



Camp WaNoKi

Master Plan

January 2016

A photograph of a dense forest with sunlight filtering through the trees. The scene is filled with green foliage and tree trunks, creating a sense of depth and natural beauty. The lighting is soft and dappled, highlighting the textures of the leaves and bark.

“The road to success is always under construction.”

Photograph by: WCC Staff

Table of Contents

- 01 Project Introduction & Purpose
- 02 Discovery: Inventory & Analysis
- 03 Camp WaNoKi Master Plan
- 04 Implementation & Partners

Master Plan



01 Introduction & Purpose

Introduction - In 2015, the Webster County Conservation Board hired RDG Planning & Design to create a vision and master plan for this recently acquired property. The plan and goals result from significant field investigation and analysis and close coordination with county conservation staff. One constant held true throughout: enthusiasm for the project from community leaders, county staff, and members of the Design Team.

Process - The Design Team, working collectively with Webster County Conservation Staff, inventoried the property, developed programming alternatives and considered potential park and facility visitors. The Design Team also analyzed site characteristics, adjacent land uses, recreational trends, economic opportunities, capacities of current and future county staff and regional offerings. The Design Team then developed a preliminary master plan. Based on comments received, the plan was modified and refined to the current park Master Plan.

Purpose - The purpose of the WaNoKi Master Plan is to determine the best and most appropriate uses of this former camp. Fire Camp and how the property can encourage conservation education for the citizens of Webster County. The plan will serve as a foundation for decision-making for the Webster County Conservation Board and staff and provide direction for the comprehensive management of the area. This property is unique to other areas under WCCB management in that buildings exist on the property but on-site housing doesn't exist. Specific considerations include the balanced management of the area as a gated facility when unstaffed and finding a mix of appropriate public use through programmed activities and rental opportunities.



History - This 77-acre riverfront forest was formerly known and managed as Camp WaNoKi. The property was purchased for a Camp Fire Camp by the Hiawatha Council in 1961. The original bank loan was largely paid off with candy sale receipts. Initially used as a camp for girls, the use of the camp changed over time, but the overall purpose was that of nature exploration for youth. The Hiawatha Council of Camp Fire had a small local staff, but was comprised mainly of dedicated volunteers who donated their time and resources to keep the camp functioning. In 1993, the Hiawatha Council merged with the Heart of the Hawkeye Council in Des Moines. The facility remained in Camp Fire ownership until 2004 when the new council sold the camp to a private individual / family. This family made road improvements, installed a restroom in the heater building, and pursued new home construction. The private owner changed his mind and offered the property for sale. Fortunately for the citizens of Webster County, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation purchased the land through a cooperative agreement with the Webster County Conservation Board in the fall of 2014.

The exact origin and meaning of the name “WaNoKi” is unknown. A former Camp Fire leader indicated that it meant “babbling brook and beautiful scenery” in an “Indian” language. Walt Steven’s 2004 Messenger article stated that the camp name is the result of a contest in which Camp Fire members were asked for suggestions. “WaNoKi is an Indian abbreviation for beautiful land, wildflowers, trees and other vegetation.”

Summary - The Camp WaNoKi Park Master Plan will provide a visionary road map for development over the next several years. The facilities proposed within this document were developed during the master planning process. The Master Plan is a guide for appropriate park uses and their approximate location. The plan serves as a long-range vision (10 to 20 year timeframe) for future development. This park master plan focus will include:

- Existing site ecology
- Proposed park facilities
- Development cost
- Phasing priorities
- Partners



Key Considerations

Parks provide a wide range of opportunity and benefit. There are three key consideration that will help drive the development of this park. There are:

- Nature Learning & Outdoor Exploration
- Camp Setting
- Corporate & Rental Opportunities



Environmental Education Programs.



Camping



Outdoor Weddings

02 Discovery: Inventory & Analysis

Inventory – The master planning process began by developing a preliminary inventory of cultural and natural assets. Webster County Conservation Staff utilized aerial surveys and photographs while physically inventorying both cultural and natural amenities. Staff interviewed past camp participants and learned much about how past and present facilities were utilized. These efforts offer an understanding of:

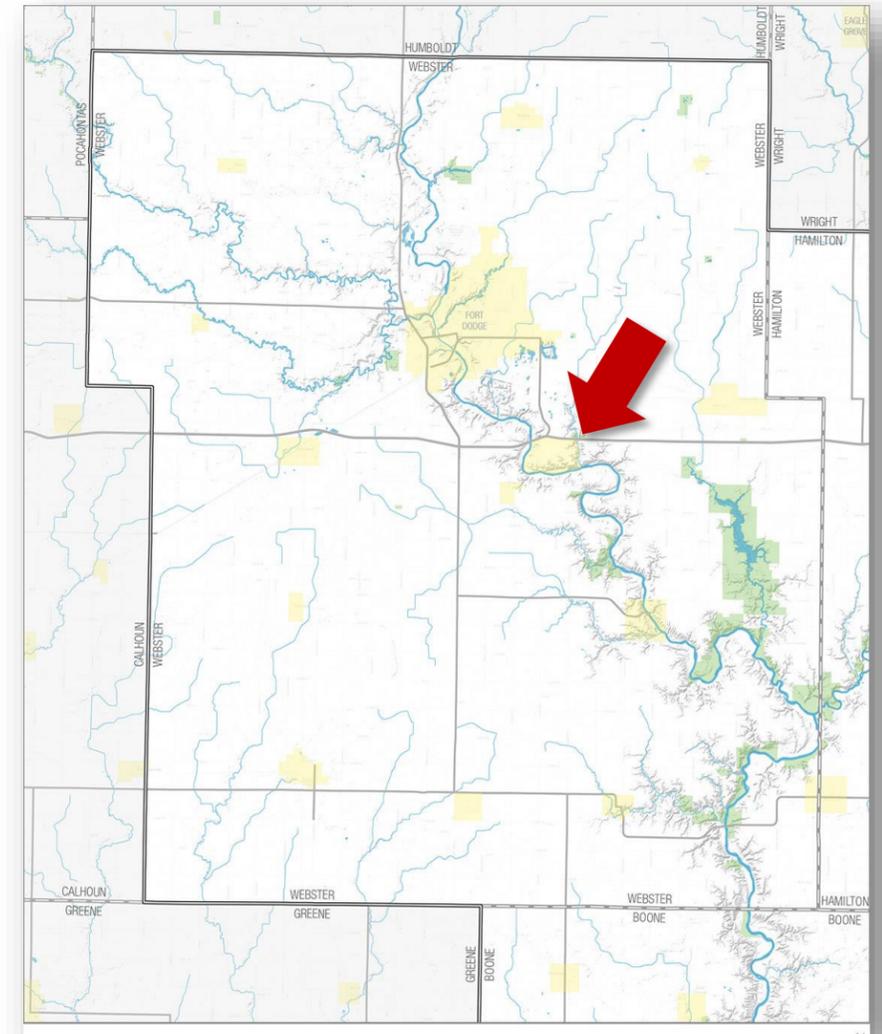
- Existing natural resources and the land’s physical attributes
- Unique characteristics of the site and how they would lend themselves to leisure opportunities
- An assessment of existing structures

Summary – As the aerials illustrate, the site is a mix-up grassy uplands, woodland ravines and floodplain. The topography is the truly unique characteristic that defines this property. The facilities are a “mix bag”, all needing significant attention.



Photograph by: WCC Staff

Much of the camp is covered in woodland.



