

EXISTING CONDITIONS

JEFFERSON COUNTY HISTORY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Jefferson County, Alabama, was acquired from the Creek Indians in the 1814 Treaty of Fort Jackson and became known as Blount County in 1816. The county was created by the Alabama legislature on December 13, 1819 and named in honor of U. S. President Thomas Jefferson. In 1920 its boundaries were fixed at their current location in the north-central part of Alabama. The county seat was originally located in Carrollsville from 1819 to 1821, then it moved to Elyton, and finally in 1873, the county seat moved to its present location in Birmingham.

As one might assume, farming became the prevailing occupation in Jefferson County well into the twentieth century. Cotton was the major agricultural product until the farmers diversified their crops in the early twentieth century adding corn, wheat, peanuts, and vegetables. While farming was abundant in the county, early settlers were also taking advantage of the abundance of the minerals such as iron ore and coal. By 1865 Jefferson County had become one of the south's major suppliers of Iron and Steel to the Confederacy. It was this abundance of iron, coal and limestone deposits that made Birmingham's industrial rise possible in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and thus became one of the leading industrial cities of in the United States. Birmingham continued to have emerging economic growth in medical research, banking, and insurance in the latter half of the 20th century.

In the early 1900's, Jefferson County focused on the development of a transportation system. The iron, steel and textile industries benefited from the continuing importance of transportation that helped to fuel the county's economic growth well into the twenty-first century. As a result, several major highways and interstates run through Jefferson County: Interstate 65, North and South through Birmingham, Interstates 59 and 20, southwest and northeast and Highway 78, northwest and south-east. In addition to a good road system, the county has 13 private and three municipal airports with the largest in Birmingham. The Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport, located 5 miles northeast of downtown Birmingham, provided domestic and international service for 3,222,689 passengers in 2007.

Jefferson County is now the most populated area in the state of Alabama, governed by an elected five-member commission and includes 38 incorporated communities. Figure 2.1 illustrates the municipalities in the County. Alabama's economic and population growth has had its fair share of "Booms and Busts." In



Photo take in 1938 of the Wenonah No. 8 Mine. Credit: Ike Matson.

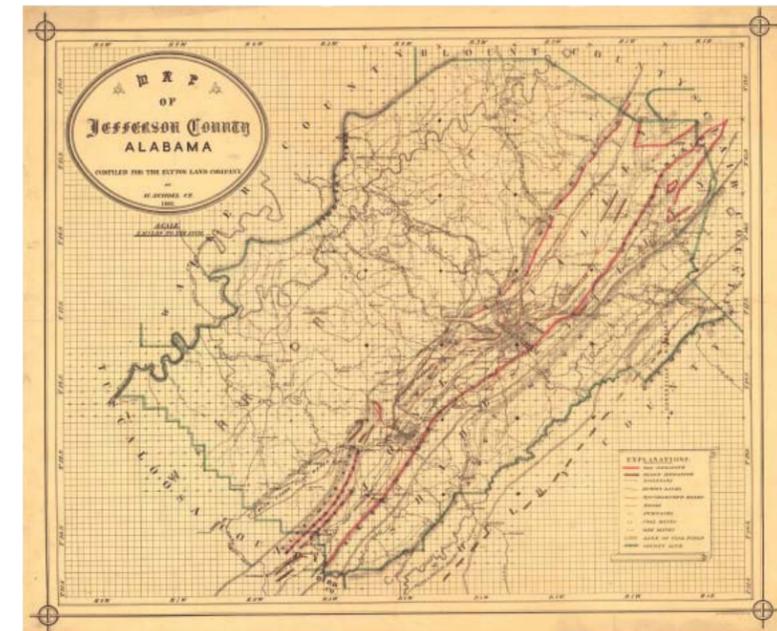
2006, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the county population was 656,700 which made it the largest county in Alabama. The largest city and the county seat, Birmingham, had an estimated 229,424 population. Figure 2.2 illustrates the population densities. At the time of the 2000 census it was estimated that the population in the county consisted of 55.7 percent white, 41.3 percent African American and 2.6 percent Hispanic. Also in 2006, the median household income was estimated as \$41,691.

School Systems in Jefferson County have played a large role in providing the diverse work force required by businesses in the county and the state with three technical schools, three religious training schools, four business schools and six universities and colleges, including the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Jefferson County lies within a dramatic geography of 1,119 square miles made up of the southern extension of the Appalachian Mountains and Cumberland Plateau. Butler Mountain boasts the highest elevation in the county.

