Planning Commission Agenda

Date: **Thursday, October 22, 2026**

Location: **Dakota County Western Service Center, Room 106**

14955 Galaxie Avenue Apple Valley, MN 55124

Time: 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

I. Call to Order

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Public Comments

Anyone wishing to address the Planning Commission on an item not on the agenda may address the Planning Commission at this time (comments are limited to 5 minutes).

IV. Approval of Agenda

V. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes of Meeting Held on July 23, 2026

VI. Welcome New Planning Commissioner Mike Reed (Barry Graham – Vice Chair)

VII. Presentations

- **Greenway System Plan & Design Manual Update – Information (Tony Wotzka & Michael Honer – Parks)**
- **Preliminary Draft Mississippi River Greenway Long Range Plan – Review and Comment (John Mertens – Planning)**

VIII. Planning Manager Update and County Board Actions

- **Natural Systems Plan** – Draft plan released for public review; natural resource restoration and grant-funded projects continue.
- **Spring Lake Park Reserve Cultural Landscape Management Plan** – Consultant contract authorized; planning work underway.

- **Greenway System** – Multiple projects advancing, including North Creek, Lebanon Hills, Mississippi River and Minnesota River Greenways.
- **Veterans Memorial Greenway** – Phase 1 interpretive features and mural progressing; future phases moving into construction/design.
- **Park Ordinance 107** – Amendments adopted addressing park use, electric-powered devices, motorized recreation and enforcement.
- **2050 Comprehensive Plan Update** – Research and public engagement phase underway; work will continue into 2027.

IX. Upcoming Public Meetings/Community Outreach

- **October 21, 2026 –** Wentworth Avenue Trail Open House: 5–7 p.m., West St. Paul City Hall, 1616 Humboldt Avenue. Public open house regarding the Wentworth Avenue Trail.
- **October 22, 2026 –** Dodd Boulevard and Kenwood Trail Projects Open House: 4–6 p.m., Antlers Pavilion, Lakeville. Opportunity for community members to provide input on proposed improvements to Dodd Boulevard (CSAH 9) and Kenwood Trail (CSAH 50).
- **November 10, 2026 –** Lexington Avenue (CSAH 43) Trail Gap Open House: 4:30–6:30 p.m., Eagan City Hall, 3830 Pilot Knob Road. Public engagement regarding the proposed trail gap between Kenneth Street and Highway 55.
- **December 1, 2026 –** Dakota County Budget and Property Tax Open House and Public Hearing: Open house from 5–6 p.m., followed by the public hearing from 6–7 p.m., at the Dakota County Administration Center in Hastings.

X. Topics for Next Meeting

- 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update **– Project Introduction**
- Spring Lake Park Reserve Cultural Landscape Management Plan **– Project Introduction**
- 2026 Planning Commission Work Plan – Year-End Lookback **– Review of progress on 2026 projects and activities**

XI. Planning Commissioner Announcements/Updates

XII. Adjourn

Next Planning Commission Meeting: Thursday, November 19, 2026, 7 – 9 p.m.

Meeting Minutes: Dakota County Planning Commission Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes-DRAFT

Date: 07/23/2026
Minutes prepared by Liz Hansen
Location: Western Service Center, Conference Room L139

Attendance

Members Present

- Jerry Rich
- James Guttmann
- Tony Nelson
- Barry Graham
- Andrea Vaubel
- Kelly Kausel
- Lori Hansen
- Dennis Peine
- Jill Smith

Dakota County staff members attending:

- Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner
- Niki Geisler, Parks Director
- Tom Lewanski, Natural Resources Manager
- Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator

Member(s) Absent:

- Amy Hunting
- Steve Shurts
- Paul Nasvik
- Abdinasir Ibrahim

Meeting Called to Order

- Time: 7:00 p.m.
- By Chair Commissioner Guttmann
- Commissioner Peine arrived at 7:02 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

- The Planning Commission opened the meeting by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

DRAFT

Public Comments

- Comments/Notes: No audience member wished to address an item not on the agenda.

Approval of Agenda

Chair Guttmann asked if there were any changes to the agenda.

The Planning Commission advised no changes, additions, or deletions.

MOTION: Commissioner Vaubel moved, seconded by Commissioner Rich, approving the agenda. Voice vote: Ayes – 8 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (from May 28, 2026)

Chair Guttmann asked if there were any changes to the previous meeting's minutes.

