

## INTRODUCTION

Trails are in high demand nationwide. As soon as trails are constructed, they become heavily used, whether they exist in pristine natural environments, urban downtowns, or rural areas. Groups ranging from neighborhood organizations to the federal government are developing trails and undertaking trail planning projects. Iowa is at the forefront of statewide trails planning, armed with the visionary goal of connecting the state's urban areas, recreational lands, and cultural resources with a comprehensive system of multi-modal trails. Iowa already has a substantial number of trail miles existing in the state, partly due to earlier statewide planning efforts, and *Iowa Trails 2000* will build on this system by offering valuable resources to trail developers and by planning for the future.

Statewide trail planning in Iowa began in 1987, when the Iowa Legislature directed the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) to undertake a comprehensive trails plan. Iowa DOT was given the task of completing a plan for the acquisition, development, promotion, and management of recreation trails with national, state-wide, or multi-county significance. In 1990, the Iowa Statewide Recreational Trails Plan was completed. This plan was developed through extensive public involvement and agency coordination. It took into account the existing trails in the state, and utilized a variety of evaluation methods to identify and prioritize potential trail corridors. It planned for a 2,982-mile network, 400 miles of which were already completed by 1990.

The 1990 plan dealt primarily with the trail facilities themselves. It outlined the extensive process that was undertaken to select and prioritize trail corridors, mapped the general location of those trail corridors, and established design guidelines for the construction of



various types of trails. *Iowa Trails 2000* goes beyond a facility-based approach by providing an array of resources which can be used by state agencies and local and regional governments during trail planning and implementation. *Iowa Trails 2000*, therefore, is a resource document designed to assist all trail implementers in achieving the vision of an interconnected, multi-modal, easily accessible statewide trails system.

## GOALS

The primary goal of *Iowa Trails 2000* was mandated by the state legislature in 1987. The trails document must provide a framework for the implementation of trail initiatives throughout the state. *Iowa Trails 2000* does this by offering resources and recommendations to trail planners and implementers, including state agencies, local organizations, regional governments, county conservation boards, and non-profit organizations. *Iowa Trails 2000* accomplishes the following goals:

- ◆ Set forth a framework for subsequent trails system planning by a variety of agencies and jurisdictions.
- ◆ Offer valuable resources to trail implementers, which can be used to implement either mode-specific or regional trails plans.
- ◆ Involve the public in the trail planning process in a variety of ways, including open houses, exhibits, newsletters, and an Iowa Trails Web site.
- ◆ Provide local communities an understanding of the benefits of trails, a valuable tool for local trail planning and implementation efforts.

- ◆ Establish design guidelines for all trail modes, to encourage consistency in quality and design of trails statewide.
- ◆ Consider the benefits of trails as both recreation and transportation amenities.

These goals are the driving force behind *Iowa Trails 2000*. The statewide trails vision set forth in this document will be implemented by state, regional, and local efforts. By setting forth a variety of guidelines and policies, and by including a statewide vision map, *Iowa Trails 2000* encourages and facilitates the implementation of trails in a variety of ways.

## PROCESS

*Iowa Trails 2000* began with the establishment of two management teams. The Project Management Team (PMT) consisted of Iowa DOT staff, consultants, and staff from other state agencies directly involved in trail implementation. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) consisted of the PMT and members of various agencies and associations involved in trail implementation throughout the state. The agencies and groups involved in the PMT and TAC included:

- ◆ Iowa Department of Transportation
- ◆ Iowa Department of Natural Resources
- ◆ Iowa Department of Economic Development
- ◆ Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs
- ◆ Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
- ◆ The Federal Highway Administration
- ◆ Iowa Trails Council



- ◆ League of Iowa Bicyclists
- ◆ Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards
- ◆ Iowa Farm Bureau Federation
- ◆ Iowa OHV Association
- ◆ Iowa State Snowmobile Association
- ◆ Iowa Equestrian Trails Council
- ◆ Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments
- ◆ Polk County Conservation Board

The PMT and TAC met periodically to review the document, maps, and policies, and to plan for public involvement throughout the process.

### — ***THE IOWA TRAILS 2000 DOCUMENT***

The overall *Iowa Trails 2000* document is a resource guide for all trail implementers, including state agencies, communities, and regional or county governments. The document sets forth guidelines, policies, and recommendations for implementing the statewide trails vision, a comprehensive network of multi-modal trails. The creation of this document was a collaborative effort between the PMT and the TAC, and is designed to serve as a prelude to more detailed trails planning by the DOT, other state agencies, and local governments.

### — ***INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS***

The planning process for *Iowa Trails 2000* includes an extensive inventory of natural, cultural, and recreational resources in the state. This inventory was performed with the help of each of the 18 Regional

Planning Affiliations (RPAs) and 8 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). This process led to a comprehensive inventory map, designed to assist agencies and communities in subsequent trails planning efforts, and to establish the basis for the statewide trails vision (see Chapter 3: Statewide Trails Vision).

