

IOWA  
**RIVER'S**  
**EDGE**  
TRAIL

*Master Plan*





# Acknowledgements

---

Those involved in this plan endeavored to create an unforgettable regional trail. The vision, created with the voices of the community, articulates a concept for an experience along the Iowa River—a concept to showcase the unique area of the Iowa River Valley and the communities that emerged because of river and rail. The project team is grateful for the contributions of everyone invested in the planning for Iowa River’s Edge Trail, who gave their time, ideas, and expertise to the creation of this plan. It is only because of their assistance and direction that this plan gained the necessary depth to truly understand the experience desired for the trail, and it is with their commitment that the plan will be implemented.

## **COMMUNITIES**

Steamboat Rock

*Tim Stearns, Mayor*

Eldora

*David Dunn, Mayor*

Union

*Stephanie Carson, Mayor*

Gifford

*Unincorporated*

Liscomb

*Stacey Nichols, Mayor*

Albion

*Eric Schmidt, Mayor*

Marshalltown

*Joel Greer, Mayor*

TRAILS, INC.



Martha-Ellen Tye  
FOUNDATION

MARSHALLTOWN  
IOWA



Hardin  
County  
Iowa



REGION 6  
RESOURCE  
PARTNERS



RDg...  
PLANNING • DESIGN

**PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE**

Amber Danielson

*Marshall County Arts and Culture Alliance*

Brady Winter

*Hardin County Trails Commission*

Chris Wieting

*Hardin County Trails Commission*

Geoff Hubbard

*City of Marshalltown*

Heidi Dalal

*Marshalltown Public Art Committee*

Jessica Kinser

*City of Marshalltown*

Joel Greer

*City of Marshalltown*

Julie Winter

*Region 6 COG*

Mary Wertzberger

*Trails, Inc.*

Michelle Spohnheimer

*City of Marshalltown*

Mike Stegmann

*Marshall County Conservation*

Mona Bleeker

*Hardin County Trails Commission*

Wes Wiese

*Hardin County Conservation*

**ORGANIZATIONS**

Trails, Inc.

IRTH Commission

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation

Region 6 Resource Partners

Marshall County Arts and Culture Alliance

Marshalltown Public Art Committee

National Endowment for the Arts

Martha-Ellen Tye Foundation

City of Marshalltown

Hardin County Conservation

Marshall County Conservation

**CONSULTING TEAM**

RDG Planning & Design

*rdgusa.com*

Iowa River and Trestle Bridge, 5.5 miles north of proposed trailhead location in Marshalltown

## Our Plan



Bridge over an Iowa River oxbow, 6 miles north of proposed trailhead location in Marshalltown

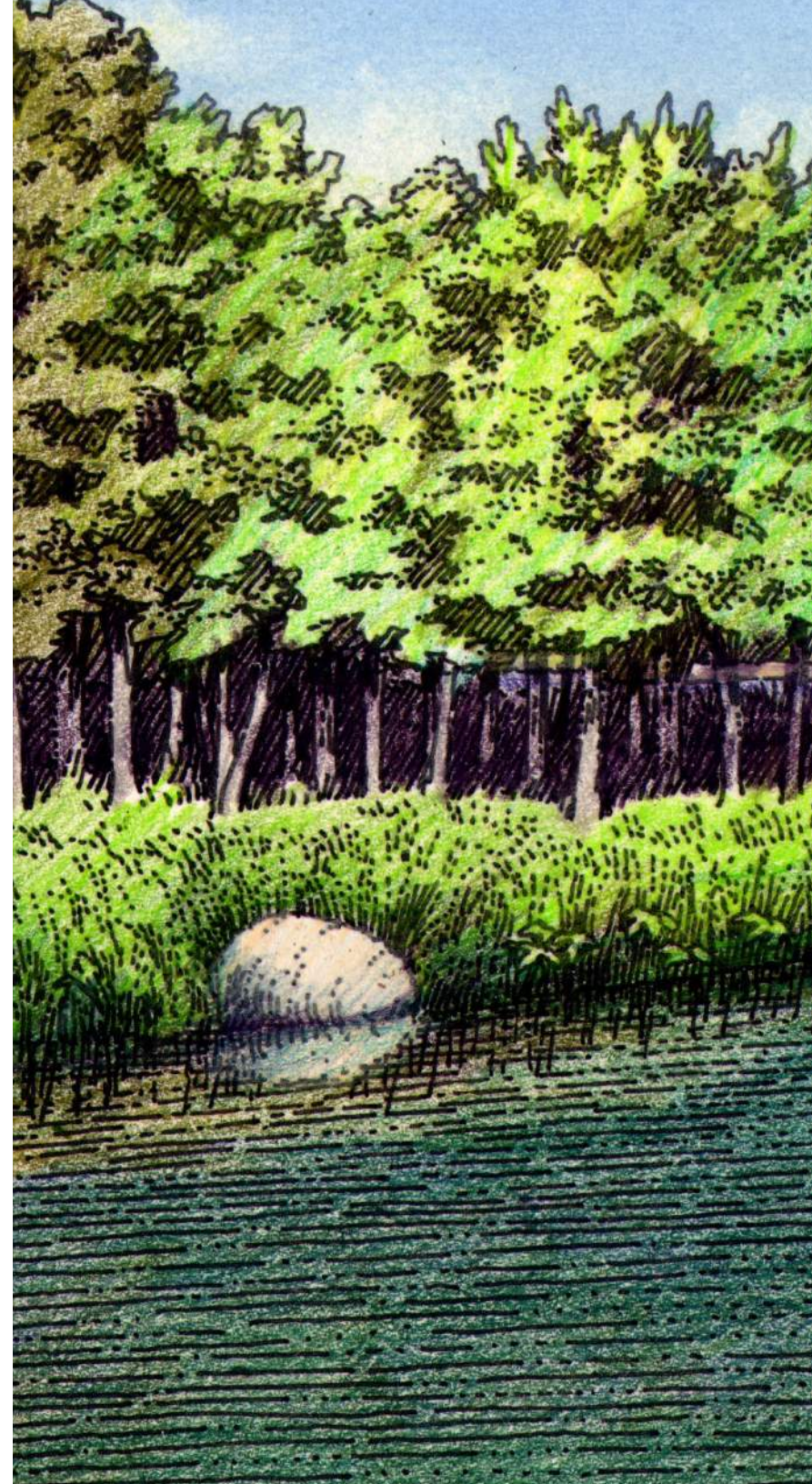
- Crafts a shared vision for a joint future.
- Provides direction when decisions may impact the trail or trail elements within the county or individual communities.
- Provides a stable reference point for how to react to new ideas and unforeseen changes to the trail.
- Acts as a living document to consult often, used as a tool for collaboration among many user groups.
- Sets the framework for implementation and pursuit of funding resources.
- Celebrates and markets local resources, assets, and opportunities to all.

