Park** is a 56-acre park that opened in 2015 and is located near 207th and Metcalf. Current amenities include a parking lot, picnic areas, and a 1-mile multi-use trail. Planning for continued development is underway.

10. A **Streamway Park System** was approved by Johnson County voters in 1986 with the passage of a one-half mill levy increase for the primary purpose of obtaining land and developing a countywide streamway park system. Eight stream corridors have been identified throughout the County as potential sites for streamway park development: Mill Creek, Turkey Creek, Tomahawk Creek, Indian Creek are all entirely within existing municipal boundaries. Bull Creek, Kill Creek, Cedar Creek, and Coffee Creek/Blue River are within portions of both the incorporated and unincorporated areas.

This system of streamway parks will protect these riparian areas as well as provide new recreational resources.

These streamway parks will primarily consist of trails that will be for the exclusive use of bicycles, jogging, walking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and other non-motorized uses, with park facilities located at public access points. The Mill Creek Streamway Park was the first project completed with these funds and is approximately 17 miles in length, beginning in Olathe and terminating at Nelson Island in the Kansas River to the north.



2.0 OTHER PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES

The following is a summary of other park and recreation facilities of potential significance to unincorporated area.

1. **Overland Park Arboretum** is located at 179th and Antioch Road within the boundaries of the city of Overland Park. This park contains 300 acres and includes the following facilities:
 - a. Shelter and indoor display area
 - b. Bike/pedestrian trails
 - c. Preserve areas
 - d. Botanical/water displays



Overland Park Arboretum

An additional 321 acres of land adjacent to the south and west of the Arboretum has been donated by members of the

Kemper family for future park use. Planning for the development of this future parkland area is now underway.

2. The **Prairie Center** located west of Olathe, on the southeast corner of 135th Street and Cedar Niles Road, is managed by the Kansas Department of Wildlife. This approximately 300-acre center provides outdoor education and natural resource interpretation. The center contains 45 acres of original virgin prairie and 60 acres of restored prairies, along with lakes, woods, clear streams and hiking trails. The focus of the Prairie Center is to preserve the natural environment of the native tall grass prairie with park usage aimed at teaching about ecological systems. Activities for the public include field trips and guided hikes and a variety of special programs on prairie history, plant and animal life.
3. **Hillsdale Lake Reservoir** located in Miami County, approximately 1 mile south of Johnson County, contains a 4,580-acre lake that provides a wide variety of recreational opportunities, including sightseeing, fishing, and boating, and equestrian trails. Facilities at the Hillsdale Lake Reservoir include boat launches, a nature trail, a visitor's center, and picnic areas. With the planned construction of camping areas, beaches, and other facilities over the next few years, it is anticipated that visitations to and usage of this lake will continue to increase in the future.
4. **MetroGreen** is a regional greenway system intended to establish

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an interconnected systems of trails that will serve and link together the Kansas City metropolitan area. It is principally comprised of linear corridors of land along streams, roadways, and within abandoned railroad corridors. The Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) has been the lead organization promoting the development of MetroGreen described in the following.

