INTRODUCTION

The Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities (JISC) and its partners have sparked a regional process for sustainable growth and development in the rapidly changing Omaha-Lincoln Flatwater Metroplex thanks to the generous support of the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund.

Through NETF support the Joslyn Institute and partners launched a three-year process under the banner of the Nebraska/Iowa Metroplex Indicators Conference, or N/IMIC. The formation of N/IMIC was recommended by the comprehensive and seminal Sixty Mile Radius Study, which identified the challenges to the natural environment and communities posed by rapid urban growth in southeast Nebraska.

Through regular meetings, workshops, seminars and annual conferences and other activities the N/IMIC partnership has brought together public, private, rural and urban stakeholders in a regional dialogue that is helping to shape the environmental future of the Flatwater Metroplex.

Rapid urban growth is far outpacing the abilities and resources of many towns, cities and counties as well as rural landowners, state/local agencies and others, to respond to a host of ecological, economic and social challenges. Through participation in N/IMIC and related activities, these various entities and other regional stakeholders are being encouraged to work together in sharing ideas, talents and resources in building a shared sustainable future.

SRS: LAYING THE FOUNDATION

The Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund has made significant contributions to sustainable growth in the rapidly urbanizing areas surrounding Omaha and Lincoln, beginning with funding of the three-year Sixty Mile Radius Study (SRS), which began in 2001. The SRS supported a host of activities aimed at increasing public awareness of regional growth patterns, beginning with the initiation of an educational process to address growth-related issues in a 60-mile radius of Omaha. The grant enabled JISC to review public policy assets, deficiencies, and alternatives; facilitate scenario-planning workshops; and identify potential regional indicators of sustainability. The SRS regional education process brought together leaders and citizens from Omaha and Lincoln, Council Bluffs, IA, and the Nebraska Governor's office (Gov. Mike Johanns). This extensive study included comprehensive assessments of more than two dozen city and county comprehensive plans, a regional polling survey, and a number of lectures, forums, meetings and workshops used to identify and disseminate key growth issues, such as low-density sprawl development, and their impacts on the environment and quality of life.
SRS participants were particularly concerned by development trends discovered in their initial findings, trends that suggested serious consequences for the region’s quality of life, the cost of providing public services, and the well-being of Nebraska’s natural systems. Like many other urban areas around the U.S., growth planning in the Omaha and Lincoln metros had been based primarily on auto transportation, and fertile agricultural land and potential food production for urban markets was being absorbed by low-density development in every county in the region. The SRS concluded that the future urban growth may be blocked in some counties by the sprawl of low-density acreage development, not to mention the enormous strain on already overburdened resources. Water supplies, and the assurances of water quality, were seen to be diminishing as strong competition for supplies continued to emerge against a backdrop of drought between urban and rural interests. Numerous habitats and the flora and fauna of the two river basins—the Missouri and the Platte and related watersheds—in the heart of the region were identified in major studies as being severely threatened. Planning to mitigate these and other environmental consequences was discovered to be very disjointed, uncoordinated, and independent of any shared vision of the region as a whole.

The SRS was unique among NETF’s funded proposals in that it addressed specific environmental concerns through a transition process from independent community planning strategies to regional, cooperative planning.

N/IMIC: A REGIONAL DIALOGUE TAKES SHAPE

The findings of the SRS team, combined with results from the survey, research and other activities resulted in the publication of the Flatwater Metroplex report in 2004. Among other findings, the report recommended the formation of the Nebraska/Iowa Metroplex Indicators Conference (N/IMIC).

The term “Flatwater Metroplex” refers to a region roughly defined by 60-mile zones encircling Omaha/Council Bluffs and Lincoln, a complex, interconnected mix of urban and rural communities that include three major cities and 119 towns of more than 400 people. Home to fragile ecosystems crossed by two major rivers, its rolling hills and broad valleys hold some of the most fertile farmland in the country. About 1.2 million people live in the Metroplex—a population projected to double in 40 years—and communities large and small are already facing challenges resulting from this rapid growth.

The Flatwater Metroplex report identified the following growth challenges:

1. Critical ecological systems are in the path of rapid growth.
2. Economic growth will not occur without attention to quality of life and the environment.
3. The region’s most valuable natural resources—water, wind, fertile soils, and a 4-season solar climate—are underutilized.
4. There is no shared vision of preferred regional growth patterns or land use policies.
5. Municipal and county governments have very different, often conflicting
approaches to planning and public policies.
6. Water resources are spotted and uneven in quality/quantity.
7. Infrastructure needed to support growth is lagging behind growth pressures.
8. Agricultural and urban growth interests are in conflict.
9. The region does not yet see itself as a unit of common economic interests; competitive tensions exist between communities and threaten future growth.

