An Interpretive Plan Guide for Wilderness Park in Lincoln, Nebraska

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AN INTERPRETIVE PLAN GUIDE FOR WILDERNESS PARK

IN LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

by

Rachel J. Ward

A PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
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Project Advisory Committee:
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AN INTERPRETIVE PLAN GUIDE FOR WILDERNESS PARK

IN LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

Rachel J. Ward, M.C.R.P.

University of Nebraska, 2014

Advisor: Gordon P. Scholz

Wilderness Park, located in Lancaster County, Nebraska, is a public park of unique ecological and historical value to the city of Lincoln and to the surrounding region. The natural and historical features of the park present an opportunity to communicate environmental and historical topics that are relevant on local, national, and global levels, as well as inspire a lively sense of pride in the community. The problem is that many topics relevant to Wilderness Park are not currently being interpreted at the park, and that there are relatively few interpretive resources available to park visitors.

The purpose of this project is to initiate the development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park. In order to accomplish this goal, the researcher developed a framework to guide the interpretive plan development process and completed initial stages of the interpretive plan development process. Five procedures were used, including a review of interpretive planning literature, a review of existing plans relevant to Wilderness Park, development of a framework to guide the development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park, focus group discussions with Wilderness Park managers and educators, and a survey of existing and potential park visitors. The final product of this project was presented to the Wilderness Park managers and educators who are considered to be key stakeholders.
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This project is dedicated to all the men and women, past, present, and future, who work to inspire interest and respect for Wilderness Park, and to those who work to protect its health and integrity for future generations.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and Setting of Project

Wilderness Park, located in Lancaster County, Nebraska, is a public park of unique ecological and historical value to the city of Lincoln and to the surrounding region. The natural, man-made, and historical features of the park present the opportunity to communicate environmental and historical topics that are relevant on local, national, and global levels, as well as inspire a lively sense of pride in the community. However, many topics relevant to Wilderness Park are not currently being interpreted in the park, and there are relatively few interpretive resources available to park visitors.

This interpretive plan guide was created to facilitate more effective communication of topics relevant to Wilderness Park. The intent of this interpretive plan guide is to guide park staff through the development of a plan for an interpretive program. Furthermore, the overall aim of this interpretive plan guide is to initiate and support the development of a plan that will guide future improvements to the interpretive program at Wilderness Park. To illustrate the breadth of explanatory power embodied in Wilderness Park, the following summation of the landscape and its history is provided.

Wilderness Park is an expansive natural area along the banks of Salt Creek, southwest of downtown Lincoln, Nebraska (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Salt Creek is an important water body for the city of Lincoln for a number of reasons. For example, more than half of the city lies within the Salt Creek watershed. Furthermore, the first settlers in the Lancaster County area settled along the banks of Salt Creek, and the rich salt deposits associated with the creek drew many early settlers.
Figure 1. Wilderness Park Region Map
(Source: City of Lincoln/Lancaster County 2014, modified from GIS Viewer)
**Figure 2.** Wilderness Park Trail Map  
(Source: City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation n.d.)
Salt Creek has unique ecology due to an unusually high salt content in segments of Salt Creek north of Wilderness Park. Underground water that feeds Salt Creek picks up salt en route to the surface. The source of the salt is shale deposited millions of years ago when much of Nebraska lay beneath a great inland sea called the Western Interior Seaway (see Figure 3) (Farrar and Gersib 1991, 5). Partly due to this salt content, segments of the creek and some areas in its watershed are home to unusual plants and animals. Though once plentiful in southeast Nebraska, salt marshes, like those found around Salt Creek, are some of Nebraska’s most threatened ecosystems (Farrar and Gersib 1991, 3). The portion of Salt Creek that is present in Wilderness Park is not saline, nor does it contain saline plants or animals; however, because Wilderness Park provides public access to several miles of Salt Creek, it is a place where Salt Creek can be experienced and appreciated.

Figure 3. Western Interior Seaway during Late Cretaceous Period
(Source: Dr. Ron Blakey n.d.)
The first people to dwell near Salt Creek were Native Americans, who first arrived thousands of years ago. The Pawnee people, who once inhabited much of modern day southeast Nebraska, and the Otoe people who hunted there (Johnson 1880, 54 - 57), were likely drawn to the bounty of game, fish, fruit, salt and timber found in and around the creek. Trees were scarce on the plains prior to widespread fire suppression, but the meandering course of Salt Creek often prevented wildfires from consuming trees along its banks, thus securing a rare source of valuable timber (Beachly 1981, 31 - 32). The presence of such precious resources attracted people to Salt Creek — and presumably attracted the regular passage of Pawnee along its banks (Beachly 1981, 34).

Much like the native people who came before, American pioneers valued proximity to Salt Creek. Because of its bounty of salt, many of Lancaster County’s earliest pioneers settled close to Salt Creek, beginning in the mid-to-late 1850s, and a few utilized the creek for industry (Johnson 1880, 437). Perhaps the most famous settler was a salt businessman named J. Sterling Morton — father of the founder of Morton Salt Company, who led a brief salt extraction operation along Salt Creek (Hayes and Cox 1889, 79). Later historical sources record a spur of the Oregon and Mormon Trails crossing through the south of present day Wilderness Park (Beachly 1981, 43; Nebraska State Historical Society 1954).

Transportation was one of the few commercial activities along Salt Creek to endure the test of time. In 1872, the Atchison and Nebraska Railroad installed Lancaster County’s first railroad tracks just east of Salt Creek (Beachly 1981, 44; Johnson 1880, 131). Five years later, the Union Pacific Railroad laid parallel tracks (Beachly 1981, 44;
Many early pioneers capitalized on the bounty of Salt Creek; however, residents soon recognized the creek’s tendency to flood — a tendency that persists to this day. For the most part, the threat of flooding and the presence of the railroads discouraged development along Salt Creek, resulting in a large expanse of open space.

The lush landscape surrounding Salt Creek quickly became a favorite place for recreation. In 1888, “Lincoln Park” opened at the northernmost section of modern day Wilderness Park and became a popular location for picnics, boating, concerts, games, and social dances (see Figure 4) (Beachly 1981, 44). Nearly thirty years later, Lincoln Park was converted to an amusement park called Electric Park (Beachly 1981, 44). At the turn of the century, the Methodist Church, affiliated with Nebraska Epworth League, began holding educational and recreational assemblies called Chautauquas just south of Lincoln.

**Figure 4.** Lincoln Park Theater  
(Source: Postcard owned by Roger Carmichael 1912)
Park (Beachly 1981, 44). The Nebraska Epworth League eventually purchased this property and furnished it with campsites, a Great Hall and a 4,000-seat auditorium where visitors heard speakers such as William Jennings Bryan and Booker T. Washington (see Figure 5) (Hulvershorn 1999, 2-2).

As time passed, use of both Lincoln Park/Electric Park and the Epworth League property waned. Electric Park was outcompeted by a nearby amusement park and experienced a variety of uses including a Boy Scouts camp (Beachly 1981, 46). The Chautauquas lost appeal as the radio gained popularity, and in 1942 the Epworth League property was wiped out by floodwaters (Beachly 1981, 46). Ownership and use of the land composing present day Wilderness Park continually shifted until 1966 when Lancaster County, the City of Lincoln, and the Salt Valley Watershed District purchased the park land — officially establishing Wilderness Park (Beachly 1981, 46).

**Figure 5.** Archway at Entrance to former Epworth League Property
(Source: photo by author)
Today, Wilderness Park is a place where people come to experience nature. Several miles of trails accommodate those seeking to explore or exercise on foot, bicycle, or horseback. Many who traverse the trails of Wilderness Park seek to observe the natural environment — to appreciate and become acquainted with the biotic and abiotic components of the ecosystem found there.

1.2 Project Purpose, Goals, and Objectives

The Wilderness Park Subarea Plan, a subarea plan that is considered part of the Lincoln/Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan (LPlan 2040) (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 12.16) emphasizes enhancing the value of Wilderness Park as an educational resource. Completed by J. Kip Hulvershorn in 1999, the Wilderness Park Subarea Plan (Subarea Plan) integrates findings of a variety of prior studies related to the park and makes recommendations for a first phase park management plan (Hulvershorn 1999, 1-3). Based on integration of the studies and a community consensus process, the Subarea Plan recommends that future planning for Wilderness Park and its immediate environs provide opportunities for ‘nature-related’ recreation such as nature study and appreciation (Hulvershorn 1999, 1-10, 3-1). In addition to nature education, the Subarea Plan recommends the historical significance of the park be interpreted through signage, brochures, and interpretive walks and talks (Hulvershorn 1999, 3-6). While all of these recommendations have been pursued to some extent, many topics relevant to Wilderness Park are not currently being interpreted at the park, especially topics related to history. Furthermore, there are relatively few interpretive resources available to park visitors.
Currently, multiple groups help facilitate nature study and appreciation at Wilderness Park. For the most part, each group organizes its own educational/interpretive activities. Current interpretive activities available in Wilderness Park include summer day camps (directed by Lincoln Parks and Recreation) and guided hikes (led by Friends of Wilderness Park). Interpretive materials that exist for the park include a few interpretive signs (created by Lincoln Parks and Recreation), and a pamphlet and map (created by Friends of Wilderness Park and Great Plains Trails Network, respectively) are available at the Lincoln Parks and Recreation office at 2740 A Street in Lincoln.

These educational efforts, managed by independent entities, could be strengthened and supplemented through the creation of a unified vision that outlines education goals and preferred methods. Such a vision would provide standards and guidance for improvement and development of educational and interpretive activities and materials. Furthermore, this vision would help the independent groups identify gaps in the collective education/interpretive program and prevent overlapping efforts. By working together, groups involved with education at Wilderness Park could work more effectively to promote a common vision.

This professional project aims to facilitate the creation of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park in order to engage visitor interest in the landscape and advance a goal of the Wilderness Park Subarea Plan. This project initiates the creation of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park by accomplishing the following tasks: (1) Providing a clear framework for an interpretive plan and recommendations for the interpretive planning process based primarily on industry best practices; (2) Providing an inventory and
evaluation of the existing interpretive program, completed by Wilderness Park managers and educators during focus group discussions; (3) Presenting stakeholder opinions regarding goals, topics, and methods for the interpretative program at Wilderness Park, gathered from Wilderness Park managers and educators through focus group discussions, and from existing and potential Wilderness Park visitors through an online survey; and (4) Presenting existing policy and recommendations regarding goals, topics, and methods for the interpretative program at Wilderness Park, gathered from existing plans that are relevant to interpretation at Wilderness Park.

The aim of the Interpretive Plan Guide for Wilderness Park (this project) is to facilitate the creation of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park — a document that clearly presents goals and preferred methods for interpretation in and related to Wilderness Park. This project presents important information to the staff at the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and other groups involved with education at Wilderness Park to help them develop an interpretive plan. Though the researcher did not complete the entire planning process, she initiated and facilitated work on a substantial portion of the planning process for an interpretive plan and has presented the key stakeholders (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation, and Friends of Wilderness Park) with a framework for completing the plan on their own. If the stakeholders choose to pursue development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park, they could use the information provided to help them develop an interpretive plan. The information in this document could also be used to guide the stakeholders as they improve and manage the interpretive program.
The tasks that remain to be accomplished by the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and other groups involved with education at Wilderness Park in order to complete the plan, include: (1) Meet to determine how to translate the key stakeholder and park user opinions into a plan that balances interests and feasibility; (2) Create a logic model; (3) Create a budget; (4) Create an overall strategy for implementation; and (5) Create a schedule and tool for periodic self-evaluation. Where possible, the researcher has recommended resources that may help guide these five tasks. A detailed outline of the remaining tasks is located in Section 6.3 of this document (see 6.3 Future Research and Remaining Plan Development Tasks).

1.3 Definitions

This project concerns interpretive planning at Wilderness Park, in Lincoln, Nebraska. Wilderness Park is a park and conservation area owned by Lancaster County and managed by the City of Lincoln, located adjacent to Salt Creek in Lancaster County on the southwest edge of Lincoln. The park extends for approximately seven miles from Van Dorn Street on the north to Saltillo Road on the south, east of Highway 77, and west of the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe railroad, and the park averages approximately 1320 feet (one-fourth mile) in width. The park consists of approximately 1,475 acres of floodplain with woodland or riparian habitat and some areas of grassland, including old agricultural fields (Hulvershorn 1999, 1-3).

There are a number of interest groups involved with Wilderness Park. For the purposes of this project, the key stakeholders (the stakeholders) are identified as
Wilderness Park managers and educators from City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and educators from the Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors.

Wilderness Park is owned by Lancaster County, which has delegated the management of Wilderness Park to the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation. The Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department Mission Statement reads:

It is the mission of the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department to enhance the quality of life in our community by providing and maintaining quality parks and green spaces, and by offering enriching recreation activities and facilities for all people in Lincoln. This is accomplished through dedicated leadership, a commitment to excellence, creative programming, and the best use of our natural financial and human resources. (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2002, 1)

Some of the priorities of the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation (Lincoln Parks and Recreation) are to acquire, develop and manage accessible park facilities that support a broad range of leisure interests and outdoor activities; acquire and manage open space areas for the enjoyment and education of community residents; conserve natural systems; provide a broad range of recreation activities enhancing the well-being of participants; develop a range of funding sources; and seek collaborative partnerships (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2002, 1).

Friends of Wilderness Park is a non-government organization made up of citizens of Lincoln and surrounding areas that are concerned with the encroachment of development upon Wilderness Park. According to their mission statement, the aim of the group is to “promote the creation of statutes, rules and regulations that will allow the long-term sustainability of Wilderness Park and the other natural areas within the Lincoln
area” (Friends of Wilderness Park n.d., 1). For over a decade, Friends of Wilderness Park has supplemented the needs of the park in a multitude of ways, including continually raising funds to repair and replace Park bridges, regularly organizing volunteers to assist with trail maintenance and invasive species removal, leading educational tours in the park, and reaching out to the community to build awareness about Wilderness Park. The City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors are two primary groups that organize and promote interpretive activities at Wilderness Park. Therefore, for the purpose of this project, the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors are considered the key stakeholders for the development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park.

In this project, specific terms are used to identify different types of education. **Education** is a broad term that refers to anything that imparts or creates knowledge through any of several means including training, instruction, and facilitation. **Interpretation** is a specific type of education. According to the National Association for Interpretation (NAI), interpretation is “a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource” (NAI 2009b, 2). Interpretation can be used to build appreciation for a location or resource and can also be used as a management tool by improving visitors’ awareness of sensitive natural and cultural resources in the area. Typically, interpretation occurs in parks and natural areas where audiences roam freely and learn at their leisure. An **interpretive method** is any media, teaching technique, or
other service employed to connect an audience emotionally and intellectually to a resource (NAI 2009a, 3). Common interpretive methods are interpretive signs, maps, pamphlets, and guided hikes. A QR code is one example of a newer interpretive method. A QR (Quick Response) code is essentially a barcode that can be scanned using a smartphone in order to open a web page that, in this case, contains interpretive information.

For the purposes of this project, the term **interpretive program** refers to the collective effort to interpret at Wilderness Park. This effort is made up of an integrated sequence of planned educational experiences and materials intended to create emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource. An **interpretive plan** is a document that outlines a thoughtful decision-making process that blends management needs and resource considerations with visitor interests to determine the most effective way to communicate the message to targeted markets (NAI 2009b, 3).

Interpretation at parks often includes environmental education. The North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) explains, “**Environmental Education** is a process that enables people to acquire knowledge, skills, and positive environmental experiences in order to analyze issues, assess benefits and risks, make informed decisions, and take responsible actions to achieve and sustain environmental quality” (NAAEE 2009, 35). Interpretation at parks often includes nonformal environmental education and informal environmental education. NAAEE explains, “**Informal environmental education** is any unstructured environmental
education activity outside the formal system where people learn from exhibits, mass media, and everyday living experiences. [It is] also referred to as free choice environmental education” (NAAEE 2009, 36). The term informal environmental education is often used synonymously with nonformal environmental education.

**Nonformal environmental education** is any environmental education that takes place at nonformal settings such as parks, zoos, nature centers, etc., rather than in a classroom. Many interpretative activities fit this description; therefore, standards for nonformal environmental education are also addressed in this project.

There are a number of special terms used to explain the components of an interpretive plan. An interpretive plan contains a series of **goals** — desired results from an activity, lesson, or course of study (NAAEE 2009, 36). Specific interpretive activities and methods are selected to best accomplish these goals. **Guiding principles** are specific principles that guide the development of education activities and preferred methods for reaching target groups, based on input from the stakeholders and relevant literature (NAAEE 2009, 36). **Educational Objectives** are statements that explain the specific measurable or observable results desired from an activity (NAAEE 2009, 36). Educational objectives are included in a **logic model** — a program design and evaluation tool that details the relationship between interpretive methods and activities (inputs), participation rates (outputs), and impacts (short-term, medium-term, long-term) (NAAEE 2009, 36). A **needs assessment** is an important part of the interpretive planning process and evaluation cycle that determines the needs for the interpretive program by considering such things as audience interest and pre-existing knowledge (NAAEE 2009,
An inventory is another important element of the interpretive planning process that investigates and lists existing interpretive activities and resource.
2.1 Planning Approach

Plan development in this project uses a *middle-ground* planning approach, as described by John Levy in his book, *Contemporary Urban Planning*. Levy explains that a middle-range approach is one that compromises between the *rational* planning model and *successive limited comparison* or, “*muddling through*” (also called *Incrementalism*), a method coined by Charles Lindblom in his classic article, *The Science of Muddling Through* (Levy 2008; Lindblom 1959, 79-88).

To provide an understanding of what is meant by a “middle range” approach, one must understand the two opposite methods that it lies between — the rational approach and successive limited comparison approaches to plan development. When using the rational approach to planning, planners work with stakeholders and policy makers to address a particular policy issue by the following steps: (1) Identifying and ranking values and objectives; (2) Identifying and analyzing all alternative solutions, taking all relevant potential factors into account; and (3) Recommending that the administrators choose the alternative determined to be the most effective at satisfying the identified values and objectives (Morris, Henson, and Fackler 2009, 3.3; Lindblom 1959, 81).

This approach seems logical, but according to Lindblom, planners and administrators don’t operate this way in the real world. This is partly because each step in the rational planning process requires ample time, staff, and other resources rarely afforded public planners and administrators (Lindblom 1959, 80). Furthermore, it is often very difficult (and sometimes impossible) to define and rank the values and objectives of
the various constituencies and stakeholders, to identify and analyze every policy option, and to know which alternative would be most effective (Morris, Henson, and Fackler 2009, 3.3; Lindblom 1959, 79-88). Lindblom explains that, in reality, policies are more commonly developed using a process of “successive limited comparison,” or “muddling through.” Using this approach, administrators consider policies that differ in relatively small degree from existing policies, rather than conducting a comprehensive analysis of every policy option – thereby limiting the number of alternatives and narrowing the scope of the investigation (Morris, Henson, and Fackler 2009, 3.3; Lindblom 1959, 79-88). Lindblom argues that incrementally refining and building on existing policy is more efficient and quick than using a rational approach, but it still considers the goals of an adequately broad set of stakeholders (Morris, Henson, and Fackler 2009, 3.3; Lindblom 1959, 79-88).

This project initiates the development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park by completing portions of the plan development process and by providing guidance for the remainder of the interpretive planning process. The procedures used and suggested in this project reflect a middle-range approach – one that recognizes the ideal of the rational model, but prioritizes efficiency in the face of limited time and resources. Simply put, this project utilizes and suggests a modified version of the three steps outlined in the rational model. Modifications include an adapted and reduced depth of alternatives analysis, and an overall emphasis on feasibility and visitor interest in the selection of the preferred alternative.
Specifically, this project presents a framework and methodology for interpretive plan development that follows the modified rational approach described as follows: (1) Determine values, goals, and objectives for visitor interpretation; (2) Identify the stakeholders’ desired approaches to visitor interpretation and evaluate their feasibility based on perceived effectiveness, staff, and budget; and (3) Recommend that administrators choose the alternative that best reflects their resource availability while still effectively satisfying the objectives. A description of the procedures used in this project is found in section 2.2 Procedures. A list of procedures suggested to complete the interpretive plan can be found in Chapter 4: Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan.

The middle-range planning approach used in this project is consistent with goals and recommendations for the development of an interpretive plan, as described by the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) in Standards and Practices for Interpretive Planning (NAI 2009b). According to NAI, an interpretive plan documents a “thoughtful decision-making process that blends management needs and resource considerations with visitor desire and ability to pay to determine the most effective way to communicate the message to targeted markets” (NAI 2009b, 3). Simply put, an interpretive plan should attempt to satisfy visitors’ desires for interpretation while strongly considering the interpretive organizations’ ability to fund, staff, and manage the selected interpretation methods. The methods used during this project, and the methods that this project suggests for the future development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park are expected to satisfy at least the minimum NAI standards and practices for interpretive planning, as
outlined in the NAI publication *Standards and Practices for Interpretive Planning* (NAI 2009b).

