

# Boone Forks Regional Plan

Boone-Hamilton-Webster Counties



We extend a special thank you to the Boone County Chamber of Commerce;  
County Conservation Boards of Boone, Hamilton, and Webster Counties;  
the Iowa Arboretum; Legacy Learning; and Prairie Rivers of Iowa.  
The efforts of Matt Cosgrove, Brian Lammers, Kurt Phillips, Andy  
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*Boone County Conservation Board*

*Boone County Convention and Visitors Bureau*

*CDS Global*

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*Linco*

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*Webster County Conservation Board*

Also, we want to acknowledge the many organizations and individuals who participated in this planning process.

*Consulting Team Supporting the Effort: RDG Planning & Design*

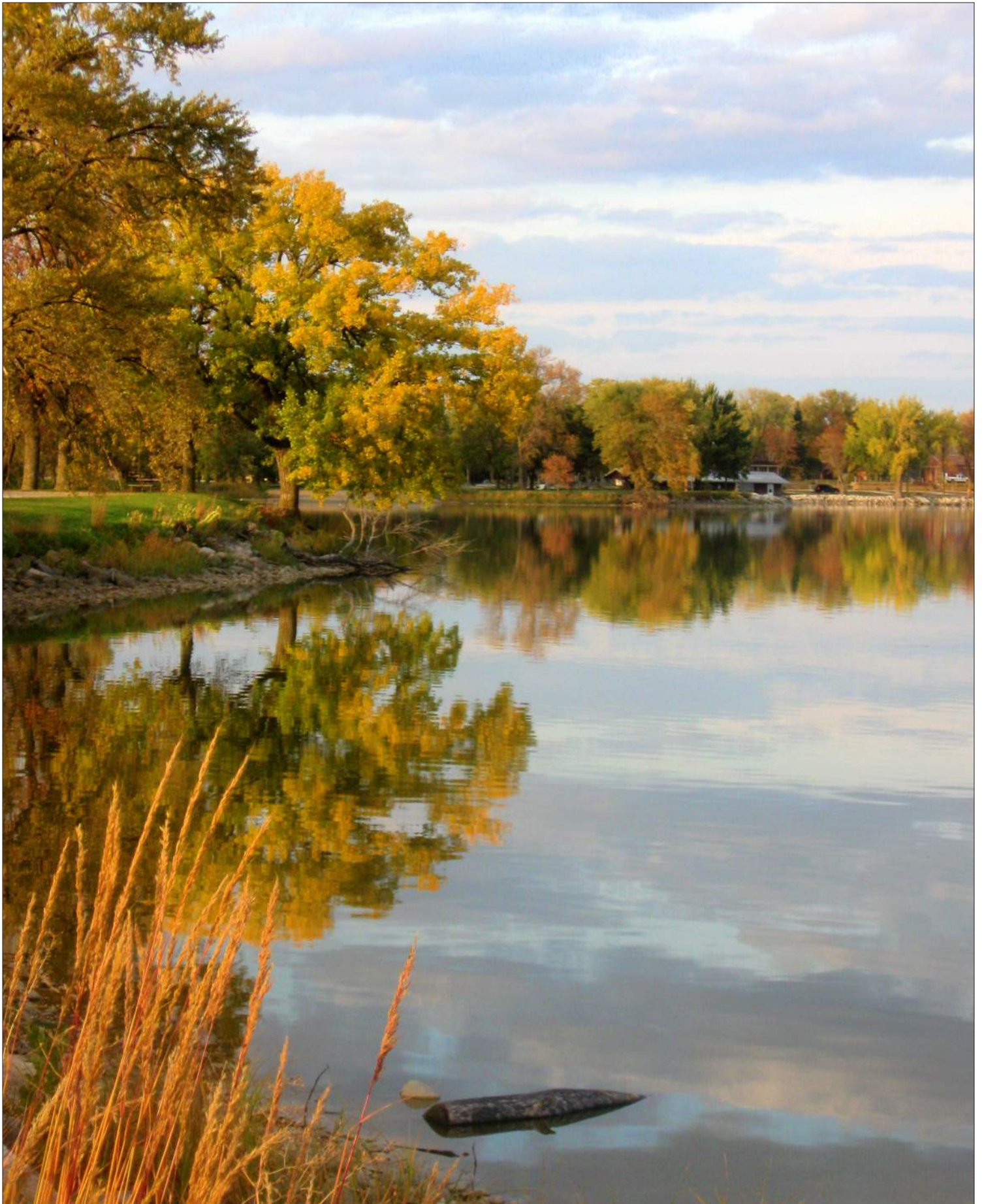




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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary





This tri-county region is blessed with exceptional natural resources, iconic features, rich multi-cultural heritage and communities on the move. Perhaps most essential to the success of this plan, however, is the dedicated team of conservation, commerce and community leaders—from throughout the region—who believe in working across boundaries for success.



# Executive Summary

This plan supports a three-county region focused on achieving economic, social and natural resources balance and improvements. The Boone Forks Parks to People planning team involves collaborators from state, county and local government, non-profit organizations and private sector economic leaders to build a strong regional approach for the future.

Their work aligns with their vision and mission statements:

## **Vision:**

### **Lands and communities fulfilling dreams**

A region renowned for its breathtaking river valleys, high trestle rail lines, working farms and natural lands—connected to historic communities of character and opportunity.

## **Mission:**

### **People and places work and grow together**

To collaborate across political and geographic boundaries for effective connection and integration of arts, heritage, nature, community and economic vitality.



# About the Region

The Boone Forks Region boasts the internationally recognized High Trestle Trail to the south, the breathtaking Des Moines River Valley as its backbone, star woodlands throughout and a series of vibrant and revitalizing communities. All of this is embedded in an agricultural context, rich in history and heritage features. Complementary to an exceptional parks, recreation and conservation system, these include:

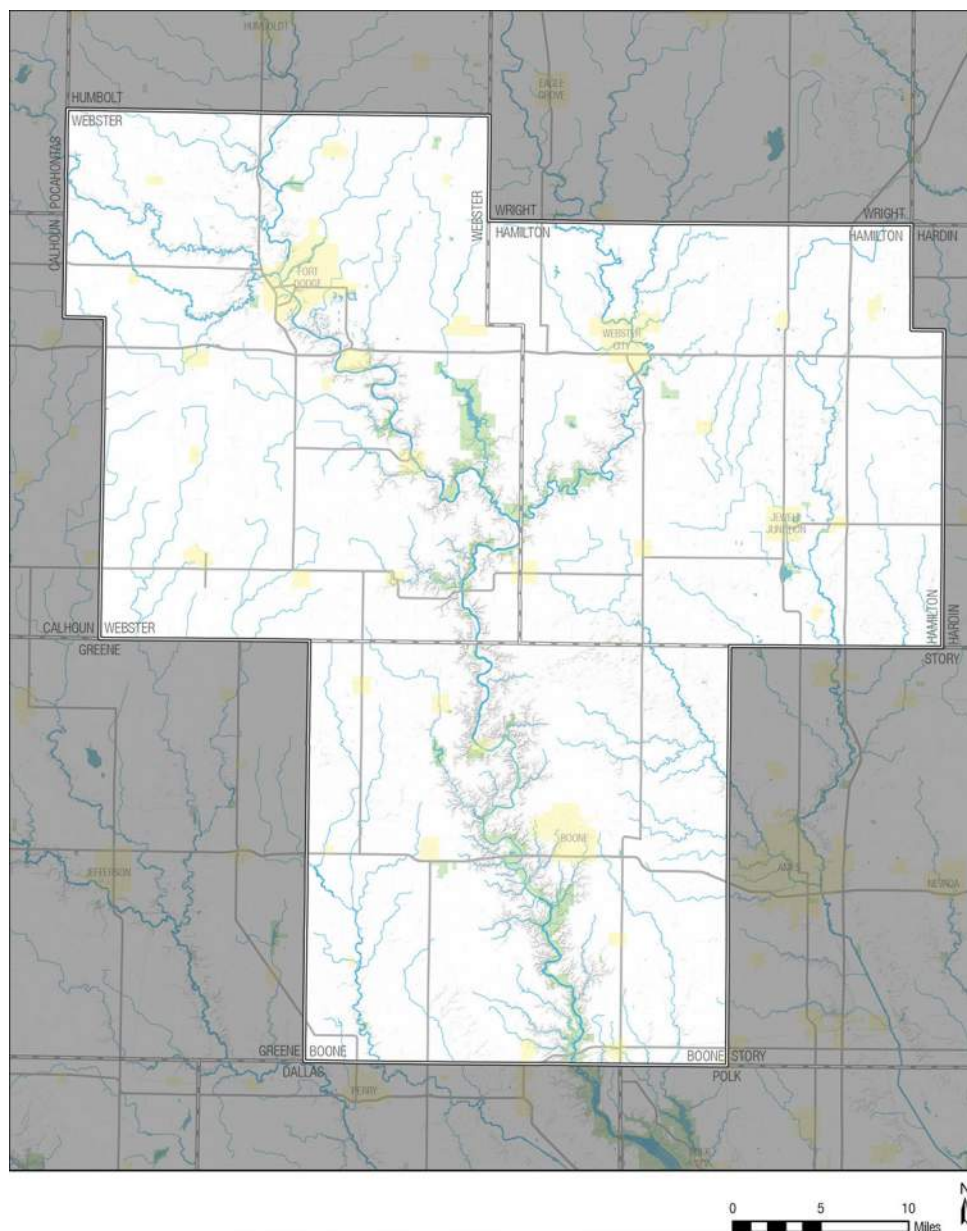
- A series of cemeteries—on-the-ground “archives” of farm families and life on the prairie
- A grassroots-led “Legacy Learning” academy, initially targeting adults and their knowledge for both learning and teaching
- The Dragoon Trail—signposts of the path of early explorers
- The Fort Museum
- The nation’s first transcontinental highway—now known as the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway
- The Boone & Scenic Valley Railroad
- Crown jewel communities throughout the region
- Several high trestle train tracks—including those of Kate Shelley Bridge fame

The parks system mixes state, county and local lands and facilities to create a full complement of opportunities. Features include bluffland hiking, equestrian trails, a premier OHV (off-highway vehicle) park and an emerging riverfront development in Fort Dodge (Webster County). The water trails of this region are some of the earliest in the state to get established and the network here continues to attract attention and expand. And the public sector is not left to its own devices for enjoying those water trails; private outfitters have stepped up in this region to support the initiative.

Meanwhile, some of the camping and facilities are among the finest in the state with Briggs Woods Cabins (for example) an extremely popular destination.

The region also hosts the bi-annual Farm Progress Show in Boone County—making it a prime launch point for agri-tourism. The Iowa Arboretum continues to expand as an important statewide asset, emphasizing the role this region can and should play in protecting and enjoying Iowa’s woodland assets.

This region is primed for a collaborative effort to connect parks to people and places—from nationally recognized historic byways and history-celebrating world-class paved trails to a notable water trails network, nearly 50 county park assets, two state preserves, three state parks and facilities within each of the region’s vital communities. When we add the heritage, cultural and educational assets to the region, the potential is unbounded.





# About the Plan

## **This plan builds from these exceptional natural resources, geological and historical features.**

This plan finds its foundation in the passions of the people in this region. Focus groups, interviews, public engagement sessions and stakeholder workshops have led to a series of concepts designed to meet regional needs—from collaboration for marketing to intentional protection of historic river valleys and historical features. Nature-based artisan education, world-class welcome facilities, overnight stay, and an expansion of a multi-faceted trails and byways network (water and land) emerge as “wow” factors and connectors.

Six key initiatives emerge as foundational to the work of this plan over the next 1-5 years.

**Linking the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway to the Kate Shelley Bridge** produces an exceptional draw for the region—potentially comparable to stellar results of the High Trestle Trail Bridge, with its 20,000 visitors monthly for the biking season. **“Hike, Bike and Paddle”** takes mixed-use outdoor recreation to new levels. **Legacy Learning** builds from a successful program in the region while **quirky tours, resource protection** and a **regional branding initiative** tie this plan together.

All six initiatives are complementary to each other and involve a mix of improvements to built facilities, natural resources protection, the arts and programming. The sixth, regional branding, pays attention to the region’s strong commitment to market together—and complements the “quirky tours” concept most directly. All of these efforts are underpinned by a strategic direction that calls for improving the overall brand/identity of the region, enhancing signage/way-finding, and making an ongoing effort to enrich program offerings and interpretation.

## **The Kate Shelley Welcome Center:** *Home of the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway and Legacy Learning*

The Lincoln Highway shifted the nation from train to car culture with its completion in 1913. Both histories converge in this region of Iowa. As the first transcontinental highway to span 13 states and take travelers from New York to San Francisco, the “byway” version of this historic highway can once again do the same, but travelers need a place on the map to land—a place with a history as rich as the highway itself: The Kate Shelley Bridge.

The concept here is to create a visitor/welcome campus—complete with diverse opportunities for overnight stay—repurposing a section of the Kate Shelley Bridge as an interpretive focal point. The Kate Shelley Welcome Center provides a vantage point of the past, present and future—like no other. Both metaphorical and physically dramatic, it provides exceptional potential to “pull” byway visitors into the region and encourage their stay.

## **Hike, Bike and Paddle:** *A multi-use network*

This initiative provides wide-ranging experiences—appealing to the most adventurous and most contemplative users of the parks-trails system all at once. Locating ten hubs for access to equipment, information and/or outfitters, this effort builds from the growing regional water trails network to include a mix of soft, gravel and paved trails. As envisioned, this network would let a user stop at a hub, rent a bike, pedal North then drop off the cycle and similarly pick up a canoe and paddle to head back to her point of origin. The network provides 93 miles of north-south trail on its western leg, 83 miles on its eastern leg, and 20 miles of rails-with-trails linking Fort Dodge to Duncombe to Webster City. This east-west

portion of the trail serves as a path to celebrate Iowa’s agricultural and railroad heritage with strategically spaced oases for the user along the way.

Key existing anchor points for this initiative include: The Fort Museum (Fort Dodge); Dolliver and Ledges State Parks; Brushy Creek Recreational Area; Deer Creek; Kennedy Park; communities of the region; Tunnel Mill; Briggs Woods; Bell’s Mill Park; Saylorville Wildlife Area; Sportsman’s Park; High Trestle Trail Bridge/Trail; and Swede Point Park.

