NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS FOR URBAN POPULATIONS NC-4902

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Guidelines for Open-Space Neighborhoods on the Urban Fringe

Residential development throughout the North Central Region is rapidly expanding into the green open spaces on the outer fringes of metropolitan areas. Much has been written about the problems associated with this kind of development (i.e., sprawl), including the negative impact on natural resources such as rural farms and forests, water and air quality, and recreational opportunities. **An emerging alternative to haphazard development in this landscape is the creation of neighborhoods with shared open, natural spaces – the "Open Space Neighborhood."**

To better understand this kind of development and its implications for natural resource policy, interviews were conducted with local government officials, developers, environmentalists, and homeowners in Livingston and Washtenaw Counties outside of Detroit. Local government officials tended to view such neighborhoods favorably because they maintain natural areas and typically provide recreation opportunities for local residents, thereby reducing the need for new public parks and recreational services. Developers believe such neighborhoods facilitate home sales, while residents feel their quality of life is enhanced in a number of significant ways. Environmentalists believe that such neighborhoods protect natural resources, provide habitat for wildlife, and maintain ecosystems.

Research suggests five major guidelines for policy makers: **Connectivity and coordination** – Each government unit should consider preparing an open space plan to guide future public and private acquisition and development, and establishing mechanisms for linking public and private parcels for ecological, recreational, and esthetic purposes. **Inter-governmental cooperation** – Consider increasing coordination and cooperation between political units in preparing land use plans, developing regulatory systems and approval processes, and managing natural resources. **Natural resource management** – Give consideration to alternative institutional arrangements, approaches, and techniques for managing neighborhood natural resources including a range of public-private partnerships. **Equal access to nature and recreational opportunities** – Address issues concerning access to natural areas and recreation opportunities, as well as sharing of opportunities, where open space neighborhoods exist and are being planned. Who has access to open spaces and under what circumstances? **Developer incentives** – Consider incentives to encourage developers to protect and maintain natural resources.

When these policy guidelines are followed, open space neighborhoods provide a highly effective way to provide for residential environments and natural resources in developing areas.