

A scenic view of the Chicago skyline from Lincoln Park, featuring the Willis Tower and other skyscrapers in the background, lush green trees in the foreground, and a body of water in the lower half of the frame. A semi-transparent green banner is overlaid on the water and trees, containing the title text.

# gROWing Chicago Habitat

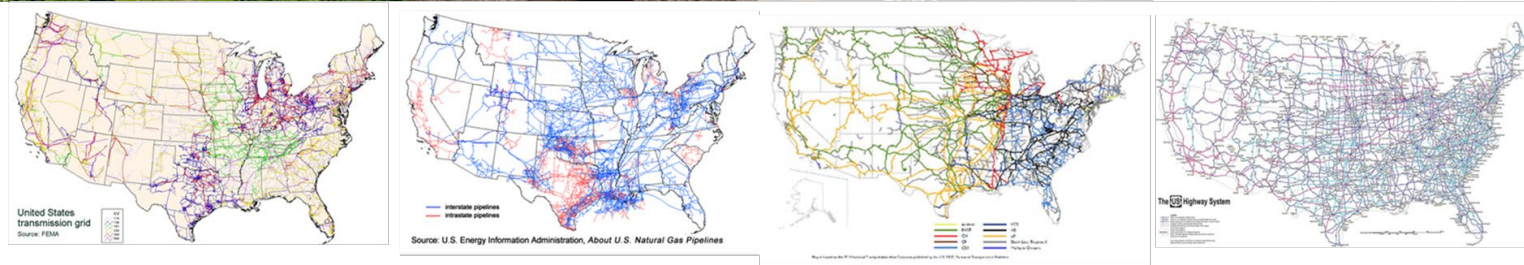
## Developing a Habitat Network for the Chicago Wilderness Region

