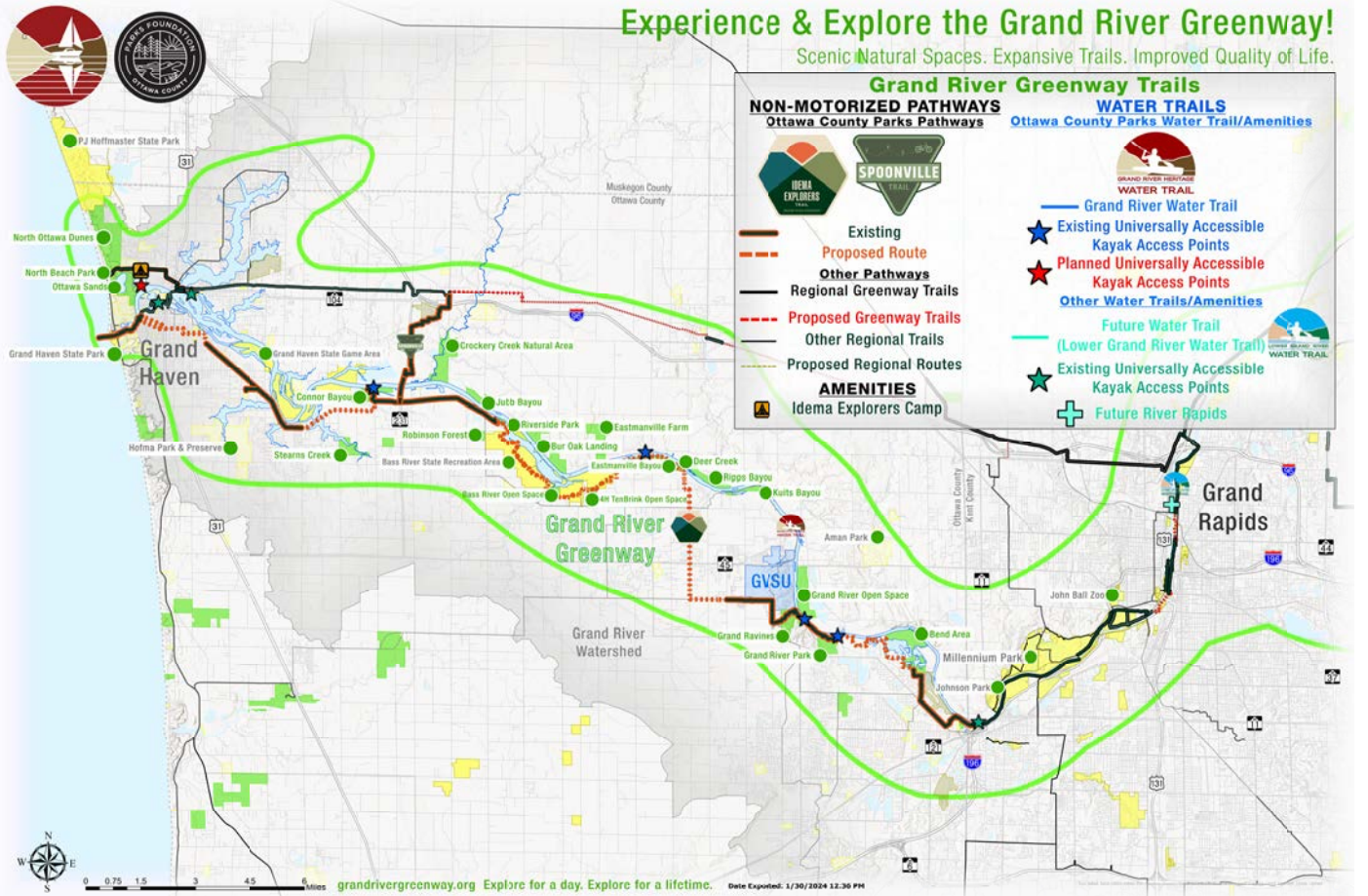


# Grand River Greenway Project Update Winter 2024



## Grand River Greenway Vision

*The Grand River Greenway is a model ecological and cultural corridor along the Grand River. It will preserve significant natural, historical and cultural features as well as promote healthier, happier, and more vibrant communities.*



# Grand River Greenway - Project Stakeholders

*The Grand River Greenway Project is being made possible through a public/private partnership and effort of multiple agencies that includes several stakeholders and supporters.*



## Ottawa County Board of Commissioners

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**Sylvia Rhodea, Vice-Chair**  
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[miOttawa.org/parks](http://miOttawa.org/parks)

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**Lukas Hill**  
**Allison Miedema**  
**Jim Miedema**  
**Paul Sachs**

## Official Public Agency Partners

Allendale Township

City of Grandville

Georgetown Township

Grand Haven Township

Grand Valley State University

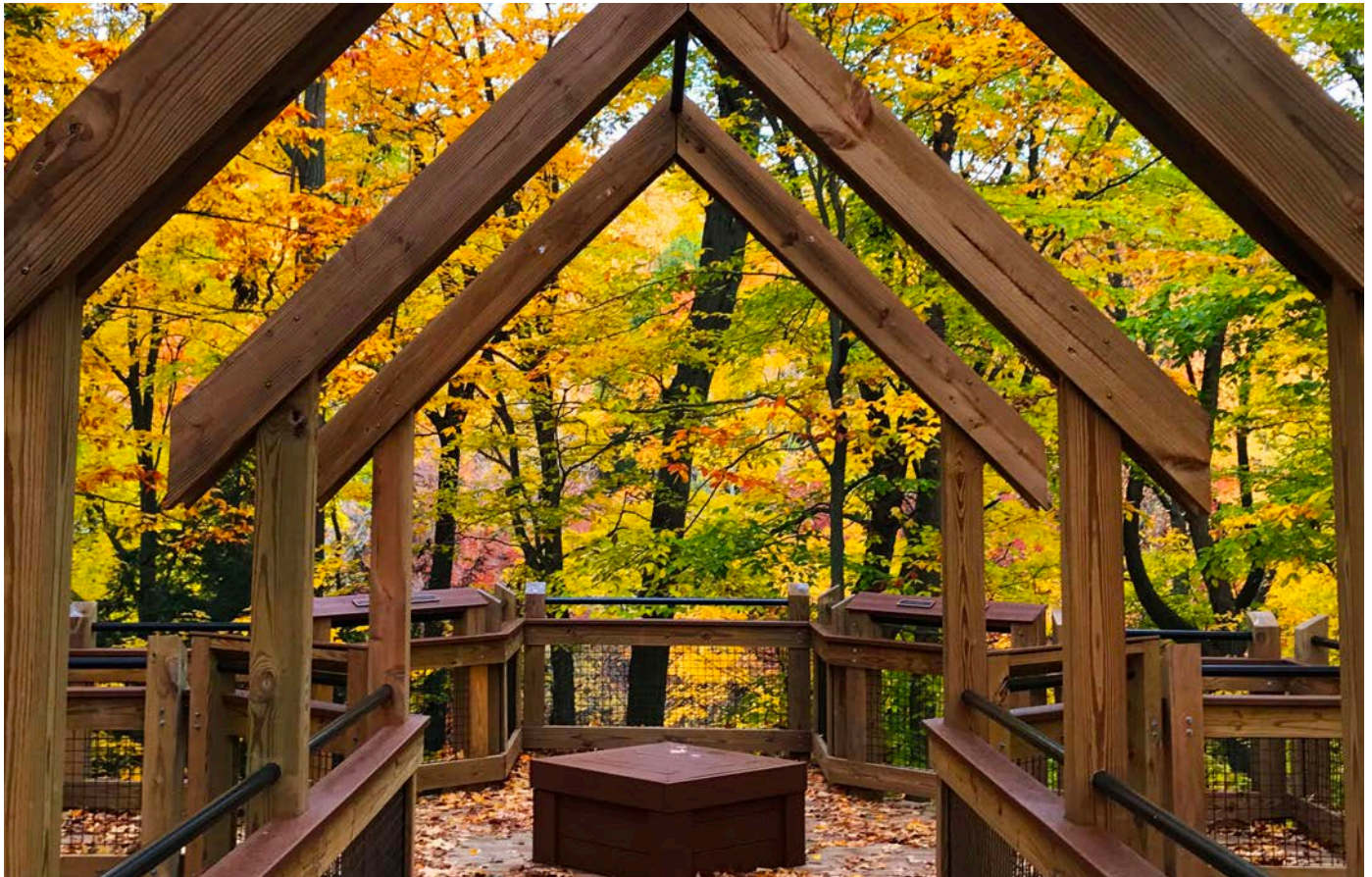
Robinson Township

Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Michigan Department of Transportation

Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund

Ottawa County Road Commission



# Grand River Greenway - Project Stakeholders

The Grand River Greenway Project is being made possible through a public/private partnership and effort of multiple agencies that includes several stakeholders and supporters.



## Grand River Greenway Campaign Committee

**Committee Co-Chairs** Myron Aldrink    Andy DeVries    Jason Shamblin  
Monica Verplank    Dr. Barb Brown    Thomas Haas    Timothy Stoepker  
Samantha Verplank    Wendy Creason    Tom Jackoboice    Al Vanderberg  
Tina Dee    Mark Schmidt

**Past Members**  
Peter Secchia †  
John Scholtz  
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## Ottawa County Parks Foundation Board of Directors

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**Jane Longstreet**  
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**Jason Shamblin, Parks Director**

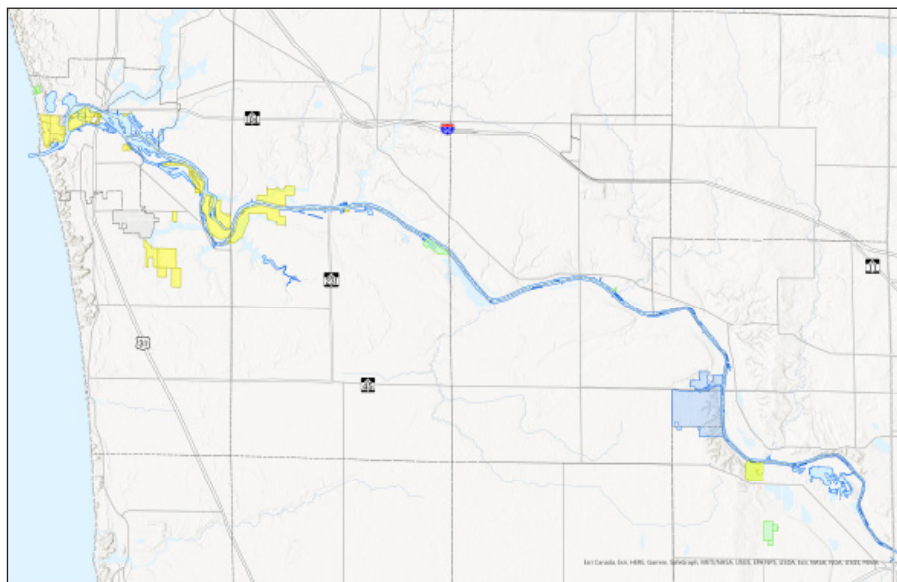
Ottawa County Parks Foundation  
PO Box 314, West Olive, MI 49460  
[ottawacountyparksfoundation.org](http://ottawacountyparksfoundation.org)  
[info@ottawacountyparksfoundation.org](mailto:info@ottawacountyparksfoundation.org)

*Thank you* to our project supporters!

|                                       |  |                                    |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Bill & Bea Idema Foundation           | Jim Zawacki                              | Bill & Marjie Viveen               |
| Meijer Foundation                     | John and Jennifer Essex                  | John & Kathryn Nash                |
| DeVos Family Foundations              | Budge & Marilyn Sherwood                 | Alt, Jonas, & Mercurio Family Fund |
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| Grand Haven Area Community Foundation | Dottie Johnson                           | Andy DeVries                       |
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| Gordon Foods                          | Beacon Recycling, Inc.                   | Damon & Kim McLaughlin             |
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| Jandernoa Foundation                  | Family Fund                              | Dr. Kate Remlinger & Robert Bell   |
| Matt & Holly Maloney                  | Priority Health                          |                                    |

# Grand River Greenway - Project Background

Map Legend: ■ County Parks ■ Other Parks/Public Property ■ GVSU



## 1987-1996: Visioning

In 1989, the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission first identified the concept for the Grand River Greenway:

*To protect land along the river that is important for nature and recreation and then connect the Greenway lands together with a multi-use pathway.*

**2,061** Acres of protected land

**14%** Shoreline protected

**2** Sites managed by Ottawa County Parks

## 1997-2016: Major Expansion

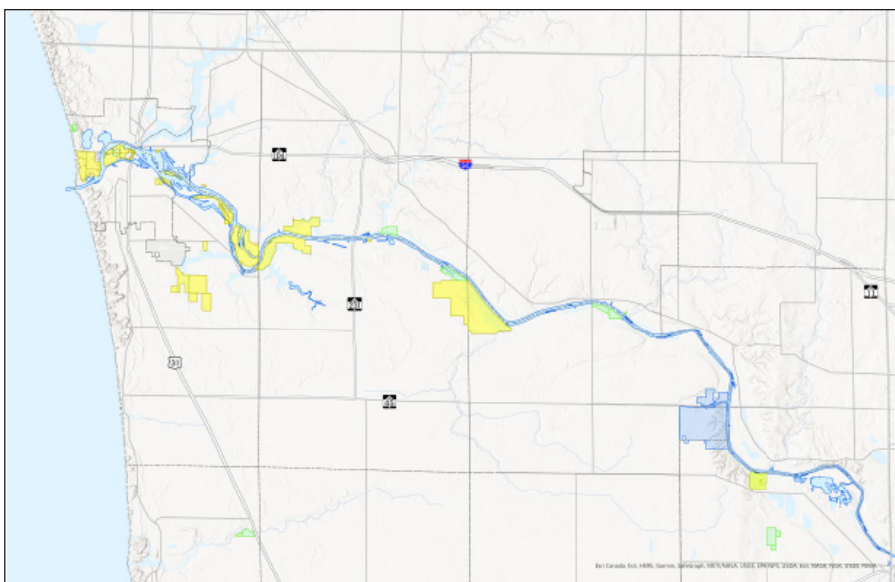
While some progress was made in protecting greenway lands from 1989 to 1996, the Grand River Greenway project did not gain momentum for Ottawa County Parks until the passage of the Parks Millage in 1996.

