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*Connecting people with nature and
improving natural resources –
making Story County a great place to
live, work, and recreate*

Strategic Plan

2018-2020

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During the last five years, our landscape has changed both literally and figuratively. These changes, combined with a very hopeful outlook for our future, shape a new vision for Story County Conservation (SCC) for the next three years. Our vision includes capacity building--community members broadly engaging with nature as a means of self and community improvement that collaboratively works to steward the nature they know--a vision of a healthier environment and a richer community.

Several factors helped formulate this plan:

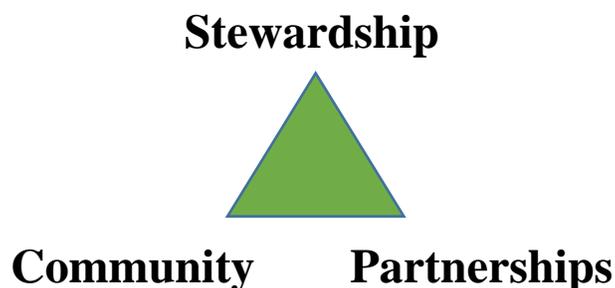
- completion of the Cornerstone to Capstone (C2C) Plan in 2016;
- lack of sustainable statewide funding for natural resources;
- recent successes in water quality awareness;
- expansion of Dakins Lake;
- improvements in the Hickory Grove Lake watershed;
- development of the Tedesco Environmental Learning Corridor;
- new efforts in drainage ditch maintenance, resource management, community engagement, facility improvements, and environmental education programming;
- improvements in awareness of the importance of soil health and water quality;
- need for greater awareness of the role of nature in community betterment; the proliferation of invasive threats to our natural environment; and,
- increasing disconnect between society and nature.

This plan was developed through a series of board, staff, and stakeholder work sessions. SCC has carefully examined where we have been, what we have accomplished, and how we can achieve our vision. Just like the last five years, we expect numerous changes in the next three years. This is a living plan. It will be reviewed annually by the SCC Board and will guide conservation efforts through 2020.

Join us in connecting people with nature and improving natural resources to make Story County a great place to live, work, and recreate.

Michael Cox, SCC Director

Nancy Franz, SCCB Chair





At A Glance

Education

- 30,000+ contacts annually
- 1,100+ public and school programs
- Programs for tots to seniors
- In all Story County school districts
- Named **Best Environmental Education Program in the State** (with more than three Naturalists)

Recreation/Parks

- 3,000 acres under management
- 1,900 acres public hunting
- 89 miles of trails including new Skunk River Water Trail
- Campgrounds, lakes, picnic areas, meeting spaces, playgrounds

Recently Completed Projects

- Hickory Grove Park storm shelter and shower building
- Dakins Lake vault toilet
- McFarland Park Discovery Nature Playscape
- Hickory Grove Lake Watershed Project Phase #1 (streambank stabilization and buffer, livestock exclusion, septic replacement)
- Sensitive Areas Inventory Phase #1 (County-wide)
- Comprehensive Natural Resources and Recreation Plan (a component of the Story County Comprehensive Plan 2036: Cornerstone to Capstone (C2C))
- County-wide Trails Plan (a component of the C2C)
- Pollinator Gardens at 3 elementary schools
- Dakins Lake Expansion
- Skunk River Greenbelt Expansion
- River Access improvements at Lekwa and 265th Street Accesses

IRVM

(Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management)

- Rights of way and drainage ditch maintenance *with a conservation emphasis*
- 63 miles of drainage ditch management
- Roadway park and prairie management
- 5,700 acres under management

Current Projects

- Tedesco Environmental Learning Corridor – *Phase #1 in progress*
- Praeri Rail Trail extension to Dakins Lake – *in design*
- Hickory Grove Lake Watershed Project Phases #2-#3 (shoreline and gully stabilization through dredging and access improvements) – *in design*
- Sensitive Areas Inventory Phase #2 (County-wide) – *in progress*
- Watershed Water Quality Assessments (County-wide) – *in progress*
- “Designate the Skunk” – South Skunk River was designated as a state water trail. Designation spring 2018
- Ronald “Dick” Jordan Family Wildlife Area acquisition

Upcoming Projects

- Hickory Grove Park sewer replacement
- Army Corps of Engineers land acquisition
- Carroll Prairie acquisition – only \$57,000 remaining
- Heart of Iowa Nature Trail Paving Phase #1 – design in FY18
- Petersen Access improvement – spring 2018
- Askew Access improvement – spring 2018

Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

*Connecting people with nature and improving natural resources -
making Story County a great place to live, work, and recreate*

Vision

Partner with others to wisely manage natural resources, provide recreational opportunities, and engage individuals, businesses, and communities to be responsible stewards of our natural environment--creating environmental, economic, and social benefits.

