



The City of Hobart

# The Hobart Marsh Plan

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This report was prepared by O'Boyle, Cowell, Blalock & Associates, Inc., Landscape Architects and Site Planners.

## Project Background

A wetland mitigation project required for the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Little Calumet River flood control project was a major impetus behind the development of a comprehensive master plan for the Hobart Marsh. A portion of the mitigation will take place on approximately 355 acres in the City of Hobart generally bounded by Interstate 65 to the west; South LaSalle Street to the east; 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the north; and 57<sup>th</sup> Street to the south. Based on a Floristic Quality Index (FQI) the USACE found this area of Hobart to offer the attributes of an appropriate mitigation area, and its rural character and contiguous open space areas make it very attractive for this use.

The primary purpose of the mitigation project is to offset wetland impacts associated with the Little Calumet River flood control project by restoring surface hydrology and native plant communities. Other benefits of the project include:

- Expanding, buffering, and connecting several natural areas
- Recharging the shallow aquifer
- Eliminating agricultural chemical loadings and reducing runoff to Turkey Creek, Lake George, Deep River and the Little Calumet River.<sup>1</sup>

The Trust for Public Lands assisted the USACE with property acquisitions that would provide the acreage needed. Ultimately, all of the mitigation properties will be owned and managed by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). The mitigation project will result in the establishment of eight to ten different types of wetland communities in the northwest quadrant of the City of Hobart. Much of the mitigation will be in the form of mesic prairie; seed will be drilled and widely spaced trees and shrubs will be installed. Plugs will be installed in wetland areas. Within existing forested areas to remain, the understory will be cleared of non-native plants and native understory shrubs will be installed. The USACE has prepared specifications for implementation and will complete the mitigation work when funding from the local sponsor is available. It is the USACE's goal to have the mitigation be seen by the public as a positive improvement to both the environment and the community. Opportunities exist for interpretive displays to further this objective.

Connectivity between the mitigation sites and the adjacent open space and recreation areas will be important, as will the exploration of shared management opportunities for the agencies with ownership. This area of Hobart is primarily being used as farm land; however it is apparent that the mitigation project will have a dramatic impact in this area of the city. Removing tree lines and distinct edges through management practices, and creating public access and educational opportunities will significantly increase the perception of this area of the City as a natural preserve rather than a series of interspersed farm fields and open space as it currently appears.



The City of Hobart's Robinson Lake Park, a large single family subdivision, several properties owned and managed by the Shirley Heinze Land Trust and Save the Dunes, the National Park Service's Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Prairie Grove Property, the Lake County Parks Departments Oak Savannah Trail, and several additional IDNR properties including the McCloskey's Burr Oak Savanna Nature Preserve are all located near the mitigation sites. Each of these property owners is currently managing and using their property or has plans to do so.

## Project Context

The City of Hobart is located in the northeast portion of Lake County, Indiana. It shares its western boundary with the City of Gary and the Town of Merrillville; and its eastern limits with the City of Portage and unincorporated Porter County. To the north are the City of Lake Station and the Town of New Chicago. Its southern boundary is several miles south of the project area. Interstate 65 bisects the western edge of the city and project area, while Interstates 80 and 94 and the Indiana Toll Road are located approximately 1 ½ miles north of the city limits. Hobart encompasses an approximately 25 square mile area, and is mostly a residential community with this land use occupying just over one-half of the total developed area.

The Norfolk & Southern Railroad freight rail lines traverse the project area. Additionally, the South Shore Line Passenger Service, operated by the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD), is available approximately 6 miles north of the Hobart Marsh area. The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore along Lake Michigan is approximately 5 miles from the City of Hobart's northern boundary.



For the most part, the project area is generally nearly level with poorly drained soils that are considered good for intensive cropping, and a good source of topsoil, but because it is fine textured, water percolates slowly, making it vulnerable to periodic flooding.<sup>2</sup> Lake George and Turkey Creek flow along the southeastern edge of the project area, and fingers of deep ravines reach up into the southern properties of the Hobart Marsh, offering diverse ecosystems and relatively dramatic topography given the flatness of the surroundings.

Roads and streets in the project area are somewhat narrow, and many are flanked by roadside ditches that convey storm water. The major north-south arterial road through the Hobart Marsh is Liverpool Road which does not have paved shoulders or a designated right-of-way through the majority of the project area. 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue is the major east-west arterial and is also narrow and lined with ditches.

The Oak Savannah Trail runs parallel to and just south of 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and provides east-west pedestrian and bike linkages through the project area. This key regional non-motorized connector is operated by the Lake County Parks Department and is part of a regional trail system that will connect to the Erie Lackawanna Trail to the west and the Prairie-Duneland Trail Corridor to the east. The 7.5 mile long nearly

straight asphalt trail is built on a former railroad bed and is used for walking, biking, and rollerblading. It begins at its west end in Oak Ridge Prairie County Park and runs eastward through Gary to Hobart, currently ending at Linda Street. The existing gap in the trail between Linda Street and Indiana State Route 51 will be filled with new trail constructed by the City of Hobart in 2013. At the Porter County line the Oak Savannah Trail connects to the Duneland Trail that runs through Porter County to the Indiana Dunes. The Lake County Parks Department's priorities for the Oak Savannah Trail include improving plant diversity and providing interpretive signage. They welcome the connection of spurs to the trail from the community.



Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO) is amenable to the use of their property, including allowing trails in their right-of-way, which cuts a wide north-south swath along the eastern edge of the mitigation properties. The NIRPC 2040 Comprehensive Plan identifies the NIPSCO right-of-way as a priority major trail connector route crossing the Oak Savannah Trail.

Robinson Lake Park is an approximately 30 acre park located at 52<sup>nd</sup> and Liverpool Road in the midst of the mitigation properties and adjacent to the Oak Savannah Trail, for which it serves as a trail head. The park contains a 17-acre lake that is stocked with fish and open to the public for fishing, with access by canoes and other non-motorized boats allowed. The park was heavily used for swimming many decades ago, but with the development of water parks and elimination of lifeguards these users have moved on. This facility is still used by a large number of people during the summer; however Robinson Lake Park has deteriorated to a marginal facility with outdated playground equipment, restroom facilities which have fallen into disrepair, and a walk trail with erosion and tripping hazards.



The park holds a great deal of potential because of its size and the lake; in addition there is approximately 50 acres of wooded property directly to the north of Robinson Lake which could be considered for acquisition.<sup>2</sup> The City Parks Department sees the potential for additional parking and possibly camping at Robinson Lake to facilitate increased use of the park, and an improved trail head for the Oak Savannah Trail.

