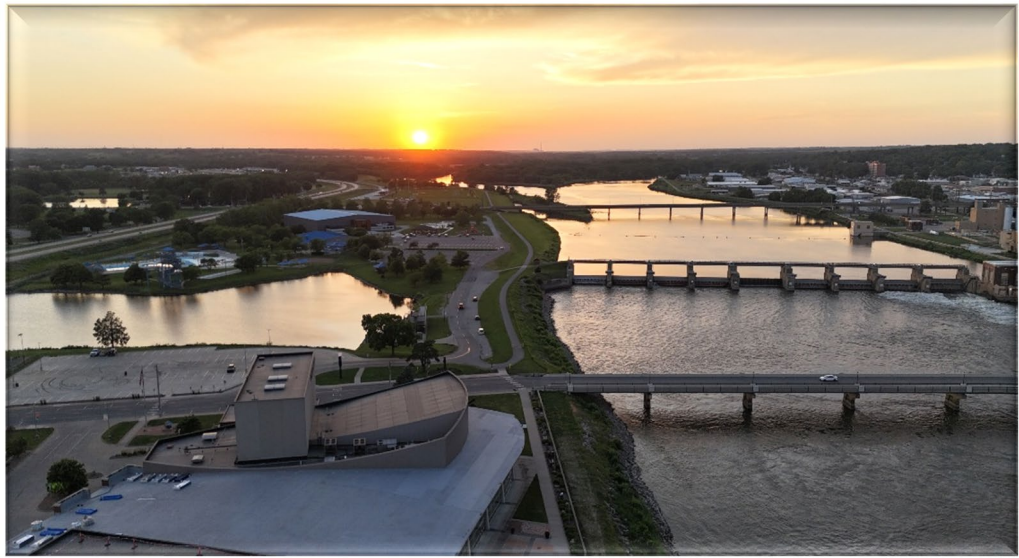
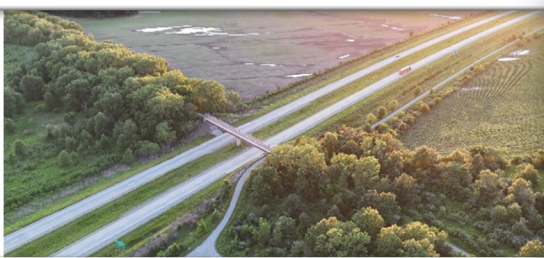




2026

Regional Trails Plan



Area 15 Regional Planning
Commission

RPA 15

August 2026

Prepared by Area 15 Regional Planning Commission

P.O. Box 1110

Ottumwa, IA 52501

(641) 684-6551

This plan was prepared with funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, and in part through local matching funds of the RPA member governments.

Adopting Resolution

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE RPA 15 REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN AS THE OFFICIAL TRAILS PLAN FOR REGIONAL PLANNING AFFILIATION 15

WHEREAS, the Area 15 Regional Planning Commission prepared a Regional Trails Plan which identifies the existing and proposed trails for REGIONAL PLANNING AFFILIATION 15; and

WHEREAS, it is a requirement of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) of 2012 that the transportation planning process and long-range planning be continued, and that bicycle and pedestrian planning be included in this process;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that REGIONAL PLANNING AFFILIATION 15
adopts the RPA 15 Regional Trails Plan as the official trails plan for the region.

Passed this _____ day of _____, 2026.

Chairperson

Regional Planning Affiliation 15

Acknowledgement

Stephen Pedrick – Jefferson County Trails

Frank Broz – Jefferson County Trails

Shawn Morrissey – Jefferson County Conservation

Melanie Carlson – City of Fairfield

Andrew McGuire – Keokuk County Engineer

Pie Reighand – Keokuk County Conservation

Sherry Vavra – Mahaska Community Recreation Foundation

Chris Clingan – Mahaska County Conservation

Kim Steele Blair – Van Buren County Trails Association

Carroll Michalek – Van Buren County Trails Association

Richard Daugherty – Van Buren County Conservation

Sarah Wenke – Wapello County Trails Council

Kim Hellige – Wapello County Trails Council

Rick Tebbs – Wapello County Conservation

Ashley Utt – Pathfinders Resource Conservation and Development

Hector Hernandez-Morales – Area 15 Regional Planning Commission

Chris Kukla- District Planner – Iowa Department of Transportation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW	2
WHAT IS AREA 15 REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION	2
WHY A REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN?	2
<i>Goals of Regional Trails Plan.....</i>	<i>3</i>
A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRAILS	3
HOW CAN YOU STAY INVOLVED?	4
UPDATING THE TRAILS PLAN	5
SECTION TWO: TRAIL AND PEDESTAIN FACILITY TYPES	11
WHY DOES IT MATTER.....	11
BENEFIT (ECONOMIC, EQUITY, HEALTH, TRANSPORTATION)	11
<i>THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF TRAILS.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>THE VALUE OF TRAILS TO PROPERTY AND COMMUNITIES.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Public Health</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Environmental Benefits</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Transportation and Equity</i>	<i>14</i>
TYPES OF FACILITIES.....	15
SECTION THREE: EXISTING TRAIL NETWORK	18
JEFFERSON COUNTY	18
<i>Trail Ownership and Management</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Current Trail System and Community Use.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Parks on the Trail System</i>	<i>19</i>
KEOKUK COUNTY	23
<i>Planning Efforts.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Trail Ownership and management.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Current Trail System and Community Use.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Parks on the Trail System</i>	<i>24</i>
MAHASKA COUNTY	27
<i>Trail Ownership and Management</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Current Trail System and Community Use.....</i>	<i>27</i>

<i>Parks on the Trail System</i>	28
VAN BUREN COUNTY	32
<i>Trail Ownership and Maintenance</i>	32
<i>Current Trail System and Community Use</i>	32
<i>Parks on the Trail System</i>	33
WAPELLO COUNTY	38
<i>Trail Ownership and Management</i>	38
<i>Current Trail System and Community Use</i>	39
<i>Parks on the Trail System</i>	40
SECTION FOUR: WATER TRAILS	49
WHAT ARE WATER TRAILS	49
WATER TRAIL CLASSIFICATION	49
EXISTING WATER TRAILS	51
<i>Water Trails Access Location</i>	52
POTENTIAL WATER TRAIL CONNECTION	53
SECTION FIVE: NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND PUBLIC INPUT	56
OVERVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS	56
REGIONAL CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES	56
PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT	56
<i>Regional Trail Plan survey for Community Leaders/Stakeholders</i>	56
<i>Jefferson County SWOT analysis</i>	57
<i>Keokuk County SWOT Analysis</i>	59
<i>Mahaska County SWOT analysis</i>	61
<i>Van Buren SWOT analysis</i>	62
<i>Wapello County SWOT analysis</i>	64
BARRIERS TO TRAIL DEVELOPMENT	65
SECTION SIX: TRAIL VISION & PHASING PLAN	67
COST ESTIMATED AND PHASING	67
<i>Calculating Planned Corridors</i>	68
<i>Phasing the corridors</i>	69
<i>Long Term Goals (Vision/Concept/No Timeline proposed)</i>	70
STATEWIDE TRAILS VISION FOR MULTI-USE TRAILS	71
<i>Jefferson County</i>	73
<i>Keokuk County</i>	73

<i>Mahaska County</i>	74
<i>Van Buren County</i>	75
<i>Wapello County</i>	75
SECTION SEVEN: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY	78
ROLE OF RPA 15 IN BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLANNING AND FUNDING	78
MUNICIPAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES	78
<i>County Responsibilities for Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure</i>	79
LAND ACQUISITION AND EASEMENT CONSIDERATIONS	81
<i>How are easements negotiated</i>	81
<i>Strategies for easement/land acquisition</i>	82
SECTION EIGHT: FUNDING	83
ROLE OF RPA 15 IN BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLANNING AND FUNDING	83
TRANSPORTATION FUNDING PROGRAMS	83
<i>Federal and State Funding programs</i>	83
<i>Department of Natural Resources & Economic Development Funding</i>	86
<i>Local and Private Organization Grants</i>	86
WHAT IS NEXT?	87
APPENDICES	89



SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

WHAT IS AREA 15 REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

The Area 15 Regional Planning Commission (RPC) has served as a vital resource for Southeast Iowa since its formation in July 1974. Originally established as a Council of Governments (COG), the Commission provides regional planning and coordination services to local jurisdictions across a six-county area. As the designated Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA) for transportation planning, Area 15 RPC specifically assists the counties of Jefferson, Keokuk, Mahaska, Van Buren, and Wapello.

The mission of Area 15 RPC is to promote the general welfare, safety, convenience, and prosperity of the region through collaborative planning and development. This includes supporting local governments with technical assistance, planning coordination, project development, and advocacy in key areas such as transportation, housing, community and economic development, land use, and natural resource management.

In the context of regional trail planning, Area 15 RPC provides strategic guidance and support to ensure trail development aligns with long-term goals for connectivity, accessibility, recreation, and quality of life. Services span four core categories: Economic Development, Community Development, Business Assistance, and Transportation Planning, all of which play a role in fostering a comprehensive and connected trail network for Southeast Iowa.

WHY A REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN?

The Regional Trails Plan is a document prepared by the Area 15 Regional Planning Commission for Regional Planning Affiliation 15 (RPA 15) with funding provided by the Iowa Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration. This plan covers five counties in southeast Iowa (Jefferson, Keokuk, Mahaska, Van Buren and Wapello) and serves as a supplement to the 2024 RPA 15 Long-Range Transportation Plan. It is designed to promote coordinated and joint planning for trails that improve recreation opportunities and transportation networks.

This plan provides an inventory of the existing and proposed trails and discusses other geographic features relating to trails such as parks, recreation areas, and scenic areas. The plan incorporates local plans and identifies issues related to future trails. It documents the goals and objectives for future investment and development by the RPA's Technical Advisory Committee and Policy Board. The plan also identifies funding sources to assist cities and counties with trail development. The trails plan will be updated every five years to stay current with the growing and changing trail systems. During the years between updates, the RPA's GIS information on trails will be updated as needed. This will enable the RPA to stay up to date with local trail planning efforts.

The Area 15 Regional Trails Plan provides a coordinated framework for improving trail connectivity across Jefferson, Keokuk, Mahaska, Van Buren, and Wapello counties. Trails play an increasingly important role in supporting recreation, transportation choice, public health, tourism, and quality of life in rural communities. While the region includes strong existing trail systems and active local partners, trail development has historically occurred in a fragmented manner, with varying levels of capacity, funding, and land access across counties.



This plan is intended to guide future trail investments by identifying needs, opportunities, and priorities while remaining realistic about implementation challenges. It serves as a supplement to the RPA 15 Long-Range Transportation Plan and aligns with the Iowa DOT 2025 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan by supporting multimodal transportation, Complete Streets principles, and regional connectivity.

Goals of Regional Trails Plan

The goals of the regional trail plan were provided by community input and steering committee, as well as other strategic planning documents from different communities or regions within RPA 15.



Figure 1-Illustrates the six goals identified from the community engagement input and Area 15 IRPA 15) LRTP

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRAILS

Trails became important early in the history of the United States for transportation. This was before roads and railroads were widely developed and the other major mode of transportation was water. Away from the coast, water transportation was limited to rivers and canals and trails were very important for transportation within the interior of the U.S. Several important routes ran through the area that is now the State of Iowa, these include: the Lewis and Clark Trail, Oregon Trail, and the Mormon Trail. In the early 1800's

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark led an expedition to explore from the Mississippi River west to the Pacific Ocean. This route included a stop in the present-day location of Council Bluffs and became known as the Lewis



and Clark Trail. The Oregon Trail was the route used by farmers and missionaries in the 1830s to travel from the towns on the Missouri River to Oregon Country. In the mid 1840's members of the Church of Latter- Day Saints sought to relocate to the present location of Salt Lake City to practice their religion without persecution. This route started in Nauvoo, Illinois, ran through Iowa on the journey to Salt Lake, included the establishment of several villages, and became the Mormon Trail.

The use of trails for transportation continued through the next several decades and interest in trail development grew as bicycles became widely available by 1890. As people took bicycles, there were few roads and they were generally in poor condition, so the idea of building bicycle paths became popular. These paths were like recreational trails in that they connected cities, recreation areas and attractions. Ideas for expanding the network of bicycle paths included building them along railroads and roads. While the railroads were not interesting, hard surfaced paths were developed alongside existing roads. During this time, the Good Roads Movement occurred, which advocated the construction of paved roads with tax dollars to connect cities and promote development in rural areas. Bicycle enthusiasts became early advocates of this movement as they saw the benefit of paved rural roads for bicycles. In the beginning of the 1900's, interest in bicycles for transportation decreased as automobiles came to greater use. At the same time, the advocacy for road improvements was taken over by automobile supporters.

Bicycling saw a resurgence in the late 1960's and early 70's in the U.S. as Americans saw it to exercise and as an energy efficient alternative mode of transportation. However as numerous automobiles were now on U.S. roads, separate trails were now preferred. Also, during the 1960's the railroads began closing and selling off lines that were not being used or generating enough revenue. Governments and private organizations saw the possibilities of using these corridors for trails that would provide transportation, recreation, tourism, and improve quality of life. The first rail to trail conversion was the Elroy-Sparta State Trail in Wisconsin. In 1976 the idea of converting abandoned rail lines to trails was formalized with the passage of the Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act. This act established the Rails-to-Trails Grant program and provided funding and assistance to preserve rail corridors and build trails. The development of recreation trails was further assisted in 1991 with the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, which provided federal funding to cities, counties and states for trail construction.

Iowa currently has 1,980 miles of multi-use trails, which includes 806 miles of trails that use abandoned rail lines. This ranks Iowa 8th among the states in rail-to-trail mileage. RPA 15 has 69.55 miles of multi-use trails in five counties, which is three percent of the state's total mileage.

HOW CAN YOU STAY INVOLVED?

The Trails plan represent the different trails throughout the region existing and future projects that have provided information on what has and will be completed. Representatives of engineers, local county trail members, governmental bodies, and county conservation staff. Organizations that have different impacts of the Area 15 Regional Trail Plan are:

- City Council
- County Board of Supervisors Meetings
- Advocacy organizations (County Trail groups)
- County Conversation

Actively reaching out saying connected with the projects. Residents may have to volunteer, attend government, non-profits, promoting successful projects. It takes more than one person to have successful trail development. Fundraising and donation projects have been taking more funds due to increase of property easements, labor, and materials.



Figure 2-Picture of Mahaska County Courthouse

UPDATING THE TRAILS PLAN

The process to update the regional plan for RPA 15 began on August 2025 by meeting with Stakeholders such as park and rec directors, trails council representatives, and public works engineers. Each member was reached by the county each organization they represented. Meetings were held to discuss the IDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian plan. A collaborative effort was made to create goals which aligned with the plans like. Long range Transportation Plan, comprehensive, economic analysis, and parks master plan. Finalizing with the implantation strategies for executing the trails plan.

Area 15 RPC attended the Iowa Summit Trail 2025 to connect with organization with success stories of their own. Organizations such as Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Economic Development of different communities, RPA/MPO, and other organizations involved with trail development.

Reaching out to different RPA/MPO in the state to provide information or input on their process of communication with cities or counties on development of trails.

Area 15 RPC created two surveys questionnaire for community leaders/stakeholders and public/residents/daily trail users. These surveys questionnaires were used to help identify the challenges and see how Area 15 could support the county in pursing for trail projects. The other survey would be used to help identify what residents believe should be prioritized while developing the trail system.

After the completion of the survey Area 15 RPC met with each county trail organization for Mahaska, Jefferson, and Wapello, Van Buren Economic Development board, and Keokuk Conservation to conduct a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threats) to learn about challenges and priority for trail development. The process can be found in Section Five: Needs and Assessment and Public Input.

After the completion of the SWOT analysis workshop the Technical Advisory Committee will review the Regional Trail Plan to make any comments or suggestions to the plan. The Regional Trail Plan then was updated and posted for public hearing on the Ottumwa Courier.

Finally, the policy board review, the public hearing comments and approve of the regional trail plan in August's Policy Board meeting.

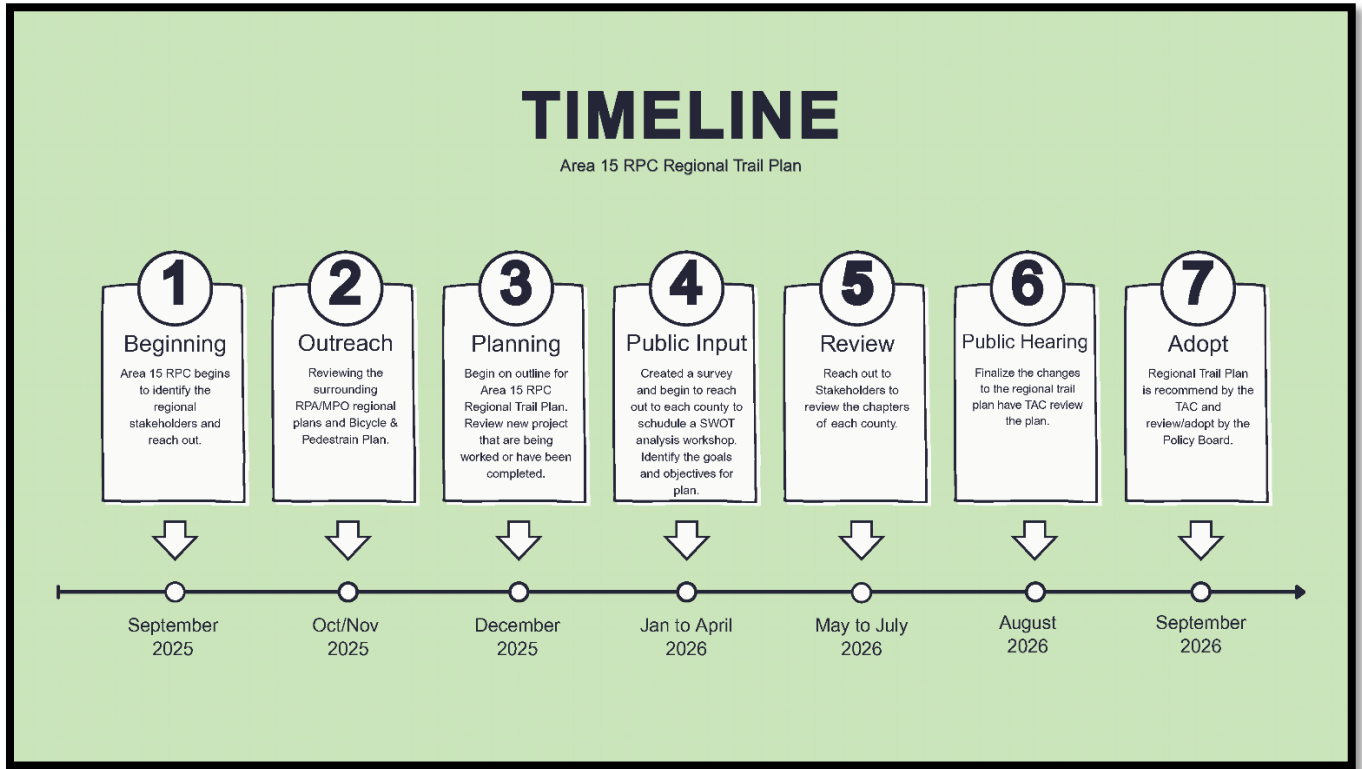


Figure 3- Timeline of the planning of the Area 15 RPC's Regional Trail Plan 2025-26

The timeline diagram demonstrates how Area 15 RPC process was updated by the Regional Trail Plan. The process began in August of 2025 discussing update to the RPA 15 regional Trail plan. The following months October and November involve reaching out to different RPA/MPO agencies in the surrounding region. December/January involved the planning phase of the plan. Public input is the process which involves the most coordination of the process.

PLANS AND POLICIES REVIEWED

Area 15 RPC reviewed different plans to have a better understanding of what is being planned and being worked on in the region. Counties, cities, non-profit organizations and states do not have constant communication between each entity. Review these plans and provide detailed information with help develop strategies for building up the trails network in RPA 15.

Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) 2045 – Regional Planning Affiliation 15 (2024)

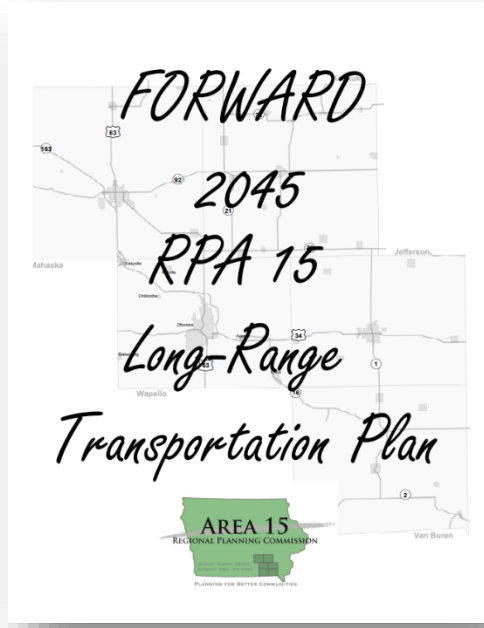


Figure 4- Area 15 RPC's LRTP 2024

The 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) serves as a comprehensive blueprint for the development, maintenance, and improvement of the region's transportation system through the horizon year of 2045. The LRTP places emphasis on creating a safe, efficient, and multimodal transportation system that supports economic development and quality of life, while also encouraging the use of alternative modes, such as public transit, walking, and biking.

The plan identifies short and long-term needs based on current infrastructure conditions, usage patterns, and projected growth. It prioritizes system preservation and improvement, acknowledging that investments in non-motorized infrastructure can help reduce congestion, improve safety, and support healthier lifestyles.

The LRTP is updated every five years to remain responsive to demographic shifts, economic trends, and emerging transportation needs. It also provides a framework for accessing federal, state, and local funding, which may support trail development and maintenance through appropriate programs.

Iowa DOT Bicycle & Pedestrian Long-Range Plan (2025)

The 2025 Iowa DOT Bicycle & Pedestrian Long-Range Plan establishes a clear statewide vision for enhancing walking and biking opportunities, supported by extensive public and stakeholder engagement. It reviews existing DOT programs and offers recommendations to improve coordination and prioritization of bicycle/pedestrian projects. A detailed infrastructure analysis helps guide appropriate facility choices, while statewide network recommendations highlight integration with major trail corridors and national routes.



Figure 5- Iowa DOT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan 2025



City of Ottumwa Comprehensive Plan (2022)

This guided document outlines the vision for integrating trails and multi-modal transportation into the city's growth trajectory. It establishes priority corridors and maps proposed trail networks especially linking residential areas, parks, downtown, and the Des Moines River with projects. The document goes over the strategies which will work towards the development and vision for 2040.

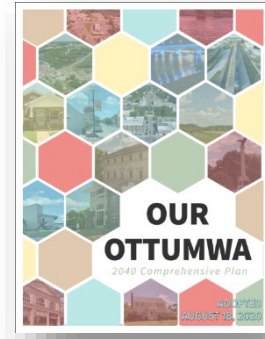


Figure 6-Ottumwa Comprehensive Plan 2020

Fairfield Forever Comprehensive Plan (2020)

The City of Fairfield's comprehensive plan lays out a long-term vision through 2040 for growth, sustainability, and quality of life improvements driven by community input around housing, economic opportunity, and active living. It prioritizes the completion and expansion of a 33-mile, multi-use trail network, including the already established 16-mile Fairfield Loop Trail, to connect neighborhoods, parks, water features, and natural corridors.



Figure 7-The city of Fairfield Comprehensive Plan 2020

PlanOskey Comprehensive Plan (2022)

PlanOskey serves as Oskaloosa's foundational guide for land use, transportation, parks, and recreation. It embeds a strong active transportation element sidewalk infill, safe pedestrian crossings, and integration with the 13.6-mile Mahaska Community Recreation Trail as part of an across-the-board push for connected mobility.



Figure 8- The city of Oskaloosa's Comprehensive Plan 2022

Red Rock Lake Master Plan (2015)

The Red Rock Lake Master Plan demonstrated the land use, future expansions, conversation for the lake, strategies on development on Lake Red Rock. Marion County is adjacent to RPA 15 which will have an impact on how to develop with Mahaska County trail development. Red Rock Lake has an extensive amount of trail development connecting the city of Pella to its trail corridor.

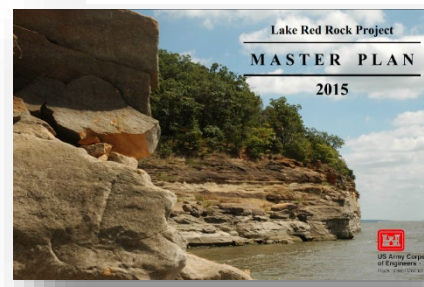


Figure 9- Lake Red Rock Master Plan 2015

Active Transportation Plan 2025 (Regional Planning Affiliation 10)

The Active Transportation Plan 2025 of Regional Planning Affiliation 10 has gone over the interest in trail development in the last few years from all the counties of Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones Linn, and Washington. Uses different outreach strategies such as surveys and workshops to ultimately decide on goals and assist counties and communities on how to spend the funding and prioritizing.



Figure 10- RPA 10's Active Transportation Plan

The Washington county brings connected to RPA 15 is an important document to review to determine how RPA 15 will align with existing trail development and proposed trail such as North English or Washington-Keota trail.

Chariton Valley Transportation Planning Affiliation – RPA 17 2022-2045 Regional Trails Plan

The 2022-2045 Regional Trails Plan from Chariton Valley Planning Affiliation (RPA 17) goes over the processes related to the counties which RPA consist of which are Appanoose, Clark, Davis, Decatur, Lucas, Monroe, & Wayne counties. Is Regional Trail plan was approved in 2022

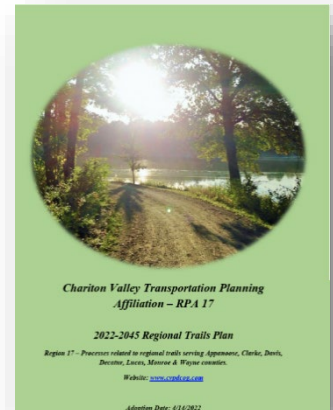


Figure 11-RPA 17's Regional Transportation Plan

RPA 2021 Regional Trails Plan

The RPA 15 Regional Trail Plan includes all the existing trails from 2021. The Regional Trail plan gets updated every five years. This document shows all the project worked on from 2016- 2021 as well as future trail. The plan is a very informative plan that includes water and Mult-use trail.

Area 15 RPC decided to structure the new regional trail plan from 2021 to help develop new strategies for helping develop trail within the region.



Figure 13-RPA 15 2021 Regional Trails Plan

the state. The document goes over the requirements for water trails, design elements, water trails in the state, land & stream management. Water trails would need to comply with these requirements to be recognized by the state as a water trail.

Developing Water Trails in Iowa

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources created this document to provide guidance on how to develop water trails in



Figure 12-Developing Water Trails in Iowa (IDNR)

Southeast Iowa Region Transportation & Development Plan 2055

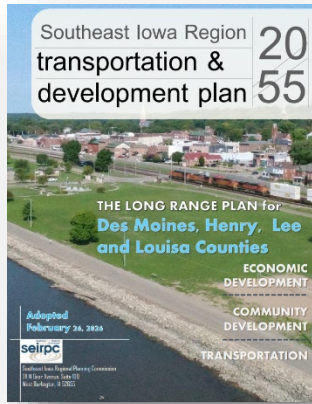


Figure 14-Southeast Iowa Region Transportation & Development plan 2055

The Southeast Iowa Region Transportation & Development Plan 2055 is the RPA 15 Long Range Transportation Plan which talks about trail development in the region. RPA 15 is adjacent to RPA 15 and has possible linkage for trail development along Fairfield and Mount Pleasant

2022 Black Hawk County Water Trail Master Plan

The Black Hawk County Trail Master plan with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and Black Hawk County to outline the site-specific infrastructure and design improvements for 22 recreation sites along the Cedar River and Black Hawk Creek. This initiative led to the official 47 miles state designation of these waterways as protected water trails.



Figure 15- 2022 Black Hawk County Water Trail Master plan



SECTION TWO: TRAIL AND PEDESTAIN FACILITY TYPES

The Regional Trail plan has different facility types throughout each county and cities in the represented Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA) 15 regions. Iowa Department of Transportations (DOT) and Statewide Urban Design and Specifications (SUDAS) have classified different sidewalks, trails, and shared roadways. The regional trails plan also includes water trails as a path within the region of RPA 15.

Iowa Department of Transportation adopted the Iowa Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in May 2025. The main goals of the plan were created by the Policy Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Committee. The Committees identified the priorities as Valid, Safe, Coordinated, Connected Funded, Well-Designed, and Healthy.

WHY DOES IT MATTER

Our trail system includes a variety of paths and sidewalks to serve people walking, biking, running, using wheelchairs, or just enjoying the outdoors. This section explains the different types of facilities we use, how they work, who they're for, and when each one is most appropriate. Understanding the types of facilities helps us make smart choices as we improve and expand our trail network.

BENEFIT (ECONOMIC, EQUITY, HEALTH, TRANSPORTATION)

Bicycle and pedestrian facilities provide more than just transportation options; they can serve as powerful tools for strengthening local economies and enhancing the overall quality of life in communities. This section highlights the wide-ranging benefits of walking and biking, from improving public health and safety to supporting economic development and increasing recreational opportunities for residents of all ages.

THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF TRAILS



Figure 16- Money to represent economic benefits

Rails-to Trails- Conservancy (RTC) is a nonprofit organization which was created in 1986 to bring trails to communities through the national. Rails-to-Trails works on creating former rail lines into rail-trails ready to be built. RTC's mission "At Rails to Trails Conservancy, we are building a nation connected by trails. We reimagine public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors."

According to RTC, coordinated investments in trails and active transportation systems yield extraordinary economic returns exceeding the cost of the initial infrastructure cost. Trails also boost property values, spur small businesses, and catalyze tourism, driving increased economic vitality.

