



"Light My Path" - Photo by Darcie Tallman in McFarland Park



# Story County Trails Plan

## Story County Conservation Board

February 14, 2025



# Acknowledgments

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# Background



Bicycle Club, Iowa State College, 1892, Ames, Iowa – Farwell T. Brown Photographic Archive, Ames Public Library

## INTRODUCTION

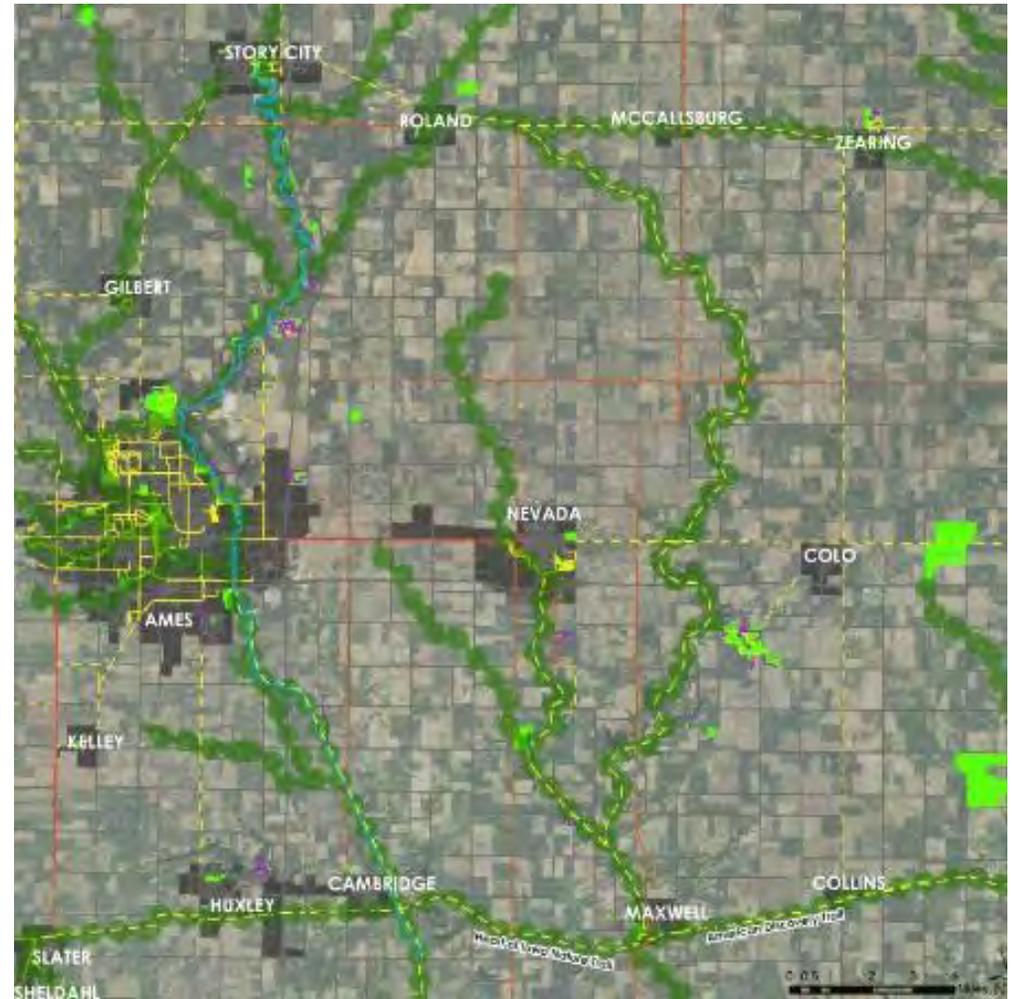
Story County has a rich history of outdoor recreation and has actively been preserving and enhancing its natural areas since the 1970s. Story County has many dispersed parks, natural areas and trails throughout the county that greatly enhance quality of life, wellness, and recreational opportunities.

Recent success in the acquisition of land, funding and the extension/paving of miles of trails have led Story County Conservation (SCC) to consider an updated trail plan for consideration and implementation of potential future trail improvements.

This Story County Trails Master Plan builds upon previous trail planning efforts, most recently the 2016 Story County Trails and Greenways Plan.

This Master Plan is tailored to identify achievable outcomes in a reasonable planning horizon given the constraints of typically available trail funding streams. Many trail plans unfortunately end up being perceived as wish lists or unmet needs. This plan is written with actionable steps that can begin to be implemented as soon as the plan is approved.

Through public engagement and consideration of past plans, this plan identifies opportunities for new trail connections, within Story County and regionally, and prioritizes a number of them into actionable projects with planning level cost opinions. These are highlighted starting on page 55 (Priority Projects: SCC Action Items).



Story County Trails and Greenways Plan, 2016

# BACKGROUND

## ABOUT STORY COUNTY CONSERVATION

**Mission:** Connecting people with nature and improving natural resources - making Story County a great place to live, work, and recreate.

**Vision:** Partner with others to wisely manage natural resources, provide recreational opportunities, and engage individuals, businesses, and communities to be responsible stewards of our natural environment - creating environmental, economic, and social benefits.

## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

There are several Story County plans and policies that guide SCC in their mission and purpose. A few that have the biggest impact on the efforts of the SCC in their parks and trails planning include:

- Ames MPO Forward 2045 Plan
- Cornerstone to Capstone, C2C
- National Trails Plans
- SCC Strategic Plan
- South Skunk Water Trail Plan
- Story County REAP Plan
- Story County Trails and Greenways Plan

What this plan sets out to accomplish is to rethink current strategies, identify new opportunities that may not have been previously considered, and provide a clear design and implementation process for existing trail priorities. The plan will include conceptual cost opinions, funding and financing strategies in order to identify ways in which to fund the implementation of future trail infrastructure initiatives.



Story County Trails and Greenways Plan, 2016  
Story County Parks Map

# BACKGROUND

## CURRENT INVENTORY

Today, Story County has a wide variety of parks, prairies, trails, and open spaces. Together, these areas create a vital, interconnected system that is essential to quality of life and furthering the mission of SCC. In total, the County owns and manages 3,400 acres and 89 miles of trails. Providing a variety of trail types encourages a more inclusive experience.

- Paved Trails, Separated and Unseparated from roads
- Unpaved Trails
- Equestrian Trails
- Mountain Bike Trails



# BACKGROUND

## PARK FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

Story County Conservation maintains an online directory of parks and available types of amenities offered at each of the county-owned areas. The Story County Conservation website provides links to learn more about or register to use various amenities and park features.

A robust trail system can provide access to physical activity, build connections between communities and other amenities, preserve natural areas, increase awareness of the environment, and create economic development opportunities.

Story County has worked intentionally at providing a trail system that includes a wide range of desirable elements that users enjoy. Not only are bicycle trails a priority, SCC has worked to provide access to other trail use types, including snowmobile, equestrian, and water trails. Many of these amenities exist in greenways or abandoned rail beds.



Links to amenities found on Story County Conservation homepage.

## PAST STUDIES

Consideration of past planning efforts provides a foundational start to this study. By researching and understanding prior recommendations, this study can advance with updated information without the reinvention of topics that have already been covered.

**Story County Trails & Greenways Plan (2016)**  
The Story County Trails and Greenways Plan is a map that depicts Story County Conservation properties that were existing and proposed in 2016. It identified ways in which Story County trails could connect to the regional trail system. Suggestions also included showing future connections between most of the towns within Story County.

**Cornerstone to Capstone, C2C (2016)**  
The C2C plan is the Story County long range plan that is intended to guide the development of the County and policy decisions. Chapter 4 of the C2C Plan outlines the goals, objectives, and strategies for preserving, protecting, restoring, and enhancing our natural and recreational resources. Goal No. 4 of this chapter is directly related to trail development objectives:

- Ensure all public parks, green spaces, and services within Story County are safe and easy to access.
- Provide accessibility for all individuals.
- Create networks of pedestrian and bike-friendly pathways that link public parks and communities, area attractions, and destinations.
- Provide safe biking, hiking, watercraft, fishing, hunting, camping, swimming, and equestrian opportunities within the county.
- Connect existing and future trails and routes across cities and adjoining counties.

## 4.1

## GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

**Objective NRR4.1:** Ensure all public parks, green spaces, and services within Story County are safe and easy to access.

**Objective NRR4.2:** Provide accessibility for all individuals through the use of accessible parking spaces, play equipment, and paved trails.

**Objective NRR4.3:** Provide connected networks of pedestrian and bike friendly pathways that link public parks and communities, area attractions and destinations.

**Objective NRR4.4:** Maximize the use of current parks by researching, introducing, implementing, and evaluating state-of-the-art equipment and activities.

**Objective NRR4.5:** Provide safe biking, hiking, watercraft, fishing, hunting, camping, swimming, and equestrian opportunities within the county.

**Objective NRR4.6:** Connect existing and future trails and routes across cities and adjoining counties.

**Objective NRR4.7:** Meet the varied recreational needs of our residents while protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

**Objective NRR4.8:** Construct park improvements which provide safe recreation and meet needs of park visitors.

### Strategies

- Encourage citizen participation in the planning, development, and maintenance of recreational trails and facilities through public hearings, surveys, and activities to ensure community needs and desires are met.
- Periodically review the existing trail network and the proposed trails and greenway plan to identify gaps, determine trail improvements, and set greenway priorities.
- Develop and fund a future trails network to increase connectivity, and ensure safe access to all public parks and recreation areas.
- Partner with local school districts, conservation groups, and organizations to support and promote recreation and natural resource protection programs.
- Work with land owners adjacent to trails and parks to develop a conservation strategy.
- Work with the NRCS and similar entities to develop, implement, and evaluate a plan that provides public access to and/or through developed buffer strips and pollinator planting zones.
- Provide natural resource areas with very limited development for wildlife observation, resource protection, bird watching, and hunting.
- Invest in park infrastructure to maintain safe and enjoyable



4-6

## PAST STUDIES

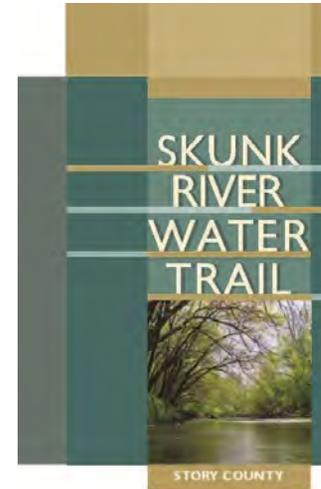
### Story County REAP Plan

The State of Iowa offers funding opportunities to counties and some of their projects through its Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Program. This program assists in the enhancement and protection of the state's natural and cultural resources. Story County has recently updated the 2023 REAP Plan. One of the seven goals identified speaks directly to trail development and connections. This goal identifies the desire to increase trail connections, build more trails, acquire more abandoned railway lands where possible, and continue to enhance trails that specifically connect parks and cities within Story County.

### Story County Conservation Strategic Plan

The current Strategic Plan encourages that wherever possible, connections and extension of existing trails to one another should be completed to create an interconnected trail network across the county and to adjacent counties.

- a. Implement the Story County Trails and Greenways Plan Map by building, upgrading, and enhancing bike/walking paths that provide non-motorized transportation alternatives in and between towns and cities in the county and reduces carbon emissions.
- b. Continue to improve, complete, and enhance the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail and the Praeri Rail Trail and connect them to other regional trails.
- c. Provide non-motorized transportation opportunities in the county, including wide, shared-use traffic lanes to accommodate both motor vehicles and non-motorized vehicles or separately marked lanes parallel to existing roadways. Example opportunities would include lanes between cities, such as Ames, Gilbert, Nevada, and Colo.



### THE SKUNK RIVER IN STORY COUNTY

The Skunk River was once a green wooded ribbon in a prairie sea. Today, it is a green wooded ribbon in a sea of agriculture. Forested river corridors are the only continuous habitat left in the modern Iowa landscape. As such, the Skunk provides critical habitat for both river and land species.



Granite, basalt, gneiss, chert, and other stones make up glacial cobble beaches.

The Skunk was formed as a major drainage for melting glaciers. Rounded cobble, large granite boulders, and gravel were left behind as the glaciers receded, and are found in and along the river. Ada Hayden Park in Ames was formerly a quarry business that mined the gravel.



The Skunk is a "non-meandered" stream in Iowa law. That means that the State of Iowa owns the water flowing through it, but not the land adjacent to it or under it. That's all private land. Please respect it and don't trespass. Even though you can't get out or camp along this beautiful stream, there's plenty to see along the way!



Dams and bridges are part of the history of the Skunk River. Paddlers will notice a bridge built by the CCC in the 1930s at Story City. Remains of bridge abutments and a mill dam remain at Soper's Mill. A low-head dam where a mill once stood still can be seen near the Sleepy Hollow Access.



Soper's Mill rock riffle dam

Rock riffles have been constructed at Story City, Soper's Mill, and River Valley Park. These areas of faster water provide excellent habitat for fish and aquatic insects and fun challenges for experienced paddlers.



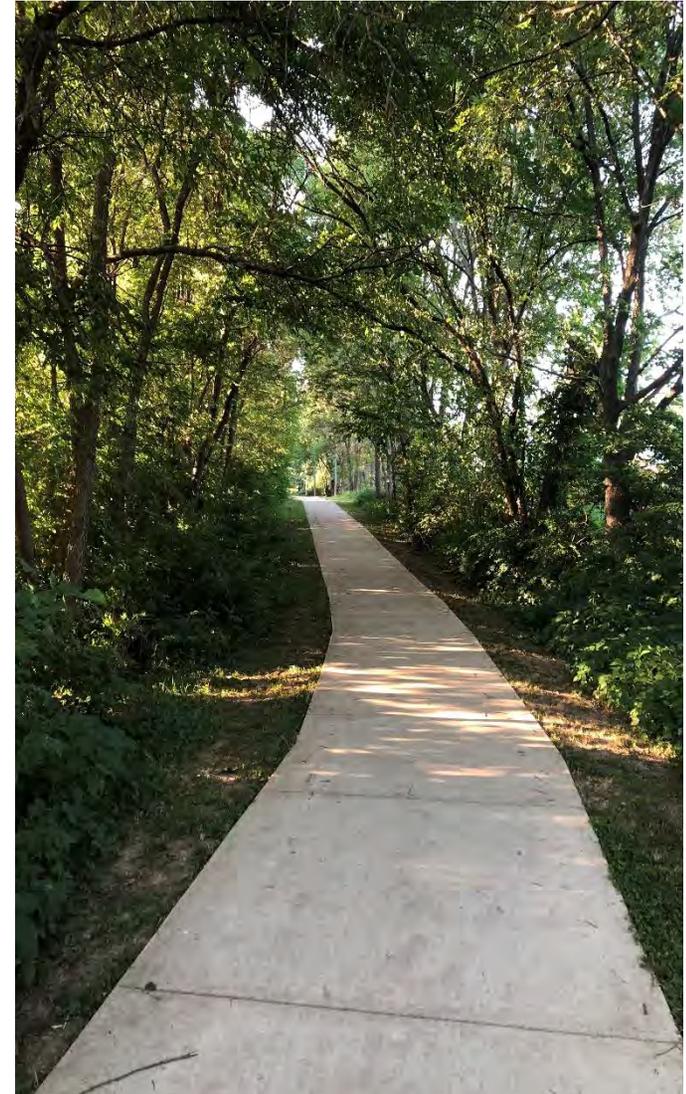
# Why a Trails Plan?

## Benefits of a Robust Trail System

Trails are more than just pathways through natural landscapes; they are integral components of healthy communities, fostering physical activity, environmental stewardship, and economic vitality. As urbanization encroaches on green spaces and sedentary lifestyles become more prevalent, the need for well-planned and accessible trails has never been greater. Overall, county trail systems play a vital role in promoting active lifestyles, fostering community connections, supporting local economies, preserving natural environments, and enhancing quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Trails are integral components of healthy, sustainable, and resilient communities. Story County Conservation seeks to underscore the importance of prioritizing trail development as a cornerstone of their planning efforts to enhance the many benefits, such as:

- *Cultural and Historical Preservation:* County trail systems offer educational opportunities for individuals of all ages to learn about local history, ecology, and environmental conservation. Interpretive signage, educational programs, and guided tours can enhance visitors' understanding and appreciation of the natural world.
- *Economic Impact:* Well-maintained trail systems can attract tourists and outdoor enthusiasts, stimulating local economies through spending on accommodations, dining, and recreational equipment. Additionally, trails can enhance property values and attract businesses seeking to capitalize on the appeal of nearby recreational amenities.
- *Environmental:* Trails can serve as corridors for wildlife, promoting biodiversity and supporting ecosystem health. Strategic trail planning can also help protect sensitive habitats and natural resources by directing recreational activities away from fragile ecosystems.
- *Health:* Trails provide opportunities for physical activity such as walking, jogging, hiking, and cycling. Access to nature through trails has been linked to reduced stress, anxiety, and depression. Spending time outdoors in natural settings can promote relaxation and mental clarity, weight management and contributing to health and overall well-being.



## Benefits to Story County

In general, county trail systems play a vital role in promoting active lifestyles, fostering community connections, supporting local economies, preserving natural environments, and enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. SCC has been working to promote active lifestyles by providing opportunities for recreation and conservation and shaping a sustainable county.

The recent paving of the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail sets a strong example. SCC noted the significant usage disparity in trail user counts comparing the granular Heart of Iowa Nature Trail versus the connecting paved High Trestle Trail. Using an initial small windfall of funding, SCC leveraged those funds against funding from various competitive trail funding streams. Once initial paving from Slater eastward began, trail counts surged tenfold. Aggressive pursuit of funding has allowed the paving to extend through Huxley, Cambridge, and Maxwell all the way to Collins.

Each of the towns is noting new economic activity associated directly with the trail improvements.

Story County can continue to enhance the benefits of the trail system by:

1. Connecting trails to destination areas (parks, public lands, other regional trails).
2. Creating separate entrances to parks for non-motorized traffic.
3. Encouraging rural and city developments that include trail and sidewalk accommodations along public streets.
4. Continually monitoring for maintenance and safety improvement needs throughout the trail system.
5. Offering a diversity of trail types throughout the county and particularly in parks (i.e. cross-country skiing, equestrian, & single-track trails).



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TRAIL PLANNING

## Guiding Principles

Guiding principles help ensure that county trails are well-planned, beneficial, and sustainable for long-term use, offering a high-quality experience for all users while protecting the environment and supporting the community. For the Story County Trails Master Plan, the following principles will be considered in the planning and decision-making efforts:

1. **Connectivity:** Connecting to existing trails, parks, amenities, and recreational areas to create a cohesive network; Providing adequate and convenient access points for users; Enhancing connectivity between neighborhoods, schools, and other community hubs.
2. **Safety:** Trail location and design that ensures the safety of users, including proper signage, sightlines, and separation of different types of users (e.g., pedestrians and cyclists); Providing information on trail rules and etiquette to promote safe use.
3. **User Experience:** Including facilities such as rest areas, benches, water stations, and restrooms; Designing trails to accommodate various activities (walking, running, biking, etc.) and skill levels; Maximizing aesthetic quality of the trail.
4. **Accessibility:** Ensuring trails are accessible to people of all abilities, including those with disabilities; Applying universal design principles to create inclusive and accessible trails; Incorporate social inclusion principles to accommodate people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.
5. **Sustainability:** Minimizing the impact on natural habitats, wildlife, water resources, and sensitive lands.



# STORY COUNTY STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
The Heart of Iowa Nature Trail is an integral part of the Central Iowa Trail Network, the American Discovery Trail and the Great American Rail Trail.	Numerous desired outcomes between varied interest groups.
Other trail resources, such as the Praeri Rail Trail and the Tedesco Connector Trail have the potential to become destination trails or at least regional trail connections expanding the trail network to new populations.	Available public right-of-way between most parks and population centers are limited to the county road system.
The Skunk River Water Trail offers a unique alternative trail experience.	Other than the High Trestle Trail in Slater, there are no trails connecting outside the county.
Well distributed parks and nature areas through the county, headlined by McFarland Park.	Gaps in trails, or inconsistent accommodation and perceived safety.
Active citizenry who value parks, open space, and trails.	Sparse wayfinding, unclear routes to access the trail system.

