



WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
LAND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN



Open Space Element

LRMP ELEMENTS

Policy Gateway

Forms & Concepts Handbook

Open Space Element

Airport Environs Element

Approved: April 18, 2002
Revised: January 20, 2011

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Acknowledgements

To the citizens of the Will County, for all their support and hard work during this update process. – April 18, 2002

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2011 Land Resource Management Plan Update Acknowledgements

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With many "Thank you's" to all the residents of Will County who participated in this update.

Introduction

Agricultural land, rivers and stream corridors, natural habitat areas, parks, and other open space resources are key to Will County's character and quality of life. Open space also provides economic benefits by enhancing the value of individual properties, developments, and communities as a whole.

Future preservation of open space is a central theme of the Land Resource Management Plan.

Participants in public meetings conducted for the Plan have consistently ranked open space and environmental protection as among the top issues for Will County's future. The Plan's guiding principles, adopted by the Will County Board in June 2001, include:

- The most desirable form of County development is a compact one that directs development into and around existing communities and service areas, with substantial open space permanently preserved throughout the County.
- The County should become a national leader in fostering development that conserves open space, protects environmentally sensitive areas, and preserves rural character.

The concern for Will County's open spaces is linked not only to the importance that residents place on these resources, but also to the perception that they are being rapidly consumed by development. This perception is supported by recent and projected growth trends that show the County's urbanized area to be increasing at an accelerated pace. Although the County as a whole is still largely (80%) undeveloped, the projections indicate that the current developed area could as much as double by the year 2020. In other words, the equivalent of the 170 years of growth that has occurred since the initial settlement by farmers in the early nineteenth century could be compressed into two decades, with major effects on the open landscapes and rural character that Will County residents value so highly.



Rural areas in the County are open space which function as a valuable asset to the whole community. However, farmers should not be held solely responsible for preservation of the County's open spaces.



Hamlets like Wilton Center, pictured above, are expected to experience substantial growth over the next twenty years.

The Open Space Element of the Land Resource Management Plan sets forth policies and strategies designed to establish a permanently protected network of open spaces as Will County continues to grow. It establishes:

1. A vision of a proposed countywide open space system, supported by criteria to be used to evaluate land for inclusion in the system; and
2. An action agenda designed to make the vision a reality. This agenda encompasses a variety of techniques, such as public acquisition, voluntary conservation by private landowners, and regulatory mechanisms to encourage open space preservation.

Supporting information and analysis of existing conditions and trends related to open space in Will County are provided in the Open Space Background Report, published as a separate document. The Background Report describes existing open and undeveloped land in the County, the amount of this land that is formally protected as open space, the likely implications of growth trends for open land in the future, and current governmental initiatives and mechanisms to protect open space.



Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie consists of nearly 20,000 acres.

Much has already been accomplished to preserve open space in Will County. Examples in recent years include passage of the Will County Forest Preserve District's \$70 million bond referendum for land conservation and establishment of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. However, given the enormity of the challenge, much more needs to be done. This plan describes a multi-faceted approach to open space preservation that ranges from land acquisition to the “win-win” regulatory technique known as conservation development, designed to accommodate development while preserving key open space resources. As part of this approach, it is proposed that the County take on a new role as the prime advocate and coordinator of a countywide open space system. The result will be a future in which development takes place within a protected network of open spaces and greenways that enhance community character and quality of life, protect environmental resources, and contribute to economic vitality.

Open Space Concept

Open space conservation protects land from future development through public acquisition, private landowner stewardship, and regulatory approaches such as conservation development. Preserving open space throughout Will County is critical to the long-term protection of the County’s ecological systems, historic and cultural features, and visual character. As population growth and development continues, protecting Will County’s open space will serve to prevent important natural habitats from being lost or fragmented, ensuring the long-term protection of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife species.

In addition to natural resource and habitat protection, open space can serve as the “connective tissue” between developed areas of Will County. Through the implementation of conservation development practices, the open space that is protected in individual residential subdivisions or neighborhoods can be linked to a larger system through greenway corridors and trails, thus providing seamless recreational experiences for residents while preserving the ecological health of the County.

Individual elements that contribute to Will County’s character and to the overall quality of life can be protected and celebrated by conservation of open space. Open space can also add to the value of individual properties, developments, and communities as a whole. Residential areas adjacent to conserved open space tend to have increased property values and market demands.



Open Space adds many valuable assets to the county.

The open space concept presented in this chapter builds on the ongoing open space planning initiatives described further on pages 6-14. One plan in particular, the *Biodiversity Recovery Plan* prepared by Chicago Wilderness, outlines many specific actions for the protection of aquatic and terrestrial communities in northeastern Illinois. Two of the primary goals established in the *Biodiversity Recovery Plan* that must be carefully considered in Will County include: (1) managing development in high-priority areas around buffer strips and greenway corridors along streams to maintain natural drainage conditions and patterns in the landscape; and (2) creating and managing both large preserves and community mosaics of open space for the protection of biodiversity. These two actions serve as the foundation for prioritized open space recommendations for Will County.

OPEN SPACE NETWORK

The following presents a long range vision and priority actions for an integrated open space network in Will County.

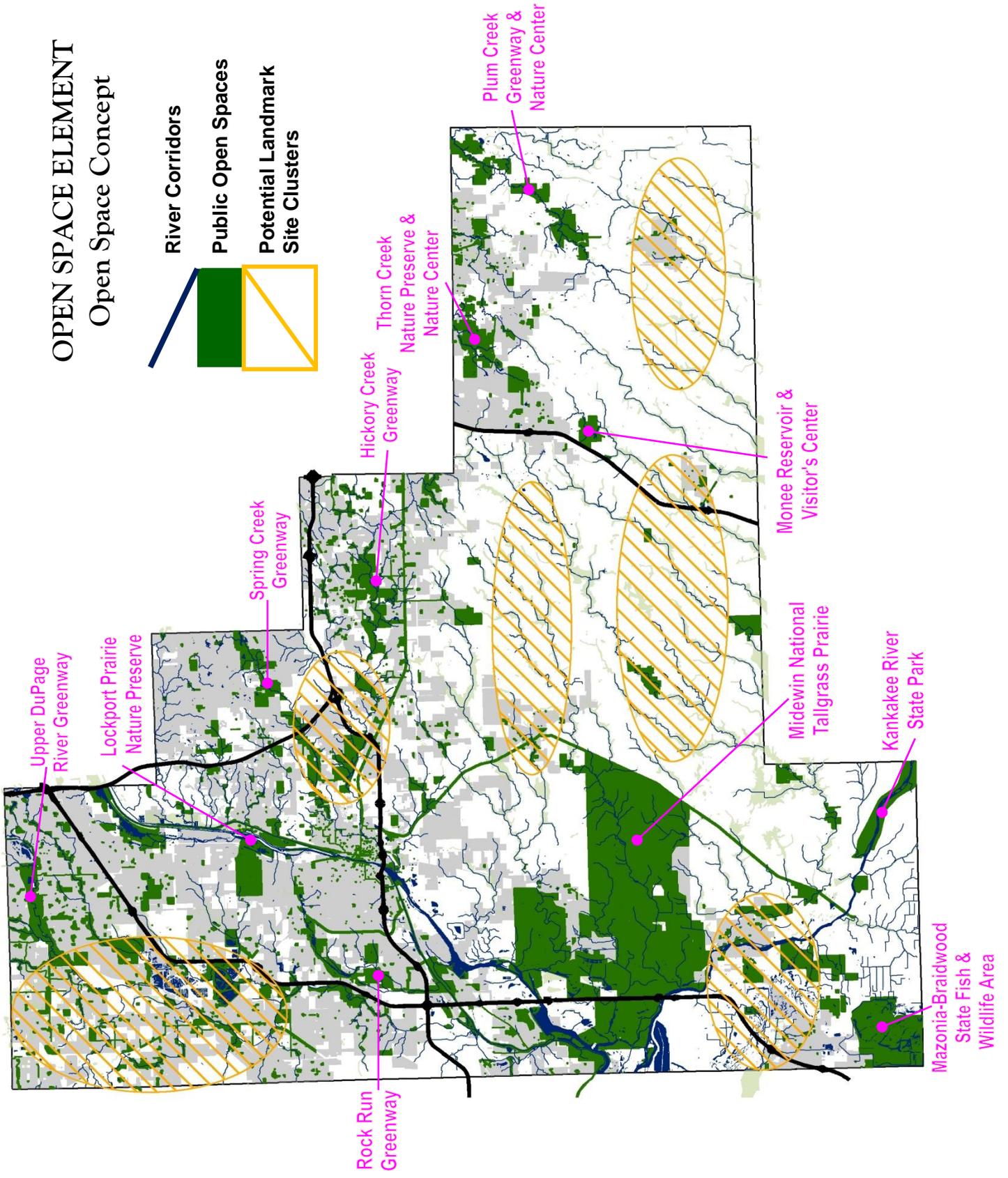
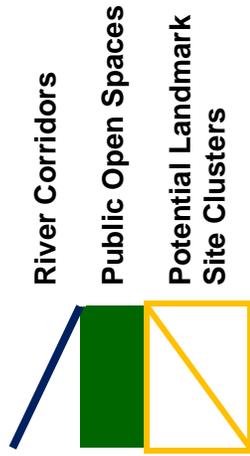
A Vision for Will County's Open Space System