The valleys and ridges provide a drainage system of many beautiful rivers and creeks such as the Black Warrior River, Cahaba River, Shades Creek, Patton Creek, Village Creek and Valley Creek. This web of smaller and larger tributaries is a host for many scenic vistas and recreational opportunities.

The following destinations were created for visitors to experience the county's natural beauty: Ruffner Mountain Nature Center has hiking trails over 1,000 acres and Red Mountain Park with 1,200 acres. Beside the large parks, many municipal parks were built by the cities throughout the twentieth century for its population to enjoy as well.



1892 Map of Jefferson County by H. Shoel. Credit: University of Alabama Map Collection

Figure 2.1 – Jefferson County Municipalities
Municipalities within Jefferson County.

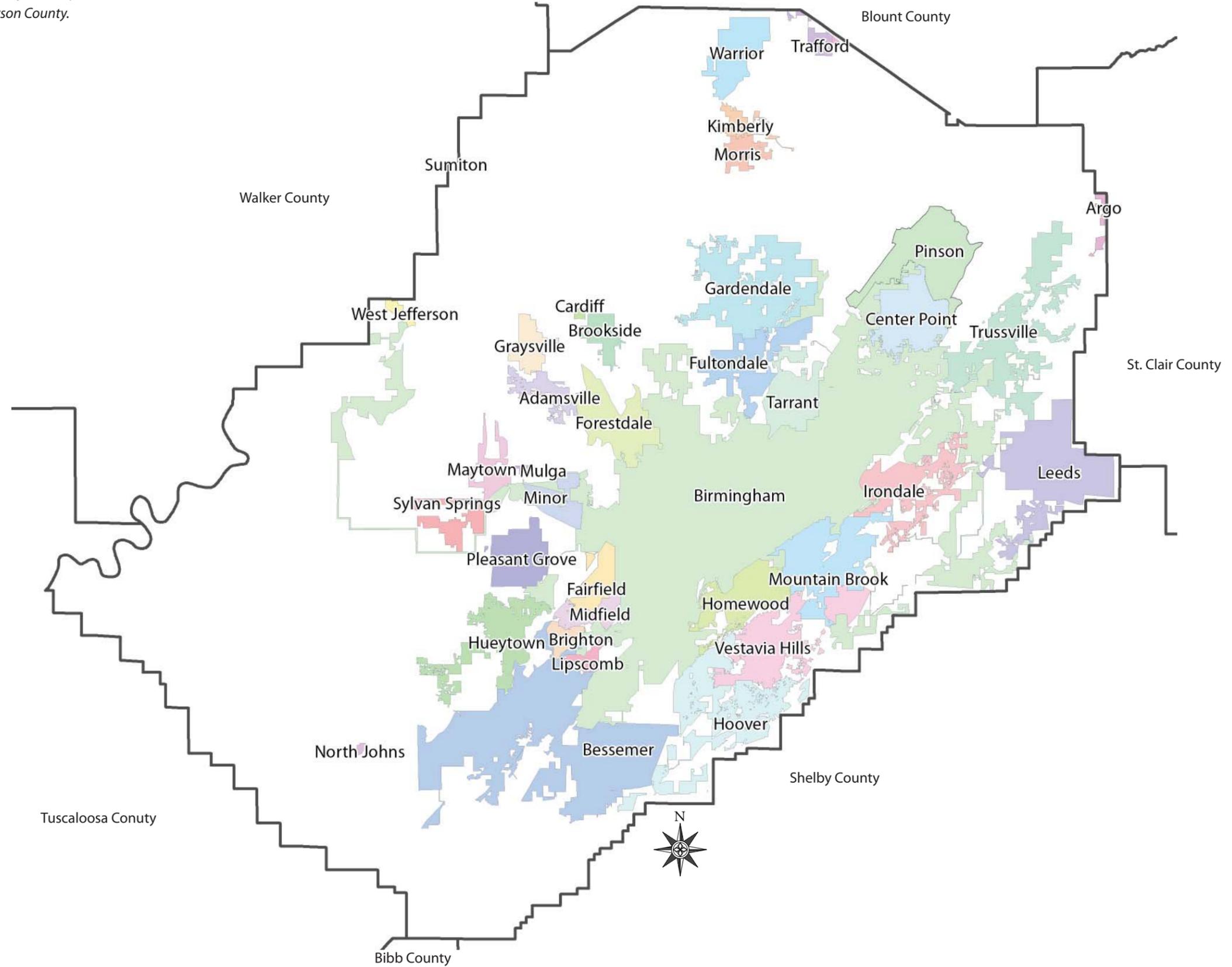
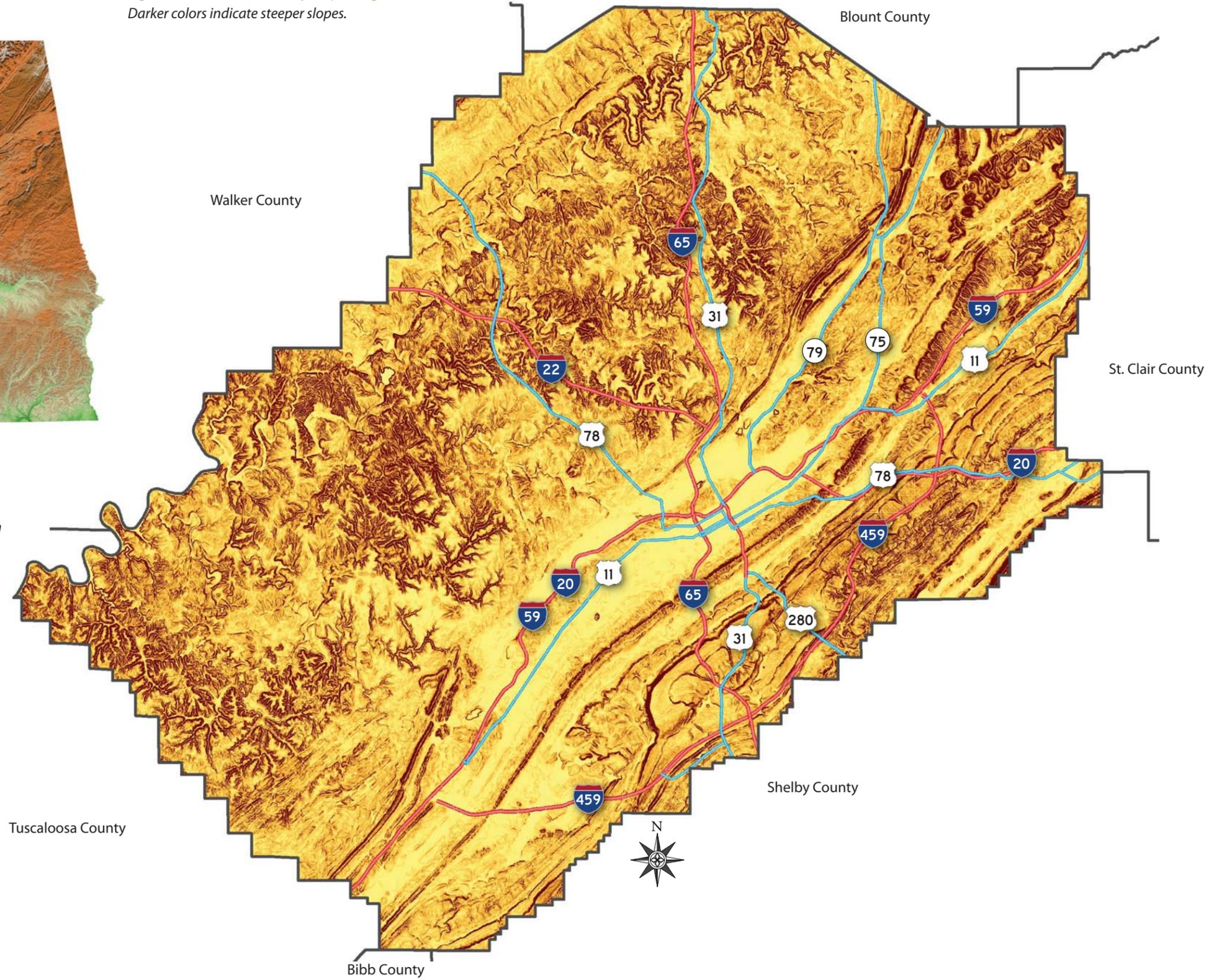