# TRAIL USER TYPES

One vital facet of trail planning is to ensure trails are designed in a manner that the network is safe and efficient for the types of experiences that trail users enjoy. Most trail users in Story County generally fall within one of these the groups noted below. Motorized vehicles are not permitted on park trails, except as required for maintenance and public safety, or devices for the mobility impaired.

## Hikers, Walkers, and Runners

Trail users who travel on foot include hikers, walkers, and runners. Hiking and walking are considered “gateway” outdoor activities; many outdoor enthusiasts begin their lifelong enjoyment of recreating outdoors and enjoying natural areas by going on a hike, a leisurely walk, or a run. These types of activities require minimal investment and time, and minimal experience or ability.

## Cyclists and Mountain Bikers

Traveling on wheels (non-motorized) is the popular way to enjoy the regional trail system in Iowa. Recreational cyclists typically use the trail for exercise, adventure, or social reasons. Most prefer paved surfaces, but granular surfaces are also popular with those who have bikes with hybrid or wider tires. Transportation cyclists include those who are on the trail system to travel from home to a destination (e.g., work, school, store, community center) and likely prefer paved surface trails. Mountain bikers are generally looking for the single-track experience, providing a narrow and more challenging terrain on trails with a natural surface.

## Skaters

These wheeled users include in-line skaters, quad skaters, skateboarders and scooters. These users are only found on paved trails. Paved trails provide a safe surface for everyday recreation and off-season cross-country skiing training.

## Equestrians

Story County does have a community of equestrian users and attracts them from all over central Iowa. Traveling on horseback is a popular way to enjoy natural surface and granular surface trails where allowed.

## Persons with Disabilities

Some trail users have physical, cognitive, or emotional impairments. Some of these users may travel on foot and some on wheels. Persons with impairments may be a subset of any of the above types of trail users but often have different needs and design requirements. “Best Management Practices” do exist for designing accessible trails and there are many resources they provide that should be consulted in order to design equitable and accessible trails.

## Paddlers and Floaters

SCC has worked diligently to create the Skunk River Water Trail in coordination with the IDNR. The comprehensive Skunk River Water Trail Plan is one of the first in the State. Future trail planning efforts should continue to connect with or run parallel to the river in order to improve access to the Skunk River. Water Trail users include kayakers, canoeists, paddleboarders, and tubers.

# TRAIL SURFACE TYPES

## Hard Surface Trails

Hard surface trails are paved using asphalt or concrete. Paved trails accommodate the most user types, including all cyclists, skaters, and walkers. Often, they are also designed for full accessibility for the mobility impaired.

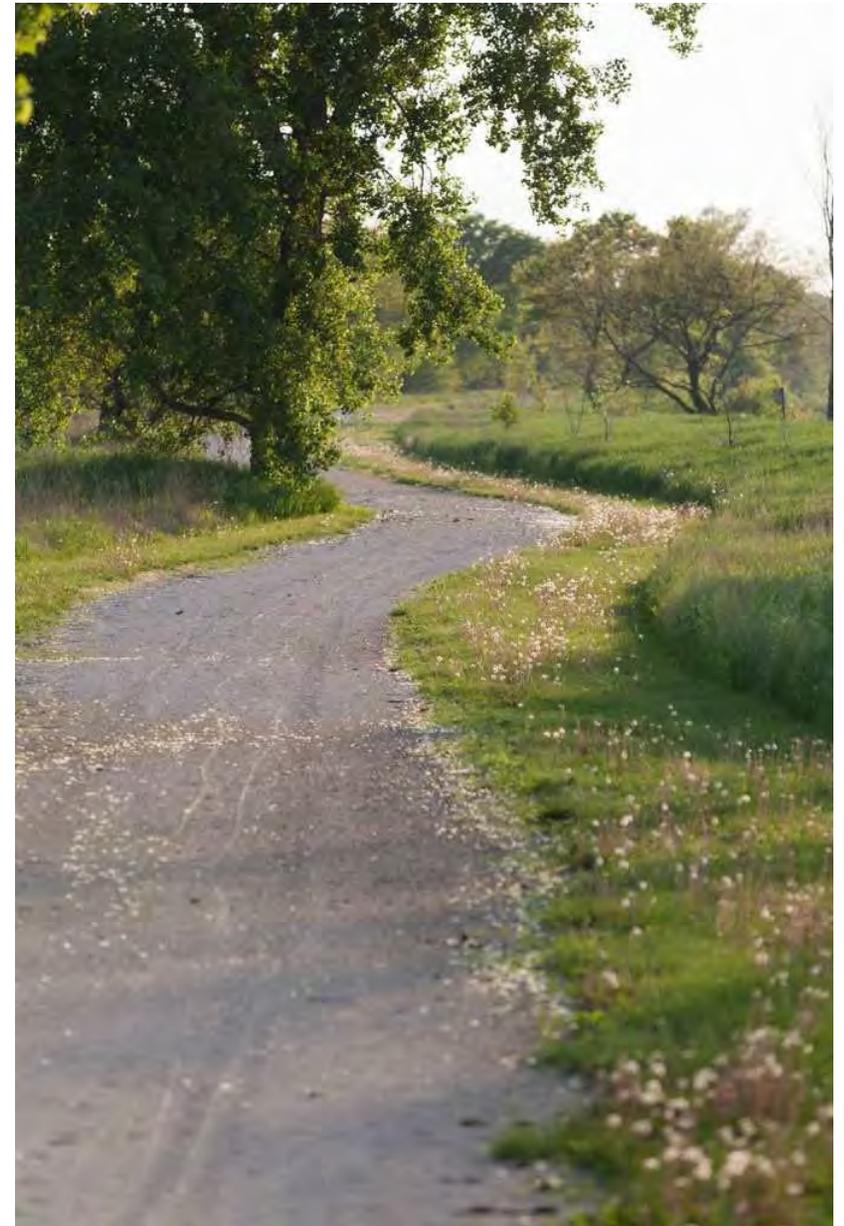
Though not technically trails, various shared-use roadway accommodations are sometimes needed to connect trails and close gaps in trail systems. These can include low volume shared use roadways, bike lanes, buffered bike lanes and protected cycle tracks.



# TRAIL SURFACE TYPES

## Granular Surface Trails

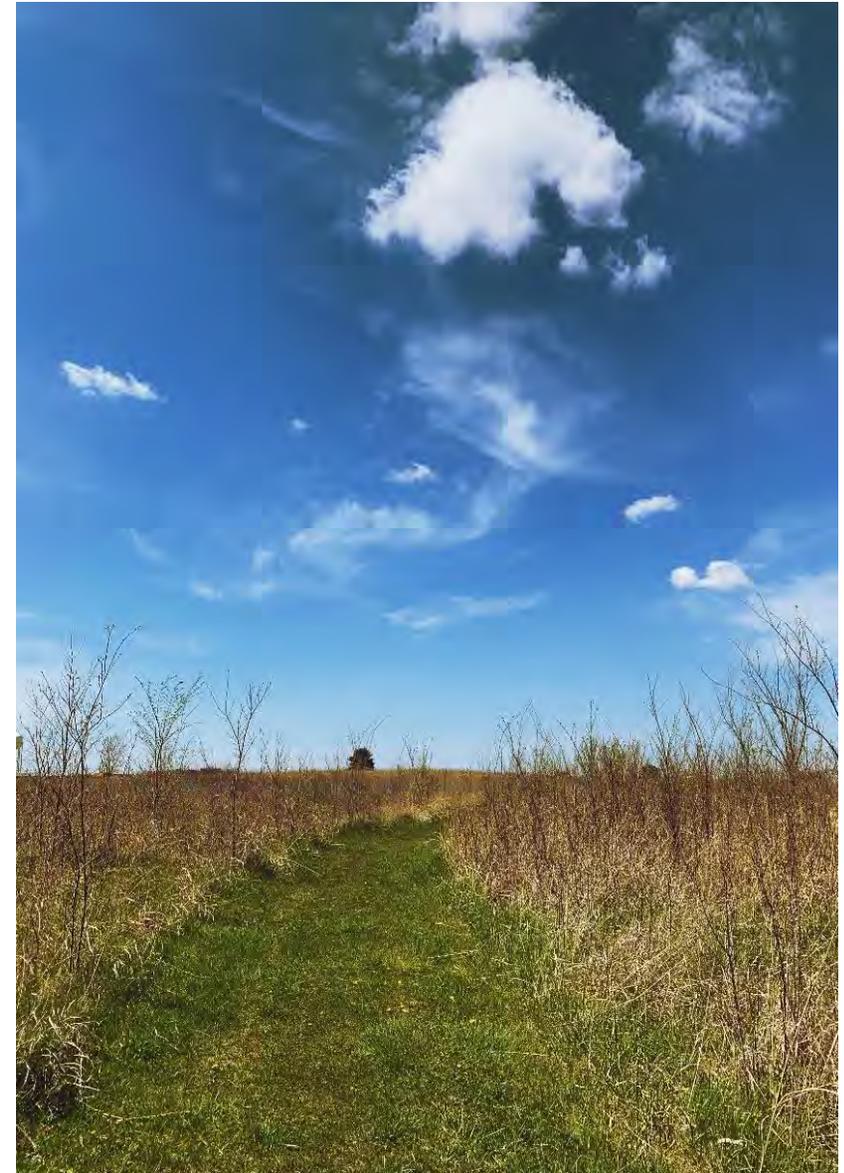
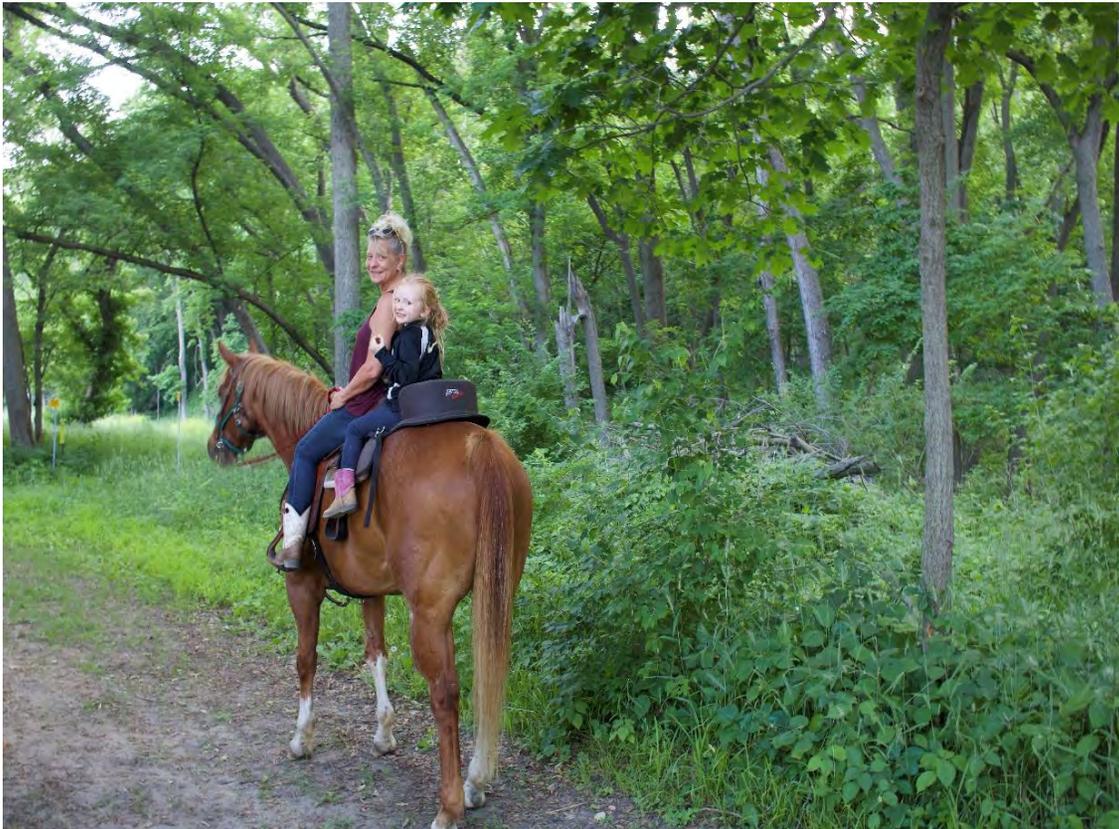
Granular trails are surfaced with gravel or crushed aggregate, typically fine graded limestone. The angular chips of rock interlock with fine material to create a reasonably resilient hard surface most times of the year, the exception being during spring thaw, or continued heavy rainfall. Granular surfaces accommodate most users, except for the smaller wheeled skaters. Cyclists with narrow, high-pressure-tire road bikes tend to avoid granular trails. In flatter terrains, a well-maintained granular surface can be considered accessible by the mobility impaired.



# TRAIL SURFACE TYPES

## Natural Surface Trails

Natural Surface trails have a surface consisting of dirt, wood chips, grass, or other natural materials and are intended to primarily accommodate people on foot, people on mountain bikes, and people on horses.



# TRAIL SURFACE TYPES

## Water Trails

Depending on the context, trail use may be considered natural resource-based recreation or facility-based recreation. Natural resource-based recreation would include any activity conducted outdoors that is dependent on a particular element or combination of elements in the natural environment. In Story County, natural resource-based trail use is available on the Skunk River Water Trail.



# BUILDING ON THE CURRENT REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM

## PROPOSED REGIONAL TRAIL EXTENSIONS

Establishing a trail system throughout Story County benefits not only Story County residents but also those from the surrounding region who are looking for additional trail opportunities. The Heart of Iowa Nature Trail is one of those regional draws. This trail runs the width of the county east to west and connects with the popular High Trestle Trail and the Des Moines metro. Additionally, the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail is just one section of the larger American Discovery Trail and the Great American Rail Trail which will someday connect coast to coast. More regional plan details can be found on page 44 of this plan.

### HEART OF IOWA NATURE TRAIL PROGRESS AS OF JANUARY 2025

**KEY**

- Proposed
- Soft
- Paved
- Bike Lanes
- County Lines



# WHERE TO FIND NEW TRAILS

## RAILS TO TRAILS

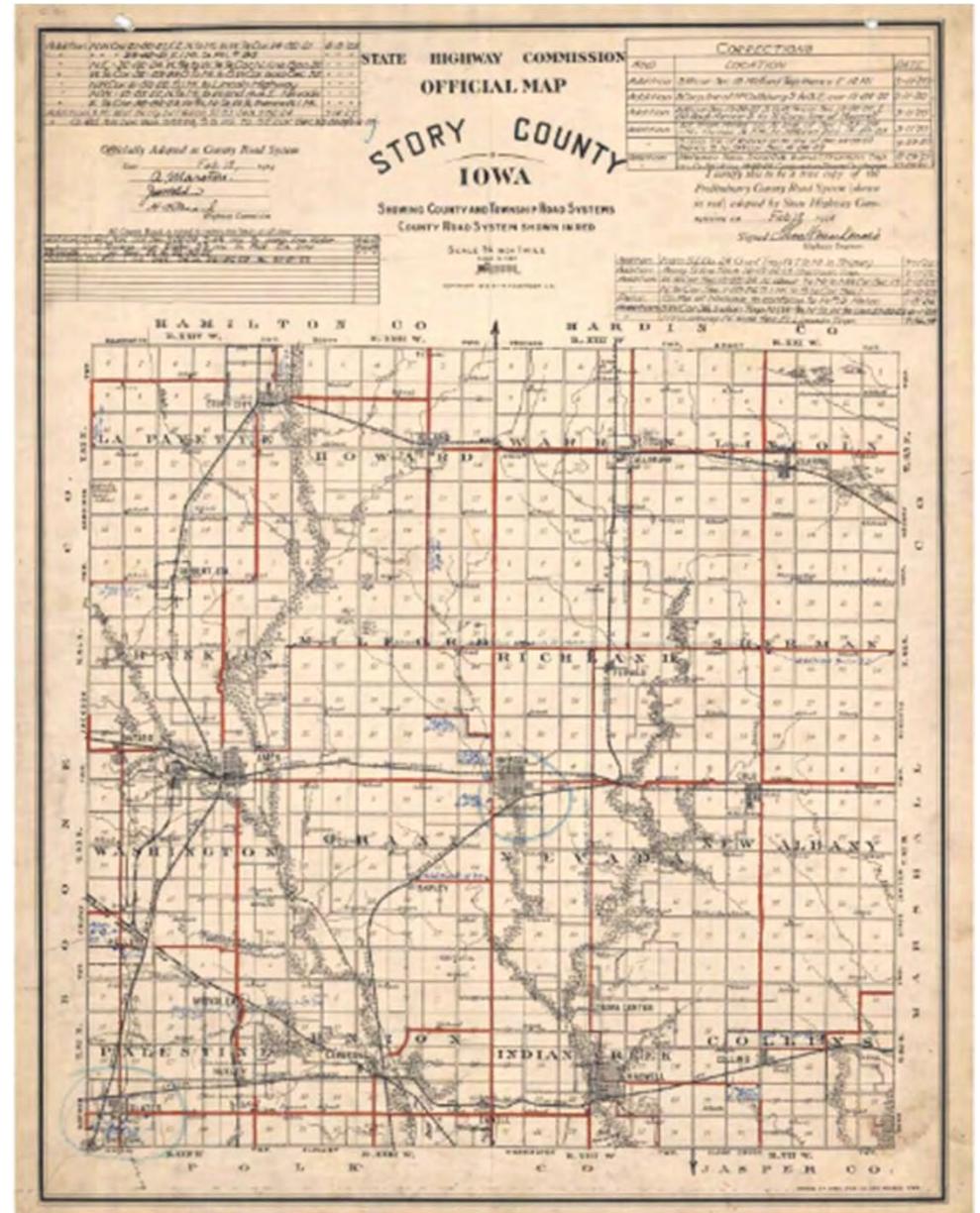
The vast majority of regional trail mileage in the State of Iowa have come from rails-to-trails conversion projects. Iowa was once crisscrossed with numerous railroads. Most of the recent rail abandonments in Central Iowa have been turned into highly popular regional trails that reconnect rural Iowa communities.

Story County is no exception, with the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail connecting Slater, Huxley, Cambridge, Maxwell and Collins, The “Vet Med” Trail in Ames and the Praeri Rail Trail connecting Roland, McCallsburg and Zearing. However, many of the railroads in the county are still active. Older railroad abandonments have reverted to adjacent property owners and the old grade has since been obliterated and the land cultivated. Even the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail has gaps where the grade was found to be eliminated and the trail routes around the gaps. This typically pushes trail development onto bike lanes on nearby roadways, such as County Highway R-38 .

The number of active railroads in Iowa peaked in the early 1900's. The 1914 Map of Story County shows the routes in detail.

## HISTORICAL STAGECOACH ROUTES

Towns within Story County were not only connected by railroads, but also by stagecoach routes. It may be possible to restore one or more of these routes if property owners are willing to restore the route as a trail to connect between county road rights-of-way.



Map of Story County, Circa 1914

# WHERE TO FIND NEW TRAILS

## COULD ANY OF THE OLD ROUTES BE RESTORED AS TRAILS?

In terms of long connections between towns, re-establishment of the former grades as trail is generally unlikely. Most of the length that is not trail already has been lost to cultivation. Iowa Code does not allow the use of eminent domain on agricultural use parcels over 10 acres, so if any particular property owner is unwilling to negotiate for trail right-of-way, or even if they are willing, but cannot come to agreement on price, that route is essentially severed and therefore unavailable.

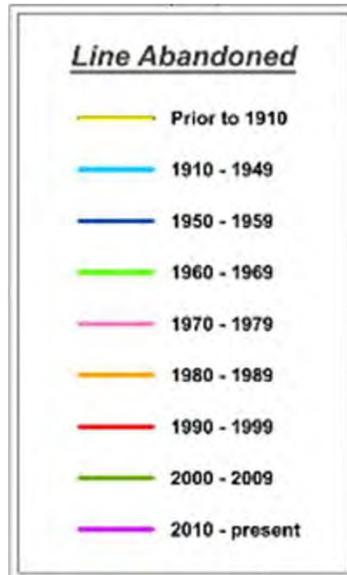
Notice the significant triangle of railroads in the southwest corner of the county. The gold color across the County is the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail, the darker green in the far southwest corner is the High Trestle Trail.

The railroad alignment between Ames and Slater would be a highly desirable connection now, and the portion out of Ames is now paved, but 90% of the remaining grade is completely gone, both as land parcels and as a definable former railroad alignment.

