



# Dead Timber State Recreation Area Redevelopment Plan



2022-2028

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## Introduction

Dead Timber State Recreation Area (SRA) is a hidden gem within the Nebraska state park system. This serene get-away is a 200-acre area located in Dodge County, Nebraska. The SRA is adjacent to Powder Horn Wildlife Management Area and is just over seven miles north of the city of Scribner. A significant amount of the SRA is within the Elkhorn River floodplain. The remainder of the area sits upon a bluff overlooking the floodplain and oxbow lakes. A map illustrating the SRA location is on page 5. The Dead Timber SRA Redevelopment Plan is a conceptual guide for redevelopment activities to address challenges and opportunities that will reinvigorate and instill new life and vitality within the park.

## History

Dead Timber State Recreation Area was purchased in 1938 by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Development of Dead Timber SRA began in 1939, which included the construction of the notable stone shelter house. This structure was built by the National Youth Administration (NYA), which searched the countryside for large rocks to construct the shelter house. It is believed that the entrance



*Stone Shelter House, 2020*

pillars were constructed at the same time as the same type of stone was used. The NYA then constructed the suspension bridge, deepened the lake, filled in low areas, constructed roads, and planted grass and trees throughout the property. Picnic tables and pit toilets were also added to the SRA to better serve park users. Many dedicated staff, local residents and volunteers have supported the upkeep of Dead Timber over the years.

Centennial Grove, also referred to as the Native Plant Museum, is located in the northwest corner of the park. The Grove originally began in 1964 with the planting of goldenrod by Governor Morrison, in memory of his mother. It was dedicated in 1965 during an Arbor Day event with additional dedications on Arbor Day in 1966 and 1967. The Grove has been an important part of the surrounding community. The Arbor Day event at the SRA in 1967 included the installation of the Centennial Grove sign by the Dodge County Native Plants Committee. Three hundred people were in attendance, which included approximately 200 students and staff from county schools. According to local history, each area rural school planted a tree within the Grove. Other improvements happened this same year. The county roads off U.S. Highway 275 and the park road were surfaced with asphalt. Also, the stone shelter house roof transitioned from cedar to asphalt shingles due to a roof fire.



*Centennial Grove Sign, 2020*

An improvement study to quantify the infrastructure needs of Dead Timber was done in 1970. The problems of flood waters, saturated low areas, and drainage were listed. Suggested improvements included upgrading roads, parking, camping, water pumps and toilets. The study also stressed the need to identify the problems that lead to the water issues so proper corrective measures could be determined.

Implementation of the improvement study suggestions did not occur due to the challenges the area faced in the 1970s. A flood in 1971 washed out gravel in lower areas and damaged roads. This was followed by Dutch Elm disease, which required the removal of over 400 trees throughout the park in 1972 and 1973. Another flood damaging roads, parking areas, and camping pads came through in 1978.

In 1980 research was done regarding dredging the lake to improve lake conditions. Estimates for dredging came back at over \$500,000, and therefore was not done due to lack of funding. The 1980s did bring some repairs and upgrades including a new roof for the stone shelter house, campground pads, toilets, and lighting. A mobile home for the superintendent's quarters was placed in 1985 to allow for a superintendent to live on site full time. Sherman Lindgren was the superintendent during this time. His wife Leona operated a concession stand just off park property to the south. They cared greatly for Dead Timber and all its visitors.



*District 36 School Bell, 2020*

Many repairs and renovations were completed again, because of major flood events and a tornado in the 1990s. These repairs and renovations included rerouting the entrance road, relocating the campground, a new shop building, and the donation of the district 36 school bell and flagpole by the LeRoy Amrndt family.

Dead Timber SRA was designated a Reduced Services Area in the early 2000s decreasing funding for the area. During this time community volunteers, largely from the Elkhorn Valley Gobblers, completed tasks such as mowing, clearing brush, repairing fencing and painting. Major flooding affected the park again in 2010. Community concern for the park was communicated with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) through Senator Schnoor.



