

RURAL COUNTRYSIDE TRAILS

Regional wildlife and cultural landscape resource management

Introduction

Safe access for walkers to Iowa's historical and cultural rural landscapes is uncommon. Establishing paths that allow walking to or through the countryside can challenge existing land use policies and landholder's rights. In England, there is a long tradition of footpath use crossing the countryside connecting agricultural fields, villages, and open lands. Can such a system be integrated in the Iowa landscape and in particular the Dallas County Farm? In this report, background information on rural land use practices in England and the U.S. sets the stage for understanding and planning trail systems. Trails can connect urban and rural residents to their cultural and historical landscapes. In this report, I assume that the Dallas County Farm can provide a connection to a cultural and historic landscape. In Iowa, trails also provide opportunities for the connections of wildlife habitat, habitat that has been severely altered by traditional intensive agriculture practices. This report concludes with recommendations that will allow the coordination of public and private lands to fulfill the vision of a network of walking trails that connect the Dallas County Farm with the greater river valley. In the future, such a trail can provide safe access, wildlife habitat, and cultural connections to our rural history and present day rural activity.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend management strategies for the Dallas County Farm.

Scope

In this report I will focus on the following topics:

- Access to the rural landscape and the effect on the user's quality of life
 - health, fitness
 - spiritual renewal
- Access rights for visitors to the open countryside
- Public and private lands in the establishment of footpaths and other recreational sites
- Policy for private and public lands when used for recreation and wildlife habitat
- Landscape management options for footpaths that consider safety, cultural and historical sites, and wildlife habitat

I will provide a brief background of the historical significance of footpaths in England as well as current access to the English countryside. I use information that comes primarily from the Countryside Agency, a United Kingdom governmental agency. While the Countryside Agency works to improve conditions related to many issues relevant to rural economics and agricultural sustainability, my focus will be on the Agency's program for access to the rural countryside through the use of footpaths. Their Web site and published reports, available in print or as

downloadable files, provide information on many aspects of the Agency's vision for the future of the rural countryside.

I will discuss some options available in Iowa for obtaining legal access for walking on private lands. Information comes from published material as well as an interview with Lisa Hein of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF). I will briefly discuss easement rights that the INHF uses when helping Iowa landowners set land aside for conservation.

I will discuss the trail options for the Dallas County Farm. One option includes connecting residents of the facility with the rural landscape. A second option will be to allow the regional residents, both urban and rural, to access the Dallas County Farm by a regional trail. This regional trail is currently a concept that visualizes a multi use trail along the North Raccoon River with connections between Adel, Iowa and Perry, Iowa as well as significant locations along the route.

I will discuss my proposal for adding Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to the management practices of the farm. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) administer this program in Dallas County, Iowa.

Assumptions

My recommendations are based on six assumptions:

- Residents of Dallas County Farm will use designed walkways to exercise, visit farm outbuildings, and use the walkway to connect to a larger network of trails. Walking can provide relief from stress and become a positive coping activity for residents that may have used negative behavior to release stress in the past.
- People that walk prefer a safe route. In many Iowa locations there is an opportunity to expand walking routes to include the countryside and county parks, all within a reasonable walking distance from local communities. An ideal walk is a safe route, bypassing highways that often have steep ditches, narrow shoulders, and poor sight visibility due to the rolling landscape of Iowa.
- Wildlife needs diverse habitat. Iowa wildlife habitat is extremely fragmented or non-existent. An agricultural field will typically have one type of crop growing on it in any one season. By connecting open lands with biologically diverse links, wildlife habitat will increase.
- A model from England can provide new information and inspiration for the design of trails in the U.S.
- Our rural landscapes have become increasingly inaccessible because of the decline in the number of family farms. This decline means more people are losing their connections to agriculture and a rural way of life. Today most people are only crossing the rural landscape seeing it at 65 miles per hour, as they travel between urban areas. Experiencing the landscape at a closer scale and slower speed provides the opportunity for enriching our collective culture and our understanding of the connections all life has with nature.
- Finally, I assume there is a spiritual need to connect with the land.

