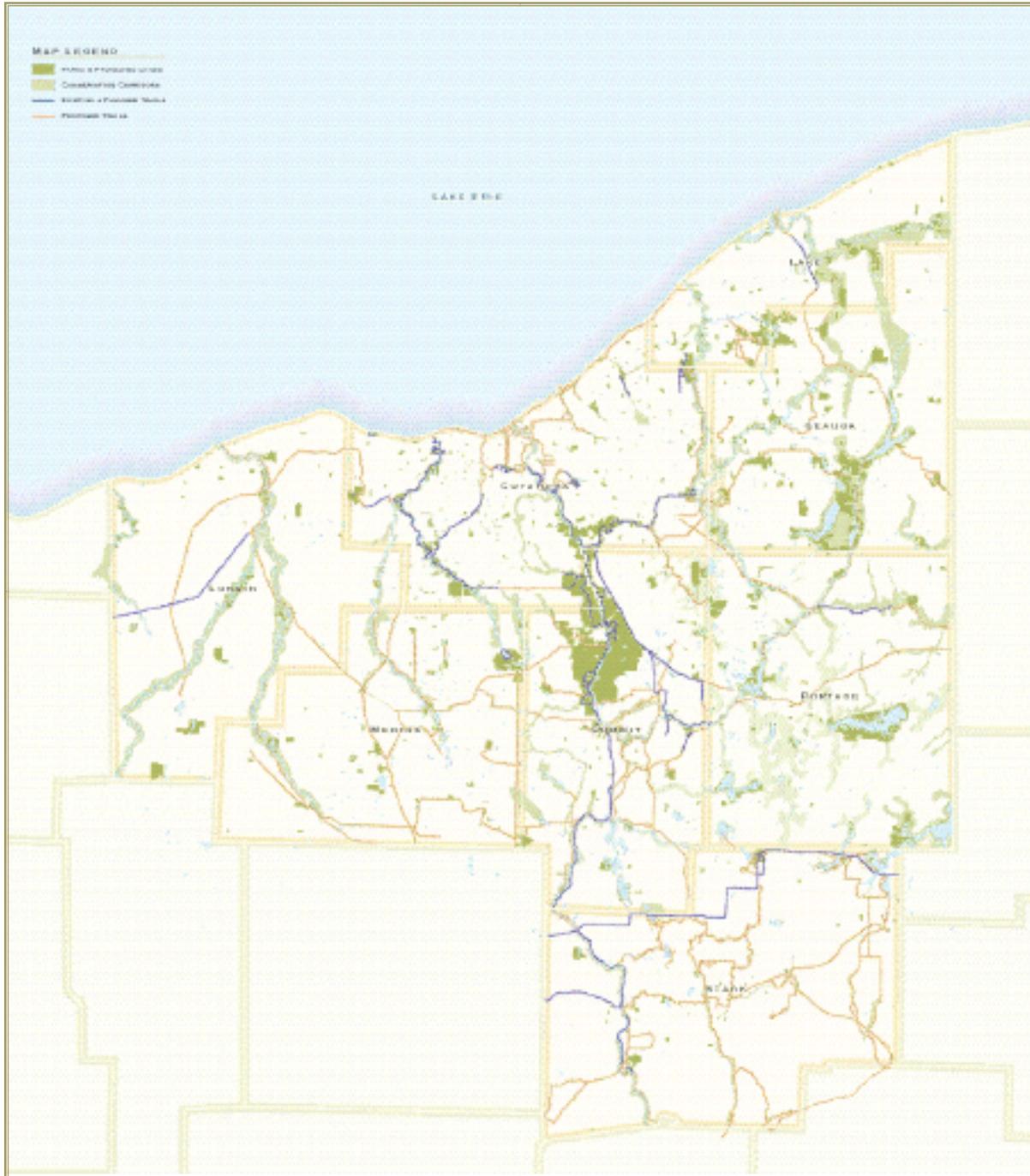


# CONNECTING *to* NATURE in NORTHEAST OHIO

A MAP OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION, RIVER CORRIDOR PROTECTION, AND TRAIL LINKAGES



During the past two years, members of the Northeast Ohio Regional Parks Consortium have been studying open space opportunities in the region. They have identified exciting possibilities for linking existing parks and protecting river corridors — a conservation vision that could improve quality of life, environmental quality, and the region’s economic competitiveness.

This map presents a conceptual view of where thousands of acres of land could be conserved and where more than 1,000 miles of new trails could be constructed. The vision would include the conservation of important natural areas, the connection of parks to cities and towns throughout the region, and the creation of greenway corridors that connect to the Lake Erie shoreline.

The park districts realize that, working alone with current resources, they cannot turn this entire vision into reality. They invite greater collaboration among the region’s conservation organizations, business leaders, elected officials, and all citizens who care about the future of Northeast Ohio.

