

EXISTING AND FUTURE LAND USES

Key Issues with Existing and Future Land Uses

- Agricultural Preservation (pages 5 – 7)
- Housing Development (pages 6 – 7)
- Economic Development (pages 7 – 8)

Countywide Goals

- Agricultural Preservation
 - Preserve agriculturally productive land uses as a vital resource to the County.
 - Continue to ensure minimal land use conflicts concerning basic farming operations, feedlots and residential/urban land uses.
- Housing Development
 - Allow for adequate residential development in rural areas taking care not to upset any agricultural or environmentally sensitive areas.
 - Continue to develop the livability and diversity of Nobles County by preserving existing farmhouse sites.
 - Supply communities with options for long-term residence within the residential sector.
 - Continue to provide adequate balance between residential developments and protection of agricultural and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Economic Development
 - Continue to enhance possibilities for the development of commercial and industrial enterprise within Nobles County that are compatible with current resources.
 - Protect the County's water supply from pollution.

Introduction

Land use regulation affects immediate as well as surrounding areas. One cannot simply zone an area as heavy industrial without affecting the surrounding areas in some way. Depending on the types of land uses that are planned for or desired, elements such as city services, infrastructure, natural resources and agricultural uses are going to be affected.

By carefully and systematically planning for appropriate growth, as well as designating different types of land uses throughout Nobles County, conflicting land uses will be minimized and desired growth can be allowed to take place.

Issues Summary

This section of the Comprehensive Plan presents an inventory of current land uses throughout the County (both a Base Map and a Land Use map of Nobles County can be found in the Map Section, Map #1 and Map #2). It will identify issues currently facing the County, as well as potential issues that are going to be of concern in the near future. All issues facing the County were identified through meetings between the general public and local officials throughout the County.

Some changes in land use have taken place in Nobles County since the last comprehensive plan was completed in 1966. The land use plan being presented in this document organizes and maps existing land use data, as well as sets up various guidelines intended to structure future growth and planning within the County. This is done by mapping out proposed growth areas, as well as identifying growth limitations for each of Nobles County's municipalities. By means of designating Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB), all incorporated areas within the County will have planned for appropriate growth, limited sprawl, protected agricultural land and discouraged leapfrog development.

To effectively manage future development areas, land use standards are necessary. If not properly planned for, a variety of detrimental consequences may occur.

Urban sprawl is low-density, uncontrolled, unregulated urban growth, and places a financial strain on different levels of government. Governing bodies are left trying to provide funding for the extra infrastructure that is required to support the inefficient use of land. When incompatible land uses develop next to each other, such as residential and heavy industry, a decrease in property values can occur.

Traditional forms of urban sprawl are not present in Nobles County because the establishment of the Agricultural Preservation District limits new non-farm home placement to properties that have proven former farm residences. However, in areas such as Nobles County, a different type of sprawl occurs. Former city dwellers moving out into the rural areas of the County can sometimes have certain expectations that will not be met. Some expect a higher level of service (i.e. snow removal, police coverage, city sewer, etc.) than will be provided. They have become accustomed to having these services while living in the city and continue to expect these services while living on the farm site. Most times, these sites exist in areas where city services do not reach. In addition to the afore mentioned problems, some residents moving out into rural areas find the agricultural practices taking place around their property to be a nuisance. This has prompted the County to develop a policy of requiring residents that do move out onto a rural housing site sign a notice saying they are aware that there will be farming operations taking place adjacent to their property, and that these operations may produce excessive noise, machinery traffic, dust and/or chemical drift.

Land Use Strengths

Residents pointed out that they feel it is important to keep an appropriate balance between urban and rural areas, as well as to continue to strengthen agricultural practices in rural areas. A strength identified was the use of the Agricultural Preservation District as a means to preserve and protect highly valued farmland and agricultural activities.

Residents felt that feedlots are an important issue facing the County and they realize that new feedlot development will be occurring in the future. Presently, residents feel the County does a good job of enforcing the various feedlot regulations through the use of zoning techniques and setback requirements (meaning residents feel there are adequate distances between urban areas and feedlots).

Land Use Weaknesses

Historically, Nobles County has been stricter in regards to their environmental regulations with feedlots (setbacks, manure management and permit requirements) than surrounding counties, or even the state. As such, an issue was raised that the County could be potentially weakening the County with too strict of regulations. The concern identified was that potential feedlot developers may end up developing feedlots in other counties due to their less strict regulations, thereby leaving Nobles County and taking with them the benefit to the economy that they provide. While no specific instances of this problem were reported, maintaining appropriate distances between feedlots, industrial uses, and housing developments is vital to the environmental well being of the County and should not be taken lightly.