Major expansions commenced the following year with acquisitions for what would become Eastmanville Bayou and Crockery Creek Natural Area.

**3,354** Acres of protected land

**37%** Shoreline protected

**12** Sites managed by Ottawa County Parks



## 2017-Present: Connecting

In 2017, following the second renewal of the Parks Millage and the launch of the Grand River Greenway Capital Campaign, the Greenway project shifted focus to:

1. Complete purchases of core Greenway properties
2. Complete the Idema Explorers Trail

The Idema Explorers Trail is being constructed on the south side of the Grand River and will connect Grand Haven to the regional trail system in Kent County, connect Greenway lands together, connect to key destinations (such as the GVSU Allendale Campus), and provide a nature-based hiking/biking experience with several extended sections of trail through parks and along river or waterfront.

**7,206** Acres of protected land

**39%** Shoreline protected

**19** Sites managed by Ottawa County Parks



# Grand River Greenway - Conservation



*"The corridor is recognized as one of the richest areas in the state for species of greatest conservation concern and biodiversity, is a focal area for Lake Michigan fisheries restoration, is above-average for climate resiliency, and lies along a globally recognized Important Bird Area"*

*- Audubon Great Lakes assessment of Grand River Coastal Corridor*

## Project Facts

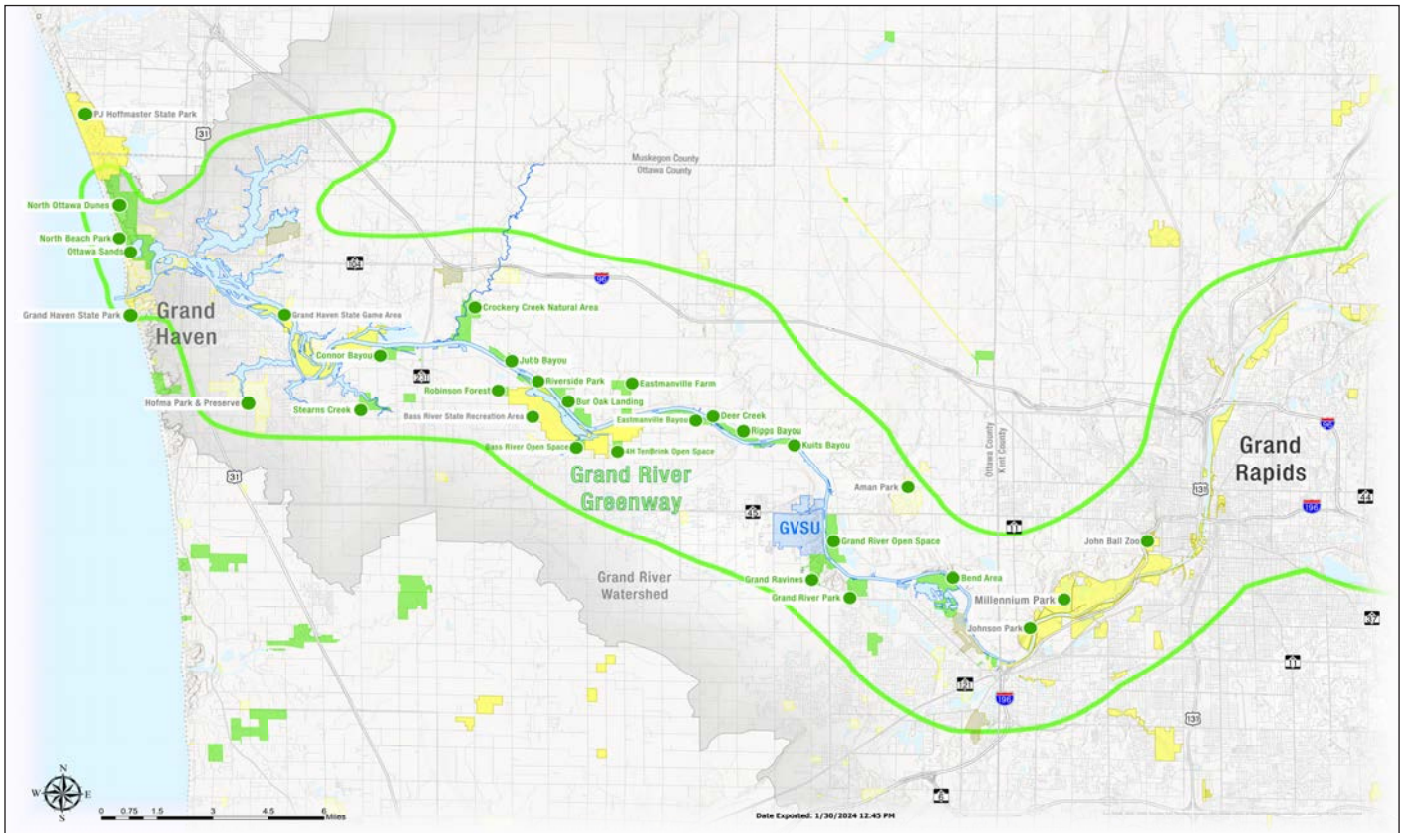
- Picturesque landscapes: ravines, marshlands, bayous, floodplain forests, and restored prairies
- 31 miles of publicly owned shoreline (out of an estimated 50 miles of undeveloped shoreline)
- 3,500+ acres of wetlands preserved
- 3,750+ acres of floodplain preserved
- Key fish spawning and migratory bird habitat and some of the most biodiverse land in the county
- Prevention and removal of invasive species in hundreds of acres of natural land
- Ecosystem creation/restoration, including 75 acres of planned forest restoration

**8,535** Total Public Acres

**31** Total Miles of Protected Riverfront

**39%** of Riverfront Protected

**212** Acreage Added with Greenway Funds



# Grand River Greenway - Idema Explorers Trail



## Project Facts

- 36.5-mile multi-use, ADA-accessible trail
  - 16 miles of trail through parks
  - 12 miles of trail along waterfront areas
- Connects users to:
  - 96 miles of regional trails (future: 250 miles)
  - 46 public parks with 65 miles of park trails
  - M-231 Grand River Bridge Trail
  - Lake Michigan
  - Ottawa Sands
  - Millennium Park
  - GVSU Allendale Campus
  - Several communities/business districts
  - 20+ locations to fish

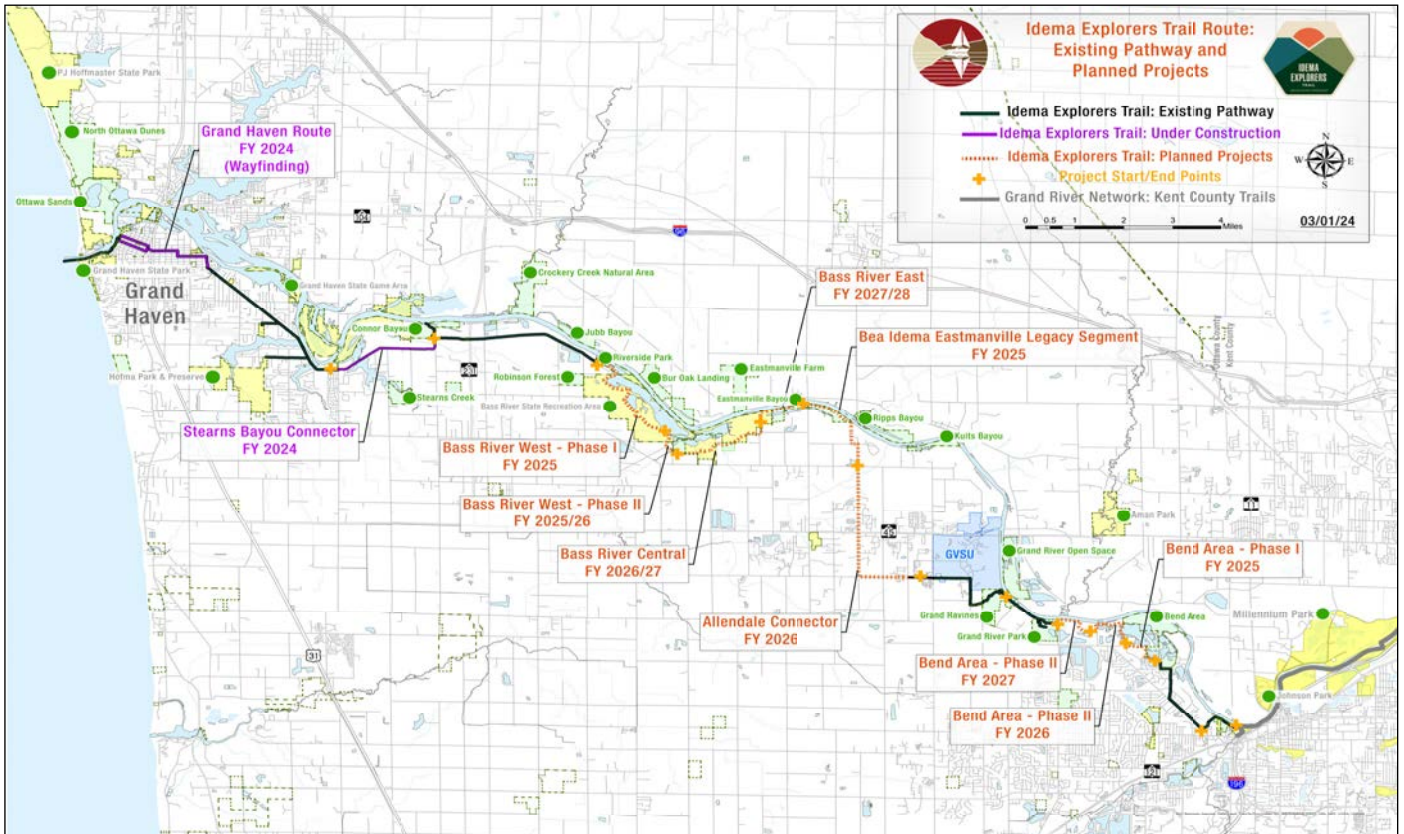
**36.5** Trail Miles

**16** Miles of Trail Completed

**18+** Miles of Trail in Progress

**113** Regional Trail Miles Now Connected

**10** Parks Now Connected



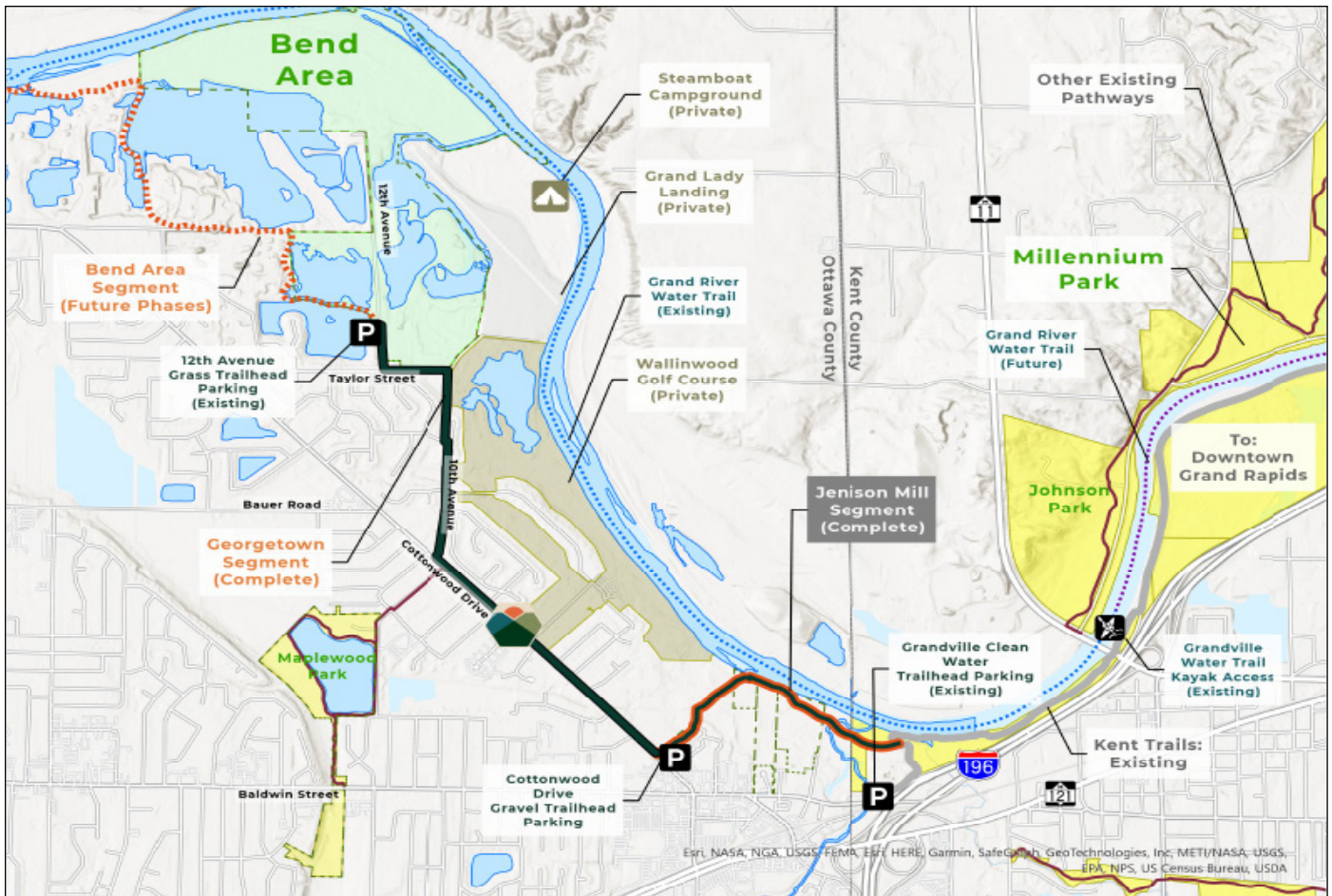
# Idema Explorers Trail - Jenison Mill Segment