Limitations

My report has four limitations. First, I have not done any primary research; for example, a survey of trail and recreational needs in the rural countryside. Second, to describe in depth the background of the rural Iowa landscape is beyond the scope of this report. Third, due to relevance, time constraints, and available literature, I have only briefly described the background and complexity of land issues that have plagued the United Kingdom for centuries. Fourth, the recommendations for the management of trails are general. I refer the reader to the web sites of agencies that have formulated extensive management plans for trails. However, even these management plans are general and any trail installation will require planning to address the requirements of a specific site.

Research methods

Information for this report comes from print, online resources, and interviews.

Inventory

Background on footpaths in the English countryside

To understand the significance of England's attempts today at preserving and integrating trails, a brief historical background follows. The first tracks and footpaths in the British Isles were probably established during the prehistoric period. The principal routes were determined by natural topography and by river crossings, as well as routes to areas with natural resources. A network of paths developed over the centuries and were traveled primarily on foot and used for interacting with neighboring communities and distant markets. (1)

During the Middle Ages, landlords enclosed open fields, commons, and wastelands. Extensive enclosure, especially for sheep farming thus removing the farmer from the fields, took place in the 16th century. This caused considerable unrest and rebellion. Even with legislation, prohibiting enclosure by 1700, about half the arable land in England and Wales was enclosed. "The farming improvements of the agricultural revolution were inoperable in open fields and, together with the food demands of an increasing landless population, brought about a relentless movement towards enclosure in the 18th century".(2) By the beginning of the 19th century, most commons were enclosed. Following is an excerpt from a document by T. LUCKMAN in 1767.

"Many of the sheep and oxen, which are fed in the inclosures, will probably indeed be the more valuable; but will the additional profits of them be sufficient to make an adequate amends for the loss of those fine crops of corn which those fields were used to produce, and enable the tenant to pay the enormously advanced rents demanded on the inclosure? Can he then afford to give thirty or forty shillings an acre for land, which he held before for ten or twelve, without being permitted either to mow or plow any part of it? Many a poor tenant has hereby been reduced to the wretched necessity of taking land upon those hard terms, or of being thrown out of all means of supporting himself and his family: ---- And every man is willing to keep from starving, or a parish allowance, as long as he can: ---- But it is highly probable that many will be reduced to one or the other in a few years, who engage for takes upon such terms as those. And as to the proprietors of

lands themselves, 'the improvement to them, we are told, is estimated by the new valuation of their estates, made by the commissioners, when set out for inclosing, compared with the rents of the same in its open-field state; e.g. If the rents of a field before inclosure are 750l. and on the valuation of the commissioners it will amount to 1500l. then the field doubles its value.'" (3)
T. LUCKMAN, 1767

In 1865, the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society was established. This society and other movements were taking up the issues of overcrowded cities and poverty and poor economic conditions in the countryside. These efforts evolved into the "desire by many to protect the beauty of the countryside and to provide public access to mountains and wilderness." (4)

By the 1960's increasing pressures of intensive agriculture and the adverse impact these had on the countryside resulted in 1968 of the establishment of the Countryside Commission. At the same time, there was growing interest in recreation and access to the countryside. "Among the many responsibilities of the [Countryside] Commission, of particular importance to this report was the support that it provided to communities to maintain footpaths." (4) In addition, Local Ramblers' Associations and parish councils have secured the future of many rights of ways that would have otherwise been lost. (5)

The latest incarnation of the governmental agency responsible for management of countryside access is the Countryside Agency. It was the result of the combination of the Countryside Commission and the Rural Development Commission in 1999. (6)

Today, touring the countryside by trail is very popular among the local populations. These trails currently are contributing greatly to England's tourism industry. In 1998 tourist and day visitors accessing footpaths spent 11.5 billion pounds (Countryside Agency Web site), the equivalent to 18.8 billion U.S. dollars using 1998 exchange rates. (7) Of this total, day visitors spent 77 percent, UK tourist spent 17 percent, and overseas tourist spent 6 percent. (8)

Background on the modern Iowa rural landscape

Today, the Iowa rural landscape for many is only a technical link, connecting towns and cities. Crossing rural areas by car is how people experience the countryside, finding their way from one urban point to another. Aldo Leopold writes in *A Sand County Almanac* (9) "...there is value in any experience that reminds us of our dependency on the soil-plant-animal-man food chain ... Civilization has so cluttered this elemental man-earth relations with gadgets and middlemen that awareness of it is growing dim." Because of our absence from the countryside, fewer people today understand this dependency on the "soil-plant-animal-man food chain." (9)