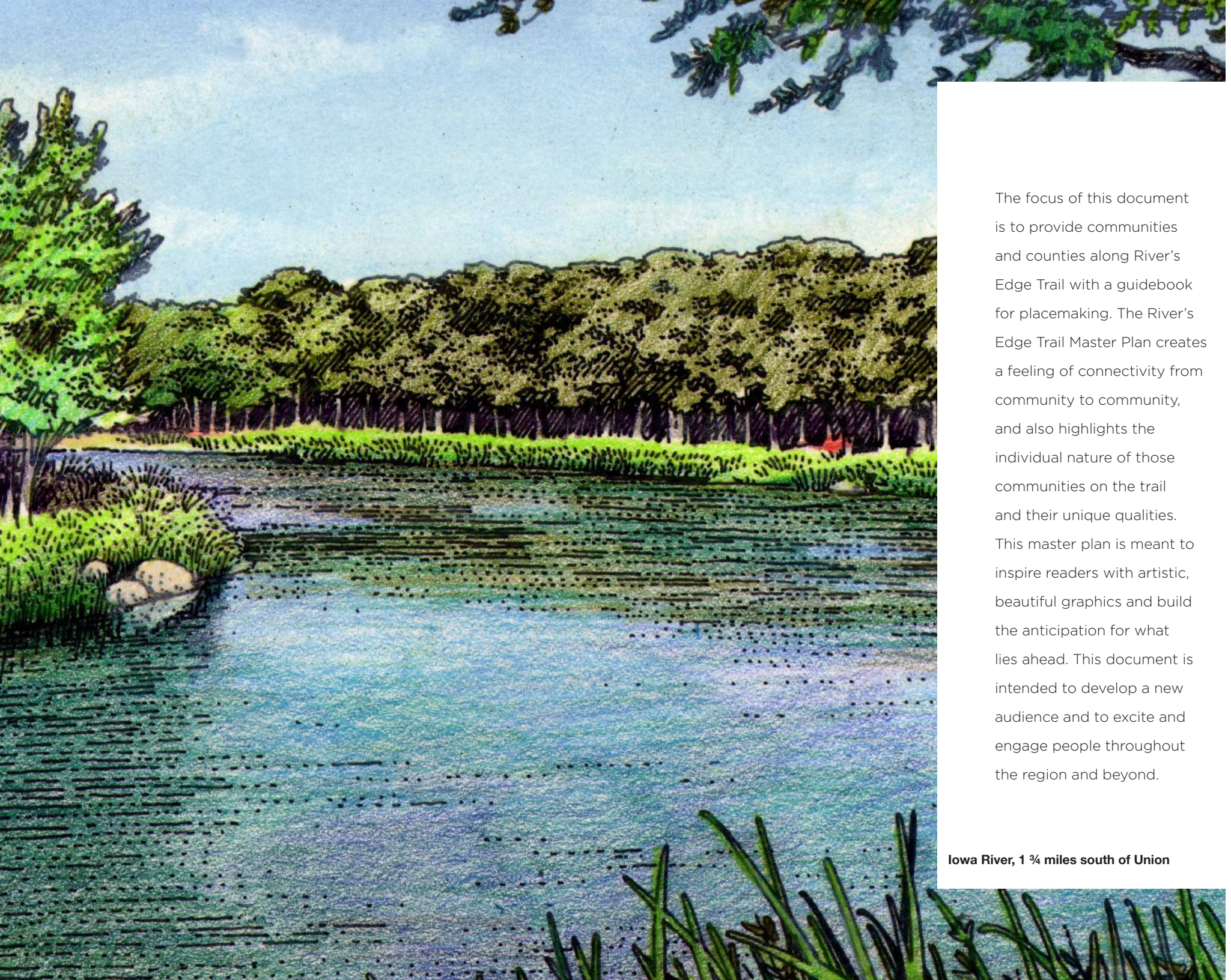


## *Why River's Edge*

Iowa was once a place of abundant environmental diversity and resources. Development and focus on Iowa's agricultural advantages led to the Iowa most people know today, with rolling hills of farm production. However, those who experience Iowa over a long time know that hidden natural gems are abundant throughout the state.

For those in east central Iowa, the Iowa River is one of those places. From a distance, agricultural fields appear bisected by tree outcroppings. Closer exploration unveils an expansive greenway and the quietly flowing waters of the Iowa River. Those who discover the Iowa River find they get lost in a place that feels unlike most of Iowa. That is where the "River's Edge" transforms us—where nature comforts us, exploration ignites us, and the experience builds anticipation for us to return.





The focus of this document is to provide communities and counties along River's Edge Trail with a guidebook for placemaking. The River's Edge Trail Master Plan creates a feeling of connectivity from community to community, and also highlights the individual nature of those communities on the trail and their unique qualities. This master plan is meant to inspire readers with artistic, beautiful graphics and build the anticipation for what lies ahead. This document is intended to develop a new audience and to excite and engage people throughout the region and beyond.

**Iowa River, 1 ¾ miles south of Union**



Water is a resource beyond food and hydration. Transportation routes evolved around water as a resource to ship goods, and the flat topography lent itself to rail transportation. However, the proliferation of the automobile and interstate highway system contributed to significant decline in railroad transportation. One such railroad line from Marshalltown to Steamboat Rock was decommissioned and abandoned by the federal government. Similar results led to the national “Rails to Trails” movement to transform these former railroad corridors into recreational trails. River’s Edge Trail connects Marshalltown and Steamboat Rock — a total of 34 miles.



**South Fork Iowa River, 2 miles north of Gifford**

# Championing Our Plan



“It’s like ‘Field of Dreams’—if you build it, they will come. Once you have established a destination, it will be a wonderful trail for people to explore the outdoors. People are noticing. My wife’s sister is a biker and she and her husband are constantly looking for trails to ride on.”

*Mike Stegman, Marshall County Conservation*





# More than a Trail



“This project has afforded our community an opportunity to share our culture and natural resources at a national level. Iowa River’s Edge Trail represents the future of outdoor recreation by facilitating cooperative growth between communities and implementing a shared space for activity.”

*David Dunn, Eldora Mayor*



Trails are a new form of economic development and provide many benefits for the communities they serve. Organizers realized the need to create a full-on trail experience to be remembered and talked about. The Placemaking Master Plan was championed to think creatively about all aspects of the trail as an opportunity for a unique experience. This plan was tasked with providing communities and counties along Iowa River's Edge Trail a guidebook for placemaking.



# Economic Value



“The 34-mile trail system provides quality of life enhancements, boosts the local economy for multiple communities, and offers an opportunity for people of all ages and health to enjoy nature's beauty.”

