

BENNETT BEACH PARK

DESCRIPTION

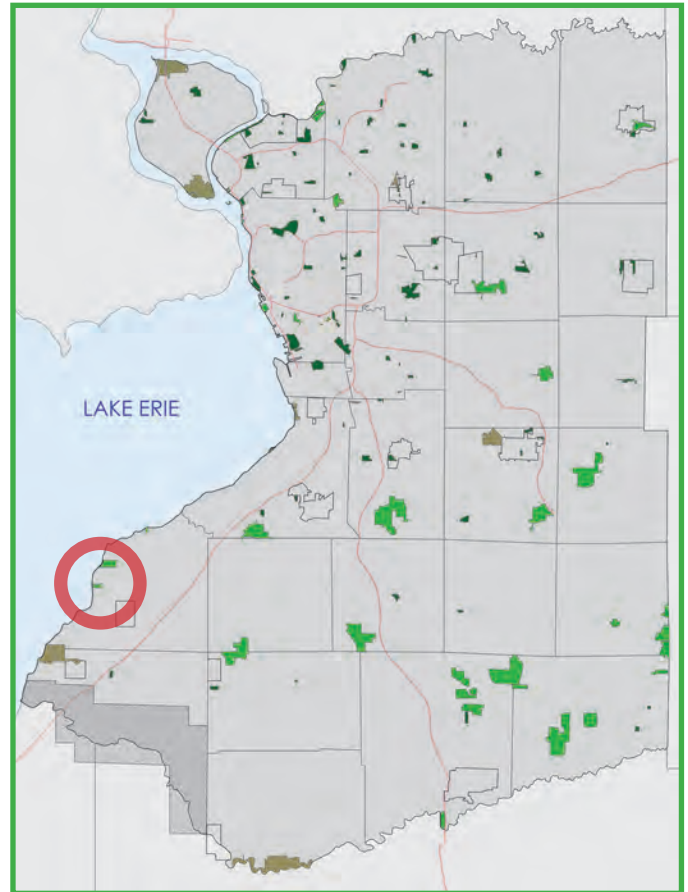
Bennett Beach is a special place along the eastern shoreline of Lake Erie, having one of the last remaining natural sand beaches and dunes. This unique lakefront park is approximately 50 acres in size and is located in the Town of Evans. Lakeshore Road splits the park into two halves, with the western half as “beach- related” open space and the remainder as an undeveloped natural wooded area. The park is also bisected from the northwest to the southeast by Big Sister Creek, which is an attractive fishing spot. A pedestrian bridge provides access from an existing parking area over to the beach. In general, the park is very flat, except for the large sand dunes and an 8'-high berm north of the bridge along the Creek.

Limited facilities exist at Bennett Beach, including a comfort station located at the parking area. The old Angola Water Treatment Facility, owned by the City of Buffalo, sits abandoned just to the south of the Bennett Beach property.

PARK AND AREA HISTORY

Bennett Beach sits on the site of the old Bennett Estate. The property was originally acquired by the City of Buffalo, and later on by Erie County. While most beaches along the eastern Lake Erie shoreline have either been destroyed, altered, or are under private ownership, Bennett Beach is one of the very few publicly held waterfront parks in Erie County. Bennett Beach still retains some of the historic landscape features that once were so common along the lakeshore, including a natural sand beach and impressive sand dunes. In addition, there are back-dune wetlands remaining and the natural dynamics of Big Sister Creek's outlet into the Lake.

It has been said that an “Old Growth” forest, with trees between 200 years and 500 years old, exists on the property immediately adjacent to the park to the north on the ‘Pine Lodge Property’.