### 2.2 Procedures

Five procedures were used in the completion of this project.

#### 2.2.1 Review Interpretive Planning Literature

A literature review was conducted regarding the development of an interpretive plan in a park setting. The review included documents by the National Association for Interpretation (NAI), the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service. During the literature review, the researcher identified the recommended components of an interpretive plan, as well as suggested practices for developing those components. Six questions were addressed during the literature review: (1) According to the literature, what are the necessary/advisable components of an interpretive plan?; (2) According to the literature, what steps are necessary/advisable to build the components of an interpretive plan?; (3) What does the literature indicate are the methods used to develop the components of an interpretive plan?; (4) According to the literature, who should be consulted during the development of an interpretive plan?; and (5) What does the literature suggest are the methods used to evaluate the success of the plan?

The review of interpretive planning literature can be found in section 3.1 of this document.
2.2.2 Develop a Framework for the Interpretive Plan

A framework for future development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park was created based on a synthesis of the models identified in the interpretive planning literature review (see section 3.1). This framework presents recommended tasks and standards from Interpretive Project Guide Book (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1994), Standards and Practices for Interpretive Planning (NAI 2009b), and Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence (NAAEE 2009), with emphasis on the latter two documents. The purpose of the framework is to logically organize and articulate the recommended steps toward the development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park.

The framework for the development of an interpretive plan follows the middle ground planning method described in section 2.1 of this project. This framework follows a modified rational approach to plan development, which includes the following overall steps: (1) Determine values, goals, and objectives for visitor interpretation; (2) Identify the stakeholders’ desired approaches to visitor interpretation and evaluate their feasibility based on perceived effectiveness, staff, and budget; and (3) Recommend that administrators choose the alternative that best reflects their resource availability while still effectively satisfying the objectives.

The suggested framework can be found in Chapter 4 of this document.
2.2.3 Review Existing Plans Relevant to Wilderness Park

Existing plans that are relevant to Wilderness Park were reviewed. This literature review was used to determine any existing goals, guiding principles, or other policies that may impact a future interpretive program. Plans that were reviewed include:

- *Wilderness Park Subarea Plan: Integration of Wilderness Park Studies with Park Management Recommendations* (Hulvershorn 1999)
- *Pioneers Park Nature Center Strategic Plan* (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2011)
- *Lincoln/Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan* (LPlan 2040) (City of Lincoln/Lancaster County 2012)
- *Salt Valley Greenway and Prairie Corridor Master Plan* (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation, and The Flatwater Group 2012)
- *Crescent Green Park Study Report* (Clark & Enersen, Hamersky, Schlaebitz, Burroughs & Thomsen 1977)
- *Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan: Supporting Natural Resources, Conservation & Stewardship* (NACEE 2010)
Three questions were considered during the review of these plans: (1) According to existing planning documents relevant to Wilderness Park, what goals, objectives, or guiding principles exist for visitor education in or related to Wilderness Park?; (2) What goals, objectives, or guiding principles unrelated to visitor education might impact the direction of education activities in or related to Wilderness Park? How should we interpret them as they relate to visitor education activities?; and (3) What do existing planning documents relevant to Wilderness Park express about community needs and desires related to Wilderness Park, or places like it?

The review of existing plans can be found in section 3.2 of this document.

2.2.4 Conduct Focus Group Discussions with Wilderness Park Managers and Educators

Focus group discussions were conducted with representatives from two primary groups that manage and educate at Wilderness Park, namely the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation staff, and the Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors. The aim of the focus group discussions was to guide Wilderness Park managers and educators in an evaluation of existing visitor education activities at the park and to encourage discussion of how to improve visitor education at the park. Participants were selected from these groups because they educate and manage at Wilderness Park, and their participation in these initial planning activities will increase the likelihood of the plan being created and implemented. The University of Nebraska -
Lincoln Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval letter for these procedures can be found in Appendix I.

**Instrument**

During the focus group meetings, participants were asked to discuss a series of fourteen questions. The questionnaire used during the focus group meetings was designed to aid participants in evaluating and discussing their interests and abilities related to improving the existing education program at Wilderness Park. The moderator posed the questions in an unbiased manner to all participants in a group setting, and participants were encouraged to discuss their answers and opinions with one another. The same questionnaire was used for each of the two focus groups. The questionnaire used for both focus group discussions can be found in Appendix II.

**Recruitment**

Potential participants for each focus group were selected by the following means. A manager at Lincoln Parks and Recreation provided contact information for Lincoln Parks and Recreation staff members who are involved with managing or educating at Wilderness Park. Contact information for Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors was obtained from the president of Friends of Wilderness Park, whose email was available on the organization’s webpage. Potential participants were approached by email. The email explained the purpose of the study, the extent of the individual’s involvement,
and the voluntary nature of their involvement. All recruitment correspondence insisted that participation was strictly voluntary.

**Participants**

The first focus group included five voluntary participants from Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department staff who are managers and/or educators at Wilderness Park and Pioneers Park. A focus group discussion was conducted with representatives from Lincoln Parks and Recreation because they oversee and implement the management of Wilderness Park. These representatives included staff from Pioneers Park Nature Center (also managed by Lincoln Parks and Recreation) because of their close relationship with Wilderness Park, which includes shared education and management staff. The many duties of staff present at the meeting included coordinating and assisting with nature camps; supervising and managing site and grounds maintenance; managing developmental issues and contracts; and promoting activities and events at the park.

Participants met with the researcher at a conference room at Pioneers Park Nature Center on Friday, March 21, 2014.

The second focus group included three voluntary participants from the board of directors for Friends of Wilderness Park who contribute to management and education at Wilderness Park. Members of the Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors were interviewed because they actively educate the community and park visitors about the history, nature, and overall significance of Wilderness Park. Furthermore, the Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors continually coordinates with the Lincoln Parks and
Recreation to raise funds for park improvement and assists with park management. Participants present at the focus group discussion were involved with organizing and hosting a diverse set of events each year aimed at raising awareness of plants, animals, ecosystems, conservation efforts, history, archaeology, and developmental threats associated with Wilderness Park. Participants met in a meeting room at F Street Community Center in Lincoln on Monday, March 24, 2014.

Consent

Participants from each group were asked to meet with the researcher as a group at a mutually agreeable time and location. A mutually agreeable time and location was established for each group of participants. Each potential participant that agreed to participate was emailed a consent form and asked to bring a signed copy of the consent form to the focus group meeting. This consent form explained the purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality of participating in the focus group, and that participants were able to withdraw from the procedures at any time without any harm to the participant or the participant’s relationship with the researchers, UNL, Lincoln Parks and Recreation, Friends of Wilderness Park, or any other organization involved in the project. A copy of the consent forms used for each participant group can be found in Appendix III. All participants signed and delivered a copy of the consent form prior to the beginning of the focus group discussions.
Confidentiality

In order to maintain confidentiality for focus group participants, all comments made during the focus groups were kept anonymous in the reports. Names of individuals who participated in the focus groups were not included in any reports. However, the reports note that participants in the focus groups were associated with either Lincoln Parks and Recreation or Friends of Wilderness Park. The reports also note (as aggregate) the duties participants undertake related to managing or educating at Wilderness Park. All notes, audio recordings, and other materials connecting individuals’ names to data were accessible only to the primary investigator and will be deleted or otherwise destroyed after the project has been approved by the professional project advisory committee and the UNL Office of Graduate Studies.

Report of Results

A report of each focus group can be found in section 5.1 of this document. Each report was reviewed and approved by an authoritative representative who participated in that focus group in order to confirm that the researcher recorded, interpreted, and communicated the results accurately.

2.2.5 Conduct Survey of Park Visitors

A survey of existing and potential park visitors was conducted in order to provide insight about their interests related to interpretation at Wilderness Park. The results of this survey are intended to help inform Wilderness Park managers and educators as they
select topics and methods for interpretation. This survey had three primary purposes: (1) To understand who is visiting the park so that education activities can be geared toward the right audiences; (2) To understand where in the park visitors spend most of their time, and what they are doing while they are there; and (3) To understand what topics park visitors want to learn about and how they would prefer to learn about them.

*Instrument*

The survey was conducted online using Qualtrics Survey Software. The survey questionnaire was designed to gather input from existing and potential park users for a range of tasks involved in developing an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park. Tasks that required input from existing and potential park visitors were identified during the literature review and included in the Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan (see Chapter 4). These tasks included: (1) Gather information about Wilderness Park visitors and about their interests related to the park including what they wish to learn at/about the park; (2) Identify environmental, education, and community needs so that the interpretive program can be designed to produce responsive, responsible benefits that address those identified needs; (3) Consider which topics and overall themes give particular significance to the landscape; (4) Consider contemporary interpretive technology such as social media, online publications, audio tours/trailcasts, and GPS; (5) Clearly indicate the mix of media required to convey the message(s) to specific audiences; (6) Enable visitors to make sound decisions and prepare for their experience.
through consideration of how to provide adequate information, orientation material and maps.

Questions used in the survey questionnaire were designed to help achieve the tasks identified during the literature review. Additional questions were included in the survey questionnaire at the request of Wilderness Park managers and educators, who approved the survey before it was distributed to participants. The questionnaire used for the existing and potential visitor survey can be found in Appendix IV.

Recruitment

Survey participants were recruited by multiple means, using a convenience-sampling approach. The survey was marketed using flyers posted at each entrance to Wilderness Park. These flyers provided retrievable strips containing a link to the online survey, as well as a QR (Quick Response) code linked to the online survey. In addition to this, twenty-two organizations based in Lincoln, Nebraska agreed to help distribute and market the online survey by email and social media to their membership and/or constituents. Of the organizations that helped distribute the survey, two organizations were related to public green space and/or Wilderness Park (Nebraska Forest Service, Friends of Wilderness Park), two organizations were related to trails (Great Plains Trails Network/GPTN, Trails Have our Respect/THOR), two were local businesses (Open Harvest, Wild Bird Habitat Store), one was related to natural resource conservation (The Nature Conservancy in Nebraska), two were related to nature education (Nebraska Project WILD, Nature Explore), and eleven were neighborhood associations (Greater
South Neighborhood Association, Salt Valley View Neighborhood Association, College View Neighborhood Association, Everett Neighborhood Association, Meadowlane Area Neighborhood Association, Woods Park Neighborhood Association, Witherbee Neighborhood Association, Indian Village Neighborhood Association, Near South Neighborhood Association, Havelock Neighborhood Association, and Country Club Neighborhood Association). It is assumed that each of these organizations carried through with their commitment to distribute the survey. Though not marketed to the following organizations or individuals, it is also known that the survey was distributed via the Nebraska Alliance for Conservation and Environmental Education (NACEE) listserv, and to a class at UNL taught by Richard Sutton, Professor of Horticulture, Agronomy, and Landscape Architecture.

Participants

Participants were required to be at least 19 years of age in order to take the survey. A total of 389 participants completed the survey.

Procedures

Participants completed the questionnaire online at the time and location of their choice. The online survey was active for three weeks, from Wednesday, March 19, 2014 until Wednesday, April 9, 2014. Each survey session began with a confidentiality page, which asked the participant to agree to the terms of confidentiality for the survey. If the participant did not agree, the survey ended immediately. Participants who agreed were
directed to a series of questions aimed at understanding the audience and potential audience for an interpretive program at Wilderness Park. Participants were asked whether they had visited Wilderness Park before. Participants who answered ‘yes’ were considered park visitors. Participants that answered ‘no’ were considered potential park visitors.

Park visitors (participants who had visited Wilderness Park before) were asked a series of sixteen questions, including questions that were intended for participants who had experience with Wilderness Park. Fourteen of these questions asked participants to select their answer(s) from a list of choices, and/or enter in a response not present on the list of choices. Two questions asked participants to rate their level of interest. Survey participants who were park visitors were asked their age and level of education, what other local parks they visit, habits related to Wilderness Park use, priorities related to park management, prior learning experience at the park, and their preferences and interests related to interpretation and education at the park.

Potential park visitors (participants who had not been to Wilderness Park before) were asked the same series of questions as park visitors, with the exception of eight questions that required prior experience with Wilderness Park. A total of eight questions were asked of potential park visitors. Six of these questions asked participants to select from a list of choices, or to enter a response not included on the list of choices. Two questions asked participants to rate their level of interest. Questions asked of participants who were potential park visitors inquired about the participants’ age and level of
education, what local parks they visit, and their preferences and interests related to interpretation and education at the park.

*Consent*

Each survey session began with a consent form page, which explained the purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality of participating in the survey, and that participants were able to withdraw from the procedures at any time without any harm to the participant or the participant’s relationship with the researchers, UNL, Lincoln Parks and Recreation, Friends of Wilderness Park, or any other organization involved in the project. If the participant did not agree, the survey ended immediately. A copy of the consent form page can be found in Appendix V.

*Confidentiality*

All surveys were completed anonymously, and no information gathered during the survey procedures could be used to trace the identities of survey participants.

*Reporting*

A summary of the results of the existing and potential visitor survey can be found in section 5.2 of this document.
2.3 Distribution of the Final Product

The final product produced in this project will be submitted to the Wilderness Park stakeholders for use in the development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park.

2.4 Limitations of This Study

The product of this study has at least two limitations. First, the project will have primary relevancy to visitor interpretation at Wilderness Park, in Lincoln, Nebraska. Second, the usefulness of the project will depend upon the extent to which the representative groups utilize the Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan, the focus group discussion results, and the visitor survey results to develop an interpretive plan; the extent to which the resultant plan is implemented; and the extent to which the proposed actions in the plan are adequately funded and maintained over time.
CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Interpretive Planning Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to identify the recommended components of an interpretive plan, as well as suggested practices for developing those components. Three of the reviewed documents were especially helpful for determining the necessary components and suggested practices for an interpretive plan. These documents included Interpretive Project Guide Book (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1994), Standards and Practices for Interpretive Planning (NAI 2009b), and Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence (NAAEE 2009).

The Interpretive Project Guide Book was designed to guide park staff through the process of planning and advancing interpretive projects like books, brochures, signs, models, etc. Though specifically created for use by the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, this document is applicable for other types of parks, and will likely be helpful at multiple stages in the plan development process. Specifically, the guide provides advice on the following steps in the Wilderness Park interpretive plan development process: (1) Deciding where and what to interpret; (2) Deciding specific topics, themes and media; (3) Drafting individual project proposals; (4) Designing the project; (5) Reviews and Approvals; (6) Contracting; and (7) Monitoring. For the purpose of developing an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park, this document will likely be useful to the organizations that manage and educate at the park in deciding where and what to interpret; deciding specific topics, themes and media; and possibly drafting individual project proposals. For example, the Interpretive Project Guide Book suggests that before
an organization can determine what to interpret, they first have to clarify interpretive opportunities. Creating an interpretive inventory helps to clarify opportunities. Part of the interpretive inventory process includes answering the following questions: (1) What are the outstanding natural features?; (2) What are the interesting human stories?; (3) What is already being interpreted in the area?; (4) Where are visitors going now?; (5) What facilities exist? (trails? pullouts? parking? viewpoints?); (6) What limitations are there to work with - access, terrain, weather, politics, sensitive or fragile sites, money, laws, policy . . . ?; (7) Who is or might be involved – partners? other agencies? city or county? (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1994, 12). Most of the questions suggested for an interpretive inventory are addressed in this project.

Identifying the inventory items and management parameters is necessary to understand the opportunities that exist for interpretation in Wilderness Park, and also to prevent duplication of any existing interpretive projects or materials. The Interpretive Project Guide Book provided the researcher with suggestions about how to build certain necessary components of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park, and therefore has also helped to determine methods, content, and structure.

The two remaining documents that were reviewed, Standards and Practices for Interpretive Planning and Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence, primarily provided standards for the plan development process. These standards suggest steps in the plan development process and identify the recommended goals, methods, content and structure for development of an interpretive program in a park setting.
The planning standards provided by NAI suggest thirteen benchmarks deemed to be important components for the development of an interpretive plan. For each component, three levels of achievement are provided—“good,” “better,” and “best.” For example, the standards for civic engagement recommend that in order to achieve *good practice*, the interpretive planning process should include at least one civic engagement opportunity. In order to achieve *better practice*, the interpretive planning process should also include one or more opportunities for key stakeholders and audiences to have input and review the plan document. In order to achieve *best practice*, the planning body should also provide drafts and the final interpretive master plan to key stakeholders through varied means (NAI 2009b, 6). The NAI explains that the “best” practices suggested in the document are what a planner in a perfect world might hope to achieve if he or she has all the operational resources required. In reality, the level of achievement chosen generally depends on the organization’s financial, physical or managerial realities (NAI 2009b, 3). As stated previously, the methods that were used during this project, and the methods that were suggested for the future development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park endeavor to satisfy at least the minimum NAI standards and practices for interpretive planning.

*Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* recommends standards for developing and administering an environmental education program. The document outlines six characteristics of a high quality nonformal environmental education program. For each characteristic, guidelines are suggested, along with corresponding indicators to help gauge whether the characteristic is embodied
in the program (NAAEE 2009, 1). For example, one key characteristic recommended in the document is that nonformal environmental education programs should support and complement their parent organization’s mission, purpose, and goals. To ensure that this goal is being met, the document suggests that the interpretive program planner or reviewer look for the following primary qualities: (1) The environmental education program is consistent with, and supportive of, parent organization priorities and objectives; (2) The environmental education program fills identified needs within existing activities of the sponsoring organization; and (3) The sponsoring organization has the means and will to support the program (NAAEE 2009, 10-11).

For each of these three primary qualities, specific indicators are listed to help the planner or reviewer understand whether the quality is being satisfied. For example, indicators that the environmental education program is consistent with, and supportive of, parent organization priorities and objectives include: (1) The program is consistent with the parent organization’s mission, goals, objectives, long-range plan, and any applicable mandates; (2) Program staff and program materials articulate the relationships among the program and the parent organization’s mission, goals, objectives, long-range plan, and any applicable mandates; (3) The program supports organizational communication strategies and priorities; and (4) The program’s budget is consistent with and fully integrated into the parent organization’s overall budget (NAAEE 2009, 10).

Furthermore, the document provides examples of how non-formal environmental education organizations throughout the country have sought to achieve each standard. These guidelines, indicators, and real-world examples were helpful during this project,
and will likely be helpful during the planning phase, and subsequently during periodic program evaluations. Much like the *Standards and Practices for Interpretive Planning, Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* points out that not all interpretive or education programs fit a set mold nor have endless resources, and therefore the standards presented are not fundamental to a healthy program, but rather are suggestions.

Specific instructions from the literature review that have been used during this project, and those that are suggested for future use by Wilderness Park managers and educators as they develop an interpretive plan, have been synthesized into a framework designed to guide the plan development process (see Chapter 4: Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan).

### 3.2 Review of Existing Plans

Existing planning documents related to Wilderness Park were reviewed as part of this project. The aim of this plan review was to determine any existing goals, objectives, guiding principles, or other policies that may impact future improvements to the park’s interpretive program.

**Wilderness Park Subarea Plan**

The *Wilderness Park Subarea Plan* (Hulvershorn 1999), a subarea plan that is considered part of the *Lincoln/Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan* (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 12.16), emphasizes enhancing the value of Wilderness Park
as an educational resource. Completed by J. Kip Hulvershorn in 1999, the *Wilderness Park Subarea Plan* (Subarea Plan) integrates findings of a variety of studies related to the park and makes recommendations for a first phase park management plan (Hulvershorn 1999, 1-3). Though the *Wilderness Park Subarea Plan* primarily focuses on land management, protection, and acquisition, a few recommendations relevant to education and visitor services are included.

A number of studies were utilized during the development of the Subarea Plan, and two of these studies specifically address education. The first study is the *Wilderness Park Survey: Fall 1998* (Williams, A., J. Dyck, S. Dietrich and B. Lontine 1999), which was conducted through the University of Nebraska Lincoln Department of Sociology in 1998. The *Wilderness Park Survey: Fall 1998* found that residents of Lancaster County value nature experience and nature learning as primary park uses to be preserved and enhanced (Hulvershorn 1999, 6-26). The second study, the *Wilderness Park Subarea Study Public Involvement Report: Community perspectives on the Future of Wilderness Park* (Wilderness Park Subarea Study Working Group 1999), was facilitated by the Lincoln-Lancaster Mediation Center in 1999. The *Wilderness Park Subarea Study Public Involvement Report* concluded that habitat, history, and education resources are among the values that the park contributes to the community, that these values ought to be preserved and enhanced, and that supporting education is one way to preserve these values (Hulvershorn 1999, 6-31, 6-32).