*Trails, Inc.*



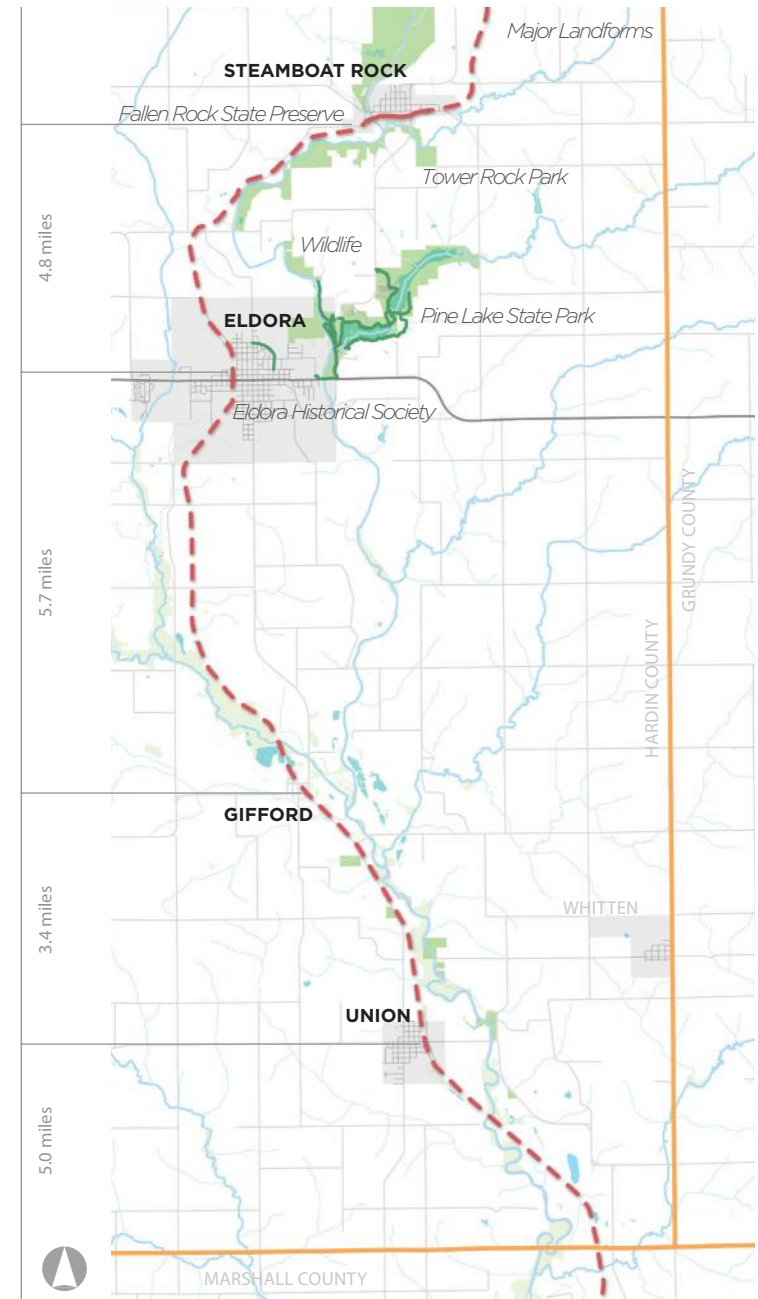
Trail segment north of Liscomb

# River's Edge Route

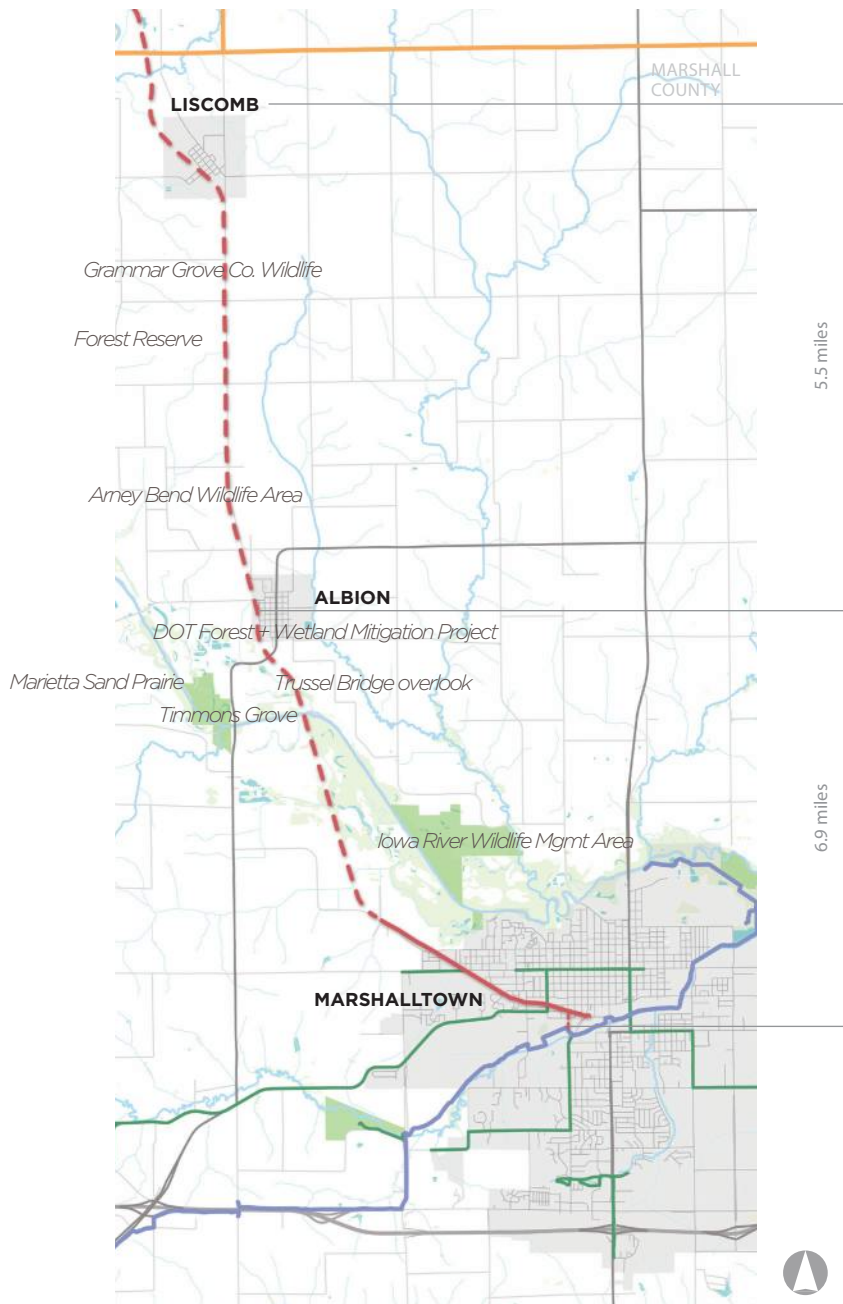
The dispersion of towns along the trail makes the route particularly appealing for active transportation. With no more than 6.9 miles between each town, users are comforted to know amenities are always close. But these towns add much more than a refuge for trail users. They represent a history of water and rail-oriented development and current agricultural hubs for the local economy. Each town is truly unique and has a special role to play in the River's Edge experience.

