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LINN COUNTY CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

Linn County Water and Land Legacy Bond – On Backside of Ballot **Vote November 8**

Dennis Goemaat, *Deputy Director*

The Linn County Conservation Board has been planning for the future of the Linn County conservation system during the past several years. During these discussions, many conservation and natural resource needs were identified. These include declining water quality in rivers and streams with potential impact to drinking water supplies, loss of wetland resulting in reduced floodwater storage and opportunities to naturally cleanse water, loss of wildlife habitat, needed county park improvements, and making trail connections to communities in the county.

These discussions and planning sessions resulted in request for a private poll to be conducted to determine how Linn County residents felt about these issues and which are the most important to them. This resulted in the proposal for a \$40 million bond question being placed on the November 8th ballot to address these needs and concerns.

The Linn County Conservation Board voted unanimously to request that this question be placed on the ballot for the general election on November 8. The Board of Supervisors also unanimously voted to place this question on the ballot giving the residents of Linn County an opportunity to decide this question.

The Linn County Conservation Board does not take lightly its obligation to the citizens of Linn County to protect the county's natural resources and to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and connecting people with nature.

The goals and benefits of the bonds include:

- Protecting drinking water sources
- Improving water quality in Linn County's rivers and streams
- Preserving natural areas for wildlife habitat
- Maintaining land and enhancing wetlands to provide natural floodwater storage

The bond question below will appear on the back side of the ballot and be labeled Public Measure E.

“Shall the County of Linn, State of Iowa, issue its general obligation bonds in an amount not exceeding forty million dollars for the purposes of protecting sources of drinking water and the water quality of rivers and streams, including the Cedar River and its tributaries; protecting and acquiring land to provide natural floodwater storage, improve water quality, protect natural areas and reduce flooding; providing fund to improve parks; providing biking and walking trails; and protecting wildlife habitat and natural areas, to be managed by the Linn County Conservation Board, with full public disclosure of all expenditures?”

- Updating parks and expanding opportunities within the parks
- Expanding the trail system to continue to connect Linn County communities with walking and biking trails
- Increasing Conservation educational opportunities for area youth

A privately funded public opinion poll of 400 registered voters in Linn County helped the Linn County Conservation Board determine priorities for the community and is reflected in the bond language. In this polling, 89% of the respondents agreed with the statement that we owe it to our children and grandchildren to save Linn County's natural areas, clean water and wildlife so future generations can enjoy them the same way we do.

The Board has received a few questions in regard to the bond question: How will the funds be divided? 55% will go toward water quality, protection of drinking water sources and wildlife habitat; 30% for park improvements, and upgrades; and 15% for trail development. Both the Linn County Conservation Board and Board of Supervisors passed resolutions locking in these percentages.

Can the funds be diverted for other purposes? No, the bond funds can only be used for the purposes identified in the ballot language.

How much will the bonds cost? The average homeowner in Linn County will pay approximately \$2.25 per month or approximately \$27 per year over 20 years to pay off the bonds.

Will any land be acquired by eminent domain/condemnation? No. Any land acquired will only be from willing sellers.

Will there be opportunities to use these funds with federal and state grants? Yes. Most grant programs require a local match. The Linn County Conservation Board's intention is to obtain grants and donations whenever possible to allow more projects to be accomplished.

How will the public know how the money is spent? All projects will be developed in open meetings with opportunities for public involvement and comment. An annual report and audit will be prepared and made available.

For more information about potential projects and additional background about the bond question, you can go to www.LinnCountyConservationBond.org

Or feel free to contact me at dennis.goemaat@linncounty.org or 319-892-6450. It is important that your voice is heard. Please be sure to turn the ballot over and vote on November 8.

Protecting and restoring our land and water is vital to protecting our drinking water. It also helps provide natural areas for floodwater storage in the form of wetlands. The recent flooding event in Linn County impacted many families and businesses, but our wetlands contained much of the excess water, helping to avoid the catastrophe we experienced in 2008. As our rainfalls become more severe and our waterways increasingly polluted, it is imperative that we protect and restore our vulnerable wetlands for today and future generations.