Based on integration of the studies and a community consensus process, the Subarea Plan recommends that future planning for Wilderness Park and its immediate
environs provide opportunities for ‘nature-related’ recreation such as nature study and appreciation (Hulvershorn 1999, 1-10, 3-1). In addition to nature education, the Subarea Plan recommends that the historical significance of the park be interpreted through signage, brochures, and interpretive walks and talks (Hulvershorn 1999, 3-6). Other interpretation-related suggestions include providing signs for way-finding and orientation, and continuing to encourage compatible park uses like the day camp and adjacent archery area (Hulvershorn 1999, 1-13). Minimal impact and intrusion on the natural environment is a value that is emphasized throughout the Subarea Plan.

The Wilderness Park Subarea Plan suggests that assistance be sought from the community in three specific ways. First, technical assistance should be utilized from scientists and environmental specialists on a Science Advisory Committee. Second, financial support should be sought through existing community foundations, planned giving programs, and a Wilderness Park Land Trust. Lastly, continued public participation should be encouraged through periodic park updates, consultation with environmental and friends groups, and through an annual forum on Wilderness Park (Hulvershorn 1999, 1-14). The plan also suggests that the City of Lincoln budget for a program of ongoing studies of the park’s ecosystems, particularly additional faunal studies and archaeological research (Hulvershorn 1999, 4-1).

**Pioneers Park Nature Center Strategic Plan**

The Pioneers Park Nature Center Strategic Plan (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013) was written to guide the operations of the Pioneers Park
Nature Center. The education section of the plan is relevant to Wilderness Park because some education programs that are run through Pioneers Park Nature Center take place in Wilderness Park. Therefore, education related recommendations from the *Pioneers Park Nature Center Strategic Plan* are applicable to Wilderness Park. Relevant recommendations from the education section of the plan are noted in the following summary.

The Pioneers Park Nature Center offers several activities aimed at interpreting Nebraska’s natural resources, including plants, animals, and physical elements. The Pioneers Park Nature Center also aims to promote conservation and preservation of these resources; foster practices that help to ensure a cleaner and healthier environment; create an awareness, enjoyment, understanding and knowledge of natural relationships; and encourage an environmentally responsible community (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 11). Strategies for interpretive programs and activities include:

1. **Identify new program needs** of constituents (conduct surveys, evaluations, etc.; cater to diverse audience) (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 11).

2. **Continue to evaluate all programs** to ensure quality and cost efficiency (survey visitors and program participants) (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 12).
3. Maintain quality teaching resources (maintain quality, add to, make available) (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 12).

4. Seek alternative funding sources for educational program needs. Aim to be at least revenue neutral. (collaborate, seek sponsorship, identify needs) (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 13).

5. Continue good public relations to market educational programs. (provide brochures/publications, enhance website, social media, utilize other organizations’ newsletters) (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 13).

6. Network and collaborate with others involved in environmental education and natural resource issues to remain current on environmental issues and teaching techniques, and to provide enhanced programming to the public (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 14).

Lincoln/Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan (LPLAN 2040)

Though it does not express specific instructions for interpretation, the Lincoln/Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan (LPlan 2040) (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011), is a document of particular relevance for Wilderness Park. Chapters of LPlan 2040 that are specifically relevant to Wilderness Park include Chapter 3: Environmental Resources; Chapter 4: Placemaking; and Chapter 9: Parks, Recreation, and Open Space. Standards and recommendations that are applicable to interpretation and environmental education at Wilderness Park from these three chapters are discussed in the following paragraphs.
Chapter 3 of LPlan 2040, titled Environmental Resources, provides insight regarding Wilderness Park’s purpose within the greater landscape of Lincoln and Lancaster County. The prominence of Salt Creek in the landscape is emphasized in this section. For example, the plan explains that the Salt Creek basin defines most of the county’s topography, and much of the city’s runoff drains into Salt Creek. The undeveloped banks of Salt Creek, including those within Wilderness Park, help to absorb this runoff.

The body of the chapter explains guiding principles and strategies for environmental resources in Lancaster County. One guiding principle that seems particularly relevant for Wilderness Park states, “Signature landscapes provide visual images of the community’s natural and cultural history and serve as a reminder of the ecosystem that forms the community’s urban and rural economic base” (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 3.3). Wilderness Park is a great example of a signature landscape, as a living continuation of Lincoln’s recreational history and culture, and as a reminder of the park’s role in protecting the community from catastrophic floods.

The next section discusses the “Greenprint Challenge,” a vision and model to maintain natural and cultural features in harmony with economic vitality and community growth (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 3.4). The Greenprint Challenge focuses on three “Core Resource Imperatives” — Saline and Freshwater Wetlands; Native Prairies; and Riparian, Floodplains and Stream Corridors — but also provides a basis for planning decisions concerning the wider range of other environmental resource features (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 3.4 – 3.5). A total of thirteen
distinct environmental resource features are recognized in the Greenprint Challenge. Generalized locations of these resources can be found in the Greenprint Challenge map (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** Greenprint Challenge Map  
(Source: City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011)
Resource features found in Wilderness Park include: freshwater wetlands; basins and streams; floodplains; riparian areas; parks, trails corridors and other recreational areas; woodlands; views and vistas; cultural and historic landscapes; greenways and open spaces; and unique features (e.g., Dakota sandstone prairie remnant north of the 1st Street entrance to Wilderness Park, sites associated with the village of Saltillo, the site where the Missouri River cutoff of the Oregon Trail crossed Salt Creek, and any other sites of unique cultural significance within Wilderness Park) (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 3.4 – 3.16).

The sheer quantity and diversity of environmental resource features found in Wilderness Park attests to the park’s unique significance within the county. Each environmental resource feature discussed in this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan has specific strategies associated with it. Those strategies that are relevant to interpretation and environmental education at Wilderness Park are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The Salt Valley Greenway is the first strategy stated in LPlan 2040 that is relevant to interpretation and environmental education at Wilderness Park. The Salt Valley Greenway is a planned (not yet fully implemented) continuous greenspace surrounding the city of Lincoln that is important for recreation, transportation, environmental resource preservation, education, and economic development among other benefits. A map of the proposed Salt Valley Greenway is shown in Figure 7.

The Greenway strategy recommends that information be prepared and distributed to community residents regarding the functions and value of the Salt Valley Greenway,
and of the plans for its creation. This strategy could be applied to visitor education at Wilderness Park in the sense that it suggests that the functions and values of the Salt Valley Greenway should be considered as a topic for interpretation in Wilderness Park.

**Figure 7. Salt Valley Greenway Map**
(Source: City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011)
The second strategy stated in LPlan 2040 that is relevant to interpretation and environmental education at Wilderness Park is related to cultural landscapes. Cultural landscapes are referenced as an environmental resource in Chapter 3: Environmental Resources but are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4: Placemaking. For the sake of simplicity, all suggestions relevant to placemaking from both chapters are discussed in the following paragraphs.

According to LPlan 2040, a cultural and historic landscape is defined as a place that is significant because of its unique character, because significant activities of events occurred at the site, or because persons who have had a significant impact on culture are associated with the site. There are several sites within Wilderness Park that fit this description. For example, historical sources record a spur of the Oregon and Mormon Trails that crossed through the south of present day Wilderness Park (Nebraska Historical Society 1954). At the turn of the century, the Methodist Church, affiliated with Nebraska Epworth League, began holding educational and recreational assemblies called Chautauquas just south of Lincoln Park. The Nebraska Epworth League eventually purchased this property and furnished it with campsites, a Great Hall, and a 4,000-seat auditorium where visitors heard speakers such as William Jennings Bryan and Booker T. Washington (Hulvershorn 1999, 2-2). In 1888, “Lincoln Park” opened at the northernmost section of modern day Wilderness Park and became a popular location for picnics, boating, concerts, games, and social dances. Nearly thirty years later, Lincoln Park was converted to an amusement park called Electric Park (Beachly 1981, 44). It is easy to see why Wilderness Park is a cultural and historic landscape. Numerous other
historical events are associated with Wilderness Park, making it a place of distinct cultural value to the region.

Chapter 4: Placemaking in the Comprehensive Plan describes principles and strategies aimed at preserving and enhancing the community’s unique character and sense of place by preserving cultural and historic resources and prioritizing the quality of public and private development. Principles and strategies relevant to Wilderness Park are noted in the following paragraphs.

Protecting and enhancing key vistas and view corridors leading to the Capitol building is of particular importance to placemaking (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 4.2 – 4.3). Though the Wilderness Park trails are not included in the maps of Capitol View Corridors, exceptional views of the Capitol building can be seen from the trails. This quality may not influence interpretive priorities (though it could), but it certainly does contribute to the unique significance of the trails. A significant statement in this chapter reads, “Other important resources for providing community identity and orientation are entryway corridors, parks, trails, and open spaces” (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 4.3). Indeed, Wilderness Park contains or constitutes all or most of these resources. Wilderness Park’s distinctive set of historical, natural, and recreational features make it an ideal location to celebrate community identity.

A guiding principle of the plan for placemaking states that exercising stewardship of historic resources throughout the county will support the community’s distinctive character and desirable quality of life for current residents and for future generations (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 4.6). Toward this aim, the plan recommends
the following strategy: “Continue to inventory, research, evaluate, and celebrate the full range of historic resources including standing structures, distinctive neighborhoods and regions, landscapes, and buried cultural materials throughout Lancaster County, collaborating with individuals, associations, and institutions” (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 4.9). This strategy can be applied to many of the features found at Wilderness Park, which include standing structures, landscapes, and buried cultural materials. Application of this strategy to important sites at Wilderness Park would contribute to interpretation at the park.

Another relevant strategy suggests that the community should continue the educational outreach effort of its historic preservation program through tours, publications, on-line information, and presentations, in order to share the results of historic preservation and research with the broadest audience of residents and visitors (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 4.9). Though Wilderness Park is not presently a part of this educational outreach effort, perhaps existing and future research and preservation efforts could be shared with the historic preservation program in order to communicate to a broader audience within the community.

Parks, recreation, and open space are discussed further in Chapter 9: Parks, Recreation, and Open Space of the Comprehensive Plan. This chapter describes principles and strategies for acquiring, managing, and enhancing parks, recreation and activity centers, open space, greenways, and other recreational facilities in the community. The plan categorizes Wilderness Park as a conservation area; however, Wilderness Park is also part of the Salt Valley Greenway. One strategy for greenways that could be
applied to interpretation at Wilderness Park states,

Continue the cooperative efforts of the City of Lincoln, Lancaster County, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District on various efforts including land assembly, maintenance, flood control, wildlife and habitat preservation, recreation, and game management” (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 9.9).

Depending on whether interpretation qualifies as a type of recreation, this strategy may suggest that interpretive efforts should involve cooperation between the City of Lincoln, Lancaster County, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District.

The final strategy stated in LPlan 2040 that is relevant to interpretation at Wilderness Park forecasts a likely shift in recreation interests and activities due to growing experience with technology as a recreational activity. The plan suggests that Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department should monitor and be responsive to emerging interests, and seek opportunities for partnerships and collaborations with user groups to support activities and to develop facilities. Relevant examples of emerging recreation activities include: mountain biking, geocaching, and adventure racing (City of Lincoln Planning Department 2011, 9.12 – 9.13). This strategy could be applied to visitor interpretation at Wilderness Park by suggesting that the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation seek community input regarding their interest in new interpretive methods. Some examples of emerging interpretive methods include audio tours accessed using a cellular phone, and QR codes. The existing and potential park visitor survey (see section 5.2 of this document) conducted as part of this project could be used to help
determine public interest regarding both traditional and contemporary interpretive methods.

Salt Valley Greenway and Prairie Corridor Master Plan

The *Salt Valley Greenway and Prairie Corridor Master Plan* (Greenway Plan) (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation, and The Flatwater Group 2012) is a plan of particular relevance to Wilderness Park because it provides guidance for the development and enhancement of a ring of green space surrounding the city of Lincoln. The Greenway Plan emphasizes the importance of Wilderness Park as a component of a greater network of natural and historic landscapes known as the Salt Valley Greenway. The executive summary of the plan acknowledges the vast benefits of the greenway within the community and emphasizes its particular importance in the context of an urbanized area. Broadly speaking, the greenway contributes to quality of life, helps protect the natural environment and inspires an awareness of connectivity with nature. The following paragraphs reflect information from the Greenway Plan that is pertinent to interpretive planning at Wilderness Park.

According to the Greenway Plan, the benefits of the greenway can generally be divided into two categories: benefits to people and benefits to nature, though many of the benefits are mutually advantageous. The benefits of the greenway are relevant to interpretation at Wilderness Park because they are important topics for community education. The following paragraph summarizes the benefits of the greenway stated in the Greenway Plan.
Much of the greenway contains recreational trails and open space, from which visitors can enjoy and study nature. The vegetated landscape within the greenway provides a corridor of food and shelter for birds, mammals, reptiles and insects. In addition to this, much of the greenway provides flood protection and improves water quality for animal habitat and recreation. There are numerous historical and cultural resources within the greenway. These places serve as living reminders of local and regional heritage and contribute to a sense of pride in the community. The plan states that by careful planning, these resources can be preserved and highlighted. An example provided in the plan suggests that trails that pass or link to a historical site can be enriched by informative signage, thereby generating a lively sense of pride in the community (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and the Flatwater Group 2012, 1).

It seems evident that the diverse values and functions of the greenway could be enhanced through visitor interpretation. As stated in the Greenway Plan, historical resources can be highlighted by use of historic signage, and these types of interpretive features can generate community pride in local history and culture. Similarly, interpretation of the natural features of the landscape can stimulate feelings of pride and respect for the landscape. This concept supports the notion that interpretation should be pursued at relevant locations throughout the greenway, such as those in Wilderness Park.

One of the primary goals of the greenway plan is to preserve and consider the natural resources in the Salt Valley Greenway when considering policy and development decisions. Figure 8 identifies these resources and highlights places where they are
predominant within the greenway and its connecting corridors (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and the Flatwater Group 2012, ES-3).

**Figure 8.** Map of Salt Valley Greenway Resources
(Source: City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation, and The Flatwater Group 2012, modified from Map ES-2)

This figure also shows that Wilderness Park is encompassed within a section of the greenway called the Crescent Green Link, which is a segment of the main loop of the Salt
Valley Greenway. As shown on the map, Wilderness Park possesses several greenway resources, including a floodway, floodplain, freshwater wetlands, streams, historic trails, existing trails, parks and open space, and conservation easements. Though not evident in the map, woodlands constitute a large part of Wilderness Park.

The remainder of the Greenway Plan primarily discusses the portion of the greenway called Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch, which will serve as a starting point for implementation and will serve as a model for implementation of the Salt Valley Greenway as a whole. Because it is intended to serve as a model for implementation of the entire greenway, it is logical to assume that many aspects of the implementation plan for the Prairie Corridor will also be relevant for Wilderness Park. Most of the discussion of the Prairie Corridor focuses on habitat management priorities. These management priorities were formulated based on review of natural resources information, as well as supplemental research and fieldwork including GIS data analysis and input from experts and stakeholders (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and the Flatwater Group 2012, ES-7). Components of the plan for the Prairie Corridor include a detailed evaluation of the corridor’s natural resources, opportunities for restoration and enhancement, trail and habitat connectivity, priorities for potential easements and acquisition, funding and land management strategies, and cost estimates.

The plan emphasizes the importance of forming public-private partnerships to accomplish the goals of the entire Greenway Plan. The plan calls for formation of a coalition that would work cooperatively to implement the overall vision of the Salt Valley Greenway and bring a range of strengths and resources to the project. As the lead
agency, the City of Lincoln would initiate this coalition and work cooperatively to develop and implement a public-private partnership. Potential partners that would form the core of this coalition include the City of Lincoln, the Lincoln Parks Foundation, Lancaster County, and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, but may also include others as appropriate (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and the Flatwater Group 2012, ES-11). For example, specific plans for implementation of the Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch include the formation of a formal partnership with the Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, the Village of Denton and other potential partners to apply for grants and implement the plan.

Lastly, the plan envisions that a coordinator will manage project details and work with the partnership to promote and coordinate the plan, conduct public outreach and education and participate in and promote fundraising activities for the Prairie Corridor and Salt Valley Greenway projects (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and the Flatwater Group 2012, ES-12). Because the implementation process for Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch is intended to serve as a model for implementation of the Salt Valley Greenway as a whole, it follows that these strategies (for forming habitat management priorities, forming partnerships, and utilizing a coordinator to engage the public) should also be strongly considered for the development and enhancement of the portion of the greenway that contains Wilderness Park.
**Crescent Green Park Study Report**

The *Crescent Green Park Study Report* (Clark & Enersen, Hamersky, Schlaebitz, Burroughs & Thomsen 1977) was written to make suggestions for the development of a series of interconnected greenways along Salt Creek and its tributaries. While the report makes no recommendations related to interpretation, it paints an exceptional picture of the significance of Wilderness Park, past and present. One of the most valuable traits of this report is its poignant summary of the landscape in and around Wilderness Park. The report underlines the little known but fundamental role of that landscape in the region’s history. Here is an excerpt from the report:

The Salt Creek, as it wanders along the west edge of the city, touches all of the sites which were important to the founding of the county and city. The first cabins were built on its banks; the first county assembly was held under a giant elm near the Burlington yards; the first industry and the whole reason for the city was to be found in the salt flats. Early settlers described magnificent stands of honey-locust, elm and cottonwood, droves of antelope and fields of giant sunflowers. Later on, the Steam Road from Nebraska City was to cross Salt Creek near the town of Yankee Hill. (Clark & Enersen, Hamersky, Schlaebitz, Burroughs & Thomsen 1977, 2)

The report then describes the gradual degradation of the area, and the change of relationship between the citizens and the creek:

Inevitably, the developing city erased the “history” and permanently altered the character of the water course. Urbanization changed the gentle stream into a channel for flood water and effluent, and industry nudged the banks, replacing the majestic timber stands. A landscape element had become a strictly utilitarian conduit, something to be hurdled, ignored and suffered. (Clark & Enersen, Hamersky, Schlaebitz, Burroughs & Thomsen 1977, 2)
Despite this degradation, the banks of Salt Creek eventually regained prominence in the eyes of Lincoln/Lancaster County residents. The report explains this in the following excerpt:

Even in its changing role, the stream was still able to save for the city an important strip of land not suited to buildings but useful as a permanent open space that could one day be reclaimed as a linear park with trails linking playfields and sports areas by paths stretching eight miles without interruption. In addition to this, the visitor has a perspective of the city which seems unique—he finds himself “in” the city, but not “of” it. (Clark & Enersen, Hamersky, Schlaebitz, Burroughs & Thomsen 1977, 2)

The story communicated in the Crescent Green Park Report gets to the core of Wilderness Park’s significance to the city and region. It conveys a coming of age tale, beginning at the region’s exciting developmental origins, recounting a, perhaps, shortsighted youth, and celebrating emergence as a mature region that is proud of its roots and prudent concerning its future. This story provides a context for the many historical elements of Wilderness Park and would be a useful starting point from which to interpret history at the park.

**Implementation Plan for the Conservation of Nebraska’s Eastern Saline Wetlands**

The *Implementation Plan for the Conservation of Nebraska’s Eastern Saline Wetlands* (Saline Wetlands Conservation Partnership 2003) highlights the importance of protecting and restoring eastern saline wetlands. Although Wilderness Park contains no saline wetlands, the park is closely associated with Salt Creek, a water body of particular significance to eastern saline wetlands. The *Implementation Plan for the Conservation of*
Nebraska’s Eastern Saline Wetlands emphasizes the importance of protecting the quality of streams and freshwater wetlands associated with eastern saline wetlands, both of which are present in Wilderness Park (Saline Wetlands Conservation Partnership 2003). The plan notes the importance of saline wetlands as a unique and vital ecosystem and also explains their importance to the region’s history. This may suggest that saline wetlands and early salt industry in Lancaster County should be considered for interpretation at Wilderness Park. If nothing more, the Implementation Plan for the Conservation of Nebraska’s Eastern Saline Wetlands underlines the importance of protecting the integrity of Salt Creek and its associated wetlands. Wilderness Park undoubtedly plays a role in this task.

Nebraska Environmental Education Master Plan

The Nebraska Environmental Education Master Plan (NACEE 2005), developed by the Nebraska Alliance for Conservation and Environment Education (NACEE), looks at the “big picture” of environmental education needs throughout the state. The document is intended to help organizations, agencies, and the public in Nebraska focus and coordinate their environmental education efforts, to raise awareness about the need for environmental education and to stimulate new partnerships that would help to implement the specific actions identified in the plan (NACEE 2005, 1). The ultimate aim of the plan is to facilitate a comprehensive way for Nebraskans to learn what they need to know to protect their natural resources for themselves and future generations.
The plan itself is a series of objectives accompanied by explanations (“rationale”) of why those objectives were chosen, and specific “action” recommendations to aid in reaching the objectives. The action recommendations used in the plan were built based on a statewide environmental literacy survey that assessed knowledge, attitudes, and behavior tendencies (NACEE 2005, 6). Throughout the planning process, participants were asked to set priorities and identify actions needed to improve environmental education on a statewide level. While many of the objectives and action recommendations are relevant to environmental education and interpretation at Wilderness Park, those that seem most relevant to the development and maintenance of an interpretive program for Wilderness Park include:

**Objective 1:** Increase the opportunities for Nebraska residents of all ages to enhance their awareness and understanding of Nebraska’s natural heritage.