<i>Northern Limit of Trail to Steamboat Rock</i>	<i>2.7M</i>
<i>Steamboat Rock to Eldora</i>	<i>4.8M</i>
<i>Eldora to Gifford</i>	<i>5.7M</i>
<i>Gifford to Union</i>	<i>3.4M</i>
<i>Union to Liscomb</i>	<i>5.0M</i>
<i>Liscomb to Albion</i>	<i>5.5M</i>
<i>Albion to Marshalltown</i>	<i>6.9M</i>

RIVER'S EDGE ROUTE - NORTH



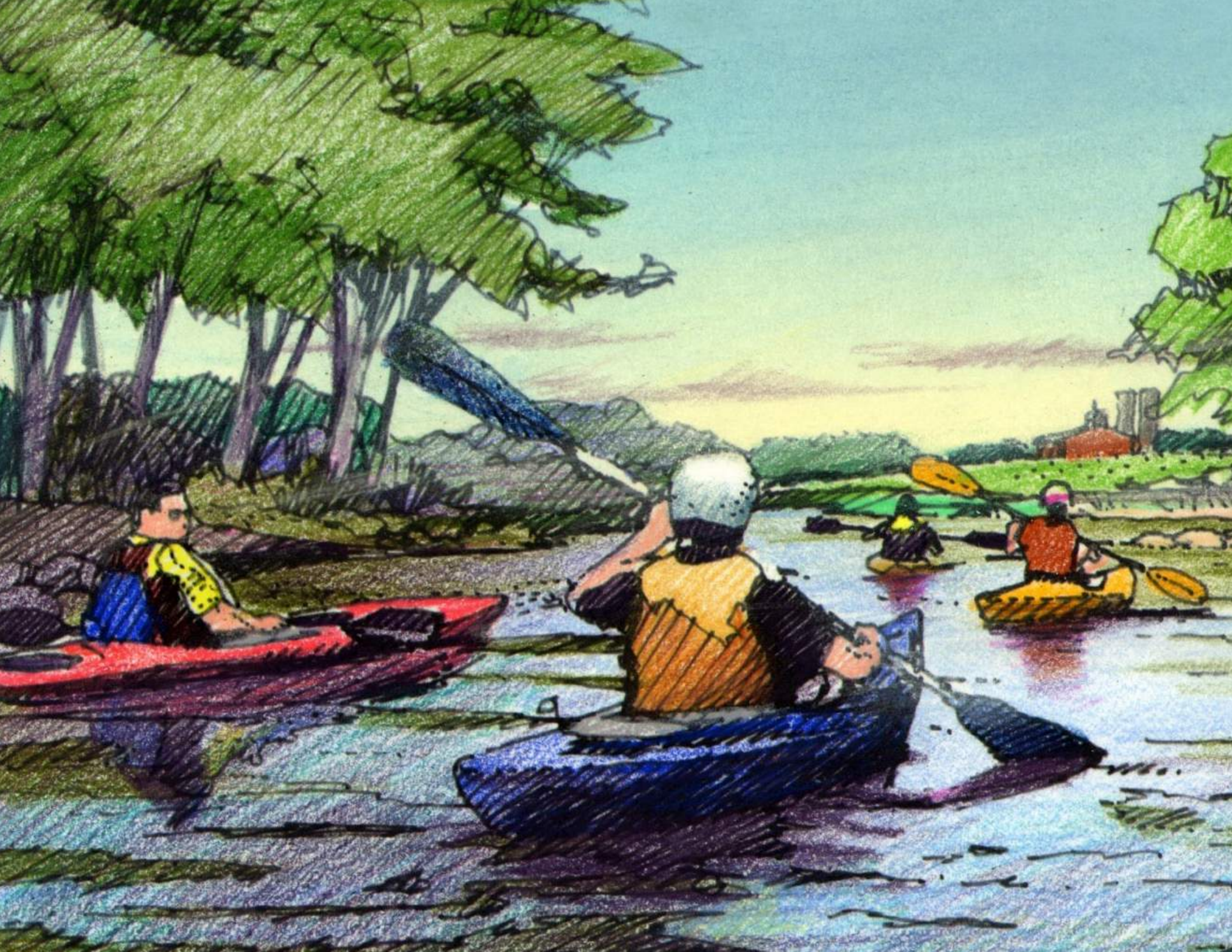
RIVER'S EDGE ROUTE - SOUTH



**AMERICAN DISCOVERY TRAIL**  
 6,800+ miles of continuous, multi-use trail stretches from Cape Henlopen State Park, Delaware, to Pt. Reyes National Seashore, California. When complete, the trail will pass the south gateway to River's Edge.







