

Summarized key points from 65 responses. See list of invitees. Invitations sent by staff to project partners (state, federal and county), landowners, land managers, a few INHF staff and board responded as well.

Negative changes

- Reduction in county and city funding- limits have been implemented at the state level by the legislature for cities.
- County supervisors halting new public land acquisition, even donations in one county
- Population losses in rural counties
- Farm Bureau and others negative influence on public land acquisition and ownership
- Urban sprawl consuming more land of all types
- Proposed Changes to IWLL formula to limit land acquisition and trails
- Existing public land under intense pressure for increased recreational development and subsequent greater human impacts to natural resources
- Cost to clean-up poor land use practices on agricultural lands that could be spent on improving our natural areas
- Invasive species on both public and private lands
- Lack of organized collaboration among the conservation community
- Farm bill policy that is still production-based not regenerative-farming based
- CRP rates getting lower, threats to CRP overall
- Limits on the ability of public agencies to implement the Endangered Species Act
- The total nitrate load leaving Iowa is on track to double by 2025

Positive Changes

- Young peoples' increased awareness and involvement in the environment
- Trails are seen as economic development for rural Iowa
- Increased INHF ownership and management of land
- Increased acceptance of human caused climate change
- New farm bill that will mandate water quality initiatives and conservation on HEL acres
- Blurring of state and county park lines and more regional collaboration
- Private groups working with public agencies to create stewardship plans for HUC 12 watersheds

Trends (PEST)

Increasing Trends

- Expectations of Corporate mindfulness. Workers are expecting company investment in their communities (the trail that Graham Construction is building was mentioned as an example).

- Disconnections between people and the outdoors and the natural world in many disciplines
- Disconnect between urban and rural areas (quality of life and income)
- Soil loss that technology hasn't solved
- Young people leaving Iowa due to the lack of recreational and outdoor opportunities
- Hyper-partisanship and politicization of menial things
- Us vs them attitudes. Conflict being acceptable
- Exhaustion from the polarization of everything
- Social and political divisions encouraged by the media
- Misunderstanding and mistrust of science
- Movement away from traditional types of outdoor recreation resulting in a need for new ways of engaging the public
- Increasing cost of recreational land in Iowa
- Disconnect from the land due to use and addiction to technology
- Increasing public awareness of conservation and climate issues
- Inability of people to know how to do manual labor
- E-scooters, e-bikes and micro-mobility options are on an upwards trajectory.
- Desire for real time information through technology and phone apps
- Facebook Trail groups for marketing and communication
- For park purposes, all of the political, economic, social and technological trends point toward a focus on "park usage" and operations. Getting more people into more parks more often should be the goal, and tying those efforts to economic development is the primary tool.

Challenges

- Misleading statements that conservation is mismanaging funds causing farmers to suffer
- National negative reputation of Iowa causing poor water quality in the Mississippi
- Conservation being a lower priority issue when compared to all others
- Strong ag voice despite fewer farmers
- Internet trolls, misinformation
- Climate change is permanent, need to adjust to excessive heat, water
- Climate change will produce dramatically different conditions in this state over the next 25 years
- Increased soil loss, flooding, poor water quality, invasive species, species extinction
- Population increases
- Conservation easements being challenged by future landowners
- Challenge to even keep the public lands we already have
- Rural septic systems are closely regulated, but CAFOs are not.
- Hunters being less about conservation and more about gun rights
- Getting people outdoors and away from the computer screen

- Need to bolster park operational assets. Make existing state and county parks better
- Increasing Cost of land acquisition
- Increased need for more land in urban areas
- Need to save the last wildlands in Iowa
- Need for more Environmental education
- Trails are generally more available to wealthier communities
- More invasive species management along roadsides and trails
- NRCS doesn't usually refer landowners to INHF

