

**Urban Ecology Framework
Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) Meeting
Vision and Goals / Analysis Methodology Workshop – 72 Marietta St.
Monday, May 21, 2018**

Committee Members in Attendance

Jonah McDonald – Author, Hiking Atl Hidden Forests	Jim Abbott – Inman Tree Watch	Aubrey Sabba – DTJ Design
Taiza Troutman – ATL IS READY	Carly Queen – Groundwork	Esther Stokes – Atl Audubon Society
Mindi Sheer-Naylor – EcoAddendum/Sheer Ecology	Jim Arrington – Groundwork	Leah Pine – Landscape Architect
Kimberly Estep – South Fork Conservancy	Kevin Curry – Resident	George Greenidge, PhD – GA State University
Darryl Haddock – West Atlanta Watershed Alliance	Michael Halicki – Park Pride	Al Bartell – NPU-J
Bithia Ratnasamy – Resident	Jill Arrington – Groundwork	

Project Team Members in Attendance

Heather Alhadeff, City of Atlanta Department of City Planning	Jennifer Dowdell, Biohabitats	Carlos Perez, PP+D
Inga Kennedy, PEQ	Marla Hill, PEQ	

Meeting Summary

SAC members were given an overview of the project and the purpose and role of the SAC. This was followed by an overview of the project scope, tasks and deliverables. A brief summary was provided about the data analysis process, including the ecological context of how national, regional and local impacts influence existing conditions. Following the presentation, the SAC was asked to participate in a series of interactive exercises to elicit input on the vision and goals of the Urban Ecology Framework.

Story of Place Activity: SAC Responses

What makes Atlanta unique today from an ecological perspective?

- Three of the four discussion groups identified trees and tree canopy as making Atlanta unique.
- Two groups elevated regional water sources, emphasizing the Chattahoochee
- Communication connections sparked energetic group discussion: the Story of Atlanta is founded on communication connections beginning with indigenous groups who established trade networks. Settlers built a transportation framework over those networks, which led to the systems that we have in place today.

How did we get here?

- The physical structure of hills and waterways has preserved substantial greenspace.
- Growth and industrial and human displacement has made people aware of diminishing greenspace and created a “moment” for ecological planning.

What current trends and patterns are you seeing?

- There appears to be a growing resistance to trends in tree removal, gentrification, and displacement. The UEF is necessary due to the amount of development that is happening and the social justice challenges that will continue to occur.

What is challenging about Atlanta’s urban ecology? And the trends shaping tomorrow? What threatens Atlanta’s ecological uniqueness?

- Clean water is an ongoing challenge, especially given the size of the Chattahoochee River watershed where Atlanta gets most of its water in relation to the population of Atlanta.
- Zoning, limited enforcement, and politics make it difficult to preserve ecological areas.
- Monoculture and mass spraying are damaging areas.
- Pressures of population growth

Updated Vision Statement based on TAC and SAC input

A city Atlanta is grounded in its unique ecological character of native functional ecological systems and , both verdant and vibrant, with accessible greenspace, both verdant and vibrant. It is likewise grounded in a strong sense of community and culture bound in many ways to our natural resources. and functional ecological systems. A framework This urban ecology framework will that strategically guide the projected increase in Atlanta’s population density such that development urban expansion respects our native forest resources, waterways and waterbodies sheds, soils, wildlife and public greenspace, promoting resilience, transportation needs, livability and connectivity.

Goal Prioritization by SAC (Activity 1)

Ranked Goals*	Priority Ranking				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
1. Access/Greenspace Connectivity	4	4	2	5	0
2. Conservation-Habitat and Biodiversity	3	5	3	2	2
3. Function - Multifunctionality of Greenspace	4	1	5	3	2
4. Resilience	2	4	4	4	1
<i>*Ordered according to weighted averages of the SAC results</i>					

SAC members identified several additional considerations for the goals:

- Equity. Application and integration of equity should be integrated into all the goals and must be inclusively developed and derived
- Emphasize livability for diverse populations (access to healthy food, clean water, shelter, resources needed to lead a full life in harmony with other life forms)
- Prioritize regulatory guidance that lays out, supports, and enforces sustainable future policy, promotion, and law

Vision - What do Atlanta’s natural systems look like in 50 years? (Activity 2)

