

2015

# Greenways: A Green Infrastructure Plan for Boone and Winnebago Counties



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*Cover Photo- Nygren Wetlands, Courtesy of Jenny Krause*



*This document is directed toward local, regional, state and federal open space, conservation and environmental agencies, municipalities, and the public. It is intended to be used by local officials whose decisions facilitate implementation of the plan. Additionally, it is directed toward the private sector and organizations whose support is needed to provide a better environment and higher quality of life in the Rockford Metropolitan Planning Area.*

## The Purpose of the Greenways Plan

To promote a regional greenway network that protects natural and cultural resources; provides alternative forms of transportation and recreational benefits; enhances environmental and scenic qualities; and stimulates economic development

The Greenways Plan does not assume to impose any restrictions on Private Property

## The Objectives of the Greenways Plan

To provide a comprehensive regional planning tool for government agencies and others involved in transportation land use planning, natural areas preservation, and recreation

To coordinate transportation planning with the greenways planning process

To reduce conflicts with development activities and offset the negative and costly impacts of urban sprawl

To be used as a tool by local organizations and municipalities to leverage additional planning and recreational funds to be allocated to our region

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This greenways planning effort was led by staff members at the Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP) under the direction and supervision of the Greenways Planning Committee, and the RMAP Technical Committee and Policy Committee. The resulting recommendations are in response to these groups and the regions vision as a whole. The community strongly urges leaders to preserve and promote our natural assets and to further commitments and investments in the regions green infrastructure network. This greenways plan and map outline the current conditions and steps for further implementation.

Allowing residents access to an interconnected system of greenways, trails, on and off-street bike routes, parks and preserves, rivers, streams and lakes, will make the region more attractive to visitors and help to attract new residents to the area. These intrinsically valuable resources provide opportunities for bird watchers, cyclists, kayakers, equestrians, cross-country skiers, snowshoeing, people looking to get a bit more exercise, and all other outdoor enthusiasts. Some greenway lands are public, others private, and still others are a combination. The regions greenways connect our forests, parks, open spaces, water resources, and even our communities. They also offer lifelong learning opportunities for residents by enhancing recreational, cultural and historical assets. Greenways and shared-use paths help to enhance local property values and increase the attractiveness of the communities they are located in through the added safety benefits they offer.

Equally important are the increased chances for local businesses to capitalize on the economic and tourism development potential that greenways and share-use paths can foster. Increases in green infrastructure investment will work to conserve, manage, protect, and even work toward restoring our natural landscapes and sensitive ecosystems through increased public awareness and public-private partnership development.

Natural corridor protection and riverbank stabilization will assist in managing stormwater capture and will naturally filter run-off water before it returns to the region's waterways and aquifers, thereby improving water quality, reducing erosion, and diminishing the severity and frequency of flood events. After the initial investments are made the ecological benefits green infrastructure provide to our region are free of charge, long lasting and easy to maintain.

This greenways plan is a tool for our land conservancy and protection groups to acquire property through purchase, donation, and often through the successful receipt of grant dollars. This plan is aimed at conservation and recreation organizations, landowners, public agencies, private sector companies and the dedicated community members who support the Boone and Winnebago County Greenways Map and Planning Document.

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# INTRODUCTION

## A REGION OF FOUR RIVERS

The Greater Rockford Region encompasses the two county area of Boone and Winnebago counties. As this area is extremely rich in natural habitats and species diversity, the need for natural resource conservation exists. The Rockford Region is at the confluence of four major river systems in northern Illinois and includes several important cold water streams. Winnebago and Boone County have a long history of joint planning for natural resource protection, and are combined into the Rockford Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP) covers the urbanized areas of Boone and Winnebago counties and a portion of Ogle County. RMAP serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) responsible for regionally coordinated transportation planning. The metropolitan area includes three Natural Divisions of Illinois and three Conservation Opportunity Areas (COA). Natural Divisions are an important tool for recognizing biological variation across Illinois, and organizing regional needs, objectives, and strategies of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan. COA's are priority areas for conserving Illinois' Species in Greatest Need of Conservation (SGNC).

The Rockford Region lies at the boundary of all three of these Natural Divisions, the Northeastern Morainal Division, the Rock River Hill Country Division, and the Grand Prairie Division. The Rockford Metropolitan Area is included in the Sugar-Pecatonica Rivers COA, the Kishwaukee River COA, and the Rock River COA. The four rivers, which form the framework for the natural resource plans for the area, are the Sugar, Pecatonica, Kishwaukee (North, South and Main Branches), and the largest and most central, the Rock River. These are all highly valued natural and recreational resources, and the Sugar and Kishwaukee Rivers are biologically significant streams with rich fish and mussel populations. Kinnikinnick, Beaver, Coon, Raccoon, Mosquito, Piscasaw, and Kilbuck creeks are tributaries to the four rivers, and provide high quality habitat for many species of wildlife in greatest need of conservation, including healthy populations of mussels and cold-water species like Mottled Sculpin. Beaver Creek, a tributary of the Kishwaukee River, is prized as a Biologically Significant Class "A" Stream, denoting the highest order of biodiversity.

RMAP has updated the Boone and Winnebago Greenways Map, now in its fourth iteration, starting with the first edition in 1997, and the last update in 2011. A notable difference is that the last 2 editions did not have an accompanying written document with the greenways map. The Greenways Planning Committee decided that it was important to produce a written document to go along with the 2015 Greenways Map Update as it was done for the 1997 Greenways update process. This document incorporates the environmental preservation and conservation strategies outlined in the 2011 Boone and Winnebago County Greenways Plan as well as additional recommendations.

Many decades of efforts to acquire land for parks, forest preserves and conservation areas in the region has resulted in land being preserved along the four rivers for public recreation, active transportation and wildlife protection. The Rockford (RPD) and Belvidere Park Districts (BPD) own several parks along the Rock and Kishwaukee Rivers, including important habitat for wildlife. These two organizations along with the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County (FPWC), Byron Forest Preserve District (BFPD), Natural

Land Institute (NLI), Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and the Boone County Conservation District (BCCD) together own thousands of acres of important wildlife habitat in the region.

The Rock River is a major corridor for migratory waterfowl and neo-tropical birds, while the east-west flowing Pecatonica and Kishwaukee Rivers provide vital stop-over habitat for migrating birds. The extensive forests and wetlands in the Pecatonica River valley have been recognized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy and the IDNR as important habitat for migratory birds. Groundwater is the sole source of drinking water for the region, and provides base flow to the rivers, creeks and wetlands. A Regional Groundwater Protection Committee has been established by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) to carry out joint planning efforts in Winnebago and Boone counties to protect groundwater. RMAP supports the efforts of this organization and will continue working together in the future.

Within the Region there are nine designated Illinois Nature Preserves, permanently protecting exceptional plant and animal communities and other unique features. Rock Cut State Park, the numerous preserves of the Boone County Conservation District and the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County, and the multitude of parks managed by the Rockford Park District and Belvidere Park District systems, in addition to many more community parks, offer residents and visitors robust recreational opportunities.

As our region is made up of many unique natural resources and ecosystems, it is difficult to put a dollar value on them. It is important to view the intrinsic value they provide and to protect them for future generations to enjoy.

## **A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE**

The Greenways Plan is an interconnected region-wide network of linear open spaces that provide many benefits to northern Illinois: environmental, recreational, economic, aesthetic, and transportation via shared-use paths. Thus, the regional greenways network is a critical component of our “green” infrastructure.

To protect our region’s rich natural heritage, a group of concerned citizens and agency staff coordinated to create Greenways: A Green Infrastructure Plan for Boone and Winnebago Counties (“Greenways Plan”). The Greenways Planning Committee (list on pg. 11) was comprised of a representative from each of the major environmental planning and advocacy groups in our region, as well as citizens with environmental and greenways planning backgrounds.

Now in its fourth iteration, the Greenways Plan has laid the foundation for natural areas protection, balanced growth, and expanded transportation choices. This plan has led to the successful receipt of many grants within the region; from acquiring and restoring prime natural habitat, to connecting and adding shared-use path mileage. This plan has close linkages to broader community planning initiatives. It promotes smart growth by protecting the region’s rich natural resources while encouraging the investment and development around existing communities and infrastructure through adaptive reuse of buildings and in-fill development.



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## DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Understanding a region's demographic characteristics, population, and housing trends is important to greenways planning. Using projected trends allows planners and policy makers to know where the population and infrastructure currently is, and where it is most likely to occur in the future. This leads to better resource protection and preservation while simultaneously planning new development in a more orderly and efficient manner.

### POPULATION TRENDS

The table below shows the population growth for the two county region from 1970 to 2010 as reported by the Decennial Census.

Population	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	1970-2010 Change
<b>Boone County</b>	25,440	28,630	30,806	41,786	54,165	-
Change		13%	8%	36%	30%	113%
<b>Winnebago County</b>	246,623	250,884	252,913	278,418	295,266	-
Change		2%	1%	10%	6%	20%
<b>Regional Total</b>	272,063	279,514	283,719	320,204	349,431	-
Change		3%	2%	13%	9%	28%

Between 1970 and 2010 the region's population has grown by 28%. Boone County has experienced the most rapid population growth, increasing 113% over this 40 year time period, with much of the growth having occurred after 1990. As a result, Boone County was ranked as the 5<sup>th</sup> fastest growing county in Illinois during this timeframe.<sup>1</sup> However, in more recent years there has been a decline. According to the US Census Bureau's Population and Housing Unit Estimates, from 2010 to 2014 population declined by 0.6%. In contrast Winnebago County's population growth, while steady, increased by only 20% during the 1970 to 2010 timeframe. Respectively, Winnebago County saw a 2.3% decline in population from 2010 to 2014 according to the Population and Housing Unit Estimates.<sup>2</sup>

According to 2010 Census data, just short of 75% of the region's population lives within an incorporated municipality. Winnebago County is home to 85% of the region's population. The City of Rockford, with 152,871 residents (almost 44% of the total) is the largest community within the region. The City of Belvidere has 25,585 residents, closely trailed by both the City of Loves Park and Village of Machesney Park in size.

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<sup>1</sup> Growth Dimensions

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/united-states/quick-facts/illinois/population-growth#chart>

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of the most current population totals from the 2010 Decennial Census for each community in the region.

<b>2010 Population</b>		
<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
<b>Rockford</b>	152,871	43.7%
<b>Unincorporated Winnebago County</b>	73,517	21.0%
<b>Belvidere</b>	25,585	7.3%
<b>Loves Park</b>	23,996	6.9%
<b>Machesney Park</b>	23,499	6.7%
<b>Unincorporated Boone County</b>	22,426	6.4%
<b>Roscoe</b>	10,785	3.1%
<b>Poplar Grove</b>	5,023	1.4%
<b>Cherry Valley</b>	3,162	0.9%
<b>Winnebago</b>	3,101	0.9%
<b>Pecatonica</b>	2,195	0.6%
<b>Durand</b>	1,443	0.4%
<b>Timberlane</b>	934	0.3%
<b>New Milford</b>	697	0.2%
<b>Caledonia</b>	197	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>349,431</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Winnebago County</b>	295,266	84.5%
<b>Boone County</b>	54,165	15.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>349,431</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Today there is an estimated 149,123 residents living in the City of Rockford and 25,282 residents in the City of Belvidere.<sup>3</sup>

## HOUSEHOLDS

Trends in the number of households (dwelling units) provide an important indicator for various planning elements in the region. An increase in the number of households in many cases influences the conversion of greenfields and rural land into residential developments. An increase in the number of households also influences the need for additional public services and infrastructure.

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of household trends between 1970 and 2010 for the region according to the Decennial Census.

<b>Households</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>1970-2010 Change</b>
<b>Boone County</b>	7,850	9,730	10,990	14,700	18,510	-
Change		24%	13%	34%	26%	136%
<b>Winnebago County</b>	77,200	89,580	97,070	108,320	115,460	-
Change		16%	8%	12%	7%	50%
<b>Regional Total</b>	85,050	99,310	108,060	123,020	133,970	-
Change		17%	9%	14%	9%	58%

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 Population Estimates. <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00>

Overall, the number of household units in the region increased by 58% during this time. The number of households in the region grew at a faster rate than the population growth for the same time period. This is in line with trends nationally which also show a decrease in the number of persons per household. Boone County experienced the highest rate of household growth, more than doubling (136%) over this 40 year time period, with the greatest gain occurring after 1990. Winnebago County had a more moderate increase of 50%.

According to the 2010 American Fact Finder General Population and Housing Characteristics data, Winnebago County had 115,501 households and is growing very slowly at this time. While according to this same dataset Boone County again grew faster with a total of 19,970 households in 2010.

## AGE DISTRIBUTION

The age distribution of our population is an important factor in planning for recreational greenways and open spaces. Activity needs and interests change as people advance through their different life stages. Children enjoy playgrounds and ball fields; older adults may be more interested in passive recreational activities and low-impact exercise. Age distribution also impacts mobility and accessibility related issues for greenways users. By researching and studying future growth patterns our region can invest in the areas and locations that seem most logical thus conserving time, energy and money.

The table below shows the age distribution for the region.

Age Distribution						
Boone County	2000		2010		Change 2000-2010	
Age	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	%
Under 5	3,158	7.6%	3,716	6.9%	558	17.7%
5-17	9,288	22.2%	11,968	22.1%	2,680	28.9%
18-24	3,219	7.7%	4,289	7.9%	1,070	33.2%
25-44	12,480	29.9%	13,911	25.7%	1,431	11.5%
45-64	9,178	22.0%	13,917	25.7%	4,739	51.6%
65 and Older	4,463	10.7%	6,364	11.7%	1,901	42.6%
All Ages	41,786	100.0%	54,165	100.0%	12,379	-
Median Age	34.5		36.8			
Winnebago County	2000		2010		Change 2000-2010	
Age	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	%
Under 5	19,752	7.1%	19,656	6.7%	(96)	-0.5%
5-17	53,774	19.3%	53,924	18.3%	150	0.3%
18-24	23,284	8.4%	25,180	8.5%	1,896	8.1%
25-44	83,082	29.8%	75,355	25.5%	(7,727)	-9.3%
45-64	63,076	22.7%	80,436	27.2%	17,360	27.5%
65 and Older	35,450	12.7%	40,715	13.8%	5,265	14.9%
All Ages	278,418	100.0%	295,266	100.0%	16,848	-
Median Age	35.9		38.3			

Regional Total	2000		2010		Change 2000-2010	
Age	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	%
Under 5	22,910	7.2%	23,372	6.7%	462	2.0%
5-17	63,062	19.7%	65,892	18.9%	2,830	4.5%
18-24	26,503	8.3%	29,469	8.4%	2,966	11.2%
25-44	95,562	29.8%	89,266	25.5%	(6,296)	-6.6%
45-64	72,254	22.6%	94,353	27.0%	22,099	30.6%
65 and Older	39,913	12.5%	47,079	13.5%	7,166	18.0%
All Ages	320,204	100.0%	349,431	100.0%	29,227	-

Between 2000 and 2010 the number of adults aged 45 to 64 increased the most across the region (30.6%), and represents the largest percentage of the population. The number of adults aged 25 to 44 decreased (-6.6%), while the number of children and adolescents under the age of 18 only experienced marginal growth. If these trends continue the region can expect to experience a more rapid increase in older adults as compared to the remainder of the population. Again, we tend to see these trends nationally also.

## EMPLOYMENT

Employment tends to influence population and housing growth within a region as well. A steady increase in employment is expected to contribute to population growth; a decrease in employment often slows population growth and housing developments. The number of jobs located within the region between 1970 and 2010 are displayed in the table below.

Year	Boone County			Winnebago County			Regional Total		
	Number of Jobs	Change		Number of Jobs	Change		Number of Jobs	Change	
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
1970	14,430	-	-	113,190	-	-	127,620	-	-
1980	14,430	0	0	130,410	17,220	15%	144,840	17,220	13%
1990	16,780	2,350	16%	150,570	20,160	15%	167,350	22,510	16%
2000	18,860	2,080	12%	175,310	24,740	16%	194,170	26,820	16%
2010	19,390	530	3%	159,090	(16,220)	-9%	178,480	(15,690)	-8%

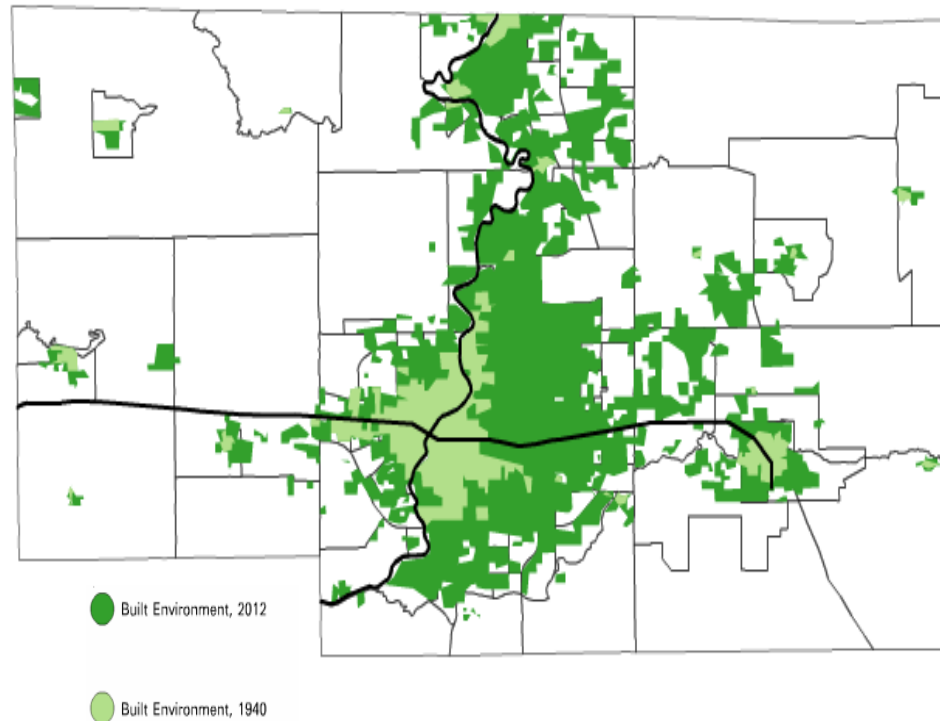
The region experienced a moderate growth in the number of jobs up until 2000. Between 2000 and 2010 Winnebago County lost 16,220 jobs (-9%), which reflects an 8% decline across the region as a whole.

## HISTORIC URBAN GROWTH

It is estimated the footprint of the built environment has nearly quintupled since 1940, while the population has only a little over doubled since then. While only 3% of the two counties were covered by the built environment in 1940 nearly 20% of the land is covered within the metropolitan area now. This rapid, low-density expansion has led to a loss of remnant prairies, wetlands, hardwood forests, and natural buffers around of regions lakes and streams. This has resulted in an increase of erosion, more river



sedimentation, and an increase in the city heat island affect due to there being more pavement, asphalt, and concrete and less permeable surfaces. These striking statistics are direct evidence a growing strain is occurring on the region's well-being.



## EXISTING LAND USES

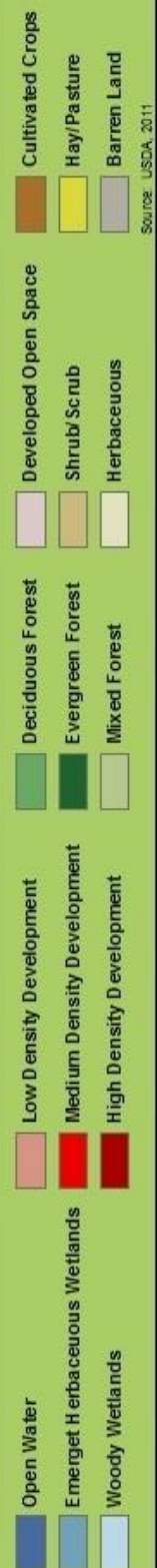
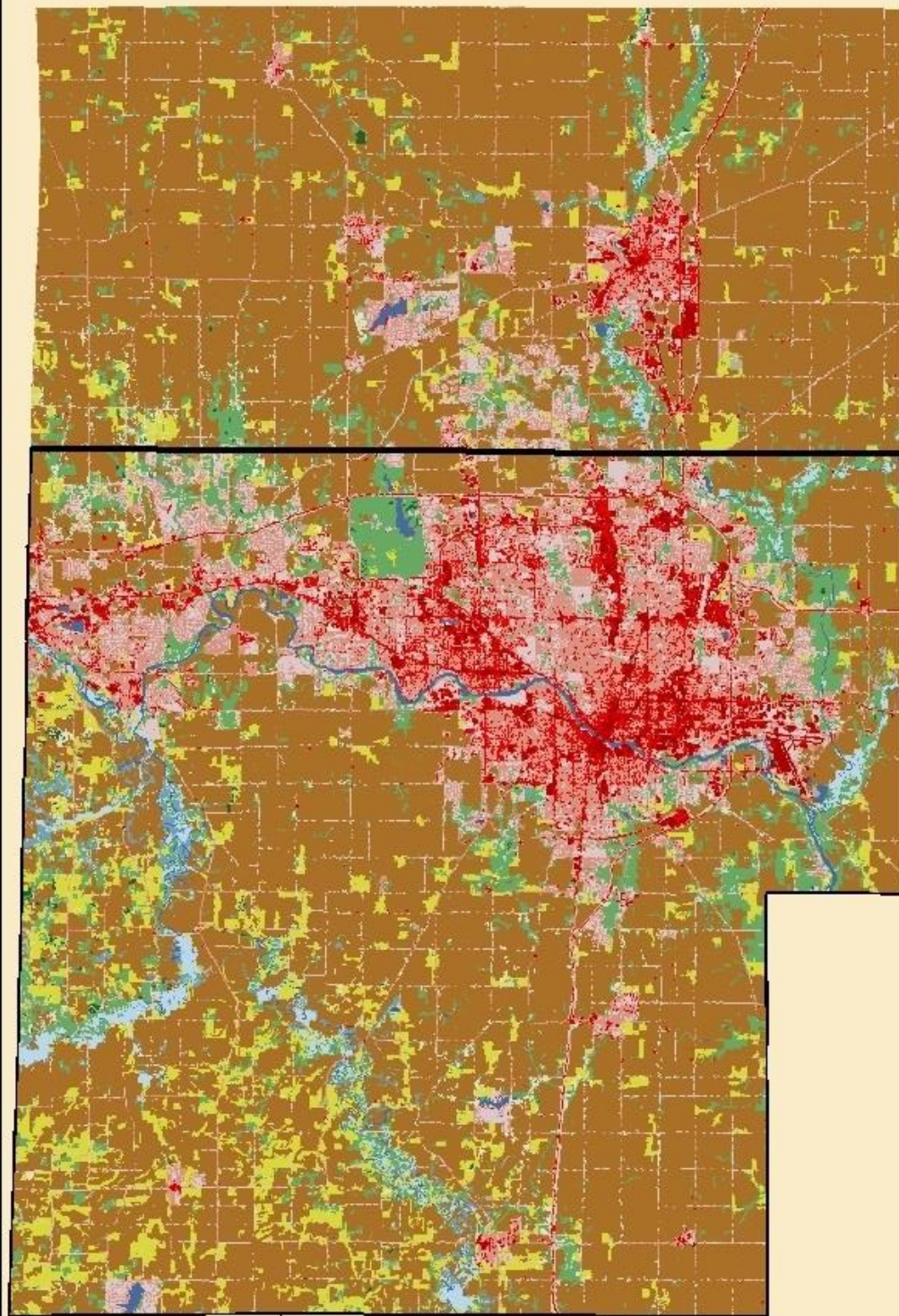
The single largest land use in Winnebago County is agriculture. 63% of the entire County is in agricultural use. Land uses surrounding the incorporated municipalities, especially those on the eastern half of the County, are predominantly single-family residential, with limited commercial and industrial development. It is assumed that, over time, many of these areas will be annexed into the various municipalities, which would extend the municipal boundaries further into the central portion of Winnebago County and increase the percentage of incorporated land. This could help to encourage further sprawl and therefore preventative measures should be taken where possible. Currently, single-family residential development constitutes approximately 13% of all unincorporated land area. With population growth, it is expected that residential development and growth will continue in the unincorporated areas of the County. Commercial and industrial uses make up 0.4% and 1.0%, respectively, of all unincorporated land area within Winnebago County.<sup>4</sup>

Boone and Winnebago County as a whole are comprised of 61% Agricultural lands, 21% residential, 2.6% commercial, and 1.8% industrial. 6% of the total land area is tax exempt, most of this being protected open space.

