

# **Dallas Co. Conservation Board Strategic Plan 2004**

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## **Introduction**

The following information contains the Strategic Plan for the Dallas County Conservation Board. When appropriate and logical to do so, specific tasks and actions are presented. However, the goals and direction of the department and its programs is the basis of the plan. This plan provides direction yet is flexible to adjust to specific circumstances and events. By having some direction the department will be better situated to deal with events and needs that will be placed upon them in the next 5 plus years.

This document is to be used as one of several tools and guides to the management and direction of the Dallas County Conservation Board. Thoughts, proposals, and surveys put on paper today can be dramatically altered due to uncontrollable circumstances in less than a year. Therefore, guidelines and directional philosophies will be used when planning long term. Exact budget estimates and revenues also are difficult to consider over a long period of time, general direction and foreseeable needs are more realistically discussed.

## **Mission Statement**

“To promote and preserve the health and general welfare of the people. To encourage the orderly development and conservation of natural, historical, and cultural resources in Dallas County. To cultivate good citizenship through environmental education by providing natural, historical, cultural, and recreational programs to the public. To plan, acquire, develop, maintain, and make available to the inhabitants of the county, public parks, preserves, parkways, playgrounds, recreation centers, county forests, wildlife, and other conservation areas.”

The above mission statement has been part of the Dallas County Conservation Board’s philosophy for years. This strategic plan is consistent with the elements of the Mission Statement and the department works on a continued basis towards implementing those goals.

One of the more interesting and important components of this plan is the county wide survey that was completed. The information includes general trends and needs of the citizens of Dallas County. The results from the survey are consistent with the direction of the strategic plan recommendations.

## **History**

Iowa's County Conservation Board system began in 1955. In 1962 the people of Dallas County voted to authorize a Conservation Board with the purpose of acquiring and developing county parks, preserves, forests, wildlife, and other conservation resources and to provide environmental programming to cultivate citizenship and conservation ethic. The Conservation Board sets policy and oversees the activities of the Conservation Department. The County Conservation Board system is governed by chapter 350 of the Code of Iowa. It is important to understand how the County Conservation Board system is set up. Much thought and wisdom was put in to the creation of Chapter 350, however, many people are not aware of the structure and details of such a system. The following section contains Chapter 350 of the Iowa Code.

## **Chapter 350**

### **350.1 Purposes.**

The purposes of this chapter are to create a county conservation board and to authorize counties to acquire, develop, maintain, and make available to the inhabitants of the county, public museums, parks, preserves, parkways, playgrounds, recreational centers, county forests, wildlife and other conservation areas, and to promote and preserve the health and general welfare of the people, to encourage the orderly development and conservation of natural resources, and to cultivate good citizenship by providing adequate programs of public recreation.

### **350.2 Petition - Board Membership.**

Upon a petition to the board of supervisors which meets the requirements of section 331.306, the board shall submit to the voters at the next general election the question of whether a county conservation board shall be created as provided for in this chapter. If at the election the majority of votes favor the creation of a county conservation board, the board of supervisors within sixty days after the election shall create a county conservation board to consist of five bona fide residents of the county.

The members first appointed shall hold office for the term of one, two, three, four, and five years respectively, as indicated and fixed by the board of supervisors. Thereafter, succeeding members shall be appointed for a term of five years, except that vacancies occurring otherwise than by expiration of term shall be filled by appointment for the unexpired term.

When a member of the board, during the term of office, ceases to be a bona fide resident of the county, the member is disqualified as a member and the office becomes vacant. Members of the board shall be selected and appointed on the basis of their demonstrated interest in conservation matters, and shall serve without compensation, but may be paid their actual and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their official duties. Members of the county conservation board may be removed for cause by the board of supervisors as provided section 331.321 subsection 3, if the cause is malfeasance, nonfeasance, disability, or failure to participate in board activities as set forth by the rules of the conservation board.

### **350.3 Meetings - Records - Annual Report.**

Within thirty days after the appointment of members of the board, the board shall organize by selecting from its members a president and secretary and such other officers as are deemed necessary, who shall hold office for the calendar year in which elected and until their successors are selected and qualify. Three members of the board shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

The board shall hold regular meetings. Special meetings may be called by the president, and shall be called on the request of a majority of members, as the necessity may require. The county conservation board shall have the power to adopt bylaws, to adopt and use a common seal, and to enter into contracts. The county board of supervisors shall provide suitable offices for the meetings of the county conservation board and for safekeeping of its records. Such records shall be subject to public inspection at all reasonable hours and under such regulations as the county conservation board may prescribe.

The board shall annually make a full and complete report to the county board of supervisors of its transactions and operations of the preceding year. Such report shall contain a full statement of its receipts, disbursements, and the program of work for the period covered, and may include such recommendations as may be deemed advisable.

### **350.4 Powers and Duties.**

The county conservation board shall have the custody, control, and management of all real and personal property heretofore or hereafter acquired by the county for public museums, parks, preserves, parkways, playgrounds, recreation centers, county forests, county wildlife areas, and other county conservation and recreation purposes and is authorized and empowered:

1. To study and ascertain the county's museum, park, preserve, parkway, and recreation and other conservation facilities, the need for such facilities, and the extent to which such needs are being currently met, and to prepare and adopt a co-coordinated plan of areas and facilities to meet such needs.
2. To acquire in the name of the county by gift, purchase, lease, agreement, exchange, or otherwise, in fee or with conditions, suitable real estate within or without the territorial limits of the county for public museums, parks, preserves, parkways, playgrounds, recreation centers, forests, wildlife, and other conservation purposes and for participation in watershed, drainage, and flood control programs for the purpose of increasing the recreational resources of the county.

The natural resource commission, the county board of supervisors, or the governing body of any city, upon request of the county conservation board, may transfer to the county conservation board for use as museums, parks, preserves, parkways, playgrounds, recreation centers, play fields, tennis courts, skating rinks, swimming pools, gymnasiums, rooms for arts and crafts, camps and meeting places, community forests, wildlife areas, and other recreational purposes, any land and buildings owned or controlled by the department of natural resources or the county or the city and not devoted or dedicated to

any other inconsistent public use. In acquiring or accepting land, due consideration shall be given to its scenic, historic, archaeological, recreational, or other special features, and land shall not be acquired or accepted unless, in the opinion of the board, it is suitable or, in the case of exchange, is suitable and of substantially the same value as the property exchanged from the standpoint of its proposed use. An exchange of property approved by the county conservation board and the board of supervisors is not subject to section 331.361 subsection 2.

