

**Recommendations for Incorporating Health Impact
Assessment During Implementation of the Sauk County
Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2020-2024**

Susan Gaeddert
MS Urban and Regional Planning
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Executive Summary

The Sauk County Board of Supervisors Land Resources and Environment (LRE) committee passed the Sauk County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP)¹ in January 2020. The Plan outlines priorities for park development, land acquisition, facilities, and recreation amenities in Sauk County properties through 2024. In this report, I argue that there are strategic points of intervention for Health Impact Assessment (HIA) during implementation of the CORP. The report includes context for outdoor recreation in Sauk County, the CORP, and how HIA is used in planning, particularly for parks and trails. Next, I propose that the Sauk County LRE department apply HIA during implementation over the next five years, in order to better align the Plan with health priorities in Sauk County, increase cross-department collaboration within the county, and bolster engagement and citizen support for the Plan. HIA is not relevant or useful for every goal, objective, and recommendation in the CORP. However, parts of the CORP include recommendations to amend the document with master plans for county properties and trails. These master plans are appropriate places for HIA, and I provide more detailed guidance for using the six-step HIA process during their development.

Introduction

This report is an exploration of applying Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to the Sauk County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) 2020-2024 during its implementation over the next five years. In the summer of 2019, I worked as an intern for the Sauk County Department of Land Resources and Environment, where I helped update and rewrite the County's CORP, which was due for an overhaul, a redesign, and a fresh round of public input. The CORP was approved by the Sauk County Board Land Resources and Environment Committee on January 21, 2020.

Access to parks, open spaces, trails, and opportunities for nature-based outdoor recreation are shown to positively impact a variety of health indicators, including physical activity, mental health, community social health, and supporting child play and development.² Planning for parks and trails already comes with the assumption that these projects will benefit community health, and the Sauk County CORP is no exception; the values statement in the CORP has community well-being at the top of the list. Why take the extra step of HIA? Because the application of HIA to park and trail planning, including the Sauk County CORP, can help ensure that projects are designed with community input and expertise to promote health, be fully accessible to vulnerable populations, address safety concerns, and remove barriers to implementation.

“Fair and equal access to nature-based outdoor recreation, regardless of age, gender, race, citizenship, socioeconomic status, sexuality, or disability status, benefits the well-being of the whole community. Furthermore, access to natural open space and trails has the potential for positive impact on community health, specifically outcomes related to mental health and obesity. Sauk County acknowledges the public health and community benefits of natural spaces and outdoor recreation, and strives to provide fair and equal access to all.”

-Community well-being statement from Sauk County CORP

This report begins with a brief introduction to Sauk County, the importance of outdoor recreation there, and the role of the CORP. The next section introduces HIA as a planning tool, and summarizes the body of work that has been done to incorporate HIA in park and trail plans across the United States. Finally, I propose a practical framework for conducting HIA on specific sections of the CORP, using established toolkits and other examples of park and trail HIAs as guidance.

Sauk County

Sauk County is located in south central Wisconsin, just northwest of the Madison metropolitan statistical area. Sauk County has many unusual geological features and natural areas which attract outdoor recreation enthusiasts from around the state. Devil’s Lake State Park and the Wisconsin Dells, located in the eastern portion of the county, have extensive recreational developments that attract millions of visitors annually. The western four-fifths of Sauk County is known as the Driftless Area and is so named because it was minimally impacted by past glacial activity. Sauk County’s hiking trails, multi-use trails, lakes, rivers and diverse wildlife habitat support a number of outdoor recreation activities.



Figure 1: Sauk County is located northwest of Madison, WI

The Sauk County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) 2020-2024

The Sauk County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) 2020-2024 establishes the County’s priorities for managing outdoor recreation opportunities for the five-year period from 2020 to 2024, and follows guidelines provided in the Wisconsin State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).³ The CORP is also necessary for eligibility for state stewardship grants and trail funding.

