



The Forest Exploration Center Accomplishments and Progress | FY20

FY20 WORK PLAN PROGRESS SUMMARY

- ***Maintain ongoing communications with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation regarding agreed-upon improvements to be effected to the FEC site by DOT, as documented in the memorandum of agreement signed by both parties.***

Accomplishments to date: Communications between DOT, DNR and FEC are ongoing and positive with the latest schedule herein:

The DOT project was LET on May 6th with a target completion date of October 15, 2019. Stage 1 of the project was construction of Swan Blvd and the south half of the roundabout at Discovery Parkway. Stage 2 was construction of the north side of the roundabout and DNR road, parking, trails.

Both stages of construction are complete. Temporary traffic barricades were installed at the south end of Forest Exploration Drive as snow removal was not provided for the duration of the winter and vehicular access was restricted spring 2020 as the east trailheads were completed. Pedestrian and passive recreational traffic has remained unimpeded.

- ***Plan, fundraise and coordinate for the installation of green infrastructure that will meet or exceed storm water management requirements.***

Accomplishments to date: In May of 2019 the FEC board made the decision to concentrate the organization's financial resources on forest-focused goals and settled on the stormwater management infrastructure to be installed by DOT. This meets all necessary capture requirements. It was decided that the design and construction of additional stormwater management features be deferred until additional site planning for infrastructure (picnic shelter, outdoor meeting place/amphitheater, utilities and building) is formalized. Grant funding awarded was returned with the understanding that the FEC would have the opportunity to reapply at a future date with a modified project scope that would be based on the stormwater needs of the upcoming site plan design.

FY20 WORK PLAN PROGRESS SUMMARY continued

- ***Develop a ten-year plan, including a draft implementation timeline, for the non-forested portion of the property.***

Accomplishments to date: To launch the development and framework for the ten-year plan of the non-forested portion of the property, the FEC board underwent a strategic planning process. The outcome was the creation of a formal road map that outlines a series of goals and action items to occur over the next 3-5 years through the development of working committees who are assigned specific benchmarks that will further the development of the site plan under the mission of the organization. A benchmark for the FY21 work plan is to finalize the draft site plan for the non-forested portion of the property.

Each subcommittee has begun the distillation of the site planning process in their focus area to further this target goal and to develop and create a map or rendering of desired built infrastructure that supports and furthers the mission. This working short list includes: a pavilion/shelter, picnic areas, native plantings/pollinator habitat with interpretive features, improving the stormwater areas with plantings, a natural play and exploration area for children, shaded gathering spaces for school groups and programs, an amphitheater/stage area for community lectures and programs, demonstration areas, outdoor classroom space and woodland seating.

A draft timeline and narrative is in development that further describes the rationale and need for each element of the conceptual site plan and its alignment with the purpose and goals of the organization.

FACILITIES: Exploring “whole tree” design and the potential for urban wood utilization in the construction of built features. Gathering information and maps on existing onsite sewer and electric utilities, their ownership and expense to hookup. Working with area partners (MMSD and Milwaukee County Parks, City of Wauwatosa) to ensure the site plan is considerate of area stakeholder needs, and includes consistent and cohesive communication, signage and improved connectivity within the broader county grounds district. A partnership is forming with UW Milwaukee Professors of Architecture with the potential to provide a reciprocal opportunity for education, design and planning for both UW students of architecture and the Forest Exploration Center site planning needs.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH: Planning a series of “virtual” field trips (and in person when possible) to area non-profits to generate site plan ideas and concepts that further refine the niche of the FEC. Discussing desired short and long term outdoor classroom needs to further the site plan to include: demonstration areas, outdoor gathering spaces, school group needs while onsite and community programming needs.

MEDIA AND PR: Furthering visual branding, written branding and press assets to better promote the organization, our needs and site plan progress for awareness, outreach grants and fundraising to complete each step in the site plan timeline.

FUNDRAISING/BUDGET: Launching a campaign platform for fundraising and donation acceptance. Determining short and long term funding needs and aspirations relevant to the site plan. Targeting grants, foundations and individuals to fund special projects, site planning and

SUSTAINING A UNIQUE WOODLAND ENVIRONMENT

While Supporting Meaningful and Accessible Opportunities in Education, Recreation and Stewardship

development and programming.

