Lee County Greenways and Trails Plan

The Purpose of this Plan

The Lee County Greenways & Trails Plan focuses on two important issues:

- **The desirability to establish a vision of resident's wants, in order to determine what would benefit the county now, as well as what might be possible 10, 20, or more years into the future.**
- **The need to develop a strategy detailing the priorities and possible courses of action to achieve that vision.**

Conservation, economic development, and transportation planning at local and state levels is an ongoing process. Taken together, the visionary planning and the strategic planning approaches defined above are our best assurance of benefiting from critical opportunities as they arise. The Lee County Greenways & Trails Plan has been conceived as the frontline tool for:

- identifying our natural and recreational resources
- defining opportunities and priorities
- recommending courses of action

It has been designed to be useful to greenspace, environmental, and recreational organizations, agencies, and jurisdictions from local communities to county, regional, and state. With the assistance of this map we can link our resources to planned greenways and trails in neighboring counties. We can expect planning officials to promote and secure funding for local plans and projects that will provide better environment, ensure access to recreation for residents and visitors, and help preserve a high quality of life throughout our region.

How will this Plan support these objectives?

The Plan envisions systems of greenspace that will preserve critical features of our natural heritage. It proposes shared-use trails on existing roads as well as extensions of dedicated off-road recreational paths, linking communities with one another and with natural and cultural resource sites throughout the county. This initiative of citizens and cooperating local agencies takes as its premise the idea that improvement of open space "infrastructure" and recreational access will, over time, provide lasting and increasingly important benefits to residents and visitors alike. The objectives and benefits of greenways and trails planning include:

- Providing a framework for coordinated greenway and trail conservation and development.
- Assistance to implementing and funding agencies to allocate resources in support of plan priorities.
- Initiating a forum for discussion and resolution of greenway issues among government jurisdictions and private sector interests.
- Providing a basis for coordinating transportation, recreation, water quality, storm and flood water, wildlife, and related programs, which will advance conservation of greenways and reduce conflict with other development activities.
- Increasing the understanding and appreciation of Lee County's natural and cultural resources and encouraging stewardship.

The Need for Action

The desire and intention of residents to preserve the rural character of the county is underscored by the 2000 Lee County Comprehensive Plan. It set forth the following guidelines:

- Preserve environmental corridor features including waterways, flood plains, wetlands, woodlands, steep slopes, wildlife habitats, and scenic vistas through the adoption and implementation of environmental protection zoning and subdivision ordinance standards.
- Ensure that residents of all ages and abilities in the County have adequate access to a diverse range of park and recreational facilities.
- Promote recreational and cultural opportunities (for tourists) in the County.
- Provide safe and convenient access for pedestrians, bicycles, and automobiles between neighborhoods, park and recreational facilities, schools, service and employment centers.

The restored H. I. Lincoln Building, Franklin Grove, built with native limestone in 1860, serves as a gift shop and as national headquarters of the Lincoln Highway Association.

- Encourage the development of multi-use trails within the County, as well as connect them to other trails in the region.

What is a Greenway?

A greenway is any linear open space established along either a natural corridor such as a stream valley, or overland along a man-made corridor such as a converted railroad right-of-way, canal, scenic road or parkway. Like arteries linking vital organs, greenways connect parks, nature preserves, wetlands, streams, cultural and historic sites with each other and with populated areas.

Some, though not all, greenways are trails that allow visitors into and through nature. However, any natural or landscaped course for pedestrian or bicycle passage is a greenway.

Greenways may be as wide as a watershed or as narrow as a trail. Some are publicly owned. Some are established on private land by easements, or other methods that protect valuable natural areas and cultural/historic sites, or allow public access along trails. Some are managed to preserve ecological diversity, while others are purely recreational.

