

INITIATIVE 2:

Greenways

INITIATIVE 2 | GREENWAYS

BUILD A FULLY-CONNECTED SYSTEM OF NATURAL RESOURCE AREAS BY SELECTIVELY EXPANDING THE EXISTING NETWORK OF PARKS, CONSERVATION AREAS, OPEN SPACE, AND TRAILS.

The Tomorrow Plan envisions a region with a functional network of green space — green space that provides habitat, protects waterways, supports regional stormwater infrastructure, expands recreational opportunities, and contributes to the region's identity. Together, these green spaces establish a logical system of multi-functional greenways — a concept already in use around the country. Greenways are synonymous with natural resource corridors or green infrastructure.

Water Works Park in Des Moines is an example of a greenway. This 1,500-acre park near the confluence of the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers is at the bottom of a 3,600 square mile watershed. The Raccoon River and a three-mile-long infiltration gallery, which serves as a major source of drinking water for Greater Des Moines, bisect the park. However, Des Moines Water Works manages the park for more than just municipal water. The park is connected to hundreds of miles of trails, through which residents, workers, and visitors can experience nature, stop for coffee at a neighborhood shop, or commute to the office. As a result of the recent Parkitecture design competition, community leaders and experts are planning to include expanded civic and event spaces, a paddleboard course on a created water circuit, kayaking on the Raccoon River, horseback riding, expanded hiking trails, adventure play, nature education, and remote camping at Water Works Park. At the same time, over 1,200 acres of the 1,500-acre park will remain wild, quiet, and serene, with large core habitats and connections for wildlife. Additionally, the land links to large habitats upstream, ensuring enough space for animals that need refuge to thrive in the heart of the region. In these ways, Water Works Park serves many purposes: generating drinking water, meeting recreation needs, protecting wildlife habitat, and supporting rare regional wildlife.

Defining the Greenways Network

Potential greenways incorporate areas shown in the following map that already contribute to the regional goals of enhancing

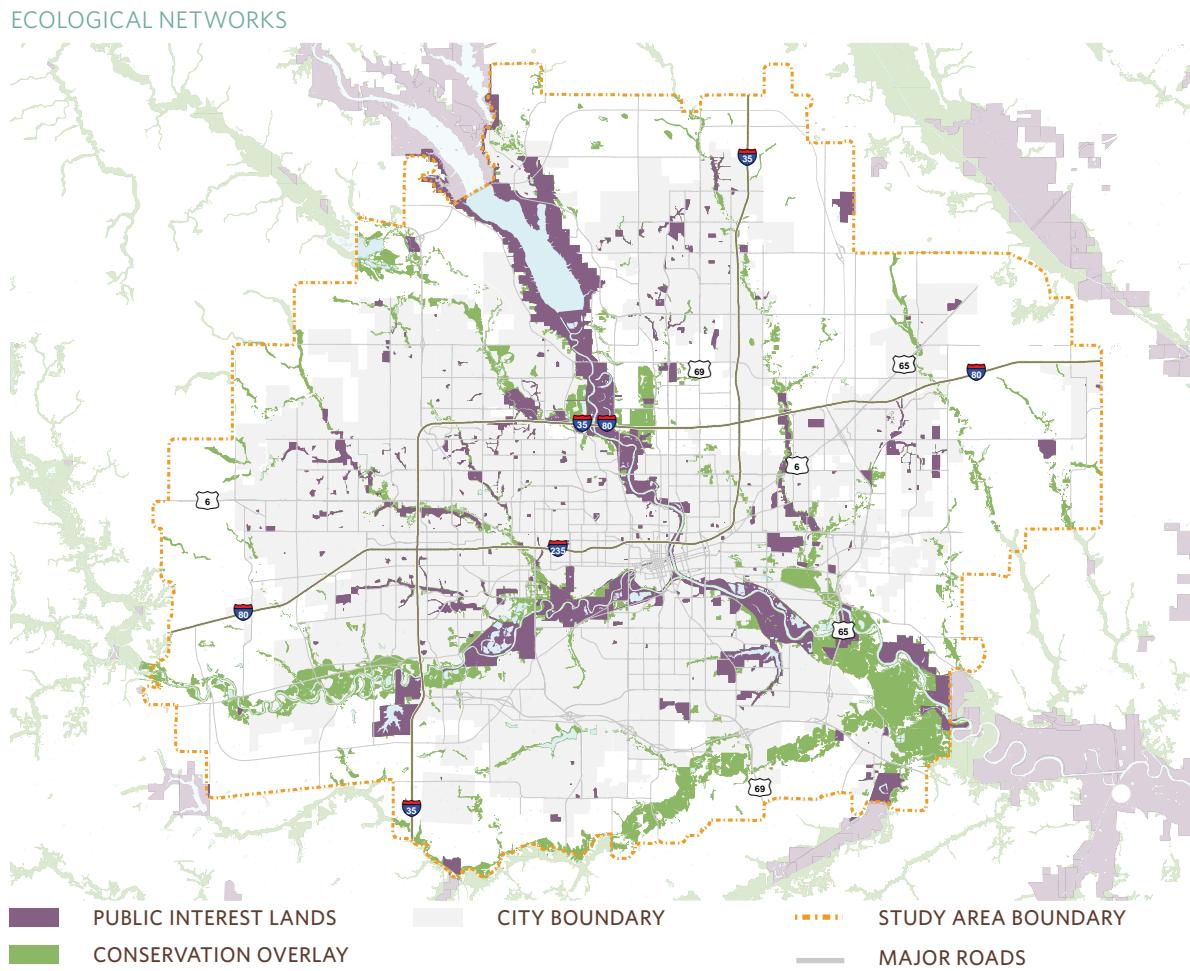
environmental health, preserving and expanding green infrastructure, and increasing access to the outdoors. The map shows a vision of what could be — a combination of protected lands, existing vegetation, wetlands and floodplains, steep slopes — with potential connections among them. Each community must decide for itself how to best treat these areas within local context. This vision is intended as a guide based on existing conditions.

