



Joe McGovern/INHF

Strategic Plan 2005-2007



IOWA
NATURAL HERITAGE
FOUNDATION

"FOR THOSE WHO FOLLOW"

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Our success is dependent on having a clear mission and strategic plan to guide our daily actions. Every three years the board, advisors, and staff of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) review Iowa's natural resource issues and trends, as well as the capacity of our organization and others to meet pressing needs. Our three-year strategic plan grows out of that review, with participation by partners, funders, and colleagues. Our annual work plans are then guided by the strategic plan.

Natural resource conservation is a "people business." Our successes depend upon our relationships with our partners, donors, and the public. Some of the best people in conservation contributed to this plan and will help carry it out. Our combined actions will benefit all of Iowa: our land, people, communities, quality of life, and economic well-being—our legacy.

Priorities and strategies for 2005-2007

Our Vision:

A diverse, healthy environment where Iowans appreciate and protect the land, water and wildlife and have recreational opportunities close to home.

Our Mission:

Protect and restore Iowa's land, water and wildlife.

Our Values:

Our board and staff are action oriented. We act with integrity and respect for each other, our donors, and partners. We encourage innovation, both teaching and learning, and motivating others to positive action.

Our Core Niches:

- Focus on *Iowa's* natural resources, working solely within the state and its contiguous lands and waters
- Only non-profit working statewide to establish and expand public parks, trails, and wildlife areas
- Top expertise in using voluntary conservation easements to permanently protect private natural lands
- Growing expertise and reputation for demonstrating and promoting land stewardship and restoration
- Active in collaborating to improve public policy and public funding for land conservation and water quality, especially at the state and federal level
- Strongest communications/education and project fundraising capacity among Iowa conservation groups

Our stability:

Our skilled staff (13 full-time and 4 part-time) has more than 130 years experience with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. We have a strong board of directors and a growing membership of 6,300. We have responsible policies and strong accountability for management of our assets. We maintain compliance with the Standards & Practices of the Land Trust Alliance, the national association of private land conservation organizations.

Ninety-seven percent of Iowa's land is privately owned and we have limited public use areas. We have the most altered landscape in the nation and have lost most of our natural systems and their function.

Iowa is a land of rivers and streams. Iowa has more than 70,000 miles of creeks, streams, and rivers. We have lost 4,000 miles to channelization and levees. Nearly 200 of our water bodies are impaired by contamination and pollution. More than 300 miles of five high quality rivers are designated "protected water areas" by the state and worthy of additional protection.

We are also a landscape in transition with even more caring landowners and private conservation and restoration underway. The rural landscape continues to see large-scale ownership consolidation on one hand and further fragmentation into smaller units on the other—both making natural resource management more challenging.

INHF's priorities in the next three years are to...

...protect what we have.

...restore what we've lost.

...lead with new ideas and opportunities.

...acquire \$15 million to implement this three year plan.

Expansion of public parks, wildlife areas, and trails

Several trends are affecting the rate and extent of public land expansion in Iowa. We're finding that the increased demand for *privately owned* recreation lands is frequently combining with low interest rates, investment diversification, and federal farm subsidy programs to dramatically increase land prices. This makes it much more costly and complex to purchase land for public use and enjoyment. Meanwhile, local and state budgets for public land expansion have in many cases either not grown or have been cut.

Parks and wildlife areas: Historically, INHF has been able to step up to acquire and serve as an interim owner of important natural and recreational lands when agencies find they cannot move quickly enough to purchase them. In recent years we've swiftly pieced together the purchase, restoration plans, and communications and fundraising strategies needed to protect key natural areas—sometimes in complex projects ranging into millions of dollars in cost.

Now, more than ever, we are often needed to provide this expertise and financial capacity, for natural lands are magnets for development. We may have only a few years to expand recreational lands, buffer key parks and preserves, and protect or restore larger complexes of natural lands essential to fragile species.

Trails: In the 1980s INHF was a leader in demonstrating how abandoned rail corridors could be converted for recreation and wildlife habitat. We often purchased corridors and then generated the public support needed to establish trails. In the 1990s many communities began to establish trails without direct INHF assistance. Now, we are once again needed to purchase abandoned corridors, this time in an effort to link Iowa's separate trails into a cohesive trail system that will attract tourists as well as serve local communities.

We will begin in Central Iowa, where two 25-mile segments of rail line have been proposed for abandonment, offering opportunities to link the Raccoon River Valley Trail, Heart of Iowa Trail, and Saylorville trails into the state's first multi-community loop trails. Each segment crosses multiple county and community jurisdictions. INHF is the only entity in a position to purchase these corridors and the only non-profit poised to organize the multi-million-dollar trail conversion effort.

