Habitat for Life: Trinity Christian College’s Ecological Vision Statement
Campus Ecological Stewardship Advisory Group
2008

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Vision

A Reformed worldview mandates that humans be good stewards of God’s creation. Trinity Christian College seeks to teach this worldview and to practice good stewardship, working to care for and redeem the earth. Accordingly, our vision for the campus is to create a sustainable environment and to adopt practices that reflect our desire to be good stewards of creation. Stewardship of creation is a broad task, not limited to the care of plants and animals, but extending to how we design and build buildings, use energy, manage waste, and other aspects of our impact on God’s world. Ultimately, stewardship is not just management, but is a spiritual practice in our striving for shalom.

Guiding Principles

Three key principles guide our stewardship. The first principle is environmental 
restoration. Trinity seeks to restore and maintain native Illinois habitats that promote biodiversity and campus beauty. Species that are native\(^1,2\) to Illinois are preferred over non-native species because non-natives create many ecological problems and economic expenses. Further, restoring the original biodiversity of habitats reflects the theological theme of restoration.

Our second guiding principle is sustainability. Sustainability means that we meet our current needs without damaging the earth’s ability to meet future needs. This requires a long-term perspective and investing in more efficient ways of operating. Because sustainability emphasizes efficiency, it also reflects good financial stewardship.

Our third principle is education. Education about Christian care for the creation is the capstone of our ecological stewardship. The habitats on campus and our practices are integral to the educational mission of the College, as we teach and model good stewardship. Our stewardship practices teach us to care for God’s earth and create a culture of stewardship in our community.

Implementing the Vision: Standard Practices

Habitat Restoration

Habitat restoration requires evaluation of the physical environment to determine current conditions and evaluate appropriate options. Trinity may have appropriate conditions for several of the habitats described in the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory\(^3\) or

\(^3\) [http://www.plantbiology.siu.edu/Invasives/Community%20types.pdf](http://www.plantbiology.siu.edu/Invasives/Community%20types.pdf)
in the Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan\(^4\). For example, the wooded area at the north end of campus, east of the President’s house, may be a good candidate for restoration to dry-mesic savanna. The forest along Navajo creek can be managed to restore a more healthy mix of mesic-upland forest trees. Open areas on campus might be candidates for establishment of restored prairie. Retention pond and drainage areas might be developed as more natural wetland habitats. Evaluation and long range planning will require careful study and engaging expert consultants. Such consultation is available from non-profit organizations such as the World Wildlife Federation Campus Ecology Program\(^5\), or the Audubon International’s Cooperative Sanctuary Program\(^6\). Once habitat restoration has been planned, the entire Trinity community can have opportunities to get involved in the work.

**Specific Practices to Consider**

1. Designate habitat areas to be vegetated by species native to those habitats and native\(^7\) to Cook County, IL.
2. Integrate developed campus areas and restored habitats so they flow together.

_Sustaining the Campus Forest_

Sustainable forestry should be an ongoing practice. Trees take a long time to mature, so the earlier they are established, the faster habitat restoration occurs. Our many mature trees will not last forever, so establishing an understory of replacement trees is an appropriate part of our long-range management plan and an immediate need. If we plant wisely, Trinity will always have a canopy of mature native trees. Part of this planning & planting is also restorative; Trinity has many exotic trees that provide various values such as beauty and shade, but in the long term they should be gradually replaced with native species.

**Specific Practices to Consider**

3. Carefully plan the planting of new trees; planting should always be done sooner rather than later, since trees take a long time to grow.
4. Gradually replace non-native trees with natives, without compromising the current values of non-natives as shade, visual breaks, nesting habitat for birds, and carbon sequestration.
5. Practice good urban forestry to protect tree health, establish tree succession, and develop desired habitats. Examples include determination of tree age by coring and dendrochronology to project lifespans and plan for replacement, and ongoing assessment of tree health to prevent spread of disease.
6. Use native species in landscape plantings to promote soil and water conservation.