Implementation

Many places in the region that support healthy land and water are located within greenways. For the most part, greenways follow the region's rivers, streams, wetlands, and steeply sloping lands. If communities maintain greenways going forward, these systems will benefit residents by managing stormwater runoff, stabilizing streams, controlling erosion, improving water quality, supporting a variety of wildlife, and becoming desirable areas to live near.

The proposed greenway system for Greater Des Moines was informed by information on natural resources collected by several scientists. The greenways combine existing habitats that are small in size, places with rare features, existing streams, wetlands and floodplains, and existing protected areas and conservation land. Despite the wealth of data that was used to create this proposed system, Greater Des Moines' lack of a comprehensive inventory of natural areas — a catalog of the best locations for the region's biological diversity — seriously impedes the setting of regional priorities.

In Greater Des Moines, about 55,000 acres of the primary greenways shown on the map already exist. Half of this land is publicly owned, conserved via easements, or regulated as floodplains and wetlands. Implementing a regional system of greenways across the study area will require a coordinated effort among stakeholders and communities over many years. A multi-step approach that identifies, prioritizes, acquires, and manages natural resource lands and water will enable the region to realize this system of greenways. The work on greenways dovetails with



efforts to promote natural stormwater utilities and more parkland and trails. Following is a list of actions that will help Greater Des Moines build a successful network of greenways.

1. DEVELOP COLLABORATIONS AND CHAMPIONS. Champions are organizations and individuals that rally support for the region's natural resources. The MPO already works with communities and stakeholders to maximize the benefit of regional efforts. The organization should continue to build these relationships. Essential partners to involve include counties and cities, private landowners, county conservation boards, conservation non-profits and colleges, and state and federal agencies. The right tools and attitudes can enable people to jointly envision and plan the future, find and share financial and technical resources, and devise incentives.

WMAs and a regional parks collaborative are collaborators and champions that would be immediately beneficial. WMAs can be formed across central Iowa at the Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 10 or 12 scale. A few WMAs already exist around the region, including in the Fourmile Creek, the Lower Raccoon River, and the Middle-South Raccoon River.

Additionally, the ongoing collaboration of park directors and conservationists started as part of The Tomorrow Plan should be supported in the future. This will improve the environmental health of the region and help in planning future regional parks and greenways.

