



DRAFT

Envision Bear Creek

The vision for the future of the
Bear Creek Greenway



June 2024



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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	V
1. PROJECT BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE	1
2. EXISTING CONDITIONS	4
3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	25
4. RECOMMENDATIONS	34
APPENDICES	51
APPENDIX A: EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT	
APPENDIX B: ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS	
APPENDIX C: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY	
APPENDIX D: GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OPTIONS	
APPENDIX E: FUNDING ANALYSIS	





Executive Summary

Project Background and Purpose

The Bear Creek Greenway is an approximately 22.4-mile paved, multi-use trail that links the cities of Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, Medford, and Central Point in Jackson County, Oregon. This pathway provides Rogue Valley residents and visitors to the area with a separated path for travel by walking and biking, a close-to-home opportunity for bird watching and wildlife viewing, and a dedicated space for exercise and general recreation. However, the Greenway is more than just a paved path. For the purposes of this study, the Bear Creek Greenway is defined as all public lands along the Bear Creek Corridor between Ashland and Central Point, including the section of public right-of-way that the paved trail passes through. The Greenway does not include privately owned lands, with the exception of private lands in which an easement for trail purposes has been granted.

While many in the community recognize the Bear Creek Greenway as a unique and valuable resource for the region, there is also a collective recognition of the Greenway's challenges. The Greenway was a source of fuel for the devastating Almeda fire that swept through Jackson County communities in September 2020, creating considerable public concern about the need for increased

vegetation maintenance. Additionally, there are concerns about public safety along the Greenway, leading some residents to avoid it altogether or limit their use of this corridor for transportation and recreation.

As a result of this community concern, the Envision Bear Creek planning process began as a collaborative effort amongst the five cities that the Greenway runs through, along with Jackson County and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). These seven jurisdictions have a long history of working together to manage the Greenway, which led to the post-fire partnership effort.

Envision Bear Creek has provided the region with a timely opportunity to consider and shape a vision for the Greenway. The goal of this planning process was to proactively identify existing challenges and formulate a plan to preserve and improve this valuable corridor for future generations. The resulting document is a community-centered plan for recreation and economic development opportunities, natural resources management and transportation connectivity. The plan also advances a structure for maintenance, security, funding, and overall governance that will better equip the Greenway to thrive well into the future.



Existing Conditions

As an initial step in this process, the project team assessed the existing conditions along the Bear Creek Greenway. The following key themes emerged:

- ▶ **Land Ownership:** Land along the Greenway is owned by both public and private entities, including local cities, Jackson County, and ODOT. This complex patchwork of ownership necessitates considerable coordination when it comes to land management. Envision Bear Creek focused on future efforts pertaining to public lands only.
- ▶ **Safety and Security:** The community has identified issues with public safety and user behavior along the Greenway as a priority for improvement.
- ▶ **Fire Prevention and Mitigation:** Because of its location in the critical wildland-urban interface, the Greenway can be a source of fuel for fires, including the devastating 2020 Almeda Fire. A comprehensive strategy for maintenance and vegetation management is critical to limiting hazards and lessening the potential for future disasters.
- ▶ **Trail Development and Connectivity:** The trail is a much-needed transportation facility for many in the Bear Creek Valley. The community has come up with many ideas for future expansion projects to connect the Greenway to additional communities, active transportation facilities, and recreational resources.
- ▶ **Displacement and Houselessness:** Jackson County's affordable housing crisis, which was exacerbated by the 2020 fires, has meant displacement is common in the area. At times, illegal encampments have proliferated along the Greenway, causing concern among residents and Greenway users. While the Bear Creek Greenway cannot address the complex issues leading to this displacement, it is important to consider what steps the Greenway managers can take to lessen the impact on facility users.
- ▶ **Environmental Conditions:** The Bear Creek Greenway is located along a riparian corridor, which is an integral part of the region's natural ecosystem. For this reason, efforts to maintain the Greenway and control fuels must be balanced with the natural functions of the corridor, including as a habitat for threatened species, a location of important waterways, and a home to valuable historic and cultural resources.
- ▶ **Vegetation Management:** The management of vegetation along the Greenway corridor is essential for ecosystem health and fire prevention. It also affects accessibility and public safety. Through the Bear Creek Natural Resources Plan (NRP), the Bear Creek Restoration Initiative (BCRI) designated Riparian Condition Zones (RCZs) along the corridor to establish suggested standards for vegetation management according to the function of each zone. This will provide the basis for a robust vegetation management plan.
- ▶ **Economic Benefits:** As a designated Oregon Regional Trail serving local residents and visitors alike, the Bear Creek Greenway plays a role in generating economic activity in Jackson County. When people use the Greenway, the local economy benefits



from recreation and tourism-based spending. This money often remains in the local economy, further supporting local businesses and residents, a phenomenon known as the “multiplier effect.” (See the table below for a breakdown of estimated economic benefits for the year 2019.)

- ▶ **Equity Considerations:** To address historic inequities, it’s important for planners and policymakers to consider how to engage and reflect the needs of “high equity priority” communities. Understanding where these communities are located along the Bear Creek Greenway corridor helps prioritize them for investment. Through an equity analysis, the project team noted some areas of high equity need that could benefit from being connected to the Greenway, as well as additional communities that are off the route of the Greenway and may benefit from enhanced connections.
- ▶ **Trail Level of Comfort:** User experience and comfort along a trail often determines whether people will use it for transportation and recreation purposes. Some major components of trail level of comfort include lighting and visibility, the distance between access

points and buffering from the noise of vehicle traffic, which is associated with noise. Members of the public consistently expressed a desire to see more lighting along the Greenway. The project team also found that there are significant distances between trail access points along the southern and northern reaches of the Greenway, exceeding a mile in some areas.

- ▶ **Jurisdictional Coordination:** Since 2008, the Greenway has been collectively administered through a Joint Powers Agreement (an Intergovernmental Agreement, or IGA) that includes five cities, as well as Jackson County. These parties contribute to the cost of routine maintenance and a part-time Jackson County staff person dedicated to the Greenway. The partnership has built trust amongst trail managers and has been largely successful. However, this structure has some weaknesses, which are outlined in detail in the Existing Conditions chapter of the Plan. Envision Bear Creek is poised to build off this long-standing model of multi-jurisdictional partnership, expanding on what works and adjusting course where challenges have arisen.

Table ES-1 Economic Benefits of the Bear Creek Greenway.

JOB	ACCOMMODATIONS	FOOD SERVICE	ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND RECREATION	FOOD STORES	TRANSPORTATION AND GAS	RETAIL STORES	TOTAL
48	\$536,170	\$798,910	\$320,769	\$231,460	\$231,460	\$340,605	\$2,820,301



Community Engagement

Beginning in July 2022, the Envision Bear Creek planning team implemented a public engagement approach to reach out to communities and provide them with an opportunity to re-envision the Greenway. Through a variety of outreach strategies, methods, and community partnerships, the substantial public input received helped shape plans for recreation and economic development opportunities, natural resources enhancements, transportation connectivity, and options for enhanced maintenance, improved security, increased funding, and efficient governance.

At the onset of public outreach, the project team developed a broad and inclusive list of public entities, business groups, community organizations, interested parties and other stakeholders. This helped to create



collaborative trusted networks for project communication, provide informational materials, and promote opportunities for public input.

Corridor community communications centered on the distribution of EBC lawn signs and over 2,500 bilingual bookmarks available in libraries, coffee shops, medical facilities, grocery stores, and other businesses and entities between Ashland and Central Point.

Due to these successful collaborations, the Community Advisory Committee’s assistance, and the project team outreach, the project benefitted from over 3,000 EBC surveys responses and created an interested parties list of over 850 individuals, agencies, groups, community organizations, etc.

Opportunities for the public to learn about the project and provide feedback included:

- ▶ **Targeted stakeholder input** (through interviews with staff from local agencies and presentations to corridor community and business groups)
- ▶ **In-person intercept outreach** with bilingual hard copies of the survey throughout the corridor to reach people who may not have access to computers
- ▶ **Two bilingual online community open house events** to provide information and gather feedback from attendees
- ▶ **Two bilingual online community surveys** aimed at understanding challenges along the Greenway and measuring public support for a variety of recommendations
- ▶ **Targeted in-person outreach** to low-income residents, unhoused residents, communities of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, people living with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, youth, and families.



Key takeaways from community engagement included the following:

- ▶ **Concerns about public safety:** When asked about current Greenway challenges, members of the public overwhelmingly mentioned safety/ crime. This included perceived issues of violence, litter, fire hazards, visibility and lack of supervision. Some simultaneously raised concerns about increased police presence on the Greenway. It is important to note that emergency service records do not indicate the Greenway as a high crime facility for public use, but there is a robust perception in the community that it is, which prevents some from using the facility.
- ▶ **Maintenance Challenges:** Survey respondents also expressed concern with maintenance challenges. This included both environmental maintenance (such as vegetation clearing and riparian habitat protection) and physical maintenance, such as pavement surfaces and graffiti removal.
- ▶ **Vegetation management needs:** Participants felt that vegetation management and natural resource restoration were important considerations for the Greenway. This included the clearing on invasive and/or non-native plants and consideration for fish passages at key locations along the corridor.
- ▶ **Other issues:** Other challenges and concerns brought up by survey participants included a desire for more access points and trail-oriented development to increase connections to the Greenway.
- ▶ **Desire for Greenway activation:** Members of the public also expressed excitement about the potential for more public events and commercial activity (such as food trucks) to encourage use of the Greenway by more people and increase “eyes on the trail.”
- ▶ **Need to fund maintenance and operations:** When asked about how they would allocate funds to the Greenway (in Survey #2), participants chose to prioritize maintenance and operations. They also noted that fire prevention should be a greater focus, especially following the Alameda fire.
- ▶ **Increased official presence on the Greenway:** In terms of ideas for increasing official presence along the Greenway, both a trail ranger program and increased law enforcement presence were popular among survey respondents, with the trail ranger program receiving slightly greater support.
- ▶ **Willingness to fund this project:** More than two-thirds of respondents expressed their willingness to financially contribute to increasing the level of service along the Greenway, and almost three quarters felt that establishing a taxing district was a better way to accomplish this than to increase local municipality spending.



Recommendations

This plan outlines a set of recommendations based on the community and stakeholder feedback received. The purpose of these recommendations is to provide a plan for addressing the Greenway’s current issues and challenges and chart a path to a sustainable future for this community resource.

These recommendations encompass:

<p>PROJECTS</p> <p>such as new access points and installation of amenities</p> 	<p>PROGRAMS</p> <p>including a Greenway Ranger program and plan for vegetation management and fire protection</p> 	<p>A revised GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE for consistent management of the Greenway</p> 	<p>A proposal for sustainable, long-term FUNDING of the Greenway through a new taxing district</p> 
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Projects and Programs

The project recommendations are organized into the following five categories:

- 1. Maintenance and Operations:** This category provides system-wide plans for regular maintenance and operations projects, including a ranger program and detailed vegetation management plan.
- 2. Amenities and Enhancements:** These projects cover important Greenway amenities such as restrooms, signage and wayfinding, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, benches, bike racks, fencing, and lighting. In addition to these enhancements, this category also includes projects focused on identifying safety improvements to underpasses and opportunities to reduce the impact of noise from I-5.
- 3. Riparian Restoration:** These projects pursue restoration along the Bear Creek riparian corridor through collaborative efforts. Projects may fall under categories such as floodplain connectivity, vegetation management, and fire safety along the Bear Creek corridor. Through projects like native vegetation planting and invasive species removal and control, the resilience and sustainability of Bear Creek will be enhanced.
- 4. Capital Repair/Replacement:** These projects address existing issues with pavement condition and provide funding for addressing future potential vandalism and damage from natural hazards (such as floods, fires, or earthquakes).
- 5. Capital Expansion/New Access:** Through public engagement, residents identified two priority projects for expansion of the Greenway. These include a paved connection from the Greenway to Glenwood Road, which will provide access to Highway 99 in North Phoenix, as well as to the future Midway Park in Medford.



Vegetation Management and Fire Protection

By mapping existing vegetation types, invasive plants, and vegetative fuel areas within the riparian corridor, the Bear Creek Restoration Initiative was able to define the corridor's four Riparian Condition Zones (RCZs), laying out potential fire mitigation and restoration opportunities specific to each zone. Vegetation management projects should occur to some level in all the RCZs, but the appropriate treatments would depend on the zone and its functions. For example, in more natural areas (RCZ1 and RCZ2), landscape management would be minimal and largely achieved through invasive species control for wildland fire risk reduction purposes. In higher risk zones (RCZ3 and RCZ4), prescriptions would involve more intensive management with tasks such as regular mowing and pruning, as well as a more hands-on landscape management approach.

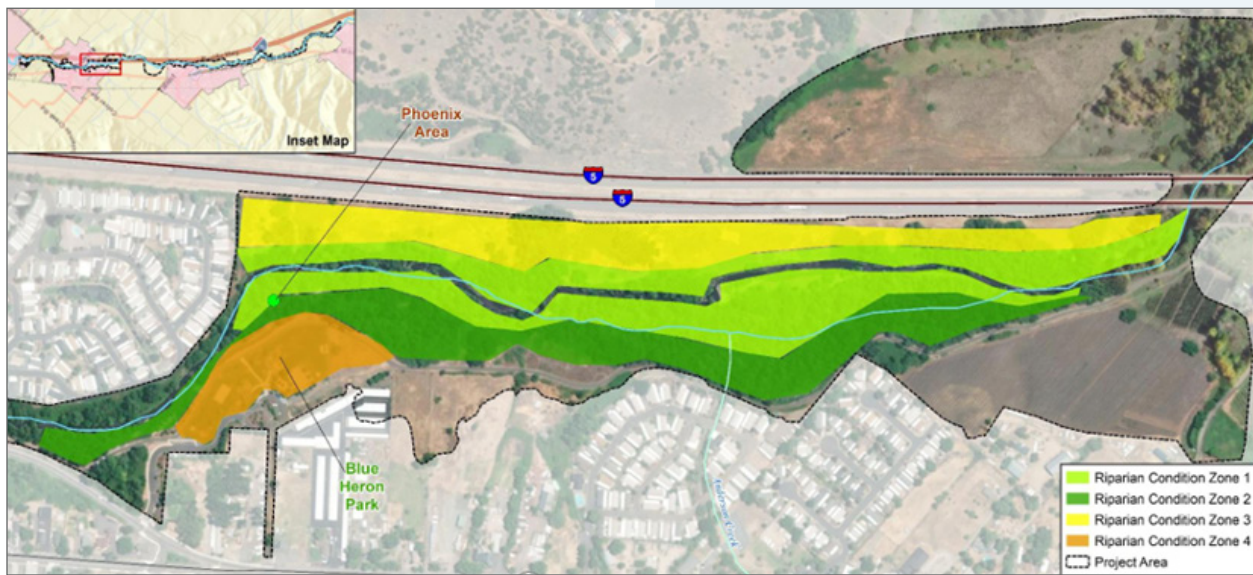
For the complete project list, refer to **pages 40 to 43** of the Recommendations chapter.