The vision for a successful open space system in Will County includes:

- An integrated network of public and private open spaces. This network will be achieved by preserving open space in individual developments and providing connections among subdivisions and to other protected open spaces throughout the County, such as municipal parks and County-owned forest preserves.
- Preservation of riparian corridors and other environmentally sensitive areas, agricultural districts, and overall rural character.
- Coordination with infrastructure systems and environmental management within Will County, such as through stormwater management efforts and protection of water supply intake areas.

OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

Open Space Concept



As a benchmark to measure success in achieving the open space system, Will County will work to preserve a minimum of 20% of the land area within the County as permanent open space through a variety of mechanisms (public acquisition, conservation development, private landowner conservation, etc.).

Open Space System Initiatives

Will County is fortunate to have an active open space protection and acquisition program in place. To guide the long-term development of the County's open space system, documentation of the County's "green infrastructure," such as major riparian corridors, floodplains, woodlands, wetlands, savannas, and prairies, is an important step to provide a foundation for long-term implementation measures. The following initiatives are recommended to guide the future protection of open space in Will County:

Initiative #1:

Protect critical lands along the Des Plaines, DuPage, and Kankakee River systems and other priority riparian corridors in Will County for protection.

Streams and river systems are corridors of exceptional significance for resource protection and preservation of important natural habitats in the County.

The Chicago Wilderness *Biodiversity Recovery Plan* outlines watershed and stream protection goals and has assigned priority levels to specific riparian systems in the region. In Will County, the Kankakee River, Forked Creek, Hickory Creek, Manhattan Creek, Pike Creek, Rock Creek, and Trim Creek have been labeled "very high priority" in the plan with "protection" as the primary recommendation. The plan prescribes "protection" for:

"...high-quality streams that fully support their potential biological integrity and diversity. Controlling point- and non-point source pollution, channelization, impoundment, and other threats to biological integrity and diversity is necessary to assure that stream quality is maintained and not degraded."



Des Plaines River during flood stage.

The Des Plaines and DuPage Rivers, as well as Jackson Creek and Prairie Creek, are labeled as “high priority” rivers with “restoration” as the primary recommendation in the *Biodiversity Recovery Plan*. The plan prescribes “restoration” for:

“...streams that are moderately degraded and only partially meet their potential biological integrity and diversity. Restoration seeks to replace lost or damaged biological conditions, restoring ecological processes and linkages (such as energy flow, dispersal mechanisms, and succession). For example, if a stream is supporting a moderate-quality fish community and is directly linked to a viable source of species recolonization, as is the Kankakee River, the goal is to restore the stream to a more diverse fish community by restoring lost habitat and improving degraded water quality.”

The recreational qualities of the three major river corridors in the County, the Des Plaines, DuPage, and Kankakee, are recognized through their designation as regional Water Trails through a partnership between state and local governments and non-profit organizations.

The *Biodiversity Recovery Plan* also identifies specific stream corridors in Will County that are identified for “rehabilitation” or “enhancement.” These are defined in the plan as follows:

Rehabilitation is used for streams that are more severely degraded and do not meet their potential biological integrity and diversity. The goal here is to replace some of the lost or damaged biological functions and linkages of the stream.

Enhancement is used for streams that are the most severely degraded. The goal is to reclaim severely damaged ecosystems.

The streams in Will County identified for rehabilitation include: East Branch DuPage River, Deer Creek, and Lily Cache Creek. The streams identified for enhancement include: Grant Creek, Rock Run, and Thorn Creek.

Will County Stormwater Watershed Priorities

In 2009, members of the Will County Stormwater Committee completed a survey in which the top three watersheds were identified for four on-going issues:

Stream Maintenance

- Des Plaines River Watershed
- Rock Run Creek Watershed
- Forked Creek Watershed

Flooding and Drainage

- DuPage River Watershed
- Hickory Creek Watershed
- Kankakee River Watershed

Erosion Control

- Hickory Creek Watershed
- Jackson Creek Watershed
- Des Plaines River Watershed

Infrastructure Maintenance

- Lily Cache Watershed
- Thorn Creek Watershed
- Mazon River Watershed

The findings of this 2009 survey are consistent with the recommendations of Chicago Wilderness *Biodiversity Recovery Plan*.

Initiative #2:

Establish riparian buffers around all stream corridors in Will County to protect water quality and prevent stream bank erosion.

Will County’s Water Resource Ordinance requires buffers around all defined Waters of the United States, as well as, isolated waters of Will County. The buffer sizes range from Thirty (30) feet to One-Hundred (100) feet depending on the size of the tributary areas, designation as a High Quality Aquatic Resource, and linear vs. non-linear water bodies. The designation and management of riparian buffers around all “Waters” will serve to effectively protect surface waters from the impacts of development or other land use practices.

Because the stream corridors within Will County are important natural features in the landscape, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning’s 2009 Northeastern Illinois Greenways and Trails Plan shows all stream corridors in Will County as proposed greenways. Establishing riparian buffers along stream corridors and coordination with landowners will also help ensure the long-term implementation of the regional Greenways Plan.

Initiative #3:

Protect environmentally sensitive lands and ecosystems.

The *Biodiversity Recovery Plan* identifies the following environmentally sensitive habitats in Will County:

- Upland and floodplain forests
- Fine textured soil and sand savanna
- Fine textured soil, sand, and dolomite prairie
- Marshes and fens



Lockport Prairie Nature Preserve also contains many environmentally sensitive marshes and fens.

The County will identify and protect these features to ensure that they are protected through measures such as conservation development practices as the County continues to grow.

