



# OUTDOOR RECREATION IN IOWA PLAN

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State of Iowa

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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The Iowa Department of Natural Resources would like to thank all those who committed time and knowledge for the development of the Outdoor Recreation in Iowa Plan. Many city, county and state officials as well as all the organizations and individuals that attended the 2012 listening sessions have made valuable contributions to this plan. With their help, we have been able to chart a course for the next five years, growing and improving recreation and natural resources conservation in Iowa.

Specifically, thanks to Vern Fish and Dennis Parker representing Iowa's County Conservation Boards; Sherrie Proud and Tim Hansen representing Iowa City Park and Recreation Departments, Martin Konrad, Sherry Arntzen, Julie Tack, Kevin Baskins, Todd Bishop and Kathleen Moench of the Department of Natural Resources. Also, a big thank you goes to Vern Fish, Carla Eysink, Tim Hansen, Ashley Christensen, and Julie Tack; contributors of the success stories for this plan. These success stories offer a glimpse into what can be achieved for outdoor recreation and natural resources conservation when partnerships and planning come together. Finally, thanks go to Julie Tack, Emily Bainter, Tammie Krausman and Angi Bruce for editing and layout.



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TERRY E. BRANSTAD  
GOVERNOR

## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KIM REYNOLDS  
LT. GOVERNOR

Citizens of Iowa:

During Iowa summers, you can hear youth playing in our city parks, see hikers, bikers and runners on our extensive trails systems, and smell the burgers cooking on the grill while families laugh and play in our county and state parks. These activities and many others year round, are available to Iowans because federal, state, county and city agencies are committed to natural resources protection as well as creating enjoyable outdoor recreational opportunities that ultimately contribute to healthier and happier lifestyles.

I am pleased to present to you Iowa's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan entitled "Outdoor Recreation in Iowa." The purpose of this plan was to assess the supply of and demand for, outdoor recreational opportunities. It was developed with cooperation and input from state, county and city staff, natural resource stakeholders, and the citizens of Iowa. This plan follows all procedures regarding the U.S. Department of the Interior, Land and Water Conservation Fund guidelines, including that of public participation.

This action plan is the first stage in outdoor recreation planning for our state. Over the next year, an implementation plan for outdoor recreation will be developed for the Department of Natural Resources and our remaining 3 years will be dedicated to improving outdoor recreation for our citizens.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund has provided numerous Iowans with recreational opportunities. I look forward to the continued partnership with the National Park Service and getting Iowans outdoors.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Terry E. Branstad in black ink.

Terry E. Branstad  
Governor of Iowa



## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### GOVERNOR BRANSTAD'S GOALS FOR IOWA

- **200,000 New Jobs for Iowans**
  - Entrepreneur opportunities for outdoor recreation business. Rental facilities/opportunities (kayak, paddleboard, bikes, ATV, Snowmobile, etc...)
  - According to new research conducted by Iowa State University in 2012, spending in state parks, county parks, lakes, rivers and streams, multi-use trails contributes more than \$2 billion of economic activity which helps support 31,000 jobs in Iowa.
  - Outdoor recreation opportunities help businesses recruit new employees, as well as grow and sustain business.
- **15 Percent Reduction in the Cost of Government**
  - Private/public partnerships bring together resources that lead to efficiencies while still meeting the end goal for recreation and natural resource management.
  - Regional and statewide recreational planning lays a roadmap for meeting the demands of outdoor recreation participants, thus eliminating redundancy while ensuring consistency of offerings between all entities.
- **Best Schools in the Nation**
  - Outdoor recreational skills courses and conservation should be incorporated into school curricula to engage youth in caring for Iowa's resources and help them better understand human relationships to the natural world.
  - Participation in outdoor recreation skills courses (for example, fishing, snowshoeing or Archery in the Schools) can lead to behaviors that help youth live healthier, active lifestyles.

## OUTDOOR RECREATION IN IOWA PLAN

*The Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan provides a framework for outdoor recreation priorities and plans that will enhance Iowa's natural resources while contributing to the well-being and enjoyment of all Iowans.*

### The Outdoor Recreation in Iowa Plan is:

**Comprehensive** – all outdoor recreation opportunities are considered.

**Inclusive** – opportunities exist for stakeholder groups and users to be involved.

**Informative** – provides information about the supply and demand of outdoor recreation in Iowa.

**Integrated** – short-term strategies developed in phase II of the plan will support the priorities included in this phase.

**Logical** – priorities, goals, strategies and actions all make sense and lead to growing outdoor recreation and conservation of natural resources in Iowa.

**Transparent** – Iowans understand the priorities and direction for outdoor recreation and conservation of natural resources.

## BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

Park and recreation areas are natural gathering places for people who like to spend time with family or enjoy the outdoors. Open spaces, provide room for outdoor recreational pursuits, but primarily offer protection for Iowa's plant and animal species through conservation or restoration of critical habitats. All areas contribute to environmental, physical, emotional and social well being while bolstering local economies.

**Environmental benefits:** People with a greater connection to the outdoors also support conservation and preservation of natural resources, contributing to a healthier environment through daily choices and actions.

**Physical benefits:** Walking, hiking, biking and other outdoor recreation activities keep Iowans active and healthy throughout their life.

**Emotional benefits:** Spending time outdoors, disconnected from technology, work and everyday tasks reduces stress and re-energizes us to take on the tasks of the day.

**Social benefits:** Open spaces and recreation areas are natural draws for people to come together and spend time with family and friends. Many communities rely on these areas for festivals and events as hubs of social structure.

**Economical benefits:** People who participate in outdoor recreation contribute to their communities through local spending. Potential employees also make job choices based on the availability of close-to-home outdoor opportunities, such as Iowa's lakes, waterways and trails.

## SECTION 2: OUTDOOR RECREATION PLANNING

### AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS INITIATIVE

In his first term, President Obama launched America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative. This initiative sets the course for a conservation and recreation agenda for federal agencies. Its aim is to address the pressures put on natural resources through development, climate change, pollution, fragmentation and unsuitable uses to chart a new course for the future. In the summer of 2010, 51 public meetings, 21 specifically with youth, were conducted across the nation and 105,000 comments were submitted from Americans providing ideas about outdoor recreation, natural resources and the ways in which to connect young people to them.

Through AGO, the President directed special attention to connecting youth to the outdoors. The increase in technology use by kids, social and/or monetary pressures, and competition for leisure time are contributing factors to the significant reduction in the time youth spend outdoors. A variety of research demonstrates connections between lack of outdoor experiences and free play, with an increase in attention deficit disorder, Type II diabetes and obesity rates that have taken hold of the nation and most specifically youth. In 2003, according to the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, children spent an average of 50 minutes participating in outdoor activities per day, compared to today's children currently spending 6-7 hours per day with electronic media. Ultimately if the trend of increasing indoor/media time continues, there will be a greater disconnect from natural resources and active outdoor recreation participation for generations.

Today, 80 percent of the American population is choosing to live in or near cities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, urban populations have increased 12 percent in 10 years, outpacing the overall national growth. As people move to urban settings, they may lose their connections to close-to-home outdoor recreational experiences. Many federal, state and local agencies and organizations have initiated programs with the specific goal to get Americans back outside.

TABLE 1

Connecting Americans to the Great Outdoors	
Provide quality jobs, career pathways, and service opportunities	•Goal: Develop quality conservation jobs and service opportunities that protect and restore America's natural and cultural resources
Enhance recreational access and opportunities	•Goal: Increase and improve recreational access and opportunities.
Raise awareness of the value and benefits of America's great outdoors	•Goal: Cultivate stewardship and appreciation of America's natural, cultural, and historic resources through innovative awareness-raising partnership initiatives and through education.
Engage young people in conservation and the great outdoors	•Goal: Build stewardship values and engage youth in conservation and recreation.
Conserving and Restoring America's Great Outdoors	
Strengthen the Land and Water Conservation Fund	•Goal: Invigorate the LWCF to better meet conservation and recreation needs.
Establish great urban parks and community green spaces	•Goal: Create and enhance a new generation of safe, clean and accessible great urban parks and community green spaces.
Conserve rural working farms, ranches, and forests through partnerships and incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Goal: Catalyze large-scale land conservation partnership projects through economic incentives and technical assistance.</li> <li>•Goal: Significantly increase the pace of working farms, ranch and forest land conservation.</li> <li>•Goal: Increase financial incentives for land stewardship for farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, and tribes.</li> </ul>
Conserve and restore our national parks, wildlife refuges, forests, and other federal lands and waters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Goal: Conserve, restore, and manage federal lands and waters to ensure access to enjoyment for future generations while contributing to the protection of a larger natural and cultural landscape.</li> <li>•Goal: Advance national, regional, and community-supported work to preserve and enhance unique landscapes, natural areas, historic sites, and cultural areas while ensuring openness and transparency in any land designations.</li> <li>•Goal: Protect America's historic and cultural resources.</li> </ul>
Protect and renew rivers and other waters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Goal: Empower communities to connect with America's great outdoors through their rivers and other waterways.</li> <li>•Goal: Support restoration and conservation of rivers, bays, coasts, lakes, and estuaries for recreation, healthy fisheries, and wildlife habitat.</li> </ul>
Working Together for America's Great Outdoors	
Make the federal government a more effective conservation partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Goal: Improve federal government performance as a conservation partner.</li> <li>•Goal: Amplify the impact of the AGO Initiative by creating the Partnership for AGO.</li> </ul>

In February 2011, the AGO report was delivered to the President outlining goals, recommendations and implementation strategies. It recommended that federal agencies strive to be better partners and supporters of local conservation efforts, while also calling on Americans to take an active part in conserving and protecting our resources. This initiative provides focus in three main areas; connecting people to the outdoors; conserving and restoring the outdoors; and partnering for America’s great outdoors to create a new 21<sup>st</sup> Century outdoor legacy that will be there for many generations to come (**Table 1**).

**“Communities have long been catalysts for and champions of action to protect the places they cherish, whether majestic national parks and forests, iconic working lands, or city green spaces.”** America’s Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations, February 2011

### ABOUT THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (LWCF)



In 1963, President Kennedy proposed legislation that established the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), carrying forward a recommendation made by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission in 1961. This fund was to assist states in planning, acquisition and development of recreation resources, as well as a guide to purchase new federal recreational areas.

After much debate and two years of discussions, bipartisan support was finally achieved and a Land & Water Conservation Fund bill was signed into law on September 3, 1964. This new act established funding for the creation of parks and open spaces, protection of wilderness, wetlands, and refuges, preservation of habitat, enhancement of recreational opportunities, and for matching grants to state and local governments for recreation planning and development. A condition of the Act for the dissemination of the matching grant funds was the

development in each state of a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). These plans are developed, updated, and submitted to the National Park Service every five years.

The funds received from the State and Local Assistance Program Fund are primarily oil and gas lease revenues acquired from leases on federal lands. By putting these revenues back into the hands of states the National Park Service is balancing the impact to the resource while providing additional close-to-home open space and

**TABLE 2**

<b>Strengthen the health and vitality of the American people by meeting state and locally identified outdoor recreation resource needs.</b>	
<b>Increase the quantity of outdoor recreation resources for public use and enjoyment.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New parks created</li> <li>• New acres acquired for public recreation</li> <li>• Parks that were developed with new facilities</li> </ul>
<b>Enhance the quality of outdoor recreation resources for public use and enjoyment.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parks that were enhanced with new or rehabilitated facilities</li> </ul>
<b>Ensure close-to-home public outdoor recreation resources.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities benefitting from grants</li> </ul>
<b>Increase the number of protected state and local recreation resources and ensure their availability for public use in perpetuity.</b>	
<b>Expand the resources protected by the LWCF Act.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acres newly protected by the LWCF Act</li> <li>• Parks newly protected by the LWCF Act</li> </ul>
<b>Ensure that resources protected by the LWCF Act are retained and used for public outdoor recreation.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LWCF parks inspected</li> <li>• Conversions resolved</li> </ul>
<b>Encourage sound outdoor recreation planning and long-term partnerships</b>	
<b>Stimulate planning initiatives to help states identify outdoor recreation needs and establish implementation strategies to meet those needs.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently approved Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORPs)</li> <li>• SCORPs updated</li> <li>• Planning grants awarded</li> </ul>
<b>Leverage non-LWCF investments in outdoor recreation.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects that exceeded the 50% match requirement</li> </ul>

recreational opportunities. States must match the federal grant funds with at least 50 percent of their own local resources or through donations. The sites must be available to all citizens into perpetuity. In 2011, the Land and Water Conservation Fund awarded \$33,332,370 in grants nationwide, of which Iowa received \$490,133.

In 2004, the National Park Service worked with state partners and constituent groups to develop the goals and measures in **Table 2**.

## IOWA'S LWCF FUNDING

LWCF has provided nearly \$54.2 million in matching grants to the State of Iowa, its cities, and counties. More than 1,295 parks and open spaces representing 485 entities in Iowa have benefited. **Table 3** indicates how Iowa's allocation has been used since the 2006 Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Iowa submitted the first Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) in 1968, titled *Outdoor Recreation in Iowa*. This report was comprehensive in that it blended goals and strategies from the Land & Water Conservation Fund, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife Planning, and the State Historical Action Program into one document intended to replace the *Iowa 25 Year Conservation Plan*.

During the past 44 years, these plans have been used by city, county and state agencies. Grants through programs such as the Fish Habitat Stamp, Wildlife Habitat Stamp, Resource Enhancement and Protection, Land & Water Conservation Fund, and Recreational Infrastructure Funds all require projects to reference back to the current SCORP plan and indicate how their potential projects accomplish the goals set forth in the plan. This plan is the tenth edition.

**TABLE 3**

Year	Competitive Grants	State Projects	Planning Grant	Total LWCF Allocation	Total GOMESA* and Reapportionment Funds Available
2007	\$316,291.46	\$316,291.46		\$370,704.00	\$261,878.91
2008	\$156,140.00	\$156,139.75		\$306,053.00	\$6,226.75
2009	\$179,944.75	\$179,772.00		\$251,086.00	\$108,630.75
2010	\$307,426.91	\$307,426.91		\$493,115.00	\$121,738.82
2011	\$343,884.25	\$343,884.47		\$490,133.00	\$197,635.72
2012	\$276,843.00	\$260,592.00	\$16,250.00	\$553,685.00	\$0.00

\* Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA)

## METHODOLOGY OF THE 2012 PLAN

In 2011, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) asked for a one-year extension on the completion of the statewide comprehensive recreation plan. This extension was requested to coincide with the completion of a number of statewide surveys that would assist in the assessment of the supply and demand of outdoor recreation in Iowa.

In the fall of 2011, the Iowa Park Foundation, working with ETC Institute, conducted focus group sessions around Iowa and implemented a survey about Iowa State Parks. In 2012, the DNR spearheaded the statewide recreation survey of 1,000 Iowans conducted by Responsive Management (Appendix A). Additionally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released Iowa-specific survey data

regarding outdoor recreation activities, and Iowa State University completed an economic survey and report on outdoor recreation. The data from all of these reports allowed for a comprehensive look into what Iowans want for outdoor recreation and open spaces in Iowa.

