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The evolution of greenways as an adaptive urban landscape form

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, urban greenways, as a landscape endeavor, have expanded explosively. More than 500 communities, in North America alone, have greenway projects under way. Today's greenways reflect more than a current landscape phenomenon or fad. They are a response to classic human needs and part of an evolving, centuries-old landscape form. More than just parks and amenities, greenways are an adaptation that helps mitigate and provide counterpoint to the loss of natural landscape as a result of growing urbanization. As times have changed, the notion of greenways has changed to address new needs and challenges. Three distinct stages or "generations" can be identified in the emergence and evolution of greenways as an urban landscape form:

Generation 1: axes, boulevards and parkways that were the ancestral greenways.

Generation 2: trail-oriented recreational greenways that provide access to rivers,

streams, ridgelines, railbeds and other corridors within the urban fabric. Often, these greenways are automobile free.

Generation 3: multi-objective greenways that go beyond recreation and beautification to address such areas as habitat needs of wildlife, promoting urban flood damage reduction, enhancing water quality, providing a resource for outdoor education, and other urban infrastructure objectives. The emerging third generation of greenways brings together a range of formerly divergent disciplines such as civil engineering, landscape architecture and wetland ecology to address complex problems posed by expanding human development. Using examples, this paper looks at the evolutionary process and some of the opportunities and challenges associated with multi-objective Generation 3 greenways.



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Keywords

Greenways; Urban; Trails; Evolution; Wildlife

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