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<sup>4</sup> 2030 Land Resource Management Plan for Winnebago County, Illinois, February 2010.

# Land Cover for Boone and Winnebago County



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# GREENWAYS AND OPEN SPACE

## WHAT IS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

The term Green Infrastructure (GI) has gained more popularity in recent years, however it is a term which can often have several different meanings. Within the context of this document GI refers to the interconnected natural resource networks and areas that exist in our region. These include open and natural spaces, water resources, forest preserves, parks, areas of native plant vegetation and other critical environmental features. Together they create a resilient landscape supporting vital ecological processes that provide health, recreation, environmental, economic and quality of life benefits to residents of the region. Boone and Winnebago County also attract a good deal of tourists from outside the two county region who enjoy hiking, biking, kayaking, and fishing, thus supporting the local economy.

The term GI is also applied to site-level engineered stormwater management practices that use or mimic natural processes to reduce and treat runoff rather than conventional storm sewer conveyance. Common practices include bioswales, rain gardens, rain barrels, and green roofs. As mentioned earlier, our region is centered on the Rock River and many smaller tributaries. Small onsite water retention efforts in large numbers can make a significant impact to reduce urban and rural runoff into our waterways. Some regions similar to ours have adopted a river or stream corridor overlay zone along their streams and rivers to create a protective natural buffer between any human development and the water's edge.

While this document will not focus too closely on this interpretation of GI, these engineered systems do play a critical role in enhancing and expanding the regional GI system, of which greenways are a part of.

## THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK

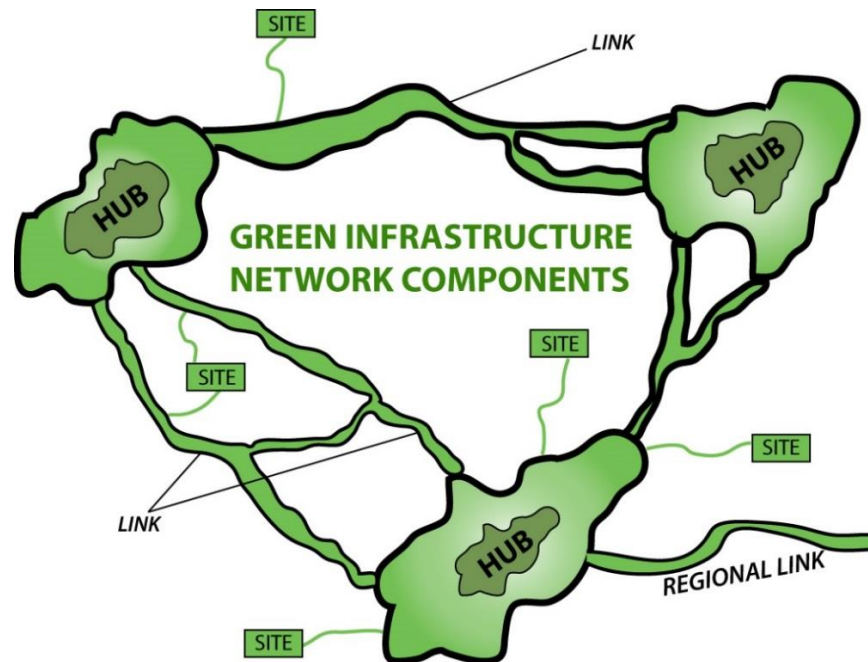
The GI network is comprised of a series of elements known as hubs, links and sites<sup>5</sup>. The interconnections that are part of this network are essential for many ecological processes to occur.

- **Hubs** make up the heart of the GI network. Hubs are large concentrations of natural habitat and open space. Most often they are large publicly or privately protected parks and preserves, however they may come in all shapes, sizes and forms. Hubs may serve as core wildlife habitat or as recreation destinations. *Examples include Rock Cut State Park and Seth Atwood Park.*
- **Links** form the veins of the GI network. They allow for the movement of organisms between the hubs. They act as the natural connection between larger habitats providing safe travel routes. Links may have many different names, but are referred to in this document as GREENWAYS. *Examples include streams corridors and the Pecatonica Prairie Path.*
- **Sites** are small scale locations of high conservation importance, often isolated natural habitats. They may be a patch of remnant prairie along an abandoned railway or a small isolated wetland. *Examples include Searls Prairie within Searls Park and Colored Sands Forest Preserve.*

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<sup>5</sup> Benedict and McMahon (2006) Green Infrastructure: Linking Landscapes and Communities. Other similar variations may refer to the composition of this network as core, hubs and corridors.





## HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS TOGETHER

Sustainable ecosystems are home to a diverse range of plants and animals. Each plant or animal species plays a role in the stability of that system. Given the highly interdependent nature of ecosystem ecology the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) uses a house of cards analogy- the removal or elimination of any one species has the potential to negatively impact many other species. Unfortunately, due to problems such as over hunting, loss of critical habitat and the introduction of non-native species, many of the plants and animals once found readily in the region are now at risk of vanishing from our landscape. Yet, other species such as deer can at times reach or exceed an areas carry capacity due to activities such as extensive farming by adding an easily accessible, but unnatural food source to an animal's diet.

## GREENWAYS IN DEPTH

Most simply put, a greenway can broadly be defined as a natural corridor of land which connects existing areas of open space. Greenways are like arteries connecting many vital organs together into one cohesive unit. They are part of a network of green infrastructure, linking together parks, preserves, wetlands, unique habitats and other environmentally sensitive areas, spanning across urban and rural lands. They provide an opportunity for the natural circulation of plants and animals from one habitat to another and even through or across man made features that act as unnatural barriers. Greenways are not only planned and managed for their natural resource value but also for the associated benefits and services they provide to people and communities. Such as the promotion of forms of transportation other than a car (active transportation), and healthier communities.

Greenways vary widely in form and function. Rural greenways may be comprised of wide swathes of marsh and wetlands whereas urban corridors tend to be thin ribbons of green weaving their way through



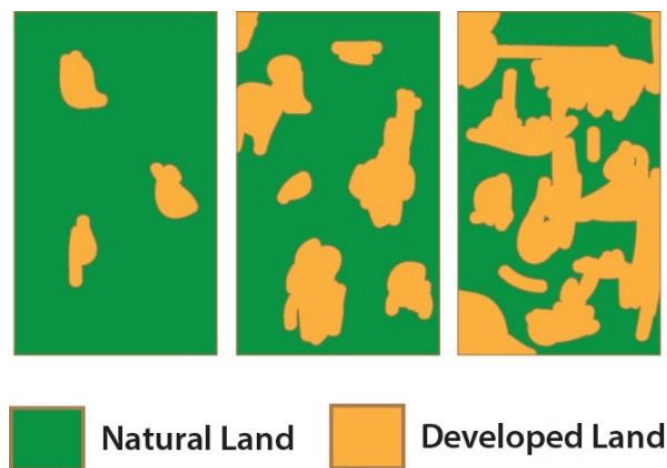
areas of dense development or abandoned industrial corridors. Some follow river or stream banks while others follow abandoned rail lines, old power corridors, or may consist of something as small as a hedge row in an agricultural field. Greenways are commonly a mixture of both public and private property; sometimes open to the public and sometimes restricted to the public. The common thread shared by all is the linear connection they provide to the rest of the network, creating a web of interconnected and dependent systems<sup>6</sup>.

It is easy to argue that greenways contain the best remaining woodlands and wetlands, wildlife habitats, undeveloped shorelands and floodlands, groundwater recharge and discharge areas, and steeply sloped lands in our region. For these reasons alone should it not be intrinsically important that we protect the rich biodiversity present here in Boone and Winnebago County?

## CONSEQUENCES OF DEVELOPMENT

“An underlying principal of conservation is that utilizing natural resources does not, in itself, pose a threat to the environment. It is the manner in which we do it that dictates whether our activities are detrimental or benign.”<sup>7</sup>

Over the years the regions urbanized area has expanded, grown and created new patterns of development mostly encouraging sprawl and promoting radial growth. Dramatic shifts in the ratio between natural and developed land has led to: loss of natural space; fragmentation of natural spaces; degradation of water resources; and decreased ability for nature to respond to change. When humans develop land for their needs there is a reduction in habitat diversity due to declines in species health and resiliency. Therefore development has a direct impact on land that is left untouched. As we convert land, we fragment it into smaller and more isolated patches of natural space. Unregulated and uncontrolled growth might be the largest threat to greenways. Therefore, infill development and adaptive reuse of existing urban structures and blighted properties would work towards protecting greenways.



<sup>6</sup> Gary Korb. *Environmental Corridors: Lifelines of the Natural Resource Base*. From Plan on It! Regional Planning Fact Sheet Series. University of Wisconsin-Extension and SEWRPC.

<sup>7</sup> Labaree, Jonathan M. *How Greenways Work: A Handbook on Ecology*. Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, National Park Service, 1997

If we are to truly grasp our impact of the natural landscape we must first understand to see it not as a group of independent pieces but rather as an intricately connected set of parts that make up an entire system. Greenways can operate in five basic ways:

- As habitat for plant and animal communities
- As a conduit for plants, animals, water, sediment, and people to move from place to place;
- As a barrier preventing movement;
- As a source for animals or seeds which move to other parts of the landscape; and
- As a natural filter trapping harmful sediments and toxins but allowing nutrients to pass<sup>8</sup>.

## BENEFITS OF GREENWAYS

### Economic

Greenways help to supplement property values, attract tourists from outside the region, are natural amenities that all citizens can enjoy, help guide smart growth, and are almost always free to enjoy. There are more than 30 studies that show a positive impact on residential properties that are near a park or greenway. It has been calculated that on average a property's value will increase by 5% if it is within 500 feet of a park or greenway. Other personal property impacts could include higher resale values, less days a house is on the market and increased quality of life benefits. Greenways also attract cycling tourists and it has been noted that 87% of regular trail riders earn more than \$50,000 annually. It has also been calculated that a 50 year old urban tree saves \$75 per year in air conditioning, \$75 per year in storm water control, and \$50 per year in pollution control.

Economists call this behavior the "hedonic value" of something. This means that there is generally an increase in property tax from the increase in property value because of the property's proximity to a park, thus making it more valuable in a market economy. Hedonic value also comes into play with other such amenities as schools, libraries, police and fire stations, playgrounds and even transit stops in larger cities. The hedonic value of a property is primarily affected by two factors. The distance from the park or greenway and the quality of the property and its amenities. Parks that are very run down and are not maintained may actually frighten local residents and thus reduce nearby property values.

It is true that the economic benefits of greenways and open space can be difficult to quantify into dollar amounts. But it can be done by taking a look at the entire scope of the region, in this way a picture begins to develop more clearly.<sup>9</sup>

- A 2012 publication by the Outdoor Industry Foundation States that the outdoor industry injects \$646 billion in direct spending into the American economy and fuels traditional sectors like manufacturing, finance, tourism, and travel - 6.1 million American lives directly depend on outdoor recreation related professions.

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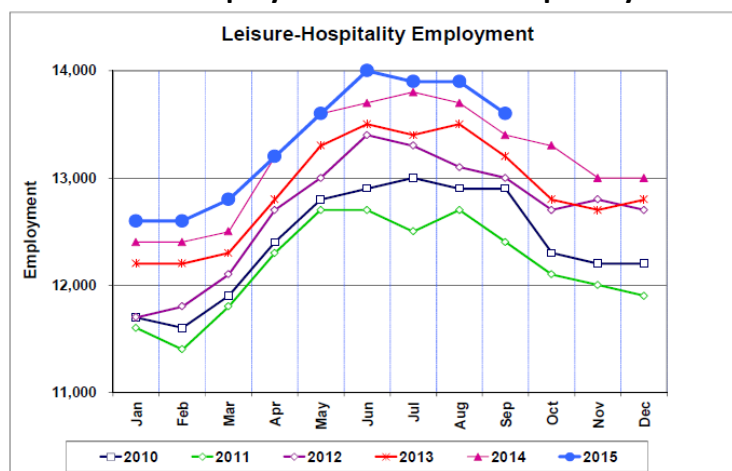
<sup>8</sup> Labaree, Jonathan M. *How Greenways Work: A Handbook on Ecology*. Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, National Park Service, 1997

<sup>9</sup> Hanik and Welle, *Measuring the Economic Value of a Park System*, The Trust for Public Land, 2009.

- A 2004 Study of the 45- mile long Washington and Old Dominion Trail showed recreational spending by non-locals supported approximately \$1.8 million of economic output, about 34 full-time job equivalents, and around \$642,000 of personal income in the northern Virginia economy.
- Trails in the Miami Valley of Ohio attract 1 million visitors who spend up to \$16 million on goods and services related to the use of trails every year. —*Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, 2009.*

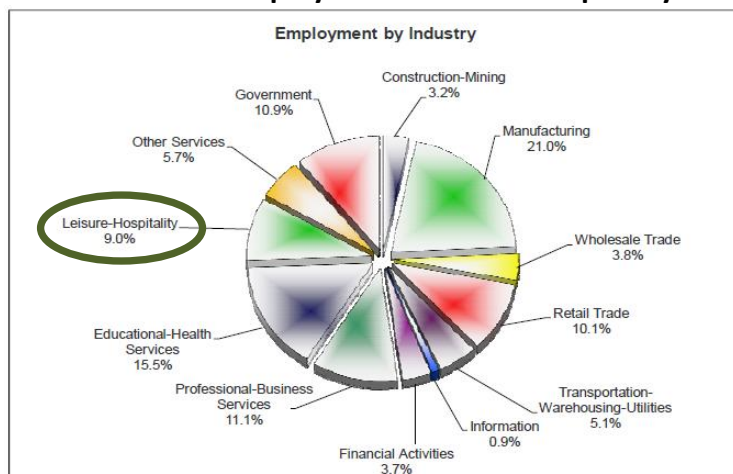
As you can see by the graph those expenditures associated with greenways related activities is seasonal, as outdoor activities are affected by adverse weather conditions. Still the Hospitality and Leisure industry makes up a substantial portion of Rockford's overall regional economy as is evident by the pie chart.

### **Rockford MSA Employment by Industry** **Total Employees in Leisure – Hospitality-**



Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) –September, 2015.

### **Rockford MSA Employment by Industry** **Percent of Employees in Leisure - Hospitality**



Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) –September, 2015.

## Health and Wellness

The region's parks and greenways offer the chance for physical activity and allow people to travel by other modes of transportation other than a car, often called active transportation. Active transportation methods require the person to exert force and expend energy in order to move. The most common ways are by bicycle, walking, and rollerblades. There are several studies that have documented the economic burden faced by those that lack physical activities in their life as part of a normal routine. Lack of exercise has been shown to contribute to obesity, heart disease and diabetes.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, Greenways filter and clean stormwater and other runoff from urban areas before it has a chance to reach the shorelines of streams, rivers and lakes. Eventually this sedimentation could affect groundwater and aquifer storage areas in the region, which would cause concern in the farming community. As sediment is captured in greenways the water quality of the region becomes healthier and more resilient to accidental chemical spills or even naturally harmful occurrences like algal blooms, which can be deadly to both animals and humans. Just as greenways help to clean our regions streams and make them more resilient trees and other vegetation in greenways and parks helps to clean the air, reduce ozone, and absorb particulates which trigger allergic reactions and asthma attacks. Also, the more natural vegetation that an urban area has the less drastic the city's heat island effect will be.<sup>11</sup> This is why it gets much cooler and seems less humid when you travel from a large urbanized area to a more rural setting on a hot summer day.

Accessing nature can be therapeutic and healing for some people. Being in the outdoors brings you back to the basics in life and allows you to feel connected with nature again. For some a strong connection to the natural world can be an addicting experience that shapes how they choose to live their life. Additionally, the National Academy of Sciences journal recently conducted a study which found that taking a 90 minute walk in a natural, as compared to an urban setting, showed a decrease in self-reported rumination, or repetitive negative thought, using a brain scan. The urban walkers showed no such improvements.<sup>12</sup>

### Examples of Health and Wellness Benefits:

- The tree canopy in Charlotte, North Carolina, covers 53% of the county's land area. This urban forest removes 17.5 million pounds of pollutants from the air each year; a benefit American Forests estimates is worth \$43.8 million each year.
- Portland, Oregon's regional trail network saves the city approximately \$115 million per year in healthcare costs. – *2011 Physical Activity and the Intertwine*

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<sup>10</sup> Booth, F. W., Roberts, C. K. and Laye, M. J. 2012. Lack of Exercise Is a Major Cause of Chronic Diseases. *Comprehensive Physiology*. 2:1143–1211.

<sup>11</sup> Hanik and Welle, *Measuring the Economic Value of a Park System*, The Trust for Public Land, 2009.

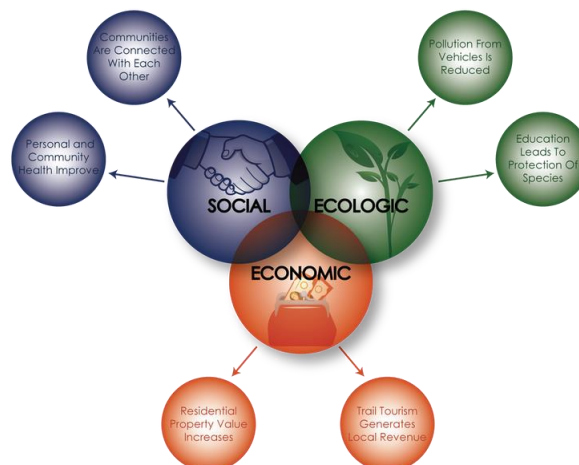
<sup>12</sup> Gregory N. Bratman, J. Paul Hamilton, Kevin S. Hahn, Gretchen C. Daily, and James J. Gross, *Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation*, PNAS 2015 112 (28) 8567-8572; published ahead of print June 29, 2015.

- An average of 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week (or 22 minutes/day), reduces risk for diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, dementia, clinical depression, and many cancers. – *U.S. Physical Activity Guidelines*

## Social Capital

Urban and rural parks, and greenways provide tangible value through providing facilities for activities such as team sports, bicycling, skateboarding, walking, picnicking, sightseeing, visiting flower gardens, nature centers, and even growing food in community gardens. All of these activities foster the interaction of people and creates a group of direct users of the greenways system. Most uses of greenways are free of charge at the time of use to residents of the community as well as visitors to the region. Parks and preserves are a regulatory taxing body and as such local home owners pay tax. There are numerous studies that have shown that the more instances of human relationships a neighborhood has, the stronger, safer, and more successful it is. This type of community cohesion can also be promoted by local clubs, schools, non-profit organization, community activists, and religious intuitions that add value to a neighborhood, and thus by extension the city, and the region. Jane Jacobs termed this human web of interactions “Social Capital”. Greenways offer opportunities for residents of all ages to interact, communicate, compete, learn, and to grow. While the economic value of social capital cannot be measured directly, the force behind it cannot be denied and is often the catalyst for many successful grass root endeavors.<sup>13</sup>

- Neighborhoods that provide trails, greenways, parks and sidewalks increase opportunities to be out and active and to interact in a shared environment. – *Indiana Trails Study*
- We benefit from access to recreation that improves physical health and fitness, quality of life and increased community pride and a sense of regional character (intrinsic value).– *Indiana Trails Study*
- Trails are the community’s front porch, everyone is welcome, and they provide a sense of place and allow people to re-connect with nature and often time each other.



