



BAYOU GREENBELT

MASTER PLAN

Lake Charles
Louisiana



Hurricane Laura

PHOTO: NOAA



FEMA



NPS-RTCA

Rivers, Trails and
Conservation Assistance
Program

When the Category 4 hurricanes, Laura and Delta, swept through southwestern Louisiana in August and October of 2020, their high winds, heavy rains, and extensive flooding left a pattern of destruction across the region reaching more than 80 miles inland.

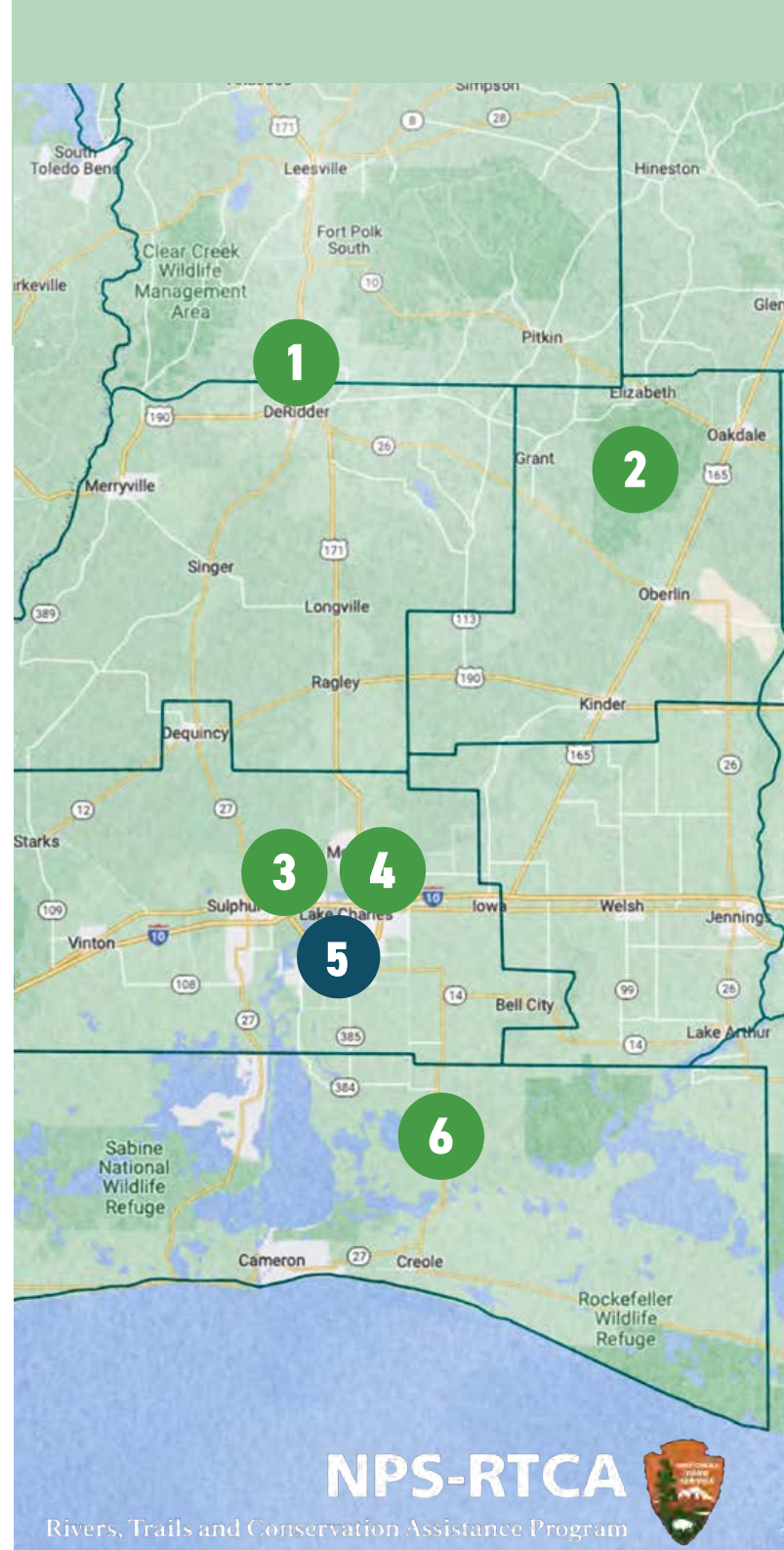
Showing the generational resiliency arising from the impacts of numerous storms, the disaster-impacted communities of DeRidder and Lake Charles, along with representatives of Calcasieu, Cameron, and Allen parishes, requested assistance from the National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA) to help with the development of long-term recovery plans.

Working closely with local partners, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Park Service helped facilitate six southwest Louisiana community-led projects focused on natural and cultural resource conservation, outdoor recreation, and nature-based tourism.



LOUISIANA
Office of
COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT

- 1 DeRidder
WEST PARK
 - Concept plan to restore West Park
- 2 Allen Parish
MILL CREEK
 - Potential pilot project for public outdoor recreation and flood mitigation
- 3 Calcasieu Parish
PARKS
 - Parks inventory
 - Concepts for disaster-impacted parks
- 4 North Lake Charles
LOCAL FOOD, LOCAL PLACES
 - Address food insecurity with mobile markets and community gardens
- 5 Lake Charles
BAYOU GREENBELT
 - 23-mile water loop around Lake Charles
- 6 Cameron Parish
CAMERON PARISH REDEVELOPMENT
 - Amenities and opportunities for nature-based recreation



6 PROJECTS FOR LONG-TERM RECOVERY

A community-led project for long-term recovery, Bayou Greenbelt seeks to improve the quality of life in Calcasieu Parish while promoting flood mitigation. In advancing its mission in natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation, the National Park Service teams up with local partners to extend the benefits of the mission to special places close to home, in communities across Southwest Louisiana.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BAYOU GREENBELT • 2025

With an eye towards attracting and retaining talent, local business leader Mike Nodier looked at a map of Lake Charles and noted the waterways flowing through and surrounding the community. Inspired, he envisioned a 23-mile loop offering outdoor recreation opportunities for residents and visitors alike. He shared his idea for the **Bayou Greenbelt** with the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana, whose leadership quickly recognized its alignment with their goal of enhancing quality of life in the region. Since then, two board members, Jon Manns and Lee Boyer, have been hands-on advocates for the project and the Foundation continues being the lead organization moving the vision for the Bayou Greenbelt from concept to implementation.

After Hurricane Laura, the vision for the Bayou Greenbelt garnered the interest and support from FEMA and NPS-RTCA to help further develop the concept. The community engagement outlined in the **Just Imagine SWLA 50-Year Resilience Master Plan** highlighted the high value residents place on natural resources and their desire for greater access to them. This momentum led to the Bayou Greenbelt becoming Just Imagine SWLA's 11th Catalytic Project, creating an **Implementation Team** to help turn the vision into reality.

The Bayou Greenbelt, much of which is **already in place**, connects English, Kayouche, and Contraband Bayous, Lake Charles, and the Calcasieu River to form a network of:

- **Blueways:** Water trails that provide paddling and boating opportunities.
- **Greenways:** Riverbank trails, parks, natural areas, and sites for programs and events.
- **Trailheads:** Public access points to the blueways and greenways.

The National Park Service worked with local partners to review and enhance the Bayou Greenbelt concept. Through multiple site visits and public meetings, they gathered invaluable information and input. With funding from FEMA, the Water Institute was commissioned to model the proposed connection between Kayouche and Contraband Bayous and to assess its impact on drainage capacity. The Water Institute hosted a series of public meetings to help develop the model, ensure transparency, and test the model's accuracy by utilizing residents' real-time observations from a historic flood. Initial indications indicate that the watershed connection would not increase drainage issues, though further work is required to determine its impacts on saltwater intrusion.

Combining their expertise with public feedback and the Water Institute's analysis, NPS-RTCA developed the following recommendations for project partners:

- **Share this concept widely** with the public and local leaders, and reference this report in grant-seeking and fundraising efforts.
- Implement the **Bayou Bike and Hike** Southwest Louisiana Trail Network.
- Add paddling access facilities and programming where feasible for **"quick wins"** that can build community excitement.
- Develop and adopt a **signage plan** to establish the Bayou Greenbelt brand at trailheads.
- **Consider regional** connections between the Bayou Greenbelt and the Creole Nature Trail.
- Look to **case studies** for insights on water trails and the River Keeper Program.
- Utilize the targeted **funding resources** provided.
- Explore **Big, Little Projects** so individuals, groups, and small businesses can support and participate.
- Create a **Strategic Action Plan** to guide this transformational project to completion.

The Bayou Greenbelt would improve the quality of life for residents, expand outdoor recreation opportunities, and enhance health and wellness, while strengthening local and regional connections, boosting tourism, and attracting and retaining a quality workforce.



Turning the Vision into Reality

The Bayou Greenbelt logo was designed by students of the McNeese State University, Department of Visual Arts.

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THE VISION

Mike Nodier, a business owner in Lake Charles, understands the role that quality outdoor recreation opportunities play in attracting and retaining talent. With that in mind, he looked at the many waterways surrounding and coursing through the city —after all, it's named for a body of water—and envisioned connecting Contraband Bayou, Kayouche Coulee (recommended to be renamed Kayouche Bayou), and English Bayou to create a 23-mile loop of paddling, hiking, and biking opportunities, calling it the "Bayou Greenbelt."