Initiative #4:

Formally designate trail corridors and loops throughout the County to provide clear, safe connections among Will County's existing and future open spaces.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's 2009 Northeastern Illinois Greenways and Trails Plan identifies two primary issues that help define the plan: (1) the need for more east-west trail linkages; and (2) the desire for loop trails. These two concepts apply directly to the concept for Will County as outlined below and illustrated in Figure 2.

The trails concept for Will County builds on trail programs that were already in place through the FPDWC, CMAP, and the Openland Project. The trails concept identifies several major "spines" in the County: the north-south spines include:

- *I&M Canal Trail,*
- *Wauponsee Glacial Trail,*
- *DuPage River Trail,*
- *Governors Highway Trail,*
- *Vincennes Trail,*
- *I-355 Veterans Memorial Tollway*

The east-west trail spines include:

- *Old Plank Road Trail*
- *Peotone-Beecher Road,*
- *Manhattan-Monee Road corridor*

Feeding into these proposed trail spines in Will County is a proposed series of trail loops throughout the County:

- Naperville Loop (1) - Follows the DuPage River from the DuPage River Park south to Plainfield, then follows the E.J.E. Railroad corridor north to Naperville.
- Romeoville Loop (2) - Links the Lake Renwick Preserve to the Lockport Prairie, follows the I & M Trail north then loops back to the west through Romeoville.



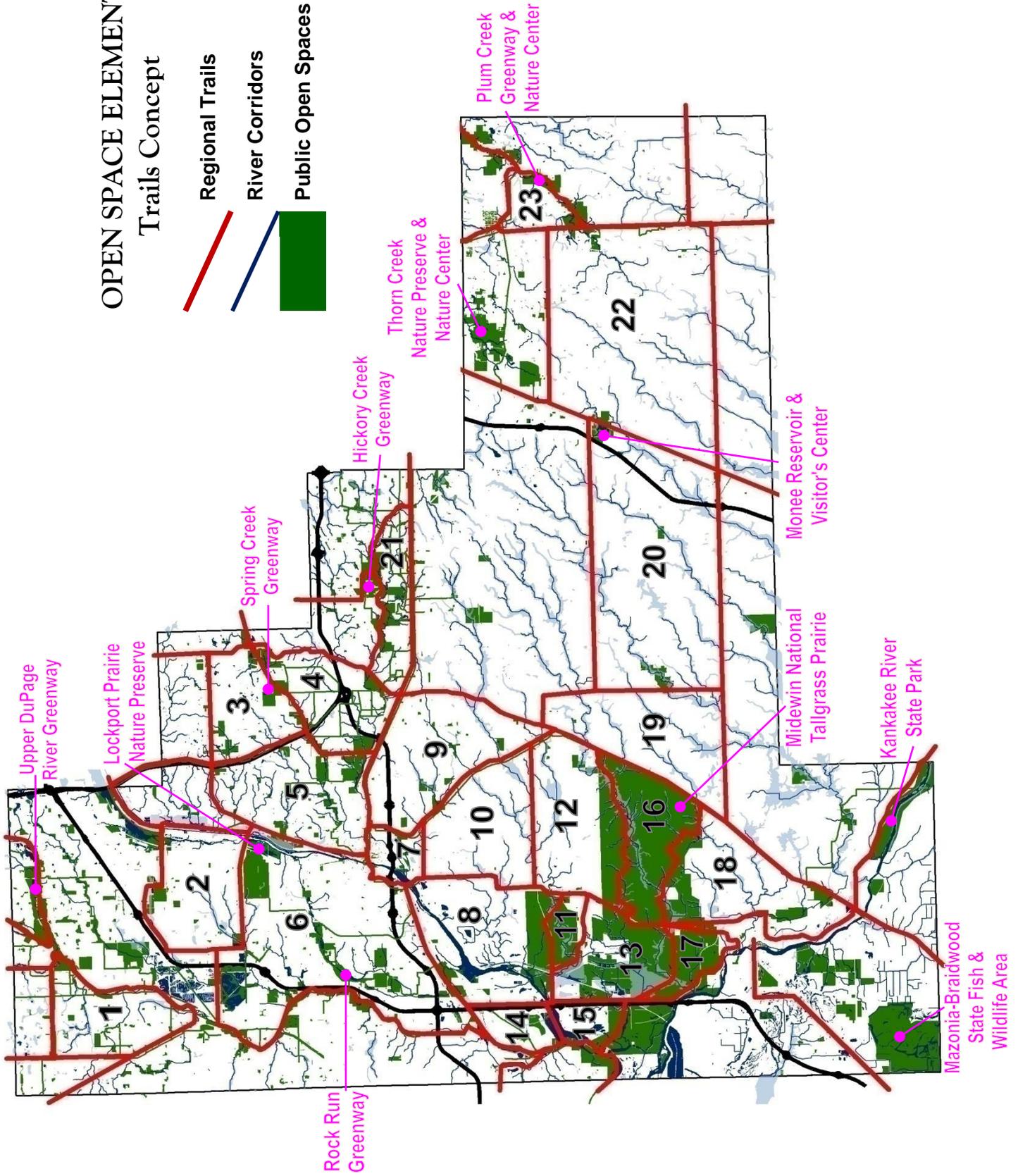
The I&M Canal Trail crossing over the historic I & M Canal.

- Spring Creek North (3) - Links the Spring Creek Greenway to the north across Homer Township.
- Spring Creek South (4) - Links the Spring Creek Greenway south to the Old Plank Road Trail and the Hickory Creek Greenway.
- Lockport Loop (5) - Links the Lockport Prairie to downtown Joliet, then to the Spring Creek Greenway north through the west side of Homer Township.
- Rock Run Loop (6) - This is the longest of the proposed trail loops at approximately 36 miles. This trail loop links downtown Joliet to the Lockport Prairie to the north, then moves west to the Lake Renwick Preserve, then follows the DuPage River south to the I&M Canal Trail and the Rock Run Greenway.
- Joliet Loop (7) - This loop connects downtown Joliet to the Plank Road Trail, south to the Wauponsee Glacial Trail, and back north to Joliet via the I&M Canal Trail.
- Des Plaines Loop (8) - Links Channahon north to the I&M Canal Trail, to Joliet, south to Elwood, and back west to Channahon.
- Sugar Creek Loop (9) - Links Joliet to the Sugar Creek Greenway/FPDWC Headquarters along the Wauponsee Glacial Trail spine to Manhattan, then follows the rail line to the north to the Hickory Creek Greenway, then back west to Joliet.
- Manhattan Loop (10) - Links Joliet to the Sugar Creek Greenway/FPDWC Headquarters along the Wauponsee Glacial Trail spine to Manhattan, then travels west to Elwood, then north back to Joliet.
- Elwood-east (11) - This short trail loop links Elwood to the northernmost boundary of Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

Trails Concept

-  Regional Trails
-  River Corridors
-  Public Open Spaces



- Elwood-west (12) - Links Elwood to Manhattan, then moves south along the Wauponsee Glacial Trail spine then west through Midewin back to Elwood.
- Midewin-west (13) - Links Elwood west to Channahon, then south to the DesPlaines Conservation Area, then east to Midewin and back to Elwood.
- Channahon Loop (14) - This short trail loop links Channahon to the I&M Trail.
- Des Plaines Conservation Area Loop (15) - This short loop links Channahon south to the DesPlaines Conservation Area.
- Midewin-east (16) - Starts at the proposed Midewin Visitor's Center. The northern part of the loop travels east to the Wauponsee Glacial Trail spine which travels south to the southern part of the loop which travels west back to the Visitor's Center.
- Midewin-south (17) - This short loop links Midewin west to the DesPlaines Conservation Area, then south along the Kankakee River to Wilmington, then back north to Midewin.
- Wilmington Loop (18) - Links Midewin south to Wilmington, then travels south along the Kankakee River to Kankakee State Park and the Wauponsee Glacial Trail, which travels north to Midewin.
- Wauponsee Loop (19) - Links Manhattan to the FPDWC Laughton Preserve, then continues south to the Peotone-Beecher Road spine, then travels west to the Wauponsee Glacial Trail spine where the loop continues north back to Manhattan.
- Laughton Loop (20) - This trail links the Laughton Preserve east to Raccoon Grove and the FPDWC Visitor's Center, then south along the railroad right-of-way to the Peotone-Beecher Road spine, where the loop then travels west back to the Laughton Preserve.