The National Park Service (NPS) has no current plans for recreation development at the 293-acre Hobart Prairie Grove. Any proposed plans would require an environmental assessment including public participation, and the process undertaken by the City of Hobart and the other Hobart Marsh stakeholders

that is described in this report is an appropriate first step toward implementing improvements on federal land. Such a federal process would be run through the local National Lakeshore office. The NPS currently manages almost 180 acres adjacent to Liverpool Road along the Oak Savannah Trail with the use of prescribed burns to remove accumulated dead plant material, significantly reducing the threat of uncontrolled wild fires in and near National Lakeshore property. These burns also promote the healthy growth of native plants that support the variety and abundance of birds and animals found in these natural areas.



The IDNR's 55-acre McCloskey's Burr Oak Savanna Nature Preserve is located in the project area as well. Burr oak savannas once covered thousands of acres in northwestern Indiana. Due to fire suppression over many decades the open savannas and understory prairie plants is currently one of the rarest natural plant communities in the state.<sup>3</sup> The savanna and tall grass prairie habitats are being restored at McCloskey's Burr Oak Savanna Nature Preserve through the reinstatement of prescribed burning practices, and will be protected in the future due to significant restrictions on activities and uses of the preserve. However the IDNR is open to cooperative agreements for management and low impact recreation uses such as nature study and hiking on other properties under its ownership, as long as they are within the dedications that guide use of their property.

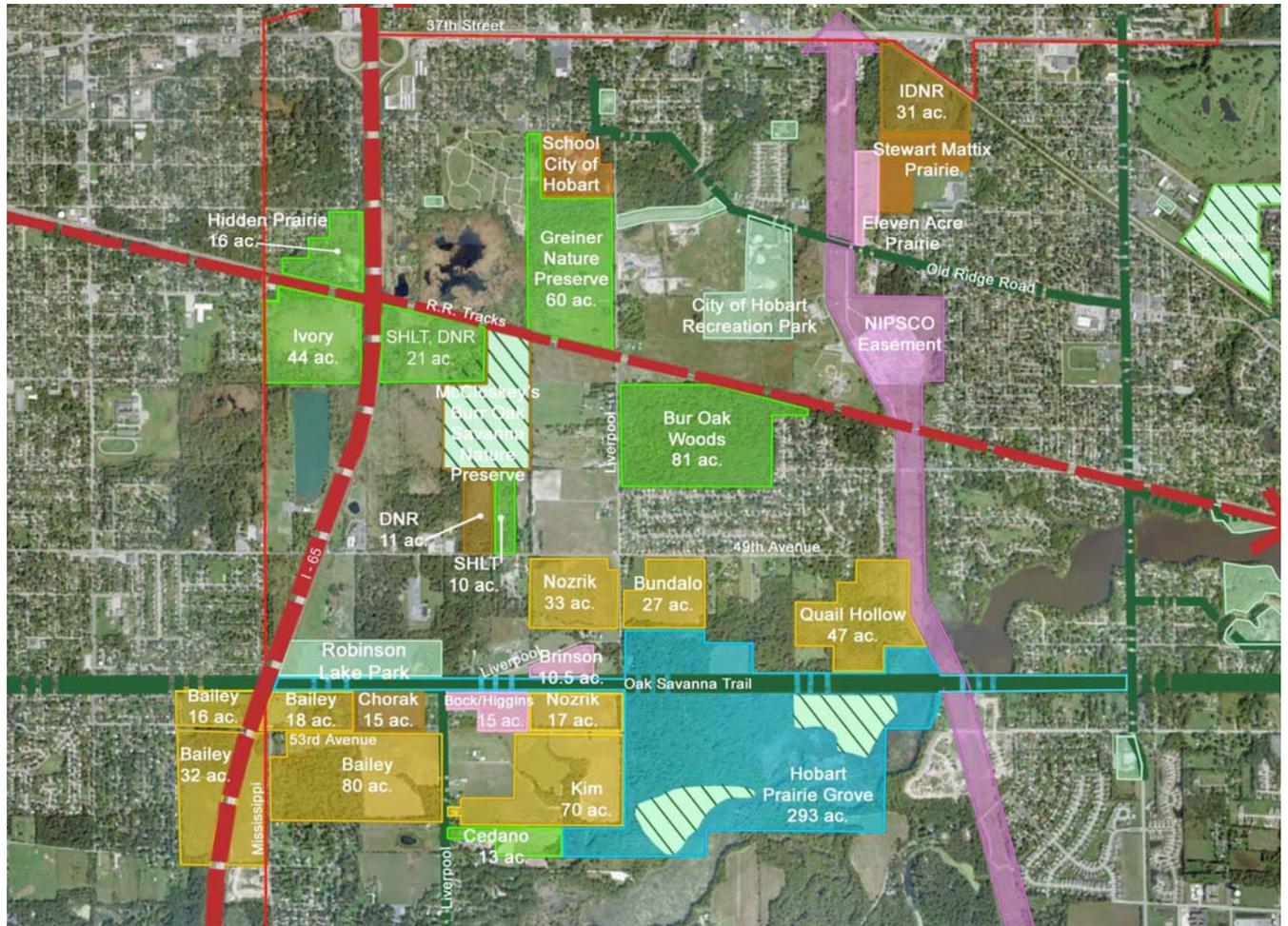
The Shirley Heinze Land Trust (SHLT) owns and/or manages several properties in the project area and sees great potential for collective management and water quality protection in the Hobart Marsh. Current management processes include prescribed burns and hunting (bow only in the city). The SHLT would like to acquire the wetland west of the Greiner Preserve – there are issues with increasingly high water in this area with at least one residence experiencing flooding. This would expand the area of preserved land adjacent to the Hobart School City property. The SHLT holdings also include a rare, black soil prairie in the Cressmoor Prairie Nature Preserve to the northeast of the Hobart Marsh. This is adjacent to the former Cressmoor Country Club which is expected to be redeveloped as a subdivision with about 440 dwelling units.



Save the Dunes owns three parcels in the Hobart Marsh, and currently has a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant in collaboration with both SHLT and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).

An issue that will be addressed through the USACE mitigation project is the maintenance of a mutual drain shared by the Crestwood subdivision and the IDNR's Bundalo tract. The southwest portion of the subdivision drains under 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue into the 12" drain tile that runs southward under the Bundalo property. The outfall is at the southern property boundary at Hobart Prairie Grove. The drain tile has failed, resulting in considerable erosion across the Bundalo tract and a wash out at the NPS property boundary.

Several alternatives have been explored to study restoration of the drain tile. At this time the City is recommending directing drainage along Liverpool Road then re-connecting to the swale system in its current location at the boundary between the Bundalo property and National Lakeshore property.



The numerous conservation lands of the Hobart Marsh area are depicted on this aerial map of the northwestern quadrant of the City of Hobart, with each property owner's land shown with a different color. Major vehicular, railroad, and bike circulation spines and the City boundary are also shown.