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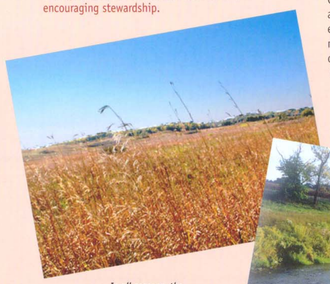
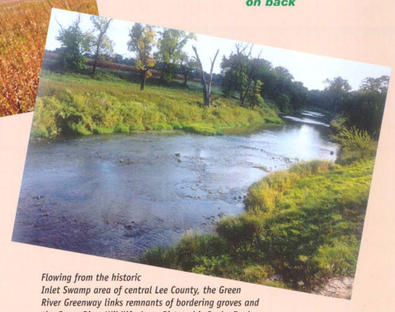
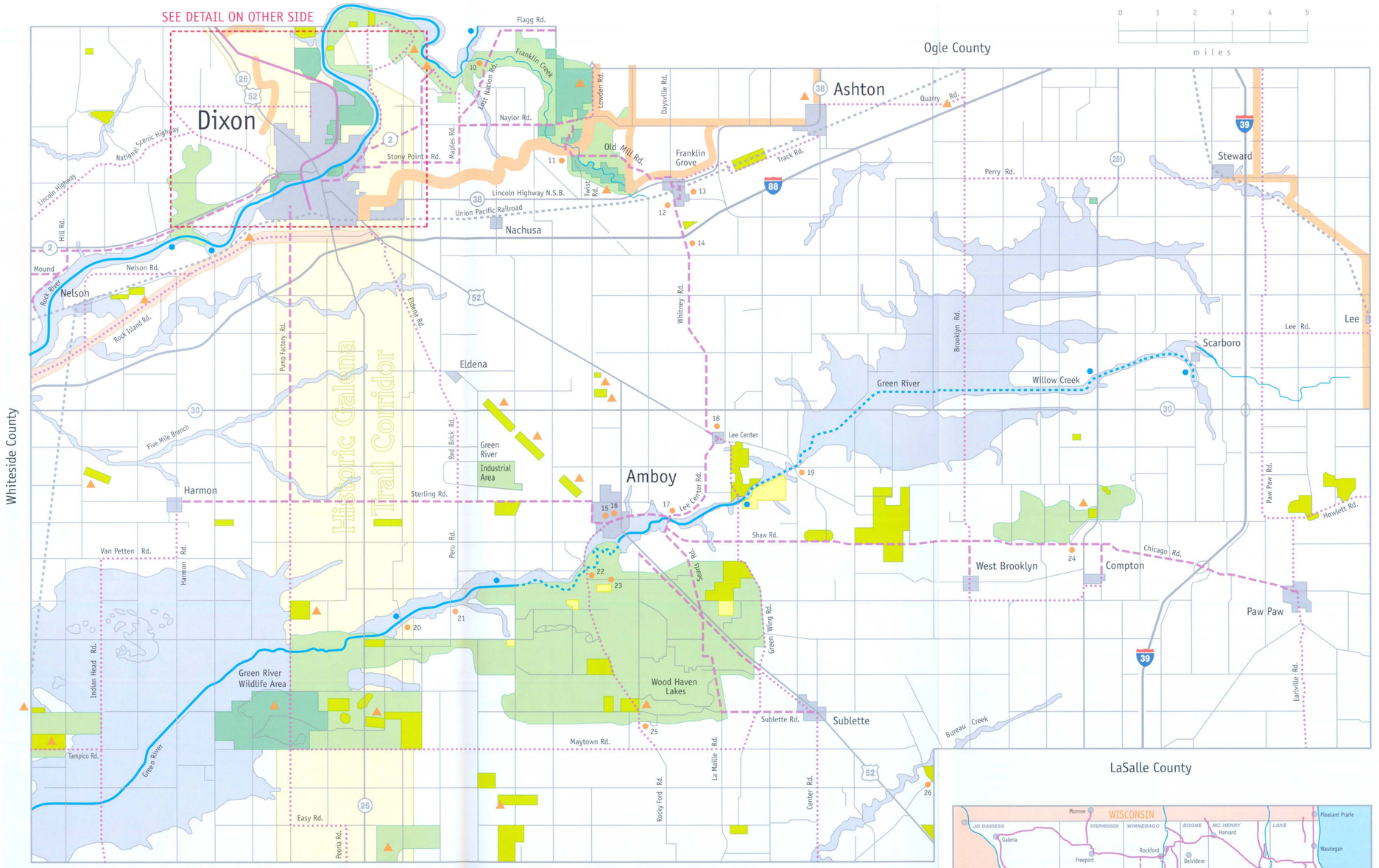


In all seasons, the Nature Conservancy's Nachusa Grasslands provides hikers with a vivid sense of the extensive prairie, marsh, and savanna landscapes of Lee County prior to settlement.



Flowing from the historic Inlet Swamp area of central Lee County, the Green River Greenway links remnants of bordering groves and the Green River Wildlife Area. Pictured is Rocky Ford, a crossing that dates back to old Indian trails.

