

Project Application: Arnolds Park Nature Area
Dickinson County Water Quality Commission



Iowa
Natural Heritage
Foundation

Applicant Organization: Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Street Address: 505 5th Ave, Suite 444
City: Des Moines, IA
Zip Code: 50309

Organization Contact: Abby Hade Terpstra, Director of Philanthropy
Email: aterpstra@inhf.org
Phone: 515-288-1846 x15

Project Title: Arnolds Park Nature Area
Application Submission Date: October 1, 2025

Project Summary: Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation is seeking support for the acquisition of 73 acres of natural land in Arnolds Park for use as a public nature area. Acquisition of this land protects it from development, enables future wetland and native vegetation restoration to protect the watershed, and allows for the addition of public amenities like mowed walking trails, parking access, a shade structure and road-adjacent bike path.

Amount Requested through this grant application: \$ 100,000.00
Total Project Cost: \$2,003,000.00

MATCHING FUNDS

Hard Match \$1.9M

Source of Matching Dollars: The option to purchase the property was secured for \$100,000. This cost was covered by internal funds from Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, and the City of Arnolds Park.

Additional hard match comes from the ongoing private fundraising campaign that Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and Ducks Unlimited began in May 2025 and that will likely conclude by October 31, 2025. To date, private donors have given or pledged \$1.63M.

If DCWQC contributes \$100,000 to the acquisition, INHF is confident we can raise the remaining \$170,000 privately.

Soft Match \$

Soft Match Sources: Administrative costs for project coordination land acquisition, fundraising and travel for Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation are not included in our project cost calculations. As a donor-supported project, we put 100% of funds INHF raises toward acquiring the land.

Amount of Federal, State or other public cash match already acquired: none

Amount of Private cash match funds: \$1.9M

Source of public and/or private cash match: INHF, in conjunction with Ducks Unlimited, has been running a private fundraising campaign throughout the summer of 2025. To date, the two entities have raised \$1.63M in cash gifts and pledges, in addition to providing \$100K to purchase the option.

In line with INHF's donor privacy policy, we will not name individuals with gift amounts here, but we can share that more than 160 households have contributed with the majority being residents and homeowners in the community. Lead gifts of \$25K-\$500K have come from an anonymous donor, the Andrea Waitt Carlton Foundation, the Gleason Family Foundation, the Mendenhall family, the Duhamel family, the East Okoboji Lake Improvement Corporation, and eight other families.

Letters of Commitment

Attached please find letters from the following supporters of this project:

City of Arnolds Park

Linda Nase

City Clerk

712-332-2341 x12

lnase@arnoldsparkcity.com

Ducks Unlimited

Ben Berka

Director of Development

515-201-8395

bberka@ducks.org

Iowa Audubon

Doug Harr

President

515-275-4818

dnharr@gmail.com

Is this project a portion of a larger, overall project to be implemented over a multi-year period? (Check one)

Yes - *If yes, describe in project narrative and include in budget form as instructed.*

No

Type of Project (select all that apply):

Public education, public awareness and information dissemination

Creation or maintenance of Best Management Practices

Erection and maintenance of storm water runoff facilities

Bank Stabilization

Water monitoring

Watershed Protection

Activities to abate and remove invasive species

Other activities which will improve, protect, or enhance the quality of water in the lakes of Dickinson County

Estimated Project Dates

Start: Purchase of the option finalized on March 14, 2025

Completion: Option to Purchase the property must be exercised by November 4, 2025.

Civil Rights Assurance of Compliance: *Upon signing in the space provided below, the applicant hereby agrees that it will comply with Title VI of the Rights Act of 1964, 1873 and the age Discrimination Act of 1975 to the end that no person in the United States shall on the grounds of race, color, national origin or otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity for which the Applicant-Recipient receives grant funds and hereby gives assurance that it will immediately take any measures to effectuate this agreement. This assurance is binding on the Applicant-Recipient, its successors, transferees, and assignees, and the person or person whose signature appears below are authorized to sign this assurance on behalf of the Applicant-Recipient.*

Applicant's Signature: 

Applicant's Name and Title: Abby Hade Terpstra, Director of Philanthropy

Date: September 24, 2025

BUDGET

Proposed Budget for Current Grant Request Year

	Commission	Hard Match	Soft Match	Total
Staff				\$ 0.00
Supplies and Services				\$ 0.00
Equipment				\$ 0.00
Travel				\$ 0.00
Water Monitoring				\$ 0.00
Land Acquisition	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 1,900,000.00		\$ 2,000,000.00
Land Development				\$ 0.00
Other		\$ 3,000.00		\$ 3,000.00
Total	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 1,903,000.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 2,003,000.00

Budget Narrative:

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation purchased an Option from OCW, LLC and MJK, LCC on March 14, 2025 for \$100,000. This option gives INHF the exclusive right to purchase the proposed Arnolds Park Nature Area land for \$2,000,000 until November 4, 2025.

