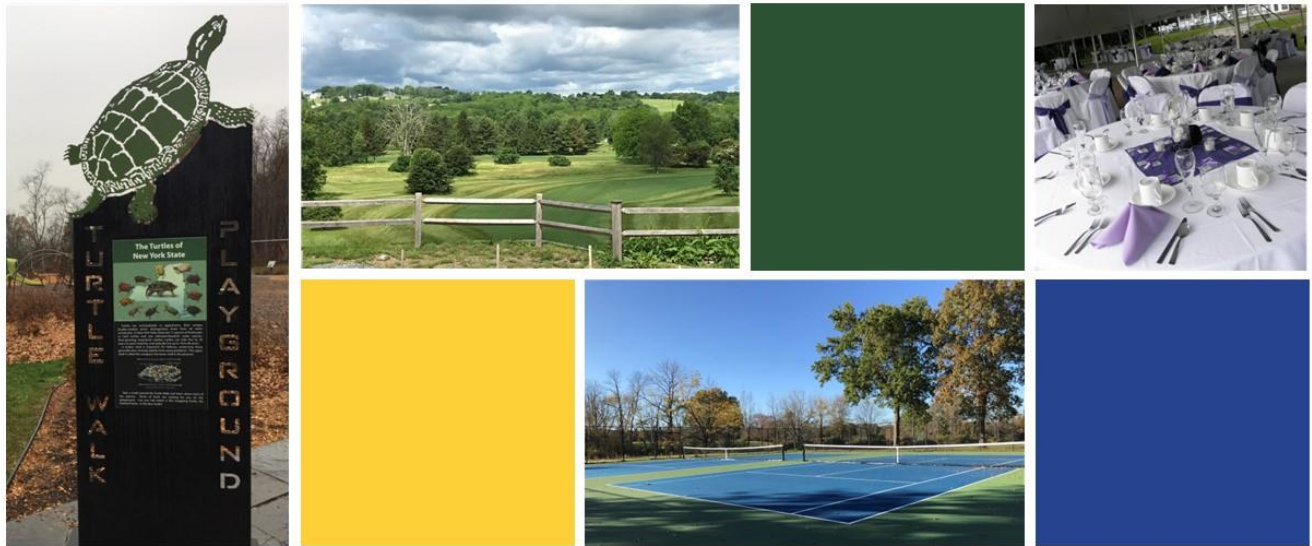


James Baird State Park | Dutchess County Town of LaGrange, NY



Final Master Plan for James Baird State Park

October 26, 2022
Revised January 25, 2023

**Final Master Plan for
James Baird State Park
Town of LaGrange, Dutchess County**

Prepared by:
The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

October 26, 2022
Revised January 25, 2023

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Abbreviations Used

DEC	New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
NYNHP	New York Natural Heritage Program
NYS	New York State
OPRHP	New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
SEQR	State Environmental Quality Review Act
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office





Under Section 3.02 of the Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation Law, OPRHP is directed “...to conserve, protect and enhance natural, ecological, historic, cultural, and recreational resources... and to provide for the public enjoyment of and access to these resources in a manner that will protect them for future generations.”

Introduction

Centrally located in scenic Dutchess County, New York, James Baird State Park has been a popular destination for day use recreation in the Taconic region for decades. While today perhaps best known for its world-class 18-hole golf course, in its earlier days the Park drew large numbers of visitors to its popular community swimming pool, which was decommissioned in the 1980s. Visitors to the pool could also enjoy the Park’s playground, a softball field, large outdoor roller-skating rink, tennis and volleyball courts, and food and ball concession stands. For the less energetic, there were open lawn areas and walking paths for picnicking, strolling, and relaxing.

Many of these amenities still exist at Baird today, and the Park’s good recreation infrastructure base continues to draw visitors. A large bathhouse – one of the Park’s original buildings – remains in the day use area, as do a bandshell, picnic tables with grills, and ball courts. Tennis courts have been updated, and a new playground has replaced the original outdated equipment. Much of the Park’s infrastructure needs updating, however, and there is demand for new amenities as recreation trends, regional changes, and visitor demographics evolve.

An important tool for addressing these evolving demands, a master plan helps the agency identify and plan for new recreation opportunities while protecting the site’s natural resources. The planning process includes evaluating the Park’s existing physical elements and documenting their condition and whether they provide a safe place for healthy recreation. A plan considers new possibilities for revitalizing a park by updating or repurposing existing elements. It also identifies actions that will ensure the facility is resilient to the increasing impacts of climate change.

A central part of the planning process is to develop and analyze potential actions that will foster stewardship of the Park’s valuable resources while improving the public’s recreational experience. The plan offers a strategic route to implementing new and updated facilities and up-to-date event spaces. Creating a Master Plan for James Baird State Park will help further the OPRHP mission to provide safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors, and to be responsible stewards of our valuable natural and cultural resources. Future actions that best meet OPRHP’s mission and the planning team’s vision for the Park are selected and prioritized. These proposed actions ultimately comprise the master plan.

Once implemented, the actions proposed by this plan will result in a safer, more cohesive, and inclusive Park that welcomes all visitors – whether they arrive on foot, by car or bicycle. The Park will offer a destination for outdoor exercise, fun, and relaxation for people in the local community and beyond.



Agency Mission

Actions and recommendations in master plans developed for OPRHP facilities are guided by the mission of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, which is as follows: “to provide safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors and to be responsible stewards of our valuable natural, historic and cultural resources.”



James Baird State Park Vision Statement

At the start of the planning process, a planning group consisting of regional staff, an OPRHP planner and environmental analyst, and a range of resource people developed a statement about how they envision James Baird State Park in its best possible state over the next ten to 15 years. The vision statement developed by the group is shown below:

James Baird State Park will be an accessible, year-round destination offering diverse recreational opportunities and a variety of event spaces while providing a healthy natural ecosystem that protects and enhances habitat for sensitive and significant species.

Goals

Each action selected in this plan was considered in the context of how it will help to accomplish the vision for the park over the next 10 to 15 years. As part of developing these actions, the planning team established broad goals for protecting and improving the Park's resources, as follows:

Goals for Natural and Cultural Resource Protection

- Expand and protect habitat and create new habitat for key species
- Increase pollinator habitat where appropriate at the Park
- Expand invasive species management efforts
- Enhance partnerships to help protect the Park's cultural/historic resources and their context and develop parameters for their preservation
- Educate the public on the Park's significant elements that determine historic character
- Establish a central resource for historic and cultural documents relevant to the Park

Goals for Recreational Resource Protection and Enhancement

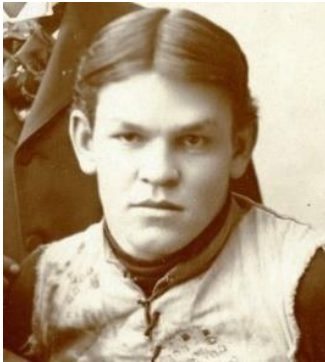
- Redevelop infrastructure and amenities in the day use area to help transform the Park into a revitalized destination for events and recreation
- Enhance environmental education and outreach, including publicity, programs, and partnerships, to encourage people to visit the Park
- Integrate the Freedom Road Area into the overall Park program

Goals for Park Operations, Management and Infrastructure

- Create a clear separation for safe pedestrian/bike/vehicle use that will accommodate both existing and future operations and development
- Provide an efficient and up-to-date regional maintenance facility