The rural landscape has become more remote to the majority of Iowan's because rural populations have declined in many parts of the state in favor of living in urban areas where work is available. Some landowners live out of the state, renting their inherited farm ground to unrelated farm managers, furthering the distance and remoteness of the rural landscape for Iowa's population. Partly due to economics and partly due to technology, farms have consolidated into larger tracts and many smaller family farms are gone. It is common to hear of farms being

several thousand acres in size. The rural areas of Iowa reveal a landscape with abandoned barns and homes. These abandoned structures are torn down and fencerows removed, enlarging the fields to accommodate bigger farm machinery, while historical elements are lost.

In recent years, there is a trend to preserve cultural resources of the 20th century. “In response to known and potential threats, particularly rapid change in the environment, the notion of heritage is slowly expanding to include significant 20th century properties.” (10) Many of the farming landscape patterns in Iowa that are seen today are the result of the 20th century's modern farming techniques, especially since the 1950's. (11) In the early 1900's, fieldwork was done with horses pulling the field implements. Corn was picked by hand. The late Myrna Mayfield of Woodward, Iowa recalled for me several years ago that her father dried and saved up in the attic rafters the best corn for the next year's planting. Today, farming is very different. The record of this transition is contained in the landscape of rural America. Is this record worth saving?

Most of Iowa's land is in private ownership. Of this land most is in agricultural use. Ninety-two percent of the land area in the state is in agriculture, ranking the highest in the nation. (12) Because of agricultural land use, very little of Iowa's land is set aside for recreation or available for wildlife habitat. There are incentives for farmers to establish wildlife habitat using programs developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Need for access to the rural countryside

In Iowa and other places in the U.S., we are out of touch with the landscape of our environment and our cultural history. One reason is that our rural landscape is nearly out of physical reach. As a culture, we are disconnected from the landscape whether it is managed farmland or wild places. By ignoring the complexity of a species' need for habitat to support life, there is a failure to make competent decisions relating to landscape management and environmental issues.

Recent research shows that people want conservation of land and resources, such as historic, natural, agricultural, and scenic areas. People believe that these resources make a major contribution to their economic and social wellbeing. With the acknowledgement of these attitudes, there has been a strengthening of legislative protection and policy guidance on conservation of the environment, of which land is a critical component. (13)

In today's agricultural Iowa, small fragmented wildlife habitats are patches within the much larger framework of agricultural fields. These conditions promote decreasing biodiversity as populations leave or die off. Wildlife may not receive the nutrients needed for growth and reproduction from today's agricultural monoculture. Agricultural land use in Iowa also prohibits walkers and wildlife from safely connecting to the more diverse habitats that still exist in parks, along rivers and streams, and even in some yards. For wildlife, this access may mean the difference between successful population numbers and extinction.

For walkers, safety is another issue when accessing open rural areas. The use of state highways and county roads as paths for the rural walker needs to be addressed. As Iowa's population ages, the need for safe low risk recreational opportunities will increase. Walks that are convenient between home and the countryside are ideal activities that can promote health and a sense of well

being. However, there are few opportunities for walkers to visit these areas and be safely removed from fast moving vehicular traffic. What options for safe routes are there?

The desire for preservation of our cultural history is apparent in the presence of active organizations that help preserve significant structures such as the Iowa governor's mansion or significant landscapes such as the Iowa State University central campus. In the rural countryside, cultural features are disappearing with the consolidation of farms. An example is the once ubiquitous fencerow that is being removed for farming efficiency. Are these features worth preserving? Having access to these locations will inform the greater population and help them answer this question.

Finally, the aspect of spiritual renewal is addressed when Holms Rolston, III writes, "a pristine natural system is a spiritual resource, as well as a scientific, recreational, aesthetic, or economic one." He goes on to say that a forest, prairie, or mountain is more than a resource of material or religion, "it is a primeval, wild, creative source." (14) In western culture, measurement of resources is reported in economic terms. Even recreation potential of open spaces is referred to in terms of revenues generated by visitors. Yet, we have all experienced the "creative source" to which Rolston refers. Humanity intuitively understands the potential for renewal of the spirit, through either quiet contemplation or energetic activity, in places of diverse natural expression.