Park Location Map: Bennett Beach is located in the Town of Evans, a short distance away from Wendt Beach off of Lakeshore Road



Nice sandy beach at Bennett Beach Park

PARK SPECIFIC PRIORITIES

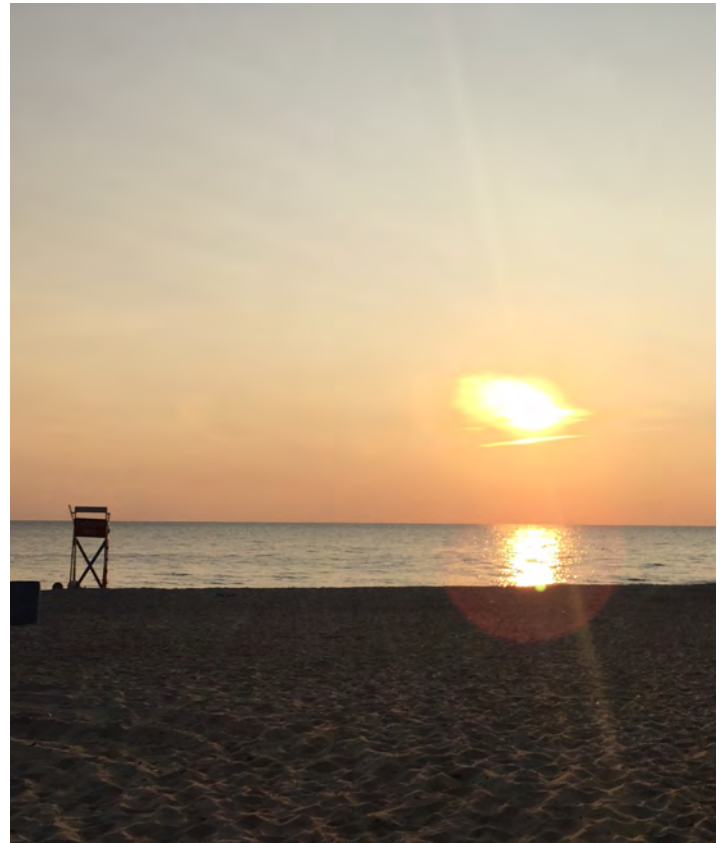
- **Preserve and enhance overall dune environment; Protection of these unique natural features along the Lake Erie shoreline should be prioritized.**
- **Prioritize the protection of archaeological sensitive areas.**
 - Determine specific areas of significance and provide proper protection;
 - Provide possible interpretive signage as warning of sensitive areas
 - Actively pursue any grants and funding available through federal agencies.

LOCAL CONTEXT

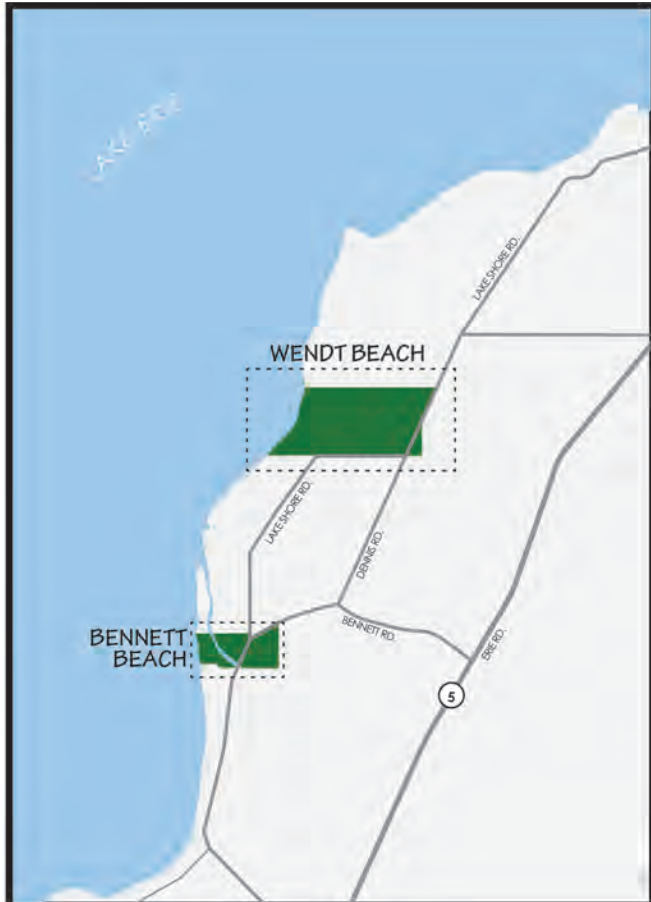
Bennett Beach is located approximately 23 miles south of Downtown Buffalo, at the intersection of Old Lakeshore Road and Bennett Road. The beach-front properties to both the north and south of Bennett Beach are primarily single family residential, with most housing historically “summer” or “seasonal” cottages owned by people in the greater Buffalo area. Areas to the east of the park are generally low density, rural residential developments. South from Bennett Beach is the thickly settled hamlet of Lake Erie Beach (Evans), a popular summer resort area with a few seasonal commercial establishments. Recent years have seen more year-round residents, as residential lakefront property has become a very hot commodity. The lakefront area to the north of Bennett Beach along Old Lakeshore Road is traditionally comprised of larger estates, many dating back to the early 1900s.

