



CHAPTER 4 **REGIONAL INVENTORY**



EXISTING REGIONAL INVENTORY

I. NIRPC Routes

The NIRPC region provides for non-motorized trips through a network of off (Class I) and on-road (Class II & III) facilities, typically confined to municipal systems, but showing great progress towards the completion of an interconnected regional bikeway system as funding permits. As of the summer of 2010, the regional bikeways system comprises approximately 80 miles of off-road trails located in segments, primarily across northern Lake and Porter counties. In addition, there are approximately 50 miles of bike trails that have already secured funding, either through federal enhancement dollars, or state and local revenues. The existing off-road, Class I network of trails generally follows a combination of abandoned railroad corridors, utility easements and flood control levees.



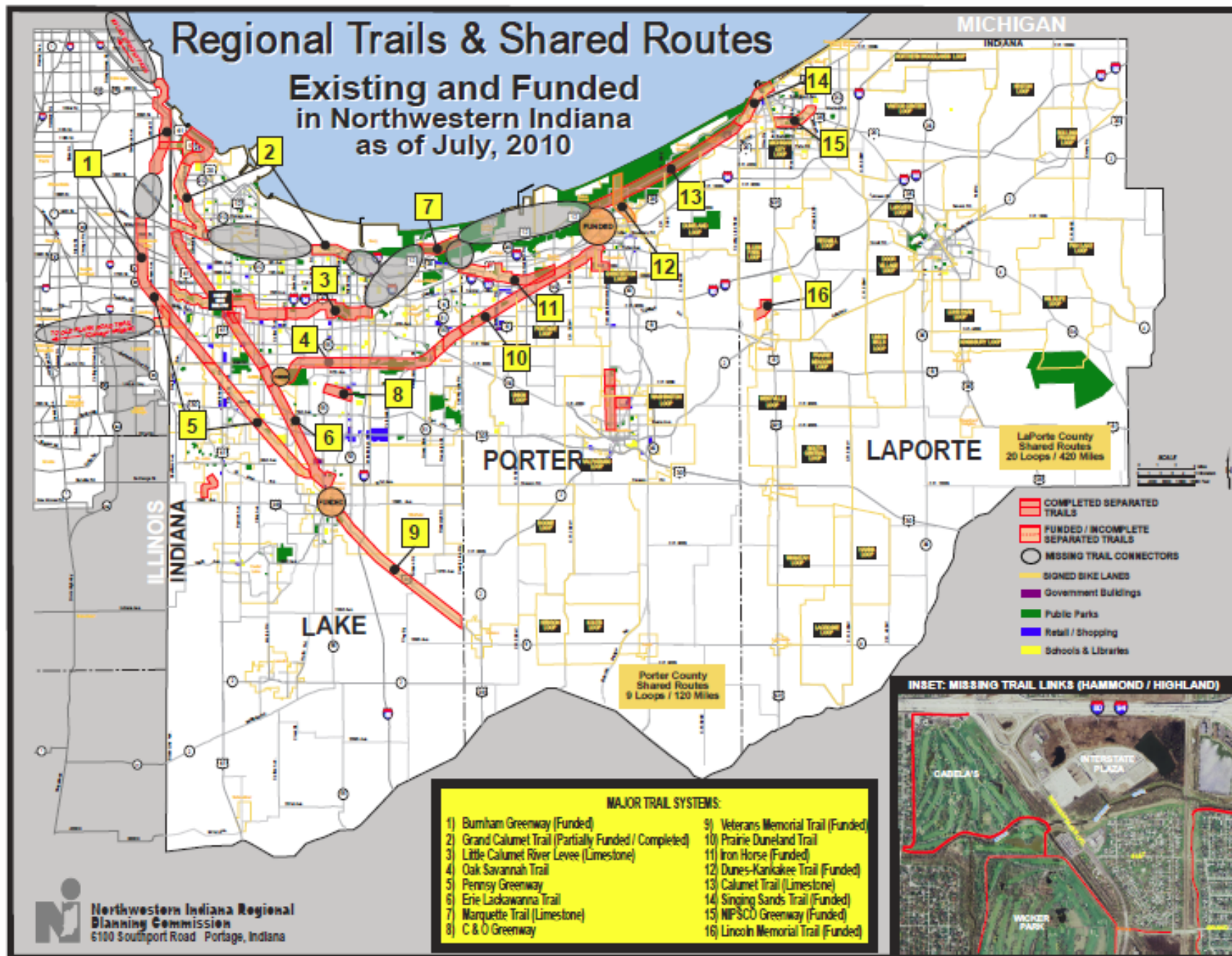
A. Off Road Routes

There are 15 principle regional trails that have been completed in whole or in part. These are as follows:

1. The *Calumet Trail* extending from Mineral Springs Road to the LaPorte County Line, parallel to the South Shore Line and U.S. 12 along a NIPSCO power line easement. 9 miles (all limestone)
2. The *Erie Lackawanna Trail* between Hammond and Crown Point. 17 miles
3. The *Little Calumet River Flood Control and Recreation Levee Trail* from Martin Luther King Drive in Gary to Wicker Park in Highland. 9.7 miles (5.8 limestone)
4. The *Marquette Trail* in the Miller section of Gary. 2 miles
5. The *Prairie Duneland Trail* (E.J. & E. Railroad Corridor) between Portage and Chesterton. 8 miles
6. The *Oak Savannah Trail* (E.J. & E. Railroad Corridor) from Griffith (Oak Ridge Prairie) to Hobart (Linda Street). 8 miles
7. The *Valparaiso Pathways* network of off-road trails. 9.2 miles
8. The *Munster Bikeways Network*, utilizing a series of abandoned rail right-of-ways, utility corridors, expanded sidewalks and painted bike lanes. 11.6 miles