Source: Comprehensive Greenway Plan – Wilmington County, NC 2013

<sup>13</sup> Gregory N. Bratman, J. Paul Hamilton, Kevin S. Hahn, Gretchen C. Daily, and James J. Gross, *Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation*, PNAS 2015 112 (28) 8567-8572; published ahead of print June 29, 2015.

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# THE FOUNDATION FOR THE GREENWAYS PLAN

## GREENWAYS: A GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN FOR BOONE AND WINNEBAGO COUNTIES

The development of this plan provides a framework to allow local and state organizations, along with private organizations and individuals, an opportunity to participate in the planning effort and have discussions on the relationships between environmental resources and growth management. The Greenways Plan has come a long ways since its original conception in 1997. Since then it has been updated in 2004, 2011, and now 2015, this planning process provided a basis for agencies involved with transportation, water quality, stormwater and floodwater management, parklands, forest preserves, and other environmental and conservation programs to address planning coordination. Through this effort interagency coordination between RMAP and the environmental community is at an all-time high.

### PURPOSE

To promote a regional greenway network that protects natural and cultural resources; provides alternative forms of transportation and recreational benefits; enhances environmental and scenic qualities; and stimulates economic development.

### OBJECTIVES

- Fill in the greenways infrastructure gaps while preventing network disruptions
- Prioritize Conservation goals
- Help shape pattern and location of future growth
- Increase connectivity of existing trail systems
- Grant Procurement
- Continued natural resource inventory updates on a regularly planned basis
- Create a vision of a regional greenway and shared-use path network
- Provide a strategic framework for the creation of a green infrastructure system that offsets negative and costly impacts of urban sprawl
- Coordinate land acquisition plans among conservation and land management agencies
- Assist funding agencies in allocating resources for natural areas and trails
- Initiate a continuing forum for discussion among governmental jurisdictions and the private sector
- Provide a basis for coordinating transportation, water quality, storm and floodwater and other services with greenways protection, thereby reducing conflicts with other development activities
- Increase the level of understanding regarding the importance and value of greenway and encourage stewardship of natural cultural resources
- Foster a stronger, more resilient, and healthier community through sense of place

## HISTORY OF GREENWAYS PLANNING IN THE REGION

The vision for regional greenways plans throughout Illinois was first conceived during the Governor's Workshop on Greenways and Trails held in Springfield in May of 1995, launched by then Governor Edgar and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The Workshop led to the creation of a program designed to "encourage and facilitate comprehensive, cooperative, and coordinated planning to protect high-priority greenways and, where appropriate, provide public access by developing trails... protecting greenways and developing trails requires cooperation and coordination amongst several jurisdictions."<sup>14</sup>

The IDNR created a grant program to provide financial assistance for the creation of regional greenways plans. Conditions for successful grant approval included:

- An active organized coalition of agencies and organizations involved in providing and using greenways and trails.
- Letters or resolutions of endorsement for the IDNR-assisted plan from a majority of the local units of governments in the planning area.

Funded plans were required to:

- Explicitly consider bike trail projects
- Identify priority greenway and trail projects
- Include an action plan identifying sequential activities and responsible parties; and
- Consider potential linkages to state sites and trails, greenway and trail initiatives of statewide significance, and priority greenways and trails in neighboring communities, counties, and metro areas.<sup>15</sup>

A group of local agency staff and community citizens were convened in 1996 to discuss developing a greenways plan for the Rockford region. Participants considered: "Does the region need a greenways plan? Who would facilitate the plan? How would this plan be created? Once it was created, how would it be shared with the region?" The answer was a resounding yes. The group successfully received funding from the IDNR to develop a greenways map and plan document and began a collaborative effort to identify existing trails and open space and identify future linkages to the system.

The purpose of the plan was to:

- Create a vision of a regional greenway network and provide a framework for coordinated greenway and trail preservation and development,
- Assist implementing and funding agencies in allocating resources in support of the plan,
- Initiate a continuing forum for discussion and resolution of greenway issues among governmental jurisdictions and the private sector,

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<sup>14</sup> Hart, Jim. "DNR Offers Financial Assistance for Greenways and Trails Planning." Illinois Parks and Recreation (March/April 1998)

<sup>15</sup> Gregory N. Bratman, J. Paul Hamilton, Kevin S. Hahn, Gretchen C. Daily, and James J. Gross, *Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation*, PNAS 2015 112 (28) 8567-8572; published ahead of print June 29, 2015.



- Provide a basis for coordinating transportation, water quality, storm and flood water, and other programs with existing and proposed greenways to advance greenway preservation and reduce conflicts with other development activities; and
- Increase the level of understanding regarding the importance and value of greenways and encourage stewardship of natural and cultural resources.<sup>16</sup>

After an extensive public engagement process the finalized plan was published in December of 1997.

A second edition of the map was produced in 2004 with help from a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, funding from the Rockford Area Transportation Study (now RMAP) for printing, and contributions from the participating agencies. The second edition incorporated updated additions to the network and new inclusions in mapping criteria.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> revision of the Greenways Plan was completed in 2011. Primary development of the Plan was brought under the responsibility of the Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP) with assistance from the region's resource agencies in order to better integrate transportation and environmental planning initiatives. RMAP received special funding from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to:

- update the map
- develop the Greenways Plan as an environmental mitigation tool
- promote healthy communities
- link transportation, the built environment and public health outcomes
- encourage and expand active transportation options

Additionally, the 2011 edition was the first time the map was developed in GIS (Geographic Information Systems), making the data shown on the map available to the partner agencies to visualize and analyze digitally so as to better understand the interrelated relationships, patterns, and trends of the green infrastructure network. The initial RMAP GIS work and data from Winnebago County Geographic Information Systems, WINGIS, was provided by a consultant in Chicago who designed the map originally. The reverse side of the 2011 Boone and Winnebago County Greenways Map was completed by Winnebago County Forest Preserve Staff Members, now named the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County.

## **THE 2015 GREENWAYS PLANNING COMMITTEE**

The Greenways Planning Committee was made up of a representative from the following agencies:

- Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning – RMAP
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources – IDNR
- Natural Land Institute – NLI
- Forest Preserve of Winnebago County
- Rockford Park District

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<sup>16</sup> B. Moore, J. Kennay, S. Merchant, *Boone and Winnebago Regional Greenways Plan*, (Natural Land Institute, 1997), p. 3.



- Belvidere Park District
- Boone County Soil & Water Conservation District – BCSWCD
- Winnebago County Soil & Water Conservation District – WCSWCD
- Winnebago County Geographic Information Systems – WINGIS
- Boone County Conservation District – BCCD
- Citizen and Local Resident – Beverly Moore
- Citizen and Former Director of NLI – Jerry Paulson

It is worth noting that the Greenways Planning Committee (GPC), with recommendations from RMAP staff, has decided to look at the possible inclusion of other relevant organizations that have a stake in the green infrastructure of our Region.

Over the course of the last year the Greenways Planning Committee meet officially 3 times at the RMAP offices located at 313 North Main Street in downtown Rockford. Additionally RMAP staff gave presentations to our partner organizations at their request in order to inform other members of the group what the greenways planning process was and what the final product would look like. These presentations also allowed for an informal open discussion at the end including a “map markup session”. This time allowed many of the members of influential and well respected environmental planning agencies in Boone and Winnebago Counties the opportunity to include both their professional and personal feedback. It also served as a time for any errors that were noticed to be corrected. Other useful information came in the form of property additions or changes in property ownership that we were able to update in Geographical Information Systems (GIS). Additionally these meetings allowed for the correct alignment of new or proposed trails.

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# MAPPING OUT THE REGION'S GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

## OVERVIEW OF THE MAPPING PROCESS

The 2011 greenways map was designed by a consultant RMAP hired to complete the GIS updates and final map using Adobe InDesign to create a final cartographic map product. RMAP staff now carries the technical expertise to create and develop the data in GIS, as well as to produce the final mapping product completely in-house. This allowed staff members to be involved hands-on and be knowledgeable about the process as well as the data. This helped to create a much more accurate, up-to-date, and cartographically comprehensive planning map in the end. More research, time and engagement with both private and public sector agencies, compared to previous greenways mapping projects, has created a final greenways map that our region should be very proud of having.

The updates to the 2015 Boone and Winnebago County Greenways map data was done entirely in GIS. This was based off of the shapefiles provided to RMAP by the previous consultant and revised in part by group meetings with the greenways planning committee, one-on-one meetings with individual agency staff, public input, property acquisition maps, CAD drawings and engineering plans, hardcopy maps or proposed developments, aerial photo interpretation, and probably most importantly new sources of GIS data as well as updated layers from our partner organizations.

## 2015 GREENWAYS MAP LAYER UPDATES

The following information consists of the data presented in the RMAP Greenways Map:

### Property Acquisitions and Boundary Adjustments

- Forest Preserves of Winnebago County
- Rockford Park District
- Belvidere Park District
- Boone County Conservation District
- Conservation Opportunity Areas, COA's (as identified by the IDNR)
- Natural Land Institute
- Boone County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Illinois State Parks
- Privately Protected Properties, golf courses, Land Advisory Council, Wildlife Reserve Program, Boone County Agricultural Conservation Easement & Farmland Protection Areas, Natural Land Institute Sites, and Endangered and Threatened Species Sites and Organic Farms,
- Municipal Boundary Updates
- Other Natural Areas of Special Significance

### Water and Rivers

- National Hydrography Dataset – NHD (US Geological Survey)
  - Water Bodies
  - Flowlines
  - Aerial Photography Interpretation – heads up digitizing to make corrections for improved accuracy of oxbows and shoreline adjustments based on newest aerial imagery
  - Removal of Intermittent Streams
- WINGIS Hydrology Dataset for Major Rivers and Water
- Olson Lake in Rock Cut State Park was more accurately digitized
- Sugar River and Pecatonica River polygons were updated and the accuracy was improved through heads up digitizing
- Kishwaukee River Ecosystems Partnerships Hydrology Layer
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wetlands Dataset

## Transportation and Trails

- Boone and Winnebago County Road Updates, new alignments, deletions and additions
- Existing Trails and Proposed Trails
- Railroads
- Functional Classification added to Roads Layer, thicker lines are classified as higher than local road, thinnest lines are all local roads

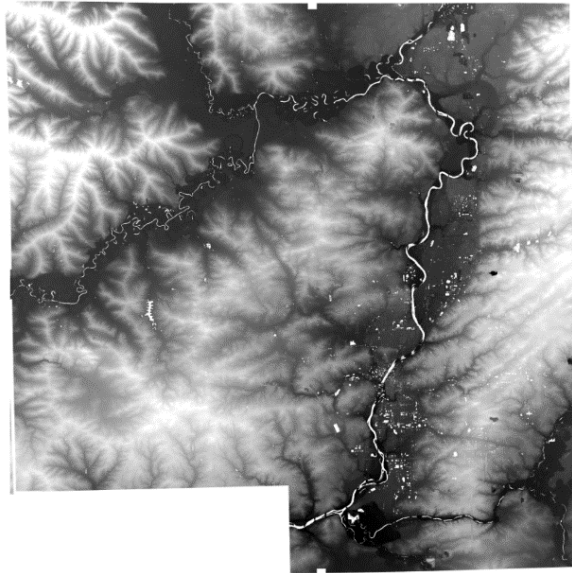
## Critical and Sensitive Areas Update

- Built on from 2011 Critical Sensitive Areas Layer –Floodplain
- Winnebago County Threatened and Endangered Wildlife Habitat
- River Islands – due to seasonal flooding and animal habitat
- 2008 Winnebago County Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) –Prairies Grasslands, Bogs, Forested Wetlands, Marsh, and Sedge Meadows (inventory created in conjunction with the Winnebago County 2030 Land Resource Management Plan)
- Boone, Winnebago, Ogle and Rock County 100yr Floodplain, data obtained from Ogle County GIS and Stateline Transportation Area, SLATS MPO
- Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) (as identified by the IDNR)
- Priority Acquisition Areas (Strategically Identified as Expansion Areas or Needing Enhanced Protection) +150ft Buffer
- Steep Slopes (12.5% or Greater) +150ft Buffer, calculated in GIS using the digital elevation model and ArcView 3D Analysts Tools
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wetlands +150ft Buffer

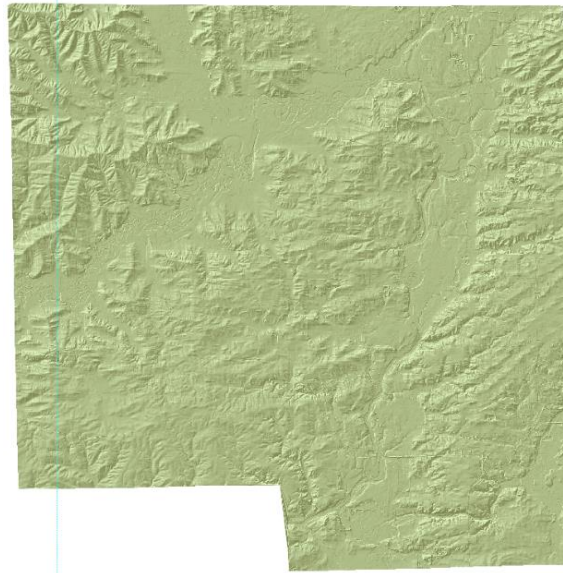
## Creating a Hillshade

Using a Digital Elevation Model (DEM) you can construct a shaded relief that represents elevation changes on a map. A completed hillshade will show a shaded representation of changes in elevation, the darker the shadow the steeper the slope. Digital Elevation models are most often obtained through

Remote Sensing from either a satellite or high-flying aircraft equipped with special instruments that use radar to obtain information about the earth surface, in this case elevation or z-value.



**Digital Elevation Model – Winn. Co**



**Hillshade – Winn. Co**

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## TRAILS AND PATHS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Regional trails and paths are routes that link smaller routes, non-contiguous neighborhoods, may cover large areas, offer unique opportunities for active transportation, or are located along high quality environmental corridors. They often go through or connect cities, villages or towns. Regional trails and paths are in addition to the trails located within parks, but may act as a link between smaller systems and greenspace. Sometimes regional trails are stand alone and do not connect or interact with other systems, they themselves are important though. Regional trail options offer residents and tourists a place for recreational opportunities, exercise and non-motorized mobility and commuting options. Regional trails also offer winter recreational options such as cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, but not snowmobiling.

It should also be noted that local trails are very important and act as the connections between larger trails systems and help to link neighborhoods and communities that may be divided from one another by major roads. This smaller trail systems are visited often by local residents as act as a place to exercise, walk your pets, and serve as the connections to the larger overall green infrastructure system for the region.

### The Rock River Trail, RRT

The Rock River Trail, RRT, is a local initiative to establish a multi-use trail of recreational, scenic and historic interest and significance along the 320 mile long Rock River.

In Winnebago County alone there are approximately 36 river miles of the Rock River Trail offering some beautiful views of the Rock River and northern Illinois. The Rock River Trail can also be accessed from Boone County on the Kishwaukee River tributary.

#### RRT Facts:

- The Rock River Trail achieved designation into the National Water Trails System in 2013
- Goal to establish a scenic, recreational and historic route within the river corridor including the Rock River Trail Scenic and Historic Route for motorists and the Rock River Trail Bike Route with hiking opportunities
- The RRT promotes ecotourism and recreational opportunities throughout the



river corridor that include many options for safe portage of the dams by kayakers and canoers

- The RRT Council advocates to protect, preserve and educate about our native American peoples, or cultural and historical settlements, and contributions of the river valley's industrialists, agriculturalists, statesmen and visionaries to the American experience
- The RRT's mission is to improve water quality and nurture the enhancement of the river ecosystem by supporting and advocating for natural resource conservation, stewardship and environmental planning and design
- The RRT supports economic development and revitalization of our river communities in an environmentally conscious manner

## *The Following Descriptions Will Be Followed By Detailed Trail Maps*

### **Pecatonica Prairie Trail**

Surface Type – Asphalt, Crushed Stone (Rail-Trail)

Length – 12.5 miles within Winnebago County

The Pecatonica Prairie Trail is a non-motorized trail (bicycle, pedestrian, cross country skiing) between the cities of Freeport and Rockford, IL. It is the longest single segment of the northern portion of the Grand Illinois Trail that is planned to one day link the Mississippi River with Lake Michigan. Trail improvements have recently been completed from Meridian Road to Winnebago/Stephenson County line through the Village of Winnebago and Pecatonica. The trail section in Stephenson County going to Freeport still remains undeveloped with a grassy surface. Trail users may continue on the corridor west to the edge of Freeport, but mountain bikes and hiking boots are recommended. This section would be 13.5-mile if targeted for improvement in the future; eventually, it will connect directly to the Jane Addams Trail in downtown Freeport.

The Trail provides a fantastic recreational resource for local residents of Pecatonica and Winnebago. It connects these two communities and serves as a functional, safe, and scenic transportation alternative route between them. The Pecatonica River and several streams meander along the length of the trail. In rural areas the trail travels through farmland, woods, remnant prairies, wetlands, and scenic meadows. In the urban areas it runs along residential, commercial and industrial sites.

### **Long Prairie Trail**

Surface Type – Asphalt, (Rail-Trail)

Length – 14.2 miles

This "Rail-Trail" is part of the larger Grand Illinois Trail that bisects Northern Boone County running East-West. There are trailhead and parking locations in Caledonia, Poplar Grove, and County Line Rd. in Capron. The trail is paved asphalt and passes through woodlands, cultivated farm fields, native prairie and the towns of Capron, Poplar Grove and Caledonia while following the old Kenosha Division Line railroad bed. The trail is open to hiking, biking and rollerblading.

The Long Prairie Trail began life as a section of the Kenosha Division Rail Line in the 1850s. The Long Prairie Trail today is pure prairie, and legend has it the railroad gets all the credit. For years, rail cars sparked

periodic blazes along the grasslands adjacent to the right-of-way. Woody species could not tolerate the frequent burns, but the native swaths of prairie grassland along the corridor adapted easily and ensured their preservation.

The small villages of Capron, Poplar Grove and Caledonia are anchored by the beautiful paved rail-trail. Starting near the town of Capron at the McHenry/Boone County Line trailhead on County Line Road, you are immediately met with an interpretive sign detailing the Potawatomi Indians' history in the area.

## **Rock River Recreation Path**

Surface Type – Asphalt, Shared-Use Path and on road (small section is Rail-Trail)

Length – 10 miles including spurs

The Rock River Recreation Path starts in downtown Rockford and heads upriver. Officially, the trail begins at Davis Park on the west bank of the river. There are about 6 miles of paved trail, while another 10 miles (depending on where you begin) follow along roads.

One of the best places to begin is off of N Madison Street by the Whitman Street Bridge where ample parking is located. Head north along the east bank of the trail until you reach Illinois Street. To pick up the next trail segment, take Illinois then go left at Ransom Place, north (right) on Arlington, east (left) on Snow, and take an immediate right on Forest Grove, which dead-ends where the trail picks up.

After passing through Shorewood Park, in a short distance you'll reach Evelyn Avenue; go east (left) then north (right) on East Drive to River Lane; turn east (left) and pick up the trail again. At E. Riverside Boulevard, the trail crosses the river on the south side of the bridge. Just over the bridge, you'll cross to the other side of Riverside Boulevard at the intersection (use caution) and continue north on the trail along the west bank.

For this part of the route the trail parallels active railroad tracks first, and then segments of the trail are linked via road. At the bend in the river, the trail crosses the tracks and enters Sportscore One, where it does a 0.75-mile loop around the playing fields. Continue north on the trail from Elmwood Road to Harlem Road (about 0.5 mile), crossing under Harlem to loop around the Winnebago County Forest Preserve. From here if you cross over the Harlem Bridge on the shared-use path you can pick up the **Bauer Memorial Path**.

## **Bauer Memorial Path**

Surface Type – Asphalt

Length – 1.3 miles

The Bauer Memorial Path provides a short route through residential and commercial areas of Machesney Park, a northern suburb of Rockford. The trail begins at the Harlem Community Center and travels in a straight line west along Roosevelt Road (which becomes Machesney Road after crossing N. 2nd Street) and passes the Machesney Park Mall on its way to Victory Lane. There, the paved trail ends, though you can take the marked bike lane south on Victory Lane (or the sidewalk paralleling the roadway) to where the trail picks up again at Harlem Road. The trail follows Harlem Road west to the Rock River. Cross the Bauer Bridge to connect to the **Rock River Recreation Path**, mentioned above. Future plans also call for linking the trail to the **Willow Creek Path** which enters Rock Cut State Park from the **Perryville Path**.



## **Perryville Path**

Surface Type – Asphalt

Length – 7 miles

The Perryville Path connects the communities of Loves Park, Rockford and Cherry Valley, not far from the northern border of Illinois. A pleasant place to begin your journey is at Rock Cut State Park, a beautiful forested area offering recreational opportunities such as swimming, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, sailing, hiking, horseback riding, picnicking and camping.

Continue south on the paved path along Perryville Road through residential, commercial and business areas. Conveniently, the trail also passes the Rockford Bicycle Company, one of the largest bike shops in the region, just north of East Riverside Blvd. Not very far north of Harlem Rd. the Perryville Path ends at its northern terminus and the **Willow Creek Path** begins. At the trails Southern Terminus, Harrison Ave., the **Swanson Park Recreation Path / Cherry Valley Path begins**.

There are also a few smaller loops that spur off of the main trail system. They include the 1.9 mile loop at Rock Valley College accessible by traveling West on Spring Brook Rd at the intersection of N Perryville Rd for .5 miles. There is also the 1.4 mile loop at Midway Village Museum off Guilford Road. The easiest way to enter is through Garrett Ln to the South of Guilford Rd. Here you can see a full sized Huey helicopter at the LZ Peace Memorial for Winnebago County Vietnam Veterans. Lastly, there is a loop that travels along the eastern edge of Aldeen Golf Club. Traveling northward from here on the Perryville Path near the intersection of East Riverside Blvd and N Perryville you can visit the Keeling Puri Peace Plaza.