Over the next three years we will...

... add 8,000-10,000 acres for public use.

... remain a reliable partner, providing leadership and interim ownership when public agencies seek to create or expand wildlife management areas, parks, preserves, and recreation areas.

...focus especially on regions with development pressure as well as rich natural lands—such as the natural lakes, big rivers, Mississippi River Blufflands, Loess Hills, Upper Iowa River, and urban growth areas.

...work to protect or restore large complexes of natural lands and waters in regions where that is still possible—such as Southern Iowa and the Prairie Pothole region of northwest Iowa.

...work with local communities to acquire key corridors of abandoned railroad to connect recreation/nature trail systems.

...work with communities to develop and implement trail plans, market and promote trails, and create a statewide system of trails and greenways.

To meet these public land protection goals for parks, wildlife areas, and trails, we need...

...increased financial capacity for INHF to provide urgently needed interim ownership for properties that will become new public lands.

...significant new public or private funding to purchase fee title and/or conservation easements on nearly 8,000-10,000 acres in high priority areas such as the Iowa Great Lakes, Clear Lake, Upper Iowa River, Mississippi Bluffs, and the Loess Hills, and major river greenbelts.

...increased trail coordination capacity to ensure strong partner communications, good public outreach, and effective multi-million-dollar fundraising.

...continued endowment growth through legacy gifts to provide stable and sufficient core funding for land protection.

...new members who are especially supportive of our work in the natural lakes areas, Mississippi River Blufflands, Loess Hills, Upper Iowa River, river greenbelts and other significant conservation areas of the state.

Voluntary protection of private natural lands

Land does not need to be in public ownership to be protected. Many landowners care about the land and have concerns about its future. INHF can help landowning families develop and implement voluntary protection, management, and stewardship strategies.

INHF is noted for its expertise in the use of land protection agreements, such as conservation easements to protect private lands. Moreover, INHF is receiving more land by bequest or outright donation with the expectation that we will protect it. It is important to us, to the land, and to Iowans that conservation easements and donations/bequests of land are handled with integrity and long-term respect by INHF and other nonprofits or agencies.

As part of our voluntary land protection program, we've responded to—and sought opportunities to talk with—county conservation boards, state personnel, and other nonprofits about how to manage the responsibilities of a conservation easement program.

We've also worked to increase our own conservation easement capacity—in part by shifting the responsibility of easement monitoring from college interns to our permanent staff, who can build strong, long-term relationships with easement owners. Part of the need for that relationship building is to ensure that landowners understand their easement responsibilities, especially new landowners who assume those responsibilities when they purchase a property under easement.

“INHF doesn't just talk about the environment. They lead, participate, and save vital Iowa lands.”

— Ted Wesenberg, Dows

Additionally, in a very limited number of situations, we've been able to purchase a conservation easement when the landowner of a significant natural area is unable to donate it—another step in increasing our capacity. However, we have no mechanisms for doing this outside of government programs, which come with limitations on location and other restrictions.

We are also seeing increased interest in integrating conservation in residential and commercial development. These types of low-impact developments will require special site-specific planning as well as solutions to insure permanent protection and appropriate management. INHF will want to help insure the success of these projects, which will help educate residents while potentially protecting and restoring important natural systems.

Over the next three years, we will...

...protect an additional 3,000-5,000 acres of privately owned lands with conservation easements.

...continue to refine and strengthen INHF's conservation easement program, especially with regard to building our capacity to purchase easements when that is the best option.

...help build the capacity for other organizations and agencies to properly hold and enforce conservation easements and to document and honor donor intentions in land donations and bequests.

...help private landowners, especially those who have “assumed” a conservation easement through a land purchase, and their advisors understand land protection methods and their financial and natural resource benefits.

...assist with model low-impact development projects through technical assistance and identification of appropriate techniques and partners.

To meet our private land protection goals, we need...

...additional financial resources for our Easement Stewardship Fund to fully meet our easement responsibilities in the future.

...access to significant conservation opportunity investment funds which would allow the purchase and resale with conservation restrictions of key parcels that are worthy of protection but not suitable for public ownership and use.

Land stewardship and restoration

Landowners are interested in learning more about the restoration and management of natural areas—giving us additional opportunities to protect and improve private natural lands.

