



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

Tom Lewanski - Dakota County Parks  
Mary Jackson - Office of Planning

Physical Development Committee Division Meeting  
January 13, 2026

1

### Overview



- Purpose
- Progress to date on land protection and natural resource plans
- Proposed revisions to Natural Systems Plan objectives and strategies
- Next Steps

2

## Purpose



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

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

3

## NRMSP to Date



Dakota County  
Natural Resource Management System Plan  
May 2017



### 2017 NRMSP

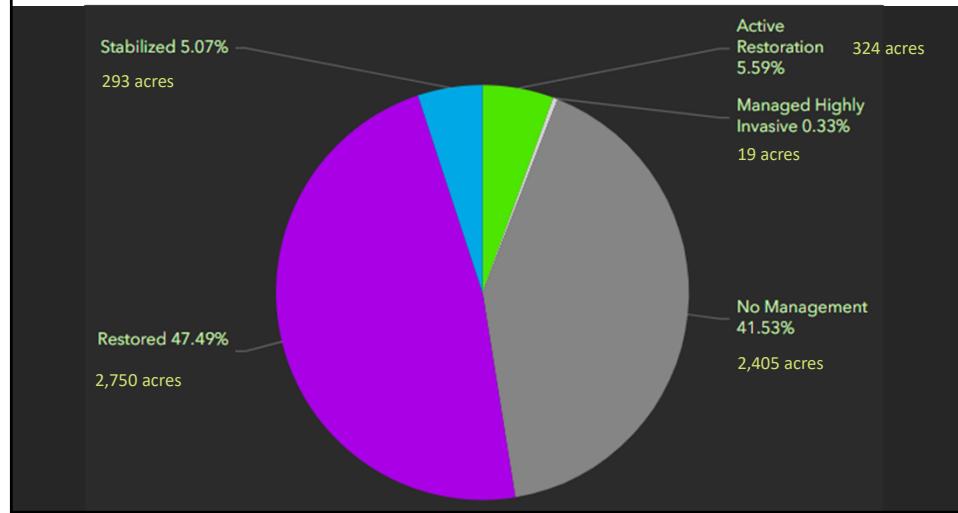
- Increased investment in Parks natural resources
- Guided restoration of half of the Park System to-date

4

## NRMSP to Date



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



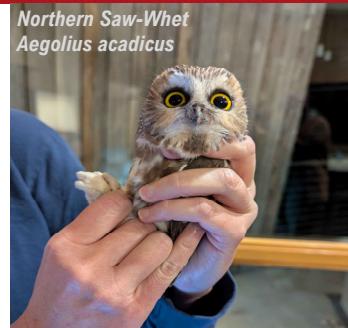
5

## NRMSP to Date



### Highlights: Wildlife

- Bison Reintroduction
- Cliff Road Wildlife Tunnel
- Saw-Whet Owl Banding



6

## NRMSP to Date



### Highlights: Plants

- Rare species discovered or rediscovered



7

## NRMSP to Date



### Highlights:

- Active volunteer participation
- Greenhouse for propagation
- New partnerships

8

# Land Conservation Plan



**Land Conservation Plan  
for Dakota County**



Adopted on November 17, 2020



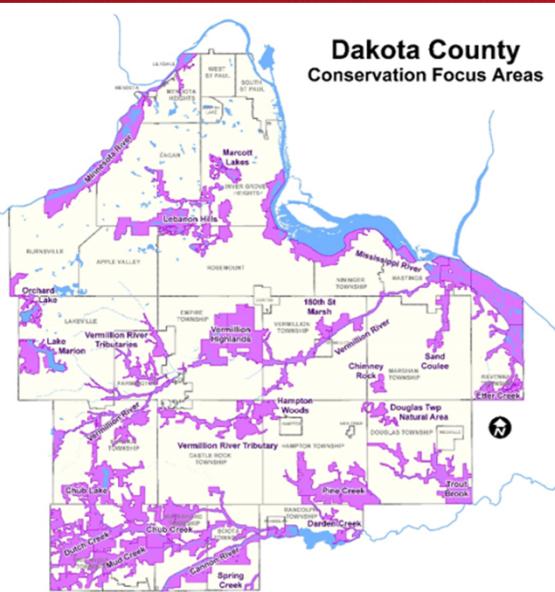
**2020 LCP**

- Prioritized land protection within Conservation Focus Areas (CFAs)
- Guides the County Land Protection program

9

# Land Conservation Plan





**Dakota County  
Conservation Focus Areas**

- 74,863 acres are in CFAs
- More than 10,000 acres have been protected by the Land Conservation Program

10

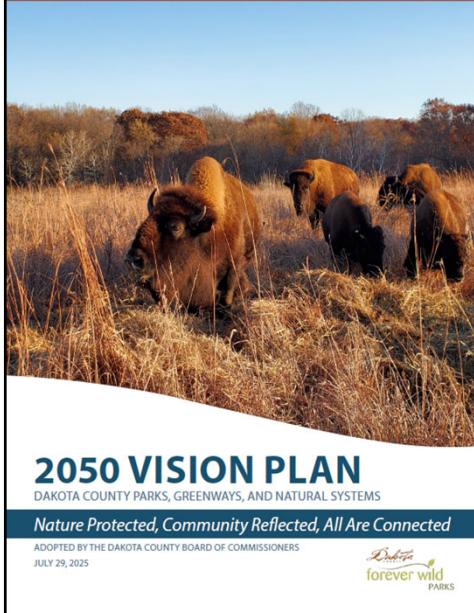
## Land Conservation Plan to-Date



- 10 Natural Area easements acquired since 2020 update, protecting 243 acres
- 3 County Park Conservation Area acquisitions, 188 acres

11

## New County Board Direction



### 2050 Parks Vision Plan

- Updated the Parks vision with emphasis on the interconnectedness of nature and people
- 15 Goals, including natural systems stewardship and land protection

12

## New County Board Direction



### 2050 Vision Plan Areas to Incorporate:

- New protection and resource goals
- Outreach and partnerships
- New park search areas
- Climate mitigation and resilience
- Engagement of Tribal communities in traditional ecological knowledge
- Supporting natural resource career pathways
- Seeking permanent funding for natural systems stewardship

13

## Project Approach



Merge the LCP and NRMS into one document with  
Land Protection and Natural Systems Stewardship  
sections

14

## 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.

15

## Draft Objectives



### Natural Systems Stewardship Chapter

Objectives restructured  
from NRMSP

1. Manage natural systems on protected lands in a comprehensive and sustainable manner



16

## Draft Objectives



### Natural Systems Stewardship Chapter

2. Manage systems to improve resilience to the impacts of a changing climate.
3. Improve ecological quality in County Parks, on other public lands and permanently protected private lands.

17

## Draft Objectives



### Natural Systems Stewardship Chapter

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

18

## Draft Objectives



### Natural Systems Stewardship Chapter

6. Expand capacity for natural systems management by building and sustaining effective partnerships and supporting the efforts of others.

19

## Next Steps



1. Stakeholder Engagement
2. Build Out Priorities and Targets
3. Draft Plan
4. Planning Commission

Draft document in second quarter of 2026

20

## Next Steps

Dakota  
COUNTY



Questions?

21

Dakota  
COUNTY



Thank you

22