In 2017, Mike shared his vision with the leadership of the Community Foundation. The Foundation was already advocating for increased bikeability in the area and two board members, Jon Manns and Lee Boyer, were actually involved in updating the region's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Seeing alignment with their goals, the Community Foundation adopted Bayou Greenbelt as a project to enhance the quality of life in Southwest Louisiana. To support this initiative, Lee Boyer researched, found, and applied for assistance from the National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA).

Even before hurricanes Laura and Delta struck in 2020, the Bayou Greenbelt vision was gaining support among outdoor enthusiasts. Following the hurricanes, as recovery efforts began, community leaders identified the Bayou Greenbelt as a flagship project for long-term recovery, enhancing quality of life, bike and pedestrian safety, and resilience to storm impacts —all while acting as a catalyst for the outdoor recreation economy.

As more partners joined the project, advocates from the Community Foundation created two things: 1) a charitable fund with the Foundation to receive tax-deductible donations and grants to support the project, and 2) the Bayou Greenbelt Acquisitions, LLC, to facilitate property acquisition and move the project forward. These efforts demonstrated the community's resilience and its commitment to building back better and more sustainably.



INTRODUCTION

As a result of hurricanes Laura and Delta making landfall in Lake Charles only six weeks apart in 2020, the Bayou Greenbelt was listed as an element of the Calcasieu Parish Long-Term Community Recovery Plan. This listing helped generate awareness of, and enthusiasm for, the project, both locally and within numerous agencies. With the Community Foundation having already applied for technical assistance from NPS-RTCA earlier that year, this project was well-positioned for partnership with FEMA, NPS, and the Southwest Louisiana community.

Goals

- Develop an action and implementation plan with initial and prioritized tasks.
- Provide recommendations and relevant resources.
- Identify potential sources of private and public funding.
- Navigate the regulatory framework.

Anticipated Outcomes

- Enhanced quality of life and outdoor recreation opportunities in Southwest Louisiana, attracting new visitors to the city and region.
- Creation of robust and scenic natural areas for wildlife.
- Safe and secure routes for non-motorized transportation.
- Improved accessibility and mobility for residents.
- Protection of the environment, conservation of water resources, and energy efficiency.
- Significantly improved drainage and stormwater management, critical for this area.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA) supports locally-led conservation and outdoor recreation projects and assists communities with natural disaster recovery across the United States. NPS-RTCA assists communities and public land managers in developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as creating outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage future generations in the outdoors.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Community Assistance Recovery Support Function (CARSF) enables local governments to effectively and efficiently carry out community-based recovery planning and management in a post-disaster environment. CARSF also supports state or territorial governments in developing programs of support for local recovery planning. **FEMA** introduced local Calcasieu Parish partners to the NPS team. With FEMA's input, the planning partners focused on outdoor recreation as an important foundation of economic recovery.

The Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana “connects people who care with causes that matter while enhancing the quality of life in Southwest Louisiana.” Among many other regional efforts, the Community Foundation worked with Urban Design Associates to develop the “Just Imagine SWLA” initiative, a 50-year resilience master plan featuring 11 catalytic projects for Calcasieu and Cameron parishes.

The City of Lake Charles provided assistance and input primarily through the Mayor’s Office as well as the Planning and Development and Recreation and Parks departments.

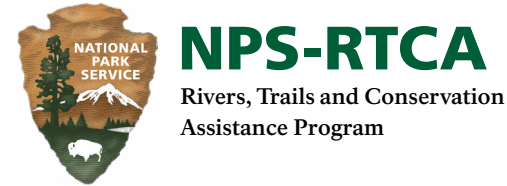
The **Calcasieu Parish Police Jury**, through the Administrator’s Office, staff from both parish parks, and the Geographic Information Systems Department, provided invaluable input and mapping services. The Parish also provided critical data for project modeling purposes.

Visit Lake Charles promotes Southwest Louisiana and has supported the “Just Imagine SWLA” catalytic projects, including the Bayou Greenbelt, through promotional efforts.

The Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission is committed to the future of the region. By focusing on key aspects of sustainable growth, the Commission helps maintain a healthy environment and streamline transportation, while driving economic development.

McNeese State University's Facilities Management Department staff played a key role in the first phase of the Contraband Bayou Improvement Project and the Richard R. Rhoden Bridge. Additionally, students from the Visual Arts Department developed the logo for the Bayou Greenbelt.

SWLA Economic Development Alliance The Southwest Louisiana Economic Development Alliance serves as the umbrella organization for the Chamber SWLA and the SWLA Alliance Foundation, combining resources to strengthen business recruitment and retention efforts across Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, and Jefferson Davis Parishes.



RELEVANT PLANS AND INITIATIVES

In addition to the momentum and community support generated by the project, the following initiatives at the city, parish, and state level complement and support the vision of the Bayou Greenbelt:

- Among other regional efforts, the Foundation engaged Urban Design Associates to develop the **Just Imagine SWLA 50-Year Resilience Master Plan**, which features 11 Catalytic Projects for Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes.
- The original concept of the Bayou Greenbelt was partly based on components outlined in the **Lake Charles Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan**.
- Beyond city limits, the **Bayou Bike & Hike Southwest Louisiana Trail Network**, adopted by the Southwest Louisiana Planning Commission aligns with this project.
- The project will also benefit from the **Lake Charles Complete Streets Policy**, which requires that new infrastructure and street improvements are designed to accommodate not only cars but also pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit.
- The **Nelson Road Extension and Bridge Project** will provide important access to Contraband Bayou and downtown.
- Many of the initiatives included in the **North Lake Charles Community Action Plan** will enhance residents’ access to the Bayou Greenbelt, while providing locally grown food and markets for visitors.
- Recommendations from the **Lake Charles Urban Tree Canopy Study** can inform native tree planting along the banks of Contraband, Kayouche, and English Bayous. The Nature Conservancy can be an important partner in this area.
- The **Louisiana Watershed Initiative** modeling project is providing valuable information for local partners to help manage future flood risks with watershed-based solutions.
- The Water Institute of the Gulf **Bayou Greenbelt Feasibility Study includes** hydraulic and salinity modeling to evaluate the Bayou Greenbelt Greenway (June 2024).
- **LC Rebound**, approved by Lake Charles voters in 2023, will help fund street and drainage improvements, along with outdoor recreation facilities such as the One Lake Charles Trail, an 8-mile connection along the west side of the Bayou Greenbelt.
- Recreational easements along established **utility corridors** provide an opportunity for trail corridors between trailheads.
- NPS-RTCA collaborated with the Cameron Preservation Alliance to develop the **Cameron Parish Redevelopment and Revisioning Project**, which includes outdoor recreation goals that complement the Bayou Greenbelt (April 2024).



[PLANSWLA.COM/BIKEWAY_PEDESTRIAN_PLANNING.PHP](https://planswla.com/bikeway_pedestrian_planning.php)

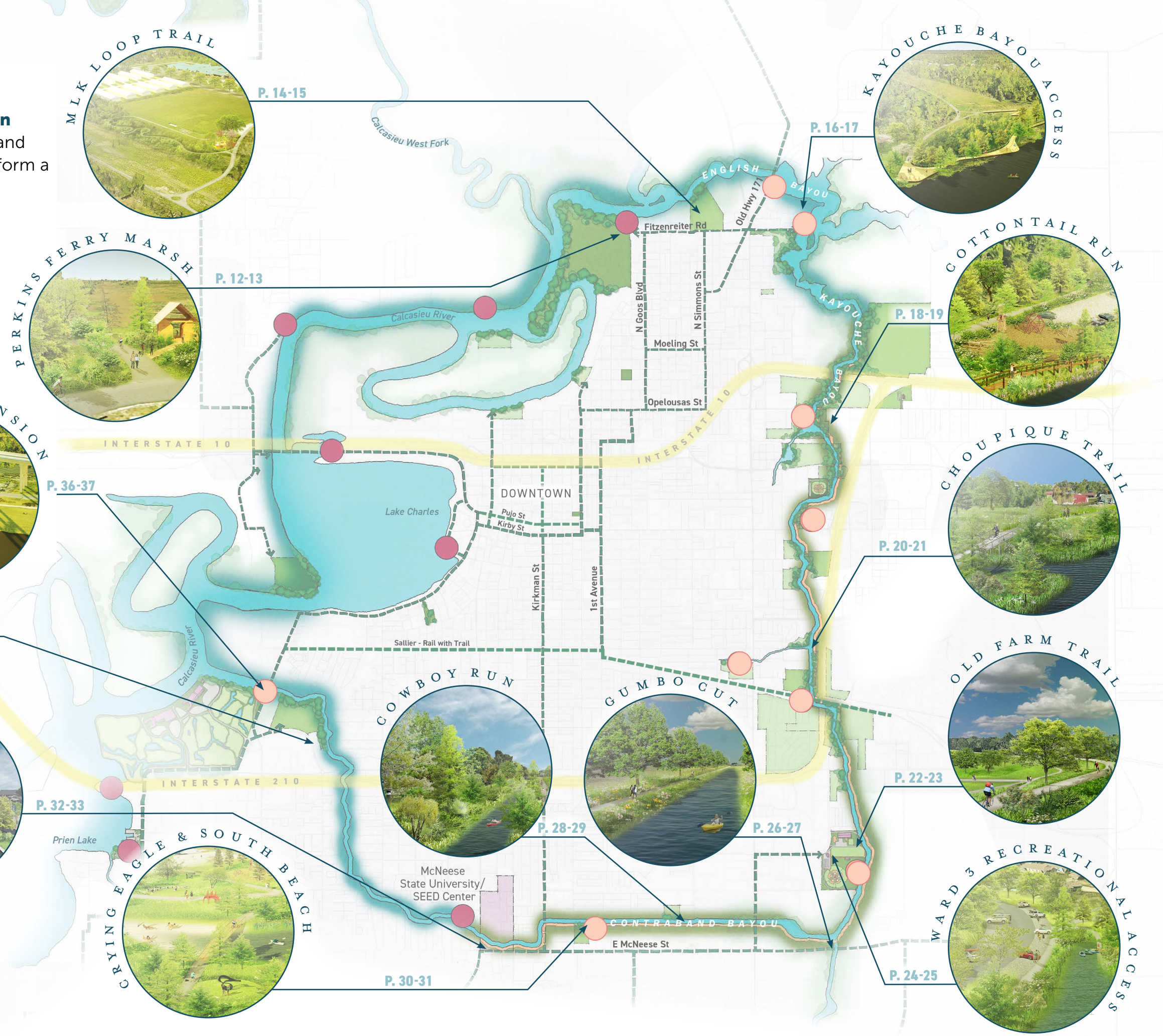
BAYOU GREENBELT CONCEPT

The Bayou Greenbelt, much of which is **already in place**, connects English, Kayouche, and Contraband Bayous, Lake Charles, and the Calcasieu River to form a network of:

- **Blueways:** A 23-mile water loop around Lake Charles for paddling and boating.
- **Greenways:** Trails on public land, adjacent to waterways, for walking, running, and biking.
- **Trailheads:** Public access points with recreational amenities to enhance the city's hidden natural features.
- **Out-of-traffic trails:** Routes that follow the Bayou Bike and Hike Trail Network to improve mobility and accessibility.

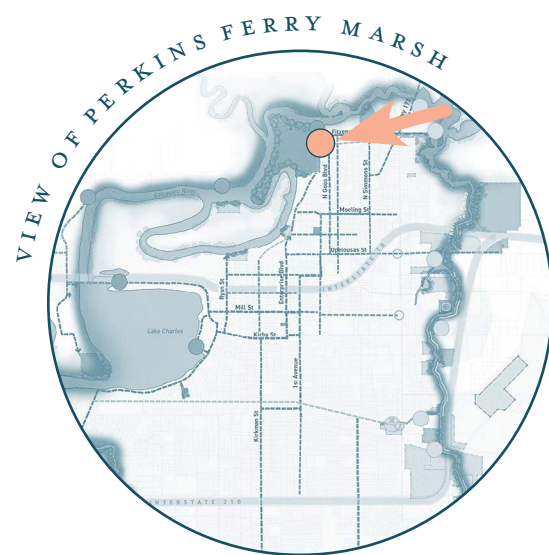


- ■ ■ ■ Proposed Trails Network
- Existing Public Access
- Potential Public Access





RENDERING BY AEDO + TERRA STUDIO



Perkins Ferry Marsh

Enhance habitat management while improving public access to this 200-acre, city-owned green space and marsheland along the Calcasieu River, located adjacent to Riverside Park on Fitzenreiter Road. Add outdoor recreation and programming opportunities for Lake Charles residents, particularly for those living in nearby North Lake Charles neighborhoods.

ACTION ITEMS

- Design and develop the key features.
- Consider integrating stormwater best management practices (BMPs) into the design.
- Extend Riverside Park walking trails south into the marsh area.
- Explore the potential for rail-trail and/or boardwalk through the marsh.
- Develop interactive exhibits and educational programming that celebrate the natural and cultural history of the area.
- Assess opportunities for adding native wetland plants.
- Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.

KEY FEATURES

- Educational Pavilion
- Nature Boardwalk
- Observation Tower
- Connection to Riverside Park
- Shared-Use Path
- Native Wetland Plantings



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MLK Loop Trail

Develop a loop trail connecting the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center and Combrel-Fondel Elementary School with the new resilient neighborhood at Project Build-a-Future and with the proposed shared-use path along the utility right-of-way corridor.

ACTION ITEMS

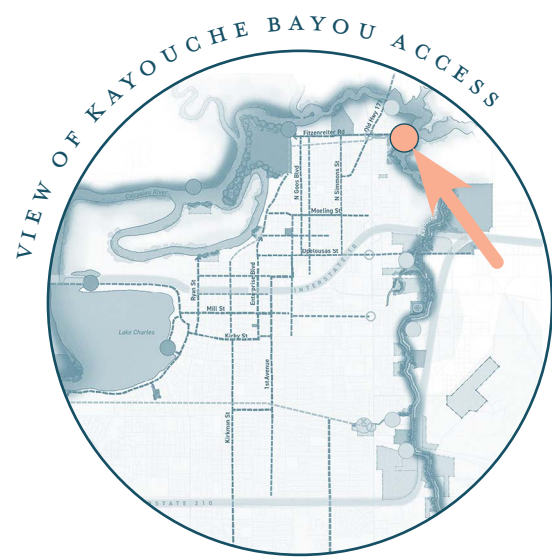
- Finalize an agreement to develop a shared-use path/greenway trail within the utility right-of-way (ROW).
- Design and develop key trail features.
- Consider integrating stormwater best management practices into the design.
- Connect trail in the utility right-of-way to nearby community facilities to create a loop trail.
- Collaborate with Project Build-a-Future and the Calcasieu Parish School Board on trail connections.
- Partner with Ward 3 Recreation District on trail-related amenities near the MLK Community Center.
- Add street trees in accordance with the Lake Charles Urban Tree Canopy Study.

KEY FEATURES

- A new resilient and affordable neighborhood on Pear Street, being developed by Project Build-A-Future.
- Greenway loop trail connecting the community center, elementary school, utility corridor trail, and housing site.
- Street tree planting along Fitzenreiter Road.
- Trail-related amenities along the greenway loop trail near MLK Community Center, including:
 - Sports Plaza
 - Nature Play Playground
 - Wooded Nature Trail
 - Shared-use path along the utility corridor



RENDERING BY AEDO + TERRA STUDIO



Kayouche Bayou Access

Given the importance of the Kayouche Coulee to the overall Bayou Greenbelt, the Implementation Team is working on an official name change to "Kayouche Bayou" and establishing public access near its confluence with English Bayou. This area offers numerous outdoor recreation opportunities, some of which could be developed in partnership with local utilities.

ACTION ITEMS

- Coordinate with the Gravity Drainage District on proposed improvements.
- Finalize an agreement to develop a shared-use path in the utility right-of-way.
- Acquire property as needed.
- Design and develop key features, starting with the kayak launch as a priority.
- Consider integrating stormwater best management practices into the design.
- Extend and connect the utility corridor trail to the proposed water access points.
- Provide waterfront amenities between the water access points.
- Assess opportunities for adding native wetland plants.
- Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.

KEY FEATURES

Waterfront amenities

- Kayak launch
- Portage route to the other side of the dam to help complete the Bayou Greenbelt loop.
- Fishing terraces
- Viewing terrace

Trail-based amenities

- Sloped lawn
- Path extension to the utility corridor trail.
- Nature boardwalk
- Access to neighborhoods
- Native wetland plantings



RENDERING BY AEDO + TERRA STUDIO



Cottontail Run

Establish public access facilities and add related amenities along the Kayouche Bayou, near the bridge at Opelousas Street. The visibility of this location may help the public envision the potential water-based recreational opportunities available with the completion of the Bayou Greenbelt. Land-based pathway connections along Kayouche Bayou, extending both north and south, could be developed by acquiring property as needed.

ACTION ITEMS

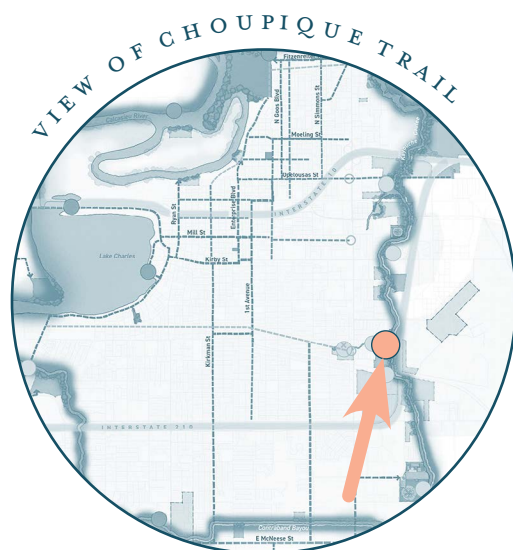
- *Acquire property as needed.*
- *Design and develop key features, starting with the kayak launch as a priority.*
- *Consider integrating stormwater best management practices into the design.*
- *Engage nearby neighborhoods in identifying potential connections and prioritizing improvements.*
- *Identify outfitters to provide kayak rentals.*
- *Assess opportunities for adding native wetland plants.*
- *Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.*

KEY FEATURES

- *Kayak launch*
- *Boat launch*
- *Parking lot*
- *Nature boardwalk*
- **'Nature play'** *playground: natural materials used in an unstructured, child-directed way.*
- *Shared-use path*
- *Native wetland plantings*



RENDERING BY AEDO + TERRA STUDIO



Choupique Trail

Water access along this segment of the Bayou Greenbelt could be provided to Kayouche Bayou via the small tributary near Hillcrest Park and John F. Kennedy Elementary School. When water levels are adequate for paddling, this tributary would serve as a family-friendly entry to the Bayou Greenbelt.

ACTION ITEMS

- Design and develop the key features.
- Consider integrating stormwater best management practices into the design.
- Engage nearby neighborhoods in identifying potential connections.
- Widen Kayouche Bayou for more consistent paddling conditions.
- Improve water access along the tributary at Hillcrest Park.
- Assess opportunities for adding native wetland and Cajun meadow plants.
- Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.

