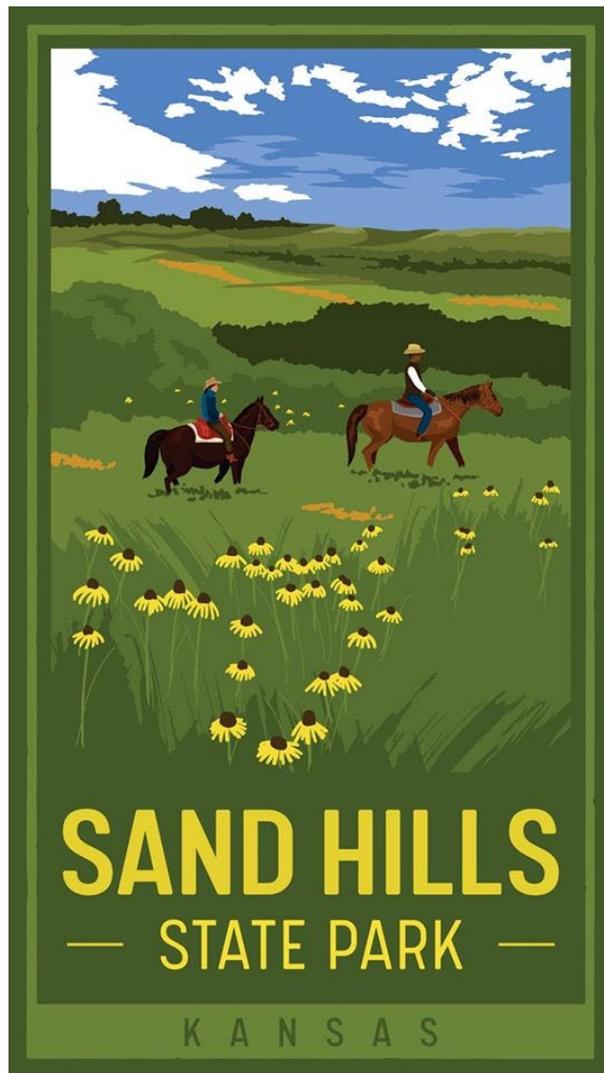


Sand Hills State Park

Master Plan 2021



Introduction

The purpose of this master plan is to guide current and future operations and development at Sand Hills State Park. Reference to this plan will ensure that operations at Sand Hills State Park meet the needs identified in the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2020. This plan is required by the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF); accepting such funds dedicates the park in perpetuity to outdoor recreation. LWCF fund grants were utilized in the acquisition of some of the land to establish Sand Hills State Park. Grant funding from LWCF, the Recreational Trails Fund, and many others are critical to development of recreational opportunities in all Kansas state parks.

Guidance from this plan also ensures that development will be in alignment with the Department mission statement:

- Conserve and enhance Kansas's natural heritage, its wildlife and its habitats—to ensure future generations the benefits of the state's diverse, living resources;
- Provide the public with the opportunity for the use and appreciation of the natural resources of Kansas, consistent with the conservation of those resources;
- Inform the public of the status of the natural resources of Kansas to promote understanding and gain assistance in achieving this mission.

Park History and Background

Sand Hills State Park, a 1,123-acre natural area, has been preserved for its sand dunes, grasslands, wetlands, and woodlands. Popular activities at the park are hiking and horseback riding. Other activities include hunting, bird watching, wildflower walks, jogging and just simple relaxation in the country. Camping has become a component of what Sand Hills State Park provides the public as well when a campground was completed in 2014. The park is located north of Hutchinson, about one mile east of K-61 on either 56th Street or 69th Street.

For thousands of years the Arkansas River carried sediment from the Rocky Mountains into this area. Prevailing southwesterly winds blew the fine sand out of the river valley, forming a narrow band of unstable sand dunes. The sand shifted and changed shape until vegetation established a foothold and stabilized the dunes. This line of sand dunes created a diversity of unique habitats. The area is limited to walk-in access in order to help protect the natural features of this area.

In 1974 the Kansas Park and Resources Authority, which at the time was in charge of all state parks, acquired 640 acres of land from Kansas State Industrial Reformatory. KSIR had used the property for pastureland but when they discontinued their farming operation using inmates, they no longer needed this property. These 640 acres became the 22nd State Park in Kansas by a House Bill signed by Governor Robert Docking. Shortly after this transfer, the Dillon family of Hutchinson donated an adjacent 320 acres of identical rolling sand dune vegetated property. With the donation the Kansas Park Authority was able to acquire another adjacent 163 acres with Federal Land and Water Funds, thus establishing the present 1,123-acre park.

