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ARTICLE

Seeking Ecology and Equity Along the Boise Greenbelt

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ABSTRACT
As a pedestrian-friendly green landscape that has become popular in the US and around the world in the past fifty years, the Boise Greenbelt seems to present an ideal example of how to create a waterfront that can promote economic growth along with high recreational use. However, there are two aspects to interrogate as we ponder an effective model for such landscapes going into a future affected by climate change: first, like many such landscapes which focus on an esthetic leisure experience for the user, the Boise Greenbelt does not fully attend to the ecology of the river along which it lies; second, also as a feature of esthetic leisure experience, the Boise Greenbelt falls into a category of "park, café, riverwalk" which potentially reduces equity in use of urban space. Analysis of this landscape and its successes can help to shape a model that will be responsive to future climate conditions and enhance social equity.

KEYWORDS
waterfront, greenbelt, ecology, green gentrification, rivers, access, displacement

The contemporary popularity of landscapes along water is undeniable. In Boise, Idaho, the linear park along the Boise River that includes a biking/walking path is termed the Boise Greenbelt. In its focus on placing a pedestrian route along a river, the Boise Greenbelt is like similar landscapes in many other cities around the US and the world. In this essay, the term "greenbelt" will be used to indicate this kind of landscape, even though in urban planning "Green Belt" more often refers to a band of open or green space around a city to limit or manage its growth, and some sources prefer the term "greenway" for a linear park.

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The chief assertion of this essay will be that a renewed conception of riverfront greenbelts is necessary under the changing conditions of climate change and increased residential pressure on remaining water-rich landscapes. Along the Boise Greenbelt, conventional environmental conservation has struggled with development impulses, both shaping aspects of public sentiment. As Bishop (2020) asserts about traditional Green Belts in the UK, "perhaps the most important legacy of [such landscapes] is that a legacy of open land has been passed down to us from previous generations" (p. 157). It remains important to figure out how this concept of public open space should interact with pressure for increased housing units, development profit, wildlife habitat, and recreation. Above all, it is important to remember that a river, even an urban river, is not just a backdrop to human activities: it has its own set of functions that connect to a broader system of hydrology. How to build greater education about biosphere processes into a managed urban and periurban environment remains a challenge for planners, practitioners, and advocates.

Everyone loves a greenbelt. A specific type of waterfront amenity that aims to provide pleasant public space and more ecologically sensitive riparian landscaping, greenbelts have been executed in some form in many cities where a river flows through developed areas, often the downtown area of a city. A more urban, less ecological model called a "Riverwalk" transformed the confined waterways in downtown San Antonio, Texas, several decades ago. Taking advantage of the growing interest in and time for outdoor recreation, especially walking, running, and biking, many other cities have turned their attention to formerly neglected waterways and made them into attractive amenities right in the downtown core. An example of this is the transformation in Denver, Colorado, of Cherry Creek and other tributaries of the South Platte from polluted wasteways to clear(er) streams with miles of running trails; as the old textile mills have been increasingly reclaimed for pubs, upscale boutiques, and housing, the history of the factory effluent has been erased. A city with a similar bent to outdoor recreation but a different economic history, Eugene, Oregon, has the Willamette River dividing its older developed area from the newer area to the north; created enough decades before more growth, the Eugene greenbelt features a band of green riparian area with large stretches of public park, including a bike/running path, as in Denver, but also hosting playgrounds and wide sweeps of turfgrass lawns. On temperate days in any season, all of these greenbelts are crowded with users, proving that greenbelts are indeed a popular type of urban landscape and typically worth a city's investment. Greenbelts provide public space that is green and accessible, favoring healthy outdoor recreation.

In the United States, greenbelts reflect the coincidence of two developments that complemented each other. First, a growing desire arose for a cleaner environment in the late 1960s and early 1970s. After the publication of *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and the growing movement for environment-oriented legislation, urban waterways could benefit from a new, more attentive environmental vision and the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1970. While an accurate understanding

of water in the hydrologic system is still a horizon in many places (witness the misunderstanding of surface-groundwater interaction that persists in California), residents began to pay more attention to the water in their immediate environments and clamored for reform.