RECREATIONAL CONTEXT

Bennett Beach is a passive park, offering no structured playing fields or courts. Wendt Beach is another County-owned lakefront park situated only one mile to the north of Bennett Beach which is easily accessible via the Shoreline Trail along Lakeshore Road. However, Wendt Beach is of a much different character, with a distinct and historic mansion setting, stony beach (non-sand), and expansive soccer fields.



Sunset over Lake Erie



Local context map

RECENT PARKS DEPARTMENT PROJECTS / IMPROVEMENTS

The 2012-2017 Capital Improvements within Bennett Beach totaled \$198,531 and included the following projects:

- Comfort Station – Roof repair and plumbing
- Parking lot and roadway improvements – Extended size and resurfaced with two types of stone
- Wall removed – Removed old bath house, foundation remains
- Storage Building – Built pole barn storage building
- Comfort Station Remodel – Complete remodel

ARCHAEOLOGY PARTNERSHIP -

Almost all of the parks under Erie County's jurisdiction are located within state designated Archaeological Sensitive Areas (ASAs). ASAs are established whenever a known archaeological site is located within a 0.50-mile radius. In several instances, there are known archaeological resources located within an Erie County Park.

At Bennett Beach Park, pre-contact Native American artifacts including, but not limited to projectile points, pottery shards, and fire pits have been unearthed. The quality of the artifacts being found at Bennett Beach has become an issue at Bennett Beach Park because of looting and, while digging in Erie County parks is strictly against the law, it is almost impossible to enforce/to prevent it from happening.

Extensive public education is one method of helping to prevent looting. An educated general public, with an awareness of how the law, goes a long way in helping keeping Parks staff aware of any looting that may be occurring within the parks.

The wealth of archaeological resources, especially at Bennett Beach, presents an excellent partnership opportunity with the University at Buffalo Department of Anthropology (which has specializations in archaeology).

Again, graduate and doctoral students from the program, under the guidance of their professors, could conduct public "dig days" at parks such as Bennett Beach. These "dig days" have proven to be highly successful at engaging, not only amateur/part-time archaeologists, but also families with children of all ages. The "dig days" have multiple benefits for everyone involved.

First, they are huge draw of interest and they bring increased visitorship to a given park. Second, they educate the public on the do's and don'ts of archaeology and make them aware of the intrinsic value of these irreplaceable sites. These members of the public often become your strongest allies in protecting the sites from looting. Finally, they provide the students with the opportunity to engage in hands-on, real-world archaeology, equipping with the experience and knowledge needed to go on to become registered professional archaeologists (RPA).

Significant finds, could be potentially be displayed with other community partners such as local historical societies or even the Buffalo History Museum or the Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

CURRENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

- Apparent archaeological artifacts buried within much of the beach front property. No protection and security in place to prevent theft from these culturally significant areas.
- No protection of sensitive and unique dune areas.
- Bennett Beach does not appear to be maximizing its potential.
- The parking lot is poorly defined and in poor condition. Ponding frequently occurs.
- Small parking area on east side of Lakeshore Road does not have good connection to park.
- The walk from the parking area to the beach can be difficult for less-abled patrons.
- One small playground structure cannot accommodate the number of children during the summer.
- No formal access to the creek for fishing and aquatic recreation.



