

# *Rivers of Opportunity*

25 Small and Mid-Size Illinois Cities that Adeptly  
Leverage Waterways to Enhance their Quality of Life











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By Joseph P. Schwieterman and Emily Hamilton

Illinois's 81,110 miles of rivers and streams reach nearly all its cities with more than a few thousand residents, but the work of smaller municipalities to leverage these natural resources is poorly understood. While the high-profile river initiatives of Chicago, Naperville, Peoria, and other cities have captured the spotlight, laudable efforts by less populated places tend to go unrecognized outside their home areas.

This report showcases 25 small and mid-size communities in Illinois that lie outside of metropolitan Chicago and are notable for having thoughtful civic, environmental, and recreational initiatives pertaining to rivers. These villages and cities, all having populations under 20,000, are a subset of the more than 100 municipalities evaluated. Each has made rivers dynamic parts of their community without the help of expansive planning staffs or public works budgets.

The Featured Communities are grouped by size, with the smaller ones presented first. To keep the focus on village and city initiatives, we exclude the work of multijurisdictional efforts of the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, the State of Illinois, county governments, and public units devoted to watershed protection from our discussion. We also excluded industrial, port, and marine shipping initiatives.

Our summaries of the 25 communities are followed by conclusions, a one-page case study on Ottawa, IL's commitment to river policy, and a review of Corn Belt Ports' work facilitating economic development in ways not covered in our review. The Appendix, starting on page 19, summarizes our evaluation techniques and the characteristics of the communities and tabulates the river strategies used by those communities.



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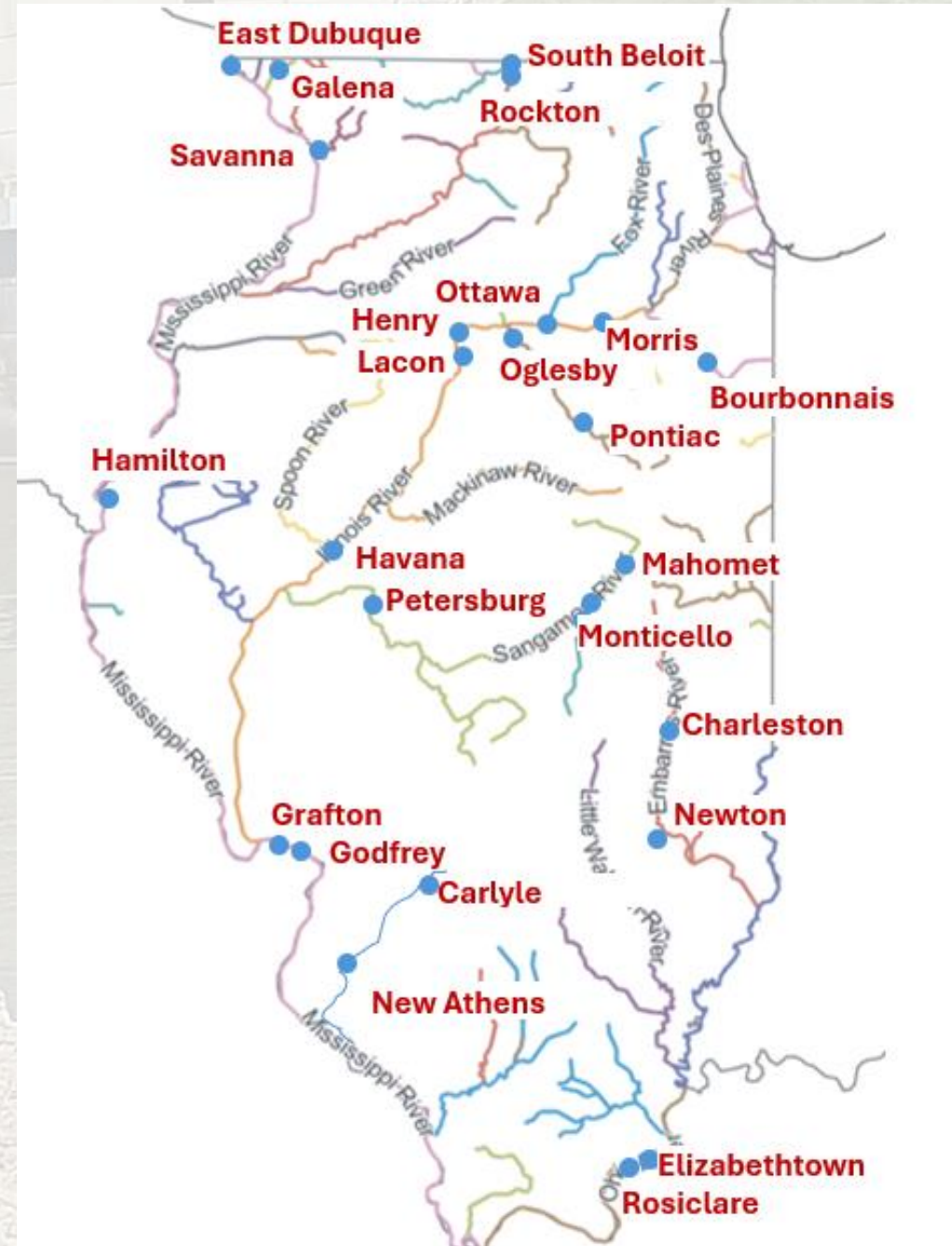


