

## Illinois River Watershed Partnership (IRWP)

### Strategic Plan 2024 -2026

#### 1. Executive Summary:

IRWP was founded in 2005 to improve the integrity of the Illinois River Watershed through public education, outreach and implementation of conservation and restoration practices. Throughout its 18 years of operations, IRWP has consistently sought to develop diverse partnerships, leverage and utilize funding effectively, and use the best available science, technology, and conservation practices to maintain steady progress towards water quality goals. Through programming and operations IRWP seeks to achieve a condition where the Illinois River and its tributaries are a fully functioning ecosystem, where ecological protection, conservation, and economically productive uses support diverse aquatic and riparian communities, meet all state and federal water quality standards, promote economic sustainability, and provide recreational opportunities.

This three-year Strategic Plan recognizes the importance of an adaptive approach that should be reviewed and adjusted, as needed, during the implementation period. The plan should be responsive and align with the Arkansas and Oklahoma Watershed Management Plans when they are finalized in 2024. Progress against this plan will be reviewed annually by the Board of Directors and quarterly, or more frequently, by the Executive Director and staff.

#### Our Mission

Improve the integrity of the Illinois River Watershed through public education, outreach, and implementation of conservation and restoration practices throughout the watershed.

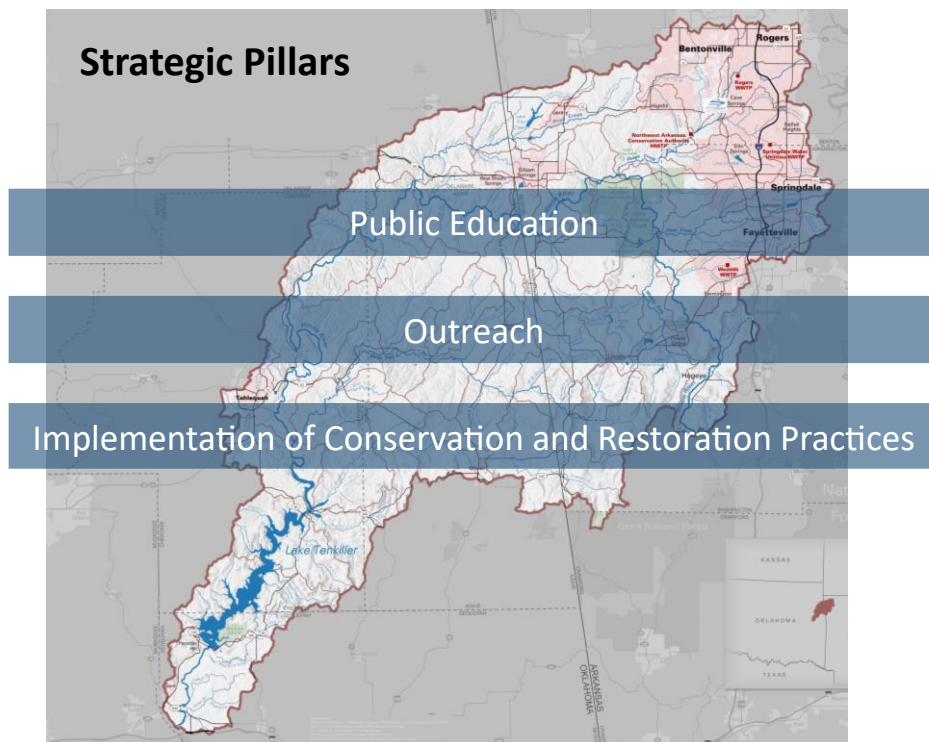
#### Our Vision 2026

1. Continue to offer, and facilitate provision of, impactful conservation and restoration programming.
  - Support consistency in use and understanding of data, analysis, and information to inform decision making.
  - Continue to grow and expand effective programming throughout the watershed that achieves measurable results in water quality and/or watershed management.
  - Make use of emerging technologies and solutions to help make better decisions based on qualitative and quantitative evidence.
2. Maintain sustainable financial resources that keeps pace with demands of a growing population and region.
  - Cover all operating expenses and expand program investments that efficiently implement programming.
  - Actively pursue new funding opportunities in balance with available resources and in keeping with IRWP's mission.
3. Effectively promote and communicate the need for, work of, and impact of IRWP.

