

Economic Development

Economic development opportunities vary by community and will generally be guided by regional assets, adjacent land uses, existing and planned trails and recreational venues, and the specific community's vision. All three cities have existing, or planned, primary trailheads that connect to the river, with its vast natural environment and its rich variety of recreational experiences. Each community's vision for capturing economic development opportunities is discussed in this chapter.

The El Rio project corridor is truly a unique treasure in Maricopa County. This portion of the project corridor associated with the river provides habitat for wildlife and also affords a vast array of recreational opportunities not found in other parts of the Valley, including the potential for: boating, fishing, hunting, walking, hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding. This regional resource also offers wilderness areas for passive uses, such as wildlife watching. All of these opportunities have the potential to serve as economic catalysts for the surrounding communities.



Avondale





7.1 Background and Assessment

The El Rio project corridor covers a stretch of approximately 17.5 miles of the Gila River running through Avondale, Buckeye, Goodyear and unincorporated areas of Maricopa County in the southwestern valley. This river corridor is composed of, primarily, a loose network of unmaintained trails and off road vehicle tracks that provide access to hikers, bikers, campers, boaters, fishermen, bird watchers and other recreationists.¹ Currently, there are limited developed recreational amenities and public facilities, such as parking, water and bathrooms.

General land use plans and existing trail networks for each community were reviewed to determine the current land use adjacent to the El Rio corridor. Within the City of Buckeye and unincorporated Maricopa County, open space and low density residential are the dominant land use types; mixed use, residential, and open space are the dominant land use types in the City of Goodyear; and the land uses in the City of Avondale include open space and low-density residential.²

Planned within proximity of the El Rio corridor, is the future State Route 30 (SR30), which is intended to be a reliever for Interstate 10. SR30 spans about 14 miles, connecting the new Loop 303 to the Loop 202, and passes through the Cities of Avondale and Goodyear. Its most southern proposed alignment provides the greatest access to the El Rio corridor, however, construction of SR30 is not anticipated until 2026, and then only if funding becomes

available.

Transportation projects, such as SR30, affect economic development by increasing efficiency, which can boost productivity, reduce transportation costs, and improve industry's access to customers, resources and the labor force. They can also improve access to parklands and wilderness areas, which then draw in visitors to partake in hiking, boating, hunting, fishing and wildlife watching. One example of a major transportation project is the Price Road Corridor in Chandler, which stretches into Tempe. This corridor facilitates access among employment hubs and serves as an anchor to major shopping centers on each end; Tempe Marketplace on the north and Chandler Fashion Square on the south. The Price Road Corridor has been underway for the last 50 years, but it wasn't until there was a density of population that stimulated recreational, cultural, office, industrial and retail development. In short, transportation projects enable economic growth and development, but do not cause them.



Avondale

Of the three communities, Avondale has the smallest portion of the El Rio project corridor within its jurisdiction. The city would like to brand the El Rio portion of the project corridor associated with the Gila River as an outdoor recreational hub within their community by invigorating the river with active recreational activities. This vision includes a series of small lakes for fishing, kayaking and canoeing. Festival Fields is the city's pilot project and is located south of Lower Buckeye Road adjacent to the Agua Fria River and is a part of the El Rio project corridor. The Avondale pilot project is located on the north bank of the Agua Fria River and currently provides ball fields for planned sporting events and ramadas for picnicking. This location is easily accessible by vehicle and bicycle, and includes potential linkages to linear trails for hiking and equestrian uses, as well as connecting to Maricopa County's Sun Circle Trail and the Maricopa Trail. A second phase of Festival Fields is planned by the City of Avondale and will include

the expansion of the ballparks and ramadas. Given that existing parking for residents and visitors is available at Festival Fields and PIR, the city is able to stage large events, festivals and activities that attract large groups of people.

The Buckeye Water Conservation Drainage District (BWCCD), which has land holdings within Avondale, has discussed a variety of concepts relating to active outdoor recreation. These concepts include mechanized water skiing, adventure rope courses, zip lines, motocross and BMX facilities and white water rafting. These types of activities could be staged on BWCCD land within the El Rio project corridor. Fees could be generated through concessions, users of the facilities and sponsorships.

In addition to the El Rio project, Avondale has connectivity to the Tres Rios project, which is located immediately to the east of the confluence of the Agua Fria and Gila Rivers, and offers primitive hiking and equestrian trails. The city's desire is to create a trailhead at the historical base meridian marker where there is an opportunity to create access for hunting and future water sports. Presently there is only one bridged crossing of the Gila River immediately east of the terminus of the El Rio project corridor at Avondale Boulevard. El Mirage Road, immediately east of the project corridor, is a low water crossing and is subject to closure during flow events.

¹ "El Rio Watercourse Master Plan Overview."

² Ibid, p6



Goodyear

The city's plans are long term and very much dependent upon two proposed residential development projects: Lakin Property, located north of the river and east and west of Cotton Lane, and King Ranch which is located south of the river, also east and west of Cotton Lane. These developments include commercial land uses within proximity to the El Rio project corridor. These could be instrumental in attracting a wide variety of businesses, including those that provide services to residents and visitors, as well as those businesses that want the ambiance of being adjacent to the river. The "Edge" treatments, described earlier, would allow a direct connection to all users and types of businesses to the recreational elements that are programmed to be an integral part of this river ecosystem.

