



A VISION FOR RACCOON RIVER

DRAFT

BOOKLET 6 OF 8
GREATER DES MOINES
WATER TRAILS AND GREENWAYS

Photo: Jim Pease
Raccoon River

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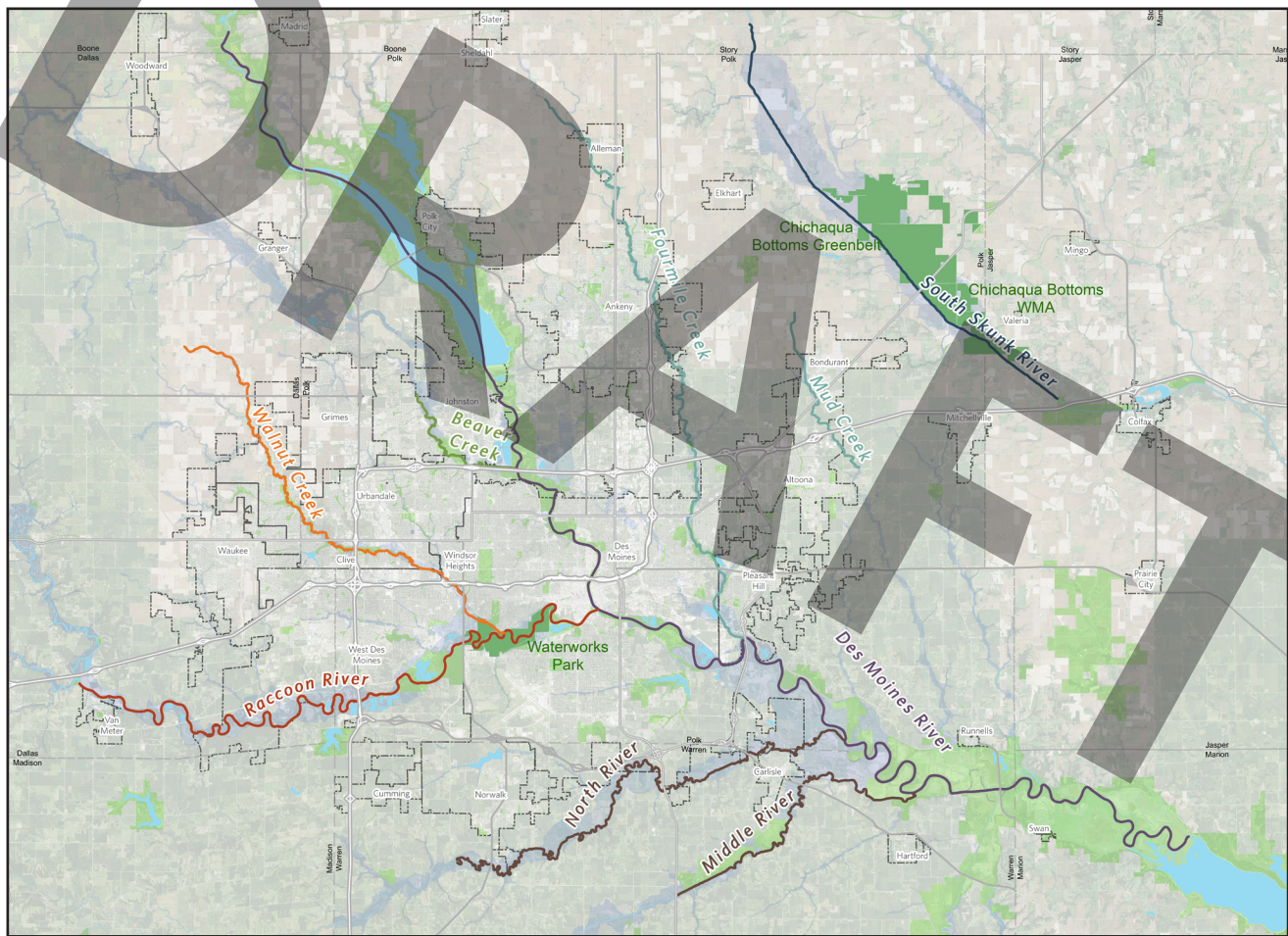
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One Vision, Many Communities

The Greater Des Moines Water Trails and Greenways Plan establishes a regional vision for our rivers, creeks, and greenways. Through extensive community engagement and with the help of a strong steering committee, a clear regional vision emerged.

Regional Vision

The water trails and greenways of Greater Des Moines will be a natural haven, healthy ecosystem, signature recreational destination, economic driver, and community focal point that welcome people of all ages, abilities, interests, incomes, and cultures to connect with their rivers, creeks, and greenways.



