
chapter five: the grand design



the city in a park

Little Rock's past, present and future as a livable city is tied to the community's perception of the city as a "city in a park." Such a perception is created by tree-lined streets, shady rock strewn creeks and vistas of tree covered hills. It is the smell of earth as you pick up the morning paper or the falling autumn leaf as you walk to work. A "city in a park" provides people with direct connections to nature that can be experienced at every level by every member of the community. It is also a city that balances development with the preservation of its natural landscape.

To maintain the "city in a park" vision, the city should proactively engage and define the future of the open space and park system. The analysis of the city's existing system, its expressed vision, and the available land, cultural, civic, historic and environmental resources is the basis for a revitalized park and open space system that maximizes the benefits of new facilities for all members of the community.

framework: linkages

Little Rock's existing parks and open space lands, as well as its future opportunities, are best seized by a linked recreational system that maximizes access between all available resources within the community. Such a system connects city parks, private parks and recreational facilities, floodplains and riparian areas, the Arkansas River, schools, steep and unbuildable slopes, urban forestry/streetscape, and landscape enhancements along thoroughfares, along with traditional land uses (i.e. office, residential, commercial, etc.). These major and minor linkages make the city a park, and bring the park into the city. The major links also form the framework for additions to the parks and open space system.





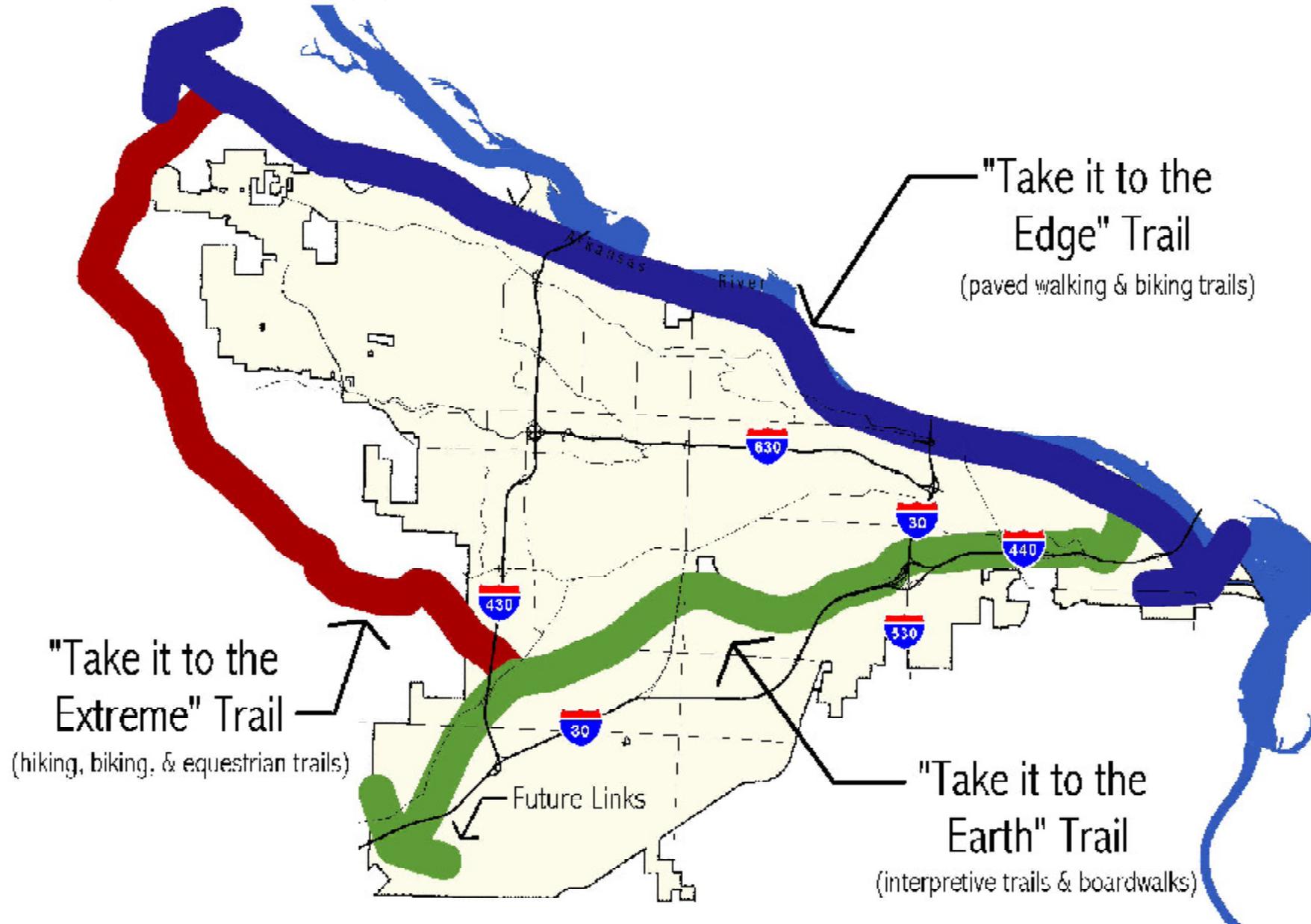
d e v e l o p m e n t c o n c e p t : t h e t h r e e - t r a i l l o o p s y s t e m

