

An Outer Emerald Necklace

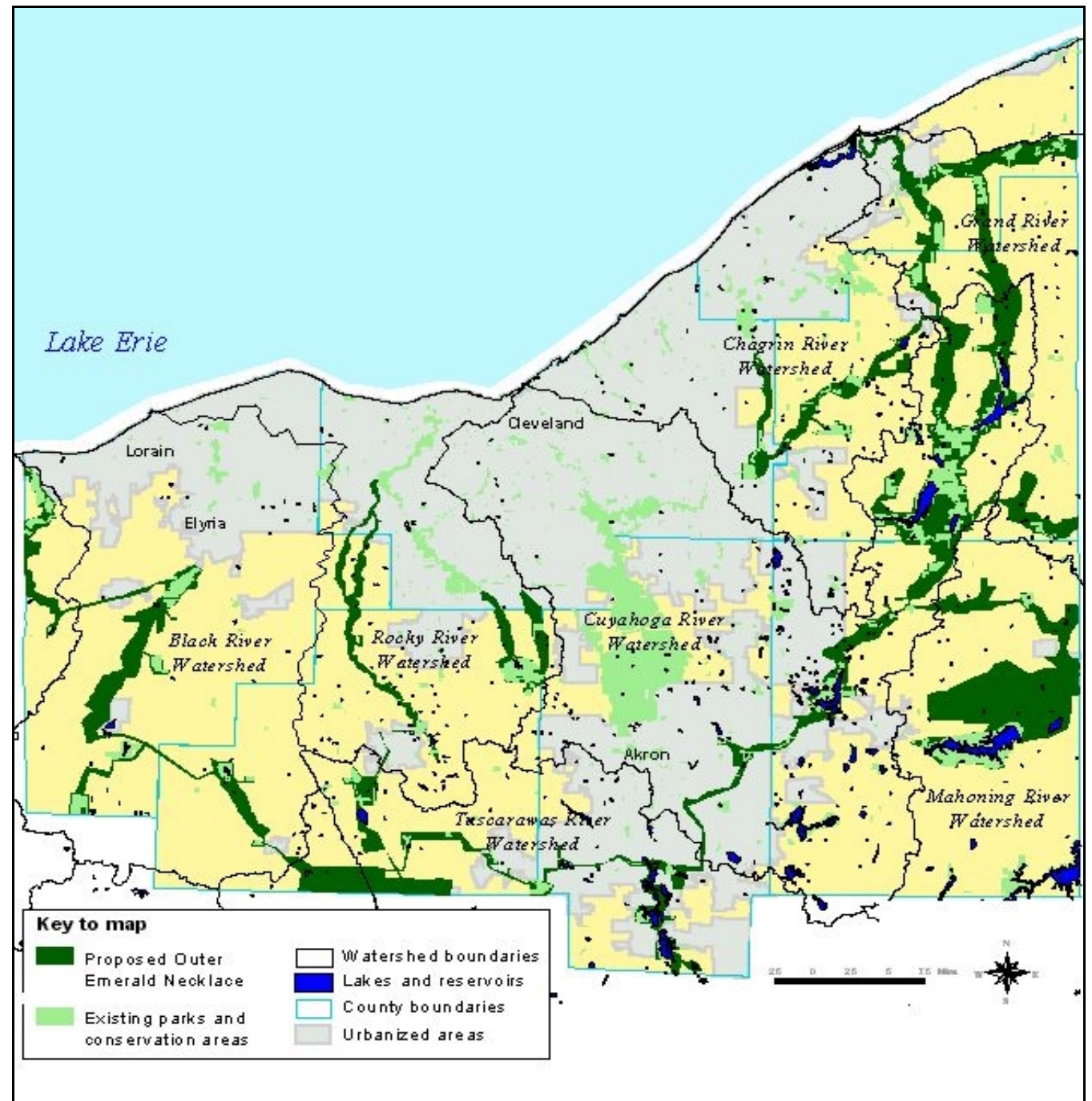
What: A proposal for creating a new, Outer Emerald Necklace in Northeast Ohio that combines existing protected spaces (in metroparks, conservation areas and recreational and institutional lands), river corridors and floodplains, as well as rail and utility corridors that could provide trails and links between protected areas.