There were plans to develop vast hiking trails, primitive camping, picnic sites, nature study areas, restrooms, and even an amphitheater, but due to lack of funding most of this did not come to pass. In the mid-70's, for two summers, the Young Adult Conservation Corps, a Federally sponsored program, was stationed at Sand Hills State Park to establish a series of trails, remove interior fences, and build several vault toilets. Due to lack of funding and personnel, the Kansas Park Authority was not able to staff the park; therefore, they leased it to the Dillon Nature Center in 1983 for a period of five years. Dillon Nature Center re-established some trails and maintained the area during that period of time. In 1988, the Department of Wildlife and Parks took the area back under its direct management and now manages it for a wide variety of users. This park does not have any full-time employees assigned specifically to it but is managed as a satellite park from Cheney State Park utilizing the Cheney staff.

Currently there are eight trails in the park, including interpretive, hiking and horseback riding trails. 15 miles of trails weave in between 10 to 40-foot high sand dunes, through grasslands and trees, and around ponds. The campground opened in 2014, providing 64 utility sites and 15 sites with horse pens.

Facilities

Over 64 campsites offer visitors a variety of campsites from primitive to water, sewer, and electric hookups throughout the one campground. 44 sites have water, sewer, and electric while the other 20 have water and electric. Along with two- and three-utility sites, there are 15 sites that offer horse corrals. There is also open primitive camping.

The facilities at Sand Hills State Park include one shower house with four private stalls, one cabin converted into a park office building, four pit toilets, one maintenance building and two lift stations.

Operations

Visitation has varied throughout the past several years due to Sand Hills State Park being a day use area, mainly providing trails for recreation until 2014. The campground opened in the fall of 2014, increasing visitation by a significant amount. When only trails were provided, the visitation was around 2,000 people. In 2020, the visitation was 67,203. The visitation from 2014 to 2017 after the campground opened was low due to the public not being aware of the new campground. Word spread, and visitation continues to grow more and more each year.

Visitation is measured by pneumatic counters at the park entrances. Visitation actually means the calculated visitor usage days, estimated from the number of counts at entrances by a calculation taking into account the average number of visitors per vehicle and the number of times each vehicle enters the park. While the numbers may not be a precise measurement, the methodology is consistent; it shows trends up and down. A slight downward trend is often noted after a price increase, while good weather and no flooding over major summer holidays bring an upward trend. Interestingly, the Coronavirus pandemic increased visitation at most of our parks as people used the park to social distance and find solace in the outdoors.

Revenue

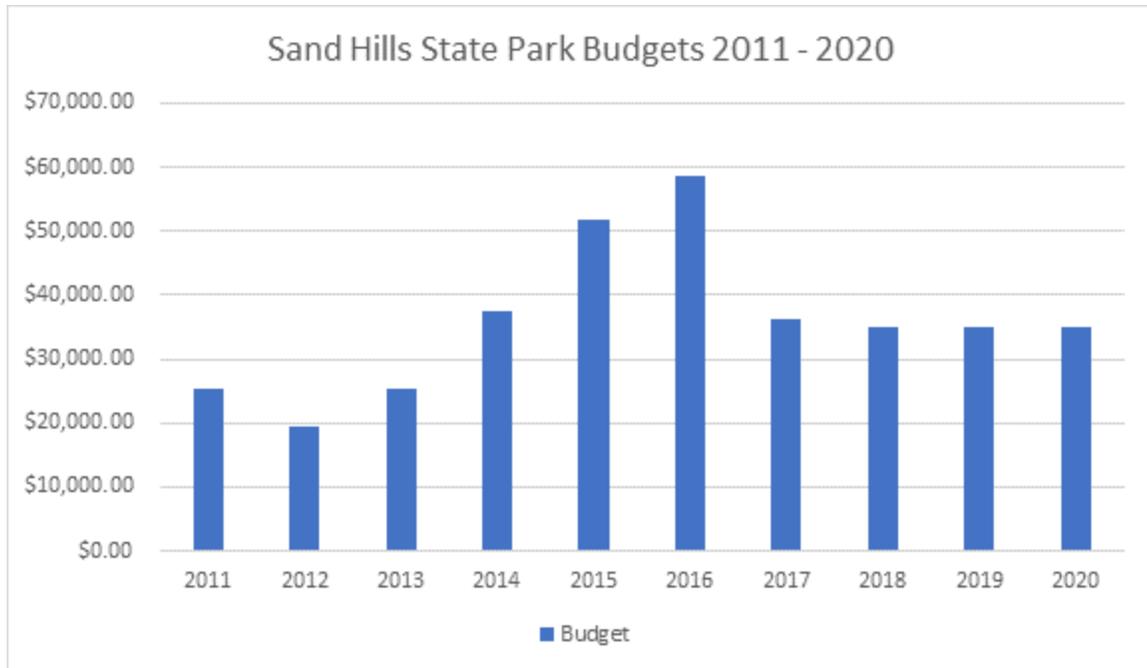
Collection of revenue has changed over the past decade, from most permit sales and campsite reservations collected in person at the park office to the majority of sales handled through internet sales. This means much revenue is collected off site. However, this shift has led to higher revenue per park overall, as users can reserve sites in mid-December for the following calendar year. It gives them the opportunity to ensure that they have the sites they want on the dates they want. It also allows us to correctly track the number of uses on annual and 14-night camping permits, as well as highlights when campers stay past the nights paid for. Permit compliance has been enhanced. The new CampIt Kansas app allows campers to check availability and reserve sites from their smartphones, or from the actual site itself. The trend is moving away from fee collection at gatehouses, offices and camp hosts to the internet. Revenue closely mirrors visitation, with weather events often an extenuating factor.