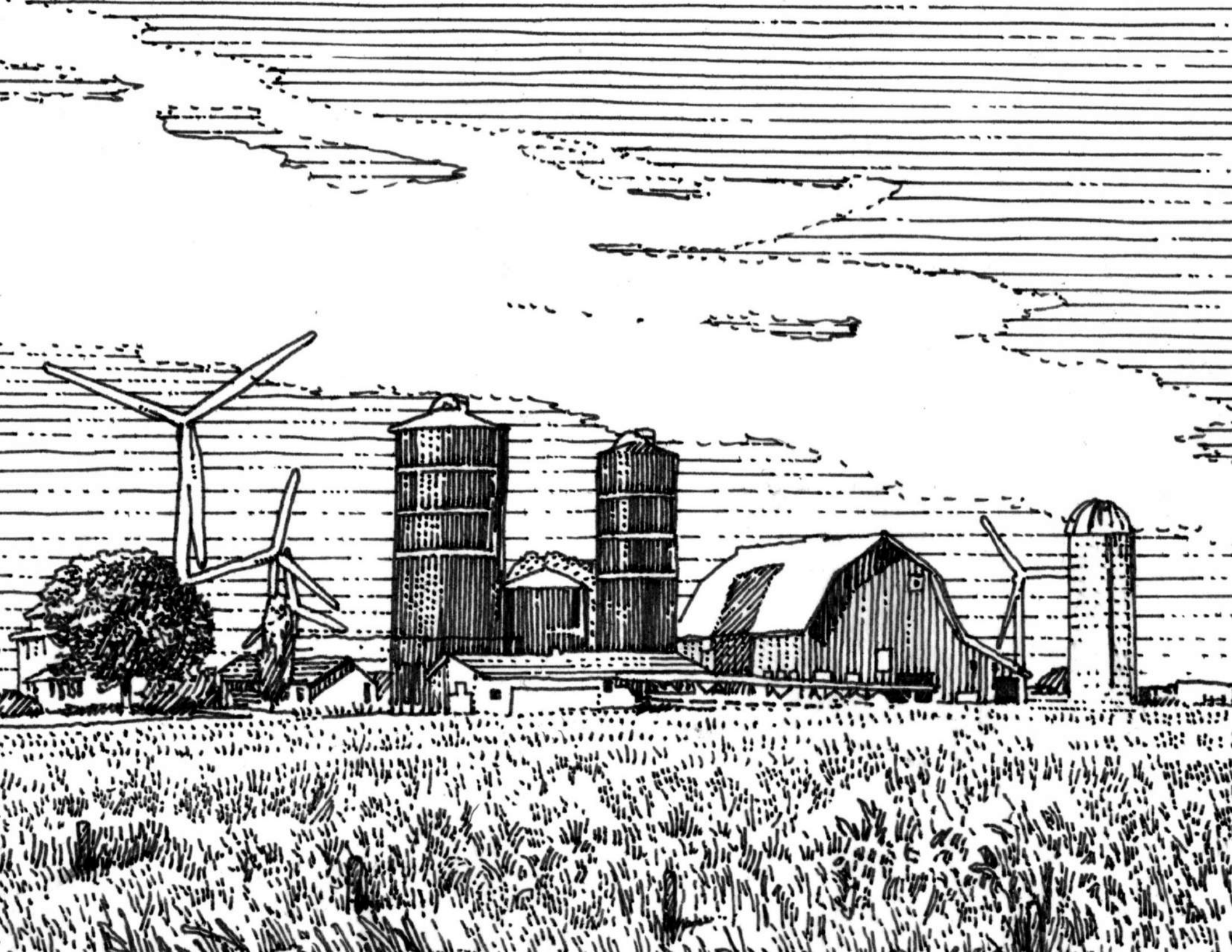
## Environmental Value



“It’s exciting to see it develop. Once the trail is completed, it’s going to be a real draw for the area—complimenting what we already have; camping, cabins, trails, and river use. I definitely view it favorably and hope we can market it as a mini-vacation/get-away spot.”

*Wes Wiese, Hardin County Conservation Director*





# Farm



“Small towns and rural communities are facing some major challenges. In many places the future is very uncertain. However, for the communities along the River’s Edge Trail, the project is taking shape to ensure they will thrive for generations to come.”

*Christopher Wieting, IRTH Commission*





LEONARD REALTY

OPPOSITE

Mike's Bikes

REWA

# Streetscape



“Iowa River’s Edge Trail is going to be just the tourism and economic boost this region needs! Trails serve as an added quality-of-life benefit—proven to increase property values and foot traffic to local businesses, directly correlating to increased spending in local shops, restaurants, and events.”

*Angela De La Riva, Hardin County Economic Development Director*



The vision for River's Edge takes root from the opinions and perceptions of those who know and understand the communities best—its residents, civic leaders, and community organizations. Through talking to people, all involved in the plan benefited from new ideas, creative barrier resolutions, and sustained excitement for what will become River's Edge. The ideas and concepts stem from community input and a local Steering Committee composed of City staff, advocacy organizations, bike groups, and the Iowa River Trail organization.





## *Community Celebration*



“I am very excited to be on the front line of Iowa River’s Edge Trail. This is an exciting time for our communities to join together and create a connecting piece of history. The two counties and multiple teams involved are all cooperating for the same end goal: an experience worth repeating.”

*Brady Winter, Eldora Area Chamber of Commerce,  
Hardin County Trails Commission*



Capturing the essence of the trail, areas of opportunity, and branding emerged from several engagement events such as Bike Chautauqua, targeted interviews, and open houses. Champions on the project Steering Committee are the heart of trail momentum and will be essential leaders moving forward. While their time and energy prove invaluable, they cannot achieve the vision for River's Edge without the support, time, effort, and marketing of all who want to see this experience become a reality.



## Our Trail



“The safety of trail riding versus street riding is going to be a huge draw for families to get out and exercise and explore together. This trail will not only connect the communities and businesses along it, but also the people out using it.”

*Kevin Fiscus, Marshall County Farmer*



# *Vision and Goals*



River's Edge is an experience that....

- Accommodates all user groups.
- Treats placemaking as economic development.
- Ensures continuity among trail elements.
- Protects the environment.
- Involves locals.
- Inspires through art and nature.
- Bridges communities of both town and country.
- Highlights places of energy and those of quiet contemplation.



IOWA  
**RIVER'S**  
**EDGE**  
TRAIL

# The Brand

The opportunity to brand one of Iowa's most significant trail segments will provide benefit to the region and clarity to trail users and seekers. The Iowa River has transformed a landscape, both urban and rural into places of wild beauty, agricultural serenity, and the energy of community. The common link between all these landscapes is River's Edge.

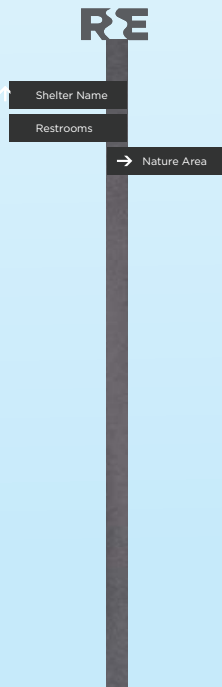
***Vision:*** Create a bold and visually appealing brand that speaks to the anticipation of a variety of different types of nature experiences that engage water, wildlife, recreation, and communities.

## ***Goals:***

- Create a transformational brand—exciting, marketable and one that provides a level of flexibility and longevity.



DISTRICT



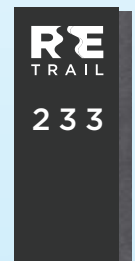
WAYFINDING



INTERPRETIVE



DESTINATION



INFORMATIONAL



# Signage

In coordination with branding, signs are both a functional and a placemaking necessity for River's Edge. Signs are another opportunity to give identity to the trail by indicating to users, through both words and design, that they are on the right path. The beauty of the Iowa River Valley paints its own interpretative elements for users. Signs are the connective and educational element that binds the trail as a related but different experience for every user.

***Vision:*** A system to designate a special place, guide, educate, attract all users, and ensure their safety without overpowering nature's intended experience.

## ***Goals:***

- Inform and interpret the trail's presence.
- Direct users to trail routes and options.
- Reassure users about the correct route.
- Welcome users to destinations.
- Educate about interpretive experiences.





# Trailheads

Trailheads are the gateways to each person's River's Edge experience. Trailheads are the oasis between segments of Iowa River's Edge Trail. The urban arrival from the untamed and rural experience. Trailheads are community gathering places and symbols to invite visitors to explore their town. Each trailhead on Iowa River's Edge Trail presents a unique opportunity for discovery.

*Vision:* A dedicated place for users to directly access River's Edge, rest along their journey, and discover local communities.

## *Goals:*

- Exemplify the community image.
- Encourage local exploration.
- Provide relief from the elements and refuel.
- Respect adjacent properties.
- Destinations for residents and visitors alike.