**Map Legend**

- US Army Corp of Engineers
- City of Hobart
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- National Park Service – Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore
- Shirley Heinze Land Trust
- Lake County Parks
- Save the Dunes
- School City of Hobart
- Northern Indiana Public Service Company
- Sensitive Habitat

A great deal of data gathering, analysis, and documentation of the existing conditions of the project area and the surrounding region took place so that there would be a thorough understanding of natural and cultural issues that might impact the Hobart Marsh Plan prior to its development. Background materials were studied to gain an understanding of the City and land owner's goals for the plan. In addition, the sites were toured with City representatives and land owners, and discussions regarding current and proposed facilities, programs, and ongoing management practices were conducted so that there was a general understanding of the opportunities and constraints presented by each parcel.

At the request of the stakeholders, a broader, more regional analysis was also conducted. The goal of this look at the regional context was to gain an understanding of how this project could potentially impact, or be impacted, by regional natural and cultural characteristics.

Rather than providing an exhaustive recounting of that data in written form, the links below are provided so that the information is current and can be easily accessed in its original form as needed over the course of plan implementation.

Indiana Map Viewer

<http://inmap.indiana.edu/viewer.htm>

Local Decision Maker

<http://ldm.agriculture.purdue.edu/>

Indiana Code for Planning

<http://www.state.in.us/legislative/ic/code/title36/ar7/ch4.html>

Lake County GIS

<http://lakein.mygisonline.com/>

City of Hobart GIS

[www.cityofhobart.org](http://www.cityofhobart.org)

Friends of Robinson Lake

<http://www.robinsonlake.com/>

Lake Michigan Coastal Program

<http://www.in.gov/dnr/lakemich/>

NIRPC

<http://www.nirpc.org/>

City of Hobart Planning Docs

<http://www.city.hobart.in.us/1611101116193219517/site/default.asp>

# The Planning Process

With numerous conservation land owners having similar management practices and goals for low impact public use in the vicinity, the City of Hobart identified the need to facilitate development of a plan for this sub-area. The City secured a grant from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake Michigan Coastal Program to create a comprehensive plan document intended to find and address gaps in existing plans and avoid duplication of effort by the various land owners.



Several meetings were held with the City and stakeholders to understand each agency’s management practices and plans for public use. The mitigation sites were then toured on foot where beautiful natural areas exist in the midst of open fields, or driven past when it was possible to see the entire site from the adjacent roads. Once the planning team had a clear understanding of the land and agency goals, a three-day planning charrette was held to bring together the multiple land owners (stakeholders) so that a comprehensive plan could be created in partnership with the City.

The charrette was structured so that City staff and stakeholders were involved for as much of the three days as their schedules allowed, with community members invited to drop-in during the studio work sessions and attend the end of day reporting sessions. The public was informed of the meetings and presentations through notification from legal ads in the paper, and announcements at City Council, Planning Commission, and Board of Zoning Appeals meetings.



Stakeholders who participated in the charrette included the City of Hobart (including the Mayor, several Council Members, and staff), the Lake County Parks Department, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service-Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, the Shirley Heinze Land Trust, Save the Dunes, and the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission. Other participants included a member of the Hobart Board of Zoning Appeals, several members of Friends of Robinson Lake, and individuals from the Hobart community not representing a specific group.



The charrette brought together multiple parties, building on the synergy of thinking together, to create a comprehensive plan that incorporated stakeholder input and built consensus from the ground up. During the charrette, ideas generated by the participants were documented by the design team, then tested and explored.

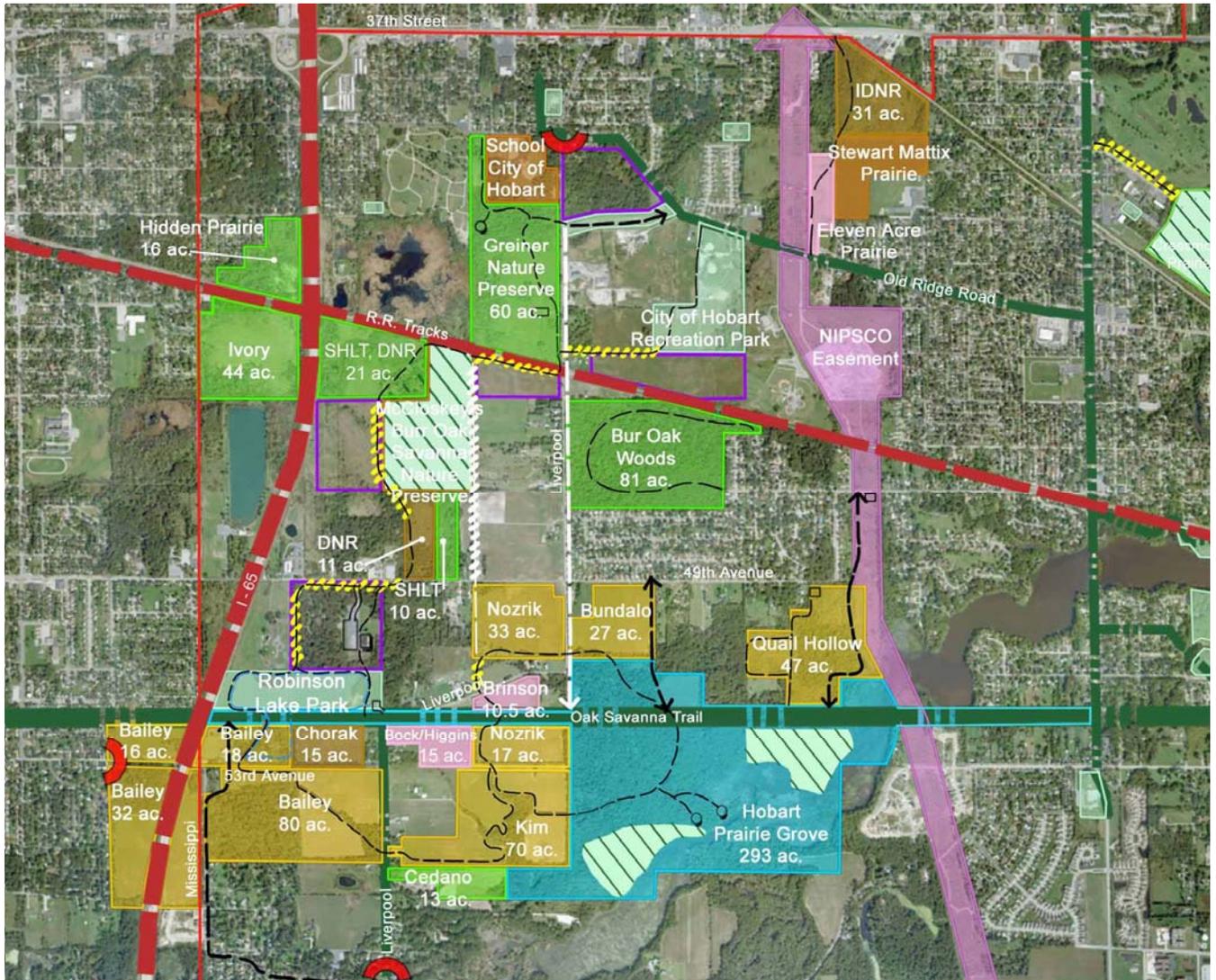
Several reporters attended the charrette and reporting sessions, and various articles have been written by the Times and Post Tribune describing the proposed recreational development in the Hobart Marsh. Highlights of the articles have included branding or using identifiable icons along nearby Interstate 65 as well as at entry points to the 1,000 acres of park and wetlands on the city's west side; having interpretive or educational signs to tell the environmental story of what's going on at the Hobart Marsh; extending trail loops from the existing Oak Savannah Trail; making it easier for blue water trail users to access the land-based trails; and encouraging volunteer or community service efforts by setting standards for things such as park benches.

