



Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Committee

Johnson County REAP Committee Agenda Thursday, August 4, 2022 at 5:00 p.m.

Second Floor Boardroom, 913 S. Dubuque St., Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Participate in person or by joining the Zoom meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84388010803?pwd=ewdruutsbkdkqitmbgv1vc9yogc0zz09>

Meeting ID: 843 8801 0803

Passcode: 4468

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Agenda

Members of the public are welcome to participate in this meeting in person or electronically by video call. Video call participants will link into the location at the top of this agenda. For those unable to join, public comments related to items on the meeting agenda may be emailed to jwenger@johnsoncountyiowa.gov or relayed via telephone at (319) 356-6000 for distribution to Committee members.

1. Call to order: 5:00 p.m.
2. Public comment
3. Approve August 19, 2021 Johnson County REAP Committee meeting minutes
4. Present REAP grant applications for review and comment by the Committee:
 - a. City of Coralville application for \$100,000 for Coralville Forest Restoration Project – Dovetail and Colony Open Space Areas
 - b. City of Iowa City application for \$200,000 for Hickory Hill Park Ecological Restoration Phase III
5. Discuss and approve *2021-2025 Johnson County Resource Enhancement and Protection Plan*
 - a. Per Iowa Code Chapter 455A.20, the Committee is required to submit a five-year plan, including one-year expenditure plan, to the Iowa DNR.
6. Next meeting date and time: Thursday, August 3, 2023 at 4:00 p.m.
7. Adjourn

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Coralville REAP Grant 2022

Coralville Forest Restoration Project – Dovetail and Colony Open Space Areas

Grant Request: \$100,000

Grant Match: \$15,000

Project Description: The Coralville Forest Restoration Project seeks to address non-native invasive species in targeted areas of Coralville forests in the Dovetail Recreation Area and in the Colony Open Space Area and to manage stands in a way that encourages native tree populations. The project will be in two phases. Phase I is the request for this grant and it will focus on removal of understory growth by manually removing and treating invasive species such as honeysuckle, oriental bittersweet, multiflora rose, burning bush, white mulberry and barberry. After removal, the areas will be managed through mowing, conversion of some of the areas to prairie, and by evaluation of the returning native species in the forested areas. Phase II will be the subject of a future grant and will address larger, overstory non-native trees.

Presented by: Sherri Proud, Director of Parks and Recreation





City of Iowa City REAP Grant Application 2022

Grant Amount Requested: \$200,000.00

Project Title: Hickory Hill Park Ecological Restoration Phase III

Project Summary:

Hickory Hill Park is a 185-acre City park established in 1967. This project will be phase III of ecological restoration and build from previous restoration accomplished through REAP funding, capital projects, and many years of volunteer efforts. The project will consist of improvements to woodland and savanna habitat on 53.5 acres and improvement of three stream crossings for better recreation, emergency, and maintenance access.

City Population: 74828

Quality of the site and/or project:

Hickory Hill Park was established as a City park in 1967 as Iowa City began to grow toward and eventually surround the park. At 185 acres, it is a large natural area close to the core of the city. The park is set to grow by 39 acres in coming years and an adjacent parcel owned by Bur Oak Land Trust further increases the size of this contiguous natural area accessible by foot, bike, car, and bus line.

As its name suggests, Hickory Hill Park is known for its mature woodlands and sloping topography along Ralston Creek. The park also contains restored prairie and shrubland to round out the habitat matrix. Two previous REAP grants (2017, 2018) have been successfully completed, and they restored large swaths of woodlands in the southern section of the park, improved a section of prairie, and stabilized portions of streambank. Other capital projects and volunteer work have improved the trail system, signage, additional habitat, and greatly increased the size of the prairie restorations.

This project will focus on improving 53.5 acres of the northern portion of the park. This will include woodland (38.5 acres) and savanna (15 acres) restoration by removing aggressive and non-native species and re-seeding with savanna and woodland grasses, forbs, and tree seedlings. In order of severity, the target species for removal will be honeysuckle, barberry, privet, multiflora rose, autumn olive, burning bush, buckthorn, and some aggressive areas of dogwood and cedar. The seed mix for reestablishment will include native species previously documented in the park that would be expected to be found in the various micro-conditions of the restoration area.