Potential Bond-Funded Projects

Water and Land Protection (55%):

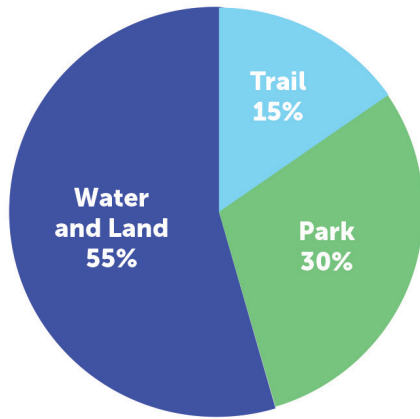
- Wetland development and protection along the Cedar River at various county natural areas including the Chain Lakes, Wickiup Hill, Palo Marsh, Goose Pond and North Cedar.
- Wetland development and streambank protection and enhancements along Morgan Creek in Morgan Creek County Park.
- Wetland development and protection along the Wapsipinicon River at various county natural areas.
- Wetland development and protection along Buffalo Creek.
- Wetland development and streambank protection and enhancements along Squaw Creek.
- Acquire conservation easements to protect and enhance areas along major rivers and streams including, but not limited to, the Cedar and Wapsipinicon rivers and Indian Creek, Squaw Creek, Buffalo Creek, Morgan Creek, Otter Creek and Blue Creek.
- Low-head dam re-design and modification to restore and improve river ecology and water quality, improve fish passage, fish habitat, improve recreational use including fishing and kayaking and safety of the site in Pinicon Ridge County Park.
- Continue to acquire priority tracts of land as available or by conservation easements along the Wapsipinicon River, Cedar River, Buffalo Creek, Otter Creek and Squaw Creek greenbelts that will protect wildlife, water quality and help prevent flooding.
- Continue to acquire adjacent properties as available at Morgan Creek, Squaw Creek and Pinicon Ridge County Parks to buffer as development pressures increase.
- Acquire priority tracts of land as available or by conservation easements along the Indian Creek Watershed Greenbelt in cooperation with the cities of Cedar Rapids, Hiawatha, Marion and Robins.
- Acquire conservation easements along the Cedar River corridor to protect drinking water sources for Cedar Rapids and the Linn County communities that they affect.
- Woodland restoration and preservation work including control of invasive plant and animal species to restore, enhance and improve our woodlands in all county parks and natural areas.
- Native prairie restoration and preservation work to restore, enhance and improve prairie areas in county parks and natural areas.

Park Improvements (30%):

- Relocate the park entrance and relocate and construct the new day-use area including picnic areas, park shelters, restrooms, road access, parking, interactive playground and nature play area and other site amenities in Morgan Creek County Park.
- Construct a new day-use area including picnic areas, park shelters, restrooms, parking, interactive playground and nature play areas and other site amenities in Squaw Creek County Park.
- Tree arboretum relocation and expansion including the arboretum entrance, road access, parking, restrooms, multi-purpose support facility including an arboretum center and all-weather park lodge, and tree and shrub gardens in Morgan Creek County Park.
- Group campground relocation and construction in Pinicon Ridge County Park together with family campground expansions in Squaw Creek and Morgan Creek County Parks including new modern campsites, rental cabins and shower house facilities, play areas, and site amenities.
- Realign main park entrance road and construct a new day-use area overlooking the Wapsipinicon River in Pinicon Ridge County Park.
- Redesign and construction of the destination playground and nature play area with accessible routes together with site amenities including new restrooms in the Riverside area in Pinicon Ridge County Park.
- Improvements to existing campgrounds in Buffalo Creek, Pinicon Ridge, Squaw Creek and Morgan Creek County Parks including shower house facilities, storm shelters, campsite improvements, utility installation and upgrades.
- Day-use area improvements in Buffalo Creek, Squaw Creek, Morgan Creek and Pinicon Ridge County Parks including modern restrooms, ADA accessible picnic sites, and modern park shelters.
- Increase all-season outdoor recreational experiences in making the Matsell Bridge Natural Area a key destination for equestrian use and cross country skiing outings.
- Day-use area improvements including accessible routes and restroom facilities at various county parks, natural areas, and historical sites including the historic Abbe Creek School Museum.

