

# CHAPTER 11: NATURE PRESERVES, PARKS & RECREATION

## Introduction

Parks and open spaces are community assets that promote a sense of place, interaction among residents, and healthy living. While there are no standards that identify how many acres of parks should exist in a community, analysis can be completed that determines whether or not parks have the desired amenities and geographic location for residents and visitors. Park and trail development should be considered in all new residential developments and as communities grow.

## Nature Preserves, Parks and Recreation

Piatt County has 28 parks totaling over 3,000 acres, as shown in Table 11-1 and Map 11-1. Each of the eight municipalities has one or more parks, and some unincorporated villages also have park areas.



*Sun Singer at Allerton Park*

**Table 11-1: Piatt County Parks**

Name	Acres
Allerton Park Monticello	1804
Weldon Springs State Park - Piatt County Unit	640
Lodge Park Monticello	439
Shady Rest Piatt County Forest Preserve White Heath	60
Piatt County Forest Preserve Galesville	60
Piatt County Forest Preserve Monticello	26
Valentine Park Monticello	18
Piatt County Fairgrounds Cerro Gordo	15
Piatt County Forest Preserve Bement	9
Robert C Burke Memorial Park Monticello	9
Gordy Park Cerro Gordo	8
Atwood Park	8
Bement Recreational Park	5
Piatt County Forest Preserve Cerro Gordo	5
Piatt County Forest Preserve Mansfield	3
Head Start School Park Cisco	3
Merry Park Monticello	3
Hammond School Park	3
Deland Baseball Diamond	3
Memorial Park Bement	2
White Heath Baseball Diamond	2
Piatt County Forest Preserve Deland	2
Dale C Born Memorial Park Cerro Gordo	2
Burgess Park Monticello	1
Piatt County Forest Preserve Hammond	1
Eagle Creek Park Monticello	1
Nick's Park Community Playground Monticello	0
Gucker Park Monticello	0
Rotary Centennial Park Monticello	0
<b>Total Acreage</b>	<b>3131</b>

Map 11-1:

# Preserves, Parks, and Recreation Piatt County, Illinois

## Legend

-  Parks
-  Heartland Pathways
-  Interstate
-  US Highway
-  State Highway
-  County Highway
-  Roads
-  County
-  Municipal Boundary



0 2 4 Miles

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Sources:  
IDOT  
CCGIS

The three largest parks in Piatt County (Allerton Park, Weldon Springs State Park – Piatt County Unit, and Lodge Park) total approximately 2,884.2 acres, or 94% of the total park area. Allerton Park and Lodge Park can be considered regional parks due to their size and amenities.

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Allerton Park was an estate built by Robert Allerton in the early 1900s. He donated the property, which includes the manor house, woodlands, gardens, and sculpture gardens, to the University of Illinois in 1946. Hiking, bicycling, picnicking, and touring the gardens and sculptures are all popular pastimes. There are over 14 miles of unpaved walking trails and over a mile of paved roads that connect different areas of the park for use by visitors. The park is located west of the City of Monticello.

Lodge Park, located in north Monticello has camping and picnic sites adjacent to the Sangamon River. Fishing, camping, hiking and special events are all attractions at this 440 acre park.

Weldon Springs State Park – Piatt County Unit is located southwest of Monticello, adjacent to Allerton Park and is owned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. It covers 640 acres with grasslands and forests along the south side of the Sangamon River. Hunting is allowed in the park only in designated areas.

The Piatt County Forest Preserve has approximately 45 acres in six different municipalities and one unincorporated area in Piatt County, including Bement, Cerro Gordo, Deland, Hammond, Mansfield, Monticello, White Heath and Sangamon Township.

Heartland Pathways is a 33-mile greenway that extends through parts of Piatt, Champaign, and DeWitt Counties.

### Key Findings

- Park amenities and geographic proximity to residents need to be assessed to determine future park needs.
- Allerton Park and Lodge Park are regional attractions in Piatt County.

## Plans for Parks, Preserves and Recreation

This section establishes goals, objectives and strategies for the future conditions of Piatt County's parks and recreation areas. Recommendations in this chapter are intended to provide tools by which these amenities can be improved and strengthen the positive imagery in the county.