# Bridges



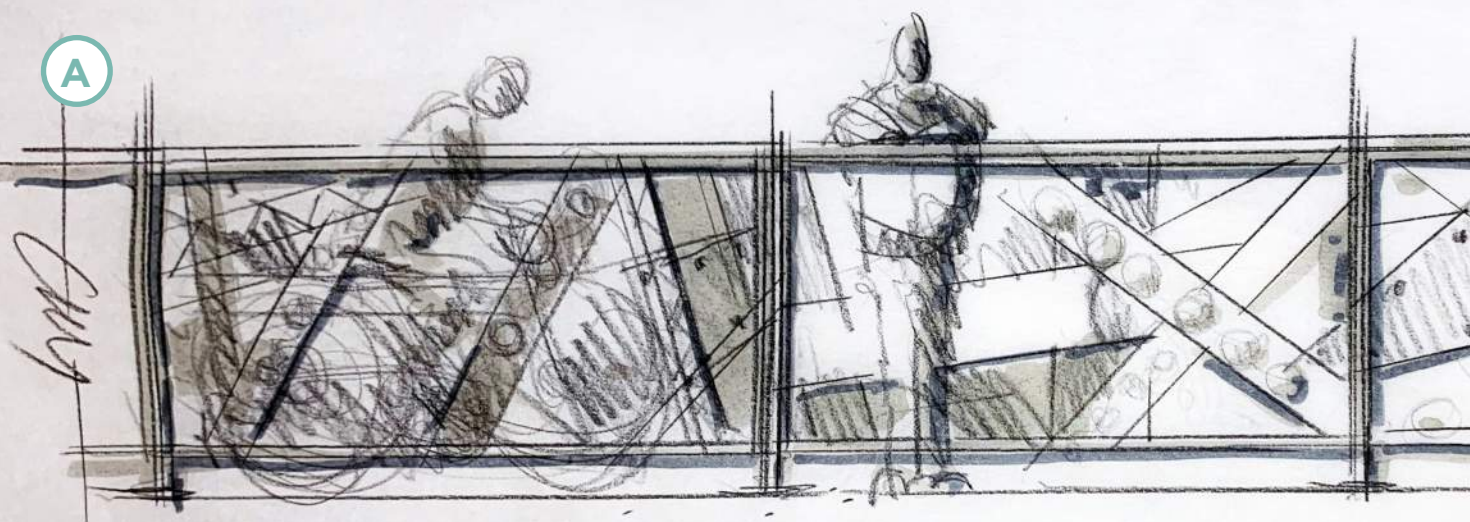
If you love art, or if you aspire to the arts, you loved nature first.

*Elbert Hubbard,  
Poet Laureate of the  
American Arts and  
Crafts Movement*

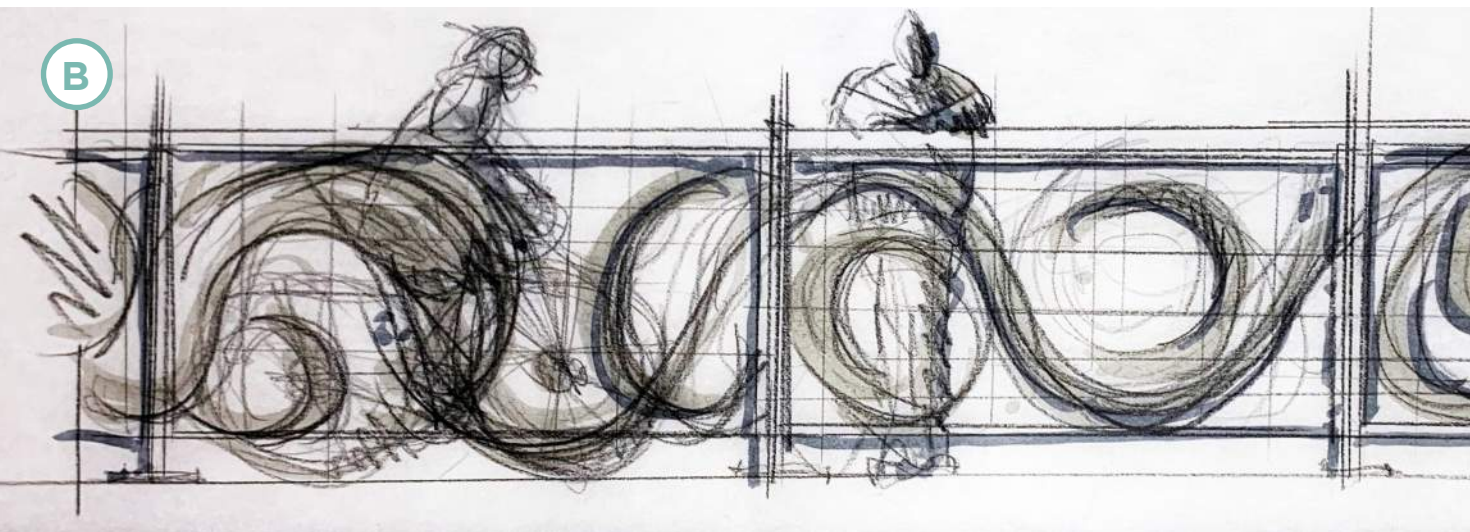
**Vision:** Each bridge becomes a destination from town to town, marking distinct distances and new vistas—setting the tone for the character of the overall trail, reinforcing themes introduced at each respective trailhead.

## Goals:

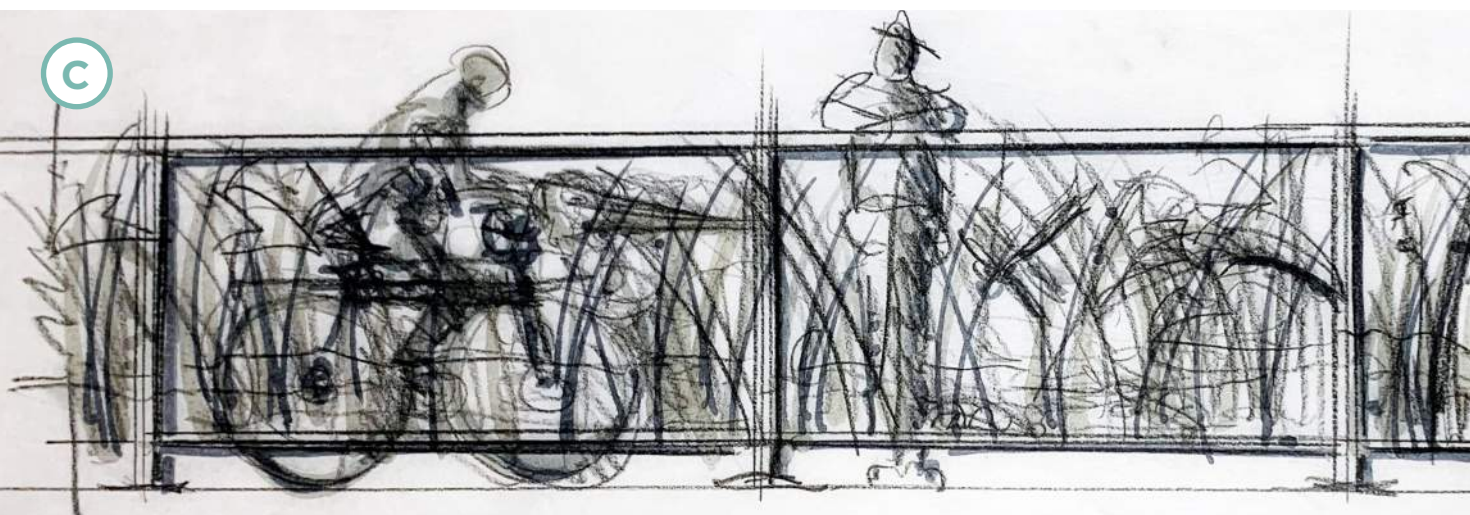
- Get up-close and personal with water.
- Quality nature viewing opportunities.
- Connect to additional experiences adjacent to the trail.
- Provide safe and non-visually obtrusive railing systems.
- Establish a priority for destination bridges.