Figure 2.3 – Alabama Relief
Relief diagram of Alabama with
Jefferson County highlighted

Figure 2.4 – Jefferson County Slope Diagram
Darker colors indicate steeper slopes.



PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

In looking at a trail system for Jefferson County, there are two important aspects of the county that must be understood in relation to the physical landscape, slope and hydrology. Studying the slope and hydrology within the county will aid in the design of the trail network by understanding locations where preferred alignments could occur.

SLOPE

Figure 2.4 illustrates grades of 10% or greater for Jefferson County, with the darker areas representing the steeper slopes. These darker locations are where construction of greenways and paths might be more difficult. Areas with steep slopes can be suitable for natural surface foot paths. It is easy to see how the shape of the ridges played such a big role in the influence of development primarily along the valleys. Running 60 degrees NE to SW the ridges form the southern terminus of the Appalachian Mountain range.

HYDROLOGY

Figure 2.6 illustrates the hydrological system within Jefferson County. This diagram shows how the two major rivers within the county, the Black Warrior River along the northwestern limit of the county and the Cahaba River along the southeastern limit of the county, collect water from tributaries that traverse Jefferson County. Major creeks include Turkey Creek, Five Mile Creek, Village Creek, Valley Creek all flowing to the Black Warrior River and Shades Creek flowing into the Cahaba River. This diagram is important in the design of the trail network because it clearly illustrates the location of potential connections along important waterways. In a greenways network, streams, creeks, and rivers act as important connections because of their relative proximity to development along the valleys. This web of smaller and larger tributaries is a host for many scenic vistas and recreational opportunities.

LAND COVER

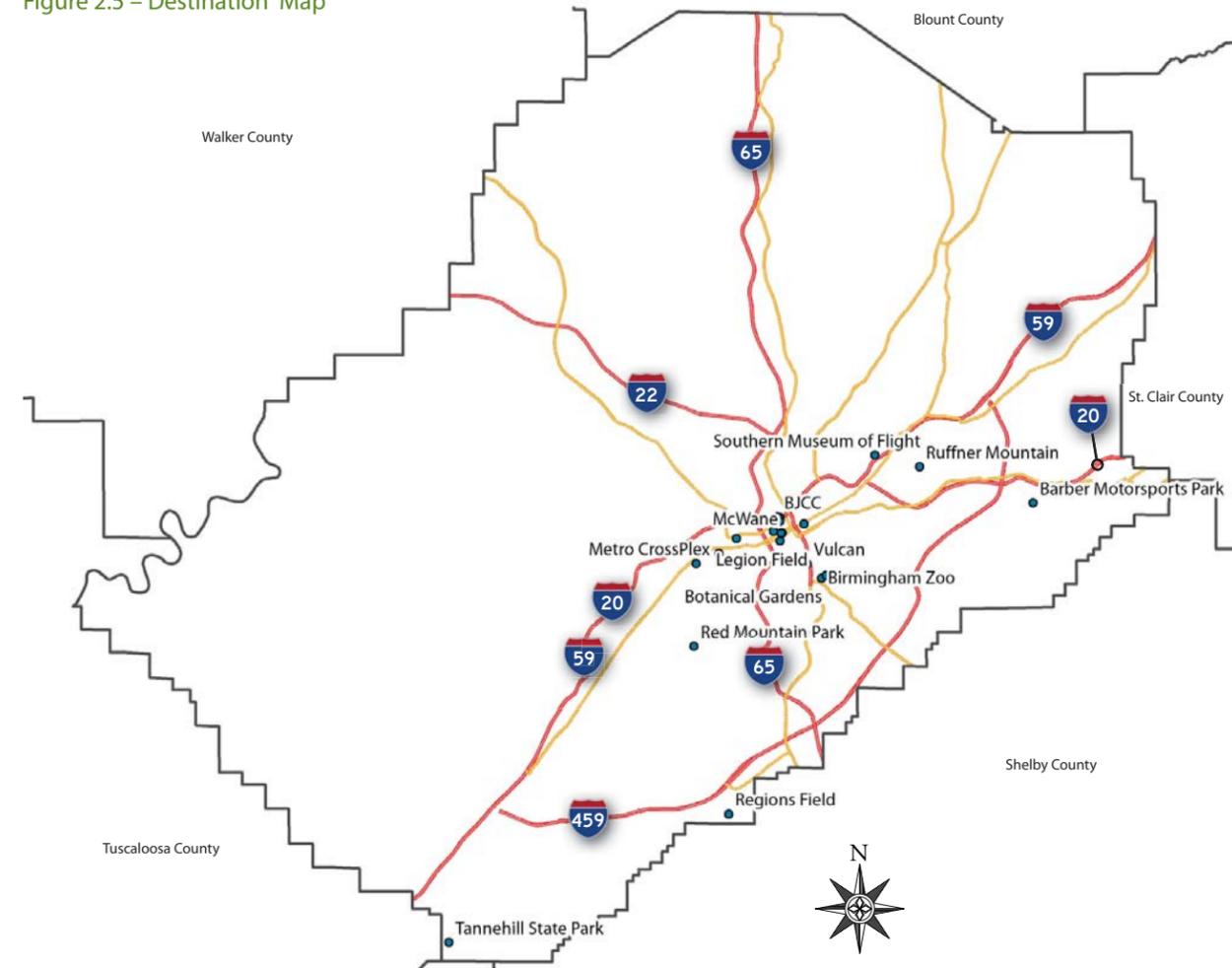
The Land Cover Diagram, Figure 2.7, illustrates how land is used throughout the county. The Central Business District is in downtown Birmingham with development radiating out among the thirty-two municipalities of the metropolitan area.