SAC feedback on map of Atlanta on next page

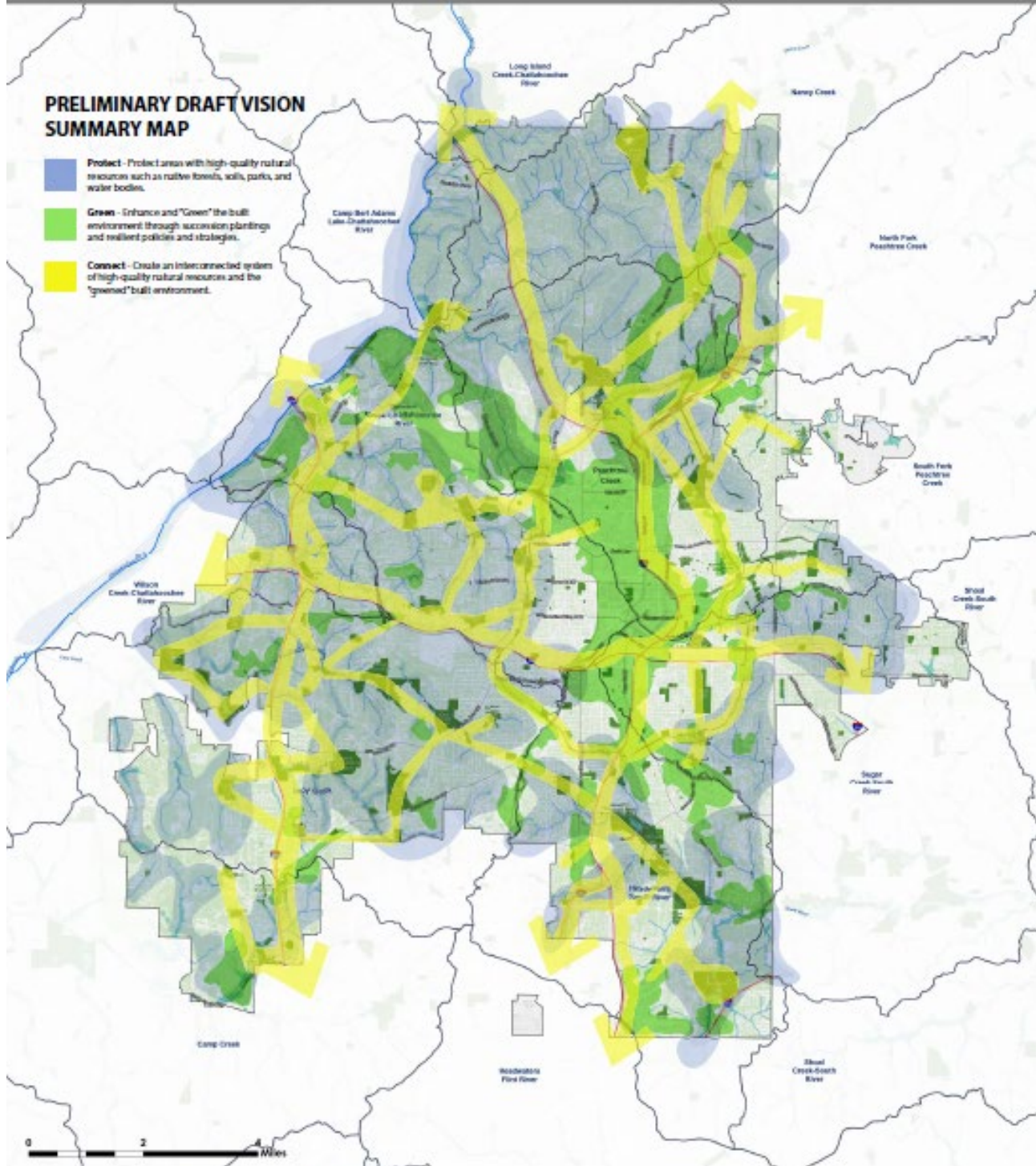
CITY OF ATLANTA - NATURAL FEATURES

WHAT DO ATLANTA'S NATURAL SYSTEMS LOOK LIKE IN 50 YEARS?



PRELIMINARY DRAFT VISION SUMMARY MAP

- Protect** - Protect areas with high-quality natural resources such as native forests, soils, parks, and water bodies.
- Green** - Enhance and "Green" the built environment through succession plantings and resilient policies and strategies.
- Connect** - Create an interconnected system of high-quality natural resources and the "greened" built environment.



Interstates	Watersheds	Parks/Open Space
Major Tributary	Welllands	Tree Canopy
Minor Tributary	Waterbodies	

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Public Connection, Funding and Communication Feedback from SAC (Activity 3)

How can the public connect with Atlanta's nature and ecology?

- Key suggestions included forums with community groups, Urban Ecology Centers, embedding ecological education in schools, and working with non-profits and agencies to create social networks centered on ecological education.

How should we fund Atlanta's future green space and ecological priorities?

- SAC's discussion focused on fees associated with development such as impervious surface or tree removal; on taxes on gas, congestion, or parking; and on federal grants. The SAC also discussed forming an Urban Conservation District and an attendant UCD fund.

How can we best communicate Atlanta's ecology opportunities to the public and public officials?

- Suggestions included engaging Neighborhood Planning Units, programming that connects communities to their greenspaces, signage and traditional marketing and advertising venues. The group distinguished between one-time efforts such as the role out of the UEF and ongoing efforts that could engage creative marketing efforts to brand Atlanta as an urban ecology center.

