

PUBLIC OUTREACH

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A distinguishing feature of this Plan is the incorporation of public outreach. The public input process had five components:

- Review of past Citizen Satisfaction Surveys as relates to Public Lands.
- The Conservancy Lands Plan Update Survey – the first dedicated survey assessing visitation, usage, and satisfaction with the conservancy land system.
- Stakeholder engagement – engagement with Middleton’s two Friends Groups: the Friends of Pheasant Branch and the Friends of Kettle Ponds.
- Public input meeting – a public meeting dedicated to the topic of conservancy lands.
- Communications plan – a conservancy lands plan-dedicated website providing a mechanism for written or verbal input.

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CITIZEN SATISFACTION SURVEY: PUBLIC LANDS

The City conducts an annual Citizen Satisfaction Survey to inform budget decisions for the coming year and beyond. Relevant findings from surveys from 2012-2017 are highlighted below. Due to changes in question design in different iterations of the survey, year-to-year response rates cannot be compared. However, several themes regarding conservancy lands were consistent across all years of the survey.

All years of the survey (2012-2017) satisfaction with Public Lands, Recreation and Forestry (Public Lands and Forestry) and Conservation and Planning (Planning, Forestry, Public Lands) ranked greater than 80%.

For short- and long-term staff attention and funding, citizens ranked Public Lands, Recreation and Forestry in the top four priorities or higher. The services/departments that ranked above PLRF were limited to Street Maintenance, Public Works (excluding street maintenance), and in some years, Planning and Community Development (City planning, community development, economic development, sustainability), and Police.

The most frequently received comments were noting the positive contribution of the conservancies and trails to Middleton. Many comments were some variation of, "I love the conservancies," "I love the [Pheasant Branch] Conservancy," or "I love the trails".

LOVE LOVE LOVE our free parks and walking/hiking/bike paths. The Public Lands make Middleton an absolute gem – Resident, 2012

In 2017, 95% of residents rated the City of Middleton as a "good" or "very good" place to live. When asked, "What do you wish Middleton had that it doesn't have now?" the most popular responses included: more bike paths and/or bike lanes, more pedestrian trails and trail connections, and more connections to communities outside of Middleton. Responses in 2017 were the first to mention accessibility. Current and future initiatives by the City of Middleton are responding to the need for improved accessibility in public lands.

We have great trails, conservancy, park lands. I only wish we had better connectivity to other communities – Resident, 2015

Another hot topic was trails including: trail surfacing, trail maintenance, trail conditions, and trail connectivity. Trail condition ratings, preferences, and conditions were further explored in the Conservancy Lands Plan Update Survey (2018).

CONSERVANCY LANDS PLAN UPDATE SURVEY, 2018

Objectives of Survey

The goal of the survey was to gather information about conservancy usage, user preferences and access to conservancies, and to identify opportunities for improvement. To date, this was the first Middleton survey dedicated to conservancy lands. Its results not only serve to inform policy recommendations in this Plan, but also function as baseline data for future polling.

Methods of Survey

The survey was conducted with Polco, a Wisconsin-based civic participation technology platform. The City has used Polco for polling services since 2017. Benefits of using Polco include their online platform and their ability to verify responses using an account system and referencing available voter registration information. In order to verify individual responses, respondents must create a Polco account prior to submitting the survey. Polco's system helps the City have more confidence that results are not unduly influenced by respondents out of state or respondents in the area who "stuffed the ballot" with multiple entries.

Some residents expressed concern regarding the need to create an account to participate in the survey. Polco's privacy policy commits to never sharing individual data or individual responses with the City or any third party. We additionally made available physical copies of the survey that could be submitted anonymously.