Reports of land values increasing so much as to slow the development of new homes in the area were noted as a concern. Other concerns expressed dealt with rural homes. Many of the farm homes in the County that have become vacant, for whatever reason, are continually being removed and converted into cropland. Residents feel that removing these farm sites is like removing part of the County's heritage, and these acreages could serve as a site for new non-farm homes. Also, these acreages act as windbreaks, and removing them allows for greater air speeds which results in higher soil erosion and more blowing snow during the winter months.

The Future of Land Use

Many residents voiced their opinions on where they felt land use guidelines should be heading in the future. Concerns in this section were lakeshore development, wind energy planning and zoning, preservation of farmsteads, and agricultural diversification.

Some residents would like to see progress in zoning for wind energy to ensure appropriate development. Opinions varied in regards to lakeshore development. Some wanted to see development take place on lakeshores at the owner's discretion while others wanted to see the County's lakeshores preserved. Other specific projects were questioned, such as whether or not Adrian Springs should be demolished and replaced with a park.

While keeping in mind current land use weaknesses in the County, residents made a point to include the preservation of farmsteads as one of the key goals in future land use planning. The protection of farmsteads and the strengthening or diversifying of the agricultural sector remains a priority for most in the County.

While growth in the number of feedlots brings many economic benefits, consideration must be taken as to the extra demand they place on roads as well as their environmental surroundings. This may cause an increase in various costs to townships as well as the entire County.

Land Use and Cover

Land in Nobles County is typical of a prairie environment and has a significant variation in land elevation. The highest elevation occurs in the northwestern portion of the County and is just over 1,800 feet above sea level. The lowest elevations occur in the northeastern and southwestern sections of the County and are somewhat below 1,450 feet.

Land use remains primarily agricultural, with urbanization typically occurring around established communities. According to the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) 2000 data, there are 462,642 total acres in Nobles County. Of that, 407,600 acres are Cultivated.

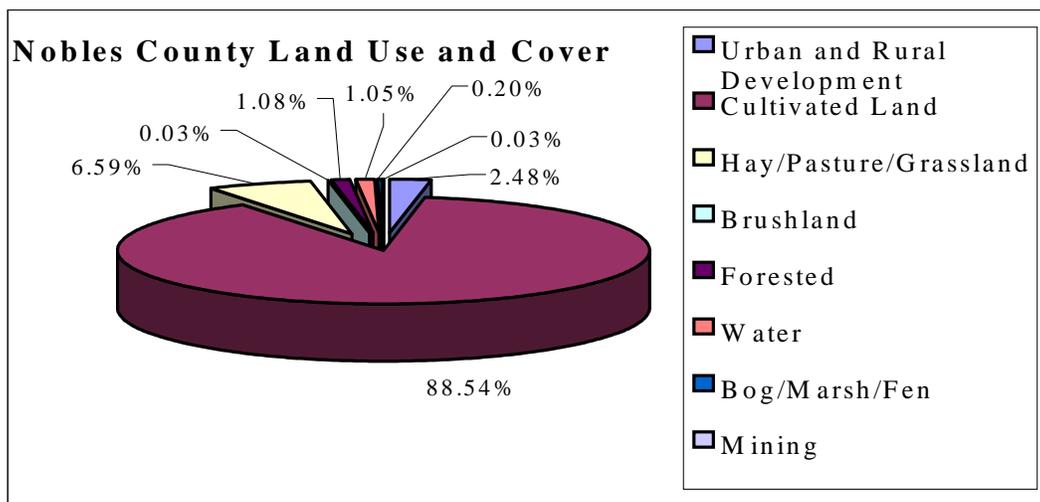
Concern was raised about the overall decrease in the number of farmers within Nobles County. Numbers from the FSA show that in 1990 there were 1,200 operators farming in Nobles County and that number has decreased to 1,046 for the year 2000. The average number of acres farmed per operator in 1990 was 350. Of those 350 acres, 65 percent were owned and 35 percent were rented. For the year 2000, the average number of acres farmed per operator climbed to 372. Of those 372 acres, 55 percent was owned and 45 percent was rented.