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation found willing partners in the City of Arnolds Park (to be the long-term owners), Dickinson County Conservation (to lend expertise to proposed habitat management), and Ducks Unlimited (to jointly fundraise and support proposed wetland reconstruction). INHF took on the role of lead fundraiser and will hold the proposed conservation easement on the property after the deed is transferred to the City.

Public fundraising began in earnest after Memorial Day 2025. The partners set a group goal of raising \$1.9M in cash gifts and pledges by October 31, in order to know we would have the necessary resources to exercise the option. To date, more than 160 households, businesses, community groups and family foundations have stepped up to provide \$1.63M in support.

INHF intends to keep fundraising through the October 31 public campaign deadline if necessary, as long as we are confident that we are close enough to the goal to exercise the option. A grant from the Dickinson County Water Quality Commission will ensure the project's success.

If the public fundraising campaign exceeds its goal, any additional funds will be used toward the on-site ecological restoration activities proposed by the partnership group: namely wetland basin restoration, native vegetation planting, and invasive species removal.

TASKS AND DELIVERABLES

October 24, 2025 INHF board of directors votes on exercising the Option to Purchase

October 31, 2025 Public fundraising campaign deadline; press release to local media

November 3, 2025 Exercise the Option to Purchase

November 15, 2025 Invoices for pledged gifts sent to donors

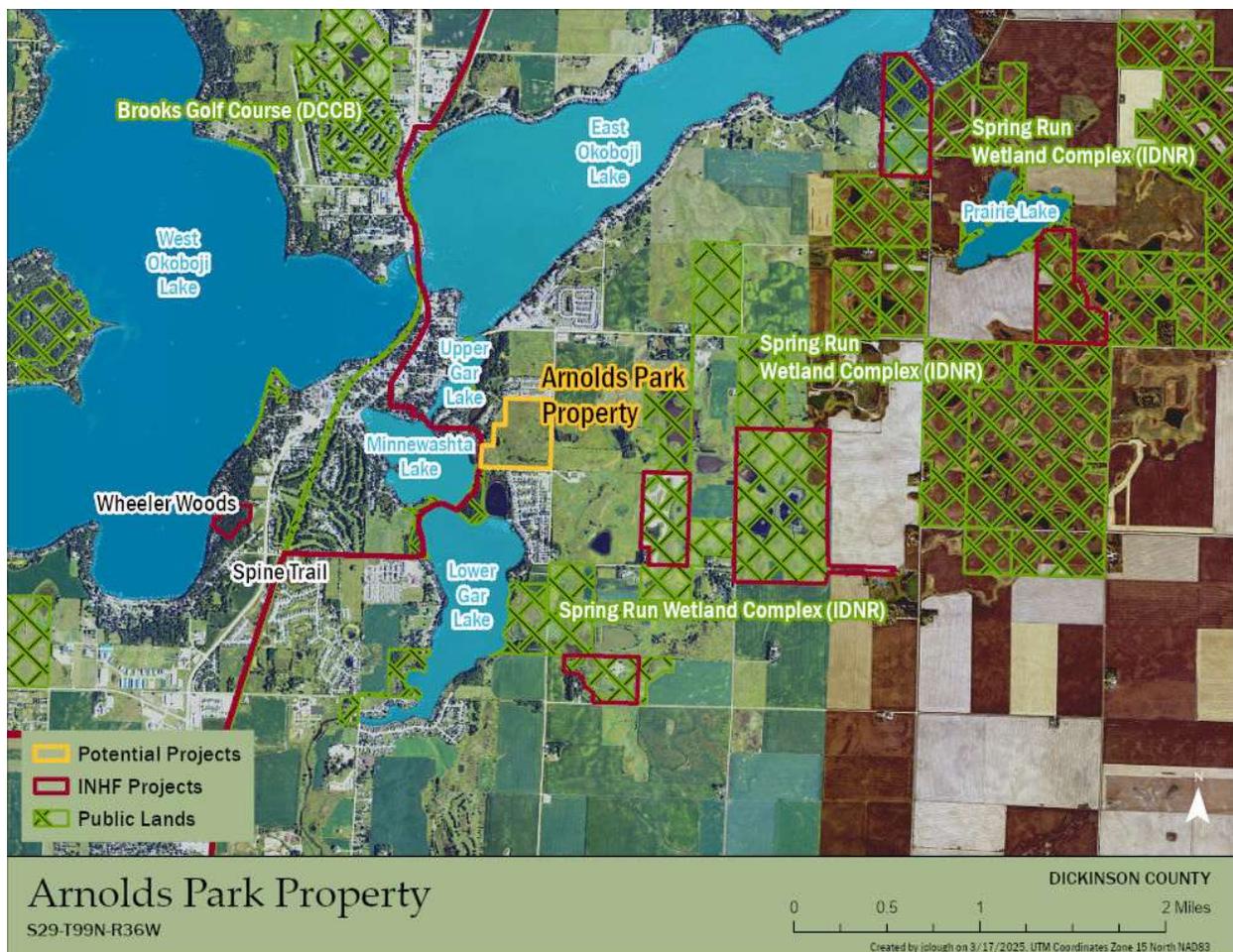
December 2025 Conservation Easement drafted by INHF