The city's vision of the El Rio project corridor associated with the river edge interface is for passive recreation, which includes hiking, cycling, and bird watching. The connection of trails is a policy objective outlined in the city's recently adopted "Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space

Master Plan," whereby city trails connect to the El Rio project corridor and to Estrella Mountain Regional Park trails. Presently, accessing the trails and river is very limited, as there are few transportation linkages. The city, however, does have three bridged crossings, including Bullard Avenue, Estrella Parkway and the recently completed Cotton Lane, which has a series of viewing platforms that extend out over the river and have made an El Rio statement with current bridge signage.

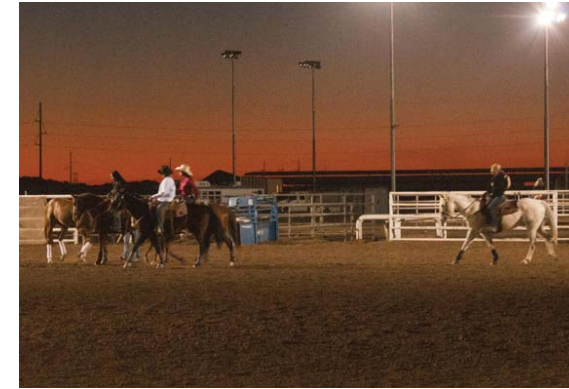
The Goodyear pilot project, which is located southwest of Bullard and Vineyard Avenues, is a proposed trailhead development that would provide trail and river access for hiking, automobile parking and equestrian trail amenities. This trailhead not only connects to the El Rio project corridor, but also to the city's Bullard Wash Trail via the BWCCD canal bank.

Buckeye

The City of Buckeye has very large aspirations for leveraging the El Rio project corridor into a wide variety of economic development projects. In addition to linear parks and trails along the river banks, they are planning for a series of lakes through the remediation of sand and gravel pits within the river corridor. Also under consideration is the extension of the Buckeye Canal south into downtown to create a river walk, similar to the iconic San Antonio River Walk, which would include boating and water features. The proposed plan is for that canal experience to branch off and connect to the El Rio river trail and river ecosystem. Trail development, ecosystem restoration and environmental education, similar to the Rio Salado Project in Phoenix is also proposed to be of high importance to the City of Buckeye.

The type of development envisioned along the river's edge includes retail, office, high density residential, education and healthcare. The medical component would have a strong focus on health and wellness and would tie nicely into outdoor recreation. Creating a winter destination for a variety of Olympic training venues, such as kayaking, associated with the City of Buckeye lake projects, will lend itself to hotel and conference center development, and could serve as a catalyst for the attraction of a wider variety of land uses, including universities and educational campuses.

Current access to trailheads and the river on the north bank is limited to dirt roads. The newly constructed Cotton Lane Bridge



incorporates a series of viewing platforms that extend out from the bridge over the river for habitat and wildlife viewing, and this crossing includes existing El Rio monumentation signage at each end of the bridge. In the future, a bridged crossing at Watson Road is envisioned that would connect the north and south banks and include viewing platforms. These El Rio Design Guidelines and Planning Standards indicate several new trailhead and river access nodes within the City of Buckeye that could help to build upon the city's current vision for an active and economically viable river corridor.

The Buckeye pilot project is a 40 acre parcel located west of Miller Road and south of the Canal. To the north of the pilot project is the South Buckeye Equestrian and Events Center, which includes state of the art boarding facilities, portable stalls, lighted arenas, and a RV Park. The city's pilot project envisions connectivity to the Equestrian Center, as well as new and existing trailheads for hiking and equestrian uses. It will also contain vehicle parking, an equestrian staging area, scenic overlook and picnic areas.

Economic Development





7.2 Economic Benefits

Over the years there have been numerous economic studies prepared by community leaders and planners to understand and document the value of trails, greenways, parks, open space, hunting, fishing and wildlife watching to the local economy. These studies have concluded that trails enhance the quality of life and build strong economically vital communities. In addition to providing an amenity to residents, trails and linkages to outdoor recreation can also help foster the growth of business, enhance property values, and revitalize neighborhoods. Outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing and wildlife watching attract residents and non-residents to the area to partake in these activities and they will often purchase equipment and spend money on food and lodging at areas that offer these unique experiences.

Another benefit that has been documented is the economic value of physical activity. People who live in walkable neighborhoods, or who can easily access open space, trails and bike paths, are more likely to be physically active and less likely to be overweight and



obese, thereby reducing healthcare costs. This also holds true for adolescents. In a national study, it was found that youth with access to multiple recreation facilities are more physically active and have a greater chance of reducing/preventing childhood obesity.³

Providing recreational opportunities and facilitating economic development comes with a cost. When evaluating the return on investment, many regions with river recreational corridors generate revenue from staged activities and special events as a way to cover the capital cost and expense of facility maintenance. Examples of the type of activities that generate income include: staged river walks and runs, flotillas on the river, music festivals, craft fairs, and classes, to mention a few. Business opportunities also exist for concessions, including food service, the rental of equipment (boats, paddleboards, etc) and equestrian trail rides. Other opportunities include agricultural leases within a greenway. Generating revenue and documenting the economic benefit can be multi-faceted. The return on investment could include the tax increment generated from the increase in property values, the retail sales tax from tourism spending, and the direct fees earned from concession contracts and registration fees from special events and classes.