The Joslyn Institute was joined by former SRS partners as well by new city/county partners in securing another three-year NETF grant to fund the N/IMIC startup.

N/IMIC was created as a voluntary, ongoing process to bring together public/private stakeholders and form effective urban/rural coalitions. From the outset the Joslyn Institute and its N/IMIC partners set forth the principle that environmental health can be maintained and even enhanced if communities work together as region, managing new growth through an ecosystems approach.

Of particular concern was an area where the metro areas of Lincoln and Omaha overlap, a place of intense growth along the I-80 Corridor that also contains some of the state’s best farmland and most threatened and fragile ecosystems. It is a region where existing and potential conflicts between rapid growth and environmental quality, and between communities and limited resources, can diminish quality of life and seriously degrade environmental, social and cultural resources.

As was noted in the Flatwater Metroplex report, “a region divided will also see its economic potential severely curtailed. Growth does not have to come at the expense of community life or environmental quality. Rather, greater prosperity and environmental health can be provided for all communities in the region if they choose to work together to manage new growth.”

Through a repetitive regional dialogue facilitated by the Nebraska/Iowa Metroplex Conference, urban, suburban and rural communities began discussions based on the growth challenges identified in the Flatwater Report. They examined public policy and governance decisions that encourage sustainable growth, including ways and means to enact the Flatwater Report’s recommendations:

1. Coordinate planning through a voluntary set of regional partners.
2. Conduct regular conferences, meetings, and workshops to provide a forum for exchange of information and ideas.
3. Establish an Annual Sustainability Indicators Report to announce progress on goals to regional stakeholders.
4. Identify and publicize examples of best practices to be used as models for creating healthy and sustainable communities.
5. Establish a consensus of the region’s most fragile natural, social and historic environments. Create strategies/mechanisms to protect these environments.
6. Define policies that clarify or limit acreage development, protect rural lands for food production and natural habitat.
7. Coordinate reviews of water-related policies to ensure equitable access to clean water for agriculture, municipalities, industry and wildlife.
8. Encourage energy conservation and alternative energy production through effective planning and green building techniques.
9. Encourage healthy lifestyles and rich living environments with compact, walkable communities.
10. Create food-based, rural/urban coalitions, and foster understanding of the interdependencies of all communities and natural systems.

Throughout its three-year operation N/IMIC brought together participants from all walks of life to craft a regional vision for sustainable growth. In addition to monthly meetings by the N/IMIC steering committee, quarterly public forums were conducted on a number of pressing growth issues including water quality and quantity, transportation planning, and land conversion and conservation. A special forum in the spring of 2006 brought together small town mayors and city managers and planners from Ashland, Waverly, Gretna and Blair to discuss the impact of metropolitan and I-80 corridor growth on their communities.

Another N/IMIC public forum (May 24, 2007) on the Pflug road development near the Platte River drew standing room only crowds at Mahoney State Park. Ideas and questions explored by the panelists (ranging from developers to county and NRD officials and others) included:

- Regions/states that run down their natural capital may be making things worse for their economic future, even if their manufactured investment seems to be keeping a healthy pace.
- Where are we going to get the water to support development anticipated at interchanges such as Pflug Road, the proposed Omaha beltway, etc. We base our planning on a small amount of historical data. Is this the best use of the land if we are indeed in the midst of a major drought cycle?
- Can the state afford the collateral infrastructure costs that will be created by an expansion of interchanges?
- What is or can be the role of regional government or planning authorities (NRDs, MAPA, etc.) Can NRDs be empowered to serve a role in land use planning in the interim, leaving counties to oversee ag land issues?
- To what extent will state leadership depart from the local land use-planning model? Are counties the appropriate authorities to be involved in this project?
- What are the economic benefits of preserving open space, grasslands, river environment, forests, habitat etc. What are alternative models for growth?