Creating a linked parks and open space system in Little Rock will greatly improve accessibility for residents to existing and new facilities as well as increasing residents' interest in the recreational system. How to establish this linkage is a challenging question, but Little Rock is fortunate in that it has diverse resources available as a basis for the linkage framework. The structure for the revitalized parks and open space system, as well as the framework that will maximize the impact of existing and new parks, are based upon a three-trail loop concept, see Figure 5.1.

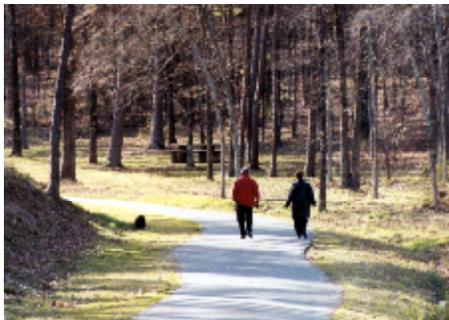
The three-trail loop concept creates a series of trails that act as primary linkages and linear edges that highlight the city's relationship to the Arkansas River, the extensive wetlands of the Fourche Bottoms, and the topographic relief found in the western parts of the city. The proposed trails explore all of the geographic regions that come together in Little Rock, and form the framework for major new special facilities, an extensive fine-grained environmental and cultural greenway system, and improved access to the parks system for the citizens of Little Rock. The three trails are described below:

- "Take it to the Edge" trail: This "Edge" trail provides users with the experience of an urban environment and its interface with the Arkansas River. It includes a string of urban parks sited along a riverfront greenway. It links the William J. Clinton Presidential Park and neighborhoods of east Little Rock to downtown, Riverfront Park, historic areas of Hillcrest, Two Rivers Park, and Pinnacle Mountain. The trail is composed of paved walking and biking trails, and serves residents and visitors to Little Rock.
- "Take it to the Earth" trail: This trail includes the natural system along Fourche Creek, linking the major watershed and drainage corridor which connects the neighborhoods of Otter Creek and southwest Little Rock to Fourche Creek and Gillam Park. Educational and interpretive opportunities are available along the unpaved and appropriately drained trails and boardwalks through east Little Rock to the Arkansas River system, serving hikers and cyclists. The "Earth" trail is primarily located in a neighborhood setting, but it also provides users with the opportunity to interact with significant natural amenities.
- "Take it to the Extreme" trail: This trail snakes along various natural drainage courses through the hilly topography of west Little

Figure 5.1: Three-Trail Loop System



Rock. It connects the “Take it to the Edge” trail to the “Take it to the Earth” trail. This system is more challenging than the other trails and can be used by equestrians, mountain bikers, or hikers. The “Extreme” trail would be unpaved and appropriately drained, and primarily located in the rural, undeveloped setting that extends beyond current city boundaries.



Secondary Trails

The three flagship trails set the framework for accessibility to the overall parks and open space system in Little Rock. These major trails are connected to the community by a fine-grained system of trails that filter through neighborhoods, see Figure 5.2.