Atlanta's Story of Place Activity
Responses from Groups
UEF SAC Meeting 5/21/2018

Group 1

Group 2

Group 3

Group 4

Q1: What makes ATL unique today from an ecological perspective? (ecological, cultural, quality of life)

- Ridgeline and trees; sitting on continental divide (water origins)
- Most water is surface water
- Southern culture of pollution
- Problems are evident (development, ordinance w/o trees), downtown care minimal app for reforestation, city built on top of old city, pollution

- Tree canopy, streams and rivers --> little attention
- Biodiversity - potential, not "gotten" yet
- Corridors - there is willingness to discuss urban ecology

- Trees - integrated into people and natural spaces
- Chattahoochee as water source for major city
- Underutilized land/vacant spaces
- Mass transit, freight rail

- The communication/transportation connections
- Rivers --> trails --> rail --> cars --> airports
- People need to communicate and transportation grew out of that, in connection with the natural world

Q2: How did we get here?

- Value for greenspace increasing
- Moment is here
- Livability <--> sustainability <--> resiliency <--> quality of life
- vocal outcry re tree removal
- guiding star/plan
- Increasing development

- Climate favorable for trees and plants
- Conservation easements, private greenspace
- Industrial and human displacement (also trend)

- Creeks and hills stopped high-density development but left greenspace intact

Q3: What current trends and patterns are you seeing?

- Deforestation due to development

- Erosion along metro area creeks by hardscape; no regeneration; large amounts of invasive species; loss of top soil
- Trees used to be planted in soil; now planting in aged soils that can be toxic
- Lawn blowers and tree removal
- Politically "sexy" to advocate for environmentalism/parks, but not as much action
- A number of eco-focused plans without much implementation
- Buried/piped springs/creeks (Green Infrastructure)
- Create community ownership of creeks/streams
- Edge density/Biodiversity (disconnection of natural habitats can be detrimental to biodiversity at the edge of natural habitats)
- Equity between focus on 3 E's (environment, social equity and economics focused on economics first, social/eco second)

- Outcry re tree removal
- Development
- Gentrification
- Preservation and equity
- Displacement
- Social justice
- Environmental literacy

- Loss of tree canopy, industry, low-income people
- Densification, gentrification, growth of wealthy population/individuals
- Increased traffic congestion and support for transit
- Increased pressure on water resources

- Single --> multi-family
- Manufacturing --> data and hospitality and sports
- Subdivision to infill
- Movement of people passionate about greenspace protection

Q4: What is challenging about Atlanta's urban ecology, and the trends shaping tomorrow? What threatens ATL ecological uniqueness?

- Culturally appropriate environmental education
- History of development - sprawl
- Car dependency
- Transit = sprawl?
- Lack of public funding
- Real estate - king --> driving financial force
- Incentives for density

- Clean water, zoning and enforcement, political climate
- Affordable housing and transportation, public perception
- Landscape and pest management (impact on pollinators), population growth, canopy loss
- Invasive species!!!

