

# Summary

## Building The River Ring: A Citizen-Driven Regional Plan



*"We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time."*

*– T. S. Eliot, St. Louis Native and Poet*



**The Great Rivers Greenway District**

# Acknowledgments

## **Citizen Advisory Committee**

*Citizens from St. Louis City, St. Louis County and St. Charles County*

Alicia Smith, <i>Chair</i>	Daniel McGuire
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Nancy Bowser	Dave Reed
John Colbert	Chris Reinagel
David Danforth	Lynda Roepke
Troy Darden	Leslie Robertson
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## **Community Forum Participants**

*Citizens from St. Louis City, St. Louis County and St. Charles County*

## **Small Focus Group Participants**

*Citizens from St. Louis City, St. Louis County and St. Charles County*

## **Technical Advisory Committee**

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Diana Allen – *National Park Service*  
Michael Arduser – *Missouri Department of Conservation*  
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Sheri Bilderback – *Home Builders Association of Greater St. Louis*  
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Mary Burrows – *Streamteach*  
Laura Cohen – *Confluence Greenway*  
Ron Coleman – *The Open Space Council*  
Robert Cropf – *St. Louis University*  
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Ted Dettmer – *Vantage Homes*  
Mary Donze – *Missouri Department of Natural Resources*  
Lori Fiegel – *St. Louis County*  
Bob Foster – *St. Louis Regional Bicycle Federation*  
Wayne Freeman – *Great Rivers Habitat Alliance*  
Bart Hager – *Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District*  
Howard Hayes – *St. Louis Public Schools*  
Ted Heisel – *Missouri Coalition for the Environment*  
Dan Kaline – *St. Charles County*  
Mary Nani Kenyon – *The Green Center*  
Jonathan Kleinbard – *Missouri Botanical Garden*

Ben Knox – *St. Louis County*  
John Kohler – *City of Crestwood*  
Larry Lanius II – *St. Louis Inline Skating Association*  
Bruce Litzsinger – *Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District*  
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Stan Mulvihill – *McCormack Baron & Associates*  
Patrick O'Donnell – *U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*  
Michael Opperman – *City of Webster Groves*  
Gene Peters – *Metro East Park and Recreation District*  
Tony Piccinni – *Parkway West Middle School*  
Jean Ponzi – *Gateway Center for Resource Efficiency*  
Karl Schneider – *Tele Atlas North America*  
Scott Shipman – *St. Charles County*  
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Connie Tomasula – *City of St. Louis*  
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Tina Votaw – *Metro*  
Lawrence Welty – *Missouri Department of Transportation*  
Bettie Yahn-Kramer – *St. Charles County*  
Genie Zakrzewski – *St. Louis County*

The Great Rivers Greenway District acknowledges the vision of the region's citizens and the tireless efforts of St. Louis 2004, the Parks and Open Space Task Force, and Gateway Parks and Trails 2004. The citizens' desire to enhance the St. Louis region led to the formation of Great Rivers Greenway.

This plan is the first major step in realizing the citizens' goal of creating an interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails for the St. Louis region.

**County Executives**

Charlie Dooley – *County Executive, St. Louis County*  
Joseph Ortwerth – *County Executive, St. Charles County*  
Francis Slay – *Mayor, St. Louis City*  
The Late George R. "Buzz" Westfall  
– *County Executive, St. Louis County*

**Great Rivers Greenway****Board of Directors**

Anne Zerr, *President - St. Charles County*  
Michael Murray, *Vice President - St. Louis City*  
David Rosenberg, *Secretary - St. Louis County*  
Damon Porter, *Treasurer - St. Louis County*  
Richard Ash - *St. Charles County*  
Timothy Bolt - *St. Louis City*  
Judith Metzger - *St. Louis County*  
Pauline Smith - *St. Louis City*  
Jeff Wagener - *St. Louis County*  
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URS Corporation

*Communications and Public Engagement*  
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Kiku Obata and Company  
Vector Communications in partnership  
with FOCUS St. Louis

# Building The River Ring: A Citizen-Driven Regional Plan

## A New Sense of Place

Throughout history, the world's great rivers, such as the Amazon, Ganges, Nile and Rhine, have shaped and defined civilizations, cultures and trade. Located at the confluence of North America's great rivers, the Mississippi and Missouri, the St. Louis region has always been tied to its waterways (*see figure 1*). The region is at the nation's crossroads and at the heart of the continent. From the time of the earliest settlers to the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and from the fur trading era to today's commercial transportation, the rivers have fueled the economy and inspired the culture of the region.