The process of developing the Sauk County CORP took place between April and August 2019. The CORP staff team developed goals and objectives based on public input, past versions of the CORP, and departmental knowledge of opportunities for the county.

Many of the goals and objectives were motivated by desire to expand economic opportunities for recreational tourism. Sauk County has much to offer visitors and residents, and is well-positioned to help meet the growing needs of the region’s recreation demands, both because of the County’s established parks, trails, and waterways, and its proximity to Madison.

To connect people to the rich natural, cultural, and historic resources of Sauk County, and create outstanding outdoor recreational opportunities now and in the future.

-Sauk County CORP Vision Statement

Sauk County CORP Goals and Objectives

Further Development of the County Park System

- Promote the establishment of a Friends of Sauk County Parks group
- Develop a 5-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to expand recreation opportunities and improve infrastructure
- Develop master plans for Sauk County Properties
- Increase staffing levels for parks and recreation in the Land Resources and Environment department

Resource Management and Stewardship

- Community education
- Improved water quality

Partnerships

- Expand county planning services
- Consider multiple outcomes when planning for cross-boundary recreation
- Intersect with other units of government and non-government organizations (NGOs)
- Leverage recreational and planning grants and other funding
- Future management of Man Mound Park and Yellow Thunder Memorial

Economic Development and Tourism

- Expansion of the Great Sauk State Trail
- Improve access to waterways
- Expansion of trails for motorized vehicles
- Promotion, branding, and marketing

Figure 2: Goals and objectives identified in the Sauk County CORP⁴

Planning and Health

Many circumstances that affect health outcomes are outside the control of the individual, such as where a person lives, plays, goes to school, or goes to work. These conditions that affect health risks and outcomes are known as “social determinants of health.”⁵ While healthcare and public health professionals are traditionally at the forefront of this knowledge, there has long been interest in various health-related topics across disciplines. This includes planning professionals, who can connect land-use patterns with health. Planners are often uniquely positioned to facilitate collaboration across many sectors of public service and private development, and prioritize public health in local decision-making. Some examples include: planning for disaster mitigation and climate change resilience, ensuring safe routes to schools, designing walkable neighborhoods, planning parks and green spaces, bike/pedestrian routes in new development, implementing policies that increase access to local produce, and more.

Economic development is only one benefit of expanding outdoor recreation opportunities. Research shows that access to parks, trails, and green space is associated with positive health outcomes.⁶ This has led to growing support for park and trail planning, outdoor education in schools, and planning for bicycle and pedestrian access in urban areas. One way to understand the health impacts of park, trail, and outdoor recreation planning is to conduct Health Impact Assessment (HIA). If Sauk County were to conduct HIA for specific development projects recommended in the CORP, benefits to community health would be prioritized along with economic development.

Health Impact Assessment

The American Planning Association (APA) describes HIA as “a process that brings public health considerations into decision-making.”⁷ To identify both positive and negative potential impacts to public health, the HIA process involves gathering information from many sources, including scientific data, stakeholder input, and expertise from health professionals. HIA is a process that is applicable to a wide range of decisions, and is certainly not exclusive to planning; however, it is estimated that “approximately one third of all HIAs completed in the U.S. between 2000 and 2014 looked at planning decisions to better understand their impacts on the health of neighborhoods and communities.”⁸

There are many advantages to incorporating HIA into planning processes and decision-making. First, HIA uses data to help make good decisions and focus implementation of plans. Second, HIA requires input from stakeholders and the public. This helps form a complete picture of a community and incorporates citizen voice into decision-making. Third, HIA requires careful examination of the effects of plans, projects, and policies on vulnerable populations, and groups who may be marginalized due to age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, or disability. Finally, planners know that the formation of plans and policies often generate conflict within a community. Involving the public in HIA helps reframe contentious issues and work through that conflict in an open and transparent way.⁹