This proposed work will remove invasive species on the final large section of the park and will not only improve this area but will also safeguard previous efforts and investments in the southern portion of the park. Once complete, the last remaining small patches of invasive species removal will be manageable by staff and the committed groups of volunteers who are continually at work enhancing and maintaining the park's resources.

The trail system throughout the park regularly crosses Ralston Creek and the smaller stream branches leading to the creek. This causes challenges for recreational use, maintenance, and emergency access throughout the year and especially during wet periods. Three key stream

crossings will be improved with this project along the main north-south trail. These improvements will, at a minimum, provide emergency and maintenance access via side-by-side utility vehicle in a manner which will not degrade the streambanks at the crossings. Currently, over half of the park is inaccessible by equipment regularly needed for maintenance activities such as prescribed burning and trail maintenance. After the improvements, most of the main trail segments and all the prairie restorations will be maintainable using the proper equipment.

Hickory Hill Park has long been inhabited by animals and people, dating back well before European settlement. However, this project area does not include any structures or known archeological elements. Furthermore, the nature of the improvements would not be expected to have a negative impact on any unknown elements of archeological significance.

Relationship to local, regional and state plans:

The project draws from recommendations of the 2018 Iowa City Urban Forest Management Plan (<https://tinyurl.com/4k47v9ec>), 2017 City of Iowa City Natural Areas Inventory and Management Plan (<https://bit.ly/3B9rxpt>), and 2017 Iowa City Parks Master Plan (<https://bit.ly/3wINsR1>). The first two plans include general recommendations, more detailed forest management strategies and management briefs for the park while the latter provides a broader scale view of the park and its place in the park system. These plans and past ecological restoration in Hickory Hill Park have highlighted the benefits to be gained from the proposed grant work.

Johnson County's REAP plan includes a priority of "Protect and preserve remaining woodland...within urban boundaries." The restoration efforts proposed in this application restore and protect the integrity of high-quality woodland and savanna that make Hickory Hill Park a community asset. This application also supports the goal of "Restore wildlife habitat in...woodland...areas." The project restoration efforts support healthy woodland, and savanna ecosystems to form a mosaic of habitat where diverse wildlife can thrive. The woodland restoration will also improve the visitor experience and enhance opportunities for environmental education and passive nature enjoyment.

This project will contribute to the following goals within the 2018 SCORP priorities.

Priority 1: Availability and diversity of natural resources, parks and outdoor recreation opportunities enhance the quality of life of Iowans.

- Goal 2: Hickory Hill Park is located close to the urban core of Iowa City and provides accessible physical activity in a natural setting close to where people live. The proximity of the park eliminates barriers sometimes found in reaching high quality natural settings in which to recreate. This project will improve the quality of the natural setting which is expected to translate to increased use of the park for physical activity.

-Goal 3: Hickory Hill Park draws visitors at the local, and regional level. It also has the potential to draw out of state visitors with its close proximity to the interstate system and local economic amenities. The park also benefits citizens and makes Iowa City a more attractive place for businesses to establish workplaces as it adds to quality of life and the ability to attract workers. This project will improve the desirability of recreating in a large swath of the park and is expected to continue to help draw in visitors and economic development into the future.

Priority 2: Natural resource, parks and outdoor recreation opportunities are available to all Iowans.

-Goal 1: Iowa City is committed to embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion for all citizens. The planning efforts this grant application stems from are rooted in use of a Social Equity Toolkit. This toolkit prioritizes significant outreach and public input including specific efforts to reach minority and underserved populations.

Priority 3: The right opportunities. In the right place. Done the right way.

-Goal 1: Much effort has gone into the planning processes supporting the current proposal and past successful projects in Hickory Hill Park. The projects have increased the quality of life for those who access the park's resources and are in response to local recreational needs. The size, location, and quality of the resources in Hickory Hill Park make this the right opportunity, in the right place, and are a continuation of projects done the right way.

Iowa Wildlife Action Plan

The following vision elements and conservation action strategies are supported by this project as it improves diversity and sustainability of habitats in Hickory Hill Park. With control of invasive non-native plant species and increase in diversity of native plants, wildlife habitat is expected to improve in response to the greater variety of plant species providing food, cover, and breeding sites. Recreational desirability is also expected to increase with this work.