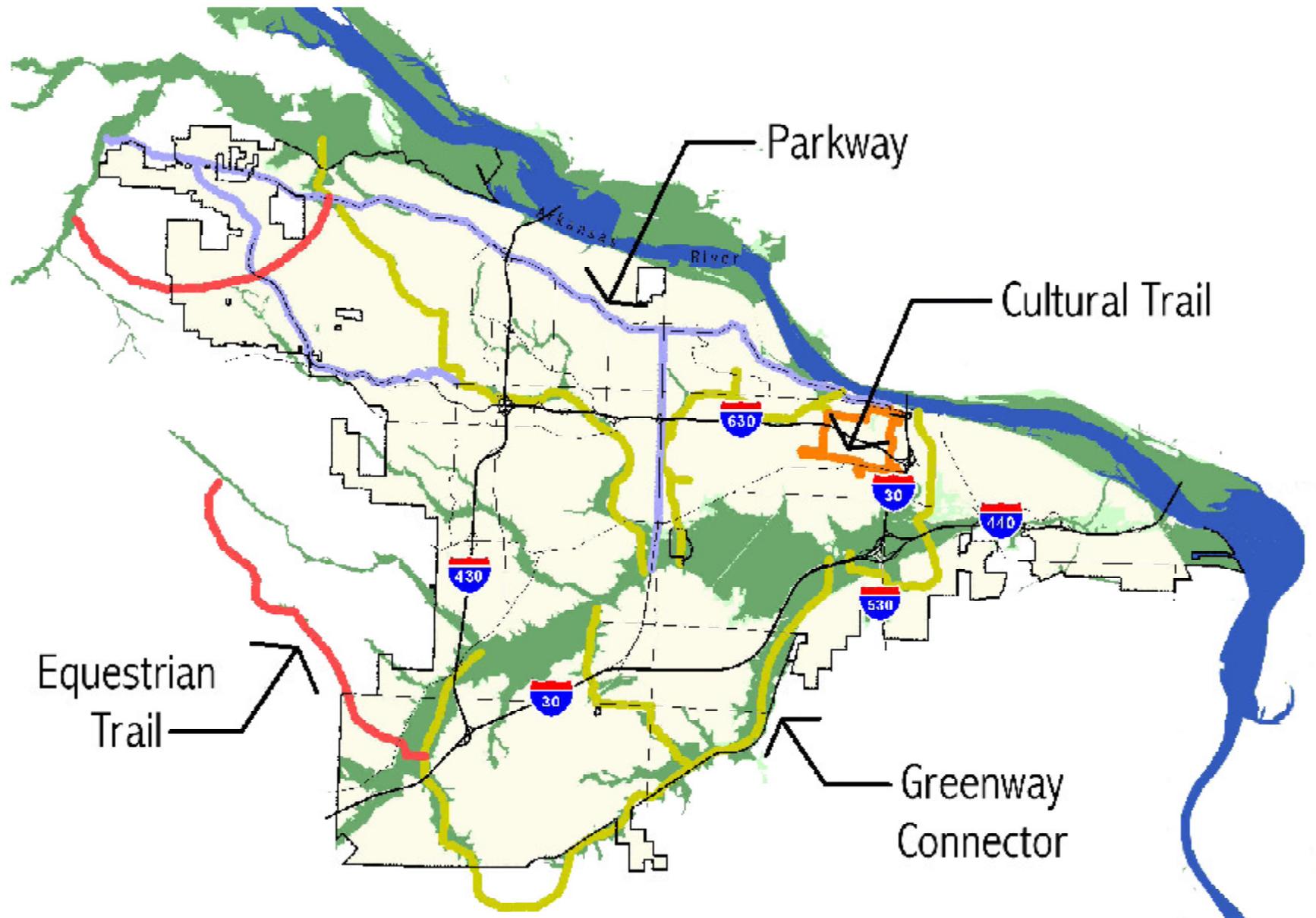
Secondary trails link existing neighborhoods to the major trails. These internal trails provide additional experiences for users by utilizing different resources of Little Rock as the basis for the trail. For example, connections along stream corridors link to the “Take it to the Earth” trail, creating greenway trails. Cultural trails can be created by linking together the historic resources of the city as well as museums, art districts and other civic facilities. In the western parts of the city, neighborhood equestrian trails can be linked to the “Take it to the Extreme” trail, giving users a broader range of riding options as well as accessibility to various destinations.