What is a Ranger Program?

This plan recommends establishing a Bear Creek Greenway Ranger Program to address public safety concerns and provide numerous other benefits to Greenway Users.

Greenway rangers will be specially trained and certified staff members who will traverse the trail on a regular basis, creating a visible staff presence, answering questions, and keeping their trained eyes on the Greenways for hazards or potential problems. Rather than being trained as law enforcement officers, the rangers will undergo training similar to other unarmed park rangers. To best serve in this role as a public liaison, rangers must be calm, compassionate, and excellent communicators. They would also wear uniforms that identify them as professional ambassadors to the Greenway, along with name tags to build familiarity and trust among users.



A map depicting the RCZs along the Phoenix section of the Bear Creek corridor. Similar maps were created for other areas of Bear Creek.



Governance Structure

An important part of the Envision Bear Creek process is to establish a governance model that that will clarify roles and facilitate collaboration among the involved agencies. Based on the list of desired conditions developed by stakeholders (see callout to the right), the project team assessed a variety of governance models to determine the most effective structure for the Greenway. (See **Appendix D** of the Envision Bear Creek Plan for a full governance structure analysis.)

Based on the results of this analysis, the Steering Committee recommended moving forward with a service district hybrid model, which combines a County Service District with an IGA between Jackson County, Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, Medford, Central Point and ODOT. While the County Service District is proposed as a funding mechanism, the annual operations plan will be compiled through a multi-jurisdictional partnership, similar to the way in which the Greenway is currently managed, a system which has been very successful. This plan recommends that an IGA be developed outlining roles and responsibilities of parties early on in discussions. Ideally, this would ensure that each jurisdiction has a voice in annual operational and capital plans and development of the annual Greenway collaborative budgeting process.

While this model provides a funding mechanism, it also provides the flexibility for each jurisdiction to retain control of their jurisdictional segments of the Greenway itself and make management decisions that best represent their community values, including code enforcement, land use, and others. This model does not eliminate local control but instead strives to develop consistency and predictability in user experience to the extent possible, as well as bringing more financial resources to the table for Greenway management.



Desired Future Conditions Along the Greenway

- ▶ Create a Greenway that extends from Emigrant Lake to the Rogue River.
- ▶ Create a consistent user experience throughout the Greenway.
- ▶ Improve ecological health and fire resistance of the Bear Creek Corridor.
- ▶ Increase efficiency in Greenway operations.
- ▶ Enhance perceived and actual safety for the Greenway.
- ▶ Support strong connectivity between local businesses and Greenway users.
- ▶ Support livable communities by creating a desirable place to live, work, and play.
- ▶ Establish a stable and predictable funding level.
- ▶ Incorporate ODOT lands into the overall long-term management structure for the Bear Creek Greenway.



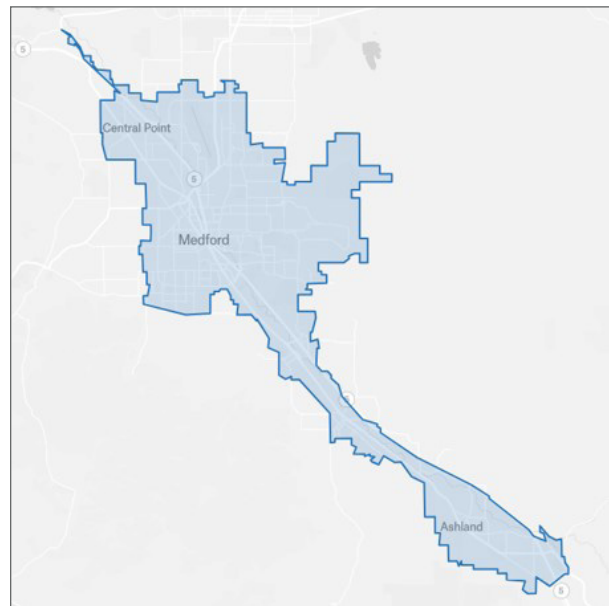
Funding

The planning process analyzed several funding mechanisms with the goal of identifying the method that delivered the most consistent, stable, and sustainable funding source to achieve the desired future conditions. (For a full list of funding alternatives that were considered, see **Appendix E** of the Plan.) The Steering Committee ultimately recommended the creation of a taxing district to fund current and future needs, as this mechanism meets the criteria of a stable funding source that will assist in a consistent funding level moving forward.

The selected project list requires \$5.9 million in one-time capital costs and an estimated annual cost of \$2.1 million for maintenance and operations (both in current dollars) to fully fund and implement. To fund the selected project list, the project team evaluated three potential options for a taxing district geography, ranging from the area immediately surrounding the Greenway to Jackson County as a whole. The Steering Committee elected to recommend the establishment of a taxing district that incorporates the Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs) of all five cities the Greenway encompasses, as well as a minimal amount of non-incorporated lands in between Ashland-Talent and Talent-Phoenix immediately adjacent to the Greenway (see **Figure 1**). Their reasoning was that as residents in this district are likely to be more connected to the Greenway and experience the benefits of proposed improvements, as compared to the other taxing district options.

The team determined that a property tax levy of \$0.20 per \$1,000 of assessed value was needed to cover the cost of the selected projects. Of this, operations and maintenance costs require a levy of \$0.15 per \$1,000 of assessed value, and amortized capital costs require a levy of \$0.05 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Given the calculated necessary levy, the average tax bill increase for residential property owners within the taxing district boundary is estimated to be just below \$52 a year. The average increase was found to range from \$66 in Ashland, where average residential property values are highest, to \$44 in Phoenix, where average residential property values are lowest.



▲ Figure 1 Proposed Taxing District

A map depicting the selected taxing district geography, which incorporates the boundaries of each of the five cities, as well as unincorporated areas immediately adjacent to the Greenway.





1

Project Background and Purpose



Project Background

The Bear Creek Greenway is an approximately 22.4-mile paved, multi-use trail that links the cities of Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, Medford, and Central Point in Jackson County, Oregon. This pathway provides Rogue Valley residents and visitors to the area with a separated path for travel by walking and biking, a close-to-home opportunity for bird watching and wildlife viewing, and a dedicated space for exercise and general recreation. However, the Greenway is more than just a paved path. For the purposes of this study, the Bear Creek Greenway is defined as all public lands along the Bear Creek Corridor between Ashland and Central Point, including section of public right of way that the paved trail passes through. The Greenway does not include privately owned lands, with the exception of private lands in which an easement for trail purposes has been granted.

While many in the community recognize the Bear Creek Greenway as a unique and valuable resource for the region, there is also a collective recognition of the Greenway's challenges. The Greenway was a source of fuel for the devastating Almeda fire that swept through Jackson County communities in September 2020, creating considerable public concern about the need for increased vegetation maintenance. Additionally, there are concerns about public safety along the Greenway, leading some residents to avoid it altogether or limit their use of this corridor for transportation and recreation.

As a result of this community concern, the Envision Bear Creek planning process began as a collaborative effort amongst the five cities that the Greenway runs through, along with Jackson County and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). The seven jurisdictions have a long history of working together to manage the Greenway, which led to the post-fire partnership effort.

Almeda Fire

The year 2020 was the most devastating fire season on record. Characterized by numerous megafires, large swaths of forests in the American West were burned and blanketed the West in a thick haze. In Oregon, over 1.2 million acres of forest were burned, more than 3,000 structures were destroyed, and 11 people lost their lives.

The Almeda Fire was particularly devastating for the cities of Phoenix and Talent, destroying much of these communities. The fire also reached outlying parts of Ashland, Medford, and large swaths of rural Jackson County. The Almeda Fire impacted 3,000 acres of forest, numerous homes and businesses, and critical infrastructure and served as a turning point in Jackson County, creating a greater sense of urgency for managing wildfires and solidifying the need for collaboration across jurisdictions.





Purpose of Envision Bear Creek

Given the effects of the recent fires on the Greenway and surrounding communities, Envision Bear Creek has provided the region with a timely opportunity to consider and shape a vision for the Greenway. The goal of this planning process was to proactively identify existing challenges and formulate a plan to preserve and improve this valuable corridor for future generations. The plan advances a structure for maintenance, security, funding, and overall governance that will better equip the Greenway to thrive well into the future. The resulting document is a community-centered plan for recreation and economic development opportunities, natural resources management and transportation connectivity.





2

Existing Conditions

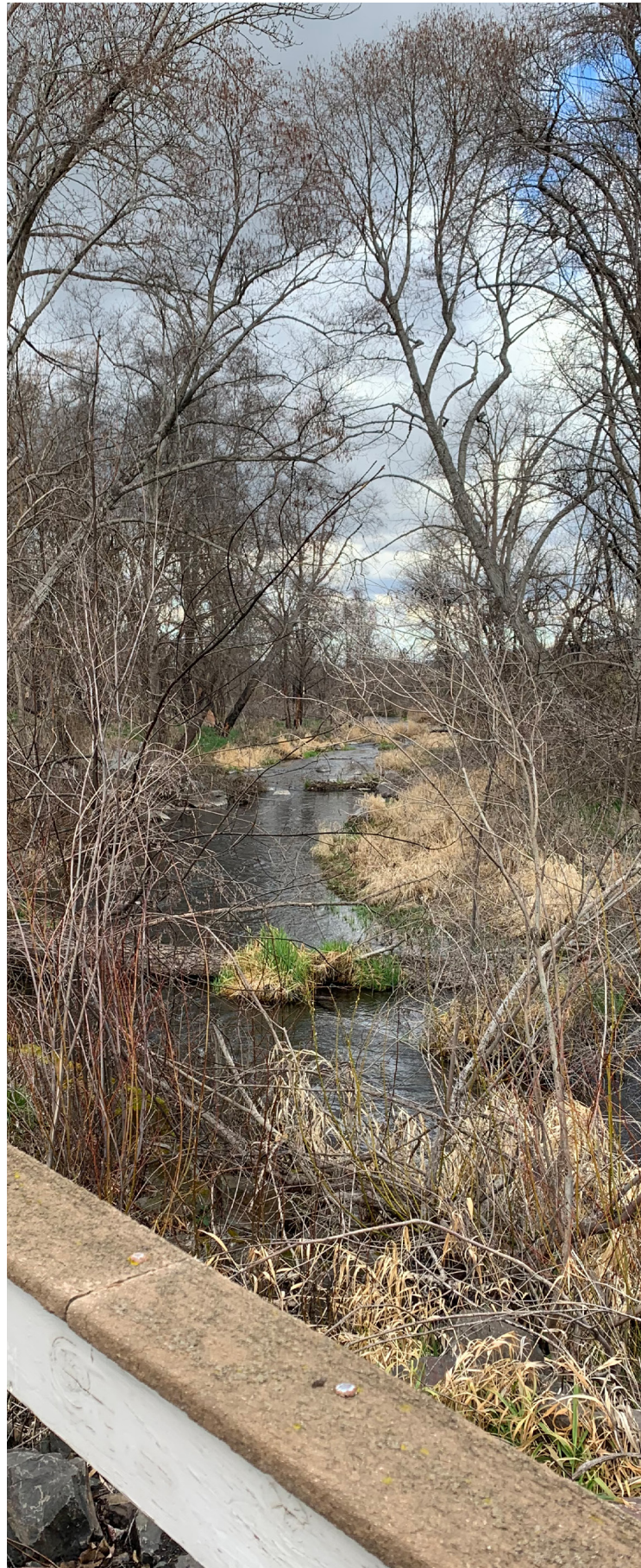
Existing Conditions

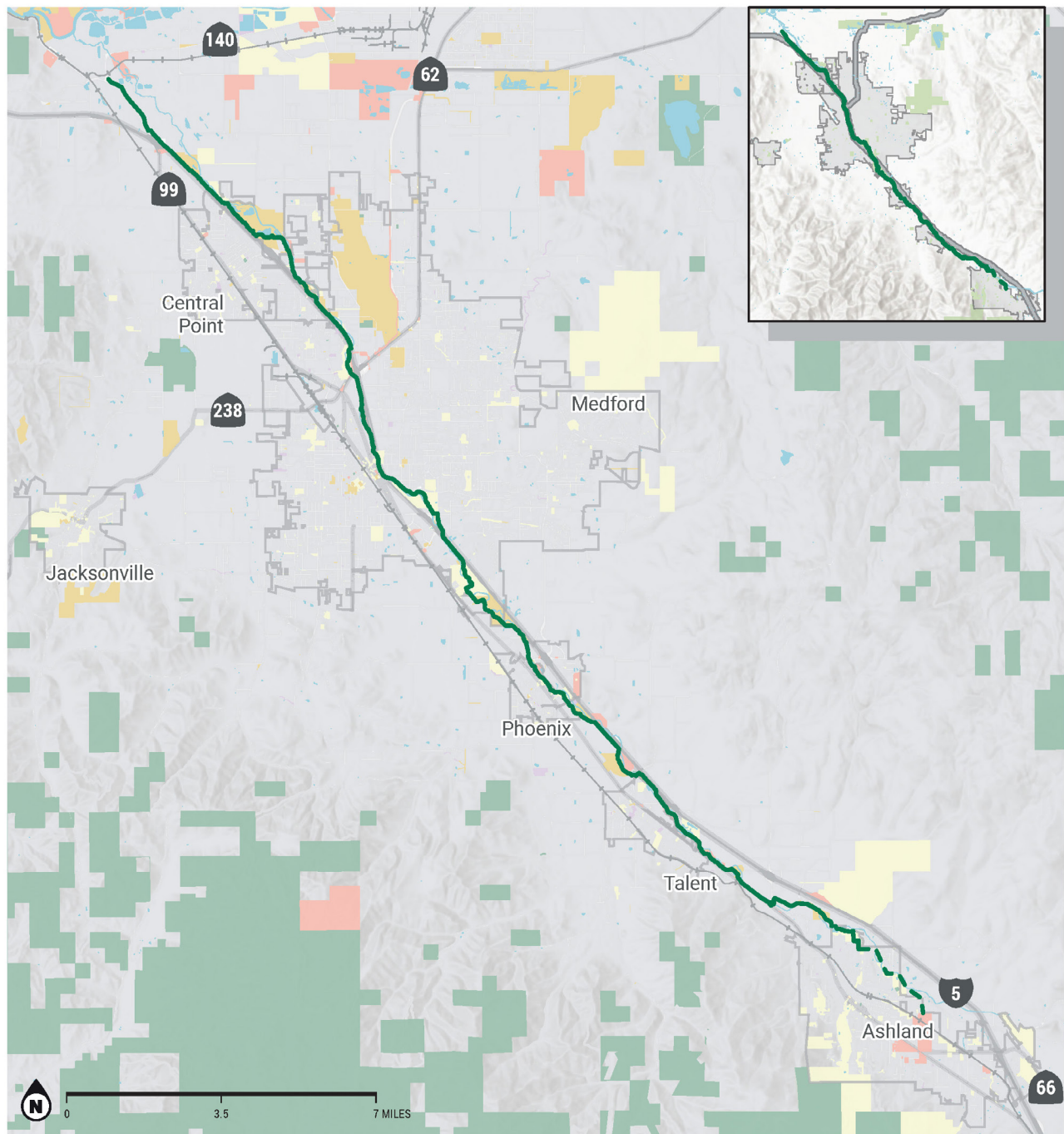
This chapter summarizes the results of the Envision Bear Creek Greenway Existing Conditions analysis. This assessment answers the question “Where is the Bear Creek Greenway today?” through evaluation of current conditions, review of previous and ongoing planning efforts, and an analysis of environmental factors influencing the Greenway. For the purposes of this study, the Bear Creek Greenway is defined as all public lands along the Bear Creek Corridor between Ashland and Central Point, including section of public right-of-way that the paved trail passes through. It does not include privately-owned lands, with the exception of private lands in which an easement for trail purposes has been granted.