Rails to Trail Conservancy new study's active transportation transforms America finds that health cost saving, climate protection, mobility and direct economic value of trails contribute more than \$34 billion to the U.S economy analysis.

Source: Rail to Trails (RTC) Conservancy



THE VALUE OF TRAILS TO PROPERTY AND COMMUNITIES

Trails and pedestrian infrastructure can provide measurable economic and community benefits for both residents and local governments. Numerous studies across the United States have found that proximity to well-maintained trails, greenways, and parks is associated with increased residential property values and improved community attractiveness. Research highlighted by the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR) and other national studies indicates that homes located near trails and green infrastructure often experience positive market perceptions and, in many cases, increased property values. While impacts vary depending on location, design quality, and surrounding land use, studies have shown that properties near trails may experience value premiums ranging from approximately 3 to 5 percent, with some communities experiencing higher increases.



Figure 17- Hand with a plant to represent environmental benefits

Trails contribute to broader community and economic development goals. Well-connected trail systems can increase quality of life, attract visitors, support tourism, and enhance the overall attractiveness of communities for residents, businesses, and workforce retention. Investments in trails and green infrastructure are increasingly viewed as long-term community assets that support both economic competitiveness and public well-being. The National Association of Realtors notes that parks, trails, and green infrastructure can generate economic returns through increased visitation, improved community desirability, and enhanced neighborhood appeal.

Trail investments also contribute significantly to Iowa's outdoor recreation economy. A 2012 study conducted by the University of Northern Iowa and the Iowa Bicycle Coalition estimated that bicycling and trails generate approximately \$364.8 million in annual economic impact statewide. More recent statewide recreation estimates indicate that Iowa's outdoor recreation economy generates billions of dollars annually, with bicycling, walking, and trail-related activities representing a substantial component of that economic activity. These investments support local businesses, recreation-based tourism, and community development throughout the state.

For rural communities within the Area 15 region, trails can also strengthen community identity and support placemaking efforts by improving access to parks, downtowns, river corridors, and natural amenities. Smaller communities may benefit from trail systems that enhance local quality of life, support tourism activity, and create opportunities for future regional connections.

Source: National Association of Realtors (NAR)

Public Health

Trails provide accessible, safe, low cost for physical activity such as walking, biking, jogging, skating that people of all ages can integrate into their daily life. Trails and greenways are powerful tools for enhancing community health by increasing opportunities for physical activity, mental well-being, and social connection. According to the CDC's Active People, Healthy Nation initiative, enabling access to places that support physical activity, like trails, parks, and greenways, is fundamental to promoting healthier behaviors across populations. Well-designed trails offer safe, convenient, and accessible routes for walking, biking, and other activities, which significantly boosts usage and activity levels. A study in Greenville County, SC, revealed that trail users were about 44% less likely to be overweight or obese (odds ratio = 0.56) and nearly twice as likely to report high self-rated health compared to nonusers.



Figure 18- Heart rate symbol of public health



Another study found that approximately 23% of trail users were “new exercisers,” who had begun regular exercise routines because of trail availability, with many relying on trails as their primary outlet for physical activity. Trails not only encourage exercise but also foster social engagement and contribute to mental health by providing pleasant, natural surroundings and safe public spaces.



Figure 19- Medical doctor to represent public health

To maximize these public health benefits, the CDC’s Community Preventive Services Task Force recommends pairing trail infrastructure improvements with programming like awareness campaigns, group walks, and community outreach to ensure long-term, equitable use.

Trails and pedestrian facilities are critical components of a healthy and connected transportation system. Shared-use paths, sidewalks, greenways, and water trails provide accessible, safe, and low-cost opportunities for physical activity, including walking, bicycling, jogging, skating, and other recreational uses that can be integrated into daily life. In both urban and rural communities throughout the Area 15 region, trails serve as important public spaces that support physical health, mental well-being, social interaction, and access to community destinations.

Trails and pedestrian facilities provide accessible, safe, and low-cost opportunities for physical activity that can be incorporated into everyday life. Facilities such as shared-use paths, sidewalks, greenways, and recreational trails support activities including walking, bicycling, jogging, and skating for residents of all ages and abilities. In rural and small communities throughout the Area 15 region, trails can serve as important public spaces that encourage active lifestyles and increase access to outdoor recreation opportunities.

Source: CDC Active People, Healthy Nation

Research has shown that trails can positively influence health behaviors and activity levels. A study conducted in Greenville County, South Carolina, found that trail users were approximately 44 percent less likely to be overweight or obese and nearly twice as likely to report high self-rated health compared to non-users. Additional studies found that approximately 23 percent of trail users identified themselves as “new exercisers” who began regular physical activity because trails were available in their community. These findings demonstrate the role trails can play in encouraging physical activity and supporting long-term public health outcomes.

Source: American Public Health Association (APHA): Improving Health Through Transportation and Active Design

Environmental Benefits

Trails and pedestrian facilities support alternative, non-motorized modes of transportation such as walking and bicycling, helping reduce reliance on personal vehicles and contributing to lower greenhouse gas emissions. By providing opportunities for shorter local trips and active transportation, trail systems can help improve air quality and support more sustainable transportation patterns within communities. When paired with compact community design and connected infrastructure networks, trails can contribute to healthier and more environmentally resilient communities.

Trails and greenways also provide important environmental and ecological benefits through the preservation and enhancement of open



Figure 20- Looking West on Milred & Eddie Ferguson Sports Complex (Keosauqua)



space and natural landscapes. Many trail corridors function as green infrastructure by incorporating vegetation, permeable surfaces, and natural drainage areas that help reduce stormwater runoff, improve water infiltration, and protect local watersheds. Green infrastructure practices associated with trail development can assist communities in managing flooding impacts, reducing erosion, and improving overall environmental quality.

Reducing dependence on motorized travel and encouraging active transportation can also contribute to broader climate resilience and sustainability goals. Investments in trails, sidewalks, and bicycle infrastructure support transportation systems that are more energy efficient and environmentally sustainable over the long term. As communities continue to plan for future growth and infrastructure improvements, integrating trails and green infrastructure into transportation planning can help support both environmental protection and community livability objectives.

Source : EPA Smart Growth

Transportation and Equity

It is important with the rural areas within RPA 15 (Jefferson, Mahaska, Keokuk, Van Buren, and Wapello) which have limited transit options. Reducing the cost of transportation on short trips (schools, grocery stores) less fuel, vehicle maintenance, or transit fares. Trails and pedestrian facilities provide important transportation and equity benefits by expanding safe, affordable, and accessible mobility options for residents of all ages and abilities

Walking and bicycling infrastructure can help improve access for individuals who may have limited transportation choices, including children, older adults, individuals with disabilities, and lower-income households. Equitable transportation systems are designed to provide mobility options regardless of income level, age, physical ability, or geographic location, ensuring that all residents have opportunities to safely access community destinations and services.

Within Area 15 region, which includes the counties of Jefferson County, Mahaska County, Keokuk County, Van Buren County, and Wapello County, transportation options can be limited, particularly in smaller rural communities and unincorporated areas. Many communities throughout the region have limited public transit service, making trails, sidewalks, and bicycle facilities important components of the local transportation network. These facilities can help residents access schools, parks, downtown areas, healthcare services, and other community destinations without relying entirely on personal vehicles.

Trails and active transportation infrastructure can also help reduce transportation costs associated with short trips by decreasing dependence on fuel, vehicle ownership, maintenance, and other travel-related expenses. For households with limited financial resources, access to safe walking and bicycling routes can provide meaningful economic benefits while improving mobility and independence. In smaller communities, trails and pedestrian facilities may also serve as critical connectors between neighborhoods, schools, parks, and recreational amenities where roadway infrastructure may not adequately accommodate non-motorized users.

Providing safe and connected pedestrian and bicycle facilities can also improve overall transportation safety by reducing conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Infrastructure improvements such as shared-use paths, sidewalks, widened shoulders, marked crossings, and traffic calming measures can help create safer environments for all users.



Figure 21-Transit buses along Hwy 163 near Eddyville



Expanding active transportation infrastructure throughout the Area 15 region supports broader goals related to accessibility, connectivity, and community livability.

Regional coordination and continued investment in multimodal transportation infrastructure will be important to improving mobility and expanding transportation choices throughout the region. As communities plan for future transportation improvements, incorporating trail and pedestrian infrastructure into roadway, bridge, and community development projects can help create more connected, equitable, and resilient transportation systems.

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT): Equity Action Plan & Complete Streets Guidance

TYPES OF FACILITIES

The Regional Trail plans have different facility types throughout each county and cities in the represented Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA) 15 region. Iowa Department of Transportations (DOT) and Statewide Urban Design and Specifications (SUDAS) have classified different sidewalks, trails, and shared roadways.

Each facility type is designed to serve specific user groups, contexts, and mobility needs. Design guidance is based on the Iowa Statewide Urban Design and Specifications (SUDAS), along with best practices from national sources such as AASHTO, NACTO, and FHWA.

The last type of facility would be water trails. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources classifies water trails as recreation corridors and routes on rivers and lakes

Sidewalks

Sidewalks are pedestrian-only facilities located adjacent to roadways, typically separated by a curb and green buffer. Minimum width would need to be 5FT with some 4FT being allowed with passing areas of 5FT every 200 FT. Commercial lots are 6FT with some sidewalks adjacent to the car park being 7FT to 8FT. Material for sidewalks is concrete.



Figure 22- Sidewalk in the City New Sharon along Iowa Hwy 102

Shared Use/ Multi-use Path (MUPs)

Multi-use paths are off-street facilities designed for both bicyclists and pedestrians. They are typically separated from vehicular traffic and offer a safer, more comfortable experience. Width of 10FT minimum, 12-14FT in high use corridors. Ideally 5FT or more from the roadway, if less than barrier or curb is recommended. Material can be either asphalt or concrete. The Multi-use/Shared-use paths are typically for regional trails, park connections, riverfronts, and school access routes.



Figure 23- Multi-use Trail along the Oxbow Trail

Sidepaths

Sidepaths are shared-use paths that run parallel to a roadway (within the Right-of-Way), often used in suburban or rural corridors. Width and standards that match shared-use path design 10FT minimum with 12-14FT in high use corridors are preferred. Buffering a minimum of 5FT if less than barrier or curb is recommended.



Figure 24- South view of Sidepath on Milner St and ariel view picture

Bike lanes (buffered and standard)

Are defined as striped lanes on streets designated exclusively for bicycle travel, often with signage or pavement markings. Typically, it is for cyclists, either commuting or recreational. The design requirements would be at least a minimum of 4FT but 5-6FT would be preferred. Buffering of 2-3FT parked vehicles or high-speed roads.



Figure 25-Bike Lane in Oskaloosa on S H St

Signed Bike Route/Shared Lanes/Bike Routes

Low-speed, low-volume streets optimized for bicycle travel through traffic calming, wayfinding signage, and shared lane markings. Typically found in low traffic count paved roads in rural areas. Two lane roadways with wide paved shoulders are preferred.



Figure 26- Shared Road/Bike Route on E Broadway Ave in Fairfield

Natural Surface Trail/Recreational Trail

Are defined as unpaved trails for hiking, mountain biking, equestrian use, or nature walking. The intended users are hikers, bikers, runners, and equestrians. The width of the trail can range from 4FT to 10FT. Material can consist of crushed rock, dirt, wood chips, or other natural material. More popular for recreation and tourism.



Figure 27-On Glasgow Rd viewing SW on the Fairfield Loop



SECTION THREE: EXISTING TRAIL NETWORK

RPA 15 has been working with the counties and cities in the region (Jefferson, Mahaska, Keokuk, Van Buren, and Wapello) by creating Trail Plans since 2001 consistently been updated about every 5 years. This section will talk about the existing trail and network they can be found in each community as well as county.

The following section provides a county-by-county overview of existing trail facilities within the RPA 15 region. Each county summary includes key trail systems (water & pedestrian), facility type, and connections to existing intercity trails.

JEFFERSON COUNTY

According to the US Census Bureau, in 2023 Jefferson County had an estimated population of 15,440. Fairfield is the county seat and largest city, with an estimated population of 9,300. In addition to Fairfield, there are six other smaller cities within the county. Jefferson County's geography is rural consisting of farmlands with scattered woodlands. The Skunk River runs through the northeastern corner of the county.

The Jefferson County Trails Council was formed in 1997 with the assistance of the County Conservation Board. The original goal of the group was to extend the Jefferson County Park trail to Libertyville along the abandoned Rock Island rail line. A section from the park to Cedar Creek was acquired and converted into a trail, and a regional enhancement grant was obtained for constructing a bridge over the creek. The Cedar View Trail Bridge was completed in 2002. While construction of the bridge and the Cedar View Trail were taking place, the trails council developed a plan for a loop trail around Fairfield, with "feeder" trails running from the loop trail into the city. The Fairfield Loop Trail was constructed in sections; the first section constructed in 1999 and the most recent in 2013. There are also five designated and signed bikeways/walkways in Fairfield, which connect the city's neighborhoods to the loop trail.

For more information/Contact for Jefferson County:

Jefferson County Trail - www.jeffersoncountytrails.org & comments@jeffersoncountytrails.org

Jefferson County Conservation Board - www.jeffersoncountyconservation.com & jeffersoncccb@lisco.com

(641) 472-4421

Fairfield Parks and Recreation – cityoffairfield.com/249/Parks-Recreation & 641-472-6159

Figure 28-Table above shows the contact information for Jefferson County

Trail Ownership and Management

The trail system in Jefferson County is managed through a collaborative effort between the City of Fairfield and the Jefferson County Conservation Board. Responsibilities are roughly split between the two entities, with each overseeing portions of the trail network that fall within their respective jurisdictions. The Conservation Board is represented on the



RPA 15 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) by Shawn Morrissey, while city staff manage technical planning, funding coordination, and long-term trail strategy.

Jefferson County benefits from the active involvement of a volunteer Trails Council. While the Council does not hold legal authority over trail infrastructure, it plays a significant role in promoting trail development, organizing volunteer maintenance, and advocating for trail enhancements. Communication regarding new trail initiatives is preferred to go through the City or County to ensure coordination with official plans, funding sources, and maintenance priorities.

Current Trail System and Community Use

The trail system connects a range of destinations including parks, preserves, neighborhoods, and downtown areas. It is supported by both paved and natural surface segments and includes bridges, signage, and scenic features such as the Lamson Woods Preserve.

With many sections now approaching 25 years of use, the trail system is transitioning into a phase of long-term maintenance and reinvestment. Routine upkeep and surface repairs are becoming more critical to preserving accessibility and safety. This conversation topic was brought up during the SWOT analysis workshop.

Name	Maintained by	Surface type	Notable feature	Connections
Fairfield Loop Trail	City of Fairfield and the Jefferson County Conservation Board	Mostly crushed limestone, paved, and shared gravel roadway	Maasdam Barns, Judy Bales Art, Matkin Bridge, Loudon Bridge and Crow Creek	Jefferson County Health Center Trail, Cedar View Trail, Waterworks Park, Woods/Wetland
Cedar View Trail	Jefferson County Conservation Board	1.4 miles crushed limestone, 3.0 miles dirt, gravel, or concrete shared roadway.	Judy Bales Art, bridge over Cedar Creek, Bridge over US 34 bypass	Jefferson County Park, Fairfield Loop Trail, Cedar Creek Wetlands, Cedar Creek Timber, City of Fairfield and the City of Libertyville.
Jefferson County Health Center Trail	Jefferson County Health Center	Crushed Limestone	Exercise stations	Fairfield Loop Trail

Table 1-Shows the existing trails for Jefferson County

Parks on the Trail System

Jefferson County has multiple parks that go through a trail system. All these parks are maintained by either Jefferson County Conversation Board or city of Fairfield if they are within city limits of Fairfield.

CEDAR CREEK TIMBER AND WETLAND



The Cedar Creek Timber and Wetland is located just Southwest city limits of Fairfield. This 275-acre park is maintained by Jefferson County Conservation. The Cedar Creek Timber and Wetland can be accessed from the Cedar View Trail. The amenities this park provides are hiking, biking, cross country, skiing trails, fishing in Cedar Creek and hunting.

CHAUTAUQUA PARK

The Chautauqua Park is located East of Fairfield on E Burlington Ave, which was the Highway 34 business corridor. The park is maintained by the city of Fairfield.

JEFFERSON COUNTY PARK

Jefferson County Park is located southwest of the city of Fairfield it is maintained by Jefferson County Conservation board. The park is 227 acres and has amenities like camping, picnic shelters, hiking, biking, cross country skiing trails, fishing ponds, natural center, playground equipment, and baseball field. Jefferson County Park is connected to the Fairfield loop and Cedar View Trail.

LAMSON WOODS

Lamson Woods is in the city Southeast of Fairfield. This 42.2-acre park is maintained and managed by city of Fairfield. This park provides parking and a walking path for the Fairfield trail.

NEFF WETLANDS

The Neff Wetlands is a located East of Fairfield on Glasgow Road. This 35-acre wetland is maintained by the Jefferson County Conversation Board. Provides parking and access to the walking path which is connected to the Fairfield Loop.

WATERWORKS PARK

The Waterworks Park is located North of Fairfield in between N B Street and Pleasant Plain Rd. This 97.2-acre park is maintained by the city of Fairfield. The park provides amenities like swimming beach, fishing, walking paths, playground equipment, picnic area, and boat launch.

WITHAM WOODS

The Witham Woods is a park located Northwest of Fairfield. This 133-acre park is maintained by the Jefferson County Conservation Board. The amenities this park offers are Hiking/cross county skiing trails, fishing pond and historic railroad



Figure 29- Ariel view picture of Jefferson County Little league and picture of Chautauqua Park



Section Three: Existing Trail Network

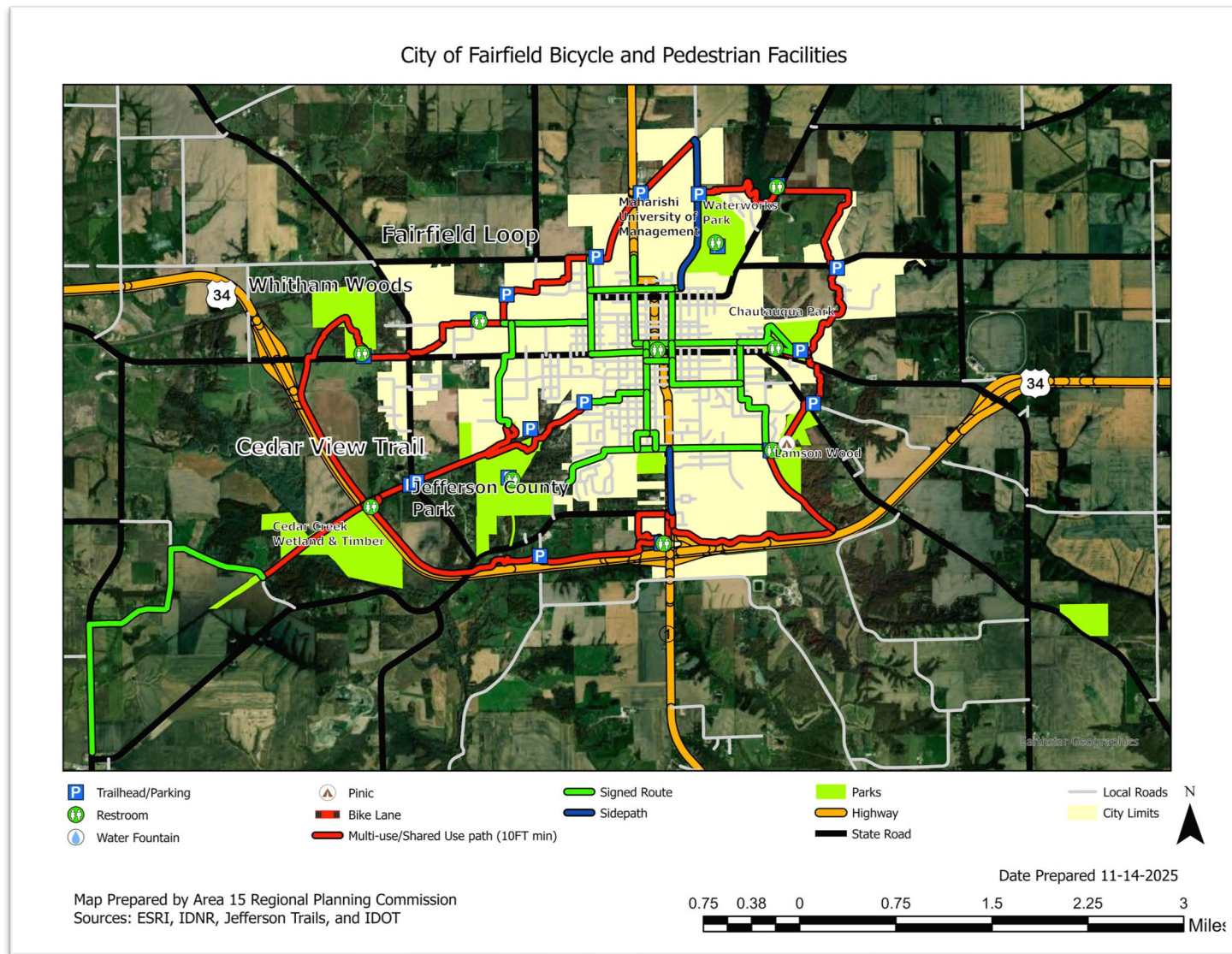
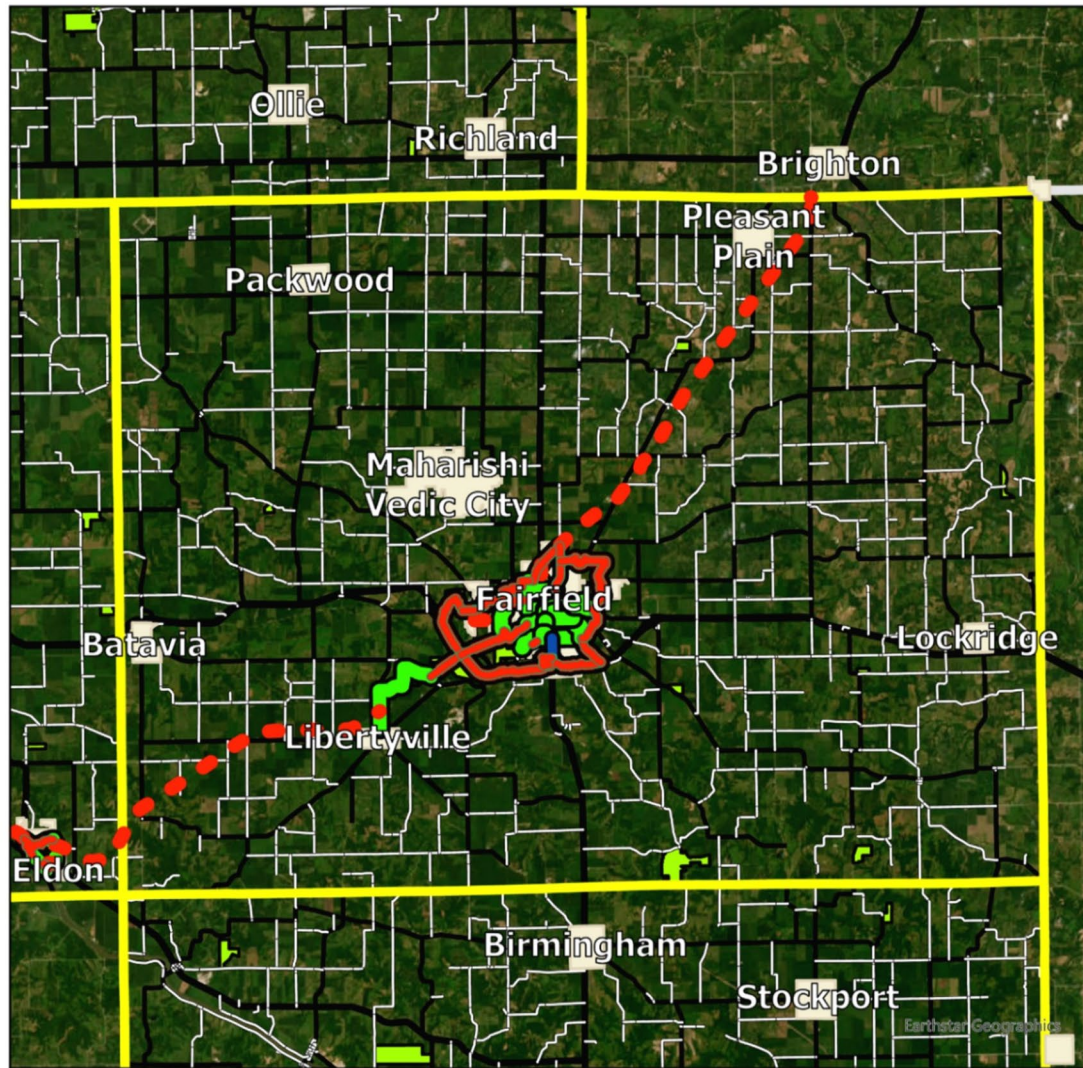


Figure 30-City of Fairfield GIS trail map



Jefferson County Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities



- Bike Lane
- Multi-use/Shared Use path (10FT min)
- Signed Route
- Sidepath
- Proposed
- City
- Counties Limit
- Iowa Counties
- Parks



Map prepared by Area 15 Regional Planning Commission
Sources: ESRI, Iowa DOT, Iowa DNR, Jefferson County Conservation, Jefferson County Trail County, and City of Fairfield
Map prepared: 3-11-26



Figure 31-Jefferson County GIS trail map

KEOKUK COUNTY

Keokuk County had an estimated 2023 population of 9,914 people according to the US Census Bureau. The county seat and largest city is Sigourney, which had a population of 1,985. The county is made up of fifteen other smaller cities in addition to Sigourney. The geography of the county is dominated by the Skunk River, both the North Skunk and South Skunk run west to east across the southern half of the county before combining to form a single river in the southeast quarter of the county.

For more information:

Keokuk County Conservation Board - www.keokukcountyia.com & kccb@cloudburst9.net - (641) 622-3757

City of Sigourney. - sigourney-iowa.com & sigourneyclerk@iowatelecom.net (641) 622-3080

Table 2-Shows the contact information for Keokuk County

Planning Efforts

The cities of Sigourney (2015) and Hendrick (2018) have gone through the process of developing the Small-Town Improvement and Development Enhancement Plan (STRIDE). The STRIDE is a strategic planning documents which is created by Area 15 RPC and the city to help develop plans to help with communities with 5,000 population or less for their transportation needs.

The document is divided into Introduction and overview, transportation system, roads, sidewalks, priorities future investment, funding, potential projects, and futures challenges. Looking closely at the sidewalks and future projects to help identify which projects could be developed.

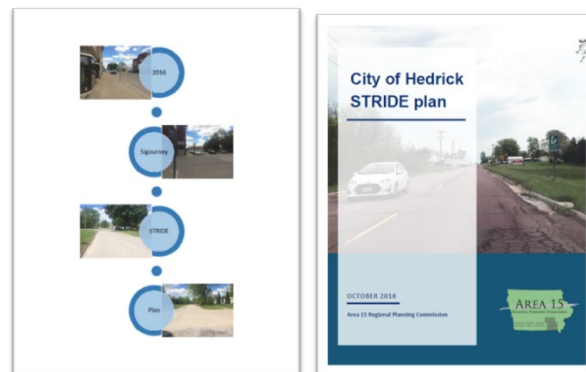


Figure 32-STRIDE plans of the city of Hendrick and Sigourney

Trail Ownership and management

Trail ownership and management within Keokuk County are primarily the responsibility which is Keokuk County, with city of Sigourney interested, and city of Keota with their trails. These entities are responsible for right-of-way control, operations, maintenance, capital improvements, and liability management. Keokuk County and its partner jurisdictions are responsible



for establishing maintenance standards, addressing safety and accessibility requirements, and ensuring compliance with applicable state and federal regulations. Trail planning and implementation efforts are typically coordinated with regional transportation planning initiatives, including the Regional Trails Plan and the Long-Range Transportation Plan, to support consistency with broader mobility, recreation, and economic development objectives.

Current Trail System and Community Use

Name	Maintain by	Surface type	Notable Feature	Connections	Length
Belva Deer Recreational Area Trail	Keokuk County Conservation Board	Poured concrete	-	Belva Deer Recreational	2.75 miles
Kewash Trail	Washington County Conservation Board	Crushed limestone	Scenic railroad corridor	City of Keota, City of West Chester, and city of Washington	14 miles

Table 3-Existing trails of Keokuk County

Parks on the Trail System

Keokuk has two different trails systems which are planned to be connected in the future. The trail system has only two parks that have connections to the trail. All the parks located in Keokuk County are either maintained by the Keokuk County Conservation Board or the city of Sigourney.

BELVA DEER RECREATION AREA

Belva Deer Recreation Area Trail is located about 4 miles Northeast of Sigourney. The 1669-acre park is maintained by Keokuk County Conservation Board. The Amenities include hunting, camping, picnic shelters, hiking /horse trails, fishing ponds, 260-acre lake and beach. This is connected to the Belva Deer Recreation Area Trail.

LEGION PARK

The Legion Park is located on West of Sigourney. The 21-acre park is next to the old railroad corridor which is planned to be connected to the Belva Deer Recreation Area. The park is maintained by the city of Sigourney. The amenities this park offers are picnic shelters, playground, paved trail swimming pool, horseshoe pits, basketball, softball/baseball fields, pickleball and tennis courts.

YENRUOGIS PARK

Yenruogis Park is located 2.5 miles North of Sigourney. The 76 acres park is maintained by the Keokuk County Conservation Board. The amenities provided are picnic area, camping, 10-acre lake and fishing. This park has walking area which also runs along the old railroad corridor which long term goals would be connecting it to the Belva Deer Recreation Area Trail.