JOSEPH  
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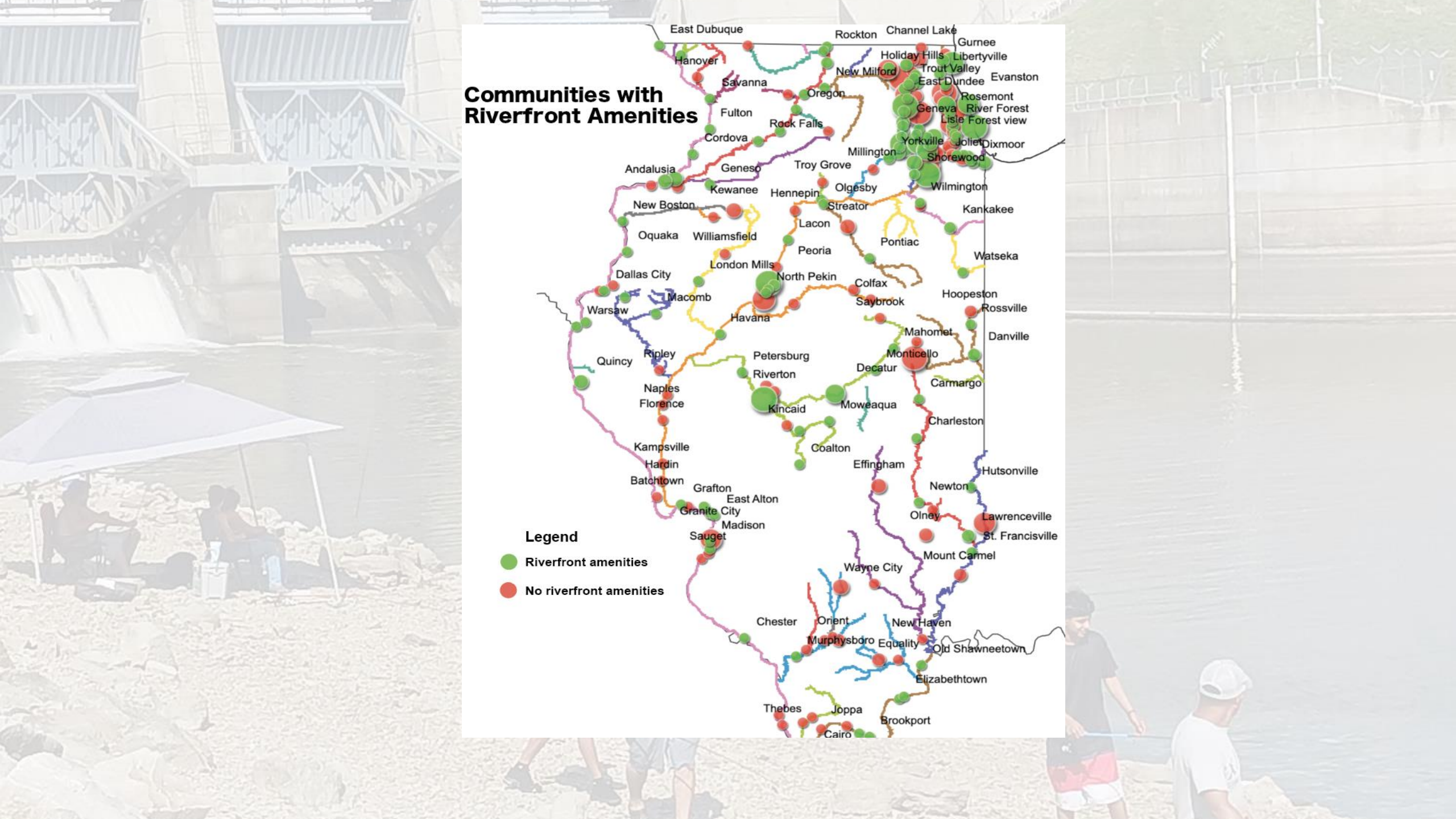


