



Macon County Conservation District

10-year Master Plan



Macon County Conservation District Mission:

To promote the conservation of natural and cultural resources by acquiring, maintaining, and restoring natural areas and cultural sites so as to leave them unimpaired for future generations.

Acknowledgements:

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Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Envision: Alternative and Preferred Strategies	9
Chapter 2 Implement: Final Open Space Master Plan	36
Chapter 3 Analyze: Inventory and Analysis	54
Chapter 4 Connect: Community Engagement	141
Chapter 5 Appendix	155



Introduction

The Macon County Conservation District developed this plan, shaped by the community, to guide conservation area, facility, and program development decisions for the next ten years. This section introduces the District profile and the structure of the plan.

Purpose

The purpose of this Comprehensive Plan is to:

- Assess existing conservation areas, facilities, and programs.
- Determine community opinion about services and facilities.
- Identify conservation area, facility, and program needs.
- Develop ecological assessments and recommend best management practices for different habitats
- Define strategic and measurable goals and objectives.
- Provide an action plan to implement strategies over the next ten years.

Planning Process

The comprehensive planning process covers four key phases: Analyze, Connect, Envision, and Implement.

The planning process began in the spring of 2018 with an extensive inventory and analysis of the Macon County Conservation District's conservation areas and community context. Information on District programs and facilities was provided by District staff. During the Connect phase, staff, stakeholders, and the community shared their opinions about the District's conservation areas, facilities, programs, and needs.

Upon completion of the Analyze and Connect phases, the planning team met to develop and prioritize alternative and preferred strategies. The planning team then incorporated these strategies into action plan items plotted over a ten-year plan. The Board and District staff provided additional insights finalizing the plan.

How to Use the Plan

This Comprehensive Plan document will be used by the Macon County Conservation District as a guide for implementing action items over the next ten years. The first two chapters provide recommendations while the last two chapters provide supporting evidence of those recommendations gained through the Analyze and Connect phases. The Action Plan in Chapter Two should be thought of as a "working list" that will need to be updated annually.

STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT



analyze

Chapter One

Envision: Alternative and Preferred Strategies

Chapter One outlines the needs that arose during the Analyze and Connect phases. It provides the background of those needs, synthesizing the results from the previous phases into justification and background for future action items and the strategies to achieve them.

Chapter Two

Implement: Final Open Space Master Plan

Chapter Two outlines the highest priority strategies into a ten-year action plan. The action plan designates when strategies will occur and how to accomplish them.



connect

Chapter Three

Analyze: Inventory and Analysis

Chapter Three provides a detailed inventory of District facilities and conservation areas, and relevant adjacent land uses, as well as other conservation and preservation agency operations in the state. Conservation area assets were classified and size, location, amenities, and habitats were documented. This chapter also contains individual conservation area inventories and ecological assessments for each conservation area.

Chapter Four

Connect: Community Engagement

Chapter Four includes summaries of the online engagement platform, community meeting, stakeholder interviews, and staff workshop.



envision

Chapter Five

Appendix

Chapter Five contains the following documents:

- Online Survey Results
- Staff Workshop Summary
- Staff Workshop Comment Cards
- Community Meeting Summary
- Community Meeting Comment Cards
- Stakeholder Interview Summary
- Proposed Restoration Maps (2004 Master Plan)



implement

District Profile

The Macon County Conservation District service area covers about 585 square miles and serves a population of over 100,000 people. The Conservation District serves the entirety of Macon County and maintains almost 3,500 acres of recreation and conservation properties.

The Macon County Conservation District properties include five conservation areas with recreation amenities, nine undeveloped conservation areas, and several historical and educational facilities. In total, the District maintains 3,489.9 acres of land that serves the population of Macon County and several adjacent communities from other counties.

Macon County which is located in central Illinois, is largely composed of agricultural land and also includes several large agribusiness campuses. I-72 runs northeast-southwest through the county and several railroad lines pass through Decatur in the center of the county. There are 13 incorporated communities in Macon County: Argenta, Blue Mound, Boody, Decatur, Forsyth, Harristown, Long Creek, Macon, Maroa, Mount Zion, Niantic, Oreana, and Warrensburg. Decatur is the county seat and also has the largest population within the county. The Macon County Conservation District offices are located in Decatur. The map on the adjacent page illustrates the communities (and their populations) as well as other open space within and adjacent to Macon County.

In addition to Macon County Conservation District, the planning team and District staff identified other conservation and preservation agencies operating in Illinois. In total, there are 14 forest preserves and five conservation districts in the state, as seen on the map on the next page.

Organizational Structure

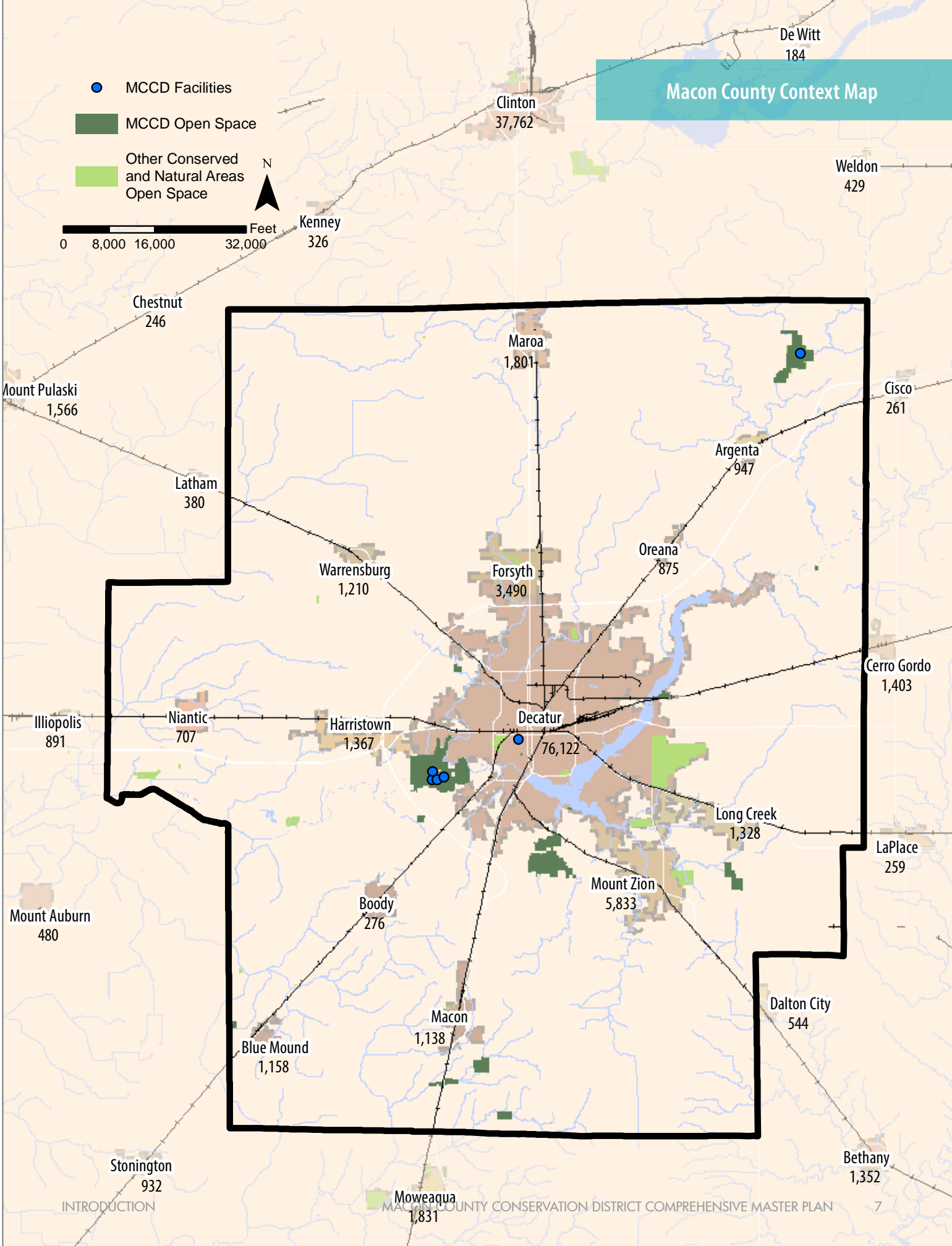
Macon County Conservation District is served by a five-member Board of Trustees. Board members are appointed for five-year terms. The Board is responsible for the development and operation of the conservation areas, facilities, and programs and communicates regularly with the Executive Director to ensure the District’s mission is being carried out. On a day-to-day basis, the Conservation District is managed by three departments overseen by the Executive Director: Operations, Program Services, and Administration. These departments are run by an operations manager, a marketing specialist, a finances and human resources manager, and a Nature Center manager who report to the Executive Director.

Related Plans

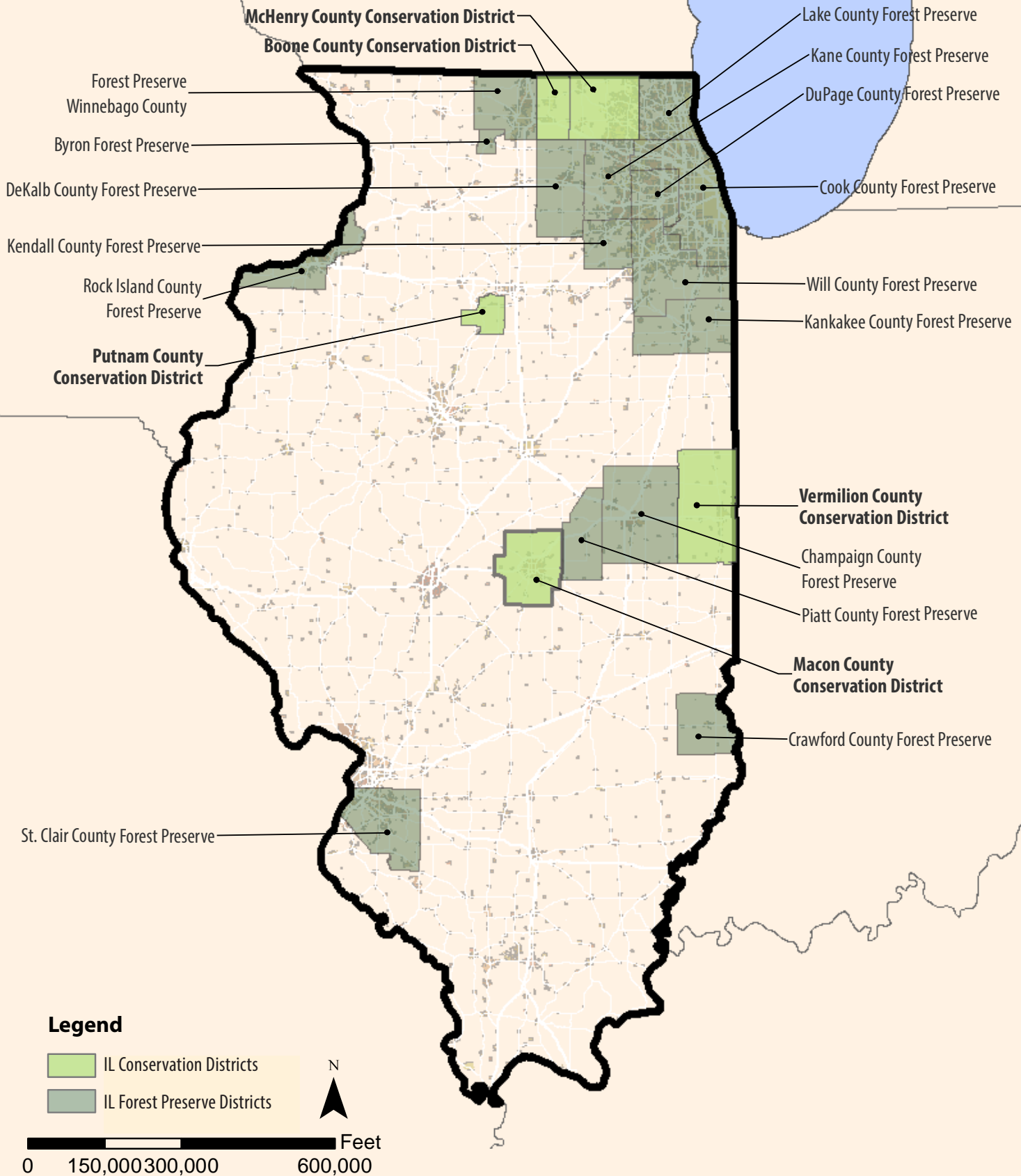
Related documents referenced during the master planning process included:

- Macon County Conservation District Master Plan (2004)
- Macon County and Decatur Comprehensive Plan (2009)
- Decatur Metro Area Greenway Plan (1998)
- Conservation area management plans
- Macon County Conservation District organizational chart
- Soil Survey of Macon County, Illinois (2009)

The Macon County
Conservation District was
founded in 1966 and celebrated
its 50th birthday in November
of 2016



Preservation Context Map



CHAPTER 1



Envision: Alternative and Preferred Strategies



Overview

This chapter documents the Envision: Alternative and Preferred Strategies Phase of the comprehensive master planning process.

Purpose

The purpose of the Envision: Alternative & Preferred Strategies Phase is to develop actionable items for the Conservation District to accomplish over the next ten years

During this phase, the planning team determined the community needs based on the data collected during the Analyze and Connect Phases. Each goal/need includes a list of strategies with recommendations to accomplish the goal and a description of the need. These were designated as recurring items or action plan items. The action plan items were later prioritized into the ten-year plan.

Chapter Outline

This chapter is organized by the defined goals, separated by classification. Action plan items are listed in the first half of the chapter while recurring items are found in the back half of the chapter. They are listed in the chronological order in which they occur in the action plan (found in Chapter 2).

Action Plan Items

Action plan goals were identified by the Planning Team and refined by Macon County Conservation District staff and board members to be accomplished over the next ten years.

Purpose

Items identified in the action plan focus on changes to existing programs or infrastructure or the addition of new items that will meet community needs identified in the Analyze and Connect Phases.

Section Outline

Each goal is categorized as planning and programs, facilities, conservation areas and open space, operations, or plan updates and includes a set of strategies to achieve the goal as well as a description of the need for the goal.

Planning and Programs:

- **Update Management Plan and Develop Prioritization List**
- Develop and implement **Interpretation Focus Groups**
- Plan and host **Special Events**
- Develop **District-wide Trail System and Public Access Plan**

Facilities:

- Complete planned **Interpretive Exhibit and Museum Renovations** at Rock Springs Conservation Area Nature Center
- Complete **Fort Daniel Conservation Area Restroom Improvements**
- Develop **Management and Restoration Standards for Farm Structures**
- Complete **Rock Springs Bottling Plant Interpretation** development

Conservation Areas and Open Space:

- Complete **Willow Branch II Restoration**
- Construct accessible **Improvements at Rock Springs Cattail Ponds**
- Develop and implement **Wayfinding Standards**
- Complete **Kaufman Conservation Area Activation**
- Complete **Wayfinding and Amenity Improvements**
- Complete **Willow Branch II Activation**
- Complete **Wright-Banton Audubon Area Activation**
- Expand **Internal Path System**
- Complete **Leiby Hall Conservation Area Activation**
- **Restore Willow Branch I**
- Complete **Willow Branch I Activation**
- Complete **Rock Springs Conservation Area Nature-based Play Expansion**

Operations:

- Evaluate **Staffing Organization and Growth Opportunities**
- Develop **Conservation District Benchmarking Standard**
- Evaluate **Partnerships for Natural Area Management**
- Develop plan to **Provide Shuttle Service** to conservation area events

Plan Updates:

- **Update Action Plan and Update Master Plan**

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

Update Management Plan and Develop Prioritization List

- Complete regular evaluations and updates of the management plan
- Identify and prioritize conservation areas and/or sections of conservation areas to be restored

Description

Maintaining and restoring natural areas and cultural sites is a key component of the Conservation District mission and was highly valued by the Connect Phase participants. It was the most highly prioritized activity in the online survey and staff workshop and was a frequent discussion point at the community meeting and stakeholder interviews. Despite the prominence of this goal, participants did not designate which conservation areas, or types of restoration work should receive priority and the District does not have an established rating system to determine priority.

The Conservation District, like any agency, is limited by the availability of resources when determining what projects to complete. In order to make best use of available funding, staff time, and materials the District keeps a management plan of best practices and procedures. This is a valuable practice that should be continued but also updated to account for changes in technology, available resources, and new practices. In addition to the management plan, the Conservation District should also track the restoration and maintenance requirements of the conservation areas. This prioritization list will identify and rank areas, or sections of areas, based on restoration type, need (benefits for water quality, animal habitat, etc.), upkeep, and other factors. This prioritization list will help the District understand and prepare for future investments and coordinate conservation area management with the District needs as a whole. An initial prioritization list was developed during the planning process. As time passes and projects are completed, the Conservation District will reevaluate and update this list to reflect District changes.

Develop and implement Interpretation Focus Groups

- Identify key community group representatives to provide input on community needs and the effectiveness of the District considering:
 - Age groups
 - Minority populations
 - Cultural groups
 - Special interest groups
- Leverage interpretation focus groups to gain community opinion on proposed types of interpretation considering:
 - Topics of interest
 - Exhibit format
 - Location and type of outreach
 - Special Events

Description

In order to best serve the Macon County community and surrounding population centers, the Conservation District must be aware of resident needs and interests. While a broad understanding of the community can be determined through census data, regional trends, and surveys, these methods do not always reflect the nuances of a community. The District already has relationships with a number of nature, educational, and agricultural groups as well as many of the other public agencies. Formalizing these relationships into a group or committee of representatives will allow the District to directly communicate with each group and allow the groups to interact with each other creating a clearer picture of how the Macon County community uses the Conservation District and interact with other agencies on a regular basis.

A group of trusted, informed community members and stakeholders could be a valuable resource to guide the District’s interpretive focus. This group would have the capacity to convey unmet needs, suggest specific educational topics, and serve as a gauge of public interest for new ideas and initiatives.

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

Plan and host Special Events

- Advertise the Conservation District to adjacent residents and communities who are most likely to use the local conservation areas
- Consider biannual and seasonal events with connections to the host site, considering:
 - Night hikes
 - Fishing derby
 - 5K, 10K, triathlon races
 - Animal meet-and-greets
 - Historic reenactments
- Consider alternative transportation options to draw visitors from all areas of the county

Description

Community awareness of the Macon County Conservation District and its locations and programs is not as broad as staff and community believe it should be. In the community meeting, improving public relations and branding was the second highest priority. A few participants in the community survey suggested expanding program and activity locations throughout the County to improve convenience for users who do not live in the center of the County. One of the greatest challenges of the Conservation District is the distribution of its publicly accessible conservation areas throughout the county. While it is not necessary to provide equitable service, it can lead to lower visitation at sites that are farthest from population centers and users who do not visit or are unaware of conservation areas they aren’t local to. To increase awareness of the full range of District sites and programs, the District could begin holding “open-houses” at the five conservation areas to encourage new visitation. These events and programs would be designed to showcase a particular site feature, activity, or element of the Conservation District mission a few times a year, expanding resident knowledge of District assets and ongoing projects and improvements. The Macon County Conservation Foundation and other area partners could also participate in the planning and implementation of these events to build recognition for their own groups and help reach a wider audience. It is recommended the first few events be scheduled at the least visited areas to showcase less known properties. After experiencing the Conservation District for the first time at these sites, visitors are more likely to travel to the better-known locations without incentives or special programs.

Develop District-wide Trail System and Public Access Plan

- Work with local agencies developing transportation, green-way, blue-way, and/or bicycle plans

Description

Walking and bicycling is a growing national and state recreation activity and is also popular among Conservation District visitors. Online survey participants reported “go for a walk/bike ride/get exercise” as the second-most common reason for visiting conservation areas, adding “more walking trails” as the second-most highly prioritized amenity to be added. Online survey participants also left over 20 comments requesting additional trails for a variety of uses. While not as highly prioritized by other stakeholders, interest in expanding the trail system was also mentioned in the staff workshop, community meeting, and stakeholder interviews. Conservation District staff are also aware that getting to conservation areas can be a challenge for some people. In the online survey, 5 out of 73 people stated that they don’t participate because they lack reliable public transportation.

The bike trail that connects the Nature Center (and Rock Springs Conservation Area) to the City of Decatur is a popular route and used regularly by area residents. More trail connections like this one could help connect the conservation areas to attract users and open visitation to people who currently do not have access to an area. There are already several groups who provide trail systems and other methods of access around the county. The Decatur Metro Area Greenway Plan (98) and the Macon County and Decatur Comprehensive Plan (09) include goals for trail and bicycle route expansion and proposed new routes. As plans are updated and new routes suggested, the Conservation District should look for opportunities to gain extensions to nearby conservation areas and develop internal trail connections can link into the larger system.

FACILITIES

Complete planned **Interpretive Exhibit and Museum Renovations** at Rock Springs Conservation Area Nature Center

- Complete planned renovations and updates per Capital Improvement Project (CIP) plan

Description

Macon County Conservation visitors expressed their support of interpretive and other educational features throughout the Connect Phase. The Conservation District maintains a small indoor museum space, a gallery of rotating exhibits, and interpretive signage throughout its publicly accessible conservation areas focusing on natural features, conservation, and local and state history. There are many resources available to aid in the updates with several stakeholders expressing interest in sharing resources and local knowledge during the interviews. Possible partners include local educational institutions like school districts or Milikin University, research institutions such as libraries, local citizen's groups such as historical societies and conservationists, and individual citizen research and historical records.

In addition to the rotating exhibits, interpretive signs and available online information, the Conservation District has allotted funding to renovate the museum exhibits in the Nature Center. The Conservation District has hired a professional company to prepare educational and interactive exhibits that will replace the current displays in early 2019. These permanent installations are expected to be in place for several years and provide crucial background on the local area and it's ecological and cultural history, while other interpretive spaces will change on a regular basis to retain community interest.

Complete **Fort Daniel Conservation Area Restroom Improvements**

- Select and install pre-fabricated restroom facility near parking lot and shelter

Description

The planning team has observed increasing demand for recreation providers to provide flushable restrooms with running water at large and/or high-use conservation areas and open space. This trend also applies to Macon County. In the online survey, restroom quality was the second most common reason participants were unsatisfied with conservation areas. 11 of these participants left comments clarifying that they are interested in additional flushable restrooms with water fountains. All five of the publicly accessible conservation areas provide pit toilets and Rock Springs, Friends Creek, Griswold Conservation Areas also have flushable restrooms available during the hours the conservation areas are open.

Fort Daniel Conservation Area is a logical location to provide a flushable restroom as it is the third most visited area according to the online survey. Staff had also discussed the potential need to upgrade this location before the planning process revealed the larger community need for restrooms throughout the Conservation District. It is anticipated that utility access would be easily connected due to the proximity to the road and adjacent residential neighborhood.

FACILITIES

Develop **Management and Restoration Standards for Farm Structures**

- Consider renovation investment and cost recovery options
 - Evaluate appropriate use
 - Consider storage
 - Consider programming/events space
- Consider safety and potential hazards

Description

The Conservation District frequently receives barns and other structures with land purchases or donations that are can be in poor condition with the acquisition of agricultural lands. The District does not currently have a policy to manage these structures and while many are away from the trails and other accessible areas, a few are near visitor areas and have attracted some interest. A few comments proposing the utilization of the barns were received during the online survey and from conservation area visitors. Currently, the Conservation District uses one of the best-maintained barns for storage at Sand Creek Conservation Area but the remaining structures are unused. In addition to maintenance and operational use as storage facilities and/or workshops, some of these structures could be adapted for public use as a program or event and rental spaces. This would require significant investment needed to make many of them safe and habitable, plus additional expense to upgrade the spaces for program and event use, providing essentials such as ADA access, water and electrical service.

Due to potential investment costs, the District will need to be thoughtful when selecting any structures to save and renovate. Appropriate use, cost of necessary repairs and upgrades, and additional support amenities such as paths, landscaping, and interpretation elements, as well as long-term maintenance requirements, should be considered. For those structures that are cost prohibitive to make usable, the Conservation District should complete a safety assessment, focusing on structures that would be easily accessible to conservation area visitors. Structures that are determined to be unsafe should be considered to be removed or made inaccessible as soon as possible to prevent visitor injury. Having a clear set of standards will guide District decision-making when determining whether to leave or remove the structures.

Complete **Rock Springs Bottling Plant for Interpretation development**

- Develop site plan for Rock Springs Bottling Plant and interpretation exhibits
 - Consider site within context of trail system
 - Improve awareness/advertise as a historic destination
- Manage slope erosion
- Improve site and surrounding area's safety and security, considering:
 - Secure structure to prevent access while improving visibility from exterior
 - Provide barrier rail at top of slope
 - Extend path to riverbank

Description

The historic Rock Springs Bottling Plant is located along the Sangamon River at the western edge of Rock Springs Conservation Area. While it is marked on the conservation maps and featured as a historic site on the Conservation District website, the bottling plant is set-back from the trail and there is no signage or interpretive elements. The structure itself has been secured to prevent entry but most of the windows are covered, making it difficult for visitors to see into the structure and the original spring itself is not visible. The structure's position at the top of the riverbank slope also makes it susceptible to damage from erosion.

There are many actions the Conservation District can take to bring this structure up to the quality of other historic sites but some may not be possible or feasible due to limiting factors. The District should strengthen the path connection to the structure and consider adding a formal path down the slope to the riverbank. Adding signage, both for wayfinding and education would also improve the area. If possible, the District may also wish to display some of the artifacts associated with the plant either at the site or within the Nature Center. Finally, the materials used to secure the structure should be upgraded to more authentic materials that also allow visibility into the structure. The District will also want to monitor the condition of the riverbank and slope, and be prepared to provide stabilization measures if the deterioration increases.

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

Complete Willow Branch II Restoration

- Continue to convert farmland to native ecosystems

Description

The Macon County Conservation District has been in the process of converting leased farmland to native ecosystems at Willow Branch II for several years. As of 2018, 87 acres of the 147.53-acre site have been restored and are being maintained on a two to three-year burn cycle. The District intends to restore the entire site within the next five years, converting additional sections of the property every year as budget and staff availability allow. As the remaining farmland is taken out of production, the Conservation District intends to create a wet mesic prairie and/or wetland on the site and is considering utilizing the area as a wetland bank. This property will also become a valuable location for wildlife viewing.

Construct accessible Improvements at Rock Springs Cattail Ponds

- Provide access and amenities at Cattail Ponds

Description

The Cattail Ponds are located along the main entry road to Rock Springs Conservation Area and are highly visible. These ponds are picturesque and good locations for fishing but do not have a path connection to the rest of the conservation area or any amenities to support visitor use. In response to increasing interest in this area, the Conservation District designated CIP funding in the 2018-2019 fiscal year to provide access to the Cattail Ponds by the spring of 2020. Proposed improvements include an accessible path connection from the shelter and playground area to the west, seating near the ponds, and a pier system for fishing.

Develop and implement Wayfinding Standards

- Improve visitor wayfinding along conservation area trails

Description

The Conservation District maintains 25.25 miles of multi-use trails across five locations, many of which overlap and double-back on themselves within the conservation areas. Walking, jogging, and bicycling is a growing state and national form of recreation and is the second-most common reason online survey respondents visited conservation areas. Trail users have expressed their confusion about the trail layout at several of the conservation areas to District staff and during the Connect Phase. Some of the challenges reported were a lack of directional signage, signage that is not easily visible or is in poor condition, and confusing directions and trail markers.

The Conservation District has committed to replacing and adding trail signage, planning to install new wayfinding signage at Rock Springs by the end of action plan year 2. Because of the need for improved signage at all of the conservation areas, it is recommended that a set of guidelines and standards be established. These wayfinding standards should provide recommendations for the sizes, colors, materials, locations, and messaging of the signs and may introduce a hierarchy of primary and secondary trails if appropriate. In order to provide consistency between sites and align all signage with the Macon County Conservation District brand, these standards should be developed and adopted before signage is added to any of the conservation areas. It should then be applied to all new wayfinding materials as they are created.

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

Complete Kaufman Conservation Area Activation

- Master plan, design, and implement improvements to allow visitation considering:
 - Shoreline access at Lake Decatur
 - Boat access
 - Fishing dock/pier
 - Path/trail system
- Coordinate new development with neighbors

Description

Interest in providing public access to currently closed conservation areas was the highest priority identified at the community meeting and was addressed by a small number of participants in the stakeholder interviews and the online survey. Kaufman Conservation Area is one of the most recently acquired areas and offers some unique assets and challenges for the District. The greatest asset at Kaufman Conservation Area is its location along Lake Decatur. Access to the county's waterways is highly valued and in-demand for fishing, boating, and enjoying nature. This is the only conservation area location that could provide visitors with access to the lake. An additional benefit is the location near downtown Decatur, the largest population center in the County which could potentially attract visitors who are not interested in or are unable to travel to some of the less central conservation areas. Additionally, the site's previous residential development has provided a large section of the site that will support development with minimum earthwork and site clearing.

There are also two significant challenges to activating Kaufman Conservation Area: the steep topography on half of the site and the close proximity of residences. The ravine that cuts through the center of the site is an interesting natural feature but is very steep. Access to the lakeshore requires traveling through the ravine and the slopes have a high potential for erosion. Kaufman Conservation Area is also unique in the District as it is located in a residential area, limiting some of the recreation and management activities that the District typically employs. Increasing the traffic volume and active recreation amenities such as a playground may not be compatible uses. Any development at this location should take into account the neighborhood and adjacent landowners preferences in the planning process through one or more community meetings.

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

Complete Wayfinding and Amenity Improvements

- Provide in-demand outdoor amenities and programs to meet community and benchmarking needs considering:
 - Fishing Piers
 - Trails
 - Bicycle
 - Equestrian
 - Cross-country skiing
 - Winter access
 - Specialty, all-accessible nature-based play
 - Shelters
 - Non-motorized boat launches

Description

Providing new amenities and expanding existing offerings and access was recommended by participants in the stakeholder and community meeting, and was the second highest priority identified by staff members. Some of the suggestions for amenities that were presented during the Connect Phase were adding and updating camping areas, adding fishing locations, adding mountain biking, adding a dog park and pet-friendly amenities, adding a boat launch, and expanding the trail system. The planning team also recommended common recreation amenities that the Conservation District does not already offer or are available but in high use/demand, such as fishing piers, winter access, and fitness stations. With the addition of trail expansion for any type of use, wayfinding standards should be implemented. While the Conservation District does provide some recreation amenities, it should be cautious not to duplicate the services of a park district/department. New amenities must be appropriate for the conservation area where they will be located and align with the District’s mission.

Very few of the suggested amenities are linked to specific sites, and depending on the need, some may be appropriate at multiple locations. As development is being planned and implemented at conservation areas, the District should consider the addition of some of these amenities in conjunction with planned wayfinding and trail improvements and conservation area master plans.

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

Complete Willow Branch II Activation

- Master plan, design, and implement improvements to allow visitation considering:
 - Interpretive/education signage
 - Path/trail system
 - Bicycle
 - Cross-country skiing
 - Shelter
- Identify opportunities for land acquisition to provide connections to Willow Branch I
- Consider potential non-vehicular routes of travel to the local Willow Branch I, Grove Branch Conservation Area (if public use becomes possible), and the City of Macon

Description

Native restoration has been underway at Willow Branch II prior to the master plan and will continue throughout the first years of the action plan. Opening Willow Branch II to the public will showcase the recent restoration and provide recreation opportunities in an underserved part of the County. Conservation and restoration are key components of the Conservation District mission but visitors at the other conservation areas rarely see in-progress sites as they are largely fully restored and being managed. In addition to showcasing restoration and native ecosystems, the Willow Branch site is an important water protection site as the Willow Branch Creek flows through the area. Another advantage to activating Willow Branch II is the location in the south-central part of the County. There are very few recreation opportunities in this region and Willow Branch II is immediately southeast of the City of Macon, a population center of 1,138 that does not have a park district or department. The varied natural features and ongoing District restoration efforts combined with the potential to serve a large number of people with limited local access to recreation suggests Willow Branch II is a valuable property to activate.

Complete Wright-Banton Audubon Area Activation

- Master plan, design, and implement improvements to allow visitation considering:
 - Interpretive/education signage
 - Path/trail system
 - Shelter
- Coordinate development efforts with Decatur Audubon

Description

Wright-Banton Audubon Area is located northwest of Decatur in a residential neighborhood. It is a protected area with very limited access. There is a perimeter fence and no roadway connections to the property which inhibits future access and development. Currently, the site is minimally managed and primarily functions as an unofficial wildlife refuge. The conservation area was donated to the District with the intent of creating a protected area for birds and is relatively small, however, opportunities exist to expand the site through future donations or land acquisition of available property. Throughout the Connect Phase process, a small number of participants from the community meeting, online survey, and stakeholder interviews expressed interest in opening the site for public access with a focus on wildlife observation. Staff also reported interest from the adjacent residents in providing walking trails for neighborhood use. Due to the interest in the site continuing to serve primarily as a habitat and the expectation that future users will predominately be neighborhood residents, site development should be as unobtrusive as possible. Appropriate amenities could be signage, a trail system, and one or more small shelters.

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

Expand Internal Path System

- Expand path system to inaccessible sections of conservation areas
 - Complete planned trail development on the northmost section of Friends Creek Conservation Area
 - Expand system to the south section of Friends Creek Conservation Area
 - Expand trails to the east at Rock Springs Conservation Area to the former Scovill Golf Course
- Implement wayfinding standards on trail extensions
- Consider adding and expanding specialty uses including:
 - Cross-country skiing

Description

Trail use for walking, jogging, bicycling, and dog walking, as well as specialty uses such as cross-country skiing during the winter and horseback riding at Sand Creek Conservation Area is popular at conservation areas. Trails are some of the most popular amenities and are experiencing growth in the national and Illinois recreation markets. Trail use and adding to the existing trail system were highly prioritized during the online survey and over 20 online comments requesting additional trails and trail-side amenities were received. The other Connect Phase groups also expressed interest in expanding the trail system while the staff specifically suggested adding mountain biking and improving ADA accessibility.

The planning team identified potential trail expansion areas within the five accessible conservation districts. At Friends Creek Conservation Area, the District is already planning an extension into the newly acquired property along E. Washington Street/ County Highway 38. Additionally, the planning team recommends adding a trail connecting to the group campsite in the south-east section of the area so campers can access the full site without using the road. There may also be opportunities to add trails within the large southwest section of the park, however, access would have to be limited and easily controlled. These trails would have to be closed during hunting season to be compliant with the regulation prohibiting all hunting within 75 yards of a trail should the District choose to add trails to this section.

The northwest corner of Rock Springs Conservation Area also presents an opportunity for trail system expansion. Any new path would have to cross the Sangamon River in at least one location but would add significant mileage to the internal system. This extension may also become appropriate to expand access to destinations outside of the conservation area. The closed Scovill Golf Course does not currently serve a recreation function but there is community support for the possibility of a recreation provider such as the Decatur Park District or the Macon County Conservation District acquiring the property for public recreation. If this does occur, making a path connection to adjacent recreation would benefit trail users looking to expand their route or find alternative routes to the conservation area.

Complete Leiby Hall Conservation Area Activation

- Master plan, design, and implement improvements to allow visitation considering:
 - Path/trail system
 - Shelter
 - Playground

Description

Leiby Hall Conservation Area is centrally located southwest of Decatur and immediately south of the Rock Springs Conservation Area. This area is relatively small for the Conservation District at 36.16 acres but includes several habitats including a small pond with a wetland and about half the site is upland forest. Leiby Hall Conservation Area was previously considered for activation but development was postponed while grant funding was unavailable. With the reintroduction of Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) grant programs in 2018, the Conservation District should develop a new master plan with site appropriate amenities such as a trail system, shelter, and/or playground and remain aware of future funding assistance.

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

Restore Willow Branch I

- Convert farmland to native ecosystems
- Improve streambank conditions along Willow Branch Creek

Description

Willow Branch I consists of unrestored former farmland this is of low ecological quality. Willow Branch I has the potential to become a valuable property with a high-quality native ecosystem and wildlife habitat. This location also includes over a half mile of Willow Branch Creek. Acquiring, restoring, and monitoring waterways are crucial to one of the District goals of improving water quality. Restoration of Willow Branch I will likely occur in sections over several years.

Complete Willow Branch I Activation

- Master plan, design, and implement improvements to allow visitation considering:
 - Interpretive/education signage
 - Path/trail system
 - Bicycle
 - Cross-country skiing
 - Shelter
- Identify opportunities for land acquisition to provide connections to Willow Branch I
- Consider potential non-vehicular routes of travel to the local Willow Branch II, Grove Branch Conservation Area (if public use becomes possible), and the City of Macon

Description

Similar to Willow Branch II, Willow Branch I is located in a part of the county that is largely underserved by recreation providers and is geographically close to other conservation areas (Willow Branch II and Grove Branch Conservation Area) and the City of Macon. The Willow Branch Creek also flows through this property making it a valuable piece of property for monitoring and improving water quality and the District plans to convert the sited to native habitat within the next 10 years.

A major restriction to activating Willow Branch I is the bisection of the site by State Route 51, splitting the property into two halves which are too small to support significant recreation amenities. Unless the two Willow Branch properties can be combined into a single conservation area, Willow Branch I will remain undeveloped. If additional property connecting Willow Branch I and II is acquired, the east half of Willow Branch I could become a feasible location to expand upon the amenities planned for Willow Branch II. Interpretive and educational signage and exhibits, a trail system extension, and shelters would all be possible recreation amenities to consider at Willow Branch I.

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

Complete **Rock Springs Conservation Area Nature-based Play Expansion**

- Plan, fund, and construct a new nature-based play experience

Description

In the spring of 2018, the Conservation District replaced the playground northeast of the Nature Center with a new, nature-based playground. This new style has been popular with visitors and the natural theme is a positive reflection on the District's mission of providing access to nature. Due to this success, the District plans to expand the nature-based play to include a larger area and incorporate additional play experiences. The expansion will build on the existing play features and has the opportunity to take advantage of the area's natural features, incorporating natural elements such as logs, stones, and the natural topography into the play experience. The proximity of the playground to the trail system provides the option to create sequential play nodes along the trail and bring play opportunities to multiple habitats. The District will also have the option to incorporate educational components into the new play area through the use of signage and interpretive play.



OPERATIONS

Evaluate **Staffing Organization and Growth Opportunities**

- Recruit skilled staff members with specializations and experience in conservation and restoration
- Consider alternatives to hiring for small-scale initiatives

Description

One of the biggest challenges the Conservation District faces when restoring and conserving natural areas is providing the resources required to restore and maintain high-quality environments. While this is a large part of the District's mission and day-to-day activities, the District also provides numerous other services including programming, education and administrative responsibilities. Due to many factors, the District is limited in what can be accomplished in a fiscal year. Compared to other agencies, the District is 2 full time employees (FTEs) per 1,000 acres under the average of other comparable agencies. Hiring additional staff is one option to expand the District's ability to fulfill its mission. Other solutions for growth could include leveraging volunteer groups and guest experts to assist with programs and education. Volunteers and the Macon County Conservation Foundation have also significantly contributed to maintenance and restoration efforts as well as the operation of special events in the past. Some stakeholders suggested opportunities to share resources for joint projects, be it equipment, expertise, or staff members.

Develop **Conservation District Benchmarking Standard**

- Adopt benchmarks considering the desired number of:
 - Staff
 - Maintained acres
 - Appropriate amenities
- Consider the following resources when developing standards:
 - Comparable agency benchmarks
 - State and national recommendations
 - Community climate and use of open space

Description

Benchmarks are one method public agencies use to evaluate their efforts and determine what changes need to be made. Common benchmarks for public open space providers are acres per population, number of amenities per population, and the number of employees per population and/or acreage maintained. Benchmarks can be established by modifying comparable agency standards and recommendations to meet community specific needs. During the Analyze Phase, the District identified seven other conservation or forest preserve districts with similar populations, service area size, and/or missions to compare the number of sites, number of employees, acres maintained, and number of amenities. Using these comparisons, and an understanding of how the Macon County community uses open space from the District and other providers, the Conservation District can set a goal or benchmark for each category that they will work to meet and maintain. It is recommended that the District adopt a benchmark for land acquisition for a defined number of acres of conservation area land per 10,000 residents.

OPERATIONS

Evaluate **Partnerships for Natural Area Management**

- Identify partners to contribute to Conservation District management including labor and financial assistance
- Determine off-site efforts that will decrease the need for and intensity of management

Description

Natural area management is a major part of regular district operations and a significant use of resources. It was also acknowledged as one of the most highly supported and prioritized initiatives among Connect Phase participants. Managing natural areas poses an additional challenge to the District as it is an ongoing requirement. As more natural areas are added to the District through restoration or acquisition, the investment of resources needed to maintain these areas also increases. This can limit the number of locations as well as the quality at which areas can be maintained. One approach to overcome this challenge is to establish partnerships with like-minded agencies and community groups to obtain assistance with the labor and funding associated with management. Partnerships that involve off-site efforts can also be beneficial in limiting the need for intensive management, such as limiting sedimentation in waterways, controlling agricultural chemicals, or managing weedy and invasive species.

Develop plan to **Provide Shuttle Service to conservation areas events**

- Offer regular transportation to various events to increase awareness and encourage visitation of the entire district
- Provide pick-up and drop-off service in high population centers

Description

The combination of distance between conservation areas and lack of public transportation and non-vehicular routes can make it difficult for some people to travel to the conservation areas. For large events and programs, the Conservation District can increase attendance and awareness of the District by providing a shuttle from central locations in population centers to events. This will also allow the District to host events at smaller locations that cannot support parking a large number of vehicles.

PLAN UPDATES

Update Action Plan and Master Plan

- Conduct annual updates and adjust objectives to reflect:
 - Completion and results of the previous objectives
 - Population and demographic changes
 - Fiscal climate
 - Major recreation market changes

Description

The following action plan is a living document that is intended to provide achievable goals for the Macon County Conservation District over the next ten years. Completing annual updates of the plan to respond to the completion or delay of plan goals will allow it to continue to be a valuable resource as the District evolves and changes.

Due to the many factors that affect the District’s operations and offerings, periodic evaluation of the master plan, and the District, will ensure that the plan continues to accurately reflect the District’s facilities, programs, staff, and users. This recurring evaluation will help the Conservation District stay aware of changing demographics and industry trends, and monitor their assets evolving strengths and weaknesses.



Recurring Items

Some of the goals identified by the planning team, staff, and board are recurring items that should occur on a regular basis to help the District make operational decisions and inform future projects.

Purpose

In order to keep up with the fast-paced recreation market, it is important that agencies reassess their facilities, programs, staff, and users on a regular basis. This recurring self-reflection will help the Conservation District stay aware of changing demographic and industry trends and monitor their assets, and evolving strengths and weaknesses.

Section Outline

As with the action plan items, the recurring items are formatted as goals with corresponding strategies to achieve the desired outcomes.

Planning and Programs:

- **Expand Volunteer Groups**
- **Monitor Program Enrollment and Operation Requirements**
- **Monitor Population Changes and Demographic Shifts**

Facilities:

- Maintain and regularly reassess **Oglesby Mansion Partnership**

Conservation Areas and Open Space:

- Identify **Acquisition Opportunities in Underserved Areas of the Community**
- Identify **Acquisition Opportunities to Improve Water Quality**
- **Monitor and Control Streambank Erosion**

Operations:

- Work with Transit Providers to **Provide Public Transportation**
- **Expand Utilization of Website Resources and Social Media**
- **Continue to Develop and Expand Partnerships**
- **Reassess Existing Partnerships**
- **Identify and Pursue Additional Funding Sources**

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

Expand Volunteer Groups

- Coordinate with existing volunteer groups to maintain participation
 - Provide participation incentives if necessary
- Consider investing in training for reliable and committed volunteers to maximize utilization and expand the scope of their abilities.
- Develop standing time and location for drop-in volunteers to accomplish simple tasks on a regular schedule

Description

Macon County Conservation District has come to depend on volunteers to assist with the operation of the conservation areas and programs every year. Volunteers regularly assist with maintenance, school programs, special events, guided, hikes, and weekend programs. Currently volunteers apply to the Conservation District and are placed by their areas of interest and skills.

As the Conservation District’s land holdings and program and event offerings grow, volunteers remain a valuable resource to continuing existing initiatives and keeping pace with the demands associated with expansion. Expanding the volunteer program would allow the District to accomplish more. While the current system is functioning well and should continue to be implemented, there may be other strategies to maximize volunteer potential. The application process and tracking of volunteers presents the opportunity to increase investment in eligible individuals. The District could offer special training that would expand volunteer knowledge, for example, allowing master gardeners to function more independently and lead others.

Conversely, for those who wish to volunteer on a less formal basis, the District could establish a regularly occurring meeting time and location where anyone wishing to volunteer could attend without undergoing the application process to complete simple tasks that require little training such as river clean-ups. These regular events make volunteering more accessible and over time can build a sense of community as large groups of like-minded individuals work for a common goal.

Monitor Program Enrollment and Operation Requirements

- Track enrollment rates to help predict future needs and success of programs
- Track investment requirements

Description

There is a lifecycle to programs as they are introduced, grow, mature, and decline. The key to maintaining a successful set of offerings is to ensure that there are never too many in any one stage. During introduction, programs are completely new and may undergo a number of changes to find the circumstances that best work for the District and its user group. Successful programs will begin growing while programs that do not work may never receive the interest needed to continue. Programs that are growing should be tracked to determine the necessary number and frequency of occurrences and what resources are needed. Once a program has been established and is serving users consistently it has matured. During this stage, very few changes will be implemented. As programs decline the Conservation District should assess potential changes to renew interest or adjust the format for wider appeal. Or it may find that the program is no longer appropriate for the District at all and choose to discontinue it. As the Conservation District monitors its program’s enrollment, it should also track the investment required to continue operations. If the operation requirements become too great, the District will need to find ways to supplement the necessary resources such as finding partners or sponsors, leveraging user fees, or making changes to the program’s format. Finally, community feedback and needs, interpretive plans, and the District mission statement should be consulted before making program changes.

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

Monitor Population Changes and Demographic Shifts

- Ensure appropriate recreation opportunities are available to all residents

Description

Macon County is experiencing a slight decrease in the overall population as well as shifts in racial and ethnic makeup. There is already a significant black population (17.3%) that is expected to grow in the next 5 years, as are all minority groups. The population is also aging in place and it appears that the number of families in the county is remaining consistent but the number of middle and high school-aged children is increasing as children in elementary school and younger are decreasing in population. There is also a significant number of adults aged 55 and older in the county (33.7% of the population) that is expected to increase. As different age groups and cultures become more prevalent in the community, the District will need to change some of their programs and services to better target changing resident needs.



FACILITIES

Maintain and regularly reassess Oglesby Mansion Partnership

- Continue to work with Oglesby Mansion Inc. to lease, program, and maintain the interior of the mansion
- Periodically reevaluate the partnership to maintain a mutually beneficial agreement

Discussion

The Oglesby Mansion is an important cultural and historic site in Macon County. Currently, the property and mansion are owned by the Macon County Conservation District and maintenance is shared by the Conservation District and the Oglesby Mansion Inc. group. The Conservation District maintains the building’s exterior systems and site while Oglesby Mansion Inc. is responsible for maintaining the interior, programming, fundraising, and leasing the residential unit within the mansion. Both organizations have been satisfied overall with the relationship and intend to continue sharing the care of the mansion in the future. Regular communication about the success and challenges of the site’s program and upkeep and the distribution of responsibilities will keep both organizations informed and allow restructuring of the agreement as needed.

