



Iowa
Natural Heritage
Foundation

2020-2024
Strategic Plan

Strategic Plan Summary

Since 1979, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation has been a statewide leader in the protection, stewardship and advocacy for Iowa's land, water and wildlife. The action and work INHF has accomplished since 1979 has increased public lands, conserved private property, and increased Iowans' connections to the outdoors.

Iowa still has much work to do to make greater strides toward a landscape with abundant clean water, healthy soils, accessible outdoor recreation, and interconnected blocks and corridors of wildlife habitat. These necessities are clearly important to the people of this state. There is a growing collective energy to ensure that land conservation and stewardship are solutions to the challenges we face as Iowans.

The impact of INHF spans all of Iowa. We continue to see our work grow in key regions of the state where population growth is expanding into natural areas and working lands, and where critical natural resources remain intact.

The strategic direction and focus outlined below will result in the protection of 30,000-50,000 additional acres of land, support for national and regional trail connections across the state, acceptance of an additional 60 conservation easements, and continued stewardship of over 8,000 acres on 65 or more properties. Equally important is engaging our 6,000+ members, donors and volunteers, and honoring our 300 planned gifts (44 of which include land).

Over the next five years we expect to see increased focus on land protection projects in eastern Iowa, central Iowa, the bluffslands region of northeast Iowa, the Iowa Great Lakes, the Loess Hills of western Iowa, and southern Iowa grasslands. Land protection includes acquisition for future public use, donated conservation easements, and land donations for long-term INHF ownership and stewardship.

Iowans will continue to see greater impacts from a changing climate such as increased precipitation that can lead to more frequent flood events. Land conservation, restoration and regenerative practices on working lands are essential to creating climate solutions that result in a healthier and more resilient environment.

We greatly value our ability to connect people to the land through INHF projects. Quality of life is essential for the people of Iowa as well as is the diversity of living creatures on the land, and in the air, water and soils. Connecting with people will help expand opportunities

for interaction with volunteers, donors, new friends and constituents.

As an organization with statewide perspective, yet local demands, it's important that we transition to being more multi-local with our leadership and outreach. Connecting people to the land and supporting our conservation partners will be more efficient, and will have a smaller carbon footprint, if we work toward a stronger regional focus in multiple areas of the state.

INHF is committed to land stewardship that reflects our values as a leading conservation organization and models thoughtful and state-of-the-art stewardship/conservation practices. Being responsible land stewards requires planning and action centered on the health of the land as well as thoughtful consideration of how our properties could be made available to the public.

We will pursue our mission through a process that shares values of respect and appreciation for those we serve, which includes the land, water and wildlife (the voiceless), our conservation partners, and future generations. Particularly now, it's our duty/responsibility and inherent to our mission that we speak for the members of the land community that do not have a voice.

INHF understands Aldo Leopold's assertion that "When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." INHF is committed to land stewardship that reflects our values as a leading conservation organization, and models thoughtful and state-of-the-art stewardship/conservation practices.

Being responsible land stewards requires planning and action centered on the health of the land as well as thoughtful consideration of how certain INHF properties could be made available to a variety of public uses.

INHF will implement land protection, land stewardship, trails, and conservation advocacy through the following major themes:

1. Increased Community Engagement
2. Deepening Regional Leadership
3. Implementing Land-based Climate Solutions
4. Ensuring Conservation Voices are Heard
5. Expanding INHF Capacity
6. Advancing INHF Brand

1. Increased Community Engagement

INHF is part of many communities because of the projects we undertake, and the land we own and steward. In our view, a community may be seen from a local, regional or statewide perspective. There are many communities of thought and action that we may share interests with, but have not yet found ways to share common purpose. By listening and broadening involvement with a diversity of partners, and by knowing the values and goals of the communities we engage with, we seek to expand our community involvement and be better positioned to help identify conservation solutions to community issues. Through community outreach we will meet people where they're at, and will focus on listening and problem solving.