Catherine O'Reilly, University of Illinois Chicago



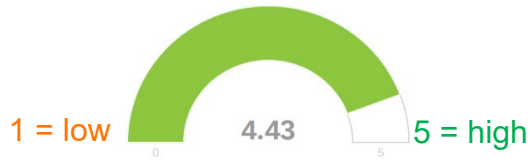


# Habitat Value of Energy & Transportation Lands

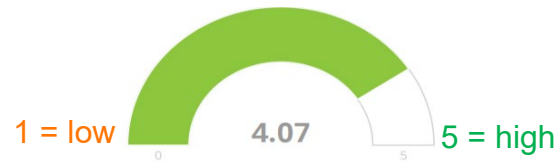


*~ 40 million acres of rights-of-way across the U.S.*

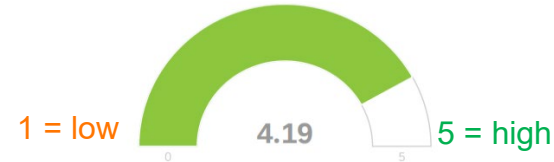
Ecological value of habitat



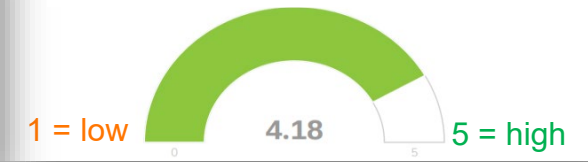
Cost-effectiveness of habitat



Compatibility with E/T operations



Public/partner engagement value

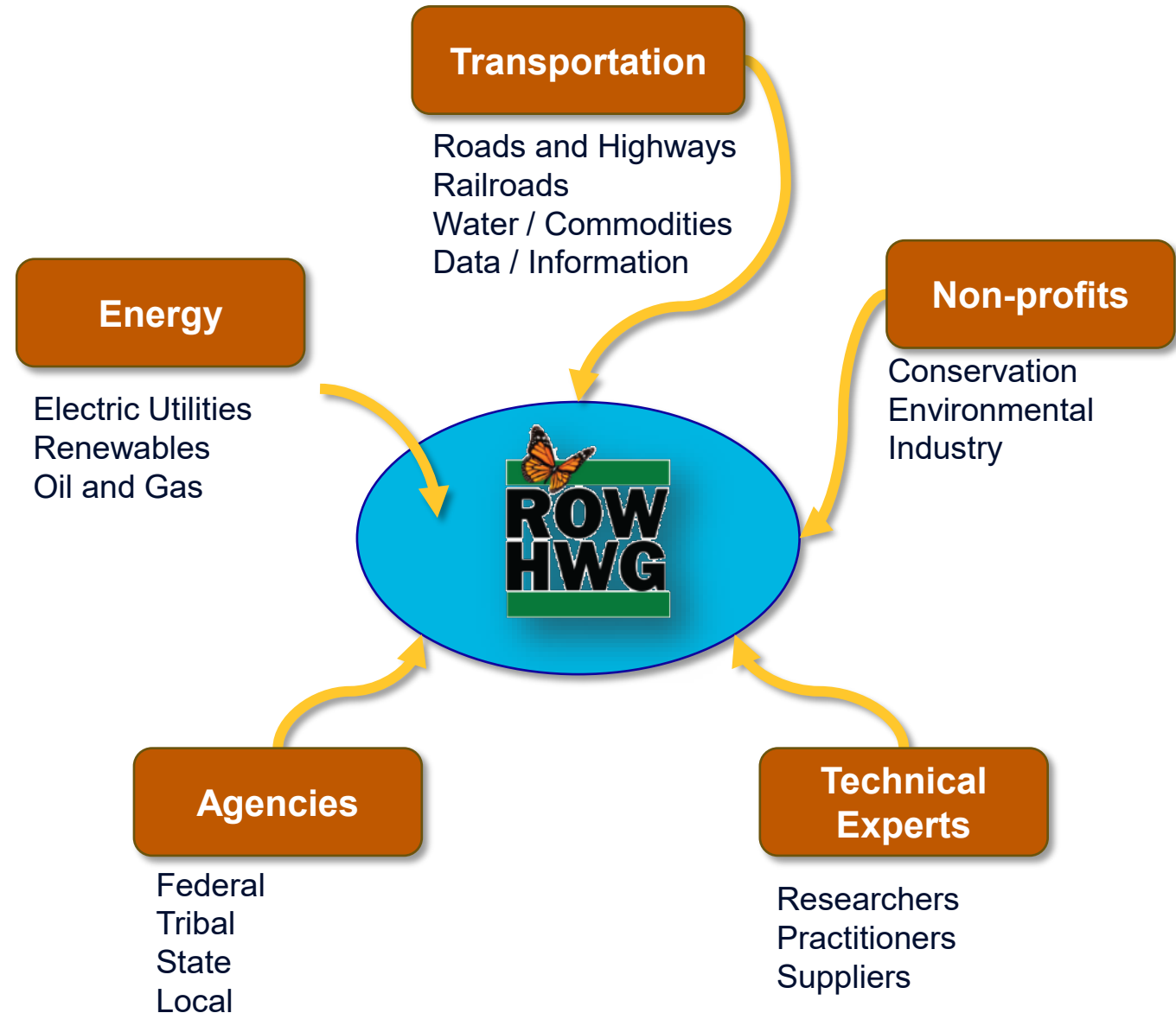


# Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group

Since 2015, the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group has been facilitated by UIC's Sustainable Landscapes Program

The Working Group works with a wide range of partners interested in:

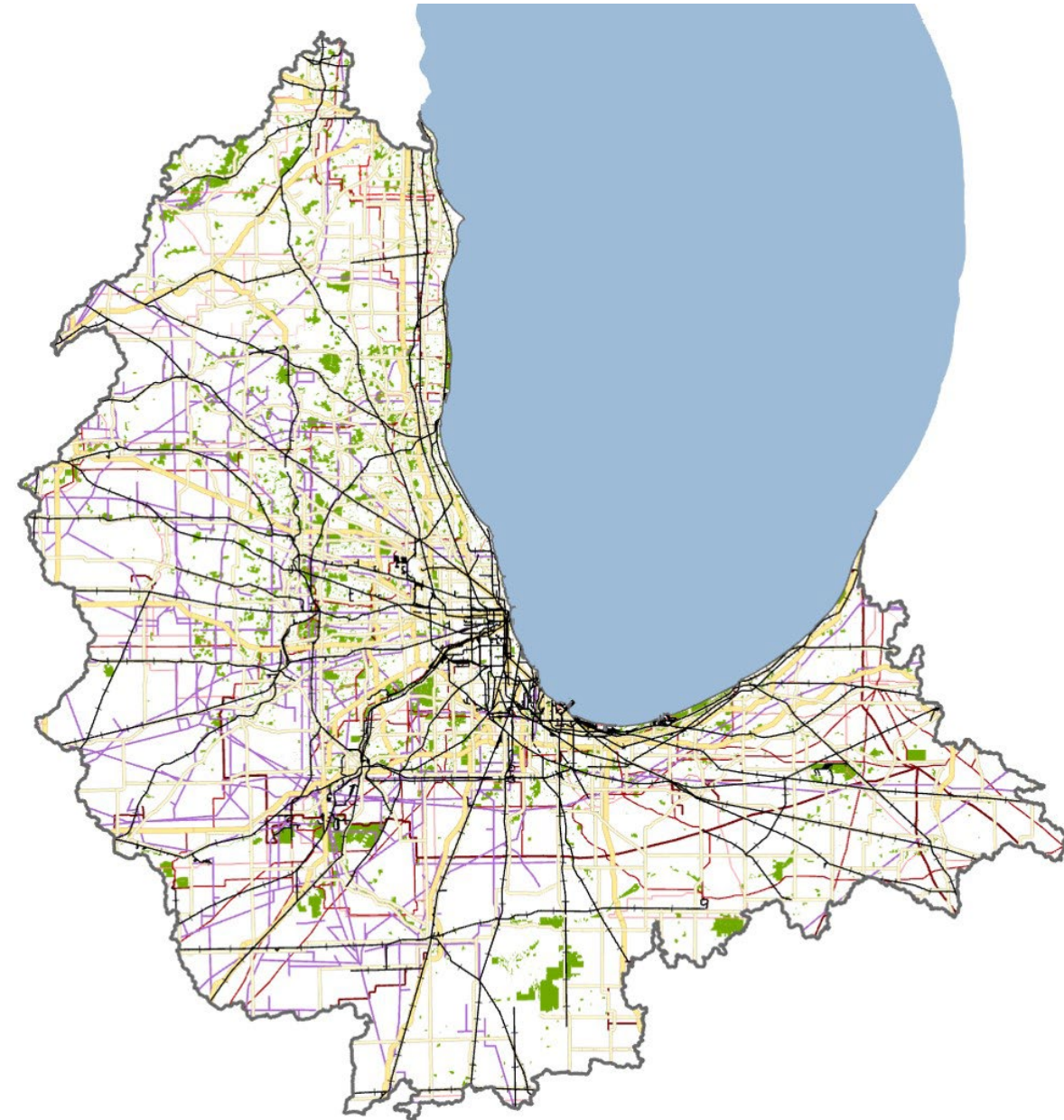
- Enhancing and expanding habitat
- Removing barriers to nature conservation near infrastructure
- Transforming sustainability with climate and biodiversity