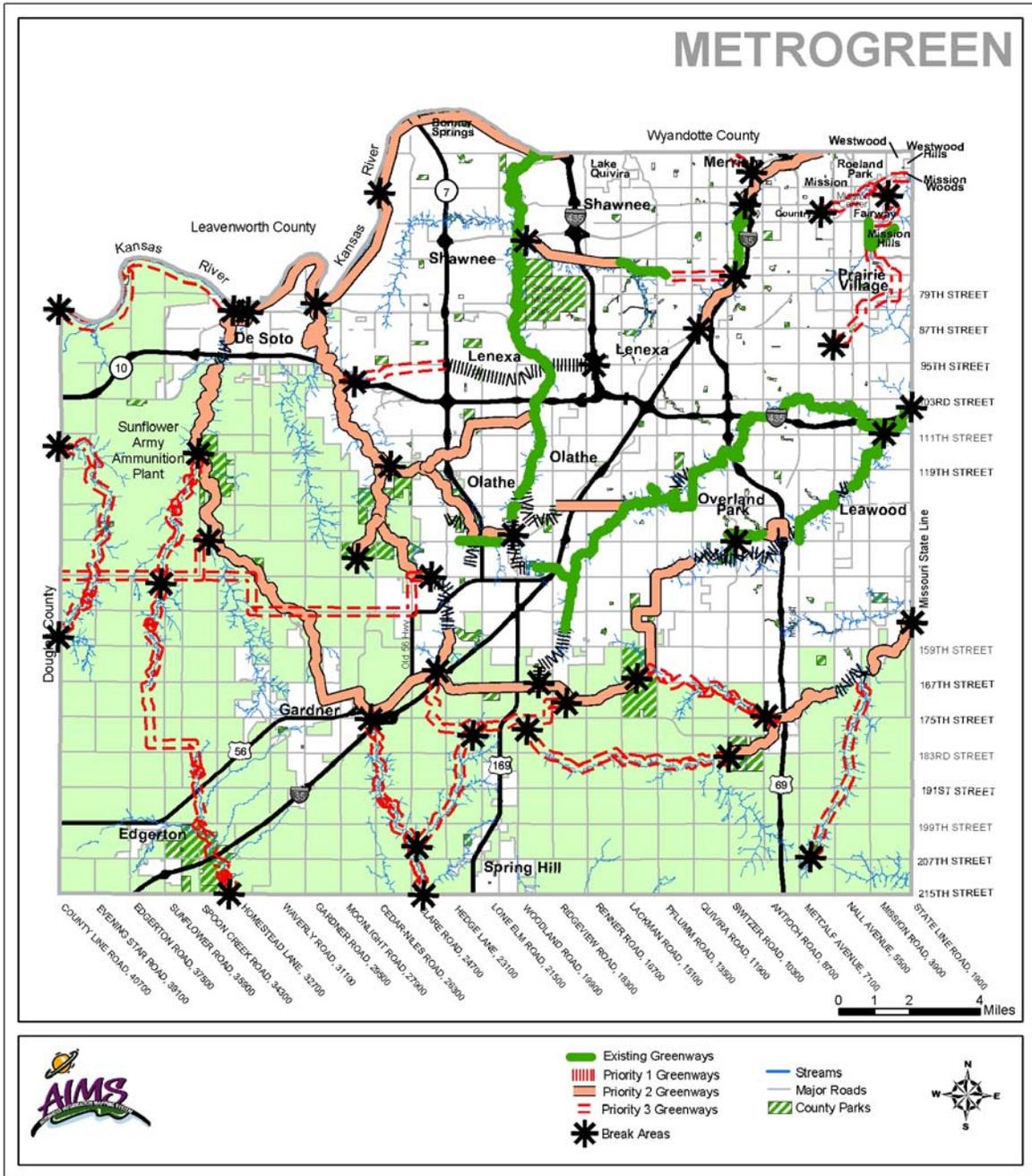
MetroGreen published by MARC in January 2002, envisions a greenway system of over 260 miles for Johnson County. The greenways envisioned in the MetroGreen for the unincorporated area were delineated in coordination with the County Park and Recreation District and correspond with similar proposals in MAP 2020, which is described in the following section.

Although not part of this Plan, MetroGreen serves as a useful reference for how Johnson County's streamway parks may fit into the metropolitan-wide streamway planning. Within the unincorporated area of Johnson County, the MetroGreen envisions nearly 130 miles of trails, including extensions of existing trails and new trails that would connect with the four surrounding counties.

Map 4 shows the location of the *Metrogreen* proposed greenways for the unincorporated area of Johnson County.

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MAP 4: METROGREEN



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2.1 Natural Resources

The *Legacy Plan* recognized the value of preserving and protecting high quality natural resources in Johnson County. The Streamway Park System provides opportunities to acquire and protect riparian habitat along the county's major streams. Additional habitat types including woodlands, grasslands, croplands, can be protected within regional parks and greenway corridors. The plan recommends an active resource management program within parks to remove and control invasive species and insure the health of natural habitats.

More information on the County's Natural Resources is provided in Chapter 8, Resource and Service Inventory.

3.0 LEGACY PLAN SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the *Legacy Plan* recommendations relevant to the unincorporated area:

- Develop a new streamway park near the confluence of Blue River and Camp Branch Creeks.
- Develop Camp Branch Park in coordination with future population increases for this area.
- Develop Cedar Niles Park into a regional park with a multi-use center, hiking trails, picnic shelters, a new Prairie Interpretive Center, and athletic fields.
- Link Heritage Park with the City of Overland Park Arboretum via a new Coffee Creek/Wolf Creek Streamway Park.

- Develop a nature-based playground at Kill Creek Park.
- Continue to upgrade the Sunflower Nature Park with pond and boardwalk improvements, trail improvements, and a wildlife observation shelter.
- Develop a master plan for Big Bull Creek Park.
- Continue acquisition and development of the Streamway Park System, to include greenways and trails along Bull Creek, Kill Creek, Coffee Creek, Wolf Creek, Camp Branch, Blue River, and Bain Creek located within the unincorporated area.
- If land (approximately 2,800 acres) is conveyed to the County Park and Recreation District, as recommended from the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant Plan, prepare a new master plan for that area.

3.1 Plan for Parks

The Plan for Parks and Recreation Facilities (on the following page), shows the recommendations from the *Legacy Plan* relevant to the County. The locations of existing and planned parks and streamways within the unincorporated area have been used as a guide for this Plan.

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Map 5: Proposed Plan for Parks and Recreation Facilities