Second, this closer attention to the environment and interest in hygiene also built on the economic trend towards deindustrialization that accelerated in the same period. Off-shoring of polluting industries (such as steel from Pittsburgh to cities in South Korea) or the failure of such industries to compete with newer ones in countries with newer equipment, cheaper labor, or fewer environmental regulations (as with textiles) meant that urban managers did not feel pressured to defend the waste that accompanied industrial processes. Along with an interest in hygiene, the onset of less-materials-based post-industrial economic activity brought a new kind of white-collar leisure time which could be spent outdoors.

The coincidence in this vision of cleaner water and more leisure time leading to certain kinds of evening and weekend recreation leads to the need for green space which a "greenbelt" along a river can provide. This may be related to the increased interest in "nature" connected to both developments described above; as some scholars of the 1964 United States Wilderness Act point out, for example, the reduced need to depend on "natural resources" made people feel more affectionate towards "nature" and more interested in spending time in it (Nash, 1967/2001); bringing "nature" back into cities follows this interest. Indeed, the impetus to increase urban health by adding open green space goes back to the late nineteenth century and found expression in urban movements such as the Garden City and public housing initiatives in cities like New York and Chicago (Zipp, 2010). The greenbelt, as a public space for leisure and new kinds of recreation, can be seen as following along from movements that created central parks (such as New York's famous one or Portland's Park Blocks, courtesy of the Olmsteds) but encompassing waterways more actively.

The final criterion which emerges from examining these factors together is how ecological a greenbelt is. Simply cleaning up the banks of a waterway with a path on either side does not make a greenbelt into a true riparian zone. Indeed, part of the misunderstanding of hydrology that developed in the period of active industrial and agriculture use of United States waterways was a failure to understand the need for stabilizing and filtering vegetation in a buffer strip along the edge of streams, especially those around which humans typically build their settlements. Along with failing to understand groundwater and other processes, most settlers along the Euro-American model were committed to using all available space, including up to the edge of a riverbank. Understanding those riverbanks as malleable and fragile has come with sometimes bitter experience. Even when a greenbelt focuses on providing a "natural" or parklike space for the public, the resulting landscape may not be recognizably riparian in most ways except for the presence of the water. For example, San Antonio's Riverwalk has trees, but its development arguably did not include any kind of restoration of the riparian zone. Many rivers have also been channelized (i.e., straightened) through the urban areas which now treat them as an

amenity, producing challenges for nearby humans and not bringing all of the benefits of a natural riparian zone.

A final preliminary example that highlights an important aim of greenbelts is the Caldwell Indian Creek walkway, just about thirty miles away from Boise in a smaller city. The shorter length of this greenbelt (so far) reduces its usefulness for vigorous outdoor recreation through the Caldwell downtown, but it brings many strollers in all seasons, including in the winter when the city hangs an elaborate array of lights for the Christmas and New Year holidays. Since the extreme pollution by industry and livestock agriculture had prompted city fathers to pave it over, the creek had to be "daylighted" in 2006; the resulting open water flow is definitely an attractive addition to the downtown landscape. Above all, though, examination of the documents prepared by the city for the daylighting of the creek show that—more than a healthy riparian zone or even the promotion of public outdoors activity—the Caldwell greenbelt was intended to reinvigorate the downtown economy, using the visual attraction of the waterway and the economic assumptions of that greenbelt model to bring new businesses to further promote the economy of leisure such as restaurants and shops. City residents genuinely enjoy the open space, green lawns, festival events, and flowing water, but importantly all these are associated with a successful model of economic activity which has definitely benefited the formerly farm town of Caldwell.

Considering these examples, we can see that the relative mix of ecology, economy, and health in the greenbelt model can be evaluated. As will become clear, in Boise as elsewhere, it is clear that the economic motivator can trump the ecological one and can have unexpected implications for social equity in public space. Popular and successful as greenbelts are, it is important to assess the model and consider whether it is time to retool it for the sake of future use and coexistence with climatic trends.

