

7.0 Sustainability

7.1 Introduction

Sustainability focuses on meeting the current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The concept of sustainability is composed of three pillars: economic, environmental and social. Sustainability encourages decisions be framed in terms of environmental, social and human impact for the long-term, rather than on short-term gains.

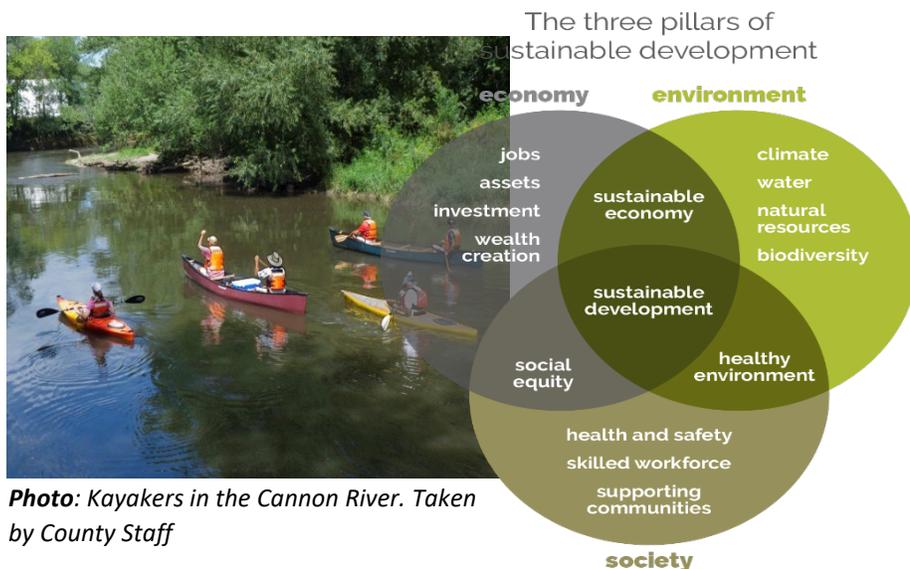


Photo: Kayakers in the Cannon River. Taken by County Staff

Rice County’s abundant natural resources contribute to the overall quality of life for all of its residents and visitors. These resources provide many benefits to the County such as economic opportunities, recreational activity options and biological diversity. Sustaining and enhancing these resources will contribute to not only the County’s vibrant economy but will also provide enjoyment for generations to come. While there are areas within Rice County that are attractive for future development it is important that it does not intrude on prosperous agricultural land, protected and preserved natural land and in areas that could cause potential environmental concerns.

The county is already taking steps toward becoming a more sustainable place for residents and visitors to be. For example, Rice County has over 24 completed solar gardens within its boundaries and has quite a few more in the process of being constructed. Rice County also has options for residents at the County solid waste facility to dispose of household hazardous waste, which can be harmful to the environment if not disposed of properly, and as well as a composting site where County residents can dispose of yard waste.

There are also a few cities within Rice County that developed (or are in the process of developing) and are implementing various sustainability practices and plans. For example, the City of Northfield adopted their Climate Action Plan in November of 2019. Their plan’s goal is to

RICE COUNTY SURVEY COMMENTS

“It would be great to continue and expand attention on renewable energy, clean water, and good agricultural practices for residents and visitors.”

“Protecting surface and groundwater is the most important issue for the future of Rice County. Beyond that, the historic preservation and rural nature of the county attracted us to move here in retirement.”

“Protecting and enhancing our natural environment, and developing jobs/businesses that are environmentally sustainable are my priorities.”

“Carefully planned sustainable development that protects natural resources is most important to me”

address storm water run-off.

go 100% carbon-free by 2040 by decreasing greenhouse gas emissions through mitigation strategies and as well as becoming more resilient to prepare for a changing climate. The City of Faribault started the process of a city-wide Climate Action Plan in the summer of 2020 with the hopes of having it completed and approved for adoption by early 2021.