Parking area



Sandy entrance to the beach



MASTER PLAN BENNETT BEACH

ERIE COUNTY PARKS MASTER PLAN UPDATE

MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:
Specific Action Items - Ex. (All)

- 1 (C:3.0) Preserve and enhance overall dune environment; Protection of these unique natural features along the Lake Erie shoreline should be prioritized. Incorporate new beach grasses and vegetation on the waterfront side of the dune to assure long term sustainability. Engage dune/ecological expert to properly define dune environment and place fencing to protect these natural features. Provide necessary signage to educate park patrons about sensitivity of the dune areas.
- 2 (P:1.0) Engage consultant and local universities to undergo investigation of archeological artifacts and historically significant features. Determine specific areas of significance and provide proper protection; Provide possible interpretive signage as warning of sensitive areas.
- 3 (C:4.0) Long-term goal to establish an ADA accessible boardwalk system/or series of paths/trails through the existing "cut" in the natural sand dune to reduce further impacts and degradation of the dunes.
- 4 (C:2.0) Reorganize and improve parking area; consider using a natural crushed stone surface as a more environmentally friendly surface material. Consider paving the lot in the future. Define boundaries and provide new tree plantings around the lot. Define lot with possible planting buffers/medians



MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 5 (C:5.0) Possibly provide expanded playground equipment to replace existing play structure which is too small to accommodate a large number of children during the summer months. It is recommended to have a play structure that appeals to both the younger/older children, and to those of all abilities.
- 6 (C:6.0) Establish picnic groves on east side of Creek; if funding is available, provide small to medium sized shelters. Shelters would see frequent rentals due to popularity over summer months.
- 7 (C:7.0) Update and improve restroom facility; Retrofit building to include stone work and 'lakefront style' design to fit better in with County Parks System character. Expansion of building could include area for concessions and expanded restroom/changing areas.
- 8 (C:9.0) Establish a more dominant gateway into the park from Lakeshore Road. Provide landscaping with seasonal interest.
- 9 Maintain area east of Lakeshore Road as a nature reserve. Provide limited trail access through this natural area to offer access to the Creek.
- 10 Incorporate new backshore beach activities, i.e. first aid/ lifeguard station, and potential rentals (wind surfers, kayaks); Introduce volleyball courts (sand and/or grass) and other beach-related activities into the recreational mix with the guidance and funding of user-groups and stakeholders.

Legend:

- Potential Major and Minor Park Gateway Locations
- Destination
- Natural Features
- Playground
- Shoreline Trail
- Park Boundary

MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Key - (Project Type: Project Number)

A - Action Item: Completed at low to no cost by Parks Staff

P - Assistance or completion of project by potential partner/user group

C - Capital project

Beach/Dunes:

- **(C: 3.0) Preserve and enhance overall dune environment;** Protection of these unique natural features along the Lake Erie shoreline should be prioritized.
 - Protect and inventory significant and rare plant species, as well as other ecological features.
 - Incorporate new beach grasses and vegetation on the waterfront side of the dune to assure long-term sustainability.
 - Engage dune/ecological expert to properly define dune environment and place fencing to protect these natural features.
 - Provide necessary signage to educate park patrons about sensitivity of the dune areas.
 - Priority: High
 - Partner: ECSWD/NYSDEC
- **(P: 1.0) Prevention of the theft of important artifacts and antiquities needs to be prioritized within archaeological sensitive areas.** Engage consultant and local universities to undergo investigation of archaeological artifacts and historically significant features. Previous studies and reports have acknowledged the evidence of such remains and they are a unique component of the park.
 - Assess vegetation and wildlife before completing any work in these areas to reduce impacts.
 - Determine specific areas of significance and provide proper protection;
 - Provide interpretive signage as warning of sensitive areas;
 - Patrolling and security measures should be taken to provide additional protection of critical areas of the park;
 - Actively pursue any grants and funding available through federal agencies.
 - Priority: High
 - Partner: University At Buffalo/Patrolling & Security/Penn Dixie/Evans Historical Society



Sensitive dune areas at Bennett Beach



Pictured on the left is the existing sand trail to the beach at Bennett, and the picture on the right is of an accessible boardwalk system installed at Walnut Beach Park in Ashtabula, Ohio.



- **(C: 4.0) Establish an ADA accessible boardwalk system/ or series of paths/trails through the existing “cut” in the natural sand dune** to reduce further impacts and degradation to one of the last surviving natural sand dunes on the eastern Lake Erie Shoreline.
 - This new boardwalk would allow for dune reinstatement/restoration, and would prevent further water erosion and debris build-up following every major storm along the lake.
 - Provide appropriate access point to reduce potential harm to dune areas.
 - Establish nature trails and interpretive signage around dunes and wetland areas.

