NATURALLY CONNECTED ONONDAGA GREENWAYS + BLUEWAYS

Plan Update
Planning & Economic Development Committee
September 24th, 2026

AGENDA

- Project Introduction
- Community Engagement
- Defining Greenways + Blueways
- Benefit Categories
- Inventory & Analysis
- Next Steps

NATURALLY CONNECTED

ONONDAGA

GREENWAYS + BLUEWAYS

J. Ryan McMahon, II
County Executive

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

- Project Team
- Project Schedule
- Project Overview
- Vision Statement
- Goals
- Wayfinding/Signage



PROJECT TEAM

Client/
Project Management

Primary Consultant

Sub Consultants

PROJECT SCHEDULE

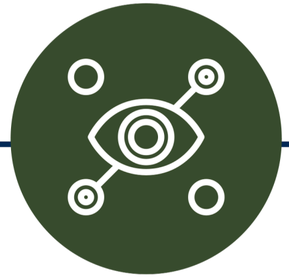
We are here!

Inventory + Analysis



Spring - Summer 2026

Vision + Strategy Development



Summer 2026

Project Profiles + Municipal Toolkit



Summer - Fall 2026

Draft + Final Plan

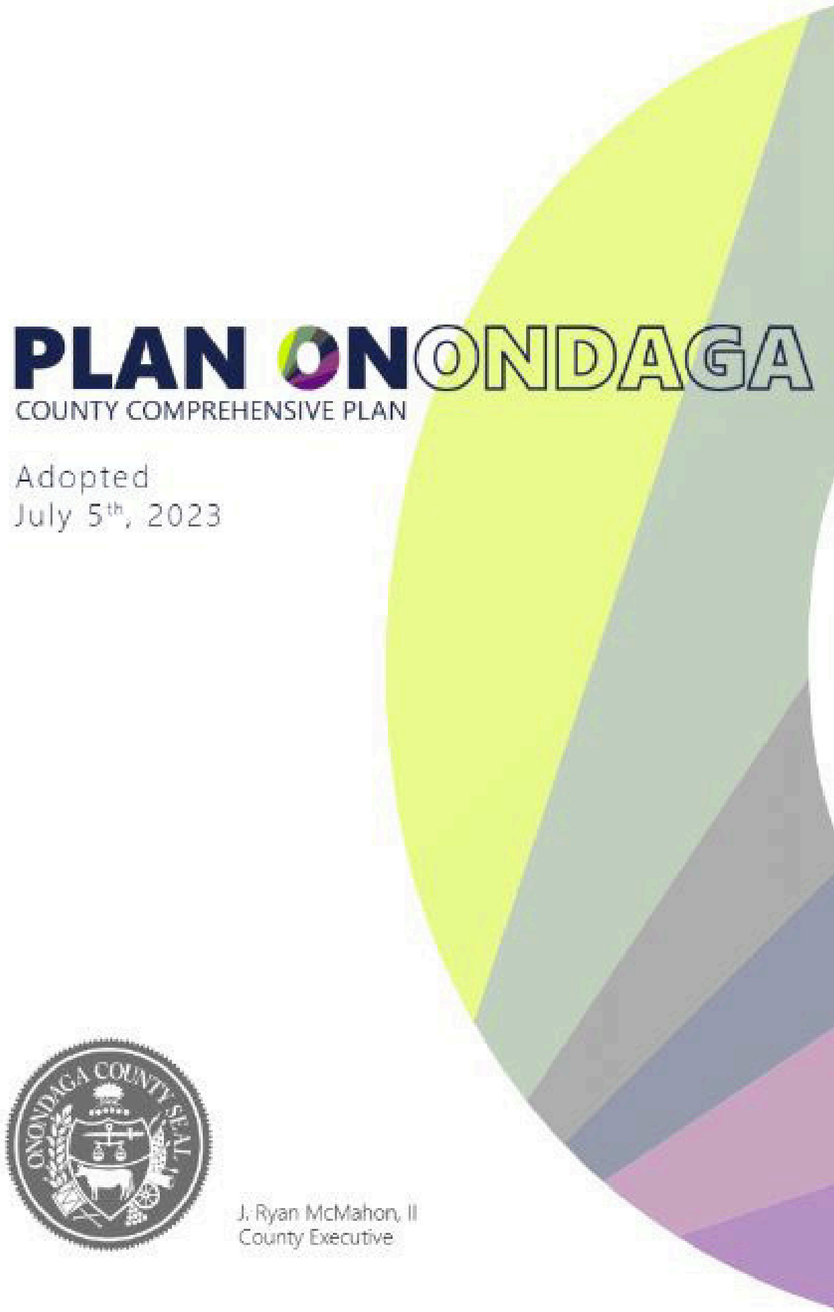


Fall - Winter 2026

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Building on Plan Onondaga's existing greenway + blueway theme, this project will further that framework & develop a comprehensive, implementation-ready plan for an interconnected network across the County.

