



ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COUNCIL
City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation
Regular Meeting

Allison-Jukebox Community Center
Wednesday, February 11, 2026
4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

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I. CALL TO ORDER at 4:32 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL –

Denise Gardiner, Cathy Meyer, David Parkurst, Adam Fudickar, Andy Ruff
Staff: Heidi Shoemaker, Mary Welz, Rebecca Swift, Tim Street, Tristyn Berube

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – December 2025

IV. AGENDA

A. Appearances

A-1 Public Comment Period

Erica Myers introduced herself to the Council. She was attending the meeting as a member of the public but has applied to become a member and hopes to have her appointment approved by the Board of Park Commissioners next week.

B. Old Business

B-1 Deer Management at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve Results

Ryan Rodts, Senior Wildlife Biologist, from White Buffalo Inc, joined the meeting virtually. White Buffalo helps coordinate the deer management hunts at Griffy Lake and Ryan Rodts gave the Council an opportunity to ask more in depth questions about this process. Rodts shared that they do hear from some residents who are displeased that the park is closed for recreation during these hunts, but in general people understand why it is important even if they may not agree with it. Another challenge for the management hunt is access to Zone 7. The park is divided into multiple zones, but Zone 7 does not have easy access and it would be hard to remove a deer from the woods if a

hunter was successful there. They typically do not assign hunters to that area for that reason. Welz shared a map with the Council so they could see the zone locations.

The management hunts at Griffy Lake are different from other hunts White Buffalo is involved in because the White Buffalo staff are usually the ones removing the deer and in this particular hunt they are supervising volunteer hunters. Rodts noted that 2025's hunt was more successful than in 2024. A trend they are seeing is that as deer density decreases, it is harder to recruit and retain volunteer hunters who will volunteer their time for 4 days spread out over 2 weekends. In 2025 they were able to recruit 22 hunters and Rodts praised them for being high quality individuals with high efficiency. Zone 1 in the southwest corner of the park is where they see the highest success followed by Zone 5.

Rodts was able to answer the question the Council had from the previous meeting about the harvesting of male and female deer. Rodts clarified that it depends on tags the individual hunters purchase from the state. Hunters can purchase a buck only tag, a bundle tag (what is included in the bundle changes annually), or a deer reduction zone tag since Griffy is a deer reduction zone. A deer reduction zone tag allows hunters to harvest a buck if they harvest a female first and they can also harvest 9 additional antlerless deer. Rodts thinks just under 50% of the hunters at Griffy use the DRZ tags. Many of them have completed their other tags in recreational hunts before the Griffy hunt veins so this allows them to continue hunting and supports a healthy ecosystem for Griffy Lake. Fudickar asked for the statistics of the 2025 hunt. Females made up 54% of the deer harvested

Welz shared that Bloomington Animal Care and Control is working with an intern who is also working with IDNR to do some drone deer density counts in Bloomington and asked for Rodts' guidance on the topic. Rodts has used drones for wildlife management counts and stated the technology greatly improved when aerial infrared surveys became available. He noted some challenges are finding the right speed and height for the drone but that vegetative cover and deer movement can still make an accurate count difficult to achieve and that deer are often missed or double counted. He also said the short battery life of approximately 20 minutes makes these types of counts difficult. You can usually cover 160 acres on one battery so there would be 11 or 12 battery changes to survey Griffy Lake. Each time the deer are continuing to move and you are not sure in which direction they are traveling. Rodts believes there is a high tendency to end up with overcounts. This margin of error can be reduced if you also incorporate marking location of deer with GPS during the flights. Drone counts aren't perfect, but they are improving, and right now it's the best technique that we have. Rodts shared that we do not have a preliminary count for Griffy and that is because we use the recovery of the vegetation as the measure of success.

C. New Business

C-1 Election of Officers

This was discussed but no one present was interested in becoming the Chair. Gardiner requested switching to Vice Chair. With three members not present and one member

hopefully being appointed during Park Board next week, this was tabled until the April meeting.

C-2 Hoosier Hikers Council MOU and Griffy Trail Improvement

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Hoosier Hikers Council (HHC) is under review with the Legal Department. We have hosted one volunteer workday in January at Griffy Lake where we rerouted a large portion of the eastern side of the Nature Trail. HHC has volunteer work days every third Saturday that typically last six hours. Eighteen volunteers showed up to work on the project with Welz and her team. We hope to continue this partnership and to help make improvements to Griffy Lake that would allow our motorized wheelchair to safely maneuver the trails. There was a master plan created after a Spectrum audit of the trails found that 90% of them should be rerouted to a degree. We have to focus on what is feasible for us to accomplish to make the trails sustainable with a minimal amount of disturbance. During the January workday, staff and volunteers were able to overlap the new trail with the old trail to minimize disturbance.

C-3 Vegetation Management Update

Welz shared some management projects that her team were able to complete internally in 2025. The team has almost cleared 24 acres of invasive, woody vegetation at Griffy Woods Nature Preserve including autumn olive, privet, and burning bush. This may not be noticeable to trail users, but it is impactful work.

