



GREENWAYS & BLUEWAYS
NORTHWEST INDIANA REGIONAL PLAN

PRESENTED FOR ADOPTION BY NIRPC EXECUTIVE COMMISSION:
DECEMBER 13, 2007
NORTHWESTERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION & OPENLANDS PROJECT
THROUGH FUNDING ASSISTANCE FROM THE GAYLORD & DOROTHY DONNELLY FOUNDATION

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“LIFE IS WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU WHILE YOU’RE BUSY MAKING OTHER PLANS.”

- John Lennon

Quoting a Beatle is not your typical start to a planning document. Then again, what you are about to read is not intended to be your typical plan.

“Greenways are the paths where the natural and human landscapes coincide.” This quote by former Supreme Court Justice John Clarke brings to bear the essence of the Northwest Indiana Regional Greenways & Blueways Plan. The purpose of this plan is to provide a roadmap: a blueprint: a “call-to-action” for all stakeholders, private and public. The goal is to inspire preservation of valuable environmental remnants – to soften the inevitable collisions between the natural and human landscapes. The overriding vision of this document will become fully expressed through the implementation of its findings on local ordinances, the mobilization of private landowners, and ongoing conservation efforts of the region’s numerous environmental advocacy groups and individuals. Above all, this plan seeks to provide simple and clear actions to the stakeholders. Instead of page after page of technicalities and policy briefs, the focus will deal with a cursory review of the issues and what can be done immediately. Far from “gathering dust,” the authors hope you will take a vested interest in the plan’s recommendations and clear strategies to secure a region that our future generations can enjoy and submerge themselves into.



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THE NORTHWEST INDIANA REGIONAL GREENWAYS AND BLUEWAYS PLAN WAS DEVELOPED JOINTLY BY THE NORTHWESTERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (NIRPC) AND THE OPENLANDS PROJECT. FUNDING FOR THE PLAN WAS PROVIDED THROUGH A GENEROUS GRANT FROM THE GAYLORD AND DOROTHY DONNELLEY FOUNDATION IN THE SUMMER OF 2005. THE FOUNDATION WAS CREATED IN 1952 TO FURTHER THE WIDE-RANGING PHILANTHROPIC AND CIVIC INTERESTS OF GAYLORD AND DOROTHY DONNELLEY. IT IS A PRIVATE FOUNDATION THAT SUPPORTS A WIDE RANGE OF CAUSES INCLUDING CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE PROTECTION, SOCIAL WELFARE, EDUCATION, ART AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS, HEALTH CARE, AND ANIMAL WELFARE.

THIS EFFORT REPRESENTS A CULMINATION OF RESEARCH, REVIEW, AND ANALYSIS OF LOCAL, REGIONAL, STATE, FEDERAL, AND

PRIVATE ENDEAVORS THAT AIM TO PRESERVE AND RESTORE LINEAR OPEN SPACE CORRIDORS IN THE NORTHWEST INDIANA LANDSCAPE. THE REASONS TO DO SO VARY. IT MAY BE FOR CONSERVATION PURPOSES, ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION, HABITAT PROTECTION, PERSONAL OR COMMUNITY HEALTH, AND RECREATION, OR EVEN TO ASSURE CLEAN WATER, PROTECT PROPERTY FROM FLOODING, AND PRESERVE COMMUNITY AESTHETICS. IT'S BASED ON A REALIZATION THAT, BY ITSELF, PROPERTY CAN EASILY LOSE THESE VALUES, BUT LINKED WITH MULTIPLE NEIGHBORS, THESE VALUES CAN BE SECURED.

CONTRIBUTORS



WHAT IS A GREENWAY?

- A greenway is a corridor of open space. It can vary greatly in scale, from narrow ribbons of open space that run through urban and suburban development to wide corridors that incorporate diverse natural and cultural features.
- A greenway can be land- or water-based. It can incorporate both public and private property, but always provides greater benefits because of its linear continuity than it would if the continuity was broken.
- Some greenways are primarily recreational corridors, while others function almost exclusively for environmental protection and are not necessarily intended for substantial human passage. Some greenways run along stream corridors, shorelines or wetlands; others follow old railway tracks or other land-based features.
- Greenways differ in their location and function, but overall a greenway network will protect natural and cultural resources, provide private or public recreational opportunities, improve and sustain hydrological functions, and enhance the natural beauty and the quality of life in neighborhoods and communities.