January 2026 Verbal or written report submitted to DCWQC

February 2026 INHF releases annual organizational impact report

Early spring 2026 Transfer to City of Arnolds Park with Conservation Easement in place

Late spring 2026 Community celebration of project success



PROJECT NARRATIVE

Qualifications of Group/Agency: Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation is a state-wide, non-profit land trust dedicated to the protection and restoration of Iowa's land, water and wildlife. Our staff of 34 collectively represent over 150 years of experience. Since our founding in 1979, INHF has worked diligently in the Iowa Great Lakes region on projects that impact water quality, preserve native ecosystems, restore wildlife habitat, and provide recreational opportunities that connect people with nature.

Statement of Project Need: The pace and scale of development in the Iowa Great Lakes region has lovers of nature and water-aware citizens concerned. The City of Arnolds Park has seen an increase of over 1,000 dwellings in the past twenty years. Open space that is available for recreation, habitat and supports water quality is in peril.

Protecting these 73 acres from intense development fits in the purview of the Water Quality Management Plan for the Iowa Great Lakes Watershed in that the land lies directly adjacent the lake chain of Upper Gar, Minnewashta, and Lower Gar – representing a watershed area close to 12,000 acres.

Statement of Project Benefit to Water Quality: Allowing this land to remain natural, enhancing the existing wetland basins to increase their effectiveness, and further protecting the land through a conservation easement will have long-term implications for water quality. This land drains 240 acres into Upper Gar and Minnewashta and can serve a critical function to slow and filter water entering the lakes.



Near the nexus of Upper Gar and Minnewashta Lakes, the proposed acquisition has existing wetland basins ready for reconstruction

Public Awareness Plan: DCWQC’s contribution to the Arnolds Park Nature Area will be noted on on-site signage thanking donors and naming those who contributed \$10,000 or more to the project. Press releases can cite the support of DCWQC and the project website, www.INHF.org/ArnoldsPark, will list DCWQC as a lead contributor.

As a location at the urban interface of nature and community, the protection of these 73 acres as natural space that is open for public enjoyment will be highly visible. If acquired, the proposed wetland restoration work could easily be viewed from the road and from users of the Spine Trail, providing opportunity for additional awareness of water quality issues and solutions in Dickinson County.

Land Acquisition and Development: If Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation fails to exercise the option to purchase by the October 31, 2025 deadline, this land will be put on the open market by the seller. With recent zoning changes, the property is appealing to developers looking for more RV camping areas or storage units in particular.

Project Location: The proposed Arnolds Park Nature Area is on the east side of the city of Arnolds Park, bordered on the east by 240th Ave and the Spring Run WMA complex, on the south by the Pelican Ridge LOA and 195th St, on the north by the Cedar Ridge Campground, and on the east by Oars Campground, Rohr Ave and the Spine Trail.



Environmental, Economic and Social Impacts of Project:

Close to 240 acres drain through the proposed Arnolds Park Nature Area, making this land a critical part of protecting the water quality of the Lakes. Maintaining and enhancing the existing wetland basins on site (future phase) will slow and filter water and provide a buffer for heavy rain events.