## The Plan

The concept behind the Hobart Marsh Plan is to capitalize on the extensive areas of soon to be native prairie, wetlands and woodlands to create a unique attraction for hikers to experience the local flora and fauna. By connecting the numerous conservation lands and building on the burgeoning regional bike trail network, the Hobart Marsh has the potential to become an eco-tourism destination from which local residents and out of town visitors can easily access the many other natural and cultural attractions of the region. The long-term goal is to attract people from within Hobart by linking downtown and nearby neighborhoods to this area of the City with hiking and bike trail connections; from northwestern Indiana with access from the Oak Savannah Trail; and from elsewhere by taking advantage of the Hobart Marsh's proximity to I-65 and I-80/94.

The plan that evolved from the charrette focuses on expanding connections among the protected parcels owned by the public agencies and non-profit organizations by suggesting spurs of walking/hiking trails coming off the Oak Savannah Trail and creating loops to offer users choices. Multiple loops of varying lengths are proposed, which in many cases connect parcels with different ownership. These trails would be passive, low impact walking trails, not intended for use by bicycles or motorized vehicles. Enforcement of use by hikers only will require the installation of stiles, trail gates and/or other structures at road crossings or trail head staging areas.





The Hobart Marsh Plan focuses on creating trail connections through and between the protected parcels of land. The existing Oak Savannah Trail provides a datum through the Hobart Marsh, and multiple trail loops of varying lengths are proposed to offer hikers and bikers a variety of experiences, as well as connections to and from other areas within the City of Hobart.

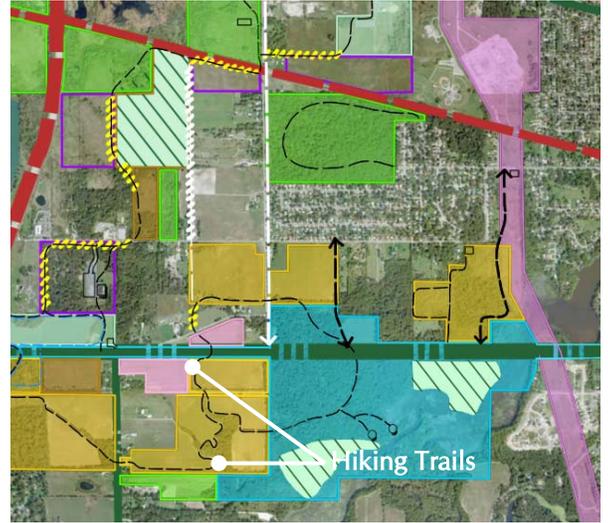
### Map Legend

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  US Army Corp of Engineers                                |  Sensitive Habitat                        |
|  City of Hobart   |  Potential Future Property Acquisition    |
|  Indiana Department of Natural Resources                  |  Proposed Hobart Marsh Gateway            |
|  National Park Service – Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore |  Proposed Hiking Trail                    |
|  Shirley Heinze Land Trust                                |  Proposed Hiking Trail on Access Easement |
|  Lake County Parks  |  Proposed Bike Trail connection           |
|  Save the Dunes   |   |
|  School City of Hobart                                    |   |
|  Northern Indiana Public Service Company                  |   |

## Hiking Trails

The conservation land owners, both public agencies and non-profit organizations, practice similar land management and maintenance practices, including the use of controlled, prescribed burning in order to reduce and eliminate non-native and invasive plant species and encourage native plant species that are tolerant of fire. The regular use of fire for maintenance requires the establishment of burn breaks to form burn cells of a manageable size. The burn breaks in turn provide recreation opportunities by creating routes where vegetation is kept mowed to a lower height than the adjacent prairie and savanna communities. The trails shown in the plan are for illustrative purposes: a next step will be to partner with the agencies and determine the best routes for the final trail alignment.

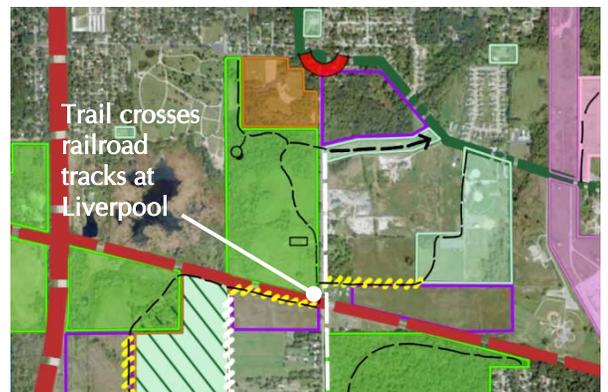
The plan recommends that hiking trails follow the burn breaks wherever possible, giving these corridors dual purpose and reducing trail maintenance needs. Where the hiking trails deviate from the burn breaks, wood chips would likely be used as the trail surface. Wood chips generally require replenishment every two to three years, which follows the prescribed burn schedule that the agencies adhere to, so this work can be coordinated without duplicating efforts.



Hiking trails in the southern half of Hobart Marsh generally follow the alignment of burn breaks on managed lands

The majority of the adjacent or nearly adjacent conservation lands occur in the southern half of the Hobart Marsh. Creating trail loops and making connections between these properties present few challenges and offer many interesting opportunities. Some of the specific suggestions for trail routes include access to the northern shore of Lake George with both an overlook deck at a location along a high bluff, and a kayak/canoe landing at the low end of one of the ravines that are found in Hobart Prairie Grove. The kayak/canoe landing is also suggested to connect to a future water trail through the Lake allowing kayakers and canoers to paddle to the landing, land their vessel and hike the ground trail in Hobart Prairie Grove.