(Top) Hendrick (Henry) Beekman (1652-1716), an early landowner in the area



(Above) James Baird in 1894, from a University of Michigan football team photograph

Park Background

The lands where present-day James Baird State Park (“Baird”) sits were once home to a mix of Algonquin-speaking groups, including the Wappinger people, who inhabited the region for centuries. The Wappinger – which means “easterner” in most Algonquin languages – once held expansive territory along the eastern shore of the Hudson River that stretched from the Bronx to Northern Dutchess County.¹ They called a place near Baird, Pooghkepesingh, meaning “the reed-covered lodge by the little water place.”² A waterfall, river, and small stream here provided good places to fish and the surrounding hills offered both protection and woodlands in which to hunt.³

In 1683, the Wappinger signed a deed giving control of the land around the falls to two Dutch settlers. Among the earliest European settlers in this area, Pieter Lansingh and Jan Smeedes, built a mill on the small creek running from the falls.⁴ By 1697, much of the land in this region had been acquired by Henry Beekman Sr., a native of Kingston, NY; the 100,000-acre Beekman Patent of 1703 was part of the second largest land holding in Dutchess County. Beekman’s heirs continued to lease the land to tenant farmers, many of whom remained there into the nineteenth century.⁵

In 1836, John D. Brown paid \$15,000 for the 280-acre farm containing the building now referred to as the “Baird House.” This rural complex included several houses, barns, a blacksmith shop, cider mill, and apple orchard. Early records show that the farm’s first tenant in 1766 was a German emigrant, Jacob Miller, a currier who also served in the French and Indian Wars.⁶

Establishment of the Park

James Baird (1873-1953) was a civil engineer who worked for the George A. Fuller Co. and later formed his own construction company. Baird directed the construction of many important American buildings, including the Lincoln Memorial, New York’s Flatiron Building, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He owned 590 acres in Dutchess County that included the former Pettit and Brown farms, and he renamed the property “Hidden Farm.”

In 1939, James Baird donated his 590-acre farm to New York State for construction of a park, under the stipulation that it be known as James Baird State Park. As an additional gift, Baird agreed to pay for part of the park’s development. Included in the gift were several buildings and much useful farm equipment which was used in the development, maintenance, and operation of the facility.

The donation also enabled the state to route the Taconic State Parkway, or – as it was then called – the Eastern State Parkway, just north of Freedom Plains Road. A portion of the site was to be used for parkway right-of-way, with the remainder as a public park. At the time of its development this area was the only state park in Dutchess County traversed by the Parkway.



Much of Baird's early infrastructure was built by workers from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). In August 1940, Camp SP-58 was established here to begin construction of the Park. World War II and dissolution of the CCC interrupted construction until after the war, when work was taken over by the Taconic State Park Commission. The Park opened officially in 1948.

Planning that has been done in the past

No formal, comprehensive planning was ever completed for Baird. In summer 2017, a Capital Facilities summer intern created a report and conceptual plan for the day use area, known as the Activity Area Concept Design, which described the Park's context and history, provided a brief site inventory and analysis, and proposed ideas for upgrading the Park's recreational offerings. Many proposed elements in the report are still relevant and will be incorporated here as recommendations; some proposed items have since been implemented.

Planning and Environmental Review

OPRHP fully integrates environmental review processes into its master planning process. The environmental review of proposed master plans for state park facilities is conducted in accordance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). This document is accompanied by a final Environmental Impact Statement which provides that review and compliance with SEQRA.

Park Description

The Region

James Baird State Park is located in OPRHP's Taconic Region, with a portion of the Park in the northern part of the Dutchess County Town of LaGrange and the remainder in the Town of Pleasant Valley. Prior to the 1960s, Dutchess County was primarily agricultural in character. Since then, the southwestern portion of the county has developed into largely residential use, with many of its residents commuting to jobs in New York City. The northern and eastern regions of the county are remain rural with considerable farmland.



Location and Access

Baird can be accessed directly from both the north and south via the Taconic State Parkway, with exits 12 miles north of I-84. An entrance is also located to the west along Freedom Road. The Park is located around 10 miles from the City of Poughkeepsie, and 140,000 individuals live within a 20-minute drive.

Park Boundaries and Adjacent Land Uses

The area immediately surrounding Baird is mostly rural and agrarian, with the Park's closest neighbor being Arlington High School. The school has its own athletic fields, but student athletes often use the Park for cross-country practice and races. For a map showing Park boundaries and location, see the FEIS Appendices Figure 1, *Park Location Map*.

Existing Conditions

Physical Resources

Geology

The geology of Dutchess County is complex. Its history extends over one and a half billion years and has included several periods of major mountain building, ocean invasion and retreat, and glaciation. The county is divided into two major physiographic units: The Valley and Ridge Province, and the New England Province. The Valley and Ridge Province includes the Hudson Lowlands and the Low Taconics. The Hudson Lowlands extend eastward three to six miles from the Hudson River, which includes the Baird site.

Topography

Dutchess County lies within the Mid-Hudson River Valley, which includes the counties of Putnam, Orange, Dutchess, and Ulster. The terrain in this region alternates between low and relatively flat and gently rolling landscapes. Baird's landscape is typical of the region, with low areas of level terrain surrounded by higher, hilly, and wooded topography.⁷

Soils

Predominant soils found at the Park are typical of soil types found commonly along the western edge of the Hudson Valley lowlands: Hoosic gravelly loam, nearly level and undulating. Hoosic gravelly soils are generally associated with level lands and, because of their loose and open structure, are usually well-drained. The absence of stones and smooth surface of this soil type make it a valuable soil for agricultural uses.⁸

Natural Resources

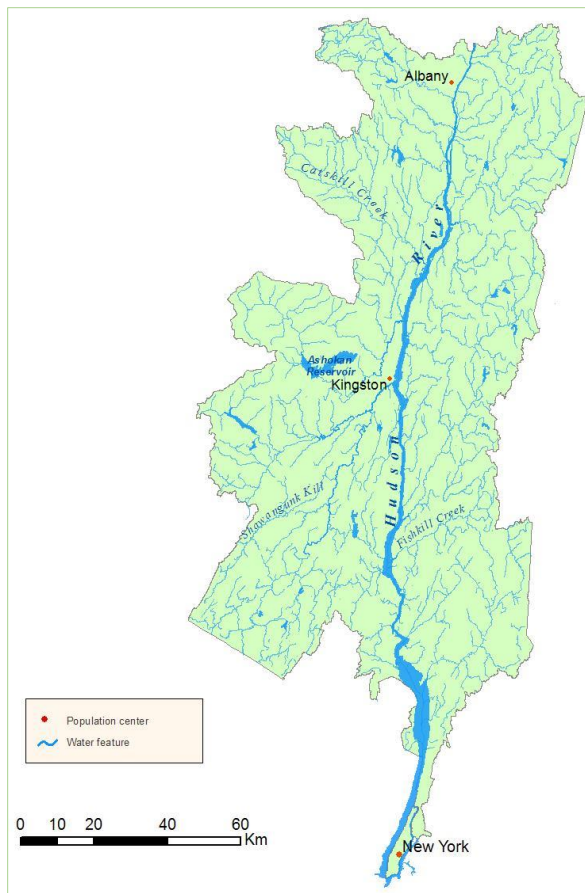
Water

Overall, Dutchess County has an adequate supply of ground and surface water supplied by its many aquifers, streams, wetlands, lakes, ponds, and seasonal pools. The largest source of surface water is the Hudson River, which forms the western boundary of the county. Poughkeepsie, the county's largest city, is supplied with drinking water from the Hudson River.⁹

Baird has a variety of water resources, including mapped state-regulated wetlands (see the FEIS Appendices, Figure 7, *Water Resources*). The facility has five man-made ponds, including two golf-course ponds and a small farm pond. A recently constructed irrigation pond serves as the main water source for the golf course, and a second pond, the Pumphouse Pond, serves as an emergency source for irrigation. The largest tributary of Fishkill Creek, Sprout Creek, also passes through the property, and the Freedom Road area, a land parcel added to the facility on the west side of County Rte. 47, also contains wetlands, a farm pond, and a small stream.

