Boone and Winnebago Regional Greenways Plan

Map and Summary

A Greenway network protects natural, cultural, and scenic resources, provides recreational benefits, enhances the natural beauty and the quality of life in neighborhoods and communities, and stimulates economic development opportunities.

This plan identifies land for which the preferred use is to keep it green—land not paved or improved with structures. These greenways form the green infrastructure of Boone and Winnebago Counties. Green infrastructure is the interconnected network of land and water that supports native species, maintains ecological processes, sustains air and water resources, and contributes to the health of people and communities.

Green infrastructure is an integral part of a healthy community. It should serve as the framework for conservation and development so that connections and key natural resource lands can be identified and protected before development begins. Across our nation, communities that understand this are prospering and holding onto their people and their evolving economic base.

The core concept of the Greenways Plan is connections. A greenway is a corridor of open space that is protected from development and that connects streams, parks, neighborhoods and natural habitat areas. Plants and animals must be able to move around in order to survive. Greenways provide that connection.

Boone and Winnebago Greenways Plan Goals & Implementation

The Greenways Plan Map is a tool to shape community development by using land conservation to guide growth and preserve the environmental and recreational assets of Winnebago and Boone Counties. The Greenway Plan will serve as the primary planning document for land acquisition, natural area preservation, greenway corridor and recreational trail development for the two county area. The Greenways Plan indicates existing protected green space and potential future green space acquisitions, as well as recreational trails and corridors. The goal of the project is to provide one comprehensive planning tool for all of the participating agencies and others involved in regional planning, natural areas preservation, land management, transportation and recreation.

The Greenways Plan is a tool to help communities steer growth and development away from valuable natural resources and toward existing communities and infrastructure. Rapidly increasing urbanization in both counties threatens stream corridors and other natural resources that are essential to the health of the region. The scientific data represented in the updated Greenways Plan Map and complementary database provide a valuable resource for community leaders and individuals making decisions about which areas are appropriate for development and which are to be prioritized for protection. Extensive GIS (Geographic Information System) data including hydrology, soil types, floodplains, geology, topography, land cover, flora and fauna inventories are available on the internet version of the Greenway Plan Map. For more information about how to access this data contact the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District at 815/877-6100.

Implementation of the Greenway Plan will require strong support and partnerships among transportation agencies, forest preserve and park districts, county and municipal governments, conservation and recreation organizations and private landowners. Real estate developers, utility companies and private property owners are encouraged to include greenway planning in their future plans. Numerous municipalities and public and private agencies have adopted the Boone and Winnebago Regional Greenways Plan for incorporation into their comprehensive land use plans and as a policy development guide. Achieving the vision of environmental quality, natural resource protection and recreational opportunities depicted in the Greenway Plan is dependent on local municipalities' commitments to developing creative and proactive incentives and policies for encouraging economic development while simultaneously funding and protecting greenway systems.

Nygren Wetland Preserve, Natural Land Institute

Benefits of Greenways:

- Improve overall quality of environment
- Reduce flood damages
- Improve water quality
- Provide areas for aquifer recharge
- Protect critical wildlife habitat
- Provide recreational opportunities
- Shape the use of the land
- Link communities to open spaces
- Ease demands on road networks
- Increase property values
- Increase tourist revenue
- Protect rivers and streams

Kishwaukee River

Additional Goals

- Create a vision of a regional greenway and trails network
- Facilitate land conservation as a tool to manage future growth and development
- Provide a strategic framework for the creation of a green infrastructure system that offsets negative and costly impacts of urban sprawl
- Coordinate land acquisition plans among conservation and land management agencies
- Assist funding agencies in allocating resources for natural areas and trails
- Initiate a continuing forum for discussion among governmental jurisdictions and the private sector
- Provide a basis for coordinating transportation, water quality, storm and floodwater and other services with greenways protection, thereby reducing conflicts with other development activities
- Increase the level of understanding regarding the importance and value of greenways and encourage stewardship of natural and cultural resources

Explanation of land and natural resource designations:

Wetland- Nationally Inventoried Wetlands that are 10 acres or larger in size.

Forest- areas where landcover was identified as forest that are 80 acres or larger in size

Grassland- areas where landcover was identified as grassland over 80 acres or larger in size

Critical and Sensitive- areas that have critical resources for flora and fauna needs and/or are sensitive to development or use of the land

Illinois Natural Area Inventory Sites- sites portrayed are where the Illinois Conservation Department's listing of all known lands and water in the state have significant natural values, support endangered and threatened or relict species, or still are sufficiently undisturbed to demonstrate what Illinois was like in pre-settlement times.