■ Priority: Medium

■ Partner: NYSDEC/Soil and Water Conservation District

- **Incorporate new backshore beach activities, i.e. first aid/ lifeguard station, and potential rentals (wind surfers, kayaks);** Introduce volleyball courts (sand and/ or grass) and other beach-related activities into the recreational mix in partnership with user-groups and stakeholders.

■ Priority: Low

■ Partner: In-House/Grants



View along the beach

- **(C: 1.0) Provide interpretive signage and opportunities** about the lakefront environment, harsh weather conditions, dune restoration, creek habitat, local history, Bennett House history, etc. An entire signage package should be developed, similar to that at Woodlawn Beach.
 - Priority: Low
 - Partner: In-House/Historical Society

- Pursue a usergroup/local investor who can lease the existing water treatment plant adjacent to the park property. The UB Archeology program could use it as a field station and spur investment into the rest of the park.

- Priority: Low
- Partner: University at Buffalo

Creek/Forested Areas:

- **(P: 3.0) Management and monitoring of invasive species is imperative to the health of the park.**
 - Address and remove threatening invasive species.
 - Priority: High
 - Partner: WNY Prism/ECSWD
- **(P: 2.0) Improve the health of Big Sister Creek. Work with NYSDEC, Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, and other local stakeholder groups.**
 - Focus projects should include stream bank stabilization and erosion control, habitat conservation and restoration, stormwater management, and contaminant reduction.
 - Continued improvements to the ecological status of the waterways and naturalization of the surrounding wooded areas can contribute to educational nature programs and trail/water recreation.
 - Priority: Medium
 - Partner: NYSDEC/ECSWD/Waterkeeper



Existing sign with park information



Big Sister Creek



Trail access to the Creek



Pedestrian bridge over Big Sister Creek

- **Maintain area east of Lakeshore Road as nature reserve.** Provide limited trail access through this natural area to offer access to the Creek.
 - Priority: Medium
 - Partner: In-House
- **Increase and enhance fishing opportunities and access points along Big Sister Creek.** Especially in the forested area to the east of Lakeshore Road.
 - Fish species include steelhead, brown trout, and smallmouth bass.
 - Priority: Medium
 - Partner: In-House
- **Monitor and maintain health of trees to preserve natural beauty around Big Sister Creek.**
 - Priority: Low
 - Partner: Forestry/In-House
- **Provide and enhance nature trails;** include possible interpretive signage about local fauna/species/ecology of the area.
 - Priority: Low
 - Partner: In-House/Cornell Cooperative Extension

Park Area:

- **(A: 1.1-1.2) Improve the tree health of the park, in particular within maintained areas.**
 - Remove dead, dying or diseased trees.
 - Prune deadwood from trees.
 - Routinely monitor the tree population for indications of pest infestations.
 - Provide new tree plantings throughout the park, particularly along the roadway edges.
 - Apply for funding from NYSDEC, for example, for purchase of trees and materials, and for the tree inventory.
 - **Priority: High**
 - **Partner: WNY PRISM/ECSWD/Forestry**
- **Continue to develop Shoreline Trail System to link with other lakefront parks and nearby communities.**
 - **Priority: High**
 - **Partner: In-House/Grants**
- **(A: 3.0) Improve playground safety; Provide or replenish engineered fiber fall surfaces at playgrounds annually.**
 - **Priority: High**
 - **Partner: In-House**