Watershed

Baird is located within the Hudson River watershed (see below). Sub-watersheds include the Hudson-Wappinger, Wappinger Creek, Fishkill Creek, Sprout Creek, and Great Spring Creek-Wappinger Creek (for maps showing watersheds and water resources at Baird see the FEIS Appendices, Figures 6 and 7).



Wetlands

Dutchess County has a network of four major wetland complexes that provide important habitat for a diverse assemblage of native plants, amphibians, reptiles, and birds, and the county supports the highest diversity of turtles in the state. These wetland complexes occur east of the Hudson River in western Dutchess County from Interstate 84 north to the Dutchess-Columbia County line, including the towns of LaGrange and Pleasant Valley, where the Park is situated.

Baird has its own significant water resources, including several large complexes of mapped, state-regulated wetlands within its boundaries (see Appendix B, *NYS DEC Wetland Delineation (2009)*, FEIS Appendices). Wetlands are a significant natural resource at the Park and range from ephemeral vernal pools, kettle holes dominated by native buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), shrub swamps, and beaver impoundments, forested wetlands, and shallow ponds. The day use activity area is adjacent to freshwater emergent wetlands and its northwest corner falls within a portion of the 100-foot state-regulated wetland adjacent area.



In addition to their general ecological value, Baird's wetlands support a population of the State-Threatened Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*). The Park and region is one of the few viable sites for this species in the northeastern U.S.

Ecological Communities

As part of an OPRHP biodiversity inventory completed in 2001, staff from the New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP) characterized and mapped natural and cultural community types in Baird (see the FEIS Appendices, Figure 9a, *Ecological Communities at Baird*). Compiled in a March 2001 report, these surveys identified 12 ecological community types within the Park, with the majority of land in natural cover, predominantly forest types. Approximately 33% was categorized as developed or "cultural" types per the NYNHP Ecological Community Classification. Community types in newer land acquisitions, including the 132-acre Freedom Road section of the Park, have not been mapped and characterized.

The Appalachian Oak-Hickory Forest that intersects the Park is considered significant from a statewide perspective. It extends north and south of the park for a total of 348 acres and is characterized by red oak, black oak, pignut hickory, and other oaks with an understory of hop hornbeam, sugar maple saplings, maple-leaf viburnum, flowering dogwood, witch hazel and many other shrub and herb species.

Flora

In addition to plant species typical of the region, the flora at Baird includes less common species that occur in more unique habitats. These species are described in greater length in the accompanying FEIS (see the FEIS Appendix F, *James Baird Flora Species List*).

Fauna

Baird supports a diverse assemblage of wildlife species, both common and rare. The region's sprawling complex of wetlands, forests, and fields offer prime basking, foraging, nesting, and overwintering habitat for turtles, and this diversity of habitats is also critical for supporting the diverse array of fauna found in the Park (see the FEIS Appendix D, *James Baird Fauna Species List*).

Rare Species

The eastern Hudson Valley region overall provides habitat for a number of rare plant and animal species. Regional wetland complexes support populations of the State Threatened Blanding's turtle, one of the few locations supporting this species in the northeastern United States. Wetlands in this area also provide critical habitat for several NYS Species of Special Concern, and regionally rare species.

The presence of Blanding's turtles at Baird has been known since the 1950s, and the Park has received increased environmental attention for the presence of this species. Blanding's turtles also inhabit the adjacent Arlington High School campus as well as wetland complexes and uplands to the north, south, and west. Wetlands in parks are given protections generally, but the presence of the Blanding's Turtle at Baird means that development is subject to additional regulations.

The NY Natural Heritage Program (NHP) review completed for Baird identified no rare plant species at the Park. The Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) is the one rare animal species documented within Park boundaries. Another rare animal species, the Indiana Bat (*Myotis sodalist*), has been documented just outside the Park.¹⁰ Awareness of the presence of rare species is important for making appropriate management decisions for the Park.

Invasive Species

Invasive plants pose a concern in some areas at Baird and a range of species have been identified. Regional Natural Resources staff are developing a management plan to control invasive species more effectively, particularly Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), which occurs in critical turtle habitat. Actions proposed in this plan will further develop invasive species management efforts at the Park.

Invasive fauna are generally non-native species – insects, aquatic animals, and mammals – that have the potential to harm ecosystems and developed environments such as agricultural crops. Introduction of invasive species can have large-scale impacts to biodiversity. They can cause or contribute to:

- Habitat degradation and loss
- Loss of native fish, wildlife, and trees
- Loss of recreational opportunities and income
- Damage to crops
- Diseases in humans and livestock
- Risks to public safety

Climate Change

Higher average temperatures and seasonal shifts are already affecting fragile ecosystems, and patterns for outdoor sports, leisure activities, and play are also changing.¹¹ Going forward, it is anticipated that impacts from climate change will increasingly affect both the natural and developed environment, with corresponding impacts to outdoor recreation. Recreation options in urban areas such as the City of Poughkeepsie are especially limited by increases in heat wave occurrences. When the temperature reaches 90 degrees or higher, walking, running, and cycling are not as safe or enjoyable as in more moderate temperatures. As impacts increase, public access to green spaces will become even more valuable.

A changing climate also means the likely possibility of more frequent and extreme weather events, including heavy rainstorms with high winds and flooding. Severe drought, algal blooms, and decreased snowfall may increasingly affect some regions, where water- and snow-based recreation may no longer be possible. Conditions such as these directly affect how people recreate outdoors by both limiting seasonal options and making it unhealthy or unsafe to engage in some activities.

Scientists are developing a better understanding of the mechanisms by which plant and animal species, and the ecosystems that support them, will be impacted by climate change. Seasonal temperature shifts are affecting habitat for tree species in the eastern U.S., with changes in forest composition and productivity. As average seasonal temperatures increase, species that require particular plant species for food and shelter, or a specific type of water habitat, are in some cases moving upwards in both elevation and latitude. Migrations have been documented in many tree species, including, for example, Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), Red maple (*Acer rubrum*), and American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*).¹²

These recent trends and current research indicate that because of a changing climate, ecosystems and natural resources will be increasingly altered, and therefore climate impacts must be a consideration when planning for future conditions at our parks. Responding to climate change proactively is key to protecting New York's rich natural environment. OPRHP can play a large role in this response.

Cultural Resources

James Baird State Park has been determined eligible for inclusion in the State and National Register of Historic Places (S/NRHP) at the local significance level in the areas of recreation, architecture, and landscape architecture. That S/NRHP determination of eligibility (DOE) was made in 2015, at which time the Park was identified as a historic district with a period of significance from 1940-1972. The qualifying criteria include that it may be "...associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns in our history," and it "embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represents the work of a master; or possesses high artistic values; or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction."