Land Ownership

Land along the Greenway is owned by both public and private entities. Each of the local cities,¹ Jackson County, and ODOT own sections of the Greenway corridor. **(Figure 2 on page 6 illustrates public land ownership along the Greenway corridor.)** In many instances, the areas immediately adjacent to the Greenway are publicly owned, while nearby parcels with access to the corridor may be privately owned. The complex patchwork of ownership along the Greenway is an important consideration for land management, necessitating coordination among varied agencies and individuals. In the past, diverse policies adjacent these jurisdictions has resulted in varied approaches to vegetation management, allowable uses, and amenities along the Greenway.

¹ Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, Medford, and Central Point





BEAR CREEK GREENWAY FULL EXTENT

LAND OWNERSHIP

- LAND OWNERSHIP
- City
 - County
 - Regional
 - State of Oregon
 - Federal
 - Private

DESTINATIONS + BOUNDARIES

- Railroad
- City Limit

BEAR CREEK GREENWAY

- Complete
- Planned

alta

▲ Figure 2 Public Land Ownership along Bear Creek Greenway



Safety and Security

The term *safety* encompasses not only transportation safety but also user behavior along the Greenway, the provision of all ages and abilities facilities, and personal security. Themes of safety and security have been included as goals in many local plans and policies throughout Jackson County. In particular, the following safety concerns have been recognized through local planning efforts:

- ▶ Wildfire safety
- ▶ Seismic safety
- ▶ Vegetation management
- ▶ Community perception of lack of safety
- ▶ Lack of visibility

A major concern among Greenway users and nearby residents is the perceived lack of supervision or official presence on the trail to deter criminal behavior. The current IGA between Jackson County and Central Point, Medford, Talent, Phoenix and Ashland relies on the Jackson County Sheriff Office or local City Police officers to respond to public safety issues that arise along the Greenway, depending upon what entity has jurisdiction over an area where an incident occurs.

Fire Prevention and Mitigation

The Greenway is located within in the wildland-urban interface, and includes sections that are heavily vegetated, creating large amounts of potential fuel and leaving the area particularly susceptible to wildfires.² To respond to this hazard, communities and Jackson County partnered with Josephine County to create the *Rogue Valley Integrated Fire Plan (2019)*, which highlighted a need for resilient infrastructure and community education around wildfire risk. More recently, awareness and urgency around fire prevention has intensified given the devastating impacts of the Almeda Fire on Jackson County communities. The *Bear Creek Fire Management Plan (2021)* reflects this urgency and provides specific guidance on vegetation management, fuels reduction, and habitat preservation. While the Joint Powers Agreement for the Bear Creek Greenway allocates funds for “unforeseen events,” including potential future wildfires, it does not provide funding for routine vegetation management to reduce fuel loads outside of the ten-foot buffer immediately adjacent to either side of the paved trail, limiting the Greenway's ability to control wildfire risk.

² The "wildland-urban interface" refers to areas that straddle urban and rural/open space regions.



Trail Development and Connectivity

The current form of the Bear Creek Greenway is the culmination of decades of collaboration between local agencies and non-profits, showcased in local planning efforts, which discuss management of resources and future expansions of the Greenway and the surrounding trail network. Possible expansion projects include an extension of the Greenway to Emigrant Lake (with potential support from outside organization such as the Bear Creek Greenway Foundation). In recent history, new trail segments were built largely with the support of the Foundation, as the entity provided a match for local jurisdictions to use in grant applications. In addition to these large-scale projects, communities throughout Jackson County generally recognize the significance of the Greenway for recreation and transportation and have identified potential projects for transportation facilities that would provide additional active transportation connections to the Greenway.



Displacement and Houselessness

Jackson County is experiencing an affordable housing crisis. This crisis was worsened by recent events such as the Alameda Fire, which displaced thousands and destroyed affordable housing, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. This has led to an increase of illegal encampments along the Greenway corridor, something that residents have identified as a concern when it comes to public health and safety. While Envision Bear Creek will not be able to resolve the complex issues of houselessness and encampments, it can add clarity about potential next steps for local agencies when it comes to addressing the effects of camping adjacent to the path.

Environmental Conditions

The Bear Creek Greenway is located along a riparian³ corridor, which is an integral part of the region's natural ecosystem. As part of this plan, the project team evaluated how efforts at trail planning, fire reduction, and vegetation management could impact the sensitive environmental and cultural resources located along Bear Creek. The team conducted an environmental review, which evaluated requirements for buffers around the creek, and identified a high-level approach to vegetation management.

The project team analyzed the environmental conditions around the Bear Creek Greenway using the following key topics as an organizing framework:

- ▶ **Goal 5 Resources:** Goal 5 resources are defined by the State of Oregon as wild and scenic rivers, state scenic waterways, groundwater resources, wilderness areas, prime farmland, and gravel mines. The project team did not find any of these that would impact the Greenway.
- ▶ **Wetlands, Ponds, and Lakes:** Significant wetlands are located in the Greenway corridor, which may require extra consideration when infill or removal of earth occurs.
- ▶ **Streams, Rivers, Fisheries, and Floodplains:** The project team evaluated flowing water features such as streams, rivers, fisheries, and floodplains, making note of potential impacts to fish species.
- ▶ **Riparian Buffers and Wetland Buffers:** Riparian zones and wetland buffers are zones located within 50 feet of the top-of-bank⁴ on both sides of a waterway and typically have additional regulations designed to protect the local ecology.
- ▶ **Special Status Wildlife:** The area around the Greenway may be habitat for special status wildlife and plant species such as foothill yellow-legged frogs, grasshopper sparrows, bald eagles, and pallid bats.
- ▶ **Historic Resources:** Two structures identified by the National Register of Historic Places are located within the study area and may require additional review by an architectural historian if the structures are altered or demolished.
- ▶ **Cultural/Archaeological Resources:** There are three precontact-era archaeological sites, seven historic-era archaeological sites, and one multi-component archaeological site containing both precontact and historic period materials within one mile of the project study area.

For more detail on environmental conditions, refer to the Existing Conditions Report in **Appendix A**.

³ "Riparian" refers to areas located along or related to the banks of a creek or river.

⁴ In some areas, it may be important to consider the entire floodplain, rather than just the 50-foot buffer.



Vegetation Management Needs

The project team analyzed the Bear Creek Greenway corridor in order to understand differing vegetation management needs across it. This analysis used the Riparian Condition Zone (RCZ) framework that was developed as part of the Bear Creek Natural Resource Plan (NRP) that was developed by the Bear Creek Restoration Initiative with funding provided by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as well as the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) post-Alameda Fire. RCZs are distinct vegetation management zones ranging from a more natural landscape in rural/riparian areas (RCZ1), to a heavily manipulated landscape, near development and urban upland settings (RCZ4).

Table 1 displays a summary of the RCZs and the acreage within each zone along the Bear Creek Greenway.

As part of this planning process, the team evaluated the different conditions along the riparian corridor, designating RCZs to different areas of the Greenway according to their characteristics and function. The four RCZs bring together the recent post-fire vegetation condition findings and desired riparian conditions with specific management direction and prescriptions. The corridor was mapped to designate RCZs in cooperation with natural resource professionals and fire officials.

Table 1 Riparian Condition Zones

RCZ	AREA OF THE GREENWAY INCLUDED	GENERAL DESCRIPTION OR DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS
RCZ 1 – Natural Riparian Zone	258 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Highest density vegetation. › Little to no maintenance other than invasive species control. › Most natural condition of the four RCZs.
RCZ 2 – Riparian Savannah Zone	194 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Second highest density vegetation, with light to moderate maintenance. › A contiguous overstory canopy is the desired future condition.
RCZ 3 – Open Savannah Zone	216 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Second lowest vegetation density. › Moderate high management. › Open canopy trees. › Little to no shrub density: patches of shrubs, mowable between shrub patches, potential areas for grading to smooth the ground surface.⁵
RCZ 4 – Park Zone	209 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Lowest density vegetation. › Highest management (most frequent mowing regime). › Includes a sparse overstory of trees and patches of shrubs within a managed landscape. › Lands immediately adjacent to development.

⁵ Per 2023 Bear Creek Natural Resources Plan



Economic Benefits

The Bear Creek Greenway plays a role in generating economic activity in Jackson County. The Greenway mostly serves users from adjacent cities but also welcomes visitors from other parts of the county, other regions of Oregon, and neighboring states such as Washington and California. Some even visit from outside the United States. (Table 2 provides an estimated breakdown of visitors based on their distance traveled to visit the Greenway.)

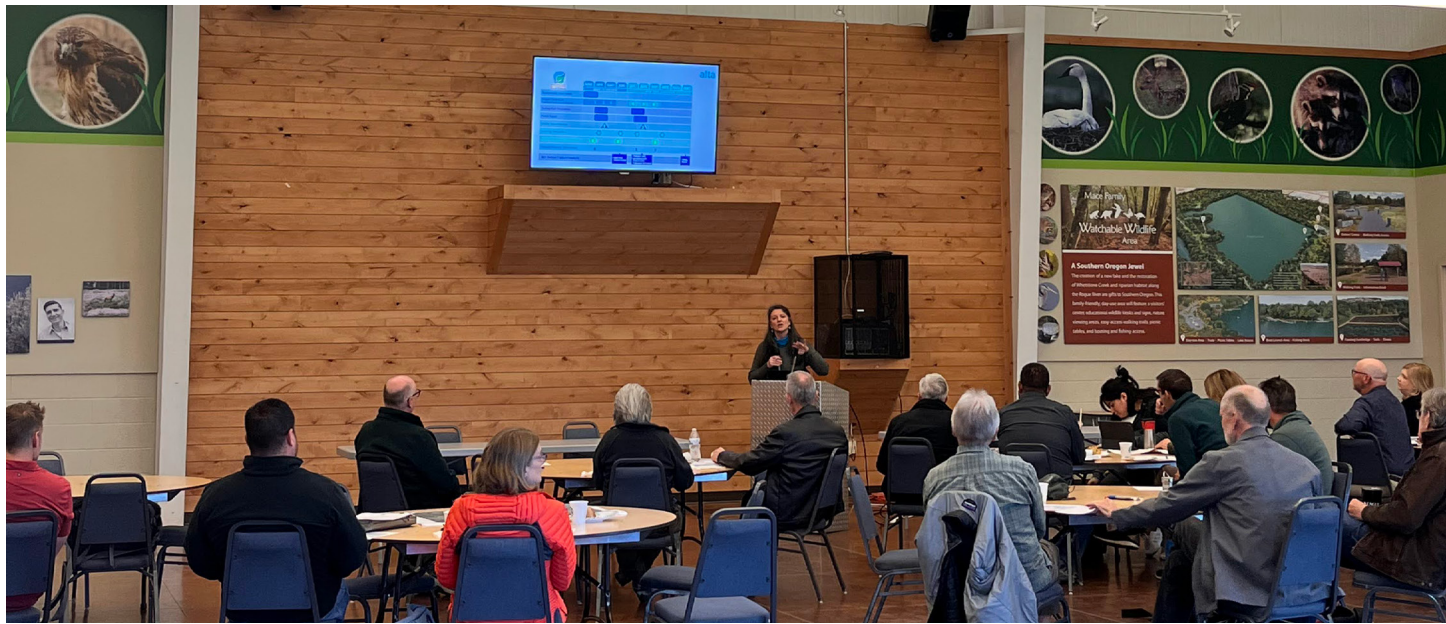
When visitors come to the Greenway from outside the area, the local economy benefits from every meal eaten in a local restaurant, hotel stay, or purchase of goods or services. This recreation and tourism-based income often remains in the local economy, further supporting local businesses and residents,⁶ a phenomenon known as the *multiplier effect*.

Table 2 Estimated Breakdown of Greenway Visitors (Source: Project Team Economic Benefits Study⁷)

TRAIL VISITOR CATEGORY	DISTANCE TRAVELED FROM ORIGIN	NUMBER OF VISITS	SHARE OF VISITS
Local visitors⁸	Less than 30 miles	30,277	68.9%
Day-use visitors	Between 30 and 100 miles	2,869	6.5%
Overnight visitors	100 miles or more	10,786	24.6%

- 6 Visitor spending in Jackson County could include expenses such as accommodations, food service, arts, entertainment, transportation, and retail sales. As an additional economic benefit, increased demand for services can mean new employment opportunities or additional hours worked and income for locals, which can be quantified by number of jobs.
- 7 The project team used a tool called Placer.ai, an artificial intelligence software that estimates origin-to-destination foot-traffic using anonymized cellular data to estimate the number of visits made annually to an area within 15 feet of the Bear Creek Greenway. Monthly data on trail visitation was collected for a five-year period from 2017 through 2021. The project team observed and adjusted for two irregularities in the data stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and Almeda Fire. COVID-19 resulted in fewer trips made to the Greenway and the month of the Almeda Fire saw an increase in visits.
- 8 Local visits were not analyzed for economic contributions as it is assumed that their economic activity would occur regardless of their presence at the Greenway.