Looking ahead to 2040, Rice County is looking at ways to become more sustainably friendly in support with the communities within the County. Some options the County’s looking into is preservation and enhancement of natural lands and systems, exploring and expanding energy efficient methods and renewable energy resources, and encouraging the reduction of waste, recycling, reuse, and composting.

7.2 Goals, Strategies and Action Items

The following goals and strategies are general statements that focus on Rice County’s Sustainability plans. The goals are broadly worded, while strategies are actions that can be taken to achieve the overarching goal. The action items are related to the goals and strategies, but are more specific and detailed. It should be noted that goals, strategies, and action items are in no particular order of importance.

7.2.1 Sustainability

Goal 1. Enhance, Protect, and Restore Natural Lands and Systems.

Strategy 1. Encourage County farmers and agricultural land owners to participate in The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP).

Strategy 2. Protect and manage streams, watersheds, and floodplains.

Action Item 1: Promote education about the values of watersheds, rain gardens, and low-impact development to



Photo: Raingarden kit. Taken by the Rice County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Action Item 2: Minimize the potential for air, waters and land contamination and pollution that could result from the development process.

Action Item 3: Encourage landowners in the shoreland areas to develop and maintain native vegetative buffers.

Strategy 3. Encourage collaboration between the county and cities to expand urban & county parks and street tree programs.

Strategy 4. Encourage farmers to utilize cover crops programs such as Rice County's Soil and Water Conservation Districts Cover Crop Incentive Program.

Strategy 5. Work with County landowners and local entities to increase land enrolled in programs like the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

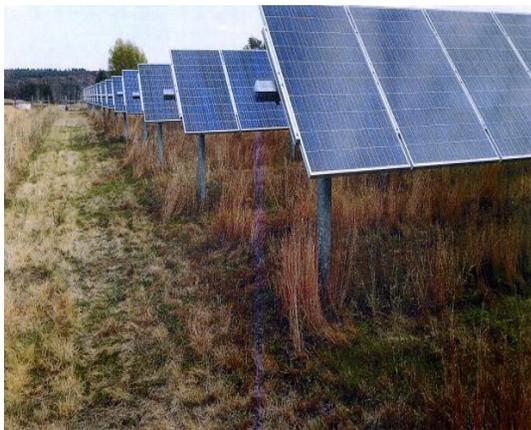


Photo: Solar panels within a solar garden in Rice County. Taken by County Staff

Goal 2: Advocate and Expand the Use of and Energy Efficient Methods and Renewable Energy Resources.

Strategy 1. Encourage cities within Rice County to participate/continue to participate in the Minnesota Green Steps Cities program.

Action Item 1. Partner with local communities and organizations to create a Sustainability Plan that aligns with Rice County's Future goals.

Strategy 2. Evaluate Rice County owned land that is suitable for renewable energy sources as solar

gardens and wind turbines.

Strategy 3. Collaborate with local municipalities to offer incentives for businesses to incorporate environmentally friendly and sustainable business models and practices.

Action Item 1: Work with MinnPACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) and commercial property owners to invest in energy efficiency upgrades.

Action Item 2: Advocate for the implementation of green building and energy conservation.

Strategy 4. Encourage Rice County residents to reduce their carbon footprint.

Action Item 1: Work with local entities to increase the number of electric vehicle charging stations.

Action Item 2: Assist homeowners with researching and obtaining grants for the weatherization of their homes.

Goal 3. Encourage Waste Reduction, Reuse, Recycling, and Composting.

Strategy 1. Increase accessibility of composting and organics recycling.

Action Item 1: Encourage the use of programs like Northfield Curbside Compost.

Action Item 2: Promote residential backyard composting throughout the county.

Strategy 2. Collaborate with local entities to host educational engagements pertaining to waste reduction, reducing and managing food waste, and composting and recycling practices.

Action Item 1: Advocate for events going on in Rice County to be zero waste.

Strategy 3. Encourage businesses around the County to switch over to more sustainable and biodegradable products.

Strategy 4. Promote and advocate for funding of food rescue programs.



Photo: Northfield Curbside Compost logo.