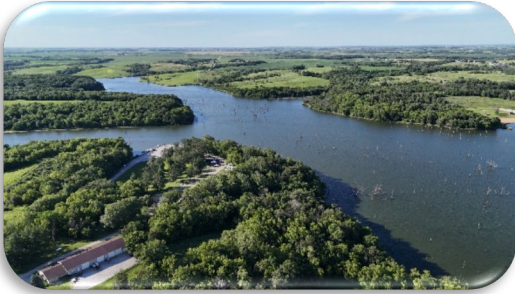


Figure 33-Aerial View of Lake Belva Deer Campground to Trail



Figure 34- Aerial view of Lake Belva Deer



Figure 35- Playground located in Belva Deer Campground



Figure 36- Trailhead located in Keota, IA

Keokuk County Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

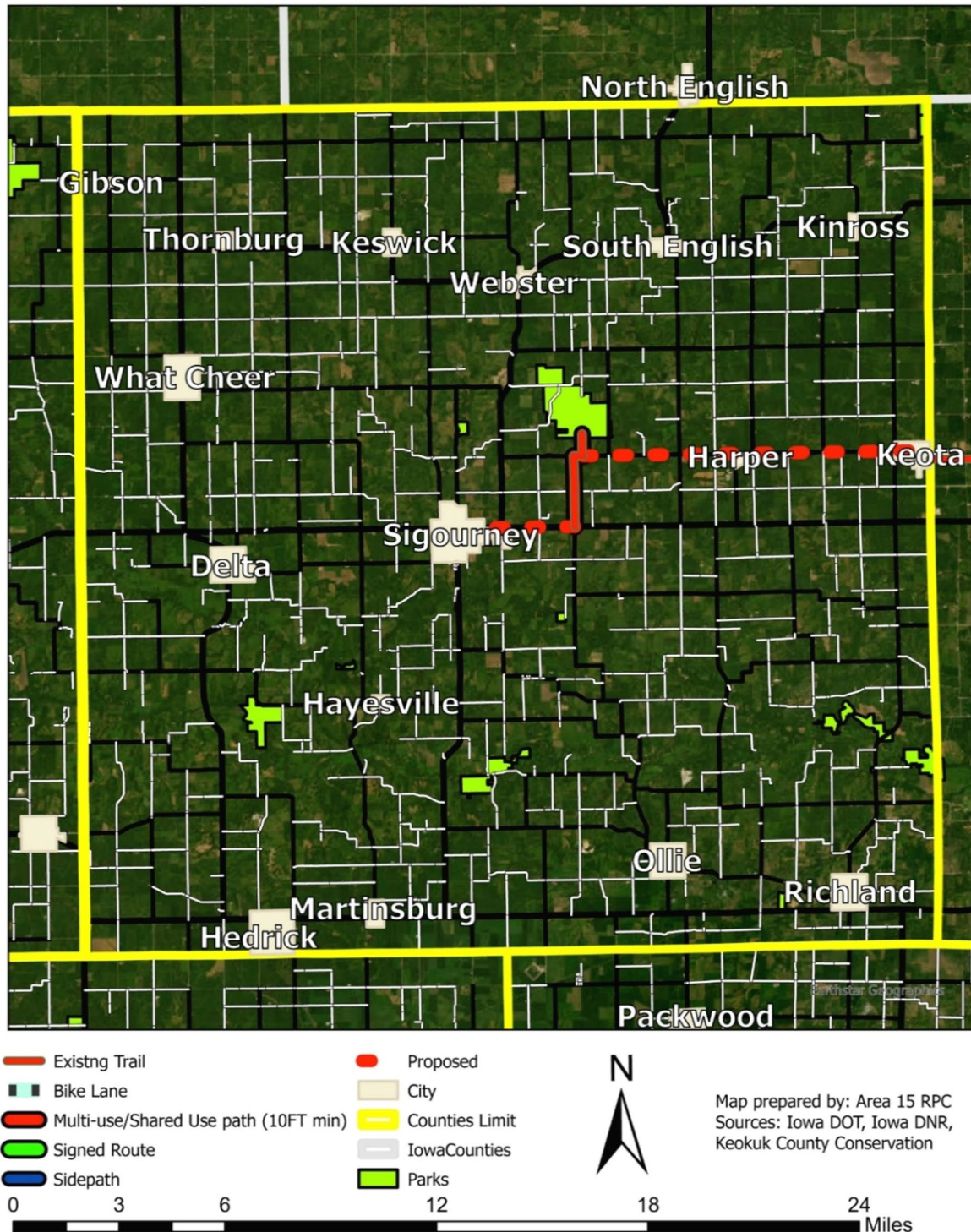


Figure 37-Keokuk County GIS Trail Map



MAHASKA COUNTY

The 2023 US Census Bureau estimate for Mahaska County had a population of 21,947 and the largest city is Oskaloosa, a population of 11,552. Oskaloosa is in the center of the county and is also the county seat. Mahaska County includes eight other smaller cities. The most prominent geographical features of the county are its three rivers, the North Skunk, South Skunk, and the Des Moines.

For more information:

Mahaska Community Recreation Foundation. - www.mcrf.info (641) 672-2499

Mahaska County Conservation Board. - www.mahaskaconservation.com (641) 673-9327

City of Oskaloosa. www.oskaloosaiowa.org (641) 673-9431

Table 4-Shows the contact information of Mahaska County

Trail Ownership and Management

The Mahaska Community Recreation Foundation (MCRF) and Mahaska County Conservation carry out trails planning within the county. MCRF was formed in 1998 with a mission to facilitate and promote recreation in Mahaska communities. The organization built their first segment of the Oskaloosa Loop trail in 1999. The MCRF is involved in developing the Community Recreation Trail, which is a loop trail around Oskaloosa, developing the Lacey Recreation Complex, and developing the Oskaloosa Urban Park, which includes a skate park, gazebo and basketball courts. As of the summer of 2026, 14 miles of the Community Recreation Trail are complete, the remaining miles to complete the loop through University Park and southeast Oskaloosa are planned for construction within the next five years.

Current Trail System and Community Use

Name	Maintain by	Surface type	Notable Feature	Connections	Length
Mahaska Community Recreation Trail	Mahaska Community Recreation Foundation and the City of Oskaloosa.	Poured concrete, shared roadway, and gravel roadway	Tram tours, underpasses (8) and Freedom Rock	Lacey Rec Complex, T65 Bike Rte., Caldwell Park, City of Univ. Park, Edmundson Park and T39 Bike Rte.	14 miles
T65 Bike Route	Mahaska County Secondary Road Department	Paved roadway	Nelson Pioneer Farm and Museum	Mahaska Community Recreation Trail	9 miles



T39 Bike Route	Mahaska County Secondary Road Department	Paved roadway	-	Mahaska Community Recreation Trail, City of Beacon and Eveland Access	8 miles
----------------	--	---------------	---	---	---------

Table 5- Shows the existing trails in Mahaska County

Parks on the Trail System

Mahaska has several parks that are connected to the trail systems. These parks are maintained by the city of Oskaloosa, Iowa Department of Resources, and the Mahaska County Conservation Board. The existing trail system is mostly located in the city of Oskaloosa and few miles falling in the Mahaska County. Here is the list of parks that are located within the trail system and what they have to offer.

CALDWELL PARK

Caldwell Park is a park located West of Oskaloosa along the Oskaloosa Loop Trail on Highway 92. The 62-acre park is maintained by the Mahaska County Conversation Board. This park has some features such as the Mahaska County Environmental Learning Center and the offices of the Mahaska County. Thie park offers amenities like hiking, disc golf, and picnic area.

EDMUNDSON PARK

The Edmundson Park is located Southwest of the city of Oskaloosa on 11th Ave (highway 309). The 60-acre park is managed and maintained by the city of Oskaloosa. The park is adjacent two golf courses. The amenities include picnic area, shelters, pond, swimming pool, playground, slow pitch softball fields, disc golf, course and dog park.

HAWTHORN WILDLIFE AREA

Hawthorn Wildlife Area is a park which is owned and operated by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. This 1662-acre area is located about 15 miles Northeast of Oskaloosa and just south of Barnes City in Mahaska County. The amenities which are offered are hiking trails, 182-acre lake, boat ramp, fishing, and hunting. This park has its own trail network which does have currently have any plans on connecting with the statewide vision.

LACEY RECREATION COMPLEX

Lacey Recreation Complex is located at the Northwest of Oskaloosa. This 200-acre park is maintained by the city of Mahaska Community Recreation Foundation. This complex park offers youth soccer fields, collegiate soccer fields, softball/baseball fields, Babe Ruth Baseball fields, and a collegiate stadium which is used for football, soccer, and track.

LAKE KEOMAH STATE PARK

Lake Keomah State Park is owned and operated by Iowa Department of Natural Resources. The 373 acres park is located just 4 miles East of the city of Oskaloosa, also where Caldwell Park is located at. The park offers amenities like camping, picnic shelters, lodging, hiking/cross country skiing/snowmobiling trails, 78-acre lake, swimming beach, boat ramp, fishing, and hunting.

RUSSELL WILDLIFE AREA

Russell Wildlife Area is an area maintained and operated by Mahaska County Conversation Board. This 220-acre park is located about 3 miles North of the Oskaloosa. This area offers amenities like picnic areas, hiking/cross country skiing/snow showing trails, natural center, fishing/boat ponds and hunting.



Figure 38-Figure 22- Aerial pictures Lacey Recreational complex



Figure 39- Aerial pictures Lacey Recreational complex



Figure 40- Roundabout over Hwy 432 and Pella Ave underpass of the trail

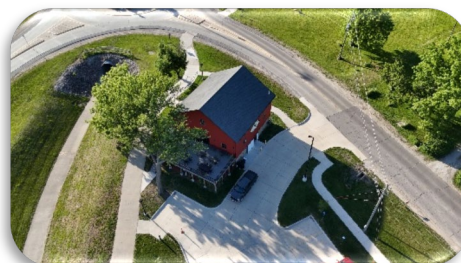


Figure 41-Trail along commercial establishment on Pella Ave

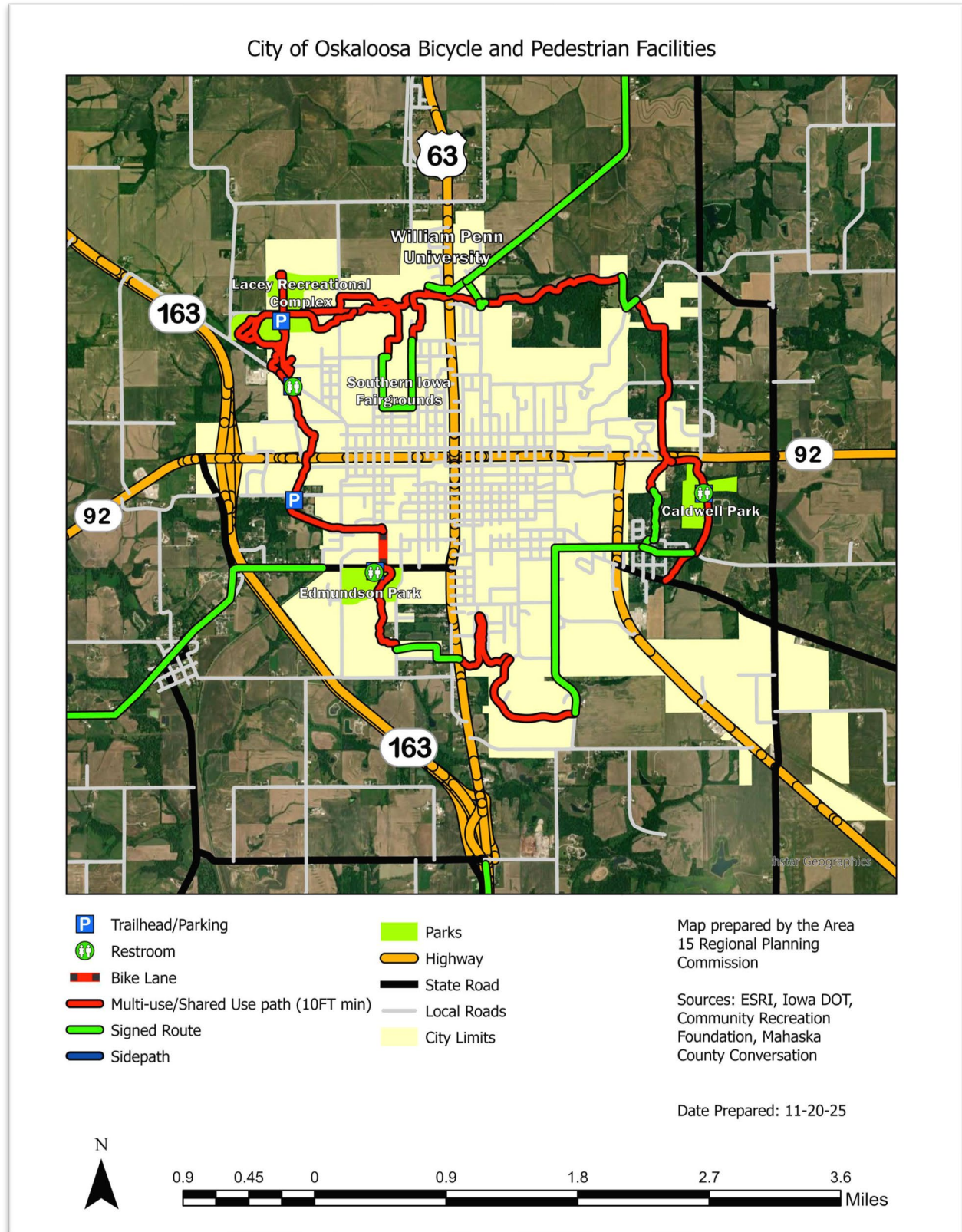


Figure 42-City of Mahaska County GIS trail Map

Mahaska County Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

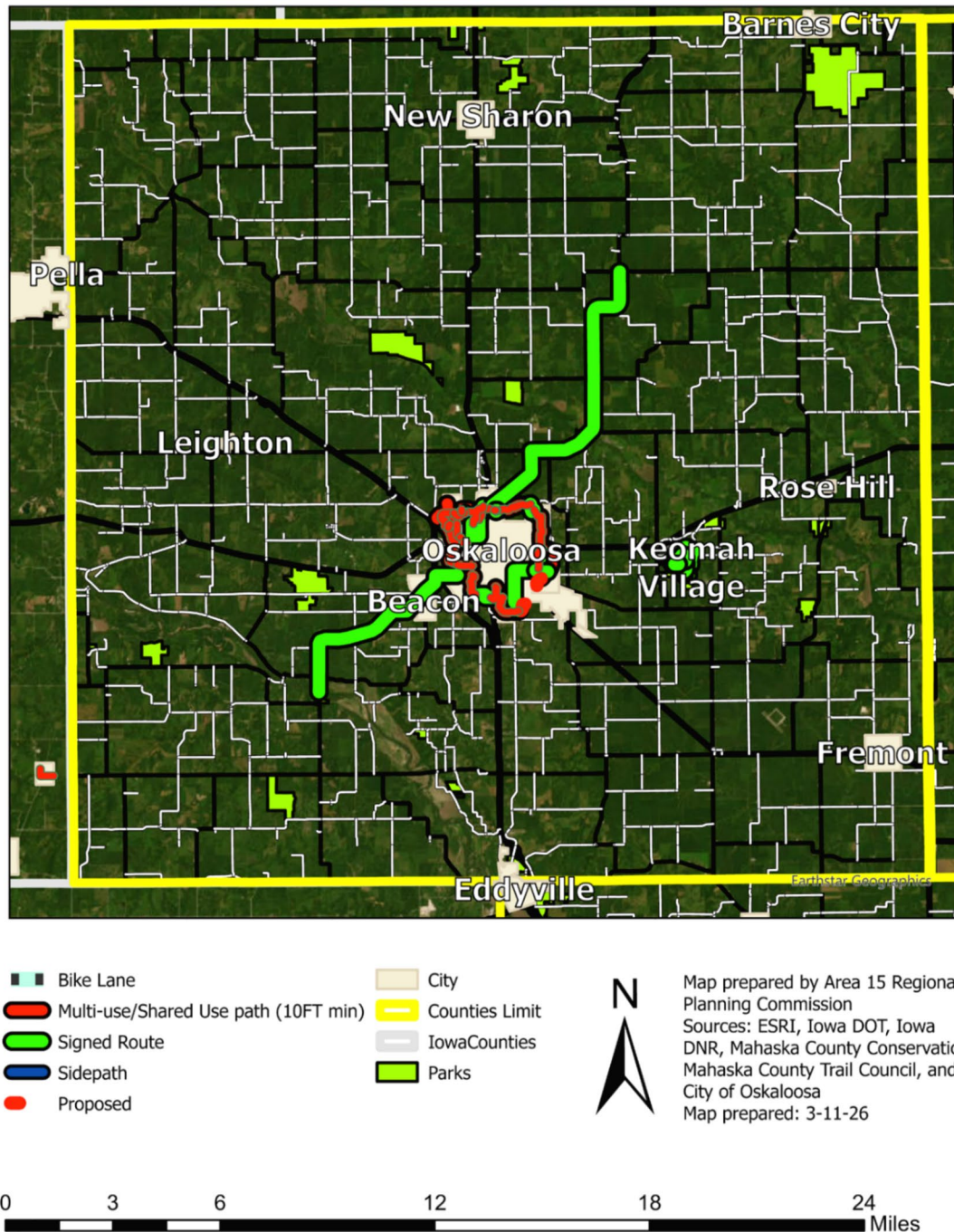


Figure 43- Mahaska County GIS trail Map



VAN BUREN COUNTY

According to the US Census Bureau, Van Buren County had an estimated 2023 population of 7,266 people. Keosauqua is the county seat and largest city, with an estimated population of 945. In Van Buren County there are six other smaller cities within the county. All seven of the cities are collectively known as the Villages of Van Buren, and they celebrate their history and heritage by offering a mixture of natural beauty, historic architecture, and small shops. Van Buren County's topography consists of the Des Moines River valley and scattered woodlands. The Des Moines River runs from the northwest to the southeast through the center of the county. Other large and notable features include Lacey-Keosauqua State Park, Shimek State Forest and Lake Sugema.

More information:

Van Buren County Trails Association - <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Van-BurenCounty-TrailsAssociation/192886144091157?fref=ts>

Van Buren County Conservation Board- www.vbccountyconservation.com vbccb@netins.com

(319) 293-3589

City of Keosauqua - citykeo@netins.net (319) 293-3536

Table 6-Shows contact information for Van Buren County

Trail Ownership and Maintenance

The Van Buren County Trails Association was formed in January of 2002 and drafted a nine-point mission statement to further trail development in Van Buren County. This mission statement was created through cooperation from the committee members and several of the villages. Some of the points in this statement include: giving priority to trails that connect existing trails in the county and to trails in neighboring counties, develop trails that connect all the villages along with other historic or natural areas, use shared roadway trails only as a last resort when other types of trails are not practical, and when possible, plan trails on county/state owned property or private property where an easement has been given.

Current Trail System and Community Use

Name	Maintain by	Surface type	Notable Feature	Connections	Length
Keosauqua Loop Trail	City of Keosauqua	Limestone chips, shared roadway & paved shoulders	Scenic railroad corridor and small bridges	Bike Loop, Van Buren County Fairgrounds and Roberts Building Community Center	2 miles
Keosauqua Riverfront Trail	City of Keosauqua	Concrete and shared paved roadway	-	Keosauqua Loop Trail, Keosauqua Bike Loop and Riverfront Park	0.98 miles



Waubonsie Trail	Cantril Grass Roots	Gravel	Shelters and camping areas	-	1 mile
Milton Loop Trail	City of Milton	Gravel		Historic covered bridges	1 mile
Indian Lake Trail	City of Farmington	Gravel	Indian Lake, totem pole, shelters and camping	-	2 miles
Lacey-Keosauqua Bike Loop	Van Buren County Secondary Rd dept and IDNR	Paved roadway	Des Moines River Bridges (2)	Keosauqua Bike Loop, City of Keosauqua and Lacey- Keosauqua State Park.	9.5 miles

Table 7-Shows the existing trails in Van Buren County

Parks on the Trail System

Van Buren has several Parks in its trail system. The parks located in Van Buren County are maintained by either the Van Buren County Conservation Board or the city of Keosauqua, which is the largest city in the county.

LACEY-KEOSAUQUA STATE PARK

Van Buren County is home of the Lacey -Keosauqua State Park, a park with a lake, beach area, and historic buildings/structures. Lacey-Keosauqua State Park is the second oldest state park in the State with more than 1,653 acres of bluffs and valleys along the Des Moines River. Lacey-Keosauqua State Park also has Lake Sugema which is a 30-acre lake with swimming, boating, and fishing area. The park and lake is maintained by6 the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and Van Buren County Conversation Board.



Figure 44- Viewing West of Lacey-Keosauqua State Park

RIVERFRONT PARK & KEOSAUQUA CITY PARK

Riverfront Park and Keosauqua City Park are adjacent to each other and connected by the Keosauqua Trail Loop. The Riverfront Park has amphitheater with access to water foundation and a bridge connecting the city of Keosauqua and Lacey-Keosauqua State Park.



Figure 45-Aerial view of Keosauqua city park

MILDRED & EDDIE FERGURSON SPORTS COMPLEX

Mildred & Eddie Ferguson sports complex was completed in 2020/21 which provides three softball fields and a baseball field. The trail does a loop around the complex on a paved multiuse trail, which is located on the Northwest side of Keosauqua. The sports complex is owned and operated by city of Keosauqua.



Figure 46- Southwest Aerial view of Mildred & Eddie Ferguson Sports Complex

INDIAN STATE LAKE PARK

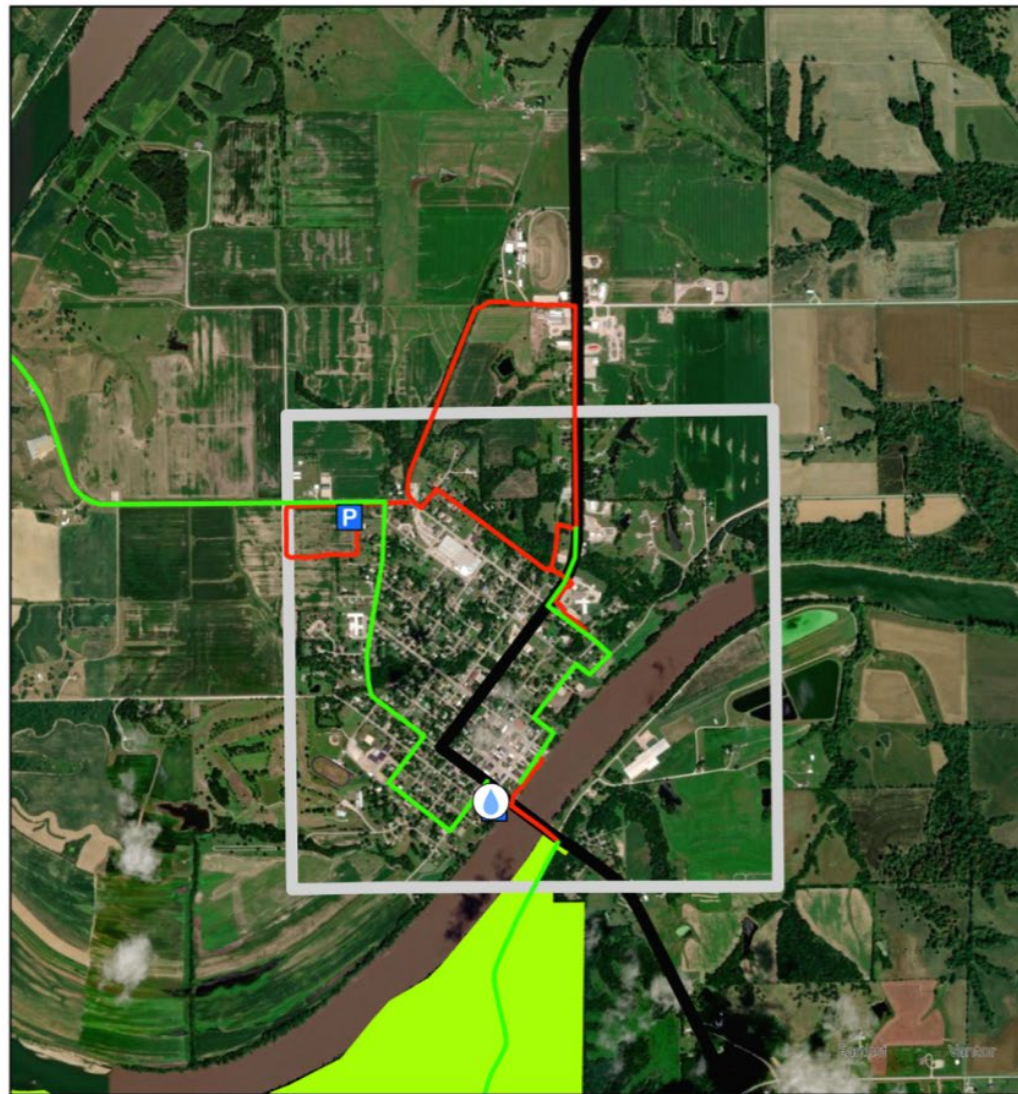
The Indian Lake Park has a nonpaved trail around the lake which is maintained by the city of Farmington which is located about 12 miles Southeast of Keosauqua. The size of the park is 177 acres, which provides camping, shelters, playground, strong lodge cabins, 44 acres of lake, fishing and boat ramp. This park is currently only connected to its own trail network but could connect with Keosauqua Loop or East to the Mississippi State Trail.

WAUBONSIE PARK



Waubonsie Park and trail are maintained by Cantril Gass Roots. The park is in the city of Cantril which is about 10 miles Southwest of Keosauqua. The size is 23 acres which includes camping area, picnic shelters, playground discs, golf course, and ponds with bird watching stations. The Waubonsie has its own trail network which could possibly connect with the Keosauqua and Milton trail network.

City of Keosauqua Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities



- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Trailhead | Proposed |
| Water Fountain | Cities |
| Trails | Counties Limit |
| Multi-use/Shared Use path | Highway |
| Signed Route | Parks |

Map prepared by: Area 15
Regional Planning Commission

Sources: ESRI, Iowa DOT, Iowa
DNR, Van Buren County
Conservation, Van Buren County
Trails Association

Date Prepared: 3-11-26

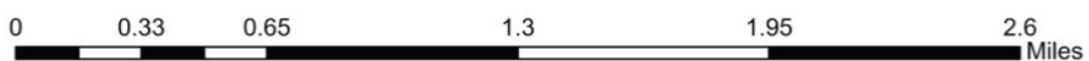


Figure 47-City of Keosauqua GIS trail map

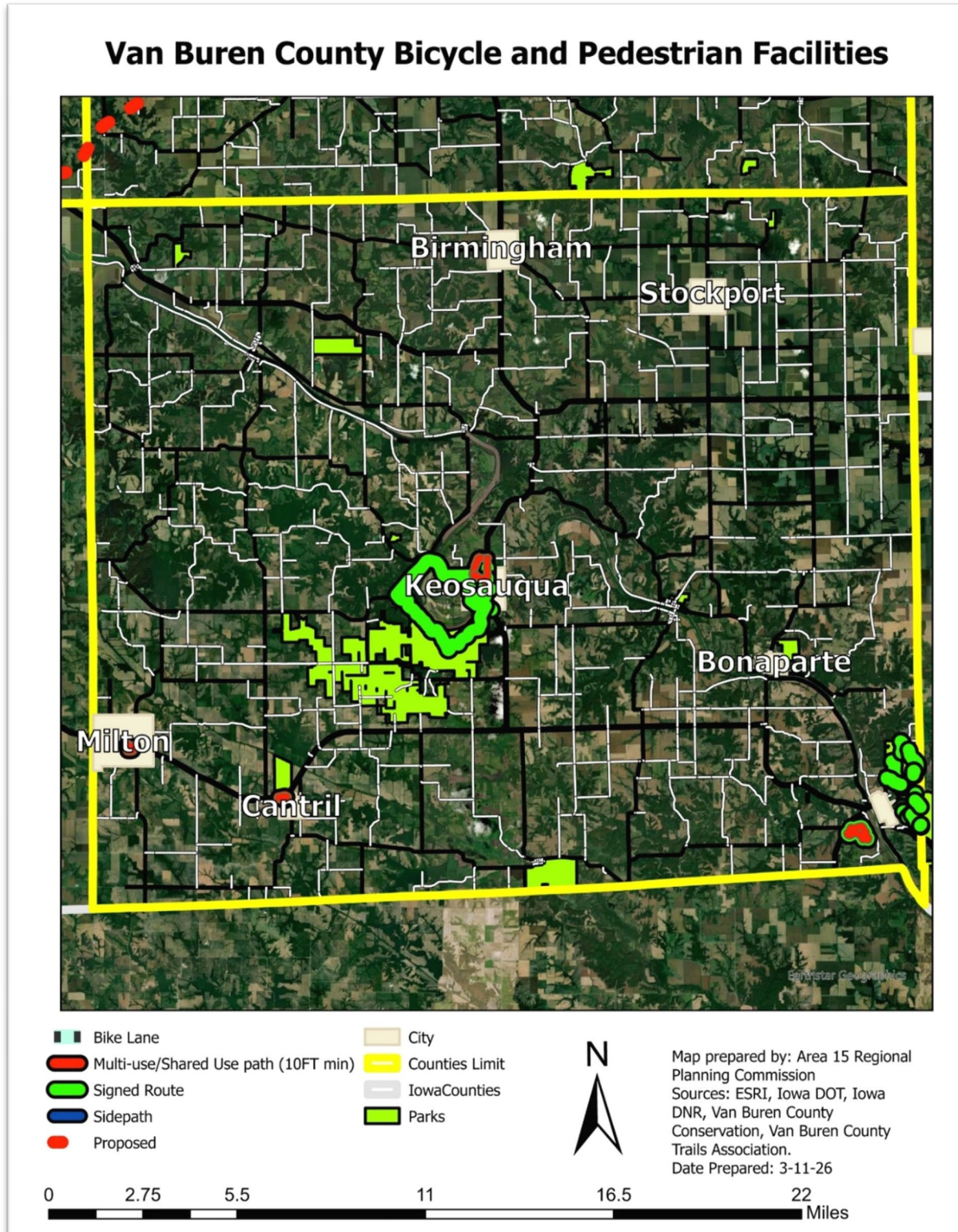


Figure 48-Van Buren County GIS trail map



WAPELLO COUNTY

Wapello County has a population of 35,166 people according to the 2023 US Census estimates. The County seat and largest is Ottumwa, which has a population of 25,252. The county is made up of six other cities in addition to Ottumwa. The geography of the county is dominated by the Des Moines River that crosses diagonally from the Northwest to the Southeast. The river runs through the cities of Eddyville, Chillicothe, Ottumwa, and Eldon.