*Flooded Stone Shelter House, 2010, Nebraskaland magazine*

The spring of 2016 was filled with improvements to restore and enhance the park. The shelters and maintenance shop were repaired and painted, roads were repaired, and new picnic tables and grills were placed. New toilet buildings were installed in the campground and near the stone shelter house. Two pollinator gardens were planted near the entrance to the park.

In the spring of 2019, a historic level flood washed through Dead Timber. The road on the south side of the park was destroyed along with primitive camping sites and a picnic shelter. The current campground was also damaged. This flood is the impetus for the Redevelopment Plan.



Map 1 - Dead Timber SRA Location Map

## Existing Conditions

A large part of Dead Timber SRA lies within the floodplain and is illustrated with the floodplain map on page 7. Due to major flood events along the Elkhorn River, parts of the park have fallen into disrepair. The suspension bridge that once spanned the oxbow lake with enough clearance for a boat now stands submerged. Also, the stone shelter house displays a stained ring from high water.



*Suspension Bridge, 2020*

The flooding, high waters and years of budget cuts have made the management of Dead Timber difficult at best, but the natural environment that has provided a serene getaway remains.



*Stone Shelter House high water stain, 2020*

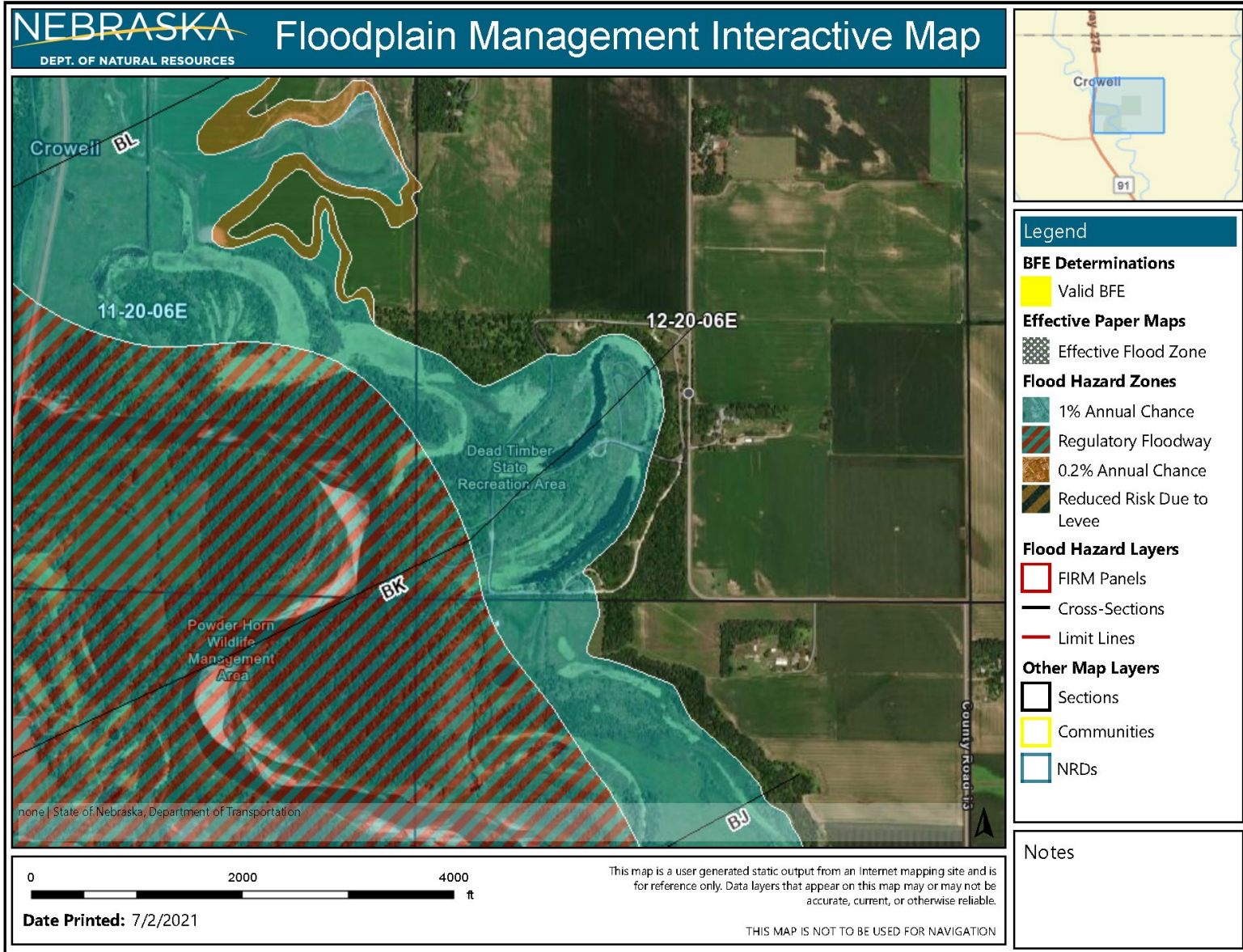
A site visit and assessment of the infrastructure and amenities by the Parks and Planning team was completed in the fall of 2020. A current amenities map is on page 8. The picnic shelters, picnic tables, campsites, campground vault toilets, and water well and pump are in good condition. The trails, bell and flagpole need minor repairs. All wildlife viewing/hunting blinds need to be assessed for repair. The entrance signage and maintenance shop building need replaced. The entrance road and roadways through the park are in good shape.