Webster County: Camp WaNoKi

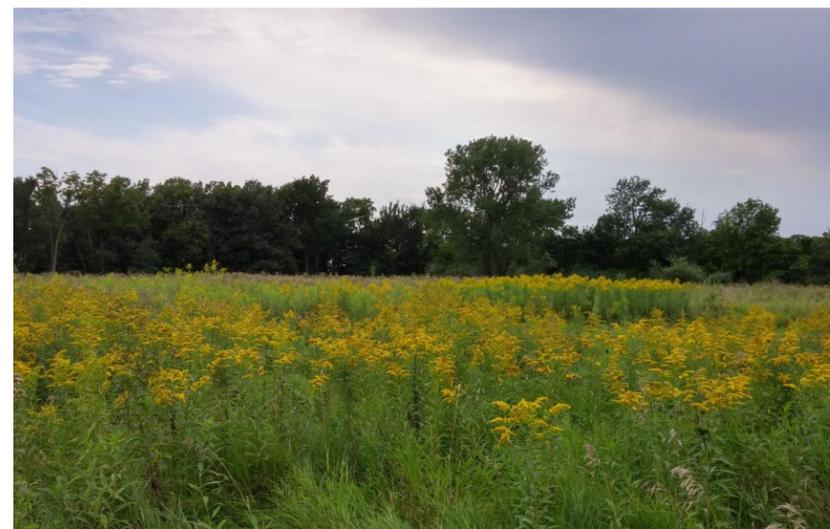
Natural Resources - The natural features of the area provide a place where people can hike, camp, and explore the Des Moines River and Holiday Creek and seek adventure. The majority of the 77-acre parcel is river valley with challenging topography. The woodlands have very limited and manageable amount of invasive plants such as autumn olive, honeysuckle, buckthorn and white poplar. Although the woodlands are predominantly oak / hickory forest, oak restoration management will be important for the sustainability of this forest type. Tree thinning and prescribed burning are examples of management techniques that would benefit the woodlands' overall health. Oak savannah restoration sites should be identified where manual clearing and burning should take place. There is at least one colony of Bigtooth Aspen (*Populus grandidentata*) that should be monitored and potentially removed if the species begins to spread.

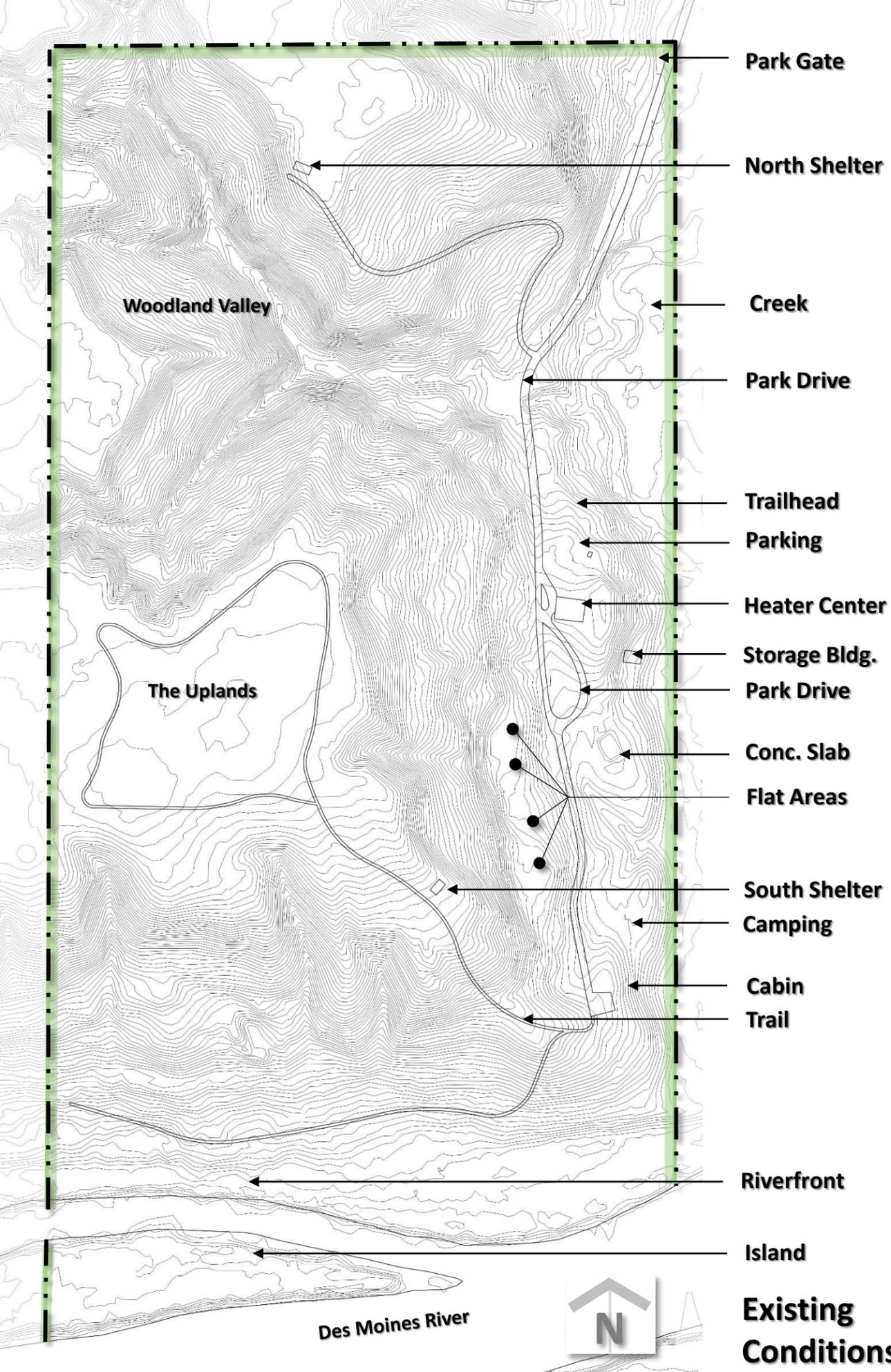
The majority of the camp is typical river valley species, however some species of trees have been planted throughout the years, including ginkgo, pin oak, autumn olive, buckthorn, honeysuckle, black locust, white poplar and Kentucky coffee tree.



A seven acre area, once named "The Meadow", is located on top of the Des Moines River Valley. An informal species inventory indicates considerable brome grass, however there are some native forb species such as wild bergamot and goldenrod varieties. Prescribed fire would be a good tool to explore additional native prairie species in the Meadow. A regular burning schedule should be developed for the Meadow and south-facing hillsides. Mowing a narrow trail through the Meadow would also allow for some interpretive / educational opportunities.

Holiday Creek meanders through the property along the northeast edge of the camp for approximately 850 feet. The northern stretch has significant exposed banks that appear to have had some streambank stabilization installed in the past with rock rip rap. The southern stretch has a more gradual riparian terrain which lends itself naturally for wildlife and people to access. Beaver dams are not uncommon in this stretch, thus providing one more educational piece to the property. Access to the stream should be highly encouraged through trail access to provide a wide range of interpretation and water play.





Infrastructure Conditions

The granular camp road is in fair to good condition. The culvert north of the Heater building (future “lodge”) has been replaced by the previous owner. In August 2015, following a seven inch rain, the deluge of water pouring down the valley was too much for the culvert and it washed out, and destroying half of the roadway. The county secondary roads department repaired the damage, however, the culvert should be regularly cleaned and monitored to prevent future damage. The large drainage area may present challenges during large rainfall events.

Current Amenities & Facilities

Septic system – Webster County Sanitarian records indicate that a septic system was installed in 1998. It consists of a 240 square foot sand filter and a 1,000 gallon tank. The system should be inspected and updated based on future use predictions.

Well – The camp water supply is provided through a well that was drilled by R & R Well (Rosenquist) of rural Dayton. Winterizing the exposed equipment will allow for a year-round potable water source. The well water should be tested and meet the requirements for a public water supply.

Electricity – The electrical service for the camp is provided by overhead lines and poles. The service consists of the main power line and secondary distribution to three existing buildings. The power lines running through the property are often subject to damage from trees falling on them. Burying the lines to a central location and providing underground distribution throughout the camp will prevent future weather-related outages.

Lodge – The former lodge was a small block building that was located in the center of the camp. It served as the main gathering place for camp participants and was used for activities, meals, and storage. The building was demolished in the late 1990’s or early 2000’s.

