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The mission of the Greenbelt Land Trust of Mid-Missouri is to conserve the streams, forests, grasslands, and farmlands that represent our distinctive landscape for present and future generations.

**Our Natural Legacy: A Plan for Columbia and Boone County
Presentation to the Columbia City Council
September 15, 2014
Gene Gardner, President**

First, thank you for this opportunity to speak before you and to say THANK YOU for your participation and support. Representatives from the Columbia City Parks & Recreation Department and Columbia Public Schools were among the 18 organizations and private citizens that were directly involved with development of **Our Natural Legacy** through the Advisory Committee. We are very grateful for all that the City of Columbia has contributed to this partnership. I will summarize this most recent effort and talk more about our future partnership in just a moment.

The Greenbelt has a long history of partnership with the City of Columbia. Our organization began in 1993 as the Greenbelt Coalition – a movement that supported greenways and trails within and surrounding Columbia. In fact, the City of Columbia adopted the greenways plan of the Greenbelt Coalition. In 1997, we accepted our first donation of private land which made possible a large section of the public Hinkson Creek Trail, a City trail that is on Greenbelt property. In 2004, we officially became a land trust with non-profit status. We currently protect more than 20 acres in private ownership through conservation easements and we own more than 70 acres of land designated as Columbia nature preserves.

The Greenbelt Land Trust of Mid-Missouri (Greenbelt) is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors with representation from landowners, business-men and –women, and resource professionals who are widely supported by the conservation community in Missouri. Mike Hood, retired City of Columbia Parks & Recreation Director, is a Board member and Councilwoman Barbara Hoppe is one of our Advisors.

The Greenbelt accomplishes our mission through fee simple land acquisition and stewardship, and by accepting permanent conservation easements on private land and, more broadly, through engaging communities through collaborative efforts. Nationally, 1,700 nonprofit land trusts like ours have protected more than 37 million acres of land through donations or purchase of fee simple acquisitions, or through donations or purchase of conservation easements.

Today I would like to call your attention to our most recent collaborative effort – one that represents our continued and successful partnership with the City of Columbia. I am referring to development of the green infrastructure plan that we call **Our Natural Legacy: A Plan for Columbia and Boone County**. We have provided these bound copies for you as a tangible representation of this successful partnership.

The products that we delivered through development of the Natural Legacy collaboration are two-fold: 1) the visionary document that we have provided here, called **Our Natural Legacy: A Plan for Columbia and Boone County**; and 2) more technical products that include geospatial, cultural, and economic analyses that are intended to help us prioritize lands for future acquisition or protection through development of conservation easements with private landowners. These technical products have been delivered to Mike Griggs via electronic media.

The Our Natural Legacy Plan is composed of several visionary components, some have materialized during the collaborative process over the last two years, and some will take more work or leadership to accomplish. As an example, Connecting People to nature is one component – this is happening through helping to establish the Rockbridge Memorial State Park Nature School and construction of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Big Muddy National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters and Visitor's Center. Another component, one that the City of Columbia and Greenbelt is continuing to work together to achieve is the Trails Network in and around Columbia. Greenbelt is working to help complete the 30-mile trail loop around Columbia and other priority trails and parks projects identified in the Metro Greenbelt/Trails Plan, the Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan, and other strategic plans.

The overarching vision of Our Natural Legacy is to connect residents and visitors to nature so as to enhance the individual, economic, and natural health of Columbia and Boone County. Therefore, the focus of Greenbelt now is to transition from development of Our Natural Legacy, which has been a successful collaboration that incubated a number of good initiatives, to implementation of the natural legacy components that directly tie-into our land trust mission, those are as follows:

- Helping private landowners protect their lands as fish and wildlife habitat and productive farmlands through conservation easements;
- Working closely with the City of Columbia and Boone County to develop trails and other outdoor open spaces that our communities can enjoy;
- Engaging communities through volunteer and outreach opportunities that assist in restoring natural areas and native species;
- Guiding policy and planning through careful development and implementation of strategic plans;
- Fostering a culture of conservation and developing collaborations by networking land trust members, landowners, professionals in public agencies and local municipalities, and representatives of non-governmental organizations.