Project Status: Complete

Features:

- Connection to trails in Kent County
  - Access to Millennium Park & downtown Grand Rapids
  - 85 miles of direct and indirect trail connections
  - Connects 2,345 acres of park land
- “Secchia Gateway Arch and Plaza” at County border
- Bridge and boardwalk over Rush Creek and floodplain



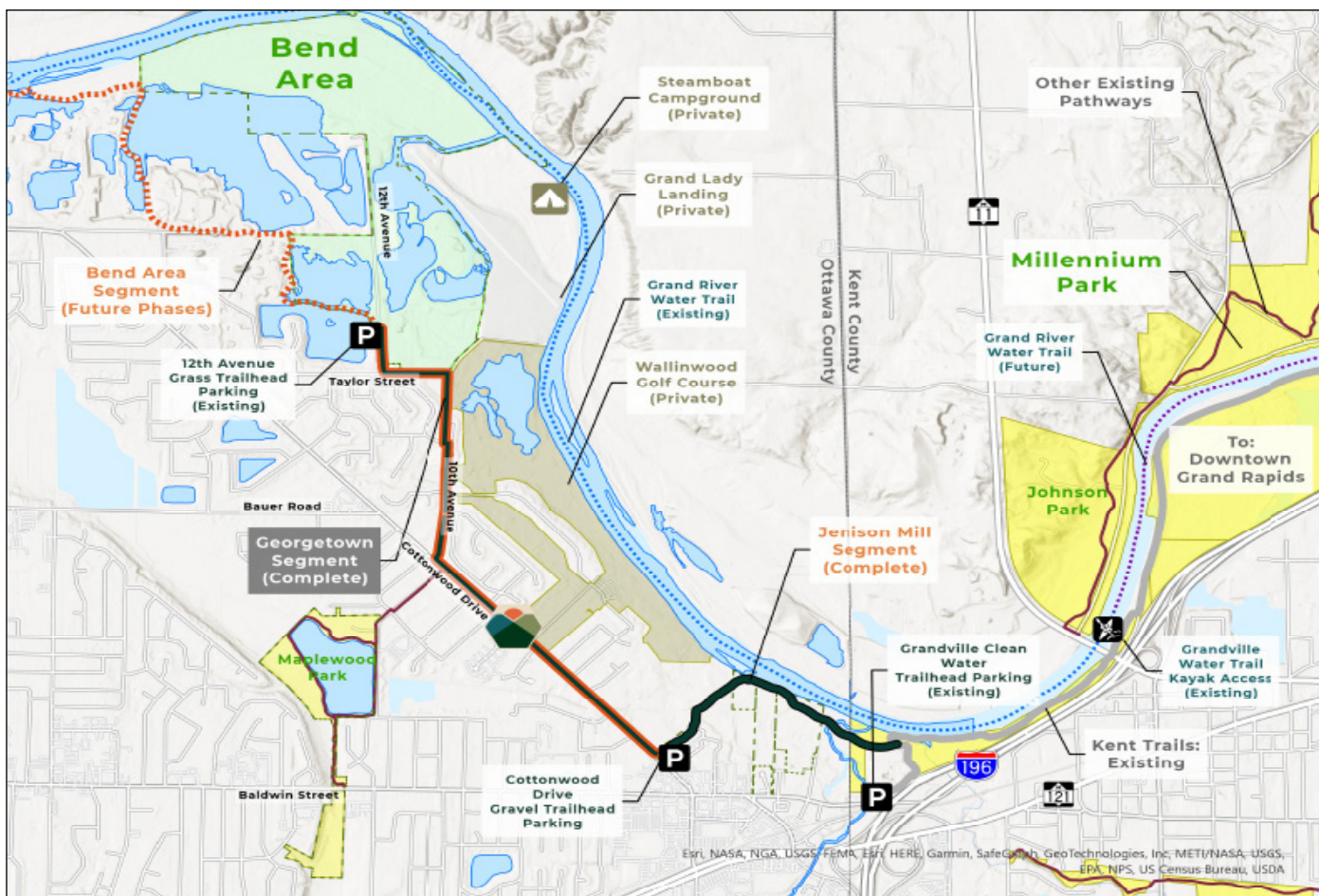
# Idema Explorers Trail - Georgetown Segment



Project Status: Complete

Features:

- Connects expanding Bend Area Open Space property to Kent County
- Connects business districts in Jenison to Georgetown Township neighborhoods
- Grass/gravel trailhead on 12th Avenue with wayfinding
- Connections to Bend Area hiking trail system, which includes 4+miles of natural surface trails with waterfront views and riverfront loop





# Idema Explorers Trail - Bend Area Segment

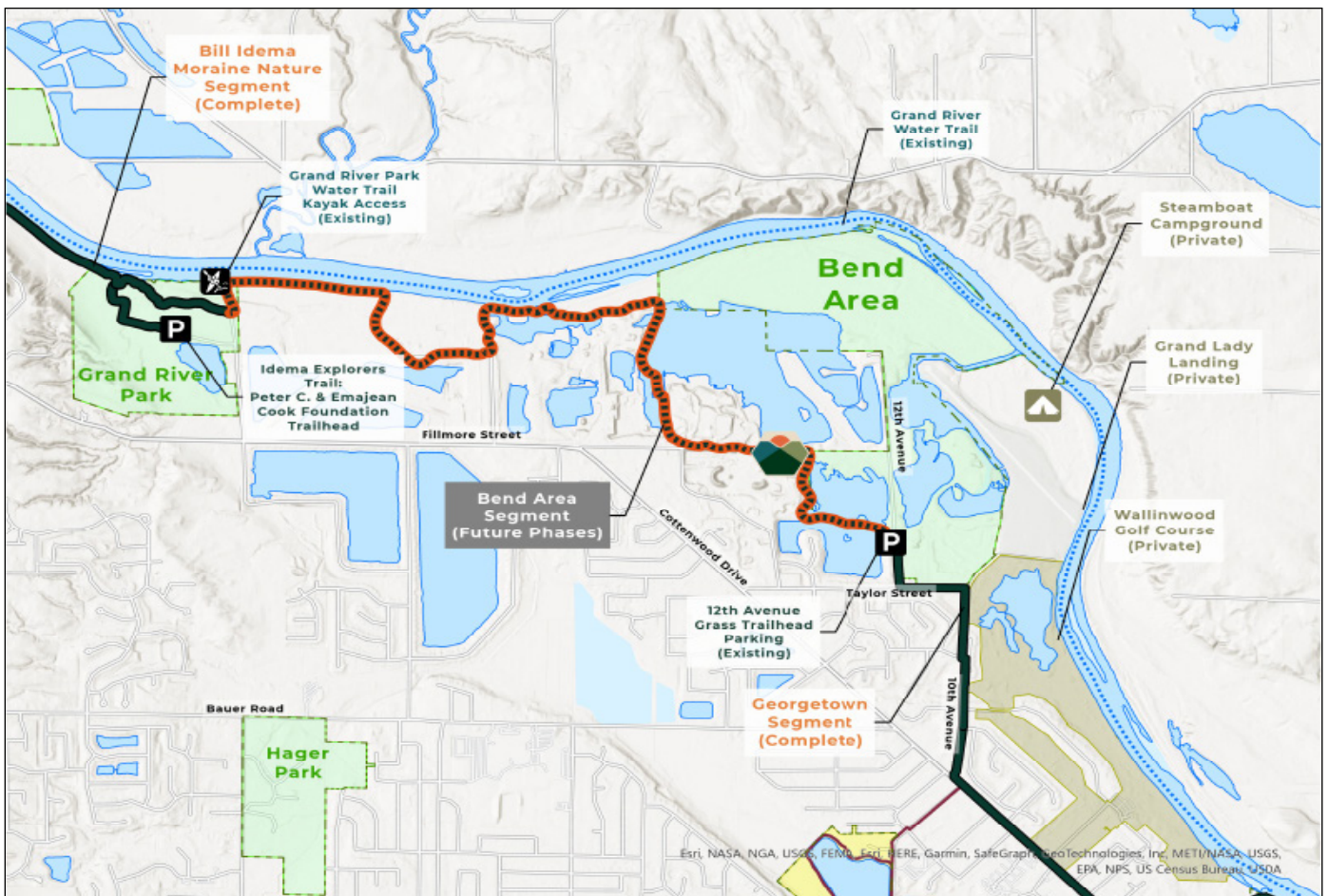


## Project Status:

- Acquisition: In process (250+ acres targeted)
- Design: Will commence following acquisitions
- Construction: TBD

## Planned Features:

- Scenic riverside/waterfront views
- Lush sections of wooded wetlands
- Connects Bend Area to Grand River Park
- Trail segment will be a central feature of future Bend Area park
- Access to future park amenities (lake, swimming beach, playground)



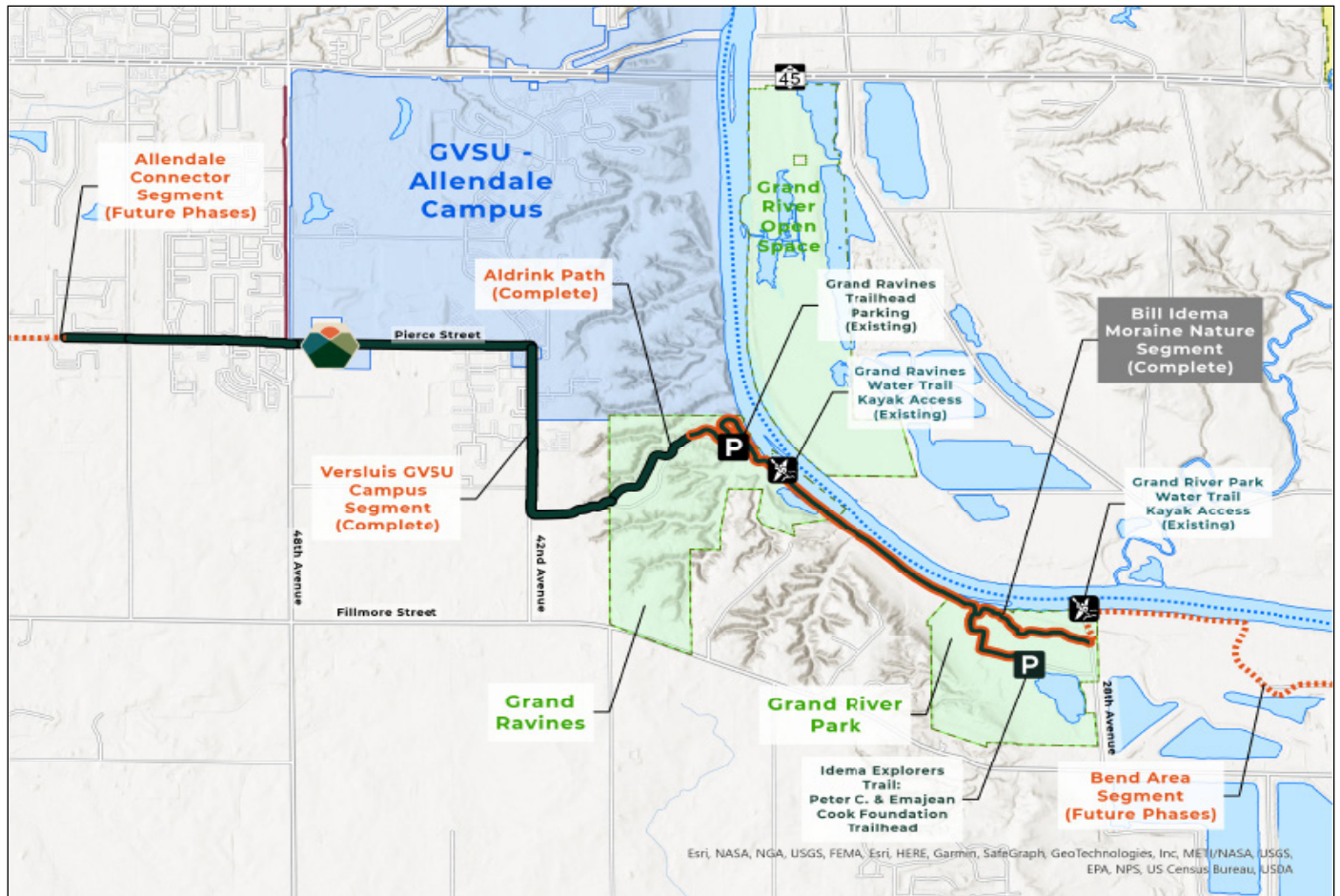
# Idema Explorers Trail -Bill Idema Moraine Nature Segment