There is precedent for HIA in parks, open space, and outdoor recreation planning. As of this writing (March 2020), the Pew Trust HIA resource webpage lists 74 example reports of HIAs for parks and green space planning.¹⁰ Most of the sample reports are for urban areas, and several are trail projects. Two HIAs that were conducted in Wisconsin could serve as models for Sauk County: *Marquette County Ice Age National Scenic Trail Expansion Health Impact Assessment* from 2011¹¹, and *Nine Springs Golf Course - Potential Park Use Master Plan* from 2014.¹²

Application of HIA to Parks and Trails in Wisconsin

The **Marquette County Ice Age National Scenic Trail Expansion Health Impact Assessment** is the first and only HIA used by a county planning for expansion of the Ice Age Trail (IAT). HIA “served as a platform for building partnerships in the trail development process and trail implementation planning.” Overall, the HIA looked at the following outcomes and determinants: **physical activity, trail infrastructure, economic impact, and social connectedness**. These were intended to address specific issues in Marquette County, including low physical activity, obesity, poor nutrition, drug and alcohol use, and the like. The report concluded that expanding the IAT, which would add 30 miles of trail to Marquette County, would increase physical activity and social connectedness, especially with targeted trail-related programming, as well as have a positive economic impact through increased property values and economic activity.

The **Nine Springs Golf Course - Potential Park Use Master Plan** includes the HIA as an appendix. In contrast to the Marquette County IAT expansion, which was a county-wide effort, the Nine Springs Golf Course Master Plan was created for a 33-acre site in Fitchburg, Wisconsin. The HIA focuses on four census block groups (CBGs) surrounding the Nine Springs Golf Course, of which three are in Fitchburg, and one is in Madison. The demographics of the four CBGs are more racially and ethnically diverse than Fitchburg and Madison as a whole, and reflect school poverty rates that are much higher than the city-wide average. Priority areas identified in the HIA focus on **reducing health inequities**, and include **physical activity, social cohesion, safety, and environmental health**.

Figure 3: Examples of Parks and Trails HIA in WI

HIA requires collaboration between relevant departments (public health, parks, planning, etc.), other experts in the field (leadership from local health clinics, for example), stakeholders (such as nonprofit groups supporting conservation efforts or trail-building), local political leaders (such as a representative from the County Board), and members of the public. The combination of local leadership, expertise, and public input helps ensure that an HIA both reflects the priorities of the local community, and bolsters public support for plans and policies as they are implemented.

Application of HIA to the Sauk County CORP 2020-2024

The Sauk County Land Resources and Environment (LRE) department is responsible for writing and amending the CORP, and leading its implementation. Ongoing public engagement will ensure that the CORP is implemented effectively; this also presents the opportunity to align the goals and objectives with community health and well-being. HIA requires consideration of marginalized population groups who otherwise may not benefit from the expansion of parks, trails, and outdoor recreation in Sauk County. In order to conduct an HIA, Sauk County will need to form a coalition or advisory committee and follow the standard HIA process.

Fortunately, there are HIA toolkits and training materials available from several national organizations. The national Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Planning Association (APA) have both developed HIA toolkits that are useful for outdoor recreation planning at the local level. The CDC offers an HIA toolkit specific to Parks and Trails.¹³ The APA HIA toolkit is intended for planners, of course, but does not focus on any specific area of planning.¹⁴ Both the CDC and APA outline the same six steps for conducting HIA, followed by more detailed guidelines for carrying out the process.

Six Steps of Health Impact Assessment:

1. Screening
2. Scoping
3. Assessing Risks and Benefits
4. Developing Recommendations
5. Reporting
6. Monitoring and Evaluation

The remainder of this report is an examination of the six steps of HIA and how they could be applied to the Sauk County CORP during implementation over the next five years. While using HIA for outdoor recreation planning projects is not unheard of, it is not particularly common, and the goal of this report is to offer recommendations to make the process less daunting. The framework that follows draws from both the CDC and APA toolkits, includes data from other relevant Sauk County documents and reports, and is specially adapted for the Sauk County CORP 2020-2024.