Former railroad parcels still exist south from Huxley to the south county line with Polk County, and Story County owns those parcels.

When considering regional connections, it's important to understand the regional trail network in the neighboring counties, to determine if connections to those systems should be considered a priority.

The Regional Facilities map on page 44 shows trail efforts in the surrounding counties that could be factors in determining priority trail routes in Story County.



Excerpts from Chronology of Iowa's Railroad Abandonments, Iowa DOT 2021



# Public Engagement

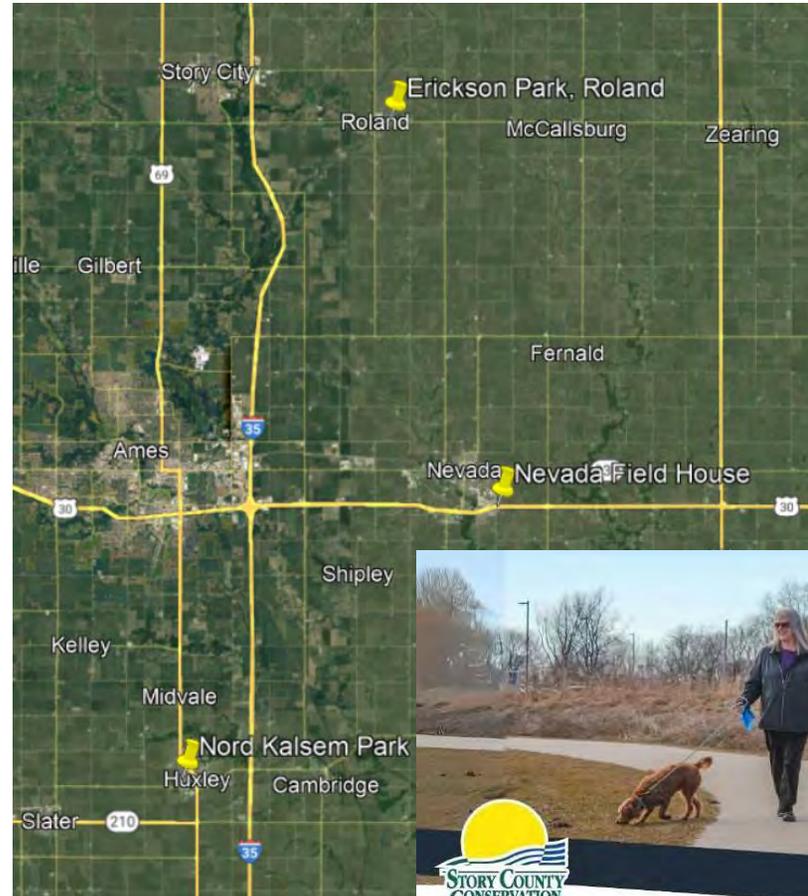


# ENGAGEMENT

## COMMUNITY INPUT

To gain insights into the current use, needs, and priorities of the trail system from the users' perspectives, SCC conducted various public outreach efforts, including open house events and an online engagement platform. These efforts aimed to involve the community at multiple stages in the creation of the Story County Trails Master Plan, impacting future planning, infrastructure identification, policy recommendations, and project prioritization.

Three open house style meetings were held throughout the county. Locations were strategically chosen to meet the community members where they were, including Nevada, Huxley, and Roland. Spreading the meetings across the county provided interaction with not only the regular users of the trail system but also with those who may not identify as a trail user but still have an interest in the SCC parks and trails as an amenity for all.



### TRAILS MASTER PLANNING UPCOMING PUBLIC INPUT MEETINGS

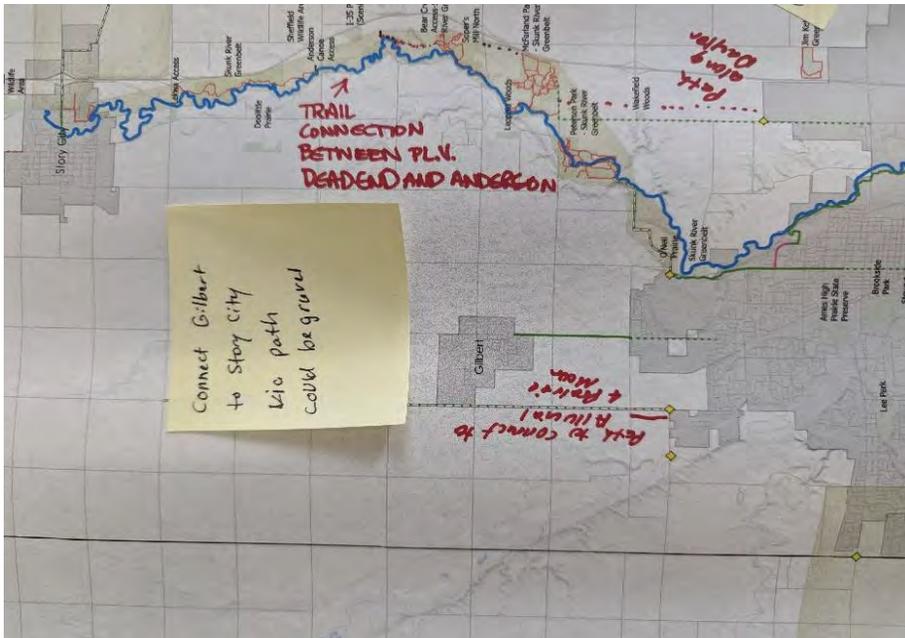
**MAY 07** | Huxley, IA  
Nord Kalsem Park  
5:30 - 7:00 P.M.

**MAY 09** | Roland, IA  
Erickson Park Shelter  
5:30 - 7:00 P.M.

# ENGAGEMENT

An Open House event was held on April 1, 2024, in Nevada, IA, with about 25 attendees. Participants viewed and commented on large maps and photo boards displaying trail types, amenities, and locations. This format facilitated casual, thoughtful discussions among attendees and with SCC staff. Similar events were held in Huxley on May 7th and Roland on May 9th.

The displayed maps included current, planned and proposed trails in Story County. Mapping also indicated potential regional connections across eight counties, highlighting the importance of inter-county trail connectivity. Discussions and feedback focused on trail safety and connections, reflecting key community concerns. Complete survey results and additional responses are detailed in Appendix A.



## Typical Trail Accommodations

### Typical Trail/Roadway Intersection Treatments

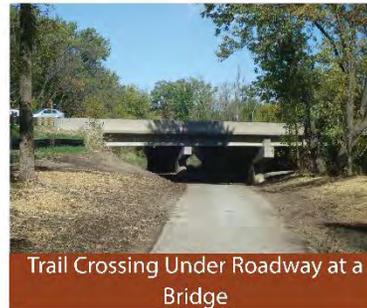
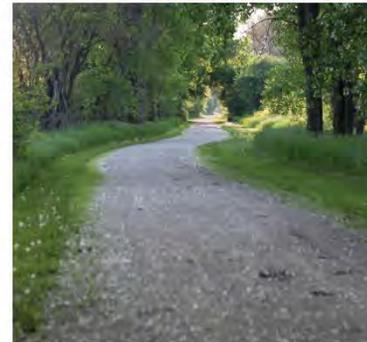


Trail at Signalized Intersection



Trail - Roadway Intersection Signage

### Granular Surface Trails



Trail Crossing Under Roadway at a Bridge



Public Art

Wayfinding Signage



Oasis

Water Fountain

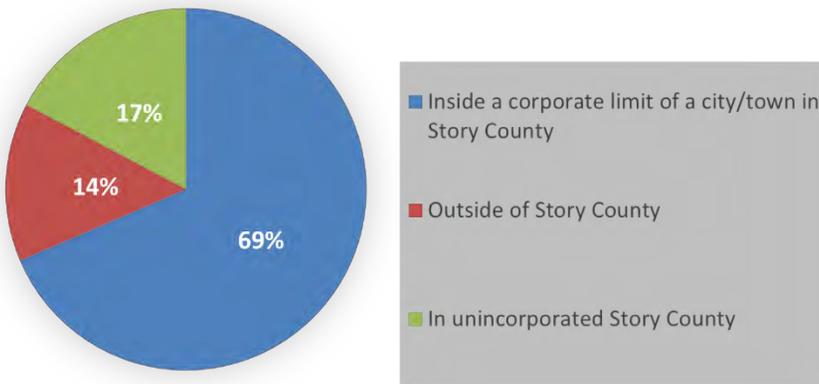
Amenities

# ENGAGEMENT

The project webpage hosted an online survey and social map from April 9th to May 14th, 2024, garnering approximately 375 responses. The survey engaged residents to understand community needs and priorities, with most respondents living within city limits in Story County and about one-third residing in unincorporated or neighboring areas. This response pattern is reflective of the strong regional trail user population in Central Iowa, particularly due to the presence of trails like the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail.

The following section summarizes key takeaways from the countywide online survey. Significant responses related to a specific topic are highlighted to indicate user perceptions of the countywide trails system. Additional and complete survey results can be found in Appendix A.

## Where do Survey Respondents Live?



Story County Conservation Trails Master Plan

Story County Conservation (SCC) is in the beginning steps of an update to the Story County Trails Master Plan (Plan). This plan will make recommendations for future improvements and connections to the existing trail systems.

SCC is committed to enhancing outdoor recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Developing a Plan is critical in achieving this goal. The Plan will outline strategies for the creation, improvement, and maintenance of trails throughout Story County, catering to a variety of recreational activities such as hiking, biking, birding, and more.



Existing Story County Parks and Trails



TRAILS SURVEY | TRAILS SOCIAL MAP

Open

### Story County Trails Survey

This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will help the planning team learn about your trail preferences, usage, and priorities. We appreciate your time and interest in improving the Story County Trails System. Be sure to finish all questions as each is important to hearing your input.

Start

## Timeline

- ✓ **Open House - Kick Off**  
Nevada Field House - April 1, 5:30 - 7:30
- ☆ **Public Meeting - Huxley, IA**  
Date and Time - TBD
- ☆ **Public Meeting - Roland, IA**  
Date and Time - TBD

See less

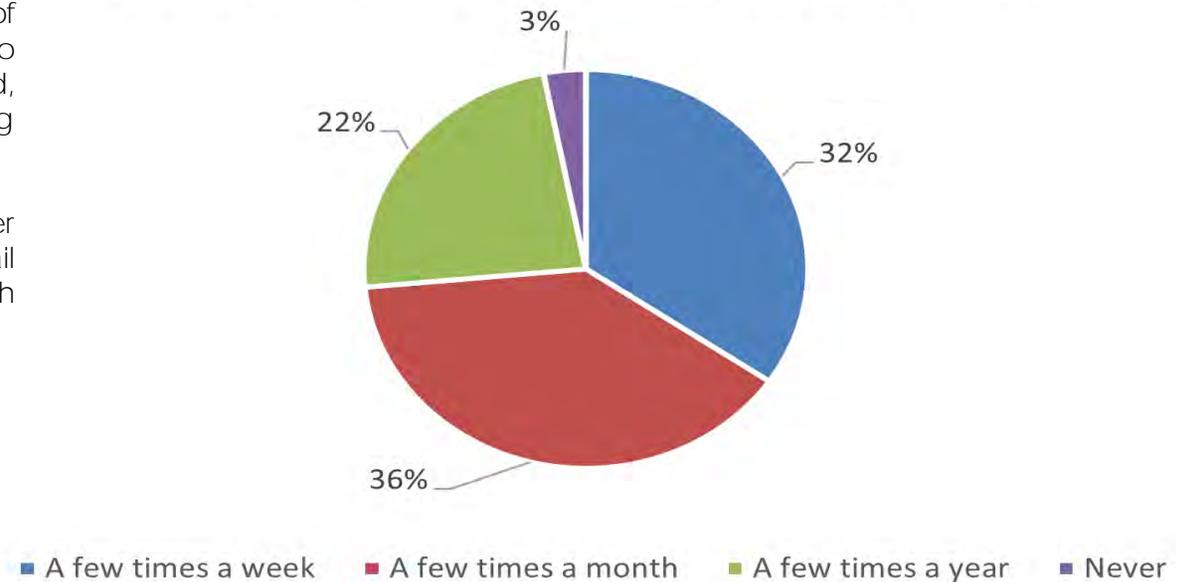
## FREQUENCY OF USE

Of the online survey participants, approximately two-thirds of the respondents use the trail system less than daily. There were follow up questions respondents could answer to indicate why they don't use the trail more frequently. Many answers seem related to convenience, no trailhead nearby, no time, not easily accessible, etc.

Close to half of the survey participants (40%) indicated they do not use the county trail system due to lack of accessibility. That lack of accessibility was related to physical constraints such as not being near a trailhead, not knowing where trailheads are located, or not living close to any of the trails regardless of trailhead locations.

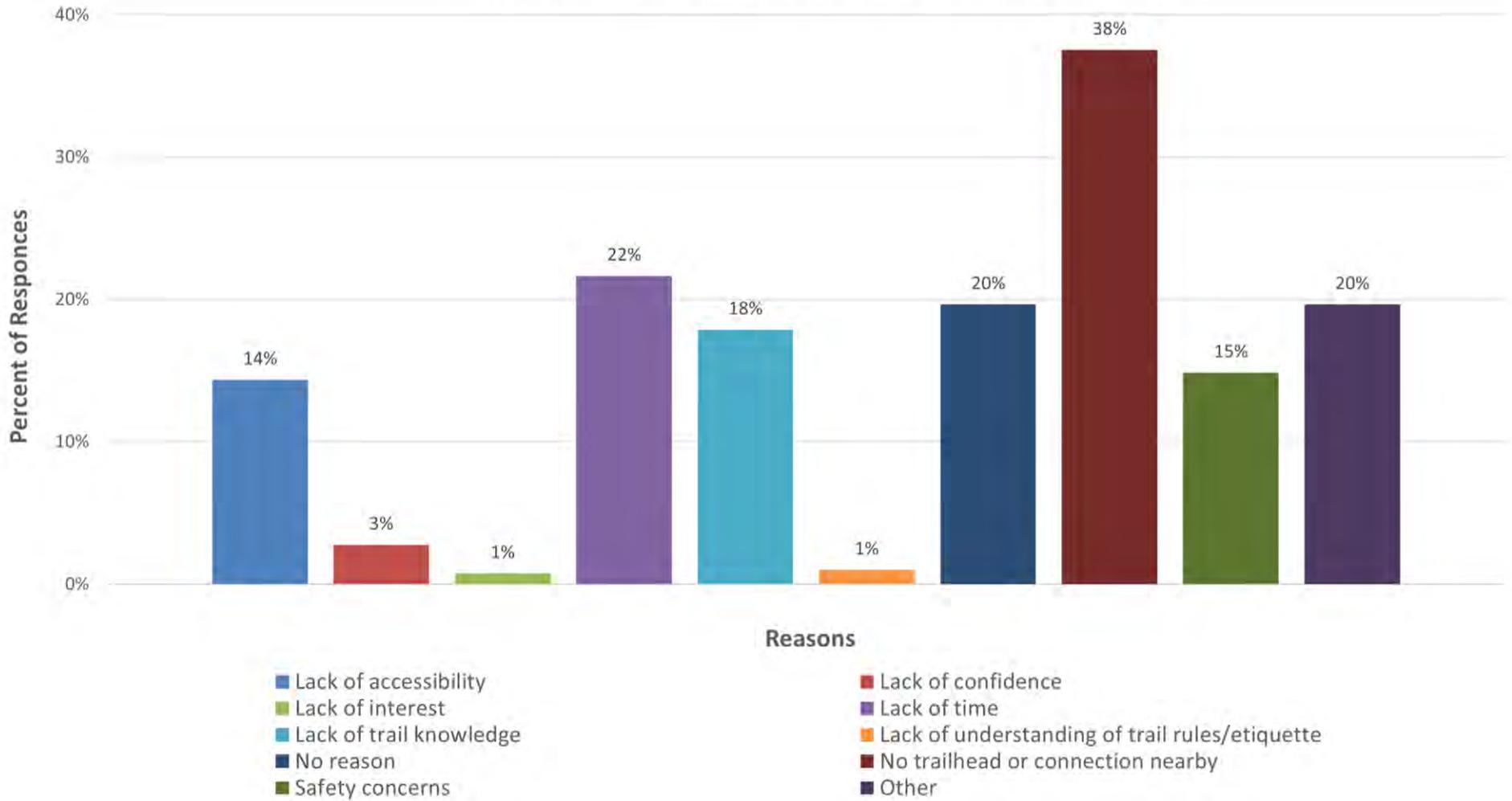
Written comments that were submitted in the other category were overwhelmingly related to trail maintenance, whether it be unpaved, obstructions such as downed trees, broken up concrete, etc.

