



Conservation Matters



Conservation

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Several years ago the Chicago Wilderness and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission developed a Conservation Design Manual to help communities update ordinances to allow them to be more amendable to conservation design practices. This article is based on information located in the Conservation Design Manual.

What is Conservation Design?

Conservation design is a design system that takes into account the natural landscape and ecology of a development site and facilitates development while maintaining the most valuable natural features and functions of the site. Conservation design includes a collection of site design principles and practices that can be combined to create environmentally sound development. The main principles for conservation design as defined by the project are:

1. Flexibility in site design and lot size
2. Protection and management of natural areas
3. Reduction of impervious surface areas, and
4. Sustainable stormwater management.

There are many community, environmental, and economic benefits to using conservation design. The most effective way to encourage conservation design is to update local comprehensive plans, codes and ordinances to reflect the community's commitment to conservation. Most importantly, conservation design should be allowed by right and should be the preferred option for many development projects.

As your community considers conservation design, it

is important to establish sustainable development principles for protecting nature:

1. Promote infill development and redevelopment where transportation facilities and utilities already exist in order to minimize the development of open lands, such as natural areas and farmland. Encourage development that is compact and contiguous to existing community infrastructure.
2. Locate and plan new development in ways that protect natural resources and habitat and provide buffers between sensitive natural areas and intensive use areas.
3. Use the development process to enhance and restore streams, wetlands, and lakes, and to enhance their potential as recreational and aesthetic amenities.
4. Preserve permanent open space as an integral part of new development to both protect critical natural areas and to provide opportunities for recreation and environmental education. Design developments to create open space linkages to adjacent and regional natural areas so that nature exists not as islands but as connected habitat.
5. Recognize the value of water as a resource and manage it to protect downstream water bodies and wetlands, prevent increased flooding, preserve groundwater resources, and maintain natural hydrology.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts

The DeKalb County Soil and Water Conservation District is one of 98 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD's) making a difference in your community. No matter how big or small, each of the 102 counties is represented equally. From educating homeowners on practical utilization of water, to helping rural landowners save soil and improve water quality; it takes everyone working together to protect our soil and water!



Benefits of Conservation Design

- Reduces construction and infrastructure costs by 11% to 66%
- Preserves natural resources and features
- Reduces the costs of municipal stormwater management
- Allows connections to existing natural areas, open space, greenways, and trails.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts Perform Many Different Tasks

- Illinois SWCD employees utilize such tools as GIS software, electronic survey instruments and old fashioned leg work to assist landowners with the planning, design and installation of conservation practices.
- Illinois SWCD employees are familiar with state, county and municipal zoning and permitting requirements and work with developers to help them comply with those requirements.
- Illinois SWCD employees assist educators in meeting conservation education requirements for students and to provide educational opportunities for adults who want to know how to care for their environmental resources.
- SWCD's meet with and advise municipal, county, state and federal governmental agencies and organizations on programs and policies to help protect our environment.

NOTE: Soil and Water Conservation Districts DO NOT have taxing authority and must rely on state source and local

DeKalb County SWCD
 1350 West Prairie Drive
 Sycamore, IL 60178
 815-756-3237 X 3
www.dekalbilswcd.org

Directors:
 John Begun
 Joe Gulotta
 Scott Pumroy
 Mike Konen
 Ralph Boesche

Sustainable Principles continued;

6. Minimize changes to natural topography, soils, and vegetation to preserve land, water and soil relationships, that are essential for sustaining plant and animal habitat. Where sites have been previously altered, attempt to restore natural conditions to the extent possible.
7. Establish procedures that assure the ongoing management of natural areas within developments as part of an overall strategy for achieving sustainability.
8. Design development to achieve the broader sustainability of human and natural communities, including the social and economic dimensions of sustainability.

Best Management Practices for Conservation Development



Bioswales and rain gardens are vegetated swale systems that have an infiltration trench designed to retain and store stormwater. Bioswales and rain gardens are planted with native grasses and wildflowers that enhance filtration, cooling, and cleansing of water.



Permeable paving materials are paving systems with spaces that allow water to move through the driving surface to the stone base below. Runoff is temporarily stored in the base for infiltration into the underlying soils and/or slow release to the storm drain system.



Filter Strips are areas with native vegetative cover used to filter and absorb runoff from impervious areas. Native landscaping helps reduce runoff volumes, increases the landscape's ability to retain nutrients, increases permeability of compacted soils along with many other benefits.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

Producers and landowners in southern DeKalb County that have land located in the Fox River watershed are eligible to participate in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

The CREP program is a Federal, State and Local Partnership designed to retire frequently flooded and environmentally sensitive cropland in order to achieve restoration and long-term protection of those areas. In Illinois, landowners implement conservation prac-

tices in the eligible CREP watersheds to reduce sedimentation and nutrients, improve water quality, and to create and enhance critical habitat for fish and wildlife populations.

Who is Eligible?

Producers and private landowners, if they owned or have had an interest in land for a minimum of one year in the Illinois River Watershed, are eligible if the land meets at least one of the following criteria:

- Is in the 100 year floodplain;
- Qualifies as wetlands, wetlands farmed under natural conditions, or prior converted wetlands.
- Is highly erodible land with an erodibility index of 8 or greater adjacent to the 100 year floodplain.



More than 90% of land in Illinois is privately owned. Programs like CREP, are essential to addressing environmental issues of both local and national significance.

Contact the DeKalb County SWCD to learn more.