Figure 4-1





9. The *Wolf Lake/George Lake Trails* in Hammond. 1.7 miles
10. The *Iron Horse Heritage Trail* in Portage. 2.3 miles
11. The *St. John Trail* which links a neighborhood to their baseball fields and recreation center. 2 miles
12. The *C&O Greenway* in Merrillville from State Road 53 (Broadway) west to 500ft east of State Road 55 (Taft Street). 1.3 miles
13. The *Lincoln Memorial Trail - Bluhm County Park Connection* north of Westville in LaPorte County. 2.2 miles
14. The *Pennsy Greenway* in Munster from Main Street to the Illinois State Line. 2 miles
15. The *Westchester-Liberty Trail* in Chesterton. 1.1 miles
16. The *Whiting Lakefront Trail* from Whiting Park to the George Lake Trail in Hammond. 2 miles

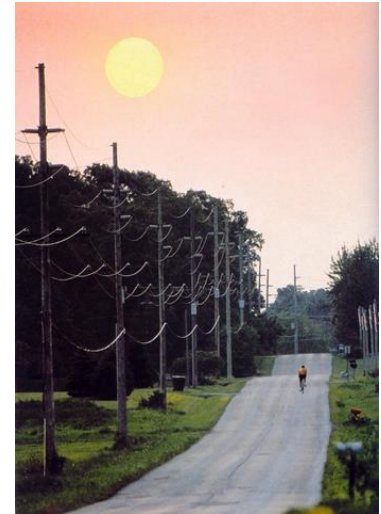
In addition, there are another ten principle regional trails that have been funded, and currently under development which include:

1. The *Little Calumet River Trail* from Wicker Park to Munster. 2.5 miles
2. The *Veterans Memorial Trail* extending along the abandoned Pennsylvania Railroad corridor on US 231 from Crown Point to Hebron. 9 miles
3. The *Oak Savannah Trail* extension to the Prairie Duneland trail through Hobart. .25 miles
4. The *Gary Greenlink* from Broadway to Bridge Street. 2.2 miles
5. The *Grand Calumet Trail* in Hammond from George Lake to East Chicago at the Indiana Toll Road. 3.8 miles
6. The *Iron Horse Heritage Trail* from Hamstrom Rd. in Portage to Woodland Park. 1 mile
7. The *Porter Brickyard Trail* from the northeast terminus of the Prairie Duneland Trail in Chesterton to the Calumet Trail. 3.5 miles
8. The *Singing Sands/Lighthouse Trail* from the eastern termini of the Calumet Trail on U.S. 12 to Washington Park in Michigan City. 3 miles
9. The *Pennsy Greenway* in Schererville from Joliet Street to Rorhman Park. 2 miles
10. The *Dunes-Kankakee Trail* from Indiana Dunes State Park to Oak Hill Road in Porter. 2.1 miles