Vision Element: Iowa will have viable wildlife populations that are compatible with modern landscapes and human social tolerance.

-Action: Focus on protection, restoration, reconstruction, connection and enhancement of native plant communities and wildlife habitats.

Vision Element: Iowa will have healthy ecosystems that incorporate diverse, native habitats capable of sustaining viable wildlife populations.

-Action: Use the Plan as a tool for private lands and public land natural resource protection, management and restoration efforts.

Vision Element: Diverse wildlife communities will be developed on public and private lands and waters through the use of adaptive ecological management principles.

-Action: Develop and implement management plans on public and privately-owned lands and waters that promote biodiversity and improve the status of species of greatest conservation need.

-Action: Expand and create local habitat working teams to implement the plans on private and public lands and waters. Provide these teams and private contractors' incentives for equipment.

-Action: Develop and implement a statewide strategy to eradicate invasive species.

Vision Element: More Iowans will participate in wildlife-associated recreation, and all Iowans will have access to publicly owned recreation areas to enjoy wildlife in its many forms.

Iowa State Forest Action Plan 2020

This project directly supports Goals 1 and 3 of the 2020 State Forest Action Plan.

Goal 1: Maximize Forest Health and Productivity

-This project is focused on health of the ecosystem and access to the resources.

Goal 3: Promote the Benefits of Iowa's Forest Resource

-Proximity to and ease of use make Hickory Hill Park a showcase for forest resources.

Supporting these goals will further the efforts to improve forests throughout the state by providing an example of the statewide goals and strategies in an accessible, heavily visited location.

Environmental Benefits:

Habitat restoration is vital to the overall function of the ecosystems in Hickory Hill Park. This project will provide environmental benefits through improvement of the flora of the park which will attract wildlife and visitors alike. Invasive plants are abundant in much of the proposed restoration area while smaller patches are in better condition but exist at a tipping point as non-native species start to further encroach. In some locations there is little ground vegetation present to hold the soil in place and the spread of invasive plants in the project area will continue to degrade the project area and pressure the areas restored in the first two project phases. If growth is left unchecked, the invasive vegetation could become much more difficult to control and there is concern the invasive species will spread to other areas in the park and watershed.

The ecological restoration of the woodland and savanna will remove invasive species and promote native species growth and establishment. These actions will work in tandem to increase the resiliency of the resulting landscape cover. This restoration, combined with previous restoration in Hickory Hill Park offers a demonstration project for residents to enjoy and use as inspiration for other public and private lands projects.

Restoration of the woodland and savanna will provide improved water quality in the network of creek branches in the park by reducing erosion caused by storm water runoff. Much of the area is on moderate to steep slopes making this a key location for establishing native vegetation that is good at holding soil in place and soaking up excess runoff from the surrounding watershed.

Improvements to the stream crossings at three key locations will allow for better access along the trail network. This will reduce erosion and streambank destabilization caused by recreational, maintenance, and emergency access across the creeks where current crossings are inadequate.

Public Benefit Served:

The effects of the proposed ecological restoration are expected to greatly enhance visitor experiences in the northern portion of Hickory Hill Park. The park is currently heavily used by hikers, joggers, birders, nature enthusiasts and others with targeted outdoor recreation interests. Completion of this project is expected to improve the aesthetics and general experience of those recreating in the park. This translates into positive social impacts and potential economic wellsprings as the park becomes an even greater asset and draw for the surrounding neighborhoods, businesses, and greater community.

The ecological restoration will provide continued improvement to the flora and fauna of the park and environmental benefits to the surrounding area. Although ongoing and long-term maintenance of the ecosystem will be necessary, this and previous work in the park will make that management sustainable with local efforts. Once restored and established, healthy native ecosystems will require less intensive input and promote more self-sustaining networks of vegetation and habitat.

Foregoing this phase of restoration would have a long-term negative impact on native species, recreationists, and the greater ecosystem. Rather than delay, action now will come at a reduced cost compared to what would be necessary if the ecosystem is allowed to degrade further. In its current state the area of planned restoration retains much of its native structure below the surface of non-native plant competition. The native seedbank and natural regeneration will help improve the area as restoration efforts give the native species an advantage.