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

Identify Acquisition Opportunities in Underserved Areas of the Community

- Determine community use of other recreation providers to determine if there is an unmet need for the Conservation District to fulfill
- Provide access to conservation areas for areas of the County with high populations and limited access to recreation and open space

Description

The first step in determining underserved areas of the community is to understand how Macon County residents use all of the available open space and recreation amenities in the county in addition to the conservation areas. The District should be cautious to not use resources that duplicate services and focus on acquisition in parts of the County where there is no available recreation or where the existing recreation offerings are not meeting resident needs. Additionally, the Conservation District will continue to provide services aligned with its mission rather than take on the role of an active recreation park provider. Appropriate acquisition properties will provide ecological value and primarily be reserved for the restoration and maintenance of high-quality natural areas with trails and educational elements for resident use. These sites may also offer other District amenities such as shelters and small playgrounds as well as water access where applicable.

The level of service analysis revealed several underserved areas in the northwest and southeast section of the County around the communities of Maroa, Warrensburg, Niantic, and Macon. These underserved areas (planning areas 1, 3, and 6) also have large populations living in unincorporated areas. As land acquisition is considered in these areas, the District should consider locations that serve residents living within and outside of population centers within a 5-mile radius.

Identify Acquisition Opportunities to Improve Water Quality

- Prioritize acquisition properties with aquatic features and watershed impact opportunities
- Develop a funding source reserved for land acquisition of properties with aquatic resources

Description

During the Connect Phase, every participant group cited improving and maintaining water quality as one of the most important initiatives in the county. As a prominent conservation agency in Macon County, the Conservation District has a significant stake in maintaining water quality and actively working towards improving the watershed. Due to the demand for high-quality water, land acquisition that encompasses natural aquatic features such as wetlands, springs, lakes, and streams is one of the District’s highest priorities.

As part of the strategy to obtain new properties, the District may consider setting aside funding specifically reserved for land acquisition. Having available funds would greatly improve the Districts ability to respond to the real estate market efficiently as new properties become available, limiting the risk of losing valuable land while funds are gathered.

Monitor and Control Streambank Erosion

- Monitor streambank conditions to identify areas in need of management
- Record success and failures to inform future projects
- Use best management practices and sustainable methods to control and mitigate erosion

Description

Maintaining a high level of water quality was a priority among every group in the Connect Phase and an existing goal of the Conservation District. One of the most crucial factors for maintaining healthy waterways and watersheds is erosion control. The Conservation District maintains multiple properties with streams and rivers running through them and has committed to continuing to acquire land with opportunities for water quality improvements. The District already employs natural mitigation and stabilization methods at several of their locations along streambanks and riverbanks. Moving forward, the District will continue to track bank condition and expand erosion control measures at all properties employing current best management practices and environmentally sensitive design.

OPERATIONS

Work with Transit Providers to Provide Public Transportation

- Coordinate planning efforts with transportation routes and expansion plans

Description

Traveling to the conservation areas can be challenging for people who do not have access to personal vehicles. Alternative forms of transportation such as bus routes and walking/biking trail systems can offer means of access but the existing routes in the county do not serve all of the District’s areas. Lack of access throughout the District creates a barrier of participation for some residents and trends to be more common among low-income families and people living in inner-city areas.

The Conservation District is aware that access is challenging for some of the County residents, and staff receive periodic requests for other methods of travel to conservation areas. A few stakeholders referenced the lack of public transportation in most of the County during the Connect Phase. While the District can provide transportation for select programs, it is not equipped to offer public transportation full-time. It is recommended that the District evaluate the existing transportation providers in the county and identify potential conservation areas that could be connected to current routes. The District should also be aware of plans for new routes or route extensions that could include access to conservation areas.

Expand Utilization of Website Resources and Social Media

- Utilize website and social media updates to provide consistent and reliable sources of District information
- Develop/enhance online learning library with cultural, historic, and conservation resources

Description

Leveraging internet resources was a highly supported topic of discussion at all of the stakeholder interviews and was also mentioned to a lesser extent at other Connect Phase events. Internet and social media communications are becoming more common and are a preferred method of communication for people of all age groups and backgrounds. In addition to the Conservation District website, the District maintains a facebook and twitter account. The Macon County Conservation Foundation also promotes the District on their website. Regular posting is a good way to stay in the public eye and share news with minimum intrusion into people’s lives.

Websites are also a great resource for organizations with strong educational missions like the Macon County Conservation District. Conservation District visitors recognize the District as an authority on the area’s natural features and history and generally support educational initiatives. Utilizing the internet also allows the District to expand the available body of knowledge by forming partnerships with other agencies to share information and be providing private citizens and other organizations a platform to share their own knowledge and research.

OPERATIONS

Continue to Develop and Expand Partnerships

- Identify community organizations and businesses to form new relationships
- Find opportunities to grow existing partnerships that are successful
- Continue to evaluate partnerships to maintain mutually beneficial agreements

Description

Maintaining partnerships was a frequent topic of discussion among stakeholders and staff members. Both groups emphasized the value of partners to spread the District mission, promote programs and initiatives, and provide additional resources. The Conservation District has worked with numerous partners in the past and maintains relationships with several regulatory, education, and conservation agencies. The District also has a close relationship with the Macon County Conservation Foundation which supports District restoration and education efforts as it’s primary mission.

To continue the success of partnerships, the District should remain aware of new opportunities to work with other organizations and agencies on a project-by-project basis or as regular collaborators. Given the District’s mission, potential new partners may be other municipalities such as park districts or departments, other conservation advocates, and educational districts. The District should also monitor existing partnerships to ensure these relationships remain beneficial for all parties. As the needs of the Conservation District and partner groups change, it may be necessary to restructure agreements. For relationships that are functioning well, there may be opportunities to expand the scope of the partnership.

Identify and Pursue Additional Funding Sources

- Track available federal and state grant funding and requirements
- Continue to provide a system to receive business and individual donations
- Develop designated funding source reserved for specific uses

Description

As is the case with any public agency, the Conservation District has limited resources to accomplish its mission but there are multiple funding sources that can be tapped to expand District resources and support specific projects. Governmental grants are available for a wide range of functions including preservation, restoration, education, recreation, and construction use. Both the Federal Government and the State of Illinois maintain catalogs of available assistance that are available online, free of charge that include searchable lists of grants and resources for additional qualification and application information.

Grants typically contribute the largest amounts from a single source but are not the only options available for funding. The Macon County Conservation Foundation assists the District with other funding sources including managing fundraising events as well as business and personal donations. While typically smaller in scale, these types of contributions are a crucial form of community support and have helped the District achieve significant conservation and development goals in the past.

A final option to ensure the District has the necessary resources is to create accounts or budgets reserved for specific uses such as land acquisition or environmental restoration. The chief benefit of creating and maintaining these types of accounts is to give the District easier and more efficient access to funding when short-term or limited time opportunities become available. Depending on the designation, they may also facilitate the receipt of donations (such as a 501(c)(3) association).

CHAPTER 2

Implement: Final Parks Master Plan



Overview

The Action Plan Chapter outlines the proposed tasks and projects for the Macon County Conservation District over the next ten years.

Purpose

This chapter outlines the steps and potential timeline for implementing the Master Plan strategies identified in Chapter One. They were further refined and finalized through workshops with staff and board members during the development of the Action Plan. This plan is to act as a guide to assist the District in implementing the strategies over the next ten years and will be periodically re-evaluated and adjusted to reflect completed projects and the community's changing needs. The Action Plan is organized by fiscal year into quarters (Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4) for the first five years and by individual years for the last five to provide a general idea of when each action or action item step might occur. Each action item is also coded as planning and programs, facilities, conservation areas and open space, operations, or plan updates.

Detailed descriptions of each action item and corresponding strategies can be found in the previous chapter on pages 12-26.

Ordering Criteria

To help determine when each item should be implemented within the ten-year plan, the following criteria were considered:

- **Restoration Priority:** It is part of a critical ecological community and/or outlined in the ecological assessment
- **Current Planned Initiative:** It is a project that is already in progress or has recommended CIP funding
- **Meets Recreation Need/Interest:** It provides for a need or interest identified from the Connect Phase findings
- **Age/Condition:** A facility or amenity is at or

nearing the end of its useful life or is in poor condition

- **Availability/Utilization:** An offering, facility, or amenity has limited availability and/or is highly utilized
- **Attainability:** Considers the District's financial and staff resources to accomplish certain projects over a ten-year period
- **Additional Data Required:** More detailed information is needed to inform the required investments

Years 5+

Year 6 2024-2025	Year 7 2025-2026	Year 8 2026-2027	Year 9 2027-2028	Year 10 2028-2029	10+ Years
	Host Special Events				
→ Implement interpretation focus group guidance cultural and historical					
Host Special Events at Rock Springs	Develop Management and Restoration Standards for Farm Structures				
Complete Wayfinding and Amenity Improvements at Griswold		Master plan Rock Springs Bottling Plant Interpretation	Fund Rock Springs Bottling Plant Interpretation	Design and engineer Rock Springs Bottling Plant Interpretation	Bid and construct Rock Springs Bottling Plant Interpretation
Master Plan and Fund Leiby Hall Conservation Area Activation	Design and engineer, bid and construct Leiby Hall Conservation Area				
		Master plan and fund Rock Springs Nature-based Play Expansion	Design and engineer, bid and construct Rock Springs Nature-based Play Expansion		
→ Bid and construct Willow Branch II Activation	Restore Willow Branch I	Master Plan Willow Branch I Activation and trail connection	Fund Willow Branch I Activation and trail connection	Design and engineer Willow Branch I Activation and trail connection	Bid and construct Willow Branch I Activation and trail connection
				Update Master Plan	

Recurring Items		
Expand Volunteer Groups	Monitor Program Enrollment and Operation Requirements	Monitor Population Changes and Demographic Shifts
Maintain and regularly reassess Oglesby Mansion Partnership		
Identify Acquisition Opportunities in Underserved Areas of the Community	Identify Acquisition Opportunities to Improve Water Quality	Monitor and Control Streambank Erosion
Work with Transit Providers to Provide Public Transportation	Expand Utilization of Website Resources and Social Media	Continue to Develop and Expand Partnerships
Identify and Pursue Additional Funding Sources		

Legend

Planning and Programs

Facilities

Conservation Areas and Open Space

Operations

Plan Updates



Current Objectives (Current through April 2019)

FACILITIES

- Complete planned **Interpretive Exhibit and Museum Renovations** at Rock Springs Conservation Area Nature Center

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- Construct accessible **Improvements at Rock Springs Cattail Ponds**
- Complete **Willow Branch II Restoration**

Year 1 (April 2019 - March 2020)

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

- **Update Management Plan and Develop Prioritization List**

FACILITIES

- Complete planned **Interpretive Exhibit and Museum Renovations** at Rock Springs Conservation Area Nature Center

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- Construct accessible **Improvements at Rock Springs Cattail Ponds**
- Complete **Willow Branch II Restoration**

OPERATIONS

- Evaluate **Staffing Organization and Growth Opportunities**
- Develop **Designated Fund for Land Acquisition**
- Evaluate **Partnerships for Natural Area Management**

Year 2 (April 2020 - March 2021)

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

- Develop **Interpretation Focus Group** (conservation and nature)

FACILITIES

- Complete planned **Interpretive Exhibit and Museum Renovations** at Rock Springs Conservation Area Nature Center
- Implement **Fort Daniel Conservation Area Restroom Improvements**
 - Design and engineer
 - Bid and construct

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- Develop and implement **Wayfinding Standards**
 - Implement at Rock Springs Conservation Area
- Implement **Kaufman Conservation Area Activation**
 - Master plan

OPERATIONS

- Develop plan to **Provide Shuttle Service** to conservation area events

Year 3 (April 2021 - March 2022)

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

- Plan **Special Events**
- Develop **District-wide Trail System and Public Access Plan**

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- Implement **Kaufman Conservation Area Activation**
 - Fund
- Complete **Wayfinding and Amenity Improvements** at Sand Creek Conservation Area
- Implement **Willow Branch II Activation**
 - Master plan
- Implement **Wright-Banton Audubon Area Activation**
 - Master plan
 - Fund
- Expand **Internal Path System** at Friends Creek Conservation Area

Year 4 (April 2022 - March 2023)

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

- Implement **Interpretation Focus Group** recommendations (conservation and nature)
- Develop **Interpretation Focus Group** (cultural and historical)
- Host **Special Events** at Griswold Conservation Area and Friends Creek Conservation Area

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- **Complete Wayfinding and Amenity Improvements** at Fort Daniel Conservation Area
- Implement **Kaufman Conservation Area Activation**
 - Design and engineer
- Expand **Internal Path System** at Rock Springs Conservation Area
- Implement **Willow Branch II Activation**
 - Fund
- Implement **Wright-Banton Audubon Area Activation**
 - Design and engineer
 - Bid and construct

Year 5 (April 2023 - March 2024)

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

- Host **Special Events** at Sand Creek Conservation Area and Fort Daniel Conservation Area

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- Complete **Wayfinding and Amenity Improvements** at Friends Creek Conservation Area
- Implement **Kaufman Conservation Area Activation**
 - Bid and construct
- Implement **Willow Branch II Activation**
 - Design and engineer
 - Permit

PLAN AND UPDATES

- **Update Action Plan**

Year 6 (April 2024 - March 2025)

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

- Develop **Interpretation Focus Group** guidance (cultural and historical)
- Host **Special Events** at Rock Springs Conservation Area

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- Complete **Wayfinding and Amenity Improvements** at Griswold Conservation Area
- Implement **Leiby Hall Conservation Area Activation**
 - Master plan
 - Fund
- Implement **Willow Branch II Activation**
 - Bid and construct

Year 7 (April 2025 - March 2026)

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

- Host **Special Events** (location to be determined)

FACILITIES

- Develop **Management and Restoration Standards for Farm Structures**

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- Implement **Leiby Hall Conservation Area Activation**
 - Design and engineer
 - Construct
- **Restore Willow Branch I**

Year 8 (April 2026 - March 2027)

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

- Host **Special Events** (location to be determined)

FACILITIES

- Implement **Rock Springs Bottling Plant Interpretation**
 - Master plan

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- Implement **Rock Springs Nature-based Play Expansion**
 - Master plan
 - Fund
- Implement **Willow Branch I Activation**
 - Master plan

Year 9 (April 2027 - March 2028)

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

- Host **Special Events** (location to be determined)

FACILITIES

- Implement **Rock Springs Bottling Plant Interpretation**
 - Fund

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- Implement **Rock Springs Nature-based Play Expansion**
 - Design and engineer
 - Bid and construct
- Implement **Willow Branch I Activation**
 - Fund

Year 10 (April 2028 - March 2029)

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

- Host **Special Events** (location to be determined)

FACILITIES

- Implement **Rock Springs Bottling Plant Interpretation**
 - Design and engineer

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- Implement **Willow Branch I Activation**
 - Design and engineer

PLAN AND UPDATES

- **Update Master Plan**

MORE THAN 10 YEARS

PLANNING AND PROGRAMS

- Host **Special Events** (location to be determined)

FACILITIES


- Implement **Rock Springs Bottling Plant Interpretation**
 - Bid and construct

CONSERVATION AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

- Implement **Willow Branch I Activation**
 - Bid and construct

CHAPTER 3

Analyze: Inventory and Analysis

A stylized logo for the Macon County Conservation District. It features a white square with a black border. Inside the square, there is a yellow circle in the top left, a blue rectangle in the top right, a brown rectangle in the bottom left, and a teal rectangle in the bottom right. The bottom right corner of the square is jagged, resembling a map outline.

Overview

The Analyze: Inventory and Analysis chapter describes and illustrates the existing conditions of the Macon County Conservation District, showing a basic understanding of the District's assets.

Purpose

This chapter documents the inventory and analysis accomplished during the "Analyze" phase of the comprehensive master planning process. This phase describes the context in which the District operates, the recreation services they provide, and the patrons that utilize the conservation areas, facilities, and programs.

- Land Acquisition Assessment
- Conservation Area Inventory
- Natural Area Assessment
- Proposed Restoration

The following chapter defines the community's demographic context and provides detailed maps of the District that identify conservation areas, open space, and other relevant land uses. It also includes the level of service analysis for the conservation areas and amenities, comparing the District's total acreage of open space and number of amenities to other similar agencies. A distribution mapping analysis of the geographic location of the conservation areas is also found in this chapter. This information provides insight into potential surpluses or deficiencies the District has in terms of open space and amenities.

Chapter Outline

- Demographics
- Existing Conditions
- Natural Resources
- Asset Inventory
 - Conservation Area Classifications
 - Conservation Area & Open Space Inventory Matrix
 - Level of Service Analysis
 - Open Space Benchmarks
 - Acreage
 - Distribution
 - Distribution Analysis
 - Employees
 - Amenities

Demographics

The demographics review utilized the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) Business Analyst Online (BAO) software to gather up-to-date demographic data necessary to gain an understanding of the District and its context.

Summary

According to 2017 estimates, Macon County has a population of 107,192. Census population numbers from 2010 indicate the population is decreasing at an annual rate of 0.76%. The population is expected to continue declining into 2022, with an ESRI projection of 103,188. The County's growth rate is directly opposed to state and national trends, declining while Illinois and the U.S. are growing at a rate of 0.17% and 0.83% respectively.

There are an estimated 44,768 households within the County. According to the U.S. Census, a household "includes all the persons who occupy a housing unit as their usual place of residence." Out of these households, 63.2% (28,257) are families. A family is defined as a household in which one or more people are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. The average household size is 2.3 in Macon County. Household size has been slowly decreasing since 2010 but is expected to remain at about 2.3 people per household in 2022.

Age Distribution

The median age of Macon County residents is 41.7 and the population is experiencing very little change in age groups. It appears that families are aging in Macon County as the total number of children ages 0-4 and 5-9 are decreasing while the number of 10-14 and 15-19 aged children is increasing. Among adults, only two age groups are growing, ages 35-44 and 65+. According to 2017 estimates, 33.7% of the population is over the age of 55. This is projected to increase to 35.1% of the population by 2022, entirely due to growth in the 65+ age group. The increase in active adult and senior population growth mirrors that of the state and national trends and these populations are and will continue to be a major County demographic.

Race and Ethnicity

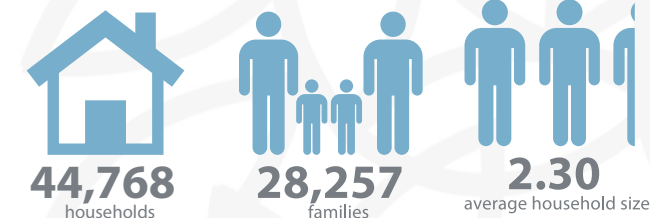
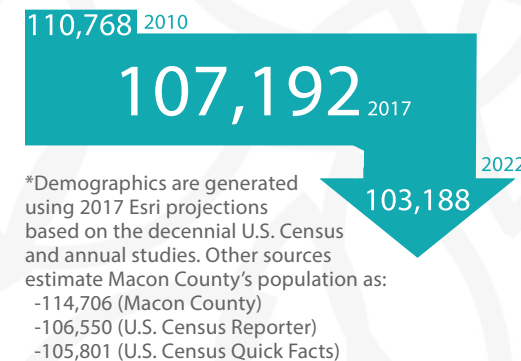
According to ESRI, Macon County has a diversity index of 36.3. The Diversity Index captures the racial and ethnic diversity of a geographic area in a single number, 0 to 100, and allows for efficient analysis of diversity throughout the U.S. The Diversity Index is "the likelihood that two persons, selected at random from the same area, would belong to a different race or ethnic group." According to demographic estimates, 77.4% of the County residents indicate their race as White. The second largest group within the County identify as Black Alone at 17.3% of the population. Additionally, 2.3% of the population identifies as Hispanic in addition to the race they reported.

Income

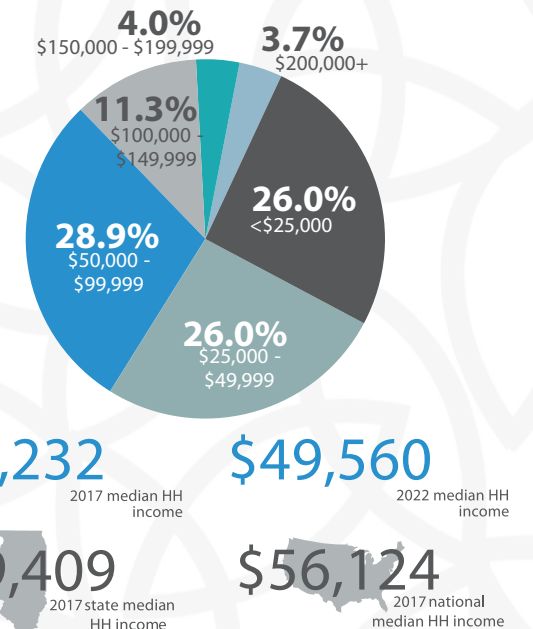
Over half of Macon County households are in the two lowest income brackets. 26% of residents live below the poverty line of less than \$25,000 per year as defined by Illinois Legal Aid. This is consistent with the state and national percentages (20.4% and 21.5% respectively) and is a significant number of Macon County residents. 4.0% of Macon County households fall into the second highest tier (\$150,000 - \$199,999 per year) and 3.7% into the highest tier (\$200,000+ per year). This is about half of the percent of the population compared to the state and national populations in these income brackets. This indicates that Macon County resident is less affluent than the average Illinois and U.S. household.

Median household incomes are expected to increase by an annual rate of 1.98% which is consistent with the state and national projections. Macon County's median household income is expected to increase from \$47,232 in 2017 to \$49,560 by 2021.

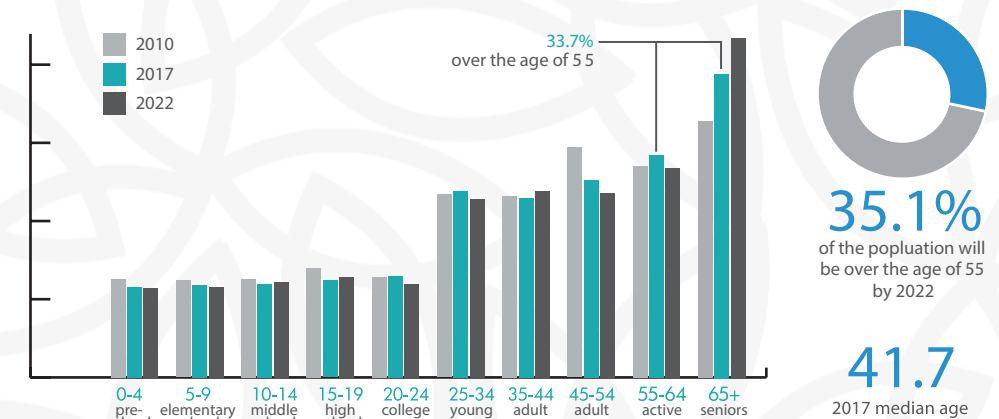
TOTAL POPULATION



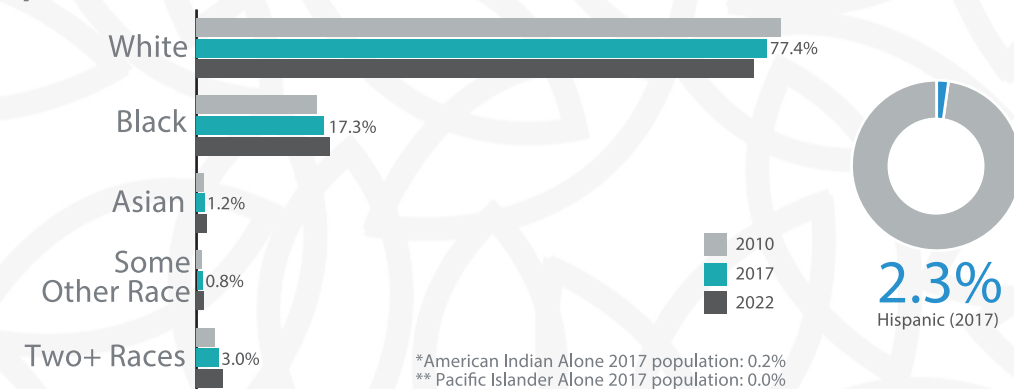
INCOME DISTRIBUTION



AGE DISTRIBUTION



RACE / ETHNICITY



Existing Conditions

The first step in the comprehensive planning process is to understand the County’s surroundings and the existing conditions of the District’s assets including land use and open space.

Land Use

The majority of Macon County is agricultural with almost all neighborhood and commercial development located within incorporated cities and villages. There is also a large population of County residents living on large lots in unincorporated areas outside of neighborhood developments. Numerous streams flow through the County and a large lake (Lake Decatur) is located in the center of County. I-72 and several railroad lines pass through the county, meeting in the center in and around the City of Decatur.

Open Space Providers

Macon County Conservation is one of many open space and outdoor recreation providers within the County. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) also provides passive recreation and preserves land at two state parks within the county. Public active recreation is provided by city and village parks departments and park districts. School Districts also provide public outdoor recreation opportunities at school properties and private agencies provide pay-to-play opportunities. Other recreation providers within the County are described below but, due to the Conservation Districts conservation and preservation focused mission, few can be considered to offer similar services.

Public Open Space

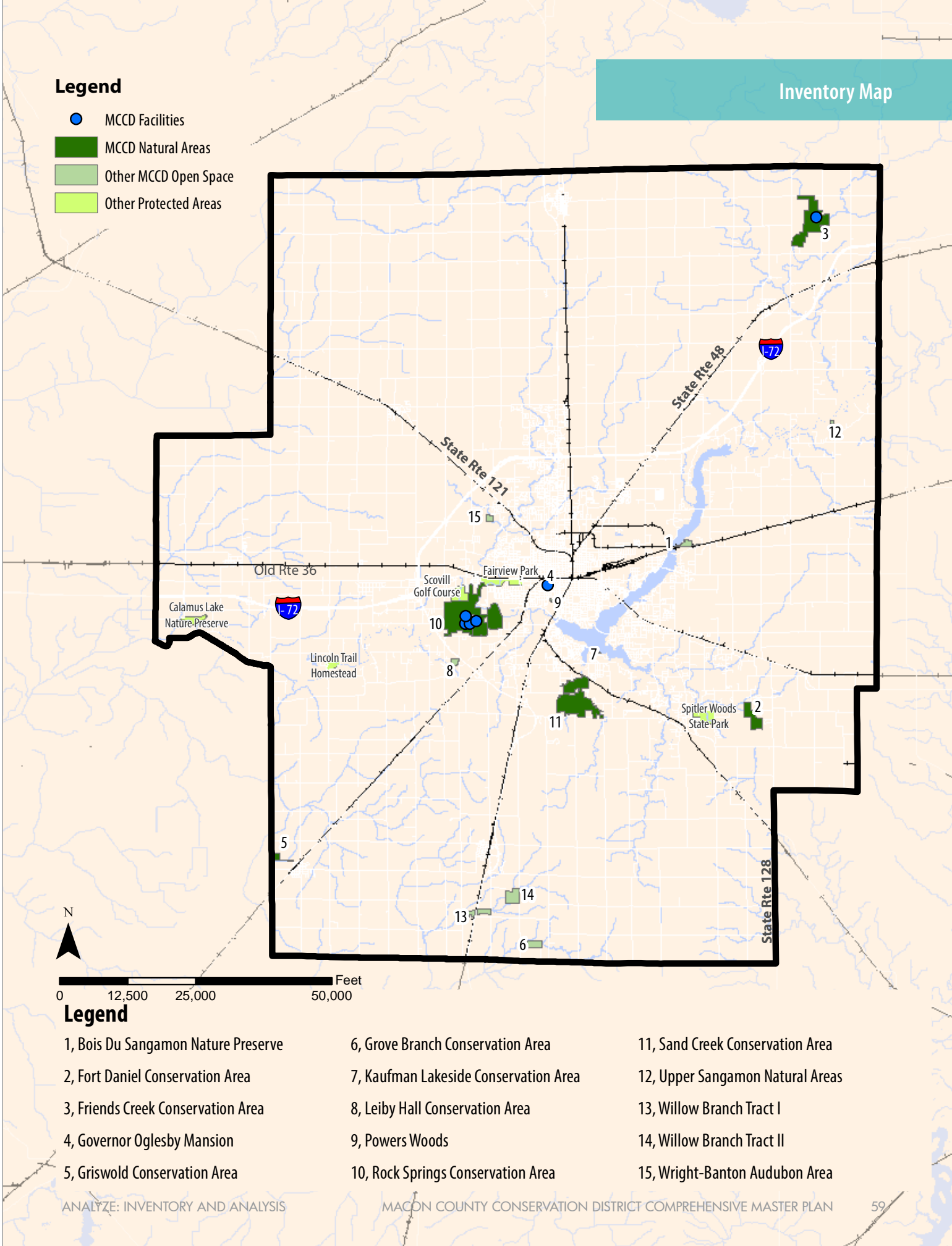
Municipal, Forest Preserve District, State, Federal
In addition to the Macon County Conservation District, there are multiple providers of public open space within the county. The IDNR has two public open spaces which provide similar services as the Conservation District.

There are also numerous municipal park departments and park districts that provide active recreation parks. Blue Mound Park District has two properties, Forsyth Parks and Recreation Department has 24 properties, Village of Mt. Zion Parks and Recreation Department has 5 properties, Decatur Park District has 28 properties, and Niantic Park District has one property. There are also other small parks in the surrounding villages and townships.

While these agencies primarily provide active recreation, the Decatur Park District offers some open space that serves a similar passive open space experience to what is offered by the Conservation District. It provides open space and a greenway at Fairview Park that connects to the existing Decatur bike trail and into Rock Springs Conservation Area.

Institutional Open Space

Elementary, Middle, and High Schools; Colleges / Universities
Macon County includes large sections of eight different public school districts as well as small sections of three additional districts. For each of these Districts, many elementary schools (and some middle and high schools) allow public use of playgrounds, sports courts, and fields outside of school hours. There are also a number of private schools in the county that, while not open to public use, do provide recreation for their students. There are two college campuses within Macon County as well. Richland Community College is locted on the northeast edge of Decatur but has limited open space. Millikin University has its main campus in the center of Decatur and offers a much larger amount of open space as well as athletic fields for student use. Although it is a private college, the campus grounds are open to the public. While there is a large amount of institutional space in the county, very little serves a passive recreation purpose and cannot be considered comparable to the Conservation District open space.



Private Open Space

Private open space also exists in Macon County but does not serve the same recreation needs as the Conservation District. There are numerous golf courses, shooting ranges, and indoor recreation properties throughout the county that meet some resident’s recreation needs. It should also be mentioned that the majority of Macon County and the surrounding areas are rural, consisting of homes on large lots. For residents with large properties, it is possible they are recreating on their own property rather than visiting a local park or conservation area.

Open Space Outside of Macon County

Because the Conservation District serves a number of people residing outside of Macon County, open spaces outside of the Macon County Boundary may also be used by county residents. There are several agencies that provide open space in the counties surrounding Macon County. The Cities of Bethany and Moweaqua, both to the south, each provide public parks offering active recreation amenities. Two large Illinois IDNR properties exist to the north of the County, Weldon Springs State Park and Clinton Lake State Recreaion Area. These properties both serve similar functions as the District’s conservation areas providing trails, water access, and other passive recreation amenities. There are numerous recreation options in Piatt County, west of Macon County. The Piatt County Forest Preserve and the cities of Bement and Monticello provide public parks with active recreation amenities. Allerton Park and Retreat is also located within Piatt County and offers many similar amenities as the conservation areas. This privately owned park provides hiking and cross-country skiing trails, historic landmarks, and natural areas in addition to ornamental gardens and landscaping. Although each of these open spaces is realitvly close to the Macon County boundary and may be utilized by Macon County residents, all of the sites that provide a similar service as the Conservation District are located more than five-miles from the edge of of Macon County.

The Conservation District’s Role

Macon County Conservation District’s mission of preserving resources and limited amenity offerings makes it a unique service provider in the County. As such, there are very few other open space agencies that it can be compared to. While numerous types of open space are summarized above, only those properties that have a conservation/preservation focus and primarily provide passive recreation such as shelters, trails, and water access are shown on the open space map on the previous page. These properties include:

- Calamus Lake Nature Preserve (IDNR)
- Lincoln Trail Homestead (IDNR)
- Spitler Woods State Park (IDNR)
- Fairview Park (Decatur Park District)
- Scovill Golf Course (closed, Decatur Park District)



Natural Resources

This section outlines the existing natural features present within Macon County. This includes watersheds, riparian corridors, floodplains, and wetlands. These have been identified to provide a baseline of information and data for long-term decision-making.

The following is a summary of the natural resources found in Macon County. A more detailed summary of the ecology of each conservation area can be found later in this chapter.

Watersheds & Riparian Corridors

The majority of the Conservation District falls within the Upper Sangamon Watershed. About a quarter of the District is in the Salt Watershed in the northwest while a small portion of the district to the south is in the South Fork Sangamon and Upper Kaskaskia Watersheds.

These four sub-watersheds are the four major sub-basins of the Sangamon River Watershed which flows to the Illinois River. The primary land use within the watershed is agricultural with small pockets of low-density development. The biggest challenge facing the watershed is contamination from agricultural chemicals and sedimentation. The damming of the Sangamon River to form Lake Decatur (the two most significant bodies of water in the county) in the 1920s has also resulted in a decline in water quality along the river and in the reservoir, mostly attributed to siltation.

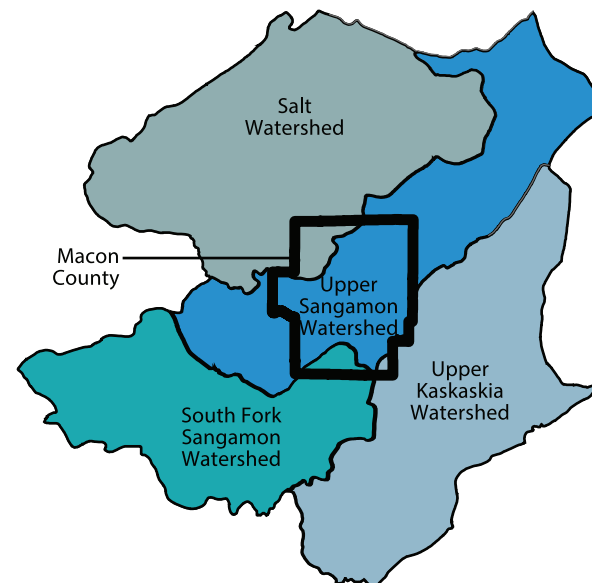
Floodplain

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), through the National Flood Insurance Program, produces Flood Hazard Boundary maps for areas prone to flood hazards. The 100-year floodplain denotes the area potentially affected by the level of floodwater equaled or exceeded every 100 years on average or having a 1% chance of being equaled or exceeded in any single year.

Ten of the 15 conservation areas partially fall within the 100-year floodplain:

- Bois Du Sangamon Nature Preserve
- Fort Daniel Conservation Area
- Friends Creek Conservation Area
- Grove Branch Conservation Area
- Kaufman Lakeside Conservation Area
- Rock Springs Conservation Area
- Sand Creek Conservation Area

- Upper Sangamon Conservation Area
- Willow Branch I
- Wright-Banton Audubon Area

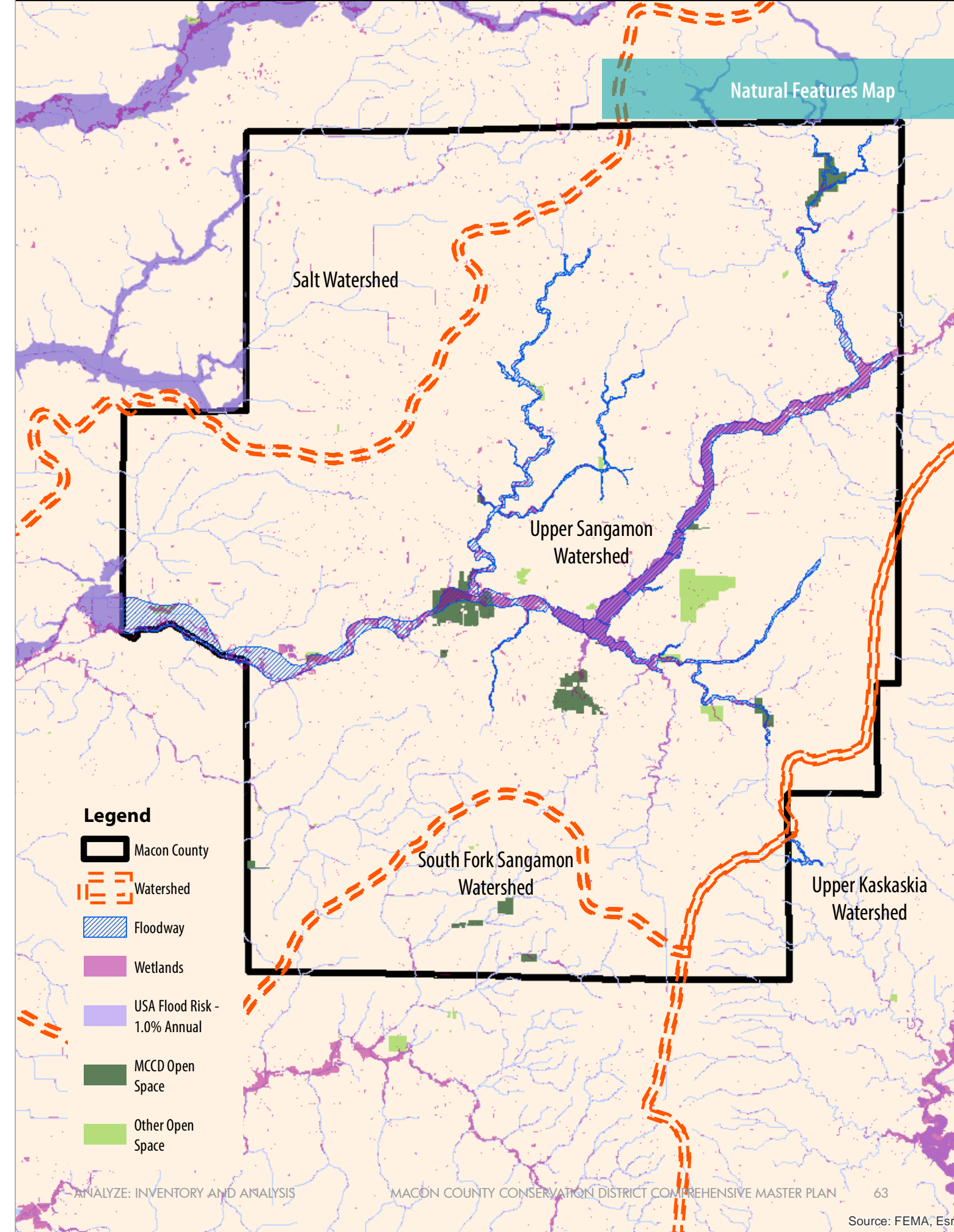


Wetlands

Wetlands are defined as lands saturated with water which affects the soil character, plant and animal communities, and surface conditions of the land. Wetland data is from the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI), conducted by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Wetlands are located throughout the county with large groupings found along Lake Decatur and the Sangamon River.

Eight of the 15 conservation areas contain a wetland:

- Fort Daniel Conservation Area
- Griswold Conservation Area
- Grove Branch Conservation Area
- Friends Creek Conservation Area
- Leiby Hall Conservation Area
- Rock Springs Conservation Area
- Sand Creek Conservation Area
- Wright-Banton Audubon Area





Asset Inventory

As a part of the planning process, the Planning Team references the guidelines outlined by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) - Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines Manual updated in 1996.

NRPA recommends creating a park classification system to serve as a guide for organizing an agency’s open space. The Park, Recreation, and Greenway Classification Guidelines are expressions of the minimum amount and development of land a community should provide for different classifications or types of parks, open space, and greenways.

Mini Park, Neighborhood Park, Community Park, Large Urban Park, and Sports Complexes are the six classifications for parks recognized by the NRPA. Commonly, School Parks serve similar functions as Neighborhood Parks and Large Urban Parks and Sports Complexes are included in the Community Park category.

These categories are based on size, function, and use. Mini Parks are the smallest and most limited in function, while Community Parks are typically the largest parks of a system and serve a variety of functions for the community. Other open space categories recognized by the NRPA are Natural Areas, Trails, Corridors or Linear Parks, and Special Use. Undeveloped Areas are sites not yet developed for meaningful access. This category is recognized for planning purposes but is not an NRPA category. Because the Conservation District’s mission is not focused on providing active recreation, it does not provide any Mini, Neighborhood, or Community parks.

These classifications are vital to a comprehensive Level of Service analysis. In the conservation area and open space matrix on the following pages, amenities were quantified to understand the District’s total recreational offerings.

For the purposes of this plan, Natural Areas are the conservation areas with public access and some recreation amenities and Undeveloped Areas are conservations areas without public access, some of which are not yet restored.

CONSERVATION AREA CLASSIFICATIONS

Classification	General Description	Service Area	Size Criteria	Macon County Conservation Areas
Mini Park* (M)	Mini Parks meet the need for a walkable, drop-in recreation experience. Appropriate elements in these parks include playgrounds, picnic areas, and seating. These parks usually do not include parking. Used to address limited, isolated, or unique recreational needs.	Less than 0.25-mile distance in a residential setting.	Typically less than 1 acre in size.	none
Neighborhood Park* (N)	Neighborhood Parks remain the basic unit of the park system and are generally designed for informal active and passive recreation and community gathering spaces. Elements in these parks often include playgrounds, picnic areas, sports fields, and trail systems. Neighborhood Parks serve as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood.	0.25 to 0.5-mile distance and uninterrupted by non-residential roads and other physical barriers.	Typically ±15 acres	none
Community Park* (C)	Community Parks focus on meeting community-wide recreation needs. These parks preserve unique landscapes and often serve the community as gathering places and for general athletics. Elements in these parks include playgrounds, pavilions, trails, and path systems, multiple sport courts and fields. Serves broader purpose than neighborhood park. Focus is on meeting community-based recreation needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces.	Determined by the quality and suitability of the site. Usually serves two or more neighborhoods and 0.5 to 3-mile distance.	As needed to accommodate desired uses. Usually a minimum of 25 acres.	none
Natural Area*	Conservation and wildlife areas, wooded areas and waterways that are maintained for the most part in their natural state.	Service radius is unlimited.	No applicable standard.	Fort Daniel Conservation Area, Friends Creek Conservation Area, Griswold Conservation Area, Rock Springs Conservation Area, Sand Creek Consrvation Area
Special Use*	Special use facilities focus on meeting community-wide recreation needs. Often, these spaces, both indoor and outdoor, are designed as single-use recreation activities. Examples of special use facilities include golf courses, nature centers, recreation centers, and museums. Areas for specialized or single purpose recreational activities. Generally designed for active recreation and focus on meeting community-based recreation needs.	No applicable standard.	Variable, depending on desired amenity.	Governer Oglesby Mansion
Trails, Corridors, and Linear Parks*	Effectively tie park system components together to form a continuous park environment.	Resource availability and opportunity.	No applicable standard.	none
Undeveloped Area	Lands owned by the agency, but not yet developed with any amenities to provide meaningful access to the site such as trails, seating areas, and other passive and active recreation amenities.	No applicable standard.	Variable.	Bois du Sangamon Nature Preserve, Grove Branch Consrevation Area, Kaufman Lakeside Conservation Area, Leiby Hall conservation Area, Powers Woods, Upper Sangamon Natural Area, Willow Branch I, Willow Branch II, Wright-Banton Audubon Area

* from NRPA’s Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines.

Conservation Area and Open Space Inventory

*Macon County Conservation District does not have any Mini, Neighborhood, or Community Parks.

Conservation District does not neighborhood, or Community Parks.	ACREAGE		TRAILS			INDOOR FACILITIES	
	Acreage - Own	Acreage - Lease / Manage	Regional Trail Access	Multi-Use Trails (miles)	Equestrian Trails (miles)	Indoor Program / Support Facility	Restrooms
DISTRICT OPEN SPACE & FACILITIES							
Natural Areas							
1 Fort Daniel Conservation Area	196.8			3.25			X
2 Friends Creek Conservation Area	621.3			3.50			X
3 Griswold Conservation Area	45.4			1.00			X
4 Rock Springs Conservation Area	1364.5		X	10.00		X	X
5 Sand Creek Conservation Area	794.2			7.50	7.50		X
Natural Area Acreage	3022.2	0.0					
	3022.2						
Special Use							
1 Governer Oglesby Mansion	0.2					X	X
Special Use Acreage	0.2	0.0					
	0.2						
Trails, Corridors, and Linear Areas / Greenways							
Trail, Corridor and Linear Areas Acreage	0.0	0.0					
	0.0						
Undeveloped Areas							
1 Bois du Sangamon Nature Preserve	53.7						
2 Grove Branch Conservation Area	81.4						
3 Kaufman Lakeside Conservation Area	4.8						
4 Leiby Hall Conservation Area	36.2						
5 Powers Woods		2.9					
6 Upper Sangamon Natural Area	10.0						
7 Willow Branch Tract I	95.4						
8 Willow Branch Tract II		147.5					
9 Wright-Banton Audubon Area		35.56					
Undeveloped Area Acreage	281.5	186.0					
	467.5						
	3303.9	186.0					
TOTAL DISTRICT OPEN SPACE	3489.9		1	25.25	7.50	2	6

AVAILABLE PROGRAMS			DAY USE AMENITIES				SPORTS COURTS AND AMENITIES				WATER-BASED AMENITIES				NATURAL FEATURES			
Camping	Cross Country Skiing	Hunting	Parking	Interpretive/Educational Signage	Shelters	Playground	Multi-Use Field	Baseball Field	Volleyball Court (grass)	Horseshoe Pit	Ice Skating	Sled Hill	Boat Launch	Fishing	Creek / River / Open Water	Prairies	Wetlands	Woodlands
	X	X	X	X	1	1	1								X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	3	1	1								X	X	X	X
	X		X	X	2	1	1					1				X	X	
	X	X	X	X	3	1	1	1					1	X	X	X	X	X
	X	X	X	X											X	X	X	X
															X		X	X
															X		X	X
															X			X
															X		X	X
															X	X	X	X
																	X	X
1	5	4	5	5	9	4	4	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	10	6	11	13

Level of Service Analysis

The Level of Service Analysis evaluates how well the District’s conservation areas are serving the current need of the community. Level of service is evaluated through four different methods: acreage, distribution, amenities, and square footage as determined by the NRPA.

The development of a Level of Service standard for parks and recreation began in the 1980s with the development of Levels of Service for other types of infrastructure such as water, storm water drainage, sewer systems, and transportation. These benchmarks provide agency officials with the ability to respond to growing communities, evolving demographics and changing needs. It is important to note, however, that these benchmarks are not strict rules that all communities should follow. These Level of Service benchmarks are simply another gauge for agencies to use when determining future needs and services.

According to the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), the Level of Service is a quantification of the park and recreation delivery philosophy and policy of a community. Its basic utility is in meeting a legal and/or economic requirement of quality service and equity. As a basic rule, a Level of Service benchmark should:

- Be practical and achievable
- Provide for an equitable allocation of park and recreation resources throughout a community with equal opportunity access for all citizens
- Reflect the real-time demand of the citizens for park and recreation opportunities

The Level of Service standard uses four measurements to help a community evaluate the comprehensiveness and equability of their current park and recreation offerings. These are:

1. **Acreage:** A calculation of the minimum amount of land required to provide all of the recreation activities and facilities required to support such activities
2. **Distribution:** An evaluation of how equitable park and open space sites are placed throughout the community, as well as how accessible existing sites are to residents

3. **Amenities:** A calculation of the minimum number of amenities and facilities required to meet state and/or national averages
4. **Square Footage:** A calculation of the minimum number of indoor square footage required to provide all of the recreation programs and services

Level of Service guidelines are developed by state and national agencies, including the NRPA. Historically, a Level of Service analysis has been limited to total park and open space acreage alone and did not include distribution, amenities or indoor square footage.