Surrounded on three sides by existing development, keeping this land natural enhances the beauty of the Arnolds Park community, allows a closer connection to nature, and preserves a connection from the Spring Run Wildlife Area complex to the east to the lake bodies to the west. Habitat for birds, plants and animals is an important part of keeping the unique lake ecosystem and experience intact.

Having this property be available for creating an along-side, off-road bike path will allow pedestrians and bikers who are currently using the narrow shoulder of 240th Street to get between Bridges Bay and the Spine Trail a safe and beautiful pathway. Mown hiking trails will invite residents and visitors to experience nature and enjoy the outdoor life, and provide learning opportunities around the importance of wetlands, natural buffers, and native plant communities.

Historical, Archaeological and Architectural Features: There are no known historical, archaeological or architectural features on site.

Relationship to State, Local and County Plans: Adjacent to the Lower Gar (Spring Run) Resource Management Area, protecting these 73 acres directly contributes to the prevention of sediment, phosphorus and excess nutrients reaching Upper Gar and Minnewashta and ultimately, Lower Gar Lake. In addition, the protection of these acres through a permanent conservation easement will ensure a long-term commitment to the goals of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' Upper Gar Lake State Game Management Area to develop and restore habitat for native and migratory wildlife species. Keeping this land natural will support the ecological health and water quality of the watershed by providing critical wildlife habitat and preventing the negative impacts of disturbance and development.

Agreements and Easements/Land Acquisition/Development: Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation will place a conservation easement on the property prior to transferring ownership to the City of Arnolds Park. The conservation easement will permanently prevent subdivision, development, and extractive uses while allowing for the reconstruction of wetland basins, construction of a bike trail along 240th Ave, mown walking trails, and a small trailhead structure with a bathroom and shaded seating area.

Itemized Cost Estimate:

Expenses	Estimate
Purchase Price	\$1,900,000
Option (non-refundable)	\$100,000
Abstract/Title/Legal	\$1,000
Appraisal	\$2,000
Total Expenses	\$2,003,000

Hard costs for the acquisition of the 73 acres are limited to the purchased option, the remaining purchase price of the property, legal and appraisal fees. Because this fundraising campaign is based on an Option to Purchase, there are no holding costs or tax responsibilities being accrued. Transfer to the City of Arnolds Park upon exercising the option is expected to happen in short order.

Maintenance Plan: Once obtained, the 73-acre parcel will be owned and maintained by the City of Arnolds Park in perpetuity. After the wetlands and prairie have been restored, the City will work with the Dickinson County Conservation Board to maintain those improvements. Being adjacent to the Dickinson County Spine Trail, a trailhead containing a limited amount of parking along with a small shelter and bathroom facility, will be established and maintained by the City.

See attached brochure for the City of Arnolds Park's vision.



Photo by Russ Mitchell: Arnolds Park Mayor Jim Hussong stands next to the on-site project promotion sign



Looking South toward Pelican Ridge LOA and 195th St: the proposed nature area is in the foreground.



Looking NNE toward 240th Ave: Cedar Ridge Campground and Bridges Bay are in the background.



Looking NW: Cedar Ridge Campground in the right foreground, Oars Campground center left middle ground, Upper Gar in the background, proposed nature area lower left.



Looking SW: Pelican Ridge LOA in upper left, Rohr St in upper right, Minnewashta and Upper Gar in background

09/24/2005

Dickinson County Clean Water Alliance
3302 18th Street
Spirit Lake, IA 51360

Dear Members of the Dickinson County Clean Water Alliance,

I am writing to express Ducks Unlimited's strong support for the Arnolds Park Project, a collaborative conservation initiative in Dickinson County that reflects the best of what partnerships can achieve. This effort, led by the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) in formal partnership with Ducks Unlimited (DU), aims to permanently protect a 73-acre property near Arnolds Park—an area of ecological, recreational, and cultural significance to the Iowa Great Lakes region.

Through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in April 2005, INHF and DU have committed to jointly raising \$1.9 million for the acquisition of the site, with the goal of restoration and transferring ownership to the City of Arnolds Park. Ducks Unlimited has provided \$25,000 toward the purchase option and is actively collaborating on fundraising, outreach, and resource sharing to ensure the success of this project.