Why: It's time for a next-generation greenbelt in the region to protect critical natural areas, provide recreational opportunities, ensure better water quality and prevent damage from flooding in most of our major river corridors, and create a buffer between rural areas and conservation development areas closer to the urban core.

How: Suggestions and proposals from individuals, land trusts, metroparks staff and planning commission officials in the seven counties of Northeast Ohio have been incorporated in this map. The identified metroparks, parks and conservation areas already are protected; the connections between them were identified to protect wetlands, floodplains and habitat for wildlife and provide recreational opportunities.

Map prepared by EcoCity Cleveland, with technical assistance from the Northern Ohio Data and Information Service (NODIS), 1999.

Data sources: Cleveland Metroparks Open Space Inventory, from Ohio Capabilities Analysis Program (OCAP), ODNR; United States Geological Survey (USGS); U.S. Census Bureau Population Statistics; Northeast Ohio Area-wide Coordinating Agency (NOACA)



Emerald Necklace visionary

I want to suggest the advisability of ultimately establishing an outer system of parks and boulevards...Through the valleys of Rocky River on the west, and Chagrin River on the east, lie some of the finest stretches of natural park lands to be found in the northern part of Ohio. While all this is now entirely outside of the city, it will be but a short time before they will be inside or very near the limits of a "Greater Cleveland" and it seems to me that such fine stretches of natural parkway should be secured for the benefit of the entire public before private enterprise or commercial industry places them beyond reach.

—William Stinchcomb, chief engineer of parks for the City of Cleveland, in 1905. Stinchcomb's bold vision eventually became the Cleveland Metroparks' Emerald Necklace.

Open space: Now or never

People probably thought that Cleveland parks engineer William Stinchcomb was crazy when he began talking in 1905 about buying up land in the country for future parks. But today we are grateful for the foresight of early park planners like Stinchcomb. The Cleveland Metroparks' Emerald Necklace is one of the most important assets of Northeast Ohio. It contributes to our quality of life in countless ways and enhances the image of the entire region.

In the 1970s, we were fortunate to protect much of the Cuyahoga Valley between Akron and Cleveland. Now, as we approach a new century, it's time to think about the next big leap forward in open space protection—an Outer Emerald Necklace. Our region has expanded outward, and so must our vision of protected open space.

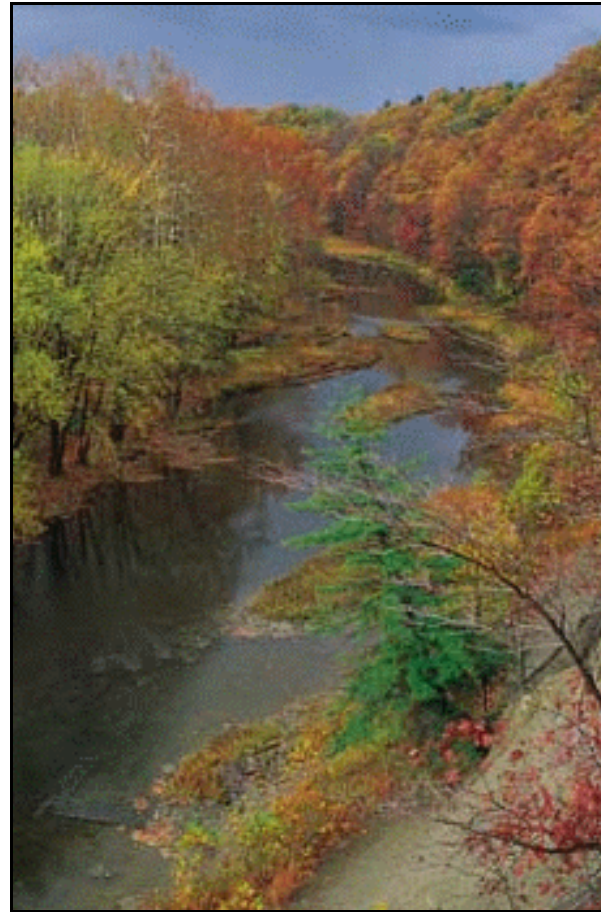
The metropark districts in the outlying counties have been working hard to acquire park lands, but their current resources will not allow them to assemble a comprehensive greenbelt before the land is gone. Development pressure is mounting. Land prices are rising. We need a major public investment today to assure that we protect the best natural areas—protect them for our children, for environmental quality, and for