As illustrated below in Table 11, the largest uses are cultivated land (which accounts for 88.5 percent of total land usage), hay, pasture, and grasslands (which comprise 6.6 percent of the total land cover), and urban and rural development (which accounts for 2.5 percent of the total).

**Table 11
Nobles County Land Use and Cover
1989 Data**

	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Urban and Rural Development	11,466	2.48%
Cultivated Land	409,605	88.54%
Hay/Pasture/Grassland	30,492	6.59%
Brushland	148	.03%
Forested	5,000	1.08%
Water	4,851	1.05%
Bog/Marsh/Fen	926	.20%
Mining	154	.03%
Total	462,642	100.00%

Source: Minnesota Planning



Source: MN Planning

Land uses of each individual community are illustrated on the land use maps included in the Maps Section. Every community in Nobles County is represented with a current land use map except for Worthington. Worthington's Land Use Map will be added to the Comprehensive Plan when the Worthington City staff has had sufficient time to complete it.

The major concentrations of development outside of the municipalities are the unincorporated areas of Leota and Reading. Nobles County implements agricultural preservation zoning which was developed in order to preserve and promote the use of land for agricultural and commercial Ag purposes. Agriculture preservation was established in order to prevent scattered, non-farm growth. In addition, it is meant to preserve natural resources and stabilize increases in public expenditures for public services.

Agriculture

The major portions of land within unincorporated areas of Nobles County will continue to be used for agricultural purposes. Urban development should generally take a secondary role to agriculture except in certain areas genuinely required for urban development. These lands are found within communities or are those lands adjacent to communities that are required for city expansion. Nobles County must continue to appropriately manage land uses by balancing the need for both urban and rural areas.

Urban growth should be confined to its immediate areas and prohibited from encroaching upon agricultural land. This is done several different ways. By restricting nonagricultural development to areas within urban expansion areas of communities, the amount of cropland loss is minimized, potential urban/rural conflicts are avoided and a more efficient, orderly and visually pleasing environment is realized. Communities can zone land for agricultural use within their boundaries limiting development. In addition, they can set minimum lot size restrictions on land zoned for other purposes. Communities can also set up UGB that are designed to completely stop growth past a certain point (UGB will be further discussed later in this Section). Another option is to designate urban service areas that discourage growth past certain boundaries due to the lack of city provided infrastructure.

Conservation

The conservation of land and habitat is important to Nobles County. This is evident in the amount of state and federally owned acres in the County. According to the 1997 Nobles County Comprehensive Water Plan, Nobles County conservation areas consist of:

- 32 Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), 3,700 Acres
- 4 Federal Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA), 500 Acres
- 2 Wetland Restoration Easements
- 1 State Scientific and Natural Area, Compass Prairie

The conservation lands in Nobles County are labeled on Map #3 in the Map Section. More information on conservation within Nobles County is provided in the Conservation, Parks and Recreation Section of the Comprehensive Plan.

Waterways

Floodplains of rivers and streams, as determined by soil characteristics or high water records, should continue to be free from any kind of development other than agriculture (within areas of minimal erosion), forestry and recreation. This way, the natural overflowing of some streams and rivers will occur with minimal property damage and eliminate a need to build costly dikes.

In regards to building in established floodplains, the County's zoning ordinance describes allowable uses within the floodplain. These uses are: (1) those that do not include a structure of any sort, or (2) are those that are an addition to an already standing structure, which comply with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Flood Insurance Rate Maps. Keeping urban development a safe distance from waterways will minimize pollution and sedimentation.

Since Nobles County lacks any major rivers, the amount of flooding that occurs is usually minimal. However, any new County zoning ordinances should continue to restrict development in areas within the floodplain. The floodplain is level land that may be submerged by floodwaters. Areas of the base (100 year) floodplain have been identified throughout the County by the National Flood Insurance Program.

Housing Development

In the past, Nobles County has not had a serious problem with non-farm development housing occurring in areas that are beyond incorporated and unincorporated communities due to the implementation of Agriculture Preservation District zoning regulations. There has been an increased desire to live adjacent to the County's lakes and in the "rural" setting in general, however, due to the Agricultural Preservation District, non-farm housing development is limited to former existing farm residences.