All City of Iowa City construction projects meet Federal ADA requirements and the City has staff with training and expertise in this area. The recent Parks Master Plan included a physical accessibility audit of all park facilities and efforts are well underway to provide additional accessibility to park users across the park system. Most of the work proposed in this grant does not include construction. The proposed stream crossings will improve the ADA access for wheeled devices into a larger portion of the park and the 2017 bridge and trail project also previously increased physical accessibility in the park. In addition, Iowa City is committed to using a Social Equity Toolkit when engaging residents which was used in the planning processes that preceded this grant request. This entails additional and specific outreach efforts to underserved populations.

Local Support:

Hickory Hill Park has a long history of local support and an active group of current volunteers from the organization, Friends of Hickory Hill Park. The volunteers assist with invasive species removal, trail work, and fundraising for small scale contracted work to preserve and improve desirable ecological functions in the park. Other community members also regularly use the park for service projects, among them have been several Eagle Scout projects and AmeriCorps work. Going back further, there was involvement from another volunteer group, Project Green, to assist with maintenance, planning, and promotion of the park in its early years as a city park.

Beyond the many volunteer projects and groups, Hickory Hill Park is a popular recreation destination for many residents and regional visitors. It is a much-loved natural space in close proximity to core neighborhoods. A recent proposal for development adjacent to the park brought many voices together to rally and advocate for further protection of the park. The outcome of this show of support was a future land donation that will add approximately 39 acres to the park in years to come.

Four planning/design projects from 2016-2017 laid the foundation for the work proposed in this grant request. The plans included the 2016 Hickory Hill Park Master Plan, 2017 Iowa City Parks Master Plan, 2017 Natural Areas Inventory/Management Plan, and the 2017 Hickory Hill Bridge, Trail and Sign project. All these planning efforts were completed with significant outreach and public input including specific efforts to reach minority and underserved populations including use of a Social Equity Toolkit.

Among the four planning processes, the 2016 Hickory Hill Master Plan and 2017 Iowa City Parks Master Plan included input from a combined 650 residents and engaged 50 partner/service groups. Participation was through stakeholder meetings, written comments, on-line comments, public open houses, Parks Commission meetings and City Council meetings and work sessions.

Following the outcomes of these plans, prior REAP Grants, capital projects, and volunteer efforts have transformed the ecological health and recreational value of the park over the past five years. This grant application requests funds to complete the remaining large piece of ecological restoration identified in the planning processes.

Public Communications Plan:

The City of Iowa City will communicate this project to the public using the following methods:

- Press release about project and REAP funding.
- Posting the project materials and timeline on the City Website.
- Announcement of the project and progress updates through City social media including highlighting the REAP Grant funding.
- Public meetings with the Parks Commission and City Council to approve the grant application and award, as well as the contract and acceptance of the work.
- Updates to Friends of Hickory Hill Park advocate/volunteer group.
- Posting of project plans and updates including the REAP logo in the display case at Robert A. Lee Recreation Center.
- Permanent posting of REAP signage at Hickory Hill Park.