Wauponsee Glacial Trail trailhead at Symerton.

- Hickory Creek Loop (21) - Links the Hickory Creek Greenway to the Old Plank Road trail.
- Peotone-Beecher Loop (22) - This loop travels along rural roads between FPDWC's Raccoon Grove and Visitor's Center, Peotone, Beecher, and the Plum Creek Greenway and Nature Center.
- Plum Creek Loop (23) - This short loop links the Plum Creek Greenway and Nature Center to Crete.

The proposed loops should be considered for all appropriate uses such as walking, bicycling, equestrian, and cross-country skiing while taking into consideration issues like terrain, proximity to a large population, habitat preservation, noise, etc.

These trail loops offer a network of linkages across Will County, connecting major open space lands, visitors centers, and other valued County amenities within urban and town cores throughout the County such as schools and community centers. This trail loop system is intended as a foundation on which other trail connections can be made as land and funds become available.

Initiative #5:

Focus acquisition efforts in areas of the County currently under the greatest threat of loss of open lands to ensure the equitable distribution of open space across the County.

Many of the densely developed areas of Will County are fortunate to have Municipal Park Districts to meet the park and recreation needs at a community and neighborhood scale. Nevertheless, future land acquisition must occur equitably across Will County to serve the open space and recreation needs of all County residents. The densely developed areas along the northeastern boundary of Will County generally appear to be well-served by FPDWC lands along Spring Creek, Hickory Creek, Thorn Creek, and Plum Creek.

When compared to the other south Chicago suburbs along the northeastern boundary of Will County, the



Municipal development threatening viable agriculture.

northernmost area of the County, including Naperville, Bolingbrook, and Plainfield currently appears to be the most threatened by the pace of development. Open space acquisition opportunities in this area should be pursued with some urgency. There are several small FPDWC forest preserves along the East Branch of the DuPage River, and at the confluence of the East and West Branches of the River, and these properties provide a nucleus around which future efforts can be targeted.

Initiative #6:

Identify lands along rail corridors and potential brownfield sites that could be converted to open space.



When railroad rights-of-way are no longer operating, they offer an invaluable addition to the County's open space and trail network.

Selected industrial sites, landfills, and Superfund sites are also potential locations for future open space acquisitions. Often these sites are located along a rail corridor or within the urban/suburban boundary, where land available for the creation of parks or to connect a trail or greenway is limited. Although a significant clean up of the site will have to be completed, several funding sources at the state and federal level offer grants for reuse of brownfields and industrial lands.

Will County should continue to consult the Office of Brownfields Assistance at the Illinois EPA, to investigate the feasibility of reusing these lands and for information on funding sources.

Other governmental organizations to contact about the reuse of Brownfields, landfills, and Superfund Sites are the Bureau of Land at Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) and United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), Brownfields Office and US Department of Housing and Urban Development. In addition, many rails-to-trails organizations also exist and might be a partner in reclaiming these sites as parkland.

CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING LANDS FOR INCLUSION IN THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

Based upon the open space initiatives identified in the previous section, criteria have been established to clearly identify lands for inclusion in the Will County open space network through acquisition or other methods. The following criteria are not presented in order of importance, but rather are meant to serve as a checklist when evaluating lands presented in development proposals or for inclusion in Will County’s open space system. The list includes locational criteria that address connectivity and the geographic distribution of open space in Will County as well as criteria related to the presence of the following significant resources:

- Water resources
- Environmentally significant natural or habitat areas
- Agricultural resources
- Historic and culturally significant resources
- Visual resources

Criteria #1:

Connectivity

Connecting existing park and open space lands across the County through a countywide trail network is critical to the creation of a continuous open space network. This will aid in the creation of recreational trails and greenways and will create uninterrupted habitat corridors to benefit Will County’s wildlife. The trail and water trail networks proposed by OpenLands, CMAP , and the Forest Preserve District can be used to identify critical “gaps” for open space protection. Connections among new development and historical and culturally significant areas can also be made.

Criteria #2:

Equitable distribution of public open space lands throughout Will County

The relationships of public open space lands to populated communities throughout Will County are important factors to consider in evaluating lands for inclusion in the open space system. Specifically, efforts to secure lands in more

Open Space Network Inclusion Criteria

- Connectivity
 - Equitable Distribution
 - Protection of Water Resources
 - Environmental & Habitat Protection
 - Preservation of Agricultural Resources
 - Protection of Historical & Cultural Significant Resources
 - Protection of Visual Resources
-

densely developed areas of the County must continually be reevaluated as population trends shift to provide a more equitable geographic distribution of open space over the long term.

It is understood that higher property values in developed parts of the County may limit the ability to acquire land in these areas. Partnerships with landowners and other active non-profit organizations may help in securing properties for open space, especially along the DuPage River and Lily Cache Creek.

Criteria #3:

Protection of Water Resources

All lands within Will County sit within one of three major watersheds: the DesPlaines, the Kankakee, and the Chicago. The natural hydrological features within these watersheds (rivers, streams, wetlands, floodplains, hydric soils, etc.) are critical components of the County open space system, as they contribute to safe drinking water supply and support important natural communities, habitats, and corridors. Identifying the hydrological features in Will County is an important first step, but implementing measures to protect water quality through stormwater management techniques and providing water-based recreation opportunities are important to preserving overall ecological health and quality of life for residents.



The areas around river corridors subject to a variety of environmental characteristics and development should respect the unique qualities of these environmentally vulnerable areas.

Wetlands, Hydric Soils, Floodplains, River & Stream Corridors

Hydric soils are the primary indicator of the presence of a wetland and may identify a small wetland area that has not been identified by the US Fish and Wildlife Service or the Illinois DNR. A listing of hydric soils in the State can be obtained from the Illinois State Office of the NRCS. A soil survey can also be obtained from the NRCS and will show the distribution of different soil series.

Floodplains are significant areas that are vulnerable to development within the County. The Federal Emergency Management Authority publishes and periodically updates the locations of floodways, 100-year floodplains, and 500-year floodplains. Development within the

floodway and the 100- year floodplain is often restricted, making these lands available for incorporation into the open space network. Because floodplains and floodways provide important habitat and a buffer for flooding events, they are important components of the open space network. Additionally, floodplains and floodways offer corridors for public access and greenway connections.

Water Quality

The Illinois EPA collects water quality data with their Water Use Designations for waterways. Additional water quality information can be obtained from the US EPA and the *Will County Stormwater Management Plan*. The Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List identifies the impaired streams in the State and provides additional information on the suspected sources and causes of impairment. Impairment caused by urban runoff, agricultural runoff, and many other common source can be partially abated by increasing open space lands and greenways.