B. Shared (On-Road) Routes

Apart from the growing off-road trail network developing in the NIRPC region, a significant regional network of on-road, or shared routes, have emerged. The on-road routes are broken down into Class II routes, which include painted, or marked lanes and direction signs designated for bike traffic, and Class III routes, which are directionally signed only. The largest of the Class III systems include the 142-mile Porter County Bikeways System, and the expansive 420-mile LaPorte County Bikeways System, which comprises 20 loop rides throughout the county. Currently, NIRPC is working with county and municipal officials, including bicycle advocates, to develop a similar system in Lake County. The Northwest Indiana Bike Map, released in 2008, highlights a broad network of on-street routes in Lake County, but to date these have yet to be signed.

A detailed inventory of all off and on-road routes that currently exist in the NIRPC region, and those in nearby Illinois, can be located in **Appendix A**.

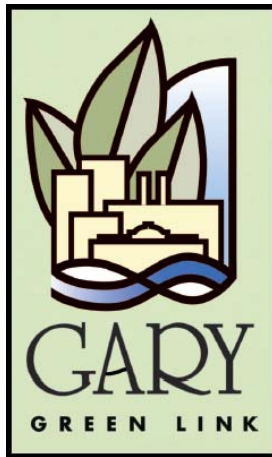


C. Significant Local Systems

Flowing down from the regional perspective are those communities which have already developed an internal bicycle network, or have been funded for development. Significant local networks & planning efforts include:

1. *Munster*: First developed in the late 1970's, the Munster Bike Network received some much needed improvements and connections in the late 1990's. Currently the Munster Bike Network is an 11-mile system that is present in all parts of the town. The network is equally divided among shared and non-shared paths, and takes advantage of abandoned rail corridors, NIPSCO utility easements, widened sidewalks, and special bike only (painted) lanes on roadways. Throughout the bike network there are a number of parks and parking lots that serve as trailhead and rest areas. The largest trailhead and parking area can be found in Community Park on Calumet Avenue. Plans are currently underway to connect this bike network to various regional and na-





tional trails via the Pennsy Greenway, which is planned to open in late 2010, along Centennial Park and from the Fisher Street Trail into Lansing, Illinois.

2. *Gary:* In 2004, the City of Gary adopted their Gary Green Link Master Plan, a project to help guide the development of a natural resources greenway and recreation corridor. This corridor, the Gary Green Link, would ring the city connecting the Grand Calumet River, Little Calumet River and the Lake Michigan Shoreline. This ambitious project sets out to accomplish a number of objectives which include:
 - Identifying, protecting and restoring globally significant natural resources;
 - Connecting the people of Gary to one another and to their environment;
 - Creating recreational opportunities through the development of multi-use trails;
 - Promoting economic development;
 - Interpreting Gary's industrial & cultural history; and
 - Establishing connections to adjacent communities.

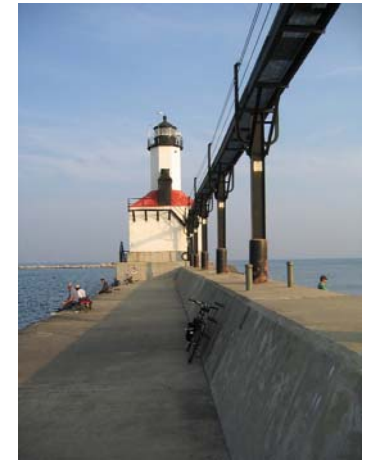
In 2010, the city released the Marquette Park Lakefront East Master Plan which identifies improvements that will enhance access to and circulation within the park, preserve and strengthen the park's natural features, provide new recreational and educational amenities, and restore the park's signature historic facilities. The proposal outlines the inclusion of several trail routes through the park, and a link south into the Marquette Greenway corridor.