2. COMPLETE A NATURAL AREAS INVENTORY (NAI) TO IDENTIFY AND PRIORITIZE NATURAL AREAS IN THE GREENWAYS. Existing natural resources, their conditions, and their protection status are foundational in shaping the region's greenways system. A NAI could significantly advance greenway creation by providing data for setting protection priorities. The Tomorrow Team compiled and interpreted much data as part of The Tomorrow Plan, but greenway priorities could be refined further through detailed, site-specific data. Helpful data would identify the region's natural areas, their ecological integrity, their ecological threats, their wildlife populations, and their restoration potential. Overlaying this information with parks and public interest lands — floodplains, wetlands, and conservation easements, for example — would identify gaps in the greenways system as well as opportunities to restore natural landscapes.

A HUC OF A LOT OF WATER

According to the US Geological Survey (USGS),²¹ “The United States is divided and sub-divided into successively smaller hydrologic units which are classified into four levels: regions, sub-regions, accounting units, and cataloging units. The hydrologic units are arranged or nested within each other, from the smallest (cataloging units) to the largest (regions). Each hydrologic unit is identified by a unique hydrologic unit code (HUC) consisting of two to eight digits based on the four levels of classification in the hydrologic unit system.”

The first level of classification divides the nation into 21 major geographic areas, or regions. These areas contain either the drainage area of a major river or the combined drainage areas of a series of rivers.

The second level of classification divides the 21 regions into 221 sub-regions, which include areas drained by a river system, a reach of a river and its tributaries in that reach, closed basins, or a group of streams forming a coastal drainage area.

The third level of classification subdivides many subregions into accounting units, of which there are 378.

Finally, the fourth-level unit — the cataloging unit — includes part of a surface drainage basin, a combination of drainage basins, or a distinct hydrologic feature. There are 2,264 cataloging units, or watersheds, in the country.

3. DEVELOP WATER WORKS PARK AND CONNECT EXISTING RESOURCES, INCLUDING WATER WORKS PARK, GRAY'S LAKE, PRINCIPAL RIVERWALK, AND UPSTREAM PUBLIC LANDS.

Plans to develop Water Works Park, one of the largest urban parks in the nation, could create a sustainable park model for the region. The park lies west of Gray's Lake on the Raccoon River. Water Works could spur the development of a regional network of connected open space due to its large size, its location at the center of the region, and its role as a regional hub for trails and public open space.

The park will focus public education on water and land use in the Raccoon River watershed, which is among the nation’s most polluted.²² Besides creating a regional identity, the enhanced park will be an economic driver, better protect a drinking water source, restore natural lands, and preserve the wild character of much of the land, all while providing education through recreation and experience. The process of developing and connecting Water Works Park to up- and downstream public lands and programs will begin to create the regional greenways network.

4. PRIORITIZE AREAS FOR A NATURAL STORMWATER UTILITY BY MODELING HOW WATER FLOWS THROUGH WATERSHEDS.

This will identify the locations most important to install best practices and other elements of a natural stormwater utility. Properly used, low-lying areas can relieve pressure on engineered stormwater and floodwater management systems. When properly treated, they also work with greenways to expand recreation, protect wildlife habitat, and stabilize neighborhood property values. Together, these areas form the region’s green infrastructure. In most cases, green infrastructure reduces the construction and maintenance costs for curbs, gutters, storm sewers, and other gray infrastructure. Green infrastructure often results in more on-site stormwater retention; lower stream volatility; reduced downstream flooding; less sediment; and, better water quality in streams, lakes, and ponds. New and developing WMAs can coordinate across jurisdictions in water planning, which municipalities have trouble doing in isolation.

5. LEVERAGE THE TRAILS NETWORK AND THE REGION'S DISCONNECTED PARKS TO FILL IN GAPS IN THE TRAIL SYSTEM.

For several years, the MPO's Bike-Ped Roundtable has coordinated and built a regional trail system that is rapidly becoming a major tourist destination. Many in the area, including municipal parks directors, want to build on that success. These individuals envision using the *Communication Master Plan for Central Iowa Trails* for regional branding and promotion; coordination of connections; and, a collaborative approach to obtaining resources, conducting trail management, and delivering services and programs.



