
CHAPTER 3: NATURAL RESOURCES

This chapter provides a guiding framework for sustainably protecting, preserving, and managing the natural resources in the City of Janesville and its extraterritorial jurisdiction for future generations to come. The information provided in this chapter will be used to guide City decision-making regarding the overall physical development of the area. This includes providing guidance to determine areas that may not be suitable for development based on environmental opportunities and constraints, including unfavorable soils, floodplains, wetlands, and groundwater impacts.

**THE IDENTIFICATION AND PROTECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN
THE JANESVILLE PLANNING AREA AS PRESENTED IN THIS
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CHAPTER ENCOMPASSES:**

- ◆ Continued reinvention of the City’s riverfront, through guiding acquisition of key areas for open space, recreational, and commercial.
- ◆ Including parks, greenspaces, and natural areas in new neighborhoods, to encourage development that integrates the built environment with the natural environment.
- ◆ Seeing the City as part of a larger regional ecosystem, connected through common natural features – such as the Rock River, glacial moraines, the Cambrian aquifer, and the overall ecology of Southern Wisconsin.
- ◆ Connecting people and natural resources via greenbelts and other storm water conveyance routes.
- ◆ Providing a high quality of life through providing sufficient access to parks, greenspaces, and natural areas.
- ◆ Reducing environmental risks through protection of air, water, and other natural resources that residents depend on.
- ◆ Working towards a more sustainable Janesville through continued provision of necessary “green infrastructure”, protecting the long-term functionality of critical resources, supporting “smart-growth” development policies, and actively working to reduce the environmental footprint of the City of Janesville.

NATURAL RESOURCES GOAL, OBJECTIVES, POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Natural Resources Goal

Sustainably manage the exceptional natural resources of the Rock River Valley region through City policy and programs.

Natural Resources Objectives

1. Preserve, reclaim, and restore the natural features of the area – including the Rock River, streams, drainageways, floodplains, groundwater, woodlands, steep slopes, prairie areas, glacial/moraine features, wildlife habitat and other significant features.
2. Provide access to passive recreational opportunities in preserved natural areas to promote healthy and active lives for residents and visitors.
3. Protect the air quality of the area through regional cooperation.
4. Sustainably manage the ecosystem services provided by the greenbelt system.
5. Expand the footprint of the greenbelt system as the City of Janesville experiences new growth and development.
6. Encourage “smart growth” and ecologically sensitive development goals to protect and enhance the natural features and ecosystem services vital to the City.
7. Collaborate with the State, County, other local governments, and other organizations on the protection of the water quality of the Rock River watershed and Southern Wisconsin aquifer.

General Natural Resources Policies and Programs

1. Protect Environmental Corridors by prohibiting new buildings in wetlands, stream banks, floodplains, and on slopes greater than 20 percent. Strongly discourage placement of new buildings on hydric soils outside of wetlands and on slopes between 12 percent and 20 percent where more appropriate sites are available.
2. Continue to identify land for parks and greenbelts consistent with the recommendations included in this *Comprehensive Plan* and the City’s Park and Open Space Plan. Land will be identified as neighborhood plans are prepared, subdivision plats are proposed, and as new development occurs.
3. Collaborate with other communities and organizations in the region to prioritize improvement of water quality in the Rock River watershed and to protect natural areas vital to the health of the Rock River. This includes acquisition of riverfront property to provide enhanced ecosystem services, protect and restore Rock River riparian corridor, and provide additional access to active and passive recreational space along the Rock River. Specific programs are recommended in the next section of this chapter.
4. Prioritize the development, protection, and management of natural areas within existing or future parks and encourage passive recreational opportunities in these spaces.
5. Protect groundwater resources through the following activities:
 - a. Maximize infiltration of clean water in groundwater recharge areas.
 - b. Support cleanup and redevelopment of brownfield sites in the City.