Additionally, a segment of the nearby Taconic State Parkway between Kensico Dam Plaza up to Interstate-90, which includes the segment that passes – and provides access to Baird – is on the National Register of Historic Places. Regional factors, such as proximity to the Hudson River Valley corridor, increase the potential for archeological sensitivity in the Park and surrounding area.

Recreational Resources and Activities

Baird's recreational offerings have not changed much since the Park opened. Along with the 18-hole golf course, the Park features wooded trails, ball courts, a playground, walking paths, and a picnic area. Two pavilions are available for visitors to rent for events up to 300 people each. Popular for larger gatherings, including parties, corporate events, and weddings, in warmer months these spaces are booked most weekends.





Day use area infrastructure: Bathhouse (top) and Playground

Nationally renowned golf architect Robert Trent Jones designed Baird's relatively flat, 18-hole golf course on this large tract of former farmland. The par 5, 13th hole is considered one of the most challenging in the Hudson Valley. In addition to the golf course, the golf complex has a driving range, pro shop, clubhouse with a restaurant, and a snack bar at the 1st and 10th holes.

Day Use Area

Baird's 20-acre day use area is bordered by the golf course to the south and wooded hills to the north. For years, the focal point of the recreation area was on the large swimming pool, which was added to the Park in 1951. For years, the pool was a popular destination in the region, and residents today still have fond memories of summer visits during that era. In addition to the pool, the day use area offered a playground, softball field, roller rink, tennis and volleyball courts, a nature center, bandshell, and food and ball concession stands.

While the pool was decommissioned in the 1980s, the 4000-square foot bathhouse remains in the day use area. The structure is in good condition and provides restrooms for day use area patrons. Open lawn surrounding the bathhouse has picnic tables and grills. Level, paved paths in this area are often used as an accessible walking loop. People regularly come to this part of the Park throughout the week to walk their dogs.

Parking

Adjacent to the bathhouse is a large day use parking lot. Original to the Park, the 180,000-square-foot lot has capacity for around 190 cars and is well-sited for larger events. The lot is only filled several times a year during special events. Scout groups use the day use area each winter for a Boy Scout Jamboree, and other recent events have included the Embalmers Car Show, which is held in the lot twice annually, and the Miles of Hope Breast Cancer Foundation charity walk, which brings several hundred people to the Park each year.

Scenic Resources

Baird's rural setting offers visitors green open space away from roads and traffic where they can enjoy a pleasant respite. Views across its waterbodies, lawn expanses, woodlands, and rolling topography are characteristic of the region, as is its rural and agrarian setting. The Hudson River Valley, including portions of Dutchess County, has been designated a Scenic Area of Statewide Significance by the NYS Department of State.¹³





Recreation Amenities

Unveiled in fall 2017, Baird's "Turtle Walk" themed playground has become a popular community amenity and regional draw to the Park. It is the most-visited element in the day use area and its sculptures, graphics, and playful aesthetic have been an impetus for further renovation of this part of the Park.

Approximately 35 charcoal grills and as many picnic tables are placed throughout the central open lawn area in this section, which are used for outdoor gatherings. Groups over 25 need to obtain a permit.



Sports Facilities

The Park's four tennis courts were repaved in 2008. Due to high demand, two courts have been re-configured for pickleball. A softball field is also available. While use of this area has decreased, its original footprint is still visible in the grass and a backstop remains in the northwest corner. The flat, mowed field here is used occasionally for impromptu recreational activities.



Existing recreation amenities at Baird (from top): turtle playground; basketball court; woodland trail

A sand volleyball court at the western end of the day use area is most often used by families picnicking at the Park. Two new sand volleyball courts are planned for a new location (see the FEIS Appendix Q – *Sand Volleyball Court Location Options*). Basketball nets are available at the former roller rink.

South Field

A chain link fence separates the day use area from activity on the golf course's ninth hole. A mowed field at the area's southern end is used occasionally for informal games. The field functions as a buffer between the two areas.

Trails

Nature enthusiasts will find the seven miles of wooded trails for hiking in the warm months and for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in winter (see FEIS Appendices, Figure 11, *Existing Trails*).



Day Use Area Buildings

The complex of buildings in the day use area is characteristic of the Park as it was originally conceived. The small bandshell (left), with its shed-style roof, offers a visual marker of the Park's early days. Constructed between 1948-1949, it is still used when the Park hosts larger events. Electricity is activated when organizations obtain a permit. The stage is adjacent to the day use parking lot.

The 1949-vintage bathhouse is a low-profile structure designed by the prominent architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. While the bathhouse is no longer used for its original purpose, the structure is in good condition, with many original finishes and details. It offers an example of park architecture of its era.

Other day use area infrastructure include a former ball-lending stand (also formerly a nature center). Similar in style to the bathhouse, this small building has been closed due to staffing cuts but remains in good condition.



A concrete oval pad, originally an outdoor roller rink, remains in this section of the day use area. It is now used as a free-form basketball court.

A former food concession building (not in use) has been condemned and is roped off from the public.

A one-story cabin built in 1925 still stands at the Park. In 2020 the building was declared uninhabitable and has been slated for demolition.



Other Park Structures

Over the years, buildings have been added to the Park, as needed. Portions of Baird's maintenance center, for instance, are original to the Park. Other elements were added later, as tasks evolved, and new equipment was acquired. More recently, pump houses, a water treatment building, and an irrigation control building were constructed.

The oldest remaining building at Baird is the Park Manager's residence, the earliest portion of which dates to early nineteenth century, and possibly even earlier. Over the years the structure has undergone numerous modifications.



Original infrastructure remaining in the Park (from top): Bandshell, former ball lending stand, picnic pavilion.

(above) A 1925 cabin, predating the park.



Golf Course Clubhouse

Golf Course Area Buildings

Buildings related to golfing at Baird include the Golf Clubhouse, a golf cart shed, and a small equipment storage structure at the driving range. The Clubhouse has a restaurant with a new bluestone patio and firepit that overlooks the course's scenic fairways. Larger parties and events at the facility are accommodated by an outdoor tent installed adjacent to the Clubhouse.

Economic Contribution

In general, public parks and open space can offer a range of economic benefits to a region. Proximity to parks has been demonstrated to enhance real estate values and increase tax revenues for communities. Green open space also provides valuable environmental benefits by capturing precipitation, reducing stormwater management costs, and protecting valuable wildlife habitat. More indirectly, benefits can decrease medical costs from more healthy exercise and a cleaner environment as trees and shrubs reduce air pollution and help protect ground water.¹⁴

Visitor revenue is another benefit of open space such as public parks, trails and nature preserves that attract people to a region. An economic mainstay in Dutchess County, tourism is estimated to bring more than 4.75 million people to visit the county annually.¹⁵ The region's historic sites, farmlands, quaint villages, and parks all play a significant role in attracting visitors. A 2018 Empire State Development report found that tourism spending in Dutchess County increased in 2017 nearly 6% over 2016, to more than \$601.5 million. This was the eighth consecutive year spending had increased and a 25% increase since 2013.¹⁶

During the 2021-2022 fiscal year, 129,368 visitors came to Baird, a significant increase from previous years. This was partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, during which greater numbers of people sought public outdoor spaces statewide. As improvements proposed in this plan are implemented, it is anticipated that the Park will appeal to a more – and wider range– of visitors, who will spend time and money within the region.