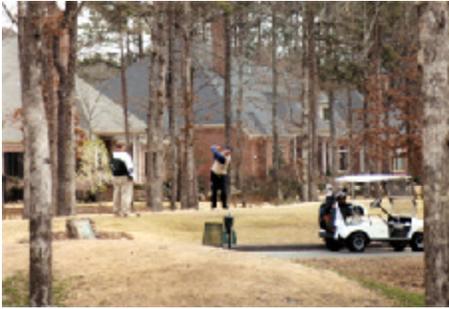
Larger park facilities also have their own internal trail system that is linked to the fine-grained system of trails through the community as well as the major trails that establish the linkage framework. These trails take users through the park, passing by interesting natural or manmade features that establish the unique experience of a particular park. Thus, the experience a trail user has in a park in western Little Rock will be very different from that in a more urban location.

Two other sets of secondary trails round out the fine-grained system of access. The integration of streetscape-enhanced roadways gives Little Rock yet another resource for its linked “green infrastructure” system. Landscaped parkways and pedestrian walks, part of the urban forestry program, provide a link to the front doors of residents. These streetscape improvements are the direct linkage between the community and the rest of the trail system – they are the starting points for trips from home, through the community, to a greenway and then to one of the banner trail facilities.

Descriptions of each trail type are located in Chapter Seven: Acquisition.

Figure 5.2: Secondary Trails





Private golf courses are examples of private recreation facilities.



Parks built in conjunction with developments are also examples of private recreational areas.

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In addition to a citywide linkage system, park service at the neighborhood level is an integral part of the park system. Each household in Little Rock should be within an eight-block radius of some form of park or green space amenity. Primarily, this need should be met with existing city parks and open space. Public lands can be supplemented with joint-use agreements with schools or privately owned parks, which also provide a recreational amenity to the community. With the addition of lands which make up the “Take it to the Earth/Edge/Extreme” trail concept, many residents of the city will have some form of green amenity within eight blocks of their home. Additional neighborhood and/or community parks should be strategically located to help achieve this eight-block coverage concept, since not all areas are served by some form of park or recreational facility, and not all private facilities will allow public access.

An analysis of the proximity of existing parks, open space and recreation areas to existing neighborhoods, as shown in the accompanying diagrams, indicates that most of Little Rock’s residential neighborhoods are already within eight

blocks of some portion of the park and open space system proposed by this plan, see Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.4 represents all recreation providers, including school play yards, property owner parks, country clubs, and other private recreation providers, as well as floodplains. For the most part, the only areas of Little Rock not served by this system are west Little Rock and parts of southwest Little Rock (which are generally industrial areas). Some neighborhoods that are not within the eight-block coverage area will need additional parks or joint-use agreements.

Figure 5.5 demonstrates all recreation providers, as well as future land uses. From this graphic, those residential areas which are not included within the eight-block radius of one or more providers was determined, and is shown in Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.3: Eight-Block Strategy: Existing Parks