This initiative will protect sensitive shoreline and wetland habitat, improve water quality, and expand public access to nature. It also demonstrates a model of conservation fundraising that leverages the strengths of each partner organization.

I believe this project aligns perfectly with the mission of the Dickinson County Clean Water Alliance. I encourage you to consider full support for this grant request.

Thank you for your leadership in protecting clean water and natural spaces across Dickinson County.

Sincerely,



Ben Berka
Director of Development – IA
Ducks Unlimited

P.O. Box 437



Arnolds Park, IA 51331

September 24, 2025

Dickinson County Water Quality Commission
John Wills
3302 18th Street
Spirit Lake, IA 51360

Dear Mr. Wills,

The City of Arnolds Park has had many discussions with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation regarding the 73-acres of undeveloped Orr's property on the eastern edge of Arnolds Park, the importance of keeping the area natural and open to the public, and has contributed \$25,000 towards the option to purchase this property.

The City is ready to assume ownership and work with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and the Dickinson County Conservation Board to restore and maintain the natural prairie and improve water quality through wetland restoration for the Iowa wildlife that call the area home.

We urge you to support the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation in their efforts to purchase some of the last remaining undeveloped property in the Lakes Region. Thank you.

Respectfully,
City of Arnolds Park

Jim Hussong
Mayor



The Voice for Iowa's Birds!

28 July 2025

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
ATTN: Abby Terpstra
505 5th Ave, # 444
Des Moines, IA 50309

Dear Abby:

Enclosed is a \$2,500 donation check from Iowa Audubon to INHF. This is to be used specifically for your acquisition of the **Arnold's Park Property in Dickinson County.**

The Iowa Audubon Board of Directors selected this as our special project priority this year, for multiple reasons. We know that such land so close to Lake Minnewashta must be protected from any more kind of expanded housing, RV, or commercial development. It also has drained wetlands that can be restored, offering additional habitat for waterfowl and other wetland wildlife. Finally, it is so close to the Spring Run Wildlife Management Complex that perhaps this might direct Iowa DNR, Dickinson CCB, Ducks Unlimited, INHF or other conservationists to eventually attempt acquiring land to the east of this Arnold's Park Property. The goal should be connecting it with Spring Run, one of NW Iowa's largest and most critically important prairie wetland complexes.

Our organization is most pleased to provide this gift to assist INHF for increasing public lands and ensuring permanent protection for birds, other wildlife, and *all* of Iowa's natural resources.

Sincerely,

Douglas C. Harr
President & Chief Operating Officer
Iowa Audubon
PO Box 117
Ogden, IA50212

Iowa Audubon Officers and Board of Directors

Jane Clark—Des Moines Audubon Karen Disbrow—Iowa City Bird Club Leland Freie—Cedar Rapids Audubon
Francis Moore—Prairie Rapids Audubon Shane Patterson—Big Bluestem Audubon Tom Reavely—At-large
Rex Rundquist—Loess Hills Audubon Paul Skrade—Upper Iowa Audubon Keith Summerville—At-large
Anna Buckardt Thomas—At-large Bob Walton—Dubuque Audubon Walt Zuurdeeg—Quad Cities Audubon

You can....

-  Create a new park
-  Protect water quality and reduce floods
-  Restore prairies and wetlands
-  Improve safety and quality of life
-  Expand biking and hiking options

... by giving or
pledging today!

Three-year pledging available for gifts over \$1,000.

Give online, by check or with stock, DAF or IRA disbursement.

Project deadline: October 31, 2025

Contact: Abby Hade Terpstra
INHF Director of Philanthropy
aterpstra@inhf.org
515-288-1846 ext. 15.



www.inhf.org/arnoldspark



Project Partners



Keep it Natural

Help create a new park and protect
land for people, wildlife and water
quality in the city of Arnolds Park

The Vision

On the edge of Arnolds Park near Oars Campground in Dickinson County lies 73 acres of undeveloped land — rare open space in a community facing development pressure.



Roughly 240 acres drain through the property into Lower Gar and Milford Creek. What happens on this land has a direct impact on water quality.



INHF is working with the City of Arnolds Park and Dickinson County Conservation to realize a vision of a city-owned park — open to everyone — with management and restoration completed by Dickinson County Conservation.



