The **Purpose** of this open space and natural areas plan is to coordinate the efforts of all local and regional open space organizations in the acquisition or protection of property that will benefit and improve the quality of life for the residents of DuPage County:

- Identify and prioritize parcels of property in DuPage County that will provide trail and greenway linkages, expand existing open space properties, buffer existing open space, and protect forests, woodlands, prairies, wetlands, watersheds, streams and river corridors.
- Identify natural areas that will promote protection and preservation of endangered and threatened wildlife and plant species.
- Create a plan that various agencies in DuPage County can use to protect the identified remaining open space, and foster cooperation and partnerships in implementing the plan over time.

**Why Now?**

In the late 1970s, DuPage County was a national leader in land use planning. Our leaders realized suburbanization was quickly growing west into the county. They wanted to be prepared and make sure DuPage County remained a great place to live, conduct business and raise a family. To that end, vast amounts of interconnected open spaces were a key piece of that future land use vision. Many of these open spaces were to be greenways along our rivers and streams, creating linear parks and forest preserves for trails and outdoor recreation.

Over the past several decades, as DuPage County grew and more people moved here, decision-makers did a good job of ensuring open space remained part of the county’s landscape. But, it was not easy. The pressure to develop as much land as possible was strong. Thankfully, forest preserves, parks and other types of open space were set aside in accordance with this early vision.

Today, many pieces of this original vision or “puzzle” remain missing. Key linkages for trails, open space greenways and river corridors have not been connected or protected. This open space master plan gets us to that original vision of an interconnected system of parks, forest preserves and trails to enhance the quality of life in DuPage County. This plan completes the vision.

**What is Open Space?**

In a county setting, protected public open space is typically in the form of a Forest Preserve. In a municipal setting, it is typically a park. This plan includes both types. An inclusive definition of open space is: lands in an open or natural state, recreational lands, or areas already permanently protected. Examples of areas that fall within this definition are prairies, nature preserves, floodplains, wetlands, forests, parks, and greenways. Open space can be passive or active. Passive areas may include floodplains, wetlands, greenways and other natural areas that offer protection to the region’s flora and fauna. Active open space may include recreation areas such as ball fields, parks, playgrounds, trails, community recreational buildings, golf courses and equestrian facilities.

In the development of this plan, not only were important natural open space areas, trail connections and river corridors identified, but we also looked at sites that would not typically be viewed as park sites. We looked at sites that have the potential to be restored and provide a benefit to the community and its citizens. In article 4 of the plan, there is evidence of the benefits of getting outside and playing in a natural setting. We hope that some of these sites will provide the opportunity to simply play and interact outside, close to home.

**Benefits of Open Space**

The largest open space landholder in the county is the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. We are also privileged to have extensive public parks and private acres, such as the Morton Arboretum, Cantigny, and numerous golf courses that provide open space. We can see the benefits from open space on a daily basis as we drive by the parks and preserves. Even if we do not have an opportunity to go to one of these sites, we get visual relief from the asphalt, their physical and mental health.

- Protects forests, prairies, savannas, wetlands and various park communities.
- Provides outdoor recreational opportunities to work, run, bike, or horseback ride by various locations, improving health and reducing automobile congestion.
- Provides areas where rainfall can infiltrate into the soil and recharge our groundwater aquifers.
- Provides access for active recreation, education, and research.
- Trail connections and river corridors are identified that would allow people to walk, run, bike, or horseback ride by various locations.
- Support for wetlands, watersheds, streams and river corridors.
- Protects historical, cultural and archeological significant sites.
- By providing more outdoor recreational opportunities, these people can improve their physical and mental health.
- The Active Living Research report found that with $1.1 per acre of land, we would save $3 in savings in project needy.

**ThankYou**

The Conservation Foundation would like to thank The DuPage Community Foundation and the Grand Victoria Foundation for providing the funding necessary to complete this open space plan.

We would also like to thank: Hitchcock Design Group for donating their staff, time, and design skills to complete the open space map.

**Action Plan**

This DuPage County Open Space and Natural Areas Plan was developed through the collaboration of members of the Steering Committee whose goals were preservation and protection of open space and natural areas in DuPage County, and developing a network of trails and interconnected greenways. This long range plan can guide future acquisitions and aid agencies in applying for grants. In the short term, the Conservation Foundation will work with members of the Steering Committee and other open space organizations to contact property owners on their behalf. In many instances, The Conservation Foundation will be the lead agency in making the initial contact. In order to implement this open space plan, we intend to keep the communication ongoing between the agencies that have participated.

We found large expanses of open space remaining in the western portion of DuPage County, but in the eastern portions of the County, they do not have the large areas of open space. To address this, we have to think “outside the box” and look at vacant lots, vacant buildings and sites that could be redeveloped or turned into park land; thereby, providing much needed outdoor recreational facilities for densely populated communities. All of the agencies that participated in the development of this plan are in the “forever business.” This is a long term plan and if a property in this plan should become available by a willing seller, it should be acquired if possible.

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**Wheaton Park District** for offering the use of the Wheaton Community Center for monthly meetings.

We would also like to thank the following agencies for their financial assistance:

- City of Warrenville
- DuPage County
- Elmhurst Park District
- Forest Preserve District of DuPage County
- Illinois Prairie Path Not-for-Profit Corporation
- Naperville Park District
- Warrenville Park District
- Woodridge Park District

**Map**

The GIS data provided by the County and by the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County identified existing parks, preserves, conservation easements, public property and large, private open space areas. The existing open space information was expanded upon with the proposed open space opportunity areas that the Steering Committee identified. This generalized information shows the network of greenways and waterways that would interconnect the parks and preserves.