This research has shown that a growing number of communities are using a "trail town" model, which places trails as the centerpiece of a tourism based strategy for community revitalization. The results show that these

communities are experiencing significant positive economic impacts. The trail town approach not only fosters cycling and hiking, but also provides the opportunity to link these trails to local businesses and downtowns.

Key findings of the economic impact research include the following:

Trails - The economic impact of visitor and tourism expenditures resulting from connecting communities and trails has proven to be long lasting and have ongoing positive effects.

1. The number one amenity that potential homeowners cite when they are looking to move into a new community is a trail system (National Association for Home Builders).
2. Trails have proven to be a catalyst for revitalizing neighborhoods by spurring development of new housing and businesses that can take advantage of the location adjacent to the trail.⁴
3. Bicycle tourism, a growing segment of the tourist market, has become an economic development vehicle for communities that have businesses connected to trails and trail use.
4. A study in Nebraska found that for every \$1 spent on trails, there was almost \$3 in savings in direct medical costs.⁵
5. In San Jose, California, Cisco Systems touts the trails as a competitive advantage for attracting and retaining employees and reducing healthcare costs.

Open Space and Property Values - Several studies demonstrate that open space can provide a wide range of benefits to residents and local governments.

1. Open spaces can lead to higher property tax revenues for local governments by increasing the value of nearby homes. In Austin, Texas increased property values associated with a greenway were estimated to result in \$13.6 million of new property tax revenue, and in Dallas, Texas developers report that there is a 25 percent premium for properties adjacent to the Katy Trail.⁶
2. Trails are providing a valuable amenity and translate into increased housing values. This was documented in a study on property values in Indianapolis, Indiana which found that proximity to a greenway has a statistically significant positive effect on property values to the tune of \$140 million.
3. Impact of the Phoenix Mountains and South Mountain preserves on residential property values in Phoenix finds that homes closer to the preserve (up to 1/2-mile) were higher in value, which supports the findings of similar studies for other regions. Further, the factors that influence the impact on adjacent developed lands include the shape, size and character of the open space preserve along with the type of activities in the preserve.
4. The positive effect of access to natural open space on property values depends upon the proximity/ adjacency of private properties to

³ Gordon-Larsen P, Nelson M, Page P, et al. "Inequality in the Built Environment Underlies Key Health Disparities in Physical Activity and Obesity." Pediatrics, February 2006.

⁴ Rails to Trails Conservancy, "Trails and Economic Development," August 2007.

⁵ Active Living Research, "The Economic Benefits of Open Space, Recreation Facilities and Walkable Community Design." Research Synthesis, May 2010.



the open space. The economic value of open space and natural areas was greater for higher density urban areas than rural areas, where it was concluded that in rural areas there is already a relatively large amount of undeveloped land (both public and private) thereby diminishing the price premium associated with living close to a public open space.⁷

5. Rio Salado Master Plan in Phoenix, Arizona, examined a number of benefits that came from the development of the Rio Salado. One area examined was the effect on property values. The report concluded that property values of land rescued from floodplain will increase 4 to 5 times and the value of land adjacent to water will also increase substantially.⁸

Events - The programming of activities and events positively impacts tourism and generates revenue for the region.

1. Nearly 5 million people have attended a special event at Tempe Town Lake since it opened. These events have

generated \$166 million in total return on investment, with most of these events raising money for local charities. Events have included Fantasy of Lights Boat Parade, Fourth of July celebration, concerts, races, etc. In addition, classes are offered in rowing, beach yoga and stand up paddle boarding. Boat rental and storage and park rentals also generate income.

2. Major events staged within Pennsylvania's Lackawanna Heritage Trail contribute to the \$31.3 million in economic impact and \$2 million in tax revenue generated. Special events that are staged include an annual bike tour, half and full marathons and clean-up events.

Wildlife Watching - Nationwide there is an avid and growing wildlife watching population. Activities include observing, feeding and photographing.

1. According to a study by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona has a birding participation rate of 18 percent, slightly below the national average of

20 percent.⁹ Total spent by residents and nonresidents on wildlife watching in Arizona during 2011 was \$936 million. These expenditures include food and lodging, transportation, equipment rental, and purchases of wildlife watching equipment.¹⁰

2. The total economic impact of wildlife watching in Maricopa County by both residents and non-residents is \$644 million. Of this, \$381 million is from retail sales generating \$42 million in state and local tax revenue.¹¹

Development Activity - The correlation between river recreational corridors and urban development can be significant.