3. *Crown Point:* In 2001, the City of Crown Point adopted their Bike Network Plan that would set out to encompass 21 miles of routes utilizing both off and on-road facilities. The city enjoys its standing as the "Hub of Lake County", which is further emphasized by the location of two abandoned rail corridors which criss-cross into the city. These corridors offer the city a unique opportunity to connect to all parts of the county, and beyond. In 2007 the city adopted their first Bikeways Plan which outlines a bold vision to connect all parts of the city together via off and on-road

trails, and painted bike lanes. The plan also strategizes new way-finding signage placement and the connections via four major regional trails into the city.

4. *Michigan City:* In 2004, Michigan City adopted a master plan for a multi-use trail system encompassing approximately 27 miles. The plan calls for seven multi-use trails connecting to one another making a loop trail around the city while connecting many neighborhoods to everyday destination points utilizing community connection trails to schools, parks, the YMCA, library and other landmarks. Five spur trails help to connect Michigan City into existing and future regional trails. Some of its regional connections are the State of Michigan, City of South Bend, Porter County, and the City of LaPorte. In 2009, the city opened up the Peanut Trail, a 0.3 mile segment along Trail Creek.
5. *Hobart:* The City of Hobart has received outside funding for completing their link between the Oak Savannah Trail to the west, and the Prairie Duneland Trail to the northeast. Within the city, plans call for a connection to Lake George and their downtown.
6. *Valparaiso:* The City of Valparaiso, lead by their Parks Department, is undertaking an important step toward meeting both the current and future alternative transportation needs of its citizens. The 2005 Valparaiso Pathways and Greenways Master Plan provides a "greenprint" for the City to use as a guide in forming a pathway network through existing developments and into future expansions of the community. The physical framework of the Pathways Network is based on a popular concept known as "Hubs and Spokes." Under this concept, residential, commercial and business landscapes (hubs) are linked to parks, preserves and open spaces via greenway and physical corridors (spokes). As of 2010, 9.2 miles of off-road trails and one mile of painted bike lanes have been installed in the city.

Beyond these, other systems of note are planned in Highland, Hammond, St. John, Portage, LaPorte, and Dyer.





D. Planned Expansions

Apart from local plans to expand routes for non-motorized transportation, there exists three significant projects of note that will require careful planning and perseverance to become reality.



1. *Pennsy Greenway:* In 2002, the communities of Munster, Schererville, Crown Point, the Lake County Parks Department and the Village of Lansing, IL met to strategize the conversion of the abandoned Pennsylvania Railroad into a trail system. The project entitled the Pennsy Greenway, would run approximately 15 miles from Crown Point to the Little Calumet River in Lansing, IL. At this point, the project would meet up with the Burnham Greenway and eventually the Chicago Lakefront Trail – for a grand total of 50 off-road miles from end-to-end. The Town of Munster will finish their segment by the end of 2010 into Lansing - representing the first off-road link between Northern Indiana and Illinois. The Town of Schererville plans to commence with their first phase from Joliet Street to Rohrman Park later in 2010.



2. *C & O Greenway:* In 2004, Purdue's Landscape Architecture Dept. researched trail conversion opportunities on the long-abandoned C & O Rail corridor from Griffith running southeast to just north of Winfield. As with the Pennsy Greenway, this too would be a multi-jurisdictional effort which would directly involve Griffith, Lake County Parks, Merrillville and Hobart. Of prime significance would be corridors intersecting with the Southlake Mall area on U.S. 30. The Purdue plan calls for a trailhead to the north of the retail area, with two non-motorized routes. One route would circumvent the area, while the other would channel trail users safely through the maze of businesses in the district. The corridor would take advantage of an existing box culvert underneath I-65. It would also serve as the off-road link between the Erie-Lackawanna and Oak Savannah Trails in Griffith. In 2010, the Town of Merrillville opened the first 1.3 mile segment of the C & O Greenway from Broadway, to just 500 feet east of Taft Street.