Goals

- 1:** Deepen our engagement with people through enhanced outreach opportunities
- 2:** Engage with neighbors and build community near long-term INHF-owned land and Ambassador lands to build upon our stewardship efforts
- 3:** Reach out and listen to the needs of traditional, diverse and/or unlikely partners and communities





2. Regional Leadership

INHF has a long tradition of working with local conservation partners and landowners who welcome our statewide staff into their land protection decisions. Now, we seek to advance as an organization that is multi-local, with deeper relationships with local conservation partners and supporters, and an ability to be more responsive to landowners and projects. As a result of this local presence, we seek to foster trust, deepen understanding of regional priorities and opportunities, and help bridge the urban and rural divide.

Goals

- 1:** Maintain and increase INHF presence for land protection, stewardship, community outreach and donor relation efforts in western Iowa, particularly in the Loess Hills and Iowa Great Lakes regions
- 2:** Expand and deepen Eastern Iowa outreach, land protection and restoration activities
- 3:** Establish regional intern crews to restore natural areas on INHF-owned properties

3. Land-Based Climate Solutions

Addressing the impacts of climate change is the most pressing environmental issue our planet is facing. While there are many ways that climate change should be addressed across the country and worldwide, national and global research indicates that a third of the known climate solutions could come from changes on the land. Examples include expanding and restoring native prairie, re-establishing floodplains, buffering tributaries and streams, protecting existing habitat, and building healthy soil. Our land conservation projects and stewardship practices enable these activities to occur.

Our strength and expertise centers around ecological restoration. At the same time, we also own a broad range of properties that contain a mix of native habitat and working lands. For this reason, we recognize that improving our experience and understanding of regenerative and sustainable agriculture is essential.

We must offer realistic improvements that have a proven track record. This includes sharing what we are learning about how Iowa's ecosystems will adapt as the climate changes, documenting the benefits of our work and keeping climate issues part of the decision-making process as we assess and prioritize our projects.

Goals

- 1:** Create a visionary blueprint for how land protection and stewardship can address climate change
- 2:** Board and staff understand and can share how our work and organization is addressing climate change.
- 3:** Increase knowledge and expertise of regenerative agriculture practices





4. Ensure Conservation Voices are Heard

INHF is seen as a non-partisan leader in the conservation community committed to advocating for conservation issues. We take seriously our responsibility to be the voice for nature and future generations who depend on us to provide a healthy, balanced natural system so that they might enjoy the same or better quality of life as we enjoy. We are a steady voice for conservation funding, and remain vigilant to address the direct and vocal opposition of conservation measures that arise periodically. Through this effort, we strive to make Iowa a better, healthier and enjoyable place to live, work and play.

Goals

- 1:** Direct our advocacy work towards conservation policy that promotes and sustains good (or appropriate) conservation
- 2:** Broaden our base of support and build capacity of our conservation partners
- 3:** Deepen our working relationships with congressional representatives, senators and their staff

5. Expand INHF Capacity

Critical to any organization is its capacity to get the work done while maintaining a healthy work-life balance for its staff, involving board members in a meaningful way, providing on-going staff and board training, and maintaining a solid organizational structure with effective internal communications. Striking the right balance among all these factors helps an organization achieve high quality outcomes in its on-going work while also pursuing new initiatives and new ways of working.

Goals

- 1: Ensure INHF has the financial capacity to fulfill our mission and maintain our obligations in perpetuity**
- 2: Ensure INHF has the staff capacity to fulfill our mission and to respond to the challenges our donors and partners look to us to address**
- 3: Ensure that INHF staff is familiar with and embodies our “values” as an organization**
- 4: Maintain or improve best practices and follow industry standards in all our work**
- 5: Maintain and Improve an organizational culture of equity, inclusion and respect**





6. Advance INHF Brand

INHF's brand is more than a logo and a mission statement. We want our values, our culture and our history of good work to resonate with people when they see our name. We want to be recognized for our broad spectrum of work that spans working lands to trails to wild places. Our partners know us and recognize our contributions, but as we work to diversify our audience, we must clearly communicate our role in improving the quality of life for all Iowans.

Goals

- 1: Increase recognition of the importance of conservation in addressing statewide, regional and community issues and concerns**
- 2: Cultivate better name recognition with people who care about protecting Iowa's land, water and wildlife now and for future generations**