The Planning Commission advised no changes, additions, or deletions.

MOTION: Commissioner Hansen moved, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, approving the previous meeting's minutes. Voice vote: Ayes – 9 – Nays – 0 Abstain – 0 – Approved

Draft Parks Natural Systems Plan, release for public review – Action

Tom Lewanski, Parks Natural Resources Manager, and Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner, provided a detailed update to the Planning Commission on the Agenda Topic.

Questions and comments by the planning commissioners, along with responses from staff (italics):

How many acres are designated as agricultural easements within the Conservation Focus Areas (CFAs)? *Staff responded that the total for ag easements is 7,799 acres and most are within the CFAs. Most of the state and federal lands, county conservation easements and many county parks are also located within the CFAs. The remaining CFA lands mostly involve connecting corridors that follow waterways and link various protected lands, forming a network of conserved lands.*

Is the county working with state agencies on encouraging agricultural easement landowners to adopt more Best Management Practices (BMPs)? *Staff responded that we primarily work with the Soil and Water Conservation District as they do extensive outreach to agricultural landowners on BMPs.*

The percentage of land in Dakota County that is publicly held appears to be quite high compared to other regions. *Staff explained that 9% of the land is estimated to be public open space, based on their research for the land conservation plan. While this may seem elevated locally, it is lower than state figures (Minnesota is estimated at 24% public open space) and national figures, as larger public land holdings are common in the Western United States.*

DRAFT

Are the goals for acquiring ten new natural area easements realistic? *Staff mentioned that several landowners are interested in pursuing easements, and plan to follow up with them. The numbers is also a projection, based on past Land Conservation Program performance and how many easements the program has secured each year over time.*

Maintenance funding comes from landowners, though their willingness to contribute may be limited. *Staff indicated that some volunteer effort, or sweat equity, is necessary for the restoration work. Additionally, such effort is essential for implementing and monitoring the natural resources plan. Landowners are paid for their easements and the hope is that they will use some portion of those payments for long-term stewardship of the land.*

If the land has restrictions, does that result in a tax benefit for the landowner as well? *Staff responded that they do not believe their real estate taxes are reduced. Although the appraisal value would be lower, leading to decreased taxes, staff will need to follow up to confirm this.*

A comment was made expressing gratitude to the staff for their prioritized consideration of the various funding scenarios.

At the Association of Minnesota Counties, can we prioritize statewide maintenance efforts? *Advocating for enhanced maintenance funding from the state and region is supported by staff. Staff are also exploring additional options; external grants for maintenance show promise.*

The Planning Commission examined the chart on Page 45 and observed a notable difference in the funding figures compared to the earlier version. *Staff clarified that the content shown in the presentation that evening had the correct numbers, based on a meeting earlier that week that discovered a lack of clarity with the original set of numbers.*

You may want to incorporate some narrative language into the paragraph above the table. *Staff indicated that the revised lead-in text to the table provides more clarity than the earlier version of the draft that the Commission received. The table in the meeting presentation is in a simpler format, identifying external funds and county funds.*

Please include a list of acronyms used throughout the document to serve as a handy reference for everyday readers. *Staff responded that this was a good idea, and one would be added.*

On page 56, in the volunteerism section, the number listed is 1,102. Are these figures accurate? *Staff responded that the volunteer participation numbers were received from the County's volunteer coordinator.*

Also, there is interest among volunteers in taking on more responsibilities, as current restrictions limit us. Additionally, securing more organizational naming rights could support the park's restoration efforts.

Does Dakota County have a policy regarding volunteer work when extreme weather or wildfire smoke prevents the work from taking place? *Staff responded that the county would notify volunteers about any weather-related adjustments.*

DRAFT

MOTION: Commissioner Rich moved, seconded by Commissioner Graham, approving the recommendation to the Physical Development Committee of the Whole to release the draft of the Natural Systems Plan for a 30 day public comment review period. Voice vote: Ayes – 9 – Nays – 0 Abstain – 0 – Approved

Planning Manager Update and County Board Actions

Comments/Notes: Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner provided the Planning Commission with an update on the following County Board Actions:

- Authorized executing contract with consultant for Spring Lake Park Reserve Cultural Landscape Plan
- Authorized executing contract with contractor for river access at Bud's landing
- Authorized entering into an agreement with Farmington for North Creek Greenway at Jim Bell Park
- Parks Ordinance 107 Amendment – Scheduled public hearing and comment period
- Veterans Greenway Mural installed near Rich Valley Athletic Complex