3. The county conservation board shall file with the natural resource commission all acquisitions or exchanges of land within one year.
4. To plan, develop, preserve, administer and maintain all such areas, places and facilities, and construct, reconstruct, alter and renew buildings and other structures, and equip and maintain the same.
5. To accept in the name of the county gifts, bequests, contributions and appropriations of money and other personal property for conservation purposes.
6. To employ and fix the compensation of a director who shall be responsible to the county conservation board for carrying out of its policies. The director, subject to the approval of the board, may employ and fix the compensation of assistants and employees as necessary for carrying out this chapter.
7. To charge and collect reasonable fees for the use of the parks, facilities, privileges and conveniences as may be provided and for admission to amateur athletic contests, demonstrations and exhibits, and other noncommercial events. The board shall not allow the exclusive use of a park by one or more organizations.
8. To operate concessions or to lease concessions and to let out and rent privileges in or upon any property under its control upon such terms and conditions as are deemed by it to be in the public interest.
9. To participate in watershed projects of soil and water conservation districts and the federal government and in projects of drainage districts organized under the provisions of chapter 467c and chapter 468, subchapter 1, parts 1 through 5, and subchapter 11, parts 1, 5, and 6, for the purpose of increasing the recreational resources of the county. Any agreement for such participation by or with a board of supervisors or trustees concerning drainage districts shall be in writing, shall be duly adopted by a resolution of the board of supervisors or trustees and shall be spread in its entirety upon the permanent records of the drainage district or districts affected.
10. To furnish suitable uniforms for the director and those employees as the director may designate to wear uniforms, when on official duty. The cost of the uniforms shall not exceed three hundred dollars per person in any year. The uniforms shall at all times remain the property of the county.

### **350.5 Regulations - Penalty - Officers.**

The county conservation board may make, alter, amend or repeal regulations for the protection, regulation, and control of all museums, parks, preserves, parkways, playgrounds, recreation centers, and other property under its control. The regulations shall not be contrary to, or inconsistent with, the laws of this state. The regulations shall not take effect until ten days after their adoption by the board and after their publication as provided in section 331.395 and after a copy of the regulations has been posted near such each gate or principal entrance to the public ground to which they apply. After the publication and posting, a person violating a provision of the regulations which are then in effect is guilty of a simple misdemeanor. The board may designate the director and those employees as the director may designate as police officers who shall have all the powers conferred by law on police officers, peace officers, or sheriffs in the enforcement of the laws of this state and the apprehension of violators upon all property under its control within and without the county. The board may grant the director and those employees of the board designated as police officers the authority to enforce the provisions of chapter 321G, 461A, 462A, 481A, and 483A on land not under the control of the board within the county.

### **350.6 Moneys - Contracts - Bonds**

Upon request of the county conservation board, the board of supervisors shall establish a reserve for county conservation land acquisition and capital improvement projects. The board of supervisors may periodically credit an amount of money to the reserve. Moneys credited to the reserve shall remain in the reserve until expended for the projects upon warrants requisitioned by the county conservation board. The interest earned on moneys received from bequests and donations in the reserve account which are invested pursuant to section 12C. shall be credited to the reserve account.

Annually, the total amount of money credited to the reserve, plus moneys appropriated for conservation purposes from sources other than the reserve, shall not be less than the amount of gifts, contributions, and bequests of money, rent, licenses, fees, charges, and other revenues received by the county conservation board. However, moneys given, bequeathed, or contributed upon specified trusts shall be held, appropriated, and extended in accordance with the trust specified.

Grants provided by the natural resource commission from its county conservation board fund shall be expended solely for the purposes of carrying out the provisions of this chapter.

The county auditor shall keep a complete record of the appropriations and shall issue warrants on them only on requisition of the county conservation board. The county conservation board is subject to contract letting procedures in section 331.341, subsections 1, 2, and 4. Upon request of the county conservation board, the board of supervisors may issue general county purpose bonds for the purposes in section 331.441, subsection 2, paragraph "c", subparagraph (2), as provided in chapter 331, division IV, part 3.

### **350.7 Joint Operations.**

Any county conservation board may co-operate with the federal government or the state government or any department or agency thereof to carry out the purposes and provisions of this chapter. Any county conservation board may join with any other county board or boards to carry out this chapter, and to that end may enter into agreement with each other and may do any and all things necessary or convenient to aid and co-operate in carrying out the chapter. Any city, village or school district may aid and co-operate with any county conservation board or any combination of boards in equipping, operating and maintaining museums, parks, preserves, parkways, playground, recreation centers, and conservation areas, and for providing, conducting and supervising programs of activities, and may appropriate moneys for such purposes. The natural resource commission, county engineer, county agricultural agent, and other county officials shall render assistance which does not interfere with their regular employment. The board of supervisors may be reimbursed to the credit of the proper fund from county conservation funds for actual expense of operations of county-owned equipment, use of county equipment operators, supplies, and materials of the county, or for the reasonable value for the use of county real estate made available for the use of the county conservation board.

### **350.8 School Property Used.**

The governing body of any school district may grant the use of any buildings, grounds, or equipment of the district to any county conservation board for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this chapter whenever such use of the school buildings, grounds or equipment for such purposes will not interfere with the use of the buildings, grounds, and equipment for any purpose of the public school system.

### **350.9 Advice and Assistance.**

The natural resource commission and the department of education shall advise with and may assist any county or counties in carrying out the purposes of this chapter.

### **350.10 Statutes Applicable.**

Sections 461A.35 through 461A.57 apply to all lands and waters under the control of a county conservation board, in the same manner as if the lands and waters were state parks, lands, or waters. As used in sections 461A.35 through 461A.57, "natural resource commission" includes a county conservation board, and "director" includes a county conservation board or its director, with respect to lands or waters under the control of a county conservation board. However, sections 461A.35 through 461A.57 may be modified or superseded by rules adopted as provided in section 350.5.

