

CHAPTER 8: Natural Resources

The **Growth and Economic Vitality** Vision theme calls for practicing sound management of environmental issues in support of business development and agricultural sustainability.

The **Community** Vision theme recognizes that investment in environmental quality will help maintain and restore the small town, rural quality that is a source of County pride.

The **Unique Character** Vision theme emphasizes the importance of water quality improvement and protecting and enhancing the County's natural features.

The natural resources objectives and policies below serve these elements of the Vision for Renville County.

GOALS AND POLICIES

SURFACE WATER AND GROUNDWATER QUALITY

The County will update the *Comprehensive Local Water Plan* in 2012, which will provide detailed recommendations in support of the following goals:

Goal 1: *Promote farming best management practices (BMPs) that help protect and enhance river, stream, and lake quality in Renville County.*

Policies

1. Continue to use education and incentives to encourage practices including, but not limited to:
 - a. Conservation tillage on erodible well-drained lands.
 - b. Sediment basins and animal waste management facilities.
 - c. Grassed waterways, filter strips, and riparian buffer strips.
 - d. Soil testing prior to fertilizer or manure applications.
 - e. Fertilizing application rates and methods that do not result in excess available nitrogen or excessive increases in soil test phosphorus.
 - f. Manure storage to prevent runoff or leakage.

- g. Erosion control practices.
 - h. Weed and pest control product choices, rates, distances, personal and environmental safety precautions, handling, storage, and disposal.
2. Continue to encourage funding of and local enrollment in programs designed to protect water quality including Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Reinvest in Minnesota program (RIM), the Agricultural Best Management Practices (AgBMP) Loan Program, and programs with similar objectives.
 3. Encourage landowners to take advantage of appropriate tax exemption programs which contribute to water quality.

Goal 2: *Ensure proper management of feedlots.*

Policies

1. Continue to regulate feedlots to ensure appropriate manure storage, transport and application, well protection, and controlled water runoff.
2. Support financial and technical assistance to operators to bring noncompliant feedlots into compliance.

Goal 3: *Maintain and manage the existing public ditch system to improve water quality.*

Policies

1. Encourage a minimum buffer for ditches consistent with state standards and which incorporates BMPs to protect downstream properties and waters. Consult with appropriate watershed district, the Renville County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), and other appropriate agencies.
2. Continue working with the Renville County SWCD to develop conservation plans to assist in public ditch system maintenance and to seed the ditches.
3. Encourage and provide incentives for the use of pattern tile drainage systems and other alternative drainage practices.

Goal 4: *Ensure proper siting, design, and maintenance of all septic systems.*

Policies

1. Continue to regulate Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems (SSTS) through ordinances, allowing development in rural areas where tests indicate soils are suitable for on-site treatment systems over the long term, and requiring that a replacement soil treatment and disposal area be available for all septic systems.
2. Maintain and update as necessary the Subsurface Sewage Treatment System (SSTS) inspection and maintenance program.
3. Work toward eliminating all nonconforming SSTSs that are or are likely to become a pollution or health hazard through incentives and regulations.
4. Support cost-share assistance to upgrade noncompliant SSTSs.
5. Monitor progress of new SSTS technology and make changes to local regulation as appropriate.

Goal 5: *Protect existing wetlands and promote the development of wetlands and meandering streams to provide water purification and groundwater recharge.*

Policies

1. Promote wetland/restoration/protection through programs including RIM, Wetland Restoration Program (WRP), CREP, and others with similar goals.
2. Encourage development that preserves wetland environments in their natural state and ensure that development activities conform to the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA).
3. Promote education of private landowners regarding the value and techniques of wetland preservation.

Goal 6: *Manage land use along lakes, major creeks, and the Minnesota River.*

Policies

1. Continue to enforce the Land Use Ordinance Shoreland Management Regulations, Minnesota Scenic River Regulations, and Project River Bend Management Regulations to control land use, setbacks, design, natural buffers, topographic alteration, and drainage; make changes as necessary to incorporate new standards for water quality and natural resource protection.