Upcoming Public Meetings/Community Outreach

Comments/Notes: Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner provided the Planning Commission with an update on upcoming public meetings and community outreach:

- County Road 50/County Road 5 Interchange at I-35 in Lakeville (CP 50-33) Public Open House - Thursday, August 27 (4:00-6:00pm) John Hennen Pavilion in the center of Antlers Park – 20141 Ipava Avenue, Lakeville MN 55044
- Minnesota River Greenway ribbon-cutting Save the Date: Wed. August 26, 11:30am-1pm Minnesota River Greenway, Lone Oak Trailhead, 2995 Sibley Memorial Hwy, Eagan

Topics for next meeting (Thursday, September 24, 2026, 7 – 9 p.m.)

Mary Jackson, Sr. Planner provided an overview of next month's meeting topics:

Mississippi River Greenway Long Range Plan – Release draft plan for public review

Planning Commissioner Announcements/Updates:

No planning commissioners gave any announcements or updates.

DRAFT

Adjournment

Chair Guttmann asked for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION: Commissioner Nelson moved, seconded by Commissioner Smith, to adjourn the meeting at 8:32 p.m. Voice Vote: Ayes – 9 – Nays – 0 – Unanimously Approved.

Next Meeting: Thursday, September 24, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., Dakota County Western Service Center, Apple Valley

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Hansen, Administrative Coordinator

DRAFT

Dakota County Planning Commission

Date: **Thursday, October 22, 2026**

Agenda Item: **Greenway System Plan and Design Manual Update**

Prepared By: **Michael Honer**

Purpose

The purpose of this presentation is to provide the Planning Commission with an update on the Greenway System Plan and Design Manual update that was initially presented to them as an upcoming project on 9/25/2025. We will be focusing primarily on the System Plan and its evolution from the Board-adopted Greenway Guidebook and looking to receive feedback on the proposed high-level changes between the two documents.

Background

Dakota County is updating its two primary guiding planning documents to have them better reflect the conditions of delivering and planning greenway projects today. This includes updating the definition of what a greenway is based on modern capabilities, regional standards, and expert feedback. This ultimately will foster transparent expectations from City partners when delivering plans and projects while also creating more consistent and high-quality greenway design and development.

Attachments

Greenway System Plan and Design Manual Update Presentation

Questions

The following questions are intended to help assist in review of the packet materials.

1. *Are you a greenway user? If yes, what is the primary feature that draws you to Dakota County Greenways? If not, what might make you more likely to use or visit one?*
2. *How have the County's needs, priorities, and community expectations changed since 2010?*
3. *Greenways provide improvements to water quality, habitat connection, transportation, and recreation opportunities for Dakota County communities. What other kinds of benefits do you see greenways providing?*

Greenway System Plan & Design Manual Update

Tony Wotzka, Greenways Manager
Michael Honer, Greenways Project Manager

Agenda

- Existing greenway planning and design documents
- Project overview and purpose
- System Plan updates
- Topics for discussion

Park Plans


2050 VISION PLAN
DAKOTA COUNTY PARKS
PARKS • GREENWAYS • NATURAL SYSTEMS
2050 Vision for Parks, Greenways, Natural Areas
Natural Resource Management System Plan
Visitor Services Plan
Greenway System Plan (greenway collaborative)
Individual unit plans for parks, greenways, County park natural areas

Current Plans

Greenway Guidebook

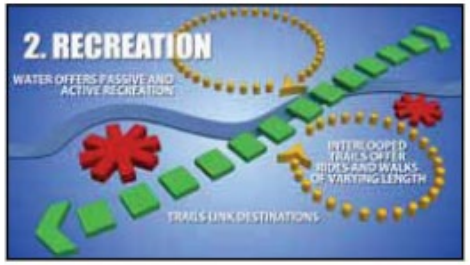
In 2010, Dakota County adopted The Greenway Collaborative that helped define the future Greenway vision and plan.



Greenways Connect Places Where People Want to Go











Current Plans

Greenway Design Guidelines

In 2020, a new document focused on providing detailed design guidelines. The document was intended to be used by municipalities, developers, and consultants to help provide design consistency across the system.