3. *Marquette Greenway:* It has been the desire of many in the South Shore region of utilizing an uninterrupted trail connecting the three states and providing access to

numerous points of interest along the lakefront. The cities of Chicago, Hammond, East Chicago, Gary, Portage, and Michigan City, including the counties of Porter and LaPorte, and the National Park Service, have been working individually for years on developing their local segments of this overall vision. During this period of development, many of these trail segments were approved for federal funding, with several more proposed. With these initiatives underway, coupled with the need to establish a true east-west connection along the Lakefront, NIRPC has begun to bring all of these visions to the forefront as a unified piece known as the *Marquette Greenway*.

In the process of developing this vision, there was a significant “missing link” in the western Porter County vicinity. This gap was scouted by both NIRPC and National Park Service staff in order to delineate the best route for an off-road trail, while taking full advantage of the environmental beauty of the area. The result will involve a route that will share US 12 and a future road from Ogden Dunes to SR 249 at the Portage Amerplex facility. From here, the route will proceed east across Salt Creek and then proceed north of Burns Harbor to the funded Brickyard Trail in Porter. Nearly the entire proposed stretch is contained within National Park Service landholdings.

Other significant gaps include a route from Calumet Park in Chicago east to the existing Whihala Beach Trail in Whiting, an undefined segment of trail route in East Chicago, and a defined route from Michigan City east to New Buffalo.

In all, the route will traverse through 15 communities for approximately 50 miles from Calumet Park in Chicago, to the heart of New Buffalo, Michigan, directly touching a population of 120,000 people, but connecting to millions more. In between, roughly 20 individual trail segments will be unified under this route.

NIRPC is working directly with all communities along the proposed route including stakeholders directly adjacent in Illinois and Michigan. The main push at present involves securing the necessary funding for each entity to