the survival of other species.

The map at left shows the location of some of the most significant areas. There are a total of 212,480 acres in this proposed Outer Emerald Necklace. Of that, 53,837 acres are already publicly protected, and another 20,578 acres are publicly owned in the Ravenna Arsenal. That leaves 138,065 acres unprotected. If half of this land could be protected through conservation easements from private landowners, then about 69,000 acres would have to be bought. At \$10,000 per acre (probably on the high side), the cost would be \$690 million.

That sounds like a lot. But our region has the capacity to raise hundreds of millions of dollars for worthwhile projects. An Outer Emerald Necklace would be one of the best investments we could make.

An Outer Emerald Necklace could be a cooperative initiative of the metropark districts in the seven counties. It could include a mosaic of public park lands and private lands protected with conservation easements. The regional initiative also could create dramatic improvements in urban parks and begin work on a lakefront greenway.



Protecting high quality river corridors, such as the Grand, should be a regional priority

Photo by Gary Meszaros



Public open space is an essential amenity

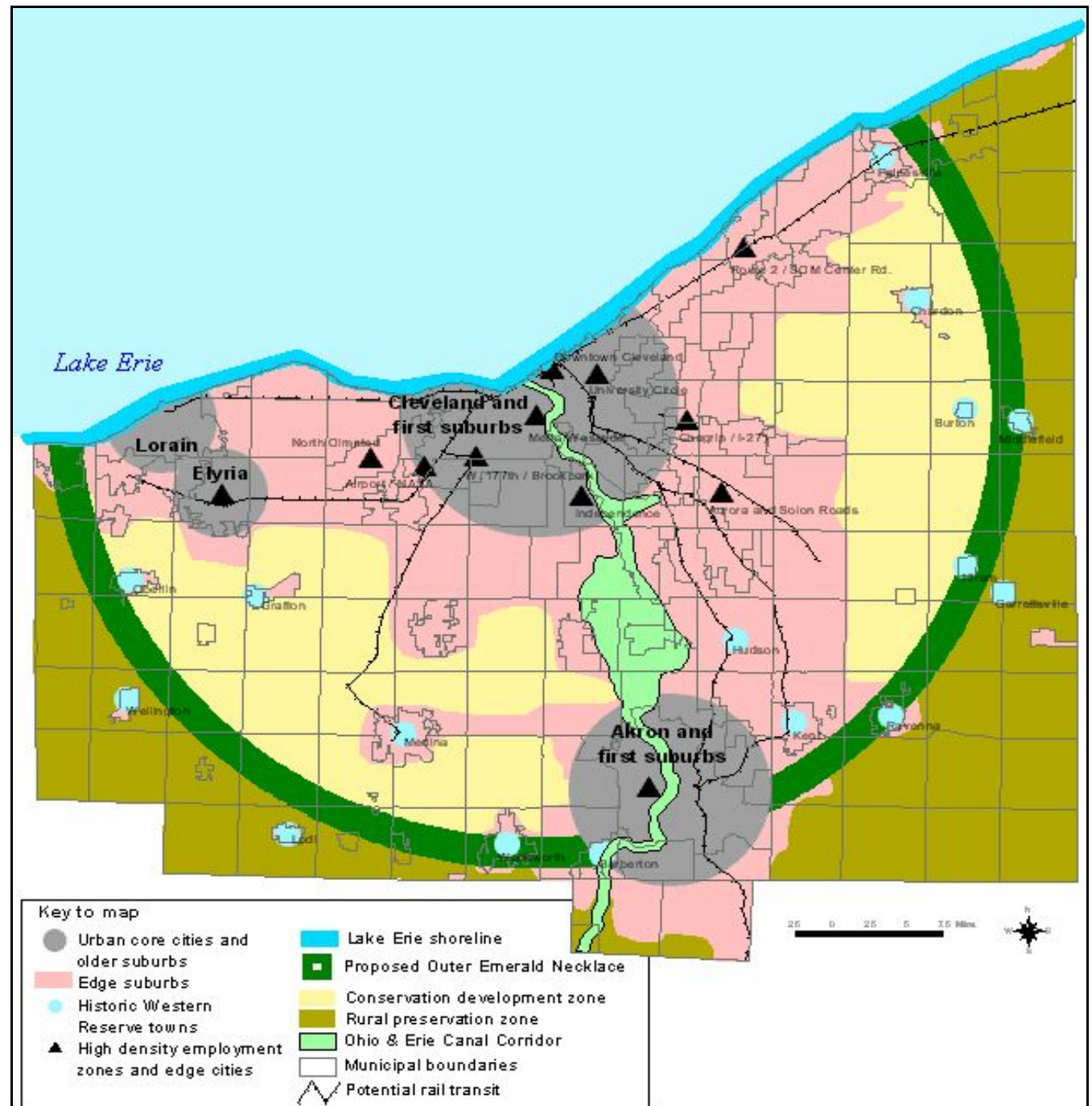
Rethinking the region

What: A composite, conceptual map of the Bioregional Plan's vision for Northeast Ohio. It shows recommended zones for urban cores, edge suburbs, conservation development areas, an Outer Emerald Necklace, and rural preservation. The urban cores are connected by rail transit to reduce dependence on the automobile.

Why: We need to reconceptualize the region in terms of development priorities and land preservation opportunities that cross county lines.