- ***Construct an ADA-compliant trail in the FEC woodland, including trailhead, wayfinding and interpretive signage.***

Accomplishments to date: Construction on the trail began in the fall of 2018. Installation resumed in the spring of 2019. As a consequence of non-approved cost overruns the FEC sought a new contractor. Work resumed and trail construction was completed spring 2020.

Once the road was built and site planning began it became apparent that due to the grading and design there was no accessible trail connection from the parking lot to the trail or the school bus stop. Two trail spurs and a boardwalk were necessary for safe access. The FEC marked these locations and designed specifications to make this accessible connection possible. A contractor was hired and began work in the fall of 2019 and completed the trail spur access work in March of 2020.

An easement with Milwaukee County Parks was negotiated and approved by the Milwaukee County Board to add connectivity on the Underwood Parkway side of the forest in conjunction with our partners at the Office for Persons with Disabilities and Wil-O-Way Recreation Center. An accessible trail spur entrance to the forest that will connect and serve the Underwood Recreation center visitors and parking area was negotiated, designed and built with cooperation from our partners at Milwaukee County Parks, the staff at the recreation center and the Office for Persons with Disabilities. A trailhead kiosk at this Underwood location will be installed in 2020 and will include the required trail access data.

A partnership was created with the SEWRPC to collect necessary GIS/GPS and LIDAR data to ensure trail access data can be provided at the level necessary for ADA guidelines and an accurate trail/area property map can be designed for visitors. Trail data collection and map design will occur in 2020. A temporary map with the outline of the trail, locations of amenities and trail access data has been designed for each trailhead kiosk with the plan that it will be replaced with the necessary more detailed map in the spring of 2021 or sooner.

Social/Volunteer trail closure will continue over the next two years along with the development and installation of other accessible trail infrastructure to include boardwalks, overlooks, seating areas and a community curated trail spur.

- ***Facilitate board-approved programming on the site as appropriate.***

Accomplishments to date: Self-guided Interpretive signage, educational media and interactive experiences in forest management have been developed and will be installed in 2020. Onsite personal services will launch as soon as social distancing guidelines allow, the stay at home order is lifted and the property holds its official opening event. Note: At the time of writing this report the official opening ceremony scheduled for June 6th has been postponed as a consequence of the Covid-19 emergency and stay at home order that began March 17th, 2020.

Also, in progress is the coordination of forest access and partnership in development of summer programs and activities with partners at the Underwood Recreation Center to include the Good Will and Easter Seals summer sessions. Further development of Interpretive and Educational planning for programs, experiences, school groups, professional development opportunities and community outreach events is ongoing.

In this interim, the Education subcommittee is currently exploring alternative methods of programming and outreach during the upcoming months of required social distancing to include the development of virtual programs, experiences and communications to schools and the community. Along with a more robust series of non-personal services in the forest such as opportunities to take part in citizen science projects, expanding self-guided interpretive installations and opportunities, activities, connecting through social media and audio tours.

FY20 WORK PLAN PROGRESS SUMMARY continued

- ***Continue program planning, including outreach and volunteer development.***

Accomplishments to date: Non-Personal programming services will be provided with the opening of the trail in 2020 with a self-guided educational series of interpretive panels and media on forest ecology, sustainable forest management and identifying the flora and fauna of the woodland. The Forest Management and Education Team is working toward the next two-year series of management goals and educational objectives to be aligned with onsite programming opportunities and the next series of self-guided interpretive experiences that will include; discussions to begin management for oak in select stands, provide opportunities to explore potential climate change models and scenarios in this and all Wisconsin forests and furthering awareness on the impact of deer and deer browse with the installation and interpretation of exclosures and the launch of a plant phenology project.

Print and digital media materials are in development to aid the board in furthering outreach and awareness. Conversations have been held with other County Grounds stakeholder groups and consideration of hosting a stakeholder meeting at the site will be considered following an official opening.

A volunteer and membership framework and agreement form are in development and will be formally launched in 2020 with opportunities for volunteering in the woodland under a series of categories and skillsets (dependent on the Covid 19 situation). Opportunities for the development of an FEC "Friend's Group" have been proposed and are being explored with help from partners within the greater community.