Greater Des Moines Water Trails and Greenways planning area

This Booklet

The Greater Des Moines Water Trails and Greenways Plan looks at more than 150 miles of water ways. This booklet provides an overview of Raccoon River, including recommendations to improve its environmental, recreational, and economic potential for the entire community. There are companion booklets for each waterway, as well as a strategies and policies booklet.

Recommendations

The longest stretch of uninterrupted river in the study area exists along the Raccoon River. The study area for this plan includes 31 miles, but many miles upstream are navigable. This offers the greatest opportunity for a multi-day paddling trips to support tourism goals.

Economic Development Opportunities

Economic development hubs are noted in several locations in the plan including Van Meter, Booneville, and the confluence with the Des Moines River. These areas offer opportunities to support small business development that capitalizes on the paved and water trail systems. Much like pubs, restaurants, and other local businesses that have popped up along the paved trail system, the water trails can also support businesses for dining, lodging, water craft rental, bait shops, etc..

Van Meter would benefit from developing a park and recreational complex along the river that would include a boat launch and fishing access. This park should connect to Van Meter's downtown through a pedestrian path. This boat launch location is much needed for emergency boat access to the river.

With some enhancements of the boat access at Booneville, this site could support additional activity connecting to the old town of Booneville. The hub could be enhanced with amenities such as dining, bed and breakfast lodging, and other tourism destinations. The planned development to the east of Booneville offers opportunities for additional amenities and accesses along the river.

The downtown Des Moines hub calls for additional small businesses near the confluence of the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers. These businesses, as well as access points and other amenities, would support the large number of people expected to be floating to downtown.



Access from Parks

There is significant dedicated and planned parkland and trails along the Raccoon River including Walnut Woods State Park, Browns Woods, Raccoon River Park, Water Works Park, and Gray's Lake Park. All of them lack for much interaction with the river that runs through them. Note the recommendations calling for enhanced connections via amenities such as portage routes to existing trails, soft trails for birding, boat access, fishing amenities, and camping. The amenities at these parks also offer great spaces for river-based programming and events such as races, how-to classes, and interpretive signage.