## **Legacy Learning Revisited:** *Hands-on arts, history and nature*

Legacy Learning in the Boone River Valley has already launched this exceptional concept to link nature, history and the arts through the work of artists, artisans, makers, historians and naturalists. Even without a physical center, well-received programs have been delivered and a Board of Directors has worked hard on behalf of this initiative. Expanding this program’s physical reach and generational appeal is the goal of this re-energized approach. The work ahead includes expansion of resources, improved branding and outreach, identification of mobile sites and the development of a permanent home as part of the Kate Shelley Welcome Center:

- Development of resources to include an executive director or dedicated part-time staff within an existing organization
- Potential growth/expansion of the Board of Directors
- Consideration of re-branding for broader appeal
- Enhancement/growth of programming, including greater emphasis on program appeal to families and young adults, expansion of the arts/crafts and science components included
- Expansion to pre-identified program sites throughout the region

- Mobilizing (literally) through a discovery van to bring tools/resources to various pre-identified program sites
- Enhancement of some existing sites to best accommodate use of and identification as “Legacy Learning” locations
- Eventual development of a Legacy Learning home base as part of the Kate Shelley Welcome Center

### **Protect the Source:** *Boone Forks and beyond*

When we first think of the scenic Boone and Des Moines River Valleys (and the many public lands throughout this region), we tend to forget the importance of protecting these lands from inappropriate development. Much of Boone County’s Des Moines River Valley enjoys some level of protection through the Saylorville Wildlife Area designation.

For this plan to succeed, the natural resources values of the entirety of these river valleys and associated tree canopies deserve some protection—through conservation easements, wildlife management or park designations, public ownership, etc. Any number of tools and partnerships can be employed to help protect these lands. Currently, many of the parcels in these river valleys are privately held—often by well-meaning church camps, scouting or other outdoor-interest groups. However, development pressures can be brought to bear on any lands, and the beautiful landscapes nestled in these valleys can be particularly appealing. It’s imperative this plan address identifying land pieces at particular risk and/or of highest value and work to put reasonable protection mechanisms in place.



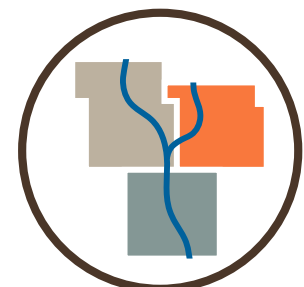
**The scenic Des Moines River Valley**

### **Quirky Wonders:** *Tours and itineraries tailored to your curiosity*

This concept, also potentially of interest to Iowa Parks Foundation and/or other regions, is modeled after the Canadian Board of Tourism’s “Explorer Quotient” initiative. Go online. Answer a few questions about yourself, and the system presents you with a series of options that will address your personal motivation for visiting the region. Intrigued by ghosts and history? The cemetery tour is for you. Inspired by your spirit of adventure? You’ll want to hike, bike and paddle with a side trip to Briggs Woods. This proposal starts small—establishing a mix of itineraries and tour options—then grows as the technology catches up with the concept.

### **Brand and Market:** *Unite to tell the region’s story*

Many of the conversations leading to this plan speak to the region as a best-kept secret. Participants know the need to name/brand and promote the many assets already in place as well as those identified through this planning effort. Naming this region, giving it a memorable brand and promoting the many benefits associated with that brand is a first ongoing step for success.



## **Boone Forks Regional Plan**

Boone-Hamilton-Webster Counties

**Proposed logo**



# Accomplishing the Plan

Prairie Rivers of Iowa is in the process of evaluating its role as a potential long-term facilitator of this plan. Their geographic footprint and associated mission are an excellent fit for helping the county conservation boards, regional planners, economic concerns, educational institutions and communities carry through with many of the elements of this plan. Perhaps this plan's longest-term but highest-impact project is the Kate Shelley Welcome Center. Prairie Rivers of Iowa, as the instigator

of the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway, is well prepared to assist in championing this large-scale destination project. At the same time, they're willing to help monitor the strategic success of other regional initiatives. Throughout this plan, we also call out additional champions for the various initiatives—organizations with vested interests in providing the critical follow-through for the plan's success.

We anticipate this plan will find a home at the respective conservation boards, within the Chambers of Commerce, and at Prairie Rivers of Iowa—at a minimum.

# Advocating for the Plan

As you will see in these pages, the natural resources, trails potential, community enthusiasm, cultural heritage and economic potential here are rich. But no amount of planning will achieve the results desired if resources are not ultimately available. The logic behind these planning efforts calls for public-private partnerships to achieve

meaningful goals. The vision must have sufficient public dollars available for effective leveraging of private resources. Iowa parks, trails, natural resources and cultural institutions have been historically underfunded. This trend continues but it must be reversed. This plan supports REAP, Iowa's Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund, the Iowa Parks

Foundation and other state and public-private programs that can help this region and the state achieve the worthy initiatives included here. This plan will further explore start-up steps for considering bond referendums or similar locally-driven funding initiatives.



# How to Read This Plan

The Master Plan has three basic sections to address the context, the planning effort and its ongoing support. While the Table of Contents provides the plan's overall outline, a little explanation is warranted:

## **Part One: The Planning Context and Process**

Here you learn a little about the history of the Iowa Parks Foundation, its granting effort that led to the plan and the process used to develop the plan. The emerging themes, derived from focused discussions, are included here as they underpin the work of the plan.

## **Part Two: The Plan—Strategy and Fundamentals**

This section includes the plan's strategic framework, derived from stakeholder and public engagement workshops and focus groups. The criteria used to develop the plan's initiatives can also be found here.

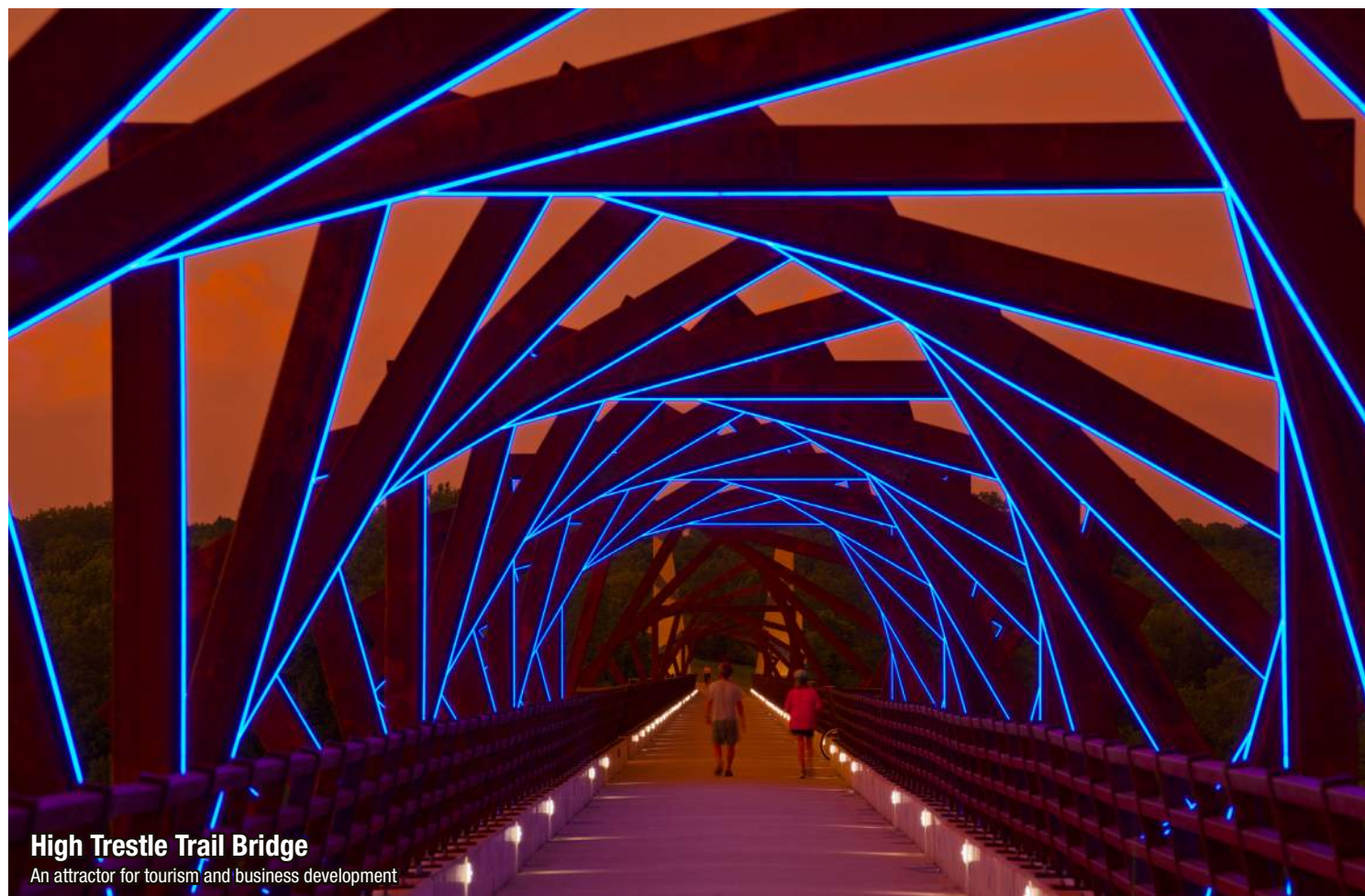
Then we address the key initiatives that have surfaced through this process. We include checklists for early implementation and highlight the project champions. We provide an overall possible magnitude of cost for each of these initiatives, noting the difficulty with providing any cost notes at such early stages with few project parameters defined.

## **Part Three: Facilitating Success**

This section discusses measurement, structure, fundraising and advocacy intended to support the short-term and long-term success of this plan.

## **Appendix**

The Appendix contains a series of references that were created for this plan, or otherwise supportive of the plan, and used through the process.











# THE PLANNING CONTEXT AND PROCESS

CH 01



Photo by Jessica Johnson

# Plan Background

## Purpose of the Plan

This Boone Forks Regional Plan serves as a roadmap and living document for collaboration toward a shared vision within the region. It will work best when considered a guide for the sustaining stakeholders and a resource for residents and visitors. The Iowa Parks Foundation's strategic plan called for these regional initiatives to develop a park system for the 21st century that meets the needs of the people. They recognized one size would not fit all as Iowa grows and diversifies.

The Master Plan's purpose is to establish and implement an ambitious vision of connecting people to their communities and to each other through parks, trails, quality of life assets and healthy-living programming. We consider not just natural resources, but also the built environment; not just economics, but also public health; not just social gathering spaces, but also cultural events. This document reflects these values through established strategic directions and identified priority initiatives.

It should also be noted that this plan is not intended to define land use, operating, or capital improvement plans for any individual entity or facility.

## Plan History

As mentioned above, this plan is rooted in the strategic work of the Iowa Parks Foundation, founded in 2008, initially to support state park enhancements in preparation for the state park system's centennial in 2020. While the 2020 celebrations remain a driving force in the work of the foundation, IPF realized the dearth of resources available to parks at all levels. They recognized we cannot look at parks in isolation. A 21st century park system involves public health, cultural and community vitality, natural resources protection/preservation and economic vitality, as well as recreation. It includes state, county and city parks and trails. Toward that end, as we prepare our state parks to once again lead the nation in outdoor

appreciation and stewardship, IPF sought regions to take a broad-based look at their many assets and create plans to achieve:

- Great places, great experiences
- Connected parks
- Community and cultural vitality
- Healthy people, healthy parks
- A lasting legacy (for parks, trails, culture and community)

The Governor and State Legislature awarded IPF initial dollars to pilot their vision for regional Parks to People plans. Boone, Hamilton and Webster counties applied for a portion of those

resources and secured a \$20K grant to be matched by the region. The region eventually designated an executive team to oversee the plan and funds, facilitated through the Fort Dodge Community Foundation. RDG Planning & Design, due to its experience with the IPF strategic plan and past involvement with county conservation boards, main streets and arts initiatives across the state, was asked to develop this plan. Work got underway with some concentrated effort in late fall 2015 and the planning concluded in spring 2017.





# The Planning Process

## Community-Driven

The process for this plan is rooted in a community involvement effort. The concepts and projects have been developed by those who know and understand the region best—its residents, civic leaders and community organizations. All with a compelling interest in the enhancement or development of additional recreational opportunities had the opportunity to participate.

The public participation process included:

- **Steering Committee**  
The committee met at key points during the planning process to review the progress of the plan and make revisions to the draft concepts.
- **Stakeholder Interviews**  
At the beginning of the planning process, the planning team sent invitations to key stakeholders within the three counties, requesting their participation as representatives of culture, history, tourism and recreation in the region. Small discussion groups were conducted in each county with additional interviews completed as needed. The discussions

introduced participants to the process and asked for initial thoughts and ideas for the plan.

- **Public Open Houses**  
(see next page)

The process, described graphically, also starts with an initial overview of the region's facilities and assets—through a bus tour with the many partners, which was part of the initial application process for the IPF grant—and a series of informative maps. Many of the maps appear in the appendix of this report, and they served as the foundation for some of the proposed initiatives that received consideration.

As maps were being developed, the consulting team met with the stakeholders as outlined above. Emerging themes related to needs and opportunities were derived from that series of conversations. Those themes, coupled with the regional maps, were compiled into a "Discovery Document." Much of the information that appeared in that Discovery Document is included in this plan or the appendix. The Discovery Document served as a tool for

stakeholder workshops. Two were held. The first focused on:

- Enhancing the asset maps
- Understanding the region's needs
- Critiquing early strategic documents
- Establishing criteria for selecting initiatives
- Generating early ideas for desired initiatives

Between workshops, the strategic documents received some refinement and public open houses were held to gain additional insights into the region's needs and opportunities. At this juncture, the stakeholders were then encouraged to develop proposals to submit for review and prioritization at their next workshop. The consulting team also submitted proposals.

The second stakeholder workshop was an intense, successful effort to set priorities. These were further vetted during subsequent steering committee meetings before forming the foundation for this plan.



# Additional Tour: “Ground-Truthing” Ideas

Two of the concepts were further ground-tested by the steering committee through a November 2016 tour. The committee wanted to understand the potential viability of the Kate Shelley Welcome Center and a concept (not proposed here as originally envisioned) to enhance and/or expand the Dragoon Trail. Through these on-site visits, the steering committee agreed the potential for the Kate Shelley Welcome Center site was exceptional—potentially accessible land

close at hand, dramatic vistas and dynamic underpasses. As noted above, this concept has become one of the top-tier interests of the steering committee to pursue further.