SEE DETAIL ON OTHER SIDE



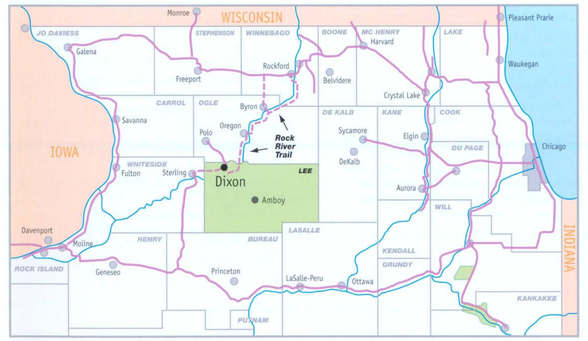
Lee County Greenways and Trails Plan

Historic Attractions

10 *LaSallier/Mack trading post site, early 1800's*
11 *Franklin Creek Grist Mill and Learning Center, 1847 reconstruction*
12 *Chaplin Creek Historic Village, restored buildings of the 1835-1895 era*
13 *H. I. Lincoln Building, 1860, national headquarters of the Lincoln Highway Association*
14 *Col. Nathan Whitney house and site of Whitney Nursery, 1856*
15 *Illinois Central Rail Road Amboy Depot (museum), 1876*
16 *First Carson Pirie store site, 1855*
17 *Early settlement of Binghampton; site of Palmer's & Dexter's saw mill, ca. 1840*
18 *Early settler homes, ca. 1837*
19 *River crossing of early settler/Indian trail; site of Dewey's saw mill and town of Inlet; Inlet cemetery*
20 *Galena Trail corduroy road toll crossing site, ca. 1830s*
21 *Site of Howe's grist mill, ca. 1840*
22 *Site of Perkins' saw mill, ca. 1840*
23 *Mormon Cemetery and early settlement site*
24 *Malugin's Grove settlement and site of inn on historic Chicago-Galena road, 1834*
25 *Sandy Hill Catholic Church and cemetery, 1840/1853*
26 *Ovid settlement on intersection of historic trails, 1836*

Legend

- Flood plains
- Roads, etc.
- Snowmobile Corridor
- Potential Snowmobile Trail
- Public Greenspace
- Potential Greenspace
- Private Greenspace
- Recreational Areas (private and commercial campgrounds, religious, etc.)
- Existing Trail
- Potential Recreational Trail
- Secondary Trail (potential)
- Rail Roads
- River & Streams
- Potential Canoe Trail
- Canoe Site
- Historic Site
- Illinois Natural Area Inventory Site



Grand Illinois Trail System

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Two Types of Trails

Dedicated Trails are designed and built off-road for the exclusive use of pedestrians, bicyclists, cross-country skiers, skaters, people in wheelchairs, equestrians, or motorized use such as snowmobilers. Surface treatment and width may vary, depending on the usage of a specific trail or segment. Permitted usage is established by the organizations and public agencies involved in the acquisition, development, and maintenance of each trail. Although more than one type of non-motorized use is allowed on most trails, typically the use by motorized recreational vehicles is segregated by location and/or by season.

Shared-Use Trails are low-volume streets or rural roads designated to be shared by existing vehicular traffic with proposed bicycle and pedestrian use. Generally shared-use trails will require at least some signage and perhaps paint striping to identify the routes and to alert motorists. Where the right-of-way is of sufficient width and suitable configuration, some shared-use roadways may accommodate other uses such as equestrians or snowmobiling within the right-of-way, although not on the pavement. State law and local ordinances govern which uses may be allowed on roads and streets.

Portions of routes that originate as shared-use roadway trails could in the future be replaced by construction of dedicated off-road trails, either within the public right-of-way or on parallel easements. The limitations on such conversions include existing development and land uses, drainage ditches and stream crossings, and vehicular traffic patterns.

Lee County's Unique History & Geography

The location of our county on many important travel routes into the Old Northwest Territory figures prominently in the development of the Lee County Greenways & Trails Plan. Some were ancient Indian trails that became crowded with lead miners and early settlers in the years following the Black Hawk War. The pattern of rudimentary roads, indicated on the original Federal Land Survey in the early 1840's, is reflected in the present-day road map of the county. Historic routes are the roads that angle across the open prairie spaces, now filled with working farms. Their destinations near and far include the original river fords and ferries that grew to become the centers of commerce and population in northern Illinois. The geography of Lee County's streams, great swamps, and the dissected terrain of a glacial moraine that spans the county dictated that many early roads would remain in spite of efforts to impose the survey grid on subsequent development.

Inspection of key roads that align with the old trail routes indicates that a greater number of scenic views, historic buildings, and cultural sites occur along these roads linking the earliest settlements. Consequently, this plan recommends that wherever possible the proposed shared-use trails coincide with historic roads. These trails offer the greatest interest for recreational use by residents and visitors alike.