\(^5\)http://www.nwf.org/campusEcology/index.cfm
\(^6\)http://www.audubonintl.org/programs/acss/
\(^7\)See notes 1 and 2, and also http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/~kenr/treetable.html
7. Minimize the use of pesticides, fungicides, synthetic fertilizers, and other potential pollutants. Organic fertilizers and integrated pest management practices are preferred, when practical.

**Buildings**

Trinity should maintain existing buildings and design and build new buildings in ways that minimize environmental impacts.

**Specific Practices to Consider**

8. Site new buildings in ways to minimize loss of vegetation, particularly mature trees and forested habitats.
9. Address drainage and erosion issues in ways that conserve water, minimize pollution, and protect habitats.
10. Plan and build new construction to be as environmentally friendly as we can afford. Standards like those for LEED\(^8\) certification can be goals for new construction.
11. Audit energy use in existing buildings, and take steps to improve their efficiency. Where feasible, energy conserving technologies could be installed to bring existing building up to LEED standards.\(^9\)

**Stewardship of Materials and Energy**

The standard stewardship of materials should include cradle-to-grave attention to sources, uses, and disposal of all sorts of materials, from paper to food to building materials. Trinity should also explore ways to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels by increasing efficiency and using renewable energy sources such as solar or wind-generated electricity.

One way that Trinity can assess its ecological sustainability and work toward a goal of increasing sustainability would be to quantify carbon emissions and carbon sequestration. Trinity blessed with many trees and much green space and it is possible to quantify how much carbon they have stored and their rates of ongoing carbon absorption. Once this is done, TCC can set goals for habitat development that will increase carbon capture, and goals for energy conservation that will decrease emissions. Ultimately, TCC should become carbon-neutral.

**Specific Practices to Consider**

12. Examine sources of building materials and consumable resources, considering alternatives that minimize our impact.
13. Minimize waste generation. For example, we could significantly reduce our paper use from its current level of 430,000 sheets per month.
14. Make recycling pervasive and effective, and practiced by all.
15. Manage food waste responsibly. Edible leftover food could be donated to agencies that distribute it, and waste could be composted & used on campus.
16. Measure and increase its campus carbon sequestration to move Trinity closer to being carbon neutral.

\(^8\) [http://www.usgbc.org/Default.aspx]

Education

The environmental stewardship of our campus has, among its goals, the education of the campus community. From visiting school children to science majors, from parents to donors, everyone will have opportunities to learn about biodiversity, Illinois species, prairie or wetland ecology, global carbon cycle and climate change, sustainable development, and Christian stewardship.

Specific Practices to Consider

17. Teach stewardship first to Trinity itself. All members of our community—faculty, staff, students and others—should learn to practice stewardship.

18. Teach the broader community about Christian stewardship of the environment. For example, elementary school students might do fall leaf collections on the Trinity Trail, or Chicago Christian High students might get involved in prairie and wetland restoration projects.

19. Use the campus to teach stewardship. Examples include the planned development of a self-guided tree diversity tour, and increased use of campus environments for laboratory activities in Trinity science classes. Trinity could extend and enhance the Trinity Trail so more pedestrian traffic is in close contact with the wonders of creation.

Trinity’s campus should be a testament to good stewardship, both for those of us who are members of the Trinity community and for those who occasionally join us on campus. Our community’s interest in taking care of the place God has given us should be evident in the construction of new buildings, in our co-curricular activities, and in our preservation of habitats. Our actions should prepare the way for our words: We care for God’s creation and work for its redemption.

Many Christian colleges have developed programs to improve environmental stewardship on their campuses, and Trinity is joining that movement. The ideas presented above are intended to serve as guidance for Trinity as we seek to be better stewards of God’s earth. These ideas can serve as guidelines for evaluating landscape proposals, construction projects, and changes in daily operations. Full implementation of a vision for stewardship may eventually require the establishment of an office to administer and manage these issues, as other colleges have done.
Respectfully submitted,
CESAG

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