

Expand and Improve Parks and Open Space

Implementation Action Area #1: Coordinate Open Space Investment to Create a Connected Regional Green Infrastructure Network

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Prioritize direct land protection within the green infrastructure network	Federal government, state (IDNR), county forest preserve and conservation districts, land trusts	The forest preserve and conservation districts should adopt and periodically update acquisition plans. These acquisition plans should set targets that are consistent with the overall objective of preserving 150,000 acres of land, two-thirds of it within the green infrastructure network. The plans should be oriented toward protecting the areas most important from a natural resources perspective. Other things being equal, a parcel within the GIV boundaries should have substantially higher priority for protection or restoration than a parcel outside it. Furthermore, direct state acquisitions should take into account whether an acquisition opportunity is within the green infrastructure network.

Implementation Examples:

- The Forest Preserve District of Cook County (FPDCC) updated its [Land Acquisition Plan](#) in 2012 and relied in part on the Green Infrastructure Vision to inform its priorities.
- McHenry County developed a [Green Infrastructure Plan](#) in 2012 to guide conservation actions by a wide range of players in the county, including land management agencies, private land owners, and others. Kane County is also developing a similar planning product.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Include green infrastructure connectivity in open space grant programs	State (IDNR), philanthropic	A replenished Open Land Trust program should have a specific set-aside, or at least a set number of points in a score-based system, to help fill out the green infrastructure network. Natural Areas Acquisition Fund (NAAF) should continue to be used as it is to acquire the most important natural areas. Almost all of the candidate properties for the NAAF are likely within the GIV, but location within the GIV <i>per se</i> should not be a criterion. Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) criteria should be revised to assign points for connectivity with other parks and protected open space. Private foundations that fund open space preservation should make preservation of the green infrastructure network part of their prioritization metrics.

Implementation Examples:

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Prioritize development of greenway trails with Transportation Enhancement funds	State (IDOT), counties, municipalities	Multimodal design (“complete streets”) should be the rule, not an exception funded as an add-on through the Transportation Enhancement (TE) program. TE can be used for 12 eligible activities including providing bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The development of multiuse, off-street greenway trails identified in the 2009 Greenways and Trails Plan should be considered an important use of the TE funds as long as they last.

Implementation Examples:

- Since the publication of GO TO 2040, the Transportation Enhancement program has been replaced at the federal level by the Transportation Alternatives program (TAP), and large MPOs like CMAP now have the responsibility to program part of each state’s TAP funding.
- In its FY 2013-14 Transportation Alternatives program development process, CMAP’s [proposed criteria](#) would give priority to projects identified in the Greenways and Trails Plan.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Refine the Green Infrastructure Vision further	State (IDNR, INHS), CMAP, CW	The GIV provides a broad, qualitative identification of the lands that are most important to protect and restore. A number of scientific issues remain, however. One is whether it is more important to concentrate on expanding hubs or on linking the hubs with corridors. Another is the actual “least-cost paths” for species migration, as could be determined by quantitative analysis. In short, the revised GIV should help inform scientific preserve design. Furthermore, groundwater recharge and surface water protection should be included more robustly. Additional emphasis should be placed on already developed areas of the region, including the City of Chicago, and on the potential contributions of urban forestry. Finally, it is of the utmost importance that corridors be identified at a finer scale in the next version so that it can guide local development and infrastructure planning.

Implementation Examples:

- In 2011-12, CMAP collaborated with Chicago Wilderness to refine the GIV (“GIV 2.0”), using the services of the national leader in green infrastructure planning. The resulting data are available at <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/green-infrastructure>.
- The GIV should be revisited on a regular basis and improved to be sure it reflects regional priorities and that it can be used effectively to help guide action, such as helping land managers decide among alternative conservation investments or helping municipalities shape development patterns through incorporation into their comprehensive plans.

Implementation Action Area #2: Invest in the Establishment of New Parks in Developed Areas

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Foster cooperation between park districts and school districts in dense areas to share use of open space	Municipalities, park districts, school districts	Develop inter-local agreement between the districts, followed by a planning study to determine land and facilities that could be used jointly to meet education and recreational needs, and then by specific improvements to meet identified needs.

