**PROJECT TITLE: Enhancing Winona’s Prairie Island**

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

Winona aims to increase access to the Mississippi River, its Backwaters, and the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge through improvements to Prairie Island’s boat launch and campground. Prairie Island is nestled along the banks of Straight Slough, surrounded by the backwaters of the Mississippi, providing a remote feel despite being only 3 miles from Downtown Winona. Prairie Island is the only public boat launch with a connected riverfront campground in all of Pool 5 on the Mississippi River. In addition, it is adjacent to U.S. Fish & Wildlife’s McNally landing— located in Pool 5A which is also without a public campground on the Minnesota side of the river. With its proximity to Winona’s Downtown and both Pools 5 and 5A, Prairie Island Park is a key regional connection to the Mississippi River ecosystem.

Prairie Island Park consists of a day use area with a shelter, 2 boat launches, and a campground with 106 electrical/water sites, 70 primitive sites, a camp store, beach, and a bath house. The City of Winona is committed to the enhancement of access and amenities at Prairie Island, and has initiated multiple upgrades to the park. In 2017 the City bonded $230,000 to upgrade the campgrounds electrical and water systems and initiate the replacement of aging vault toilets throughout the facility. In 2018 $25,000 was budgeted to install two new dock facilities and $4,000 in 2019 to repair one boat launch this season. The City awarded a new campground operator contract in 2018, which included the addition of online reservations, a community garden, and several public events for the community. As a result of these updates, Prairie Island is beginning to see a resurgence of community use and for many— Prairie Island is their primary exposure to nature. The City would like to continue to upgrade Prairie Island Park as a primary river access for the regional community.

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activity 1 Title: Mississippi River Access Improvements**  **Description:** In 2018 the City purchased two new docks to begin improving river access at Prairie Island’s boat launches. To increase capacity and user access we aim to add 3 additional docks located along the campground to improve boating access to the campground. This will allow visitors to access their campsites via the river. In addition, the boat launches are in need of repair to ensure safe access for users. The City is repairing one of two launches in 2019 and is requesting funding to complete the repair of the second launch. This includes replacement of deteriorating ramps and realignment of approaches.  **ENRTF BUDGET: $28,000** |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Installation of 3 New Boat Docks- to increase visitor capacity* | *August 2020* |
| *2. Boat Launch Restoration- to increase user access* | *December 2020* |

**Activity 2 Title: Campground/Park Improvements**

**Description:** As outlined above the City is in the process of renovating and upgrading Prairie Island to maintain a high quality outdoor experience as well as to promote new users— there are a number of small projects that will assist with this. The City would like to update signage and wayfinding to increase visibility and user navigation, improve the campsite experience by including native plantings throughout the facility, and provide more accessible picnic tables. The additional of a naturescape natural playground and discovery area at the campground will broaden the amenities for families while connecting them with the outdoors. The City initiated the replacement of old vault toilets at the campground in 2018 to reduce potential failure of the aging facilities. To meet the demand of this high use area we would like to add 2 additional single vaults and one double vault. All vault facilities are built and installed in concert with current MN DNR vault facility standards.

**ENRTF BUDGET: $98,500**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Access Signage- to increase awareness and visibility* | *August 2020* |
| *2. ADA Accessible Picnic Tables* | *August 2020* |
| *3. Floodplain Compliant Vault Toilet- to meet user demand* | *November 2020* |
| *4. Native Landscaping* | *June 2021* |
| *5. Naturescape Playground* | *June 2021* |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**

Partners in this project include:

Front Porch Management- the contracted campground operator,

Winona State University’s Outdoor Education and Recreation Center (WSU’s OERC) – provider of equipment rentals and programs within the park area and adjacent backwaters,

Recreation Alliance of Winona- a local outdoor recreation advocacy nonprofit

**IV. LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:**

City staff is prepared to initiate contracts and implementation of the listed projects in short order as permitting processes and relationships with vendors are already established from current projects. In addition, inter City department coordination is already underway to facilitate timely completion of City aspects of these projects. Once complete these facilities will be maintained through the general parks maintenance budget for their functional lifespan.