**A.** The railroad truss bridge is a true vestige of a bygone world. These relics are on the verge of extinction. This is an opportunity to pay tribute to these iron works of art expressed in an abstracted montage of the unique details that define them.



**B.** This U-shaped bend in the course of a river is a reminder that the river is alive. It is ever changing. Minute by minute and year after year, the river is recreating itself. Juxtaposed over the Jeffersonian grid of the Iowa landscape, these oxbows are habitat for some of the rarest amphibians and reptiles.



**C.** Wetlands once dotted the prairie and woodland landscapes that dominated Iowa. They were most common in north and central Iowa in the region known as the Des Moines Lobe. This region is the result of the most recent glaciers that carved through the area 10-14 thousand years ago. Over 94% of Iowa wetlands have been lost.

# Bridges

The bridges over the Iowa River represent the physical and symbolic connections between people and the landscape. The crossings create a rhythm along the trail, inviting people to stop for a moment and take in the incredible views of the river, experience the awesome expanse of nature and the intimate patterns of water below.

The bridges are the best opportunity for the integration of public artwork. Each becoming

a destination from town to town, marking distinct distances and new vistas. They may set the tone for the character of the overall trail, reinforcing themes that are introduced at the different respective trailheads.

Throughout history, bridges have been a part of peoples' memories. They have become the special places where stories are told and people and events are celebrated and commemorated. The bridges

speak to the relationship between the railroad and our agricultural heritage.

The artwork integrated within the structure of the bridges, both large and small, will become part of the textural fabric and identify of Iowa River's Edge Trail. Many opportunities for sculptural railings, abutments, markers, lighting, historic narratives, shade, and sound, will raise awareness and sensitivity to the natural world that surrounds you.



Our region will see positive impact from Iowa River's Edge Trail, not only in increased visitors enjoying the recreational opportunities, but also in economic growth from businesses locating to capitalize on the quality of life amenities. We are confident that locals and visitors alike will enjoy our shops and restaurants, while hiking, biking, or riding the trail. Quality of life offerings are one of the leading drivers in the choice individuals and businesses make in where they want to locate.”

*CEO of the Marshalltown Area Chamber of Commerce, Lynn Olberding*



# ART



The opportunities to incorporate art and artistic features along the River's Edge are endless...the bridges, trailheads, signage, not to mention the scenery and views are nature's artwork that all will be able to experience.”

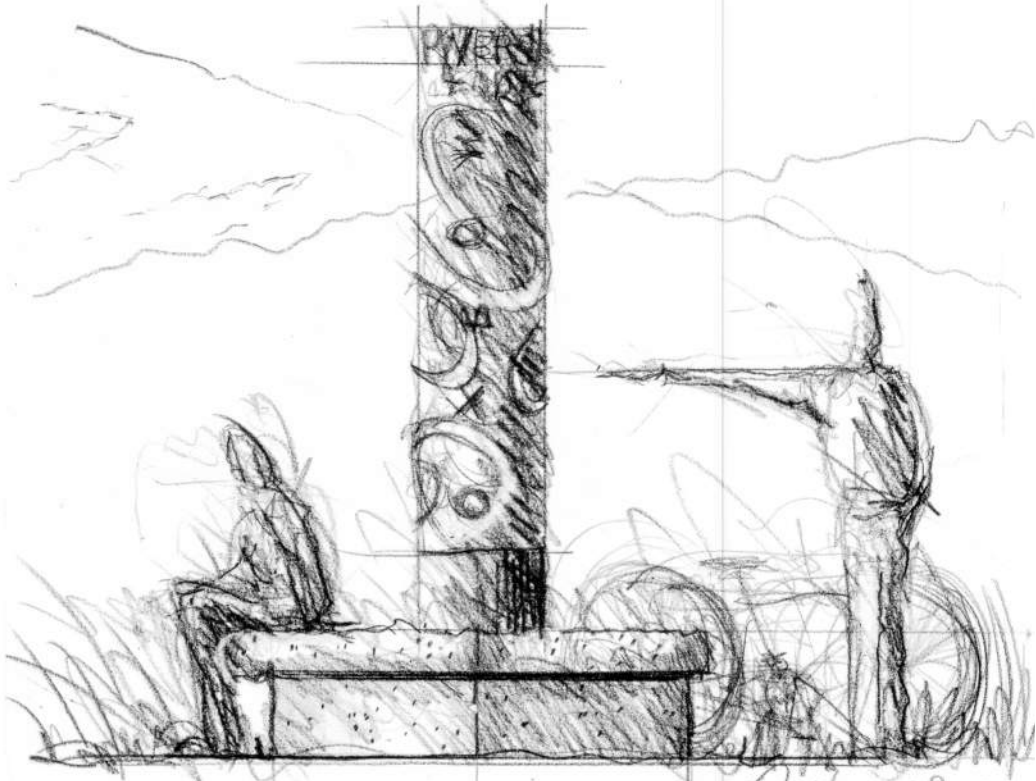
*Amber Danielson, Executive  
Director of Alliance*

***Vision:*** The artwork will educate, inform, and entertain—attracting and growing new audiences to the trail and adjacent towns.

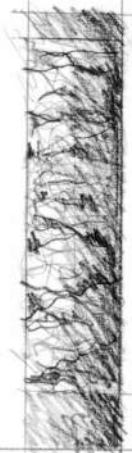
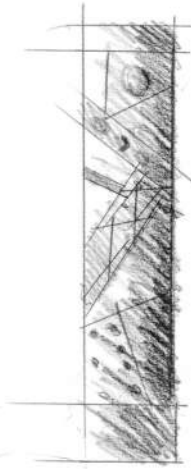
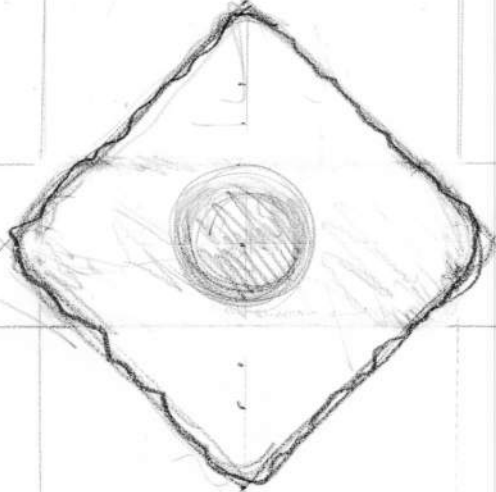
## ***Goals:***

- Integrate throughout the trail.
- Based on nature and water.
- Reflect awareness of location, scale, and materials.
- Low maintenance and sustainability.
- Be sensitive to moments for the “big impression” as well as the intimate, personal discovery.





