

UrbanRiver Visions



An initiative of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Secretary Bob Durand, in partnership with the City of Chicopee

Dear Friend of Community Preservation:

UrbanRiver Visions is the Community Preservation Initiative's newest project. The initiative provides community leaders with the tools, information, and technical assistance necessary to help them plan for future growth. This new project represents an important next step because it helps facilitate the community's vision and planning to explore ways in which the downtown can be revitalized using the river as a focal point. All of the initiative's efforts have the same goal, to empower communities to make balanced and forward thinking growth decisions that preserve and enhance the quality of life in our communities and throughout the Commonwealth.

Rivers have long defined the core of many of the Commonwealth's urban areas. The harnessing of these rivers for power and manufacturing characterized the Commonwealth's growth in the nineteenth century as a center for commerce and prosperity. The legacy of this era is reflected in the mill buildings that define the heart of many cities and towns and represent a celebrated element of our built environment. Recently, our communities suffered with several decades of decline in the industries these mills once housed. The legacy of land and water pollution that accompanied earlier industrial development has been a burden to our communities.

Now, many communities are poised to reexamine the role of their rivers as a source of urban vitality, as an amenity, and as an attractor of new enterprises and jobs. UrbanRiver Visions is designed to take these efforts a step further by working with individual communities to help shape their future and reconnect them to the river, making it once again a focal point for commerce and community.

This project defines and provides the framework for reclaiming these rivers as environmental and economic assets, integrating them back into our civic lives. It is a celebration of rivers, communities, and creativity.

I hope that you find the accompanying information useful. Electronic versions of these documents are available on the UrbanRiver Visions web site at www.urbanrivervisions.org. I wish you the best of luck and I look forward to continuing our partnership as we work to make these dreams a reality.

Very truly yours,

 Bob Durand



UrbanRiver Visions Chicopee Charrette: Chicopee River

The communities of Athol, Chicopee, Easthampton, Hudson, Fall River, Lawrence, and Worcester held charrettes in the fall of 2002 as part of EOE's UrbanRiver Visions project. After the charrettes, all the communities came together in Hudson on December 19, 2002 to share their visions. Each of the UrbanRiver Visions communities seized this opportunity to define its vision for the future. The visions reflect an overall community consensus about the relationship between the community and its riverfront. These visions represent important starting points that can continue to be refined and modified over time in response to new information, opportunities, changed circumstances, or unforeseen difficulties.

This poster summarizes the findings of the Chicopee UrbanRiver Visions Charrette that was held on October 26, 2002 at Cabotville Industrial Park. The charrette resulted in a vision plan and action plan that are summarized here. This side of the poster documents community goals, issues, and possible next steps. The reverse side includes a Vision Plan and describes actions needed to achieve this vision.

Additional charrette information is on file at the Chicopee Planning Department in a project binder that contains verbatim notes from the charrette, copies of powerpoint presentations, base maps, and other technical information.

For additional information, please visit www.urbanrivervisions.org

UrbanRiver Visions Consultant Team:
 EOE selected Goody, Clancy & Associates and its team of consultants to provide professional assistance to each of the communities in the program. Chicopee consultant team members also included Maria Van Dusen, The Waterfront Center, and Norris & Norris

Chicopee Charrette

The Place

The study area for Chicopee's UrbanRiver Vision extends six miles along the Chicopee River from its confluence with the Connecticut River to Poor Brook and the new Chicopee River Business Park. By focusing attention here – a hidden resource adjacent to Chicopee's main street, new library, and the new business park – the community sought to create links that will tie together destinations along the river. On October 26, 2002, charrette participants were asked to develop a strategy for guiding change that pairs enhancement of the Chicopee River with economic development.

A Shared Vision

The Chicopee River is one of the city's greatest and least discovered assets. Through improved river access and expanded public use, the river can become one of the city's great public places, supporting recreation on land and water while serving as a catalyst for attracting jobs and promoting new business activity. Both the Chicopee River Business Park and the new city library can serve to draw people to the river once again. And as the city moves to open a first segment of a new riverwalk, the river's potential is being newly discovered by the entire community.