For more than a century, however, citizens have lost touch with their rivers. The era of railroads, automobiles and air transportation has distracted attention from the river ways and much of the access to the creeks, lakes and streams is limited.

As the region moves into the 21st century, there is a new realization and understanding of the importance of these vital natural resources. Citizens are eager to restore their connection to the rivers, and their surrounding greenways and adjacent parks that wind through and shape the St. Louis region. The people of the area are determined to refocus the region and build a new notion of the Midwest. The development of The River Ring, an interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails, will create a new sense of place and source of pride – The Great Rivers Greenway District.



THE CONFLUENCE OF THE MISSISSIPPI AND MISSOURI RIVERS *Figure 1*





## Early History of the St. Louis Region

### 4,200 BC:

Native Americans settle near the confluence of the Missouri, Mississippi and Illinois rivers in the oldest known permanent dwellings in North America – the Koster site.

### 700 – 1,350 AD:

Native Americans, the Mississippian Woodland Indians, settle in the region. They inhabit a city of as many as 20,000 and build more than 120 earthen mounds in and around the center of their civilization, Cahokia.

## 17th Century:

Pere Marquette and Louis Joliet are the earliest Europeans to chronicle their journey along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. In 1673, they travel the Mississippi in search of the Pacific Ocean.



"Painting of Marquette and Joliet" by Edgar S. Cameron  
Chicago Daily News negatives collection, DN-0003451.  
Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society.

## 19th Century:

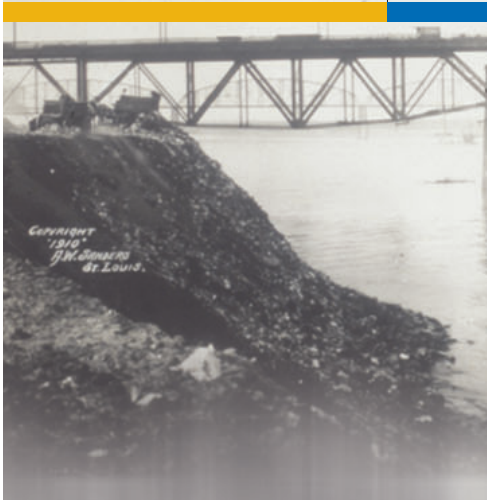
In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson negotiates with Napoleon the sale of the Louisiana Territory – the entire drainage area of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers west of the Mississippi. In 1804, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark embark on their two-year expedition on the Missouri River.



The Filson Historical Society  
History of the expedition under the command of Captains Lewis and Clark, to the sources of the Missouri



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"McKinley Bridge"  
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## 18th Century:

In 1699, French settlers first inhabit the Upper Mississippi at Cahokia. Soon, Jesuit missions and small trading posts, such as Kaskaskia and Prairie du Rocher, are established along the eastern bank of the River. In 1764, the most advantageous site below the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri is claimed by Pierre Laclède and named in honor of his patron saint, King Louis IX of France. The village of St. Louis is situated on a low bluff just above the Mississippi's unstable floodplain. In 1767, Carondelet and Florissant are founded, followed by St. Charles in 1769.



"Embouchures du fleuve St. Louis ou Mississippi. 1763"  
Map Collections: 1500 - 2003  
Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library



## 20th Century:

For the 1904 World's Fair, Forest Park is expanded to its present size – 1,400 acres. In 1964, coinciding with the city's bicentennial, the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark Expedition are again celebrated, as the National Park Service opens the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial and Gateway Arch.



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"Everything is connected to everything else."

-Aldo Leopold

## Proposition C

In 1996, St. Louis 2004 was formed with the mission of bringing about a renaissance in the metropolitan region by 2004. The same year, St. Louis 2004 began visioning sessions throughout the metropolitan area. More than 10,000 citizens were asked two basic but related questions: how should St. Louis build upon its assets to improve the region's quality of life; and how should the region celebrate the centennial of the 1904 World's Fair and the bicentennial of the Louisiana Purchase. From the hundreds of ideas generated, St. Louis 2004 formulated 11 priorities for the region, one of which ultimately became Proposition C (see figure 2).