NEW JERSEY TEA GROWS IN OPEN, SEMI-WOODED SETTINGS OF SAVANNAS AND THE EDGES OF PRAIRIES. THE LOSS OF THESE HABITATS HAS REDUCED THE DISTRIBUTION OF THIS PLANT IN IOWA



WOODLAND PHLOX ONCE BLOOMED IN MOST WOODLANDS AND SAVANNAS OF IOWA, BUT ITS RANGE HAS SHRUNK BECAUSE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF DENSE UNDERSTORIES IN IOWA'S WOODS

Despite the success of the Bike-Ped Roundtable, the trail system is incomplete. Finding resources to complete connections falters due to a lack of political will, and federal funding is limited and perhaps dwindling. Connecting regional parks through recreational trails is essential. For example, Jester Park in the northwest portion of the region and Yellow Banks in the southeast lack trail connections with the rest of the network and prevent these existing resources from being harnessed for the system.

6. IDENTIFY FUNDING MECHANISMS TO COMPLETE AND MAINTAIN THE REGIONAL NETWORK OF NATURAL LANDS AND CORRIDORS.

There are several ways to fund land acquisition and easements. The most common are capital funds for parks and open space, park construction requirements for development projects, sales tax funding such as the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) program, and private land donations and fundraising. Zoning codes and ordinances can designate floodplain or conservation districts with a natural resource overlay district, which also helps add to protected park space. Another mechanism for adding green space is market trading in environmental credits. Land owners can generate credits by sequestering carbon, avoiding downstream stormwater pollution, and implementing practices to reduce runoff in municipalities with stormwater utilities. Unfortunately, the economics of credit generation and sale are complicated and usually challenging to implement. The region would have to conduct a rigorous analysis of this opportunity.

Another source of project funding is federal and state programs for stormwater management and natural resource protection and enhancement. These funds target specific projects and require matching funds. For example, the 319 program provides matching funds to complete final designs and carry out stream and lake restoration projects in impaired waters.

Greater Des Moines has historically accepted the water quality it is given by upstream landowners and communities, reacting with expensive infrastructure projects, such as the nitrogen-removing equipment at Des Moines Water Works, to obtain desired water quality. Instead, the region can seek to influence the actions of farmers, federal agencies, and researchers so that cleaner water comes into the region. Initiatives like the Raccoon River Watershed Water Quality Master Plan are serious attempts to improve water resources, but they lack a significant enforcement mechanism because the Clean Water Act does not regulate cropland agriculture. A united effort by Greater Des Moines communities could have greater influence in changing the runoff of agricultural land than any single act by independent organizations. Another approach would be to develop a pollution marketplace system, in which credits for pollution mitigating efforts at one site could be sold to polluters at another location. Other places around the country already use pollution removal credits.²³ Finally, the Greater Des Moines region could simply pay upstream landowners to alter their land use practices in ways that improve water quality. The region should assess these ideas and make a decision as to whether to pursue any. Politically, an initiative by the state legislature

has the greatest chance of succeeding in bringing urban and rural interests together to find a solution to Iowa's damaged waterways. The first step to such an initiative would be to create a blue ribbon commission of state and regional leaders, as was recently done to advance the state park system.

7. BUILD PERPETUAL MAINTENANCE INTO PROJECT COSTS.

Dollars for building a system have proved more accessible than dollars to maintain a system. This is particularly true of trails. Funds were readily available to build Greater Des Moines's vast system, but keeping the system running is up to municipalities, which face shrinking budgets.

The region should establish a consensus on maintenance standards for the regional trail system. Then, Greater Des Moines can define, identify, and earmark funds up-front for the maintenance of parks, trails, natural lands, and corridors. Municipalities and counties can set aside money for a perpetual stewardship fund at the time of capital budgeting. Developments usually set up a stewardship fund to manage the open space, with tenant and landowner dues maintaining the fund levels. The region should perform an analysis of potential funding sources and methods for managing stewardship funds over the long term.