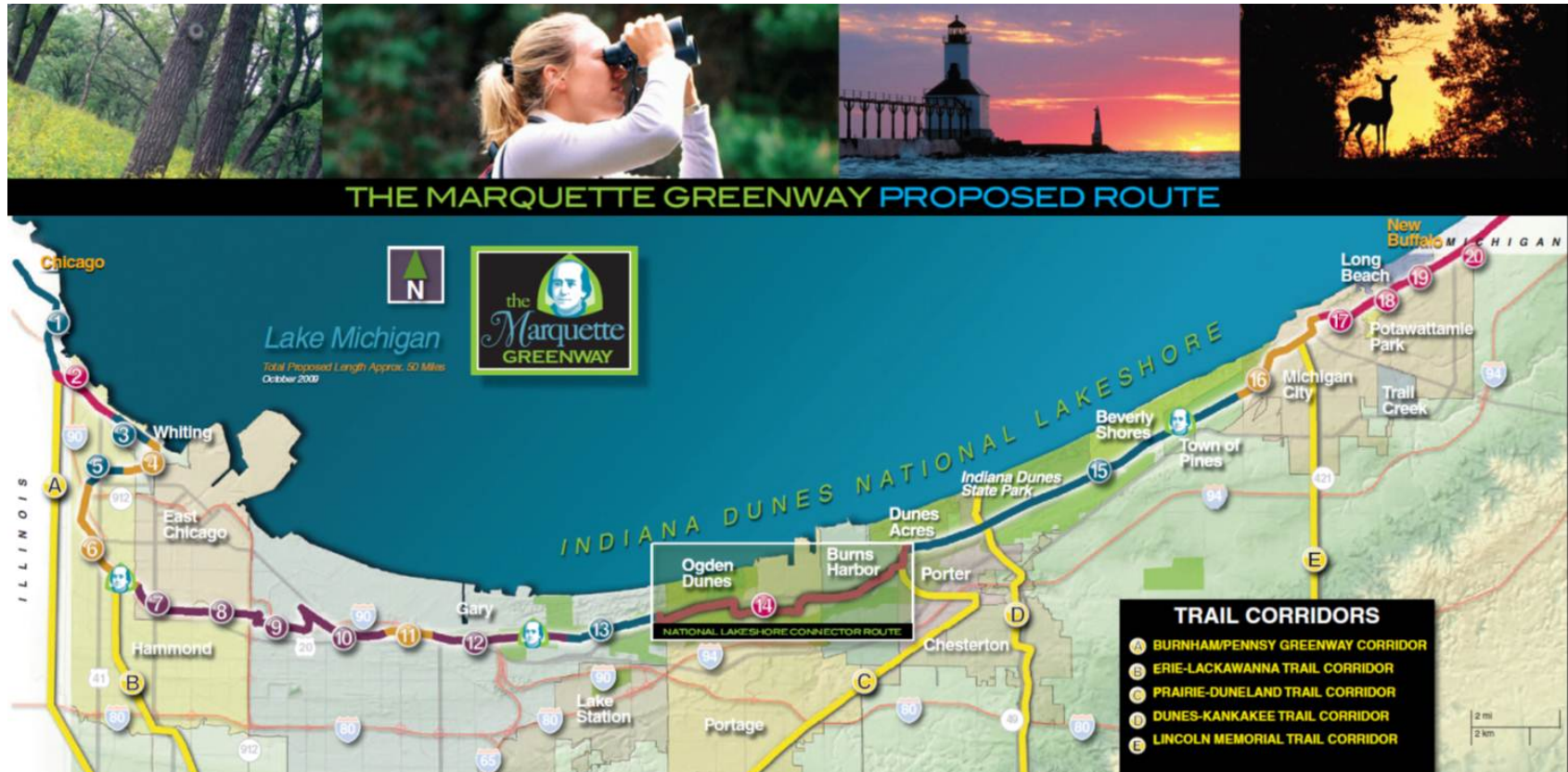




complete their segment. To this end, the soon-to-be approved Indiana State Trails Plan will identify the Marquette Greenway route as a major priority for immediate funding. How much money and how fast it will be allocated remains to be seen, but when coupled with Congressman Visclosky's determined efforts to fund strategies from the Marquette Plan, the outlook becomes very positive.

In October, 2009, NIRPC, along with the Burnham Centennial and the Indiana Planning Association – Indiana Chapter, released The Marquette Greenway - National Lakeshore Connector Route Proposal poster plan. This document outlines the proposed route of the entire corridor, as well as specifically details the gap at the National Lakeshore. A copy of the map from the Proposal is shown in **Figure 4-2**.

Figure 4-2:
Marquette Greenway
Proposed Route



4. *Dunes-Kankakee Trail:* There exists a glaring need where there are no trails connecting the northern half of Porter County to the county seat—Valparaiso—or the southern reaches of Porter County—Kouts, Hebron, and the Kankakee River. With no vacant north-south corridors (such as a retired rail line or utility corridor) and no municipalities bordering Valparaiso on any side, the only viable option is to construct a parallel trail within the right-of-way (ROW) of a motorized thoroughfare: SR 49. In 2009, a broad-based committee of municipal and civic stakeholders spearheaded by Indiana Dunes Tourism (Porter County), created the Dunes-Kankakee Trail Plan to provide guidance on the creation of the trail corridor. Much success has been witnessed since the plan's release with funding secured from both Congressman Visclosky and the Regional Development Authority to construct the first segment of the trail from the Indiana Dunes State Park to Oak Hill Road. INDOT plans to install a new bike lane on their rebuilt bridges over US 12 and 20.



II. Interregional Facilities

Beyond the NIRPC region exists a vast array of non-motorized routes. From Northeast Illinois, to Southwest Michigan, St. Joseph County and all parts south, an impressive network is beginning to take shape positioning Northwest Indiana as a premiere destination for hiking and biking in the Midwest.