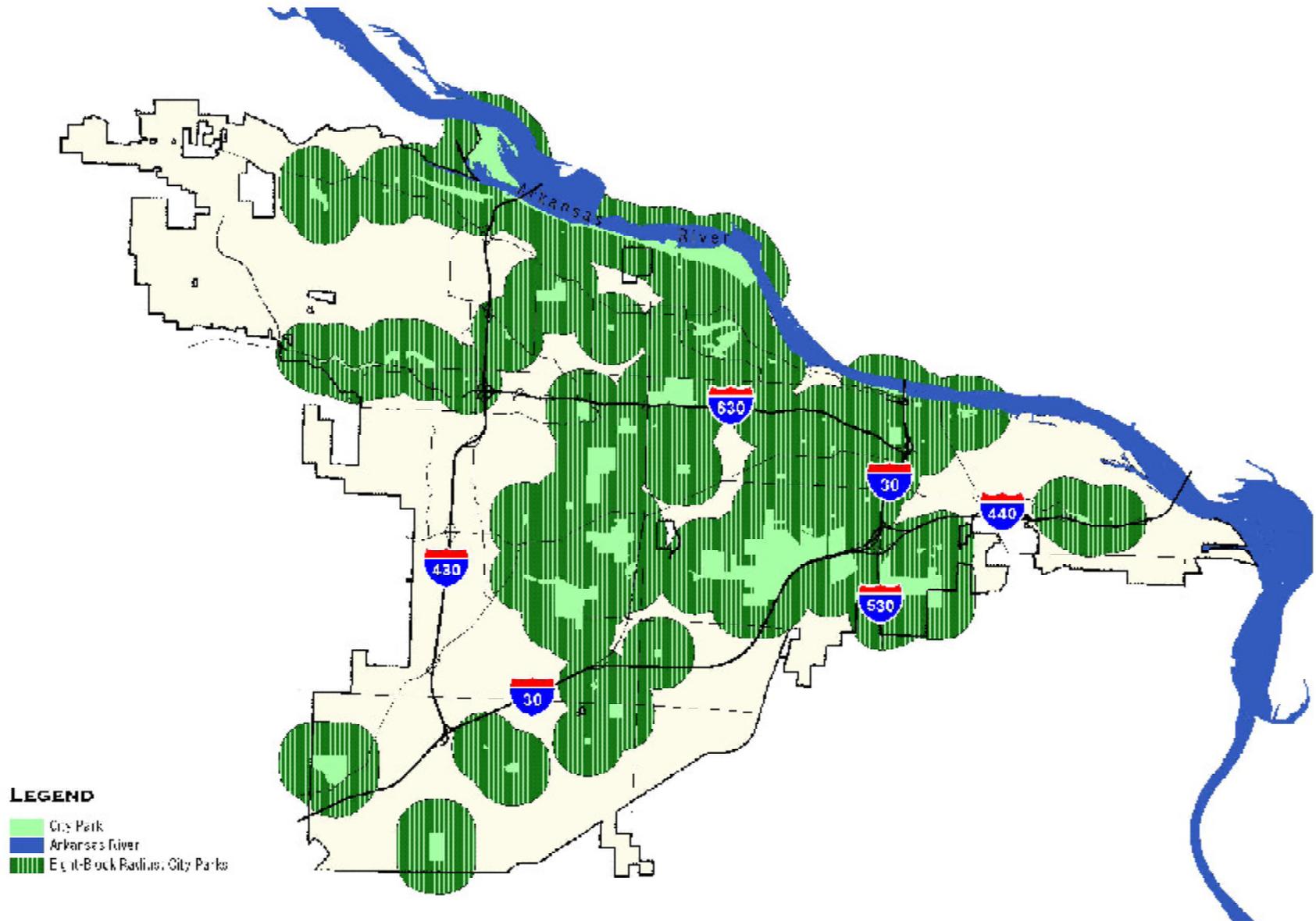


Figure 5.4: Eight-Block Strategy - All Recreation Providers