Long before the establishment of the SRA, the Elkhorn River changed course and created the current oxbow lake. While it is one lake, it has developed into three distinct areas. Two of these, northeast of the suspension bridge and south near the campground, are shallow with rooted vegetation. Watermeal and duckweed have taken over large sections. The third area, on the western side, is also shallow but more open and clearer of vegetation. Historically, the oxbow has been used for fishing, canoeing, and kayaking. Access to the lake can be difficult due to saturated soil and overgrowth.



*Vegetation on the lake, 2020*

The floodplain and oxbow lake provide a living outdoor classroom for park visitors to learn about the form and function of floodplains within a riverine system. The bluff and areas outside of the floodplain provide excellent opportunities for revitalization. These opportunities for embracing the ecosystem of Dead Timber are reflected within the plan goals.







Map 3 - Amenities Map

## Planning Process and Public Participation

The Redevelopment Plan process began the summer of 2020. The Plan core team, comprised of Parks and Planning Divisions staff, met approximately twice a month for the duration of the process. Throughout the development of the plan, other agency staff were consulted for their expertise in engineering, fisheries, wetlands, and wildlife. The process involved the creation of a redevelopment plan vision, goals, and action items.

Public participation was sought to gain feedback on potential design concepts for the redevelopment. The concepts were derived from understanding the challenges and constraints of the area, concerns raised by the public over the years, and the opportunities afforded by the landscape. To facilitate this process NGPC worked with landscape architect firm Vireo beginning in January 2021. Vireo provided concept designs, an online collaborative Mural board for public participation, and assisted in the facilitation of a virtual public meeting. The NGPC Communications division advertised the public meeting through several media platforms.

The virtual public meeting, attended by over 150 people, was held on Tuesday, March 23, 2021. This recorded meeting consisted of an introduction and brief history of Dead Timber, explanation of the redevelopment plan concept designs, and break out groups for participants to share their feedback. The meeting recording and online collaborative board were available on the NGPC website for two weeks following the meeting. This two-week period allowed for over 40 additional public comments to be included in the planning process. Feedback was compiled and taken into consideration when finalizing the concept drawings and action items incorporated into the plan. Upon review by NGPC staff the redevelopment plan was completed in August 2021 and presented to the NGPC Board of Commissioners in January 2022.



*Oxbow Lake, 2020*

## Vison, Goals and Action Items

Community input from the public participation process and the history of Dead Timber SRA are reflected in the vision statement created for the redevelopment plan. This vision encompasses the overall intended experience for Dead Timber SRA visitors. From this vision, the goals and action items were created.

**Vision Statement:** Dead Timber natural area provides unique outdoor recreational and educational opportunities for visitors to experience the history and natural habitats of the Elkhorn River floodplain.

The goals of the redevelopment plan were established by the core team to support the vision while addressing the challenges of the landscape. Input from NGPC Fisheries, Wildlife and Engineering divisions and the public contributed to the goals and action items. Continued collaboration with these divisions and the public will be needed to implement these goals. This feedback primarily included preferred amenities, location of redevelopment projects, and visitor needs.