### **350.11 County Conservation Boards Created.**

Notwithstanding the referendum specified in section 350.1, the board of supervisors of any county in which a county conservation board has not been established as of January 1, 1989, shall create a county conservation board to become effective July 1, 1989. The membership of a county conservation board created pursuant to this section, shall be appointed during the month of January 1989, for the purposes of organizing, planning, and budgeting for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1989. A county conservation board created as provided in this section shall become fully operational as of July 1, 1989.

### **350.12 Iowa's County Beautification Program.**

1. A county conservation board may establish an Iowa's county beautification program to encourage the prevention and cleanup of litter in public areas of the county. The county conservation director shall prepare and implement the program which is designed to employ persons from fourteen years of age to eighteen years of age in a six-week summer program. The program may include public informational activities, but shall be directed primarily toward encouraging and facilitating involvement in litter prevention and cleanup. The program shall also include weekly instruction on safety in the workplace while employed with an Iowa's county beautification program. Financial assistance for an Iowa's county beautification program may be received through the county conservation account pursuant to section 455A.19. County matching funds shall not be required for eligibility for funding an Iowa's county Beautification program.

2. A county conservation board shall coordinated its Iowa's county beautification program with the county engineer or director of the county secondary road department and with the district highway engineer of the state department of transportation. The respective county and state highway authorities, within time and budgetary limitations, shall cooperate with the county conservation board in implementing the litter program in regard to the rights-of-way of primary and secondary roads when requested by the county conservation board.

### **Existing areas and facilities.**

The DCCB owns or manages 16 sites totaling over 2680 acres.

### **Park and Recreation Areas**

1. Big Bend Wildlife Area, 380 acres, 2 miles north of Redfield. This area is open to hunting and located adjacent to the Middle Raccoon River.
2. Crellin Wildlife Refuge, 16 acres, 3 miles SW of Minburn. In the spring of 2004 an additional 35.5 acre refuge was acquired ½ mile north of the Crellin Area. The new area is yet to be named.
3. Fazel Wildlife Area, 13 acres, 3 miles south of Perry. Refuge area, limited access, adjacent to the North Raccoon River.
4. Forest Park Museum, 17 acres, ½ mile south of Perry, main headquarters of the Dallas County Conservation Board, museum complex with 7 buildings on site.
5. Glissman Nature Area, 60 acres, 6 miles SE of Redfield. Natural area with house that may be used for environmental education, retreats and possible group activities. Area contains a 7 acre pond.
6. Hanging Rock Park, 440 acres, ½ mile south of Redfield, south half of the park is open to hunting and contains a 10 acre wetland. The north half of the park is a refuge and developed as a park with interpretive farm buildings, a link to the Raccoon River Valley Trail, prairie and savanna areas and the hanging rock formations along the Middle Raccoon River.

7. Kuehn Conservation Area, 590 acres, 5 miles north of Earlham, north section is open to hunting, most of the area is closed to hunting and is used as a natural area, low impact camping, many environmental education programs and events on sight, prairie restoration areas, adjacent to the South Raccoon River.
8. Puckerbrush Access, 31 acres, 3 miles north of Van Meter, boat ramp on the North Raccoon River.
9. Raccoon River Valley Trail, 56 mile, 630 acres, paved trail from Des Moines to Jefferson, 22 miles of the trail is managed by the Dallas County Conservation Board.
10. Redfield Dam, 25 acres, West edge of Redfield, boat ramp access on the Middle Raccoon River.
11. Sportsman Park, 40 acres, ½ mile NE of Dawson, camping, picnicking, hiking, fishing, 4 shelterhouses, flush toilets, caretaker on site.
12. Trindle Park, 22 acres, ½ mile south of Van Meter, picnicking, 2 shelters, flush toilets.
13. Voas Nature Area, 370 acres, 1.5 miles west of Minburn, museum of rocks, geological information and exhibits, wetlands complex, restored prairie, hiking trails, many environmental programs and events on sight, refuge area.
14. Wagner Prairie, 10 acres, 5 miles N of Adel, restored prairie area, refuge.
15. Redfield Depot, Redfield, serves as a trail head for the Raccoon River Valley Trail.
16. G.A.R. Lodge, Grand Army of the Republic Lodge, in Redfield, historical restoration of one of the few remaining G.A.R. buildings in Iowa.

It is important that the department manage the existing areas so that quality is a priority. The existing areas provide diverse recreational opportunities for the public. These areas each provide something a little different for the public. Future acquisitions could enhance the existing areas acres or if significant enough size wise will provide a new opportunity for recreation.

### **Land Acquisition**

Seven categories are used to evaluate properties for inclusion into the public lands system. For a property to qualify for acquisition it usually fits into several of the adopted categories. Properties are ranked in terms of priority based upon their relationship to the seven categories.

1. Unique resource sites may include areas with special features such as rare and endangered species, unique geologic formations, unique plant communities, special federal or state protected areas or archaeological sites.
2. “Mega” sites are developed in areas suitable for large resource sites because of their location or relationship to existing public lands or large tracts of relatively undisturbed natural area.
3. River access points are acquired for public access to the river system. Access points may rank higher if they are adjacent to a federal or state protected area or recreational attraction.
4. Recreation sites and parks are easily accessible areas that provide space for active and passive forms of outdoor recreation.

5. Trails and trail corridors include land and water based trails for hiking, bicycling and canoeing.
6. Support sites include lands or waters adjacent to existing public land.
7. Historic and cultural sites include areas rich in Native and European history. These sites commonly serve as social gathering areas.

Funding for land acquisition projects comes from federal, state and private grant programs. One or more grants may be used to fund an acquisition project. Programs common in Iowa include, Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP), Habitat Stamp Fund and the Water Recreation Access Cost Share program, and Land and Water Conservation Fund.

### **Additional Emphasis:**

- Continue to acquire areas as is feasible and in accordance with the land acquisition guidelines already in place.
- Manage areas using appropriate wildlife management tools and applications.
- Promote the planting of trees and prairie.
- Implement an annual tree planting program for our areas that need it.
- Conduct wildlife habitat development workshops annually.
- Maintain a continued strong voice in decisions relating to land use in the county, including environmental assessments and critical lands designations. Provide this input through, among other means, the Board of Supervisors, the planning and development department, interpretation, programming, etc.
- Continue the efforts in following the goals of the Raccoon River Valley Greenbelt plan.