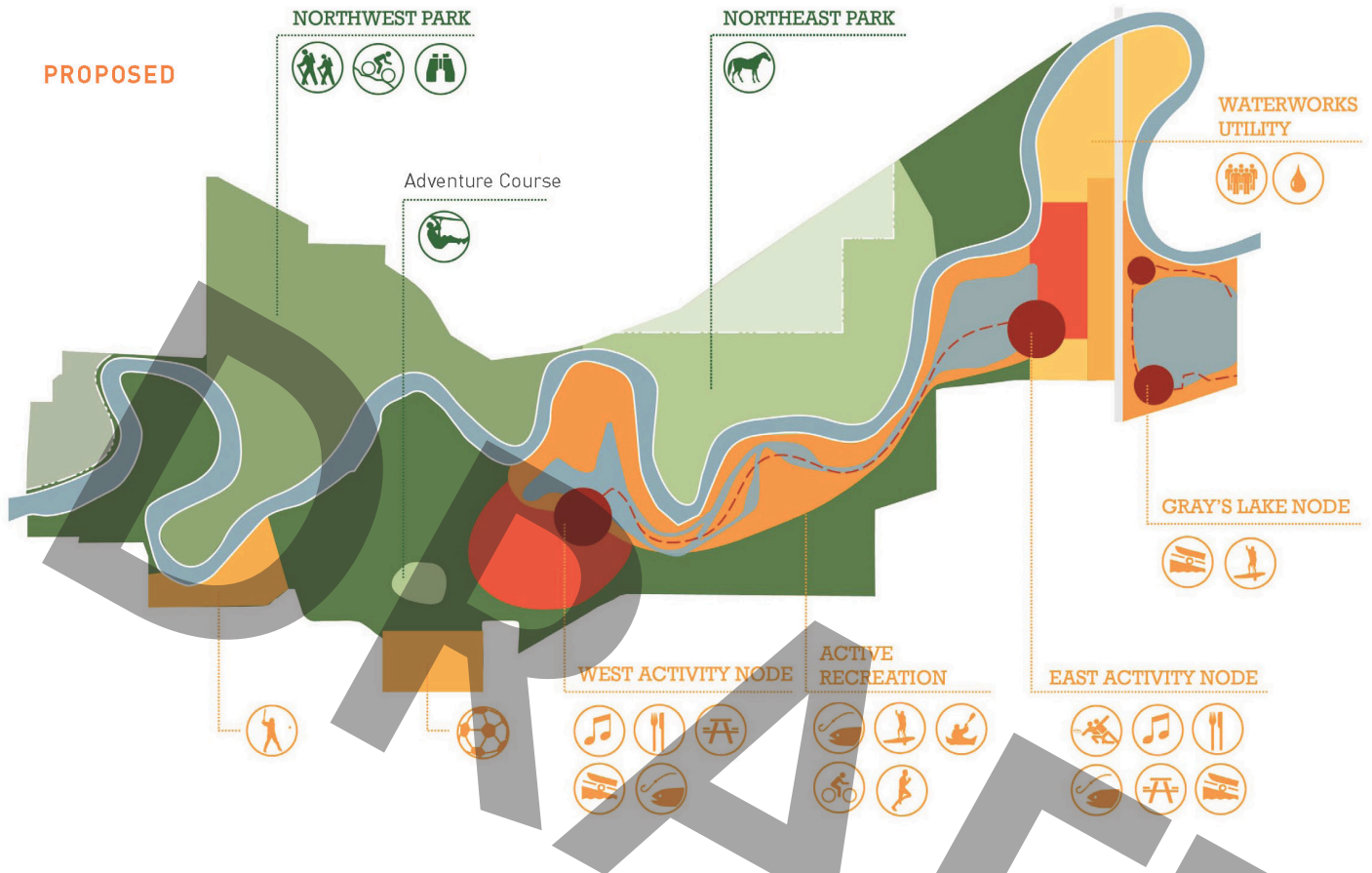
Conservation and Greenspace

It is recommended to protect and restore the quarries as a future greenspace. Significant opportunities exist to add fishing, birding, paddling, and hiking amenities in this greenspaces.

Additionally, creek and shoreline restoration is recommended. Whenever possible, the 100-year floodplain should be protected and maintained as a habitat corridor.



Water Works Park Master Plan



Launched in 2013, the Water Works Master Plan will play a key role in supporting and elevating the Raccoon River. The plan recommends policies, programming, and infrastructure to further enhance this 1,500-acre urban park's functions - operation, recreation, education, and conservation.

These four functions are front and center in the plan. For operations, floodplain management and water quality will be critical for the long-term future of the Raccoon River. As a recreational hub, the proposed enhancements in the figure to the right highlight the many ways this park will be a regional activity hub. As an education opportunity, Water Works Park will connect visitors to the river and illustrate the wide-ranging impacts Raccoon River has on our region. Finally, the park is a key conservation hub and link for the greater greenway system.

Some key recommendations from the plan include:

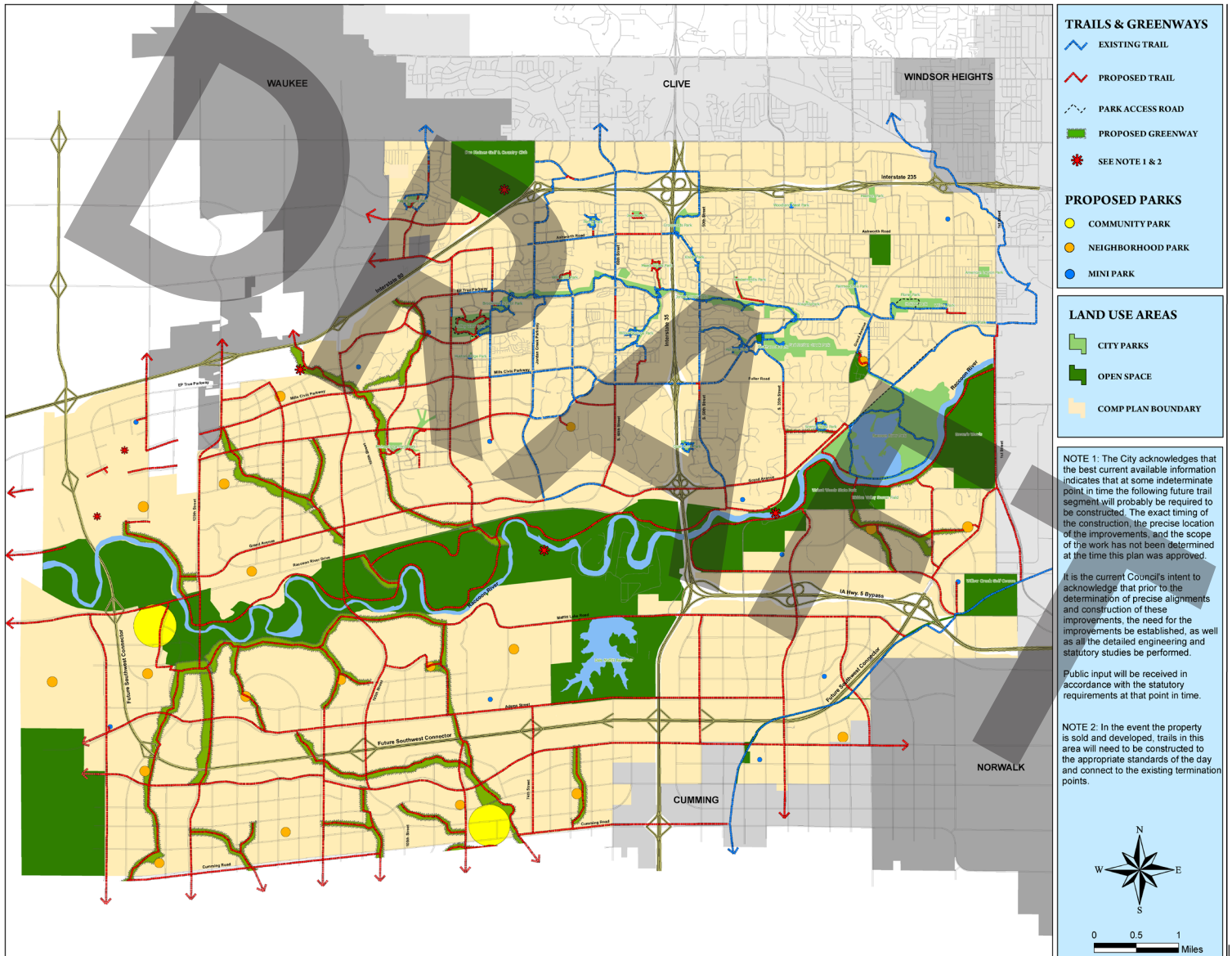
- expanding the paved trail system and connecting north into Des Moines,
- improving the river access for fishing and paddling,
- adding new off-water activities,
- and programming new events and educational opportunities along the river.

