



## BACKGROUND

The Mid-America Regional Council, the metropolitan planning organization and association of city and county governments serving the bistate Kansas City area, has committed to support the development of a regional system of greenway trails connecting the seven-county region. MARC has worked closely with local government officials and community advocates since 1991 toward the completion of the 1,144-mile system. While the system has strong support in concept, local communities have faced challenges in securing resources necessary to acquire land and develop the trail system. These challenges are due to limited public resources and competing demands, concerns about public access to stream corridors abutting private property, and hesitancy by local officials to assume responsibility for more miles of greenway trails to operate and maintain.

MARC worked with a leadership board to broaden support for MetroGreen over the past five years (2004-2008). The board recognized that completion of the MetroGreen system will require greater community support. Such support could be secured by broadening the range and number of stakeholders interested in the system and engaging more partners in the effort. Over the past year, MARC has worked to link MetroGreen with a broader set of community objectives and to engage new partners through the MetroGreen Alliance.

## OVERVIEW

MetroGreen is an interconnected system of natural areas, greenways and trails in the Kansas City metropolitan area. It is principally composed of linear corridors of land along streams, roadways and within abandoned rail corridors. The 1,144-mile greenway plan currently covers Leavenworth,

Johnson and Wyandotte counties in Kansas and Cass, Clay, Jackson and Platte counties in Missouri.

The MetroGreen vision emerged in 1991 through the efforts of the Prairie Gateway Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects. The ASLA chapter convened its membership and local officials to develop a vision plan for a regional greenway system. The vision plan was unveiled at the ASLA national conference held in Kansas City in 1991. The concept plan expanded upon the work of landscape architect George Kessler, who designed a network of green park corridors in 1894. The Kansas City Park and Boulevard system which emerged from that 1894 plan has defined the Kansas City landscape and guided its urban form. His 100-year plan provided the city with a unique identity that links function with beauty. Throughout the 1900's farsighted city leaders fine-tuned the Kessler open-space plan.

Following the unveiling of the MetroGreen vision plan in 1991, MARC and local officials promoted the concepts and encouraged adoption of the vision in local and regional plans. While support was strong for the concepts, progress in building the system was slow. In 2001, MARC oversaw efforts to refine the vision into a detailed action plan and has continued to coordinate implementation efforts by local communities.

MetroGreen identifies more than 75 separate corridors that will form a regional network to connect many of the area's most valuable natural assets. Over 200 miles of the system have been constructed and an additional 100 miles are planned for construction in the next 10 years.

**MISSION STATEMENT:**

**MetroGreen is an interconnected system of natural areas, greenways and trails linking together communities throughout the Kansas City metropolitan area.**

**GOALS:**

- Offer recreation and alternative transportation opportunities.
- Enhance the value of adjacent properties and bolster the region's economic competitiveness.
- Provide close-to-home and close-to-work access to popular destinations such as schools, parks and shopping centers.
- Promote the conservation of our region's precious natural heritage in urban, suburban and rural settings.
- Protect important natural resources and landscapes, water resources and wildlife habitat.
- Preserve open space in advance of development to alleviate potential flooding problems and guide future growth.
- Serve as a focal point for redevelopment and reinvestment in the urban core and in brownfield areas along primary streams.
- Influence the pattern of land use by protecting green corridors and open-space resources.
- Provide educational resources for youth and adults and encourage them to celebrate the historic, cultural and environmental attributes of the metro region.

**OUTCOMES**

The MetroGreen Action Plan provides a greenprint for a metropolitan system connecting urban and rural green corridors throughout seven counties in the Kansas City region. The plan is designed to protect and improve water quality in the region for the next 100 years, and to protect and enhance the region's existing natural elements and quality of life for all residents.

- MetroGreen will preserve and protect stream corridors in the Kansas City area by helping to use floodplain lands to absorb floodwaters, thus reducing economic loss.
- MetroGreen will link local residents to home, work, school and other destinations.
- MetroGreen is designed to provide off-road corridors that form an alternative-transportation network connecting the Kansas City region.
- MetroGreen will promote non-motorized travel options and expand non-motorized routes.
- MetroGreen will make it possible for residents throughout the Kansas City region to experience the beauty of natural landscapes.
- MetroGreen proposes interpretive programs that celebrate cultural facilities located within its corridors.
- MetroGreen will support ways to protect and restore native habitats for indigenous plants and animals.
- MetroGreen will encourage the development of public/private partnerships to make practical decisions concerning the construction and maintenance of future greenways.
- MetroGreen will identify partnership opportunities with private-sector businesses, civic organizations, associations and

individuals to spread the cost of implementing and managing greenways, and will concentrate on cost savings associated with greenway development.