The Heater Center - (photo on opposite page) is an open 40 ft. X 60 ft. metal building built in the late 1970’s with a \$20,000 bequest from the Ethel Heater Estate. The overall condition is fair to good. The building was also used as a gathering space.

- **Floor** - there are some pronounced cracks in the cement floor. Determining the structural integrity of this foundation would be advised to determine the direction of the building’s use.
- **Ceiling** – the rafters for the building are at a very low height (7 feet) which reduces the use and aesthetics of the structure. The Conservation Board should explore the feasibility of raising the rafters.
- **Walls** – are largely unfinished and show exposed insulation. For aesthetics and durability, a finished wood interior would provide a “rustic lodge” atmosphere.
- **Restroom** – A single restroom was installed by the previous owner after 2004. It includes a toilet, sink and shower. The restroom should be redesigned to accommodate persons with disabilities and gathering of up to 100 people.

Shelters (2) – (photo on opposite page) There are two open shelters located on the property. Both are structurally sound but in need of updating. Updates or improvements would include new roof, wood pillars and new tables.

Storage Building – (photo on opposite page) The storage building on the east property line is a metal building with a concrete floor. The large sliding doors have been repaired and locks placed for storage. There are two stalls that should provide basic storage for camp supplies and equipment.

Cabin – One of two of the original “bunkhouses” remains. Structurally, the floor is in excellent condition. The building needs a face-lift and a purpose. Potential uses for the building may include a cabin or equipment storage for a future adventure course.

Existing Conditions

Pedestrian bridge – The walking bridge is located between the former lodge and the north cabin. The bridge is in poor condition and should be replaced for visitor safety. The bridge provides a valuable trail connection and outdoor experience. The new bridge should have a similar rustic structure.

Riverfront – The property borders the Des Moines River on the south end of the property for about 1,350 ft., plus another 450 ft. of water access due to the majority of the island included in the legal property. An approximately 90 foot wide channel separates the island from the mainland on the west one-third of the riverfront property. The river bank along the property is roughly 8-12 feet high. The area is prone to flood damage; however, it provides a great opportunity for accessing the Des Moines River. Riverfront property offers canoeing and kayaking access, fishing access, a bottomland camping area, riverbank campfires and interpretive program site. Improved access to the riverfront should be explored.

Island – An island on the southwest edge of the property has been cut away by the meandering of the Des Moines River channel. The majority of the island is part of the 77 acre parcel. This offers unique programming opportunities such as island camping, river fishing, rope course river crossing, etc.

Trails – A historic, hand-drawn trail map depicting six different trails along with some points of interest from decades past and a few old wooden signs are all that remain of the former camp trail system. There is great opportunity to create an extensive trail network throughout the camp property of various widths.



Photograph by: WCC Staff

Existing Bridge



Photograph by: WCC Staff

Cabin



Photograph by: WCC Staff

Old Camp Sign



Photograph by: WCC Staff

Heater Center



Photograph by: WCC Staff

Shelter



Photograph by: WCC Staff

Storage Building

03 Camp WaNoKi Master Plan

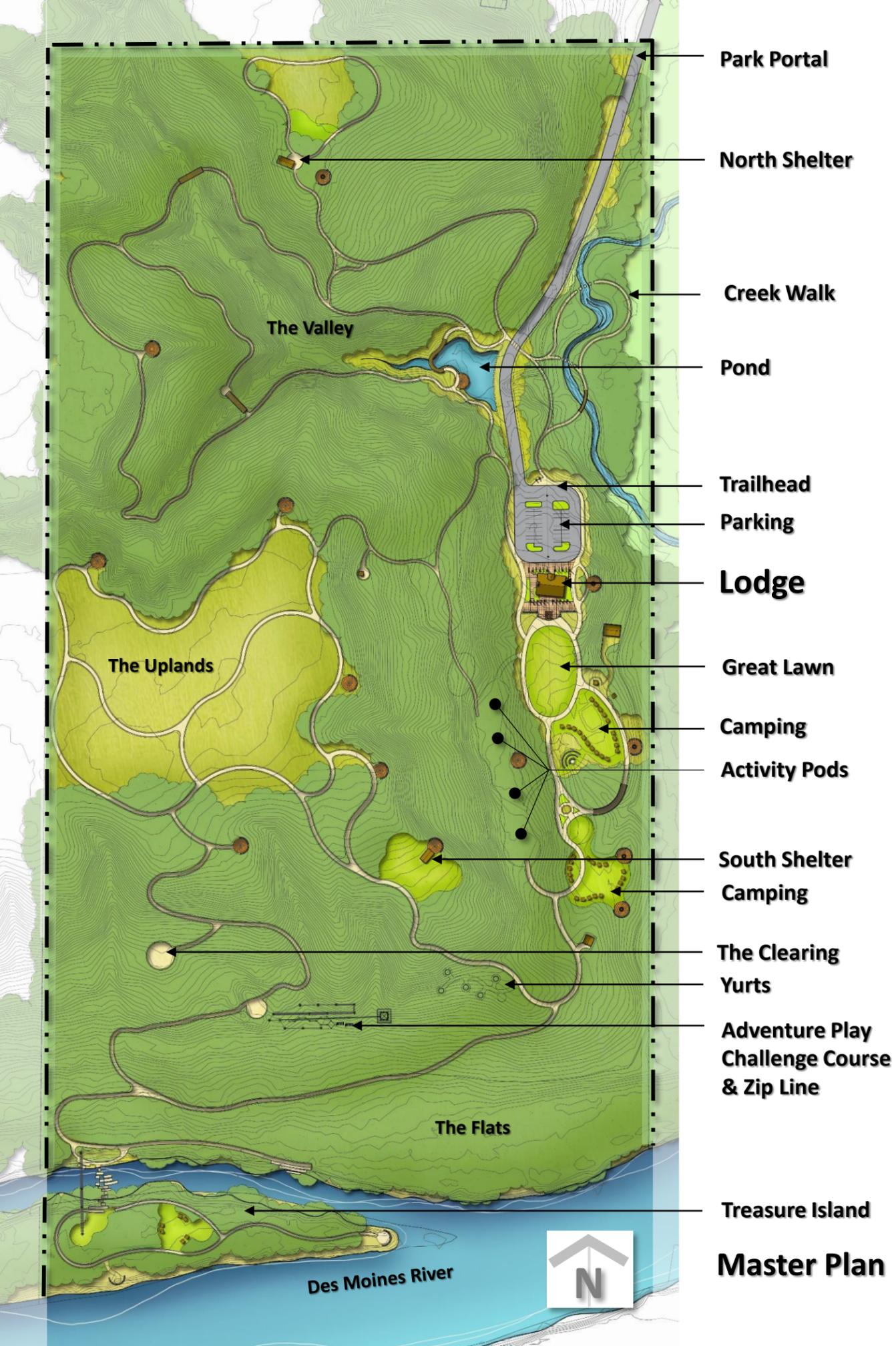
Summary of Goals - As with the original goal of the Hiawatha Council in 1961, to provide an opportunity for youth nature exploration and enjoyment, the Conservation Board is excited to rekindle the fire of the young outdoor spirit. The primary goal of this property under the direction of the Webster County Conservation Board will be to provide outdoor education and recreation opportunities for the general public with a special focus on youth. The day and overnight camp history of Camp WaNoKi will serve as the foundation for educating the next generation of sustainable land stewards.

A second focus of the camp is to create a facility that encourages conservation and recreation programming through partnerships with other youth groups, such as church youth groups, scout groups, corporate partners and schools.

Additional goals include:

- Public programs & events
- Nature hikes & exploration
- An adventure course
- River float opportunities
- A setting for corporate retreats & weddings
- Team Building
- Educational Workshops





Park Portal

North Shelter

Creek Walk

Pond

Trailhead

Parking

Lodge

Great Lawn

Camping

Activity Pods

South Shelter

Camping

The Clearing

Yurts

Adventure Play
Challenge Course
& Zip Line

The Flats

Treasure Island

Master Plan

Programmed Use

Camp WaNoKi is unlike other properties managed by the Webster County Conservation Board, in that this property will not be generally open to the public on a daily basis; rather, the camp will be used through programmed activities and rentals. The core mission of the camp will be to provide an outdoor learning experience. County Naturalists will lead nature-based programming to provide “hands-on” outdoor adventures.