How: In a simple, graphic presentation, this map integrates our previous maps of urban cores, Outer Emerald Necklace, and transportation projects.

Map prepared by EcoCity Cleveland, 1999
 Data sources: U.S. Census Bureau Population Statistics; U.S. Census Bureau TIGER files; Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA); Bogart, W.T. and Ferry, W. (1997) Employment Centers in Greater Cleveland: Evidence of Evolution in a Formerly Monocentric City. Manuscript, Department of Economics, Case Western Reserve University (submitted to the journal *Urban Studies*); Cleveland Metroparks Open Space Inventory, from Ohio Capabilities Analysis Program (OCAP), ODNR



Bioregional zoning

A bioregional perspective allows us to look beyond the constraints imposed by city and county boundaries. It allows us to see broad patterns at the regional scale.

What are the underlying patterns of Northeast Ohio? We see the region having the following basic zones:

Urban cores: These are made up of the region's historic cities and older suburbs. They are places that have been fully developed for some time. They have relatively dense street grids and other infrastructure, walkable neighborhoods, and a healthy mix of housing, shopping and work places. They also may have increasing poverty rates and pressing needs for redevelopment. Maintaining the region's historic investment in these communities and promoting urban livability should be a top priority. Key programs for this zone include aggressive brownfields cleanup and land assembly, infill development, housing maintenance, historic preservation, urban park improvements, pedestrian and bicycle enhancements, streamlined permitting for redevelopment, and public school improvements.