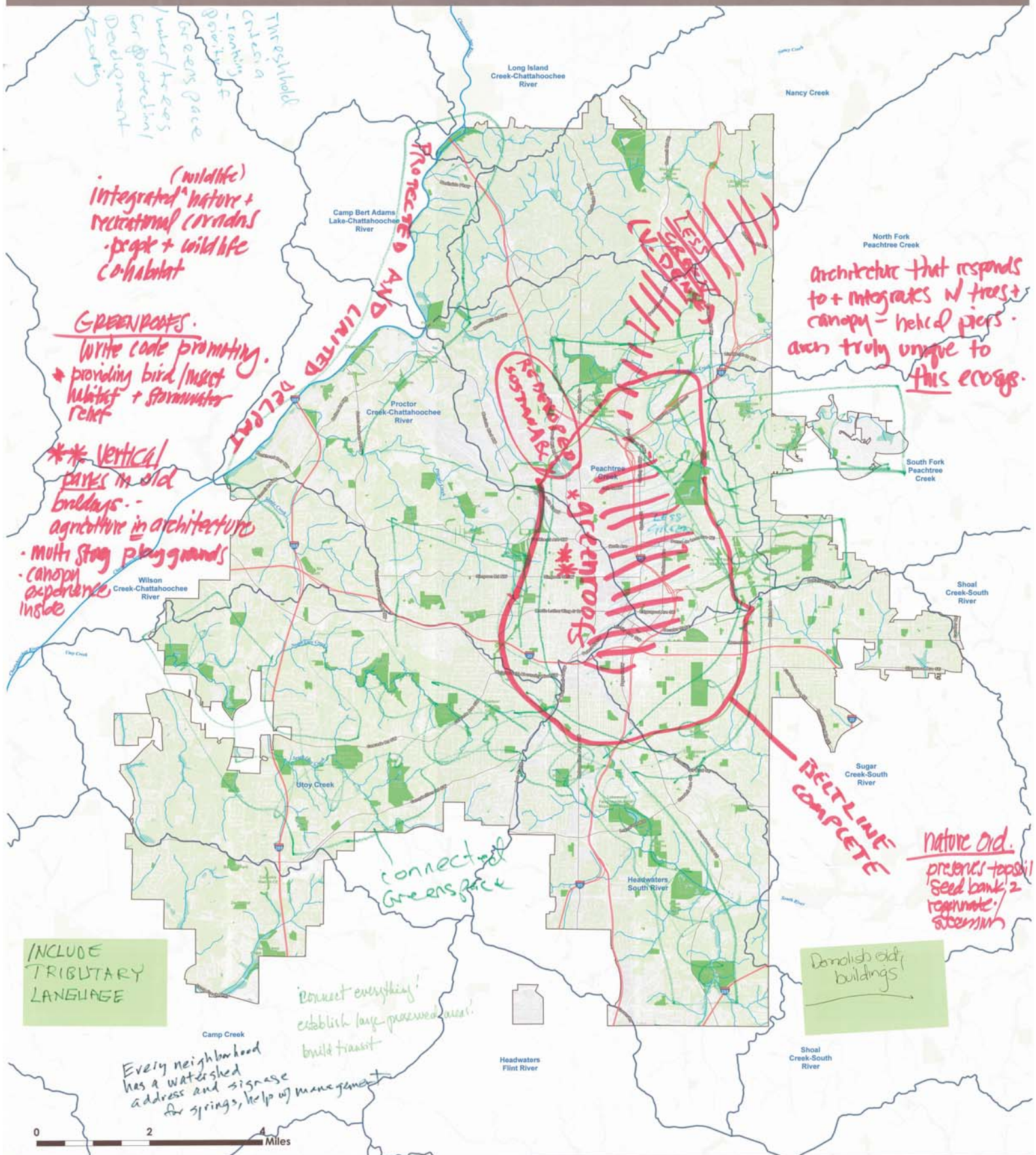
- How to create rules, regulations, laws to protect greenspace

Q5: What threatens Atlanta's ecological uniqueness?

- Free market threatens the urban ecology
- How to create value in the urban ecology that fosters protection

CITY OF ATLANTA - NATURAL FEATURES

WHAT DO ATLANTA'S NATURAL SYSTEMS LOOK LIKE IN 50 YEARS?