Small playground area



Parking area should be formalized and enhanced

- **(P: 4.0) Enhance habitats for both resident and migratory birds;**
 - Emphasize the plantings of native vegetation which provides food, cover, and nesting locations for birds.
 - Seek input and technical expertise from groups such as the NYSDEC and US Fish and Wildlife Service.
 - **Priority: High**
 - **Partner: NYSDEC, US Fish and Wildlife Service**
- **(P: 5.0) Provide pollinator friendly plants and pollinator gardens for the presence of Hummingbirds, Butterflies, Bumblebees, Clear-winged moths, and others.**
 - Plant late season nectar sources such as New England Aster, which would improve late summer/early fall migrating periods.
 - Prioritize protection and enhancement of sensitive ecological areas;
 - Propose appropriate additional native plantings throughout the park;
 - **Priority: High**
 - **Partner: NYSDEC/Cornell Cooperative Extension/ECSWD/In-House**
- **(C: 2.0) Reorganize and improve parking area;** Consider paving the lot.
 - Define boundaries and provide new tree plantings around the lot.
 - Define lot with possible planting buffers/medians
 - **Priority: Medium**
 - **Partner: Consultant/In-House**
- **(C: 5.0) Possibly provide expanded playground equipment** to replace existing play structure which is too small to accommodate a large number of children during the summer months.
 - It is recommended to have a play structure that appeals to both the younger (2-5 yrs) and older (5-12 yrs) children.
 - **Priority: Medium**
 - **Partner: In-House/Consultant**
- **(A: 4.0-4.2) Provide directional signage to the park at strategic locations:**
 - Intersection of Bennett Road and Dennis Road
 - Bennett Road and Erie Road
 - **Priority: Medium**
 - **Partner: In-House**



Comfort station



Large open space area between Creek and parking lot



Ponding of water in parking lot

- **(C: 6.0) Establish picnic groves on east side of Creek;** if funding is available, provide small to medium sized shelters. Shelters would see frequent rentals due to popularity over summer months.
 - Priority: Low
 - Partner: In-House
- **(C: 7.0) Update and improve restroom facility;** Retrofit building to include stone work and 'lakefront style' design to fit better in with County Parks System character.
 - Expansion of building could include area for concessions and expanded restroom/changing areas.
 - Priority: Low
 - Partner: Consultant/In-House
- **(C: 8.0) Relocate the park entrance road to the south for better site distances and safety;** consider the unsafe conditions at the current entrance/ intersection.
 - Priority: Low
 - Partner: Consultant/In-House
- **Provide emergency access;** Given the three distinct zones of the park (beach, back of dune to creek area, and between the creek and road),
 - provide emergency access through the water treatment facility area (Schwert Road) to the beach;
 - off Schwert Road for the back-dunes;
 - and off Lakeshore Road for the main park area.
 - Priority: Low
 - Partner: In-House
- **(C: 9.0) Establish a more dominant gateway into the park from Lakeshore Road. Provide landscaping with seasonal interest.**
 - Priority: Low
 - Partner: In-House
- **Improve ADA access throughout the park wherever is reasonable and feasible, especially within the walk to the beach.**
 - Priority: Low
 - Partner: In-House



Entry signage off of Lakeshore Road

BENNETT BEACH PARK: ACTION ITEMS

Project Type	Project #	Recommendation	Implementation Strategies	Priority	Term	Estimated Cost
A	1.1	Increase tree health and tree canopy throughout the park. Develop a multi-pronged tree planting strategy including contracted work, in-house staff and volunteer group plantings to increase tree canopy and renew the resource over time.	Prune and/or remove trees if determined to present an increased risk to park patrons and employees.	High	Ongoing	In-House, Forestry
A	2.0	Continue to develop Shoreline Trail System to link with other lakefront parks and nearby communities.	Coordinate planning efforts with Town	High	Ongoing	Project specific
A	3.0	Improve playground safety	Provide or replenish engineered fiber fall surfaces at playgrounds annually.	High	Ongoing	P.O.B.
C	3.0	Preserve and enhance overall dune environment; Engage dune/ecological expert to properly define dune environment.	Engage a consult to develop plans and a contractor to construct the improvements	High	6-10 Years	Conduct a formal study and cost estimates
P	1.0	Engage consultant and local universities to undergo investigation of archaeological artifacts and historically significant features.	Partnership with University At Buffalo, Penn Dixie, Hamburg Historical Society	High	6-10 Years	Partnership
P	3.0	Management and monitoring of invasive species is imperative to the health of the park. Address and remove threatening invasive species.	Coordinate with WNY Prism, ECSWD, and others.	High	Ongoing	Partner
P	4.0	Enhance habitats for both resident and migratory birds;	Seek input and technical expertise from groups such as the NYSDEC and US Fish and Wildlife Service.	High	1-2 Years	Partner
P	5.0	Provide pollinator friendly plants and pollinator gardens for the presence of Hummingbirds, Butterflies, Bumblebees, Clear-winged moths, and others.	Coordinate with NYSDEC/Cornell Cooperative Extension/ECSWD	High	1-2 Years	Partner