The Conservancy Lands Plan Update Survey was advertised through online and social media outlets. A link to the online survey was advertised on the Conservancy Lands Plan Update information web page (adaptiverestoration.com/clplan), on the Middleton Public Lands, Recreation and Forestry website, through Middleton Parks and Rec government list serve, on the Parks, Recreation, Forestry and Youth Center Facebook page, and was distributed to the Middleton Cross Plains Area School District (MCPASD), the Friends of Pheasant Branch, the Friends of Kettle Ponds, and the Capital Off Road Pathfinders.

Physical copies of the survey were available at the Middleton City Hall, the Middleton Public Library (Central Library), and the Middleton Senior Center.

A total of 419 respondents completed the survey between January 1–31, 2018. Online responses (405) exceeded paper survey responses (14). Roughly 50% of respondents (208) were verified Middleton residents, as determined by voter identification information. Non-verified responses did not necessarily indicate that respondents were non-residents of Middleton; instead it indicated a lack of information, such as address, resulting in an inability to verify voter registration in Middleton. For verified respondents, available demographic information included age, gender and precinct.

Respondents are separated in the following categories:

All respondents – total number of respondents (all categories)

Registered voters in Middleton – respondents who are registered voters in Middleton. Name and address used to create a Polco account matched with available voter information. Also referred to as *verified Middleton residents*.

Registered voters – includes all registered voters, not just residents of Middleton.

Live in Middleton, self-reported – respondents with a self-reported Middleton address. These respondents did not match with available voter information. The most common reason for unmatched information is a discrepancy between self-reported address and address as listed on voter identification.

Subscribers to Middleton – respondents who regularly respond to Middleton questions on Polco. This includes registered voters, self-reported Middleton residents, and others who may not report an address in Middleton but that regularly participate in Middleton questions.

Abstained – number of online respondents who did not respond to a question.

Anonymous – the number of respondents who submitted paper surveys.

Survey respondents included individuals from multiple age groups ranging from 18-79. The lowest engagement was from the 18-29 age group. In future surveys Middleton should seek increased participation from the 18-29 age group and respondents less than 18. Since minors under the age of 18 are not registered voters, we were unable to determine the number of respondents in this age category.

Following completion of the survey, respondents were able to view results of the survey through the Polco website platform. Responses and comments were displayed as anonymous unless the respondent has a public Polco account (user selects “use my name on comments” under profile settings).

For all questions, the total number of respondents meet the criteria for >90% confidence for statistical significance. For verified respondents (registered voters), all questions meet an 80% confidence interval for statistical significance.

Results

Similar to the Citizen Satisfaction Survey results, the Conservancy Lands Plan Update Survey respondents provided many comments applauding the conservancy lands system and its variety of trails and habitats.

The beauty and accessibility of the conservancy lands are a key element of what makes Middleton such as desirable place to live

Responses to the question, "What do you enjoy about Middleton's conservancy lands," highlighted the naturalness of the conservancy system, its proximity to residences, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and aesthetics (Figure 4-1).

[I enjoy] being able to spend time in nature so close to where I live and work. Also, being able to travel using the conservancy trails

I appreciate [conservancy lands] very much and feel fortunate to partake in the parks and trails



Figure 4-1. Visualization of responses to, "What do you enjoy about Middleton's conservancy lands?" The word cloud gives greater prominence to more frequently used words in survey