In November 2000, 68 percent of voters in St. Louis City, St. Louis County and St. Charles County, Missouri, approved Proposition C, the Clean Water, Safe Parks and

Community Trails Initiative. The vote created the Metropolitan Park and Recreation District, now doing business as The Great Rivers Greenway District. At the same time, residents of Madison and St. Clair counties,

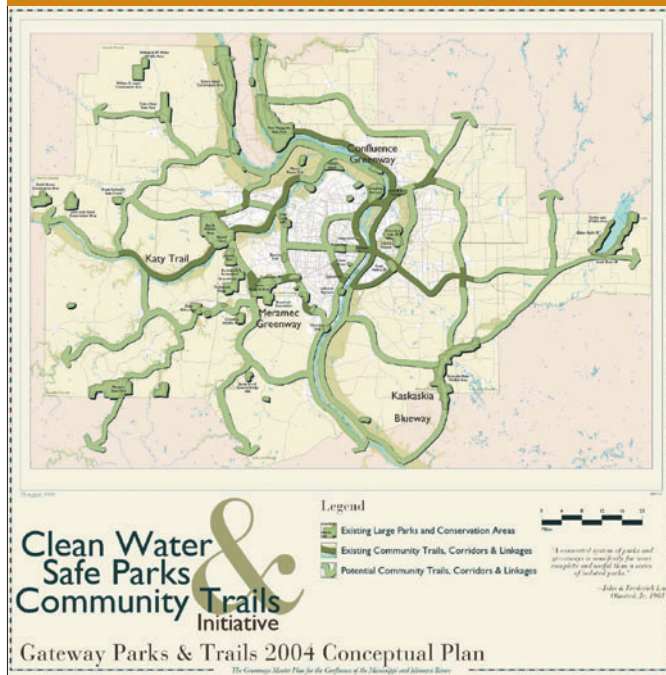
Illinois, voted to create the Metro East Park and Recreation District. The two organizations collaborate to ensure maximum regional benefit (see figure 3).

Proposition C funds The Great Rivers Greenway District through a one-tenth of one cent sales tax, which generates \$10 million dollars annually. Great Rivers Greenway is responsible for developing The River Ring, a well-planned, interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails in St. Louis County, St. Charles County and the City of St. Louis. The River

Ring will enhance the St. Louis area and redefine it as a region of clean, green and connected communities.

**PROPOSITION C, THE CLEAN WATER, SAFE PARKS AND COMMUNITY TRAILS INITIATIVE**

Figure 2



**THE GREAT RIVERS GREENWAY DISTRICT**

Figure 3



Former Governor of Illinois, George Ryan and Late Governor of Missouri, Mel Carnahan, congratulate each other after signing the Clean Water, Safe Parks and Community Trails Initiative enabling legislation on the Old Chain of Rocks Bridge—on the Illinois-Missouri State line.



**"A connected system of parks and parkways is manifestly far more complete and useful than a series of isolated parks."**

*– John & Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. 1903*

## Purpose of the Plan

From its inception, Great Rivers Greenway has been inspired, nurtured and guided by the people of the St. Louis region. In 2002, the organization initiated a planning process, which engaged citizens from across the region in envisioning and planning the long-term development of a regional system of greenways, parks and trails.

Building The River Ring: A Citizen-Driven Regional Plan is a working document that serves as a long-term framework. It reflects a community vision as well as an ambitious set of goals, opportunities and strategies that will be fully realized over several decades. The plan includes all current Great Rivers Greenway projects, which will be completed in the next several years. To reflect the changing face of the region and the possibility of more counties joining Great Rivers Greenway, the plan will be reviewed and updated every five years.

## Three Outcomes of an Interconnected System

Initiatives in metropolitan areas across the nation, including Boston, Denver, Minneapolis and Portland, demonstrate that the benefits of an interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails go far beyond recreational use: economic growth is stimulated; property values increase; tax bases stabilize; new businesses develop; citizens and neighborhoods connect; open space is preserved; and healthier lifestyles are encouraged. Based on these findings, Great Rivers Greenway recognizes the development of the interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails has three guiding outcomes that will benefit the region:

### **Economic Development**

Outcome

*An interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails strengthens local economies and is a catalyst for economic growth in new and established communities.*

### **Social Capital**

Outcome

*An interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails enhances social capital—health, education, dignity and interaction—and strengthens community bonds.*

### **Environmental Stewardship**

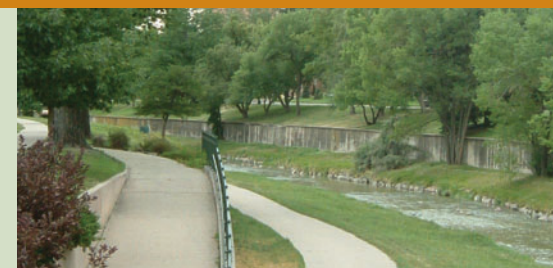
Outcome

*An interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails is the physical armature that defines communities and preserves and enhances the natural environment.*

