



Friends of Dicken Woods



Dicken Woods Vision Statement and Stewardship Plan

Prepared by Friends of Dicken Woods

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Dicken Woods Nature Area Vision Statement

Through mutual collaboration between the Friends of Dicken Woods, the City of Ann Arbor Parks & Recreation Department, Dicken Elementary School, and other stakeholders, Dicken Woods Nature Area will be maintained and improved as an ecological, educational, and recreational community asset.

This will be accomplished through a combination of the following objectives and activities:

- Provide directed classroom grants in the form of money or other resources to not only enhance the enjoyment and learning of Dicken Elementary students but also
 - Promote the understanding of the plants and trees in Dicken Woods
 - Promote the understanding of the birds and animals in Dicken Woods
 - Promote the understanding of the importance of preserving wildlife habitats
 - Provide supervised and structured walks in the woods
 - Enhance the quality of the nature area

- Provide regular opportunities for service projects of mutual benefit to Dicken Woods and volunteer organizations or individuals. Solicit monetary or in-kind grants from local or national organizations to support Ann Arbor Parks, NAP, FoDW, or other service projects. Target service organizations include, but are not limited to:
 - FoDW volunteers
 - Scouting units that meet at Dicken Elementary
 - Local Eagle Scout candidates

- Provide an inviting impression of the nature area to the public through
 - Planning & implementing perimeter & point of access improvements
 - ❖ Perennial garden in front of Maple/Pauline sign
 - ❖ Poison ivy removal along Maple sidewalk
 - ❖ Buckthorn removal along perimeter ???
 - ❖ Removal of brush piles visible from Maple on paved path to Dicken
 - ❖ Removal of guard rail from end of Dicken
 - Frequent trash removal on the park perimeter and interior areas
 - Regular trail maintenance (chips, edging, brush trimming)
 - Immediate cleanup of trash, junk, or yard waste dumped in or adjacent to the nature area, accompanied by immediate (tasteful but convincing) postings. [Note - such “postings” are in keeping with NAP policy, and are not to be confused with permanent signage]
 - Immediate repair of storm damage (fallen trees, stream crossings)
 - Signs identifying the nature area at strategic locations

- Introduction of appropriate plantings at strategic locations (e.g., bushes at Pauline/Maple nature area sign or naturalizing daffodil plantings in front of that sign)
 - Tasteful directional or informational signs
- Provide access and egress within the nature area to citizens of all ages through
 - Avoiding trail routes on cross-slopes
 - Maintaining woodchips on the trails to for a clean and safe walking surface
 - Provide corduroy log walks or boardwalks where the trails cross streams or seasonal ponds or wetlands
- Maintain or enhance the quality of plants and trees in the nature area through
 - Identifying existing desirable species and encouraging their growth by clearing around them (e.g., oak - hickory groves and specimen trees) or routing trails around them to prevent damage (e.g., trout lily)
 - Identifying and removing invasive species (e.g., buckthorn, oriental bittersweet, honeysuckle, multi-flora rose, Dames Rocket). Volunteer activities involving the use of herbicides shall be coordinated through NAP and the NAP Steward program.
 - Introducing wildflower and plant species in selected areas that will enhance butterfly habitats
 - Introducing desirable trees and/or ground cover plants in ash groves that are affected by the emerald ash borer so that the vacant space will not be overrun by unwanted invasive species.
- Maintain or enhance the quality of the wildlife habitat in the nature area through
 - Proper disposition of fallen trees and cleared brush
 - Leaving dead trees standing if they are not a safety hazard
 - Managed introduction of man-made habitats (e.g., bat houses, screech owl houses, butterfly houses)
- Maintain the area as a safe place to walk and play, through
 - Eliminating or not introducing attractive nuisances that will be used for unintended and unwanted purposes (e.g., seating that is attractive as permanent homeless campsites, picnic or trash containers)
 - Maintaining an egress buffer adjacent to Dicken Elementary and private homes by avoiding “cut-through” paths. (NAP experience with such paths is that they are typically used by “non-users” of the nature area and can quickly become irreversible shortcuts for mountain bikes and dirt bikes.)
 - Fostering and encouraging constant use of the nature area by neighborhood walkers
- Support NAP’s Nature Area Steward Program

1-Year Plan Priorities (2006)

The following are FoDW 2006 priorities involving planning and in-park activities that will directly alter or affect the Dicken Woods Nature Area property. These activities will be the focus for the April 29 Spring Cleanup Day, September 30 NAP Volunteer Work Day, fall weekly work days, and FoDW fundraising activities in 2006 (* items are candidates for scout group service projects):