GOALS OF THE PLAN

- Create a vision for greenway preservation and water trail development in NW Indiana.
- Create a conversation among stakeholders on the attributes inherent in greenway development and conservation.
- Provide an interactive resource for local and county jurisdictions to utilize as they develop their visions and plans and negotiate development proposals that affect their remaining open space corridors.
- Facilitate active discussion on potential water trail opportunities.
- Detail the financial incentives available that encourage and support private and public greenway initiatives.
- Highlight the many not-for-profit environmental organizations in the region with expertise in working with private and public landowners to protect and restore greenways.
- The Greenways and Blueways Plan invites you to become an active participant in establishing a greenway and blueway system in Northwest Indiana.



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BUILDING ON THE PAST

In recent years, many open space initiatives have occurred in the region and on a local level. The Greenways and Blueways Plan is guided by those approaches and attempts to reflect them in this document.

- The 2005 Ped & Pedal Plan, which identified over 500 miles of potential off-road trails in the three-county region
- The Marquette Plan, which has an overall vision to open up 75% of the lakefront to public access, as well as establish a number of open space opportunities
- The Gary Greenlink Plan, a 2005 effort, and one of the best examples of local environmental planning, with an exhaustive analysis of sensitive environmental areas and greenway linkages for potential conservation and/or restoration
- The massive environmental remediation of the Grand Calumet River
- The flood control efforts of the Calumet River Development Commission and affected local communities
- The increasing focus of local communities to expand parklands and habitat preserves with notable examples in communities such as Michigan City, Valparaiso, and Cedar Lake

There have also been notable private endeavors to conserve habitat, help raise awareness, and provide insight to protecting the region's valuable ecological resources. These include:

- The commitment by innumerable landowners to preserve their backyard creek, protect a grove of oaks, restore a prairie garden, enhance a wetland, or make space for local wildlife to survive.
- The *Restoration Revolution in Northwest Indiana* by Lee Botts and the NW Indiana Quality of Life Council, which identify recent, ongoing projects to restore the region's natural areas as of 2006.
- *Protecting Nature in Your Community – Indiana Addendum to the Biodiversity Recovery Plan* by Chicago Wilderness, the Indiana-Illinois-Wisconsin region's first comprehensive conservation and restoration plan.
- The significant role and success of local not-for-profit land trusts and park foundations in preserving several thousand acres of critical habitat through donations, purchase, or dedication of conservation easements.
- The increasing number of developers that integrate open space features and greenway corridors into their projects as community and neighborhood amenities.

COME TOGETHER

This document was prepared after first meeting with public and private stakeholders so that their thoughts and ideas could be heard before a plan or implementation strategy materialized.

NIRPC is led by a 51-member board of Commissioners, where all municipalities and counties are represented by elected officials. Each of these local governmental agencies was interviewed at length regarding his or her perspectives on greenways and water trails. Past efforts and current or future initiatives as reflected in local comprehensive plans or project initiatives were discussed. Numerous interviews were held with municipal and county department heads and support staff, park superintendents, or directors. When possible, meetings were held with elected officials, especially from smaller towns, who may not have had staff.

After this initial round of interviews, stakeholders that are actively involved with environmental issues, were interviewed, including Save the Dunes Council, Shirley Heinz Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and the Wildlife Habitat Council. Discussions were also held with individuals with long standing environmental connections in the Calumet region.

The first product to be released for review from these interviews was a Greenways and Blueways Opportunities Map. This document highlighted those lands that were already protected or that had physical constraints, or prime greenway values. Hydric soils, wetlands, floodplains, woodlands and savannas, utility corridors, railroad corridors, bike and pedestrian trails, and interstate highway corridors were shown. In addition, large private landholdings, such as golf courses, boy scout and girl scout camps, arboretums, and land trust properties were also shown. The map was shown initially to the stakeholders, then to the public in a series of “Open Houses” that took place in all three counties in the NIRPC region during 2006.

Canoe trips were taken on area creeks and rivers to assess their potential as water trail corridors, or “blueways”. These are detailed in Chapter 4.

After the first year of interviews and public open houses, a draft Greenways and Blueways Plan was released for a final round of public review in November of 2007





THE GREENWAYSEIGHT



HOW DOES A PLAN MOVE FROM PAPER TO PROGRESS? THE KEY TO THE SUCCESS OF THIS PLAN IS HOW WELL IT TRANSLATES TO LANDOWNERS THROUGHOUT THE REGION, WHETHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE.