## BENEFITS

The benefits of MetroGreen include cost-effective improvement of water and air quality; stabilization of streams; reduction of flood risks; protection of wildlife habitat; opportunities for biking, hiking and walking; and ultimately, the formation of a framework around which more sustainable urban development patterns can occur. MetroGreen is intended to connect communities together and connect people to nature, and to cultural and historic resources along its green corridors. These and other benefits of the MetroGreen network are described below:

### Transportation Benefits

MetroGreen corridors are designed to serve as extensions for road networks, offering realistic and viable connections between origins and destinations such as work, schools, libraries, parks, shopping areas, historic and cultural sites, and tourist attractions. Greenway-based bikeways and walkways are most effective for certain travel distances. National surveys by the Federal Highway Administration have shown that Americans are willing to walk as far as two miles to a destination and bike as far as five miles. Destinations can be linked to multiple origins throughout the Kansas City area with a combination of off-road trails and on-road bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

### Economic Benefits

MetroGreen offers numerous economic benefits, including higher real estate property values, increased tourism and recreation-related revenues, and cost savings for public services. Greenways have been shown to raise the value of adjacent properties by as much as 5 to 20 percent. Many home buyers and corporations are looking for real estate that provides direct access to public and private greenway systems. Additionally, greenways

can save local tax dollars by utilizing resource-based strategies for hazard mitigation and managing community stormwater, thus placing into productive use landscapes that would not normally be considered for conventional development.

Greenways also enhance the role tourism plays in the economy. The state of Missouri, for example, spent \$6 million to create the 200-mile KATY Trail, which, in its first full-year of operation generated travel and tourism expenditures of more than \$6 million.

### Health and Recreation Benefits

Studies have shown that as little as 30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity exercise (such as bicycling, walking or roller blading) can significantly improve mental and physical health and prevent certain diseases. Greenways contribute to public health by encouraging more people to walk or bike to short-distance destinations. In 1987, the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors released a report that profiled the modern pursuit of leisure and defined the quality of life for many Americans. Limited access to outdoor resources was cited as a growing problem throughout the nation. The commission recommended that a national system of greenways could provide all Americans with access to linear, open-space resources.

The MetroGreen system will complement existing parks and open space throughout the region. MetroGreen will serve as a primary recreation and fitness resource and help meet the passive recreation needs for a growing population of older residents and young children.

### Cultural Benefits

Successful greenway projects across the United States have served as new "main streets," where neighbors meet, children play and community groups gather to celebrate. For cities and towns large and small, greenways have become cultural assets and focal points for community activities.

Various walking and running events are held on greenways to support charity events or extend traditional sporting events. Many civic groups adopt segments of greenways for cleanup, litter removal, and environmental awareness programs.

The richness and diversity of the area's historic and cultural resources are represented by local and national significant historic sites and districts. The interpretation of historic and archaeological sites along greenways can serve to increase the awareness and appreciation of the area's rich history. Greenways can also serve as vehicles to provide controlled public access to important cultural sites in a manner that promotes preservation and enhances interpretive opportunities.

### **Security and Safety Benefits**

Safe neighborhoods are of prime concern and a priority to metro residents. Some of the most successful deterrents to criminal activity involve increasing citizens' neighborhood awareness and participation in community-watch programs. Greenways have proven to be an effective tool to encourage local residents to participate in neighborhood programs. Crime statistics and reports from law enforcement officials have shown that parks and greenways are typically land uses with the lowest incidence of reported criminal activity.

In order to better address trail safety issues, regional 9-1-1 system officials are working with local parks and public works departments to add trail markers to support improved response to emergencies.