### How Often Do You Use Story County Trails?



## BARRIERS

### What Prevents You From using the Trail System?

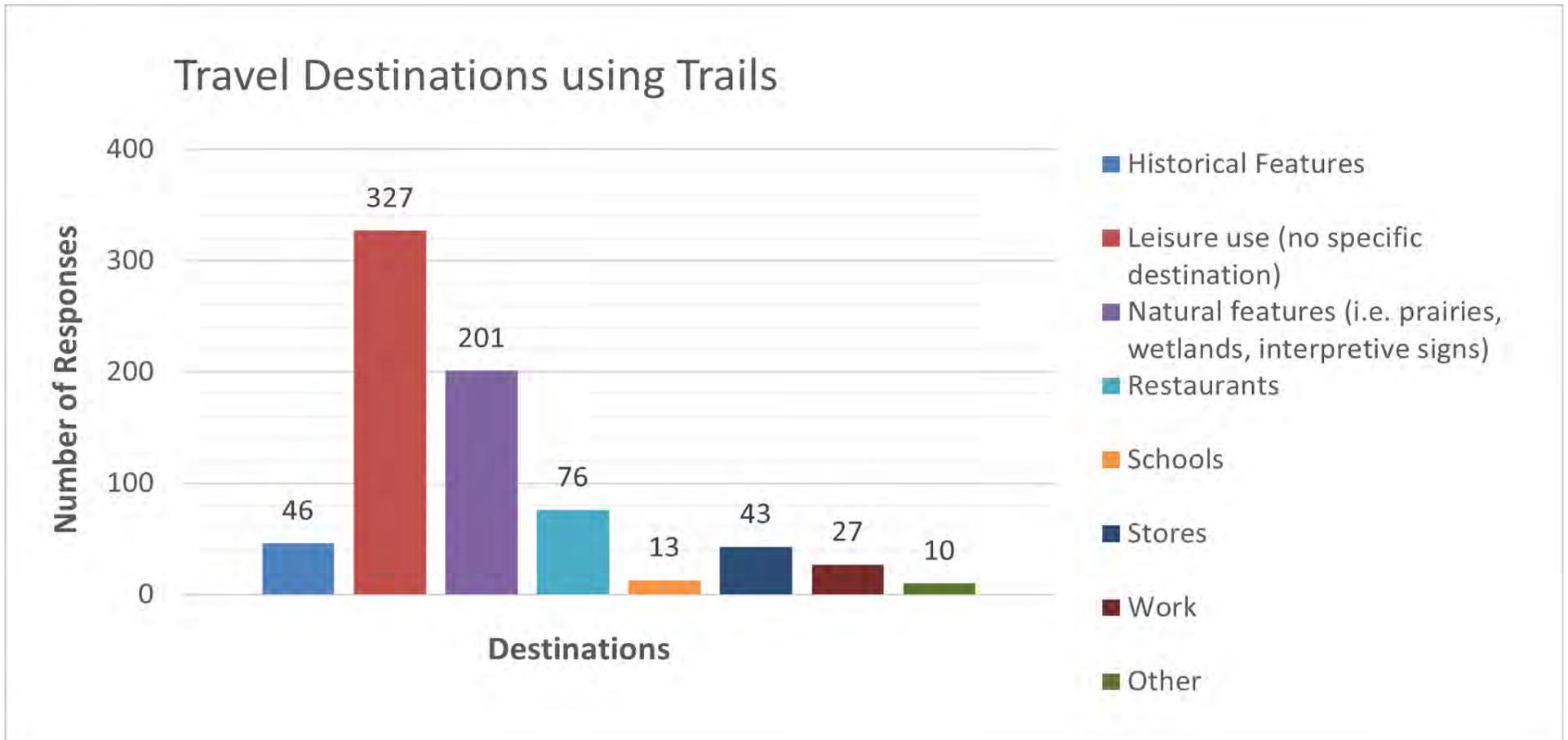


# ENGAGEMENT

## TYPE OF USE

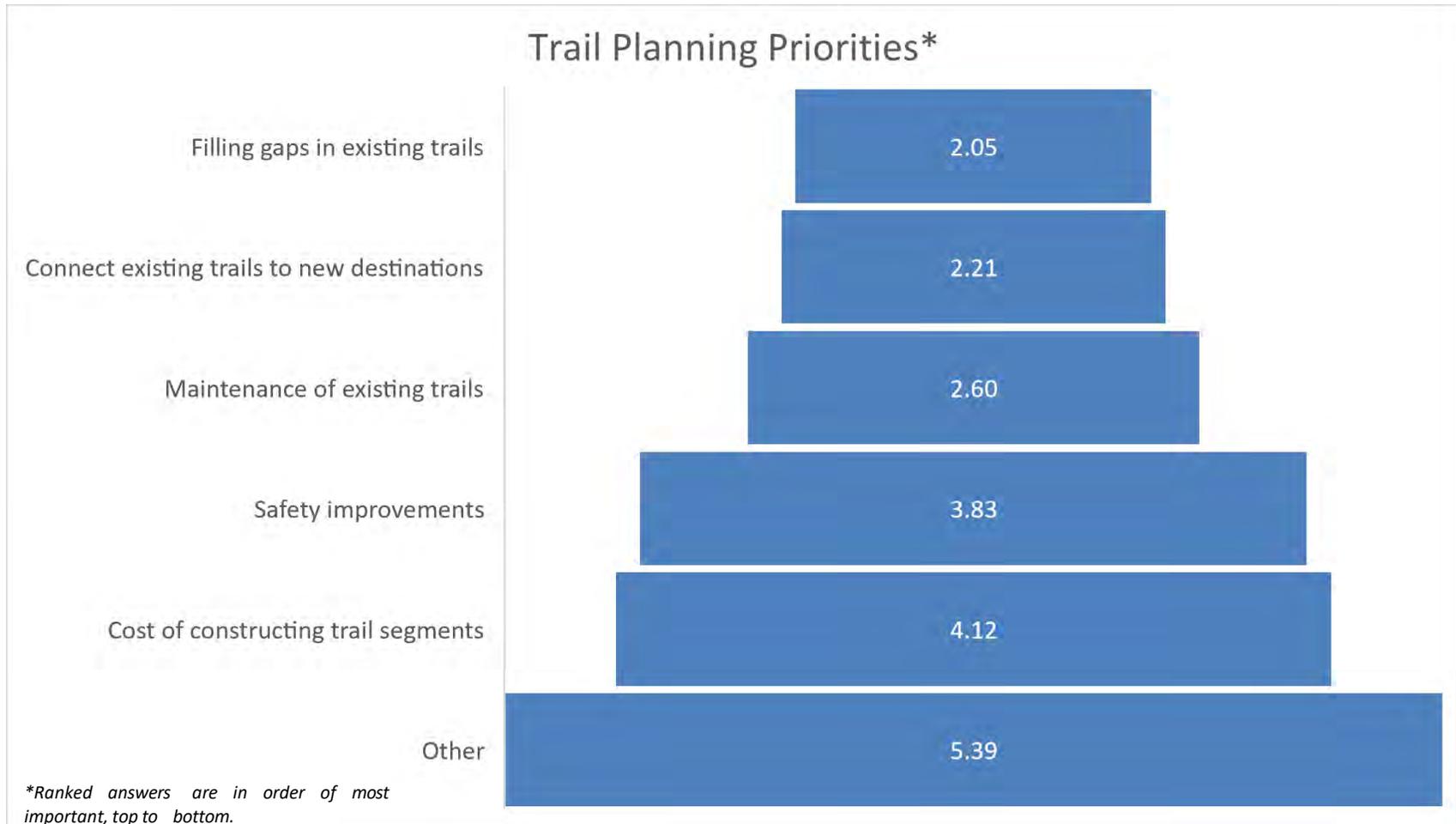
Survey participants were asked how they use the trail systems and where they go on the trails. Survey respondents use the trails in a wide array of methods with walking and biking being the most popular. The majority of those who identified as “other” users took advantage of the county's equestrian trails.

Reasons for why people are using the trails were spread across several user types, but most can be generalized into leisurely and relaxed personal enjoyment.



## PRIORITIES

Respondents identified and rated their planning priorities in terms of improvements to the trails system in Story County. Highest priorities were rated 1, second highest 2, and so on. Averages for the top priorities are illustrated below.

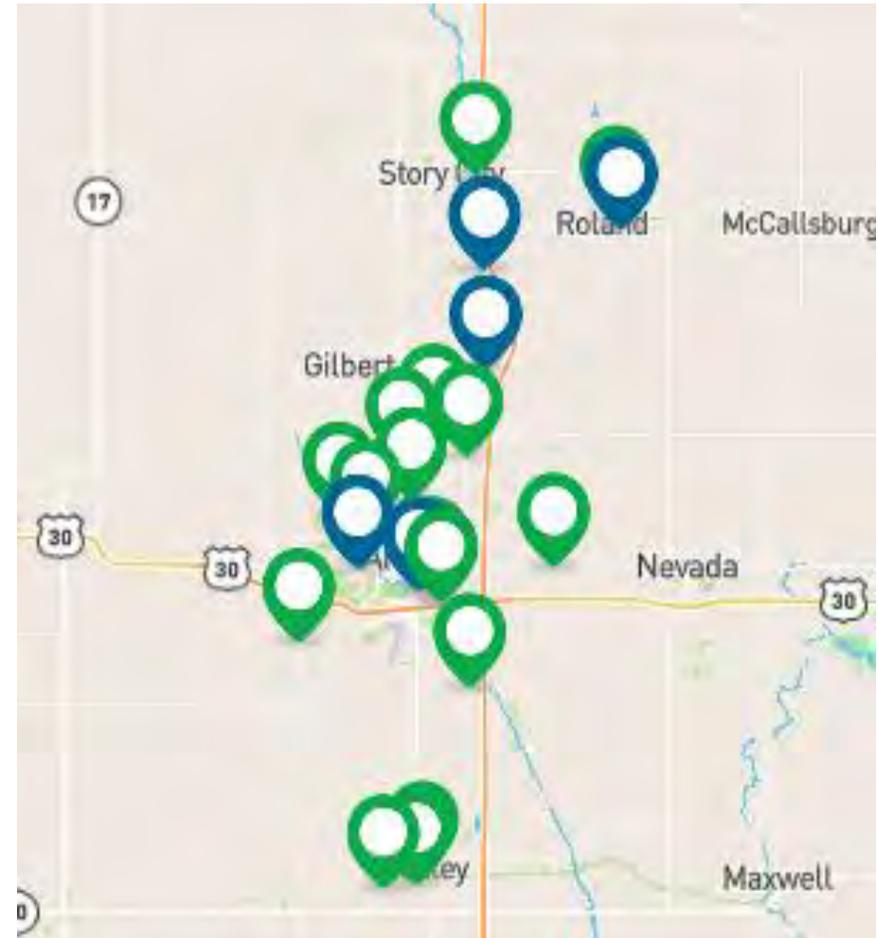
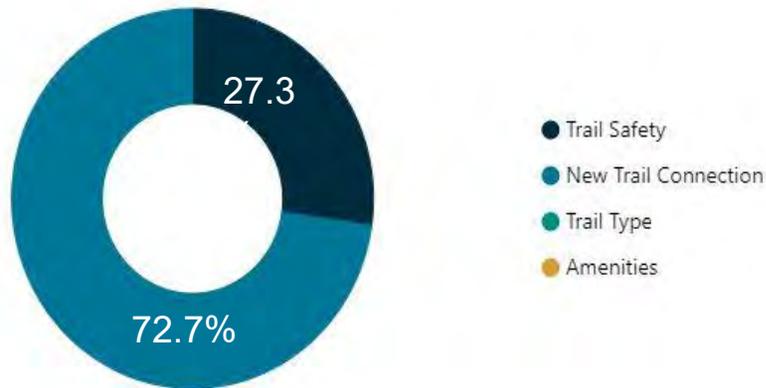


# ENGAGEMENT

## Social Mapping

Online respondents were encouraged to participate by leaving comments via an online interactive mapping option. They were able to leave trail feedback of any topic based on location by dropping a pin on a map and typing in a comment.

This method of engagement saw only a total of nine respondents. However, those nine individuals left a total of 22 comments. Most of the social map comments were related to new trail connections but were dispersed throughout the county. Commenters wanted to see more connections to the Skunk River from South 16<sup>th</sup> Street in Ames, Ada Hayden, and Reactor Woods.





# Goals

# GOALS

## GOALS

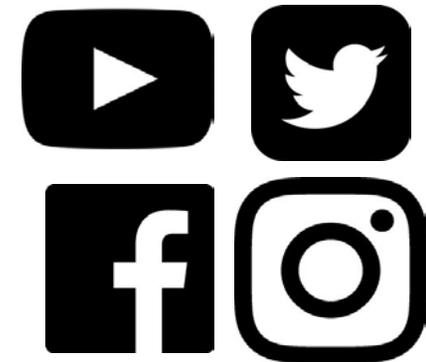
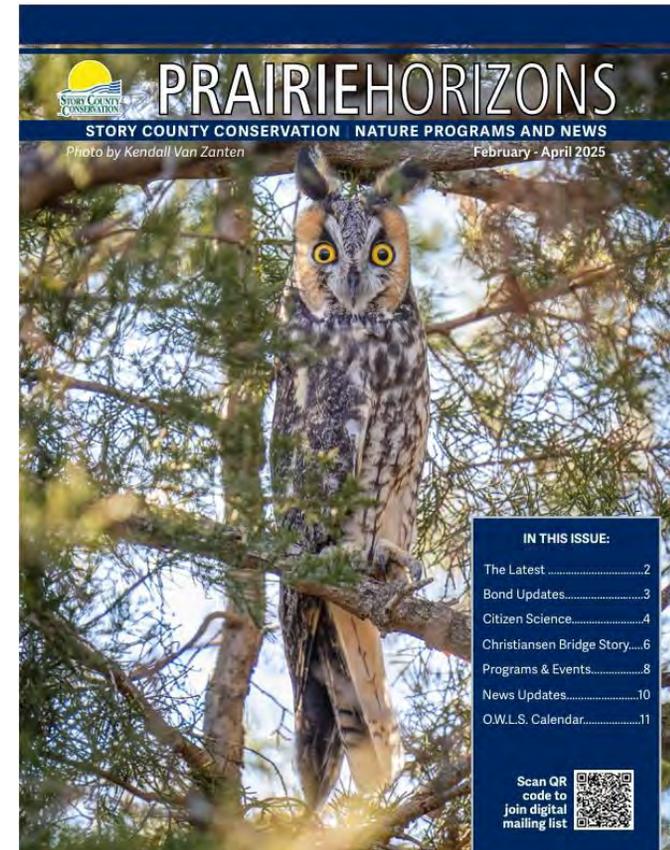
Goals and strategies are policies that will help Story County become a more trail and bikeway-friendly community. As SCC looks forward to future planning efforts this chapter can serve as a guide for areas of focus. Previous county parks and trail planning documents were reviewed to understand the direction SCC has been moving over the years. Those plans, along with the community engagement conducted for the purpose of creating the new Master Plan, have led to the creation of these recommended goals.

### GOAL 1: CONTINUE TO PROMOTE THE USE AND AVAILABILITY OF THE TRAIL SYSTEM

The first goal aims to continue work that is already being done within the current trail system. SCC has a strong and positive social media presence through its webpage and popular services such as Facebook, YouTube, X and Instagram. They publish the quarterly newsletter, Prairie Horizons, and have a new online app, shown on the following page, which illustrates trail systems and user location in a GIS format.

These efforts should be continued but should be reviewed on a regular basis for information that could be added or promoted. For example, 149 respondents indicated they do not use the county trail system due to the lack of a trailhead or trail connection nearby. A future layer could be added to the web app map that shows trailhead locations or where parking is available for trail access.

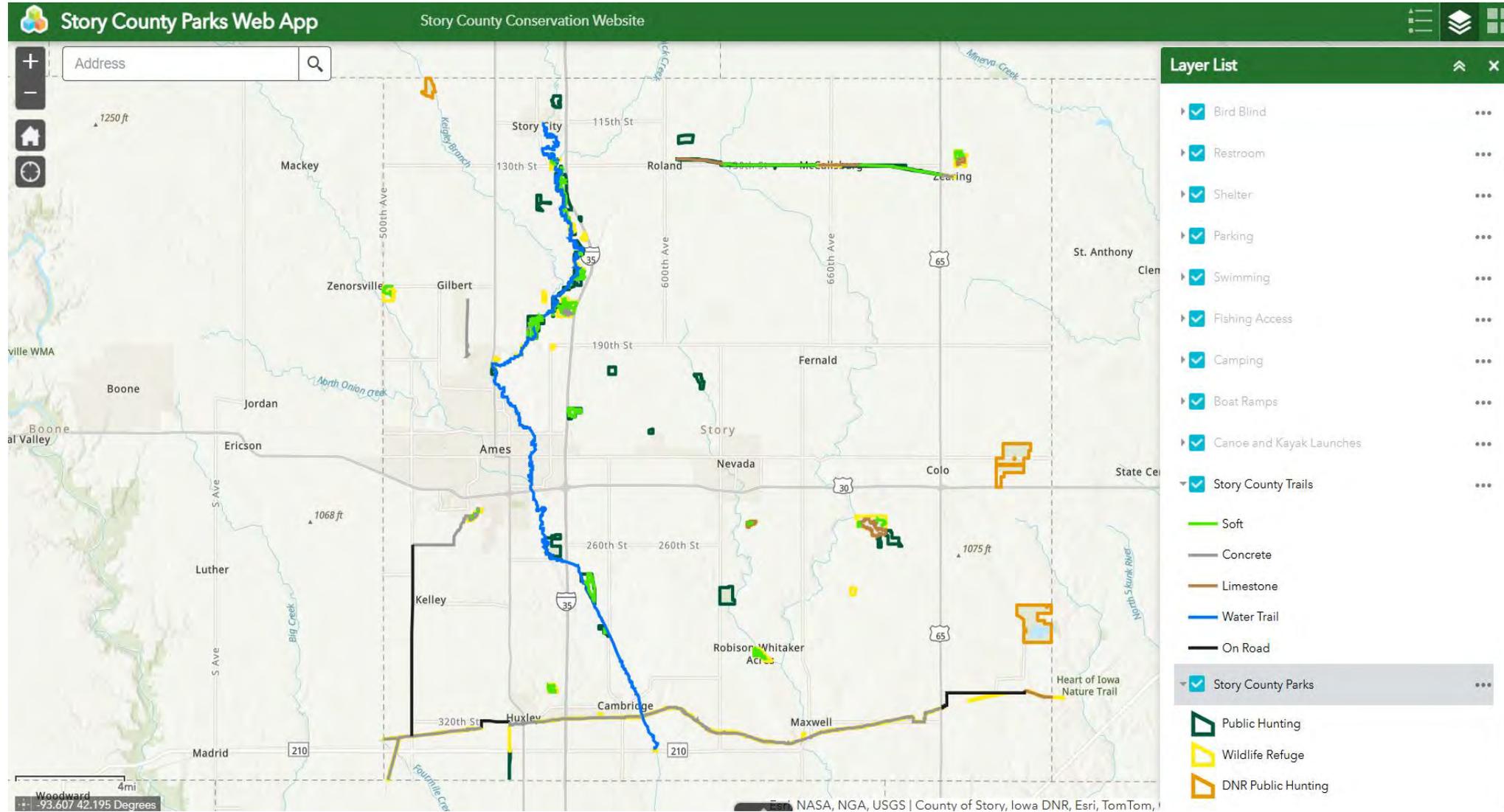
Other answers given were related to the conditions of trails to be improved through general maintenance and cleanup after a storm (snow/ice clearing and trees/debris removal). Social media posts could include more "in the moment" information such as a post related to trail cleanup is underway or a way to report needed maintenance. A reporting app or the use of Survey 123 or similar software would make easy reporting for users. The opportunities for promotions are endless with social media and creative posts.



# GOALS

## GOAL 1 (CONTINUED): MAP EXAMPLE

The mapping promotes awareness by showing locations of parks, amenities, trailheads, etc. [Story County Parks Web App](#)



# GOALS

## GOAL 2: FILL IN GAPS BETWEEN EXISTING TRAILS

The highest priority identified in public comments involved the closure of gaps in existing trails. The Heart of Iowa Nature Trail, as an example, has a few gaps where on-road accommodation is needed for users to continue on the trail. As more families enjoy the trail network, on-road accommodations are not considered nearly as safe as the separated trail. Respondents encouraged eliminating these gaps with trail connections, even if those connections need to follow the road right of way. The physical separation from traffic is desired.

Public comments during this process indicated a strong desire for a separated trail connection along County Highway E-63 (320<sup>th</sup> St., W. 1<sup>st</sup> St. Huxley) in addition to, or in replacement of, the existing bike lanes. Families riding with small children have expressed strong concerns for safety.



Current on-road connection on the west side of Huxley – Image Source: Google Maps (w/bicycling layer)

# GOALS

## GOAL 3: METHODICALLY ADD NEW TRAILS AND CONNECTIONS

As priority projects are completed, the potential for new trail connections for all trail types should be considered throughout the county and re-evaluated to set new priorities. The ideas presented for future connections are general in nature and the list is long. The prioritization of these ideas should align with long-term planning but allow for opportunistic projects that arise due to changes in budgets, available funding, development, or other events that would impact priority planning. Planning long-term for future trails will allow the county to have options as other trails, parks, and amenities are developed.

Many of the connection ideas proposed as part of this plan require sub-area studies to further understand the opportunities and challenges of the particular route corridors. These sub-area studies can be initiated when those routes are considered the possible next series of priority projects.

Some opportunity projects may come as joint ventures with other jurisdictions, cities, adjacent counties, and possibly school districts.



# GOALS

## GOAL 4: IMPROVE WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

The ability to navigate across a trail network is informed by landmarks, natural features, and other visual clues. Wayfinding signage allows users to identify routes to their destinations. It may provide directional information, names of trails, mileage, information regarding bicycle-friendly facilities, and more. Trail-specific wayfinding may be designed in a way that it is located at major entry points and trailheads to provide additional information, including a system map.

There are informational signs that should be considered as well. These categories might include temporary signage, trail etiquette, interpretive, and informational.

Safety and Traffic Control signs are intended to alert trail users to changes in the trail geometry, warning of approaching intersections and regulatory requirements for trail traffic. These signs are common, but compliance is important. The placement and condition of these signs must be continually monitored and updated as a periodic maintenance activity.



Etiquette signs inform trail users of proper behavior when multiple user types are anticipated. Yielding the right-of-way is a courtesy and yet a necessary part of a safe trail experience. The message must be clear and easy to understand. Trail etiquette information should be posted at access points and periodically along popular trails.



# GOALS

## GOAL 4: IMPROVE WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE (CONTINUED)

Interpretive signs provide trail users with information about the surrounding site, ecosystem, history, or cultural significance of an area. Interpretive displays may also be combined with the public wayfinding along the trail. It is recommended to work with subject matter experts familiar with the information that is to be shared, such as historians, ecologists, or artists. The design of the signage should take into consideration the character of the trail and surrounding elements.

Information signs could be as simple as a directional sign or a larger kiosk design that provides users with information to orient themselves, learn of areas of interest, read the rules and regulations of the trail system, and find park hours and amenities. These types of signs should be considered for all trailheads.



# GOALS

## GOAL 5: CONTINUE CREATING A MULTI-USE TRAIL SYSTEM

Generally, SCC has developed trails for a variety of users such as equestrian, hikers, and snowmobiles. While some trail types may be more rare than others, they do exist. One way to ensure the continuance of multi-use trails is to take a multi-use design approach to trails. This goal considers multi-use trails as the partnership of granular trails or natural surface trails either on their own or with paved trails. Multi-use trails are generally used for hiking, mountain biking, or horseback riding. They can be designed as their own paths and can extend into a larger connected system when placed adjacent to a paved trail that is more likely to accommodate walkers, bicycles, joggers, and ADA mobility devices.

