

## Why Greenways?

Aldo Leopold once said, “Everything is connected to everything else.” It is that connection – to our institutions, to our communities, to nature, and to each other – that is so important to our quality of life. Formal studies confirm what each of us intuitively knows – that people value parks, wildlife and natural areas, and that in places where it’s green, people enjoy being together.

Greenways are, of course, not new. Fredrick Law Olmstead coined the term *parkway* in 1865, and Benton MacKaye proposed perhaps America’s greatest greenway, the Appalachian Trail, in 1921. Greenways, broadly defined, are trails and open space corridors that connect natural and cultural resources, educational institutions, neighborhoods and communities, and people.

Greenways give shape and definition to open space. They link us to our neighbors, to the educational, cultural and social institutions we treasure, and create opportunities for us to share in experiences together. They improve our quality of life by providing a kind of green infrastructure for our communities.

Greenways can enrich our everyday lives by providing recreation and access to nature within a few minutes of almost every household in America. But greenways are not limited to recreation. They can help promote tourism by enhancing an area’s unique natural and cultural attractions. They can provide pathways for people commuting to and from work by providing an alternative to the automobile. Greenways can also serve as movement corridors for wildlife. They can provide a buffer against harsh views and a filter against non-point source pollution, sediment, and runoff into our rivers and streams.

Around the nation, surveys continue to show that the majority of people consider having open space and recreation opportunities that are easy to get to as “absolutely critical” or “important” to the health and restoration of their communities. In the 1990s, the mayors of Pittsburgh and Denver both characterized the creation and maintenance of greenways as their cities’ most important economic revitalization program.

Greenways are really links in a chain of opportunities that begin in our own backyards. These opportunities begin with our recognition of the potential in each and every piece of open land. Greenways allow us to treat land and water as a system, as interlocking pieces in a puzzle, a puzzle in which we are important pieces as well. They provide a new way of looking at land and community – a new “green” way.

Over the past five years, the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan has supported the design, planning and construction of greenways throughout the region. With funding coming from such public sources as the Michigan Department of Transportation’s Enhancement Program and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources’ Natural Resources Trust Fund as well as many others, in addition to the Community Foundation’s GreenWays Initiative, approximately \$100 million has been or will soon be invested in the design and the building of greenways in those five years.

The investments have included such things as the acquisition of abandoned railroad corridors for future greenways construction, visioning sessions to seek out neighborhood attitudes and interests, the establishment of a multi-community greenways oversight body, a greenways restoration plan for an industrial brownfield site, and, of course, the construction of greenways. When completed, the projects funded over the past five years will double the amount of greenways mileage that existed previously in the region.

Now, five years later, it's time to take stock in what has been done, what is being done, and what could be done in communities throughout the region, and to bring those community initiatives together to develop a shared vision for how the landscape might look in every county, and in all of southeast Michigan. By every municipality in every county in southeast Michigan coming together around the development of a vision that outlines how local initiatives contribute to county-wide and regional programs, a greenways vision created by each and everyone for all of southeast Michigan will be born.