For more information:

Wapello County Trails Council - www.wapellocountytrails.com

Wapello County Conservation Board- wapellocounty.org/departments/conservation-board/ & wapellocb@netins.com (641) 682-3091

Ottumwa Park Department- www.cityofottumwa.com/departments/parks-and-recreation/ (641) 682-7873

Table 8-Contact information for Wapello County

Trail Ownership and Management

The Wapello County Trails Council is a non-profit community organization that was formed in 2006 to create a trail system in Wapello County. The council's original goal was to construct trails on the levees along both sides of the Des Moines River in Ottumwa. Wapello County Trails council is to create and coordinate a trail system that promotes Health, Recreation, and Safety while maintaining the natural beauty of the historic area. Another project of the council was to convert the Wabash Railroad Bridge into a pedestrian walkway. This was completed with volunteer help to re-deck (2023) the bridge and install fencing, creating a unique walkway over the Des Moines River. Their most recent project was an underpass under Highway 34 that connects the levee trail with Ottumwa Park. This was completed in 2016.

The Eldon Trail Committee was formed in 2006 with the purpose of developing, preserving, promoting and maintaining trails in Eldon. The committee's first project was to construct a trail from Elm Street to the Des Moines River to 7th Street. The Eldon Trail Committee's current project is to develop a trail through the Wapello County Fairgrounds.

Wapello County Trails Council, Eldon Trail Committee, and Fairfield County Trail group created the American Gothic trail which would go from Ottumwa to Eldon to Fairfield using old railroad corridors to connect.



Figure 49- East view Aerial picture Ottumwa trail, the Legacy Soccer fields, and Ottumwa Dog Park



Current Trail System and Community Use

Wapello County has two major trail system which are the American Gothic Trail and Ottumwa trail system. Dahlonge and Blakesburg offer a bike route which consists of shared roadways. Below shows the details of each trail with additional information regarding each route.

Name	Maintained by	Surface type	Notable feature	Connections	Length
Eldon Gothic Trail	City of Eldon, Eldon Trails Committee, and the Masons	Asphalt and concrete	Bridge over Chippewa, Des Moines River and overlook	Eldon Main Street, America Gothic House, and Center	1.5 miles
Dahlonge and Blakesburg Bike Routes	Wapello County Secondary Road Department	Paved Roadway	Dahlonge School House	Indian Hills Community College	6-mile inner loop and a 17-mile outer loop
Ottumwa Trail System	City of Ottumwa	Paved	Des Moines River and the Wabash Bridge.	Ottumwa Sports complex/Beach Water Park, and Gray Eagle Wildlife Preserve	16 miles

Table 9-Shows existing trails in Wapello County



Figure 50- Aerial View of Ottumwa Trail on the levee viewing East

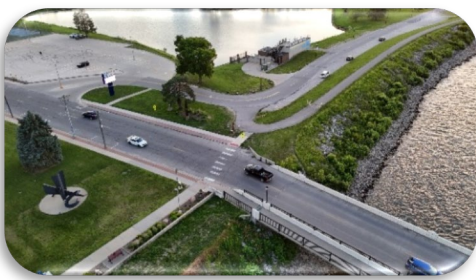


Figure 51-Trail crossing on Market Street in Ottumwa



Parks on the Trail System

Wapello County has a range of different parks connected to a trail system. Recently the development in the greater Ottumwa parks has helped develop a few new parks in Wapello County.

Union Park:

- Maintained by: City of Ottumwa.
- Size: 23 acres.
- Amenities: Picnic area, shelter, playground, Midwest Little League baseball fields, basketball and tennis courts.



Figure 52-Picture of Union Park

Ottumwa Park:

- Maintained by: City of Ottumwa.
- Size: 340 acres.
- Amenities: Picnic shelters, camping, fishing ponds, horse arena, dog park, softball/baseball fields, football fields, soccer fields, basketball and tennis courts.



Figure 53-Aerial view of Ottumwa park

Gray Eagle Wildlife Reserve:

- Maintained by: Wapello County Conservation Board.
- Size: 142 acres.
- Amenities: Hiking trail and fishing.

Legacy Soccer Field

- Maintained by the City of Ottumwa
- Wapello County existing Trails: Land and Water
- Legacy Fields Soccer Complex
- Located in Greater Ottumwa Park
- Completed in Fall of 2025



Figure 54-Gray Eagle Wildlife Reserve viewing East



- Has three full size soccer fields, with options of smaller sizes for the young population

All-wheel Skate Park

- Maintained by the City of Ottumwa
- Located in Greater Ottumwa Park
- Completed in November 2025
- 10,000 Square Foot concrete park for skateboards, bikes, and scooter
- Connected to the Ottumwa Trail system

Southeast Iowa JBS Sports Center

- Maintained by private investment, state economic development grants (Iowa Destination Grant) and local foundations (Legacy)
- Located in Greater Ottumwa Park
- Completed in March 2025
- \$12 million facility 3 basketball courts, indoor track, and a turf field



Figure 55-City of Ottumwa Legacy Soccer Fields



Figure 56-City of Ottumwa All-wheel Skate Park



Figure 58- Picture of Southeast Iowa Sports Center



Figure 57- Ottumwa Leadership Unity Garden along the trail



Ottumwa Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

Pathways to Healthy Neighborhoods

Priority 1 Corridors - North Side

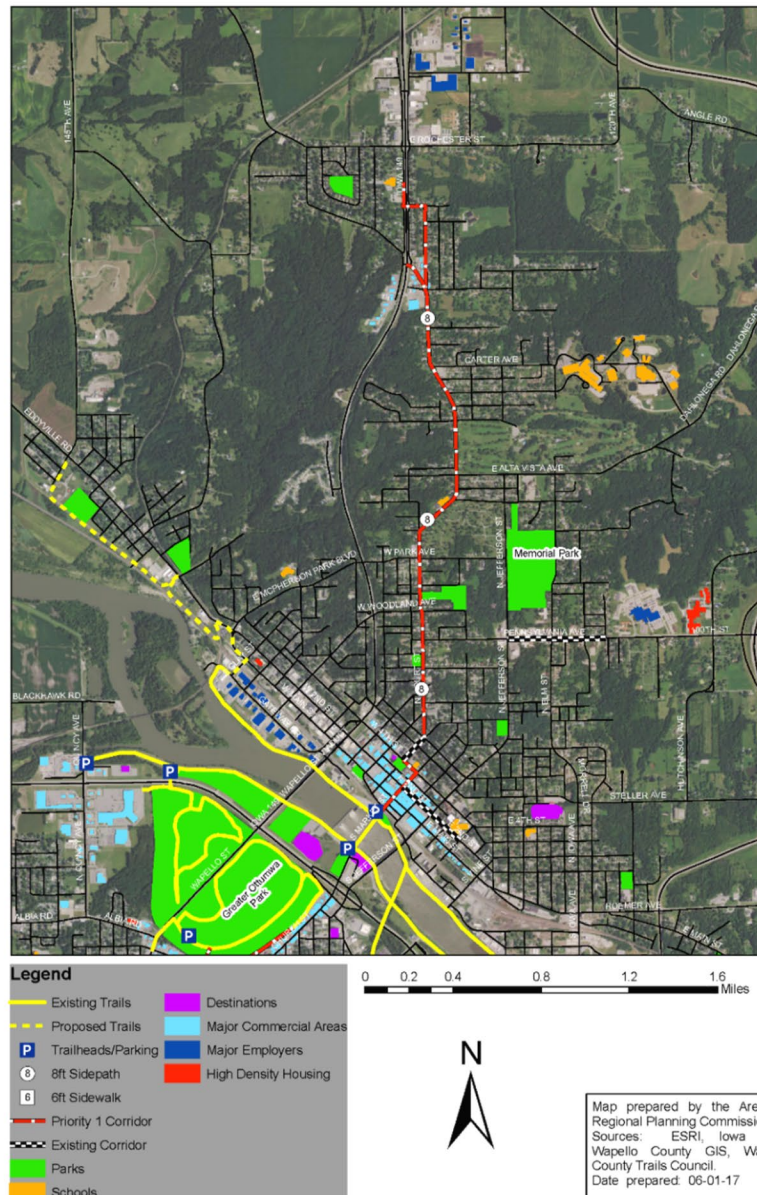


Figure 59-Ottumwa Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan north side GIS map

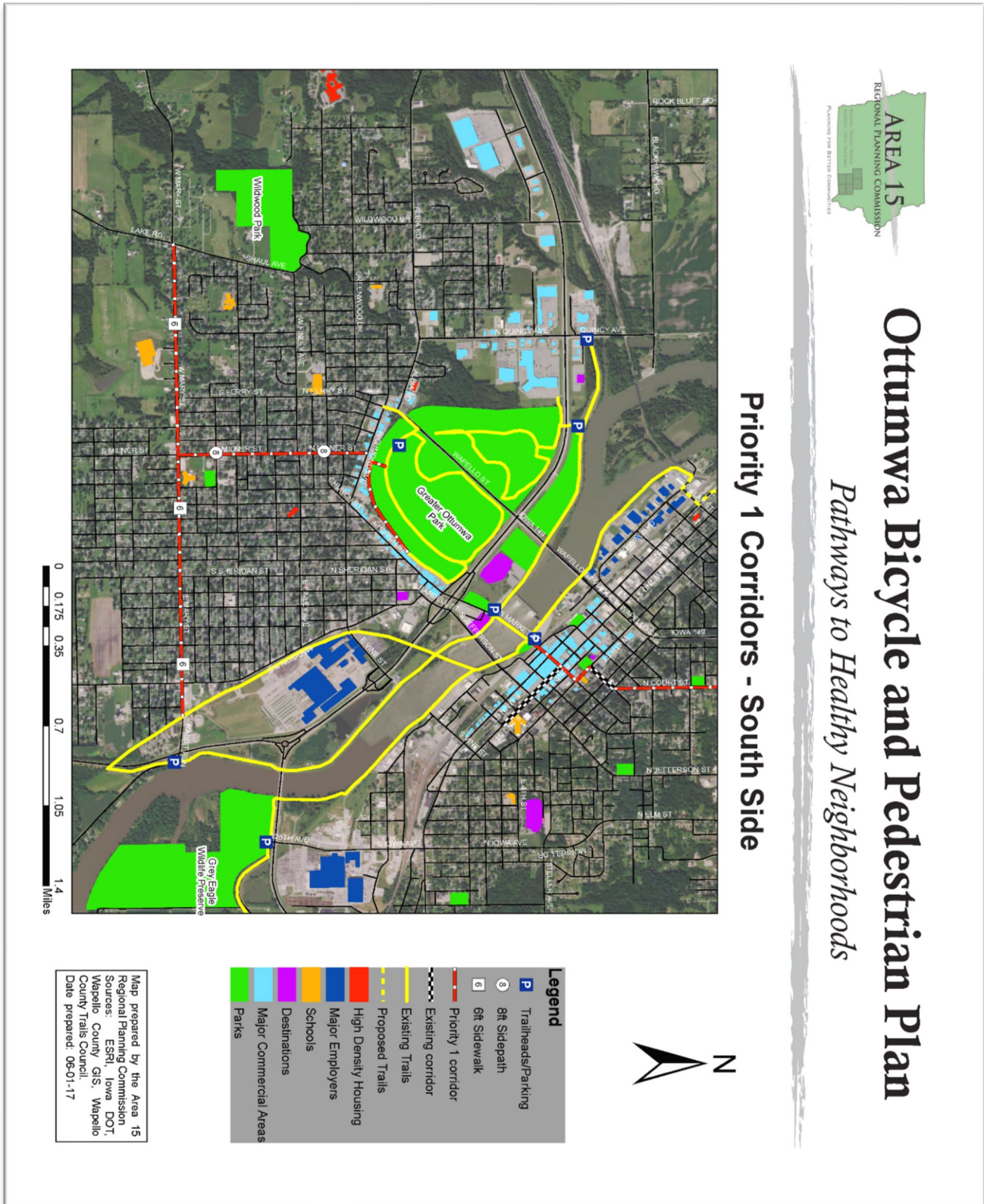


Figure 60-Ottumwa Bike and Pedestrian South side GIS map



AREA 15
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
PLANNING FOR BETTER COMMUNITIES

Ottumwa Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

Pathways to Healthy Neighborhoods

All Corridors - North Side

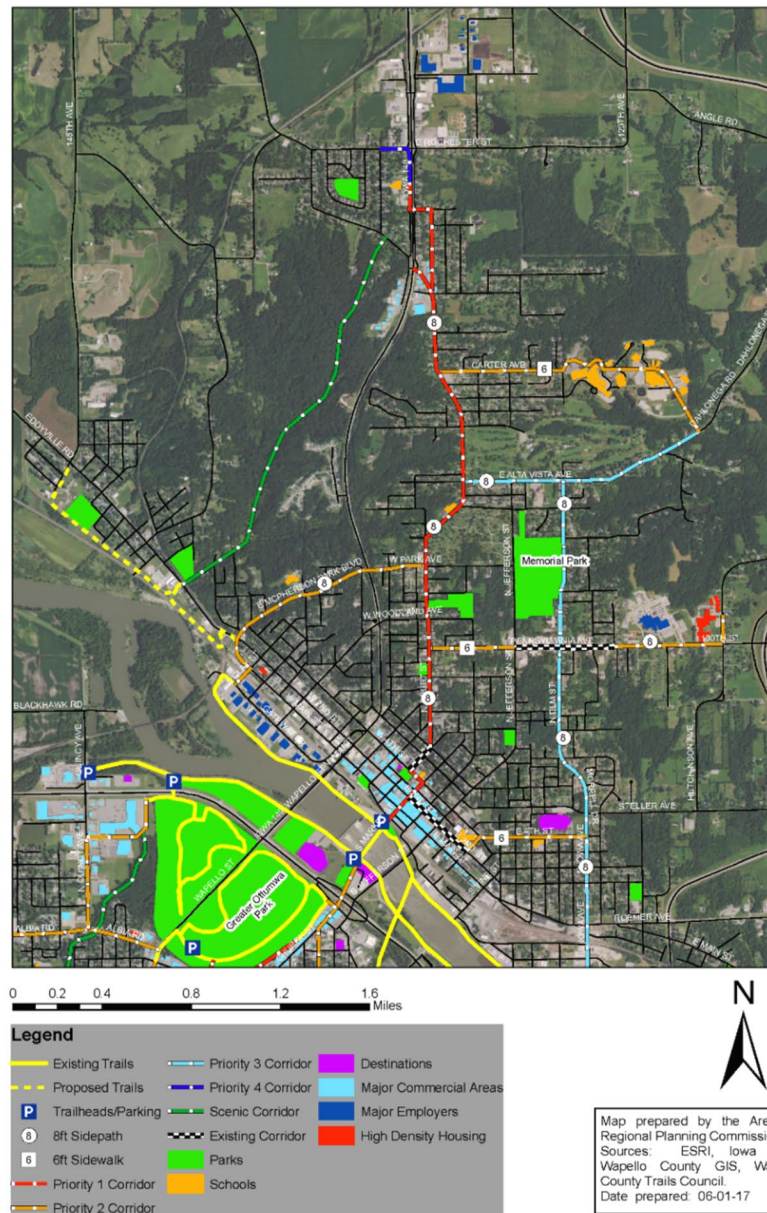


Figure 61-Ottumwa Bike and Pedestrian Plan All Corridors on North side GIS Map

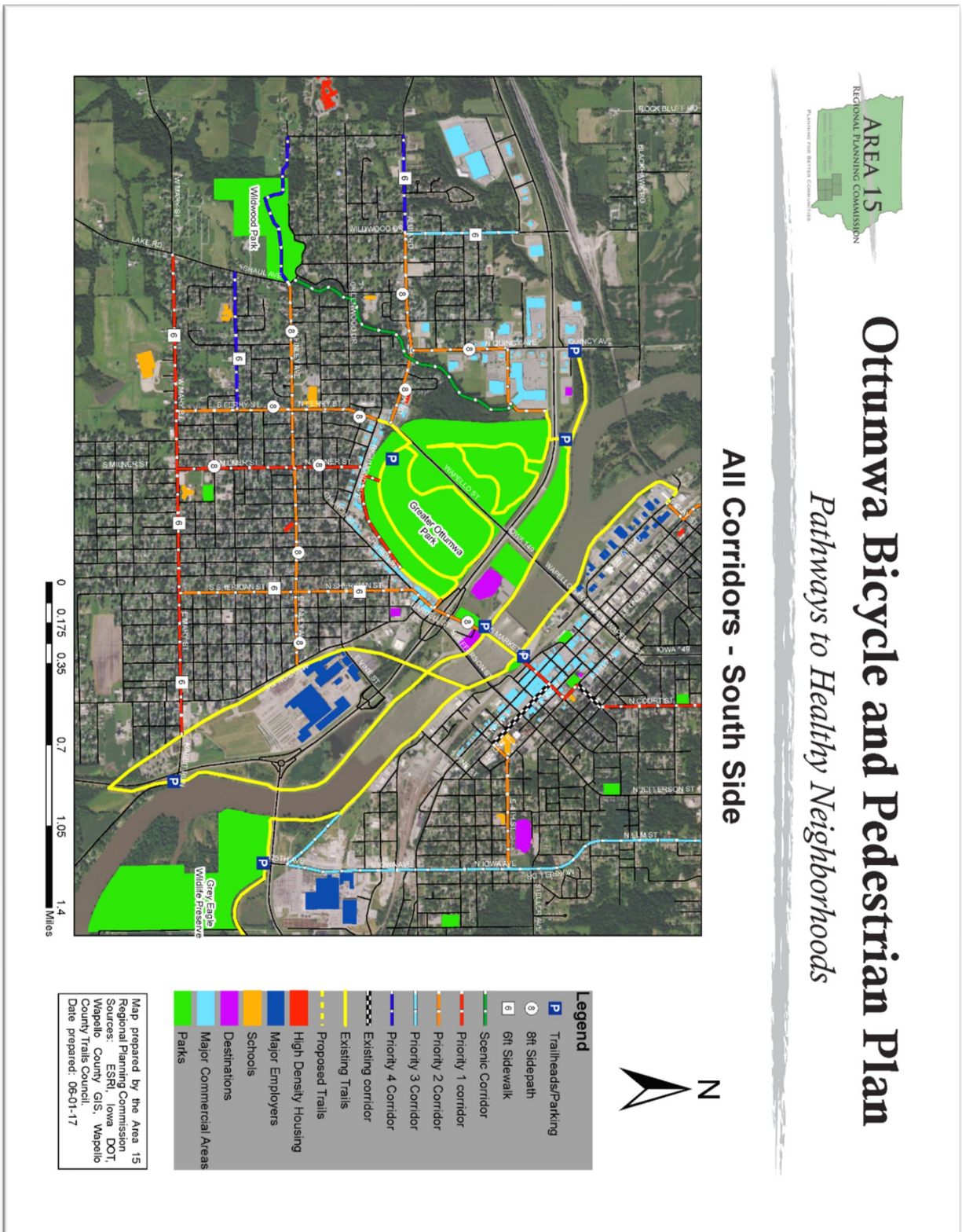


Figure 62- Ottumwa Bike and Pedestrian Plan All corridors on South side GIS Map



Section Three: Existing Trail Network

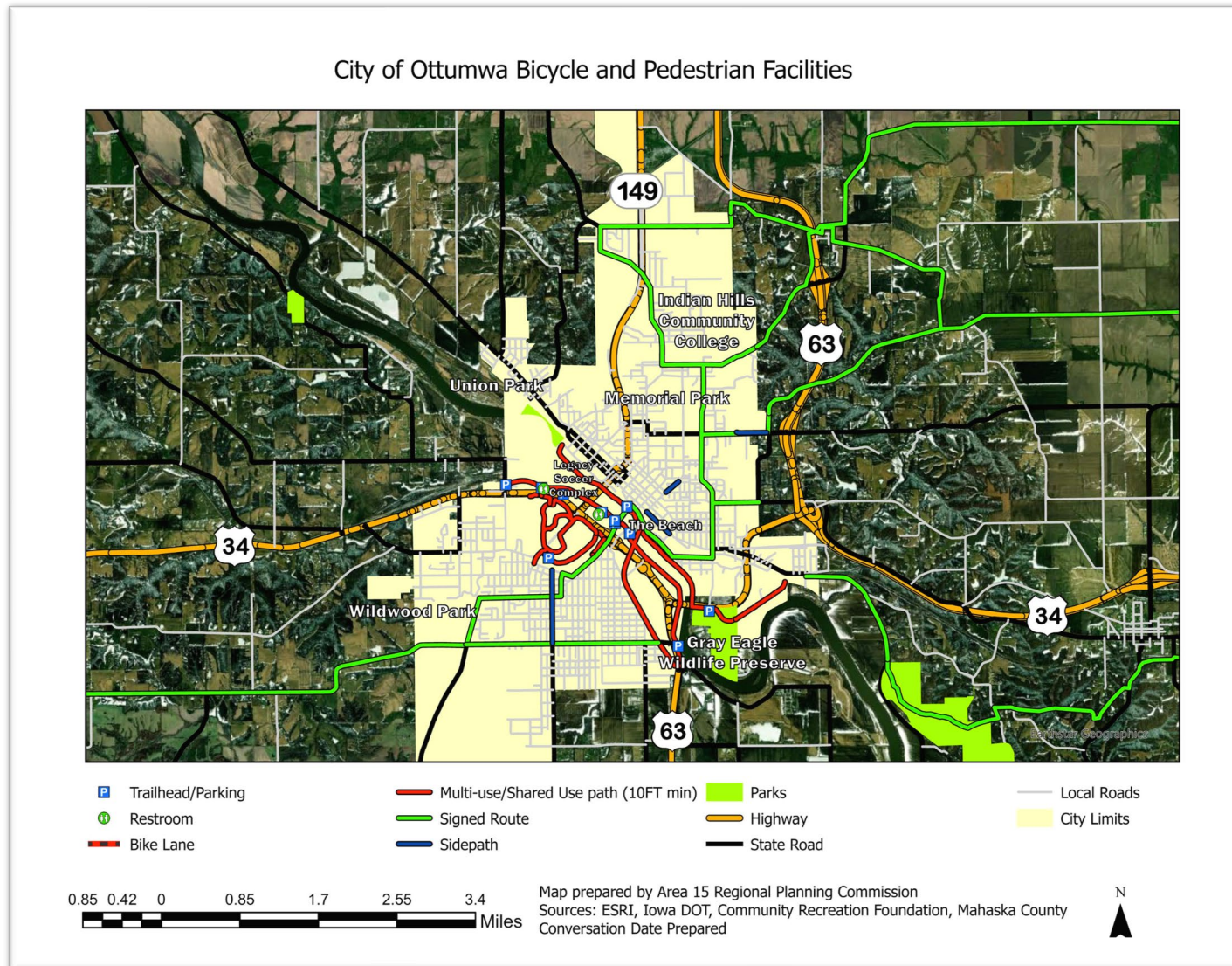


Figure 63- City of Ottumwa existing Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

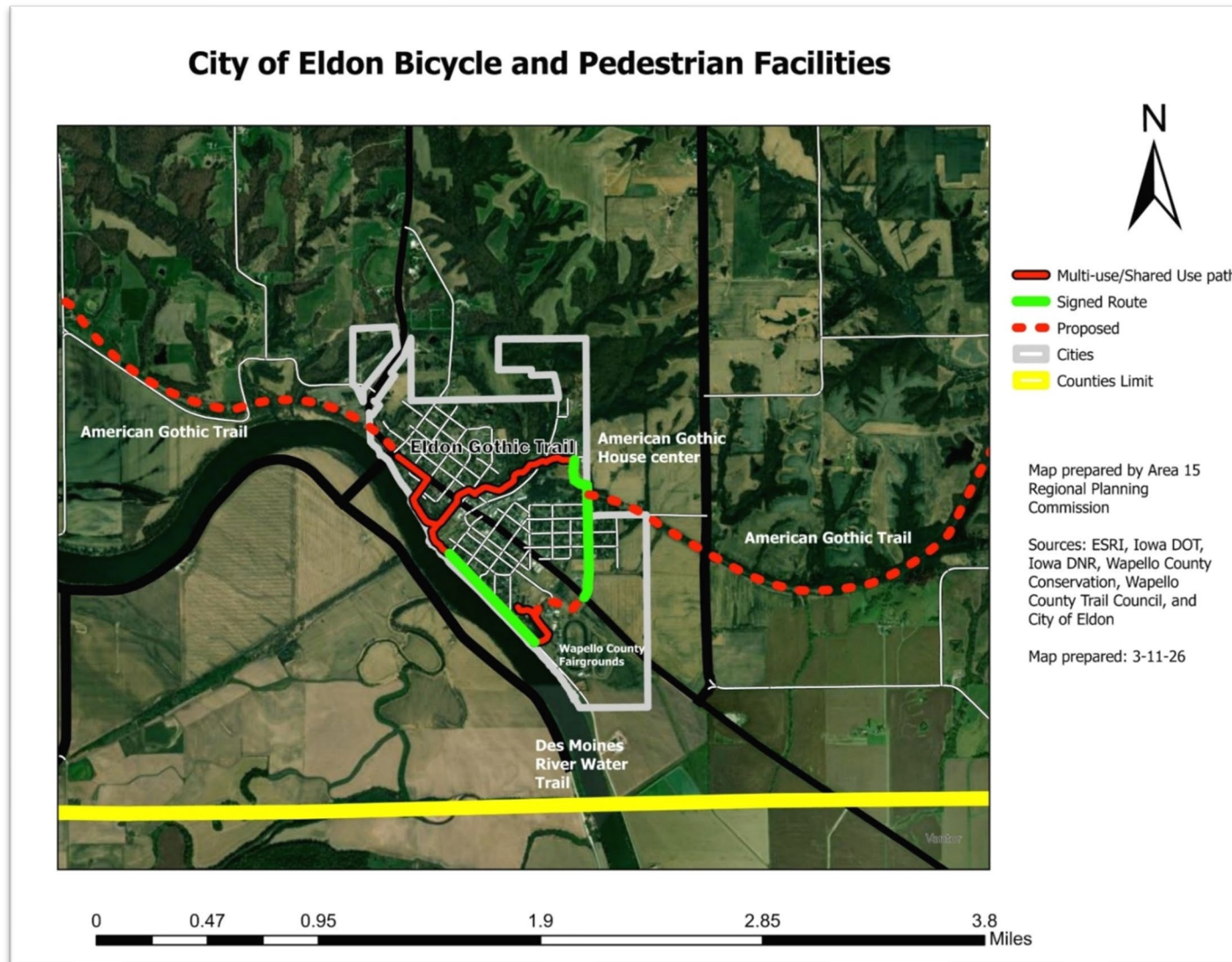


Figure 64- Existing Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities in Eldon

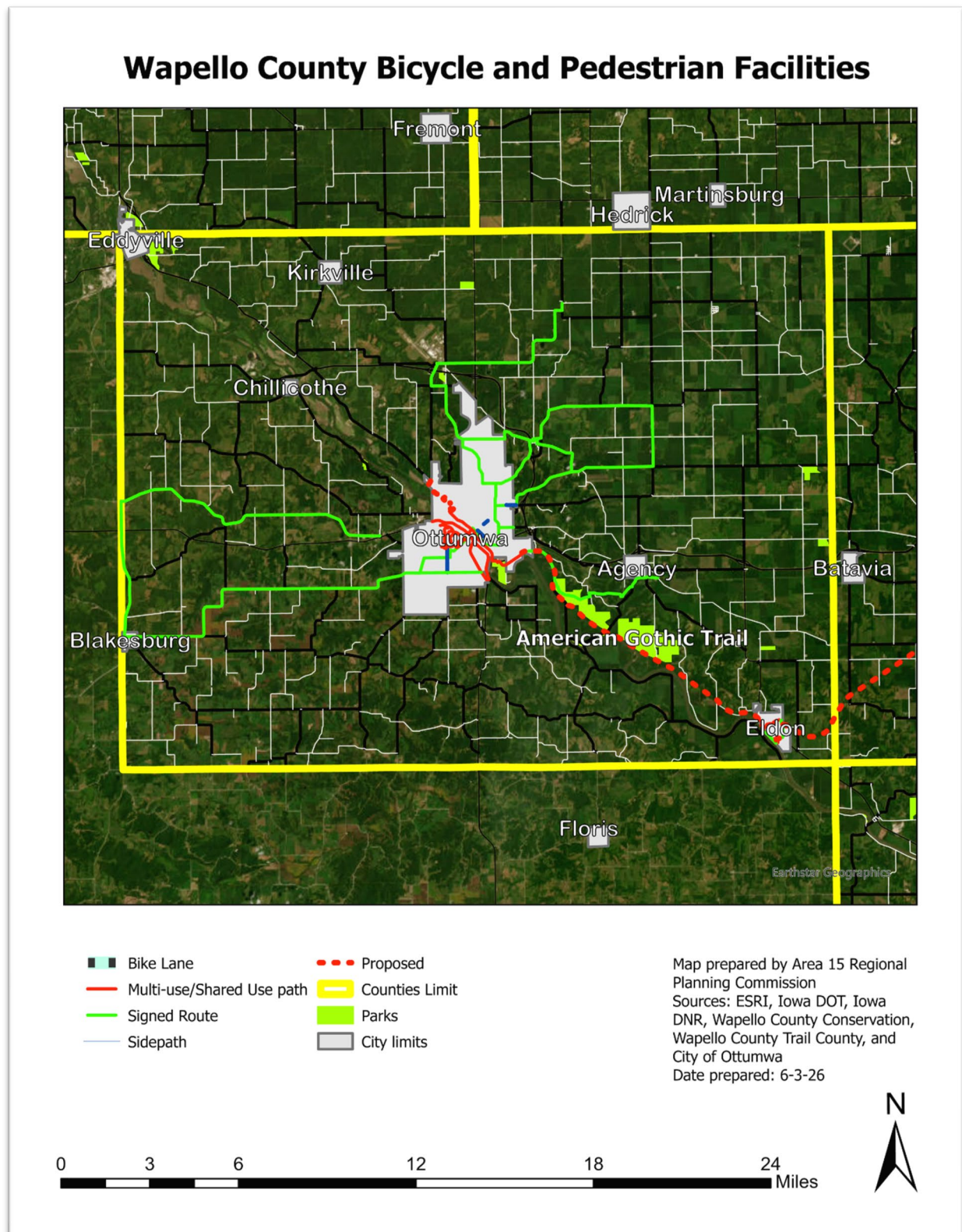


Figure 65-Wapello County existing trails GIS Map

SECTION FOUR: WATER TRAILS

In the Regional Trails Plan, Area 15 RPC decided to make a standalone chapter for water trails due to increased popularity. Water Trails are a more recent concept compared to multiuse trails. Iowa Department of Natural Resources is responsible for overview of water trails in the state. This section will go over what a water trail is, existing water trails, access points and facilities, potential connections, safety and environmental, and water trail enhancement opportunities.