A multi-use trail system is a practical way to manage, maintain and reduce environmental disturbance, and accommodate more user groups. There are exceptions when single-use trails should be considered. However, there are no set guidelines for when a shared-use or single-use approach to trail design is most appropriate. The county should determine on a case-by-base basis and conduct site-specific evaluations of user group needs.

Results of public engagement and the online survey supports this goal through the many equestrian related comments that indicate a desire not only for more trails but also amenities that would enhance their experience. Anticipated use levels, cost and management implications, terrain, location, environmental considerations, and the need for specialized or more technical trails are factors that should be considered when determining whether shared-use or single-use is appropriate and sustainable.

Another way to create a sustainable trail system may be to plan for more looped trails that are shorter in distance. Trail loops can be used to help accommodate multiple user groups. A multi-use trail loop may offer more specialized trail experiences and meet the need for more challenging and technical trail experiences.



# GOALS

## GOAL 6: PLAN FOR AND PROVIDE AMENITIES FOR TRAIL USERS

A trail mapping app, wayfinding signage, and water stations were the top three desired amenities based on survey responses. The Story County trails online map app was not yet live when the survey was active. This is a useful feature that can continue to be improved, and more information added as needed.

The top response for reasons why respondents did not use a trail system was lack of trailheads or access at a convenient location. The first task is to determine if there is a lack of trailheads, or a lack of knowledge of where the trailheads are. The mapping application should aid in the latter. SCC should also inventory types of trailheads and access points and what amenities might exist or should exist at each one. Creating a hierarchy of where and what features to provide would allow trail users to have a general expectation of what they will have access to along the trails.

Amenities can include water stations, bike repair stations, restrooms, parking, benches, and other features. Amenities dependent on utility infrastructure, such as restrooms and water features, could be limited to major trailhead locations. Simpler amenities like benches are a reasonable addition along the trail system and provide comfortable areas for breaks, allowing users to recharge and enjoy their surroundings.

Opportunities to identify historic and cultural features along trails should be a continued priority, as well as opportunities for public art along the trails to further that interpretation and enhance the user experience. Amenities add expense to trail development and construction; however, they also enhance user experience. These enhancements not only improve the functionality of the trail but also foster a greater appreciation and sense of place, which encourages responsible outdoor recreation.



## GOAL 7: PROMOTE TRAIL SAFETY

Continuous review and consideration of trail safety is important to control potential liability concerns. Trail safety can be achieved through intentional trail design details, signage, and messaging. Story County Conservation's social media presence and Prairie Horizon newsletter offer easy ways to proliferate trail safety information.



### Minimize Conflicts with Motorized Vehicles

- Separate trails from roads when possible
- Review micro-mobility and motorized device policies as technology & popularity advances
- Review all trail/roadway crossings for appropriate signage/marketing/ and possible signalization



### Routine Trail Maintenance

- Seasonal routine daily/weekly maintenance
- Create an online reporting feature
- Create a periodic inspection and maintenance response plan
- Follow the maintenance response plan



### Trail Safety

- Lighting at Trailheads
- Emergency Call Boxes
- Bike Repair Stations
- Trail Etiquette Signage and Materials

# Proposed Regional Trail Connections and Extensions



# PROPOSED REGIONAL CONNECTIONS

## SURROUNDING COUNTIES: CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE STORY COUNTY MAP

All the surrounding counties have regional trail efforts that can inform the potential trail extensions within Story County.

Hamilton County has the JewEllsworth Trail and Jewell Jubilee Trail as existing trails. They desire to extend the trail system south to Little Wall Lake and ultimately to Randall and Story City. Therefore, extending the Praeri Rail Trail to Story City and a new trail from Story City to Ames would seem like logical extensions.

Hardin and Marshall Counties are focused on completing the Iowa River's Edge Trail. The former rail line that is now the Praeri Rail Trail would have linked to the Iowa River's Edge Trail just northeast of Marshalltown.

Marshall County will be the final extension of the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail.

Polk County Conservation could potentially extend a trail in partnership with SCC between Alleman and Huxley to connect to the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail.

Boone County has several planned trails, notably a possible connection toward Ames.

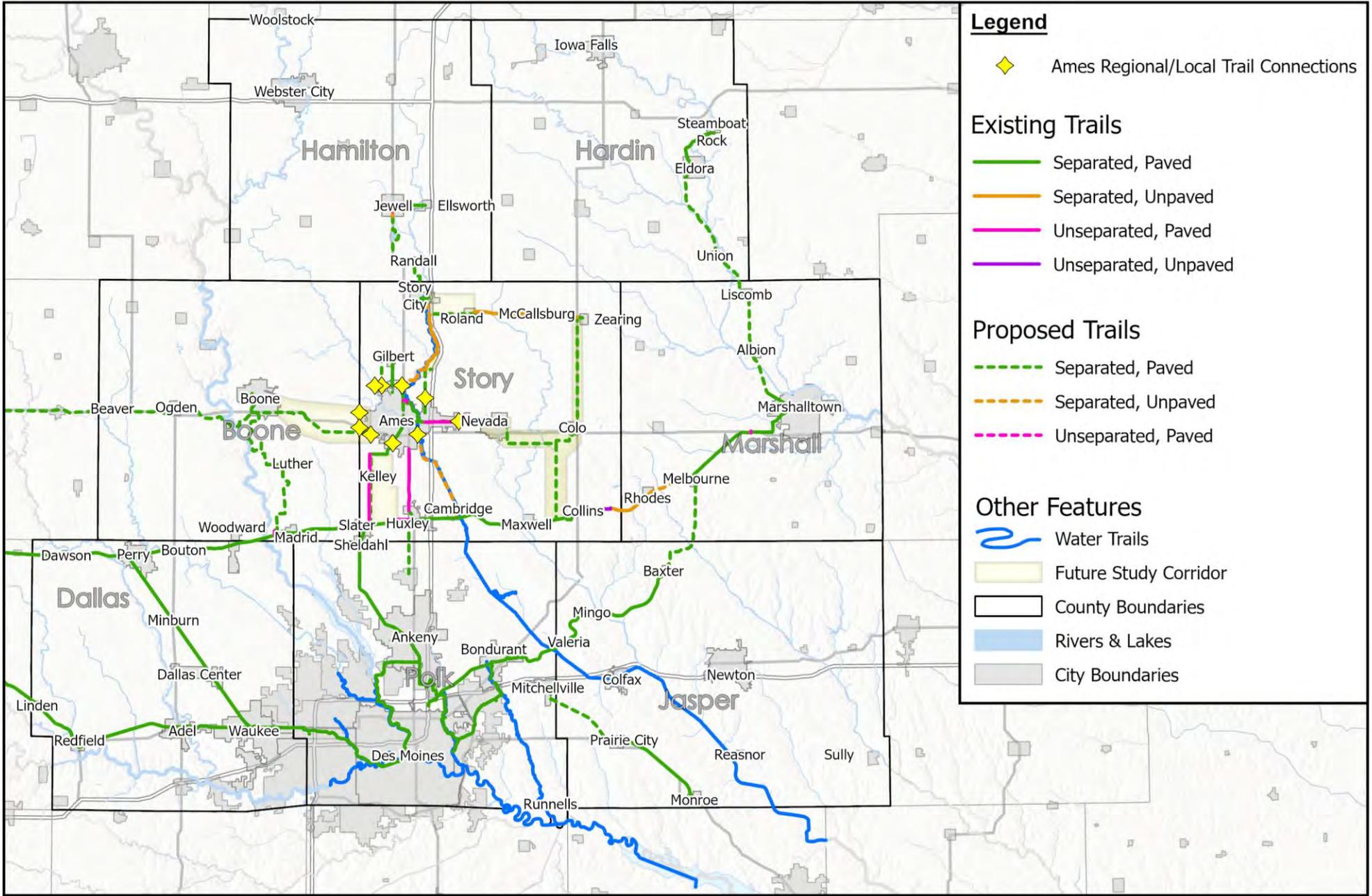
These trails, plus other desirable routes between SCC Parks, natural areas, and communities, are depicted in the map on the following page.



JewEllsworth Trail in Hamilton County



Melbourne to Marshalltown, Marshall County – Image Source: DMAMPO Data Bike



**Legend**

◆ Ames Regional/Local Trail Connections

**Existing Trails**

- Separated, Paved
- Separated, Unpaved
- Unseparated, Paved
- Unseparated, Unpaved

**Proposed Trails**

- - - Separated, Paved
- - - Separated, Unpaved
- - - Unseparated, Paved

**Other Features**

- ~ Water Trails
- Future Study Corridor
- County Boundaries
- Rivers & Lakes
- City Boundaries



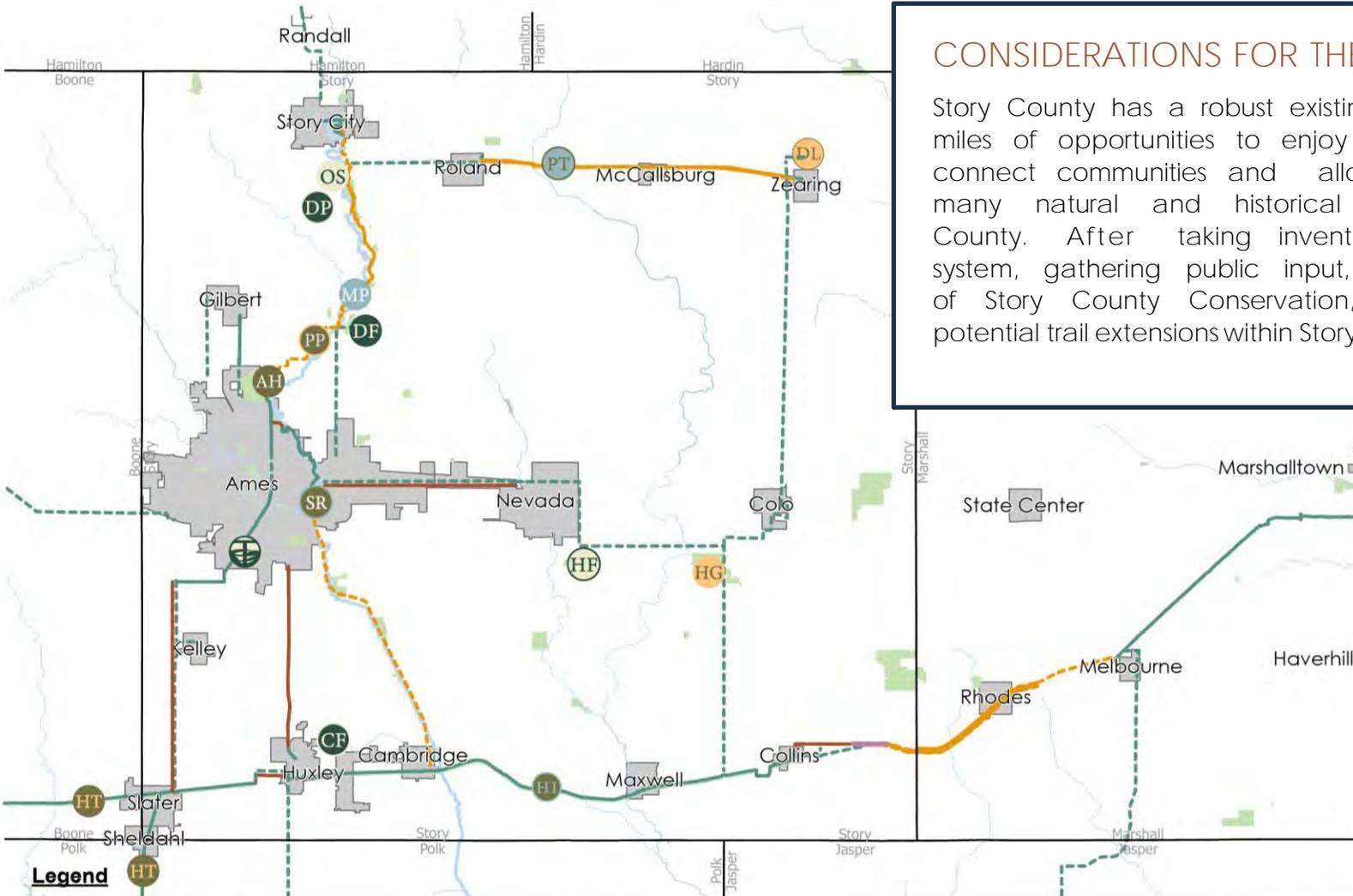
# Proposed Story County Trails



# PROPOSED STORY COUNTY TRAIL PROJECTS

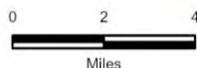
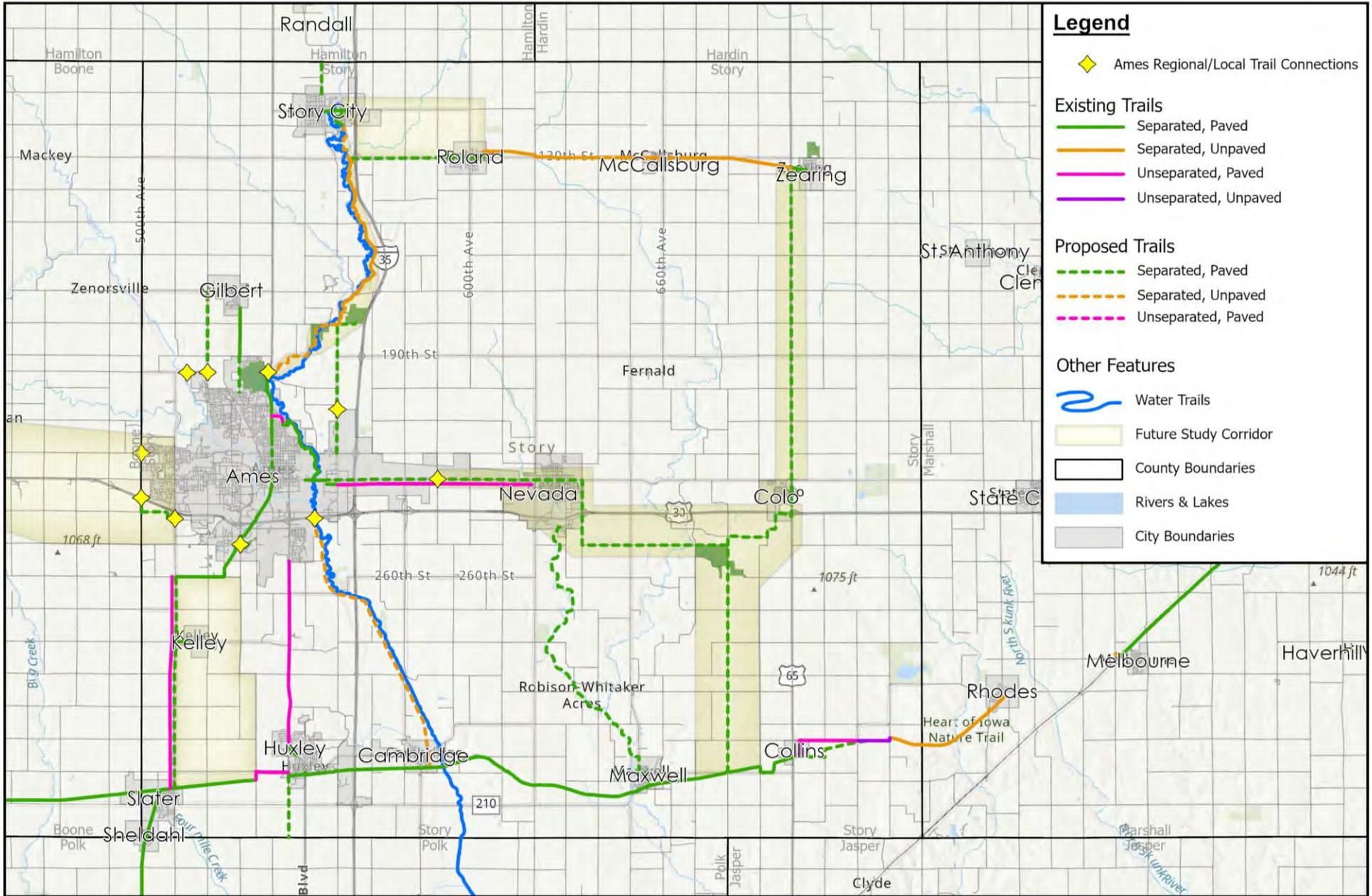
## CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE STORY COUNTY MAP

Story County has a robust existing trail system that provides miles of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. Trails should connect communities and allow users to access the many natural and historical features throughout the County. After taking inventory of the existing trail system, gathering public input, and reviewing the goals of Story County Conservation, the following future and potential trail extensions within Story County are identified.



### Legend

PP Peterson Park	HI Heart of Iowa Nature Trail	Tedesco Park	Water Trails	Proposed Separated, Unpaved
AH Ada Hayden Park	MP McFarland Park	DP Doolittle Prairie	City Boundaries	Proposed Separated, Paved
DL Dakins Lake	SR Skunk River Access	DF Deppe Family Conservation	Public Land	Existing Separated, Unpaved
HG Hickory Grove	PT Praeri Rail Trail	HF Hertz Family Woods	County Boundaries	Existing Separated, Paved
HT High Trestle Trail	OS Osheim Prairie & Slough	CF Christiansen Forest		Existing Unseparated, Paved
				Existing Unseparated, Unpaved



## Story County Trails

Story County Trail Plan | Story County, Iowa | 9/30/2025



# PROPOSED COUNTY TRAIL CONNECTIONS

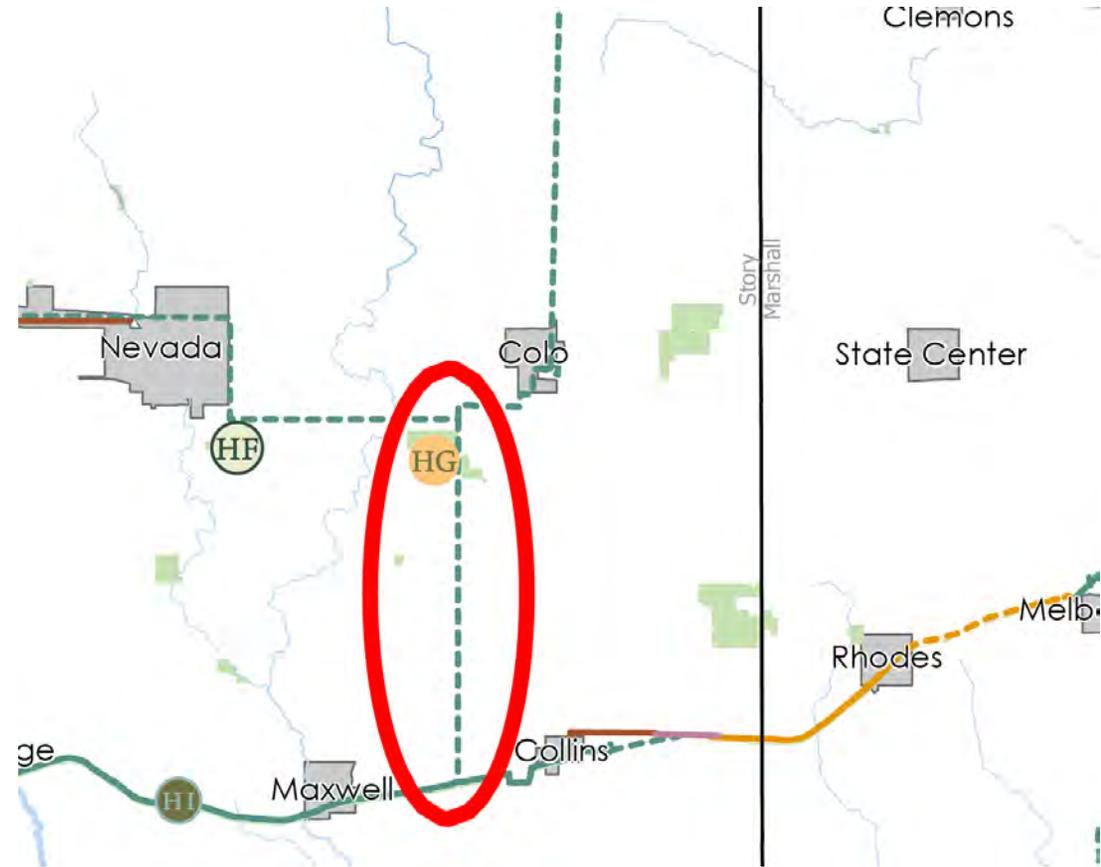
## HEART OF IOWA NATURE TRAIL TO HICKORY GROVE

As the county's largest park, Hickory Grove Park has many amenities offering year-round use. This park should be considered an essential trail destination. Extensions to Colo and Nevada would connect to nearby populations.