- **Action 1:** Encourage the development of quality programs that give families the opportunity to explore the natural world together.

- **Action 2:** Develop resources, training, and sites that incorporate environmental education into early childhood development.

- **Action 5:** Develop programs that provide environmental education opportunities for seniors. (NACEE 2005, 9)

**Objective 2:** Increase funding for environmental education in Nebraska.

- **Action 3:** Encourage school districts, educational service units, private conservation organizations, and governmental agencies to increase their support and funding for environmental education. Environmental education should be given higher priority for funding and staff allocation
within organizations having responsibility for educating our citizens and managing our natural resources.

Action 4: Identify corporate partners and private foundations whose mission/objectives are similar to and/or overlap those of environmental education and seek their support. Develop and prioritize a list of corporate partners and private foundations that would be most likely to support environmental education. Identify key groups or individuals who have existing relationships or could develop new ones with potential corporate and foundation leaders. (NACEE 2005, 10)

**Objective 3**: Promote collaboration and partnership among a diversity of environmental education stakeholders.

Action 1: Encourage greater participation by all stakeholders in addressing environmental education issues. Increased collaboration must be sought among the wide diversity of groups that impact environmental issues. These groups include, but are not limited to, agricultural groups, conservation groups, environmental groups, private industry, and individual landowners. By finding mechanisms for these various groups to assist in addressing environmental education issues together, the environmental health of the state can be enhanced. (NACEE 2005, 11)

**Objective 4**: Ensure that environmental education reflects Nebraska’s ethnic and cultural diversity.

Action 1: Seek to broaden environmental education to better reflect Nebraska’s ethnic diversity. At present, many environmental education materials are not relevant to minority communities. In addition, minorities appear to be under-represented in the teaching profession. It is imperative to obtain minority input into material design and provide training for minority environmental educators so that the environmental education community can be broadened to be more representative of Nebraska residents.

Action 2: Develop new or modify existing environmental education programs that are designed specifically for underserved populations. Students of various communities have unequal access to hands-on materials and effective curricula. Given appropriate materials, more teachers may be encouraged to include environmental education in their classrooms.
Objective 3: Develop new environmental education programs or modify existing ones that are sensitive to and address differences between rural and urban audiences. The workshops held across the state in 2004 to gain input for this Master Plan clearly showed that issues differ between rural and urban inhabitants as well as between various areas of the state. There is a need to incorporate these varying perspectives into environmental education programs. (NACEE 2005, 12)

Objective 5: Improve the quality and accessibility of environmental education resources.

Rationale: There is a large unmet demand and need for environmental education resources. Resources may include knowledgeable speakers, festivals, activity guides, nature center programs, hands-on materials, and videos. A well-maintained catalog of resources is needed that can be accessed easily by educators and others. An annotated inventory could highlight the best and most effective resources. Funding issues need to be addressed at environmental education centers. Areas where new nature centers are needed should be prioritized. (NACEE 2005, 13)

Objective 6: Increase the number of formal educators from all disciplines who have knowledge, time, skills, and confidence to integrate environmental education into their curricula.

Action 4: Ensure that formal educators are aware of and have access to environmental education resources. By widely disseminating information about the availability of resources, teachers will be able to find information and materials relevant to their needs and have greater confidence to teach about these subjects. A database will ensure teachers have access to current information.

Action 5: Provide forums that increase networking and information exchange between formal educators and the environmental education community. Formal educators need to have opportunities to be informed on environmental topics. Listservs, electronic forums, newsletters, white papers, meetings/workshops, etc. can provide opportunities to network and exchange information. (NACEE 2005, 14).
Objective 7: Increase the number of non-formal educators from all disciplines who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to participate in environmental education.

Action 1: Develop, implement, and encourage use of an education training program for new educators and provide continuing education opportunities for existing educators. Non-formal educators need training opportunities to be given the tools and knowledge to be effective teachers (e.g. theory of multiple intelligences, inquiry-based learning, etc.). A ‘train-the-trainer’ program should be developed so that individuals across all disciplines can be instructed by their peers to be effective educators. Annual advanced training opportunities should be developed to provide continuing education opportunities to improve the effectiveness and content of environmental education.

Action 2: Encourage a greater number of professionals in the natural resources and environmental fields to support and take part in environmental education. Natural resource managers and administrators need to be made aware of the importance of environmental education to the conservation of natural resources, and engage their staff in meaningful environmental education.

Action 3: Ensure that non-formal educators have access to environmental education resources. By widely disseminating information about the availability of resources, educators will be able to find information and materials relevant to their needs and have greater confidence to teach about the environment. A database will ensure teachers have access to current information.

Action 5: Develop a recognition program that acknowledges non-formal educators for outstanding efforts in environmental education. There are many committed non-formal educators who are contributing to environmental education in Nebraska. Formal and informal appreciation of these efforts needs to be made through awards, public and private recognition, and other means. (NACEE 2005, 15)

Objective 8: Encourage and assist in the development of cross-disciplinary and Nebraska-specific environmental education curricula and materials.

Action 1: Encourage the promotion of existing Nebraska-specific curricula and the development of new high quality materials modeled
when possible after existing successful programs or curricula. Students often identify with an issue best if it can be related to something with which they are familiar. Educators can expect a greater level of success by using regionally specific curricula. Teachers, university faculty, and environmental educators should work collaboratively to better promote existing Nebraska-specific curricula and to develop new curricula with a local or regional focus.

Action 2: Encourage and support innovative and cross-disciplinary environmental education programs in Nebraska schools and communities. Integrated approaches to environmental education in Nebraska need to be promoted and better supported. Nebraska’s environmental education community could benefit from exploring new and innovative programs and philosophies. The Environment as an Integrating Context model (www.seer.org) is one successful model that breaks down traditional boundaries between subject areas. (NACEE 2005, 16)

Objective 10: Encourage monitoring and evaluation of environmental education effectiveness and outcomes.

Action 1: Encourage and seek funding for environmental educators to measure the effectiveness of programs using accepted evaluation protocols. New programs should include front-end evaluation protocols to measure effectiveness and adapt program implementation if necessary. Current programs should strive to develop evaluation criteria to measure outcomes.

Action 2: Publish an annual report of environmental education activities and outcomes. An annual report of outcomes will help ensure that stakeholders and the public are informed about the successes and deficiencies of environmental education efforts across Nebraska.

Action 3: Advocate for long-term evaluation projects. Without long-term evaluation projects (e.g., multi-decade longitudinal studies), it will be difficult to assess the impacts of environmental education and the changes needed to make it more effective.

Action 4: Conduct regular surveys of environmental literacy and use results to identify environmental literacy strengths and deficiencies. A protocol modeled after the Roper-Starch National Report Card should be developed to assess environmental literacy in Nebraska and compare it to a national benchmark. The survey results could be used to identify and
prioritize key issues. Funding sources need to be identified for conducting the survey on a regular basis. (NACEE 2005, 18)

It is recommended that the *Nebraska Environmental Education Master Plan* be consulted during the development and implementation of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park. As part of this project, a PDF of the Master Plan will be submitted to the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation along with other plans found to be relevant to interpretive planning at Wilderness Park.

**Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan**

The purpose of the *Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan* (NACEE 2010) is to present a comprehensive strategy, linked with state educational standards and curricula, to provide youth with structured and unstructured opportunities for play, outdoor recreation, learning and scientific study. The plan was developed by the Nebraska Alliance for Conservation and Environment Education (NACEE), which created a workgroup of stakeholders in order to gain input during plan development. The plan recommends that the State of Nebraska take certain steps to ensure that children in Nebraska have opportunities to connect with nature and to grow to become informed and responsible stewards of our environment (NACEE 2010, 4). While this plan has primary relevancy to Nebraska Department of Education (NDOE) and formal educational institutions, parts of the plan have relevancy to informal environmental education, such as interpretation at Wilderness Park.
The *Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan* addresses several “elements” determined to be in need of standards by North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) and the Nebraska Alliance for Conservation and Environment Education. During the plan development process, NACEE established “goals,” and “strategies” aimed at addressing each element. Elements, goals, and strategies that seem relevant to informal education and interpretation at Wilderness Park include:

**Element 1**: Identify specific content standards, content areas, and courses or subjects where instruction will take place.

**Goal**: Use the existing Nebraska Department of Education Standards as a basis for further incorporating environmental literacy into school practices.

**Strategy 4**: Fostering Partnerships Related to the Standards.

• Non-formal educators should communicate with teachers and schools, explaining how their programs will help them meet specific content standards. (NACEE 2010, 6-7)

**Element 2**: How state high school graduation and other requirements will ensure that graduates are environmentally literate

**Goal**: The course requirements for high school graduates make a strong statement about which skills and knowledge are valued to best prepare students to live and work as productive, responsible citizens. Course requirements should reflect a commitment to environmental education.

**Strategy 3**: Community Service Requirements.

• Encourage schools with community service requirements to include environmental service learning hours tied to the curriculum. (NACEE 2010, 8)
**Element 3: Professional Development for Teachers**

Goal: Provide programs, partnerships, information and opportunities for formal and non-formal educators to improve their environmental content knowledge, skills in teaching about environmental issues, and field-based pedagogical skills.

**Strategy 1: Conduct a Needs Assessment.**

- Input should be solicited from teachers and professional organizations, to determine what professional development resources and opportunities are needed and to determine what, if any, barriers have kept them from providing/participating in environmental education in the past. (NACEE 2010, 9-10)

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**Element 4: Measuring environmental literacy and the impact of the Environmental Literacy Plan**

Goal: Establish evaluation of all programs in order to assess the benefits of environmental education and to implement ongoing program improvement.

**Strategies:**

4. Evaluation Components for Non-formal Educators.

- Evaluation should include measures of environmental literacy, value and behavior change as well as concrete measures such as: increased use of parks and other outdoor related programs, reduced litter, youth participation in programs, increasing enrollment of students choosing environmental/conservation related courses.

5. Evaluation of Implementation.

- Implementation of the Environmental Literacy Plan should be evaluated in order to continually improve each element (e.g., evaluation should gage teacher interest/involvement in environmental education over time and should also be used to identify the types of trainings and resources that would be beneficial to teachers).

• Data collection should take place regularly so that indicators (such as student knowledge, attitudes and behavior) can be tracked over time (the progression through the school career) and should use a variety of appropriate methods (focus groups, journaling, portfolios, results mapping by following up with graduates, service learning projects, pre- and post-tests, tests, etc.). When appropriate, online evaluation tools should be used to reduce paper use. (NACEE 2010, 11-12)

**Element 9: Resources for Non-Formal Educators**

**Goal:** Provide resources and training opportunities to support non-formal environmental educators.

**Strategies:**

1. **Conduct a Needs Assessment.**

   • Input should be solicited from teachers and non-formal educators to determine what resources would be helpful in supporting partnership and non-formal educators’ efforts to provide environmental education.

2. **Develop an Online Catalog of Resources.**

   • With input from Nebraska teachers and non-formal educators, develop a well-organized, comprehensive and searchable catalog of resources including:

     o NAAEE Environmental Education Guidelines.
     o Nebraska Education Standards.
     o Listings of funding opportunities for environmental education programs.
     o Resources for non-formal educators on how to align their programs with education standards.
     o Resources for non-formal educators on how to engage teachers and administrators in environmental education.
     o Resources for non-formal educators on how to evaluate their programs. (NACEE 2010, 21)
Element 10: Public Campaign to Enhance Stewardship

Goal: Develop a plan that creates opportunities to strengthen understanding and appreciation of natural resources and enhances stewardship of our shared environment.

Strategies:

1. Highlight Existing Opportunities.

- Provide greater coordination for children and families to experience a seamless network of environmental opportunities in local, private, county, state and national parks.
  - Highlight the value of parks and offer promotional free weekends at local, state and federal parks.
  - Highlight the value of cultural sites that focus on the environment and/or agriculture.
  - Highlight play-based experiences for youth.
  - Promote existing educational opportunities that connect students with nature.
  - Promote existing local outdoor opportunities that connect families with nature.
  - Promote agri-tourism.

2. Marketing Campaign.

- Creation of a statewide marketing campaign focused on inspiring a cultural shift to connect children to nature and appreciation of natural resources. The campaign should include creative strategies such as:
  - Using a variety of media outlets to promote stewardship including radio, television, websites, electronic media and social networking websites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter).

  The messaging regarding the campaign should:

  - Explain how the environment is inter-dependent with the other major social benefits: social/cultural, technology, health, economy, public policy.
  - Be directed at families and inclusive all of all ages, abilities, and racial/cultural groups.
Focus on the small things that people can accomplish in Nebraska.

Emphasize how environmental stewardship enhances quality of life and reduces outmigration of population.

Teach people how they impact the environment (e.g., ecological footprint).

Discuss how to become an environmentally conscious consumer.

3. Establish a Network of Volunteers and Educators.

- Create a statewide network of volunteers and educators that can:

  - Provide service-learning opportunities.
  - Serve as speakers on topics related to conservation, stewardship, and environmental education.
  - Recruit young people to become involved and to work with youth.
  - Recruit retired residents to become involved and to work with youth/serve as mentors.
  - Create/promote volunteer opportunities for families.

4. Support Outdoor Education for Adult Learners.

- Create/promote outdoor education opportunities for adult learners (e.g., classes through the University Extension Offices or Community College courses on outdoor skills, etc.).

(NACEE 2010, 22-23)

It is recommended that managers and educators involved with education and interpretation at Wilderness Park consider how they might advance these elements, goals, and strategies during the planning and implementation of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park. As part of this project, a PDF of the *Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan* will be submitted to the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation along with other plans found to be relevant to interpretive planning at Wilderness Park.
4. FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERPRETIVE PLAN

The following framework provides an outline of tasks and recommendations for the development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park. This guide, which is tailored to reflect the specific circumstances surrounding the development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park, represents a synthesis of the recommendations given in three documents: *Interpretive Project Guide Book* (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1994), *Standards and Practices for Interpretive Planning* (NAI 2009b), and *Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* (NAAEE 2009), with emphasis on the latter two documents. The purpose of the framework is to logically organize and articulate the recommended steps toward the development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park. While this framework was specifically designed to guide the development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park, it may also be useful as a guideline for other parks and non-formal interpretive venues.

This framework was developed using the procedures discussed in section 2.2.2 of this document. The results of the literature reviews (sections 3.1 and 3.2), focus group discussions (section 5.1), and visitor survey (section 5.2) conducted as part of this project could be used to provide vital input for most of the steps outlined in the framework, particularly the development of goals, methods, content, and resources for a successful plan. The results of focus groups and surveys can be found in the next chapter (Chapter 5: Focus Group and Visitor Survey Results).

The framework recommends a nine-step plan development process. These steps are presented in a logical chronology; however, in many cases the steps could be
completed using a different sequence, and some steps could occur concurrently. An abbreviated outline of the nine-step framework is presented below in Figure 9.

**Figure 9.** Basic Interpretive Plan Development Framework

1. **Compile an Inventory of Existing Activities and Goals**

2. **Compile an Inventory of Resources**

3. **Determine Community Needs and Analyze Audience**

4. **Determine Management’s Needs and Abilities**

5. **Articulate Program Goals and Scope**

6. **Select Topics and Themes**

7. **Select Interpretive Methods**

8. **Prepare Education Resources**

9. **Evaluate Program Results**

Repeat steps based on evaluation
The framework includes a nine-step plan development process. Each step, written below in bold, is an overall action. Each step is composed of many smaller tasks, written beneath the overall action. Words written in italics are specifications for a task.

Input from the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation management staff and other key stakeholders should be utilized for each step. Some of the necessary input from staff and stakeholders was collected as part of this project and can be found in the literature reviews (sections 3.1 and 3.2), focus group discussion results (section 5.1), and visitor survey results (section 5.2) included in this document. Furthermore, the outcome of each step should be submitted to appropriate City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation management staff and key stakeholders (where appropriate) for review and subsequent revision. An asterisk (*) indicates that input from park users should be used during this step.

**Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan for Wilderness Park**

1. **Compile an Inventory of Existing Activities and Goals**
   List all existing interpretive activities associated with the park.
   
   *Utilize results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups to determine existing interpretive activities.*
   
   List parent organization’s mission, purpose, and goals.
   
   *Utilize results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups for information about the mission, purpose, and goals of the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation (parent organization) and Friends of Wilderness Park.*
2. Compile an Inventory of Resources
List staff, volunteers, collaborators, and funding.
Consider potential collaborators and grants.
Assess staff competencies for education and creation of education materials.
Identify environmental and historic topics embodied by the landscape.

Utilize results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups for a list of general topics. Further research, including literature reviews and interviews with local experts is recommended to better understand and document the topics embodied in Wilderness Park.

3. Determine Community Needs and Analyze Audience
Identify environmental, education, and community needs so that the interpretive program can be designed to produce responsive, accountable benefits that address those identified needs.

Consult Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan, Nebraska Environmental Education Plan, and utilize the results of Wilderness Park Visitor Survey and Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups to help determine community needs.

Gather information about Wilderness Park visitors and about their interests related to the park, including what they wish to learn at/about the park.

Consult the results of the Wilderness Park Visitor Survey to determine visitor interests.

Consult page 6-2 of the Wilderness Park Subarea Plan (Hulvershorn, 1999).

Consider potential audiences in meaningful and realistic ways relevant to the project. Consider complementary operations.
4. Determine Management’s Needs and Abilities

Identify parent organization’s unmet goals based on a comparison of goals and activities.

*Utilize the results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups to determine which goals are being met by existing interpretive activities, and which goals are not being met by existing interpretive activities.*

Identify resources available for interpretation.

*Utilize the results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups to determine staff members who are dedicated to interpretation or similar activities (staff responsibilities are listed in the focus group results, but names are not provided); and the ability of management to take on new interpretive activities and materials to maintain.*

*Determine availability of city/county funding; any funding from friends or partner organizations, and any grants. Utilize Wilderness Park manager and educator focus group results to determine availability of funding and other support from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors.*

5. Articulate Program Goals and Scope

Develop goals that support and complement their parent organization’s mission, purpose, and goals.

*Utilize the results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups.*

Develop objectives that logically support the selected goals.

*Utilize the results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups to determine which objectives contribute to the identified goals, and whether there are goals that need objectives to support them. Develop objectives for unsupported goals.*

Ensure that goals and objectives are well-articulated.

Assess the overall fit of the program within the field of environmental education.

State how the program will contribute to the development of environmental literacy.
*6. Select Topics and Themes*

Consider which topics and overall themes give particular significance to the landscape. Use input from visitor survey to determine what should be interpreted at the park.

*Utilize the results of the Wilderness Park Visitor Survey.*

Identify environmental, educational, and community needs that might be addressed using the environmental and historic resources in the park.

*Consult the Review of Existing Plans (section 3.2 of this project), specifically the reviews of the Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan (NACEE 2010), the Nebraska Environmental Education Plan (NACEE 2009); and Wilderness Park visitor survey results to determine community needs. Consider how these needs might be addressed using the topics identified in the results of the Wilderness Park visitor survey and the results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups.*

Consider how the program can address identified environmental, educational, and community needs and produce responsive, accountable benefits that address those identified needs.

*Consult the Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan and the Nebraska Environmental Education Plan (NACEE 2010).*

Consider a central theme to encompass the selected topics.

*Ensure that message elements relate to a central theme or big idea to be conveyed to the audience.*

Once themes, subthemes, and topics are selected, ensure that themes and message elements clearly align with specific interpretive plan objectives and that all objectives and that all objectives are supported by message elements.

*Consult Interpretive Project Guide Book (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1994) for instructions.*
*7. Select Interpretive Methods


Consider contemporary interpretive technology such as social media, online publications, audio tours/trailcasts, and GPS.

Clearly indicate the mix of media required to convey the message(s) to specific audiences.

*To accomplish this effectively: Determine format, techniques, and training needs.*

*The interpretive plan should provide descriptions of suggested media types. These descriptions should include details about the media, such as the target audience, theme relationship, location, and a physical description of the media.*

Select interpretive methods.

*Select methods based on what methods are determined to work best for park goals, and can be afforded and maintained.*

*The selected methods should: (1) Provide opportunities for visitors to understand and appreciate the resource; (2) Provide opportunities for visitors to connect with the resource both emotionally and intellectually; (3) Enable visitors to make sound decisions and prepare for their experience through consideration of how to provide adequate information, orientation material and maps; (4) Consider safety and security issues of both the visitor and the resource. (NAI 2009b, 17)*

Create a logic model that explains how methods will achieve program goals and how success can be measured.

*The logic model should specify measurable goals of the interpretive program.*

Develop evaluation strategies, techniques, and criteria to accompany the logic model. Include the logic model and accompanying evaluation strategies, techniques, and criteria in the interpretive plan. Consult *Nonformal Environmental Education Programs – Guidelines for Excellence* (NAAEE 2009), pages 23 and 32 for information about how to build a logic model.