Edge suburbs: These are newer communities, such as Strongsville and Mentor, within the region's urbanized area. Most are still growing, and they are developing at lower densities than the urban cores. Housing, shopping and work places are widely separated, so it's hard to get around without a car. Key programs for this zone include development of town centers with mixed land uses and higher density housing, redesign of streets to improve pedestrian environments, and redevelopment of strip malls and office parks to create better public spaces and architectural character. Edge city employment areas, such as Chagrin/I-271 and Rockside/I-77, are prime areas to be redeveloped as mixed-use nodes of activity

where transit is a practical alternative to the car.

Conservation development zone: Communities in this zone are now rapidly developing, typically at extremely low densities with houses on large lots. Much of the land is in townships, but some is also in historic Western Reserve towns, such as Chardon, Oberlin and Hiram. If these communities are to preserve their rural character and small-town charm, they need to develop less and develop more compactly. Key programs for this zone include support for urban redevelopment to reduce pressure for rural development, reformed zoning and building codes to require compact and mixed-use development adjacent to existing towns, open space conservation requirements for subdivisions that must be located in rural locations, land trusts to protect land with conservation easements, right-to-farm laws, and watershed protection programs.

Outer Emerald Necklace: This zone contains river floodplains, wetlands, and other natural areas that should be preserved for future generations. Some of the land could be acquired by parks, but much of it could remain in private hands and be protected through a system of conservation easements. Key programs for this zone include a regional campaign to raise funds for open space preservation and new public-private partnerships to reach out to landowners.

Rural preservation zone: This is what we really mean by rural. Ideally, this area will see little development pressure, and a working, rural landscape will be preserved. New housing should be located in existing rural towns and villages, rather than located on frontage lots split from farm fields. Key programs for this zone include new forms of agricultural zoning and programs to support family farms.



Redevelop the cities...



...retain the scale of small towns...



...and preserve the countryside

The loss of a forest or a farm is justified only if it is replaced by a village. To replace them with a subdivision or a shopping center is not an even trade.

—Andres Duany,
architect and leading proponent of the New Urbanism

A bold and positive vision

Why not go out on a limb? That's where the fruit is.
—Will Rogers

With our Citizens' Bioregional Plan we have attempted to lay out a bold and positive vision for Northeast Ohio. We recognize that this vision represents a major departure from business as usual. But we believe it's rooted in real possibilities, future-oriented thinking, traditional community design, and the desires of many citizens throughout the region.

Our plan is about improving our quality of life, being more economically competitive as a metropolitan area, protecting our environment and our historic investment in existing communities, and developing in sustainable ways that save tax dollars in the long run.

It's also a pro-development vision. It describes where future development should be actively encouraged and supported by public policy and investment. For we need to keep developing in Northeast Ohio. We need to keep improving our communities.

But we are saying that new development does *not* have to entail the sprawling, geographic expansion of our urbanized area. We should focus on taking care of our existing communities and protecting our countryside. If we do this well, we can satisfy our housing needs and maintain the property values of most people in the region. And we can keep the building industry supplied with good work for a long time to come.

A special opportunity

In a way, Northeast Ohio is fortunate. It hasn't sprawled nearly as much as some metropolitan areas in the country. So we have a special opportunity to do things right. We can keep our region manageable and livable.

But things must change—and change quickly. If low-density development patterns continue for another generation, our urbanized area will balloon outward. This expansion will impose tremendous costs on our children.

Can we change? At EcoCity Cleveland, we've been encouraged by how the public dialogue about regional development patterns has progressed in recent years. Public awareness has grown. Many organizations are promoting changes in state policies, land use planning, transportation investments, and regional cooperation.

Now is the time to reconceptualize Northeast Ohio. We can overcome the narrow political boundaries that divide us and see the bioregion—a network of healthy cities and town centers surrounded by open space and a working landscape of productive farms.



How you can help

This bioregional plan is a work in progress—a dialogue with citizens throughout the region. In the coming months, EcoCity Cleveland will be following up on the plan's recommendations, working with citizens' groups in all seven counties, and educating elected officials.