ENVISIONING REGIONAL DESIGN

A signal event in the three-year N/IMIC process occurred in the fall of 2006 with the two-day Envisioning Regional Design Conference at the Strategic Air & Space Museum near Ashland. With the support of the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund, the Joslyn Institute forged a partnership with the American Institute of Architects and the Nebraska Innovation Zone Commission to stage this unique multi-charrette exercise.
Envisioning Regional Design (ERD) describes an ongoing initiative created to address regional growth issues identified by the N/IMIC process. N/IMIC’s diverse membership comprised the core of ERD, which was kicked off in September 2006 with a two-conference featuring six charrette teams. The teams, each led by a facilitator with graphic assistance from professional and student architects, were arranged throughout the Strategic Air & Space Museum’s cavernous restoration hanger. Noted regional planner George Crandall of Crandall Arambula (Portland, Oregon) and W. Cecil Steward, President of the Joslyn Institute and ERD director, were co-leaders of the event. More than 150 architects, planners and regional stakeholders, including Lincoln Mayor Colleen Seng, worked together to craft sustainable visions for each of these six charrette environments:

- **I-80 Corridor**: I-80 exits and communities between Lincoln and Omaha.
- **Communities in the Path of Growth**: The impacts/opportunities for the small commuter town of Ashland.
- **Suburban Conservation Community**: Proposal for a conservation community near Bennington (exurban Omaha).
- **Transformation of Regional Shopping Mall**: Reuse proposals for outdated shopping mall in suburban Fremont.
- **Near Urban Core Neighborhood**: Continued revitalization of the Drake Court district near downtown Omaha.
- **Urban Core Center**: Examination of opportunities for revitalization in downtown Lincoln in light of Downtown Master Plan, Antelope Valley, and other initiatives.

These Metroplex environments were chosen to model various urban and rural challenges. Solutions identified in charrette visions and in the final report are readily transferable to any community facing growth and change.

Five Elements—Land, Water, Materials, Energy and Food—were identified as areas most affected by growth management issues in the Flatwater Metroplex. These elements are seen as common to both rural and urban interests and serve as a basis for discussion and, ultimately, the formation of urban/rural coalitions that are essential to building sustainable communities.

Several themes emerged from the charrettes that can be applied to a range of urban and rural conditions along the I-80 Corridor and throughout the Metroplex. The themes echo, consolidate and expand upon the findings of the earlier Flatwater Metroplex report:

1. **Need for a Shared Vision**: There is a dire need for regional agreements on preferred growth patterns, land use policies and economic goals. Lack of coordination, and competitive tensions lead to inefficiencies and hamper efforts to improve quality of life. Lack of communication and public input leads to mistrust.
2. **Outmoded, Conflicting Policies**: Municipal, county and state governments have different, conflicting approaches to planning. Policies and jurisdictions designed to address 19th century conditions are not suited to the global and environmental challenges of the 21st century.
3. **Infrastructure**: Critical infrastructure lags behind growth pressures due to lack of coordinated planning and transportation alternatives. With commuter traffic
expected to increase eightfold in forty years, alternatives are needed to current transportation networks and funding methods.

4. **Ecological Threats:** Economic growth will not occur, and quality of life will diminish, without a consensus of the region’s most fragile natural, social and historic environments and strategies/mechanisms to protect these environments.

5. **Land Conversion:** Rural/urban interests are in conflict as farmland and fragile natural environments are lost to sprawl and acreage-style development. There is a critical need to foster understanding of the interdependencies of all communities and natural systems through the creation of food-based coalitions.

6. **Energy and Natural Resources:** Valuable natural resources (water, wind, soils, 4-season solar climate) are underutilized or misallocated. Incentives are needed to increase the use of clean, alternative energy and to make energy efficiency a priority through building code improvements and incentive programs.

7. **Healthy Living:** Policies are needed to encourage healthy, walkable communities that offer transportation and housing choices in mixed-use developments, preserve urban centers, and promote vibrant public spaces and neighborhood identity.

There was a consensus that current development and consumption habits are neither cost-effective nor sustainable even for the near future, and continued inaction will lead to extreme consequences as ever-greater demands are put upon natural resources and infrastructure. Overall, charrette participants concluded that towns, counties and other stakeholders must coalesce into a single economic, cultural, environmental and civic entity if they hope to maintain or improve the quality of life in the Metroplex region. Stakeholders and their leaders need to discover and adopt tools and means to address the source of problems rather than the symptoms, and consider policies and initiatives that are being enacted by other metro regions in the U.S., namely:

1. **Adopt state policies** that clarify and prioritize land uses, protect the most arable and fertile rural lands for food production, and protect natural, historic and cultural resources. The state should coordinate reviews of water-related policies to ensure equitable access to clean water for human, agricultural, industrial and wildlife uses. Water is perhaps the most significant element; if the state and region does not get a handle on water policy, economic prospects will fall flat.