# gROWing Chicago Habitat

## *...a framework for habitat conservation in the Chicago Wilderness Region*

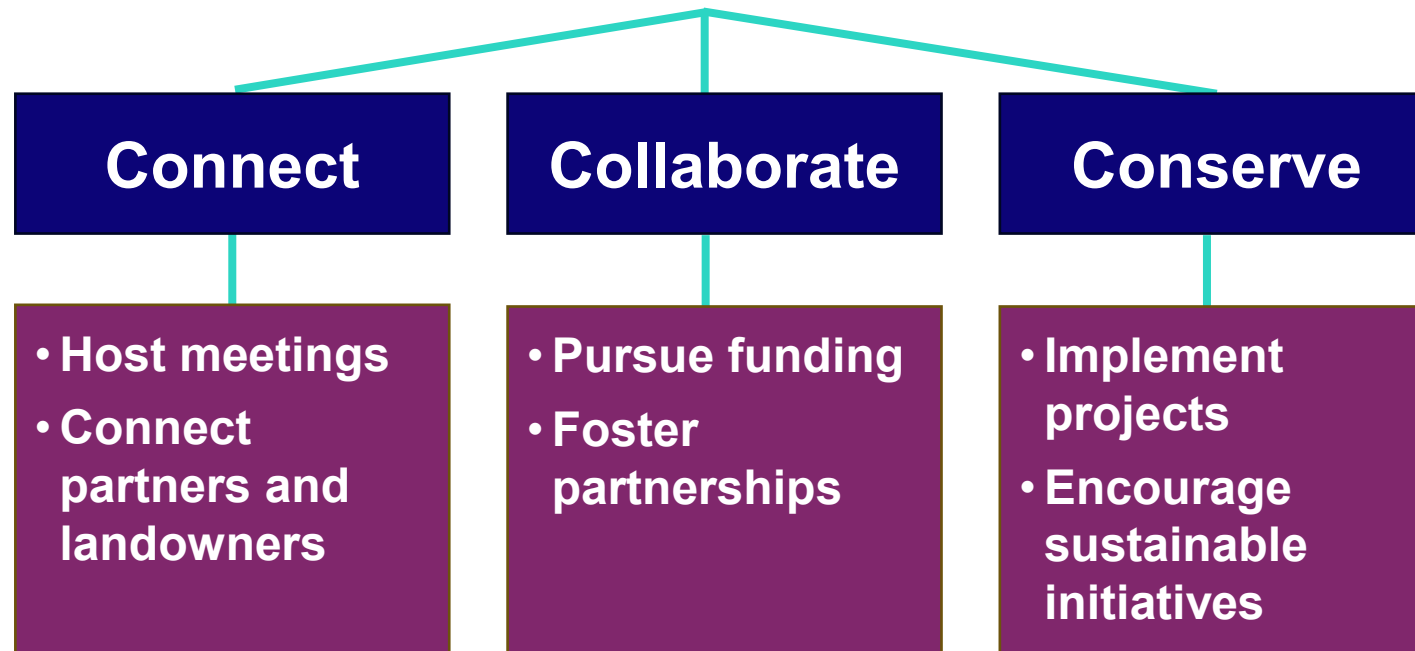
- Realization of **recommendations from a strategic road mapping** exercise conducted in 2021
- **57 partners** from conservation groups, utility and transportation organizations, landowners, and more
- Over **30 habitat restoration projects** started by partners since 2022
- Collaborated on **8 funding pursuits** with gROWing Chicago Habitat Partners





# gROWing Chicago Habitat Goals

## gROWing Chicago Habitat



# gROWing Alignment

gROWing Chicago encourages energy and transportation lands to connect greenspaces, protected lands, and communities across Chicagoland in support of regional plans and goals.

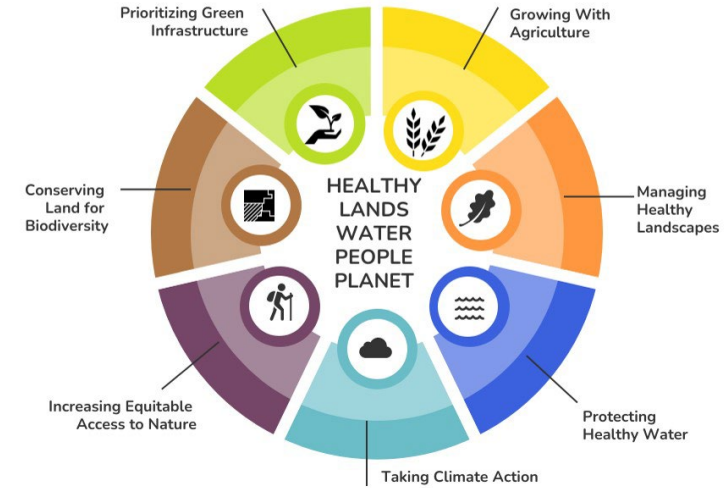


How Chicago area residents would spend \$100 on the 10 climate outcomes envisioned in the Chicago Climate Action Plan. City of Chicago.

