

## **Noble County Parks Board Summit 2025 Overview**

**Location:** One Room Stanley School House

**Date/Time:** April 23rd, 10am to 1:30pm

### **Welcome by Diann Scott**

#### **Chain O' Lakes State Park Presentation**

##### **Housekeeping:**

- The 1915 School House has no plumbing.
- Vault toilets are located across the street.
- Ample parking is available.

##### **Chain O' Lakes State Park Update:**

- Camping, hiking, and boating are up again this year, with over half a million visitors.

##### **New for 2025:**

- 4 square courts
- New outdoor preschool space
- New interpretive signs for Native American history
- Pollinator planting and growth area at the Old Mulberry School
- Invasive species removal on approximately 6 acres
- New water softener and plumbing
- 400 rainbow trout added to Sand Lake
- New flooring and backsplashes
- Painting of bridges
- 18 cabins - Thank you, Libbert!

##### **School House Fun Facts with Carly:**

- This is the 4th schoolhouse on the property - two were log cabins, and two were brick.
- All three previous schoolhouses burned down.
- The current schoolhouse (1915-1954) was still a school.
- The 1854 School House (Mulberry) can be seen near the front of the campus.
- 1st-8th grade were all in one class.
- McGuffey Readers were often used as educational books.

- Reading, writing, and math were the core classes; everything else was secondary.
- Students had chores.
- The schoolhouse was heated with wood.
- **Opening Day is Saturday, April 26th**

### **Meeting Program:**

- Ice Breaker Game
  - a. Break up into groups of 3
  - b. Choose an Outdoor Destination to Travel to
  - c. Use travel, their water, land, and 1 vehicle
  - d. Objective: get your group to the location as quickly as possible and explain your route to the group
- Short Stroll & Hike
- Rest Room Break
- Photos
- Partner Updates:

### **Visit Noble County**

- New - Pixle from Datafy to help tell more about visitor travel
- Project Sky Event in July at Bixler Lake
- Moved to CLC
- 1000% increase in new visitors
- Over \$4 Million in Economic Impact - Top 28 Festivals and Events
- Blogs - Ice Fishing, 9 Lake Paddle Challenge
- Visitor Guide requested by 13 Countries and 43 States
- Camping & Road Trips on the rise
- Well-being is a big part of driving new and returning visitors to Indiana and Noble County

### **Noble Trails Inc:**

- Finishing connecting Avilla and Kendallville.
- Working on the south side of Wollocative to connect St. Rd. 9 in Rome City to the LaGrange County trails, in order to better connect Noble and LaGrange Counties.
- Developing a 3-acre trailhead park on St. Rd.. 3 near Kendallville.
- Hosting a 5k at GSP & Fishing Line Trail on Saturday, April 26th.
- Planning to eventually connect Avilla to Auburn, which would connect Noble County to the Pokabash Trail & Pumpkin Vine.
- Open to questions.

### **Rome City Updates**

- Completed 5-Year Plan submitted to DNR on April 15th
- ARC is taking on additional projects for the musical park
- Partnering with Noble Trail for trail completion & State Rd (Oct)
- New playground equipment coming to Lakeside Park
- Kelly Park pickleball and tennis courts will be resurfaced
- Pickleball tournament in August

### **Gene Stratton Porter**

- Wildflower garden growing at the Cabin
- Noble Trails, Noble House, and Common Grace 5 Ks this year
- Two new interpreters
- New Programmer and programs
- Sower House
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### **Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center**

- Fully Staffed
- Lots of Volunteers
- Hosting an America-Core Member
- It's field trip season- expecting to see at least 3,000 kids
- Preschool Wrapping Up
- Nature Fest in May
- Conservation Leadership School is coming up this summer
- Summer Programming
- May term- over 20 students (3 weeks)

### **Albion Star Team (Historic Downtown Albion)**

- 2025 rack cards are ready to be distributed
- 7 events planned for 2025
- The Gazebo on the courthouse is being renovated
- Mural on Fox Den is being removed and restored

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### **Plan Commission Update:**

- The comprehensive plan review and amendment process is currently on hold. The plan commission hopes to revisit this in the future.

### **Avilla Update:**

- The park board was dissolved at the end of 2024.
- The Town Manager has assumed the responsibilities of the board.
- The Park Manager position is filled.
- Avilla has three parks and one community center.
- T-ball is currently the main program.
- Seventeen acres have been set aside for a future park.