This is an invitation to create a greener future for a great metropolitan region.

#### THE NORTHEAST OHIO REGIONAL PARKS CONSORTIUM

- Cleveland Metroparks
- Cuyahoga Valley National Park
- Geauga Park District
- Lake Metroparks
- Lorain County Metro Parks
- Medina County Park District
- Metro Parks Serving Summit County
- National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program
- Portage Park District
- Stark County Park District

For more information, call XXXXXXX



## CHANGES IN THE REGION

How do people view the landscape of Northeast Ohio? Increasingly, they feel that the places they knew and loved as a child – city neighborhoods, picturesque small towns and the scenic countryside – are changing. Woods and farm fields at the edges of the metropolitan area are being rapidly converted into housing developments and shopping centers. Much of this growth is being fueled by residents moving out from the region’s existing urban areas.

This new development is responding to changing lifestyles and consumer demands, but it also is placing great pressure on the region’s remaining open space, natural areas, and environmental quality. In the coming years, wise planning will be necessary to ensure a balance between development and the conservation of special places. It is essential that this planning take place at the regional, multi-county scale.

Over the years, the park districts of Northeast Ohio have worked hard – and with great success – to preserve and develop the “green infrastructure” that communities need for recreation, economic development and environmental quality. But, as we enter a new century, it’s appropriate to ask how the region will meet the open space needs of coming generations:

- Given the pace of development in the Northeast Ohio, are current land preservation efforts sufficient?
- How can park districts collaborate more effectively to create a network of trails, protected river corridors and natural areas that continue across county
- As the communities in the metropolitan area become more interdependent, how can park districts work with other partners to create a system of parks and open space that provides benefits for the entire region — and how can new partnerships for conservation help Northeast Ohio compete with other metropolitan areas that offer greater access to nature?

*Park districts in Northeast Ohio believe there is a closing window of opportunity to meet the region’s future open space needs.*

## NEW PARTNERSHIPS, NEW METHODS FOR CONSERVATION

The next vision for open space in Northeast Ohio will require conservation efforts at the regional, multi-county scale. And it will require a complex web of partnerships among not just park districts but many different kinds of organizations — land trusts and other nonprofit organizations, local governments, state and federal agencies, regional planning agencies, farmland preservation groups, private landowners, and businesses.

In addition to many partners, the region’s open space future will likely involve many different strategies for land protection. While purchase of land for public parks will be appropriate in many cases, it’s sometimes more cost-effective to secure conservation easements from willing landowners. This keeps the land in private hands but assures it will never be developed, thus protecting scenic and ecological qualities. Other land protection strategies include conservation zoning to give builders the flexibility to protect the natural features of a development site, voluntary farmland protection programs to preserve the working rural landscape, or even urban revitalization programs that help reduce development pressure in rural parts of the region.

One may want to think of a mosaic of protected greenspaces in Northeast Ohio — lands that serve different purposes, including nature preserves protecting rare plants and animals, river corridors protecting water quality, parks and trails for public recreation, and other open spaces that preserve a working rural countryside.

## MAKING THE INVESTMENT

Each year the communities of Northeast Ohio invest hundreds of millions of dollars in public facilities – roads, bridges, wastewater treatment plants, buildings – to meet important needs and prepare for the future. One of the smartest investments, though, is for open space. Open space contributes to the competitiveness of the region in many ways:

**Recreational benefits** – Provides access to nature close to home for hiking, biking, fishing, swimming, sports, horseback riding, and bird watching.

**Environmental benefits** – Protects water quality, air quality, and the diversity of plants and animals that comprise our natural heritage.

**Economic benefits** – Attracts business investment and skilled workers to the region, boosts tourism, increases property values, and reduces the need for stormwater control.

**Community benefits** – Acts as a catalyst for community revitalization, promotes exercise and healthy lifestyles, and helps create a sense of place.

*To remain competitive in the new century, Northeast Ohio needs to work harder on its “green infrastructure.” The park districts of the region are working together to help lead this important discussion about regional priorities.*

Photos at left:  
Wild hyacinths and golden alexanders (G. Meszaros)  
Paine Falls (G. Meszaros)  
Earthmovers (D. Beach)  
Chagrin Boulevard overpass at Interstate 271 (D. Beach)  
Cyclists on the Towpath Trail (D. Beach)  
American rubyspot dragonfly (G. Meszaros)  
Luna moth (G. Meszaros)  
Turk’s cap lily (G. Meszaros)  
Ohio and Erie Canal lock (D. Beach)  
Harvesting chives (D. Beach)

Photos below:  
Lake Erie shoreline (G. Meszaros)  
Water strider in river (G. Meszaros)  
Emergy sedge beds along the Grand River (G. Meszaros)