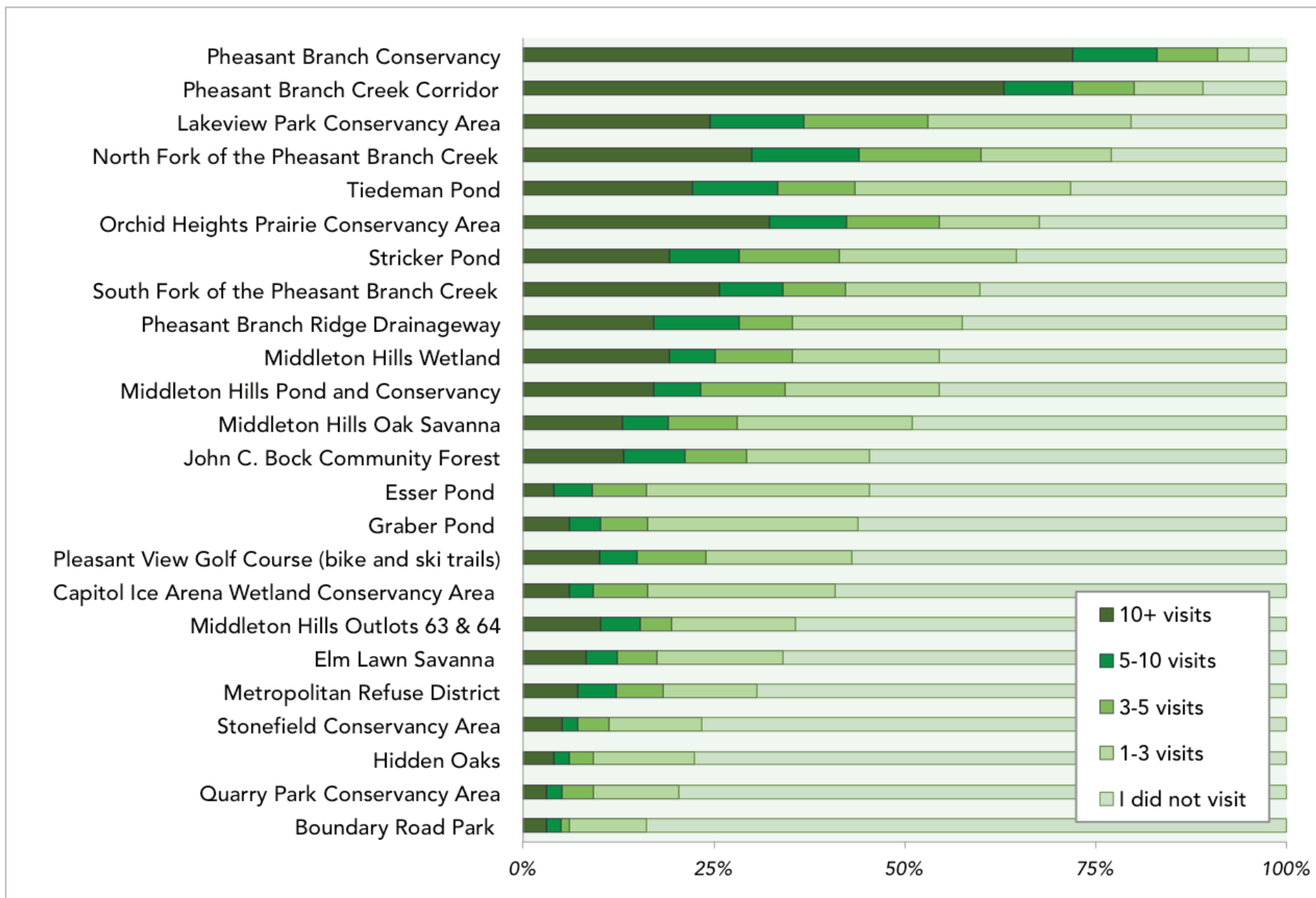


Figure 4-2. Visitation to conservancy areas and trails in the last year. Percent of responses for the following categories: 10+ visits, 5-10 visits, 3-5 visits, 1-3 visits, or "I did not visit."