KEY FEATURES

- Shared-use path and footbridge
- Widened bayou
- Native wetland planting
- Cajun meadow planting



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Old Farm Trail

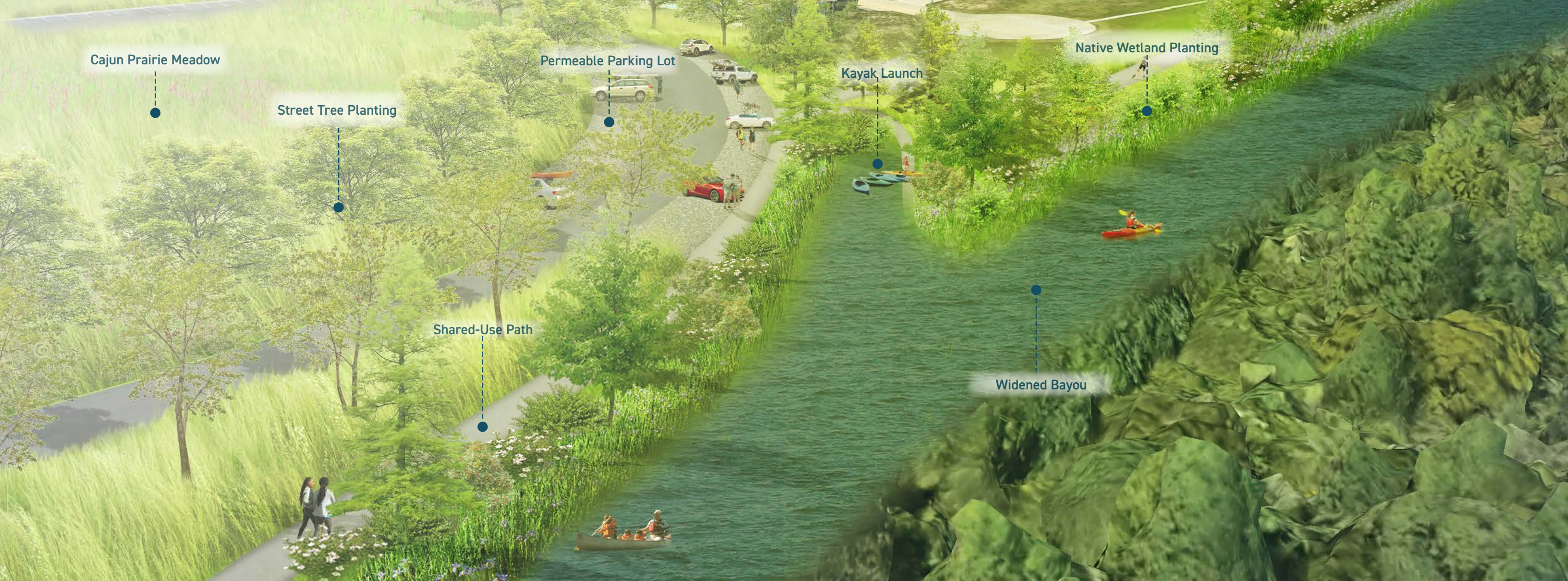
The half-mile-long eastern boundary of Ward 3 Recreation District is the Kayouche Bayou. Targeted improvements for a trail along this boundary could provide water access to the Kayouche Bayou, increasing public awareness of the bayou as a source for both passive and active outdoor recreation. Stormwater management improvements will help mitigate flooding in this area.

ACTION ITEMS

- Collaborate with Ward 3 Recreation District on the proposed new facilities along the eastern boundary of the Ward 3 site.
- Design and develop key features, starting with the kayak launch for public access.
- Where feasible, widen and deepen the channel to improve paddling conditions.
- Consider integrating stormwater best management practices into the design.
- Engage nearby neighborhoods in identifying and prioritizing improvements.
- Identify outfitters to provide kayak rentals.
- Assess opportunities for adding native wetland plants.
- Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.

KEY FEATURES

- Existing pedestrian path around recreation fields.
- An extension of the existing path along the entire frontage of Kayouche Bayou.
- Public water access with a kayak launch.
- Widened sections of the bayou, where feasible, to better accommodate paddlecraft.
- Native wetland plantings within the floodplain.



RENDERING BY AEDO + TERRA STUDIO



Ward 3 Recreation Access

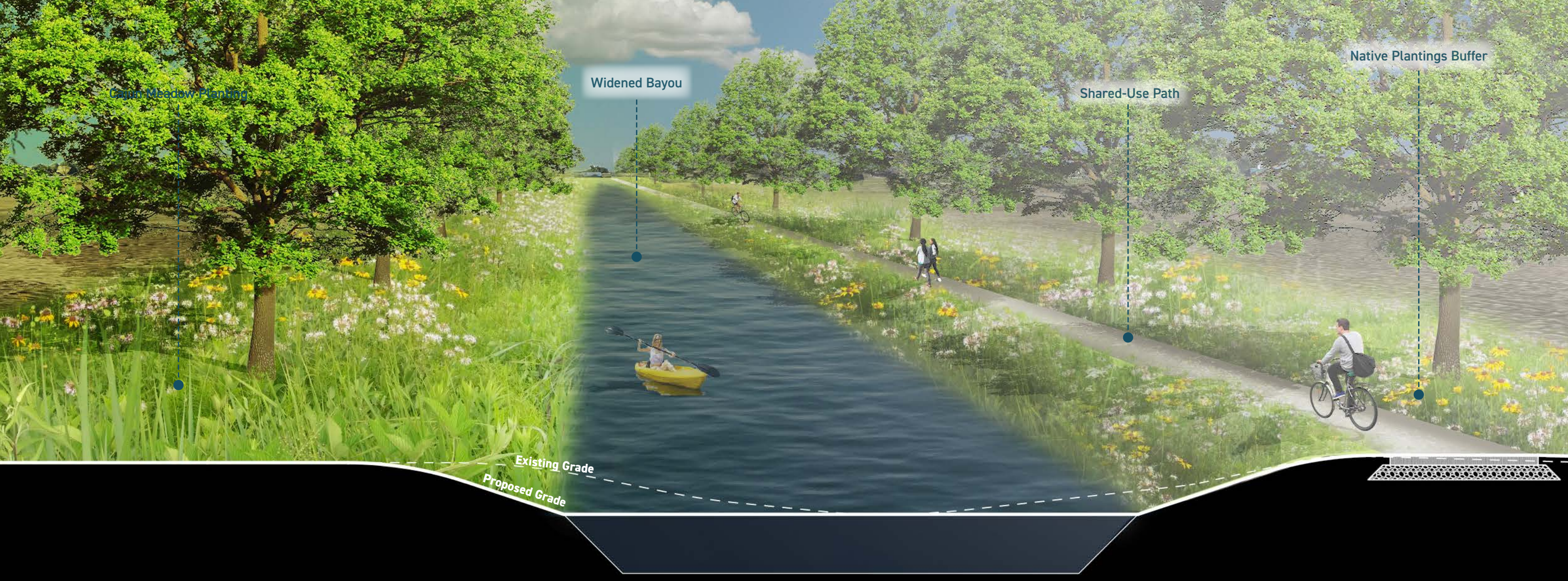
Make targeted improvements at the southeast corner of the Ward 3 Recreation site to increase public awareness and access to Kayouche Bayou as a resource for both passive and active outdoor recreation. Stormwater management improvements will help mitigate flooding.

ACTION ITEMS

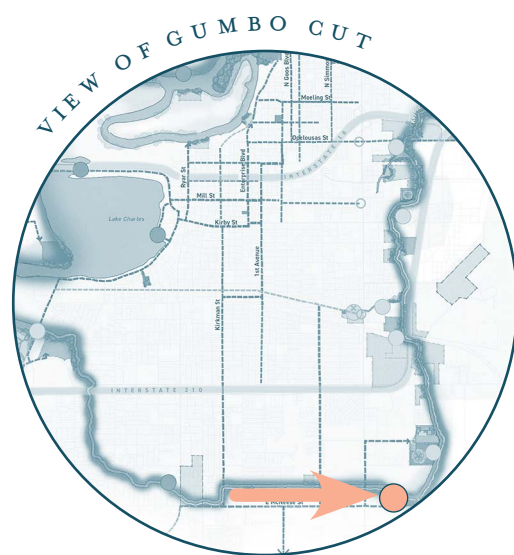
- Collaborate with Ward 3 Recreation District and McNeese Farm on proposed facilities.
- Design and develop key features, starting with the kayak launch for public access.
- Where feasible, widen and deepen the channel to improve paddling conditions.
- Mitigate impacts of flooding through stormwater best management practices such as porous pavement, street tree plantings, and native landscapes.
- Engage nearby neighborhoods in identifying connections and prioritizing improvements.
- Identify outfitters to provide kayak rentals.
- Assess opportunities for adding native wetland plants.
- Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.