Clearly describe the visitor experience.

After the final step of determining methods is complete, submit a draft of the interpretive master plan to key stakeholders for review.
8. Prepare Education Resources
Assess logistical and resource (facilities, supplies, and equipment) needs based on selected methods.
Assess staff training needs.
State how staff will be prepared to deliver the education methods (whether teaching or creating an interpretive sign or pamphlet).

Consult Summary of Guidelines for the Preparation and Professional Development of Environmental Educators (NAAEE 2010).

Agree on a plan for management of interpretive materials.
Evaluate cost for future projects and anticipate cost increases.
Ensure that no more than four sub-themes are planned for a specific site, building, collection, or media piece.

9. Evaluate Program Results
Evaluate management objectives every few years, using the logic model (created during step 7), in order to improve current programs, ensure accountability, and maximize the effects of future efforts.

Set a date for an annual evaluation as soon as possible.
Present the results of evaluations of management objectives in an annual report.
CHAPTER 5. FOCUS GROUP AND VISITOR SURVEY RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the focus group discussions and visitor survey conducted as part of this project. These results could be used to provide vital input for most of the steps outlined in the Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan (see Chapter 4), particularly the development of goals, methods, content, and resources for a successful plan. The focus group results provide an inventory and evaluation of the existing interpretive program, completed by Wilderness Park managers and educators during the focus group discussions. Together, the survey results and focus group results present key stakeholder opinions regarding goals, topics, and methods for the interpretative program at Wilderness Park.

5.1 Focus Group Results

Focus group discussions were conducted with representatives from the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation staff, and the Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors using the procedures discussed in section 2.2.4. The IRB approval letter for these procedures can be found in Appendix I. The questionnaire and handout used during both focus groups can be found in Appendix II. The results of the focus group discussions are presented in the two following sections.
5.1.1 City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation

Focus Group Results

The following report is a record of the comments expressed during the focus group discussion with five staff members from the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation. Participants met with the researcher at a conference room at Pioneers Park Nature Center on Friday, March 21, 2014.

Prior to the start of the focus group discussion, participants expressed that a fundamental value of Wilderness Park is its wild, relatively unmanicured landscape. To protect the park’s wildness, it is critical to maintain a wild appearance as new interpretive activities and approaches are considered.

The City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation participants considered the following topics important to include in visitor education:

- Plants at the park
- Animals at the park
- Year round and seasonal plants and animals
- Different landscapes and ecosystems in the park, such as the floodway, different types of forest, bur-oak stands, wetlands, grasslands, etc.
- How the plants and animals are protected at the park
- The trails – their locations, length/distance markers, and what visitors will find along the way in terms of landscape and history (perhaps via map)
• The park’s **location** and vastness. A map is an ideal way to communicate this.

• **Historical** events and locations in the park

• The many ways that visitors can **have fun out-of-doors**

The focus group participants hope that the following educational directions and **goals** can be achieved at Wilderness Park:

• Facilitate an awareness and **understanding of the habitats** at Wilderness Park and the Lincoln area, and communicate why they are important.

• Encourage **stewardship** of natural resources (including parks and greenways) in the community. Specifically, participants expressed that they hope education efforts will inspire the community to care about Wilderness Park to the extent that they are willing to continue to support its conservation through their votes, money, and time.

• Encourage **advocacy** within the community to fight developmental threats to the park.

• Communicate the multitude of ways that green spaces like Wilderness Park benefit the community. These include **benefits** to wildlife, water quality, flood protection, recreation opportunities, opportunities to find peace and solitude in the city, and also the often overlooked economic benefit — that people (particularly young people) want to live and remain in a community that has recreational spaces like Wilderness Park.
Much of the focus group discussion was geared toward a self-evaluation of existing interpretive activities. Education activities that have been going well include:

- **Nature camps** at Wilderness Park
- **Entomology**, specifically the Kids Bug Hunt. Campers enjoy the Bug Hunt, and it stimulates energy and interest among the kids in attendance. Wilderness Park is the best place for this.
- Activities where visitors (and campers) **explore independently**
- Activities that are **hands-on**
- Activities that are a **new experience**. A new experience broadens the individual’s idea of what it means to be outside, and have fun outside.
- **Science education** activities go well because they’re hands-on and exploratory in nature and broaden the individual’s idea of what a person can do outside.
- **One-day activities** (e.g. run for the bridges, etc.)
  - 2 - to - 3 hour events are best because that’s how long people are willing to commit their time to a particular activity.
  - Irregular (not weekly or monthly, for example) events get more attendance because people are less likely to say, “Oh, I’ll just go next week.”
- **Bird watching class**
- **Run for the Bridges**
Activities that went well in the past, but no longer occur, or occur irregularly, include:

- **School tours.** These tours haven’t occurred in recent years, but were popular in the past. This type of event is inhibited because Wilderness Park does not have infrastructure to keep people dry in the event of rain, and the park does not have restrooms.
- A large **group hike** event with interpretive stations
- **Jim McKee’s** tour and slide show about the history is very good. This event only occurs once every 3 or 4 years, but the focus group participants expressed that the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department would be open to hosting this event more often.

Education activities that need improvement include:

- More **interpretive signage** is needed. However, focus group participants emphasized that they think interpretive signage should be minimal.
- Descriptions of **trails:** length, landmarks, notable features of nature and history.
- Availability of online **interpretive materials** that can be accessed by **QR code** in the park. Materials that could be accessed by QR code include: a park map, interpretive brochures, and other materials explaining nature and history of the park.
Some general education-related problems and needs include:

- Mitigating conflicting park uses. Some recreation activities at Wilderness Park conflict with one another, and it is worth considering a few possible approaches to mitigate these conflicts. Two ideas were brought up during the focus group discussion. First, the idea of dividing the park into use areas in order to alleviate conflicts was discussed. This might mean designating specific areas for more conspicuous activities like large group events and bicycling and setting aside other areas for less conspicuous activities like nature observation and study. Use areas would generally be designated based on where people are already pursuing certain activities. It was suggested that Parks and Recreation work with the various groups of parks users (e.g., bike groups, Friends of Wilderness Park, Audubon Society, etc.) to discuss how each group can work to encourage mutual respect for different park uses.

- Mitigating impact of park uses on the sensitive natural areas within the park. It was suggested that the Department of Parks and Recreation work with the various groups of parks users (e.g., bike groups, Friends of Wilderness Park, Audubon Society, etc.) to seek their help in encouraging respect for the vast natural areas of the park, which can be compromised or destroyed by more obtrusive activities like trail blazing.

- Funding is needed in order to expand and enhance interpretive programs.
• **Reputation:** Park safety is an issue, particularly in the northern portion of the park. Undesirable activity that occurs includes illegal camping (presumably by homeless people), suspicious looking people sitting in cars in the parking lots, drug activity (implied by presence of occasional drug paraphernalia litter), and activities that leave other types of offensive litter like contraceptives. The presence of these activities and related litter negatively impacts the park’s image, deters visitors, and thereby hinders the ability to reach people in the community through in-park education. Promoting family activity may help discourage illegal uses, encourage family presence, and improve the park’s image. Lincoln Parks and Recreation is trying to improve safety by providing unobstructed views of the parking lots in the park from adjacent city streets. Furthermore, before camps start each summer, Parks and Recreation notifies the captain of the Southwest Division of the Lincoln Police Department who has the park combed by officers on bikes. This kind of presence, even sporadically, lets people know the park is being watched, therefore improving the park’s image.

• **Vandalism** seriously impacts success of interpretive signage. It is possible that installing interpretive signs farther down the trail (in other words, not at parking lots) would help prevent vandalism.

• **Coordination/communication** with other groups that provide education in the park needs to be improved so that all organizations can support one another and also make sure that different groups don’t hold conflicting events on the same day.
• Camp activities are restricted because the park (specifically, the Day Camp area) is public. Because of this, any recreation infrastructure that is used for day camps must be set up and removed daily.

The group would like to see the following improvements in the park’s interpretive program:

• Install more interpretive signage, but still keep it minimal. No paper literature is desired.

• New interpretive signage should be installed farther along the trail where it is less likely to be vandalized.

• Topics for signs should be descriptions of trails, including trail length, landmarks, notable features of nature and history. (Specific topics are listed at the beginning of this summary of the focus group discussion with Lincoln Parks and Recreation staff.)

• Add QR codes to signs that lead to online interpretive materials. One existing interpretive material that should be accessible by QR code is the park map. This map, created in 2011, is already on the Parks and Recreation website and has GPS associated with it. During this focus group discussion, participants expressed an interest in adding layers to this map that explain information about the ecosystems, plants and animals, and history. Participants also expressed interest in installing QR codes that lead to interpretative materials about nature topics, including plant
life, birds, ecosystem functions, locations of different ecosystems along the trail, and historical features of the park.

- **Encourage scavenger hunts/geocaching** for summer camps. Continue to allow geocaching for park visitors.

- **Host training opportunities** for the Master Naturalist program. Representatives of this program have expressed an interest in having more training opportunities.

- Encourage more university groups to visit the park for field studies. In the past, groups from local universities have visited the park to learn about hydrology, watershed management, and mammalogy. There is certainly potential for a greater variety of university groups to visit the park in order to study aspects of the park such as geology, wetlands, etc.

- **YouTube and Channel 5** could be used to educate the public about Wilderness Park history and nature, to show what the trails look like, to build a good image of the park, to advertise programs, and to simply encourage people to visit the park.

- Receive a (very large) donation to privatize the **Day Camp area**. This would allow for a much greater variety of activities for the summer camps that occur at the park and would open opportunities for higher quality visitor interpretation. Focus group participants explained that improvement of summer camp programs is greatly hindered because the Day Camp area is a public park space. For example, in a public park, anything that is set up during the day needs to be removed at the end of the day.
**Challenges** to reaching these aims include:

- Establishing a **common vision** for education at the park among all of the groups that use Wilderness Park for educational purposes.
- Allocating **adequate resources**, time, and staff. In the past, and at present, limitations in funding have hindered expansion of interpretive programs.
- **Balancing** habitat diversity management and maintenance and other programs with interpretation. This is also an issue related to budget, staff, and time constraints.
- Improving and marketing programs without drawing *too many* people. 
  Preventing overuse is important, because when too many people are in the park, it doesn’t feel like wilderness anymore. Marketing efforts should consider the fact that while the Department of Parks and Recreation wants people to be aware of Wilderness Park and respect and appreciate it, they don’t want everyone there all of the time, because overcrowding will not allow people to get what they want from the park — a feeling of wilderness and a place for nature observation.

Next, the discussion focused on evaluating **existing goals** for interpretation at Wilderness Park. Goals that were discussed came from the *Wilderness Park Subarea Plan* and the *Pioneers Park Nature Center Strategic Plan*, both of which make recommendations for visitor interpretation at Wilderness Park.
The *Wilderness Park Subarea Plan* recommends:

1. Provide opportunities for **nature study** and appreciation. (Hulvershorn 1999, 3-1)
2. Interpret the **historical significance** of the park through signage, brochures, and interpretive walks and talks. (Hulvershorn 1999, 3-6)

The *Pioneers Park Nature Center Strategic Plan* recommends:

1. **Identify new program needs** of constituents (conduct surveys, evaluations, etc.; cater to diverse audience). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 11)
2. Continue to **evaluate all programs** to ensure quality and cost efficiency (survey visitors and program participants). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 12)
3. Maintain quality **teaching resources** (maintain quality, add to, make available). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 12)
4. Seek alternative **funding sources** for educational program needs. Aim to be at least revenue neutral. (collaborate, seek sponsorship, identify needs). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 13)
5. Continue good public relations to **market educational programs**. (provide brochures/publications, enhance website, social media, utilize other organizations’ newsletters). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 13)
6. Network and collaborate with others involved in environmental education and natural resource issues to remain current on environmental issues and teaching techniques, and to provide enhanced programming to the public. (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 14)

Goals that have seen evidence of progress include:

- **Goal:** Provide opportunities for nature study and appreciation. **Evidence of Progress:** Nature camps at Wilderness Park have successfully promoted nature study and appreciation among campers and junior counselors. Camp registration has grown significantly over the last year, and many parents are registering their kids early this year. Furthermore, ongoing maintenance of the trails has played an important role in facilitating self-directed nature study and appreciation at Wilderness Park.

- **Goal:** Continue good public relations to market educational programs. (provide brochures/publications, enhance website, social media, utilize other organizations’ newsletters). **Evidence of Progress:** Marketing has successfully created a positive image, particularly for camps.

Goals that have not seen evidence of progress include:

- **Goal:** Interpret the historical significance of the park through signage, brochures, and interpretive walks and talks. **Ideas for improvement:** History study could be
incorporated into the camps. History study could be marketed to Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (OLLI at UNL) which offers classes and learning opportunities specifically for lifelong learners ages 50-plus. Informal educators could be invited to learn about the history and nature of Wilderness Park in a class or walking tour. History information could be made available online via QR code. This would be good for visitors who prefer instant access to information and prefer to learn on their own rather than in a group.

- **Goal:** Seek alternative *funding sources* for educational program needs. Aim to be at least revenue neutral. (collaborate, seek sponsorships, identify needs). **Thoughts on this goal:** A lack of funding is hindering growth of the interpretive program. Focus group participants expressed that acquiring funding will have to be their first priority, because they have to look for funding for everything that they do, and without funding none of the other goals can be achieved.

Focus group participants expressed that all of the *existing goals* are still relevant for Wilderness Park, and none of them need revision. Overarching goals that focus group participants hope to see achieved through visitor interpretation at Wilderness Park are listed at the beginning of Section 5.1.1 of this document.
5.1.2 Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors Focus Group Results

The following report is a record of the comments expressed during the focus group discussion with three representatives from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors. Participants met in a meeting room at F Street Community Center on Monday, March 24, 2014.

The participants considered the following topics important to include in visitor education:

- **Plants** present at the park
- **Animals** present at the park
- **Historical locations** located in the park
- **Floodplain** functions and **hydrology**
- How to access and navigate **trails** in Wilderness Park
- The presence and **location** of the park
- It is important to educate the public about **immediate needs** and opportunities to oppose developmental threats and promote conservation related to Wilderness Park and Salt Creek. Right now, some needs and opportunities include the conservation of the Salt Creek watershed, specifically the south Salt Creek riparian corridor and its tributaries, and the surrounding landscape.
Focus group participants hope to achieve the following goals by educating at, and about, Wilderness Park:

- Build community **awareness** of the importance of Wilderness Park, the Salt Creek riparian corridor and associated historical and natural resources.
- Encourage more people in the community to work toward **protecting** Wilderness Park and the Salt Creek riparian corridor.
- Inspire citizens of Lancaster County to become more **ecologically conscious** and, as a result, work toward creating a more ecologically sustainable region.

Much of the focus group discussion was geared toward self-evaluation of existing interpretive activities. Education activities that have been **going well** include:

- **Run for the Bridges**
- **Native plant sale** and lecture
- Annual **candidate forum**
- **Educational hikes** through the park (topics include plants, animals, history, archaeology, etc.)
- **Bird walk**
- Sharing information about the nature and history at Wilderness Park by **word of mouth** with family and friends
• The Wilderness Park calendar sale (the calendar contains photos of Wilderness Park taken by park visitors)

Education activities that need improvement include:

• More interpretive signage is needed.

• Availability of resources to help orient park visitors, including trail descriptions that note trail length, landmarks, and notable features of nature and history. High quality signage is one method that should be used to orient and educate visitors.

• More effective and diverse media should be utilized to educate visitors and the community about Wilderness Park. At the moment, participants would like to see a greater availability of online interpretive materials that can be accessed by QR code in the park. Examples of materials that should be accessible by QR code include: a park map, interpretive brochures, and other materials explaining the nature and history at the park.

• Availability of Lincoln Parks and Recreation staff expertise, time, money, and effort to help create and improve the activities listed above.
Some general education related **problems and needs** voiced by the focus group participants include:

- More effective **communication** and improved **coordination** with the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation. This will require representatives from the two groups to meet more often. Right now, representatives from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors meet with representatives from Lincoln Parks and Recreation annually for a management meeting. At this meeting, representatives from each group discuss management issues related to the park, including their priorities.

- More **funding** and allocation of Lincoln Parks and Recreation **staff time and effort** is needed to pursue improvements to the education program at Wilderness Park. The Friends of Wilderness Park would like to raise money for education in and related to the park in order to better pursue this aim.

The group would like to see the following **improvements** in the interpretive program:

- Creation of a **user-friendly map** of Wilderness Park. Ideally, this map would be available online and would have multiple layers or multiple pages. Layers and/or pages that should be present on this map include: a user-friendly trail map, a user-friendly map for kids, a map highlighting plant communities (one already exists, and should be made available), and historical features of the landscape.
• Resources to encourage **school groups** to visit Wilderness Park. If adequate teaching materials were made available, teachers would be more likely to take their classes to the park. A usable building at the park would also encourage school groups to come.

• Utilize the knowledge of **experts** like Bill Beachly and Dave Murphy to **build educational resources** about the historical features of the park.

• Utilize effective **media** to reach the visitors and the community. One example is **QR codes** linked to interpretive materials that would be available on the Parks and Recreation website.

• Create and install more **interpretive signs** to explain the historical and biological aspects of the landscape. Focus group participants expressed that Friends of Wilderness Park would be happy to help with this task.

• Create an **education committee** to focus on improving the education program. Participants expressed that they would like to recruit committee members from Friends of Wilderness Park membership, from staff at Lincoln Parks and Recreation and Pioneers Park Nature Center, as well as from other interested community groups.

• The issue of greatest importance to the participants is to achieve **improved coordination** between Lincoln Parks and Recreation and groups (such as Friends of Wilderness Park) who are interested in improving and protecting the park. The participants believe that both Friends of Wilderness Park and Lincoln Parks and
Recreation would greatly benefit from working together with greater synergy. Without this, it will be hard to improve the education program.

- Participants expressed that they would like Lincoln Parks and Recreation to commit more staff time, energy, and money to education at Wilderness Park. Without this, it will be hard to improve the education program.

Challenges to reaching these aims include:

- **Coordinating** with Lincoln Parks and Recreation to make materials available. Most education related efforts require coordination with Lincoln Parks and Recreation because they manage the park for the City of Lincoln. For example, any online materials accessed by QR code in Wilderness Park are required to link to the City of Lincoln website.

- Participants expressed concern that if Friends of Wilderness Park volunteers take on too many management and education responsibilities, potential funding may be lost (or not pursued) due the perceived lack of need for funding.

- Achieving additional staff time, energy, and money from Lincoln Parks and Recreation for Wilderness Park would be a challenge, since it would likely require reallocation of these resources from other Lincoln Parks and Recreation functions and/or parks.
Next, the focus group discussion focused on evaluating **existing goals** for interpretation at Wilderness Park. Goals that were discussed came from the *Wilderness Park Subarea Plan* and the *Pioneers Park Nature Center Strategic Plan*, both of which make recommendations for visitor interpretation at Wilderness Park.

The *Wilderness Park Subarea Plan* recommends:

1. Provide opportunities for **nature study** and appreciation. (Hulvershorn 1999, 3-1)
2. Interpret the **historical significance** of the park through signage, brochures, and interpretive walks and talks. (Hulvershorn 1999, 3-6)

The *Pioneers Park Nature Center Strategic Plan* recommends:

1. **Identify new program needs** of constituents (conduct surveys, evaluations, etc.; cater to diverse audience). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 11)
2. Continue to **evaluate all programs** to ensure quality and cost efficiency (survey visitors and program participants). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 12)
3. Maintain quality **teaching resources** (maintain quality, add to, make available). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 12)
4. Seek alternative **funding sources** for educational program needs. Aim to be at least revenue neutral. (collaborate, seek sponsorship, identify needs). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 13)

5. Continue good public relations to **market educational programs**. (provide brochures/publications, enhance website, social media, utilize other organizations’ newsletters). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 13)

6. Network and collaborate with others involved in environmental education and natural resource issues to **remain current** on environmental issues and teaching techniques, and to provide enhanced programming to the public. (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 14)

Goals that have seen evidence of **progress** include:

- **Goal**: Provide opportunities for **nature study** and appreciation. **Evidence of Progress**: Great Plains Trails Network provided funding for interpretive signage on the Jamaica North Trail. The Wilderness Park Nature Camps run by Lincoln Parks and Recreation have gone well, and are growing. All of the education programs organized by Friends of Wilderness Park are going well.

- **Goal**: Interpret the **historical significance** of the park through signage, brochures, and interpretive walks and talks. **Evidence of Progress**: An **interpretive sign** was installed along the Jamaica North Trail that explains the train wreck on the Rock
Island Line. The **interpretive walks and talks** run by Friends of Wilderness Park have gone well.

