

SEWRPC COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING FACT SHEET

Environmental Corridors and Isolated Natural Resource Areas

- One of the key recommendations of the regional land use plan for Southeastern Wisconsin is the preservation of primary environmental corridors within the Region. Primary environmental corridors, which are identified by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC), include concentrations of important natural resources. The protection and preservation of primary environmental corridors in essentially natural, open uses is critical to maintaining both the ecological balance and natural beauty of the Region.
- Identification of environmental corridors is based on the presence of one or more of the following important elements of the natural resource base: 1) lakes, rivers, and streams and their associated shorelands and floodplains, 2) wetlands, 3) woodlands, 4) prairies, 5) wildlife habitat areas, 6) areas of wet, poorly drained, and organic soils, and 7) areas of rugged terrain and high-relief topography. The presence of elements that are closely related to the natural resource base, including park and open space sites, historic sites, scenic view points, natural areas, and critical species habitat sites are also considered in the delineation of environmental corridors.
- SEWRPC also identifies secondary environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas. Secondary environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas contain the same important natural resources as primary environmental corridors; they differ from primary environmental corridors due only to their size.
- Primary environmental corridors are at least 400 acres in size, two miles long, and 200 feet in width. Secondary environmental corridors are at least 100 acres in size and one mile long, unless they connect primary environmental corridors, in which case there is no minimum size requirement. In addition to environmental corridors, there are isolated concentrations of natural resources that are at least five acres in size and 200 feet wide, which do not meet the minimum size requirements of primary or secondary environmental corridors. These areas are called isolated natural resource areas.
- The SEWRPC regional land use plan recommends that steps be taken by State, County, and local governments to preserve and protect environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas. It is recommended that the lowland portions of environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas--areas that are floodplains and wetlands--not be filled and be kept free from future urban development of any kind. It is further recommended that the upland portions of primary environmental corridors be preserved and protected, ensuring that the lands are not developed except for residential use at a density no greater than one unit per five acres and other limited uses specified in the regional land use plan. Finally, the plan recommends that County and local governments give consideration to similarly protecting the

upland portions of secondary environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas as local needs and conditions may warrant.

- Implementation of the foregoing environmental corridor protection recommendations is envisioned to come about primarily through enactment of appropriate zoning regulations at the county and local levels of government. In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services seek to bring about the specific recommendations related to protection of the primary environmental corridors when carrying out their responsibilities for public and private sanitary sewer extension approvals. Essentially, the operational rules of those Departments require that the environmental corridor protection and development density recommendations, as set forth in the Commission's regional plan, be met before State approval of sewer extensions. This State policy may have the effect of imposing more stringent development limitations than contained in local zoning regulations.
- The Commission inventories of natural resource features and delineations of environmentally sensitive lands are carried out on one inch equals 400-foot scale aerial photos. The delineations are always held out, however, as subject to field verification. Because of the importance of these delineations, County and local governments frequently call upon SEWRPC staff to verify and stake in the field the boundaries of such environmentally sensitive lands.
- For more information on environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas, refer to the "Plan on It!" brochure titled *Environmental Corridors-Lifelines of the Natural Resource Base* and other information provided on the Environmental Corridor page of the SEWRPC website: <http://www.sewrpc.org/SEWRPC/LandUse/EnvironmentalCorridors.htm>.