*Goal: What we are working to achieve*

*Action Item: A specific action to accomplish a goal*

**Goal 1:** Develop or redevelop sustainable infrastructure considering historic flood elevations and other limitations.

Action Items:

1. Identify current infrastructure, amenities and activities that are sustainable within the floodplain.
2. Identify unsustainable infrastructure.
3. Develop alternative site(s) for infrastructure to be relocated from the floodplain.
4. Remove unsustainable infrastructure that is not suitable for relocation.

**Goal 2:** Provide visitors with unique recreational experiences that showcase the area’s natural and scenic qualities.

Action Items:

1. Evaluate and develop kayak/canoe access points on the oxbow lake.
2. Develop a diverse, multi-use, non-motorized trail system to include equestrian opportunities.
3. Create feasible new camping opportunities out of the floodplain.
4. Determine feasibility for unique primitive<sup>1</sup> camping opportunities.
5. Plan and develop ways to increase and enhance public fishing access and opportunities.
6. Develop and maintain walking trail access to the Elkhorn River.
7. Incorporate family friendly recreational opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Primitive is defined as sites without electrical hook-up, picnic tables, fire rings or grills; may not have access to restroom facilities or trash receptacles.

**Goal 3:** Develop historical, cultural, and ecological education opportunities.

Action Items:

1. Provide wildlife viewing opportunities with multiuse viewing blinds.
2. Develop accessible scenic overlook(s) that allow visitors to view the Elkhorn River floodplain.
3. Create themed educational trails and natural playscape that interpret the ecological features of the area.
4. Plan and develop unique trail features that foster visitors' sense of discovery, exploration, and adventure.
5. Showcase the park's National Youth Administration (NYA) heritage through refurbishment and/or relocation of NYA built stone structures.
6. Coordinate with Engineering Division to determine the feasibility of relocating/preserving the old suspension bridge.
7. Research Native Peoples history of the area and consider appropriate interpretive or historical educational addition to the park.

**Goal 4:** Through sound land stewardship practices, effectively manage the natural resources of the area.

Action Items:

1. Create a five to 10-year operational plan outlining prescribed burns, vegetation establishment, invasive species control, management of native plant communities, etc.
  - a. Work with internal and external partners to begin implementation of a five to 10-year operational plan.
2. Use ArcGIS to create a base map of the park, track changes for development of plans, and monitor/document park management actions to assist managers with park operations.
3. Research hydrology of the oxbow lake to determine best management practices for fishing opportunities.
4. Create or enhance hunting and fishing opportunities with effective habitat management.

**Goal 5:** Increase internal and external support for the park.

Action Items:

1. Develop a prioritized and detailed list of projects, with estimates, for upcoming capital improvement requests during biennium budget creation.
2. Develop Operation and Maintenance budgets and necessary support infrastructure, and provide training to park personnel to adequately support park operations.
3. Develop new external partnerships or enhance current ones, to assist with future recreational and educational development on the area.

The physical redevelopment projects reflected within the goals and action items are illustrated in concept design maps. The draft versions of these maps were used in the public participation process for participants to engage with and provide comments. The final versions are presented in the following section.

## Redevelopment Concept Designs

The Redevelopment Concept Design maps are a visual representation of where redevelopment activities could be located upon completion. Feedback provided from the public participation process is represented.

These conceptual redevelopment designs utilize the natural topography of the park to minimize the current maintenance issues within the flood-plain area, while providing visitors sustainable recreational activities. Because of the complexities and maintenance issues associated with the park being situated in a floodplain area, these concepts are dependent on engineering studies and survey work to determine the feasibility within the park.