Implementation Examples:

- The [City of Berwyn Comprehensive Plan](#), developed through the LTA program in 2012, identified needs for additional neighborhood parks, and it encouraged meeting these needs partly through shared use of open space and recreational amenities with schools.
- The [Elmwood Park Comprehensive Plan](#), another LTA project, recommends cooperation between the Village and school districts and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County to share/encourage/enhance access to open space for Elmwood Park residents.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Use innovative financing and delivery mechanisms to meet the need for more park space	Counties, municipalities, park districts	Redevelopment can be a major opportunity to provide more park space for a community. Codes can be altered to incentivize developers to provide open space during redevelopment by providing density bonuses, making reinvestment in existing communities more attractive. Furthermore, local governments can ask developers to provide connections to greenways or even trail segments as part of redevelopment. When appropriate, they could also fund park improvements through tax increment financing, considering that parks are known to have a positive effect on the value of nearby properties.

Implementation Examples:

- Several plans produced by the LTA program have tackled this issue. The City of Northlake Comprehensive Plan recommends the creation of a new public plaza consisting of open space as a community gathering place in the middle of a mixed use development, and also recommends the preservation of a nearby creek. A subarea plan for the Village of Carpentersville Old Town recommended the creation of a large new open space greenway connecting an existing park to the Fox River and a new public open space area connecting to a regional trail system.
- The Old Joliet Prison redevelopment plan recommends the conversion of hundreds of acres of state-owned prison property to a new public open space.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Review land-cash donation ordinances	Counties, municipalities, park districts	Older communities should review their subdivision codes or land-cash donation ordinances to make sure open space donation requirements or in-lieu fees apply during redevelopment, that they are at least 10 acres per 1,000 people (or at least 4 acres per 1,000 in dense areas), and that in-lieu fee values reflect current land values. Municipalities should work closely with park districts in this regard; higher donation requirements coupled with higher allowable densities will tend to encourage compact development. Communities expecting new growth should review their ordinances to ensure they provide rules on land donation to ensure land is well-located. It is also in the public interest to allow developers to donate land in the floodplain; park districts should strongly consider accepting these lands as part of the donation and manage them as passive recreational open space.

Implementation Examples:

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Encourage volunteerism and non-traditional staffing	Forest preserve and conservation districts, park districts	Park and forest preserve districts should actively encourage the creation of conservancies and partner with them to reduce the cost burden of maintenance and park programming while giving more “ownership” to users.

Implementation Examples:

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Make Open Space Land Acquisition and Development match requirements more equitable	State (IDNR)	Local governments in the most “under-parked” areas will frequently find it most challenging to provide the 50 percent match required for OSLAD. The state should decrease the match required in communities with lower fiscal capacity, as measured (for example) by equalized assessed value per capita.

Implementation Examples:

- SB 1341 allows distressed communities to receive up to 90% (rather than 50%) for acquisition of land under OSLAD; passed both houses in 2013 session. That bill was signed into law as Public Act [98-0520](#) in 2013.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Identify and protect sensitive recharge areas	State (ISWS, ISGS), CMAP, counties, municipalities	CMAP should lead a collaboration to identify SARAs, prioritize those most important for protection, and develop and disseminate model ordinances to ensure their preservation.

Implementation Examples:

- As part of Water 2050, CMAP developed an initial identification of sensitive aquifer recharge areas based on an earlier effort in McHenry County. This initial work was incorporated into the green infrastructure mapping that CMAP developed in collaboration with Chicago Wilderness in 2011-12 (the Green Infrastructure Vision, available at <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/green-infrastructure>).
- Crystal Lake, Elgin, McHenry, Oakwood Hills, and Prairie Grove, which are within the Silver Creek, Sleepy Hollow Creek, and Ferson-Otter Creek watersheds, are all engaged in LTA projects to identify ways to incorporate the protection of sensitive groundwater recharge areas into municipal plans and ordinances.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Encourage the integration of resource conservation in land use planning	State (DCEO), CMAP	Use planning grant programs to assist communities in incorporating resource conservation in local comprehensive planning.