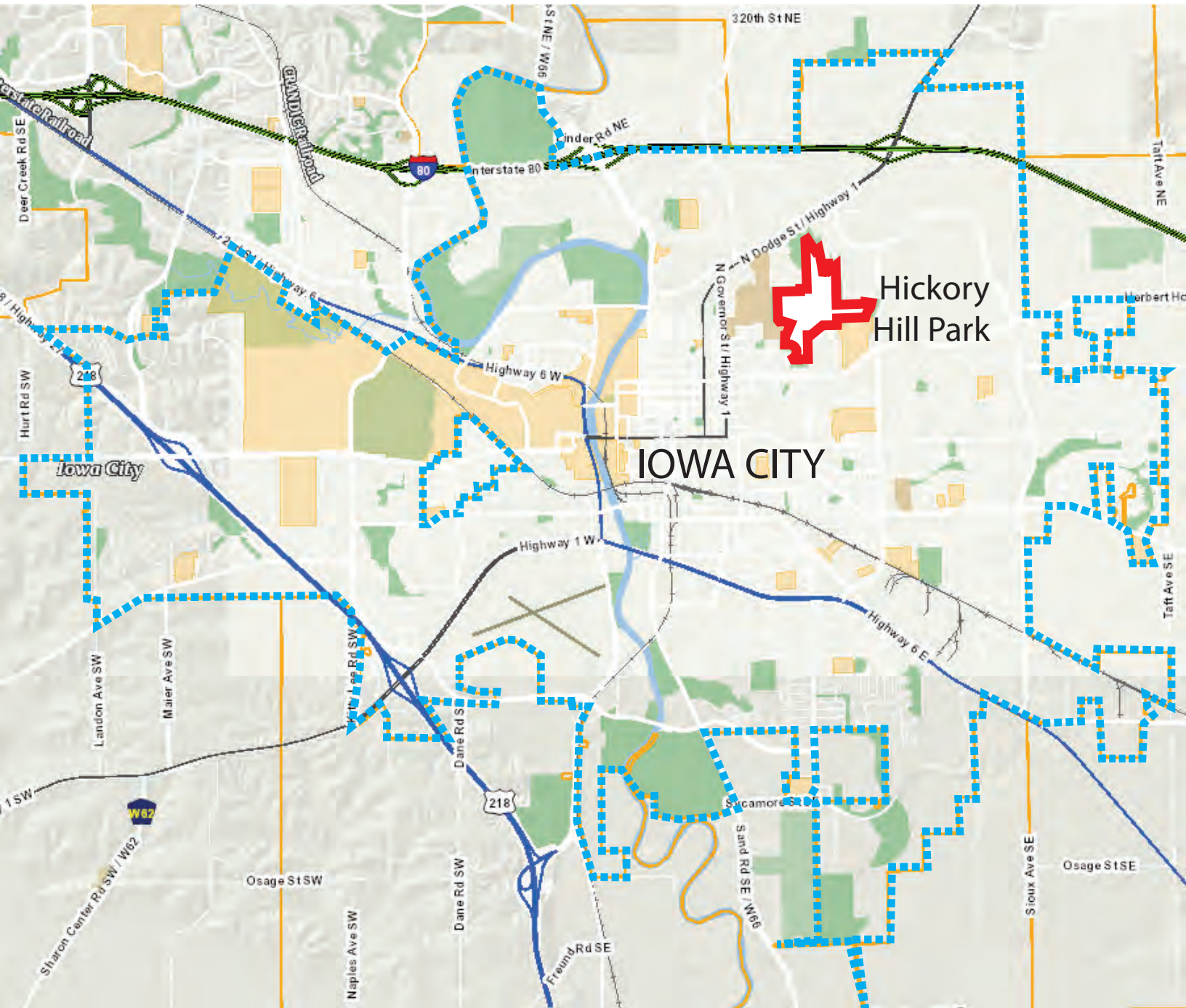
Project Budget:

- \$ 53,500.00 Invasive Shrub Removal (53.5 acres)
- \$ 15,000.00 Savanna Understory Opening (15 acres)
- \$ 30,000.00 Woodland and Savanna Seeding (20+ acres)
- \$ 1,500.00 Tree Seedling Planting (100 seedlings)
- \$100,000.00 Stream Crossing Improvements (3 crossings)
- \$200,000.00 TOTAL

Minority Impact Statement: No impact

Although significant outreach efforts have been made to include underserved and minority populations in the planning efforts for Hickory Hill Park, the location is not within an area of the City with disproportionate representations of minority or low-income individuals. The park serves as a regional park for all residents and residents of all demographics and abilities are regular users of the park and will benefit from the planned ecological restoration efforts.