#### **-City of Ligonier Parks**

- Repair and maintenance are the key focus for 2025
- Later this month, a new memorial by the Fire Station
- More Pickle Ball Courts planned for 2026 & 2027
- Disc Golf is growing in popularity, with two tournaments hosted this year
- Thousands of out-of-state visitors

#### **Acres Land Trust**

- Growth, about 120 nature preserves
- 7 in Noble, 3 are open to the public
- Lots of improvements to come for trails and signage
- Just hosted Boots & Brews in Ligonier and Harry Stuff Brewing Co
- Has a quarterly newsletter

#### **Albion Parks Dept**

- Hidden Diamond Improvements
  - New Barn & Office
  - Disc Golf is growing in popularity
  - Skate Park is complete
  - Attracting many visitors from outside of Albion
  - A playground is getting repairs, and some equipment is being replaced
  - Wetlands & Marton House are receiving praise
  - All ages Universal Design Playground is accessible for everyone

#### **Master Planning Round Table Discussion**

- Grace Caswell Lead with the questions below to get the conversation started:

“Can each partner please provide an overview of your current master

plan or strategic plan, including key points, and whether you intend to seek DNR funding? Additionally, how can we collaborate on these initiatives?"

## **Partner Feedback**

### **1- Rome City**

- Has a 2026-2031 Master plan, which may need amending as time moves forward.
- Hired a 3rd party to conduct the plan
- May seek DNR funding for future projects.
- **Accessibility is a KEY focus.**
- Seeking safer water access with a new kayak & canoe launch area away from high-traffic speed boat locations.
- Community feedback during the information gathering phase was less than expected/hoped for.

### **2- Noble Trails**

- Noble Trails will send out a digital copy of their current plan.
- The long-term plan is to connect the entire county of Noble and also connect the Noble Trail to Allen, DeKalb, Elkhart, LaGrange, etc.

### **3- Noble County GIS.**

- Just started their master plan-Runs from 2025-2029
- Began with a SWOT analysis
- Tried to align with the State GIS as much as possible
- Hiring more staff
- ADA compliance for websites is very important
- The bulk of projects surround mapping and infrastructure improvements

### **4- Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center**

- Plan runs from 2022-2025
- Focuses on Capital Projects
- Planning was done by a 3rd party
- Big focus on ADA updates and Universal design

### **5- Gene Stratton Porter State Historic Site**

- Updating in 2026
- Takes the lead from the State Museums Foundation Board
- Early stages currently

- ADA updates and Universal design are also top of mind
- Tiffany Parker will release GSP info to the public once it is available

#### **6- Albion Parks Dept**

- Master plan was approved and runs from 2024-2029
- Focuses on: Trails, Playgrounds, Board Walk, Wetland Project, Bird projects, Outdoor Theatre with pavilion and seating for 300
- Received DNR funding in the past
- May seek DNR funding in the future

#### **7- Advance Rome City**

- Currently working off an Annual Plan, but looking to put a 3-year strategic plan together.
- Fundraising is a major focus, with an Annual Fundraiser at Sylvan Cellars.
- Not seeking DNR funding at this time.

#### **8- Noble County Parks Board**

- Currently evaluating a 5-year master plan
- Seeking funding from County Government & Grants
- Questioning if they need DNR funding, as they don't own land
- Considering if a strategic plan makes more sense
- Want to add a County park when and if the opportunity arises - it would be the 1st county-owned park
- Leveraging strengths of CVB, GIS, and Plan Commission to work together

#### **9- Plan Commission Update:**

- The comprehensive plan review and amendment process is currently on hold. The plan commission hopes to revisit this in the future.

#### **10-West Lakes Association**

- Has a plan in place
- Applies for DNR funding
- Projects mostly focus on cleaning rivers and lakes

#### **11- Chain O'Lakes State Park**

- State Parks office creates a plan that filters down to individual parks throughout the state
- An accessibility assessment was recently done - park needs meaningful upgrades
- Nature Programming is a major part of the plan as well
- Action Items are being addressed as best as possible, starting with smaller and less expensive projects first
- Desiring a new high-quality nature center to better serve

## **12-Ligonier Parks Department**

- Working on finishing a plan
- Need a year-round bathroom
- Playground updates to three parks
- Pickleball court expansion

## **13- Avilla Parks**

- Using an older plan
- Expansion of Elley Park with new playground, splash pad, west of current park
- The plan is public and copies can be made available
- A 3rd party conducted the plan

Adjourned at 1:35

[Noble County Parks Board](#) Meeting immediately followed the summit