DESTINATIONS

Jefferson County is rich in diverse destination points ranging from schools and regional employment centers as well as six universities and colleges, more park land per capita than any other county in the country, museums, the entertainment district, a major regional culinary destination with numerous world class restaurants, botanical gardens, race ways, and ball fields. Schools, libraries and community centers were also included within the Plan as destinations within the county. The following is a list of some of the most popular destinations identified in the public stakeholder meetings associated with this planning effort.

The destination map, Figure 2.5, illustrates points identified in the public stakeholder meetings, as places that people would want to walk or ride to if adequate facilities existed. It is important to connect these destinations in order to instill activity in everyday activities as well as occasional trips.

Figure 2.5 – Destination Map



- Alabama Sports Hall of Fame
- Alabama Theater
- Barber Motorsports Park
- Bass Pro Shop
- Birmingham Botanical Gardens
- Birmingham Civil Rights Institute
- Birmingham CrossPlex
- Birmingham Museum of Art
- Birmingham Southern College
- Birmingham Zoo
- Birmingham-Jefferson Civic center
- Jefferson State Community College
- Lawson State Community College
- Legion Field
- McWane Science Center
- Miles College
- Railroad Park
- Red Mountain Park
- Regions Field
- Regions Park
- Rickwood Field
- Ruffner Mountain Nature Center
- Samford University
- Sloss Furnaces
- Southern Museum of Flight
- Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park
- University of Alabama in Birmingham
- Vulcan Park and Museum