### — ***PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT***

Once an inventory map had been created, five public open houses were held to solicit input. At these open houses, the public was asked to review the inventory maps and help to establish criteria for the preliminary selection of trail corridors that would appear on the statewide vision map (see Chapter 3: Statewide Trails Vision).

A total of four newsletter updates were distributed throughout the trail planning process. The purpose of these newsletters was to provide information about the progress of the trails document, to alert the public of upcoming public meetings, and to suggest additional alternatives for public input, including mailed comments and the Iowa Trails Web site.

A Web site was created which carried much of the same information as the newsletters, but also provided an electronic comment form for public comments. In addition, inventory and trails system maps were made available on the Web site for viewing or download.

Further along in the process, another battery of open houses was held. The purpose of these 10 open houses was to solicit comments on the draft trails document and the statewide vision map.



## — ***CREATION OF THE STATEWIDE TRAILS VISION***

Based on extensive inventory, analysis, coordination with regional governments, and public input, a statewide trails vision map was created. The purpose of this map was to set forth a possible statewide network, from which subsequent trails planning efforts could draw. This map delineates corridors of national, state, or regional importance that connect communities to each other and natural and cultural resources. The actual alignments of trails within these corridors, and the inclusion of other corridors in the statewide trails system, will be determined as specific trail projects are proposed and implemented, based on more detailed planning efforts (see Chapter 3: Statewide Trails Vision).

## — ***SPECIAL STUDIES***

A variety of special studies were undertaken to better understand and plan for trail projects in the future. These studies formed the framework for the policies and guidelines included in *Iowa Trails 2000*. Some of the studies that were undertaken include:

- ◆ Economic development relating to trails
- ◆ Local community trail planning, specifically for pedestrians and bicycles
- ◆ Surveys of off-highway vehicle users
- ◆ Research on current design standards
- ◆ Research on funding sources for trails, both existing and innovative
- ◆ Research on working with adjacent landowners

## ***IOWA TRAILS 2000 OVERVIEW***

*Iowa Trails 2000* is a resource document designed to establish the framework for trail implementation in Iowa. As such, it considers a variety of items related to trails planning and implementation.

### ◆ **NEEDS AND BENEFITS**

The 1990 trails plan listed a variety of the precedents and needs for a comprehensive statewide trail system. *Iowa Trails 2000* updates and strengthens the needs which can be met and the benefits which can be gained by the establishment of such a trail system.

### ◆ **EXISTING/PLANNED TRAILS AND CULTURAL/NATURAL FEATURES**

The components of the statewide trail system should relate to significant natural, cultural, historic, and recreational amenities found in the state. The trail system should also connect major existing outdoor recreational facilities, in order to maximize recreational use and to provide logical beginning and ending points for trail users. Extensive inventory of these recreational, cultural, and natural features was undertaken in 1990. *Iowa Trails 2000* reexamines these features and updates the inventory to include any recently developed or discovered features. In addition, this document takes urban amenities into account, with the goal of better connecting the state system to local systems.

### ◆ **TRAIL LOCATION CRITERIA**

Through agency involvement and citizen input, over 20 trail location criteria were defined and prioritized in 1990. *Iowa Trails 2000* reevaluates these criteria, through the same agency involvement and citizen input process, as a means of keeping the trail document in line with public desires. These criteria serve as the basis for the statewide trails vision.



◆ **STATEWIDE TRAILS VISION MAP**

Both the 1990 plan and *Iowa Trails 2000* focus on trails of national, statewide, or regional significance. There are many trail initiatives taking place on a smaller scale, serving a single county, city, or metropolitan area. While these local trails are a crucial part of the statewide trails system, they are not delineated in any detail on the statewide vision map because they should remain locally driven initiatives. The 1990 plan set up a “backbone” system of trails which linked major recreational amenities and population centers across the state. “Support system trails” provided longer distance local links and spur trails leading to specific recreational or cultural amenities. *Iowa Trails 2000* reevaluated this “two-tiered system” in light of updated inventory and updated trail location criteria. This review resulted in the revision or deletion of some 1990 corridors and designation of additional corridors. Also, based on input received from TAC members and the public, it was determined that a non-hierarchical (as opposed to “two-tiered”) system better described the statewide trails vision. Therefore, unlike the 1990 plan, the *Iowa Trails 2000* system map shows only one network of trails.

◆ **GREENWAY CORRIDORS**

Though the primary use of long-distance trails is recreation, some trails inherently serve as natural resource protection corridors. Trails that utilize and, by extension, preserve wetland buffers, stream corridors, remnant prairie areas, and woodlands can be considered greenways. Greenways offer recreational amenities for humans along with a vegetated, unobstructed corridor for animal movement and seed dispersal by plants. Greenways can also be coordinated with canoe trails. *Iowa Trails 2000* considers where greenway corridors may be planned. Greenways can be

accomplished through acquisition of additional right-of-way width, through restoration of native species, and by seeking out continuous corridors that safely cross major highway barriers.