2. Continue to enforce provisions of the Land Use Ordinance Flood Plain Regulations and update as warranted.
3. Identify and promote restoration of existing eroded streambanks.

Goal 7: *Regulate development to foster protection of water quality.*

Policies

1. Manage stormwater to promote infiltration and reduce the rate of surface water runoff utilizing BMPs such as ponds, swales, rain gardens, and infiltration areas. Consult with the watershed districts, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and Renville County SWCD to develop management standards for water quality and rate control, and performance and/or design details, as well as for exemptions and waivers.
2. Require appropriate handling and treatment of contaminated soils and other environmental hazards identified during the development process.

Goal 8: *Monitor water quality to track progress toward achieving water quality standards.*

Policies

1. Conduct regular sampling of water in identified problem areas.
2. Coordinate with appropriate agencies to identify specific strategies to address contaminants identified through ongoing monitoring.

SOIL EROSION/SEDIMENTATION

Goal 1: *Promote farming best management practices (BMPs) that protect against soil erosion due to wind or water.*

Policies

1. Continue to add substantial acreage of conservation tillage within the County.
2. Promote the establishment of windbreaks in appropriate areas.
3. Promote the establishment of native seed plantings on filter and buffer strips.

4. Promote continued enrollment of eligible land in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Easement Program (CREP), utilization of cost-share and loan programs, and property owner participation in other programs to address erosion problems.

Goal 2: *Manage construction sites to prevent on and off-site erosion and sedimentation.*

Policies

1. Require erosion and sediment control plans that carry out best management practices for site development.
2. Ensure adequate staffing to enforce and monitor construction activities.

FISH/WILDLIFE

Goal: *Protect and enhance diversity of habitat for wildlife in the County.*

Policies

1. Implement policies cited above under the water quality topic, including protection/restoration of wetlands and use of conservation easements, for their value in providing habitat.
2. Implement policies in Chapter 9 related to resource protection and restoration within parks, including measures to control erosion, application of Wild and Scenic River requirements, restoration of native vegetation, and protection of sensitive areas.
3. Work with agencies such as the DNR and U.S. Fish and Wildlife on possible habitat acquisition sites.
4. Encourage wildlife tree and native grass plantings on private land dedicated to conservation and the incorporation of wildlife food and shelter producing tree species in farmstead and field windbreaks.
5. Encourage cooperation among the County, SWCD, wildlife clubs, state and local agencies, and individuals on improving existing wildlife habitat.

PRESERVATION OF NATURAL FEATURES

Goal 1: *Ensure that land use is compatible with features of the natural environment and that development is accommodated without destroying environmental features, natural amenities, and access to natural resources.*

Policies

1. Work with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to develop a natural resource inventory focused on the Minnesota River Valley.
2. Require to the extent practical that development be designed to adapt to the natural setting and minimize disturbance of the site. Require that development applications include an inventory of trees, vistas, and natural features.
3. Restrict development on steep slopes. In instances where development on steep slopes is permitted, require grading and erosion control plans to prevent erosion, dust, and soil sedimentation.
4. Integrate new development with the natural characteristics of the Minnesota River Valley through the preservation of attractive natural amenities such as streams, wetlands, rock outcroppings, wooded areas, and slopes.
5. Maintain, update, and enforce local environmental regulations as necessary to ensure the proper protection of identified natural resources in the County. Ensure that development activities also conform to state and federal regulations.

Goal 2: *Protect scenic views.*

Policies

1. Preserve and protect major unique environmental features in the Minnesota River Valley with functional and aesthetic value as perpetual County assets through possible purchase, dedication, or protective and scenic easements, and/or clustering of development to avoid encroachment and destruction of such features.
2. Require that uses, including rural residences, commercial, and mining, proposed along the river be sited so as not to be visually intrusive. Where such siting is not possible, require buffering of uses through landscaping and/or berming.
3. Continue to restrict large signs and communications towers to avoid visual intrusion to parks, the river, and the scenic byway.