Environmental Education – The core mission of the camp will be to provide an outdoor learning experience. County Naturalists will lead nature-based programming to provide “hands-on” outdoor adventures.

Group camps – These include theme-oriented programmed camps offered through the WCCB primarily for youth. Theme camps might include: outdoor skills building and survival skills (fire building, shelter building, etc.). Priority will be given to these public events.

Adventure pod learning – Activity areas will be identified throughout the camp to provide a cluster of small-group activities. Outdoor recreation themes might include: orienteering, geocaching, fishing, hunting, archery, atlatl use, river kayaking, etc.

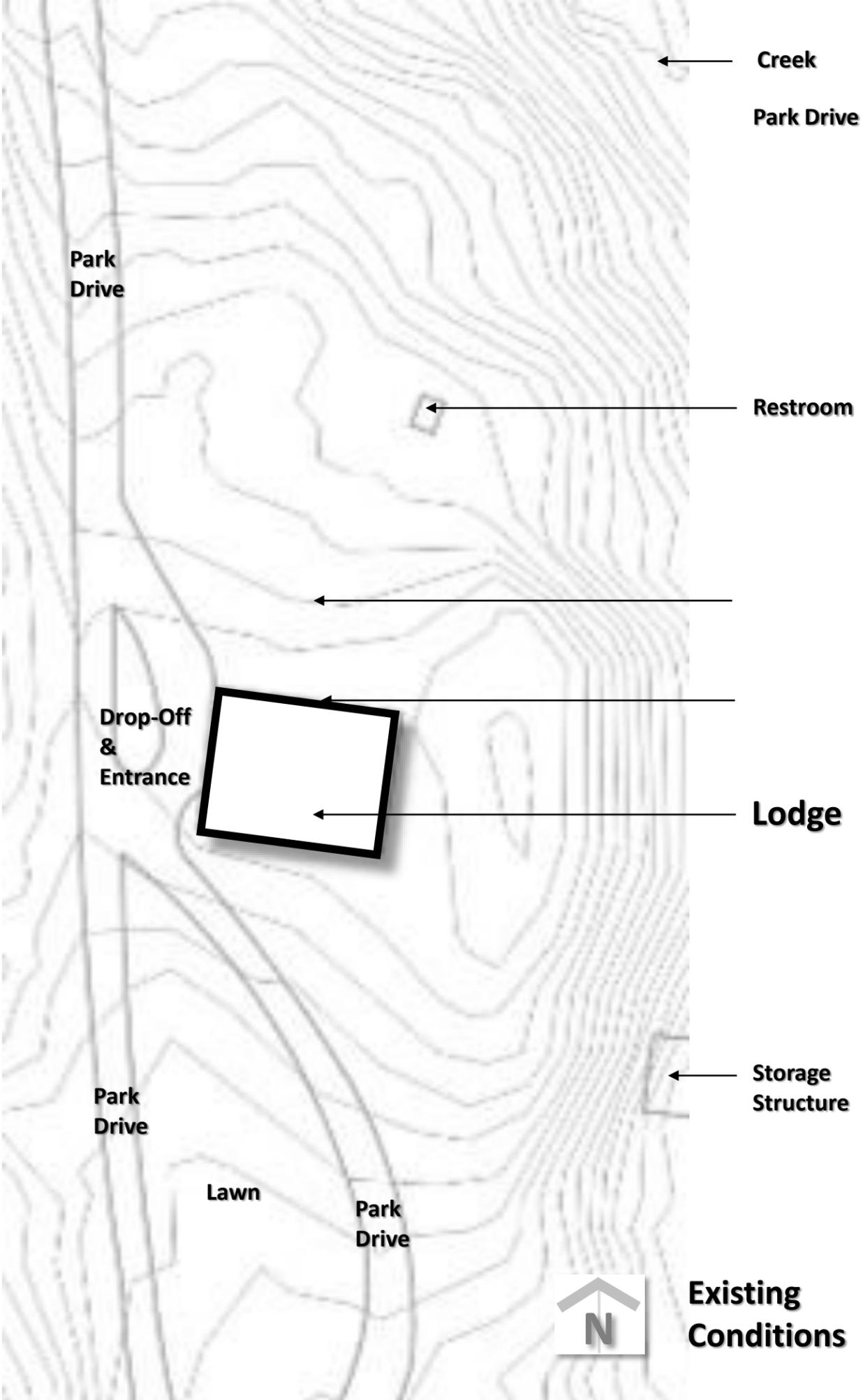
Passive recreation - bird watching, wildflower identification, tree identification, insect exploration, aquatic invertebrate study, etc.

Outdoor Adventure Learning Course – a fun, skills-building challenge course that could include ropes, zip-lines, obstacles and natural elements to encourage team building, outdoor fitness, and build self-esteem in participants.

Temporary activity sites – located at designated amphitheater areas or open shelters for traveling environmental education activity, examples may include: bird watching, insect exploration, woodland wildflower identification, tree activity, etc. Small storage for props such as binoculars, nets, bug boxes, clipboards, etc. should be a consideration.

Corporate Retreats & Team Building – This unique outdoor setting provides the opportunity to offer programmed corporate retreats. Team building and corporate outings may offer a unique and meaningful opportunity for businesses in the county. This could involve staff-led activities and a fee structure; examples may include river float excursions, corporate picnics, holiday events and more.

Rental Use – The programmed use of this facility provides the potential for public use through a reservation and fee system. Potential rental activities could include weddings, graduation parties, family reunions, and receptions. The camp has the possibility of renting individual components or the entire facility if the board desires to generate revenue from the facility. The board programmed activities should have first priority for use of the facility to accomplish the primary goal of the camp.