Model of the English Countryside Agency's trail system

As indicated earlier, the history of trail uses and preservation is very long. Over the last 150 years, there have been several attempts to legislate for improved open space access. Most recently, there has implementation of a new act called the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. This act introduces a public right of access on foot to mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land. (8)

There is the strong belief by many in England that the land is for all to share and enjoy and not the "personal fiefdom of the country landowners." (15) This has been a difficult position for the landowners to adopt. The right to walk on private property is popular, sometimes referred to as the right to roam. A poll in the late 1990's showed that 85 percent of the public wanted a law that allowed reasonable access rights through private property to open areas. The term *reasonable access* refers to restrictions placed on the use of the property for protection of the environment and farming operations. (15)

These open lands and registered common lands will be mapped so that planning for access can be started. Areas that are inaccessible on foot will be identified and landowners that surround these lands will decide which parts of the land to dedicate to footpaths (8) (it is not clear in the references used, for this report if the landowner is required to dedicate land to comply with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.). After the owner's land has dedicated the right, it will be irrevocable and will bind future owners (8), much like the Iowa's conservation easements. (13)

The interest and use of the countryside has increased considerably in recent years. In 1998, 24 percent of all leisure day visits were to the countryside. (11) "Public rights of way continue to be the most important means by which the countryside is enjoyed, on foot, horse or bicycle. In

some places, footpaths and cycleways are also used for journeys to school, work or the shops."(11)

The management plan Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, while general, is extensive. For example, some types of land will be excluded from participation even if they are surrounded by access lands. These areas will be known as excepted land. Excepted lands will include the following:

- Cultivated land - land plowed/drilled during the past year to grow crops/trees
- Buildings and any enclosed areas immediately around them (e.g. gardens, farmyards, or courtyards), together with any land within 20 meters of a house
- Livestock pens designed to catch or hold sheep etc., or land within 20 meters of a building used to house livestock(8)

This background information on the Countryside Agency is included in this report to encourage questions and possible solutions that focus on the rural Midwest's agricultural landscape. Can a system as described be implemented in the U.S. countryside?

Existing options available in Iowa for walking access to the rural countryside

There is limited access to the rural countryside for local surrounding communities. Providing access to public lands by means other than a road is rare in Iowa. The idea of allowing public access through private land is challenging to many landowners. This can become an issue when considering a change in land use. What legal issues exist that may hinder a partnership between private and public landholders when such partnerships allow public access to private land? Alternatively, should all recreational lands and accesses be public?

The outright purchase of land for public recreation use is expensive for taxpayers. Obtaining grant money to purchase lands for county conservation and recreation can be difficult because the competition is so great for these limited funds. Resource Enhancement and Protection, or REAP, is a program that invests in the enhancement and protection of the Iowa's natural and cultural resources. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) distributes REAP funds to counties in several ways, one being a grant program known as a REAP grant. The funds acquired through these grants purchase lands for enhancement of wildlife and recreational areas in the counties. The lands are county property and management of these areas is the responsibility of the County Conservation Board of that county.(16)

In 1971, Iowa adopted legislation for conservation easements. Originally, legislation allowed only the IDNR, county conservation boards, or cities and city agencies to hold conservation easements. In 1984, an amendment permitted private, nonprofit organizations such as the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF), to hold conservation easements. These organizations are called land trusts. "Land trusts are predominantly nonprofit local, regional, or statewide organizations that work with private landowners to protect their land for conservation, recreation, and other public benefit."(13) Purposes of conservation easements are to preserve or conserve scenic beauty and wildlife habitat as well as promote outdoor recreation.(13) A conservation easement spells out what restrictions will be placed on the land. An agreement may include

restrictions on future land development; for example, prohibiting any building on the tract of land and, if some development is allowed, the development will be specifically described. Lisa Hein, a landscape architect with the INHF, describes this process with an analogy and says the easement rights are like a bundle of sticks, each stick representing a right. Specific sticks are given to another for safekeeping. The bundle can never be ignored or separated from the property. With the sale of the property, any restrictions placed on development by an easement stays with the land title and the new owners have a legal obligation to obey the restrictions. The holder of the easement will continue to monitor the property to ensure that the owner follows the easement agreement as part of the land management practice. If easement restricted lands are going to be used for recreation, typically they are owned by cities, counties, or land trusts (personal communication, April 4, 2001).