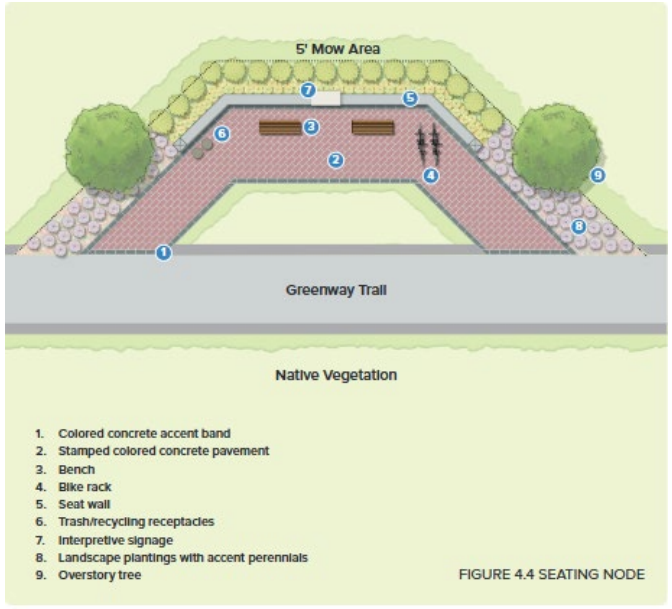


FIGURE 4.4 SEATING NODE

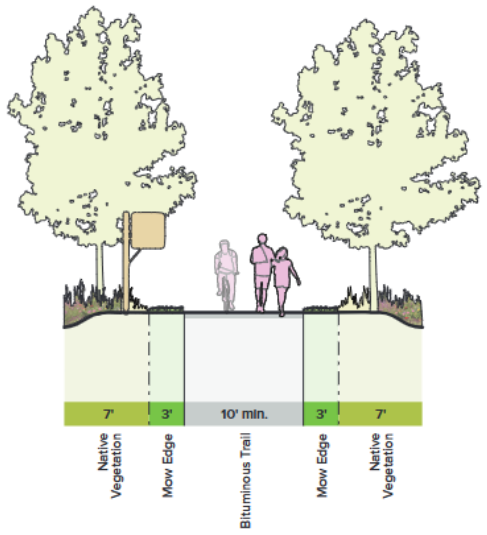


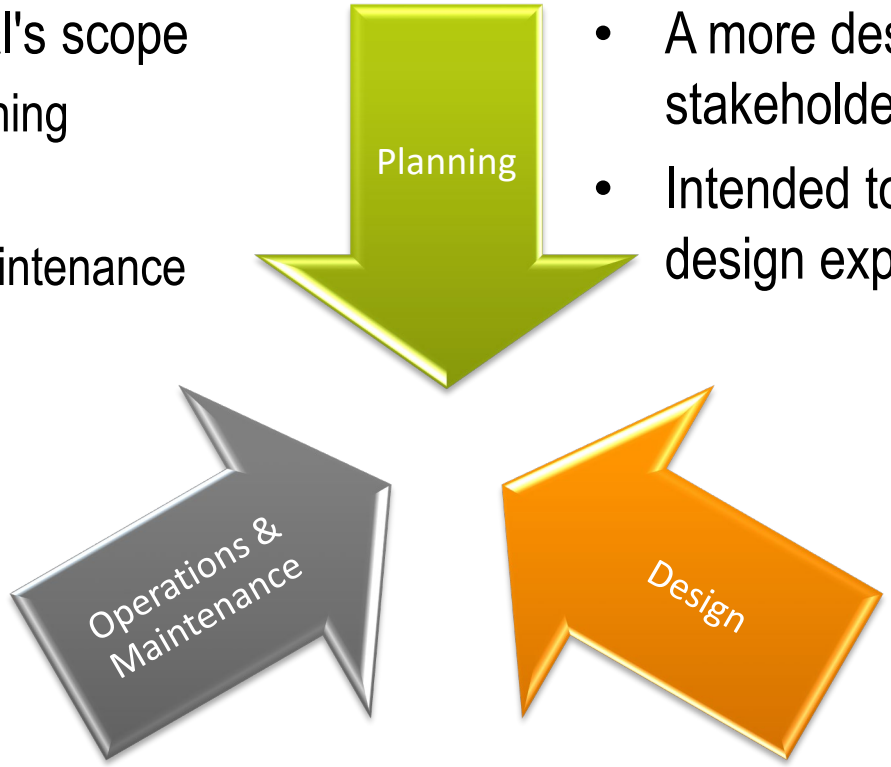
FIGURE 3.1 OPERATIONAL ZONE



Project Overview and Purpose

Greenway System Plan

- Evolution of the Greenway Guidebook
- Expands on the original's scope
  - Planning & Visioning
  - Policy
  - Operations & Maintenance