## **Willow Creek Path**

Surface Type – Asphalt

Length – 2.6 miles

The Willow Creek Path is a pleasant, tree-lined trail that follows its namesake creek for most of its journey through the communities of Machesney Park and Loves Park in the Rockford metropolitan area. It extends from Harlem High School into Rock Cut State Park, one of the most-visited state parks in Illinois. As you enter the park, you can also connect with the Perryville Path, which travels about 7 miles south through residential and commercial areas. The pathway runs adjacent to the Dennis Johnson Memorial Park as well, which offers volleyball, tennis and basketball courts.

The western end of the trail begins south of the Harlem High School parking lot. The eastern trail endpoint is located in Rock Cut State Park at the Lake View Trailhead and picnic area on the west side of Pierce Lake. Note that the park closes at 10 p.m. during the spring and summer and 5 p.m. during the winter.

## **Swanson Park Recreation Path / Cherry Valley Path**

Surface Type – Asphalt

Length – 2.4 miles



Swanson Park Recreation Path is sometimes known as the Cherry Valley Path as it's located in the Village of Cherry Valley on the outskirts of Rockford in northern Illinois. The paved path travels along a tree-lined creek through picturesque open space and is within easy reach of housing developments.

The trail offers good bird watching opportunities; keep a look out for red-tailed hawks, Canada geese, and red-winged blackbirds. It continues along Southeast Community Park, past a few small ponds, and under the busy US 20 Bypass. From the tunnel, you can follow street signs to connect to the **Baumann Park Recreation Path**.

### **Baumann Park Recreation Path**

Surface Type – Asphalt

Length – 1.25 miles

Baumann Park is located adjacent to the Kishwaukee River in Cherry Valley. A paved pathway runs through the park and loops around Baumann Park Lake. The park offers a playground, baseball fields, tennis and basketball courts, and picnic areas. Fishing is allowed in the lake. There is also a great location to hand launch a canoe or kayak on the Kishwaukee River for a trip downstream to one of the many forest preserves. A short distance away from Baumann Park (via roads) you can connect to another Cherry Valley trail, the Swanson Park Recreation Path, near the US 20 Bypass.

### **Stone Bridge Trail**

Surface Type – Crushed Stone (Rail-Trail)

Length – 5.75 miles

Built on a former rail bed dating back to the 1850s, the Stone Bridge Trail provides a crushed limestone pathway through rural countryside. The Stone Bridge Trail picks up where the Long Prairie Trail ends at the Boone/Winnebago County Line. The highlight of the trail is traversing the Stone Bridge over the scenic South Kinnikinnick Creek. Built in 1882, the double-arch bridge is included on the National Register of Historic Places. Not far from the Stone Bridge Trail is the **Hononegah Recreation Path** which is connected by the short, .6mile, but important **Kinstone Recreational Path**.

### **Hononegah Recreation Path**

Surface Type – Asphalt

Length – 3.2 miles

The Hononegah Recreation Path begins near the State Route 2 Bridge over the Rock River in Rockton, a small town about 4 miles south of the Illinois–Wisconsin border. The paved trail follows Hononegah Road for 3 miles in a southwest direction, connecting residential and commercial areas.

The eastern end of the trail goes under State Route 251 (N. 2nd Street) and into Roscoe, ending at Main Street. From here, the **Kinstone Recreational Path** can take you northeast through woodlands along North Kinnikinnick Creek to the Stone Bridge Trail, a scenic nearly 6-mile-long rail-trail. An underpass beneath Hononegah Road also provides access to Kelly-Meyers Park.

Alternatively, go south from Elevator Road to get on the **Leland Path**, which follows Main Street through Roscoe and then turns east at Chestnut Road and travels past Leland Park to reach the Stone Bridge Trail. Parking can be found in the Hononegah Forest Preserve and in Kelly-Meyers Park.

## **Leland Path**

Surface Type – Asphalt

Length – 2 miles

Although a relatively short trail, the Leland Path provides an important connection between the Hononegah Recreation Path and the Stone Bridge Trail. The pleasant, tree lined path travels through residential neighborhoods, as well as some retail areas, in Roscoe, a suburb of Rockford situated along the Rock River. Mid-trail, parking is available at Main Street Square. At the southern end of the trail, you can park in Leland Park.

## **Kinstone Recreation Path**

Surface Type – Asphalt, Crushed Stone, Gravel

Length – .6 miles

From Main Street and Elevator Road in Roscoe, the scenic Kinstone Recreational Path winds its way northeast through woodlands along the north branch of Kinnikinnick Creek to the Stone Bridge Trail. The Kinstone Recreation Path is an important link between the Stone Bridge Trail and the **Hononegah Recreation Path**.

## **Mel Anderson Memorial Path**

Surface Type – Asphalt

Length – 2.7 miles

The Mel Anderson Memorial Path, named for a long-serving alderman of the Seventh Ward, connects Lockwood Park, Searls Park, Bressler Park and Talcott-Page Park. Mid-way, the trail offers access to the Northwest Community Center and approaches Kent Creek, which it follows for the rest of its journey. The route is lined with trees, though the southern-most section (east of Central Avenue), and travels through a commercial and industrial area. Benches along the pathway, as well as picnic tables and benches in the parks, provide ample opportunities to rest and enjoy the scenery.

Parking is available at the trail's northern end in Searls Park, and at its southern end in Talcott-Page Park. Both parks also offer drinking water and toilet facilities during the warmer months. Mid-trail, you'll find parking at the Northwest Community Center on Johnston Avenue.

## **Kishwaukee River Recreation Path**

Surface Type – Asphalt

Length – 2.5 miles

This path is located in Cherry Valley just on the outskirts of Rockford. The well-maintained, asphalt trail connects the Kishwaukee River Forest Preserve with Blackhawk Springs Forest Preserve. The trail crosses the Kishwaukee River twice as it drops to the river's edge and climbs up out of the valley. It offers pleasant scenery and is almost entirely sheltered from commercial or residential development. In addition to the paved bike path, there are also hiking trails (for walkers only) available throughout Blackhawk Springs Forest Preserve. These trails span more than 600 acres and traverse through heavily wooded areas, open fields, over streams and even a natural spring if you know where to look. Blackhawk Springs Forest Preserve offers beautiful views of the meandering Kishwaukee River. Wildlife is abundant in this natural and very secluded setting not far from CherryVale Mall.

## Charles Street Community Path

Surface Type – Asphalt

Length – 2.6 miles

The Charles Street Community Path offers a neighborhood route through southeastern Rockford, connecting residents to CherryVale Mall on its eastern end. On its western end, Alpine Park is just north of the trail's terminus, offering recreational amenities. The trail also provides access to AC Thompson Elementary School.

Nearby parking may be found at: CherryVale Mall, AC Thompson Elementary School, and Alpine Park.

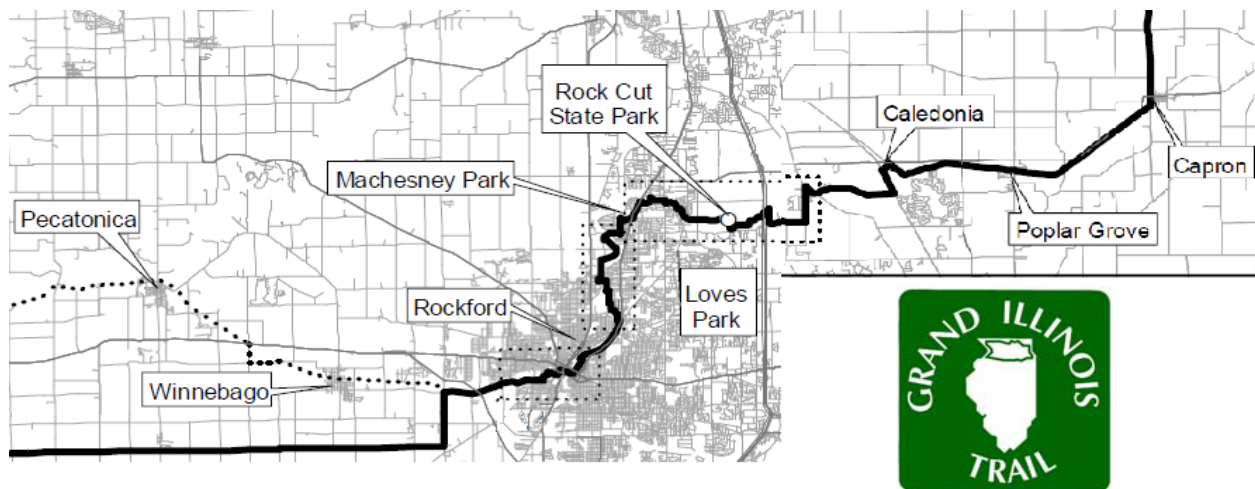
## Grand Illinois Trail

Surface Type – Conceptual route linking existing trails, developing new trails, and on-road connections

Length – Approximately 500 miles when complete

In the early 1990's, with the growing network of northern Illinois trails, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) suggested a "Grand Illinois Trail" in the Illinois State Trails Plan. The concept was enthusiastically supported by cities and villages; park, forest preserve, and conservation districts; and non-profit organizations; the many local partners involved in the Grand Illinois Trail. An Executive Council was formed with state agencies and regional coalitions all working together with local partners to link existing trails, develop new trails and establish on-road connections to make traveling the Grand Illinois Trail a continuous, memorable experience.

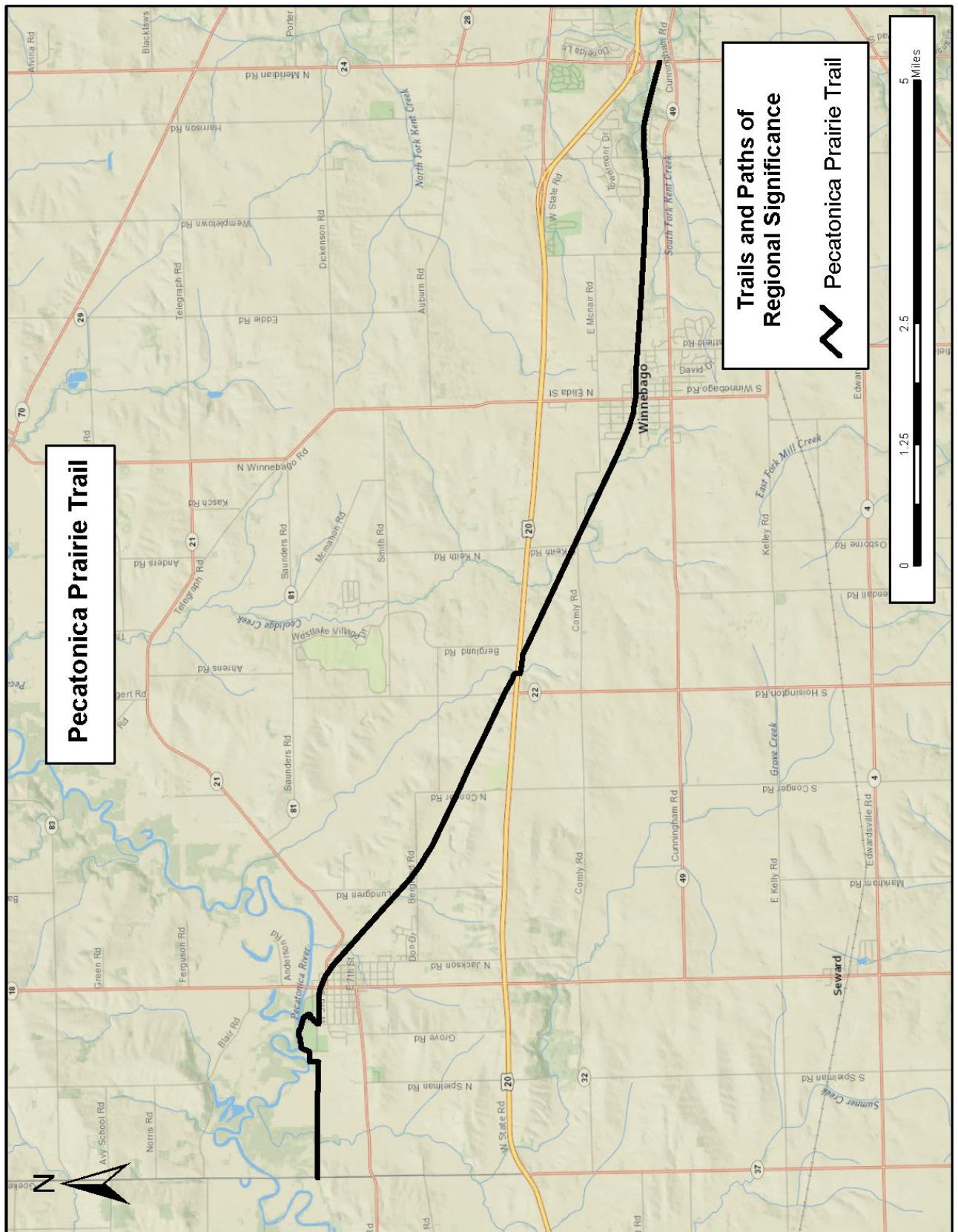
The IDNR has developed a "Grand Illinois Trails User's Guide" that is meant to help you plan your trips. The guide divides the trail into ten (10) segments, each with a detailed map outlining the route with turn by turn directions.



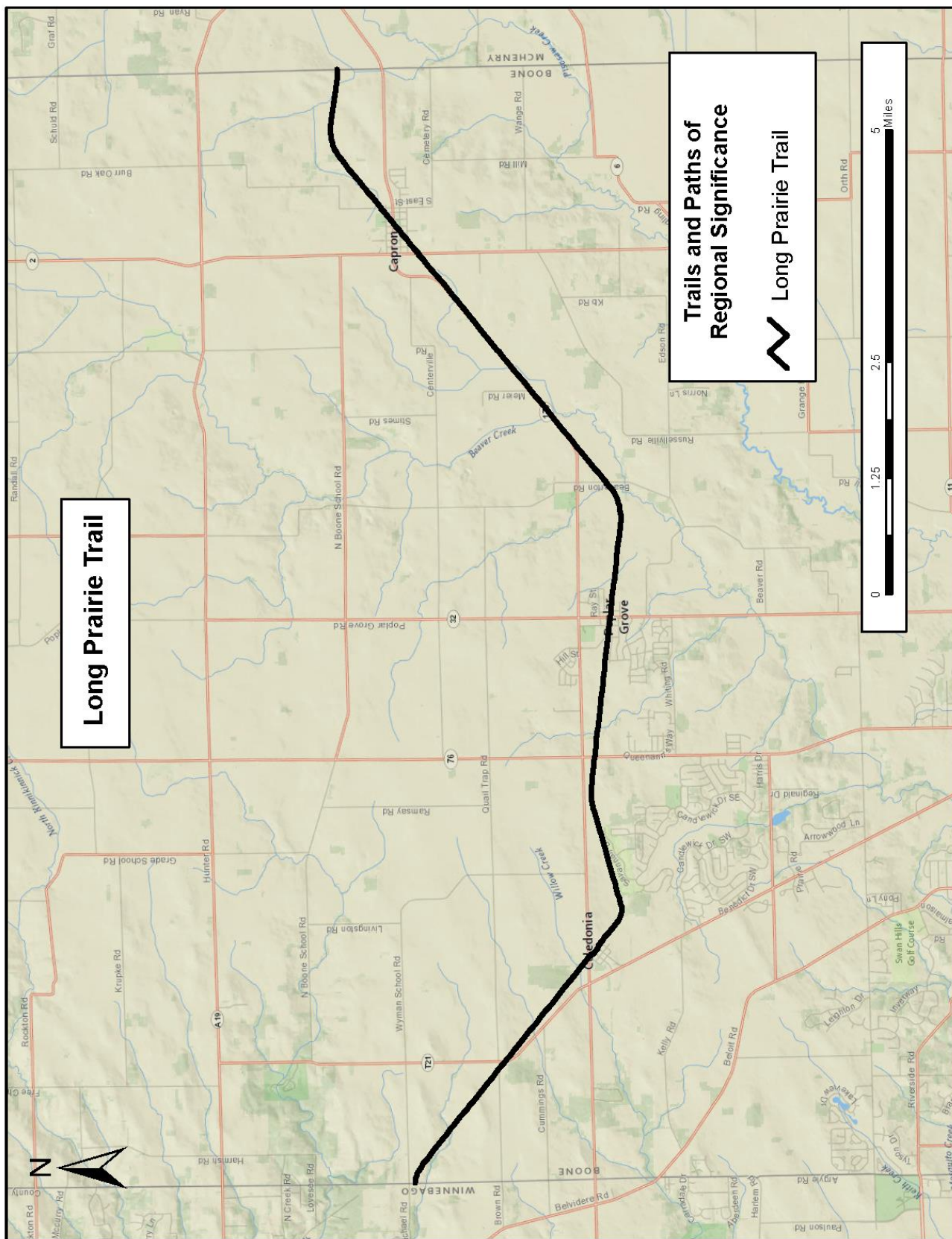
# Trails and Paths of Regional Significance Map List

<b>Map 1</b>	Pecatonica Prairie Trail (pg. 31)
<b>Map 2</b>	Long Prairie Trail (pg. 32)
<b>Map 3</b>	Rock River Recreation Path & Bauer Memorial Path (pg. 33)
<b>Map 4</b>	Perryville Path & Willow Creek Path (pg. 34)
<b>Map 5</b>	Swanson Park Recreation Path & Baumann Park Recreation Path (pg. 35)
<b>Map 6</b>	Stone Bridge Trail, Hononegah Recreation Path, Leland Path & Kinstone Recreation Path (pg. 36)
<b>Map 7</b>	Mel Anderson Memorial Path (pg. 37)
<b>Map 8</b>	Kishwaukee River Recreation Path (pg. 38)
<b>Map 9</b>	Charles Street Community Path (pg. 39)

*Note: there is a potential for scale variation due to formatting of the maps into this document*