Conversely, the Dragoon Trail route did not test well. At some points in the most southern reaches of the tri-county region, the trail—almost exclusively gravel-surfaced—leads to some scenic riverside settings, but the winding, dusty nature of the trail through landscapes,

with minimal views of the river valley, make it a challenging concept to pursue. Some aspects of this trail may make sense to pursue for fat tire/gravel riding (an increasingly popular sport, complementary to adventure recreation like the OHV park), but the steering committee suggests pulling away from a Dragoon Trail focus for this region.

## Public Engagement

In addition to the focus groups and workshops, the tri-county region made a commitment to reach out to the broader public for input,

including a series of open houses and an online questionnaire for the public to make their voices heard.

## Online Questionnaire and Public Open Houses

The online questionnaire was launched to coincide with three public open houses, held in February of 2016 (one per county). Attendance at the open houses ranged from single digits at one venue to well over fifty participants in Boone. Through news releases, online sources and contacts with those involved with the project up to this point, the public was encouraged to participate in both the open houses and the online questionnaire. The tables below summarize the results and demonstrate the high level of interest in trails based on the 99 participants who participated online. The questionnaire appears in the Appendix of this report.

The schedule for public open houses was as follows:

- February 16: Sampson Room at Fuller Hall at 625 Bank Street, Webster City (Hamilton)
- February 17: Greater Fort Dodge Growth Alliance Office at 24 North Ninth Street, Fort Dodge (Webster)
- February 18: Second-Floor Auditorium, Boone City Hall, 923 8th Street, Boone (Boone)

Each open house was held from 5:00–6:30 p.m. and included Q&A and discussion with participants who reviewed materials

highlighting strategy and ideas, and encouraging public recommendations and feedback.



# Emerging Themes

## Background

In preparation for developing vision, mission and strategies to support the Boone Forks Regional Plan, RDG Planning & Design conducted six focus groups/interviews (two per county) in September of 2015, exploring what participants saw as strengths and challenges ahead for the regional effort. Participants represented multiple backgrounds in the

region – including history/heritage sites, various parks and trails, culture and the arts, economic development, tourism, conservation, community development, education, policy-making and public health. This document summarizes those conversations and provides material to use in development of a draft strategic framework.

Quotations from participants that reflect some of the conversation highlights appear in *shaded italics* throughout this section.

**The region faces both opportunities and challenges in working together.** Participants say a solid foundation has taken shape for working together, built on some long-lasting relationships across county boundaries. At the same time, they acknowledge there still is work to be done in removing barriers and creating a region of “no boundaries.” They recognize that when resources are tight, multiple parties at the table can be interpreted as competition, and collaboration can suffer.

*Our people are our biggest asset. They're very supportive and when there is a cause, the people step up – willing to collaborate.*

*Some are not wanting to buy into the whole regional plan due to efforts going on in communities . . . some focus on their own little silo and worry about their own little community.*

*I think part of the problem is an elderly population on fixed income that doesn't see the benefits in the [quality of life and recreation] things we're talking about. They're not going to kayak or ride horses . . . they just don't see the need, and they vote.*

*I don't want everything to be about finances, but when you have counties like Hamilton – it's a classic example. It's dependent on revenue for their existence . . . if you want them to think regionally, and Hamilton County loses revenue, that's an underlying impediment.*

**Nature-based experiences provide exceptional, lasting opportunities and the counties' nature assets appear largely complementary.** Assets abound here, including thousands of acres set aside for public ground that take in exceptional vistas and natural resources. Exceptional forest timber, river valleys, park lands, trails, other landscape set-asides and remnants of native habitat – all combine to give this area, rooted in its own geology, an opportunity for distinctive natural experiences.

Some see nature-based experiences as a powerful tool for economic development, in that they will stand the test of time—unlike the manufacturing sector, for example, where businesses come and go.

*We have a unique geology and geological resources in this area.*

*We have the Central Coast of Iowa – as the Boone meets up with the Des Moines, we have one of the most beautiful and diverse habitats.*

*Underlying this whole thing is the Boone River Protected Watershed Area – the first protected waters in the state.*

*I truly believe when you do economic development and you anchor it with natural resources, it can't be moved away from you. It's anchored here because the natural resources anchor it.*



*The Boone and Des Moines Rivers in particular present some tremendous opportunity out there. If you look at the land cover map in Iowa, one spot shows as having a larger forest resource, and it's this resource right here in the Hamilton, Boone and Webster County river corridors. We have a tremendous opportunity to develop that as an economic development opportunity.*

*I think it does come back to the forest resource – how do you begin to develop a changed view of the place?*

*Individual [outdoor skills] instruction to youth is being overlooked – as a regional center, bringing natural hands-on experience to the environment, to the woodlands, to wildlife – is a real strong plus. . . [The county] dimensions . . . are very complementary in terms of the outdoor recreation.*

*We have Dolliver, Ledges, Brushy Creek and substantial county parks.*

**This opportunity also presents a challenge – adjusting a mind-set that hasn't looked at this region's economic development as nature-based.** Participants say thinking differently about the area's natural resources could require a "paradigm shift."

*Even though in the past we have looked at our natural resources as a minor opportunity, we really have a unique resource here and I think we have the opportunity to begin to have the local economic shift from ag and manufacturing to recreation and tourism.*

**Connections can make all the difference.** They speak to building from the success of the High Trestle Trail and the current Boone River Water Trail. They want more connections, more loops, more options and more experiences along the way. They recognize the expense of paved trails and value alternatives, but they see real potential in loops and links that take advantage of the already vibrant HTT. They also wonder, though – how difficult will it be to convince the High Trestle Trail users to ride North? They also speculate on building around the artful bridges theme as a trail system expands – this could be a distinguishing characteristic for the region.

They recognize, too, the importance of way-finding, signage, interpretation, apps and more in the development of any kind of a trails network – or the whole of the region overall. They also see some potential early wins through connections that don't necessarily mean trails – they're thinking byway potential.

*High Trestle Trail artistically stands as a major feature. Could that be done at other sites along the river that would excite people to not only go to the high trestle but other trestles or bridges along this river?*

*We need to make it fun to get to the next stop.*

*Rather than try to build everything, we have a lot of what needs to be built already here. We would love those pathways – that's a vision: connect and sign the roads we already have.*

*Been up to Minnesota? They have businesses along their trail – a pie place, you not only ride the trail, you have Flat Tire [trailside bar] experiences along the way. You can buy a candle . . .*

*Healthy communities, healthy counties – those trails add to that.*

*We haven't even touched yet on the commuter piece and I think Ames has a high commuter rate.*

### **Culture, heritage, history and the arts also present powerful program opportunities that these participants say are under-used today.**

Respondents have a long list of opportunities they see here. Some examples include:

- Native sons (and daughters) who had a place in history
- A series of under-used, disconnected museums of quality and potential interest
- Many skilled/talented artists and artisans
- A number of interesting historical attributes
- First people's history and culture – unsung and not well understood
- The Dragoons
- Historical buildings/architectural significance
- Scattered cemeteries
- Incoming wineries, breweries
- Community theater

Some participants in these discussions are already attempting to leverage these pieces through tour plans, social media and events planning. "Legacy Learning" has been launched as well. This is an initiative to connect adults to unique, educational opportunities building from the talents/resources of

the region and also creating new energy in the region through invited guests, perhaps reminiscent of the historic Chautauquas.

Additionally, work is already underway to connect these resources (at least in part) through exploration of a folk arts school – particularly emphasizing nature-based arts.

*We pull in regionally known people to teach everything from basket making to flint knapping, to welding garden sculptures.*

*We see a folk arts school really focused in the natural resources as a base.*

*The Dragoon Trail – it's marked and we know very little about the Dragoons.*

*Could there be something like the Dragoon Loop?*

*The American Cream Draft Horse story – a native-bred draft horse – they bred them down at Jewel. . . . It's a rare breed.*

**The towns themselves present significant opportunities for signature recognition and experiences.** In some instances, the communities connect via a circuit and create a distinct experience that way. In other situations, community amenities can stand alone as a draw. Regardless, these communities count and can help set this region apart. At the same time, the communities could use some assistance to stay as vibrant and vital as desired.

*We're branding Hamilton Hometowns – four communities going to brand together and market together to get people to come and shop and open businesses: Ellsworth, Jewel, Stanhope and Stratford. We just had a big party on Saturday and a social media scavenger hunt.*

*What we're working on right now is building up these downtowns.*

**Transportation as recreation – current and historic – also resonates in this region.** From equestrian uses to the Boone & Scenic Valley Railroad, to the largest off-highway vehicle (OHV) park in the state, these features also present one-of-a-kind opportunities to leverage.

*We're about to have the largest OHV park in Iowa, if not the Midwest.*

*Ride a train across a high bridge . . . that's a market we have cornered.*

**Let's not forget agriculture and agri-tourism.** These participants come to realize that what seems day-to-day to us – the production of corn and soybeans – can actually be of interest to visitors. Especially when combined with the local foods movement, “foodie tourists” and incoming wineries and breweries, opportunities pop. Participants say we have potentially underestimated the possibilities of our agriculture heritage – as a draw and as something to celebrate throughout our parks and trails systems. The Farm Progress show is also a significant event that has not yet translated into its full potential for the region – perhaps that factors in here as well.

*In the agri-tourism business, we're hearing more about how it would be a great way to entertain people here – a hops farm and the wineries and the full-out experiences. I just missed the grape stomp, for example.*

*I'm thinking of the lady, her husband's driving the RV up I-35 and she has her camera and she's taking pictures of the wind turbines. They don't see them in New Jersey.*

*If you give people peeks at certain areas, and farming is one of them, [they will want to visit].*

*These are farm counties and we're in the middle of it.*

*It almost lends itself to an ag museum of some type – or historical place that tells the story of agriculture in this region.*

**Branding, partnerships and planning are keys to success.** Nearly every participant at some point acknowledges that this area needs its own distinctive brand – and they struggle to define it. But that's only a struggle because of the wealth of what's here. How do you create a focused brand when land, waterways, history, arts, heritage, communities and much more all have a significant role in this region's future? Because of the many opportunities (and the needs associated with taking advantage of those opportunities), they also recognize the critical need of partnerships – of various configurations.



Finally, they recognize the need to be strategic in the development of this plan. It won't happen all at once and they desire a plan that can build/unfold in a way that leads from one iteration to the next.

*We need public-private partnerships.*

*Our first phase is awareness, letting people know where we are. Starting to get the word out.*

*And then look at the phases, making sure that the phases make sense and that the funding stream comes in when you want to do these things.*

*You have to have a solid plan and have to get a lot of people to get eyes on it and have to do some politicking to get people to buy into it. We need to build testimonials from people . . . see the big picture and know that this is an important part for all three counties.*

*That's why these three counties have come together. Create an experience and brand it. This is us and this is where we are.*











# THE PLAN STRATEGY AND FUNDAMENTALS

CH 02



This strategic framework emerged from focus group discussions, individual interviews, survey results, public meetings and a series of workshops focused on the region's future.





**Vision:**

**Lands and communities fulfilling dreams**

A region renowned for its breathtaking river valleys, high trestle rail lines, working farms and natural lands—connected to historic communities of character and opportunity.

**Mission:**

**People and places work and grow together**

To collaborate across political and geographic boundaries for effective connection and integration of arts, heritage, nature, community and economic vitality.

# Strategic Directions

## Great Spaces, Great Experiences

### The Value of Our Public Lands

1. Pursue a paradigm shift from emphasizing more traditional economic models to advancing appreciation for the region's natural history and the economic gains that come from outdoor recreation and tourism
2. Develop a community of stewards and advocates for the region's exceptional timber lands, river valleys, prairies/savannahs and geologic features
3. Foster an outdoor culture rooted in both agriculture and nature

### The Parks

4. Create unique overnight stay opportunities within the region, particularly enhancing river valley and trail experiences
5. Expand mini-destination experiences within and leading to parks

### Arts/Culture/Heritage

6. Enhance opportunities for using/learning/ experiencing the region's many cultural and heritage amenities, including museum tours, architectural tours, cemetery trails, winery circuits, etc.

### Connections

7. Building from the reputation and history of the region's current water trail and the popularity of the High Trestle Trail, plan and implement a Boone River Trail Spine-and-Spur system, enhanced through day-trip loops and connecting to the region's many communities and amenities

8. Connect parks to parks, parks to trails and parks to communities

9. Expand the water trails network

10. Expand the incorporation of the arts in the trails-and-bridges system (e.g., the next High Trestle Trail Art Bridge)

11. Consider a long-walk foot path system through the Boone River Valley

12. Build from the railroad history to expand one-of-a-kind experience opportunities

13. Leverage the Dragoon history and Lincoln Highway history and the associated byway work underway

### Healthy Parks, Healthy People

14. Promote parks as "outdoor fitness centers" and build park-based outdoor health events (runs, hikes, rides, cross-country, etc.) into other promotional packages and events

15. See #11 above

16. Work with Watershed Management Authorities and other means to achieve improved water resources throughout the region to maintain quality parks, beaches and in-stream experiences

17. Employ a variety of means (volunteerism, conservation corps, citizen scientists, university teams, etc.) to supplement professionals and achieve ongoing natural resources stewardship and progress monitoring

### Community and Cultural Vitality

18. Build on the talents of artists and artisans to integrate culture, art and conservation within communities and parks, and along

trails; expand offerings and reach of "Legacy Learning," a nature-and-folk arts school

19. Establish an agri-tourism component to the region's destination mix

### Lasting Legacy

20. Create a region that serves as an attractor to outside interests—appealing to both Sioux City and Des Moines audiences (at a minimum)—drawing from urban centers both north and south

21. Grow public, base-line support to ensure systems have ongoing maintenance and repair dollars

22. Establish ongoing, private funding strategies using the IPF Grant Match requirement as the means for initiating and/or enhancing critical relationships

23. Establish a mechanism for ongoing collaboration/coordination and shared responsibilities across the region



# Priority Criteria

In order to set priorities during the second stakeholder workshop, we wanted to have general agreement in the room on the criteria used to make those assessments. Discussion at the first workshop touched on this and the second workshop provided a final review of criteria before launching into the priority exercises.