“It is the mission of the Sauk County Parks and Recreation service area to acquire, develop, protect and maintain our parks and facilities for all citizens and to provide outdoor recreational opportunities that contribute to the well-being of individuals and families.”

-Sauk County Parks and Recreation mission statement

Step 1: Screening

Would an HIA be useful? If all the decisions have been made, an HIA is probably not appropriate. If HIA findings most likely would not change any decisions, an HIA would not be useful.

The initial step is to determine whether or not conducting HIA is appropriate and useful for a plan or project. Because the Sauk County CORP is a comprehensive document that covers many topic areas, the screening step is important for determining what parts of the CORP should be assessed for health impact.

The public engagement process and draft writing for the Sauk County CORP took place primarily during the late spring and summer months of 2019. Revisions were made in the fall before final approval by the Land Resources and Environment oversight committee in January 2020. The important decision of whether or not to approve the CORP has already been made. Had HIA been conducted during the development of the CORP, it is likely that community health priorities would be reflected in specific goals and objectives of the plan, and may have been identified as a separate priority area, much like economic development and tourism. However, the CORP is in effect through 2024, which leaves room for HIA during implementation. The HIA process is an opportunity to reach groups of people who were not directly involved in developing the CORP, but who are considered stakeholder for health assessment practices. Appendix A includes a full list of the goals and objectives from the Sauk County CORP and assessment of their potential to impact health outcomes.

Among the recommendations appropriate for HIA are trail expansion, water trail development, a county park capital improvement plan, and master plans for county park properties. These would all be developed separately and attached to the CORP as amendments, which presents an excellent opportunity for conducting HIA to align implementation of the CORP with public health interests in Sauk County. HIA will help guide important decisions for each of these plans, such as where to locate routes and access points for trails, how to approach outreach and programming in county parks, and designing facilities for inclusive access. This report focuses on expansion of the Great Sauk State Trail (GSST) and master plans for county properties as examples for the HIA process.

Health Factors for Adults in Sauk County

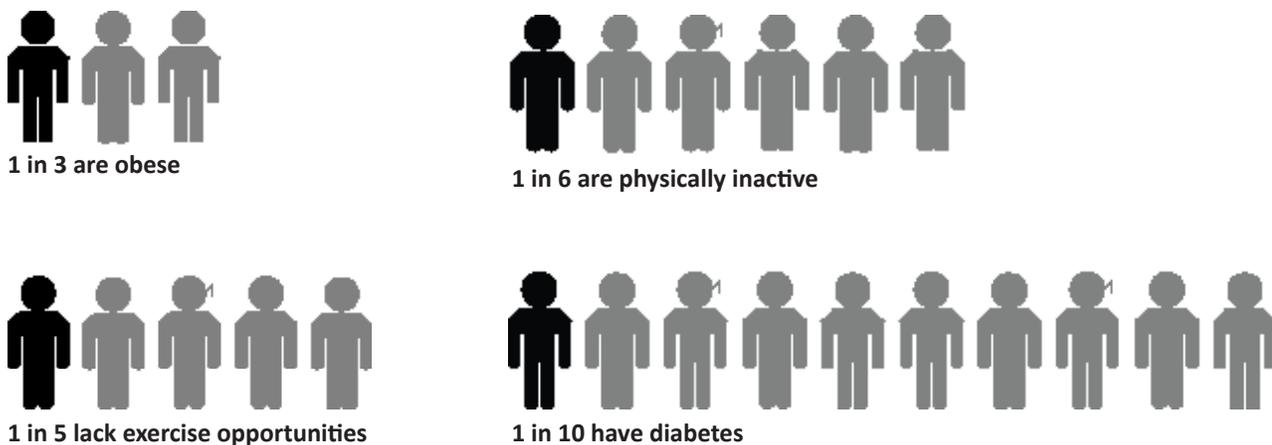


Figure 4: 2019 data from countyhealthrankings.org

“Health and wellness is integral to all aspects of outdoor recreation, and infuses all of the goals and objectives of the CORP, from expanding opportunities for exercise through bicycle trails, to protecting water quality in the interest of public health, to building community by sponsoring events at county parks. For this reason, ‘health and wellness’ is not identified as a separate goal or priority, but is a lens through which the objectives are informed in the CORP.”