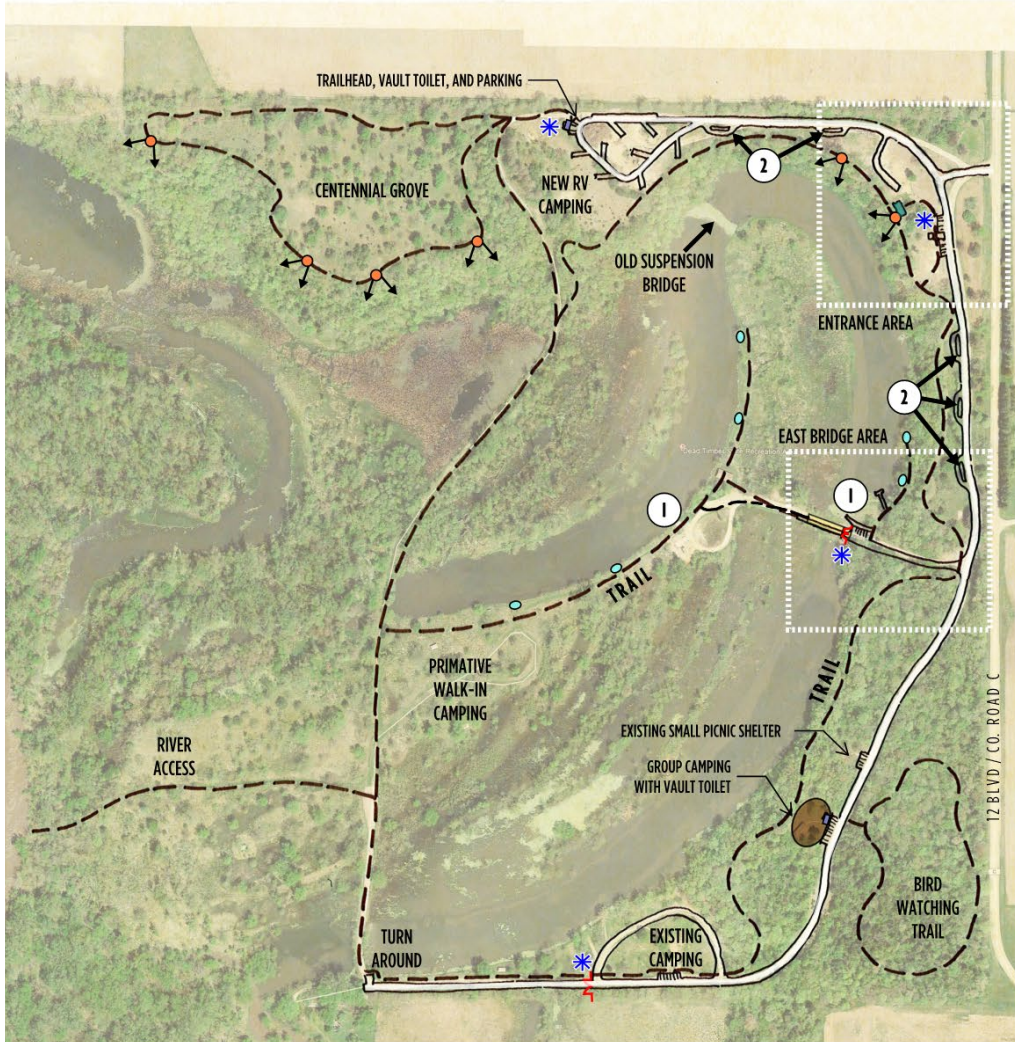
### *Overall Concept Design Map*

The Overall Concept design map illustrates an overview of the recreation area and potential locations for the redevelopment plans. The north side of the park contains Centennial Grove and a potential new RV camping area. This campground concept received many positive comments during the public participation process. Discussions reflected thoughts on amenities such as electric hookup options, a shower house, and dump station. These should be taken into consideration for the design of a new campground area.

The east side of the map illustrates a redeveloped Entrance area and East Bridge area, along with potential pull-through camping, group camping area, and bird-watching trail. Details of the Entrance area, to include the new stone shelter house and East Bridge area are shown in additional individual perspective maps highlighting features within these two areas of the park. The additional camping concepts, along with the primitive walk-in camping concept within the center of the park, help to address public demand.

Parking access, trail signage, and a trail for accessing the Elkhorn River were part of many discussions and comments within the public participation process. These important amenities are illustrated within the overall concept design map. Additional fishing access points were also discussed. The fishing access points illustrated on the map are presented as examples. Additional access points near the existing campground should be included.