Among other possible reframings, in spite of all the positive effects of greenbelts and their popularity with urban users, it has long been clear that the "greenbelt model" is not necessarily an environmental one; continuous human use of spaces that are cleared for trails and picnic space often contradict the conditions that wildlife need for habitat or the conditions that water needs for filtration, spring flow, and promoting ecological disturbance for vegetation health. Greenbelts were an important step beyond the landscapes of industrialization, but now urban planners have the opportunity to develop something more specific than the generalized greenbelt model which (below) can also bring gentrification processes that are destructive to social equity and true public access. This might bring greater public education about the need to accommodate biosphere processes in the form of seasonal patterns of permitted use rather than an abstracted use of generalized "greenbelt space" for physical exercise and purely visual enjoyment.

Boise, Idaho, is a city with a well-used and extensive greenbelt along the Boise River. It illustrates these points and, as a city in the high desert which depends heavily on snowmelt-fed runoff for both groundwater and surface water in the river, provides an opportunity to consider the greenbelt model as a mode of coexistence with that river water in a warming and drying climate.

Boise Greenbelt History

This section of the essay will consider the history of the Boise Greenbelt's development related to hygiene, deindustrialization, green space, and ecology. For the details before 1990, I have drawn heavily from Susan Stacy's book *When the River Rises: Flood Control on the Boise River, 1943–1985* (1993).

The Greenbelt came to be, Stacy (1993) notes, because Boise residents began to find the river attractive after a series of events made it look less dirty; we can note that changes in the river's flow and appearance came at a time when general awareness of "nature" was on the rise. Before the Lucky Peak Dam was installed and began operating in 1955, the river's natural flow regime—its yearly fluctuation in flow level dependent on melting snow and rain—caused annual pulses in water volume every spring, which scoured the river bed and did not allow vegetation to accumulate. Stacy notes that the river became more visually attractive to human eyes after the dam began to control that flow volume. She quotes an observer who mentioned that the river acquired "significant heavily wooded sandbars" which made it more "scenic" (1993, p. 68). This change in appearance, along with a generally higher average water level, made the river more attractive for favored recreational activities: floating on small craft or walking along its banks.

However, the water in the river at this point in time was not yet clean enough for humans to swim in. By the 1960s, while the Boise River seemed to meander freely through its flood plain, with considerable open space around it, it received many kinds of industrial and agricultural effluent, just as other US rivers had long done. Agricultural runoff entered the river mostly downstream, where drains re-entered the river after flowing over farm fields. In and near the city of Boise, as Stacy records, a sewage treatment plant discharged warm and chlorine-laced water while food processing plants and dairy operators released "grease, potato peelings, beet pulp, paunch manure [offal], blood, dissolved sugars" (1993, p. 70). The late industrial impulse towards hygiene had not yet affected the quality of the water itself.

Residents' desire to be near the river and engage in recreation pressured the city to conduct cleanup, moving the riparian areas further from a more industrial type of use to an amenity for a post-industrial economy with leisure time. Indeed, the 1963 report to the city by a planning firm noted that since "Boise was the capital city of the state with an economy based on trade and commerce, it 'has more than the usual need and opportunity for parks and green areas'" (Stacy, 1993, p. 73). Deindustrialization and desire for hygiene here combine to produce a desire for green space in which to exercise the accompanying leisure. It is worth providing a longer version of this passage:

> […] because the economy of the area is based largely on trade and commerce attracted from a wide area, and its economic future is partially dependent upon tourist travel and retirement living, Boise City's physical enhancement is a particularly worthwhile community goal. (As cited in Tuck, 2014, p. 4)

Ecology itself, while it definitely animated some advocates, was not necessarily the primary goal. The fundamentally healthful impulses involved in this river cleanup must not obscure the fact that planning of such parks initially set out to create visually generalized green spaces for human use—not native habitat for a functioning river. Of landscaping in Ann Morrison Park, dedicated in 1959 as interest in the river was growing, Stacy notes that "most of the natural vegetation was cleared and replaced with turf and new trees" (1993, p. 73); it was perceived as problematic that "the park lands were overgrown with willows and cottonwoods, laced with sloughs and other soggy places" (p. 71).