### Issues

Piatt County residents indicated a variety of issues related to parks, preserves, and recreation during the public input opportunities afforded by the planning process.

- There is a lack of maintenance at some parks in Piatt County.
- Green space is lacking in some new subdivisions.
- Parks and recreational facilities need more marketing and promotion.
- Accessibility for disabled persons could be improved at parks and recreation areas.
- Residents would like more recreational programs for children and adults.

### Best Management Practices

There are several factors that should be considered in light of current known best planning practices for Piatt County's economy. The following can be considered when implementing the plan.

- **Connectivity**  
Parks should be accessible by a variety of transportation modes. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities within and connecting parks are positive additions to a community and can increase park usage.
- **Proximity**  
Ideally, parks will be located within walking distance of every residence within incorporated areas and rural settlements. Walking distance is typically considered to be  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile. Having parks adjacent to residential areas raises property values of those residences closest to the park.
- **Diversity**  
Amenities within a system of parks should include as many amenities as possible, and economically feasible. Such amenities might include water features, trails, a variety of ball fields, playgrounds for different ages, and other elements that cater to different types of users.

## Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Piatt County will have sufficient open space and related amenities for all residents that can be accessed by multiple travel modes.

Objective 1.1: Undertake a needs assessment that identifies park space, amenities, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities.

Objective 1.2: Acquire amenities in accordance with an amenities plan that is based on the desires and needs of a majority of Piatt County residents.

Objective 1.3: Acquire adequate sites in advance of need and in accordance with an overall parks acquisition plan.

Objective 1.4: Create and implement an ordinance that requires an established amount of open space in all new developments.

Objective 1.5: Withdraw from normal urban use and retain as permanent open space those areas which because of topography, flooding, steep slopes, or other similar conditions are not suitable for development.

Objective 1.6: Encourage Federal Rails-to-Trails initiatives, especially those that have linkages to parks and other recreational activity centers.

Objective 1.7: Encourage safe and logical connections between parks, residential areas, and other activity centers for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Goal 2: The Piatt County parks system will be a regional tourist attraction and draw for area residents.

Objective 2.1: Develop a marketing plan for Piatt County parks, including an inventory of attractions, potential funding sources for marketing and tourism, and responsible parties.

Objective 2.2: Market parks in Piatt County as an amenity for home seekers.

Objective 2.3: Use trails and routes to connect Piatt County to other regional attractions.

Goal 3: Piatt County parks will be maintained and upgraded as needed given available funding.

Objective 3.1: Maintain facilities so that they remain safe, viable, and handicap accessible recreation and tourist areas.

Objective 3.2: Seek funds for maintenance, upgrading, and expansion of parks and their facilities.

Objective 3.3: Make best use of volunteers for maintenance.

Objective 3.4: Ensure that all facilities meet or exceed accessibility standards for disabled persons.

Objective 3.5: Support creative funding mechanisms in order to achieve and implement park, open space, and recreation objectives at every level of Piatt County government.

Goal 4: Piatt County parks will remain important activity centers in the community.

Objective 4.1: Protect and enhance the extensive open space areas that are essential to the overall image and character of Piatt County and its municipalities.

Objective 4.2: Identify opportunities to network multi-use trails and pathways to provide connections between subdivisions, schools, parks, and commercial areas.

Goal 5: Support a public and private parks and recreation system that promotes healthy lifestyles by offering active and passive recreational opportunities.

Objective 5.1: Create a County Greenways and Trails Plan and provide support for any interrelated municipal open space plans.

Objective 5.2: Continue to enhance access and utilization of the Sangamon River for recreational purposes.

## **Future Conditions**

Piatt County has ample parks and preserves space on a regional scale. The next twenty years should focus on accelerated maintenance of existing facilities and implementing new amenities and programs. New residential subdivisions should have dedicated public open space to further provide for local recreation opportunities. Trails should become more prominent through and between activity centers such as the parks, tourist attractions, and commercial areas. Piatt County can become a regional tourist attraction with a showcase parks system and connecting trails. Cooperation and partnerships with other entities to provide a unified and interconnected park system is a high priority. A regional park plan will help entities establish priority projects and develop partnerships that will help accomplish identified goals.