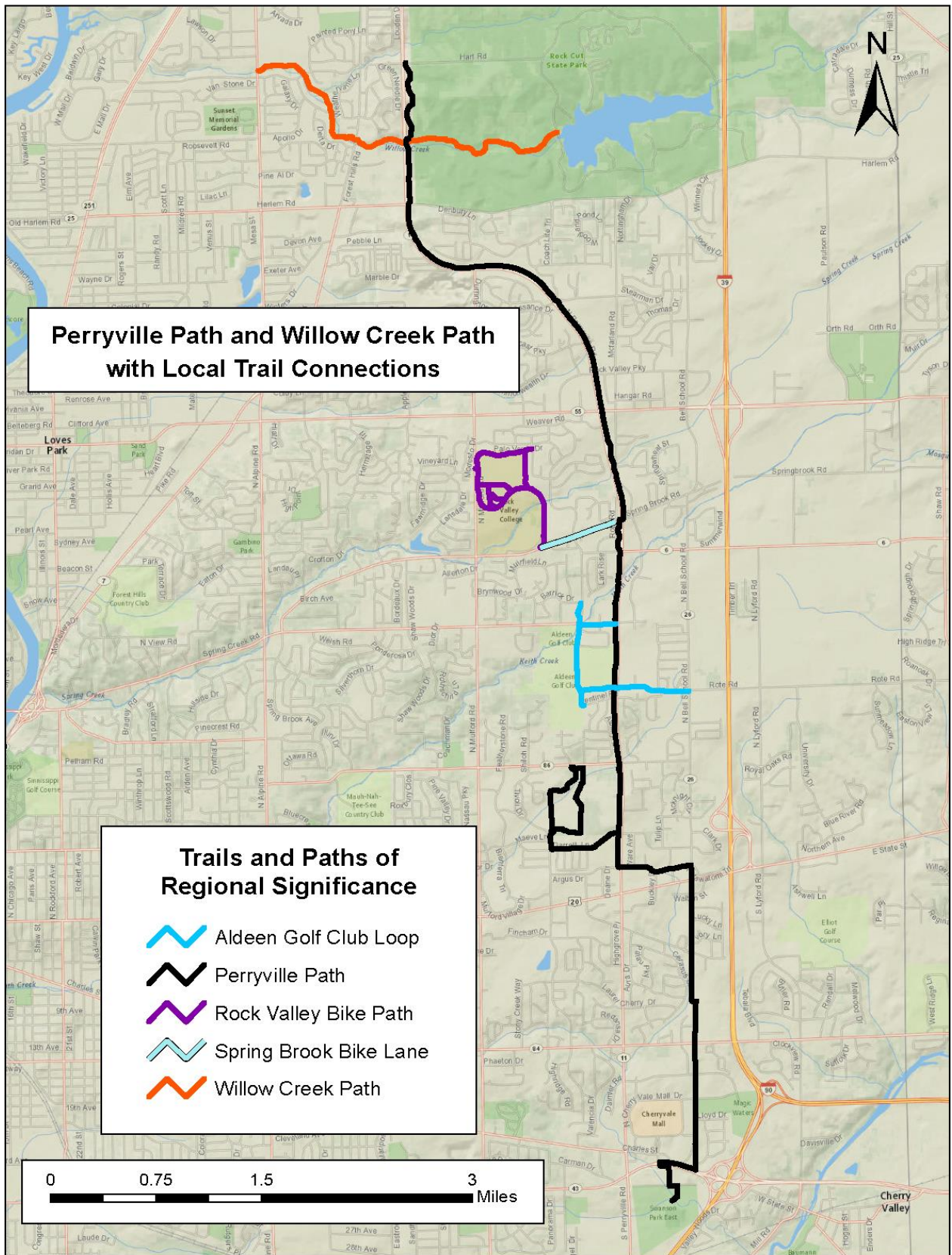






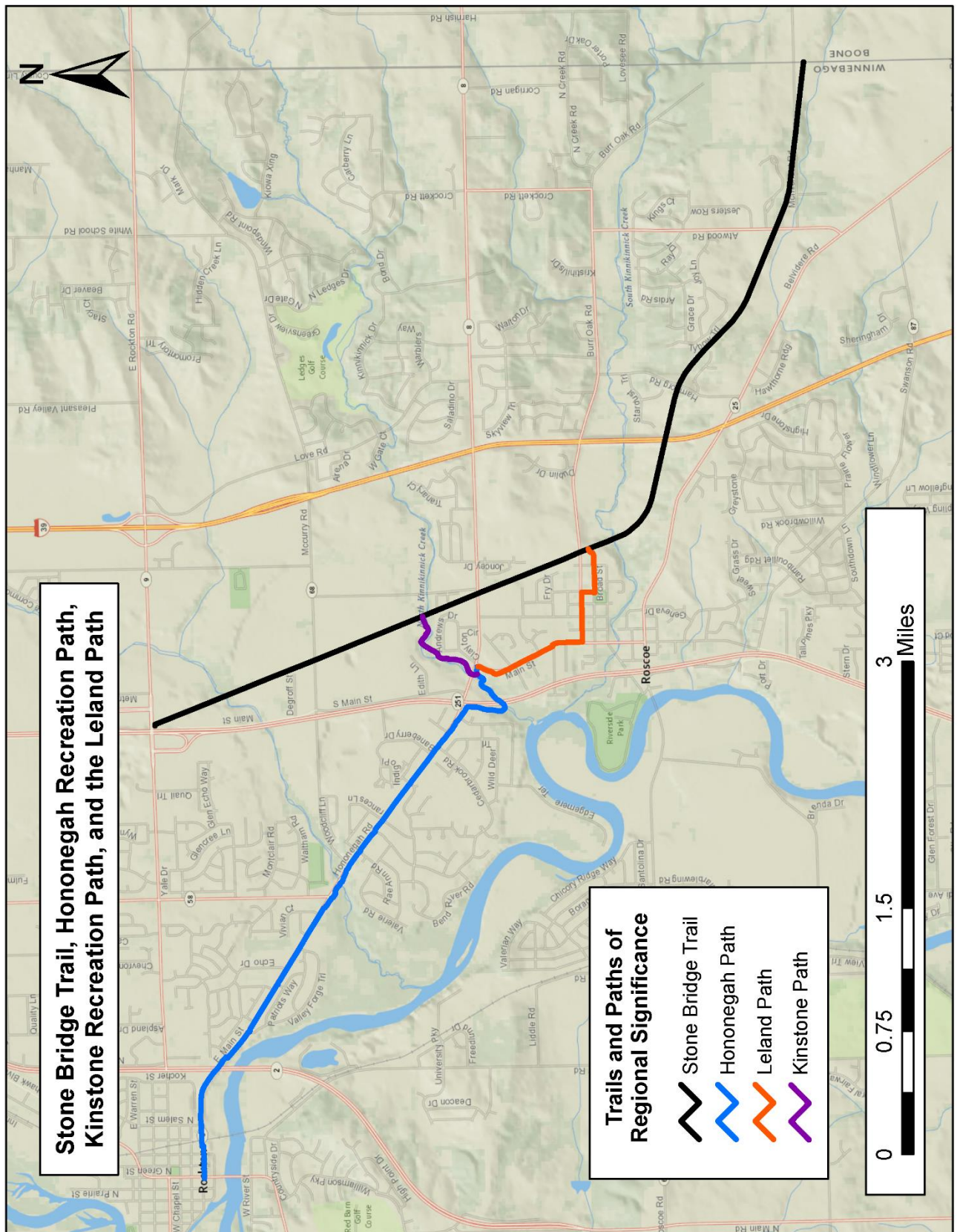






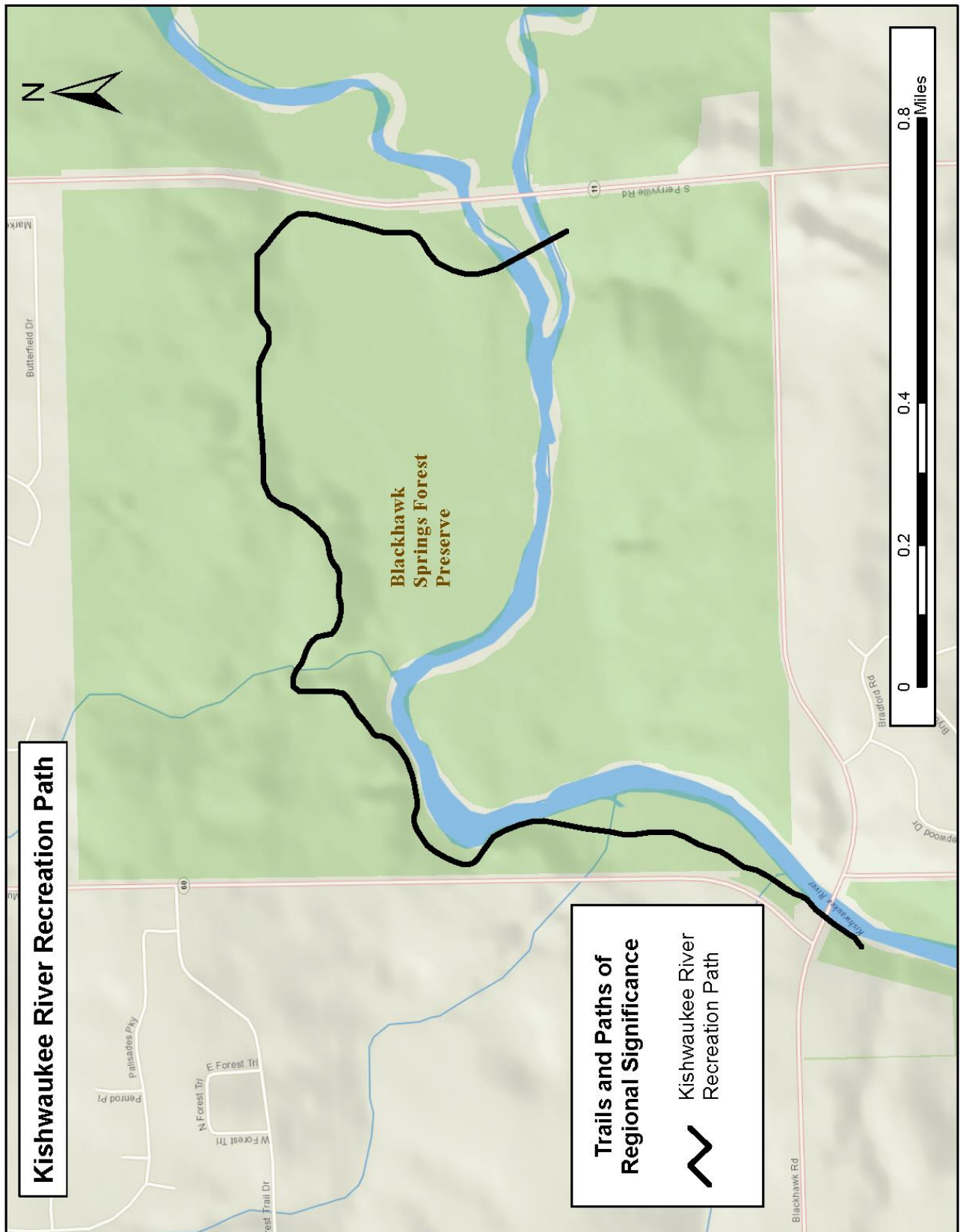




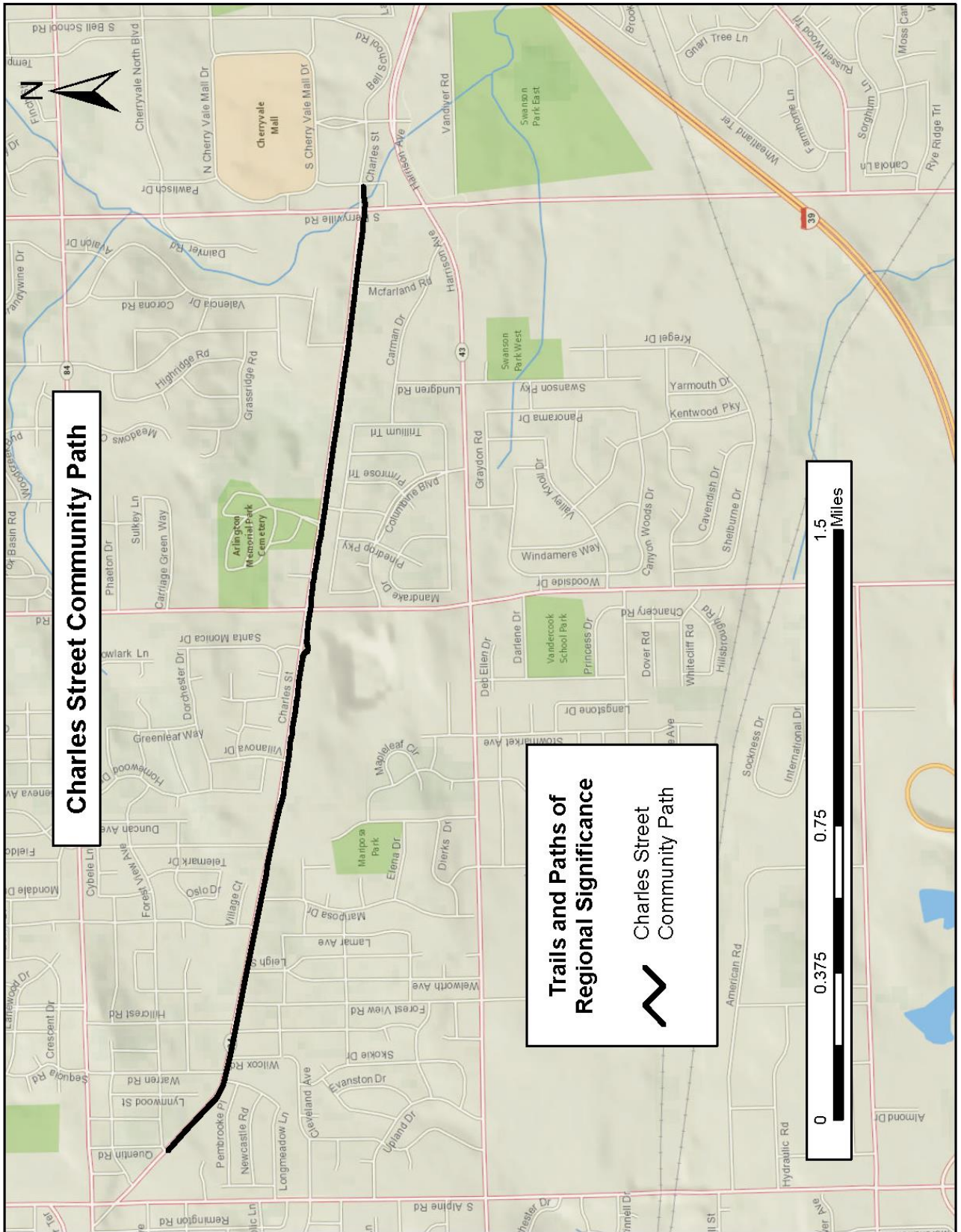












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# INTEGRATING TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

## ROCKFORD METROPOLITAN AGENCY FOR PLANNING (RMAP)

The Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP) is the transportation Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Rockford Region. By Federal Law, urbanized areas (over 50,000 designated by the U.S. Census Bureau) are required to have an organization that plans and coordinates decisions regarding the area's transportation systems. RMAP is empowered and governed by a Cooperative Agreement that has been adopted by the Cities of Rockford, Belvidere, Loves Park, Village of Machesney Park, the Rockford Mass Transit District (RMTD), the Counties of Boone and Winnebago and the State of Illinois acting through the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT).

During the past several decades there has been a growing awareness of the need to have a more thorough discussion and understanding of the relationship between the transportation planning process, the impacts of highway programming and construction and environmental protection. Our knowledge and understanding between the complexities of the natural environment and the built environment is a continuous process. The connection between these two regional planning issues has developed new sets of best practices and many new innovative design standards have been developed as a result of new ways of thinking.

History has clearly demonstrated that the quality of life and the sustainability of human settlements is dependent on the stewardship of natural resources. In response to this issue, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are developing strategies to include conservation in the area's overall transportation planning process and the development process of the area's long-range transportation plan (LRTP).

## SAFETEA-LU AND NEPA

Section 6001 of SAFETEA-LU, requires that MPOs LRTP include a fundamentally different discussion of mitigation efforts than are typically contained in the National Environmental Policy Act, NEPA, documents. This requirement is a more broad-based planning approach for reviewing the "types of potential mitigation activities and potential areas to carry out these activities" than normally done by MPOs. RMAP has and will continue to assist in the planning and preparation of the resource materials that are currently being used by traditional transportation planning agencies responsible for the actual preparation of the NEPA documents.

To meet the intent of Section 6001, RMAP staff, voting members, non-voting members and other participating agencies who receive federal funds have and will continue to follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. However, one of the planning approaches that SAFETEA-LU stresses is for MPOs to shift towards a broader and more strategic involvement with a wide range of agencies, organizations and the public who might not have been traditionally connected with the transportation planning process, or understand the role, or functions of RMAP. Beginning in 2013 RMAP reached out to a handful of local agencies that traditionally did not have a strong connection with RMAP



and its planning efforts. In order to move to a broader more environmentally inclusive approach to the planning process the following agencies were added to the RMAP Technical Committee in 2012; Boone County Conservation District, Winnebago Forest Preserves of Winnebago County, Rockford Park District, Rock River Water Reclamation District, and Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation District. RMAP staff has made it a point to work closely with these new Technical Committee members to identify approaches that will cause the least disruption of environmentally sensitive areas in the region while promoting environmental protection with active transportation strategies.

Types of activities that will be considered for mitigating the impacts of transportation projects are:

- wetland replacement
- avoidance of habitat fragmentation
- preservation of habitat for endangered species
- replacement of trees and other types of vegetation,
- identification and creation of mitigation banks within the watersheds of possible projects
- planting native vegetation
- buffering existing parks, forest preserves and other parkland from high-impact land use development
- working with the land use controls of the local units of government to adopt policies that would avoid environmentally fragile areas
- and to develop landscaping plans and other amenities that would restore and enhance the ecological values of the land.

Another management activity might be the creation of an in-lieu fee program where developers and other users who impact certain environmental areas could contribute to a third-party conservation organization that is attempting to restore, acquire or develop high-value natural areas.

## **Planning Through Environmental Linkages (PEL)**

Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL), represents a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decision-making that;

1. considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the transportation planning process, and
2. uses the information, analysis, and products developed during planning to inform the environmental review process.

State and local Agencies can achieve significant benefits by adopting environmental and community values into the transportation planning process early in planning and carrying these considerations through project delivery. The benefits can include improved relationships with other local and regional agencies, improved project delivery times resulting in saved money, and improved project designs that better serve the community while avoiding and minimizing impacts on natural resources.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration, FHWA, Environmental Review Toolkit, Planning and Environmental Linkages.

The 2007 planning regulations (23 CFR Part 450) give authority to State DOTs and MPOs to link planning and NEPA, as do relevant NEPA implementing procedures (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508, 23 CFR Part 771). U.S. DOT encourages the full utilization of these authorities. FHWA views corridor and subarea studies as one technique in helping prepare the highway community to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation system and economy. The use of planning studies to inform NEPA falls within the administration's Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) initiative. PEL represents an approach to transportation decision-making that considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the planning stage and carries them through project development, design, and construction. The goal of PEL is to create a seamless decision-making process that minimizes duplication of effort, promotes environmental stewardship, and reduces delays from planning to project implementation.<sup>18</sup>

## **Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning**

The Region has supported and planned for the development of a bikeway system for many years. The oldest part of this system is the Rock River Recreation Path that was constructed by the Rockford Park District (RPD) in the mid-1970s. Bicycle system planning was initiated with the Regional Bikeway and Pedestrian Plan adopted by the Rockford Area Transportation Study (RATS) on June 27, 1984. The RPD, the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District, Rockford, Loves Park, Machesney Park, Cherry Valley, and Winnebago County also adopted this plan. An extensive bikeway system has also been developed in Boone County through the efforts of the Belvidere/Boone Planning Department and the Boone County Conservation District. Bikeway systems within the Rockford MPA include: Perryville Path, Willow Creek Trail, Mel Anderson Memorial Path, Bauer Bridge Bike Trail, Cherry Valley Path, and Stone Bridge Trail. There are also several bikeway systems that extend beyond the Rockford MPA; the Pecatonica Prairie Trail, Grand Illinois Trail, Hononegah Recreation Path and Long Prairie Trail.

The Rockford MPA has an extensive pedestrian system but like many other older cities there are gaps and nonconformities within the network. Most municipalities have required sidewalks to be constructed as part of the land subdivision process. However, some parts of the Rockford MPA were developed under regulations where sidewalks were not required or the municipalities waived the sidewalk requirements in an attempt to persuade developers to build in their areas to increase the local tax base. One of the most notable examples of lack of sidewalks is the commercial area along East State Street in the City of Rockford. This area is automobile-oriented and does not completely allow for safe pedestrian movement. An adequate pedestrian system is especially important for access to bus stops, schools, medical facilities and senior citizen housing.

The positive results of past planning efforts and policies are evident throughout the Metropolitan Planning Area. However, it has been more than 20 years since the original Regional Bikeway and Pedestrian Plan was adopted. A comprehensive update to the current (2008) pedestrian/bicycle system plan is in order. A thorough and comprehensive evaluation of the current status of the Region, necessary plans for the future, and the policies and actions needed to attain those plans would be a useful process for the communities in the MPA to undertake.

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration, FHWA, *Guidance on Using Corridor Subarea Planning To Inform NEPA*, April, 5 2011.

As part of the continuous transportation planning process, RMAP is tentatively scheduled to begin updating the 2008 MPO Bicycle–Pedestrian Plan in Fiscal Year 2016. Since the time of the 2008 Plan, bikeways have been completed in the region and new national planning and engineering standards have been issued that provide for a safer and bicycle-friendly environment for both motorists and cyclists.

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# A LOCAL RIVER CORRIDOR PLAN

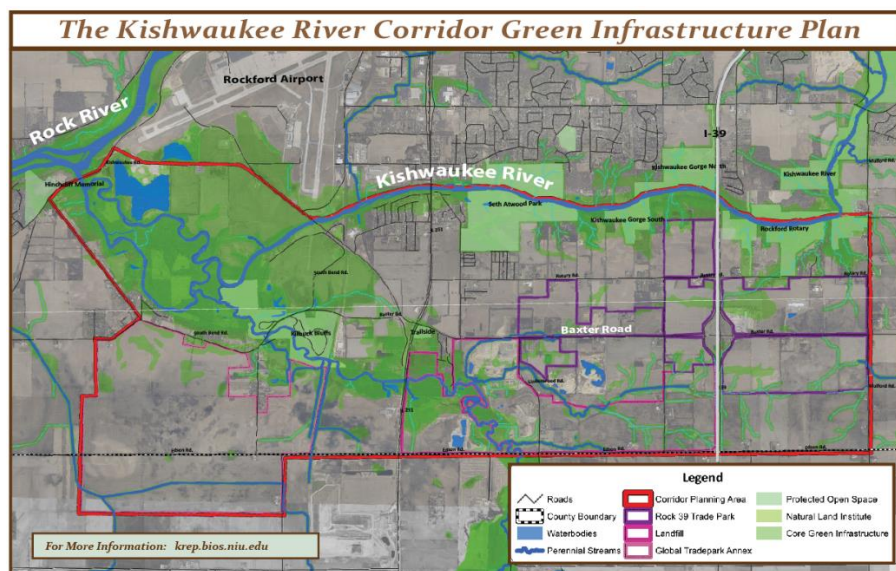
## THE KISHWAUKEE RIVER CORRIDOR GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

As mentioned earlier Green Infrastructure uses vegetation, soils, and natural processes to manage and create healthier environments. The natural areas provide animal habitat, flood protection, recreational opportunities, cleaner air, and cleaner water among other things.

The Kishwaukee River Corridor Green Infrastructure Plan is based on an area in Winnebago County that has significant natural and recreational resources and has been identified for a new industrial development corridor. The assets and opportunities present at this location made it an ideal site to incorporate green infrastructure into development plans. Chicago Wilderness recognized this opportunity, and Boeing funded a project to provide green infrastructure consulting and technical assistance to municipalities with jurisdiction over the development corridor.

The I-39/Baxter Road Redevelopment Project, because of its size and proximity to the Kishwaukee River, is a project that should be sensitively designed paying special attention to the quantity and quality of storm water runoff produced by development. Preventing storm water impacts within the boundary of the I-39/Baxter Road Redevelopment Project (1,348 acres), Eco-Rock Landfill Expansion (862 acres), and Global Trade Park (1,637 acres), will go a long way in protecting the public investments already made along the Kishwaukee River.

Advanced storm water engineering strategies in common practice today have proven effective in mitigating storm water impacts on rivers and streams and can be incorporated into the design of the proposed industrial developments to help insure the protection of the Kishwaukee River. The Green Infrastructure Plan for the Kishwaukee River recommends land development policies, best management practices for storm water management, and ordinance revisions needed to implement these strategies.



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# AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION AREAS (AG. AREAS)

## AGRICULTURAL AREAS

According to the Illinois Agricultural Areas Conservation and Protection Act (505 ILCS 5/1), Agricultural Preservation Areas (Ag Areas) are defined as: areas designated within a county where landowners have chosen to create and emphasize the importance of agriculture.

Ag Areas are adopted for an initial ten year period and renewable every eight years. These areas are controlled at the county level and are approved, modified, or terminated by the county board. The minimum size for an Ag Area is 350 contiguous acres with no maximum acreage. Ag Areas can provide protection from nuisance complaints and special benefit assessments (sewer, water, non-farm drainage easements etc.), which may influence State agencies in site selection for a project. Overall, these areas provide limited protection.