This is an area that has been identified as needing further study for a trail route. 680<sup>th</sup> Avenue is approximately halfway between the trailheads in Maxwell and Collins providing direct access to Hickory Grove Park from the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail.

### Legend

- |                               |                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| PP Peterson Park              | DF Deppe Family Conservation      |
| AH Ada Hayden Park            | HF Hertz Family Woods             |
| DL Dakins Lake                | CF Christiansen Forest            |
| HG Hickory Grove              | --- Proposed Separated, Paved     |
| HT High Trestle Trail         | - - - Proposed Separated, Unpaved |
| PT Praeri Rail Trail          | — Existing Separated, Unpaved     |
| HI Heart of Iowa Nature Trail | — Existing Separated, Paved       |
| MP McFarland Park             | — Existing Un-separated, Paved    |
| SR Skunk River Access         | — Existing Un-separated, Unpaved  |
| Tedesco Park                  | Public Land                       |
| OS Osheim Prairie & Slough    | Water Trails                      |
| DP Doolittle Prairie          | City Boundaries                   |
|                               | County Boundaries                 |



# PROPOSED COUNTY TRAIL CONNECTIONS

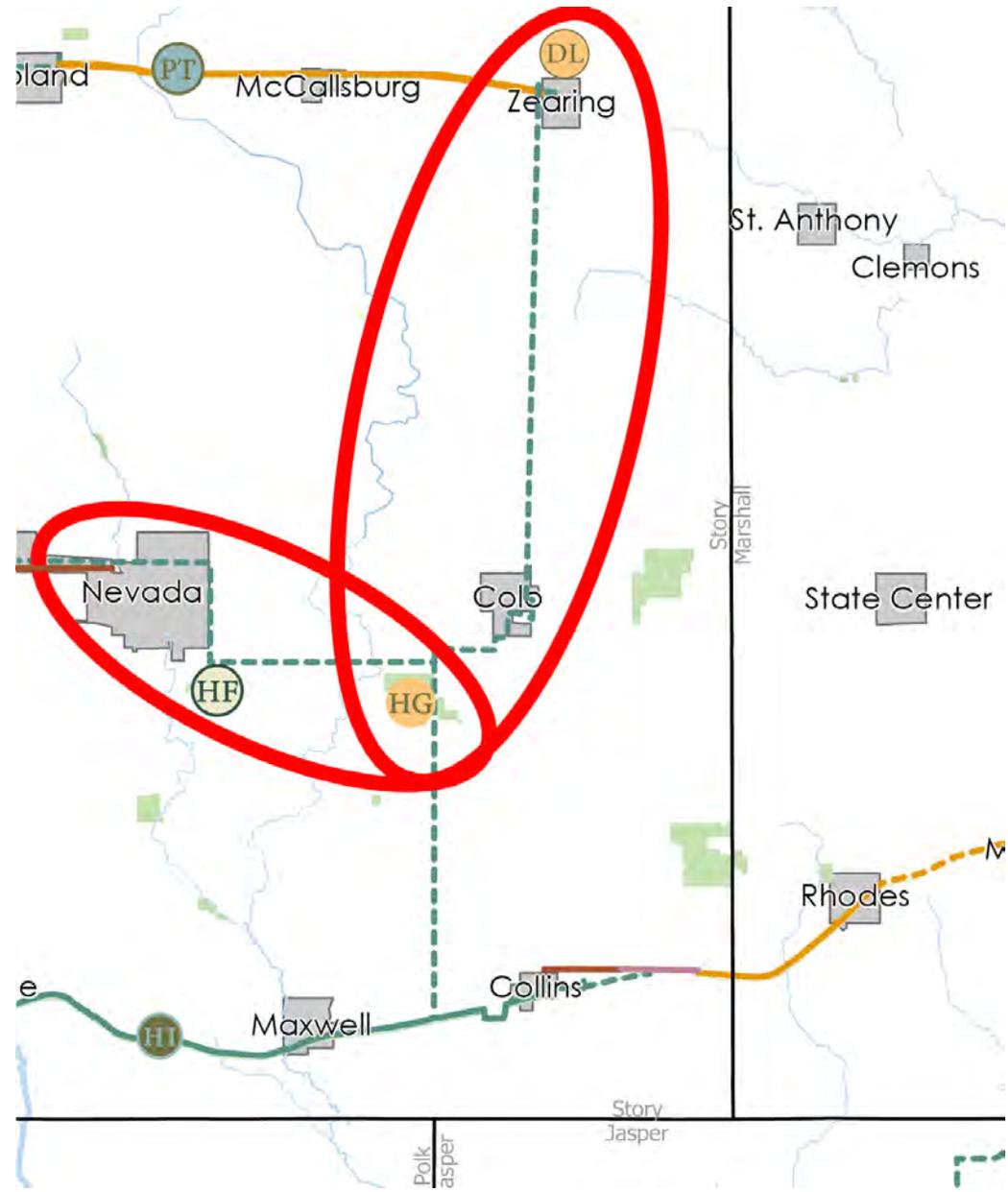
## HICKORY GROVE PARK TO DAKINS LAKE

Dakins Lake is in northeast Story County and allows year-round use like Hickory Grove Park. A trail connection to Dakins Lake from Colo would allow the completion of a county-wide north-south trail.

The final route should pass through Colo and Zearing to connect to the Praeri Rail Trail. Again, this is an area that has been identified as needing further study to determine a trail route.

## HICKORY GROVE PARK TO NEVADA

Hickory Grove Park has many year-round amenities for outdoor enthusiasts to take advantage of and is located within a short trip by road and trail to Nevada and Colo. Direct connections between these two communities and Hickory Grove Park should be given strong consideration when future improvements are planned within this area.



### Legend

- |                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Peterson Park              | Deppe Family Conservation      |
| Ada Hayden Park            | Hertz Family Woods             |
| Dakins Lake                | Christiansen Forest            |
| Hickory Grove              | Proposed Separated, Paved      |
| High Trestle Trail         | Proposed Separated, Unpaved    |
| Praeri Rail Trail          | Existing Separated, Unpaved    |
| Heart of Iowa Nature Trail | Existing Separated, Paved      |
| McFarland Park             | Existing Un-separated, Paved   |
| Skunk River Access         | Existing Un-separated, Unpaved |
| Tedesco Park               | Public Land                    |
| Osheim Prairie & Slough    | Water Trails                   |
| Doolittle Prairie          | City Boundaries                |
|                            | County Boundaries              |

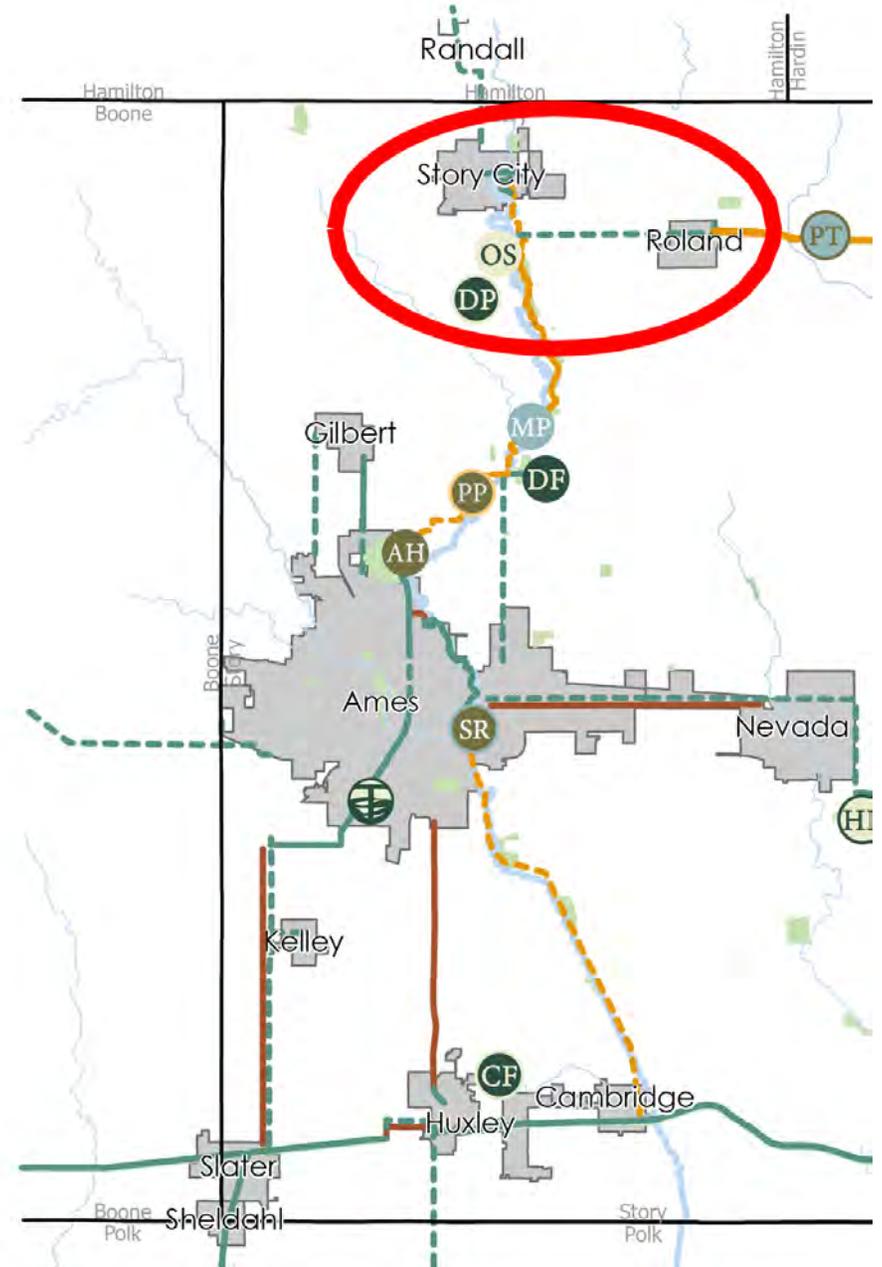
# PROPOSED COUNTY TRAIL CONNECTIONS

## ROLAND AND STORY CITY CONNECTIONS

A trail connection between the cities of Story City and Roland is a highly requested connection in the northwest corner of the County. This new trail would extend the Praeri Rail Trail towards a larger vision of a county-wide trail loop.

This segment of the trail is identified as an area that needs further study to define the route.

It will be important when planning the location of the trail to consider the type of users that may utilize this segment. Story City and Roland are a consolidated school district and share many amenities between the two cities, like the community pool and public golf course. There is the potential for this trail segment to be safe and highly used by school-aged users for social and recreational uses.



### Legend

- |                            |                               |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Peterson Park              | Deppe Family Conservation     |
| Ada Hayden Park            | Hertz Family Woods            |
| Dakins Lake                | Christiansen Forest           |
| Hickory Grove              | Proposed Separated, Paved     |
| High Trestle Trail         | Proposed Separated, Unpaved   |
| Praeri Rail Trail          | Existing Separated, Unpaved   |
| Heart of Iowa Nature Trail | Existing Separated, Paved     |
| McFarland Park             | Existing Un-separated, Paved  |
| Skunk River Access         | Existing Unseparated, Unpaved |
| Tedesco Park               | Public Land                   |
| Osheim Prairie & Slough    | Water Trails                  |
| Doolittle Prairie          | City Boundaries               |
|                            | County Boundaries             |

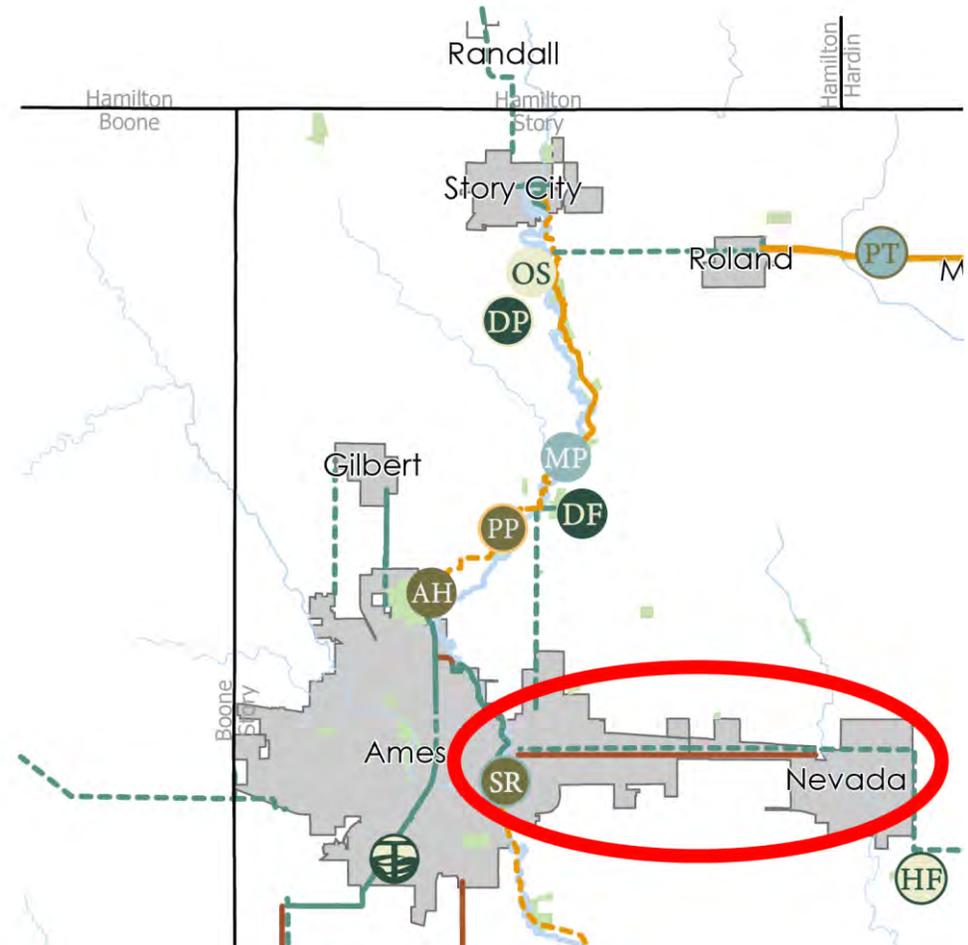
# PROPOSED COUNTY TRAIL CONNECTIONS

## AMES TO NEVADA CONNECTION

Ames to Nevada is a needed connection between two of the most populated cities in Story County. This section of land was annexed between the two cities for business development in 2010 and therefore the planning of this trail should be a priority effort lead by these two communities with support from Story County. There are route options for where this connection could be made. This connection should be a paved and separated route offset from existing roads, given the eastward growth of the City of Ames and the amount of automobile traffic between the two cities.

### Legend

- |                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Peterson Park              | Deppe Family Conservation      |
| Ada Hayden Park            | Hertz Family Woods             |
| Dakins Lake                | Christiansen Forest            |
| Hickory Grove              | Proposed Separated, Paved      |
| High Trestle Trail         | Proposed Separated, Unpaved    |
| Praeri Rail Trail          | Existing Separated, Unpaved    |
| Heart of Iowa Nature Trail | Existing Separated, Paved      |
| McFarland Park             | Existing Un-separated, Paved   |
| Skunk River Access         | Existing Un-separated, Unpaved |
| Tedesco Park               | Public Land                    |
| Osheim Prairie & Slough    | Water Trails                   |
| Doolittle Prairie          | City Boundaries                |
|                            | County Boundaries              |



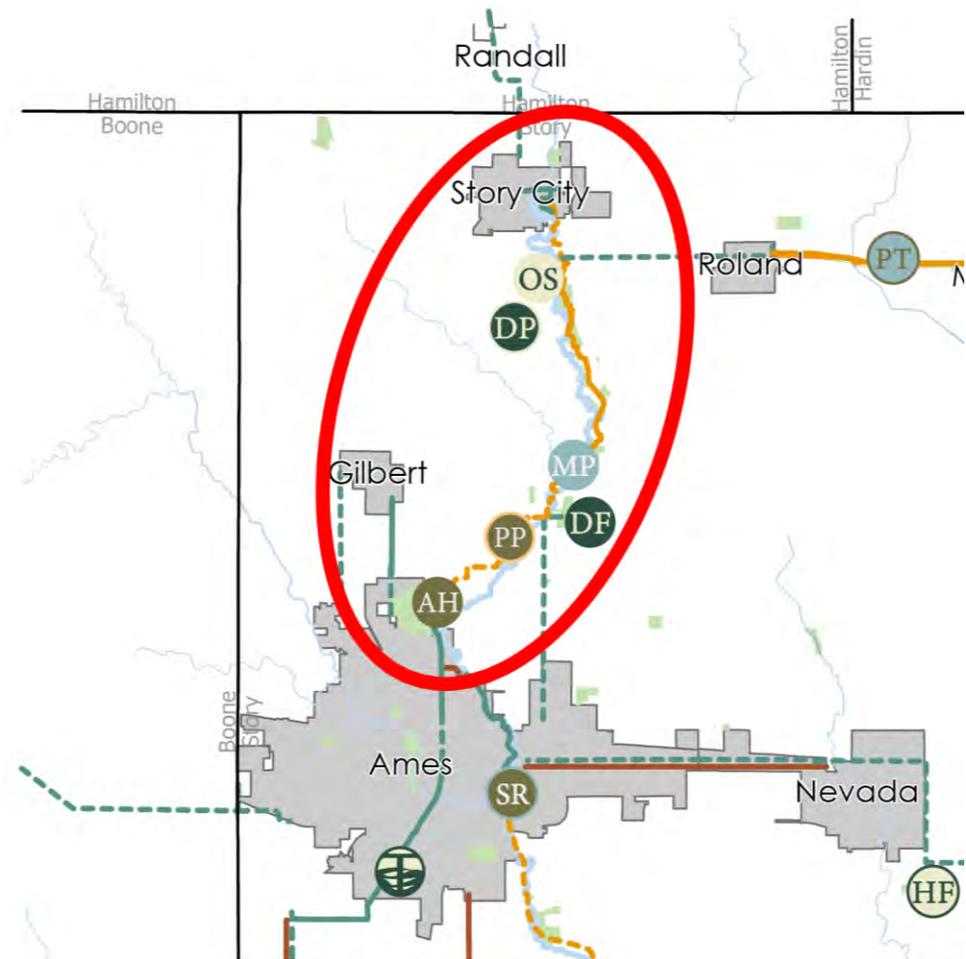
# PROPOSED COUNTY TRAIL CONNECTIONS

## STORY CITY TO GILBERT TO AMES CONNECTION

This is an area that could provide a densely populated area of the County to be more connected. Proposed trails show a route between Ames and Gilbert and a separate trail route between Ames and Story City. A connection between Gilbert and Story City could be considered in future planning. This would allow a local looped trail system anchored by population centers, Ada Hayden Heritage Park, and McFarland Park.

This trail connection is in proximity to the Skunk River Water Trail. Special attention should be given to planning for connections and amenities that may be unique to their locations; such as kayak racks, bike racks, or possibly lock boxes for use. This creates a unique opportunity for multi-use of trails in one outing.

Other benefits of a looped trail connection between these three towns would allow for bike commuting to and from work, several existing county parks and amenities, opportunities for new economic endeavors that cater to trail traffic, and more.



### Legend

- |                               |                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| PP Peterson Park              | DF Deppe Family Conservation      |
| AH Ada Hayden Park            | HF Hertz Family Woods             |
| DL Dakins Lake                | CF Christiansen Forest            |
| HG Hickory Grove              | - - - Proposed Separated, Paved   |
| HT High Trestle Trail         | - - - Proposed Separated, Unpaved |
| PT Praeri Rail Trail          | — Existing Separated, Unpaved     |
| HI Heart of Iowa Nature Trail | — Existing Separated, Paved       |
| MP McFarland Park             | — Existing Un-separated, Paved    |
| SR Skunk River Access         | — Existing Un-separated, Unpaved  |
| Tedesco Park                  | Public Land                       |
| OS Osheim Prairie & Slough    | Water Trails                      |
| DP Doolittle Prairie          | City Boundaries                   |
|                               | County Boundaries                 |

# PROPOSED COUNTY TRAIL CONNECTIONS

## ROUTE INFLUENCERS

A route influence is any element that would play a role in determining the most suitable and efficient route for the trail to achieve its objectives, such as recreation and conservation. A route influencer could be any natural, man-made, or social element that affects the alignment, design, or type of a trail. Familiar route influencers might be McFarland Park, Tedesco Environmental Learning Corridor, Peterson Park, and Ada Hayden Heritage Park.