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- c. Minimize the potential for future sources of contamination.
 - d. Enforce wellhead protection policies in wellhead areas, and work with neighboring communities to protect areas outside of the City.
6. Implement the City's stormwater management plan and ensure that it is achieving maximum effectiveness, including enforcing erosion control and stormwater management ordinances, and requiring that high-quality stormwater management plans be submitted with development proposals.
7. Work with landowners at the time development is proposed to preserve woodlots and other environmental features that serve to protect wildlife and vegetative resources. Consider protection of these areas through designation as greenbelts or parks.
8. Work with the MPO, WisDOT, WDNR, and other communities and organizations in the region to prioritize improvement of air quality in the region, addressing both transportation-related and industrial source pollution. Encourage proper regional monitoring of air quality to avoid designation as a non-attainment area.
9. Require adherence to stringent standards for any mineral extraction activities in the City and encourage these standards to be met in the City's ETJ planning area as well.
10. Continue to utilize the Sustainable Janesville Committee, including City Council members, key stakeholders, and interested citizens, to advise the City on initiatives and decision-making related to environmental sustainability.
11. Encourage compact development in key areas of city through higher density infill development to create mixed use, walkable, bikeable, and universally accessible neighborhoods.

NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The City and surrounding area contain extremely valuable natural resources that will require concerted, on-going, and coordinated efforts to maintain and enhance, including the following efforts:

Protect Environmental Corridors and Greenbelts as “Green Infrastructure” for the City

Environmental Corridors are important reservoirs of ecological habitat, biodiversity, and ecosystem services for Janesville and the surrounding area. They shape the form of neighborhoods and help to define the character to “Wisconsin’s Park Place”. They provide environmental, ecological, recreational, stormwater management, groundwater protection and recharge, slope and erosion control, wildlife benefits. Environmental Corridors in Janesville also serve as utility corridors. Environmental Corridors require



Environmental Corridors serve as critical green infrastructure for communities – protecting sensitive lands and providing habitat and vital ecosystem services.

limitations to development of the built environment to fully realize the benefits of green infrastructure and reduce potential damage to private property.

In this *Plan*, Environmental Corridors are defined and illustrated in two ways:

- ◆ The Land Use chapter, and Map 2.1: Future Land Use, illustrate and describe in detail continuous drainageway systems that are prioritized for preservation and are currently designated, or are likely to be designated in the future as part of the City’s greenbelt system. These areas are a component of the area categorized as *Parks, Open Spaces, and Environmental Corridors* on the Future Land Use Map.
- ◆ Floodplain, wetland, steep slope (12 – 20 and 20%+), drainageway and waterway buffer areas, and hydric soils as defined by Rock County are shown on Map 3.1 Natural Features. In some cases, these correspond with what is mapped on Map 2.1. In other cases, these are isolated areas

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that are not identified on Map 2.1. Map 3.1 should be referred to and an environmental inventory of these resources prepared along with any development proposal.

There may be a need—through future efforts like a Sewer Service Area (208) Plan update—to reconcile different definitions of what constitutes an Environmental Corridor between the City and County.

Existing development and farming, with proper erosion and runoff management practices, should be allowed to continue within mapped Environmental Corridors, but some improvements may be limited (see policies in Land Use chapter). New buildings that do not replace old buildings and significant expansions to existing building footprints should not be allowed, unless the environmental corridor boundary is determined to be in error or environmental protection laws are otherwise followed. Environmental Corridors should also be maintained with sufficient width and ground cover to provide movement of wildlife and fulfill their stormwater management functions. Maintained lawns and formal landscaping within Environmental Corridors are regulated by City Ordinance and enforced by the Public Works Department.

Within Janesville, Environmental Corridors often coincide with the City’s designated greenbelts. As a means of continuing to protect Environmental Corridors, and other natural or recreational priorities, the City will require that parks and greenbelts are identified, designated, and set-aside as detailed neighborhood plans are prepared, subdivision plats are proposed, or new portions of the City are otherwise proposed for development.