### **Future Parks**

Within a few years Dallas County will have an opportunity to accept from Halletts Construction a 100 acre +- lake. This would be the remains of a sand quarry operation. The area could be used as a park. This area is located in the southeast part of the county near Booneville. This area could be developed with little or many amenities to the site. The more amenities developed the more users will make use of the park. As the development of the park continues so will the need for additional staff and budget. The development could be plan so that additional revenues will be brought in accordingly. Is the county prepared to enter into the “traditional park” business? This can be a highly rewarding and positive activity for the department. Many opportunities for public recreation would come out of such an endeavor. On the other hand maintenance costs for such a park would require a significant increase in the budget.

Martin Marietta has proposed a quarry that would be adjacent to the Halletts site which could increase the lake acres to 250 acres of water.

Glissman Conservation Area is an area with much potential however a decision must be made as to how to manage this area. In the spring of 2004 an ISU Forestry 454 class did a management plan on this area. That plan is included with this document. It is the intent of the board to develop this site as a retreat area and to utilize for environmental education purposes.

As other areas and or buildings become available it is important for the board to consider the long term ramifications of such a venture. More buildings may mean more maintenance which could mean additional staff and resources need. The board should also consider whether new opportunities that present itself are actually opportunities that are within the goals philosophies and Mission Statement of the department. Chapter 350 of the Code of Iowa grants the conservation board much latitude in what they can be involved in. The unique thing about the county conservation board system is that each county operates differently and each county has its own goals and plans on how to provide the serves of its citizens.

The department should continue to be flexible and open minded about potential new types of park and recreation opportunities and needs for the public. Increased population may demand facilities the department has not been involved with before. As potential requests come about, the following issues should be addressed.

- Is this needed for the people of Dallas County?
- Budget Concerns
- Staffing concerns
- Maintenance
- Impact on the existing natural resources.
- Could it be a joint effort with other entities?
- Should the County Conservation Board be the entity that provides the service?

Dallas County does not need to provide everything, but they do need to provide quality and services that meet the needs of its citizens. Once again referencing the 2004 county recreation survey is an important tool in this strategic plan.

### **Communication, Public Relations, Marketing**

A better job of letting the public know about the board's areas and activities should be done. This information was evident in the recreation survey results and is evident through everyday observance.

A possible source that needs to be enhanced and utilized more is the web site. The web page needs to be updated and made accessible by the department for editing purposes. In order to market the web page to the public better the web address could be put on the back of each of the Dallas County Conservation Board vehicles. This is becoming very common for private businesses and even other county conservation boards. If the board is going to go through the work to create and maintain a web page they certainly would want the public to read it.

The use of volunteers to distribute flyers, brochure, etc. should be continued. Presence at Farmers Markets by some of the volunteers handing out information has been somewhat successful. These opportunities if reasonably priced should be continued. An up date of the county conservation board parks and recreation brochure and the individual park brochures needs to be done. Some brochures are completely gone and some of the others need to be updated.

The use of PowerPoint programs are becoming the standard. Training for these types of presentations and developing should be considered for the appropriate staff.

Over the next few years it would be appropriate to update the CD/video that was put together that gives a general presentation on of the departments parks and areas. This type of presentation can be used for many types of audiences and used by most any staff or volunteer.

Video and audio enhanced displays for museum exhibits would greatly increase the quality of the exhibits. As the museums controlled by the department continues to modernize and upgrade itself, so should the communications devices be upgraded. These types of communications devices can be part of an overall improved amenities package for the users of the facilities. As the quality of the exhibits goes up so will the visitations to the sites go up.

Promoting the museums and parks in parades, special events, Dallas County Fair and other festivals should be enhanced when feasible.

### **Maintenance/equipment needs**

An effort to upgrade the equipment that is available with the department and to acquire some important but basic maintenance equipment is needed. For several years the maintenance of the parks, shelters, office buildings, and other public facilities has been neglected. Several thousands of dollars are needed to bring these facilities back to a condition the department would be proud of. The department's vehicle replacement plan of two new vehicles per year should continue. This will keep the fleet up to date and lessen the maintenance costs down the road. A good maintenance program enhances the overall quality of the departments' areas and program. With the lack of equipment there was a tendency to delay basic maintenance tasks or to spend more money than necessary to contract out or hire someone else to do it. Many times a quick response time helps promote and substantiate that the department is professional and has a quality program.

### **Personnel/Staff needs**

Existing Staff include: (\* full time position)

Executive Director \*

Administrative Assistant/Support Programs Coordinator\*

Park Ranger Biologist\*

Museum Curator/Historical and Cultural Resources Coordinator\*

Environmental Education Coordinator/Naturalist\*

(2) Natural Resources/Maintenance Technician\*

Assistant Youth Coordinator/Naturalist\*

Office Assistant

Museum Assistant

Museum Intern

(3) Seasonal Park Rangers

(8) Seasonal conservation workers

(2) "Experience Works" employees

Recently a second full time naturalist was hired for the department. This position is actually a shared position with Dallas County Extension Office. 6-% of the funding for this position comes from Dallas County Conservation Board and 40% comes from Dallas County Extension Office. This type of employee sharing set up is working very well. This type of sharing agreement should be used whenever possible to help with tight budgets.

If a major developed park would be acquired then additional staff would be needed to address the issues of that area. With existing parks and recreation areas and the existing programming requests, the following positions are recommended:

Full time naturalist.

Full time maintenance

Full time office assistant

3 seasonal maintenance workers, part time

Full time marketing, special projects/events coordinator

## **Historical/Cultural Program**

Forest Park Museum and Arboretum contains two exhibit buildings, a school house, and a log cabin. Due to lack of attention, maintenance, and general up keep everything is in need of an update (inside and out). This facility is the backbone of the historical program of the department. There is tremendous potential for this museum to be a major attraction in Iowa. There is potential to add to this site a building designated to the collections of Architect, Bill Wagner who some consider, was the “Father of Historic Preservation and Restoration” in Iowa. This wing or building addition would provide a place for training and education about historic preservation and restoration.