Existing Condition of Lodge



Photograph by: WCC Staff

Interior of the Lodge



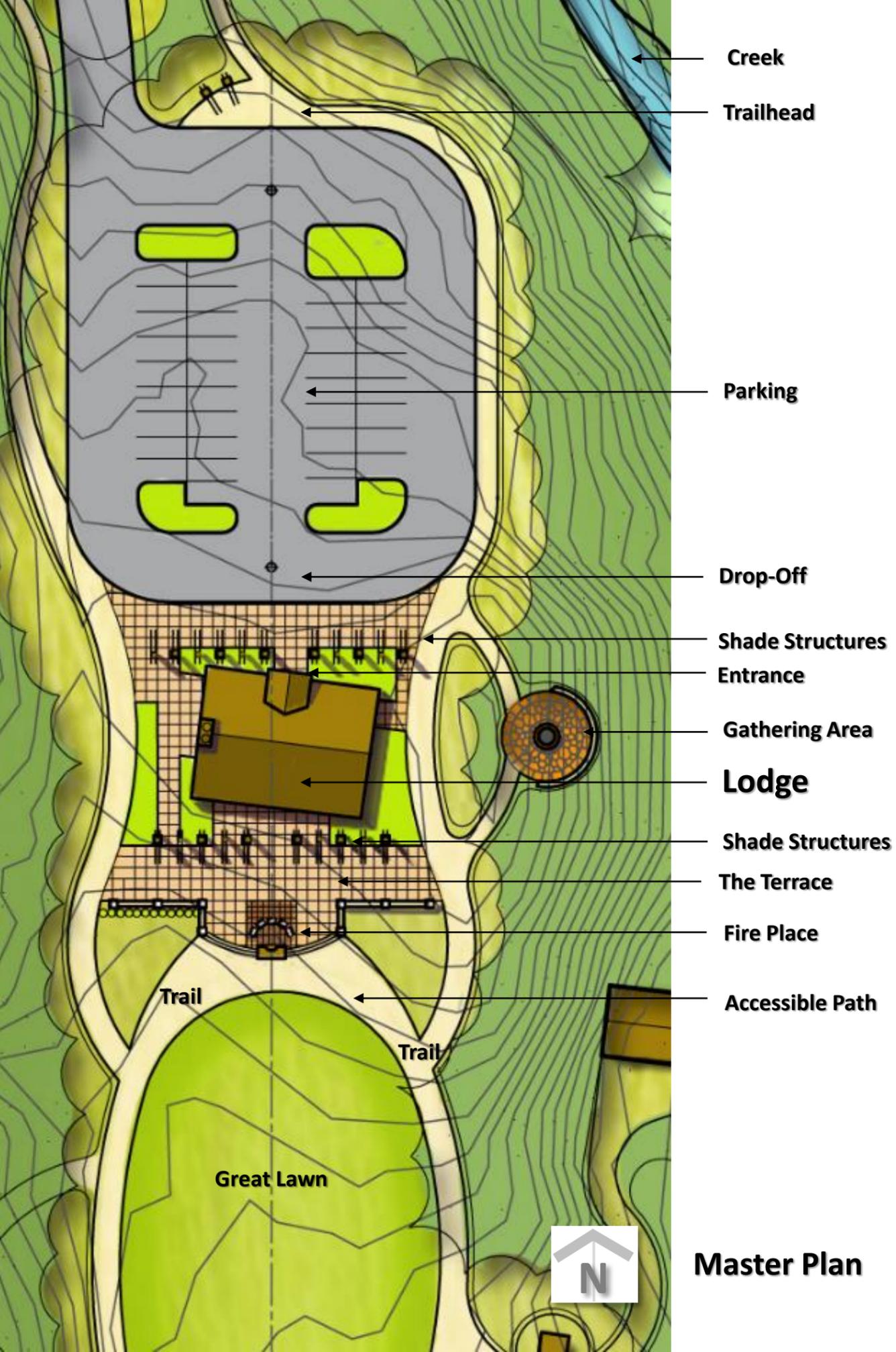
Photograph by: WCC Staff

Exterior of the Lodge



Photograph by: WCC Staff

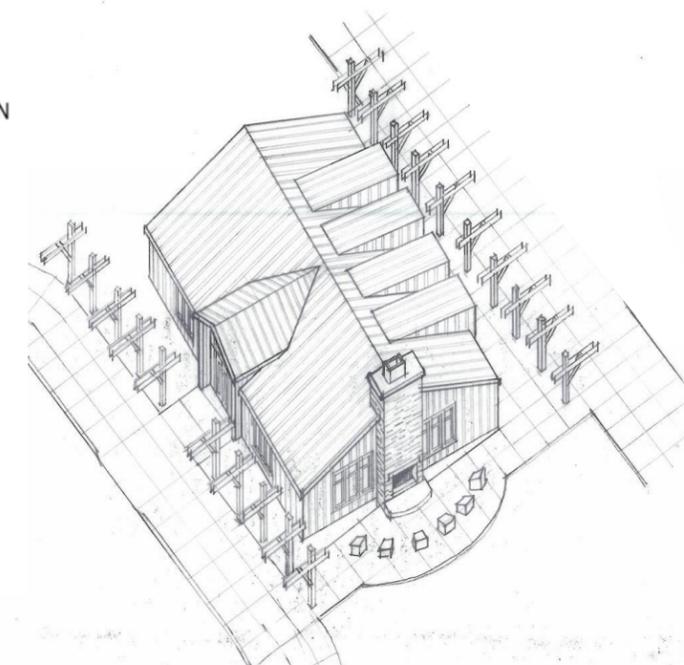
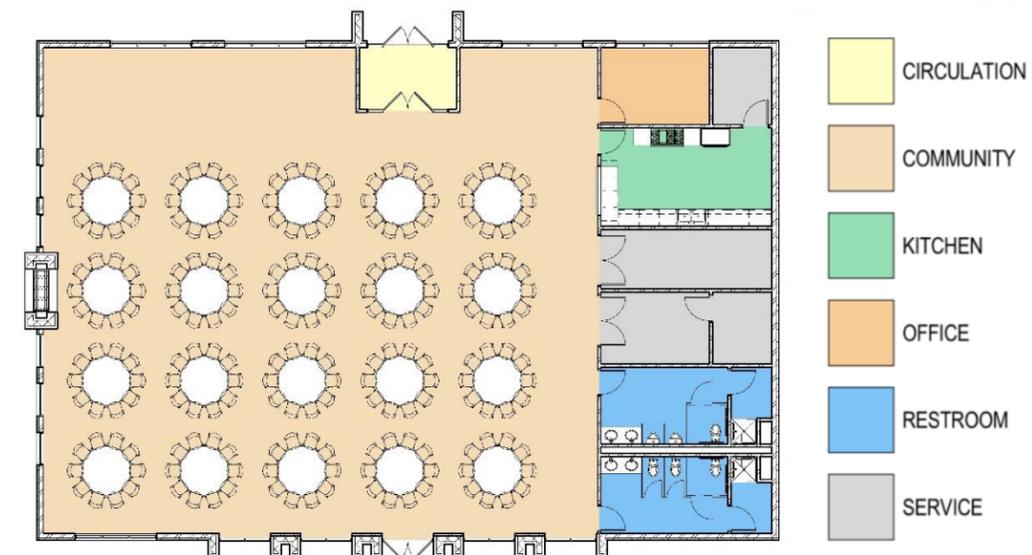
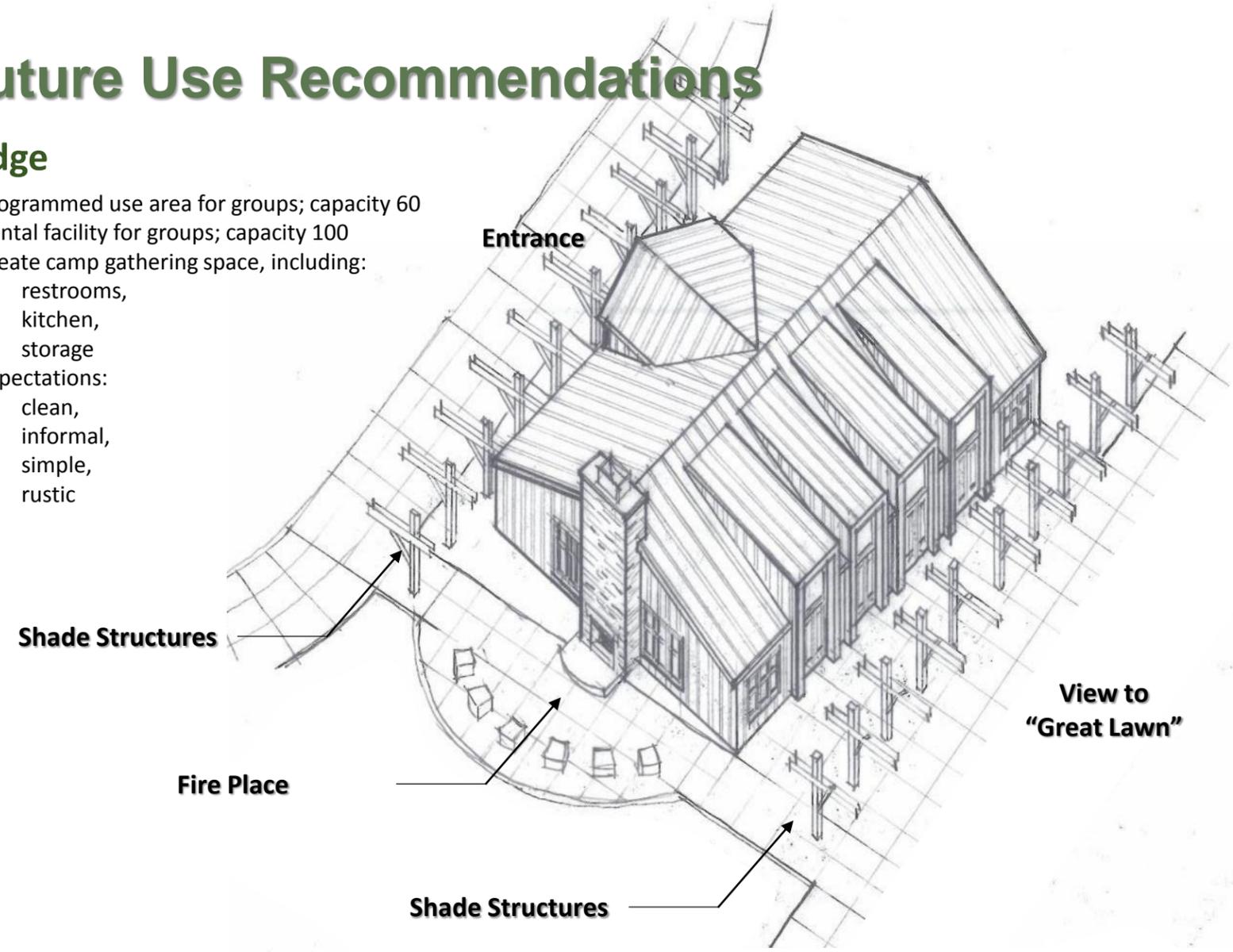
Lawn and gravel drive to the south of the Lodge