As a recreation resource, most trails and greenways provide a safer and more user-friendly resource than other linear corridors, such as local roads, as users are separated from motor vehicle traffic. Greenways typically attract local residents who use the facilities frequently, creating an environment that is virtually self-policing. Additionally, greenways – whether publicly or privately owned – are dedicated for multiple uses and are normally designed to meet federal, state and local standards for public safety and use.

### **Water Quality and Water Quantity Benefits**

Greenways preserve wooded, open spaces along creeks and streams which absorb flood waters and filter pollutants from stormwater. Historically, flooding has been a significant problem in the Kansas City area. In some cases, buildings and other land uses have encroached into flood-prone areas. By designating floodplains as greenways, encroachments can be managed, and sometimes replaced with linear open space, an amenity to residents and businesses occupying adjacent property.

As a flood-control measure, MetroGreen corridors serve as primary storage zones during periods of heavy rainfall. The protected floodplain can also be used during nonflood periods for recreation and alternative transportation. In conjunction with existing stormwater management policies and programs in the region, greenway lands can be set aside as development occurs.

Greenways corridors also serve to improve the surface-water quality of local rivers and creeks. The floodplain forests and wetlands contained within greenway corridors filter pollutants from stormwater. These pollutants are not removed if stormwater is collected in pipes and discharged directly into local streams and rivers. Improving surface-water quality in streams benefits both local residents and numerous forms of wildlife that depend on streams for their habitat.

### **Air Quality Benefits**

Greenways serve as alternative transportation corridors that reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality. Since the majority of automobile trips are less than two miles in length, offering alternative transportation choices through greenways would encourage people to bicycle or walk these short distances more often, thereby reducing traffic congestion and automobile emissions.

## Plant and Animal Habitat Benefits

MetroGreen corridors can serve as viable habitat for many species of plants and wildlife. Greenway corridors provide essential food sources and, most importantly, access to water that is required by all wildlife. Greenways in the Kansas City area could become primary migratory routes for terrestrial wildlife, serving to help maintain the integrity of many plant and animal gene pools. Some wildlife biologists have extolled greenways as future “gene-ways” because these migration routes are essential to maintaining healthy wildlife populations.

Greenways can also serve as “gene-ways” for plant species that migrate with changes in climate and habitat. These “gene-ways” often follow river and stream corridors that have long served as transportation routes for animals and humans.

MetroGreen promotes local programs to protect valuable, existing forested and wetland areas and to reclaim and restore streams to support higher-quality habitat.

## METROGREEN ALLIANCE

MetroGreen is a visionary, large-scale system of interconnected landscape corridors that will span more than 1,100 miles linking city to countryside, suburb to urban center, and regional residents to the landscapes they cherish. To fully achieve MetroGreen’s goals, a coordinated effort by local governments, private interests and residents of the Kansas City region will be necessary.

Initially, MARC established a Civic Leadership Board and a Technical Advisory Committee to help lead the MetroGreen effort and to create a support framework for the system’s development. The leadership board was composed of community leaders from throughout the region representing diverse constituencies. The technical committee consisted of primarily local government parks and public works personnel charged with the

responsibility of developing and operating greenway trails in their respective communities.

The leadership board and technical committee met for approximately five years, providing guidance to MARC and helping to broaden support for MetroGreen. The board recommended that MARC form a MetroGreen Alliance to help organizations and institutions charged with developing and implementing some aspect of MetroGreen work together. MARC identified over 80 groups that have some interest in MetroGreen, and began convening representatives from those organizations in 2008. The alliance has since become a network of organizations, local and state governments, and private sector partners that have a shared interest in building a regional greenway system.

The MetroGreen Alliance is a regional organizational framework focused on MetroGreen conservation and restoration. The alliance network of organizations is dedicated to the provision of multi-use trails, conservation and restoration of habitat, biodiversity, water quality, and green infrastructure.

MARC solicits best practices from alliance members, shares updates through an electronic newsletter, and convenes members several times a year to network and share information. MARC works to identify opportunities for two or more alliance members to collaborate on efforts that support MetroGreen.

The MetroGreen Alliance will continue to bring dozens of member organizations together to achieve shared goals, create synergies and increase the efficacy of local actions. The alliance will help strengthen the work of member organizations by: fostering creative partnerships; building broader community political and financial support; catalyzing on-the-ground results through action-oriented planning; and creating an integrated policy framework.