1. Tempe Town Lake in Tempe, Arizona, has a variety of existing residential and commercial development valued at \$356 million. In the works is another estimated \$241 million in development projects. More than 1,000 people currently live at Town Lake, and with the completion of other residential projects there will be more on the way. Town Lake merchants and hotel sales revenues total more than \$753 million since 1999, which translates into significant sales tax revenue for the City of Tempe.¹²
2. The Rio Salado Master Plan, Phoenix, Arizona, evaluated the economic impact of the plan on the district and on the region. They concluded that the predominant development type attracted to this public amenity would be residential. In areas where there

is existing commercial development, additional commercial development is likely to follow, creating jobs both during the construction stage and the ongoing operations. The growth in permanent jobs is estimated at 74,000 and the supply of new housing units would increase by 16,000. The annual amount of property tax revenues due to the rescue of land from the existing floodplain is \$37 million.¹³

3. The Bayou Greenways 2020 initiative in Houston, Texas, is a seven year program to connect linear parks for 150 miles along nine bayous within the city limits. Redevelopment has been propelled by public/private partnerships and voter and philanthropic support. Underway along the Bayou is an 18-story, 250,000 square foot office building, a 7-story, 22 unit condo project and a planned 40-story mixed use residential and retail high rise building. The Bayou project has awakened the economic development potential of the city.

There exists conclusive evidence that by consciously linking trails and businesses, and by providing new desirable housing choices within proximity and connected to trails, communities around the country are building vital, economically stable neighborhoods. The economic benefits of trails can play an important role in policy makers' decisions about zoning, restrictions on land uses, government purchase of lands for parks and investments in similar initiatives that include trail linkages in the decision process.

⁷ Active Living Research. "The Economic Benefits of Open Space, Recreation Facilities and Walkable Community Design. Research Synthesis, May 2010.

⁸ Rio Salado Development District. "Rio Salado Master Plan, January 1985."

⁹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis," Addendum to the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.

¹⁰ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation-Arizona."

¹¹ Tucson Audubon Society. "Economic Contributions of Wildlife Viewing to the Arizona Economy: A County Level Analysis, 2013." Southwick Associates and Arizona Game & Fish Department.

¹² City of Tempe. "Tempe Town Lake by the Numbers, 2012"

¹³ Rio Salado Development District. "Rio Salado Master Plan, January 1985."

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7.3 Economic Development Opportunities

An examination of other river parks and trails in the U.S. was conducted to learn innovative and effective approaches to river and trail-based economic development. Many cities, such as: Denver, Colorado; Tempe, Arizona; San José, California; and Dallas, Texas, are aggressively transforming their underutilized floodways into active recreational amenities, and in so doing, are enhancing the quality of life and furthering their economic prosperity. To gain an understanding of what recreational amenities and activities are being programmed, and help identify economic opportunities that other cities are experiencing, research was conducted on five river and trail systems around the country, which may have some applicability to the El Rio project corridor. The five river systems evaluated for this analysis include:

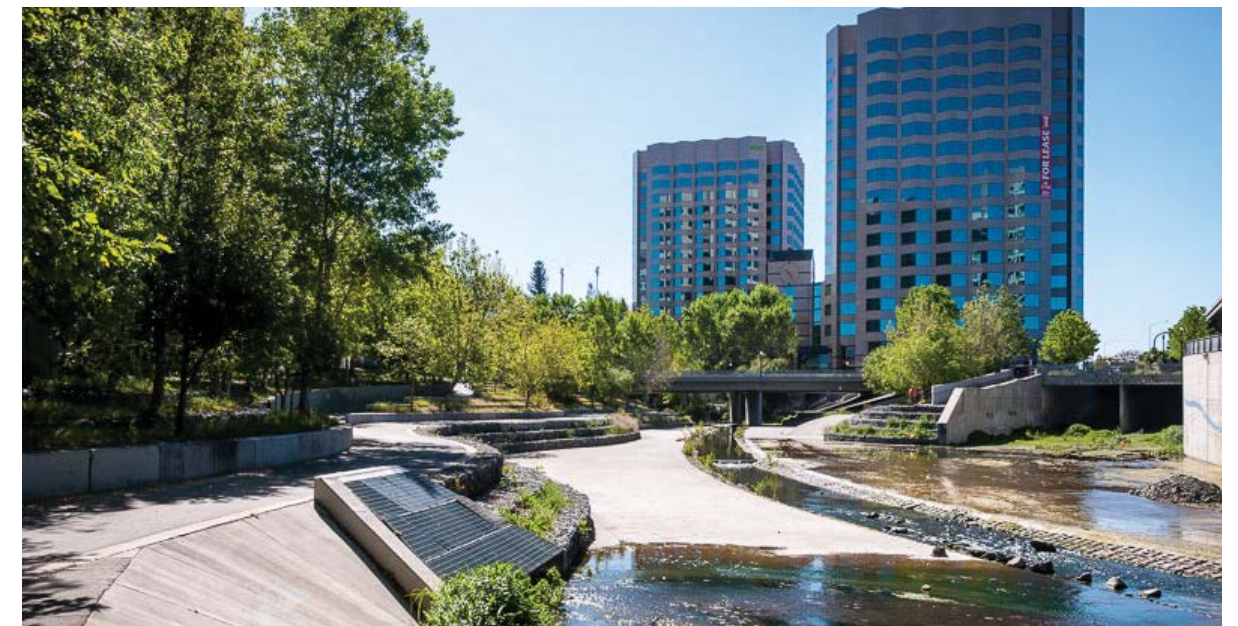
1. **Guadalupe River Park and Bay Ridge Trail** – This urban trail along the Guadalupe River within the City of San Jose, California offers an abundance of recreational, educational and quality of life amenities. Staged events draw upwards of 150,000 people a year. The Guadalupe River Park connects to a much larger trail system called the Bay Ridge Trail within the San Francisco Bay Area.
2. **James M. Cobb River, Colorado River State Park** – This river trail project in Western Colorado links together a series of five lakes that provide a variety of recreational and nature opportunities for residents and visitors to experience.