KEY FEATURES

- Kayak launch
- Widened bayou
- Shared-use path
- Street tree planting
- Permeable parking lot
- Cajun prairie meadow
- Native wetland plantings



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Gumbo Cut

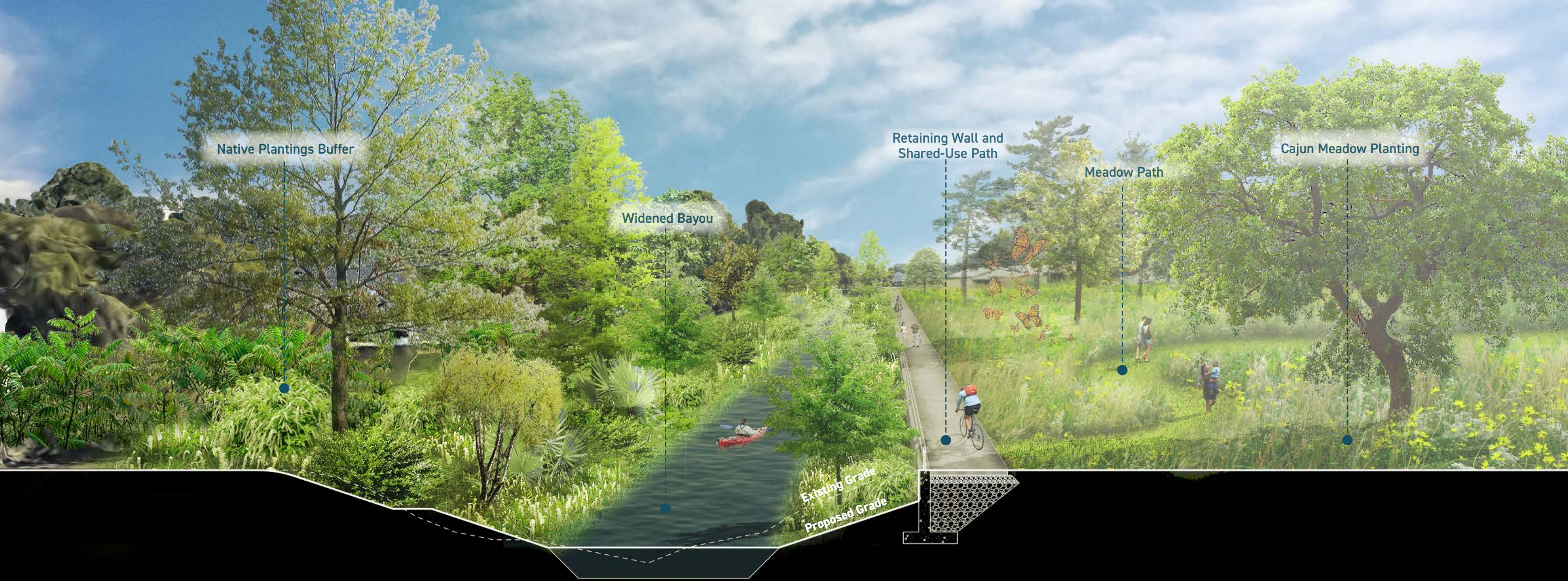
This is the potential connection between Kayouche Bayou and Contraband Bayou. The Water Institute is reviewing its potential impact. Regardless of whether the watershed connection is made, most of the Bayou Greenbelt amenities can be implemented, including a nearly continuous shared-use path.

ACTION ITEMS

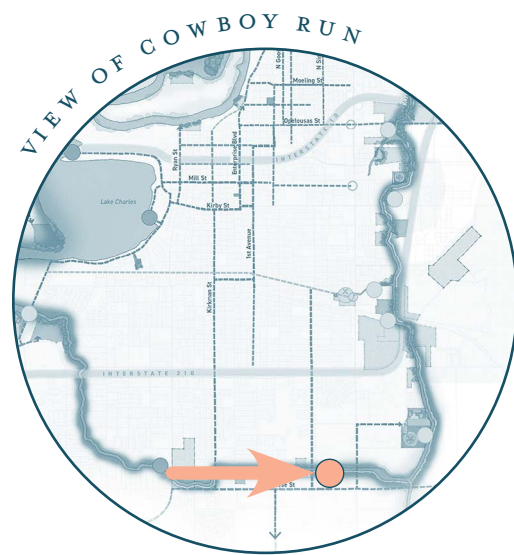
- *Acquire property as needed.*
- *Review and interpret the hydraulic modeling study by The Water Institute regarding this potential waterway connection.*
- *Where feasible, widen and deepen the channel to improve paddling conditions.*
- *Design and develop key features.*
- *Consider integrating stormwater best management practices into the design.*
- *Assess opportunities for adding native wetland and Cajun meadow plants.*
- *Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.*

KEY FEATURES

- *Shared-use path*
- *Widened bayou and, if feasible, a new channel*
- *Cajun meadow plantings*
- *Native plantings buffer*



RENDERING BY AEDO + TERRA STUDIO



Cowboy Run

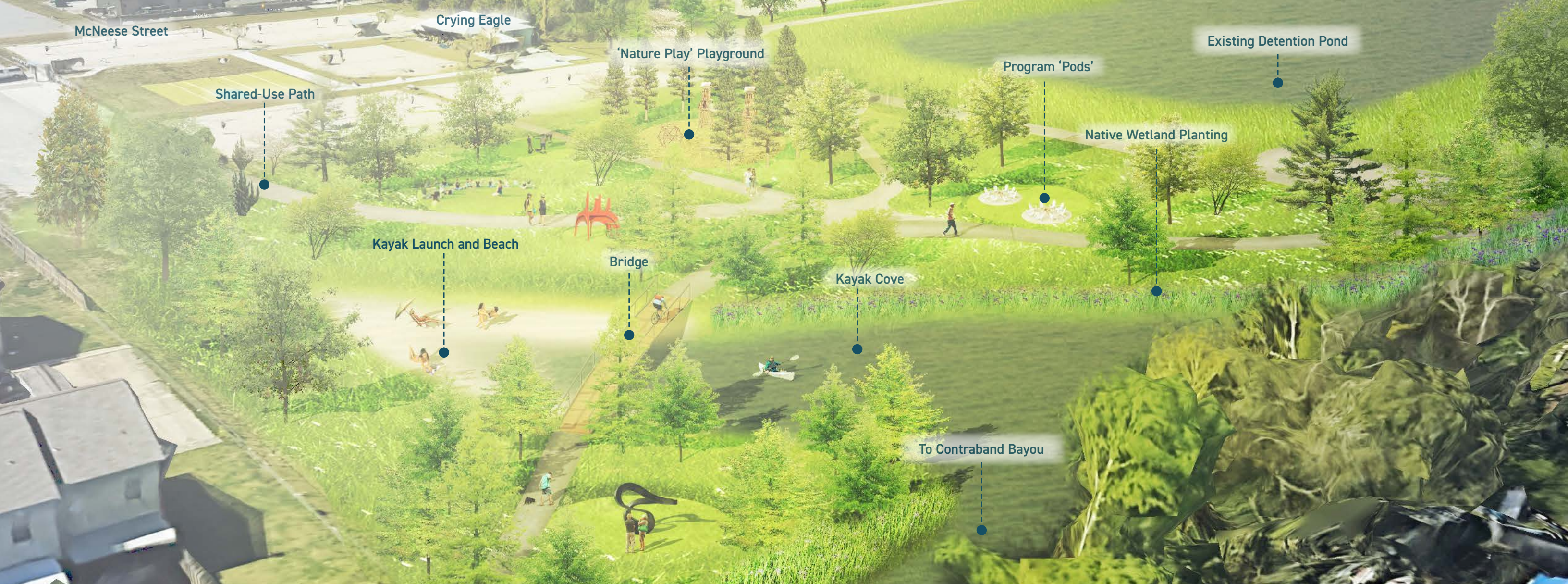
A shared-use path through developed and undeveloped areas along the Contraband Bayou where it runs parallel to McNeese Street. In areas where available space is narrow, a retaining wall can support the shared-use path (for biking and hiking) near the water's edge. Along some segments of the Contraband Bayou, where space is even narrower, low-volume residential streets can provide connectivity.

ACTION ITEMS

- *Acquire property as needed.*
- *Design and develop key features.*
- *Where feasible, widen and deepen the channel to improve paddling conditions.*
- *Consider integrating stormwater best management practices into the design.*
- *Engage nearby neighborhoods in identifying potential connections.*
- *Assess opportunities for adding native wetland and Cajun meadow plants.*
- *Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.*

KEY FEATURES

- *Retaining wall and shared-use path*
- *Widened bayou*
- *Meadow path*
- *Native plantings buffer*
- *Cajun meadow planting*



RENDERING BY AEDO + TERRA STUDIO



McNeese Street: South Beach and Crying Eagle - University

An excellent example of a potential public-private partnership along the Bayou Greenbelt, providing outdoor recreation opportunities while employing best management practices for flood mitigation. The area will offer recreation opportunities such as volleyball and a nature playground, while the development of the kayak cove will provide a family-friendly entry to Contraband Bayou.

ACTION ITEMS

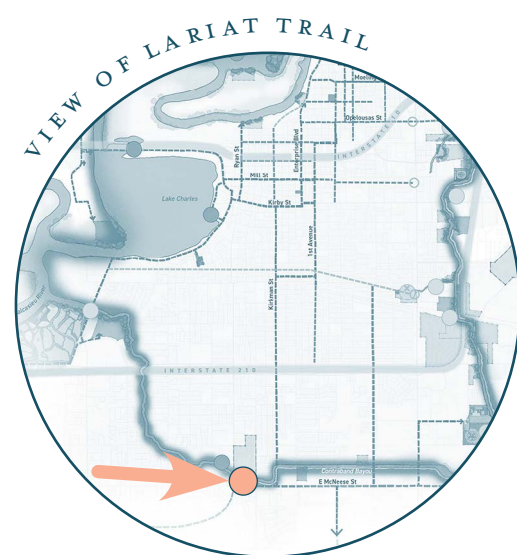
- Formalize agreements with private partners to ensure public access, which may include establishing an easement.
- Collaborate with private partners to design and develop key features.
- Consider integrating stormwater best management practices into the design.
- Engage nearby neighborhoods in identifying potential connections.
- Create the kayak cove as a connection to the Contraband Bayou.
- Assess opportunities for adding native wetland plants.
- Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.