Here's how you can help:

- Endorse the plan personally and help us collect endorsements from organizations. We will keep a running list of endorsers on our Web site.
- Get involved in the land use planning for your community, and give copies of the Bioregional Plan to your public officials. Tell them this is what you want for our region!
- Visit our Web site (www.ecocleveland.org) and experiment with our bioregional maps.
- Keep sending us your comments and ideas (by mail, e-mail, or phone).
- Get to know the bioregion better, and think about how your own actions impact your home territory.



Summary recommendations

The Citizens' Bioregional Plan for Northeast Ohio recommends that we change our thought and practice in the following ways:

- **Adopt a new vocabulary to describe the region.** The old vocabulary describes an old urban core competing against new suburbs and outer counties. The new vocabulary describes a network of high density centers—urban cores, edge cities, Western Reserve towns—existing in balance with open space and rural areas.
- **Maintain and redevelop existing cities and towns.** Much of the region's new housing construction could occur as infill development in existing urban areas or as conservation development subdivisions adjacent to town centers. Rural development programs should enhance the viability of family farms.
- **Begin a major campaign to preserve open space.** Now is the time to create an Outer Emerald Necklace for the next generation. If we wait much longer, the land will be gone. A parallel effort should work on improving urban parks and increasing public access to Lake Erie.
- **Change transportation priorities.** Transportation investments should promote quality of life in existing urban areas by creating great public spaces that are not dominated by cars. The urban centers of the region should be efficiently linked by alternative modes of transportation, such as light rail.
- **Create new partnerships at the regional level.** These partnerships should include not only citizens and organizations in Northeast Ohio, but also the State of Ohio, which must realign its policies to support urban redevelopment and open space protection.



Caveats and next steps for bioregional mapping

Given the limited resources of a small, nonprofit organization, EcoCity Cleveland staff worked hard to make this Bioregional Plan as accurate and insightful as possible. But there were a number of limitations to our analysis, many of which were raised in our public review meetings:

- **Old data:** We had to rely on Census data from 1990. This probably makes our analysis conservative, since the pace of low-density development in rural areas seems to have accelerated since then. (In other words, things may be worse than our maps indicate.) After the next Census in 2000 it will be interesting to run the numbers again.
- **Small region:** For practical reasons our analysis was confined to seven counties, an area that does not include the entire bioregion. We would like to expand our coverage to pick up all the Grand River and Vermilion River watersheds. And we need to look at how development pressure is building farther out in the region, such as in Ashtabula and Wayne counties.
- **Lands at risk:** Our analysis could be refined with more detailed information on land sales, building permits, and infrastructure facilities plans.
- **Forests:** Large, intact areas of mature forest are of critical ecological importance in the region. Much of our forested areas have already been developed or cleared for farming, and much of the remainder is fragmented into small woodlots. Many native species of animals cannot survive in such a fragmented landscape. Migratory songbirds, for instance, need to nest deep in the woods to avoid predators. Our current open space map would protect forest lands along stream corridors, but we'd like to refine our analysis to include other areas where the large forest area still exist. Similarly, we need to do more work to map important wetland resources.
- **Farmland:** We need a more sophisticated analysis of

farmland and soil quality so we can prioritize where to focus farmland preservation efforts.

- **Urban parks:** Our analysis of open space and parks was at a broad, regional scale, so it was impossible to map smaller urban parks. It's important not to overlook urban greenspace, since it contributes so much to quality of life in cities. We also need to support plans to connect parks and open space with linear trails and greenways.
 - **Lakefront access:** We need a detailed, regional analysis of how to improve access to Lake Erie. It's a tragedy that public access to our greatest natural resource is so limited.
 - **Industrial land:** We would like to include an analysis of where new industrial development should be located. Presently, there are many scattered areas of industrially-zoned land throughout the region, as every community feels the need to have an industrial park for tax base. It's not clear whether we have the right kind of land in the right locations to permit sustainable economic growth while promoting reinvestment in existing urban areas where jobs are needed.
 - **Impervious cover:** One of the most serious impacts of development is the creation of impervious surfaces (roads, parking lots, rooftops) that cause stormwater runoff problems. We need analyses of impervious cover for the watersheds of every stream and river.
 - **Transportation:** We need a much finer analysis of what kinds of transportation investments will improve quality of life in each community.
- Many of these tasks are technically complex and will require substantial resources. Ultimately, a detailed bioregional plan should be the work of our public planning agencies and a program of complete and meaningful public involvement.