- **Goal:** Continue good public relations to **market educational programs.** (Provide brochures/publications, enhance website, social media, utilize other organizations’ newsletters). **Evidence of Progress:** Friends of Wilderness Park has pursued marketing efforts by using their organization’s **social media and website.**

Lincoln Parks and Recreation has also made positive improvements to their website and social media.

- **Goal:** **Identify new program needs** of constituents (conduct surveys, evaluations, etc., cater to diverse audiences) **Evidence of Progress:** Friends of Wilderness Park conducted a survey to understand public opinions related to Wilderness Park.

Goals that have not seen evidence of progress include:

- **Goal:** Seek alternative **funding sources** for educational program needs. Aim to be at least revenue neutral. (Collaborate, seek sponsorship, identify needs) **Thoughts on this goal:** The participants expressed that Friends of Wilderness Park could be doing a better job **going after funds** for education at the park. Right now, the money that they raise comes from annual membership fees and the native plant sale. All of the money raised during the Run for the Bridges goes toward repairing the bridges. The participants expressed that they would like to form a **grants**
committee to write grants to pursue a greater interpretation program for
Wilderness Park.

Participants expressed an interest in adding the following new goals related to education
at Wilderness Park:

- Educate about conservation.
- Create a plan to guide education and interpretation at and related to Wilderness
  Park.

Overarching goals that were expressed by the focus group participants are listed at the
beginning of Section 5.1.2 of this document.

5.1.3 Discussion of the Focus Group Results

The following paragraphs provide a discussion of the most significant results of
both focus group discussions. It is the hope of the researcher that these results will aid the
development of a common vision for interpretation at Wilderness Park. The results are
primarily intended to contribute to the selection of topics, methods, and goals for
interpretation. The results also provide an inventory and evaluation of each group’s
existing interpretive activities. Both participant groups emphasized the necessity of
collaborating with one another, and with other community groups, in order to improve
and expand the interpretive program at Wilderness Park. Because collaboration was
considered to be very important, the following discussion primarily seeks to communicate goals, priorities, and opinions that both groups hold in common, to identify differing goals and abilities that will allow each organization to supplement one another’s efforts, and also to note differing points of view that may need to be reconciled in order to promote harmonious cooperation.

Generally, both groups provided very similar feedback during the focus group discussions. Their goals and interests related to improving the interpretive program at Wilderness Park are very closely aligned. Both Lincoln Parks and Recreation participants and Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors participants expressed that they hope to achieve the following long-term goals by providing interpretive services at and related to Wilderness Park:

- To build community awareness and **understanding of the habitats** within and related to Wilderness Park, and to communicate why they’re important.
- To build community awareness and **understanding of the natural and historical resources** within and related to Wilderness Park, and to communicate why they’re important.
- To encourage **stewardship** of natural resources (including ecosystems, parks, greenways) in the community.
- To encourage **advocacy** within the community to fight developmental threats to the park.
Each of the two participant focus groups provided additional details related to these long-term goals. For example, participants from Lincoln Parks and Recreation specified that it is important to communicate the multitude of ways that green spaces like Wilderness Park benefit the community, and participants from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors specified that it is important to communicate the importance of protecting the Salt Creek Riparian Corridor. Participants from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors expressed that the development of an interpretive plan will be an important step toward improving the interpretive program at Wilderness Park. Additional details provided by each group can be found in section 5.1.1 Lincoln Parks and Recreation Focus Group Results, and section 5.1.2 Friends of Wilderness Park Focus Group Results.

Each of the two participant focus groups was asked to evaluate existing goals and strategies for interpretation at Wilderness Park. Goals and strategies that were discussed came from the Wilderness Park Subarea Plan and the Pioneers Park Nature Center Strategic Plan, both of which make recommendations for visitor interpretation at Wilderness Park (Terry Genrich, April 7, 2014, email message to author). Participants from both the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors expressed that all of the goals and strategies discussed are still relevant and should be pursued. These goals include:

1. Provide opportunities for nature study and appreciation. (Hulvershorn 1999, 3-1)
2. Interpret the historical significance of the park through signage, brochures, and interpretive walks and talks. (Hulvershorn 1999, 3-6)
3. **Identify new program needs** of constituents (conduct surveys, evaluations, etc.; cater to diverse audience). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 11)

4. Continue to **evaluate all programs** to ensure quality and cost efficiency (survey visitors and program participants). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 12)

5. Maintain quality **teaching resources** (maintain quality, add to, make available). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 12)

6. Seek alternative **funding sources** for educational program needs. Aim to be at least revenue neutral. (collaborate, seek sponsorship, identify needs). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 13)

7. Continue good public relations to **market educational programs**. (provide brochures/publications, enhance website, social media, utilize other organizations’ newsletters). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 13)

8. Network and collaborate with others involved in environmental education and natural resource issues to **remain current** on environmental issues and teaching techniques, and to provide enhanced programming to the public. (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 14)

Both participant focus groups identified that a few of these goals and strategies have seen little or no progress in recent years. Participants from Lincoln Parks and Recreation specifically noted that their education program has not included interpretation of the
historical significance of the park. Participants suggested that they could incorporate historical topics into the nature camps and develop literature that park users could access online via QR code within the park. Furthermore, participants suggested that informal educators could be invited to Wilderness Park to learn more about historical aspects of the park during a class and/or a walking tour, and a similar type of educational event could be marketed to groups interested in learning about local history. For example, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (OLLI at UNL), which offers classes and learning opportunities specifically for lifelong learners ages 50-plus, might sponsor such an event.

Both participant focus groups also noted that they have not made progress toward seeking alternative funding sources for education program needs. Participants from Lincoln Parks and Recreation stated that acquiring funding would have to be their first priority for improving the interpretive program, because without new funding none of their interpretive goals will be possible. Participants from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors expressed that they would like to form a grants committee to write grants to pursue an expanded interpretation program for Wilderness Park.

Topics

Both Lincoln Parks and Recreation focus group participants and Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors focus group participants considered it important to educate visitors about plants, animals, and historical sites present at the park. Participants present at the Friends of Wilderness Park focus group discussion specified that the
knowledge of local experts should be utilized to build educational resources about the historical and natural features of the park. For example, Bill Beachly and Dave Murphy are two local experts that are very knowledgeable regarding history at Wilderness Park. Both groups also considered it important to provide descriptions of trails present at Wilderness Park. Elements that participants expressed should be included in the trail descriptions include trail length, whether the trail is a loop or an ‘out and back’ trail, and what features are present along the trail, including landscape types, plant and animal communities, and historical sites. Participants expressed that trail descriptions should be included in or accompanied by a map. Lastly, both participant groups considered it important to educate the community about ecosystem management at Wilderness Park, and why it is so important.

Each participant group provided additional topics and additional details related to these topics. For example, participants from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors specified that they consider it important to educate the public about immediate needs and opportunities to oppose developmental threats and promote conservation related to Wilderness Park and Salt Creek, and participants from Lincoln Parks and Recreation specified that it is important to communicate the multitude of ways that visitors can have fun outside. Additional details provided by each group can be found in section 5.1.1 City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation Focus Group Results, and section 5.1.2 Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors Focus Group Results.
Desired Improvements

Both Lincoln Parks and Recreation participants and Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors focus group participants concluded that the interpretive program at Wilderness Park needs improvement. Both groups identified that more interpretive materials are needed for Wilderness Park, including more interpretive signage in the park, and more interpretive information available online and accessible in the park via QR code. Participants present at the Lincoln Parks and Recreation focus group discussion specified that no paper literature is desired and that any new interpretive signs should be placed at a distance from parking lots and other locations where vandalism is likely. Both participant groups agreed that these interpretive materials should communicate notable features throughout the park and should help visitors orient themselves within the park (see the preceding ‘topics’ section of this document for specific topics that participant groups considered important to interpret).

During both focus group discussions, specific emphasis was put on the need for new and improved maps. For example, participants in both focus groups suggested that additional layers should be added to an existing map (currently available on the Lincoln Parks and Recreation webpage) in order to explain and provide spatial reference for locations of significance, such as unique ecosystems, plants, animals, and historical sites. Participants in both focus groups expressed that this map, in its current form, should be made available via QR code within Wilderness Park.

It was important to both focus groups to encourage educators and students to utilize Wilderness Park for educational purposes. Participants in the Lincoln Parks and
Recreation focus group discussion expressed that they would like to encourage more university groups to visit the park for field studies. Furthermore, participants communicated an interest in hosting training opportunities for the Nebraska Master Naturalist program at Wilderness Park. Participants present at the Friends of Wilderness Park focus group discussion expressed that they would like to encourage more school groups to visit Wilderness Park by making more teaching materials available for school teachers.

Both focus groups expressed a need for additional improvements and/or additional details related to desired improvements. For example, participants from Lincoln Parks and Recreation specified that they consider it important to maintain a feeling of wilderness at Wilderness Park by limiting the amount of new interpretive signage, and participants from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors emphasized the importance of providing high quality interpretive signage that helps park visitors orient themselves. Additional details provided by each group can be found in section 5.1.1 City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation Focus Group Results, and section 5.1.2 Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors Focus Group Results.

Needs and Obstacles

Focus group participants identified a number of needs and obstacles that will have to be addressed in order to accomplish improvements to the interpretive program at Wilderness Park. Both focus groups indicated that improved coordination among groups involved with interpretation at Wilderness Park would strengthen and accelerate efforts to
improve the interpretive program. Related to this, both groups highlighted the importance of improving communication between one another in order to better pursue interpretive goals. Specifically, participants from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors suggested that representatives from their own organization should meet more frequently with representatives from Lincoln Parks and Recreation to discuss their common efforts to improve interpretation at Wilderness Park. Furthermore, participants from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors stated that they would like to create an education committee to focus on improving the education program. Participants expressed that they would like to recruit committee members from Friends of Wilderness Park membership, from staff at Lincoln Parks and Recreation and Pioneers Park Nature Center, as well as from other interested community groups.

Both focus groups also indicated that more funds would be necessary in order to expand and enhance the interpretive program. Related to this, participants from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors stated that they would like to raise money to help fund creation of new interpretive materials for Wilderness Park and would also like to form a grants committee to better pursue this aim. Furthermore, participants present at the Friends of Wilderness Park focus group discussion emphasized that more time and effort from staff at Lincoln Parks and Recreation will be necessary to improve the education program.

Each of the two focus groups identified a few factors that may serve as obstacles to improving interpretation at Wilderness Park. Participants from Lincoln Parks and Recreation expressed that vandalism seriously impacts the success of interpretive signs at
Wilderness Park. The process of designing, creating, and installing an interpretive sign is very costly, so extra measures ought to be taken to protect future interpretive signs. Participants observed that interpretive signs installed farther along the trail (e.g., not at parking lots) tend to encounter fewer instances of vandalism. Therefore, participants suggested that future interpretive signs be installed in locations where they are less likely to be vandalized, for example, at a reasonable distance from the nearest parking lot.

Participants from Lincoln Parks and Recreation identified that Wilderness Park has a reputation for being unsafe and attracting illegal activity. This image negatively impacts the ability to reach members of the community through interpretive programs. Participants expressed that Lincoln Parks and Recreation is taking steps to improve Wilderness Park’s image and would like to encourage a greater presence of families in the park in order to further discourage illegal activity and improve the park’s image.

Participants in the Lincoln Parks and Recreation focus group discussion identified that the presence of conflicting park uses at Wilderness Park may also serve as an obstacle to interpretive efforts. For example, visitors who come to Wilderness Park to observe and learn about wildlife may be hindered by the presence of activities (e.g., group events, mountain biking, etc.) that frighten away animals or otherwise prevent seeing or hearing wildlife. Though the problem of conflicting park uses is currently being addressed through the provision of single use trails (e.g., walking trails, biking trails, horse trails), focus group participants expressed that there is still a need to mitigate conflicting park uses. Participants suggested that Lincoln Parks and Recreation should work with the various groups of parks users (e.g., bike groups, Friends of Wilderness
Park, Audubon Society, etc.) to discuss how each group can work to encourage their membership/constituents to practice mutual respect for different park uses. Participants suggested that a similar collaborative approach should be used to encourage park users (e.g., trail blazers) to be respectful of ecologically sensitive locations in the park.

Both focus groups expressed additional needs and obstacles. Additional details provided by each group can be found in section 5.1.1 City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation Focus Group Results, and section 5.1.2 Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors Focus Group Results.
5.2 Wilderness Park Visitor Survey Results

A survey was conducted in order to provide insight regarding visitor interests for interpretation at Wilderness Park using the procedures discussed in section 2.2.5. The results of this survey are intended to help inform Wilderness Park managers and educators as they select topics and methods for interpretation. The online survey was active for three weeks, from Wednesday, March 19, 2014 until Wednesday, April 9, 2014. The questionnaire used for this survey can be found in Appendix IV.

5.2.1 Survey Results

A total of 389 surveys were completed. Not all 389 respondents answered every question, but all responses have been included in the results regardless of whether the individual respondent completed the entire survey. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number; however, some percentages have been rounded to the nearest tenth in cases where percentages are below 2%. The first two questions aimed to understand the age and education level of all survey participants. Respondents ranged between the ages of 19 and 84, with the majority (64%) falling between the ages of 35 and 64 (see Table 1). All respondents had at least a high school diploma or GED, and nearly half of respondents possessed either a bachelor’s (29%) or master’s degree (20%) as their highest educational credential (see Table 2).

The next question aimed to understand survey participants’ experience with Wilderness Park. Participants were asked whether they had ever been to Wilderness Park.
### Table 1. Survey Question #1: Select your age group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19 - 24 years</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25 - 34 years</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>35 - 44 years</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>45 - 54 years</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>55 - 64 years</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>65 - 74 years</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>75 - 84 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>85 + years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2. Survey Question #2: Select your highest level of education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less than a high school degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>High school diploma or GED</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Associates degree</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Some of a bachelors degree</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bachelors degree</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Some of a masters degree</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Masters degree</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Some of a doctorate degree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Doctorate degree</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the participant responded ‘no,’ the respondent was asked to explain why he or she had not been to Wilderness Park. Most of the respondents (86%) had been to the park. Of those respondents who had not been to the park, 27% lived too far away (i.e., not in
Lancaster County), 25% had never heard of Wilderness Park, 14% did not know where the park was located, 14% expressed that they had no good reason to visit the park, and 5% expressed safety concerns.

Participants were asked what other local natural areas they visited (see Table 3). Because participants were able to select multiple options, the total of all percentages is greater than 100%. Participants were asked to select from a list of local natural areas and/or enter a description of a different natural area. Natural areas (other than Wilderness Park) that survey participants visited the most included Pioneers Park (81%) and Antelope Park (61%). After accounting for various saline wetland areas that were entered into the ‘other’ response space, it was determined that 14% of respondents visited one or more saline wetlands in the Lincoln/Lancaster County area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pioneers Park</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Antelope Park</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Saline Wetlands</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Other (please explain below)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the more common ‘other’ natural areas that were entered in the response box by respondents included other City/County parks (8%), especially Holmes Park and Lake; local native prairies (about 5%), especially Spring Creek Prairie and Nine Mile
Prairie; local bike trails (4%) such as the Jamaica North Trail, and MoPac Trail; and local state recreation areas (4%), especially Branched Oak State Recreation Area, and Wagon Train State Recreation Area. Of those survey participants who had never been to Wilderness Park, many had visited Pioneers Park (63% of respondents who had not been to Wilderness Park) and Antelope Park (31% of respondents who had not been to Wilderness Park), while many had not been to any other natural areas (28% of respondents who had not been to Wilderness Park).

The following information (regarding survey questions 5 through 12) was gathered only from respondents who stated they had been to Wilderness Park. The majority of survey participants who had been to Wilderness Park visited the park less than once a month (62%), and the next largest group visited the park 2-3 times per month (14%) (see Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less than Once a Month</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Once a Month</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2-3 Times a Month</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Once a Week</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2-3 Times a Week</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey participants were asked whether they brought children to Wilderness Park. If the respondent answered yes, the respondent was asked to select the age of each child and note how many children they brought within that age group. The survey results show that 40% of respondents who have visited Wilderness Park brought children with them. Of the children noted for each age group, the majority were between the ages of 8 and 10 (29%), with 23% between 12 and 14 (the researcher made a mistake by failing to include the age 11 in any age group), 17% between 5 and 7 years, 15% between 15 and 18 years, 11% between 2 and 4 years, and the remaining 6% were under 2 years old. In summation, 40% of respondents brought children to Wilderness Park with them, and over half of those children were between 8 and 14 years old.

Survey participants were asked what activities they pursued while at Wilderness Park (see Table 5). Participants were asked to select from a list of activities (participants could select multiple activities) and/or enter a description of the activity that they pursued at the park. Because participants were able to select multiple options, the total of all percentages is greater than 100%. The most common activity pursued by respondents is walking (74% of respondents). The second most common activity is nature observation (60% after accounting for nature observation related responses entered as ‘other’), with biking coming in third at 48%, bird watching coming in fourth at 29%, running coming in fifth at 20%, and 13% of participants listing some other activity. Some of the more common ‘other’ activities included dog walking (4%), day camps (1.5%), cross country skiing (1.5%), horseback riding (1.2%), picnicking (1.2%), seeking peace and solitude
(.9%), and work or volunteer work (.9%). Other activities listed included fishing, geocaching, exploring, photography, art, schooling, run for the bridges, and motorcycling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Survey Question #8: What activities do you pursue at Wilderness Park? (You may select multiple.)</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>walking</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>biking</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>running</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>nature observation</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>bird watching</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>other (please explain below)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next question asked participants what would most improve their experience at Wilderness Park (see Table 6). The responses to this question may help park managers understand which park improvements are priorities for park visitors. Participants were asked to select one choice from a list of improvements and/or enter a description of the activity that they pursue at the park. The improvement that received the greatest number of responses was the creation and/or installation of ‘signs or other materials that explain the history and natural features’ of the park (21%).

A few respondents who selected ‘other’ also asked for interpretive materials like signs, trail maps, and information about plants. Other popular improvements that were frequently noted included ‘better trail maintenance’ (21%), and ‘better trail markings’ (18%). Some participants also expressed that no improvements were needed (15%).
Table 6. Survey Question #9: What would most improve your experience at Wilderness Park? (Please select the option that would improve your experience the most.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>better parking</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>better trail maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>better trail markings</td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>signs or other materials that explain the history and natural features</td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>nothing - no improvements are needed</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>other (please explain below)</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A large percentage of respondents (21%) selected ‘other’ and entered a description of the improvement that would most improve their experience. The two most common entries were repair and/or replacement of the bridges (6% of total responses), and improvement of trail markings to encourage and emphasize single use designations and directional flows (1.6% of total responses). There were a number of other requests, some of which stated a preference to allow all uses on all trails (1.3%), and improvement of security (1.3%).

The next two questions asked survey participants to select which areas of the park they used most commonly (see Table 7), and which entrances they used most commonly (see Table 8). Maps were provided to assist survey participants with these questions (see Appendix IV). The responses to these questions may help identify which areas of the park get the most visitor traffic and therefore may be the best locations to reach the most visitors via interpretive signage. Because participants were able to select multiple options, the total of all percentages is greater than 100%.
Table 7. Survey Question #10: Select the section(s) of Wilderness Park you use most commonly. (You may select multiple areas.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A - Day Camp area (west of 1st Street, south of Van Dorn Street/Bison Trail, north of Calvert Street)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>B - Epworth area (south of Calvert Street, north of Pioneers Blvd.)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>C - Pioneers Blvd. area (south of Pioneers Blvd., north of Old Cheney Rd.)</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>D - Old Cheney Rd. area (south of Old Cheney Rd., west of 14th Street)</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>E - East 14th Street area (east of 14th Street, north of Saltillo Rd.)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Survey Question #11: Select the entrance(s) to Wilderness Park you most commonly use. (You may select multiple.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Day Camp entrance (on 1st Street, south of Van Dorn St., north of Calvert St.)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Epworth entrance (on Calvert Street, west of Salt Creek, entrance has stone arch)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jamaica North Trail entrance at Epworth (south of Van Dorn St., east of Salt Creek)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pioneers Blvd. entrance</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1st Street entrance (south of Pioneers Blvd.)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Old Cheney Rd. entrance</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>14th Street entrance (north of Rokeby Rd.)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Saltillo Rd. entrance</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Jamaica North Trail entrance at Saltillo</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Other (please explain below)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The areas of the park that respondents used most commonly included the area south of Pioneers Blvd. and north of Old Cheney Rd. (56%), and the area south of Old Cheney Rd. and west of 14th Street (50%). The results showed that a considerable number of respondents used each area of the park. The entrances that respondents used most commonly included the Pioneer’s Blvd. entrance (36%), the Old Cheney Rd. entrance (32%), and the Day Camp entrance (29%).

