

# Healing Nature Trail At Oconomowoc River Conservancy Park

## Background

The Town of Merton and Tall Pines Conservancy have partnered to update and implement the master plan for the Oconomowoc River Conservancy Park. The approximately 25-acre park is designed to educate and encourage patrons to enjoy nature through **passive recreational activities** such as walking, hiking, skiing, wildlife observation and bird watching. In 2019, Tall Pines completed the installation of the **Hunt Eldridge Memorial Observation Deck** through generous funding provided by the **Buchanan Foundation**.



**Waukesha County** owns approximately 20 acres of land adjacent to the park and the river, where cropland is gradually being transitioned into pollinator habitat. Tall Pines has planted approximately 100 Oak trees on the portion of land closest to the Ice Age Trail Bridge over the river.

In early 2020, Tall Pines began working with the **Healing Nature Center from Three Lakes Wisconsin** on the concept of a Healing Nature Trail for forest bathing at the Park. Later with the onset of Covid-19, the need for such a trail became very apparent and TPC applied for and received a generous grant from the **Kettle Moraine Garden Club** to fund the design of the trail. Currently the first phase of the trail has been cut through the established prairie (installed by the Town 13 years ago) and leads walkers through a transition into the woodland and out to the Oconomowoc River.



## About The Healing Trail

Walking in Nature has been [proven](#) to lower heart rate and blood pressure, reduce stress hormone production, boost the immune system, and improve overall feelings of wellbeing. Scientific research shows that inhaling tree-derived compounds—known as phytoncides—reduces concentrations of stress hormones and enhances the activity of white-blood cells known as natural killer cells.

Choosing to become present with the subtle sensations found only in nature opens a doorway into another realm. Connecting with nature can shift the perceptions of your everyday world in profound ways. What follows becomes your own journey into peace of mind, tranquility, inspiration, and curiosity. It is a great place to rejuvenate for many who are experiencing anxiety, depression, any mental or physical health issues.

The entrance to the Healing Nature Trail is marked by a woven and braided wood arch, which begins off the gravel road and brings walkers into the lush prairie. Walking through the arch is the first step to leaving the busyness of daily life behind and giving oneself permission to let go and be immersed in the healing and replenishing energy of nature. The trail is very narrow by design, as to better immerse walkers in the feel and scents of nature. As the trail winds through the prairie, the journey takes one through a transition zone from prairie to woodland, and into the wetland leading to the River and back. Along the way, there is a “Zen Untangle” featured area that offers users the ability to wander and lose themselves in working through obstacles and “tangles” that help them unravel troubles and to solve problems challenging them.

The Trail was designed to provide a metaphor for the healing journey, offering multiple paths, alcoves for personal reflection, and (eventually) log benches nestled between elder trees overlooking the river along the way. All paths are suitable for barefoot walking which allow users to feel more fully the healing energies of Nature and the Earth. Plate-size finger labyrinths will be eventually be available to take on the trail, which allows one to experience a labyrinth in whatever space calls you. There are no rules. The most important factor is conscious intent to be open to both self and nature.

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## Phase Two

Phase Two of the trail will be a woodland loop leading off the parking area through the dense forest leading up to the overlook. This loop is in the design phase and will be constructed in fall 2020.

## Partners

Tall Pines Conservancy thanks the following partners who helped with implementation of the park plan and the creation of the trail thus far:



***Buchanan  
Foundation***



***Healing Nature Center***



***Kettle Moraine  
Garden Club***