At its most basic level, priorities are often established by one or more of the following more “generic” ways of looking at priorities:

- **Chronological priorities**—Some projects or processes need to be developed early in the plan because other plan elements rely on their completion.
- **Low-hanging fruit**—Some initiatives have impact but are simple to execute. Sometimes this occurs due to low-to-no cost, current political will, available resources, and/or technological ease of execution.
- **Big impact**—Some efforts may take a long time to accomplish, either due to their cost or other challenges, but they will likely have a significant impact.
- **Personal passion/evident leadership**—Some projects have dedicated champions whose leadership and commitment will likely provide sufficient follow-through to achieve the desired result for the region.

Criteria used to assess proposals for the Boone Forks Region included:

## Regional impact

Viable projects address the whole of the region directly (as do many of the touring initiatives, for example) or are easily replicable throughout the region.

## Promotes regional culture and historical significance

The heritage features within this region are rich and unsung, not to mention the historians, artists and artisans finding homes in the area and looking to join forces for regional impact. These are among the factors considered here.

## Educational

While educational features can certainly serve as tourism attractors, it is just as important here to identify the means to help residents understand the region’s many outstanding assets.

## Sustainable

With the natural resources of the region poised to support the livelihoods of many and promising a way to promote tourism and economic development, this factor is intended to ensure those resources maintain their value through restoration or preservation and protection.

## Marketable

The intent is to leverage the region’s location as a destination along the nationally significant Lincoln Highway; as a location with exceptional agricultural, natural and historical resources; and the region immediately up-river from the world-renowned High Trestle Trail. This factor gets to the recognition of the tourism (external and internal) potential of the region.

## Community buy-in, public support, volunteerism

This region shouldn’t pursue efforts that do not have community support. We won’t be successful if residents aren’t willing to engage.

## Access to resources/funding

Assessment of initiatives includes likely access to resources to make a project happen.

## Positively impacts diverse users

This reflects the increasing diversity of the region and the capacity for successful tourism with improved understanding of the needs of diverse audiences.

## Enhances current facilities and programs

Some of the most cost-effective and efficient initiatives build from an existing baseline.

## Building the Regional Collaborative

A broad range of early partners have helped drive this regional collaborative with Webster County Conservation Board, Hamilton County Conservation Board and the Boone Chamber of Commerce providing much of the initial push with support from the Fort Dodge Community Foundation. The Boone County Conservation Board and Prairie Rivers of Iowa have joined the executive team as this initiative continues.

Throughout the process, state parks have been involved with county parks, regional planning groups, educational institutions, the Iowa Arboretum and many others.

Some challenges and opportunities are too big to take on alone. This region acknowledged that and began working collaboratively to tackle issues prior to this planning process. Working regionally to identify needs and priorities creates efficiencies, eliminates redundancies and ties together local goals and projects. The Parks to People initiative builds on existing processes, priorities and public input.

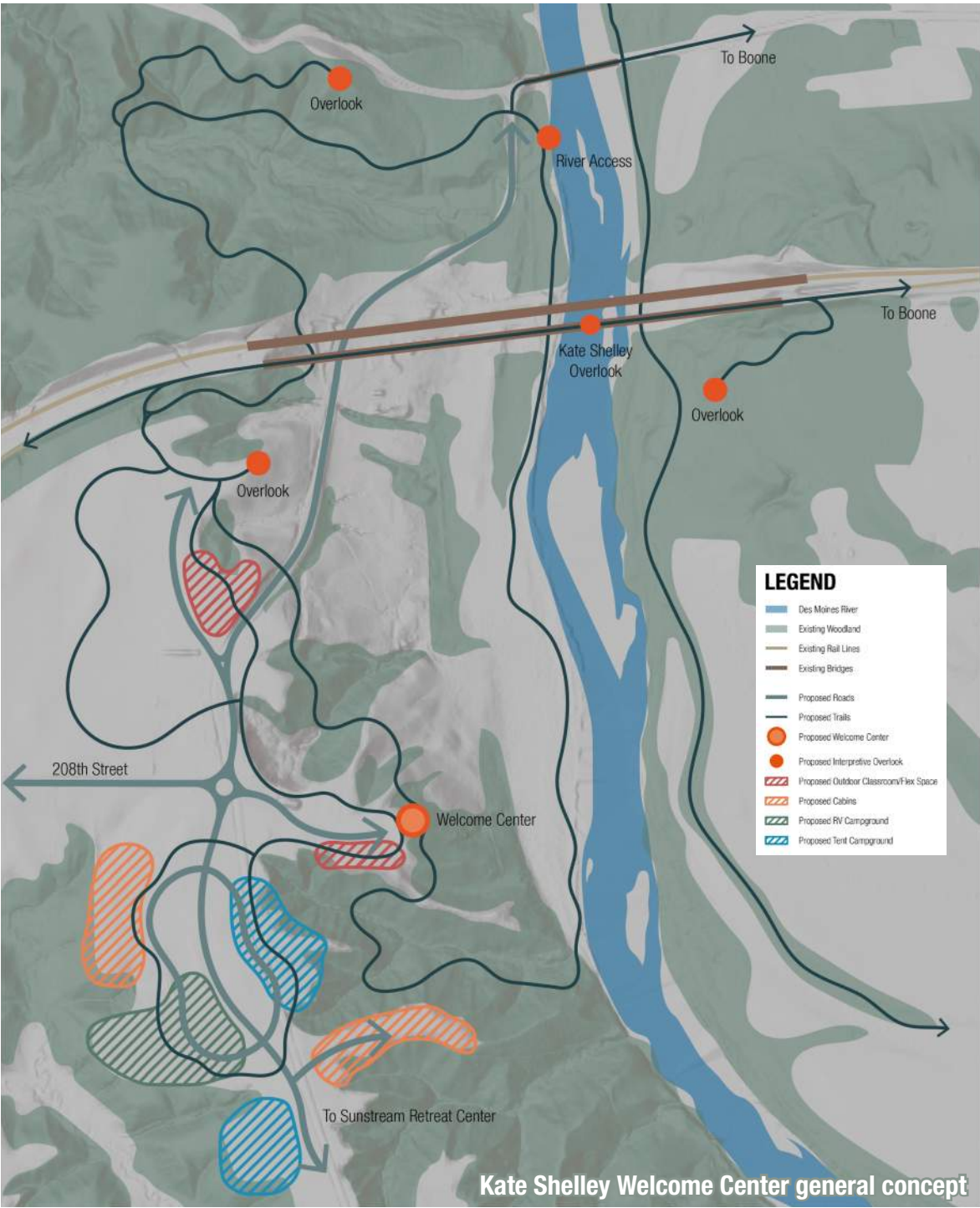


# The Plan/Priority Initiatives

The priority initiatives that appear here were selected as the heart of the Master Plan. Most of these initiatives have potential for early successes but substantial effort is required over time to achieve some of the

most meaningful projects on this list. These initiatives come to the fore because of the close match to strategic directions and criteria. Each of the initiatives in this section was developed as a regional effort consisting of

existing and planned local projects, connectors, upgrades to current facilities and assets, and major projects needed to meet the region's overarching goals.



### **The Kate Shelley Welcome Center: Home of the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway and Legacy Learning**

The Lincoln Highway shifted the nation from train to car culture with its completion in 1913. Both histories converge in this region of Iowa. As the first transcontinental highway to span 13 states and take travelers from New York to San Francisco, the “byway” version of this historic highway can once again do the same, but travelers need a place on the map to land—a place with a history as rich as the highway itself: The Kate Shelley Bridge.

The concept is to create a visitor/welcome campus—complete with diverse opportunities for overnight stay—with the repurposed Kate Shelley Bridge as its interpretive focal point. The Kate Shelley Welcome Center provides an unmatched vantage point of the past, present and future. Both metaphorical and physically dramatic, it provides exceptional potential to “pull” byway visitors into the region and encourage their further exploration and stay.

This vision includes using the Kate Shelley Welcome Center as a home campus for a re-branded and expanded Legacy Learning initiative: a nature-and-folk arts school already underway in the region. (Legacy Learning

is discussed in greater detail further in this document.) This central campus would act as a hub for the area’s programming and activity, ensuring tourists and local residents continually activate this important space.

Land ownership near the bridge, links between the trail and the highway, and places and spaces for overnight stay (from primitive, to “glamping,” to RV camping and beyond) must all be explored for this initiative to advance. But this concept leverages a prime tourism route while protecting landscape and history of the region. When coupled with “Quirky Tours,” this likely creates a national draw for the region.

## **The Lincoln Highway**

Dedicated in 1913, the Lincoln Highway was America’s first transcontinental road. Although the Transcontinental Railroad had been completed 44 years earlier, there was only a patchwork of mostly rural, dirt roads for vehicles. But as automobile production increased dramatically in the early 1900s, the need for infrastructure development became clear.

At the time, road-building was more of a local charge and Congress wasn’t prepared to fund it federally. In 1912 a young entrepreneur named Carl Fisher, who manufactured headlights, proposed a privately funded interstate road and began soliciting donations. The Lincoln Highway—originally called “The Coast-to-Coast Rock Highway” because “Lincoln Highway” had been reserved for another project, which collapsed—was underway.

The original route connected New York City to San Francisco, spanning 3,400 miles and 13 states, and traces portions of several historic roads, including a 1675 Dutch colonial road, the Mormon Trail, a Pony Express route and Donner Pass. It traverses Iowa roughly along what is now Highway 30 from Council Bluffs to Clinton.

The Lincoln Highway Association advocated cross-country trips, which would take 20 to 30 days and would be “something of a sporting proposition.” The route breathed life into small towns along its path and by 1925 federal and state governments developed the numbered U.S. Highway System, then the Interstate Highway System 30 years later.

Iowa’s section of the Lincoln Highway, the Heritage Byway, crosses 13 counties and features sites of archaeological, cultural, scenic, recreational, natural and/or historic significance. The longest of Iowa’s byways, 460 miles, the Heritage Byway includes loops through landmarks, vistas and communities.



**Tama, Iowa**

Photo by Michael Kelly



**The Kate Shelley High Bridge**

### Vistas/views

In general terms, the proposed Kate Shelley Welcome Center and Campus proposed here would take full advantage of the 200' vertical drop from the valley's edge to the river surface below.

### Unique stay

The south side of the campus could provide a mix of overnight stay options (with amazing views!)—from RV, tent camping and cabins to a mix of historical pull-on campers (think Airstreams or older). The historical campers would mark the campus' relationship to the Lincoln Highway and create an authentic one-of-a-kind destination.

### Learning and connections

The diagram imagines sites supportive to events and Legacy Learning—pottery kilns, interactive classroom space and flexible indoor-outdoor venues. The campus would include a network of trails—a mix of fully accessible and harder-to-manuever stretches (where full access is not feasible but adventurers would want to wander).

### History

Ongoing interpretation would take place here, allowing visitors to interact with the site's converging histories: Kate Shelley's heroism, Iowa's transportation leadership (rail and highway), as well as an introduction to the history of the wider Boone Forks Region.

### Phasing

The diagram envisions phases of implementation, allowing for expansion over time.

## LET'S GET STARTED!

### Early Champions for the Kate Shelley Welcome Center:

- Prairie Rivers of Iowa
- Boone County Chamber of Commerce

Prairie Rivers of Iowa's work on the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway and the Boone Chamber's early exploration into the feasibility of securing the Kate Shelley Bridge make them natural partners to pursue this initiative. Additional partners to contact in the earliest phases of this work include land owners in the vicinity (private property owners, Sunstream Recreation Center, railroad, DOT, etc.).

## EARLY ACTION STEPS

- Pursue the potential for protecting the Kate Shelley Bridge (early exploration underway) including agreement in principle to secure the bridge if/when possible
- Identify and convene a staffed Project Committee with leadership from Prairie Rivers of Iowa for securing resources and advancing planning
- Secure resources to execute a feasibility study for this project that would include:
  - Discussions with landowners, decision-makers and a broad range of stakeholders
  - Further conceptual development
  - Exploring the possibility of a regional approach to development and operations
  - Funding and marketing feasibility
  - Options for costs, operations and phasing



## The Kate Shelley Bridge

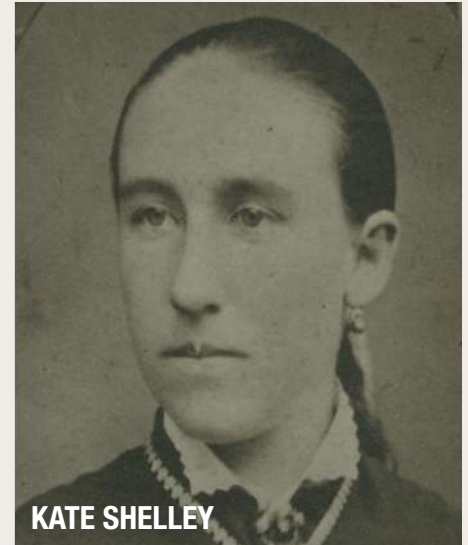
Kate Shelley, an Irish immigrant, was 17 years old when a fierce thunderstorm blew through central Iowa on July 6, 1881. The storm flooded Honey Creek, near her family farm, which was already swelled by recent heavy rains. At 11pm a pusher train, sent to inspect the Honey Creek Bridge, crashed into the creek when the bridge collapsed underneath, spilling four crewmen into the water.

Kate heard the crash and realized a passenger train was en route to the fallen bridge at midnight. She donned a jacket and a straw hat, grabbed a lantern and raced to cross the Des Moines River bridge to warn the station agent. The storm raged around her, blowing out her lantern, so she navigated by lightning. The bridge consisted only of rails and ties—including large gaps to discourage

people from walking—so Kate had to crawl across the long, high bridge. She finally felt solid ground and ran down the tracks to alert the railroad.

After explaining what had happened, Kate passed out (not before someone said, “the girl is crazy”). But the station agent recognized her and was able to stop the train, which was carrying 200 passengers. Kate accompanied the rescue party on a train to Honey Creek; rescuers saved two of the four crewmen.

Kate’s bravery brought her international acclaim. The passengers, the railroad and the State of Iowa all collected hundreds of dollars as a reward. Kate was given medals from school children, a gold watch from the Order of Railway Conductors and a lifetime pass from the Chicago and North Western Railroad.



The Kate Shelley High Bridge was constructed in 1901—the first bridge in the country named for a woman.