Onondaga County's Comprehensive Plan (2023)



VISION STATEMENT

“Onondaga County is envisioned as a naturally connected region where an integrated network of greenways, blueways, parks, open spaces, agricultural lands, and conservation corridors serve as vital infrastructure, connecting residents and visitors of all ages and abilities across urban, suburban, and rural communities…”



Vision

Guiding framework for Naturally Connected Onondaga.

Goals

Conceptual ideas that Naturally Connected Onondaga and proposed projects should address to achieve the visions.

Strategies

Mechanisms for achieving the goals and vision. Also used as metrics for tracking project impacts.

GOALS

GOAL 1 ENVIRONMENT: Build Climate Resilience & Protect Natural Resources

GOAL 2 ECONOMY: Attract Investment & Support Regional Prosperity

GOAL 3 RECREATION: Promote Health & Environmental Engagement

GOAL 4 SOCIETY: Advance Equity, Community Connectedness & Cultural Identity

GOAL 5 TRANSPORTATION: Improve Transportation Connectivity & Access

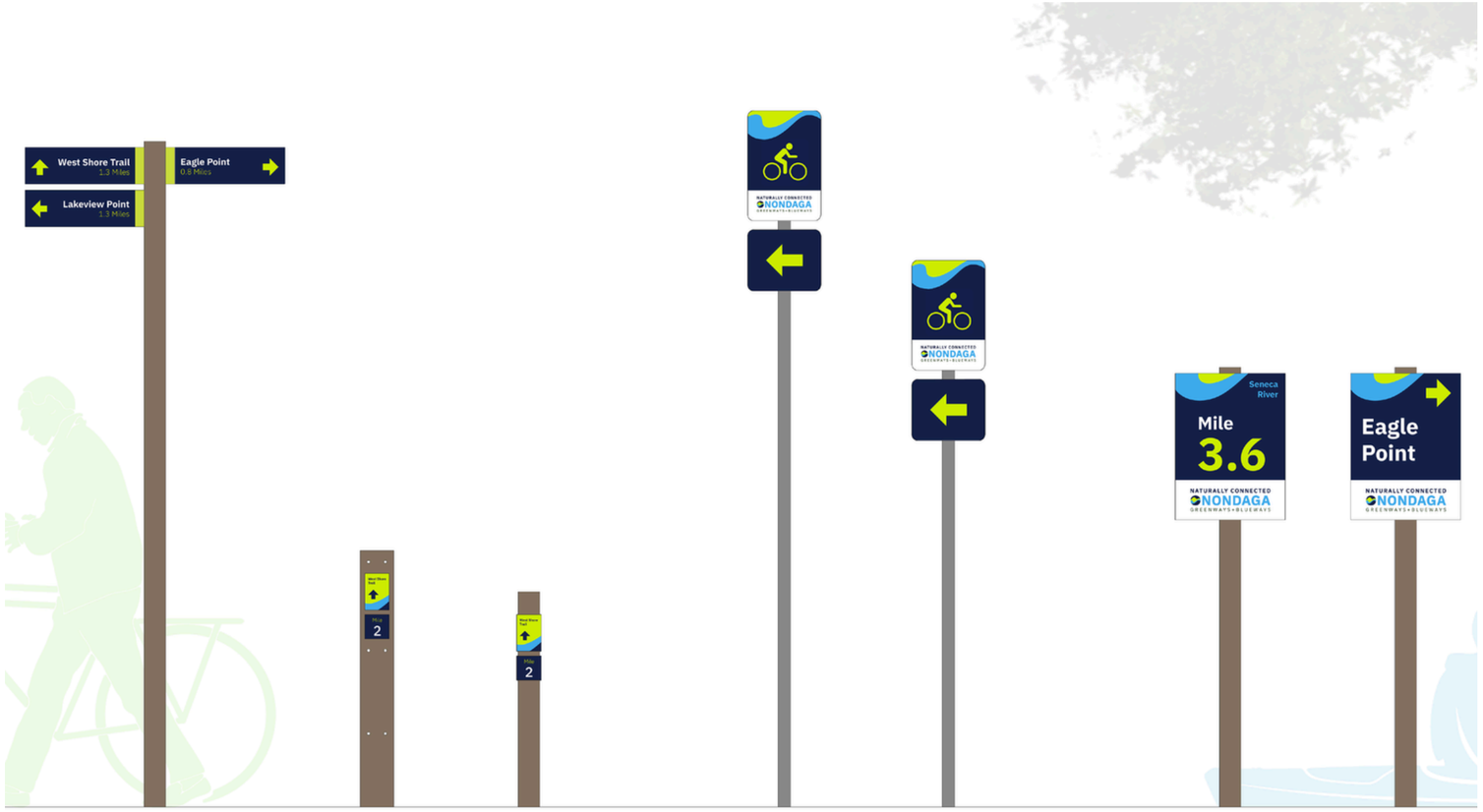
GOAL 6 LAND CONSERVATION & AGRICULTURE: Protect Open Space, Working Lands & Habitat Connectivity