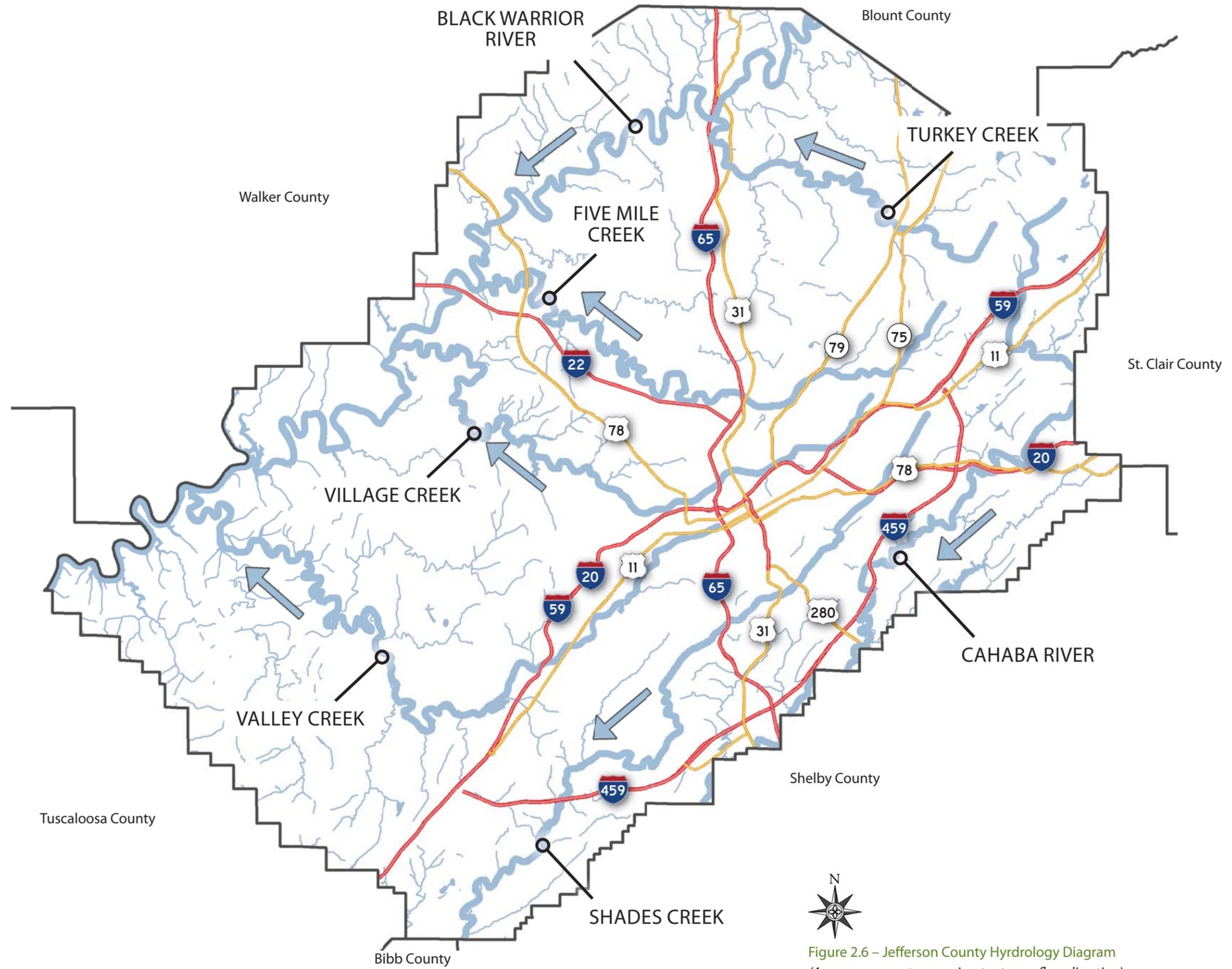


Figure 2.6 – Jefferson County Hydrology Diagram
(Arrows represent approximate stream flow direction)