Adequate controls should be maintained for new housing developments to occur, primarily on land that is within designated urban growth areas. In doing this, two desired results would be achieved: (1) the County will preserve the prime agricultural land for crop production and other agricultural activities, and (2) the County will prevent unnecessary urban-rural conflicts. These are important steps because controversy arises when non-farm rural dwellers are placed in the immediate vicinity of farming operations. Farming operations may produce significant amounts of dust from working the soil. Odor from livestock and drift of chemicals during spraying operations may result if the winds are blowing at moderate levels. All of these different occurrences may be serious nuisances to new rural dwellers. On the other hand, farmers must deal with their own set of problems resulting from new non-farm neighbors. These include a potential increase in taxes resulting from new non-farm neighbors because extra funding is needed for the building and reconstruction of roads, additional police and fire protection that results from new development, and more school busing costs due to a greater amount of children living in rural areas.

Rural Housing

Housing development on prime agricultural land with a soil classification of I, II, III and/or floodplain is prohibited. New housing development is not allowed to occur in unincorporated areas of the County because of the Agricultural Preservation District. However, if this document is to be sustainable over the next 20 to 25 years, it must be able to address the housing needs that the future may require.

Currently, there is not a great need for new housing construction in rural areas of Nobles County. Some Nobles County communities, especially Worthington, currently have designated areas for housing development that aren't being developed. However, as mentioned earlier, there has been an increased desire to live next to the County's lakes and sometimes in a generally rural setting. The County will have to be prepared to address these needs in the future as increased demand for housing in the rural areas occurs.

The uses of the Agricultural Preservation District should be revisited during the next 10 to 15 years. At this time, a housing analysis should be done in order to determine whether or not the Agricultural Preservation District requirements should be changed. If need warrants the altering of the current guidelines, a new strategy must be implemented. This would not include allowing rural homes to be developed all over the rural areas of the County for several reasons. This strategy would make siting livestock facilities more difficult, increase the costs of public services, increase costs for bussing children to and from school, and hamper the ability to provide adequate emergency response to individual households.

The allowance of rural housing must be appropriately planned for and confined to appropriate areas. If need warrants, rural non-farm areas could be encouraged in the Kinbrae/Dundee/Grahams Lakes area and also within the Round Lake/Indian Lake area. Density should be limited as physical features and soil types permit. In addition, septic systems, lakeshore development and DNR guidelines for Natural Environment Lakeshore Development will have to be accounted for.

Commercial Development

As in most small communities within the region, commercial development within Nobles County is now concentrated almost entirely within the central sections of communities. Worthington has commercial development in both its downtown, and along the major highway corridors. A number of commercial additions have recently been built on the northwest portion of Worthington along Highway 59 and Oxford Street. Businesses there are becoming increasingly dominant. Types of businesses such as Wal-Mart, Holiday Inn Express, and Slumberland are becoming larger and are competing more often with the downtown area. For the most part, such decentralization of commercial activity in Worthington has occurred during the years following WWII but has progressed more rapidly in recent years. Indications are that this decentralization will continue in the years ahead. There are, however, niche businesses within Worthington's downtown area that help retain its vitality and attractiveness to shoppers. Some of these businesses include specialty stores like female and children's clothing stores, bookstores, sports apparel stores and craft stores.

Homogeneous groupings of commercial developments should continue to be encouraged, primarily in established downtown areas. The Nobles County zoning ordinance describes these areas as the General Business District (B-2). The main function of the General Business District is to provide an area that will permit general retail and commercial uses in both incorporated and unincorporated areas of the County. In addition, commercial development should also take place along highways or strategic highway intersections, such as the Highway 60 and Interstate 90 intersection, and the Highway 59 and Interstate 90 intersection. The outer edge of certain communities should also be encouraged to provide areas for development. These areas are known as Highway Business Districts. Generally, only vehicle oriented commercial establishments (gas stations, truck stops, restaurants, motels, etc.) should be permitted in close proximity to highways and strategic intersections. Other commercial uses which require sites for parking or display of merchandise (auto dealerships, farm implement dealers, mobile home sales, lumber yards, etc.) should be permitted at the edge of city boundaries because of a recognized land shortage within downtown areas for such activities.

Development of commercial uses in strip fashion along principal streets and highways should be discouraged. In cases where such pattern has already been established, access points between the roadway and commercial development should be minimized to reduce traffic conflicts, thereby increasing safety.

Industrial Location

The locating of highway business and industry can create access management difficulties. As the number of accesses along a stretch of road is increased, the potential for traffic conflicts also increase. Development measures to limit the number of highway accesses along major corridors should be implemented. Planning for joint use accesses or frontage roads could be ways to reduce points of conflict.