# DEAD TIMBER STATE RECREATION AREA OVERALL CONCEPT



**LEGEND**

- 1 KAYAK LAUNCH
- 2 PULLTHROUGH CAMPING STALL
- ENHANCED OVERLOOK AREAS
- TRAIL
- PARK ROAD
- TRAILHEAD, WAYFINDING, RULES SIGNAGE
- 12' WIDE NOSTALGIC PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE
- GATE TO LIMIT VEHICULAR SEASONAL ACCESS
- VAULT RESTROOM
- FISHING ACCESS



*Entrance Concept Design Map*

The Entrance Concept design map highlights major redevelopment concepts for the entrance to the park. This includes construction of a new stone shelter house that will replicate/replace the existing shelter located in the floodplain. The concept orientation and location presented reflects the input provided from the public. The feedback provided from the public process indicated a preference for bluff views from the shelter house and for the playground to be available to shelter house users but at a distance to not be disruptive. This new shelter and connected patios will be the focal point of the entrance and will capitalize on the scenic vistas of the Elkhorn River valley. The stone shelter house along with trail development, parking access, restroom facilities, scenic overlook areas, and natural playground are illustrated. The host campsite remains at its current location to support visitor needs. Combined with refurbished entry signage and the historic school bell the concept design provides for a defined, functional, and welcoming entrance space.