Values

These values guide SCC's mission and vision:

- Creativity/innovation – achieving success in new ways
- Efficiency – achieving objectives with minimum waste or unnecessary effort
- Legacy – achieving positive results which transcend generations
- Passion – achieving vision with personal and organizational commitment and excitement
- Teamwork – achieving solutions collaboratively

Stewardship of Natural Resources

Issue

Story County is being altered in ways that threaten or eliminate natural ecosystems

Rationale

Increased population and agricultural land in Story County have reduced and changed natural and cultural resources, decreasing people's connections with nature and their past. Current SCC properties need enhanced natural resource restoration and preservation. New land needs to be secured for natural and cultural resource stewardship, providing improved social, economic, and environmental conditions. Sustainability of Story County's natural resources also depends on the actions of private landowners who may lack incentives, education, or motivation to steward their natural resources.

Story County Conservation is positioned to model and facilitate stewardship of our natural resources.

Goal

1. Promote and practice stewardship of natural resources
2. Improve Story County's water quality

Outcomes and Strategies

1a. Improve our natural resources

- Create and share a summary of the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of the first five years of the expanded SCC Natural Resource Program
- Create a plan of the inputs, outputs, and outcomes for the next three years of the SCC Natural Resource Program
- Create a more holistic, organized, and effective approach to improving natural resources across SCC units, Story County departments, and SCC stakeholders
- Align with and leverage partners inputs/resources dedicated to natural resource management to match the three-year vision
- Increase community and volunteer involvement in stewardship of natural resources

1b. Permanently protect and effectively manage 10% of priority lands identified in the sensitive areas inventory

- Develop a consistently used definition of "permanent protection"

- Increase engagement and education of partners and private landowners in active stewardship and permanent protection of priority lands
- Continue to inventory and assess the county's sensitive areas, prairies, habitats, and other natural resources

1c. Reduce pressure of invasive species in Story County

- Educate the public and SCC stakeholders to prevent and reduce invasive species pressure
- Provide training and resources for volunteers to remove invasive species
- Provide opportunities for the public and SCC stakeholders to get involved with invasive species reduction
- Create a more holistic and organized approach across SCC units, Story County departments, and SCC stakeholders for invasive species control

1. Preserve, protect, restore, and enhance the quality of Story County's ground water and surface water

- Provide coordinated educational resources and activities to improve water quality
- Continue the Hickory Grove Lake watershed restoration project
- Complete development of the Tedesco Environmental Learning Corridor (TELC)
- Demonstrate water quality improvement and best practices in stewardship and education at TELC
- Engage volunteers in water quality assessment and improvement projects
- Complete and use the Story County watershed assessments
- Expand the Skunk River Greenbelt
- Encourage landowners along open drainage ditches and water bodies to adopt water quality improvement strategies
- Encourage water quality improvement strategies in drainage districts, SCC properties, and other land in Story County

Ways to Help

- Volunteer to help remove invasive species or become a water steward on SCC properties
- Help others learn about the SCC Natural Resource Management Program
- Donate to help SCC acquire sensitive areas
- Test the water quality on your land

Community Engagement

Issue

Stewardship of natural resources is an integral part of how we can view the livability of our communities--affecting community economics, quality of life, health, and environmental sustainability.

Rationale

The more people engage with the outdoors, the more inclined they are to care for and conserve our natural resources. Time in nature also improves social and economic wellbeing at the individual, family, business, and community levels. All people in Story County should have equal and full access to SCC projects, programs, and properties.

Goal

Increase the reach of SCC in Story County to enhance environmental awareness, responsibility, and stewardship

Outcomes and Strategies

1. Increase opportunities to connect people with SCC and nature
 - Select, orient, and use volunteers to share SCC programs, projects, and properties with others
 - Create and use strategic messages for staff and volunteers
 - Continue to communicate in multiple ways to engage and educate the public
 - Continue to integrate more SCC parks and properties into programming
 - Continue to research and use emerging practices for programs, projects, and properties

2. Increase the scope and depth of SCC partnerships and volunteers to leverage impact
 - Engage more groups, businesses, families, and individuals in achieving the SCC vision
 - Establish more partnerships with non-conservation organizations
 - Strengthen the ability to attain SCC's vision through current and new partnerships
 - Expand recruitment and use of skills-based volunteers
 - Involve partners and volunteers in promoting SCC programs, projects, and properties

3. Increase the diversity of SCC users and supporters

- Engage the ISU community more deeply
- Identify and engage targeted potential users and supporters
- Continue to form partnerships and collaborations to reach more diverse users and supporters
- Include underserved users and supporters in attaining SCC's vision
- Educate underserved users and supporters in how to access and enjoy outdoor experiences
- Identify and reduce barriers to participation/use

Ways to Help

- Sign groups up for SCC public programs
- Visit every SCC property and tell others about them
- Volunteer with SCC and bring a friend

Partnerships

Issue

Growth, resilience, and sustainability of conservation work in Story County can be maximized through infrastructure and funding partnerships.