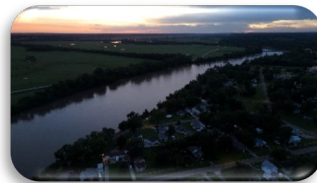


Figure 66-Aerial View of Water trail of Eldon

WHAT ARE WATER TRAILS

Defined by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), a water trail is a navigable river or waterway that is mapped, signed, and managed for safe recreational paddling, fishing, and boating, they are designed to connect communities, parks, and natural resources while promoting tourism and outdoor recreation. Iowa Currently has over 900 miles of designated water trails across the state. Water Trails are a part of Iowa's Outdoor recreation network, like land-based trail.



Figure 67-Two kayakers being used for recreational use

WATER TRAIL CLASSIFICATION

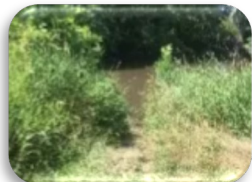
RPA 15 has three rivers that are classified as water trails. One has been approved by IDNR to be a State recognized water trail which is Des Moines River. The Cedar Creek and Skunk River are considered local water trails. The objective would be to get these two local water trails into State recognition as a state water trail. State approval water trail process is a 3–5 years process beginning with planning/design process 6-18 months followed by funding and implementation from 3rd to 5th year.

Getting state designation would allow for utilizing state resources such as technical assistance/review, prioritized DNR-managed funding assistance, and informational updates. In the RPA only one water trail is classified in this category. Van Buren is responsible for

IDNR has classified the State-designed water trails into four basic types of experiences which are recreational, gateway, challenge, and wilderness.



Table 10- Shows the different classification from Iowa DNR Master Plan

Type	Description	Photo Examples
Gateway Water Trails	Considered to be for beginners, short trips with easy to navigate routes (small rocks, small drops). High use levels and Launch parking areas. Foundation signs, maps, and amenities for casual paddling.	
Recreational Water Trails	More complex routes with access usually gravel point parking and safety information. Some boats maneuver around hazard. Some portage.	
Challenge Water Trails	Not for beginners, high hazard, high waves, logjams, rapids, short or long portages required, amenities usually not available, launch areas challenging.	
Wilderness Water Trails	Designated to preserve unique ecological, minimal human and distraction or amenities,	

Sources: Pictures are from Cedar Valley Water Trail Master Plan and Description from IDNR Water Trail Plan

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

The State water trails recognition have different requirements that will need to be completed before being classified as one. One of the design elements is the launch area for kayaking/boat. The IDNR requires that the water trails follow the design elements for parking. Stormwater management on site would also need to be part of the design elements when creating the access point with parking which uses the Iowa Urban Stormwater Manual engineering standard which also takes into consideration the infiltration design.

These design development standards can be found in Iowa's State Water Trails Plan. If you want to learn more about this process, please contact U.S. Army Corps of Engineers District, Rock Island, Clock Tower Building P.O. Box 2004 Rock Island, IL 61204-2004 or calling 309-794-5376.

Environmental Permits

The state has certain guidelines which a trail must follow to be an official state water trail. Each access point there must be a boat launch that could be either gravel or hard-surface ramps for canoes, kayaks, or small boats. Signage/Wayfinding should have the put in and take out locations, informational kiosks showing maps, mileage, and hazard. Safety signage



would also need low-head dams, rapids, or restricted zones. Maintaining safe portage around dams and hazards, ensuring the facilities do not negatively the water quality.

All water trail projects which require moving soil anywhere by the river must get an environmental permit. The application would need to be submitted to the IDNR floodplains, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and Iowa DNR Sovereign Lands. More information can be found at www.iowadnr.com/other/slands.html. In most cases the USACE can issue Nationwide permits.

- Use less than 50 cubic yards of net fill (remove 50 cubic yds add 100 cubic yds of stone)
- Move all extracted material to the upland or spread excess soil in the floodplain at less than 6 inches in depth.
- Do not discharge soil, water, or other material into an existing wetland.
- Disturb less than 1/10 an acre of wetland.
- Do not place in the water more than 10 cubic yards of material, including riprap, soil, or other materials.
- Do not accumulate debris within a floodplain.
- Do not obstruct the flow of any river.
- Minimize use of bridges or culverts in the floodplain.
- Obtain clearance through the USFWS for Threatened and Endangered Species areas.

Source: Water Trail Development Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Other permits may be required if corridor will be along Protected Water Areas. This information is only for aid. For questions for permitting reach out to Iowa DNR Floodplains (515-281-4312), Iowa DNR Sovereign Lands Permitting (515-281-8967), or the U.S Army Corps of Engineers Rock Island District (309-794-5380).

EXISTING WATER TRAILS

Currently RPA 15 has three rivers that have been funded and classified as water trails this includes Skunk River Water Trail in Keokuk & Jefferson County, Cedar Creek Water Trail in Jefferson County, and Des Moines River Water Trail in Van Buren & Wapello County.

CEDAR CREEK WATER TRAIL (LOCAL WATER TRAIL)

The Cedar Creek Water Trail has two access points which are from Turkey Run Wildlife Area and Round Prairie Park. The water trail is located Southeast of city of Fairfield. The water trail is a 8.4-mile scenic paddling route. Turkey Run Wildlife Area to Round Prairie Park is 8.4 mile. Round Prairie Park to Willow Road Bridge is 8.1 miles. This segment takes you over a 1.5 foot drop then a 20-yard riffle.

DES MOINES RIVER WATER TRAIL (STATE WATER TRAIL)

In 2003, the association started work on the Des Moines River Water trail across the county using funds from the Van Buren Foundation and the Federal Recreational Trails Program. These funds were used by the Trails Association to construct boat ramps at access points. The Des Moines River Water Trail begins at the city of Eldon in Wapello County going through Davis County then into Van Buren County. Van Buren County has been able to make all the Des Moines classified as a water trail. The water trail has seven access points including one in Keosauqua, the largest community in Van Buren, Farmington, and Bonaparte. The current length of the water trail is 41 miles in Van Buren County and 3 miles in Wapello County, which is currently the longest length in RPA 15.



Figure 68-Lower Des Moines River Van Buren County Boat Ramp awarded by TAP funds 2026 \$318,000

SKUNK RIVER WATER TRAIL (LOCAL WATER TRAIL)

The Skunk River Water Trail is a 72-mile designated paddling route that begins near Sigourney in Keokuk County, travels through Washington and Jefferson counties, and ends at Oakland Mills in Henry County. The trail provides paddlers with opportunities to experience the scenic Skunk River as it winds through agricultural landscapes, wooded corridors, and diverse wildlife habitat.

The Jefferson County segment of the water trail extends approximately 10.5 miles and connects with neighboring Washington and Henry counties. Public access to this segment is available at the Coppock Access and Mac Coon Access, providing convenient launch and take-out locations for canoeists, kayakers, and anglers. The Skunk River is also recognized for its quality fishing opportunities, with abundant habitat supporting channel catfish, freshwater drum, carp, and other fish species.

Water Trails Access Location

Access Location	Water Trail Location	Number	Owner	Launch Type
Eldon	Des Moines River	74	Wapello County Conversation (City of Eldon)	Carry Down
Selma	Des Moines River	69	Van Buren County Conservation (City of Selma)	Carry Down
Douds/Leando	Des Moines River	65	City of Douds	Carry Down
Austin Park	Des Moines River	55	Van Buren County Conservation	Carry Down
Keosauqua	Des Moines River	49	Van Buren County Conservation (City of Keosauqua)	Boat Ramp
Bentonsport	Des Moines River	40	Van Buren County Conservation (City of Bentonsport)	Carry Down
Bonaparte	Des Moines River	37	Van Buren County Conservation (City of Bonaparte)	Carry Down
Des Moines River (Van Buren Access)	Des Moines River	33	Van Buren County Conservation	Carry Down



Farmington	Des Moines River	31	Van Buren County Conservation (City of Farmington)	Boat Ramp
Turkey Run Wildlife Area	Cedar Creek	37	Jefferson County Conservation	Carry Down (Limited)
Round Prairie Park	Cedar Creek	28	Jefferson County Conservation	Carry Down (Limited)
Macon Access	Skunk River	54	Jefferson County Conservation	Carry Down (Limited)
South River Access	Skunk River	109	Keokuk County Conversation	Boat Ramp
Manhattan Bridge County Park	Skunk River	102	Keokuk County Conversation	Carry Down (Limited)
330th Ave/Highway 77 Access	Skunk River	88	Keokuk County Conversation	Boat Ramp

Data sources: Iowa Department of Transportation, Iowa Department of Natural Resources

POTENTIAL WATER TRAIL CONNECTION

For potential water trail connections water trail expansion exists and development new water trail connections. Expanding the existing water trails would be the most feasible since the county conversation and cities are already committed to maintaining existing connection. Here proposed water trail corridors which have been identified:

Ottumwa to Des Moines River Water Trail

Ottumwa is just outside of the Des Moines River Water Trail which State recognition ended at the city of Eldon. Ottumwa is the largest in RPA 15 that would provide access to the State water trail providing a different amendment inside the community. The development of the Market Street would be a complementary to providing recreational water trails. The length of the water trail that would need to be worked is estimated to be about 18 miles. The IDOT Statewide Vision suggest Multiuse corridor along the Des Moines River which could provide easier access point for this future water trail connection.

The Wapello County Conservation has no ownership of boat ramps and has all the boat access owned by private owners or nonprofit organizations like cities. Conservation was one of the last established in the state making this process a bit more challenging for the water trail to be developed in the county.

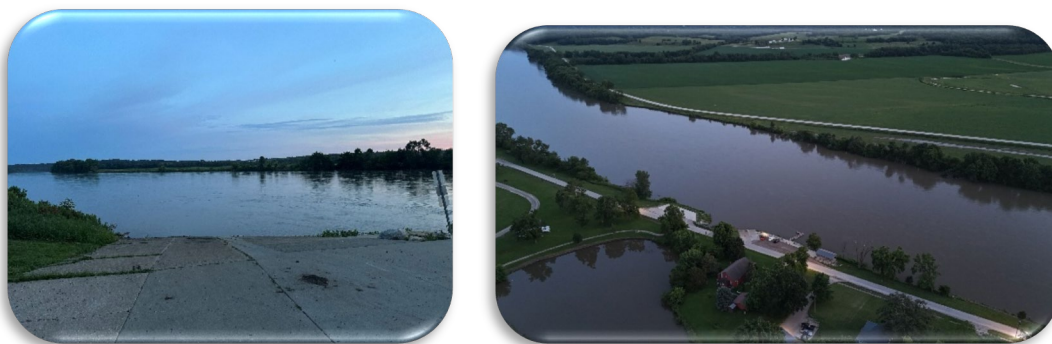


Figure 69-Eldon Water Trail access point of the City of Eldon

Oskaloosa to South Skunk River Water Trail & Des Moines River Water Trail

Mahaska County is currently the only County which has not identified a water trail in past trail plans. Oskaloosa currently is between two possible water trail locations which are the South Skunk River Water Trail & Des Moines Water Trail. The South Skunk River connection would be North of Oskaloosa by Highway 63. This water trail would be about 35 miles to reach the locally designated South Skunk River Water Trail. The Des Moines River south of Oskaloosa would be estimated about 25 miles to reach the city of Ottumwa. Connecting connections between both communities would have the largest access to population without people having to leave their communities. Future connection could possibly connect Oskaloosa to Red Rock Lake. IDOT Statewide Vision suggests multi-use corridors along the Des Moines River which could provide easier access points for the future water trail connection.



Figure 70-Des Moines River North View along Turkey Island in Ottumwa

Sigourney, Delta, and New Sharon to North Skunk River Water Trail

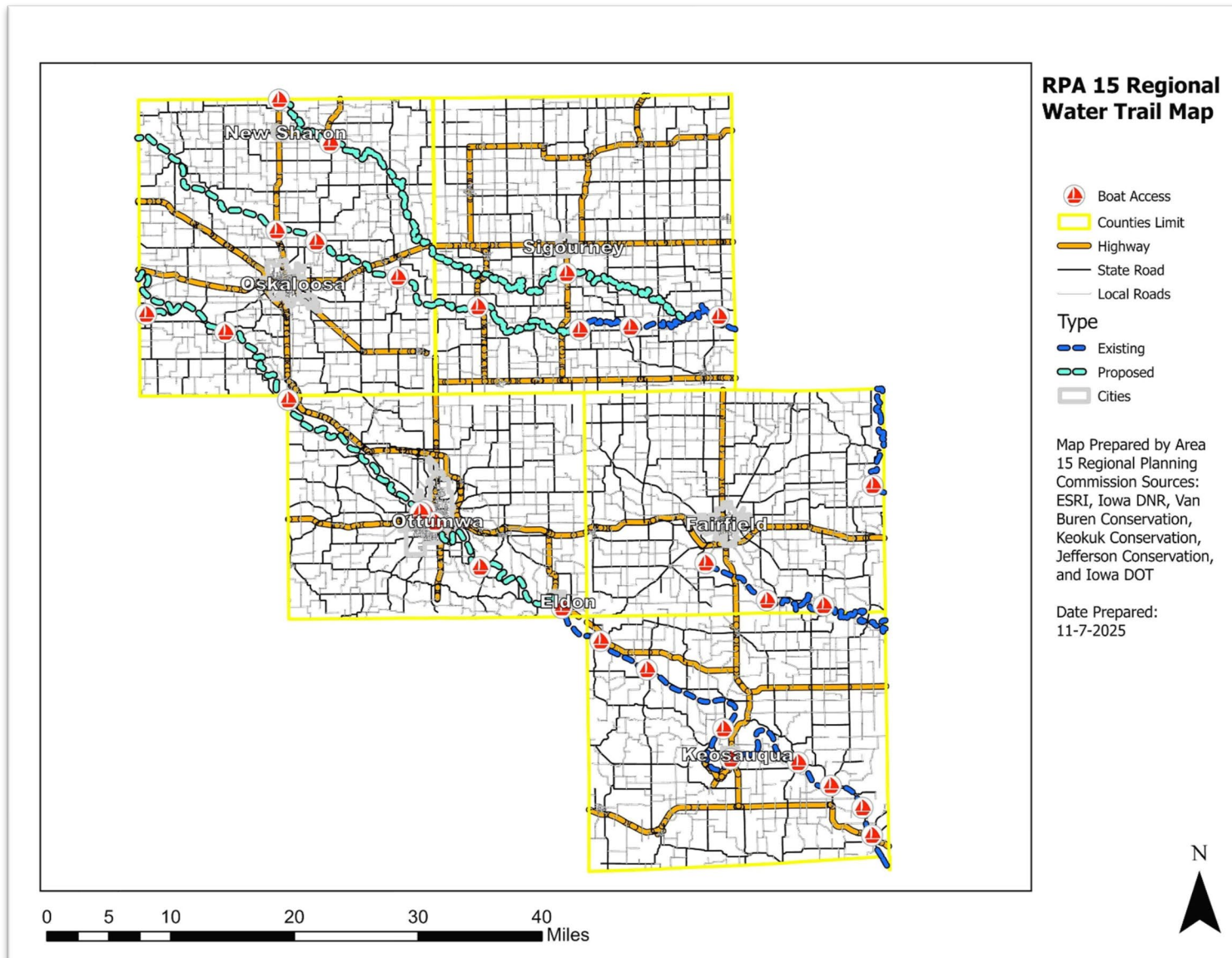
Sigourney, Delta, and New Sharon are all connected by the North Skunk River. With this connection they would provide recreational opportunities for about 3,200 people without having to travel outside their communities. These smaller sized communities do not have immediate future to create multiuse trails connection due to limited funding sources and small population. Water Trail could be a substitute option for these communities. The route is estimated to be about 35 miles in length from outside the city limits of New Sharon and South of Sigourney city limits.



Figure 71-On the left Aerial picture of Sigourney and on the Right of downtown New Sharon possible communities connecting to the Water Trail system



Section Four: Water Trails





SECTION FIVE: NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND PUBLIC INPUT

OVERVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The needs assessment for the Regional Trails Plan was conducted to better understand existing conditions, identify barriers, and document opportunities to expand multimodal connectivity across the five-county region. This assessment supports long-range planning goals and helps local jurisdictions, the RPA, and the Iowa DOT align priorities for future investments. The analysis relied on a combination of field review, GIS datasets, county comprehensive plans, statewide plans, and conversations with local officials and stakeholders. The goal of this process was to evaluate gaps in the current trail network, summarize community needs, and establish a foundation for the vision and phasing framework presented in Section Six Trail Vision & Phasing Plan.

REGIONAL CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

Area 15 region is predominantly rural, with communities differing in size, available resources, and existing trail infrastructure. Some counties have established trail committees and extensive systems, while others are focused on maintaining limited facilities or exploring future opportunities. A major challenge identified through stakeholder outreach is the difficulty of securing easements, particularly along former rail corridors now under private ownership. As a result, trail implementation often requires flexibility in alignment, early coordination with landowners, and a phased, opportunity-driven approach.

Recognizing these realities, this plan emphasizes incremental progress through smaller-scale projects that strengthen local connections while laying the foundation for long-term regional corridors.

PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Public input and stakeholder engagement played a key role in shaping this plan. Input was gathered through surveys, focus groups, and meetings with county trail representatives, local staff, and community organizations. Participants identified safety concerns, missing connections, maintenance needs, and desired amenities, as well as barriers to trail use such as limited access points and lack of connectivity.

This feedback was used to inform priority corridors, phasing strategies, and recommend implementation actions. While public and stakeholder input helped identify needs and preferences, final recommendations reflect a balance between community goals, technical feasibility, and funding considerations.

Public and stakeholder engagement for this plan included facilitated SWOT discussions with county trail organizations, a survey of community leaders and local staff, and public input gathered through a stakeholder regional survey. This approach allowed for both strategic and community-based input while recognizing differences in expertise and capacity across the region.

Regional Trail Plan survey for Community Leaders/Stakeholders



To better understand local priorities and regional opportunities, Area 15 Regional Planning Commission distributed a community leader survey to representatives throughout the five-county region. The survey was used to gather input from individuals involved in planning, trail development, parks and recreation, local government, and community organizations. Participants represented a diverse range of stakeholder groups, including county staff, park and recreation departments, elected officials, trail committee members, trail volunteers, conservation staff, and other community leaders. The complete survey instrument and response summary are provided in **Appendices**.

Survey responses indicated broad agreement regarding the benefits that trails provide to communities throughout the Area 15 region. Recreation was consistently identified as the greatest benefit of trail development, followed by improvements to quality of life, public health, economic development, tourism, and transportation. These findings reinforce the role of trails as community assets that support recreation while also contributing to broader community development goals.

Community leaders also identified several common barriers to expanding and maintaining trail systems. Funding was overwhelmingly identified as the greatest challenge, followed by easement and land acquisition, maintenance costs, limited staff capacity, inter-county coordination, and community support. These responses closely relate to the discussions held during the county stakeholder workshops and SWOT analyses, suggesting that many of the challenges facing trail development are consistent across the region regardless of community size.

When asked to prioritize future investments, respondents emphasized the importance of improving regional connectivity. Connecting trails between nearby communities was identified as the highest priority, followed by surface improvements, maintenance of existing facilities, safety improvements at roadway crossings, closing local trail gaps, and expanding access to water trails. The emphasis on regional connections supports one of the primary goals of this Regional Trail Plan: creating a more connected trail network that links communities, parks, recreation areas, and destinations throughout the Area 15 region.

The survey also demonstrated strong support for regional collaboration. Nearly all respondents indicated that their community or organization would be willing to participate in regional partnerships for trail planning and implementation. No respondents indicated opposition to regional collaboration. This level of support demonstrates a willingness among local governments and community organizations to work together on projects that extend beyond individual jurisdictional boundaries.

Participants also identified several existing and future trail projects that should remain priorities within the region. Frequently mentioned projects included continued improvements along the Des Moines River Water Trail and Skunk River Water Trail, regional trail connections between Ottumwa, Eldon, and Fairfield, Court Street sidewalk improvements, connections between the Keosauqua trail system, the local high school, and golf course, and replacement or rehabilitation of existing trail facilities within Keosauqua. These responses illustrate the diversity of trail needs throughout the region, ranging from maintenance and accessibility improvements to long-term regional corridor development.

Water trail planning was also included as part of the survey. While fewer respondents indicated familiarity with water trails than with land-based trail systems, those who were familiar identified several priority improvements. The highest-ranked needs included additional signage and wayfinding along waterways, upgrades to existing river access locations, improved parking and restroom facilities, and the development of new public access points. These findings highlight opportunities to enhance recreational access to the region's river systems while supporting tourism and outdoor recreation. Bring awareness to water trail would need to be discussed with each county trails group.

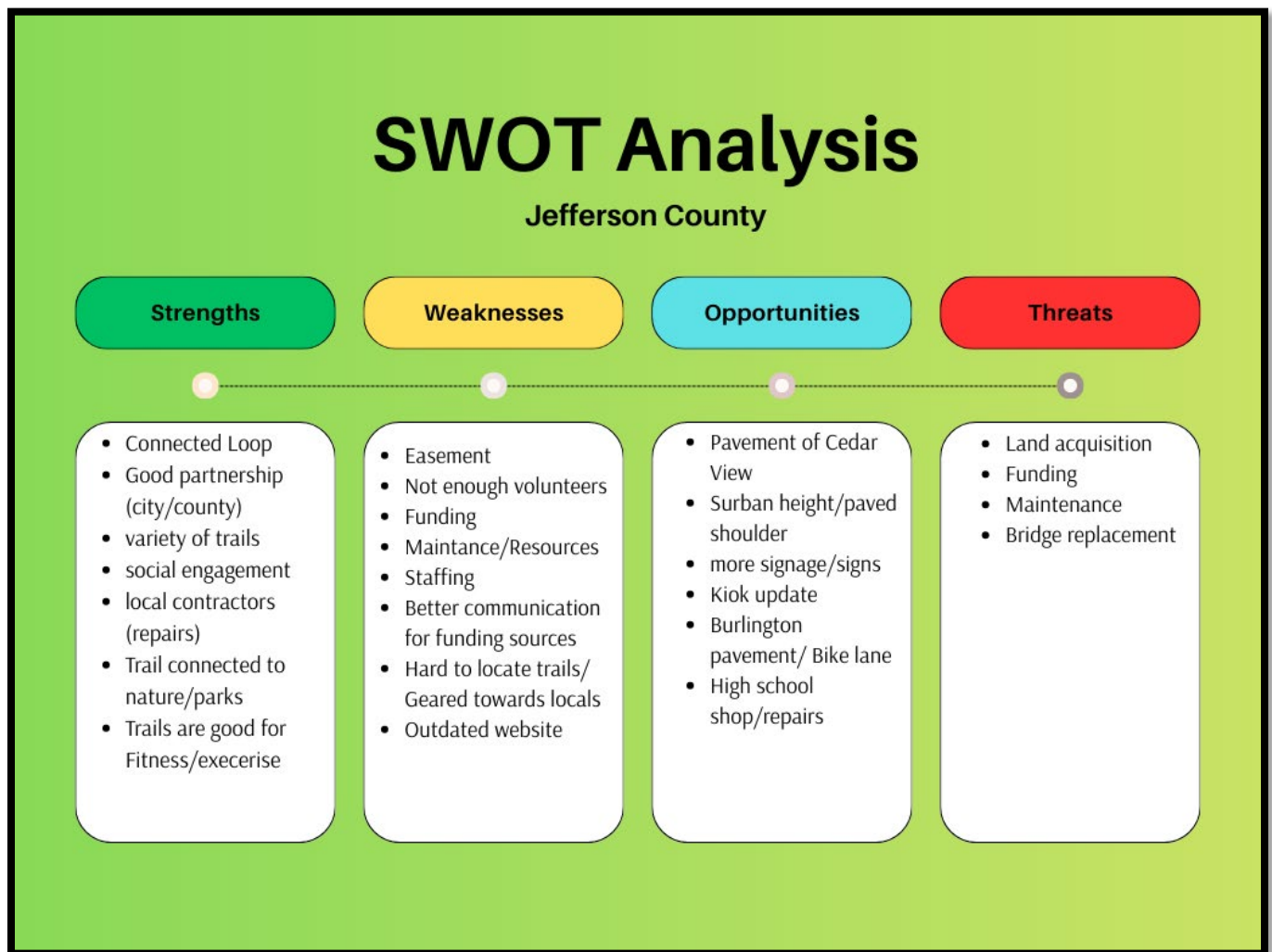
Overall, the community leader survey confirmed many of the themes identified through stakeholder workshops, SWOT analyses, and previous planning efforts. Respondents emphasized the need for increased regional connectivity, sustainable



funding, continued maintenance of existing facilities, and stronger collaboration among communities. The survey findings were used to inform the goals, recommendations, and implementation strategies presented throughout this Regional Trail Plan.

Jefferson County SWOT analysis

Jefferson County SWOT analysis involved a range of people city council member, parks and recreation department, members of Jefferson County Trail group, and Jefferson County Conversation staff. From the workshop collect information on what were the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.



STRENGTH

The Mahaska County Trail group meets at least monthly to discuss concerns, future projects, and other issues related to their trail system. The meeting does have a good partnership with the city staff, nonprofit organization, and as well as the county. Social engagement is very high and has a lot of input from residents and key stakeholders. Trails are connected and referred to as the Oskaloosa Loop or Mahaska Community Recreation Trail. Plans for the completion of the loop are scheduled in Fiscal year 2027 or 2028 depending on railroad easement.



WEAKNESSES

Jefferson County did talk about how the easements are difficult to obtain to expand out of the city limits to county limits. Funding is challenging to obtain with the limited opportunity for grants or local funds in the region. With limiting funding will maintain the trail and staffing for existing corridors. The existing resources such as the website maps are geared towards locals and not visitors from outside the county.

OPPORTUNITIES

The discussion started with the current proposed Cedar View which is planned to be paved using Transportation Alternatives funds in FY27. This is part of the Eldon American Gothic Trail connector from which begins just outside the city of Fairfield to connect to Eldon. Other opportunities could connect the existing road adding shoulder pavement and connecting it to the Fairfield loop on Burlington Ave. Burlington Ave was part of an IDOT project which converted the four lanes to three lanes with turning lane in the middle. Looking at updating some of the kiosk by the trailhead. Partnership with the Fairfield School District creating a program to help with minor repairs with kiosk, trailhead, and improvement to the trail.

