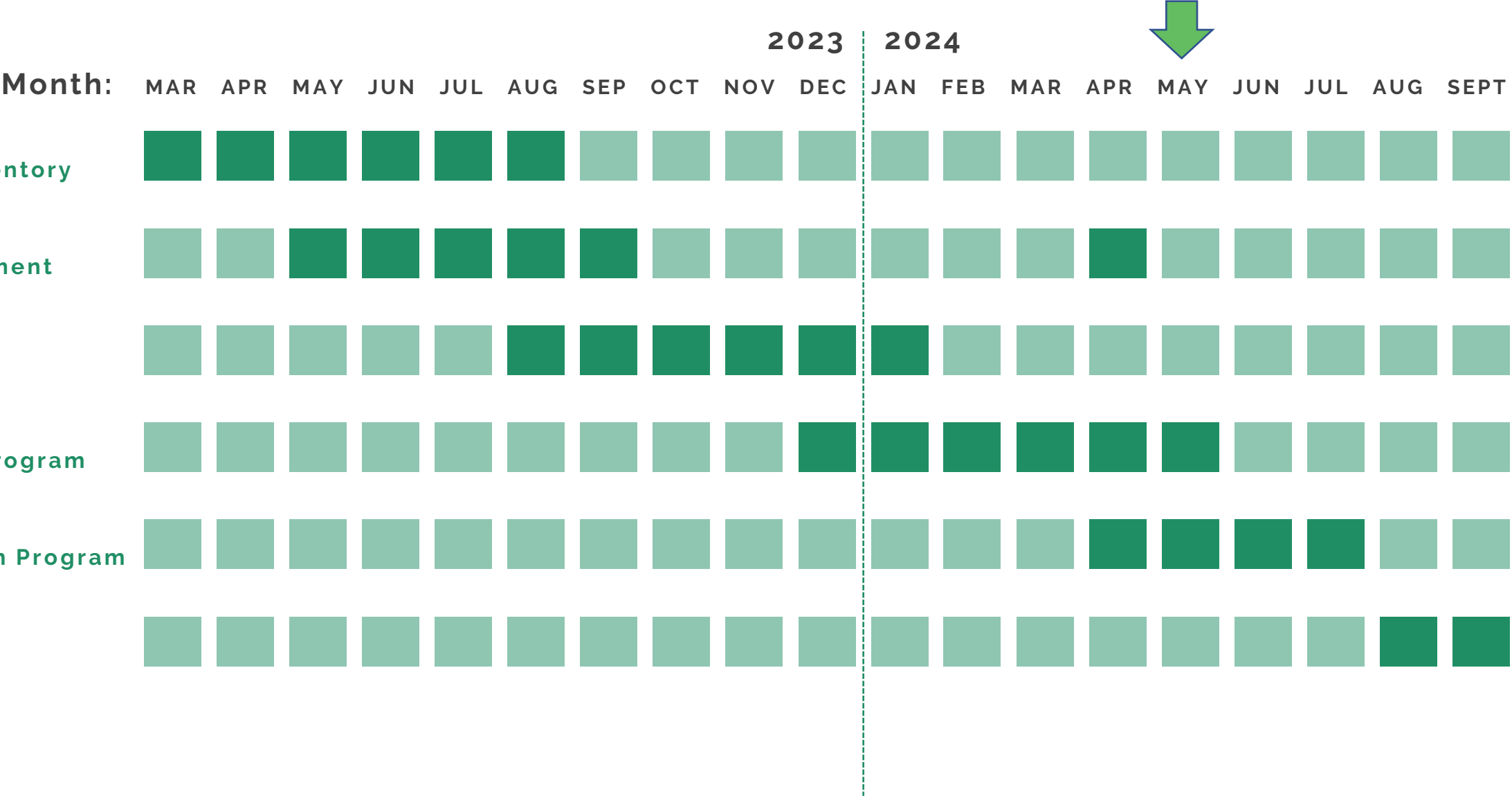


DALLAS COUNTY OPEN SPACE PLAN

TRAIL AND PRESERVE PROGRAM BOARD
Special Review Session
May 9, 2024



PROJECT TIMELINE



Schedule is tentative and subject to change.

PLAN GOALS



ENHANCE: Implement context-sensitive improvements to give residents the opportunity to explore and interact with the natural environment in a safe and responsible manner.