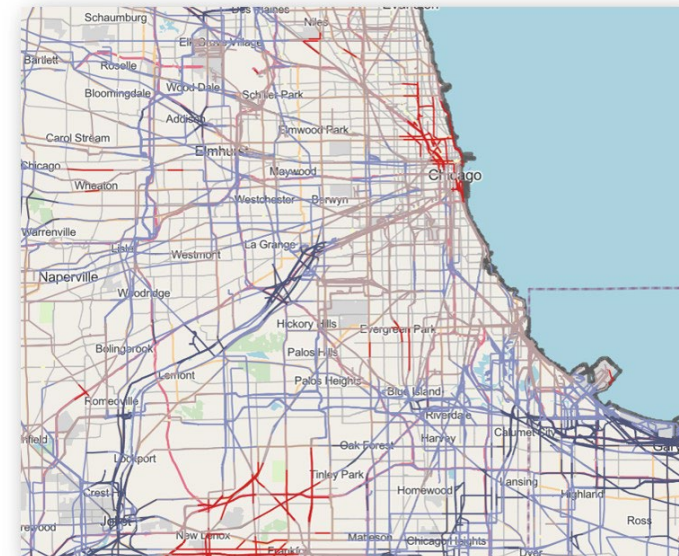
## GREEN VISION - 2025

chicago wilderness

### HUB

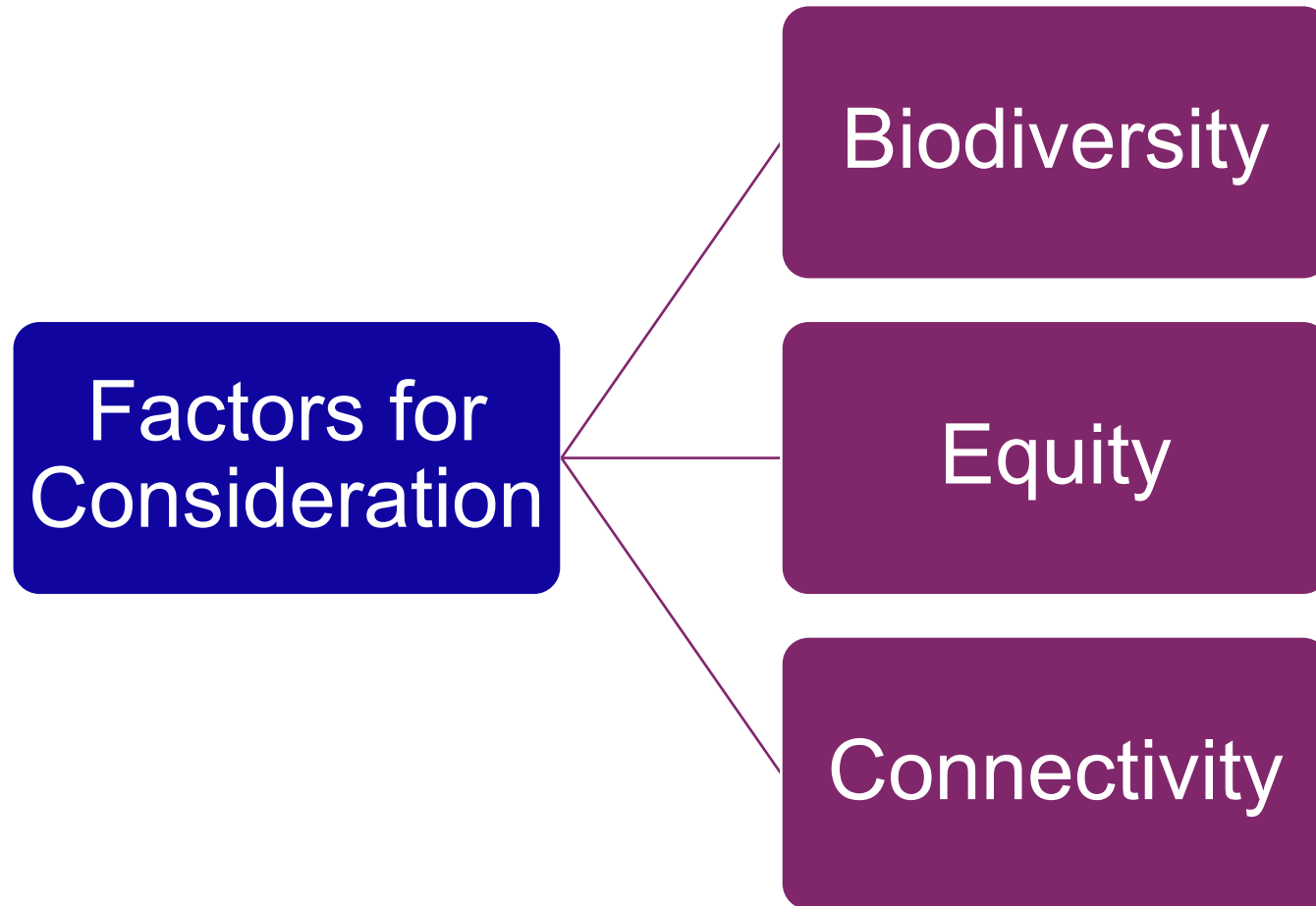


Top: Chicago Wilderness Green Vision Goals (Chicago Wilderness)



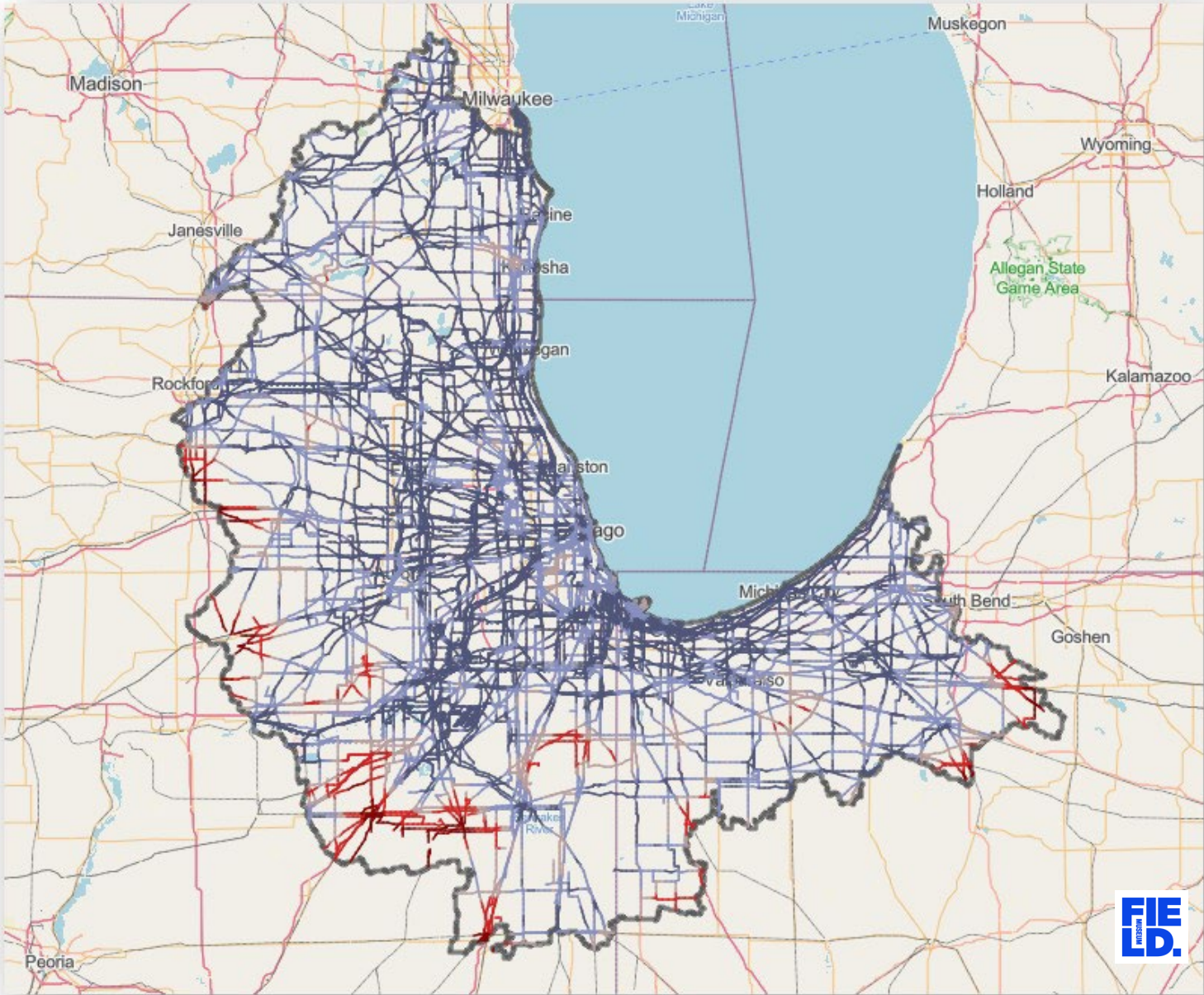
Bottom: gROWing Chicago prioritization map (The Field Museum, UIC, MJV)