EMILY  
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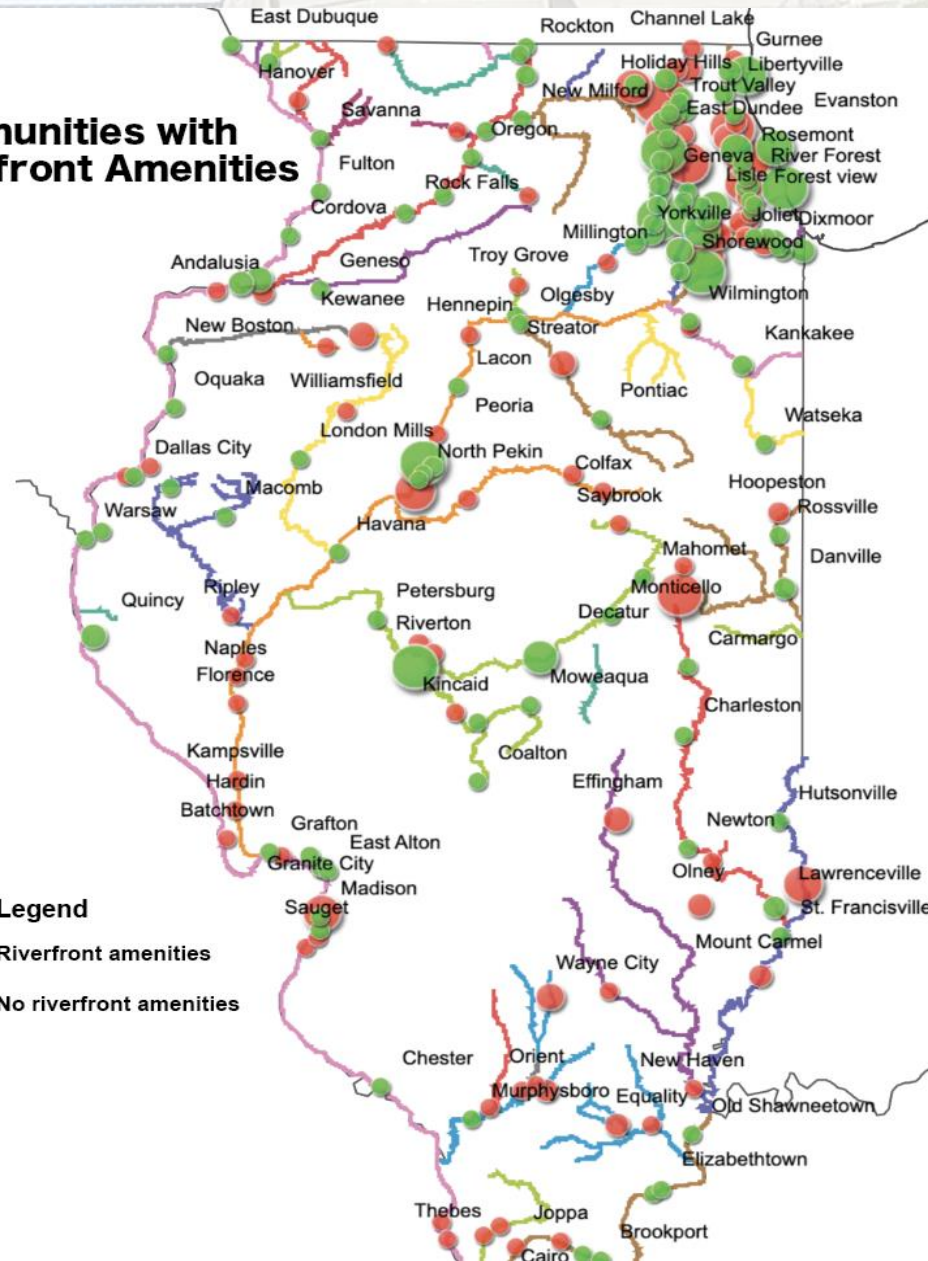
WILLIAM KLING, JD, Project Advisor