Uniqueness of place

In the age of cheap energy we did not pay much attention to locality. Waste—call it ecological incompetence—was subsidized by cheap fossil energy. But in the century ahead, powered by sunlight, we must learn how to rebuild communities and develop in ways that preserve distinctive features of landscape, local ecology, and culture. We will need "elegant solutions predicated on the uniqueness of place," in John Todd's words. Elegance in this sense means:

- Architectural design that fits the ecologies of particular places.
- Landscape design that preserves open spaces, pockets of wilderness, wildlife corridors, biological diversity, and agricultural lands.
- Public policies that promote efficiency in the use of materials and energy.
- Urban design that enhances community cohesion and real prosperity.
- Economic accounting that includes all costs.

In the decades ahead the rewards will go to the ecologically competent who understand their places and regions.

—David Orr,
professor of Environmental
Studies
at Oberlin College

EcoCity Cleveland Mission

EcoCity Cleveland is a nonprofit, tax-exempt, educational organization. Through the publication of the *EcoCity Cleveland Journal* and other programs, it will stimulate ecological thinking about the Northeast Ohio region (Cuyahoga Bioregion), nurture an EcoCity Network among local groups working on urban and environmental issues, and promote sustainable ways to meet basic human needs for food, shelter, productive work and stable communities.

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■
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Cuyahoga Bioregion
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Bioregional Plan meetings

The following organizations kindly hosted presentations of the draft Citizens' Bioregional Plan between May 1998 and April 1999. (Listing here does not necessary imply endorsement of the final plan or its recommendations.)

Black Brook Audubon
Cleveland State University, Center for Neighborhood Development
Cleveland State University College of Urban Affairs, class on regional sustainability
Cuyahoga County League of Women Voters
Cuyahoga County Soil and Water Conservation District
Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan, Coordinating Committee
Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan, Yellow Brook group
Geauga County Soil and Water Conservation District
Headwaters Landtrust
Holden Arboretum
Inter-Community Coalition
Kent Environmental Council
Lake County Farmland Conservation Task Force
Lake County Metroparks
Lakewood/Rocky River Rotary Club
Lakewood United Methodist Church
Lorain County Community College, Public Services Institute
Lorain County Soil and Water Conservation District
Medina County Soil and Water Conservation District
Metroparks Serving Summit County, Seiberling Naturealm
Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency, Environmental Advisory Committee
Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization (NEFCO)
Northeast Ohio Land Trust Coalition
Northeast Ohio Regional Alliance
Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Northeast District office staff
Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Division of Surface Water
Ohio Student Environmental Action Coalition
PLACE (Portage Land Association for Conservation and Education)
Portage County Environmental Roundtable
Portage County Soil and Water Conservation District
Shaker Lakes Nature Center
Sierra Club Northeast Ohio Group
Sierra Club Portage Trails Group
Tinkers Creek Land Conservancy
Western Reserve Resource Conservation and Development Council

Cover photo (bottom center) of Chagrin River by Gary Meszaros.