CONNECT: Increase awareness of and access to the preserves to better connect residents to nature in their own backyard and throughout the County.



PROTECT: Conserve and sustain the natural and cultural resources within the County while celebrating the unique features of the preserves.



MANAGE: Employ best practices for managing and funding the preserves and steward strong relationships with partners to ensure longevity of the parks and open space program.

KEY ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES



ENHANCE

Implement context-sensitive improvements to give residents the opportunity to explore and interact with the natural environment in a safe and responsible manner.

ISSUES



Availability of amenities.

The type and number of amenities varies widely across preserves and some preserves lack amenities.

Condition of amenities.
Many preserves feature outdated amenities that are not inviting to visitors.



Attendance.

Overall attendance of preserves varies and can be influenced by the types and availability of amenities.

OPPORTUNITIES



Preserve development.

Appropriate development of amenities and facilities within the preserve and future projects should be specific to the individual preserve recommendations.

Preserve experience.
Capitalize on the intended experience each preserve offer visitors.



Preserve Safety.

Develop consistent signage at preserve entrances and throughout preserves.

KEY ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES



CONNECT

Increase awareness of and access to the preserves to better connect residents to nature in their own backyard and throughout the County.

ISSUES



Access to amenities.

Not all preserves accommodate mobility assistance devices by providing paved paths to reach amenities.

Accessible facilities.

Where facilities exist, there are instances where upgrades are necessary to improve accessibility for all users.



Wayfinding signage.

There is a lack of consistency across the Preserve System in signs directing people to and within the preserves.



Accessing preserves using non-motorized routes.

Most preserve are not accessible via pedestrian and/or bicycle pathways or within a reasonable distance of public transportation stops.



OPPORTUNITIES

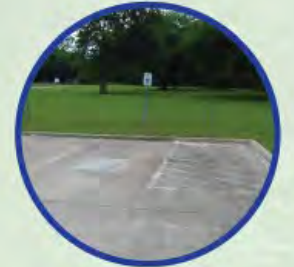


Increase access to underserved residents.

The majority of the preserves are in close proximity to traditionally underserved (low-income and minority) residents.

ADA compliance.

As amenities and facilities in preserves are updated, they should be designed to support ADA accessibility.



Promote the preserves.

Leveraging community events as opportunities to share what the Dallas County Parks and Open Space Program is and what it has to offer.



KEY ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES



PROTECT

Conserve and sustain the natural and cultural resources within the County while celebrating the unique features of the preserves.

ISSUES



Threatened and endangered species.

The majority of preserves have habitats suitable for state and federally-listed threatened and endangered species.

Invasive Species.

The majority of preserves have a notable presence of invasive species.



Cultural and historical resources.

Many preserves have a notable presence of culturally significant resources.

OPPORTUNITIES



Education.

Provide educational opportunities to visitors about existing natural and cultural resources through programs and interpretive signage.

Increase Awareness.

Seeking specific designations can increase awareness of the Parks and Open Space Program and the unique habitats, wildlife, and other resources available at preserves.



Community Partners.

There are local and regional groups that have or would be interested in building a relationship to support the maintenance of the preserves and protection of their resources.

KEY ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES



MANAGE

Employ best practices for managing and funding the preserves and steward strong relationships with partners to ensure longevity of the parks and open space program.

ISSUES



Preserve condition.

Instances of illegal dumping, litter, and overgrown vegetation blocking trails have been observed.

Feeling of safety.

There have been reported occurrences where users have not felt safe when in preserves.



Local Capacity.

The funding and staff allocation towards the management of preserves varies across the preserve management partners and the County.

OPPORTUNITIES



Partnerships.

Continue to foster and explore partnerships with local entities to help with preserve stewardship.

Volunteers.

The Dallas County Parks and Open Space Volunteer Program and other interested groups are available to assist with maintenance of the preserves.



Investment In Personnel.

Add additional staff to increase preserve safety and to enhance the programs, partnerships, and projects that the Parks and Open Space Program increasingly manages.



RECOMMENDATION STRUCTURE

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Series of strategies that are applicable to the entire system.

PROPOSED THEMES:

- *Safety & Security*
- *Funding Resources*
- *Maintenance*
- *Partnerships*
- *Program Administration*
- *Resource Management*
- *Access*
- *Awareness*

PRESERVE-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

List of priority projects for each of the 21 preserves.