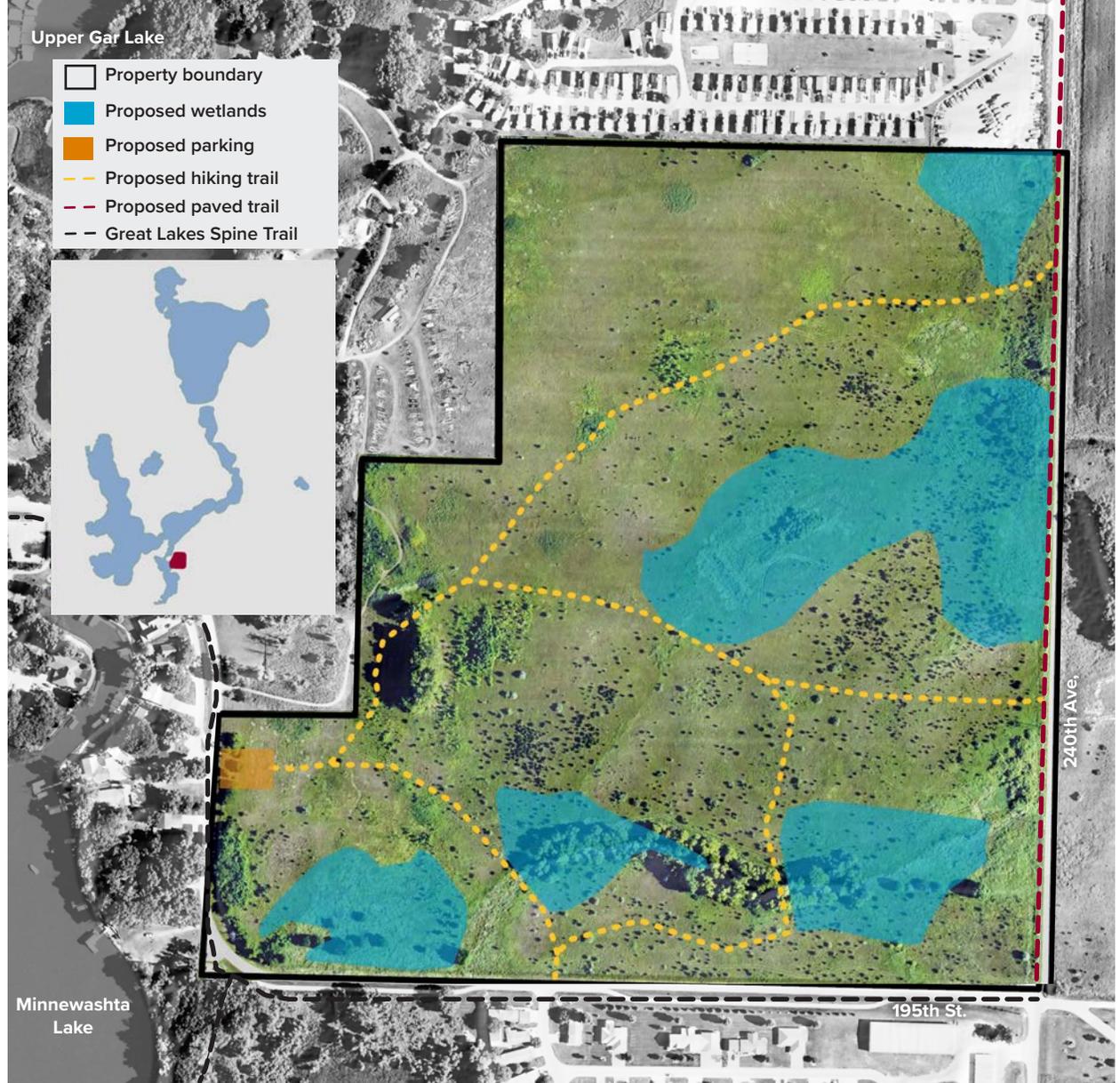
Permanent land protection and restoration of prairies and wetlands will offer important habitat for Iowa wildlife.



This urban interface is a key location for a possible trail connection and trailhead, providing a safe off-road alternative for cyclists and walkers.



The city's concept plan prioritizes open space and easy access to nature, with a small parking lot, shade shelter and soft-surface trail — creating outdoor recreation opportunities for improved quality of life.



Learn more or donate at
www.inhf.org/arnoldspark

We Need You!

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and Ducks Unlimited need to raise **\$1.9 million by October 31, 2025** to exercise a secured option to purchase the property and create a new park.