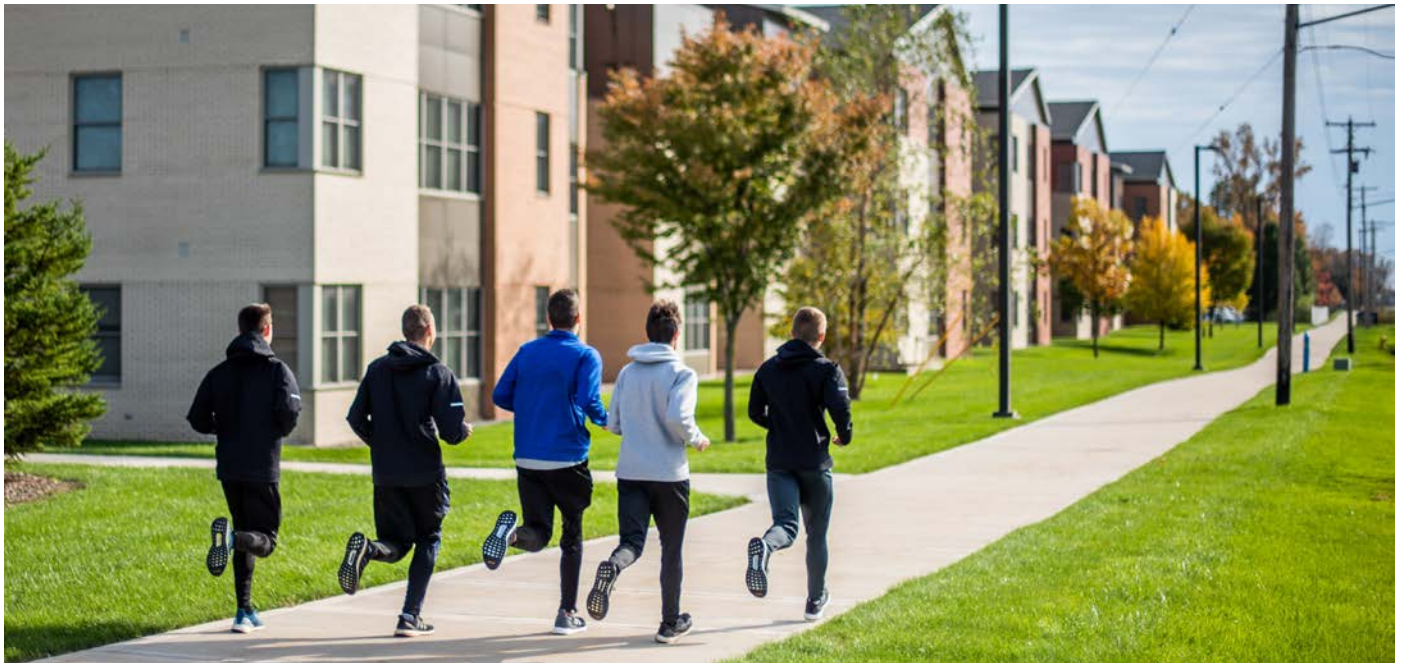
Project Status: Complete

Features:

- Scenic riverside/waterfront views
- Ascent/descent from top of ravines to river level
- Connects Grand River Park to Grand Ravines (364 Acres)
- Trailhead access at Grand River Park
- Access to modern restroom facilities on both sides of the trail
- Access to hiking trail systems at Grand River Park and Grand Ravines (nearly 9 miles of trails)



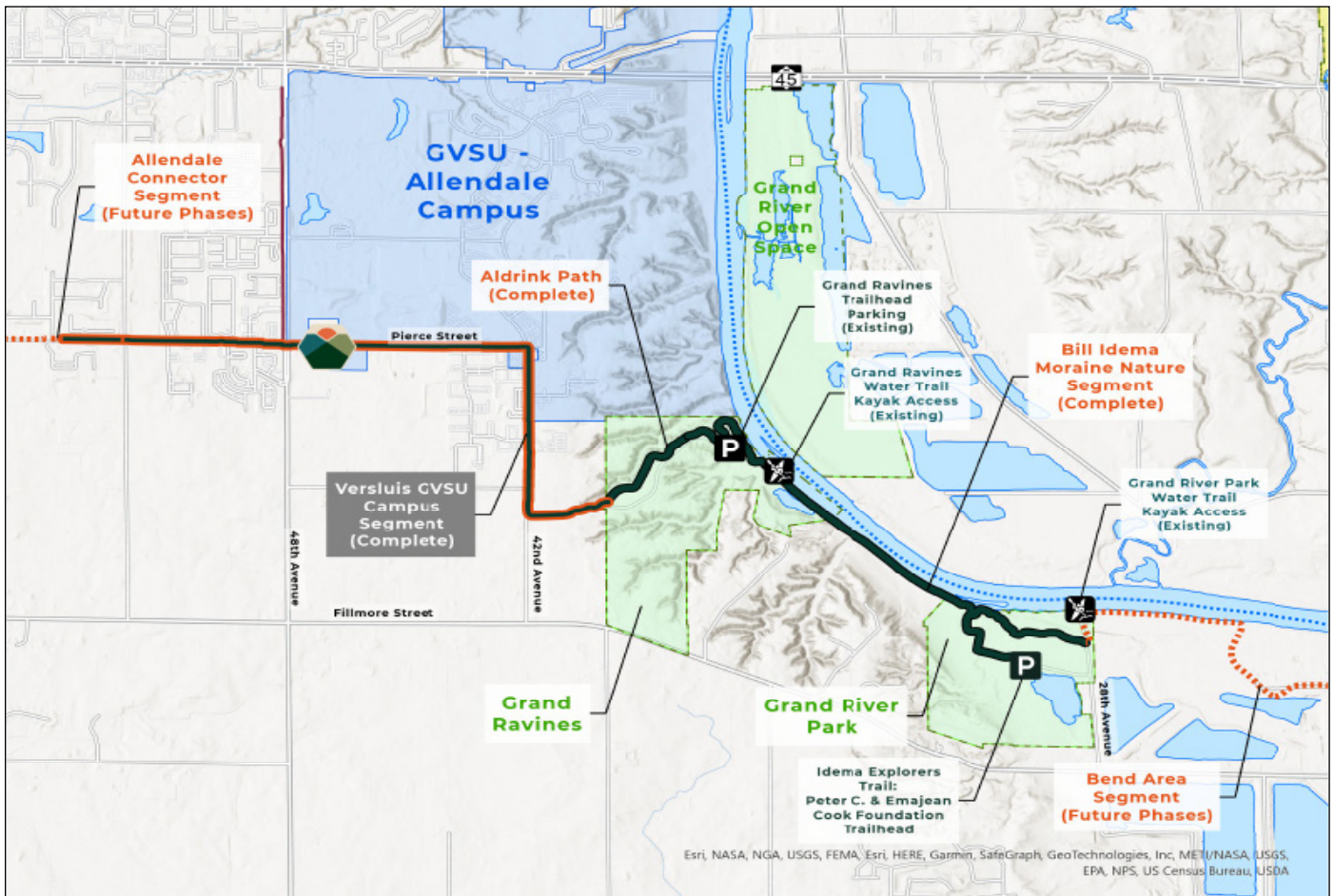
# Idema Explorers Trail - Versluis GVSU Campus Segment



Project Status: Complete

Features:

- Safe connection from GVSU Allendale Campus/Student Housing to Grand Ravines
- Connections to campus pedestrian/bike system
  - Access to campus amenities such as campus store, restaurants, and coffee shops
- Connections to M-45 Business District
  - Access to amenities such as food and lodging
- Access to The Rapid transit system



# Idema Explorers Trail - Allendale Segment

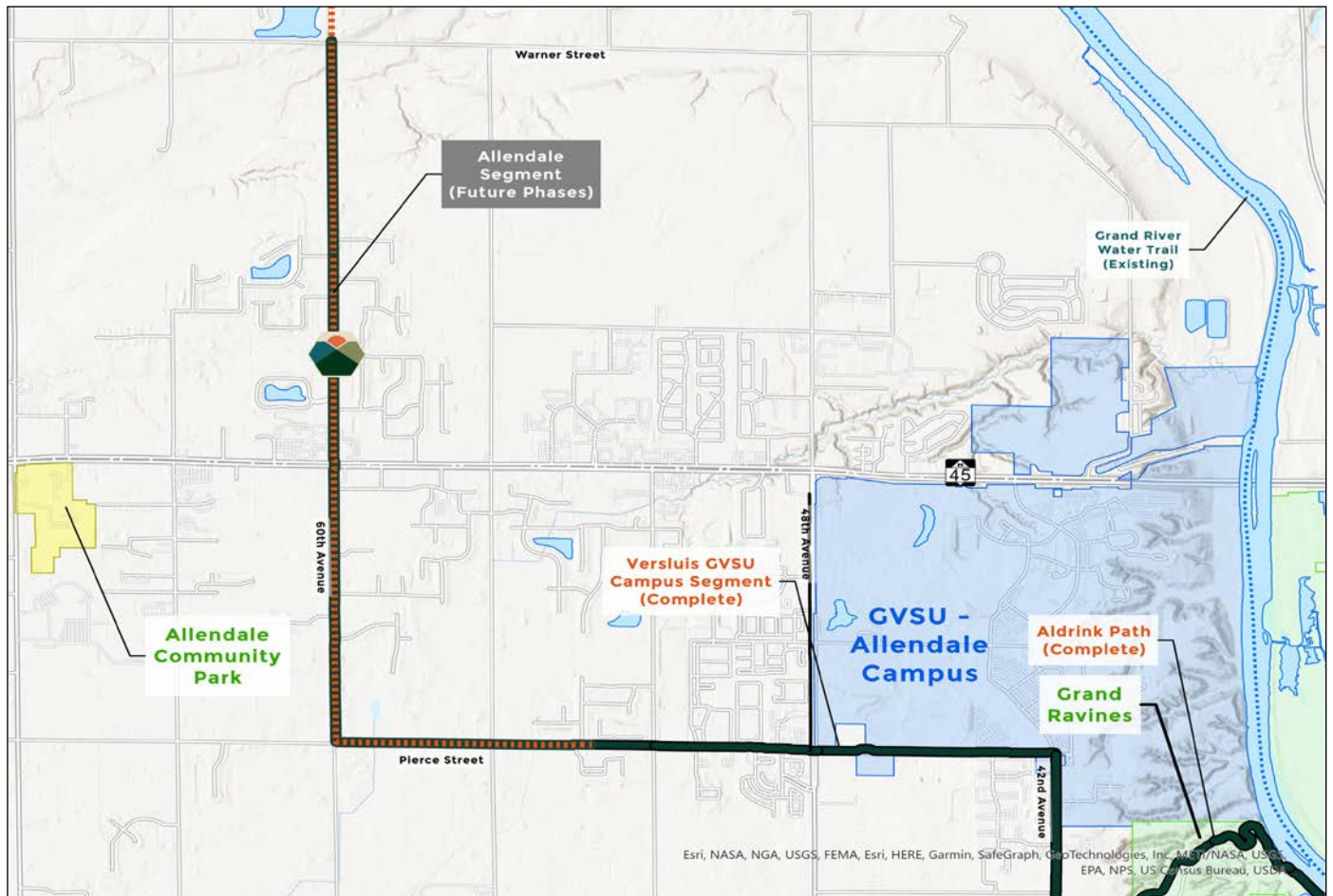


## Project Status:

- Acquisition: Easements may be sought
- Design: In process
- Construction: TBD

## Planned Features:

- Connects Allendale neighborhoods to:
  - Greenway Parks
  - M-45 Business District
  - GVSU Allendale campus
- Trail segment could be spine of larger township trail system