Opportunities

- Some Iowa leaders understand the need to re-invest in the state
- Drastic changeover in land ownership in the next decade will present some chance for acquisition of land for long-term or permanent conservation.
- Greater awareness of conservation needs and activities may lead to greater engagement.
- Precision ag technologies could lead to more conservation
- Climate crisis could be a unifying issue
- Climate Change mitigation is going to be key (floods, drought)
- We need a climate statement, a fact sheet – for land retirement
- INHF can focus on the co-benefits of climate change, mitigation and adaptation
 - Document the benefits and co-benefits of what we're doing and share it
- How can INHF model sustainable agriculture?
- Implementation of Sustainable funding – being ready for it
- Reward landowners for preserving water quality
- Focus on specific areas (watersheds or regions) to measure real change and demonstrate how targeted resources could make a difference
- Eventual requirement to use conservation on every acre and the resulting new business and industry such as cover crop producers, pasture fencing, water quality monitors, etc.
- Park usage needs to get beyond the RV and reach single parents, elderly and immigrants
- Protect greenways with buffers and connect them to core areas
- Increase waterway management including wetlands
- Keep the public in touch with conservation
- Connect people to the land
- Need more lobbying for sustainability
- Trails are number one in several central Iowa community surveys in WDM, Altoona, Ankeny.
- Completing trail connections ranks high
- Create a system of “destination” trails that are improved and promoted
- Preserving Greenspace is important
- Public understanding Ecological improvements and the disturbance that comes first can be a challenge. People understand better when they see the root-depth graphics
- Stormwater flooding is a concern with citizens and the negative impacts to trails

- Need to reconnect the broken links in the greenways
- Focus on buyouts after a flood. Political will is highest then
- Need to be calculating carbon sequestration on our lands, and then use that data to get other people to do the same – plant prairie, trees, etc.
- More science supported land management

INHF most important qualities and strengths

- INHF is a progressive, multi-faceted, state-wide organization that can facilitate change in the short, mid and long term.
- Character, passion, respect, thoughtful
- Ability to take risks
- Great partnerships and networking
- Work with landowners
- Keep working with legislators
- Personal touch
- Quality staff
- Interim land ownership
- Stay true: honest, humble, knowledgeable, focused
- More outreach and engagement of young people in Iowa
- Consider a strategic alignment of projects based on a measurable outcome (water quality for example)
- You are a positive asset for small towns that do not have professional staff
- Build figurative and literal bridges as you have always done, pull political levers in a calculated and strategic ways, find appeal with rural and urban Iowans, including small business owners and how your work impacts them favorably, perhaps become stronger on DEI issues to ensure a balance of voices as Iowa changes, stay strong in the face of the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation.
- Develop a demonstration or outreach program such as “comprehensive farm planning for natural resources” that helps landowners look holistically at their property
- Good people with a great work ethic
- Be as diverse as possible, include farmers, food growers, sporting groups, republicans, democrats, urban, rural, ethnicities, etc.
- Share success stories more frequently
- Keep working on trails
- Trail advocacy
- More robust focus on park operations and efforts to increase park use
- Unique landform and natural area preservation
- Let the landowners tell the stories

- Communicate more why we need to be thinking about the natural connections
- Better public communications
- More communication about all your great work
- Keep your standards and expectations high
- Push the intern program to the maximum
- Internship program
- Find more ways to partner with business and industry
- Use technology to market Iowa's natural resources, showcase Iowa's beauty
- Focus on state rather than national policies
- Diverse services (trails, easements, land acquisition, renewable energy?)
- More consulting work with agencies (planning, grant writing, fundraising)
- I hope that increased support can be applied for land stewardship in the coming years.
- I think that INHF needs to take a strong position on combating climate change.
- Positive reputation
- Can-do spirit
- Thinking outside the box
- INHF is a trusted source for information
- Being nimble

Our most important work

- Strong commitment to IWLL
- Ability to reach across political lines
- Protection of high quality, large-scale natural areas.
- Protection of fragile habitats, high quality recreation and conservation lands
- Restoration of native ecosystems
- Ownership of conservation lands
- Conservation easements near public lands
- Partnering with landowners as well as a diversity of organizations
- Facilitation of projects
- Finding solutions to complicated and complex conservation problems by bringing a variety of partners to the table
- Making connections
- Staff support of small towns
- Connection to small towns and communities
- Trails and connections between parks and communities
- Connecting people to nature and the land
- Engaging students
- Setting an example

- Having a human answer the phone – the personal touch
- Building a vision for what Iowa should look like
- Statewide vision, planning, views, perspective and voice
- Being a strategic voice in the political process
- Being a voice for Iowans interested in preserving and managing natural resources