The next question aimed to understand which topics visitors have learned about during previous visits to Wilderness Park (see Table 9). The responses to this question may be useful in identifying gaps in the existing interpretive/education program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>plants</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>animals</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>pre-settlement landscape</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Native American history</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pioneer and early settlement history</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>geology</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Wilderness Park's role as part of a greenway that will one day surround Lincoln</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Wilderness Park's role in protecting Lincoln from floods</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because participants were able to select multiple options, the total of all percentages is greater than 100%. Topics that a large percentage of respondents had learned about at the park included plants (45%) and animals (44%). Many of the survey respondents indicated that they had not learned about any of the listed topics at the park (31%).

Relatively few respondents had learned about the pre-settlement landscape (7%), Pioneer and early settlement history (13%), Native American history (5%), and geology (11%) present at the park. Only a few respondents noted ‘other’ topics that they had learned about while at Wilderness Park; however, two respondents stated that they had learned about fungi (even though this fits into the ‘plants’ option, it is worth specifying) while at Wilderness Park, and two other respondents noted that they had learned about birds (even though this fits into the ‘animal’ option, it is worth noting) while at the park.

The remaining questions were asked of all survey participants, regardless of whether they had visited Wilderness Park before. The next question aimed to elicit respondents’ level of interest in certain topics relevant to Wilderness Park (see Table 10). The responses to this question may help park managers and educators select which topics should be discussed in interpretive and educational materials. Survey participants were asked to rate their level of interest (options included: uninteresting, neutral, interesting, very interesting) in the following topics: plants, animals, pre-settlement landscape, Native American history, Pioneer/early settlement history, geology, wetland ecology, forest ecology, and prairie ecology. The topic that was deemed ‘very interesting’ by the highest percent of participants was animals (43%), while plants (34%), prairie ecology (33%),
and forest ecology (32%) also received a relatively high percentage of ratings as ‘very interesting’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Uninteresting</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Interesting</th>
<th>Very Interesting</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Plants</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pre-settlement landscape</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Native American history</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pioneer/early settlement history</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Geology</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Wetland ecology</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Forest ecology</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Prairie ecology</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All topics were rated as ‘very interesting’ by at least 22% of respondents. The topic that was deemed ‘interesting’ by the largest percent of participants was Pioneer/early settlement history (51%), with all other topics receiving a rating of ‘interesting’ by at least 44% of respondents.

Topics that received the largest percentage of ‘neutral’ ratings were geology (27%), pre-settlement landscape (27%), and wetland ecology (26%). Topics that received the largest percentage of ‘uninteresting’ ratings were pre-settlement landscape (6%), and
geology (5%). It seems worth emphasizing the fact that all nine topics were rated as ‘interesting’ by at least 44% of respondents.

Survey participants were asked to provide their opinion of the most important function of Wilderness Park (see Table 11). Participants were asked to select one of the options provided, or enter the function that they considered most important. The function that was selected by the largest percentage of respondents was ‘a place for physical activity like walking, cycling, horseback riding, etc.’ (32%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>protects the city from floods (flood water storage)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>a place for physical activity like walking, cycling, horseback riding, etc.</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>a place for nature observation</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>a place for peace and quiet - a retreat</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>habitat for plants and animals</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>provides an understanding of human impact on the landscape</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two functions that also received relatively high percentages of selections included ‘a place for nature observation’ (20%), and a place that provides ‘habitat for plants and animals’ (20%). The functions that received the least number of selections included ‘protects the city from floods (flood water storage)’ (8%), and ‘provides an understanding of human impact on the landscape’ (1%). Very few participants entered their own
functions; however, common entries included ‘all of the above,’ and ‘a place to reconnect with nature or experience wilderness.’

The next question was aimed at understanding respondents’ interest level for certain learning methods (see Table 12). The responses to this question may help park managers and educators select methods to use in their interpretive/education program. Participants were asked to rate their level of interest (options included: uninteresting, neutral, interesting, very interesting) in the following learning methods: sign at a trailhead, sign at a location of significance, pamphlet, map, guided hike, class for children, class for adults, audio tour using cell phone, QR codes on signs, and social media. The learning method that was deemed ‘very interesting’ by the greatest percent of participants was ‘sign at a location of significance (31%), with ‘map’ trailing close behind at 28%.

The learning methods that were considered ‘interesting’ by the greatest percent of participants were ‘sign at a trailhead’ (62%), ‘sign at a location of significance’ (54%), and ‘map’ (52%). Respondents felt neutral toward several of the learning methods, specifically ‘class for adults’ (44%), ‘guided hike’ (43%), ‘audio tour using a cell phone’ (43%), ‘QR codes on signs’ (41%), ‘social media’ (40%), ‘class for children’ (36%), and ‘pamphlet’ (35%). Learning methods that were deemed ‘uninteresting’ by the greatest percent of participants were ‘QR codes on signs’ (27%), and ‘audio tour using a cell phone’ (27%). Table 12 highlights with bold face and underline the highest value that was received for each learning method. The highest value that was received within each interest designation category is highlighted in yellow.
Table 12. Survey Question #16: Select your level of interest in each of the following learning methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Uninteresting</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Interesting</th>
<th>Very Interesting</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>sign at a trailhead</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td><strong>62%</strong></td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>sign at a location of significance</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td><strong>54%</strong></td>
<td><strong>31%</strong></td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>pamphlet</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td><strong>38%</strong></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>map</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td><strong>52%</strong></td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>guided hike</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td><strong>43%</strong></td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>class for children</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td><strong>36%</strong></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>class for adults</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td><strong>44%</strong></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>audio tour using cell phone</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td><strong>43%</strong></td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>QR codes on signs</td>
<td><strong>28%</strong></td>
<td><strong>41%</strong></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>social media</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td><strong>40%</strong></td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final question asked survey participants where or how they prefer to access interpretive materials (see Table 13). The responses to this question may help park managers and educators determine the best locations to make interpretive and educational materials available. Because participants were able to select multiple options, the total of all percentages is greater than 100%. The majority of respondents preferred to access literature online (86%). It is important to note that the high percentage of survey respondents that preferred to access literature online may be skewed due to the fact that the survey was conducted online. A noteworthy percentage (28%) of respondents expressed interest in accessing literature at the Pioneers Park Nature Center.
Table 13. Survey Question #17: Select your preferred location to access literature for Wilderness Park. (You may select multiple.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>online</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lincoln Parks and Recreation headquarters (2740 A Street)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pioneers Park Nature Center</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were also permitted to enter a description of their preferred location to access literature about Wilderness Park. Though few respondents entered a response, some respondents expressed that they would prefer to access literature about Wilderness Park at Wilderness Park (2% of all respondents).

5.2.2 Discussion of Survey Results

It is important to begin the discussion of the survey results by emphasizing that the survey was conducted using a convenience sampling approach. Because of this, it is difficult to say whether the survey participants are an accurate representation of the entire population of existing and potential users of Wilderness Park. The survey procedures did not include collection of information about respondents’ location. Therefore, it is not possible to know whether all respondents were residents of Lincoln. While all of the organizations that distributed a link to the survey were based in or near Lincoln, it is possible that at least three of these organizations (The Nebraska Wildlife Federation, The Nature Conservancy in Nebraska, Nebraska Forest Service) contacted members outside
of Lincoln. Because of this, some respondents could have been from other parts of Nebraska, or elsewhere. Furthermore, it is not known how many potential participants learned about the survey via flyer, email, website, social media, or word of mouth, nor is it known whether respondents were affiliated with any of the organizations that helped to distribute the survey.

These factors make it difficult to say whether the survey participants are an accurate representation of the entire population of existing and potential users of Wilderness Park. However, the results are still useful in the sense that they express the opinions of a large number (333) of park visitors and a notable number of potential park visitors (56), spread over a wide range of age groups, education levels, and park user types (walkers, bikers, nature observers, etc.). Though the responses may not reflect a representative population of existing and potential park users, they are still useful.

The following summary of the survey results reflects existing and potential park users that took the survey and is not necessarily an accurate reflection of all existing and potential park users. To the extent possible, given the nature of the sampling procedures, the researcher makes the following conclusions about existing and potential users of Wilderness Park based on the results of the survey.

In general, the results suggest that existing and potential users of Wilderness Park would like to see improvements to the interpretive program at Wilderness Park. Improvements that have the highest priority include: (1) installation of interpretive signs; and (2) installation and improvement of trail markings that help park users orient themselves and understand trail use designations. The survey results suggest that park
users primarily view Wilderness Park as a place for physical activity, nature observation, and provision of habitat for plants and animals. This suggests that park managers should seek to balance trail maintenance and habitat protection with efforts to improve the interpretive program.

The survey results suggest that existing and potential park users are very interested to learn about the entire spectrum of historical and biological topics relevant to Wilderness Park. Topics that users are most interested in learning about include animals, plants, prairie ecology, forest ecology, and pioneer/early settlement history. The survey results suggest that a little less than half of visitors have learned about plants and animals at Wilderness Park, while very few visitors have learned about any other topic. A significant percentage of visitors reported that they have not learned anything at the park. When compared to visitor interests identified in the survey results, these responses suggest a need for more interpretive programming about all topics, especially topics related to history, such as pioneer and early settlement history, and Native American history.

The results suggest that existing and potential park users would prefer to learn about these topics via signs at locations of significance, signs near trailheads, and maps. In addition to this, the results suggest that existing and potential park users would like interpretive literature to be available online. The results suggest that the largest percentage of existing park users enter the park through the entrances at Pioneers Blvd., Old Cheney Rd., or the Day Camp, and most commonly spend their time in the portions of the park south of Pioneers Blvd., and west of 14th Street, though it is important to note
that a considerable number of respondents used each section of the park. Because these entrances and areas of the park get the most visitor traffic, they may be the best locations to reach the most visitors via interpretive signage.

The survey results suggest that Wilderness Park users are of all ages, but are mainly between the ages of 35 and 64, and have some level of higher education. Many park users bring children with them to the park. These results suggest that educational materials should be designed for a wide range of age groups and learning levels.

Lastly, a number of survey respondents expressed concerns for their personal safety at Wilderness Park, specifically referencing fear of physical assault, theft, and the park’s reputation as a meeting place for sexual activity. During the focus group with staff members from the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation, participants expressed similar concerns, specifically referencing suspicious looking people sitting in cars at parking lots in the park (this is a common occurrence), and evidence of illegal activity, including offensive litter such as drug paraphernalia and condoms. Focus group participants also noted that Lincoln Police Department has declined their request to patrol the park, except for one instance each year, before the day camps begin. Park users, managers, and educators have expressed safety improvements to be an important priority for Wilderness Park. Because safety is important to park managers, educators, and visitors, and police presence is not a feasible solution, it follows that groups involved with improving Wilderness Park should strongly consider using alternative approaches to improve safety at the park.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Recommendations

It is recommended that the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation pursue the following recommendations regarding development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park if adequate time, money, and staff are available. The following recommendations are educated suggestions, but should not be interpreted as requirements. The results of the procedures used in this project suggest that, if resources are available, the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation should pursue improvements to the interpretive program at Wilderness Park, and that improvements ought to be planned, funded, and implemented in cooperation with relevant community groups. The review of interpretive planning literature generated a list of recommendations for improving an interpretive program and recommended that an interpretive plan should be developed in order to produce the most effective approach for improving the interpretation program at Wilderness Park. Based on the results of the literature review, the researcher recommends that the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation pursue the development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park according to the guidelines listed in the Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan (see Chapter 4 of this document) if adequate resources are available.

If the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation decides to move forward with development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park, it is recommended that a working group be formed to pursue completion of the plan. Both focus group discussion participant groups in this project emphasized the necessity for the City of
Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and the Friends of Wilderness Park to collaborate with one another, and with other community groups, in order to improve and expand the interpretive program at Wilderness Park. The *Nebraska Environmental Education Master Plan* also strongly encourages a collaborative approach to improving interpretation (NACEE 2005, 11). Because collaboration was considered to be important, the interpretive planning working group should include staff members from City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation (including Pioneers Park Nature Center), and should also include representatives from relevant community organization like Friends of Wilderness Park in order to promote successful collaboration while implementing the plan in the future.

It is recommended that the interpretive plan be developed according to the standards outlined in the Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan (see Chapter 4). The framework suggests additional documents that should be consulted during the interpretive planning process for guidance on how to complete certain tasks. All of the suggested documents are available to the public online and can be accessed at the web pages noted in their respective citations in the reference list of this document. Furthermore, digital copies of these documents have been submitted to the key stakeholders.

The results of the focus group discussions and survey of existing and potential park visitors suggest a number of priorities that should be reflected in an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park. Improvements to the interpretive program that had the highest priority for survey respondents included installation of interpretive signs and installation
and improvement of trail markings that help park users orient themselves and understand trail use designations. These priorities were also identified during both focus group discussions. Survey respondents expressed strong interest in learning the entire spectrum of historical and biological topics relevant to Wilderness Park. For the most part, survey respondents who had learned something at Wilderness Park in the past had learned about plants or animals, while very few had learned about history. This suggests that, while existing and potential park visitors desire more interpretive programming about all topics, there is a greater need for interpretation of topics related to history. Existing and potential park users expressed that they would prefer to learn about these topics via signs at locations of significance, signs near trailheads, and maps (see example in Figure 10).

Figure 10. Interpretive Kiosk at a Jamaica North Trail Trailhead in Wilderness Park (Source: Photos by author)
In addition to this, the survey results suggest that existing and potential park users would like interpretive literature to be available online. Focus group discussion participants expressed interest in interpreting the same topics and utilizing the same interpretive methods that survey participants preferred. Furthermore, the Salt Valley Greenway and Prairie Corridor Master Plan reinforces the notion that historic sites within the Salt Valley Greenway should be highlighted and enriched through informative signs (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation, and The Flatwater Group 2012, 1).

It seems important to note that while focus group participants expressed a strong interest in installing QR codes on signs (see Figure 11), existing and potential park users expressed a much stronger interest in physical interpretive signs and orientation markings.

**Figure 11.** A Sign Containing QR Codes in Wilderness Park
(Source: Photo by author)
This suggests that while QR codes should be pursued and installed, QR codes should not be viewed as a primary means for interpreting the landscape, but rather as a supplementary interpretive tool. Focus group participants from the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation expressed concern about vandalism of interpretive signs (see Figure 12). In order to attempt to avoid vandalism, focus group participants suggested installing interpretive signs at an appropriate distance away from parking lots, and possibly in parts of Wilderness Park where less illicit activity is believed to occur.

Figure 12. Two Vandalized Signs in Wilderness Park
(Source: Photos by author)

The results of the visitor survey suggest that Wilderness Park users are of all ages, but are mainly between the ages of 35 and 64, and have some level of higher education.
Many park users bring children with them to the park. These findings suggest that educational materials should be designed for a wide range of age groups and learning levels — simple enough for a child in grade school, yet intriguing enough for a well-educated adult. The diversity of the audience at Wilderness Park may also suggest that supplementary interpretive materials and activities should be provided for specific age groups and learning levels at all points in the learning spectrum. The *Nebraska Environmental Education Master Plan* reinforces this notion by suggesting that organizations should encourage and create opportunities for families, young children, and seniors to enhance their awareness and understanding of Nebraska’s natural heritage (NACEE 2005, 9). Focus group participants also expressed interest in providing learning opportunities to young children and seniors, and encouraging a strong family presence in Wilderness Park.

The results of the visitor survey suggest that existing and potential park users primarily view Wilderness Park as a place for physical activity and nature observation, as well as a habitat for plants and animals. This suggests that park managers should seek to balance trail maintenance and habitat protection with efforts to improve the interpretive program. Maintaining a balance between trail and habitat management and interpretation was also identified as a concern during the focus group discussions.

The focus group discussions affirmed that all of the goals and strategies for interpretation at Wilderness Park that are listed the *Wilderness Park Subarea Plan* and the *Pioneers Park Nature Center Strategic Plan* are still relevant and should be pursued if resources are available. These goals include:
1. Provide opportunities for **nature study** and appreciation. (Hulvershorn 1999, 3-1)

2. Interpret the **historical significance** of the park through signage, brochures, and interpretive walks and talks. (Hulvershorn 1999, 3-6)

3. **Identify new program needs** of constituents (conduct surveys and evaluations, etc., cater to diverse audience). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 11)

4. Continue to **evaluate all programs** to ensure quality and cost efficiency (survey visitors and program participants). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 12)

5. Maintain quality **teaching resources** (maintain quality, add to, make available). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 12)

6. Seek alternative **funding sources** for educational program needs. Aim to be at least revenue neutral. (collaborate, seek sponsorship, identify needs). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 13)

7. Continue good public relations to **market educational programs**. (provide brochures/publications, enhance website, social media, utilize other organizations’ newsletters). (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 13)

8. Network and collaborate with others involved in environmental education and natural resource issues to **remain current** on environmental issues and teaching techniques, and to provide enhanced programming to the public. (City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 14)
All of these goals and strategies should be included and reflected in an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park. Both participant groups identified that a few of these goals and strategies have seen little or no progress in recent years, and should be pursued with greater effort.

In addition to affirming the relevance of pre-existing goals for interpretation at Wilderness Park, both the Lincoln Parks and Recreation focus group and the Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors focus group expressed that they hope to achieve the following long-term goals by providing interpretive services at and related to Wilderness Park:

- To build community awareness and understanding of the habitats within and related to Wilderness Park, and to communicate why they’re important.
- To build community awareness and understanding of the natural and historical resources within and related to Wilderness Park, and to communicate why they’re important.
- To encourage stewardship of natural resources (including ecosystems, parks, greenways) in the community.
- To encourage advocacy within the community to fight developmental threats to the park.

These goals should be clearly articulated and supported in an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park. These goals, in addition to pre-existing goals and strategies from the
Wilderness Park Subarea Plan and the Pioneers Park Nature Center Strategic Plan, are consistent with several goals and strategies identified during the review of existing plans, which was completed as part of this project.

The goals and strategies outlined in the review of existing plans should also be considered for inclusion in an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park. Many of these goals are already embodied in the goals and strategies identified during the focus group meetings. Some of the additional goals and strategies identified during the literature review include:

- Improve the quality and accessibility of environmental education resources (NACEE 2005, 13; NACEE 2010, 21).

- Ensure that non-formal educators have access to environmental education resources by widely disseminating information about the availability of resources (NACEE 2005, 15; NACEE 2010, 21).

- Ensure that environmental education reflects Nebraska’s ethnic and cultural diversity (NACEE 2005, 12)

Additional priorities, goals, and strategies can be found in the review of existing plans (section 3.2 of this document).

If an interpretive plan is completed, it is recommended that City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation, Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors, and any other relevant organizations consider forming a working group to pursue
implementation of the plan. A collaborative approach to implementation would allow organizations to support each other’s efforts, encourage an ongoing conversation about challenges and opportunities, and provide a venue for organizations to keep one another accountable for pursuing their individual goals. This working group should also be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the interpretive program periodically, as outlined in the Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan.

The results of the focus group discussions suggest that City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors are interested in pursuing improvements to the interpretive program at Wilderness Park as resources become available. Both groups identified that they would have to acquire funding in order to pursue improvements to the interpretive program. The researcher recommends that City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation and Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors consider forming a working group to pursue grants and other funding for interpretation at Wilderness Park. A collaborative approach to fund raising would allow organizations to support each other’s efforts, encourage an ongoing conversation about fund raising opportunities, and provide a venue for organizations to keep one another accountable for pursuing their individual fund raising goals. In addition to this, the *Nebraska Environmental Education Master Plan* suggests that financial support should be sought from corporate partners and private foundations whose mission and objectives are similar to those of the interpretive program (NACEE 2005, 10).
6.2 Contributions of this Project

The Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan (see Chapter 4) developed as part of this project is a user-friendly tool that could be used by an interpretive organization to guide the development of an interpretive plan. While the framework was developed specifically for Wilderness Park, it can be applied to virtually any interpretive organization.

This project has contributed to several tasks that are essential for the development of an interpretive plan (see Chapter 4: Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan). First, an inventory and evaluation of the existing interpretive program and interpretive resources for Wilderness Park was facilitated during the focus group discussions conducted as part of this project. This inventory generated a list of activities that occur at Wilderness Park, a list of interpretation related goals held by two primary groups that educate visitors at the park, and an initial list of environmental and historic topics relevant to the park. A review of existing plans, completed as part of this project, also contributes to the inventory of goals and topics relevant to interpretation at Wilderness Park. During the focus group discussions, Wilderness Park managers and educators evaluated their existing interpretive activities and determined which goals were not being met through existing interpretive efforts.

Second, community needs and interests related to interpretation at Wilderness Park were identified through the results of the Wilderness Park Visitor Survey and the review of existing plans completed during this project. The results of the Wilderness Park Visitor Survey contributes to a better understanding of visitor interests related to different
types of interpretive materials, including traditional and contemporary interpretive technologies. Furthermore, the visitor survey results contribute to a better understanding of the existing and potential audiences at Wilderness Park.