Greenbelts should serve one or more of the following functions:

1. Serve as green infrastructure for stormwater management.
2. Coincide with Environmental Corridors, or otherwise protect important natural and environmental features, and other significant resources that should not be developed (such as floodplains, wetlands, woodlands, moraine areas, ridgetops, and steep slopes).
3. Serve as corridors to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian paths, and / or other linear utilities (e.g., below ground transmission lines).

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

“Historically, communities have used gray infrastructure—systems of gutters, pipes, and tunnels—to move stormwater away from where we live to treatment plants or straight to local water bodies...Green infrastructure filters and absorbs stormwater where it falls.

Green infrastructure elements can be woven into a community at several scales. Examples at the urban scale could include a rain barrel up against a house, a row of trees along a major city street, or greening an alleyway. Neighborhood scale green infrastructure could include acres of open park space outside a city center, planting rain gardens or constructing a wetland near a residential housing complex. At the landscape or watershed scale, examples could include protecting large open natural spaces, riparian areas, wetlands or greening steep hillsides. When green infrastructure systems are installed throughout a community, city or across a regional watershed, they can provide cleaner air and water as well as significant value for the community with flood protection, diverse habitat, and beautiful green spaces.” – US EPA 2021 “What is Green Infrastructure”

In 2019 congress passed the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act which defines green infrastructure as “the range of measures that use plant or soil systems, permeable pavement or other permeable surfaces or substrates, stormwater harvest and reuse, or landscaping to store, infiltrate, or evapotranspire stormwater and reduce flows to sewer systems or to surface waters.”

4. Provide connectivity between existing and planned parks, open spaces, neighborhoods, and retail, service, and employment centers.

Protect the Rock River Corridor and Watershed

The Rock River is a defining natural feature of the City of Janesville and the region that guided much of the early settlement, commerce, and development in the City. The rich and celebrated history of the Rock River and how it shaped the community is documented in detail in the document, “City on the Rock. River: Chapters in Janesville’s History.” Today, the Rock River is a focal point for redevelopment and revitalization in the heart of Janesville. The river also provides links to other communities along the Rock River Valley and within the region. The River plays a central role in the future of Downtown Janesville and strategies for development of this corridor are multi-faceted – from promoting the River as a focus of redevelopment and recreation to preserving and restoring open and natural spaces along the River to showcase its beauty. Central to all these efforts is ensuring that the water quality of the watershed is improved, protected, and sustainability managed. The City, in conjunction with the Sustainable Janesville Committee when applicable, will consider several initiatives aimed at achieving that, including:

1. Provide for additional green infrastructure along the Rock River through acquisition and protection of riverfront property.
2. Coordinate with the Janesville and Milton School Districts on educational programs focused on water and natural resources-based education – focused on raising awareness of students as citizens of the Rock River Watershed.
3. Consider development of a River “Ecology Center” as a focal point for information and education about the River – including its history, issues, and education. This idea is presented in greater detail in the Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, which proposes that such a center be in or near the Fourth Ward Neighborhood.
4. Use the proposed Downtown Riverwalk as a platform for educational and awareness efforts, encouraging interpretive exhibits that raise awareness of watershed issues and opportunities and increase the City’s physical connection to the River.
5. Showcase the Rock River through encouraging development of commercial and entertainment uses with frontage on or views of the River in appropriate locations.
6. Continue to integrate natural areas and buffers as components of the stormwater management system. Explore ways to promote additional innovative stormwater management techniques.