There are many features within the county that may be lesser known or maybe haven't been given consideration as a route influencer. As future trails are planned and features acquired or enhanced throughout the county, consideration should be given to how these influencers and destinations should impact trail planning. Type of trail and trail user type should be given just as much consideration as the route. Some lesser known but valuable influencers for trails to travel to and through might be:

- Deppe Family Conservation Area
- Christiansen Forest Preserve
- Hertz Family Woods & Nature Preserve
- Osheim Prairie & Slough Preserve



# WATER TRAIL ENHANCEMENTS

## THE SKUNK RIVER WATER TRAIL

The Skunk River Water Trail is a 33-mile water trail that runs the length of the county north to south. SCC has worked to create 11 access points for paddlers. This water trail continues south into Polk County, which can tie into other regional water trails.

Public comments included considerations for further access improvements. Attention should also be given to the interaction with other trail types. The intersection of the Skunk River Water Trail and the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail offers a unique opportunity near a historic and aesthetic bridge.

A wider scope should be considered regarding improvements along the Skunk River. Beyond recreational improvements, win-win scenarios should be explored that also enhance water quality and habitat.

The Skunk River watershed offers an opportunity to establish a mitigation bank under the management of SCC. Mitigation banks are the favored method to mitigate for wetland and stream impacts from a variety of projects. Story County could use the credits to mitigate their own projects, or they could sell the credits to other entities for other projects within the watershed that have impacts. In any case the conservation mission of protecting and enhancing habitat and water quality is fundamental in the creation of a mitigation bank.

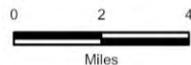
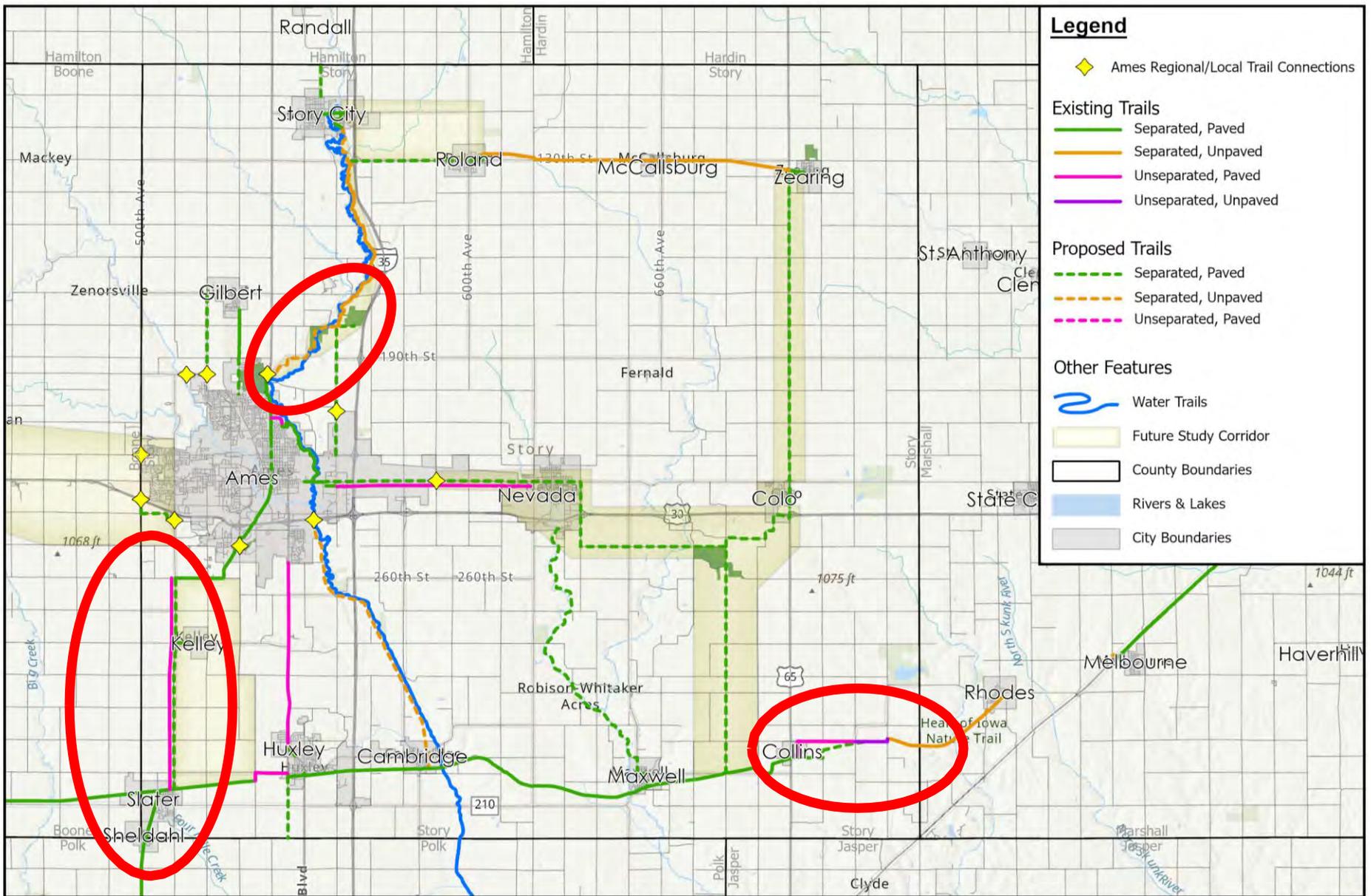
Story County  
Water Trail Map





# Priority Projects: SCC Action Items

# PRIORITY PROJECTS: SCC Action Items



# HEART OF IOWA NATURE TRAIL

## COLLINS TO THE EAST COUNTY LINE

The Heart of Iowa Nature Trail was paved from the Skunk River to Collins in 2024, which leaves Collins to the county line as the last unpaved section in Story County. Portions of the former Milwaukee Road grade are gone, so some right-of-way acquisition is needed, and the trail will route around those areas. This project was included in the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail Master Plan with a total project cost of approximately \$1.4 million in 2018. Significant inflation in both construction costs and land values increases that to a \$2 million project in 2025 dollars.

All funding streams should be considered for application for this trail segment, as it is part of both the American Discovery Trail, and the Great American Rail Trail. It is also a significant step in creating one of the final planned Central Iowa Trail Loops that extends the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail to connect to the Chichaqua Valley Trail and the Highway 330/Linn Creek Trail in Marshall County.



# AMES TO SLATER

## COUNTY HIGHWAY R-38 SIDE PATH

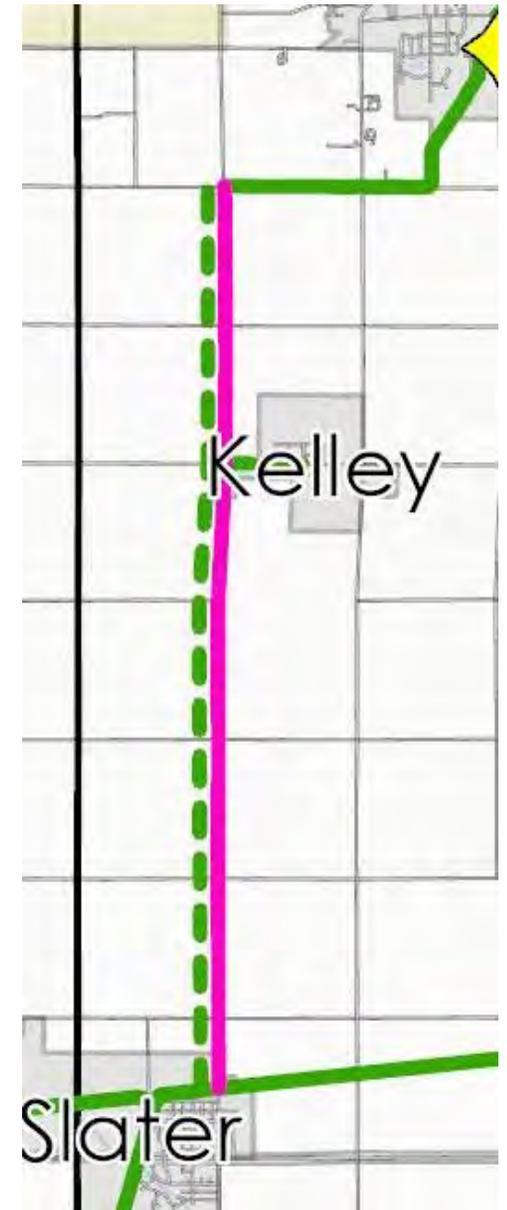
County Highway R-38 has included bike lanes for many years to connect Ames to Slater. However, with the extension of the trail paving from the Tedesco Environmental Learning Corridor to R-38 on the north side of 260<sup>th</sup> Street, the remaining on street trail gap is down to 6.5 miles.

At the in-person public meetings, this corridor received the most comments. Everyone appreciates the presence of the bike lanes, but only the “strong and fearless” cyclists will typically ride them. Even very experienced riders mention that the ride is continually tense and uncomfortable.

Many public meeting attendees wanted an off road, side path added along R-38.

Ideally, additional easement or right-of-way would be purchased from adjacent landowners to allow the trail to be constructed on the back side of the roadway ditch. Some property owners may not be in favor of such an accommodation. In those cases, the trail would be located within existing right-of-way and the ditch would need to be enclosed into a longitudinal storm sewer to duplicate its function as a stormwater runoff conveyance. This type of construction is feasible but is more costly than building the trail in the fence row.

Estimated cost for this connection assuming a mix of willing and unwilling landowners is \$8.3 million.



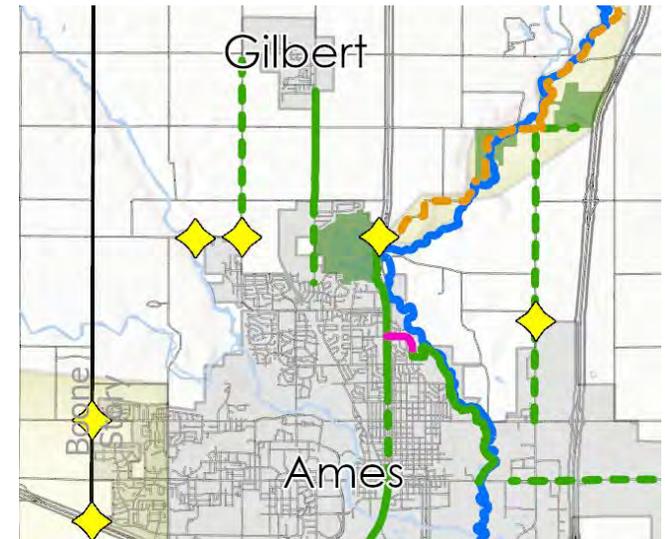
## AMES TO MCFARLAND PARK

Input from the various public meetings indicated a strong desire to connect Ames to Story City by trail. Trail planning in Hamilton County also includes connections from the Jew Ellsworth Trail and the Jewell Jubilee Trail through Little Wall Lake with the hope of eventually connecting to Story City and Ames.

It is a grand undertaking to ultimately create a new trail connection of that length, but the right way to start is to look at segmental connections that have independent utility as an immediate and stand-alone quality of life improvement.

Ames to McFarland Park stands out as a desirable connection, and there are three main options to consider for doing so.

1. Via Side Path Along Dayton Avenue and 180<sup>th</sup> Street – The City of Ames is slowly developing a trail corridor along the west side of Dayton Avenue by requiring construction of the trail as part of new development. As additional parcels develop, more segments of the alignment are created. In theory the trail will eventually be complete to the current northern city limits. This trail could be extended along Dayton Avenue to 180<sup>th</sup> Street, then along 180<sup>th</sup> Street to McFarland Park.
2. Via Shared-Use Roadway on Arrasmith Trail and 180<sup>th</sup> Street – This would provide a connection from Ada Hayden Heritage Park to McFarland Park on existing public right-of-way. However, much of the distance is gravel and paving would be required. This route also includes very steep hills. Improving the vertical profile to more favorable grades will have a substantial impact on adjacent properties.
3. Via New Trail on Independent Alignment – This would also connect from Ada Hayden Heritage Park to McFarland Park, and a paved trail would be an ideal accommodation. However, this will require substantial and essentially unanimous support from property owners toward the acquisition of easements for the trail. The public lands along the greenbelt could be used to accommodate the trail, but there are existing soft trails within each parcel, and there is a strong desire to retain those as soft trails.



Further study of this connection is recommended to evaluate and assess the feasibility of the noted options.



# Implementation & Funding Sources

# IMPLEMENTATION

## PRIORITY PROJECTS

These projects are intended to be near term efforts that can commence as soon as the Story County Conservation Board determines. Feasibility studies will be completed to develop the concepts and allow informed, data-driven, and competitive funding applications. Development of the projects can accelerate once these funding efforts are successful.

## ENHANCEMENT AND AMENITY PROJECTS

Smaller projects are more flexible in terms of production, as fundraising efforts are not as dependent on the larger competitive funding streams. As part of yearly budget planning, certain desirable amenities can be identified for production and determination if outside funding is required. These projects can be developed as approved by the Conservation Board.

## LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES

The recent success of the Story County Water and Land Legacy bond effort provides a source for required local matching funds for priority projects. These funds can be matched at magnified through the various State and Federal funding streams. Private and corporate donations may also be critical to funding success for priority projects.

## DISCRETIONARY GRANT PROGRAMS

A host of discretionary grant programs have been created by recent Federal legislation that are competitive nationally, and the application process is a significant undertaking. However, these programs also offer significant funding, so the right set of projects applying to the appropriate program can create the potential for major improvements to take place.

## CONGRESSIONAL APPROPRIATIONS

Earmarks are back in a sense, as congressional members can develop lists of projects that they want to sponsor for attachment to various appropriation bills. Several trail efforts have been successful in raising major funding in comparison to the amounts typically available in trail funding streams.

## ANNUAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAIL PROJECTS

[Community Attraction and Tourism\(CAT\)](#)

[Federal Recreational Trails Program](#)

[Iowa Snowmobile Trail Grants](#)

[Land and Water Conservation Fund](#)

[Regional Transportation Alternatives Set Aside \(TASA\)](#)

[Resource Enhancement and Protection \(REAP\)](#)

[The Rivers & Trails Conservation Assistance Program](#)

[State Recreational Trails Program](#)

[Surface Transportation Block Program](#)

[Story County Water and Land Legacy \(SCWLL\)](#)

[Private Donations](#)

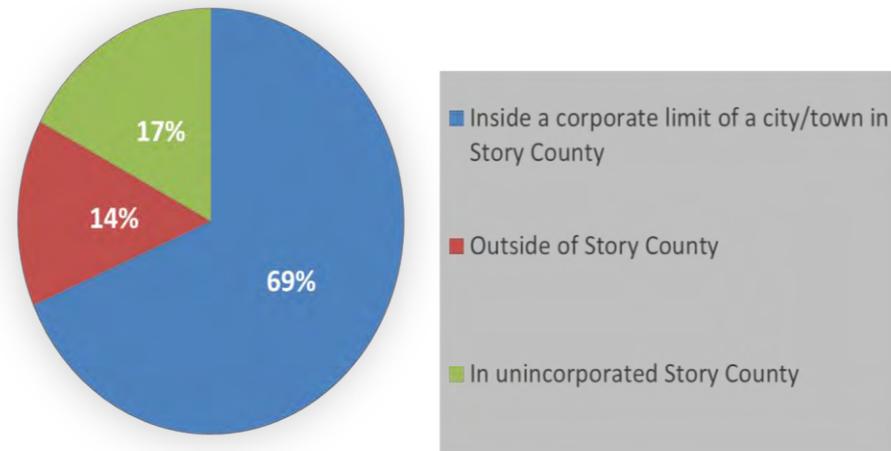
[Corporate Donations](#)



# Appendix A – Public Engagement

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the existing trail system's current use, needs, and priorities from the user's perspective, several different public outreach opportunities were held throughout Story County. These outreach efforts consisted of open house events, and a master plan website. Multiple outreach efforts were planned to provide multiple opportunities for participation. The community outreach process had an impact in every step of the creation of the Story County Trails Master Plan, including future planning, identification of missing links in infrastructure, desired amenities, and criteria informing project prioritization.

## Where do Survey Respondents Live?



A project webpage was created and hosted an online survey and social map. An online survey was available from April 9th through May 14th, 2024, during which time approximately 375 surveys were completed. The survey engaged residents in order to understand community needs and priorities related to the existing trail system. A majority of respondents were residents within the corporate limits of a city or town within Story County, while one-third of the respondents lived in unincorporated areas of the county or even outside of Story County. It is not unusual to see respondents from outside of Story County given the strong bicycle/trail user population in Central Iowa. The larger, interconnected regional trail system has a presence in the southern portion of the county and includes the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail that, when completed, will traverse the state.

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Additionally, three open house-style meetings were held in three locations (Huxley, Nevada, and Roland) throughout the county to open a fluid discussion about the parks and trails system with community members, leaders, and organizers who have deep insight into their communities' facilities and needs. These locations were strategically chosen for logistical reasons to better reach Story County residents.

The locations were spread across the county with the hopes of interacting not only with regular users of the trail system but also with those who may not identify as a trail user but still have an interest in Story County parks and trails as an amenity for all. The three locations in Nevada, Huxley, and Roland brought the project to the residents and were held in the early evening in the hopes to fit into most people's available time.



# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



An Open House was advertised for April 1, 2024, and held at the Nevada Fieldhouse in Nevada, IA, from 5:30 – 7:30pm. Approximately 25 people attended. Large maps were laid out on tables for the public to view and write on. This allowed space for attendees to discuss with each other and SCC staff.

This casual interaction led to thoughtful comments. It allowed others to not only hear opinions and ideas but also discuss and contemplate ideas and perceived needs. This same format was used again in Huxley on May 7th, with approximately 20 people in attendance, and in Roland on May 9th, with similar interactions with the public.

Photo boards were on display that showed trail types, trail amenities, trail locations, and other images that are specific to trail design and use. The purpose of these general photos being displayed was to help people visually identify with what they like or don't like in the county trail system, what they may like to see more of, what may be missing, etc. This helps put words with photos and allows trail users of all levels and non-users to communicate with each other and county staff.

Story County Conservation

## Park & Trail Amenities

Join us in shaping the future of our local trails!