Foremost among them are:

- The Galena Trail between Peoria and Galena, crossing the Rock River at Dixon
- The Chicago-to-Galena route through Paw Paw and Inlet to the ferry at Dixon
- The route between the shallows of the Illinois River at Peru, crossing the Rocky Ford on the Green River en route to Dixon
- The Green Wing route from LaMoille to Inlet crossing, through Lee Center and Franklin Grove, passing north toward Daysville and Rockford.

Similarly, most greenspace opportunities lie along the slanting, parallel pattern of the original river corridors, swamp lands, and the high, rolling moraine with its glacial features and sand deposits. The unique qualities of the recommended combined greenways and trails plans are that:

- historic patterns are preserved and exploited

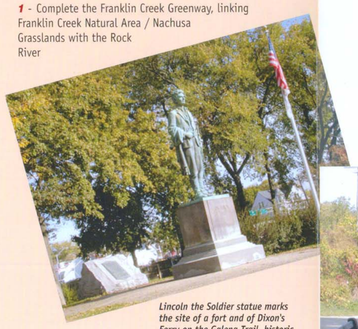
trails do not conform solely to east-west trending greenway and railway corridors; instead they follow historic precedent by cutting across the grain geographically to link communities, public sites, and scenic destinations located in the natural corridors.

A prominent exception will be the Rock River Trail. It will follow the greenway on the Rock River in order to provide Lee County with a connection to the Grand Illinois Trail.

The Top Priorities

Prioritizing development is the key to winning broad local support for implementation of individual projects. It is essential to attract state, federal, and private funding. This plan gives highest priority to 14 proposed greenways or trails, four of which are integral components of the Rock River Trail that will link Lee County to the Grand Illinois Trail system (***GIT***). A total of 38 are shown on the map and described in more detail in the written report that accompanies the Lee County Greenways & Trails Plan:

1 - Complete the Franklin Creek Greenway, linking Franklin Creek Natural Area / Nachusa Grasslands with the Rock River



Lincoln the Soldier statue marks the site of a fort and of Dixon's Ferry on the Galena Trail, historic resources within the Dixon Park District riverfront parks, now a link in existing and proposed regional bicycle/pedestrian trails.

2 - Define and develop a conservation plan for the Palmyra Greenway between Sunnydale Acres Subdivision and the Rock River

3 - ***GIT:*** Plan and implement the Sauk Valley Trail segment of the Rock River Trail from Page Park in Dixon to the Whiteside County line, connecting with Sterling's Riverfront Trail

4 - ***GIT:*** Implement the planned bike/ped access lanes on both sides of Dixon's new Peoria Avenue bridge

5 - ***GIT:*** Plan and implement the South Riverfront Trail via the Union Pacific rail route from 7th St. in Dixon to White Oak Lane

6 - ***GIT:*** Improve and designate the Rock River Trail segment over local roads from the South Riverfront Trail to the Ogle County line

7 - Designate the shared-use Old Mill Trail between the Rock River Trail at Dixon, Franklin Creek Natural Area, and Franklin Grove on the Lincoln Highways National Scenic Byway

8 - Designate the shared-use Whitney Trail between Franklin Grove and Lee Center

9 - Designate the shared-use Lee Center Trail (bicycles only) from Lee Center to Binghampton and Amboy

10 - Designate the shared-use Pump Factory Trail between Dixon,, Amboy, and Harmon

11 - Designate the shared-use Chicago Trail from Binghampton to Paw Paw

12 - Designate the shared-use Brooklyn Leg of the Chicago Trail

13 - Designate the shared-use Compton Leg of the Chicago Trail

14 - Designate the shared-use Sublette Trail from Shaw Road to Woodhaven Lakes and Sublette

Meiner's Wetland natural area, as well as Nachusa Grasslands and the Franklin Creek Natural Area, are accessible via shared-use Naylor Road on the priority Old Mill Trail.

Lowell Parkway Trail, developed on the former railroad alignment now owned by Dixon Park District, connects the city with Lowell Park and the inter-county Joe Stengel Trail.