## Agricultural Conservation Easements

Agricultural Conservation Easements can be defined as a voluntary and permanent legal agreement a landowner can place on their property to give up development rights, while the land remains privately owned. The landowner retains the right to own and sell the property, but restrictions in the legal agreement, such as development or subdivision of the land, remain with the property and attached to the land title. Agricultural Conservation Easements allow landowners to ensure their land will be preserved as farmland or natural areas for future generations, while reflecting the landowner's individual needs and wishes. For more information about our regions Agricultural Preservation areas contact the Boone County Soil & Water Conservation District.

*A detailed map of the regions Agricultural Preservation Areas can be found in appendix A.*

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# THE REGION'S VISION FOR TOMORROW

## GREENWAYS PLAN AND MAP IMPLEMENTATION

In the realm of urban and regional planning, it is hard to find a word more complicated than “Implementation”. The reason for this is simple. Implementation is what makes or breaks a plans success story. There are plans and documents that have been developed, written and re-written for the Rockford Region as a whole. But sometimes the ideas in these documents have been unable to make the leap from plans to action. This is not the case however with the past planning and mapping efforts by the Boone and Winnebago County Greenways Map and written Plan.

In order to protect, preserve, and conserve valuable natural resources our regions municipalities, park districts, counties and other environmental organizations should formally adopt the 2015 edition map and plan, “Greenways: A Green Infrastructure Plan for Boone and Winnebago Counties”. The majority of the environmental planning agencies and organizations in Boone and Winnebago County have either officially adopted the previous plans or recognize them as the go-to document related to the region’s Green Infrastructure. Through these official and unofficial adoptions of previous greenways planning efforts the region has ensured the protection of existing green infrastructure while also acquiring new lands and properties that help bolster the system as a whole.

## SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

### Federal, State & Regional Entities

Generally government and municipal entities are only thought of as having regulatory roles when it comes to open space and greenways planning. However, they will commonly participate on many committees and councils with local government officials that do have influence over these areas locally. The Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning, RMAP, continually strives to uphold these standards.

1. Federal and State funding levels for greenways planning, collaboration, development, preservation, and maintenance should be increased. Continue to leverage possible grant funds for future planning initiatives. The 1997 Greenways map and plan was funded by a grants from Illinois Department of Natural Resources, IDNR.
2. RMAP shall continue to collect, analyze and update GIS information as it pertains to green infrastructure planning in Boone and Winnebago Counties. RMAP will also continue following the recommendations of FHWA to use the Planning through Environmental Linkages (PEL) approach to transportation planning decision making.
3. RMAP will continue considering environmental, community, and economic goals early in the transportation planning process, and use the information, analysis, and products developed during planning to inform the environmental review process.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, NIRPC, “Greenways & Blueways – Northwest Indian Regional Plan, 2007



4. RMAP will continue to support our partner agencies with information, GIS work, mapping products, or other data that helps them succeed in obtaining grants or other planning related functions. MPO staff is very knowledgeable about environmental planning and mapping.
5. It is recommended that an Open Space and Green Infrastructure Subcommittee be assembled to continue the planning efforts set forth in this planning document.

## Local and County Governments

The lay of the land begins with the decisions that are made at the municipal planning level. Further details of development are decided by zoning codes, ordinances, sub-division regulations, planning boards, city councils, elected officials and other legislative bodies.

1. Each local and county jurisdiction in Boone and Winnebago Counties should assess this document and the objectives set forth and incorporate its locally pertinent aspects into their Comprehensive Plans and other Planning Documents. The Greenways Plan sets a basis for best management practices when it comes to future development and land use. It helps to organize land uses, and how these land uses can integrate open space corridors into future development projects. Local Governments could also establish special area plans or overlay zones to help achieve special or unique outcomes in areas of importance.
2. Local subdivision or zoning codes could be amended to allow for open space conservation projects to be built along with new developments. By developing a code requiring all new developments to install sidewalks we can create a stronger community through increased mobility opportunities and safety. Sidewalks are the most logical travel option for neighborhoods to access local parks, trails and greenways. Too often sidewalks simply stop for a house or two only to continue again. In more extreme cases sidewalks do not exist at all for many miles of roadway requiring pedestrians to risk their life simply trying to get places. An example of this is the majority of East State Street. Amendments to zoning codes and subdivision regulations have the strength of law to back them up. Code regulations help to offer a level of predictability for both the local official and the developer. When standards are applied consistently, and enforced equitably and regularly, all parties know what is to be expected of them.
3. Besides regulation, code enforcement and the other governmental regulatory terms, each jurisdiction has the opportunity to actively pursue acquiring new properties on their own accord. Regardless of the size of a jurisdiction there exists opportunities to purchase properties that are considered “environmentally sensitive”, or are in need of satisfying a growing recreational space or community need.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, NIRPC, “Greenways & Blueways – Northwest Indian Regional Plan, 2007

## Private Property Land Owners

This can be a delicate subject. For the most part our region's environmental organizations will not pursue private land owners to engage them about greenways planning. Rather there is a let them come to us approach in order to not impose on anyone's rights. However, it has been shown that property owners who participate voluntarily in a greenway network will see more habitat, stormwater, and aesthetic benefits than those who do not choose to participate.

“One of the most effective activities a property owner could pursue would be to work together with neighbors to define what is special about the open space attributes in one's neighborhood and to propose strategies to make it more special.”

1. Develop an environmental inventory or assessment of your neighborhood. Identify tree types, shrubs, birds, water quality and biodiversity of any waterways or significant habitats. Learn which species are invasive and the proper techniques that you should use to best remove them. Invasive species have the propensity to overtake natural plants and animals and in so doing damage the biodiversity of your neighborhood. This base inventory could be forwarded to the proper planning agency for use in future studies or to simply make your neighborhood a more desirable place to be.
2. When landscaping your property choose native trees, shrubs and prairie plants instead of cultivars, non-native plants, or invasive species. Using the internet, and local university programs, for example contact a local Master Gardener, and other programs to find the best plants that are suitable for you region, soil type, drainage, and sun exposure. By planting locally native species you help to protect your property from the adverse effects of extreme weather, as these species are resilient to local extreme weather occurrences.
3. Look outside the vicinity of your neighborhood, say one-mile, and research how the activities in this region affect the land uses in yours. Try to link up with these property owners on larger more regional issues that affect you both such as seasonal flooding, drought resiliency and other extreme weather conditions.
4. If you own property that you wish to assure its preservation in perpetuity, contact a local land trust agency and discuss the possibility of establishing a conservation easement. There are many different types, length of durations and level of compensation as well. You will still own the land and be able to limit public access to it, but subsequent owners of the property would be required to retain the regulations as stated.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, NIRPC, “Greenways & Blueways – Northwest Indian Regional Plan, 2007

## Land Trusts and Advocacy Groups

Land Trusts and Advocacy Groups are generally not-for-profit entities solely focused on land stewardship and conservation efforts locally. They most often hold private conservation easements and properties with some level of restrictions put in place in regards to development and use. They use grant funds to purchase land and accept land donations. Land Trusts focus significant energy on environmental education, stewardship, and volunteerism.

1. Land trusts should always consider expanding their roles beyond that of simply being a land preservation organization. The need exists to also continually collaborate with local governments, developers, planning agencies, and other environmental groups in protecting and restoring the regions flora and fauna.
2. Expanding educational role by developing more public engagement, workshops, tours and including outdoor recreational programs into your organization's mission. Land trusts could also work more closely with municipal commissions and boards as another function of outreach and education, with particular attention directed more towards city and elected officials.
3. Municipalities in our region that do not currently support a park foundation, local or national, should consider doing so or organizing one based on other park foundations already in existence in the Rockford Region. (Rockford Park District Foundation, Community Foundation of Northern Illinois, and the Natural Land Institute).
4. Land trusts and park foundations should also make a concerted effort to reach out and engage corporations, educational institutions, hospitals and other local businesses that own large or significant pieces of property and start formal dialogue and form relationships with them. One might be surprised in finding they have similar community goals and aspirations for the community and region they are located in.

## Corporate Property Land Owners

Most of the same strategies exists for corporate business parks and other companies with large parcels of land. New developments that occur on greenfield sites, or that reuse existing sites, have the opportunity to create site plans with both sustainable environmental characteristics and sustainable energy features.

1. Actively engage the region's land trusts and advocacy groups to build partnerships for habitat management and open space preservation tactics.
2. Consider establishing a corporate sponsored grant program to conservation and restoration projects locally. Projects of this type are great for advertising one's company in the region not only as an employer of residents but also to show that you care about the community as a whole.
3. Create incentives that encourage your employees to live a more active and healthy lifestyle. The region has many parks and trails that employees can take advantage of. The Rockford Region, namely the Rockford Park District, has won many national awards recognizing the quantity and quality of our parks and open space. These environmental commodities should be leveraged to help entice future employees to either move to the region for work, or to continue living here.

## Linear Corridor Owners

Often forgot but just as important are thin, long stretches of greenway corridors that are usually privately owned and not used for recreational purposes. Examples are utility corridors, right-of-ways along roads, transportation corridors, riparian corridors, or railroads. All offer different types of habitat and are regularly used as safe routes of transportation for animals needing to get from one location of green infrastructure to another.

1. Partner with local public planning agencies, advocacy groups, land trusts, parks, city and county planning departments and local citizens on creating increased greenways conservation and designation opportunities. Linear corridors are often unused and could possibly be utilized for recreational uses such as shared-use trails, mountain biking, equestrian riding, bird watching, etc. Utility corridors are often a “hangout” spot for birds of prey as it offers them a habitat perfect for hunting. Also, they are often used as a trail system for animals such as deer as they offer safe routes through neighborhoods and densely populated urban areas.
2. Linear corridors being often forgotten also tend to collect garbage, refuse and other dumped materials. A plan of action should be outlined to clean these corridors and restore them to as natural a state as possible. Maintenance plans should also be developed and implemented to keep corridors clean and free of debris.
3. Municipalities, local government, and Boone and Winnebago Counties Highway Departments could incorporate stronger landscaping and conservation design standards into all new roadway construction projects. By planting native plant species along roadway corridors you significantly increase the aesthetic look of the road while also helping reduce stormwater runoff through water filtration and percolation.
  - a. Municipalities need to work with developers to ensure sidewalks are put in at warranted location that they do not already exist while a roadway improvement project is underway.<sup>22</sup> It is unacceptable that a neighborhood has sidewalks that randomly end only to start up again a few houses down. Sometimes neither side of the road will have a sidewalk in a purely residential neighborhood. Areas on the west side of Rockford have complete blocks and even areas within a neighborhood are completely void of any sidewalk. In other areas sidewalks are so decayed they have been blocked off indefinitely and offer an immediate danger, especially to younger children as they travel to school in the morning.

*RMAP has taken the first steps to identifying possible solutions to remedy this situation by conducting a sidewalk inventory in GIS using aerial photography to map and catalogue the gaps in the system*

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<sup>22</sup> Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, NIRPC, “Greenways & Blueways – Northwest Indian Regional Plan, 2007

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## APPENDIX A

### BOONE AND WINNEBAGO COUNTY GREENWAY MAP LAYERS

*Note: there is a potential for scale variation due to formatting of the maps into this document*

<b>Municipalities</b>	<b>1A</b>
Outlines the regions urban administrative division having corporate state and powers of self-government of jurisdiction.	
<b>Railroads</b>	<b>2A</b>
Highlights the regions active major railroads, some spurs and transfers have been removed	
<b>Regional Roadways</b>	<b>3A</b>
Functionally Classified Roads including Local Streets, but not alleys and private drives	
<b>Regional Trails – By Type</b>	<b>4A</b>
Differentiates between current and proposed shared-use paths	
<b>Agricultural Preservation Areas</b>	<b>5A</b>
Are areas designated within a county where landowners have chosen to create and emphasize the importance of agriculture	
<b>Privately Managed Natural Resources</b>	<b>6A</b>
These properties are privately owned and operated, sometimes they are open to the public, other times an appointment is required, while some locations are sensitive and visitors are prohibited all together	
<b>Publicly Managed Natural Resources</b>	<b>7A</b>
These properties are owned and operated for public use, usually free of charge	
<b>Water Resources/Hydrology</b>	<b>8A</b>
Lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands	
<b>Critical and Sensitive Areas</b>	<b>9A</b>
Includes 100yr floodplain, steep slopes with 150ft buffer, hydrology with 150ft buffer, and any areas identified as priority for acquisition	
<b>Digital Elevation Model</b>	<b>10A</b>
3D representation of terrains surface	
<b>Hillshade</b>	<b>11A</b>
A grayscale 3D representation of the earth’s surface with the sun's relative position taken into account for shading the image	
<b>Base Map – All Data</b>	<b>12A</b>



DURAND

PECATONICA

WINNEBAGO

SOUTH BELOIT  
ROCKTON  
ROSCOE

CAPRON

MACHESNEY PARK

CALEDONIA

POPLAR GROVE

TIMBERLANE

LOVES PARK

ROCKFORD

BELVIDERE

CHERRY VALLEY

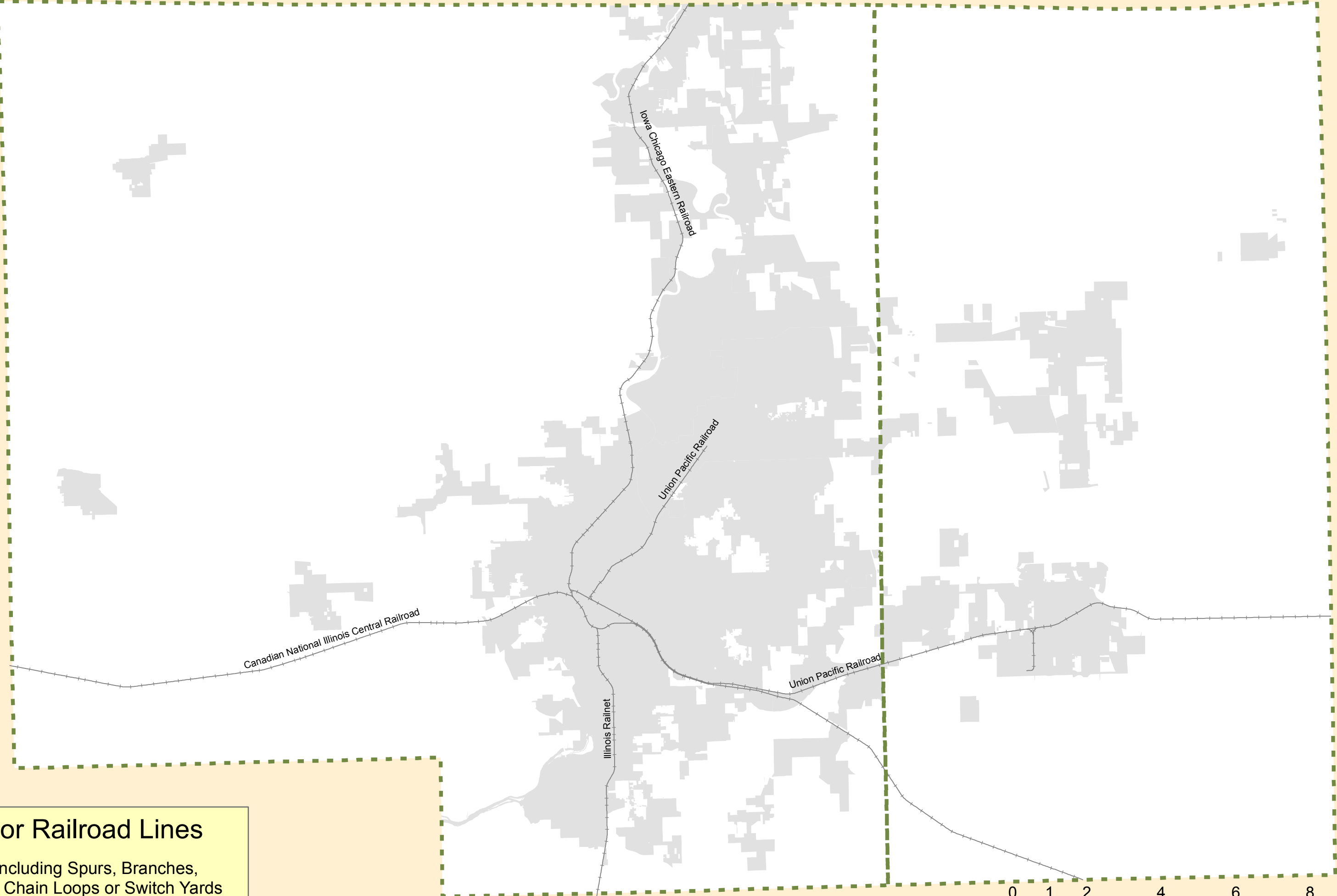
NEW MILFORD

## Boone and Winnebago Municipalities

Areas of Urban Development having corporate status usually with powers of self-governance or jurisdiction

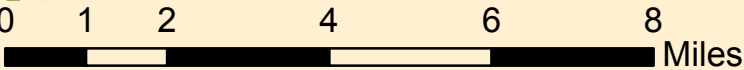


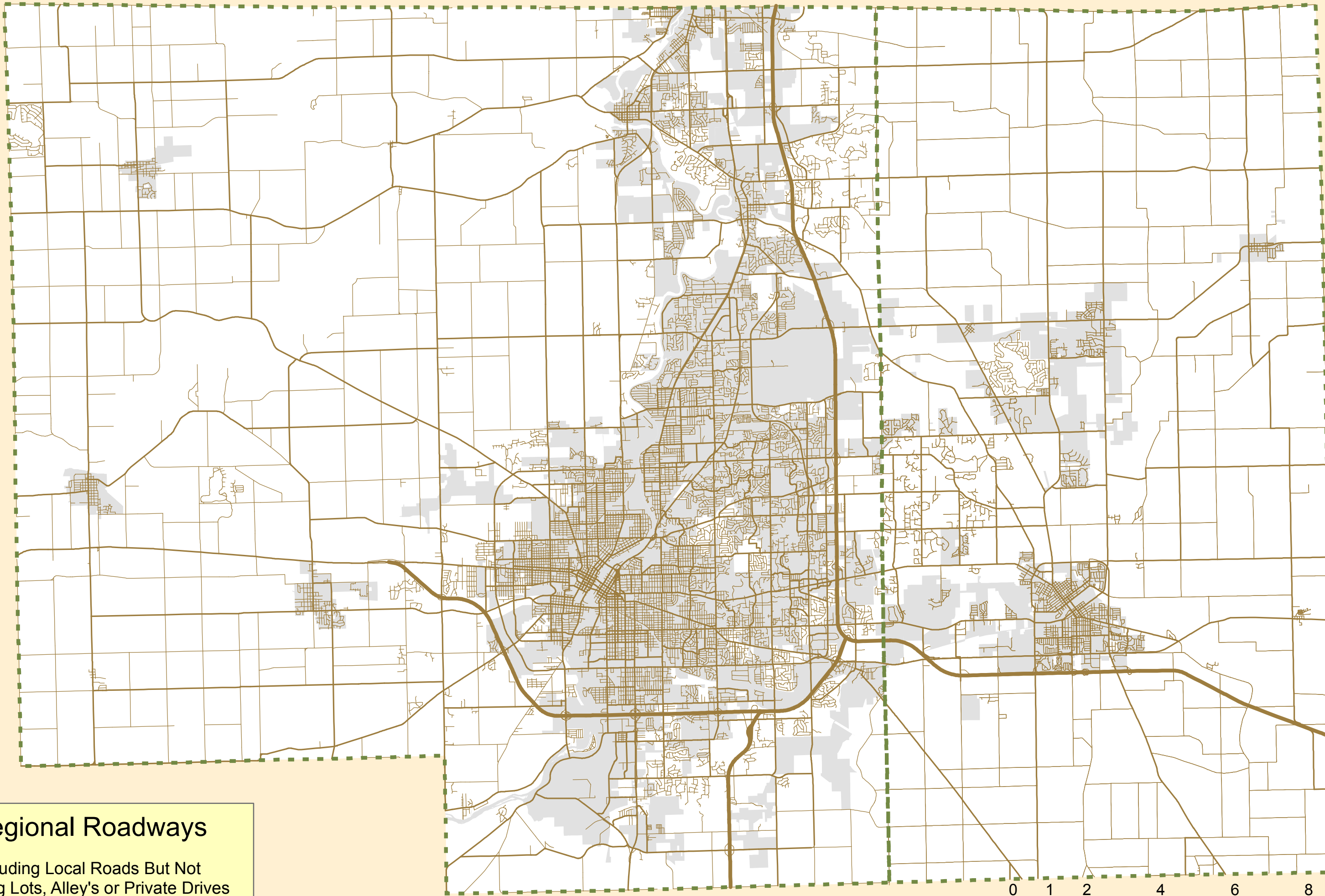




# Major Railroad Lines

Not Including Spurs, Branches,  
Sidings, Chain Loops or Switch Yards





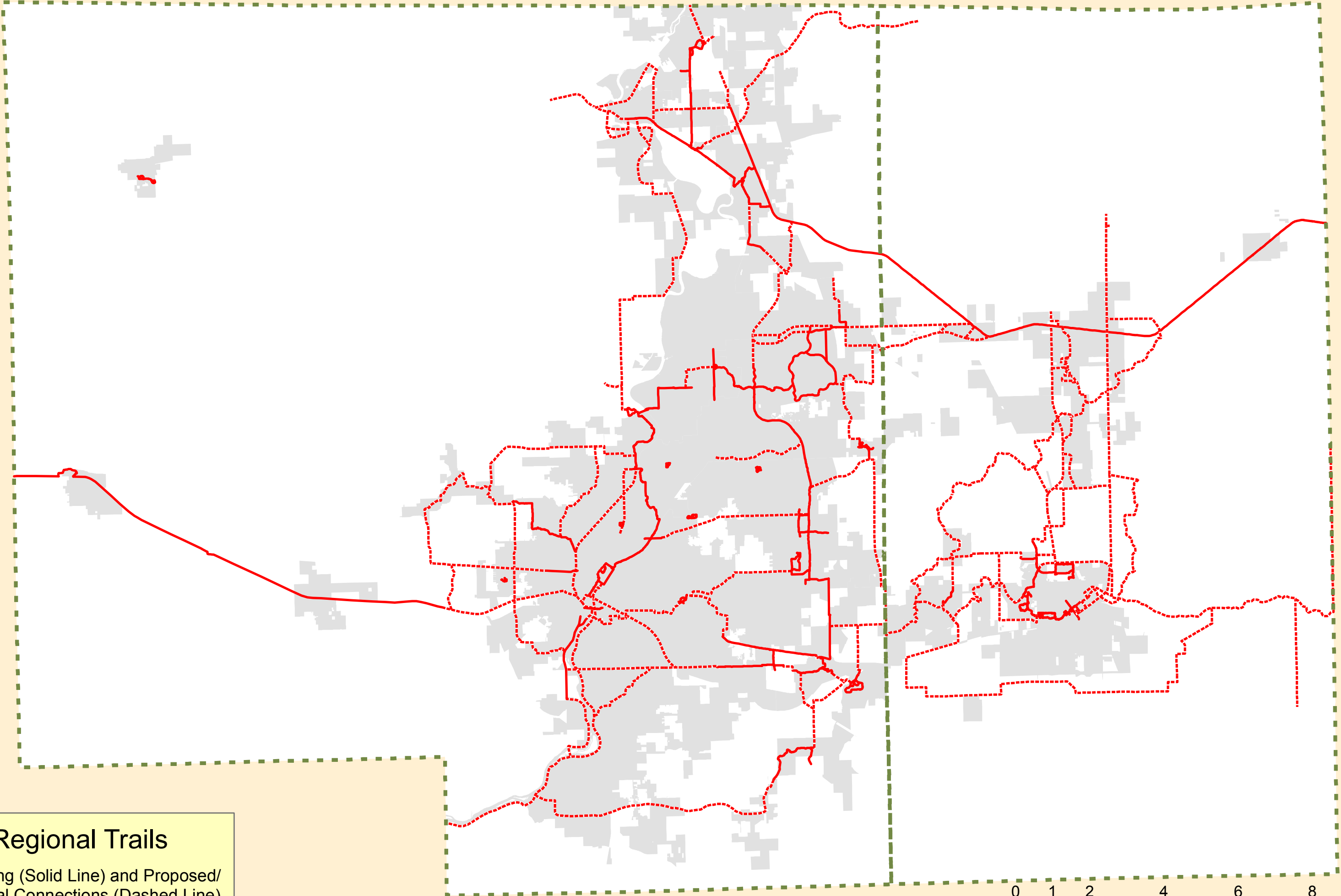
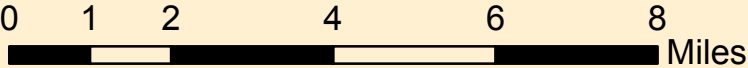
**Regional Roadways**