Voas Nature Area Museum is slowly being modernized and new exhibits are being created. Staffing of the building so that it can be opened to the public is a concern. It is hard to justify putting more money into a facility that is not open to the public.

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) building is a building currently in the second phase of being renovated. Again, staffing of the building so that it can be open to the public is a concern. Volunteers are currently being used. The use of volunteers will be continued, however, additional volunteers or staff is recommended.

The preservation of historical buildings off site of an existing museum complex are projects that need to be looked at very carefully. Some questions that need to be considered are: What will you use the restored building or facility for? How and will it be accessible to the public? Will we be able to staff the building or facility so it could be used by the public?

The Prairie Awakening, Native American Celebration has been taking place for seven years. It is a popular but time consuming event. This event could be put on by the Native American Community and a gradual progression towards that goal is happening. Support of this type of event is rather unique among county conservation boards and should continue in some format or to some degree. It is hard to justify the amount of time and money that has been spent on this event on a yearly basis. There appears to be much support for this event to be coordinated and run by the Native American community. Overall intent and goal of the activity needs to be reviewed.

## **Trails Plan**

The Raccoon River Valley Trail is the backbone of the trail system in the county. It is also considered by many the backbone of the Central Iowa Trails System. The Dallas County Conservation Board is responsible for the 22 miles section from Waukee to the Dallas/Guthrie county line. This trail was opened in 1989 and after 15 years of use is in need of an overlay. Funds, which include grants, donations, county budgeted dollars, and in kind matching sources have been raised to do an overlay for 12 of the 22 miles section in Dallas County. This 12 mile section is planned to be completed the summer of 2004. The remaining section will be completed in 2005.

### **Dallas County Trails points of emphasis:**

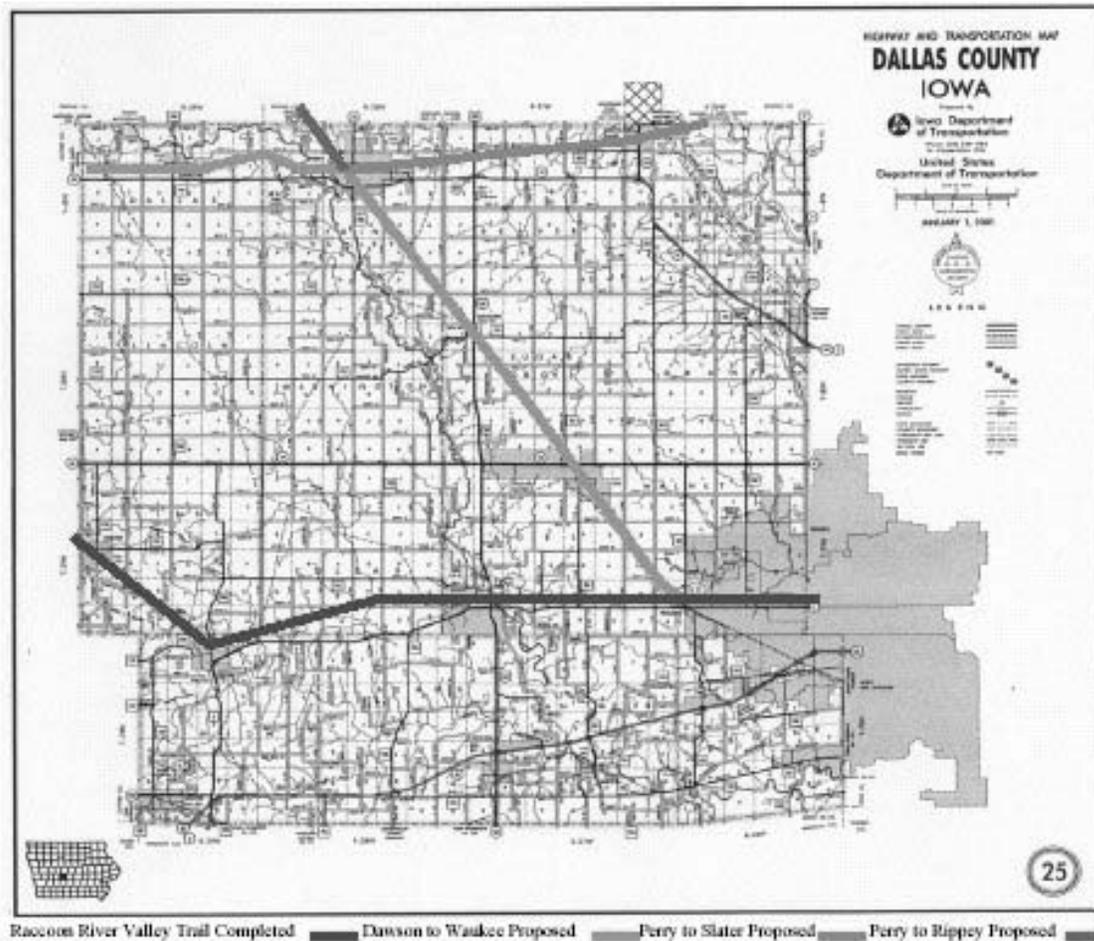
- Rehabilitate and asphalt overlay the Raccoon River Valley Trail.
- Maintain the quality of the RRVT.
- Work to establish a trail that would link Perry with the RRVT at Herndon.
- Work to establish a trail link from Perry east to Woodward and then from Woodward east.
- Construct and develop the Galloping Goose Trail (Perry to Rippey).
- Create a Perry to Forest Park trail loop.
- Work to establish a trail from Perry to Waukee. This would create somewhat of a loop of the Raccoon River Valley Trail almost within Dallas County.
- Work with adjacent towns and communities to link and enhance the trails system in the county.
- Work with neighboring communities to provide trail links to the backbone trail system. Plans are underway to acquire and develop several significant ROW's for new trails. These trails all will be connected to the RRVT through various direct or indirect links.

### **Major Proposed Trail Project**

Dawson to Woodward. The section from Dawson to Perry is currently on the list for potential abandonment. The section of ROW just west of Dawson to Herndon is already owned by Dallas and Guthrie county Conservation Boards. A trail route is already planned or completed in the town of Perry. A route to Woodward has unofficially been designated and preliminary negotiations for easement are in the works.