## Communities with Riverfront Amenities





# Grafton, IL

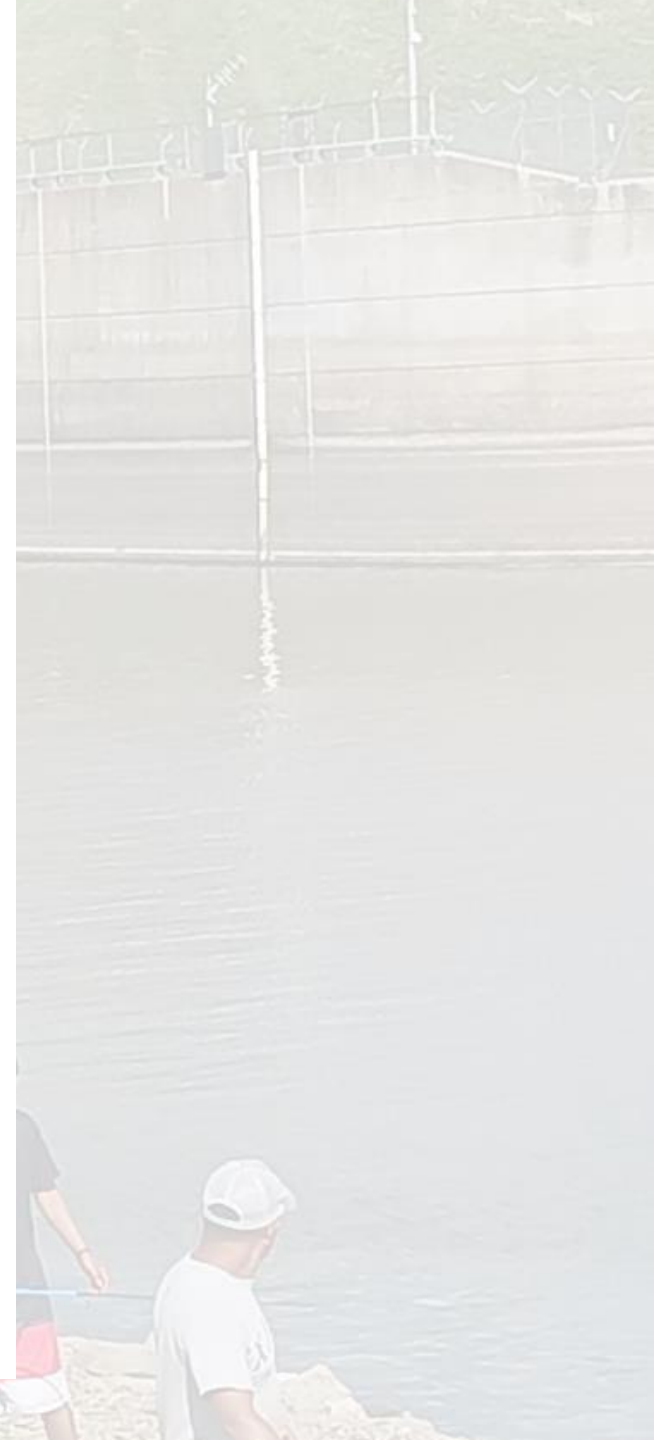
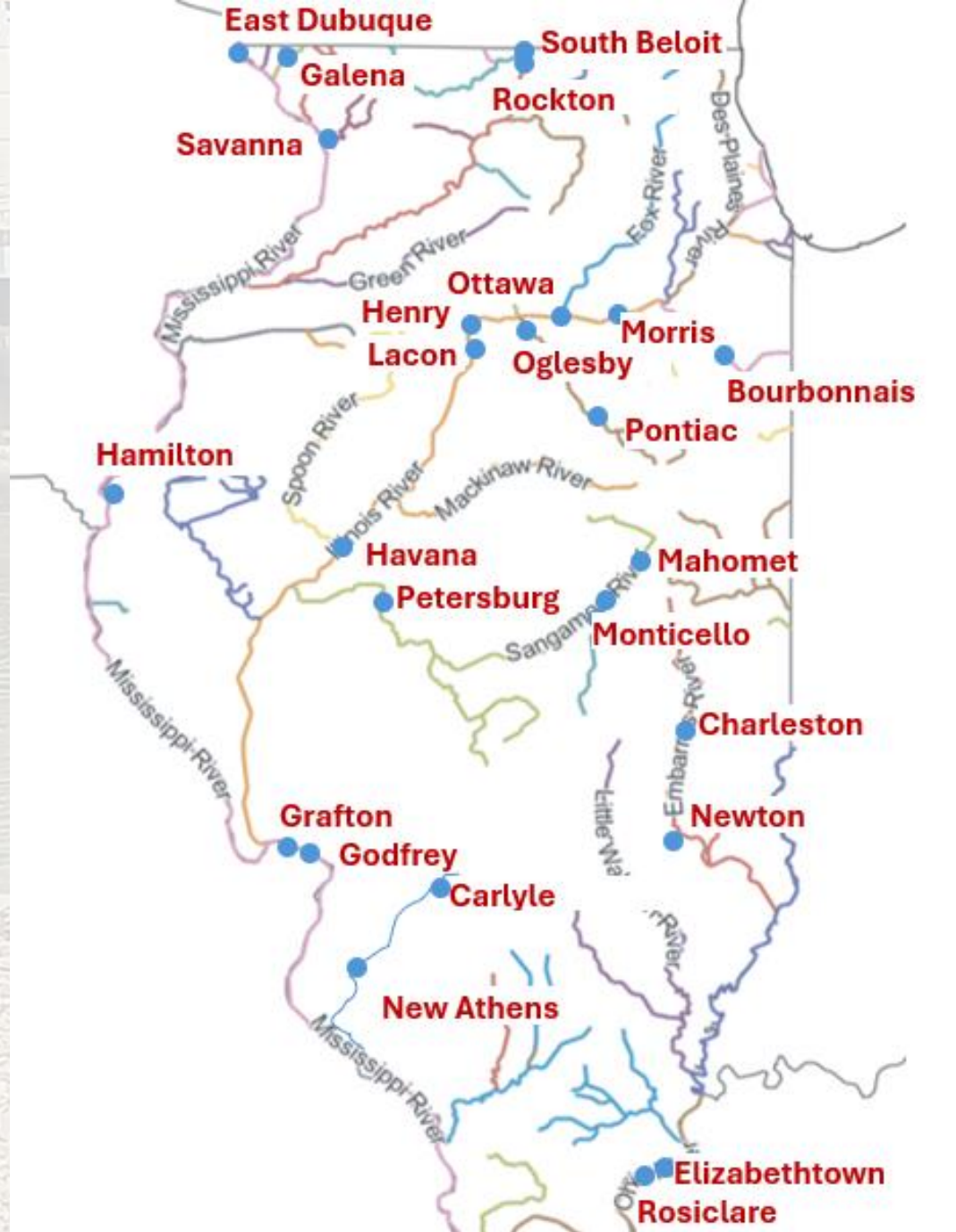