Five years ago we added a Land Stewardship Director to our staff, enabling us to better manage the diverse farms we own long-term and the lands that pass through our hands on their way to public ownership. Since then, we have added a summer intern crew of three college students for land management and restoration and a Land Stewardship Specialist to supervise their work. We are receiving even more requests to provide our intern crew to work on privately owned, protected lands (i.e. lands with conservation easements or lands bequeathed to INHF for conservation). A recently approved grant will provide primary funding to add three more land stewardship interns beginning in Summer 2005.

All of these positions allow us to expand and solidify our Land Stewardship program—with hands-on assistance to improve the health of key lands, plus the expertise and reputation to provide management/restoration materials and advice to landowners who are managing natural areas on their own and train next generation.

Over the next three years, we will...

...expand our land management, restoration, and stewardship capacity with additional interns, partnerships, and staff associates.

...work directly with landowners on restoration and/or reconstruction of lands that will be permanently protected through INHF.

...work with public conservation agencies to help build and expand capacity to steward public land and public/private complexes.

To meet our land management, stewardship, and restoration goals, we need...

...additional, long-term funding to expand and sustain our land stewardship program, including the summer intern crews.

...partner relationships and financial capacity to establish more sites for prairie seed harvest, which can be used to reconstruct prairie habitat on new land protection projects.

...greater financial capacity to launch a public/private stewardship program in Southern Iowa.

Public policy and funding

Conservation leadership in the public arena is keenly important now. Government programs create a huge impact on Iowa's landscape and resources. Iowans need new policy and funding ideas to protect our "green infrastructure" and clean up our polluted and impaired waters. We are being challenged more than ever to help create public policies, programs, initiatives, and funding to restore balance to Iowa's severely altered landscape and create a lasting legacy.

In recent years we have developed new capacities and partnerships in alternative land management strategies, finance and tax issues, and new avenues to more effectively use existing public financing programs for conservation and water quality protection.

Over the next three years we will...

...educate Iowans and public policy makers on the economic benefits of conservation, recreation, and environmental protection.

...provide ideas for innovative public funding and policies to provide a better foundation for broad conservation efforts in Iowa.

...help develop, improve, and implement the conservation components of federal and state farm programs as well as federal and state natural resource and parks programs.

...continue to help create and support clean water alliances with special emphasis on permanent land-use change where appropriate to accomplish water quality improvement and protection.

To meet our public policy goals, we need...

...involvement of other partners and our own members interested in creating change in public policy.

...sustained/expanded capacity to continue our leadership role in policy and creation of new funding initiatives.

Communications and education

Iowans are becoming more urbanized and, as a result, are growing more disconnected from the land. We realize that we need to do more to involve local citizens in our land protection projects, land stewardship, and nature-based recreation opportunities. This will foster broader conservation knowledge and more financial support for conservation in Iowa.

Through our 25th Anniversary communications campaign, which promoted “25 ways to enjoy Iowa’s great outdoors,” we developed new capacities and partnerships in public education and outreach. We learned how to choose and use public outdoor events that were not only fun, educational, and fit our mission and priorities but also helped reconnect Iowans to the land. Based on that success, we will continue sponsoring and co-sponsoring events.

We’ve also gained experience in the past five years about how we can better involve large numbers of Iowans, especially from local communities, when we work to establish or expand public lands. This is important not just for the funds these Iowans provide to local projects, but also for the opportunities these projects provide citizens to learn about and appreciate local natural resources and take ownership in these special places.

Our project, stewardship, and communication internship program provides valuable education to college age students while providing important service to INHF overall. To date, we have trained nearly 150 interns.

Furthermore, INHF has continued to reach out to individuals through our long-standing tradition of sponsoring books, publications, conferences, and other learning opportunities.

Over the next three years we will...

- ...provide internships to another 40 young adults.
- ...expose more people to broader, more effective outreach around learning opportunities, fun ways to connect with nature, as well as our other programming.
- ...explore opportunities to use art, music, and essays to heighten awareness of conservation and wildness in Iowa.

...expand our public outreach—fund- and friend-raising, education, and celebrations in project communities.

...explore new opportunities to promote trails and to explore Iowa.

...support and promote selected publications, public education events, and conferences that are consistent with our mission and priorities.

To meet our communications goals, we need...

...a membership campaign to enlist 1,200 new members, which could increase our membership to 7,000 by 2007. This effort help us reach a broader audience to increase their conservation awareness and knowledge and support for our program and project activities across Iowa.

...expanded communications capacity for public outreach and community involvement.

...the financial capacity to consistently sponsor more events, books, publications, and conferences.



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