8. DEVELOP CONCEPTS FOR ECOLOGICAL BUFFERS. Ecological buffers that also serve as connections are shown in the greenways map. Research has documented the importance of ecological buffers to improve water quality, increase wildlife populations, and preserve ecosystem functionality. For instance, a 10 to 20 meter wide grass filter strip can remove most of the sediment and phosphorus from parking lot runoff before it reaches a nearby stream.²⁴ Many of the region's rare wildlife



THE REGAL FRITILLARY WAS A COMMON INSECT IN IOWA'S PRAIRIES AND ACROSS THE NATION'S MIDCONTINENT. LAND CLEARING AND POOR MANAGEMENT OF REMNANT PRAIRIES HAVE ELIMINATED OR GREATLY REDUCED IT THROUGHOUT ITS RANGE

species need space — up to 400 meters — from development in order to raise offspring. Buffer concepts and model ordinances already exist in some places. For example, the City of Pleasant Hill recently adopted a stream buffer ordinance. Other communities should integrate such buffers into their zoning codes and ordinances as well.

9. DEVELOP TOOLS TO ESTABLISH GREENWAYS.

The above steps build the framework for the greenways system. Municipalities must then determine how to implement them locally. The following *Tools for Municipalities to Implement Greenways* section describes how a greenway system could be completed, using Brenton Slough as a hypothetical example. One tool is a management plan that each municipality writes. A management plan explains to landowners and developers how their own actions can help complete greenways and provides tools for doing so. A municipality may also use a management plan to coordinate among its departments and with outside groups.

10. DEVELOP A NATURAL RESOURCE OVERLAY DISTRICT.

A natural resource overlay district is a big tool that combines several environmental features in one area for zoning protection. These districts protect specific habitats and associated functions of waterways, riparian corridors, wetlands, and regulated wildlife habitat. The City of Cedar Falls²⁵ combined all floodplains, wetlands, steep slopes, forests, prairies, parks, and public interest lands in its natural resource overlay district.

Municipalities can develop district-specific ordinances. The region could create a model ordinance as a template, which could then be adopted and modified by municipal staff and elected officials. The major parcels of land and the water that makes up the existing greenways in Greater Des Moines covers 55,000 acres. This amounts to 17 percent of the 542-square mile study area and could be included in a natural resource overlay district. Some 27,000 acres are already in some form of protection, via public ownership, easements, or regulations.

11. ASSESS AND PLAN FOR THE NEED OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACE.

The inventory of existing parks in The Tomorrow Plan is an initial baseline of public lands and easements, greatly augmented by data from several municipalities that collaborated by refining their own geographic information systems (GIS) data. The task of adding data for all municipalities, adopting a common GIS park classification language, and adding natural resource data still remains. The City of Des Moines provides a model with its natural resources inventory of parks. The result is a clear picture of the type, extent, and condition of natural resources in parks, a useful tool in identifying gaps in the greenways.



A NATURAL RESOURCE OVERLAY DISTRICT CAN HELP PROTECT SPECIFIC HABITATS AND ASSOCIATED FUNCTIONS OF RIPARIAN CORRIDORS.
Source: Iowa State University

12. ENSURE ADEQUATE PARKS LEVEL-OF-SERVICE AS THE REGION GROWS.

REGION GROWS. With a growing population, park level of service (LOS) becomes important. Since 1983, the National Recreation and Parks Association standard has been to provide 10 acres of parkland for every 1,000 people.²⁶ This standard is strictly for game-based field recreation and does not include parkland used for biking, camping, water recreation, nature study, dog runs, the quiet contemplation of nature, and other similar activities. Many municipalities provide more parkland for residents than the recommended standard because of a growing understanding of the complex ways in which people interact with parks and open space. The average LOS in the region is currently over 19 acres per 1,000 people but ranges from 3 to 60 acres per person within this region's 17 municipalities. At a minimum, LOS should not fall below the current level as population grows, but LOS should rise in areas that are underserved. Ensuring adequate bike and pedestrian

access to parks and open space region wide should also be considered. The collaboration of the region's parks managers that began with The Tomorrow Plan should continue to guide the quest for higher than average park LOS in this area.