The national standard for acreage Level of Service was 10 acres per 1,000 population, but as park and recreation planning developed, professionals saw the need to develop a more comprehensive benchmarking tool that could be adjusted for and specific to each community. Because one size does not fit all, the NRPA recommends using community-specific benchmarks if needed.

The Macon County Conservation District did not have an adopted level of service benchmark at the time of the planning process and serves a different purpose than the parks providers described by the NRPA. To benchmark the Conservation District, the planning team utilized the standard measurements of acreage, distribution, and amenities (indoor space, and therefore square footage, was not included in this analysis), comparing the District against six peer conservation and forest preserve districts. The peer agencies used for comparison were Boone County Conservation District, Byron Forest Preserve District, Champaign County Forest Preserve District, McHenry County Conservation District, Rock Island Forest Preserve, and Vermillion County Conservation District.



Open Space Benchmarks

	Population	Associated Foundations	Number of Sites	Full-time Employees	ACREAGE	TRAILS			INDOOR FACILITIES	
					Acreage - Own	Multi-Use Trails (miles)	Equestrian Trails (miles)	Skiing Trails (miles)	Indoor Program / Support Facility	Restrooms

Other Conservation and Forest Preserve Districts

Boone County Conservation District	130,728	X	28	9	3,600.00	40.40	4.00	7.60	2	
Byron Forest Preserve District	51,000		6	18	2,200.00	27.00	X	X	5	
Champaign County Forest Preserve District	209,399	X	6	37	3,696.00	48.04			3	19
McHenry County Conservation District	309,122	X	34	72	25,070.00	60.08		34.00	3	
Rock Island Forest Preserve	144,808		6	35	2,529.00	74.00	6.00	14.00		
Vermillion County Conservation District	80,000	X	5	14	5,900.00	36.00		36.00	20	21

Average Number of Amenities	4/6	14	31	7,165.83	47.59	0.00	22.90	7	0
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Macon County Conservation District	1	15	16	3,489.95	25.25	7.50	11.00	2	6
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MCCD Amenity Comparrison to Average	1	-15	-3,675.89	-22.34	7.50	-11.90	-5	6
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Per 10,000 population

Other Conservation and Forest Preserve Districts

	Population	Associated Foundations	Number of Sites	per 10,000 population	per 1,000 acres	ACREAGE	Multi-Use Trails (miles)	Equestrian Trails (miles)	Skiing Trails (miles)	Indoor Program / Support Facility	Restrooms
Boone County Conservation District	130,728	X	2.14	0.69	2.50	275.38	3.09	0.31	0.58	0.15	
Byron Forest Preserve District	7,801		1.18	3.53	8.18	431.37				0.98	
Champaign County Forest Preserve District	209,399	X	0.29	1.77	10.01	176.51	2.29			0.14	0.91
McHenry County Conservation District	309,122	X	1.10	2.33	2.87	811.01	1.94		1.10	0.10	
Rock Island Forest Preserve	144,808		0.41	2.42	13.84	174.65	0.51	0.41	0.97		
Vermillion County Conservation District	77,909	X	0.63	1.75	2.37	737.50	4.50			2.50	

Average Number of Other District's Amenities	4/6	0.96	2.08	6.63	434.40	2.47	0.36	0.88	0.77	0.91
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Macon County Conservation District	1	1.40	1.49	0.15	325.58	2.36	0.70	1.03	0.19	0.56
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MCCD Amenity Comparrison to Average	0.44	-0.59	-6.48	-108.82	-0.11	0.34	0.14	-0.59	-0.35
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AVAILABLE PROGRAMS			DAY USE AMENITIES		SPORTS COURTS AND AMENITIES								WATER-BASED AMENITIES			
Camping	Snowmobiling	Hunting	Shelters	Playground	Multi-Use Field	Baseball/Softball Field	Basketball Court	Volleyball Court	Dog Park	Golf (holes)	Disc Golf (holes)	Horseshoe Pit	Ice Skating	Sled Hill	Boat Launch	Fishing

			11						1					1	1	1
1			2	1							18				2	1
1			10	3				4		9				1	6	6
	1	1	29			1	1	1			9			1	4	18
2			5	5		3				18				1	2	2
4	2	5	8	7	6	2		1				8	9	2	5	10

2	2	3	11	4	0	2	1	2	1	27	14	0	0	1	3	6
---	---	---	----	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	---	---	---	---	---

1		4	9	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
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-1	-2	1	-2	0	4	-1	-1	-2	-1	-27	-14	0	0	0	-2	-5
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			0.84						0.08					0.08	0.08	0.08
0.20				0.39	0.20						3.53				0.39	0.20
0.05			0.48	0.14				0.19		0.43				0.05	0.29	0.29
	0.03	0.03	0.94			0.03	0.03	0.03			0.29			0.03	0.13	0.58
0.14			0.35	0.35		0.21				1.24				0.07	0.14	0.14
0.50		0.63	1.00	0.88											0.63	1.25

0.22	0.03	0.00	0.72	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.03	0.11	0.08	0.84	1.91	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.27	0.42
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0.09	0.00	0.37	0.84	0.37	0.37	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.09	0.09
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-0.13	-0.03	0.37	0.12	0.37	0.37	-0.03	-0.03	-0.11	-0.08	-0.84	-1.91	0.00	0.00	0.04	-0.18	-0.33
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Acreage

Acreage Level of Service benchmarks are comparisons of Macon County Conservation District open space and the average amount of land provided by peer agencies.

The NRPA’s population ratio method (acres/1,000 population) emphasizes the direct relationship between recreation spaces and people and is the most common method of estimating an agency’s level of service for parkland and open space. NRPA uses a baseline of 10 acres/1,000 population for active but does recommend that this standard be modified to fit the agency as needed. This standard only includes active recreation areas (mini, neighborhood, and community parks), it does not have a recommended level of service for natural areas, special use areas, greenways, or undeveloped areas.

Currently, the Conservation District does not have an adopted benchmark and also does not provide active recreation. However, the standard NRPA benchmark of 10 acres of total open space per 1,000 population was applied. In the future, the District may adopt agency-specific standards for total acreage.

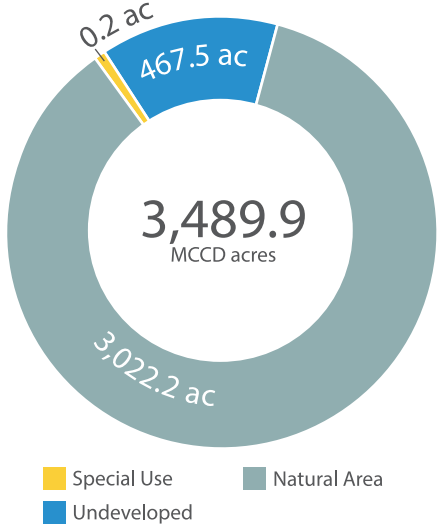
Macon County Conservation offers 3,489.9 acres of open space or 28.2 acres/1,000 population. According to the NRPA benchmark recommendation, the Conservation is well over the minimum recommended acreage of 1,071.9 acres or 10 acres/1,000 population as seen in the table on the right.

Because the NRPA benchmark was created for active recreation providers, it is not the best comparison for conservation/preservation focused agency such as the Conservation District. The planning team also benchmarked the Conservation District against similar agencies as seen in the table on the previous pages and the excerpt to the right.

When compared to the similar conservation and preservation agencies, Macon County Conservation District is very similar to its peers in terms of acres per 1,000 population, coming in at only about 100 acres below average for these types of providers in Illinois.

The Conservation District is also very similar in terms of the number of sites. On average, other conservation and preservation providers have 14 sites, while the Macon County Conservation District has 15 total sites.

District-Owned Acreage



NRPA Level of Service Analysis: 10 acres / 1,000 population

ALL MCCD MANAGED OPEN SPACE					
Classification	MCCD Acreage (Total)	MCCD Existing Level of Service (acres / 1,000 population)	NRPA Recommended Acreage	NRPA Recommended Level of Service (acres / 1,000 population)	Acreage deficiency / surplus (acre)
Mini Park	0.0	0.0	53.6	0.5	-53.6
Neighborhood Park	0.0	0.0	214.4	2.0	-214.4
Community Park	0.0	0.0	803.9	7.5	-803.9
Natural Areas	3022.2	28.2	0.0	0.0	3022.2
Special Use	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
Greenways	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Underdeveloped	467.5	4.4	0.0	0.0	467.5
Total MCCD Open Space	3489.9	28.2	1071.9	10.0	2418.0

Recommended acreage is based off the existing population of 107192

Agency Benchmark Level of Service Analysis: Per 1,000 population

	Number of Sites	Acreage	Acreage/1,000 population
Agency Average	14	7,165.83	434.40
MCCD Average	15	3,489.95	325.58
MCCD Comparison to Average	1	-3,675.89	-108.82

Distribution

Planning areas are used to analyze land distribution to guide land acquisition and redevelopment needs.

The location and geographic distribution of open space can offer an indication of how well an agency is serving its residents. Understanding where open space is located in relation to residential development determines what parts of the community are underserved. This analysis may reveal the need for acquisition to expand service or may show that the District is serving the residents well and should focus on maintaining or updating existing assets.

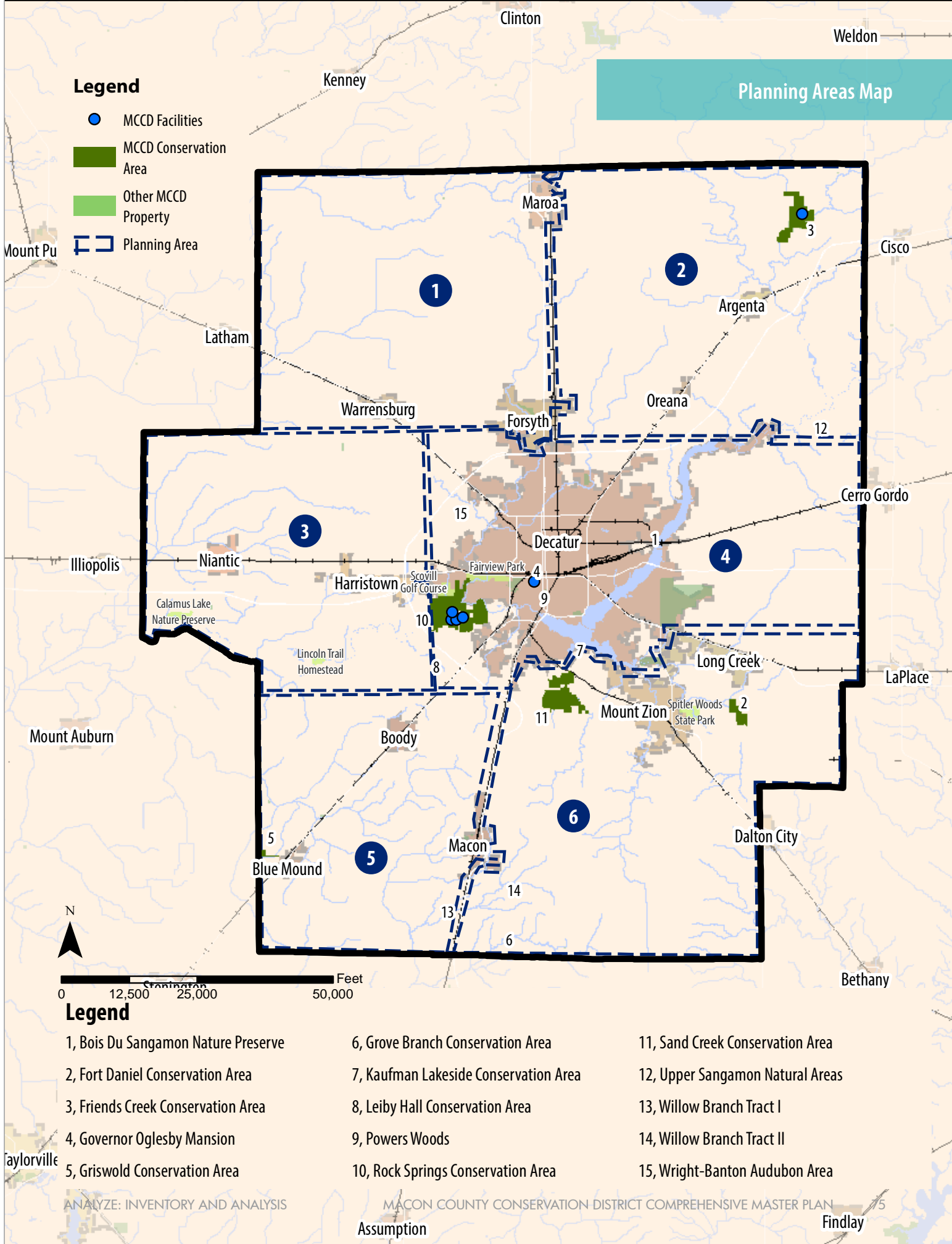
Methodology

Typically, planning areas are delineated by major pedestrian barriers such as major roads or highways, railroad corridors, and impassible natural features. However, since all of the conservation areas are drive-to destinations and because the Conservation District serves such a large geographic area, this approach of dividing the district along pedestrian barriers is not feasible. Instead, planning areas were determined by equally dividing the District into six areas of approximately equal geographic size, each with at least one population center. Boundaries were drawn with a north-south orientation except where they align with clear boundaries such as municipal limits or railroad lines.

County Population Estimates

Population Center	Population
Planning Area 1	
Forsyth	3,490
Maroa	1,801
Warrensburg	1,210
unincorporated	653
Total	7,154
Planning Area 2	
Argenta	947
Oreana	875
unincorporated	1,725
Total	3,547
Planning Area 3	
Harristown	1,367
Niantic	707
unincorporated	1,174
Total	3,248

Population Center	Population
Planning Area 4	
Decatur	76,122
unincorporated	1,738
Total	77,860
Planning Area 5	
Blue Mound	1,158
Boody	276
Macon	1,138
unincorporated	176
Total	2,748
Planning Area 6	
Long Creek	1,328
Mount Zion	5,833
unincorporated	5,474
Total	12,635



The Overall Distribution Analysis illustrates the District-wide locations and deficiencies of the Macon County Conservation District public open space.

The map on the right illustrates the service areas for all five of the publicly accessible conservation areas and the Oglesby Mansion property using a 5-mile radius. Because each of these is a drive-to destination and because a significant number of non-county residents use the Conservation District, service areas cross planning area lines and the County boundary. Conservation areas that are not open for public use were not included in this analysis.

Conservation area service in Macon County is not equally distributed geographically. The highest level of service is concentrated in the center of the County around Decatur in planning areas 3, 4 and 5. Planning area 4 is particularly heavily served with multiple conservation area service areas overlapping for residents in southwest Decatur. There are also two service areas in the northeast (Friends Creek Conservation Area) and southwest (Griswold Conservation Area) corners of the community. Conversely, the central and northern sections and the southeastern sections, as well as the eastern edge of the County are not being served by the Conservation District.

While geographic distribution is important, population is also necessary to consider when determining the level of service. Planning area 4 has the largest area served by a conservation area but also has a significantly higher population than the other planning areas. Additionally, almost the entire population of this area lives in the City of Decatur, the majority of which is served by at least one property. Similarly, planning area 6 which has the second largest population is reasonably well served around the population centers. Unlike area 4 though, almost half the population lives outside of a population center in an unincorporated area and may be unserved.

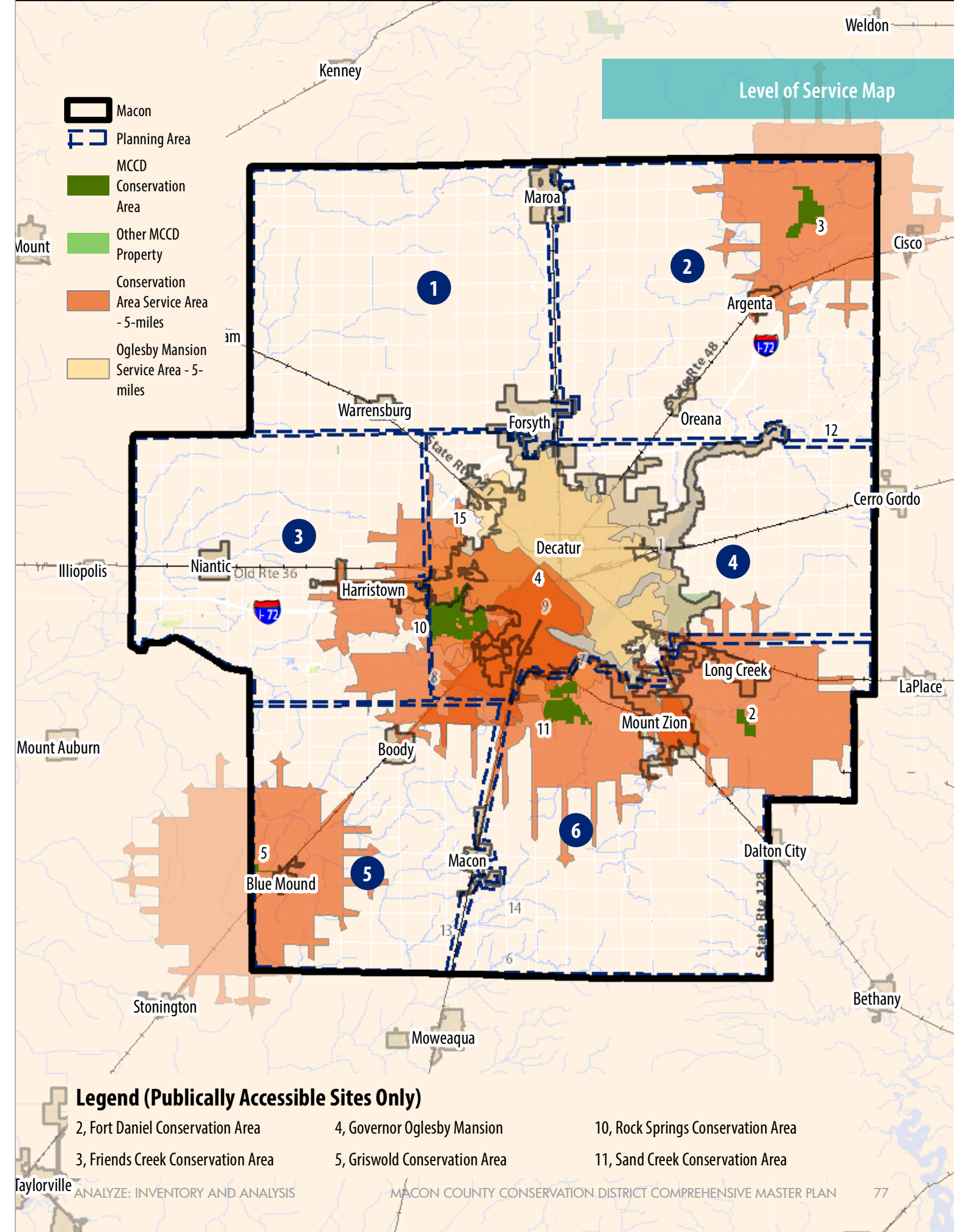
While planning areas, 1, 2, 3, and 5 have significantly smaller populations they are also not as well served. Areas 2, 3 and 5 have no more than a quarter of the area served which excludes large populations living in unincorporated areas. Planning area 1 has the third largest population but no Conservation District service.

In total, there are five communities in Macon County that do not have access to a conservation area within a 5-mile radius from anywhere in their limits:

- Maroa
- Macon
- Niantic
- Oreana
- Warrensburg

Two of these communities are located in planning area 1, two in planning area 5, and one each is in planning areas 2 and 3.

The Oglesby Mansion provides a drastically different service than the rest of the conservation areas. It is a primarily indoor attraction and has very little available outdoor space. It also does not offer the same outdoor amenities such as trails, playgrounds, and shelters that the other areas provide. Given these circumstances, the District should also consider distribution excluding this property. Due to its central location, the Oglesby Mansion alone accounts for over half of the served Decatur population. When this site is excluded, the majority of the Decatur population and the population of planning area 4 do not have access to a conservation area.



Employees

In addition to park acreage and distribution, the Macon County Conservation District compared the number of full-time employees (FTEs) to those employed by other conservation and preservation agencies.

As part of the comparable agency benchmarking, the Conservation District compared the number of FTEs employed per 10,000 population and per 1,000 acres against other agencies. As seen on pages 72-73 and summarized below, the Conservation District employs fewer people than

average. When compared against 10,000 population, the district is only 0.6 employees below average, however, when compared against 1,000 acres the district is 6.5 employees below average.

Agency Benchmark Level of Service Analysis

	Number of FTEs	FTEs/10,000 population	FTEs/1,000 acres
Agency Average	31	2.08	6.63
MCCD Average	16	1.49	0.15
MCCD Comparison to Average	-15	-0.59	-6.48



Amenities

The total number of recreation amenities available to residents is another measure of Level of Service. The Conservation District was compared against similar agency benchmarks.

The results of the benchmark can be found in the table on pages 72-73, and in the table below. Across the six agencies contacted, there was a wide range of amenities offered ranging from typical passive recreation amenities such as trails and shelters to highly specialized assets like golf courses and dog parks. In staying consistent with the Conservation District mission, some of these amenities may not be appropriate options for Macon County Conservation Area. Comparisons among the agencies were made per 10,000 population and overall the Conservation District had few major differences.

Compared to the averages, the District was below average for:

- Disc golf (-1.91)
- Golf (-0.84)
- Fishing (-0.33)
- Boat launch (-0.18)
- Volleyball courts (-0.11)
- Dog park (-0.08)
- Baseball/softball fields (-0.03)
- Basketball courts (-0.03)

While the District was below average for these amenities, most are not well aligned with the District mission and are unlikely to be added in the future unless there is a large amount of public demand. The two exceptions are boat launches and fishing amenities, both of which are current and popular District offerings.

For other amenities the District does offer and that also align with the mission, they are all at or above the average number. The three amenities with the greatest number above average are:

- Playgrounds (+0.37)
- Multi-use fields (+0.28)
- Shelters (+0.03)

The District is also above average in the miles of equestrian trails (+0.34) and skiing trails offered (+0.14) but is below average for multi-use trails (-0.11).

The benchmarks also compared the Conservation District against averages for a few key indoor facilities. The District was below average in the number of indoor program/support facilities (-0.59) and restrooms (-0.35) but was slightly above average for concession facilities (+0.09).

Finally, the programs offered by peer agencies were compared, focusing programs with additional infrastructure requirements. For camping and snowmobiling, the conservation District offers fewer sites than average, (-0.13 and -0.03 respectively) but offered 0.37 sites above average for hunting.

Agency Benchmark Level of Service Analysis

Per 10,000 population

Other Conservation and Forest Preserve Districts	
Boone County Conservation District	130,728
Byron Forest Preserve District	7,801
Champaign County Forest Preserve District	209,399
McHenry County Conservation District	309,122
Rock Island Forest Preserve	144,808
Vermillion County Conservation District	77,909
Average Number of Other District's Amenities	
Macon County Conservation District	
MCCD Amenity Comparison to Average	



TRAILS			INDOOR FACILITIES		AVAILABLE PROGRAMS			DAY USE AMENITIES		SPORTS COURTS AND AMENITIES								WATER-BASED AMENITIES			
Multi-Use Trails (miles)	Equestrian Trails (miles)	Skiing Trails (miles)	Indoor Program / Support Facility	Restrooms	Camping	Snowmobiling	Hunting	Shelters	Playground	Multi-Use Field	Baseball/Softball Field	Basketball Court	Volleyball Court	Dog Park	Golf (holes)	Disc Golf (holes)	Horseshoe Pit	Ice Skating	Sled Hill	Boat Launch	Fishing
3.09	0.31	0.58	0.15					0.84						0.08					0.08	0.08	0.08
			0.98		0.20				0.39	0.20						3.53				0.39	0.20
2.29			0.14	0.91	0.05			0.48	0.14				0.19		0.43				0.05	0.29	0.29
1.94		1.10	0.10			0.03	0.03	0.94			0.03	0.03	0.03			0.29			0.03	0.13	0.58
0.51	0.41	0.97			0.14			0.35	0.35		0.21				1.24				0.07	0.14	0.14
4.50			2.50		0.50		0.63	1.00	0.88											0.63	1.25
2.47	0.36	0.88	0.77	0.91	0.22	0.03	0.00	0.72	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.03	0.11	0.08	0.84	1.91	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.27	0.42
2.36	0.70	1.03	0.19	0.56	0.09	0.00	0.37	0.84	0.37	0.37	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.09	0.09
-0.11	0.34	0.14	-0.59	-0.35	-0.13	-0.03	0.37	0.12	0.37	0.37	-0.03	-0.03	-0.11	-0.08	-0.84	-1.91	0.00	0.00	0.04	-0.18	-0.33

Land Acquisition Assessment

The Conservation District developed this assessment tool to provide a quantitative measure of land value of conservation for properties being considered for acquisition.

The founding mission of the Macon County Conservation District is to promote the conservation of natural and cultural resources by acquiring, maintaining, and restoring native ecosystems and cultural sites to leave them unimpaired for future generations. Today, the District manages over 3,490 acres of land holdings, roughly 1.5% of the County's total land area. Limited resources, both financial and staff, require prioritizing the management and improvement of existing property. However, it's important for the District to continue to evaluate opportunities to acquire and preserve additional land, preserving rare and critically threatened ecological resources, filling gaps within current land holdings, expanding education and recreational opportunities (particularly those that generate revenue), and providing public access to open space in underserved communities within the County. Future acquisitions need to be strategic, resulting in a high value of return without placing undo stress on available resources. The goal of the land acquisition assessment is to help the District identify, evaluate, and acquire critical properties that will strengthen the already remarkable District holdings.

In order to determine the value of land for potential acquisition, the planning team and District staff developed a set of assessment criteria to assign numerical value to properties. The following land acquisition assessment ranks circumstances for seven different categories; minimum size, location, current land use, land value, ecological value, community support, and education, recreation, and scientific value. Weighted scores are assigned to each criterion based on its degree of importance. For each category, the most beneficial circumstances add up to the highest number with a maximum possible score of 300. This assessment tool should be used as a starting point for evaluation but should not be the sole determining factor.

Minimum Size:

In the past, there has been no specific minimum acreage for land acquisition that is not located immediately adjacent to the District's existing holdings. The proposed ranking system favors large sites due to the difficulty and inefficiency in managing small isolated sites. Smaller sites can however contain important cultural, archeological, and historic sites, contain viable remnant plant communities, support critically threatened or endangered species, and support successful venues for both educational and recreational activities. Therefore, smaller isolated sites should still be considered for acquisition where there is a strong case the site would contribute to the District's mission and goals.

Location:

This evaluation criteria places emphasis on land that is an inholding, a privately-owned parcel within the boundary of the Conservation District, and parcels that are adjacent to District land. Parcels of land that are isolated are considered less desirable.

Land Use:

Land that is not currently developed/managed or is maintained as a natural area is ranked the highest. These land uses require the fewest resources to conserve or restore the site and have a potentially a lower acquisition cost. Agricultural land is ranked the second highest since it is likely that less investment has been made to develop the land than if it is used for other activities. It is also likely that land developed for agricultural purposes has been altered less than sites which have been developed for other uses. Moderately developed refers to land which has some infrastructure development, minimal structures, and roads. Significantly developed refers to land which has commercial, industrial, or extensive residential development. The last two categories represent greater levels of capital investment and land alteration and are therefore ranked lowest for acquisition.

Land that is at a high risk of being developed is rated the most highly while land that is at a low risk of development, is given the lowest priority. The Conservation District will have the largest conservation impact by protecting land from degrading development practices. Conversely, land that is at a low development risk will continue to provide some ecological benefits even with a low quality of ecosystem than property that has been developed.

Land Value:

Acquisitions that are a good value (cost per acre) will stretch the public acquisition dollars.

Ecological Value:

Floristic Quality Assessment (FQA), defined by Wilhelm and Rericha in Flora of the Chicago Region, A Floristic and Ecological Synthesis (2017), is a method of assessing the natural quality of site based on its inhabitancy by conservative plant species. Observed native plant species are recorded and assigned a coefficient of conservatism (C-value), ranging from 0 to 10 based on its affinity for intact natural plant communities. Introduced species adapted to a broad spectrum of environmental variables are characterized by a low C-value. While, species adapted to a narrow spectrum of environmental variables are characterized by a high C-value. Areas of high natural quality would include a range of plants comprising a matrix with a native mean C-value greater than 5. Floristic quality index (FQI) is obtained by multiplying the native mean C-value by the square root of the number of native species inventoried at a site. Sites with an FQI greater than 35 indicate a high natural area quality.

Natural Community Grading, outlined by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI), evaluates a series of environmental indicators to rate the natural quality of a plant community (A, B, C, D, and E). Grade A natural communities exhibit native species composition, structure, and function with very minimal signs of degradation and require minimal management to maintain their present condition. Inversely, Grade E communities have experienced severe levels of degradation that the functional community has been removed and requires total reconstruction.

Wildlife population sampling is an important tool when evaluating the success of long-term management activities. Sampling can help establish a baseline for community health and can be an indicator of natural quality. Population sampling can be performed for a number of species including mammals, birds, bats, reptiles, amphibians, fish, mussels, freshwater invertebrates, insects, etc. Sampling protocol will vary dependent upon the species being surveyed.

Stream assessments can be used to gather information on the ecological condition of a river/stream and identify the stressors that might affect them. Utilizing the United States Department of Agriculture Stream Visual Assessment

Protocol, streams are evaluated based on 15 characteristics and given a value from poor (1) to excellent (10). An overall assessment score is determined by adding the values and dividing by the total number of assessment criteria. An overall score of 9 and greater is considered a high-quality stream. It is also important to record physical characteristics of the stream including drainage area, stream gradient, and the overall position in the landscape.

The presence of threatened and endangered (T&E) species can be evaluated using the web-based Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Ecological Compliance Assessment Tool (EcoCAT) (<http://dnr.illinois.gov/EcoPublic/>). EcoCAT uses GIS mapping to determine if a protected natural resource has the potential to be within the vicinity of a proposed site. Additional information and Macon County distribution of listed endangered, threatened, and candidate species can be found on the United States Fish and Wildlife Service website (<https://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/lists/illinois-cty.html>). The actual distribution of endangered and threatened species may be further investigated by performing detailed field surveys.

The presence of special flood zones can be evaluated using the FEMA digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) (<https://msc.fema.gov/portal/home>).

Potential acquisition sites located within the Big/Long Creek Watershed and subject to the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Implementation Plan as outlined by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are considered high priority. This TMDL Implementation Plan is intended to improve water quality by reducing pollutant loads.

Hydric soil is a soil that formed under conditions of saturation, flooding, or ponding long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic conditions in the upper part. The presence of hydric soil is critical to conservation planning and assessment of potential wildlife habitat and wetland communities. Potential locations for hydric soil can be determined using the Web Soil Survey (WSS) operated by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (<https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm>). Field investigation is required to determine actual presence of hydric soils on a parcel.

Wetlands are important environmental features that provide numerous beneficial functions including protecting and improving water quality, providing fish and wildlife habitats, storing floodwaters, and maintaining surface water flow during dry periods. Potential locations for wetlands can be determined using The Wetland Mapper operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (<https://www.fws.gov/wetlands/data/mapper.html>). Field investigation is required to determine the actual presence of wetlands on a parcel.

The Restorability Index, developed by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INIA), was developed to rapidly assess the restoration potential of lands that are of lesser quality but still possess significant natural values. This assessment can provide an indication of the potential for, effort associated with, and cost of, restoring a site to higher natural quality, for example in moving a parcel from a Grade of C to a Grade of B. The Restorability Index is not designed to be applied to existing high-quality natural communities.

Community Support:

This evaluation criteria places emphasis on properties where the community supports Conservation District acquisition. This could include general support from the neighborhood property owners and/or local municipality, state, or federal agency. Properties that have been incentivized by the community, such as donations, grants, or acquisition assistance are rated more highly. Whenever possible, community outreach should be referenced or collected to determine the level of community support. This criteria is subjective and is largely determined by Conservation District perspective and expertise.

Education, recreation, scientific value:

Properties that can support education, recreation, and scientific amenities and programs are valuable to fulfilling the District’s mission. The most highly rated properties are those that provide significant value, such as sites that provide all three types of value or have the ability to support one-of-a-kind elements (rare habitats, endangered species, historic sites, and/or a unique recreation amenity). Average sites might not offer all the types of value, include more common elements, or contain these elements in smaller quantities. The lowest value properties are sites that only provide one type of value in a small quantity and/or poor condition. This criteria is subjective and is largely determined by Conservation District perspective and expertise.

Size

Greater than 100 acres	20
50-100 acres	10
1-50 acres	5
Total	

Location

In-holding	20
Adjacent to current land holdings	10
Location in underserved communities	5
Total	

Land Use

Current Use	
Natural/Undeveloped	20
Agriculture	10
Moderately altered	5
Significantly altered	1
At Risk of Development	
High risk	10
Medium risk	5
Low risk	1
Total	

Land Value

Donation	20
Fee-Simple Purchase	
Less than \$4,000/acre	10
\$4,000-\$10,000/acre	5
Greater than \$10,000/acre	1
Total	

Ecological Value

Floristic Quality*	
Native mean C value of >4.0	20
Native mean C value of 3.0 - 4.0	10
Native mean C value of 2.0 - 3.0	5
Native mean C value of < 2.0	1
Community Grading	
Grade A	20
Grade B/C	10
Grade D/E	5
Wildlife Counts (mammal, bird, reptile, fish, amphibian, mussel, and invertebrates)	
High wildlife population	20
Medium wildlife population	10
Low wildlife population	5
Stream Quality (bank erosion, natural meanders, pool and riffles, in-stream habitat)	
High stream stability	20
Medium stream stability	10
Low stream stability	5
Critical Biodiversity	
Multiple T&E plan species, animal species or natural communities	20
One T&E plan species, animal species or natural community	10
Plant species, animal species, or plant community of regional significance	5
Presence of Special Flood Zones (floodway, 100-year floodplain, 500-year floodplain)	
Adjacent to river or stream	20
Presence of special flood zone	10
No special flood zone presence	5
Watershed	
Location within critical subwatershed in need of protection	20
Presence of Hydric Soil	
Hydric soil present (>30% site)	20
Hydric soil present (<30%)	10
No hydric soil present	5
Restorability	
High restorability index	20
Average restorability index	10
Low restorability index	5
Total	

Community Support

High community or political support	20
Medium community or political support	10
Low community or political support	5
Total	

Education, Recreation, Scientific Value

Provides significant education, recreation, or scientific value	20
Provides average education, recreation, or scientific value	10
Provide low education, recreation, or scientific value	5
Total	

*Developed by Floyd Swink and Gerould Wilhelm and documented in *Plants of the Chicago Region*



Conservation Area Inventory

This inventory offers a snapshot of the existing conditions for all conservation areas during the time of the master plan process.

Introduction

This section includes a detailed inventory and analysis of each individual property. The planning team and District staff performed a site visit and evaluation of each of the Macon County Conservation District's conservation areas to determine the opportunities and/or potential recommendations for improvements. Each site was photographed, and staff provided information on how the area is used and any issues with the site or site amenities.

Inventories are grouped by classification. Natural areas in the Conservation District include small areas of development and passive recreation amenities that are necessary for District management and visitor programming. Special use areas serve a single program purpose. Each conservation area classified as a natural area of special use area includes a spread with a detailed list of site observations, development history, and an evaluation of each amenity in addition to the area and site photography. The undeveloped area spreads follow the natural area and special use area information. These sites consist of maintained land in its natural state but have no recreation development. Due to the lack of amenities, these site spreads only include site observations with aerial and site photography

Utilization

The purpose of the conservation area analysis is to guide the action plan development and to serve as a general reference guide. This not only allows the Conservation District to utilize these pages to reference the existing conditions of each conservation area at the time of the master plan but also to document the on-going changes and updates to each area as capital improvements and master plan action items are completed.

**The Macon County
Conservation District
maintains 15 properties
totaling 3,489.9 acres.
Five of these areas contain
recreation amenities.**

Fort Daniel Conservation Area

4975 Fort Daniel Road, Decatur

General Observations:

- Site Accessibly
- open to the public

Adjacent Land Use

- agricultural
- residential

Users / Programs

- adjacent neighborhood residents

Park Access

- vehicular: paved drive with 2 parking lots and accessible handicap spaces
Stabilized stream ford
- pedestrian: concrete paths to shelter, playground, and restroom, internal mown paths and compacted dirt paths

Site Furnishings

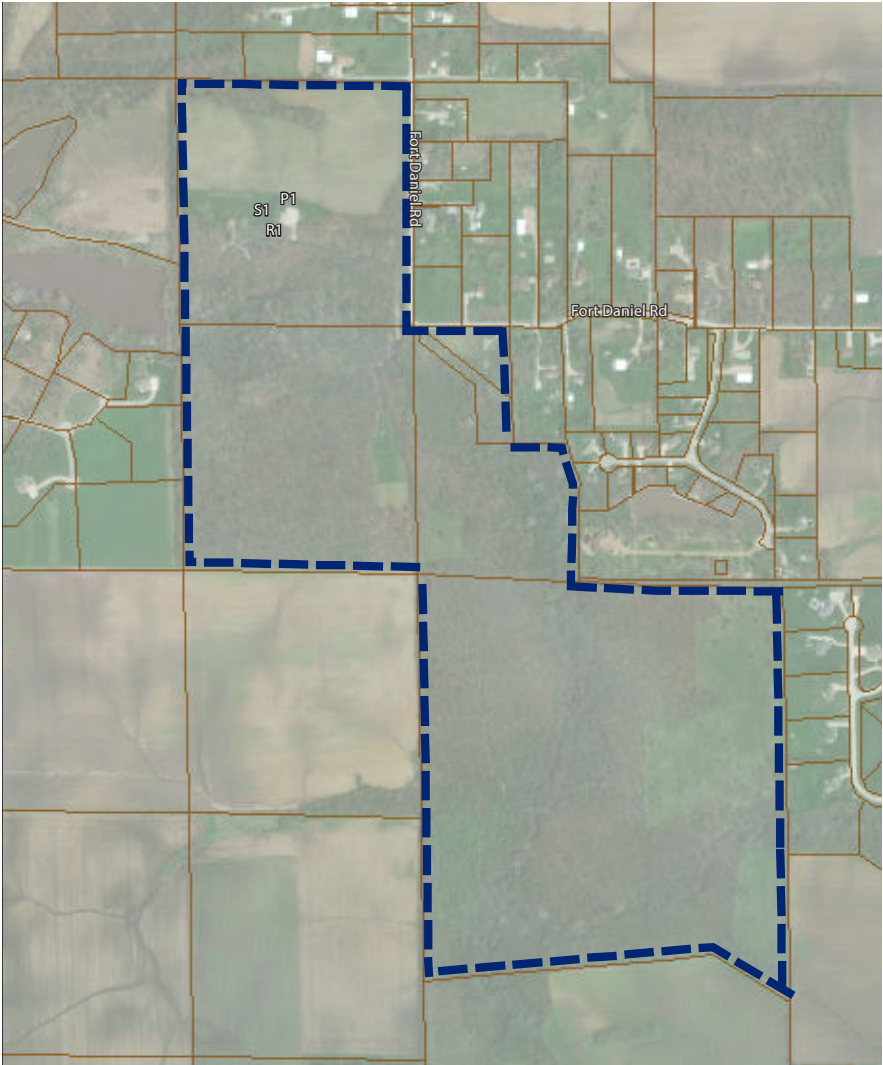
- wood and metal picnic tables
- recycled timber litter and recycling receptacles
- metal bike rack
- metal grill
- metal fire pit
- interpretive signage

Special Features

- maintenance building

Development History

Quantity	Year Built		
3.25		Trails-Multi-Use (miles)	Trails
✓		Hiking	
		Bicycling	
		Equestrian	
✓		Cross-Country Skiing	
		Regional Trail Access	Indoor Facilities
✓		Indoor Program / Support Restrooms	
		Camping	Available Programs
		Hunting	
✓		Parking	Day Use Amenities
✓		Interpretive/Education	
1		Picnic Shelter	
1		Playground	
1		Multi-use Field	Sports Courts and Amenities
		Baseball Field	
		Softball Field	
		Volleyball Court	
		Horseshoe Pit	Water-based Amenities
		Ice Skating	
		Sledding	
		Boat Launch	
		Fishing	Natural Features
✓		Creek / River / Open Water	
✓		Prairie	
✓		Wetlands	
✓		Woodlands	



Classification
Acres

Natural Area
196.7

Amenities

Amenities	Accessible	Condition	Character
Shelter (S1)	yes	fair	large hexagon with ten tables. concrete paving, wood supports, shingle roof
Playground (P1)	yes	good	5-12 play structure, engineered wood fiber, wood timber curb, concrete access ramp
Restroom (R1)	yes	good	pit toilet, one woman's, one men's



Friends Creek Conservation Area

13734 Friends Creek Park Road, Cisco

General Observations:

- Site Accessibility
- open to the public

- Adjacent Land Use
- agricultural

- Users / Programs
- camping rentals
 - educational programming

- Park Access
- vehicular: paved drive and parking lots with accessible handicap spaces on both sides of Friends Creek Park Road, gravel roads and parking at camp and Bethel School
 - pedestrian: concrete paths to shelter 1 and Bethel School, asphalt path to playground, internal mown paths and compacted dirt paths

- Site Furnishings
- wood and metal picnic tables
 - recycled timber litter and recycling receptacles
 - metal bike rack
 - metal grill
 - metal fire pit
 - water fountain at shelter
 - interpretive signage

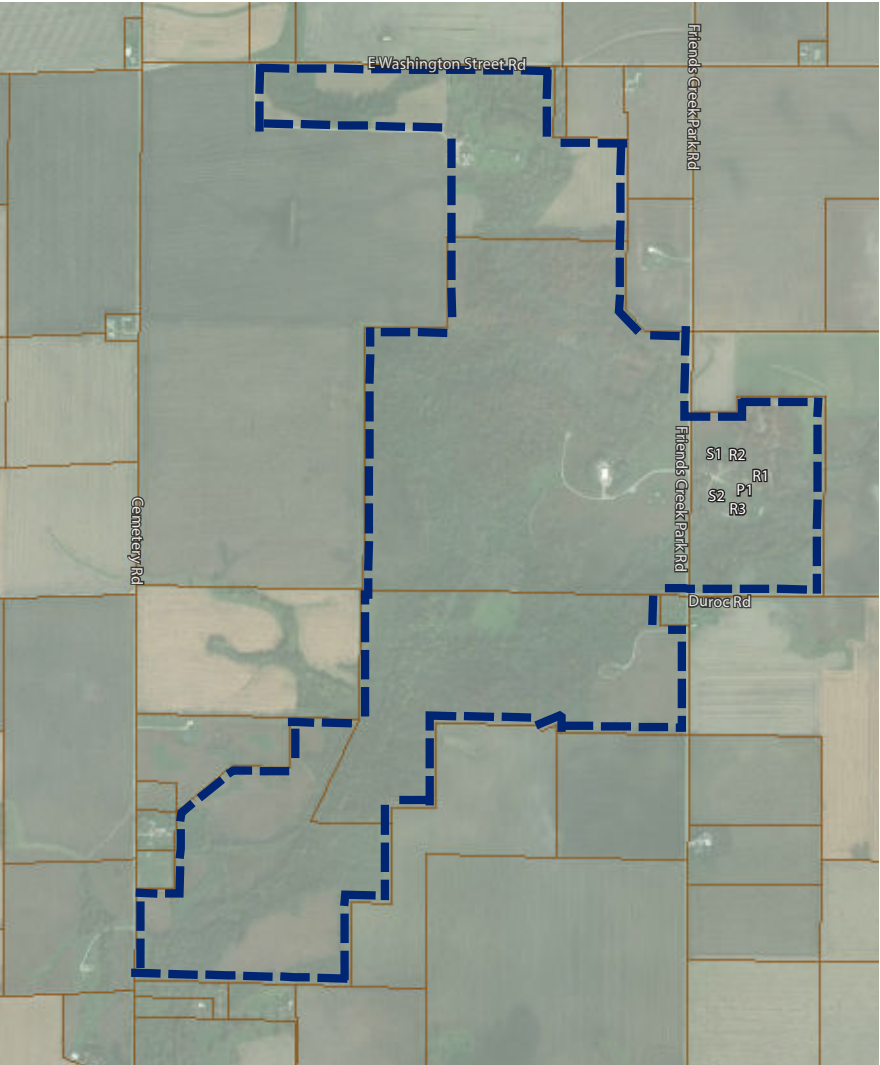
- Special Features
- Bethel School
 - comfort station at camp with flushable restrooms, showers, and potable water
 - maintenance building

Amenities

Amenities	Accessible	Condition	Character
Shelter (S1)	yes	fair	large rectangle with 15 tables, brick fireplace. concrete paving and supports, vinyl siding, tongue and groove decking, shingle roof, light
Shelter (S2)	no	good	large divided rectangle with 12 tables, concrete paving and supports, vinyl siding, tongue and groove decking, shingle roof, electrical panel
Playground (P1)	yes	good	5-12 play structure. engineered wood fiber, wood timber curb, concrete access ramp, asphalt path over 5% slope
Restroom (R1, R2, R3)	no	good	pit toilet, single occupancy

Development History

Quantity	Year Built		
3.5		Trails-Multi-Use (miles)	Trails
✓		Hiking	
		Bicycling	
		Equestrian	
✓		Cross-Country Skiing	Indoor Facilities
		Regional Trail Access	
✓		Indoor Program / Support	
✓		Restrooms	
✓		Camping	Available Programs
		Hunting	
✓		Parking	
✓		Interpretive/Education	
3		Picnic Shelter	Day Use Amenities
1		Playground	
1		Multi-use Field	
		Baseball Field	
		Softball Field	Sports Courts and Amenities
		Volleyball Court	
		Horseshoe Pit	
		Ice Skating	
		Sledding	Water-based Amenities
		Boat Launch	
		Fishing	
✓		Creek / River / Open Water	
✓		Prairie	Natural Features
		Wetlands	
		Woodlands	
✓			



Classification
Acres

Natural Area
621.2



Griswold Conservation Area

9896 S Meridian Avenue, Blue Mound

General Observations:

- Site Accessibly
- open to the public

Adjacent Land Use

- agricultural

Users / Programs

- Blue Mound residents\drop-in neighborhood users
- dark skies and astronomy programming
- wildlife refuge (north slope)
- ranger station and maintenance building

Park Access

- vehicular: gravel drive and parking lot with 2 accessible concrete handicap spaces
- pedestrian: concrete paths to shelter 1 and playground with slopes >5%. Internal mown paths, mown path connection to Blue Mound, observation deck at top of mound

Site Furnishings

- wood and metal picnic tables
- recycled timber litter and recycling receptacles
- metal bike rack
- metal grill
- metal fire pit
- water fountain at shelter
- interpretive signage