Still, initially there was little competition from other uses for the land along the river and it was possible to envision a wide greenbelt that would allow for both riparian areas and human recreation, primarily in the form of the bike/walking path. In 1971, the Greenbelt Committee established "a minimum setback from the river of 70 feet for all structures and parking areas" (Tuck, 2014, p. 5), something which sounds extravagant now. Recreation and hygiene considerations were uppermost, but ecology found a de facto place in the absence of other pressures.

Meanwhile, while ecological concerns might not always have been uppermost, a certain kind of concern for social equity remained key. An extremely important element in the early plan for the Boise Greenbelt were statements in early documents that "the public would have 'in perpetuity unrestricted access to the river'" (Stacy, 1993, p. 74). Even though the initial design might have lacked some ecological sensitivity, the focus on public access is arguably key to the long-term survival of the greenbelt. Along with expectations of public access, the role of public investment, in the form of funds committed and time spent, is critical.

The desire for public space with "natural" features along with the political will to commit public funds created the conditions for attractiveness to private investors. After setting the goal of a usable greenbelt along an attractive, clean river, the city of Boise was for several years able to acquire land parcels which allowed extension of the greenbelt's length. Then, pressure for development began to increase. As Stacy notes,

> once the river cleanup and public investment in the Greenbelt had transformed the river into a sparking urban amenity, property owners who had been content with agricultural or industrial uses of their riverfront acreages took another look. If so many people wanted to be along the river, then surely they would enjoy having offices and homes along the river. […] [Still] developers could not always get their buildings as close to the river as they would have liked, but had to compete with the public for access. (1993, p. 80)

Developers, of course, rely on stable spaces with minimal ecological variation (including outright damage but also simply rising and falling water levels) in order to construct buildings and create income. Development might not have been so willing to move forward had there not been a federal program in place to reduce their financial risks and, in effect, redefine or reshape flood plain area as not floodable or not

vulnerable. Stacy notes the introduction of the National Flood Insurance Program as the catalyst for developers to propose projects and urban infrastructure in what had been a fairly open flood plain. The federal program, which had been passed by the US Congress in 1968, began to affect Boise in 1975 (Stacy, 1993, p. 81); its system of assessing the vulnerability of land to flooding, specifying mitigation approaches to avoid paying flood insurance, and its provision of post-disaster payments gave would-be developers and city boosters a way to rationalize building in the flood plain, making ecologically variable space into reliably open geometry. This shift made acquisition of land parcels more competitive and set the stage for conflicts between recreational use, development, and any notion of healthy river function.

Private developer projects sought to minimize both the public and the ecological aspects of the greenbelt model by changing the calculations of floodable area and edging construction as close as possible to the riverbank. In a notable project proposal from 1982–83 that was denied, we can see the conflicts between the notion of the public, ecology, and private financial interest in reducing the size of the flood plain and capitalizing on the amenity of the riverfront greenbelt. After years of watching the city accommodate developers' projects based on questionable measurements of the flood plain, a group of stakeholders combined forces to oppose the so-called Crandlemire project and to "promote the protection of natural and wildlife values on the river" (Stacy, 1993, p. 96). In Stacy's description of the reaction of the Greenbelt Committee, we can see these tensions between multiple values:

> Alarmed at an upsurge of sentiment that seemed to endow wildlife habitat with such a high priority, the Greenbelt Committee began to feel that the most basic principle of the Greenbelt—public access to the river—might be compromised. [...] The riverbank should not be removed from the public domain on the premise of designating it as a wildlife preserve. (1993, p. 96)

