

INDICATOR: SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN GREENWAY TRAILS

Background

Greenways are linear open spaces, including habitats and trails that link parks, nature reserves, cultural features or historic sites for recreation and conservation purposes. Throughout North America, greenways promote outdoor recreation, catalyze economic development, increase adjacent property values, celebrate historical and cultural assets, promote conservation and environmental education, and improve quality of life (Figure 1). Greenways can provide exceptional outdoor recreational experiences that reconnect children and families to natural resources which build a stewardship ethic. It should not be surprising that greenways are an enormous source of community pride. In many major urban areas, greenway trails provide an alternative mode of transportation.

Such greenway trails connect communities through a green infrastructure for biking, skiing, hiking, jogging and rollerblading; they serve as fishing piers, kayak landings, and wildlife corridors. Greenways promote sustainable communities and are considered an essential element in a sought-after community.



Figure 1. Greenway in Flat Rock, MI
(Photo credit: Melissa Prowse).

Status and Trends

Early greenway efforts were initiated in Detroit in the 1970s with the development of a linked riverfront parks plan (Table 1). Although visionary in its design, the plan was not implemented. In the 1980s, greenways received a national champion with the creation of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. The Michigan Rails-to-Trails Field Office was established in 1989.

The 1990s brought growing emphasis on regional planning for greenway trails. In 1994, the City of Detroit developed

a land use master plan that included greenways as one of the five key components of redevelopment in the city. The Southeast Michigan Greenways Initiative, established in 1990 as a project of the Michigan Chapter of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, and the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Office of the National Park Service published *A Vision for Southeast Michigan Greenways* in 1998. The Greater Detroit American Heritage River Initiative, established under the Metropolitan Affairs Coalition in 1998, championed linked greenways as one of its five priorities. In 1999 the Southwest Detroit Riverfront Greenway Project published a report titled "Detroit's New Front Porch." Later that year the Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative (DLGI) was established when a concerned group of citizens joined business representatives and state, local, and federal officials to champion linked greenways among the 21 Downriver communities south of Detroit. To

date, over 16 km (10 miles) of new trails have been constructed to link with 16 km (10 miles) of existing trails and over 2,835 hectares (7,000 acres) of natural areas and parks meandering through cultural, historic, community and business sites. Over \$10 million of greenway trail investment has been made Downriver since 1999. In 2003, DLGI created *Downriver Linked Greenways Wayside Companion*, in cooperation with the National Park Service, to help develop community stories and provide consistency for trail users.

Table 1. History of greenways development in southeast Michigan.

Time Period	Greenways Activities
1970s	Limited emphasis on greenways; City of Detroit prepared a conceptual plan of linked riverfront parks.
1980s	Emphasis on maintaining and improving existing parks; Rails-to-Trails Conservancy founded to catalyze greenways across the country; Michigan Rails-to-Trails Field Office established in 1989.
1990s	Growing emphasis on regional planning for greenway trails; Southeast Michigan Greenways Initiative established in 1990 to champion greenways; City of Detroit land use plan includes greenways as one of five keys to city redevelopment in 1994; Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and National Park Service release <i>A Vision for Southeast Michigan Greenways</i> in 1998; Greater Detroit American Heritage River Initiative, established under Metropolitan Affairs Coalition in 1998, championed linked greenways as one of its five priorities; Southwest Detroit Riverfront Greenway Project published "Detroit's New Front Porch" in 1999; DLGI established in 1999 to champion linked greenways between 21 Downriver communities.
2000s	In 2001, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan launched its GreenWays Initiative to help build a regional network of greenway trails. The GreenWays Initiative raised \$25 million from foundations and private contributions to help communities build greenway trails. It awarded over \$15 million in grants that leveraged \$90 million for greenway trails in southeast Michigan. The City of Detroit created a riverfront vision in 2002 using a multi-stakeholder process. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy was established in 2003 to build the Detroit RiverWalk from the Belle Isle Bridge to the Ambassador Bridge. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy has raised nearly \$100 million to build the Detroit RiverWalk, much of which will be completed in 2007. An endowment was also created through the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy to operate and maintain the Detroit RiverWalk in perpetuity. In 2003, DLGI created <i>Downriver Linked Greenways Wayside Companion</i> , in cooperation with the National Park Service, to develop community stories and provide consistency for trail users.

In 2002, the City of Detroit created a riverfront vision using a multi-stakeholder process. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy was established in 2003 to realize that vision and build the Detroit RiverWalk from the Belle Isle Bridge to the Ambassador Bridge. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy has raised nearly \$100 million to build the Detroit RiverWalk, much of which will be completed in 2007. The Conservancy created an endowment to operate and maintain the Detroit RiverWalk in perpetuity.

A significant resource for recent greenway development in the region is the GreenWays Initiative, launched in 2001 by the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan. This Initiative raised more than \$25 million from foundations and private contributions to help communities build and connect a regional network of greenway trails. This effort was the first of its kind in the nation and created an unprecedented momentum for greenway development in southeast Michigan. To date, the GreenWays Initiative has

awarded \$15 million in grants to local units of government and nonprofit organizations for greenways planning and construction throughout southeast Michigan. Those grants have leveraged an additional \$90 million in public money to support those greenways projects. This Initiative significantly jump-started greenway development by providing capital for greenway planning and construction, identifying previously untapped funding resources, raising awareness about the issue, and by facilitating a regional master planning process that resulted in a consistent plan that will help prioritize and unify greenway development efforts at both a regional and local level.

In 2006, the GreenWays Initiative supported a public involvement process that engaged literally every municipality in the seven counties in southeast Michigan to develop greenways' visions for each of the counties and for the region as a whole.

Greenway planning and development increased significantly over the past five years due, in great part, to the increased availability of funding through previously untapped sources within the governmental, foundation, and business sectors. In total, over 145 km (90 miles) of greenways have been built at a cost of over \$75 million in the last five years. An additional 56 km (35 miles) are slated for construction over the next two to three years. Although much remains to be done to complete a regional greenways system, considerable progress has been made in a relatively short period of time.

Management Next Steps

The greenways vision for southeast Michigan is an interconnected trail system that stretches from the southern tip of Lake Huron to the southwestern corner of Lake Erie, up tributaries like the Clinton, Rouge, Huron, and Raisin rivers, and across to Canada to preserve or create natural beauty and to provide nonmotorized transportation options in rural and urban areas. The GreenWays Initiative and Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative will continue to play a role facilitating greenway planning and development to follow through with the regional vision. DLGI will update its master plan to include new trail locations, mapping, a marketing piece, website development and next action steps. Individual communities and counties will address their projects locally while working in the context of the regional plan. Recently completed projects have helped to build momentum for the next set of priority greenway projects.

Research/Monitoring Needs

Identifying creative financing options for greenways, as well as a provision for long-term maintenance and security, is a continuous challenge for greenway systems. Research should address these issues to work toward solutions to greenway management and construction. In addition, more applied research is needed on benefits assessment for greenways. Promoting the integration of greenways and trail development into community master planning processes to promote sustainable community development should also be a priority. There is no doubt that considerable benefits are accrued, but the benefits need to be better quantified and used as the rationale for completing the regional greenways vision.

Links for More Information

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy: <http://www.railtrails.org/index.html>

Detroit Riverfront Conservancy: www.detroitriverfront.org

Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance: www.michigantrails.org

Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative: <http://www.miseagrant.umich.edu/coastal/revitalization.html#greenways>

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