### CASE STUDIES FROM AROUND THE NATION PROVIDE EXAMPLES OF THE THREE OUTCOMES.



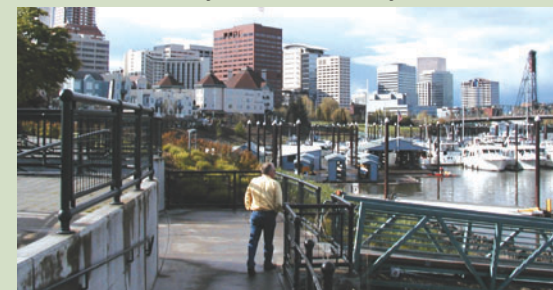
**Boston** – Southwest Corridor



**Denver** – Cherry Creek Greenway



**Minneapolis** – Chain of Lakes



**Portland** – Willamette Greenway

## The Planning Process

Throughout the planning process, Great Rivers Greenway staff collaborated with a team of planning consultants and the region's citizens.

*"Stabilize areas with declining populations."*

– Small Focus Group Participant

*"Provide alternative forms of recreation."*

– Technical Advisory Committee Member

*"Preserve and maintain open space."*

– Citizen Advisory Committee Member

*"Serve as a magnet for young professionals, new business and tourism."*

– Citizen Advisory Committee Member



## December 2002

A 36-member Citizen Advisory Committee representing the residents of St. Louis City, St. Louis County and St. Charles County assisted Great Rivers Greenway staff and the planning team. Between December 2002 and September 2003, the committee met monthly. The meetings gave residents an opportunity to share their communities' desires and concerns and learn about the region's demographics, geography, and topography. They also reviewed national and international case studies on comparable projects.

The committee expressed nine ways an interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails could benefit their individual communities:

1. Can you tell us about your community's assets and liabilities?
2. Can you propose projects (priorities) to minimize community liabilities and enhance community assets?
3. Can you suggest guidelines for Great Rivers Greenway to evaluate potential projects?

**Question 1:** Participants most frequently mentioned these assets and liabilities:

### ASSETS

- Agricultural and natural areas
- Areas of wildlife habitation
- Educational institutions and community centers
- Existing trails and walkways
- Existing revitalized neighborhoods
- Historical and cultural attractions
- MetroLink (where applicable)
- Parks – regional and neighborhood
- Proximity to major transportation arteries
- Rivers, streams and creeks
- Vast areas of open space (where applicable)

### LIABILITIES

- Air pollution
- Blighted areas
- Existing quarries and junkyards
- Floodplain development
- Fragmented government
- Lack of adequate coordination of growth
- Limited access to waterways, streams and creeks
- Limited connectivity between attractions and neighborhoods
- Scattered plots of vacant buildings
- Traffic congestion
- Undercapitalized parks
- Underutilized urban core

**Physical Development** – Restore brownfields and abandoned properties, preserve land for parks and alleviate streambank erosion.

**Education** – Educate the public about greenways, parks and trails, provide setting for multi-disciplinary education and incorporate learning at an interactive level.

**Social Connectivity** – Create and stimulate regional communications, promote social interaction and encourage residents of the region to think of themselves as one.

**Accessibility** – Link pathways along rivers, historical sites and cultural attractions and provide safe routes to schools.

**Aesthetics** – Improve St. Louis' image as a vibrant city and create a more attractive region for young people to relocate and promote tourism.

**Economic** – Increase property values, create development and employment opportunities and revitalize depressed areas.

**Preservation** – Preserve wetlands for future generations, provide an unbroken habitat for wildlife and protect native plant growth.

**Health** – Improve quality of life for citizens of all ages, provide solitude and encourage healthy lifestyles.

**Pollution Deterrent** – Repair streams through the development of greenways, parks and trails.

## March 2003

To ensure citizens' voices were heard throughout the planning process, Great Rivers Greenway held small focus group meetings in all three counties. Committee members each hosted one meeting in their community, inviting 12 to 15 friends, neighbors and co-workers. Participants were asked to answer three questions:



*"Your history is connected to the rivers."*

– Laureates

*"Great Rivers Greenway should be the steward and custodian of the region's physical resources, but also serve as a capacity builder for the region's social and human resources."*