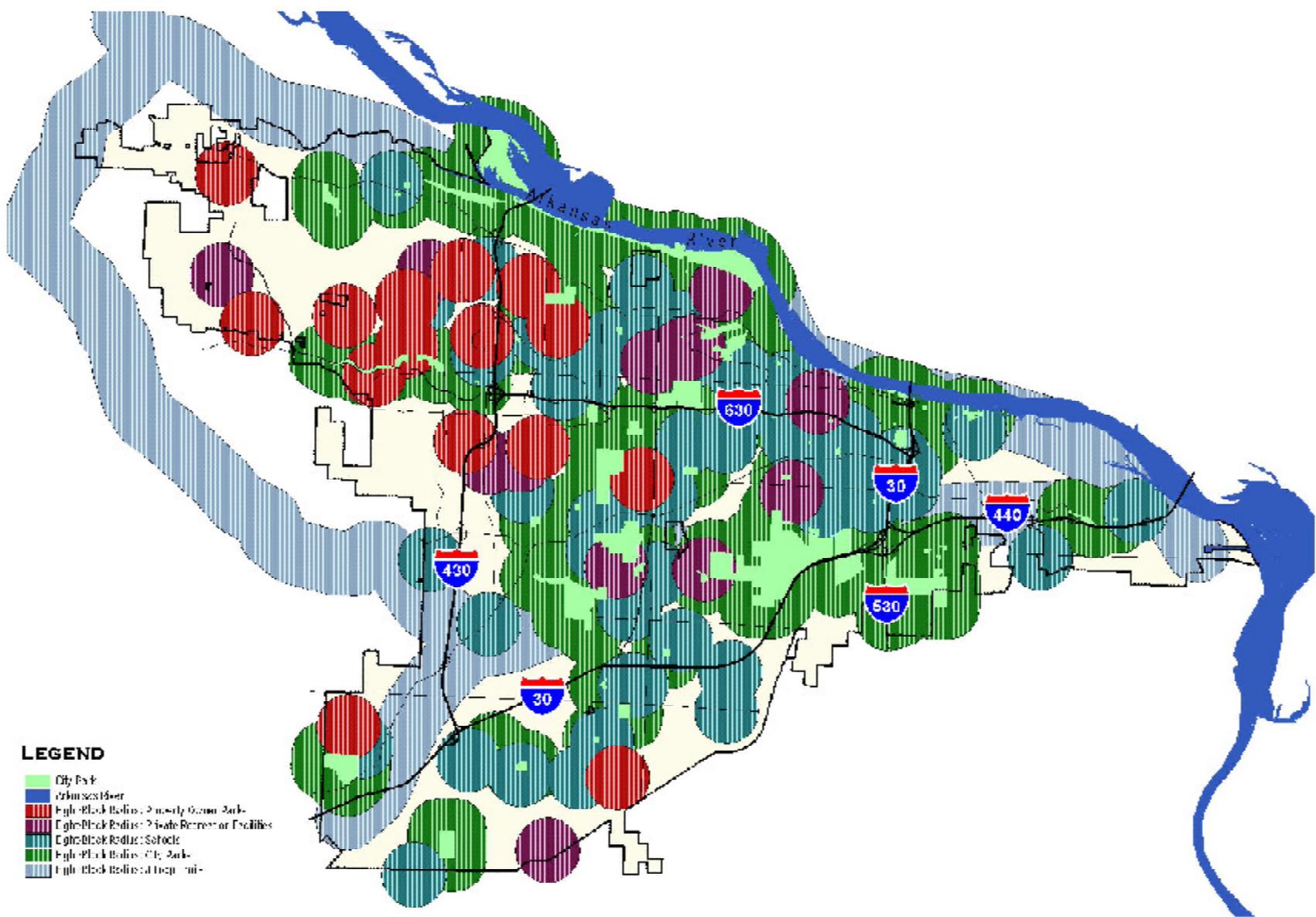


Figure 5.5: Eight-Block Strategy - All Recreation Providers