- Diversify and expand the awareness of the organization and watershed engaging new and existing stakeholders in a meaningful way.
  - Measure and report on the results of IRWP programming in improving water quality and watershed management.
4. Ensure quality organizational leadership, management, and staffing.
- Expand the organization's reach and participation to engage new stakeholders and experts in decision making.
  - Maintain and develop staff and board capacity to achieve results.

### Our Strategic Pillars

IRWP's has three strategic pillars: outreach, education, and implementation of conservation and restoration practices across the watershed. These pillars guide how, where, and with whom we work.



### Our Values

Partnership, People, Results, Conservation, Restoration, Public Education, Water Quality, Supporting Economic Development, Quality of Life, Cost-effectiveness, Efficiency

**Strategic Initiative # 1: Improve Understanding of Watershed Dynamics and Water Quality Through Improved Monitoring and Analysis of Program and Land Use Impacts**

Key Action Steps	Project Dates/Work Completion	Responsible Persons
<p><b>Identify and align opportunities for water quality monitoring</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support implementation of relevant monitoring efforts e.g., upstream and downstream analysis, before and after project implementation near restoration projects</li> <li>• Collaborate on and lead research on relevant watershed management topics such as percent of forested area near streams</li> </ul>	<p>Pre/post project December 2024</p>	<p>Project Managers Executive Director</p>
<p><b>Continuously improve results monitoring and maintain metric comparability over time</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review impact tracker and make adjustments as needed to better monitor and tell IRWP's story</li> </ul>	<p>Annually</p>	<p>Executive Director w/ Staff</p>
<p><b>Communicate on impact and results of programming</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define strategies for raising awareness, building a strong brand identity, and attracting support and partnerships</li> <li>• Develop IRWP Communications and Outreach Plan that identifies strategies and channels to effectively communicate our mission, programs, and impact to stakeholders</li> <li>• Implement IRWP Communications and Outreach Plan including development of data-supported success stories, quarterly newsletters reaching at least 4,000 each quarter, and an active social media feed that tells our story and reaches 90,000 annually</li> </ul>	<p>July 2024 March 2024 Ongoing</p>	<p>Executive Director, All staff</p>
<p><b>Coordinate and harmonize water quality monitoring initiatives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement voluntary water quality monitoring initiative that strengthens decision support and complies with reporting requirements to EPA's water quality WQX database</li> </ul>	<p>March 2024</p>	<p>Youth Education Specialist, Education and Monitoring Subcommittee</p>

**Strategic Initiative #2: Education and Outreach to Stakeholders on the Importance of Watershed Management and Water Quality**