– Laureates

*"Terrific vision for St. Louis."*

– Community Forum Participant

*"Excellent utilization of taxpayer dollars."*

– Community Forum Participant

*"Continue effort to inform the public."*

– Community Forum Participant

*"Whole effort is wonderful and great for the future of region."*

– Community Forum Participant

**Question 2:** Participants then established priorities to enhance assets and minimize liabilities in their communities:

### PRIORITIES

- Park and nature area development
- Waterway development – riverfront, streams and creeks
- Bicycle and pedestrian trail systems
- Education
- Public engagement and stewardship

**Question 3:** Participants recommended Great Rivers Greenway evaluate all potential projects using three criteria:

### CRITERIA

- Regional impact
- Enhancement of the existing system
- Number of potential users

**May 2003** A 50-member Technical Advisory Committee was formed to complement the Citizen Advisory Committee's activities. The Technical Advisory Committee included representatives from many of the region's commercial, cultural, educational, environmental, governmental and recreational entities. The Technical Advisory Committee offered its comments regarding Great Rivers Greenway's role in four major categories:

**Visionary** – Create and sustain the vision of an interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails  
**Convener and Partner** – Transcend the region's jurisdictional boundaries to promote a greater sense of community

**Educator** – Serve as an educator and supporter of parks, trails and greenways, open space and wildlife preservation

**Greenway, Park and Trail Advocate** – Advocate for the support of greenways, parks and trails in the region

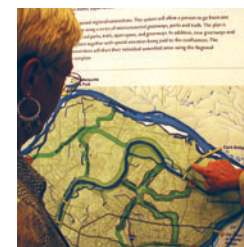
**June 2003** At the invitation of Great Rivers Greenway, five senior planning and design professionals (laureates) visited St. Louis to share their observations and experience with greenway, park and trail planning. The laureates also met with the Citizen Advisory Committee. With the laureates' help, the planning team further refined the regional plan.



**July 2003** Great Rivers Greenway held community forums to gather additional comments on the draft plan. Public engagement will remain a staple of Great Rivers Greenway's work, as broad-based community involvement will be important to successfully implement the interconnected system.



**September 2003** The Citizen Advisory Committee reviewed and submitted the draft plan to Great Rivers Greenway's board of directors for their approval.



## Elements of the Plan

Great Rivers Greenway is developing The River Ring, an interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails that links three counties, joins two states, and covers an area of 1,216 square miles. To implement the regional system, the organization will utilize the region's waterways and natural systems – its rivers, streams, creeks, forests, hills and prairies.

Because it is surrounded by waterways, the St. Louis region has often been referred to as an island. This notion inspired the main concept for the development of what will become the regional, interconnected system: The River Ring.

Historically, the region has been defined by its great rivers – the Missouri and Mississippi. Together with the Meramec and Cuivre rivers, the Mississippi River forms a three-quarter ring around the Great Rivers Greenway planning area. By joining these three rivers with the Missouri River through a series of interconnected greenways, parks and trails, the circle is completed, providing access to The River Ring throughout the St. Louis region (*see figure 4*).





# Development of the River Ring

The development of The River Ring includes numerous greenway and trail corridors throughout the Great Rivers Greenway region. The River Ring itself consists of two key components:

1. Greenways of various scales (major, regional, local and neighborhood) (see figure 5)
2. Confluences of various sizes (see figure 5)

**Greenways.** Greenways are linear open spaces that serve a variety of purposes. They are a way to link natural, cultural and community assets to each other. The advantage of greenways is that they are flexible.