Implementation Examples:

- The Village of Campton Hills comprehensive plan, an LTA project, recommends the preservation of open space within ‘conservation neighborhoods’ as a strategy to preserve the open, rural character of the community and to protect natural resources.
- The Village of Lakemoor comprehensive plan, an LTA project, also recommends the preservation of open space within new residential development that coincides with green infrastructure areas.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Implement “urban greening” projects	Counties, municipalities, park districts	Although it does not provide recreational opportunities for the most part, providing more extensive landscaping, tree cover, etc. does make developed areas more attractive and hence more livable. It can help increase access to open space and connect people with nature. Municipalities should build such practices into local infrastructure projects they undertake, such as street and sidewalk reconstruction. They should also review the potential to include requirements for them in new development through local ordinances.

Implementation Examples:

- The Green Healthy Neighborhoods LTA project recommends the integration of ‘urban greening’ strategies into a number of South Side neighborhoods including Greater Englewood, Woodlawn, and Washington Park. Strategies include additional open space and incorporation of stormwater management green infrastructure practices.
- The Riverside Central Business District Plan, an LTA project, recommends the use of stormwater management green infrastructure practices in local streetscaping improvements to improve water quality and enhance the aesthetics of the City’s commercial streets.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Implement urban farms and community gardens	Municipalities, park districts	In some cases, it will be more appropriate to utilize available urban land for farming, ¹ rather than for recreational parks. This will depend on local interests and the current availability of either type of land. Urban farming and community gardening have become increasingly important, as they satisfy a consumer preference for locally grown food, reduce food transportation costs, and provide a number of other benefits.

Implementation Examples:

- The Will County Fairmont Neighborhood Plan recommends the creation of community gardens. Since the adoption of this plan, which was produced through the LTA program, a community garden was created and was a success this past summer. Openlands is also working with the Fairmont School to create another community garden at the school.
- The Green Healthy Neighborhoods City of Chicago LTA project recommends the integration of three urban agriculture districts into a number of South Side neighborhoods including Greater Englewood, Woodlawn, and Washington Park as catalysts for redevelopment, to improve food access, and to increase local food production.

¹ See the *GO TO 2040* section titled Promote Sustainable Food.

Implementation Action Area #3: Harmonize Actions by State and Local Government with Natural Resource Protection

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Adopt progressive conservation design ordinances	Counties, municipalities	The most important thing a local government can do to protect open space is to plan for livability. ² This will reduce overall land consumption. Some development will continue to occur within the green infrastructure network, however. In this case, local governments should require or at least encourage conservation design, resulting in the legal protection of a significant portion of the site through a conservation easement. The protected areas should be fully accessible to the public and linked to any offsite trails. Conservation design should produce site yields equal to or greater than allowable with the underlying zoning, so that gross density does not change. Local governments should adopt a conservation design ordinance based from the <i>Conservation Design Resource Manual</i> to make it a by-right form of development. Some consideration should be given to having conservation design requirements apply automatically on sites containing important natural resources, as identified in a local comprehensive plan. A funding source and requirements for the management of common open space must be part of the development approval process.

Implementation Examples:

- Numerous watershed plans developed by CMAP and partners, including plans for Hickory Creek, Blackberry Creek, Ferson-Otter Creek and others, have reviewed ordinances and recommend updates to better incorporate conservation design strategies into land use controls.
- CMAP will be updating its conservation design model ordinance in FY 2014, which will be based on previously developed materials.

² See the *GO TO 2040* section titled Achieve Greater Livability Through Land Use and Housing.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Emphasize the protection of the green infrastructure network in local comprehensive plans	Counties, municipalities	As part of its comprehensive plan, a municipality should (in collaboration with the park district) specifically identify areas preferred to serve as parks, greenways, and natural areas. These areas should be zoned as such in accordance with the municipality's comprehensive plan.

Implementation Examples:

- The Village of Lakemoor comprehensive plan, an LTA project, recommends the preservation of open space within new residential development that coincides with green infrastructure areas.
- Comprehensive Plans for Addison, Blue Island, Northlake, Norridge, and Alsip, all LTA projects, include recommendations that have been crafted with assistance from their Parks Departments/Districts to identify where new parks and open space is desired.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Protect natural resources in transportation corridors and focus compensatory mitigation into the green infrastructure network	Federal (U.S. ACE), state (IDOT, Tollway), CMAP, forest preserve and conservation districts	One way of maximizing resources for preservation and restoration within the green infrastructure network is to stipulate that compensatory wetland mitigation required under federal or local ordinances occur within that network, but still focused within the watershed where the impact occurred. Requiring mitigation in this predefined area could help resolve the problem that entities required to do mitigation are often pressed to find a land management agency willing to take ownership and management responsibilities for the wetlands. It remains important to adhere to a sequence of avoiding and minimizing wetland impacts before utilizing compensatory mitigation. Furthermore, transportation agencies should use advanced design techniques to protect resources in project corridors, such as those spelled out in the I-LAST (Illinois – Livable and Sustainable Transportation) manual developed by IDOT.