Rationale

Conservation work has become increasingly complex, requiring enhanced collaboration with a wide variety of partners to successfully accomplish goals. SCC needs to engage more widely and deeply with partners to improve facilities and infrastructure as well as secure funding for those improvements. SCC is not currently funded to optimize its capacity to address critical conservation needs in the county. While partnerships are the norm for SCC's stewardship of natural resources and community engagement, they are less commonly used for enhancing SCC's infrastructure and funding.

Goals

1. Provide improved, exceptional facilities to support SCC's vision
2. Identify diverse and sustainable funding sources to support growth, resilience, and sustainability

Outcomes and Strategies

- 1a. Ensure that new facilities meet building standards, provide room for growth, and minimize resource consumption
 - Conduct a facility condition inventory to determine and prioritize future needs
 - Design facilities to include green technology and room for growth
 - Include priority facilities and facility upgrades in the capital improvement plan
- 1b. Determine the feasibility of creating a destination conservation/nature center to meet the needs of diverse users
 - Conduct an analysis of the current center and the desired state
 - Identify potential resources to fill the gap
- 1c. Provide new and improved facilities to fully support user traffic and needs
 - Build at least one sustainable energy cabin at Dakins Lake or Hickory Grove Park
 - Replace the Bear Creek bridge
 - Improve Skunk River Water Trail accesses

- Begin paving the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail
- Designate a SCC signature park each year to improve and increase public use
- Implement the SCC Capital Improvement Plan
- Analyze facility use and make appropriate adjustments to best serve the needs of the community and our natural resources

2a. Retain satisfied, passionate, and dedicated staff and board members

- Continue to provide SCC employees and board members with conservation incentives/benefits (free camping, free facility use)
- Support recognition programs and events
- Designate funds for continuing education for staff and volunteers

2b. Continue to effectively and efficiently use limited resources

- Explore options for increasing revenue by charging fair market value for services
- Continue to provide opportunities for all income levels
- Look for new ways to be cost effective when making purchases, utilizing staff time, and conserving resources
- Enhance partnerships with businesses, corporate groups, and other government entities
- Provide training and resources for volunteers to lead projects

2c. Identify and secure new, creative, and leveraged funding sources

- Secure professional services and support
- Increase gifts, donations, and land acquisition from supporters
- Advocate for IWILL passage by the Iowa Legislature
- Secure more funding through partnerships
- Explore passage of SCC bond (fall 2020)

Ways to Help

- Join SCC “Partners” membership program
- Sponsor the 2020 IACCB conference in Ames showcasing SCC accomplishments
- Donate money to acquire Carroll Prairie in honor/in memory of a friend or loved one

Appendix: Cross Walk of the SCC Strategic Plan and the Story County Comprehensive Plan 2036: Cornerstone to Capstone (C2C)

SCC Strategic Plan Outcome	C2C Objectives
Reduce pressure of invasive species in Story County	1.1, 1.5, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.8, 6.1, 6.2, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4
Permanently protect and effectively manage 10% of the high priority lands identified in the sensitive areas inventory	1.1, 1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.6, 4.3, 4.6, 4.7, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4
Improve visibility and resourcing of the SCC Natural Resource Program	1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.8, 4.7, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4
Preserve, protect, restore, and enhance the quality of Story County’s ground water and surface water	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.2, 3.6, 4.7, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4
Increase opportunities to connect people to SCC	All
Increase the scope and depth of SCC partnerships and volunteers to leverage support	All
Increase the diversity of SCC users and supporters	1.5, 3.7, 3.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 6.1, 6.2
Ensure that new facilities meet building standards, provide room for growth, and minimize resource consumption	1.3, 3.7, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 4.8, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 7.3
Determine the feasibility of creating a destination conservation/nature center to meet the needs of diverse users	1.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7, 4.8, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 7.3
Provide new and improved facilities to fully support user traffic and needs	3.7, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 7.3
Retain satisfied, passionate, and dedicated staff and board members	4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.7
Continue to effectively and efficiently use limited resources	All
Identify and secure new, creative, and leveraged funding sources	All