3. **The Lackawanna River Heritage Trail** – This Pennsylvania multi-purpose trail system connects 30 communities. In addition to recreational opportunities, a primary objective is fostering economic development within the communities by activating the trails with public art, annual festivals, team training and numerous races and competitive events, thereby encouraging destination tourism.
4. **Tempe Town Lake** – The City of Tempe, Arizona developed an urban lake that was channelized, which resulted in reclaiming several hundred acres of land for commercial and office development. Recreational amenities include a beach park which is used year-round to stage outdoor activities.
5. **Trinity River Project** – This massive public works project for the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas provides flood protection, recreation, environmental restoration, economic development and major transportation components.

The following river system case studies are applicable to the El Rio Design Guidelines and Planning Standards in that they illustrate a wide variety of recreational and real estate opportunities, as well as the economic and quality of life impacts they have on their surrounding areas. Some of these projects have been in existence for decades, while others are relatively new. All of them are considered “works in progress” and endeavor to take advantage of evolving consumer desires and market position.

Management of these river facilities is critical to ensure that the millions of dollars spent on planning and capital investment are sustained. Maintenance of the river corridor and administrative tasks, such as strategic planning and marketing, are ongoing activities of the fiduciary agency

or non-profit organization. For multi-jurisdictional river corridors, the creation of a single entity to maintain, plan, market, fund-raise and forge public-private partnerships has been the administrative approach taken.



Guadalupe River Park and Bay Ridge Trail

San José and the Bay Area in California

BACKGROUND

Guadalupe River Park is a 253 acre three-mile stretch of parkland that runs along the banks of the Guadalupe River in the heart of downtown San José, California. This three-mile stretch is composed of 2.3 miles of trails and includes a series of seven sister city plazas, playground areas, water

features and public art. There are in total 27 various exhibits and plazas to educate the multitude of visitors about the city's history, the river's natural environment along with information on flood protection measures.

The *San José Business Journal* identifies the Guadalupe River Trail as one of the city's top attractions. San José annually hosts 10 major events along the Guadalupe River Trail. These popular events each draw up to 150,000 attendees. Bike Valet Parking is offered by the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition at the San José Blues Festival and

Music in the Park. Connections to other paths and transportation hubs as well as a future BART station, encourage use of the River Walk by commuters. In addition, the River Walk ties into the Countywide Trails Master Plan system and serves as a link in the larger regional trail system, the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

The Bay Area Ridge Trail, which currently consists of 350 miles, traverses a multitude of jurisdictions along the ridgelines overlooking the San Francisco Bay. The Bay Ridge Trail is a multi-use trail for hikers, runners, cyclists and equestrians. Its focus is on active outdoor recreation and communing with nature and offers geocaching opportunities and activities and outings for families and children. The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council formed a corporate partnership with REI, who is helping to promote the active engagement of kids and families, whether it be hiking, cycling or camping.

The first segment of the Ridge Trail was dedicated in 1989 and involved a collaborative effort on the part of countless public, private and community partners and advocates. Today oversight is conducted by the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, whose mission is to create a continuous 550+ mile trail. When complete, the Ridge Trail will connect over 75 parks and open spaces. This continuous, long-distance, trail is also creating a protected greenbelt corridor for habitat and wildlife.

MANAGEMENT

In 1992, the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council became an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The Council continues to collaborate with countless public, private and community partners and advocates in all nine Bay Area

counties to create more miles of Ridge Trail. The council is responsible for planning, acquiring, designing, building, caring for and promoting the Ridge Trail and have been doing so for the past 26 years.

James M. Robb Colorado River State Park (String of Pearls)

Colorado

BACKGROUND

The James M. Robb Colorado River State Park links a series of parks via a 35 mile trail system along the river corridor, which is referred to as a "String of Pearls." This trail system is used for hiking, walking, and cycling. Each section of the String offers various activities.

Fruita Section – This portion is open year-round for camping and day use, including boating, fishing, picnicking and seasonal bird watching. Amenities include parking, restrooms, showers and recreational vehicle dump stations.

Connected Lakes - Connected Lakes provides a network of trails that traverse a series of ponds. Visitors find a wide variety of recreational opportunities, including fishing, picnicking, hiking and bird watching. Amenities include:

1. River launch site for boaters and rafters
2. Several handicapped accessible fishing piers/structures
3. Picnic shelters
4. Fishing - warm water only
5. Boating - electric motors only in ponds



Colorado River Pear Park - The numerous small lakes in the Pear Park trail section provide critical habitat for endangered fish. These lakes were created in partnership with gravel extraction. There are opportunities for hiking and wildlife observation, but boating, rafting and fishing are prohibited. Vegetative management is ongoing on the shoreline of most lakes. Amenities include drinking water, restrooms and wildlife watching areas.

