



## Liberty Prairie Conservancy

Preserving Lake County's Disappearing Landscape  
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## Groundwork Laid for New Vision on County's Open Space

(Grayslake, IL) The Liberty Prairie Conservancy recently finished laying the groundwork on a vision for open space preservation in Lake County that calls for protection of an additional one-thousand acres per year for the next two decades. Drafted by representatives of all 16 of the county's land conservation organizations, the vision was approved by the Liberty Prairie Conservancy board and is now going to the boards of the other 15 organizations for their approval. With Congress poised to renew tax benefits for landowners who place development restrictions on private properties, and forest preserve land acquisition funds newly replenished, the ambitious vision is considered both feasible and vital to retaining the county's economic strength.

"Lake County's residents and businesses have long recognized that our economic strength is closely tied to our quality of life, including access to natural areas," said Jeff Sundberg, Ph.D., president of the Liberty Prairie Conservancy and chair of the economics and business department at Lake Forest College. "Keeping that local character requires maintaining a balance between growth and land preservation."

The group's vision is to realize a Lake County landscape where, by 2030, at least 20 percent of the county is preserved as natural areas, parks, trails, farmland and scenic views. In comparison, 11 percent of the open space in Cook County has been preserved and 13 percent in DuPage County. In Lake County, approximately 40,000 acres of open space are already protected, with the vision calling for protection of another 20,000 acres. Land is presently protected by the county (27,000 acres), state (8,300 acres), private landowners who have placed development restrictions on portions of their parcels (2,500 acres) and other public entities such as townships and local park districts (2,200).

Led by the Liberty Prairie Conservancy, a non-profit group that preserves wildlife habitat and other open space in Lake County, the conservation representatives spent six months developing the vision. Representatives from the following organizations contributed: Illinois Department of Natural Resources; Illinois Nature Preserves Commission; Lake County Forest Preserve District; Lake County Department of Planning, Building and Development; Openlands; Libertyville Township; Citizens for Conservation; Barrington Area Conservation Trust; Lake Bluff Open Lands Association; Lake Forest Open Lands Association; Mettawa Open Lands Association; Upper Des Plaines River Ecosystem Partnership; North Branch Watershed Project; Fox River Ecosystem Partnership; and Indian Creek Watershed Project.

"These organizations recognize that the vast majority of the remaining undeveloped land in Lake County will face significant development pressure over the next two decades," said Sundberg. "We want the county to keep a reasonable balance between more development and more protected open space. This vision will guide the efforts of these groups to maintain that balance."

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