

## 1.1. BIODIVERSITY POLICY

### 1.1.1. POLICY STATEMENT

It shall be the policy of the Johnson County Park and Recreation District (District) to serve as an innovative and ecologically responsible land steward in its efforts to protect the District's biological diversity and ecological processes and systems (e.g. air, soil and water quality), particularly within the District's natural areas and linear corridors, by balancing the protection and enhancement of natural flora and fauna with increasing demands for quality public recreation experiences on District properties.

### 1.1.2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to affirm that the District values plant and wildlife habitat, ecosystem functions, natural heritage, general aesthetics, and community livability. To that end, this policy shall:

- A. Guide and direct the District's Board of Park and Recreation Commissioners (Board) and staff in optimally balancing the need to ensure the continuing availability of a diverse array of outdoor recreation experiences to the public while preserving, restoring, and enhancing the District's natural areas,
- B. Guide the District in its current and future application of management plans specifically related to natural resources including, but not limited to, the District's Master Action Plan "MAP 2020," Resource Management Plan, and various park master plans,
- C. Outline specific but adaptive procedures based on currently acceptable best practices to be undertaken to achieve the desired conditions intended by this policy, and
- D. Address specific threats to biodiversity on District properties as follows:
  - 1. Ecologically non-sustainable practices and materials, both on and off site, that contribute to the pollution of water, soil, and air and excess utilization of natural resources,
  - 2. Invasive species, both native and introduced flora and fauna (land and aquatic), upsetting the natural ecological balance,
  - 3. Reduction in the availability and regular use of scientifically proven vegetation control regimes (e.g. appropriate prescribed burning) due to cultural landscape changes and population growth in the District,
  - 4. Overpopulation of animals beyond the social and/or biological carrying capacity of the resource, which is often due to the lack of natural predators and/or the confined and limited habitat in a protected urban park system, with resulting negative impacts that include conflicts with humans and other wildlife and plant species, as well as health and safety hazards,
  - 5. Habitat loss and barriers to movement and migration due to land-use changes, which typically include the conversion of natural areas to more active and developed uses and the fragmentation of larger resource plots, and
  - 6. Reduced protection of the riparian vegetation corridor that directly affects the loss of habitat and water quality.

### 1.1.3. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The District shall develop, maintain, and/or implement a Resource Management Plan with *adaptive* procedures based on currently acceptable best practices to achieve the desired conditions intended by this policy.

- A. The Resource Management Plan shall include, but not be limited to:
  - 1. Biodiversity inventory/mapping/habitat assessments,

2. Overview of restoration and renovation areas,
3. Recommendations on monitoring methods for all categories of resource areas,
4. Maintenance standards for all categories,
5. Control of invasive vegetation species including sericea lespedeza, bush honeysuckle, garlic mustard, Johnson grass, Russian thistle, and other noxious weeds and problematic species not officially listed (e.g., red cedar), and
6. Endangered Species, Threatened Species, Species in Need of Conservation, and Critical Habitat.
  - a. The District shall provide diverse habitats including those that may provide essential physical and biological features necessary for the support of populations of species listed as endangered, threatened, and/or in need of conservation as determined by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDW&P) under Kansas State Statutes (K.S.A 32-957 through 32-963; K.S.A. 32-1009 through 32-1012, and K.S.A. 32-1033). (NOTE: Kansas law does not allow for the listing of plant species. Federal law is the only protector of plant species in Kansas.)
  - b. The District shall seek to assess, identify, and inventory properties for high-quality natural areas and remnant natural communities capable of hosting species that are endangered, threatened, and/or in need of conservation. If such plant and/or animal species are believed to be found on District properties, the following actions shall be taken:
    - (1) A recognized expert shall verify the existence of such species, and
    - (2) Upon verification, a specific management plan giving full consideration to the property's intended uses and District's mission shall be formulated with an effort to reclassify into a different maintenance category.

B. The Resource Management Plan shall contain the following components to address specific areas and/or resources of the District.

1. Nuisance Wildlife Plan

The Nuisance Wildlife Plan shall manage varying control categories and strategies related to overpopulation of deer, geese, rodents, beavers or other species. The plan shall also manage excessive wildlife populations to address health and safety concerns, conflicts with people and other wildlife, and the health of native plant communities. The plan shall be based on or include:

- a. Periodic and regular surveys completed by qualified professionals,
  - b. Sustainable population recommendations by professionals per regular survey data, and
  - c. Recommended control options as detailed in the Nuisance Wildlife Plan.
2. Forest Stewardship Plan

The Forest Stewardship Plan shall manage and protect the forested areas within the District's ownership that will be used for forest recreation uses, watershed management, and wildlife management benefits. Utilizing assistance from the Kansas Forest Service, this plan shall include an inventory of existing resources to determine which areas are in need of management in order to address specific concerns or issues related to fish and wildlife habitat, watershed improvements, forest recreation, and aesthetics. Individual prescriptions and recommendations shall be established within the Forest Stewardship Plan for specific parcels or areas as defined in the Resource Management Plan for each park site.

3. Prairie Stewardship Plan

The Prairie Stewardship Plan shall manage and protect pastures, fields, meadows, and other open areas of the District. The plan may include conversion of cool-season prairies to warm-season prairies through reintroduction or promotion of native grasses and forbs as defined in the Resource Management Plan for each park site. (For additional information, the Kansas Biological Service has produced a Hay Meadow Guide accessible at <http://www.kbs.ku.edu/assets/HayMeadowGuide.htm>.)

4. Riparian Areas, Lakes, and Wetlands Plan

The Riparian Areas, Lakes and Wetlands Plan shall manage and protect streams, creeks, rivers, open waters, wetlands, and associated riparian areas (waters) throughout the District to provide for a higher water quality of all District waters to maximize the potential habitat quality by fostering diverse native plant communities, both terrestrial and aquatic, and for public recreation and enjoyment. To this end, the District shall:

- a. Maximize opportunities to maintain or elevate water quality in the parks and assure that policies are designed to protect the natural resources of the waters and watersheds within the parks.
- b. Delineate the management responsibilities of the District, State, and County agencies responsible for management of waters.
- c. Take an “adaptive management” approach in reviewing the management plan to assure that best management practices provide natural resource protection and recreational opportunities.
- d. Inventory land use and zoning, management of shoreline, and vegetative buffer strips to ensuring management of land adjacent to waters is compatible with resource protection. In addition, inventory the nature and extent of human activities that negatively affect water quality and seek ways to limit or minimize the effects (point and non-point source pollution).

**1.1.4. BIODIVERSITY COMMITTEE**

A Biodiversity Committee shall be developed and maintained for the purposes of monitoring the District’s Biodiversity Policy and Resource Management Plan.

- A. The committee shall be comprised of 5-6 citizen members who have science and biology education backgrounds as assigned by the District Board and 4-5 District employees as assigned by the Director of Parks and Recreation.
- B. The committee will meet at least quarterly to evaluate the District’s biodiversity practices and, when necessary, identify suitable adaptations to ensure the health of the District’s natural resources.
- C. The committee will present an annual report to the District Board and make recommendations for revisions to the Biodiversity Policy and/or Resource Management Plan as necessary over time.