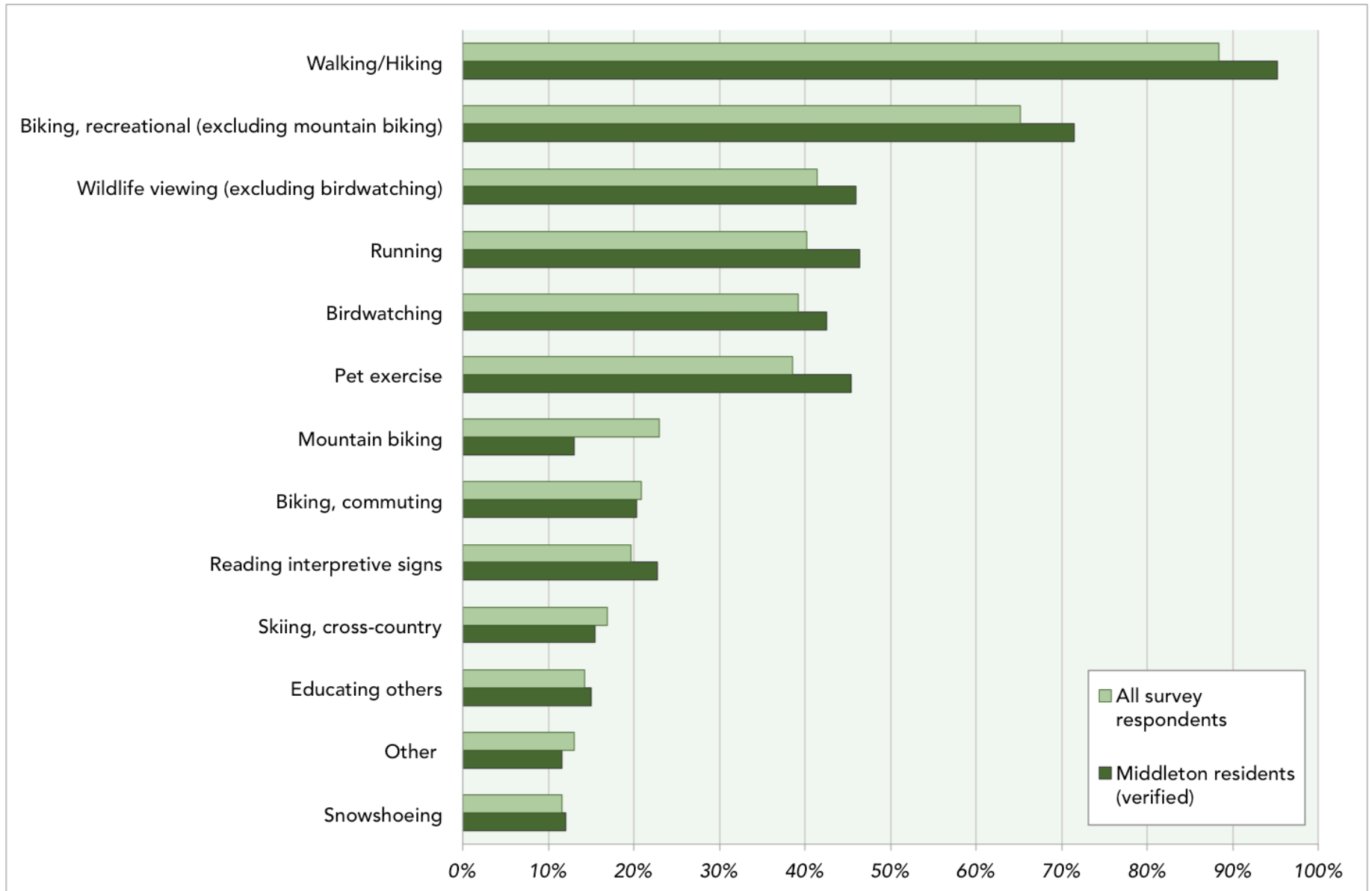


Figure 4-3. Most popular activities performed in conservancy lands in the last year (percent of respondents who performed each activity). Responses for total survey respondents and verified Middleton residents (registered voters) are displayed separately. Respondents could select multiple responses. "Other" included: ice skating, photography, looking at plants, driving for pleasure, geocaching, gardening (Bock Community Gardeners), kayaking and canoeing.