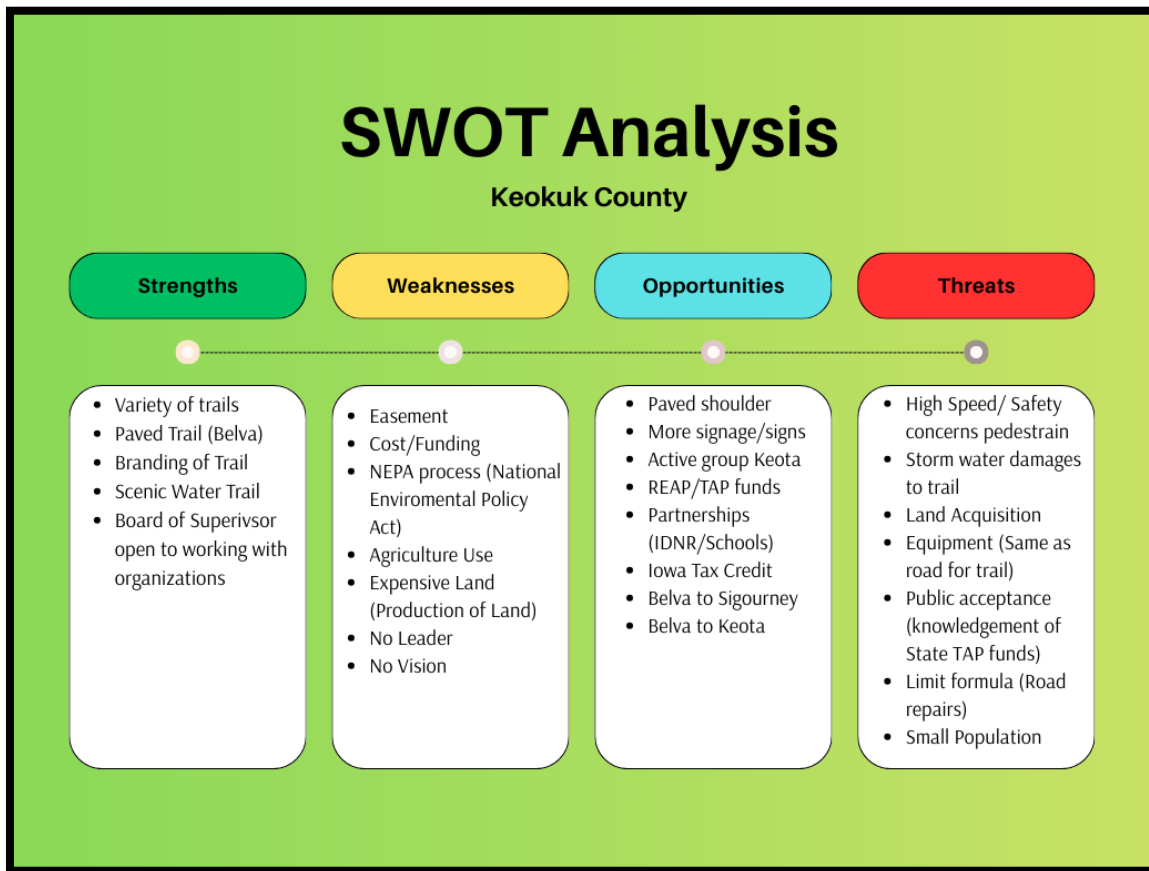
THREATS

Like other counties, the land acquisition process has been limited to expansion to just trails which are owned by the city of Fairfield and Jefferson County. Property owners have concerns about the easement being on their property. Funding also could help with the land acquisition which is limited. Maintenance of the existing trail would be challenging to maintain if expanded. Bridges also fall in that category.

Keokuk County SWOT Analysis

A stakeholder workshop was conducted with representatives from the Board of Supervisors, County Conservation, city administration, the county engineer's office, and local trail advocates, including members of the Keota trail community, to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to trail development in Keokuk County.

Area 15 Regional Planning Commission coordinated outreach efforts and invited key stakeholders to participate in the discussion, ensuring representation from both local government and community-based perspectives. The workshop provided an opportunity to gather input on existing conditions, identify challenges and opportunities, and better understand the capacity and priorities for trail development within the county.



STRENGTH

Stakeholders identified several strengths related to existing trail assets and openness to collaboration. Despite a smaller population base, Keokuk County offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including the paved trail at Belva Deer Recreation Area and access to scenic water trail resources. Participants noted that local governing bodies are generally supportive and open to working with organizations, nonprofits, and regional partners to advance trail-related initiatives.

WEAKNESSES

Significant structural weaknesses were identified. The county currently lacks a formal trail organization or designated leadership to guide planning and implementation efforts. This absence of organizational capacity limits the ability to pursue funding, coordinate projects, and maintain long-term momentum. Stakeholders also noted that easement acquisition and land access present ongoing challenges, often increasing project costs and complicating feasibility. Regulatory requirements, including environmental review processes such as NEPA, were identified as other barriers, especially limited local resources and staffing capacity.

OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities for trail development include incremental improvements such as enhanced signage, wayfinding, and safety features. The concept of utilizing paved shoulders to accommodate bicycle travel was discussed as a potential lower-cost alternative to dedicated trail facilities, though safety concerns were noted. Stakeholders also identified long-term



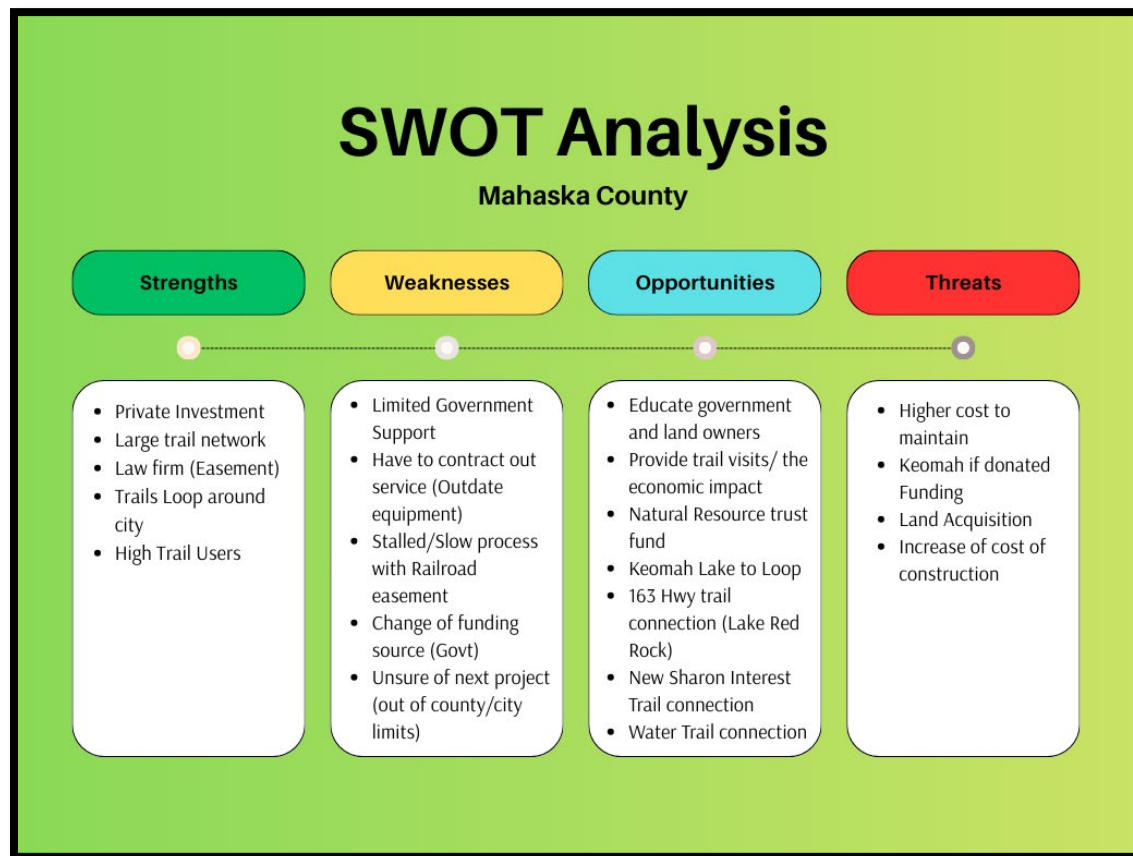
opportunities to develop regional connections, including corridors linking Belva Deer Recreation Area to Sigourney and Keota. Local engagement in communities such as Keota presents an opportunity to build grassroots support. Additional funding opportunities may include programs such as REAP and private investment incentives, including tax credit programs, as well as partnerships with schools, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations.

THREATS

Several threats may impact trail development in the county. Safety concerns were identified as a primary issue, particularly related to high-speed traffic along roadways adjacent to existing or proposed trail corridors. Stormwater management challenges along corridors such as the Belva Deer Trail were also noted as factors affecting design and maintenance. Stakeholders expressed concern about public perception and acceptance of funding for trail projects, particularly where there is limited awareness of funding sources and benefits. These factors, combined with limited capacity and funding competition, may constrain the advancement of future trail projects.

Mahaska County SWOT analysis

Mahaska County SWOT analysis involved a range of people from County Chamber & Development, Conservation, Mahaska Community, Mayor, county engineer, and Keota trail member. Area 15 RPC had to identify the group of stakeholders of this county and sent out invitation to discuss the Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats of trails in the region.



STRENGTHS



Discussion started with interest in private investment in the trails. The investment has made it easier to development and maintenance the trail network in Mahaska County. Good partnership with local law firms helps/assist easement obtainment for trail development. The trail loops around the city of Oskaloosa and should be completed by 2028 in the Southeast section (currently shared route). A lot of trail users are seen regularly.

WEAKNESSES

Limited government support from county and local governments. Having to contract out services and equipment being outdated needing replacement (expense). Currently obtaining easement with rail is a slow process/stalling. The change of governmental funding sources at local, federal, or state level. Not knowing the next expansion of trail or location, within city/county limits. No communication from outside county such as Wapello or Marion.

OPPORTUNITIES

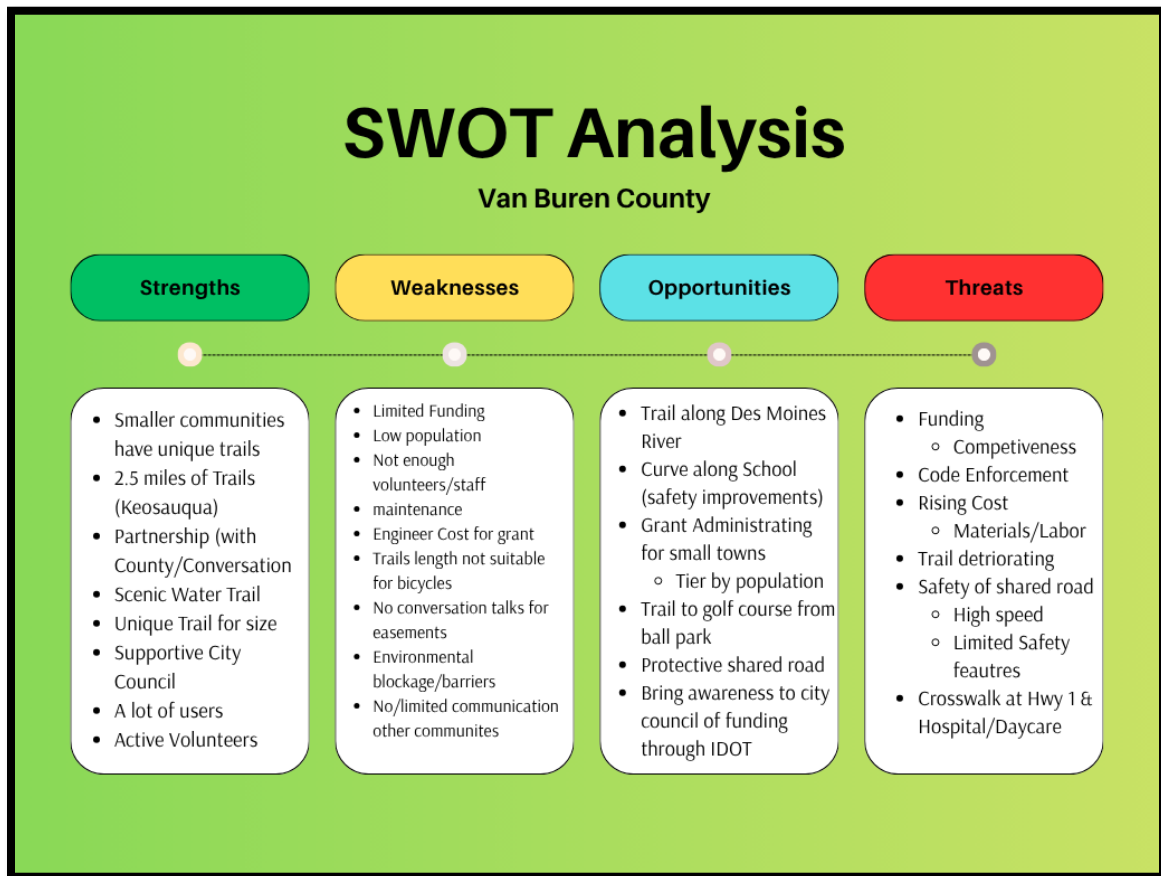
Educating the landowners and local government of funding, easement, and other questions and concerns. Provide trail visits and economic impact assessments to government to help support growth/funding. Natural Resources funds such as IDNR and REAP grant. Keomah Lake to the Loop, along IA Hwy 92 as well as IA Hwy 163 connecting Pella/Red Rock Lake, amenities. New Sharon is currently working with Area 15 RPC on developing STRIDE Plan and expressed interest in Trail System local, possibly connecting to Oskaloosa Loop. Water Trail connection development in South Snuck River could connect to existing local Keokuk Water Trail located in Snuck River.

THREATS

The rise in the cost of maintaining the existing trail network. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is wanting to donate Keomah which would be expensive. Land acquisition for future expansion is challenging to obtain and also raises costs. Increase of construction labor.

Van Buren SWOT analysis

A stakeholder workshop was conducted with members of Keosauqua Engage and additional participants from Van Buren County to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to trail development in Van Buren County. Participants included former city officials, trail advocates, and community members, providing insight into both local priorities and regional considerations.



STRENGTHS

Stakeholders identified several strengths related to the diversity and character of trail assets within the county. Communities including Keosauqua, Milton, Cantril, and Farmington, as well as Lacey-Keosauqua State Park, offer a variety of trail types and recreational opportunities. The City of Keosauqua currently maintains approximately 2.5 miles of trail, and strong partnerships between local governments and conservation entities support ongoing efforts. The presence of the Des Moines River Water Trail, a state-recognized route, provides a unique recreational and tourism asset for the county. Despite a smaller population base, stakeholders noted strong community support, active trail users, and engaged volunteers.

WEAKNESSES

However, several significant weaknesses were identified. Limited funding and a small population base constrain the ability to develop and maintain trail infrastructure. Staffing capacity is limited, and volunteer availability is insufficient to meet long-term maintenance needs. Existing trail segments are relatively short and may not adequately serve longer-distance bicycle users. Stakeholders also noted that no formal discussions have occurred regarding easement acquisition or expansion beyond current trail limits, particularly outside the City of Keosauqua. Environmental constraints, including terrain and natural features, further limit feasible trail alignments and increase project complexity and cost.

OPPORTUNITIES



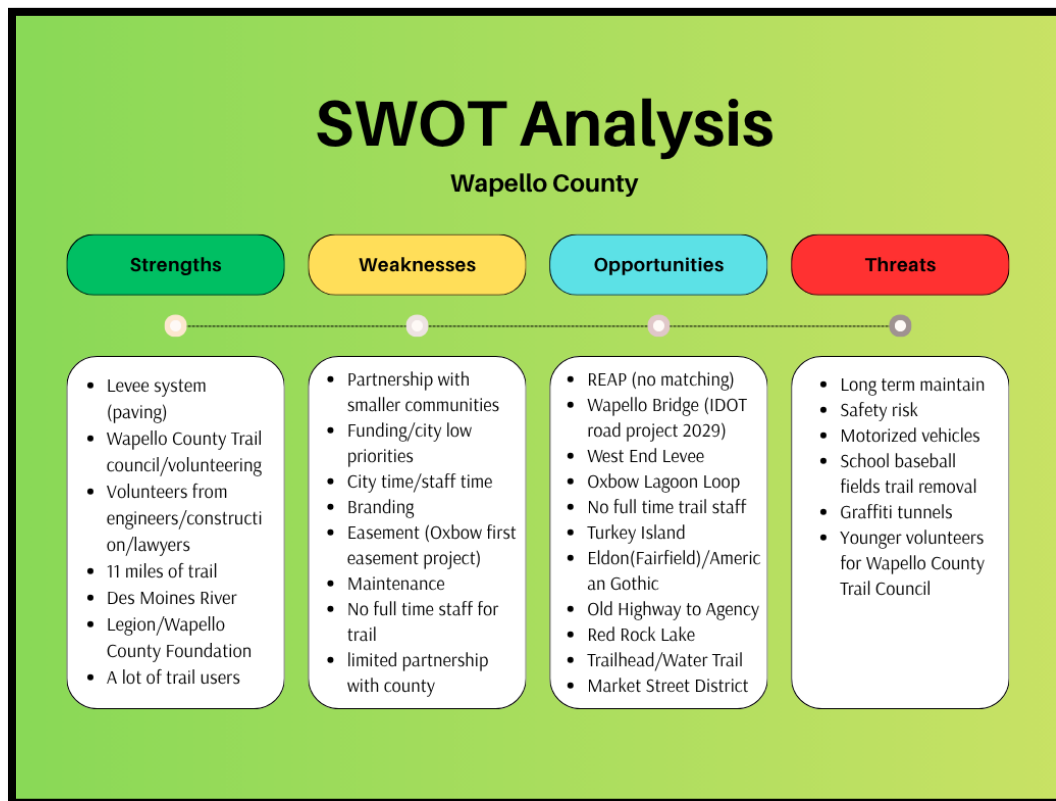
Opportunities for future development include leveraging the Des Moines River corridor to support regional trail connections, particularly through water trail and adjacent land-based trail improvements. Shared-use roadways present an opportunity to enhance safety through striping, signage, or the addition of side paths. Additional opportunities include improving local connections, such as linking the golf course to the ballpark, and increasing awareness of available funding sources through coordination with state agencies and local decision-makers. Stakeholders also identified a need for additional support in grant administration for smaller communities.

THREATS

Several threats may impact the long-term viability of trail development in the county. Funding remains highly competitive at the regional, state, and federal levels, which can limit project advancement. Rising costs of labor and materials further challenge implementation and maintenance. Safety concerns were noted on shared roadways, particularly where high-speed traffic and limited infrastructure create risks for pedestrians and bicyclists. Specific concerns were raised regarding crossings along Iowa Highway 1 near the hospital and daycare facilities, where safety improvements may be needed but have been difficult to advance due to limited supporting data. Additionally, enforcement of regulations and maintenance of existing trail conditions present ongoing challenges.

Wapello County SWOT analysis

A stakeholder workshop was conducted with representatives from the City of Ottumwa Parks and Recreation Department and the Wapello County Trail Council to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to trail development in Wapello County. Participants included a range of stakeholders within engineering, nonprofit coordination, and trail advocacy, providing a comprehensive perspective on current conditions and future opportunities.





STRENGTHS

Stakeholders identified several key strengths that position Wapello County as a leader in regional trail development. The existing levee system has facilitated trail expansion by simplifying easement acquisition and providing a stable corridor for development. The county benefits from a highly active and engaged trail council, supported by volunteers from diverse professional backgrounds. The existing trail system, consisting of approximately 11 miles within the City of Ottumwa, offers scenic access along the Des Moines River and experiences strong seasonal usage. Additionally, local funding support is strengthened through partnerships with organizations such as the Wapello County Foundation and Legion-related funding sources.

WEAKNESSES

Despite these strengths, several weaknesses were identified. Limited coordination with smaller communities has persisted, particularly following challenges associated with easement acquisition for the American Gothic Trail connection to Eldon. Funding from local jurisdictions is often a lower priority, making it difficult to secure matching funds required for grant programs. Staffing constraints, including the absence of dedicated full-time trail personnel, limit the ability to plan, implement, and maintain projects. Stakeholders also noted that trail branding and online presence could be improved to increase visibility and user engagement. Maintenance demands continue to grow due to increasing labor and material costs, and recent projects such as the Oxbow Trail have highlighted the difficulty of easement acquisition as a learning process for local partners.

OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities for trail development in Wapello County include several active and potential projects. The West Levee Trail project, which has received Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding, will expand connectivity on the west side of Ottumwa and may serve as a foundation for future regional connections toward Pella and Oskaloosa. The Oxbow Loop project, awarded in Fiscal Year 2025, will provide an additional connected loop within the existing system as easements are finalized and construction progresses in phases. Other opportunities include potential pedestrian improvements to the Wapello Street Bridge and the availability of funding programs such as the Iowa Department of Natural Resources REAP program, which does not require a local match.

THREATS

Several threats may impact long-term trail development and sustainability. Rising costs associated with maintenance, labor, and materials continue to strain limited local resources. Safety concerns were noted, including unauthorized motorized vehicle use on trails, which contributes to surface deterioration and user conflicts. Stakeholders also expressed concern about potential conflicts with adjacent land uses, such as the restoration of school-owned baseball fields that may impact existing trails. As well as, issues include vandalism and graffiti, in underpass areas along the trail corridor.

BARRIERS TO TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

Stakeholder input gathered through county-level workshops identified several consistent barriers to trail development across the region. The most frequently cited challenges include limited funding, ongoing maintenance needs, staffing constraints, and difficulties associated with easement acquisition. These barriers affect both the development of new trail segments and the long-term sustainability of existing facilities.



Expanding trail systems to support county-to-county connections would require coordination among multiple jurisdictions to address key considerations such as maintenance responsibilities, funding commitments, staff capacity, agricultural land use, and landowner concerns. Establishing clear roles and expectations among participating entities is critical for advancing multi-jurisdictional trail corridors.

Limited local funding capacity was identified as a significant constraint, particularly in smaller communities and rural counties with a constrained tax base. Most of the projects rely heavily on state and federal funding sources. Stakeholders brought up that infrastructure needs, such as roadway and bridge projects, are often prioritized due to their perceived importance for transportation and economic activity, which can make trail projects more difficult to advance.

Communication and coordination between counties were also identified as areas for improvement. In discussions, stakeholders noted that collaboration between counties has been limited in recent years due to a lack of shared projects. Strengthening regional communication will be necessary to advance future trail connections. Some counties have limited organizational capacity for trail development. For example, Keokuk County does not currently have an active trail organization, which may limit project development, coordination, and advocacy efforts. Increasing awareness of trail opportunities at both the county and regional levels will be important moving forward.

Staffing and administrative capacity were also identified as barriers, particularly in smaller communities such as Keosauqua, Keota, and Sigourney. Limited staff resources can make it challenging to manage grant applications, administer funding, and oversee project implementation. While contracting with engineering consultants is an option, it can significantly increase overall project costs. In addition, securing local match requirements remains a challenge for many jurisdictions with limited financial resources.

Overall, the variation in planning and implementation capacity across the region highlights the need for continued coordination and technical support. Strengthening partnerships among the Iowa DOT, Area 15 Regional Planning Commission, counties, and municipalities will be critical to improving communication, expanding planning resources, and supporting the development of active transportation plans. These efforts will help the region identify shared priorities, enhance competitiveness for funding opportunities, and successfully implement trail and bicycle and pedestrian projects.



Figure 72- Representing collaboration between a group of people increases productivity demonstrated by the graph



SECTION SIX: TRAIL VISION & PHASING PLAN

Trails considered as regional connect more than one city and/or county within Regional Planning Affiliation 15. Regional trails can serve as destinations for local trails and connect multiple local trails, improving the overall trail system. To identify potential trail connections to cities and counties outside of RPA 15, organizations involved in trail planning and development for the surrounding area were contacted regarding their maps or plans showing existing and proposed trails. Information obtained from these organizations was reviewed to determine potential connectivity and regional trail development.

COST ESTIMATED AND PHASING

The cost estimates and phasing section provides planning-level cost estimates for proposed trail corridors and outlines a recommended phasing strategy. These estimates are intended to guide regional decision-making, funding applications, and implementation priorities.

The cost ranges are based on the average Iowa construction costs for trails by surface type, as documented in the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) Bike and Pedestrian Plan (2025). Cost estimates for National Recreation Trails and U.S. Bicycle Route System (USBRS) corridors are based on historic per-mile trail construction costs in Iowa.

The estimated costs per mile presented below are intended for planning purposes and may be affected by site-specific conditions, including former railroad grades, trail alignments along urban or rural roadways, stream corridors, and the level of surrounding development. These factors are applied as cost multipliers to the estimated per-mile construction costs to provide a more realistic planning-level estimate.

Facility Type	Estimated Cost Per Mile	Multiplier Cost	Examples
New paved multi-use Trail 10FT wide	\$400,000	0.5	Former rail line grade
		0.6	Flat terrain
		1.0	Rolling terrain
		1.2	Hilly terrain
		1.2	Along waterways (streams)
		2.0	Highly Developed Areas
New paved sidepath 10FT wide	\$300,000	1.0	Along Urban Roadway
		1.6	Along Rural Roadway
		1.4	Highly Developed Areas
New Paved shoulders 5FT wide each side of Road	\$750,000	1.0	Adequate shoulder width
Shared Lane/Road	\$500	1.0	Rural with few turns (very little wayfinding signs)

Source: Iowa Department of Transportation, Iowa Pedestrian and Bicycle Long Range Plan, section 5.7, 2025.



Calculating Planned Corridors

The following corridors are using the estimate cost for paved Multi-use trail (10FT) and the two incorporated towns the routes follow between. Each corridor uses Iowa IDOT Bike and Pedestrian cost estimates from historical cost estimates based in 2024 data. Data would need to adjust for inflation construction cost by 4%. This does not consider land acquisition as this process varies from owner to owner (donations, market price, etc.).

CORRIDORS	ESTIMATED COST (PER MILE)	LENGTH (MILES BASED ON GIS MAP)	COST (BASED ON HISTORIC CONSTRUCTION)	PRIORITY (BASED ON POPULATION/ COORDINATION)	POPULATION (ESTIMATED FROM 2023)	TIMELINE (PLANNING)
FAIRFIELD TO ELDON (AMERICAN GOTHIC TRAIL)	\$400,000	8.74	\$3,496,000	High	10,500	Near-Term (Easement)
FAIRFIELD TO MOUNT PLEASANT	\$400,000	16.71	\$6,684,000	Low	18,000	Timeline not identified
FAIRFIELD TO WASHINGTON	\$400,000	20.3	\$8,120,000	Medium	17,500	Long-Term
KEOSAUQUA TO ELDON (AMERICAN GOTHIC TRAIL)	\$400,000	19.72	\$7,888,000	Medium	1,700	Timeline not identified
KEOSAUQUA TO FARMINGTON	\$400,000	16.33	\$6,532,000	Low	1,500	Timeline not identified
OSKALOOSA TO MONTEZUMA	\$400,000	19.8	\$7,920,000	Low	13,000	Timeline not identified
OSKALOOSA TO PELLA (RED ROCK LAKE)	\$400,000	14.65	\$5,860,000	High	22,000	Long-Term
OSKALOOSA TO SIGOURNEY	\$400,000	18.4	\$7,360,000	Medium	13,500	Timeline not identified
OTTUMWA TO OSKALOOSA	\$400,000	20.0	\$8,000,000	High	37,000	Long-Term
OTTUMWA TO ELDON (AMERICA GOTHIC TRAIL)	\$400,000	9.0	\$3,600,000	High	27,000	Near-Term (Easement)
SIGOURNEY TO NORTH ENGLISH	\$400,000	14.06	\$5,624,000	Low	3,500	Timeline not identified
SIGOURNEY TO KEOTA	\$400,000	12.3	\$4,920,000	High	4,000	Long-Term

Sources: ESRI/ArcGIS Pro software, Google maps, Iowa DOT Bicycle and Pedestrian 2025



Phasing the corridors

Based on the calculation, total estimated population, community input, and fund feasibility, Area 15 RPC is recommended proceeding by phases. To execute the regional trail plan successfully phases out the projects into three different categories.

PRIORITY CORRIDORS (SHORT TERM)

ELDON AMERICAN GOTHIC TRAIL

This project has been in the work since late 2000's and will continue to have one of the greater impacts on starting the connectivity of the region's trails in RPA 15. With population exceeding 35,000 people with RPA 15 estimated population being around 90,000 people. 1/3 of the region's population will have direct access without traveling to a different community.

Eldon Project was funded with Transportation Alternatives funds due to limited ease of access to trail routes the project could not be started. Bringing awareness of the Eldon American Gothic trail to governing bodies, local agencies, school boards, and word of mouth to local property owners. Architect and engineering plans have been designed and planned for this route, only needing to secure the easement along the former railroad corridor.



Figure 73-Aerial picture of American Gothic House and visiting center

OSKALOOSA (MAHASKA COUNTY) TO TRACY/PELLA/LAKE RED ROCK/KNOXVILLE (MARION COUNTY)

Proceeding with connecting towards Marion County would allow access to around an estimated 29,500 population (Pella, Oskaloosa, and Knoxville). Currently Knoxville approved a comprehensive plan with long term goals of obtaining easement to connect to Pella and Lake Red Rock of 17 miles of trails. Marion County and Us Amery Corps of Engineers have the Volksweg Trail.



Figure 74-Aerial view of the Trio and trail along Hwy 163 possible connection to Pella/Lake Red Rock

SIGOURNEY TO LAKE BELVA DEER/KEOTA/WASHINGTON

Keokuk County recently developed a trail (Sidepath) along 240th Ave to reach Belva Deer RV Campground. The end point of the trail ends at a gravel parking lot just under 3 miles East of Sigourney. Making the connection to Sigourney would give access to people safe access to the Lake Belva Deer Campground. Sigourney could the trail to the high school since it is located east on Pleasant Valley St or continue highway 149/92.

Finally connecting the Belva Deer to Sigourney would allow time to collect the easement and funding for connecting to Keota. Keota has a trail leading to Washington in Washington county. This would connect around 10,000 people from all three communities.



Figure 75-Aerial viewing West of Belva Deer trail parking viewing toward Sigourney

Long Term Goals (Vision/Concept/No Timeline proposed)

KEOSAUQUA TO AMERICAN GOTHIC TRAIL (ELDON) OR MILTON/CARTIL/FARMINGTON

Keosauqua existing trail network would have the ability to connect to American Gothic Trail or to smaller communities with their existing trail network. American gothic would have more access towards larger population. With the smaller population a lot of coordination between communities would be required.



Figure 76-Aerial view of Keosauqua Manning Hotel next to the Water Trail access and Keosauqua Trail Loop

OSKALOOSA TO AMERICAN GOTHIC TRAIL (ELDON, FAIRFIELD, AND OTTUMWA)

Once the American Gothic Trail is connected, Northwest old railroad corridor could connect Oskaloosa bring the total 46,000 people who would have access to this trail without leave their community. Hypothetically Lake Red Rock and Oskaloosa connection would bring the total to 64,500 connected within the regional trail network.