Illinois Protected Natural Areas- sites portrayed are protected by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission through dedication as nature preserves or land and water preserves.

River Markers- river and stream markers portrayed every 5 miles

Canoe Launch Sites-canoe launch sites portrayed are open to the public

The mapping and data compilation for this project was funded by a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation.

The printing of this map was funded by a grant from the Rockford Area Transportation Study and by contributions from the participating agencies.

Natural resource data for Kishwaukee River Watershed provided by the Kishwaukee River Ecosystem Partnership and funded by grants from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Conservation 2000 program and the Grand Victoria Foundation.

This map and complementary GIS and natural resource inventory database are available for public access on the internet. For more information call Winnebago County Forest Preserve District at 815/877-6100.

Participating agencies include:

Winnebago County Forest Preserve District, Boone County Conservation District, City of Rockford, City of Loves Park, City of Belvidere, Village of Rockton, Rockford Park District, Belvidere Park District, Natural Land Institute, Rockford Area Transportation Study, Belvidere Park District, Boone County and Winnebago County Planning Department.

Critical & Sensitive Areas Provide Habitat for Wildlife

There are many types of landscapes categorized as Critical & Sensitive Areas on the Boone/Winnebago Greenways Plan map. They were designated in this category because they contain natural features and landscape characteristics that are essential to support native ecosystems and species. Criteria for inclusion in this category include quality wetland, high quality or remnant prairie, native woodland, sensitive floodplain area or areas containing state endangered flora and/or fauna species. A major reason to protect various types of critical and sensitive land is to protect biodiversity. Destruction of habitat has caused many of our native species to become threatened or endangered. Extinction of any species creates an adverse effect on the area's biodiversity, and consequently, the web of life.

Kishwaukee River and its tributary, Coon Creek. The goal of the initiative is to create a large open space area over an extended period of time in an area that still contains some high quality habitat and offers the potential to protect one of the highest quality stream systems in the state of Illinois. Both the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Boone County Conservation District have purchased property in this study area. Landowners with an interest to donate or willingly sell land for conservation purposes or with a desire to implement conservation efforts through their own private stewardship are encouraged to contact Boone County Conservation District for more information.

Definitions of designated habitats:

Community Separation Areas
Boone County has a number of freestanding communities that would like to retain their uniqueness and individuality. Community Separation Areas provide buffers between developed areas and these communities. These areas may evolve a number of different land uses including agriculture and outdoor recreation. Very low density and institutional development are also generally compatible with this concept below the range of one dwelling per twenty acres.

Crow's Foot Conservation Area (Boone County) is the result of a conservation initiative aimed at preserving and enhancing habitat along the

Nygren Wetland Preserve in Winnebago County is owned and managed by the Natural Land Institute, a private conservation organization. Nygren Wetland, located at the confluence of the Rock and Pecatonica Rivers, consists of more than 700 acres of wetlands, prairies, and forests which support many species of plants and animals. Nygren is actively being restored and is open to the public many times throughout the year and for special events and tours. Call for dates to visit this unique natural area.

For more information on how to enjoy the parks, preserves and natural areas in Boone and Winnebago County contact the agencies listed below:

Winnebago County Forest Preserve District- 815/877-6100
www.wcfpd.org

Rockford Park District- 815/987-8800
www.rockfordparkdistrict.org

Boone County Conservation District- 815/547-7955
www.boonecountyconservationdisrict.org

Belvidere Park District- 815/547-5711
www.belviderepark.org

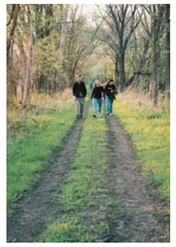
Natural Land Institute- 815/964-6666
www.naturalland.org

Rock Cut State Park- 815/885-5311
www.dnr.state.il.us

Discover the fun and beauty of greenways and natural areas in Boone & Winnebago Counties

Explore natural areas, woods, rivers and prairies. While visiting public natural areas you can enjoy lush, shady woods carpeted with wildflowers. You may discover wide-open acres of waving prairie grasses and flowers visited by a variety of insects and butterflies. Perhaps you'd like to take in the wonder and beauty of the diverse waterfowl, wildlife and plants in our rivers, wetlands and ponds. All of these valuable habitats support complex webs of interdependent native species.