The Norfolk & Western Railroad that runs diagonally through Hobart Marsh is a barrier to both bikers and hikers; it is too busy with fast-moving trains to make trail crossings practicable. Hence, the plan indicates a northern trail loop connecting Ridge View Elementary School and the adjacent SHLT Greiner Preserve with properties east of Liverpool Road. This location is near the Liverpool Road crossing of the railroad tracks, therefore it is logical to incorporate an on-street trail crossing as well. This will provide the single connection between the north and south trail loops.



The Norfolk & Southern railroad creates a barrier between the northern and southern trail loops in the Hobart Marsh

To provide barrier free access in the Hobart Marsh, a 6'-8' wide asphalt paved trail loop around Robinson Lake Park is recommended, along with a shorter trail loop through a forested wetland area just to the south that is part of the USACE mitigation project. Both of these paved loops would connect to the Oak Savannah Trail; in combination, they would provide a variety of experiences for those who require a barrier free, accessible route. There is also potential for cross country teams to return to this park if existing sink holes and other impediments not conducive to running around the lake are removed. If a paved path comes to fruition it should be designed in a manner that would also allow the return of cross country meets to the park.

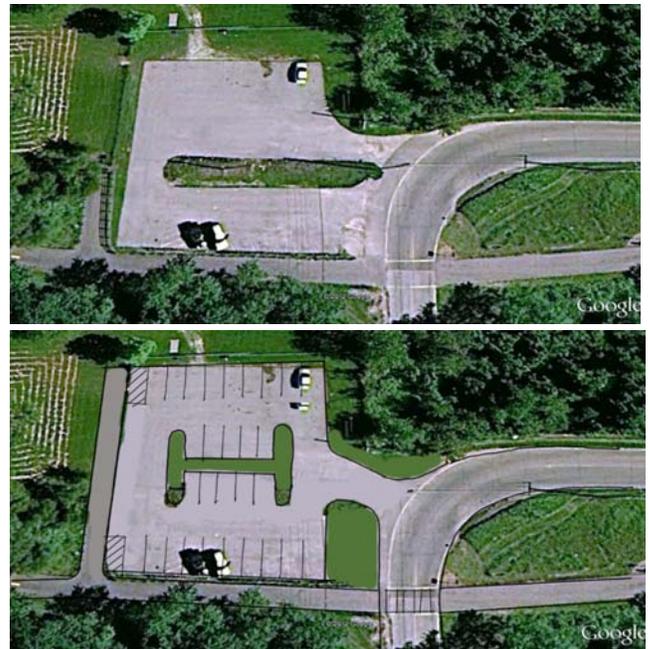
## Trail Heads

A trail head for hikers from the neighborhood north of Old Ridge Road is recommended on the narrow strip of SHLT land that runs along the western boundary of the School City of Hobart property. The Greiner Preserve is already the site of a hiking trail head with parking off of Liverpool Road. The SHLT has offered that this trail head may be further developed and used for the same purpose for the Hobart Marsh trails.

Other trail head development is recommended at the USACE management access area south of 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the Quail Hollow property; in the existing gravel area south of West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in the NIPSCO easement, and at the existing Robinson Lake Park parking lot, which currently serves as a trail head for the Oak Savannah trail.

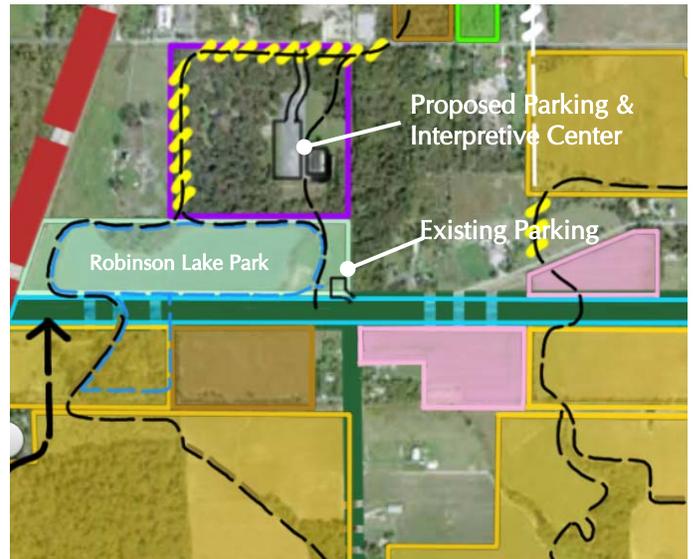
Concerns about the safety of the Robinson Lake Park parking lot and trail head access at the 90 degree turn on Liverpool Road at the crossing of the Oak Savannah Trail led to the recommendation that the parking lot access be redesigned to a two-way drive that is perpendicular to Liverpool and has room for cars to stack in the parking lot while waiting to exit. This will reduce confusion and increase safety in an area that is potentially dangerous due to car/bike/pedestrian conflicts. In addition, it is recommended that the parking lot be organized and expanded to accommodate more vehicles as use of both the trails and the park increases over time.

Another possible response to improve safety may be installation of a roundabout; this would likely require acquisition of additional right of way to provide the needed space. Further study of this issue will be required.



A redesign of the existing (top) Robinson Lake Park parking lot and Oak Savannah trail head to create an entry drive and expanded parking (bottom) would improve safety and access from Liverpool Road

One long term idea for Robinson Lake Park is to acquire the vacant St. Sava property immediately to the north for future park expansion. Suggested uses of this future park land include development of an interpretive/visitor center that could become the focal point for Hobart Marsh activities. A trail head which includes parking, restrooms, picnic facilities, and educational opportunities on the shores of Robinson Lake would breathe new life into the park. In addition to increasing park usage, it would offer the opportunity to abandon the existing parking area at the turn on Liverpool Road, providing access to the park from 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue instead and permitting a looped trail within the St. Sava property. If the St. Sava property is unavailable for acquisition, an easement or other access will likely need to be acquired (probably along the western boundary) to facilitate a walking trail to link up with the marsh properties that are north of 49<sup>th</sup> Ave.