Personal vision

- I want to see... diversified farming - we can grow so much more than corn and soybeans. I'd love to see us become a leader in plant-based meats and in cell-grown meats. I want to see clean air, clean water, and healthy soils. I want to see people that are connected to the environment around them and feel a responsibility to be stewards of the land.
- As we all cope with climate change, I sincerely hope that we can come to as many collective solutions as possible for our sake and for generations to come.
- A place where people care about the land
- A place where finding common ground is acceptable and encouraged
- Balance between agriculture and natural lands
- Balanced land uses
- More balance between ag, recreation, streams
- A state that rivals others in protecting habitat, providing outdoor spaces for people and providing environmental education
- A place that draws young adults to live here
- Less urban sprawl into our agricultural fields, natural areas, wetlands
- Cleaner water, healthier soil, abundant wildlife
- Swimmable and fishable rivers, streams and lakes
- Clean, safe beaches
- Wider and wider conservation corridors and green spaces that includes whole habitats, gardens, lawn and rooftops
- More connectivity between parks and rivers and trails
- Connected wildlife corridors all across the state
- Well -funded public and private agencies that can provide recreational opportunities for the public.
- 1,300 acres protected in every county
- Twice as much public land
- Actual Climate change goals for Iowa
- Sustainable and sensible agriculture
- Teeth in regulations to protect water quality
- Fewer CAFOs
- Iowans spending more free time outdoors

- The Trust fund funded
- A state where big ag doesn't limit our work and exhaust our resources
- Corporate ag is a partner in restoration
- New industries to support conservation
- data base of public areas and hiking trails in Iowa

How can we be a partner to you

- Mainly, I need INHF to persist so that my financial support (current and legacy) will continue to carry forth the organization's mission.
- We need INHF to assist local communities with holding land until they have funding to acquire. We need them to be advocates for smaller communities in trail development.
- Be open to all challenges and opportunities
- Don't be afraid to take risks
- Press releases that can be shared with local entities
- Problem solving skills
- Interns to help on CE lands
- Partner with land acquisition
- Help combat plant blindness (inability of people to identify plants)
- Support other Iowa land trust's work
- More strategic partnerships outside the normal circle
- We rely in INHF to inform our policy positions and legislative priorities
- Your perspective is unique, nuanced and critically important
- Elevate the voices of Iowans
- Land management education
- Long range conservation planning
- Advocate for sound funding and protection
- Small community support with fundraising and grant writing
- INHF is a self-reflective organization that is able to adapt to both opportunities and challenges
- INHF volunteer opportunities and relationship building
- Land management with a different perspective than NRCS
- Plan for local presence in more regions of the state

Who's being left out?

- I think the honest answer is a wide sweep of the state. By that I mean any Iowan who hasn't experienced a remnant prairie, an intact mixed hardwood forest, or a pristine river. I am concerned that so much of the land INHF owns is inaccessible to the public.

Could that resource be a source of inspiration and connection rather than an out-of-reach concept?

- Getting kids into nature is incredibly important for the kids and for the nature. Some urban kids don't get this opportunity.
- Close to home recreation and parks in the urban areas
- People without resources
- Tourism, economic development
- Rural communities
- Young people
- People new to INHF
- Urban sector, minorities and international populations
- Minority angling community
- No one, because we all benefit from clean water
- Farm bureau
- Those that aren't landowners, trail geeks, park users, agency staff
- Iowa farmers and farm based organizations
- Single parents, elderly, immigrants who are or could be park users
- Young rural women, suburban women, women landowners
- New landowners
- AARP

General Advice

- Conservation work is similar to financial investments, there is a time-value of protection and restoration/management. The sooner those activities are undertaken the greater the long-term benefit.
- Be bold and open to new ideas
- Make INHF better than we could ever imagine
- Don't just follow the money
- We can be the change for a better Iowa
- Put Iowa and its people first
- Be relevant across the state
- There is more people and no more land. Buy more land, farm it with maximum conservation
- Keep searching out new organizations and partners
- Tell your story more
- Grow beyond the word conservation to grow the tent
- Be inclusive and create a vision of a place where young adults want to start a family
- Check your blind spots
- Be knowledgeable and proactive with farm land. Don't let SILT be the only agency talking about land and local food production

- Continue to be forward thinking and look for ways to build and maintain organizational capacities
- Be the voice for the land
- Diversify the board
- Work to get more voices to the table especially during this process
- Stay broad based and flexible
- Get all staff out in the field more often
- Leave party politics at the door
- We are facing some very short timelines in our efforts to prevent a complete loss of many aspects of our natural heritage
- Consider broader sharing of communications
- Make a vision for the future that neither urban or rural friends can argue with
- Be more inclusive with partners, stakeholder and participants
- More aggressive with intern program, communications, marketing, advocacy
- Broaden the organizations messages to include every person who lives in Iowa
- Think about contingencies
- Dream big and diverse, bring as many people as possible to the table
- Start with Why
- Stay positive, we depend on you
- Empathy for rural Iowans who are feeling left out from all the economic gains