



# Strategic Plan

Clayton County Conservation Board  
FY 2018 - 2022



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## **Plan Participants**

### **Clayton County Conservation Board**

Gary Kregel of Guttenberg, Chair

Daryl Landsgard of St. Olaf, Vice Chair

Larry Stone of Elkader, Secretary

Marilyn Lenth of Postville, Member

Pam Vaske of Strawberry Point, Member

### **Clayton County Conservation Staff**

Jenna Pollock, Director

Marty Mulford, Operations Supervisor

Molly Scherf, Office Manager

Abbey Harkrader, Naturalist

Kenny Slocum, Naturalist

Tammie Kraus, Administrative Assistant/Director of Sales

Tucker Anderson, Park Ranger/Special Projects

Deron Hakert, Maintenance Technician

### **Assisted by:**

Michelle Barness, Regional Planner, Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission

## Strategic Planning Framework

This Strategic Plan for the Clayton County Conservation Board covers the five-year planning period from 2018 – 2022. The plan is an ongoing effort to plan for the future, and can guide the conservation board in decision making pertaining to the allocation of resources and the prioritization of activities to be accomplished by Clayton County Conservation in the next few years.

In order to update the Strategic Plan, the conservation board, conservation staff, and the planning consultant met on several occasions over the course of a year to review previous planning documents and to participate in visioning sessions to plan for the future. The planning process incorporated the following steps:

**Create and implement a countywide Park User Survey.** Planning staff met with the conservation board to identify topics for a public park user survey. The survey was distributed to stakeholders throughout the county through email, online posting, countywide publications, and other means. Over 240 completed surveys were submitted, the results of which were compiled and brought back to the conservation board and staff for review and discussion.

**Identify critical issues through a Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats (SWOT) Analysis.** A SWOT Analysis was conducted with the conservation board and staff, which provided an opportunity to identify assets, opportunities, and challenges within and external to county conservation.

**Complete a Visioning Exercise.** Using the SWOT analysis and public Park User Survey feedback as a starting point, the conservation board and staff were asked to imagine where county conservation facilities, programs, services, and public engagement could be in five years.

**Define Mission Statement and Values.** After assessing public opinion, identifying critical issues, and envisioning future possibilities, the board finalized a mission statement and list of organizational values to guide the formation of goals and strategies.

**Set Goals and Strategies.** Goals and objectives from the 2012 Strategic Plan were re-evaluated and re-defined for better interpretation and alignment with the

current planning process. In the updated plan, six over-arching goals have been identified to align with the Board’s Mission, and strategies have been designed to provide areas of focus within each goal.

**Action Identification.** New to the 2018 – 2022 Strategic Plan are a list of action steps that can be taken to implement established goals and strategies. Listed actions identify specific activities that can be executed by the conservation board and staff over the short and long term.

# Clayton County Conservation At A Glance

## Recreation/Parks /Trails

- Management of 1,463 acres of land, including 18 areas managed for wildlife habitat and recreation
- Natural areas consisting of river-bottom ground, reclaimed native prairies, and upland mixed-age forests
- 6 “primitive” campgrounds (no hook-ups), with water, restrooms, picnic tables and fire rings available. Over 1,600 camping parties in 2017.
- 9 trail locations/segments with over 18 miles of trail
- 5 public hunting areas
- 13 fishing locations; 7 canoe/kayak water trail accesses
- Amenities including picnic areas, playgrounds, restrooms, and shelters

## Osborne Conservation Center

- Iowa Welcome Center & gift shop, nature center, native wildlife exhibits, headquarters and offices for Clayton County Conservation Board, Pioneer Village, hiking trails, pond and shelters
- Over 6,000 visitors from 58 Iowa counties, 39 states and 9 countries in calendar year 2017
- Over 400 Environmental Education Program events in 2017, with over 750 presentations and 13,518 participants
- Programs and Events, including:
  - Classroom programs and field trips, from preschool to high school
  - Hunter education classes
  - Junior Naturalist Camp
  - Youth Conservation Program
  - Iowa Junior Naturalist Program
  - Monthly public programs
  - Older, Wiser, Livelier, Souls (O.W.L.S)
  - Specialty programs, such as Heritage Days

## Our Mission

Promote the health and general welfare of the people, to model and encourage preservation, conservation, education and recreation through responsible use and appreciation of our natural resources and cultural heritage.

## Our Vision

Inspire stewardship and community vitality, by using land management best practices and direct engagement with the public by providing recreational opportunities, quality environmental education and interpretive programming.

## Our Values

We recognize that a **healthy environment** is a critical component of a **healthy community** .

We have a responsibility to **conserve natural resources** and preserve the **ecological integrity** of the natural world.

