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## ***Integrating Plans and Opportunities Successfully into the Surrounding Environment***

The success of the Gateway Area depends on more than projects; it depends on successful integration of the plans and projects into the surrounding natural and community environment. The desire to maximize the economic and employment potential of the Gateway Area cannot be at the expense of the natural surroundings, nor should it jeopardize financial commitments made by the County to the protection of the Gateway Preserve, or the County's upcoming commitments to watershed restoration and management.

Additionally, planning for the Gateway Area must recognize existing neighborhoods - Gateway is home and community to many people. The residential land uses contribute to both the vitality and diversity of the Gateway Area. Consequently, County projects and plans must be sensitive to neighborhood concerns and needs. For example, residents both in and outside of the Gateway Area have expressed concern over plans to expand Airport operations, particularly in regard to noise levels. Concerns such as these require creative and ongoing planning to resolve.

The following details provide further description and context to these types of concerns and relate natural surroundings and quality of life to the planning process for the Gateway Area.

### **■ ■ *Natural Resource Protection and Public Use Opportunities***

The Gateway Area contains at least two significant environmental features, the approximately 1,600 acre Gateway Preserve and the Cross Bayou Canal. The Gateway Preserve is a part of the County's network of managed environmental lands, managed by the Environmental Lands Division of the Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management. It is unique in that it was the first large environmental investment by the County for natural resource protection. Today, the Preserve is managed by the County for its significant regional habitat value and for its contribution to the overall goals of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. The Preserve was recently annexed by the City of St. Petersburg.

The Cross Bayou Canal bisects the County, and is navigable in portions. Off and on, the Canal has been the subject of discussion by the County as a possible canoe trail, or blueway. However, for several reasons, including security issues associated with the proximity to the Coast Guard Facility and the Black Hawk Training Facility, it has been difficult to advance a plan for such a use. Regardless, the Cross Bayou Canal remains a significant environmental feature in the Cross Bayou Watershed and water quality issues have contributed to its priority in the County's watershed planning program. Watershed diagnostics and planning are currently underway by staff from the County, the City of Largo, the City of Pinellas Park and the Southwest Florida Water Management District. The Cross Bayou watershed management initiative recently received a designation by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Land