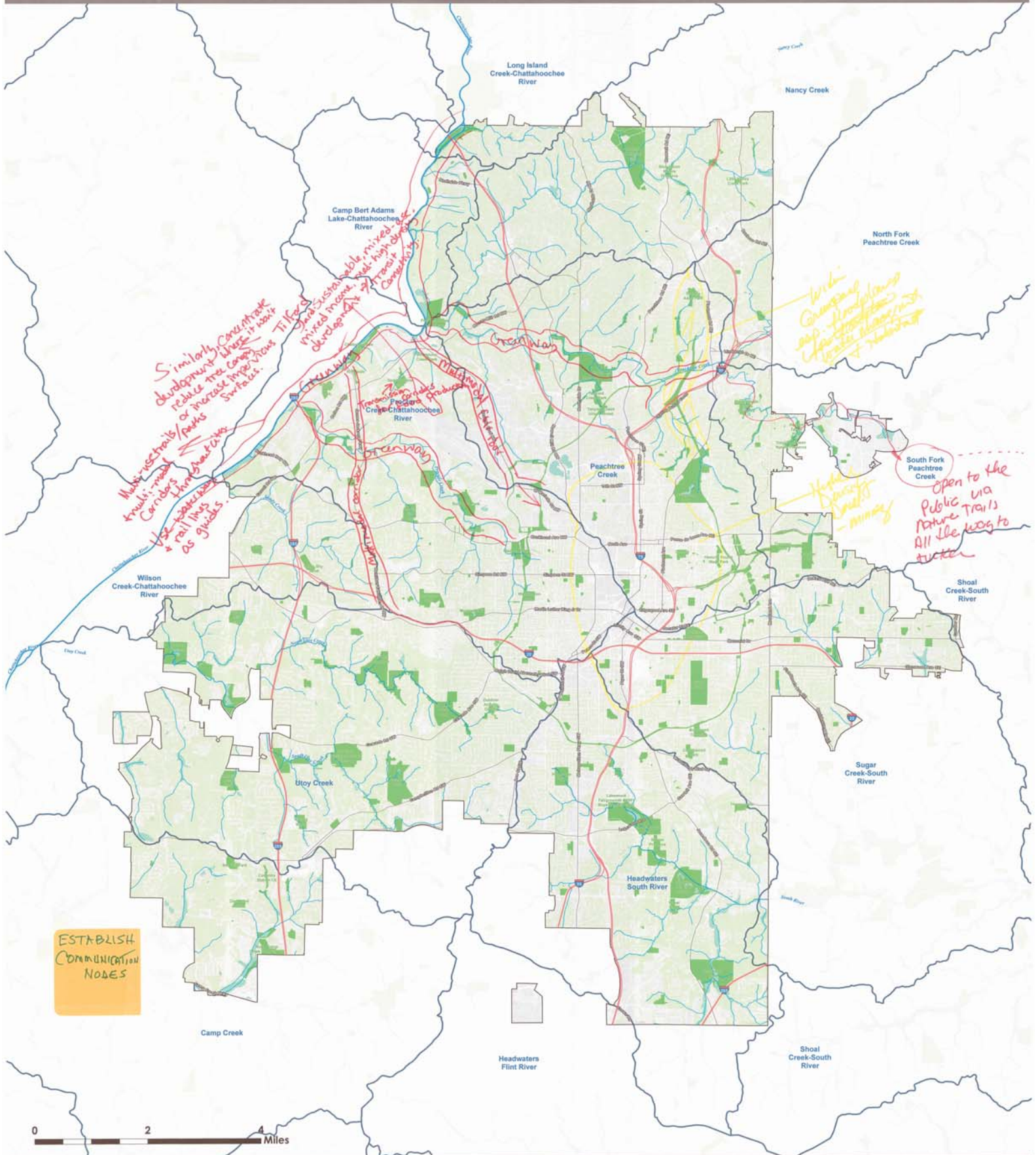


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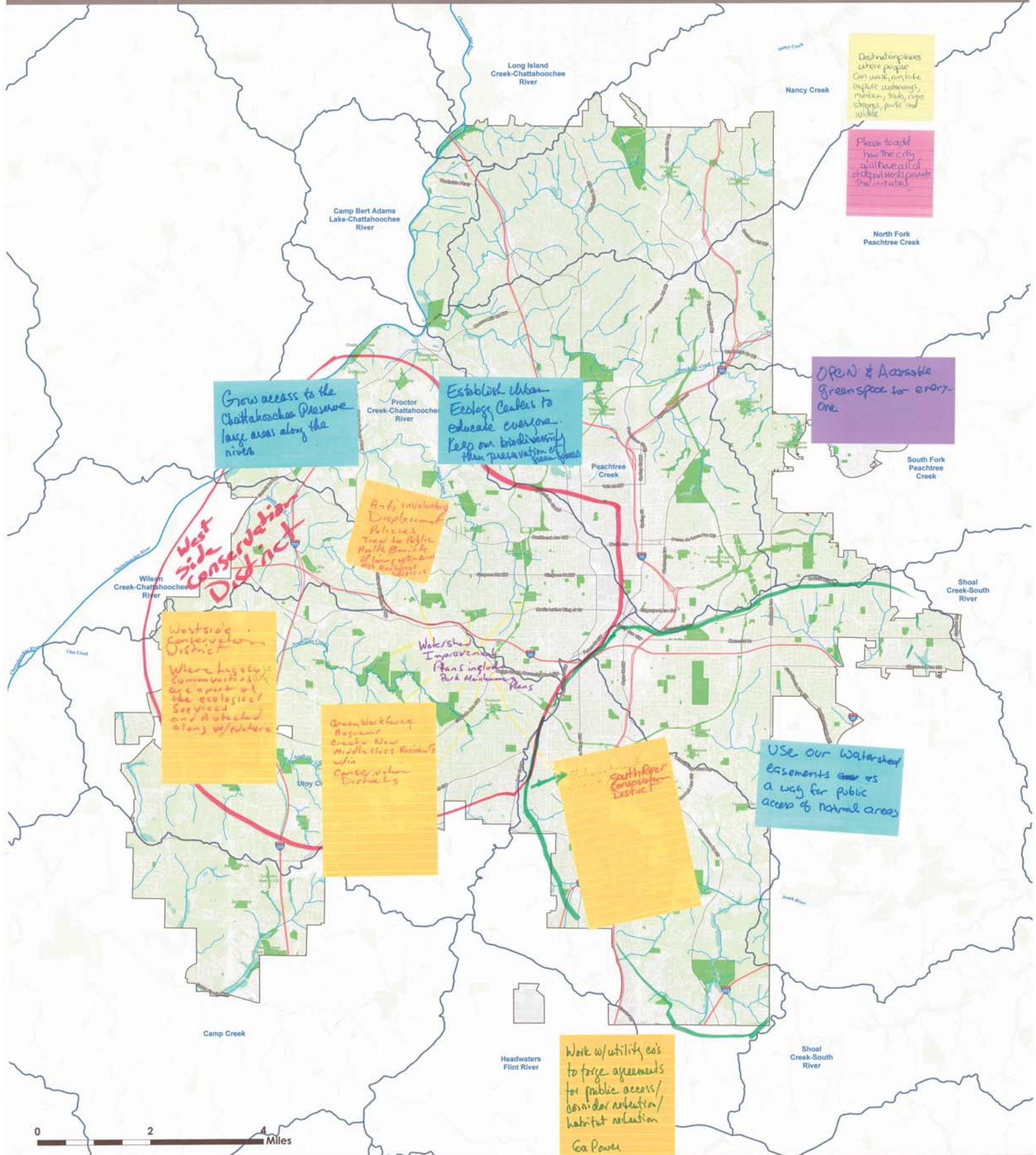
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