A. Northeastern Illinois

Due to the proximity to one of the largest cities in the world, Northeastern Illinois has enjoyed a number of off and on-road facility developments over a number of years. This section highlights those most directly related to Northwest Indiana.

Although many trail systems have developed over much of the Chicagoland region, the South Suburban area still remains largely disconnected. However, this is rapidly changing. In 2000, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources officially opened the Grand Illinois Trail (GIT), a 475-mile loop trail connecting the Chicago lakefront to the Mississippi River. The GIT consists of existing off-road trail managed by





state and local agencies as well as non-profit organizations and connecting on-road bike routes. Of significant note to Northwestern Indiana was the push to link the GIT route through the South Suburbs via two already established facilities: the *Old Plank Road Trail* and *Burnham Greenway*.

The Old Plank Road Trail (OPRT) runs 21-miles from Chicago Matteson west to New Lenox. The OPRT developed along the abandoned Penn Central line, and started construction in 1997. The Burnham Greenway runs 11 miles from the Chicago Skyway to the Little Calumet River between Lansing and Calumet City. The Burnham also took advantage of an abandoned rail corridor. In 2007, the Village of Lansing extended the Burnham Greenway south and called it the Pennsy Greenway to the Indiana state line at Munster. At this point, Munster will continue the route southeast as the Pennsy Greenway.

Due to the Illinois DNR's heavy concentration on developing the GIT, much attention has been given to closing "critical gaps" in the GIT network - most especially those in the South Suburbs. Of prime note are the 12-mile gap from the Thorn Creek Forest Preserve in Lansing to Chicago Heights, and the gap from the Chicago Skyway to the Lakefront Trail. The Cook County Forest Preserve District is working with the Illinois DNR on connecting the GIT from the Burnham to the OPRT via existing District landholdings.

Motivated by the centennial of the Burnham Plan of 1909, Friends of the Parks proposes completing the last four miles of Chicago's existing 26 mile public lakeshore park system. This includes the nearly 2-mile gap from Rainbow Beach to Calumet Park. The vision also aims to complete another 2-mile gap on the northern reaches of the city up to Evanston.

The Active Transportation Alliance has helped spearhead the vision for the Cal-Sag Trail, a multi-use path built almost entirely along the banks of the Calumet-Sag Channel and Calumet River. Along 26 miles of waterway from Lemont in the west to Burnham in the east, the Calumet-Sag Trail will stitch together more than 185,000 people in fourteen communities. It will connect them to regional trails, transit systems, retail areas, parks, forest preserves, marinas, nature centers, and the legacies of Big Steel, immigrant communities and the Underground Railroad. The Cal-Sag's easternmost terminus is planned to connect directly into the Burnham Greenway.

B. MACOG/South Bend Regional Routes

Directly east of the NIRPC region are the three counties encompassed under their MPO - the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG). MACOG provides planning oversight in St. Joseph, Marshall and Elkhart counties. In 2001, they released their *Regional Bicycle Facilities Map* which outlined all off and on-road bike routes in the MACOG region, including major recreational sites. Routes which were planned to remain unsigned were also identified. Larger communities such as Elkhart and South Bend were detailed on inset maps. The overall document serves as an excellent resource for those looking to connect to many points east, and into SW Michigan.



C. Southwestern Michigan

The adjacent region to the northeast of NIRPC consists primarily of three counties - Berrien, Van Buren and Cass. In 2001, the Michigan Dept. of Transportation (MDOT) generated a report, the Southwest Michigan Non-Motorized Improvement Plan, which detailed opportunities for increasing non-motorized facilities in the region. The plan put forward suggestions for a Great Lakes Trail to be a signed and shared route along the Red Arrow Highway from the state line north to St. Joseph. Another suggestion was a route along U.S. 12 from New Buffalo to Niles, to meet up with a planned route emulating from St. Joseph County to the south.

