

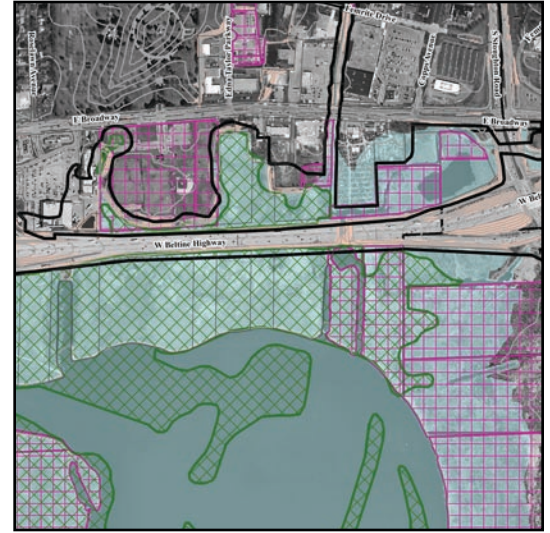
Fact Sheet

Environmental Corridors

Environmental corridors are continuous systems of open space in urban and urbanizing areas, that include environmentally sensitive lands and natural resources requiring protection from disturbance and development, and lands needed for open space and recreational use. They are based mainly on drainage-ways and stream channels, floodplains, wetlands, steep slopes, and other resource features, and are part of a countywide system of continuous open space corridors.

Function	Resource Features							
	Lakes, Ponds & Streams	Wetlands	Floodplains	Shoreland Buffer Strip	Steep Slopes	Woodlands	Parks	Unique Vegetation or Geology
Protect Water Resources, Drainage & Hydrologic Functions	▲	▲	▲	▲	△			△
Provide Pollution Control		▲	△	▲	△	△		
Protect Public Health, Safety & Property	▲	△	▲		▲		▲	▲
Provide Outdoor Recreation & Education Opportunities	▲	△	△	△		△	▲	△
Provide Wildlife Habitat	▲	▲	△	△		▲	△	△
Enhance Scenic Beauty & Shape Urban Form	▲	▲	△	▲	▲	▲	▲	

▲ Primary Function △ Secondary or Supplemental Function



How Are Environmental Corridors Mapped and Used?

Environmental corridors have been mapped for all urban and limited service areas in the county. The RPC staff works with the local unit of government to delineate the corridors, based on available information and mapping of environmental resources and open space lands (water bodies and drainageways, floodplains, wetlands, steep slopes, woodlands, areas of unique vegetation or geology, existing and proposed parks, etc.).

The objective is to delineate, in local and regional plans, those lands and resources which perform important environmental functions (see illustration) and need to be protected from development and urbanization. Including the corridors in community plans helps the local government to protect lands needed for drainage and recreation; avoid problems from development on steep slopes, poor soils or flood-prone areas; protect water resources and avoid pollution; and enhance scenic beauty and wildlife habitat.

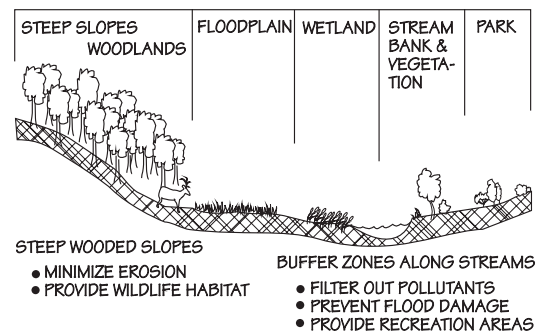
Once delineated and adopted, the corridors are used by local governments, and by the RPC and state and federal agencies in making decisions on the location of urban development and major facilities.

The corridors are also used as a basis or starting point for open space and recreation planning and acquisition. An important use of the corridors is in RPC/DNR review of sewer extensions and sewer service areas, to direct urban development to areas outside the corridors.

Making Changes to Corridors

Changes to the environmental corridors are classified into two categories: **a) major changes** to the corridors that require approval by the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and Department of Natural Resources (DNR) before these changes would be effective for the purpose of reviewing sanitary sewer extensions; and **b) minor changes** that do not require prior approval by the RPC or the DNR.