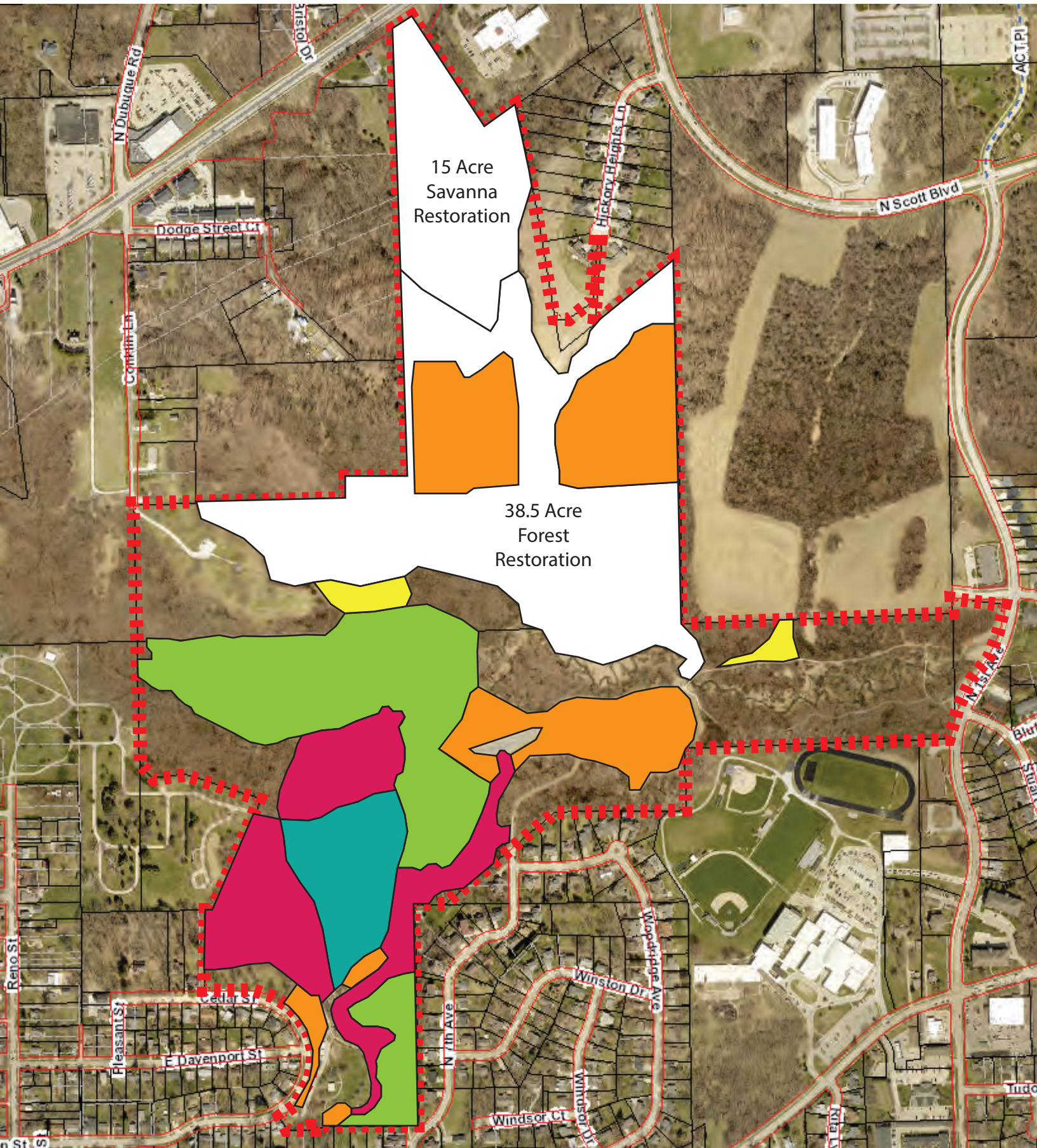
Hickory Hill Park Ecological Restoration Phase III - Context Map



 Hickory Hill Park Boundary

 Iowa City Limits

Hickory Hill Park Ecological Restoration Phase III



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|  Ecological Restoration Phase III |  Friends of Hickory Hill Woodland Restoration |
|  Ecological Restoration Phase II (REAP 2018) |  Friends of Hickory Hill Dogwood Transition Restoration |
|  Ecological Restoration Phase I (REAP 2017) |  Prairie Restorations |

Hickory Hill Park Ecological Restoration Phase III - Stream Crossings



○ Stream Crossing Improvements (at minimum, accessible to side-by-side maintenance/emergency vehicles)