Recreational Needs Assessment

The 2020-2025 NY Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan ([SCORP](#)) indicates high demand in Dutchess County for recreation facilities of all types.¹⁷ More details about recreation need at Baird is discussed in the FEIS.

Legal Constraints, Designations and Other Programs/ Designations

James Baird State Park is located within the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area, a region designated by Congress in 1996 as having nationally significant cultural and natural resources. In partnership with the National Park Service, the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area is managed by the Hudson River Valley Greenway, which collaborates with residents, government agencies, non-profit groups, and private partners to interpret, preserve and celebrate the Hudson River Valley.¹⁸

In its 2016 Open Space Plan, the NYS DEC identified James Baird SP as part of an important Turtle Conservation Area.¹⁹

Central Hudson holds an easement within the parcel across Freedom Road (now part of the Park), which allows power lines to pass through, as well as an agreement with Solar Liberty for a solar array. The solar facility was constructed in the Freedom Road Area of the Park in 2021 and came online later that year.



Taconic Regional Maintenance Center at Baird

Operations

The maintenance facility at Baird serves OPRHP's Taconic Region. The Park maintains a number of vehicles and machinery for regional maintenance activities as well as serving as a repair facility, tool bank, parts supplier, and storage facility, as well as supplying fuel and parking for state and personal vehicles.

Planned Actions

The Master Plan provides a blueprint for future action to be taken at James Baird State Park, which will help protect and enhance the Park's natural, cultural and recreation resources, and support management and operations, as funding becomes available.

Most actions described here are based on the analysis process documented in the accompanying FEIS, which results in selection of the preferred alternatives (see FEIS, Chapter 2). Proposed actions are guided by the vision the planning team developed for Baird. Key points from the Park's vision statement have been translated into specific actions which will help to realize these elements, comprising the essence of the master plan.

Actions proposed in the Master Plan are also represented graphically in the large format Master Plan Map that is part of this document.

The specific actions planned for implementation in the Park are divided into three general subject areas:

- **Natural and Cultural Resource Protection** – Actions that foster stewardship of the Park's natural, cultural, and historic resources
- **Recreational Resource Protection and Enhancement** – Actions that will help revitalize the facility's recreation infrastructure
- **Operations, Infrastructure and Facilities Improvements** – Actions that will improve Park operations and infrastructure, including management practices and infrastructure that support the functioning of the Park

Natural Resource Protection Strategies

Goal: Expand protected habitat and create new habitat for key species.

Rare Species and Habitat Protection

Much of Dutchess County has been extensively altered for agriculture, mining, and urban development, severely impacting the region's wetland complexes. These proposed actions will help restore and expand crucial wildlife habitats, protect, and improve water quality, and offer new opportunities for visitor education and interpretation.



Action 1: Expand and improve natural resource management practices by enhancing habitat, installing new wildlife protections, and developing educational programs to raise public awareness.

Stewardship staff at Baird has partnered with colleges and regional environmental specialists to develop protocols and management strategies that will protect important species and their habitats within the Park. This action looks to expand these efforts by implementing an active management approach to further protect these rare and endangered species at the Park.

Action 2: Implement habitat enhancement for key species: acquire land when available, facilitate research opportunities, and implement techniques to decrease predation; partner with adjacent landowners and other involved agencies to develop additional species protection.

With much of the region's natural habitat under pressure from expanding development, this action aims to increase habitat connectivity, foster knowledge-sharing, and provide greater protection for wildlife, particularly rare and endangered species.

Action 3: Investigate opportunities to implement riparian/streambank and wetland creation/ expansion; enhance buffers and create greater connectivity along wildlife migration zones.

Pollinator Habitat

Action 4: Construct a berm system planted with native species between the golf course and day use area to provide pollinator habitat and create visual and functional separation.

Replacing an existing chain link fence with naturalistic berms planted with native plant species will add important pollinator habitat while improving the aesthetics and function of the day use area. The berms will provide a more pleasing separation between activities in the day use area and the golf course and provide new opportunities for environmental education.

Goal: Expand invasive species management efforts at the park.

Action 5: Develop and implement a more proactive invasive species management program.

Invasive species are among the leading threats to native wildlife. Native species may not have adequate defenses, or they may not be able to compete with more aggressive non-native plants, and invasive plants, insects or diseases can spread quickly. Applying a more systematic approach to addressing species is especially important for Baird's fragile populations of rare and threatened species. Implementing this action will help protect existing habitats and the biodiversity of the Park's natural areas.



Cultural Resource Protection Strategies

Goal: Educate visitors on Baird’s significant elements that contribute to its historic character.

Action 1: Develop interpretive content that tells the story of the establishment of the Park and the significance of its design.

As part of a historic state park system, every facility has an opportunity to foster a wider understanding of regional history and the part that parks have played in the state’s development. Implementing this action at Baird will improve the visitor experience as well as protect significant historic elements at the facility.

Historical Documents

Action 2: Develop an annotated bibliography that catalogues original design documents and resources on the Park’s historical and cultural elements.

Creating a digital archive of material related to the Park’s development will ensure that documentation on Baird’s significant historical elements is readily available and retained for the agency’s institutional history.

Recreational Resource Enhancement Strategies

Goal: Redevelop infrastructure and amenities in the day use area to help transform the Park into a revitalized destination for events and recreation.

Bathhouse

Action 1: Retrofit the bathhouse as an events venue to accommodate up to 500 guests, with accessible restrooms, upgraded utilities, facilities for caterers, and a large-scale pavilion.

The Master Plan envisions Baird as a regional events destination with attractive, up-to-date facilities for larger gatherings. As a focal point of the day use area, a renovated and repurposed Bathhouse will be a productive asset for the Park that offers the public a unique venue for their special events.





Bandshell

Action 2: Rehabilitate the Bandshell structure and adjacent paved area; provide visual separation from the adjacent parking lot.

Part of Baird's original infrastructure, the bandshell contributes to the Park's historic character. Improving the Bandshell and adjacent area builds on other day use area improvements and creates a more appealing space for performances at the Park.

Picnic Shelters

Action 3: Make improvements to picnic shelters and upgrade associated comfort stations and utility infrastructure.

Baird's picnic pavilions are very popular for larger group gatherings. These proposed upgrades will improve their functionality and may attract additional use. Nearby pathway improvements will allow better connections to the Park's other recreation amenities, including the playground and ball courts.



Playground

Action 4: Install an accessible walking path in the day use area with seating, shade structures and a connection to the proposed multi-use path.

Park staff noted a need for shade and seating at the playground. Providing benches and a shelter for small gatherings such as birthday parties will offer a more comfortable visitor experience at this popular play area, and a connection with the multi-use path will improve accessibility to other Park activities.



Parking Lot

Action 5: Redevelop the parking lot in the day use area with green infrastructure elements, a clear layout, and improved circulation.

This action will increase the Park's functionality and provide a safer and more welcoming environment for visitors. It will be more environmentally friendly and aesthetically appealing. Including green infrastructure will protect the environment while offering new educational opportunities at the Park.





Ball Courts

Action 6: Convert an existing tennis court to add two additional pickleball courts in the day use area.