and Future Land Use

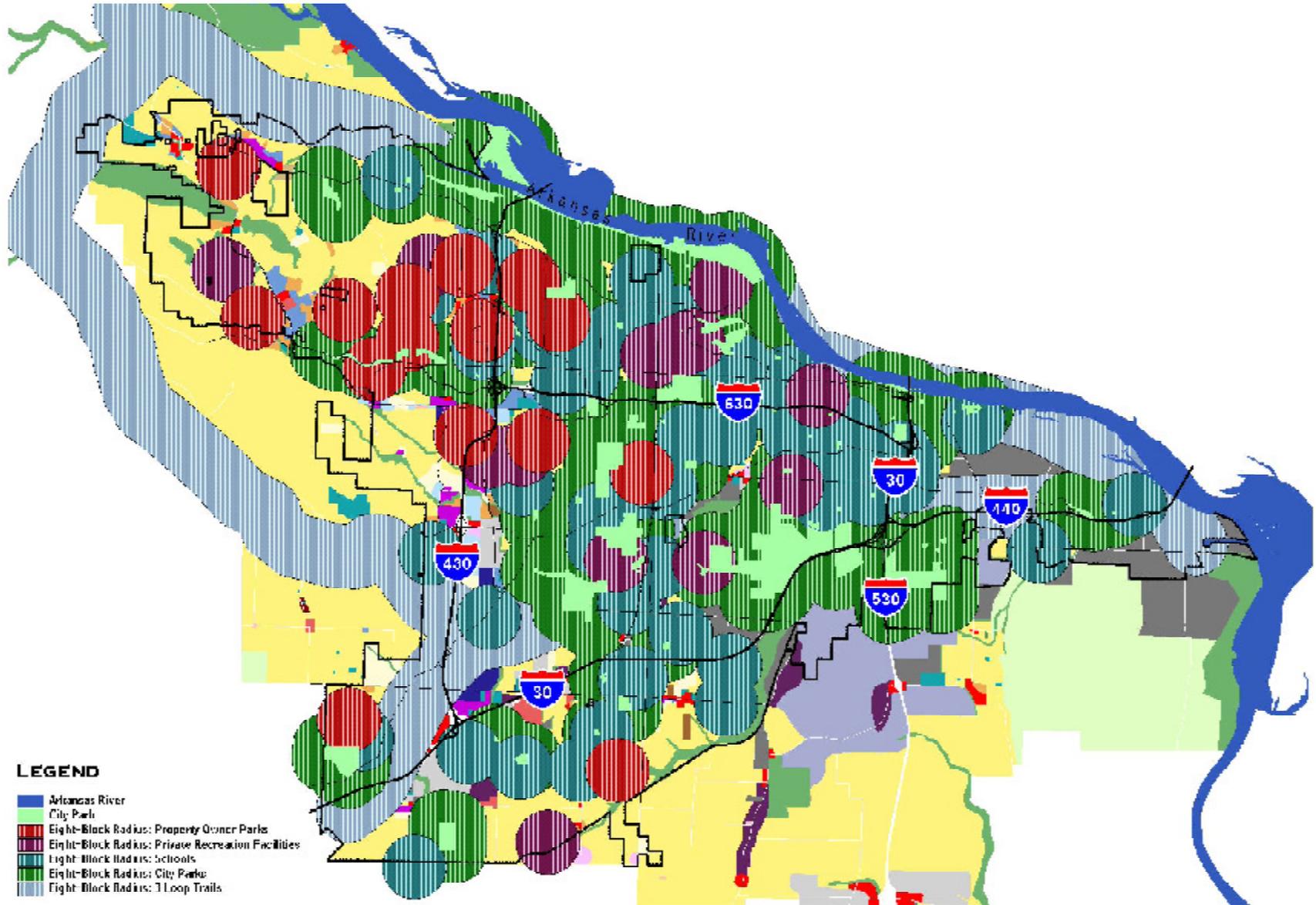
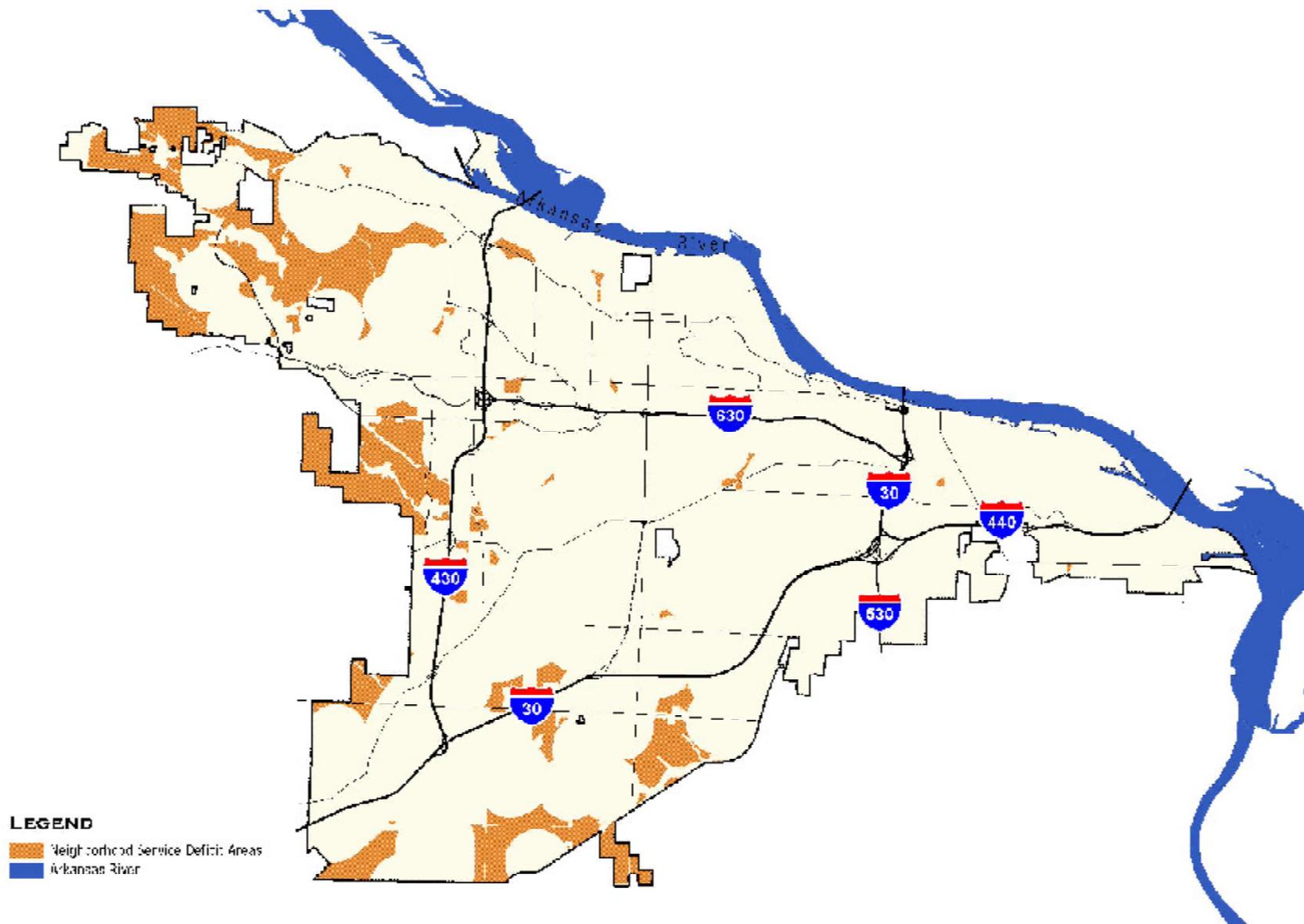


