

Vision North Branch Greenway

CLINTON RIVER
MACOMB COUNTY



JULY 2020

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the Steering Committee for their invaluable input and time.

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FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS



PLAN CONSULTANT



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Borland Farm - Ray Township
Credit: MCPED

Overview & Process

The process to develop this document was funded, in part, by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) via their program to fund multi-jurisdictional planning efforts. In 2019, SEMCOG awarded Macomb County Planning and Economic Development with a grant to develop a vision for a Greenway along the North Branch of the Clinton River.

A Steering Committee was formed to guide the project and partners in development of the vision and included The Clinton River Watershed Council, Six Rivers Land Conservancy, SEMCOG, Huron Clinton Metropark Authority, Macomb County, Macomb Township, Clinton Township, Ray Township and Lenox Township.

Project Goals

THE PRIMARY LONG-TERM GOALS OF THE PROJECT ARE 1) TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF FUTURE FLOODING WITHIN THE NORTH BRANCH OF THE CLINTON RIVER, 2) TO WORK STRATEGICALLY TO PROTECT THE RIPARIAN CORRIDOR, AND 3) ESTABLISH A MULTI-MODAL LINEAR RECREATIONAL CORRIDOR ALONG, OR NEAR, THE NORTH BRANCH OF THE CLINTON RIVER FROM CLINTON TOWNSHIP'S BUDD PARK TO THE MACOMB ORCHARD TRAIL.

This document was developed to serve as a guide and tool for local governments, as well as county and regional agencies, to assist in policy development, master plan and ordinance development, land acquisition and creation and promotion of recreation opportunities. The document and supporting graphics are also intended to be used to illustrate the vision for a protected and connected riparian corridor along the North Branch of the Clinton River.

STUDY/VISION OBJECTIVES

- With assistance from the University of Michigan and the US Army Corps of Engineers, construct an updated flood model for future floodways in the Clinton River North Branch and Coon Creeks.
- Establish a partnership of local and regional agencies to guide and implement strategies that focus on riparian conservation and enhancement as well as increased recreational opportunities.
- Encourage the establishment of a continuous, protected riparian corridor to provide for habitat connectivity as well as room to allow the river to move longitudinally and laterally across the floodplain to process high flows and sediments in a more naturalized manner.
- Work closely with the communities along the North Branch to discuss potential for increased recreation including possible trails, fishing access points and kayak/canoe launches.
- Maintain and increase tree cover in the County.
- Enhance and promote the fishery in the North Branch of the Clinton River.
- Promote agricultural heritage and tourism in the County.

Context & History

THE CONCEPT FOR A GREENWAY ALONG THE NORTH BRANCH OF THE CLINTON RIVER ORIGINATED DURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 2004 SEMCOG REGIONAL GREENWAY PLAN. THE CONCEPT EVOLVED AFTER SIGNIFICANT FLOODING EVENTS IN THE COUNTY AS WELL AS A GROWING INTEREST IN CONSERVATION AND RECREATION. THE IDEA FOR A GREENWAY WAS INCLUDED IN THE GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE VISION FOR MACOMB COUNTY IN 2012.

POPULATION GROWTH

Clinton Township is mostly developed and according to SEMCOG 2019 predictions has a population of 105,466 - growth of nearly 10,000 people since the 2010 census and is expected to continue to grow. Clinton Township has already taken many steps to protect the flood prone areas of the township along all three branches of the Clinton River.

Macomb Township has a significant portion of the township that remains undeveloped but is one of the fastest growing communities in the state seeing a 57.7% increase in population from 2000-2010. With a current population of 90,321 (SEMCOG 2019), SEMCOG predictions suggest that the township will continue to grow. This study will aid the township with planning for the continued development by protecting these investments and the North Branch of the Clinton River.

Ray and Lenox Townships are primarily agricultural communities. Ray Township is expected to see slight growth by 2045 however, much of the township is zoned agricultural residential and a large portion of the township is part of Wolcott Mill Metropark. Lenox has not seen a large growth in population, however, due to new sanitary sewer lines, they are expected to see over a 25% increase in population by 2045.

RECENT FLOODING EVENTS

The North Branch of the Clinton River has had historic issues with flooding. In 2004, a large rain event caused the river to crest at 20.34 ft which was 5 ft above flood stage. This major flooding along the North Branch caused multiple houses in Macomb Township to be condemned and the township received funding from FEMA to purchase these homes.

Even as recent as January 13th, 2020 (photo below at 24 Mile and Card Roads) the North Branch of the Clinton River rose above flood stage marking the 13th largest event in recorded history.



As part of this project, the Steering Committee worked with the University of Michigan and the US Army Corp of Engineers to develop a flood plain model of the study area. This model was used to inform community decision makers on possible scenarios with future build out and increased precipitation. This Study is suggesting that communities incorporate at least a 50ft buffer from the floodway into their zoning ordinance to further protect existing and future development from flooding and allow for habitat conservation and potentially public access to the greenway and recreational asset.

UNIQUE NATURAL FEATURES

The North Branch of the Clinton River in Macomb County is one of the last remaining rural areas within the Clinton River Watershed. The North Branch drains approximately 200 square miles of land consisting of agricultural, forested and residential areas. This is a distinct difference from the rest of the Clinton River Watershed which is mainly residential and commercial developments with park lands dispersed throughout. The North Branch offers a glimpse of years past, but as urban sprawl continues, it will be crucial to protect these lands for the conservation of this unique ecosystem in southeast Michigan.

One ecosystem component critical to river and stream health is the riparian buffer, otherwise known as the transitional area from water to land. The North Branch maintains stretches with ample riparian buffers in the northern reaches consisting of forested lands, wetlands and habitat complexities that offer a range of refuges for wildlife. Riparian ecosystems and river corridors are important pathways for mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles. These riparian areas provide for habitat connectivity, foraging lands, refuge, breeding grounds and migratory pathways. Rivers in particular are important to migration of anadromous fish. These fish rely on migrating upstream in rivers and streams from lake habitats for reproduction. *Conservation and enhancement of riparian corridors should be a top priority for ecosystem management of the North Branch.*

HIGH QUALITY FISHERY

The upper portions of the North Branch also support a great degree of aquatic biodiversity. Biological diverse communities contribute to more resilient ecosystems. Sections of the North Branch maintain a diverse array of macroinvertebrates, fishes and amphibians. Interactions between these organisms help to maintain ecosystem processes such as nutrient processing, resistance to invasive species and preservation of natural habitats in southeast Michigan. Past macroinvertebrate data has indicated that the North Branch is composed of a highly stable and diverse community of insect fauna. The upper portions used to be stocked by the DNR Fisheries Division but was stopped due to lack of public fishing access. *This data also indicates that the North Branch has the potential of being a high-quality fishery in southeast Michigan.*

The North Branch has a variety of fish species that can attract anglers from across the region. Fish species include but are not limited to Small Mouth Bass, Rock Bass, Walleye, Yellow Perch, Log Perch, Catfish, Northern Pike, Northern Sucker, Muskellunge, darters and many more. The North Branch headwaters are unique in that they support populations of native Brook Trout, Steelhead and other coldwater species. Coldwater habitats are rare in southern Michigan and the North Branch provides opportunities for conservation of these important ecosystems.

To conserve and restore river and stream ecosystems it is necessary to protect the flora and fauna of the system. The North Branch supports many fish species due to its less impacted stretches that have significant riparian buffers. They are allowed to maintain a natural flow and sediment regime. Over the years many projects have taken place to restore and enhance this fishery. Dams have been removed, aquatic habitats have been enhanced, off channel habitat connectivity has been improved and riparian areas have been protected. The North Branch will continue to serve its diverse fish community well into the future if proper management practices are used to conserve this unique resource.

ACCESS TO PARKLAND AND AMENITIES

As a partner in this planning effort, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) did analysis to determine how much parkland the residents of Clinton, Macomb, Ray and Lenox Townships have in proximity to their homes and how it compares to other communities. In addition, SEMCOG mapped public access (via a 10 minute walk (darkest green); a 10 minute bike ride; and, a 10 minute drive (lightest green) to a number of natural resource amenities including fishing and kayak launches among others.

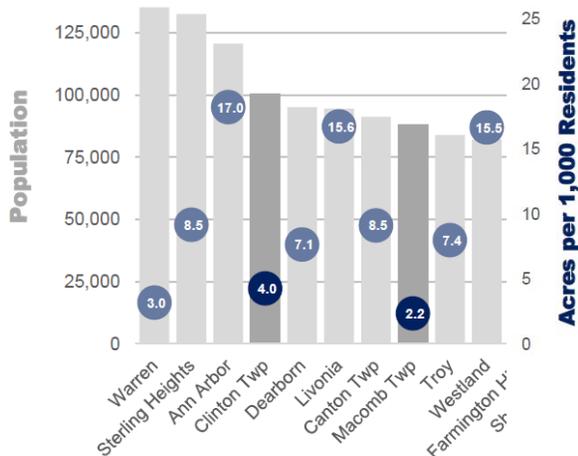
**ACCESS TO COMMUNITY PARKS
(40+ ACRES)**

	Within 10-min. Drive		Within 10-min. Bike		Within 10-min. Walk	
	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%
Clinton Twp	43,314	100%	22,703	52%	2,381	5%
Lenox Twp	28,782	100%	5,090	18%	285	0%
Macomb Twp	1,439	89%	806	50%	85	5%
Ray Twp	1,421	100%	839	59%	131	9%

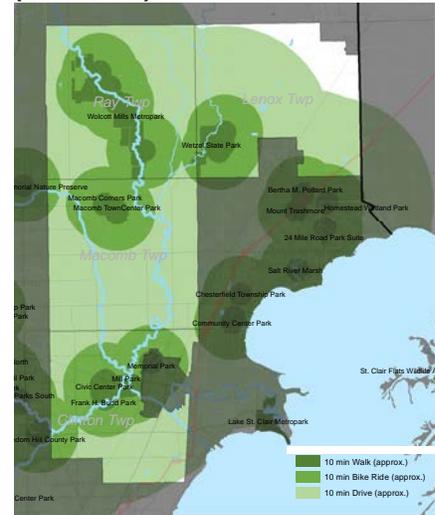
The data helps to support the vision for a connected greenway along or near the North Branch of the Clinton River in order to provide additional public lands and access to a variety of natural-resource based recreation opportunities.

Ray and Lenox Townships have a significant amount of parkland per 1,000 residents (723 and 155 acres/1000 respectively) due to their lower populations and vast property held by the HCMA and MDNR. Both Clinton (4 acres) and Macomb Townships (2.2 acres) have relatively small amounts of parkland in comparison to other highly population communities in Michigan.