Public input included multiple requests for additional pickleball facilities at Baird. Community residents use the existing courts regularly and indicated that long waits are sometimes required to get a court. Adding pickleball courts will help meet the growing demand for this sport in the region.

Softball Field

Action 7: Repurpose the existing softball area as a fitness trail/exercise route.

An accessible route with specialized equipment will expand recreation offerings in the day use area. It encourages an active lifestyle and may attract new visitors to the Park. It also adds an up-to-date amenity and activates an underutilized area in the Park.

Former Roller Rink

Action 8: Create a multi-purpose court at the former roller rink (e.g., to accommodate basketball, lacrosse rebound wall, street hockey, handball, etc.).

Repurposing and upgrading this deteriorated paved area will offer a wider range of up-to-date recreation opportunities that may appeal to new visitors. It will improve Park aesthetics, encourage more healthy activities, and help to activate this area.

Winter Recreation

Action 9: Develop low-maintenance winter recreation opportunities at the Park (e.g., snowshoeing, cross-country skiing) to encourage more year-round Park use.

This action offers visitors the opportunity for winter recreation at the Park without adding significant maintenance responsibilities. It will increase enjoyment of the Park by the public year-round.

Park Circulation

Goal: Create a clear separation for safe pedestrian/bike/ vehicle use that will accommodate both existing and future operations.

Trails

Action 1: Construct a park-wide, accessible, multi-use path that separates pedestrians and bicycles from active roadways.

Multiple public comments were received indicating the need to provide an accessible, off-road path at the Park. This action will create safer pedestrian facilities and increase connectivity between the different activity areas. People from the community who regularly come to walk their dogs, socialize, or exercise at Baird will have a defined route for safely exploring more sections of the Park.

Action 2: Repair low, wet, and eroded areas in the Park's existing hiking trail system; reroute non-sustainable sections, repair culverts and bridges, and improve trail markings.

Baird's seven miles of wooded trails allow visitors to enjoy nature while engaging in healthy exercise. A well-functioning trail system is an important part of the Park's revitalization and works hand-in-hand with other circulation improvements. Park trail planners assessed Baird's trails system to identify issues and update maps. Implementing this action will provide a safer, more cohesive pedestrian infrastructure system for the Park.

Action 3: Designate a natural surface hiking/cross-country ski trail system in the Freedom Road Area; eliminate unnecessary trails and provide connectors and/or new segments as appropriate.

This action will help to meet Plan goals for integrating this area into the Park. It will offer the public new opportunities to walk and explore the Park and addresses community demand for this type of recreation.

Action 4: Provide a pedestrian connection to trails in the Freedom Road Area as part of the park-wide multi-use path system.

Providing safe, accessible pedestrian and bicycle connections to planned trails and recreation amenities in the Freedom Road Area will expand options for visitors and help to create a more cohesive facility. This action will help meet Master Plan goals to integrate the Freedom Road Area into the overall Park. It will promote safe use of Baird's recreational offerings and offer more opportunities for cyclists and pedestrians to enjoy the extended routes through the Park.

Strategies for Education and Outreach Development

Goal: Enhance education and outreach, including publicity, programming, and partnerships to encourage a diverse range of people to visit the park.

Sports Programs

Action 1: Develop new visitor activity programs to utilize the Park's upgraded sports infrastructure (e.g., workshops for beginner pickleball, golf, disc golf).

Developing programming that helps people learn new sports will encourage a healthier lifestyle and may attract new visitors. Programs that make use of Baird's new and upgraded recreation amenities will encourage the community to become more engaged with the Park.

Environmental Education

Action 2: Develop new partnerships to help develop and implement in-person environmental educational programs (e.g., with schools, colleges, DEC).

Baird's unique wildlife and natural resources offer opportunities for engaging a range of special interest groups with the Park to develop special events, research projects, and educational programs. Partnerships and other collaborative approaches to developing environmental education provide avenues for richer, more innovative content.

Action 3: Develop self-guided environmental educational content, including new signage, podcasts, QR codes, social media, and other platforms.

Utilizing different methods and media to disseminate educational material will enable the Park to reach people who might not otherwise be aware of the Park's activities, amenities, and resources.

Outreach

Action 3: Develop an up-to-date information resource to address frequently asked questions on park amenities, activities, events, and resources; to include handouts, interactive maps, and facility rental information.

Creating multi-media information sources about the Park's functions, offerings, and amenities will maximize the Park's ability to reach the public. It will allow for better use of staff time, get the word out about what the Park has to offer, and help the facility function more efficiently.

Actions for Operations, Infrastructure, and Facilities

Goal: Create a clear separation for safe pedestrian/bike/vehicle use that will accommodate both existing and future park operations.

Vehicular Circulation

Action 1: Implement traffic calming measures (e.g., speed bumps, speed feedback signs, road narrowing, wildlife crossings, pavement markings, etc.) to improve safety and enhance Park character.

Baird's roadways are shared by walkers, runners, strollers, bicyclists, motorists, and wildlife. The roads are used both by visitors accessing different sections of the Park and by cars crossing through to reach outside destinations. Managing, slowing, or "calming" traffic can be accomplished using design elements such as pavement markings, physical barriers, road humps, and other measures. Implementing this action will enhance the recreational experience and safety of visitors and wildlife who enjoy the Park's tranquil, natural environment.



Signage

Action 2: Develop and implement a comprehensive, parkwide signage plan to ensure that information is accessible and welcoming to all visitors.

The need for a clearer and more cohesive signage system at Baird was identified by both the public and Park staff. This action will ensure that visitors can navigate more easily through the Park and are informed about all of its activity areas. The facility will be safer, more efficient, and aesthetically pleasing. Signage will be consistent with standards in the OPRHP guidance documents and the *Statewide Interpretive Signage Program* and *Statewide Wayfinding Signage Program*.

Park Entrances

Action 3: Improve Park entrances to enhance visibility, aesthetics, and ensure safe access.

Public comments indicated the need to create more clearly marked and safer entrances at Baird's two access points. This action will address these concerns and provide visitors with a more welcoming experience. It will create a more defined presence for the Park and better integrate the facility into the community.

Maintenance and Operations

Regional Maintenance Facility

Goal: Provide an efficient and up-to-date regional maintenance area.

Action 1: Redevelop the Park's maintenance area in its current location to ensure appropriate infrastructure is available for efficient functioning of the Park now and in the future.

Baird's maintenance facility serves OPRHP's Taconic Region and is an important resource at the Park. Improving staff safety, comfort, and efficiency will enable them to better meet visitor needs. An updated and facility will have improved energy efficiency and will provide a better working environment, while addressing an important operational need for the region.

Utilities

Action 2: Upgrade the Park's electricity infrastructure, including phone and internet systems, to ensure reliable service for current needs as well as planned park development.

An up-to-date utility infrastructure helps advance the Master Plan goal to improve the Park's event amenities. It will improve staff communication capabilities and accommodate future improvements proposed in this plan.

Water System

Action 3: Upgrade the Park's water supply system to better accommodate current and future park operations.

Park staff reported the need for ongoing repairs to the facility's aging water infrastructure. Addressing these issues will both reduce staff time needed for frequent repairs and support the vision of Baird as an events destination. It aligns with a statewide OPRHP goal to repair aging infrastructure in park facilities.

Staffing

Action 4: Develop a staffing plan and a corresponding operational budget that addresses current and proposed operations at the Park.