We understand that natural resources are essential to **connect** with, appreciate, and become **stewards of the natural world** .

We recognize **remnants of the past** , be it an ecosystem or culture, **provide lessons and guidance** regarding human impacts on the earth.

## Our Direction : Goals, Strategies, & Actions

### Goal 1: Land Management / Habitat.

Park grounds, facilities, exhibits, and natural areas should be managed as a model of public safety, education and habitat

**Strategy 1.1** : Continue the level of maintenance adequate for safe public use of grounds, facilities, exhibits and natural areas

#### Actions:

- 1) Conduct a condition assessment of facilities annually and post-natural disaster
- 2) Develop and implement a capital improvement project plan by 2020
- 3) Update equipment replacement schedule and preventative maintenance schedule as new equipment is acquired/serviced and old equipment is dispensed/serviced

**Strategy 1.2** : Manage properties in a manner that protects, preserves and enhances natural communities

#### Actions:

- 1) Develop & Implement park management plans by 2020 (for areas > 40 acres)
- 2) Support continuing education of staff in natural resource management (fire certification, woodland class, etc.)
- 3) Explore partnerships for resource management on county property (Preserve Hardwoods, Improve Native Animal Habitat, Reduce Invasive Species)
- 4) Expand volunteer opportunities and education for resource management of properties by offering one field day per year
- 5) Provide staff training and field work days quarterly
- 6) Straighten fenced boundaries and signs on property boundaries
- 7) Complete the sign inventory and sign replacement cycle document

**Strategy 1.3** : Increase/maintain a park ranger presence in areas ensuring public safety, land stewardship and CCCB policy, federal and state laws are upheld

#### Actions:



- 1) Support continuing education of staff in law enforcement/peace officer association
- 2) Consider certifying additional staff and place priority on new hires with certifications
- 3) Continue close partnership with Clayton County Law Enforcement Association and needs of County Sheriff's Office
- 4) Add additional surveillance to areas to deter unlawful activities in remote areas

## **Goal 2: Education.**

Enhance environmental education & interpretive programs to bring awareness, appreciation and stewardship to the natural world

**Strategy 2.1** : Offer early childhood programming as a connection to nature

### **Actions:**

- 1) Utilize an expanding network of staff and volunteers that offer programs to early childhood families
- 2) Create and offer monthly programs that target Pre-K

**Strategy 2.2** : Refresh, tailor and align school programming both on and off-site with a focus on progression and continuity of subject matter and knowledge base (to build on previous experience(s))

### **Actions:**

- 1) Create a focus group of teachers to receive feedback on their needs to best serve as a supplemental education source
- 2) Incorporate hands-on science to meet the needs of STEM, Iowa Core, NGSS, NCES

**Strategy 2.3** : Refresh, tailor and align youth programming both on and off-site with a focus on progression and continuity of subject matter and knowledge base (to build on previous experience(s))

### **Actions:**

- 1) Create a focus group of youth programming leaders/teachers to receive feedback on their needs to best serve as a supplemental education source
- 2) Incorporate their curriculum goals for each mission youth group

**Strategy 2.4** : Enhance public programming opportunities

**Actions:**

- 1) Host public program events in a variety of public areas
- 2) Bring in a variety of specialty speakers twice per year (try to avoid repeats/over saturation)

**Strategy 2.5** : Structure programming (to meet the Interpretive Plan) on values of the CCCB

**Actions:**

- 1) Draft a Clayton County Conservation Board Interpretive Plan
- 2) Support continuing education of staff in environmental education and interpretation

**Goal 3: Recreation.**

Provide quality recreational opportunities (the facility & equipment) to create valuable connections with the natural world

**Strategy 3.1** : Improve, expand and promote accessibility to public access areas and amenities

**Actions:**

- 1) Designate parking areas at all CCCB managed properties
- 2) Restore streambank accesses to stabilize and improve access along water trails
- 3) Identify, mark, map, maintain and expand land trails

**Strategy 3.2** : Provide events that make use of public access areas and amenities.

**Actions:**

- 1) Provide introductory events that make recreational equipment available for use to the general public (5K, fishing derby, float, disc golf tournament, Snowfest, moonlight snowshoe, etc.)
- 2) Purchase a kayak trailer

- 3) Promote primitive backpack-in camping through the purchase of backpacking equipment (cook stoves, back packs, cookware, canteens, solo tents)
- 4) Promote rock climbing and purchase climbing gear (research insurance)
- 5) Research and invest in bike rentals/rack systems
- 6) Further research mountain bike trail interests

#### **Goal 4: Public Awareness / Marketing.**

Expand public outreach and engagement measures to connect people to county conservation facilities and services

**Strategy 4.1** : Increase public knowledge of available facilities and programs

##### **Actions:**

- 1) Create maps and update information on facilities and programs (e.g. park and trail maps, etc.)
- 2) Communicate with the public using diverse methods (e.g. websites, print materials, maps, road signs, wayfinding kiosk, etc.)
- 3) Create virtual tours of conservation facilities

**Strategy 4.2** : Develop visitor's connections with nature by welcoming volunteer involvement in conservation activities

##### **Actions:**

- 2) Identify and advertise opportunities for volunteers to participate in conservation programs (Ratio target of 1:5 or 1:10)
- 3) Identify and advertise opportunities for volunteers to assist with facility management and expansion needs (Ratio or supervised/unsupervised varies by task)
- 4) Build interest in volunteerism through outreach on social media (Promote existing volunteer network, more recognition)

#### **Goal 5: Historic Preservation.**

Preserve and enhance the unique ecological, cultural and historical heritage present in Clayton County

**Strategy 5.1** : Consider supporting future areas that meet the criteria for evaluation of land, facilities, exhibits and natural areas

**Strategy 5.2** : Coordinate with other historical and preservation societies and groups

**Actions:**

- 1) Provide Coordinator support to the Motor Mill Foundation’s efforts to restore the building site
- 2) Meet bi-annually with the Historic Preservation Commission and other historic groups in Clayton County for an ability to “partner” on future projects

**Strategy 5.3** : Cooperate with other agencies to re-introduce species and their habitats that have been eliminated from Clayton County and to restore relationships among biotic communities

**Strategy 5.4** : Expand programs to utilize county, state and natural preserves and areas countywide; emphasize lands offering unique habitats or sites

**Goal 6: Partnerships.**

Enrich and support partnerships with groups, agencies and individuals that enhance the work of the CCCB

**Strategy 6.1** : Evaluate partner agencies priorities and their relationship to the overall goals of CCCB.

**Actions:**

- 1) Identify current and future partners
- 2) Review priorities annually before Board appointments

## Appendix A: Land Evaluation Criteria

The Clayton County Conservation Board is often presented with the opportunity to purchase land or accept donated land. Also, the Board is tasked with making long term decisions regarding budget and funding priorities. The Board has identified the following evaluation criteria to assist in making informed and objective decisions regarding the prioritization of resources and funding for new lands, exhibits and facilities. For projects that rate highly according to these criteria, it is the Board's intent to aggressively seek appropriate funding sources.

- Distribution of areas in the county
- River/ water access
- Trail potential
- Boundary problems
- Minimize inholdings
- Unique attributes
- Quality of natural resource
- Proximity to existing area
- Long-term maintenance
- Greenbelt corridor
- Connections or links to other public or private conservation areas
- Historical significance
- Mississippi access/vistas
- Potential for selected activities (not currently provided)
- Wildlife habitat
- Potential to restore biotic communities

## Appendix B: Community Survey Summary

In the spring of 2017 the Clayton County Conservation Board implemented a Community Park User Survey to gather input from residents and visitors regarding use of park and trail facilities in Clayton County. The online survey was advertised on websites and via email to county residents, cities, school districts, businesses, nearby counties and more. Survey feedback assisted the Board in identifying goals and strategies for park, trail and open space expansion, improvement and protection in Clayton County.

The survey posed sixteen questions regarding park user preferences and assessments of county park, trails and facilities. The following graphs illustrate top (not exhaustive) findings for key survey topics:

**Which recreation and leisure activities do you participate in?**

What priority should the Clayton County Conservation Board place on each of the following programs and facilities?

What is your impression of current Clayton County Conservation Board (CCCB) programs, facilities and areas?

(% Given an Excellent Rating )

(% Given a Poor Rating)



If you do not use CCCB parks and areas what are your reasons?

What CCCB parks and areas do you want to see improved?

What CCCB trails do you want to see improved?

## Appendix C: List of Related Plans/Planning

### Clayton County Conservation Board:

- Capital Improvement Plan/Capital Projects Plan
- Park Management Plan (for areas > 40 acres)
- Park and Facilities Plan
- Interpretive Plan
- Condition assessment of facilities
- Equipment replacement schedule / Preventative maintenance schedule
- Sign inventory and replacement plan
- Finance/budget

### County or Regional:

- [Turkey River Recreational Corridor](#)
- [Motor Mill Foundation](#)
- [Iowa Byways Travel Guide](#)
- [River Bluffs Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan](#)
- [Iowa Great River Road Corridor Management Plan](#)
- [Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation and Development](#)
- Clayton County Comprehensive Plan