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**McLEAN COUNTY
REGIONAL GREENWAYS PLAN**

Prepared By

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**In Cooperation with the
McLean County Greenways Coalition**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The McLean County Regional Greenways Plan is a local response to the national and statewide greenway movement. The greenway movement arose from the need to address the nation's urban and environmental problems and to meet growing demands for recreation and open space nationwide. Greenways are narrow bands of open space that can provide habitat for wildlife, provide essential routes for species migration, filter pollutants from water, enhance scenic and aesthetic qualities, and in many instances expand recreational as well as social, cultural and economic opportunities. The need to preserve and expand these opportunities is particularly important in rapidly growing communities such as McLean County, which since 1970 has experienced more absolute growth than any other Illinois county outside the Chicago region.

The McLean County Regional Greenways Plan identifies a vision and recommends a course of action to achieve a regionwide system of greenways to address these important issues in McLean County. This report presents the vision and recommendations as well as a description of the process used to develop the plan and the findings of research on the County's greenway resources.

The greenway planning process in McLean County has made effective use of broad-based public input, including extensive citizen participation. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources developed planning guidelines and provided technical and financial assistance for the local planning effort. The City of Bloomington, Town of Normal and County of McLean each passed a resolution of support for the greenways planning program. The McLean County Greenways Coalition was formed to provide direct input from interested citizens, local governments and organizations, including recreational and environmental groups as well as the McLean County Farm Bureau and individual landowners. A steering committee was appointed by McLean County Regional Planning Commission to coordinate planning efforts between planning staff and the main body of the Coalition. The result is a plan that reflects a wide range of interests, talents and perspectives.

The vision presented in the McLean County Regional Greenways Plan reflects national and statewide visions as well as those of County residents. The McLean County vision embodies the national vision presented by the President's Commission on American Outdoors and the State of Illinois vision for trails-related outdoor recreation presented by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. From these broad visions, the Coalition in conjunction with Commission staff formulated a series of goals and objectives to guide the development and implementation of the regional greenways plan. Goals and objectives were established for the five areas of (1) Conservation, Environment and Reservation; (2) Parks and Recreation; (3) Implementation, Management and Coordination; (4) Legal Issues; and (5)

Education Issues. These goals and objectives, combined with the national and state visions, comprise the vision for greenways in McLean County.

This report also presents a series of conclusions that reflect the results of research completed on the County's natural and manmade features which have implications for greenways planning. McLean County has a number of important natural and scenic resources as well as numerous other resources that should be preserved and integrated into the regional greenway system. Major features include the Mackinaw River system, Moraine View State Park, Funks Grove, COMLARA Park and Lake Bloomington in addition to selected road and railroad rights of way and numerous other waterways throughout the County. The Constitution Trail provides an excellent basis for the development of a regional system of greenways and trails that could serve not only the metro area, but could also be extended to connect important features throughout the County and quite possibly with other regions of the State. The plan incorporates these and other appropriate features either as designated future greenways or as origins and destinations between greenways.

The plan identifies seventy-eight priority future greenways for ultimate development countywide. A potential greenway is considered a priority future greenway and illustrated as such on the map if it exhibits at least one of the ten beneficial features described in Chapter 4 of this report. Twenty-five greenways with six or more beneficial features were identified and described in the text of the report.

In order to facilitate analysis and ensure countywide planning coverage, the County was divided into five planning areas with priority future greenways identified for each. In the Bloomington-Normal metro area, proposed future greenway projects include extensions to the Constitution Trail system and the preservation and development of the Sugar Creek waterway system as a network of greenways. In Northern McLean County, the Mackinaw River system and Historic Route 66 are among the priority greenways identified. The Crooked Creek and Sangamon River waterways are identified as priority greenways in Eastern McLean County. Several waterways and the Norfolk & Southern Railroad right of way are included in Southern McLean County, while Western McLean County includes the southern portion of Historic Route 66 as well as several area waterways.

Implementation is a key component of the McLean County Regional Greenways Plan. The plan identifies methods available to aid in implementation, including regulatory ordinances and numerous acquisition, ownership and financial strategies which emphasize participation by landowners and private citizens. It also describes responsibilities for implementation, including those of federal, state and local governments as well as interested citizens and organizations. Additionally, the plan stresses the need for continuing coordination of plans, programs and projects in order to effectively meet plan objectives.

The planning report concludes by setting forth an implementation plan outlining actions that will be required to carry out plan recommendations. These actions begin with the official adoption of the regional greenways plan by local governments and include the selection of a management agency to target and coordinate priority future greenways for implementation. Also included are actions by the management agency to determine appropriate strategies for acquisition, ownership and financing, and to perform annual reviews of the plan to measure progress and target additional greenway projects. Public relations and education is another activity recommended for the management agency. The plan also recommends that McLean County Regional Planning Commission provide staff and technical support to the management agency to aid in coordinating greenway activities.

According to the plan, local units of government would serve a number of roles of great importance to the success of the plan. Among these are providing financial support to fund particular projects within respective jurisdictions and to meet local match requirements for federal and state grants as available for greenway projects. The plan also recommends that local governments consider the regional greenways plan and the need for greenways when reviewing proposed development projects. Finally, the plan recommends that local regulatory ordinances be up to date and strictly enforced with respect to provisions affecting greenways and land dedication requirements.

While the preparation of this document is an important first step toward realizing the vision for greenways in McLean County, it is only the first of many important steps in the planning process. To achieve the desired results will require appropriate follow-up actions involving much dedication and hard work. This document is intended to serve as a guide for those actions.