KEY FEATURES

- Kayak launch and beach
- Kayak cove for paddle practice and access to the Contraband Bayou.
- Pedestrian bridge crossing the kayak cove, connecting South Beach to the main path.
- **'Nature play'** playground: natural materials used in an unstructured, child-directed way.
- Program 'pods' for outdoor activities such as kayak safety skills or outdoor education.
- Existing detention pond by the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury.
- Shared-use paths connecting key features
- Native wetland planting



RENDERING BY AEDO + TERRA STUDIO



Lariat Trail

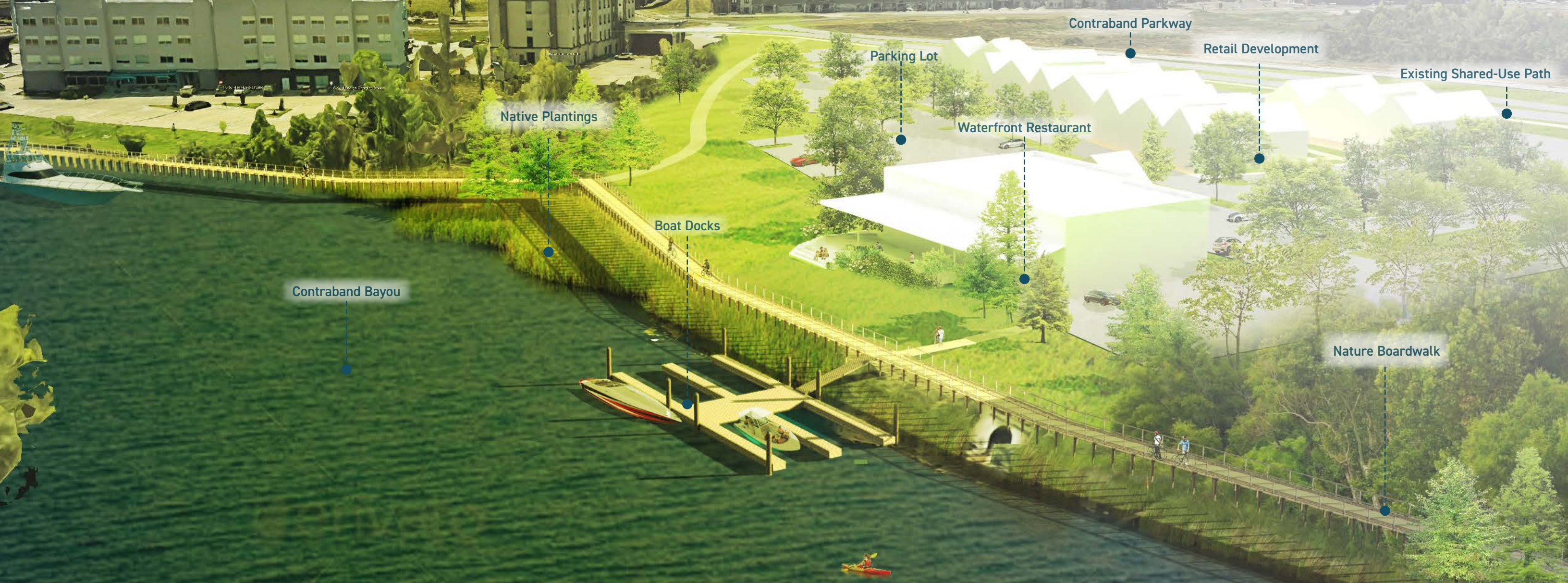
This view looks east from the Richard Rhoden Pedestrian Bridge (dedicated in 2023) at McNeese State University (MSU) toward Common Street. Revitalization efforts of the Contraband Bayou corridor through the campus included the construction of the bridge and cleanup along the streambank. A kayak launch, located 1,500 feet downstream at the SEED Center (not shown), will soon provide paddling access.

ACTION ITEMS

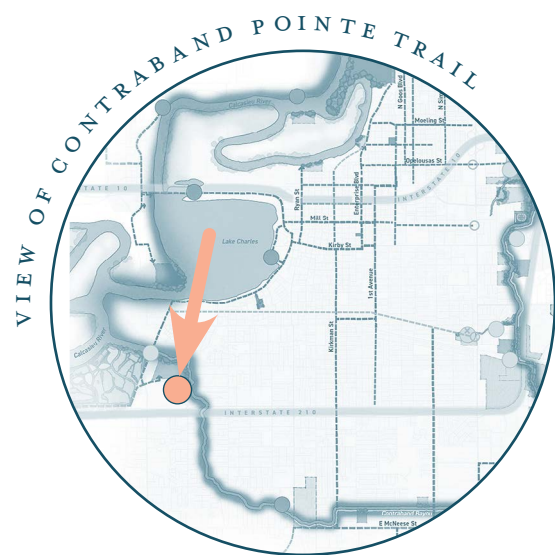
- Design and develop the proposed shared-use path to the MSU Legacy Center.
- Where feasible, widen and deepen the channel to improve paddling conditions.
- Engage nearby neighborhoods and campus community to identify and prioritize potential connections.
- Develop signage standards and install prototype signage at the Rhoden Bridge and kayak launch.
- Consider integrating stormwater best management practices into the design.
- Assess opportunities for adding native wetland plants.
- Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.

KEY FEATURES

- Enhanced Contraband Bayou corridor through McNeese State University.
- Richard Rhoden Pedestrian Bridge, serving as a gateway to the campus.
- Kayak launch at SEED Center on Ryan Street (not shown in rendering).
- Shared-use path
- Informational and wayfinding signage
- Native plantings



RENDERING BY AEDO + TERRA STUDIO



Contraband Pointe Trail

This area offers an excellent opportunity for a public-private partnership along the Bayou Greenbelt, with outdoor recreation opportunities and flood mitigation practices. Nearby businesses and hotels will benefit from the trail, including a connection to the existing shared-use path along Contraband Parkway. The visibility of this location may help the public envision the benefits of completing the Bayou Greenbelt loop.

ACTION ITEMS

- Formalize agreements with private partners to ensure public access, which may include establishing an easement.
- Work with private partners to design and develop key features.
- Provide a connection between the proposed boardwalk and the existing shared-use path along Contraband Parkway.
- Extend the nature boardwalk downstream to the Nelson Road Bridge.
- Consider integrating stormwater best management practices into the design.
- Engage neighboring businesses and hotels to identify potential connections.
- Assess opportunities for adding native wetland plants.

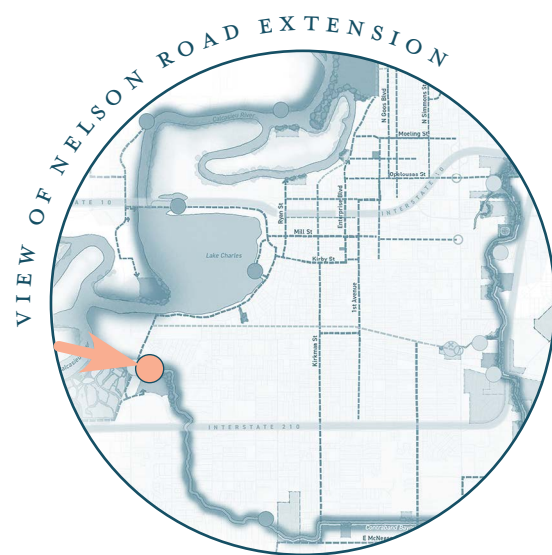
- Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.

KEY FEATURES

- Nature boardwalk
- Boat docks
- Native plantings
- Connection to waterfront restaurants and retail development.
- Existing shared-use path on Contraband Parkway.



RENDERING BY AEDO + TERRA STUDIO



Nelson Road Extension

Create a new node for facilities beneath the Nelson Road Bridge, offering public access to outdoor recreation opportunities on both land and water. Nearby hotels and casinos will benefit, as well as residents on both banks of Contraband Bayou. The addition of boat and kayak launches will provide water access to the Bayou Greenbelt, while a nature-themed boardwalk will provide opportunities for passive recreation.

ACTION ITEMS

- Coordinate the design of recreational facilities with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, the Port of Lake Charles, and local governments.
- Design and develop key features.
- Extend the nature boardwalk upstream to Contraband Pointe.
- Consider integrating stormwater best management practices into the design.
- Assess opportunities for adding native wetland plants.
- Develop a seasonal landscape maintenance plan for native plant species.

KEY FEATURES

- Fishing dock
- Kayak launch (add label)
- Boat launch
- Boat parking lot
- Nature boardwalk
- Native wetland plantings

TURNING THE VISION INTO REALITY

As an extension of the Just Imagine SWLA master planning process, the Bayou Greenbelt project was repeatedly identified as a catalytic project that touches many of the other initiatives. The public was drawn to the recurring themes of **Love of People** (Quality of Life for Locals and Hospitality for Visitors) and **Love of Place** (Nature and Culture). The Community Foundation of SWLA has taken the first steps toward realizing this vision by establishing an Implementation Team comprised of stakeholders, experts, and local champions.

Determine a Structure for Coordination and Communication

A project of this scale requires engagement and coordination across many levels, both inside and outside government. An Implementation Team and Policy Committee would have separate but complementary purposes. Additionally, a Friends group could harness public enthusiasm and engagement.