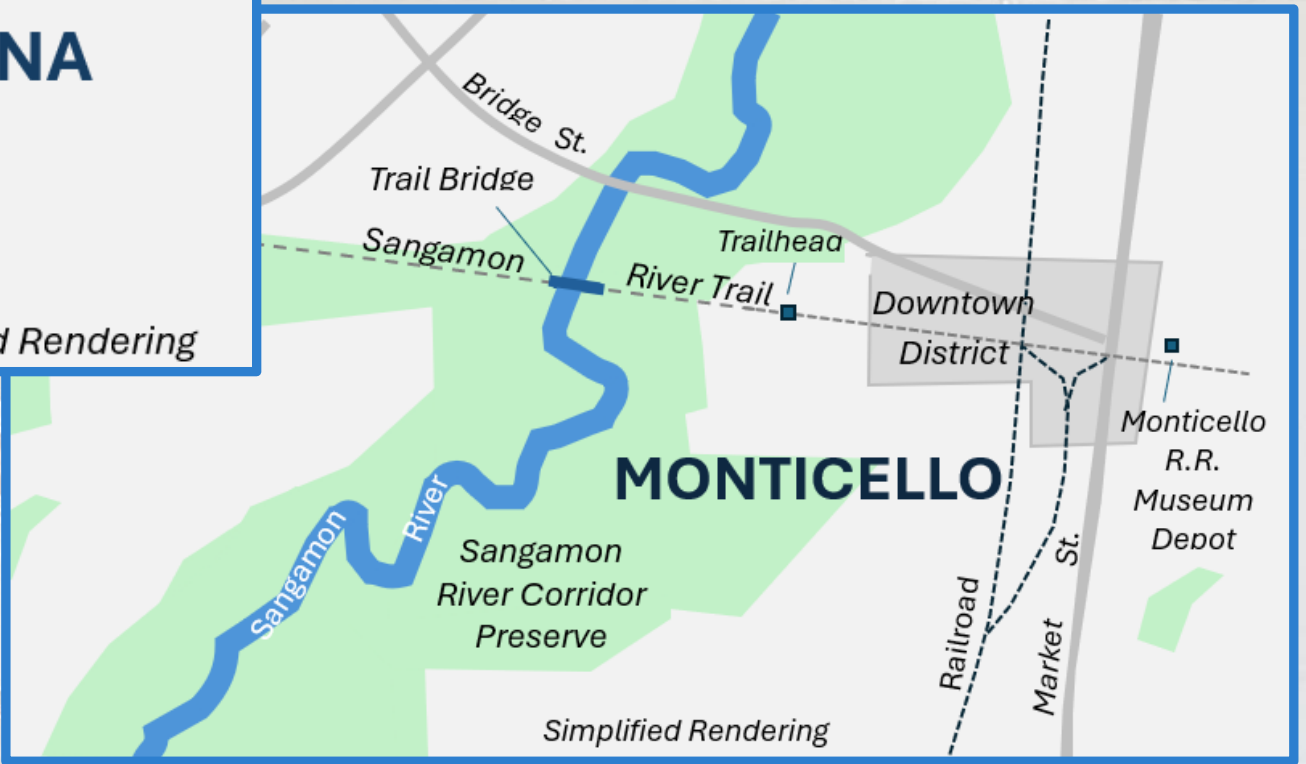
