



Dane County Land & Water Resources Department
Parks Division

Darren Marsh, Parks Director
Laura M. Hicklin, Director
Joe Parisi, Dane County Executive

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contacts:

Chris James, Dane County Parks - james@countyofdane.com

Foundation for Dane County Parks - foundationfordanecountyparks@gmail.com

Public Private Partnerships Advance Accessible Pier Projects Throughout Dane County Parks This Spring

MADISON, WI – May 20, 2020: Dane County Parks is making fishing and water recreation opportunities available to more people with the installation of accessible piers at two county parks this spring and summer.

As part of a multi-year project at Babcock County Park, parks staff in conjunction with private fundraising from the Foundation for Dane County Parks recently installed two refurbished piers with handrails at the boat landing along the Yahara River.

Nestled between Lake Waubesa and Mud Lake, Babcock County Park in McFarland is the county's most-used lake access point, and its shoreline and boat landing are fishing hot spots. Also this month, another accessible pier is tentatively planned to go in at Salmo Pond County Park near Black Earth Creek in Cross Plains.

Having more options throughout the county are especially useful amid the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is urging people to fish closer to home rather than traveling throughout the state.

A number of Dane County's piers already offer some of the accommodations, but stakeholders have identified several more locations where improvements can be made to better connect residents and visitors with the joys of being outdoors. Other properties identified include Fish Camp County Park, Lussier County Park, Fish Lake Natural Resource Area, Silverwood County Park, Tenney Lock Breakwater and Mendota County Park. Improvements proposed would include vehicle parking and paths providing barrier free access to new accessible piers, kayak landings, restrooms, and seating.

"Dane County is committed to providing residents and visitors of all ages and abilities the opportunity to access our incredible outdoor spaces," said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi.

Parisi's 2019 budget advanced a multi-year program to create accessible shoreline fishing at county parks. This initiative set out to make sure everyone had the opportunity to enjoy being near the water by creating piers that are fully ADA compliant. Parisi chose to double the program's funding to \$200,000 in his 2020 budget.

"We see this project as opening up a wide range of opportunities to participate in our county's water resources," said Bill Lunney, President of the Foundation for Dane County Parks, which is spearheading the project's fundraising.

"Over the next several years, this program will provide access to this important outdoor resource for people who have not previously been able to do so, including low income senior citizens, veterans, and people with physical and cognitive challenges," Lunney noted. "We want to have parks accessible to all our citizens, that's why our Foundation is excited about this project."

Although estimates are still being calculated, this public-private initiative will require substantial fundraising. The Foundation for Dane County Parks is leading this effort with support from the County and other nonprofits, including Access Ability Wisconsin, the Madison Fishing Expo, the Madison Community Foundation, the Courtier Foundation, Take a Vet Fishing, and the Capital City Chapter of Muskies, Inc. to name a few. "Our parks foundation is ideally positioned to help coordinate the enthusiastic partnership between private and public funds," noted Lunney.

"This project is important because it is the right thing to do on so many levels—basic rights, health, psychological and physical health, and the ability to enjoy nature just like everyone else," said Monica Spaeni, President of Access Ability Wisconsin.

"As I age, I want to be able to still get near the water around Dane County with a fishing pole or binoculars (fishing and birding), and be able to do that safely," said Chuck Rolfsmeyer, Director of Madison Fishing Expo.

In January, Sally Wilmeth and Terry Geurkink made a \$25,000 donation in memory of their children, Jenni and Kyle, to help fund proposed accessibility improvements at Babcock County Park. Dane County Parks has been working with the Foundation for Dane County Parks on coordinating the partnership supporting the project. Preliminary planning for an accessible fishing pier, kayak landing, and boat loading assistance station, along with parking improvements at Babcock County Park—the site of several annual fishing events each year for veterans and persons with disabilities—are an integral part of the effort.

"The county recently purchased two properties on the lake shore that will expand Babcock County Park and further help people with disabilities enjoy the park and waterways," said Chris James, Senior Landscape Architect with Dane County Parks. "The work will be done in phases and is still very early in the planning stages. The project is anticipated to add additional accessible parking spaces and water access for persons with disabilities on the peninsula between the existing boat landing and Lake Waubesa."

"By improving ADA accessible piers and other projects in partnership with the Foundation (for Dane County Parks), we're hoping to make this a regional water access destination for people with disabilities," James said. "Similar accessible improvements including a kayak landing are being proposed at Fish Camp County Park on Lake Kegonsa, which would make paddling on the Yahara River between the two parks (roughly three miles apart) much more accommodating."

About Dane County Parks

Dane County Parks offers a variety of recreational opportunities for the outdoor enthusiast and natural environments for quiet getaways or special events. Dane County Parks takes an active role to enhance and preserve the county's finest natural resources.

###