A technical committee to aid in the development of the 2012 plan is made up of six representatives from the Department of Natural Resources, two representatives from the Iowa Association of County Conservation Board Directors and two representatives of the Iowa Parks and Recreation Association. Members of this committee assisted with the gathering of supply-and-demand information as well as assistance with public listening forums.

In autumn 2012, the DNR conducted six public listening sessions across the state. Each forum started with a brief overview of the data gathered through the Iowa surveys mentioned above. Participants were then asked to provide input to the following questions:

1. What opportunities does Iowa have in outdoor recreation right now?
2. How do we capitalize on those opportunities to get more interest or participation in outdoor recreation?
3. What is threatening current levels, interest, and future participation in outdoor recreation?
4. What can we do to minimize or avoid the impacts of those real or potential threats?

Common themes were found among all meetings and from written comments received by the DNR. Consistently, participants focused on the use and need for trails (surfaced, unsurfaced, snow and water) across the state. Funding, or in most cases the lack of consistent funding, was discussed along with a suggestion that more planning and partnering be done to move outdoor recreation forward. Comments and ideas from these listening forums (Appendix B) along with the survey data, and comments received from agency meetings where these same questions were posed, were used by the technical committee to develop the list of priorities and goals for this plan.

In 2013, the technical committee will provide assistance with the development of an implementation plan. Small group meetings for each of the goal areas identified in this plan will be conducted from January through June, including additional participation by stakeholder groups and organizations specific to the goals discussed. The implementation plan will include strategies, actions and performance goals for each goal along with the organization or group responsible for that action over the course of the five-year plan. This will be evaluated on an annual basis and results will be used in the development of the 2017 Outdoor Recreation in Iowa Plan.

## PRIORITIES OF THE 2012 OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

Outdoor Recreation in Iowa priorities must support the needs of Iowans in to grow participation and conservation of natural resources. The five priorities of this plan also align with America's Great Outdoors Plan and the goals and performance measures of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Priorities for this plan are in no particular order of importance. To move in a positive direction during the next five years, equal focus has to be on all areas of this plan.

**Priority 1:** Address funding challenges as they relate to growing healthy and sustainable opportunities in outdoor recreation and open spaces for Iowa.

**Priority 2:** Create places to go in Iowa that exemplify best practices in natural resources conservation and protection while providing a variety of opportunities for outdoor recreation.

**Priority 3:** Encourage collaboration and planning efforts to advance outdoor recreation.

**Priority 4:** Promote outdoor recreation as a means to achieve healthier lifestyles, enhancing the quality of life for all Iowans.

**Priority 5:** Better understand Iowans' outdoor recreation wants and needs, and develop effective tools that connect them to Iowa's natural resource opportunities, based on their unique demographics and interests.

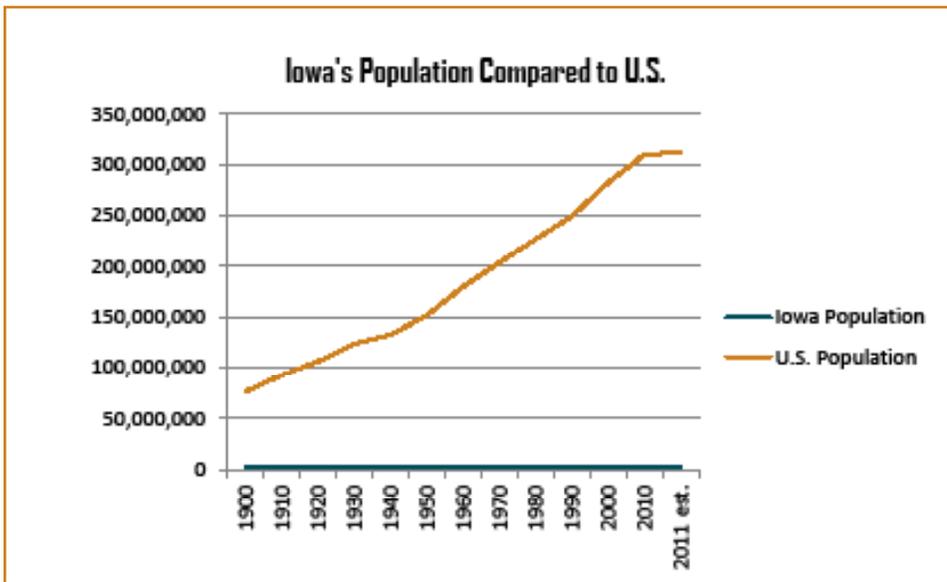


## SECTION 3: STATE OF IOWA PROFILE

### POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

During the last 112 years, Iowa’s population has remained relatively stable while the United States population has grown significantly (**Figure 1**). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Iowa’s population in 2010 was estimated at 3,046,355, an increase of only 120,031 people in the last 10 years. Residents of Iowa are predominantly Caucasian, however, the Hispanic population is growing faster than all other nationalities. Growing 2.2 percent in the last 10 years, the Hispanic population is the largest minority group in Iowa.

**FIGURE 1**



The population of the United States is getting older and living longer. Iowa also reflects this trend. Comparing 2010 data to 2000 (**Table 4**), there is a slight decrease in the percent of Iowans 44 years and younger and a slight increase in the percent of older Iowans. In the 2012 outdoor recreation survey of Iowans, older residents indicated that one of the largest barriers to outdoor recreation participation is their health.

More than one-third of households have children 18 or younger in residence. Many of these households have their children enrolled into

sporting activities such as football, basketball, soccer, baseball and softball. In the 2012 statewide recreation survey of Iowans, 59 percent of households surveyed with children indicated that they are very likely to sign their children up for these activities in the next two years. Seventy-seven percent also indicated their children participate in enough outdoor activities.

**TABLE 4**

	IA 2000 Census	IA 2010 Census
Population	2,926,324	3,046,355
Male Population	49%	50%
Female Population	51%	51%
19 and Under	28%	27%
20 - 44 Years Old	35%	32%
45 - 59 Years Old	18%	21%
60 and Older	19%	20%
Median Age	36.6	38.1
Households with Individuals under 18 Years of Age	33%	31%
Rural vs. Urban	39% / 61%	36% / 64%

\*2000 and 2010 Data From the U.S. Census Bureau

Most of the United States considers Iowa a rural state with the predominant industry as agriculture. Data shows, however, that more than half the population, 64 percent in 2010, lives in urban settings concentrated mostly within major metropolitan areas. While the leading industry during the last 10 years has been in the education services, health care and social services according to the U.S. Census Bureau data. The top five industries in Iowa are:

1. **Educational services, and health care and social assistance** – 24 percent
2. **Manufacturing** – 15 percent
3. **Retail Trade** – 11.5 percent
4. **Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing** – 7.7 percent
5. **Arts, entertainment, recreation, and accommodation and food services** – 7.5 percent

## OUTDOOR RECREATION TRENDS

Nationally, participation in recreation activities is growing, according to the Outdoor Industry Foundation’s 2011 report. The activity with the most significant growth in one year, by 27 percent, was kayaking. In Iowa, participation in recreational activities increased by 9 percent since 2006; fishing from shore, swimming in natural waters and ATV’ing (Figure 2). Out of 41 possible recreational activities only eight decreased in participation with the largest decrease, by 4 percent, was being the use of trails for physical fitness (Figure 3).

FIGURE 2\*

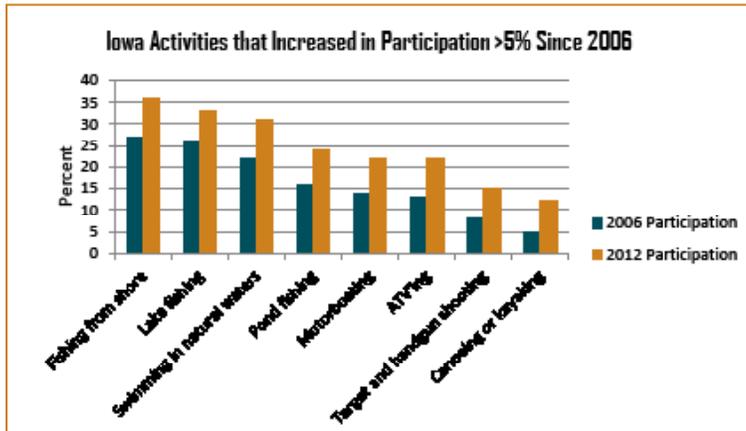
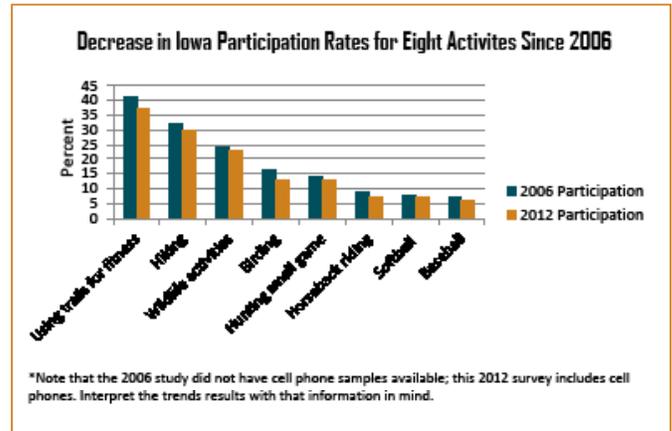


FIGURE 3\*



Based on the 2012 statewide recreation survey of Iowans, the top 10 activities with the highest rates of participation are:

1. **Walking** – 89 percent
2. **Picnicking, barbeque, or cooking out** – 83 percent
3. **Driving for pleasure** – 56 percent
4. **Family oriented outdoor activities** – 52 percent
5. **Swimming** – 49 percent
6. **Fishing** – 46 percent
7. **Observing, feeding or photographing wildlife within a quarter-mile from home** – 44 percent
8. **Using trails for physical fitness** – 37 percent
9. **Fishing from the shore** – 36 percent
10. **Other bicycling activities and camping** – 34 percent

When respondents were asked to identify those activities they would like to participate in within the next two years, only two current activities from the list above were not mentioned: observing, feeding or photographing wildlife; and other bicycling activities, although they did not drop far from the top 10, while lake fishing and visiting entertainment facilities climbed. Thus, recreational pursuits during the last six years remained fairly status quo. Stand-up paddle boarding is an activity that surged in popularity during in 2012. The high interest in this activity was not well known prior to the 2012 statewide recreation survey but will be included in future surveys.

The 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation Survey, coordinated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, indicates that nationally hunting and fishing participation is increasing, while participating in wildlife watching had no significant change from data collected in 2006. Iowa’s participation in fishing and hunting had no significant increase. However,

there was a decrease in participation in around-the-home wildlife watching. In contrast, the 2012 statewide recreational survey results for hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing more than 1 mile from home in Iowa, all had small levels of growth compared to 2006 data. Small game hunting had a slight decrease in participation as did viewing wildlife less than 1 mile from home, similar to the decrease shown in the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service survey.

The Iowa Parks Foundation’s Citizen, Attitude and Interest Survey looked at the key role the Iowa park system plays in accomplishing Governor Branstad’s vision of the Healthiest State in the Nation, as well as potential ways to improve the state park experience. When survey participants were asked if they visited

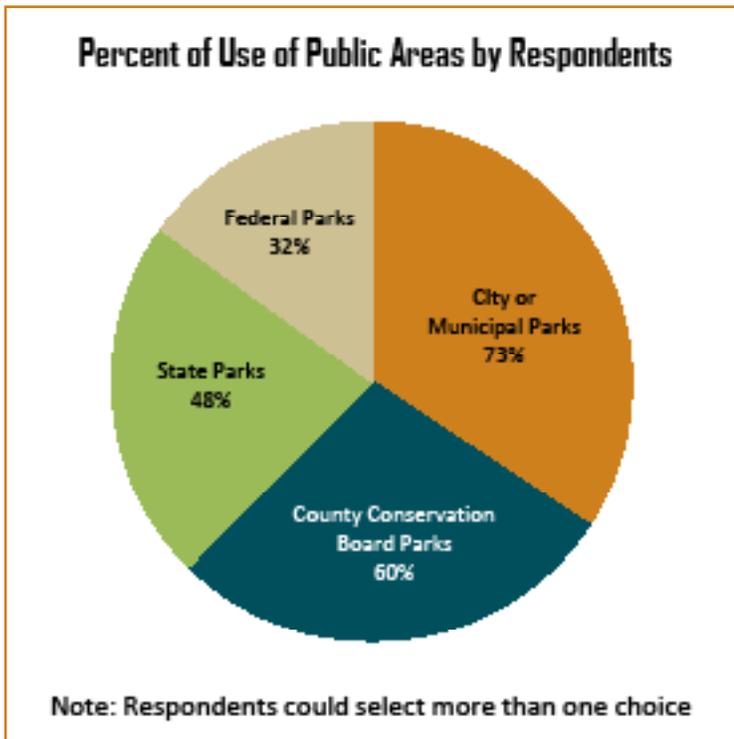
**TABLE 5**

Facility	Total Sample %	Households with under 10 year olds, %	Households with 10-19 year olds, %
Walking and Hiking Trails	72	76	78
Picnic Areas/Shelters	67	70	71
Playgrounds	42	67	29
Swimming Beaches	49	66	61
Scenic Areas	53	48	62
Shoreline Fishing	42	53	49

Iowa State Parks in the past 2 years, more than 79 percent responded yes and 72 percent said they visited one to four different parks in that time. The top choices for activities while at state parks are very similar to the activities that the statewide recreational survey (Table 5).

From comments received during focus groups conducted in the fall of 2011 by the Iowa Parks Foundation, 2012 Statewide Recreational Survey of Iowans, 2012 Polk County Recreation Survey, and the fall 2012 listening forums, Iowans visit local city or municipal parks the most. Figure 4 shows the percent of each type of park used by respondents to the 2012 statewide recreational survey. The data indicates Iowans are looking for opportunities to recreate close to home.

**FIGURE 4**



When asked about the quality of the facilities or recreational experiences either through the 2021 statewide recreation survey of Iowans, 2012 Polk County Recreational Survey, or the Iowa Park Foundation’s Citizen Attitude and Interest Survey, respondents were highly satisfied with the availability of their recreational pursuits and the condition of the facilities. What keeps participants from engaging in the activities are generally social issues such as lack of time, marginal health and age. Weather is also a large factor in participation. During the last six years, Iowa has experienced extremely wet or hot conditions, both of which greatly impact participation. Barriers such as cost to participate, travel time, or difficulty finding information were mentioned in surveys and listening forums as barriers that could be addressed by agency decisions.