Somewhat ironically in light of this concern, it was not wildlife values but private development values which tended to reduce public access outright. Plans for the River Run residential area southeast of Boise on the south shore of the river went forward in 1978; calculations were made to redefine the area, previously assessed in the flood plain, as acceptable for construction. Notably, while the publicly accessible Greenbelt had played a significant role in making riverside living attractive, the River Run developers did their best to limit public access to the riverbank (Stacy, 1993, pp. 89–91); in the end, the city was able to keep a public portion along the river for pedestrians while bikes were detoured around the complex on a major arterial road (City of Boise, 2019). Similarly, but with even more dramatic consequences for public access, the Riverside Village residential development in the urban jurisdiction of Garden City went forward in 1980; these developers saw public access as a detriment to property values for the "estate homes" it aimed to market. For a period of time, in spite of negotiations, the Riverside Village posted signs at either end of the greenbelt stretch which declared it to be "private property." At a minimum, the Homeowners Association insisted that bicyclists must get off their bikes and walk through this stretch of path.

Private development also took little account of the natural river function on and around sites of planned development, dispensing with a holistic vision for the sake of delineated parcels. Adjustments were made to suit the construction needs at a site, not the broader needs of water or wildlife. For example, Riverside Village builders "haul[ed] fill onto all of the flood fringe up to the edge of the greenbelt path […] Custom homes were built next to the river on lots for sale at premium prices" (Stacy, 1993, p. 102). The Plantation project near Eagle suffered a setback in the dramatic 1983 flood because the clearing of shoreline for building and the dredging of a side stream permitted extreme erosion by the scouring floodwaters, reducing the size of the riverbank in that spot (p. 101). Building levees, the typical approach to avoid flood insurance, calculated how to protect a single building or project but did not factor in the effect of river flow on the opposite shore or surrounding buildings. During planning for the River Run project, it became clear that "calculations done earlier by the Corps [for an earlier project] had indicated that the levee along River Run and a controlled Loggers Creek would shift part of the flood to the other side of the river" (p. 89). Development, given its parameters and goals, always aimed to expand buildable area and reduce the friction of ecological variability; it also sought to reduce public access as a negative effect on privacy and profit.

While the word "gentrification" does not appear in discussions of the greenbelt's history, it is clear that the combination of hygiene, visually attractive green space, and leisure options created by the greenbelt tended to raise property values and decrease equitable access unless the urban jurisdiction chose to resist this force. The value of stable, buildable space along a waterway derives in part from the now globally attractive "park, café, riverwalk" model, which tends to attract an affluent urban class without taking account of ecological variability or, in this case, the needs of healthy river function.

A Brief Foray into River Function

Rivers have different flow regimes and different morphology in different topographies. The shape of a river and its topography determines how the water which flows in it will interact with the surrounding landscapes. For example, a river that has a wide, level flood plain will naturally meander, changing course from year to year depending on the volume of spring runoff; the height and angle of riverbanks will affect whether the land along the banks will experience flood. Generally, rivers in valleys where humans prefer to settle will flood in spring when the melting of snow produces a higher level of water; the water with its load of sediment tends to overflow existing banks to spread that sediment around the plain, redistributing nutrients that promote plant growth. Vegetation in such landscapes must adapt to these cycles, and sometimes require these "disturbances" to sustain healthy growth.

Many rivers which flow through urban areas have been modified either along their course or upstream of the cities in order to control the annual spring flows which produce flooding in human settlements. In the case of the Boise River, a dam system upstream (particularly Lucky Peak Dam) as well as channelization through the city

stabilize the river's flow; the shape of the river and infrastructure around it aim to prevent or reduce the flooding caused by spring runoff.