-Sauk County CORP 2020-2024²²

The Sauk County Health Department, in conjunction with the Sauk County Health and Wellness Coalition, conducts a Health Needs Assessment and Improvement Plan every three years. The most recent Health Needs Assessment (HNA) was completed in 2018, and identifies three priorities of focus: 1) Mental Health; 2) Alcohol and Other Drugs, and; 3) Healthy Activity and Nutrition.¹⁵ These priorities have the potential to intersect with goals and objectives of the CORP to improve health outcomes in those domains. It is important to note that an HIA is not necessarily restricted to measuring only the top priorities from the HNA, but should include other measures of health outcomes that are relevant to the particular plan being assessed.

The screening step also entails consideration of resources available to conduct HIA, including a general timeline and budget allotment for staff time, stakeholder meetings, data collection and analysis, and evaluation. Plans for the GSST and county properties will be developed over a certain timeframe, during which HIA can be incorporated into the planning process. The table below suggests stakeholder groups to include in the HIA.

Table1: Recommended stakeholder groups

Expansion of the Great Sauk State Trail (GSST)	Master Plans for County Properties
Great Sauk State Trail Commission	Association of Sauk County Snowmobile Clubs
Friends of the Great Sauk State Trail	Lake protection district associations
Ho Chunk Nation	Law Enforcement
Law Enforcement	Reedsburg Area Medical Center
Park Departments in Baraboo and Reedsburg	Sauk County ADRC
Reedsburg Area Medical Center	Sauk County Board of Supervisors LRE Oversight Committee
Sauk County ADRC	Sauk County Health Department
Sauk County Board of Supervisors LRE Oversight Committee	Sauk County LRE Department (including park and planning staff)
Sauk County Health Department	Sauk Prairie Healthcare
Sauk County LRE Department (including park and planning staff)	SSM - St. Clare Hospital, Baraboo
Sauk Prairie Healthcare	
SSM - St. Clare Hospital, Baraboo	

Step 2: Scoping

Identify which health effects to consider and by what methods.

During the Scoping step, the HIA team develops a framework and timeline for research. This includes the identification of which health effects to consider, development of research questions and a plan for answering them, determination of roles and responsibilities for each member of the team, and a more detailed plan for stakeholder and public engagement. Research questions should be developed around specific, measurable impacts to both individual and community health. These in turn will help define the goals and objectives of the HIA, which can be tracked and evaluated according to the specific metrics determined in the scoping step.

The goals and objectives from the Sauk County CORP identified in Step 1 will guide the formation of research questions in Step 2. Master plans for county properties are comprehensive documents that may have broader impact, while plans for individual trail projects will likely have more specialized research questions. Regardless, according to best practice, the scoping step is when “the range of health issues to be examined in the HIA must be clearly defined,” and must also include an evaluation of potential inequities based on characteristics such as age, gender, race, and income.¹⁶ The APA recommends choosing between two to five impacts to consider in order to maintain focus during the assessment process.¹⁷

Any HIA conducted in Sauk County should prioritize the community health needs identified in the Health Needs Assessment. Partnering with the Public Health department will be a key part of the process, particularly for data collection and analysis. The scoping phase could easily become too ambitious, so it is important to consider available resources and staff capacity for collecting and analyzing data, as well as stakeholder and community engagement. HIA that focuses on a few strategic priorities is preferable to a long list of impacts that are cumbersome to track and evaluate. Below are suggestions for measurable health impacts to consider for the GSST and county property master plans. Note that the table below merely contains suggestions; more detailed research questions should be determined during the scoping step. A logic model or scoping diagram developed by the HIA team will also help visually map the impacts of various indicators.