The *Strategic Plan for Water Resource Management* that was completed by NIPC (forerunner to CMAP) discusses water resource management issues and strategies to address those issues. The plan focuses on stormwater management, water quality, and water supply. Several issues and strategies relate to open space acquisition and could provide guidance on what types of areas are intended for inclusion in the regional open space network.

Stormwater Management

The *1998 Will County Stormwater Management Plan* identifies a number of flooding, stream bank erosion, and water quality trouble spots in the County that might be linked within the open space network. One of the main goals of the *1998 Will County Stormwater Management Plan* is to “prevent increases in stormwater-related problems associated with development, redevelopment and other watershed activities.” The Plan includes an analysis of Land Use Area and Population by Watershed that will be helpful in determining areas where establishment of an open space network can help achieve stormwater management objectives. It also states

that almost 50% percent of mapped floodplain is potentially available for development. Thus, incorporating these lands into the open space network could help prevent future stormwater management and flooding problems.

Public Surface Water Intakes/Public Groundwater Wells

Capture zones delineated around all public supply groundwater wells can contribute to open space lands in Will County. This effort would likely have to be coordinated with the Illinois Geological Survey and the Illinois State Water Survey, both divisions of Illinois DNR. These capture zones and areas of the County which have a high potential for groundwater recharge could be target areas for future acquisitions to protect public water supply.

Information on the areas of Will County with the potential for groundwater recharge can be obtained from the Illinois State Geological Survey.

The Kankakee is the only watershed in Will County with a public supply surface water intake. In addition to IL DNR, open space acquisitions may be identified through coordination with public water suppliers and the US EPA.

The Illinois EPA manages the water use designations for the streams and lakes in the County, including the designation of streams used for public water supply. An increase in the open space network in these watersheds will help to protect the water supply from significant contamination, which in turn could reduce treatment costs.

These actions and many others concerning water supply are recommended in the “Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Supply/Demand Plan” which was endorsed by CMAP in March of 2010 and accepted by the Will County Board as a reference document.

Water-based Recreation Resources

An increase in open space lands will help to protect water quality for streams that have been designated for recreational contact such as swimming, boating, and

fishing. Specific streams that have been designated for public water supply will also benefit from a streamside buffer to filter overland flow before it enters the stream channel.

The major river corridors in Will County - Des Plaines, DuPage, and Kankakee - have been designated as regional Water Trails with proposed access points through a partnership between state and local governments and non-profit organizations. These Water Trails are intended to provide regional tourism and economic benefits, educational and stewardship programs, and recreational opportunities for canoeists and kayakers in northeastern Illinois.

Criteria #4:

Protection of Environmentally Significant Natural or Habitat Areas

Areas of Will County that have known occurrences of threatened and endangered species are key components of the open space network. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources in conjunction with The Nature Conservancy is monitoring the status of many threatened and endangered species and habitats in the State of Illinois. The program in Will County currently monitors 52 species. Specific sites under consideration for development must be evaluated for their relationships to critical habitat areas to protect threatened and endangered species in the County, and habitat areas must be formally designated as part of the open space network.

Some other natural areas, such as small local woodlands and grasslands, may have significant regional open space value as well as contribute to local biodiversity. The *Biodiversity Recovery Plan*, completed by *Chicago Wilderness*, provides insights into lands in the region that could have significant habitat or could add biodiversity to an open space network. *The Recovery Plan* also provides strategies for identifying, managing, and incorporating these lands into an open space network.

The Illinois DNR maintains and updates a Natural Areas and Fish & Wildlife Areas database and map. The Natural Areas Acquisition Fund is a state-funding source that is used



Critical habitat will be protected.

to purchase high-quality natural areas and habitat for endangered and threatened species.

Criteria #5:

Preservation of Agricultural Resources

Farmland defines Will County's rural character and is potentially an important component of the future open space network. While the Plan recognizes the need for land owners to use their land for non-agricultural uses when farming ceases to become viable use, there is a need to preserve agricultural land where appropriate due to the ongoing urbanization of the County. The Agricultural Use Concept in the Land Use Element describes agriculture as the dominant land use in the Rural Form Area. The continuation of agricultural uses is an important goal of the Land Resource Management Plan.



Crop land within the County is a valuable resource that needs to be protected.

Prime Farmland and Soils of Statewide Significance

According to the 1997 Natural Resources Inventory by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Illinois is losing Prime Farm land at a fast rate and the supply of land most suitable for farming is limited. Conversion and loss of agricultural land can diminish the State's and County's cropland base and could negatively impact environmental quality. The NRCS designates Prime Farmland Soils as "land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is also available for these uses." Its current use must be for crops and pasture or it must be available for future use in producing food and fiber. Specific soil series are designated by NRCS as Prime Farmland Soils and must be considered as the basis for protecting open spaces from development over the long term.

In addition to Prime Farmland Soils, the USDA/NRCS maintains a listing of Soils of Statewide Significance for every County. While these soils do not meet the criteria for Prime Farmland Soils, they are high-quality farming soils and can be as productive under the right circumstances.

Criteria #6:

Protection of Historic and Culturally Significant Resources

Historic Resources and Rural Structures

Locations with sites listed and identified as potential local landmarks and thematic districts on the National Register of Historic Places or on the local register are high priority areas in open space preservation efforts. These sites have been determined to have significant value and could be incorporated into trails to provide areas of interest and anchors for the open space system. Rural structures should also be considered in some areas as they may provide character for a park and/or trail. In 1988, Will County completed an inventory of its historic resources. In 2000 and 2001, a rural structures survey was completed for four townships. A fifth township will be completing its rural structures survey soon.

Archeological Resources

The Illinois State Museum, a division of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, has developed a map of areas that have high archeological potential. The map is intended only for a coarse regional analysis and does not ensure that archeological artifacts will be found in those areas. However, this information could help to further inform the process of evaluating land for preservation as open space.

Criteria #7:

Protection and Enhancement of Visual Resources

Areas that reflect the character of a community or rural setting are important components of the open space plan to be preserved and enhanced where possible, including lands along scenic roads and byways and around scenic man-made and natural features. Coordinating these lands with existing or proposed trail networks can protect them and make them more accessible to the recreational user.



The Old Plank Road Trail is an example of how historic features can be preserved and included in a countywide open space network.

RELATIONSHIP TO FORMS & CONCEPTS HANDBOOK

The proposed open space network is envisioned as forming an integral part of Will County’s future land use pattern and thus is closely related to the Forms & Concepts Handbook of the Land Resource Management Plan. In the context of the Development Forms described in the Forms & Concepts Handbook, open space is viewed both as “connective tissue” that ties together the diverse urban, suburban, and rural parts of the County; and as a resource that helps to define the distinctive characteristics of individual Form areas. To illustrate the first concept, greenway corridors along rivers and streams are proposed in the Open Space Element to link different areas within Will County and the County as a whole to a regional open space system. With respect to the latter, the “keystones” (statements of desired characteristics of each Form) and Development Use Concepts enumerated in the Land Use Element define principles for open space preservation that vary according to the context. For example, conservation design principles for rural areas promote extensive open spaces and maintenance of agricultural uses, while the principles for suburban communities emphasize smaller amounts of open space closely integrated with development in the form of neighborhood parks, landscaped buffers, and similar design features.

Implementation

A number of positive and successful open space conservation efforts are already underway in Will County and the region. Building on these efforts, there are many actions that the County can take to be a catalyst for creation of an integrated open space network.

This chapter identifies proposed actions related to public acquisition, conservation development, landowner voluntary conservation, farming and agricultural preservation, strengthening of ordinances, and coordination with public and private entities interested in open space issues. It provides a “blueprint” to guide Will County in implementation of this Open Space Element of the Land Resource Management Plan.