Implementation Team

Hosted by the Community Foundation of SWLA, the Implementation Team is an integral component of **Just Imagine SWLA**, with representation from stakeholder groups as well as the technical capacity of the Lake Charles Metropolitan Planning Organization, the SWLA Planning Commission, and City and Parish governments.

Policy Committee and Advisors

Move the Bayou Greenbelt forward as a collection of projects **developed and overseen by a Policy Committee of owners and managers** such as the City of Lake Charles, the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, McNeese State University, etc. An Advisory Committee could help ensure communication and cooperation among those involved.

Friends of the Bayou Greenbelt - Separate Entity

A dedicated Friends group could serve as an independent entity to engage the public and promote the Bayou Greenbelt. Successful models for this approach include: the **South River Watershed Alliance**, which manages a lengthy trail system in Atlanta, and the **Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Project**, which creates partnerships between regional outdoor recreation agencies and local governments in California.

Develop the Implementation Team

See these resources for guidance:

- *Steering Committee: Complete Guide with Examples & Templates* ([status.net](#))
- *Project Steering Committee: Roles, Best Practices, Challenges* ([projectpractical.com](#))

Additional information can also be found in the “Relevant Resources” section of this report.

Action Items for the Implementation Team

Administration and Leadership

- *Engage existing partners and seek new ones.*
- *Identify stakeholders and local champions, such as outdoor enthusiasts and garden clubs.*
- *Form specific committees.*
- *Set meeting schedules.*

Public Engagement

- *Review projects, brainstorm new ideas, and prioritizing initiatives.*
- *Address the “not in my backyard” concerns from some residents regarding trail development.*
- *Recruit new volunteers and partners.*

Strategic Plan Development

- *Develop and formalize the vision, goals, and values.*
- *Assign roles and responsibilities.*
- *Prioritize projects and initiatives.*

Fundraising and Grant Writing

- *Match the goals and priorities developed through the strategic planning process.*

Property Acquisitions and Easements

- *Identify and prioritize property acquisition needs.*
- *Explore opportunities for conservation servitudes and easements.*

Project Planning, Design, and Construction

- *Projects will most likely be administered by the Policy Committee.*

Promotion and Marketing

- *Partner with 'Visit Lake Charles' to promote the Bayou Greenbelt's outdoor recreation opportunities in connection with the Creole Nature Trail.*
- *Approach the early steps as a branding opportunity to make the public aware of the existing public access points. More than half of the Bayou Greenbelt loop is already in place.*
- *Celebrate milestones to sustain momentum and keep the public engaged.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation

- Develop a website dedicated to the Bayou Greenbelt.
- In addition to the fundraising and grant-seeking efforts involving major components of the Bayou Greenbelt, develop a “Big, Little Projects” program with opportunities for individuals, groups, or small businesses to participate at various funding levels.
- Explore opportunities for conservation and access easements, in addition to fee simple acquisitions of property.

Programming

- Promote the Bayou Greenbelt as a paddleboard destination. With sheltered water, minimal boat traffic, warm weather, and access to amenities, it’s perfect for this increasingly popular activity.
- Develop instructional programming to introduce paddle sports, camping, fishing, birding, and more to children and adults.
- Host an Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count on the Bayou Greenbelt.
- Hold a Bayou Greenbelt Marathon.
- Develop camping and glamping opportunities on the Bayou Greenbelt, promoting it as a “Wilderness Experience in Your Own Backyard!”
- Once complete, work towards a national water trail designation for the Bayou Greenbelt.

Coordination

- Encourage Lake Charles Public Transit to explore the possibility of providing service to some parks and access points along the Bayou Greenbelt.
- Involve the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers early in the planning process, as permits may be required for some projects. Engage the Port of Lake Charles in the planning process, as well.
- Work in partnership with the railways operating in the Lake Charles area, including Amtrak, Port Rail, and Union Pacific.

Facilities

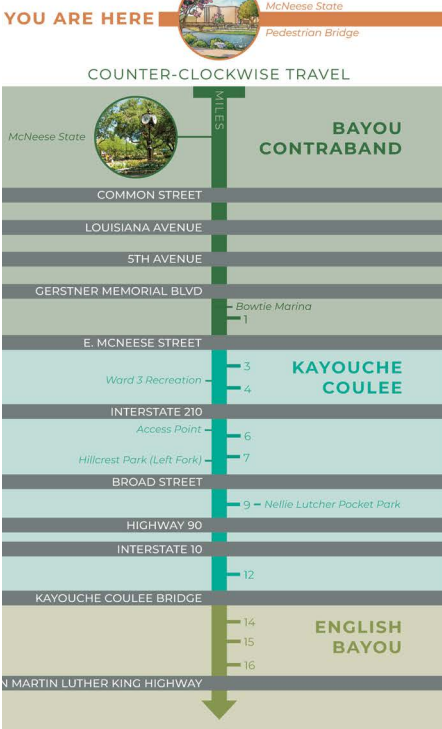
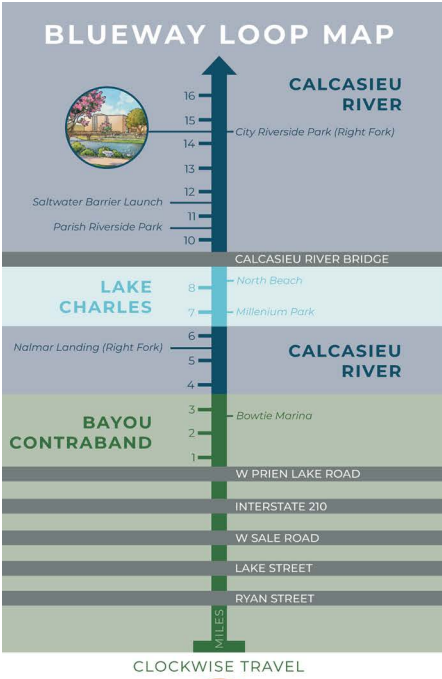
- Develop signage standards for wayfinding and public safety (p. 41)
- Strive to make all of the components of the Bayou Greenbelt as accessible and inclusive as possible and market Lake Charles as an outdoor recreation destination for those of all ability levels. (Minimal elevation changes should help with meeting ADA requirements.)
- Be pet-friendly and add dog waste dispensers and small dog parks along the greenbelt.
- Provide E-bike and cell phone charging stations.
- Work with a local vendor to install kayak rental kiosks along the Bayou Greenbelt. A good example can be found at Sam Houston Jones State Park.
- Include lockable storage units along trails, particularly near food, lodging, and attractions.
- Consider accessible fishing piers during the design process for access sites.
- Design new paddle and/or boat launch facilities with docks that can rise and fall with normal fluctuations and can be disconnected and removed if needed during flooding.
- Kayouche Bayou drops several feet as it passes over the Gravity Drainage Pump Station barrier. To complete the loop, create a portage around it, or across the island. “Roller portages” could be used to make it easier to move canoes and kayaks.

Case Studies

- Develop a “Bayou Keeper” program modeled after the successful “River Keeper” programs across the country. See the list in “Relevant Resources.”
- Review the websites for two successful initiatives, similar to Bayou Greenbelt, such as the: **Boise River Greenbelt**, **Boise River Greenbelt | City of Boise** and Bayou Teche National Water Trail, **TECHE Project | Enrich It, Explore It, Embrace It**.
- Consider implementing a system similar to SRCHECKIN by the **South River Watershed Alliance**. This system allows users of Atlanta’s South River Trail to “check in,” provide feedback, document trail use, and help generate community support.

Wayfinding and Signage

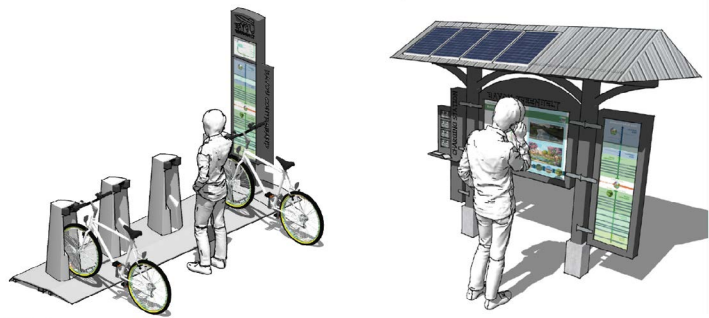
Distinctive signage for Bayou Greenbelt serves several important purposes: orient trail users to the trail network with a range of wayfinding methods, provide important public safety information, and serve as iconic and recognizable gateways to the trail network.



Orientation Diagram



Sample layout for trailhead signage



Sample trailhead amenities, featuring signage, charging stations and bike parking

Rendered like a subway map, this diagram of the Bayou Greenbelt trail system is an example of a simplified network map (below), with a customized orientation diagram for each trailhead (at left).



Network Map

LITTLE PROJECTS HAVE BIG IMPACTS

“Big Little Projects” are opportunities for everyone to contribute to Bayou Greenbelt, ranging from individual/family efforts to community-wide projects.

A collaborative approach to “Big Little Projects” will grow support for Bayou Greenbelt and local parks while enhancing a sense of community.

“Big, Little Projects” can have Big Impacts, and their sheer number could help generate a wider range of public support, while also enhancing the sense of community. Examples could include:

- Individuals funding the planting of trees or native plantings.
- Local businesses providing bike racks or repair and pump stations.
- Civic groups partnering to fund playground equipment or new shade structures. See ‘nature play’ playground: natural materials used in an unstructured, child-directed way.
- Designing a highly recognizable logo and sign.
- Offering stickers for storefronts or residences to provide recognition and generate even more support.
- Installing sturdy, attractive trash cans to enhance public spaces.
- Providing dog-walking stations equipped with bag dispensers
- Providing kayak storage.