Including Local Roads But Not  
Parking Lots, Alley's or Private Drives

0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles

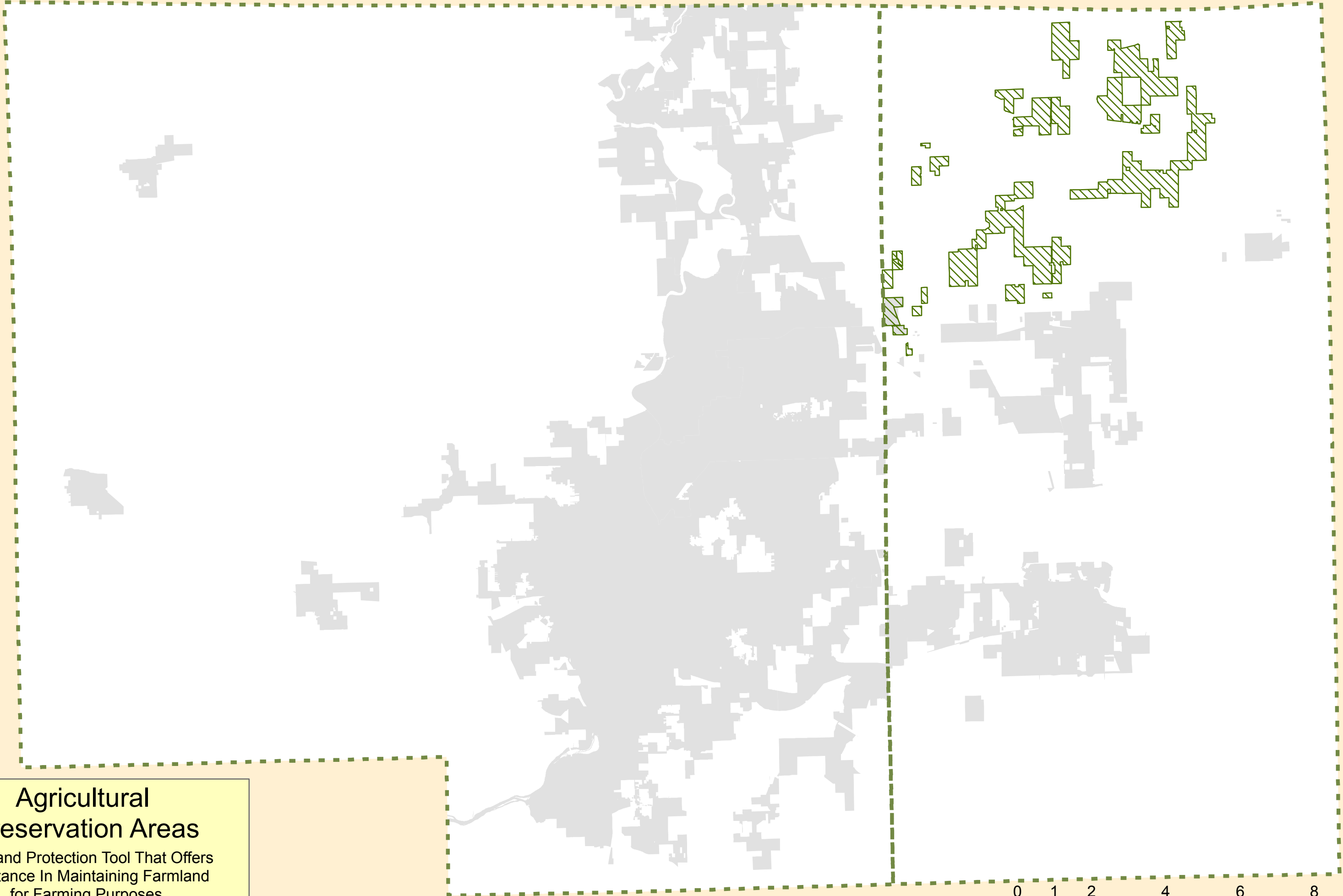


**Regional Trails**  
Existing (Solid Line) and Proposed/  
Logical Connections (Dashed Line)





**Agricultural  
Preservation Areas**  
Farmland Protection Tool That Offers  
Assistance In Maintaining Farmland  
for Farming Purposes



0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles

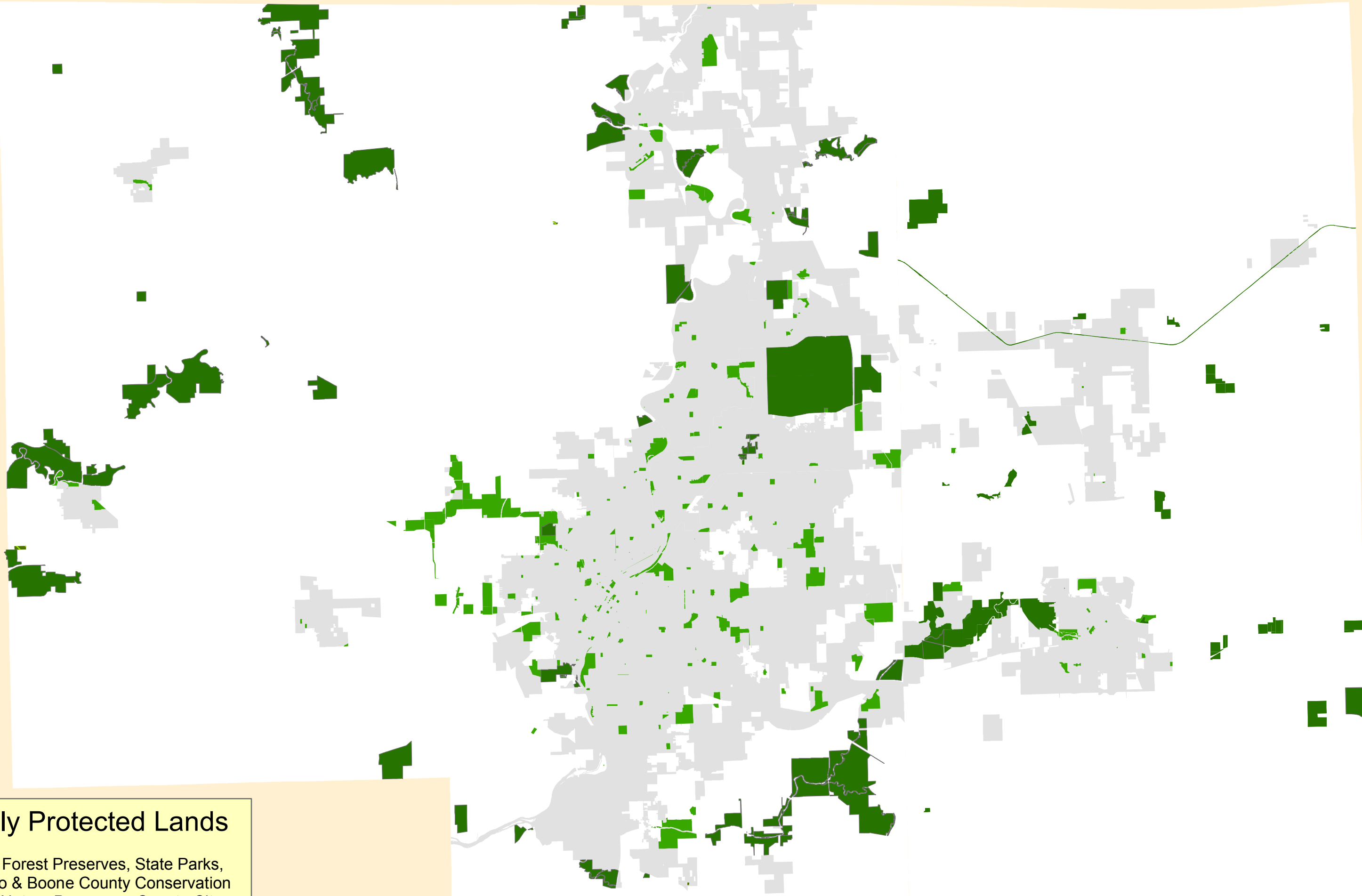


# Privately Protected Lands

Including Wildlife & Agricultural Conservation  
Easements, Wetlands Reserve Program,  
Private Golf Courses and Organic Farms







## Publicly Protected Lands

Including Forest Preserves, State Parks,  
Winnebago & Boone County Conservation  
Districts, Nature Preserves, County-City-  
Town-Village Parks, and Other Open Space

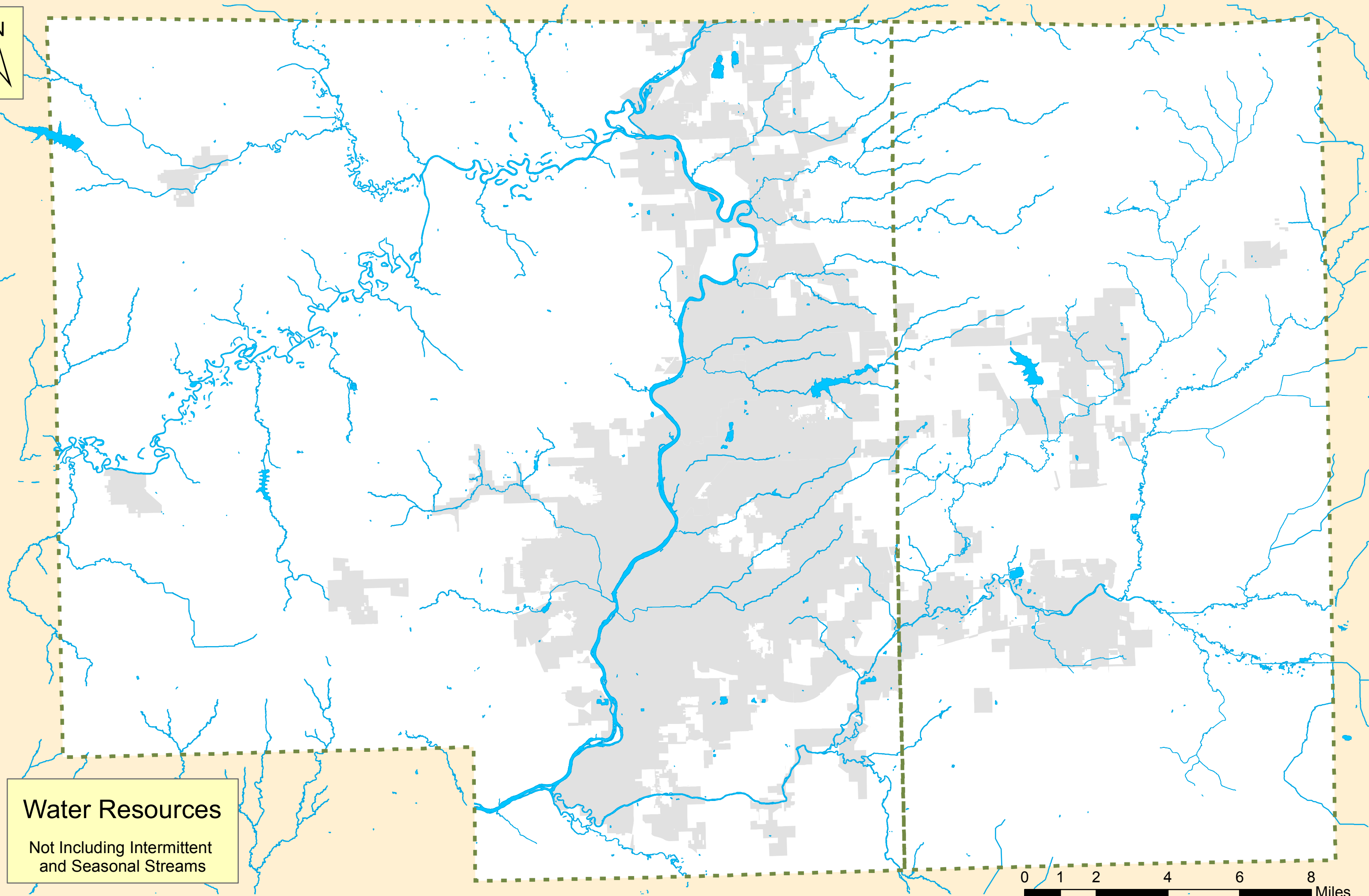
0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles

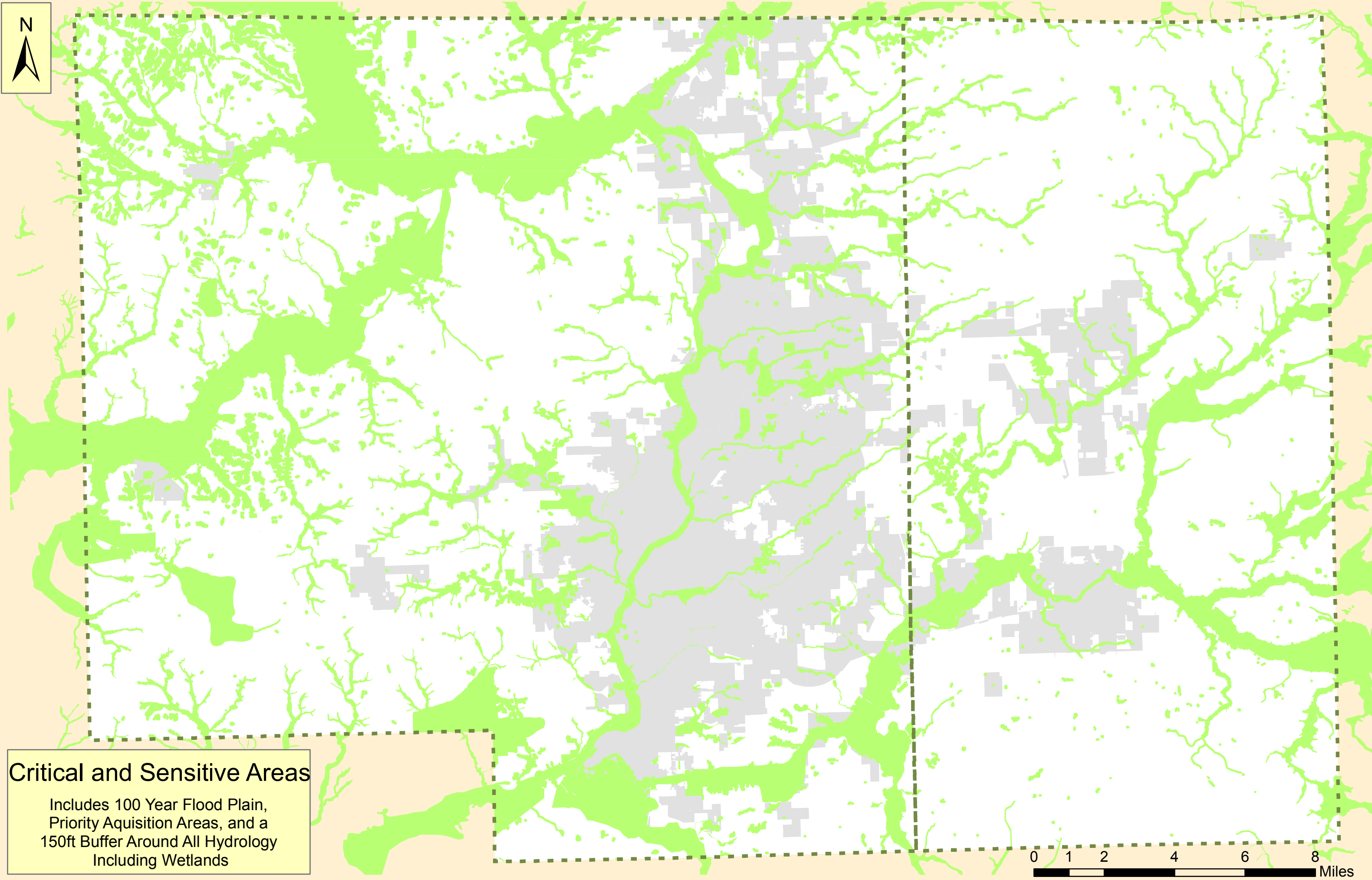


## Water Resources

Not Including Intermittent  
and Seasonal Streams

0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles

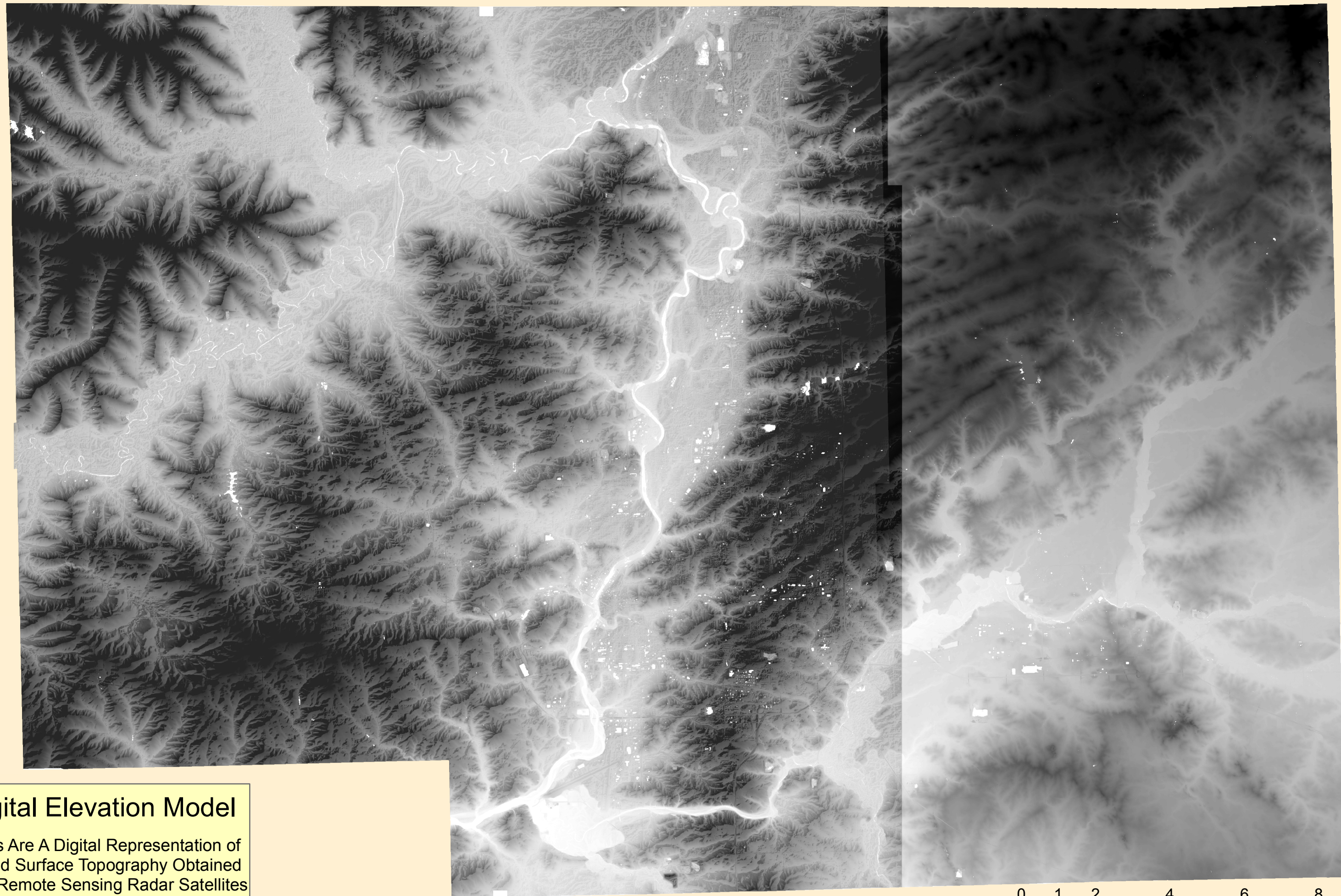




**Critical and Sensitive Areas**  
Includes 100 Year Flood Plain,  
Priority Aquisition Areas, and a  
150ft Buffer Around All Hydrology  
Including Wetlands