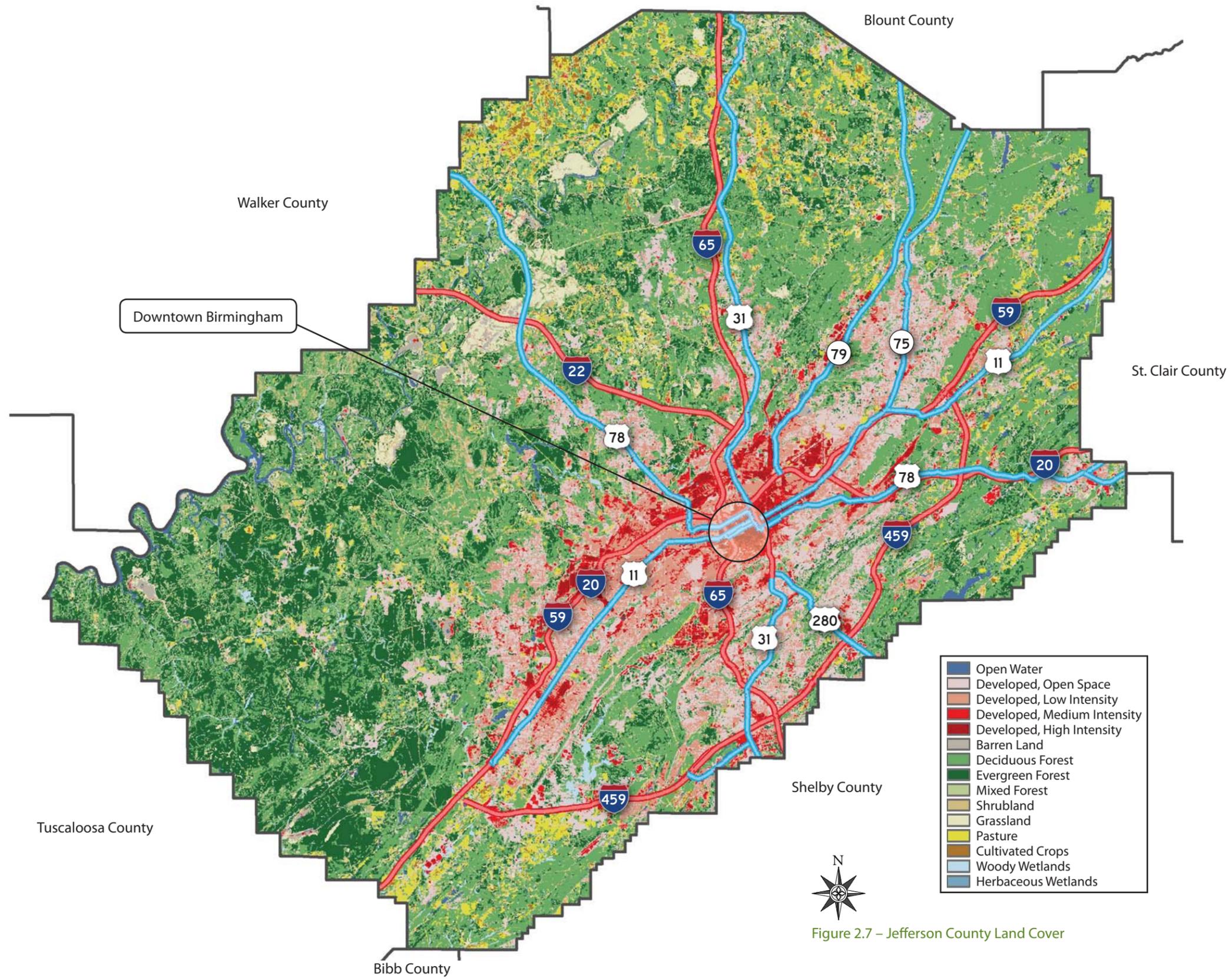


Figure 2.7 – Jefferson County Land Cover

PREVIOUS PLANNING GREENWAY ESTABLISHMENT EFFORTS

Olmsted Brother: A Proposed Park System for Birmingham

Many of the communities built prior to the 1960's in Jefferson County were based on traditional walking neighborhoods with complex sidewalk systems supplemented by bus and streetcar transit. The street cars are now gone, but the sidewalk system is still in place, in the older neighborhoods, with need of renovation for accessibility to green space. The Olmsted Brothers, the nation's premier park planning, firm developed a master plan for green space for the metropolitan area in the 1920s. As written by local historian, Marjorie White, "The plan suggested numerous parks for active and passive uses. The report recommended neighborhood parks within easy walking distance of every house, including those of black citizens; expansion of certain parks with beautiful, natural