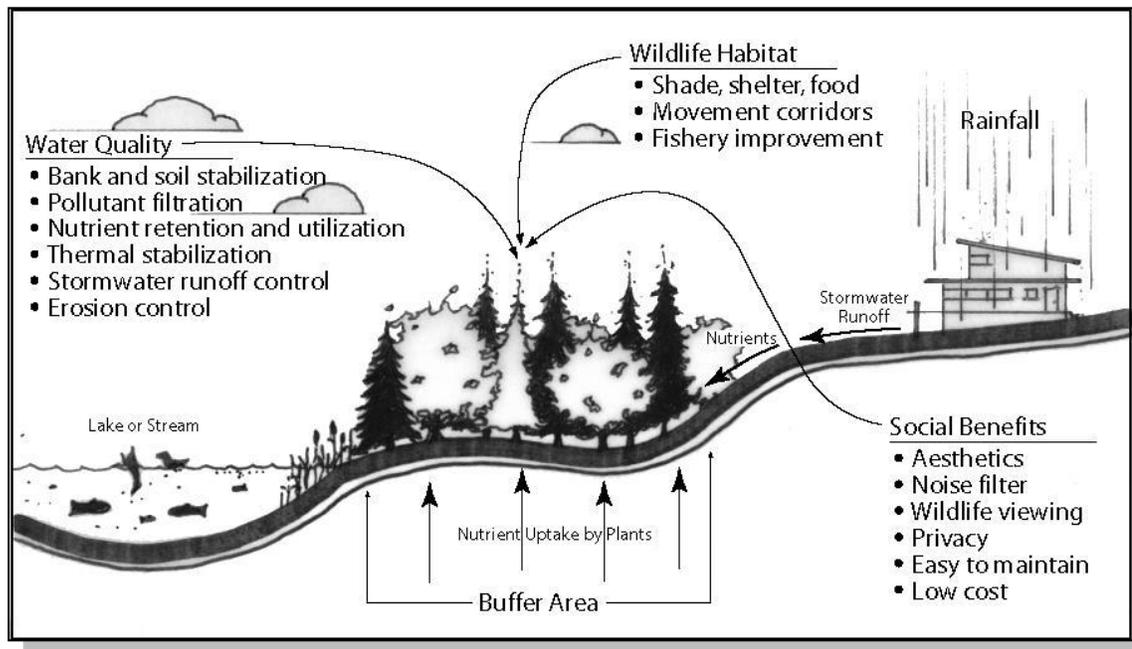


The Rock River is a valued City and regional resource.

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7. Encourage measures to minimize both point source and non-point source pollution. Raise awareness of point source dischargers. Work with the Rock River Coalition, WDNR, Rock County, and neighboring towns on minimizing non-point source pollution, particularly from agricultural sources, through encouraging best management practices.
8. Utilize the 2015 Flood Hazard or more up-to-date information on the floodplain, flood fringe, and floodway when making building development and preservation decisions that are located along or near the Rock River.
9. Encourage restoration of riparian areas along water ways and water bodies. Riparian corridors are management areas that provide an essential buffer between developed areas and water bodies. There are many benefits of a healthy riparian area, including the protection of water quality, flood control, stream bank stabilization, water temperature control, and room for lateral movement of stream channels. Trees and shrubs retained in buffer areas provide the benefit of buffering noise from watercraft, providing privacy to residents, and serving as nesting areas for songbirds. The following buffering techniques illustrated in Figure 5 can maximize water quality protection, habitat, and erosion control benefits in buffer areas around rivers and creeks in the City, particularly in areas that currently have limited development.