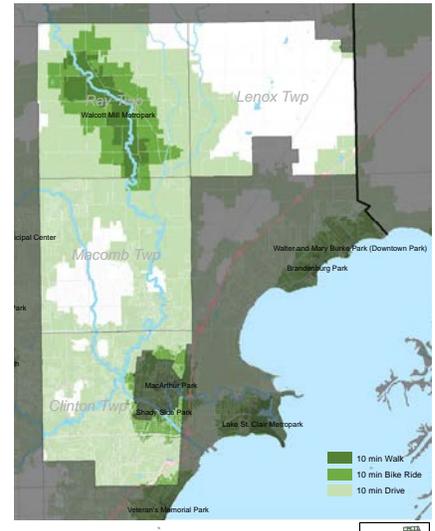
ACRES OF PARKLAND PER 1,000 RESIDENTS



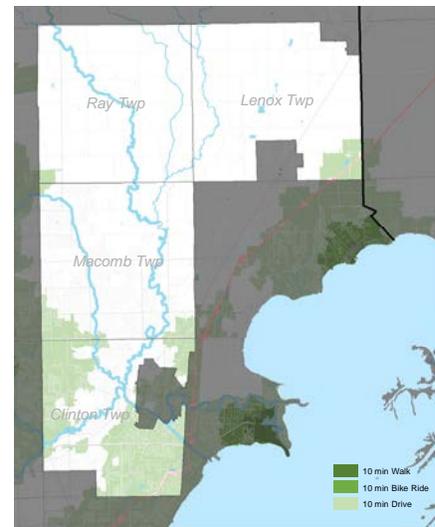
**ACCESS TO COMMUNITY PARKS
(40+ ACRES)**



ACCESS TO FISHING

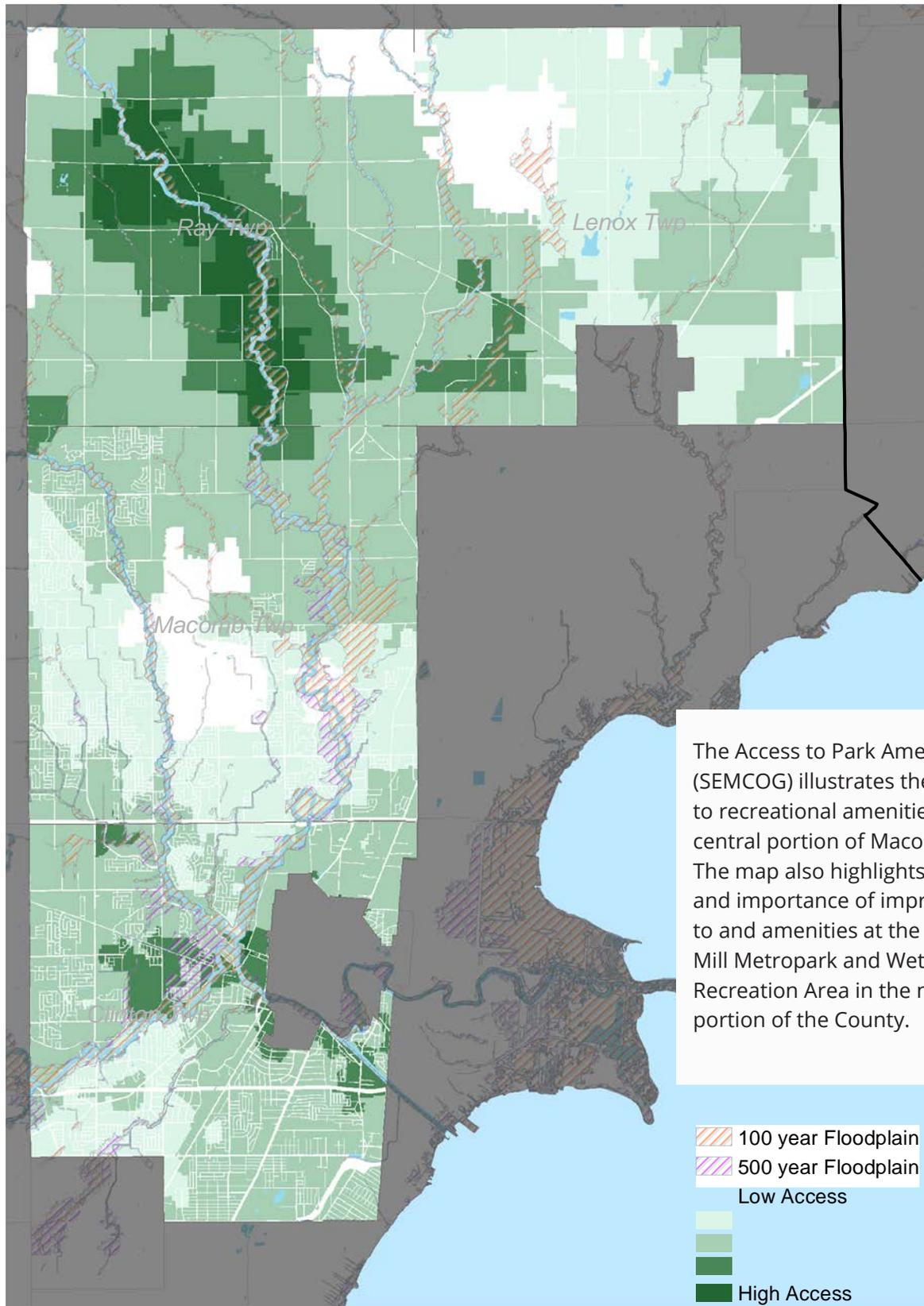


ACCESS TO KAYAK LAUNCH



MACOMB COUNTY

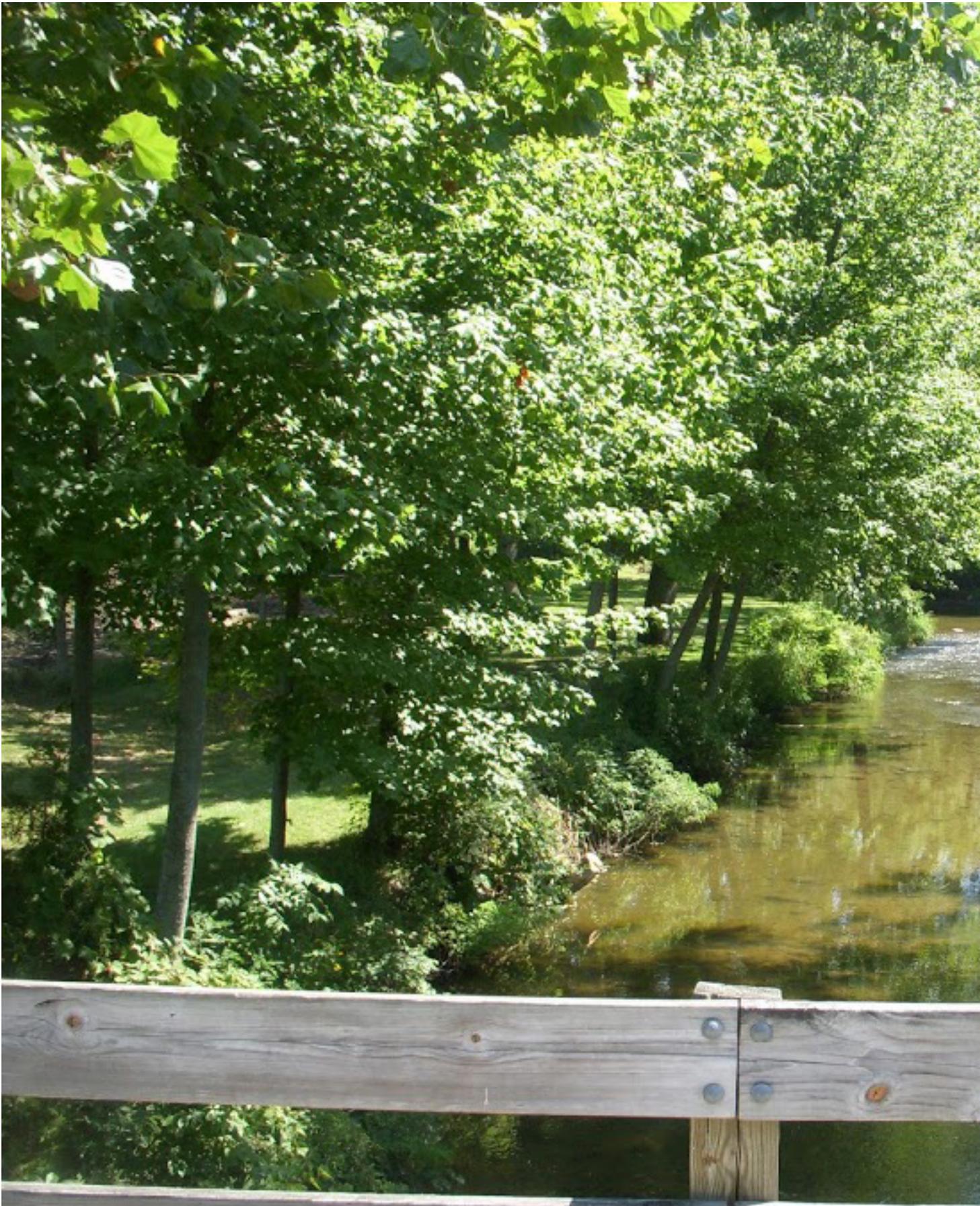
ACCESS TO PARK AMENITIES (SEMCOG)



The Access to Park Amenities Map (SEMCOG) illustrates the gap in access to recreational amenities through the central portion of Macomb County. The map also highlights the vastness and importance of improving access to and amenities at the Wolcott Mill Metropark and Wetzel State Recreation Area in the northern portion of the County.

Planning Process







North Branch of Clinton River, Wolcott Mill Metropark
Credit: livingLAB

Proposed Greenway

A greenway is defined as a strip of undeveloped land near an urban area set aside for environmental protection and/or recreational use. The proposed North Branch Greenway follows the North Branch of the Clinton River from the confluence with the Main Branch of the Clinton River in Clinton Township, north through Macomb, Ray and Armada Townships and the East Branch Coon Creek in Lenox Township.

This greenway study also identifies potential trail routes and conservation strategies along the publicly- and privately-owned properties. The proposed North Branch Greenway works to not only protect and conserve the riparian corridor, but also envisions a network of trails that would traverse the center of the County and connect the Freedom Trail in the south to the Macomb Orchard Trail in the north.

Floodplain Study

AS PART OF THIS PROJECT, MACOMB COUNTY PARTNERED WITH DR. ANDREW GRONEWOLD AND A GRADUATE STUDENT, HELENA GARCIA, AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY TO DEVELOP A HEC-RAS MODEL FOR THE CLINTON RIVER NORTH BRANCH, COON CREEK AND EAST BRANCH COON CREEK.

The North Branch of the Clinton River has had historic issues with flooding which has resulted in bridges being washed out, houses being condemned and road closures.

The objectives for this model were:

- Create a conceptual floodplain model of possible future development conditions for the North Branch of the Clinton River, Coon Creek, and the East Branch of Coon Creek. These domains are collectively referred to as the Study Area.
- Provide summary maps of future floodplain scenarios for townships in Macomb County.

A future floodplain scenario in the North Branch subwatershed will likely be characterized by increased development activity and subsequent land use change. Changes in land use, particularly increases in impervious areas from increased development, have been shown to significantly alter hydrology within urban and semi-urban watersheds. However, some studies have found minimal changes in peak storm flows in post-development conditions because of improvements in stormwater and changes in weather and precipitation patterns. Macomb County has implemented stormwater detention standards which would likely result in little to no increase in flooding due to impervious surfaces.

However, as mentioned, there are already issues with flooding with the existing development standards.

Macomb County also engaged with the US Army Corps of Engineers on the modeling. They reviewed the initial work performed by U of M and updated the model to improve the accuracy. The USACOE also were able to develop a floodway for the Coon Creek and East Branch Coon Creek which was not previously done by FEMA studies. Macomb County Public Works will be involved in future Steering Committee meetings and will assist with discussions about floodplain modeling, future projections related to county stormwater standards, as well as engagement from a stormwater management and drain maintenance perspective.