Assessing the facility's staffing needs will help the facility to better understand present and future requirements and to appropriately prepare for, and accommodate, the new amenities and activities proposed in the Master Plan.

Park Manager's Residence

Action 5: Construct a new Park Manager's house at the Freedom Road Area.

Providing a new, energy-efficient house for park management staff will allow the Park to offer better living and working conditions for current and future staff. A newly constructed residence will be significantly more energy-efficient and will ensure the Park can provide staff with appropriate accommodations. The existing house will continue to be utilized by the Park, with minor updates.

Golf Course

Parking Lot

Action 1: Redevelop the Clubhouse parking lot to meet current and anticipated demand and provide a safe overflow area.

Staff indicated that the current golf Clubhouse parking lot is not able to effectively accommodate large events. A redesigned lot that provides an overflow area will improve pedestrian safety while ensuring the area can accommodate future uses proposed at the facility. It will reduce staff time needed to manage larger events and help realize the Master Plan vision for the Park as a regional events destination.

Golf Practice Facility

Action 2: Improve and upgrade the golf practice facility and driving range.

The golf practice facility is a popular amenity at Baird. Improvements will meet goals to provide new recreational activities at the Park, attract new users, and support new programming at the Park.

Pro Shop

Action 3: Develop a banquet facility in the former Pro Shop for smaller indoor events.

Offering this space as an events venue will increase opportunities for the restaurant concessionaire and provide a wider variety of events facilities. Repurposing this underutilized infrastructure is a cost-effective approach to meeting the need for a smaller, indoor venue. This action will build on other proposed improvements help realize the Master Plan vision of Baird as an events destination for the region.



Freedom Road Area Development

Goal: Incorporate the Freedom Road Area into the overall park program.

Recreation and Usage

Action 1: Develop new recreational amenities in the Freedom Road Area that are consistent with existing natural resource protections at the Park.

As the newest part of the Park, the planning team considered strategies for integrating Freedom Road Area into the overall facility. Developing more passive recreation opportunities in this part of the Park will encourage visitors to use the area while ensuring that important natural resources at the property will not be impacted.

Disc Golf

Action 2: Install a disc golf course at the Park's Freedom Road Area.

Adding disc golf to the Park's recreation offerings will further connect visitors and the community to the new section of the Park. It will provide a popular amenity to the Park and provide additional opportunities for people to relax in the Park.

Trails

Action 3: Designate selected trails at the Freedom Road Area for four-season use by providing groomed trails for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

There is demand for winter recreation facilities in the region. Offering groomed trails in this part of the Park will encourage visitors to utilize this area for winter activities at Baird, protecting other areas in the Park from potential damage. It will help meet the goal to activate the Park year-round.

Fishing

Action 4: Provide a designated location for fishing access at the pond in the Freedom Road Area.

There is currently no fishing access at Baird. Offering this opportunity at the Freedom Road Area will help meet demand for this activity in the region and may attract new visitors. This action will also encourage a low-impact recreational activity that is in keeping with goals for this part of the Park.

Habitat Enhancement

Action 5: Implement habitat enhancement strategies on former agricultural lands.

Phasing out agricultural use at the Freedom Road Area will enable the Park to improve the environmental stewardship of its lands and to enhance important regional habitat. It will also offer new opportunities for public education.



Implementation

Partnerships

James Baird State Park has partnered with various groups and agencies over the years, including the Boy Scouts and the Hudson River Valley Greenway (which manages the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area). Baird has worked with local schools, colleges, and girls' golf teams, and it has hosted fundraising events with non-profit groups such as Sparrow's Nest and Miles of Hope.

Priorities

The Master Plan sets forth OPRHP's vision for capital improvements and operational enhancements to the Park for the next ten to fifteen years. OPRHP has not developed detailed cost estimates for the proposed components. Cumulatively they will cost tens of millions of dollars to implement. The pace and sequencing of recommended actions will be determined by the availability of funding, which is a function of the size of OPRHP's annual capital budgets and the need to balance investments throughout the park system.

The Master Plan will be reviewed annually to select projects that will be added to the Park's budget for implementation and to assess the progress of Plan implementation. Any operational improvements that are already planned at the time of the master plan will go forward as planned.

Implementation of this Master Plan is divided into priority phases. Projects fall generally into one of three priority levels. The prioritized actions for specific components in the table shown below are subject to reorganization based on available funding.

Priority 1 = Completed in 1-3 years

Priority 2 = Completed in 3-5 years

Priority 3 = Completed in 5-10 years

Table 1 - James Baird State Park Implementation Priorities

IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES	Description/Development Component
Actions for Natural Resource Protection	
Priority 1 (1-3 years)	Develop and implement a more proactive invasive species management program.
	Expand and improve natural resource management practices by enhancing habitat, installing new wildlife protections, and developing educational programs to raise public awareness.
	Implement habitat enhancement strategies on former agricultural lands.

IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES	Description/Development Component
Priority 2 (3-5 years)	Investigate opportunities to implement riparian/streambank and wetland creation/ expansion; enhance buffers and create greater connectivity along wildlife migration zones.
	Construct a berm system planted with native species between the golf course and day use area, to provide pollinator habitat and create visual/functional separation.
Priority 3 (5-10 years)	Implement habitat enhancement for key species: acquire land when available, facilitate research opportunities, and implement techniques to decrease predation; partner with adjacent landowners and other involved agencies to develop additional species protection.
Actions for Cultural Resource Protection	
Priority 2 (3-5 years)	Develop interpretive content that tells the story of the establishment of the Park and the significance of its design.
	Develop an annotated bibliography that catalogues original design documents and resources on the Park's historical and cultural elements.
Actions for Recreational Resource Enhancement	
Priority 1 (1-3 years)	Construct a park-wide, accessible, multi-use path that separates pedestrians and bicycles from active roadways.
	Provide a pedestrian connection to trails in the Freedom Road Area as part of the park-wide multi-use path system
	Convert an existing tennis court to add two additional pickleball courts in the day use area.
	Repair low, wet, and eroded areas in the Park's existing hiking trail system; reroute non-sustainable sections, repair culverts and bridges, and improve trail markings.
	Designate a natural surface hiking/cross-country ski trail system in the Freedom Road Area, eliminate unnecessary trails and provide connectors and/or new segments as appropriate.
	Develop low-maintenance winter recreation opportunities at the Park (e.g., snowshoeing, cross-country skiing) to encourage more year-round use.
	Repurpose the existing softball area as a fitness trail/exercise route.

IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES	Description/Development Component
Priority 1 (1-3 years)	Retrofit the bathhouse as an events venue to accommodate up to 500 guests, with accessible restrooms, upgraded utilities, facilities for caterers, and a large-scale pavilion.
	Make improvements to picnic shelters and upgrade associated comfort stations and utility infrastructure.
	Implement the Golf Course Bunker Rehabilitation project
	Develop new recreational amenities in the Freedom Road Area that are consistent with existing natural resource protections at the Park.
	Designate selected trails at the Freedom Road Area for four-season use by providing groomed trails for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.
	Provide a designated location for fishing access at the pond in the Freedom Road Area.
Priority 2 (3-5 years)	Create a multi-purpose court at the former roller rink (e.g., to accommodate basketball, lacrosse rebound wall, street hockey, handball, etc.).
Priority 3 (5-10 years)	Install an accessible walking path in the day use area with seating and shade structures with links to the multi-use path.
	Rehabilitate the Bandshell structure and adjacent paved area; provide visual separation from the adjacent parking lot.
Actions for Operations, Infrastructure, and Facilities	
Priority 1 (1-3 years)	Improve Park entrances to enhance visibility, aesthetics, and ensure safe access.
	Implement traffic calming measures (e.g., speed bumps, speed feedback signs, road narrowing, wildlife crossings, pavement markings, etc.) to improve safety and enhance Park character.
	Develop and implement a comprehensive, parkwide signage plan to ensure that information is accessible and welcoming to all visitors.
	Redevelop the golf Clubhouse parking lot to meet current and anticipated demand and provide a safe overflow area.
	Develop a staffing plan and a corresponding operational budget that addresses current and proposed operations at the Park.
Priority 1 (1-3 years)	Redevelop the day use area parking lot with green infrastructure elements, a clear layout, and improved circulation.

IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES	Description/Development Component
Priority 2 (3-5 years)	Upgrade water supply system to better accommodate current and future park operations.
	Redevelop the Park's maintenance area in its current location to ensure appropriate infrastructure is available for efficient functioning of the Park now and in the future.
	Develop additional park programming opportunities with new visitor activities.
	Develop a banquet facility in the former Pro Shop for smaller indoor events.
	Improve and upgrade the golf practice facility and driving range.
	Upgrade the Park's electric infrastructure, including the phone/ internet system, to provide reliable service for current needs and planned park development.
Priority 3 (5-10 years)	Construct a new Park Manager's house at the Freedom Road Area.
Actions for Education and Outreach	
Priority 1 (1-3 years)	Develop an up-to-date information resource to address frequently asked questions on park amenities, activities, events, and resources; to include handouts, interactive maps, and facility rental information.
Priority 2 (3-5 years)	Develop new visitor activity programs that utilize the Park's upgraded sports infrastructure (e.g., workshops for beginner pickleball, golf, disc golf).
	Develop new partnerships to help develop and implement in-person environmental educational programs (e.g., with schools, colleges, DEC).
	Develop self-guided environmental educational content, including new signage, podcasts, QR codes, social media, and other platforms.



Planning Team Findings

The planning team began its work by considering the strengths and weaknesses of the overall facility at Baird. They looked at what works well at the Park and what needs improvement. The Park's varied recreation offerings were identified as among its strongest elements. The group noted, however, that a good portion of the Park's infrastructure is aging, outdated, or inefficient, with a corresponding decline in overall aesthetics. With the over-arching goal to create a more relevant and sustainable facility, actions developed for the Master Plan have focused on upgrading supporting infrastructure and productive approaches to repurposing existing buildings.

The group also looked at regional demographics and talked to Baird's users about their recreation preferences, which have evolved since the Park was first conceived. To ensure that the Park's offerings reflect current interests, Baird will develop a range of new and updated amenities, including a multi-use path that will connect different sections of the Park that will provide better accessibility within the Park.

Underlying each proposed action in the Master Plan is an awareness that the Park is part of a larger ecological complex that provides habitat for rare and endangered species. Actions have been developed that will further protect these species by expanding existing habitats and improving invasive species management. Recognizing that wildlife travel across property lines, the group also included actions to improve habitat connectivity both within and outside the Park's borders.

Finally, the group agreed that more efficient and well-designed staff facilities are integral to a well-functioning Park, and a will provide a higher quality visitor experience. Actions proposed for improved infrastructure will ensure that Baird has up-to-date and efficient facilities, including a redeveloped maintenance center, a new Park Manager's house, and upgraded utilities to reduce repairs and improve energy efficiency across the board. These actions were included as important for attracting and retaining staff and providing a safe, comfortable, and efficient working environment.

This Master Plan is the product of many months of research, many hours of discussion, and public input. It converts ideas into actions, with the overall goal of making James Baird State Park a great destination, a thriving natural environment, and a good neighbor within the community and region.

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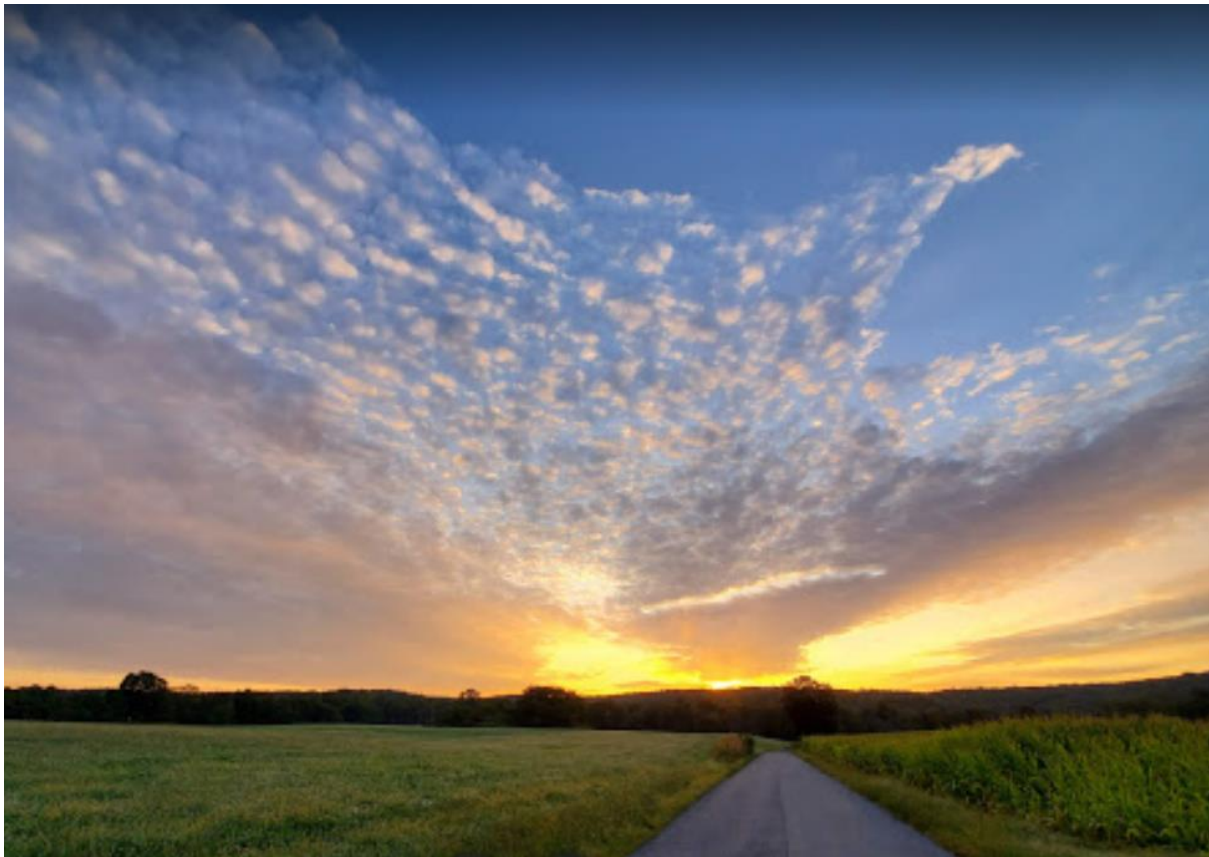
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