Oxbow



# ART

To ride Iowa River's Edge Trail is to be immersed in our natural environment, to wind one's way along a beautiful and ancient river. Integration of art, manifested in many different forms and materials, is the most important visual expression of our love and respect for nature. Art will "tell the story" of the landscape and heighten visitor's trail experience. Thoughtful integration of art will speak to the character and beauty of both the natural environment and the history of the communities along the trail.

Riding or walking River's Edge Trail is an "artful" experience unto itself. Art is part of our everyday existence and inherent in the discoveries we find in nature. It is through nature that we make the most meaningful

connections with our "self." The artwork that is part of the trail experience helps to make this connection even more profound.

There are many opportunities for the integration of artwork throughout the trail. The strategy for the successful development of an art "program" should be based on the concepts of nature and water, which emerged and were emphasized through public input during the planning process. The future integration of artwork needs to reflect a comprehensive awareness of location, scale, materials, maintenance, budget, phasing, and more. It must be sensitive to moments for the "big impression" as well as the intimate, personal discovery. In this way, the artwork will educate, inform,

and entertain, attracting and growing new audiences to the trail and the adjacent towns.

*Artwork in architecture and site:*

Kiosks at individual trailheads.

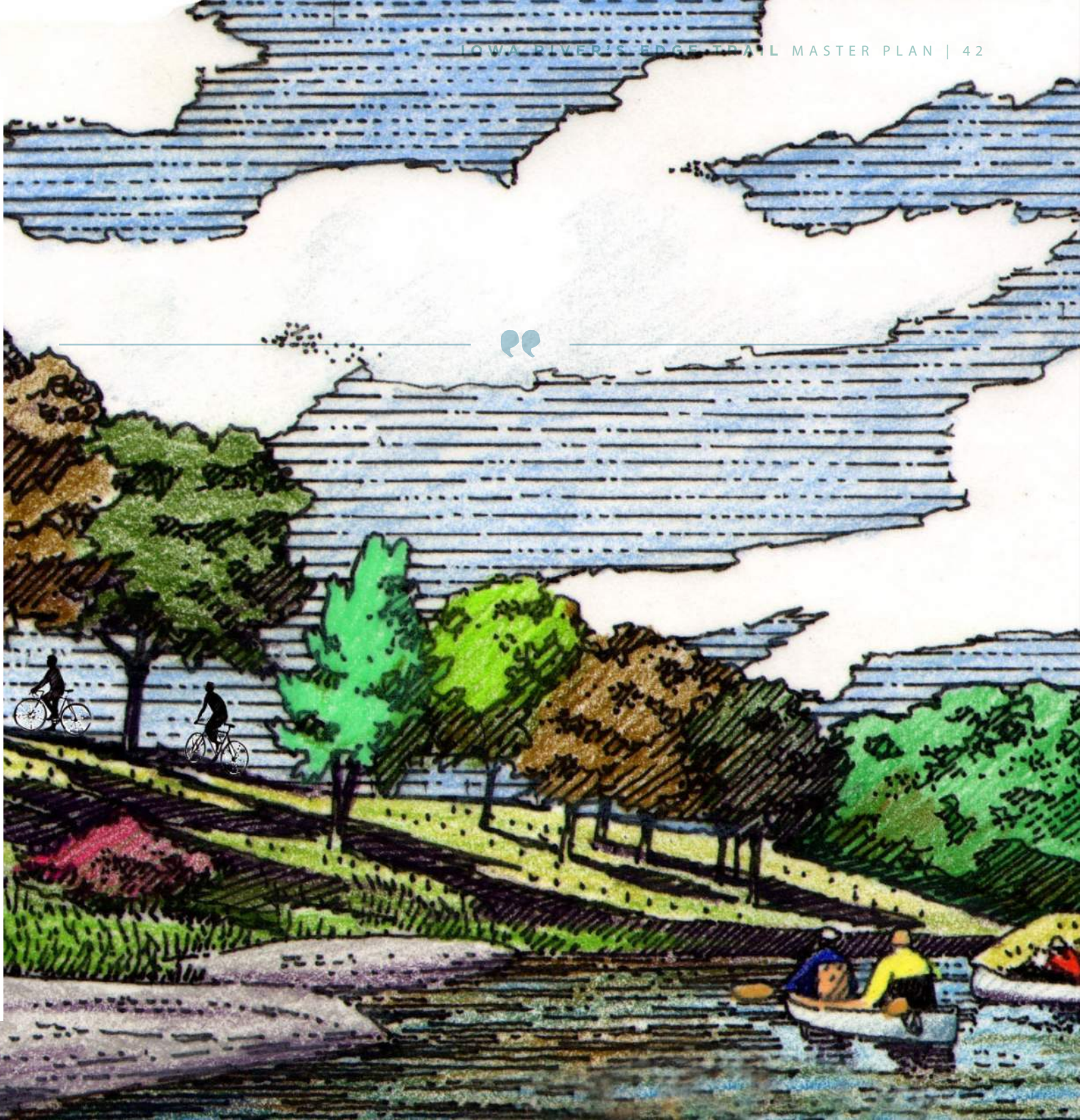
*Artwork in the infrastructure of the bridges:*

Railings, entrances, abutments, deck, lighting.

*Sculptural artwork:* Benches, pavement

patterns, shade structures/canopies, observation platforms/blinds, markers along the trail/historic narrative, individual freestanding sculpture, sculptural lighting along trail, outdoor "galleries"—locations for temporary or changing thematic exhibitions, children's art programming, photography, commissioned "sound" or music integrated into locations above, signage and wayfinding.

Iowa River's Edge Trail Master Plan presents an ambitious and exciting program for the trail, borne out of the local communities' vision for all to find value in the trail. The plan and its scheduling will inevitably change over time. Some projects may advance as opportunities or demands open, while others may appear less desirable over time. However, the overall concept holds the vision and will change the face of this new regional trail opportunity.



## *Moving Forward*

“For economic development, this trail will be one of the most significant things to improve the attractiveness of living in Marshalltown that we have seen in decades. Marshalltown is a meet in the middle place, and this will be yet another reason for groups, conventions, visitors, and families to enjoy what we have to offer. I can’t wait to have our grandchildren enjoy the views and get the exercise that this fine trail will allow.”

*Joel Greer, Marshalltown Mayor*

# Get Involved!

Are you inspired by the future of River's Edge Trail?

Do you have an idea, a funding source, or simply want to be part of the transformation?

## **The vision of the plan cannot happen without you. What you can do:**

- Lobby for Trail Amenities in Your Town
- Volunteer for Positions, Events, and Programs Around the Trail
- Positively Connect with River's Edge Towns
- Brag About River's Edge!
- Reach out to TRAILS, Inc., The City of Marshalltown, or Hardin County to get started

