

## II. Greenways and Trails

### Types of Greenways

As defined by Charles Little in the influential work, *Greenways for America*, a greenway is a 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 humans passage into and through the natural world. However, any natural or landscaped course for bicycle or pedestrian 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. Following are the general types described by Little, with familiar examples:

1. Recreational greenways, featuring paths and trails, sometimes of long distance.

*Examples: Joe Stengel Trail on the former ICRR right-of-way; the Rock River Canoe Trail from Oregon to Grand Detour; the Rochelle Bike Path*

2. Ecologically significant natural corridors, usually along rivers and streams and sometimes ridgelines, providing for wildlife migration and species inter-change, nature study, and hiking.

*Examples: The combined Castle Rock S.P., George B. Fell Nature Preserve; Lowden-Miller Forest*

3. Scenic and historic routes, usually along a road, highway or stream, preferably with some pedestrian access along the route or places to alight from the car.

*Example: Black Hawk Trail (Ill. Scenic Rt. 2)*

4. Comprehensive greenway systems or networks, usually based on natural land forms such as valleys and ridges but sometimes simply an opportunistic assemblage of greenways and open spaces creating an alternative municipal or regional green infrastructure.

*Example: The Rock River corridor and its tributaries, including the lower Pine Creek corridor; certain segments of Leaf River and Kyte River corridors, and other streams, bluffs, rock outcroppings, forest and prairie remnants.*

5. Urban riverside (or lakeside) greenways, usually created as part of a redevelopment program along neglected and run-down waterfronts.

*Examples: the Rockford riverfront; Beloit's Riverfront; Dixon's historic riverfront parks*

## **Types of Recreational Trails**

All the existing and potential trails in the Plan fall into one of the following categories:

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 snowmobiles. Surface treatment and width may vary, depending on the uses allowed on any specific trail or segment. Uses allowed on each dedicated trail are established by the organizations and public agencies involved in the acquisition, development, and maintenance of the trail. Although more than one type of non-motorized use is allowed on most trails, typically uses by motorized recreational vehicles is segregated by location and/or by season.

These trails may be further classified according to whether the trail's intended purpose and value is primarily "active" or "passive." Active purposes would include travel and recreational uses by joggers, cyclists, skaters, equestrians, or motorized recreational vehicles. Passive trails and paths are generally developed in more sensitive or heavily populated areas; they include interpretive trails within nature parks and preserves and riverwalks that exclude even bicycles and skates.

Shared-Use Trails are low-volume streets or rural township roads designated and intended to be shared by existing vehicular traffic with proposed bicycle and other non-motorized uses. Their value and purpose is both recreation and transportation, providing access for alternate means of travel on existing right-of-ways and surfaces. Although all streets and roads except limited access highways are technically accessible to most forms of transportation under Illinois law, designation of selected routes as trails or bike paths not only improves accessibility for the general public for such uses but also allows local jurisdictions to better serve alternate transportation and safety concerns. Generally this would involve 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 snowmobiling within portions of the right-of-way, however not on the pavement. State law and local ordinances govern which uses will be allowed on roads and streets.

Portions of any route that originates as a shared-use roadway trail could in the future be replaced by construction of a dedicated off-road trail, either within the public right-of-way or on easements. Conversions from shared-use to dedicated trail routes would be limited by existing development and land uses, by drainage ditches and stream crossings, and by vehicular traffic patterns.

Snowmobile Routes: The extensive Tri-County Snowmobile Trail System links 15 communities in Ogle County with one another, and with neighboring counties, and with publicly maintained snowmobile areas. Except for the dedicated Joe Stengel Trail, snowmobile trails primarily are routes on the public right-of-way and on private land by arrangement with the property owners, which may be altered from year to year. Permissions, mapping, and signing the routes are the responsibility of local snowmobile organizations. Snowmobile trail development is supported in part by a state fund derived from fees paid by snowmobile users. Use of the trails crossing privately owned land is limited to seasonal use by snowmobiles only.

Equestrian Trails: Paths that permit horseback riding typically are not compatible with

most other uses except limited foot or seasonal snowmobile use. In Ogle County, equestrian trails occur primarily on privately owned lands, including campgrounds, dude ranches, and horse-boarding farms.

Canoe Trails: Any navigable waterway that is not obstructed by fences or fallen trees is a potential canoe trail. However, canoeists generally prefer streams that require white-water skills or afford nature viewing with a minimum of wake and noise from high-speed boats and jet skis.

ATV Trails: Users of motorized all-terrain vehicles prefer rugged land. ATVs may not be operated legally on roads, and their use is incompatible with non-motorized trail uses. Consequently, their use is frequently limited to private or public ATV parks with parking facilities. Ownership of ATVs is growing; they are attractive to recreationists who enjoy skilled riding as well as youth who are too young to be licensed to operate cars or motorcycles, etc.

## **Benefits and Uses**

Greenways can provide many opportunities in Ogle County. They may:

- preserve sensitive land resources, with multiple resulting benefits.
- preserve or restore natural ecosystems, expanding habitat for plants and animals.
- provide corridors or "bridges" between natural areas for movement of animals and plants.
- provide buffer zones between incompatible development patterns, reducing noise, visual and environmental impacts.
- act as filter zones to stop sediments and pollutants that degrade water quality.
- enable waterways, wetlands and flood plains to collect excess storm water caused by new development, protecting private property from flooding.
- allow access to archaeological and historic sites, including land and water routes, abandoned rail lines, Native American and early settlement villages.
- serve as outdoor classrooms for education in the fields of natural and environmental sciences and management.
- offer non-discriminatory access to open space—especially for the elderly, the disabled, and the socially disadvantaged.
- increase nearby property values.
- enhance quality of life values and community image, and support commercial recreation enterprises and tourist activities.
- reduce costs of land maintenance by utilizing sustainable natural means.

- impart an understanding of the regional landscape and respect for the environment; build a sense of place and regional identity by emphasizing the inter-relatedness of all parts of the region and de-emphasizing the importance of man-made boundaries.

In addition, trails and trail systems will:

- provide low cost and convenient recreation while increasing spending for recreation locally.
- establish energy-efficient and safe means of connecting people and places—home, school, work, shopping, parks and recreational facilities.
- increase healthful outdoor physical activity, i.e. walking and biking, especially for residents who live near a trail route.

### **Other Greenway Plans Reviewed**

Regional plans have been completed recently in four neighboring counties with funding support from the same IDNR Greenways & Trails program. These plans were reviewed to determine their purpose and for opportunities to align Ogle County's proposed trails and greenways across their shared borders.

The *Boone & Winnebago Regional Greenway Plan* (1997) "serves to . . . create a vision of a regional greenway network and provide a framework for coordinated greenway and trail preservation and development." It delineates proposed recreation paths on both sides of the Rock River from Rockford's trail system to the Ogle County line, which may serve as connections with the Rock River loop of the Grand Illinois Trail through Ogle County.

The *Greenways and Trails Plan for Stephenson County and City of Freeport* ((2000) established "a framework for continued public policy making." The intention was to have the plan adopted as an amendment to the comprehensive plans of both jurisdictions. The plan proposes a regional trail following Crane Grove Creek from Freeport to Baileyville, there to continue on the old ICRR bed through Ogle County. It also features a Kellogg (Galena) Historic Trail Corridor.

The *Whiteside County Greenway and Trail Plan* (1999) began "the process of looking at areas that should be considered for preservation as the cities and villages continue to grow, as well as laying out a plan for creating trail systems within the communities and attempting to link the towns together via shared use roadway trails." It proposes a Riverfront Trail in Sterling linking to the Hennepin Feeder Canal Trail via a Rock River bridge to be constructed on top of the new upper dam.

The *Lee County Greenways and Trails Plan* (2002) inventoried the greenway resources that correspond with a the pre-settlement streams, groves, marshes, and a prominent moraine system. It places high priority on establishing a Rock River Trail parallel to Ill. Rte. 2 from Sterling to Dixon, where it will join riverfront trails, link to the Joe Stengel Trail, and continue upriver to the Ogle County line. It also seeks to link communities with a system of shared-use trails, preferring those local roads that reflect important historic travel routes between early settlements and river crossings. Proposed connections with Ogle County include trail routes on Lowden Road and Brooklyn Road. The "Historic Galena Trail Corridor" is featured.