Next Steps

- These next steps will advance the vision:
- Build on the vision and engage new constituencies in a "River Coalition"
 - Move forward with plans to create the first segment of a pedestrian trail along the canal on city-owned land (former rail line); use banners and flower planters to mark the trail and beautify the area
 - Work with Con-Ed to explore potential public use of the canal
 - Initiate discussions with the landholders in the area, including Cabotville and Facemate, to encourage cooperative initiatives
 - Conduct research with school groups regarding river interpretive opportunities
 - Improve access to the river and promote low-impact recreational activities
 - Engage in discussions with landowners of natural areas to secure long-term conservation
 - Continue advocacy for water quality; support the stormwater utility and other efforts to eliminate combined sewer overflows
 - Find locations where minor tree pruning could open up views
 - Consider developing flexible zoning for mills to allow broader range of uses, including housing

The Charrette

In several meetings preceding the charrette, community leaders identified a number of themes that would be addressed during the event itself. These themes helped to guide the work of more than 60 individuals who took part in the evening reception on October 25 and the day-long charrette, on October 26, 2002, both at the Cabotville Industrial Park in Chicopee. The day-long program included morning discussion groups and afternoon visioning groups.



Redefining the River's Edge



Morning Sessions

Structured around a series of facilitated small group discussions, the morning groups focused on three core topics: (1) connections; (2) the potential for river use; (3) economic opportunity.

Key recommendations include:

Connections

- Increase visual connections to the river through selective cutting and overlooks
- Construct a multi-use trail that connects the downtown, the mills, the future amphitheater at the Public Library, Szot Park, and other open spaces
- Provide eel passage and fish ladders to reconnect aquatic habitats separated by dams
- Foster increased opportunities for riverfront activities including boating, festivals, environmental education, and waterside restaurants
- Create regional connections along the length of the Chicopee River, specifically to the Chicopee River Delta to the northwest, and the Business Park to the northeast
- Increase the number of river crossings to bring people from the north side of the river to Chicopee Center
- Work with local artists and school children to beautify and enliven the waterfront, potentially including a mural at Ames Privilege and sculpture along the Cabotville Canal
- Form a local constituency around the ownership and maintenance of the river corridor and associated recreational amenities

River Use Group

- Create safe and limited access to the river; increase recreational opportunities and promote river awareness
- Enhance the character of the riverbank by cultivating views in some areas and increasing vegetation in other areas
- Provide recreational and cultural opportunities along the length of the river including: picnic areas, artist overlooks, nature walks, bird watching, fishing, and exploration of historic mills
- Provide areas for environmental education and habitat conservation
- Create facilities for car-top boats in areas where water is deep enough
- Continue to improve water quality, specifically addressing residual industrial pollution and storm water management
- Plan for future river activities such as swimming

Economic Opportunity Group

- Promote uses that engage and protect the river
- Support reuse of mills and industrial land that are compatible with the river
- Develop a unique concept for the river that ties into Chicopee's history and working heritage
- Use the river as an amenity to attract investment into the area
- Beautify the river by improving water flow, maintaining flood walls and removing trash

Afternoon Sessions

In the afternoon discussions, three groups of charrette participants created an annotated plan that outlined their vision for the Chicopee River. Each of these visions were presented to all charrette participants at the end of the day. The visions contained many shared themes and elements that are listed below. These plans provided the basis for development of the vision plan.

Group 1

Group 1 was mainly concerned with outdoor education, preservation, new cultural amenities, and enhancing trails and access along the river. The delta/canal area became a destination for cultural activities and leisure, including picnicking, restaurants, and a museum for Chicopee artifacts. The canal was also seen as the "First Mile" of a riverwalk. The middle segment of the river was seen as quieter, with viewing areas and a possible historic boat launch. In the upper river section, Group 1 focused on trails and a conservation area around the oxbow.

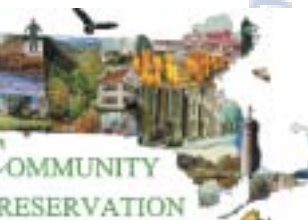
Group 2

Group 2 was interested in steps needed to implement existing community initiatives. The group focused on riverbank activities. In the delta area, connections to the downtown were a priority (including a


Visitors' Center) together with improved bridges, and links to existing trails. Bridge connections and new trails were also seen as important in the middle section as ways to improve access. This section had many places for views and overlooks, but was seen as a providing only limited opportunities for boating. The upper river was envisioned as incorporating trail links, an environmental center, and was generally seen as a better area for boating use.

Group 3

Group 3 focused on the potential of the delta/library area to become a destination for a wide variety of commercial and cultural activities. The mills at Cabotville would continue to house commercial and industrial uses together with new activities such as restaurants and cultural destinations. A new canalwalk would link these mills to the library area. A restaurant and farmers' market would also be accommodated near the library. The canalwalk would connect to a regional bikeway along the Connecticut River. In the middle section of the river, new trails and restored bridge crossings are proposed. Group 3 agreed that the upper section of the river was well-suited to boating and natural recreation, along with educational and conservation components.