West Des Moines Trails and Greenway Plan

The 2010 Trails and Greenway Plan highlighted the need for floodplain conservation along the Raccoon River. Combining these efforts with wetland and habitat restoration, as well as, recreational opportunities like trails and birding areas provides key corridors for the greenway system.

Expanding on the successful paved trail system also allows for more access to the river by walking and bicycling. Connecting neighborhoods and other parks to the river gives communities the opportunity to integrate the greenway into their daily lives.

In 2015, West Des Moines updated the city's Bicycle Master Plan which further develops the trail system along the river.



Relevant Links

[Water Works Park Master Plan](#)

[West Des Moines Master Trails and Greenways Plan](#)

[Hallett-Marietta Reclamation Plan](#)

[State of the Rivers: Raccoon River Report](#)

Key Projects

West Segment

Project	Location	Jurisdiction	Key Amenities	Considerations
Economic Hub	Van Meter	Van Meter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boat launch and fishing access Pedestrian path to downtown Van Meter Improve park facilities Trail connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design for use by emergency responders Consider potential conflicts between boaters, paddlers, and anglers. Site design can mitigate conflicts.
Economic Hub	Booneville	Booneville/ West Des Moines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bed and breakfast lodging Tourist destinations Wayfinding to businesses Parking, lighting, trash cans Camp sites Bicycle/watercraft lockers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access maintenance and upgrades Coordinate with planned paved trail system to allow for pedal to paddle opportunities
Quarry Restoration		West Des Moines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parking, restrooms Fishing spaces Trail connections Bicycle/watercraft lockers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pedal to paddle options Direct carry-down portage connection from the river to the quarry
Wading access	Commerce Ledges	West Des Moines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpretive signage for birding Parking Portage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider uses. Paddlers may be doing circuits through Commerce Ledges. Birders will be looking for quiet, natural environment



The Greater Des Moines Area has more than 600 miles of bike trails, with more planned for the future. Combining this extensive network with the more than 150 miles of water trails in the metro would allow for extensive pedal to paddle opportunities. There are numerous routes where this type of multimodal experience could take place, but the frequency of such trips would be enhanced with more liveries and excursion vendors along these trails for rental or storage of equipment. Optional routes could combine the use of the Raccoon River and the Bill Riley Trail, the Des Moines River and the Neil Smith Trail, or Beaver Creek and the Trestle to Trestle Trail. Multimodal options like this could benefit a variety of sectors in the region, and even open up new ones.