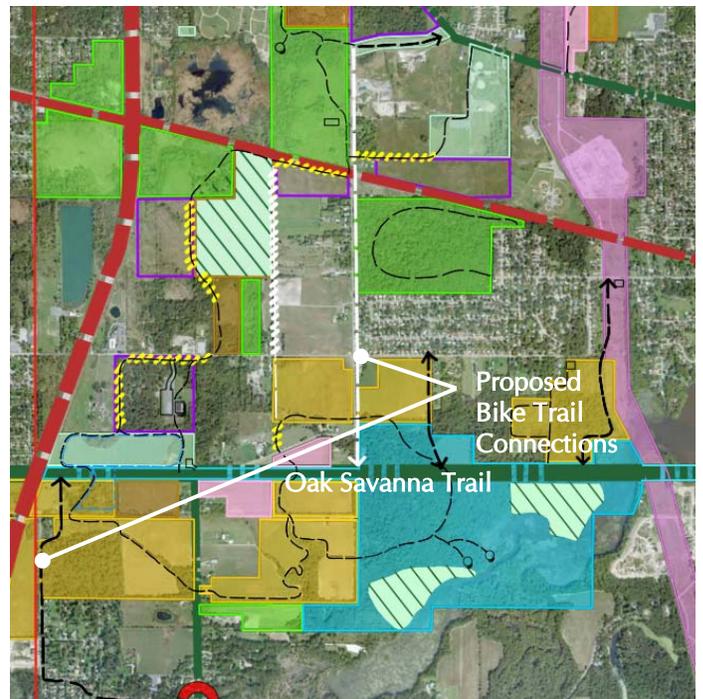


Acquisition of the St. Sava property for use as a trail head and interpretive center for the Hobart Marsh could eliminate the need for the existing parking lot on Liverpool Road

### Bike Trails

To enhance bike usage and ease access to the Oak Savannah Trail, especially from existing neighborhoods, the preliminary plan recommends paved bike routes be developed in three locations: from 3<sup>rd</sup> Street south along the NIPSCO right of way; from the Crestwood Subdivision south across USACE/IDNR and Hobart Prairie Grove parcels; and from existing neighborhoods west and north along Mississippi Street.

A recommended long range future goal is to incorporate “complete street” design of Liverpool Road, thereby providing access for all modes of transportation, including vehicles, bikes, pedestrians and wheelchair users. This is conceived as a project to be undertaken at such time as Liverpool Road requires improvement or reconstruction beyond the desire to simply add bike lanes and when funding for such a project is available.

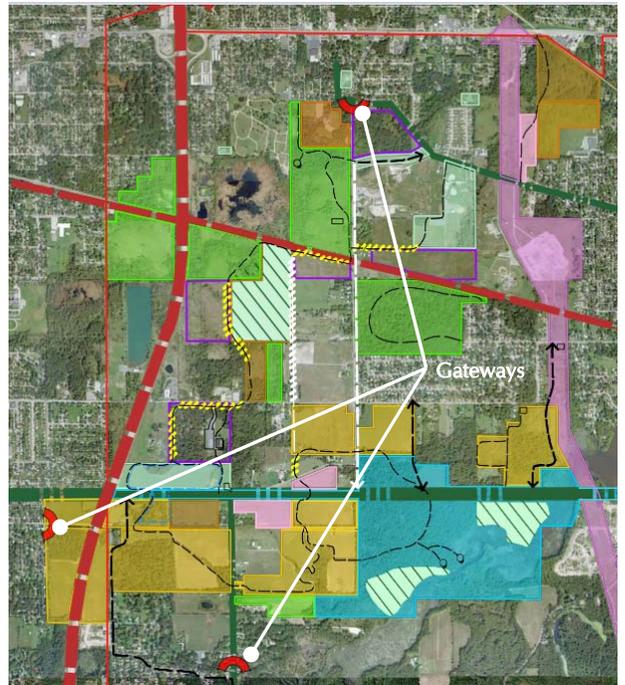


Bike lane connections on quieter streets and across conservation lands are shown in black. A bike lane on Liverpool Road, shown in white, will require redesign of the road as a Complete Street

## Gateways

The Hobart Marsh Plan depicts three gateways: one each on the north, south, and west entries to the project area. The north gateway is shown on Liverpool at Old Ridge Road; the west gateway is on conservation land on either side of 53rd Avenue in Merrillville; and the south gateway is just past the Turkey Creek crossing on Liverpool Road. Each of these locations is chosen because of the sense of transition to a different space, based on vegetation, topography, and spatial enclosure.

The consensus among charrette participants was that a gateway from the east is not needed as most Hobart Marsh residents or other visitors approaching the Hobart Marsh from the east will already be aware of its existence. However if an eastern gateway is contemplated, West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street at the NIPSCO right of way would be a good location.



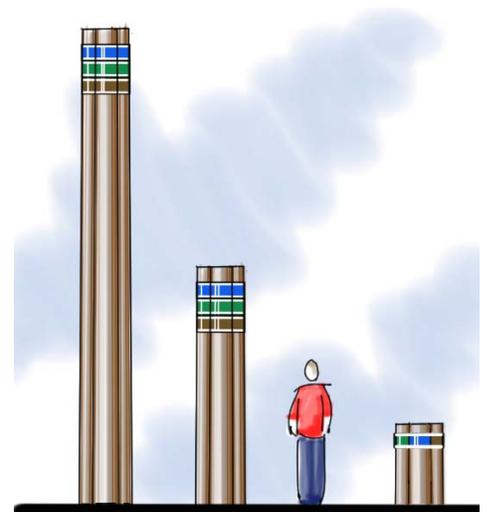
Gateways into the Hobart Marsh are proposed at the north, west, and south entrances into the project area

## Branding and Marketing

The plan recommends developing a package of markers or icons identifying Hobart Marsh as a unique area that can become a destination for those seeking the attributes and activities available. These should be developed at a hierarchy of scales such that the largest are visible along I-65, middle size versions are used as entry markers as one enters the Hobart Marsh, and the smallest size at each parcel of land that offers recreational opportunities as part of the system.

It is recommended that a series of interpretive signs be developed to place throughout the area to educate and enhance the experience of visitors. These should be simple, and follow the concept of the signage recently installed by the City in other locations. They should tell the story of the Hobart Marsh including such issues as the creation of Lake George, the USACE wetland mitigation project, and the need for prescribed burns as part of the land management practices, among others.

It is recommended that a set of design standards be developed along with a list of community service projects. This combination would provide consistency of elements such as benches and signage, and would afford the opportunity for community members to volunteer their time and effort to help



The concept of utility poles wrapped with graphics offers an inexpensive, durable, and low maintenance approach to identifying the Hobart Marsh

make Hobart Marsh a desirable, successful area. Developing a family of simple and durable amenities made from common and easily accessible materials (such as utility poles for icons instead of steel or concrete) would allow groups such as the Boy Scouts to take on projects in the Hobart Marsh annually, and offer opportunities for volunteer-based upkeep. This will be an important part of the Hobart Marsh Plan, as the agencies and non-profits do not have the financial or manpower resources to build and maintain extensive improvements. The project's success is based on the buy-in and participation of the community.