Special Features

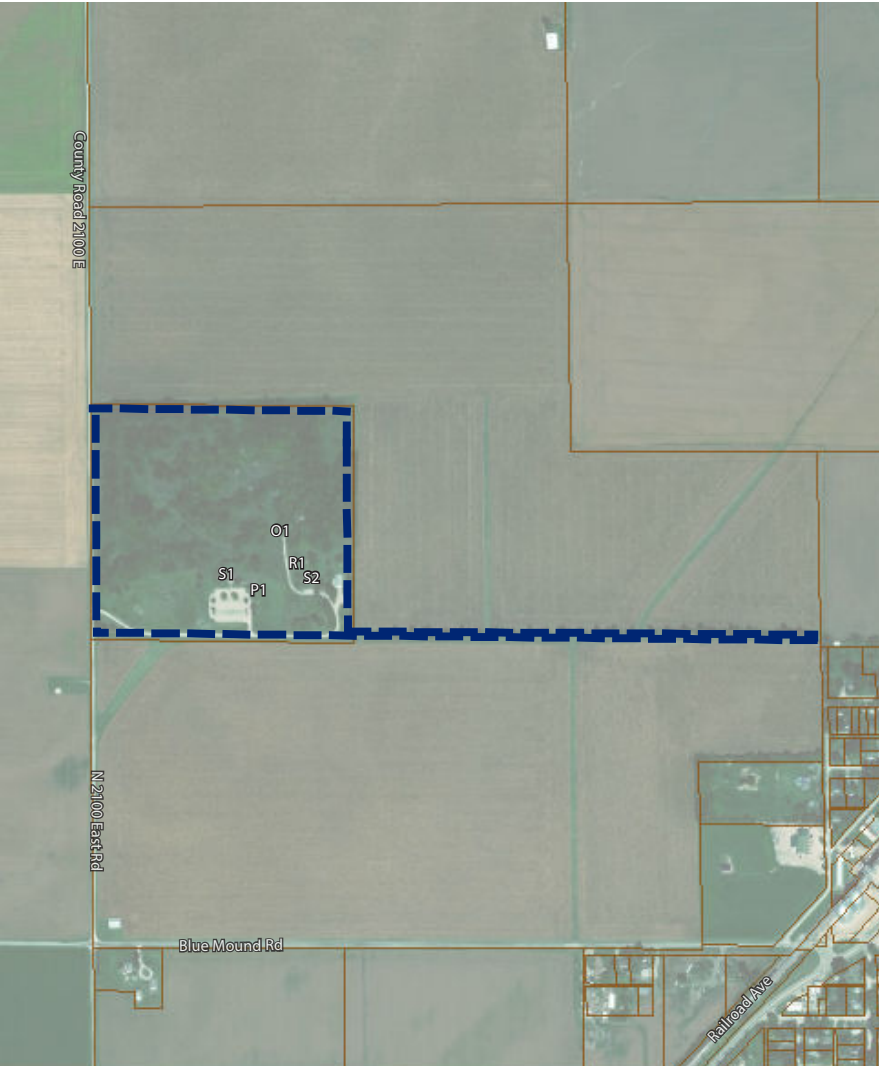
- glacial kame
- ranger residence and maintenance building
- restroom building with flushable toilets, potable water, storage

Amenities

Amenities	Accessible	Condition	Character
Shelter (S1)	yes	good	large rectangle with 12 tables, central fireplace. concrete paving, metal supports, wood siding and tongue and groove, shingle roof, attached to restroom building
Shelter (S2)	no	fair	small rectangle with 6 tables, concrete paving in poor condition, wood supports, vinyl siding, shingle roof
Observation Deck (O1)	no	good	wood structure with metal stairs and railing, interpretive signage
Playground (P1)	yes	excellent	5-12 play structure, engineered wood fiber, wood timber curb, concrete access ramp
Restroom (R1)	no	good	pit toilet, one woman’s, one men’s

Development History

Quantity	Year Built		
1.0	✓	Trails-Multi-Use (miles)	Trails
		Hiking	
		Bicycling	
		Equestrian	
✓		Cross-Country Skiing	
		Regional Trail Access	Indoor Facilities
✓		Indoor Program / Support Restrooms	
		Camping	Available Programs
		Hunting	
✓		Parking	Day Use Amenities
2		Interpretive/Education	
1		Picnic Shelter	
1		Playground	Sports Courts and Amenities
		Multi-use Field	
		Baseball Field	
		Softball Field	
		Volleyball Court	
		Horseshoe Pit	
		Ice Skating	Water-based Amenities
1		Sledding	
		Boat Launch	
		Fishing	
		Creek / River / Open Water	Natural Features
✓		Prairie	
✓		Wetlands	
		Woodlands	



Classification	Natural Area
Acres	45.4



Rock Springs Conservation Area

3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur

General Observations:

- Site Accessibly
- open to the public

Adjacent Land Use

- agricultural
- residential
- municipal

Users / Programs

- Recreation Center visitors
- education programs
- camp programs
- special events
- regional bike trail
- boating

Park Access

- vehicular: paved road and parking at Nature Center and canoe launch gravel road and parking across Brozio Lane
- pedestrian: concrete paths to Nature Center, playground, and shelters, brick pavers at Homestead Prairie Farm, internal gravel, mown, and compacted dirt paths

Site Furnishings

- wood and metal picnic tables
- recycled timber litter and recycling receptacles
- metal bike rack
- metal grill
- metal fire pit
- water fountain at shelter and building
- interpretive signage

Special Features

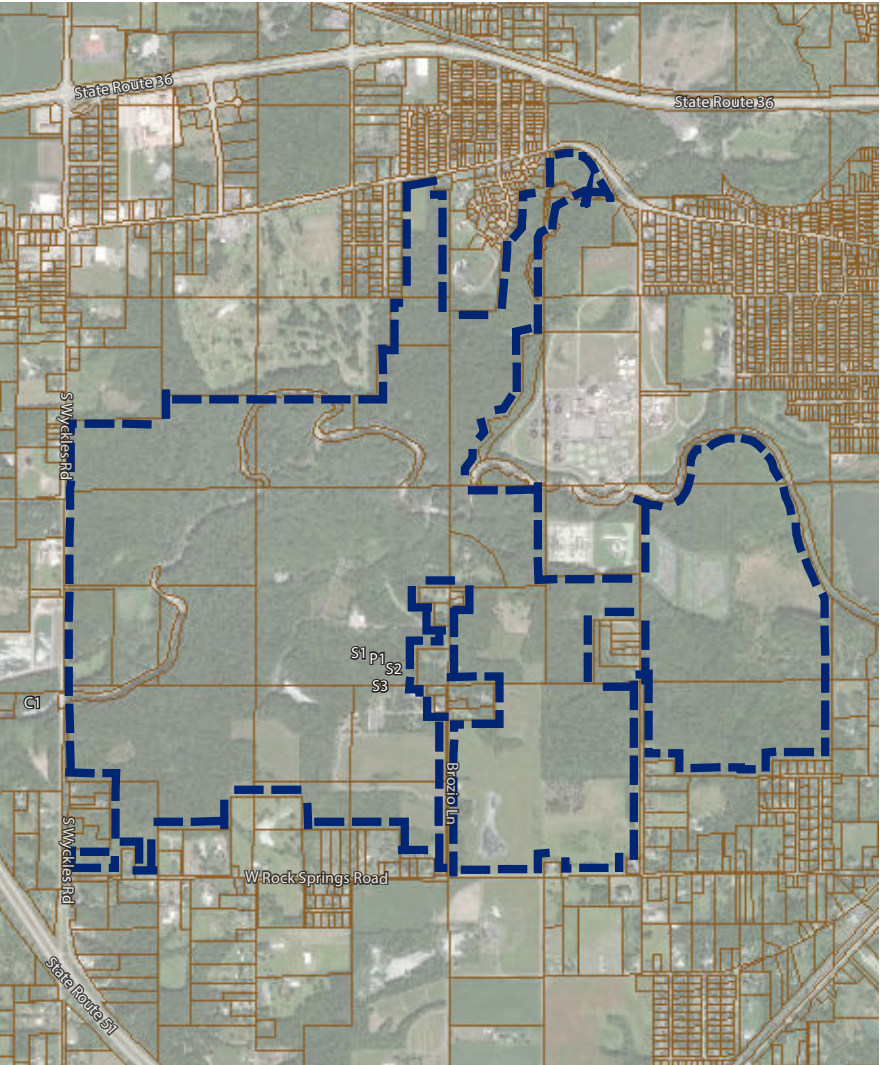
- Nature Center (and District offices)
- Homestead Prairie Farm
- Rock Springs Bottling Plant
- ranger residence
- restroom and information shelter
- maintenance building
- 421 acres enrolled in Illinois Land and Water Reserce Program

Amenities

Amenities	Accessible	Condition	Character
Shelter (S1)	yes	good	small rectangle, 8 tables. concrete paving, wood structure, shingle roof
Shelter (S2)	yes	good	small rectangle, 8 tables. concrete paving, wood structure, shingle roof
Shelter (S3)	yes	excellent	small trapezoid, 6 tables. concrete paving, wood structure and siding, shingle roof connected to restroom and concession building
Playground (P13)	yes	excellent	2-5 and 5-12 structure, GFRC climbers, log balance course. engineered wood fiber, concrete curb, stone seat wall, concrete access ramp
Canoe Launch (C1)	yes	good	concrete paving to river

Development History

Quantity	Year Built		
10.0		Trails-Multi-Use (miles)	Trails
✓		Hiking	
✓		Bicycling	
		Equestrian	
✓		Cross-Country Skiing	
✓		Regional Trail Access	
✓		Indoor Program / Support	Indoor Facilities
✓		Restrooms	
		Camping	Available Programs
✓		Hunting	
✓		Parking	Day Use Amenities
✓		Interpretive/Education	
3		Picnic Shelter	
1		Playground	Sports Courts and Amenities
1		Multi-use Field	
1		Baseball Field	
		Softball Field	
		Volleyball Court	
		Horseshoe Pit	Water-based Amenities
		Ice Skating	
		Sledding	
1		Boat Launch	
✓		Fishing	
✓		Creek / River / Open Water	Natural Features
✓		Prairie	
✓		Wetlands	
✓		Woodlands	



Classification	Natural Area
Acres	1,364.5



Sand Creek Conservation Area

4314 S. Franklin Street Road, Decatur

General Observations:

- Site Accessibly
- open to the public

Adjacent Land Use

- agricultural

Users / Programs

- equestrian
- seasonal hunting

Park Access

- vehicular: gravel drive and parking lot with 20 trailer spaces
- pedestrian: Internal mown and compacted dirt paths, stream fords

Site Furnishings

- wood and metal picnic tables
- recycled timber litter and recycling receptacles
- metal bike rack
- metal grill
- metal fire pit
- water pump
- interpretive signage

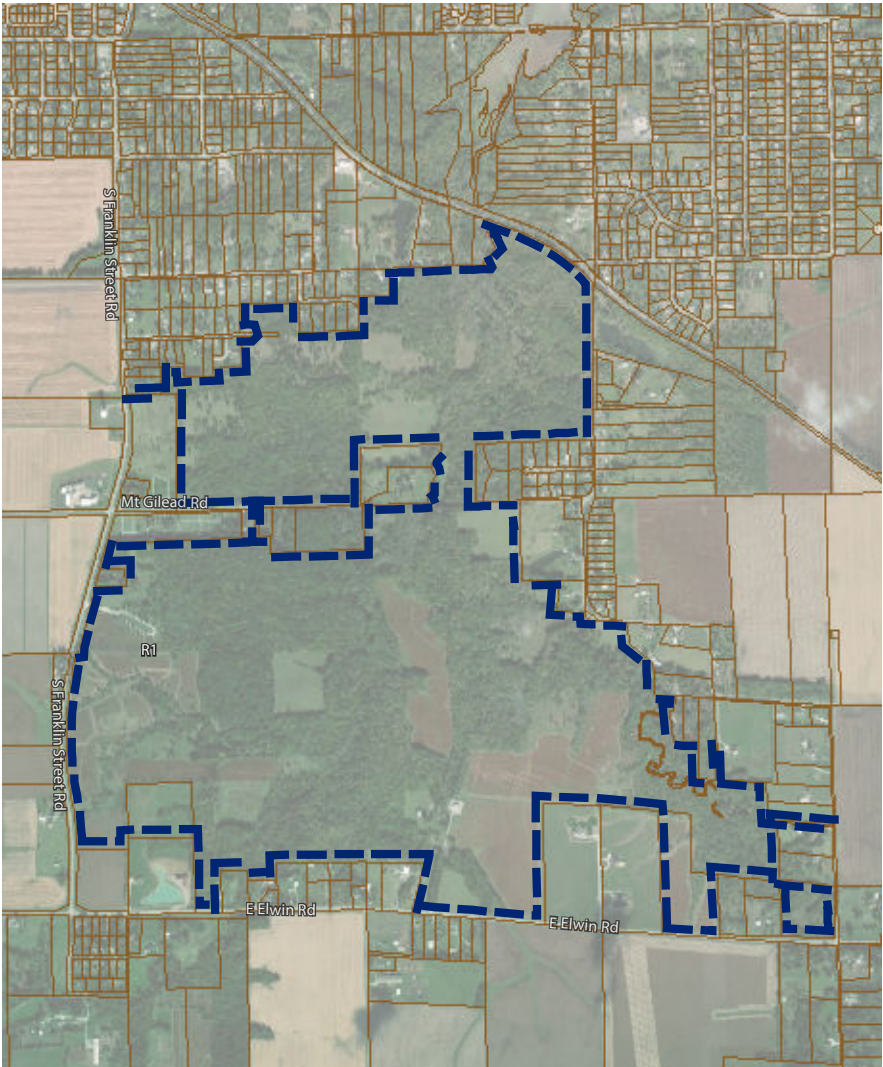
Special Features

- ranger residence and maintenance building
- accessible horse ramp
- historic Paris-Springfield Road

Development History

Quantity	Year Built		
7.50		Trails-Multi-Use (miles)	Trails
✓		Hiking	
		Bicycling	
✓		Equestrian	
✓		Cross-Country Skiing	
		Regional Trail Access	
		Indoor Program / Support Restrooms	Indoor Facilities
✓		Camping	Available Programs
		Hunting	
✓		Parking	Day Use Amenities
✓		Interpretive/Education	
✓		Picnic Shelter	
		Playground	Sports Courts and Amenities
		Multi-use Field	
		Baseball Field	
		Softball Field	
		Volleyball Court	
		Horseshoe Pit	Water-based Amenities
		Ice Skating	
		Sledding	
		Boat Launch	
		Fishing	Natural Features
✓		Creek / River / Open Water	
✓		Prairie	
✓		Wetlands	
✓		Woodlands	

Classification	Natural Area
Acres	794.2



Amenities

Amenities	Accessible	Condition	Character
restrooms (R1)	yes	good	pit toilet, single occupancy

Governor Oglesby Mansion

421 W William Street, Decatur

General Observations:

Site Accessibly

- open to the public on Wednesday and Saturday from June through September and on the last Sunday of the month from March through November

Adjacent Land Use

- residential

Users / Programs

- historic programs
- tours
- event rentals
- residential tenant

Park Access

- vehicular: street parking available
- pedestrian: brick path with stair connection to public sidewalk

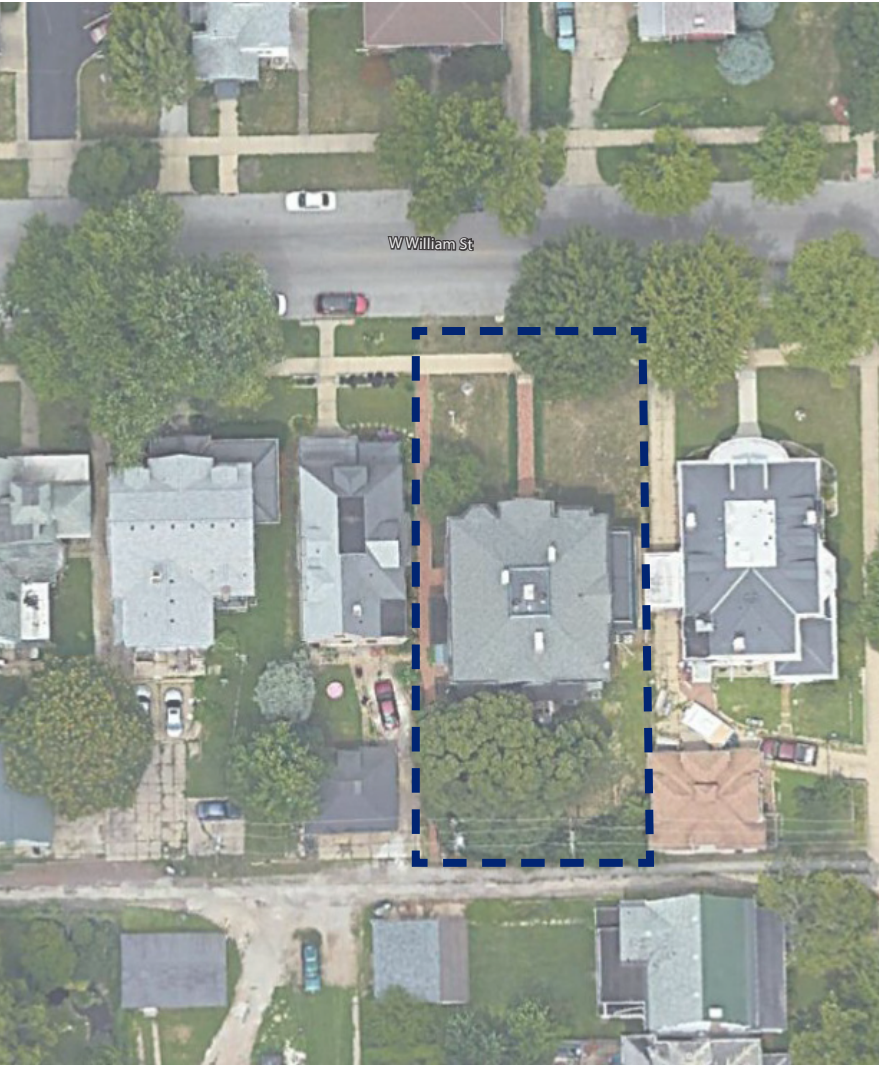
Site Furnishings

- concrete bench
- historical marker
- interpretive signage

Special Features

- on National Register of Historic Places

Quantity	Year Built		
		Trails-Multi-Use (miles)	Trails
		Hiking	
		Bicycling	
		Equestrian	
		Cross-Country Skiing	
		Regional Trail Access	Indoor Facilities
✓		Indoor Program / Support Restrooms	
✓		Camping	Available Programs
		Hunting	
		Parking	Day Use Amenities
✓		Interpretive/Education	
		Picnic Shelter	
		Playground	Sports Courts and Amenities
		Multi-use Field	
		Baseball Field	
		Softball Field	
		Volleyball Court	
		Horseshoe Pit	Water-based Amenities
		Ice Skating	
		Sledding	
		Boat Launch	
		Fishing	Natural Features
		Creek / River / Open Water	
		Prairie	
		Wetlands	
		Woodlands	



Classification
Acres

Special Use
0.2 (leased/managed)

GOVERNOR OGLESBY MANSION

Amenities

Amenities	Accessible	Condition	Character
no additional outdoor amenities			



GOVERNOR OGLESBY MANSION

Bois du Sangamon Nature Preserve

Apollo Drive and N Sangamon Road, Decatur

Classification	Undeveloped
Acres	53.7

General Observations:

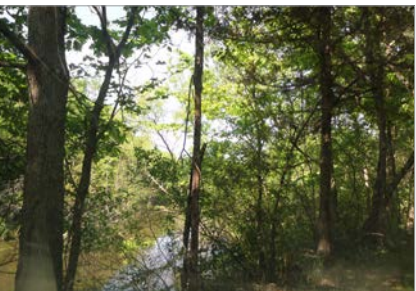
- Site Accessibly
- not open to the public

Adjacent Land Use

- residential
- industrial
- Lake Decatur shore

Special Features

- natural ravines
- virgin timber stand
- State of Illinois assists in management
- Illinois nature preserve



Grove Branch Conservation Area

3000N Shelby County Road/W Hilvety Road west of Jacobs Road, Moweaqua

Classification	Undeveloped
Acres	81.4

General Observations:

- Site Accessibly
- not open to the public

Adjacent Land Use

- agriculture

Special Features

- Sheriff Department shooting range
- woodlands



Kaufman Lakeside Conservation Area

1604 South Shores Drive, Decatur

Classification	Undeveloped
Acres	4.8

General Observations:

- Site Accessibly
- open to the public

- Adjacent Land Use
- residential
 - Lake Decatur shore

Special Features

- gravel parking lot
- steep natural ravines



Leiby Hall Conservation Area

Hartung Road and Crossroads Road, Decatur

Classification	Undeveloped
Acres	36.2

General Observations:

- Site Accessibly
- not open to the public

- Adjacent Land Use
- agriculture

Special Features

- small pond
- woodlands



Powers Woods

Spring Street and Greenwood Avenue, Decatur

Classification	Undeveloped
Acres	2.9 (leased/managed)

General Observations:

- Site Accessibly
- not open to the public

Adjacent Land Use

- residential
- municipal

Special Features

- woodlands



Upper Sangamon Natural Area

Donavan Road and Ruch Road, Oakley

Classification	Undeveloped
Acres	10.1

General Observations:

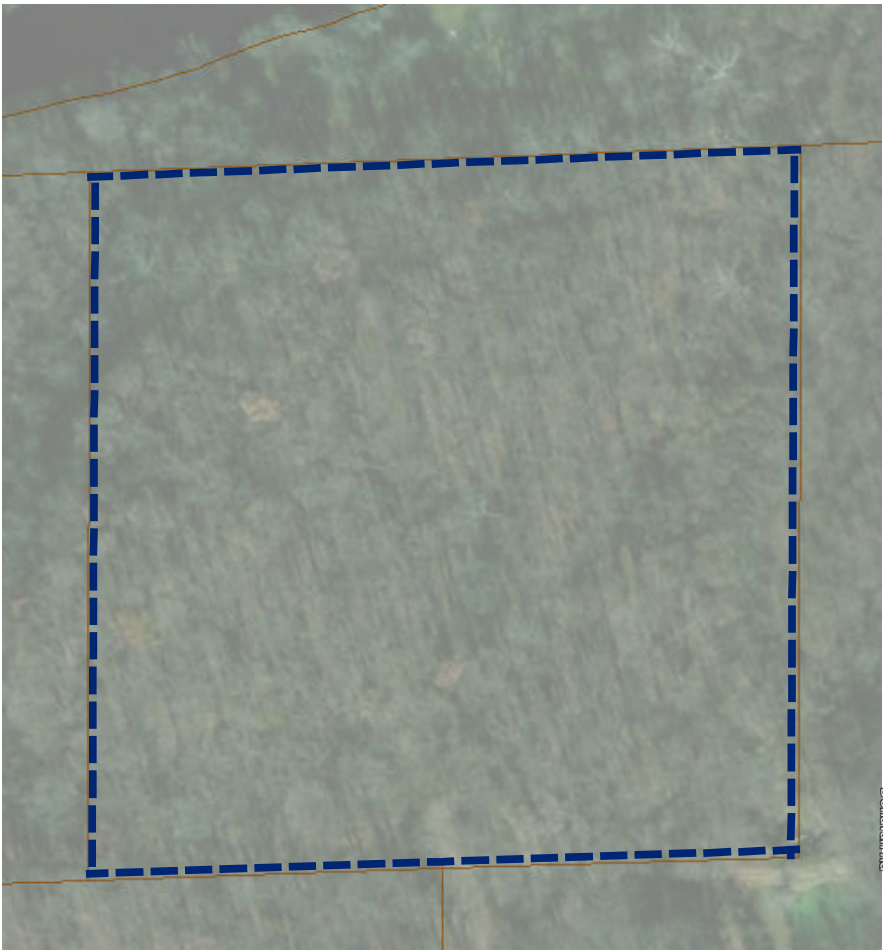
- Site Accessibly
- not open to the public

Adjacent Land Use

- agriculture
- woodland

Special Features

- only access point through private, residential land



Willow Branch I

W Walker Road and Route 51, Macon

Classification	Undeveloped
Acres	95.4

General Observations:

- Site Accessibly
- not open to the public

- Adjacent Land Use
- agricultural

Special Features

- Willow Branch Creek



Willow Branch II

Riley Road between W Walker Road and W Ridlen Road

Classification	Undeveloped
Acres	147.5

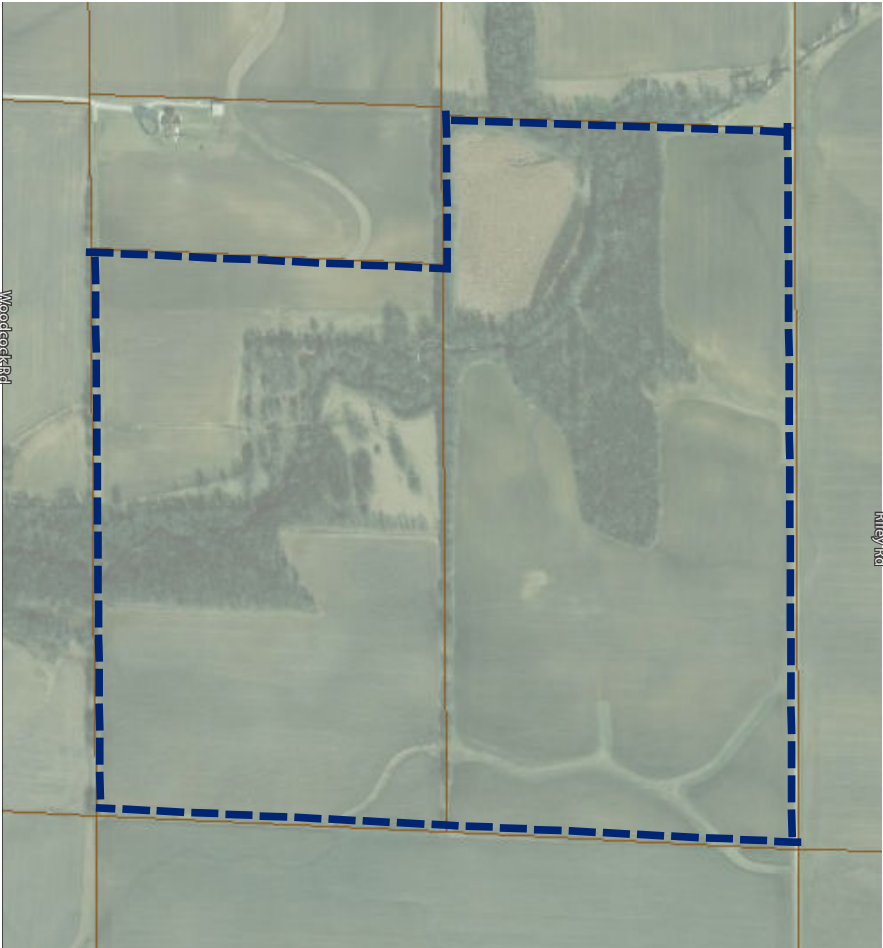
General Observations:

- Site Accessibly
- open to the public

- Adjacent Land Use
- agriculture

Special Features

- Willow Branch Creek
- in-progress restoration
- east half is rented for farming
- gravel parking lot



Wright-Banton Audubon Area

South of Thunderbird Drive and Tropicana Road, Decatur

Classification Undeveloped
Acres 35.6 (leased/managed)

General Observations:

Site Accessibly

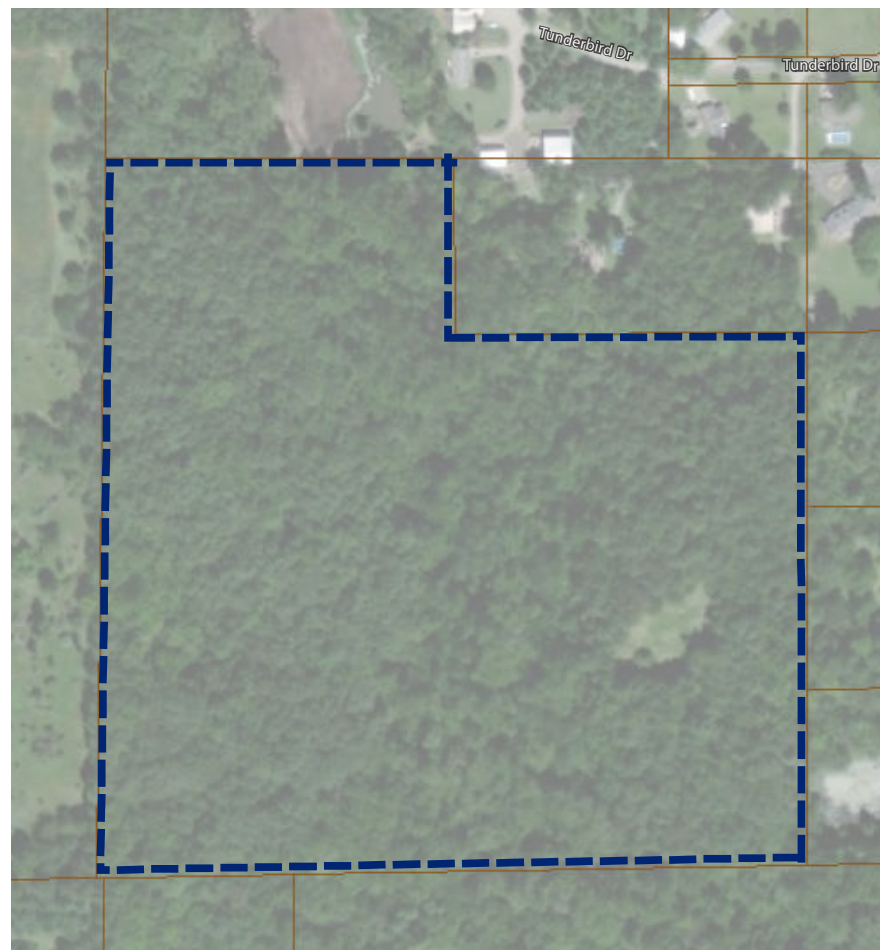
- not open to the public

Adjacent Land Use

- residential
- woodlands
- agricultural

Special Features

- sanctuary for native plants and animals
- no direct access



Natural Area Assessment

The natural area assessment identifies the existing and proposed site habitats and natural features, and includes a maintenance schedule for each site.

Introduction

This section includes an introduction of every Conservation Area describing the site's location, development/preservation history, existing natural features, and any challenges or potential threats to the site. This section also includes a management schedule that provides goals and actionable steps and resources to achieve them for the following categories:

- Annual monitoring
- Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species – Native or Landscaped
- Tree management
- Control of exotic organisms and animal overpopulation
- Introduction of conservative plant species*
- Conversion of agriculture land to native plant communities
- Conversion of manicured lawn to native plant communities
- Streambank stabilization
- Selective demolition of structures

Finally, this section contains site-specific restoration plans that establish a vision for ten sites that were not included in the 2004 Master Plan and require planning to guide future restoration.

Utilization

The purpose of the conservation area analysis is to guide the action plan development and to serve as a general reference guide. This not only allows the Conservation District to utilize these pages to reference the existing conditions of each conservation area at the time of the master plan but also document the on-going changes and updates to each area as capital improvements and master plan action items are completed.

Methodology

The following maps documenting existing and proposed conditions were generated using the planning team site visits in 2018, data from the 2004 master plan update, historic land cover records, aerial imagery, input from Conservation District staff, FEMA flood mapping, Web Soil Survey (WSS), and National Wetlands Inventory (NWI). For the ecological assessment, the planning team only visited sites and portions of conservation areas that were acquired in 2005 or later. For the remaining properties, the 2004 master plan vision was referenced with staff, providing input where conditions had changed. The conservation areas are listed in alphabetical order.

The floodplain data shown on the maps was recorded by FEMA and was unchanged by the planning team and may not reflect current conditions for all locations.

One of the Conservation District's goals is to restore sites to the best historical ecosystem they are capable of supporting and sustaining.

*Conservative Plant Species are species with a high fidelity to intact native habitats (undisturbed remnant communities) are called "conservative" species. These plants would have a high C-value (Coefficient of Conservatism). Plants on the opposite end of the spectrum are considered weedy or ruderal. These plants would have a low C-value. Habitats with high numbers of conservative species are defined as being high quality.

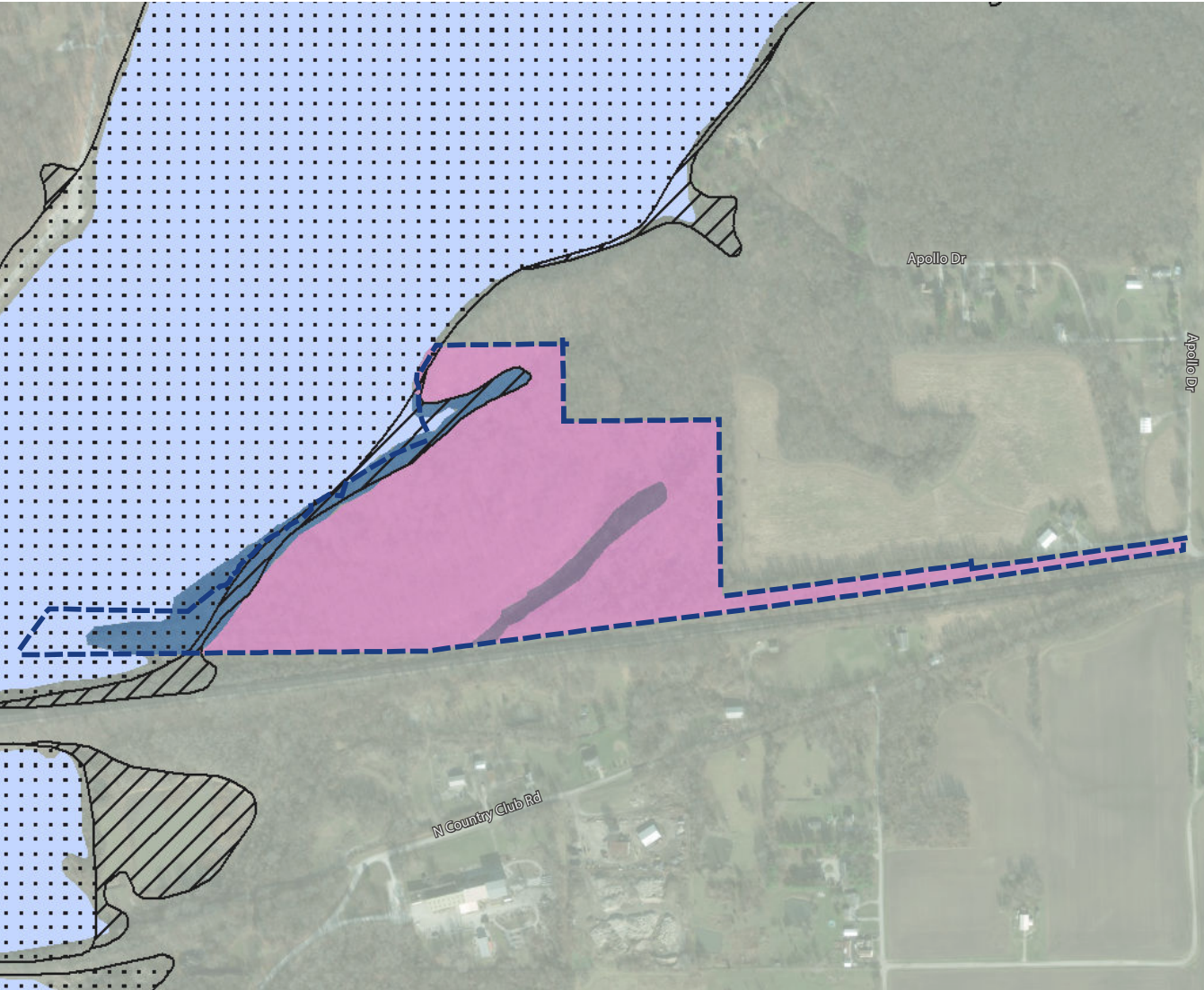
Bois du Sangamon Nature Preserve

Apollo Drive and N Sangamon Road, Decatur

Introduction:

The Bois Du Sangamon Nature Preserve is located in Oakley Township in the east-central part of the County, on the eastern edge of the City of Decatur (T16N, R3E, Sec 4). This site is 53.7 acres and is the District’s only holding that is a nature preserve. The site was donated to the District in 1979 and visitors are allowed by permit access only. The site is composed of white oak-red oak mesic uplands (much of which is virgin timber), a wetland, and retired borrow pits. The nature preserve is located on the shore of Lake Decatur and has frequently saturated soils.

Existing Conditions:



- Legend
- MCCD Conservation Area

Floodway

100-Year Floodplain

500-Year Floodplain

Savannah

Agriculture

Developed

Fallow

Floodplain Forest

Open Water

Prairie

Restoration Area

Upland Forest

Wetland



Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species - Native	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch.
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Introduction of conservative plant species	Restore degraded natural communities through the introduction of conservative plant species	Perform supplemental seeding and planting to increase floristic quality and biodiversity. Supplemental seeding and planting of wetland vegetation in hummocks and hollows.
Streambank stabilization	Stabilize erosion of streambank	Utilize applicable best practices to prevent erosion and mitigate damage such as rock veins, stone-toe, pools and riffles, coir logs, root wads, and/or native deep rooting plants

*See appendix for proposed restoration.

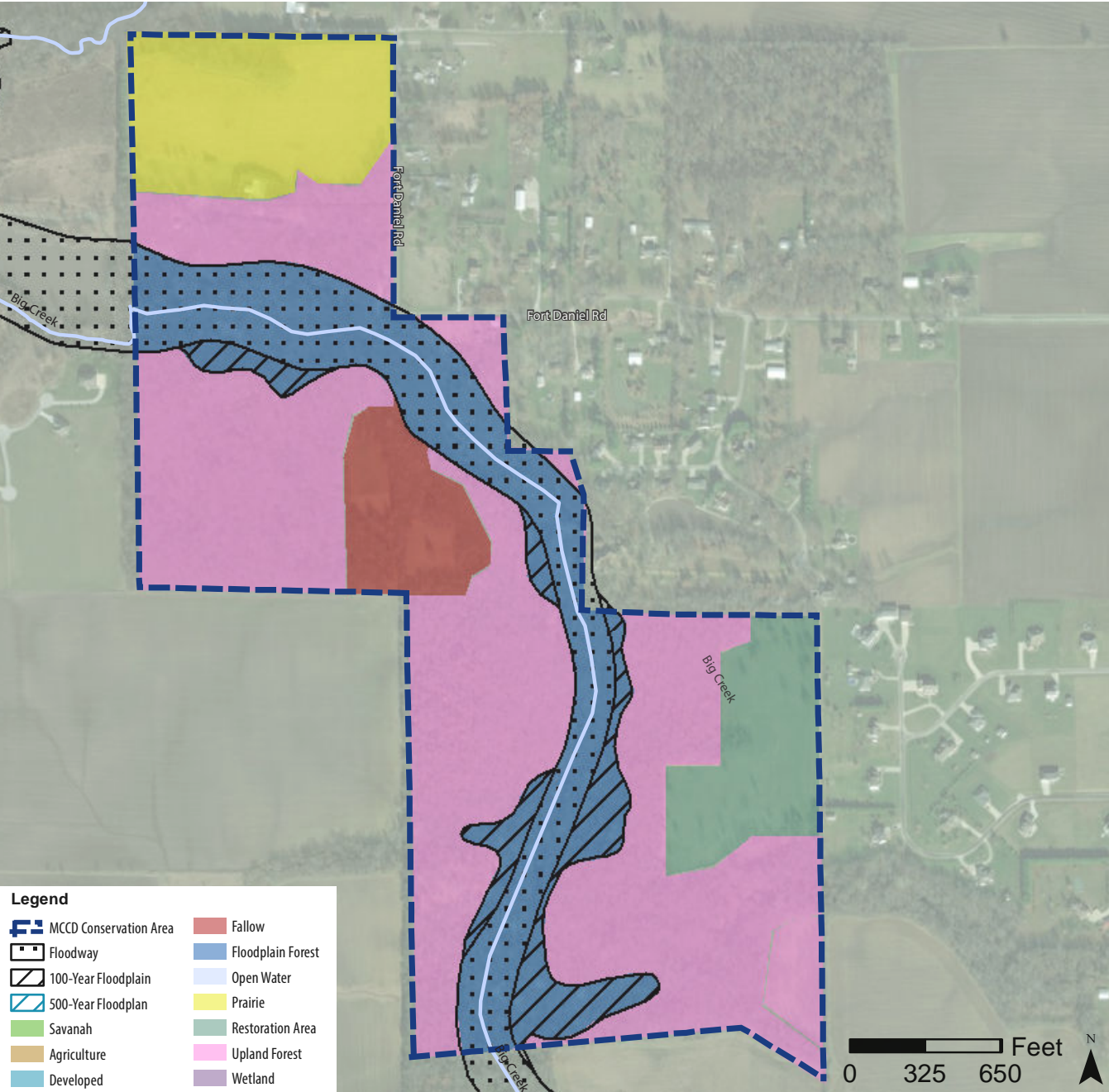
Fort Daniel Conservation Area

4975 Fort Daniel Road, Decatur, IL

Introduction:

The Fort Daniel Conservation Area is located in Mount Zion Township in the center of the County, on the southwestern edge of the City of Decatur (T15N, R3E, Sec 1) and is 196.8 acres. Named after 1800s Macon County resident Reverend Daniel Traughber, the site has historic links to southern sympathizers during the Civil War and a stagecoach route. Today, this conservation area offers a varied habitat with oak-hickory forests, a sugar maple grove, open grasslands, and floodplain forests. Big Creek also runs through the site, although historical data shows that this was not always the case. It is suspected that land use changes in the area altered the path of the stream. These historic records also indicate that the site has been heavily forested in the past.

Existing Conditions:



Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species - Native	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch.
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Introduction of conservative plant species	Restore degraded natural communities through the introduction of conservative plant species	Perform supplemental seeding and planting to increase floristic quality and biodiversity. Supplemental seeding and planting of wetland vegetation in hummucks and hollows.
Conversion of agriculture land to native plant communities	Restore agriculture land to native communities	Perform prescribed burn to remove non-native species, seed and plant with native species
Streambank stabilization	Stabilize erosion of streambank	Utilize applicable best practices to prevent erosion and mitigate damage such as rock veins, stone-toe, pools and riffles, coir logs, root wads, and/or native deep rooting plants

*See appendix for proposed restoration.

Friends Creek Conservation Area

13734 Friends Creek Park Road, Cisco

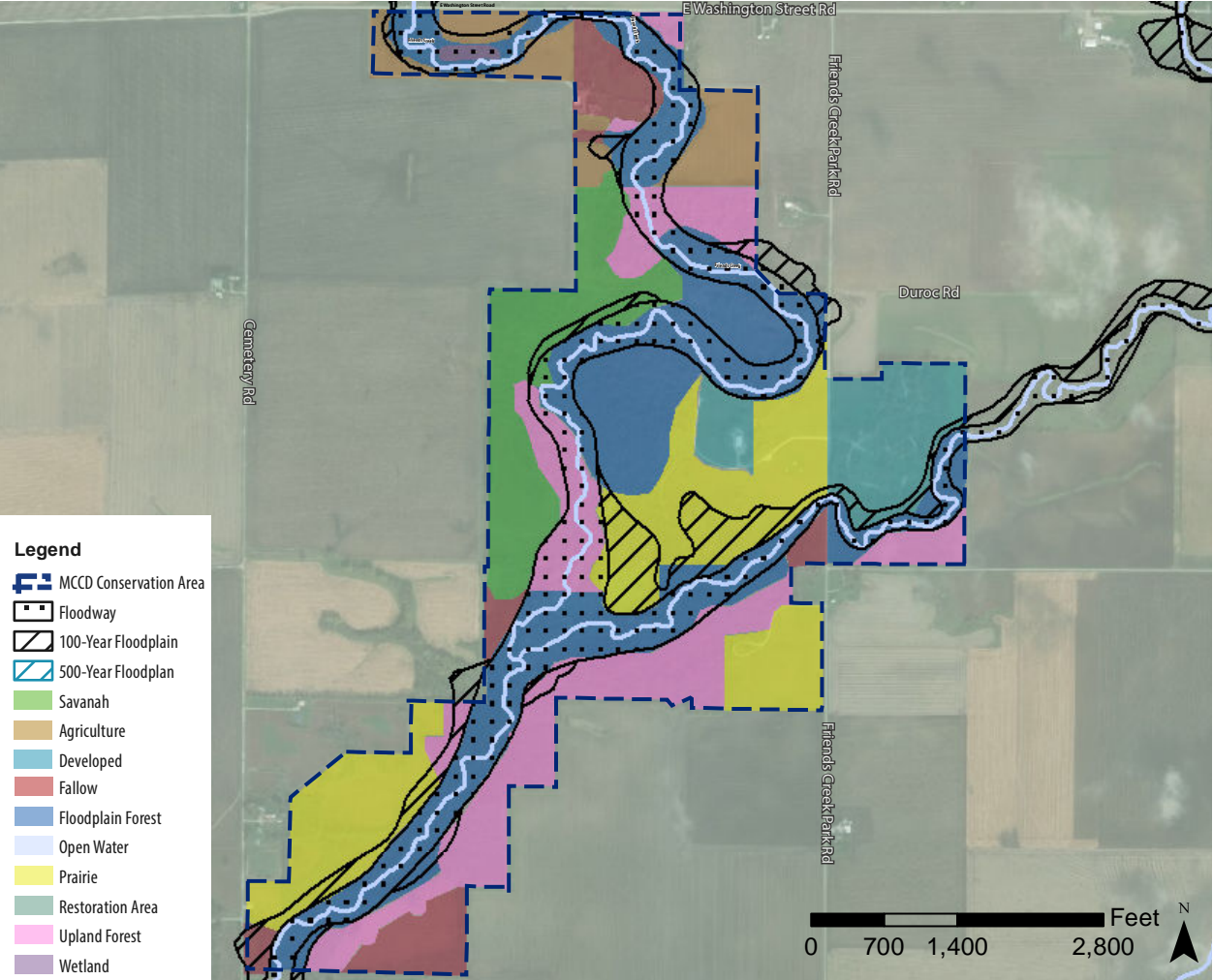
Introduction:

Friends Creek Conservation Area is located in Friends Creek Township in the northeast portion of Macon County (T18N, R4E, Section 7, 8, 18). The site is 621.3 acres and contains campground areas for both tent and recreational vehicles. The site is also the new location of the historic Bethel School; a one room school house, circa 1890. Friends Creek Conservation Area was part of the District's original land holdings, with additional parcels having been acquired over the years. Most of the site was planted in row crop or pasture when acquired before being converted back to a natural area, however, a large portion of the area east of Friends Creek Park Road is maintained turf grass for use by campers and other day-use visitors. Historical land cover data suggests this area was previously forested floodplain adjacent to Friends Creek surrounded by expanses of prairie.

Planned Restoration:

The newly acquired parcel south of Washington Street Road is composed mostly of agriculture land. Several buildings from the original homestead remain, including the main house, multiple barns, and storage sheds. Friends Creek bisects the site with associated lowland wooded floodplain and fringe wetlands. Restoration of the site includes; performing a drain tile investigation and strategically break tiles to return the natural hydrologic conditions to the site, removal of row crops can be achieved using controlled burns and overseeding with a native prairie grass matrix, removal of understory brush and invasive tree species within the floodplain woods, evaluate stability of the streambank and install erosion control measures where needed; and herbicide invasive species and supplemental planting in the floodplain wetlands to increase the floristic quality.