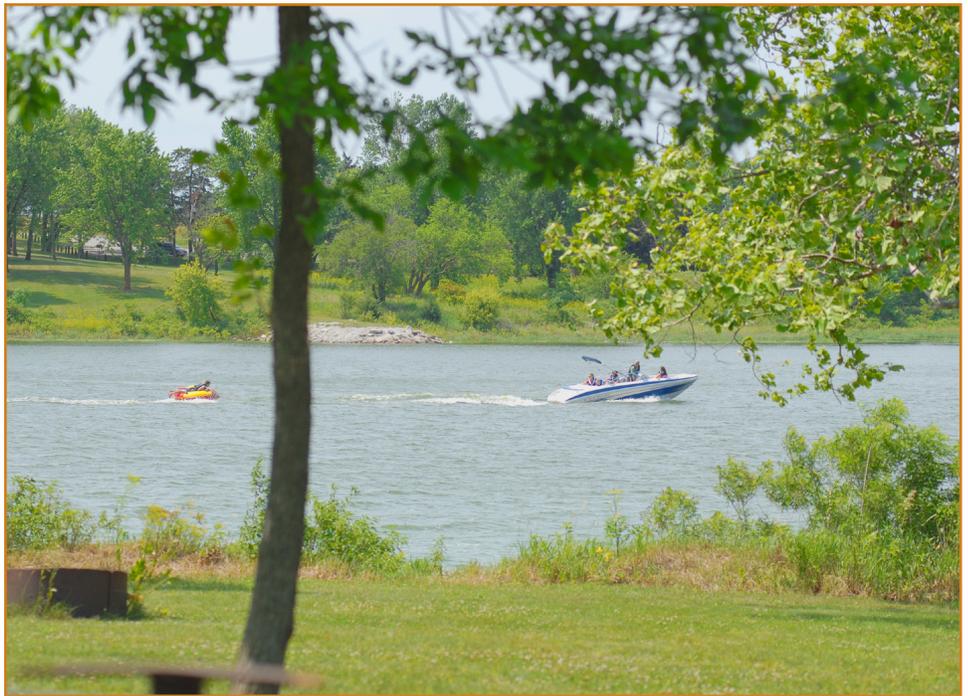
Surveys conducted by the DNR of Iowans who participate in one outdoor activity found they usually participated in at least two or three other outdoor related activities. Activities that can be accomplished in a day or in a couple of hours also have higher

participation rates and are continuing to grow. Trips that are close to home, completed in a day, and require little to no equipment are those that fit into limited leisure time.

## ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN IOWA ATTRIBUTED TO OUTDOOR RECREATION

According to the Outdoor Industry Foundation, Americans spend \$646 billion on outdoor recreation, making it the third largest contributor to annual consumer spending. Recent research conducted by Iowa State University in the report *Economic Value of Outdoor Recreation Activities in Iowa*, found that more than \$3 billion of spending on outdoor recreation (state parks, county parks, lakes, rivers, streams and multi-use trails) supports approximately 31,000 jobs. Hunting Works For Iowa reports that hunting alone contributes to \$395.5 million in economic activity and supports 6,000 jobs.

The strong connection between recreational activities and local economic impacts can be seen in areas where there is a decline in water quality at a state or county park lake. As the quality of the resource declines there is noticeable decrease in the numbers of visitors. Businesses in local communities are also impacted by this decline, such as less gas sold for cars and boats, less bait sold, fewer convenience items purchased and sometimes less storefront shopping in the local town. As efforts are made to improve the resource, the use begins to rebound and so do the contributions to the local economy. In the last 10 years, this has been most evident at Green Valley State Park, Lake Ahquabi State Park, Storm Lake and Clear Lake.

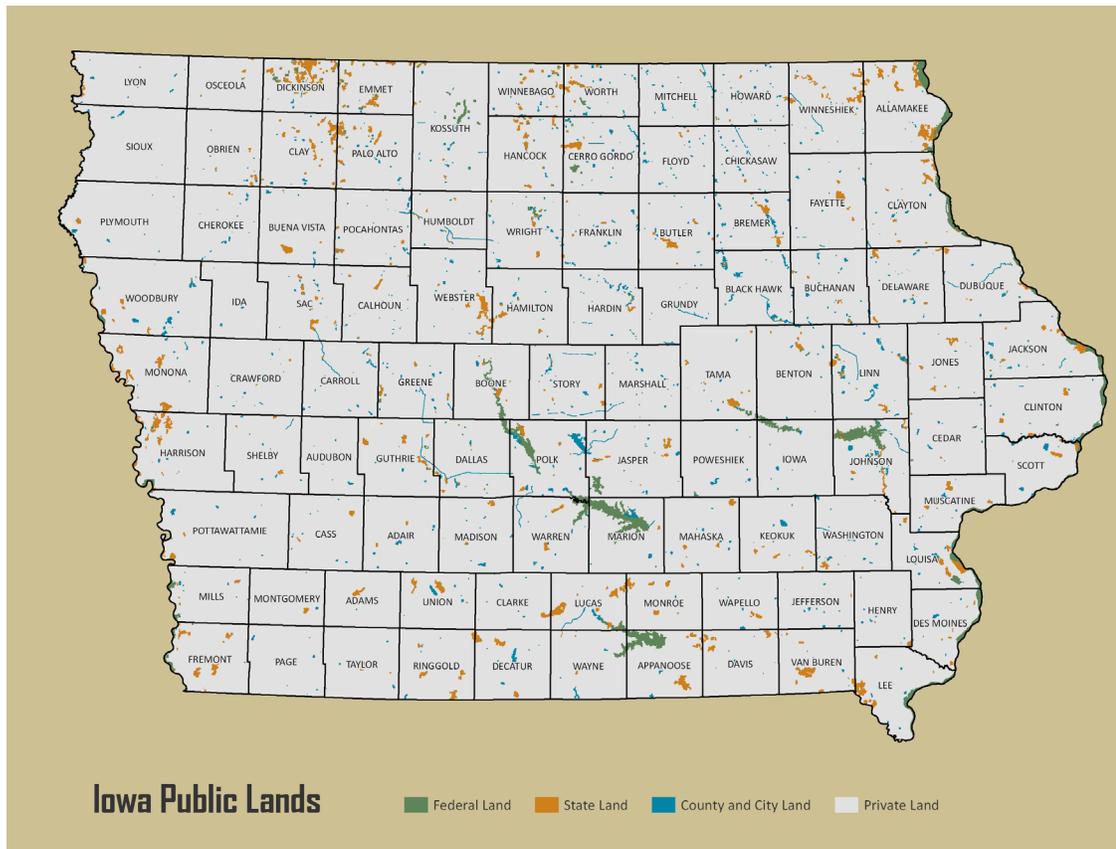


Due to the changes in the national economy since 2008, many Iowans have reduced their expenses and taken vacations closer to home. Even with the economic downturn, less-than-ideal weather conditions and higher gas prices, parks have seen consistent numbers in overnight stays and day-use recreation. People have been choosing to take more trips, but ones that are closer to home, which may account for the increase in some outdoor recreational activities since 2006. According to the U.S. Travel Association, these multiple but shorter “staycations” were the norm across the nation; however, travel seems to be shifting back to fewer and longer vacation stays, which were common prior to the recession. U.S. Travel Association data reports people took an average of 3.8 leisure trips from May 2011 to April 2012. The number of leisure trips per year was at its all-time high in 2008 at 4.5. The U.S. Travel Association also reports that spending in Iowa for domestic travel increased. With this rise comes an increase in jobs, and a growing economy. The availability and quality of outdoor recreation opportunities have direct impacts.

## PUBLIC RECREATION LAND IN IOWA

Prior to settlement, Iowa was blessed with a rich diversity of natural resources. From the Mississippi River on the eastern border through the rolling tall-grass prairies, river systems, glaciated wetlands and lakes, sand-blown loess, to the Missouri River on the western border, the land provided habitat for a wide variety of flora and fauna. This landscape proved to be a fertile home for the life-sustaining needs, crops and livestock of the settlers more than 150 years ago.

FIGURE 5



In 2005, the Department submitted to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service a document entitled, “Securing a Future for Fish and Wildlife: a Conservation Legacy for Iowans.” This document is also known as the Iowa Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan and is the first attempt ever to enumerate the majority of the state’s wildlife and evaluate the status of each species. It also examines stresses on wildlife or their habitats and lays out a vision with corresponding strategies to conserve wildlife over the next 25 years. Although this

document does not assess individual plant species, it does assess habitats and their relationships to wildlife species.

TABLE 6

Land and Water Resources	
Interior Rivers (Miles)	19,000 Miles
Trout Streams (Miles)	176 Miles
Border Rivers (acres of water)	203,000 Acres
Natural Glacial Lakes	16
Shallow Natural Glacial Lakes	27
Constructed Lakes	156
On-Stream Impoundments	52
Oxbow Lakes	32
Ponds on Public Land	308
Ponds on Private Land	100,000
Surface Mines	130,000 Acres
State Parks	57,385 Acres
State Preserves	9,825 Acres
State Forests	45,246 Acres
State Wildlife Management Areas	418,675 Acres
City Parks	39,096 Acres
County Parks	193,624 Acres
Federal Lands	237,903 Acres
ATV Parks	909 Acres

Iowa has about 56,239 square miles between its borders with only about 2 percent of natural resources in public ownership managed by federal, state, county, and city governments (Figure 5). Currently, Iowa ranks 49th in the nation for percentage of land available for public recreation. City, county, state and federal agencies manage these resources for the flora and fauna that continue to thrive in this state as well as for recreational opportunities for Iowans (Table 6). Comments made by the public attending hunting, fishing, and trapping forums in 2010 and 2012, state park forums in 2012, and Outdoor Recreation in Iowa forums in 2012 focused around the need for more public lands, open spaces and access to public or private lands to pursue their recreational interests. In the 2012 statewide recreation survey, 50 percent of respondents indicated that agencies should be acquiring land for open spaces.

Although the majority of those surveyed in the 2012 statewide recreation survey and the Iowa Parks Foundation’s *Citizen Attitude and Interest*

survey indicated that they are satisfied with the condition of the facilities and their availability, one-third of lowans indicated there are not enough opportunities for outdoor recreation. Fifty-three percent of those surveyed also indicated the highest priority of park and natural resource agencies should be to build park and recreation facilities. Heard through many of the fall 2012 listening sessions was the need to focus on trails in Iowa and on recreational pursuits that are easy to install, low maintenance, and good for beginners, such as disc golf. **Table 7** lists outdoor recreation amenities available in Iowa and managed by governmental agencies.

**TABLE 7**

Amenity	City	County	State	Total
Campgrounds	31	302	71	404
Cabins/Cottages/Yurts		168	114	282
Year-Round Overnight-Lodge			1	1
Day-Use Lodge		54	26	80
Group Facilities			3	3
Park/Picnic Shelters	857	699	147	1703
Picnic Areas			247	247
Restroom Facilities		877	453	1330
Playgrounds	915	349		1264
Paved and Unpaved Trails (miles)	932	647	1080	6078
Boat Ramps		313	124	437
Fishing Piers and Docks		496		496
Shooting Ranges		43	2	45
Basketball Courts- Outdoor	389		2	391
Football Fields	118			118
Soccer Fields	553			553
Softball/Baseball Fields	1078			1078
Sand Volleyball Courts	200			200
Tennis Courts	590			590
Skateparks	54			54
BMX/Bike Course	6			6
Horseshoe Courts	296			296
Disc Golf	35			35
Golf (18 hole)	42		1	43
Golf (9 hole)	30	117		147
Dog Park	25			25
Indoor Pool/Waterpark	30		1	31
Outdoor/Aquatic Center	106	4		110
Splash Pad	13			13
Beaches		64	40	104
Ice Rinks	53			53
Gymnasiums	114			114
Recreation/Community Center	71			71
Visitor/Nature Center		75	5	80
Amphitheater		23		23
Viewing Tower		24		24
Concession Operations			11	11
Community Gardens	44			44
Cemeteries	90			90

## Wetland Action Plan for Iowa

Iowa is a place of international importance for North America's migratory birds. North-central Iowa represents the southernmost extent of the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR), an area of global importance as nesting habitat for migratory birds. This portion of Iowa encompasses approximately 7.7 million acres and 21 percent of the state. It is estimated that this area supported 3.4 million acres of prairie marshes, prairie pothole wetlands, and wet meadows prior to European settlement, representing 44 percent of this grassland region. The combination of tallgrass prairies and wetlands created some of the richest, most productive soils in North America. This is the wettest portion of the PPR, receiving 30 to 35 inches of precipitation annually. The mild climate, long growing season, and ample annual precipitation in this region made Iowa farmland extremely valuable.

By 1980, more than 95 percent of the prairie wetlands in Iowa's portion of the PPR had been drained, along with more than 99 percent of the native tallgrass prairie grasslands associated with them. The few remaining wetlands contain some of the richest, most diverse plant and animal communities in the entire PPR. They continue to provide critical habitat for many migratory birds including ducks, geese, shorebirds, and numerous grassland birds. The densities of waterfowl using these wetlands during the breeding season equal or exceed densities in other parts of the PPR. The critical importance of these southern PPR wetlands to wetland-dependent species like scaup during their spring migrations is just beginning to be appreciated.



Since the mid-1980s, several wetland restoration programs have been implemented, most of them funded for the purposes of improving habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. It has been hoped that these added wetland acres, in combination with federal wetland protection gained through the Clean Water Act and the Swampbuster provision of the Farm Bill, would result in a no-net-loss of wetlands. A second National Wetland Inventory mapping effort was conducted for the state of Iowa in 2002. This state/federal partnership provided an opportunity to quantify changes to wetland habitat across the Iowa PPR between 1985 and 2002. This analysis demonstrated wetland gains of just under 50,000 palustrine

(vegetated wetlands traditionally called marshes, swamps, bogs, or fens) acres, balancing wetland losses estimated at just under 54,000 palustrine wetland acres. The majority of wetland loss occurred in small prairie pothole wetlands at the upper ends of watersheds, while most of the wetland gain was in floodplain wetlands associated with streams further down in the watersheds.

By tracking traditional conservation program accomplishments from 1987 through 2005, the Iowa DNR estimates that federal, state, and local government programs, in partnership with non-government organizations such as Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, have restored about 15,000 wetland acres. Perpetual easements on private lands, primarily acquired by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture through the Wetland Reserve Program, count for restoration of an additional 7,000 acres. Another 22,000 acres of temporary and seasonal wetlands are estimated to have been restored on private lands through the Conservation Reserve Program. In total, these programs account for 44,000 acres of restored palustrine wetlands, indicating that approximately 88 percent of wetland restorations can be attributed to government- subsidized conservation programs with a primary purpose of providing habitat for migratory birds.

Since the vast majority of the wetland restoration noted above has been delivered through a planned and coordinated conservation strategy that focuses on developing wetland complexes with associated upland grasslands, the capacity of the Iowa prairie pothole landscape for producing waterfowl and supporting continental populations of other migratory birds has been enhanced. For the most part, the wetland restorations are much better habitats, in more productive locations, associated with better quality upland habitats, and are under better long-term management and protection than the farmed wetlands being lost.

Given the trends in land use and regulatory programs that provide protection to existing wetlands, it appears that the level of investment in conservation programs that has funded wetland protection and restoration during the past 25 years has been adequate to approach the no-net-loss goal first set forth by the Bush administration. However, comparable, if not larger, annual conservation funding will be needed in the future to maintain the no-net-loss goal. As land values and crop prices increase, more pressures will be placed on enhancing drainage of farmed and temporary wetlands, and current conservation program funding levels cannot offset these reductions in wetland functions.

These wetland grassland complexes provide hunters, bird watchers and other nature enthusiasts with much appreciated rich and diverse natural environments to explore. Natural areas like the wetland-grassland complexes developed through the programs described above are in extremely short supply at the southern end of the PPR. Consequently, they are used intensively. It is not unusual for densities of duck hunters to be as high as one hunter per 5 acres of wetland on opening weekends on these areas or for pheasant hunter densities to be even higher. The wetland complexes developed in Iowa may be some of the most expensive in the region. But they are also some of the most productive, intensively used, and consistently wet habitats in the entire region.

There is more to Iowa wetland conservation than the PPR. Bordered by the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, Iowa is positioned along one of the continent's most important migration routes. Land use decisions in Iowa affect the water quality, extent and duration of flood events, and the ecologic health of

these two important river basins. The National Wetland Inventory provides a statewide estimate of 1,216,712 wetland acres. Given numerous estimates that place statewide wetland loss above 85 percent; historically, wetlands covered in excess of 6 million acres across Iowa, or 16.8 percent of the state.

The first comprehensive state wetland plan was led by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and was completed in 1998. It is this plan, and its successor which was led by the Iowa DNR's Geological and Water Survey Bureau and completed in 2010 that establishes the multiple societal benefits and objectives for wetland conservation in Iowa. These plans set the goals and objectives for working across government programs and in partnership with private interests, landowners and concerned citizens.

There was clear consensus that promoting a volunteer approach to wetland conservation and protection using education, outreach, technical assistance, and incentives is the most effective way to achieve wetland conservation goals in Iowa. The planning efforts acknowledge that Iowa wetland conservation contributes toward, and is vital to successfully achieving national priorities related to addressing the hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico, improving the ecological health of the Upper Mississippi River Basin, and providing habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds, many of which are experiencing alarming population declines. Obviously, these issues involve much more than wetland conservation, but it is clear that considerably more wetland acres will be required to contribute significantly toward any of these efforts. Therefore, wetland restoration and construction represent major elements of Iowa's wetland conservation Plans. In further consideration of this point, it is important that added wetland acres be located and designed to maximize their abilities to address the multiple goals: wildlife habitat, water quality, and flood attenuation and mitigation; and to do so in a manner that does not negatively affect rural economies or the abilities of agricultural landscapes to produce food.

In 2002, the update National Wetland Inventory included 110,000 small impoundments, commonly referred to as farm ponds, covering 80,000 wetland acres. Between 1985 and 2002, the number of small impoundments increased by 25 percent. All indications are that the rate of construction of small impoundments in Iowa has increased during the past decade. Not present on the Iowa landscape until the late 1940s, these structures were initially constructed across erosion gullies to stem further gully formation. These structures were also built in pastures to provide water for livestock. Structures have been popular with recreational landowners and a favorite tool for watershed projects to trap sediment and improve water quality. An overwhelming number of these impoundments are designed at sufficient depths to support fish populations, and these private lands impoundments represent a significant segment of Iowa's sport fishery. Iowa DNR's fish hatchery program provides fingerling fish at a minimal cost to private landowners at a rate of 250-300 ponds each year. Given their popularity and growth potential, it makes sense to incorporate these water features into wetland planning efforts and to improve construction designs and management capabilities to maximize the multiple wetland benefits of water quality improvement, wildlife habitat, and flood damage mitigation.

To that end, wetland priorities projects are those that demonstrate multiple benefits. Specific wetland attributes that produce favorable results include: presence/restoration of an adequate upland buffer; moderate (not extreme) surface water to watershed ratios; inclusion of water control structures that facilitate management favoring emergent and other rooted aquatic vegetation; and fish exclusion structures that prevent entry of carp and other undesirable fish species. Further, building wetland complexes either adjacent to or within the watershed of existing lakes and large marshes and as part of larger river corridor projects improves the recreational capacity of these investments as well as the ecological functions of the wetland habitats.

Iowa's highest wetland priority remains restoration of palustrine-emergent wetlands in the PPR. With emphasis on 100 focal landscapes where historic wetland densities were highest, chances of successful restoration are greatest, and production of row crops has been the most challenging. Priority is also given to floodplain areas most affected by both damaging (often where farming is facilitated by agricultural levees) and chronic flooding (such as along the Cedar and Wapsipinicon Rivers where relatively few structural controls have been installed and a large number of near-stream forested and palustrine wetlands still exist). Corridor projects along the interior rivers (e.g., Iowa, Skunk, Chariton, Raccoon, Des Moines, Little Sioux) where several significant and successful projects have been completed (e.g., Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, Iowa River Corridor, Sedan Bottoms) continue to be the most popular wetland conservation efforts.



## FUNDING AND GRANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

Cities, County Conservation Boards, the DNR and federal agencies continue to increase the quantity and quality of recreational opportunities throughout the state. Through the assistance of grant funding, mostly from state or federal funding sources, these agencies have developed small and large projects across the state. Projects range from playground upgrades, development of new shelters, upgrade of large campground electrical systems or land acquisitions and habitat improvements. Most projects are not accomplished by a single entity alone; they usually involve working with partner groups such as Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and organized clubs.

Competitive grants are offered through the following funds:

### **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Program is a federally funded grant program that provides match funds of 50 percent for outdoor recreation area development and acquisition. Iowa's cities and counties are eligible to participate. Competition for LWCF funds is intense; but this program provides an excellent opportunity to develop a wide range of outdoor recreational projects in high demand. Popular projects in recent years have included skate parks, playgrounds, new and renovated swimming pools, sport complexes, campgrounds and multipurpose trails.



### **Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) City Parks and Open Space**

This money is available to cities through competitive grants. Parkland expansion and multi-purpose recreation developments are typical projects funded under the REAP program, which comes from annual allocations by the Iowa state legislature.

### **REAP County Conservation**

This money is available to counties, only if they are dedicating at least 22 cents per \$1,000 of the assessed value of taxable property in the county for county conservation purposes through competitive grants. This money is available to counties for land easements or acquisition, capital improvements, stabilization and protection of resources, and environmental education.

### **REAP Private/Public Open Space Acquisition**

This money is available for cost-share land acquisitions with private organizations. The cost-share arrangement entails 75 percent of the acquisition costs coming from REAP and the other 25 percent from private contributions. This program provides an excellent opportunity

for private conservation organizations to help the DNR achieve open space protection goals. The DNR owns and manages the property that is jointly purchased.

#### **REAP Conservation Education Program (CEP)**

This money is available to grantees for programs that teach people of all ages about their environment and how to make intelligent, informed decisions about its well-being. \$350,000 is available for this program.

#### **REAP Roadside Vegetation**

This money is available for state, county, and city management of roadside vegetation. The establishment of attractive gateways into cities is also becoming a popular use for this money. Demonstration and research projects are typically funded under this program in an effort to learn and share new approaches to vegetation management. The purchase of specialized equipment and seed to carry out management practices is also a part of this program.

#### **REAP Soil and Water Enhancement**

These funds are available to landowners for soil and water conservation and enhancement projects and practices. Project money is directed towards protecting the state's surface and ground water resources from point and non-point sources of contamination. Practices awarded funding include; reforestation, woodland protection and enhancement, wildlife habitat preservation and enhancement, protection of highly erodible soils, and water quality protection.

#### **ATV Grants**

These funds are for the acquisition and development of All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) trails and the upkeep and maintenance of DNR-designated Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) parks. This program is funded from vehicle registration fees. Fees are placed into an account and can be used for the development of riding areas, trail maintenance, equipment purchases, operation and maintenance of sites and equipment, insurance and land acquisition.

#### **Snowmobile Trail Grant Program**

This grant program is for the development of snowmobile trails. This program is funded from snowmobile registration fees, which are placed into the state snowmobile fund. Snowmobile clubs apply for grants on an annual basis for trail grooming, trail maintenance, equipment purchases, operation and maintenance of snowmobile trial groomers, and insurance through an insurance agent.

#### **State Recreational Trails Program**

The State Recreational Trails Program funds public recreational trails. The grant requires a 25 percent local match and the trail must be maintained as a public facility for a minimum of 20 years. Proposed projects must be part of a statewide, regional, area-wide, or local trail plan.

### **National Recreational Trails Fund**

The National Recreational Trails Fund is a federal granting program with a 20 percent local match. It can be used to construct and maintain motorized and non-motorized recreational trails and trail-related projects.

### **Water Trails Site Planning and Work Crew Assistance Application**

The Iowa DNR River Programs offers an opportunity for site planning and work crew assistance. The crew is designed to help groups with a variety of low-tech projects in Iowa on Designated or In-Progress Water Trails that adhere to naturalistic river and surface trail design principles, or on a site of a low-head dam mitigation project.

### **Water Recreation Access Cost-Share Program**

The Water Recreation Access Cost-Share Program is available for constructing or improving boat access facilities to Iowa's lakes and streams. Projects can include boat launching ramps, loading/off-loading docks and other structures to enhance use by the public.

### **Fish Iowa! Club/Mentor Effort Mini-Grants**

Mini grants (up to \$500; over two years) are available for local angling education programs that provide multiple experiences and/or an ongoing support network for beginning anglers. Programs must use Fish Iowa! and demonstrate local partnerships that can support efforts after the grant period (two years). Angling education can be part of a broader program or effort, but grant funds can only be used for fishing/fisheries-related programming.

### **Fishing Field Experience Mini-grants**

Mini grants (up to \$5 per participant, grant must not exceed \$250) are available to help fund school fishing field experiences. The field experience must: occur at a site no more than 50 miles away from the school, and be part of a Fish Iowa! unit or course. Grants must be issued to accredited K-12 schools.

### **Shooting Sports Program Grants**

The purpose of the shooting sports development grant program is to provide state cost sharing to eligible applicants for the creation of new and improvement of existing shooting ranges and facilities.

### **Iowa Archery in the Schools Foundation Equipment Grant Program**

This grant program was established to promote youth archery by providing the equipment needed to conduct National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP), international-style target archery programs. The equipment is usually provided as part of a "package" that includes all of the equipment needed to start an NASP program.

### **Iowa Scholastic Clay Target Grant Program**

Schools starting a High School/Scholastic Clay Target Program are eligible to apply for a grant for up to \$10,000 over a two-year period.

### **Place-Based Education Mini-Grants**

Mini-grants (up to \$750) are available to schools to implement a place-based approach to learn about local aquatic resources/issues in coursework.

### Small Grants Program

Funded by donations from the Fish & Wildlife Protection Fund (Chickadee Checkoff) and Natural Resource License Plate funds, small grants are available for projects directly relating to wildlife diversity conservation, education, or research. Approved projects will be funded on a single-year basis but can be submitted for additional funding in subsequent years (not to exceed 3 years in succession).

### Habitat Management Grants Program

The Wildlife Diversity Program makes small grants available for habitat management projects directly related to wildlife diversity conservation. Approved projects will be funded on a single-year basis but can be submitted for additional funding in subsequent years (not to exceed 3 years in succession). Proposals will be accepted from any organization engaged in management for the benefit of wildlife conservation. Projects should be closely related to the goals of Iowa's Wildlife Action Plan. Total grant allotment is \$15,000 per year with \$7,500 being the maximum amount available per proposal request.



### Wildlife Habitat Promotion with Local Entities Program

This program offers 75 percent cost-share funding to County Conservation Boards for the acquisition and development of lands for wildlife habitat. Lands must be open to hunting and trapping. Only those compatible activities such as fishing, hiking, nature study, cross-country skiing, etc. will be permitted. Applications must be for a project with a cost of not less than \$4,000 due to administrative costs. Grant applications for wildlife habitat projects are received two times a year.

### Habitat and Access Program

The State launched a new pilot program in 2011 that provides habitat improvement funding to landowners. In turn, the landowners who voluntarily participate offer public hunting access on designated areas of their private land from Sept. 1 - May 31 of each hunting season.



### Trees For Kids and Trees For Teens Grant

This competitive grant awards between \$1,000 and \$5,000 to qualified tree planting projects on publicly owned property. Qualifying public planting areas include, but may not be limited to: street right-of-ways, parks, school grounds, courthouse lawns, public buildings, fairgrounds, cemeteries, libraries and trails. Applicants must show an educational component of the planting. Grants applications are available semi-annually, in the fall and spring.

## SECTION 4: PRIORITIES FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

**PRIORITY 1:** Address funding challenges as they relate to growing healthy and sustainable opportunities in outdoor recreation and open spaces for Iowa

### ISSUE

Use of county, state and federal parks in Iowa is high. Based on data from the Iowa Parks Foundation's Citizen Attitude and Interest Survey, at least 79 percent of those surveyed have visited a state and at least 35 percent are visiting one to five times during the past two years (**Figures 6 and 7**). According to surveys conducted in 2012 Iowans are satisfied with their park systems and other natural resource amenities. This is also supported by the number for friends groups and organizations that share their time and talents volunteering in these areas. Nationally, parks and natural areas also enjoy broad public support. According to a recent poll conducted by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates and Public Opinion Strategies for the Nature Conservancy:

- **79 percent** believe we can protect land and water and have a strong economy with good jobs for Americans at the same time, without having to choose one over the other.
- **70 percent** believe our state and national parks, forests, monuments and wildlife areas are essential parts of their state's economy.
- **77 percent** believe that one of the things our government does best is to protect and preserve national history and natural beauty through national parks, forests and other public lands.