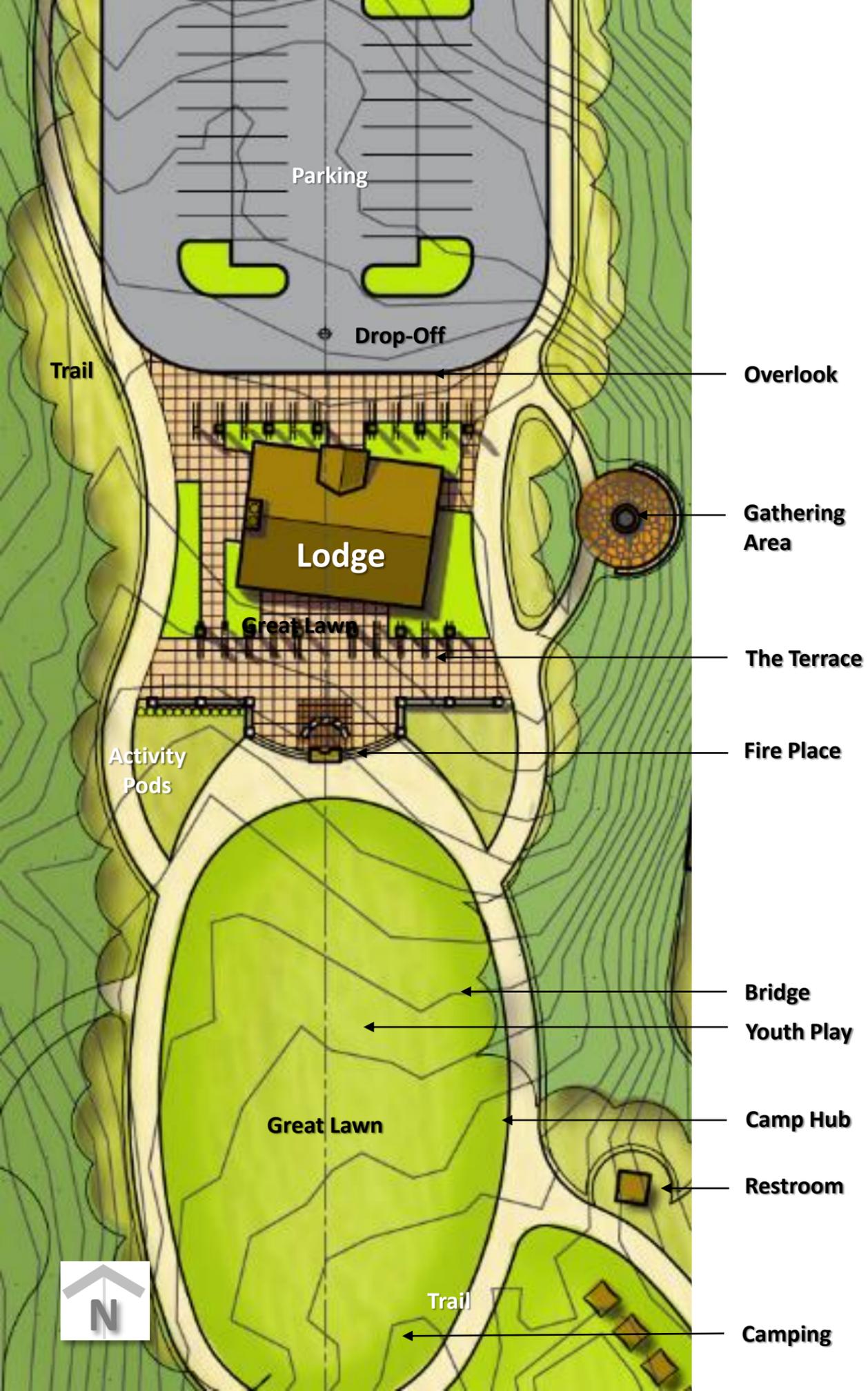
Future Use Recommendations

Lodge

- Programmed use area for groups; capacity 60
- Rental facility for groups; capacity 100
- Create camp gathering space, including:
 - restrooms,
 - kitchen,
 - storage
- Expectations:
 - clean,
 - informal,
 - simple,
 - rustic



Future Use Recommendations







Future Use Recommendations

Cabin

- Storage for adventure course equipment

Storage Building

- Store kayak trailer and / or canoe trailer
- Store other environmental education equipment
- Store future motorized equipment: OHV, mower
- Storage of land stewardship equipment (chainsaws, loppers, weedeaters, gear, water jugs, coolers)

Shower / Restrooms

- Install concrete latrine (pit)
- Explore shower in lodge

Bridge

- Replace existing bridge in same location



RDG Illustration

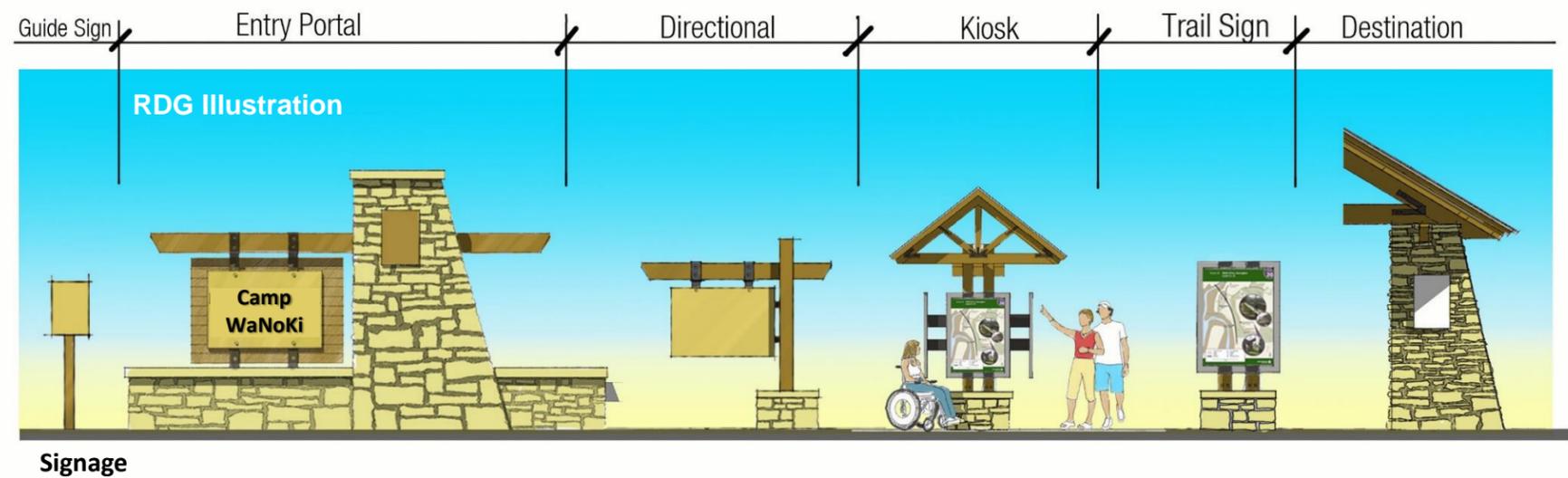


Cabin / Storage for Adventure



RDG Illustration

Restroom





Future Use Recommendations

Adventure Course

- Develop Obstacle Course
 - Ropes
 - Platform
- Team Building
 - Activities
 - Stations