- Establish “interest groups” to facilitate multitasking in-woods activities (e.g., storm damage tree felling, wildflower seed gathering)
- Clear and prepare soil for butterfly garden at the end of Carol Drive in support of the 2005-2006 Dicken classroom grants *
- Chip maintenance for west trail loop (spring or summer)
- Start an early fall collaborative chip day with Dicken Elementary
- Continue wildflower seed gathering & planting program *
- Complete plans for and finish “frog pond” area remediation (includes relocating 2 bushes planted in 2005 that are under water in the spring)*
- Rebuild log stream crossing on west trail loop with larger logs *
- Move some of the larger fallen trees to edge of trails *
- Remove guard rail from end of Dicken
- Provide input to NAP on “wayfinding sign”
- Develop plan for other desired permanent informational park signage
- Consider more permanent replacement for deteriorated map signs *
- Install a directional “Exit to Dicken” post at 4-way trail intersection *
- Place postings on “rogue” trails in stream beds to discourage use and to prevent long-term erosion problems
- Inventory trees that are “keepers”, prioritize the areas, remove invasive species in the highest priority areas, and apply herbicide to stumps. Coordinate with NAP for fall work day (may be a candidate for a city-owned chipper)
- Plant naturalizing daffodil bulbs in front of Pauline/Maple sign (fall) *

2-5 year Priorities

- New boardwalk over east stream crossing
- Start ash tree clearing remediation
- Continue inventorying, protecting “keeper” trees, & invasive removal
- Complete permanent signage projects
- Complete initial perimeter improvements (invasives, plantings, butterfly gardens, wildflower areas)

Site Overview

Geographic Information

Dicken Woods Nature Area is located in west central Ann Arbor at the headwaters of the Allen Creek and Mallets Creek watersheds. It is bounded by Pauline Boulevard and a wooded portion of the Walden Village Condominium property to the north, South Maple Road to the west, residential homes on Stephen Terrace and Carol Drive to the east, and Dicken Elementary School and several residential homes to the south. It is a 10.14-acre park with a bisected central loop trails accessed from the end of Dicken Drive, and serves as a valuable recreational area and outdoor classroom for children and people of all ages. A heavily traveled chipped footpath with a boardwalk over a seasonal wetland connects the ends of Dicken and Carol Drives, and a branch of this trail extends into the Dicken schoolyard using a network of smaller boardwalks on the school property.

Geology and Physiography

Dicken Woods is a glaciated landscape. It is located within the Fort Wayne terminal moraine, which was created by the retreat of the Wisconsin glacier approximately 14,000 years ago. The park has gently rolling terrain with elevations ranging from a high of 988 feet near Maple Road to a low of 955 feet near the northeast corner of the property. The wooded parcel has 33 feet of vertical relief and contains slopes that vary from 2 to 12 percent. There are three wetland areas within the park. The first is located in the southwest quadrant (near Maple Road) at elevation 978-979 feet and supports a wet meadow. This 0.70 acre wetland extends through a vernal stream to the northeast corner of the park (near Pauline Boulevard) at elevation 949. A second 0.54 acre wetland and vernal pond is located in the southeast quadrant and extends south onto the Dicken Elementary property and extends to the north along the east property line to the northeast corner of the property. A third 0.28 acre wetland and vernal pond is located in the northwest quadrant along Pauline Boulevard and drains along Pauline to a low area in the Walden Village property adjacent to the northeast corner of Dicken Woods. Some small depressional areas exist on site that are subject to seasonal flooding.

Biotic Communities

Approximately 60 percent of the Dicken Woods land area is covered by woodland containing young to medium aged trees. Portions of the woodland in the northwest, northeast, and east central sectors is higher quality woodland having Basal Readings from 70 to 100 ft²/acre. This portion of the woodland meets the characteristics of a Pioneer Woodland. In addition, brush covers about 40% of the property, and three wetlands (totaling 1.52 acres), occur within the wooded and brushy areas. Although a shrubby strip of brush is present on site as a southwest-to-northeast diagonal area and along the perimeter adjacent to Maple Road and Pauline Boulevard, not all of the woodlands consist of invasive tree and shrub species. Only the shrubby brush contains the invasive shrub thorny buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) and an occasional honeysuckle. Grey dogwood, small American elm, and some hawthorn also occur within the areas of brush. In contrast, within the wooded area, there is a diversity of tree species, including white oak, red oak, American elm, silver maple, red maple, hop hornbeam, black walnut, shagbark hickory, cottonwood, and white ash. Some old and dead apple trees also occur

in the southwestern portion of the property. In general, the park contains five different communities: oak-hickory woods, walnut-ash-elm woodland, shrub thicket, old field, and wetlands (including a wet meadow and vernal ponds).