FIGURE 6

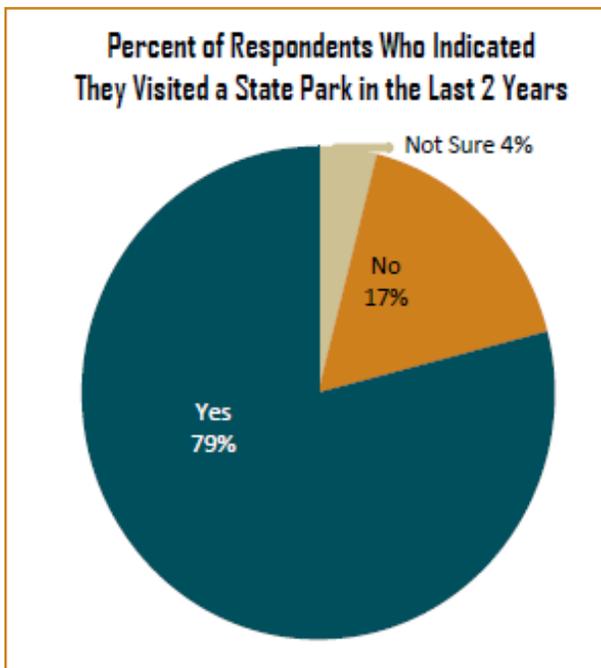
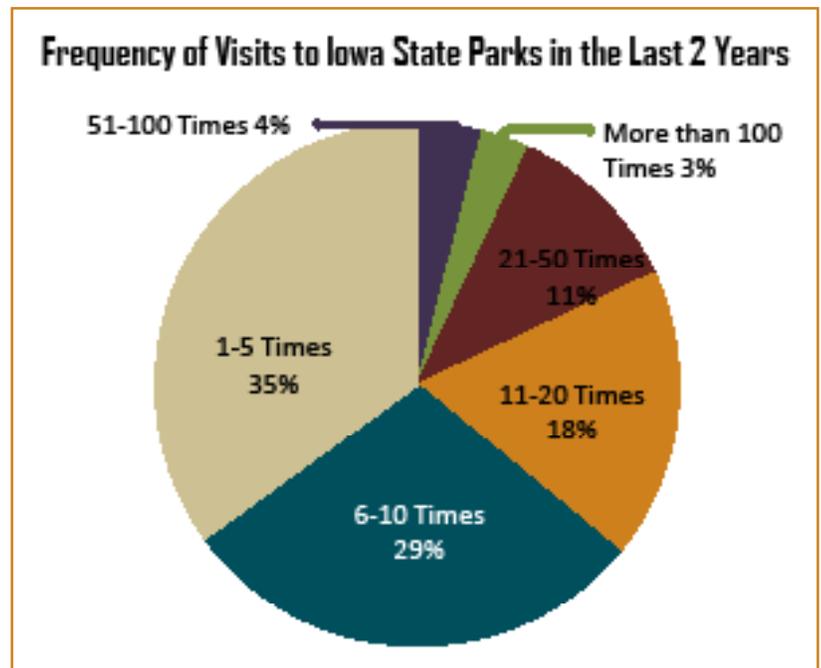


FIGURE 7



Even with the support of citizens and from government, due to the national economic downturn and weakening finances, outdoor recreation and natural resource conservation funding has declined significantly. Even though many budgets have remained the same over time, inflation has greatly impacted the amount of goods and services purchased to maintain natural resource areas and amenities. In 2011, states received nearly \$37 million in Land & Water Conservation Funds through the state grant program. Even with those funds going toward acquisition and development of natural areas and recreational opportunities, it was reported that there were more than \$18 billion in unmet needs, a \$16 billion increase since 2006.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

In a majority of public forums and the listening session, funding for outdoor recreation was discussed. The common theme of these discussions is the need for consistent and reliable funding for current resources and amenities to be maintained and for recreation providers to grow opportunities to meet the demands of Iowans. As stated in Section 3, State of Iowa Profile, outdoor recreation is a large contributor to Iowa's economy. Recreational pursuits drive entrepreneurs to start new businesses, providing an economic benefit to local communities. Businesses promote outdoor recreation to attract new employees to a specific community or Iowa in general. This is all worthwhile if the resource and the associated amenities are kept in quality conditions that benefit not only the recreational users but also the resource.

In 2012, 57 state and local conservation funding measures were on November voting ballots. Out of those funding measures, American Voters passed 46 with overwhelming support. According to an article written by Lisa Hayden for the Nature Conservancy's *Planet Change* newsletter, 2012 was the most successful year for conservation ballot initiatives. These budget initiatives will generate \$1 billion for land and water protection. In Iowa, there have been three successful ballot initiatives within the last five years, with the most recent being the successful Polk County Water & Land Legacy Bond which passed with 72 percent of the vote. At the local level, this bond will protect water quality of rivers, lakes and streams, protect drinking water sources, wildlife habitat and natural areas, protect land to help prevent flooding, and improve parks and trails.

Organizations like the Nature Conservancy also are concerned about funding for natural resources conservation and recreation. In their 2012 *Conserving Natural Resources for a Stronger America: Recommendations for Natural Resource Policy for the Next Four Years*, they identified five major initiatives, two of which directly relate to funding: invest in natural infrastructure; and finance conservation in innovative ways.

"Innovation", "creativity" and "partnering" were also common words used during discussions on funding through the forums and listening sessions. Iowans are committed to their resources and recreational pursuits and they want to help keep these activities well funded, even in tough economic times. Government agencies alone cannot maintain, conserve and protect natural resources and the recreational opportunities they provide. It takes individual leaders, communities and businesses all working together to care for the resource.

## OUTDOOR RECREATION IN IOWA GOALS

- **Goal 1:** Promote the contribution of natural resource recreation and conservation to the economic vitality and quality of life for Iowans.
- **Goal 2:** Ascertain funding opportunities available for consistent and long-term financial support to meet the demands of outdoor recreation and conservation that are mutually beneficial to government agencies, the private sector and user groups.
- **Goal 3:** Revise grant funding criteria to meet the needs of Iowans and to place a priority on projects that enhance the quality of life of Iowans and are safe, affordable, beneficial to natural resources, and supported within communities.

### SUCCESS STORY



#### **THE LAKE RED ROCK AREA: *Solving the Puzzle of Economic Development in Rural Iowa***

*Carla Eysink, Executive Director, Marion County Development Commission*

Marion County ranks 54<sup>th</sup> out of 3,141 counties in the United States for having the highest percentage of jobs in manufacturing. In a county where the total population is just over 33,000 there are more than 6,000 manufacturing jobs. Most of these companies, large and small, are family-owned businesses. Their growth relies on innovation and the attraction of a quality workforce.

As competition for employees tightens, amenities that add to quality of life become critical in recruitment of highly skilled talent to rural areas. Amenities such as trails, fishing, boating, recreation, camping and birding provide our area an advantage in this recruitment of workforce. In addition, events that include family activities, running races, nature exploration and history build a connection to nature and a reduction in stress from a busy lifestyle. This adds to the health and vitality of our workforce.

The Marion County Development Commission (MCDC) is a unique department of county government driven by a citizen board. The purpose of the commission is to enhance the quality of life and standard of living in Marion County by promoting and developing Marion County as a quality destination to live, work and visit. The agency focuses efforts in tourism, business and infrastructure with an approach that concentrates efforts on building connections and promotions.

**TOURISM:** Our recreation and nature partners are incorporated into all efforts to promote tourism to the region. MCDC has spearheaded a regional cooperative to promote the area's tourism and nature amenities at tradeshow. This year eight partners from Marion County will work together to exhibit at these home and sport shows to promote visitation. Likewise, the Red Rock Travel Guide is a 52-page professionally designed publication that utilizes strong photo images as a primary fulfillment piece at tradeshow, advertising requests, welcome centers and workforce recruitment. The region is also working to bring in a national destination development expert, Roger Brooks of Destination Development International, to complete a weeklong opportunity assessment to drive future promotional and tourism development. Since 1995, travelers have increased annual spending in the county by more than \$30 million, adding to the bottom line of local governments, businesses and nonprofits.

*Continued...*

**BUSINESS:** In business development, MCDC visited 40 tourism-related businesses and attractions in 2012 as part of the Commercial, Retail, Tourism & Service (CRTS) Synchronist program. This is a nationally acclaimed business call program to identify trends within sectors, understand challenges businesses are facing, and build data for economic development efforts. This effort has allowed us to not only understand what our tourism businesses want visitors to know, but provides an understanding for where opportunities and challenges are for growth within the sector. As a county with the 5<sup>th</sup> highest median household income in Iowa, our businesses are a key component to growth potential and building wealth for our citizens.



**INFRASTRUCTURE:** People are our greatest resource. They drive projects and create solutions for challenges in our communities. For nearly 20 years, MCDC and our county partners have operated a multi-community leadership program that focuses leaders on issues key to our future and connects leaders to organizations. Nature, tourism and recreation are the focus of one session where participants see the county through the eyes of a tourist...on a motorcoach! In addition to our leadership focus, efforts also include enhanced directional signs for the Red Rock area and improved highway access to the area for businesses and tourists.

With the largest contiguous public land base in Iowa, Marion County understands the connection between economy, environment and community. Here our economic development efforts focus on bringing in money from outside our county and keeping our citizens spending their money locally. The work of economic development is like solving a jigsaw puzzle. For the picture to be complete, a region needs assets just like the pieces of a puzzle that are connected, in the right place and not missing. Change happens and pieces always seem to keep shifting, but the goal is to keep working at solving the puzzle by understanding the inter-relationship of economics, environment and community. To learn more, go to [www.redrockarea.com](http://www.redrockarea.com) or [www.marioncountyiowa.com](http://www.marioncountyiowa.com).

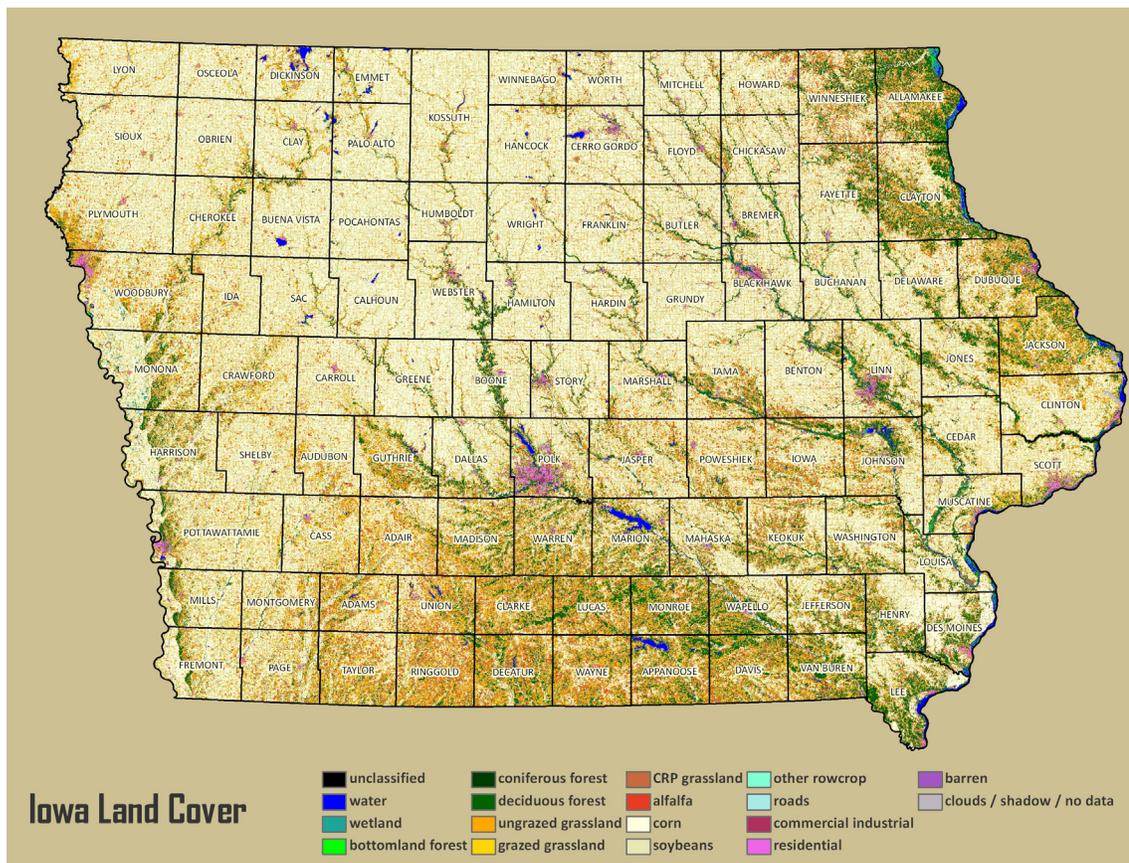
**PRIORITY 2: Create places to go in Iowa that exemplify best practices in natural resource conservation while providing a variety of opportunities for outdoor recreation**

**ISSUES**

Currently, 1.3 million Iowans participate in wildlife-associated recreation and it is estimated there were 10-14 million visitor use days in state parks in 2011. To accommodate additional users, public access for a variety of recreational uses must be available, but where sound management practices, with an emphasis on protecting and preserving natural resources, are assured.

Currently, Iowa's land area is 35,760,000 million acres, of which approximately 1,002,663 acres are in public lands. The majority of land use in Iowa is traditional row-crop agriculture (**Figure 8**) making the small pockets of public lands dotted across the landscape especially important for Iowa's fish and wildlife resources.

**FIGURE 8**



Agriculture practices, mostly through corn and soybean production, have changed drastically over time. Farming fence-row-to-fence-row was replaced with incorporation of federal programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wetland Restoration Program (WRP), buffer strip programs, and contour farming to name a few. Traditionally, Iowa has had the most acres of land in the nation enrolled in the continuous Conservation Reserve Program sign-up done through the federal Natural

Resource Agency. Changes in the recent Farm Bill and higher crop prices could dramatically change the additional resource benefits Iowa has seen on the landscape through these conservation programs. In a state that depends on a strong agricultural economy, especially in rural areas, the conversion of row crops to native grasslands, wetlands, and forested habitats has not traditionally been viewed as a positive economic action.

Likewise, some of the most beautiful scenery in Iowa can only be seen from its waterways. Iowa's river floodplains were once incredibly diverse habitats. Rivers meandered through floodplains and frequently changed course, leaving oxbows and off-shoots that provided important habitat for fish and wildlife. This process was repeated over thousands of years creating a variety of wetlands throughout the floodplain. Prior to installing drainage tile and ditches, water

would flow overland from adjacent uplands and fill these depressions during spring and fall. The Prairie Pothole Region in north central Iowa has global importance as a nesting area for migratory birds. Estimated wetland loss in the Prairie Pothole Region is as high as 98 percent, and less than 1 percent of the native grasslands associated with these wetlands remain today. Statewide, wetland loss is estimated to exceed 85 percent. These waterways and associated upland and wetland habitats are also critical for water quality protection and for the transportation of fish and wildlife populations, along with their recreational benefits.

Finally, controlling the introduction, and preventing the spread, of non-native fish, plant and wildlife species has become a major undertaking for natural resource managers. Wetlands, forests, rivers and open areas – all important to Iowa’s landscape – are under constant threat from aggressive invaders like purple loostrike, zebra mussels, honeysuckle, garlic mustard, Asian carp, emerald ash borer and gypsy moths. These invasive species can choke an area and quickly devoid it of natural habitats if left out of control. Appropriate management cannot happen solely on public areas. With such few acres of land under public ownership, work on private lands becomes crucial to the success of healthy ecosystems.

Iowa has 19,000 miles of interior rivers, all of which have potential for enhancement to existing greenbelts or creation and restoration of new ones. River greenbelts are especially critical areas during high flood events. During the last 10 years in Iowa, hardly any river has escaped a flood event and the corresponding heavy impacts to agricultural land as well as the communities situated along them. These river systems plus all other city, county, state and federal lands are surrounded by land under private ownership, meaning the majority of restoration or enhancement efforts must come through cooperation and/or partnerships with different agencies, organizations, and private landowners.

With all this said, however, rural impacts on the land are giving way to development, with 64 percent of Iowa’s population now residing in urban settings. Local public/private partnerships are stepping forward to ensure development pressures do not threaten resources that attracted residents, businesses, and tourists. As these urban and suburban populations continue to grow, they could potentially have a greater impact on recreational experiences as lands that people have farmed for years are slowly replaced by roads, homes and businesses.

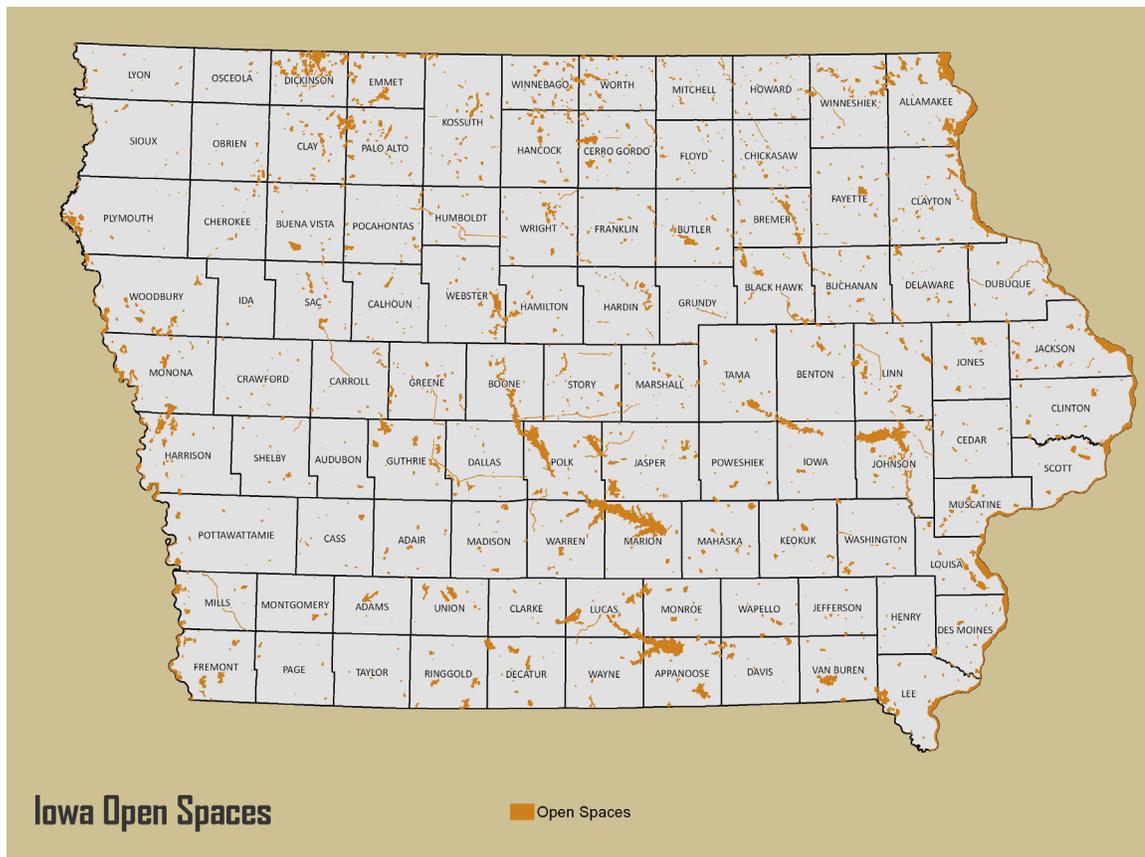
## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Resource managers play a key role in development and implementation of best management practices for public lands, protecting and conserving habitat for flora and fauna while providing appropriate areas for public recreation. Best management practices on public lands should include areas of non-development in order to preserve critical habitats and resources. In the 2012 Outdoor Recreation Survey of Iowans, 50% stated that acquiring open spaces, such as greenbelts and buffers to urban development is a high priority. Another 48% stated that acquiring natural areas for outdoor recreation activities that have few manmade features is a high priority.

Using best management practices through an ecosystem based management approach not only can help determine areas appropriate for recreational development versus non-development, but it can also be used as a tool to help agencies plan for the control of invasive species while protecting endemics. This approach takes into consideration biological, societal and economic factors in order to develop a management plan that will protect and enhance diversity and productivity of habitats and their associated flora and fauna.

Currently underway, is the review and revision of the Iowa Wildlife Action Plan, the leading plan in the state for the conservation and protection of aquatic and wildlife species. It outlines action steps critical for management agencies, that when carried out will lead to cleaner water, air and a healthier environment for all Iowans. All city, county and state agencies are leaders in showcasing best management practices, for areas including recreational pursuits as well as those areas that are free of manmade features and managed for critical habitats and species. The quality of the resource serves as a teachable opportunity for those private landowners who want the same diversity and opportunities on their land.

**FIGURE 9**



It will be important to communicate the value of these resources and potential educational opportunities they hold to local communities, including what recreational uses are appropriate for each area. Implementation of best management practices, however, cannot take place solely on public lands since so many public areas are surrounded by private lands. Strong partnerships and cooperative planning provided to private lands is needed to improve the quality of Iowa's

natural resources while we continue to improve best management practices on public lands, setting the example for private individuals to follow. Critical to this public/private conservation success is assistance provided by the DNR's Forestry Bureau, Wildlife Bureau, Fisheries Bureau, County Conservation Boards, and federal programs such as the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Through cooperative work between public and private entities, acquisitions, easements, water quality monitoring, and volunteer efforts on new river corridors or existing corridors can be enhanced and enlarged. During the past

20 years, Iowa conservation partners have worked to build complexes wherever possible. Acquisitions to existing public lands will be sought to provide for larger blocks of continuous public ownership (**Figure 9**). Larger areas have the potential for a greater diversity in flora and fauna species, providing for healthier ecosystems. Increasing and enhancing these corridors, especially on river systems will not only create larger travel corridors for fish and wildlife species, and enrich water recreational experiences for users, but will also assist with flood control and protection. Especially for nearby communities, this additional flood control can significantly reduce flooding impacts, while providing additional close-to-home opportunities for land-based recreation (hiking, wildlife watching, hunting and gathering of natural products).

One of the most frequent comments received through recent public input forums across the state, including Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Forums, State Park Forums and the 2012 listening sessions, is about access to recreation areas both public and private. Bond funding received by the DNR during the 2010 legislative session allowed the DNR Fisheries Bureau to place easements on private lands for additional fisheries access to rivers and streams. In 2011, the DNR Wildlife Bureau initiated a new Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP). In its first year, with 7,000 acres enrolled into the program, landowners are receiving funding and assistance to improve habitats on their property in exchange for allowing access to their land for hunting. Walk-in hunters are allowed onto these private lands from September 1<sup>st</sup> through May 31<sup>st</sup> each year. IHAP is in its second year in 2012, with growing interest and use.

Resource managers can work with natural resource organizations and private landowners and showcase the best conservation practices benefitting the most species on the land. Private land conservation efforts can link to public lands and assist in building diverse systems to which natural resources and recreational interests can coexist and grow.

## **OUTDOOR RECREATION IN IOWA GOALS**

- **Goal 1:** Preserve, enhance and protect statewide water and land resources while specifically targeting connections (habitat and lineal greenbelts) regionally and locally to ensure a greater protection of Iowa's open spaces.
- **Goal 2:** Encourage public agencies and local governments to protect the parks and natural areas within their jurisdiction, limiting resale of public lands and open spaces for other non-outdoor recreation or non-open space development.
- **Goal 3:** Provide assistance to local communities and governments to improve the quality and revitalize the recreational use of priority water bodies.
- **Goal 4:** Provide high-quality, safe and affordable recreational opportunities that meet the demands, needs and diversity of experiences Iowans desire.

## SUCCESS STORY

### CEDAR BEND SAVANNA

*Vern Fish, Executive Director and Mary Cox, Natural Resources Intern*

The Cedar Bend Savanna (CBS) is a 55-acre oak savanna located at the north end of the Cedar River Wildlife Management Unit in northwest Black Hawk County. This area was purchased by the Black Hawk County Conservation Board in the mid 1980s with a Wildlife Habitat Stamp Grant. Historically, this area was open-canopy woodland and prairie dominated by black and bur oak, which thrived on the sandy soils. The canopy began to close when natural disturbances such as fire, grazing, and browsing were eliminated. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis of aerial photos shows that in the 1930s the canopy cover was 38 percent. It has now closed to 95 percent by encroaching trees. Cattle grazing until 1985 and volunteer efforts over the years have allowed 5 percent of the area to remain open for sun-loving prairie species to persist.

In 1985, it was estimated that only 0.02 percent of Midwest oak savannas remain, making it one of the rarest plant communities in the world. The CBS provides critical habitat to a variety of unique plants and animals.

It is one of two locations in the county that plant enthusiasts can view the delicate, early-blooming Pasque Flowers. Other species of interest at CBS include Bent Vetch and Clustered Sedge, which are listed as species of special concern in Iowa. Another draw of CBS is the 100+ year old, open-grown oak trees. These “lone wolf” trees are recognized by their thick, far-reaching lower limbs.

The Black Hawk County Conservation Board (BHCCB) had identified the CBS as a *Significant Natural Area (SNA)* within Black Hawk County and made a commitment to its management. A committee was formed with representatives from the University of Northern Iowa Biology department, the Iowa Tallgrass Prairie Center, Prairie Rapids Audubon Society, a Black Hawk County Conservation Board member and staff to oversee the restoration of this unique natural area. A graduate student in the Professional Science Masters- Ecosystem Management at UNI was provided a stipend to do research and write a management plan. This stipend came from the BHCCB’s Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) account.

The restoration of CBS required the removal of invasive species and recently established woody species. This called for cutting and removal of a huge volume of material. Volunteers had only been able to keep a small segment of prairie open to sunlight. The BHCCB invited private loggers to bid on the undesirable trees for commercial firewood. The old growth oaks and a select number of younger oaks were marked and protected from cutting. Using a grant from ITC Midwest and BHCCB REAP funds, the Conservation Corps of Iowa was brought in to clear away the smaller trees. A commercial logger then proceeded to remove the bigger trees for firewood and fence posts.

Until the native prairie grasses are reestablished the site will be mowed to control woody vegetation. Once the grasses are up, the site will be burned and mowed on a rotation to maintain the savanna habitat. This mix of prairie and oaks should also provide excellent habitat for game species like woodcocks, turkey and deer.

*Continued...*

This land was originally purchased with funding from the hunters of Iowa, a Wildlife Habitat Stamp grant. The management has been funded by private donations, grants, REAP dollars and the labor of hundreds of volunteers. A commercial logger paid the BHCCB to help with the restoration. In the long run an important piece of Iowa's natural heritage will be actively preserved and open to hunters, hikers and other outdoor recreation.



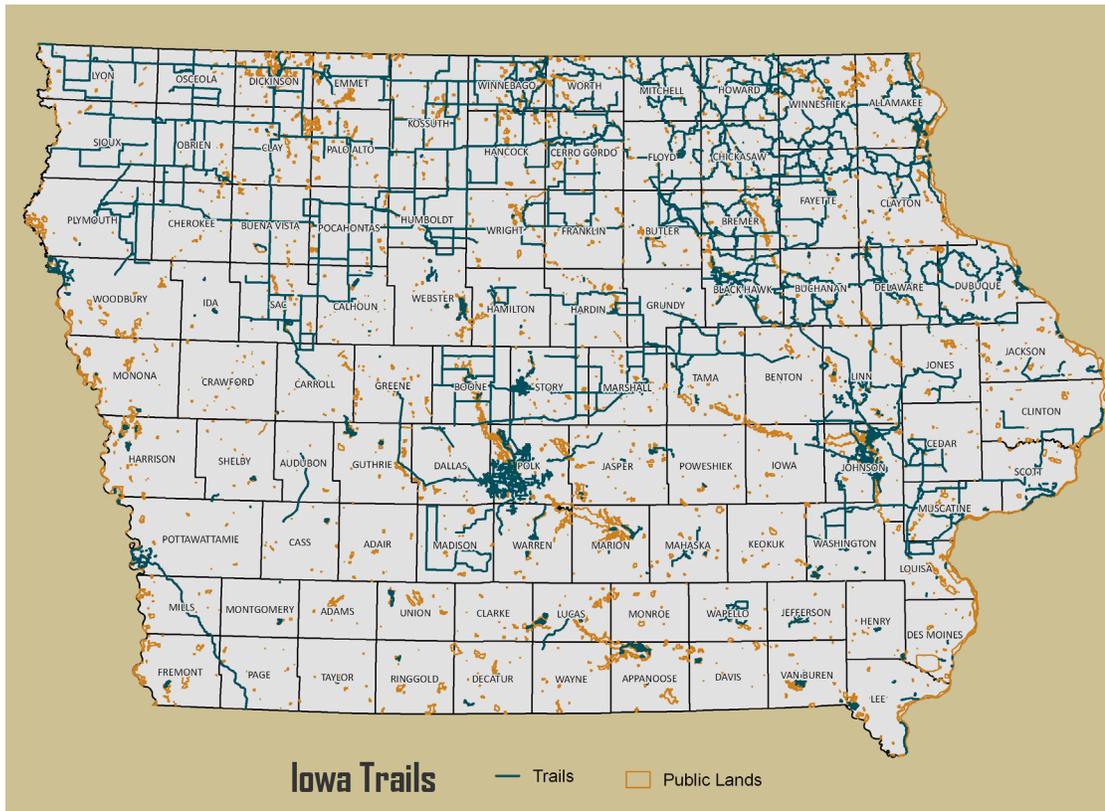
For more information go [www.blackhawkcountyparks.com](http://www.blackhawkcountyparks.com) and look under the Natural Resources tab for the Cedar Bend Savanna Management Plan and a Cedar Bend Savanna Map.

**PRIORITY 3: Encourage collaboration and planning efforts to advance outdoor recreation**

**ISSUE**

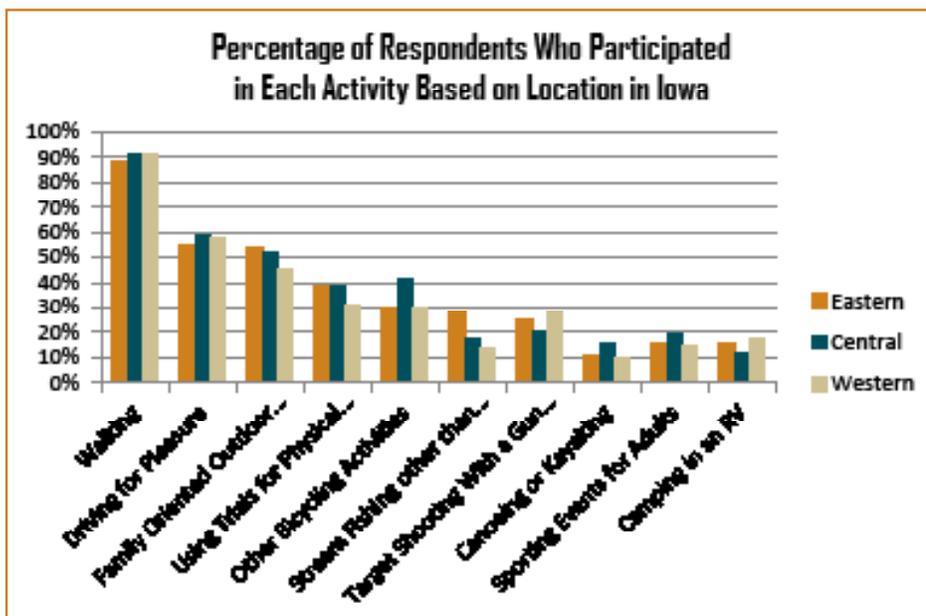
Agencies responsible for recreation and natural resource conservation spend a majority of their time developing and maintaining areas and associated facilities. Recreational users, whether wildlife watchers, snowmobilers or picnickers are benefiting from the use of the resource, but is it the right experience for the area?