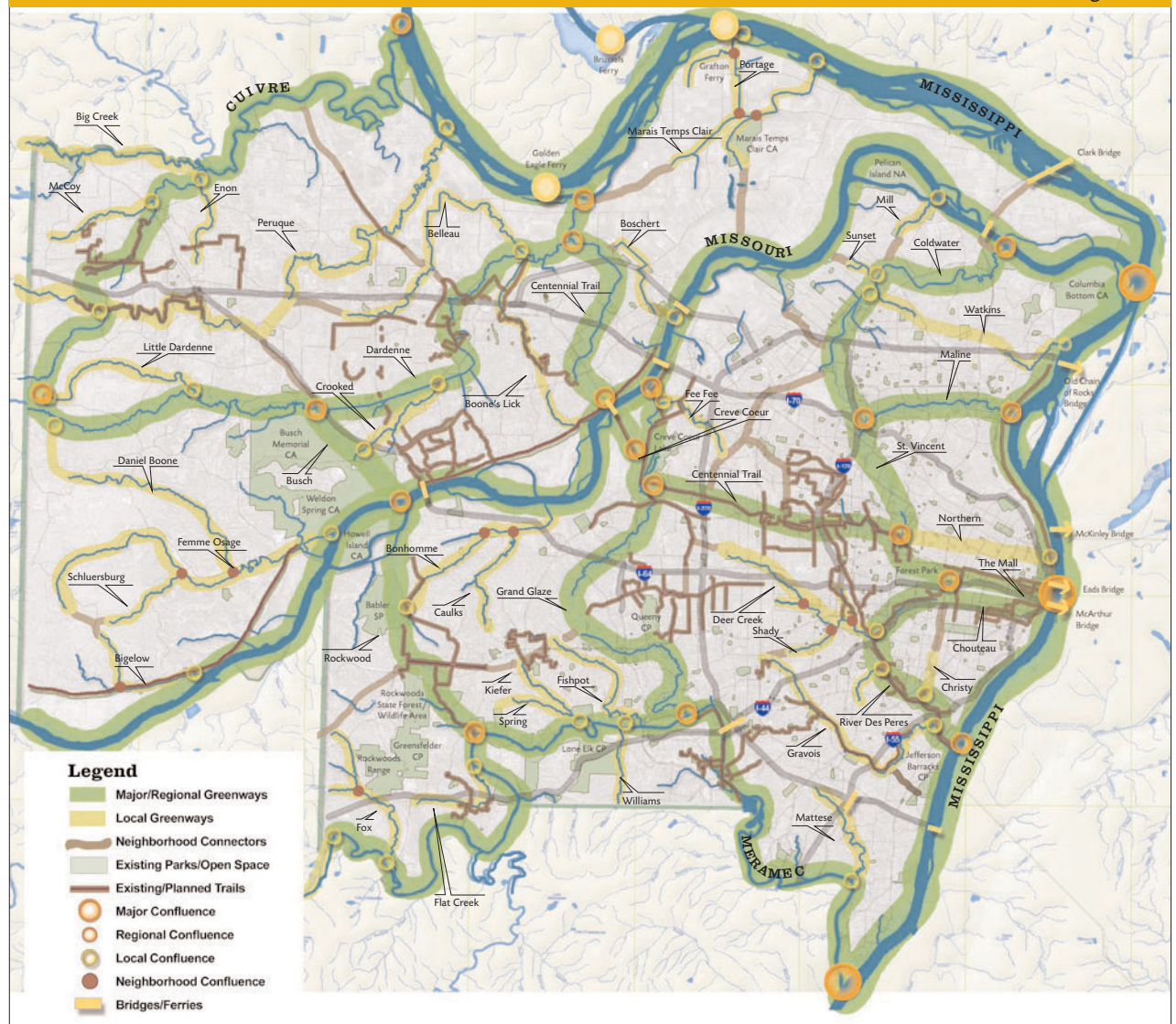
**Confluences.** The confluences, which denote the location where two greenways meet, will provide opportunities for newly developed facilities, including:

- Bicycle and/or pedestrian bridges
- Boat rentals and docks
- Information kiosks
- Interpretive trails with explanatory signage
- Parking hubs, including accessible spaces
- Picnic facilities, shelters and restrooms, and
- Rental facilities for bicycles and electrically powered golf carts.

A web of more than 45 major, regional, local and neighborhood greenways will crisscross The River Ring (see figure 5). Each greenway's size and facilities will vary depending on its location and existing conditions. The River Ring also is linked to the Metro East Park and Recreation District, providing citizens with access to a bi-state, regional system.

THE INTERCONNECTED SYSTEM OF GREENWAYS, PARKS AND TRAILS

Figure 5



*This map shows the entire interconnected system of existing and future greenways, parks and trails. The connections identified in this map generally follow natural systems, such as creeks and streams, as well as existing public parks and open space.*

## Physical Elements of Greenways

- Bicycle lanes
- Buffers between different land uses
- Cemeteries
- Conservation areas
- Farmed fields
- Forests and prairies
- Linear parks

- Migratory routes
- Private open space
- Protected viewsheds
- Recreation areas
- Recreation trails
- Water and riparian corridors (rivers, streams and creeks)
- Wetlands

## Nonphysical Elements of Greenways

- Economic development (e.g. tourism) strategies
- Education programs and activities
- Funding strategies
- Local partnerships
- Strategies to protect viewsheds