Table 2: Suggested impacts for consideration

Expansion of the Great Sauk State Trail (GSST)	Master Plans for County Properties
Effect of new miles of trail infrastructure on physical activity	Evaluation of accessibility for individuals with limited physical mobility (such as older adults or disabled individuals)
Effect of new miles of trail infrastructure on social cohesion	Effect of recreation opportunities and programming at county parks on social cohesion
Safety considerations at highway intersections	Health impact of water quality to water-based recreation activities

Step 3: Assessing Risks and Benefits

Identify who might be affected and how they might be affected. Use data and research to determine the likelihood, direction, magnitude, and distribution of potential health effects.

During the assessment step, data is collected and analyzed to determine potential impacts of a project or policy. Qualitative and quantitative data are used to describe current conditions for the areas of focus defined during scoping. Data can come from existing reports, data clearinghouse resources (such as the U.S. census), local expertise, data from stakeholder meetings and focus groups, public surveys, and comparisons with peer communities. Additionally, a review of available literature should be conducted on topics identified in the scoping step. This phase of assessment can be overwhelming, which is why it is important to define the scope of the HIA carefully during step 2.

Next, for each health determinant under consideration, the direction (positive or negative), likelihood, magnitude, severity, and distribution of impact is assessed. The APA recommends looking ahead to the reporting step during the assessment phase to help prioritize indicators and data collection methods.¹⁸ Ultimately, HIA is only useful if the results can be communicated clearly to the public and to people with decision-making power.

Below is a sample chart summarizing findings from the assessment step

Table 3: Sample chart of assessment findings

Health Outcome	Direction and Extent of Impact	Likelihood of Impact	Distribution of Impact	Quality of Evidence
<i>Examples: Trail Infrastructure, Social Connection, Disabled Access, etc.</i>	<i>Positive Impact:</i> <i>Negative Impact:</i> 	<i>Choose from one of the following:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely Possible Unlikely Uncertain 	<i>Name of subpopulation impacted more (i.e. children, elderly, residents near the trail, racial minorities, etc.)</i>	<i>*** Strong: 3 or more studies supporting evidence</i> <i>** Good: fewer than 3 studies with supporting evidence</i> <i>*No clear studies, but consistent with principles of public health</i>

Source: *Nine Springs Golf Course HIA*¹⁹

Step 4: Developing Recommendations

Suggest changes to proposals to promote positive health effects or minimize adverse health effects.

Ultimately, HIA recommendations come out of the work conducted during screening, scoping, and assessment, and include details for implementation. It is also useful to know what best practices have been established. Below are examples of suggested recommendations, some of which are adapted from the CDC toolkit.²⁰ Note that the recommendations in an HIA report should include site-specific details and directives for implementation.

Table: 4: Suggestions for HIA recommendations

Expansion of the Great Sauk State Trail (GSST)	Master Plans for County Properties
Connectivity and access to trails from communities in Sauk County: links to Baraboo River water trail and Ice Age Trail, frequent access points, signage	Inclusive access for disabled and/or elderly individuals: boat ramps, restrooms, paved trails, fishing piers, paratransit, seating, adaptive playgrounds
Safety considerations at highway intersections: visibility, traffic calming, signage	Multi-functional park sites: variety of amenities, diverse programming, multi-use trails
Equitable access for marginalized populations: inclusive participation during planning, walking access from neighborhoods	Safety consideration: alcohol and drug use, lighting, emergency call boxes
Social cohesion: events, partnerships with local institutions, planned activities with health focus	Water quality: native plantings, low/no pesticide use, minimal loose soil on trails

Step 5: Reporting

Present results to decision makers and the public.

At the conclusion of the HIA, a report should be written and presented to the appropriate oversight committees from the Sauk County Board of Supervisors, such as Aging, Disability, and Resource Center (ADRC) and Land Resources and Environment (LRE). If HIA is included as an amendment to a master plan, reporting to oversight committees and the public could be folded in with general reporting of the entire plan. Once approved, HIA should be published on the Sauk County website.