TYPE 1- LESTER LORCH
Management Partner: City of Cedar Hill



#	DRAFT RECOMMENDATION	IMPORTANCE (TOP 3)
1	Install a solar-powered automatic security gate at the preserve entrances.	
2	Improve the existing parking lots to include additional parking spots.	
3	Develop a concept plan for the preserve focusing on adding soft-surface trails and interpretive signage, activating the upper part of the preserve with passive amenities, and identifying opportunities to connect the two parts of the preserve.	
4	Install permanent restroom facilities at the main preserve entrance.	
5	Install new information kiosks at the main preserve entrance.	
6	Integrate interpretative signage with historical information about the preserve.	
7	Create formalized soft-surface trails in the preserve.	
8	Implement a trail connection that connects to trailheads at both entrances.	

Note: Recommendations are listed in no particular order.

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Theme: Safety & Security

Strategies that address safety and security of the preserves are important because:

1. Feedback received during community engagement activities highlighted *issues with perception of safety* in preserves
2. During site visits to the preserves, *instances of undesirable activities* such as vandalism and dumping were observed

The strategies developed to address this topic focus on:

- Addressing the feeling of safety within preserves
- Encouraging people to explore the preserves
- Investing in measures for crime prevention



SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Theme: Funding Resources

Strategies that address funding resources for the Parks & Open Space Program are important because:

1. The Program works within a ***constrained budget***
2. Sources for increasing and diversifying funding should be ***identified through this plan***
3. ***Increasing funding is a priority*** to support new programs, improvement projects, and growing the Parks & Open Space Program

The strategies developed to address this topic focus on:

- Identifying new potential funding sources and partners
- Recommending additions to the Program focused on funding opportunities



SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Theme: Maintenance

Strategies that address maintenance within the preserves are important because:

1. There aren't established guideline for ***consistent maintenance standards***
2. Observations of current conditions highlighted ***instances of outdated amenities and deferred maintenance***

The strategies developed to address this topic focus on:

- Implementing standards and schedules for maintenance
- Addressing safety and accessibility issues
- Utilizing outside resources to assist with maintenance needs



SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Theme: Partnerships

Strategies that address partnership opportunities available to support the Parks & Open Space Program are important because:

1. Collaborating with partners allows the Program to *expand experiences offered* at the preserves
2. Partners can *provide resources* in the form of funding opportunities, staff support, growing programs/initiatives, and network building
3. Stakeholder listening sessions identified opportunities for *expanding existing partnerships and exploring new ones*

The strategies developed to address this topic focus on:

- Identifying local and national organizations for partnership opportunities
- Identifying specific instances that could utilize support from partner agencies



SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Theme: Program Administration

Strategies that address the administration of the Parks & Open Space Program are important because:

1. Staff capacity will need to *align with anticipated growth of the program*
2. Current Program *policies* need to be updated to *reflect the outcomes of this plan*
3. Regular *communication with existing and future partners* is essential to overall management

The strategies developed to address this topic focus on:

- Identifying resources, partners, and approaches to balance responsibilities of the program today and in the future
- Addressing methods for continued communication within and outside of the County



SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Theme: Resource Management

Strategies that address managing the resources of the Parks & Open Space Program are important because:

1. Through review of the preserves, *unique ecological and cultural resources* have been identified, particularly threatened and endangered species
2. The preserves serve as the *protected habitats for wildlife* and opportunities *to connect people with the natural environment*
3. The preserves play a role in *larger ecological systems*

The strategies developed to address this topic focus on:

- Identifying agencies to assist with the appropriate management and protection of resources
- Recommending best practices to protect and enhance the natural environment



SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Theme: Access

Strategies that address accessing the preserves are important because:

1. The preserves provide *open space and recreational opportunities to all County residents*
2. Some preserves have *limited accessibility to and within preserves today*, especially in terms of ADA compliance

The strategies developed to address this topic focus on:

- Increasing accessibility in an equitable manner
- Recommending best practices for addressing accessibility
- Identifying opportunities for regional connections



SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Theme: Awareness

Strategies related to awareness about the Parks and Open Space Program are important because:

1. Awareness of *the preserves and what they offer is not widely known* by County residents
2. *Accessible information* about the program could be more easily available

The strategies developed to address this topic focus on:

- Increasing visibility of the Parks and Open Space Program and the individual preserves
- Leveraging existing community initiatives and events to spread awareness
- Improvements to physical elements at preserves and digital informational and resources



SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

EXERCISE 1: REVIEW OF THEMES

Do you agree with the proposed themes?