Key Action Steps	Project Dates/Work Completion	Responsible
<p><b>Youth Education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximize impact and quality of youth education programming through educating at least 3,000 students through Mobile Learning Labs and 1,000 students through field trips and events</li> <li>• Coordination of education programs with Oklahoma counterparts</li> <li>• Expand tracking of impact and results to include secondary use and lesson downloads</li> </ul>	<p>Annually</p> <p>Annually March 2024</p>	<p>Youth Education Specialist, Education and Monitoring Subcommittee</p>
<p><b>Municipalities and Regional Stakeholders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support adoption and utilization of USACE study</li> <li>• Identify and share out opportunities for development of voluntary incentives for developers to invest in LID/green infrastructure</li> <li>• Pilot stormwater detention for 6-month and 1-year return intervals</li> <li>• Hold relevant and timely forums on emerging opportunities such as sub-basin urban stormwater planning and stormwater utility</li> </ul>	<p>November 2024 December 2026</p> <p>December 2024 As needed and at least once annually</p>	<p>Staff and Stormwater Subcommittee</p>
<p><b>State and Federal Agencies in AR and OK</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore collaborative opportunities with Oklahoma agencies on program opportunities building off recommendations in Watershed Management Plans</li> <li>• Develop new and strengthen existing collaborative partnerships with OK and AR agencies on complimentary watershed management topics</li> <li>• Review annual workplans and agreements to identify shared goals and tasks with agencies and other stakeholders</li> </ul>	<p>December 2024 Ongoing</p> <p>Annually</p>	<p>Cherokee Nation, OK Department of Wildlife, NRCS/Conservation Districts, OCC, OWRB, Northeastern University,</p>
<p><b>General Public and All Audiences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use public awareness strategies to build momentum and improve public perceptions of IRWP through “solutions approach,” press, information sharing, presentations, etc.</li> <li>• Update website with key messages and information about the watershed</li> <li>• Align messages with other partners including BWA and U of A Extension</li> <li>• Develop presentation slides with key messages for easy use by staff and partners</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>July 2024 March 2024 Ongoing</p>	<p>Executive Director, Staff, Monitoring and Education Subcommittee</p>

<p><b>Look at opportunities to diversify and reach new stakeholders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold focus groups and engage marketing firms where budget allows to refine messaging and outreach (e.g. gutter installers, landscaping companies, others)</li> <li>• Assess opportunities to support certifications and continuing education on green infrastructure</li> </ul>	<p>During program cycle</p> <p>January 2025</p>	<p>Program Managers</p> <p>Staff and Stormwater Subcommittee</p>
<p><b>Engage Volunteers in Watershed Programming</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twice Annual and develop self-led litter cleanup Programs</li> <li>• Develop an “adopt a BMP, Creek, and/or Public Access Area” program</li> </ul>	<p>August 2024</p> <p>March 2025</p>	<p>Executive Director and Staff in partnership with Municipalities</p>
<p><b>Lead a Collaboration with Partners on Conferences and Field Tours</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host two or more field trips, pasture walks, and annual conference on relevant BMP topic(s)</li> <li>• Analyze participation and effectiveness of public events and adapt approaches to maximize impact</li> </ul>	<p>Annually</p> <p>Post-event</p>	<p>Program Managers</p> <p>Program Managers</p>
<p><b>Identify and pilot emerging opportunities that align with the IRWP Mission and capabilities.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage subcommittee and outside expertise to look at feasibility of a Stormwater Utility</li> <li>• Explore opportunities to develop new partnerships on Riparian and Floodplain Conservation Easements, Recreation and Public Access, and Stream Restoration</li> <li>• Assess potential for development of certification programs for residential and commercial green infrastructure services providers</li> <li>• Explore technology that could be leveraged to improve communications with partners, volunteers, advocates, and internally to increase the success and perception of the positive impact(s) of programs and projects</li> </ul>	<p>October 2024</p> <p>December 2026</p> <p>December 2025</p> <p>October 2024</p>	<p>Program Mangers, Executive Director</p>

**Strategic Initiative #3: Implementation of Best Management Practices in the Watershed**

Key Action Steps	Project Dates/Work Completion	Responsible Persons
<p><b>Extend Septic Tank Repair Program in the watershed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold learning workshop to identify and build consensus on program needs</li> </ul>	<p>March 2024</p>	<p>Septic Program Manager</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify funding to extend program as needed</li> <li>Partner on pilot program in Oklahoma if funding can be secured</li> </ul>	<p>December 2024</p> <p>December 2024</p>	
<p><b>Extend and Expand Riparian Restoration Program</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement Landowner services program developing at least 15 landowner conservation plans annually</li> <li>Prepare assessment of program impact</li> <li>Identify financial resources to continue high-priority restoration services in partnership with landowners</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>November 2024</p>	Restoration Specialist and Conservation and Restoration Subcommittee
<p><b>Implement Blue Cities and Blue Neighborhoods Programs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify additional funding sources to implement program for next two years</li> <li>Implement LID/Green Infrastructure projects in partnership with 10-15 private and public partners</li> </ul>	<p>April 2024</p> <p>December 2026</p>	Program Manager and Stormwater Subcommittee
<p><b>Recreation Stewardship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finalize Illinois River Recreation Master Plan that supports watershed management, respects streamside landowners, supports economic development, embodies a conservation ethic, and prioritizes safety</li> <li>Develop new partnerships and implement opportunities in sustainable management, education, and outreach</li> <li>Implement lifejacket loaner program at Siloam Springs Kayak Park and Chamber Springs Public access locations</li> </ul>	<p>June 2024</p> <p>June 2025</p> <p>May-September 2024, '25, '26</p>	Executive Director, Consultant
<p><b>Identify and Invest in Emerging Partnership Opportunities Such As:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stormwater infrastructure retrofitting and maintenance in collaboration with municipalities to address water quality impacts</li> <li>One to two large grants to do work in Oklahoma that align with priorities</li> <li>Vegetation management trainings</li> </ul>	<p>December 2025</p> <p>July 2024</p>	Executive Director, Subcommittees

**Strategic Initiative #4: Quality Organizational Leadership, Management, and Staffing**

Key Action Steps	Project Dates/Work Completion	Responsible Persons
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<p><b>Maintain sustainable staffing levels and support professional development, retention, and growth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit high quality staff, support training and progression in professional development</li> <li>Conduct annual performance evaluation and provide feedback to staff</li> <li>Develop opportunities for Board Member/staff collaboration</li> <li>Provide incentive opportunities for staff performance and retention</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>January '23, '24, '25</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>March 2024</p>	<p>Executive Director, Executive Committee</p>
<p><b>Maintain full complement/maximum number of board members</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit and diversify representation and membership</li> <li>Maintain 90 percent engagement by board members as measured by participation in board meetings</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Quarterly</p>	<p>Executive Director, Staff, Board Members</p>
<p><b>Develop Board Committees</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and invite non-voting Board Sub-Committee membership to include expert stakeholder (ADEQ, Cities, County Environmental, Conservation Districts, Private Companies, Conservation Organizations, and others) from AR and OK</li> <li>Develop potential Board Members through Sub-committee participation</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Executive Director, Board Members, Staff</p>
<p><b>Work Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop annual workplans with Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) goals</li> <li>Review and update annual workplans and update monthly</li> </ul>	<p>December 2023, '24, '25</p> <p>Monthly</p>	<p>Executive Director, Staff</p>

**Strategic Initiative #5: Maintain sustainable funding that keeps pace with demands of a growing population and region.**

Key Action Steps	Project Dates/Work Completion	Responsible Persons
<p><b>Cover all operational costs and maintain healthy surplus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess opportunities for optimizing operational efficiencies and adjust budget as needed</li> <li>Look at opportunities to diversify revenue streams through water quality projects with municipalities, HOA/POAs, and others.</li> </ul>	<p>Quarterly</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Executive Director, Board of Directors, Staff</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review opportunities to invest “idle” funds to maximize return on investment</li> <li>• Review cost/benefit of applying for NICRA</li> </ul>	<p>November ‘23, ‘24, ‘25 March 2024</p>	<p>Executive Director</p>
<p><b>Expand and maintain financial sponsorships and grants that result in value to watershed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review sponsorship levels and opportunities with Board and Staff</li> <li>• Obtain sponsorships from all MS4 municipalities</li> <li>• Hold 20<sup>th</sup> Year of IRWP Event</li> <li>• Assess opportunities for “Membership” incentives for donors and sponsors (e.g. lower rates for Pavilion Rentals)</li> <li>• Actively pursue mission-aligned grant opportunities in collaboration with Board Members</li> </ul>	<p>Annually December 2025 May 2025 July 2024  Ongoing</p>	<p>Executive Director, Executive Committee, Staff</p>