Third, the results of the literature review, focus groups, and survey conducted as part of this project contributes to a better understanding of what topics and themes should be interpreted at Wilderness Park. During the focus groups completed for this project, Wilderness Park Managers and Educators selected topics they consider important to interpret at Wilderness Park. The results of the Wilderness Park Visitor Survey contributes to a better understanding of which topics are of interest to existing and potential Wilderness Park visitors, which topics they have learned about in the past, and which topics they have learned little about. The survey results, in addition to the review of the Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan, and the Nebraska Environmental Education Plan, contributes to a better understanding of how the interpretive program at Wilderness Park can be designed to address identified environmental, educational, and community needs.

Fourth, this project contributes to the development of goals, objectives, and preferred methods for the interpretive program at Wilderness Park. During the focus groups completed for this project, Wilderness Park managers and educators stated long-term goals and specific objectives that they hope to achieve through educating visitors at Wilderness Park. Wilderness Park managers and educators reaffirmed their interest in pursuing pre-existing goals and objectives related to interpretation at Wilderness Park during the focus group discussions. Lastly, Wilderness Park managers and educators
involved in the focus group discussions stated their **preferred methods** for improving interpretation at Wilderness Park, and considered opportunities and obstacles related to pursuing these improvements and additions to the interpretive program.

As a whole, this master’s professional project could be used as a justification for interpretation related funding in a grant application. This professional project, in addition to many of the documents referenced in this project, establishes the context, significance, and need related to interpretation at Wilderness Park. Sections that may be most useful for a grant application include: 1.1 Context and Setting of Project, 3.2 Review of Existing Plans, 5.1 Focus Group Results, 5.2 Visitor Survey Results, 6.1 Recommendations.

### 6.3 Future Research and Plan Development Tasks

In order to clearly communicate what tasks remain to be accomplished in order to complete an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park, the Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan (presented in Chapter 4 of this document) has been modified and presented again below in order to show which tasks have already been accomplished. Tasks that have been accomplished during this project are written in gray, while those tasks that remain to be accomplished are written in black. Because the interpretive program at Wilderness Park is a collaborative effort, the interpretive plan development process should reflect the interests and abilities of the different groups that educate at Wilderness Park. Therefore, if the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation decides to pursue development of an interpretive plan for Wilderness Park, it is recommended that Wilderness Park managers and educators from the City of Lincoln
Department of Parks and Recreation meet with representatives from Friends of Wilderness Park and other organizations that educate at Wilderness Park in order to pursue completion of the plan. It was suggested by Terry Genrich of City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation that remaining plan development tasks could be pursued by one or more students as part of a master’s professional project, or multiple master’s professional projects (Terry Genrich, June 2, 2014, interview with author).

As noted in Chapter 4 of this document, an asterisk (*) next to a step in the framework shown below indicates that input form park users should be used during this step.

**Framework for the Development of an Interpretive Plan for Wilderness Park**

1. **Compile an Inventory of Existing Activities and Goals**
   List all existing interpretive activities associated with the park.
   Utilize results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups to determine existing interpretive activities.
   List parent organization’s mission, purpose, and goals.
   Utilize results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups for information about the mission, purpose, and goals of the City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation (parent organization) and Friends of Wilderness Park.

2. **Compile an Inventory of Resources**
   List staff, volunteers, collaborators, and funding.
   Consider potential collaborators and grants.
   Assess staff competencies for education and creation of education materials.
Identify environmental and historic topics embodied by the landscape.

Utilize the results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups for a list of general topics. Further research, including literature reviews and interviews with local experts is recommended to better understand and document the topics embodied in Wilderness Park.

*3. Determine Community Needs and Analyze Audience*

Identify environmental, education, and community needs so that the interpretive program can be designed to produce responsive, accountable benefits that address those identified needs.

Consult the Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan, Nebraska Environmental Education Plan, and utilize the results of Wilderness Park Visitor Survey and Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups to help determine community needs.

Gather information about Wilderness Park visitors and about their interests related to the park, including what they wish to learn at/about the park.

Consult the results of the Wilderness Park Visitor Survey to determine visitor interests.

Consult page 6-2 of the Wilderness Park Subarea Plan (Hulvershorn 1999).

Consider potential audiences in meaningful and realistic ways relevant to the project. Consider complementary operations.

*4. Determine Management’s Needs and Abilities*

Identify the parent organization’s unmet goals based on comparison of goals and activities.

Utilize the results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups to determine which goals are being met by existing interpretive activities, and which goals are not being met by existing interpretive activities.

Identify resources available for interpretation.
Utilize the results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups to determine staff members who are dedicated to interpretation or similar activities (staff responsibilities are listed in the focus group results, but names are not provided); and the ability of management to take on new interpretive activities and materials to maintain.

Determine availability of city/county funding; any funding from friends or partner organizations, and any grants. Utilize Wilderness Park manager and educator focus group results to determine availability of funding and other support from Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors.

5. Articulate Program Goals and Scope
Develop goals that support and complement their parent organization’s mission, purpose, and goals.

Utilize the results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups.

Develop objectives that logically support the selected goals.

Utilize the results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups to determine which objectives contribute to the identified goals, and whether there are goals that need objectives to support them. Develop objectives for unsupported goals.

Ensure that goals and objectives are well-articulated.
Assess the overall fit of the program within the field of environmental education.
State how the program will contribute to the development of environmental literacy.

*6. Select Topics and Themes
Consider which topics and overall themes give particular significance to the landscape.
Use input from visitor survey to determine what should be interpreted at the park.

Utilize the results of the Wilderness Park Visitor Survey.
Identify environmental, educational, and community needs that might be addressed using the environmental and historic resources in the park.
Consult the Review of Existing Plans (section 3.2 of this project), specifically the reviews of the Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan (NACEE 2010), the Nebraska Environmental Education Plan (NACEE 2009); and Wilderness Park visitor survey results to determine community needs. Consider how these needs might be addressed using the topics identified in the results of the Wilderness Park visitor survey and the results of the Wilderness Park manager and educator focus groups.

Consider how the program can address identified environmental, educational, and community needs and produce responsive, responsible benefits that address those identified needs.

Consult the Nebraska Environmental Literacy Plan and the Nebraska Environmental Education Plan (NACEE 2010).

Consider a central theme to encompass the selected topics.

Ensure that message elements relate to a central theme or big idea to be conveyed to the audience.

Once themes, subthemes, and topics are selected, ensure that themes and message elements clearly align with specific interpretive plan objectives and that all objectives and that all objectives are supported by message elements.

Consult Interpretive Project Guide Book (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1994) for instructions.

*7. Select Interpretive Methods


Consider contemporary interpretive technology such as social media, online publications, audio tours/trailcasts, and GPS.

Clearly indicate the mix of media required to convey the message(s) to specific audiences.

To accomplish this effectively: Determine format, techniques, and training needs.
The interpretive plan should provide descriptions of suggested media types. These descriptions should include details about the media, such as the target audience, theme relationship, location, and a physical description of the media.

Select interpretive methods.

Select methods based on what methods are determined to work best for park goals, and can be afforded and maintained.

The selected methods should: 1. Provide opportunities for visitors to understand and appreciate the resource; 2. Provide opportunities for visitors to connect with the resource both emotionally and intellectually; 3. Enable visitors to make sound decisions and prepare for their experience through consideration of how to provide adequate information, orientation material and maps; 4. Consider safety and security issues of both the visitor and the resource. (NAI 2009b, 17)

Create a logic model that explains how methods will achieve program goals and how success can be measured.

The logic model should specify measurable goals of the interpretive program. Develop evaluation strategies, techniques, and criteria to accompany the logic model. Include the logic model and accompanying evaluation strategies, techniques, and criteria in the interpretive plan. Consult Nonformal Environmental Education Programs – Guidelines for Excellence (NAAEE 2009), pages 23 and 32 for information about how to build a logic model.

Clearly describe the visitor experience.

After the final step of determining methods is complete, submit a draft of the interpretive master plan to key stakeholders for review.

8. Prepare Education Resources

Assess logistical and resource (facilities, supplies, and equipment) needs based on selected methods.

Assess staff training needs.
State how staff will be prepared to deliver the education methods (whether teaching or creating an interpretive sign or pamphlet).

*Consult Summary of Guidelines for the Preparation and Professional Development of Environmental Educators (NAAEE 2010)*

Agree on a plan for management of interpretive materials.

Evaluate cost for future projects and anticipate cost increases.

Ensure that no more than four sub-themes are planned for a specific site, building, collection, or media piece.

9. Evaluate Program Results

Evaluate management objectives every few years, using the logic model (created during step 7), in order to improve current programs, ensure accountability, and maximize the effects of future efforts.

*Set a date for an annual evaluation as soon as possible.*

Present the results of evaluations of management objectives in an annual report.

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ecc7251b000f (accessed October 1, 2013).


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IRB - Project Approved - Certification of Exemption

Your project has been approved by the IRB.

Project Title: An Interpretive Plan Guide for Wilderness Park, Lincoln, Nebraska

Approvers Comments:

Dear Ms. Ward and Dr. Scholz,

Your project, An Interpretive Plan Guide for Wilderness Park, Lincoln, Nebraska, has been certified as exempt. You are authorized to begin data collection.

1. The approved informed consent forms have been uploaded to NUgrant (files with -Approved.pdf in the file name). Please use these forms to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the informed consent forms, please submit the revised forms to the IRB for review and approval prior to using them.

Your official approval letter will be uploaded to NUgrant shortly.

Good luck with your research!

Becky Freeman, CIP
for the IRB
bfreeman2@unl.edu

This message has been sent to you through NUgrant. To view project/form please follow this link:
https://nugrant.unl.edu/era/orr/irb/projectDetails.php?ProjectFormID=21481

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Office of Research and Economic Development
nugrant.unl.edu
APPENDIX II: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Questionnaire

Opening Question
1. How have you been involved in managing or educating at Wilderness Park?
2. What aspects of Wilderness Park are suitable and important to educate visitors about?

Introductory Question/Transition Question
3. Think back over the past year of educating park visitors. What went particularly well?

Key Questions
4. What needs improvement?
5. We’ve discussed what’s working well and what needs improvement. What education activities haven’t we discussed?
6. What change/s would you envision to improve the program?
7. Are there any challenges to reaching this aim?
8. Have a look at the list of the organization’s goals related to education at Wilderness Park (see handout below). Over the past few years, where have you seen evidence of progress toward these goals?
9. What goals have seen less progress?
10. Do any goals need revision?
11. What end results do you hope will come of educating visitors about Wilderness Park?

Ending Questions
12. Of all the things we discussed, what to you is the most important?
Moderator provides summary of discussion and asks the following questions:

13. Is this an adequate summary?
14. Have I missed anything?

B. Existing Goals and Objectives Handout

At present, the Wilderness Park Subarea Plan is the only document with specific recommendations for visitor interpretation at Wilderness Park. The Nature Center Strategic Plan may also have some applicability to interpretation at Wilderness Park.

The Wilderness Park Subarea Plan recommends:

9. Provide opportunities for **nature study** and appreciation

10. Interpret the **historical significance** of the Park through signage, brochures, and interpretive walks and talks

The Nature Center Strategic Plan recommends:

1. **Identify new program needs** of constituents (conduct surveys, evaluations, etc.; cater to diverse audience)

2. Continue to **evaluate all programs** to ensure quality and cost efficiency (survey visitors and program participants)

3. Maintain quality **teaching resources** (maintain quality, add to, make available)
4. Seek alternative funding sources for educational program needs. Aim to be at least revenue neutral. (collaborate, seek sponsorship, identify needs)

5. Continue good PR to market educational programs. (provide brochures/publications, enhance website, social media, utilize other organizations’ newsletters)

6. Network and collaborate with others involved in environmental education and natural resource issues to remain current on environmental issues and teaching techniques, and to provide enhanced programming to the public.
APPENDIX III: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORMS

A. Consent form: City of Lincoln Department of Parks and Recreation

An Interpretive Plan Guide for Wilderness Park, Lincoln, Nebraska: IRB# 14156

Purpose:
The purpose of this focus group will be to stimulate discussion about the future of visitor education at Wilderness Park among managers and educators (from Lincoln Parks and Recreation) who are involved with the park. This research project will aim to guide park managers and educators in improving visitor education activities at Wilderness Park in Lincoln, NE. The focus group will be audio recorded. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study because of your involvement in management or education at or related to the Wilderness Park.

Procedures:
You will be asked to discuss 14 questions as a group. The procedures will last for approximately one hour, and will be conducted at the Pioneer's Park Nature Center.

Benefits:
There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained during this study that could be used to identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in the investigator's home office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for five months after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study will be presented in a report to Wilderness Park managers and educators, but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the investigator(s) at the phone numbers below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln Parks and Recreation, Friends of Wilderness Park, or any other organization involved with this project, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

☐ Check here if you agree to be audio recorded during the focus group interview.

Signature of Participant:

____________________________________  ______________________
Signature of Research Participant          Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)
Rachel Ward, BS, Principal Investigator       Cell: (856) 981-9110
Gordon Scholz, AICP, Secondary Investigator   Office: (402) 472-9284
B. Consent form: Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors

An Interpretive Plan Guide for Wilderness Park, Lincoln, Nebraska: IRB# 14156

Purpose:
The purpose of this focus group will be to stimulate discussion about the future of visitor education at Wilderness Park among representatives from the Friends of Wilderness Park Board of Directors. This research project will aim to guide park managers and educators in improving visitor education activities at Wilderness Park in Lincoln, NE. The focus group will be audio recorded. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study because of your involvement in management or education at or related to the Wilderness Park.

Procedures:
You will be asked to discuss 14 questions as a group. The procedures will last for approximately one hour, and will be conducted at the location agreed upon by the participants.

Benefits:
There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained during this study that could be used to identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in the investigator’s home office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for five months after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study will be presented in a report to Wilderness Park managers and educators, but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the investigator(s) at the phone numbers below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln Parks and Recreation, Friends of Wilderness Park, or any other organization involved with this project, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

☐ Check here if you agree to be audio recorded during the focus group interview.

**Signature of Participant:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Research Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Name and Phone number of investigator(s)**

Rachel Ward, BS, Principal Investigator

Gordon Scholz, AICP, Secondary Investigator

Cell: (856) 981-9110

Office: (402) 472-9284

Room 302 Architecture Hall / P.O. Box 880105 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0105

(402) 472-9212 / FAX (402) 472-3806 / http://archweb.unl.edu
APPENDIX IV: VISITOR SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Visitor Survey Questions

The following questions were used in the survey of existing and potential park visitors. Sentences highlighted in gray explain the ‘skip logic’ used in the survey. The researcher designed the survey so that the survey software would skip one or more questions depending on how the participant answered a previous question. Skip logic refers to the logic behind whether a question or series of questions were skipped based on the participants’ previous selection.

Q0 Consent to Participate

Purpose:
The purpose of this survey is to better understand public interest in visitor education at Wilderness Park. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study because you are considered a potential or existing visitor of Wilderness Park.

Procedures:
This online survey will ask up to 15 questions, and should take 8 minutes or less to complete.

Benefits:
There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:
This survey is anonymous. No information will be gathered that could be used to identify you. The results will be reported to Wilderness Park managers and educators as aggregated data.

Freedom to Withdraw and Consent:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or any organization involved with this project. Continuing to the survey certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented.

**Opportunity to Ask Questions:**
Questions about this study may be directed to the investigator at (856) 981-9110. Concerns about the research and questions about your rights as a research participant can be directed to UNL Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965.

Thanks!
Rachel Ward, BS, Principal Investigator Cell: (856) 981-9110
Gordon Scholz, AICP, Secondary Investigator Office: (402) 472-9284

☐ Continue to Survey
☐ Decline Survey

If Decline Survey Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey
Q1 Select your age group.
- 19 - 24 years
- 25 - 34 years
- 35 - 44 years
- 45 - 54 years
- 55 - 64 years
- 65 - 74 years
- 75 - 84 years
- 85 + years

Q2 Select your highest level of education.
- Less than a high school degree
- High school diploma or GED
- Associates degree
- Some of a bachelors degree
- Bachelors degree
- Some of a masters degree
- Masters degree
- Some of a doctorate degree
- Doctorate degree

Q3 Have you ever been to Wilderness Park?
- Ye
- No (If no, please use the space below to state your reason for not visiting Wilderness Park.) ____________________

If No (If no, please use the s... Is Selected, Then Skip To Q4 What other natural areas around Linco...
Q5 How often do you use Wilderness Park? (Select the answer that best describes you.)
- Less than Once a Month
- Once a Month
- 2-3 Times a Month
- Once a Week
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Daily

Q6 Do you ever bring children with you to Wilderness Park?
- No
- Yes

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Q8
What activities do you pursue at Wild...

Q7 Please select the age groups of any children you bring to Wilderness Park. In the space provided, please note how many children within that age group come with you.

- Under 2 years ________________
- 2 - 4 years ________________
- 5 - 7 years ________________
- 8 - 10 years ________________
- 12 - 14 years ________________
- 15 - 18 years ________________
Q8 What activities do you pursue at Wilderness Park? (You may select multiple)

- [ ] walking
- [ ] biking
- [ ] running
- [ ] nature observation
- [ ] bird watching
- [ ] other (please explain below) ________________

Q9 What would most improve your experience at Wilderness Park? (Please select the option that would improve your experience the most.)

- [ ] better parking
- [ ] better trail maintenance
- [ ] better trail markings
- [ ] signs or other materials that explain the history and natural features
- [ ] nothing - no improvements are needed
- [ ] other (please explain below) ________________
Q10 Select the section(s) of Wilderness Park you use most commonly (you may select multiple areas).

Select the section(s) of Wilderness Park you use most commonly. (You may select multiple.)
A - Day Camp area (west of 1st Street, south of Van Dorn Street/Bison Trail, north of Calvert Street)
B - Epworth area (south of Calvert Street, north of Pioneers Blvd.)
C - Pioneers Blvd. area (south of Pioneers Blvd., north of Old Cheney Rd.)
D - Old Cheney Rd. area (south of Old Cheney Rd., west of 14th Street)
E - East 14th Street area (east of 14th Street, north of Saltillo Rd.)
Q11 Select the entrance(s) to Wilderness Park you most commonly use. (You may select multiple.)
Day Camp entrance (on 1st Street, south of Van Dorn St., north of Calvert St.)
Epworth entrance (on Calvert Street, west of Salt Creek, entrance has stone arch)
Jamaica North Trail entrance at Epworth (south of Van Dorn St., east of Salt Creek)
Pioneers Blvd. entrance
1st Street entrance (south of Pioneers Blvd.)
Old Cheney Rd. entrance
14th Street entrance (north of Rokeby Rd.)
Saltillo Rd. entrance
Jamaica North Trail entrance at Saltillo
Other (please explain below) ____________________

Q12 What topics have you learned about during previous visits to Wilderness Park?
Select all that apply.
plants
animals
pre-settlement landscape
Native American history
Pioneer and early settlement history
geology
Wilderness Park's role as part of a greenway that will one day surround Lincoln
Wilderness Park's role in protecting Lincoln from floods
none
other ____________________
Q4 What other natural areas around Lincoln do you visit? (You may select multiple.)

- Pioneers Park
- Antelope Park
- Saline Wetlands
- none
- Other (please explain below) ____________________

Q13 Select your level of interest in each of the following topics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Uninteresting</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Interesting</th>
<th>Very Interesting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plants</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-settlement landscape</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native American history</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pioneer/early settlement history</td>
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<td>Geology</td>
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<td>Prairie ecology</td>
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</table>
Q14 In your opinion, what is the most important function of Wilderness Park?
☐ protects the city from floods (flood water storage)
☐ a place for physical activity like walking, cycling, horseback riding, etc.
☐ a place for nature observation
☐ a place for peace and quiet - a retreat
☐ habitat for plants and animals
☐ provides an understanding of human impact on the landscape
☐ other ____________________

Q15 Select your level of interest in each of the following learning methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Method</th>
<th>Uninteresting</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Interesting</th>
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<tr>
<td>audio tour using cell phone</td>
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Q16 Select your preferred location to access literature for Wilderness Park. (You may select multiple.)

- online
- Lincoln Parks and Recreation headquarters (2740 A Street)
- Pioneers Park Nature Center
- other ____________________
APPENDIX V: VISITOR SURVEY CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate

Purpose:
The purpose of this survey is to better understand public interest in visitor education at Wilderness Park. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study because you are considered a potential or existing visitor of Wilderness Park.

Procedures:
This online survey will ask up to 15 questions, and should take 8 minutes or less to complete.

Benefits:
There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:
This survey is anonymous. No information will be gathered that could be used to identify you. The results will be reported to Wilderness Park managers and educators as aggregated data.

Freedom to Withdraw and Consent:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or any organization involved with this project. Continuing to the survey certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
Questions about this study may be directed to the investigator at (856) 981-9110. Concerns about the research and questions about your rights as a research participant can be directed to UNL Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965.

Thanks!

Rachel Ward, BS, Principal Investigator          Cell: (856) 981-9110
Gordon Scholz, AICP, Secondary Investigator     Office: (402) 472-9284