2. **Establish regional governance** through a voluntary set of regional partners. Transportation networks, watersheds, natural resources and cities extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries and are not effectively managed by outdated, piecemeal or conflicting approaches. Sustainable development is only achieved through connected, coherent regional policy.

3. **Initiate an effective planning process** through regular conferences, meetings and workshops that give every stakeholder an opportunity at the table. Establish a series of councils and investment zones representing diverse rural and urban interests, identify and publicize best practices, and establish a consensus of the region’s most fragile, natural, social and historic environments. Based on a series of indicators, planning should promote safe, walkable communities, food-based rural/urban coalitions, and energy conservation while protecting the most fragile natural, social and historic environments.
The Envisioning Regional Design charrette exercise and subsequent reports and activities were lauded by the national office of the American Institute of Architects and incorporated into their Blueprint for America, the primary program of AIA150 that marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of the AIA. The Blueprint program was created to offer citizens in communities across America an opportunity to celebrate their community heritage, address emerging architectural challenges and trends, and find their voices to help make their vision real for beautiful, safe, and livable communities. Results of Envisioning Regional Design were also published by AIA on a searchable geographic database in cooperation with Google Earth.

The complete Envisioning Regional Design report, including visions created by all six charrette teams, can be downloaded from the Joslyn Institute website (http://www.ecospheres.com/charrette.asp).

**APPLICATION OF THE E/STEP℠ TOOL**

N/IMIC-sponsored discussions, workshops and initiatives—including Envisioning Regional Design—are grounded in the Joslyn Institute’s Five Domains of Sustainability (Environmental, Socio-cultural, Technological, Economic & Public Policy) and tested through the application of the E/STEP℠ tool.

The Five Domains paradigm provided valuable and exciting opportunities for a completely new framework for design and/or management at any scale – from a single house to an entire region or ecosystem—in the work of the N/IMIC partnership.

For N/IMIC partners and for any community of the future, these domains will be necessary organizing principles for urban administration, urban design and planning, urban growth management, and regional and urban sustainable development.

The Five Domains, and all the information contained within them, are interdependent, interactive, and affective, one in turn upon each of the other four. A systematic analysis of their interdependencies, in any developmental situation, will reduce the potential of unintended, unanticipated consequences at any scale.

The E/STEP℠ tool utilizes the Five Domains to organize an array of issues at various scales to define sets of sustainability indicators. Sustainability indicators are measurement tools that alert us to negative trends in systems and communities and help us recognize what needs to be done before these trends become larger problems.

Sustainability indicators differ from traditional indicators (which usually measure just one area as if it were entirely independent of others) in that they reflect interconnections of all five domains of any system or community. Sustainability indicators are effective in generating debate and discussion among leaders and stakeholders of different backgrounds and viewpoints. For the purposes of the NETF grant the indictors are used to help N/IMIC stakeholders craft a shared vision.
Using the E/STEP℠ tool, these stakeholders can define issues and measure outcomes within their own neighborhoods, cities, counties and even watersheds. Ultimately, the tool can be applied to define issues and measure outcomes for the entire Metroplex region.

Measuring or projecting the improvement or decline of various quality of life factors over time is clarified using the E/STEP℠ tool (pictured at left). Symbolizing the cyclical quality and interconnectivity of all living systems, E/STEP℠ is an effective tool for plotting various indicators in the three term ranges—short-term (S), medium-term (M), and long-term (L)—each divided into ten time frames that can be defined however the user chooses (i.e. one year, ten years, etc.).

In an ideal world, an indicator (for example, water quality), plotted near the outermost ring of each term scale would be considered as approaching the best possible outcome or condition.

In this example, short-term conditions appear to be approaching optimal, yet the relative immediacy of medium and long-term measures indicate water quality challenges that lie ahead. For further detail, the dots plotted on the scale can be color-coded and sized according to the urgency or scale of the challenge of that particular indicator.

The E/STEP℠ tool allows any user to assess hypothetical yet real life situations and communicate those situations to stakeholders and leadership. By incorporating all five domains the tool is effective both in gauging progress and in revealing the various and complex trade-offs that will occur between indicators.

Fifteen E/STEP℠ indicators were identified for each of the six charrette communities and will be useful not only for those particular environments but for similar communities and situations in the Flatwater Metroplex.

This graphic representation of issues and conditions makes E/STEP℠ an ideal tool for collaborative planning as well as for communicating to leaders and the public a region’s progress towards a sustainable vision and quality of life goals.