WAYFINDING/SIGNAGE

Clear, consistent wayfinding is essential to the **user experience**.

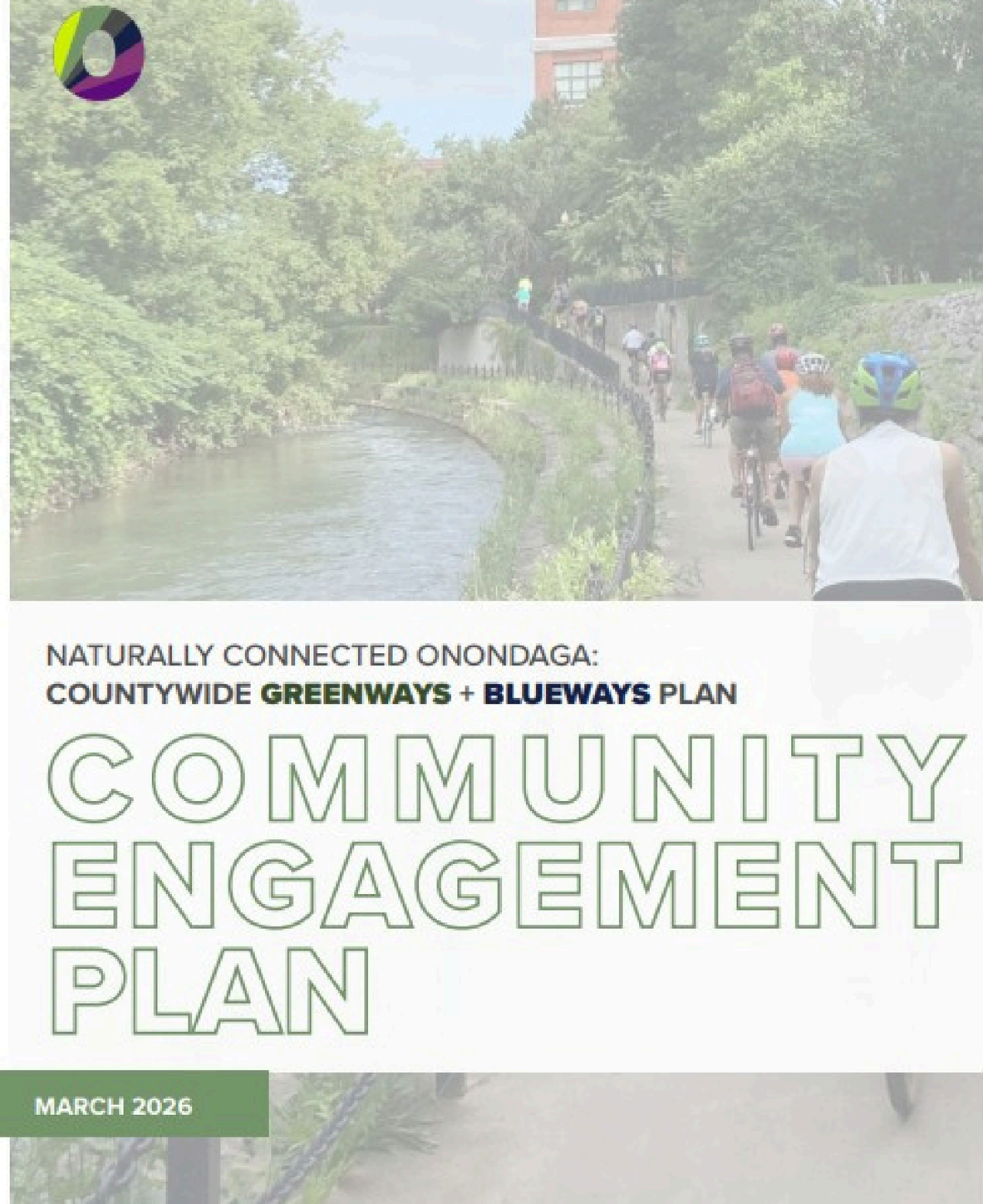
Visitors need to know where they are, where they’re going, and what destinations are accessible along the way.