As part of this planning process, the project team conducted an economic benefits study to better understand the financial impact of these visits on the local economy, as well as how Greenway improvements could increase visitors and generate additional economic benefits. The estimated benefits of the Bear Creek Greenway for the year 2019 are summarized in **Table 3**.

The economic benefits study helps illustrate how Jackson County is currently benefiting from the presence of the Bear Creek Greenway. In addition to these existing effects, it is likely that increased visitation spurred by expansion, improvement, and increased investment in the Greenway could lead to greater economic benefits. For example, according to this study, a 10% increase in visitors to the Greenway would result in the creation of an estimated five jobs and \$282,000 into the local economy.

Table 3 Economic Benefits of the Bear Creek Greenway⁹

JOB	ACCOMMODATIONS	FOOD SERVICE	ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND RECREATION	FOOD STORES	TRANSPORTATION AND GAS	RETAIL STORES	TOTAL
48	\$536,170	\$798,910	\$320,769	\$231,460	\$231,460	\$340,605	\$2,820,301

⁹ The project team used Dean Runyan Associates statewide spending estimates for day travel, Jackson County's average overnight visitor spending, and the IMPLAN model to analyze contributions that the day-use and overnight visitors would make to the local economy.



Equity Considerations

To address historic inequities, it's important for planners and policymakers to consider how to engage and reflect the needs of "high equity priority" communities. These communities include people of color, older adults, households without a private vehicle, and those who live in areas with higher levels of air pollution. Many of these high equity priority communities have been excluded from past planning processes, and they are more likely to experience disadvantages that limit their options for where to live, how to get around, and how to stay active and healthy. They have also generally shouldered a disproportionate burden from things like development and environmental hazards. (For a more detailed breakdown of high equity priority groups, see "Dimensions of Equity" on the following page.)

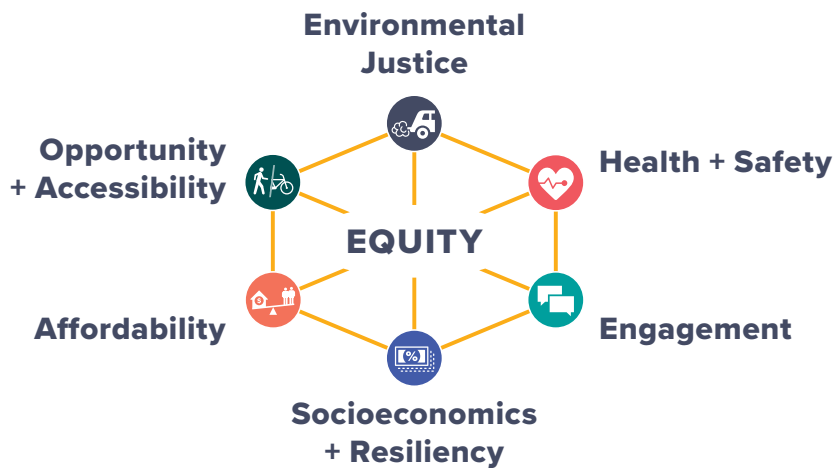
Understanding where high equity priority communities are located along the Bear Creek Greenway corridor can contextualize future planning efforts and prioritize these communities for investment. To better understand the landscape of equity in the region, the project team collected demographic and environmental data for Jackson County census block groups and created a combined equity score for each area. The team then mapped the scores across the corridor to identify areas of higher priority for investment. (See **Figure 3** for a map of these equity scores.)

Overall, the project team observed that the Bear Creek Greenway tends to align with communities of high equity priority and transportation disadvantage.¹⁰ Furthermore, transportation corridors such as I-5 and the Central Oregon and Pacific Railroad often form a barrier between areas of socioeconomic privilege and those of greater disadvantage. The Bear Creek Greenway can play a role in bridging communities and enhancing regional continuity.

The project team noted some areas of high equity need that could benefit from being connected to the Greenway, as well as additional communities that are off the route of the Greenway and may benefit from enhanced connections. These include White City, the neighborhoods near Asante Rogue Regional Medical Center, South Medford, and Central Ashland.



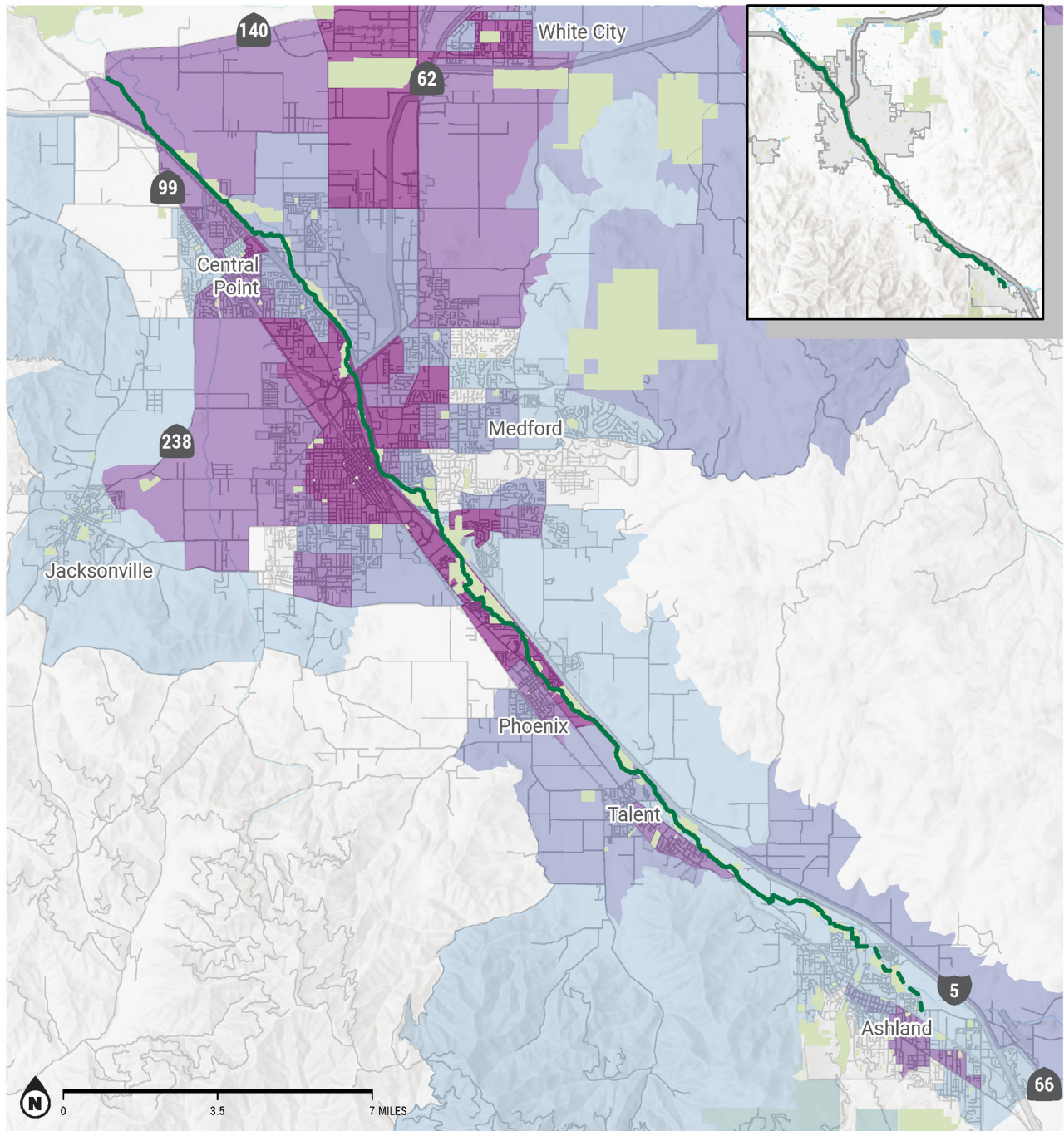
¹⁰ Transportation-disadvantaged communities are populations of people who have fewer options for how to get around. For example, their economic circumstances may prevent them from owning their own vehicle or because their area isn't well served by transit. Additionally, communities that have faced discrimination or marginalization in the past are more likely to struggle with limited choices in where they live and how they get around.



Dimensions of Equity

1. **Engagement:** The inclusion of those who have been historically excluded and marginalized from power and decision-making processes.
2. **Opportunity + Accessibility:** Opportunities for people to improve their quality of life and the role of transportation in enabling the connections to those opportunities.
3. **Environmental Justice:** The disproportionate exposure to pollution and other environmental burdens that people face as a result of proximity to industry, the transportation system, or other pollution sources.
4. **Health + Safety:** The disparate outcomes from the built environment that impact people’s health and the role of the transportation system in enabling safe systems.
5. **Affordability:** The variable costs that housing and transportation impose on people’s lives and its connection to their quality of life and risk of involuntary displacement.
6. **Socioeconomics + Resiliency:** The risk of harm that a major unforeseen disruption or natural disaster poses to a community. Socially vulnerable populations are especially at risk during public health emergencies or economic crises because of factors like socioeconomic status, household composition, minority status, or housing type and transportation options.





**BEAR CREEK GREENWAY
FULL EXTENT**

COMPOSITE
EQUITY SCORE BY
BLOCK GROUP



EQUITY PRIORITY SCORE

- High Priority
- Medium Priority
- Low Priority

BEAR CREEK GREENWAY

- Complete
- Planned

DESTINATIONS + BOUNDARIES

- Railroad
- Parks & Recreation
- City Limit

▲ Figure 3 Equity Map



Trail Level of Comfort

User experience and comfort along a trail often determine whether people will use it for transportation and recreation purposes. Some major components of trail level of comfort include lighting and visibility, the distance between access points and the distance from vehicle traffic, which is associated with noise. As part of this planning process, the project team mapped these two dimensions of user comfort using data to learn more about where users are likely to experience less-ideal conditions.

Lighting

There is some lighting along the Greenway, but it is not consistently installed across the corridor.

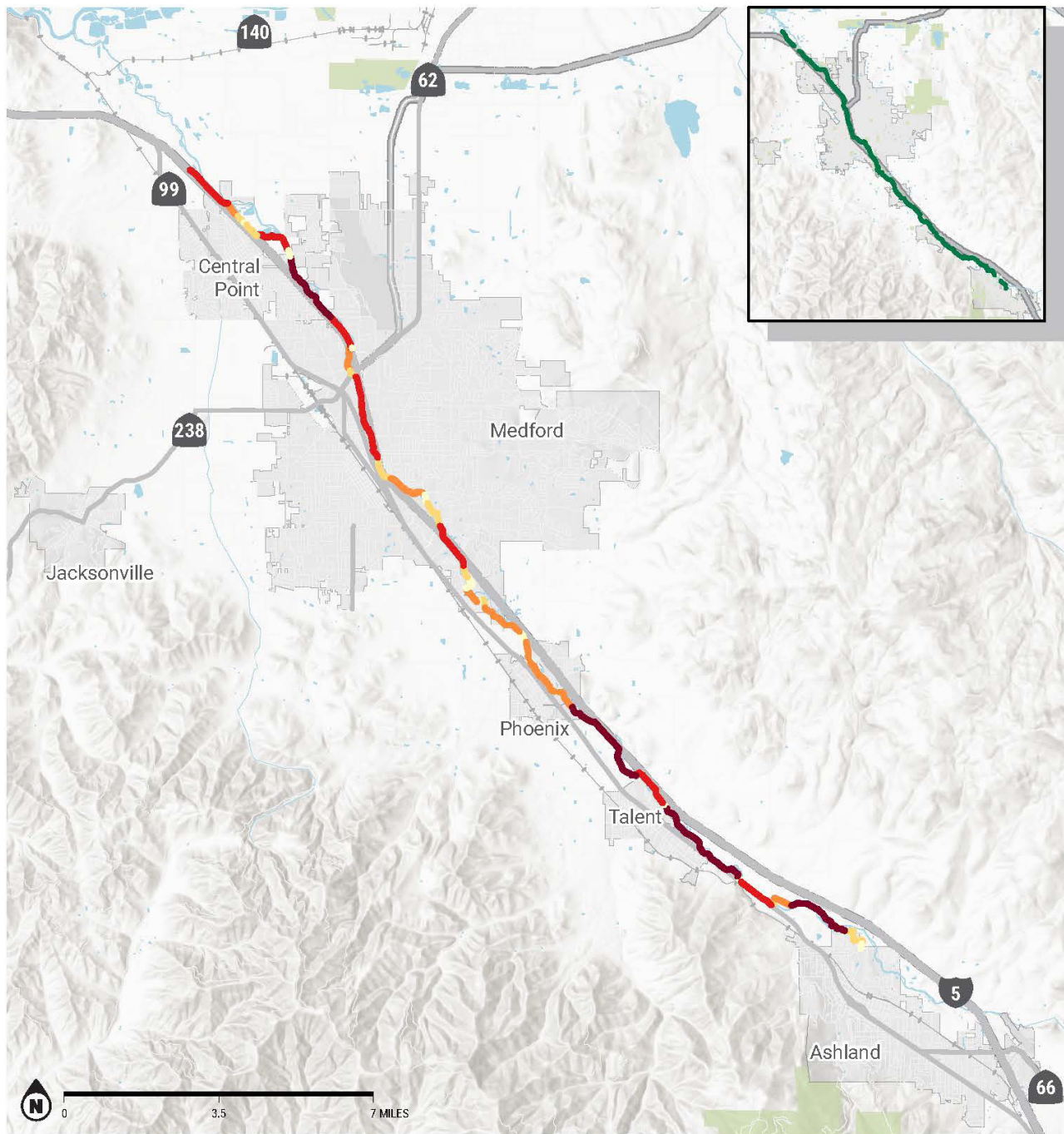
Distance between Access Points

Access points allow the community opportunities to connect to the Greenway. An analysis of access point spacing provides insights into how convenient it is for users to access the trail and identifies locations where community members may need to travel long distances to reach the Greenway. Moreover, the distance between access points can impact personal security concerns, as fewer access points mean longer distances to exit the Greenway. As shown in **Figure 4**, there are significant distances between trail access points along the southern and northern reaches of the Greenway, exceeding a mile in some areas. In contrast, the sections that travel through Medford and Phoenix have smaller distances between access points, typically around a half mile or less.

Distance from I-5

Proximity to roadways, and in this case I-5, influences user experience due to the presence of traffic, noise, and pollution. While the Greenway's alignment and the location of Bear Creek are fixed, it is essential to consider projects that can mitigate the impact of I-5 on the user experience and provide a buffer from the roadway, enhancing the experience of the natural environment. **Figure 5** illustrates the noise level of comfort based on proximity to I-5. This data shows that the Greenway segments in Central Point, Medford and between Phoenix and Talent are closest to I-5 (and potentially the noisiest), while those at the southern extent near Ashland are farthest away.