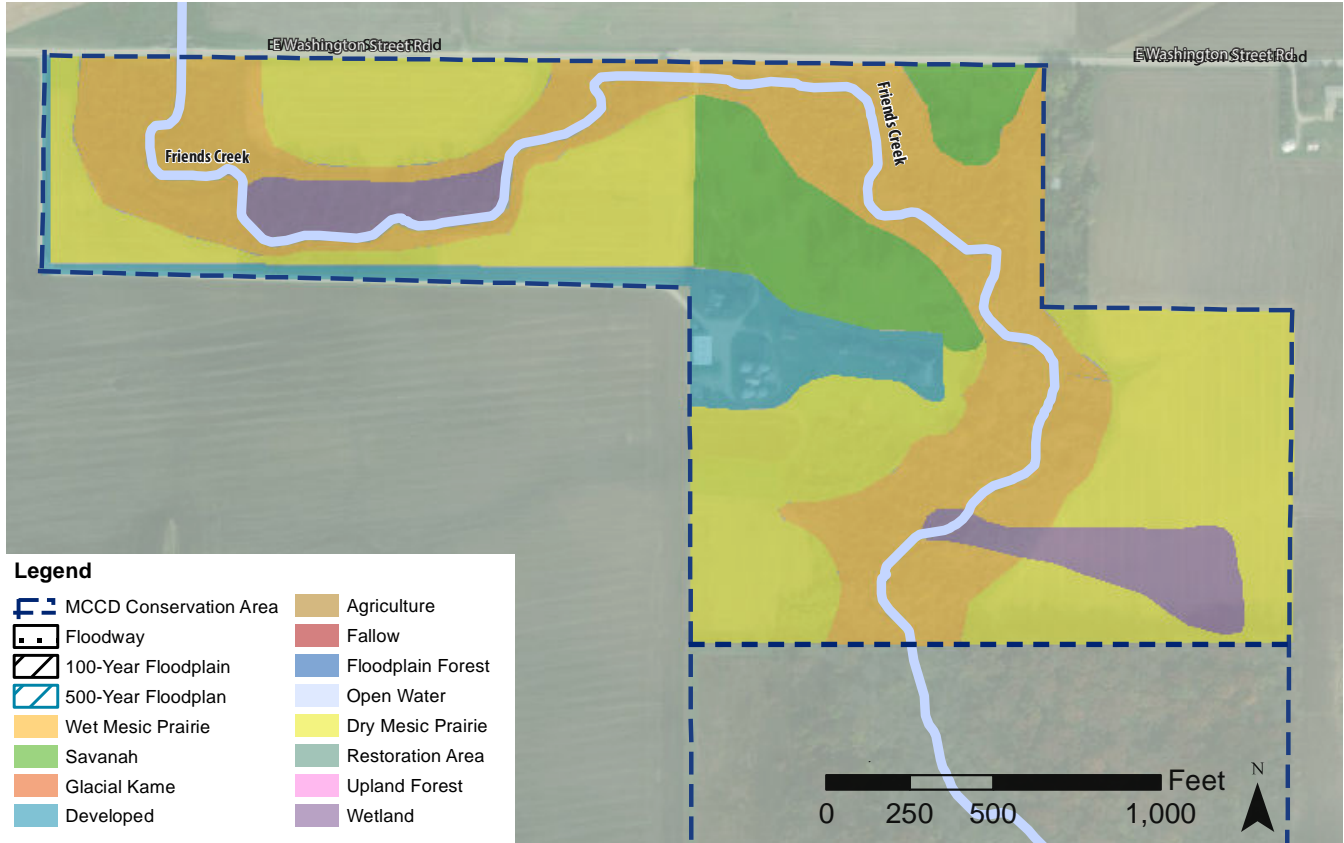
Existing Conditions:



Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species - Native	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Control of exotic organisms and animal overpopulation	Control exotic organisms and animal overpopulation to preserve or restore degraded natural communities	Maintain deer control program. Control beaver dams in the stream
Introduction of conservative plant species	Restore degraded natural communities through the introduction of conservative plant species	Perform supplemental seeding and planting to increase floristic quality and biodiversity. Supplemental seeding and planting of wetland vegetation in hummocks and hollows.
Conversion of agriculture land to native plant communities	Restore agriculture land to native communities	Perform prescribed burn to remove non-native species, seed and plant with native species
Streambank stabilization	Stabilize erosion of streambank	Utilize applicable best practices to prevent erosion and mitigate damage such as rock veins, stone-toe, pools and riffles, coir logs, root wads, and/or native deep rooting plants

Proposed Restoration:



Governor Oglesby Mansion

421 W William Street, Decatur

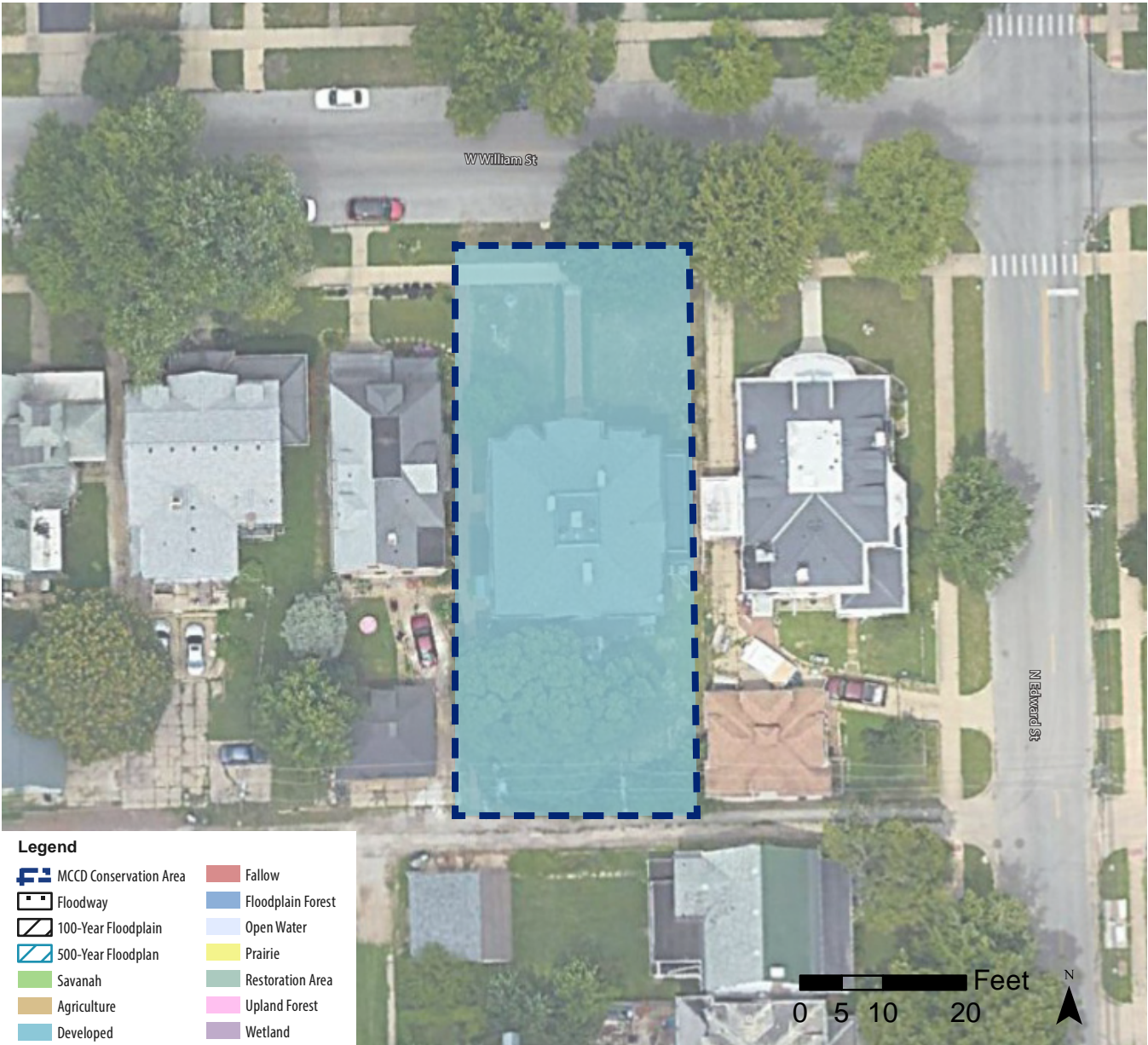
Introduction:

The Governor Oglesby Mansion is a unique property for the Conservation District. It is small (0.2 acres), located in a developed area, and does not contain native habitat. The mansion is on the National Register of Historic Places and was constructed in the late 1800s. It is located in downtown Decatur in Decatur Township (T16N, R2E, Section 15). The building takes up most of the site and the remaining property is maintained landscape and turf grass which supports the sites use as a program/rental venue, historical context, urban location, and small size.

Planned Restoration:

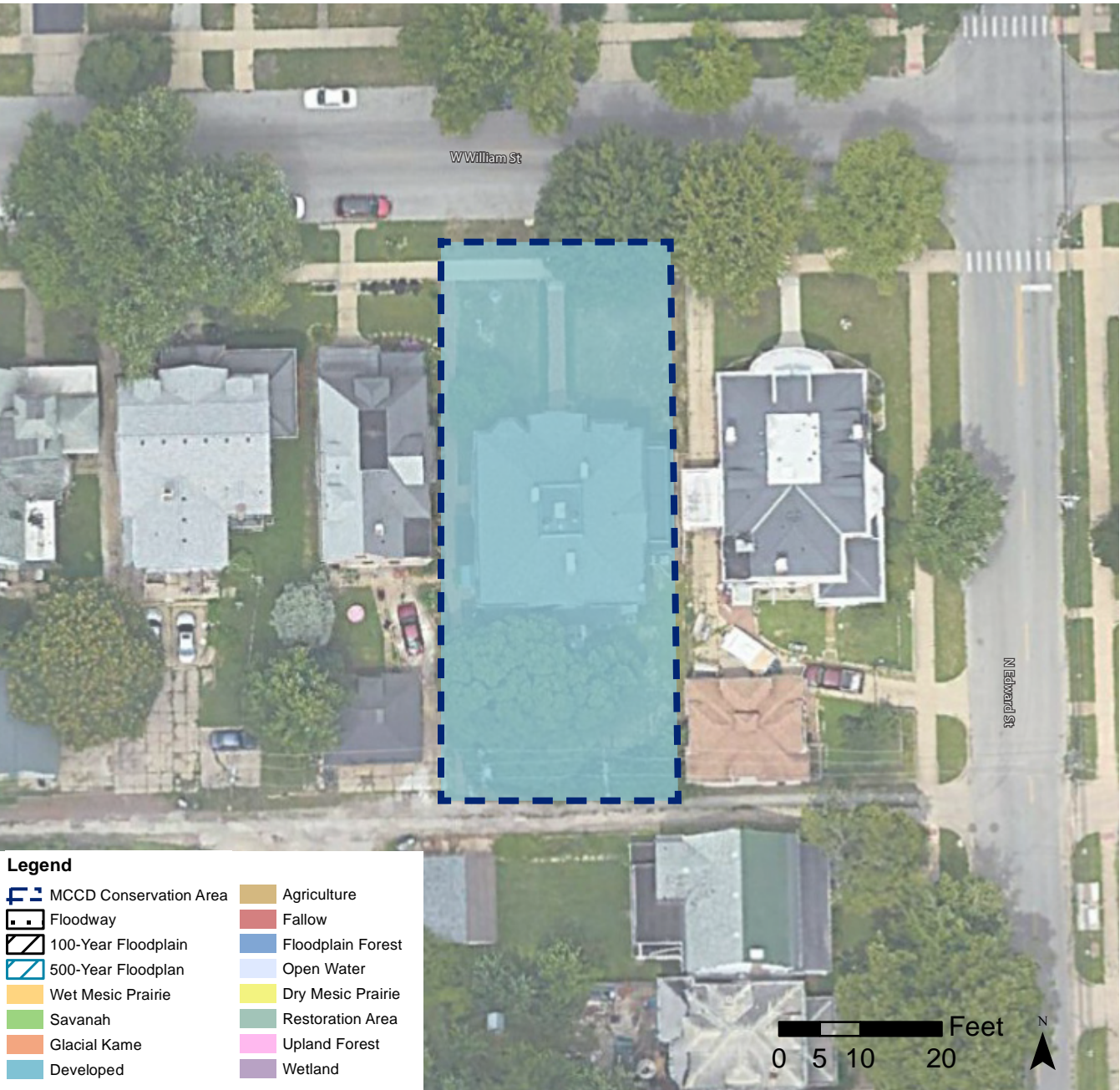
There is very little change that is required at the Govenor Oglesby Mansion site. Due to the property's use and limitations, it will remain developed and is not eligible for native ecosystem restoration. Instead, the Conservation District will continue to maintain the mown turf and landscape plantings, controlling the spread of weeds and using native and naturalized species in an ornamental capacity as needed.

Existing Conditions:



Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species - Landcaped	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), and other management practices	Maintained landscapes are characterized by more planning and control than native habitats. Native species used for ornamental effect are encouraged but non-native, non-weedy plant species and turf grass are also appropriate for this application.

Proposed Restoration:



Griswold Conservation Area

9896 S Meridian Avenue, Blue Mound

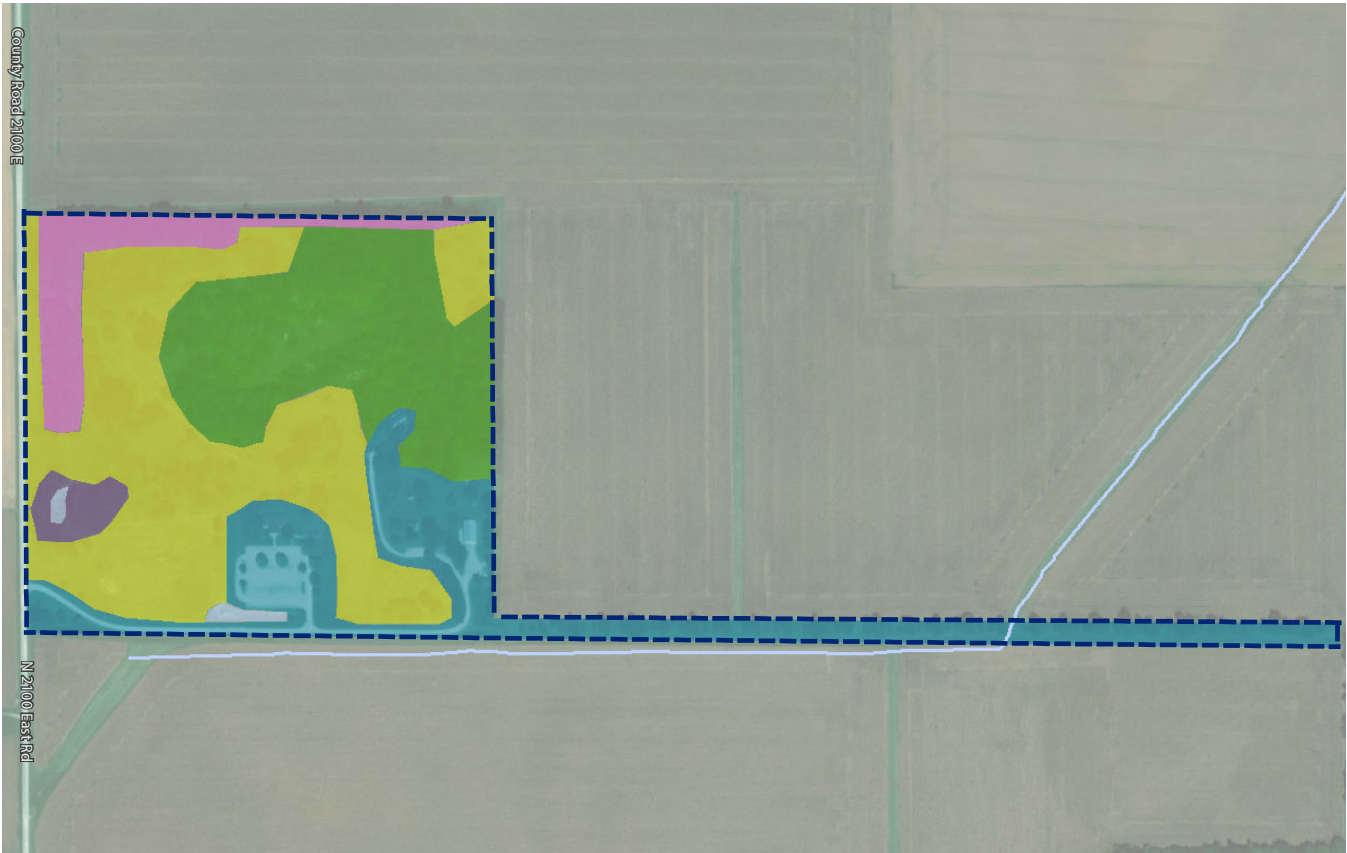
Introduction:

Griswold Conservation Area is located 1.5 miles northwest of Blue Mound in Southwest Macon County (T15N, R1E, Section 31). The site features one of the glacial kames of the Blue Mound area. The tall mound, formed by the glaciers, rises 80 feet above the surrounding farmland. At 706 feet above sea level, it is the second highest point in Macon County and provides spectacular views. On a clear day, you can see four counties. The mound is a glacial kame or a cone-shaped hill of gravel that forms as a glacier melts. Kames form at intersections of ice crevices as water, carrying gravel from on top of the glacier, drains through the crevice. This kame was left behind with the melting of the Illinois glacial episode 75,000 years ago.

Planned Restoration:

Based on historic aerial photographs, the land surrounding the kame was prairie with a planted windrow of trees in the northwest corner of the site and a small pond directly to the south. Over time trees have started to invade the prairie. Recommended restoration of the site includes removal of invasive tree species and all trees less than 20" DBH within the prairie, supplemental planting in the prairie and wetland to increase biodiversity, and control of invasive species across the site.

Existing Conditions:



- Legend**
- MCCD Conservation Area
 - Floodway
 - 100-Year Floodplain
 - 500-Year Floodplain
 - Savanah
 - Agriculture
 - Developed
 - Fallow
 - Floodplain Forest
 - Open Water
 - Prairie
 - Restoration Area
 - Upland Forest
 - Wetland

Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species - Native	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Introduction of conservative plant species	Restore degraded natural communities through the introduction of conservative plant species	Perform supplemental seeding and planting to increase floristic quality and biodiversity including but not limited to upland forest, prairie, and wetland plant communities

Proposed Restoration:



- Legend**
- MCCD Conservation Area
 - Floodway
 - 100-Year Floodplain
 - 500-Year Floodplain
 - Wet Mesic Prairie
 - Savanah
 - Glacial Kame
 - Developed
 - Agriculture
 - Fallow
 - Floodplain Forest
 - Open Water
 - Dry Mesic Prairie
 - Restoration Area
 - Upland Forest
 - Wetland

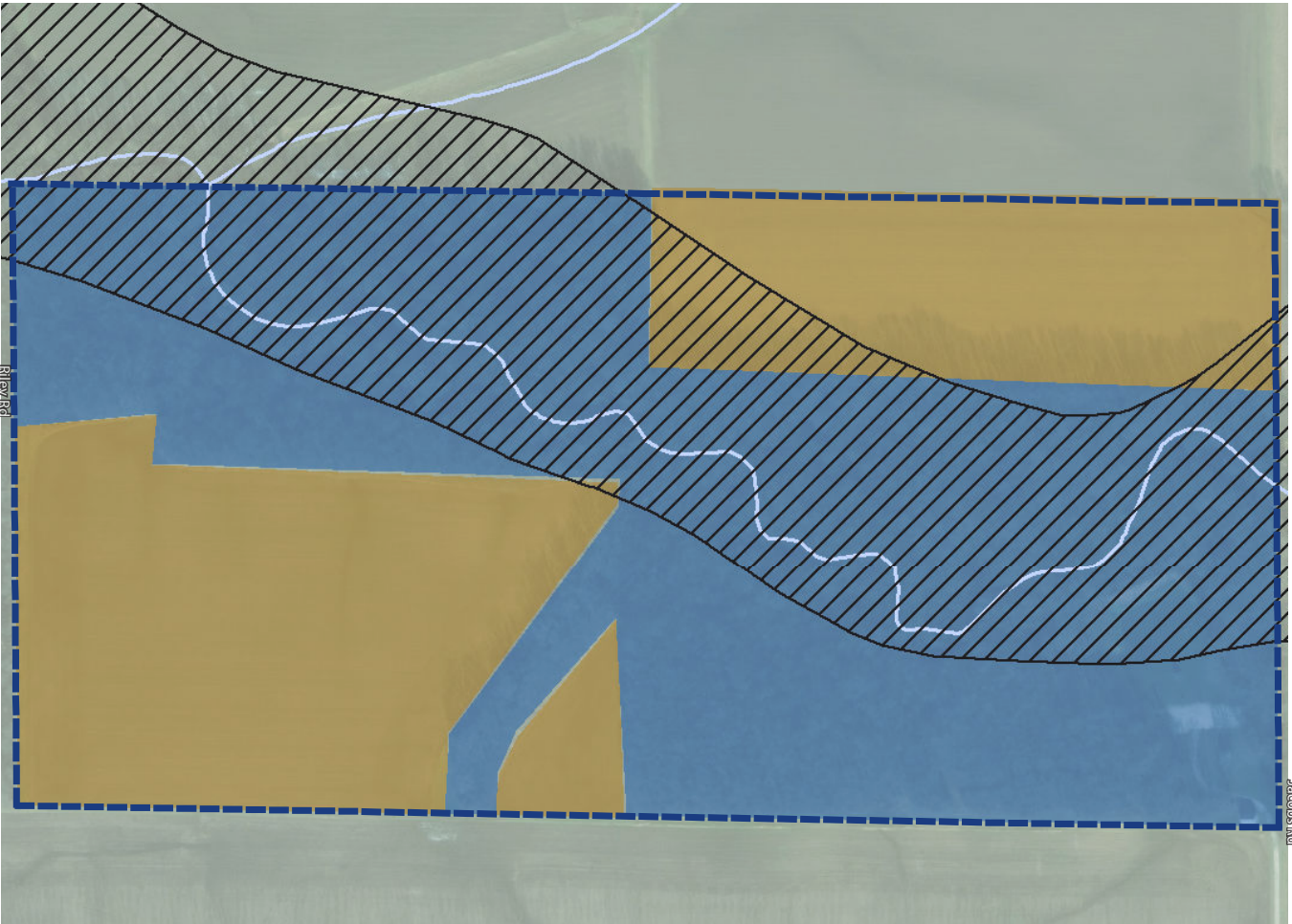
Grove Branch Conservation Area

3000N Shelby County Road/W Hilvety Road west of Jacobs Road, Moweaqua

Introduction:
Grove Branch Conservation Area is located in the southernmost part of central Macon County in South Macon Township (T15N, R2E, Section 15). It consists of 81.4 acres obtained in 1976. Historically, the site predominately consisted of wet-mesic floodplain forest and over half of the site is still covered in floodplain forest. The remaining property is leased for agricultural use. The Conservation District also discovered a matrix of understory grasses and sedges unique to the County in the wooded areas which have been left undisturbed.

There is an intergovernmental agreement for Grove Branch Conservation Area between the Conservation District and the county sheriff department. Through this agreement, the sheriff department uses a portion of the site as a shooting range. This has limited the District’s ability to access the site and complete restoration activities and prohibits the use of the conservation area by the public.

Existing Conditions:



- Legend**
- MCCD Conservation Area
 - Floodway
 - 100-Year Floodplain
 - 500-Year Floodplain
 - Savannah
 - Agriculture
 - Developed
 - Fallow
 - Floodplain Forest
 - Open Water
 - Prairie
 - Restoration Area
 - Upland Forest
 - Wetland

Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/ encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Conversion of agriculture land to native plant communities	Restore agriculture land to native communities	Perform prescribed burn to remove non-native species, seed and plant with native species
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Streambank stabilization	Stabilize erosion of streambank	Utilize applicable best practices to prevent erosion and mitigate damage such as rock veins, stone-toe, pools and riffles, coir logs, root wads, and/or native deep rooting plants

*See appendix for proposed restoration.

Kaufman Lakeside Conservation Area

1604 South Shores Drive, Decatur

Introduction:

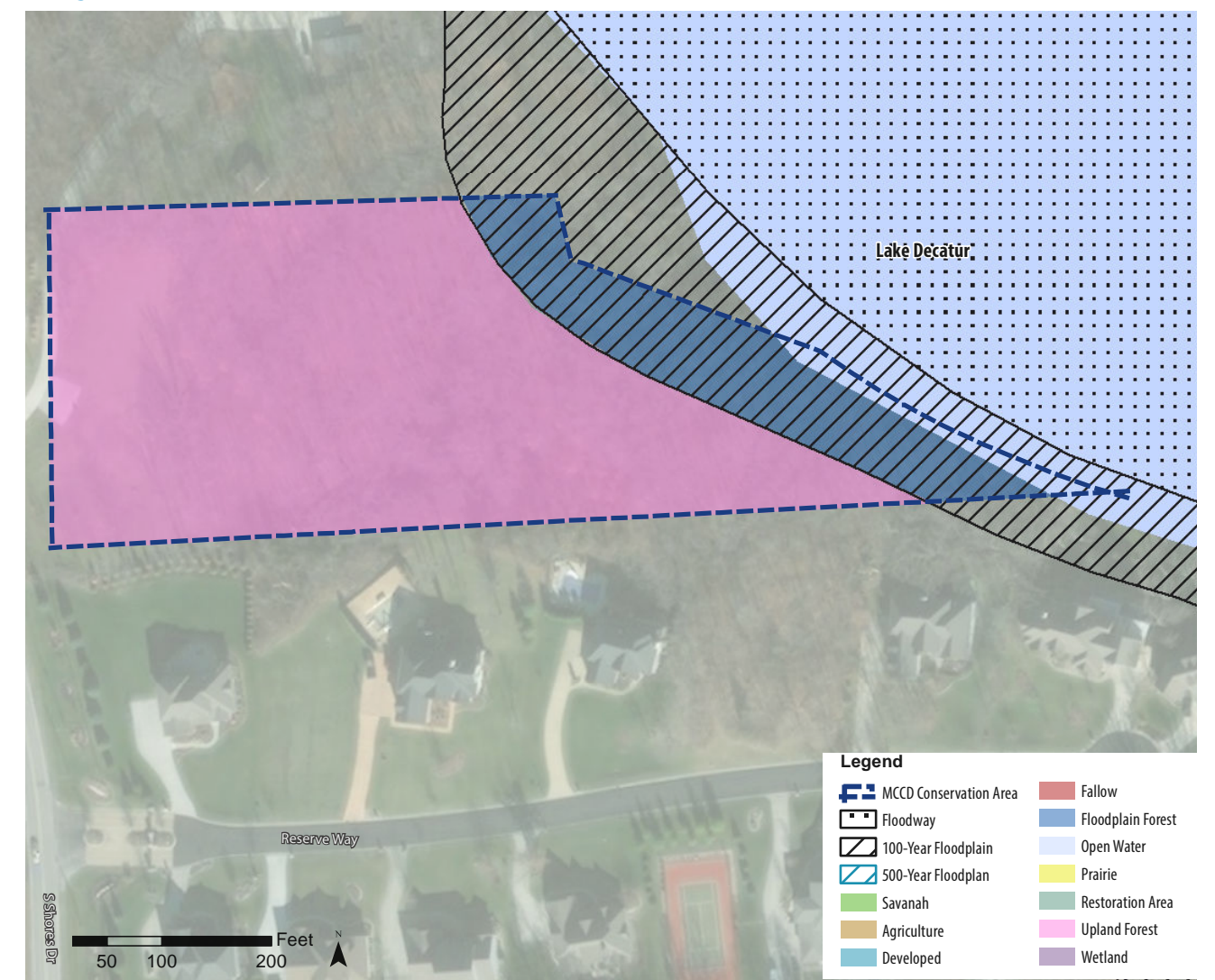
Kaufman Lakeside Conservation Area is the most recent Conservation District acquisition. It is located on the shore of Lake Decatur in a residential section of the City of Decatur. It consists of 4.8 acres of land in South Wheatland Township (T16N, R2E, Section 25. The site was formerly a residential lot with a home and parking on the high ground along the west edge of the property. The rest of the site slopes steeply toward the lake and includes a natural ravine. Aside from the cleared area where the residence stood, the conservation area consists of low-quality upland forest with a strip of floodplain forest along the east side of the property by the lakeshore.

Planned Restoration:

Overall, the existing land cover at Kaufman Lakeside Conservation Area is appropriate but adjacent land uses have negatively impacted the ecosystem’s quality and erosion along the ravine poses a threat to soil and water quality. Recommended restoration of the site includes removal of invasive tree species and increased planting of native understory species for slope stabilization and water filtration.

If the site is planned for recreation development, it is recommended that the most disruptive changes, such as the addition of paving, parking, or structures be limited to the western edge of the site that has been previously developed.

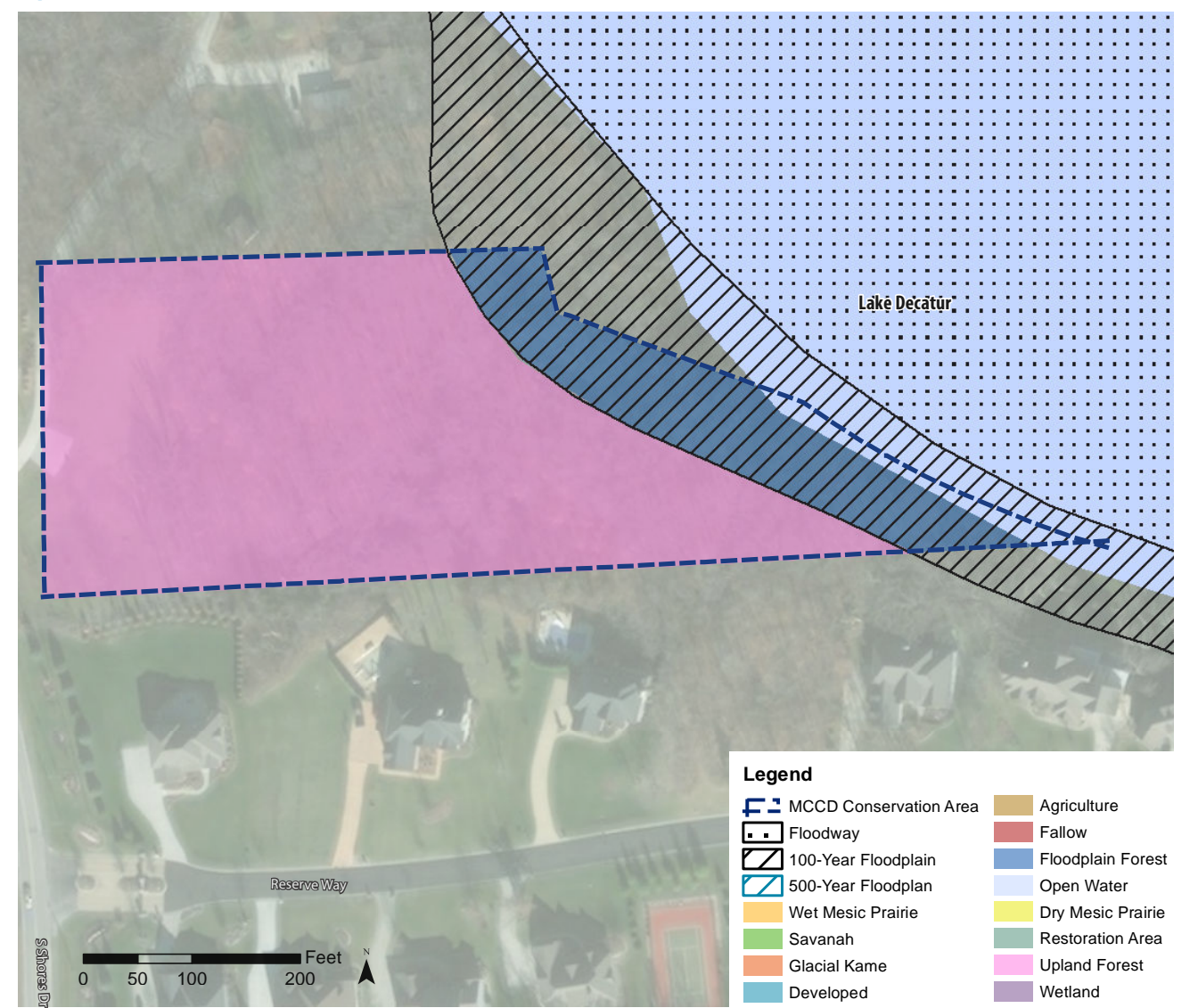
Existing Conditions:



Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Streambank stabilization	Stabilize erosion of streambank	Utilize applicable best practices to prevent erosion and mitigate damage such as rock veins, stone-toe, pools and riffles, coir logs, root wads, and/or native deep rooting plants

Proposed Restoration:



Leiby Hall Conservation Area

Hartung Road and Crossroads Road, Decatur

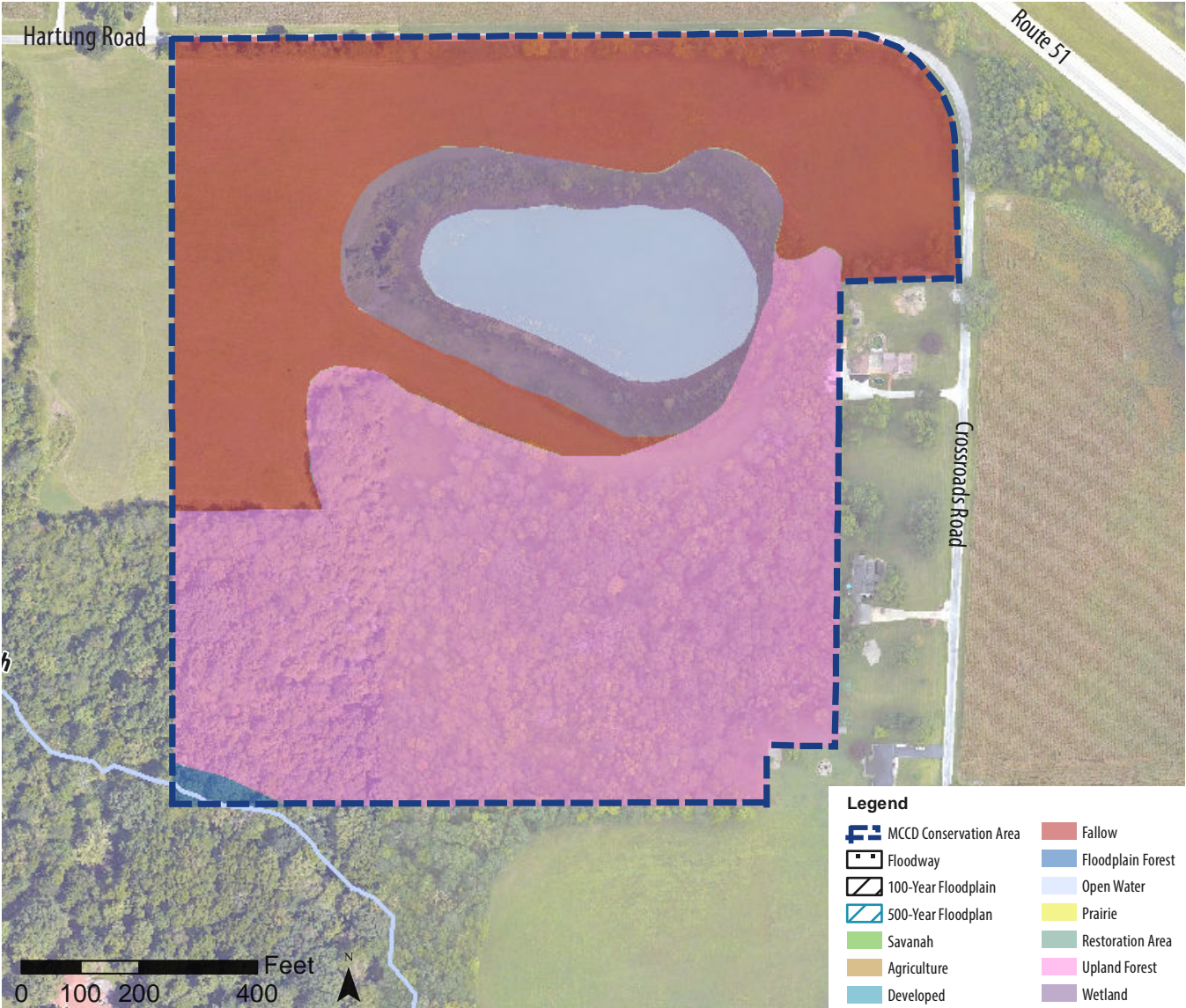
Introduction:

Leiby Hall Conservation Area is a 36.2 acre property located southwest of the City of Decatur in South Wheatland Township (T16N, R2E, Section 30). The property includes two bodies of open water a small pond and Smiths Branch Creek which passes through the southwest corner of the site. The Conservation Area is split nearly evenly between fallow farmland and upland forest with a small section of floodplain forest around the creek and a wetland buffer around the pond. Most of the adjacent properties are developed or in agricultural production, but the property owner across Hartung Road maintains cool season grasses.

Planned Restoration:

The existing ecosystem at Leiby Hall Conservation Area is recommended to be maintained and improved. Restoration and maintenance efforts should be focused on maintaining a high-quality wetland buffer around the pond, removing invasive tree and understory species from the forest, and the removal of all trees less than 20" DBH within the Prairie. The success of the adjacent (off-site) cool season grasses could also be replicated at this conservation area as part of the ongoing prairie restoration.

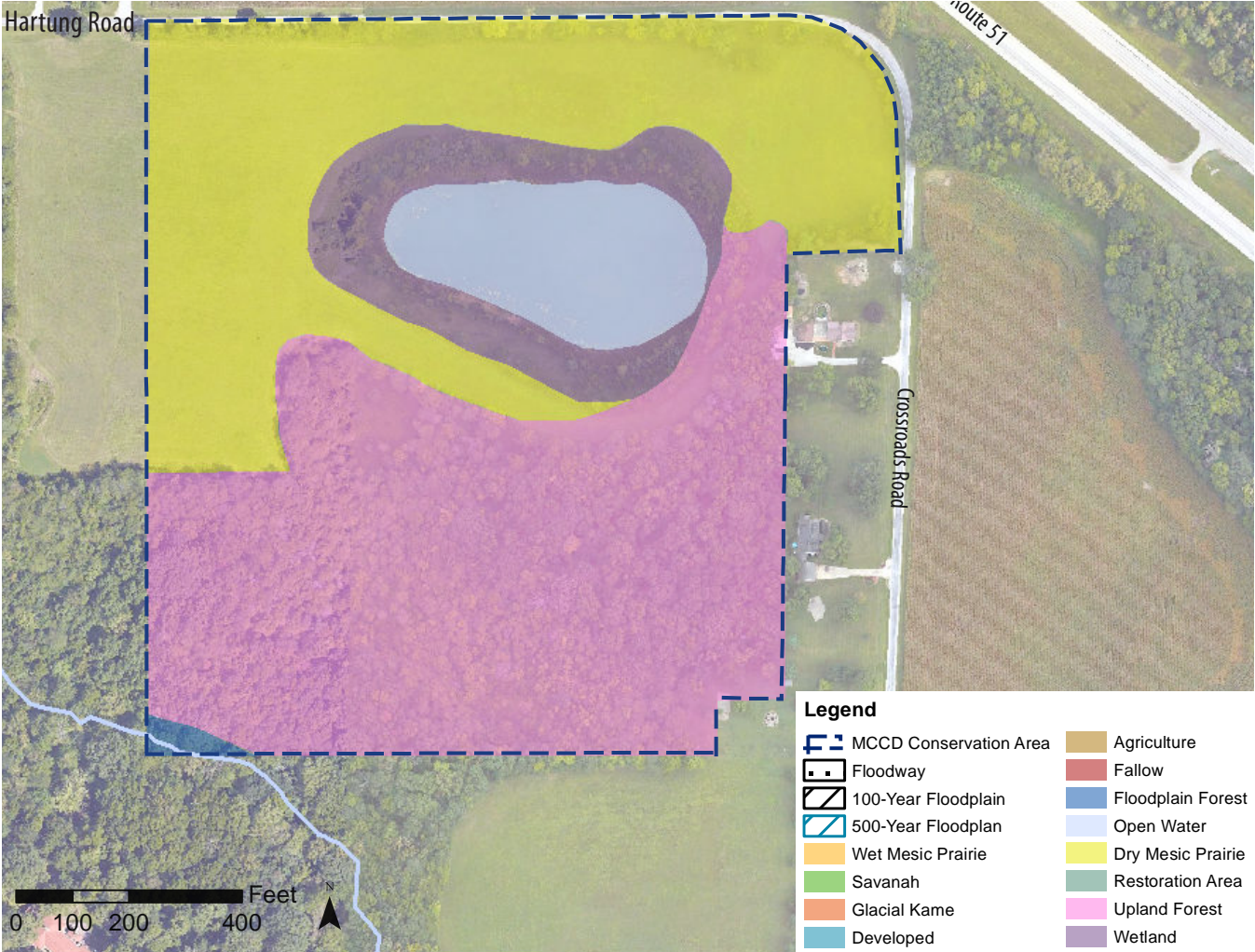
Existing Conditions:



Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch.
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Introduction of conservative plant species	Restore degraded natural communities through the introduction of conservative plant species	Perform supplemental seeding and planting to increase floristic quality and biodiversity including but not limited to upland forest, floodplain forest, and wetland plant communities
Conversion of manicured lawn to native plant communities	Restore manicured lawn to native communities	Perform prescribed burn to remove non-native species, seed and plant with native species

Proposed Restoration:



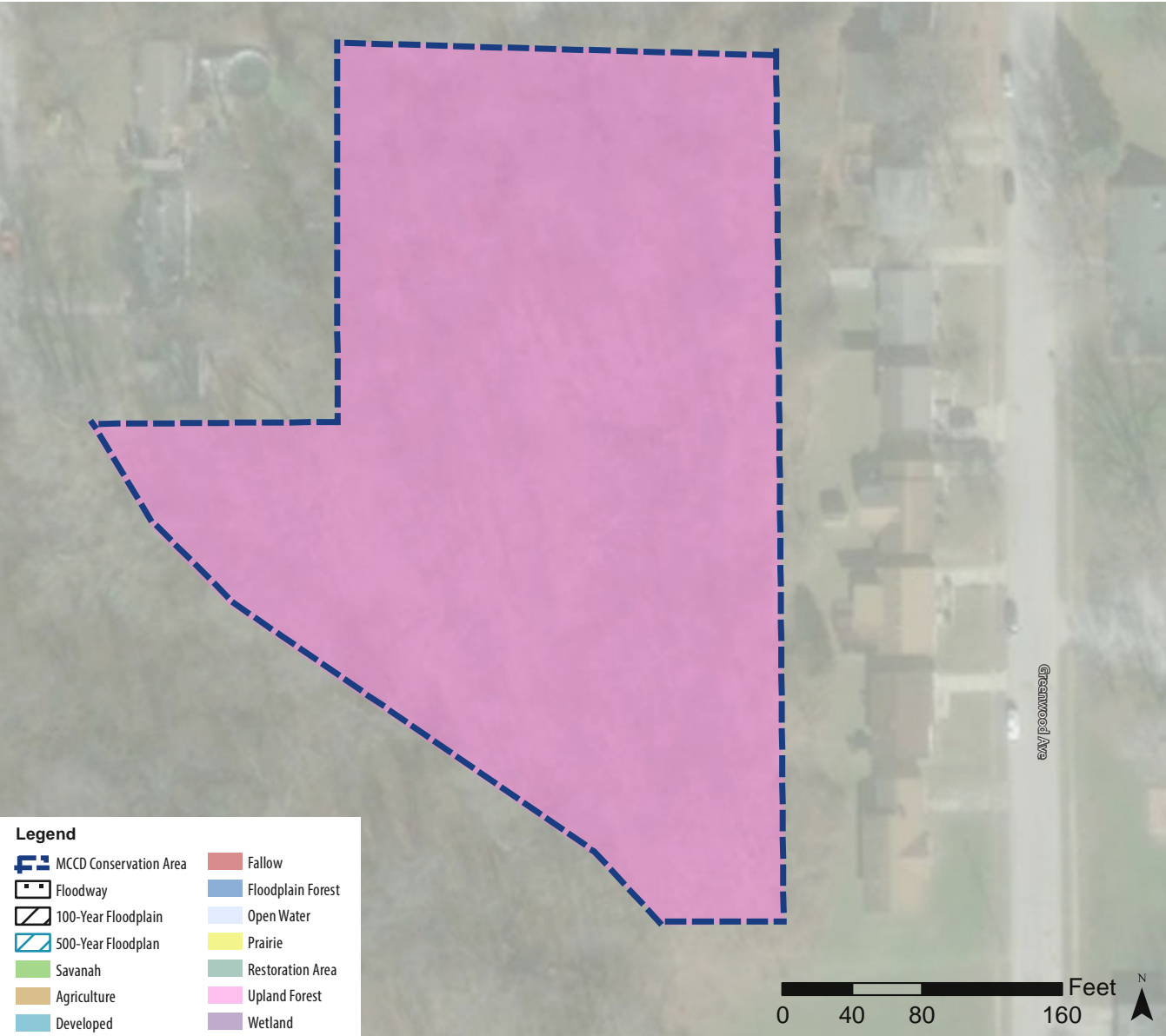
Powers Woods

Spring Street and Greenwood Avenue, Decatur

Introduction:
Powers Woods is located in a residential section of Decatur in Decatur Township (T16N, R2E, Section 15). It consists entirely of dense, low-quality upland forest and is completely inaccessible due to understory species. It is likely that this property has always consisted of upland forest but the dense residential development around the site has contributed to a decrease in quality.

Planned Restoration:
Despite the low-quality of the existng upland forest at Powers Woods, this site is a relatively low priority for restoration. It is recommended that the existing upland forest is maintained and the Conservation District recognizes the value of the dense understory in preventing access to hazards within the site that includes precarious terrain, poor visibility from outside the site, and refuse left on-site. To improve ecological quality, it is recommended that the trash is removed from the site and no dumping policy is enforced. Weedy and non-native tree and understory species should also be removed and replaced with native alternatives that maintain the existing character of the site.

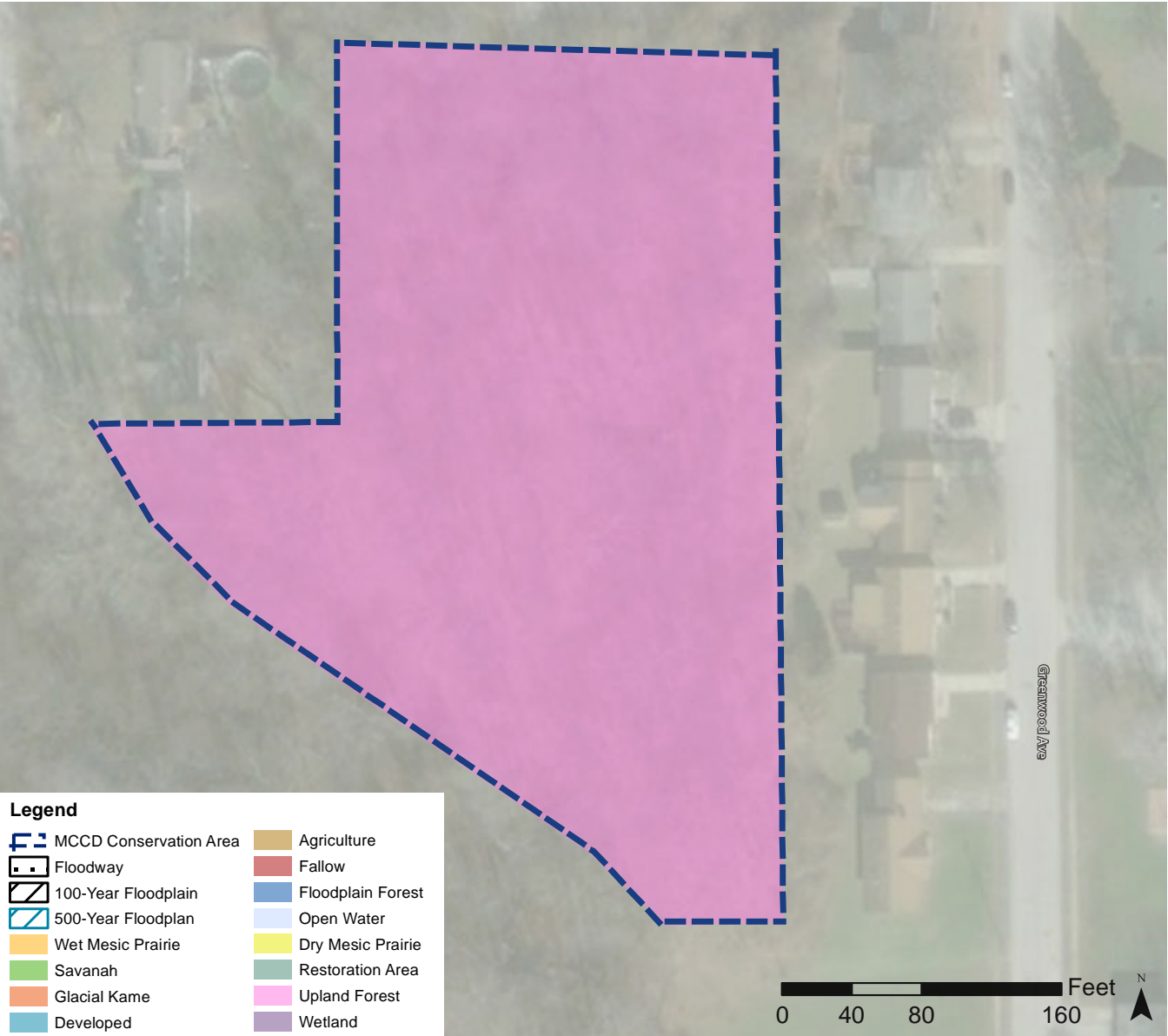
Existing Conditions:



Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust

Proposed Restoration:



Rock Springs Conservation Area

3939 Nearing Lane, Decatur

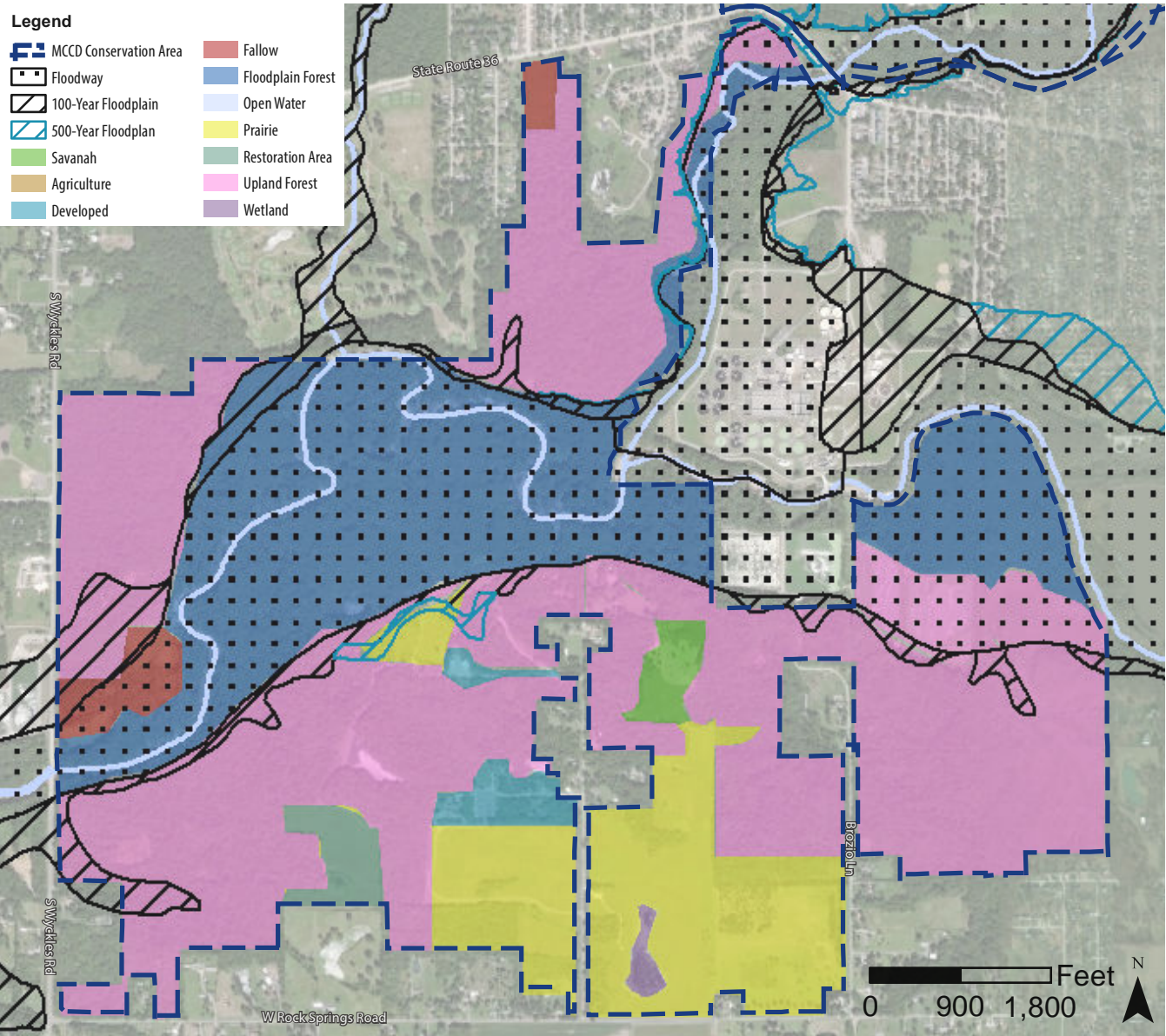
Introduction:

Rock Springs Conservation Area is located in Decatur Township in the central part of the County (T16N, R2E, Section 18 and 19). Rock Springs is the largest of the District holdings with a total of 1,356 acres. Most of the site was planted in row crop or pasture when acquired before being converted to prairie. Historical land cover data suggests this area may have been forested floodplain adjacent to the Sangamon River and that Stevens Creek was surrounded by expanses of prairie. Rock Springs has the most diversity of natural communities of all MCCD land holdings. It contains a river ecosystem, streams, upland and bottomland forest expanses, wetlands, prairie restorations, ponds and active springs. The north and west section of Rock Springs is enrolled in the Land and Water reserve Program with IDNR.

Planned Restoration:

The newly acquired parcel, north of Rock Springs Road at the terminus of Brozio Lane, is a wooded parcel containing three residential buildings adjacent to the Sangamon River. Recommended restoration of the site includes demolition of the structures, selective removal of invasive tree species, and conversion of manicured lawn to native plant communities.

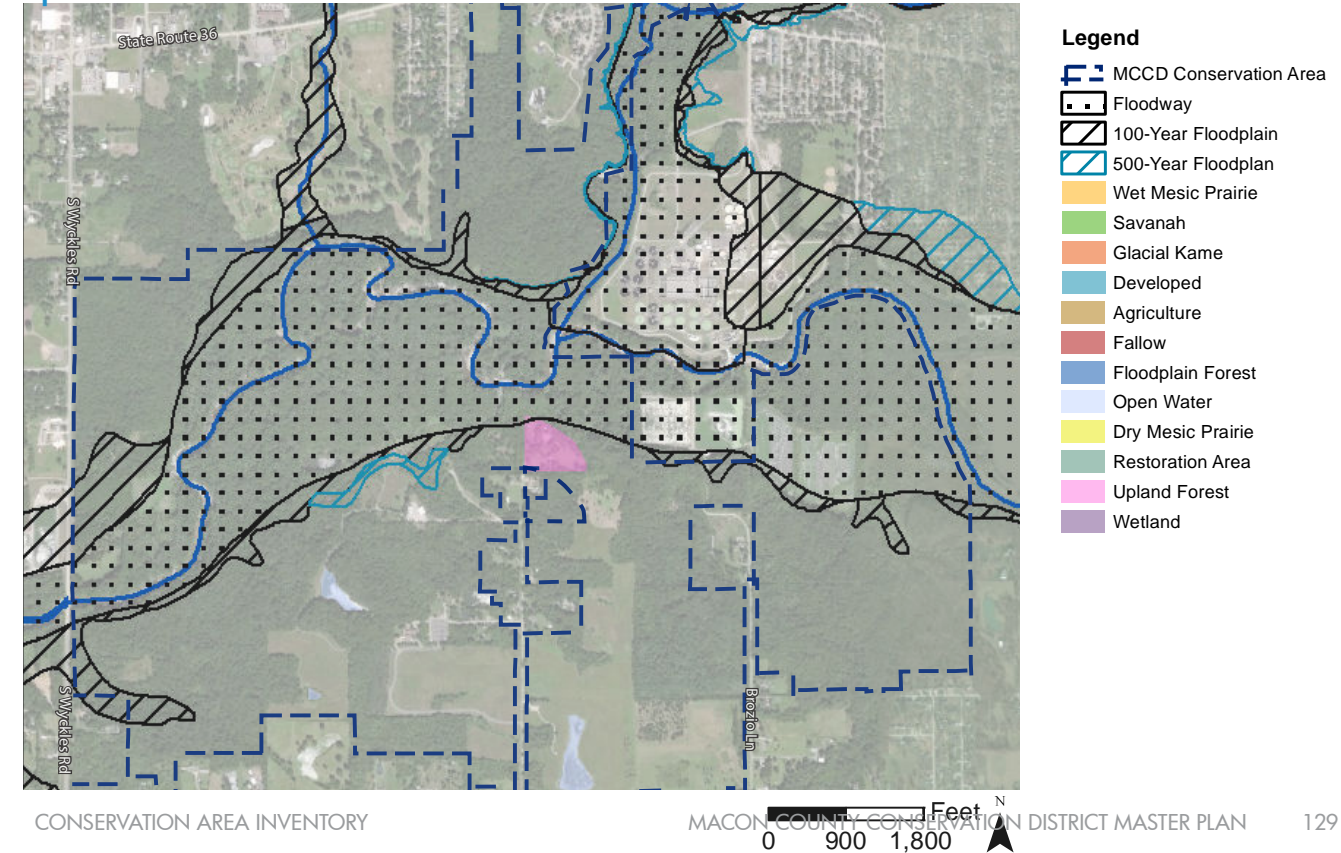
Existing Conditions:



Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch.
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Control of exotic organisms and animal overpopulation	Control exotic organisms and animal overpopulation to preserve or restore degraded natural communities	Maintain deer control program
Introduction of conservative plant species	Restore degraded natural communities through the introduction of conservative plant species	Perform supplemental seeding and planting to increase floristic quality and biodiversity including but not limited to upland forest, floodplain forest, and wetland plant communities
Conversion of manicured lawn to native plant communities	Restore manicured lawn to native communities	Perform prescribed burn to remove non-native species, seed and plant with native species
Selective demolition of structures	Remove structures or portions of structures that are unsafe or impede ecosystem restoration efforts	Demolish structures including foundations and other buried elements; complete soil testing for contamination
Streambank stabilization	Stabilize erosion of streambank	Utilize applicable best practices to prevent erosion and mitigate damage such as rock veins, stone-toe, pools and riffles, coir logs, root wads, and/or native deep rooting plants

Proposed Restoration:



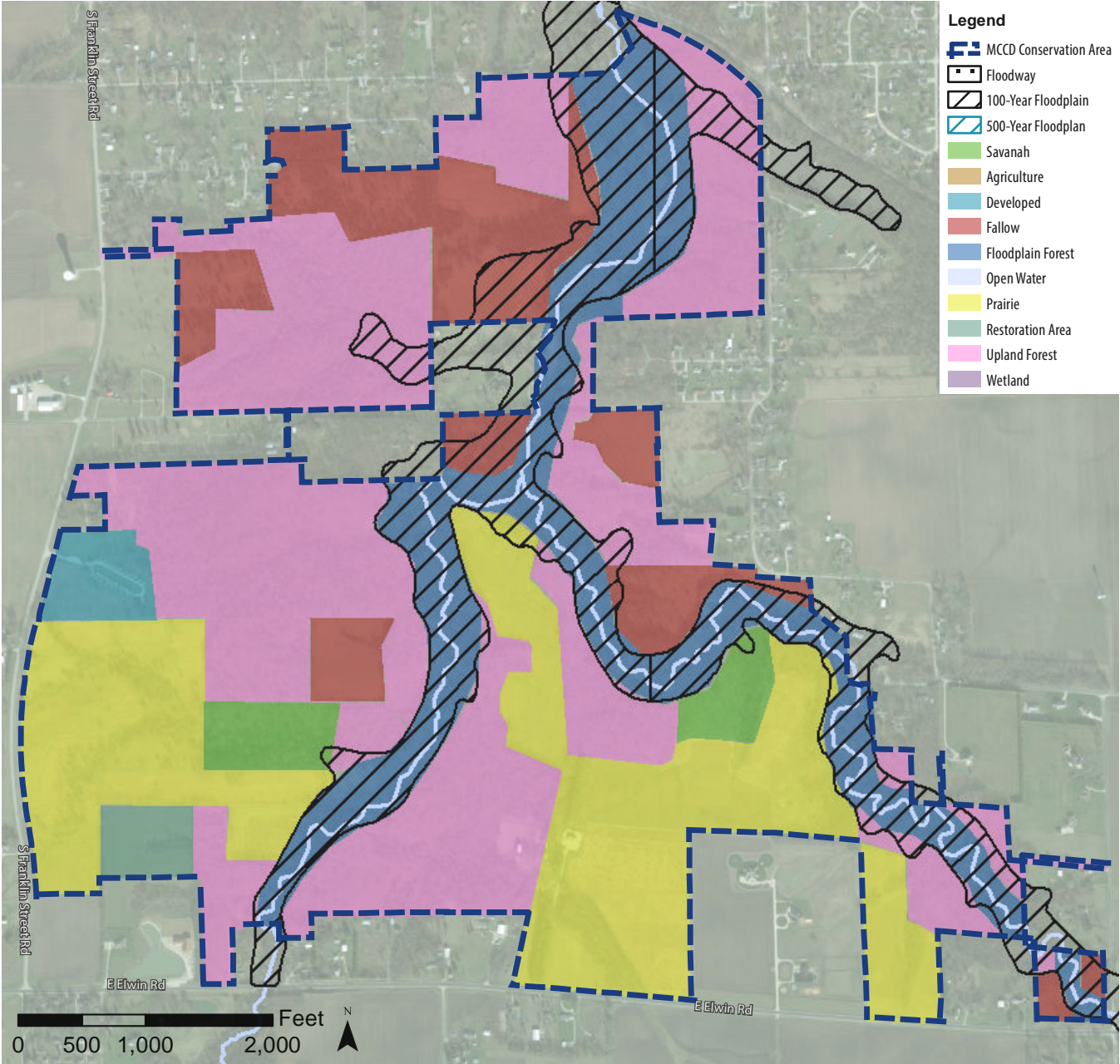
Sand Creek Conservation Area

4314 S. Franklin Street, Decatur

Introduction:

Sand Creek Conservation Area is one of the Conservation Districts original properties. The area is currently 794.2 acres and is located south of the City of Decatur in South Wheatland Township (T15N, R2E, Sections 1 and 2). The area is named after the Sand Creek which runs through the area and included the location where the two branches meet. Historically, the site was almost entirely comprised of forestland with small sections prairie but agricultural and logging activities degraded the native habitat. It is also the site of a portion of the historic Paris-Springfield Road. Today, most of Sand Creek Conservation Area has been restored to upland forest or floodplain forest. There are also large areas around the creek corridor which are designated floodplain. Because of the numerous small tributaries of Sand Creek in the conservation area, past land use, and the degradation of trails by hiking and equestrian use, erosion is a challenge at Sand Creek Conservation Area, particularly along the waterways.

Existing Conditions:



Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch.
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Control of exotic organisms and animal overpopulation	Control exotic organisms and animal overpopulation to preserve or restore degraded natural communities	Maintain deer control program. Control beaver dams in the stream
Introduction of conservative plant species	Restore degraded natural communities through the introduction of conservative plant species	Perform supplemental seeding and planting to increase floristic quality and biodiversity. Supplemental seeding and planting of wetland vegetation in hummucks and hollows.
Conversion of agriculture land to native plant communities	Restore agriculture land to native communities	Perform prescribed burn to remove non-native species, seed and plant with native species
Conversion of manicured lawn to native plant communities	Restore manicured lawn to native communities	Perform prescribed burn to remove non-native species, seed and plant with native species
Streambank stabilization	Stabilize erosion of streambank	Utilize applicable best practices to prevent erosion and mitigate damage such as rock veins, stone-toe, pools and riffles, coir logs, root wads, and/or native deep rooting plants
Selective demolition of structures	Remove structures or portions of structures that are unsafe or impede ecosystem restoration efforts	Demolish structures including foundations and other buried elements; complete soil testing for contamination

*See appendix for proposed restoration.

Upper Sangamon Natural Area

Donavan Road and Ruch Road, Oakley

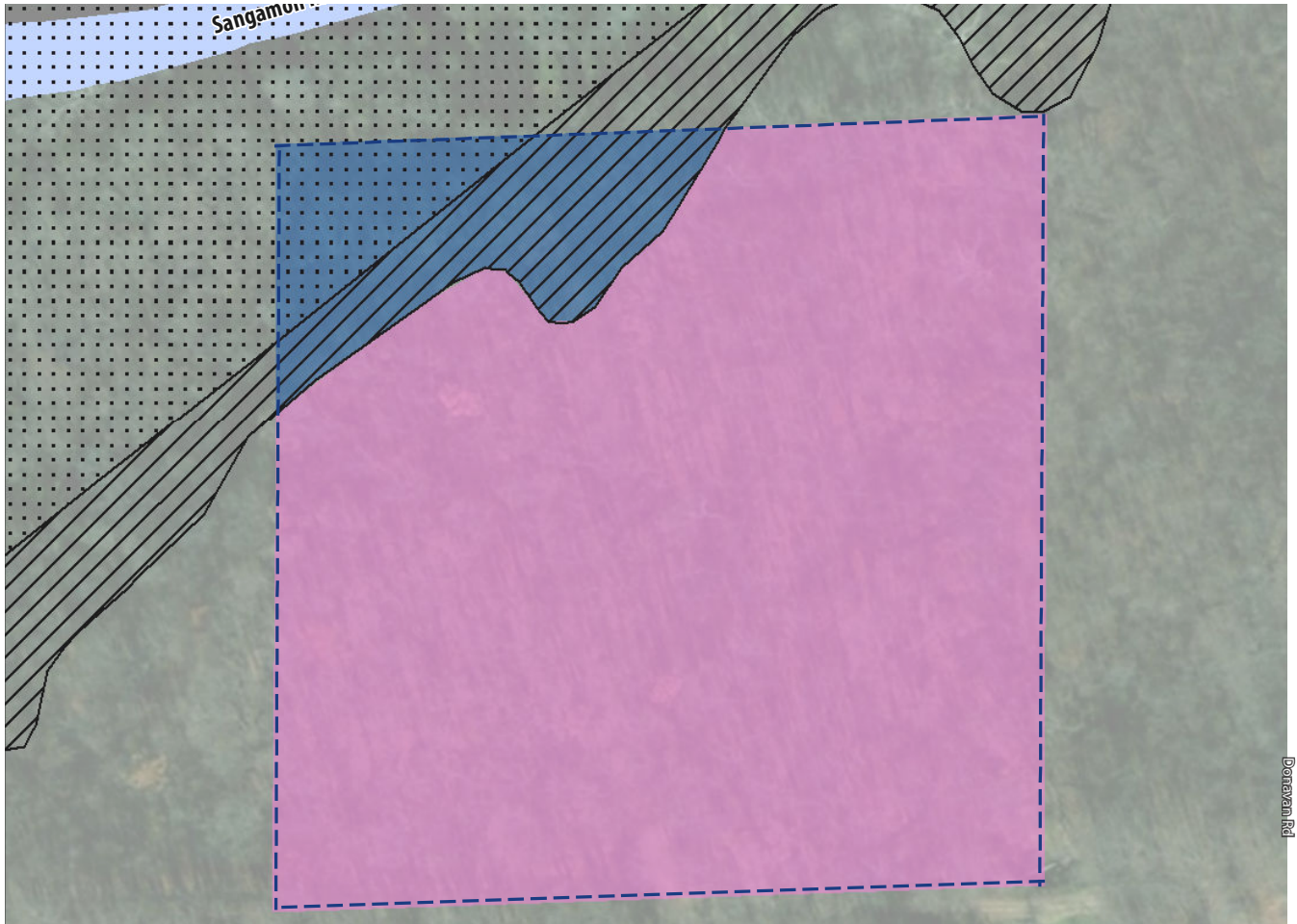
Introduction:

The Upper Sangamon Natural Area is located towards the eastern edge of the County in Oakley Township (T17N, R4E, Section 4E). It is located in a wooded area surrounding the Sangamon Creek and consists of floodplain and upland forests. This conservation areas is largely undisturbed but is also inaccessible as it cannot be reached except by traveling through private property.

Planned Restoration:

The current upland and floodplain forest land cover at the Upper Sangamon Natural Area appropriate ecosystems for the site and should be maintained. Recommended restoration includes removal of non-native species, however, to make any significant restoration improvements and carry out the necessary maintenance, the Conservation District will need to find a reliable way to access the property either through an agreement with the adjacent landholders or through the acquisition of frontage property.

Existing Conditions:



- Legend**
- MCCD Conservation Area

Floodway

100-Year Floodplain

500-Year Floodplain

Savannah

Agriculture

Developed

Fallow

Floodplain Forest

Open Water

Prairie

Restoration Area

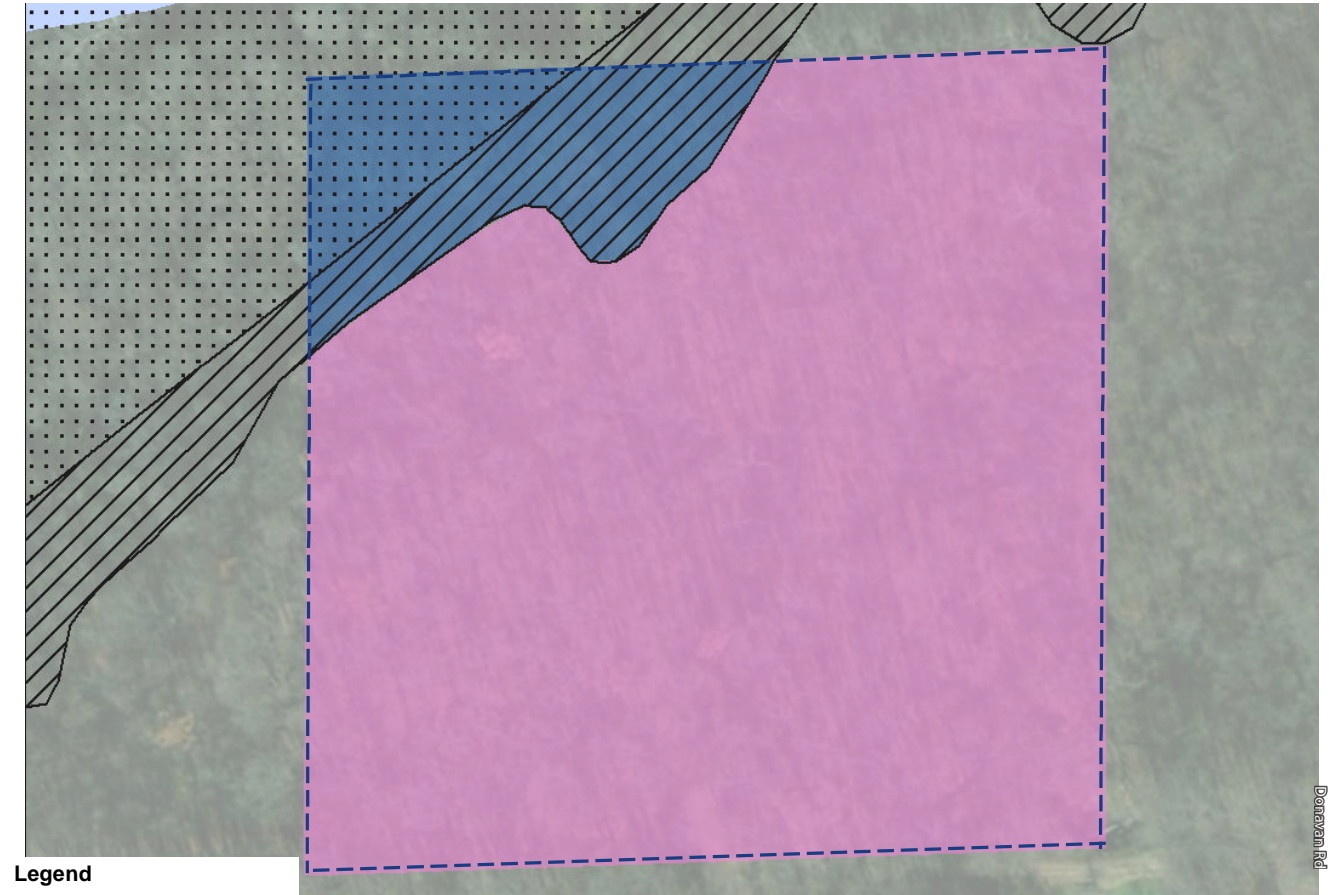
Upland Forest

Wetland

Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch.
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Introduction of conservative plant species	Restore degraded natural communities through the introduction of conservative plant species	Perform supplemental seeding and planting to increase floristic quality and biodiversity including but not limited to upland forest, floodplain forest, and wetland plant communities

Proposed Restoration:



- Legend**
- MCCD Conservation Area

Floodway

100-Year Floodplain

500-Year Floodplain

Wet Mesic Prairie

Savannah

Glacial Kame

Developed

Agriculture

Fallow

Floodplain Forest

Open Water

Dry Mesic Prairie

Restoration Area

Upland Forest

Wetland

Willow Branch I

W Walker Road and Route 51, Macon

Introduction:

Willow Branch I is located in the south-central portion of the County outside of the City of Macon in South Macon Township (T14N, R2E, Section 8). The area consists of two properties, bisected by State Route 51 both of which were acquired in the 1970s. The area is named after the perennial Willow Branch Creek. This creek has always flowed through the western property but ended in the middle of the eastern property whereas today, it passes through the entire site and continues onto adjacent property. Past plant and animal inventories of the stream have indicated high water quality despite the threat of agricultural runoff and sedimentation. In addition to the creek and associated floodplain, historical records indicate the presence of early successional trees around the creek and hedge, black walnut, and cherry forest on the rest of the site. These habitats were previously converted to farmland but are currently an unrestored, low-quality mix of invasive and native species.

Existing Conditions:



- Legend
- MCCD Conservation Area

Floodway

100-Year Floodplain

500-Year Floodplain

Savannah

Agriculture

Developed

Fallow

Floodplain Forest

Open Water

Prairie

Restoration Area

Upland Forest

Wetland

Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
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Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Control of exotic organisms and animal overpopulation	Control exotic organisms and animal overpopulation to preserve or restore degraded natural communities	Maintain deer control program. Control beaver dams in the stream
Introduction of conservative plant species	Restore degraded natural communities through the introduction of conservative plant species	Perform supplemental seeding and planting to increase floristic quality and biodiversity. Supplemental seeding and planting of wetland vegetation in hummucks and hollows.
Conversion of agriculture land to native plant communities	Restore agriculture land to native communities	Perform prescribed burn to remove non-native species, seed and plant with native species
Streambank stabilization	Stabilize erosion of streambank	Utilize applicable best practices to prevent erosion and mitigate damage such as rock veins, stone-toe, pools and riffles, coir logs, root wads, and/or native deep rooting plants

*See appendix for proposed restoration.

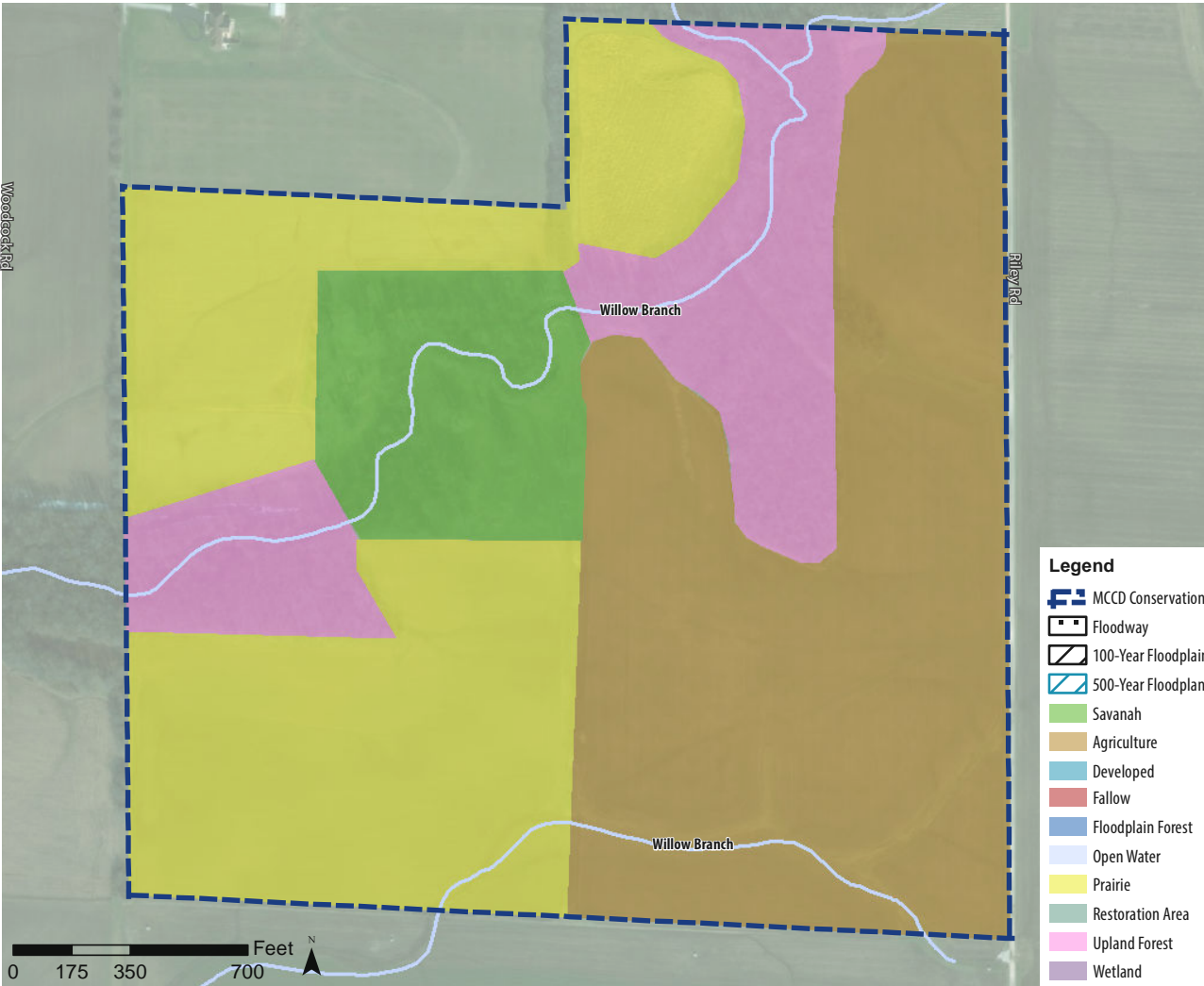
Willow Branch II

Riley Road between W Walker Road and W Ridlen Road

Introduction:
Willow Branch II is located northeast of I in the south-central portion of the County outside of the City of Macon in South Macon Township (T15N, R2E, Section 32). This site is also named for the Willow Branch Creek which flows through the site in two spurs. However, historical records indicate the creek did not always extend this far northeast. The historical record indicates that this property was formerly completely prairie, specifically noting that there were no trees present. The property was later converted to agricultural land which left metal and other debris in the stream. In addition to removing this waste, the District fully completed a prairie restoration on most of the western portion of the site and added upland forest around the creek which does not flood in this property as it does downstream.

Planned Restoration:
The newly acquired site is immediately west of the original land holding and was in agricultural production before being recently restored to prairie. Historic aerial photographs indicate this area to be prairie. There is a tract of floodplain woodland and pockets of wetland fringe along the stream. Restoration includes building upon the work that has been started by adding supplemental planting of more conservative plant species in the prairies and wetlands, selective removal of invasive tree species and understory brush to open up the tree canopy along the creek, as well as control of invasive herb species. Monitor the streambank for areas of erosion and install stabilization methods where appropriate. Complete a tile investigation and strategically break tiles to restore natural hydrology to the site. There is an opportunity to create a mitigation bank site on this parcel in the future if funding is available.

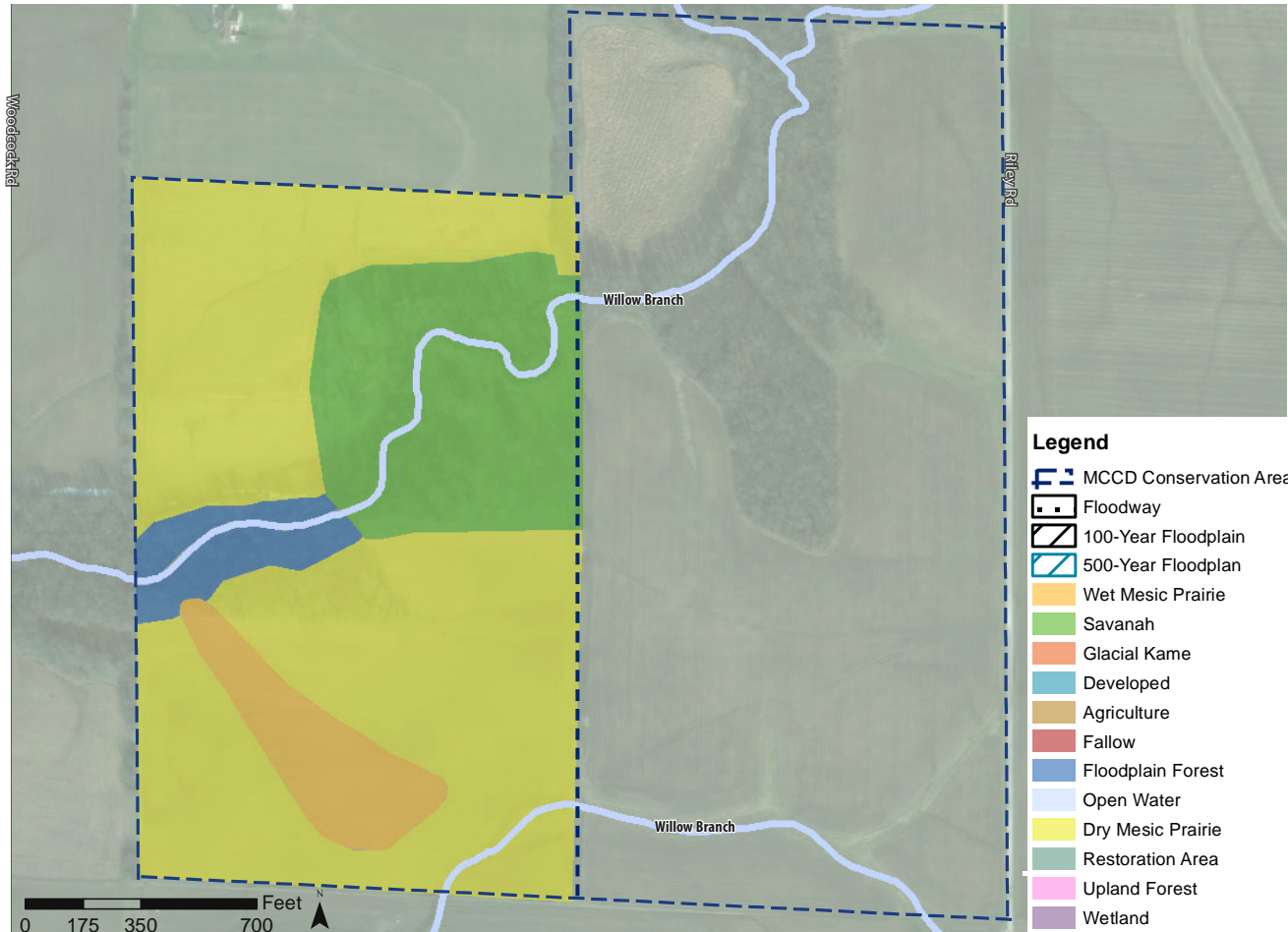
Existing Conditions:



Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch.
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Control of exotic organisms and animal overpopulation	Control exotic organisms and animal overpopulation to preserve or restore degraded natural communities	Maintain deer control program. Control beaver dams in the stream
Introduction of conservative plant species	Restore degraded natural communities through the introduction of conservative plant species	Perform supplemental seeding and planting to increase floristic quality and biodiversity. Supplemental seeding and planting of wetland vegetation in hummocks and hollows.
Streambank stabilization	Stabilize erosion of streambank	Utilize applicable best practices to prevent erosion and mitigate damage such as rock veins, stone-toe, pools and riffles, coir logs, root wads, and/or native deep rooting plants

Proposed Restoration:



Wright-Banton Audubon Area

South of Thunderbird Drive and Tropicana Road, Decatur

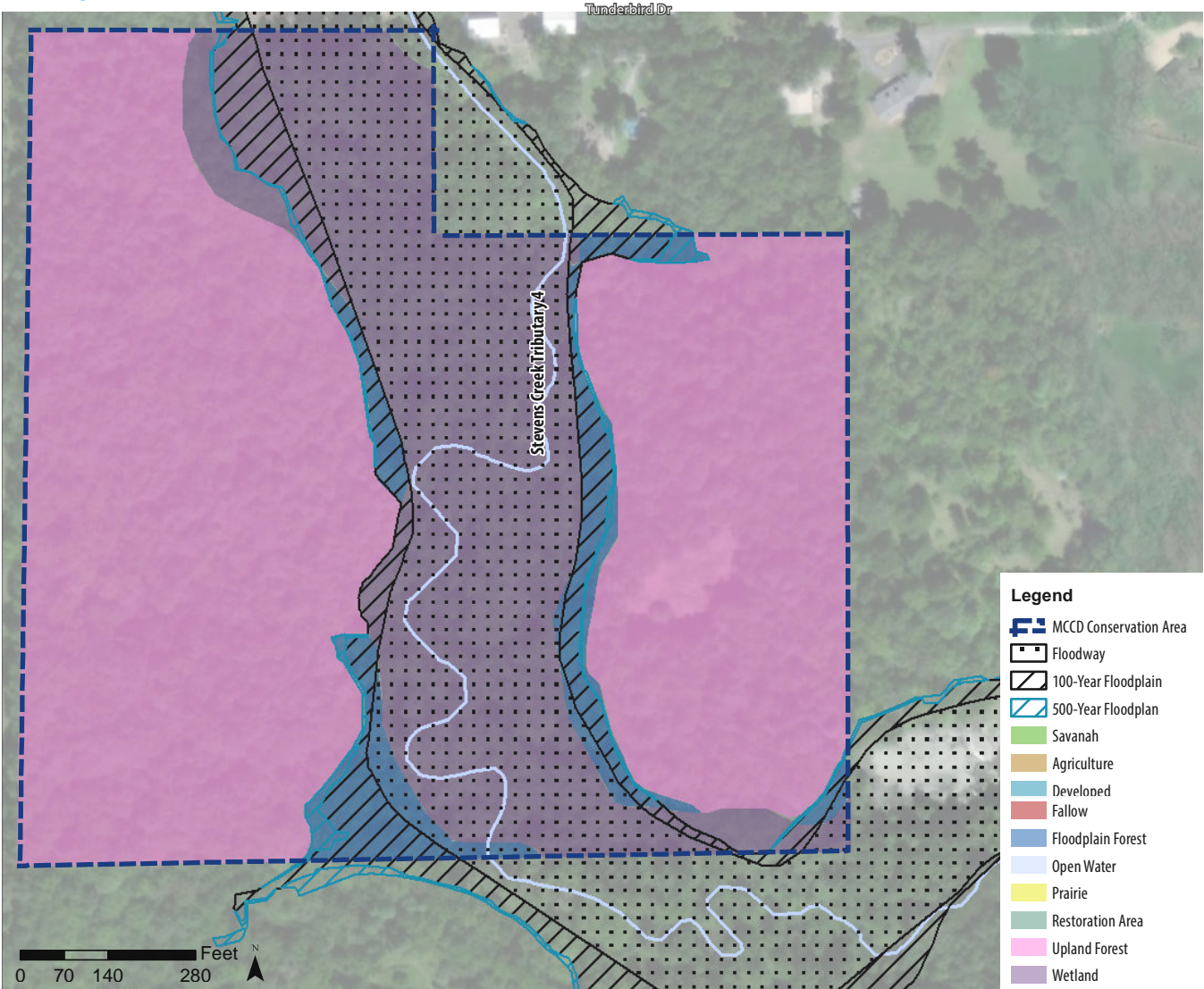
Introduction:

The Wright-Banton Audubon Area was acquired through a joint effort between the Macon County Conservation District and the Decatur Audubon Society. The property is located at the edge of a residential area near the center of the County and just east of the City of Decatur in Hickory Point Township (T17N, R2E, Section 32). The Stevens Creek Tributary 4 runs through the center of the site and is surrounded by a side floodway and floodplain on the east and west. The current land cover includes designated wetland along the creek that is edged by floodplain forest. The remaining site is composed of upland forest.

Planned Restoration:

Given the soils, topography, and creek in the area, the Wright-Banton Audubon Area has the potential to support a varied ecosystem. As a response to soil conditions, it is recommended that portions of the upland forest and wetland around the creek and floodplain be transitioned to floodplain forest utilizing species that better tolerate changing water levels and soil saturation. Additionally, there is a naturally occurring open area in the east half of the site that can be maintained as prairie by preventing trees from the adjacent upland forest from filling in this area and maintaining grasses and sedges. Species management to remove invasives is recommennded throughout the site, and the area should be closely monitored to maintain water quality and prevent erosion in the large areas of floodway and floodplain.

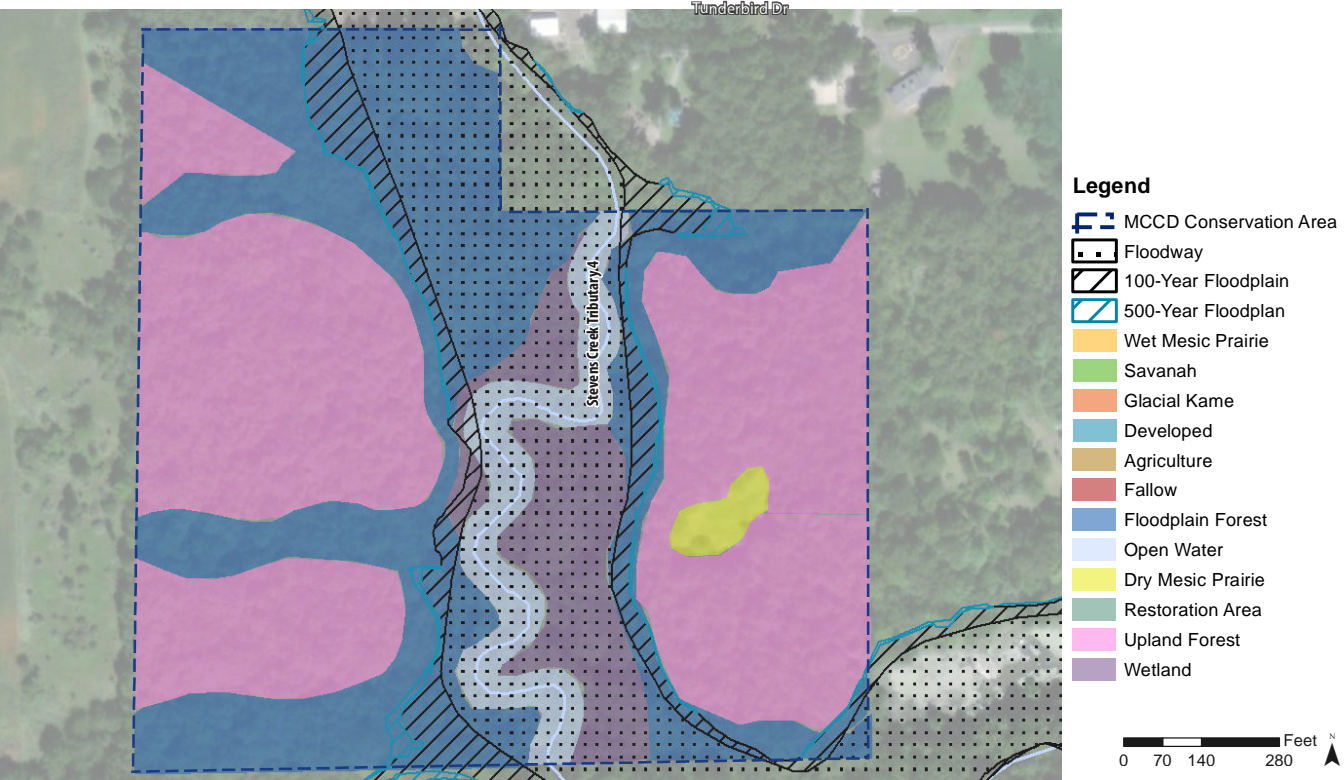
Existing Conditions:



Management Schedule:

Management Tool	Management Objective	Management Activity
Annual monitoring	Conduct annual monitoring visits in Spring, Summer, and Fall to observe and document site changes; complete post inspection field report including representative site photographs	Assess floristic quality, vegetative dominance, and invasive species presence; document disturbance factors, erosion issues, stream stability, changes in site hydrology, and plant community succession/encroachment; complete wildlife surveys
Control of non-native, weedy, and invasive plant species	Manage vegetation by chemical control (herbicide), mechanical control (mowing, cutting, hand removal), prescribed burning, and other management practices	See Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Herbicide Reference Tool for current list of management guidelines and approved herbicide by species. Including but not limited to garlic mustard, phragmites, reed canary grass, clover, thistle, teasle, brome, fescue, purple loosestrife, moneywort, and crown vetch.
Tree management	Manage woody vegetation by controlling non-native understory brush growth; tree removal or girdling to maintain or restore high quality plant communities	Selective tree and brush removal; treat stumps with herbicide (see INPC Herbicide Reference Tool) Including but not limited to box elder, buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose, osage orange, white poplar, white mulberry, quaking aspen, siberian elm, and honey locust
Control of exotic organisms and animal overpopulation	Control exotic organisms and animal overpopulation to preserve or restore degraded natural communities	Maintain deer control program. Control beaver dams in the stream
Introduction of conservative plant species	Restore degraded natural communities through the introduction of conservative plant species	Perform supplemental seeding and planting to increase floristic quality and biodiversity. Supplemental seeding and planting of wetland vegetation in hummucks and hollows.
Conversion of agriculture land to native plant communities	Restore agriculture land to native communities	Perform prescribed burn to remove non-native species, seed and plant with native species
Conversion of manicured lawn to native plant communities	Restore manicured lawn to native communities	Perform prescribed burn to remove non-native species, seed and plant with native species
Streambank stabilization	Stabilize erosion of streambank	Utilize applicable best practices to prevent erosion and mitigate damage such as rock veins, stone-toe, pools and riffles, coir logs, root wads, and/or native deep rooting plants

Proposed Restoration:





CHAPTER 4



Connect: Community Engagement



Overview

The Connect: Community Engagement chapter documents specific input received from the Macon County Conservation District community.

Purpose

In order to continue to provide valued services and increase participation, knowing the trends and interests of various user groups is crucial. During the Connect Phase, the Conservation District and planning team identified key user groups and solicited feedback from stakeholder representatives and community members.

Feedback was received in four different forms. The planning team conducted stakeholder interviews, led workshops with Conservation District staff, and facilitated a community meeting. An online engagement platform, available 24/7 for a four-week period, gathered input from residents about their thoughts on conservation areas, programs, and facilities. At the end of this process, the planning team lead a discussion between Board of Trustees and Macon County Conservation Foundation Board members to review the results of the Connect Phase and receive additional comments. This chapter summarizes this input.

Chapter Outline

- Methodology
- Online Engagement
- Stakeholder Input
- Board Input

METHODOLOGY

Online Engagement

Residents of Macon County and the surrounding communities were invited to participate in an online survey from May 18, 2018, to June 15, 2018. In total, 235 people participated in the 17 question survey.

Stakeholder Input

Stakeholder input consisted of stakeholder interviews, staff workshops, and a community meeting. Stakeholder interviews were held for specific interest groups relevant to the Conservation District. These meetings presented a series of questions about goals, objectives, and desires of how groups might utilize the recreation resources in the future. Stakeholders were also asked for their opinions on the current state of the Conservation District.

The staff workshop consisted of a single meeting to gather input from District staff members representing all of the District Departments. Input was provided about their goals, objectives, desires, and hopes for the next ten years as well as their opinions on the current state of the District.

The community meeting was held in the evening and was open to all members of the public. Attendees participated in the same workshop completed by the staff, suggesting and voting on their objectives, desires, and hopes for the future.

Board Input

At the end of the Connect Phase, the results of the Analyze Phase and the other community engagement groups was summarized at a joint Conservation District Board of Trustees and Macon County Conservation Foundation Board meeting. After reviewing these results board members provided comments on their goals and priorities for the Conservation District through a guided discussion.

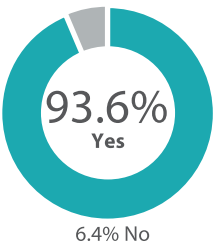
Envision Macon County Conservation District

Residents shared their ideas for the next ten years via an online survey called *Envision Macon County Conservation District*.

The online engagement platform consisted of a webpage and a survey. Both were available 24/7 to provide information on the planning process and allow participants the opportunity to give input on programs, conservation areas, and facilities at their leisure. The survey was advertised at all of the Connect Phase events and was promoted on the Conservation District’s webpage and social media accounts.

The online survey was available from May 18, 2018, 9:00 AM through June 15, 2018, 5:00 PM and consisted of 17 questions. Participants had the option to skip any of the questions, and responses to certain questions determined the next question a participant answered. In total, 235 people completed all or part of the survey and the average completion rate was 71%. The following is a summary of the results:

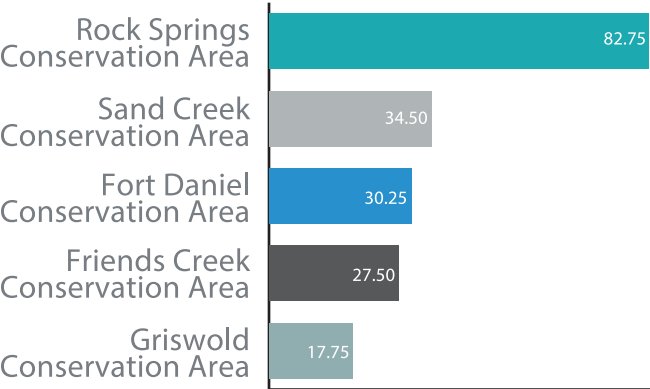
1. Have you or members of your household visited any Macon County Conservation Areas in the past 12 months?
Answered: 235 skipped: 0



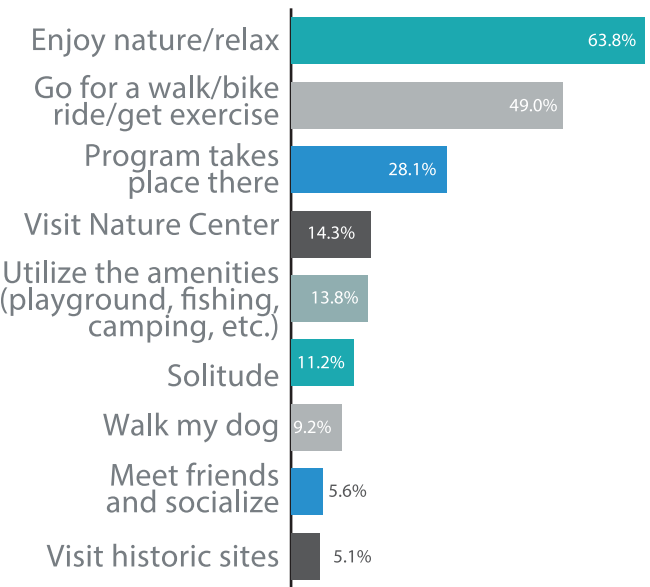
Participants who responded “yes” continued to question 2. Those who responded “no” skipped to question 6.

2. About how many times have you or members of your household visited the following Macon County Conservation District areas in the past 12 months?
Answered: 169 skipped: 39

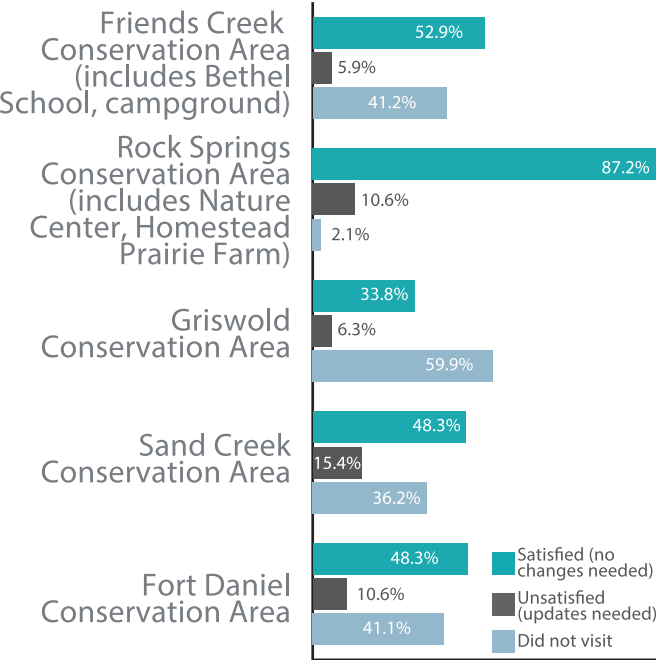
When the frequency of visits were averaged, the most visited areas were:



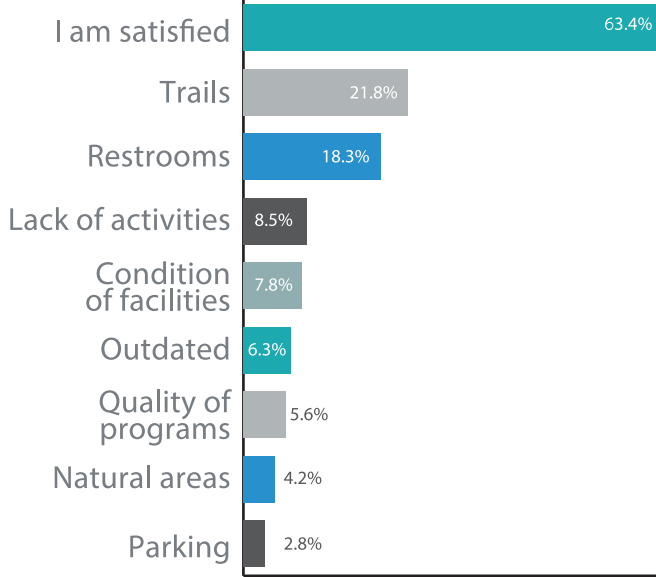
3. Why do you visit Macon County Conservation District Areas? (select your TWO most common reasons)
Answered: 196 skipped: 39



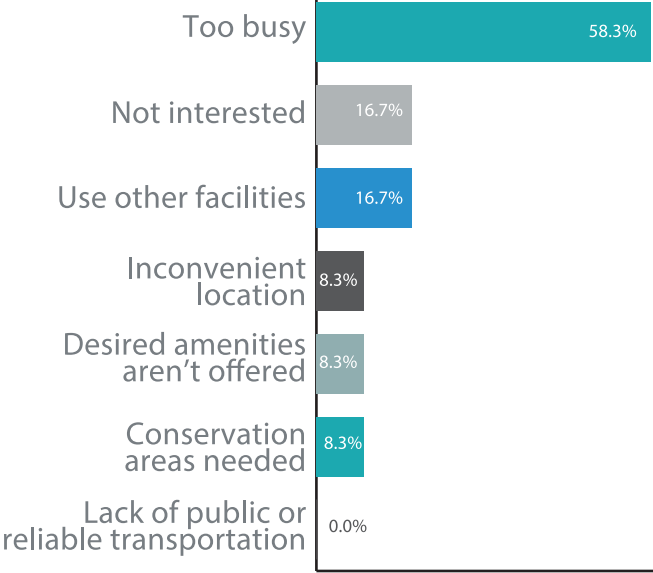
4. Of the Conservation Areas you visited the past 12 months, how satisfied were you with the amenities and facilities? (check all that apply) Answered: 195 skipped:40



5. If you selected “Unsatisfied” for any of the locations in the previous question, what do you feel needs improvement? (Select all that apply.) Answered: 142 skipped: 93

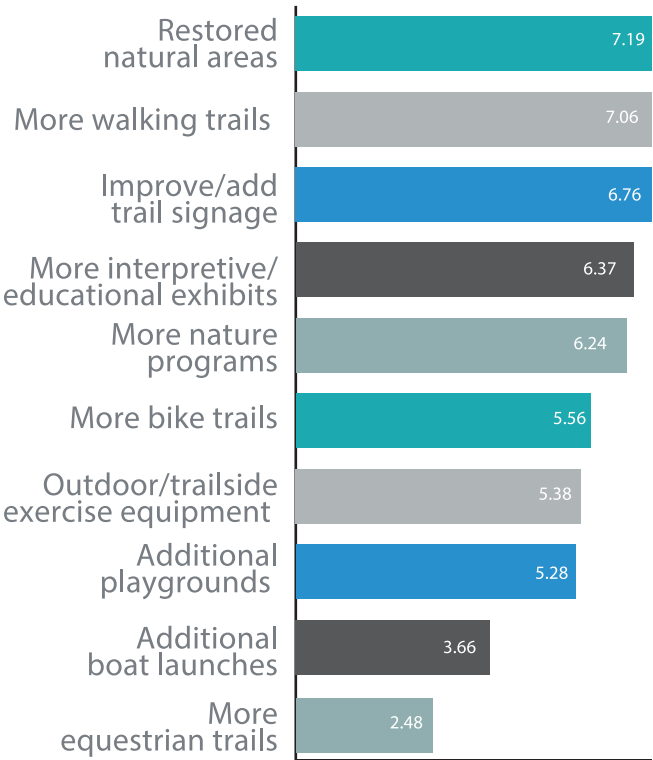


6. If you don’t visit the Conservation District areas and facilities, why not? (Pick all that apply.) Answered: 12 skipped: 223



7. Please prioritize the following potential Conservation District OUTDOOR activities/amenities that would be most important to you and your household where 10 is the most important and 1 is the least important. Answered: 188 skipped: 47

The prioritized scores were calculated using the weighted average of respondents who ranked each activity/amenity where the highest number indicates the item most important to the respondents.



8. Please list any additional amenities that would be important to you and your household. Answered: 93 skipped: 142

The responses to this open-ended question have been grouped into the following categories by the planning team.

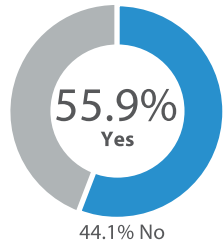
About 20 of the comments were for trail improvements including making additional bike connections, adding more amenities (benches, trash receptacles, etc.) and improving accessibility. A small number of comments were also received requesting improved trail signage and adding exercise equipment. A few participants also requested more locations for equestrian trails.

A large number of responses requested water fountains and flushable restrooms (11), additional boat launches (5), adding an outdoor lounge area for adults (4), and increasing the management of invasive plantings (4). Comments also included four suggestions for activities and programs such as team-building and corporate retreat activities, family programs with a family focus, and generally, more activities. Finally, two comments requested an archery/gun range for public use and two requested more hunting.

The remaining comments were received with less frequency, receiving between one to three comments each. Most of these were suggestions for new outdoor amenities including a golf cart area, more picnic areas, more fishing, non-electric camping, a zip line, a trust course, a dog run, and a butterfly garden and/or bug house. Other comments requested updating the indoor theater, adding a phone app for the trails, expanding history programs, posting events and programs on social media, and advertising farm/Conservation District collaboration. A few comments suggested adding specialized staff and that staff should be friendlier.

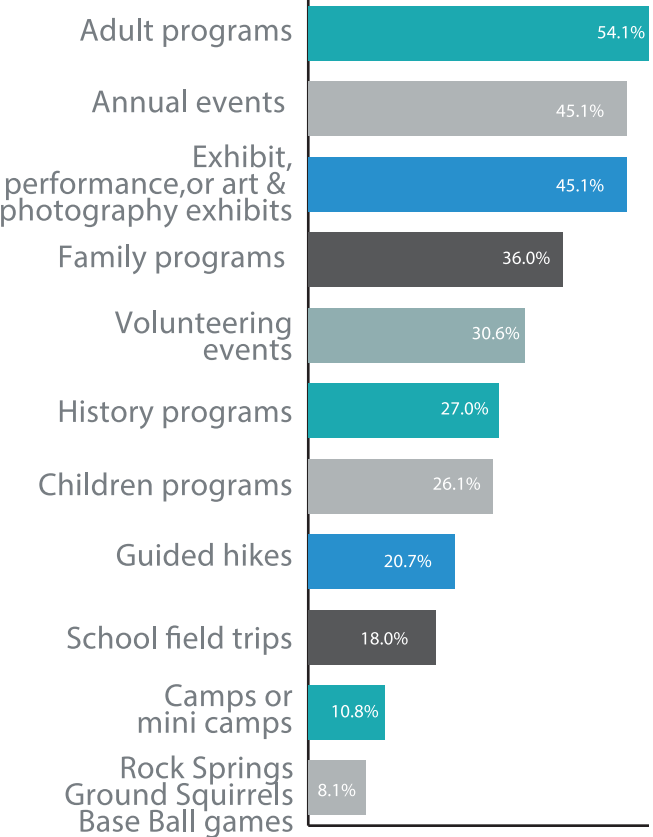
Finally, 12 comments indicated that there were no additional amenities needed.

9. Have you or members of your household participated in any Conservation District programs or events in the last 12 months? Answered: 177 skipped: 58

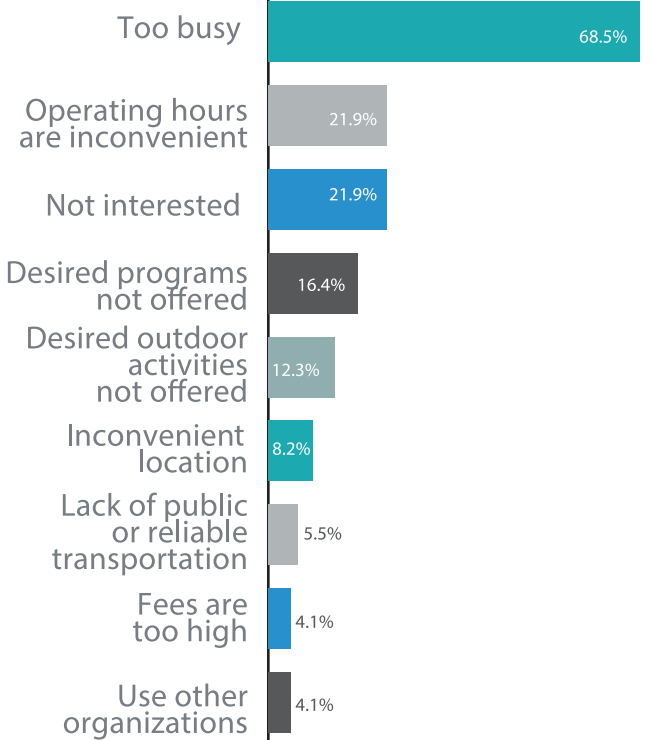


Participants who responded “yes” continued to question 10. Those who responded “no” skipped to question 11.

10. What Conservation District programs have you or members of your household participated in over the last 12 months? (select all that apply) Answered: 111 skipped: 124

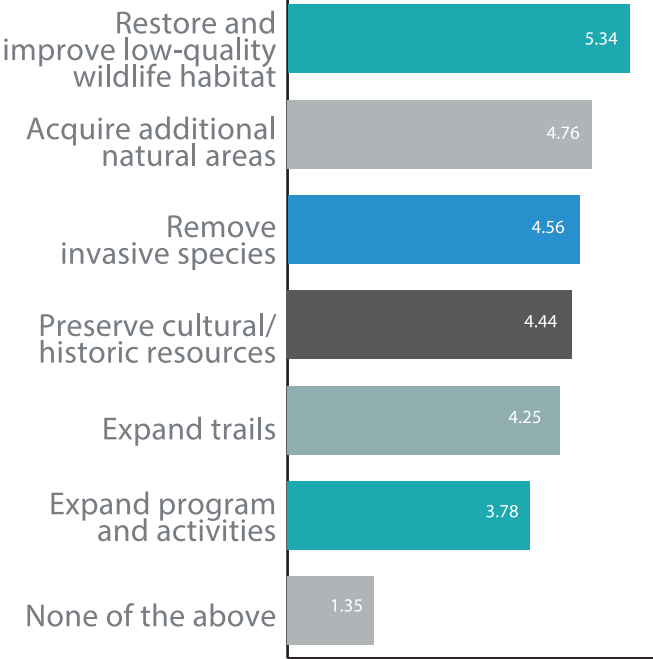


11. Why don't you and members of your household participate in programs and events? (select all that apply) Answered: 73 skipped: 162

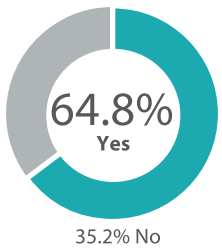


12. Which of the following conservation goals is most important to you? Please rank where 7 is the most important and 1 is the least important. Answered: 181 skipped: 54

The prioritized scores were calculated using the weighted average of respondents who ranked each goal where the highest number indicates the item most important to the respondents.

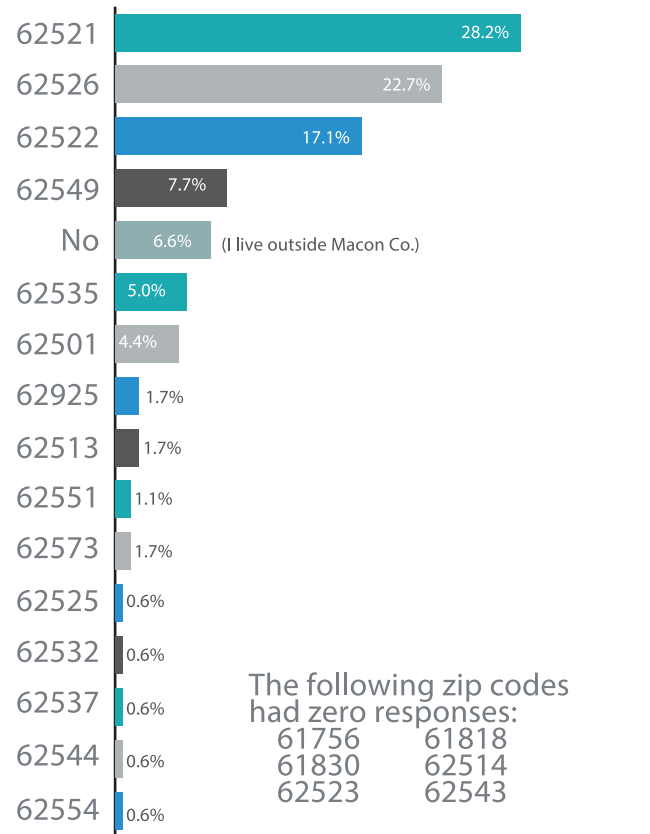


13. Were you aware that the Conservation District is supported in part by the non-profit organization Macon County Conservation Foundation. Answered: 182 skipped: 53



14. Are you a resident of Macon County? Answered: 181 Skipped: 54

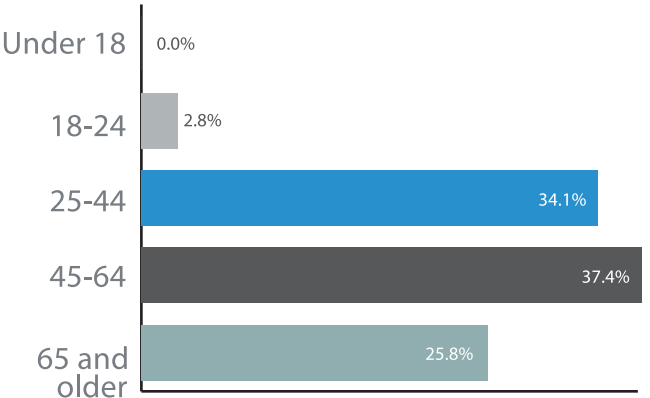
Participants who answered “yes” were given the following list of zip codes to select from.



The following zip codes had zero responses:
61756 61818
61830 62514
62523 62543

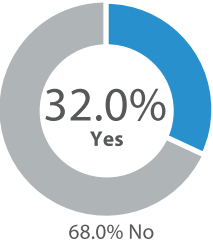
The map to the next page illustrates where survey respondents reside in Macon County.

15. What is your age? Answered: 182 Skipped: 53



16. Do you currently have any children, ages 18 & under, residing in your household?

Answered: 181 Skipped: 54



17. Thank you for your participation. If you have any additional comments please write them here or direct them to Paul Marien, Executive Director, Macon County Conservation District. Answered: 56 Skipped: 179

The responses to this open-ended question have been grouped into the following categories by the planning team.

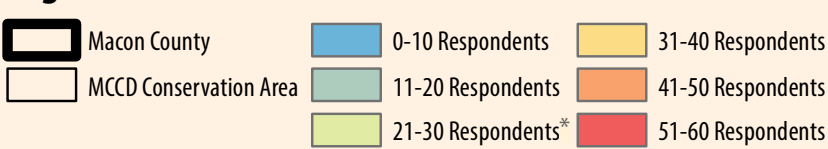
This question received very similar responses to the previous open-ended question. Many of the responses focused on trails. In total, eight comments requested additional trail amenities or changes including completing the Forsyth bike trail, adding off-highway vehicle trails, adding educational components, and connecting to water trails. Separate comments were received requesting more equestrian trails and some requesting fewer equestrian trails.

A small number of comments requested additional outdoor amenities including camping, fishing, an archery/gun range, more kayak/boat launches, a zip line, and a trust course. On a broader scale, three comments were received requesting land acquisition adjacent to existing properties, two of which specifically mentioned Scovill Golf Course.

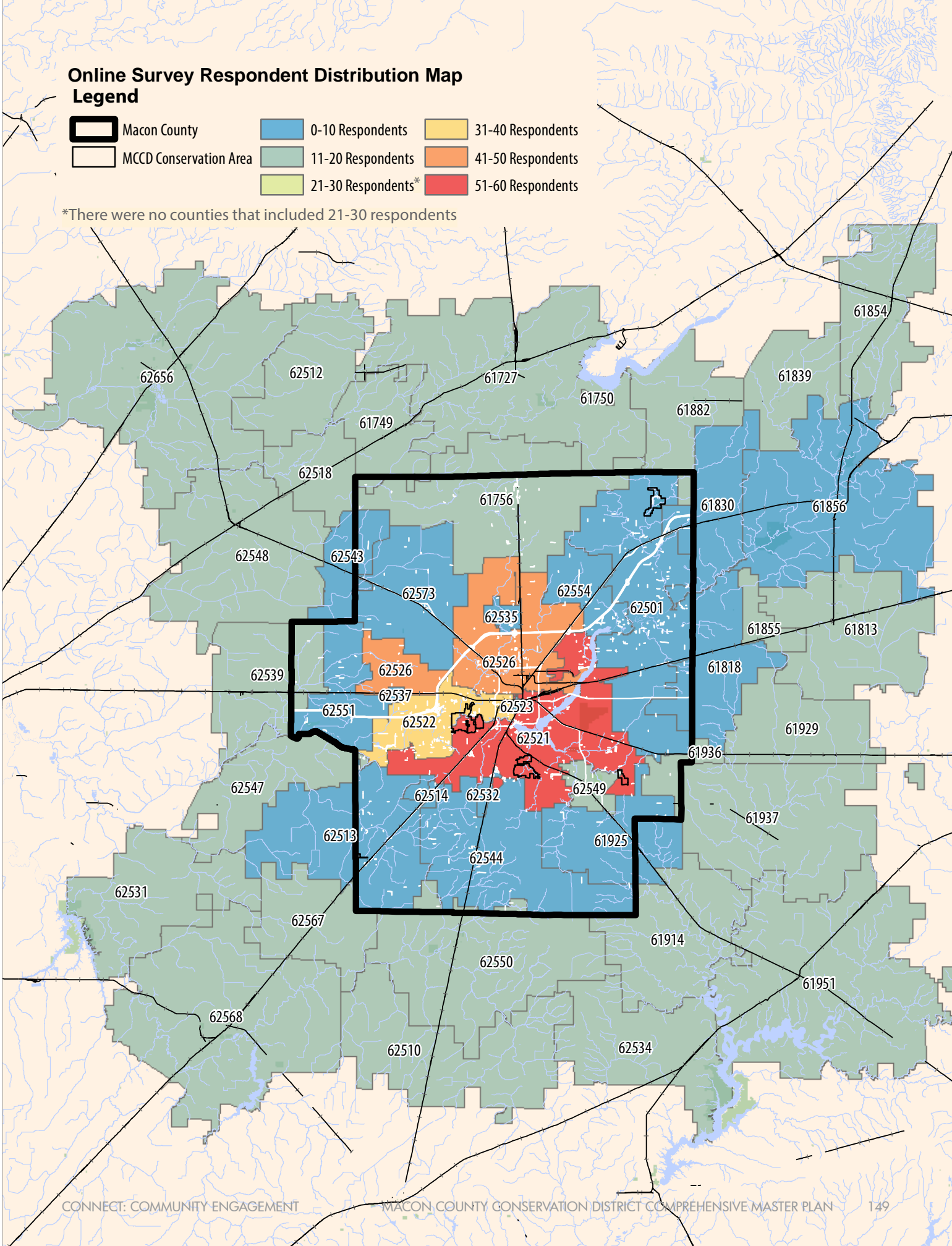
The remaining comments varied greatly with several emphasizing the importance of conservation and maintenance of the conservation areas. A few were also received requesting alternative types of advertising for programs and the Conservation District Mission. There were also a few comments requesting more engaged staff and the addition of a naturalist. A few comments were made regarding programs, specifically, offering activities at locations other than Rock Springs, programs on the weekends, and providing better transportation. Two comments referenced the importance of establishing and maintaining partnerships.

Finally, 20 of the comments praised the Conservation District. These were almost all vague, saying “thank you” or “keep up the good work”. At least one comment each specifically praised the District’s conservation work, children’s education programs, and specific site improvements.

Online Survey Respondent Distribution Map



*There were no counties that included 21-30 respondents



Stakeholder Input

The following summary is an overview of input received from the staff workshop, stakeholder interviews, and community meeting.

Stakeholder input was collected through three methods. On May 23, 2018, the planning team facilitated a staff workshop, three stakeholder group interviews, and a community meeting. At each, participants were asked to generate ideas answering the question “What should the Macon County Conservation District focus on over the next five to ten years?”

For the staff and community groups, participants were given several prompts while they brainstormed ideas for new and improved conservation area, facility, and program amenities. Each staff member submitted the two ideas most important to them and the community members submitted their three most important ideas. The planning team assisted the participants in organizing the ideas into categories which the participants voted on to determine the highest priorities. The community meeting consisted of seven people while the staff workshop included five Administration employees, five Program Services employees, and nine Operations employees for a total of 19 staff members.

The Conservation District invited representatives of citizen groups and local governmental, educational, and conservation agencies to share their experiences working with the Conservation District and their vision for the next five to ten years. In total, eight people participated in three interview sessions and one in a separate phone interview. Participants responded to prompts to begin the discussion and then continued conversations building on their own experiences and the group discussion. The following organizations were represented:

- Macon County Conservation Foundation
- Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Macon County Environmental Management
- Sustain Our Natural Areas
- Community Environmental Council
- The Nature Conservancy
- Heart of the Sangamon Ecosystem Partnership
- Decatur Audubon
- Village of Mt. Zion
- Friends of Lincoln Trail Homestead State Park
- Decatur Park District (phone interview)

The following is a summary of the most common themes from all three methods.

Preservation and Restoration

Restoration was the most highly prioritized item at the staff meeting receiving almost a quarter of the entire number of votes. Suggestions within this category ranged from broad ideas about preserving natural areas and green spaces to specific suggestions to add aquatic habitats and clear unwanted vegetation.

The community meeting participants had a slightly different interpretation on preservation but still ranked it high. Preserve Nature/History was one of three categories to tie as the second highest priority. For community members, preservation included natural functions such as preserving natural areas, removing invasive species, and implementing natural mosquito control, to acquiring and preserving historical sites. A few people also suggested expanding efforts into preservation of inner-city green space and increasing the number of natural areas.

Stakeholders in all of the interview groups placed a strong importance on preservation and restoration efforts. In terms of quantity, participants were divided with some suggesting that the District focus on acquiring new aquatic and terrestrial properties with significant natural value while others prefer the District focus on maintaining their existing sites at a high level rather than acquiring more land. Many of the stakeholders agreed that the District needs to have and implement a management plan for the top priority areas in the District. They also placed a high value on water quality, stating that the District’s focus should be on stream corridors and agricultural buffers to maintain high-quality watersheds.

From a cultural perspective, stakeholders also supported the District’s acquisition and maintenance of historic properties. Some felt that there are additional sites in need of conservation but many stakeholders also acknowledged the decline in resources and volunteers available to the District.

New and Improved Amenities

Among staff members, expanded recreation was tied as the second highest priority. Within this category, staff suggested more recreation opportunities in general, adding biking and fishing specifically, and supported improving ADA accessibility.

Community meeting participants placed a lower priority than staff on amenities. They suggested two areas of improvements, camping (adding local camping and updating existing sites) and trail expansion (including providing access to new areas). Neither of these was highly prioritized.

The stakeholders who participated in interviews had very similar responses to the staff suggestions. Most of the comments were focused on adding walking trails. One stakeholder also suggested adding more opportunities for spontaneity and different types of recreation but did not specify what these new opportunities may be.

Programs and Education

Program and educational service was a major topic of discussion among staff members. This discussion generated two distinct categories: Nature/Cultural Education and Expand Programs. Staff also recognized the relationship between these ideas and the importance of outreach, creating the categories “Outreach” and “Expand Programs”. Between these categories, and the items within them, ideas for programs and education (and outreach) received over a quarter of the votes. Most of the educational comments focused on nature as a topic while history and culture were secondary concerns. A key theme that emerged from the staff categories about programs and education was “reaching all age groups”.

The community meeting participants suggested that kids programming and educational opportunities be added. Specifically for grades seven through twelve and by providing teacher training. Another comment suggested that a different format be applied to the summer day camps. Overall, the community prioritized kids programs/education fairly lowly, giving the category 2 of the 24 votes.

Education was discussed by all three of the stakeholder interview groups and produced a variety of ideas and comments. Stakeholders suggested that the District expand learning opportunities, possibly through the use of the internet and social media and by bringing school groups to the District, although they stated that more funding and volunteers are needed to accommodate the students. Accessing other organization’s archives and records, as well as internet resources to supplement District assets was also suggested as a method to continue updating and improving education services while minimizing District investment.

Outreach

Staff developed a category called Community Outreach that had similar ideas to programming and education but was also a distinct idea. Reaching all age groups was also mentioned in regards to expanding outreach efforts and staff also expressed interest in reaching out the entire community in general, particularly underserved groups.

Participants at the community meeting voted Public Relations/Branding as one of the second highest priorities. This discussion focused on the need for better awareness of the District services. Suggestions to achieve this included adding a “wow factor” and reaching out to underserved inner-city areas.

Public Access

Community members felt that providing public access to natural areas was the highest priority for the District and this category received a quarter of the total votes. In general, community members support the development of new properties and improving access to the water and the bank of Sangamon River. Specifically, the community suggested improving Wright-Banton Audubon Area for visitor use.

The stakeholder groups mostly agreed that the Conservation District needs to improve visitation. Some support the addition of physical links such as trails and more development partnerships to accomplish this while others suggested better utilizing social media and the website to build awareness. One stakeholder also referenced potential challenges in traveling to conservation areas and suggested the District investigate alternate means of transportation. Finally, a few stakeholders identified the Wright-Banton Audubon Area as a potential location for recreation development.

Partnerships

Partnerships/Alliances was tied for the second highest prioritized category at the staff meeting. Participants saw partnerships as key to educating the general public on the benefits of conservation. They felt that connectivity with individuals, organizations, and government agencies would be beneficial.

Many of the stakeholders who participated in the interviews are existing Conservation District partners and are satisfied with the District and what they accomplish. All of the stakeholder groups suggested expanding the partnerships and recommended a variety of initiatives including streambank and watershed improvements, increasing weed control efforts, and expanding education. One stakeholder also proposed the joint creation of a cooperative, multi-agency natural area management plan.

Service

Providing quality service was the third most important idea for staff members. Staff emphasized the value of quality services and spaces, the importance of a good staff/public relationship, and the need to balance maintenance and innovation.

Resources

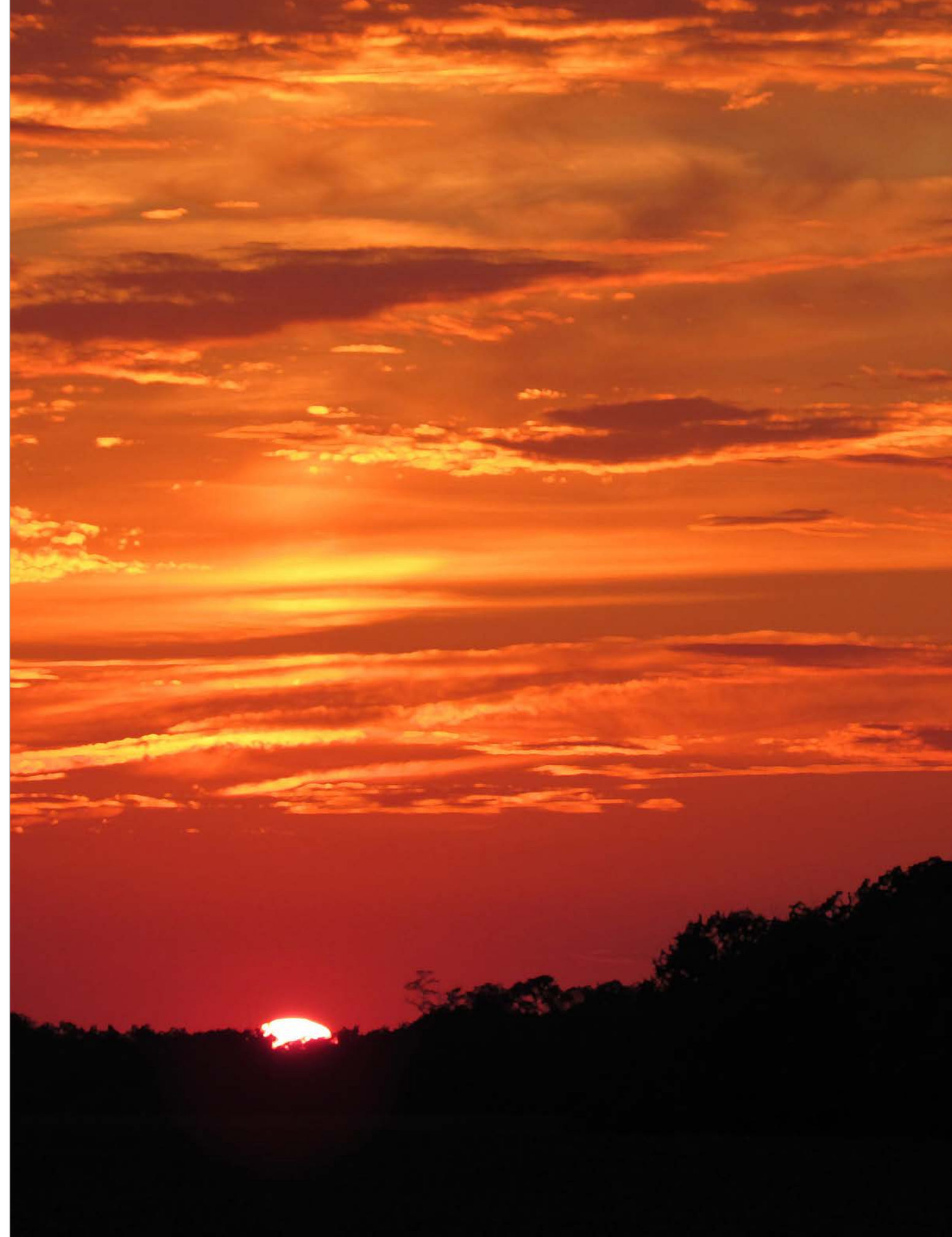
Ensuring the District has the necessary resources was a moderate priority among staff members, “Expanded Resources” received five of the 54 votes and increasing revenue received eight votes, making it one of the second highest priorities. While expanding revenue focused solely on increasing the revenue stream, the idea of expanded resources was much broader and included ideas such as adding staff and equipment and expanding volunteer efforts.

Other Comments

The planning team received additional ideas that were not highly prioritized (or received no votes) and were independent of other categories. The idea of following the plan came out of the community meeting.

Awareness was a topic of discussion for two of the stakeholder interview groups with conflicting conclusions. One group thought that resident awareness of the conservation areas is good while the other group thought that Rock Springs Conservation Area as a hub is well known but the other areas need more awareness.

A common theme throughout the stakeholder interviews was the benefits of technology in advertising and educating the public on District initiatives, programs, and conservation areas. Every group supported the expansion of technology as a tool to supplement existing District resources and a medium to reach a greater audience.



Board Input

The following is a summary of the results of the joint meeting between the Macon County Conservation District Board of Trustees and the Macon County Conservation Foundation Board.

A couple of key points came out of the joint board meeting. On the whole, input from board members from both agencies aligned with the comments received from the stakeholder meetings, interviews, and workshops. Board members also had a few operations comments that were not raised by the other groups.

Balancing Restoration and Visitor Use

Balance was the overarching theme of the Boards discussion, with members discussing how to manage the various responsibilities of the Conservation District. One key aspect of this was identified as continuing to educate the community on the District mission and on the importance of habitat improvement. Part of this includes the careful control of what recreation amenities are added to conservation areas and how public access and education interact with conservation efforts. Board members highlighted places to fish at Friends Creek Conservation Area and building trail connectivity for walking and biking as crucial recreation amenities. Both of these compliment the conservation mission.

The boards still value natural area restoration as one the District's highest priorities and biggest challenges. Members commented on the labor intensive nature of establishing and maintaining restored habitats. Specifically, the constant need to monitor and remove invasive species is a major concern, particularly at sites with limited access and dense vegetation, where vegetative and species quality cannot be monitored. Utilizing available resources, such as maintaining and purchasing equipment, was a highly supported method to help staff manage restoration projects.

Board members also support the Conservation District's continued management of historic sites but not as the District's primary objective. They recommended the District evaluate each site's relevance to the ecological focus of the overall mission.

Managing Programs

Board members commented on several needs revolving around program management. Overall they identified a need for better market analysis to determine which programs will generate the most community interest. They also commented that the District should have a more robust method of program analysis for program analysis and new program development.

Other Comments

Board members also questioned if the number of District staff is adequate for all of the restoration and management needs. They also expressed concerns that overall staff knowledge is being lost as more senior staff retire.

Finally, improving access for those who don't have reliable modes of transportation was discussed. Board members identified bussing as an important resource, particularly for school groups.

CHAPTER 5

Appendix





Memorandum

Date: June 22, 2018
To: Paul Marien, Macon County Conservation District (MCCD)
From: Bridget Deatrick, Hitchcock Design Group (HDG)

RE: Macon County Conservation District Comprehensive Master Plan
Online Survey Results

Key Points:

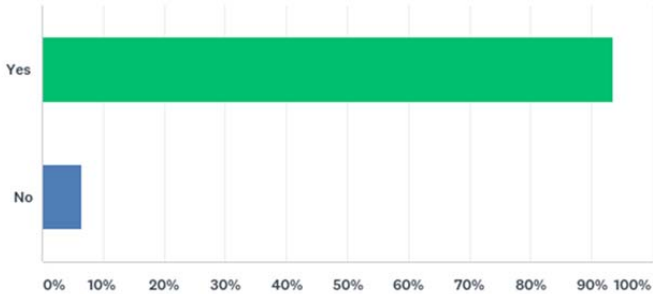
The online engagement platform consisted of a webpage and a survey, hosted through SurveyMonkey. Both were publicly available 24/7 to provide information on the planning process and allow participants to provide input on Conservation District facilities, conservation areas, and programs. The survey was advertised at all of the Connect Phase events and was promoted on the Conservation District’s webpage and social media accounts.

The online survey was available from May 18, 2018, 9:00 AM through June 15, 2018, 5:00PM and consisted of 17 questions. Participants had the option to skip any of the questions and responses to certain questions determined the next question a participant answered. In total, 235 people completed all or part of the survey and the average completion rate was 71%. The following is a summary of the results:

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1. Have you or members of your household visited any Macon County Conservation Areas in the past 12 months?
Answered: 235 skipped: 0



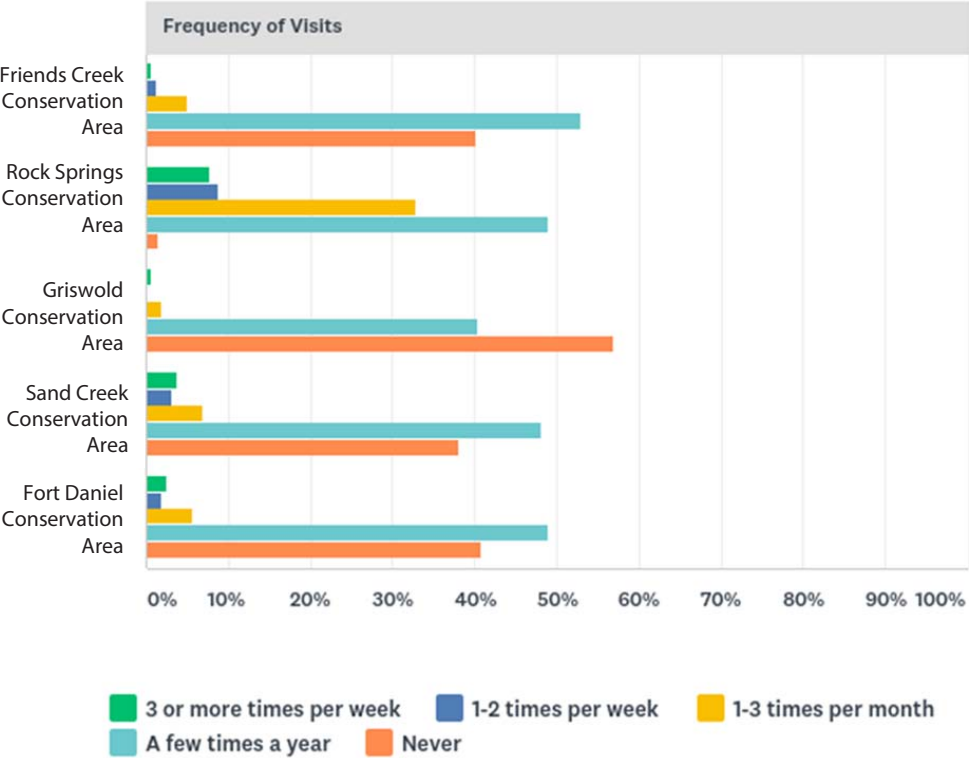
Participants who responded “yes” continued to question 2. Those who responded “no” skipped to question 6.

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2. About how many times have you or members of your household visited the following Macon County Conservation District areas in the past 12 months?
Answered: 169 skipped: 39

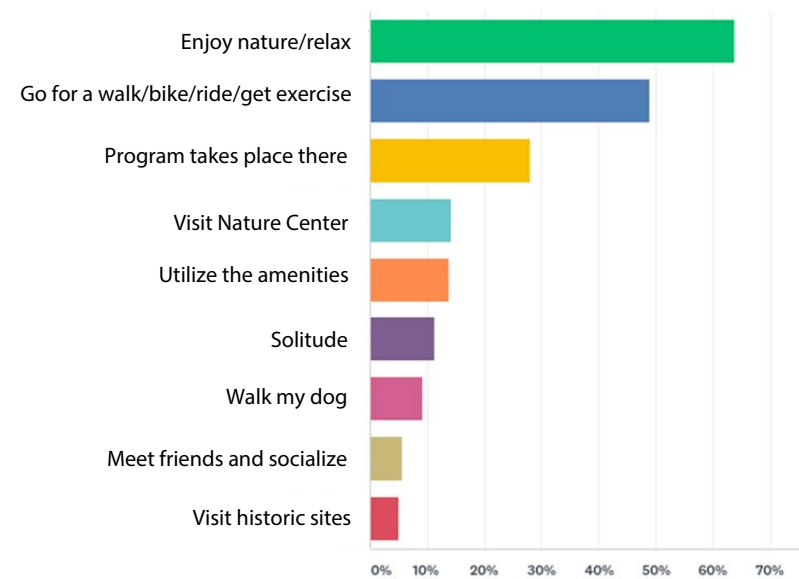


- When the frequency of visits were averaged, the most visited areas were:
1. Rock Springs Conservation Area (82.75)
 2. Sand Creek Conservation Area (34.5)
 3. Fort Daniel Conservation Area (30.25)
 4. Friends Creek Conservation Area (27.5)
 5. Griswold Conservation Area (17.75)



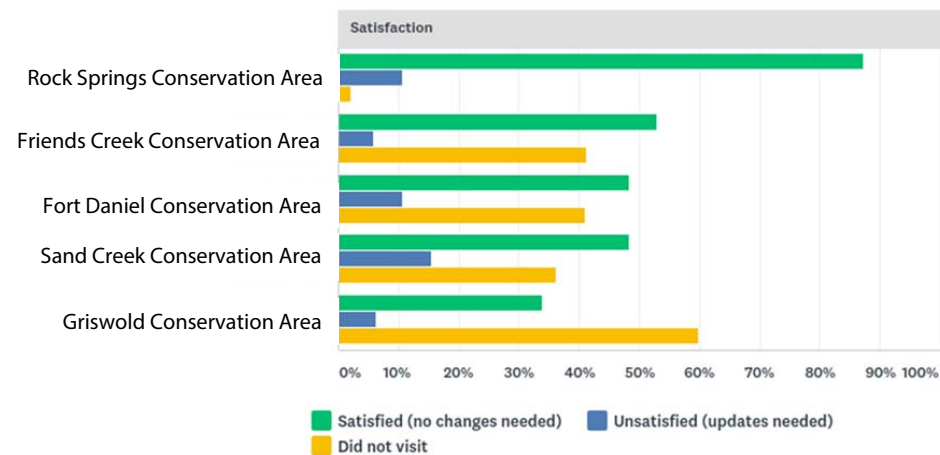
3. Why do you visit Macon County Conservation District Areas? (select your TWO most common reasons)

Answered: 196 skipped: 39



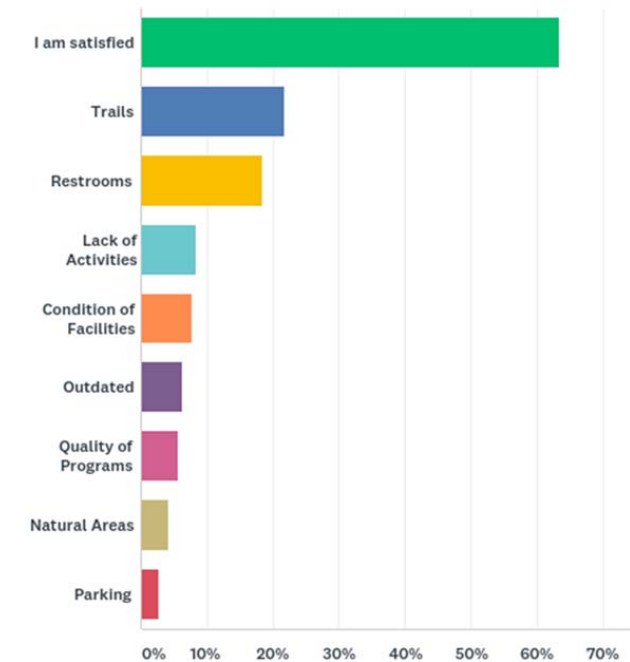
4. Of the Conservation Areas you visited the past 12 months, how satisfied were you with the amenities and facilities? (check all that apply)

Answered: 195 skipped: 40



5. If you selected "Unsatisfied" for any of the locations in the previous question, what do you feel needs improvement? (Select all that apply.)