East Segment

Project	Location	Jurisdiction	Key Amenities	Considerations
Camping and Wading	Walnut Woods	State/DNR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wayfinding and interpretive signage Trash receptacles Watercraft lockers Riverside camping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect Walnut woods to the river through signage, amenities, and trail use Pedestrian bridge across river
Wading access	Brown's Woods	Polk County Conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wading area Fishing space Paths to the park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preserve the natural character of the area Find connections across the river to Raccoon River Park
Portage	Raccoon River Park	West Des Moines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wayfinding and interpretive signage Benches Soft trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for opportunities to build programming from flat water experience on the lake to the river experience
Access and activities	Water Works Park	Water Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCycle hub Public art and focal points Restrooms Fish cleaning station 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align with Water Works Park Master Plan Find balance between use and conservation
Dam mitigation	Water Works Park to Confluence	Water Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portages and signage until mitigated for safe passage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider utility intakes and other infrastructure needs
Economic Hub	Confluence	Des Moines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced access point Small businesses Signage to restaurants, businesses, and amenities BCycle hub 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan for emergency services needs Pedal to paddle opportunity Decisions on Scott Ave. Dam will impact decisions here

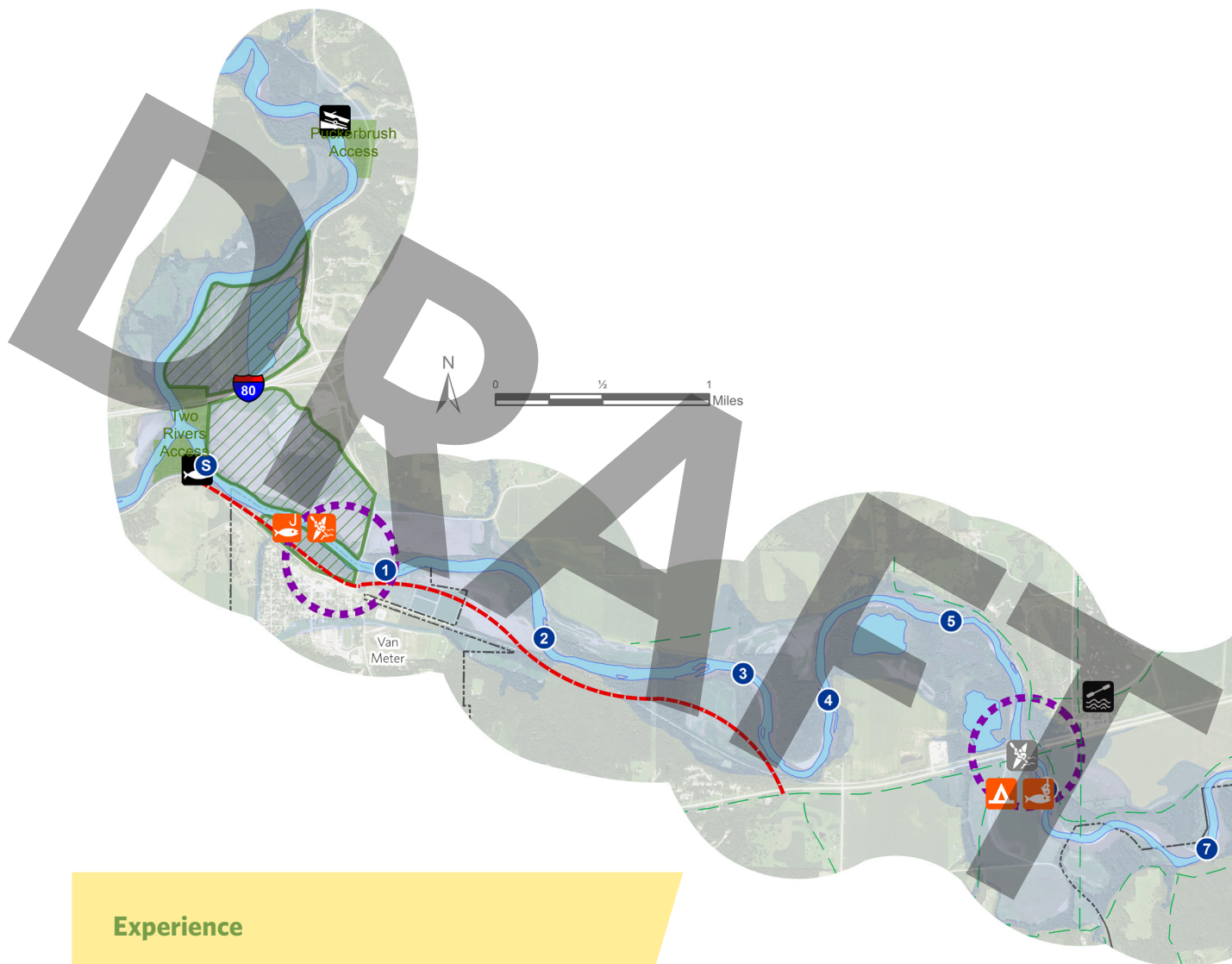
**Additional initiatives can be found in the Policies and Practices Booklet*