- ## 13. ENHANCE THE REGIONAL TREESCAPE.
- The region's tree canopy covers roughly 23 percent of the land surface, with most trees located near streams and rivers and in more affluent neighborhoods. A scientific definition of a woodland tree canopy is more than 50 percent of the land surface. According to one study, tree canopy cover in 20 American cities ranges from 10 percent (Denver) to 54 percent (Atlanta), and tree canopy cover has decreased in all but one of those cities during the 2000s.²⁷

Trees help reduce stormwater runoff, the urban heat island effect, and energy costs. They also enhance the emotional

well-being of residents. They make communities more walkable and invite outdoor activities. While municipalities require tree planting during construction of new development, future development could still result in a reduced number of trees. Further, the likelihood of more diseases and pests, such as the Emerald Ash Borer, entering the region suggests that enhancing the tree canopy is a vital step for the region.

A regional urban forestry plan should be developed that includes a tree inventory system with common reporting methods, public-private partnerships to support the work, educational programs to assist land owners with tree maintenance, and stakeholder involvement.

14. IMPLEMENT TOOLS IN THE PROPER SEQUENCE.

Completing the greenways and natural stormwater utilities will take 30 to 40 years and become the work of future generations. One of the first tools to implement is the NAI of environmentally sensitive lands. Another is to establish WMAs across the region. The regional park collaborative also should continue to meet and point the way to a park system that meets the future and diverse needs of the region's population. By aggressively taking on these three items, small initial steps will lead to momentous steps within a decade.

Targets

An effective way to gain support for project goals and to communicate accomplishments is to develop a suite of metrics. Metrics objectively measure performance from a variety of perspectives, and targets quantify progress toward success. Targets for improving the region's environmental health and access to the great outdoors are:

Greenways

- Regional Natural Areas Inventory completed by 2014
- Forest management plans completed in all municipalities by 2014
- Fifty percent of municipalities with natural resource overlay districts to establish greenways by 2020 and 100 percent by 2040
- Fifty percent of high-quality natural areas protected by 2025 and 100 percent by 2050
- Fifty percent of greenways with management plans by 2020 and 100 percent by 2035
- By 2040, populations of wildlife indicator species up to numbers that ensure long term persistence

Treescape

- Regional tree inventory completed by 2015
- Forestry plan completed by 2016

Natural Stormwater Utilities

- WMAs established across all the planning area by 2016
- Post-construction ordinances requiring a significant percent of annual precipitation in new developments be infiltrated on site (or alternative standard which controls volume and manages water quality) enacted by municipalities by 2016
- Plans that address retrofitting existing developments to improve stormwater management adopted by municipalities by 2016
- Stream volatility at 13 existing USGS/DNR stations reduced by 25 percent in 2025 and 50 percent in 2040
- Sediment levels at 13 existing USGS/DNR stations in spring and summer reduced by 90 percent in 2025

Parks

- At least 20 acres per 1,000 residents maintained as a regional average through 2050 assessed at five-year intervals
- Fifty percent of residents with safe bike or pedestrian access to greenways by 2020 and 100 percent by 2040