Woodward to Slater, Slater to Ankeny. The Dallas County Conservation Board is currently working with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Boone, Polk, and Story County Conservation Boards to acquire and develop this ROW into a trail. This new trail would create a Central Iowa Loop and be a significant draw to users because of the scenic high bridge between Woodward and Madrid over the Des Moines River. The DCCB would be responsible for the trail from Woodward to the Dallas/Boone County line.

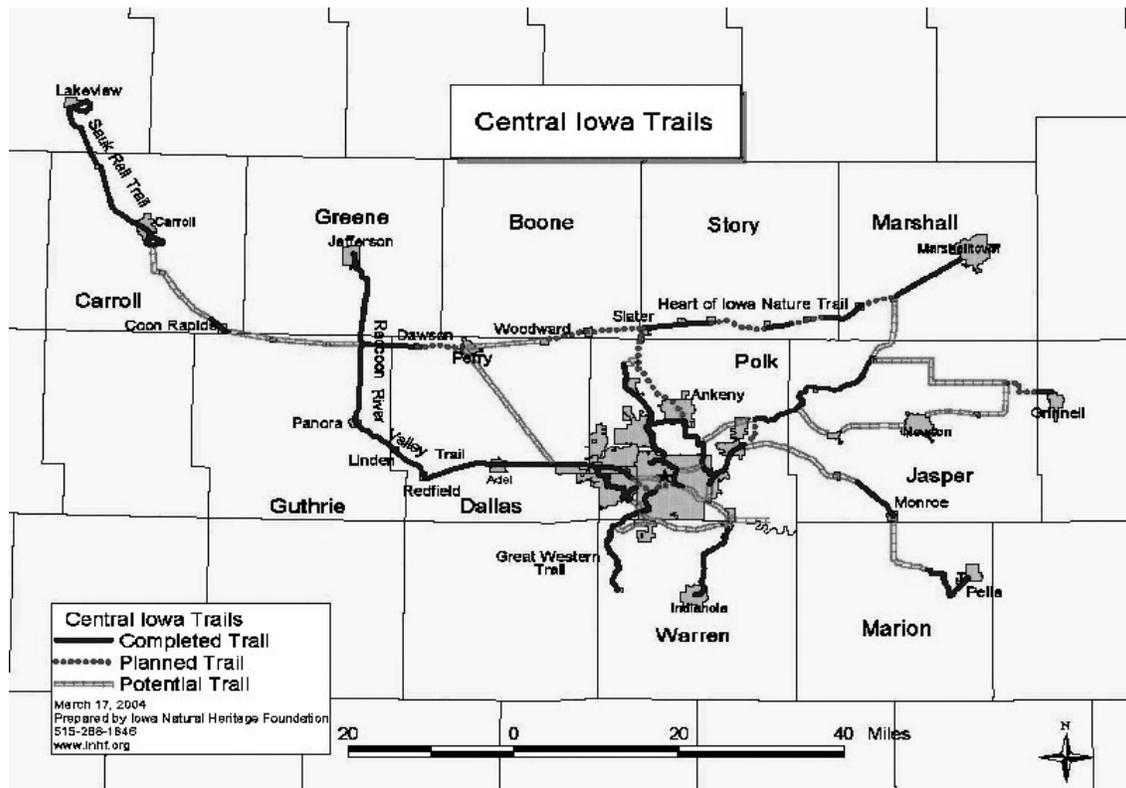
## Dallas County Trails Plan Map



### Regional Trail significance

The tremendous growth in the southeast part of the county could require additional trails to accommodate the public. It would be important to continue to work with West Des Moines and potential Booneville area connections in the development of other trail links and routes. The continued cooperative trail ventures with all the communities in the county as well as West Des Moines, Clive, Urbandale are a priority. Cooperative ventures with surrounding counties should be continued and in some cases enhanced so that the partnerships that result will provide a regional system that benefits the entire central Iowa region.

## Central Iowa Trails Plan Map



### Volunteer program

Volunteers are a major component of the department. Overall, the volunteer program is one of the best. Some specific projects or activities could greatly benefit from some additional volunteers. The core group of volunteers provides a significant asset to the department's activities and lessens the need to employ additional staff. The DCCB volunteer saves the county \$1000's every year. Marketing the department's opportunities better may bring in additional and new volunteers.

Since the beginning of the volunteer program in 1993, several volunteer position categories or groups have developed such as: genealogist, Native American planning council, prairie propagation area volunteers, water quality monitors, youth volunteer program, photographers for the department, carpenters, trail rangers, and many others.

Overtime, with volunteer group leaders, the program has become an efficient and effective way to meet the department's goals.

The department has a designated Support Programs Coordinator. This person is responsible for coordinating the volunteer program for the DCCB. Guidelines and procedures have been developed to assist in the volunteer program process. Those procedures and information are as follows:

## **Procedures**

### **Application**

Interested volunteers need to complete an application form which can be obtained by writing to Dallas County Conservation, 1477 K Avenue, Perry, IA 50220 or by calling (515) 465-3577 or e-mailing a request to [info@dallas25.org](mailto:info@dallas25.org).

### **Interview**

After receiving the completed application, the department will interview volunteers for an interview. Interviews are held at the Administration Office at Forest Park Museum, near Perry and the Bear Creek Nature Center at the Kuehn Conservation Area, north of Earlham. The individual's area of interest is assessed and the accepted volunteer will be given the appropriate information for their position including: name of their supervisor, location of volunteer service and schedule. At this time, the volunteer signs a form which enables the county to pay an additional insurance premium for volunteers in case of work injury.

### **Agreement**

Volunteers sign an agreement which states there will be no pay for services and the department will provide necessary tools and supplies to complete their task.

### **Service Records**

Volunteers are responsible for documenting their volunteer service: date, location, brief description of work and total number of hours. Volunteer records are audited by the county and state. Records assist in the grant application process for many programs and events.

### **Training**

Most training is done on-the-job! Once on the department's volunteer list, notification of all activities and opportunities will be sent via newsletter, postcards, and email. Everyone works together until volunteers are ready to fly on their own.

### **Meetings**

Volunteers will be notified of Volunteer Staff meetings. Ideally, one should be held each season: Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. This is a social time to recognize volunteers for their service, share ideas, and to receive input on the volunteer and conservation program.