1. Late successional **oak-hickory woods** (dry-mesic forest) are found in the northeast section of the park on well-drained slopes. Dry forests, such as this one, can be found growing on sites with very good drainage, usually in areas with a layer of glacial outwash underlying the soil. The dominant tree species found here are: Shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*), white oak (*Quercus alba*), and black oak (*Quercus velutina*). The understory is a combination of early successional overstory species and competing invasive common buckthorn.
2. A **walnut-ash-elm woodland** community exists in the northwestern quadrant of Dicken Woods. The walnut grove stands on the higher ground and slopes, with mature cottonwoods located in the poorly drained bottomland that is subject to flooding in the spring. Black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), white ash (*Fraxinus Americana*), American elm (*Ulmus Americana*), and cottonwood (*Populus Deltoides*) characterize this late successional stand. The entire Dicken Woods ash tree population has been infested by the Emerald Ash Borer and is expected to die off over the next several years.
3. A dry **shrub thicket** can be found growing in the southeastern and northern areas of Dicken Woods. Once an open and disturbed site (farmstead including orchard and garden crop areas), it is now thick with woody species. The dominant overstory species is common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), an aggressive exotic shrub introduced from Europe. Common understory species include gray dogwood (*Cornus foemina*), buckthorn, and an occasional honeysuckle (*Lonicera sp.*)
4. In the north-central portion of Dicken Woods exists an **old field** community. It is a small but relatively open site with a mixture of wildflowers, grasses and scattered shrubs. Smooth aster (*Aster laevis*), showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*), and thimbleweed (*Anemone virginiana*) can be found growing in this open sunny area. This site is also characterized by early successional species including common black raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*). Exotics such as buckthorn and Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*) are also abundant in this community.
5. Wetlands
A **wet meadow** is located near the southwestern corner of Dicken Woods. Found in low wet areas, wet meadows are open sites with few shrubs or trees. Standing water is common through the spring and early summer, but not year round, even though the soil is always very moist. Dominant species here include tiel and a seasonal yellow flower, Inula helenium. The wet meadow can be seen from but not directly accessed from the west trail loop.

This wet meadow is part of the 0.7 acre wetland stretching from the southwest corner diagonally to the northeast corner of the park. This wetland exhibits considerable

diversity of vegetation, including *Carex sedge*, slender rush, reed canary grass, tall goldenrod, wild grape, silky dogwood, honeysuckle, small American elm, a few highbush cranberry shrubs, glossy buckthorn, grey dogwood, and small silver maple trees.

The wetlands in the northwest and southeast quadrants of the property also exhibit a diversity of vegetation, but are forested wetlands populated with eastern cottonwood, red (green) ash, black willow, silver maple, and red maple trees.

Two small **vernal ponds** are located in Dicken Woods, one in the northwest corner and the other straddling the Dicken Elementary property line at the southeast corner. The seasonal ponds receive water solely from precipitation and runoff from the surrounding terrain, i.e., there is no source of flowing water such as a stream or spring. As a result, the ponds dry up in the summer creating an unsuitable environment for fish, frogs, and salamanders. The southeast pond is a seasonal breeding area for a pair of mallard ducks.

Wildlife

Because of the many different communities found in Dicken Woods, it is home to a variety of animals. Both the woodlands and the areas of brush support a variety of small mammals as well as considerable bird life. Through direct observation and snow track identification, neighbors and park users have observed fox squirrels, red squirrels, cottontail rabbits, a red fox, skunks, and white-tailed deer. Screech owls have been heard at night. In addition, birds species that have been observed or heard on site include red-tailed hawk, migrating yellow warbler, wren, blue jay, hermit thrush, redstart, sparrow (including chipping sparrow & song sparrow), robin, catbird, cedar waxwing, cardinal, black-capped chickadee, grosbeak, indigo bunting, a variety of finches (including goldfinch, redpoll, & purple finch), flicker, red-headed and downy woodpecker, redwing blackbird, mallard duck, and mourning dove. This list is by no means exhaustive of the species found in Dicken Woods, but instead, represents those species most commonly found here. The areas of brush support considerable animal life and important habitat for small mammals and birds.