Implementation Examples:

- In 2013, CMAP prepared “Policies to Encourage the Preservation of Regional Green Infrastructure in Northeastern Illinois” to explore in more detail how agencies can protect natural resources in transportation corridors and focus compensatory mitigation into the green infrastructure network.
- CMAP is working in partnership with the Illinois Tollway and Lake County on a multi-jurisdictional land use plan for the Route 53/120 corridor, which will examine green infrastructure resources and develop mitigating strategies to minimize impacts of land use change that may occur if the facility is built.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Limit urban infrastructure expansion within the green infrastructure network	State (IEPA), CMAP, municipalities	Sewer service should not be permitted in especially sensitive areas of the green infrastructure network. These especially sensitive areas should be precisely defined and identified in a refined version of the GIV, after which they should be specifically excluded from the incremental new area added to expanding facility planning areas.

Implementation Examples:

- CMAP is currently working to revise the process it uses to review applications for new or expanded wastewater treatment plants, and the current draft of its procedures manual calls for applicants to adopt measures to protect green infrastructure identified in the Chicago Wilderness Green Infrastructure Vision.

Implementation Action Area #4: Increase Funding to Achieve the Level of Park Provision and Land Conservation

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Secure additional dedicated state open space funding	State (IDNR), nonprofits	State funding for land acquisition, recreational facility development, and state park operations have declined significantly in the past few years. While a state capital bill was passed in 2009, more significant and stable funding is needed to replenish the state's Open Land Trust account. A set-aside specifically for acquisitions within the GIV and for parks programming in northeastern Illinois would be ideal.

Implementation Examples:

- The Illinois General Assembly passed SB 1566 to create a \$2 motor vehicle surcharge to support IDNR's conservation efforts. SB 1566 was signed into law as Public Act [97-1136](#).

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Stop diverting revenue from Illinois Department of Natural Resources programs	State (General Assembly, IDNR)	Despite the dedicated revenue stream, OSLAD and NAAF have been significantly underfunded in recent years. In some years, IDNR has spent less than half of OSLAD and NAAF funds, with the remainder raided for other state budgetary priorities. ³ IDNR had \$60 million less in funding in 2006 compared to four years earlier. Diverting Illinois Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT) funds and raiding the IDNR budget for other state priorities must cease.

Implementation Examples:

³ Illinois Environmental Council Education Fund, Illinois State Land Conservation Funding, 2007. See http://img.ilenviro.org/attachments/2007ISLCF_report.pdf.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Increase involvement by private landowners and land trusts in conservation activities	State (General Assembly), federal (Congress)	Private land conservation activities must play an increasingly important role in northeastern Illinois, but the state should provide incentives to encourage this, such as a state income tax credit for the donation of a conservation easement. ⁴ Federal tax incentives should be strengthened and extended. These actions could help encourage people to donate easements. In some cases, landowners may wish to provide public access to certain portions of their property for recreation or volunteer restoration work. However, landowners are inadequately protected from liability at present. The state should seek to offer liability protection to landowners who wish to allow these uses.

Implementation Examples:

- In 2012, CMAP prepared an [analysis](#) of the revenue potential of a conservation easement tax credit in Illinois, similar to the programs found in a number of other states. Such a tax credit would incentivize permanent protection of important lands while keeping it in private ownership.
- In 2013, SB 1042 was passed and signed into law as Public Act [98-0522](#), providing liability protection for private owners who open their land for recreation and conservation-related activities.

⁴ As an example, the state currently reduces real estate taxes on qualifying land enrolled in an Illinois Nature Preserves Commission program.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Build capacity in private conservation organizations	Land Trust Alliance, CW, Openlands, and others	To help them fulfill their important role in regional conservation, additional technical and administrative capacity needs to be built up at land trusts. This could entail training in real estate instruments, finance, and land management, among other areas.