# Idema Explorers Trail - Bea Aldrink Eastmanville Legacy Segment

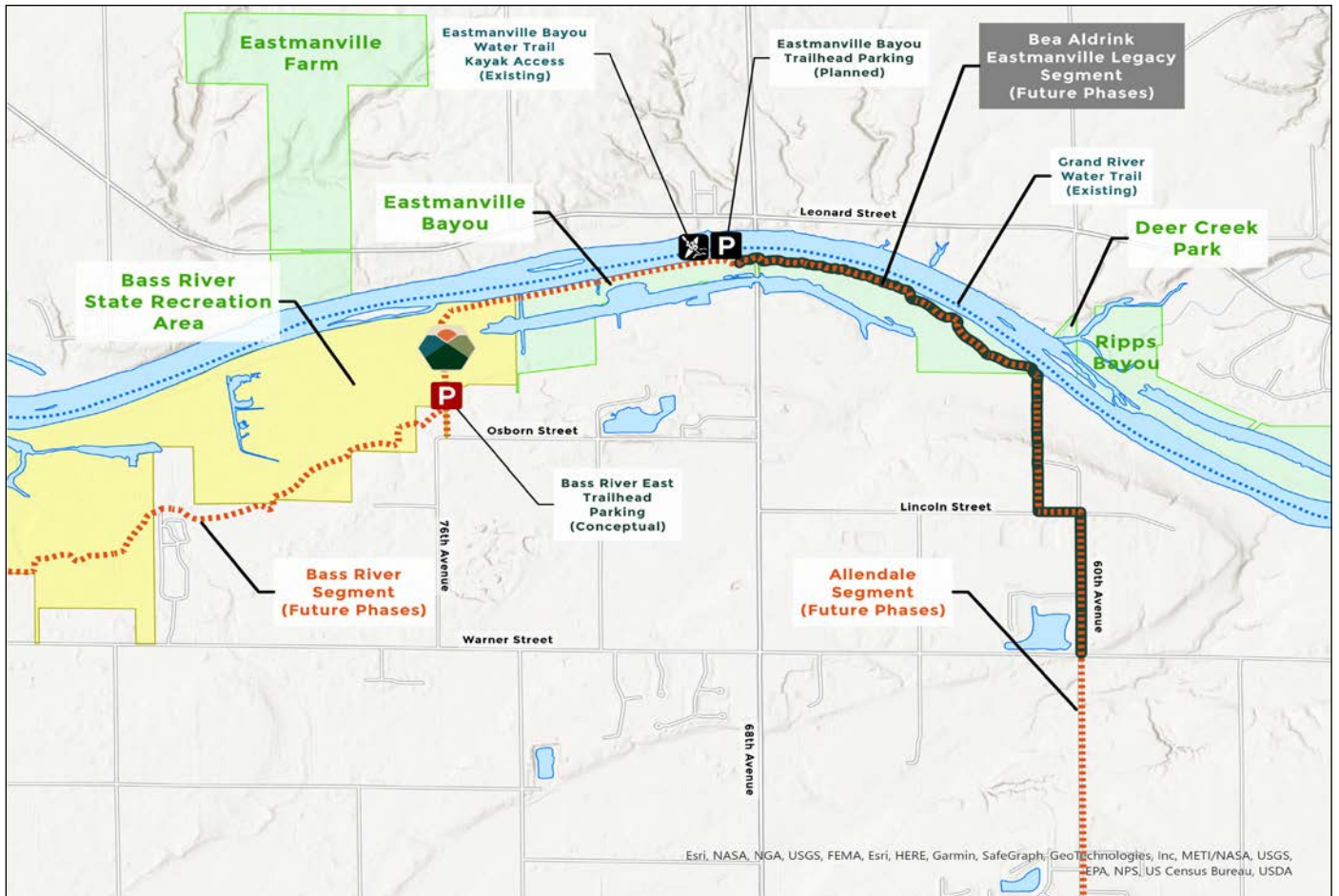


## Project Status:

- Acquisition: One easement remaining
- Design: Complete
- Permitting: In process
- Construction: 2025 (Tentative)

## Planned Features:

- Access to Eastmanville Bayou from Allendale
- Scenic mile-long stretch of trail along Grand River and Eastmanville Bayou/wetlands
- Access to remote Virginia bluebell area
- East terminus of possible 9-mile stretch off road and in park land



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, US Census Bureau, USDA

# Idema Explorers Trail - Bass River Segment

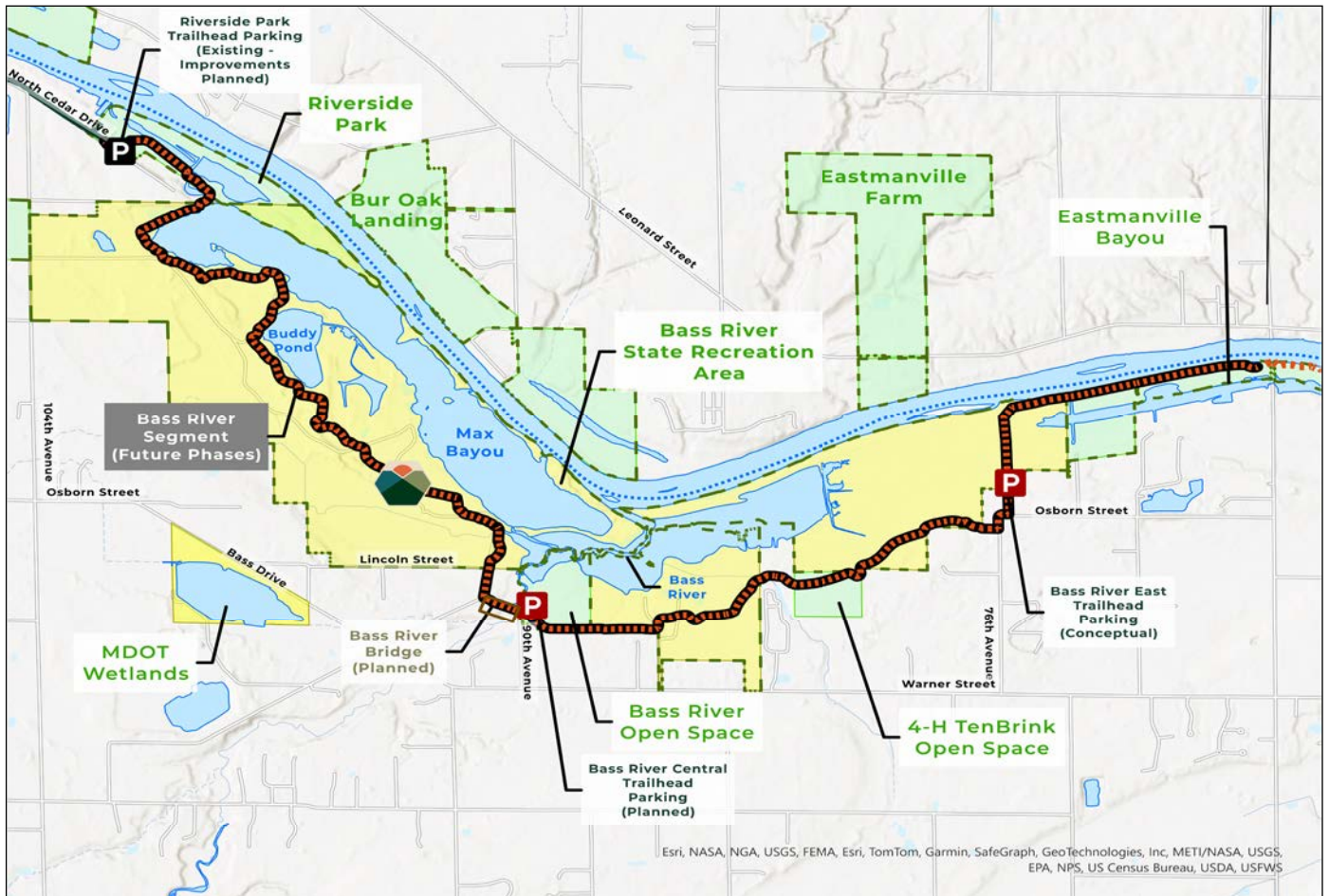


## Project Status:

- Acquisition: In process
  - 80 acres acquired to-date
  - Some additional acres targeted
- Design: In process
- Construction:
  - Phase I Targeted for 2024/25

## Planned Features:

- Scenic riverside/waterfront views
- Central area of possible 9-mile stretch of trail off road and in park land
- Varied landscapes - woodland, floodplain forest and wetlands, open grasslands
- Bridge over Bass River



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, US Census Bureau, USDA, USFWS

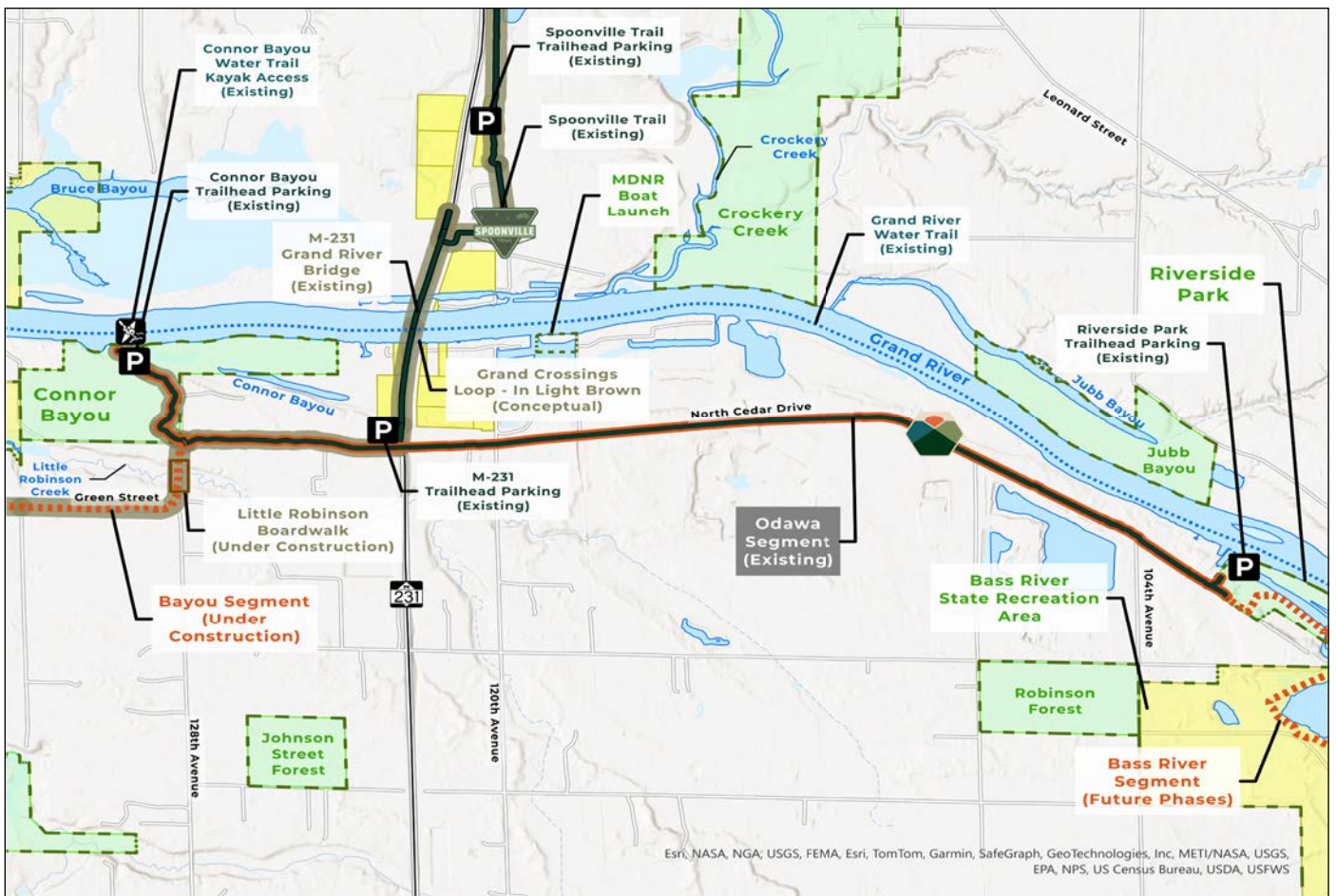
# Idema Explorers Trail - Odawa Segment



Project Status: Complete

Features:

- Connects Connor Bayou to Riverside Park, with wooded route through Connor Bayou
- Connects to M-231 Grand River Bridge and trail network on north side of Grand River
  - Bridge trail features scenic views of river as well as Connor Bayou and Bruce Bayou
- Part of possible “Grand Crossings” loop
- Trailhead access at M-231 Bridge
- Access to MDNR 120th Avenue Boat Launch
- West terminus of possible 9-mile stretch of trail off-road and in park land



# Idema Explorers Trail - Bayou Segment

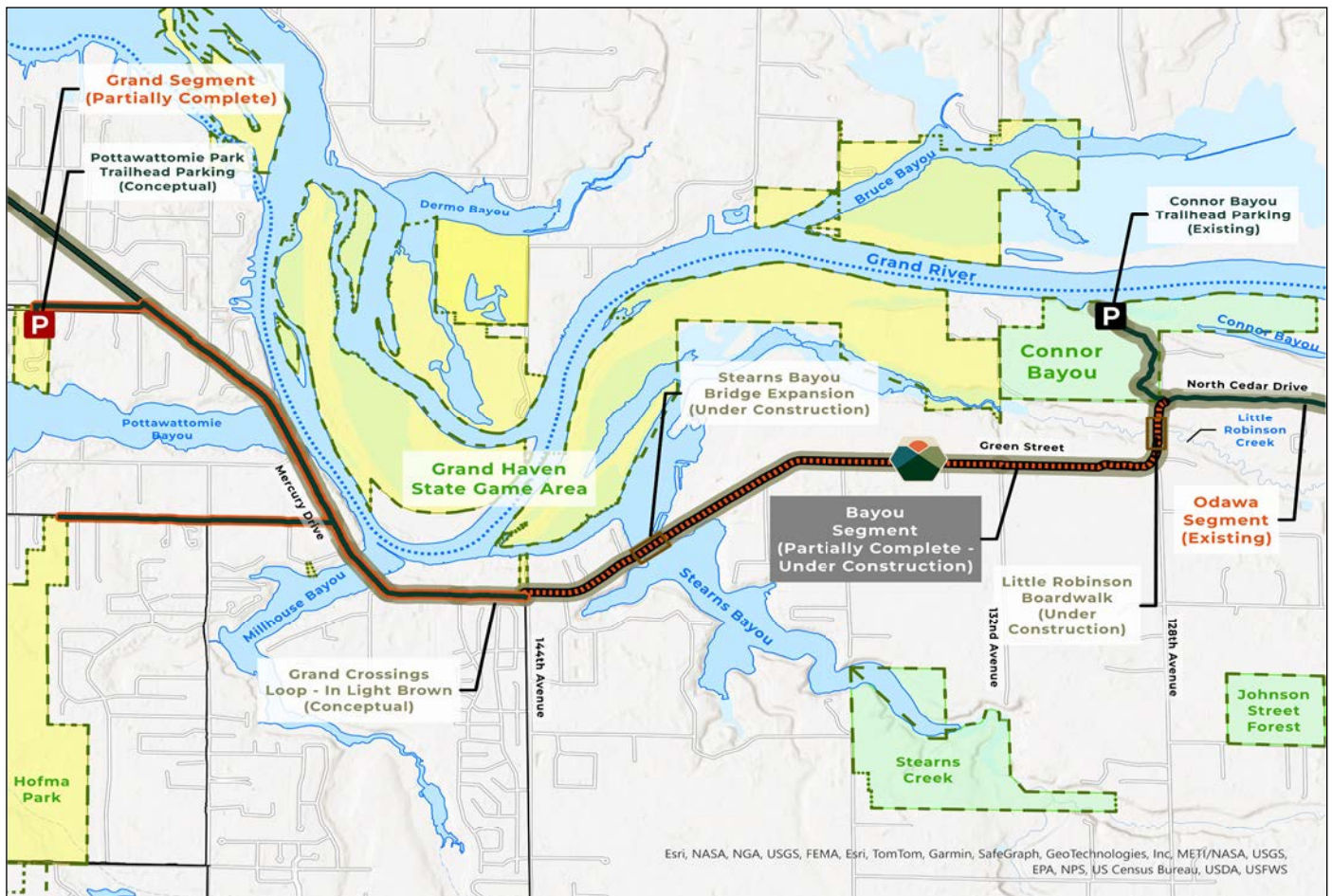


## Project Status:

- Acquisition: Complete
- Design: Complete
- Permitting: Complete
- Construction underway

## Planned Features:

- Scenic riverside/waterfront views, including a series of Grand River bayous
- Expanded bridge over Stearns Bayou
- Connects Grand Haven area to Greenway parks
- Connects Grand Haven area to M-231 Grand River Bridge
- Part of possible “Grand Crossings” loop





# Idema Explorers Trail - Grand & Boardwalks Segments

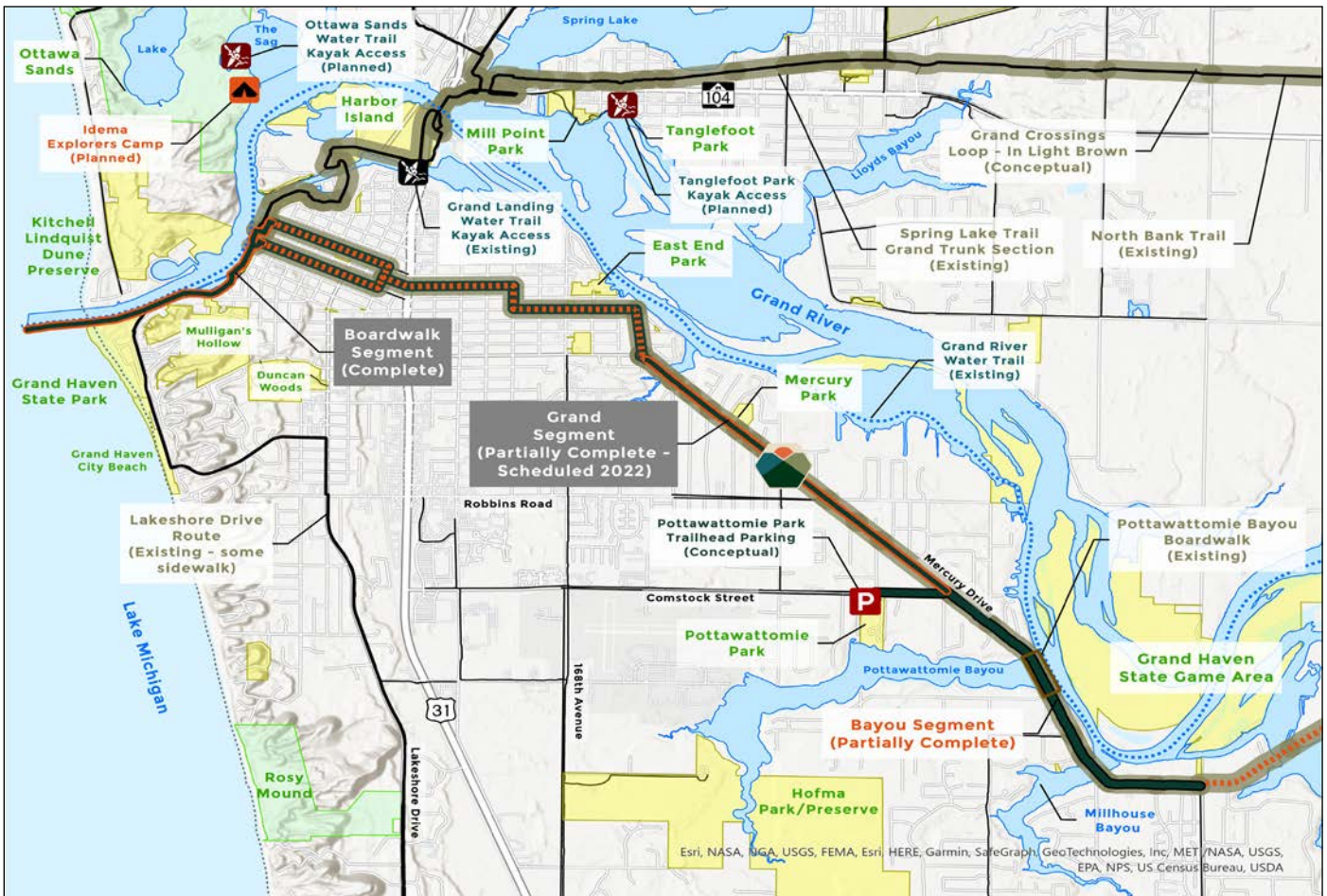


## Project Status:

- Design: In process
- Route Designation: 2024

## Planned Features:

- Connects Grand Haven to Greenway
- Connection to downtown Grand Haven & Boardwalk
- Connection to Lake Michigan
- Access to several parks
- Part of possible “Grand Crossings” loop
- On-street route through Grand Haven neighborhoods





## Project Status : Complete

In 2021, a master plan was completed for Ottawa Sands which focused on a “regenerative approach.” Overuse and overdevelopment were identified as top concerns during the master plan community engagement process. Additionally, there was a strong commitment among staff and stakeholders not only to avoid overuse and overdevelopment of Ottawa Sands, but also to preserve and enhance the “sublime experience” that has enchanted so many. With this in mind, a painstaking effort was undertaken to craft a balanced Master Plan that maintains the serene aesthetic features of the site while also enhancing ecological health and expanding access. Details about specific elements of the regenerative approach are provided below.

- Restoration and Enhancement to 238 acres (69% of the site)
  - Active ecological enhancements to at least 26 acres (8% of site)
    - Help wildlife thrive by increasing biodiversity through wetland creation and restoration
    - “Terraced” shoreline along Grand River to prevent erosion and improve flood storage
  - Site sculpting for recreational improvements will provide aesthetic and ecological benefits
  - “Enhanced landform buffers” will screen different activity areas from view, preserving aesthetics
  - Diversified terrain important for habitat in areas left
  - Proposed native landscaping efforts will diversify site, improving habitat for wildlife
- Limited areas of active recreational improvements
  - Only 8% of site proposed for improvements (only 1% of new development in coastal corridor)
  - Recreational areas significantly reduced from Trust Fund grant concept plan (30-acre RV Park removed)
  - Recreational sites reduced from initial Master Plan proposal (3 camping areas across site combined to one)
  - Active sites limited to previously distributed areas and will stabilize these sites
- Enhancements will integrate high performance green infrastructure which will benefit ecological health of park
  - “Bio-swales” and rain gardens
  - Constructed wetlands for wastewater
  - Green roofs
  - Rainwater harvesting
  - Alternative energy sources being investigated where possible, including solar panels
- Recreational enhancements will drive removal of invasive species prevalent in some areas of park
  - Thick honeysuckle at campground otherwise very difficult and expensive to remove
- Restoration and site enhancements will provide “a visible, exciting demonstration and education resource to illustrate the potential to re-establish increasingly health and diverse ecologies on degraded sites”

# Grand River Greenway - Ottawa Sands Eco-Enhancements



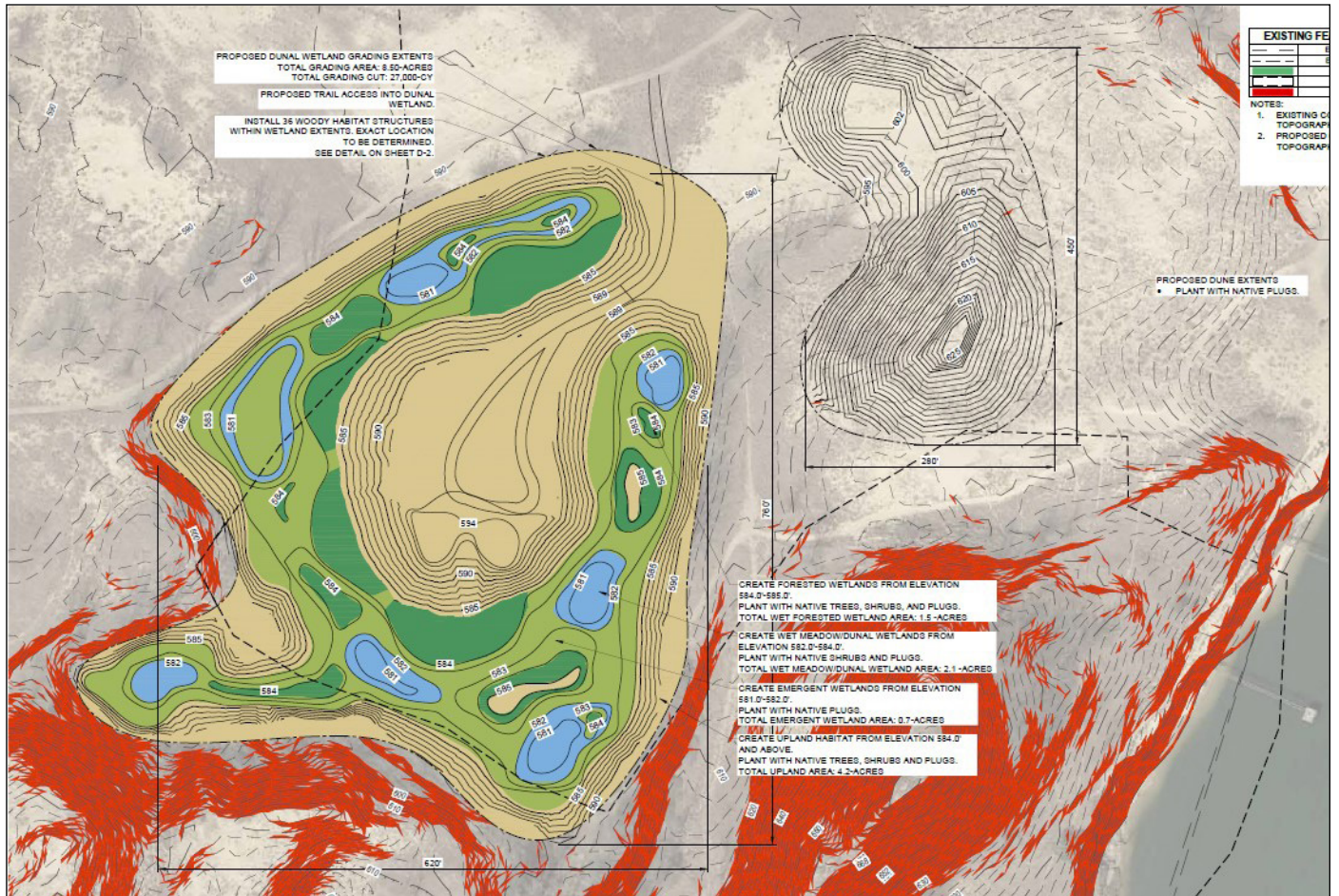
## Project Status

Through Sustain Our Great Lakes and MDNR Fisheries Habitat grants, the first phase of “regenerative” ecological enhancements is underway at Ottawa Sands.