As a first part of an answer about the ecological qualifications of the Boise Greenbelt, then, we can see that by minimizing flooding, a greenbelt tends to deny this fundamental dynamic aspect of a river's natural existence. The Boise Greenbelt does not entirely avoid flooding. In recent years, for example in spring 2017 after a very deep snowpack year or even in spring 2021 when rapid warming caused earlier runoff, the Boise River has run high in March and April and sometimes has flooded parts of the surrounding banks, including lower-lying portions of the greenbelt, damaging stretches of the bike/walk path or making them impassable. If a greenbelt were to take the natural life of a river completely seriously, humans would accept the cost and trouble of rebuilding the bike/walk path each year after partial flooding; humans would agree to leave the riparian areas to the river for the time during spring flood and regard it as "theirs" only during the months of lower water flow. The very act of stabilizing the banks for human use—including making sure that spaces "owned" will reliably remain in existence and not erode away—means a drastic step away from ecology in many cases.

A second, related part of this answer concerns appropriate vegetation. Turfgrass has drawbacks but has become familiar and common as the most resilient ground cover for heavy use by human activities in parks. Arguably, city residents associate grass with a park's self-respecting appearance and would be troubled by alternatives. Natural riparian vegetation might offer far less space for picnic blankets and would not look as fitting. For most of its length the Boise Greenbelt has at least a strip of more native riparian vegetation; in some places it is very narrow, perhaps ten or a dozen yards; in other places, the formation of small near-shore islands has occurred and remains undisturbed. If the nearby land is publicly owned, these strips or buffers are likely to be wider; in one area further east of the city, called Barber Park, a vegetated area from 150–300 yards wide lies on the south bank of the river between its edge and the nearest development or parking lot. Yet native vegetation, such as cottonwood trees, has been found to respond and regenerate thanks to flood disturbance and will not germinate new individuals without such disturbance; thus, stabilized paths and vegetation at this level, too, are a step away from strict ecology.

The Boise Greenbelt Today

In 2016, the Boise Greenbelt was considered complete when a final short portion of path was built just southwest of downtown (KBOI, 2016).It stretches for over 25 miles, east to a park at the dam that made it possible and west into neighboring urban settlements; towns further west, downriver, have plans eventually to link up with the Boise Greenbelt and are preserving riparian area accordingly. As the Visit Idaho webpage states (Boise River Greenbelt, n.d.), the greenbelt "links over 850 acres of parks and natural areas along the Boise River," including a few large city parks and a county park where recreationalists typically start their "float" of the river in rafts or tubes (large tires). A walk along the greenbelt south of downtown could take you

past a nature center, the zoo, office buildings, park space, and small apartments with patios facing the path and the nearby river. Along some stretches, a fully vegetated riparian buffer separates the path from the water, while in some others or at access points, the river is fully visible and within several feet of the path. By plan, the Warm Springs Golf Course occupies an area north of the river, east of Boise; the Boise State University campus occupies a large area south of the river, opposite Julia Davis Park. Further east, you pass more homes and even come to the Idaho Shakespeare Festival, an outdoor theater facility. The greenbelt truly incorporates many uses and has managed to keep something of a pathway open along its entire length, in spite of occasional efforts to reduce public access. Having marked its 50-year anniversary in 2019, it has become "one of the most widely used amenities in the Treasure Valley" (Boise River Greenbelt, n.d.).

Interestingly, the issue of public access increasingly is tied to mobility between urban destinations. There is heavy use of the greenbelt as a bikeway for commuters or bicyclists seeking exercise. A 2014 Boise State University study of data from a survey of greenbelt users in September 2012 found that respondents were 44% pedestrians and 56% bicyclists, but "[ITD] traffic counts show that the actual numbers are probably closer to 35 percent pedestrians and 65 percent bicycles" (Tuck, 2014, p. 7; see also Boise River Resource, 2014, pp.26–27). In this situation we see a further stage of post-industrial development, where environmental concerns about fossil fuel use in cars prompt cities to develop systems of bike lanes (as Boise has done) and inspire individuals to travel by bicycle. While laudable environmentally, this value is not strictly ecological in terms of river function; separately, it can also come into conflict with viewing the greenbelt through the lens of property values. Thus, bicycle use, while technically less expensive than car ownership and technically "environmentalist," also may be a sign of gentrification rather than sustained affordability. There are groups in the city which actively seek to make the urban experience more equitable, such as the Boise Bicycle Project, but their heroic work is a sign of the difficulty and need for investment in creating social equity in space: assuring bicycle ownership cannot ensure access to housing for a wider "public" or assure healthy river function.

