



Strategic Plan for The Conservation Foundation

Fiscal Years 2018-2023

Our Mission

We improve the health of our communities by preserving and restoring natural areas and open space, protecting rivers and watersheds, and promoting stewardship of our environment.

Our Long-Term Vision

We envision a sustainable region where, through education and collaboration:

- Protected natural areas provide quality habitats for wildlife and places where people can enjoy nature forever.
- Public and private partnerships accelerate the pace of land preservation for the enrichment of all.
- People benefit from and enjoy clean and healthy streams, wetlands and lakes.
- All land development incorporates stewardship of the environment.
- People understand and embrace conservation issues, and act to preserve the environment.

The Conservation Foundation is a recognized expert and reasoned voice on conservation issues and with the help of its members and donors, provides the leadership required to achieve this vision.

Our Strategic Focus

Over the next five years, The Conservation Foundation will continue and strengthen its commitment to be a community-based, grassroots conservation organization with impactful on-the-ground programs and projects tailored to the needs of each community served. This strategic approach will result in:

- Deeper mission impact in our communities,
- A consistent and expected presence in our communities,
- Meaningful and long-lasting relationships with communities and individuals,
- A more engaged (grassroots) community in local conservation,
- Broader community support for TCF and for local conservation programs,
- Enlightened communities where conservation is embraced as a core value.

Critical Principles to Success

- We must understand that advancement is everyone's responsibility- it must permeate through everything we all do, every day.
- We must identify our "publics/customers" and develop strategies to communicate effectively with each of them in an ongoing manner.
- We must focus our programs on specific county and local community priorities, and engage people where they live and work.
- We must develop our staff, cross-train and advance skill development while maintaining our areas of expertise.
- We must develop our board and staff to be active in advancement strategies that move the organization toward more sustainable (unrestricted) funding sources.
- To remain a leader in conservation, we must be flexible, opportunistic, creative, innovative and possess an entrepreneurial spirit.

Strategic Initiative #1: To be more impactful in the communities we serve, we will expand our sources of revenue, especially unrestricted funding.

- An endowment, fueled by planned gifts and other large donations, is large enough to generate at least \$200,000 of annual interest income to help expand programs and organizational priorities.
- The Strengthening Our Foundation (Benevon) Campaign continues to introduce TCF to potential donors and provide new unrestricted funding allowing program expansion and other organizational priorities.

Strategic Initiative #2: To expand our sphere of influence and bolster our support base, we will increase awareness of our positive impact in communities.

- Diversity, equity and inclusion are factored into TCF's work, ensuring relevance and success in the communities it serves.
- A growing membership and donor base is fueled by a well-funded marketing effort that reaches diverse audiences, provides more member benefits, and utilizes proven conservation messages to attract people to the mission of TCF.
- A growing and well-defined volunteer program utilizes volunteers for the specific needs of TCF and is organized using professional volunteer management standards and practices.

Strategic Initiative #3: To ensure we remain the noted professional experts in conservation, we will develop the marketing, fundraising, relationship building, professional and technical skills of our board and staff.

- A growing and diverse professional staff embraces all facets of the organization (programs and advancement), works cooperatively across different teams, enhances their professional development, and has succession plans for key positions.
- A diverse and multi-skilled board of trustees embraces training and education on conservation, governance and advancement issues, manages itself, and helps with activities that tap into their networks attracting talent and donors.

Strategic Initiative #4: To ensure we are meeting the needs of the communities we serve, we will create, tailor and modify programs and services responsive to the specific needs of each county we serve.

Land Preservation

- All four core county forest preserve districts pass open space referenda with a restoration component.
- More people are volunteering for restoration workdays at local natural areas (parks, forest preserves, etc.), including TCF conservation easements, as a way to improve their health, meet like-minded people, and help nature.
- Significant progress is being made in implementing open space protection plans in the four core counties, with emphasis in the Big Rock Creek and Lower Fox River watersheds.
- The Natural Areas Assurance Program is being implemented in new and existing developments (retrofit) and our partner communities encourage it in their local ordinances.