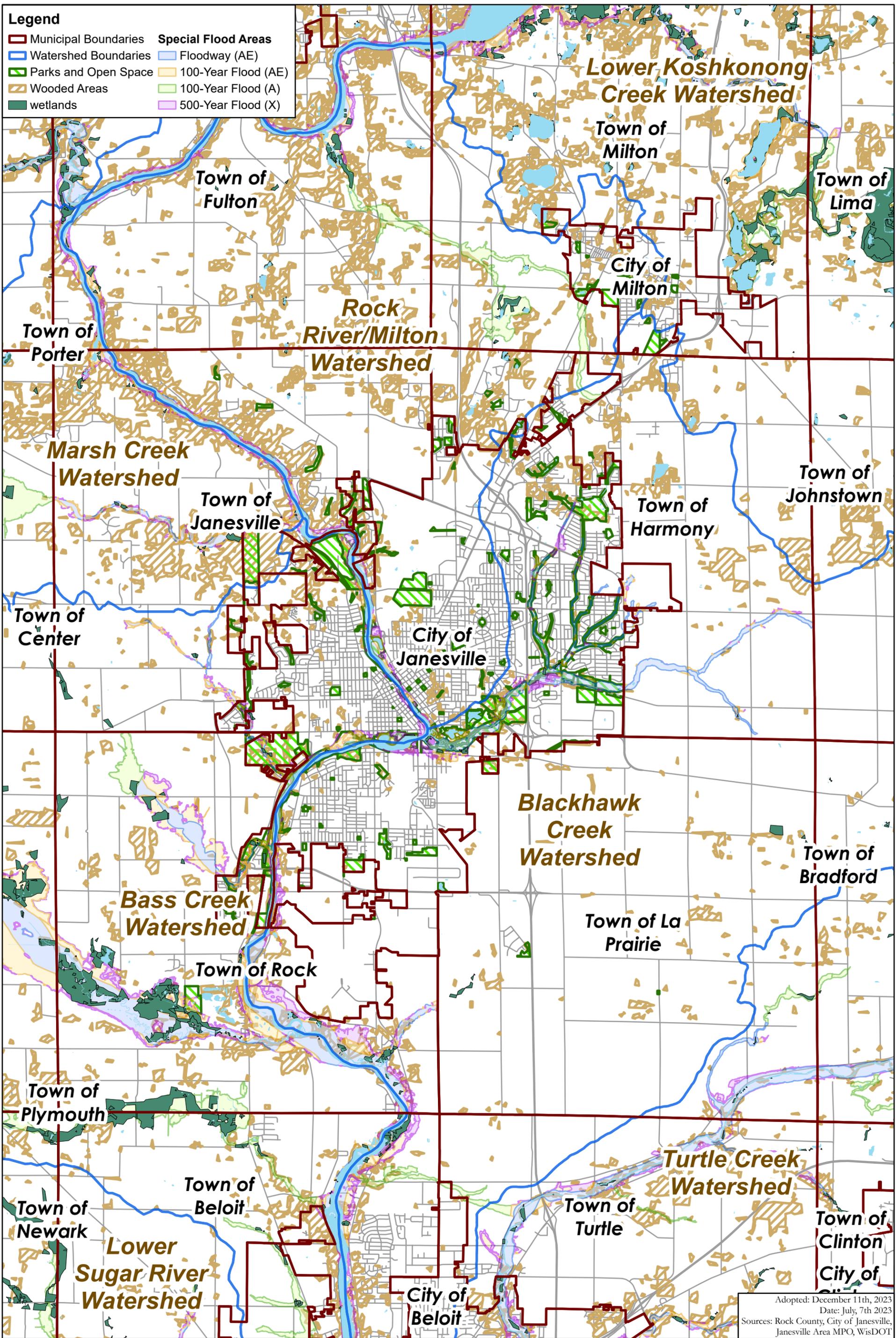
Figure 3.1: Example of Riparian Area



10. Continue improvements to the built and natural environment within the urban core of Janesville and along the Rock River. Many portions of river wall are reaching the end of their life and will need repair or replacement. It is recommended that the City work with the DNR to evaluate alternatives to the current structures, with a focus on improving water quality and water habitats for aquatic life and creating a more inviting and welcoming atmosphere along the River through improved public access.

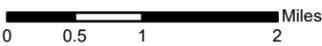
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11. Consider developing a Rock River Committee that would be responsible for evaluating and helping to spearhead restoration and improvement projects along the Rock River in Janesville.
12. Enforce erosion control and stormwater management laws and seek compliance for best practice techniques for water quality protection and improvement. Consider new rules to reduce impact of improperly managed construction sites, a significant contributor to off-site sediment runoff in Janesville.



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 Date: July, 7th 2023
 Sources: Rock County, City of Janesville, Janesville Area MPO, WisDOT

Map 3.1 Natural Features



CITY OF JANESVILLE
Wisconsin's Park Place

8/25/2023; D.Salmon, Planning Division
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