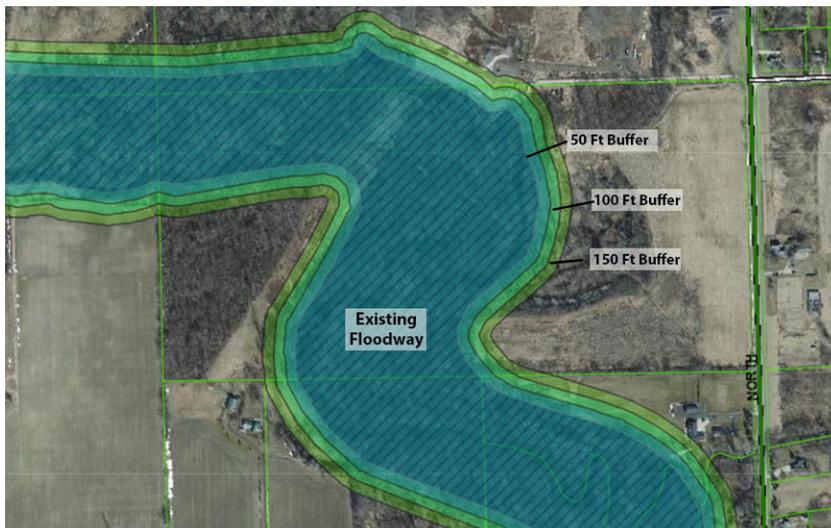
This model was used to inform community decision makers on possible scenarios with future build out and increased precipitation. ***This Greenway Vision is suggesting that communities incorporate at least a 50ft buffer around the floodway into their zoning ordinance to further protect developments from flooding and allow for access to the greenway.***

EXAMPLE FLOODWAY & 50 FT, 100 FT AND 150 FT BUFFERS



Clinton Township

Floodway, 50' - 150' buffers



Macomb Township

Floodway, 50' - 150' buffers



Ray & Lenox Townships

Floodway, 50' - 150' buffers

North Branch Greenway

THE NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY IS A VISION FOR A PROTECTED AND CONNECTED RIPARIAN CORRIDOR THAT WILL ASSIST WITH HABITAT CONSERVATION, FLOOD REDUCTION, AND CREATE A FIRST CLASS RECREATIONAL ASSET THROUGH THE CENTER OF MACOMB COUNTY.

The proposed North Branch Greenway traverses through 5 different communities including areas that are much more developed than others as well as areas that contain a significant amount of private property. It is envisioned, that, at the very least, each community works to incorporate the results of this study into their local planning and zoning documents, and works with property owners to preserve the riparian corridor and floodway.

The vision for the North Branch Greenway also includes a connected network of trails that follows the North Branch and Coon Creek as much as possible between the Freedom Trail to the south and the Macomb Orchard Trail to the north. It's envisioned that this connected network of trails could develop in a variety of ways and for a variety of recreational opportunities from paved trails for biking and walking to unpaved trails for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding. The vision includes a small section in Armada Township in order to connect to/from the Macomb Orchard Trail.

The vision for the North Branch Greenway also looks to capture opportunities for increased fishing access and seasonal water trails for kayaking and canoeing.

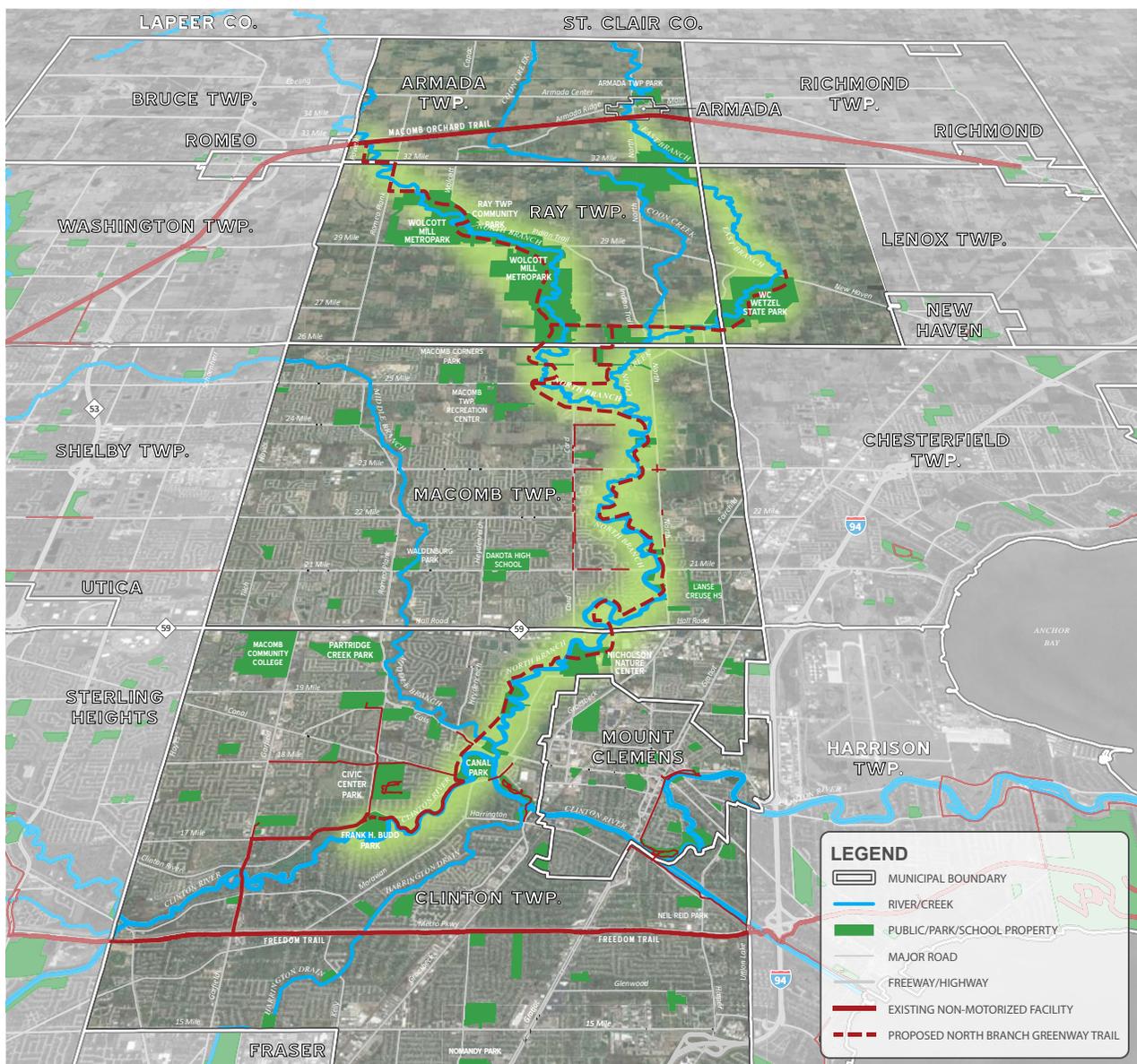


Vision NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY



Planning & Economic Development

CLINTON TOWNSHIP MACOMB TOWNSHIP RAY TOWNSHIP ARMADA TOWNSHIP LENOX TOWNSHIP



County/Regional Priorities

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITY NEXT STEPS THAT CAME OUT OF THIS PLANNING PROCESS THAT AREN'T COMMUNITY SPECIFIC, BUT APPLY TO THE ENTIRE EFFORT AND NORTH BRANCH CORRIDOR OR ARE SPECIFIC TO A REGIONAL OR COUNTY AGENCY SUCH AS MACOMB COUNTY, CLINTON RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL AND SIX RIVERS LAND CONSERVANCY.



It is envisioned that Macomb County Planning and Economic Development will continue to advocate and encourage the efforts of this study to move forward and take the lead on a number of priorities including facilitating an on-going steering committee of stakeholders to ensure coordination and progress.

COUNTY PRIORITY NEXT STEPS

- Obtain an estimate and then secure partners and funding to complete a Hydrologic Model for the North Branch
- Secure funding to complete survey cross-sections where flood model data is missing. Macomb County Public Works will be involved with modeling needs and analysis and coordination with FEMA and USACE.
- Macomb Co. Planning provide on-going support to local entities including informational presentations to Township Boards/Planning Commissions, ensuring awareness of funding opportunities, assisting with grant writing, providing letters of support, etc.
- Macomb County Planning continue to hold quarterly meetings with a Steering Committee of stakeholders to ensure coordination and encourage progress.
- Macomb County Planning and Roads continue to coordinate with FEMA and Army Corps of Engineers to reduce flooding and protect habitat.
- Macomb County reach out to ITC and Consumers Energy to discuss overall vision and begin to understand how to move forward.
- Seek funding and partnerships to assist implementation efforts.
- Macomb Co. Public Works will be involved in future Steering Committee meetings and will assist with engagement from a stormwater management and drain maintenance perspective.



CRWC PRIORITY NEXT STEPS

- Secure funding to complete survey cross-sections where flood model data is missing
- Conduct a habitat and resource inventory of the North Branch to identify areas in need of protection, restoration or enhancement. In addition identify/confirm areas suitable for paddlers and potential fishing access.
- Coordinate with MDNR to encourage a return to stocking fish in the North Branch.
- Work with HCMA, Ray Township, Macomb Township and Clinton Township to identify and develop public fishing access points on the North Branch.



SIX RIVERS PRIORITY NEXT STEPS

- Outreach and education with community leaders and residents within the project area to explain the benefits of using conservation easements to preserve and protect their property. Start efforts in Clinton Township and build community engagement on these successes.
- Provide hands-on guidance on how to get started with the process of conserving private property by using the conservation easement tool.
- Assist communities with open space and natural area preservation efforts within the project area with the potential to utilize the Six Rivers Land Conservancy's Acquisition Assist Program. This program involves the pre-acquisition of land and a holding period for the future purchase by a government or other entity for future use as open space and/or park land.
- Advocate for and assist with the implementation of the study with all stakeholders in the project area by partnering and collaborating to increase awareness of opportunities and to help avoid and reduce duplication of efforts.

Clinton Township

NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY



Clinton Township is one of the largest communities in southeast Michigan with a population estimated around 100,000. Over the years, the Township has worked to preserve floodplain areas and establish public recreation spaces along the North Branch of the Clinton River including Budd Park, and 35 acres along the river, east of Heydenreich. Significant acreage in Clinton Township along the North Branch is also conserved as the Nicholson Nature Center.

The Township has funding to extend their existing trail network north along Clinton River Road to Cass. They also have secured funding to build the kayak/canoe launch at George George Park.