Land Use History

An old house foundation, and what appears to be an abandoned residential water well, occur on a high spot located directly east of Maple Road. Several other abandoned and filled foundations for several smaller outbuildings are nearby. No other structures are present on this vacant, wooded property. In the early 1900s, the higher elevations of the property were apparently farmed, and an additional well on the west side of the property may have been used to irrigate strawberries. The rolling terrain of Dicken Woods more than likely precluded farming along the steeper slopes which were populated with oaks and hickories in the early 1800's. These late successional stands still cover some of the drier sites. Remains of an apple orchard still exist south of the homestead site adjacent to the wet meadow.

Currently, Dicken Woods Nature Area is an intentionally underdeveloped park with a modest chipped trail system providing access to the interior areas. The trail head for the bisected chipped trail loop is located at the end of Dicken Drive and is connected to the end of Carol Drive by a moderately traveled chipped path with a boardwalk over a seasonally wet area. A branch of that chipped path extends to the Dicken Elementary schoolyard over several smaller boardwalks on the school property. Although the park serves many users, including hikers, walkers, and runners, one of its its predominant uses is as a natural interpretive center for the adjacent Dicken Elementary School. Elementary school classes as well as organizations such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Cub Scouts use Dicken Woods as an outdoor classroom. The educational opportunities are not limited to young people, however, as many local adults visit the property to study birds, butterflies and vegetation. Presently, mountain biking is not encouraged through limiting trail width and overhead clearance, although mountain biking is not strictly prohibited.

Conservation Targets And Goals

1. Oak-Hickory Woods
 - Restore and maintain mature oak-hickory woods
 - Promote succession of shrub thickets to oak-hickory woods
2. Wet Meadow
 - Preserve this unique wetland community for its critical wildlife habitat and source of plant diversity
3. Vernal Ponds
 - Preserve these exceptionally sensitive areas and utilize as a valuable educational resource
4. Forest Areas Populated with Ash Trees Afflicted by Emerald Ash Borer
 - Identify and systematically plant tree or plant species that will prevent the vacated clearing and associated canopy from being taken over by undesirable invasive species.

Stresses And Conservation Strategies

I. Oak-Hickory Woods

Stresses

- a. Invasive plant species which compete with native plants for light, space and nutrients:
 - Buckthorn
 - Honeysuckle
 - Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)
- b. Soil erosion

- c. Dumping of yard waste along the park borders which smothers and kills existing vegetation and has the potential to introduce non-native, invasive plants into the nature area.

Strategies

- a. Reduce invasive plant species
 - o Actively manage invasive vegetation using the most effective, efficient and appropriate control method to date depending on the species. Methods might include: hand pulling young seedlings, herbicide application, girdling and burning
 - o Educate neighbors and public regarding the benefits of native landscaping
- b. Minimize soil erosion
 - o Install and maintain water bars and trail liners where needed to reduce erosion
 - o Discourage bicycle use in park. Accommodate cyclists by creating alternative bicycle path through Huron Parkway right-of-way.
- c. Eliminate dumping of yard waste along park boundaries
 - o Organize workdays to remove yard waste
 - o Mail letters and fact sheet to park neighbors explaining how dumping yard waste smothers native vegetation and serves as a seed source for exotics in a natural area. Letters should also explain the City's ordinance and associated fines regarding such acts.
 - o Erect "No Dumping" signs where appropriate

II. Wet Meadow

Stresses

- a. Invasive plant species - potentially
 - o Glossy buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangula*)
 - o Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)
- b. Soil compaction and disturbance – potentially

Strategies

- a. Minimize invasive plant species
 - o Currently there has been little need to manage the site for invasives. Careful monitoring should continue to be carried out yearly to detect the establishment of non-native species. \
 - o Should any potentially threatening invasive plant populations appear, we would actively manage the invasive vegetation using the most effective, efficient and appropriate control method to date depending on the species. Methods might include: hand pulling young seedlings, herbicide application, and burning.
 - o Educate neighbors and public regarding the benefits of native landscaping.
- b. Minimize soil compaction
 - o Currently there is no access path to the wet meadow, which has protected it thus far from damage. Continue to not have path access through the

area, but rather use an inconspicuous unchipped path to view the area from its perimeter.

III. Vernal Pond & Environs

Stresses

- a. Soil compaction
- b. Soil erosion and sedimentation
- c. Over collection and improper handling of aquatic organisms – potentially

Strategies

- a. Minimize soil compaction and trampling of vegetation
 - o Continue to have well-demarcated chipped trails that avoid these areas
- b. Minimize soil erosion
 - o Do not establish trails to access these areas, and post “rogue” trails that are following existing stream beds.
- c. Educate school groups, scout troops and other organizations regarding the proper handling of aquatic organisms collected from the pond. Emphasize the importance of returning these organisms to their original habitat.