The Kansas Legislature approves the budget and funding is often subject to political trends. No State General Fund (tax revenues) have been allocated to state parks for the past several years, and only a small amount from lottery revenues. Therefore, the Kansas State Park system is largely self-supporting from user fees. Sand Hills State Park revenue has changed drastically over the years. Before the campground was open in 2014, the park would only gain revenue from vehicle permits; therefore, only a couple thousand dollars in revenue was made each year. Most of that revenue would come from self-pay stations. As the chart below indicates, revenue increased dramatically in the past four years. 2019 was our highest year to date due to the staff having a full park for several months in a row. As you can tell again, the Coronavirus Pandemic significantly increased revenue and visitation for 2020.

Revenue

2020	\$103,520.22
2019	\$107,799 (Park received additional visitors when other parks located on reservoirs that were flooded)
2018	\$55,322
2017	\$56,518.08

2010-2020 O&M Budget



Staffing

Sand Hills State Park is one of the smallest state parks in Kansas. However, the Cheney State Park staff located 35 miles to the south also manages this park, utilizing the Cheney full-time staff as needed.

Office staff and Rangers are in constant contact with the camp hosts and seasonal maintenance during the summer months to help run the park efficiently. The Reno County Sheriff's Department will also drive through the park from time to time and respond to calls in the park if Cheney staff is unavailable. This helps ensure that campers feel safe while utilizing the park.

The park also utilizes a variety of seasonal employees during the busy months. The park could not operate successfully during the busy summer months without seasonal employees. They handle various maintenance and grounds duties within the park. Typically, two volunteer camp hosts, and either one or two seasonal mowers/maintenance are utilized each year.

Facilities and Equipment

Like most state parks in Kansas, Sand Hills State Park must maintain many services of a city. Over holiday weekends, Sand Hills State Park can grow significantly with people putting a lot of stress on facilities in order to keep up with demand. 2020 brought even more people out than normal due to the COVID-19 pandemic, surpassing 67,000 people vs the previous year of 37,000. Sand Hills contains 1.75 miles of dirt roads, 1 mile of paved roads, 3 miles of water and sewer line, and several miles of electrical lines, all maintained by park staff. Water and sewer are provided by city services billed monthly so park staff does not need to manage lagoons or water sampling. Along with sewer service in the park comes sewer lift stations that can fail

unexpectedly and are a large expense not only parkwide but at the statewide level.

Trash disposal is also another city-like concern. When available at reasonable cost, we contract with trash disposal services. Sand Hills trash is currently out to bid for four three-yard dumpsters placed throughout the state park that are serviced weekly.

Whitetail deer, turkey, quail, many species of songbirds, waterfowl, and a wide variety of wildlife populations can be observed within the park. Sand Hills State Park also provides archery hunting by special permit through the park office. The bow hunters are only allowed to hunt in areas away from the hiking the trails. Visitation slows in the fall/winter, so everyone remains safe. Sand Hills park staff also works with the Public Lands Division to provide upland bird hunting by special hunt permits.