River and Watershed Protection, and Enhancement

- The ecological health of the DuPage River, Salt Creek and Fox River watersheds has significantly improved through collaborative restoration efforts including the removal or modification of priority dams.
- A successful water education campaign has been completed in our four core counties leading to more volunteers participating in local stream clean-ups, Adopt-a-Stream, storm-drain stenciling and other water related activities.
- TCF is providing leadership in the water quality improvement efforts for a newly established Lower Des Plaines Workgroup.

Community Education & Outreach

- The Conservation @ Home/Work strategic plan is being implemented and all six “enabling conditions” are being met.
- Conservation In Our Community partnerships (municipality and/or park districts) are established in half of DuPage County communities where local leaders and citizens are engaged in working on meaningful conservation initiatives where they live and work.
- The Fox River Initiative is completed and has met or exceeded expectations; there are community partnerships established in every Fox River town in Kane and Kendall counties and significantly more community engagement with TCF and our programs.
- A new initiative that connects nature and wellness is underway and more people understand and appreciate how spending time in nature is good for their physical and mental health.
- TCF continues to be the leading champion and a reasoned voice in promoting stormwater best management practices in new and redeveloped sites throughout the region.
- TCF has an educational presence for youth in all four core counties. Original programming and Mighty Acorns curricula are present in Boys and Girls Clubs, scouts, schools, park districts, and other youth-based organizations.

County Priorities

DuPage County

- Half of DuPage County park districts support and participate in TCF programs such as meadow mix, Mighty Acorns, etc., and act as ambassadors to help increase TCF name recognition.
- Conservation In Our Community initiatives are active in half of DuPage County communities.
- The DuPage Forest Preserve District has passed at least one open space referendum with a restoration component.
- TCF continues to provide support and staff for the DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup and other watershed initiatives.
- At least five service organizations are interacting with TCF through volunteering, financial support, etc.

Kane County

- The Fox River Initiative’s goals have been met and there is more conservation activity, awareness and TCF support in all Fox River towns.
- Conservation In Our Community initiatives continue in all Fox River towns and with Kane County government (Fox River Initiative).
- The Kane Forest Preserve District has passed at least one open space referendum with a restoration component.

- Mighty Acorns programs are either expanded or established in Elgin, Aurora and at least one other Kane County community.

Kendall County

- Conservation In Our Community initiatives are active and ongoing in Oswego and two other communities (Fox River Initiative, Conservation @ Home plan).
- TCF is supporting the Kendall Outdoor Education Center in helping to increase outdoor education for area youth and families (Fox River Initiative).
- The Kendall Forest Preserve District has passed at least one open space referendum with a restoration component.
- Land preservation is expanded along the Fox River and Big Rock Creek watersheds (Lower Fox River/Big Rock Creek plans) and at least two key parcels have been protected.

Will County

- Conservation In Our Community initiatives are established in Frankfort, Mokena, Plainfield, Joliet and Shorewood.
- TCF is leading and staffing a Lower Des Plaines Work Group.
- TCF continues to staff and lead the Lower DuPage River Watershed Coalition.
- The Will Forest Preserve District has passed at least one open space referendum with a restoration component.
- The Will County Advisory Council is revamped and is helping the Will County Program Director implement county priorities.
- Mighty Acorns is established with the Joliet Boys and Girls Club and one additional school.

Other Counties

- **DeKalb:** TCF will continue to assist the DeKalb County Forest Preserve District (as requested) with land acquisitions and facilitating land donations, and place conservation easements on private lands.
- **Grundy:** TCF will look for land conservation and watershed protection opportunities in the Aux Sable Creek watershed and other areas throughout the county, and reopen the conversation to establish a conservation or forest preserve district.
- **LaSalle:** TCF will continue to focus land conservation activities on the Lower Fox River watershed and establish a community partnership with the Ottawa community.
- TCF will continue to partner with and mentor other conservation land trusts in the Chicago region and remain open to more formal relationships in the future.