Corn Lake – This day-use-only park provides a launching site for boaters and rafters enjoying the Colorado River. A 0.9-mile trail follows the lakeshore. The trail provides access to both the Colorado River and Corn Lake for fishing and is used by hikers and bicyclists. The park also offers picnic sites and restrooms for physically challenged visitors. Corn Lake offers both warm and cold water fishing and picnic shelters. The park is stocked with trout each spring and fall. Amenities include boat ramp access, parking, picnic area,

restrooms, trailhead and fishing. The area has both paved and unpaved trails.

Island Acres Section - The Island Acres section is open year-round for camping and day-use activities. The day-use area closes at 10:00 p.m. The park is enjoyed by Grand Valley residents and out-of-state visitors as a convenient and attractive place to fish, camp, picnic and/or hike along the Colorado River or near any of the lakes in the park. Amenities include recreational vehicle electrical hookups, picnic areas, parking, restrooms, showers, swimming beaches, tent camping and access to numerous unpaved trails.

MANAGEMENT

The two agencies, Colorado State Parks and Division of Wildlife, merged in 2012. Oversight of the James M. Cobb Colorado State Park is now managed by the merged organization Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Economic Development





The Lackawanna River Heritage Trail

Pennsylvania

BACKGROUND

The Lackawanna River Heritage Trail (LRHT) is part of a multi-purpose trail system that follows the Lackawanna River through 30 communities in Pennsylvania. When completed, it will span 70 miles, with 40 of these miles running along the Lackawanna River. The trail begins at the confluence of the Lackawanna and Susquehanna rivers in Pittston, southwest of Scranton. LRHT is a linear, interpretive path which connects to the river and promotes health, wellness, recreation, socialization, alternative transportation, conservation of natural resources, and economic development. The multi-surface section connecting Scranton to Taylor has become a popular destination, attracting visitors to stone carvings, symbols, and sculptures that interpret Native American heritage. The last 6.1 miles of the Inaugural Scranton Half Marathon were run along the LRHT,

exposing participants from 23 states to the beauty of the newest section of the trail in Scranton.

Activities and programs staged in 2014 included a family fun day with music and performances, a bike tour, birdwalks/fishing and concerts on the trail. One of the new projects is a community partnership between Keystone College, Keystone Iron Works, the County Department of Arts, and the Lackawanna Heritage Valley who collaborated to install large iron sculptures by noted artists at sites along the trail. The program, known as "Confluence: Art on the Trails," was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts allowing artists to transform portions of the trail into outdoor galleries of iron sculptures. In addition, a myriad of organizations and school groups have begun to use the LRHT for events, fundraisers and as a training ground for athletic teams. These events, with their use of the LRHT facilities, drive sales for the hospitality industry as well as for many local retail shops and businesses.

An economic impact analysis of the Lackawanna Heritage River Trail system

was conducted in 2009 and is currently being updated. The study's initial findings concluded that, overall, there is a \$31.3 million annual economic impact to the region, with visitor and tourism expenditures being the primary source of economic benefits at \$27 million. Given that more miles of trails have opened since 2009, they are expecting the new analysis to show a greater economic impact on the surrounding areas.

MANAGEMENT

The Lackawanna River Heritage Trail (LRHT) is managed by Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority, a municipal authority of Lackawanna County. The Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority was established in 1991 and LRHT became the first State Heritage Park in Pennsylvania. In 2000, it was designated as a National Heritage Area by the U.S. Congress in recognition of the region's unique contribution to the American experience. One of the Authority's goals is to enhance the economic vitality of the communities in the Lackawanna Valley.



Tempe Town Lake

Tempe, Arizona

BACKGROUND

In March of 1989, the Tempe City Council adopted the Rio Salado Master Plan, which was the culmination of 20 years of environmental land planning and studies to create the Tempe Town Lake. This 2.5 mile stretch of lake passes through the City of

Tempe just north of Tempe Butte. To create the lake, channelization of the Salt River was conducted and completed in 1996. This resulted in the recovery of 843 acres of developable land from the floodplain. The channelization was funded by the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) and Flood Control District of Maricopa County (FCDMC).

Today, Tempe Town Lake provides walking, jogging and cycling on concrete paths on

each side of the lake, while also featuring public art at select locations. Recreational amenities include the Tempe Beach Park that accommodates volleyball, a splash playground and an amphitheater that can accommodate 5,000 people, in addition to boating, sailing and fishing. The Tempe Center for the Arts anchors the western boundary of the lake. Furthermore, there are annual events and activities staged at Tempe Town Lake that attract hundreds of thousands of people to the City of Tempe. Besides the creation of recreational amenities, the Tempe Town Lake has spawned substantial private mixed use development, including class A office towers and several condominium projects. Future plans also include a hotel. Its proximity and connectivity to major transportation facilities such as the Sky Harbor International Airport, the light rail, Loop 202 and Loop 101 highways are key economic development strengths of this location.

Tempe Town Lake has emerged as a top destination that has created jobs and stimulated the economy for the City of Tempe and the broader region. Since its creation, the estimated economic impact of Tempe Town Lake is \$500 million and has attracted upwards of 2.7 million people. Today more than 5,000 people work at the various businesses surrounding the lake.

MANAGEMENT

The City of Tempe is responsible for the management and maintenance of Tempe Town Lake.



