

ELEMENT 8. ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND CRITICAL AREAS

One of the goals of the Comprehensive Plan is to preserve Cerro Gordo County's environmentally sensitive areas, *including woodlands, wetlands, forested areas, wildlife habitat areas, public areas such as county and state parks, and rural ambiance.* Preservation of the environment - the air, water, and land quality of Cerro Gordo County - is an important goal, *today and for the future.* Park areas, forests, wetlands, streams, lakes, and aquifers provide recreational opportunities, scenic enrichment, and necessary ecological variety.

Areas designated as *Critical Resource Areas* indicate lands which present *significant limitations* to development or contain environmental conditions which *require special management.* Special planning considerations and environmental concerns should be taken into account *during the development review and approval process.* Intense development or alteration of the environment is *not intended* in these areas.

GOAL 8.0 Encourage planning and land use management which recognizes the special advantages and limitations imposed by natural systems, and which encourages protection of the land and wise use of its resources.

OBJECTIVE 8.1 Recognize the natural environmental character of the land as a unique and significant asset to the quality of life, and a principal natural resource of the County; and preserve this natural character as a whole by protecting its individual components which includes among others, the topography, waterways, scenic views, natural vegetation and tree cover.

Policies:

8.1.1 In order to preserve the natural character of the land, *discourage non-farm uses* from locating outside of urban areas, *or limit such uses* to areas that are appropriate for the development and least disruptive and designed to blend with the natural character as much as possible.

8.1.2 Identify areas which contribute to the natural character of the County, and *establish land use and development regulations, such as overlay districts,* that will preserve this character and limit disruption from non-farm rural development.

8.1.3 Encourage owners of land which contribute to the natural character of the County to *preserve these areas* by conservation easement, lease, deed restriction, or other formal methods.

Recommendations:

8.1.R 1 Investigate methods for the County to obtain *conservation easements* for the preservation of agricultural land near the waterways; *such as* the Farmland Protection Program available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

8.1.R 2 Investigate methods to place *public and private lands* which contribute to the area's natural character *into connecting green belts as wildlife refuges and passive recreational areas*, or to protect scenic vistas.

OBJECTIVE 8.2 Prevent the degradation of environmentally sensitive natural resources, such as stream banks and flood plains, steep slopes and slide prone areas, natural forests and wildlife habitat, areas containing shallow soils, karst areas, and endangered plants and animals.

Policies:

8.2.1 Identify *environmentally sensitive natural resource areas* of the County, and *establish land use and development regulations* that will protect, or set aside these areas from development.

8.2.2 Encourage owners of land which contains *environmentally sensitive natural resources* to protect these areas by conservation easement, lease, deed restriction, or other formal methods.

Recommendations:

8.2.R 1 Investigate methods for the County to *obtain conservation easements* for the preservation of agricultural land near the waterways, such as the Farmland Protection Program available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

8.2.R 2 Investigate methods to place *public and private lands* which contain environmentally sensitive natural resources into connecting green belts as wildlife refuges and passive recreational areas. Revise and update the County's Soil Survey.

OBJECTIVE 8.3 Reduce flood damages by promoting drainage area-wide programs stressing non-structural measures, such as flood plain regulations, flood proofing, flood forecasting, and watershed treatment, in conjunction with other structural measures, where necessary, to protect the lives and property of residents.

Policies:

8.3.1 Locate future development *outside of flood hazard areas* where feasible. Where development is allowed in the flood plain, *require* it to be elevated, flood proofed and located outside the flood way.

8.3.2 Ensure that local flood management programs *meet or exceed* regulatory requirements of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and applicable state regulations.

8.3.3 Design local flood management programs *to allow public and private options*, while protecting life and property from storm water runoff.

8.3.4 *Stress* retention of natural drainage patterns and construction of detention systems to help ensure development activity *will not add* substantially to the flood problem.

OBJECTIVE 8.4 Prevent the degradation of the air and water quality throughout the County.

Policies:

8.4.1 Encourage the use of *centralized* water and / or sanitary sewer systems in developments, or expanding developments, to reduce the reliance on, and potential contamination from, individual wells and septic systems.

8.4.2 Encourage existing developments that have *expanded beyond* the original subdivision to install centralized water and septic systems in the new development and the original development, *if there has been a history* of contamination problems in or adjacent to the original subdivision.

8.4.3 Require new developments in the unincorporated area of the County to provide for the *short-term and long-term* maintenance and operation of internal infrastructure.

8.4.4 Require new development in the unincorporated area of the County to *reduce site runoff*, both during and after construction, through the use of storm water management, detention basins, and buffer strips, in order to protect the water quality of streams and rivers.

8.4.5 Identify past and ongoing *environmentally contaminated areas* of the County to protect air and water quality from any negative impacts, and to encourage mitigation and cleanup of those areas.

OBJECTIVE 8.5 Recognize the watersheds of Clear Lake, sloughs and marsh areas throughout the County as critical resource areas.

Policies:

8.5.1 Where these resource areas have been identified, they should be protected by using overlay districts or similar means to reduce pollutants into these bodies of water.

- 8.5.2** Require new subdivisions to use erosion control measures during development and install storm water filtration systems, buffer strips, and / or storm water detention basins as a permanent part of the development to limit the amounts and velocities of runoff into streams, rivers, and lakes. (see also 8.4.4)
- 8.5.3** Residential development within critical resource areas should be at a density of no more than one dwelling per ten (10) acres unless the dwelling is connected to a centralized wastewater system deemed suitable by the Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health. (see also 8.4.1)
- 8.5.4** Where possible, open space should be preserved around such bodies of water by private means, conservation easements, or acquisition by the County or other public entities where appropriate. (see also 8.1.3 and 8.2.2)
- 8.5.5** The Environmental Resource Overlay District (EROD) requirements in the zoning ordinance should be strictly adhered to and amended where necessary to enhance protection of the Clear Lake watershed.