KEY:

A: Action Item: Completed at low to no cost by Parks staff

P: Assistance or completion of project by potential partner/user group

C: Capital Project

POB: Parks Operating Budget



BENNETT BEACH PARK: ACTION ITEMS

Project Type	Project #	Recommendation	Implementation Strategies	Priority	Term	Estimated Cost
A	1.2	Increase tree health and tree canopy throughout the park. . Develop a multi-pronged tree planting strategy including contracted work, in-house staff and volunteer group plantings to increase tree canopy and renew the resource over time.	Develop an annual tree planting program.	Medium	Ongoing	In-House, Forestry
A	4.0	Provide directional signage <u>to the park</u> at strategic locations:	Coordination between Parks & Highways to develop and produce the sign panels, and coordinate with the road jurisdiction regarding placement of the signs.	Medium	6-10 Years	In-House
A	4.1	Intersection of Bennett Road and Dennis Road	Coordination between Parks & Highways to develop and produce the sign panels, and coordinate with the road jurisdiction regarding placement of the signs.	Medium	6-10 Years	In-House
A	4.2	Bennett Road and Erie Road	Coordination between Parks & Highways to develop and produce the sign panels, and coordinate with the road jurisdiction regarding placement of the signs.	Medium	6-10 Years	In-House
C	1.0	Provide interpretive signage in the park:	Coordinate with historical society to develop copy and obtain images for the interpretive content.	Medium	6-10 Years	\$3,500
C	2.0	Improve safety and functionality of main parking lot, reduce size of lot, provide asphalt surface, striping, accessible parking spaces, planting medians, and rain gardens	Engage a consult to develop plans and a contractor to construct the improvements	Medium	6-10 Years	\$100,000
C	5.0	Provide expanded playground equipment to replace existing play structure which is too small to accommodate a large number of children during the summer months.	Engage a consult to develop plans and a contractor to construct the improvements	Medium	6-10 Years	\$40,000

KEY:

A: Action Item: Completed at low to no cost by Parks staff

P: Assistance or completion of project by potential partner/user group

C: Capital Project

POB: Parks Operating Budget

BENNETT BEACH PARK: ACTION ITEMS

Project Type	Project #	Recommendation	Implementation Strategies	Priority	Term	Estimated Cost
C	6.0	Establish picnic groves on east side of Creek; if funding is available, provide small to medium sized shelters. Shelters would see frequent rentals due to popularity over summer months.	Engage a consult to develop plans and a contractor to construct the improvements	Medium	6-10 Years	\$100,000
C	4.0	Long-term goal to establish an ADA accessible boardwalk system/or series of paths/trails through the existing "cut" in the natural sand dune to reduce further impacts and degradation to one of the last surviving natural sand dunes on the eastern Lake Erie Shoreline.	Engage a consult to develop plans and a contractor to construct the improvements	Low	6-10 Years	\$240,000
C	7.0	Update and improve restroom facility; Retrofit building to include stone work and 'lakefront style' design to fit better in with County Parks System character. Expansion of building could include area for concessions and expanded restroom/changing areas.	Engage a consult to develop plans and a contractor to construct the improvements	Low	6-10 Years	\$100,000
C	8.0	Relocate the park entrance road to the south for better site distances and safety; consider the unsafe conditions at the current entrance/ intersection.	Engage a consult to develop plans and have DPW construct the improvements	Low	6-10 Years	P.O.B.
C	9.0	Establish a more dominant gateway into the park from Lakeshore Road. Provide landscaping with seasonal interest.	Engage a consultant to develop sign types including copy, structure and landscape typology for each location.	Low	6-10 Years	\$17,800
P	2.0	Improve the health of Big Sister Creek	Focus projects should include bank stabilization and erosion control, habitat conservation and restoration, stormwater management, and contaminant reduction.	Low	Ongoing	Waterkeeper, NYSDEC, ECSWD



THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK