

# **Conservation Board Priorities & Strategies**

## **BOARD APPROVED ON 12/9/08**

### **I. Education**

#### **Indicators**

- **Increase the number of Green Education programs offered by 20 percent in the next three years.**
- **Increase participation in outdoor programs by 30 percent in the next three years.**
- **Complete an annual assessment of the impact of using the arts, service learning, unstructured outdoor programming, and traditional nature programming on learning.**
- **Program participants will increase their use of “green practices” by 15 percent in the next three years.**

#### **Priority: Going Green Education**

##### **1a) *Partner to develop a Green Education program for Greater Des Moines.***

- Develop with education partners (particularly MWA, DMWW, other CCBs, classroom educators, Green/Arts and others) to clearly define “green education,” hone in on PCC/partners mission and core competencies, identify audiences and key messages/goals/objectives.
- Translate above work into collaborative offerings and/or coordinated calendar for “going green” programming.

##### **1b) *Integrate Going Green education into PCC environmental education.***

- Adopt or expand on partnered green education goals/objectives and develop “going green” education/outreach modules to incorporate into existing programs and publications.
- Evaluate offerings each year, and adapt programming as appropriate.

#### **Priority: Focusing on the mental & physical benefits of outdoor activity**

##### **1c) *Implement partnerships that increase participation in outdoor programs.***

- Build upon the success of Louv’s visit and the associated partnerships, particularly with Iowagreen.com and the Polk County Health Department.
- Build upon the success of the Playscape project in assessing other opportunities.
- Develop and/or enhance relationships with organizations involved in tourism and/or promoting outdoor recreation/education to develop and implement marketing strategies.
- Implement at least three major initiatives to connect people to the outdoors targeting: 1) families, 2) young adults, 3) supporting field trips for school groups.

**1d) *Develop incentives to encourage participation in outdoor activities.***

- Increase opportunities to go into the wild or natural areas for unstructured outdoor experiences.
- Determine what specific activities to target for greater participation, analyze what incentives may be appropriate and develop a marketing program for each which may involve partnering with other organizations.

### **Priority: Combine science, humanities and service learning**

**1e) *Accommodate a variety of learning styles.***

- Identify the various types of learning styles & the best methods to address each style, build programs based upon these learning styles.
- Assess how the programming offered meets the learning style it was developed to address –explore the impact of using the arts, service learning, unstructured outdoor programming, and more traditional nature programming on learning.

### **Priority: Focus on technology**

**1f) *Assess the impact of technology on environmental education***

## **II. Outdoor Recreation**

### **Indicators**

- **Acquire substantial funding for at least one trail connection in the next three years.**
- **Achieve sustainable surfaces on 20 percent of the non-paved trail miles in the next three years.**
- **Identify the green and gray costs per mile for trail maintenance by the end of the first year of the plan.**
- **Increase funding available for trail maintenance to the level of 80 percent of the national standard per mile in the next three years.**
- **Develop three partnership agreements for the maintenance of non-paved trails in the next three years.**

### **Priority: Outdoor recreation as a gateway to green education and conservation**

**2a) *Combine opportunities for outdoor recreation with green education.***

- Create “park specific” opportunities and focus existing resources on developing and delivering those opportunities.
- Link skills building programs to Going Green education.
- Promote low impact, environmentally sensitive recreation opportunities.
- Increase the use of green signage throughout the park system.

## **Priority: Trails and amenities**

**2b)** *Evaluate the non-paved trail needs in each Polk County park. .*

- Evaluate on a cost-benefit basis existing and potential non-paved trails.
- Develop partnerships to complete maintenance activities.

**2c)** *Facilitate the development of plans to address current and ongoing needs for a sustainable paved trail.*

- Serve as a catalyst for locating regional maintenance resources and developing trail amenity guidelines.
- Pursue the coordination of maintenance and rules enforcement across jurisdictions.
- Initiate the documentation of maintenance costs by participating entities.
- Implement an affordable standardized signage system.
- Work with additional new partners to promote and facilitate trail completions.

**2d)** *Pursue alternative transportation connections and access to and from the Polk County parks system.*

- Assess the viability of existing transportation corridors, roads and nature trails to serve as non-motorized access.
- Develop connections to the Central Iowa Trails System in Ft. Des Moines and Browns Woods.
- Build the Easter Lake trail.
- Identify potential trail and/or complete street connections to Jester Park.

## **III. Resource Conservation**

### **Indicators**

- **Increase the acreage of protected land resources by 300 acres over the next three years.**
- **Increase the acreage of actively managed lands by 100 acres annually.**
- **Completion of three pond studies over the next three years.**
- **Acquire the funding match for the completion of the Easter Lake restoration program within the next three years.**
- **Remove 20 percent of the ash trees in mowed areas annually.**
- **Plant 200 trees as ash replacements annually.**

## **Priority: Land Protection and Preservation**

**3a)** *Develop and implement a land protection and preservation plan.*

- Develop criteria to be used to prioritize land protection and preservation.

- Analyze the impact of the County's 2030 plan and similar plans of other local governments.
- Develop an aggressive land use protection program within existing parklands to address infill or expansion to adjacent parklands.
- Partner with INHF, NCRS, DNR and others to promote the role of land protection in flood mitigation.
- Participate in Green Belt/Blue Belt initiatives such as the Des Moines & Raccoon River Greenbelt and the Ankeny Blue Belt.

**3b) *Develop and execute a land protection funding plan.***

- Research potential funding sources used by other organizations involved in land preservation and protection.
- Evaluate the internal resources required to enhance current efforts.
- Evaluate the possibility of involving corporate partners.
- Establish a targeted amount of funds to have available.
- Partner to establish a land protection and conservation easement monitoring fund.

**3c) *Continue to build upon the Southeast Polk green infrastructure plan.***

- Develop cooperative agreements between the County and local communities to protect water input which remain in effect if lands are annexed.
- Identify adequate corridors to protect watershed areas.
- Identify funding sources to continue efforts.

**3d) *Watershed, Water quality and Fisheries Protection.***

- Continue with the Easter Lake restoration project.
- Continue with pond studies using a comprehensive approach.
- Implement the pond restoration plan in Thomas Mitchell Park.

## **Priority: Active Land Management**

**3e) *Pursue additional sources of skilled labor, funding, partnerships and mechanized equipment to accomplish annual priorities..***

- Develop yearly priorities and identify the resources necessary to accomplish them.

**3f) *Implement a proactive invasive species plan to address emerald ash borer, gypsy moths, invasive shrubs, herbaceous and aquatic plants.***

## **IV. Organizational Development**

### **Indicators**

- **Park master plans will be completed for three parks in the next three years.**

- **Enhanced communication capabilities will be extended to all outlying areas by the end of the plan.**
- **Tools to measure the impact of outdoor recreation programming and conservation initiatives will be in place by the end of the plan.**
- **Each work unit will develop and implement a green practices plan by the end of the second year of the plan.**
- **Polk County Conservation's carbon footprint will be identified by the end of year 2 and reduced by 10 percent by the end of the plan.**

## **Priority: Parks Development**

### *4a) Develop park/linear park master plans.*

- Gather input from neighbors, staff, the public, conservation groups, and current park users in the development process.
- Evaluate the impact of such factors as ADA accessibility, user safety, park topography, hydrology, eco systems, natural amenities, existing opportunities within the park and within reasonable proximity to the park, recreational trends, unique opportunities, urban sprawl and planned development, etc.
- Evaluate the viability of identifying an overall percentage of parkland that should be available for development, then allocating that percentage amongst the parks based upon their current and anticipated usage, and unique characteristics.
- Evaluate the opportunity for revenue generation to help offset development and maintenance costs.
- Establish trail heads and access points in location that encourage people to explore the "natural" areas of the parks. Develop signage with specific information about opportunities using the area will provide, and what the user may expect to experience.
- Evaluate proper use and preservation of trail corridors/linear parks and their connections.

## **Priority: Technology**

### *4b) Develop a comprehensive 5 year technology plan.*

- Assess the costs and time frames necessary to extend communications capabilities to remote areas.
- Evaluate the potential for web-based applications.
- Analyze opportunities available through technology for efficiencies.
- Continue emphasis on data base development.

## **Priority: Outcome measurement**

### *4c) Fine tune tools measuring the impact of education programming.*

- Evaluate how tools used by Environmental Education may be used by other units.
- Research the availability and feasibility of other tools.

### **4d) Develop effective tools to measure the impact of outdoor recreation programming and conservation initiatives.**

- 4e) Ensure systems are in place to analyze the results of the measurements in comparison to best practices and incorporate the results into operations.

## **Priority: Operational enhancements**

4f) *Integrate green practices and methods throughout the organization, including practices at the work unit level and individual action.*

- Develop “green criteria” –what does “green mean”.
- Develop an operational plan establishing priorities for green practices.
- Model appropriate “green” behaviors in the parks.

4g) *Continue efforts to streamline operations enhance teamwork and intra organizational cooperation and collaboration.*

- Annually assess the operational efficiencies and effectiveness of the organization.
- Convene intra organizational teams as appropriate to facilitate effective communication, planning, resource management and service delivery.
- Evaluate the existing sources of labor, equipment and materials needed to accomplish priorities, and identify gaps.
- Analyze all costs associated with all potential program expansions and the impact on current staff resources.

4h) *Continue to pursue enhancing relationships with key strategic partners and participating fully in county-wide priorities.*

- Participate in county-wide efforts at improving service to the public, planning and enhancing operational efficiencies
- Identify opportunities to partner with other County departments, other public sector organizations and the private and non-profit sectors to enhance programming and better serve the public.
- Identify and implement tools for effective partnering.

4i) *Continue to enhance internal communications*

- Develop a program to provide an overview of PCC to seasonal employees.
- Provide routine opportunities to staff to share their ideas on matters of interest and/or PCC priorities such as the budget, CIP, land protection and planning.
- Encourage staff to engage in two way communications and to share their knowledge with appropriate staff.

## **V. Parks Advocacy**

### **Indicators**

- **Participation in outdoor skills building programs will increase by 10 percent over the next three years.**

- **Parkland restoration projects will be identified and initiated in each park**
- **At least one parkland restoration project will be “completed” in each year of the plan.**
- **Increase patrol efforts directed at illegal ATV and 4-Wheel activity by 20 percent each year of the plan.**
- **Boundaries for at least one (1) park or paved trail will be identified annually.**

## **Priority: Parks Programming**

### *5a) Enhance opportunities available in each County park*

- Initiate contacts with neighbors, neighborhood associations, the media and others to promote opportunities available in each park.
- Develop and offer educational and outdoor skills building programs in cooperation with other county staff and others involved in outdoor recreation.

## **Priority: Public Safety**

### *5b) Enhance law enforcement services to persons using the amenities available through Polk County Conservation.*

- Develop plans and cost estimates for technology commonly used by law enforcement agencies.
- Provide recommendations on how most effectively to provide law enforcement services within the park system, on paved and non-paved trails, and in related areas.
- Interact with other law enforcement agencies to participate in county-wide initiatives, share resources as appropriate, and enhance staff development opportunities.
- Increase the emphasis placed upon ATV and 4-Wheel enforcement activities.

## **Priority: Park Natural Resources**

### *5c) Participate in efforts to maintain and enhance the natural resources in the park system.*

- Identify opportunities to expand parklands and communicate these opportunities to other appropriate County staff.
- Lead efforts to improve the conditions of ponds within the park system.
- Collaborate with the Natural Resources unit to identify and implement parkland restoration projects for Parks Advocacy staff to complete.

### *5d) Identify boundaries for all Polk County parks and trails.*

- Initiate a plan to conduct legal surveys of all existing parkland and trails. Identify situations where utilizing GPS technology may be a viable alternative.
- Actively work with neighbors to resolve issues.
- Implement the plan beginning with properties that present the most pressing need.
- Develop a law enforcement policy recommendation addressing encroachment.

## **VI. Community Outreach**

### **Indicators**

- **Increase the number of active volunteers by 25 percent over the next three years.**
- **Develop and implement a volunteer training program by year three of the plan.**
- **Implement the Family of Parks plan throughout 2009 and continue refinement in 2010 and 2011.**
- **Hold at least two (2) new “signature events” over the next three years.**
- **User groups will have taken over the responsibility for six (6) park events by year 3 of the plan.**
- **At a minimum, one (1) park/trail/facility user survey will be implemented each year.**

### **Priority: Advisory Committees and Task Forces**

#### *6a) Enhance the development of the Advisory Committee and PCC Task Forces*

- Provide opportunities for personal growth for members and emphasize continued opportunities to support PCC growth and development
- Support the Advisory Committee and task forces move forward in addressing specific priorities of the strategic plan.
- Serve as the liaison between the above groups and PCC work units to foster the development of partnerships

### **Priority: Public Involvement**

#### *6b) Continue to grow the public involvement program in keeping with PCC priorities*

- Work with other PCC staff to develop and implement plans to gather timely public involvement on matters of importance.
- Promote the value of volunteers to PCC staff
- Develop motivators to increase the number of volunteers participating on a routine basis with PCC
- Grow the frequency with which user groups accomplish park operations events.

#### *6c) Elevate the role of volunteers in delivering PCC programming/activities*

- Develop and administer training designed to provide volunteers with the necessary background and skills to coordinate other volunteers and manage an activity or program

### **Priority: Marketing and Promotions**

#### *6d) Update the marketing program to enhance the visibility of and participation in PCC programs*

- Update the plan working with PCC staff to develop yearly priorities.
- Implement the Family of Parks plan.

## **Priority: Events**

*6e) Coordinate the department's efforts to offer one-time, special and reoccurring events*

- Coordinate the assessment events in keeping with strategic priorities.
- Coordinate the development of the resources and plans.
- Assess the viability of "signature events" in each park.

## **VII. Construction Maintenance**

### **Indicators**

- **The completion of 85 percent of capital improvement projects within 15 percent of projected costs.**
- **Fifty (50) percent of the infrastructure development and maintenance projects will be completed in accordance with green building standards by the end of this plan.**
- **Full implementation of the Fleet Management system by December, 2009.**

## **Priority: Infrastructure Development and Maintenance**

*7a) Develop, revise and administer the Capital improvement plan*

- Implement the Capital Improvement Plan as resources allow.
- Project the potential funding available each year from all sources.
- Utilize "green building" techniques in new construction and remodeling projects.
- Evaluate the capital improvement plan based upon green standards. Incorporate green standards in CIP priority criteria.
- Develop a green construction and maintenance policy.
- Evaluate and enhance the process for the review and processing of change orders.

*7b) Institute life cycle cost/budgeting in the planning process.*

- Identify all "assets" that need to be included in the life cycle cost/budgeting process.
- Develop an asset replacement plan.
- Pursue alternative approaches to equipment replacement.
- Fully implement the fleet management system.

*7c) Education and Implementation of Green construction and maintenance practices.*

- Increase knowledge and education in green industry standards and practices.
- Evaluate upfront costs versus payback to determine the viability of green implementation on projects, equipment, vehicles, etc.
- Monitor savings to determine the benefit of green practices.
- Develop partnerships for "going green."

## VIII. Equestrian Center

### Indicators

- **Increase the number of at-risk and mentally/physically challenged clients participating in programming by 15 percent over the next three years.**
- **Increase the involvement of Equestrian user groups in Equestrian Center projects/events by 20 percent over the next three years.**
- **Increase the number of service learning opportunities offered by 20 percent over the next three years.**
- **Increase the level of funding from grants and donations by 20 percent over the next three years.**

### Priority: Programming

#### **8a) *Enhance programming offered to at-risk and mentally/physically challenged clients***

- Develop a detailed plan including the goals of the expansion and the resources needed.
- Identify potential sources of funding.

#### **8b) *Expand the opportunities for service learning at the Equestrian Center***

- Develop a detailed plan including the goals of the expansion and the resources needed.
- Offer service learning opportunities to targeted audiences.
- Identify potential sources of funding if needed.

#### **8c) *Provide education and information on environmentally sensitive equestrian programming to program participants.***

- Work in collaboration with other PCC staff to develop and deliver this information.

#### **8d) *Increase the involvement of Equestrian Center user groups in Equestrian Center projects and programming.***

- Involve user groups in trail maintenance planning and projects.
- Involve user groups in fund raising and special events.
- Enhance ongoing communications with user groups.