Story County Conservation is committed to enhancing outdoor recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, and the development of a comprehensive trail plan is a critical step in achieving this goal. The trail plan will outline strategies for the creation, improvement, and maintenance of trails throughout the county, catering to a variety of recreational

SNYDER & ASSOCIATES

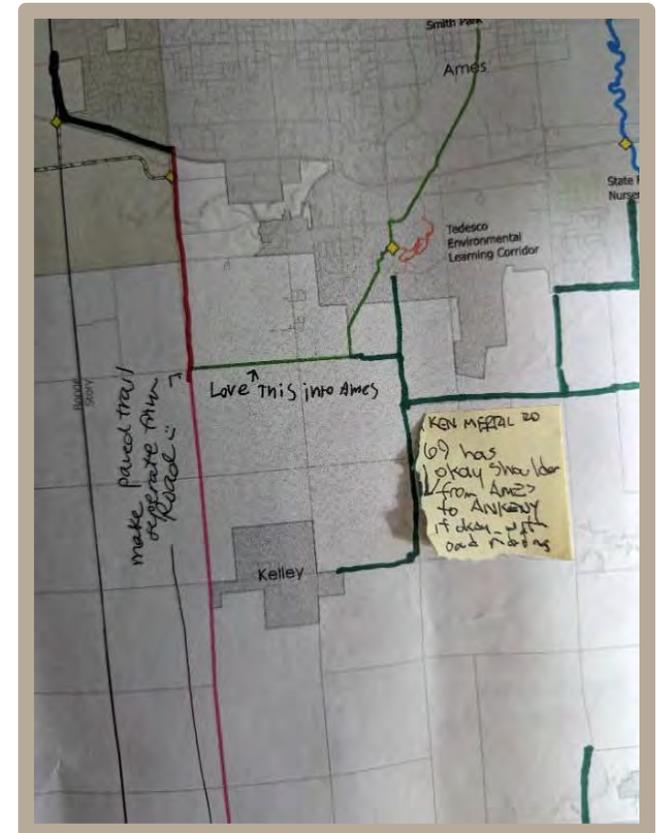
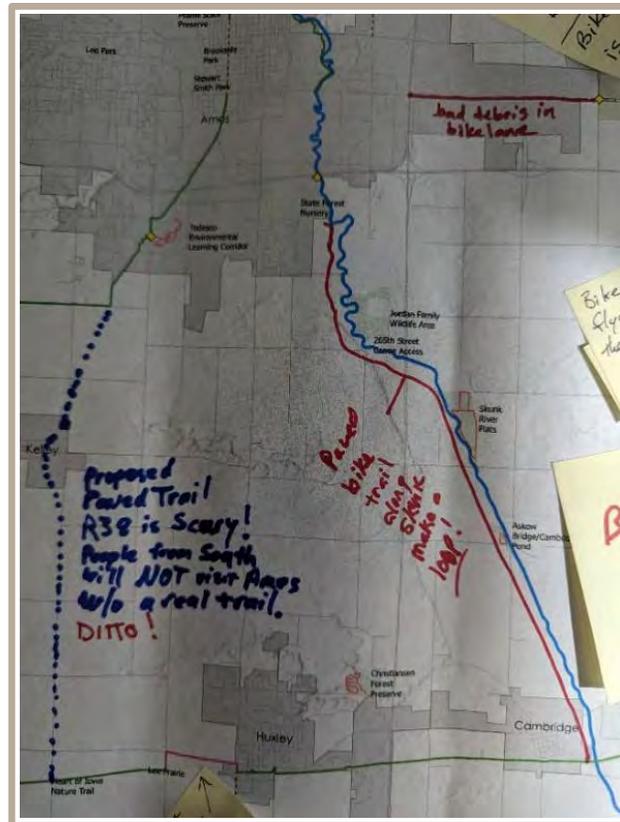
STORY COUNTY CONSERVATION

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

In addition, large maps were laid out on tables for participants to review and write directly on. Two different maps were displayed of Story County and its existing trail system, as well as showing areas that had already been identified for future trails and connections as well as 'areas of study'. The 'areas of study' were located between two points whether it was town to town, town to park, park to park, essentially areas that would be preferred connections but routing is unknown and no planning efforts have been made to date.

A second regional, eight-county map was displayed that showed regional trail planning efforts. This map was designed with Story County at the center. Providing a visual context to regional trail planning efforts brought to the forefront how trail infrastructure, routes, and connections are not just important within the county boundaries but regionally. Having strong connections with adjacent county trails will foster the many benefits of a connected trail system, such as physical, cultural, and economic.

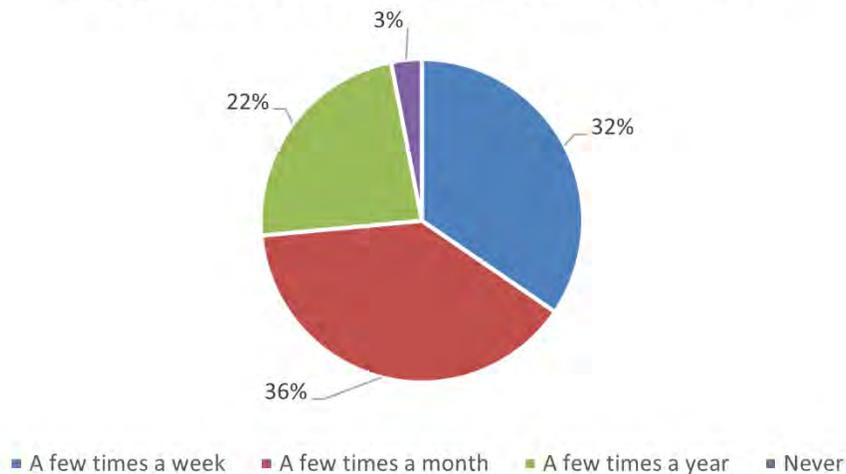
The following section summarizes key takeaways from the countywide survey. Where significant, responses related to a specific topic are highlighted to indicate user perceptions of the countywide trails system. The most abundant responses, both in written comments on maps, in conversations, and in online survey responses, were related to trail safety and trail connections.



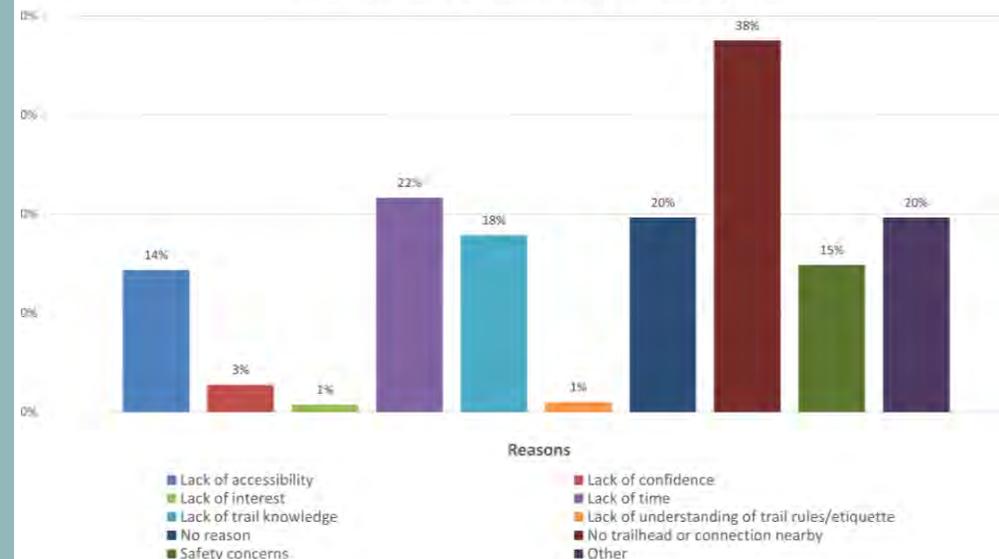
## FREQUENCY OF USE

Of the online survey participants, approximately two-thirds of the respondents use the trail system less than daily. There were follow-up questions respondents could answer to indicate why they don't use the trail more. Many answers seem to be related to convenience, no trailhead nearby, no time, not easily accessible, etc. A majority of the responses related to the conditions of the trail, whether it be the type of surface or quality of surface.

### How Often Do You Use Story County Trails?

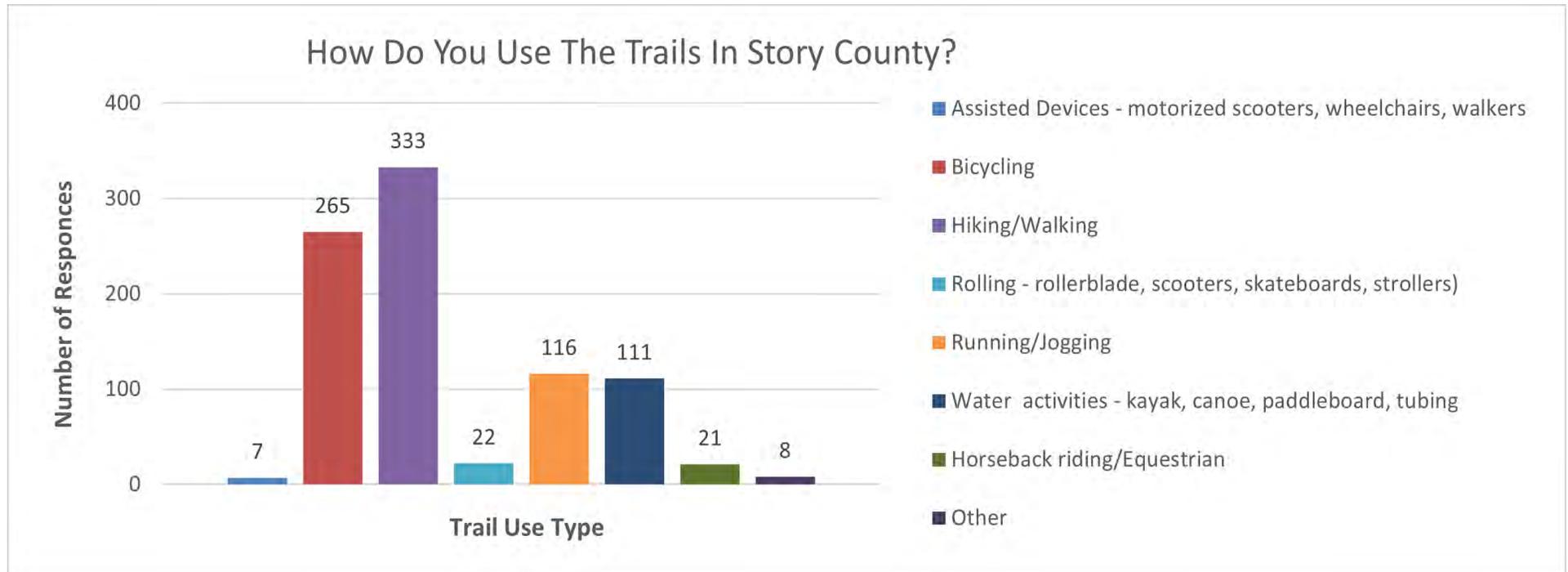


### What Prevents You From using the Trail System?



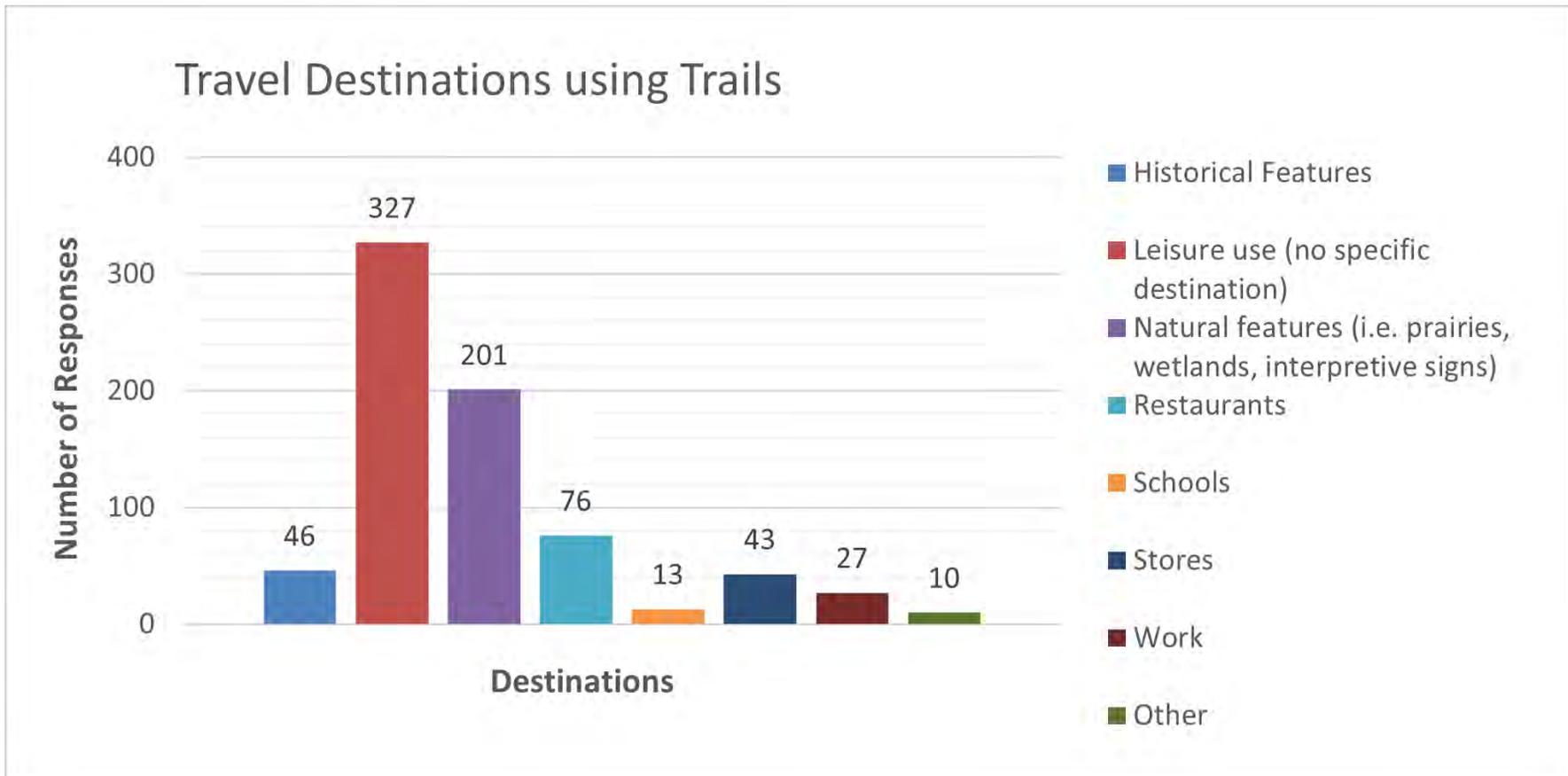
## TYPE OF USE

Survey participants were asked how they use the trail system. People use the trails in a wide array of methods, with walking and biking being the most popular. The majority of those who identified as “other” user took advantage of the County’s equestrian trails. The reasons for why the trails are used seem to spread across several reasons, but most can be generalized into relaxed personal enjoyment.



# DESTINATIONS

Survey participants were asked what their typical destinations were. Leisure use and natural features dominated the results. Restaurants are the next highest category. This indicates that the trail system is used largely for personal enjoyment and connection with the outdoors versus more utilitarian trips.



## PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Survey respondents were asked to select topics that should be prioritized. The top four priorities were maintenance of existing trails, completing connections on existing trails, i.e., filling in gaps, creating new trails to destinations or points of interest that **aren't** yet included, and trail safety.

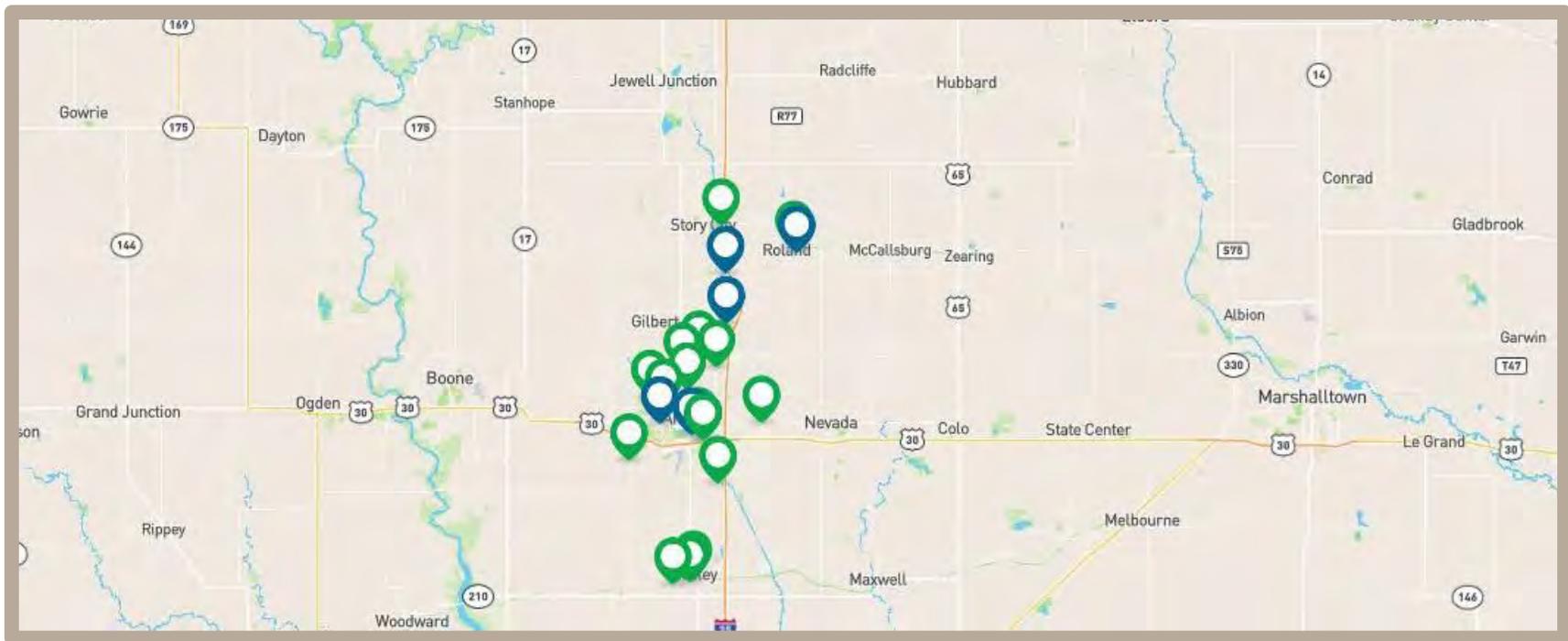
In-person engagement allowed for conversations on any topic but primarily was related to location specific priorities such as relocating a trail, new connections, what type of amenities are desired and other details. Open houses were held in three different parts of the county. Some of the trail improvements discussed had stronger support for certain facilities, depending where the meeting was held. For example, the Praeri Rail Trail located between Roland and Zearing was predominantly the focus of engagement when the open house was held in Roland, while the HOINT was the predominant topic when the open house was held in Huxley.



## SOCIAL MAPPING

Online respondents were encouraged to participate was to leave comments via an online interactive mapping option. They were able to leave trail feedback on any topic based on location by dropping a pin on a map and leaving a comment.

This method of outreach saw only a total of nine respondents. However, those nine left a total of 22 comments. The majority of the social map comments were related to new trail connections but were dispersed throughout the county. Commenters wanted to see more connections to the Skunk River from South 16th Street in Ames, Ada Hayden, and Reactor Woods.



## SURVEY RESPONDENT COMMENTS:

Many comments were submitted as part of the survey responses. Below are just a sample of some of those comments. The majority of the comments submitted were positive in terms of tone but provided several suggestions for improvements for trail users, such as available amenities, trail development for various trail use types, trail surfaces, desired connections, safety, and more.

“I would love to have more equestrian trails in Story County or have our existing trail systems expanded to add more trails to explore. One suggested location is the Skunk River Greenbelt Trail could be improved along the Soper's Mill section to allow equines access. Another location that has plenty of space to add trails is the Skunk River Greenbelt trail that heads out of the Anderson Canoe Access. It would be fantastic to have a more options there.”

“I feel safer riding away from road traffic, my children ride with me, so it's very valuable to have safe places to ride horses together.”

“Bridle trails are always appreciated. We enjoy using the hiking trails, as well.”

“Thank you so much for having equestrian trails! I use the Greenbelt, Peterson Pits, and Skunk Flats a lot to ride. Sometimes the old rail trail out of Cambridge too.”

“I would like to see more trails open to equestrians. Trails can be multi-use, if we add the correct trail etiquette signage.”

## SURVEY RESPONDENT COMMENTS:

“Please add mountain biking, like Central Iowa Trail Association CITA!”

“More mountain bike off road trails would be FANTASTIC!”

“Put sign information to identify the miles you hike.”

“The Skunk River hiking / biking trails don't connect! The trails are too discontinuous, and some are in poor shape and eroding.”

“I'd appreciate benches along the trail to take breaks.”

“More trails! Please make a trail in Deppe, when it opens up.”

“I believe parks should stay as natural as possible, and should not have concrete paths.”

“There NEEDS to be more restrooms.”

“I'd like to see a paved bike trail from Story City to Ames.”

“Connections to Heart of Iowa and High Trestle Trail and up to Story City and other towns badly needed. The areas north of Huxley are missing out on economic development opportunities that those south of us are enjoying. I pack my bike in my car to drive south to get on those trails and always eat out on at restaurant on the trail on weekends and my wife joins me to eat or occasionally ride. Also, bring out of town guests. Too bad the same hasn't been done from Ames.”