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INTRODUCTION

Chapter

1

McLean County offers a quality of life that attracts significant economic and population growth. Fertile soils have made McLean County a world leader in crop production while unemployment levels are consistently among the lowest in the state. Educational opportunities abound, from elementary to the university level. In addition, a wide variety of cultural, entertainment and recreational opportunities contribute to the region's attractiveness. As a result the County's population has increased steadily and significantly since 1950 and is expected to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Growth provides many benefits but it also creates challenges. Growing numbers of people increase demands for services, including recreation and open space, but also increase the abilities of local government to provide services through increased revenues.

The challenge for local government is to provide services and accommodate growth in an environmentally compatible manner. McLean County, like similar areas within the State, is faced with the need to protect valuable natural resources from development and environmental degradation, while creating additional open space and recreational opportunities. Areas of prime farmland adjacent to the Bloomington-Normal metro area that were once considered "rural" have been replaced with residential, commercial or industrial development. Plant and animal species, such as the Cooper's Hawk, Slippershell Mussel, and Upland Sandpiper to name a few, that were once prevalent have suffered greatly through loss of habitat or through a

detrimental change in the environment, attributable at least in part to urban and agricultural development.

Waterways such as the Lower Mackinaw River have fallen victim to man-made and environmental stresses such as flooding, habitat loss, sedimentation, pollution and stormwater runoff. Within the metro area, the preservation of open space and the provision of recreation opportunities must compete with other development pressures.

WHAT IS A GREENWAY?

Greenways represent a means to address these and similar challenges. The author Charles Little, in his work, *Greenways for America*, defined a greenway as follows:

1. A linear open space established along either a natural corridor, such as a riverfront, stream valley, or ridgeline, or overland along a railroad right-of-way converted to recreational use, a canal, a scenic road, or other route.
2. Any natural or landscaped course for pedestrian or bicycle passage.
3. An open space connector linking parks, nature reserves, cultural features, or historic sites with each other and with populated areas.
4. Certain strip or linear parks designated as a parkway or greenbelt.

Little's definition of greenway illustrates the correlation between open space and recreational use. Sometimes it is appropriate for the two to function together; in other cases, the two should remain separate. In either case, greenways provide a variety of environmental benefits that promote harmony between the natural and built environments.

THE GREENWAY MOVEMENT

The greenway movement arose from the need to address important ecological and recreational issues nationwide. Government agencies at the local, state and federal levels, in cooperation with interested citizens and organizations, have collaborated nationwide to address environmental threats and concerns regarding open space and recreation availability. The Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways Plan, developed by the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) and Openland Project with assistance from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), was the first cooperative effort by public and private organizations to create a regional greenways plan in Illinois.

Subsequently, IDNR offered financial and technical assistance to other metro areas in the State to prepare regional greenway plans. The McLean County Regional Planning Commission submitted a proposal for assistance from IDNR for the preparation of a regional greenways plan for McLean County. The proposal was approved by IDNR and was the basis for the development of this plan.

THE REGIONAL GREENWAYS PLAN

The McLean County Regional Greenways Plan presents a vision and provides a framework for achieving a regional system of

interconnected greenways throughout McLean County. The plan presents specific goals and objectives and identifies priority future greenways which reflect the vision and the County's greenway resources identified in this report. The plan also recommends a course of action to pursue in developing or preserving planned future greenways. Emphasis is given to ownership and acquisition strategies that involve voluntary participation of landowners, as well as strategies that may be eligible for funding under grant programs through the IDNR, the Illinois Department of Transportation, or the United States Department of Agriculture. Another consideration in the development of the plan is the potential for greenway linkages to other regions that may be accessible due to the County's strategic location in the heart of Central Illinois as illustrated in Figure 1.

HOW THE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The plan was developed in cooperation with the McLean County Greenways Coalition. The McLean County Greenways Coalition was formed to provide direct input from interested citizens, local governments and organizations, including recreational and environmental groups as well as the McLean County Farm Bureau and individual landowners. A steering committee of the Coalition was appointed by McLean County Regional Planning Commission to coordinate planning efforts between planning staff and the main body of the Coalition. In addition to the Steering Committee, the Coalition includes three subcommittees; (1) the Conservation and Environment Committee; (2) the Legal, Implementation & Management Committee; and (3) the Recreation Committee. The chairpersons of these committees are members of the Steering Committee. During the course of

[Figure 1-
Regional Perspective]

plan development, the Steering Committee met twice a month, while the individual committees met monthly. Public meetings of the entire Coalition were held on a quarterly basis and provided a forum for significant citizen input. The structure of the McLean County Greenways Coalition allowed for input that reflects a wide range of expertise, talents and perspectives.

Following the formation of the steering committee, the process proceeded with the identification of specific goals and objectives for greenway planning. The identification of existing development patterns, land use characteristics, transportation features, and major activity centers occurred in the early stages of the planning process. Future growth areas and greenway needs were identified based on prior activities and on existing comprehensive plans and ongoing comprehensive planning activities. An inventory of existing greenway resources was completed to identify locations, significant features, potential linkages, trail opportunities, primary implementation strategies and issues, and principal funding sources for potential greenways. Priority future greenways were selected from the inventory of greenway resources on the basis of criteria set forth in the plan.

Implementation was a major consideration and is addressed in the concluding chapter of the document. Various methods, strategies and responsibilities are presented along with recommended actions for carrying out the plan.

LIMITATIONS AND USE OF THE PLAN

A basic limitation of the Regional Greenways Plan is that it is advisory in nature and must be supplemented with appropriate follow-up actions. The plan does not

represent an end result. The report summarizes findings, presents goals and objectives, identifies greenway resources, identifies priority greenways, describes available implementation and funding strategies, and recommends a course of action to follow in carrying out the greenways plan. The McLean County Greenways Coalition should take an active role in carrying out the plan through advocacy, education and in helping establish an organization to coordinate the implementation and management of greenways in McLean County. However, these actions must be carried out if the vision for greenways in McLean County is to be achieved.