At this time, there are very few off-road routes of regional significance in SW Michigan. The only one of note is the Kal-Haven Trail from South Haven east to Kalamazoo. This 33-mile, crushed stone route offers its users a breathtaking ride through small towns and historical sites. Shared routes have been identified, and maps can be accessed through the League of Michigan Bicyclists or MDOT.

In 2009, The Harbor Country Hike & Bike Plan was released as a comprehensive non-motorized transportation plan for the townships of New Buffalo, Chikaming and Three Oaks, Michigan. Their goal is to provide a foundation for future implementation and construction of routes for cyclists, pedestrians, equestrians. One of the major links recommended is a connection to the Marquette Greenway along US 12.





D. The American Discovery Trail

On a national scale, the development of the American Discovery Trail (ADT), a 6,800-mile route stretching across 15 states from Delaware to California, continues to build momentum. The ADT splits into northern and southern routes in Cincinnati, OH, coming back together again in Denver, CO. The northern route of the ADT has been planned to pass directly through the Northwest Indiana area, and coordination has begun to secure this route along the planned Veterans Memorial Trail, into Illinois via the proposed (but not funded) Pennsy Greenway from Crown Point to Lansing, IL. The ADT is currently as close to the NIRPC region as North Judson, Indiana. **Figure 4-3** shows the planned nationwide route of the ADT.



In 2006, NIRPC hosted three ADT “Congresses” to bring together Indiana’s northern route stakeholders to identify a new route into the NIRPC region, assuring the trail would connect to a Great Lake. Two routes were proposed, one that would take the trail directly north of Rochester to South Bend, and over to Michigan City, and another which would continue through to North Judson, then into southern LaPorte County, along SR 8 to Hebron, then along the abandoned Pennsylvania RR into Lansing, IL. This latter route was eventually selected as the preferred route by the Congress, and at this time officials of the ADT Society are reviewing the re-route. An official decision is expected in early 2011.

E. United States Bicycle Route System



The United States Bicycle Route System (USBRS) is a proposed national network of bicycle routes. Two bicycle routes, Bike Route 1 and Bike Route 76, were designated in 1982. Soon after, however, the program stagnated until 2003, when the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) formed their Task Force on U.S. Bicycle Routes. By 2005, the Adventure Bicycling Association was providing staff support to develop a National Corridor Plan. This process involved getting a picture of what was already on the ground, and moving forward from there in developing a system of corridors that would house new numbered bike routes across the country. The group was ready to implement the plan by May of 2009.

The USBRS will connect urban, suburban, and rural areas to each other. Each route must be nominated for numbered designation by state departments of transportation (DOTs).



*Figure 4-3:
American Discovery
Trail Route*



This work is already being done by the DOTs as well as volunteers. Several states are already working hard on assembling applications to begin to implement their parts of the proposed system. Applications for the designation of new corridors are accepted twice per year. AASHTO then catalogues each route through the Special Committee on U.S. Route Numbering, which is the same committee that assigns numbers to highways and interstates.

The National Corridor Plan shows two corridors slated for the NIRPC region. Bike Route 35, a north-south route, will come through LaPorte County on its way from Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan to its confluence with Bike Route 45 in Mississippi. Bike Route 45 ultimately terminates in New Orleans, Louisiana. Bike Route 36 is an east-west route that goes west from Detroit, Michigan to the Illinois/Iowa state line. While relatively short, it provides connections to other, farther-reaching bike routes that travel both east-west and north-south. The full corridor map is shown in *Figure 4-3*.

The regional bicycle system must be developed in a way that is mindful of the USBRS as the plans for the corridors through Northwest Indiana are developed. Whenever possible, NIRPC must be prepared to help the corridor planning process along in order to help implement this nationwide system. This will require working with the Adventure Cycling Association, INDOT, AASHTO, neighboring states, and other stakeholder groups. Bike Routes 35 and 36, along with the American Discovery Trail, will provide an opportunity for the regional bike system to connections to areas outside of Northwest Indiana and across the country. As with other modes of transportation, Northwest Indiana's location puts it in an important position of providing key links in the larger national transportation system.





Figure 4-3:
United States Bicycle
Route System