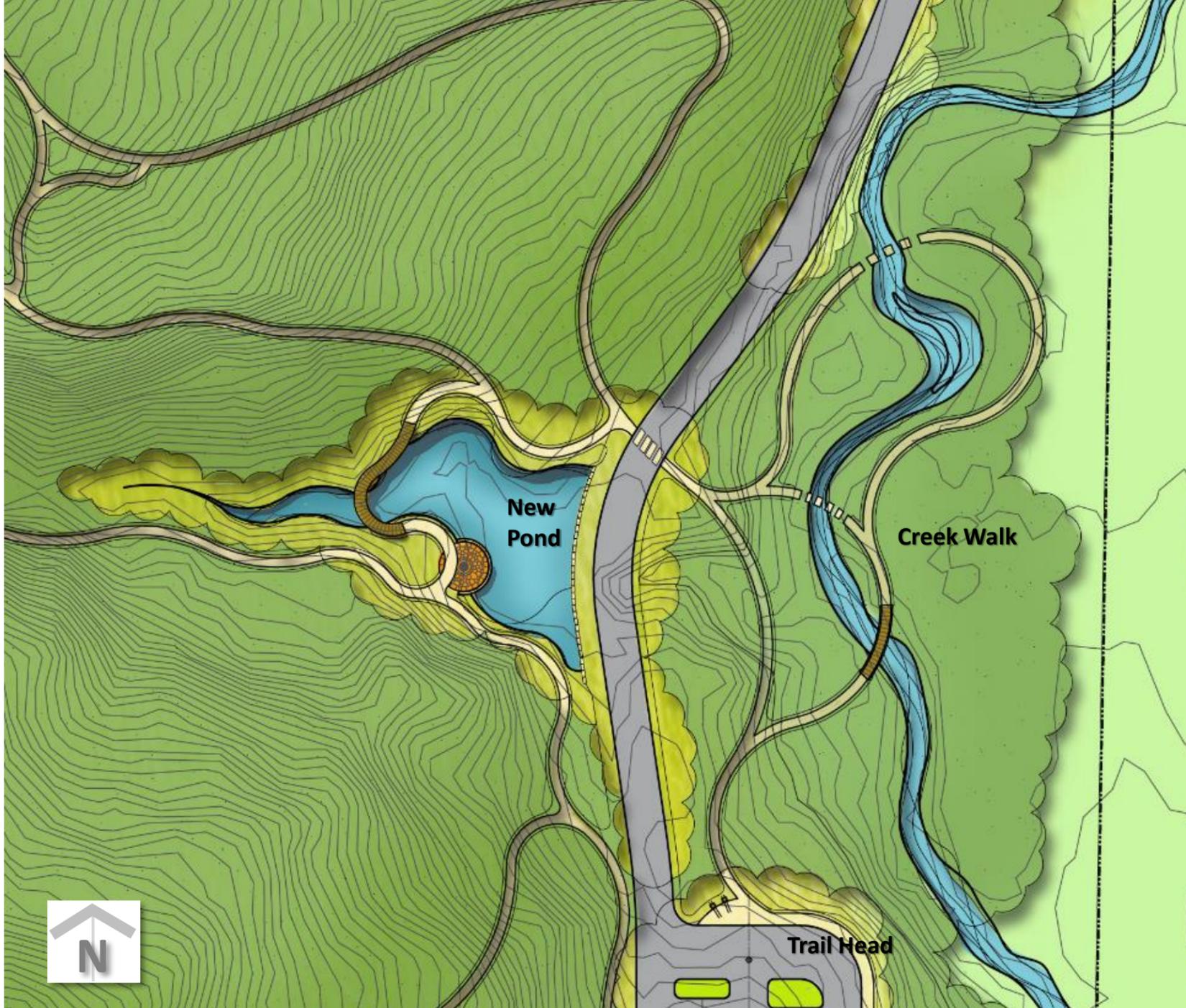
Yurt

- Develop Unique Camping Opportunities



Yurts Camping





RDG Illustration
Creek Walk

Future Use Recommendations

Creek Walk

- Access for Education Programs
- Develop New Pond on West Side of Park Drive
 - Board Walk
 - Water Study
 - Rocks in side channel as stepping stones



RDG Photograph



RDG Photograph



Island Access



River Access

Future Use Recommendations

Riverfront

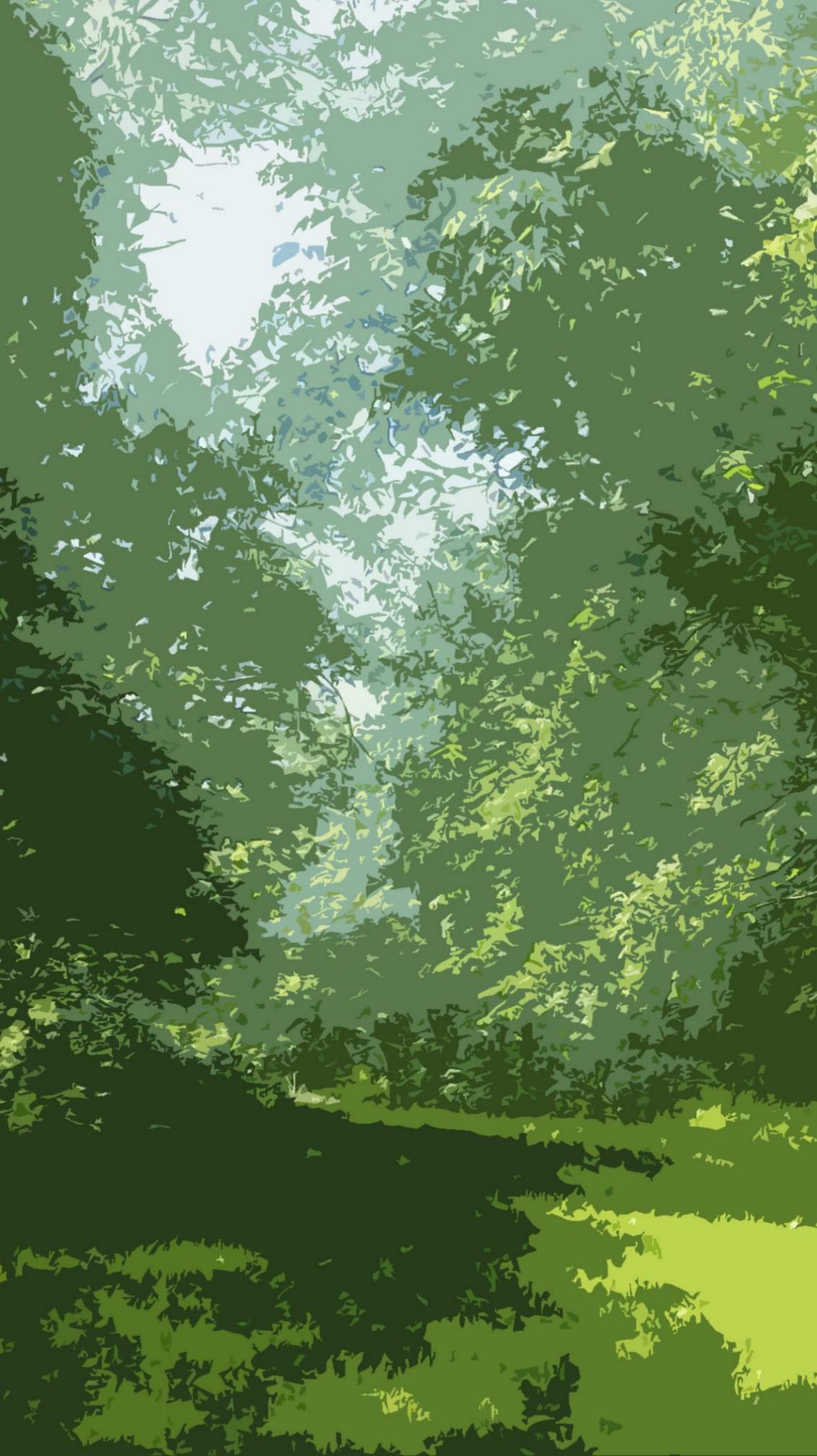
- Access for canoes and kayaks (stone step down, with accessible pathway)
- Access to island
- Access for fishing
 - Natural ledges
 - Accessible dock
 - Rocks in side channel as stepping stones