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

Action:

Continue support of the Forest Preserve District’s current acquisition initiatives and encourage partnerships to expand the program.

The passage of the \$95 million bond initiative in 2005 resulted in 36,000 additional acres of land being added to the current Will County forest and nature preserves, as managed by the Forest preserve District of Will County.

While the bond initiative will contribute greatly to the acquisition and management of open space in Will County, other methods of acquiring open spaces at the County level will be explored. The current FPDWC acquisition program could be expanded through partnerships with governmental entities and private land organizations to identify alternate sources of funding and ensure that all communities within Will County are appropriately served by public open spaces. A dedicated County source of revenue for open space acquisition is a possible mechanism to help fund this effort. The Initiatives and Criteria identified previously can be used to evaluate properties for potential acquisition.

Implementation Categories

- Public Acquisition
 - Conservation Development
 - Landowner Voluntary Conservation
 - Farming & Agricultural Preservation
 - Strengthening of Ordinances
 - Coordination with Public & Private Entities
-

CONSERVATION DEVELOPMENT

Action:

Adopt conservation development regulations with incentives to preserve open space and actively promote use of this option.

Endorsed both by environmental interests and development organizations such as the National Homebuilders Association, conservation development is a “win-win” alternative to conventional “cookie-cutter” subdivisions that both accommodates development and preserves valuable open space. Under this technique, houses and roadways are grouped closer together to preserve nearby farmland, woodlands, and other open space. While in this respect the technique is similar to traditional cluster ordinances, conservation development regulations offer a significant improvement by establishing greater requirements on the size and quality of the open space protected. Specific benefits of this approach include:

¹ One such study in Amherst, MA examined more than 800 property sales transactions on 227 homes in two subdivisions over a 21-year period. This study found comparatively sized homes in the conservation design subdivision appreciated on average 12.7% more than the homes in the conventional subdivision, even though located on smaller lots (12,000 square feet as opposed to 24,000 square feet). Randall Arendt, *Rural by Design*, American Planning Association, 1994, p. 237

- Conservation development provides open space and recreational amenities for residents, increasing the value of the development. Studies have demonstrated that homes in conservation subdivisions typically have higher resale value than those in conventional subdivisions.¹
- Conservation development provides environmental benefits such as maintenance of habitat areas and natural drainage patterns. In doing so, it can save money by necessitating considerably less extensive site grading and less costly infrastructure improvements that do not compromise public safety or welfare. Examples include streets scaled for actual use conditions (rather than hypothetical parking needs) and bio-retention measures such as swales and conservation meadows instead of curb/gutter and “impact crater” detention basins.
- The more compact development patterns allowed by conservation development lessen the amount of streets and utilities required, reducing initial site improvement (developer) costs and long-term (taxpayer) costs for maintenance and services.

- Conservation development improves the visual quality of new development as seen from public roads by facilitating the maintenance of “green” buffers.
- Conservation development preserves open space for the community at little expense to the taxpayer while creating enhanced value for developers. With proper planning and design, the open space can form part of an interconnected, communitywide system of parks, greenways, and trails.

The County will adopt a new ordinance that enables conservation development as a by-right permitted use. The ordinance will address the following issues:

- **Density:** The starting point for determining allowable density will be the maximum number of lots that could realistically be developed on the land per the requirements of the underlying zoning district, taking into consideration environmental limitations (wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes, septic suitability, etc.) as demonstrated through a “yield plan.” The minimum lot size and dimensional requirements specified by conventional zoning will be reduced to allow appropriate areas to be dedicated as permanent open space.
- **Incentives:** Because most developers are reluctant to change from the typical suburban pattern of houses with large lots (not realizing that conservation development can increase the marketability and profitability of their subdivisions), the ordinance should incorporate incentives in the form of density bonuses for this form of development. The bonuses could be established on a sliding scale, increasing as the percentage of dedicated open space increases. The parkland dedication requirement could also be waived, provided that suitable recreational land is provided within the dedicated open space. Another possible approach is to discourage conventional development by classifying it as a Conditional Use, requiring applicants to clearly demonstrate that standard layouts better meet the County’s overall planning objectives.

Issues to be addressed by New Ordinance

- Density
 - Incentives
 - Standards
-



The conservation development ordinance will establish standards for the design, use, ownership, and maintenance of dedicated open space areas.

- **Standards:** The conservation development ordinance will establish standards for the design, use, ownership, and maintenance of dedicated open space areas. With respect to maintenance, the regulations should require conservation management plans to be submitted and approved prior to final approval of the development. A range of ownership options for the open space is available. Typically, the protected land remains in some form of private ownership, most often an association of homeowners within the development. Other private ownership options include a business operator (in the case of a farm or other compatible commercial venture) or a non-profit land conservation organization. In rural areas, homeowner association responsibilities can be reduced by transferring ownership of extensive open space to individuals (hobby farms) or compatible businesses (wholesale nurseries, equestrian facilities, orchards, etc.), with conservation easements and management plans to ensure its preservation and care. In selected situations, (e.g., where the protected land provides an important linkage in a designated greenway trail system), public ownership (the County or a local municipality) may be the best solution if agreed to by both the governmental entity and the property owner/developer.

Designing conservation developments is a four-step process:

Step One: Identify Conservation Areas

Step One consists of identifying and mapping the land that should be permanently protected, such as wetlands, floodplain, woodlands, steep slopes, historic structures and landscapes, and farmland. These features are separated into Primary Conservation Areas, which consist of constrained land (i.e., floodplain, wetlands, and steep slopes), and Secondary Conservation Areas, which include typically unprotected features such as woodland and farmland. After “greenlining” these conservation elements, the remaining property becomes the Potential Development Area.

Step Two: Locate the House Sites

Step Two involves locating individual houses on the Potential Development Area determined in Step One. It makes good economic sense to locate the houses to maximize access to, and views of, the designated open space areas. The number of houses is based upon net density of the underlying zoning district as determined by a yield plan for a conventional subdivision, plus any density bonuses applied as an incentive.

Step Three: Align the Streets and Trails

Step Three involves connecting the house lots with a system of streets and trails. “Single-loaded” streets (houses on one side only) as well as double-loaded streets are economically viable because of the shorter lengths of road required compared to conventional subdivisions and can provide visually attractive views of open space areas.

Step Four: Draw in the Lot Lines

Step Four consists of drawing in the lot lines. This final step is the easiest, once the conservation areas have been delineated, the house sites located, and the road alignments determined.

The Sketch Conference procedural step contained in the County’s Subdivision Ordinance can be used as a vehicle for facilitating use of this design process prior to preparation of expensive engineering drawings. As noted, the sketch plan showing the proposed conservation development should be accompanied by a conventional subdivision layout (yield plan) for the purpose of determining density.

In addition to adopting regulations, the County will actively promote the conservation development approach through outreach to landowners, developers, local municipalities, and others. “Build-out” analyses depicting the long-term results of applying conventional development patterns across the existing rural landscape, combined with videos and slide programs illustrating the kinds of resources that have been successfully preserved through the conservation design process, can be used to help achieve public acceptance. The County can also provide technical assistance to local municipalities considering adopting similar regulations.



LANDOWNER VOLUNTARY CONSERVATION

Action:

Work with private land conservation organizations to encourage private landowners to set aside land for conservation purposes and offer incentives, such as tax benefits.