Even as genuine incorporation of ecology remains elusive, market pressures remain. Today, as tensions may have decreased in development inside the City of Boise's portion of the greenbelt, contradictions in philosophy are seen more between Boise, which pursues a more conservationist, ecology-oriented approach, and Garden City, a small city with a heretofore smaller tax base just to Boise's west, which has taken a much more pro-development and less ecologically sensitive approach to developing its own stretches of the greenbelt.

What happens along the greenbelt on that few-mile stretch is determined in some ways by overall trends in the district. The trend in Garden City, along the south shore of the Boise River to the west of Boise's downtown, has been to increase the tax base and gentrify previously more affordable areas, which typically include older housing, mobile home parks, and warehouse areas. The type of development which replaces it tends to value the river and its banks as an attractive visual backdrop to the

accumulation of financial equity; river function is not primary and public access may be acknowledged but not always embraced. Already in the late 1970s,

> the town had more than its share of transients and poor residents; most of the housing consisted of mobile homes, and the property tax yield was too low to do very much about the town's problems. In the 1970s new municipal leaders determined… to annex new land and let developers build high-quality residential developments. Garden City would be able to improve its tax revenues. (Stacy, 1993, p. 100)

Garden City remained relatively low-cost well into the 2010s until facing more gentrification pressure. In the early 2020s, caught in the rise in housing costs that has affected the Treasure Valley as well as the entire US, Garden City has seen the pressure on previously affordable areas produce more development projects that upgrade residential options but also increase rents. Assessing the difference in approach of the Boise greenbelt, a *BoiseDev* journalist wrote that

> Boise's Greenbelt is a more natural, secluded experience. There are occasional buildings and residences backing up to the pathway, but the city has left the dense vegetation between the Greenbelt and the river largely untouched. It feels nothing like a riverside boardwalk and there's very little commerce right on the Greenbelt. With a few exceptions, you must venture hundreds of feet off the walkway to grab a beer or find a place to eat. (Carmel, 2021)

While the phrase "dense vegetation" exaggerates the quality of some of the riparian area within the city limits of Boise, this passage signals the contrast.

The Boardwalk project located on the Garden City stretch of greenbelt is a good example of the way that this smaller municipality is seeking to bring the more standard "park, café, riverwalk" model to bear, leaning away from ecology and towards gentrification. The developer Michael Talbott set out to replicate in some way the beach boardwalk in Laguna Beach, CA, that he says his mother reminisced about when he was growing up. News coverage in 2019 stated that Talbott hoped to provide assistance to displaced tenants in finding new locations for mobile trailers or new residences, but the reporter noted that "to make the project a reality, about a dozen cottage homes and 16 mobile homes on the property will have to be torn down or moved" (Day, 2019). We can see that local ecology is neglected for an attractive vision derived from another place (in a different climatic regime) and that displacement is necessary in order to create this new residential space: that is, gentrification here generates a process of generalization, producing a differently hygienic, cleaned-out space of commonly attractive amenities. Based on sketches and plans, the project will surely produce a pleasant landscape that many people will enjoy if they can afford it and gain access to it (Day, 2021), but another population will find itself displaced along with the native ecology. The developer states laudable motives, but the project functions within a set of values that may or may not produce a project which will adapt to future climate changes or serve the river's needs. It would be wrong to generalize that such projects will occupy the river's length, and this

one seems to accept the premise of public access in the generic sense (that is, without considering financial ability to enter that "public space"), but it still participates in a model that allows the individual developer to consider isolated plans above the needs of the river.