Trail Improvements (15%):

- Construct Morgan Creek County Park's trail network and connect to Cedar Rapids' trail system via construction of the regional Highway 100 Trail. A scenic overlook trail bridge will be constructed over and across the Cedar River.
- Construct a regional trail hub and complete the regional trail connection from the Grant Wood and Marion Trail through Squaw Creek County Park and connecting to the Sac & Fox Trail in Cedar Rapids.
- Construct a new accessible trail and other site amenities including a park shelter, picnic benches and tables, and bird viewing areas around the 8-acre wetland in Squaw Creek County Park.
- Continue trail construction and paving phases along the Cedar Valley Trail including phase 5 from Center Point to Urbana, Iowa, a distance of approximately 6 miles.
- Completion of the Grant Wood Trail including connections to Marion and Squaw Creek County Park, closing gaps in the trail, trail surfacing, fencing and drainage work.



Water Quality and Land Protection
(\$22 million)

Park Improvements
(\$12 million)

Trail Improvements
(\$6 million)



Water Quality and Land Protection (55%)

These projects involve protecting critical functions related to water and soil. This includes protecting and enhancing watersheds and greenway floodplains in partnership with local agencies and landowners to protect sources of clean drinking water, buffer communities from flooding to reduce or prevent costly flood damages, improve water quality and to protect fish and wildlife habitat for future generations.

We intend to protect sensitive and critical land and water areas for nature and fish and wildlife habitats and to further prevent fragmentation of these habitats and wildlife travel corridors. This also involves acquiring lands, as available, to buffer existing county park property and to protect areas along rivers and streams. Additionally, projects will help address the needs for increased public open space and improving public access to areas to further connect people to nature in response to the projected population growth within the County.

Watershed improvement plans and individual park master plans will guide projects in consultation with natural resources agencies including the Iowa DNR, Natural Resources and Conservation Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Linn County Soil and Water Conservation District. Projects will also be guided by the Linn County Comprehensive Plan, the Linn County Conservation Strategic Open Spaces Plan, park and natural area master plans, and conservation and wildlife agencies. **Land will NOT be acquired by use of Eminent Domain.**

Park Improvements (30%)

These projects will add or improve existing park facilities to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities of current and future park users.

Projects will promote encouraging families to get outdoors and to improve health and fitness for adults and children.

Projects will be guided by park and natural areas master plans and will be responsive to recent surveys highlighting the public's desire for outdoor recreation.

Projects will be designed and developed with emphasis on water quality, protecting sources of clean drinking water, and ways to help reduce flooding.

Trail Improvements (15%)

These projects involve completing regional trail connections between communities and those trail projects associated with existing trails and parks.

Parks, trails and natural areas provide spaces where families and children can safely walk, run and bicycle – improving the physical health of Linn County residents, and reducing health care costs. These projects will be guided by metro area trail plans and park master plans in consultation with local and regional trails organizations.

Projects will be designed and developed with emphasis on water quality, protecting drinking water sources, and ways to help reduce flooding.

Accountability & Reporting

Improvements to existing parks, recreational facilities and natural areas will be guided by approved master plans that include public involvement, comment and review. Full public disclosure of all expenditures will be required and subject to public discussion by the Linn County Conservation Board and reviewed by the Linn County Board of Supervisors.



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Nonprofit Organization
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LINN COUNTY

Water & Land Legacy Bond