### Hike, Bike and Paddle: Trestles, Trails and Waterways

Participants in the online questionnaire named a bike trails network their number-one choice for the region. This may, in part, be inspired by the exceptional success of the High Trestle Trail at the southernmost tip of Boone County. This facility draws an estimated 20,000 visitors monthly to the stretch between Madrid and



Woodward, which houses the massive High Trestle Trail Bridge, during the cycling season (May–October) and associated economic development. The goal here, in part, is to build on that success, drawing visitors north into the region while at the same time creating experiences of value for those who already live here.

This initiative will provide wide-ranging experiences—appealing to the most adventurous and most contemplative users of the parks-trails system at once. This proposal creates a user-directed network of easy-to-access hubs for equipment, information and/or outfitters. This effort builds not just from the High Trestle Trail audience, but from the growing regional water trails network. At build-out, this system will include a mix of soft, gravel and paved trails to complement the water trails network plus tools to rent and use this multi-modal system—cycles, paddles, canoes and life vests, for example.

### The basis: water trails

The water trails network here has potential to work as its own signature destination but it is included as the foundation for this network due to its significant advancement thus far. The region continues to plan, build out and connect a land trails network, while the water trails system here is one of the more complete systems in the state. Ongoing work to maintain (or improve) water quality and flood mitigation will be part of the water trails’ continued success, coupled with dam removal and riverfront development. Communities in the region are already working on these fronts.

### Hub-by-hub approach

As envisioned, each hub would offer visitors access to hike, bike or paddle without the need for premeditated outfitting. Most hubs would include opportunities to rent a bicycle or canoe on the spot, as well as providing necessary hiking/adventuring accommodation such as picnic tables, restrooms and drinking water.

This would allow a visitor to, for example, rent a bike and cycle upriver to the next hub, then pick up a canoe and paddle back to the point of origin.

The network hub points will need detailed assessment to make sure services are not duplicative or proposed in locations prone to flooding. In some instances, hub points may consist simply of durable signage pointing users to nearby pre-existing services.

### Cost-effective land trails

The network also works to cost-effectively create trail connections, make loops and take advantage of new adventures in cycling (e.g., fat tire/gravel cycling). Many of the connecting pieces in this network are linked by taking advantage of low-use county roads, paved shoulders, gravel and some limited use of new soft trails for more “immersion-in-nature” experiences.

### Livery needed

This work relies particularly on effective public-private partnerships to promote outfitter services/livery and capture economic development opportunities from the network. On the one hand, it sounds a bit confusing to develop a system that could work without a livery service, but this network will need ongoing management and back-up services, and may be best suited to private livery. Perhaps the best way to state it is thus: to create an effective on-demand recreation experience, a dedicated livery is needed behind the scenes to ensure resources (both recreational equipment and infrastructure) are properly maintained and distributed. Robust livery services will also help create the demand for the system and vice versa—introduction to short (three-mile or less) trips in urban areas should inspire longer, more challenging, and/or “curated” adventures best provided through a private livery service.

### Technology improvements

Technology will also play an important role here. Not only can technology inform and guide a user, but the current livery service in the region has abandoned sites for service due to a lack of reliable cellular phone network coverage. Livery needs internet/cell connections at key locations for user communications and pick-up notification. This would also be an important safety back-up to this system. This plan recommends securing technology partners to aid in plugging this system hole.

### The system

Key existing anchor points for this initiative include: The Fort Museum (Fort Dodge); Dolliver and Ledges State Parks; Brushy Creek Recreational Area; Deer Creek; Kennedy Park; communities of the region; Tunnel Mill; Briggs Woods; Bell's Mill Park; Saylorville Wildlife Area; Sportsman's Park; High Trestle Trail Bridge/Trail; and Swede Point Park.

### Rails with/to trails

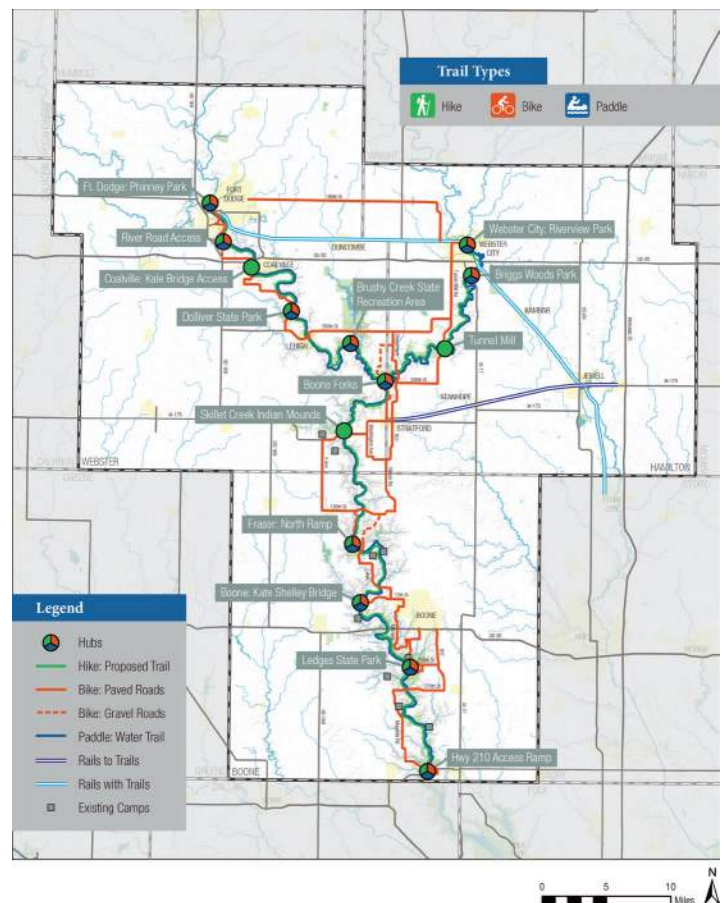
The network provides 93 miles of north-south water trail on its western leg, 83 water miles on its eastern leg; however, east-west trail links are not as easy. One solution: develop a network of rails-to-trails and rails-with-trails connections. For the uninitiated, rails with trails is exactly as it sounds: trails placed in the right-of-way along active rail lines. These are typically found on lower-volume rail

corridors; however, safety buffers allow higher-volume options as well.

One opportunity for a rails-with-trails route is the 20-mile corridor linking Fort Dodge to Duncombe to Webster City. This east-west trail link could serve as a path to celebrate Iowa's agricultural and railroad heritage with strategically spaced oases for the user along the way.

### Introductory segments

Important pieces of this proposal are the three-mile paddling/hiking loops proposed in or near urban centers to provide short-duration excursions for those pressed for time, for easy family outings and as introductory experiences for novices to the outdoors. Options for short excursions in both Fort Dodge and Webster City have been suggested as part of this plan.





# LET'S GET STARTED!

Early Champions for Hike, Bike and Paddle:

- Webster County Conservation Board (WCCB)
- National Park Service

Webster County Conservation Board is involved with the Fort Dodge riverfront project, water trails improvements, new trail links and expansion of its OHV park (a potential key destination for this network). This makes WCCB a good fit for helping a larger team work cooperatively on this project.

# EARLY ACTION STEPS

The early work ahead includes:

- Convene a staffed coordinating committee, potentially including decision-makers, multi-use trail enthusiasts, regional/community leaders, livery/outfitter interests, tourism professionals, technology partners and outdoor skills-building educators
- Secure resources for and/or assign a task force to complete a more detailed network study, including:
  - Existing bike-share and canoe-share programs
  - Organizational structure for network
  - Regional signage convention (see branding), recognizing other signage systems already in play
  - Additional research in self-directed equipment/facility rental/use
  - Hub-by-hub verification of viability/needs
  - Funding and phasing approach
- Ongoing operations, maintenance, revenue-generation strategies
- Promotional/marketing requirements
- Livery/private sector role(s)

# SUSTAINING THIS INITIATIVE

Ongoing work here includes:

- Enhance/establish:
  - Gateways
  - Improved/expanded access points
  - Interpretation
  - Off-trail adventures (River Valley scenic side-trips, e.g.)
  - Community/business/cultural draws/packages
  - Unique overnight experiences
  - Multi-night stays
- Work to continue meeting water trails network needs
- Partner with watershed management authorities, watershed advisory councils and others for water quality/quantity improvements
- Continue to flesh out more detailed trails plans on a multi-county basis



## Legacy Learning Revisited: Hands-on Arts, History and Nature

Legacy Learning, originally an educational effort of Hamilton County Conservation and a dedicated team of exceptional volunteers, already has established a wonderful track record of attracting notice within the region and creating memorable experiences. The power of the concept of linking nature, history and the arts through the work of artists, artisans, makers, historians and naturalists cannot be oversold. Participants gain new meaning in their lives and appear more than willing to come back for more.

At the same time, the audience has likely been a bit limited compared to its potential—it was originally targeted to adults (hence the “legacy” moniker) and has no real home. Still, even without a physical center, there is a certain amount of momentum that should be the foundation for an exciting future on behalf of this program and the region. In partnership with the Board of Directors that has already put a great deal of investment in play here, the plan hopes to support expanding this program’s physical reach and multi-generational appeal.

This plan recommends partnering for improved resources (including grants, fundraising and revenue generation from services), re-branding, securing a wrapped/branded van for service delivery, and enhancing physical sites where this van will “land.”

Sites to enhance for Legacy Learning mobile-based services include:

### Webster County

- Camp Wanoki
- Dolliver State Park
- Fort Museum
- Fort Dodge Riverfront
- Ann Smeltzer Learning Farm

### Hamilton County

- Briggs Woods Park/Cabins



### Boone County

- Iowa Arboretum
- Proposed Kate Shelley Welcome Center

Program expansion could target younger audiences and families and foster new/improved partnerships with arts/culture, history and conservation groups of the region. More adventure-related programming might include:

- Guided river floats (e.g., from Fort Dodge to Camp Wanoki)
- Outdoor skills-building
- Shooting sports (a natural for Brushy Creek State Recreation Area)
- Paddling lessons/skills-building (again, a good fit for Brushy Creek)

Outdoor art classes and women-in-agriculture forums are additional ideas that have surfaced through this planning process.

## LET'S GET STARTED!

or, more accurately...

## LET'S KEEP GOING!

### Early Champion for Legacy Learning:

- Hamilton County’s Legacy Learning Organization

In partnership with the Board of Directors, Hamilton County Conservation Board (HCCB) helped launch Legacy Learning and is poised to continue working with that board for version 2.0. Hamilton County Conservation and the Board have committed to keeping Legacy Learning going while hoping to expand, re-brand and re-invigorate the effort.



# EARLY ACTION STEPS

The early work ahead includes:

- Board identify the potential for programming with broad-based/ family and/or youth/young adult appeal
- Establish and promote new program(s) as early as possible (perhaps Summer or Fall 2017)
- Participate in a branding effort to expand the reach of Legacy Learning
- Revise Legacy Learning branding, outreach and program needs accordingly
- In partnership with HCCB, Prairie Rivers of Iowa and other members of this regional planning team, secure additional grants/resources to enhance Legacy Learning sites identified in each county for ease-of-use and promotion
- Consider securing resources for a mobile van to support programming and outreach
- Participate in Kate Shelley Welcome Center planning (aid in securing this campus as future home base for Legacy Learning)
- Expand/enhance social media presence
- In partnership with this regional planning team, advance the concept of resources for part-/ full-time staff support for Legacy Learning



## Protect the Source: Boone Forks and beyond

A map of the dramatic river valleys through these counties can fool a person. Typically, a swath of greenspace on an Iowa map implies publicly held lands, typically preserved as park, greenway, prairie or woodland. That occurs in this region—the Saylorville Wildlife Management Area and the many state, county and local parks are prime examples. But many of these greenspaces are private lands. They have been successfully stewarded over the years by church groups, scout camps and the YMCA. They have been exceptional private partners in supporting these lands. But as these organizations work to maintain their services in ever-tightening financial times, the immediate financial rewards of development place these lands at risk.

For this plan to succeed, the natural resources values of the entirety of these river valleys and associated tree canopies deserve some protection—through conservation easements, wildlife management or park designations, public ownership, etc. Any number of tools and partnerships can be employed to help protect these lands. It is imperative this plan address identifying land pieces at particular risk and/or of highest value and work to put reasonable protection mechanisms in place.



## LET'S GET STARTED!

Early Champion for Protect the Source:

- Boone, Hamilton and Webster County Conservation Boards

Natural partners for the CCBs of the region include the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Prairie Rivers of Iowa, the many church/private groups and camps within these pristine valleys, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Audubon Society, and federal agencies working in the region, including U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and possibly the National Park Service.

## EARLY ACTION STEPS

The early work ahead includes:

- The three CCBs meet with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation to more fully understand work underway to preserve/protect elements of this landscape
- Gather enhanced/appropriate mapping tools as a means for identifying resources at greatest risk (each county's GIS expertise can be employed here)
- Convene a larger group of potential partners identified above, facilitate with mapping tools to begin to set criteria and prioritize sites for protection
- Strategize for developing appropriate piece-by-piece approaches, including protection and education tools needed for success
- Attempt to protect at least one priority piece by Spring 2018 (this goal is to serve as a measure for the needed continued planning outlined above)

## SUSTAINING THIS INITIATIVE

We see the work above as needing a near-continuous loop—an annual assessment of priorities for land protection is needed (at a minimum) and ongoing work to fund those protections is also needed. Funding sources for land protection are addressed in greater detail in the “Lasting Legacy” section of this report.



## Quirky Wonders: Tours and itineraries tailored to your curiosity

This concept, also potentially of interest to Iowa Parks Foundation and/or other regions, is modeled after the Canadian Board of Tourism's "Explorer Quotient" initiative: go online, answer a few questions about yourself, and the system presents you with a series of options that will address your personal motivation for visiting the region. Intrigued by ghosts and history? The cemetery tour is for you. Inspired by your spirit of adventure? You'll want to hike, bike and paddle with a side-trip to Briggs Woods. This proposal starts small—establishing a mix of itineraries and tour options—then grows as the technology catches up with the concept. The work ahead includes:

- Research on the app (in partnership with IPF and the Grant Woods Loop)
- Establishing a Tour and Itinerary Task Force to set the stage by advancing the Quirky Tours itineraries developed through this planning process



## LET'S GET STARTED!

### Early Champions for Quirky Wonders:

- Hamilton Hometowns Director Sarah Thompson
- Boone, Hamilton and Webster County Convention and Visitors Bureaus—Tourism Divisions

Additional partners include the for-profit and non-profit partners listed as potential tour destinations on the current Quirky Tours itineraries – along with partners for future tour summaries. Additionally, both Iowa Parks Foundation and other regions have keen interest in advancing the concept of appealing to visitors by virtue of their personal motivations.