Step 6: Evaluation and Monitoring

Determine whether the HIA will affect public health decisions and the actual effects of those decisions.

HIA is only effective if it is an active document with regular monitoring and evaluation. In order to make this step as efficient and effective as possible, Sauk County staff should find opportunities to incorporate monitoring and evaluation with processes that are already established, such as the Health Needs Assessment conducted every 3 years by the health department. This section should include recommendations and timelines for tracking data to determine the actual impact of plans to community health. The following are a few suggestions for trackable metrics:

Table 5: Suggested metrics for tracking progress

Expansion of the Great Sauk State Trail (GSST)	Master Plans for County Properties
Trail-related emergency calls to law enforcement	Self-reported mental health data in the next Sauk County HNA in 2021
Trail user surveys	Park user surveys
Number of local (Sauk County) trail users	Water quality testing

Conclusion

The intersection of public health with parks and trails planning is an area of research and practice that deserves more attention. Increasingly, communities are tackling complex health issues by approaching them from many different sectors of policy-making, including planning.²¹ HIA is one way to make planning projects and policies more robust, including local plans for parks, trails, open spaces and outdoor recreation. Working with stakeholders and experts to form research questions, collect data, make recommendations, and monitor impact all contribute to ensuring that important - and often expensive - decisions about acquiring land and building infrastructure for parks and trails are made with the best evidence and community priorities at the forefront.

Sauk County, poised to expand and develop the county park system, is well-positioned to make HIA part of the work of implementing the goals and objectives in the Sauk County CORP. Expanded trails and new parks have the potential to improve the health and well-being of Sauk County residents. Incorporating HIA into plans for the GSST expansion, master plans for county parks, and other CORP goals and objectives will help define a clear path for implementation and promote stakeholder and citizen involvement during the process.

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Appendix A

Full Screening of Sauk County CORP 2020-2024 Goals and Objectives for HIA

The following goals and objectives from the Sauk County CORP have the potential to impact health outcomes. (This is not a complete list of goals and objectives in the Sauk County CORP; those that have no direct impact on health are not included.) Some objectives, while potentially beneficial for community health, are too general or broad in scope to be appropriate for HIA. Other objectives are appropriate for HIA because they include specific directives for infrastructure, amenities, and programs that could be measured and evaluated for health impact. Each item listed below is further assessed for viability for an HIA.

Priority Area 1: Further Development of the County Park System

Objective: Promote the Establishment of a Friends of Sauk County Parks Group

Rationale for consideration: Volunteer organizations such as Friends groups are essential to the success of many parks and public institutions. They provide volunteers, raise money, promote stewardship, assist with communication, and help maintain a relationship between parks and the broader community.

HIA? No. A Friends of Sauk County Parks group could coordinate and promote programs and volunteer experiences that benefit community health. However, the scope and purpose of a Friends group are too broad to justify conducting an HIA as part of this process.

Objective: Develop a 5-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to Expand Recreation Opportunities and Improve Infrastructure

Rationale for consideration: Any changes to infrastructure should take into consideration health and safety standards, ADA compliance, and resilience to the effects of climate change. Additional recreation opportunities and adding more parks to the inventory will increase access for Sauk County residents.

HIA? Yes. A CIP is essentially a budget document that prioritizes permanent infrastructure changes and improvements county-wide. Any significant infrastructure project should include measures of specific health impacts to help guide implementation.

Objective: Develop Master Plans for Sauk County Properties

Rationale for consideration: Similar to the 5-year CIP, the master planning process identifies needs for individual properties, including infrastructure and consideration for future amenities and recreation opportunities. A master plan also includes a budget and timeline for prioritizing projects.

HIA? Yes. An HIA should be conducted for any master plan for a Sauk County property because changes or updates to infrastructure, amenities, and recreational opportunities have a direct bearing on health impacts.

