

“A Voluntary Land Conservation Project” Lower Fox River Land Conservation Planning (LFR LCPP)

Fact Sheet

What is the LFR LCPP? This voluntary planning project will concentrate on land areas along the Lower Fox River (LFR), its tributaries and the LFR Conservation Opportunity Area (COA), an area identified as having important conservation value in the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan. A strategic land conservation plan will be developed by a diverse group of local stakeholders in Kendall and LaSalle County, including private landowners, local municipalities, counties, agencies, and other groups to help them determine their priorities regarding natural resource protection. It may also enable some to qualify for potential funding by complying with the local and state plan.

This strictly voluntary planning project will be led by the stakeholders with support from The Conservation Foundation (www.theconservationfoundation.org), serving as a facilitator.

Who is The Conservation Foundation? The Conservation Foundation (TCF) is a not-for-profit, volunteer-led land and watershed protection organization. Established in 1972 by business and community leaders, our headquarters are located in Naperville, Illinois, on a 60-acre working farm. We also have a program office located in Montgomery, Illinois. Today, The Conservation Foundation is one of the region's largest and oldest private conservation organizations.

The mission of the Foundation is to preserve open space and natural lands, protect rivers and watersheds, and promote stewardship of our environment. The Foundation maintains a support base of over 5,000 members and donors and 500 volunteers in DuPage, Kane, Kendall and Will Counties, Illinois. Although our primary service area is within these four counties, we work throughout northeastern Illinois, including LaSalle County, especially in regards to Lower Fox River (LFR) issues.

What is the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan (IL-WAP)? Each state is to develop a comprehensive wildlife conservation plan as a part of federal funding. These plans, developed with cooperation from conservation partners and input from the public, will set a course for stewardship of all wildlife species, with special attention given to species in greatest need of conservation. More details about the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan can be found at these two websites: <http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/wildliferesources/theplan> or <http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/wildliferesources/theplan/pdfs/oi/wap%20oi%20insert%20whole%20doc.pdf>

What is a Conservation Opportunity Area (COA)? There are 32 COAs identified in the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan, adopted in 2005. They were identified as priority areas for conserving Illinois' species in greatest need of conservation. COAs represent geographic areas across political boundary lines that are in the greatest need of conservation of various flora and fauna species. Kendall and LaSalle counties comprise the Lower Fox River COA.

How were COAs determined? A COA is an area with wildlife and habitat of statewide importance, local willing partners to be involved, financial and human resources, and an agreed upon conservation purpose and set of objectives. Boundaries were developed based on the presence of important habitats and fish and wildlife resources, as well as stakeholder input in the plan. The Lower Fox River was identified as one of the COAs.

How is the LFR LCPP funded? The Lower Fox River planning process is funded through a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation (www.illinoiscleanenergy.org) to The Conservation Foundation.

How can citizens be involved with the effort? The planning process is being led by a stakeholders' committee comprised of citizens with diverse interests and backgrounds. Other individuals can offer input to the committee individually or as part of public meetings to be held in the COA.

What are the goals of the LFR LCPP? The overall goal is to develop a recognized plan for local entities and individuals to use in local land preservation efforts for water quality, natural resource, and open space protection. It may aid in obtaining approval for grant funding or tax incentives for protection efforts.

How will priority parcels be identified? Parcels will be prioritized using criteria as determined by the stakeholder committee. TCF staff will present the results of the process to the stakeholders and the entities they represent at a stakeholder meeting and further meetings as necessary. Possible criteria include availability of funds, location, managing entity, and biological importance.

What happens if a land parcel is identified on the plan? The identification of parcels to receive priority for protection does not mean any specific action must or will be taken. Any actions are strictly voluntary.

If the parcel is publicly owned, the plan can support efforts for obtaining maintenance and development funds, grants, etc. in the future.

If the land is privately owned, it can provide the landowner with a higher potential for either private protection or sale, depending what their desires may be. That decision again is strictly voluntary on the part of the landowner. It does not mean any landowners must sell their property, unwillingly preserve it, or be otherwise impacted unless they choose to do so.

Any future sale of property would only be done with the cooperation of willing landowners and buyers on a voluntary basis. If private land owners choose to sell to an open space agency or other entity, the plan may help enhance the value by being recognized as a priority parcel.

If landowners choose to protect property themselves through a conservation easement, the plan may help with the approval process or it may help them obtain approval for tax benefits or governmental easement program payments, such as CREP, WHIP, or EQIP.

Why concentrate attention on land conservation in the Lower Fox River area? The lower Fox River basin contains some of the most beautiful and significant segments of the river from high limestone bluffs to wetlands, seeps and fens, along with the attributes of its many tributaries. The 36 miles from Yorkville to Ottawa have been described as one of the most physiographically and botanically interesting areas in the state.* These environmental features and other reasons have enticed a rapidly increasing number of people to the COA over the past decade, especially in Kendall County, which was the fastest growing county in the country in the 2000's. Such rapid population increases can put pressure on the viability and quality of many of the river basin's resources, if protection is not planned adequately. (*IL Dept. of Natural Resources, Native Habitat Inventory of the Lower Fox River, 1999)

What benefits are there to completing this planning process? As identified in the Wildlife Action Plan, much of Illinois' natural habitat areas have been lost over the generations which can cause environmental decline and economic losses. Protection of such areas can protect habitat for flora and fauna, provide open space for aesthetic and natural area protection, provide economic and environmental enhancements to communities, provide possible tax incentives for property owners, and provide the ultimate "tax cap" for residents.

Both Kendall and LaSalle Counties also have protection of natural areas and open space as a goal in their county comprehensive land use plans, especially protection of river areas.

What will be the final product of this plan? Data will be compiled to create and add to GIS map layers. The parcel identification criteria will then be applied to parcels throughout the Lower Fox COA, resulting in the identification of priority parcels to be preserved. This task has been completed for much of the Kendall portion of the project, however it will be updated.

Parcels will be prioritized using criteria as determined by stakeholders. TCF staff will present the results of this process to the stakeholders and the entities they represent at a stakeholder meeting and further meetings as necessary. The maps will be made available through the project website, and the TCF newsletter and website.

The plan will help private landowners, local municipalities, counties, agencies, and groups that may have an interest in natural resource and open space to set priorities and plan for future efforts.

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