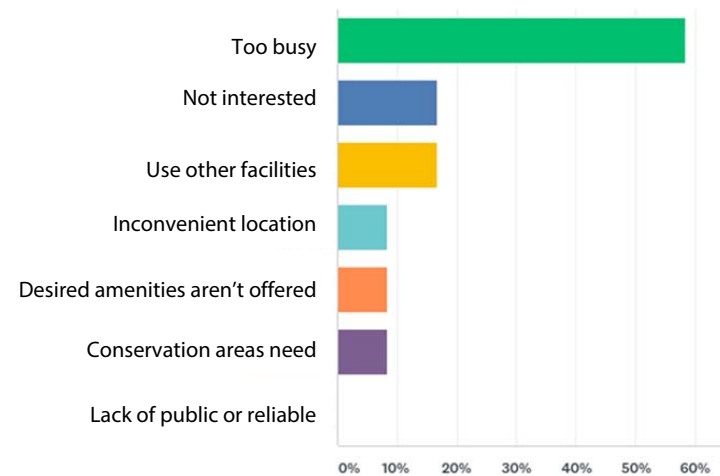
Answered: 142 skipped: 93





6. If you don't visit the Conservation District areas and facilities, why not? (Pick all that apply.)

Answered: 12 skipped: 223



7. Please prioritize the following potential Conservation District OUTDOOR activities/amenities that would be most important to you and your household where 1 is the most important and 10 is the least important. (ranking question 1-10 or levels of importance)

Answered: 188 skipped: 47



8. Please list any additional amenities that would be important to you and your household.

Answered: 93 skipped: 142

The responses to this open-ended question have been grouped into the following categories by the planning team.

About 20 of the comments were for trail improvements including making additional bike connections, adding more amenities (benches, trash receptacles, etc, and improving accessibility. A small number of comments were also received requesting improved trail signage and adding exercise equipment. A few participants also requested more locations for equestrian trails.

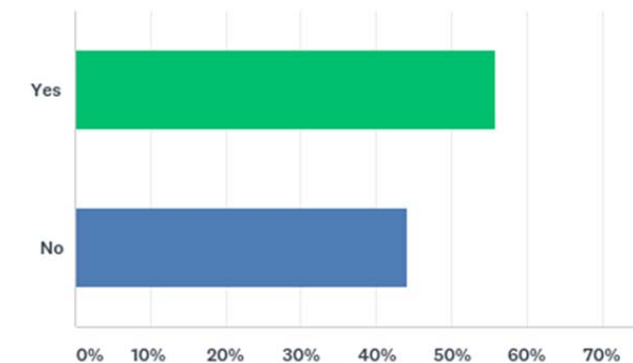
A large number of responses requested water fountains and flushable restrooms (11), additional boat launches (5), adding an outdoor lounge area for adults (4), and increasing the management of invasive plantings (4). Comments also included four suggestions for activities and programs such as teambuilding and corporate retreat activities, family programs with a family focus, and generally, more activities. Finally, two comments were requested an archery/gun range for public use and two requested more hunting.

The remaining comments were received with less frequency, receiving between one to three comments each. Most of these were suggestions for new outdoor amenities including a golf cart area, more picnic areas, more fishing, non-electric camping, a zip line, a trust course, a dog run, and a butterfly garden and/or bug house. Other comments requested updating the indoor theater, adding an app for the trails, expanding history programs, posting events and programs on social media, and advertising farm/Conservation District collaboration. A few comments suggested adding specialized staff and that staff should be friendlier.

Finally, 12 comments indicated that there were no additional amenities needed.

9. Have you or members of your household participated in any Conservation District programs or events in the last 12 months?

Answered: 177 skipped: 58

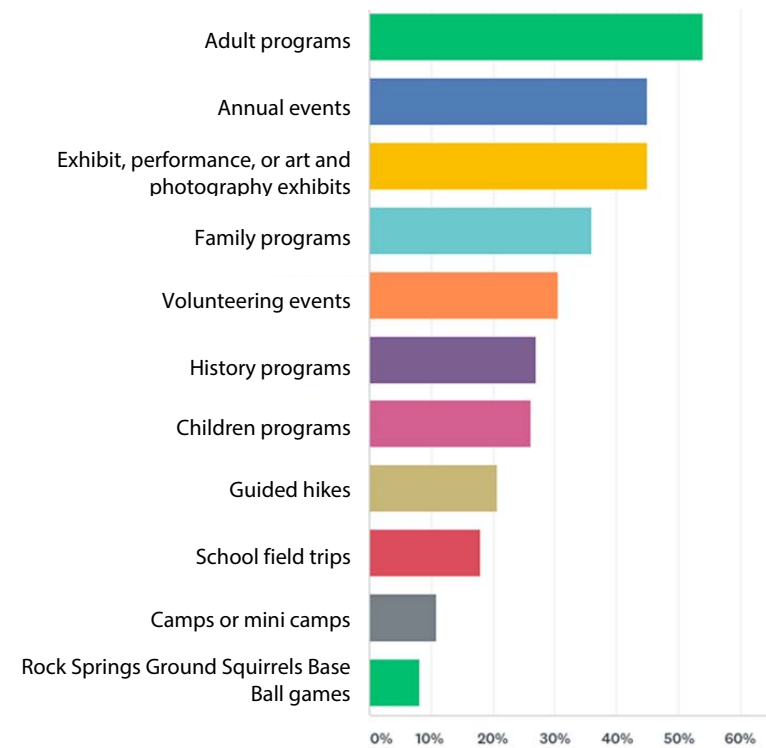


Participants who responded "yes" continued to question 10. Those who responded "no" skipped to question 11.



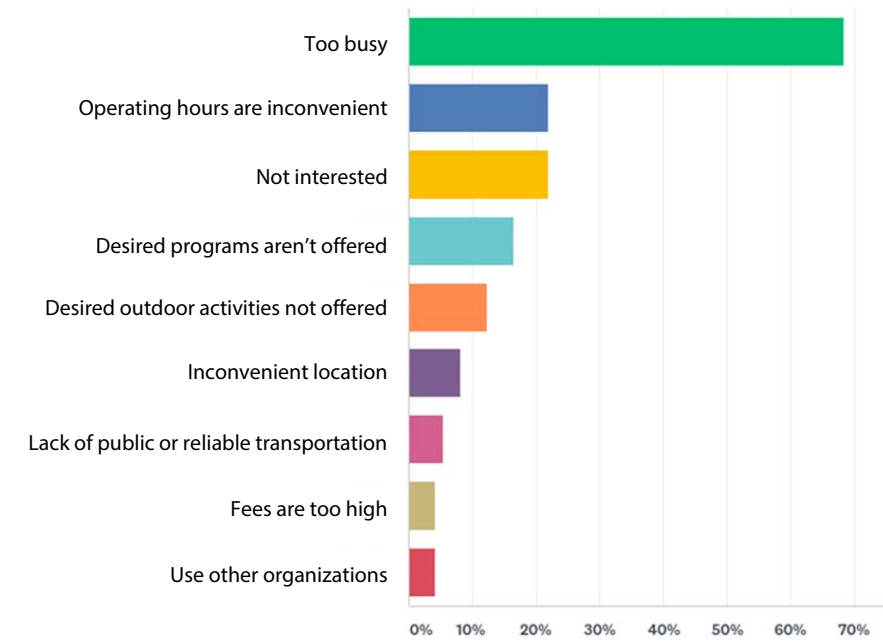
10. What Conservation District programs have you or members of your household participated in over the last 12 months? (select all that apply)

Answered: 111 skipped: 124



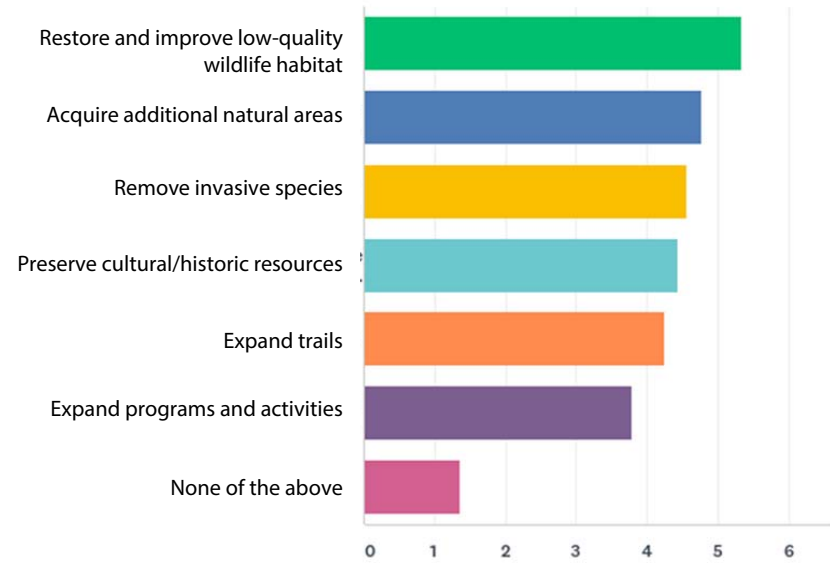
11. Why don't you and members of your household participate in programs and events? (select all that apply)

Answered: 73 skipped: 162

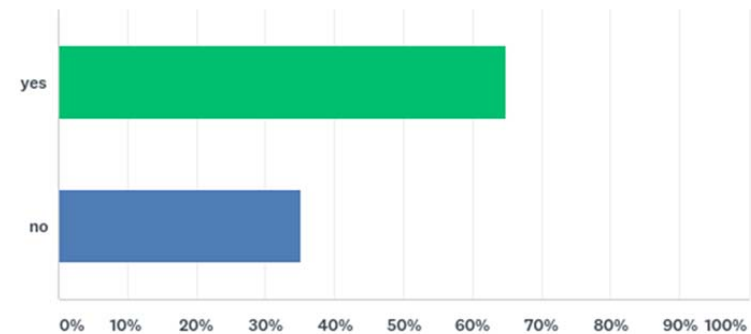




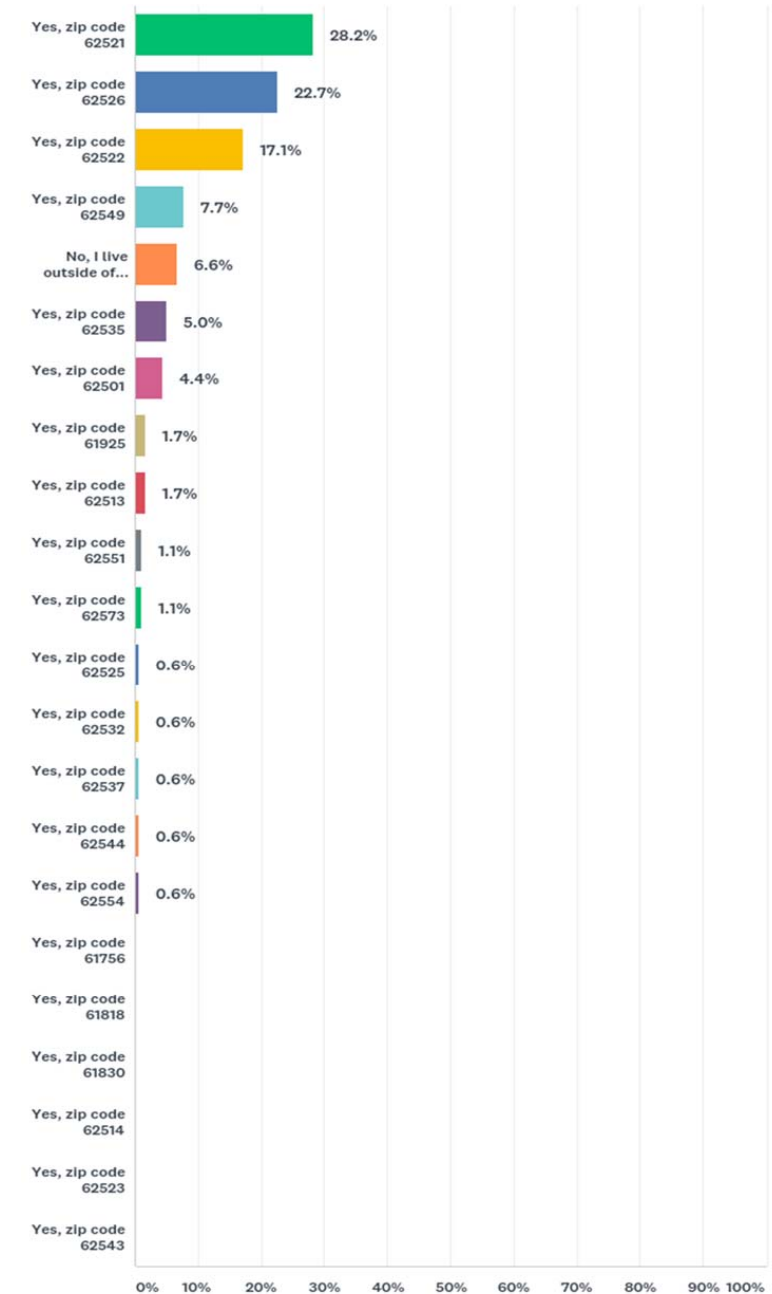
12. Which of the following conservation goals is most important to you? Please rank where 1 is the most important and 7 is the least important.
Answered: 181 skipped: 54

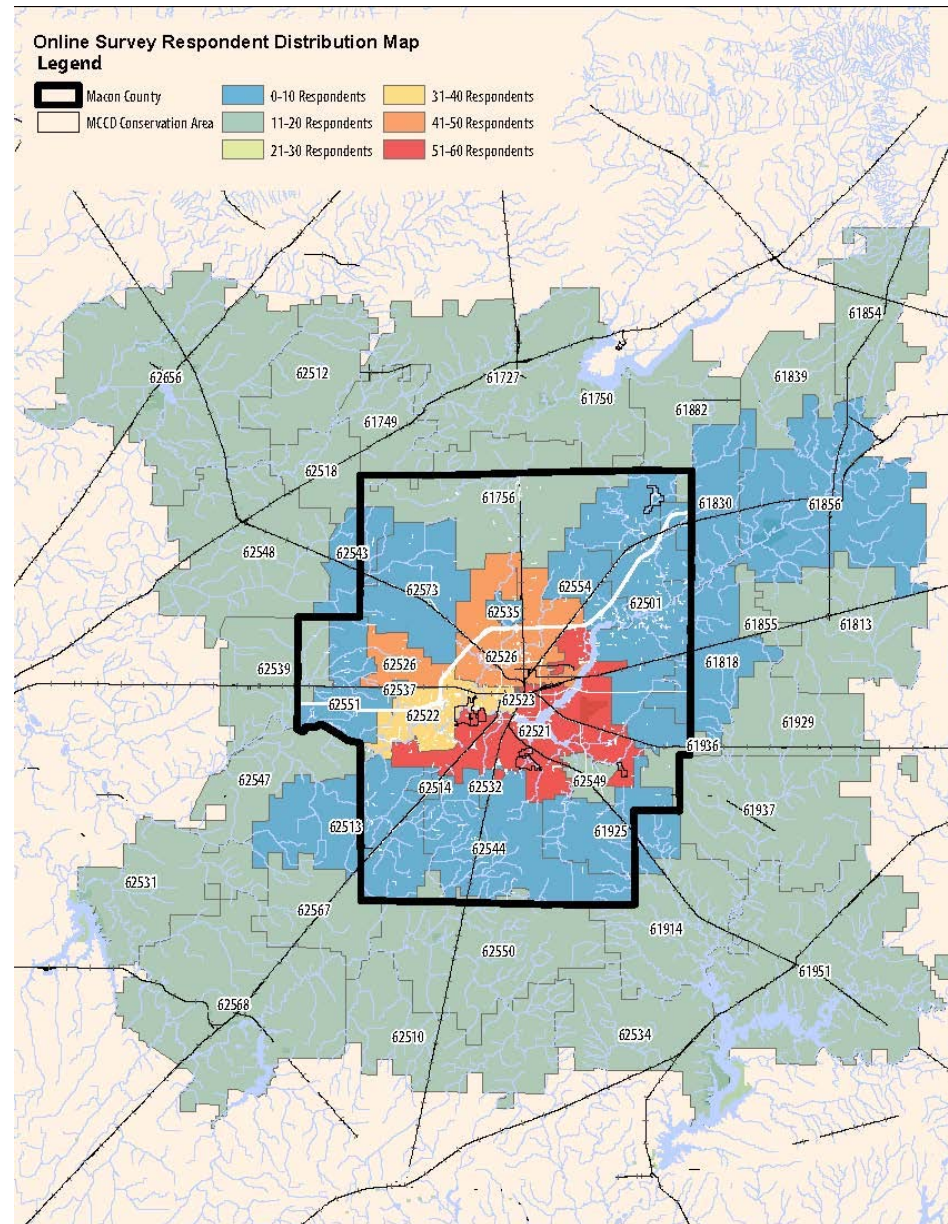


13. Were you aware that the Conservation District is supported in part by the non-profit organization Macon County Conservation Foundation.
Answered: 182 skipped: 53



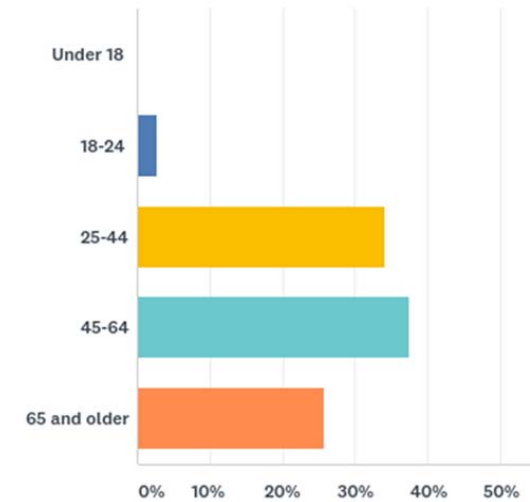
14. Are you a resident of Macon County?
Answered: 181 Skipped: 54





15. What is your age?

Answered: 182 Skipped: 53



16. Thank you for your participation. If you have any additional comments please write them here or direct them to Paul Marien, Executive Director, Macon County Conservation District.

Answered: 56 Skipped: 179

The responses to this open-ended question have been grouped into the following categories by the planning team.

This question received very similar responses to the previous open-ended question. Many of the responses focused on trails. In total, eight comments requested additional trail amenities or changes including completing the Forsyth bike trail, adding off-highway vehicle trails, adding educational components, and connecting to water trails. Separate comments were received requesting more equestrian trails and requesting fewer equestrian.

A small number of comments requested additional outdoor amenities including camping, fishing, an archery/gun range, more kayak/boat launches, a zip line, and a trust course. On a broader scale, three comments were received requesting land acquisition adjacent to existing properties, two of which specifically mentioned Scovill Golf Course.

The remaining comments varied greatly with several emphasizing the importance of conservation and maintenance of the conservation areas. A few were also received requesting alternative types of advertising programs and the Conservation District Mission. There were also a few comments requesting more engaged staff and the addition of a naturalist. A few comments were made regarding programs, specifically, offering activities at locations other than Rock Springs, programs on the weekends, and providing better transportation. Two comments referenced the importance of establishing and maintaining partnerships. Finally, 20 of the comments praised the Conservation District.



Meeting Summary

Date: May 23, 2018
Time: 11:15 AM
Location: Macon County Conservation District
Attendees: Steve Konters, Hitchcock Design Group (HDG)
Bridget Deatrick, HDG
See Sign-in Sheet for staff members

RE: Macon County Conservation District Comprehensive Master Plan

Purpose of Meeting: Staff Input

The planning team conducted a workshop with the Conservation District staff with a total of 19 staff participants. There were five staff members each from Administration and Program Services departments and nine staff members from Operations department. Participants were given a notecard and asked to write down their comments and suggestions for Macon County Conservation District relating to facilities, parks, and programs. They then selected the two items most important to them. The planning team, along with the participants, organized the responses into the following categories.

- 1. Increase Revenue
 - a. Increase revenue stream
 - b. Increase revenue
- 2. Restoration
 - a. Restoration
 - b. Restoration
 - c. Add water features – Aquatic habitats at all areas
 - d. Preserve natural areas
 - e. Keeping green spaces green – No development!
 - f. Clear unwanted vegetation
 - g. Restoration recreation
- 3. Expanded Resources
 - a. Equipment
 - b. More people, equipment
 - c. Need more equipment
 - d. Volunteerism
 - e. Inspired staff
 - f. Few challenges! We can do anything we set our minds to
- 4. Quality Service
 - a. Customer service
 - b. Quality of service
 - c. Better public spaces
 - d. Working with the public and staff
 - e. Balance between maintaining and innovating
- 5. Expanded Recreation
 - a. More fishing opportunities
 - b. More recreation opportunities

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Page 2

- c. Adding mountain bike trails
- d. Recreation accessibilities for the handicapped
- 6. Nature / Cultural Education
 - a. Educate on preservation of natural resources
 - b. Connect people to nature and history
 - c. Education
 - d. Nature experience
 - e. Public education and awareness
 - f. Education
 - g. Connect people to nature and history
- 7. Community Outreach
 - a. Reaching underserved groups
 - b. Reaching out to the community
- 8. Both Community Outreach and Expand Programs
 - a. Provide an environment that would bring ages between ~12 to retirement, New visitors
- 9. Expand Programs
 - a. More programs for users
 - b. More programs for older groups
 - c. More hands-on exhibit/programs



After the categories were established, participants were given three stickers to vote on the items most important to them. They could vote on a category (bolded) or an item within it and could vote for the same thing multiple times. The following breakdown is the compilation of the results of the three workshops.



Meeting Summary

Date: May 23, 2018
Time: 6:00 PM
Location: Macon County Conservation District
Attendees: Steve Konters, Hitchcock Design Group (HDG)
Bridget Deatrick, HDG
See Sign-in Sheet for attendees

RE: Macon County Conservation District Comprehensive Master Plan

Purpose of Meeting: Community Input

The planning team conducted a workshop with Macon County residents with a total of seven participants. Participants were given a notecard and asked to write down their comments and suggestions for Macon County Conservation District relating to facilities, parks, and programs. They then selected the three items most important to them. The planning team, along with the participants, organized the responses into the following categories.

1. Follow the Plan
 - a. Follow the plan
2. Partner / Alliances
 - a. Greater connectedness to individuals, organizations, and government agencies
 - b. MCSCD / MCCD more joint meetings, ag/conservation (education)
 - c. Coordinate support going to be needed in future. Educate them now of the benefits
3. Improve Camping
 - a. Add local camping
 - b. Update camping area
4. Kids Programs / Education
 - a. Outdoor education grades 7-12
 - b. Different format for summer day camps
 - c. Work with schools to do more teacher training
5. Trail Expansion
 - a. Expand trail system
 - b. Add access such as trails to natural areas that currently lack it
6. Provide Public Access
 - a. Develop new properties
 - b. Improve Wright-Banton
 - c. Access to Sangamon River. Add another boat launch. Trails nearer to or alongside the river
7. Public Relations / Branding
 - a. Wow factor
 - b. Better advertising, Raising awareness of what's available
 - c. Advertising and marketing for programs
 - d. Environmental awareness in underserved areas – inner city

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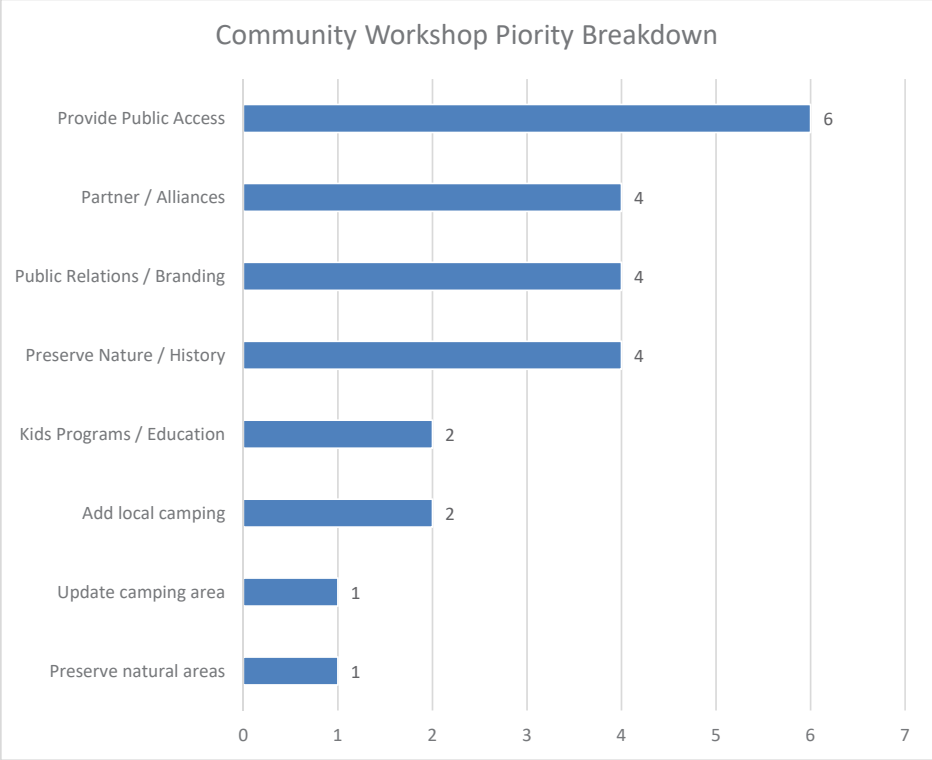
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8. **Preserve Nature and History**
- a. Preserve natural areas
 - b. Natural mosquito control
 - c. Increased number of protected areas
 - d. Inner city preservation
 - e. Explore preservation of historic sites (Lorton Trading Post, Hards Cabin)
 - f. Invasive species control (Bush Honeysuckle)

After the categories were established, participants were given three stickers to vote on the items most important to them. They could vote on a category (bolded) or an item within it and could vote for the same thing multiple times. The following breakdown is the compilation of the results of the three workshops.



Meeting Summary

Date: May 23, 2018
Time: 1:30 PM, 2:30 PM, and 3:30 PM
Location: Macon County Conservation District
Attendees: Steve Konters, Hitchcock Design Group (HDG)
Bridget Deatrick, HDG
See Sign-in Sheet for stakeholders

RE: **Macon County Conservation District Comprehensive Master Plan**

Purpose of Meeting: Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder group interviews were conducted on May 23, 2018 at the Visitor Center in Rock Springs Conservation Area. There were three group timeslots and a total of eight participants representing the following organizations: Macon County Conservation Foundation, Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District, Macon County Environmental Management, Sustain Our Natural Areas, Community Environmental Council, The Nature Conservancy, Heart of the Sangamon, Decatur Audubon, Village of Mt. Zion, Friends of Lincoln Trail Homestead State Park.

The following is a summary of the common topics of discussion from all the groups.

- Recreation
 - o Provide more opportunity: different types, spontaneity
 - o Walking is an interest
 - o Expand trails
- Awareness
 - o Resident awareness is good
 - o Rock Springs is hub, more awareness of other areas
- Education
 - o Expand opportunities to learn
 - o Keep master Gardner program
 - o Use social media to share and educate
 - o Funding and volunteers needed to bring back school groups
 - Audubon subsidizes buses
- Access
 - o How do we get more visitors?
 - o More access
 - Open Wright-Banton – use partners
 - o Make links and connections with others
 - Physical
 - Partnerships
 - Trails
 - Digital
 - Improve website and technology
 - o Alternate transportation
- Preservation/restoration
 - o Focus on existing, not new
 - o Acquire new natural areas (terrestrial and aquatic)
 - o Management plan of top priority areas
 - o Focus on stream corridors and agricultural buffers

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- o Historic and cultural
 - Lacks volunteers and resources it previously had
 - Use internet to teach and access other resources
 - Obtain more historic sites
 - Lorton Trading Post
 - John Hanks House
 - Access existing research and archives
- Partners
 - o Use partners for weed management
 - o SWCD partners for grants and erosion control
 - Friends Creek Watershed management plan and streambank analysis needs to be addressed
 - o All share responsibility of Sangamon River Valley
 - o SONA suggests a cooperative management plan for all natural areas and agencies
 - o Partners are satisfied with the variety the District offers and what is accomplished

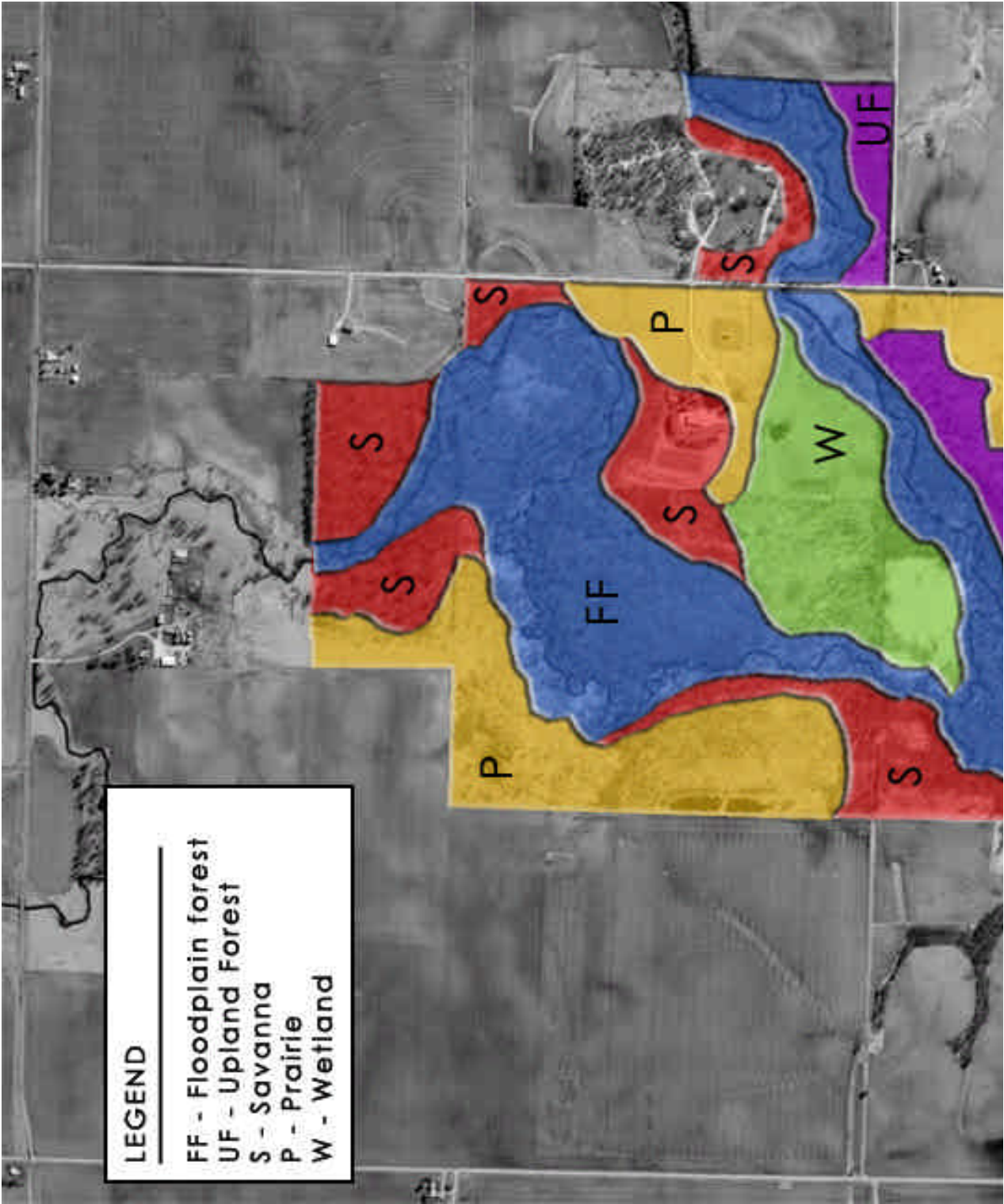
Map 7: Proposed Vision, Bois Du Sangamon Nature Preserve



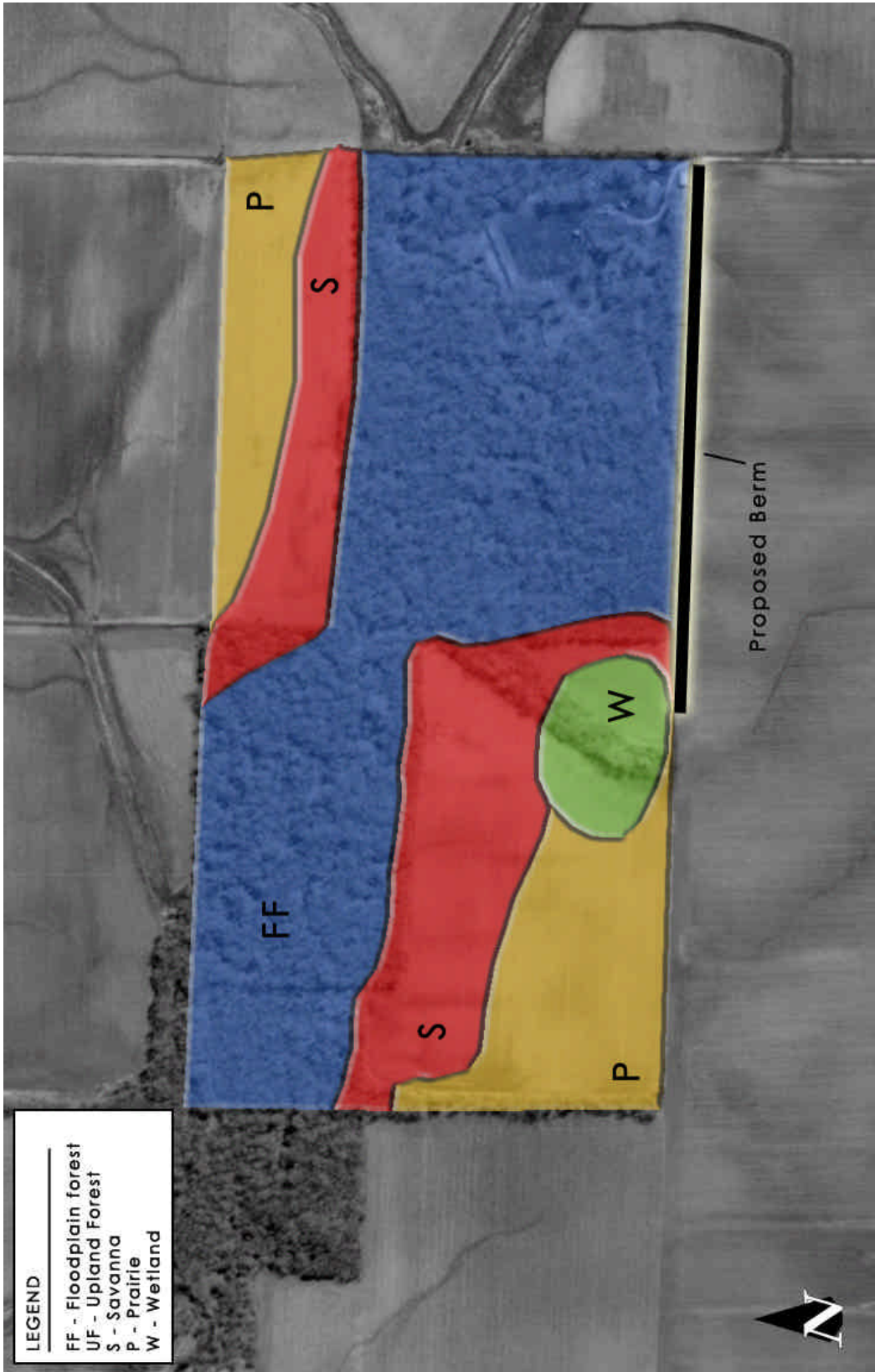
Map 10: Proposed Vision, Fort Daniel Conservation Area



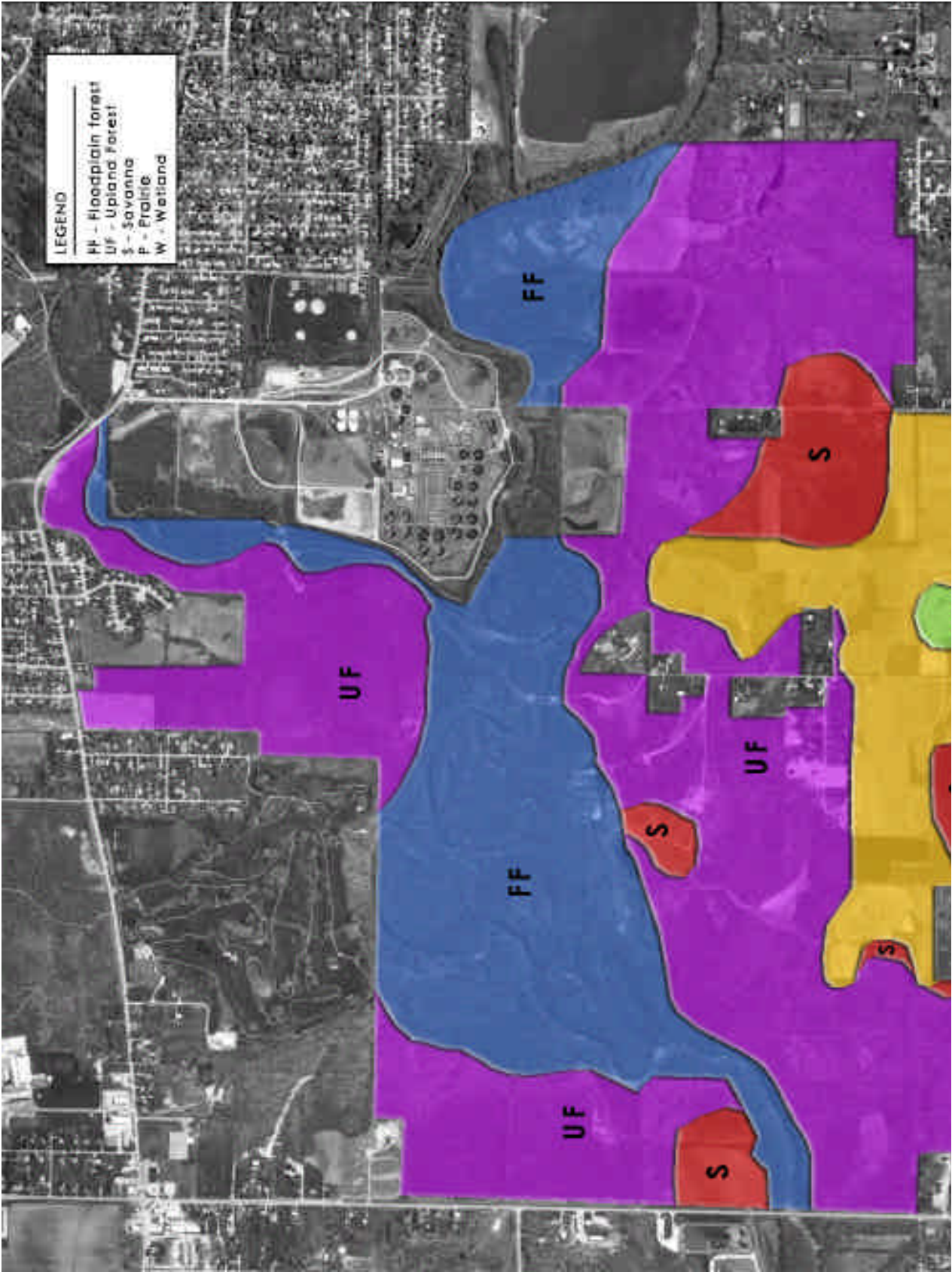
Map 13: Proposed Vision, Friends Creek Regional Park



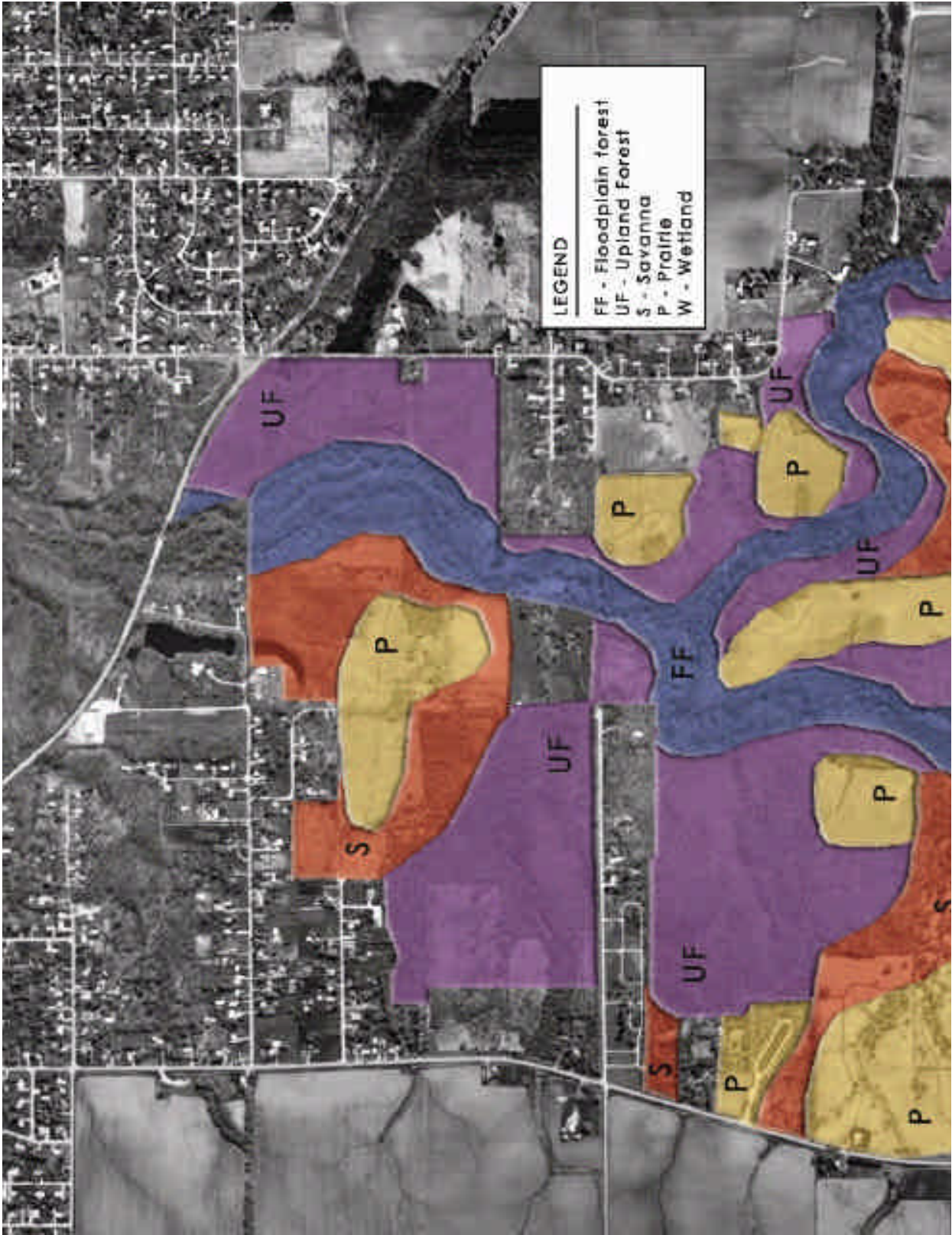
Map 16: Proposed Vision, Grove Branch Conservation Area



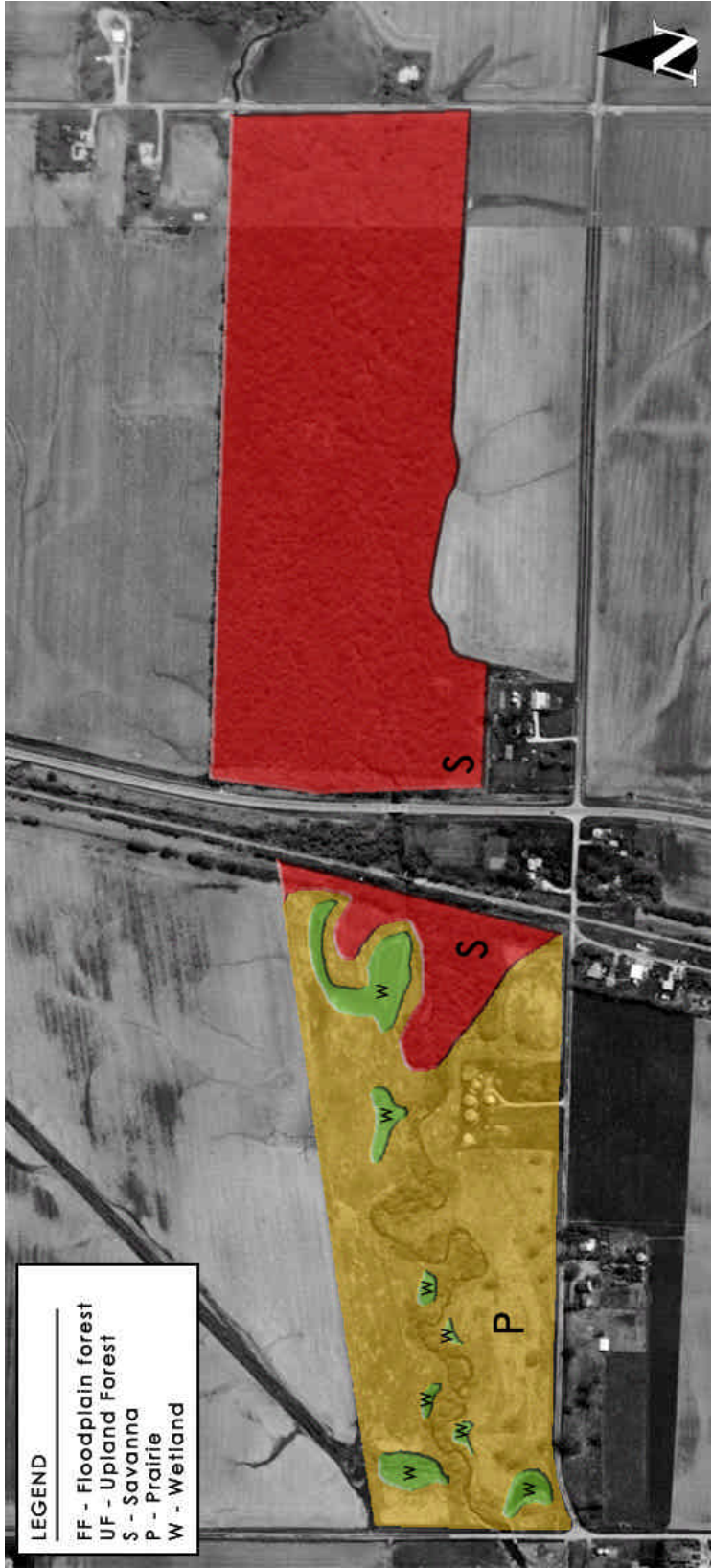
Map 19: Proposed Vision, Rock Springs Center



Map 22: Proposed Vision, Sand Creek Recreation Area



Map 25: Proposed Vision, Willow Branch Conservation Area Tract 1



Map 28: Proposed Vision, Willow Branch Conservation Area
Tract 2