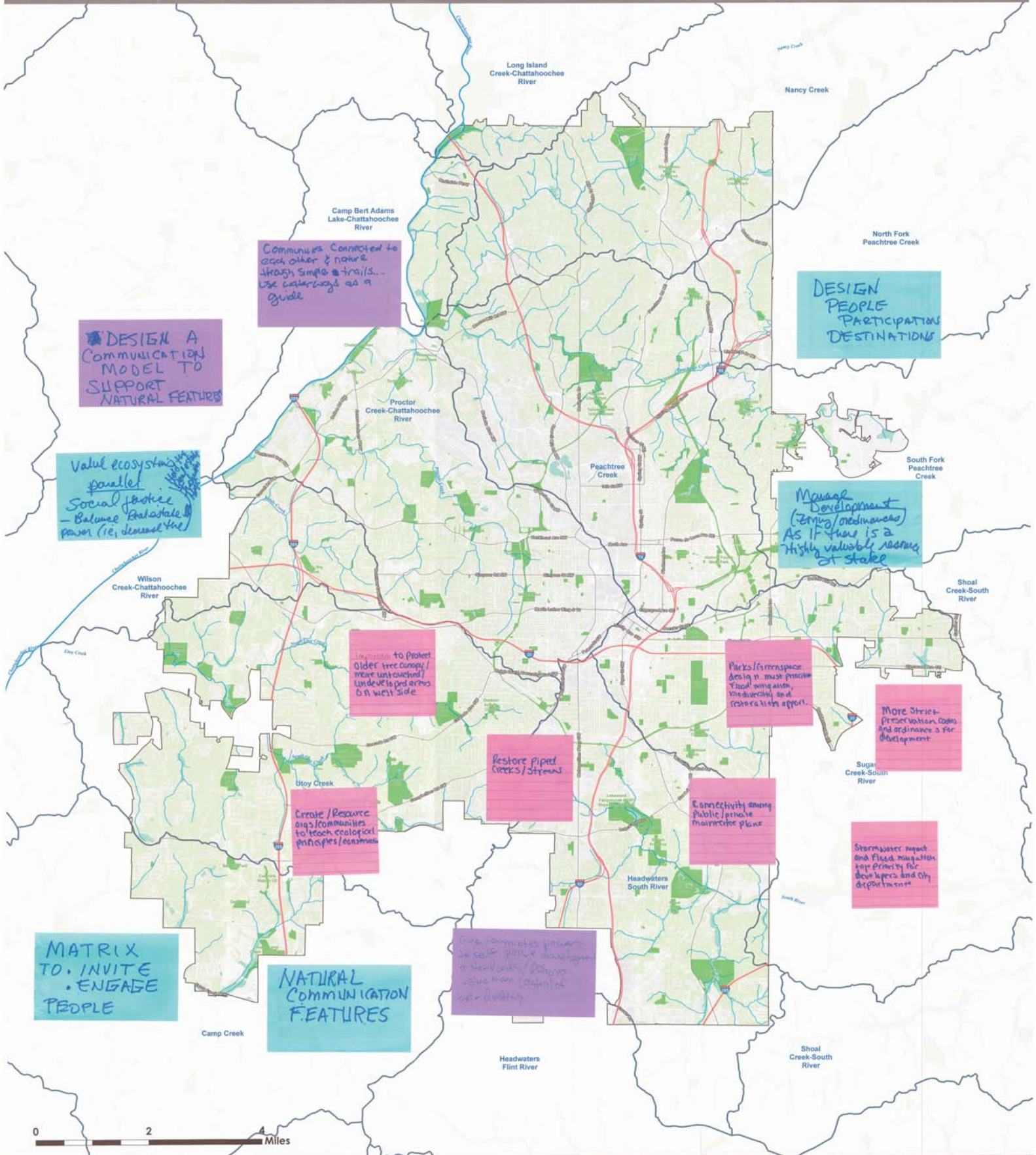


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Source: City of Atlanta, The Atlanta Regional Commission, 2008, 2009