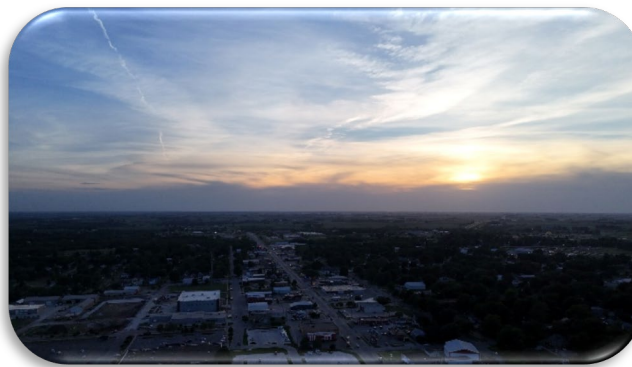


Figure 77-Aerial View of Oskaloosa viewing West possible connection towards American Gothic/Pella

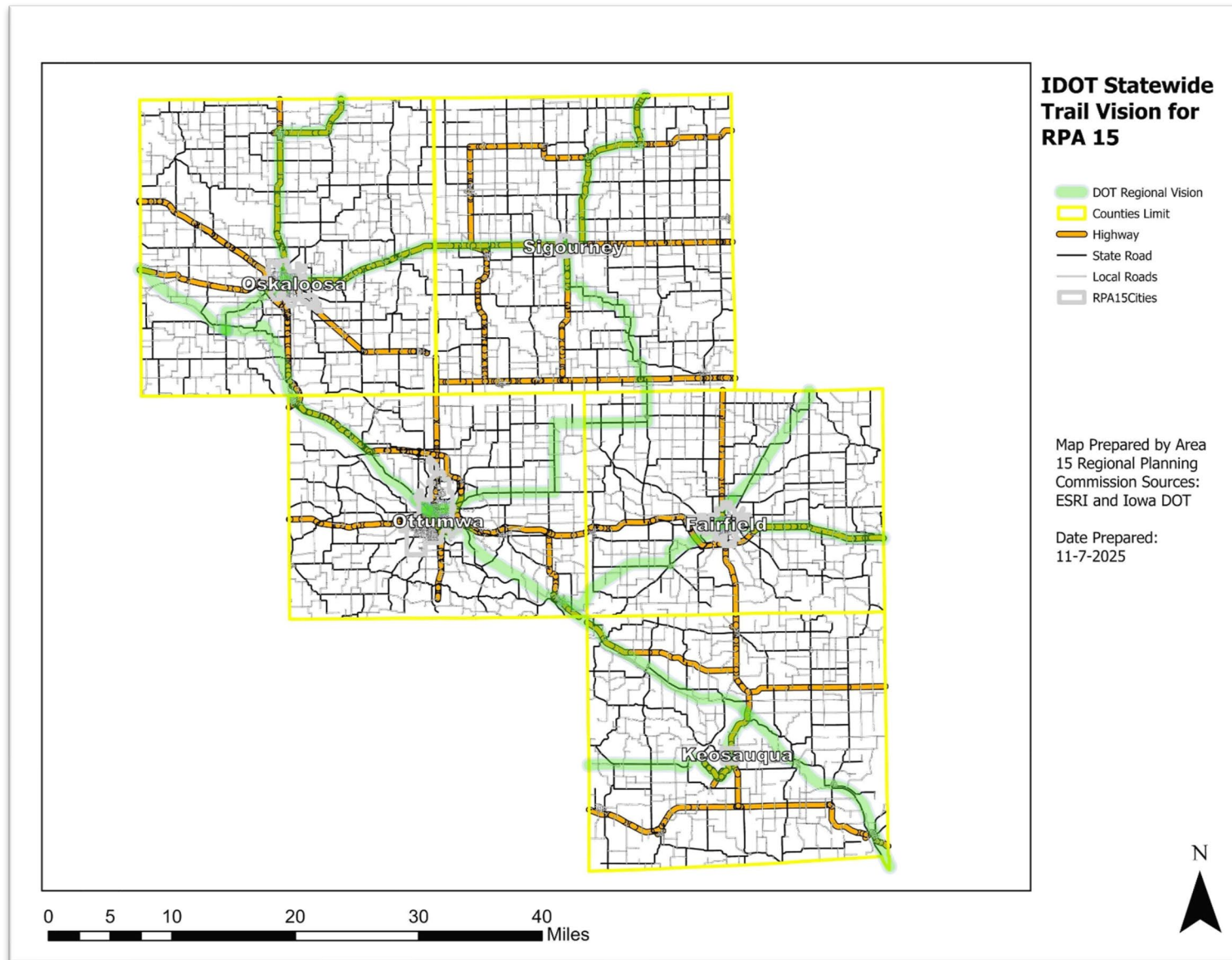
STATEWIDE TRAILS VISION FOR MULTI-USE TRAILS

The statewide trails started back in the 1970s. At this time most of the trails were individually constructed and had no strategic growth. IDOT decide to develop a statewide plan for which would use former abandoned railroad lines and connect major towns. In 1987, the legislature lawmakers asked IDOT to create a more detailed statewide plan trail map. In 1990 the IDOT created the first statewide recreational plan. At the time there were about 400 miles of existing trails with estimated about 2928 miles of plans corridos with the statewide plan.

Around the 2000's the IDOT was designed to work on smaller scale projects and focus more on existing trail networks. IDOT has five trails of statewide significance which are American Discovery Trail, Mississippi River Trail, Lewis and Clark Trail Iowa Greate Lakes Connection, and Central Iowa Trail Loop. In the state's long-range transportation plan, it classified the trails into three levels, which were level 1 statewide significance, level 2 regional significance, and level 3 of local significance. The following page shows the IDOT Statewide wide vision map.



Section Six: Trail Vision & Phasing Plan





Jefferson County

Maintenance will be a key focus for Jefferson County's trail system in the coming years. One of the most significant planned improvements is the replacement of the bridge over Crow Creek in Lamson Woods Preserve, originally constructed in 2007. Scheduled for Fiscal Year 2027, this project will be self-funded through local resources. The city intends to collaborate with the Fairfield High School welding program, tasking students with constructing a prefabricated metal bridge frame as a hands-on educational partnership. The finished bridge will be delivered in sections, assembled on-site, and topped with wood or metal decking. More information on this segment can be found at Lamson Woods Trails.

The City of Fairfield is partnering with the local economic development corporation on a housing subdivision located on the south side of town, near the hospital. As part of the development, the subdivision will include a direct trail connection, supporting both recreation and active transportation for new residents.

Fairfield has worked with Eldon and Ottumwa in Wapello County to create the American Gothic Trail. This trail would be placed on the previous rail line service route. The route would go through Libertyville.

Addition to existing Trail:

- Replaced surface of segment between Lamson Woods and Glasgow Road
- Replaced segment near National Guard.
- Installation of bike maintenance station and three benches.
- Artistic enhancements were removed, powder coated and reinstalled.
- Brickwork leading to bridge removed leveled and replaced.
- The Kiosks were refinished and stained.
- New reflective tape on bollards.

Maharishi Vedic City is interested in connecting their trails to the Oskaloosa loop. City officials have been attending meetings at the Jefferson County Trail meeting and would like to look for opportunities to connect to the trail system. The city of Maharishi Vedic City has small local trail that would like to expand and bring awareness to these local projects to the county.

Keokuk County

Keokuk County has created the Belva Deer Trail that connects from Belva Deer RV Campground to south near the intersection of 240th Ave and highway 92. The end point of the trail falls just under 2.5 miles away from the largest and county seat Sigourney. Connecting Sigourney would greatly benefit the community members and people who may not have access to the current starting point of the trail.

Keota is town in the far east of Keokuk County which already has an existing trail the connects directly to the city of Washington located in Washington County. The Keota trail group is partnering up with Keota School District and city of Keota to apply for State Recreational Trail (SRT) and was awarded TAP funds for FY27 to connect the existing Keota to Washington trailhead to the Keota school and swimming pool.

A concern for connecting Keota to Belva Deer to Sigourney is the limited paved roads that would be eligible for signed routes or adjacent to multiuse trail. Keokuk County does not have a direct paved road from Belva Deer to Keota.



Keokuk County would need to prioritize these two routes for the statewide vision as these would have the most impact by population impact.



Figure 78-Aerial View of Belva Deer to Sigourney connection viewing West

Mahaska County

Oskaloosa has planning priorities in Osky Comprehensive Plans which focus on completing the city recreation trail that loops around the city. This is planned to be divided into five sections. Starting with completing the Southeast loop. This will go along Fox Run Dr as Sidepaths and the future southeast corridor. It is planned to be developed in fiscal year 2026. A project which is practically completed is the Merino Ave/S 11th St to East University Park. The trail going from S 11th St to 9th Ave is completed as a sidepath and the remaining amount would be from 9th Ave E to Eastbound to University Park. The Sidepath was completed FY23-24 part of a reconstruction of S 11th St. Oskaloosa has planned for 21st Ave to be a sidepath connecting into the trail loop, creating a sidewalk or sidepath at 6th Ave W (currently bike lanes), and adding shared road signage or marking at N 17th St and 235 St.

The other section involves providing safe active transportation routes from the outer trail system to Oskaloosa's downtown, Willams Penn University, and other city destinations. Oskaloosa has a complete street policy which it plans to implement with bike connector to the destinations. High Ave is planned to be redeveloped into a safe street narrow traffic lane, more on street parking (horizontal and vertical), landscaping along corridor, and widen the sidewalk. Using a combination of Sidepaths, complete streets, and on street bike lanes on low volume streets, Oskaloosa plans to connect Oskaloosa Christian School and Willams Penn University at Trueblood Ave from D St and S of A Ave. Another section which will connect from N 1st St and N 3rd St will connect high school and its stadium to the loop with a combination of sidepaths and on street bike lanes. The last connection mentioned would connect 6th Ave Eastbound to the loop which would use complete sidewalks and bike lanes to connect with a possible new park between the routes.

Lake Red Rock Master Plan includes a regional connection from existing trail in Marion County being connected to Mahaska County. The proposed route is from Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. Lake Red Rock already has a trail connecting on the Southeast of the lake to Pella. Plans indicate connecting to Knoxville. Others proposal included connecting to the existing



shoulder to the town of Tracy, using the old railroad route to connect to Oskaloosa in Mahaska then connecting to Ottumwa in Wapello County.

NEW SHARON

New Sharon was awarded the Small-Town Rural Improvement and Enhancement Plan (STRIDE). The STRIDE plan is a transportation plan going over Strategical planning long term to improvement transportation and safety. One of the issues wanting to be addressed would be the identification of trail since there is no existing trail currently. Area 15 RPC will work with the city to determine the prioritize map to help identify which trail corridor should be identified. New Sharon Comprehensive Plan was Completed in 2024 and identified as trails part of the plan.

Van Buren County

Van Buren County has the surrounding communities like Milton and Cantril that have small unpaved trails. Cantril has the trail along Waubonsie Park Campground and with a pond. Milton has the has a trail going through community park and Milton's cemetery. Keosauqua has constructed new Mildred & Eddie Feguson Sports Complex which has trail around it that connects to the Keosauqua loop.

Longer term goals would be to connect Eldon in Wapello County to Keosauqua which would be aligned with the water trail on Des Moines River. The connection would follow the abandoned rail line which would reach the Indian Lake trail in Farmington located in Van Buren County. Easement for this route has not been explored and appear to have owned privately at the moment.

Farmington, IA was selected for the 2026 Iowa's Living Roadways Community Vision Program, a partnership involving Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development. This initiative helps communities create landscape planning and design strategies to enhance their transportation infrastructure and reflect local identity, with support from Trees Forever and the Iowa Department of Transportation.

Wapello County

Ottumwa Comprehensive Plan was approved in 2022 and goes over the vision of the Ottumwa Park Reimagined. Greater Ottumwa Park made improvements like adding the Legacy Fields Complex which consisted of 3 full size soccer fields, two opened shelters, expanded parking, and new digitized scoreboard. The JBS sportsplex was finished in 2025, which includes a indoor turf fields, three full size basketball courts, and indoor track. City of Ottumwa and Legacy worked on a new All-wheels Skate Park located next to the Sports complex. Comprehensive plan shows the baseball fields are to be redeveloped in the next few years with support from the Ottumwa School District. All these recreational projects connect to Ottumwa Trails System.

MARKET STREET LANDING

A multi-faceted riverfront revitalization project launched in 2023, featuring inclusive play areas, a riverwalk trail extension, gateway design elements, and housing connection, all contributing to trail-user accessibility and connectivity in Ottumwa.

The Ottumwa Legacy Foundation's Market Street Landing initiative is transforming vacant City-owned parcels along both sides of the Market Street Bridge into a vibrant riverfront destination.

Building on the 2011–2014 Riverfront Renaissance planning efforts, the project relaunched in 2023 via a Riverfront Steering Committee, with the Foundation leading design and implementation efforts.



Key components include:

- A new inclusive play space, designed for all ages and abilities, funded in part by a Destination Iowa grant
- A public riverwalk with trail connections, extending active transportation access across the Des Moines River.
- An artistic gateway arch, urban housing development adjacent to the river, and the relocated skatepark, all to be integrated with the trail network

These enhancements strengthen Ottumwa's trail system by:

- Providing new linkages between downtown, recreational amenities, and neighborhoods.
- Supporting multimodal travel such as walking, running, and biking to the riverfront.
- Promoting inclusive design, ensuring accessibility for children, seniors, and users with disabilities.



Figure 79- Aerial picture of the Market Street signage funded by Legacy Foundation



Figure 80- Aerial picture of Market Street Landing Inclusive Play Place

Future Improvement

- Paving the trail along the northwest levee from Railroad crossing at W 2nd St to Midwest little league fields.
- Connection to Turkey Island to the Ottumwa Trail system
- Constructing the Oxbow Trail from Ferry Street and the Greater Ottumwa Park around the outside of the Oxbow Lagoon to Church Street.
- Connector from the Des Moines River, through the Wapello County Fairground, to the American Gothic House.
- Connecting Eldon to the Jefferson County Trails.

- Creating a Memorandum of Understanding with the city of Ottumwa
- Connect trail from S Market St to S Wapello St with new Residential Development on Market Landing
- IDOT redeveloping Wapello Bridge to include a Sidepath connecting to trail corridor in FY31



Figure 81- Hwy 149/business 63 bridge will be programed FY31 for Bridge Rehabilitation with a possible Sidepath connecting trails

The city of Ottumwa has been awarded tap funds during the fiscal year 2026 to complete the Oxbow Loop Trail which would go through Church Street Business district. Ottumwa was partially awarded for expanding Westbound corridor, which will be divided into two phases and connect to the main trail corridors. West trail extension would reach the city limits, with long term vision of expanding to Eddyville in Wapello County mostly on old railroad corridors.



Figure 82-Existing Oxbow Loop, Estimated Completion of Oxbow Loop FY28

East of the trail will follow the Wapello Chief Trail then go along the old Railroad line. The study for this route was done back in 2005(2010) which was named the American Gothic Trail. The route would go on the previous abandoned railroad lines along the Des Moines River until reaching the city of Eldon home of the American Gothic Home in Wapello County. The American Gothic trail continues until reaching Libertyville and Fairfield in Mahaska County. Long term goal would be following the existing water trail from Eldon to Keosauqua as a multiuse trail.



SECTION SEVEN: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

An implementation strategy for a recreational trail is a list of action plans to make the vision of the Trail plan bring it into reality. It will go over steps and resources Area 15 RPC determine different methods of implementation strategies to create progression towards the goals which the regional trails plans identified.

This plan is intended to be a living document that supports local decision-making and regional coordination. It does not mandate specific projects or alignments but provides a shared framework that cities, counties, and partners can use to pursue funding, coordinate planning efforts, and advance trail development over time.

Successful implementation will depend on continued collaboration among local governments, trail organizations, landowners, and regional partners. By aligning local priorities with statewide and federal programs, the Area 15 region will be better positioned to incrementally expand its trail network and improve access, safety, and connectivity for residents and visitors alike.

ROLE OF RPA 15 IN BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLANNING AND FUNDING

As a Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA), RPA 15 plays a central role in advancing bicycle and pedestrian mobility across southeast Iowa. RPAs are responsible for developing and maintaining regional transportation plans, identifying priority multimodal projects, and allocating key funding sources, including Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) set-aside funds—within their regions. These responsibilities position RPAs as critical partners in the implementation of regional trail and pedestrian infrastructure.

There are four primary areas where RPAs can support bicycle and pedestrian mobility:

- **Regional Network Planning:** Develop and regularly update Regional Trails plans that identify priority corridors and facilitate cross-jurisdictional coordination.
- **Funding Prioritization:** Use project evaluation and scoring methods to prioritize funding, particularly TAP and STBG, set-aside, for projects that significantly improve non-motorized access and safety.
- **Agency Coordination:** Act as a liaison between local jurisdictions and the Iowa DOT, offering technical assistance to ensure consistent design and planning practices statewide.
- **Creative Funding Solutions:** Work with small agencies/cities/counties to explore innovative uses of TA Flex funds or funding solutions to overcome financial or capacity limitations.

MUNICIPAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Cities and towns play a critical role in making Iowa communities more bicycle and pedestrian friendly. Although municipalities represent only one-third of Iowa's paved roads by length, most of the walking and biking trips and nearly all crashes involving bicyclists and pedestrians are within city limits. Municipalities are therefore central to both the everyday use and the long-term safety of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.



City street projects are typically funded through a mix of local sources (such as property taxes) and state aid. With limited budgets, cities must make strategic decisions to invest in infrastructure that supports multimodal transportation.

County Responsibilities for Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure

Counties are the primary agencies responsible for ensuring that Iowa's rural transportation system provides safe and efficient access for all users. Each county manages thousands of miles of paved and unpaved rural roads that fall outside the state highway system. This responsibility includes planning, designing, constructing, and maintaining these roadways to meet the needs of all travelers including bicyclists and pedestrians.

Because county roads serve surrounding areas but outside incorporated cities, counties play a crucial role in enabling regional trail connectivity and rural active transportation options. Iowa counties receive funding from the state for transportation projects, supplemented by local revenues such as property taxes. Given the use of state and federal funds on many counties led projects, there is a shared interest between counties, the Iowa DOT, and the federal government to ensure bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure is incorporated in compliance with multimodal policies and Complete Streets principles.

While the level of investment required by counties may be less than that of urban governments, they will still play an important role in implementing this Regional Trails Plan. Key county responsibilities include:

- **Providing Accommodations:** Ensure that bicycle and pedestrian needs are evaluated during the planning and design of county road projects. On many low-traffic rural roads, the appropriate treatment may simply be signage or route markings.
- **Paved Shoulders on High-Traffic Roads:** Identify County roads that experience—or could potentially support—higher levels of bicycle use. In these cases, evaluate the need for paved shoulders or other enhancements. Counties should collaborate with cities and regional agencies to develop joint funding strategies where needed.
- **Maintenance Considerations:** Prioritize roadway maintenance on corridors identified in regional or local bicycle network plans, especially those with known or anticipated high levels of bicycle use.

Moving forward, counties are encouraged to adopt Complete Streets policies or incorporate Complete Streets principles into their project development process. While rural roads typically may not require sidewalks, context matters—roads passing through unincorporated communities, near parks or schools, or in areas with expected pedestrian activity should be designed accordingly.

Importantly, when counties use state or federal transportation funds, they are expected to plan and design those projects with the clear assumption that bicyclists—and in some cases pedestrians—will be using them. This aligns with state and federal policy goals around equity, mobility, and safety for all users.

ADOPT A COMPLETE STREETS POLICY OR APPROACH PRIORITY CORRIDORS (LONG TERM)

- Cities should plan all transportation projects regardless of funding sources with the assumption that bicyclists and pedestrians are legitimate users. Complete Streets design principles ensure that roads are safe and accessible for all users, not just motorists. When using state or federal funds, it is especially important to integrate bicycle and pedestrian accommodations to remain compliant with Iowa DOT and federal transportation policy.

By proactively planning and building bicycle and pedestrian facilities, cities can improve connectivity, safety, and quality of life for residents, while also aligning with regional and statewide mobility goals



Source: Iowa Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, Iowa DOT

One of the methods created was creating a tiered implementation plan. This would use tier 1: High-priority projects which could be shoveled ready, short funding gaps, and city connections projects. Tier 2: Mid-term goals such as county-to-county connections, bridge crossings, Tier 3: Long term vision- full regional loops. hard surface long distance trails.

Capital Planning Integration

- Ensures trails are considered early in local capital improvement planning.
- Identifies opportunities for co-funding (e.g. road or utility projects that could include trail components).
- Helps cities set aside matching funds for grants (TAP, REAP, etc.).

Timing 2–3 months before local capital plans are finalized (e.g., late winter/early spring) Participants City/county engineers, planners, parks staff, local trail groups, RPA 15 staff, county supervisors, MPOs if applicable Purpose Review past year's progress, flag regional priorities, identify new opportunities, discuss co-funding options Output. Shared list of candidate projects, local commitments, grant match needs, potential phasing or adjustments.

Create a Regional Trail Authority

One of the methods suggested in the meetings was to create a regional which would meet every quarter (maybe twice a year) to discuss an update in plans for each county. This group of people would consist of all the representatives of each county trail organization. The organization will follow the ideas and goals of this regional plan to determine what are the necessary steps to complete the regional trail connection. This process will be a long-term goal as the counties with smaller population and funding sources.

Start off small and hold an annual regionals coordination meeting on updates to the project that has happens throughout the county/city. Communicating, exchanging ideas, and motivating each organization to continue to make progress on the regional trail. Encourage jurisdictions to commit to at least one regional trail advancement action per year (planning, easement, design, match funding, or construction).

STRENGTHENING INTERCITY TRAIL CORRIDORS

Cities and Counties may run into the issue of land acquisition and easement, more information in the next section, this will implement strategies would focus on the existing right of way which a city already has acquired. This could consist of multiuse trails, sidepaths, sidewalks, or even bike path. The community/county would need approval from the city council from each community to have more impact on future allocation of funds.

Area 15 RPC assisted Ottumwa with creating and implementing a Bike and Pedestrian plan with priority corridors for trails. This could be provided to the urban area with population over 5,000 which would be Oskaloosa and Fairfield. Ottumwa has identified five different corridors for its plan six sidewalk and eight sidepaths. Reaching out to city staff and local officials to discuss progress with the priority corridors. Checking progress every year on how the city prioritizes corridors.

Smaller communities which are less than 5,000 in population are eligible for the Small-Town Iowa Development and Enhancement (Stride), which is a program that was created by Area 15 RPC to provide transportation needs. This Stride plan includes a section for sidewalk and another section for future improvement. These sidepaths/sidewalks could be identified and added with more visual pleasing. Like the largest community's priority corridor plan, this would need to be reviewed yearly possibilities every other year (due to smaller funding sources) if it is being proceeded.

REGIONAL BRANDING AND PUBLIC AWARENESS



Building a recognizable regional identity can help increase public support, strengthen partnerships, and communicate the long-term vision of a connected trail network throughout the Area 15 region. Developing a regional trail logo, brand, or slogan can create a consistent identity across Jefferson, Keokuk, Mahaska, Van Buren, and Wapello counties while promoting the Regional Trails Plan.

Area 15 RPC and local partners should consider developing a regional GIS-based trail map that illustrates existing and proposed trail corridors. The map could be made available through a dedicated webpage and QR code placed at trailheads, kiosks, and community facilities, allowing residents and visitors to track project progress and explore regional trail opportunities.

Continued public outreach will also be important throughout implementation. A regional trail webpage can provide project updates, planning documents, funding opportunities, and educational information for residents and landowners. Communities are encouraged to pursue partnerships with local foundations, nonprofit organizations, and private businesses to support planning, public engagement, and future trail development.

LAND ACQUISITION AND EASEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Developing a regional connected trail network often requires crossing private property or securing land adjacent to public rights-of-way. Successful implementation depends on collaboration between local government, landowners, and regional partners. Permanent easements are required when the trail design crosses into private property, and the land remains with the owner while allowing specific trail uses.

How are easements negotiated

The agency sends a Right of Way contract letter notifying the property owner that an appraiser will reach out to the property owner. The property does not have to be appraised if the property is believed to be under \$10,000. From \$10,000-\$25,000 the property can be appraised if the property owners would like to. Any property valued greater than \$25,000 would need to be appraised to be given the right of way. Calculating the property could also be done by calculating the valuation of the land using the county assessor giving it by the number of square footage land acquiring.

THE ROLE OF CITIES, COUNTIES, AND PRIVATE LANDOWNERS

The city, counties, and private landowners all have different roles when easement/land acquisition for the project. The roles will be described and how it could impact the project timeline, efficiency, and success.

The city

The city must identify the proposed location of the trail, which is usually the most inexpensive and efficient route for the trail proposal. This could be completed with Bike and Pedestrian master plan, the city's comprehensive plan, community input, and local stakeholder. Preliminary plans are created by private firm/city staff, afterwards using community input the plans are refined to the plans.

Counties

Counties have a similar role in using existing plans like their comprehensive plans, mission statements, and other community plans that may have an impact. Communication is key at times counties are not familiar with the community



plans that are being worked on. Most if not all the regional proposed corridors for the trails fall outside city limits and fall under the governing body of the county.

Private Landowners

Private landowners also help with the trail proposal being successful. The private owners are responsible for reviewing appraisal of their property. Determining the value of their land being acquired, followed by the sale of the property becoming an easement. Some challenges may arise such as economic remnants, concerns regarding property value, and constant public traffic. The easements will need to be fully obtained for the project to be successful. All landowners along with the proposed easement would need to agree.

Landowners and city/County Trails Organization may not reach an agreement on valuation, concerns about liability, challenges with use of property (farm equipment), decrease property valuation concerns, lack of privacy, and disapproval/dislike of trail use.

Strategies for easement/land acquisition

Some suggestions for negotiating strategies are:

- Communication- Property owners are more likely to negotiate with the local government/county trail group.
 - Find a common ground between landowner and land acquiror (similar interest/hobbies)
 - Provide them with all the options
 - Bargain sale or donation
 - Fee title
 - Fair Market Fee
- Relocation – Property owners could ask for different route of the trail instead of the existing corridor
- Accommodate – Developers could provide extra accommodation such as
 - access point (increased pavement depth)
 - Buffering, trees, plants, etc. for privacy
 - Gates to allow to the close of part of the trail during farm/harvest season (protection of liability)
 - Signage such as private property, driveway, etc.
 - Name recognition on land donated signage, bench, or mile markers
- Assistance – Needs help with documentation for Wetland, wildlife, etc. in exchange for an agreement
- Reach out – Speaking with success stories, property owners who had same concerns
 - Reach out to local officials, family, or friends who have a relationship with owners and support project



SECTION EIGHT: FUNDING

This section identifies potential funding sources and partnership opportunities that can support the planning, design, construction, and long-term maintenance of trails within the Area 15 region. Trail implementation will require a combination of federal, state, local, and private funding sources, often layered together to advance projects over time. The funding strategy is intended to be flexible and adaptable, recognizing that funding availability, local priorities, and project readiness will vary by county and community.

Trail projects in the region are expected to be implemented incrementally through phased development. Most projects will rely on a mix of competitive grant programs, local matching funds, and partnerships among cities, counties, conservation boards, nonprofit trail organizations, and regional agencies. Early phases may focus on planning, engineering, easement acquisition, or small-scale construction, while later phases may involve larger capital investments or regional connections.

ROLE OF RPA 15 IN BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLANNING AND FUNDING

As a Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA), RPA 15 plays a central role in advancing bicycle and pedestrian mobility across southeast Iowa. RPAs are responsible for developing and maintaining regional transportation plans, identifying priority corridors, and allocating key funding sources, including Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) set-aside funds within their regions. These responsibilities position RPAs as critical partners in the implementation of regional trail and pedestrian infrastructure.

There are four primary areas where RPAs can support bicycle and pedestrian mobility:

- **Regional Network Planning:** Develop and regularly update regional bicycle and pedestrian plans that identify priority corridors and facilitate cross-jurisdictional coordination.
- **Funding Prioritization:** Use project evaluation and scoring methods to prioritize funding, particularly TAP and STBG, set-aside, for projects that significantly improve non-motorized access and safety.
- **Agency Coordination:** Act as a coordinator between local jurisdictions and the Iowa DOT, offering technical assistance to ensure consistent design and planning practices statewide.
- **Creative Funding Solutions:** Work with small agencies to explore innovative uses of TA Flex funds or pooled funding solutions to overcome financial or capacity limitations.

Source: Iowa Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, Iowa DOT

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING PROGRAMS

Area 15 Regional Planning Commission has been administering the Transportation Alternative program since its inception. The Area 15 Regional Planning Commission has contributed \$6,771,897. This subsection will list the following federal and State funding programs available for funding projects.

Federal and State Funding programs

Federal Recreational Trails Program:



- Awarding Agency: Iowa Department of Transportation
- Match Requirement: Minimum of 20%.
- Eligible Activities: Construction of trails, trail facilities, and linkages, acquisition of easements or property for trails and operation of educational programs related to trail environmental protection and safety.
- Website: <https://iowadot.gov/modes-travel/trails/federal-state-recreational-trails>
- Application Deadline: October 1st.

State Recreational Trails Program:

The State Recreational Trail Program (SRT) funds are used for development of recreational trails through the state of Iowa, and free to use for the public. The SRT is restricted to the use of construction, improvement of recreational, or acquisition.

- Awarding Agency: Iowa Department of Transportation.
- Match Requirement: Minimum of 25%.
- Eligible Activities: Construction of trails and trail improvements and land acquisition for trails. Website: <https://iowadot.gov/modes-travel/trails/federal-state-recreational-trails>
- Application Deadline: July 1st.

Regional Transportation Alternatives Program:

The regional Transportation Alternatives program has funded several projects within the last 30 years. These projects

- Awarding Agency: Regional Planning Affiliation 15
- Match Requirement: Minimum of 20%
- Eligible Activities: Construction of trails, sidewalks, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure
- Website: <https://www.area15rpc.com/transportation-alternatives-program-1>
- Application Deadline: April 1st.