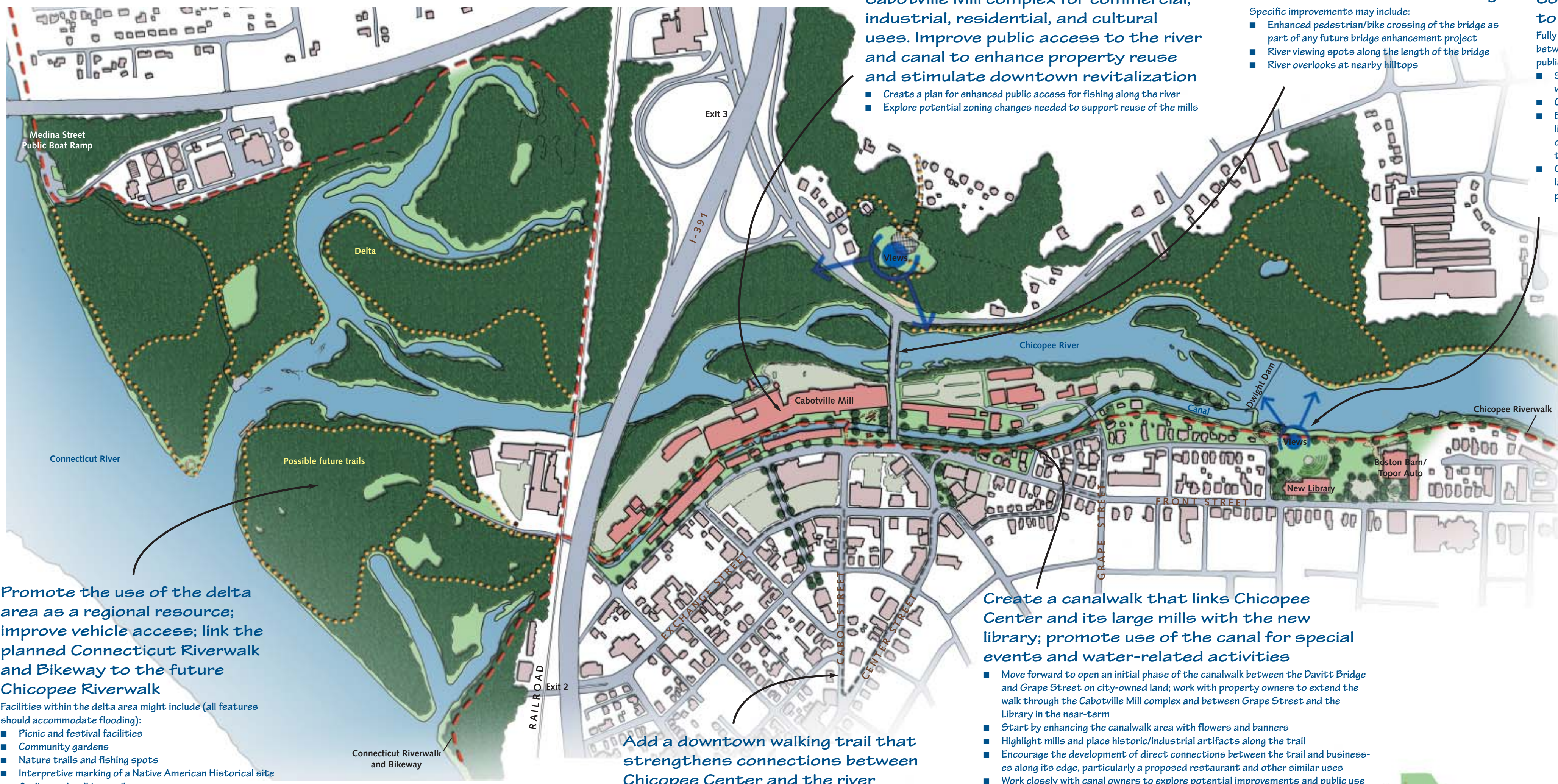


Rediscovering the Chicopee River: Promoting access, environmental education, and economic development



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Promote full reuse of space within the Cabotville Mill complex for commercial, industrial, residential, and cultural uses. Improve public access to the river and canal to enhance property reuse and stimulate downtown revitalization

- Create a plan for enhanced public access for fishing along the river
- Explore potential zoning changes needed to support reuse of the mills

Enhance the visibility of the river around the Davitt Bridge
Specific improvements may include:

- Enhanced pedestrian/bike crossing of the bridge as part of any future bridge enhancement project
- River viewing spots along the length of the bridge
- River overlooks at nearby hilltops

Connect the library to the river
Fully use the future grassy amphitheater between the building and the riverbank as a public destination

- Selectively cut vegetation to highlight views of the river
- Create pedestrian access to the river
- Build on the library's success; work with library stakeholders to accomplish continuous pedestrian access along the canal as far as Chicopee Center
- Consider providing a canoe/kayak launch adjacent to the library to provide access upriver