Quick Facts:

31 miles in area
 27% floodplain preserved
 Dallas County, West Des Moines, Des Moines

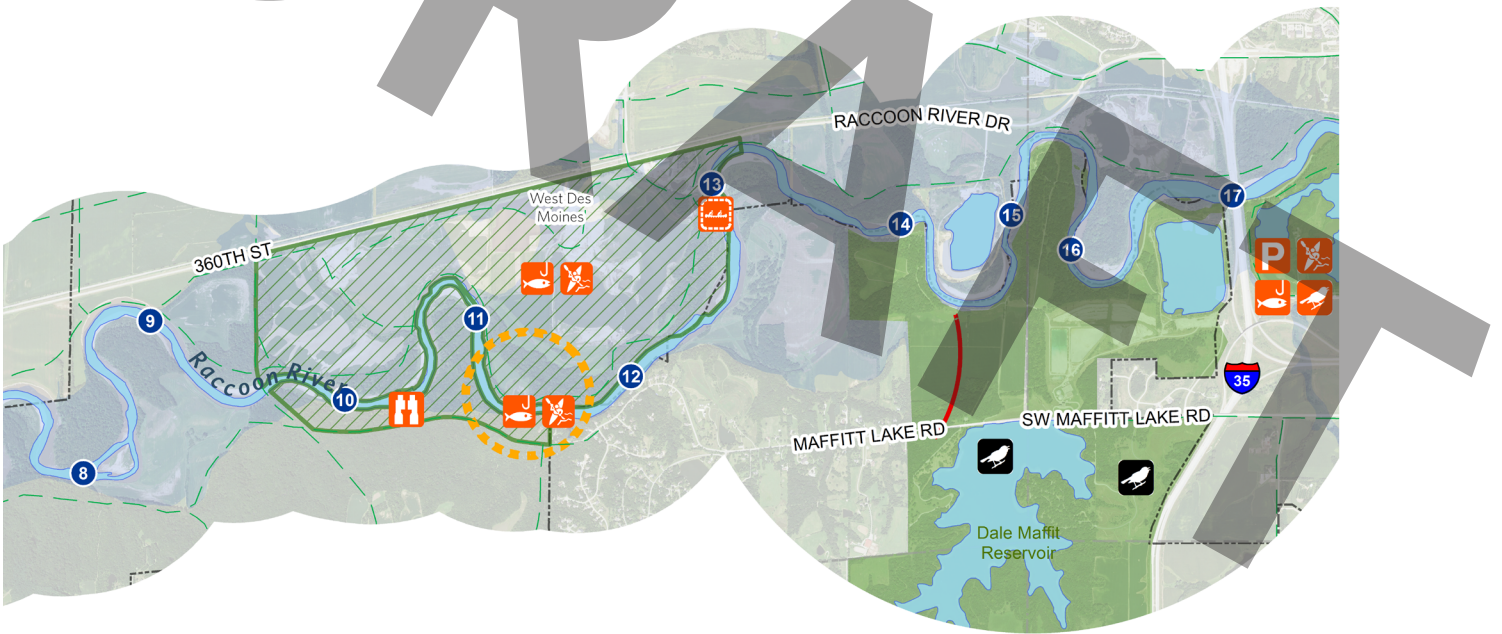
Raccoon River – West



Experience

The Raccoon River requires some paddling experience, since there is the potential for logjams and obstructions, but is largely accessible to many paddlers. Raccoon River is ripe for greater use by paddlers, boaters, anglers, and others and offers from natural experiences among the parks and urban experiences approaching downtown Des Moines.

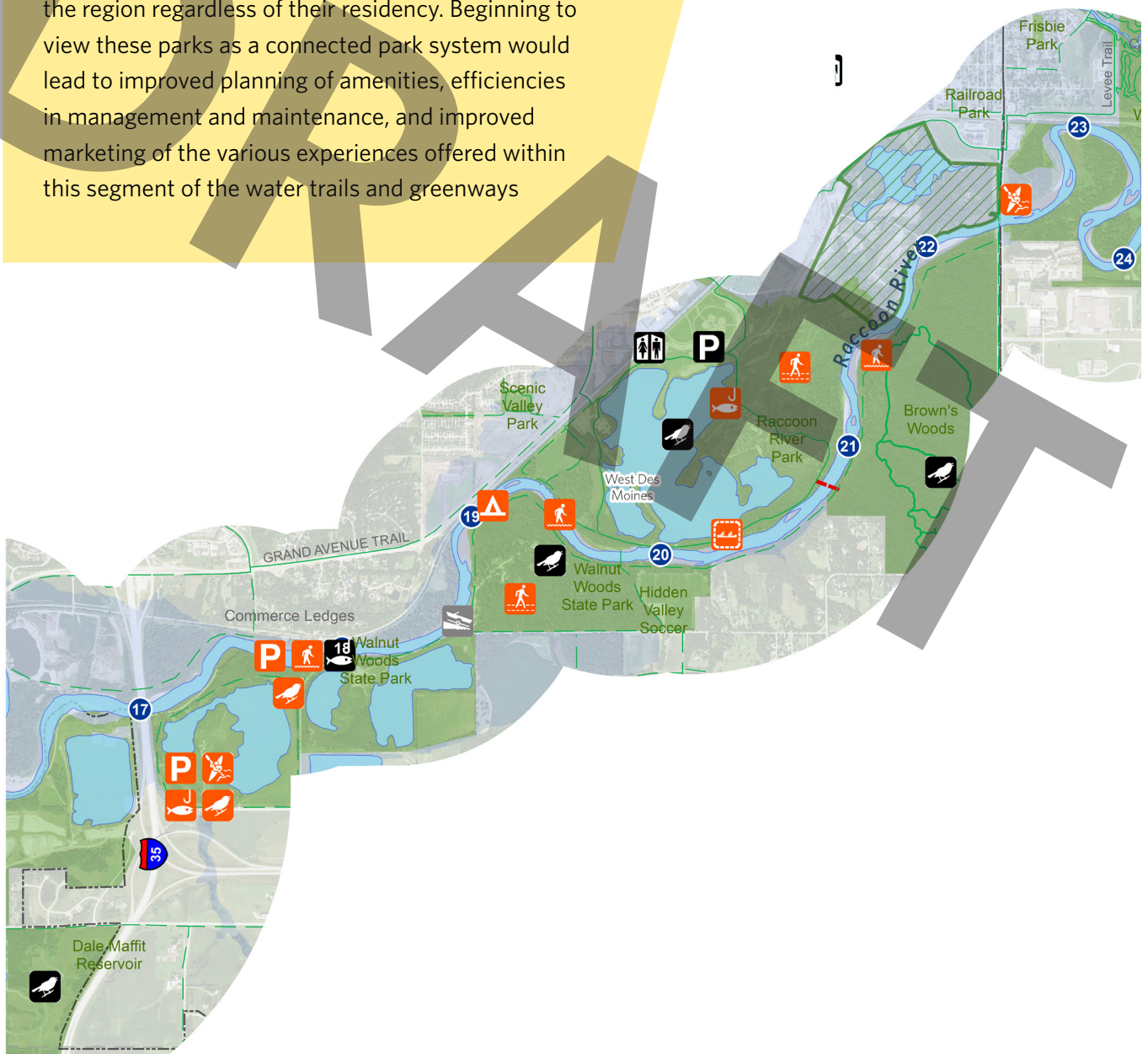
Color Codes	Potential Hubs	Other Icons
Existing	Economic Hub	Mile Marker
Potential	Activity Hub	Raccoon River
Modifications	Camping	County Boundary
Amenities	Restrooms	Conservation and Park Land (Public)
Carry-down Access	Bike Shop	Floodplain
Boat Access	Livery	Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities
Fishing Access	Winery	Trail Needed
Wading Access	Parking	Existing
Birding	Dam Mitigation	Future
Portage	Conservation Area	
Soft Trails		



Raccoon River - East

Raccoon River Regional Park

A significant amount of contiguous parkland exists along the Raccoon River. There is great benefit in beginning to connect the individual parks - Walnut Woods, Browns Woods, Raccoon River Park, Water Works Park, and Gray's Lake Park - and treat them as an integrated Raccoon River Regional Park System. While owned and managed by different governments, they are enjoyed by citizens throughout the region regardless of their residency. Beginning to view these parks as a connected park system would lead to improved planning of amenities, efficiencies in management and maintenance, and improved marketing of the various experiences offered within this segment of the water trails and greenways.