# Creating a Habitat Prioritization Strategy





# Biodiversity



## Prioritized ROW Segments- Biodiversity

### D2P\_Index

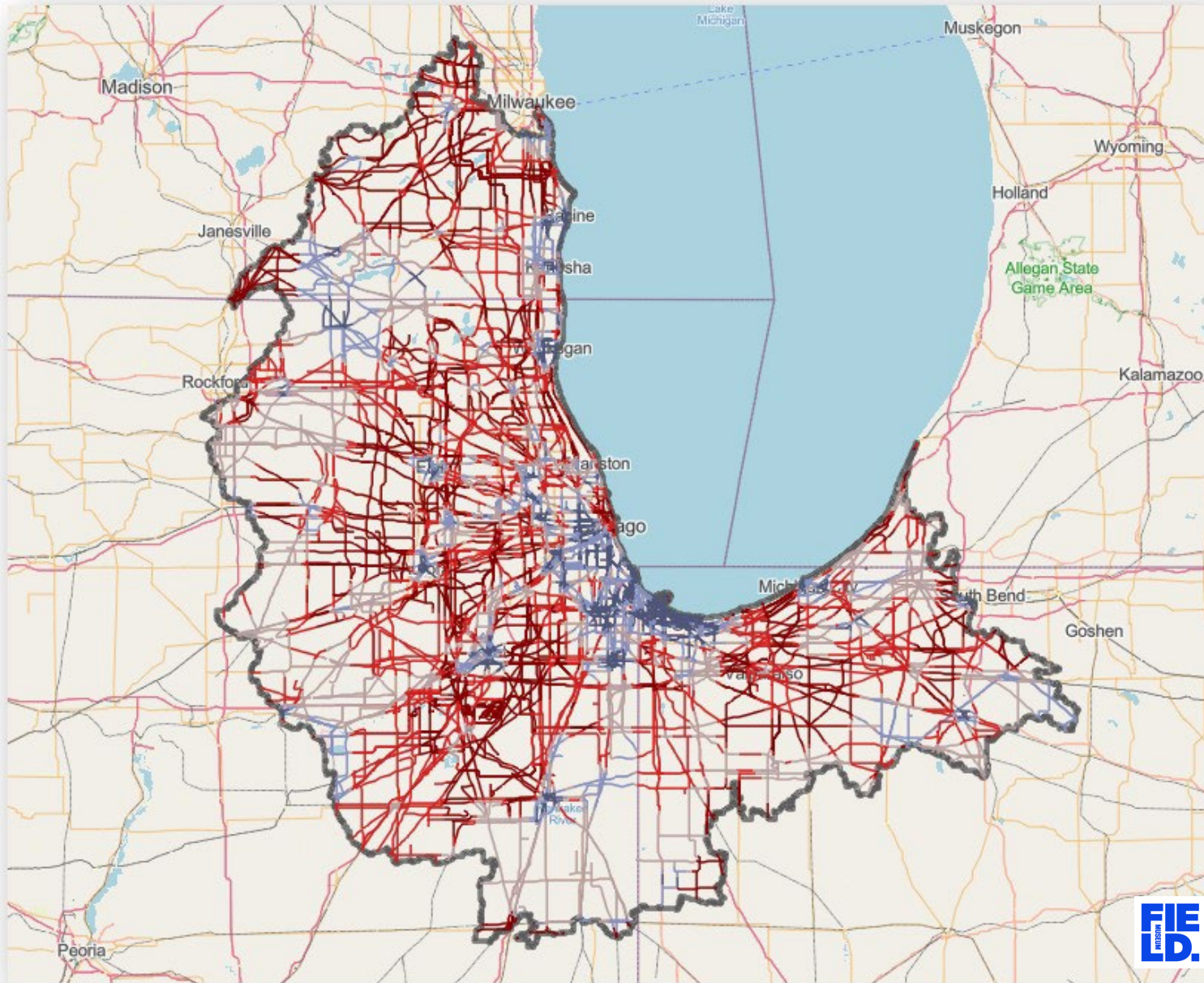
- > 4.5 - 5 (High Opportunity)
- > 3.5 - 4.5
- > 2.5 - 3.5
- > 1 - 2.5
- 0 - 1 (Low Opportunity)

## Chicago Wilderness Boundary (2021)





# Equity



## Prioritized ROW Segments SVI

### Social Vulnerability Index

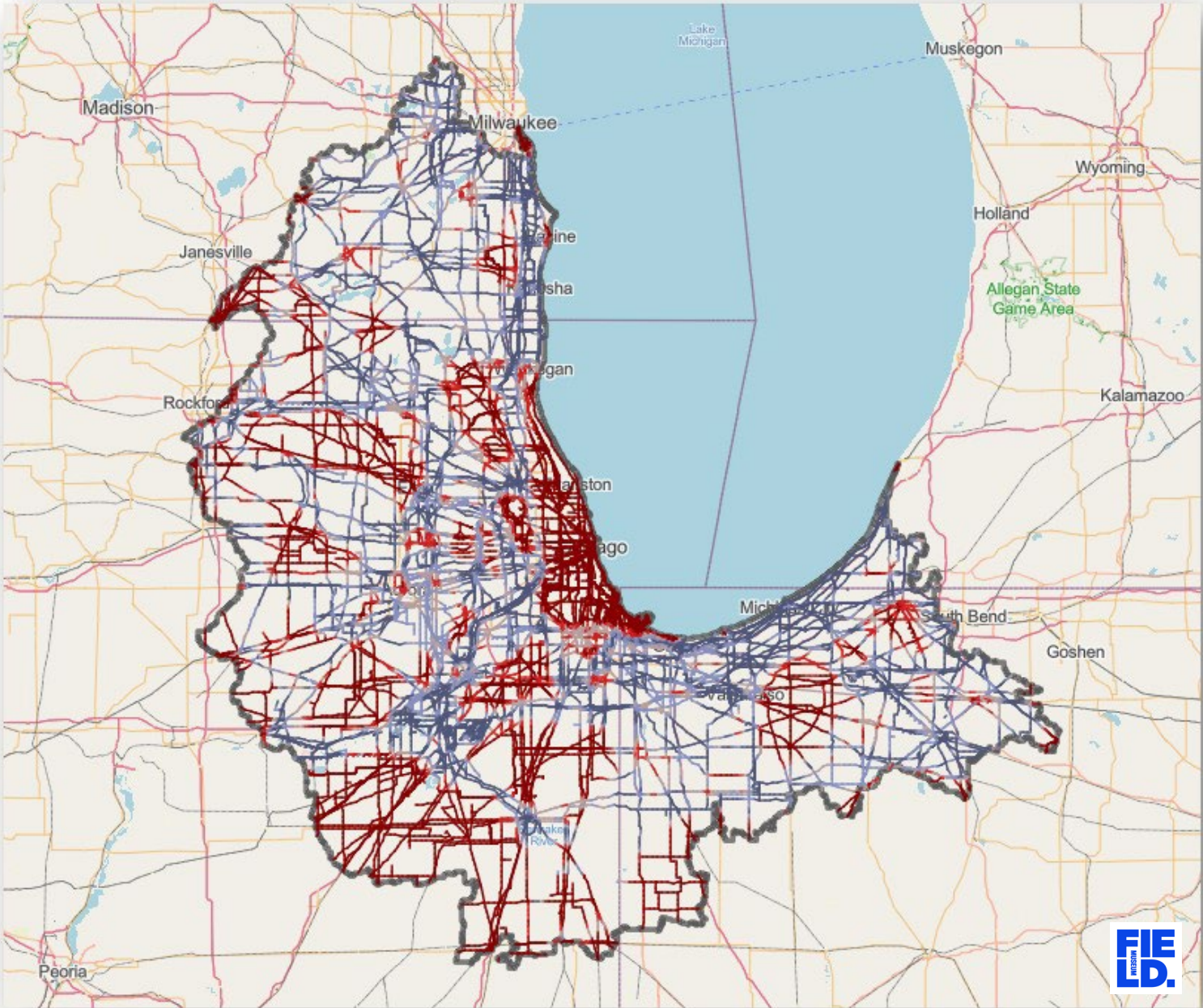
- > 4 - 5 (High Opportunity)
- > 3 - 4
- > 2 - 3
- > 1 - 2
- 0 - 1 (Low Opportunity)