WAYFINDING SIGNAGE

BIKE PARKING KIOSKS

BENCHES OR PICNIC TABLES

BUTTERFLY GARDENS

NATIVE TREES AND PLANTINGS

LARGE SWINGS

HAMMOCK PARKS

DOG WATER FOUNTAINS

BIKE FIX-IT STATIONS

FITNESS TRAIL EQUIPMENT

KAYAK LAUNCHES

PUMP TRACK OR KIDS BMX



Dog water fountain



Outdoor swing



Picnic shelter



Kayak storage

Accessible kayak launch on Calcasieu River: Riverside Park at Fitzenreiter. Dedicated 7/31/2024



Hammock park



Bike parking



Shaded seating



Bike fix-it station

RELEVANT RESOURCES

Search for federal funding opportunities at www.grants.gov.

The Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a federal grant funding program that helps urban communities to create new outdoor recreation spaces, reinvigorate existing parks, and form connections between people and the outdoors in economically underserved areas. LWCF is administered by Louisiana’s Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Office of State Parks, Division of Outdoor Recreation.

Recreation Trails Program, funding opportunities for all types of trails.

Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, administers several programs that provide funding for water resource issues and projects, as well as watershed management.

Building Community Resilience with Nature-Based Solutions: A Guide for Local Officials. This FEMA publication provides context and solutions to leverage nature-based solutions for adaptation and climate resilience.

Several playground manufacturers offer grants and/or assistance. Some of these include:

- **Landscape Structures**
- **Kaboom**, Build a Playground Toolkit, examples of inclusive and equitable projects and grants.
- **Playground Equipment.com**, playground grants in Louisiana.
- **Green Schoolyards America**, promotes the benefits of nature play.

U.S. Economic Development Administration, grants for outdoor recreation sectors to invest in infrastructure, workforce, or other projects to support the recovery of the industry and the economic resilience of the community in the future.

Rebuilding America’s Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant Program, funds designated bike lanes and sidewalks.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), grant funding opportunities for new voluntary conservation and restoration projects across the country.

Southwest Louisiana Regional Planning Commission, Community Development Division can help with planning, funding, and technical analysis of demographic, environmental, and economic issues.

Arts and Humanities Council of Southwest Louisiana, funds projects and arts organizations in five parishes through the Louisiana Project Grants (LPG) program. Visit the LPG grant webpage.

Grantsmanship Center, online training programs.

Safe Routes Partnership, an informative yet easy to read introduction to bike and pedestrian planning.

Alta, examples of other Bike and Pedestrian plans from across the country.

Louisiana Recreation and Parks Association, Louisiana’s organization for park and recreational professionals.

National Recreation and Parks Association, together with **NRPA Partnerships**, builds relationships with like-minded partners and allies to build strong, vibrant, and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation.

General Recreation, an excellent source of information on designing, funding, and building an inclusive playground.

Louisiana Land Conservation Assistance Network, technical assistance for a wide range of land use, conservation, green energy, and water resource issues.

Strava, provides “heat maps” showing where people are cycling in and around Lake Charles and Calcasieu Parish.

www.ebird.org. A nation-wide birding website with information on local hotspots and sightings, provided by birders in the area. The Bayou Greenbelt could provide diverse habitat areas for many bird species.

Strategic Planning Resources:

- **How to write a strategic plan (harvard.edu).**
- **How to Write a Strategic Plan for a Project | Adobe Workfront**. Very good template and narrative addressing strategic and project plan development.
- **UPDATED-2022-Final-Strategic-Plan-for-Adoption_small.pdf** (bendparksandrec.org). Bend, Oregon, Parks and Recreation.
- **A New Approach to Parks and Recreation System Planning | Feature | Parks & Recreation magazine | NRPA**
- **Strategic_Plan_2017-2021.pdf** (austintexas.gov). An excellent “Letter from the Director” describing the plan to residents.
- **Parish of East Baton Rouge, Imagine Your Parks 2 - Better Parks, Better Living** (BREC.org).

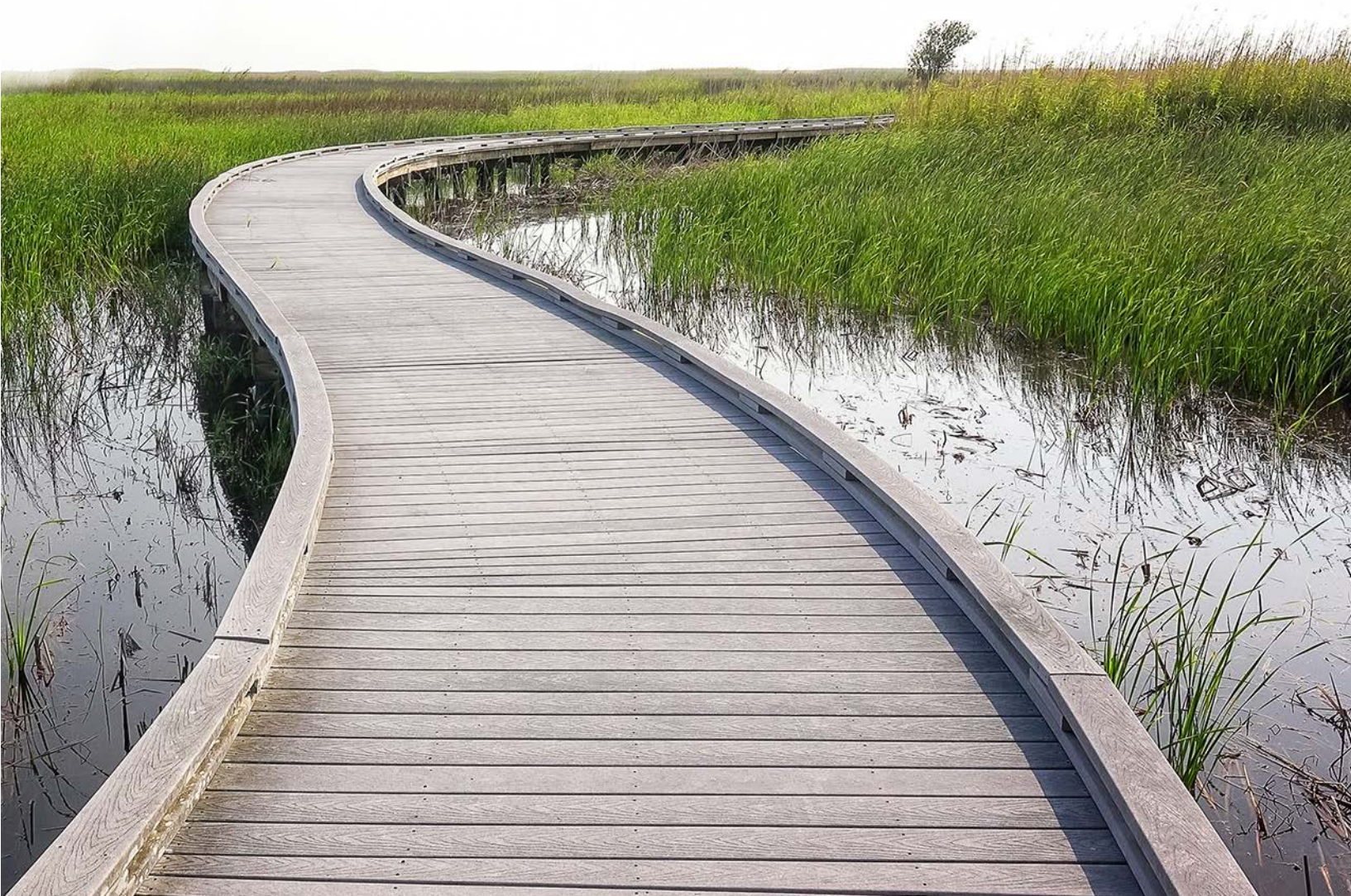
MOVING FORWARD

Daniel Burnham, a renowned city planner and one of America’s most influential architects, who played a key role in rebuilding Chicago after the Great Fire of 1871, once said:

“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die.”

Mike Nodier’s idea, now the community’s vision for the Bayou Greenbelt, is indeed one of those “big plans!”

The National Park Service team thanks you for inviting us to your city, and for the opportunity to be involved in what will truly be a transformational project for Lake Charles and Southwest Louisiana. We look forward to returning and paddling all 23 miles of the Bayou Greenbelt alongside project partners, residents, and visitors alike!





FEMA

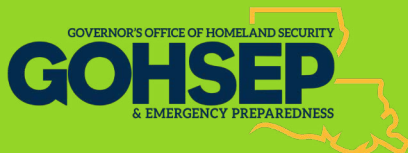
The Federal Emergency Management Agency Community Assistance Recovery Support Function (CARSF) enables local governments to effectively and efficiently carry out community-based recovery planning and management in a post-disaster environment. CARSF also supports state or territorial governments in developing programs of support for local recovery planning.



NPS-RTCA

Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program

The National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA) supports locally-led conservation and outdoor recreation projects and assists communities with natural disaster recovery across the United States. NPS-RTCA assists communities and public land managers in developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as creating outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage future generations in the outdoors.



The Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness leads and supports Louisiana and its citizens to prevent, prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against man-made or natural disasters that threaten the state.



LOUISIANA
Office of
**COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**

The Louisiana Office of Community Development creates a safer and stronger Louisiana by leading the state's disaster recovery and long-term community resilience planning efforts with a great sense of urgency through innovation, partnerships, and best practices.