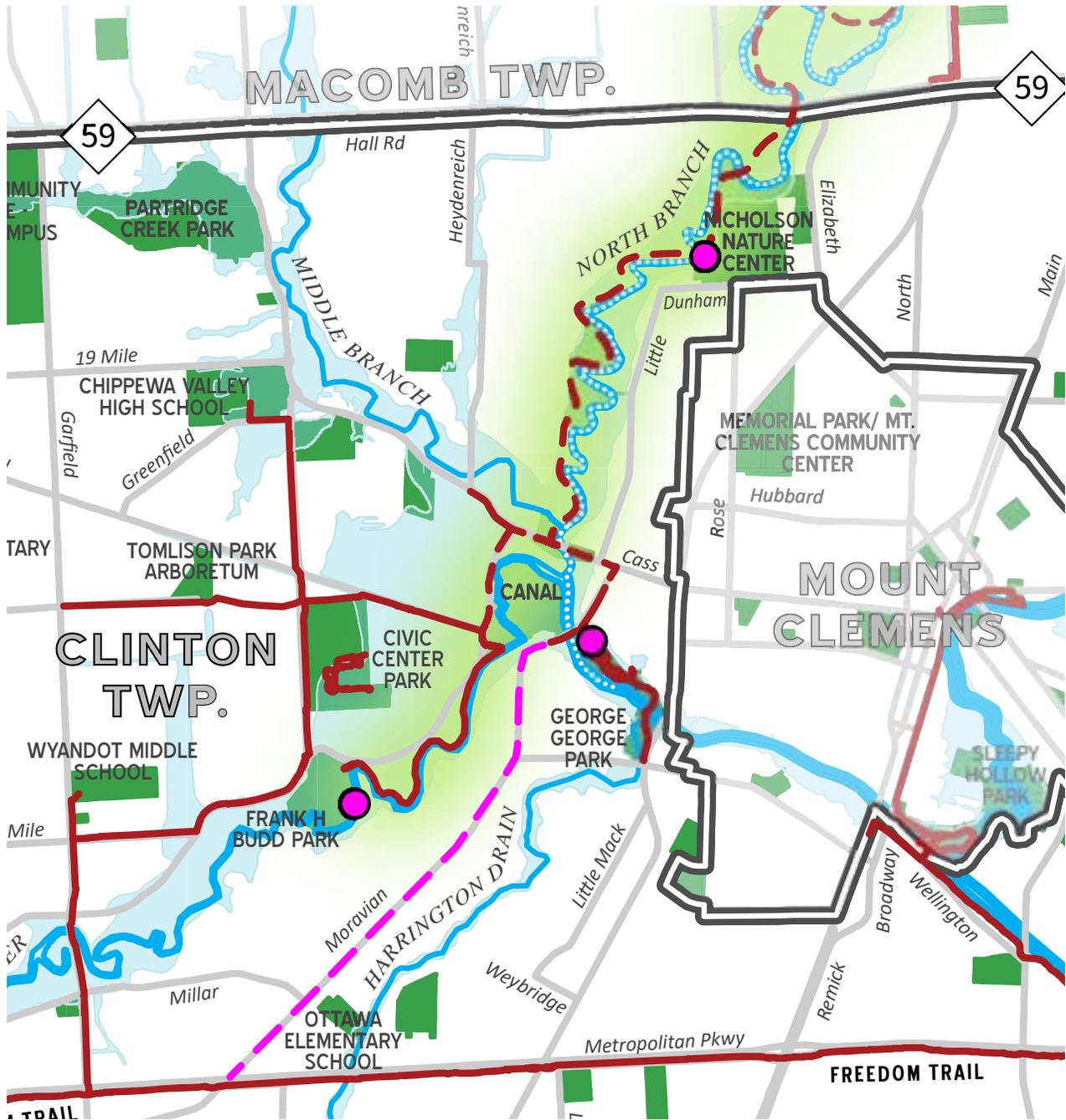
The proposal for the North Branch Greenway in Clinton Township includes:

- Preservation of the riparian corridor along the North Branch of at least between 50-100 feet (wider if the floodway is wider). Preservation is intended to mean limited to no construction within the corridor with the exception of recreational trails and/or fishing/kayak access.
- Three locations in the Township for kayak/canoe launches including Budd Park (existing), George George Park and Nicholson Nature Center.
- Work with property owners along the North Branch to discuss the intent and work to obtain easements or full ownership in order to protect the riparian corridor and to eventually be able to build a connected trail between Budd Park and Hall Road.

PRIORITY NEXT STEPS

- Construct kayak/canoe launch along the Clinton River Main Branch at George George Park (grant funding already secured).
- Plan, design, secure funding and construct a kayak/canoe launch along the North Branch of the Clinton River at Nicholson Nature Center.
- Construct trail/path connections along Clinton River Road/Cass Ave/Moravian Drive to complete a connection between Budd Park and George George Memorial Park.
- Coordinate with Macomb County and private property owners to further plan and evaluate feasibility of protecting the floodplain and riparian corridor as well as establishing a recreational trail connection between Cass and Hall Road.
- Work with planner, attorney, etc. to discuss incorporating at least a 50ft buffer from the floodway into zoning ordinance to further protect existing and future development from flooding and allow for habitat conservation and potentially public access to the greenway and recreational asset.
- Include vision and recommendations into update of Township Master Plan and Parks and Recreation Master Plan and adopt coordinated policies and zoning in the subject areas.

CLINTON TOWNSHIP
NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY



LEGEND

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY | | PROPOSED NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY TRAIL | |
| RIVER/CREEK | | PROPOSED WIDE PAVED SHOULDERS | |
| FLOODPLAIN | | PROPOSED SEASONAL WATER TRAIL | |
| PUBLIC/PARK/SCHOOL PROPERTY | | EXISTING/POTENTIAL KAYAK LAUNCH | |
| EXISTING NON-MOTORIZED FACILITY | | | |

It is recognized that a significant amount of privately-owned property exists along the North Branch and Coon Creek. This study does not support the use of eminent domain. Realization of the proposed greenway should be on a volunteer basis through easements, acquisition, conservation, etc.

Macomb Township

NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY



Macomb Township is one of the largest communities in southeast Michigan with a population estimated around 90,000. It is also a community feeling intense development pressures as one of the fastest growing communities in the state seeing a 57.7% increase from 2000-2010. The Township currently has very little land along the North Branch of the Clinton River in public ownership but significant acreage that is prime for redevelopment and/or conservation.

In recent years, the Township has acquired a few properties due to flooding and via FEMA south of 21 Mile Road and most recently is working with Six Rivers Land Conservancy to conserve a former equestrian center along 26 Mile Road.

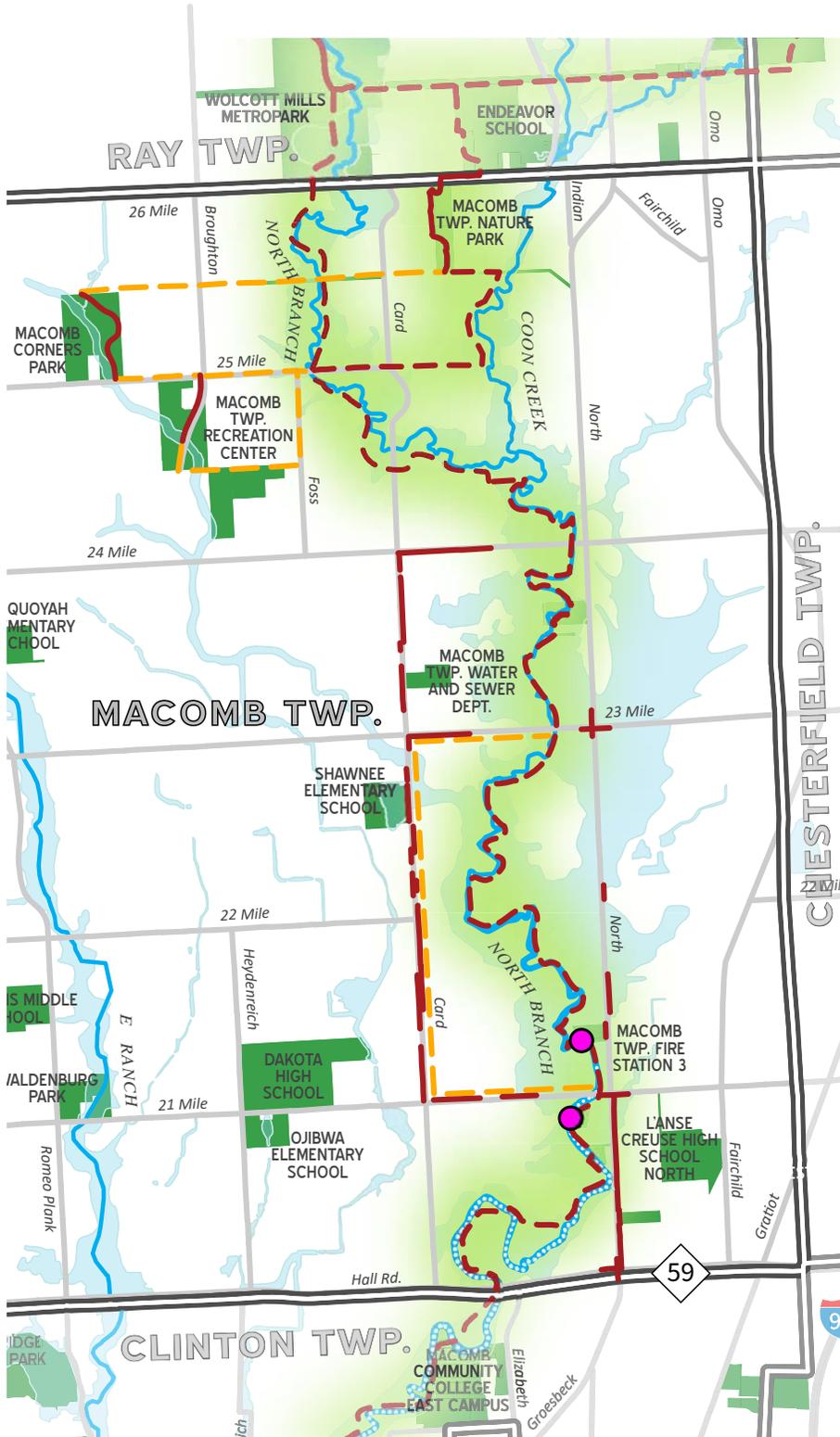
The proposal for the North Branch Greenway in Macomb Township includes:

- Preservation of the riparian corridor along the North Branch of at least between 50-100 feet (wider if the floodway is wider). Preservation is intended to mean limited to no construction within the corridor with the exception of recreational trails and/or fishing/kayak access.
- Two potential locations in the Township for kayak/canoe launches including Fire Station #3 and/or the Patnick Street properties.
- Work with property owners along the North Branch to discuss the intent and work to obtain easements, development agreements or full ownership in order to protect the riparian corridor and to eventually be able to build a connected trail between Hall Road and 26 Mile Road.

PRIORITY NEXT STEPS

- Include vision and recommendations into update of Township Master Plan and Parks and Recreation Master Plan and adopt coordinated policies and zoning in the subject areas.
- Consider incorporating a low density/agricultural/equestrian district in northern portion of Township into Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance with a connected trail network.
- Work with planner, attorney, etc. to discuss incorporating at least a 50ft buffer from the floodway into zoning ordinance to further protect existing and future development from flooding and allow for habitat conservation and potentially public access to the greenway and recreational asset.
- Plan, design, secure funding and construct a kayak/canoe launch along the North Branch of the Clinton River at one of the suggested locations.
- Coordinate with Macomb County and private property owners to further plan and evaluate feasibility of protecting the floodplain and riparian corridor as well as establishing a recreational trail connection between Hall Road and 26 Mile Road.

MACOMB TOWNSHIP
NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY



LEGEND

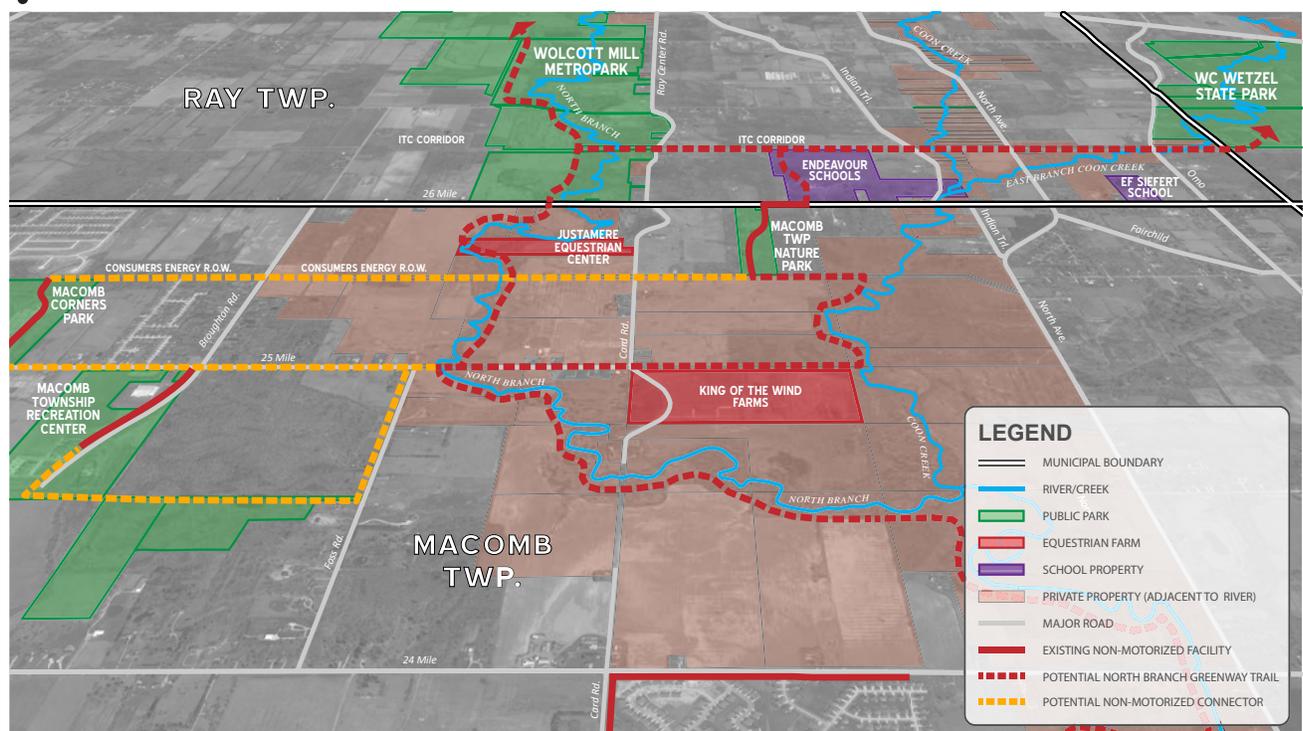
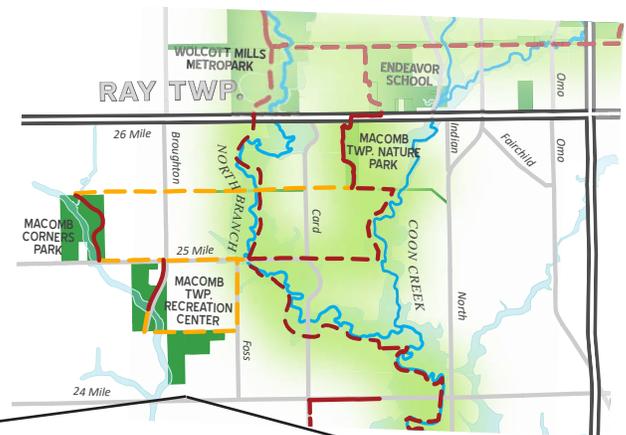
- MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY
- RIVER/CREEK
- FLOODPLAIN
- PUBLIC/PARK/SCHOOL PROPERTY
- EXISTING NON-MOTORIZED FACILITY
- PROPOSED NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY TRAIL
- PROPOSED NON-MOTORIZED CONNECTORS
- PROPOSED SEASONAL WATER TRAIL
- POTENTIAL KAYAK LAUNCH

A kayak/canoe launch is proposed at one of the two locations noted on the map and will need further discussion and analysis.

It is recognized that a significant amount of privately-owned property exists along the North Branch and Coon Creek. The study does not support the use of eminent domain. Realization of the proposed greenway should be on a volunteer basis through easements, acquisition, conservation, etc.

LONG-TERM VISION FOR A POTENTIAL NORTHERN MACOMB/SOUTHERN RAY TOWNSHIP BRIDLE FARMS REGION

A long-term vision for a connected trail network in northern Macomb Township, southern Ray Township and into Lenox Township has been discussed with a number of public parks and open spaces, schools and large equestrian centers in close proximity. This Study recommends Macomb Township work to develop a low density/agricultural/equestrian district in the northern portion of the Township (precise boundaries to be determined) into the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance. Over time, if development occurs in this area, it could be done in a manner where the riparian corridors are protected for public use, and an equestrian-focused community could emerge with miles of interconnected trails for equestrians, hiking, running and biking.



Images from equestrian neighborhoods throughout the United States



Ray Township

NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY



Ray Township, with a population around 3,700 is home to the 2,850-acre Wolcott Mill Metropark which traverses through all but 1 mile of the community. Much of the North Branch of the Clinton River through the Township is within HCMA-owned property. The Ray Township Park/Hall/Library also sit on property that abuts the river.

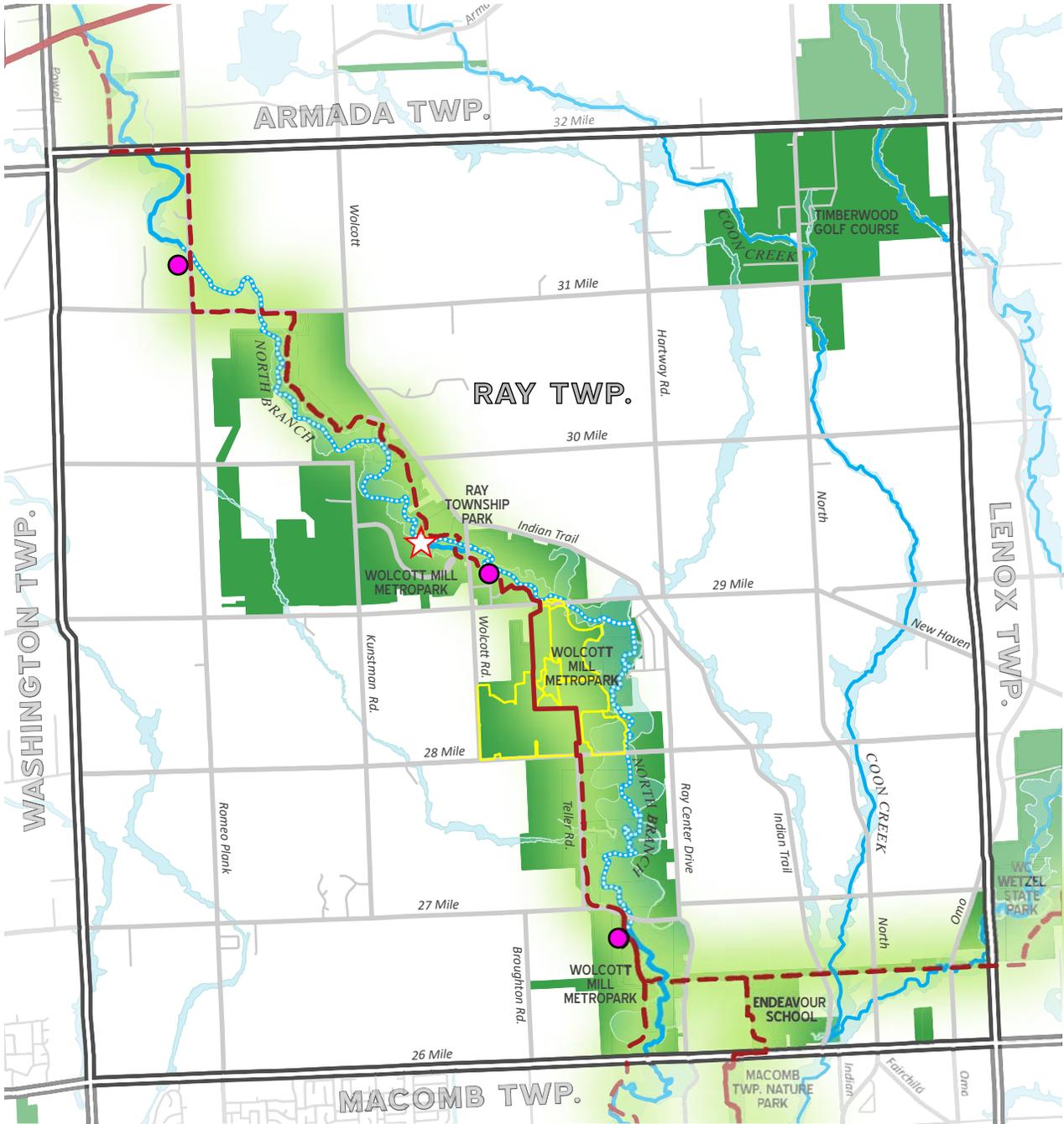
The proposal for the North Branch Greenway in Ray Township includes:

- Preservation of the riparian corridor along the North Branch of at least between 50-100 feet (wider if the floodplain is wider). Preservation is intended to mean limited to no construction within the corridor with the exception of recreational trails and/or fishing/kayak access.
- Three locations in the Township for kayak/canoe launches including near the former Romeo Plank dam, at Camp Rotary, and south of 27 Mile Road in the former golf course property.
- A vision to eventually be able to build a connected trail between 26 Mile Road and the Macomb Orchard Trail.
- A trail connection between Wolcott Mill Metropark and Wetzel State Park via ITC utility corridor.

PRIORITY NEXT STEPS

- Include vision and recommendations into update of Township Master Plan and Parks and Recreation Master Plan and adopt coordinated policies and zoning in the subject areas.
- Work with planner, attorney, etc. to discuss incorporating at least a 50ft buffer from the floodway into zoning ordinance to further protect existing and future development from flooding and allow for habitat conservation and potentially public access to the greenway and recreational asset.
- Support HCMA's efforts to improve fishing access, trail connectivity, and kayak/canoe launches in the Township.
- Work with Armada Township, DTE, private property owners along and north of 31 Mile Road as well as the Macomb County Road Commission to discuss the intent of the greenway and work to obtain easements, development agreements or full ownership in order to protect the riparian corridor and to eventually be able to build a connected trail between 31 Mile Road and the Macomb Orchard Trail.
- Identify areas where restoration and conservation can first be implemented to initiate the program.

RAY TOWNSHIP
NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY



LEGEND

- MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY
- RIVER/CREEK
- FLOODPLAIN
- PUBLIC/PARK/SCHOOL PROPERTY
- EXISTING NON-MOTORIZED FACILITY
- EXISTING EQUESTRIAN TRAIL
- PROPOSED NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY TRAIL
- PROPOSED NON-MOTORIZED CONNECTORS
- PROPOSED SEASONAL WATER TRAIL
- POTENTIAL KAYAK LAUNCH
- PROPOSED FISHING ACCESS

It is recognized that a significant amount of privately-owned property exists along the North Branch and Coon Creek. The study does not support the use of eminent domain. Realization of the proposed greenway should be on a volunteer basis through easements, acquisition, conservation, etc.



Wolcott Mill Metropark

NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY

Wolcott Mill Metropark is located in Ray Township. At 2,850 acres, it is the newest of the 13 Metroparks, having opened in 1989. There are four primary facilities within the park - the grist mill (on the National Register of Historic Places and dates back to the mid 1800s) and the surrounding buildings; the fully-functioning Farm Center serves as a reminder of the long, important history of agriculture in southeast Michigan; Camp Rotary and the associated equestrian trails; and, the North Branch Trails (Ray Center Road near 27 Mile Road) established in 2017 from former golf course cart paths.

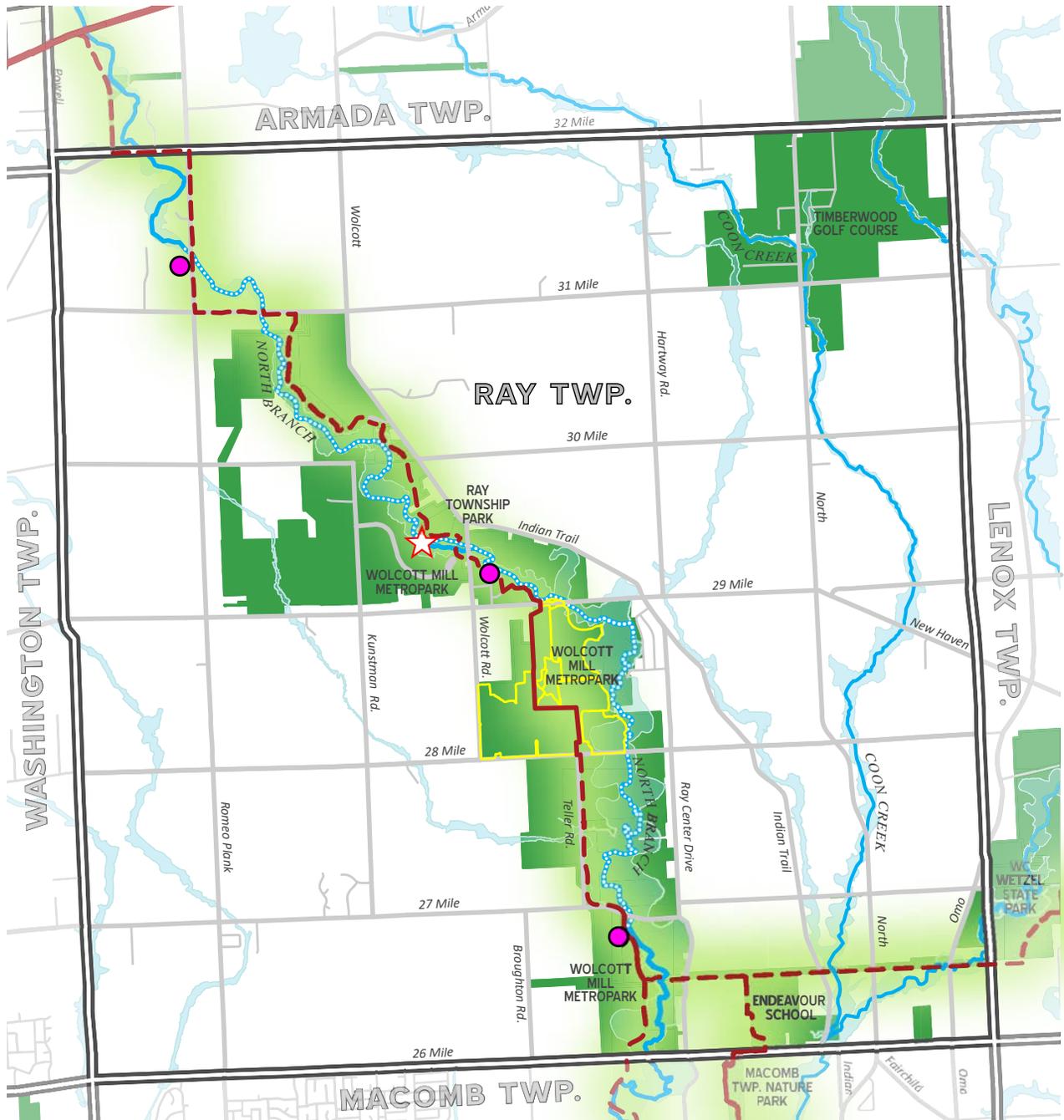
The proposal for the North Branch Greenway within Wolcott Metropark includes:

- Preservation of the riparian corridor along the North Branch of at least between 50-100 feet (wider if the floodplain is wider). Preservation is intended to mean limited to no construction within the corridor with the exception of recreational trails and/or fishing/kayak access.
- Two locations within the park for kayak/canoe launches. Possible locations include one at Camp Rotary and one at the North Branch Trails/former golf course property. Water trail would be seasonal only (spring and late fall) as water depth is shallow during most of summer.
- Incorporating a connected trail system within the park from 26 Mile Road to 31 Mile Road as well as a spur to connect Wetzel State Park and Wolcott Mill Metropark. The type of trail and types of users for various sections will need to be determined so as not to present user conflicts.

PRIORITY NEXT STEPS

- Design and construct Mill-to-Farm Center natural surface trail.
- Develop interpretive programming for wagon rides along new trail.
- Identify location(s) for and seek out grant funding to develop accessible canoe/kayak launch in collaboration with CRWC.
- Design and construct streambank improvements near new access points to enhance water quality and mitigate additional traffic.
- Seek out opportunities for improved connectivity within and between the Historic Center, Farm Center, Camp Rotary, and the North Branch Trails facilities.
- Implement green infrastructure and other projects identified in the Stormwater Management Plan approved by the Board of Commissioners in late 2019.
- Work closely with Ray, Macomb and Lenox Townships, MDNR, ITC, Macomb County and others to coordinate the vision for a protected and connected riparian corridor and network of trails to connect the Metropark with the Macomb Orchard Trail and to Wetzel State Park.

WOLCOTT MILL METROPARK
NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY



LEGEND

MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY		PROPOSED NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY TRAIL	
RIVER/CREEK		PROPOSED NON-MOTORIZED CONNECTORS	
FLOODPLAIN		PROPOSED SEASONAL WATER TRAIL	
PUBLIC/PARK/SCHOOL PROPERTY		POTENTIAL KAYAK LAUNCH	
EXISTING NON-MOTORIZED FACILITY		PROPOSED FISHING ACCESS	
EXISTING EQUESTRIAN TRAIL			

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WOLCOTT MILL METROPARK

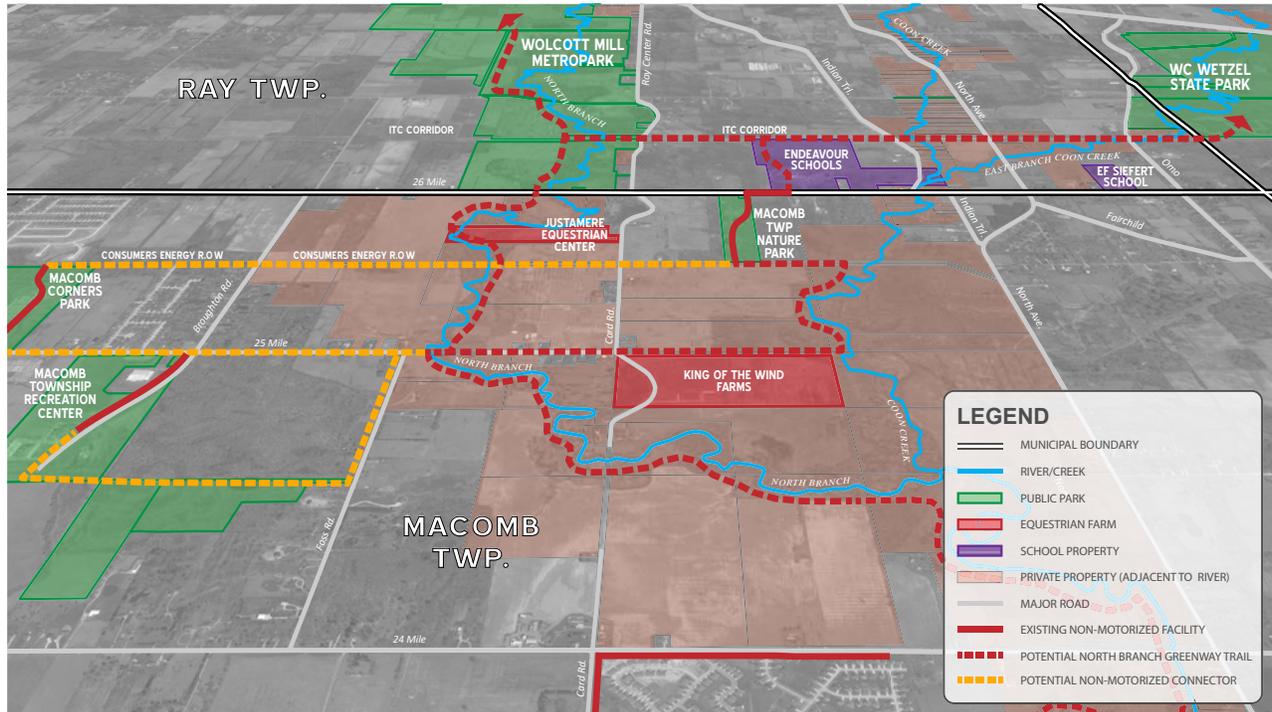
PROPOSED NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY RECREATIONAL ACCESS

A priority for HCMA is to Identify location(s) for and seek out grant funding to develop accessible canoe/kayak launch, trail improvements and fishing access in collaboration with CRWC such as the illustrated in the before and after concept below.



LONG-TERM VISION FOR A POTENTIAL NORTHERN MACOMB/SOUTHERN RAY TOWNSHIP BRIDLE FARMS REGION

A long-term vision for a connected trail network in northern Macomb Township, southern Ray Township and into Lenox Township has been discussed with a number of public parks and open spaces, schools and large equestrian centers in close proximity.



Lenox Township

NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY



Lenox Township is located in northeastern Macomb County on the Gratiot/I-94 corridor. The Township is generally rural in nature with a population of approximately 5,500 people. The East Branch of the Cook Creek traverses the western edge of the Township as does the only State Park in Macomb County - the 913-acre Wetzel State Recreation Area between 26 and 28 Mile Roads.

Wetzel State Recreation Area is largely undeveloped with the exception of a parking area and restrooms as well as a network of unpaved trails for walking and cross-country skiing. The 2006 MDNR Management Plan for Wetzel State Recreation Area recognizes the many natural features and special habitats at the park including mitigated and naturally-occurring wetlands, warm season prairie uplands, the Coon Creek and associated floodplain, and woodland areas. The 2006 Plan includes the idea of connecting Wetzel to Wolcott Mill Metropark via trails. The Friends of WC Wetzel State Park are a passionate 501(c)(3) group that works closely with the MDNR and Township to advocate for continued improvements and management of the property.