Working with private/non-profit land conservation organizations, such as OpenLands Project or the Conservation Foundation, private landowners can preserve significant areas of open space through a variety of voluntary actions that can be financially beneficial. Voluntary land preservation allows landowners, not wishing to develop their property to live on, and use it as they wish while benefiting the broader community by preserving open space without the expenditure of public funds for buying or maintaining land. The County will actively support the efforts of private land conservation organizations to protect privately owned open space and work to make landowners aware of the available options.

A number of tax benefits can be made available to landowners interested in preserving their property as open space through the activities of qualified private land conservation organizations. These benefits include:

- Charitable gift deductions
- Reduction in capital gains taxes
- Reduction in personal income taxes
- Reduction in estate taxes
- Reduction in transfer taxes upon the sale of property
- Reduction in property taxes

Landowners can also dedicate their land in the form of a conservation easement, designating all or a specific part of their property to remain either in its natural condition or to be used for limited purposes, such as agricultural production, nature preserve, or in some cases limited development. The terms of the easement are set forth in a legal agreement between the owner and a qualified non-

profit organization, such as a land trust. The easement is conveyed by the landowner to the receiving organization.

Donation of land in fee simple is a straightforward way for a landowner to give land away for conservation purposes. The recipient of the gift must be an organization with a demonstrated record in land management and conservation. Donations can take several forms:

- ***Outright Donation:*** The land is conveyed to a qualified non-profit organization or government agency.
- ***Bargain Sale:*** The land is conveyed at a price below fair market value. This is part gift and part sale, and has the benefit of providing the landowner with some cash return. The sale price is determined jointly by the landowner and the recipient. For federal income tax purposes, it results in both a taxable sale and a charitable contribution deduction.
- ***Donation with a Reserved Life Estate:*** The landowner gives the property to a qualified organization but retains the right to live on his property during his lifetime. An income tax deduction is allowed for the value of a charitable contribution. The IRS takes into account the number of years that the landowner is likely to enjoy the use of the property in valuing the easement.
- ***Bequest:*** A bequest is a donation of land in an owner's will. While this does not generate tax savings to the owner during his lifetime, the value of the bequest is deductible in determining the donor's taxable estate.
- ***Limited Development:*** The landowner develops some of the property to generate return while setting aside the remainder (containing the most valuable open space resources) for tax benefits.

Methods of Donation

- Outright Donation
 - Bargain Sale
 - Donation with a Reserved Live Estate
 - Bequest
 - Limited Development
-

FARMING & AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION

Issues to be addressed by New Ordinance

- Encourage Agricultural Preservation Areas
 - Encourage Land Evaluation Site Assessment
 - Develop a Right-to-Farm Ordinance
 - Promote Conservation Design Options
 - Potential Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
-

With the increasing urbanization of Will County, farmland in the County is at risk of development unless preservation measures are taken.

Farmland preservation is critical to the creation of an open space network. Farmland preservation safeguards a region's agricultural tradition and quality of life. Agriculture is essential to the local economy, especially in rural communities, as it provides employment and tax revenue. Agricultural operations often provide more in tax revenue than they require from public services. Farmland also aids in the protection of natural resources, providing land area for groundwater recharge, absorption of floodwaters, and as an essential source of habitat for animals and birds.

Once farmland is developed it cannot be returned into agricultural production. A reduction in farmland, especially prime farmland, means farming will occur on lesser quality land, resulting in the need for greater physical, chemical and biological treatment, thereby increasing the potential for greater water quality and soil erosion problems.

Given the urbanizing nature of Will County, the Land Resource Management Plan recognizes the need to balance agricultural preservation with the expectations of landowners

to achieve a reasonable return on their properties. However, there are a number of farmland preservation actions that can be taken at the local and state level that are sensitive to this issue.



Action:

Encourage the creation of Agricultural Preservation Areas.

Per Illinois Statute 505 ILCS 5 (the Agricultural Preservation Act), landowners may apply to their local County board to designate more than 350 acres of land as an Agricultural Preservation Area. The Agricultural Areas Program requires that the farmer keeps their land in production for ten years and, in return, it protects farmers from local ordinances and farming laws that restrict farming rights. It also provides an area of the County where farming is encouraged and valued. After the initial ten-year period, the land can then be enrolled for additional eight-year periods. This action needs to be coordinated with the Illinois Department of Agriculture, which administers the Agricultural Areas Program.



Many rural areas are experiencing pressure from encroaching residential uses.

Action:

Encourage use of the Land Evaluation Site Assessment System.

A Land Evaluation Site Assessment System (LESAs) ranks a parcel’s agricultural value according to a number of relevant factors. The system is currently in use in Will County when a petition is submitted to convert an agriculturally zoned area. Greater use of this technique could aid in identifying and protecting the most valuable farmland.

Action:

Develop a right-to-farm ordinance.

A local right-to-farm ordinance can clarify and strengthen state right-to-farm policies. Right-to-farm laws protect farmers from lawsuits by neighbors claiming nuisances such as dust, odor, and noise. Local ordinances can also require that notices be placed on deeds so those potential buyers are aware of the possibility of nuisances. While right-to-farm laws may not directly preserve farmland, they provide farmers with the security that they will not be sued for good agricultural practices.

Right-to-farm laws can be used in conjunction with agricultural area designations to encourage farmers to keep their land in agricultural production.



“Right-to-farm” measures will protect agricultural uses.

Action:

Promote farmland preservation through use of conservation development options.

Use of conservation development practices can contribute to farmland preservation efforts by accommodating compatible agricultural uses on portions of properties developed using this option. In addition, dedicated open space areas in conservation subdivisions can be designed to provide a buffer between residences and adjacent working farms.



The Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement can be used to keep land in agricultural production.

Action:

Consider a Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements Program.

Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) is a technique that is used to pay property owners to keep land in agricultural production or available for future agricultural use. The development rights of the land are usually sold to a governmental institution, nonprofit conservation organization, or land trust. The owner retains the title and the right-to-farm or use the land for pasture. The easement is binding to future owners, unless a term limit has been negotiated. The program also provides the farmer with cash to reinvest in their operation or to offset losses. PACE programs can be administered and funded at the state level or allowed at the local level due to state policy. Unlike many other states, Illinois does not have a PACE program. In the absence of any state support, some localities have instituted local programs. Conservation easements can also be donated to a governmental agency or a conservation organization. This approach allows for added tax incentives, but does not provide the owner with cash in exchange for development rights.

OTHER REGULATORY ACTIONS

Action:

Create a Greenway Overlay District to designate easements for open space or greenway corridors.

Currently, Article 25 of the Will County Subdivision Ordinance includes the requirements for establishing utility easements, drainage easements, and screen-planting easements where applicable. In addition, Section 32 includes requirements of open space in conservation designed subdivisions. One requirement is to have the open space dedicated or reserved.

The Greenway Overlay District will identify areas of the County that an adopted greenway master plan has determined appropriate for inclusion in a countywide greenway system. Following models used in other communities, such a district would also help implement an integrated stormwater management strategy. The Greenway Overlay District would facilitate the implementation and ongoing utilization of a countywide greenway system through appropriate design and development of properties within the district, possibly requiring the dedication of otherwise unbuildable sections of property as greenway linkages. Additionally, this action could encourage active participation in the implementation of an adopted greenway plan through the use of incentives for developers and property owners.



A Greenway Overlay District can be a component to an integrated stormwater management strategy.

Action:

Strengthen the existing Will County Park Donation Ordinance.

As a condition of approval of a final plat of a residential subdivision or development, the Land Donation Ordinance requires developers to dedicate land for park and recreational purposes or to make a cash contribution in lieu of land dedication. The actual acreage of land that has been dedicated, however, has not resulted in meaningful community- or neighborhood-scale park acreage within subdivisions.



