INTRODUCTION

Along the south shore of Lake Michigan, just east of the Illinois-Indiana state line, lies an unparalleled challenge and opportunity. Along Indiana’s lakeshore is an opportunity for the rebirth of a region looking for a way back to a livable lakeshore. The Marquette Plan, a collaboration between the lakeshore communities of East Chicago, Gary, Hammond, Portage and Whiting, Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and the office of Congressman Pete Visclosky, is focused on creating a catalyst for such a rebirth through reinvestment along a twenty-one mile segment of Indiana’s Lake Michigan shoreline.

At the heart of this effort is a green ribbon of connected dune and swale landscapes, river corridors, lakes, beaches, reclaimed industrial canals and a range of diverse habitat that provides the natural counterpart to the industrialized brownfield setting that has dominated for the past century. It connects local parks, state parks and lands within the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore with the over 250,000 residents within the sixty square mile study area and the millions that visit and travel through it each year, including thousands of resident and migratory species of birds, fish and other wildlife. And connecting it all are miles and miles of trails, including nature trails, bike trails, boardwalks, rivers and trails, many of which follow Native American routes and glacial landscapes established long ago.

This is much more than a traditional trail-focused greenway plan, however, but rather a comprehensive land use vision intended to create a lasting legacy that is community-based, action-oriented and geared to achieving tangible quality of life improvements along the Lake Michigan shoreline and beyond. The Plan recognizes that the environs must be addressed before any trails are built to ensure long-term sustainability. Issues of incompatibility, air and water quality, over-designed physical infrastructure that severs habitat and community fabric and countless other barriers must be addressed. It’s a plan about balance - between nature and industry, between public access and privacy, between old jobs and new economies, between redevelopment and restoration and between heritage and a new way of life. If parks are the "lungs of the city" as many have indicated then the Marquette Plan represents the veins bringing a healthier, more prosperous way of life to the heart of each community.

The plan capitalizes on green space linkages, improved infrastructure and resulting community enhancements to lay a framework for reinvestment in a changing landscape of massive, once thriving industrial entities and the communities impacted by their decline. The plan establishes a series of achievable short-term demonstration projects for each community guided by a compelling long-term vision intended to charge and unite the many stakeholders in the region. And to ensure immediate action, short-term initiatives will become legislation, guided by the Congressman, to bring funding and key political support.

In summary, the Marquette Plan aims to:

- Recognize Lake Michigan as the most important asset in our own survival - from drinking water to climate to property value;
- Increase public shoreline access from approximately 33 percent today to over 75 percent in the future and provide generous minimum setbacks for new development to ensure this access;
- Establish physical, social and economic connections, including a continuous trail network linking people to the lake, features along it and to each other;
- Change perceptions of the lakeshore and the lakefront communities as a destination and a place that attracts new residents and new investment;
- Recognize a changing economy in the region and capitalize on new opportunities such as technologies associated with the remediation and re-use of industrial brownfield properties that could result in a campus of new employers with this focus, referred to as "Remerchopis" in this study;
- Leverage available resources, including political resources that span city, county and state boundaries to broaden the pool of funds and support needed to achieve the vision;
- Continue and expand the partnerships that are necessary to achieve the vision, including an effective management and funding structure to ensure long-term success and preservation of the vision;
- Plant the seed so the plan becomes a rallying cry for change and the process lives on.

Key Achievements of the plan include over ten miles of reclaimed, publicly accessible lakeshore with up to 2,500 acres of voluntarily reclaimed land for parks and open space and nearly one hundred miles of land and water based trails that connect to miles of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore to the east and Chicago’s twenty-three-mile green ribbon of parks to the west. The plan achieves approximately 1,500 acres of reclaimed industrial brownfields and underutilized lands for economic development including tax based diversification to ease the burden on area homeowners and new job creation in existing and new employment fields. Finally, the resulting air and water quality, buffers between incompatible uses, reconnected communities and renewed interaction with the lake will achieve an elevated value of life for the everyday resident, employee or visitor of the region.

In the end, the Marquette Plan is about reinvesting in the lakeshore and the future envisioned in the Plan illustrates key, catalytic actions that are critical in this effort. In a region that is losing population, losing jobs and losing its identity in the process we haven’t lost sight of our greatest resource - Lake Michigan. It is our drinking water, our climate, our economy, our scenery…our livelihood. Because of the vision and collaboration of leaders like Congressman Visclosky, IDNR and the cities of East Chicago, Gary, Hammond, Portage and Whiting, as well as the passionate residents and stakeholders that have never given up hope, we have chosen to reclaim it, cherish it, nurse it and its tributaries back to health and ride it back to prosperity. Chicago has a motto for their lakefront…”Forever Open and Clear”. For Northwestern Indiana it’s a Livable Lakeshore.