

2030 Land Resource Management Plan

PLANNING ISSUES—OPEN SPACE

Objectives

1. To preserve and protect Kane County open space as the cornerstone of natural resource protection and community well being.
 2. To protect environmentally sensitive areas from deterioration or destruction by private or public actions.
 3. To enhance and expand Kane County’s green infrastructure by connecting water resources, natural areas, forest preserves, cultural and historic sites, and communities as part of the Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways Plan.
 4. To foster public awareness, education, and support for environmental and open space management.
 5. To continue enhancing the county’s visual and community character by preserving natural areas, landscapes, scenic vistas, and rustic roads and their historic, cultural, and archeological resources.
 6. To provide a variety of open space opportunities and recreational activities in proportion to the needs of an expanding population.
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Chapter Focus



The Kane County open space system provides a necessary and desirable counterpart to development. Open space is the armature of the 2030 Plan, providing the framework that complements all other land uses. The open space system is a tapestry of undeveloped public and private lands, with the Fox River and its tributaries as its backbone. The chief functions of open space are environmental protection and community well being. Open space can be acquired and preserved a number of ways through public and private efforts, including forest preserve and park district acquisitions, the development approval process, and dedication of conservation easements.

This chapter examines:

- Open Space Armature
 - What is Open Space?
 - Open Space Assets
 - Green Infrastructure
 - Community Benefits of Open Space
 - Continuing the Green Legacy
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Open Space Armature

Open land in the Chicago region is being consumed at an alarming rate. From 1970 to 1990, the metropolitan region’s population grew 4.1%, yet its residential area expanded an estimated 46%. Located at the western edge of the metropolitan region, Kane County is experiencing continued pressure on land for conversion from agricultural land and open space. At this crossroads, the county has two choices: to manage growth or to allow development pressure to result in suburban sprawl.

Open space is the counterpart of the built environment. Open space often contains natural resources that are too valuable to lose. Protection of these resources ensures a continuity of nature for future generations. Along with environmental protection, open space provides “breathing room,” recreational opportunities, visual beauty, spiritual enrichment, educational opportunities, and other benefits. As the county and municipalities grow, the challenge will be to use new development to restore, conserve, and enhance, and where appropriate preserve open space. With planned,

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compact development, open space can receive the highest level of protection possible, even in a time of growth and development.

The Kane County open space system is the armature of the 2030 Plan—a combination of large and small green spaces with the Fox River and its tributaries as the backbone. A network of greenways connects the larger and smaller green spaces with the Fox River and its tributaries. Greenways are linear corridors that protect and manage natural resources, provide recreational opportunities, and enhance the aesthetics of the built environment. Kane County’s greenway preservation program is part of a long standing tradition in the metropolitan area that includes Chicago’s lakefront park system, the boulevard system, and forest preserve acquisition along the Chicago, Des Plaines, DuPage, and Fox Rivers.

Open space protection and the greenway network have strong roots in Kane County policy dating back to the 1967 Five Point General Development Policy. The 1976 Comprehensive Plan called for a countywide greenway system to protect natural areas. The 1982 Comprehensive Land Use Plan continued the greenway system and stressed the need to preserve remaining natural areas, to provide connections between open spaces, and to ensure a full range of recreational opportunities. The 2020 Land Resource Management Plan introduced a bold, comprehensive approach to open space preservation. The 2030 Plan aggressively promotes and further implements the countywide greenway planning tradition. A goal of the 2030 Plan is that 50% of the area of Kane County will be in agriculture and open space in spite of the unprecedented population growth and community development of the next two and a half decades.

As the county and municipalities continue to face growth pressures, the preservation and expansion of open space, particularly along the Fox River and its tributaries, will help to balance the increased population and create safe, healthy, and livable communities.

What is Open Space?