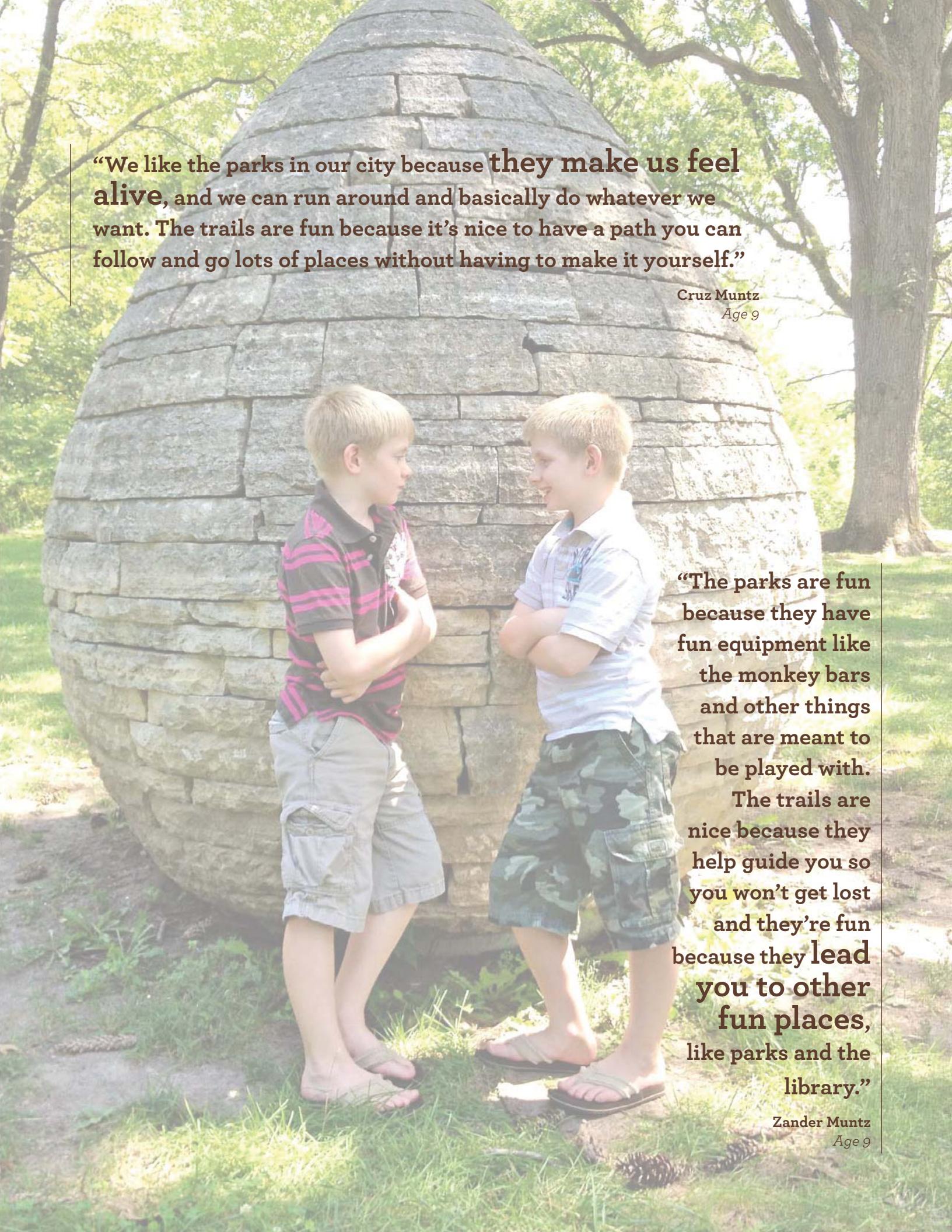
Tools for Municipalities to Implement Greenways

Tools for implementing greenways are in use throughout the country. The example of Brenton Slough, a wetland complex near the City of Grimes in northwest Greater Des Moines, illustrates the application of these tools.

The greenway system proposed in this plan covers a wide geography. Actual implementation, though, will happen community by community. For example, the City of Ankeny's greenways map includes more greenways than The Tomorrow Plan corridor map of the same area because the city uses more detailed information.

In this example, there are three types of areas the municipality considers : a) areas of no development, b) areas of no new development, and, c) areas where development proceeds with zoning and ordinance guidance.

NO DEVELOPMENT. These areas have the highest value natural resources at Brenton Slough. These areas would be publicly or privately owned lands regulated by floodplain and wetland laws.



“We like the parks in our city because they make us feel alive, and we can run around and basically do whatever we want. The trails are fun because it’s nice to have a path you can follow and go lots of places without having to make it yourself.”

Cruz Muntz
Age 9

“The parks are fun because they have fun equipment like the monkey bars and other things that are meant to be played with.

The trails are nice because they help guide you so you won’t get lost and they’re fun because they lead you to other fun places, like parks and the library.”

Zander Muntz
Age 9

In other words, these lands are already protected by law in some way. Available tools for preserving land for no development are:

- Land purchases with REAP grants or bonding initiatives for corridor and habitat acquisition.²⁸
- Parkland dedication and other land donations. Allow transfer of dedications from other locations to priority conservation areas and corridors. Consider increasing park dedication requirement.

NO NEW DEVELOPMENT. These lands have natural resource value but are already partly developed or partly used for agriculture. Conservation easements could limit future development on these lands while acknowledging current development patterns. Tools for accomplishing this goal include:

- Donation or purchase of easements, with a non-profit conservation group as intermediary.
- Publicly-funded land conservation programs, federal or state (e.g., Conservation Reserve Program).