Participating planning organizations are:

Lee County Tourism Council

City of Dixon — "Father" John Dixon

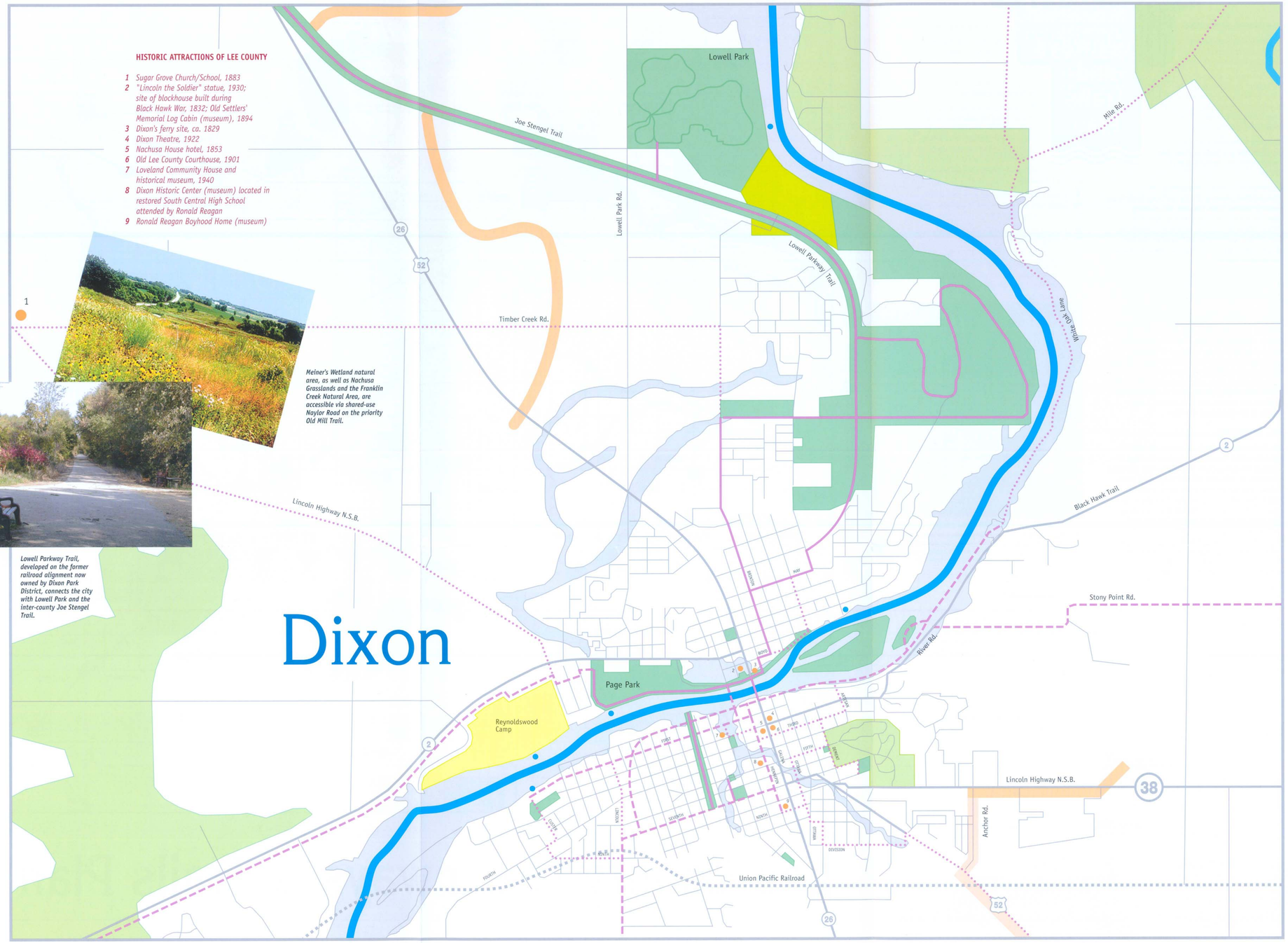
Lowell Park — Dixon Park District

Blackhawk Hills — Resource Conservation and Development

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

HISTORIC ATTRACTIONS OF LEE COUNTY

1 *Sugar Grove Church/School, 1883*
2 *"Lincoln the Soldier" statue, 1930; site of blockhouse built during Black Hawk War, 1832; Old Settlers' Memorial Log Cabin (museum), 1894*
3 *Dixon's ferry site, ca. 1829*
4 *Dixon Theatre, 1922*
5 *Nachusa House hotel, 1853*
6 *Old Lee County Courthouse, 1901*
7 *Loveland Community House and historical museum, 1940*
8 *Dixon Historic Center (museum) located in restored South Central High School attended by Ronald Reagan*
9 *Ronald Reagan Boyhood Home (museum)*



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- Canoe Site
- Historic Site

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one mile

PHOTOGRAPHY: DEAN SHEAFFER
DESIGN: DE GOEDE + OTHERS INC

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