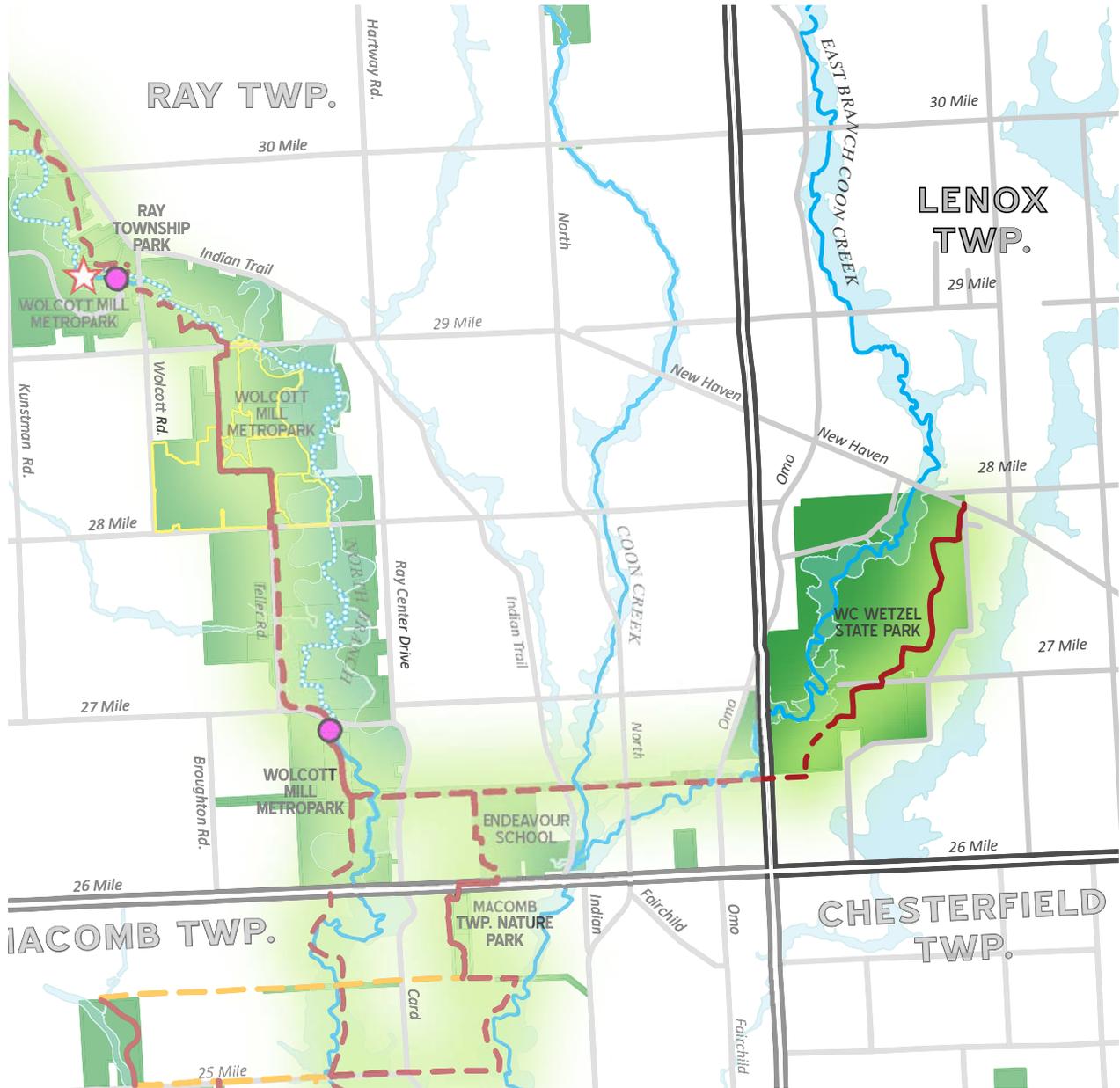
The proposal for the North Branch Greenway in Lenox Township includes:

- Preservation of the riparian corridor along the Coon Creek of at least between 50-100 feet (wider if the floodplain is wider). Preservation is intended to mean limited to no construction within the corridor with the exception of recreational trails and/or fishing/kayak access.
- Working with others to eventually be able to build a connected trail between Wolcott Mill Metropark and Wetzel Recreation Area.

PRIORITY NEXT STEPS

- Continue discussions with Macomb County and the Michigan State Department of Natural Resources regarding potential staff sharing between other nearby existing and/or future state parks/recreation areas in order to increase opportunities for additional amenities and associated maintenance at Wetzel Recreation Area.
- Lenox Township and the MDNR are interested in continued invasive species management at Wetzel State Recreation Area but would need assistance in management of the grant administration. Macomb County assist in investigating.
- Interested in working with MDNR, HCMA, the New Haven School District, Friends of Wetzel, Ray Township and Macomb County in advancing the conversations with ITC about a trail connecting Wetzel State Recreation Area, Endeavour Schools, and Wolcott Mill Metropark.
- Work with planner, attorney, etc. to discuss incorporating at least a 50ft buffer from the floodway into zoning ordinance to further protect existing and future development from flooding and allow for habitat conservation and potentially public access to the greenway and recreational asset.

LENOX TOWNSHIP
NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY



LEGEND

MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY		PROPOSED NORTH BRANCH GREENWAY TRAIL	
RIVER/CREEK		PROPOSED NON-MOTORIZED CONNECTORS	
FLOODPLAIN		PROPOSED SEASONAL WATER TRAIL	
PUBLIC/PARK/SCHOOL PROPERTY		POTENTIAL KAYAK LAUNCH	
EXISTING NON-MOTORIZED FACILITY		PROPOSED FISHING ACCESS	
EXISTING EQUESTRIAN TRAIL			

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Wolcott Mill Metropark
Credit: CRWC



Strategies & Techniques

There are a number of strategies, techniques and tools that can be used by the various agencies working together on the vision for the North Branch Greenway - many of which revolve around ways to preserve and conserve the riparian corridor.

This section of the report is not exhaustive, rather, it is meant to serve as a quick reference and idea generator for the stakeholders to continue to investigate and consider which techniques and strategies may work best in their community. In addition, this section briefly highlights potential funding sources that may be good candidates to assist in furthering the vision.

DONATION OF LAND FOR CONSERVATION

Donating land for conservation is a legacy to leave to future generations. A land conservancy may retain ownership of the property as a permanent preserve or transfer the property to a suitable owner such as a government agency. In some cases, the land is sold to a private owner subject to a conservation easement held by the land conservancy. Proceeds from that sale could fund the long-term management of the conservation easement and/or help to protect even more land. The full market value of the land donated to a qualified nonprofit is tax deductible as a charitable gift.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

A Conservation Easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified land conservancy to impose permanent restrictions on the land in order to protect its natural resources and conservation values. Restrictions are personalized to the land and the owner. The right to enforce the restrictions is held by the land conservancy. Each conservation easement is different, just as parcels of land and their special conservation values are different. Landowners continue to own and use their land and can even sell their property or pass it on to family members with the restrictions in place. A conservation easement does not have to cover the entire property; it can only be a portion. For the North Branch Greenway project, we would encourage conservation easements along the North Branch Clinton River, Coon Creek and East Branch Coon Creek to protect these rare habitats as well as reduce disturbance within flood prone areas. Easements can also define and allow certain uses such as recreational trails and fishing access that complement the study goals of conservation and recreation.

Conservation easements are voluntary and can be completed at a minimal expense to the landowner. However, typically a stewardship donation accompanies the easement to help defray the cost of enforcing the restrictions in perpetuity. Conservation easements do not grant public access to your

land. If you want to or need to sell your land but do not want to see it be developed, you can work with your local land conservancy to place a conservation easement on the land before it goes on the market. The land conservancy may be able to help identify buyers for conserved land.

A landowner can expect to receive less money for land with development restrictions than if it were sold free of easements. Benefits include a cap on 'pop up' taxes, potentially lower property taxes due to the development restrictions and a federal tax deduction for the value of the conservation easement determined by a qualified appraisal.

PURCHASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

Macomb County has a Macomb Agricultural PDR Committee (MAPDRC) which was formed in the mid-2000's to work toward protecting farmland in the County and particularly in the northern portions of Macomb County. A PDR (purchase of development rights) allows a landowner the option to preserve his/her property as farmland in perpetuity. In such a program, a landowner is paid the fair market value of the development rights of his/her property and an easement is then placed on the property that prohibits any future residential, commercial or industrial uses from being built on the land. The landowner may further develop the property for agricultural or personal needs. The value of the development rights is generally calculated as the difference between the development value and the agricultural value of the land. Proceeds of a PDR agreement may be used by the landowner to make additional investment in agricultural pursuits or living space. The property can also be sold but the classification of 'agricultural' stays attached to the property. [A link to more information about MAPDRC including application directions and checklist.](#)

RESOURCE PROTECTION OVERLAY ZONING

Adopting an overlay zoning district can be an effective method for communities to protect a specific natural feature of an area. The overlay district does

not replace existing regulations, rather it supplements them with language designed to protect significant ecosystems. Overlay districts can be particularly effective when they include provisions that 1) protect trees and other vegetation; 2) enforce setbacks from sensitive natural areas; 3) require open space preservation; and, 4) protect identified mating, nesting, and other critical habitat areas.

Maps that show areas intended for resource protection should be a component of any overlay zoning district. The Macomb County Planning Department has much of this information on file and may be of assistance to communities in developing resource protection maps and/or overlay zoning language. [Model ordinance language can be found here.](#)

TREE PRESERVATION ZONING

Macomb County has developed a number of model ordinances that local governments can adapt and use in their communities including a tree and woodlands preservation ordinance to provide for the protection, preservation, and proper maintenance of trees and woodlands in order to prevent damage to them so they may continue to provide their many benefits. A tree protection ordinance can be used to protect individual trees, tree rows and/or woodlands. They can also promote creative design and construction techniques that maximize preservation. Inventories, maps, and other information of a community's tree resources can be used to identify areas for priority protection and to measure the effectiveness of the ordinance based on the change in tree resources over time. [Model ordinance language can be found here.](#)

FARMERS TAX CREDIT DEDUCTION

If a farmer donates a permanent conservation easement on his or her land, or donates the land itself for conservation purposes, the donor may claim a federal income tax deduction for the fair market value of the conservation easement as determined by a licensed appraiser. This deduction can also be claimed for a charitable sale, or

“bargain sale,” in which the property is sold for less than market value. However, to prevent a donor from using the deduction to avoid paying any tax, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) limits the deduction that can be claimed in the year the donation is made.

Qualifying farmers and ranchers can claim a deduction for donating (or making a bargain sale on) a conservation easement or property equal to 100 percent of their adjusted gross income. A landowner can claim those deductions for up to sixteen years or until the deductible amount is reached, whichever comes first.

LEASING LAND BACK TO FARMERS

Purchasing land, or already having ownership of land, and then leasing it back to the farmer or out to a new farmer can achieve a number of mutual goals including maximizing security for farmers on the land and to make land affordable for farmers while meeting the landowner's financial objectives. Just as important is stewardship of the land, with landowner and tenant both caring for the property's agricultural and other natural resources. Leasing land for farming can lend to:

- land management that meets stewardship goals
- a revenue stream
- increased local food production
- offering an important opportunity to a new farmer or farm family
- keeping your working landscape open and in production.

The Huron-Clinton Metroparks has executed multi-year agricultural leases at both Wolcott Mill and Hudson Mills. HCMA has done 3-year leases on properties they own that were not needed for recreational purposes. HCMA issues RFPs at the end of each lease term to solicit bids. Leasing land to farmers has been a good strategy for transitioning property over time.

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

There are a number of potential funding sources that could assist the various stakeholders in the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Some of these are described here with a brief overview.

Sustain Our Great Lakes (NFWF)

Sustain Our Great Lakes is a public-private partnership designed to improve the ecological health of the Great Lakes basin. Its mission is to sustain, restore, and protect fish, wildlife, and habitat in the basin by leveraging funding, building conservation capacity, and focusing partners and resources toward key ecological issues. The program achieves this mission, in part, by awarding grants for on-the-ground habitat restoration and enhancement. Up to \$1,000,000 and 50:50 match. [Link to more information.](#)

Bring Back the Natives (NFWF)

Funding for restoration projects, riparian corridors, connectivity and invasive species management targeting habitat improvements for Sturgeon, Eastern Brook Trout and Northern Pike. Also supports projects that advance innovation in fisheries management, including developing decision support tools, landscape-scale assessments to determine where to implement restoration to maximize native fish recovery, piloting innovative restoration techniques, identifying key flow restoration thresholds that enhance fish habitat and water quality in flow-limited systems, and innovative public outreach methods like crowd-sourcing data or information needed for native fish conservation. \$50,000 - \$100,000 and 50:50 match. [Link to more information.](#)

Southeast Michigan Resilience Fund (NFWF)

Improving Habitat Quality, Connectivity and Enhancing Public Space: The Fund supports habitat restoration projects that improve the

quality and connectivity of in-stream, riparian, upland, and wetland habitats throughout Southeast Michigan. Habitat projects must be designed with a dual purpose, to restore habitat while also improving public access to and/or use-opportunities of natural areas throughout the region. \$300,000 and 50:50 match. [Link to more information.](#)

MDNR - Trust Fund

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF), provides grants to local governments and the DNR (with approved plan) to secure and develop lands for recreational purposes. Trail projects connecting communities to one another and to natural resources are a priority of the Trust Fund Board and are routinely awarded grants through the MNRTF. Additionally, since the MNRTF is a state source of funds, it can be used as match for TAP or other federal grant projects. Providing legal pedestrian access to the Great Lakes Shoreline (acquisition) and the Iron Belle Trail (among other items) were additional priorities for the Trust Fund Board in recent years. Development grant maximum is \$300,000 with a 25% local match. Acquisition grants have no maximum limits. [Link to more information.](#)

MDNR Rec Passport

PA 32 of 2010 created the Local Public Recreation Facilities Fund to be used for the development of public recreation facilities for local units of government. Money for this fund is derived from the sale of the Recreation

Passport which replaced the resident Motor Vehicle Permit (MVP) - or window sticker - for state park entrance. All local units of government are eligible. Maximum grant request is \$150,000. Renovation of existing facilities has been a focus of the program. [Link to more information.](#)

MDNR/NPS Land & Water Conservation Fund

The LWCF Federal program provides matching grants to local governments and the MDNR (with approved plan) for the acquisition and

development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. Maximum grant request is \$300,000, and there is a 50% local match. [Link to more information.](#)

Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program

Addresses strategic issues of prevention, detection, eradication, and control for both terrestrial and aquatic invasive species in Michigan. Requests between \$25,000 and \$400,000 depending on type of project. [Link to more information.](#)

EGLE 319 NPDES

Land protection projects prevent NPS pollution due to land use changes that may impact water quality. Past land protection projects have included actions such as local ordinance development and permanent conservation easements. Proposed conservation easements must be selected based on potential water quality benefits and must permanently protect the proposed area. NPS Program staff will inspect all proposed easement sites prior to signing a grant contract. Proposals including conservation easements that will be paid for or used to match NPS Program funds must provide maps and aerial images showing each parcel of interest overlain with a proposed easement boundary. \$25,000 minimum. 25:75 match. [Link to more information.](#)

Ralph Wilson Fund

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation was formed in 2015 and funded after the passing of Ralph Wilson, a Detroit native who founded and owned the Buffalo Bills football team. The Foundation accepts grant applications in western New York and Southeast Michigan and has 4 focus areas. One area of focus is "Livable Communities" where the foundation is seeking to contribute to strong and sustainable communities and supporting access and design to public spaces that support healthy living. [More information at www.ralphcwilsonjr.org.](http://www.ralphcwilsonjr.org)

In addition to applying directly to the Foundation, the Foundation has provided funds to the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan for the management of Ralph Wilson Legacy Funds. The Legacy Funds are seeking requests for funds for Design & Access (increase walkability/ bikeability and outdoor recreation opportunities) as well as Youth Sports Fund (high-quality sports programs to youth). Applications are due in January. [Link to more information.](#)

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

TAP is a competitive grant program that uses federal transportation funds designated by Congress for specific activities that enhance the intermodal transportation system and provide safe alternative transportation options including pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Additionally, investments made through TAP support place-based economic development by offering transportation choices, promoting walkability, and improving quality of life. MDOT and SEMCOG are responsible for selecting TAP projects in southeast Michigan.

Eligible applicants include county road commissions, cities, villages, regional transportation authorities, transit agencies, state and federal natural resource or public land agencies, nonprofits responsible for the administration of local transportation safety programs, and tribal governments. MDOT may partner with a local agency to apply for funding and implement the project. Other organizations, such as townships or trail groups, may work with an eligible agency to apply. Grant coordinators are available to assist you by providing more information on the program, guidance on competitive projects, and how to best develop a competitive application. [Link to more information.](#)

Great Lakes Fishery Trust: Habitat Protection and Restoration

The goal of the Great Lakes Fishery Trust Habitat Protection and Restoration grant category is to preserve essential habitat; protect, restore, and stabilize important fish habitats; and increase habitat availability. Priority is given to Lake Michigan Basin, but available for all great lakes basins in the state of Michigan. Land acquisition, dam removal, fish passage, and other capital projects are highly resource intensive and, as a leading strategy, would quickly exhaust the resources of the GLFT. Therefore, the GLFT limits its direct investment in these projects to situations where the habitat opportunity is prime, other funders are contributing, long-term management is assured, and the proposed acquisition or restoration project has the strongest community support and interest. \$500,000 maximum. [Link to more information.](#)

Great Lakes Fishery Trust: Access to Great Lakes Fishery

The GLFT funds projects that create or enhance shore-based access to fishing, which includes construction or improvement of boardwalks and fishing piers with adjacent amenities such as parking facilities and walkways. Protection, enhancement, and/or restoration of valuable Great Lakes fisheries habitat (e.g., acquiring property interest to preserve, enhance, or restore coastal wetlands or to provide fish passage). Recreational or tribal access to the Great Lakes fisheries (e.g., acquiring interest in property to secure public access to shore-based recreational fishing facilities or to construct/operate a tribal fishing facility. \$100,000 maximum. [Link to more information.](#)

Michigan Department of Ag - Agricultural Preservation Fund

To provide grants to eligible local units of government for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements through Purchase

of Development Rights programs (PDRs) to preserve farmland. The Macomb Agricultural PDR is available to Armada, Bruce, Ray, Lenox, Richmond and Washington. [Link to more information.](#)

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has funded \$3.84 billion dollars worth of projects that improve the Great Lakes region since 2020. Working to accelerate environmental progress in five Focus Areas; Toxic Substances and Areas of Concern, Invasive Species, Nonpoint Source Pollution Impacts on Nearshore Health, Habitats and Species and Foundations for Future Restoration Actions. [Link to more information.](#)

Erb Family Foundation

The Erb Family Foundation mission is a healthy Great Lakes, evidenced by increased stewardship and improved water quality in the Ausable Bayfield, Clinton, Detroit, Huron, Raisin, and Rouge watersheds. To achieve that, they support efforts to increase individual and institutional stewardship; improve understanding of emerging contaminants; and coordinate best practices and policies at the state, federal, and binational levels. [Link to more information.](#)

FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program

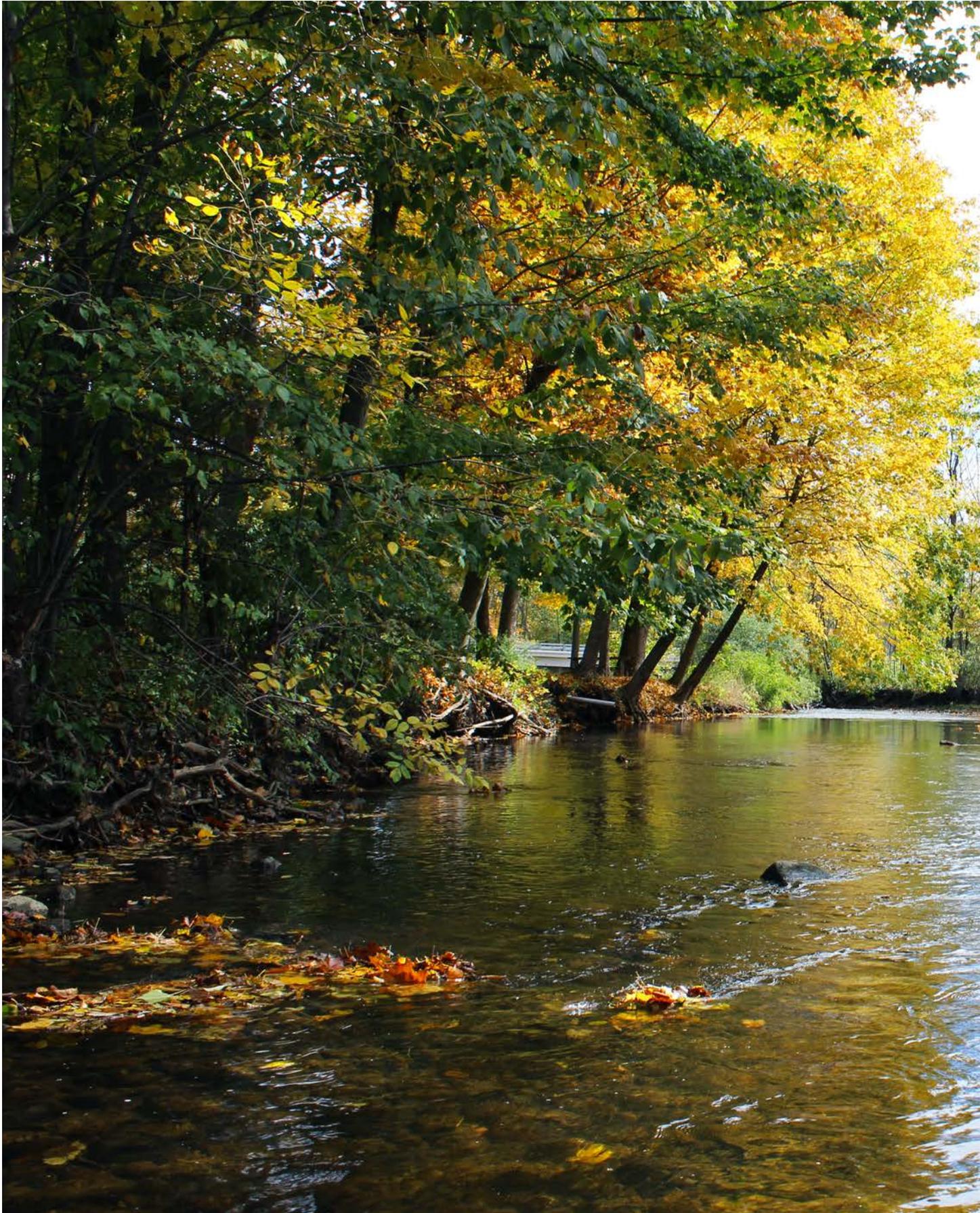
The HMGP provides grants to states and local governments to implement long-term hazard mitigation measures after a major disaster is declared. The purpose of the HMGP is to reduce the loss of life and property due to natural disasters and to enable mitigation measures to be implemented during the immediate recovery from a disaster. [Link to more information.](#)

FEMA Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program

The Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program, authorized by Section 203 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, is designed to assist states, territories, federally-recognized tribes, and local communities in implementing a

sustained pre-disaster natural hazard mitigation program. The goal is to reduce overall risk to the population and structures from future hazard events, while also reducing reliance on federal funding in future disasters. This program awards planning and project grants and provides opportunities for raising public awareness about reducing future losses before disaster strikes.

[Link to more information.](#)





Appendix

Public Input Summary

[Model Ordinance Summary Sheets](#)