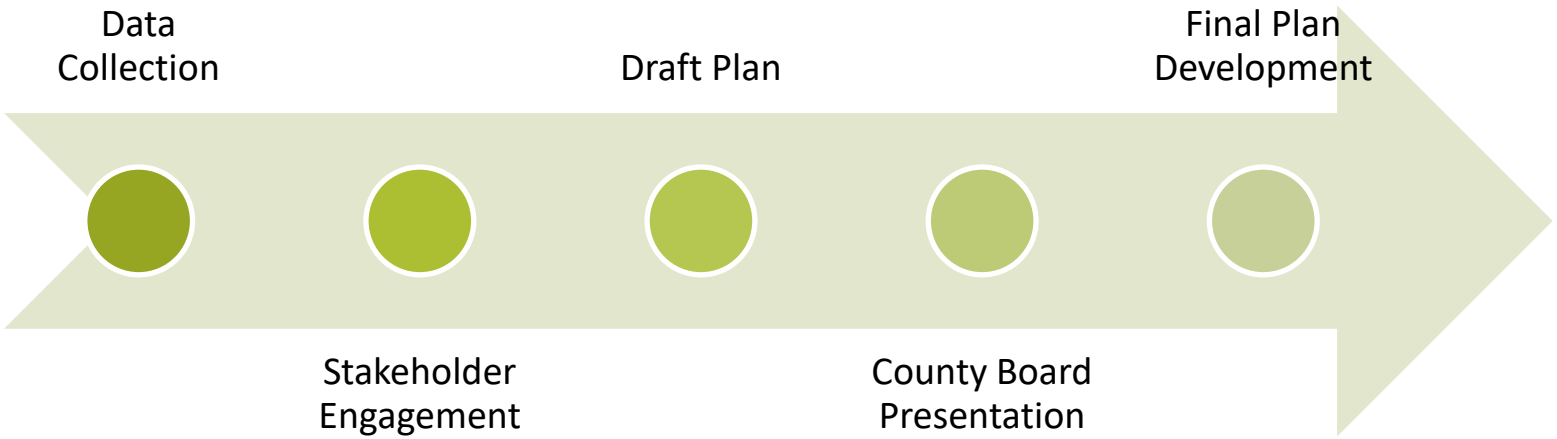


Greenway Design Manual

- Evolution of the Greenways Design Guidelines
- A more design-intensive document for project stakeholders at the design level
- Intended to improve project consistency and set design expectations

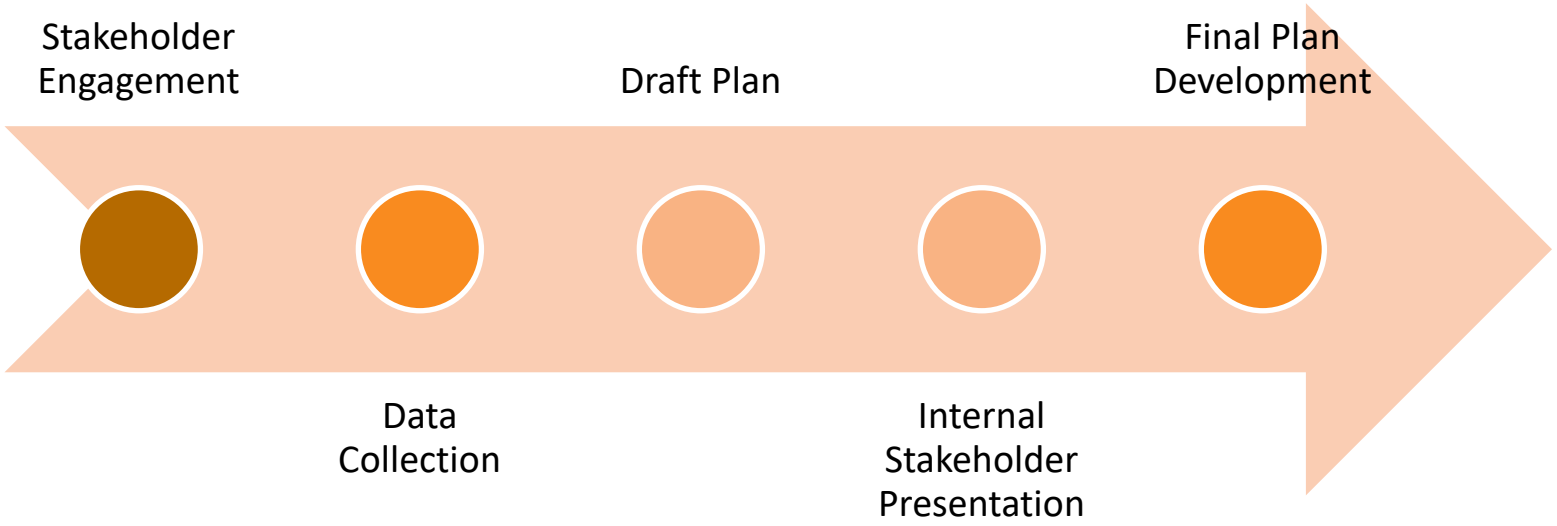
Project Overview and Purpose (Cont.)

Project Phases



Greenway System Plan

Greenway Design Guidebook



System Plan Updates



Building On Existing Partnerships

- Engaging city and internal partners
- Reviewing successes and failures
- Updating cost sharing and opportunities
- Revisiting operations and maintenance strategies

System Plan Updates

"Recreation" ⟶ "Visitor Experience"

- Public art
- Interpretation
- Story-telling
- Programming
- Greenway "activation"



System Plan Updates

Modernization

- Established system and new Greenways team
- Expanded City involvement
- Evolving capabilities and standards
- Growing visitation demands



Discussion Topic

Are you a greenway user?

If yes, what is the primary feature that draws you to Dakota County Greenways? If not, what might make you more likely to use or visit one?

Discussion Topic

It has been 15+ years since this original plan…

Are there changes in technology, design details, or user experience that this plan can help highlight, prioritize or plan for as the Greenway vision continues to grow, connect and activate?

Discussion Topic

Greenways provide improvements to water quality, habitat connection, transportation, and recreation opportunities for Dakota County communities.

What other kinds of benefits do you see greenways providing?

Thank You!




BDOTE
OHEYAWAHI


Fahey Trailhead
SPRING LAKE PARK RESERVE
ALL DOGS




Places We Served Memorial
MIA Prairie Memorial
Military Places In Dakota County Memorial
forever wild
VETERANS MEMORIAL GREENWAY



Dakota County Planning Commission

Date: **Thursday, October 22, 2026**

Agenda Item: **Mississippi River Greenway Long-Range Plan Update**

Prepared By: **John Mertens**

Purpose

Provide overview of preliminary draft of the Mississippi River Greenway – Long Range Plan prior to formal public release of plan. Meeting will provide opportunity to walk through the highlights of the plan with time for discussion and comments.

Background

The Mississippi River Greenway (MRG) is a local, regional and nationally significant recreational corridor. Building on decades of planning and development, this Long-Range Plan establishes the framework for the next era of the greenway – balancing its roles as a critical habitat corridor and a premier recreation destination. The overall goal of this planning effort is to transition the MRG from a primarily completed trail to a fully integrated greenway.

Goals and Objectives:

1. *Complete the Greenway Vision*
2. *Elevate User Experience*
3. *Establish Comprehensive Management Strategies*
4. *Position MRG for external grant funding*

Attachments

Preliminary Draft Mississippi River Greenway – Long Range Plan (Note this plan is still in process so focus of review should be on higher level content and organization).

Questions

The following questions are intended to help assist in review of the packet materials.

1. Does the plan flow and feel organized? Is it clear?
2. Plan has significantly utilized AI to generate graphics that illustrate potential improvement along the greenway. Are the renderings effective? realistic? too much? etc.
3. Provide general feedback?



MISSISSIPPI RIVER GREENWAY

Long Range Plan

DRAFT

Preliminary Draft for Planning Commission Review

OCTOBER 2026

Dakota COUNTY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dakota County Project Core Team

- **John Mertens** - *Principal Planner*
- **Lil Leatham** - *Principal Planner*
- **Autumn Hubbell** - *Outdoor Education*
- **Michael Honer** - *Greenway Project Manager*
- **Beth Landhal** - *Visitor Services Manager*
- **Tony Wotzka** - *Greenway Manager*

Dakota County Board of Commissioners

- **District 1** - *Mike Slavik*
- **District 2** - *Joe Atkins*
- **District 3** - *Laurie Halvorson, 2026 Chair*
- **District 4** - *William (Bill) Droste*
- **District 5** - *Liz Workman*
- **District 6** - *Mary Liz Holberg*
- **District 7** - *Mary Hamann-Roland*

Thank you to all of the community members who provided input during this process

DAKOTA COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

- Dennis Piene
- Jerry Rich
- Amy Hunting
- Lori Hansen
- Jill Smith
- Paul Nasvik
- Barry Graham
- Abdinasir Ibrahim
- John Wallace
- Stephen Shurts
- James Guttmann
- Anthony Nelson
- Kelly Kausel

PROJECT TEAM

PROJECT LEAD

HKGi

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

EOR

INDIGENOUS/INTERPRETIVE PLANNING

Full Circle Indigenous Planning + Design

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**Select content within this plan was supported using Gemini 3 AI software*



UP NEXT:

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

01 INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW



Section Content:

i Project Purpose
ii Past Planning
iii Corridor Framework

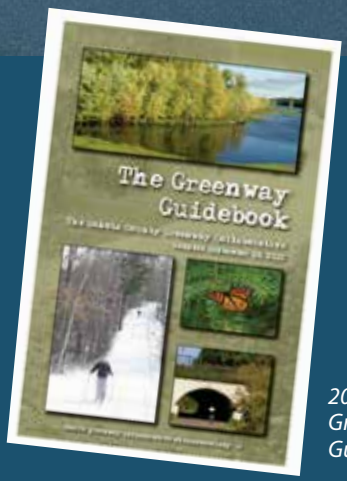
i PROJECT PURPOSE

WHY PLAN?

The Mississippi River Greenway (MRG) is a recreational asset of local, regional, and national significance. Building on decades of persistence and visionary development, this Long-Range Plan (LRP) establishes the framework for the next era of the greenway—balancing its roles as a critical habitat corridor and a premier recreation destination.

The purpose of this planning effort is to transition the MRG from a primarily completed trail to a fully integrated greenway.

This section will describe: The goals, objectives, and vision for the future of the Mississippi River Greenway (MRG).



2010 Greenway Guidebook

LONG RANGE PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The following outlines an integrated vision for the Mississippi River Greenway, ensuring it serves as a premier destination for recreation, a vital transportation artery, and a resilient ecological corridor.

1. Standardize and Complete the Vision

Create a cohesive framework that balances development with environmental health. While much of the MRG is in place, this plan applies the ***Dakota County Greenway*** standards to ensure a consistent, high-quality experience across the entire corridor. New projects identified within this plan are designed to:

- **Protect and Restore:** Revitalize native habitats and strengthen biodiversity along the river corridor.
- **Enhance Water Quality:** Implement sustainable practices to protect the Mississippi River watershed.
- **Enrich Experience:** Offer diverse recreation and seamless non-motorized mobility for all users.
- **Establish Regional and Local Connections:** Strategic trail extensions and investment in trail infrastructure that improves access to and along the greenway, and create trail loops.

2. Elevate the User Experience

Beyond basic infrastructure, this plan introduces **"Ideas"** to activate the greenway. This includes:

- **Unique Amenities:** Designing signature facilities and rest points.
- **Dynamic Programming:** Planning for events, educational interpretation, and recreational activities that draw visitors year-round.
- **Local Connectivity:** Strengthening the links between the greenway and the neighborhoods it serves, creating trail loop experiences.
- **Responsible Growth:** Alternative alignments that respond to geographic, environmental, and community needs; including supportive on-road bike routes and alternative alignments to improve user experience and manage user conflicts.

3. Establish Management Strategies

Provide a roadmap for the long-term success of the MRG, specifically focusing on:

- **Resource Stewardship:** Proactive land acquisition and habitat management that support the recently approved NRMP.
- **Sustainable Operations:** Clear guidelines for development, maintenance, and daily operations.
- **Dynamic Interpretation:** Strategies to share the cultural, historical, and natural stories of the river.

4. Position for External Grant Funding

As a designated regional trail system, the MRG must evolve alongside broader regional goals. This document satisfies the ***Metropolitan Council's 2050 Regional Parks Policy Plan*** requirements, ensuring the greenway remains eligible for essential regional funding and support by developing ideas for tangible projects and providing high-level cost projections for priority projects to inform capital planning.