Our plan develops signage concepts to help **fill gaps** in existing wayfinding.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- PAC
- Public Meetings
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Municipal Roundtable Discussions
- Agency Review Meetings
- Online Engagement



ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

- **Project Advisory Committee (PAC)**
  - ¾ Meetings Held, 4th in Fall 2026
- **Public Meetings**
  - 1st Meeting Held in June, 2nd in Fall 2026
- **Key User Group Stakeholder Interviews**
  - Completed in August
- **Municipal Roundtable Discussions**
  - Conducted in April/May, 18 Municipalities Participated, Second Round Coming Fall 2026
- **Online Engagement**
  - StoryMap & Crowdsourcing Survey Live Now!

Scan to Access the StoryMap!

Open the Greenways + Blueways StoryMap”

DEFINING GREENWAYS + BLUEWAYS

- Recreation Greenways
- Conservation Greenways
- Blueways
- Agricultural Lands
- Mobility Corridors
- Additional Considerations



RECREATION GREENWAY

Illustrative Example

Often provide connections to - or are **co-located** with other recreational resources.

People-centered, designed to serve diverse audiences and accommodate a wide range of uses and activities.



Robust in design and built to accommodate a variety of users, generally featuring an accessible multi-use path.

Recreation greenways are predominantly publicly owned, with some privately owned segments where public access is permitted.

CONSERVATION GREENWAY

Illustrative Example

Environmental education & interpretation of natural processes are core functions.

Preservation of refuge and protected lands is central to the Conservation Greenway typology.



Often characterized by **managed entry points** that may accommodate vehicles and direct visitors to dedicated trails, reducing impact on sensitive natural areas.

Conservation greenways encompass a mix of public, private, and non-profit-owned lands, with access varying from open to restricted depending on ownership and conservation designation.

BLUEWAY

Illustrative Example

Because many shorelines are privately owned, blueways often function as **waterfront destinations**, providing public water access and connecting shoreline destinations primarily by water.

Public water access points **support a variety of recreational activities**, including ~~fishing, kayaking~~, canoeing, ~~boating, and swimming~~.



Support **rich biodiversity** along aquatic ~~and shoreline~~ environments, providing habitat for a wide range of native plant and animal species.

Blueway waterways are predominantly public in ownership, but access points are largely private, making public launch and entry opportunities essential to the network's usability.

AGRICULTURAL LANDS

Illustrative Example

Serves as **natural buffer zones** that provide co-benefits for open space and natural resource protection, while their **scenic character and rural viewsheds** draw visitors to the working landscapes.



Often follow rural routes such as **scenic byways**, where road shoulders accommodate cyclists and hikers. These routes support **agritourism**, offering the public a way to experience and enjoy working agricultural landscapes while connecting to broader regional trail networks.

Agricultural corridors are predominantly privately owned, with public access opportunities largely limited to agritourism-oriented destinations.

MOBILITY CORRIDOR

Illustrative Example

Corridors may also be suburban or rural in character and design.

