

# Grand Prairie Friends

## Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014

Version 1.0.PLC  
December 2009



### Grand Prairie Friends Board of Directors 2009 - 2010

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## **Executive Summary**

Grand Prairie Friends exists because of a small group of people who valued nature in east-central Illinois, and wanted to see something done to protect and conserve remnants of nature that hadn't fallen victim to the plow or other human "progress." After more than 25 years, there is still a small group of people who value the remnants of prairie, woodland, savanna, marsh, and seep that dot the landscape of east-central Illinois.

The need to protect and manage natural areas still exists, and it's up to groups like Grand Prairie Friends along with public agencies and dedicated individuals to make sure that natural areas are protected and managed.

Even with a 25-year history, Grand Prairie Friends is barely a teenager when it comes to maturity as an organization that can be effective at land conservation and management. Over the last few years, the current Board leadership has recognized that to be an effective land conservation organization, we need to step up our efforts. One way to start this process is to make sure we have firm foundation in our organizational structure and policies, hence, the need for a Strategic Plan. Through a process that in part has been facilitated by the Land Trust Alliance and its Guided Organizational Assessment, we have embarked down a road to put in writing what we value and how we will operate. It's trudgingly slow, but vital if we are to be effective at what we do.

To that end, the current Board has determined general goals to strive for over the next five years (2010-2015):

1. Achieve Land Trust Accreditation.
2. Increase the number of participants in administrative aspects of Grand Prairie Friends.
3. Increase the number of participants in the volunteer aspects of Grand Prairie Friends.
4. Increase awareness of Grand Prairie Friends.
5. Enhance natural area steward and volunteer training.
6. Increase landholdings.
7. Acquire a centralized and stable space for the needs of the organization.

This plan then details the action steps and personnel needed to achieve these goals.

I've always said that the conservation business is a slow process, and with an all-volunteer organization, it seems very slow. In the end, though, it's well worth the time and effort.

Jamie Ellis  
President, Board of Directors  
November 2009

## **Overview of GPF Strategic Planning**

Organizations develop many types of plans. Master plans generally provide overarching guidance for long-term development of facilities and programs. Business plans usually clarify the organization's financial position and the programs it provides that impact finances. Operation plans, marketing plans, and other topical plans guide the day-to-day work of staff, partners, and volunteers.

Strategic planning helps an organization look closely at its present operational efforts, considers stakeholder needs, and examines the current environment in which the organization works. End results include a better understanding of the organization and the interests and needs of members, discussion of difficult or challenging issues, and a plan that targets meeting specific, critical goals of the organization for a defined time period. It involves doing just what it implies--being strategic in selecting the most important issues to address.

Although it had long been recognized that Grand Prairie Friends could benefit from a strategic plan, it did not become a priority until after The Land Trust Alliance provided GPF with a Guided Organizational Assessment as part of the process in becoming an accredited land trust. One major recommendation from LTA's Guided Organizational Assessment was to have a strategic plan in place for GPF.

The first step in the strategic planning process was a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the organization by the current GPF Board of Directors. Each Board member completed the initial analysis anonymously. The GPF Board of Directors held two "whiteboard" meetings (June 22 and June 29, 2009) to prioritize concerns brought forth in the SWOT analysis and to begin outlining strategic plan goals and objectives. The SWOT analysis and whiteboard meetings were facilitated by Board of Directors member Dan Olson. Documentation and development of the plan were completed internally by GPF Board of Directors Members.

### **GPF Strategic Planning Results**

The following items were decided or accomplished at the planning meetings:

1. The plan would be for five years with a new or revised plan to be developed in year six.
2. It was agreed that the current mission statement, endorsed by the membership in 2007, did not need further revision. However, the Board of Directors also noted that everything addressed in the Strategic Plan should be within the guiding principles of the Mission Statement.
3. Goals and objectives were developed based on items brought up in the SWOT analysis.
4. Action steps were developed that will be used to achieve the objectives and goals. This is not just a check list of "things to do."
5. A process needs to be put in place for documenting, reporting and updating the plan on a regular basis.
6. GPF's Strategic Planning Goals and Objectives will fall under three categories. These categories are Administrative, Membership, and Volunteer.