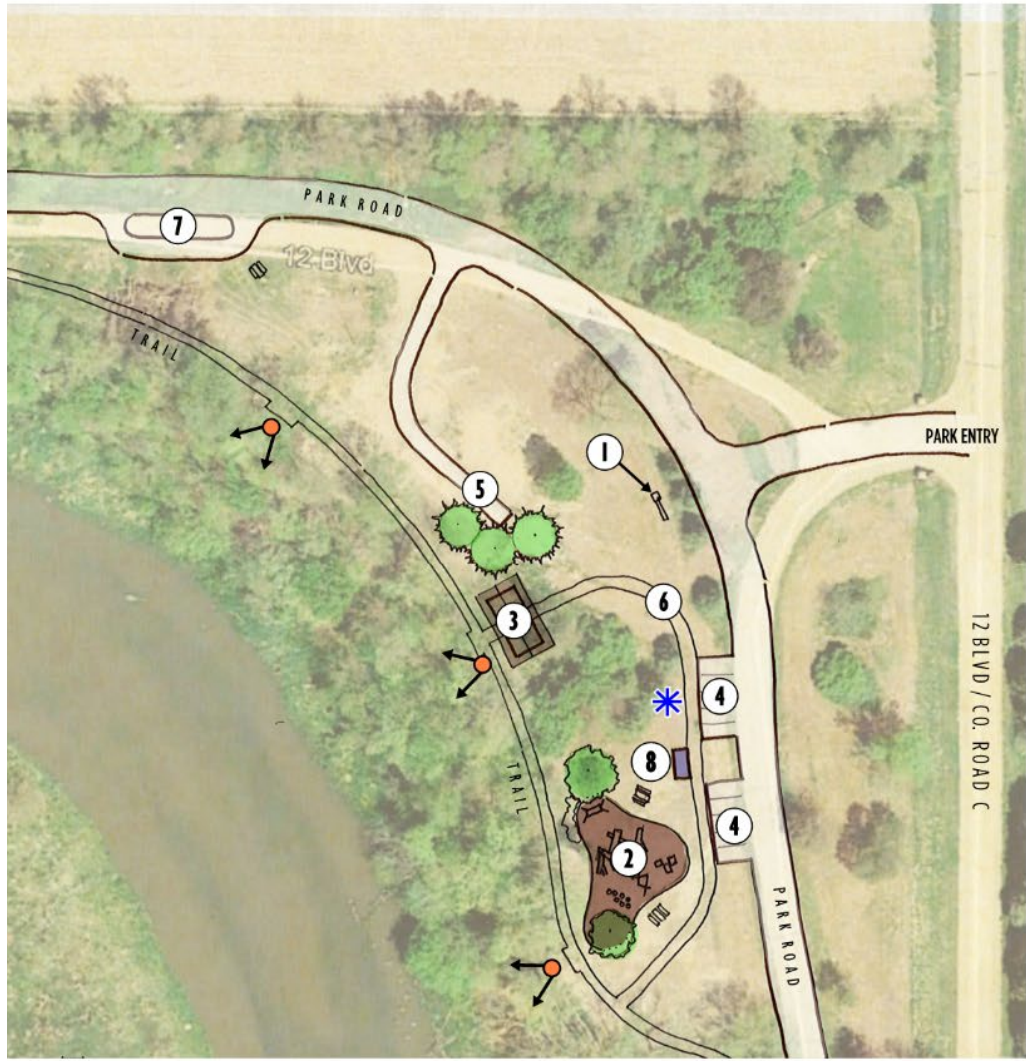


*Entrance Aerial View facing west, 2020*

# DEAD TIMBER STATE RECREATION AREA ENTRANCE AREA

**LEGEND**

- 1 NEW ENTRY SIGNAGE / HISTORIC BELL.
- 2 NATURE PLAYGROUND
- 3 RELOCATE STONE SHELTER ON RAISED FOUNDATION WITH CONCRETE ACCESS WALK.
-  ENHANCED OVERLOOK AREAS
- 4 PARKING
- 5 HOST CAMPSITE WITH LANDSCAPE SCREEN
- 6 WIDEN PAVED TRAIL
- 7 PULL THROUGH CAMPSITE
- 8 VAULT RESTROOMS
-  WAYFINDING/RULES SIGNAGE
-  PICNIC TABLE



Map 5 - Entrance Area Concept Map



*East Bridge Area Concept Design Map*

The East Bridge Area concept design aims to provide multiple amenities. The bridge itself is conceptually designed to aesthetically remind users of the old suspension bridge while providing trail access to the center of the oxbow and unobstructed water access beneath. Trailhead signage is indicated to inform visitors of the trail system, rules, and regulations. Participants in the public participation process expressed a need for accessible fishing access to accommodate all users regardless of age or mobility. A designated boat launch was also expressed as a priority. Currently, boaters are putting in where they can find access within the campground. Parking, kayak/canoe launch and fishing access, including an Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant fishing dock, are illustrated to ensure safe, accessible access for paddlers and anglers. One pull-through RV campsite is also illustrated.



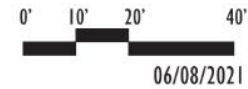
*East Bridge Area aerial view facing southeast, 2020*



# DEAD TIMBER STATE RECREATION AREA EAST BRIDGE AREA

## LEGEND

- 1 ADA FISHING DOCK
- 2 KAYAK LAUNCH
- 3 12' WIDE NOSTALGIC "BRIDGE" STRUCTURE. AESTHICALLY SIMILAR TO EXISTING BUT NOT STRUCTURAL.
- 4 PARKING
- 5 ACCESS GATE AND REMOVABLE BOLLARDS
- 6 PULL THROUGH CAMPING STALL
- TRAIL
- PARK ROAD
- FISHING ACCESS
- WAYFINDING/RULES SIGNAGE
- PICNIC AREA



## Next Steps

This section is designed to identify the crucial next steps to put the action items outlined within this plan into practice. It is recommended that on a yearly basis the Core Team of this planning effort meet and create an implementation plan for the upcoming year. The benefits of an implementation plan include clarity of understanding of the action items, accountability to ensure projects are on track, and provide a defined opportunity for communication and cooperation amongst the team and community.

The six key components of the annual implementation plan should include:

1. Outline of the goals and action items that should be accomplished within the year.
2. Assignment of roles and responsibilities to ensure a clear picture of what needs to be done and by whom.
3. A schedule to track progress for the projects to keep all stakeholders informed.
4. Identification of the needed resources to be allocated. This includes financial resources, materials, staffing, partnerships, procurement procedures, etc.
5. Define the metrics used to determine success for each project. This would include Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to establish the measurability of progress and success, and the celebration of milestones.
6. A contingency plan that addresses potential issues such as budgetary increases, loss of resources, unmet deadlines, etc. This will ensure staff are able to stay on track when challenges arise.