**REGIONAL FOCUS, LOCAL ACTION**

Regional collaboration through the N/IMIC has played a significant role in the start-up of community-based initiatives such as the Green Omaha Coalition (GOC) and Lincoln Green by Design (LGbD). The Joslyn Institute and N/IMIC stakeholders were involved in the start-up of both of these new organizations in 2006. Although GOC and LGbD focus on issues in their respective communities, the groups share many ideas and resources and even come together at N/IMIC-sponsored forums such as the November 2007 Conference, “Building Resource Efficient Communities,” at Quarry Oaks near Ashland.

This conference offered N/IMIC stakeholders and fledgling GOC and LGbD partners a unique opportunity to meet and work with three nationally known experts in
environmental conservation and sustainable design: Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, co-founder of the Congress for the New Urbanism and dean of the University of Miami School of Architecture; Brad Klein, Environmental Law Fellow who works on a broad range of clean energy and clean water litigation and policy issues; and Susan Seacrest, founder of the Lincoln-based Groundwater Foundation and recipient of the prestigious Heinz Award for the Environment.

Following morning presentations by each of the experts, the afternoon featured breakout sessions for the nearly 90 participants. In general, participants called for increased public awareness of environmental issues and expressed a desire for action, risk-taking and attainable goals (“we need to have more to do, we need to create movement,” concluded one group. “Establish a demonstration project, such as a regional renewable energy park with wind/bio/hydro/etc.). The results also suggested a generally positive view that is forward-looking, with a future designed within an ecological framework, a future built of dreams rather than fears.

There was an undercurrent of “getting back to the basics” (“People need to realize true needs...”) and a desire to make green the new “status symbol” (“cool, sexy and easy...”).

Another breakout group described transforming ourselves from a society that "takes, makes and wastes" to one that can create goods and services that generate ecological, social and economic value but also can be used, recycled, and used again without losing any material quality (“cradle to cradle thinking...it's not just about objects, but also a way of thinking about the genesis of things and where they are going...”). It's about how we make decisions and a recognition that sustainability is about healthy, thriving and culturally alive places with people in them.

There was a call for more opportunities for low- and middle-income persons/families to invest in green, more acknowledgement of positive actions (“no matter how small we need to constantly beat the drum, pat folks on back and give out awards—we all need to hear more about the good things), and a need for a champion or champions to spread the word.

Organized along JISC's Five Domains of Sustainability are recommendations from citizen participants in the breakout groups at Building Resource Efficient Communities:

ENVIRONMENT

• Create comprehensive protection of environment resources.
• Make connections through watershed-based interlocal agreements.
• Make conservation areas accessible to public.
• Develop uniform policies on stormwater management (restrict development in unprotected lands).
• Encourage xeriscaping, water-thrifty lawns (fescue, buffalo grass) and crops.
• Sustainable Agriculture practices, with education at micro/macro levels and at a younger age level.
• Economic incentives for alternatives such as wind power generation, organics, and low water impact crops.
• Protection of agricultural uses/interests (farm to market, greenbelt legislation, conservation easements, limit nuisance liability).
• Incentives for grocery chains to buy and market local goods.
• More public information on food systems and alternatives.
• Need more pre-planning for green development.
• Climate protection by advancing Cool Cities & US Mayors Agreement.

SOCIO-CULTURAL

• Develop an independently funded, statewide organization with a holistic mission of educating K-12 on sustainable principles.
• Emphasize early interactions with the natural world in education.
• Leadership Development (Develop and train Environmental Champions).
• Develop networks of local communities and more effective methods for receiving public input and fostering social accountability.
• Bring together various volunteer groups with common agendas and enhance communication (share resources, local case studies, client education etc.).
• Establish Peer-to-peer network of local community leaders, each working with own focus and pace specific to his or her region.
• Encourage governments to set sustainable examples.
• Easily accessible, comprehensive database/clearing house of best practices.
• Consider limits to population growth in some areas.

TECHNOLOGICAL

• Develop a ride share database.
• Plan for future so later on we can upgrade for transportation alternatives, reserve right of way (start by changing Dept. of Roads to Dept. of Transportation).
• Develop trails as alternative to motor vehicle traffic.
• Establish/enhance land use patterns to support mass transit (rail).
• Lincoln/Omaha cooperate in coordinating development of major public amenities (arenas, stadia, airports etc.) and connect through rail/transit network.
• Limit road construction (infrastructure) to force density.
• Be mindful of impending oil shortages in future transportation/energy plans.
• Examine cost of infrastructure needs vs. limited resources. Develop new methods.