Urban mobility corridors are often found within **downtowns, urban villages, and main streets**.



Mobility hubs feature **protected bike lanes** and **bus pullouts**, accommodating a diverse range of users and modes of transportation.

Mobility corridors are predominantly public in ownership, as they follow existing roadways and transportation infrastructure maintained by public agencies.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Winter-Specific Activities

- Cross-Country Skiing
- Fat-Tire Biking
- Ice Fishing
- Ice Skiing
- Snowmobiling
- Snowshoeing
- Nature Observation

Accessible Design Considerations

- Accessible Surfaces
- Connections to Community Destinations
- Gentle Grades & Clear Sightlines
- Lighting
- Rest Amenities
- Year-Round Maintenance

BENEFIT CATEGORIES

- Economic
- Environmental
- Recreational
- Social
- Transportation



ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Greenways and blueways function as economic infrastructure, attracting visitors, supporting local businesses, and strengthening communities.

- **Tourism & Spending:** Attract visitors and generate spending at local businesses.
- **Jobs & Economic Output:** Support employment and significant economic activity through outdoor recreation.
- **Return on Investment:** Connected trail networks can generate substantial economic returns beyond initial infrastructure costs.
- **Quality of Place:** Enhance community character, property values, and the conditions that attract long-term investment.

$1.3 Trillion

generated annually nationwide through connected active transportation networks, including walking, bicycling, and trails.

264,539 Jobs

supported by outdoor recreation in New York State (2024).

9.75 Million Visits

to New York State's Empire State Trail system annually.

$1.87 Billion

generated by the Empire State Trail annually.

$687 Million

generated by the Erie Canalway Trail annually.

$5.43 Returned

in economic output for every $1 invested in the Empire State Trail.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Connected greenways and blueways protect natural systems while strengthening community resilience, reducing costs, and supporting biodiversity.

- **Climate Resilience:** Buffer communities from flooding and extreme temperatures while providing natural stormwater storage.
- **Clean Water & Healthy Watersheds:** Riparian corridors filter pollutants, stabilize soils, protect drinking water, and reduce downstream flood risk.
- **Habitat & Biodiversity:** Connect fragmented habitats, supporting wildlife movement, migratory birds, pollinators, and aquatic species.

a 7-to-1 return on investment, with every $1 invested yielding an estimated $7 in natural benefits such as water filtration, flood protection, and habitat conservation.

$1 billion+ in annual flood damages are mitigated by Greenways & conserved open spaces.

Up to $22.6million can be saved per year by municipalities in stormwater management costs through greenways & parks.

RECREATIONAL BENEFITS

Greenways and blueways provide accessible recreation that supports physical health, mental well-being, and quality of life.

- **Active Lifestyles:** Support hiking, fishing, running, bicycling, paddling, and other outdoor activities.
- **Physical Health:** Access to parks and trails encourages physical activity and healthier lifestyles.
- **Mental Well-Being:** Nearby green space and waterways reduce stress, improve mood, and support cognitive health.
- **Inclusive Recreation:** Growing participation among women, seniors, and people of color highlights the need for accessible, multi-use corridors.

175.8 Million

Americans participated in outdoor recreation in 2023 — a record high.

A 2023 meta-analysis of nine studies and 6,500+ participants documented significant gains in physical activity levels among populations with Greenway access.

Residents living within a half-mile of a park or trail are measurably more likely to meet recommended physical activity guidelines.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

Greenways and blueways strengthen communities by connecting neighborhoods, expanding equitable access, and celebrating local identity.

- **Community Connectivity**: Link neighborhoods and create safe, welcoming spaces for gathering and interaction.
- **Equitable Access:** Expand access to recreation and transportation for diverse and underserved communities.
- **Culture & Placemaking:** Celebrate Indigenous heritage, canal hisory, agriculture, natural resources, and local character.
- **Stewardship & Pride:** Create civic assets that foster environmental stewardship, community pride, and a sense of place.

51.9% of American women participated in outdoor recreation in 2023, a record high.

30.4% of outdoor recreation participants were people of color in 2023, a share that has grown steadily over five years.

80% of New Yorkers sayparks and trails are important to their health and well-being.

Nearly two-thirds of the Empire State Trail passes through communities identified as moderately or severely distressed.