A handful of Quirky Tours are essentially ready to launch because of this planning process. These tools can serve as an initial testing ground for how the "low-tech" version of motivation-based tourism can work to serve a region. These tools will likely also play a role in any more advanced version of this initiative.

## EARLY ACTION STEPS

### The early work ahead includes:

- Convene the region's tourism groups and some of the "destination partners" to form an active task force
- Walk through the existing Quirky Tours tools for feedback and first-wave expansion and/or edits
- In partnership with the branding exercise below, further fine-tune the current package of Quirky Tours
- Include electronically accessible versions of the tours (via websites and social media)
- Develop and execute a marketing/promotion plan for Quirky Tours
- Prepare methods of measuring use and feedback for continuous improvement

## SUSTAINING THIS EFFORT

While a task force may well be involved in the initial launch of Quirky Tours, a more permanent overseeing group (either through the CVBs or other key stakeholders) will be required. This mechanism will likely be most accurately identified through the marketing plan for the region.

At the same time, either the task force or the more permanent home (or both) should connect as early as possible to other partners interested in this motivations-based tourism/marketing and develop long term partnerships for lasting growth and ongoing use of best practices.

## Brand and Market: Unite to tell the region's story

Many of the conversations leading to this plan speak to the region as a best-kept secret. Participants know the need to name/brand and promote the many assets already in place as well as those identified through this planning effort. Naming this region, giving it a memorable brand and promoting the many benefits associated with that brand is a first and ongoing step for success.

The region is in a particularly good spot for launching a branding/marketing effort. The high-profile Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway and the University of Iowa's involvement in the region make bringing partners to the table for advancing branding and marketing a natural outgrowth of this plan and work already underway in the region.

This is also an essential piece of the work, as many of the partners and funders recognize this as a critical tool for the overall efficiency and effectiveness of this regional work. Regional

marketing can generate cost savings and synergisms from project to project, community to community, and county to county.

## LET'S GET STARTED!

### Early Champions for Brand and Market:

- University of Iowa
- Prairie Rivers of Iowa

## EARLY ACTION STEPS

The early work ahead includes:

- Use the Quirky Tours work to launch an early-win regional branding product.
- Follow the University of Iowa branding/marketing processes but this work should likely include convening Convention and Visitors Bureau, Chamber representatives and similar partners involved with marketing and promoting the region.
- A marketing and branding plan should be deliverable in year one of this plan.

## SUSTAINING THIS INITIATIVE

At the outset, work with the University of Iowa to establish mechanisms that will allow for ongoing regional marketing and assessment. Silos and Smokestacks might serve as a statewide model for the regional concept in play here.





Quirky Tours







# 100 YEARS, 100 WAYS TO CELEBRATE IOWA STATE PARKS

## HOW WILL YOU CELEBRATE?



The Iowa Parks Foundation was established in part to support the 100th anniversary celebration of Iowa's State Parks system. These regional plans address pathways for the region to take part in those 2020 celebrations. In the case of this region, a specific proposal for the anniversary has not yet been identified, but this plan's oversight committee will develop more specifics over the course of the next year. Meanwhile, the following list demonstrates a century's worth of ideas to use as starting points for that planning. This list was provided by the CELEBRATING ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE.

The objectives of Iowa's State Park Centennial Celebration are simple.

- Ensure all Iowans know 2020 is the 100th anniversary of Iowa's State Parks*
- Increase public awareness and value of state parks*
- Encourage use of parks for good physical and mental health*
- Create state park events and stewardship opportunities prior to 2020*
- Propel Iowa State Parks into the next 100 years with 2020 celebrations*

# 100 WAYS TO CELEBRATE

## Arts

- State Park Centennial print
- Coloring books for children and adults
- Coffee Table book
- Theatrical and performances at various state parks by major entertainers and local talent
- Impersonators playing the roles of early state parks leaders such as Louis Pammel, Ding Darling, Margo Frankel, etc.
- Artist in residence program at State Parks arts including theater, poetry, storytelling, painting, music
- Poster, photo, selfie, video, art, writing, and storytelling contests with parks as the subject; award major prizes; option to display winners at the State Fair

## Beautification/Environmental

- Sponsor cleanup crew similar to AmeriCorps, to clean up state parks in 2019
- Supply paint for picnic tables, signs, buildings, etc.
- State Parks paint day including picnic tables and buildings
- Provide or plant trees, shrubs, flowers and do landscaping
- Organize park cleanup projects
- Adopt a state park

## Capital Improvements

- Lodges
- Cabins
- Shower buildings
- Shelter buildings
- Restrooms
- Playgrounds
- Kiosks including campground registration kiosks
- Repair and enhance trails in parks
- Gravel camping pads
- Boat docks

## Challenges

- Prizes for the people with the highest number of visits, number of parks visited, or number of camping nights
- Prizes everyone who visits every state park in Iowa during 2020
- Private sponsor to hide very high value item (or a symbol of that item) in a state park for visitors to find
- Daily, weekly and monthly drawing for park visitor of the day at each park
- Passports with brief description of each park; stamps to mark which parks have been visited

## Events in State Parks

- Food events and/or cook-offs
- Organize and lead tours in the park
- State park birthday parties with birthday cake
- Something on New Year's Eve Day 2020 to conclude the yearlong celebration
- Every park has a special event has an event sometime during the year; type of event depends on the park and resources in the park, Friends Group, relationship with nearby communities

## Faith and Local Communities

- Explore the spiritual nature of state parks, churches in the woods
- At least one church service in each state park
- Floats in community celebrations parades
- Booths at County Fairs







## Fishing

- Multigenerational fishing contests
- Cops and Bobbers: Law enforcement officers take youth fishing, especially high-risk youth
- Other civic clubs take youth fishing for a day: Lions, Rotary, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, etc.

- Nursing homes and adult day care. Park tours, picnics, fishing tournaments
- History project for high school students researching state park history
- Define a program to bring youth to the parks
- Volunteer interpreters for youth, adults and seniors

## Historical/Restoration

- Documentary on State Parks:
  - ♦ Recognizing history of state parks
  - ♦ 1st National Conference on State Parks held in Des Moines
  - ♦ Recognize Iowa's leadership role in the state park movement nationally in the early 1900s
- CCC - Civilian Conservation Corps story. Perhaps set up a replica of a CCC camp
- Highlights of today's state parks.
- Collect each park's history including photos, stories, memorabilia, etc.

## Other Items of Interest

- Fireworks, perhaps on New Year's Eve 2020 at a major state park
- Create a logo and slogan
- Make a commemorative coin or other collectable
- State Fair booth/display in 2020 and the years leading up to the centennial
- Recognize celebration on a food and/or beverage container: Local beers, American Popcorn, Palmer Candy Co. in Sioux City, Candy Company in Creston

## Intergenerational Projects

- Bring together a youth congress to get their opinions of what parks should be in the future
- Mentoring program for elders bringing youth to the State Parks
- State Parks Scholarship Program
- Get schools involved
- Classroom in the park. Schools have class in a park
- Get private clubs and organizations of all types involved including auto clubs, RV travel clubs, flying clubs, geocache, earth-cache, gardening, hiking, birders, fishing, scouts, 4-H, etc.
- Involve local and state dignitaries
- Get youth involved in tree planting and other hands-on projects





## Recognition

- Iowa State Park Hero's Program with the introduction of the first "Major John F. Lacy" Award
- Identify and recognize the longest standing family reunion located in a state park
- Feature volunteer projects and outstanding individual or group volunteers throughout the year
- Volunteer of the week
- New project ceremonies and ribbon cuttings
- Help provide prizes for contests and challenges

## Technology

- Website for all events going on in parks and websites for local parks
- Photo contest using Pinterest or Facebook
- Geocaching
- Park video competition
- Online map of all state parks in Iowa

## Tours

- Traveling exhibit of state park history
- Feature a State Park tour by commercial bus line
- Winnebago and/or RV dealer to sponsor a "wrapped" RV that travels throughout the state during the year
- Vintage car tours of selected state parks
- Flyovers of state parks by flying clubs
- Bike, horseback or motorcycle tours

## Wellness/Health

- Bike ride to several state parks using Angela's map
- Runs, triathlons and walks
- First Day Hikes in state parks on Jan 1, 2020
- Bike rides in parks
- Kayak and canoe races



## Setting a Course for the Next 100 Years

- Creation of a New State Park -- Blood Run State Park
  - ◆ Native American site inhabited for about 300 years between 1300 to 1600 A.D.
  - ◆ Proposed to be a joint state park with South Dakota which has already its side as a state park
  - ◆ South Dakota has named their side Good Earth State Park.
- Iowa to host national parks and state parks symposium - "Future of Parks in the Nation"
- Iowa to host worldwide parks symposium - "Future of Parks in the World"

## State Agencies

- *Iowa Outdoors* magazine series of articles throughout 2020
- DNR staff presentations mention State Parks Centennial
- State Park Centennial on DNR stationary (possible all state government stationary) and email formats, including DNR letterhead featuring State Parks Centennial
- Collect stories from park employees, past and present
- Fisheries partner with fishing contests
- Wildlife partner with bird watching
- Cabin and campsite giveaways throughout the year
- Governor makes a declaration with resolutions
- Proclamations with a pledge for cities, counties and state governments
- Legislative efforts and special recognitions
- State Parks 2020 day or week at the Capitol. Set up area at the Capitol to display photos, videos, handouts, etc. Find a sponsor for each day to provide food and drinks
- Picnics in the parks. Schedule visits to parks by public officials. Governor, Lt. Governor, legislators and local officials
- Picnic at the Capitol grounds
- Iowa 2020 license plate design and state highway map
- Postage stamp









# FACILITATING SUCCESS

Facilitating Success

CH 03





To help ensure the success of this plan, we need to understand what the plan needs to move forward. At the same time, we need to know how this plan benefits the region if we intend to secure resources to help the plan become reality. We further need funding strategies, the means to monitor plan progress and an organizational approach for the plan. These are the elements addressed in this important chapter.



Photo by Jessica Johnson



# Plan Benefits

## Strategic/Vision

The accompanying table highlights the original Parks to People Statewide Plan Strategic Directions and where these regional initiatives deliver on that statewide plan.

A case can be made that each of these initiatives delivers across the board; but, conservatively, the mix of initiatives provides a full strategic complement.



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS—PLAN INITIATIVES					
Strategic Direction	Great Spaces, Great Experiences	Connected Parks, People & Pathways	Healthy Parks, Healthy People	Community & Cultural Vitality	Lasting Legacy
Kate Shelley Welcome Center	•	•		•	
Hike, Bike and Paddle	•	•	•		
Legacy Learning Revisited	•	•		•	•
Protect the Source	•		•		•
Quirky Tours	•	•		•	
Regional Branding and Marketing		•		•	•

## Health Benefits

Health benefits through a plan like this are many-fold. Data shows a simple ten-minute walk in the woods enhances immune systems. The fact that mental/emotional health benefits stem from exposure to natural settings has also been documented. Similarly, increases in physical activity link to reduced medical expenses that stem from sedentary lifestyles.

The Surgeon General recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate activity a week, and that children and adolescents are active for at least 50 minutes every day (Surgeon General, 2015). The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports only 20% of adults meet the physical activity guidelines. While physical activity and obesity rates rise, so do the economic impacts of poor health. **The CDC estimates a lack of physical activity costs \$615 per person per year in direct medical expenses.**

The following table shows the 2021 population of the tri-county region that will receive increased opportunities for physical activity, based on 1/8 and 1/4 mile access to an expanded trails network. Using the CDC's \$615 annual cost estimate, we calculate the potential medical cost benefits of exposure to the proposed trails network highlighted in this plan.

POTENTIAL MEDICAL SAVINGS FROM POPULATION WITH NEW EXPOSURE TO <u>RAILS-TO-TRAILS</u>		
Pct.	1/4 Mile Savings (population: 4,450)	1/8 Mile Savings (population: 1,659)
10%	\$279,210	\$102,090
20%	\$558,420	\$204,057
30%	\$837,630	\$306,085
40%	\$1,116,840	\$408,114
50%	\$1,396,050	\$510,142

Based on 2021 population projections

*Note: Table indicates savings depending on percentage of population using the new access opportunity*

POTENTIAL MEDICAL SAVINGS FROM POPULATION WITH NEW EXPOSURE TO <u>TRAILS</u>		
Pct.	1/4 Mile Savings (population: 11,173)	1/8 Mile Savings (population: 6,094)
10%	\$687,139	\$374,781
20%	\$1,374,279	\$749,562
30%	\$2,061,418	\$1,124,343
40%	\$2,748,558	\$1,499,124
50%	\$3,435,697	\$1,873,905

Based on 2021 population projections

*Note: Table indicates savings depending on percentage of population using the new access opportunity*

## Outdoor Recreation Benefits

According to the Economic Value of Outdoor Activities in Iowa report which was completed in 2012: "Accessing outdoor recreation opportunities and improving the quality of the natural resource environment that support recreation are important to Iowans. Our current report documents continued increase in the utilization of Iowa's outdoor recreational resources since a benchmark study in 2007. Along with the increased utilization is an increased economic impact as Iowans spend on equipment, travel, and supplies to enjoy Iowa's parks, lakes, rivers, and trails. The growth in outdoor recreation participation occurs alongside production agriculture in many parts of Iowa. The co-existence of these

two major resource based industries presents a challenge for successfully encouraging the growth of both industries in Iowa. In examining the magnitude and growth of outdoor recreation activities in Iowa, our report underscores several major points:"

- "Outdoor recreation opportunities are increasingly important to Iowans."
- "Outdoor recreation spending is a big business in Iowa."
- "Considerable attention is being paid and substantial effort has gone into improving water quality in the state."
- "Studies have shown that recreational amenities and quality of life opportunities are important to attracting business and entrepreneurs."

- "Increased access to outdoor parks and recreation amenities can contribute to lower health care costs for Iowans by increasing participation in outdoor physical activity." (See Health Benefits, above).