### **Monthly Staff Meetings**

The first Wednesday of each month is set aside for the paid staff to hold a meeting and all volunteers are welcome to attend. Please call to confirm time and location.

### **Monthly Board Meetings**

On the second Tuesday of each month, the Dallas Conservation Board meeting is held. The Board is made up of volunteers appointed by the Dallas County Board of Supervisors. The meetings are open to the public and are typically held at Forest Park Museum, 1477 K Avenue, Perry, IA 50220 at 7:00 PM. Please call to confirm time and location.

### **Annual Dallas County Conservation Foundation Board Meeting**

The Dallas County Conservation Foundation Board is a non-profit organization, and usually meets once per year. The Foundation supports the county department projects and programs such as land acquisitions, volunteer program, restoration projects and historic preservation projects.

### **Benefits**

Volunteers receive the Greenbelt Newsletter quarterly, to be informed of interpretative programs, special events, meetings, land acquisitions, personnel changes, departmental needs, nature notes and volunteer opportunities.

Uniform T-shirt and ID Tag: The uniform gives the conservation volunteer recognition as a staff person and also identifies them as someone who is available to assist the public.

Use of county vehicles, tools, computers and equipment while on duty.

Workman's comp insurance, in case a volunteer work injury occurs.

References for future paid positions.

All Dallas County Conservation Department Volunteers are honored at an annual banquet held each autumn.

### **Budget**

Budget projections are difficult especially when most of the budget funding is based on county tax dollars. With interesting state and county tax formulas, a dramatic downward fluctuation of available tax dollars could occur a few years down the road. One would think that year after year there would be a consistent flow of money into the county from county tax receipts. Barring people deciding not to pay taxes one would think there would not be a downward trend in tax receipts. This is where the state taxing formulas come in to play. 2004 currently is dealing with a reduced budget situation. The only thing that is keeping large drastic cuts from hitting the county departments is the economic growth that is taking place in Dallas County. Short term budgetary concerns can be addressed with one or more of the following options; raise taxes, increase non tax revenues, decrease expenses. None of which are easily done. Long term solutions include; increase tax base through controlled growth, increase non tax revenues, continue with cooperative projects between departments, agencies and counties.

The following information shows the budgets of the last three years and the current budget.

01-02	\$742,100
02-03	\$760,919
03-04	\$796,702
04-05	\$796,702

Budget growth is not expected to be significant under the current economic climate. An increase in the budget should be used to retain quality staff. Other increases could be seen depending upon the project and programs quality, need and feasibility. The large mall and extensive growth in the southeast part of the county has potential to provide a significant growth in the tax base. However, it is too early to see what the real impact will be or how quick those dollars would be available.

One of the biggest assets to the department is its staff. It is important that the department hires, and keeps good employees, and makes proper adjustments for those employees that are not up to par. Providing them with good competitive wages and benefits helps accomplish part of that goal. Continued budget reductions or freezes will catch up with the department and pose a negative impact on the departments overall efforts. Not only will the department start seeing a loss of good quality staff due to no raises, but an impact on the other portions of the department will be seen. Some concerns would be lack of funds for equipment, maintenance of facilities, and matching funds to be used for grants. A stable source of dollars for the department to maintain a quality program needs to be addressed.

The department has been very active and successful in obtaining grants for specific projects. It is important that the department is funded to provide the matching dollars needed for the various grants that are obtained and so that additional dollars can be leveraged.

### **Environmental Education Program**

To accomplish the Board's mission and meet the program goals, the Dallas County Conservation Board's Environmental Education Program sponsors formal educational opportunities in cooperation with the county's school systems as well as non-formal educational opportunities for the general public and adult populations.

### **Theses educational opportunities include:**

- Field trip and outdoor learning programs at county parks and natural areas for local school districts, primarily in the fall and spring.
- Classroom programs for local school districts, primarily in the winter.
- Informational and educational opportunities for local teachers, including newsletters, manual, workshops, etc.
- Programming and special events for the general public.
- Educational programs for adult populations.
- Requested programming for special populations.
- Publication and distribution of an informational newsletter for the general public.
- Periodic publicity concerning conservation programs, event activities, projects, etc.

### **Additional Emphasis:**

- Continue school class programming on site at our natural resource areas.
- Look for additional ways for environmental education interpretation for families.
- Look for additional opportunities for adult interpretation.
- Utilize all of our parks and recreation areas, all are unique in their own way.
- Utilize and promote the RRVT more.
- Continue the emphasis on getting people outside to interact with and be more knowledgeable about Dallas County's natural resources. The real classroom is not inside a nature center or building but in the outdoors, touching, feeling, smelling, hearing, and observing the natural resources.
- Continue to look for additional ways and opportunities to enhance the environmental education efforts through partnerships with not only other governmental agencies but the private sector as well.
- Continue the efforts of educating the public about our diverse wild areas.
- Continue the efforts of educating the public about the unique Raccoon River Greenbelt.
- Water quality education is an important topic and the department's efforts on this should be encouraged and enhanced.

### **Survey Results, highlights and summary.**

The Dallas County Recreation and Conservation Survey was sponsored by the Dallas County Conservation Board. Technical assistance was provided by the Community Development Data Information and Analysis Laboratory (which is associated with Iowa State University) to complete the survey. The purpose of the survey was to collect input from citizens regarding their awareness and use of services and facilities, ideas about future changes or improvements, and views on conservation issues. Results of the survey provide useful information to the Conservation Board as they plan and set future priorities for the residents of Dallas County. A random sample of 972 residents were mailed questionnaires. A total of 393 residents returned their questionnaire. The adjusted response rate for the sample was 42%. More than one half (53%) of the respondents in the random sample were male.

The average respondent was 51 years of age and had lived in the county for 24 years. Three fourths (77%) were married, one in ten were widowed (8%) or divorced (7%), and one in ten (8%) were single. Seven in ten (72%) had completed at least some college or technical school whereas three in ten (28%) had a high school diploma or less. Seven in ten (69%) respondents were employed either part-time or full time and approximately one in four (23%) were retired. Slightly less than one in ten (7%) reported that an adult in the household works more than one full time job. The median 2002 household income for the random sample was \$58,000. The median 1999 household income for the 2000 Census was \$48,528. Four in ten (41%) households included children age 18 or younger. In general, the survey results may under- represent younger, less educated respondents, and lower income respondents. The results may also slightly over-represent older, more educated respondents, and higher income respondents.

