



# Update on the Dakota County Land Protection and Natural Systems Plan

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Dakota County Planning Commission  
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## Presentation Overview



- Updated draft objectives and strategies (in packet)
- Presentation and discussion of draft implementation items
  - Management approach
  - Project prioritization
  - Desired outcomes for five and ten years

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## Plan Purpose



Combine the 2017 Parks Natural Resources Management System Plan (NRMSP) with the 2020 Dakota County Land Conservation Plan (LCP) into a comprehensive Natural Systems Plan:

- Build from the 2050 Parks Vision Plan
- Update objectives, strategies, priorities, targets, and timeframes
- Streamline content

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## Draft Objectives



### Land Protection Chapter

LCP Goals become objectives (mostly unchanged)

1. Prioritize ecologically important areas for protection.
2. Protect and enhance water quality and quantity.
3. *Natural resource quality is improved and sustained.*  
(moved to stewardship section)
4. Use CFAs as a framework for restoring and sustaining biodiversity.
5. Inform and engage the public in natural resource protection and management.
6. Enhance nature-based recreational access to conservation lands.

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## Draft Objectives



### Natural Systems Stewardship Chapter

1. Manage natural systems on protected lands in a comprehensive and sustainable manner
2. Manage systems to improve resilience to the impacts of a changing climate.



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## Draft Objectives



### Natural Systems Stewardship Chapter

3. Improve ecological quality in County Parks, on other public lands and permanently protected private lands.
4. Manage permanently protected land to improve surface and groundwater quality.
5. Manage habitat to sustain native and rare species, increase biodiversity, and enhance ecosystem health on permanently protected lands
6. Expand capacity for natural systems management by building and sustaining effective partnerships and supporting the efforts of others.

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Draft Objectives
Dakota  
COUNTY



Comments and questions from the Commission on the draft objectives and strategies?

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Implementation
Dakota  
COUNTY

### Protection and Long-Term Management Phases

- Fee title purchase
- Easement acquisition
- Greenway partnerships

**1. Land Protection**  
(one-time transaction)

- Removal of structures
- Removal of non-native and invasive species
- Replanting desired communities
- Monitoring restoration progress

**2. Restoration**  
(3-5 years)

- Monitoring community establishment and diversity
- Periodic burns, mowing, spraying, or grazing
- Invasive control
- Enhancement (added species)
- Adjusting based on monitoring

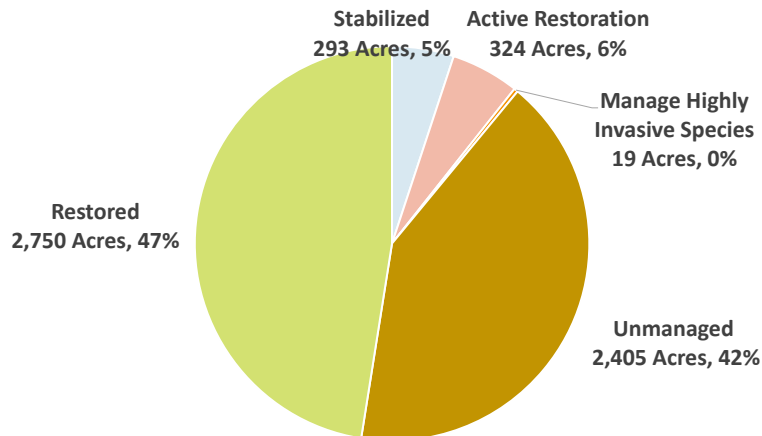
**3. Long-Term Adaptive Management**  
(perpetual)

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## Implementation



**Current Status:** Parks, Greenways, Natural Area Easements, and Selected Service Centers and Libraries



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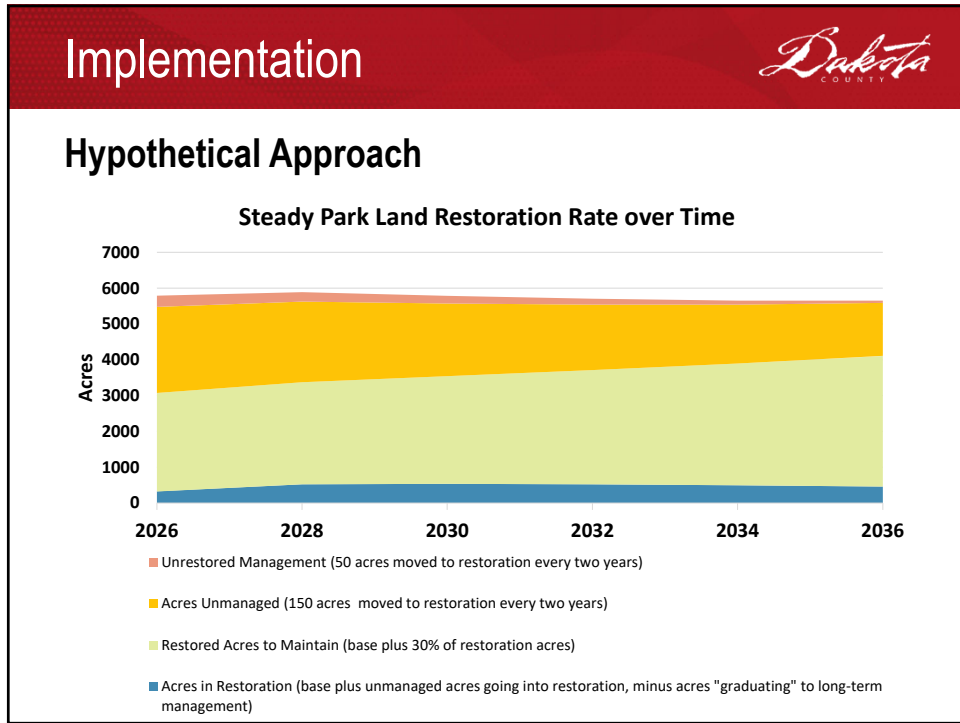
## Implementation



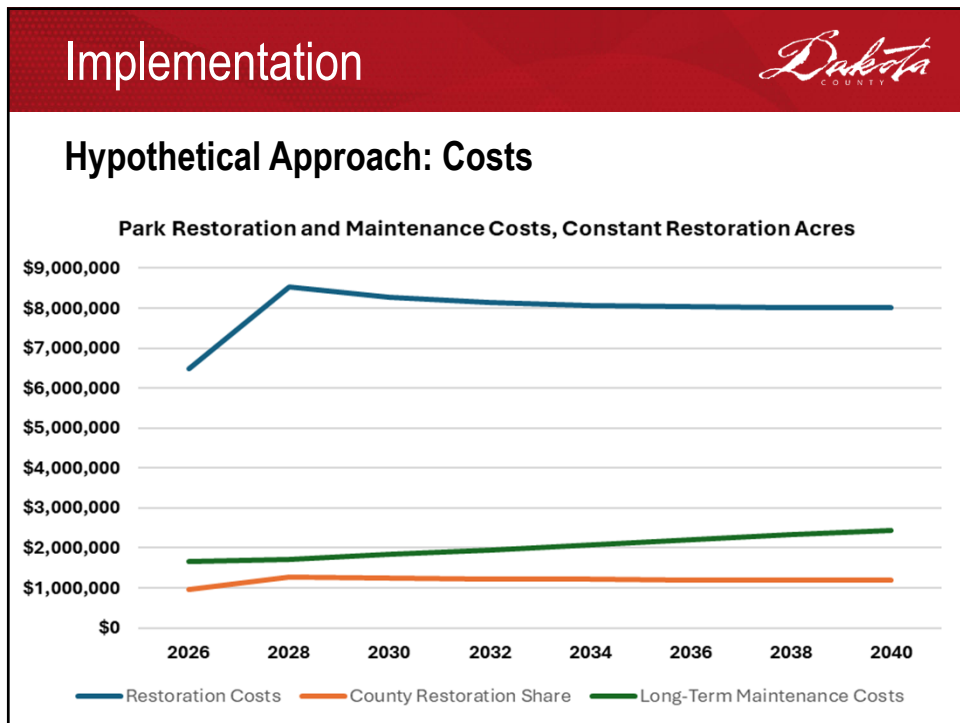
### Setting the Pace of Restoration

- Park land historically has not been restored or managed upon protection. Easements require NRMPs.
- Roughly half of the park system is not yet managed, mostly land retired from long-term farming over the past 50-plus years, and inaccessible areas.
- Once restored, lands transition into perpetual long-term adaptive management. Long-term management is required to protect the investment made in restoration.

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## Implementation



### Restoration Pacing Considerations:

#### Cost Differences:

- High restoration cost per acre (\$4,500 to \$25,000+ per acre)
- Lower long-term adaptive management costs (~\$300 to \$1,000 per acre)

#### Finite funding availability for each phase:

- Restoration usually has outside funding with 10-25% County match
- Long-term adaptive management is generally County-funded

#### Staff Capacity:

- Staff project management (includes in-house projects and contracted projects)
- Staff-coordinated partnership projects
- Staff-coordinated volunteer efforts
- Staff participation in non-NRMP plans (adding natural resources perspective)
- New management projects (via NRMPs, projects at non-park County buildings, restorations added with major park developments)

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## Implementation



Commission comments and thoughts on the park restoration approach?

Note: Does not include wildlife and water quality

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## Implementation



### **Prioritization:** integrating into system-wide priorities

- selecting the highest priorities from individual park, greenway, and easement NRMPs
- prioritizing the individual objectives and actions in this plan
- prioritizing a list of near-term projects

Or a combination of all three methods.

2017 Parks NRMSP did not have criteria.

2020 Land Conservation Plan had project criteria, later weighted into scoring, and prioritized strategies.

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## Implementation



### **Proposed Prioritization Criteria for Land Protection:**

#### **Inholdings Within Approved Park Boundaries:**

Less frequent, work with willing sellers as they come forward

#### **Easements Within CFAs:**

Surface water, upland/wetland mix, upland forest and grassland

#### **Easements Outside of CFAs:**

Significant natural resources, groundwater protection, location by waterbody, greenway, or a protected property

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## Implementation



### **Proposed Prioritization Criteria for Natural Resource Management Projects:**

- Maximizes ecological benefits, increases successful outcomes
- Improves water quality
- Provides social benefits through education and increased stewardship
- Has favorable economics
- Has favorable alignment (geographic, funding, partners)

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## Implementation



### **Natural Resource Management Criteria:**

Could be weighted according to different project types and locations:

- Higher weight on ecological criteria in parks and reserves
- Higher weight on social benefit criteria in greenways, County facilities

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## Implementation



Commission comments and questions on prioritization and weighting?

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## Implementation



**Desired Five-Year Outcomes** assembled from:

- Current five-year workplan, committed projects
- New Vision Plan initiatives for natural systems
- New Natural Systems Plan initiatives

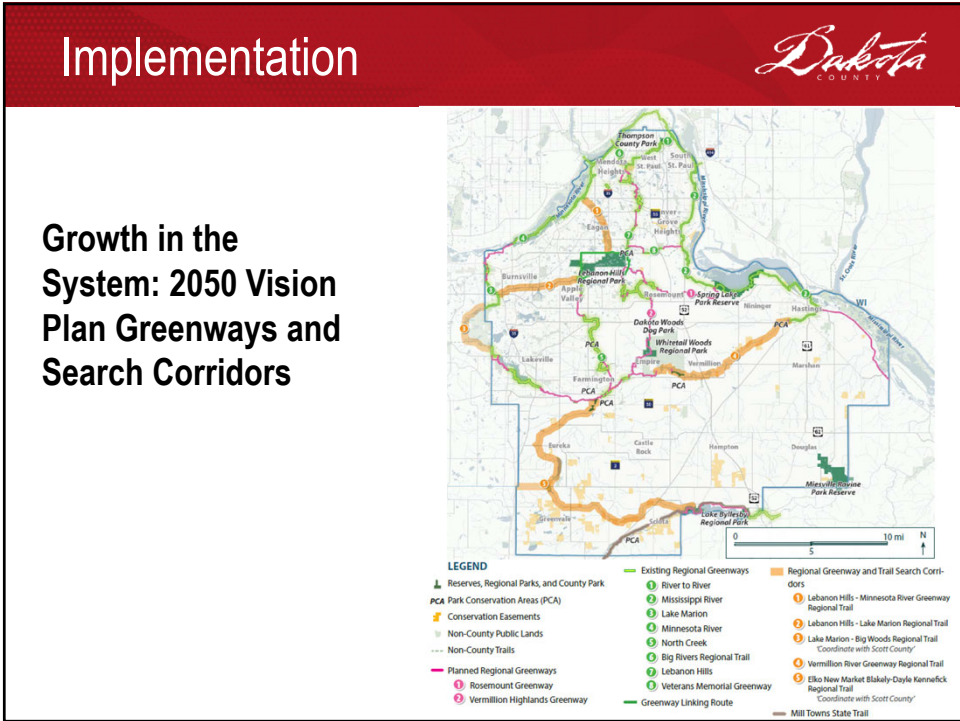
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Implementation				
<b>Current Workplan Initiatives: Five Years</b>	<b>Projects</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Budget</b>	
City-County Conservation Collaborative Planning and Implementation	12	277.3	\$1.29 M	
Capital Improvements Project Advisor	7	TBD	TBD	
Greenway Planning, Design, Construction Advisor	33	N/A	TBD	
Greenway NRMP Implementation	10	TBD	TBD	
General System Planning, Parks Planning, and Administration	21	N/A		
Parks NRMP Implementation	25	3,000+	\$6.8+ M	
Park Conservation Area Planning	1	37	TBD	
Park Conservation Area NR Implementation	3	177	TBD	
Landowner Outreach (inholdings, conservation area and easement in CFAs)	2	TBD	TBD	
Private Easement Acquisition (estimated), NRMP, NRMP Implementation	37	580+	\$0.5+ M	
Wildlife and Vegetation Surveys/Monitoring	9	N/A	N/A	
Wildlife and Water Quality Projects	10	N/A	TBD	
Volunteer Program	5	N/A	N/A	
Transportation and Capital Facilities Projects	15	TBD	TBD	

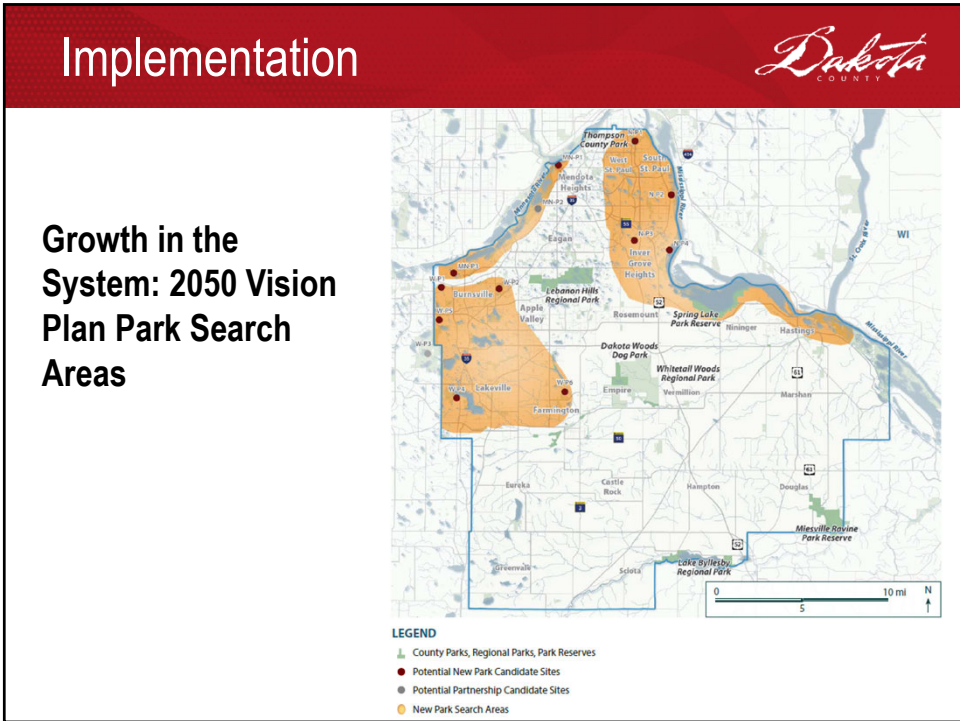
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Implementation			
<b>2050 Vision Plan Initiatives for Ten Years</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Start</b>	
Develop NRMPs for County Park Conservation Areas and a naming strategy.	new	2026-2031	
Employ Indigenous experts using Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)	New-ongoing	2026-2031	
Seek legislative authority to own land for conservation purposes	new	2026-2031	
Develop process and criteria to designate resource-sensitive areas where special management or limited access may be needed.	new	2026-2031	


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Implementation			
Priority New NSP Initiatives	Status	Start	
A.1.b. To protect the ecological and financial investment in the acres restored, secure stable funding for long-term adaptive management.	New	2026-2031	
A.1.e. Explore options for using a private funding entity to secure and disburse private funds for natural resource restoration and maintenance on protected private lands.	New	2028-2031	
A.2.b. Designate selected areas within the park system that have higher natural resource quality, unique habitat value, restored areas, or areas with sensitive cultural resources as places where the priority use and management will be to protect, improve, and maintain resource integrity. Limit recreational use and access in areas with the most sensitive resources on a temporary or permanent basis.	New	2026-2031	

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Implementation			
Priority New NSP Initiatives	Status	Start	
B.2. Use adaptive, science-based practices to prepare for future conditions. a. When supported by science, explore assisted migration methods to carefully introduce selected species that are native to warmer climate zones. b. Apply emerging research to anticipate and manage ecological changes linked to climate trends.	New	2026-2031	
E.2. Enhance habitat connectivity and wildlife movement across the landscape. a. Enhance wildlife movement corridors in greenways, parks, and adjacent lands to maintain population genetic diversity and resilience. b. Seek partnerships with the MN DNR, adjacent jurisdictions, and others on regional wildlife habitat and connectivity. Identify and remove <u>hazards</u> and barriers to safe wildlife movement, prioritizing locations with high ecological or connectivity value.	New and ongoing	2026-2031	

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Implementation		<i>Dakota</i> COUNTY	
Priority New NSP Initiatives	Status	Start	
F.1. Build enduring partnerships to share expertise and resources. a. Create-foster long-term partnerships with County departments, cities, tribes, state and federal agencies, and others to manage natural systems using a coordinated, systems-based approach. b. Engage and learn from Indigenous partners and experts in Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to inform management practices. c. Strengthen and expand collaborative initiatives such as the City-County Conservation Collaborative and the Greenway Collaborative. d. Partner with transportation agencies and utilities to improve pollinator habitat within right-of-way and corridors.	New and ongoing	2026-2031	
F.3. Promote stewardship through outreach and education. a. Promote County parks as living classrooms and demonstration sites. b. Share knowledge and lessons learned from County projects to inspire and inform partner and community stewardship efforts.	New	TBD	

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Implementation		<i>Dakota</i> COUNTY	
	<p><b>Commission Comments and Questions on the Five-and Ten-Year Initiatives?</b></p>		

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## Stakeholder Engagement



### Group Meetings:

- County Partner Departments
- State and Federal Agency Partners
- Cities and Local Government, TBD
- Non-Profit Groups
- Implementation Partners
- Tribal Experts, through other projects

### Resident Intercepts and Easement Owner Contacts

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## Next Steps



Continued Engagement of Stakeholders

Draft Plan this summer

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Questions?

Thank you!