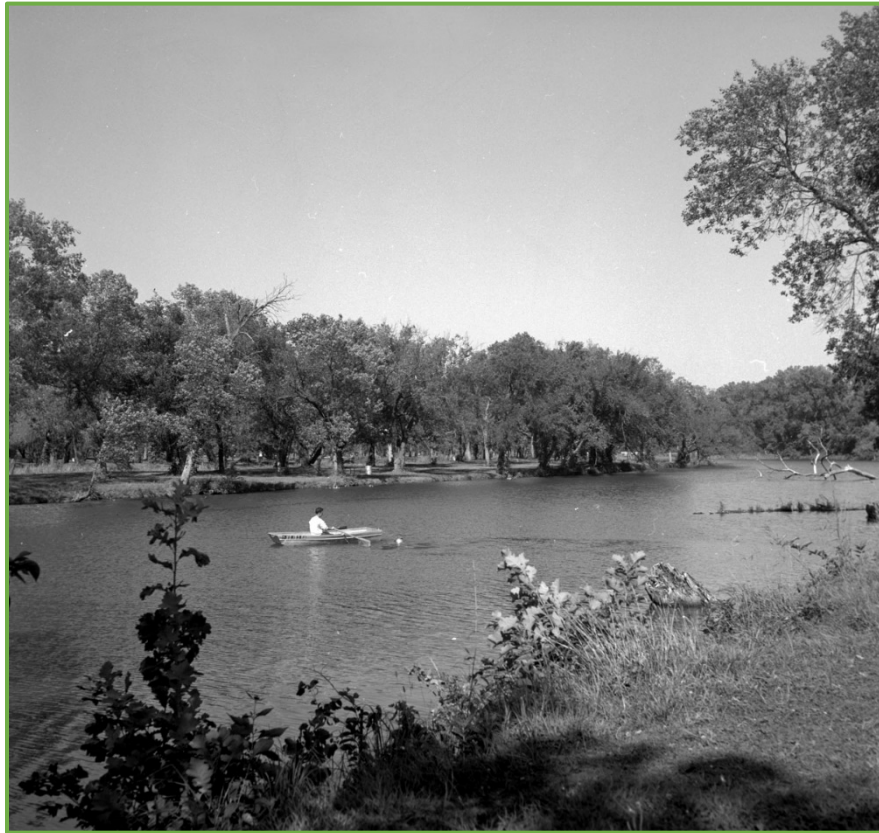
The first step for creation of an implementation plan is to evaluate and select action items for initial work to be completed within the year. This should be guided by staff knowledge of the park, engineering and survey work, and financial resources. When planning the year, consideration must be taken for needed steps to facilitate completion of action items in later years. This includes planning ahead for biennium budgeting, capital improvements, and required state processes. Consulting with the State Historic Preservation Office is necessary for action items relating to cultural history. It is essential to collaborate with the Education Division for education-based action items.

Redevelopment activities are contingent on the available financial resources. Agency funding resources are limited annually, so alternative funding resources and partnerships must be explored to assist with projects. This could be through means such as grants, donations, volunteers, or fund raising. The virtual public meeting was well attended by community members who care deeply for Dead Timber. Community support should be considered as a potential way to build capacity for redevelopment activities. Volunteers and support of the local communities are instrumental in ensuring the success of the area and that the redevelopment resonates with the community.

Oxbow lake access and fishing were shown through the public participation process to be imperative to the public. A complete scientific understanding of the hydrology within Dead Timber would be beneficial to the decision-making process for sustainable infrastructure within the flood plain. It is recommended that a team of NGPC staff evaluate the oxbow hydrology. It may be necessary to obtain assistance from an environmental consulting firm that specializes in floodplains and wetlands to understand the hydromorphology of the landscape. This will ensure aquatic development is made in the best long-term

interest of the ecological habitat. The time for this action may take more than the first year but will inform all action items surrounding the oxbow and within the floodplain.

The redevelopment plan is a living document that should be assessed at the five-year mark and a plan created for the future beyond the redevelopment plan. This could include modified goals or action items, additional action items, long-term maintenance, development not addressed within this plan, and updating the entire plan if necessary.



*Rowboat on the water at Dead Timber State Recreation Area. Rowboat on the water, circa 1965, Nebraskaland Magazine*