Color Codes	Potential Hubs	Other Icons
Existing	Economic Hub	Mile Marker
Potential	Activity Hub	Raccoon River
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Amenities	Restrooms	Conservation and Park Land (Public)
Boat Access	Bike Shop	Floodplain
Fishing Access	Livery	Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities
Wading Access	Winery	Trail Needed
Birding	Parking	Existing
Portage	Dam Mitigation	Future
Soft Trails	Conservation Area	

Symbology Explained

Carry-down Access



Carry-down accesses are for non-motorized paddling such as kayaking, tubing, or canoeing. Site design involves many factors, and should first look at the Iowa DNR's *Developing Water Trails in Iowa* guidelines. Lesser accesses are denoted by the portage symbol, and may not require the same level of infrastructure or amenities.

- Lighting and trash cans
- Parking
- Seasonal restrooms
- Launch types
- Watercraft and bicycle lockers
- Interpretive and wayfinding signage



Wading Access



Wading spaces are where we can get our feet wet. They can be designed for mucking among natural vegetation and sandbars or as play spaces with steps and stones. No matter the design, wading areas allow us the opportunity to physically connect to the water and nature.

- All ages access
- Restrooms/showers
- Benches and resting points in view of access



Fishing



Fishing is a popular activity all along the creeks and rivers. Creating access points can provide safe and comfortable areas that support anglers. Rock outcroppings, docks, and other designs offer different experiences. Universal design is critical since fishing is often a multi-generational activity.

- Restrooms
- Lights and trash cans
- Spaces for relaxing
- All-ages/abilities design
- Parking and bicycle parking



Respite



Areas to relax, take in the view, and enjoy the river allow people to find a moment of respite in the metro. These areas can be natural greenspaces or more urban like the Principal Riverwalk depending on the context of the area and desire of the community.

- Benches with a view
- Picnic areas and tables
- Paths and trails along water



Economic Hub



Water trails can play a role in developing economic hubs. These hubs typically represent the convergence of multiple assets, such as a river, trails, residential, and economic clustering, and other factors. These are destinations that draw in visitors for multiple reasons. The scale changes for smaller or rural communities, but the economic impacts remain. These hubs are opportunities for supportive development along the rivers.

- Event spaces
- Parking
- Restrooms
- Launch types
- Bicycle parking
- Public art
- Restaurants and shops
- Liveries/outfitters
- Shuttle service



Activity Hub



Activity hubs leverage existing attractions into destinations where multiple activities converge. These hubs take advantage of nearby parks and trails to create spaces for longer visits and multiple activities. Often multi-generational and family-friendly spaces, these hubs should be planned with a diverse audience in mind and combine several different reasons to visit.

- Play spaces
- Educational opportunities
- Areas to eat, relax and play
- Programming
- Restrooms and trash cans
- Lights
- Bicycle parking
- Wayfinding

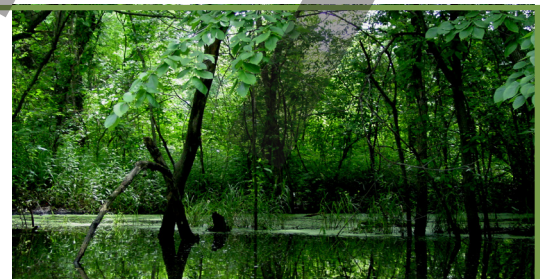


Conservation Area



A key component to fully enjoying the rivers and creeks is ensuring their natural quality and sustainability over time. Creating connected spaces for habitats, restoring wetlands and reducing flooding, and educating the next generation of river stewards are central pieces to the long-term health of the waterways.

- Educational programming
- Interpretive signage
- Habitat connectivity
- Wetlands restoration
- Floodplain management



Soft Trails



Unpaved walking, hiking, and birding trails give people access to nature and offer a much different experience than paved trails. They also do not disrupt wildlife connections and can provide the opportunity for education programming.

- Educational programming
- Interpretive signage for history or birding
- Maintenance and conservation





Raccoon River

A DAY IN 2025

AFTER A LONG DAY AT WORK YOU ARE EXCITED TO GET OUTSIDE. YOU CATCH THE BUS NEAR YOUR OFFICE AND TAKE IT TO WATER WORKS PARK. THERE ARE FOOD TRUCKS LINED UP AND YOU GRAB SOME LIGHT DINNER AND SIT IN PEACE ALONG THE WATER. AFTER FINISHING UP, YOU HEAD TO A B-CYCLE STATION AND GET ON A BIKE. RIDING WEST YOU FOLLOW THE TRAIL ALONG THE RACCOON RIVER. IN NO TIME YOU HAVE REACHED RACCOON RIVER PARK WHERE YOU CAN TURN IN YOUR BIKE AND RENT A KAYAK. YOU PADDLE BACK TO WATER WORKS. A SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS FROM BUS TO BIKE TO RIVER ALLOW YOU TO HAVE AN OUTDOOR ADVENTURE CLOSE TO DOWNTOWN.