Figure 5.6: Eight-Block Strategy - Neighborhood Service Deficit Areas



s i g n a t u r e f a c i l i t i e s

Signature facilities have been identified in conjunction with the three-trail loop framework and the corresponding physiographic conditions, see Figure 5.7.

In conjunction with the “Take it to the Earth” trail and its interpretive trails along Fourche Creek, a **major educational and interpretive center** to serve both Fourche Bottoms and Gillam Park is recommended. This facility will highlight the Gulf Coastal Plain and the transition of physiographic and geologic conditions. Public and private school students can benefit from such a facility if its resources are incorporated into the educational curriculum. Such a facility may also be developed and/or operated in conjunction with the University of Arkansas.

Two Rivers and its associated unique ecology (cattail marshes and birding) is appropriate for **interpretive kiosks and self-guided trails**. This facility can educate users about the Arkansas River history and its cultural significance for Little Rock and the state. It also provides users with the opportunity to experience the edge of the Ouachita Mountains physiographic region as well as the Arkansas River Valley physiographic region. Two Rivers and Pinnacle Mountain State

Park may enhance each other’s programs by linking each to the other through canoe and trail access.

A major **sports complex** to fulfill many of the sports field deficiencies identified in Chapter Four should be located as suitable land is available. This land should be relatively flat, of little ecological value, have suitable adjacent land uses which will not be affected by light and noise, and be easily accessible by at least one major thoroughfare.

An **outdoor recreation center** should be located along the “Take it to the Extreme” trail, near the center’s anticipated user group. This center should be sited to provide facilities for emerging popular extreme sports such as rappelling, rock climbing, kayaking, etc., and should be located in an area with suitable rugged topography.

A **river-related destination center** along the “Take it to the Edge” trail is appropriate and already underway. This center will include Riverfront Park, the William J. Clinton Presidential Park, a connection to North Little Rock, and other river-related tourist activities. This destination center will firmly anchor Little Rock’s relationship to the Arkansas River.

An **equestrian center** is appropriate if located



A marina is proposed as part of the river-related destination center, a string of parks and open space which extend from Riverfront Park to East Little Rock Park.



along the “Take it to the Extreme” trail’s equestrian loops. The center should be located in a rural location, and should provide both trail and formalized equestrian facilities. Financially self-sustaining boarding and training facilities would be appropriate for such a center.

Recommendations

Specific recommendations regarding these signature facilities are summarized below:

Sports Complex

- Lighted game fields for tournament play
- Regional service
- Baseball/softball (8)
- Soccer (12)
- Football (4)
- Basketball, volleyball, roller hockey, etc.

Equestrian Center

- Equestrian-related educational and riding programs
- Equestrian tournament facilities
- Boarding facilities
- Located along “Take it to the Extreme” challenge trail

River-Related Destination Center

- Collection of water-related parks: Murray, Rebsamen, River Front, William Jefferson Clinto Presidential Park, East Little Rock
- Located along “Take it to the Edge” river front trail

Interpretive Centers

- Educational programming
- Associated with Fourche Creek and Two Rivers physiographies
- Fourche Creek: wetlands, swamp habitat, geologies of Gillam
- Two Rivers: birding, cattail marshes, array of vegetation types
- Interpretive trails
- Canoe trails
- Located along “Take it to the Earth” ecological trail

Outdoor Recreation Center

- “Take it Outside” Center
- Associated with rolling topography of west

Figure 5.7: Signature Facilities