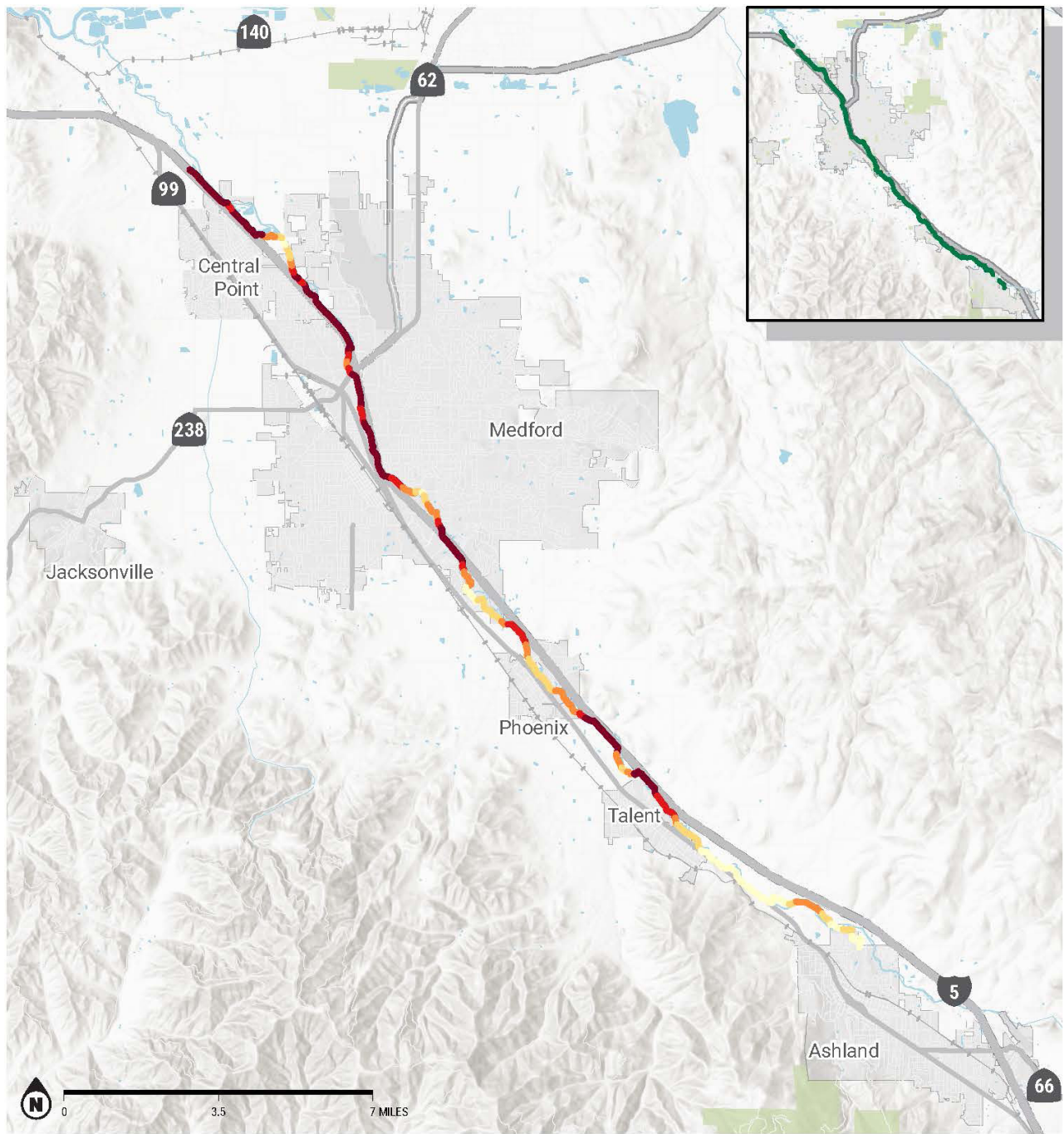
**DISTANCE BETWEEN
ACCESS POINTS
BEAR CREEK GREENWAY
FULL EXTENT**

DISTANCE BETWEEN ACCESS POINTS

- █ Greater than 1 mile
- █ 1/2 - 1 mile
- █ 1/4th - 1/2 mile
- █ 1/8th - 1/4th mile
- █ Less than 1/8th of a mile

alta

▲ Figure 4 Distance between Greenway Access Points



**NOISE LEVEL OF COMFORT
BEAR CREEK GREENWAY
FULL EXTENT**

- DISTANCE TO I-5**
- Closer to I-5
 -
 -
 - Further from I-5



▲ Figure 5 Noise Level of Comfort



Jurisdictional Coordination and Governance

Since 2008, the Greenway has been collectively administered through an IGA that includes the cities of Ashland, Central Point, Medford, Phoenix, and Talent, as well as Jackson County. As part of this agreement, the various parties help to fund routine maintenance and the cost of a part-time Jackson County staff person dedicated to the Greenway. Each of these parties' contribution to the cost of this management effort is calculated based on the population

and mileage of Bear Creek within their jurisdiction.

Part of the Envision Bear Creek planning process was to assess the effectiveness of this existing agreement. This structure has had strengths and weaknesses, which are outlined in detail in **Table 4**. These provide an excellent basis for consideration of how a revised governance structure should function.



Table 4 Strengths and Weaknesses of Current Government Structure

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › There is considerable communication, collaboration, and goodwill among the partners. › There is a high level of trust in the County as the coordinating agency among the constituent jurisdictions. › All parties to the agreement feel empowered and heard when it comes to issues, proposed priorities, and allocation of resources along the Greenway. › There is consistency in achieving the minimum established levels of service along the Greenway as funded. › There is strong consensus among the partners that the current organizational structure and funding level are insufficient to realize the Bear Creek Greenway’s full potential as a recreation and transportation resource for local residents, a healthy ecological corridor for wildlife, and an economic driver for the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Achieving consistency in experience for users along the entire length of the Greenway is challenging because each partner is responsible for a different portion of the Bear Creek Greenway (outside of the 30-foot trail corridor). › Because the various jurisdictions have different resources and capacity to augment the base funding, there are inconsistencies in maintenance levels throughout the corridor. › There are issues with duplication of resources and inefficiencies because each partner must independently monitor and maintain their section of the Greenway (outside of the 30-foot trail corridor). › The current structure is inadequate for generating funds for large projects, such as Capital Repair/Replacement, as well as expansions to the Greenway. › The structure makes it difficult to promote and market the Greenway as a recreation and transportation resource. › The structure makes it difficult to establish a coordinated system for patrolling the corridor, increasing public perception that the Greenway is unsafe. › The current boundaries only encompass ten feet on each side of the paved path, making it difficult to manage vegetation in a coordinated, holistic, and prioritized fashion. › ODOT, one of the major property owners along the corridor, is not a party to the current agreement, creating difficulties in coordination where issues overlap with ODOT land. › There is no single organization who is the advocate, champion, or accountable official for the Bear Creek Greenway. This makes consistent management, marketing, design, safety, and operations almost impossible.





Opportunities and Constraints

Based on the team's review of the existing conditions along the Bear Creek Greenway, the following opportunities and constraints emerged. In addition to the corridor-wide opportunities and constraints listed below, Figure 6 displays a map of location specific opportunities and constraints.

Opportunities

- ▶ **Manage Bear Creek Greenway Beyond the Pavement:** The Bear Creek Greenway is more than just the paved trail. There is significant interest in and support for expanding discussion of the corridor to include the areas beyond the pavement to address the ecological functions of the corridor and vegetation management more comprehensively. This can enable a more holistic approach to managing the Greenway and allow for allocation of resources consistent with the community's vision.
- ▶ **Manage Fuels and Restore Habitat:** Management of the Greenway must consider both the opportunity to manage fuels and control non-native plants while also balancing restoring habitat in accordance with requirements related to riparian buffers and migratory birds. A comprehensive Vegetation Management Plan is one opportunity to develop a unified approach along the Greenway while also recognizing the diversity of vegetation zones in the corridor.
- ▶ **Increase Access:** Increasing the number of access points available along the Greenway can expand opportunities to use the corridor, as well as exit the trail and access other areas nearby. Increased access can also improve connectivity, lending to greater transportation options for the corridor.
- ▶ **Consolidate Management of the Greenway:** A consolidated management structure could support a more unified approach to both environmental and community policies that strongly influence the maintenance of the Greenway and user experience along the corridor.



- ▶ **Unify Policies:** There is interest in and support for creating consistent policies and procedures to govern the corridor. Trail users experience the Greenway as a single corridor, so differing policies and procedures increase confusion and can become difficult to navigate. For service providers, such as emergency services, or restoration efforts, varying policies, permit requirements, and procedures can limit efficiency and effectiveness. While this plan does not set policies, it encourages future efforts to do so to the extent possible amongst land managers.
- ▶ **System-Wide Improvements:** There is a desire to increase the amenities provided along the corridor, including wayfinding and interpretive signage, drinking fountains, restrooms, lighting, benches, bike racks/repair stations, and shade structures. These improvements enhance the sense of place along the trail, support navigation and use of the trail by both residents and visitors, and create a cohesive identity for the corridor.
- ▶ **Trail Maintenance:** In addition to system-wide amenities, improving trail maintenance activities, including pavement condition, can further enhance user experience along the corridor.

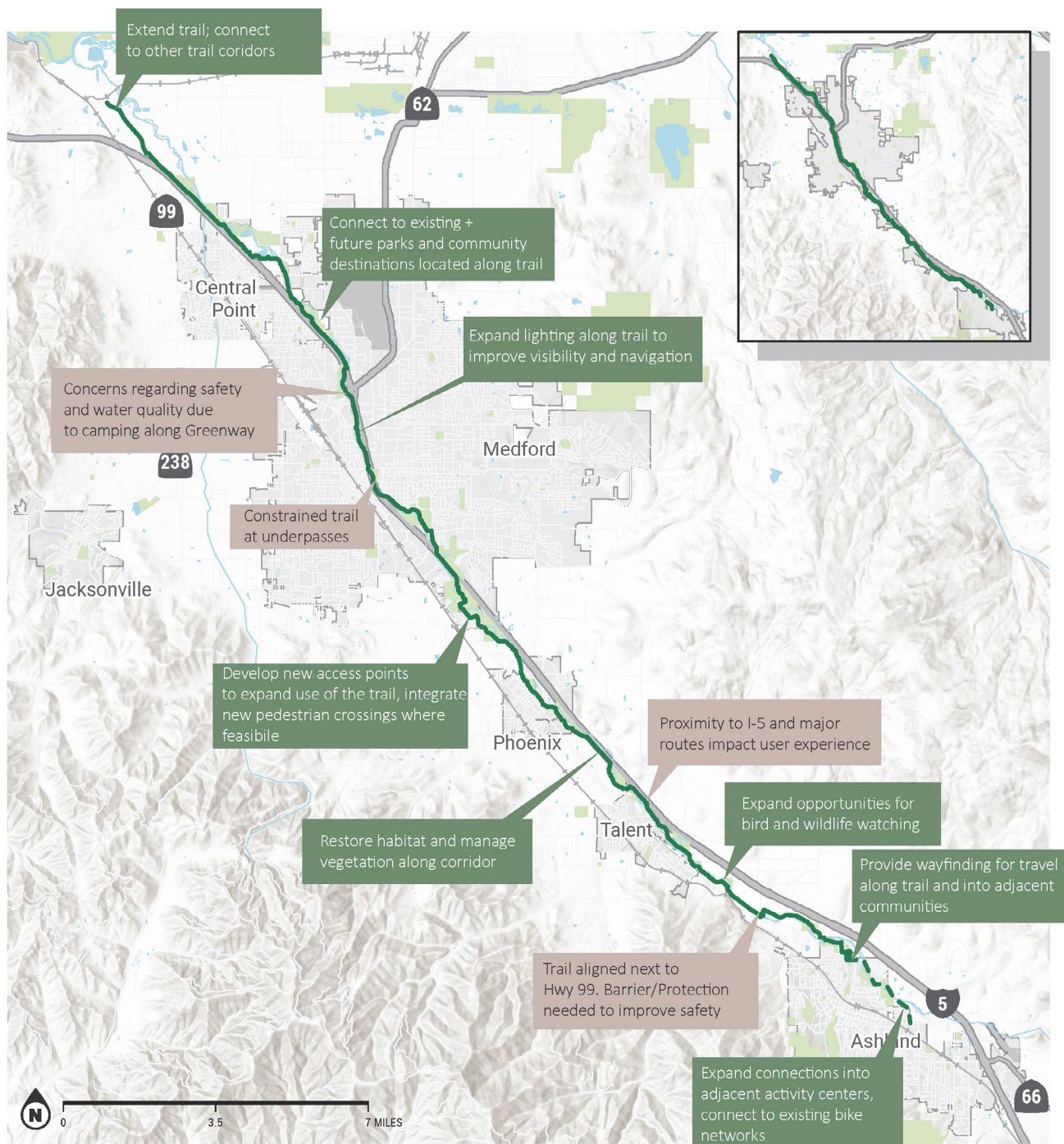




Constraints

- ▶ **Limited Right-of-Way:** In locations along the corridor, the available right-of-way for the trail is limited and results in a constrained environment. This is particularly true where the trail travels under roadways. These locations may require additional intervention, such as improved lighting, delineation of space by direction of travel or mode, or other tactics to improve visibility and navigation. As the greenway was constructed, a utilitarian approach was needed to find feasible routes across public lands, right-of-way, or private easements to achieve the ultimate goal of a continuous path from Ashland to Central Point. As such, additional access points may prove very difficult and costly to implement.
- ▶ **Environmental Regulations and Buffers:** As the discussion of the Greenway expands beyond the paved trail, it is important to identify and respond to regulations that apply to wetlands, streams, riparian areas, and more. Identification of and compliance with these requirements is necessary for the community vision for the corridor and its ecological function.
- ▶ **Proximity to Major Highways and Roadways:** The alignment of the Greenway passes close to major highways and roadways, including I-5, OR 99, and low-volume county roads in various places along the corridor. While interventions, such as sound walls or physical barriers, may improve user experience, the location along these roadways will continue to impact user experience along the corridor. While noise is a recognized factor, noise reduction efforts were not included in recommended projects, as they may prove to costly to incorporate.
- ▶ **Interaction with Elements External to the Corridor:** The Bear Creek Greenway is influenced by conditions and elements that exist beyond the corridor. Many of the challenges identified through public engagement are the result of forces that are beyond the Greenway and not within the control of the existing management structure. While the resulting management structure may have influence over their impact on the Greenway, these elements represent a complex combination of factors that likely will require collaboration with organizations and agencies across Jackson County. Examples of these challenges include houseless communities and camping along the Greenway, safety on and near the Greenway, private property management, and broader vegetation management and restoration approaches.





OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS



- Opportunity
- Constraint

BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE

- Bear Creek Greenway
- Complete
- Planned

DESTINATIONS + BOUNDARIES

- Railroad
- Waterbody
- Parks & Recreation
- City Limit

▲ Figure 6 Opportunities and constraints map



3

Community Engagement

Community Engagement

Community engagement is an essential part of any planning process. By plugging into local knowledge and experience, the project team was able to better understand existing circumstances and develop a vision for the future of the Greenway. This section describes what the Envision Bear Creek project team was able to learn through community engagement efforts.

Beginning in July 2022, the Envision Bear Creek (EBC) planning team implemented a public engagement approach to reach out to communities and re-envision their Bear Creek Greenway. Through a variety of outreach strategies, methods, and community partnerships, the resulting substantial amount of public input helped shape the Greenway’s future recreation and economic development opportunities, natural resources enhancements, transportation connectivity, and options for enhanced maintenance, improved security, increased funding, and efficient governance.

Over 3,000 people provided their input during the course of the Envision Bear Creek project. During Phase One, the project team learned about how people are currently using the trail, what some of the current challenges and opportunities are, and how they would like to use the trail under a variety of different scenarios. The project team gathered input through targeted outreach with underrepresented groups, with project stakeholders, and with the public through a survey and open house.





Goals for Community Engagement

The Envision Bear Creek Engagement Team committed to a public engagement process that was:

- ▶ **Realistic:** Be clear about the project constraints, objectives, and parameters.
- ▶ **Accountable:** Respond to public feedback promptly.
- ▶ **Inclusive:** Reach out to project-area stakeholders, including those who do not use computers or who face other participation barriers.
- ▶ **Meaningful:** Ensure that the public's input will be considered by decision-makers.
- ▶ **Transparent:** Make the decision-making process easily understandable and accessible with essential project materials available on the project website.
- ▶ **Timely:** Provide accurate, easily accessible, and widely available project information early on for the public to provide well-informed feedback.

Project Advisors

The project was supported by three main advisory groups, which all played different roles in guiding the project through different points in the project timeline (see **Figure 8**). The following groups provided guidance and feedback at key points in the planning process:

- ▶ **Project Steering Committee:** Comprised of staff and elected officials from each jurisdiction along the Bear Creek Greenway, and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). The Steering Committee provided direct input on key decisions throughout the planning process.
- ▶ **Community Advisory Committee (CAC):** Comprised of representatives from all jurisdictions reflecting all trail users' perspectives, including higher education, community foundations, residents, and recreation.
- ▶ **Technical Advisory Committee (TAC):** Comprised of representatives from natural resources, law enforcement/safety, fire/fuel, economic development, transportation, and general recreation.



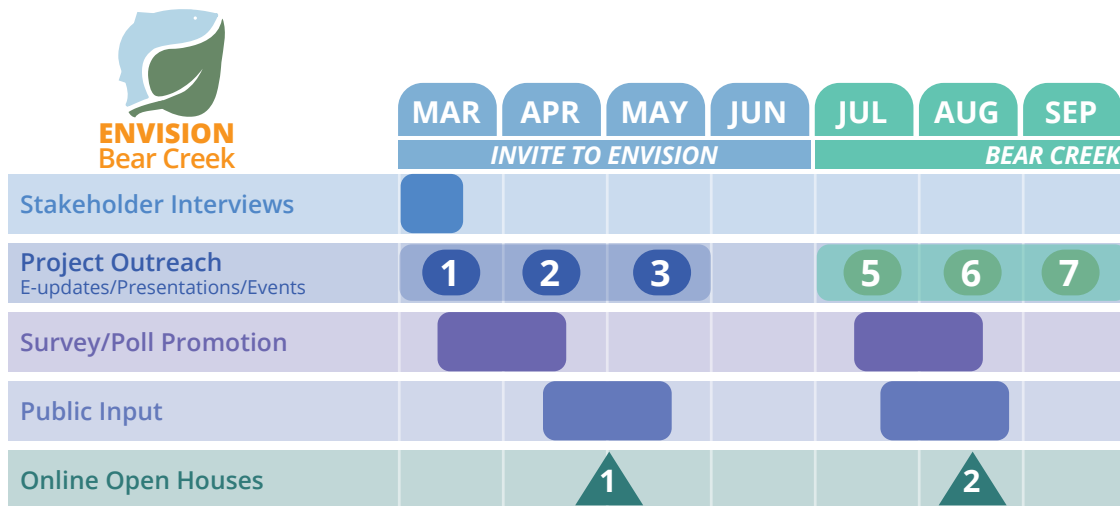
Opportunities for Input

The project team used a variety of methods to gather stakeholder and public input throughout the project. **Figure 7** summarizes the opportunities for partner agencies, stakeholders, and members of the public to provide their feedback on the project.

▼ Figure 7 Opportunities for Public Engagement and Input

PHASE OF ENGAGEMENT	OPPORTUNITIES FOR INPUT / METHODS FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
Phase One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Targeted Stakeholder Input: The project team scheduled and held interviews with staff from local agencies and hosted presentations to corridor community and business groups. › Bilingual Community Survey #1 introduced the project and connected members of the public to further opportunities of engagement. The survey was open between April and May 2022 with online and hard copy versions available, as well as an interpretive map component. › Open House #1 provided project context, presented preliminary issues and opportunities for discussion, and included a presentation available in English and Spanish.
Phase Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Bilingual Community Survey #2 measured public support for the proposed management structure, potential funding mechanisms, maintenance policies, and corridor safety plans. The project team disseminated the Phase Two survey between April and September 2022. › Open House #2 was an opportunity to collect public input on draft elements of the plan and included a presentation available in English and Spanish. › Targeted Outreach: The process also included targeted outreach throughout to low-income and unhoused residents, communities of color, LGBTQ+, people living with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, youth, and families.

▼ Figure 8 Public Engagement Timeline



What We Learned

Phase One

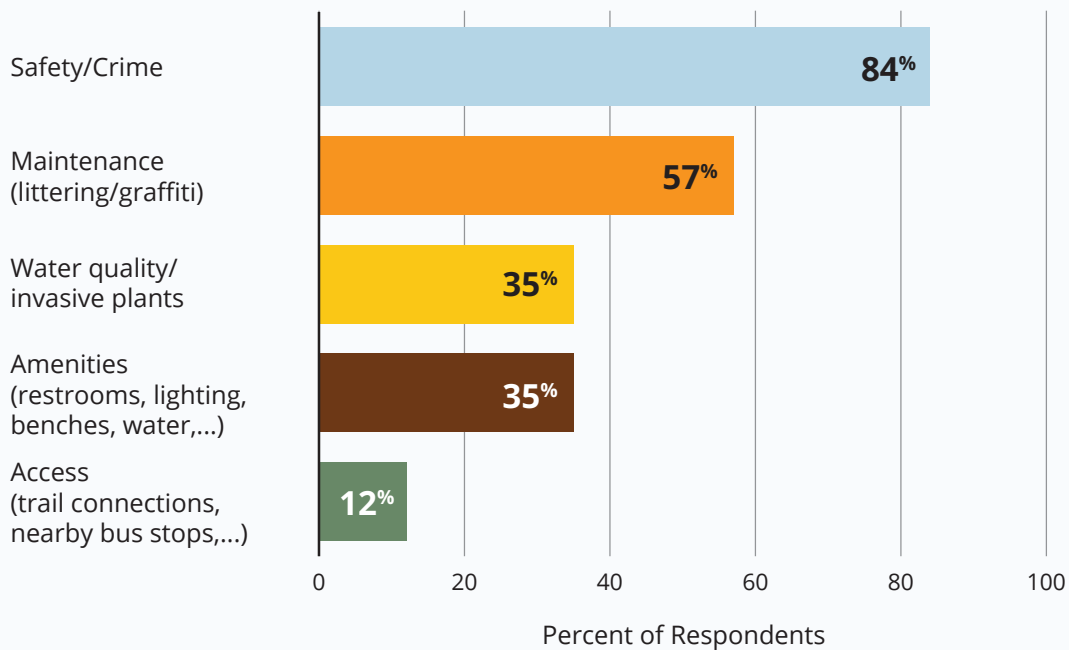
Overall, the people who provided their input through the Envision Bear Creek engagement process¹ are passionate about the Greenway, regard it as a regional treasure, and are excited about changes that may lead to its improvement.

In terms of how respondents reported using the Greenway, exercise was the most reported activity. Medford was the location

where participants reported that they use Greenway the most often. When asked about current Greenway challenges, the respondents overwhelmingly mentioned safety/crime, as shown in **Figure 9**. Respondents also brought up other issues intertwined with safety and crime, such as violence, litter, fire hazards, visibility, and lack of supervision. At the same time, many people raised concerns about having increased police presence on the Greenway.

▼ Figure 9 Current Greenway challenges identified by Phase One survey respondents.

What are the current Greenway challenges?



¹ The public participants during Phase One of the project were fairly representative of the demographics of Jackson County, and most responses were from people who live in the county. Importantly, 32% of the respondents reported that they do not use the Bear Creek Greenway.

More than half of respondents were concerned about challenges around maintenance, including both environmental maintenance and physical/capital maintenance. For example, the following points were important to respondents:

ENVIRONMENTAL MAINTENANCE:

- ▶ Clearing vegetation to reduce fire risk and improve visibility, as well as the need for fire breaks
- ▶ Reducing invasive species while increasing native and drought-resistant plants
- ▶ Ensuring riparian habitat protections
- ▶ The potential for the trail to function as a wildlife corridor
- ▶ Removal of trash and debris from the river
- ▶ Minimizing the use of large vehicles that can compact soil and disturb habitats

PHYSICAL/CAPITAL MAINTENANCE

- ▶ Maintaining consistent pavement surface
- ▶ Desire for multiple surface types for different users
- ▶ Considering difference uses of the greenway by different modes
- ▶ Concerns about speed of bicycle travel
- ▶ Removal of graffiti



The Firebrand Resiliency Collective was instrumental in reaching underrepresented voices and communities throughout the corridor.

Through their community liaison Zone Captains administering hard copy bilingual surveys, providing incentives, and creatively including and promoting EBC materials in their Alameda fire recovery work, both surveys' results reflected a broader representation of Bear Creek Greenway communities.

Additional key community outreach partners included Rogue Valley Transportation District, Rogue Action Center, Hawthorne Park Daily Potluck, Jackson County Library District, and the Long-Term Recovery Group Communications Committee.





Other challenges and concerns brought up by survey participants included a desire for more access points and trail-oriented development to increase community connections to the Greenway. Respondents also expressed excitement about the potential for more public events and commercial activity (such as food trucks) to encourage use of the Greenway by more people. Using these principles to increase the relationship between the trail and its surrounding communities would bring more activity and natural surveillance to the trail (“eyes on the trail”), potentially making it safer for users.

Participants also felt that vegetation management and natural resource restoration were important considerations for the Greenway. This included the clearing on invasive and/or non-native plants and consideration for fish passages at key locations along the corridor.

At this point in the engagement process, it was clear to the project team that the issues facing the Greenway would require multi-agency solutions. For this reason, the team identified modifications to the governance structure as a priority for the next phase of the project, described in the next section.



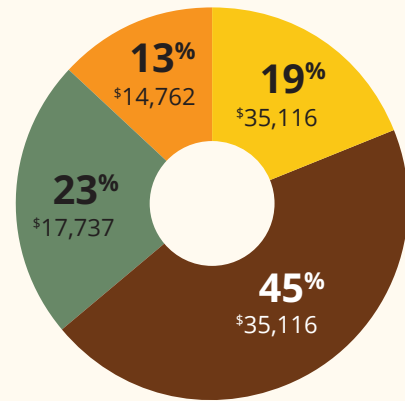
Phase Two

While the first phase of public engagement gathered feedback about priorities for the Greenway, Phase Two was focused on understanding how the community wanted to prioritize improvement efforts, as well as funding.

In one survey section, participants were asked to imagine they had \$100 to allocate toward different priorities. When asked how they would apportion their funds to the Greenway (see **Figure 10**), the participants chose maintenance and operations as the greatest funding priority, with nearly half of funding dedicated to that category (45%). Survey participants also noted that fire prevention should be more of a priority, especially following the Alameda Fire. Solutions proposed by participants included fire breaks and removal of invasive species.

The second survey also asked participants about which approaches to increasing support along the Greenway they would be in favor of implementing. As shown in **Figure 11**, the idea of both a trail ranger program and increased law enforcement presence were popular among survey respondents, with the trail ranger program receiving slightly greater support.

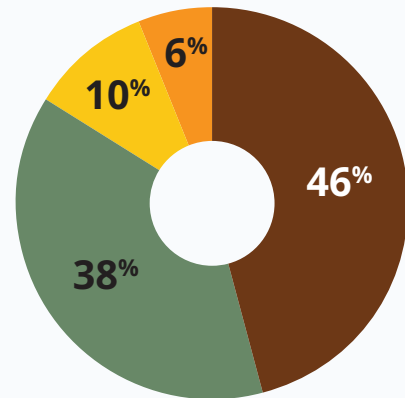
Results of Funding Prioritization Exercise



- General Maintenance and Operations
- Amenities
- Greenway Resiliency Measures
- Greenway Expansion and New Access

▲ Figure 10 Results of funding prioritization exercise

Approaches to Increasing Support Along the Greenway



- Trail Ranger Program
- I'm not interested in either
- Increase Law Enforcement Presence
- I need more information

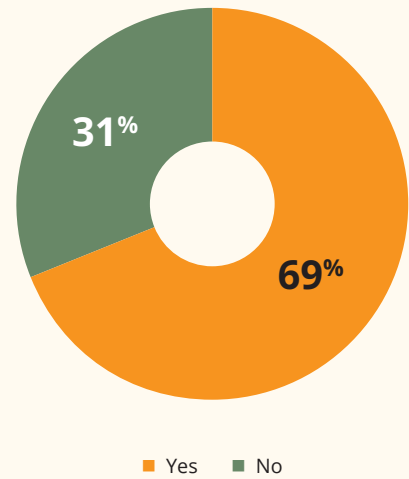
▲ Figure 11 Approaches to increasing support along the Greenway



More than two-thirds of respondents expressed their willingness to financially contribute to increasing the level of service along the Greenway (see **Figure 12**), and almost three quarters felt that establishing a special district was a better way to accomplish this than to increase local spending (see **Figure 13**).