Any change to an environmental corridor, whether major or minor, should be initiated or sponsored by the affected local units of government (city, village, town), or by the Regional Planning Commission in consultation with affected local units of government. It is expected that all changes, major or minor, would be initiated by formal action by the municipality—by resolution, or approval of a plat or development plan.



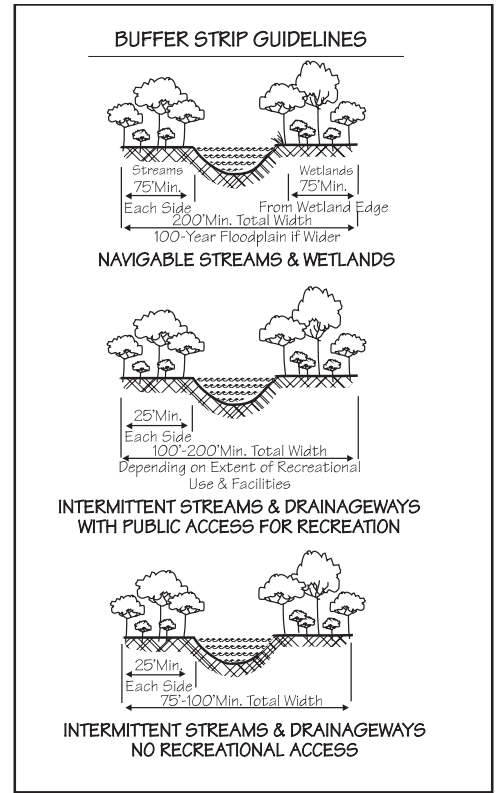
The schematic diagram depicts the resource elements one finds in a typical environmental corridor. Often one or more elements are found in the same locality, such as woodlands and steep slopes.

Major Changes:

Major changes have the potential for significant impacts on water quality, and require RPC and DNR approval. The review and decision process for a proposed major corridor change requires a public hearing and generally takes three months.

Major changes include:

- 1) Removing any mapped wetland area unless exempted by state administrative rules or state-approved rezoning.
- 2) Any change that would remove any area below the ordinary high water mark of a stream, pond or lake.
- 3) Any change resulting in the elimination or interruption in the continuity of any corridor segment which includes floodplains, wetlands, shoreland buffer strips or steep slopes adjacent to water bodies (defined as slopes over 12% where the base of slope does not have at least 75 feet of vegetated buffer strip between the base of slope and the ordinary high water mark of perennial streams, ponds and lakes).
- 4) Any change reducing the width of vegetated shoreland buffer strips along streams, wetlands, and drainageways below minimum guidelines (see illustration).
- 5) Grading in a wetland vegetative buffer within 30 feet of the wetland edge, where the buffer has been delineated in environmental corridors, unless the grading is re-establishing natural grades or restoring wetland habitat.



Minor Changes:

Minor changes generally do not have the potential for significant impacts on water quality, and do not require RPC approval. The RPC should be notified of the official local action (resolution, plat or development plan approval, etc.) changing the corridors.

Minor changes include:

- 1) Changes resulting from DNR-approved changes in floodplain or wetland delineations, or DNR-approved rezoning.
- 2) Relocation or shortening of a corridor based solely on intermittent streams and drainageways, or adjustment of the buffer strip width within the guidelines (see illustration).
- 3) Addition to or removal from the corridors of public or private lands which do not include water bodies, floodplains, wetlands, minimum buffer strips or steep slopes adjacent to water bodies.
- 4) Changes resulting from utility or roadway maintenance or construction which meet the criteria set forth in NR 117. (It is not the intent of the environmental corridors to prevent or obstruct necessary maintenance, expansion or construction of transportation or utility facilities intended to serve areas outside of the corridors, needed to maintain or improve continuity of those systems, or designed to serve compatible uses in the corridors, such as park shelters or facilities. Facilities intended to serve new sewered residential, commercial or industrial development in the corridors are not permitted.).



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For more information see the adopted
Environmental Corridors Policies and Criteria
document on our website.