ECONOMIC

• Tie economic benefit to the environmental sustainability ("Environomics").
• Educate others about economic benefits (business/builders).
• Take advantage of trends that support green building and sustainable design.
• Make use of green marketing as much as we do of green science/technology.
• Need better and broader economic incentives to change behavior.
• Conduct and publicize a cost-benefit analysis of sustainable economics
• Establish economic incentives/disincentives.
• Identify the “true costs” of unsustainable development.
PUBLIC POLICY

• Identify policy barriers at all levels. Be vigilant that good policies remain in place and are made known to leaders, developers and others.
• New tax incentives/provisions (tied to new building standards, encourage innovative sustainable competitions and collaboration).
• Specific policies to encourage mass transit, alternative energy and conservation, green building standards, recycling, and habitat/ag land preservation.
• Emphasize that natural resources belong to people of the state—the State of Nebraska needs to better reinforce this idea.
• Explore and enact policies or legislation that encourage regional-level cooperation and governance.

THE N/IMIC LEGACY

The work of the Nebraska/Iowa Metroplex Indicators Conference has brought together a diverse cross-section of regional stakeholders who are now working toward a common vision through rural-based, grassroots organizations such as Save Our Hills in Washington County to public-private citizen groups in Omaha (GOC) and Lincoln (LGBD). The participation of JISC and N/IMIC partners is also influencing future discussions and planning in the Metroplex region. For example, a draft report prepared by consultants hired by the Nebraska Innovation Zone Commission (NIZC) draws upon past research conducted by JISC (both the SRS and Flatwater reports are cited) as well by direct participation by JISC staff and N/IMIC volunteers in NIZC-sponsored forums and roundtable discussions.

This “Phase 1 Report” (available at: ) calls for a "green corridor" concept along I-80 between Lincoln and Omaha that would preserve scenic views, protect sensitive environmental areas and require that new buildings blend into the scenery. The report makes a strong case for environmental stewardship, noting that:

“Sustainability practices should define the use of identified environmental and natural resources. Major environmental resources should be protected or developed according to best management practices. These practices apply to productive agricultural land, sand and gravel extraction, and drinking water sources. The Study Area’s communities will benefit by protecting and enhancing their distinctive and individual character. Cities and towns will determine the features that most effectively preserve their sense of place...Unique and sensitive landscapes along stream and river corridors and surrounding existing state parks should be preserved and enhanced to promote habitat conservation and recreation...Growth and development should focus on specific development clusters, most notably at interchanges, or within or adjacent to existing cities and towns. Leapfrog and rural development should be discouraged. Best management practices (BMPs) and low impact development techniques should be incorporated into local government comprehensive plans and used for new development, where warranted. Land conservation policies should be incorporated into state and local government planning efforts. Development should locate on or near existing infrastructure
(community water and sewer systems, and paved roadways) and provide the means to connect to infrastructure when such connection is viable. Design guidelines should be included in local governments plans to promote a built environment that is consistent with visions for the Corridor.

The report continues to echo the past work and recommendations of JISC and N/IMIC by noting:

“A common, regional vision for the area is needed, but it must be created to preserve local control of zoning and utility provision. To be effective the vision must have the support of all jurisdictions in the Study Area. There are plenty examples of undesirable development (I-35, I-70, etc.). There is a need for good examples of development we do want and that fits with regional vision. What conservation methods have worked in other places? What types of economic development can be environmentally sensitive?...There is a concern about lack of agricultural zoning in Sarpy County. Sarpy County and Todd Valley are historically some of the most productive, dry land agricultural land in state. With high land prices, farmers cannot afford to buy land for farming all land purchases today are for speculation. Are there additional opportunities for land swaps or conservation easements?...Environmentally sensitive areas should be identified and preserved. Some areas of particular importance are: critical habitat, wildlife corridors, view sheds, significant vegetation and productive agricultural land. In areas where development can be considered, low impact/conservation development is appropriate.

CONCLUSION

The N/IMIC process was an unprecedented attempt to spark regional dialogue and consensus in Nebraska’s Flatwater Metroplex. It brought together key stakeholders, many meeting for the first time, to shape a regional vision that protects and sustains the natural environment and the communities that depend upon it. The work of N/IMIC and its partners leaves of strong legacy of research, cooperation and engagement, participation and vision that will serve Nebraska’s conservation goals for many years into the future.

This report was prepared by David Ochsner, Director of Communications for the Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities, with offices in Omaha and Lincoln.