RESOURCE EXTRACTION

Goal: *Allow orderly development of mineral resources through sound mining practices, mitigation of adverse environmental impacts, and planning for the re-use of sites.*

Policies

1. Continue to use the Countywide aggregate study developed by the DNR. Incorporate results into long-range land use planning for the mining industry.
2. Identify and protect sensitive areas from mining.
 - a. Control the siting and operation of gravel mining operations to maximize compatibility with adjoining and planned land uses and include mitigation measures to reduce nuisance concerns such as noise, dust, hours of operation, and traffic.
 - b. Require that mining operations be screened from view by landscaping, berming, or careful siting of activities.
3. Protect land areas identified with aggregate and clay deposits from incompatible development where feasible.
4. Require detailed gravel pit operations and reclamation plans that identify the ultimate end use of the property that is complementing to surrounding and future land uses.
 - a. Develop creative plans for reclamation that fit with objectives of the Minnesota Valley Scenic Byway.
 - b. Implement measures to enforce reclamation.

ORGANIZATION/RESOURCES

Goal: *Ensure a strong, well-coordinated organization for natural resource protection in Renville County.*

Policies

1. Emphasize coordination among the many agencies involved in environmental management in the County. Develop a clear definition of roles and responsibilities. Ensure communication regarding programs and planning activities being carried out by individual agencies.
2. Investigate development of a County natural resources information system, based on geographic information systems (GIS), for use by appropriate agencies.

3. Commit to adequate staffing and funding for environmental protection in Renville County.
4. Aggressively seek funding for water quality improvement, habitat enhancement, and natural resource protection.

PRESERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Goal 1: *Assure the reasonable and responsible use of the County's natural resources including land, surface water and groundwater, minerals, open space, wetlands, wildlife, and woodlands.*

Policies

1. Provide for the managed, sustainable use of mineral, soil, water, and timber resources.
2. Protect non-agricultural wooded tracts and special habitats through preservation, conservation development standards, and promoting strong stewardship efforts by individuals and private organizations.
3. Recognize the carrying capacity of groundwater and surface water in development and land use decisions.
4. Encourage use of renewable energy systems, including wind energy and solar energy, which reduce the footprint of development on local and global natural systems.

Goal 2: *Protect the County's agricultural natural resources.*

Policies

1. Protect productive agricultural soils and other agricultural resources by regulating non-agricultural land uses in Agricultural Districts.
2. Encourage sustainable agricultural practices that protect agricultural soils and waters for future generations.

Goal 3: *Protect the County's aggregate resources and provide for reasonable economic use of aggregate.*

Policies

1. Preserve the aggregate resources in the County through protection and utilization activities.
2. Manage aggregate resources to provide for the extraction of high quality aggregate prior to non-agricultural development on the site.
3. Adopt regulations to minimize nuisances from aggregate extraction that affect developed areas and that ensure restoration of extraction sites to protect other natural resources and natural functions.

Goal 4: *Support the goals of the Comprehensive Local Water Plan.*

Policies

1. Protect and improve the quality of our water resources by reducing erosion and sediment loading of surface waters, reducing nutrient and contaminant loading, and preventing groundwater contamination.
2. Maintain an adequate supply of surface and groundwater for all users through management of our water resource supplies to minimize use conflicts.
3. Support efforts to increase preservation and restoration of wetlands.
4. Protect and improve biodiversity through protection and management of our natural resources.
5. Expand our knowledge and understanding of water resources through water monitoring and studies.
6. Provide for effective and efficient administration of the water plan through public awareness, technology, and administration of land use controls.

Goal 5: *Support the goals of the County Solid Waste Management Plan.*

Policies

1. Support land disposal of non-processible industrial wastes.

2. Review and amend the Solid Waste Ordinance using the “Model Ordinance” as developed by the MPCA.
3. Explore options to provide solid waste and recycling collection services to rural residences.
4. Encourage and educate citizens and businesses on the importance of waste reduction, recycling, and proper management of yard, household hazardous, and demolition waste.
5. Continue to explore regional landfill abatement options through the Southwest Regional Solid Waste Commission.