To achieve the goal of 55 acres per 1,000 population, significantly increasing the acreage standard for the Park Land Donation Ordinance from the current 5.5 acres per 1,000 population will result in parkland donations that more effectively serve the surrounding communities. In addition, an increase in the standard is justified by the need identified by this Plan for regional parkland to serve Will County’s expanding population.

The ordinance currently authorizes the County to direct the developer to donate cash in lieu of land when the available land is too small or otherwise unsuitable for park and recreational purposes. This provision is a useful tool to prevent unusable or inappropriate parkland dedications; however, the funds must be monitored to ensure that they are used for their intended purpose. The provision would be made more valuable if the County were to amend the park donation ordinance to allow “in lieu” funds to be used for acquisition and development of a future regional park. Other changes to the Park Donation Ordinance include:

- Add the FPDWC as a direct recipient of in lieu funds to support its ongoing acquisition efforts.
- Explore dedication of funds by non-residential (commercial and industrial) as well as residential developments for open space acquisition and development.

Action:

Explore the feasibility of a Transfer of Development Rights program.

While not currently addressed in statewide policies, the application of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) will be explored for potential use in Will County as an incentive to landowners to protect open space and the rural character of the County.

TDR programs allow owners to transfer the right to develop one parcel of land to another parcel and are usually established through local zoning ordinances. Transactions occur between private landowners and developers and do not include public lands or funds. The purpose of the program is to displace development from agricultural or other designated preservation areas and relocate it to designated growth areas. An added incentive to developers is that the purchase of development rights from a private landowner can allow for higher density development than was originally permitted. Although most TDR programs do not use public funds, some localities have explored the possibility of using public funds to purchase development rights that are later sold to developers.



COORDINATION

Action:

Designate a lead entity to coordinate countywide open space conservation efforts.

The County should become a national leader in fostering development that conserves open space preserves environmentally sensitive areas and preserves rural character.

- Will County LRMP - Policy Gateway;
Guiding Principle #8

In accordance with a guiding principle of the Land Resources Management Plan, Will County has a unique opportunity to become a national model by leading efforts to establish a countywide open space system that provides multiple benefits for residents. As the two agencies whose missions include open space planning and preservation at the County level, the Will County Land Use Department and the FPDWC have critical roles to play in this effort. The FPDWC will continue to concentrate on acquisition and development of a countywide preserve system, while the Will County Land Use Department will play a key role in implementing the Open Space Element through its planning and coordination functions. The Department's responsibilities will include public education and outreach to build support for approaches such as conservation development, as well as technical assistance to local jurisdictions on open space issues. A critical task will be to build partnerships with numerous public and private entities at the local, regional, state, and national levels to leverage resources and public support for the actions necessary to bring about the countywide open space system.

To assist in this process, it is recommended that Will County designate a lead entity to coordinate the efforts to achieve a countywide open space system. This entity could be an existing organization, such as the FPDWC, or a new Open Space Steering Committee comprised of representatives of the County and key organizations with an interest in open space planning and preservation. The Committee's mission would be to coordinate efforts to implement the countywide open space system, including maintaining regular contact with the appropriate public and private entities, identifying funding sources, etc.

The following text identifies a non-inclusive, sample list of public and private organizations that could contribute to implementation of the proposed open space system and will be involved in coordination and partnership efforts. Organizations that are actively involved in Will County open space issues would be included in the membership of the Open Space Steering Committee if such a committee is designated.

Non-Profit or Citizen-Based Organizations

OpenLands Project

OpenLands Project is a non-profit organization that is dedicated to preserving open space in Northeastern Illinois. It is involved in open space land acquisition and greenway, water trail, and trail development in Will County. OpenLands Land Preservation is a nonprofit affiliate of OpenLands Project that assists governmental organizations in preserving open space.



The Conservation Foundation

The Conservation Foundation is a non-profit land and watershed conservation organization based in Naperville. The Conservation Foundation chairs the DuPage River Coalition, which is comprised of over 50 partner organizations. The Foundation is involved in negotiating with private landowners for the Forest Preserve District in Will County as part of the County's ongoing acquisition program.



Watershed Organizations

The active watershed organizations in Will County range from citizen-based volunteer organizations like the Prairie Creek Preservation Group to non-profit supported organizations like the DuPage River Coalition. Other organizations include the Thorn Creek Ecosystem Partnership and the Long Run Creek Watershed Planning Committee. In addition, regional non-profit organizations may be focusing their efforts on certain watersheds or have watershed-based programs. Identifying and maintaining key contacts with these organizations can help with the implementation of open space preservation efforts.



American Farmland Trust

American Farmland Trust is a national nonprofit organization that is committed to the protection and best management of agricultural resources. The Trust has a number of publications that deal with the preservation of farmland and conducts research on many agriculturally related environmental and conservation issues. Much of the Trust's research can be accessed through its web site at <http://www.farmland.org>. The Trust can serve as a resource



and clearinghouse to assist Will County in specific farmland preservation practices.

Other Non-Profit Organizations

There are many active non-profit organizations in Will County. In addition to OpenLands and The Conservation Foundation, the Environmental Law and Policy Center, the Canal Corridor Association, and others have been involved in Will County and in the Land Resource Management Plan.

Intergovernmental Coordination

Federal

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a federal agency within the Department of the Interior. The Service is concerned with the preservation of wildlife and habitat and is the primary contact for Threatened and Endangered Species and habitat nationally. The Service is also involved in wetlands protection as part of the agency's interest in wildlife habitat.



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

The EPA is the primary federal regulatory agency. Information on regulated facilities, brownfields, water quality, and water use can be obtained from the EPA.



U.S. Forest Service

The Forest Service is an agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Forest Service manages the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in Will County. It has recently prepared a Land and Resource Management Plan for Midewin, which includes a proposed trail system concept.



U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the primary federal agency concerned with preservation of natural resources such as soils, wetlands, farmland, and stream corridors. Information on the locations of Prime Farmlands Soils, Soils of Statewide Significance, wetlands, and stream buffers can be obtained from the NRCS.

State

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources is the primary state agency that monitors the status of natural resources. The department maintains databases on natural areas, significant wildlife areas, historical and cultural resources, threatened and endangered species, and wetlands. It also coordinates several grant programs aimed at preserving natural resources, and creating open space and trail networks.



Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency is the primary state agency that safeguards environmental quality. It regulates and monitors water quality, air quality, hazardous waste sites, regulated facilities, and brownfields in concurrence with federal programs. It also funds pollution prevention, watershed protection, and environmental cleanup programs.



Regional

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning is the comprehensive planning agency for the northeastern Illinois region that includes Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties. CMAP is active in greenways, trail, and water resource planning in Will County and the region. CMAP's library of open space publications includes a *Strategic Plan for Water Resource Management* and a *Map of Greenway and Trail Opportunities*. CMAP is also involved in collecting and maintaining planning related data for the region.



Metropolitan Planning Council

The Metropolitan Planning Council is a nonprofit organization composed of business and civic leaders. The council will occasionally publish briefs about current transportation, housing, and regional and urban development issues.





Local

Forest Preserve District of Will County

The Forest Preserve District of Will County preserves and manages open space in Will County. It is the primary local agency concerned with future open space acquisitions and management of regional trails and parks. It also has a conservation easement program, which it runs with The Conservation Foundation and CorLands.

Municipal Park Districts

Municipal Park Districts are responsible for the management and maintenance of municipally owned parks in Will County.
