

Aux Sable Creek Watershed Grundy County Open Space Mapping

One component of the Aux Sable Creek Watershed Plan Update is to include a watershed-wide open space map as an appendix to the Plan. A portion of this has already been completed through an initiative that occurred in Kendall County in 2005-2007 called *Protect Kendall Now!* It created a Kendall County open space plan. 77% of the Aux Sable Creek watershed is in Kendall County. However, approximately 22% is in Grundy County and less than 1% in Will County. The Kendall portion will not be changed or revisited. The project will focus on completing portions that have not been mapped and combining that with the Kendall portion to create a watershed-wide open space/green infrastructure plan.

How the Map is being Created

The Grundy & Will County portions of the Aux Sable Creek Watershed Open Space Map combine existing information to provide a view of the watershed's open space opportunities. It builds from there recognizing opportunities to enhance the open space network by identifying unprotected natural areas and by connecting open space. It is not a zoning map. The purpose is to identify special places and set a vision that will enable them to be treasured forever.

Creation of the map included the following steps:

1. Compiling all existing planning data.

- local comprehensive plans
- local open space plans (if any)
- park district data
- existing natural areas data.
 - 100-year flood zone (Federal Emergency Management Agency) – as available
 - USGS National Hydrography Dataset (for surface water features)
 - land cover (USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and Illinois Department of Agriculture)
 - other suggested data

2. Converting planning data into GIS.

Data were in various formats including AutoCAD, MicroStation, and ArcView. All data were converted into a Geographic Information System (GIS). GIS is a computerized system for entering, storing, analyzing, and displaying spatial or mapped data. GIS is widely used as a planning tool. By converting the data into this system, more analysis potential is available with the data collected & shared.

3. Reclassifying data into appropriate open space categories.

Most planning entities use open space designations specific to their plan. This Plan consolidated the various categories into three main groups: (Note: No data provided by project partners is modified or manipulated. Data were simply reclassified into categories used on this Plan.)

- “Existing Open Space – Preserved & Public” are lands owned by the State, municipalities/park districts or other governmental agencies.
- “Existing Open Space – Preserved & Private” includes lands with conservation easements or nature preserves. These are permanently protected, yet remain in private ownership. Not all of these lands are shown on the map due to their small size or incomplete information.
- “Open Space Opportunity” is the classification used for lands identified in existing county/municipal/recreational plans for open space. Much of that incorporates floodplain areas, but not in all cases.

4. Identifying “Additional Open Space Opportunities.”

This category identifies opportunities to link open space from the various plans and to preserve significant natural resources not identified in other plans. A Committee (see list of members below) is working to identify these opportunities by reviewing the data described above. These areas go beyond that which has already been identified by the County or municipalities. Note: Areas currently identified as “Additional Open Space Opportunities” on the draft map are not set. Local input is sought at this time regarding the appropriateness of these suggested areas. Input is also sought as to other areas that may be appropriate.

How Would the Plan be Used?

Working to implement the watershed-wide open space plan would be by voluntary measures only. These voluntary approaches could include any of the following:

- *Private Conservation*

Conservation easements are a voluntary form of private open space preservation. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a nonprofit conservation group or qualified public agency that permanently restricts development of the land to ensure that the owner’s conservation goals are upheld. A conservation easement can guarantee that the trees on a property won’t be cut down, for instance, or that the property will remain farmland. This type of easement endures even if the land is sold or passed on to heirs. It protects the natural character that makes the land special. One or more of the following criteria must be met in order to qualify for a conservation easement:

- Preserve habitat for endangered or threatened species,
- Contribute to the ecological viability of another park or natural area that is publicly owned or otherwise protected,
- Provide for public access for recreation or outdoor education,
- Be identified in the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, and/or
- Be part of a local, state or federal policy or plan to conserve wildlife habitat or open space, restore or protect lakes and streams or protect scenic areas.

Being identified on a master open space plan can assist interested landowners in qualifying for the tax benefits of a conservation easement. By putting a

conservation easement in place, a landowner can qualify for tax benefits which can sometimes be significant. These benefits include charitable deductions, property tax reductions, and estate tax benefits.

Private protection can also be achieved through voluntary designation of a Nature Preserve. High-quality natural areas in private, corporate, or government ownership can be dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve. This program is run by the Department of Natural Resources.

Limited private protection can also be achieved through several USDA programs such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP), and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). Most, but not all, of these programs apply to agricultural lands, however they could potentially apply to natural areas or be combined with other programs to maximize land conservation. For more information on these programs visit county Soil & Water Conservation Districts or the USDA website.

- *Conservation Oriented Development*

While this statement may seem like an oxymoron, it is another method to protect natural areas. Development is occurring and we can turn that into an opportunity to permanently protect lands. Developments employing conservation design principles will preserve sensitive areas, be environmentally sustainable, and have lower infrastructure installation and maintenance costs than conventional development. This is true for both residential and commercial developments.

Many governing entities require a percentage land to be maintained as open space and also require land-cash donations to the park/forest preserve districts. That open space should match this plan.

- *Public Acquisition*

Outright purchase, donation, or partial donation of land are common forms of open space protection. The Kendall County Forest Preserve District passed a \$45 million dollar referendum in April 2007 for property acquisition. Grundy County continues to consider formation of a forest preserve district, no such district exists at this time.

Land is also acquired by public agencies (Forest Preserve District and park districts) through a land-cash donation requirement when a property develops. Typical requirements are 7.5-10 acres per 1,000 people to be donated as park land. Open spaces identified on this plan can be priority protection areas for these donated lands.

Who's Working on the Mapping?

The Conservation Foundation is facilitating a subcommittee of Grundy and Will County representatives from the 319 advisory committee to complete these portions of the open space plan. This project will not revisit the Kendall portion of the watershed

recently mapped. It focuses only on the Will and Grundy portions – to compile all data into a watershed-wide open space map.

Data was gathered from these partners and the subcommittee is meeting to review the information for accuracy and consider areas that should be part of this open space plan. A schedule of meetings is listed below. Once a draft plan is complete, a public information meeting will be held to gather further input on the plan. This will likely occur in early 2008.

Will & Grundy Open Space Meetings

Date	Time	Location
Thursday, September 6, 2007	Following 319 advisory committee meeting	Anne Vickery's shed - 4728 Chicago Rd., Minooka
Tuesday, October 30, 2007	9:00 – 10:00 a.m.	Minooka Village Hall – 121 E. McEvelly Rd.
Tuesday, November 20, 2007	9:00 – 10:00 a.m.	Minooka Village Hall
Tuesday, December 18, 2007	9:00 – 10:00 a.m.	Minooka Village Hall

Will & Grundy Subcommittee Members

Name	Title	Organization
Colin Duesing	Long Range Planner	Will County Land Use Department
Deb Steffes		watershed resident, Grundy County
Debra Jo Kinsella	County Extension Director	University of Illinois Extension, Grundy Unit and watershed resident, Grundy County
Dick Kopczick	Mayor	City of Morris
Heidi Miller	Director of Planning, Building, Zoning & Solid Waste	Grundy County
Jake Melrose	Planner	Village of Channahon
James Grabowski	Village Administrator	Village of Minooka
Julie Buck	Executive Director	Morris Community Foundation
Tim Good	Planning Program Supervisor	Will County Forest Preserve District
Natalie Mahler	Resource Conservationist	Grundy County SWCD
Tasha Jordan-Bunting	Manager	Grundy County Farm Bureau