- Design: Complete
- Permitting: In process
- Construction: Scheduled for Fall 2023

## Planned Features:

- One mile of shoreline enhancements to the mining lake to improve biodiversity
- Regrade shoreline to encourage wetland transition area
- Creation of four acres of wetland near southeast end of the property.
- Creation of new 3-acre 30'-tall dune that will create more “natural” viewshed





## Project Status

Through a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant, Ottawa County Parks is coordinating with several partners to embark on an engineering feasibility study of additional eco-enhancements at Ottawa Sands as well as reviewing possible eco-enhancements at Harbor Island. This project is expected to commence in Spring 2024.

## Study Elements:

- Ottawa Sands
  - Up to 18 acres of additional wetland enhancements
  - Over 5,000 feet of shoreline enhancement
- Harbor Island
  - Review of possible wetland and shoreline enhancements



**RIVER PROMENADE**  
Ottawa Sands County Park

# Grand River Greenway - Idema Explorers Camp (Ottawa Sands)



## Project Status

With a major gift from the Bill and Bea Idema Foundation, work has commenced to construct the Idema Explorers Camp, which is being designed to directly service Greenway hikers, bikers, and kayakers .

- Design: Complete
- Permitting: Complete
- Construction: Underway

## Planned Features:

- “Outfitted” Camping
- Yurts and Treehouses
- Tent sites
- Scenic riverside views
- Connections to amenities across the Grand Haven/ Spring Lake area
- Accessible kayak launch on “the Sag”
- Access to Grand River and Lake Michigan Water Trails



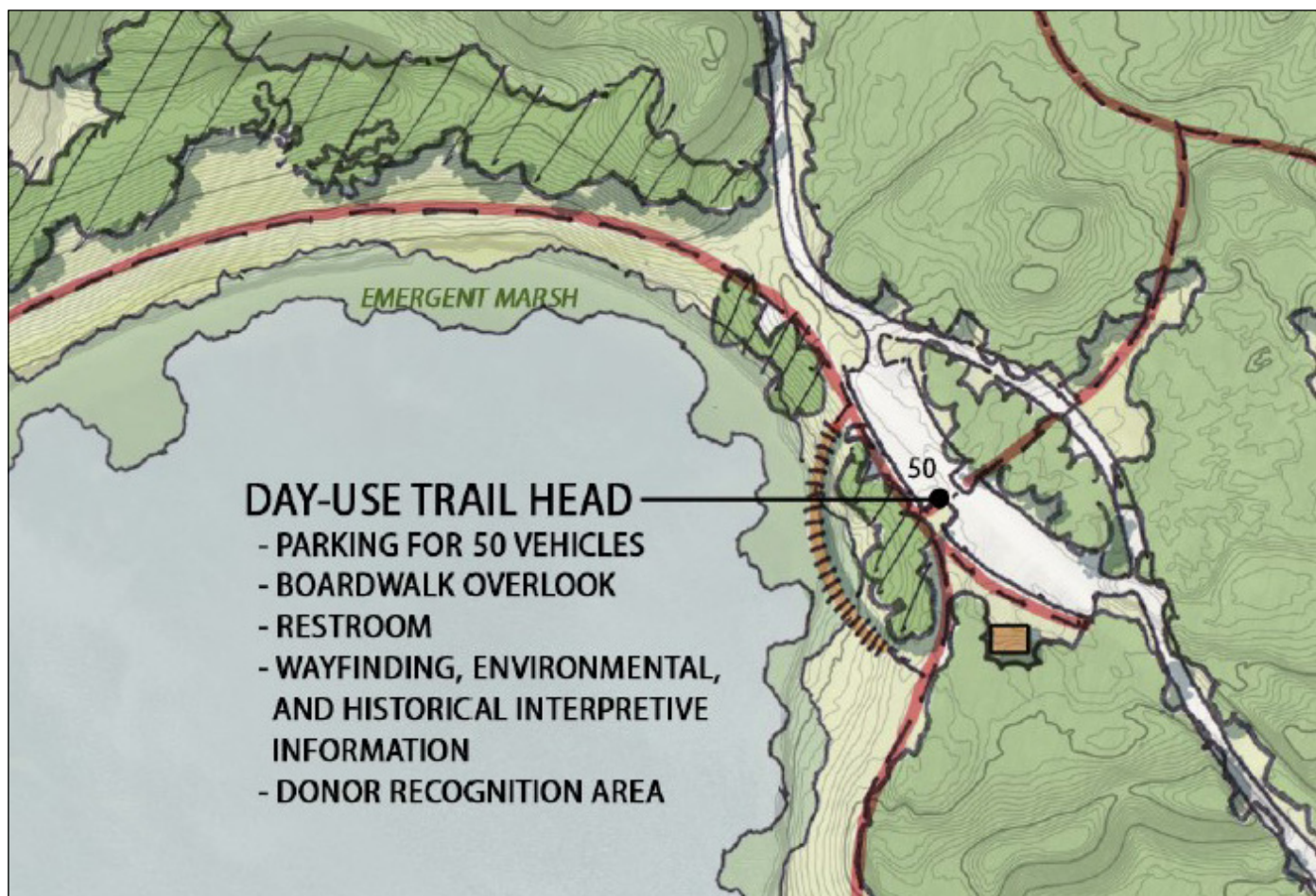


## Project Status

- Design: In process
- Permitting: In process
- Construction: Scheduled for 2023/2024

## Planned Features:

- Paved 1.6-mile 10' -wide "Lake Loop" Trail
- Day-Use Area Improvements
  - Parking Area
  - Accessible lake views
  - Accessible modern restroom
  - Accessible benches



## DAY-USE TRAIL HEAD

- PARKING FOR 50 VEHICLES
- BOARDWALK OVERLOOK
- RESTROOM
- WAYFINDING, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND HISTORICAL INTERPRETIVE INFORMATION
- DONOR RECOGNITION AREA

# Grand River Greenway - North Shore Connector

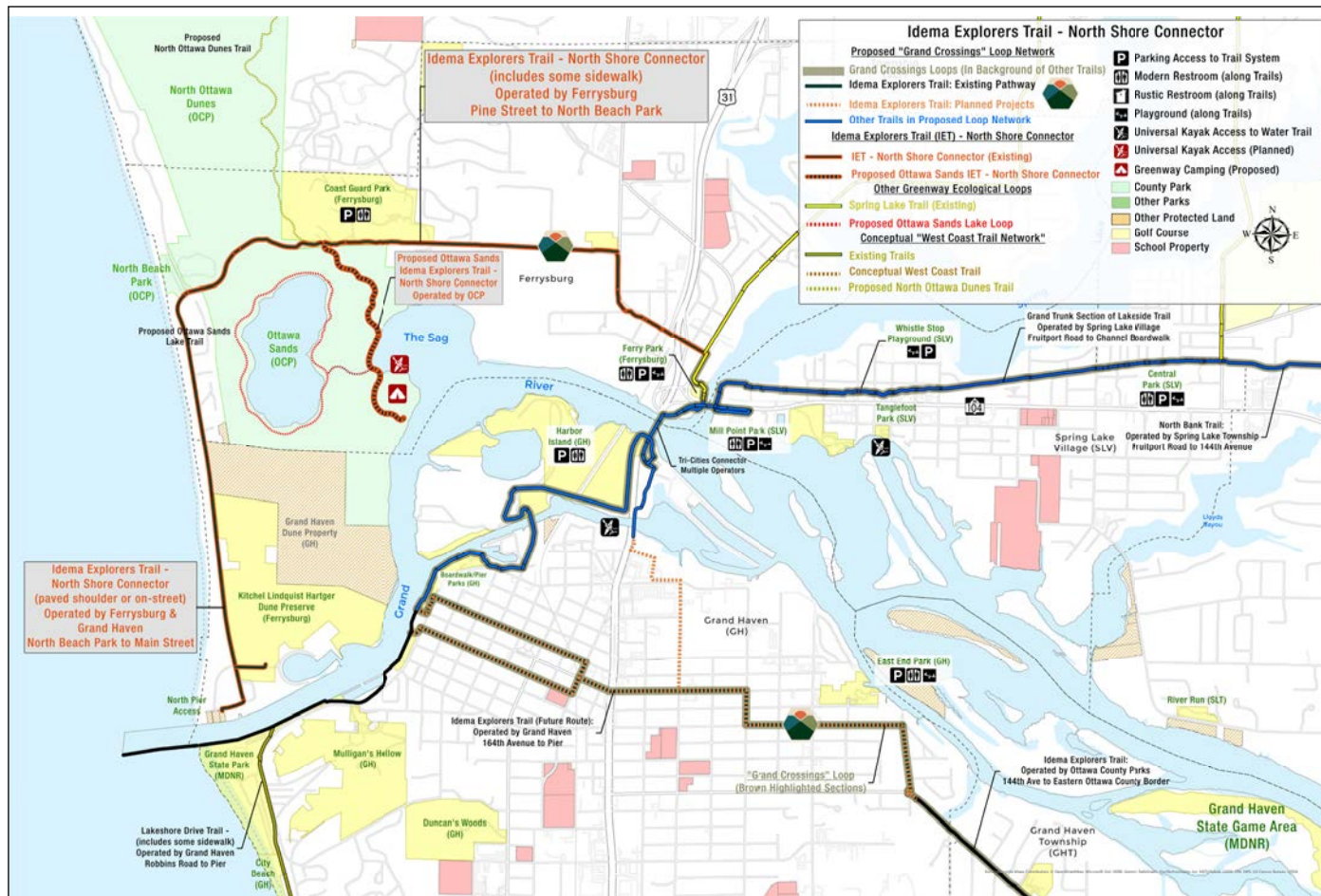


## Project Status: Planned

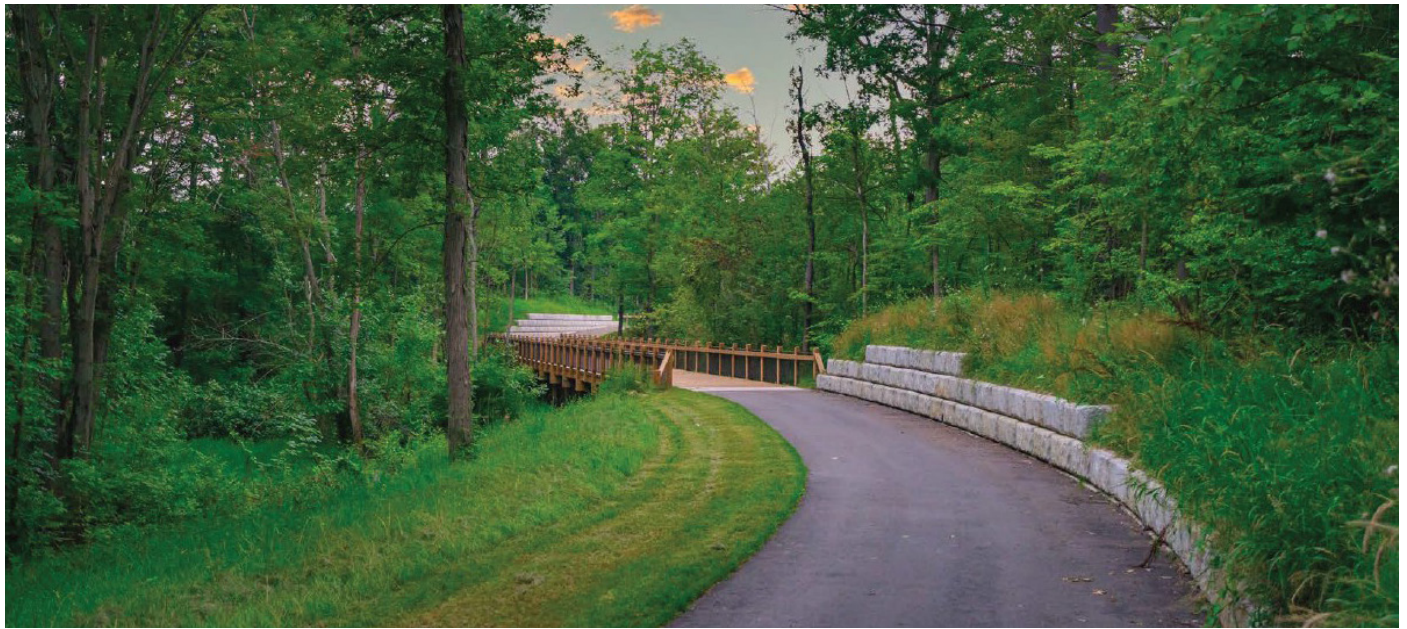
With the improvements at Ottawa Sands underway, including the Grand River Greenway-focused Idema Explorers Camp, Ottawa County Parks is working with its local partners to establish the “North Shore Connector” of the Idema Explorers Trail. This will better integrate Ottawa Sands into the Grand River Greenway, while offering a guided route to north shore Lake Michigan amenities.