The amount of open space in Kane County has greatly increased in the last 40 years. Along with this expansion, the diversity of open space ownership, function, and type has also increased. Open space in Kane County includes forest preserves, municipal and township parks, school and neighborhood playgrounds, greenways, golf courses, bicycle/pedestrian trails, and cemeteries. An additional component of the open space inventory includes institutional lands consisting of large acreage holdings such as the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation and the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. For 2030 planning purposes, open space consists of public and private lands, ranging from large forest preserve tracts to small parks and playgrounds.

Open space is categorized as passive, active, or scenic. Passive areas may include floodplains, wetlands, and other natural areas that offer protection to indigenous biota, comprising the flora and fauna, of the region. Active areas may include recreation areas such as parks and playgrounds, urban plazas and golf courses. Scenic areas include viewsheds, observation points, and rustic roads.

There is no minimum size or shape required for land to be valued and protected as open space. Open space may be privately owned with limited public access or it may be publicly owned, but intended to preserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas with restricted access. It may be common open space intended for use by a specific group, but in most cases it is publicly owned and intended for use by the entire community. See Figure 50 for the different types of open space.

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Open Space Assets

Kane County's greatest open space asset is the Fox River. The major natural feature of the region, the Fox River is a significant greenway consisting of wildlife and aquatic habitat, as well as a recreational resource. The Fox River has served as a magnet for development and recreation since early settlement. The appearance of the riverfront has improved greatly since the time when heavy industries and junkyards were located along its shoreline. The municipalities have recognized the Fox River as an open space and community amenity by acquiring riverfront acreage and designing riverwalks to link housing, parks, shops, offices, and restaurants in their downtowns. Such development beautifies downtown centers as well as revitalizes the economy. Parkland along the river is a prime spot for picnicking and recreation, including bicycling and walking along the Fox River Trail. In some communities riverfront amenities also include boating and canoeing. A scenic driving route was established along the Fox in 1989. This route, designated as the Fox River Road established on parts of both Routes 31 and 25, accentuates the natural beauty of the Fox River Valley.



The largest proportion of public open space in Kane County is Forest Preserve land, consisting of more than 13,000 acres as of the beginning of 2004. The majority of Forest Preserve holdings are comprised of mixed grasslands (old farm fields, wetlands, turfgrass, hayfields), woodlands, and agricultural land. The Forest Preserve has restored over 1,137 acres of preserve land to native prairie grasses. Portions of eight Kane County Forest Preserves contain Illinois State Nature Preserve acreage: Bliss,

Burlington, Freeman Kame, Helm Woods, Johnson's Mound, Nelson Lake Marsh, LeRoy Oakes-Horlock prairie, and Underwood.

A 1993 Forest Preserve inventory determined only 736 acres of the county's total 334,031 acres contain the undisturbed, original flora of the region. The remainder of the county has been disturbed through agriculture, urbanization, or other activities, which have permitted the invasion of non-native vegetation. Therefore, the District places its highest land acquisition priorities on land that contains natural features, especially land supporting mature forest/prairie or wetland and endangered/threatened species.

The Kane County bicycle/pedestrian trail system totals over 90 miles and is one of the most extensive trail systems in the Midwest. It has been established jointly by the Kane County Forest Preserve District and local park districts. The most prominent trail is the Fox River Trail, a 32-mile greenway connecting Kane, Kendall, and McHenry Counties and comprised of county forest preserves, local parks, rail-trail conversion, local streets, and sidewalks. The Great Western Trail, once an abandoned railway, is now a 17-mile trail from St. Charles to Sycamore. This popular recreational trail passes through woodlands, prairie, farmland, small streams, wetlands, urban areas, and the county's agricultural villages.

In 1999, Kane County passed a \$70 million referendum to acquire additional open space as recommended in the 2020 Plan. Other significant open space acquisition efforts in Kane County include open space protection programs by Dundee Township and Campton Township. In 1996, Dundee Township residents voted to establish an open space plan and sell more than \$18 million in bonds to fund the acquisition of open space. By the end of 2003, 835 acres of open space, comprised of wetlands, dry hill prairie, forest, fen and farmland, had been donated or purchased by the township. In Campton Township, the citizens approved an \$18 million referendum for open space preservation. To prioritize potential open space acquisitions, the township created An

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Open Space Plan. The objective of the plan is to acquire open land for passive and active recreation purposes and for protection of farmland, historic landmarks, scenic roadways, wetlands, woodlands, wildlife, and geologically significant features. By the beginning of 2004, Campton Township had purchased just under 700 acres. These efforts have preserved important environmental and historically significant features, such as the headwaters of Blackberry Creek and Corron Farm, a 442 acre farmstead that has been farmed by the Corron family for five generations.

In 2002, the City of Aurora adopted a Countryside Vision Plan promoting an innovative living environment in harmony with nature. The plan was created in part as a response to Kane County Forest Preserve District acquisitions within the area. The Countryside Vision Plan states that open space forms the framework that compliments all other land uses. The Village of Wayne, in cooperation with the Nature Conservancy, acquired title to a 26-acre wildlife sanctuary from the Illinois Audubon Society. Named the Barbara Dunham Dole Wildlife Sanctuary, in honor of the Dole family's stewardship of the land, the property consists of prairies and woodlands. The Village of Wayne has shown their commitment to the preservation of the sanctuary by placing a conservation easement on the property. In 1997, the City of Geneva voters approved a \$10 million referendum for the Prairie Green project. The City of Geneva in partnership with Kane County and the City of St. Charles assembled 540 acres for the Prairie Green project, located west of Peck Road and south of Route 38. Prairie Green is envisioned as a multi-faceted watershed management demonstration project that includes prairie restoration, wetland restoration, regional stormwater management, passive recreation facilities and selected active recreation facilities.

These efforts at the county, township, and municipal levels indicate the high value placed on open space protection and greenway implementation by the citizens of Kane County. The challenge for 2030 is to continue to work together to expand Kane County's open space armature and achieve the goal of more than 50% of the county in open space and farmland.

The countywide open space system cannot be preserved solely by government. Private individuals or nonprofit organizations such as the Fox Valley Land Foundation and the Conservation Foundation may place conservation easements on a piece of land so that its natural features are permanently preserved. Through this legal technique the property owner retains ownership while waiving some of his/her development rights. Conservation easements can protect natural areas that function as greenways and habitat corridors, and other sensitive areas such as wetlands, floodplains, ridgelines, slopes, and viewsheds.

Green Infrastructure

The green infrastructure of Kane County is the interconnected network of land and water that supports native species, maintains natural and ecological processes, sustains air and water resources, and contributes to the health and quality of life for people and communities. Green infrastructure includes the following principles and strategies:

- Emphasizes the importance of planning and protecting green infrastructure before development.
- Connects ecosystems for both conservation and development purposes.
- Develops greenways that recognize the physical linkage between open space elements as the key to sustaining natural ecosystems.
- Considers the needs of both nature and humans—addressing both environmental effects of proposed development and economic well being of a community.

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The various jurisdictions responsible for acquiring open space in Kane County have often concentrated on protecting individual parcels, pieces of land, or sites for open space. Preserving only “islands” of open space reduces the range and diversity of plant and animal species. An understanding of the connectivity of green infrastructure helps restoration, acquisition and management efforts to complement each other. A successful green infrastructure model requires long-term acquisition planning and long-term management of open space.



Large tracts or hubs of open space are needed to provide continuity of habitat and genetic disbursement required by birds, mammals, fish, plants, and other wildlife. Such tracts, when interconnected by the greenways, help maintain the county’s biodiversity and water quality, provide flood and stormwater control, and serve as the foundation for balanced development. Large tracts of open space also provide scenic views, promoting a sense of place and community identity, as well as leisure driving and sightseeing.

Greenways are part of the green infrastructure. Along with environmental protection, greenways provide bicycle and pedestrian trail access between homes, shopping, schools, parks, and commuter rail and transit stations.

When managed wisely, greenways along waterways are effective filter strips that trap sediment and pollutants that damage water quality. The vegetation in greenways also helps remove pollutants from the air, reduces noise, and moderates summer heat and wind. Greenways provide space for streams and wetlands to function naturally and accommodate stormwater flows.

Kane County’s green infrastructure is a key component in the metropolitan region’s Greenways Plan, unveiled in 1990 by the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission and the Chicago-based Openlands Project. The goal of the Greenways Plan is to preserve expanses and corridors of open space connecting neighboring counties and communities, and ultimately, the entire Chicago region. Several of the priority links in the Greenways Plan are found in Kane County, including the Fox River and the Fox River Trail, Blackberry Creek and the adjacent Virgil Gilman Trail, Mill Creek, the Great Western Trail, and the Illinois Prairie Path. The regional Greenways Plan is a reminder that natural areas and wildlife habitat traverse municipal and county boundaries (Refer to Figure 53).

Community Benefits of Open Space

Too often in the past, open space has been viewed strictly as an amenity. It is now recognized that open space enhances development, reduces the cost of sprawl, and produces strong economic benefits. Economic benefits derived from open space include:

- Flood damages and erosion problems are prevented, reducing costs to homeowners or local governments.
- Water quality is improved as native vegetation and wetlands filter pollutants before entering streams, reducing the community’s cost of treating and filtering drinking water.
- Increased tourism to large open spaces or greenway trail system draws investment to the surrounding areas.
- Recreation related businesses increase.
- Community enhancement and investment advances, increasing the local tax base and enhancing surrounding property values.
- Retail and service occupations increase along greenways.

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Further, since open space is not intensely developed, it requires limited tax supported infrastructure (schools, roads, water and sewer lines). This cost savings ultimately provides a more reasonable tax structure for businesses and residents.

Permanent protection of open space offers many opportunities to shape the built environment. Open space identifies a community by surrounding it and defining boundaries. Open spaces such as streams, greenways and parks create identifiable neighborhoods and landmarks. Open space serves as a central, unifying focus providing gathering places for community activities. Parks and open space create a high quality of life for residents and attracts tax paying businesses to communities (Refer to Figure 54).

There are clear connections between open space, community character and quality of life. Community character and quality of life attracts tax-paying businesses and skilled employees. According to Steve Lerner and William Poole, the authors of Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space, corporate CEO's say quality of life for employees is the third-most important factor in locating a business, behind only access to domestic markets and availability of skilled labor. Owners of small companies ranked recreation/parks/open space as the highest priority in choosing a new location for their business. Today, employers shop for appealing locations that will attract and retain employees.

According to the National Park Service, at present rates of growth, the tourism/leisure industry will soon become the leading U.S. industry of any kind. The recreation and relaxation opportunities provided by open space are a significant benefit to the physical, mental, and economic health of a community. These opportunities can be for active, passive, and educational recreation. Active recreation generally involves intensive uses and requires substantial facilities including playing fields, swimming pools, campgrounds, and tot lots. Passive recreation provides widely spaced picnic areas and trails for hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing. Recreational/educational facilities include nature interpretation centers, cultural and historic sites, and teaching areas.

Open space provides opportunities for long-term scientific research and education. Natural, undeveloped areas afford scientists the opportunity to study how ecosystems function, especially those adjacent to urbanized areas. Open space provides places to teach children an appreciation for the environment and natural resources. Examples in Kane County include the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation and the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory.

Continuing The Green Legacy

It is crucial to continue to acquire and protect sufficient open space to meet the county's needs during the next 25 years of unprecedented population growth. Therefore, the 2030 Plan takes an aggressive and unrelenting approach to the implementation and preservation of the county's green infrastructure. Additional open space is needed in three general categories: (1) large tracts of natural areas, also referred to as hubs; (2) gateway linkages; and (3) recreational facilities.