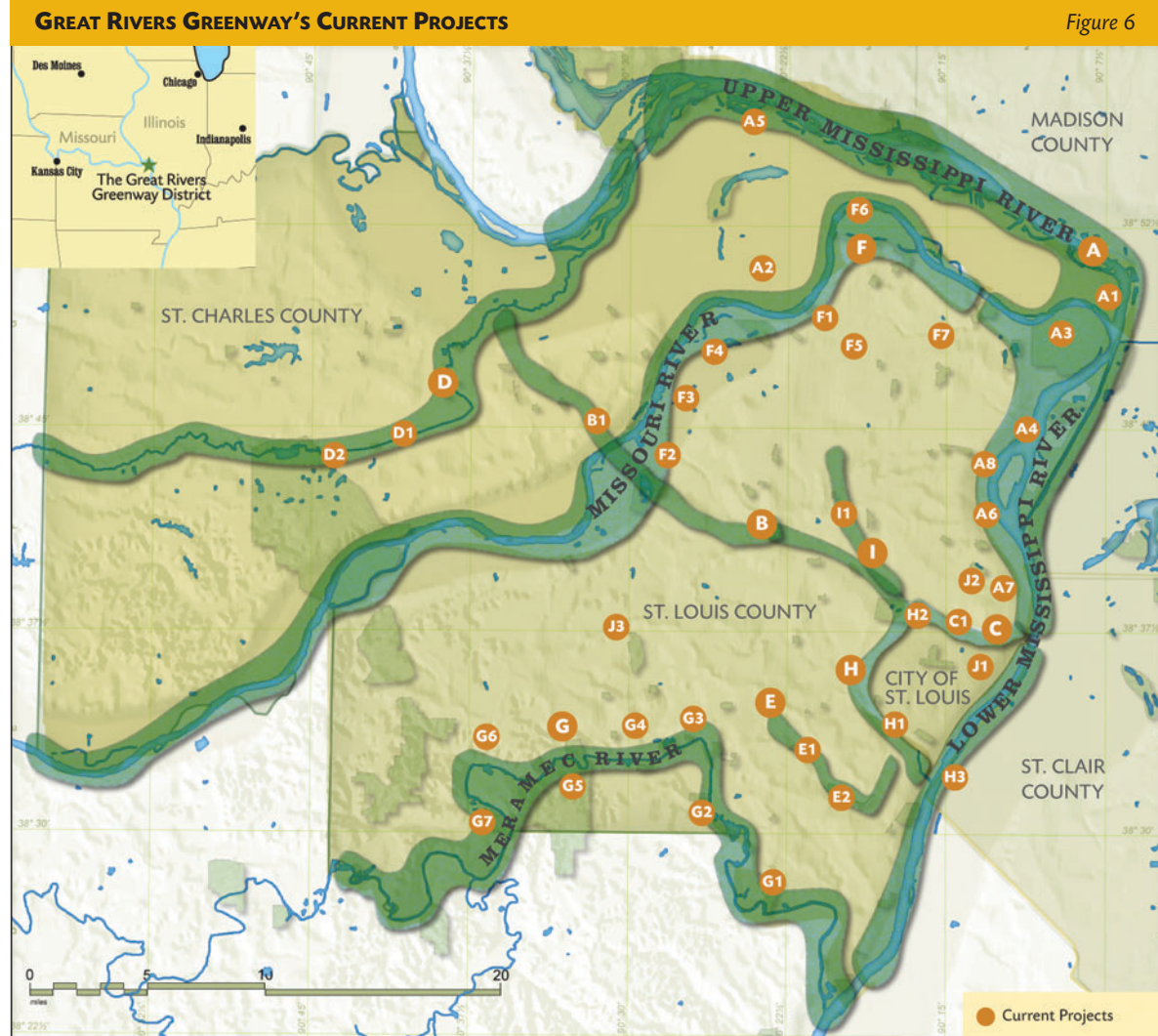


<b>A</b> <b>Confluence Greenway</b>	<b>A8</b> Riverfront Trail	<b>E</b> <b>Gravois Creek Greenway</b>	<b>F4</b> SEED Project-St. Stanislaus Conservation Area Picnic Area	<b>G3</b> River Mile 20 – City of Kirkwood	<b>H3</b> Canary Island Riverside Greenway
<b>A1</b> Ted and Pat Jones Confluence Point State Park	<b>B</b> <b>Centennial Greenway</b>	<b>E1</b> Grant's Trail	<b>F5</b> SEED Project-Old Town Florissant Trail	<b>G4</b> River Mile 25 – St. Louis County	<b>I</b> <b>St. Vincent's Greenway</b>
<b>A2</b> Katy Trail Connector	<b>B1</b> Katy Trail to St. Peters Trail Connection	<b>E2</b> Clydesdale Park	<b>F6</b> SEED Project-Pelican Island Trail	<b>G5</b> River Mile 28 – St. Louis County	<b>I1</b> Planning and Design
<b>A3</b> Columbia Bottom Conservation Area	<b>C</b> <b>Chouteau Greenway</b>	<b>F</b> <b>Missouri River Greenway</b>	<b>F7</b> SEED Project-Missouri River Greenway Bulletin Boards	<b>G6</b> River Mile 30 – St. Louis County	<b>J</b> <b>Collaborative Planning</b>
<b>A4</b> Old Chain of Rocks Bridge	<b>C1</b> Phase III Planning Study	<b>F1</b> Missouri River Greenway: Phase 1 Planning		<b>G7</b> River Mile 31 – City of Wildwood	<b>J1</b> Bike St. Louis
<b>A5</b> Portage Des Sioux Nature Area	<b>D</b> <b>Dardenne Greenway</b>	<b>F2</b> SEED Project-Maryland Heights	<b>G</b> <b>Meramec Greenway</b>	<b>H</b> <b>River Des Peres Greenway</b>	<b>J2</b> St. Louis Citywide Parks Plan
<b>A6</b> Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing	<b>D1</b> Dardenne Creek Storm Water Management Plan	<b>F3</b> SEED Project-Riverwoods Conservation Area and River Access	<b>G1</b> River Mile 7 – St. Louis County	<b>H1</b> River Des Peres Pilot Project–Christy Greenway Connection	<b>J3</b> Regional Bicycle Facilities Plan
<b>A7</b> McKinley Bridge and Branch Street Railroad Trestle	<b>D2</b> Dardenne Greenway at BaratHaven		<b>G2</b> River Mile 18 – City of Fenton	<b>H2</b> Lindell Pavilion in Forest Park	

## Implementation of The River Ring

To initiate projects throughout the region, Great Rivers Greenway will continue educating the community about the benefits of greenways, parks and trails, and forge partnerships to collaboratively develop The River Ring. Furthermore, Great Rivers Greenway will identify greenway planning areas to facilitate the creation of the regional, interconnected system.

Greenway planning areas will allow Great Rivers Greenway to develop The River Ring both on local and regional levels, as they may include several communities and transcend jurisdictional boundaries. Each planning area will identify local connections, such as greenways, parks, trails and on-street bicycle lanes, to be integrated in The River Ring.





