

NATURAL AREAS

VISION: Our natural features, hillsides, floodplains, streams, wetlands and other open spaces and natural areas are protected and treasured.

Goal 1: By 2030, the acreage of protected natural habitat in Benton County will be increased by 50%.

Strategy 1: Initiate a comprehensive, long-range, natural area conservation plan.

Action 1: *Regularly convene* a gathering of public and private partners around natural areas conservation planning.

Action 2: *Adopt* an integrated natural areas conservation plan, which includes acquisition criteria and priorities for acquisition, protection and active conservation management.

Action 3: *Implement* conservation priorities under the plan.

Strategy 2: Provide stable, long-term revenue sources for the acquisition, restoration and preservation of prime natural areas.

Action 1: *Identify* potential, long-term funding sources.

Action 2: *Establish* a range of diverse, stable, long-term funding mechanisms.

Action 3: *Disburse* conservation funds according to priorities established by the integrated natural area conservation plan.

Strategy 3: Assign the monetary value of services provided by natural ecosystems to guide and inform land use planning and development decisions.

Action 1: *Compile and undertake*, as needed, research to establish equivalent monetary values of the full range of natural ecosystem services.

Action 2: *Establish* guidelines to take ecosystem values into account and seek appropriate code amendments for land use and development decisions.

Action 3: *Provide* an extensive, publicly-accessible database of equivalent monetary values for services provided by our local ecosystem.

Goal 2: By 2030, 100% of public and private natural area acreage in Benton County will be managed under a set of practices that optimizes their ecological integrity and resilience.

Strategy 1: Adopt a restoration and best management practices plan for all public natural areas.

Action 1: *Develop* restoration and management plans for areas within the cities, and newly acquired natural areas beyond city limits.

Action 2: *Review and update* existing natural area management and restoration plans in accordance with best management practices.

Goal 2 (continued)

Strategy 2: Promote habitat management and restoration on private land.

Action 1: *Provide* comprehensive education and training on sustainable restoration and management practices to private landholders.

Action 2: *Develop and promote* residential natural habitat programs.

Action 3: *Develop* a wide range of incentive and recognition programs to encourage habitat restoration and management projects on private lands.

Strategy 3: Promote community volunteer-supported restoration projects on public and accessible private natural areas.

Action 1: *Establish* an electronic network and web presence for community natural areas conservation activities and volunteer opportunities.

Action 2: *Coordinate* volunteer conservation activities in the community.

Action 3: *Further develop and expand* urban creek restoration and outreach program (UCROP), including development of urban creek watershed councils.

Goal 3: By 2030, 60% of community members will participate in natural areas appreciation programs or restoration efforts.

Strategy 1: Increase the number and accessibility of conservation education and outreach programs.

Action 1: *Establish and maintain* outdoor classroom programs for all community K-12 schools.

Action 2: *Integrate* locally-focused (place-based) natural history instruction into all K-12 school curricula.

Action 3: *Increase* the number of and access to a wider range of natural history programs for adults.

Strategy 2: Increase appropriate recreation and access in public and private natural areas.

Action 1: *Expand and improve* opportunities and facilities for unstructured recreational opportunities such as hiking, fishing, bird watching, nature photography.

Action 2: *Create and maintain* a functional network of paths and trails to and between natural areas.

Action 3: *Continue* a week of celebration and awareness around local natural areas.

Strategy 3: Provide natural history and cultural information at natural areas.

Action 1: *Establish* natural history interpretive activities on public and private natural areas.

Action 2: *Develop and implement* state-of-the-art ecological, natural, and cultural history interpretive tools, including signs at public natural areas that do not detract from the natural aesthetic.