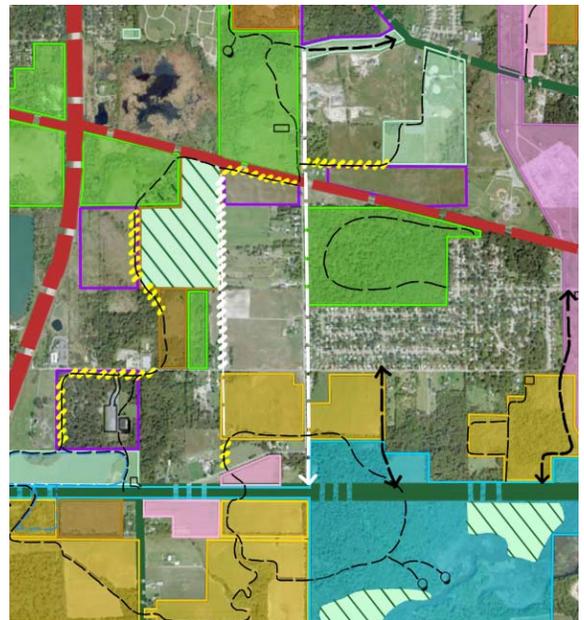
Program development should be a high priority to create fun and exciting reasons to use the trail system. Working with the agencies and non-profits, the City should consider taking the lead in creating programs that all can support. This may require identifying groups and agencies with constituencies which could benefit from and take advantage of the trail system, such as the School City of Hobart and South Shore Trails. These groups and agencies should be encouraged to partner with the City to the benefit of both.

The City could then inform the public of the trails and programmed activities through its partner groups and agencies. Not incidentally, this type of collaboration would be perceived very favorably by potential funding agencies and foundations enabling the City to leverage a relatively small investment of its own resources into a much larger set of resources to create and sustain the programming. Grant funding should be sought for a program coordinator to develop and operate programs in the area. Brochures and maps should be created depicting the location and opportunities available in the Hobart Marsh.

An obvious but useful method to disseminate information about Hobart Marsh is through the internet. The City – perhaps with the City Parks Department in the lead – can post information about programmed activities as well as important maintenance actions (e.g. prescribed burns) to spread awareness. The City should take the lead to develop a calendar of events and activities to avoid conflicts and take advantage of coordinated opportunities.

### Linkages between Conservation Lands

Many of the properties in the Hobart Marsh owned and preserved by public agencies and non-profit organizations are separated by one or more parcels privately owned by others. Where hiking trails are proposed to connect the conservation lands, acquisition of property, access easement or other negotiated agreements are recommended to support continuous trail development. In a few cases, future acquisition by a conservation-minded owner is recommended.

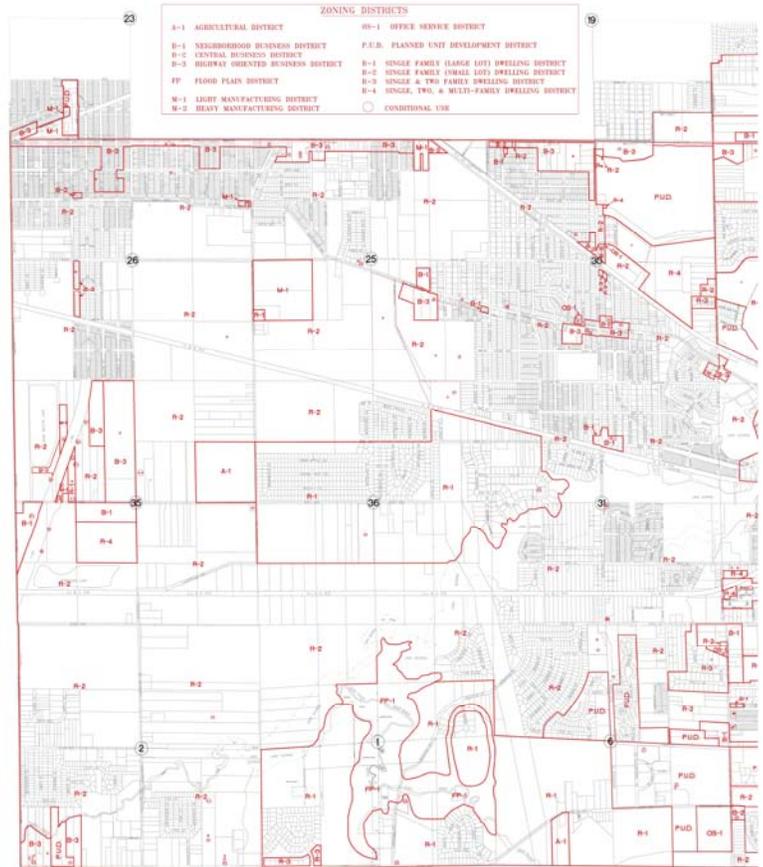


Access easements, property acquisitions, or other negotiated agreements are needed for trails shown with yellow and white hatches. Properties outlined in purple denote potential property acquisitions for conservation.

## Land Use and Zoning

The majority of the Hobart Marsh area is zoned for residential development. A possible strategy to enhance the uniqueness of the project area would be to continue to seek residential development but to create a new “Conservation Development” zoning overlay that would require sustainable building and site development practices, which closely follows the *NIRPC 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan’s* recommendations. For instance, this could be an appropriate location for a *LEED for Neighborhood Development* subdivision or one that allows more density and common space for conservation or sustainable farming practices by the residents. Also this may be an ideal area to create community gardens so that people can farm small plots of land for a fee.

Although concern has been expressed by neighboring residents that residential development is not compatible with the proposed natural area management techniques, and by city council members that it does not offer an aggressive economic development scenario, the reality is that it’s difficult to envision other uses that would attract new development in an area of the city that does not have improved and adequate access as compared to other vacant properties adjacent to major arterials. Developing unique offerings such as conservation communities in conjunction with the ongoing development of a truly robust natural area traversed by a network of trails may be the catalyst for an unforeseen influx of sustainability-minded young professionals and families.



This area of the City is primarily zoned R-1 and R-2, with a few small pockets of business, manufacturing, and agriculture interspersed

Other possible uses should also be explored to attract green industry private development, such as the solar farm that has recently been constructed north of 49<sup>th</sup> Street. Attraction of other green industries could be a goal of economic development efforts of the City. This might include other types of alternative energy producers and clean industries related to the existing economic activities of the region, such as composting facilities, green power producers and supporting manufacturing facilities. The potential for agricultural, community agricultural, forestry, and landscape nursery uses might also be explored.

Additional land uses that have the potential to spur economic development consistent with the natural theme of Hobart Marsh include bed and breakfast style lodging facilities for ecotourists and cafes or coffee shops to serve trail users; the natural setting of Hobart Marsh may be considered an asset for this type of development.

Environmental education facilities and programs would be an excellent fit with the goals of the Hobart Marsh plan. For instance, this could include programs for school children similar to the Mighty Acorns, a collaboration between Shirley Heinze



Hobart Marsh will be an ideal location to serve existing environmental education programs such as the Mighty Acorns.