“To make a greenway is to make a community.”

– Charles Little

## Next Steps

### 1. Current Great Rivers Greenway Projects

*Continue current projects in collaboration with regional partners to implement The River Ring.*

Great Rivers Greenway recognizes that many municipalities, public agencies and nonprofit organizations in the St. Louis region have been active in greenway, park and trail planning and implementation for more than 30 years. Since Great Rivers Greenway began collecting revenue in April 2001, it has become an active partner in many of these efforts, helping to implement them, acquiring property for open space preservation or initiating new plans (*see figure 6*). Participation in such efforts, along with ongoing citizen involvement and coordination with municipalities, public agencies, stakeholders and nonprofit organizations, enables Great Rivers Greenway to build strong alliances, pursue common goals and proceed with projects that will contribute to its overall vision.

### 2. Greenway, Park and Trail Plans

*Prepare detailed plans for greenway planning areas.*

Great Rivers Greenway will increase its public outreach and begin work on plans in at least three greenway planning areas. The plans will propose local connections and completion of unfinished segments of major, regional, or local greenway systems to feed into The River Ring.

### 3. Great Rivers Greenway Educational Convention

*Establish a task force and host the first convention.*

On an annual basis, Great Rivers Greenway will organize an educational convention that includes regional leaders representing community, business, recreational and open space interests. The convention serves as the regional forum for the development of The River Ring.

### 4. Communications Strategy

*Intensify communications efforts.*

Great Rivers Greenway will implement an extensive communications strategy, including outreach efforts to inform the region about Great Rivers Greenway's activities and solicit volunteers and assistance in the implementation of The River Ring.

### 5. Benchmarks of Success

*Start measuring effectiveness of Great Rivers Greenway's work.*

The development of The River Ring is a long-term effort. To ensure citizens and partners view Great Rivers Greenway as an effective, pro-active organization, it will work to measure its progress and share its success with all constituents.