Three fourths (76%) of respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with living in Dallas County. Two thirds (68%) were satisfied with the quality of the environment. Slightly less than one half (48%) were satisfied with outdoor recreation and leisure activities in the county. Four in ten (44%) respondents report that they participate in outdoor recreation and leisure 1-4 days per month.

There was wide variation in the awareness and use of parks. The most widely known and used recreation area was the Raccoon River Valley Trail. Less than one half of respondents were aware of nine other parks and recreation areas asked about in the questionnaire. This indicates that many respondents are not aware of and have not visited many parks and recreation areas in Dallas County.

Activities with the highest participation included walking, hiking, jogging, or rollerblading and picnicking. Respondents were most satisfied with bicycling; walking, hiking, jogging, or rollerblading; and picnicking. Six in ten respondents reported that the county needs more wildlife habitat areas and picnicking areas. Approximately nine in ten reported that the Conservation Department should provide these areas. User fees, private donations, and grants were the most popular sources of funding amongst respondents for these and other new programs, activities, and facilities. Two thirds (66%) of respondents reported that they were not sure where the department currently receives its funding.

The most popular educational programs and events are Dallas County Museums and Hunter Safety Training. Approximately one third or less of respondents were aware of other educational programs available to Dallas County residents. Slightly more than one in ten (12%) respondents reported that they would be somewhat or very likely to volunteer with the Conservation Department in the future. The most useful methods for providing information about parks and recreation areas were roadside signs, state and county maps, newspapers or magazines, park brochures, and flyers.

When respondents were asked to rate the importance of the four main programs and service areas of the department, on average they rated land and water conservation as the most important. This was followed by recreational opportunities, educational programs, and cultural and historical preservation.

Results from the questionnaire suggest that respondents support the protection of natural resources. Almost nine in ten (86%) somewhat or strongly agreed that some natural resource areas should be preserved from development. Seven in ten (71%) agreed that public agencies should regulate the use of land to protect wildlife habitat and streams. One half (50%) of respondents receive their information about land and water conservation issues from friends or family and four in ten (43%) receive their information from newspapers.

Respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of several issues in Dallas County. The most serious issue according to respondents was urban growth from the Des Moines area. This was followed by soil erosion and water pollution.

The information in this report is information perceived to be important by CD-DIAL staff after analysis of the data and conversations with the Dallas County Conservation Board. However, the information in this report should not limit the scope of future planning efforts. Other areas of concern than those discussed might emerge that also need to be addressed. It is important now that Dallas County officials interpret the information contained in this report to begin a planning process for the future of the county.

### **Strategic Plan Summary**

The information in this plan was acquired through public meetings and input, surveys, staff input, and board members input. Below is a summary of the directions recommendations, and priorities that the Dallas County Conservation Board will strive to address over the next 5 years.

#### **Priorities of this strategic plan.**

1. Land acquisition and protection should be a major part of what the department is involved with. Existing land acquisition guidelines should continue to be used. Conservation of the natural resources associated with the Raccoon River system in Dallas County is a high priority. This system is unique, scenic, and important to the public not only locally, but on a regional scale as well. The board should continue to apply for and raise money for acquisition of areas that meet the land acquisition criteria. Land can be preserved and protected by means other than out right purchase. Easements, leases, 28 E agreements all can provide the same natural resources protection.
2. Environmental Education is another department program that should continue to be a priority. Without educating the people about our environment all other problems are hard to overcome. The board should continue its leadership role in educating the public about natural resources. Its major emphasis on educating the youth should be continued. Adult education is something that should be enhance when possible but not at the expense of reduced youth opportunities. Continue the emphasis of educating the public out doors in our natural resources, not inside a building.

3. Trail opportunities for the public should be a priority as well. It is important to maintain quality and safety for the trail systems. As new trail opportunities arise the department should strive to acquire and develop them. Not only do these trail systems provide recreational opportunities but they also provide and preserve additional wildlife habitat. They are an important part of the quality of life that we all pursue.
4. Maintaining quality in the parks, buildings, recreational areas, programs and areas is very important. Without the care and the quality concerns, the public will not be satisfied and use those amenities.

### **Areas of Consideration**

- Park acquisition and development. All options should be considered on heading down the path of high use and highly developed parks. There is a possibility of such a facility at the Booneville location by utilizing the Halletts sand and gravel site. This lake, along with potential funding from Halletts could provide the necessary resources to provide a high use lake/park and recreation area. Maintenance and funding after the initial development dollars also needs to be calculated and considered when accepting any new major program or public use site. This proposed park could provide a positive impact to the recreation efforts of the department if the necessary funding and amenities are provided.
- Historical and Cultural efforts. Care and development of museum buildings and activities associated with museums is important to the general public. Therefore, much thought should be given to acquiring too many buildings and historical sites. With limited staff and tight budgets, outreach programs may have to be curtailed so that efforts can be put in to maintaining a quality museum facility system. The Native American Celebration is of interest to the actual people that attend the event but does not rate very high as something the general public want the department to be involved in (indicated by the results from survey). If the event continues in its current format, it may become apparent that the event could and should continue, but not necessarily by the department. The use of the area and basic amenities could be provided by the department, however, the facilitation of the event, fundraising, manpower, etc. could be done by others that have shown the interest. These types of events sometimes become personal interest activities and therefore are not necessarily requested by the majority of the general public. Budget concerns, manpower resources and expertise available for such specialized events should all be a consideration.
- Budget. A stable and sufficient funding source for the departments' budget is always a concern and is no less important than other points listed.

## **Goals**

- Work to expand the efforts towards the conservation of our natural resources.
- Continue to be innovative in programs, activities, events, budgets and efficient utilization of staff.
- Enhance the environmental education efforts.
- Work with other entities in a regional approach in the conservation of the natural resources.
- Provide quality areas, activities, events, and facilities.
- Work to enhance one of the finest trails systems in Iowa.
- Maintain and provide a well rounded but manageable historical and cultural program.
- Enhance the departments marketing and promotional activities.