Implementation Examples:

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Support direct federal investment in open space	Federal (Congress, U.S. FS)	Some of the biggest hubs or “macrosites” in the region are based on land protected by the federal government. Direct federal investment in open space in the region is an important form of funding that could be expanded; the federal government should take on a more significant role in open space protection in the region. This could happen through the formation of national wildlife refuges and the transfer of appropriate surplus federal property for open space uses, as happened at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and Fort Sheridan. Organizations in the region should support these opportunities as they arise.

Implementation Examples:

- After a feasibility study by the Fish and Wildlife Service, the [Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge](#) was formally established in 2012. Numerous public and private non-profit partners have been involved in the bi-state refuge’s creation, and they will continue to fill out the land protected within the refuge boundary.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Increase funding for federal open space grant programs	Federal (Congress)	The federal Urban Park and Recreation Recovery (UPARR) program has not been funded since 2002. It is the only federal program specifically for constructing and rehabilitating local parks, and has been in place for more than three decades. The state portion of the Land and Water Conservation Fund has seen very limited budgetary authorization in recent years.

Implementation Examples:

Implementation Action Area #5: Treat Management Needs as an Important Part of Landscape Preservation

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Restore open space within the green infrastructure network to natural land cover and hydrology and commit to long-term management	Forest preserve and conservation districts, land trusts, state (IDNR), utilities	From an environmental viewpoint, the central purposes of protecting the green infrastructure network are to protect water resources and to preserve biodiversity within the region. Ecosystem restoration, which often depends on at least partial reversal of hydrologic modifications, must be a major activity within the green infrastructure network. Local park sites are successfully being redesigned to include smaller green infrastructure practices for stormwater management; this is an important role they can play in the future in addition to providing recreation opportunities. Lands that are not protected open space per se are also candidates for management as green infrastructure. For instance, utility companies should make additional effort to put right-of-way into natural land cover.

Implementation Examples:

- CMAP is working on an LTA project with the Village of Antioch to create a Lifestyle Corridor, a multi-use path that generally follows Sequoit Creek through Village parks and open spaces, which the plan recommends be restored and managed in a natural state.
- In its updated conservation design ordinance, CMAP is considering provisions for stewardship plans with performance monitoring and long-term management requirements.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Devise and commit to a system to prioritize restoration needs based on regional criteria	State (INHS, IDNR), CMAP, forest preserve and conservation districts, nonprofits	It is not yet clear which areas are most important for restoration from a region-wide standpoint. CW or other partners, such as the Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS), should develop or simply adapt a system to rank natural areas by the viability and importance of restoring them. Restoration projects by organizations in the region should then be based on these priorities, as should external funding for restoration projects. Standardization of collection and sharing of data on restoration success should be encouraged as part of this system.

Implementation Examples:

- CMAP and Chicago Wilderness collaborated in 2011 – 2012 to update the Green Infrastructure Vision, which was used on GO TO 2040 to identify the most important lands to protect and restore. This update helps identify restoration opportunities at a regional level, but more work is needed by land managers to validate the priorities identified by the tool.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Consider purchase of agricultural land as an interim link in the green infrastructure network	Forest preserve and conservation districts, counties	Although the long-term goal is to restore land within the green infrastructure network to natural land cover, it is important to acquire farmland as an interim link. This can be licensed to producers to continue farming, which should be done in accordance with a conservation plan approved by the forest preserve or conservation district. Provision should be made to offset lost tax revenue for other taxing bodies in rural areas.

Implementation Examples:

- CMAP has been working with Lake County stakeholders on LTA projects to encourage the consideration of agricultural land for its food production potential and as an important asset within the green infrastructure network for the county.

Action	Lead Implementers	Specifics
Support efforts to provide adequate operating budgets for implementing agencies	State (General Assembly), CMAP, nonprofits	Re-evaluate statutory restrictions on the ability of park districts and forest preserve and conservation districts to raise property taxes to manage lands they acquire. Consider inclusion of funds for management in open space referenda. Estimate financial needs for restoration work in the region.

Implementation Examples: