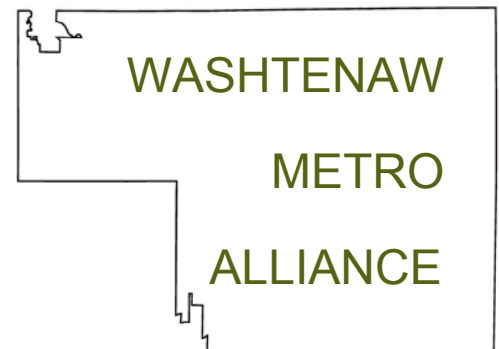


Green Places: Open Spaces

A Plan For Coordinated Parkland And Open Space



April 2007

**A RESOLUTION TO ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT THE GREEN PLACES:
OPEN SPACES "PLAN FOR COORDINATED PARKLAND AND OPEN
SPACE" AND SPECIFIC ACTION ITEMS**

Washtenaw Metro Alliance
April 5, 2007

WHEREAS, elected officials of the cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, the townships of Ann Arbor, Pittsfield, Superior, Scio and Ypsilanti, and Washtenaw County have come together to form the Washtenaw Metro Alliance (WMA), by resolution support of its charter; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of the WMA is to protect the region's quality of life by anticipating issues before they become problems and to enhance our quality of life by identifying opportunities to maintain our sense of place through commitment to leadership and action; and

WHEREAS, a coordinated approach to open space preservation was identified by the WMA membership as a priority quality of life issue and opportunity for the region; and

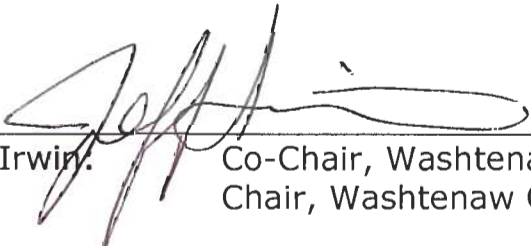
WHEREAS, a draft Green Places: Open Spaces "A Plan for Coordinated Parkland and Open Space" was developed with extensive input from the public, open space partners and local government boards and committees, and WMA members; and

WHEREAS the Plan's vision is to create an interconnected system of open space throughout the region that supports ecological function, biodiversity, water quality, productive farmland, recreational opportunity and scenic character for current and future residents; and


WHEREAS the plan outlines specific actions needed to increase awareness and support for open space preservation and coordinating open space activities to maximize the region's quality of life.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Washtenaw Metro Alliance, for the reasons enumerated above, and in accordance with its stated purpose, wishes to formally endorse the Green Places: Open Spaces "A Plan for Coordinated Parkland and Open Space" and commits to move toward implementing the plan by: presenting the plan to their local commissions and boards for consideration of adopting the plan into local master plans;

continuing to refine the plan by coordinating with open space and transportation partners in identifying highest acquisition priorities and improving pedestrian, bicycle and transit access to the region's open space; coordinating land use and development best practices; and monitoring progress toward meeting the plans vision.



Jeff Irwin: Co-Chair, Washtenaw Metro Alliance
Chair, Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners



John Hieftje: Co-Chair, Washtenaw Metro Alliance
Mayor, City of Ann Arbor

Attachment: Description of Action Items

April 5, 2007 WMA Resolution Attachment
Green Places: Open Spaces
Action Items

Getting the Word Out About Open Space: Provide information to residents, businesses and community groups about the plan. Let everyone know we care about our quality of life and get their comments on how we can have the best open space system possible.

Endorsing the Plan: Washtenaw Metro Alliance Members present the plan to their local Commissions and Boards. Local governments adopt the plan and incorporate the open space strategy into their master plans.

Strengthening the Partnerships: The high level of coordination among the existing partners that exists today increases as the partners help implement the plan. Regular meetings and cooperative structures will facilitate establishing a clearinghouse, identifying highest priority open space areas for acquisition.

Implementing the Plan: Clearing house for preservation information and assistance: open space partners coordinate activities and act as a one-stop shop for preservation information and local, state and federal program assistance.

Leveraging Open Space Funds/Resources: Local governments and partners coordinate their funding resources to leverage state and federal programs. Partners work together to maintain or initiate local millages and explore new funding and grant opportunities.

Identifying Highest Priority Areas for Acquisition: Regional open space partners meet to identify important areas for preservation based on individual program goals, ability to connect open space in the region and to county-wide open space systems, public use and access and other important considerations.

Improving Pedestrian, Bicycle and Transit Access to the Region's Open Space: Develop a detailed access plan, identify funding and build access connections within the region and to larger open space systems such as the Border to Border Trail.

Coordinated Land Use and Development Approach: Regional governments adopt best practices and model ordinances to promote open space plan implementation such as open space development, access easements and transfer of development rights.

Monitoring Progress and Sharing Success: WMA will report on the progress made and additional actions needed to realize the vision and meet the open space goals for the region on an annual basis.



Acknowledgements

Washtenaw Metro Alliance Representatives:

John Hieftje, Co-Chair	City of Ann Arbor	Feliziana Meyer	Charter Township of Pittsfield
Wesley Prater, Co-Chair	Washtenaw County	Michael Moran	Charter Township of Ann Arbor
Jean Carlberg	City of Ann Arbor	David Nacht	Scio Township
John Gawlas	City of Ypsilanti	Charles Nielsen	Scio Township
Leah Gunn	Washtenaw County	Gene Ragland	Charter Township of Ann Arbor
Ruth Ann Jamnick	Charter Township of Ypsilanti	Conan Smith	Washtenaw County
Kathleen Knol	Scio Township	Brenda Stumbo	Charter Township of Ypsilanti
Ed Koryzno	City of Ypsilanti	James Walter	Charter Township of Pittsfield
William McFarlane	Charter Township of Superior	Kay Williams	Charter Township of Superior

Special Thanks to:

Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority	Washtenaw County Drain Commissioner
Huron River Watershed Council	Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation
Superior Land Conservancy	Washtenaw County Road Commission
Washtenaw Area Transportation Study	Washtenaw Land Trust

Prepared by:

Washtenaw County Planning and Environment
and
Carlisle/Wortman Associates, Inc.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Table of Contents	iii
Executive Summary	1
Introduction	5
A Call for Regional Action	5
Purpose of the Plan	6
Project Partners	8
Planning Process	8
Relationship to Other Plans	8
Current Conditions and Trends	11
The Region's Resources: A Physical Inventory	11
Partners in Preservation: An Institutional Inventory	25
Trends and Projections	32
Stakeholder Input	39
Prior Surveys on Parkland and Open Space	39
Project Partner Input	40
Public Input	42
Analysis	47
Existing Open Space Resources	47
Land Use Policies	48
Preservation Efforts	55
Conclusions	59
Regional Preservation Plan	67
A Framework for the Region's Green Infrastructure	67
Regional Preservation Plan	67
Areas Not Identified in the Plan	69
Action Strategy	75
Vision	75
Goals	75
Action Strategies	75
Strategies to Coordinate Regional Open Space Preservation Efforts	77
Regional Land Use Reform Strategies	81
Strategies Involving Existing Preservation Tools	82
Part of a Bigger Picture	86
Case Studies	87
Green Infrastructure in Action on the Loxahatchee	87
Grassroots Preservation in Superior Township, MI	87
Regional Governance of Green Infrastructure in Kansas City, MO	88
Preserving Quality of Life through Growth Management in Austin, TX	89

List of Maps

Map 1: Regional Location	10
Map 2: Natural Features	15
Map 3: Farmland	17
Map 4: Community Facilities	19
Map 5: Existing Open Space Preserves	21
Map 6: Existing Non-Motorized Resources	23
Map 7: Extent of Ann Arbor Greenbelt	26
Map 8a: Population Density, 1990	36
Map 8b: Population Density, 2000	37
Map 9: Natural Features Complexes	61
Map 10: Composite Future Land Use Map	63
Map 11: Composite Zoning Map	65
Map 12: Preservation Framework	71
Map 13: Regional Preservation Plan	73

List of Tables

Table 1: Major Streams in the WMA Region	11
Table 2: Population Trends	32
Table 3: Housing Trends	32
Table 4: Population Projections	33
Table 5: Acreage of Active Agriculture	34
Table 6: Acreage of Woodlands and Wetlands	34
Table 7: Developed Area	34
Table 8: Development Scenario Analysis	52
Table 9: Open Space Comparison	58

Figure 1 – Farmland and Tree Rows in Pittsfield Township



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vision

The vision of this plan is to create an interconnected system of open space throughout the region that supports ecological function, biodiversity, water quality, productive farmland, recreational opportunity and scenic character for current and future residents.

Introduction

The Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti area is recognized as an exceptional place to live, work and play. This is due in large part to its wealth of parkland, natural resources, farmland, and scenic countryside, which help to define the region. Over the long-term, it is recognized that the preservation of the region's high-quality open space resources, or "green infrastructure," is a very important strategic element in the region's continued success.

Purpose of Report

This plan has been prepared under the charter of the Washtenaw Metro Alliance to achieve a number of objectives. First, this plan seeks to promote the issue of open space preservation to increase awareness and support for such efforts. Also, a comprehensive approach to open space preservation demands that actions be coordinated regionally for maximum result. The region has a wealth of talent and resources found within its various political jurisdictions and non-governmental organizations geared toward open space preservation. This plan seeks to draw them together in a coordinated fashion.

Because open space relates to such a wide range of "quality of life" indicators important to the WMA region, such as ecological health, recreational opportunity, scenic character, etc., the pursuit of open space preservation offers the opportunity to focus on multiple planning objectives simultaneously. In doing so, we can uncover further opportunities to leverage our efforts for maximum result.

Although this plan explores the issue of open space and "green infrastructure" from a regional perspective, it is not intended to replace detailed planning and programs undertaken at the local level. This plan is about drawing connections and creating synergy throughout the region.

Report Sections

Existing resources, institutions and trends found across the region are summarized in the *Current Conditions and Trends* chapter.

Despite substantial growth and development over the past couple of decades, the region retains substantial natural resources and farmland. The Huron River, and its associated riparian systems, stands out as the region's most significant natural feature. Much of the region's parkland and open space, community facilities and non-motorized routes are located along its banks.

Continued growth and development is projected over the next 25 years. Nearly all of this growth is anticipated to occur within the region's townships, posing a potentially serious threat to valuable open space resources.

Stakeholder input was collected in the development of this plan. Identified stakeholders included representatives from the region's governments, institutions and non-profits, referred to as "Project Partners," as well as members of the public. These groups commented on the scope and composition of a regional open space system, and the manner by which it should be pursued. Their comments are summarized in the *Stakeholder Input* chapter.

The *Analysis* chapter offers an evaluation of the resources, policies and programs found across

the region. In general, it is noted that current approaches have not resulted in the creation of a coordinated system of open space. It is concluded that extensive preservation of a regionally-significant system of open space is possible through reform of land use policies and coordination of preservation actions.

The *Regional Preservation Plan* chapter identifies the core components of the region's "green infrastructure," around which preservation efforts should be coordinated. These include the region's major riparian corridors and intact natural feature complexes, as well as existing open space preserves.

The plan highlights the interface between riparian corridors and identified natural feature complexes as a priority for preservation. Unbuffered riparian corridors are identified as key areas for restoration, in order to enhance the connectivity of the region's natural features.

The region's agricultural preservation areas are portrayed, as well. The "core" or central portions of these agriculture preservation areas are identified as the priority for agricultural preservation action. The perimeters are envisioned to serve as "buffers" from more intense development beyond.

The *Action Strategy* chapter sets forth a range of action items meant to guide open space preservation efforts across the region. In general, they emphasize the importance of the

“green infrastructure” philosophy, and identify means by which coordinated action may be taken.

Next Steps

There are a number of measures identified for the implementation of this plan. Primary among these is the establishment of a regional preservation consortium represented by WMA member governments and Project Partners to promote coordination of preservation activities.

Reform of the region’s land use policies will also play a major role in plan implementation. Short- and long-term opportunities for land use reform are identified, all emphasizing the need for a more coordinated approach to land use decision-making.

Existing preservation tools will remain significant components of regional preservation action. These include acquisition programs, regulatory mechanisms, and other tools. An extensive list of these is provided in the *Action Strategy* chapter.

For More Information

For more information regarding this plan contact the Washtenaw County Planning and Environment Department at (734) 222-3800. Information is also available on-line at http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/planning_environment/planning.

Figure 2 – Open Field in Ann Arbor Township



INTRODUCTION

The Washtenaw Metro Alliance (WMA) region, composed of the Cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti together with Scio, Ann Arbor, Superior, Pittsfield and Ypsilanti Townships (all within Washtenaw County), is acknowledged as an exceptional place to live, work and play (see Map 1). This distinction is credited in no small part to its wealth of parkland, natural resources, farmland, and scenic countryside, which help to define the region. Over the long-term, it is recognized that preservation of the region’s high-quality open space resources is a very important strategic element in the region’s continued success.

A Call For Regional Action

In the fall of 2003, the political leadership of the Washtenaw Metro region came together out of a shared belief that many issues bearing on the long-term success of their communities were in fact regional concerns, and should be ad-

ressed as such. It was understood that the region’s continued development and growth offered both opportunities and challenges, and that many issues related to the growth of the region were better managed through partnership.

Purpose of the WMA

“To protect our quality of life by anticipating issues before they become problems and to enhance our quality of life by identifying opportunities to maintain our sense of place through commitment to leadership and action.”

WMA Charter. 10/13/03

The efforts put forth that fall resulted in the creation of a voluntary body comprised of representatives of the region’s cities and townships, together with Washtenaw County, aimed at tackling regional concerns proactively.

What Is Open Space?

Broadly, open space can be viewed as a system of natural areas and corridors, parklands, farmland, and other undeveloped areas that can provide recreational opportunities, support plant and animal habitat, protect sensitive environmental resources and ecological processes, and maintain scenic character and natural beauty.

The WMA recognizes the region’s open space resources as one of its primary assets, contributing greatly to the environmental quality, recreational opportunities, economic prosperity and “sense of place” that the area’s residents

benefit from. The WMA further acknowledges that the impacts of landscape fragmentation and sprawling development patterns are one of the single greatest threats to the region's open space resources and the quality of life enjoyed by its residents.

Recent decades have seen the accelerated conversion of natural areas and farmland into residential, commercial and other types of development. Ironically, the attraction of the region's open space is itself partly responsible for fueling the development pressure that threatens its very existence.

Despite efforts on many fronts by WMA members and other organizations, the region has not accomplished a coordinated approach to open space preservation to date. It is now better understood that the individual efforts employed by each community in the region are being outmatched in the face of ever-mounting development pressure.

Additionally, strained municipal finances have further hampered local government's ability to respond to land use and open space issues. In the period from 2001 to 2004, state revenue sharing paid to the WMA's municipalities decreased by 16% (amounting to \$4.5 million less per year region-wide), pitting immediate concerns such as emergency services and road maintenance against long-term strategic issues like open space preservation.

Regionalism and Partnership

The WMA region benefits from many and diverse municipal, institutional, non-profit and private entities with varied skills and abilities. However, with budgets under increasing pressure across the board, and an increasing pace of growth and change, partnership and consolidation of our efforts has become all the more critical. By leveraging our individual strengths in a collective fashion and eliminating overlapping efforts, we can achieve greater impact from our limited resources.

A coordinated approach between various units of government and conservation organizations will be more effective. It is also, to a great extent, expected by citizens. Through partnership, the resources available throughout the region can be combined to achieve a synergy that has thus far not been applied to the issue of open space preservation.

Purpose of the Plan

This plan is intended to serve a number of objectives. First, it is anticipated that elevating open space to a matter of regional importance will draw greater support to the issue, both publicly and politically. Many of the components that comprise the region's open space resources do not obey political boundaries therefore individual governments' efforts are typically unable to preserve functional systems of open space.

The second objective of this plan is to offer a regional perspective on the subject of open space, through which regional priorities with the greatest strategic significance can be identified and focused on collectively. This will allow elements such as natural features and farmland preservation to be handled in a fashion more consistent with the concept of “green infrastructure.”

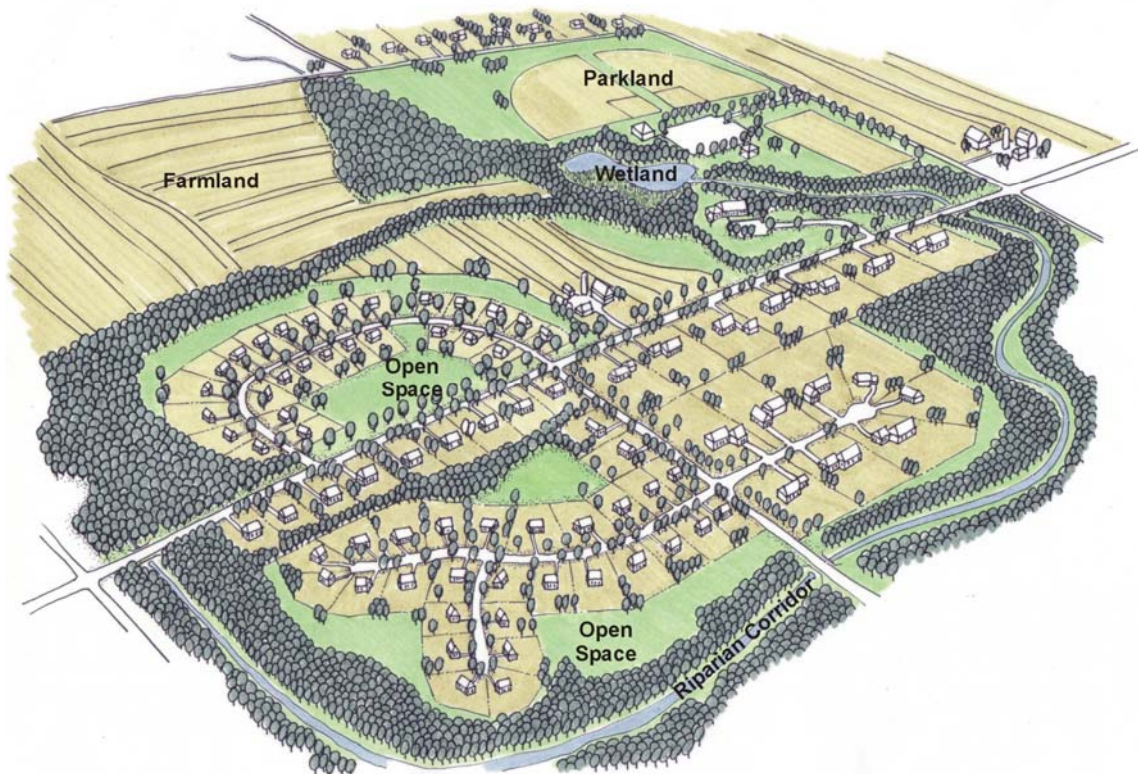
The third objective of the plan is to account for the various resources available throughout the region, and organize and align them for maximum effectiveness. The WMA region is fortunate to have a wide array of talent and financial resources geared toward the preservation of open space. However, these resources are distributed across many different political

jurisdictions and non-governmental organizations. This plan will bring them together for maximum benefit to the region.

“Green Infrastructure”

The concept of “green infrastructure” is a contemporary approach to the issue of community open space. It looks at open space as more than a mere amenity, but as a system that is every bit as necessary to a community’s health and success as conventional, or “grey,” infrastructure systems. By repositioning the issue of open space in this way, emphasis is placed on creating healthy and functional networks of open space that are based on ecological or other rational and scientific principles. This approach results in systems of open space that exhibit connectivity, rather than isolated parcels and preserves.

Figure 3 – Green Infrastructure



Project Partners

The WMA’s participating governments, together with its constituent governments make up only a portion of the solution. It is readily acknowledged that meaningful success in the preservation of open space will rely on resources and insight beyond that of individual municipalities. This broader group of organizations is commonly referred to as our “Project Partners,” who are listed below. Their input has been essential in the preparation of this plan, and their continued involvement will surely be critical to its successful implementation. This list of partners is not exhaustive, and additional partnerships will be welcomed as this effort evolves.

Identified Project Partners

WMA Member Communities

Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners

Washtenaw County Planning & Environment

Washtenaw County Parks & Recreation

Washtenaw County Road Commission

Washtenaw County Drain Commissioner

Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS)

Huron River Watershed Council

Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority (HCMA)

Superior Land Conservancy

Washtenaw Land Trust

School Districts, Colleges and Universities

Planning Process

A detailed scope of work necessary to undertake this project was formulated after conducting preliminary inventories of the region’s resources and existing planning efforts. Then, a working session with the Project Partners was

held to review the proposed scope of work, identify their ideas and concerns, and review their current programs and policies.

Subsequently, a public workshop was conducted where residents from across the region were invited to share their ideas, attitudes and opinions about open space issues. Their input, coupled with an analysis of the area’s resources (both physical and institutional) and current preservation efforts were used to develop goals and strategies, a physical plan, and implementation methods.

Relationship to Other Plans

This plan is not meant to replace or contradict the various planning efforts undertaken by WMA member communities and other project partners on the subject. On the contrary, this plan seeks to draw together prior and ongoing efforts, identify gaps in the region’s approach to open space, and identify opportunities to achieve multiple objectives simultaneously, with greater effect through partnership. This plan is about drawing connections and creating synergy throughout the region.

Multi-Objective Planning

Because open space relates to such a wide range of “quality of life” indicators important to the WMA region, such as ecological health, recreational opportunity, scenic character, etc., the pursuit of open space preservation offers the opportunity to focus on multiple planning objectives simultaneously. In doing so, we can uncover further opportunities to leverage our efforts for maximum result.

Glossary of Terms

Farmland: Land actively cultivated for agricultural production.

Greenway: A linear strip or corridor of open space, with or without non-motorized facilities, often providing a connection between other open space resources.

Green Infrastructure: A functional system of open spaces that exhibits connectivity, considered essential for successful communities.

Natural Feature: A landscape feature that was created by natural processes, including topography, wetlands, woodlands, etc.

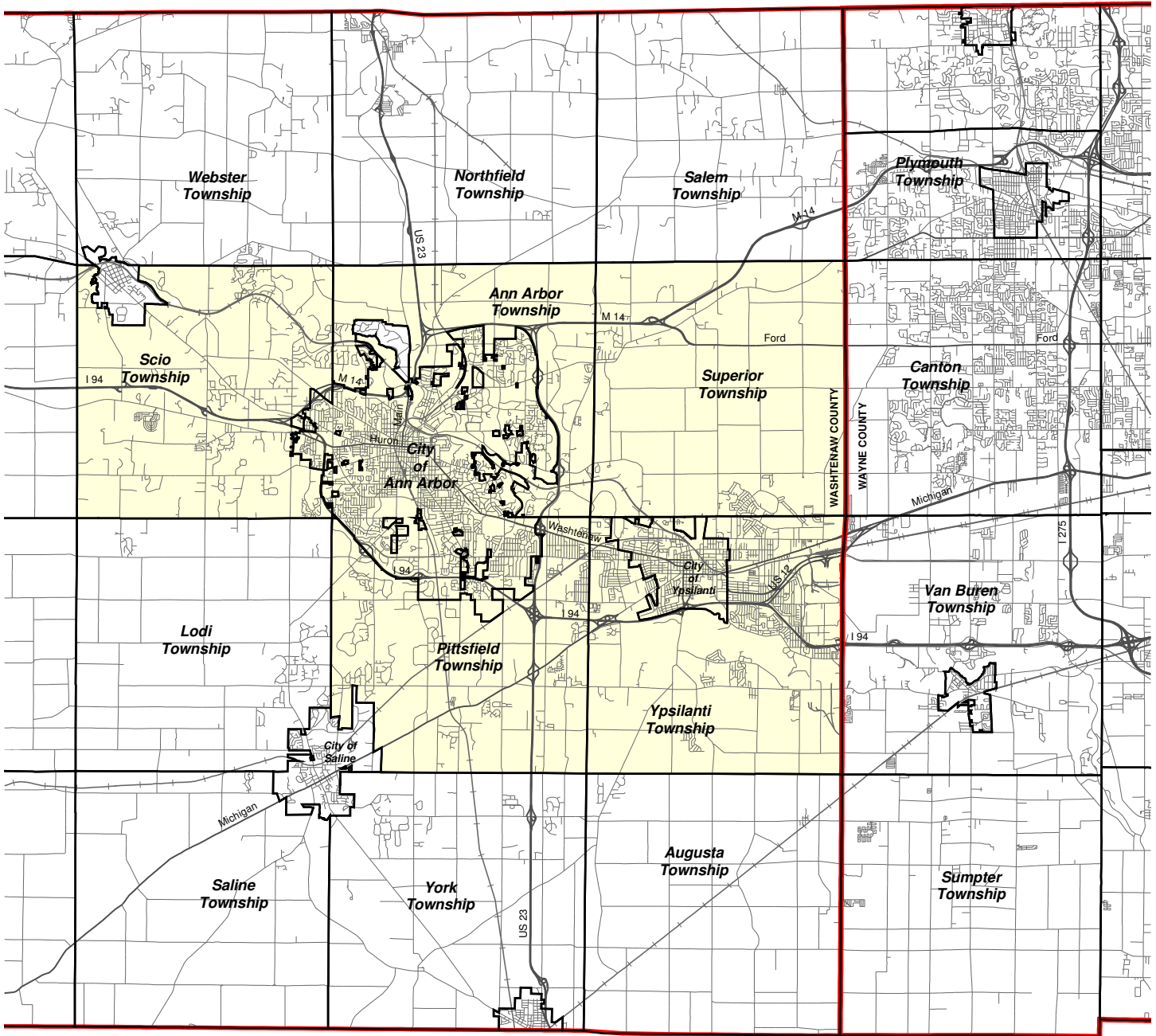
Non-Motorized Facilities: Routes such as sidewalks, paths and trails that facilitate circulation by pedestrians and bicyclists.