## Chicago Wilderness Boundary (2021)





# Connectivity



## Prioritized ROW Segments Connectivity

Con\_Index

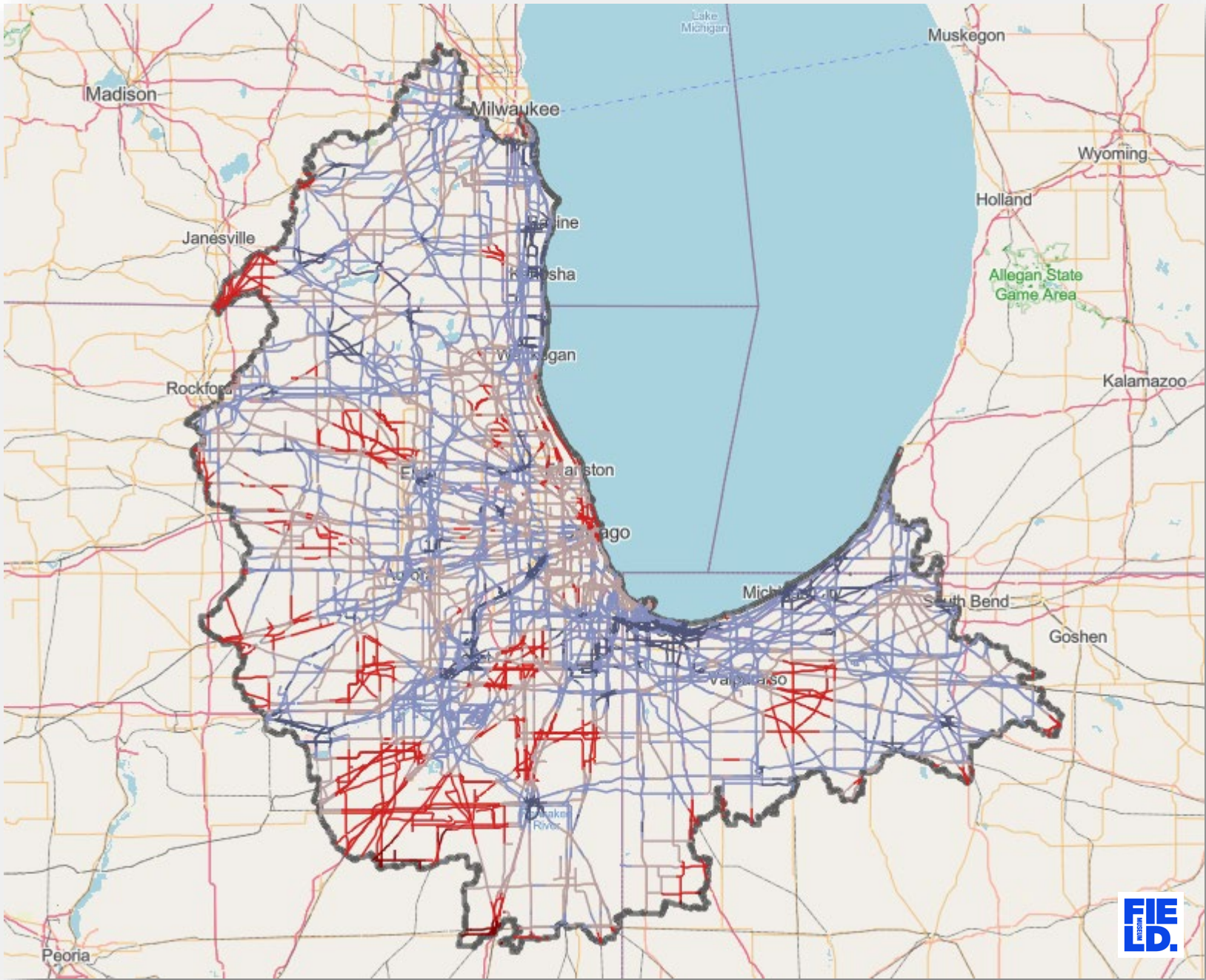
- > 4 - 5 (High Opportunity)
- > 3 - 4
- > 2 - 3
- > 1 - 2
- 0 - 1 (Low Opportunity)