Land Trust and School City of Hobart's Ridge View Elementary in which fifth graders provide stewardship aid to the Land Trust's Greiner Nature Preserve, adjacent to the school site. Ridge View's students assist in improving the habitat at the Preserve, and in turn learn about their local environment through such activities as collecting seeds from native species for future planting. Alternatively, for adults, there may be demand for programs and activities such as teaching nature skills, plant and bird identification, bird banding, survival skills, perhaps bow hunting and hunting safety classes. The plan identifies the St. Sava property as an excellent location for an interpretive center which could house these types of programs.

Appropriate zoning districts and their location should be identified. This issue requires further exploration, discussion and analysis of the economic impact of prospective land uses and zoning changes. All development proposed should involve uses, structures and plans that are in context with the surrounding land uses. The inclusion of planned unit developments which are sensitive to surrounding land uses and are in conformity with the goals of the Hobart Marsh Plan and the City's legitimate development interests should also be considered. Careful site plan review for any new development proposed is vitally important.

## Land Management

All of the stakeholders currently work well together with coordinated maintenance and scheduling common among them. All believe that no new, formal management structure for the Hobart Marsh is needed. An informal arrangement documented with a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that all would sign is considered adequate.

Regular (annual or biannual) meetings to discuss past progress and plans for the future are recommended. The City of Hobart is the likely agency to convene and facilitate these meetings as they have a stake in every property, regardless of ownership. For instance, the City could establish a calendar of events, both for public activities and land maintenance actions to coordinate efforts among the multiple agencies.

Clear statements of the management priorities for each agency and non-profit should be established – for the most part, these are already in place – and promoted to inform the public of the critical mass of preserved and conserved land in this area of the City. Coordination of these priorities among the land owning organizations should be promoted to create a cohesive management palette for Hobart Marsh that fits with the marketing of this area as a natural area abundant in recreational opportunities. The land owning organizations should also be encouraged to develop and agree to a unified design vocabulary for select items that can contribute to the branding of Hobart Marsh as a unique, cohesive area. Joint development of a use plan that shows permitted and prohibited uses on each property, similar to the table shown on the next page, is recommended. It should be noted that this table is included as an example only, and may not accurately reflect the current permitted uses for each agency's property.

## Prohibited Activities by Organization

Organization	Horseback Riding	Bicycling	Motorized Vehicles	Hunting & Trapping	Camping	Glass	Fires Grills Fireworks	Metal Detectors	Pets	Natural Object Removal	Natural Object Release
Shirley Heinze Land Trust		X	X	X (1)	X		X			X	X
Save the Dunes	X	X	X	X						X	X
NPS National Lakeshore	X(2)	X(3)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X (4)	X	X
Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources											
Lake County Parks Department		X									
City of Hobart Parks Department		X		X (5)							

### Notes:

- (1) Shirley Heinze Land Trust allows hunting with special permission only.
- (2) NPS does not allow horseback riding in Hobart Prairie Grove.
- (3) NPS allows bicycling on the paved Oak Savannah Trail only.
- (4) NPS allows pets on a leash only.
- (5) Bow hunting only is permitted within the City of Hobart.

## Plan Implementation

Implementing the Hobart Marsh Plan will be an incremental endeavor, particularly given that there is not a known timeline for the completion of the USACE mitigation project. Determining what next steps are needed to begin implementation of the plan, prioritizing them, and identifying potential funding sources is a key component of the Hobart Marsh Plan. The list of next steps will essentially serve as the agenda for future annual meetings of the stakeholders; it will provide a tool to track what has been done and what should be done next, who the logical agency is to spearhead the effort, and what resources are available for funding the work.

### Next Steps

- Begin a campaign to build awareness and support for the project by presenting the plan to regional and local businesses and service clubs.
- Develop detailed design standards and guidelines for:
  - Trail widths, surfacing, wet area crossing appurtenances such as boardwalks, and stiles or gates to limit access by off road vehicles
  - Overlooks, way stations, and interpretive station amenities
  - A system or family of icons that identify the Hobart Marsh
  - Trail head layouts and amenities, including interpretive and wayfinding signage and kiosks, benches and trash receptacles, restrooms or vault toilets, and trail distance markers and maps

- Begin to develop and maintain trails in the burn break areas on the non-mitigation properties in the Hobart Marsh.
- Identify potential public/private partnerships, funding sources, and strategies to purchase or secure conservation easements on the properties indicated on the plan. Mechanisms identified in this document recommend acquisition of a narrow strip of property or access easement. These and other negotiated agreements should be investigated in greater detail to determine the most viable approach to each of the areas identified on the plan.
- Develop a master plan for Robinson Lake Park that depicts the recommended parking lot improvements, barrier-free trail loop, and a long term plan for the St. Sava property so that short term projects dovetail with the long term plan.
- Redesign the entry to and expand the parking lot at Robinson Lake Park.
- Discuss the idea of relocating the parking lot at Robinson Lake Park in the future with the Lake County Parks Department as they own a portion of this lot along with the City of Hobart.
- Develop a barrier-free trail loop designed per ADA/AASHTO standards at Robinson Lake Park.
- Identify grant funding sources for property acquisitions or other creative financing techniques to subsidize the purchase of available properties and develop a strategy to negotiate purchase.
- Work with the solar energy company property owners to coordinate utilization of the access route preliminarily addressed in the site plan.
- Initiate the redesign of Liverpool Road as a Complete Street.
- Identify property ownership at each of the proposed gateway locations and determine if there is right of way or other city or agency owned property that the gateway feature could be erected on.
- Develop trail links across City of Hobart properties east of the Greiner Preserve.
- Coordinate development of a trail head and bike lane connection with NIPSCO.
- Coordinate development of trail head amenities on the Greiner Preserve property with the SHLT.
- Coordinate the development of trail head amenities on the IDNR Quail Hollow property in the location of the management access parking lot.

- Encourage the National Park Service to develop a master plan for the Hobart Prairie Grove property that is consistent with and promotes development of the overall Hobart Marsh recreational development plan. The City should play an involved, pro-active role with NPS to develop this plan.
- Contact groups such as the School City of Hobart and South Shore Trails to understand their goals and needs and begin building their support for the project.
- Work with existing groups and agencies to develop programmed activities to encourage use of the Hobart Marsh trail system with an emphasis on collaborative programs having an environmental education component.
- Develop and seek grant funding for support of programmed activities; include funding of a program coordinator position in the grant request.
- Develop a marketing program with promotional materials (paper and electronic) including brochures and trail maps to brand and increase awareness of Hobart Marsh and its recreational opportunities.

<sup>1</sup> Location, Purpose and Scope of the Little Calumet River Mitigation Project Report, Department of the Army, Chicago District, Corps of Engineers, July 2010

<sup>2</sup> City of Hobart Parks and Recreation Department Master Plan, 2011, prepared by James M Mandon, PE

<sup>3</sup> National Park Service Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore website

<sup>4</sup> 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan - A Vision of Northwest Indiana, June 2011, Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission