SECTION 3.

GOALS AND POLICIES
MISSION

The role of Isanti County in the Parks and Recreation Plan is to maintain, acquire and/or expand parks that preserve natural areas, provide passive recreation opportunities, strive to maintain the rural character of the County, and promote the health, well-being and quality of life for residents of the County.

Figure 84. Image of Isanti County Lake, Joe Crocker, 2006.
The purpose of the Isanti County Parks and Recreation Plan (Parks Plan) is to:

(a) Inventory the outdoor recreational opportunities in the County that are now provided by state, county, city, township and school district levels. Inventory outdoor recreational opportunities within the ring counties that surround Isanti County.

(b) Continue the process of investigation and planning to meet the outdoor recreation and land preservation needs of future generations.

(c) Define the types of outdoor recreational opportunities for which the County should be responsible in meeting the total outdoor recreational needs of County residents.

(d) Establish a framework to guide decisions regarding future planning, acquisition, development and maintenance of the County’s outdoor recreation.

(e) Set short and long term goals for the Parks Plan.

(f) Prioritize recreation/open space acquisition and development to meet the needs of present and future County residents.

(g) Provide suggestions for implementation strategies.

(h) Document the public participation process and utilize the public input in the Parks Plan.

(i) Coordinate with the Isanti County Comprehensive Plan and Isanti County Active Living (ICAL).
GOALS AND POLICIES

GOALS

The following goals, policies and site selection criteria have been used to guide specific planning, acquisition, improvements and management throughout the development of the Parks Plan.

It is important to note that Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission’s role and the focus of its efforts in the following goals will be to provide primarily for County park and trail facilities.

These facilities will focus on low-infrastructure, passive uses or special use facilities as deemed appropriate by the Parks and Recreation Commission, and do not include those types of recreational opportunities and activities normally provided by local units of government.

These goals, based on public input from the Parks Plan and Comprehensive Planning Process, are not prioritized and are intended to be considered together when making decisions:

1. To protect and enhance the quality of life for this generation and generations to come.

2. To preserve and restore unique or sensitive environments, bio-corridors and resources for wildlife habitat, human enjoyment and environmental education while maintaining a balance between natural systems and human intrusion.

3. To protect essential hydrologic resources for use by present and future residents.

4. To preserve and protect the land adjacent to the Rum River.

5. To preserve and protect significant geological sites which provide a link with our past.

6. To preserve and enhance significant cultural and historical resources that put our present habitation of the land in context with our heritage.

7. To provide areas and facilities that help meet the recreation needs of this generation and provide flexibility to meet the potential needs for generations that will follow.
8. To provide appropriate public use of water resources for use and enjoyment by the public.

9. To promote the health and well-being of the citizens of the County by providing opportunities for active living and healthful recreation.

10. To work with the cities and townships within Isanti County to identify opportunities for collaboration in providing for the full range of recreational needs of the citizens of the County.

11. To work with the State and adjoining counties to identify opportunities for collaboration on a regional recreational system that meets the needs of the citizens of the region.

12. To work with willing land-owning residents and developers to create non-public open space that complements public space as connected buffers or separate additional open spaces adjacent to roads or public areas, natural vistas, bio-corridors and water.

13. To provide walking, hiking and biking paths within the parks to encourage healthy recreation and active living.

14. To provide non-motorized linkages between the cities of Isanti County and from the cities to parks.

Figure 85. Image of Isanti County Roadscape, Carol Urness, 2006.
15. To seek out ways to connect safe biking and walking routes in Isanti County with trails and safe biking and walking routes in adjoining counties.

16. To provide attractive signage on trails and stopping points for education, interest and enjoyment.

PLANNING POLICIES

1. Isanti County will continue to acquire land and develop facilities in the Parks Plan to work toward the above goals.

2. Isanti County will use the Parks Plan as the planning guide for the County-owned parks as a group. It must be reviewed and amended periodically to ensure that it is useful, current and relevant.

3. Isanti County has prepared a project master plan for each component of the system that is the basis for acquisition, development and management. The master planning process includes citizen participation, review by the affected local units of government and review and adoption by the County Board. New plans will be developed for any additions to the Parks Plan and will be prepared with the master planning process. The plans documented are:
   - Becklin Homestead Park/WMA
   - Dalbo Park
   - Springvale County Park
   - Vegsund Family County Park
   - Wayside Prairie Park

4. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will maintain and annually update or amend a five-year Capital Improvements Program for all acquisition and development of the Parks Plan.

5. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will maintain and periodically update a comprehensive ordinance for controlling and managing the Parks Plan.

6. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will continue a public awareness program coordinated with other recreation providers to keep its residents informed of available parks and recreation opportunities.
7. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will coordinate its planning efforts with various Isanti County commissions and task forces, governmental units, foundations, agencies and individuals that plan or provide for parks and recreation affecting Isanti County.

- Referring to the Central Minnesota Parks, Trails, and Open Space Coordinating Board (member counties: Stearns, Benton, Sherburne) as a model for cooperative and collaborative planning, The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will actively pursue a similar relationship with Chisago, Wright and Sherburne Counties to coordinate planning efforts and state/federal level funding requests for park land acquisition and development.

8. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will refer to the 2001-2002 Minnesota Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), March 2005 Forest Resource Management Plan for the East Central Landscape, the Metro Greenways Program, and other local surveys when planning facilities and activities for guidance.

NEED/DEMAND POLICIES

1. Isanti County will meet the current needs of its residents first and recognizes that some of these needs may be met by park providers at various levels - federal, state, regional, municipal and private. (See the Recreation Opportunities in Isanti County Section)

2. Future needs will be determined and planned for through community profile projections that includes demographic and social economic data.

3. Assessment of current and future resident needs will be validated through a public input process convened at appropriate points in the implementation of the plan.

LAND ACQUISITION POLICIES

1. Preservation of Natural Resources:
The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission recognizes that official public
controls and/or public ownership of significant and unique resources may be desirable in some cases essential to:

- Protect a significant resource threatened by deterioration, neglect or inordinate increase in land value.
- Preserve the intrinsic ecological, cultural and/or scenic value of a unique resource.
- Preserve unique or significant examples of features in the landscape:
  - Geological features
  - Biological features
  - Hydrologic features, in particular, to protect water quality

To achieve preservation of natural resources, the Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission recognizes that land acquisition policy will need to focus on aggregating public land into larger parcels as a priority.

2. Preservation of Social and Cultural Resources and Opportunities
   - Preserve unique or significant examples of historical or cultural features in the landscape such as historically significant sites or archeologically significant sites.
   - Preserve opportunities to assure availability of additional recreational lands for future generations although the current need may not be imperative.
   - Preserve open space within natural settings as a relief from dense urbanization and as an opportunity for healthful recreation.
   - Identify appropriate opportunities for special programming needs that might best be served by the County, e.g. a swimming beach, horse trail park, mountain biking park.

3. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will monitor opportunities as they arise and funding is available as the basis for determining the extent and timing of acquisition.

4. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will schedule acquisition priorities in a five-year Capital Improvements Program with projections for 10 and 15 years.

5. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will maintain a reserve fund to acquire lands as they become available.
6. Tax forfeiture land that the MN DNR deems sensitive and therefore cannot be sold may, at the discretion of the County Board, come into the Parks Plan.

7. Land Acquisition - Methods of Acquisition
To assure protection and availability, Isanti County will utilize various methods of acquisition, including but not limited to:
- County purchase negotiated whenever possible.
- Purchase by other state or local agencies.
- Long-term leases.
- Easements for use or protection.
- Land dedication provisions in local or county land use regulations.
- Land trades and development rights.
- Assistance and/or cost-sharing with other agencies.
- Donations, bequests and foundations.
- Interim uses (land stewardship).
- Tax forfeited land.
- Grant programs through state, federal and private agencies and organizations.
- Partnering with community groups, non profits, sportsmen clubs and associations.

8. Land Acquisition - Methods of Purchase
Isanti County will utilize various purchase arrangements to obtain land with the most benefit to the County, land owner and governmental unit directly affected, including but not limited to the following:
- From willing sellers if possible.
- Life tenancy of current owners.
- Purchase - lease back.
- Options/right of first refusal.
- Relocation.
- Tax advantages.
- Land exchange.

9. Isanti County will use the master planning process as the basis for determining the extent and timing of acquisition.

10. Isanti County will provide necessary staff to accomplish these Acquisition Policies.
DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

1. Isanti County will use a project Master Plan for each site as the basis for determining facility/activity areas, protection of open space, intensity of development, access points, phasing and interim uses.

2. Isanti County recognizes resource protection as a primary consideration when determining the number and type of uses and the use intensity.

3. Isanti County will encourage compatible site development that provides for multiple use and multi-seasonal use, but recognizes that single-use facilities may also be appropriate in some cases, e.g., swimming beach.

4. Isanti County will provide development that is accessible to all segments of the population, including the aged and handicapped where feasible and appropriate.

5. Isanti County will provide park accessibility that accommodates modes of public transportation, e.g., bus parking.

6. Isanti County will schedule development timing in a five-year Capital Improvements Program with projections for 10 and 15 years.

7. Isanti County may provide park space and facilities that will accommodate the following types of outdoor recreation: swimming, picnicking, boating, fishing, camping, hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, interpretation of resources, sightseeing, scenic driving, equestrian activities, unstructured open field activities and specialized types of recreation.

MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION POLICIES

1. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission facilities will be maintained in a manner that provides a safe and attractive environment for users.

2. Isanti County will provide effective management and staffing of its resource base and facilities to ensure the continued quality of the natural system and the recreation experience.
3. Isanti County will make the system available to all persons regardless of race, religion, color, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation or place of residence.

4. Isanti County will rely largely on self-guided facilities for resource interpretation.

5. Isanti County will assist local units of government in providing fire and police protection and emergency medical services for users of County facilities.

6. Isanti County will provide necessary permanent and part-time staff to properly manage sites and facilities.

FINANCING POLICIES

1. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will vigorously pursue acquisition and development funding available through various state grants, federal grants and private agencies and organizations.

2. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will continue to assess fees on new development within the County.

3. The Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission will consider revenue generating opportunities, as appropriate and warranted, to assist in financing acquisition and operational costs. These opportunities could include but are not limited to:
   a. User fees, where appropriate, which typically include park entrance fees or activity fees.
   b. Dedication of a portion of the general tax levy to fund the acquisition, development, and maintenance of County facilities.
   c. State bonding opportunities toward acquisition and development of parks, trails, and recreational facilities.
   d. Place a bond referendum for parks, trails, and open space before the voters in a general election. This allows voters to have direct involvement on deciding how much money should be allocated to parks, trails, and open space.
   e. When feasible and appropriate, engage in other means of generating internal revenue, e.g., timber sales.
   f. When feasible and appropriate, continue to dedicate a portion of the sales of tax forfeit land to the Park General Fund.
SECTION 4. PLANNING & ACQUISITION
The mission of the Isanti County Parks and Recreation Commission is to maintain, acquire and/or expand parks that preserve and protect natural areas, provide passive recreation opportunities, strive to maintain the rural character of the County and promote the health, well-being and quality of life for residents of the County.

These resources shall be used for the recreation, education and enjoyment of present and future generations of Isanti County citizens. Finding appropriate sites for county park facilities requires significant planning efforts. Many different factors must be considered when determining which sites are best suited to provide natural resource based outdoor recreational opportunities. These factors must also be balanced to create a system meeting the County’s current and long-term needs. The primary criteria on which these factors are based are size, geographic distribution and the presence of significant natural amenities. The factors listed below (not in order of priority) provide an overview of the primary considerations involved when identifying potential sites for the Isanti County Parks and Recreation Plan (Parks Plan).

Location
Planning for and developing a system of parks and trails that are geographically distributed is a goal of the Parks and Recreation Commission. Since ideal and/or desirable sites having natural amenities, good availability and desirable acreages are not necessarily evenly distributed acquiring properties in a perfect geographic distribution may be impossible. However, areas of significance within the County were identified in the Public Workshops. Significant areas were identified on two maps, a Natural Areas Map and a Rural Character Map. The Natural Areas Map shows areas within the County that have environmental integrity. The Rural Character Map shows areas within the County that are visually pleasing.

The outcome of the Natural Areas and Rural Character Significance Maps (shown in Figures 86 and 87) is the Planning Regions Map (as shown in Figure 88). The Planning Regions Map focuses on areas of heightened natural function and areas of strong rural character. The significant natural and the rural character areas do not exist exclusive of each other but begin to shape the communities experience of these particular areas. The Planning Regions Map is meant to serve as a guide to help acknowledge the diverse land use, opinions, needs and opportunities, while simultaneously taking into consideration the level of development pressure. Each of the regions reflect similar issues and opportunities that exist based on such things as zoning and land use, population density, geologic land forms, and demographics. With different planning regions identified, the key ecologic, historic, and educational sites within each region that have the most potential can be identified, prioritized and planned for.

1. Environmental integrity reflects a state of the environment wherein air, water, and biologic systems function adequately to be self-sustaining. In this state the environment can also provide services that sustain human health and well-being (Steve Roos, Center for Rural Design, 2007).
Natural Areas
Isanti County, MN

The Natural Areas map identifies areas that have significant value to support environmental quality and health in Isanti County.

Natural areas do not represent prime wildlife areas – they represent, in relative terms, those areas that provide ecological function and are somewhat less impacted by human activity. Therefore, they need careful consideration in planning for the future.

This map is based on six features:
- Natural Area Size (continuouous areas of forest, wetlands, prairie, and grassland);
- Core Forest;
- Land Cover Change (potential coincidence between pre-settlement vegetation and current land cover);
- Sites of Significant Biological Diversity identified by the MN DNR;
- Shoreline Protection Zones and Buffer Areas around water bodies;
- Human Disturbance (degree of disturbance from human land use).

![Natural Areas Map](image)

Figure 86. Natural Areas Map, Center for Rural Design, 2006.

Rural Character
Isanti County, MN

The Rural Character map identifies areas that have significant scenic value related to the natural areas and farming practices that fundamentally define the rural landscape.

While the perception of rural character can vary between individuals, in general, it is defined by the presence of both natural features and agriculture blended in a complex and interesting visual pattern.

Rural character can be assessed as a combination of two broad factors:
- Landform Complexity – represented by the shape of the land and the presence of hills, valleys, meadows, and gullies;
- Landcover Complexity – represented in the form and character of the things that sit on the land such as woods, pastures, wetlands, and farmsteads.

![Rural Character Map](image)

Figure 87. Rural Character Map, Center for Rural Design, 2006.
**POTENTIAL PARK FACILITIES**

During the development of the Parks Plan two Public Workshops took place in which community members discussed the Parks Plan’s mission, types of parkland and park facilities. The resultant theme and thrust of the public’s opinion of the Isanti County Park Commission (shown in Appendix C) was the management of natural resources in passive parks. The park facilities input included separate results for corridor and site facilities. The public input helped to gain insight into how people use and would like to use the Parks Plan, the type of parkland for future acquisition (passive or active) and the current development of existing park land.

**Overall Objective- Natural Resource Management**

Of the utmost concern to the public is natural resource management shown in the Public Workshop results (Appendix C). According to definitions cited in federal law, natural resources are defined broadly to include land, fish, wildlife, biota, air, water, ground water, drinking water supplies and other such resources. These items are more than just amenities that contribute to the quality of life, they are the fabric of our society. Natural resources can make the difference in how people view a region, a community, and a backyard. Their presence can make the difference in how far people are willing to travel for viewing, hiking and simply being at these sites. Identifying and protecting the unique natural resources of Isanti County is a primary goal of the Parks Plan. Determining the appropriate natural resource sites that are most representative of the area and best capture Isanti County’s landscape requires well researched planning using a variety of resources and maps. Ideal sites can compete in being legitimate choices for people to visit and can serve as an economic draw to the region. Among some of the county’s top natural resources are its rivers, lakes, floodplain forests, oak savannas, wet and dry prairies.

**Local Needs, Interest, and Opportunity**

With growth patterns significantly different between southern and northern Isanti County, local needs and demands for parks and trails can be quite different based on population, housing densities and available park opportunities. At the same time, good opportunities that arise in less developed areas need to be strongly considered before they become cost prohibitive and/or no longer available. Local interest and support will also influence the type of projects pursued. The results from Public Workshop One and Public Workshop Two in Figures 89 - 91 indicate large support for connective bike trails, picnic areas, a swimming beach and public water fishing access sites.

**Connective Bike Trails**

Connective bike trails are multi-use paved trails or on-road designations that provide limited infrastructure (trail and signage) to connect significant areas together. Within Isanti
**Public Workshop One: Potential Corridor Facilities**

Figure 89. Public Workshop One, Exercise 4: Proposed Corridor Facilities Graph, Center for Rural Design, 2007.

**Public Workshop One: Potential Site Facilities**

Figure 90. Public Workshop One, Exercise 4: Proposed Site Facilities Graph, Center for Rural Design, 2007.
Public Workshop Two: Potential Corridor and Site Facilities

Figure 91. Public Workshop One, Exercise 4: Proposed Corridor Facilities Graph, Center for Rural Design, 2007.

County trail connections between Braham, Cambridge, Isanti and the Isanti County Parks are of high importance according to the Public Workshops and input from Active Living Isanti County.

Picnic Areas
Picnic Areas are places designed to host various gatherings that usually consist of a parking lot, bathroom facility, picnic shelter, barbecue pit and some portion of mowed area for activity. The Parks Plan provides various levels of picnic areas at all of its park holdings. According to the public workshops park development of existing parks was significant and should be considered when funding becomes available.

Swimming Beach
A swimming beach is a designated area that is open to the public to swim at their own discretion. Swimming beach facilities can consist of a changing and bathroom facility, a payment booth and parking lot. According to the public workshops there is a significant interest in having a designated publicly owned swimming beach.

Public Water Fishing Access Sites
Public water fishing access sites may consist of a boat launch and signage. Isanti County has some public water fishing access sites. According to the public workshops public water fishing access sites could be increased when funds become available.
**Acreage and Parcel Size**
The following guidelines are applied by Isanti County for the selection and acquisition of county parks and trails relating to size. The guiding principles are summarized below.

1) Parks should be at least 100 acres in size. Larger sites of 200 acres or more are preferred. Sites that are sustainable, provide high quality wildlife habitat, and feature opportunities for natural resource based recreation will generally involve larger parcels.

Exceptions to that include sites that offer or provide:
   a) water based recreation or water access
   b) historic, cultural, or geologic significance to the site
   c) a special use that would not be otherwise available within a reasonable distance
   d) significant, sensitive, or unique natural resources
   e) good potential for future expansion of parks or open space via adjacent property

2) County Parks should contain a diversity of resources, either natural or artificial, that contribute to the outdoor recreation experience. Sites should be able to provide natural resource based recreation and, where possible, contain unique or unusual geologic features or have historical significance.

3) County Parks should consider the proximity to similar public facilities owned by federal, state, city, township, or other local units of government.
   a) Isanti County should avoid the duplication of services and park uses that are otherwise planned or currently provided by local units of government.
   b) Isanti County should consider sites that would be contiguous to other local units of government if it is supported by affected parties and would enhance the value and desired use of the sites in question.

4) Land acquired for public trail use should meet the minimum requirements established by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Minnesota Department of Transportation regarding necessary trail width for safe public use.

5) Land that serves as or helps establish, a local or regional trail connection for public trail use should be strongly considered.

6) Facilities within any site needs to provide universal access to diverse parkland resources and experiences as required by Minnesota statues.
Funding and Leveraging
Finding new sites and projects that are cost-effective is an ultimate goal of the county. Desirable sites for future parks and trails cannot be considered simply on the merits of protecting a rare ecosystem nor can they be ruled out based on their acquisition costs. Natural resources are finite, non-renewable amenities that cannot be replaced or re-created. Being responsible, resourceful and effective with available public funds is critical in helping acquire and develop cost-effective parks and trails. Being in a position for the County to leverage its resources as opportunities arise is equally important and can result in significant cost savings. Leveraging local funds and resources with available grants, programs, donations and interested partners should be considered whenever possible to best allocate the financial resources. One way to leverage funds and acquire new parkland in the County is to engage developers interested in housing developments. The County could encourage conservation developments, outlined in the following pages by the Minnesota Land Trust and University of Minnesota’s Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. Conservation Developments intend to be sensitive to the natural and rural environment and in most cases set aside part of the development for park land.

With the acquisition of parks, users of these parks will come from throughout the geographic region. Although a park may be located within a particular township or city, residents from local communities surrounding it will also share in its use and its benefits. In addition, it is safe to assume that a county park may not be feasible or practical to acquire in every township or city of the county. Therefore, to foster and promote good relationships among local units of government, Isanti County encourages the collaboration and shared use of resources from a geographic perspective.

Level of Urgency
Prioritizing potential sites for parks and trails is subject to the landowner’s intentions and plans for the property, geographic location and function, connectivity value and activities affecting imminent land exchange. As changes occur affecting availability, size, cost or ecologic value, sites must be re-evaluated to identify potential changes in its desirability.
WHAT IS CONSERVATION DESIGN?

In its simplest form, conservation design is a broad term for the process of developing a particular parcel of land in a manner that respects the site’s natural and cultural features. It usually addresses new residential developments in rural or suburban settings. This process first asks questions about specific features of value to the community. For example, are there mature woodlands on the site worth protecting? Are there trout streams or native prairie? Is the development within an important scenic watershed? Then, the buildings, roads, and lots are arranged in such a manner to protect these resources and to minimize the overall impact of the development to the site itself and to the greater community. The result? Often, land is set aside in permanent open space (frequently between 40 and 80% of the site). This open space protects or restores the identified conservation values and provides the residents with a common area for their enjoyment. “Golf course development without the golf course” is how conservation design is often described. And just as good golf courses are laid out with impeccable attention to their form and function, good open space design requires a similar seriousness of purpose, albeit for vastly different conservation and community purposes.

Conservation design is not an entirely new nor complex concept. In the 1960s and 1970s, developments like Keya Paha in Rice County and Jonathon in Chaska tested the feasibility of protecting lakeshore and other natural features for all the residents to enjoy, rather than parceling it off for the exclusive appreciation of a few homeowners. Unfortunately, many of these innovative approaches were sidelined in subsequent building booms and busts. Now, however, there is a new resurgence in alternative development patterns.

There are many names and variations of conservation design: Cluster Development, Cluster Design, Open Space Development, Conservation-Based Development, Growing Greener and others. These terms have some differences, but by and large all of these concepts are attempts to improve how we develop land. Because conservation developments are occurring in places with unique political contexts and housing markets, comparing them can sometimes be quite difficult. Therefore, conservation design is perhaps best thought of as a process, rather than a standard product. In fact, one of the primary differences in this approach from conventional platting is that the ecological and cultural context for the development should help direct the design. This should result in different goals and thus different development outcomes.
HOW WOULD CONSERVATION DESIGN FUNCTION IN A RURAL SETTING?
In many cases, landowners desire to keep farming, logging or otherwise using their land. They also desire to preserve its natural features. However, they often wish or need to derive some income from the sale of several lots. This scenario is quite common, as many landowners do not wish to fully develop their property. The land, however, is their only real asset for retirement or other future financial needs. This is an opportunity for Limited Rural Development.

Many zoning ordinances in rural settings require that land be broken up into 5-, 10- or 20-acre parcels, which makes continued farming or forest management difficult. With limited development, the areas most appropriate to keep in open space are identified first. In this case, the farmland, forest, and lakeshore areas are left largely intact and will be owned by the original landowner. Three smaller lots are located in areas that least impact this larger landscape, while still providing great marketability. Then, a conservation easement is placed over the larger area to ensure its future protection. The original landowner wins by having both income and the use of his or her property, while the larger community wins by having a development that maintains the rural character and function of the area. There are numerous limited developments around the state, both in agricultural settings as well as in forest or lakeshore contexts. ...

WHO OWNS THE OPEN SPACE?
Land ownership is another important factor in conservation design. In many projects, a homeowners association (HOA) comprised of all of the landowners in a particular development retains joint ownership of the conserved open space. The homeowners are thus responsible for maintaining the open space, paying taxes and covering liability issues. HOA ownership of open space has become the most frequent model for conservation developments. HOA ownership is not the only model, however. In Windsor Park, the city of Elk River owns part of the open space as a public park. In Jackson Meadow, the adjacent landowners own part of the open space and intend to keep it in agricultural use. And in Cardinal Ridge, a Lake Elmo project, the open space is partially owned by one of the landowners in the development who owns a larger lot extending over part of the open-space. Regardless of ownership, the conservation purposes for which the land was set aside should still remain intact.
HOW SHOULD THE OPEN SPACE BE MANAGED?

The creation of a strong management plan – which identifies how the open space will be managed and by whom – is an important component of successful conservation projects. Just setting land aside does not ensure its long-term quality or viability. For example, when a homeowners association or other entity takes ownership of the open space, how will they know what areas were intended to be kept as farmland or prairie? How will the shoreline buffers be managed (e.g., what will keep them from being mowed down?)? The management plan would help answer these questions on how the protected area should be maintained to retain its conservation values. This plan would spell out specific goals and directions for various areas of the site. These goals might include extensive ecological restoration to help bring the site back to an earlier time. The Fields of St. Croix in Lake Elmo, Jackson Meadow in Marine on St. Croix, and Mineral Springs in Goodhue County are just a few of the developments that have restored prairies and other native systems within the open space. Wild Meadows in Medina takes the restoration concept even further by restoring both the open space and much of the residential lots into woodlands and a mixture of prairie types and wetland species. This restoration also provides the stormwater management infrastructure for the development, thereby serving multiple purposes. Wild Meadows’ covenants require a part-time ecologist to help manage the property and educate residents about the ecological values that surround them.

Other developments around the country have even furthered this concept by prescribing what landowners can or cannot do on their individual properties. For example, some developments have designated no-mow areas on individual lots or enacted policies such as a no-pet restriction for residents (cats and dogs can have devastating impacts on certain bird species). These cases consider the multitude of impacts of residents adjacent to conservation areas, thereby extending the environmental mission of the project beyond the open space borders to the individual landowners themselves.

SECTION 5.
FINANCIAL SUPPORT
Multiple finance options are available to help fund the acquisition, development and maintenance of parks and trails. No single source should be relied upon to adequately fund the Isanti County Parks and Recreation Plan (Parks Plan). Incorporating and implementing all of these options as they become feasible should be considered as part of a sound, comprehensive funding strategy. New finance opportunities should be aggressively sought and innovatively applied as they become available. Below is a list of the methods to consider.

1. Grant Programs
A variety of grant programs provide significant amounts of money for parks and trails. Grants generally require a cash match from the local unit of government of 50% of the total project cost. A portion of matches can sometimes be provided in-kind and/or technical services. Most of the available grants are restricted to helping fund only acquisition and development costs. Examples of available grants include: Outdoor Recreation Grant, Regional Park Grant, Natural and Scenic Area Grant, Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources Grants, Greenways Program, Metro Wildlife Corridor Program, Transportation Enhancement Program and Local Trail Connections Grant.

2. Taxes
Through the general levy, the County Board has the ability to fund the acquisition, development and maintenance of county parks and trails.

3. Park Dedication of Lands
The dedication of lands for public parks and trails is regulated according to state law (MS 2002, Sect. 394.25 subd.7, as revised by S.F. No.484). The dedication of land for public parks is a result of a subdividing of land and/or land development and can be applied by counties in the State of Minnesota, where it meets the criteria as stated in the statute. Examples of acceptable land dedication include lands that create or connect trails, lands that result in an aggregation of public parks/trails, or lands that contain rare natural resources that may benefit from protection or limited use. The County may choose to accept fees on new house construction. Dedication fees can be used to pay for the acquisition of parks, trails and open space and for their development costs in the township where the new lots are located. Dedication fees cannot be used toward park/trail maintenance. The County will encourage partnerships between townships (and cities, if appropriate) to fund park and trail projects and to assist in utilizing the funds in an efficient manner.

4. User fees
Where appropriate, the County may choose to establish user fees, which typically will include park entrance fees or activity fees.
5. Partnerships with Cities and Townships
Establishing partnerships, combining available resources and collaborating the efforts of county, city and township officials and staff is critical to the success of future parks and trails in Isanti County. Avoiding the duplication of services and planning efforts will further assist in getting the maximum benefit from budgeted funds, particularly as local units of government face tighter budgets and reduced funding.

6. State Bonding
When possible, the County will consider state bonding opportunities for the acquisition and development of parks, trails and recreational facilities. Opportunities for the County for state bonding projects include collaboration with the Central Minnesota Parks, Trails, and Open Space Coordinating Board.

7. Bond Referendum
The County may choose to place a bond referendum for parks and trails before the voters in a general election. This allows voters to have direct involvement on deciding how much money should be allocated to parks and trails.

8. Donations/Gifts
The County can seek and/or accept land donations from private landowners or corporations toward public parks and trails.

9. Partnerships with Not-for-Profit Organizations
The County may choose to partner with not-for-profit organizations that specialize in acquiring and/or preserving land for parks, trails, and open space. Not-for-profits can often provide technical and financial support as well as assist in negotiations and fund raising. Examples of organizations of this type include the Conservation Fund, MN Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, sportsman clubs and associations.

10. Volunteer Assistance
Although not a source of funds, volunteers and other forms of in-kind services can reduce the operational costs of parks and trails.

In addition to the above options, a variety of alternative methods can be considered and encouraged for preservation and management of quality parks and trails including: conservation easements, deed restrictions, leases, donations, stewardship programs, the Greenway Program and the Metro Wildlife Corridor Program. Although not implemented
as a County tool for land preservation, the restrictions that exist due to the “Wild and Scenic River” classification along parts of the Mississippi River and the Rum River help preserve these areas from development.
Tools and Funding Sources for Park Land Acquisition
MFRC Landscape Program

Private Sources

- **Donations.** Land or cash from private parties (individuals, businesses, and organizations).

- **Parkland Dedication.** MN Statutes Chapter 394 (County), 462 (non-Metro municipalities), 473 (Metro municipalities).

- **Park Fees from Building Permits.** Isanti County has been using this since early 2005.

- **Municipal Forests.** MN Statutes Chapter 459 Subdivision 1.
  1a. County or Cities or Townships Resolution to accept donation of private lands.
  1b. Donations of 100 or + ac. land entitle land to perpetually bear donor’s name.
  2. Cities or Townships, via public vote, can, by purchase or condemnation, obtain land.

- **Tax Forfeited Lands.**
  Use Deeds, (PT Form 962, MN Statutes Section 282.01, Subdivisions 1a through 1e)
  - State Government is not promoting use deeds, but because this is a legislative decision, use deeds may still be an option.

  Memorial Forests. MN Statutes Chapter 459 Subdivision’s 2 & 3.
  County Board Resolution to set aside tax-forfeited land …more suitable for forest purposes than …any other purpose and dedicate such lands as a memorial forest…

Local Government (County, Township and City) Participation with State Sources

- **Co-op Agreements.** Allow local units (counties, townships or cities) to manage School Trust Parcels with MN DNR Forestry - the agreement should resolve any conflict between park and public hunting uses.

State and Federal Sources

- **Natural & Scenic Area Grants** – possible no funding in ’08.

- **Regional Non-Metro Park Grants** – status uncertain.

- **Remediation Fund Grants** - funding opportunities are decreasing.

- **Metro Greenways Grant Program** – program changed to another name & different interests.

- **LAWCON (Land & Water Conservation Fund; off shore oil lease $)** - status uncertain.
SECTION 6.

BENEFITS
HEALTH AND WELLNESS BENEFITS

Active Living by Design, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, notes that physical inactivity plays a significant role in the most common chronic diseases in the United States, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and diabetes; each of these is a leading cause of death.

Researchers have found that the presence of a trail can increase physical activity among adults. Trails and greenways create healthy recreation and transportation opportunities by providing people of all ages with attractive, safe, accessible places to bike, walk, hike, jog, skate or ski. In doing so, they make it easier for people to engage in physical activity. According to Active Living by Design’s “Parks, Trails and Greenways Fact Sheet”, a survey of U.S. adults indicated that people with access to neighborhood parks were nearly twice as likely to be physically active as those without access to parks. Trails and greenways provide natural and scenic areas that cause people to actually want to be outside and physically active. In findings from the “Land Use Fact Sheet” from Active Living Research, on average, residents in highly walkable neighborhoods took twice as many trips as people with less walkable neighborhoods.

According to the Surgeon General’s “call to action,” less than one-third of Americans meet the federal recommendation of at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five days a week and 40 percent of adults engage in no leisure time physical activity at all (online resource). Both the Surgeon General’s “call to action” and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention emphasize the connection between exercise and health (online resource). In addition to helping control weight, physical activity helps control cholesterol levels, slows bone loss associated with advancing age, lowers the risk of certain cancers, and helps reduce anxiety and depression. As a society, the problems of physical inactivity are well documented. One in four adults are considered obese, with obese individuals having a 50-100% increased risk of premature death.

SAFETY

Trails connect towns, parks, neighborhoods and schools so adults and children can cycle or walk. In Isanti County, the towns of Braham, Cambridge and Isanti have some trails within their cities limits. The proposed trail connecting the cities of Isanti and Cambridge will be the only connective trail in Isanti County. With additional research indicating that the proportion of young people who are overweight has more than doubled in the last 20 years, Isanti County has a tremendous opportunity to reduce this trend locally. By adding more
connective trails that link the County Park system with communities and ultimately to regional systems, Isanti County could provide more active and healthy transportation choices.

**Economic Development**

The recreation and tourism industry is an important aspect of economic development. Due to its proximity to the Twin Cities metropolitan area with direct connection on MN 65 and indirect connection on both Interstate 35 and US 169 Isanti County has opportunities for capturing part of the recreational market passing through on the way “up north”. Providing recreational destinations in Isanti County can offer economic benefit to the county and also contribute to enhancing the economic health of Minnesota.

**Economic Benefits of Green Infrastructure**

Many findings and scientific facts document the economic benefits provided by a green infrastructure. In northern Minnesota, lake clarity was shown to positively affect property values where a 1-meter decline in lake clarity would subtract over $130 million from all lakeshore property values. In Saskatoon, Canada a river view adds $1.2 million annually to property values in the community. In Maryland, the conversion of developable pasture to privately owned conservation land increased the value of nearby residential property by over $3,000 per acre. In Portland, Oregon a home within 1,500 feet of any open space can sell for over $2,000 more than a home located farther away. Research is consistent that living near parks, trails, and open spaces will enhance property values. In addition, parks and open space serve as safeguards from flood damage and erosion; they help prevent noise, air, and light pollution; and they help make a positive impact on the community by attracting tourism, business investments, and local housing projects.

**Quality of Life**

Quality of life in Isanti County and other communities is a complex set of attributes that helps distinguish the community by adding to its standard of living. According to the results from the first Public Workshop, as shown in Figure 90 on the following page, natural resources and rural character contribute to a high quality of life in Isanti County. In addition the results from the Comprehensive Plan Public Workshop (see Appendix) suggest a large margin of residents agree that Natural Resource Preservation is important and natural resources and open spaces of the County are assets for the future.
Exercise One: How important are Natural Areas and Rural Character to your quality of life in Isanti County?
(1-5 points scored individually)

Figure 90. Public Workshop One - Exercise One, Center for Rural Design, 2007.

Public Workshop 2 Results

New Land Acquisitions and Development of Existing Facilities Continuum - Team
- New Land Acquisition 51%
- Develop Existing Facilities 39%

Parks and Development of Connecting Trails - Teams
- Connecting Trails 41%
- Parks 50%

New Parcels and Existing Park Land Expansion - Team
- Expanding Existing Park Land 57%
- Creating New Parks 43%

Passive Parks and Active Parks - Team
- Active Parks 14%
- Passive Parks 86%
Parks, trails, and open space also directly contribute to the quality of life by providing social, physical, anecdotal, and environmental benefits. In Public Workshops One and Two the community weighed in on their interest in parks, trails and open space in Isanti County. As shown in Figure 91 on the following page: new land acquisition is more important than the development of existing facilities, parks are slightly more important than connective trails, expanding existing park land is more important than creating new parks, and passive parks are more appropriate that active parks. These results help the Parks and Recreation Commission to determine fund allocations that are complementary with the community’s input on quality of life.

**Planning for the Future**

With growth projections indicating that Isanti County will develop competitively by 2030, implementing a park and recreation plan that emphasizes acquisition first and development second allows the County to be in a position to develop the sites as public demands increase. Future generations will have few opportunities to acquire significant park and open space acreage due to general land value increases along with current trends of low density development that reduces contiguous plots of land. By 2030, even fewer quality sites will remain. By planning for the future and focusing on acquisition now, significant economic savings can be made before land costs are cost prohibitive. As shown below in Figure 92, Isanti County faces the possibility of a 35% increase in population from 2000 to 2030. The potential demand and expectation for public parks, trails, and open spaces, particularly in current unincorporated areas, will directly affect the areas desirability. Identifying the appropriate steps to provide for these future recreational demands and implementing a timely strategy that meets those needs is a critical step for Isanti County.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isanti County Percent of Population Change 2000-2030</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isanti County Residents</td>
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* 2000 US Census  
**Isanti County Projection

Figure 92. Isanti County Percent of Population Change 2000-2030, Center for Rural Design, 2007.
SECTION 7.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, MAINTENANCE, AND PROTECTION
The primary goals for the Isanti County Parks and Recreation Plan (Parks Plan) is to preserve natural areas, provide passive recreation opportunities, strive to maintain the rural character of the County and promote the health, well-being and quality of life for residents of the County. Featuring the unique natural resources, landscapes and ecosystems representative of Isanti County is an outcome sought as a result of implementing the Parks Plan. Acquiring areas for their natural resources is the first step in a long-term proactive commitment to maintain and enhance the resources that the Parks Plan is built around. For each unit acquired, a natural resource management plan will be developed and incorporated into the Parks Plan. Natural resource management should involve the consideration of vegetative communities, mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians. Obtaining baseline data of these amenities and conducting periodic follow up work to regularly assess the current status of the plants and animals is a recommended action of this plan.

**Natural Resource Inventories**

As indicated by Figures C5 and C6, Natural Areas Map in Appendix C there are significant areas of high quality, natural plant and animal communities located in Isanti County that have not yet been severely fragmented or otherwise disturbed. Unfortunately, many of these are being lost as a result of land use changes and urban development. Utilizing additional existing maps and resources such as Marschner’s map (derived from bearing tree data, circa 1855) and the Biodiversity map (MN DNR), most of these sites can be identified, reviewed, and prioritized to determine when and where proactive steps should be considered for preserving the resource.

**Natural Resource Management**

Identifying acceptable methods for restoring, preserving, and managing the natural resources in a manner that balances ecosystem sustainability, multiple use recreation and environmental education is critical for a sustained Parks Plan that emphasizes natural resources. Using baseline inventories of the County’s natural resources strategies can be adopted which help maintain or enhance the resource. Depending on the goals and objectives a variety of stewardship practices can be considered which typically have specific goals, outcomes and results. Examples may include selective tree harvests to eradicate non-native species, conducting prescribed burns to favor desirable wildflowers and native grasses, applying an herbicide to control exotics, or simply leaving an area undisturbed. When identifying the available options consideration must be given to all existing resources including the vegetation, water and wildlife as well as the users and adjacent landowners. Developing policies concerning wildlife management is especially important,
particularly for deer, where populations can quickly escalate within a protected area and negatively impact the vegetation. Incorporating steps into a management plan that monitors, regulates, and manages population levels using tools most suited and appropriate for the site such as hunting, trapping, and releasing of wildlife is recommended.

**Sustainability vs Use**

When managing the natural resources involving parks and trails, identifying the anticipated level of use, the designated user groups and ultimately what the sites primary objectives are, is critical in helping develop a long-term management plan appropriate for the amenity. As with sites that are planned for featuring multiple recreational opportunities along with showcasing environmental amenities, striking a balance that allows for continued recreational use with minimal impact to the resource can be challenging. Safety considerations, compatibility issues, natural resource sustainability, adjacent land use and maintenance requirements can each influence how a site is managed. Annually monitoring parks, trails and open spaces to identify potential conflicts with overuse or misuse is a necessary part of an overall management plan.

**Maintenance**

To achieve cost-effective maintenance of the Parks Plan and it’s resources, the use and sharing of equipment, staff, and other available resources among Isanti County Departments and local city and township services is necessary.

**Protection**

Effectively protecting a designated natural resource can require outreach, education, signage and compliance checks by authorized personnel. Adopting a park ordinance is further recommended to assist in the rule enforcement, public compliance and natural resource protection.