When open lands for recreation and wildlife habitat are purchased by a land trust then these lands can be held and managed by the land trust or turned over to another entity for management. INHF is very active in helping to raise funds and acquire grants to assist in setting lands aside for habitat restoration, preservation, and conservation (Lisa Hein, personal communication, April 4, 2001). An example of INHF activity is Munn Heritage Woods in Ames, Iowa. Ms. Hein relates that INHF raised funds to purchase the Munn property which INHF then gave to the city of Ames free. The city in return gave a conservation easement on the property to INHF. It is the conservation easement holder's responsibility, in this case INHF, to monitor the property for compliance with the easement description while the city of Ames has the responsibility for land management activity (personal communication, April 4, 2001).

Another way that landowners can provide access to the public is to just allow people to walk on their property. Ms. Hein says that the Recreational Use Statute, in the Iowa Code, limits landowner liability when they open their land for free (personal communication, April 4, 2001). There are at least two drawbacks to allowing people onto private property. First, there may be no management plan in place to care for the property if permitted use degrades the site's conditions. This can lead to habitat degradation as well as a decrease in suitability for owner and public use. Second, land management will take money and if land is open for free use there is no revenue generated to cover management cost. There is a need to explore other ways for developing recreational opportunities and restoring wildlife habitats.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Dallas County Farm are in a format that uses determined objectives followed by management practices to achieve and maintain results. Objectives were identified through individual discussions as well as group discussions. Discussions included participation from the following:

- Iowa State University landscape architecture class 562
- Landscape Architecture professor Paul Anderson
- Dallas County Farm administrator Karen Smith
- Dallas County Farm manager David Boots
- Dallas County Conservation Department director Jeff Logsdon
- Dallas County Farm Long Range Study Committee members
- Dallas County Supervisors.

Objective	Management practice
<p>Provide accessible walkways connecting residence facility with grounds, farm buildings, and gardens. The goal is to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ enhance safe access to the farm ▪ offer positive experiences for recreation and stress management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a route that is less than 5% grade, and has seating for rest stops along the way ▪ Concrete walkway for durability ▪ Consult with physical therapist and occupational therapist for routes that meet the residential needs for physical activity and access to destinations on the farm
<p>Allow any future trails along the North Raccoon River valley to connect with on site trails, creating an alternative route connecting urban and rural environments through the countryside. The goal is to encourage the exploration of rural cultural activity by regional residents of urban and rural communities. It is hoped that with this engagement of the farm, the greater community will adopt a desire to preserve a rural environment that acknowledges the state's agrarian history.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consult with Dallas County Conservation Department for partnering opportunities with a future trail system ▪ Refer to Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation for details on trails and easements at the following web site www.inhf.org (17) ▪ For detailed information on planning and management strategies for trails refer to the Iowa Department of Transportation for the Iowa Trails 2000 program at the following web site www.dot.state.ia.us/trails (18) ▪ Refer to the Countryside Agency in Great Britain at the following web site www.countryside.gov.uk (8)
<p>Increase bio-diversity on the farm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement programming provided by the USDA. Web site www.usda.gov (19) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for installation of a riparian forest buffer · provides technical and cost sharing assistance ▪ Trails planted with native plant material to increase habitat ▪ Continue with the prairie planting ▪ Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · establish habitat around southern pond · on flood plain field · provides technical and cost sharing assistance

Conclusions

In our time, we have seen a marked change in the attitude toward the environmental impacts of our cultural activities on the land. At the same time, so many in our population are removed from direct involvement of our lands. I believe one way to get a connection reestablished is by providing access for visitors to the rural landscape. When we engage in a dialogue with our physical outdoor environment, we adopt it as our own and begin to care how the resources of the land are used. Lasting ideas are formed through experience and influence our lives far greater than the experience one gets from watching as an observer. By actively participating in the use of our landscape resources we have the opportunity as a society to make informed decisions on the use of these resources.

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