

# BLOOM




## Building Landscapes of Opportunities and Mitigation

BLOOM (Building Landscapes Of Opportunity & Mitigation) is an iterative regional environmental framework that links environmentally sensitive areas, especially in existing and proposed Central Ohio Greenways corridors, to green infrastructure strategies, nature-based solutions, and innovative funding sources. BLOOM research, analysis, and recommendations are designed to empower communities and guide decision-making by matching the region's most sensitive lands with suitable green infrastructure and nature-based strategies to protect, conserve, mitigate, or restore the environment while continuing to open up access to nature, trails, and active transportation.

### BLOOM Framework Intent

The overarching intent of BLOOM is to support communities with decision-making guidance and access to funding resources that balance the region's ecological needs with public access to outdoor recreation and active transportation.

#### BLOOM will:

-  » Provide decision-making guidance
-  » Link communities to funding sources
-  » Balance ecological support with public access

### BLOOM PHASE 1: Environmental Sensitivity Index Process & Methodology

With Columbus Foundation's Green Fund's support in 2024, the first phase of the BLOOM work began with the development of an Environmental Sensitivity Index (ESI).

The ESI was developed in partnership with Franklin Soil & Water Conservation District and in collaboration with both a Technical Committee and a larger Steering Committee. The intent of the study was to identify, compile and evaluate existing and natural resources for the extents of Franklin County.

#### Natural Resources and Data:

The initial step collected and analyzed the best available data from multiple reputable sources to mention ODNR, OEPA, The Nature Conservancy, FEMA, Changrin River Watershed Partnership, and City of Columbus. A total of

13 layers were used to emphasize natural features and ecosystem health, including stream and riparian zone protection, wetland and soil conservation, groundwater protection measures, and ecological data and sensitivity assessments.

#### DATA ASSESSMENT LAYERS

<b>Soil Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Soil Erodibility: Incorporates Slope</li> <li>» Soil Hydric Rating: Percent Hydric</li> <li>» DRASTIC Ratings</li> </ul>
<b>Tree Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Tree Canopy: Heights</li> <li>» Tree Canopy: Contiguous Canopy</li> </ul>
<b>Water</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Groundwater Protection: Inner Management Zones</li> <li>» Wetland Buffering</li> <li>» Stream/Riparian Zones: Big Darby and Franklin County Stream Setbacks</li> <li>» Stream/Riparian Zones: FEMA Flood Zones</li> <li>» Groundwater Vulnerability</li> <li>» Riparian Buffers</li> <li>» Stream/Riparian Zones: Aquatic Life Use</li> <li>» Stream/Riparian Zones: All Buffers Merged</li> <li>» Stream/Riparian Zones: All Buffers Incorporating Aquatic Life Use and Species Protection</li> <li>» OEPA Aquatic Life Use</li> <li>» OEPA Aquatic Life Use</li> </ul>

### Scoring Methodology

The process applied a three-step scoring methodology: The 43 resulting tiers from Step 1 were further reclassified in Step 2 into 14 sensitivity tiers. These 14 tiers were then regrouped, after discarding the lower 6 tiers, to form the final 5 levels of classification in Step 3: Moderate, Elevated, High, Critical, Extreme.

Step 1	Step 1	Step 3
Individual Layer Scoring	GIS Suitability Analysis	5 Classification Levels
Composite map with scores ranging from 1 to 43	14 discrete sensitivity tier reclassification	Simplified into 5 levels from "moderate" to "extreme"

**MODERATE** Areas with notable natural value that contribute to a healthy environment  
 » Low effort and investment needed

**ELEVATED** Areas where several natural resources overlap increasing the conservation significance  
 » Low-medium effort and investment needed

**HIGH** Thriving natural areas that play an active role in keeping the environment healthy  
 » Medium effort and investment needed

**CRITICAL** Rich natural areas with multiple high-value resources supporting a well-functioning ecosystem  
 » Medium-high effort and investment needed

**EXTREME** Ecological anchors essential to the long-term environmental health of the region  
 » High effort and investment needed

The Moderate to Extreme levels on Step 3 correspond to the level of ecological function present and the relative effort and investment required to support it (illustrated and defined in the previous table).

## PHASE 2: Defining Ecological Corridors of Regional Significance

In 2025, MORPC received additional funding from the Columbus Foundation Green Funds to advance BLOOM concepts. This funding alongside encouragement from environmental, trail building, and active transportation partners supported the evolution of the concept of “Ecological Corridors of Regional Significance” (ECORS). ECORS are linear or connected landscape system that provides multiple ecosystem services, including flood mitigation, water quality protection, groundwater recharge, carbon sequestration, native biodiversity support, and active transportation or outdoor recreation linkage, across an interconnected mosaic of environmentally sensitive land.

### A Tool for Trail Development

BLOOM positions ECORS as a decision-support tool for MORPC’s Central Ohio Greenways (COG) program. COG has a vision for a network of over 1000 miles of interconnect multiuse trails in our region. Today there are nearly 400 miles already built and many more with committed funding. With more funding than ever before in the region to trail development, the COG program is leveraging the momentum to expand beyond paved trails to include activated trailheads or Gateways, Bikeways, and Blueways. This expanded vision also presents an opportunity to balance conservation, access, and adaptability as a living framework.

Using a 1-mile buffer analysis boundary around each of the five major Central Ohio rivers, and intersecting existing and proposed trails, this framework quantified the proportion of land and trails within each ESI level. This provides stakeholders with an initial picture of the need for integrated access and conservation efforts.

## PHASE 3 & BEYOND: Actionable Framework

The immediate next steps to continue to advance the BLOOM framework include:

- » Develop Trail Design Guidelines for existing and proposed trails within Ecological Corridors.
- » Establish a catalogue of collaborative funding resources and partnership pathways for land acquisition, green infrastructure, and nature-based solutions that support COG network development.
- » Create a BLOOM Strategic Action Plan that is supportive of a living framework that evolves with the region and expand to the 15 County Region.

