

Greater Des Moines Water Trails and Greenways Plan

We are a river town. Des Moines was founded as a city because of its location at the confluence of two major rivers. For thousands of years, these waterways have been sources of food and sustenance, transportation and energy, respite and beauty. The past 50 years have seen us more disconnected from the water than ever. Where would you go to touch the water? Despite riverwalks, numerous parks that border creeks and rivers, and an extension trail system, the Des Moines region lacks access to get down to the water to fish, paddle and play. Our primary relationship with our streams is one of concern over poor water quality and threat of floods. It is not a place of recreation and joyful experience.

In cooperation with several community partners, the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) completed the Greater Des Moines Water Trails and Greenways Plan which envisions an abundant network of water recreation for 150 miles of the region's creeks and rivers, including places for tubing, birding, hiking, paddling, boating, and fishing, the establishment of area greenways, floodplain protection and improved habitat. The plan covers the Des Moines, Raccoon, South Skunk, North and Middle rivers, as well as Beaver, Fourmile, Mud and Walnut creeks. When implemented, the recommendations outlined in the plan will bring about transformational change - reconnecting thousands of people with the rivers as a keystone natural resource.



Quality of life will improve with more outdoor recreation opportunities.

Economic development will benefit from improved recreational amenities.

Tourism will benefit from new attractions.

Public health will improve with more outdoor recreation.

Water quality, as an issue, will gain champions as more people interact directly with waterways.

Workforce recruitment will be supported by the addition of water recreation.

We couldn't have imagined 20-30 years ago what long-term impact the paved trail system would have on our region. With 150 miles of streams, there are abundant places to offer tubing, fishing, paddling, respite, stone skipping and mucking around. The Greater Des Moines Water Trails and Greenways Plan, when implemented, will reimagine and reconnect us with our river roots.

The plan was adopted on November 17, 2016, at which time the MPO, on behalf of the region, will transition to regional coordination of implementation of projects listed in the vision document.

Recommendations identified through Community Input and Stakeholder Discussions:

- Activate the Des Moines River in downtown Des Moines through dam mitigation, shoreline improvements, fishing nodes, tube and boat rentals, bird viewing areas and other amenities;
- Improve access for anglers, paddlers, tubers, birders and families;
- Brand three regional parks along Raccoon and Des Moines rivers by connecting networks of existing parks;
- Develop greenway through protection of the 100 year floodplain;
- Expand programming, events and businesses along and in the river and creeks;
- Restore river and creek shoreline and numerous quarries;
- Encourage of water quality improvements and flood mitigation efforts;
- Coordinate regionally across government entities and user groups;
- Emphasize economic development nodes;
- Increase soft trails and paved trail connections;
- Support historic preservation and interpretation;
- Expand multi-modal options for river engagement; and,
- Create family-friendly amenities along creeks and rivers.



Full plan available at:
dmampo.org/water-trails