Trinity River Project

Dallas and Fort Worth Texas

BACKGROUND

Dallas

The Trinity River Corridor Project covers 20 miles, or approximately 10,000 acres, along the Trinity River, which runs through Dallas, Texas. It is an enormous public works and economic development project that provides flood protection, recreation, environmental restoration, economic development and major transportation components. Work has been underway on this corridor continuously since the Dallas City Council approved the "Trinity River Corridor Project Balanced Vision Plan" in 2003.

It is envisioned that the Trinity River of the future will feature iconic bridges, soccer

fields, parks, lakes, promenades and trails for hiking and biking. It is intended to become the focus of sustainable development and an attraction to people seeking alternatives to conventional suburban living. This 2,000 acre regional park will knit together scattered recreational facilities into one system. In short, it is believed that this project will become a catalyst for urban development in Dallas, Texas for decades to come.

In terms of economic development, city leaders and stakeholders identified development districts to spur new interest along the corridor. At locations with enhanced access to recreation and transportation, new large-scale development is being encouraged. Larger scale development will be required to support the cost of infrastructure such as levee stabilization and sump relocation. Throughout the corridor, they anticipate

that these public investments should lead to revitalization and redevelopment, which support existing communities and create new business and mixed use areas. The type of development called for within these districts includes infill within existing neighborhoods along with residential, office and retail development.

Fort Worth

The 2003 Trinity River Vision Master Plan was adopted by the Tarrant Regional Water District, Streams and Valleys, Inc., the City of Fort Worth, and Tarrant County, Texas. The Trinity River Vision was incorporated into the City of Fort Worth's Comprehensive Plan. Many projects have been implemented since its adoption, including: trail extensions, new trailheads, trail amenities, additional low water dams, new low water crossings, pedestrian bridges and private developments oriented to the Trinity Greenbelt.

The Trinity River Master Plan was designed to provide flood protection, recreation, scenic beauty and accessibility to the public. The plan focuses on eight segments of the Trinity River and its tributaries: Clear Fork North, Clear Fork South, Marine Creek, Sycamore Creek, West Fork East, West Fork West, and the central city area now called Panther Island. Projects that are underway include the following:

Panther Island / Central City

This project will create an urban waterfront community north of Ft. Worth, Texas. Public dollars are currently being spent on environmental cleanup, flood protection and infrastructure improvements, including new bridges and new or improved trails. Panther Island will include 800 acres of mixed use development consisting of

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10,000 square feet of commercial space and 10,000 mixed income households. Overall the development will include boating, a river walk and canals, dining and entertainment, a town lake with boardwalks and higher education. This development is anticipated to generate more than \$600 million in economic development activity in its first decade.

Gateway Park Master Plan

A component of Central City is revitalization of the 1,000 acre Gateway Park, which will become the largest urban-programmed park in the area. The plan includes major restoration of the park's ecosystem, provides a multitude of diverse and recreational amenities while providing necessary flood storage. Park improvements will include practice and competition soccer fields, baseball/softball fields, covered basketball courts, boat launch, trails, and picnic areas, dog park, amphitheater and river education center, mountain bike trails and mountain bike course. It is anticipated that the plans will spur positive economic development.

MANAGEMENT

There are several organizations responsible for the various aspects of planning and development, environmental and transportation components of the Trinity River Corridor Project. These partners include the City of Dallas, the North Texas Tollway Authority, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and the Texas Department of Transportation. Other non-profit partners are raising money to help implement the plan. In Fort Worth, Texas, the Trinity River Vision Authority (TRVA) was created as the organization responsible for the implementation of the Trinity River Vision.



7.4 Recommendations

Trails and river parks play a central role in economic development and have proven to be an important community amenity. All across the country, well-designed trails and open space are helping to shape urban growth, contribute to neighborhood revitalization and enhance property values. As mentioned earlier, all cities are keen on the El Rio Trail and its connectivity to their own trails and Maricopa County's trails system. Placing trails as centerpieces of a tourism based approach has shown, in other markets, to invigorate economic development.

Opportunities for private residential and commercial development exist along the river edge in Buckeye, Goodyear and unincorporated areas of Maricopa County. This type of development takes on a more urban form and has the potential of spurring investment along the corridor due to its access to recreation and unique desert riverine environment.

Based on research conducted on other river trails/parks in the country, combined with input from the three cities, and Maricopa County there are several ideas to explore that could enhance economic development and recreational potential of the El Rio project corridor and help to

establish it as a top tourist destination in the southwest valley.

Identify unique recreational districts –

Given the length and diversity of the river, there is an inimitable opportunity to leverage each city's, and Maricopa County's, vision on how to best utilize the recreational asset of the El Rio corridor. Like other recreational river corridors noted in this report, consideration may be given to dividing the El Rio into recreational districts that offer a distinct variety of active and passive outdoor activities and amenities, such as areas for trails for hiking, cycling and equestrian uses, active sports and recreation, areas for hunting and fishing,

and other areas for nature recreation such as wildlife watching. These unique districts could then be independently branded and marketed, much like the individual lakes in the String of Pearls along the James M. Cobb River in Colorado.