TRANSPORTATION BENEFITS

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60% **reduction in bicyclist injury rates on off-road Greenways vs. roadways.**

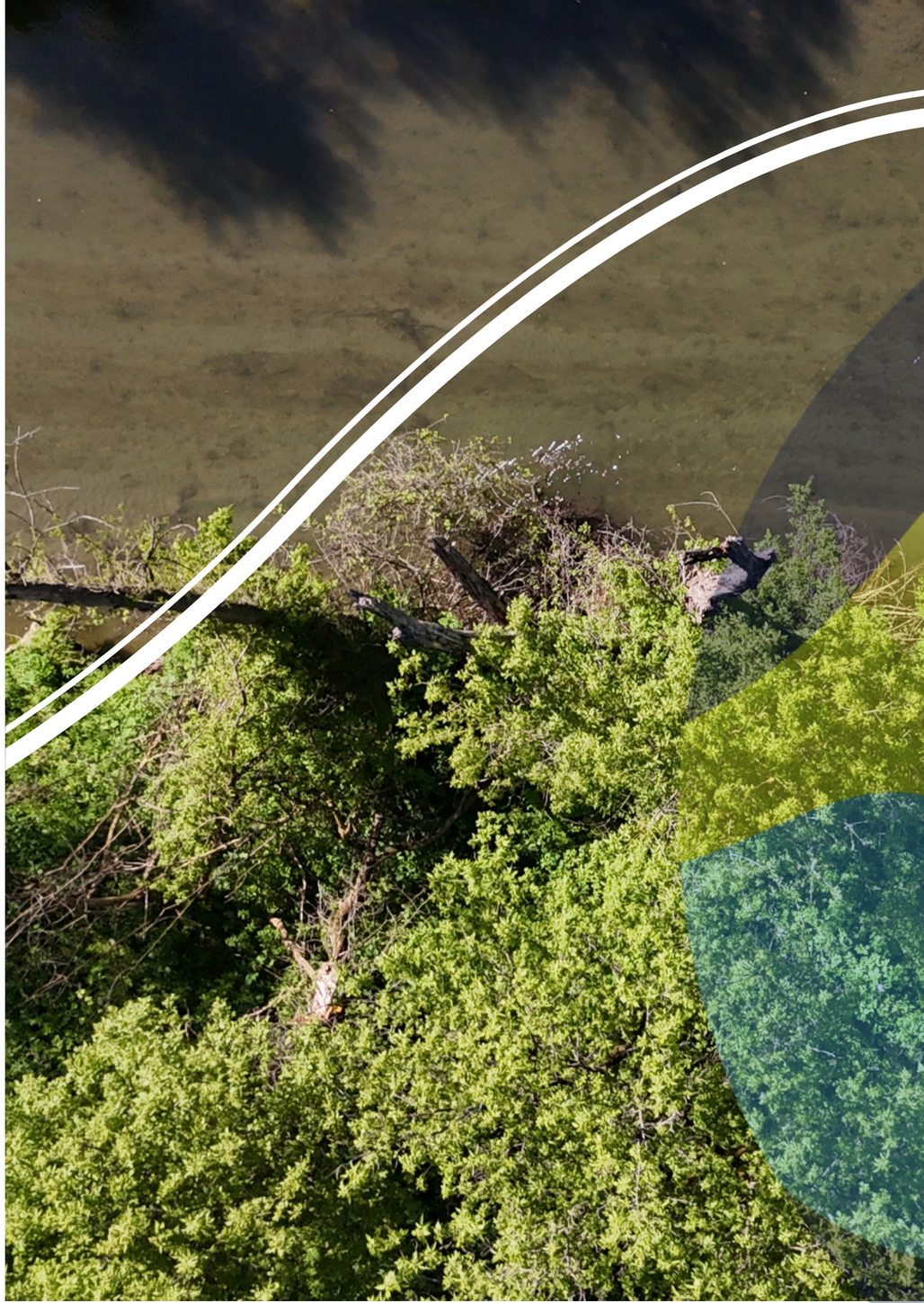
36%+ **of total national outdoor recreation GDP is driven by travel and tourism supporting activities with the strongest return comes from connected, multi-destination trail networks.**

Nearly 2 Million residents live within a quarter mile of the Empire State Trail.