WHILE PUBLIC AGENCIES HAVE PRESERVED MANY HIGH-QUALITY HABITAT REMNANTS ON ISOLATED PARCELS THROUGHOUT NORTHWEST INDIANA, BECAUSE OF FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS, THEY HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO FOCUS ON THE MANY REMAINING GREENWAY CORRIDORS SPREAD THROUGHOUT

THE REGION. YET THESE ARE THE GREENWAY CORRIDORS THAT PROVIDE THE BIRDS AND BUTTERFLIES, TURTLES AND FROGS, FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THEIR BACKYARDS AND NEIGHBORHOODS. THESE ARE THE CORRIDORS THAT DO MOST OF THE STORMWATER INFILTRATION, GROUNDWATER RECHARGE, SURFACE WATER CLEANUP. AND THESE ARE THE CORRIDORS THAT ADD COMMUNITY AESTHETICS, AUTUMN TREE COLORS, QUIET SPACES, AND PLACES TO WALK, OBSERVE, PLAY, AND EXPLORE.

THUS, IT WILL TAKE A SUBSTANTIALLY BROADER EFFORT TO ACHIEVE A CONNECTED GREENWAY SYSTEM THAN CAN BE PROVIDED BY PUBLIC AGENCIES. EIGHT MAJOR STAKEHOLDER GROUPS WERE IDENTIFIED AS KEY TO ACHIEVING AN EFFECTIVE BROAD-BASED GREENWAY SYSTEM. ONLY TWO OF THE EIGHT ARE BASED ON PUBLIC AGENCIES; ONE OF THE EIGHT DEPENDS ON UNIVERSITIES AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AND FIVE OF THE EIGHT ARE PRIVATE IN NATURE. COLLECTIVELY, THEY ARE THE "GREENWAYS EIGHT."



LOCAL & COUNTY GOVERNMENTS

These stakeholders are the local gatekeepers – they decide on how a community will develop or re-develop. Local and county governments pass the local ordinances and long-range plans that determine the types of development that will occur within each community. These development regulations and guidelines are formed during Common Council, Plan Commission, Redevelopment Commission, Parks Board, Board of Public Works, and Board of Zoning Appeals meetings – amongst other specialized decision-making bodies. The meetings are important outlets for public discussion on sensitive development patterns that can preserve the unique landscape features of a community. Municipal and county officials have substantial power to steer new growth toward the goal of achieving a successful mix of development and conservation. A development that incorporates conservation design also provides substantial financial benefits to local government in terms of protecting infrastructure investment and minimizing its associated maintenance costs.

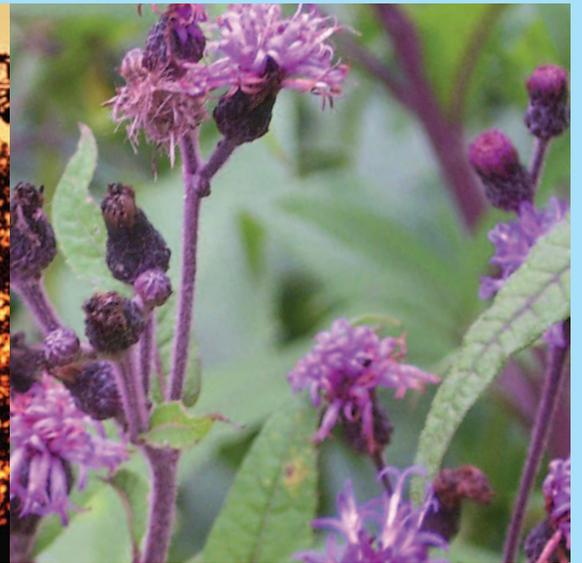
With regard to blueways, parks and public works departments play vital roles in implementing water trail segments, providing training and education on paddling, maintaining accurate signage at access sites and portages, and clearing out water trail routes of fallen trees and debris.



PRIVATE PROPERTY OWNERS

Participation in an interconnected greenway system does not mean opening up private land for public use. A functioning greenway system involving private property provides many public benefits – cleaner water, plant and animal biodiversity, less floodwater volume, community aesthetics, and groundwater recharge, to name just a few. In a viable, sustainable greenway system, the vast majority of creek banks, stormwater swales, oak groves, wetlands, farmlands, and floodplain forests will be privately owned. Many new subdivisions in the region dedicate greenway features to private homes associations. There is an increasing number of sources for information on managing these privately owned greenway segments to enhance their habitat or hydrological value. Several sources for management information are noted in the appendix, or generally available on the web. Many property owners also work closely with the not-for-profit land trusts, soil and water conservation districts, and county extension offices to conserve and manage their properties. Grants and tax benefits are available to many property owners who make long-term commitments.