## **Mission and Guiding Thoughts**

### **Mission of Grand Prairie Friends**

*Our mission is to preserve and restore natural communities in east-central Illinois and to promote an understanding and appreciation of natural resources.*

### **Guiding Thoughts**

Although educational goals and objectives were discussed at length, the Board felt that focusing on the three categories of Administrative, Membership, and Volunteer goals should take priority in this plan. It was felt that other entities in the region were focused on education and offered programs and trainings that GPF members could enjoy and learn from. Additionally, it was reported that good stewardship activities and volunteer days include some introductory education by the site steward or other volunteers. The GPF Board strongly encourages the continuation and enhancement of educational opportunities for the membership, but chooses to put current efforts toward improving aspects of GPF Administration, Membership, and Volunteer.

## **Overview of Goals, Objectives, and Action Steps**

During the development of this Strategic Plan, it was agreed that the Goals, Objectives, and Action Steps should be developed within the following guidelines:

### **Goals**

- Goals shall be broad statements that set general priorities for the organization.
- Goals shall be based on issues that rise to the top in the SWOT analysis.
- Goals shall be written so they can be revised to meet changing conditions and needs.
- Goals shall be categorized into Administrative, Membership, and Stewardship areas.
- Goals shall be consistent with our mission to manage our natural and cultural resources in perpetuity.
- Goals shall be fiscally responsible and financially stable.

### **Objectives**

- Objectives shall have targeted results that are clear, measurable, and attainable with an all volunteer board and membership.
- Objectives shall be timely and succinct.

### **Action Steps**

- Action steps shall be specific projects or actions designed to help meet the objective.
- Action steps shall be assigned a leader and a time frame for completion.

The GPF Board of Directors will assign action steps to individuals or committees best suited for that action and receive periodic updates from the contact person on that action step.

## **Grand Prairie Friends Goals**

Seven goals were agreed upon by the GPF Board of Directors. Although the goals are listed from 1 to 7, the Board of Directors has agreed not to prioritize one goal over another. The Board of Directors recognizes that the opportunity to complete the goals can arise at any time; therefore each goal is as important as the next. The goals are as follows:

1. Achieve Land Trust Accreditation.
2. Increase the number of participants in administrative aspects of Grand Prairie Friends.
3. Increase the number of participants in the volunteer aspects of Grand Prairie Friends.
4. Increase awareness of Grand Prairie Friends.
5. Enhance natural area steward and volunteer training.
6. Increase landholdings.
7. Acquire a centralized and stable space for the needs of the organization.

## **Monitoring and Reporting Plan Progress**

### **Action Item Assignments**

The president of the Board of Directors shall serve as the plan champion and be responsible for assigning action items to others, discussing individual progress on action items, and assisting with getting resources needed for the completion of the action items.

It may be necessary for the Board of Directors president to appoint an ad hoc committee to help with the monitoring and reporting of accomplishments during the five-year plan. It is recommended that action item leaders take it upon themselves to recruit or ask for additional help in order to complete their action items.

### **Quarterly**

It shall be the duty of the president of Grand Prairie Friends to get quarterly progress reports from all individuals involved in completing action steps.

### **Annually**

One Board of Directors meeting per year should focus on the Strategic Plan. An individual will be assigned by the president to compile the progress reports into a Strategic Plan update. The written update shall be distributed to all members of the Board of Directors as well as others assigned to complete action steps. Updates should be communicated in the newsletter and on the GPF website.

An individual or the ad hoc committee should meet prior to the following fiscal year budget approval to review the entire plan. This annual meeting can include additions and deletions based on the current fiscal situation of GPF.

### **In Five Years**

The Strategic Plan should be reviewed and accomplishments noted. A new updated Strategic Plan process should begin in 2014. It is suggested that the 2014 Strategic Plan include identifying goals out to 100 years.