Here are examples of projects throughout the region which were funded by Regional Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP):

Keokuk County

Year	Name of Project	Total Contribution
2017	Belva Deer Recreation Area Trail Project	\$509,744
2019	Belva Deer Recreation Area Trail Project	\$860,000
2027	Keota School to Pool Safe Route and Intra-city Trail Project	\$281,000
Total		\$1,650,744

Jefferson County

Year	Name of Project	Total Contribution
2001	Cedar View Trail	\$28,000
2002	Cedar View Trail	\$358,600



2003	Louden (BNSF) Bridge	\$282,951
2007	Matkin (Hwy 1) Bridge	\$125,000
2010	Loop Trail NW Segment	\$136,516
2020	Hwy 1 Trail and sidewalk (Filmore av to Libertyville Rd)	\$320,000
2027	Cedar View Trail Paving	\$498,000
Total		\$1,749,067

Mahaska County

Year	Name of Project	Total Contribution
2003	Hwy 63 South trail Underpass	\$158,919
2006	Eddyville Cemetery Road	\$85,008
2007	Hwy 63 North Trail Underpass	\$229,218
2016	Oskaloosa sidewalk Improvement	\$162,574
Total		\$635,719

Wapello County

Year	Name of Project	Total Contribution
1997	Eldon Gothic Park	\$74,184
1997	Ottumwa Lagoon Trail	\$132,089
2002	Market St to Quincy Av Trail	\$85,857
2007	Market St to Vine St Trail	\$38,735
2008	Gray Eagle Extension	\$161,451
2009	South Loop Trail	\$163,640
2010	Iowa Av to City Limits Trail	\$131,654
2020	Milner Neighborhood Trail	\$204,968
2026	Oxbow Lagoon Link	\$528,964
2027	West End Trail	\$238,118
Total		\$1,759,660

Van Buren County

Year	Title of Project	Total Contribution
2003	Bentonsport Trail Bridge	\$62,707
2005	Keosauqua Loop Trail	\$148,000
2015	Keosauqua Riverfront Trail	\$240,000
2023	Austin Park Gateway Launch	\$208,000
2025	Lower Des Moines River Water Trail	\$318,000



Total	\$976,707
-------	-----------

Department of Natural Resources & Economic Development Funding

Resource Enhancement and Protection Program:

- Awarding Agency: Iowa Department of Natural Resources
- Match Requirement: No local match required.
- Eligible Activities: Construction of trails, acquisition of easements or property for trails.
- Website: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/programs-services/resource-enhancement-protection-reap/reap-funding-opportunities>
- Application Deadline: August 15th.

Land and Water Conservation Fund:

- Awarding Agency: Iowa Department of Natural Resources.
- Match Requirement: Minimum of 50%.
- Eligible Activities: Observation and sightseeing trails, trail support facilities.
- Website: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/about/grants-funding/land-water-conservation-fundApplication>
- Deadline: March 15th.

Community Attraction and Tourism Program:

- Awarding Agency: Iowa Economic Development.
- Match Requirement: At least 65% of project funds must be already raised
- Eligible Activities: Construction of recreational trails.
- Website: <https://www.iowaeconomicdevelopment.com/Enhancelowa>
- Application Deadline: Quarterly, see website for details.

Local and Private Organization Grants

Greater Jefferson County Foundation Grant:

- Awarding Agency: Greater Jefferson County Foundation.
- Match Requirement: No local match required.
- Eligible Activities: Projects that benefit the residents of Jefferson County.
- Website: <https://www.greaterjeffersoncountyfoundation.org/grants>
- Application Deadline: July 1st.

Mahaska County Community Foundation Grant:

- Awarding Agency: Mahaska County Community Foundation.
- Match Requirement: No local match required.
- Eligible Activities: Projects that benefit Mahaska County communities and organizations.
- Website: <http://www.mahaskafoundation.org/>



- Application Deadline: See website for details.

Bright Ideas Community Enrichment Fund:

- Awarding Agency: Ottumwa Regional Legacy Foundation
- Match Requirement: Large project greater than \$25,000, 25% is recommended.
- Eligible Activities: Projects that enrich the quality of life for residents of Ottumwa and Wapello County.
- Website: <https://www.ottumwalegacy.org/for-grantees-scholars/bright-ideas-community-enrichment-fund/>
- Application Deadline: See website for details.

Wapello County Foundation

- Awarding Agency: Wapello County Foundation
- Match Requirement:
- Eligible Activities: Projects which enhance or improve the quality of life for residents of Wapello County, public projects for community good, educational efforts, facilities for recreation, and medical care & treatment
- Website: <https://www.wapellofoundation.org/>
- Application Deadline: August 31 – Follow up required due July 1st

Community Foundation of Van Buren County

- Awarding Agency: Quad Cities Community Foundation
- Match Requirement:
- Eligible Activities: The Community Foundation of Van Buren County accepts grant applications from charitable projects and programs impacting a wide range of needs in the community--art and culture, health, human services, community betterment, historic preservation, etc.
- Website: <https://www.qccommunityfoundation.org/communityfoundationofvanburencounty>
- Application Deadline: March 15

Keokuk County Community Endowment Foundation

- Awarding Agency: Keokuk County Community Endowment Foundation
- Match Requirements:
- Eligible Activities:
- Website: <https://kcendow.org/grants/>
- Application Deadline: Application due last weekday of October, project seeking up to \$25,000 letter of intent due May 31.

WHAT IS NEXT?

The Regional Trails Plan serves as a guide for enhancing trail connectivity, safety, and accessibility across the five-county RPA 15 region. Moving forward, the following steps will ensure that this plan is an active tool for decision-making and project development:

1. **Plan Adoption and Distribution** – The RPA 15 Policy Board will adopt the plan and distribute it to cities, counties, conservation boards, and partner organizations for reference in local planning efforts.



2. **Integration with Regional and Local Plans** – Key recommendations will be incorporated into the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and future Passenger Transportation Plans, ensuring alignment with other regional priorities.
3. **Project Prioritization and Funding** – High-priority trail projects identified in this plan will be evaluated for eligibility in programs such as the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Recreational Trails Program (RTP), and other local, state, and federal funding sources.
4. **Partnership Development** – Area 15 RPC will continue collaborating with local governments, conservation boards, schools, nonprofits, and private organizations to leverage partnerships and funding opportunities.
5. **Monitoring and Updates** – The plan will be reviewed and updated every five years to reflect new construction, changing needs, and updated GIS trail data.



PUBLIC COMMENTS

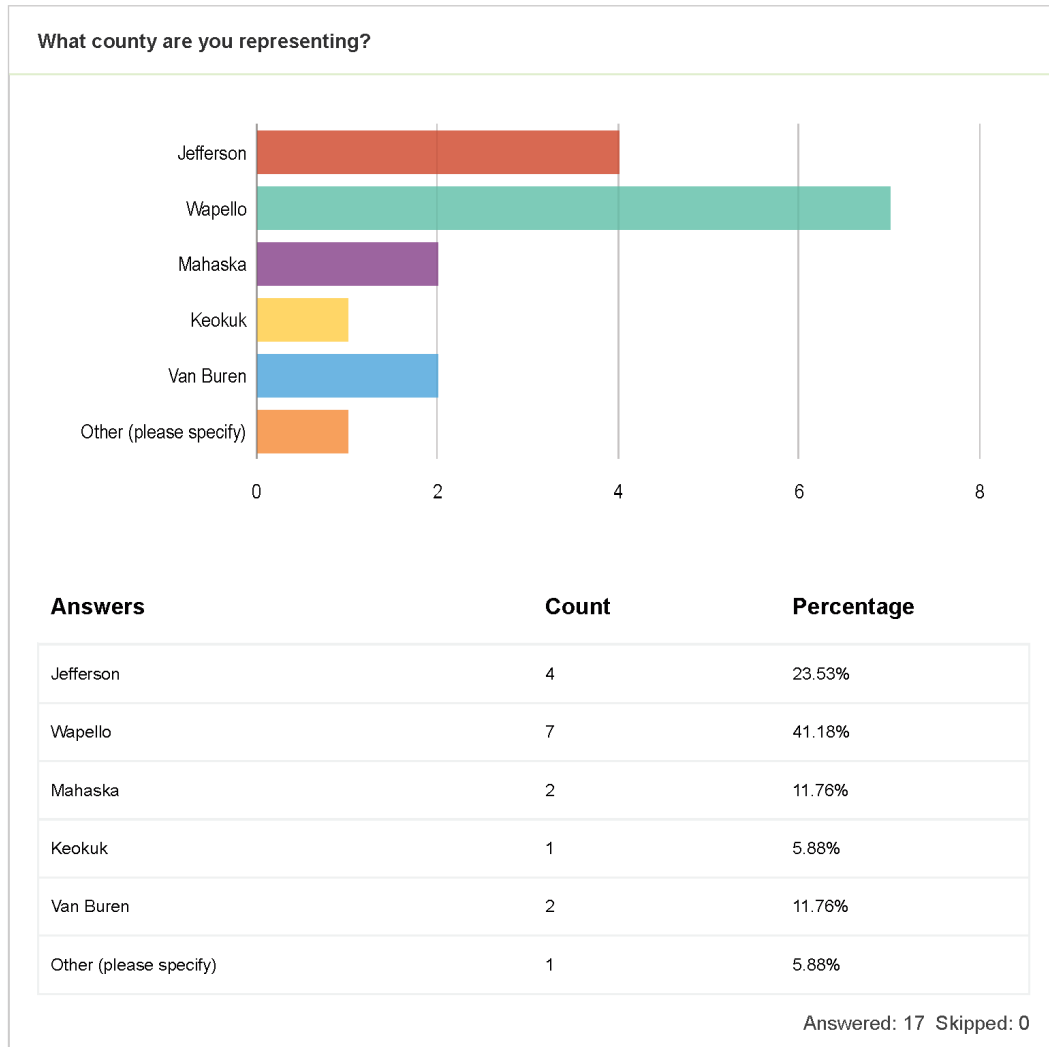


APPENDICES

2/2/26, 9:57 AM

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders



Which group best describes your role?

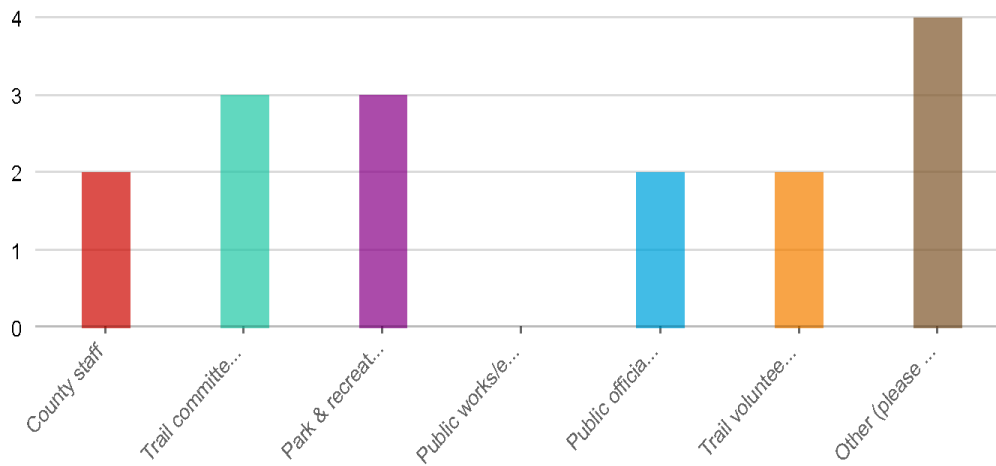
https://survey123.arcgis.com/surveys/564feaecc6845b2857a457fc1cd7a21/analyze?position=0.what_county_are_you_representin

1/11



2/2/26, 9:57 AM

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders



Answers

Count

Percentage

County staff	2	11.76%
Trail committee member	3	17.65%
Park & recreation staff	3	17.65%
Public works/engineering	0	0%
Public officials/elected	2	11.76%
Trail volunteer/advocate	2	11.76%
Other (please specify)	4	23.53%

Answered: 16 Skipped: 1

How familiar are you with the existing trail system in your community or...

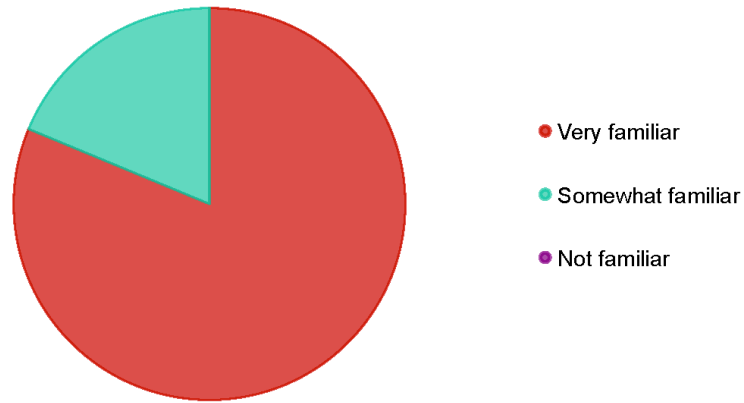
https://survey123.arcgis.com/surveys/564feaecc6845b2857a457fc1cd7a21/analyze?position=0.what_county_are_you_representin

2/11



2/2/26, 9:57 AM

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders



Answers

Count

Percentage

Very familiar

13

76.47%

Somewhat familiar

3

17.65%

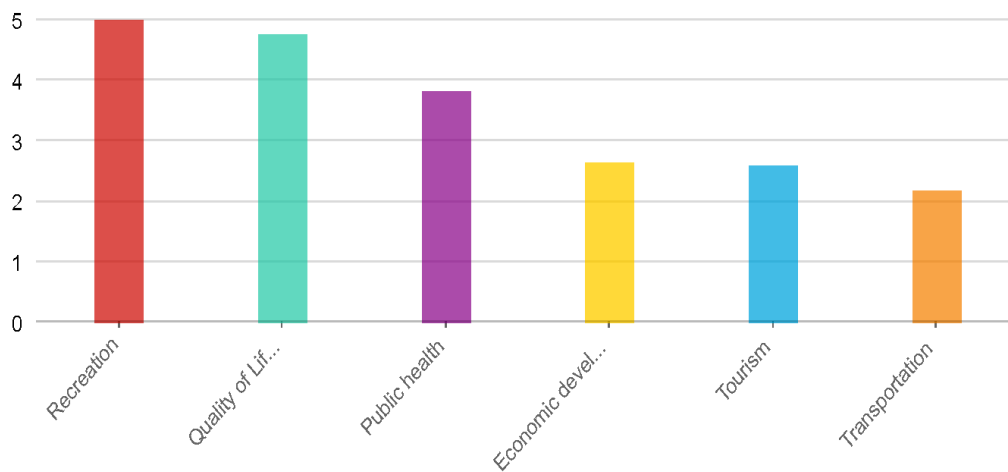
Not familiar

0

0%

Answered: 16 Skipped: 1

What benefits do trails provide to your community or county?



Average

https://survey123.arcgis.com/surveys/564feaecc6845b2857a457fc1cd7a21/analyze?position=0.what_county_are_you_representin

3/11



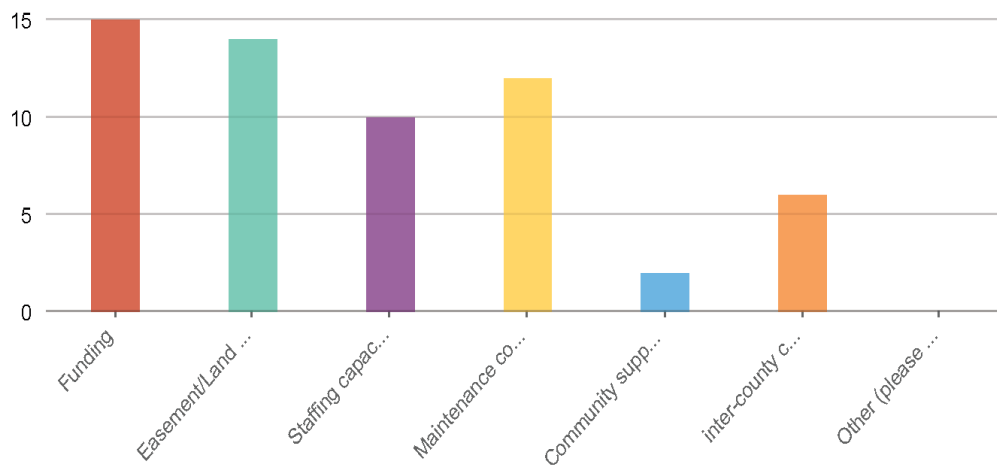
2/2/26, 9:57 AM

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders

Rank	Answers	1	2	3	4	score
1	Recreation	41.18% 7	41.18% 7	5.88% 1	5.88% 1	0% 5.00 5.88% 1
2	Quality of Life	47.06% 8	11.76% 2	17.65% 3	17.65% 3	5.88% 4.76
3	Public health	5.88% 1	17.65% 3	47.06% 8	11.76% 2	17.65% 3.82 0% 0
4	Economic development	5.88% 1	5.88% 1	11.76% 2	17.65% 3	41.18% 2.65
5	Tourism	0% 0	5.88% 1	11.76% 2	35.29% 6	29.41% 2.59 17.65% 3
6	Transportation	0% 0	17.65% 3	5.88% 1	11.76% 2	5.88% 2.18

Answered: 17 Skipped: 0

What barriers limit trail implementation in your community or county?



Answers

Count

Percentage

Funding

15

88.24%

https://survey123.arcgis.com/surveys/564feaecc6845b2857a457fc1cd7a21/analyze?position=0.what_county_are_you_representin

4/11



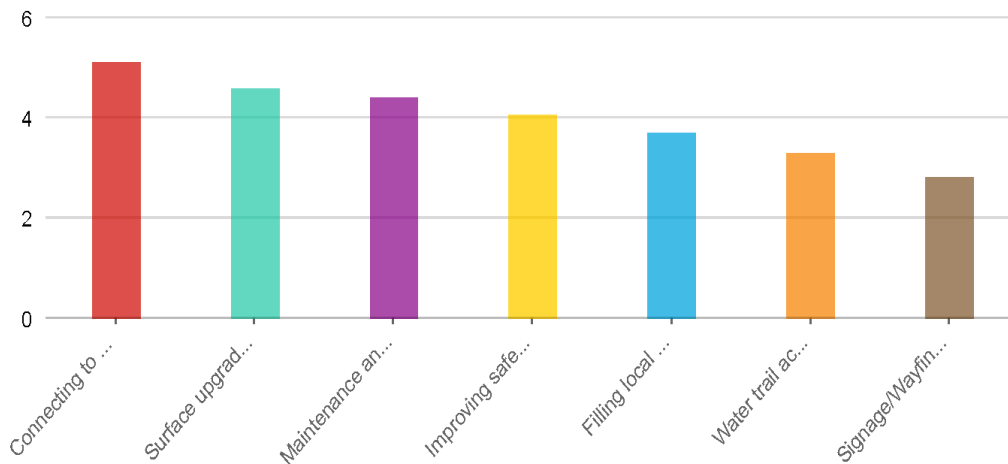
2/2/26, 9:57 AM

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders

Easement/Land access	14	82.35%
Staffing capacity	10	58.82%
Maintenance costs	12	70.59%
Community support	2	11.76%
inter-county collaboration (counties & communities)	6	35.29%
Other (please specify)	0	0%

Answered: 17 Skipped: 0

Which trail investments are most important for your community or county?



Rank	Answers	1	2	3	4	5	Average score
1	Connecting to nearby communities	41.18% 7	5.88% 1	17.65% 3	11.76% 2	11.76% 2	5.88% 5.12 1
2	Surface upgrades	17.65% 3	11.76% 2	17.65% 3	29.41% 5	17.65% 3	4.59
3	Maintenance and operations	23.53% 4	23.53% 4	11.76% 2	5.88% 1	0% 0	17.65% 4.41 3
							4.06

https://survey123.arcgis.com/surveys/564feaecc6845b2857a457fc1cd7a21/analyze?position=0.what_county_are_you_representin

5/11



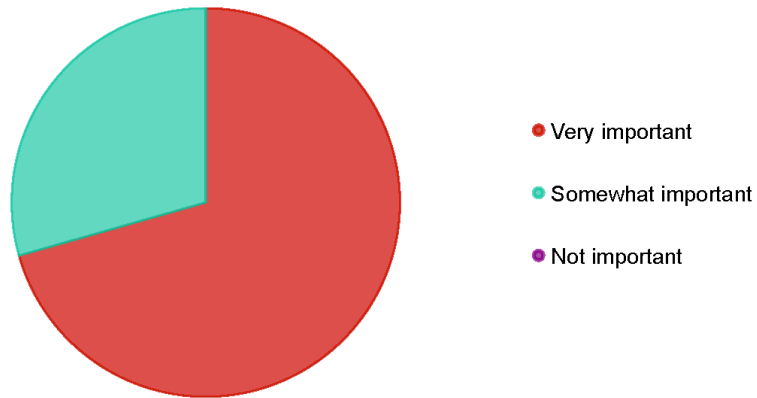
2/2/26, 9:57 AM

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders

4	Improving safety at crossings	11.76%	29.41%	5.88%	11.76%	0%	29.41%	11.76%
		2	5	1	2	0	5	2
5	Filling local gaps	5.88%	5.88%	23.53%	11.76%	23.53%	29.41%	0%
		1	1	4	2	4	5	0
-	Water trail access	0%	17.65%	11.76%	23.53%	11.76%	0%	35.29%
		0	3	2	4	2	0	6

Answered: 17 Skipped: 0

How important is regional coordination for trail development?



Answers

Count

Percentage

Very important	12	70.59%
Somewhat important	5	29.41%
Not important	0	0%

Answered: 17 Skipped: 0

Would your community or county be willing to partner on regional trail...

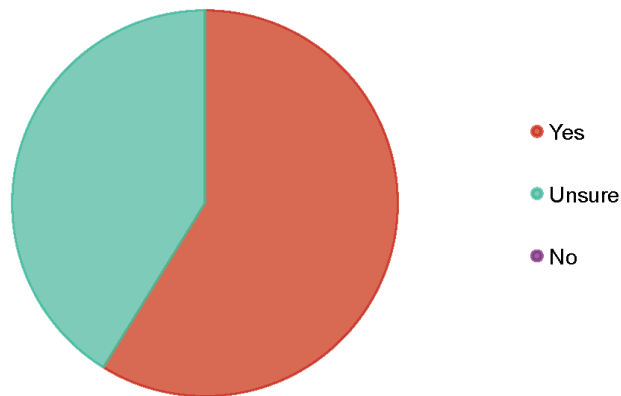
https://survey123.arcgis.com/surveys/564feaecc6845b2857a457fc1cd7a21/analyze?position=0.what_county_are_you_representin

6/11



2/2/26, 9:57 AM

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders



Answers

Count

Percentage

Yes	10	58.82%
Unsure	7	41.18%
No	0	0%

Answered: 17 Skipped: 0

What trail projects in your county are “shovel-ready” or moving toward funding?

The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Response

Count

Not sure	2
west end levy	1
We have some water trail plans for the south skunk and the Des Moines river. We just have not had the time or the resources to get started working on them at this point.	1
oxbow loop trail. New trail on Court street. Trail from Ottumwa to Fairfield. Trail from Ottumwa to Oskaloosa.	1
ox bow trail, trail to eldon and oskaloosa	1

https://survey123.arcgis.com/surveys/564feaecc6845b2857a457fc1cd7a21/analyze?position=0.what_county_are_you_representin

7/11



2/2/26, 9:57 AM

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders

Nothing that I am aware of at the moment	1
None that I know of right now. There has been talk about connecting our loop trail in Fairfield to Vedic City north of town but I don't believe there is any solid plan for that as of now, it has just been talked about	1
I'm not sure about countywide projects but in Keosauqua the replacement of half of the Keo loop Trail with new concrete surface. Fundraising will begin this spring for the second half. The first half was replaced in fall 2025. There are no new trail projects planned at this time.	1
Closing the current trail loop in Oskaloosa on the east side of Oskaloosa	1
Ceder View Trail Paving- Shawn Morrissey would have most up-to-date information	1

Answered: 11 Skipped: 6

Which long-term regional trail projects do you think should remain in the plan even if they...

The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Response	Count
trails to eldon and oskaloosa, bloomfield, and fremont	1
Trail connection to Libertyville Whitham Woods extension/ easement which would allow the trail to continue through a wooded section, not along the side of the road.	1
Ottumwa to Pella, Ottumwa to Fairfield	1
not sure but I would love to see Ottumwa connected to Eldon, Batavia, Agency, Fairfield, Oskaloosa, Bloomfield	1
Not sure	1
New trail on court street. Trail from Ottumwa to fairfield. Trail from ottumwa to oskaloosa	1
Garrison rock	1
Connection to Lake Keomah Connection to Marion county/ Lake Red Rock	1
Connecting the Keosauqua Sunset Trail by the ballfield to the high school, which would go around the edge of the golf course.	1

https://survey123.arcgis.com/surveys/564feaecc6845b2857a457fc1cd7a21/analyze?position=0.what_county_are_you_representin

8/11



2/2/26, 9:57 AM

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders

Connecting Fairfield to libertyville and Ottumwa. Or looking at connecting Fairfield to Brighton in Washington county.

1

Connecting all the Cities within Wapello County with a Master Trail System.

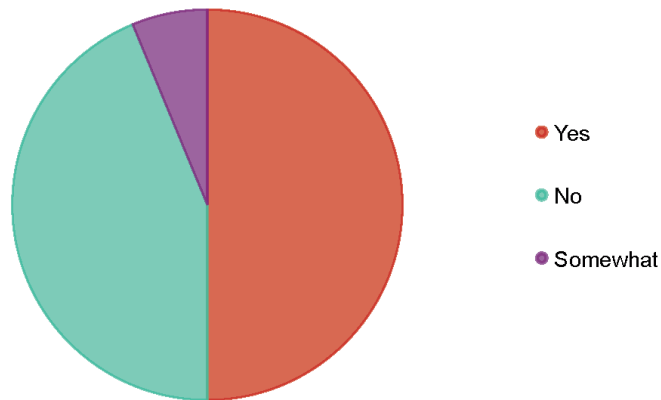
1

Adding to our existing trail

1

Answered: 12 Skipped: 5

Are you familiar with any existing or potential water trails in your county?

**Answers****Count****Percentage**

Yes

8

47.06%

No

7

41.18%

Somewhat

1

5.88%

Answered: 16 Skipped: 1

If you are aware of water trails, what improvements should be prioritized?

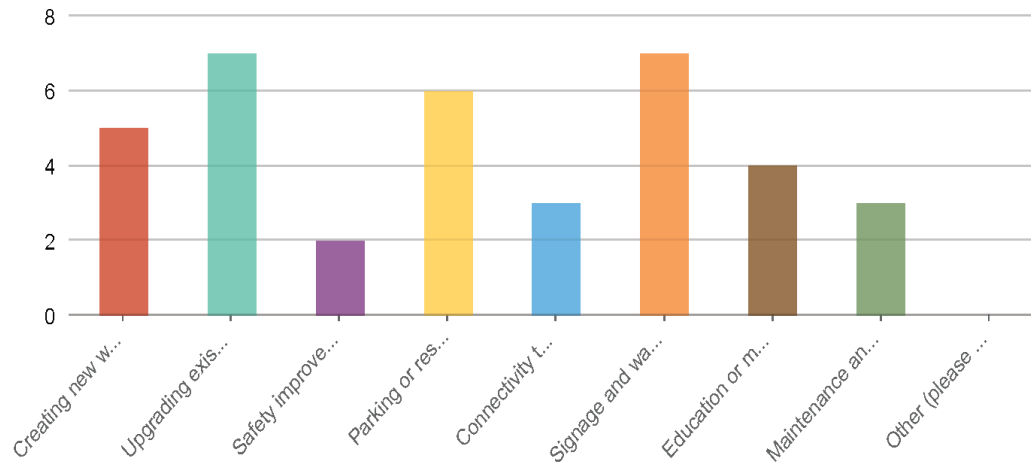
https://survey123.arcgis.com/surveys/564feaecc6845b2857a457fc1cd7a21/analyze?position=0.what_county_are_you_representin

9/11



2/2/26, 9:57 AM

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders



Answers

Count

Percentage

Creating new water trail access	5	29.41%
Upgrading existing water trail access	7	41.18%
Safety improvements	2	11.76%
Parking or restroom improvements	6	35.29%
Connectivity to nearby towns or parks/trails	3	17.65%
Signage and wayfinding along waterways	7	41.18%
Education or mapping resources	4	23.53%
Maintenance and debris removal	3	17.65%
Other (please specify)	0	0%

Answered: 8 Skipped: 9

From your perspective, what is the single most important action needed to advance trail...

The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

https://survey123.arcgis.com/surveys/564feaecc6845b2857a457fc1cd7a21/analyze?position=0.what_county_are_you_representin

10/11



2/2/26, 9:57 AM

Regional Trail Plan for Community Leaders

Response	Count
Trying to get land easements to build the trail and then the funding and support to maintain those new trails.	1
Secure more Local and State Funding to continue the Wapello County Trails System.	1
more funding and more easements	1
More and younger volunteers, and as always additional funds, although our local foundations are always helpful with funding. On another note, the immense amount of paperwork required for the bigger state and federal grants is a burden on our employees at City Hall. Very small cities don't have their own engineering departments. It's a shame that some of the money to build trails has to be spent on engineers to complete all of the compliance requirements	1
More active participants in our trails council, this includes a need for younger people.	1
Many communities our size have paved trails and we currently have a very small percentage that are paved. As construction costs rise, I think we need to have a plan to begin moving forward with larger sections being paved.	1
land easements and funding for connecting trails	1
inner city trails	1
Getting support from the community to move forward with the projects and finding someone with experience to lead the effort	1
Funds	1
Funding, more easements, and expanding the trail system in all directions.	1
coordination with other counties to start linking trails and communities	1
Communication and county support to move forward. Highlighting the importance of the trail, the impact of trails to a community.	1

Answered: 13 Skipped: 4