The following is an itemized listing of facilities located within Sand Hills State Park:

Number of Structures

Office Building	1	Sewer Lift Stations	2	Maintenance Buildings	1
Water Hydrants	75	Shower houses	1	Electrical Pedestals	68
Vault Toilets	3	Grills/Fire Rings	130	Shelter Houses	0
Picnic tables	100	Gate Houses	0	Campsites	64
Playground	0	Cabins	0	Dump Stations	1
Horse Corrals	15	Ponds	3		

Miles of:

Water Lines	3	Paved Roads	1	Trails	15
Electrical Lines	4	Sewer Lines	3		

Equipment

Vehicles for operations and maintenance for the park are located there. Park law enforcement officers utilize the trucks assigned to them and operate primarily from Cheney State Park. The park also utilizes large numbers of hand and small power tools and two large mowers.

The most recent vehicle list is below:

Vehicle #	Year	Make	Model	Mileage	Condition	Primary Use
7577	1991	Chevy	1T 3+3	149967.2	Fair	Maintenance
0711	1996	Samsung	SE280 Trackhoe	Used Statewide	Fair	Major Projects
911	2017	John Deere	5100E Utility Tractor	622.1	Good	Mowing
0657	1980	John Deere	Backhoe	4429.8	Poor	Maintenance
0640	1976	John Deere	401B Tractor	3883.5	Fair	Mowing
		Kubota	UTV	1869.7	Good	Trail Maintenance
755	1997	Zetor	Tractor		Poor	To Be Sold

Potential Future Development

Playground

Since 2014 when the campground opened, Sand Hills State Park revenue and visitation continues to increase every year. Currently Sand Hills has a small pond in the campground for patrons to fish, but swimming is not allowed due to restrictions regarding it being classified as an aquifer. We also offer 15 miles of trails for people to walk, hike, bike, and horseback ride. A playground for kids to play on would be a great addition. This would provide the parents an additional outdoor opportunity for their children. The number one request we get from park constituents is a playground for children. Estimated cost would be around \$75,000.

Front End Loader for 5100e Tractor

We are in the final stages of purchasing 49.2 acres adjoining Sand Hills State Park. This addition will require considerable effort to develop and fence it. Development could involve tasks like brush clearing, fence building, creating new trails, and more. A few years ago, Sand Hills got a new John Deere 5100e tractor that we use for mowing. This tractor could be utilized so much more if it was equipped with a loader. Approximate cost for this would be \$12,000 to \$15,000.

In Progress Development

Recreational Trail Program Land Acquisition

We are in the final stages of purchasing 49.2 acres adjoining Sand Hills State Park.

Shelter House Addition

We have been approved for a Recreational Trail Program grant for a 24 feet by 44 feet shelter.

Small Bathroom Shower House Addition

We have been approved for a Recreational Trail Program grant to provide bathroom and shower facilities that can operate efficiently year-round.

Future Events

5K'S/Half Marathon/Glow Run

Sand Hills teamed up with the Hutchinson Parks and Recreation Department in 2016 creating the Trail and Treat 3k/5k. The event has grown each year until we had to cancel in 2020 due to Covid-19. In 2019 we had approximately 100 racers. Another idea park staff has entertained is a glow run that would take place at night. We could use the same race path that we

have for the Trail and Treat or chose another route. Hutchinson Parks and Rec has several volunteers, so in partnership with our staff, several people would be out on the trails to make sure no one gets lost. This could be a big hit around Halloween like our current event. We have also talked about making our current 5k into a half marathon. Constituents have nothing but great things to say about the park and love the event. A half marathon will take participants thru the rest of the sand dunes and most of the park.

Movie in the Park Night

Park staff is excited to host its first Movie in the Park Night this May at Cheney. All the equipment was purchased last year for this event but was put on hold due to Covid-19. It is still an on-going battle with Covid-19, but park staff believes they can have this event this year with everyone able to practice safe social distancing. Park staff will try to have this same event at Sand Hills as they do at Cheney when a shelter house facility is available.

Tournaments

Staff has been considering doing many tournaments throughout the next year or couple of years, such as sand volleyball or corn-hole. Having volleyball and corn-hole tournaments may draw a younger crowd to the park than normally use the park.