Open Space: Natural areas and corridors, farmland, parklands, and other undeveloped areas that can offer a range of benefits, such as ecological health, recreational opportunity, and scenic character.

Riparian Corridor: The land adjacent to a stream, river, or other body of water, including associated wetlands, floodplains and aquatic habitats.

Scenic Corridor: A length of roadway having scenic qualities, often attributable to the presence of open space.

Viewshed: The view available from a particular location in the landscape.



Legend

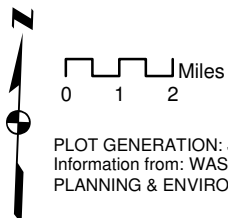
WMA Member Communities

MAP 1

REGIONAL LOCATION

Washtenaw Metro Alliance

Carlisle/Wortman Associates, Inc.
Community Planners & Landscape Architects



PLOT GENERATION: JULY 5, 2007
Information from: WASHTENAW COUNTY
PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT

Figure 4 – LeFurge Woods Preserve in Superior Township



CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

A successful approach to preserving the region’s vital open space resources must be based on a clear picture of the resources in question and the parties involved in their preservation, as well as the forces (economic, political and social) influencing such an effort.

The Region’s Resources:

A Physical Inventory

Natural Features

The region’s various natural features are illustrated on Map 2. The Huron River winds its way through the region from northwest to southeast and is clearly the region’s most prominent natural feature. It is the drinking water source for many of the region’s inhabitants, provides important wildlife habitat, and serves a range of recreational purposes, while contributing greatly to the scenic character of

the region. The River widens at the southeast corner of the City of Ypsilanti to form Ford Lake, after which it continues across southern Wayne County, ultimately discharging into Lake Erie.

A number of major streams, many of which are tributaries of the Huron, can also be found in the region (Table 1). These streams exist in a range of conditions. While many urban streams are buried or channelized, riparian corridors in rural areas remain intact and largely in a natural condition.

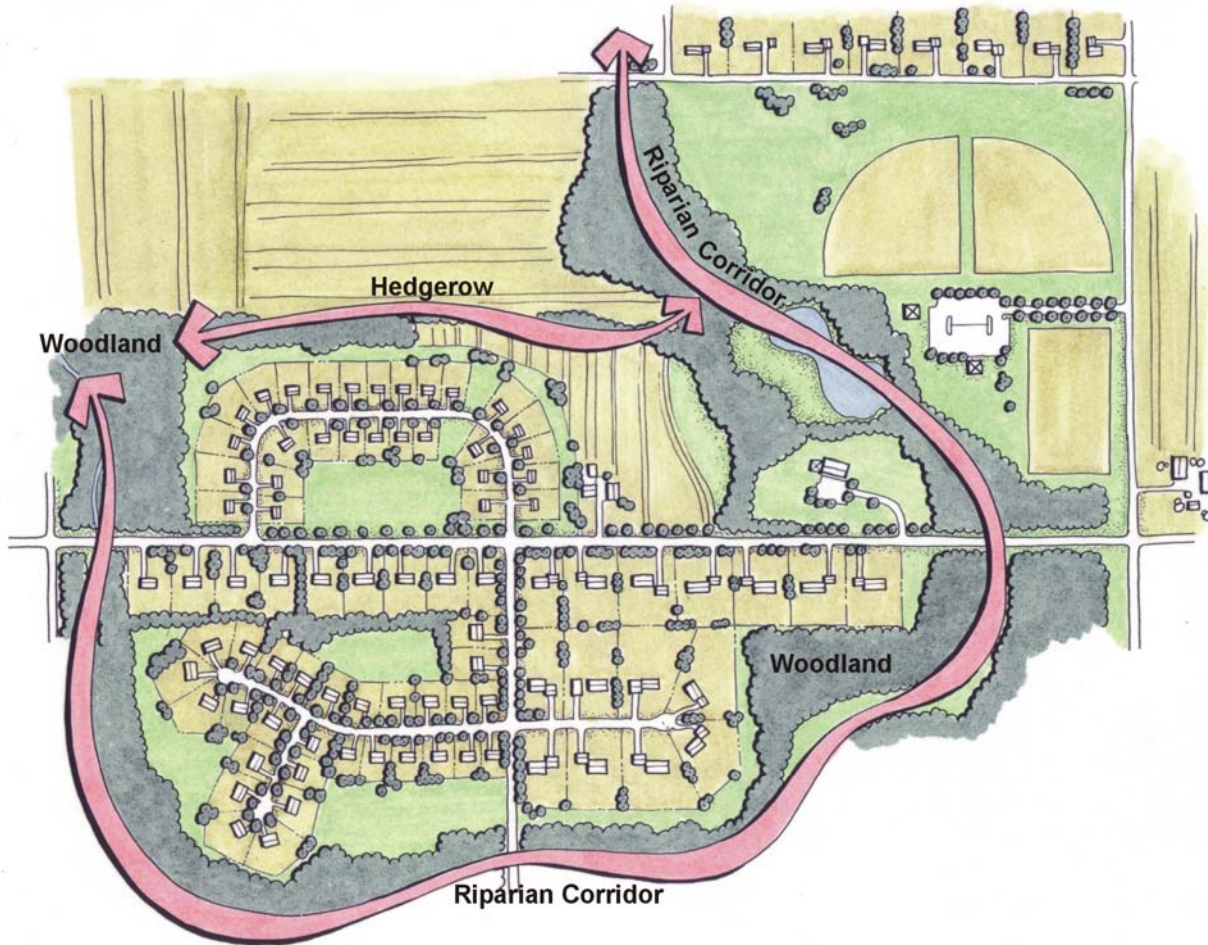
Table 1 – Major Streams in the WMA Region

Stream	Watershed	Communities
Mill Creek	Huron River	Scio Township
Honey Creek	Huron River	Scio Township
Traver Creek	Huron River	City of Ann Arbor
Allen Creek	Huron River	City of Ann Arbor
Flemming Creek	Huron River	Ann Arbor and Superior Townships
Mallett’s Creek	Huron River	City of Ann Arbor and Pittsfield Township
Swift Run	Huron River	City of Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor Township and Pittsfield Township
Wood Outlet Drain	Saline River	Pittsfield Township
Pittsfield Drain No. 5	Saline River	Pittsfield Township
Koch and Warner Drain	Saline River	Pittsfield Township
Paint Creek	River Raisin	Ypsilanti Township

Source: Huron River Watershed Council, Pittsfield Township, Ypsilanti Township

Areas susceptible to periodic flooding are found in association with many of the region’s riparian corridors, particularly the main branch of the Huron River, Honey Creek, Allen Creek, Swift Run, Wood Outlet Drain, and Paint Creek. The 100-year floodplain is portrayed on Map 2.

Figure 5 – Landscape Connectivity



The region also contains wetlands (characterized by constant or intermittent inundation, hydric soils, and specific vegetation types), particularly in association with riparian corridors and headwaters areas. Isolated wetlands can be found throughout the region, as well.

Areas of steep slopes (slopes in excess of 12%) exist in close association with the region’s watercourses, particularly the main branch of the Huron. These slopes are susceptible to erosion if unprotected, and, given their relationship to the region’s watercourses, should be included in preservation efforts.

Natural Features Function Together

Although natural features can be identified and described as distinct elements, it is important to keep in mind that, from an ecological standpoint, they are interrelated. The various natural features commonly inventoried combine in various ways to create ecologically-significant landscape systems, or “complexes.” A systems approach to preserving natural resources is critical for ecological functions to be maintained.

Historically, woodlands covered the vast majority of the WMA region. Logging and conversion to agriculture eliminated much of