- *Safety & Security*
- *Funding Resources*
- *Maintenance*
- *Partnerships*
- *Program Administration*
- *Resource Management*
- *Access*
- *Awareness*

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

EXERCISE 2: REVIEW OF STRATEGIES

Are there any changes you would make to the strategies?

Are there any strategies you feel should be identified as high priority for implementation?

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT Safety & Security Recommendations	Related Goal(s)
Add a park ranger to monitor preserves on a more regular basis to increase sense of safety and maintain a regular presence in the preserves that do not have a preserve management or maintenance partner.	Manage
Establish a program for emergency markers along trails to facilitate emergency response and increase safety within preserves.	Manage
Invest in security cameras to help deter vandalism and illegal dumping and improve the sense of safety within preserves.	Manage

Note: The recommendations are not listed in any particular order.

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT Funding Resources Recommendations	Related Goal(s)
Explore developing a cost sharing program between the county and member cities to show accountability and strengthen relationship with partners.	Manage
Support the establishment of a Dallas County Parks Foundation to help improve parks through private donations.	Enhance, Manage
Continue to work with partners to pursue grant funding for preserve improvements to diversify funding sources available to accomplish projects.	Manage
Collaborate with partners to seek donation opportunities from corporations and philanthropists as a way to diversify funding sources.	Enhance
Work with NCTCOG on regional trail initiatives to learn about resources and funding opportunities.	Connect

Note: The recommendations are not listed in any particular order.

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT Maintenance Recommendations	Related Goal(s)
Establish guidelines for 'maintenance modes' for each preserve classification, providing direction for frequency and type of maintenance procedures.	Manage
Develop a design and construction standards manual for preserves within the unincorporated area that guide improvements and maintenance to provide consistent standards and brand.	Manage
Work with other County departments with drone equipment for special projects and remote monitoring elements such as vegetation and wildlife health, facility inspections, development planning, and emergency response guidance.	Manage
Remove existing debris and proactively deter illegal dumping to provide visitors with a safe and welcoming experience at preserves.	Manage
Conduct conditions assessments of each preserve on an annual or bi-annual basis to determine amenities and facilities in need of maintenance or replacement and to maintain accountability.	Manage

Note: The recommendations are not listed in any particular order.

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT Partnerships Recommendations	Related Goal(s)
Explore opportunities with allied organizations to hold programs within preserves such as bird walks, clean ups, and BioBlitz events to provide new experiences for preserve visitors.	Enhance, Connect
Work with partners such as the Audubon Center and Trust for Public Land to expand stewardship, education, and community access opportunities.	Protect, Manage
Build relationships with nature conservation organizations to pursue funding for habitat conservation.	Protect, Manage
Coordinate with Dallas County Health & Human Services to increase community awareness, engagement, and promote healthy lifestyle activities related to open space accessibility.	Connect, Manage
Partner with a local university with a GIS department to digitize trails and location of amenities within preserves as a way to outsource tasks in a cost effective manner.	Connect, Manage
Explore a partnership with Leave No Trace to bring awareness to caring for the outdoors.	Protect, Manage

Note: The recommendations are not listed in any particular order.

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT Program Administration Recommendations (page 1 of 2)	Related Goal(s)
As the number of programs, partnerships, and projects that the Parks & Open Space Program manages increases, add additional staff to balance new responsibilities and reduce deferred maintenance.	Manage
Update Chapter 50 of the County Code to reflect more modern practices that align with the recommendations of this Master Plan such as changes to daily operations and natural/cultural resource management.	Manage
Update current criteria for accepting property into the parks & open space program focusing on expanding access to existing preserves, increasing ability to provide desired facilities or amenities, and protecting valuable natural or cultural resources.	Enhance, Manage
Allocate funding for professional development trainings and attending conferences to grow staff knowledge and learn best practices from peer entities.	Manage
Continue to grow the volunteer program run by the Dallas County Open Space Coordinator to improve the preserves and reduce overall maintenance costs.	Connect, Manage

Note: The recommendations are not listed in any particular order.