In addition to the numerous restored natural areas, there are six designated Illinois Nature Preserves within Winnebago County forest preserves: Sugar River Alder, Colored Sands, Pecatonica Bottoms, Hartley Memorial, Laona Heights, and Severson Dells. Other nature preserves in Winnebago County include Searles Prairie, Harlem Hills, and Colman Dells. Boone County contains three: Flora Prairie, Ispen Prairie and Kinnikinnick Creek. These dedicated nature preserves are areas of land or water in public or private ownership that are formally dedicated to protect and preserve their natural character. Many nature preserves contain state threatened or endangered species and many contain rare or critical habitat. Nature preserves within the forest preserves and conservation areas are open to the public for hiking and nature observation.



Oakridge Forest Preserve, Winnebago County Forest Preserve District

Trails & Recreation Paths

Both Boone and Winnebago Counties have abundant opportunities and facilities for hiking, biking, jogging and horseback riding. Both Boone and Winnebago Counties offer extensive trail systems, both paved and unpaved, in urban and natural settings. Whether you are seeking the exercise and active recreation of jogging, bicycling or rollerblading, or wanting to escape on a dirt footpath through the forest or prairie to view wildflowers and listen to birdsong or a babbling stream, you'll find it here. The Winnebago County Forest Preserve District, the Boone County Conservation District, the Rockford Park District, and the Belvidere Park District all maintain trail systems to be enjoyed by the public at no charge. To help you find all the trails and paths in Winnebago County, you can reference a free *Recreation Path Guide* available at the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District or the Rockford Park District.

Spencer Conservation Area, Boone County Conservation District

Major Recreation Trails in Boone & Winnebago

Long Prairie Trail- An asphalt path of 14.6 miles is located east of Capron and runs between County Line Road in Winnebago County to the Boone/McHenry County line through the villages of Capron, Poplar Grove, and Caledonia.

Pecatonica Prairie Path-This crushed rock 21-mile path follows the Com Ed right-of-way between Rockford and Freeport through the villages of Winnebago and Pecatonica.

Perryville Path includes the Midway Village loop and provides 15 miles of paved trail links to Willow Creek Path and Rock Cut State Park.

Rock River Recreation Path is a beautiful way to see Rockford and Loves Park as it winds along the banks of the Rock River for 10 miles. Beginning at the YMCA in Rockford it follows the river, crosses the Riverside Blvd. Bridge and makes a loop around a quarry lake at Headquarters Forest Preserve.

Stonebridge Trail is a picturesque crushed rock trail that includes a historic stone railroad bridge and runs 5.7 miles through woods and residential areas and provides access to Roland Olson Forest Preserve.

Willow Creek Recreation Path connects to Rock Cut State Park. Altogether, the path covers a total distance of 5.12 miles of paved trail, beginning at Harlem High School on North Alpine Rd in Machesney Park and extending east along the creek 1.57 miles into Loves Park and on to Rock Cut.

Kishwaukee Riverfront Path is a 3.5-mile asphalt path that is enjoyed by walker, joggers, and bicyclists year round. The path system begins in downtown Belvidere at the State Street Bridge and continues westward through Doty Park and Belvidere Park until it crosses the Historic Baltic Mill Race and turns north to enter Spencer Conservation Area.

Parks and Preserves

Park districts, a forest preserve district and a conservation district provide a combined total of over 15,000 acres of public greenspace and recreational areas. Some of these properties, such as playgrounds and ball fields, are developed for specialized recreational activities. The Winnebago County Forest Preserve District, the Boone County Conservation District, the Rockford Park District and the Belvidere Park District, and the Natural Land Institute all manage areas that are maintained in a natural state to provide habitat for wildlife and passive recreation opportunities for human visitors. Rock Cut State Park offers an additional 3,092 acres for fishing, hiking, camping & picnicking.

