The Need for a Regional Greenways and Trails Plan

A greenways and trails plan offers a vision of continuous greenways and trails that transcend jurisdictional boundaries, providing scenic beauty, natural habitat, and recreational opportunities for our communities. Many jurisdictions possess land use and landscape design in northeastern Illinois, so our greenways and trails plan builds on this tradition of cooperation across these jurisdictions to create an integrated network of greenways and trails that can be enjoyed by all. This plan will focus on the following:

- Creates new connections between communities
- Provides wildlife corridor opportunities between isolated natural areas
- Protects tributaries streams to preserve water quality and ecosystem values throughout the region
- Protects residential and commercial areas threatened by flood damage
- Facilitates access to recreational trails where it is currently lacking
- Protects high quality natural areas threatened by development
- Protects important natural values and historic areas
- Increases access to open space for recreation and education needs
- Offers a variety of recreational uses
- Provides alternative transportation routes

Key Features of the Map

The map updates existing and proposed regional greenways and trails, open space, and connectivity among them. It includes the locations of Illinois Natural Preserves and Critical Natural Areas (CNAs) and natural floodplains. Many of these high-quality areas are within designated greenways or meeting open space and need to be preserved. The region’s greenways and trails provide opportunities for viewing these areas, but care must be taken to protect fragile natural areas resources. Visitor activities, which are planned for some areas on the map, will occur only through non-motorized use such as hiking and biking. The Regional Greenways and Trails Plan will guide implementation of these opportunities in a way that is ecologically sensitive and responsive to public desires.

Greenways & Trails

Greenways and trails are vital parts of the region’s open space system. They provide access to important natural areas, provide habitat for plants and animals, and offer recreational opportunities. In this plan, greenways and trails are considered existing or proposed.

Stream Greenways

Stream greenways are a vital part of this plan; they are focal points for public recreation and education, and they provide opportunities for connecting urban and rural areas. Stream greenways can be developed to enhance connectivity, offer recreation opportunities, and reduce development impacts.

The Route 66 Trail

The Route 66 Trail is a proposed trail that follows the historic Route 66 corridor, providing a linear greenway and trail system that can be enjoyed by all. The project will follow the historic Route 66 corridor, connecting communities and greenways throughout the region. While on-road bicycling presents many benefits, connecting communities and greenways throughout the region are beginning to be addressed through the Regional Greenways and Trails Plan.

The Plan Document

This plan includes the need for a comprehensive implementation of the plan. These recommended actions are an integral part of the plan and will be implemented through cooperation among state agencies, forest preserve and park districts, local governments, and environmental organizations.

Objective 1: Promote and Implement Greenway Open Space

Objective 2: Provide and Improve for Quality and Abundance of Open Space and Greenways

Objective 3: Improve the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Trails

Objective 4: Protect and Manage Regional Trail System and Related Landscapes

Objective 5: Enhance the Environmental Benefits of Greenways

Objective 6: Improve the Transportation Benefits of Greenways

Implementation of the Regional Greenways and Trails Plan will require a partnership among state natural resource and transportation agencies, forest preserve and park districts, local governments, and environmental organizations.