## Possible Features:

- Scenic riverside/waterfront views
- Connections to several north shore parks, including the 2,400-acre “coastal corridor”
- Connection to the Idema Explorers Camp



# Grand River Greenway - Grand Crossings Loop

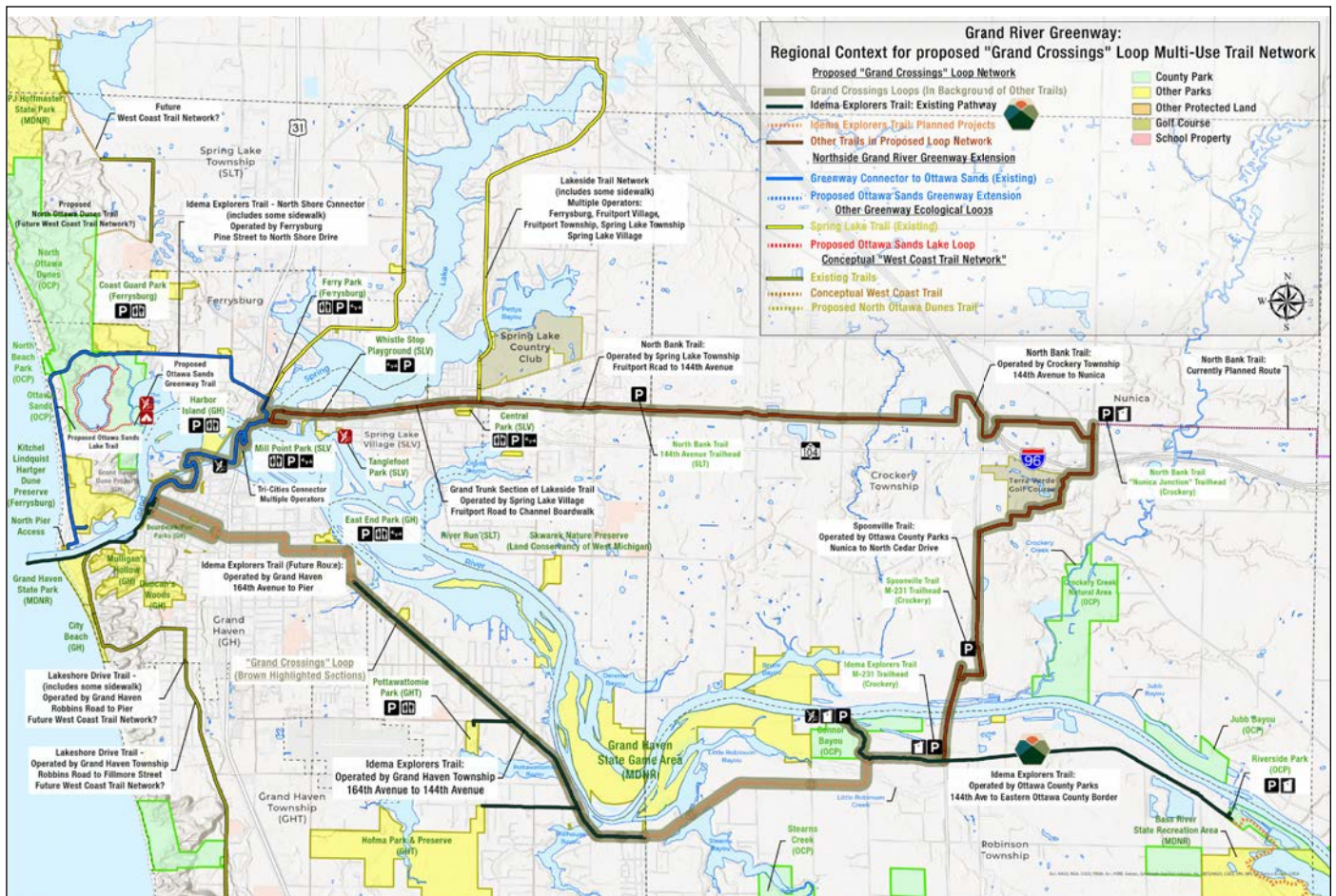


## Project Status: Conceptual

With the completion of connector trails from the Spring Lake area to the Grand Haven area (including the Spring Lakeside Trail, North Bank Trail, and Spoonville Trail), there is an opportunity to incorporate the western section of Idema Explorers Trail into a 24-mile loop network. The US-31 Grand River bridge and M-231 Grand River bridge are the bookend “crossings” of this network.

## Possible Features:

- Scenic riverside/waterfront views
- Connections to amenities across the Grand Haven/Spring Lake area
- Access to Lake Michigan on north and south side of the river
- Access to duneland corridor of parks on north side of Grand River
- Idema Explorers Camp at Ottawa Sands (under construction)





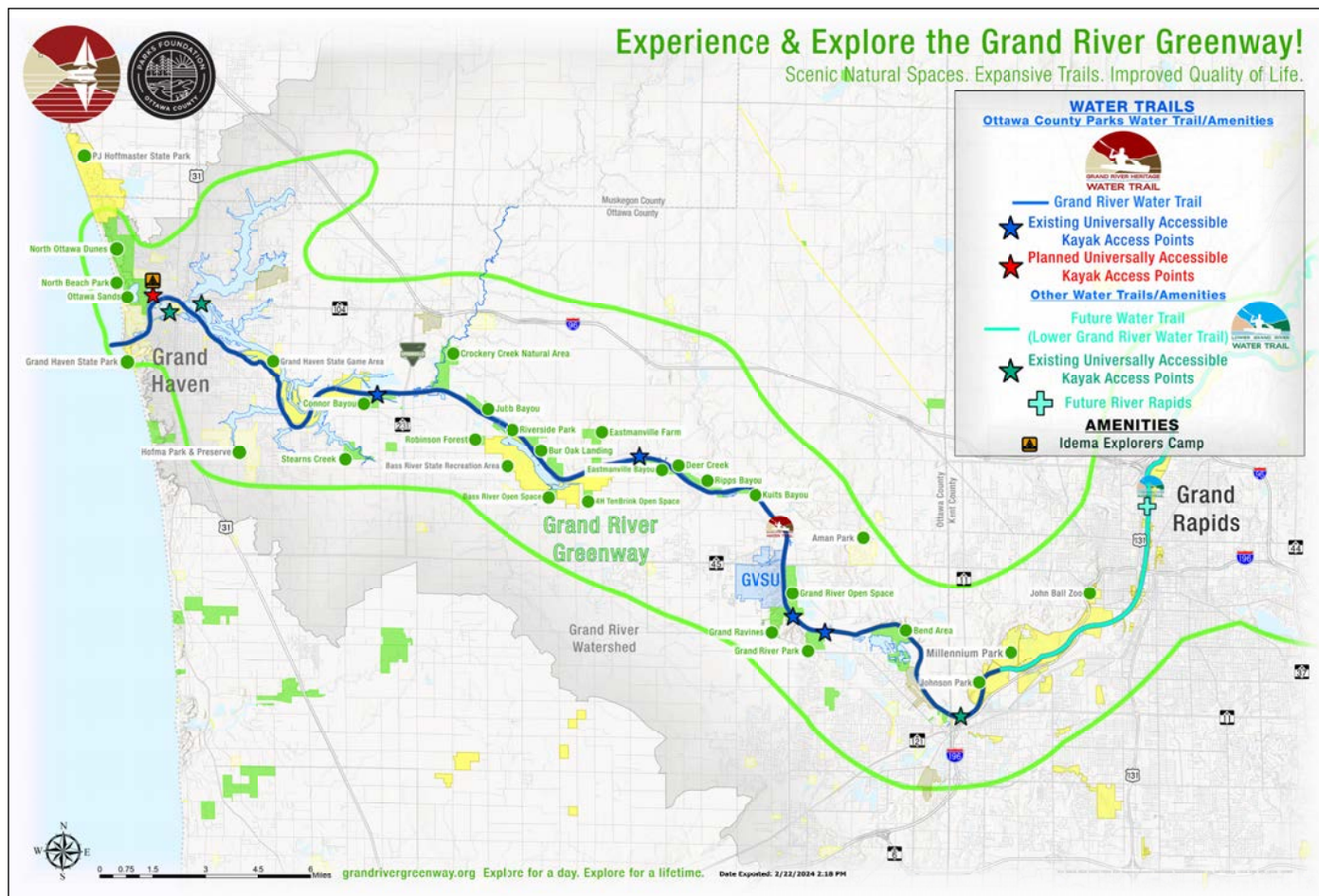
# Grand River Greenway - Grand River Water Trail

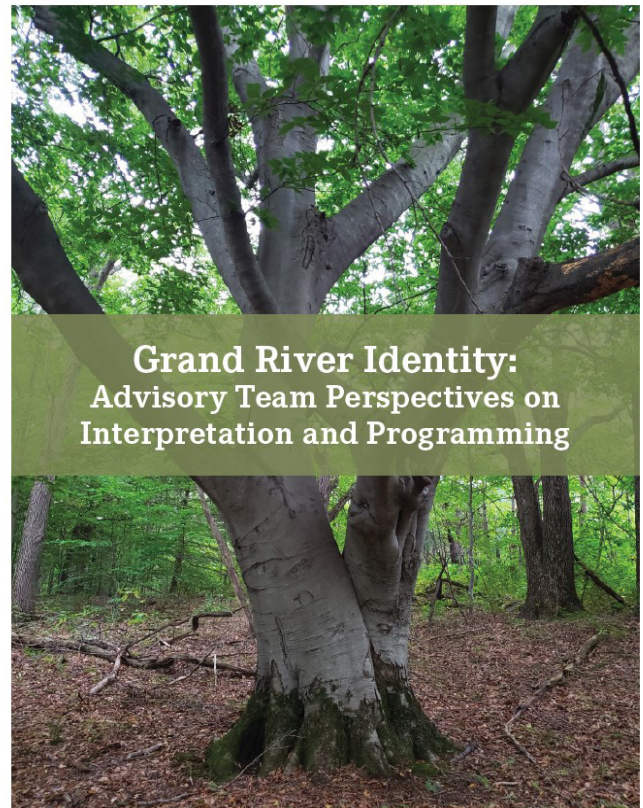


## Project Status: Complete

In 2010, the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission established the Grand River Water Trail in Ottawa County to increase river access to paddlers. The Water Trail now includes six universally-accessible launches (four managed by the Parks Commission) with a new launch being added at Ottawa Sands later this year. The Water Trail also includes consistent wayfinding and an associated website with information about natural, historical, and cultural features along the river.

The Grand River Water Trail is in the process of expanding beyond Ottawa County. The Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds is working to obtain official designation from the State of Michigan for the Water Trail from Grand Haven to Ionia. This designation could allow for an effort to pursue national designation for the entire river.





With a gift from the Wege Foundation, Ottawa County Parks worked with Audubon Great Lakes to complete an analysis of the ecological value of the “Grand River Coastal Corridor.” The Coastal Corridor focused on the area where the Grand River interfaces with the unique Lake Michigan ecosystem. This resulted in the 2021 report, “Grand River Coastal Corridor Ecological Assessment and Conservation Recommendations” (the report is available to review online via [grandrivergreenway.org](http://grandrivergreenway.org)). A few key report findings are listed below:

- Corridor Features:
  - Supports high levels of biodiversity
  - Features some of the highest quality natural areas in the state
  - Critical wetlands for marsh birds
  - Is regionally and globally important for birds
  - Migratory bird hotspot
  - Climate resilient
- Corridor Threats
  - Habitat loss (past wetland loss in western communities is significant)
  - Degradation (invasive species; climate change; contamination)
  - Critical natural areas are unprotected
  - Lack of diverse community engagement
- Recommendations:
  - Establish diverse collaborative group
  - Develop Conservation Action Plan
  - Support water quality management strategies
  - Establish several ongoing monitoring programs to fill critical knowledge gaps
  - Seek higher levels of protections for key properties
  - Create outreach strategies & programming

The intended focus of this project (facilitated by Encompass Consulting LLC) was centered on the idea that there is an opportunity to develop thematic interpretive signage that is consistent across the entire Grand River Greenway and thereby develop a space to educate and engage the community—in essence, creating a 40-mile long classroom. Since there was a general sense that a crucial part of the story of the Grand River in Ottawa County would involve Native American history, Encompass Consulting engaged tribal citizens as an essential part of the team to hear their perspectives.

However, as a series of meetings were held, it became clear that before a detailed interpretive program could be developed, the Greenway had to be better defined. While the Greenway has been a long-term Parks Commission initiative, the Greenway is not tangible enough to the general public, and it is not obvious or apparent for visitors to Greenway parks that these parks form a piece of a larger whole. As a result, the report finds that deliberate work is needed to “imprint” the Greenway identity onto the Greenway parks and trails.

The recommendations in the report are broad, preliminary, and conceptual; and make it clear that there is a range of possibilities for moving forward (the report is available to review online via [grandrivergreenway.org](http://grandrivergreenway.org)). The recommendations are eye-opening in outlining the great potential for the Greenway to be a seminal feature for our community. However, further consultation and consideration is needed before acting on the report findings.