Industrial expansion should be encouraged in homogeneous groupings within city boundaries. These expansions should occur in appropriate locations, and should be discouraged in outlying rural locations. Proper planning should be used when siting future developments so access problems are minimized, the use of land is maximized, and improper developments do not occur next to each other. While heavy industries are desired for their economic benefits, it is important to group them together and separate them from most other land uses because of their visual and operational (noise, odor, heavy traffic, etc.) characteristics. However, light industrial uses are generally compatible with commercial and residential uses. The mixing of lighter industries with other types of uses does not have such a profound negative impact on their immediate surroundings. In addition, the closeness of employers with employees can have positive effects, such as, decreased drive times to and from work, and less congested city streets during peak driving times.

Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB's)

UGB's are regarded as an extremely useful tool for municipalities attempting to manage the challenges of both normal and rapid growth. They distinguish between the lands that will better serve for development and those that should remain in agricultural or conservation uses. UGB's

can also help lead to programs that encourage appropriate urban development inside the boundary, while enhancing long term ecological and agricultural stability outside of the boundary. The idea of an UGB is to contain, control, direct or phase growth in established urban areas. This is done in order to encourage higher density growth and adequately service that growth. A successful UGB will protect farmlands and other resources like watersheds or wildlife habitat, from low-density (urban sprawl) development.

UGB maps of Adrian and Worthington are located in the Maps Section and are labeled Map #4 and Map #5.

Adrian

UGB's for the City of Adrian have been designated in both northeast and southeast portions of the City. Although the City of Adrian does not foresee any immediate population growth demands requiring the City to expand its corporate limits, Adrian must provide a realistic and maintainable development decision that allows for growth and directs it to areas within and adjacent its existing urban areas.

Worthington

As the UGB map of Worthington indicates, the City has chosen to direct growth to the West, East, and North. Worthington has also designated a buffer zone surrounding the UGB's. There were three main reasons for establishing this buffer. The City wanted to:

- prevent poor planning in areas surrounding the community
- protect farmers and farmland immediately surrounding the community
- protect land from incurring development because it is highly unlikely to be serviced by the City of Worthington

Nobles County should continue to uphold the use of Ag Preservation in areas surrounding Worthington. The potential changing of this zoning regulation through individual requests can negatively affect the community several different ways. First, the City's zoning ordinances are much more stringent than the County's. This makes the construction of buildings and facilities outside of the City's corporate limits a problem when the City does need to grow and has to annex these buildings and land into the City. Also, poor planning on the City's periphery can negatively affect the way future developments are allowed to occur.

AGRICULTURE

GOAL 1: Preserve agriculturally productive land as a vital resource to the County.
(related goals/objectives: Residential 4)

Objective: Develop and sustain a healthy agricultural economy designed to prevent loss in the total number of farm units and diversify the products that it produces.

Policies

1. Maintain a working knowledge of the intricacies of agricultural economic aspects and issues.
2. Continue to consider impacts of external and internal change on farming activities and the agricultural economy as a whole.
3. Continue to support economic incentives and the agricultural preservation district that works to retain highly valued farmland and keep it from conversion to other types of uses.

Strategies

1. Support livestock production within Nobles County.
2. Support the development of agricultural activities that produce diverse agricultural products and services that add value to the local economy.
3. Restrict land uses incompatible with agriculture to incorporated, unincorporated, and non-agriculture areas of the County.

GOAL 2: Continue to ensure minimal land use conflicts concerning basic farming operations, feedlots and residential/urban land uses.

Objective: Maintain good relations between urban and rural areas by defining appropriate boundaries for each.

Policies

1. Continue with zoning regulations (Ag Preservation District) that does not site non-agricultural facilities on prime agricultural land and near existing and future feedlots.
2. Continue separation distances between new feedlots and existing urban areas (corporate city limits or any R-1 or R-2 district boundary).
3. Provide land use districts that are clearly and reasonably tied to their locality.
4. Provide appropriate setbacks and separations between incompatible land uses and land use activities.
5. Coordinate with Nobles County communities in order to establish Urban/Rural Boundaries (Urban Growth Areas).

Strategies

1. Ensure that feedlot and zoning regulations are properly enforced, continually reviewed, and updated when necessary.

2. Encourage screening livestock facilities in order to make them more attractive.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

GOAL 1: Allow for adequate residential development in rural areas taking care not to upset any agricultural or environmentally sensitive areas.
(related goals/objectives: Natural Resources 1 and 2; Infrastructure 2)

Objective: Encourage and stimulate orderly housing development within municipalities and near appropriate lakes that are in compliance with DNR regulations and open space planning.

