

Potential New Land Conservation Initiatives

1. Establish Conservation Focus Areas

The 2002 Farmland and Natural Area Protection Plan identified 42,000 acres of farmland and 36,000 acres of natural areas as being eligible for protection. Staff used lakes, rivers and streams; public conservation lands, privately protected lands, hydrology, potential wetland restoration sites; land cover; natural resource quality; upland restoration potential; connectivity and land ownership to identify and map 29 individual and interconnected Conservation Focus Areas (CFA) throughout the County. Preliminarily, the CFAs total approximately 81,300 acres, of which approximately 34,000 acres are permanently protected.

These CFAs would become the framework for future outreach and subsequent land conservation projects. Landowner teams would be organized to assess the issues and opportunities for each of the CFAs to determine respective priorities, goals and future land protection and natural resource improvement projects. It is expected that CFA boundaries will evolve based on the conservation teams' work. In some cases, the areas may be deleted due to lack of landowner interest or relative importance. In other cases, lands could be added. Wetland restoration hydrology involves a number of unknowns and will likely alter project boundaries and require different approaches.

Note: Other eligible areas could include standalone, forest tracts; smaller scale wetland restoration sites and important open space areas within the cities.

2. Develop a County/City Conservation Collaborative (CCCC)

Using the Regional Greenways Collaborative model, a similar collaborative would be formed between the cities and the County to protect key undeveloped areas and to increase natural resource restoration and management within city parks and other city conservation areas. The CCCC would identify land protection priorities and opportunities; use the County template to develop natural resource management plans and priorities for city properties; develop joint grant proposals; improve efficiencies and lower costs for purchasing seed, nursery stock, and other materials; and potentially share staff resources and equipment.

3. Create a Dakota County Conservation Trust

Short- and long-term natural resource restoration, management and maintenance on protected private lands was identified as a critical and ongoing challenge. County staff research did not identify a private County-affiliated entity with a primary focus on natural resource management of private lands. However, the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust provides a local model for Dakota County to potentially collect and disburse private funds for natural resource management on protected private lands.

4. Assist in Implementation of Groundwater Plan

It is expected that Drinking Water Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMAs) and other sensitive groundwater infiltration areas may require changes to land use that will not overlap with the proposed CFAs. It is likely that one or more Groundwater Plan strategies will be to use the Land Conservation Program to assist in implementing the Groundwater Plan.

5. Improve Conservation in Agricultural Use Areas

Many of the proposed CFAs and the Groundwater Plan Implementation activities will involve lands currently used for agricultural purposes. In order to achieve natural resource goals in these areas, it may be necessary or advantageous to support conservation improvements or conversion of agricultural lands. Potential lands include existing County agricultural easements, land within or in close proximity to CFAs, and lands linked hydrologically to surface water or DWSMAs. It is envisioned that the County would assist the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District as they lead these activities.