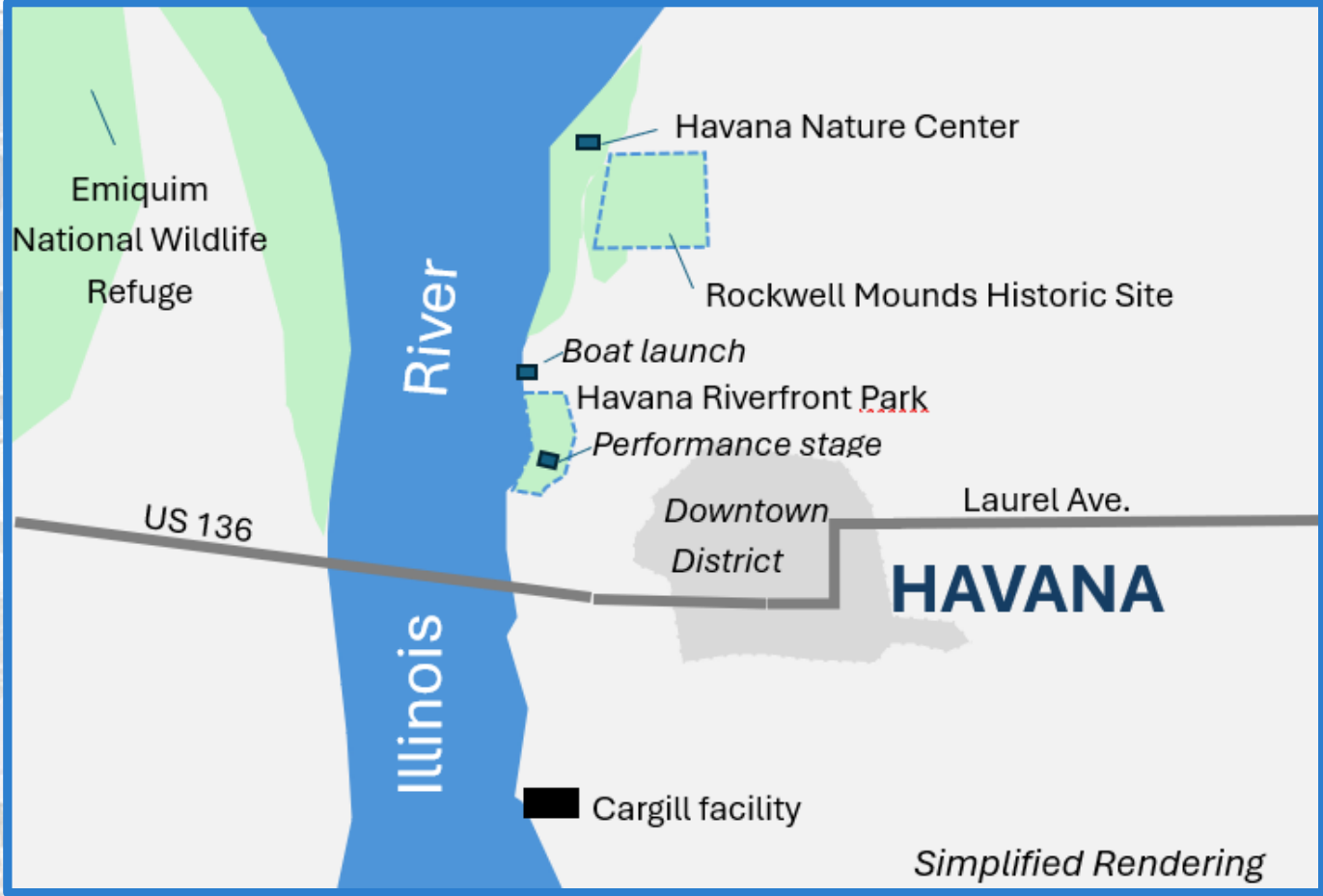