Visitation/Usage

Pheasant Branch Conservancy was the most frequently visited conservancy with 60% of respondents indicating that they visited 10 or more times in the last year (Figure 4-2). For verified Middleton residents, the visitation was even higher: 70% visited over 10 times in the last year. Only 9% of all respondents had not visited PBC. Other highly visited sites included the Pheasant Branch Creek Corridor, the North Fork of the Pheasant Branch Creek, Orchid Heights Conservancy, and the South Fork of the Pheasant Branch Creek, where over 30% of all respondents visited more than 5 times last year. High visitation to these areas is not surprising considering that these areas serve as trail corridors, providing pedestrian and bike paths across the City.

Conservancy areas with high local visitation included Stricker Pond Conservancy and Tiedeman Pond Conservancy. Although 36-42% of all respondents did not visit these areas, 16-17% of respondents visited over 10 times in the last year, suggesting that those who do use the pond areas use them frequently.

I walk around [Tiedeman] Pond every day - Public meeting participant

Middleton's conservancy lands support a variety of outdoor activities (Figure 4-3). The most popular uses of conservancy lands were walking/hiking and biking. These two activities are also the most frequent methods of accessing conservancy lands for Middleton residents. Other popular activities included wildlife viewing, birdwatching, running, pet exercise and mountain biking.

Management and policy of conservancy lands should protect user interests such as wildlife viewing and birdwatching, while also supporting activities such as recreational biking, dog walking, and mountain biking.

Conservancy lands usages and motivations are in line with national trends in outdoor recreation. Middleton respondents cited, "Spending time in nature," and "Exercise" as the primary purposes for visiting conservancy lands. According to a national Outdoor Foundation report, the most cited motivation for getting outdoors was exercise, and over half of respondents said pursuing outdoor recreation was means of being close to nature¹⁷.

Additional results are discussed in subsequent chapters. Full survey results are available with a Polco account at polco.us, or a pdf version of results is available at: adaptiverestoration.com/clplan

17 The Outdoor Foundation. 2017. 2017 Outdoor Recreation Participation. Washington, DC. Accessed January 13, 2018 at <https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/outdoor-recreation-participation-report-2017/>2/24/2018>.

PUBLIC INPUT MEETING

Sixteen residents in addition to City staff and Adaptive Restoration staff attended the January 20, 2018 public meeting.

Objectives of the Public Meeting

The goal of the public meeting was to provide a forum for open discussion of thoughts, concerns and ideas about conservancy lands, and to foster development of a future vision of Middleton's conservancy lands.

Methods of Advertising

Announcements advertising the Public Meeting were posted on the Middleton Public Lands, Recreation and Forestry website, through "Middleton Parks and Rec" government list serve, on the Parks, Recreation, Forestry and Youth Center Facebook page, and on the Conservancy Lands Plan Update web page (adaptiverestoration.com/clplan). The meeting was also advertised to the Friends of Kettle Ponds, and to the Friends of Pheasant Branch by email and an announcement in their Winter 2017/2018 newsletter.

The meeting was structured as a two-hour event starting with a period for introductions and a 15-minute presentation on the goals of the Plan from Adaptive Restoration, LLC and City staff. Remaining time included a period for socializing, a visioning exercise, and discussion.

We performed a creative visioning exercise where participants wrote a future "cover story" on Middleton's conservancy lands for a published newspaper or magazine. This exercise encourages participants to share individual visions and thoughts, and collaboratively generate a shared future vision of the conservancies. Attendees and staff were separated into groups representing several future timepoints: 1 year, 5 years, 10 years and 50 years in the future. This exercise was modified from resources available through the Learning to Give organization and Campus Outreach Opportunity League.

Take-homes

Stakeholders expressed the role of conservancy lands in making Middleton special.

- A new resident noted that Middleton’s conservancies and public lands was one of reasons they moved to Middleton

Stakeholders enjoy the naturalness of conservancy areas.