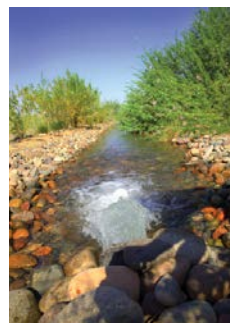
Provide the widest range of recreational opportunities – Offering playing fields for active sports, wilderness recreational uses such as canoeing and kayaking, and bird-watching, and trails for hiking, and equestrian areas for all ages and abilities invites many to get involved. Improving the recreational experience for canoeists by creating waterways that exhibit increased velocity sections interspersed with slower pools encourages participation. Divisions could be created in the channel flow regime that would allow for smaller whitewater features to be created and managed for recreational uses. Including canoe launches that allow for a variety of trip lengths and experiences on and in the river corridor depending upon interest and skill level will engage many community members. Ensuring that any El Rio trails will connect to the larger trail systems in the area creates a myriad of possibilities.

Activate the trails and parks – Use is encouraged by providing a rich diversity of environmental education, including interpretive exhibits, nature observation areas and self-guided trails that include wetlands, and riparian zones. These should



include environmental exhibits that support other nature oriented activities such as birding and ecotourism. The placement of public art at key locations that promotes or depicts the remnants of the heritage, history and culture of the El Rio project corridor should be considered. Regularly staging events and activities that draw people, such as family fun days with music and performances, fun runs, bike tours, birdwalks/fishing and concerts on the trail will result in sustained use. As an example, Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority conducted a half-marathon event on a section of trail that attracted people from 23 states.

Engage children and families – Connecting youth to the outdoors is the focus of recent studies that suggests that a very real “nature-deficit” disorder contributes to a diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, conditions of obesity and higher rates of emotional and physical illnesses. Research also suggests that this nature deficit weakens ecological literacy and stewardship of the natural world. These problems are linked more broadly to what health care experts call the “epidemic of inactivity,” as well as to a devaluing of independent play. This project can benefit from the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council who formed a corporate partnership with REI. Jointly, they are helping to promote the active engagement of kids and families, whether it be hiking, cycling or camping.



This project can capitalize on the research and resources provided by REI, Children and Nature Network, Pathways to Nature for Kids, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and others, to create viable programs.

Form partnerships with stakeholders

– Implementation of the El Rio Design Guidelines and Planning Standards will depend upon the active participation of partners, including national and local public agencies and a wide spectrum of non-profit groups and environmental organizations. In addition, seeking the support of the private sector and foundations for funding and or sponsorships, including philanthropy, is essential to a successful project. Specific, targeted, fundraising events should also be explored.

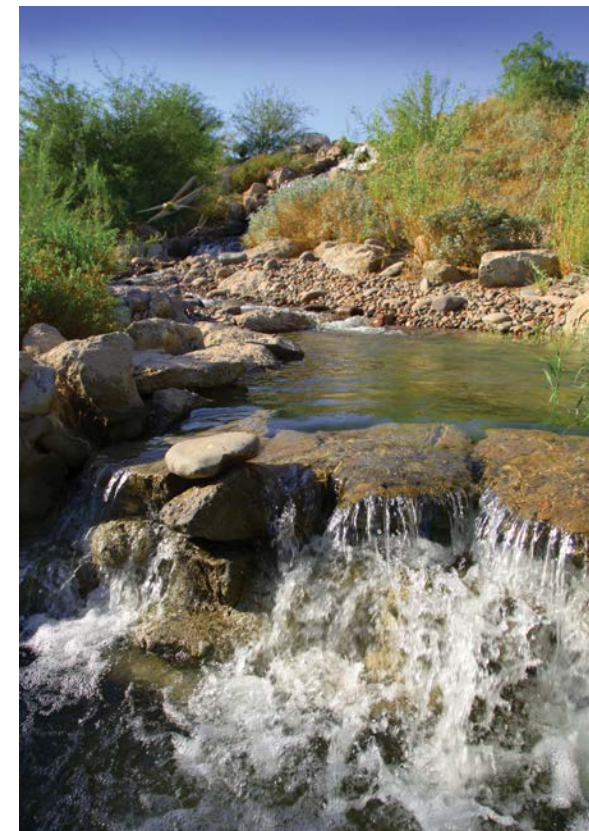
Market the El Rio Corridor - Encouraging organizations and businesses to use sections of the El Rio trail for events, such as run/walks, races, group bike rides, trail and river cleanups, geocaching, and other activities, benefits everyone. The events engage the community and invite participation. A website devoted to the El Rio Trail that includes the vision and history, along with visitor information, such as downloadable map(s) and a calendar of events and activities, is a basic requirement in any marketing plan.

These ideas, individually or collectively, will help achieve the overarching goals



outlined under the El Rio Design Guidelines and Planning Standards. This includes transforming El Rio into an economic engine by becoming a tourist destination and a regional attraction in the west valley, and by stimulating the attraction of private investment that fosters economic development.

Maintain the El Rio Corridor - The Flood Control District of Maricopa County is preparing the El Rio Vegetation Management Plan for the Lower Gila River. The plan will provide planting guidelines for the floodway and will also provide recommendations for the removal of Tamarisk (saltcedar), which may have a direct and positive effect on the economic viability of the overall area by potentially reducing flood risk in the area and opening the river to recreational uses.



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