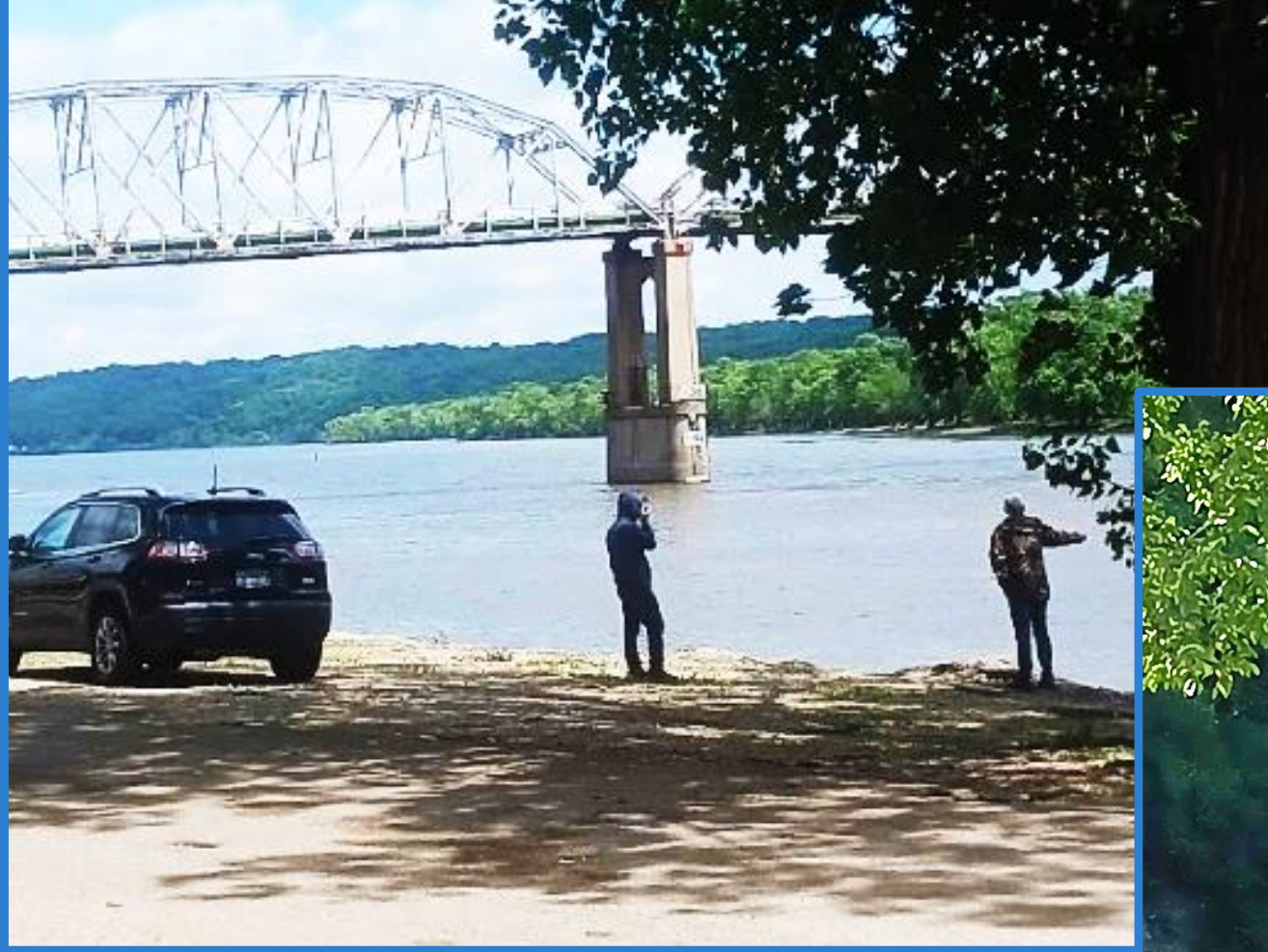
Ottawa, IL









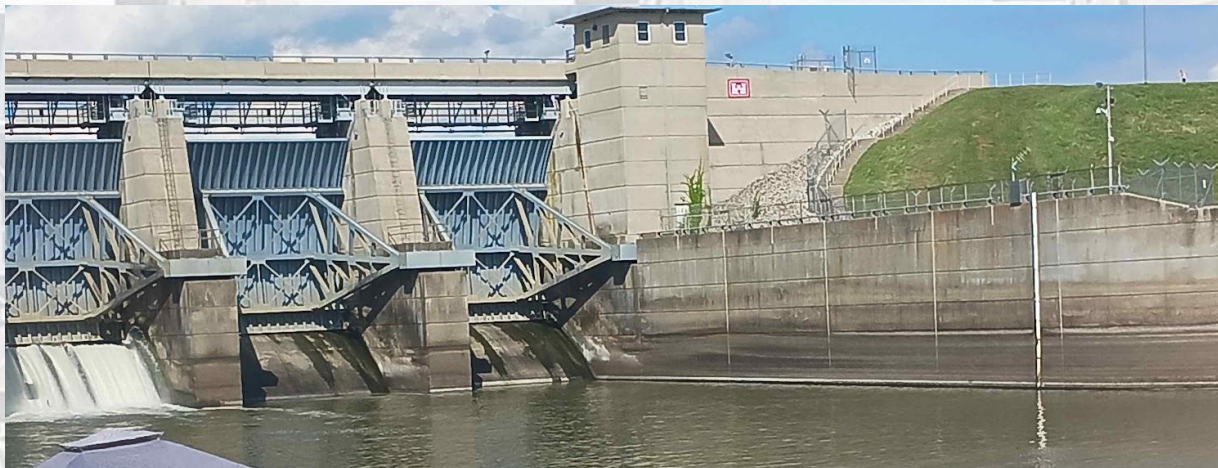


Hamilton, IL



Henry, IL





Bourbonnais, IL



Carlyle, IL



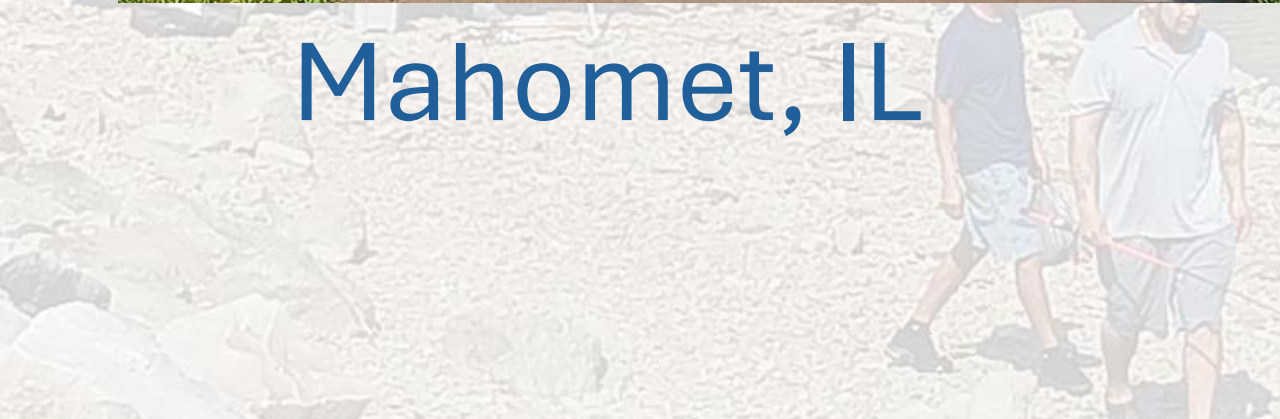




Pontiac, IL



Mahomet, IL





## Table 2. Policies and Program of 25 Featured Communities

| c             | Riverside Park (* behind levee;<br>+ separated by highway) | Public Boat launch | Festival(s) along riverfront | Municipal Campground<br>(*privately owned) | Nature Center Along River | Amphitheater or<br>performance state | Large Habitat Program | Extensive Nonprofit<br>Conservancy Collab. | Pedestrian Bridge(s) | Marina, full service<br>(*private) | Historic Vehicular Bridge<br>(*denotes railroad) | Paved municipal trail<br>along river (exl. state trails) | Commemorative River<br>History Display | Retail along shoreline |
|---------------|--|--------------------|------------------------------|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|--|----------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|--|------------------------|
| Bourbonnais   | X  | X                  |                              |  |                           |                                      |                       |  |                      |                                    |  | X  |  |                        |
| Carlyle       | X  | X                  |                              | X  |                           |                                      |                       |  |                      |                                    |  |  |  |                        |
| Charleston    | X  | X                  |                              |  |                           |                                      |                       | X  |                      |                                    |  |  |  |                        |
| East Dubuque  |  | X                  |                              |  |                           |                                      |                       |  |                      | X                                  | X*   |  | X                                      |                        |
| Elizabethtown | X  | X                  |                              |  |                           |                                      |                       |  |                      |                                    |  |  |  |                        |
| Galena        | X*   | X                  | X                            |  |                           |                                      |                       |  | X                    |                                    |  | X  |  |                        |
| Godfrey       | +  | X                  |                              |  | X                         |                                      |                       |  |                      |                                    |  |  |  |                        |
| Grafton       | X  | X                  |                              |  |                           |                                      |                       |  |                      |                                    |  |  |  | X                      |
| Hamilton      | X  | X                  |                              |  |                           |                                      |                       |  |                      |                                    |  |  | X                                      |                        |
| Havana        | X  | X                  |                              | X  | X                         | X                                    |                       |  |                      |                                    |  |  |  |                        |
| Henry         | X  | X                  |                              |  |                           |                                      |                       |  |                      | X                                  | X  |  | X                                      |                        |
| Lacon         | X  | X                  | X                            |  |                           |                                      |                       |  |                      |                                    |  |  | X                                      |                        |
| Mahomet       | X  | X                  |                              |  |                           |                                      |                       | X  |                      |                                    |  |  |  |                        |



# RiverWatch Program



**The National Great Rivers  
Research & Education Center**



# Metropolitan Chicago Efforts





# New Activities for 2023-24

- Municipal Recognition & Report
- Event & webinars
- River Fellows Program
- Join our listserv (no spam!)

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