The team also continued a vegetation removal project that they started at Cascades Park above the waterfall with KCI where they were able to clear about 3.5 acres around the waterfall areas. Urban Greenspace has also been working there with volunteers during monthly Saturday work days at Cascades.

For 2026, we have contracted with Habitat Solutions to do another prescribed burn at Griffy Lake in a 15 acre section north and east of the boathouse. We are hopeful for ideal weather conditions to conduct a prescribed burn in March. We are getting information out to neighbors and the public about our intent to burn. If the weather doesn't allow for a burn in March, we will have to postpone the contract until the winter. The goal of this burn is to increase diversity in the midstory and understory. Eco Logic will continue Miller-Showers management, Switchyard Park invasive species mapping and management, and a newly contracted for 9 acres of wetland woody invasive management work upstream from Griffy, mostly to remove privet.

C-4 Education Updates

In 2025, the education team offered 132 programs (not including the Nature Days field trips) and reached a total of 5,727 people across all programming. There was one fewer staff member in 2025 and our longest running staff member left in September so this was quite an accomplishment. Winter's Tea Time started off the 2026 programming in January. We were able to start the After School Nature Club at Fairview Elementary already and we have a sold out maple syrup program in February. We hosted the WINGS (Women in Nature Gaining Skills) Expo right here in AJB in January. Attendance was low with only 27 participants, so we aren't sure if that was due to the weather or if over the years enough women have taken part in the programs and know about WINGS already and don't feel they need to attend the expo. WINGS is a partnership between

Bloomington Parks, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Hoosier National Forest, and Sycamore Land Trust and offers outdoor programming for women led by women.

The Hike & Seek programs for January and February didn't run, likely due to weather, but this is still an initiative that Shoemaker is passionate about and would like to see succeed. Hike & Seek is designed for preschoolers to explore nature and make their own observations and discoveries with the help of a naturalist and an adult that they know and trust. Shoemaker stated that the rosters for public programs are almost 100% adults so she started this initiative as a way to encourage families with preschools to get out and explore nature together. Shoemaker shared her concerns that a few Hike & Seek programs have had 1 or 2 people register and they have had to be cancelled so if they keep getting cancelled we will lose those who were interested and they will stop signing up. She sees 2026 as a make or break year for the program and asked for the help of ERAC to spread the word about the program. They are currently advertised in the program guide, through social media, on the website, and via a flier Shoemaker created and shared with Banneker Community Center to share with their open play participants. Our public programs attract a lot of adults and we reach a lot of schoolagers in After School Nature Club, Banneker Summer Nature Club, and our field trips, but we haven't found the right combination for preschoolers yet. The Council had questions about the days of the week and the time of the programs. Shoemaker responded that they happen at 10:00 a.m. in order to allow families with preschoolers and schoolagers to get their schoolagers to school and still have time to get to the program. The day of the week changes from month to month because families have different preschool schedules and we are trying to accommodate most of the families at least some of the time.

We will be partnering with US Fish and Wildlife to put on a 2-day Pollinator Habitat Workshop at Switchyard Park in May. This will be a more in depth version of the 1-day workshop we cohosted at Rogers Family Park last June. It is still free to the public, but participants have to commit to both days of programming. Also mark your calendars for Earth Day at Switchyard Park on April 18. Invitations for vendors have already gone out so if you know an organization that should be there and they haven't been invited, please let Shoemaker know. This year, the education team is developing a recycled games area to make the event more child-friendly. Music will be on the main stage and food trucks will also be on site.

Interviews are currently taking place for the boathouse staff. Staff will start in March and the boathouse will open the first weekend in April. The boathouse will have some changes in 2026 requiring a state or university issued ID to rent a boat and a few price increases. Rentals of watercrafts will be \$12 per hour and the annual launch permits will now have two separate prices. Non motorized boats will remain \$100 per year for the first permit and motorized boats will increase to \$125 per year for the first permit.

C-5 Project Updates

Swift needed to leave the meeting early so Agenda item C-5 was moved up during the meeting and was discussed after C-1.

The Rail Trail crossing at Rogers Street is close to completion. This crossing update will improve safety by removing an angled crosswalk and adding some solar powered pedestrian-controlled beacons. As soon as we get some warm temperatures and the snow melts, crosswalk striping will go in as well as a new street light. The Rail Trail will remain a natural surface trail, but a small section will be paved on each side of the road.

The multi use Power Line Trail has been 30 years in the making, and the project went out for bids prior to today's meeting. Six contractors have already reached out with interest and questions. This project is for a .9 mile trail from Rogers Street at Switchyard Park to RCA Community Park. It will end in a roundabout, but will hopefully eventually be continued through the Sudbury neighborhood, connect to the Mill Trail, and then connect to Clear Creek Trail for a continuous multi use paved loop. There will be a Rogers Street closure of approximately 2 weeks to construct a raised crosswalk. The glow in the dark rock for the trail is now in construction.

C-6 April Meeting agenda Items

A request was made to go into detail about the program guide schedule and how far in advance groups should plan for a partnership with Parks.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:48 p.m.

NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY, April 8, 2026

Winslow Woods Park Shelter