In addition to local resident landholders are large private corporate landholdings throughout the region. Many of these corporations hold vast amounts of property, much of it still undisturbed and ecologically valuable. Even corporate-owned “Brownfields” can be remediated back to greenways, in whole, or as part of a large redevelopment plan. Corporate stewardship has been, and will continue to be, highly important in maintaining privately owned corporate open space for conservation purposes. Many large corporations have already partnered with both public entities and private environmental groups on strategies to conserve and enhance significant amounts of their properties for greenway purposes. Through the efforts of organizations, such as the NW Indiana Forum and the Wildlife Habitat Council, new partnerships continue to be fostered toward a stronger ecological balance between conservation and industry.



LAND TRUST/ADVOCACY GROUPS

Their names are well-known and a source of pride for our region: Save the Dunes Council, Shirley Heinze Land Trust, Coffee Creek Watershed Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Habitat Council, Wolf Lake Initiative, Talltree Arboretum, Izzak Walton League, Woodland Savanna Land Conservancy, LaPorte County Conservation Trust. In addition, the region is home to many successful local park foundations that acquire land or accept donations to help expand local community park systems. Collectively, these organizations represent the heart of the not for profit land preservation movement in NW Indiana. Through their efforts, the Northwest Indiana region is recognized as one of the most ecologically diverse areas in the world. These groups have been responsible for protecting several thousand acres of property for conservation purposes. They are especially focused on working with private property owners, and they are increasingly outreaching to local governments to identify sensitive landholdings and sound management strategies.





Developers are primary movers for creating land use change, and, from a greenway perspective, that can be good. It is during the transition of land use from, in many cases, agriculture to suburban neighborhoods, that the opportunity to create and preserve greenways can occur. Developers also take on the substantial risk of redeveloping brownfields, and it is also at that time that greenways can be introduced into the community fabric where they hadn't existed beforehand. Developers define the landscape for the next 100 years or more, and thus have a critical role in providing open space for future neighborhoods and communities. An increasing number is using greenway corridors because they can be the most efficient open space design strategy available to border the most homesites. This proximity to open space is popular in the marketplace, will be utilized by the most people for healthy activity, and provides multiple benefits in terms of stormwater management. An increasing number of developers in Northwest Indiana is utilizing these conservation design principles.



A substantial framework of greenways, mostly privately owned, already exists throughout the region. Represented by the landholdings of utility and transportation agencies. Northwest Indiana is criss-crossed by active and abandoned rail lines, interstate highways, bike trails, NIPSCO corridors, and pipelines. These corridors represent hundreds of miles of functioning greenways. NIPSCO has been particularly effective in working with local governments, environmental groups, and farmers to manage their linear landholdings for greenway and open space purposes. The expanding bike trail system of Northwest Indiana brings multiple greenway benefits to many neighborhoods and communities. Railroads have retained prairie remnants in their corridors and are migration corridors for animals. Drainage boards do not allow development within the width of the easements of their legal drains. Interstate highways offer the potential for major landscaping initiatives to enhance the character of the region for the many interstate travelers who pass through.

Linear corridor owners usually have a primary purpose in owning their corridor, but because the corridor is usually wider than the road or bike trail or utility line that utilizes it, multiple greenway benefits are already in place.



LINEAR CORRIDOR OWNERS





FEDERAL, STATE, & REGIONAL ENTITIES

Federal, state, and regional agencies play a significant role in NW Indiana either through land holdings, statutory authority, review and enforcement procedures, and dialogue between public and private interests. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region V, and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) play crucial roles towards, remediation of contaminated brownfields and rivers, and the protection of our most ecologically sensitive properties. In addition, the National Park Service and Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) provide another layer of environmental protection. The DNR also

provides several conservation and open space granting programs to aid local jurisdictions in purchasing additional lands. On the regional level, NIRPC staff devotes a significant amount of staff resources on stormwater management programs, including the MS4 program. NIRPC hosts the Environmental Management Planning Committee (EMPC), which serves as a forum between government entities, land trusts, and environmental advocates to identify strategies that will aid in the creation of new environmental protection policies and to assess how well existing ones are working.



INSTITUTIONS OF EDUCATION



Throughout all of NW Indiana, there have been conservation initiatives that have been either spearheaded or assisted through our region's colleges, universities, secondary, and elementary schools. Programs and projects have been initiated to help students take an active part in helping to create a culture of environmental awareness at all ages of educational development. These institutions have partnered with other stakeholders, such as advocacy groups, and numerous occasions to advance a solid ecological ethic for the students, communities, corporations and private property owners they work with. Additional opportunities abound through research possibilities regarding the definition of local habitats with the assistance of funding tailored for these purposes. Bringing these educational stakeholders into the mix is imperative to establish the importance of conservation and a deeper appreciation of nature, in general.