0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles



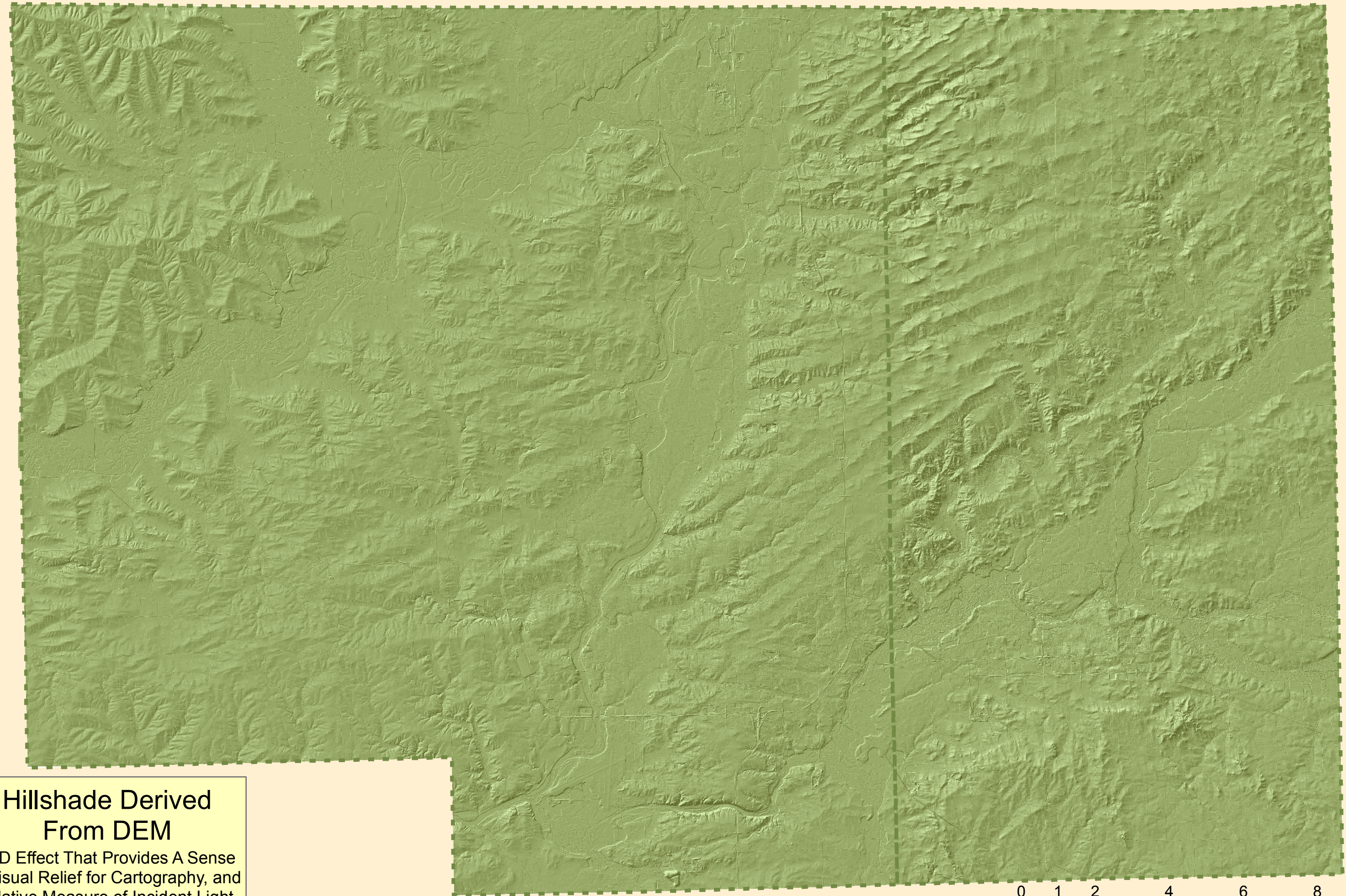


## Digital Elevation Model

DEM's Are A Digital Representation of  
Ground Surface Topography Obtained  
From Remote Sensing Radar Satellites

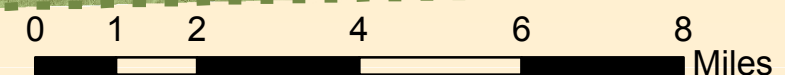
0 1 2 4 6 8  
Miles





## Hillshade Derived From DEM

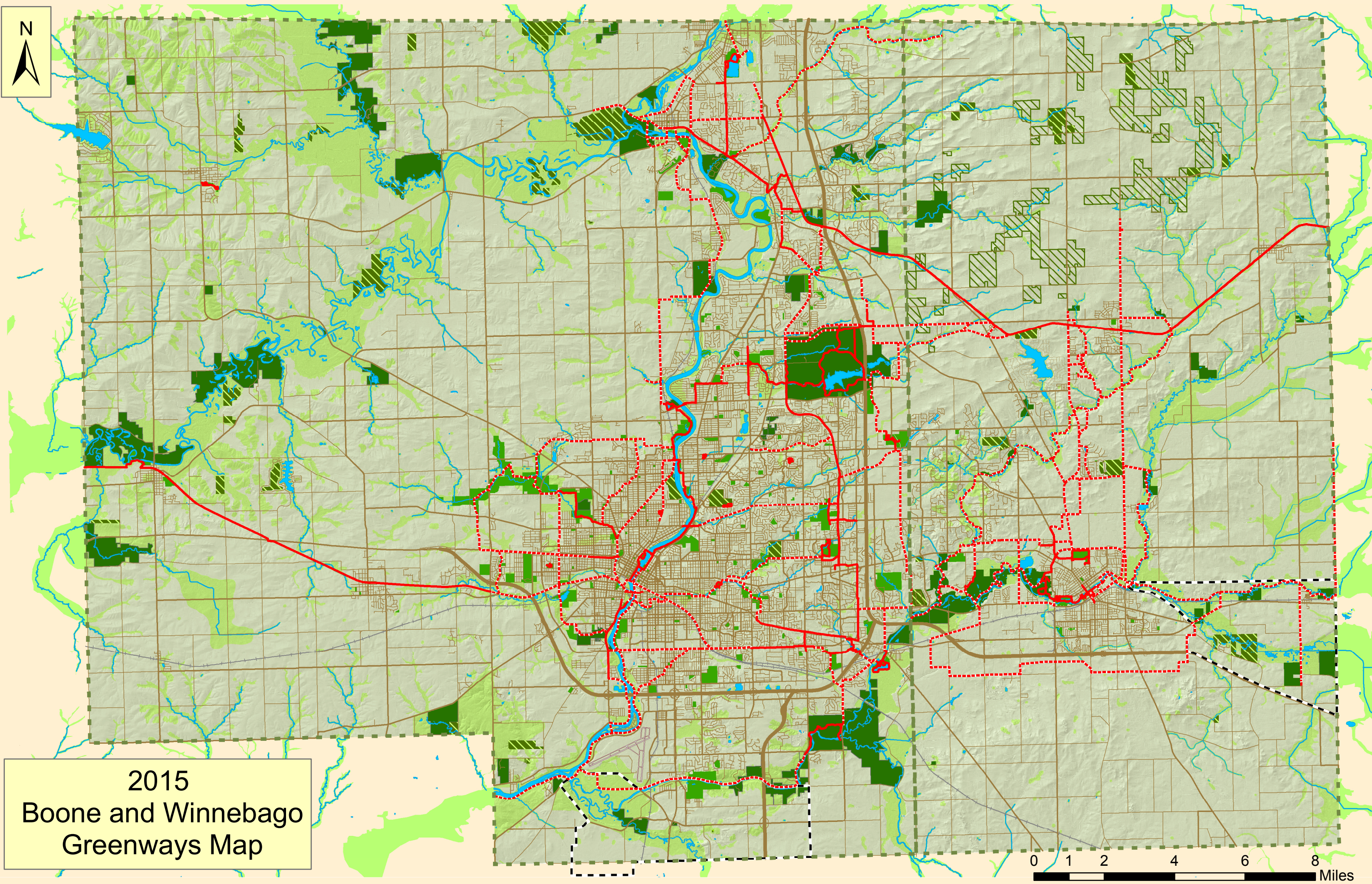
A 3D Effect That Provides A Sense  
of Visual Relief for Cartography, and  
Relative Measure of Incident Light







2015  
Boone and Winnebago  
Greenways Map





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### DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

**Winnebago County Natural Resource Inventory** – As part of the Winnebago County 2030 Land Resource Management Plan, a natural resource inventory was developed. It was published and released in September 2008. The main project objective was to inventory, categorize and list the types of natural resources whose locations and characteristics should be identified and mapped in a GIS format due to type of environmental significance. Winnebago County GIS researched information about private and public natural resources that may not have been previously recorded by local, state, federal, or private agencies, but which are still considered assets to the residents of Winnebago County. This inventory has already been used to help protect and manage these precious assets. The foundation for this work effort is the State of Illinois Natural Area Inventory. This 30-year old inventory identified high-quality remnant natural communities and grades them according to their ecological integrity. As part of County's 2030 Land Resource Management Plan, the Winnebago County Geographic Information System (WinGIS) contracted with a consulting team to (1) create an inventory of scarce natural resources, (2) assess the ecologic significance of the natural resources, (3) recommend a management strategy to maintain, restore and protect the natural resources and (4) provide the inventory and strategy data in an approved GIS format. RATS/RMAP assisted WinGIS in developing the project overview and purpose of this activity. Also of important note is that this Natural Resource Inventory was beneficial in the development of the 2011 Greenways Map update project.

**Illinois Wildlife Action Plan** – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) has completed a detailed, science-based approach to develop a comprehensive plan to manage public and private lands to conserve the State's wildlife. The planning approach included an inventory of species, but also developed a plan to address the particular needs of wildlife that are declining so that these species can be stabilized and then increased. To address the eight congressionally required elements, IDNR's method involved more than 150 federal, state, and local agencies, partnerships, institutions, and nongovernmental organizations. Through a wide-variety of other public events and announcements, an estimated 600 people were consulted throughout the state.

The fifteen natural land divisions of Illinois, defined by biological and geological characteristics, were used to geographically divide the state into sections to evaluate wildlife and habitat conservation needs. To assess each of these land divisions, thirteen major and minor categories were used in the environmental – ecosystem review. Three of these fifteen land divisions are included in the RMAP Metropolitan Planning Area, the Rock River Hill Country, Northeastern Morainal Natural Divisions, and the Grand Prairie.

Included in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) is a *Green Cities Campaign* section. As a result of increasing population growth in several of the 102 counties in Illinois, this plan discussed several actions steps for developing areas to foster an understanding of and appreciation for wildlife, habitat, natural communities, ecological processes and disturbance regimes. Knowledge of these issues and related subjects are important for urban residents to support scientifically driven conservation priorities. The steps that were outlined are:

1. Minimize the adverse effects associated with development on wildlife and habitats.

2. Integrate wildlife and habitat conservation in developing areas, as possible or appropriate.
3. Increase water quality education efforts in areas under high development pressure and/or within fragile geographic zones (i.e. karst terrain).
4. Make natural areas conservation, ecology and environmental education a mandatory part of school curricula.
5. Fill information gaps and develop conservation actions to address stresses.
6. Increase access to open lands and waters within and near urban areas for wildlife-related recreation.

**Illinois Department of Natural Resources Ecosystems Program: Ecosystems Partnerships** – The purpose of this state-wide effort “is to integrate the interests and participation of local communities and private, public and corporate landowners to enhance and protect watersheds through ecosystem-based management.” In the RMAP Metropolitan Planning Area are four of these ecosystem partnerships:

- Upper Rock River
- Kishwaukee River
- Sugar – Pecatonica Rivers
- Kishwaukee River Ecosystem Partnership, KREP

The strategy of these partnerships is to ensure that habitat and other environmentally-sensitive areas are maintained and managed to enhance biological diversity and to establish human, economic and recreational conditions that will be compatible with local and regional interests. Because more than 90% of the state’s land area is privately owned, a new approach was initiated to have a cooperative effort to protect, enhance and restore natural resources through private management and public support and encouragement.

**IDNR Grand Illinois Trail Concept-** As it loops more than 500 miles between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River, the Grand Illinois Trail joins together existing and proposed state and local trails to create the state’s longest continuous trail. Several core segments traverse the Rockford region, connected by stretches of on-street routes. The Illinois Trail concept seeks to continue to connect and develop these trails.

**Winnebago County Watershed Improvement Plan Steering Committee (WCWIPSC)** – is a consortium of municipalities in the Buckbee Creek and Madigan Creek watershed, resource agency professionals, environmental advocates, and local residents that established itself in April 2010 to guide the development of strategies to protect and restore Buckbee Creek and Madigan Creek and its tributaries. The origin of the WCWIPSC occurred following a meeting on April 27, 2010, of interested parties invited to discuss storm water issues regarding the Buckbee Creek and Madigan Creek watershed. Approximately two dozen people attended the meeting including the Winnebago County Board Chairman and Board members, the County Engineer and Highway Department staff members, and representatives of the Cherry Valley Township, City of Rockford, Rockford Township, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Kishwaukee River Ecosystem Partnership (KREP), and the Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP). After a discussion of water quality and stormwater problems and the need to coordinate the studies and planning required to implement solutions to the problems, the County Board Chairman agreed that the Winnebago County Highway Department would be the lead agency responsible for taking steps to formally organize the WCWIPSC and applied for the CWA Section 319 grant for the preparation of a watershed-based plan on behalf of the WCWIPSC.

The project was initiated and funded by the Winnebago County Highway Department with a grant from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Section 319 grant program in the spring of 2011.

Participating stakeholders contributed staff time to provide information and participate in the watershed planning progress. They include the Village of Cherry Valley, Kishwaukee Ecosystem Partnership (KREP), City of Rockford, Rockford Park District, Winnebago County, Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation District, and watershed residents.

This watershed-based plan was produced via a comprehensive watershed planning approach that involved input from local residents, municipal officials, municipal employees, and representatives from natural resource agencies. Information obtained from watershed stakeholders and numerous natural resource agencies was then used to assess the overall condition of the watershed including water quality, natural resources, and flood risks. Using this information, a series of recommended management practices aimed at improving the water quality and natural resources conditions of the watershed was developed. Potential funding sources and strategies for the implementation and monitoring of the identified recommended projects were also included in the watershed-based plan.

**Rockford Region Vital Signs Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD)** – In early 2011, the Rockford Region began work to develop the first regional plan for sustainable development. This initiative, called "Rockford Region Vital Signs", is based on taking the social, economic, and environmental “pulse” of the Rockford Region. Once community leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the region’s sustainability and well-being, it is our belief they can be more strategic in determining what needs to be done to improve the community.

Three reports in early 2013 aimed to empower community leaders from diverse backgrounds to have a clear picture of the region’s interworking parts. The regions leaders began a conversation on how to improve the region’s sustainability by working together towards a common goal.

This initiative was funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), and U.S. Department of Transportation (US DOT) Partnership for Sustainable Communities. This award to the Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP) was the result of a local consortium of 30 agencies in Boone and Winnebago Counties agreeing to support and align their strategic plans and long-range visions into a set of common goals and action steps. The local consortium is anchored by RMAP, our regional metropolitan planning organization.

The Rockford Region is fortunate to have many local environmental initiatives including the US Conference of Mayors Cool Cities program, the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) program, the Greater RMAP Environmental Education Network (GREEN), the Winnebago County Green Business Network, the Boone County Farmland Preservation Commission, the Four Rivers Environmental Coalition (FREC), the Kishwaukee River Ecosystem Partnership (KREP), The Boone County Stormwater Management Committee, WINAQUA and the HUD-DOT-EPA Sustainable Communities Partnership. The continuation and integration of these environmental efforts into the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development is a high priority and the allocation of staff resources within the local Consortium is recommended.



**Rock River Trail** – The Rock River Trail, RRT, is a local initiative to establish a shared-use trail of recreational, scenic and historic interest and significance along the 320 mile long Rock River.

In Winnebago County alone there are approximately 36 river miles of the Rock River Trail offering some beautiful views of the Rock River and northern Illinois. The Rock River Trail can also be accessed from Boone County on the Kishwaukee River tributary.

- The Rock River Trail achieved designation into the National Water Trails System in 2013
- Goal to establish a scenic, recreational and historic route within the river corridor including the Rock River Trail Scenic and Historic Route for motorists and the Rock River Trail Bike Route with hiking opportunities
- The RRT promotes ecotourism and recreational opportunities throughout the river corridor that include many options for safe portage of the dams by kayakers and canoers
- The RRT Council advocates to protect, preserve and educate about our native American peoples, settlement cultural heritages and contributions of the river valley's industrialists, agriculturalists, statesmen and visionaries to the American experience
- The RRT's mission is to improve water quality and nurture the enhancement of the river ecosystem by supporting and advocating for natural resource conservation, stewardship and environmental planning and design
- The RRT supports economic development and revitalization of our river communities in an environmentally conscious manner.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND COMMENT**

The first Boone and Winnebago County Greenways Plan and Map update held by the Greenways Planning Committee was on July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014 at the Regional Center for Planning and Design, 315 N. Main Street, Rockford IL, 61103. Additionally, the Greenways Planning Committee (GPC) met together as a group on July 30, 2014 and May 13, 2015. These meetings were all open to the public. Also, a presentation and public information session was presented to the Land Advisory Council

As early as September 2014 RMAP staff brought to the attention the beginning of the update process to the Greenways Map. In November of 2014 RMAP staff member Colin Belle stated "the RMAP staff has been updating the Greenways Plan for some time now. The purpose of the plan is to allow local and regional organizations the opportunity to participate in the discussions in the relationship between the environmental resources and our regions management growth practices and transportation issues, which is the main purpose of the map. The Greenways Plan will continue to be used as a tool to plan open space. Mr. Belle provided a brief summary of the Greenways Plan". Greenways updates and progress reports were given by Mr. Belle when appropriate, and at most Technical Committee meetings in 2015.

An email was distributed to the RMAP Policy Committee, Technical Committee, and the public information list on December 12, 2015 to announce that the 2015 Greenways Plan, "Greenways: A Green Infrastructure Plan for Boone and Winnebago Counties, draft was available for review and public comment. RMAP staff made adequate time for this with a cut-off date of January 7, 2016. However, things worked out that an extension was given for a few more weeks due to meeting conflicts. This also

allowed staff members to make all the needed updates and corrections giving plenty of time before the next Technical Committee meeting in February 2016.

It should also be noted 6 presentations were given to local groups that were interested in learning more about RMAP's role in environmental planning and land protection in the region.

- 12/10/2015 - RMAP Policy Committee announcement of open public comment period
- 12/16/2015 - Forest Preserves of Winnebago County Board Meeting
- 1/6/2016 - Boone County Soil & Water Conservation District Board Meeting
- 1/13/2016 - Northern Groundwater Protection Planning Committee
- 1/27/2016 - Boone County Rotary Meeting
- 2/8/2016 - City of Rockford Planning and Development Committee Meeting

## New greenway plan, map to guide development in Winnebago, Boone counties



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By Adam Poulisse

Staff writer



Posted Dec. 18, 2015 at 7:14 PM

ROCKTON — The first updated Boone and Winnebago County Greenways Plan since 1997 will outline the economic and social merits of the

newest environmental assets in the region, and can guide development around them or include them.

The plan will be coupled with the first updated Greenways map since 2008.

A draft of the 67-page plan is available on the [Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning website](#). Public comment will be accepted until Jan. 7, which could alter the document before it goes to an agency committee vote on Jan. 21. Amendments would be possible.

"It poses no restrictions on any properties at all," metropolitan planner Colin Belle said. "This has no legality behind it. It's just a set of best practices and current conditions of what's there."

The new plan mentions transportation planning and links it to environmental implications.

"The 1997 document was less of a guide than it was a ... current-conditions analysis," Belle said. "That document tells you what is here in the region and what we hope to expect for growth, whereas this actually offers some strategies for smart growth."

The new two-sided map, which aims "to be more aesthetically pleasing and easy to read," shows new trails, properties acquired, and critical and sensitive areas (floodplains and endangered species) that wouldn't be ideal locations for development. It also is available on the [agency's website](#).

"It's just updating what's out there already, but the main thing is that all the properties that have been acquired are shown on the map," he said.

The map also shows agricultural conservation districts, which are unique to Boone County. They assess agricultural land and require that it be used for farming for a certain number of years.

[Forest Preserves of Winnebago County](#) trustees adopted the new map Wednesday.

"A lot of new areas were identified that weren't identified before," Executive Director Mike Holan said. "Part of that change comes when you have development. As things get developed you start finding areas that are a little bit more critical as you get housing projects and they expand."

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# 2015 GREENWAYS PLANNING COMMITTEE ORGANIZATIONS