**GPF Goals, Objectives, and Action Steps**  
**for 2009 – 2014**

## Goal: Achieve Land Trust Accreditation

**Objective: Develop and adopt standards for a Land Trust as outlined by the Land Trust Alliance Guided Organizational Assessment.**

| Action Steps to Meet Objective                 | Target Date  | Action Item Leader                    | Notes |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|-------|
| Develop a Board-approved Strategic Plan.       | In progress  | Dan Olson                             |       |
| Develop a Board of Directors Ethics Statement. | Completed  | Jim Payne                             |       |
| Review GPF Mission Statement.                  | Completed  | Board of Directors                    |       |
| Maintain federal tax exemption status.         | Ongoing  | Treasurer with Board of Directors     |       |
| Submit annual budget for Board approval.       | Each year  | Finance Committee, Board of Directors |       |
| Develop a Finance Policy.                      | Completed  | Finance Committee                     |       |
| Develop a Record Keeping Policy.               | In progress  | Jim Payne                             |       |
| Conduct periodic financial reviews or audits.  | As needed  | Finance Committee                     |       |
| Develop Financial Assets Policy.               | June 2010  | Finance Committee                     |       |
| Develop Use of Dedicated Funds Policy.         | Completed? Some of this is already in our bylaws. Finance Committee may want to clarify the statements in the bylaws as cases arise. | Finance Committee                     |       |

**Goal: Increase the Number of Participants in Administrative Aspects of Grand Prairie Friends.**

**Objective: Increase Board member recruitment and retention.**

| <b>Action Steps to Meet Objective</b>  | <b>Target Date</b> | <b>Action Item Leader</b>                       | <b>Notes</b> |
|--|--------------------|---|--------------|
| Develop Board member job description and expectations.                                       | January 2010       | Fred and Jamie                                  |              |
| Diversify the Board of Directors with respect to desired skills, backgrounds, and expertise. | Evaluated annually | Board President, All Board of Directors members |              |
| Develop protocol for announcing Board of Director openings.                                  | Spring 2010        | Jamie   |              |
| Develop and produce Board member handbook.   | Spring 2010        | Jamie   |              |
| Develop a Board member orientation and training session.                                     | Spring 2010        | Jamie   |              |

**Goal: Increase the Number of Participants in Administrative Aspects of Grand Prairie Friends.**

**Objective: Increase committee member recruitment and retention.**

| <b>Action Steps to Meet Objective</b>                                      | <b>Target Date</b>   | <b>Action Item Leader</b> | <b>Notes</b> |
|--|--|---------------------------|--------------|
| Develop committee chair job descriptions and expectations.                 | Jamie and Fred said they would get back to me on dates for all of this objective | Jamie and Fred            |              |
| Develop protocol for announcing committee chair openings and member needs. | Annually   | Jamie and Fred            |              |
| Revisit committee descriptions in the GPF bylaws and change if needed.     | Periodically   | Jamie and Fred            |              |

**Goal: Increase the Number of Participants in Administrative Aspects of Grand Prairie Friends.**

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|--|
| <b>Objective: Create paid position(s) for Grand Prairie Friends.</b> |
|--|

| <b>Action Steps to Meet Objective</b>                          | <b>Target Date</b> | <b>Action Item Leader</b> | <b>Notes</b> |
|--|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Identify need for a paid employee.                             | January 2010       | Drew                      |              |
| Develop a job description for potential employee(s).           | January 2010       | Drew                      |              |
| Identify a reliable revenue stream to support a paid employee. | April 2010         | Drew                      |              |

**Goal: Increase the Number of Participants in Volunteer Aspects of Grand Prairie Friends.**

**Objective: Increase the number of Natural Area Stewards.**

| <b>Action Steps to Meet Objective</b>  | <b>Target Date</b> | <b>Action Item Leader</b> | <b>Notes</b> |
|--|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Develop job descriptions and expectations for site stewards.   | January 2010       | Derek                     |              |
| Distribute a copy of the East Central Illinois Stewardship Manual and Field Guide to every active Steward. | Dec. 2009          | Derek                     |              |
| Develop protocol for announcing site steward openings.   | April 2010         | Derek                     |              |
| Make list of sites that need a steward.  | Feb. 2010          | Derek                     |              |

**Goal: Increase the Number of Participants in Volunteer Aspects of Grand Prairie Friends.**

**Objective: Increase the number of Natural Area Volunteers.**

| Action Steps to Meet Objective  | Target Date  | Action Item Leader | Notes |
|---|--|--------------------|-------|
| Develop ways to best communicate with the membership.                                   | Ongoing  |                    |       |
| Offer a set number of volunteer trainings per year.                                     | Ongoing but develop next set of trainings by Jan. 2010 for 2010. | Derek              |       |
| Develop recruitment opportunities in conjunction with “Increase Awareness of GPF” goal. | Ongoing  | Derek              |       |
| Compile a list of members willing to use their expertise for GPF matters.               | Annually   | Fred               |       |