Creeks & Rivers

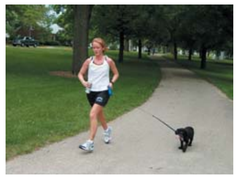
Boone and Winnebago Counties offer a wealth of quality water resources, and most of their greenway corridors have been created along river and stream corridors. These corridors are critical to protecting water habitat quality, protecting biodiversity along the streams and creating recreation trails for hiking, horseback riding and canoeing. The region offers a unique network of riverside parks, forested shoreline, campgrounds and designated boat landings that make it a favorite destination for recreationalists and nature lovers. Many forest preserves are located on the area's four rivers and offer canoe launch areas, as well as amenities like parking, outhouses, water and picnic areas. To enable residents and visitors to find and safely enjoy canoeing and fishing activities, the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District and the Rockford Park District have produced a comprehensive *Boating, Fishing & Canoeing Guide*, which covers all recreational water facilities and regulations in Winnebago County. To receive a copy of this free brochure, call the Forest Preserve District at (815) 877-6100, or access www.wcfpd.org.

Sugar River Forest Preserve, Winnebago County Forest Preserve District

Sinnissippi Recreation Path, Rockford Park District

Stone Bridge Trail

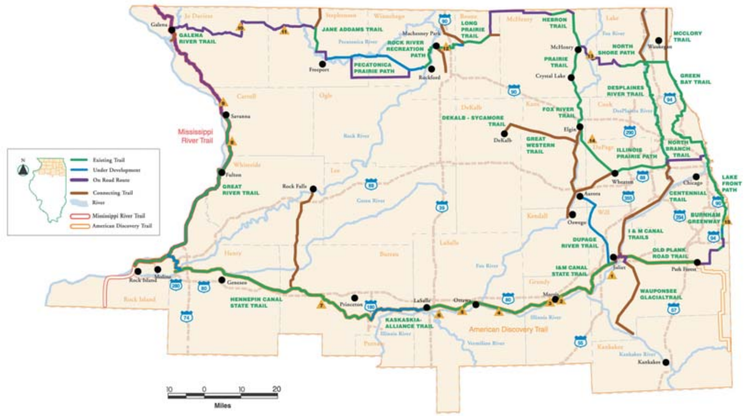
Background Photo: Harlem Hills Nature Preserve, Illinois Department of Natural Resources



Kishwaukee Riverfont Path, Belvidere Park District

Distillery Road Conservation Area, Boone County Conservation District

GRAND ILLINOIS TRAIL CONCEPT



GRAND ILLINOIS TRAIL CONCEPT

As it loops more than 500 miles between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River, the Grand Illinois Trail joins together existing and proposed state and local trails to create the state's longest continuous trail.

Contact local trail managers for more information, such as trail surface and on-road connections. Recognize that while the Grand Illinois Trail route is a designated 500-mile loop, it is not a continuous off-road trail. It is many trails linked together, and you must go on-road in various locations to connect to the next trail. In many cases this is a quick connection between trails, and in other locations more on-road travel is involved. Trail development will continue, with the ultimate goal a continuous Grand Illinois Trail.

All sections of the Grand Illinois Trail are suitable for biking and hiking, with opportunities available in some areas for horseback riding, snowmobiling, in-line skating, and even paddling. Follow the green and white Grand Illinois Trail signs, and discover the trail's many opportunities to experience the diversity of Illinois, its people and its special places. It's time to hit the trail … the Grand Illinois Trail.

A detailed Grand Illinois Trail User Guide is also available. The user guide features cue sheets and maps for all segments of the trail. The guide, developed by the League of Illinois Bicyclists, is available by contacting the Illinois Department of Natural Resources at 217/782-5715, via email to greenway@dnrmail.state.il.us or you can download the guide by visiting the League's web site at http://www.bikelib.org

BOONE AND WINNEBAGO COUNTIES REGIONAL GREENWAYS PLAN MAP

- Private
- Public
- Urbanized Area
- Priority Aquisition
- Critical & sensitive area
- Boone County Separation Areas
- Crow's Foot Marsh Study Area
- Wetland
- Grassland
- Forest
- Existing Recreation Paths/Trails
- Grand Illinois Trail
- Potential Recreation Paths
- Illinois Protected Natural Areas
- Illinois Natural Areas Inventory Sites
- Canoe Launch Site
- 5 Mile River Markers

N

0 1,250 2,500 5,000 7,500 10,000 Feet

SOUTH BELOIT
ROCKTON
ROSCOE
DURAND
MACHESNEY PARK
LOVES PARK
CALEDONIA
POPLAR GROVE
CAPRON
PECATONICA
WINNEBAGO
ROCKFORD
CHERRY VALLEY
BELVIDERE
NEW MILFORD

Illinois Route 75
Illinois Route 251
Illinois Route 173
United States Highway 20
United States Highway 20 (Bus)
I-90