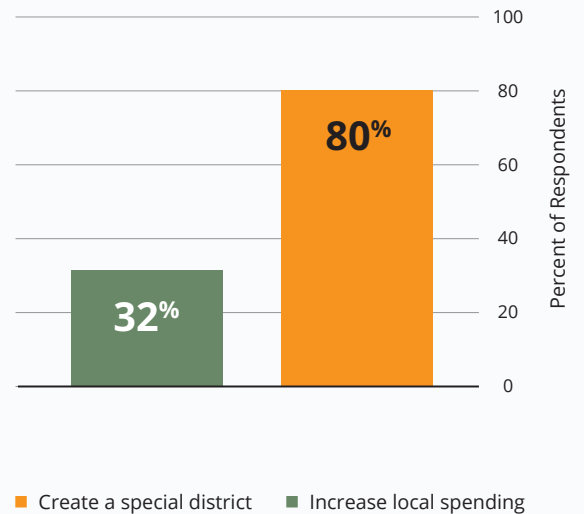


Willingness to Financially Contribute to Increased Greenway Level of Services



▲ Figure 12 Willingness to financially contribute to increasing Greenway level of service

Opportunities to Expand Funding



▲ Figure 13 Opportunities to expand Greenway funding





4



Recommendations

Recommendations

This chapter outlines a set of recommendations based on the community and stakeholder feedback received. The purpose of these recommendations is to provide a plan for addressing the Greenway's current issues and challenges and chart a path to a sustainable future for this community resource. It must be noted

that these recommendations are those of the Project Steering Committee and may not necessarily reflect those of the elected officials in each jurisdiction. For any action to occur as a result of these recommendations, all jurisdictions would be required to take further official action by their governmental bodies.

These recommendations encompass:

PROJECTS

such as new access points and installation of amenities



PROGRAMS

including a Greenway Ranger program and plan for vegetation management and fire protection



A revised GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

for consistent management of the Greenway



A proposal for sustainable, long-term **FUNDING** of the Greenway through a new taxing district



Projects and Programs

Based on public engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and advisory groups, the project team developed a comprehensive list of recommended projects and programs to achieve the vision set forth in this plan. This list represents the selection of projects and programs chosen by the Steering Committee for funding and implementation. The committee weighed what may be needed versus what could reasonably be funded in their opinion. The recommendations are organized into the following five categories:

1. **Maintenance and Operations:** This category provides system-wide plans for regular maintenance and operations projects, including:
 - ◆ Development of a new ranger program (see callout on **page 37**), providing a consistent official presence on the Greenway
 - ◆ Increasing the Greenway coordinator to a full-time dedicated position and continuation of the volunteer coordinator
 - ◆ Routine maintenance (e.g., removing litter, repairing damage or vandalism)
 - ◆ Maintenance, repair, and replacement of signage, amenities, lighting, etc.
 - ◆ Vegetation management and fire prevention (see section callout on **page 38** for more information)
 - ◆ Bridge inspections and repairs
2. **Amenities and Enhancements:** These projects cover important Greenway amenities such as restrooms, signage and wayfinding, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, benches, bike racks, fencing, and lighting. In addition to these enhancements, this category also includes projects focused on identifying safety improvements to underpasses and opportunities to reduce the impact of noise from I-5.
3. **Riparian Restoration:** These projects pursue restoration along the Bear Creek riparian corridor through collaborative efforts. Projects may fall under categories such as floodplain connectivity, public access, vegetation management, and fire safety along the Bear Creek corridor. Through projects like native vegetation planting and invasive species removal, the resilience and sustainability of Bear Creek will be enhanced.
4. **Capital Repair/Replacement:** These projects address some existing issues with pavement condition, as well as providing funding for addressing future potential vandalism and damage from natural hazards (such as floods, fires, or earthquakes).
5. **Capital Expansion/New Access:** Through public engagement, residents identified two priority projects for expansion of the Greenway. These include a paved connection from the Greenway to Glenwood Road to provide access to Hwy 99 in North Phoenix, as well as to the future Midway Park in Medford.



What is a Ranger Program?



This plan recommends establishing a Bear Creek Greenway Ranger Program to address public safety concerns and provide numerous other benefits to Greenway users. This idea received a great deal of support from the public throughout the planning process.

Greenway rangers will be specially trained and certified staff members who will traverse the Greenway, offering users a visible staff presence, answering questions, and keeping their trained eyes on the Greenway for hazards or potential problems. Rather than being trained as law enforcement officers, the Rangers will undergo training similar to other unarmed park rangers. To best serve in this role as a public liaison, rangers must be calm, compassionate, and excellent communicators. Rangers would wear uniforms that identify them as professional ambassadors to the Greenway, along with name tags to build familiarity and trust among users.



These Rangers would have the following responsibilities:

1. Act as Greenway ambassadors, a welcoming presence that can provide orientation, wayfinding, and information for users.
2. Assist visitors who are lost, injured, or experiencing health emergencies.
3. Act as eyes and ears on the Bear Creek Greenway, monitoring proactively and consistently.
4. Share environmental and cultural information about various places and features along the Greenway to enhance users' appreciation of Bear Creek's historical, cultural, and environmental values.
5. Identify and report hazards and maintenance needs.
6. Inform users of Greenway standards and park rules with the goal of generating voluntary compliance.
7. Provide reliable and rapid communication access to operating partners and emergency responders.
8. Report criminal activity to the appropriate law enforcement agency.
9. Provide connections to social service agencies for those in need.

The Greenway Rangers Program would function as part of the IGA for the Bear Creek Greenway as a whole.

Vegetation Management and Fire Protection

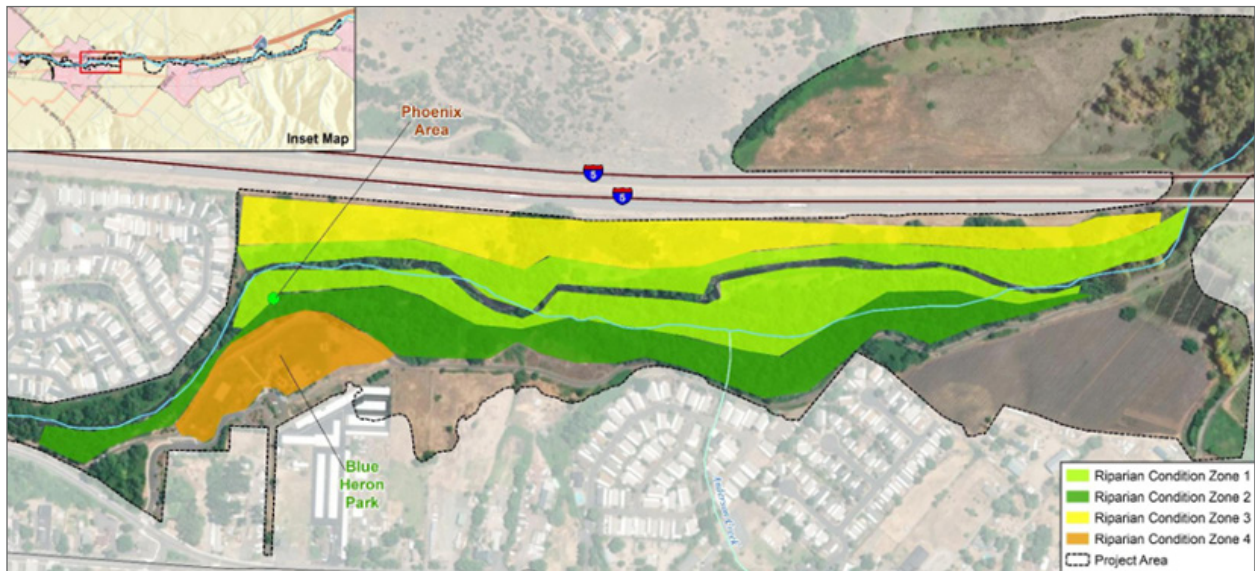
A key component in wildfire prevention is the reduction of fuels, as large quantities of grasses and certain shrubs can contribute to severe fires. While the development of a long-term management plan for Bear Creek’s vegetation has been a goal of the Bear Creek Restoration Initiative (BCRI) before the 2020 wildfires, a post-fire vegetation conditions assessment has helped to inform the foundation of a such a plan.

By mapping existing vegetation types, invasive plants, and vegetative fuel areas within the riparian corridor, BCRI was able

to define the corridor’s four RCZs¹, laying out potential fire mitigation and restoration opportunities specific to each zone.

Vegetation management projects should occur to some level in all the RCZ’s, but the appropriate treatments would depend on the zone and its functions. For example, in more natural areas (RCZ1), fuel reduction would be achieved through a combination of habitat enhancements (seeding and planting) and wildland fire risk reduction. In other zones (for example, RCZ2 and RCZ3) prescriptions would likely involve routine maintenance projects. An example map of RCZs for the Phoenix area is included in **Figure 14**.

▼ Figure 14 Example RCZ map for Phoenix area (Source: Bear Creek Natural Resources Plan, 2023)



1 See **page 10** for definitions and descriptions of the four RCZs.

Key vegetation management activities that can occur in the Bear Creek corridor (depending on zone conditions) include:

- ▶ Annual mowing and clearing of vegetation (cutting grass, establishing fuel breaks and defensible space).
- ▶ Brush thinning and increasing spacing between shrubs, especially around critical Greenway facilities.
- ▶ Limb removal and pruning on trees and selective shrub and brush thinning. Tree and snag removal outside of riparian buffers.
- ▶ Invasive species removal and control

The plan recommends fully funding these key vegetation management activities. This represents an increased investment in vegetation maintenance with an estimated annual cost of \$926,000. This increased maintenance would provide essential wildfire mitigation, lessening the risk to Jackson County communities of future devastating wildfires. Simultaneously, these valuable activities would help to preserve and restore Bear Creek’s ecosystems and habitats, as well as providing the public with places to recreate and connect with nature. The plan recognizes that a healthy, natural ecosystem in the corridor serves both ecological and fire mitigation functions.



Project and Program Recommendations



Maintenance and Operations

PROJECT LOCATION	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	ESTIMATED COST
System-wide	Annual Bridge Inspections/Repairs	\$10,000 (annually)
System-wide	Five-Year Contracted Bridge Inspections/Repairs	\$15,000 (every five years)
System-wide	Annual Vegetation Management	\$925,900 (annually)
System-wide	Routine Maintenance	\$75,000 (annually)
System-wide	Pavement Maintenance	\$300,000 (annually)
System-wide	Removal/Disposal of Dump Sites	\$100,000 (annually)
System-wide	Trail Counter Batteries & Transmission	\$4,000 (annually)
System-wide	Ranger Program Operations	\$365,272 (annually)
System-wide	Ranger Program Start-up Costs	\$150,000 (one time, during first year)
System-wide	Signage Replacement/Maintenance	\$10,000 (annually)
System-wide	Lighting Maintenance	\$25,000 (annually)
N/A	Greenway Coordinator	\$150,000 (annually)
N/A	Volunteer Coordinator	\$75,000 (annually)





Amenities / Enhancements

PROJECT LOCATION	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	ESTIMATED COST
System-wide	Basic Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage	\$4,000
System-wide	Expanded Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage	\$30,000
System-wide	Trash Receptacle Installation	\$24,000
System-wide	Bench Installation	\$30,000
System-wide	Bike Rack Installation	\$30,000
Medford, from Sports Park to Garfield St/I-5	I-5 Noise Reduction Study	\$150,000
Medford	Fencing Installation/Repair	\$250,000
Underpasses along Greenway	Underpass Improvement Study	\$250,000
System-wide	Solar Lighting Installation	\$2,000,000
System-Wide	Restroom and Drinking Fountain Installation	\$150,000





Riparian Restoration

PROJECT LOCATION	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	ESTIMATED COST
Neil Creek/Walker Creek Confluence	Native Planting and Invasive Plant Control for Five Years	\$250,000
Peninger Fire Area (below Pine Street in Central Point to Expo Center)	Native Planting and Invasive Plant Control for Five Years	\$450,000
Lower Lone Pine Creek and Bear Creek at Pine Street Bridge in Central Point	Native Planting and Invasive Plant Control for Five Years	\$375,000
Upton Road to Dean Creek	Native Planting and Invasive Plant Control for Five Years	\$375,000
Confluence of Jackson Creek	Native Planting and Invasive Plant Control for Five Years	\$375,000
Highway 62 downstream to I-5 crossing in north Medford	Native Planting and Invasive Plant Control for Five Years	\$375,000
Confluence of Wrights Creek	Native Planting and Invasive Plant Control for Five Years	\$30,000





Capital Repair / Replacement

PROJECT LOCATION	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	ESTIMATED COST
Southeast of Eagle Mill Rd	Gap Repair	\$10,000
Milepost 17.25-17.5	Pavement Repair	\$150,000
System-wide	Repair of Vandalism Damage	\$50,000 (one time, during first year)
System-wide	Repair of Natural Disaster Damage	\$20,000 (annual reserves)



Capital Expansion / New Access

PROJECT LOCATION	PROJECT DESCRIPTION / TYPE	ESTIMATED COST
Glenwood Rd and Hwy 99	Establishment of Paved Connection from Glenwood Rd to Greenway	\$225,000
Future Medford Midway Park, north of I-5 and HWY 62 junction	Establishment of Paved Connection from Greenway to future Midway Park	\$150,000



Governance Structure

Because of the existing challenges and limitations inherent to the Greenway’s current management structure, an important part of the Envision Bear Creek process is to establish a governance structure that that will clarify roles and facilitate collaboration among the involved agencies. To determine a suitable plan for ongoing governance of the Greenway, the project team reviewed case

studies and best practices from around the nation,² which provided insight into options available for Bear Creek Greenway.

Through this process, the project team considered the following governance models as options for managing the Bear Creek Greenway, as listed in **Table 5**.

Table 5 Governance Models Considered for the Bear Creek Greenway

GOVERNANCE MODEL	DESCRIPTION
Cooperative Agreement (Current Model)	An organization agreed to by partners via an IGA, which is referred to as the Joint Powers Agreement.
County Service District	An organization created by the County to provide services in a designated service area; County Commissioners serve as Board of Directors.
Hybrid Service Model: County Service District with County Intergovernmental Agreement	An organization created by the voters to provide services in a designated service area; County Commissioners serve as overall Board for the taxing district (funding mechanism), but day-to-day governance and operations remains with an ORS 190 inter-governmental entity created cooperatively by all jurisdictions through the terms of an inter-governmental agreement. Ultimate control remains with each jurisdiction based on their community values.
Special Parks and Recreation District for Greenways	An autonomous governmental organization that provides parks and recreation services within a designated service district. Control would be transferred to the district board and would not remain with each jurisdiction.
Nonprofit Organization	A nonprofit organization that provides designated parks and recreation services within a designated service district.
County Agreement for Transportation Facilities	A newly created autonomous governmental organization that provides transportation services within a designated service district; there is uncertainty about whether it could provide the recreation, economic development, and ecological enhancement services desired for the Bear Creek Greenway.