## **Goal: Increase Awareness of Grand Prairie Friends**

**Objective: Increase public awareness of Grand Prairie Friends.**

| <b>Action Steps to Meet Objective</b>  | <b>Target Date</b>              | <b>Action Item Leader</b>  | <b>Notes</b> |
|--|---------------------------------|--|--------------|
| Revamp website design and information.   | Completed but should be ongoing | Publicity Committee  |              |
| Increase outreach opportunities.   | Ongoing                         | Publicity Committee  |              |
| Determine good outlets for pamphlet distributions.                                   | Aug. 2010                       | Derek  |              |
| Increase good media coverage.  | Aug. 2010                       | Jim Payne (via Mare Payne), Publicity Committee                    |              |
| Develop ways that fund raisers can be used for an awareness campaign and vice versa. | Continual as needed             | Publicity, Membership and Volunteerism, and Fundraising committees |              |

## Goal: Increase Awareness of Grand Prairie Friends

**Objective: Communicate effectively with membership and partners.**

| <b>Action Steps to Meet Objective</b>                    | <b>Target Date</b>                                    | <b>Action Item Leader</b>                           | <b>Notes</b> |
|--|---|---|--------------|
| Investigate ways to communicate with the GPF membership. | Ongoing   | Board of Directors                                  |              |
| Investigate electronic options for newsletter.           | If feasible a 2010 target for electronic newsletters. | Board of Directors along with Newsletter Volunteers |              |

**Goal: Enhance Natural Area Steward and Volunteer Training.**

|   |
|---|
| <b>Objective: Determine stewardship and volunteer needs and develop training opportunities.</b> |
|---|

| <b>Action Steps to Meet Objective</b>  | <b>Target Date</b>  | <b>Action Item Leader</b> | <b>Notes</b> |
|--|---|---------------------------|--------------|
| Conduct a survey of members to see what skill trainings are needed.                              | Completed by Jan. 2010 so it can be incorporated into 2010 trainings. | Stewardship Committee     |              |
| Have East Central Illinois Stewardship Manual available to all potential and current volunteers. | March 2010  | Dan and Derek             |              |
| Develop Natural Area Steward training.   | Feb. 2010   | Dan and Derek             |              |

## Goal: Increase Landholdings.

**Objective: Increase the number of GPF-stewarded areas under direct ownership, partnerships, and easements.**

| <b>Action Steps to Meet Objective</b>   | <b>Target Date</b> | <b>Action Item Leader</b>                | <b>Notes</b> |
|---|--------------------|--|--------------|
| Develop land acquisition criteria that fit with the Mission of Grand Prairie Friends. | Completed          | Mary Kay Solecki                         |              |
| Adopt an easement standard or template.   | Nov. 2010          | Jim Payne and Land Acquisition Committee |              |
| Develop a conservation plan.  |                    |  |              |

## Goal: Increase Landholdings.

**Objective: Position GPF for land or easement acquisition when opportunities arise.**

| <b>Action Steps to Meet Objective</b>   | <b>Target Date</b> | <b>Action Item Leader</b>               | <b>Notes</b> |
|---|--------------------|---|--------------|
| Determine what financial levels are needed for a sustainable land acquisition fund. | Dec. 2010          | Land Acquisition Committee, Jim and Dan |              |
| Determine outside funding sources for land acquisition and conservation easements.  | Dec. 2009          | Jim Payne                               |              |

**Goal: Acquire a Centralized and Stable Space for the Needs of the Organization.**

**Objective: Determine space needs and investigate possible locations.**

| <b>Action Steps to Meet Objective</b>      | <b>Target Date</b> | <b>Action Item Leader</b> | <b>Notes</b> |
|--|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Determine space needs of organization.     | Dec. 2010          | Jamie and Jim             |              |
| Investigate options for rental agreements. | Dec. 2010          | Jamie                     |              |