Priority Area 2: Resource Management and Stewardship

Objective: Community Education

Rationale for consideration: This objective includes recommendations to pursue a “bird city” designation for all of Sauk County, partner with local nonprofits for outreach and volunteer opportunities, and pursue programs and events that promote resource stewardship, outdoor recreation, and physical and mental wellness.

HIA? No. While community education initiatives can certainly include coordination and promotion of events and activities that support community health, this objective is too broad for an HIA to be appropriate or effective. However, proposals for specific programs and partnerships targeting physical and mental wellness, though not outlined in the CORP, could benefit from HIA. Additionally, because HIA requires community engagement and stakeholder input, the process of conducting HIA for other aspects of the CORP may inadvertently benefit this objective.

Objective: Improved Water Quality

Rationale for consideration: Surface water quality is an ongoing concern in Sauk County, with several lakes and waterways listed as high priority on the Wisconsin DNR’s Impaired Waters List. Much of the pollution originates from phosphorous and sediments from erosion and non-point source pollution. This leads to algal blooms in lakes and fish contamination, all of which significantly impact outdoor recreation because of the threat to human health. There are continuing efforts to improve water quality in collaboration with the Sauk County conservation staff, the Baraboo River Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), state and federal programs, local nonprofit organizations, and individual landowners.

HIA? No. There are many programs and collaborative efforts already underway, and HIA would likely only duplicate efforts to manage data related to water quality improvements.

Priority Area 3: Partnerships

No objectives in this priority area were appropriate for HIA.

Priority Area 4: Economic Development & Tourism

Objective: Expansion of the Great Sauk State Trail (GSST)

Rationale for consideration: This objective includes a recommendation to develop a master plan for the next segment of the GSST and including it as an amendment to the CORP. The Great Sauk State Trail (GSST) is a multi-use trail connecting the Sauk Prairie community to Devil’s Lake State Park. Plans are underway to extend the trail so that it connects with larger trail systems statewide: east into Dane County on a bridge over the Wisconsin River to connect with the Walking Iron Trail; from Devil’s Lake State Park into Baraboo, where it will overlap with the Ice Age Trail; and to Reedsburg, where it will meet the “400” State Trail. Eventually, the GSST will be part of a state-wide trail system that will make it possible to travel from Milwaukee to La Crosse by bicycle.

HIA? Yes. Recreational trails have great potential to positively impact public health and improve quality of life for the communities in which they are built. Additionally, any master plan for a recreational trail requires significant public engagement and stakeholder input. The existing segment of the GSST has had a positive impact on the tourism economy and has generally been considered good for the local economy. Any future development of the GSST should also include an HIA.

Objective: Improve Access to Waterways

Rationale for consideration: Two phases of a plan for the Baraboo River Corridor were completed in 2016 and 2019, respectively. Phase I (2016) provided recommendations to improve water quality and enhance recreational use of the River Corridor. Phase II (2019) includes recommendations for improving water access points, community-specific conceptual plans, and guidelines for development in floodplains. This objective includes a recommendation to form a commission to carry out

implementation of Phases I and II of the Baraboo River Corridor Plan. Communities along the Corridor are enthusiastic about the potential for economic development related to a water trail, especially in areas where it intersects with other recreational trails such as the GSST.

HIA? Yes. Health impacts of river trails have the extra complications of water quality, safety hazards such as logjams, and the need for emergency services. An HIA would assist in decision-making related to development along the river trail.

Conclusion

The following objectives from the Sauk County CORP are appropriate for HIA:

- Develop a 5-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to Expand Recreation Opportunities and Improve Infrastructure
- Develop Master Plans for Sauk County Properties
- Expansion of the Great Sauk State Trail (GSST)
- Improve Access to Waterways

Appendix B

Sauk County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) 2020-2024

See attached document, or click on the link below:

https://www.co.sauk.wi.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/land_resources_and_environment/page/97611/scorp_2020-2024.pdf