Policies

1. Ensure that new residential uses do not conflict with existing County ordinances or laws.
2. Ensure housing opportunities are in line with the Equal Housing Opportunity Act.

Strategies

1. Implement regulations for lakeshore development compliant with DNR regulations and open space planning.
2. Ensure that adequate zoning regulations are in place to direct new residential uses to the appropriate location.
3. Consider incentives to developers in order to stimulate construction.
4. Encourage the development of housing where there is access to infrastructure (water, sewer) services.

GOAL 2: Continue to develop the livability and diversity of Nobles County by preserving existing farmhouse sites.
(related goals/objectives: Agriculture 1)

Objective: Preserve farmsteads in rural areas as well as publicly accessible open space by continuing the use of the Agriculture Preservation District.

Policies

1. Encourage future growth to occur within existing municipalities protecting existing farmhouse sites and the land around them from development.
2. Further the development of planting value added crops which will bring diversity to the rural areas.
3. Match development suggestions with current uses to help create a sense of community in appropriate areas thereby preserving the “rural character”.

Strategies.

1. Attempt to encompass special characteristics of land use in order to utilize and preserve the County’s natural rural environment.

GOAL 3: Supply communities with options for long-term residence within the residential sector.

(related goals/objectives: Housing 1, 2, 3; Demographics 2)

Objective: Provide a variety of housing accommodations for Nobles County residents including differences in styles, prices and supply in addition to housing for the elderly, starter families, those seeking co-housing options, accessory housing and rental housing.

Policies

1. Encourage development guidelines that promote the development of variety in the housing supply.
2. Encourage the development of higher densities in areas where they can be supported by city services.

Strategies

1. Plan for the increasing elderly population in order to provide them with opportunities to stay close to their original homes and families, to be located next to essential city services such as transportation, medical services and social services and to have adequate shopping within a close proximity.

GOAL 4: Continue to provide adequate balance between residential developments and protection of agricultural and environmentally sensitive areas.

(related goals/objectives: Agriculture 2)

Objective: Discourage highly incompatible land uses, such as residential and high density industrial, from developing next to each other by using effective zoning regulations.

Policies

1. Prohibit development in the following areas that are prone to degradation from nearby urban developments:
 - floodplains
 - riparian corridors
 - environmentally sensitive lake shore areas
3. Non-farm land uses should only be considered where they could be adequately served by appropriate infrastructure including transportation and sewage disposal.
4. Provide for adequate lakeshore development to satisfy demand only in areas where the environment and appropriate infrastructure services allow it.
5. Increase local recreational opportunities that do not overcrowd existing facilities.

Strategies

1. Protect all areas of special rural character valued by residents.

2. Continue to implement land use plans that provide for urban and suburban land uses adjacent to existing incorporated areas, forbidding the destruction of rural character.
3. Integrate zoning review criteria that necessitate the existence of appropriate infrastructure before all non-farm type development occurs.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GOAL 1: Continue to enhance possibilities for the development of commercial and industrial enterprise within Nobles County that are compatible with current resources.

(related goals/objectives: Natural Resources)

Objective: Further develop the economic base by ensuring opportunities for additions to the commercial and industrial sectors of Nobles County.

Policies

1. Add to the commercial and industrial sectors while taking care not to disrupt existing land uses already in place.
2. Avoid “leap-frog” developments by expanding on areas that are already in use, thereby limiting the amount of infrastructure that would have to be extended.
3. Limit the development of high volume water usage industries to conserve the limited water supply.

Strategies

1. Ensure that adequate zoning regulations are in place to direct new commercial and industrial uses to appropriate location.

GOAL 2: Protect the County’s water supply from pollution.

(related goals/objectives: Natural Resources 2, 3, 4)

Objective: Implement land use controls that support Nobles County communities in developing wellhead protection plans.

Policies

1. Initiate land use controls that protect wells in areas of ground water susceptibility to pollution.

Strategies

1. Work with communities and the SWCD to identify wellhead protection areas.
2. Evaluate land use activity within the wellhead protection areas.

3. Identify land uses that have the potential to pollute the groundwater in the wellhead protection areas.
4. Identify mitigation measures and ensure that adequate zoning regulations are in place to allow for the protection of the County's water supply.