Advocacy at some locations along the river do reflect awareness of the needs of the river and wildlife habitat, which is a good sign for the ecology but presages further struggle over a vision for the greenbelt. The 2014 Boise State study cites an unpublished history of Boise's development which noted that

> Downstream from Garden City, the Greenbelt ran into a snag—the protection of wildlife habitat. As the river approaches Eagle Island, it runs through lush wildlife habitat supporting eagles, foxes, deer and more. Greenbelt advocates tended to dismiss concerns as wealthy property owners wishing to bar the public from their land. But wildlife advocates pushed for a plan to relocate the path next to the State Street bypass to avoid disturbing wildlife. (J.M. Neil, City Limits [Unpublished manuscript], as cited in Tuck, p. 8)

Leaving spaces where biosphere processes are prioritized over human activity at some level contradicts the idea of unfettered "public" access; "additional amenities, including more restrooms, drinking fountains and trash cans" (Tuck, 2014, p. 8) reduce rather than support the ecology. If a greenbelt is to truly favor ecological processes and reflect education about and awareness of the needs of the river under changing conditions, human activity has to give way to reserved ecological space; certainly, this may be more acceptable to some than private homeowners forbidding entry to stretches of the riverbank, but it might be hard to accept for many. This inflection point reveals that, while post-industrial economies may be, at least at a local level, less materials-based than their industrial predecessors, they are not necessarily any more ecological unless they prioritize ecological function.

Piecemeal jurisdiction along the banks of any river can make holistic approaches difficult, but there are definitely stretches of the river where groups plan efforts to prioritize ecology and healthy river function. In July, the Boise City Open Space and Clean Water Advisory Committee approved a proposal by the Golden Eagle Audubon Society to spend $48,000 along the Boise River east of the city, primarily through removal of invasive species and planting of native vegetation that would support processes which conserve water quality, particularly by reducing erosion (Charan, 2021). Some aspects of the project would also divert human traffic away from vulnerable riparian areas. According to the meeting of the Boise City Open Space and Clean Water Advisory Committee, "the improvement project would conduct habitat restoration, create focused river access points, and provide educational opportunities throughout 1,028 acres of the Boise River riparian area extending from the Boise River Diversion Dam to the East Parkcenter Bridge" (Boise City Open Space, n.d.). Implying the need for greater awareness of how human activities affect biosphere processes, a spokesman for the Golden Eagle project noted that "a lot of the citizens of Boise don't recognize that they may be damaging [the river] […] As the Treasure Valley's population grows, 'the potential for the river quality to decline is quite high'" (Charan, 2021).

This type of project, incorporating education about river function into an existing, popular space that was initially catalyzed by desire for green space recreation, seems like the horizon for urban amenities like the Boise Greenbelt. The river is not a static visual backdrop for human relaxation; for sustainment of its capacity to offer clean water and a restorative setting, humans will need to understand its needs and adjust their expectations.

An intriguing and critical parallel to this notion of compromise with wildlife habitat and biosphere processes lies in analyses of the displacement caused by more affluent users and projects taking over space along any new green space amenity, particularly one including water such as riverbanks. The Garden City cases illustrate starkly that the process of land turnover for more affluent uses presumes that more hygienic, green, post-industrial spaces are intended for a certain class of people and will always end up that way. Another horizon for urban development in the coming decades is making clean, green spaces for lower class people that do not automatically gentrify. Along these lines, several scholars criticize the "park, café, riverwalk" model as a culprit and advise making spaces "just green enough" for ecological function and benefits, but not so green and gentrified that these spaces become financially unavailable to less affluent residents (Wolch et al., 2014). As Curran and Hamilton (2012) note, "environmental remediation in older neighborhoods and the creation of new green spaces can … literally 'naturalize' the disappearance of working-class communities, as such improved neighborhoods became targets for new and more upscale development" (p. 1028). Along these lines, an imaginative horizon might be to reconceptualize more "industrial" spaces as also allowing the presence of healthy biosphere processes, so that such landscapes do not necessarily require upscale post-industrial inhabitants (and thus unaffordability).

A greenbelt that supports a variety of class imaginations of landscape while also prioritizing the healthy function of the river in its ecosystem could provide a new and more climatically flexible model of the sort that cities need as they sustain their waterfronts.

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