Promote the use of the delta area as a regional resource; improve vehicle access; link the planned Connecticut Riverwalk and Bikeway to the future Chicopee Riverwalk

Facilities within the delta area might include (all features should accommodate flooding):

- Picnic and festival facilities
- Community gardens
- Nature trails and fishing spots
- Interpretive marking of a Native American Historical site
- Cycling and walking trails

Continued cooperation with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission will be needed as the commission advances design of the Connecticut Riverwalk and Bikeway alignment

Add a downtown walking trail that strengthens connections between Chicopee Center and the river

- This route through the downtown and to the riverfront will allow people to enjoy the canal, historic housing, civic buildings, historic storefronts, and other community destinations
- The trail should be marked with interpretive signage and should include signage that provides information on links to other local and regional amenities

Create a canalwalk that links Chicopee Center and its large mills with the new library; promote use of the canal for special events and water-related activities

- Move forward to open an initial phase of the canalwalk between the Davitt Bridge and Grape Street on city-owned land; work with property owners to extend the walk through the Cabotville Mill complex and between Grape Street and the Library in the near-term
- Start by enhancing the canalwalk area with flowers and banners
- Highlight mills and place historic/industrial artifacts along the trail
- Encourage the development of direct connections between the trail and businesses along its edge, particularly a proposed restaurant and other similar uses
- Work closely with canal owners to explore potential improvements and public use opportunities
- Develop overlooks to the canal at the Dwight Dam, behind the Cabotville Mill complex, and other locations



A canalwalk linking the Cabotville Mill Complex and the new city library could become one of Chicopee's most memorable public spaces – and promote reuse of the historic mills



Flood control walls can be seen as barriers to access to the river – but could be used creatively as walkways or viewing areas



The canal is an untapped resource – the future canal walk will recast it as a pleasant and enjoyable place to stroll



Improvements along the river could enhance the potential of facilities such as the Cabotville Mill Complex to attract new business to Chicopee – and increase the customer base for businesses in the downtown area

Seek to create pedestrian access wherever possible all along the Chicopee River; incorporate new river crossings and improve links to existing open spaces

- Maintain existing vegetation and preserve the wooded character of the area
- Research ownership along the river corridor
- Seek protective agreements for public recreational use
- Create a "North Bank Nature Trail" with safe access points and well maintained paths and overlooks; establish a "Sandy Hill Nature Area"; maintain the natural quality of the river's edge, preserve habitat, and provide limited trail access
- Create two new pedestrian crossings at the old Oak Street crossing and at Chicopee Electric Light
- Provide links from the river to Frank J. Szot Park, to open space along Poor Brook, and to related conservation lands (in Springfield)

Establish a public-private partnership to promote the river as a major community asset and educational resource

- Form a partnership that builds on existing community partnerships and initiatives including the Chicopee River Watershed Council, the Chicopee Conservation Commission, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, the Chicopee Public Library, and others
- Continue to work with area schools and the Mass Audubon Society to incorporate the river in educational initiatives
- Organize a river cleanup on Earth Day 2003

Improve access for boaters at select river locations; encourage river use that is respectful of the environment and river neighbors

- Promote non-motorized boating above the Chicopee Falls Dam and in the Chicopee River Delta
- Create legal access points; consider the delta area, Rick's Landscaping, Taylor Street, Fuller Road, and adjacent to the Route 291 Bridge
- Discourage boating where the water is shallow

Advocate for continued improvements to water quality that can enhance river use

- Continue to work with the City to advance improvements and educate residents
- Continue efforts to eliminate combined sewer overflow discharges; identify priority actions that contribute to advancing the vision
- Use best management practices and the Storm Water Utility to prevent urban run-off

Identify public and private properties that could provide enhanced river access and views

- Inventory city-owned property, such as the library, Chicopee Electric Light, the high school, and Chicopee Housing Authority property
- Investigate underutilized properties such as Boston Barn/Topor Auto, Facemate, and along Fuller Road
- Continue to work with owners of the Cabotville Mill complex to enhance public access
- Enhance river views from East Main Street
- Improve views of the river from Front Street near Szot Park and the new high school
- Work to identify immediate-term opportunities for enhanced views that involve minor trimming of vegetation or other modest actions

Create a center for environmental education at the Chicopee River Business Park; establish an "Oxford Conservation Area" that provides opportunities to explore the river and Poor Brook

- Create low-impact nature trails with interpretive signs along the river and Poor Brook for community residents and Business Park users
- Establish an Environmental Center
- Undertake habitat analysis and preservation
- Recognize a Native American tribal area
- Create a public boat launch area