- Residents living along a conservancy corridor enjoy the wildlife (turkeys, owls, birds, other)
- Appreciate preservation of areas that were never developed
- Suggest identifying areas with rare endemic communities as areas to be protected from human influence (i.e. few or no trails), while other areas can serve as recreation areas

Stakeholders support active restoration efforts.

- Noted impacts of past restoration efforts. “The oak that was planted is now maturing”
- Expressed interest in seeing more habitat improvement and more native plant communities
- Expressed interest in updating existing management plans to reflect current conditions and future desired conditions. Suggested a policy of having a management plan for each conservancy area

BOX 4-1: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A MEMBER OF THE FOPB RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

- Recommends managing across municipal boundaries in Pheasant Branch Conservancy
- Recommends active monitoring of and mitigating the spread of invasive species, particularly in high quality areas. Suggests the mapping tool GLEDN mapping/ EDDMapS
- Has concerns over the spread of new invasions such as crown vetch, wild parsnip, and spotted knapweed, in City portions of the Pheasant Branch Conservancy
- Recommends a higher level of coordination between the City, Dane County Parks and the FOPB (at least one annual meeting)
- Would like discussion of dogs and dog regulations in conservancy lands
- Would like to see accessibility issues in Pheasant Branch Conservancy addressed
- The FOPB are interested in the acquisition land to the north of the Dane County portion of Pheasant Branch Conservancy as it becomes available.
- Wants to move beyond previous joint efforts to new projects such as clearing buckthorn around the duckblind vista.
- Thinks the City is doing well with respect to storm water management, streambank restoration, John C. Bock Community Forest restoration and coordination of resources and volunteers managing “Bock Forest”

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT WITH FRIENDS GROUPS

FRIENDS OF PHEASANT BRANCH

We presented to the Board of the Friends of Pheasant Branch on December 12, 2017. The presentation included discussion of Plan update objectives, a draft timeline of projected work, and a request for input from all members of the Friends of Pheasant Branch (FOPB) through direct written comments, participating in the Conservancy Lands Plan Update Survey, or attending the January 20, 2018 Public Meeting. We submitted an article announcing the Plan update, the Conservancy Lands Plan Update Survey and Public Meeting to the FOPB Winter 2017/2018 newsletter.

Detailed minutes of the December 12, 2017 Board of FOPB meeting are included in Appendix A.

We solicited and received written comments from the Restoration and Management Committee of the FOPB, a subcommittee responsible for creating and implementing restoration goals, managing restoration volunteers, and grant writing (Appendix B). We additionally met in person with a member of the Restoration and Management Committee (Box 4-1).



WALK AND TALK AT TIEDEMAN POND WITH THE FRIENDS OF KETTLE PONDS AND NEIGHBORS

We hosted an informal “walk and talk” at Tiedeman Pond on December 16, 2017 with the Friends of the Kettle Ponds and interested neighbors. The meeting was advertised through the Friends of Kettle Ponds and local alders.

Twenty-four residents attended the one-hour meeting in addition to City staff and Adaptive Restoration staff.

Take-homes

Stakeholders live within walking distance of the pond and use the ponds frequently.

- Attendees lived close to Tiedeman Pond or Stricker's Pond. Many walk the pond daily. Many cite the ponds as the reason why they purchased their house or have stayed in their house
- All attendees appreciated access to the Pond and had a positive statement about the Pond
- Most popular uses were walking, dog-walking, and birdwatching

Stakeholders value the naturalness of Tiedeman Pond, in particular, the presence of migratory birds.

- Attendees appreciated the naturalness of the pond. Seasonality of the pond, associated vegetation, migratory birds, and quietness of the pond were mentioned when describing the wildness of the pond
- Viewing birds (migratory birds) and wildlife was indicated as a highlight of the Pond by at least 9 attendees. There was shared concern about overdevelopment of the Pond resulting in declines in bird populations. Other concerns included the number of users and fluctuating water levels as a result of stormwater system and forebay system

Stakeholders do not support further development of Tiedeman Pond, in effort to maintain its wildness. Stakeholders expressed both pros and cons of current trail surfacing.