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT Program Administration Recommendations (page 2 of 2)	Related Goal(s)
Develop a FAQ about the program to share with preserve management partners and potential partnering entities in order to share consistent information on common topics.	Connect, Manage
Establish a regularly occurring meeting between Dallas County and the preserve management partners to stay informed about recent accomplishments and challenges.	Manage
Establish interdepartmental agreements with relevant county departments to align County initiatives and request support where appropriate.	Manage
Implement and maintain a regular communication schedule for each preserve management partner including email, virtual and in-person meetings to actively maintain partnership and coordinate project updates.	Manage

Note: The recommendations are not listed in any particular order.

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT Resource Management Recommendations (page 1 of 2)	Related Goal(s)
Align future open space preservation and planning with goals from local Watershed Protection Plans to ensure protection of water resources within preserves.	Protect, Manage
Coordinate with relevant agencies to assist with cultural resource management including determining the best way to share these resources with the public in an appropriate manner.	Protect, Manage
Coordinate with Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) and US Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) where threatened and endangered species are identified within preserves to ensure appropriate action steps are followed.	Protect, Manage
Partner with university and academic institutions to study ecosystem services within preserves as a way to determine the contributions preserves provide for Dallas County residents.	Protect
Work with partners such as the Texas A&M Forest Service to monitor impact of EAB over time within the preserves.	Protect, Manage

Note: The recommendations are not listed in any particular order.

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT Resource Management Recommendations (page 2 of 2)	Related Goal(s)
Incorporate permeable surfaces and other low-impact design solutions when updating, enhancing or developing parking lots and trailheads to reduce impacts of run-off during rain events.	Enhance
Utilize best practice clearing techniques to remove invasive plant species and allow native plant species to flourish.	Protect, Manage
Utilize software such as i-Tree Eco to quantify the environmental (e.g. carbon sequestration) and monetary benefits that the tree canopy within the preserve system brings to the County.	Manage

Note: The recommendations are not listed in any particular order.

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT Access Recommendations	Related Goal(s)
Strive for equitable and accessible distribution of preserve lands throughout the unincorporated areas to fulfill unmet open space and outdoor recreational needs of county residents.	Connect
Require new soft-surface trails be designed by a professional firm to utilize their expertise on the best routes, surface materials, and maintenance over time.	Enhance
Explore feasibility of larger soft-surface trail loop that would connect Goat Island, Riverbend, Cottonwood Creek, and Palmetto-Alligator Slough to promote eco-tourism opportunities.	Enhance, Connect

Note: The recommendations are not listed in any particular order.

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT Awareness Recommendations (page 1 of 2)	Related Goal(s)
Continue to pursue designations to highlight unique elements of the preserves as a way to promote awareness and attract visitors.	Enhance, Connect
Utilize interpretative signage to highlight unique habitats to support awareness and engagement within the local community.	Enhance, Connect
Develop a promotional campaign for 2026 to celebrate 50 years since Lester Lorch Park, the first park in the Parks & Open Space Program, was dedicated as an opportunity to bring awareness to the program.	Connect
Regularly maintain and update the Dallas County Parks & Open Space Program website to provide consistent and current information to the public.	Connect
Implement a robust social media strategy with frequent and varied content to grow awareness of the program and attract new visitors.	Connect
Create easily updated marketing materials such as QR codes or digital brochures to increase accessibility to information and minimize time required for future updates.	Connect

Note: The recommendations are not listed in any particular order.

SYSTEMWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT Awareness Recommendations (page 2 of 2)	Related Goal(s)
Develop educational materials to share with elected officials regarding the benefits of various land management practices to serve as a resource.	Manage
Provide translation of all published materials into predominant languages for Dallas County to increase the audience this information reaches.	Connect
Create a DCOSP “How to Enjoy Your Visit” printed brochure with a map of the preserve system or individual preserves and distribute brochures via local and regional entities to share knowledge of the variety of experiences the preserves offer.	Manage
Develop consistent signage to be implemented at preserve entrances and throughout preserves to serve as a recognizable brand for the Parks & Open Space Program.	Enhance
Have a visible presence at preserve partner community events or activities when appropriate to bring awareness to the Parks & Open Space Program.	Connect

Note: The recommendations are not listed in any particular order.

NEXT STEPS

IN PROGRESS TASKS

- Draft Chapter 3

UPCOMING TASKS

- Implementation program
- Draft Chapter 4

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