2 The project team reviewed the governance structures of four greenways as part of this process, each of which crosses multiple jurisdictions, like the Bear Creek Greenway. These were Charleston County Greenbelt Plan (Charleston County, South Carolina), Razorback Regional Greenway (Benton and Washington Counties, northwest Arkansas), and the Springwater Trail Corridor (Portland, Gresham, and Boring, Oregon).



With input from the public, stakeholders, and advisory committee members, the desired future conditions listed in the left column of **Table 6** were identified for the Greenway. Based on these desired conditions, the

project team developed the associated criteria (in the right column) for assessing each potential structure’s ability to realize those goals.

Table 6 Desired Greenway Conditions and Associated Criteria for Governance Structure Selection

DESIRED GREENWAY CONDITION	ASSOCIATED CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF GOVERNANCE MODELS
Create a Greenway that extends from Emigrant Lake to the Rogue River.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > N/A
Create a consistent user experience throughout the Greenway.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Will this governance model create consistency in operations, management, and user experience throughout the Bear Creek Greenway? > Will this governance model increase efficiency in Greenway operations?
Improve ecological health and fire resistance of the Bear Creek Corridor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Will this governance model accommodate an expanded Greenway boundary to improve ecological health and fire resistance of the Bear Creek corridor?
Increase efficiency in Greenway operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Will this option have a broad-based governing body that will be able to focus on the needs of the Bear Creek Greenway, without other competing priorities?
Enhance perceived and actual safety for the Greenway.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Will this governance model enhance perceived and actual safety of the Greenway?
Support strong connectivity between local businesses and Greenway users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Will this governance model support local businesses consistently?
Support livable communities through creating a desirable place to live, work, and play.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Will this governance model facilitate the ability to market and promote the Greenway to locals and visitors?
Establish a stable and predictable funding level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Will this option provide a stable long-term funding source for operations? > Will this option provide funding for expansion, capital improvements, replacement, and repairs? > Will this governance model provide the ability to apply for federal and state grants?
Incorporate ODOT lands into the overall long-term management structure for the Bear Creek Greenway. ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Will this governance model include the ability to enter agreements with ODOT, including management of ODOT lands in the corridor?
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Will this governance model require a public vote to implement?

³ This plan does not provide a detailed plan for ODOT lands. The project team recommends that conversations continue regarding the consolidation of land ownership for consistent management approaches.



The project team evaluated each of the potential governance models based on these selected criteria. **Table 7**, below, provides a summary of the results.

Table 7 Governance Options Matrix

GOVERNANCE OPTION	SCORING RESULTS (SUPPORTS DESIRED CONDITIONS?)
Cooperative Agreement	> 1 Yes; 2 Depends/Uncertain; 9 No
County Service District	> 6 Yes; 4 Depends/Uncertain; 2 No
Service District Hybrid	> 11 Yes; 1 Depends/Uncertain
Parks & Recreation Special District	> 11 Yes; 1 Depends/Uncertain
Non-Profit Organization	> 2 Yes; 5 Depends/Uncertain; 5 No
County Agreements for Transportation Facilities	> 5 Yes; 5 Depends/Uncertain; 2 No

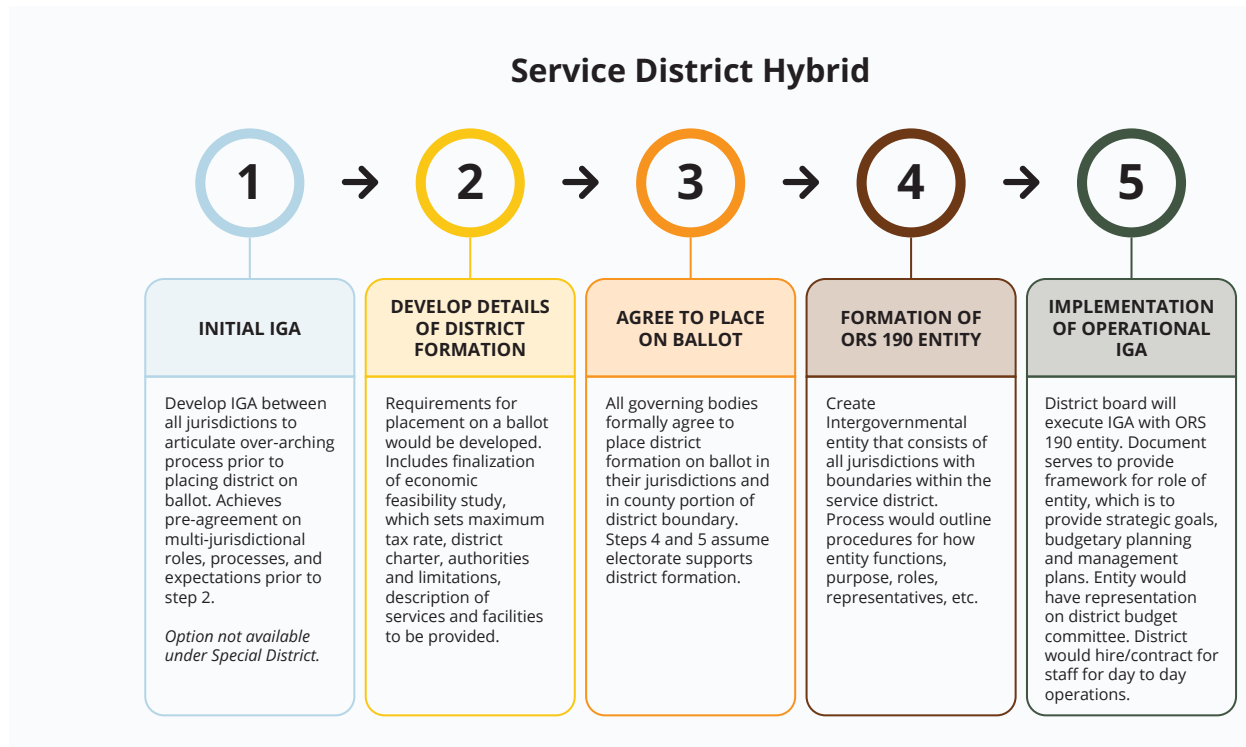


Service District Hybrid

Based on the results of this analysis and further discussions, the Steering Committee recommended moving forward with a service district hybrid governance model, which combines a County Service District with a County IGA. This approach would require the approval of all five City Councils and the County Board of Commissioners to place a ballot measure establishing a taxing district in a future election. If approved and passed by voters, the District would collect property taxes to fund maintenance and operations, as well as capital improvements along the Greenway corridor. Funds would be expended as identified and prioritized by a joint governing body established as an ORS 190 inter-governmental entity with representation by all six jurisdictions. It is recommended that an IGA outlining the process and roles of each jurisdiction be developed prior to proposal for a taxing district.

This selected governance model fulfills the list of criteria established as part of the planning process, while allowing each jurisdiction the ability to retain control of their respective sections of the Greenway. The model would also allow for federal and state grants, while increasing the efficiency of Greenway operations and allow for stable, cooperative funding for expansion, capital improvements, vegetation management, and replacement and repairs. The shared responsibility of an IGA can address future challenges more comprehensively and adapt to changing circumstances, ensuring the trail's vitality over time.

The chart in **Figure 15** outlines the process for establishing this model for the Greenway.



▲ Figure 15 Establishment Process for Service District Hybrid Governance Model

Funding

The project team analyzed three potential project lists, ranging from a minimal increase of the current funding level to a fully funded scenario including all identified projects and programs. The Steering Committee agreed that the fully funded scenario was most suitable, as it would comprehensively address the identified issues and implement the related recommendations.

This selected project list, which includes both ongoing needs and one-time projects, requires an estimated annual funding amount of \$2.7 million in current dollars, as shown below in **Table 7**. Estimated ongoing costs are \$2.1 million; estimated one-time costs are \$5.9 million. A 10-year amortization of all one-time investments would result in annual costs of \$2.7 million.

Table 8 Estimated One-Time and Annual Costs (FY 2024 dollars)

CAPITAL COST TYPE	ONE-TIME COST	ANNUAL COST
ONGOING COSTS		
> Maintenance and Operations	-	\$2,124,695
Subtotal Ongoing Costs	-	\$2,124,695
ONE-TIME CAPITAL NEEDS		
> Maintenance and Operations	\$1,500,000	\$15,000
> Amenities / Enhancements	\$2,918,000	\$291,800
> Riparian Restoration	\$2,230,000	\$223,000
> Capital Repair / Replacement	\$230,000	\$23,000
> Capital Expansion / New Access	\$375,000	\$37,500
Subtotal One-Time Costs	\$5,903,000	\$590,300
Total Project Costs	\$5,903,000	\$2,714,995

Source: Jackson County; EConorthwest



The capital cost types in **Table 7** can be defined as follows:

- ▶ **Maintenance and operations** costs cover a host of system-wide activities, including vegetation management, the costs to start and continue a park ranger program, replacement of signage, and other maintenance.
- ▶ **Amenities and enhancements** are one-time costs aimed at improving the Greenway usage experience. These funds would pay for the installation of solar lighting, trash receptacles, benches and signage, as well as other amenities.
- ▶ **Riparian restoration** aims to remove invasive plants along various sections of the greenway.

- ▶ **Capital repair and replacement** costs primarily repair cracked pavement and include a reserve for repairs due to natural disaster.
- ▶ **Capital expansion and new access** includes funds to create two new connections between the Greenway and Glenwood Road and Midway Park.

To fund the selected projects, the project team evaluated three potential options for establishing a taxing district, ranging from the area immediately surrounding the Greenway to Jackson County as a whole. The three options are described in more detail in **Table 9**.

Table 9 Geographic Options for Taxing District

TAXING DISTRICT OPTIONS	DESCRIPTION
Bear Creek Greenway Taxing District	A new taxing district would be established, encompassing properties within the adjacent cities of Ashland, Central Point, Medford, Phoenix, and Talent, as well as properties in unincorporated Jackson County that are near Greenway. All properties within this boundary (see Figure 13) would be taxed to fund the Greenway.
Metropolitan Planning Organization Boundary	All properties within the Rogue Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization would be taxed to fund the Greenway. As the greenway serves as a regional transportation facility, this option was developed as a consideration.
Jackson County Boundary	All properties within the Jackson County boundary would be taxed to fund the Greenway.



Selected Taxing District and Tax Levy

The Steering Committee elected to move forward with the establishment of a taxing district encompassing the UGBs of the five cities the Greenway encompasses, as well as minimal amounts of unincorporated lands between Ashland-Talent and Talent-Phoenix, as residents in this district are likely to be more connected to the Greenway and affected by Greenway management practices than the other options⁴. The project team evaluated the total Greenway project costs along with property value data from the Jackson County Assessor’s Office

to solve for a levy rate sufficient to cover projected costs. ECONorthwest, the team’s subcontractor determined that a property tax levy of \$0.20 per \$1,000 of assessed value was needed to cover the cost of the selected projects and annual operations and maintenance expenses. Of this, operations and maintenance costs require a levy of \$0.15 per \$1,000 of assessed value, and amortized capital costs require a levy of \$0.05 per \$1,000 of assessed value, as illustrated in **Table 10**.

For more details about the tax levy, please see **Appendix E**.

⁴ Representatives from the City of Talent preferred a taxing district geography that would encompass the entire county.

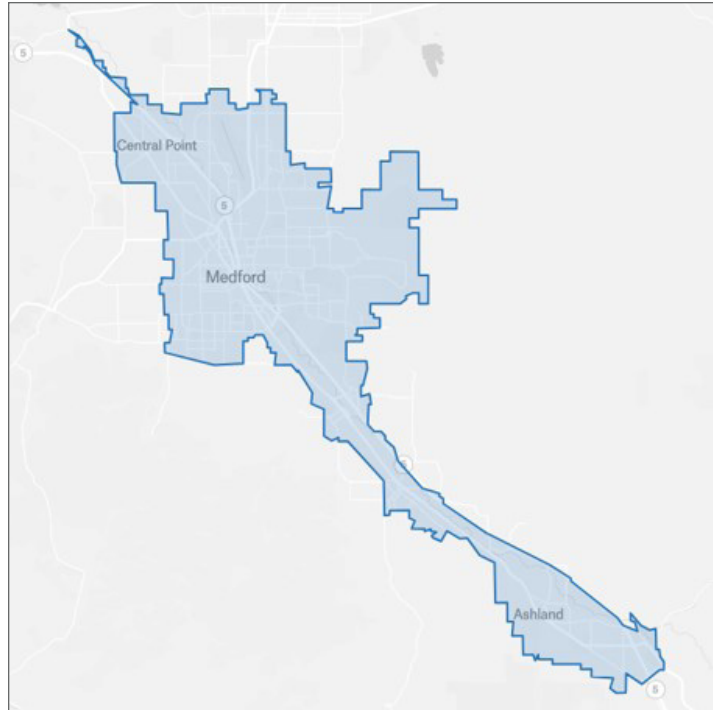
Table 10 Necessary Levies

LEVY COVERS	NECESSARY LEVY (PER \$1,000 AV)
Ongoing Costs	\$0.15
Amortized Capital Costs	\$0.05
Total Annual Cost	\$0.20



Impacts to Average Residential Tax Bills

Given the calculated necessary levy, the average tax bill for residential property owners within the proposed taxing district boundary was estimated to increase by just below \$52 per year. The average estimated property tax increase ranges from \$66 in Ashland, where average residential property values are highest, to \$44 in Phoenix, where average residential property values are lowest. Additional construction, which was not forecast in this analysis, would reduce the average residential tax bill increase over time. Increases in the assessed value of residential properties will increase the average residential tax bill increase over time.



▲ Figure 16 Proposed Bear Creek Taxing District

Table 11 Increase in Average Residential Tax Bill

JURISDICTION	AVERAGE RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY VALUE	AVERAGE RESIDENTIAL TAX BILL INCREASE
Ashland	\$336,974	\$66.25
Central Point	\$227,066	\$44.64
Medford	\$251,400	\$49.43
Phoenix	\$226,001	\$44.44
Talent	\$233,381	\$45.89
Unincorporated Areas	\$278,019	\$54.66
Taxing District Average	\$262,398	\$51.59

Source: Jackson County Assessor; ECONorthwest





ENVISION
Bear Creek