DEVELOPMENT IN THE CORRIDOR. These lands buffer and connect streams, lakes, wetlands, and natural areas in order to protect their natural resource values. Development proceeds but does so in a way that preserves the healthy functioning of lands and waters by using best management practices. In this context, conservation must be incorporated into the development process. Tools include:

- Conservation design and low impact development. Encourage conservation design and low impact development practices through ordinances. Examples include the City of Lino Lakes, Chisago City, Marine on St. Croix, and St. Croix County, Wisconsin. These kinds of examples of conservation development designs and approaches are widely available.²⁹ They also preserve large natural areas, manage stormwater ecologically, minimize land clearing and grading, reduce infrastructure costs (e.g., sewers, curbs, gutters, irrigated turf grass, pavement, utility run lengths), and promote stewardship of natural resources. Low impact development practices often focus on stormwater management, and performance standards can be established to address specific needs with regard to rate, volume, infiltration, and water quality. Incentives to landowners include accelerated permitting, variances, and increased density.
- Natural resource protection ordinances include structural setbacks and ecological buffers based on best available science. Examples exist for streams, shorelands, and wetland buffer ordinances; floodplain ordinances; forest and woodland protection; and, erosion control.

- Easements for stormwater, trails, and natural areas, which allow landowners to use the land within the terms of the easement.
- Deed restrictions and covenants in development projects. These dedicate open space in developments for conservation purposes, and they are governed by a management plan and protected from development in perpetuity.

Governance of Greenways

Cities use different approaches to implement greenways. Lessons can be learned from four examples in the Midwest, from simple institutional initiatives to multi-pronged regional approaches.

INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVE, MILWAUKEE. To avoid building new storm sewer infrastructure in its watersheds, the Milwaukee Municipal Sewerage District identified locations that could store stormwater runoff. The District then used part of its capital improvement budget to purchase easements over those potential runoff storage locations. It then restored infiltration functionality on several thousand acres of land through its Greenseams program, which is managed by a non-profit organization that



charges service fees. By using green infrastructure, the approach stores an acre-foot of water for \$3,500 to \$4,000 versus \$20,000 to \$100,000 per acre-foot for a conventional stormwater projects.³⁰

REGIONAL VISION AND MODELS, KANSAS CITY. The 3,000-square mile transportation planning region administered by the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) was comprehensively mapped for natural resources in 2003 and 2004. By making the maps widely available, integrating GIS systems among communities, and providing model stream buffer and stormwater best practice ordinances, MARC has helped shift the region's valuation of natural areas and greenways. MARC also promotes MetroGreen, a proposed 1,144-mile public-private open space and greenway trail system. The same natural resource maps also are used for MARC's transportation planning to mitigate transportation impacts.

REGIONAL VISION AND HUBS, CHICAGO. The Chicago Wilderness Project, a consortium of agencies and non-profits begun in the 1990s to protect and connect natural areas, was the impetus behind the green infrastructure element of the GO

TO 2040 plan developed by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). CMAP establishes coordinated strategies, including those on open space and the environment, for 284 municipalities and seven counties. With GO TO 2040, CMAP is building consensus for a green infrastructure system. The heart of this system is two dozen large natural areas and significant holdings on several rivers owned and managed by the Cook County Forest Preserve District. Building on the Forest Preserve Districts, CMAP intends to help communities realize its vision for the green infrastructure system.

REGIONAL AUTHORITY, MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL. The Metropolitan Council provides guidance for and approves municipal comprehensive plans in the seven-county Twin Cities region. Just as important, the Met Council has authority over public transportation, wastewater treatment, and regional parks in the region. Regional parks maintained by the Met Council are important elements of the greenway and natural areas system, together with stream and river corridors and wetland complexes. In the latest round of comprehensive plans, a regional natural areas and greenway system map, developed by the Minnesota DNR, influenced local decisions about new transportation and wastewater infrastructure. The Minnesota DNR's comprehensive natural areas inventory of the seven counties was used to prioritize the greenways system.

Source: Applied Ecological Services