**FIGURE 10**



During the fall 2012 listening sessions for this plan, comments were made by attendees stressing the need for more cooperation and planning. The impression, by some, is that many agencies are doing similar work which seems inefficient and a poor use of limited funds. These comments mostly focused around discussions on Iowa's trails system. Iowa has an extensive trails system, from the smaller non-paved state park nature trails and equestrian trails to the paved rail-trail bike

**FIGURE 11\***



trails and the miles of snowmobile and ATV trails but there are pockets where availability to trails systems are limited (Figure 10). Many of the 2012 listening sessions included representation from these various stakeholders. Some of the best discussions focused on the need for cooperative efforts connecting agencies, stakeholders and users together to provide better planning and communication for trails in Iowa. Specifically at one session, a question arose as to why there was not more cooperation between equestrian and snowmobile trails. Two uses, which happen during opposite times of the year. It was determined during the discussion that if there was a connection, a plan and better communication between all parties

\*For a complete listing of all activities as it relates to the participation based on location in Iowa, see Appendix A.

could result in a highly desirable and marketable offering in their community while respecting the resource. Statewide efforts to this effect have been fostered at the annual Iowa Trails Summit. As seen through the 2012 statewide recreation survey of Iowans, however, Iowa recreation use is not the same across the state. Depending on the recreational opportunities, citizens in eastern Iowa may participate more or less than citizens in other parts of the state (**Figure 11**). Thus, a more localized planning effort only may not be the most effective for forwarding natural resource conservation and recreation in Iowa.

This discussion is not new. However, this philosophy has been revisited through the decades. During the 1970s and early 1980s planning was a high priority for most recreational agencies across the nation. However, in the late 1980s and 1990s planning staff and efforts were cut as budgets tightened. The lack of recreation and open space plans at the national, state and local level has been noticed. It is not uncommon to have organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever and other non-governmental organizations along with Iowa DOT road projects and trails, city parks, county conservation boards, state areas, federal areas, and others all located within one county. All of these agencies and groups have individual goals for their properties or projects and recreational use activities they are promoting. However, they may not always be aware of a similar projects or strategies within close proximity.

Unknown to most grantees of the Land & Water Conservation Fund is the requirement that all grant submissions must include a copy of their local recreation plan. Some counties have a county-wide conservation plan developed by Resource Enhancement and Protection Fund (REAP) committees. Many REAP plans, however, are outdated and the committees rarely meet to discuss changes in demographics or recreational areas and associated uses within their counties. All this furthers the confusion of users and helps foster the perception of lack of planning among agencies.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Planning ensures that recreation opportunities and the associated natural resource are safe, well constructed and maintained, provide easy and sufficient access, and relevant to the current demands and within the limitations of the resource. Planning helps maintain equally distributed recreational opportunities so everyone within Iowa has a relatively close-to-home opportunity in which to participate. Appropriate planning also allows for proper consideration of opportunities for all age types including those with physical limitations. Planning at the local level can encourage groups to consider all city, county, state, federal and private areas and efforts to help eliminate redundancy, develop consistent messaging and promotion, and help foster private/public partnerships that create the best opportunities for recreation and natural resources conservation in the community.

Many federal agencies such as the National Parks Service have reinvigorated plans for outdoor recreation by incorporating healthy initiatives due to national concern over rising obesity levels. First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move* program called for all federal programs in the Department of Interior to develop goals and strategies to get children outdoors and moving. That has led to an insurgence of public relations efforts about how to get engaged in outdoor recreation.

The Bureau of Land Management uses a Benefits-Based Planning and Management Model and a Recreation Activity Management Plan in their recreation planning. They define these planning models on their website as:

- **Benefits-Based Planning and Management (BBM)** - Means managing recreation resources to focus on positive or beneficial outcomes derived from engaging in recreational activities. Benefits-Based Planning and Management provides the conceptual framework to view, plan and collaboratively deliver recreation services as a means to a larger end – outcomes that benefit individuals, communities, economies and the environment.
- **Recreation Activity Management Plans (RAMPs)** – Activity plans that describe multiple projects that apply best management practices to meet the land use plan objectives. These plans provide specific direction for recreation management in the defined areas building on the general direction of the land use plan.

No matter the model used, the first step in successful planning is understanding what the resource provides and what its limitations are. Just as importantly is an understanding of recreational users' current participation and interests. At a statewide level, a survey is conducted every five years (Appendix A), however, there are benefits to developing a simple local survey or listening sessions in each community within the county to engage users, listen to their thoughts and ideas, and determine what will benefit the area. Based on this information plans can connect the resource to the use and determine what future opportunities exist to meet gaps identified by users. Plans that include county-wide or region-wide strategies, implementation, and success measures are challenging but necessary. Once completed, the planning group needs to communicate to additional stakeholders and users who were not involved in the plan while continuing the discussion and evaluation of the plan over time. Updates should be sought at a minimum every five years.

By the 2014 submittal of the Land & Water Conservation Fund grant round, all grantees will submit a copy of their local plan along with their grant request.

## **OUTDOOR RECREATION IN IOWA GOALS**

- **Goal 1:** Invest in sound local and regional planning, including the integration of outdoor recreation, health and natural resources conservation and protection, as well as to provide a comprehensive and diverse vision.
- **Goal 2:** Provide seamless delivery of outdoor recreation from all recreation providers encouraging private-public partnerships that share a common vision for high-quality, sustainable and resource benefitting opportunities.
- **Goal 3:** Bring together agencies, stakeholders, users and private sector business to focus on linear trails (hard, soft and wet surfaces) to develop sound comprehensive planning for a high quality trails system in Iowa.
- **Goal 4:** Develop tools to assist local entities (governments and stakeholders) in building a constituency that supports and is active in outdoor recreation efforts.

## SUCCESS STORY

### INDIAN CREEK GREENBELT TRAIL

*Story County Extension*

#### Project Description

Several years ago, the need to add bike lanes/pedestrian access from the southern city limits of Nevada south to the Indian Creek Country Club was identified as a priority due to a high volume of pedestrian/bike use and no identified shoulders. However, a lack of funding to do the project was a major obstacle to complete this 1.7-mile segment. In 2011, after Story County paved its piece of the roadway to the country club, a group of private individuals, county officials and city officials came together to add 6-foot wide paved shoulders along this stretch of roadway.

The total project is estimated at \$488,515 and is set for construction in the summer of 2013. To date \$456,280 has been committed to the project through a public-private partnership that includes Story County (\$200,000), City of Nevada (\$25,000), CIRTPA (\$126,780), three private grants (\$55,000), and private donations (\$49,500) from trail supporters and individuals living along the route.

Because of this partnership, the Nevada community is enhancing the safety and quality of life of its citizens.

#### Community Benefits

##### Safe Routes for Children

- Provide safe route for children traveling to and from school and extra-curricular activities.

##### Healthy Lifestyles & Healthy Planet

- Enhance health and recreational opportunities for residents living in the area.
- Connect area residents with City of Nevada Indian Creek Green Belt Trail System, which also connects with Ames.
- Create educational opportunities for students to access Hertz Family Woods and Nature Preserve.

##### Community and Economic Betterment

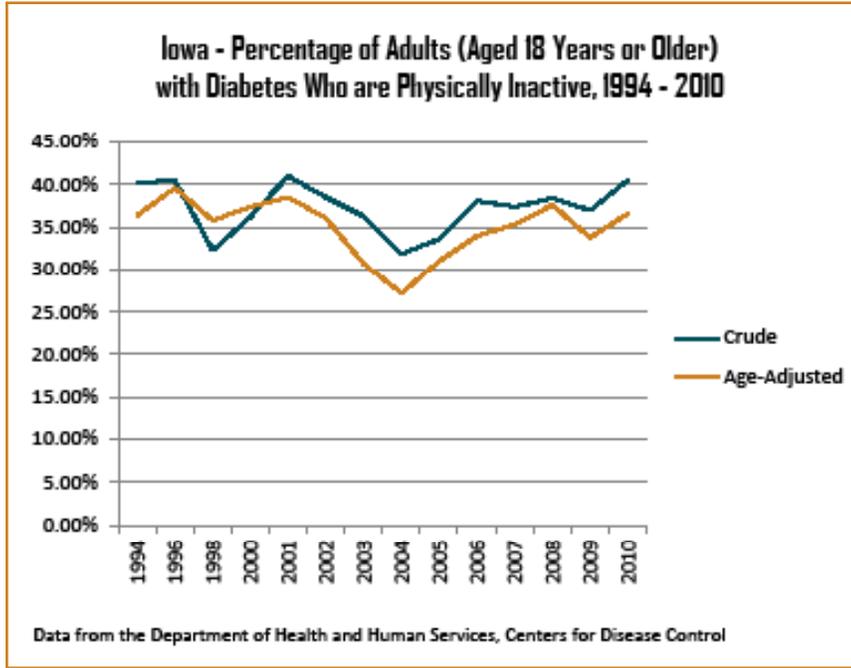
- Advance attractiveness of the area to spur further development and economic benefits.
- Be genesis for City of Nevada connection with Heart of Iowa Nature Trail, a part of the American Discovery Trail passing through many cities from the east to west coasts of the United States.

**PRIORITY 4: Promote outdoor recreation as a means to achieve a healthier lifestyle, enhancing the quality of life for all Iowans**

**ISSUE**

You cannot turn on the television or radio without hearing advertisements or newscasts on the increasing number of obese adults and children. According

**FIGURE 12**



to 2008 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, roughly 25 percent of adults did not participate in any type of physical activity during their free time. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services *Healthy People 2020 Plan* states that more than 80 percent of adults do not meet the minimum requirements for physical activity. Their studies show that inactivity contributes to the rise in obesity, diabetes and other diseases (Figure 12).

Children are influenced by the behaviors and lifestyle patterns of their parents. As adult participation in physical activity decline, there is a direct correlation to the decrease in children’s participation. The same *Healthy People 2020 Plan* notes that like adults, over 80 percent of children are not meeting minimum levels of physical activity. Just in media time alone (computers, video games, cellular

devices, television) children up to age 18 spend from 6-7 hours “connected” to technology according to a Kaiser Family Foundation Study (Table 8).

**TABLE 8**

Inactivity, in adults and children, leads to numerous health issues. Every year,

**Among All 8- to 18-Year-Olds, Average Amount of Time Spent with Each Medium in a Typical Day**

Media	2009	2004	1999
TV Content	4:29	3:51	3:47
Music/Audio	2:31	1:44	1:48
Computer	1:29	1:02	0:27
Video Games	1:13	0:49	0:26
Print	0:38	0:43	0:43
Movies	0:25	0:25	0:18
Total Media Exposure	10:45	8:33	7:29
Multitasking proportion	29%	26%	16%
Total Media Use	7:38	6:21	6:19

Total media exposure is the sum of time spent with all media.  
 Multitasking proportion is the proportion of media time that is spent using more than one medium concurrently.  
 Total media use is the actual number of hours out of the day that are spent using media, taking multitasking into account.

\*Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8-18-Year-Olds , Victoria J. Rideout, M.A., Ulla G. Foehr, Ph.D and Donald F. Roberts, Ph.D., A Kaiser Family Foundation Study, January 2010

1,000 U.S. adults are surveyed daily by the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index. This data looks at six areas of well-being: life evaluation; emotional health; physical health; healthy behavior; work environment and basic access. According to their findings (Figure 13) government health agencies and medical practitioners around the nation are concerned about the rise in obesity, and American citizens concern has risen by 15 percent in just 10 years. In 2008, the Centers for Disease Control noted that more than one third of children and adolescents were overweight or obese, while in Iowa 37 percent of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were overweight or obese (Figure 14). Obesity can lead to an increase in Type II diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and cholesterol, and many other health complications.

**RECOMMENDATION**

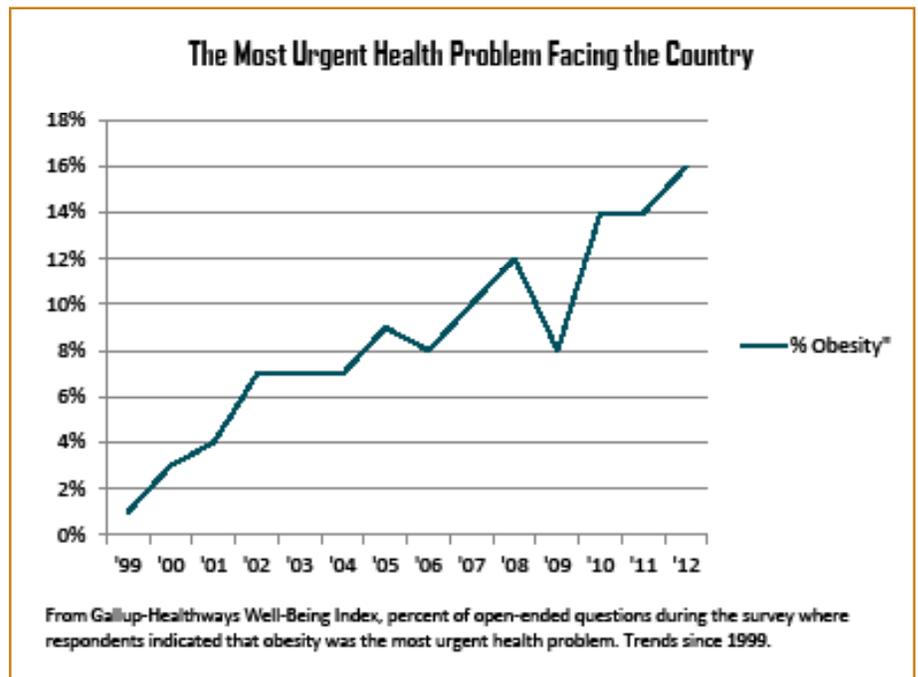
Natural resource and recreation providers need to partner with the Iowa Department of Public Health’s Iowans Fit for Life initiative, Iowa Blue Zones, and other healthy Iowan initiatives organized across the state. Many



partner groups have goals that contribute to healthier living and getting people more active that can be achieved through outdoor recreation. For example, the Iowa Department of Public Health's *Iowa's Health Improvement Plan, 2012 - 2016* has the following strategies for improving the state by 2016:

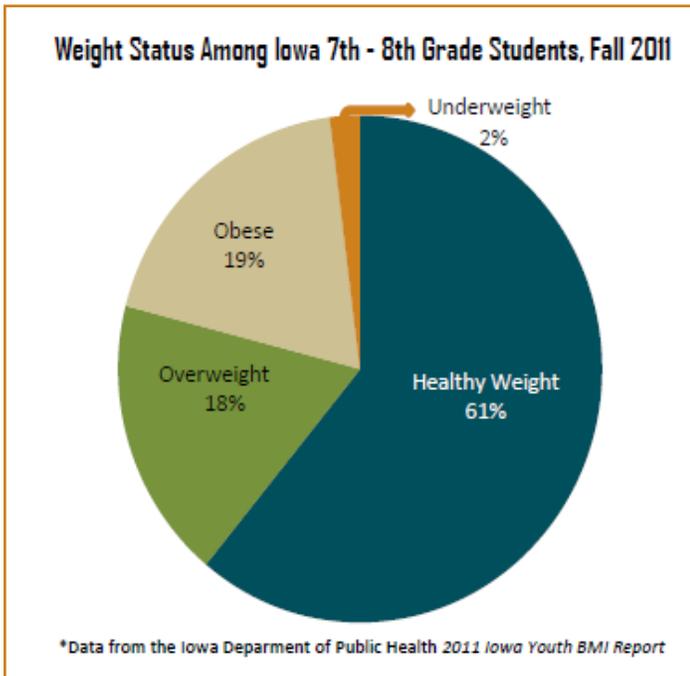
**FIGURE 13**

- By 2013, increase the number of facilities/environments to promote healthy eating and physical activity by 5 percent.
- By 2013, increase the number of community coalitions addressing nutrition, physical activity and obesity by 5 percent.
- Increase by 2 percent Iowans' overall participation rate in more physically active, natural resources-based outdoor recreation activities as listed in the Outdoor Recreation Plan for Iowa.