features: the creation of beauty spots and athletic fields; a civic center surrounded by major public buildings; parkways and large parks in the flood plains of area creeks and along ridges, reservations of vast lands in Shades Valley and at sites critical for protection of domestic water supply; and the building of parkways along ridge tops to gain for the public impressive outlooks." (1) This plan went largely un-implemented, but continues to serve as a guiding vision of connected greenways in the greater Birmingham area.

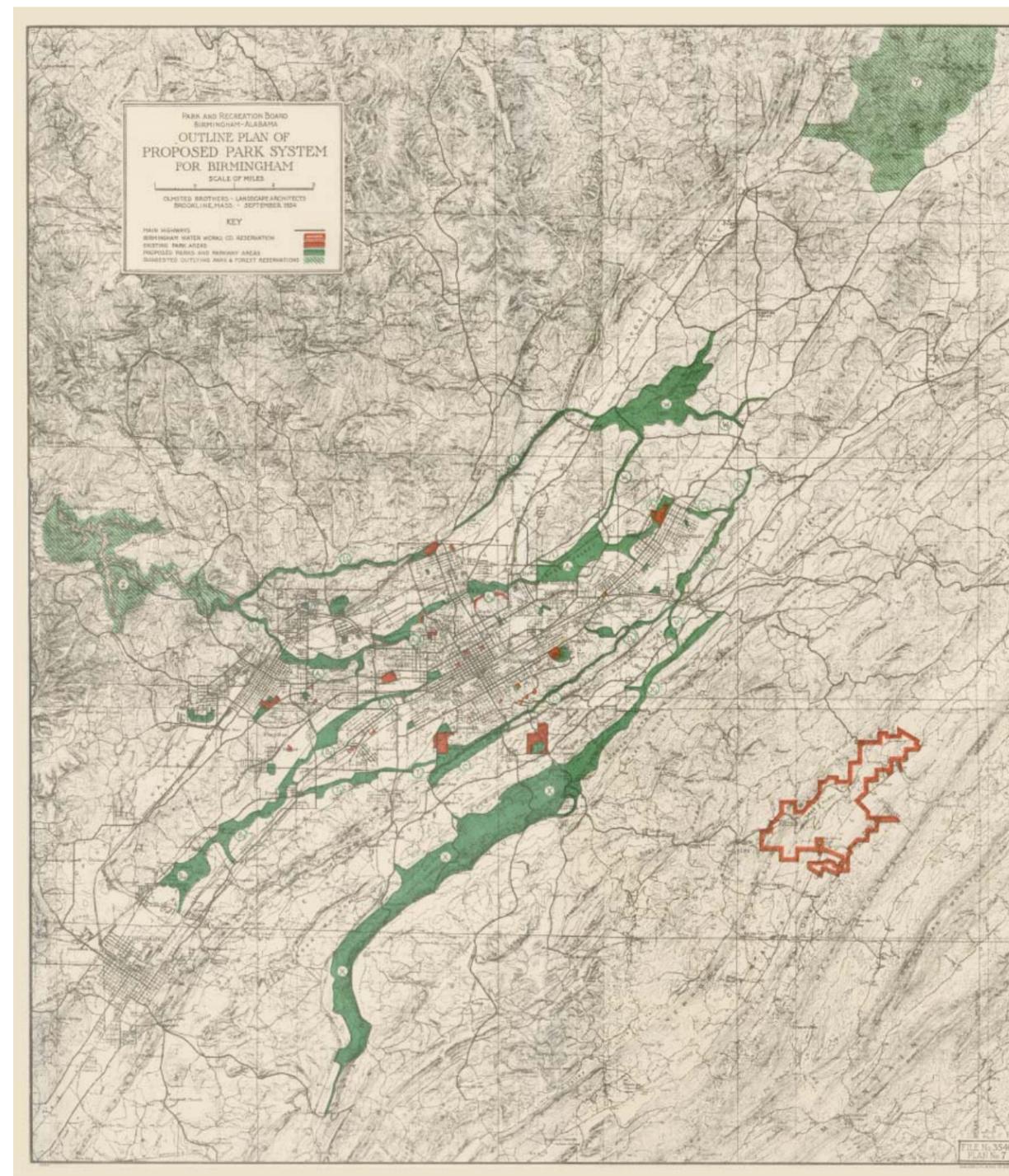
The newer communities built, after the 1960-80s, do not have a walkway system similar to the earlier communities of Jefferson County. However, during the last two decades great efforts have been made in numerous communities such as Bessemer, Birmingham, Center Point, Homewood, Hoover, Mountain Brook, Tarrant and Vestavia Hills to develop pedestrian facilities and trails with access to green space.

