

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Regional Coordinating Committee

From: Jesse Elam, Senior Planner

Date: March 6, 2013

Re: Update on Recommended Policies to Encourage the Preservation of Regional Green Infrastructure in Northeastern Illinois

Regional green infrastructure is a planned landscape of important natural areas, parks, and other open spaces linked by open space corridors.¹ The concept is an important part of GO TO 2040, which recommends protecting a significant amount of additional conservation land in the region using a green infrastructure approach. The GO TO 2040 plan notes that “coordinated investment in land protection will be necessary to achieve this [goal]. Forest preserve and conservation districts, the state, and private funders should all prioritize land preservation within the green infrastructure network. Municipalities and the state should harmonize policies to promote the preservation of green infrastructure.”²

CMAP is developing a policy paper to explore in more detail how this could be done. Its guiding idea is to follow an “all of the above” strategy – any agency or organization involved in conservation or urban development has a role to play in preserving green infrastructure. The basic ideas were previously presented to the Regional Coordinating Committee in June 2012, and have been discussed several times in the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. Over the past few months they have also been discussed informally with staff in a variety of agencies who might be involved in implementation.

¹ “Green infrastructure” has actually emerged as a term to refer to two different but related planning concepts. As opposed to regional green infrastructure, which is the focus of this paper, site-scale green infrastructure is a suite of practices to handle stormwater that emphasize using vegetation, soils, and natural processes to mimic natural hydrology. These practices are also known as best management practices (BMPs) or low-impact development (LID) techniques.

² Expand and Improve Parks and Open Space section, p. 127, <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/2040/open-space>.

The current draft can be found on the Environment and Natural Resources Committee webpage (<http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/environmental-and-natural-res/minutes>). CMAP expects to finalize the paper mid-year. A summary of the current recommendations is as follows:

- Municipal Comprehensive Plans and Other Local Planning
 - Include the regional green infrastructure network within comprehensive plans and adopt policies to protect it.
- Transportation Project Development
 - Review impacts on the regional green infrastructure network as part of normal project-level environmental documentation.
 - Compensate for regional green infrastructure that is negatively impacted by construction if doing so is not already required by law.
 - Consider the impacts on the green infrastructure network when evaluating potential transportation investments at the programming stage.
- Compensatory Wetland Mitigation
 - Encourage compensatory mitigation to take place within green infrastructure network.
- Recommendations for CMAP Programs
 - Use the green infrastructure dataset as the basis for open space planning in the Local Technical Assistance Program.
 - Use green infrastructure data to identify probable open space areas for demographic projections.
 - Evaluate impacts to the green infrastructure network as part of the Facility Planning Area amendment application.
- Land Conservation
 - Use presence within the green infrastructure network as a criterion for identifying conservation land to acquire directly or award grant funds to protect.
 - Revise land/cash donation ordinances to specify that parcels within the green infrastructure network are preferred for donation over other parcels.
- Other State Actions
 - Use regional green infrastructure data to update Illinois Wildlife Action Plan (expected 2015).

The regional green infrastructure network itself was identified through a collaboration with Chicago Wilderness between 2011 and 2012. In that project, a national leader in green infrastructure planning (The Conservation Fund) was retained to develop a GIS dataset identifying critical green infrastructure using a transparent, criteria-based approach. The dataset and accompanying final report are available at <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/green-infrastructure>.

ACTION REQUESTED: Discussion

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