### Estimated spending values noted in this study:

<b>State Parks:</b>	\$45.53 per party (camping) \$41.77 per party (day trips)
<b>County Parks:</b>	\$25.37 per person
<b>Rivers and Streams:</b>	\$34.75 per/person (interior rivers)

## SUMMARY OF VISITS AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES IN IOWA 2011

\$ millions	Visits	Spending	Value Added	Income	Jobs (000s)
State Parks	3.7	785.9	376.4	216.2	7.5
County Parks	24.0	608.9	291.6	167.5	5.8
Trails	1.9	22.1	8.5	4.9	0.2
Lakes	12.0	1,210.0	394.8	302.2	14.8
Rivers	18.8	823.5	268.8	130.0	6.4
Total	60.3	3,450.8	1,340.3	820.8	34.5
Duplicates from lakes located in parks	3.8	376.9	180.5	103.7	3.6
<b>Net Total</b>	<b>56.6</b>	<b>3,073.9</b>	<b>1,159.7</b>	<b>717.1</b>	<b>31.0</b>

A more recent study prepared for the Iowa Economic Development Authority, Iowa Department of Tourism by the research department of the U.S. Travel Association, Washington, D.C. (August 2015) provides more specific information about economic impacts of tourism through the Boone Forks Region (Boone, Hamilton and Webster Counties).

## 2015 DOMESTIC TRAVEL IMPACT ON IOWA

County (Rank)	Expenditures (\$ millions)	Payroll (\$ millions)	Employment (000s)	State Tax Receipts (\$ millions)	Local Tax Receipts (\$ millions)
Boone (39)	26.0	3.0	0.16	1.86	0.21
Hamilton (41)	23.9	3.0	0.18	1.51	0.19
Webster (20)	95.7	10.8	0.57	4.13	0.62

*Note: These figures do not consider the likely potential growth in travel impacts from the build-out of this plan. Arguably, this plan's connectivity, iconic features, and collective branding/promotion could conservatively be considered to lead to 5–10% growth in the region's domestic travel impact in Iowa, as outlined in the following table.*



### POTENTIAL GROWTH IN DOMESTIC TRAVEL IMPACT BOONE FORKS REGION (CONSERVATIVE)

Growth Assumption	Expenditures (\$ millions)	Payroll (\$ millions)	Employment (000s)	State Tax Receipts (\$ millions)	Local Tax Receipts (\$ millions)
5%	5.8	0.8	0.05	0.4	0.05
10%	11.6	1.7	0.09	0.7	0.10

Additionally, we can look specifically at the economic impacts of Iowa's river-based recreation. A 2010 study by Iowa State University Professor Dan Otto (note: his 2012 study is referenced above) focused on Economic Impacts of Iowa's River and Nature-Based Recreation. In this study he references the stream segments that dominate the Boone Forks Region as stream segments 23 and 39 and determines the following impacts:

### ECONOMIC IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH RIVER VISITS IN IOWA (2010)

River Segment	Trips	Statewide Trips		Total \$ Spent	Multiplier Spending	Income Effects	Job Effects
		Persons	Households				
23	979	711,794	287,753	\$19,522,824	\$30,952,120	\$4,882,976	239
39	68	49,440	19,987	\$1,358,112	\$2,149,892	\$339,165	17

Again, assuming 5–10% increase in growth from this plan, we could see the following potential impacts:

### POTENTIAL GROWTH IN ECONOMIC IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH RIVER VISITS IN IOWA

Growth Assumption	Trips	Statewide Trips		Total \$ Spent	Multiplier Spending	Income Effects	Job Effects
		Persons	Households				
5%	52	38,062	15,387	\$1,044,046	\$1,655,100	\$261,107	13
10%	105	76,123	30,774	\$2,088,093	\$3,310,201	\$522,214	26

This review paints a picture of potentially saving significant dollars in health care costs while growing jobs/payroll and state and local tax receipts. This is without quantifying the extensive natural resources benefits from the plan, and taking a conservative view of the potential tourism impacts.



Portions of this section were previously developed for another regional plan by Lynn Dittmer of Metropolitan Area Planning Association (MAPA), but were updated for inclusion in this report due to their applicability.

# Plan Needs

Here we summarize the cost of this plan while encouraging the reader to recognize a 10- to 20-year build-out is anticipated for this plan, involving many partners. We would particularly like to note that the plan's most costly feature—road improvements in the tri-county region to support an extensive cycling network—may well prove feasible through a partnership with the Iowa Department of Transportation. That single ticket item alone is nearly double almost any other line item in the plan.

The plan can be meaningfully launched through pursuit of two low-cost options as early wins: Quirky Tours brochure development and branding/marketing for the region. A mobile van supporting a rebranded Legacy Learning component is also an opportunity for a notable impact early in the plan's implementation.

We would look to the reasonably affordable hubs in the three counties as the means to get the Hike, Bike, Paddle concept underway. As for the Welcome Campus, that work is already getting started through the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway efforts of the Prairie Rivers of Iowa and Boone's Chamber of Commerce pursuing bridge protections/preservation.

Where appropriate, a table featuring a project cost range (low to high) is included. For the built projects, costs include inflation over ten years, 15% contingency and fees for design, engineering and contractors. Cost estimations at this extremely early stage of any project can—at best—reflect some magnitude of cost. As can be seen below, some of these estimates reflect a high number that doubles the low estimate—further evidence of the difficulty in landing on a number at this stage. That said, more detailed cost figures are included in the Appendix of this report.



KATE SHELLEY WELCOME CENTER		
Item	Low (\$)	High (\$)
Property Acquisition, Utilities, Site Preparation, and Grading	\$1,750,000	\$2,500,000
Trails, Trailheads, Signage, Overlooks, and Interpretation	\$1,200,000	\$2,500,000
New Road Networks and Parking Lots	\$6,500,000	\$7,500,000
Bridge Rehabilitation	\$1,500,000	\$2,500,000
Welcome Center	\$14,500,000	\$16,500,000
Camping Options (RV, Tent, and Historic Camper)	\$1,300,000	\$2,300,000
Landscaping, Native Seeding, and Turf	\$750,000	\$1,250,000
Total	\$27,500,000	\$35,050,000

The first phase for this project should be property acquisition and the creation of selected roads, parking lots and the welcome center. This will likely require an investment of between \$5–7 million, depending on how much property is acquired. This phase will begin to draw people to the site and encourage future economic investment. This first phase

should also include starting the necessary conversations with Union Pacific to discuss the transfer of ownership of the Kate Shelley Bridge.

Subsequent phases should focus on expanding the use of the site. We would recommend first creating a basic trail loop with one interpretive

destination. Based on the conversations with Union Pacific, developing the Kate Shelley Bridge would be an ideal path. Subsequent phases should include the integration of additional trail loops, interpretive destinations and overlooks and the addition of on-site camping.



## HIKE, BIKE AND PADDLE

Item	Low	High
River Hiking Trail with Signage	\$7,000,000	\$11,000,000
Paved-road Biking Improvements with Signage	\$25,000,000	\$50,000,000
Rails-to-Trails: Stratford to Ellsworth, with Trailheads	\$14,000,000	\$20,000,000
Rails-with-Trails: Ft. Dodge to Webster City, with Trailheads	\$15,000,000	\$18,000,000
Rails-with-Trails: Webster City to Story City, with Trailheads	\$17,000,000	\$20,000,000
Property Acquisition and Easement Allowance	\$2,000,000	\$5,000,000
Hike, Bike and Paddle Hubs: Webster County	\$1,500,000	\$3,000,000
Hike, Bike and Paddle Hubs: Hamilton County	\$300,000	\$500,000
Hike, Bike and Paddle Hubs: Boone County	\$1,000,000	\$2,000,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$82,800,000</b>	<b>\$129,500,000</b>

Phasing for the Hike, Bike, Paddle project should begin with developing a relationship with a private outfitter, branding the experience, and upgrading the existing park infrastructure, including making boat ramps ADA-accessible

and providing locations for bike and boat check-out. These steps will get the project off the ground and start the private-side investment which may dramatically shape how the initiative moves forward.

Second phase projects include signing on-road bike routes, developing high-priority non-park hubs and starting a dialogue with railroad companies to initiate rails-with-trails projects.

## LEGACY LEARNING REVISITED

Item	Low	High
Mobile Legacy Learning Vehicle	\$60,000	\$85,000
Outdoor Classrooms - Indoor and Outdoor Education Centers	\$19,350,000	\$22,000,000
Outdoor Classrooms - Moveable Equipment	\$5,000	\$10,000
Rebranding	(see below)	(see below)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$19,415,000</b>	<b>\$22,095,000</b>

Phasing for the Legacy Learning project should start with the rebranding initiatives. This will ensure that the project is properly marketed

towards its broader audience. The next phase will be to acquire the van and moveable equipment which will start increasing the

mobility of the program in the tri-county area. The third phase would include the construction of outdoor classrooms—a task that should

be integrated into other park construction efforts to ensure efficiencies in cost and proper park integration.

As this work progresses, it will require additional board development and resources for operations, maintenance and permanent staffing. Cost estimates here address capital expenses only, but growing Legacy Learning from a voluntary to paid staff operation should be noted.



## PROTECT THE SOURCE

The costs associated with land protection vary depending on the approach taken as well as the particular acres involved.

The following quantities can be used to provide some estimates involved in private lands protection for the region's main river valleys.

Lands needing protection will depend on the ultimate protection goals, as outlined in the two tables below.

### PRIVATE LANDS REQUIRING PROTECTION—WHEN AFFECTED PARCELS CANNOT BE SUBDIVIDED <sup>(1)</sup>

County/ Protection Goal	25' Either Side of River (Total: 50 ft)		400' Either Side of River (Total: 800 ft)		100-Yr Flood Zone (Main River Channel)	
	Parcels	Acres	Parcels	Acres	Parcels	Acres
Webster	500	7,166	1,347	12,100	1,112	12,562
Hamilton	314	6,214	562	8,474	570	8,912
Boone	77	1,758	297	4,875	302	5,264
<b>Total</b>	<b>891</b>	<b>15,139</b>	<b>2,206</b>	<b>25,449</b>	<b>1,984</b>	<b>26,740</b>

### PRIVATE LANDS REQUIRING PROTECTION—WHEN AFFECTED PARCELS CAN BE SUBDIVIDED <sup>(2)</sup>

Protection Goal	25' Either Side of River (Total: 50 ft)		400' Either Side of River (Total: 800 ft)		100-Yr Flood Zone (Main River Channel)	
	Parcels	Acres	Parcels	Acres	Parcels	Acres
<b>Total</b>	<b>956</b>	<b>982</b>	<b>2,186</b>	<b>8,820</b>	<b>1,947</b>	<b>9,981</b>

## QUIRKY TOURS

Item	Estimate
Brochure Development	\$4,000
Printing	\$1,500
Social Media/Website (Development and ongoing five years)	\$17,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$22,500</b>

We anticipate brochure development, printing, and accompanying social media would make an effective Phase One launch of this project. The technological build-out to reach the high-level customer interaction referenced in this plan has potential to be accomplished in partnership with the Iowa Parks Foundation and other regional parks initiatives, including the Grant Wood Loop and/or Loess Hills Missouri River Region.

## REGIONAL BRANDING AND MARKETING

Item	Low	High
Consulting Fee Estimate for Marketing Plan	\$90,000	\$110,000
Logo/Brand Development	\$15,000	\$20,000
Initial Incorporation of Logo/Brand into Materials (annual/three years)	\$20,000	\$30,000
Ongoing Implementation of Regional Marketing (annual/five years)	\$75,000	\$100,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>	<b>\$260,000</b>

This cost could be dramatically reduced through a partnership with the University of Iowa or Iowa State University business/marketing schools to assist in consulting/facilitating the branding/rebranding effort.

#### Notes:

1. This table looks at land parcels and acreages requiring protection when there is no ability to sub-divide the land—that is, no ability to just purchase the acreage specifically required to meet the intended goal.
2. These acres do not include river or right-of-way footprints.



# Funding the Plan

A plan of this caliber needs many partners and wide-ranging strategies for successful implementation. The funding strategies include: local and/or regional bond referendums and/or local option sales taxes; advocacy for effective state supports; partnering with other state agencies; private fundraising; and public and private grants/foundational supports. Highlights of some of the

most immediately available resources are included in the funding matrix on the next few pages of this report. Meanwhile, this plan recommends contacting those who have been successful with local bond referendums in the past. In 2012, nearby Polk County Conservation succeeded in passing a \$50 million bond referendum to support parks, conservation, trails and water quality. West Des

Moines, Iowa is currently considering a similar strategy. In 2016, ballot measures in support of conservation and/or recreation were on the ballot in 86 locations across the country. Sixty-eight passed (79%), achieving \$6.9 billion in support, including a \$40 million bond referendum in Linn County, Iowa, garnering 74% support.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

Description	Program Element	Possible Uses
<b>Federal Transportation Enhancement Program; IDOT through Regional Planning Affiliate (RFA)</b>		
Funding for enhancement or preservation activities of transportation related projects.	T, L, O, W	The following projects are funded: facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists; safety and educational activities for pedestrians and bicyclists; scenic or historic highway programs; acquisition of scenic or historic sites; landscaping and scenic beautification; historic preservation; rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation facilities; preservation of abandoned railway corridors; control and removal or outdoor advertising; archaeological planning and research; mitigation of water pollution due to highway runoff; or transportation museums.
<b>Recreational Trails Program (Federal)</b>		
Funding for creation and maintenance of motorized and non-motorized recreational trails and trail related projects.	T	Recreational trail extension.
<b>Recreational Trails Program (State); IDOT</b>		
Funding for public recreational trails.	T	Trail projects that are part of a local, area-wide, regional, or statewide trail plan.
<b>Iowa Clean Air Attainment Program (ICAAP); IDOT</b>		
Funding for highway/street, transit, bicycle/pedestrian or freight projects or programs which help maintain Iowa's clean air quality by reducing transportation related emissions.	T, O	Projects which will reduce vehicle miles traveled or single-occupant vehicle trips; Transportation improvements to improve air quality.
<b>Land and Water Conservation Fund; Iowa DNR</b>		
Federal funding for outdoor recreation area development and acquisition.	T, P	Improvements to existing recreation facilities and development of new facilities.
<b>General Obligation Bonds</b>		
Allows cities to secure funding by pledging future tax revenues to repay the bond.	W, T, P, L, O	Capital improvements, such as street projects