Land trusts

Northeast Ohio Land Trust Coalition, c/o Roger Gettig, Holden Arboretum, 9500 Sperry Rd., Kirtland, OH 44094, (440) 946-4400.
 Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland, The Park Building, 140 Public Square, Cleveland, OH 44114, (216) 861-5093.
 Chagrin River Land Conservancy, PO Box 148, Chagrin Falls, OH 44022, (440) 247-0880.
 Cleveland Museum of Natural History, 1 Wade Oval, Cleveland, OH 44106, (216) 231-4600.
 Headwaters Landtrust, P.O. Box 171, Hiram, OH 44234, (330) 569-7872.
 Holden Arboretum, 9500 Sperry Rd., Kirtland, OH 44094, (440) 946-4400.
 Hudson Land Conservancy, P.O. Box 1381, Hudson, OH 44236, (330) 653-5649.
 Lake County Land Conservancy, 5974 Hopkins Rd., Mentor, OH 44060.
 Medina County Land Conservancy, 3210 Trails Lake Dr., Medina, OH 44256, (330) 666-1994.
 The Nature Conservancy, Ohio Chapter, 1504 W. First Ave., Columbus, OH 43212, (614-486-4194).
 Portage Land Association for Conservation and Education (PLACE), P.O. Box 3286, Kent, OH 44240, (330) 678-8635.
 Quail Hollow Land Conservancy, 13340 Congress Lake Ave., Hartsville, OH 44632. (330) 699-6213.
 Revere Land Conservancy, 970 North Hametown Rd., Akron, OH 44333, (330) 666-4246.
 Tinkers Creek Land Conservancy, 9224 Darrow Rd., Suite W271, Twinsburg, OH 44087, (440) 425-8793.
 Waite Hill Conservancy, 9494 Smith Rd., Waite Hill, OH 44094.

Park districts

Cleveland Metroparks, 4101 Fulton Parkway, Cleveland, OH 44144, (216) 351-6300.
 Lake Metroparks, 11211 Spear Rd., Concord Twp., OH 44077, (800) 227-7275 or (440) 639-7275.
 Geauga Park District, 9420 Robinson Rd., Chardon, OH 44024, (440) 285-2222, ext. 5420.
 Lorain County Metro Parks, 12882 Diagonal Rd., LaGrange, OH 44050, (800) LCM-PARK.
 Medina County Park District, 6364 Deerview Lane, Medina, OH 44256, (330) 722-9364 or (330) 336-6657.

Portage County Park District, 449 S. Meridian St., Ravenna, OH 44266, (330) 673-9404.
 Metro Parks Serving Summit County, 975 Treaty Line Rd., Akron, Ohio 44313, (330) 867-5511.
 Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, 15610 Vaughn Rd., Brecksville, Ohio 44141, (440) 526-5256.

County planning commissions

Cuyahoga County Planning Commission, 323 Lakeside Ave. West, Suite 400, Cleveland, OH 44113, (216) 443-3700.
 Geauga County Planning Commission, Courthouse Annex, 215 Main St., Chardon, OH 44024, (440) 285-2222.
 Lake County Planning Commission, 125 E. Erie St., Painesville, OH 44077, (440) 350-2739.
 Lorain County Planning Commission, 219 Court St., Elyria, OH 44035, (440) 329-5544.
 Medina County Planning Commission, 144 N. Broadway, Medina, OH 44256, (330) 723-3641.
 Portage County Planning Commission, 128 North Prospect, Ravenna, OH 44266, (330) 297-3613.
 Summit County Planning Department, 175 S. Main St., Rm. 207, Akron, OH 44308, (330) 643-2551.

Other agencies and organizations

Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA), 1299 Superior Ave., Cleveland, OH 44114, (216) 241-2414.
 Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS), 806 Citicenter Building, 146 South High St., Akron, OH 44308, (330) 375-2436.
 Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning & Development Organization (NEFCO), 969 Copley Road, Akron, OH 44320, (330) 836-5731.
 Countryside Program, P.O. Box 24825, Lyndhurst, OH 44124, (216) 691-1665.
 First Suburbs Consortium, 40 Severance Circle, Cleveland Heights, OH 44118, (216) 291-2854.
 NORA (Northeast Ohio Regional Alliance), c/o Citizens League Research Institute, 843 Terminal Tower, 50 Public Square, Cleveland, OH 44113, (216) 241-5340.

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