◆ **DESIGN GUIDELINES**

Due to increasing numbers of multi-use trails, user modes, and users in general, trail design guidelines have changed since 1990. *Iowa Trails 2000* updates the design guidelines for various types of trails in a variety of corridors. The design guidelines set forth by this document are based on current recommendations by national transportation and recreation agencies, and by specific user groups.

◆ **USER MODES**

Modal diversity is a goal of the statewide trails vision. Many user modes were considered in the 1990 plan, and design guidelines were established for each mode. *Iowa Trails 2000* reaffirms the state's commitment to the accommodation of a variety of modes, including, but not limited to, the following:

- ◇ Pedestrians
- ◇ Bicyclists
- ◇ In-line skaters
- ◇ Mountain bikers
- ◇ Equestrians
- ◇ Snowmobile users
- ◇ Off-highway vehicle users
- ◇ Motorbike users
- ◇ Canoeists



◆ **IMPLEMENTATION COSTS AND STRATEGIES**

Both the 1990 plan and *Iowa Trails 2000* serve as a framework for implementing trail initiatives. *Iowa Trails 2000* provides a step-by-step reference guide for trail implementation. It also details the roles and responsibilities of various groups involved in trail projects, and offers resources for funding opportunities, both in the form of existing funding sources and innovative concepts.

◆ **OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLES**

Use of off-highway vehicles (OHVs), including snowmobiles, motorbikes, and ATVs, has increased since the 1990 plan. This increased use, along with the special needs of motorized - as compared to non-motorized - trail users, initiated an effort to examine the needs of OHV users and make recommendations for their inclusion in trail planning initiatives as a part of *Iowa Trails 2000*. The principal issues considered are the implementation of additional OHV parks, connections between these parks, and exploration of multi-use corridors with separated trails.

◆ **ADJACENT LANDOWNERS**

As the network of trails in Iowa expands, it is important to consider the views of those that own land adjacent to proposed trails as these trails are planned and implemented. *Iowa Trails 2000* examines past state and national issues related to the sentiment of adjacent landowners regarding trail projects, and offers strategies for working with landowners during the trail planning process to address and alleviate landowner concerns.

◆ **OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE**

The 1990 plan identified several operational issues that warrant further study. In addition, as existing trails age and as new trails are planned, the importance of considering maintenance costs of

trails, as well as construction costs, becomes more apparent. *Iowa Trails 2000* sets forth specific policies regarding the operation and maintenance of trails, including jurisdictional responsibility, liability issues, and general maintenance.

◆ **COMMUNITY BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN SYSTEMS**

The statewide trail system is designed to link population centers and major recreational amenities. The effectiveness of the statewide trail system can be enhanced, however, through the development of “feeder” trail systems within local communities. *Iowa Trails 2000* sets forth a guide for communities (large and small) interested in planning for local bicycle and pedestrian accommodation (bicycle and pedestrian planning is emphasized because, statistically, they make up the largest percentage of trail users). Through the implementation of local trails systems, more users will be able to easily access longer-distance recreational opportunities, the main purpose of the statewide system. The guide details a variety of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, both for recreation and transportation; offers a process for planning at the local level; and shows how local systems could connect into the statewide system.

◆ **ECONOMIC BENEFITS**

Trails can provide significant economic benefits to local communities and the state as a whole. These benefits originate primarily from tourism dollars spent by trail users. Trails can provide significant economic benefits both to local communities and to the state as a whole. Though these benefits originate from spending by trail users, they do not stop as just tourism dollars, as money spent by tourists will then be spent by businesses and individuals throughout Iowa. It is therefore important for



communities to not only capture spending from trail users, they should also try to capture the additional rounds of spending generated by the inflow of tourist spending in order to maximize the economic benefit. The 1990 plan recognized this fact, and stated that further study was needed to fully capitalize on the economic benefits of trails. *Iowa Trails 2000* sets forth a planning guide for communities interested in reaping the benefits of their trails.

◆ **BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ACCOMMODATION GUIDANCE**

In early 1999, the Iowa Transportation Commission adopted guidance on bicycle and pedestrian accommodation within state highway rights-of-way. The guidance lists several instances where new highway construction or highway reconstruction could warrant bicycle or pedestrian accommodation. *Iowa Trails 2000* examines this new guidance and makes recommendations for a method of evaluating the need for bicycle facilities within state highway corridors.

## **THE FUTURE OF IOWA'S TRAILS**

Since the original 1990 Iowa Statewide Recreational Trails Plan, Iowa has been building high-quality recreational facilities for all types of users. *Iowa Trails 2000* will continue to build upon this tradition by setting forth a statewide trails vision; offering additional guidance to state and local agencies, non-profit groups, and other trail implementers; and updating design guidelines and information on funding sources.