Advanced identification and planning of open space is fundamental to protect and expand the countywide green infrastructure. One way to enhance Kane County's green infrastructure is to prepare Green Plans for the five major watersheds in the county's Critical Growth Area. Such plans would provide a comprehensive analysis and a long-range open space plan for each watershed. Each plan would include a detailed map to identify existing open space, trails, natural areas, gathering places, and

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opportunities for open space enhancement and protection. Green Plans would tie together open space planning with community development and Smart Growth. Implementation of the county's green infrastructure requires cooperation from various public jurisdictions, private property owners, developers, and state and federal government agencies. Long-range planning and management of green infrastructure will lead the county towards the goal of achieving safe, healthy, and livable communities.

Policies

1. Implement the open space and green infrastructure network depicted in the 2030 Plan for its environmental, aesthetic, social, and economic benefits.
2. Protect biodiversity by preserving, regenerating, and restoring natural areas using the principles of the Biodiversity Recovery Plan.
3. Cooperate with the Forest Preserve District, municipalities, and local park districts in obtaining additional shoreline areas along the Fox River and its major tributaries to provide public trails, stream access, and resource protection.
4. Encourage the improvement and further development of a Fox River canoe paddleway in cooperation with the municipalities and park districts.
5. Incorporate environmental design criteria in development controls and county ordinances to protect natural, scenic, historic, archeological, and environmental areas and to minimize adverse impacts.
6. Connect new subdivisions and neighborhoods with bike trails and walkways as a means of encouraging walking and biking.
7. Encourage the increased use of non-acquisition techniques such as conservation easements, tax adjustments, and dedication as alternative methods for implementing local, county, and regional open space plans.
8. Protect scenic views through viewshed preservation and enhancement by implementation of the county's Rustic Roads Program.
9. Coordinate open space planning and preservation with protection and maintenance of county water resources.
10. Prepare cooperative green plans for each of Kane County's five watersheds in the Critical Growth Area.



Figure 48

“Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them.”
 —Aldo Leopold

Figure 49

Burnham Legacy

In 1909 Daniel Burnham coauthored a visionary and farsighted plan for the Chicago region. A major part of that plan was the creation of a large interconnected open space system extending from Lake Michigan westward. A 1956 follow-up coauthored by Daniel Burnham, Jr. recorded the accomplishments of the 1909 plan and sounded a call to continue its vision.

The 1956 Burnham Plan recognized Kane County for its efforts in establishing a Forest Preserve District and in acquiring open space. Kane County began open space conservation in 1926 with the acquisition of Johnson’s Mound Forest Preserve. This was followed in 1928 by the acquisition of Bliss Woods, Elburn, and Tyler Creek Forest Preserves.

The 2030 Land Resource Management Plan carries forth the Burnham legacy and challenge.

Figure 50

Types of Open Space

Passive	Active
Natural Area	Bicycle and Pedestrian trails
River and Stream Buffers	Parks and Playgrounds
Retention and Detention basins	Equestrian Facilities
Wetlands	Formal Gardens
Floodplains	Golf Courses
Geologic Features	Playing Fields including those with Detention Facilities
Steep Slopes	Courtyards and Squares
Urban	Scenic
Urban Plazas	Viewsheds
Urban Streetscapes	Road Corridors
Landscape Mediums	Rustic/Historic Features
Rooftop Gardens	Air Quality
Utility Corridors with Easements	Community Separators
Cemeteries	Observation Points

Figure 51

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the totality of genes, species, and ecosystems in a region. For example, a healthy prairie community would normally include dozens of plant species as well a habitat for various species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects, mites, fungi, and bacteria. Within a region the size of the Chicago area, the number and variety of natural communities that exist side by side in a given area, such as oak savannas, meadows, and wetlands can measure biodiversity. A high degree of biodiversity is normally an indication of a healthy, sustainable natural community, ecosystem, or region.

Source: Biodiversity Recovery Plan, Chicago Wilderness, 1999.

Figure 52

Biodiversity Recovery Plan

The Kane County Regional Plan Commission adopted the Biodiversity Recovery Plan as an advisory supporting document to the Kane County 2030 Land Resource Management Plan. The Biodiversity Recovery Plan published in 1999 by Chicago Wilderness is a plan and process for guiding the Chicago region in efforts “to protect the natural community of the Chicago region and to restore them to long-term viability, in order to enrich the quality of life of its citizens and to contribute to the preservation of global diversity.” As the Chicago region continues to grow and develop, the Biodiversity Recovery Plan provides a vision and guide for regional conservation planning. The goal of the plan is to “establish a broad policy of beneficial coexistence in which the region’s natural heritage is preserved, improved, and expanded even as the metropolis grows.”

Source: Biodiversity Recovery Plan, Chicago Wilderness, 1999.



Figure 53

Chicago Wilderness

The Chicago Wilderness coalition is a collaborative partnership of more than 170 public and private organizations, in addition to thousands of volunteers, that pool their resources and expertise to study, protect, restore and manage the region’s natural lands and the plants and animals that inhabit them. Stretching from southeastern Wisconsin, through northeastern Illinois and into northwestern Indiana, Chicago Wilderness is a regional nature reserve containing some of the rarest natural communities in the world. Embedded in one of North America’s largest metropolitan regions, Chicago Wilderness is a mosaic of natural areas that includes more than 250,000 acres of protected lands and waters, as well as many that are unprotected. These natural areas are home to a wide diversity of life: thousands of native plants and animals live here among the more than nine million people who also call the region home.

Source: 1999-2003 Progress Report, Chicago Wilderness.

Figure 54

Economic Benefits of Open Space

Easy access to parks and open space has become a new measure of community wealth—an important way to attract businesses and residents by guaranteeing both quality of life and economic health. American cities large and small are creating parks as focal points for economic development and neighborhood renewal.

Attracting reinvestment:

In the early 1980's, Chattanooga, Tennessee, was facing rising unemployment and crime, polluted air, and a deteriorating quality of life. Departing residents explained they were moving to the cleaner, greener, and safer suburbs. To lure them back, local government, businesses, and community groups decided to improve Chattanooga's quality of life by cleaning the air, acquiring open space, and constructing parks and trails. Chattanooga today has green spaces surrounded by a bustling commercial and residential district. From 1988 to 1996 the number of businesses and full-time jobs more than doubled. Assessed property values went up more than \$11 million, an increase of 127.5%.

Revitalizing cities:

For years, an unsightly parking garage occupied a two-acre parcel in Boston's financial district. In the early 1980's, at the urging of surrounding businesses, the city joined a unique public-private partnership to demolish the structure to create an underground garage covered by a park. Today, the park features a spreading lawn, polished granite walls, teak benches, a 143-foot formal garden, a walk-through sculpture fountain, and a café. This open space in Boston's financial district has boosted the value of surrounding properties while providing an elegant green focus to a crowded commercial area.

Boosting tourism:

Hiking and biking trails can stimulate tourism. Trails along former railroad corridors also pay handsome dividends. In Dunedin, Florida, store vacancy rates tumbled to zero after the Pinellas Trail was built through town beginning in 1990. A 1994 study of the 20-mile Northern Central Rail Trail near Baltimore found that whereas the trail cost \$191,893 to maintain and operate in 1993, it returned \$304,000 in state and local taxes. A National Park Service study found that three rail trails in Iowa, Florida, and California contributed between \$1.2 million and \$1.9 million per year to their home communities.

In 1978, the Great Western Trail became one of the first rails to trails conversions in the country. The Great Western Trail runs 17 miles from St. Charles to Sycamore.

Creating jobs:

In 1996, outdoor recreation in the United States generated at least \$40 billion, accounting for 768,000 full time jobs and \$13 billion in annual wages.

Source: 1. "Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space," Trust for Public Land, 1999; 2. "Economic Benefits of Outdoor Recreation," Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America, State of Industry Report, 1997; 3. "Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space," Public Investment," APA PAS Memo, September 1999