<b>H</b>	Health
<b>N</b>	Nature/Habitat
<b>W</b>	Water Resources/Streambank/Stormwater Management
<b>T</b>	Trail
<b>P</b>	Parks
<b>A</b>	Art
<b>L</b>	Land Acquisition
<b>O</b>	Other Amenities

Deadline	Available Funds	Required Match
Typically October 1 for statewide applications; Check with RPA for deadlines.	Dependent on allocation as part of reauthorization of MAP-21. Funding has historically been \$4,500,000 annually statewide. Funds available vary by region.	Varies by region; Contact RPA.
Typically October 1	Varies each year	20%
Typically July 1	Varies each year	25%
Typically October 1	Approximately \$4,000,000 annually Minimum \$20,000 total project cost	20%
March 15, or closest working day	Varies annually	50%
NA	Varies	NA



POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES		
Description	Program Element	Possible Uses
<b>Community Attraction and Tourism – Enhance Iowa – Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA)</b>		
To assist projects that will provide recreational, cultural, entertainment and educational attractions.	T, P, A	Packaged amenities and connections to existing tourist attractions
<b>Iowa Great Places – Cultural Affairs</b>		
Supports the development of new and existing infrastructure intended to cultivate the unique qualities of neighborhoods, communities and regions in Iowa.	T, P, A	Streetscape, façade repair, community spaces
<b>Iowa Arts Council Grants – Cultural Affairs</b>		
To support the creation and presentation of new artwork, development of an arts experience or formation of an arts education program.	A	Functional art; event space art; other community art projects
<b>Brownfield/Grayfield Redevelopment Tax Credit – IEDA</b>		
Tax credit incentive for the rehabilitation of dilapidated/underutilized commercial properties with environmental challenges.	H, W, O	Dilapidated/hazardous buildings and other redevelopment sites
<b>Brownfields Program – Iowa DNR</b>		
Cost reimbursement for Phase I, asbestos/lead inspection; free Phase II services; 50% reimbursement for environmental cleanup.	H, W, O	Dilapidated/hazardous buildings and other redevelopment sites
<b>National Endowment for the Arts</b>		
Several grant programs that foster art and culture – Challenge America, ArtWORKS, and OurTown	A	Creative placemaking, community art
<b>Public Works Program – EDA</b>		
Provides resources to meet construction and design of infrastructure essential to economic development	O	Workforce facilities; shipping/logistics; business incubators; telecommunications
<b>Fort Dodge Community Foundation</b>		
The foundation supports quality-of-life initiatives including Fort Dodge/ Webster County trails.	H, P, T, A, O	Potential to apply to nearly any aspect of the master plan
<b>Other Private Funders</b>		
Additional private foundations and corporate giving programs are available for a variety of projects.	N, W, T, P, A, L, O	Varies

<b>H</b>	Health
<b>N</b>	Nature/Habitat
<b>W</b>	Water Resources/Streambank/Stormwater Management
<b>T</b>	Trail
<b>P</b>	Parks
<b>A</b>	Art
<b>L</b>	Land Acquisition
<b>O</b>	Other Amenities

Deadline	Available Funds	Required Match
October 1; often times other deadlines throughout the year	In flux; contact Nicole Shala at <a href="mailto:enhanceiowa@iowaeda.com">enhanceiowa@iowaeda.com</a>	1:1 (typically)
Online application typically due May 1; June site visits; August letter of intent for grant funding	\$1,000,000 annually; communities can apply for \$15,000–\$400,000; can only apply for three years of funding after designation; average award \$185,000	1:1
Usually May and November rounds	\$1,000 to \$10,000 grants	At least 1:1
September 1	Up to 30%, up to \$1,000,000 per project; up to \$10,000,000 each fiscal year.	None
Rolling	Varies (up to \$25,000 each for investigation and cleanup)	50% for cleanups
Varies	Varies	Varies
Rolling – Discuss with ECIA (project must meet CEDS goals)	\$100,000–\$3,000,000	
County Endowment Funding Grant application: May 1, 2017	Hosts <a href="http://FortDodgeResources.com">FortDodgeResources.com</a> and funding resources appear to vary	(unclear)
Varies	Varies	Varies



POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES		
Description	Program Element	Possible Uses
<b>Healthy Watershed Consortium</b>		
The goal of the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program is to accelerate protection and enhancement of healthy watersheds.	N, W	Boone River Watershed has received special attention in the past, which could be helpful here
<b>Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) – Sustainable Community Demonstration</b>		
Provides grants for varied projects demonstrating comprehensive innovative approaches to support community sustainability. Applications must meet at least one HUD national objective.	N, W, O, Varied	Varied
<b>Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities (IISC)</b>		
IISC partners with communities through a formal request for proposals process. Typically, the RFP is released each Fall for the following academic year. Each partnership is one year long, with the opportunity to extend into two years. If all partners choose to extend their partnerships each year, the RFP may be released on an every other year basis.	Many varied	Nearly any of these Boone Forks Regional Plan initiatives might get consideration
<b>Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP)</b>		
REAP-CEP; roadside vegetation; historical resources; public land management; city parks and open space; soil and water enhancement; county conservation; state open space. Administered through four state agencies: DNR, IDALS, DCA and DOT.	N, W, T, P, L	Varied
<b>National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)</b>		
NFWF provides funding to projects that sustain, restore and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, habitats. Initiatives have science-directed business plans approved by the board. Grant available to support actions in the plan.	N, W, Possibly L	Habitat, possibly water quality
<b>Wellmark Foundation</b>		
Focus on active living and healthy nutrition	H, T	Community gardens and/or ped/trail links
<b>Iowa Clinic Healthcare Foundation: Rise Up Iowa</b>		
Grants to charitable organizations in Central Iowa focused on improving community; this grant launches with program details provided on September 1, 2016	H, other options unclear	Likely varied

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<b>O</b>	Other Amenities

Deadline	Available Funds	Required Match
Typically March	Grant range \$50,000–\$200,000	25% minimum match required
Discuss application with Jeff Geerts; 515-725-3069	Max award: \$500,000	Unclear
Typically January	Appears focused on technical assistance	Unclear
County Conservation – Aug City Parks – Aug Cost Share – Aug REAP – CEP: May and Nov	Depends on annual allocation; REAP-CEP consistently \$350,000, however	Cost Share requires 25%
Various Grants; <a href="http://www.nfwf.org">www.nfwf.org</a>	Various	Cost Share requires 25%
May	\$75,000 max	1:1
Program launches Sept 1, 2016	\$100,000	Unknown

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES		
Description	Program Element	Possible Uses
<b>Kresge Foundation</b>		
Works to reduce health disparities among children and adults by addressing conditions that lead to poor health outcomes. Many programs. <a href="http://www.Kresge.org/opportunities">www.Kresge.org/opportunities</a> ; receive updates on Twitter for current opportunities @kresgefdn	H	Highly varied. Many potential fits.
<b>RW Johnson Foundation</b>		
Culture of Health Prize places priority on communities emphasizing health and partnerships to meet the needs of all, especially those with health challenges. Other funding sources through Robert Wood Johnson also available.	H	Varied.
<b>De Beaumont Foundation</b>		
Health related – many programs; not typically awarded to communities, but this appears possible	H, Varied	Varied
<b>Meredith Foundation; Edwin T. Meredith Foundation</b>		
Grants largely for youth agencies, higher education, cultural programs, and historic preservation areas; some support for hospitals and health agencies, as well as for conservation; sustainability	N, W, T, P, O	Conservation, youth programming, capital campaigns, varied
<b>State Revolving Fund Sponsored Projects</b>		
Municipalities that borrow funds to complete sanitary collection or treatment projects can potentially support a stormwater project through the Sponsored Projects Program. The state adjusts the interest rate on the project loan, allowing an extra 10% to be borrowed, but the repayment amount remains the same. Essentially, for every \$1 million spent on a sanitary project, \$100,000 can be borrowed toward construction of a stormwater quality project, at no additional cost to the municipality receiving the loan.	N, W	Stormwater management projects, streambank stabilization, might apply to some aspects of habitat restoration
<b>Boone County Community Endowment</b>		
Support community betterment projects in Boone County, including arts & culture, community affairs & development, education, environmental protection, health, historic preservation and human services.	Likely all	



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<b>O</b>	Other Amenities

Deadline	Available Funds	Required Match
Varied – some rolling; some with deadlines	Varied	Varied
November 3, 2016 and annually	\$25,000 “Prize”	N/A
Varied	Varied	Varied
Appears rolling	Edwin T. Meredith \$500,000 in giving annually; Meredith \$1,500,000	Preferred; requirements unclear
Currently September 1, 2016	Depends on status of Wastewater Reclamation Authority loans; statewide total \$35,000,000 for 2016	“Match” provided through WRA projects; technically this is not a grant but it functions similarly
Typically February with April award. This may vary; last date accessed, 2015.	Unclear, but project completion deadline typically six months	Match queried in grant application but requirements unclear

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES		
Description	Program Element	Possible Uses
<b>Enhance Hamilton County Foundation</b>		
Projects must improve the quality of life for Hamilton County residents in areas of arts/culture, community affairs & development, environment, health, human services, historic preservation, youth and education; multi-benefit projects preferred	Likely all	Varied. Many potential fits.
<b>Ann Smeltzer Charitable Trust</b>		
Provides outreach and resources in the arts, music, literature, history, environmental conservation and stewardship, and social justice. Trust Board consists of representatives from Fort Dodge and Webster County.	N, W, A, O	Varied. Many potential fits.
<b>Catherine Vincent Deardorf Charitable Foundation</b>		
Fine arts, education, libraries and parks are primary recipients but grants support arts and culture, local history, education and nature. Funds awarded only to 501(c)3 organizations in Webster County.	P, A, N, O – possibly W	Varied. Many potential fits.
<b>Friends of Webster County Conservation</b>		
Supports Webster County Conservation; funding priorities are environmental education, youth recreation, trails (land and water), outdoor recreation, natural resource conservation and habitat protection	Likely all if impacting WCCB but P, N, T, W most likely fits	Varied. Many potential fits.

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<b>O</b>	Other Amenities

Deadline	Available Funds	Required Match
Next grant cycle begins October 15, 2017; deadline December 31, 2017	Typically distributes 90,000 annually to local organizations	Unclear
Grant applications on-line, must be submitted at least six months prior to event or project	Unclear	Match queried in grant application but requirements unclear
Grant applications reviewed six times per year during meetings held the 3rd Monday of Feb, Apr, Jun, Aug, Oct and Dec	Has granted more than \$6,700,000 since 1993	Match queried in grant application but requirements unclear
Unclear	Unclear	Unclear



# Building a Lasting Legacy

## Advocacy

Just as efforts to establish and support a formal regional collaborative are a necessary precursor to successful implementation of the priority initiatives, so too is it imperative to maintain the assets built and developed through these initiatives. Sustainable and predictable funding sources are necessary for the long-term survival of our natural, cultural and recreational resources.

The Boone Forks Region is particularly concerned about the ever-increasing reduction in funding for necessary facilities maintenance, operation and support of the State and County Parks systems, while also acknowledging resources continue to decline for city parks as well. As laid out in the Green Ribbon Commission's Vision: Parks to People Plan, the number one "To-Do" is to grow basic state and county agency support and build a strong parks system on a base of dependable funding for basic park infrastructure and operations.

In honoring that vision, the Boone Folks region challenges our stakeholders, partners, private entities and the people of Iowa to advocate for resources to restore our parks to a baseline level of quality. Only then can we work as a state to enhance our exceptional places and experiences. The Boone Forks Region proposes to support the following activities:

- Full funding for the Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP)—this annual program offers a balanced approach to the various partners who work to support natural resources and parks.
- Continuous funding for dam mitigation and stream restoration work. At the time of this writing, funding for these initiatives is in serious jeopardy. These dollars are of particular importance to a region leading in water trails development.
- Advocating for securing the 3/8-cent sales tax intended to fund the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. The Trust Fund received 63% public support at the voting booth in 2010.
- Developing the Boone Forks Regional organization into a sustainable entity advocating for parks, trails, water trails, cultural/heritage and agri-tourism supports, as well as the natural resources features critical to the region's health (water quality and quantity, wildlife/habitat, woodland protection, etc.)
- Including operating and maintenance support in all project budgets.
- Identifying funding opportunities for key projects, necessary upgrades and operating support.



## Organizational Structure

As of the time of this writing, the partners are considering a structure to support the plan that would involve Prairie Rivers of Iowa serving as the coordinator/facilitator of the overall plan, while specifically leading funding and implementation strategies in support of the Kate Shelley Welcome Center. The lead partners at this juncture (Webster/Hamilton County Conservation Boards and Boone Chamber of Commerce plus Prairie Rivers) would serve as an initial executive team to a broader-based coalition of partners, including:

- Communities of the Region
- Watershed groups
- Chambers of Commerce
- Economic Development and Tourism Boards
- Educational institutions
- Other stakeholders

A partnership, likely achieved through a tri-county 28E agreement, could formalize plan oversight/facilitation while still allowing individual jurisdictions the control they need for specific project implementation. A variety of mechanisms can be put into play here.



Photo by Jessica Johnson

In the Loess Hills Missouri River Region, the Golden Hills RC&D is serving a similar coordinator/facilitator role.

The methods required to achieve a regional park management strategy for the Kate Shelley Welcome Center will require additional study and legal review.

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## Sustainable Effort

The Boone Forks Region has launched an ambitious vision through this plan. The tremendous work that will come out of this plan will not have been possible without the dedication and input of the partners and stakeholders and citizens of the region. As a collaborative region, honest evaluation of successes, failures and opportunities will allow the region to adjust the plan as needed.

We recommend use of the “Let’s Get Started Checklists” as a master means to monitor progress for at least the first 1–2 years of this plan. These checklists should be updated annually, always noting specific outputs or outcomes in each and every year and reporting those results. We recommend quarterly meetings of the partners with report-outs from the initiative champions and an annual report submitted to all of the partners. A broad report to the tri-county residents of annual accomplishments would also help identify areas of plan progress and where it lags.

This plan presents the region with potential to launch an innovative regional park at one end of the spectrum and a simple, effective co-branding on the other. This range of ease and impact provides the partners with the opportunity to get short term wins along the way to a plan of significant regional (if not national) impact. Do not lose or bury this plan. Take it with you to meetings, workshops and camp-outs. Keep remembering all that is in this document, and continue to chip away at it—bringing it to life.





Photo by Jessica Johnson