Photograph by: WCC Staff



Photograph by: WCC Staff



04 Implementation & Partners

Introduction

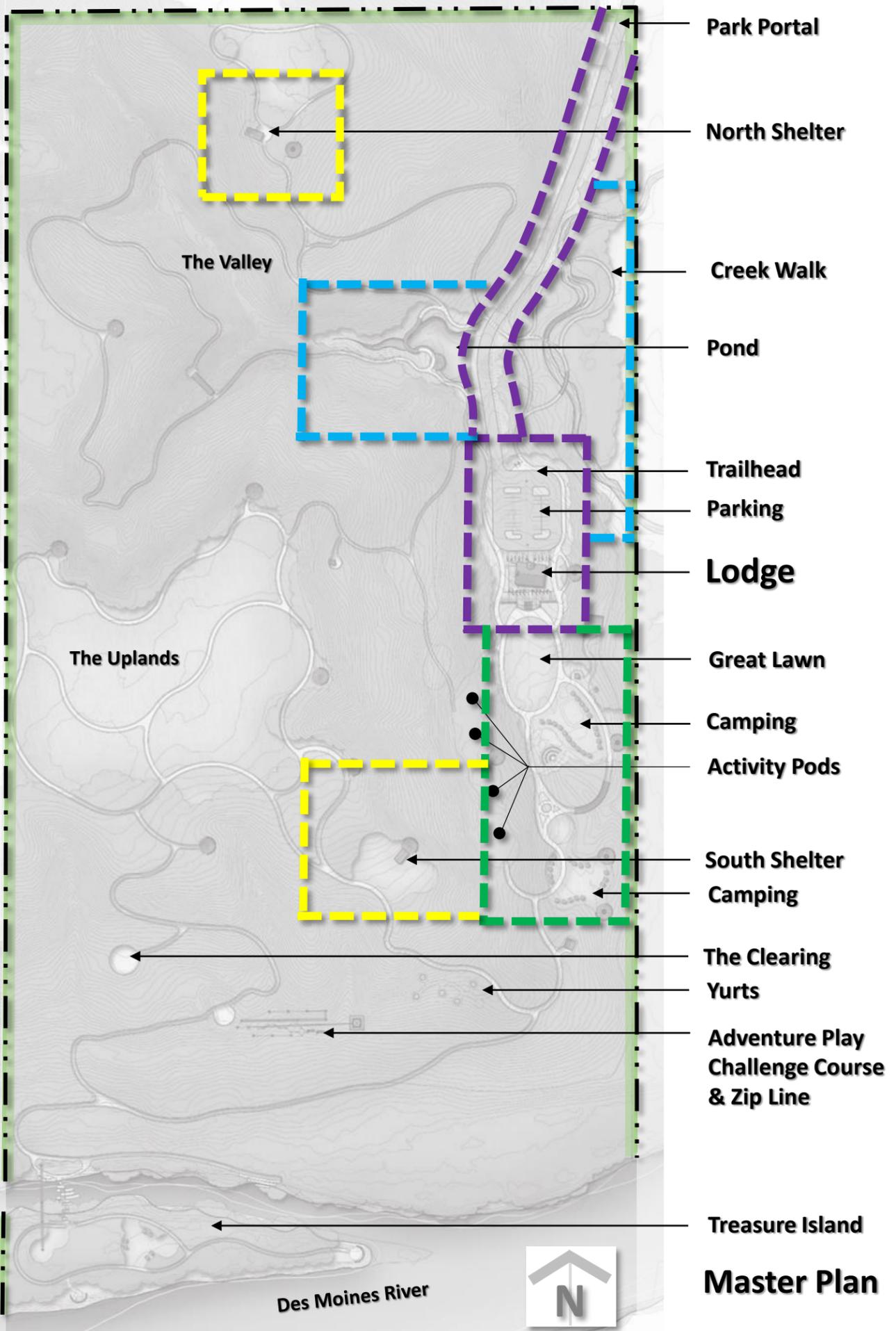
The Camp WaNoKi Master Plan is intended to be a long-range plan for future development of the Park. This Master Plan will serve as a guide for the Webster County Conservation Board to appropriately budget funding for future implementation phases of the Park.

Timing

The recommended improvements identified in this plan are anticipated to be implemented over time. Some recommendations require more detailed planning and design which would extend implementation of those recommendations (example: lake and adventure course). Projects that require less planning and design and can be done with limited funds may be completed earlier (example: trails, shelter and nature resource work).

Priorities

Higher priorities are assigned to those recommendations that are more responsive to the goals of the plan. Projects related to trails, recreation and environmental restoration opportunities are considered high-priority. Additionally, those projects that improve park access, provide greater accessibility and generate increased revenues are considered a higher priority.



- Park Portal
- North Shelter
- Creek Walk
- Pond
- Trailhead
- Parking
- Lodge
- Great Lawn
- Camping
- Activity Pods
- South Shelter
- Camping
- The Clearing
- Yurts
- Adventure Play Challenge Course & Zip Line
- Treasure Island

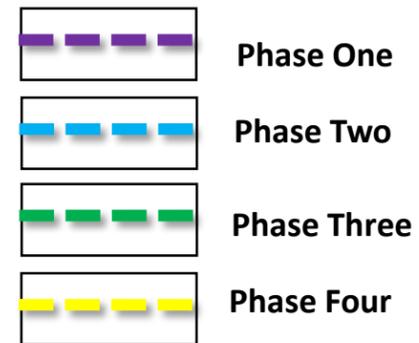
Phasing Plan

The framework of this Master Plan is intended to provide guidance for future development; however, the scope of each phase of construction will need to be carefully balanced with the current needs of Webster County Conservation board and available funds. The Phase 1 scope of work and each additional phase of construction should strive to build a coalition.

Phase One: 1 to 3 Years

The Master Plan process includes a preliminary consideration for prioritized improvements. The primary objectives of a conceptual Phase 1 scope of work could include including the following priorities:

- Work with adjacent property owners with the common goal of improving water quality.
- Improve and enhance the interior circulations systems
- Begin to develop the network of trails
- Begin to reestablish native plant communities and ecological-based stormwater management systems
- Begin the process of restoring Creek, the wetlands, woodlands and grasslands



Master Plan

Improvement Priorities

Project	Priority
General	
Trail System	High
Natural Resource Management	High
Programming Guide	High
Rental Plan & Policy	Low
Pond construction	Low
Signage & wayfinding	Medium
Site furnishings	Medium
Parking	Medium
Facilities	
North Shelter	Medium
South Shelter	High
Lodge	Medium
Storage Building	Low
Walking Bridge	High
Restroom - camp	Medium
Cabin	High
Yurts	Low
Recreation Activities	
Adventure Course	Medium
Creek Walk	Medium
River Access	Medium
Island Improvements	Low
Activity Pods	High
Camp areas	High
Utilities	
Bury electric service	High
Water Supply Testing & Improvements	High
Septic System Upgrade	High
Road & Culvert improvements	Medium