- Reduce by 5 percent the disparity in physical activity and obesity between persons with disabilities and those without disabilities.
- Increase awareness of at least 5 percent to 10 percent among lowans about the link between outdoor recreation and healthy lifestyles, based on benchmarks established in the Outdoor Recreation Plan for Iowa.

**FIGURE 14**



Additionally, with the 2012 Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index ranking Iowa #9 in the nation for physical, emotional and mental health, Governor Branstad announced a plan, Iowa’s Healthiest State Initiative, with a goal of making Iowa #1 in the nation. This is a public-private initiative that will help Iowans to live healthier lifestyles. The centerpiece to this initiative is Iowa’s participation in the Blue Zones Project, a community-based effort helping individuals make better choices through change in their communities. The first communities chosen as Blue Zones in 2012 are Mason City, Spencer, Cedar Falls and Waterloo. One focus area for Blue Zone communities is the environment in which people live. The project states “the best communities are ones that provide safe, fun ways for people to get outside and move.”

Leading a healthy lifestyle means being physically active. In Iowa, recreation within our natural resource areas, walking in a wildlife area observing nature, biking down a trail system, etc., are affordable ways to get active. Many Iowans

have close and easy access to city, county, state or federal areas. The closer and easier it is to hop on a walking and biking trail the more likely Iowans will do it. Efforts across the state have been initiated as described above. It is crucial for public and private entities to partner and combine efforts for those existing and new strategies to be successful. It has been shown that just being outdoors is a great way to relieve stress, “getting away from it all.” Iowa offers numerous opportunities to get away and explore.

#### **OUTDOOR RECREATION IN IOWA GOALS**

- **Goal 1:** Link outdoor recreation and participation to desired wellness and public health benefits.
- **Goal 2:** Collaborate with existing Healthy Iowans, state and county initiatives to promote outdoor recreation and increase participation.

## SUCCESS STORY

### THE SAFARI ADVENTURE

*The Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative*

What comes to mind with the word “safari?” The Amazon Rainforest? African jungles? Rural Iowa?? Iowa’s farmland and gently rolling hills seem like an uncommon place for a safari, but that is exactly what can be found during the summer in Northeast Iowa.



From Memorial Day to Labor Day, the bluffs and valleys of Winneshiek County buzz with excitement as people of all ages take part in Driftless Safari, named after the region’s driftless landscape. A free, county-wide treasure hunt, Driftless Safari creates opportunities for families and groups to actively explore the great outdoors while searching for natural, cultural and historical treasures throughout the county. The program aims to promote physical activity, community engagement and environmental stewardship among Winneshiek County residents and visitors.

The treasure hunt features 20 sites throughout the county including parks, libraries, wildlife areas, bike trails and historic landmarks. Participants receive a Driftless Safari map and guidebook to assist in their search of the hidden wooden post located at each site. Participants have all summer to visit as many sites as they can in any order; prizes are awarded to those who visit 15 or more sites. Once participants discover a post, the adventure has only just begun. Driftless Safari encourages families to continue playing and exploring by giving background information and suggestions for other activities at each site along the treasure hunt. This fundamental element of the program helps participants build a sense of connection with these places, bringing them back time and again for more exploration and fun.

Since 2011, Driftless Safari has been a tremendous success, thanks to efforts and support from the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative, the Winneshiek County Conservation Board and countless other organizations and sponsors. The Iowa DNR, a key partner of the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative, was among the organizations involved in making the program a success.



Almost 2,000 individuals have participated in the treasure hunt, some from as far away as New Jersey and Texas. Upon completion of the program, participants reported being more likely to participate in healthful physical activity, being more concerned about protecting natural resources and being inspired to spend

*Continued...*

more time outside with their family. After completing the Driftless Safari with her family, one participant commented, “For me, it is like having free mini-vacations all summer long right here at home.” Another woman traveled with her four children from Cedar Rapids, a four-hour round trip, just to participate in Driftless Safari; the family visited all 20 sites in just one day.

The safari movement in Northeast Iowa is not going away any time soon. Plans are already underway for next year’s Driftless Safari program, and word of the program’s success is spreading fast to others in Northeast Iowa and beyond. Another Northeast Iowa safari program, Turkey River Safari, took off during the summer of 2012 around the Turkey River Recreation Corridor in Clayton and Fayette Counties. Allamakee County Economic Development, also in Northeast Iowa, is working hard to start their own program in 2013. Additionally, the Driftless Safari program is being highlighted at conferences across the state and Midwest.

Driftless Safari is based on a similar program developed in Lincoln, Nebraska. More information about Driftless Safari can be found on its website, [www.driftless-safari.org](http://www.driftless-safari.org). Check out other exciting outdoor recreation and health-promoting activities going on in Northeast Iowa by visiting the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative website at [www.iowafoodandfitness.org](http://www.iowafoodandfitness.org) and the Winneshiek County Conservation Board website at [www.winneshiekwild.com](http://www.winneshiekwild.com).

**PRIORITY 5: Better understand Iowans’ outdoor recreation wants and needs, and develop effective tools that connect them to Iowa’s natural resource opportunities, based on their unique demographics and interests**

**ISSUE**

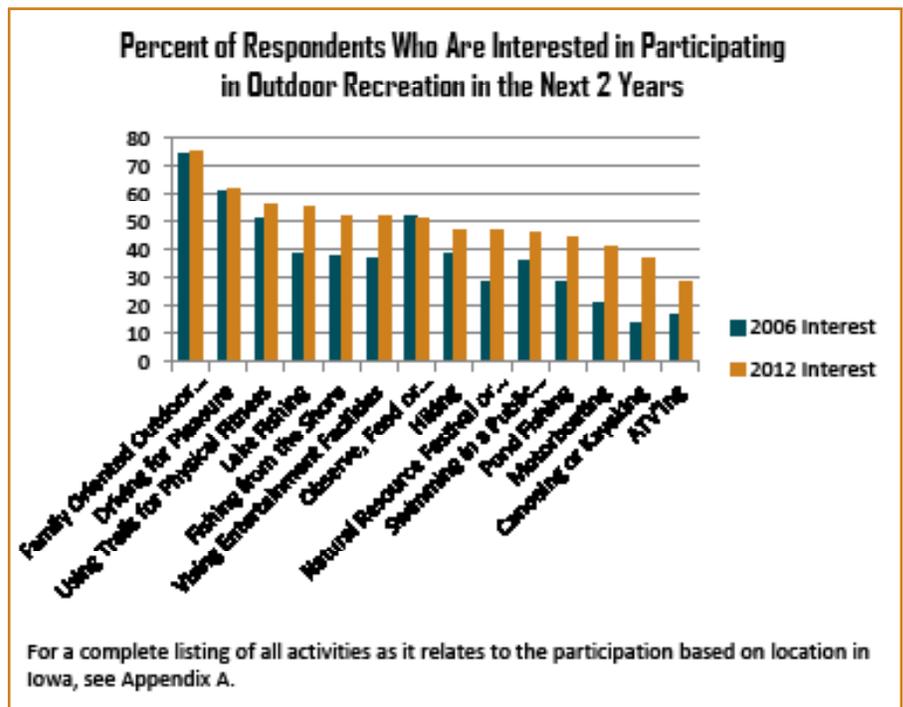
Each Iowan, regardless of age, makes decisions every day on how to spend free time. With so many options available (i.e. work, technology, movies, after school activities, TV, etc.) Iowans need to be reminded and encouraged to go outside, walk in the woods, fish in the river, or bike down a trail.

Natural resource agencies are not selling something tangible; they are selling experiences. Positive experiences lead to continued increases in participation.

According to the 2012 *Statewide Recreation Survey of Iowans*, there is strong interest in many recreational activities like canoeing or kayaking which increased by 23 percent from 2006 (**Figure 15**). This interest is only as good; however, as the availability or willingness of participants to get engaged. When respondents to the survey were asked what would encourage them to participate or participate more actively, 31 percent said nothing and 29 percent said more free time (**Figure 16**). In the Iowa Parks Foundation Citizen Attitude and Interest Survey, respondents said that they lack of free time (33 percent) was the greatest reason they weren’t visiting state parks more often. These responses, along with data that shows adults and children are more inactive, are challenges for natural resource agencies in getting more people outdoors.

When respondents to the 2012 Statewide Recreation Survey were asked their satisfaction with natural resource offerings, 93 percent were satisfied. This was also noted in the survey conducted by the Iowa Parks Foundation and has been heard in public forums across the state in discussions about state parks and for the 2012 listening sessions. What is communicated to the Department more frequently through these face-to-face opportunities that is not strongly represented in the surveys is the desire to have more information about where to go to participate and what to do. Discussions tended to go towards, participants requesting more print documentation but also more information on the internet through websites and through social media offerings. There was also a strong suggestion by many for the natural resource agencies to partner more frequently with the Iowa Department of Tourism, as well as with local tourism and economic development offices to promote opportunities in which to participate.

**FIGURE 15**

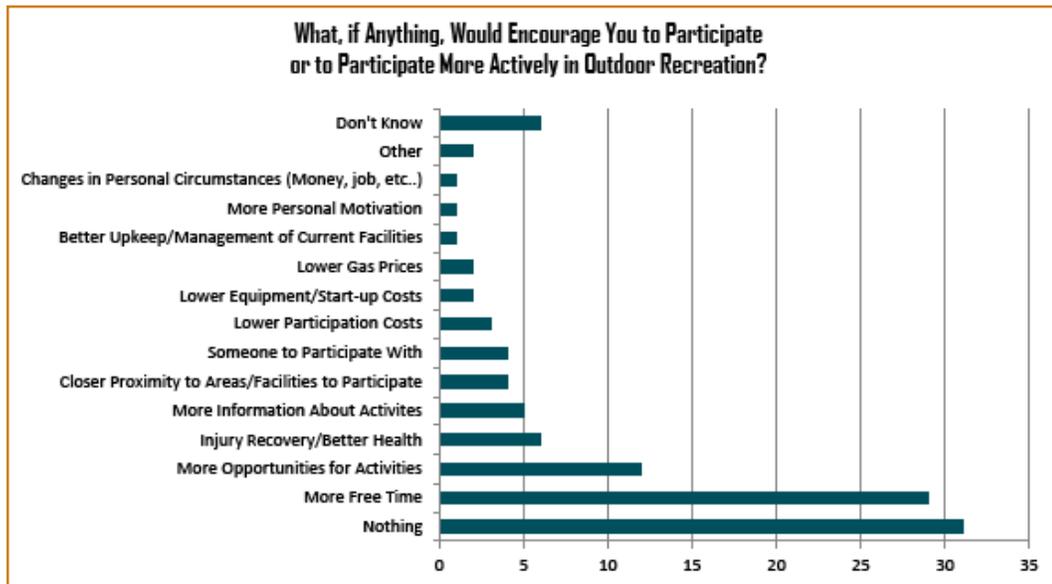


## RECOMMENDATION

What do specific recreational users want and need; what keeps them from recreating; what market segments are more interested in which recreational activities? In 2012 natural resource agencies have more data on what lowans want in natural resources opportunities and conservation than ever before. For this plan, 2013 – 2017, there are at least four Iowa- specific surveys available and a number of national surveys with current data for comparison. This sets the stage for thoughtful analysis and planning to connect lowans to the outdoors. However, this data alone is not sufficient. Over time, users’ needs will change due to technology, time, barriers, etc. Frequent qualitative and quantitative survey tools such as targeted focus groups, interviews, and general surveys should be conducted to help target new efforts and assess success of past opportunities.

FIGURE 16

“Marketing” and “advertising” were common terms used at many of the 2012



public forums conducted by the DNR and for the outdoor recreation plan. Marketing can be looked at as an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, delivering and communicating value to customers, and managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its shareholders. In this case, the organization is Iowa’s outdoor recreation infrastructure.

The set of engagements necessary for successful marketing management includes: capturing customer

insights, connecting with customers, building strong brands, shaping the products and services to meet customer needs, delivering and communicating value, creating long-term growth, and developing marketing strategies and plans. To promote outdoor recreation as a service to lowans in ways that provides value to them, we must have a basic understanding of customer wants and needs before to develop strategies that benefit natural resource as well as the recreation participants.

In an article by Francis Pandolfi, chief operating officer of the United States Forest Service and former Chairman of the American Recreation Coalition’s Recreation Roundtable, the author compared recreational opportunities to traditional consumer product brands. The eight considerations he mentioned were:

- A well-articulated strategy based on a thoughtful analysis of information about demand and supply trends.
- Up-to-date, credible data for evaluating decisions, alternatives and their potential consequences.

- A focus of energy and resources on investing in those options where the returns will be the greatest. Which opportunities are most valued by our customers relative to their costs?
- A careful transition from a mostly extractive resource emphasis on much of our public lands to a more balanced emphasis between commodities, recreation, and ecosystem health.
- Adequate staffing by employees with appropriate skills and an improved organizational structure for effectively providing high-quality recreation opportunities. Appropriately building the right mix of skills will be particularly important in government where marketing and customer service have not historically been widely practiced.
- Continue to conduct (and even accelerate) research to clearly define people’s wants for outdoor experiences and how satisfied they are with that experience.
- Improve information and educational materials (printed literature, on-site signage, etc.) for delivering quality customer service and for improving product development as technology yields new recreation equipment.
- Establish partnerships with others with knowledge and expertise in areas government do not have.

Iowa is a state where participation in many outdoor recreational opportunities is free, other than licenses and equipment. As participation grows, a secondary effect might be an increase in funds due to license sales, campground stays, bike trail use, and gear purchases. This, however, is a secondary effect because the desired outcome is getting Iowans to experience the outdoors, spending their limited leisure time outside, learning about the resource, and ultimately conserving and protecting it for future generations.

**“Loyal customers rely on their favorite products week in and week out. They don’t have to worry whether they’re getting the best deal because they know the brands they love deliver the best products at a good value every day.” - Procter & Gamble Company**

## OUTDOOR RECREATION IN IOWA GOALS

- **Goal 1:** Conduct follow-up surveys of Iowans to determine their decision-making process when prioritizing their leisure time and what types of information and tools can be created to help make recreation and conservation an everyday lifestyle choice.
- **Goal 2:** Using a multi-faceted approach (formal and informal educational processes), promote youth participation in the outdoors striving for a greater understanding, appreciation and use of Iowa’s resources.
- **Goal 3:** Create an on-line and easily accessible tool for users to locate recreational opportunities across Iowa.

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