- Perception that development of gravel and paved trails and increased usership has negatively impacted wildlife and bird populations (at least two households vocalized this opinion)
- At least two households expressed appreciation that past trail development has increased accessibility to multiple types of users (e.g. children, persons using wheelchairs), but are concerned about bike traffic and biker speed
- Same as above but specific to recently paved section of trail: appreciate that paved section is less icy in winter because of snow removal; but opinion that paving should not be extended
- Perception that recent maintenance of trails and boardwalks is better than in the past. Missing boardwalk boards "doesn't happen any more"
- Three households commented about icy boardwalk conditions or icy patches on gravel path in a particularly shady section
- At least one comment about improving signage related to bike use
- One comment that the mowed edge along trails gets wider every year, and that the mowed section is encroaching into natural areas ("it is wide enough")

Stakeholders believe that the ponds have improved over time.

- Attendees who had lived in the area for over 20 years generally felt that the ponds have improved over time. Improvements mentioned include vegetation, active restoration, forebay system, and trails.

Stakeholders support active restoration efforts

- One attendee stated that there should be capital funding for restoration
- At least two household stated that the forebay project was an improvement
- Two households cited restoration at the pond as inspiring them to pursue their own native yard restorations
- Attendees were interested in learning about invasive species and how to control them (e.g. reed canarygrass, hybrid cattail, garlic mustard)
- One attendee requested removing invasive species at Stricker Pond
- One attendee requested removing garlic mustard around Tiedeman Pond
- Interest in prescribed burning at Tiedeman Pond: City staff received email queries asking if Tiedeman Pond could be burned this fall
- At least two households stated that the vegetation at Tiedeman Pond has improved over time

Stakeholders are concerned about water levels in the ponds, flow of water between the ponds, and sedimentation of ponds.

- Concern that Tiedeman Pond is getting shallower was shared by several
- At least one household expressed concern about fluctuating water levels negatively impacting nesting birds and animals (muskrats)
- Three attendees/households expressed concern that shallower water levels is contributing to the spread of American lotus, or, that the lotus is contributing to sedimentation
- Stakeholders were supportive of dredging a forebay for the storm water grate on the east side of the pond (project was proposed by not funded by the City). Two attendees suggested a community fundraising effort for the project

Stakeholders are concerned about phosphorous and algae in the ponds

- At least two attendees perceived American lotus as a positive contribution by reducing blue-green algae in the ponds.
- Discussion about the storm water management system, how water flow is regulated, and if water quality is measured

Mixed opinions about American lotus in the ponds

- Three attendees/households expressed concern that shallower water levels is contributing to the spread of American lotus, or, that the lotus is contributing to sedimentation
- At least two attendees perceived lotus as a positive contribution by reducing blue-green algae in the ponds, as it was intended to. View that lotus is preferable to blue-green algae was shared by at least three households

Stakeholders expressed interest in volunteering

- Some attendees expressed interest in volunteering
- At least two attendees were members of the Friends of Kettle Ponds

Stakeholders support discouragement of social trails.

Other feedback:

- One attendee expressed that many users like picking black caps, and do not want them (all) removed
- One household would like replacement of the Tiedeman Pond overlook/deck

RECOMMENDATIONS

Use the Conservancy Lands Plan Update Survey as a baseline for future surveys. In future surveys Middleton should seek increased participation from the 18-29 age group and respondents less than 18 years of age.

Management and policy of conservancy lands should protect user interests such as wildlife viewing and birdwatching, while also supporting activities such as recreational biking and pet exercise where appropriate. Impacts of conservancy usage on wildlife and birds should be explored through monitoring.

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Conservancy Lands Plan 2018-2023