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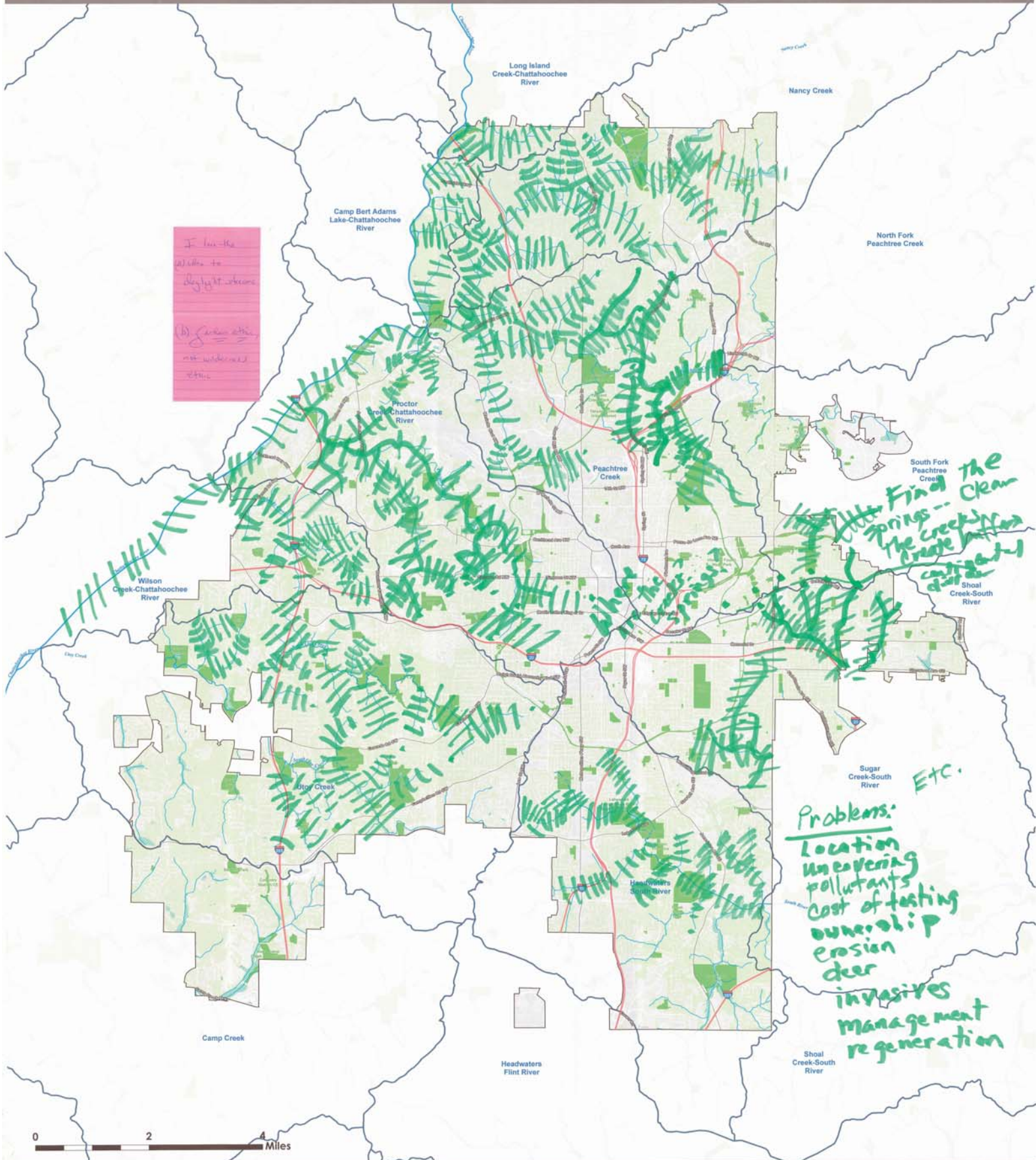
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*I see the
wishes to
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(b) some other
not with the
etc.*

*Final the
Springs - Clean
the creek bottom
create better
habitat*

*Problems:
Location
uncovering
pollutants
Cost of testing
ownership
erosion
deer
invasives
management
regeneration*



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**SAC Meeting 1- Activity 3 Results | Questions Exercise -
SAC Meeting 5/21/2018**

Q1: How can the public connect with Atlanta's nature and ecology?

Develop forums with community groups as a part of their monthly agenda!

Urban Ecology Centers - re: Ken Leinbach - reach out and teach children and parents; education at early age --
> early and often accessible and equitable

The concept of urban ecology centers should be embraced by Atlanta so they are one day as plentiful as rec centers. Ken Leinbach has created a vision in Milwaukee that can and should be replicated in Atlanta.

Community Urban Ecology centers housed in neighborhoods/districts/NPUs that are resourced and tasked with community education, natural asset mapping/inventory, coordination of ecological centered planning, advocacy and enforcement of ecology framework/eco-centered ordinances and engages with community and policy makers as a liaison regarding the work

In cities where this has worked, local ecology is in all school levels and is embedded in each city department

I feel very strongly that Atlanta has an opportunity to address two urgent needs by combining them: (1) slowing tree loss and adding greenspace and (2) Further developing cultural resources. Atlanta is the City in a Forest. It's also the City Too Busy to Think. We've made strides in arts and culture, but we have far to go. We need great ideas for bringing nature (esp. trees and streams) together with the arts - public art in our parks, natural themes/topics as part of our arts org. programming, etc.

To be successful and sustainable, nature and ecology developments must be accessible and useful and in the li

Using well known program, e.g., City Design as way to sell/promote to public, e.g., tree ordinance, waterways, ecology

Show the relationship (if it exists) to Atlanta's economic vitality and its ecology --> preserve jobs and the tax base by preserving nature!!!

The definition of ecology must now include people and communication to be an effective vision for a 21st Century future neighborhood leaders communicate ecology different than community leaders different than faith leaders different than small business leaders

In-person and remotely. We need ADA compliant access to nature, but not everywhere. Consider virtual means of access to supplement in-person experiential opportunities.

We need to embrace education related to greenspace - so many opportunities. The Urban Ecology Centers are such a great way to reach kids, parents -- and should be available to all ages.

If we don't understand the value of greenspace to people, we destroy it. That's a mentality we need to change
- through education.

**SAC Meeting 1- Activity 3 Results | Questions Exercise -
SAC Meeting 5/21/2018**

Q2: How should we fund Atlanta's future green space and ecological priorities?

Federal grants/monies

Gas taxes

Emissions - taxes: Reallocation of existing taxes that could be used better

Tollways

Other "non-green energy" taxes. Allow developers to buy additional density, put money into ecology efforts.

Development must pay something closer to the true cost of converting green resources to solely human use. Look at DC and what fees they charge for removal of large trees.

Everyone must share in the cost of greenspace and ecological priorities. Homeowners, businesses, governments, etc. More public investment in this must be prioritized. FIND A WAY.

Ecological has to include people priorities and communication priorities.

Fund them with priorities on the areas with the most need. Fund capacity building at community/grass roots level, organizations, fund community education cohorts and fund ecology centers.

We need more public in our public-private partnerships. The City needs to step up with dedicated funding for land acquisition for parks and greenspace. Foundations can't do it all!

Develop Urban Conservation District and a UCD fund

-Appropriately use the taxes for what they are intended, stop misappropriating voted on funds, i.e., transportation SPLOST to pet projects citizens did not vote for.

-Development tax

-Congestion tax

-Parking lot tax

Real estate development

-Employ impact fees (esp. if impervious surface)

-Offer incentives to developers who use green infrastructure or who minimize impervious surface

-Gas tax or some kind of transportation tax

-Infrastructure costs related to conversion of trees/greenspace to residential, commercial, etc. need to be paid for (somehow) by builders/developers.

Taxes/fees on parking, tree removal, added impervious surface, etc. Place a cost on actions that deteriorate our urban ecology and use it to mitigate and rebuild ecological resilience.

-I would add "appropriate" to the level of what is lost - what is the price of a 200-year old tree?

Add a special tax to housing costs and new developments to fund this

**SAC Meeting 1- Activity 3 Results | Questions Exercise -
SAC Meeting 5/21/2018**

Q3: How can we best communicate Atlanta's ecology opportunities to the public and public officials?

- Increased awareness about work of ecology-centered groups
- More interaction with everyday people
- Communication: Signage, events, engagement opps
- House it in urban ecology centers
- NPU/neighborhood association engagement around natural/ecological resources and opportunities for improvement.

Differentiate between one-time and ongoing

(1) One-time = big launch of the results of the UEF like a major university launching a fundraising campaign. High profile events leading into ongoing programmatic activities maybe led by the major environmental non-profits and the universities, collaborating with government.

(2) Ongoing = get ideas from Atl's larger and smaller PR/marketing firms. Result should be very creative, cutting-edge marketing effort to enlist people in branding Atlanta as a leading urban ecology center.

Have local communities, neighborhoods, continue to develop priorities for their areas in conjunction with public officials, and neighborhood residents.

Programs --> greenspace with events connect communities and help people think of open spaces as belonging to them.

- Social media
- Public events, music festivals
- News - radio and TV
- MARTA ads
- Billboards
- Pop-up - parks, in parking lots

This effort must be grassroots meeting top down priorities. Elected officials must be instrumental in communicating goals. It must be a fundamental priority of an administration.

Experiential tours - get people outside who have not been invited.

Through a jobs pathway that lifts up ecology jobs! People need a livable wage and will invest if they have the \$\$ resources

Create an Office of Outdoor Engagement (like Chattanooga)

Make sure and distinguish terms for people - some people see "watershed" not as creeks, but as sewers/CSOs. Be careful with terms. Educate the citizens and officials about key ideas from ecology, esp. interconnectedness and the ideas of connectivity

Through many different channels to reach a variety of audiences. Photos, video, virtual reality, websites, social media, mobile apps, in-person at events and through signage

Events - pocket community events to get the word out - bring in the fun

Ecology public policy must include people/culture:

- Public policy communication patterns
- Public policy communication practices
- Public policy communication challenges