Birmingham Area Bicycle, Pedestrian and Greenway Plan (1996)

The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham with cooperation between Jefferson and Shelby Counties completed the *Birmingham Area Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenway Plan* as an integral element of the Birmingham Area Long-Range Transportation Plan. The following recommendations were made (2):

1. Incorporate the programs and facility improvements recommend by in the Long Range Transportation Plan.
2. Establish a Staff position for a Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator within the Birmingham Regional Planning Commission.
3. Formalize the Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenway Advisory Committee whose purpose should be to advise and make recommendations to the MPO.
4. Provide regional coordination for the adoption and implementation of the plan.
5. Implement and periodically update the planning tools developed by the plan.
6. Establish funding through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for bicycling and pedestrian programs.

This planning effort was one of the first meaningful discussions in the area about the need for and enhancement of pedestrian and cycling facilities. It was successful at bringing these discussions to every community and kick started the beginning of a county-wide greenway system. Trails, paths, and a few bike lanes have been planned and implemented in number of Jefferson County municipalities as a result of this plan.



Outline Plan of Proposed Park System for Birmingham, 1924 Olmsted Brothers. Credit: Birmingham Historical Society

Jefferson County Greenways Program and the Freshwater Land Trust

In 1997, Jefferson County developed the “Jefferson County Greenways Program” which was a \$30 million effort to acquire and protect forested buffers along critical stream segments in order to protect these streams from non-point sources of pollution. The Freshwater Land Trust was established to implement this program over ten years. By the end of the implementation period, the Freshwater Land Trust acquired over 4300 acres of property, 10% of which is available for development of soft surface paths and canoe launches to facilitate public recreation. These properties, along with existing municipal parks and parks under commission management, constitute substantial “Green Infrastructure” that is the foundation of a comprehensive network of parks, greenways, and bike pedestrian pathways though out the county.

Other Planning Efforts

The following is a list of previous studies or plans that were referenced during the development of this Greenway and Path Master Plan. Important elements from these previous studies were incorporated into this Greenways Plan to be carried forward in the interest of improving connects between municipalities and other destinations in Jefferson County.

- 2008-2011 Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Improvement Plan
- 2035 Regional Transportation Plan
- Alabama Department of Transportation Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
- City of Center Point Reed Harvey Community Greenway
- City of Leeds Master Plan
- City of Pinson Master Plan
- Clay Greenway Master Plan
- Fultondale Five Mile Creek Corridor Study
- Homewood Greenway Master Plan
- Hoover Greenway and Sidewalks Master Plan
- Inverness Greenway Master Plan
- Mountain Brook Sidewalk Master Plan
- Town of Brookside Bike/Hike Trail Corridor Study
- Valley Creek Trail by Wisser
- Vestavia Hills Sidewalk Master Plan
- Village Creek Linear Park Master Plan

Chapter Footnotes:

1. “A Park System for Birmingham” by Heather McArn and Marjorie White November 6, 2005, supplement to “A Park System for Birmingham” by the Olmsted Brothers 1925.
2. Birmingham Area Bicycling and Pedestrian Greenway Master Plan (1996).



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