## Chicago Wilderness Boundary (2021)





# Prioritization Areas



## Combined Index

Combined index

-  > 4 - 5 (High Opportunity)
-  > 3 - 4
-  > 2 - 3
-  > 1 - 2
-  0 - 1 (Low Opportunity)

## Chicago Wilderness Boundary (2021)

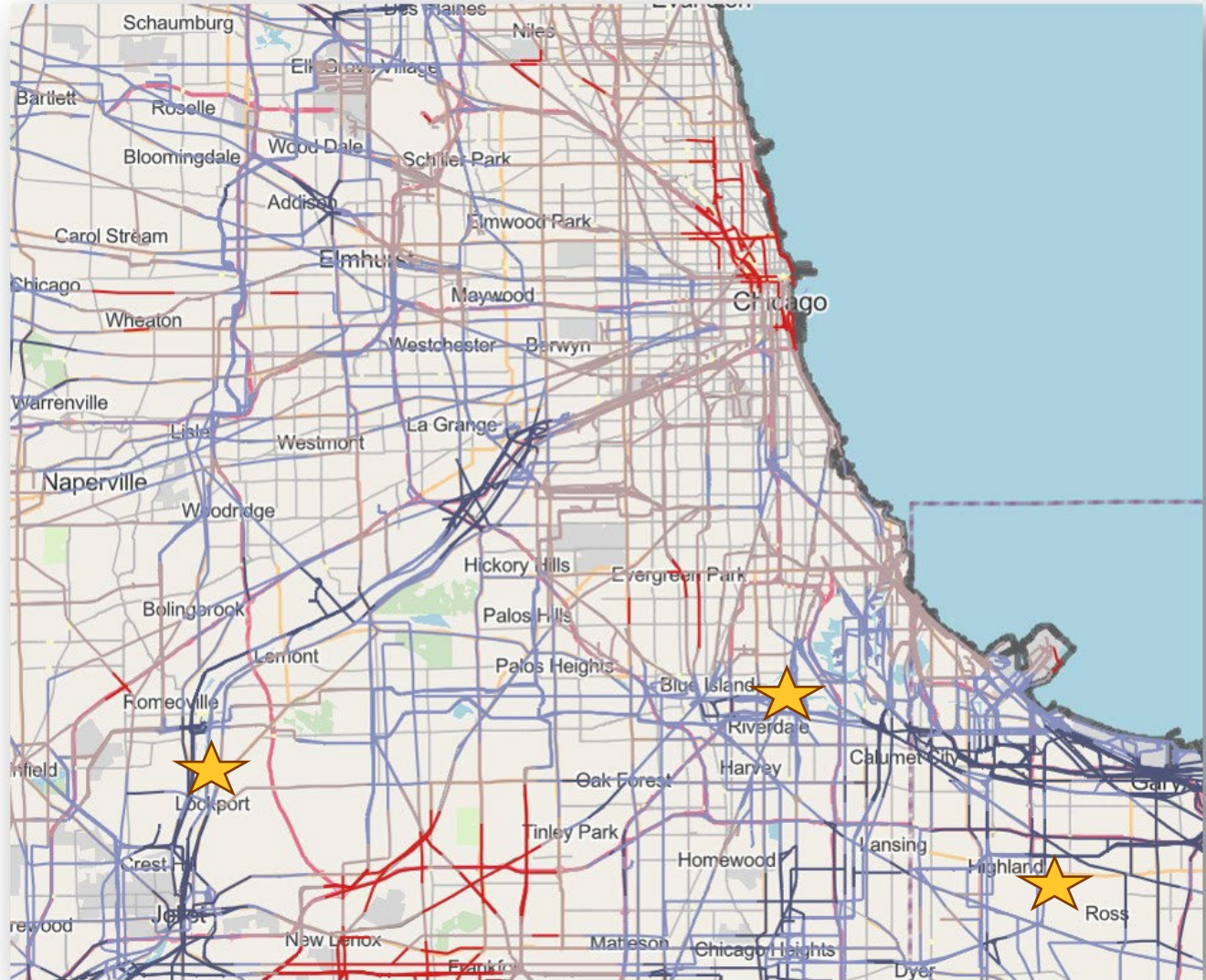




# Prioritization Projects

Thanks to **funding from the Monarch Joint Venture**, gROWing Chicago has formed habitat project partnerships with:

- Shell and the City of Lockport (in Lockport, Illinois)
- ComEd and Friends of the Chicago River (in Riverdale, Illinois)
- NiSource and the City of Griffith (in Griffith, Indiana)





# Connect with the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group!

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Sustainable Landscapes  
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