26,000+ **businesses are located within a quarter mile of the Empire State Trail.**

INVENTORY & ANALYSIS

- Recreational Resources
- Transportation Infrastructure
- Land Use
- Agricultural Districts
- Natural Resources
- Key Assets + Destinations
- Trail Camera Analysis



RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Onondaga County’s greenway and blueway network forms the recreational backbone of the region, connecting communities, supporting ecological health, and providing access to a richly varied landscape.

- **Trails, Parks, & Open Space**
  - Trails
  - Parks & Open Space
  - Campgrounds
  - Ski Mountain & Snowmobiling
- **Water Access**
  - Blueways
  - Boat Launches
  - Fishing Access

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Onondaga County's transportation network presents key opportunities to **strengthen greenway access, close trail gaps, and improve connections to parks, open space, and blueways** throughout the region.

- **Rail**
- **Transit**
- **Bike Infrastructure**
- **Pedestrian Infrastructure**

Key Takeaway: Multimodal infrastructure is concentrated within Syracuse and established community centers. This presents opportunities to improve connections between communities through enhanced transit, pedestrian, bicycle, and trail facilities.

LAND USE

Land use directly shapes where greenway & blueway corridors can be established, where connectivity gaps exist, and where opportunities for **open space protection and trail development** are greatest.

- **Residential**
- **Agriculture**
- **Commercial and Industrial**
- **Parks/Open Space, Public Service, and Vacant**

Key Takeaway: Vacant land use is the third largest land use category in the County. These parcels represent ready candidates for trail connections, open space acquisition, and habitat restoration.

AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS

Agricultural land comprises approximately **23%** of the county's land area, concentrated primarily in the southern and western townships. Approximately **38.6%** of the county's land area, is within one of four active agricultural districts established under New York State's Agricultural Districts Law.

- **Agricultural Districts**
- **Agricultural Economy**
- **Farmland Protection**

Key Takeaway: Agricultural districts cover more than one-third of the County's land area, offering an expansive and largely untapped opportunity to establish Agricultural Corridors as a defining element of the countywide network.

NATURAL RESOURCES

These resources form the ecological foundation of the greenway and blueway network, providing **water quality protection, flood mitigation, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity** that underpin both environmental health and quality of life.

- **Wetlands**
- **Wildlife Management Areas**
- **NYS Natural Heritage Communities**
- **Flood Hazard Areas**
- **Flood-Prone Corridors**
- **Dams**

Key Takeaway: There are over 10,300 acres of valuable natural resources dispersed throughout the County, which creates the opportunity for an exceptional Conservation Greenway development.

KEY ASSETS + DESTINATIONS

Community assets reflect the span and diversity of the region. These destinations represent the **places and experiences** that residents and visitors seek out.

- **Historic Districts**
- **Shopping Centers**
- **Entertainment**
- **Anchor Institutions**
- **AgriTourism**
- **Onondaga Nation**

Key Takeaways: Major assets/destinations are concentrated mainly in the City of Syracuse. This presents an opportunity for the network to serve as connective tissue between the urban core and the broader county.

TRAIL CAMERA ANALYSIS

Locations:

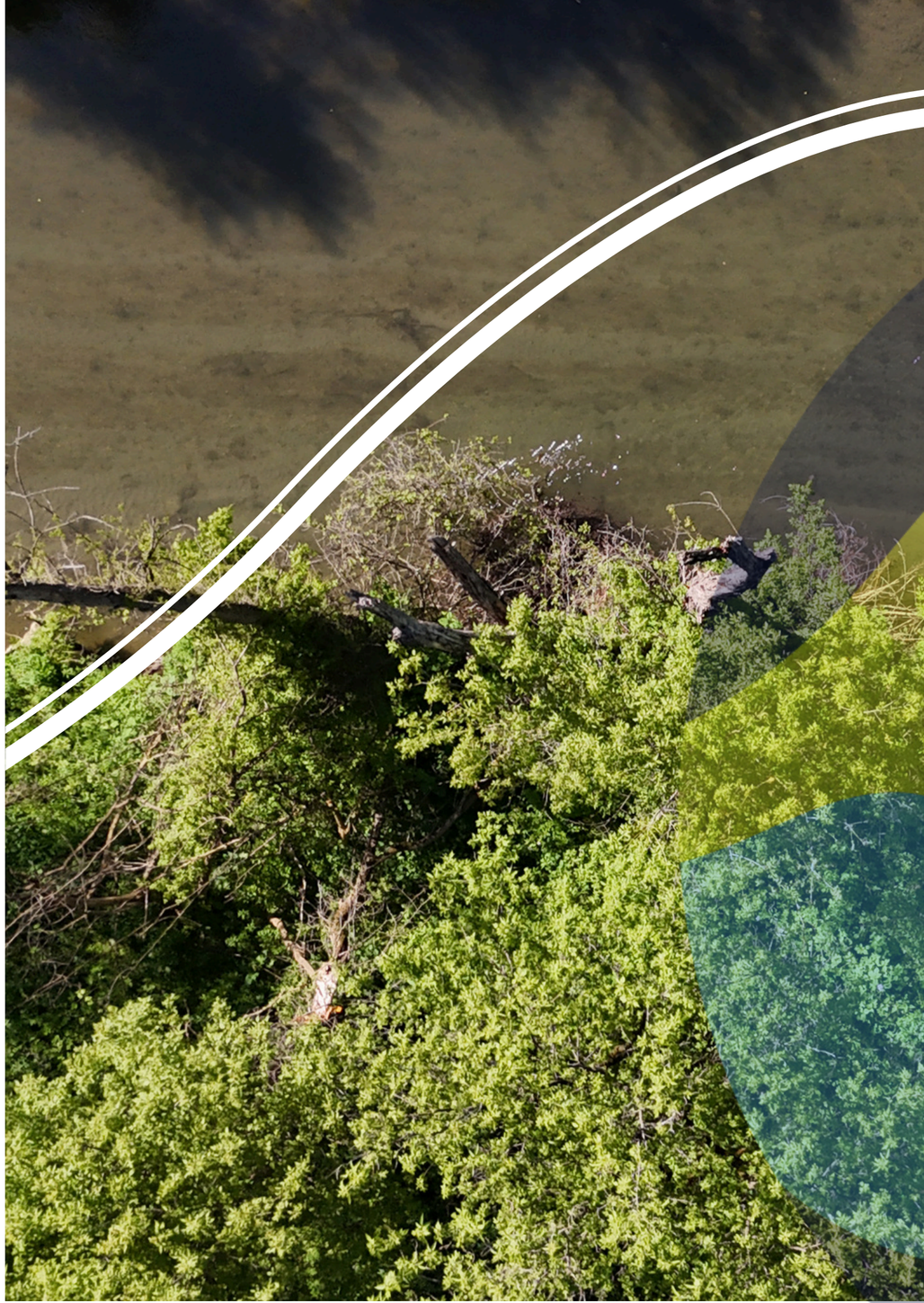
- **Limestone Creek Greenway**
  - Village of Manlius
- **Canal Landing Park**
  - Village of Fayetteville
- **Charlie Major Trail**
  - Town of Skaneateles
- **Mercer Park Kayak Launch**
  - Village of Baldwinsville
- **Riverfront Park**
  - Brewerton

Data Collected:

- **Trail Users Per Day**
- **Group Composition**
  - Single, double, group
- **User Group Types**
  - Walking, bicycling, running, dog walking
- **Age Groups**
- **Time of Day**

NEXT STEPS

- Project Profiles
- Municipal Toolkit/Funding
- Engagement



PROJECT PROFILES

80+ projects identified throughout the County thus far.

35% Public Meeting 1
30% Crowdsourcing Mapper
25% Stakeholder Groups
10% County/Municipal Roundtables

45% Greenways & Trail Connectivity
30% Blueways & Water Access
20% Countywide Programs & Initiatives
5% Other

MUNICIPAL TOOLKIT

The toolkit will help municipalities implement, manage, and maintain the Greenway + Blueway Network.

Deliverables:

- **Brief summary of toolkit**
- **Meeting-in-a-box materials and options for on-going engagement**
- **Best practice guide and standards**
- **Performance evaluation and roadmap**
- **Funding resources**
- **Maintenance**

REMAINING ENGAGEMENT

Second Round of Municipal Roundtables

- 2 in-person meetings in early November

Public Meeting #2

- One in-person meeting in early December to present the plan



THANK YOU!
QUESTIONS?