5. Explore Big Ideas

This plan acts as a capstone document that honors and documents previous planning successes while creating the space for new, innovative enhancements. By synthesizing past efforts with fresh stakeholder input—gathered through in-person and digital engagement—the Long Range Plan ensures the greenway reflects the diverse needs of today's residents and agencies.



Swing Bridge, Inver Grove Heights

**The ultimate goal of this plan is to ensure the Mississippi River Greenway remains a resilient ecological corridor and a vibrant community landmark for generations to come.*

CORE ELEMENTS OF THE GREENWAY VISION

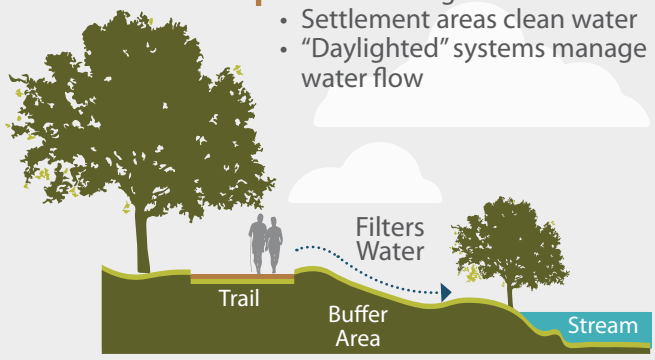
Dakota County's greenway concept expands the notion of corridor to integrate habitat, recreation, water quality, transportation, and art and interpretation to create a county-wide green infrastructure network.

Vision Elements

Water Quality

Buffer strips filter water before entering streams

- Settlement areas clean water
- "Daylighted" systems manage water flow



Transportation

With trails, greenways link destinations



Separation from roadways improves safety and the experience

Habitat

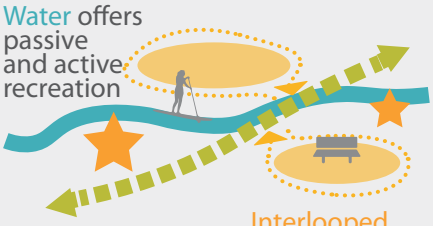
Corridors link habitats for plants and animals



Greenway Hubs Create Habitats

Recreation

Greenways are linear parks



Interlooped trails offer rides and walks of varying lengths

Art & Interpretation

Along trails enhance the user experience



GREENWAY SYSTEM

- *Greenway Design and Infrastructure (Transportation, Trail, Road Crossings)*
- *Greenway Activation + Programming*
- *Visitor Services: Restrooms, Accessibility, Trailheads, Signage, Interpretation, and Art*
- *Land Protection & Stewardship (Habitat + Water Quality)*
- *Governance & Funding*
- *Operations & Maintenance*

PAST PLANNING

WHY REVIEW PAST PLANS?

The 2026 Mississippi River Greenway Long Range Plan builds on decades of planning along the corridor.

Reviewing past plans provides valuable context to how the surrounding area has evolved and recognizing that it will continue to change in the future.

This section describes: Existing projects and plans that have occurred along the Mississippi River Greenway over the past 30 years, and projects that are currently underway.

EXISTING CORRIDOR-WIDE PROJECTS & PLANS

1998



Mississippi River Regional Trail Plan

Original trail plan for the Mississippi River Regional Trail.

2009



Hastings to Red Wing Trail Plan

A master plan for a trail corridor connecting the Mississippi River Greenway to Goodhue County and the City of Red Wing.

2014



Mississippi River Trail Interpretive + Experience Design

A plan outlining 10 locations for interpretive nodes, content, and visual language for the Mississippi River Greenway.

2018



Connecting People to the Mississippi River

A study by Dakota County identifying new opportunities to connect people to the Mississippi River while using the Mississippi River Greenway. This plan details current, planned, and future nodes for recreation, overlooks, interpretive elements, and more.

2025



2050 Dakota County Parks and Natural Systems Vision Plan

A plan on shaping Dakota County's park system, greenway system, and natural system over the next 25 years in accordance with community values.

2025



Mississippi River Greenway Natural Resources Management Plan

A natural resource management plan for the Mississippi River Greenway describing geology, water resources, soils, vegetation, and wildlife. It includes approaches to providing community assets, controlling invasive species, connecting natural areas, and improving habitat.

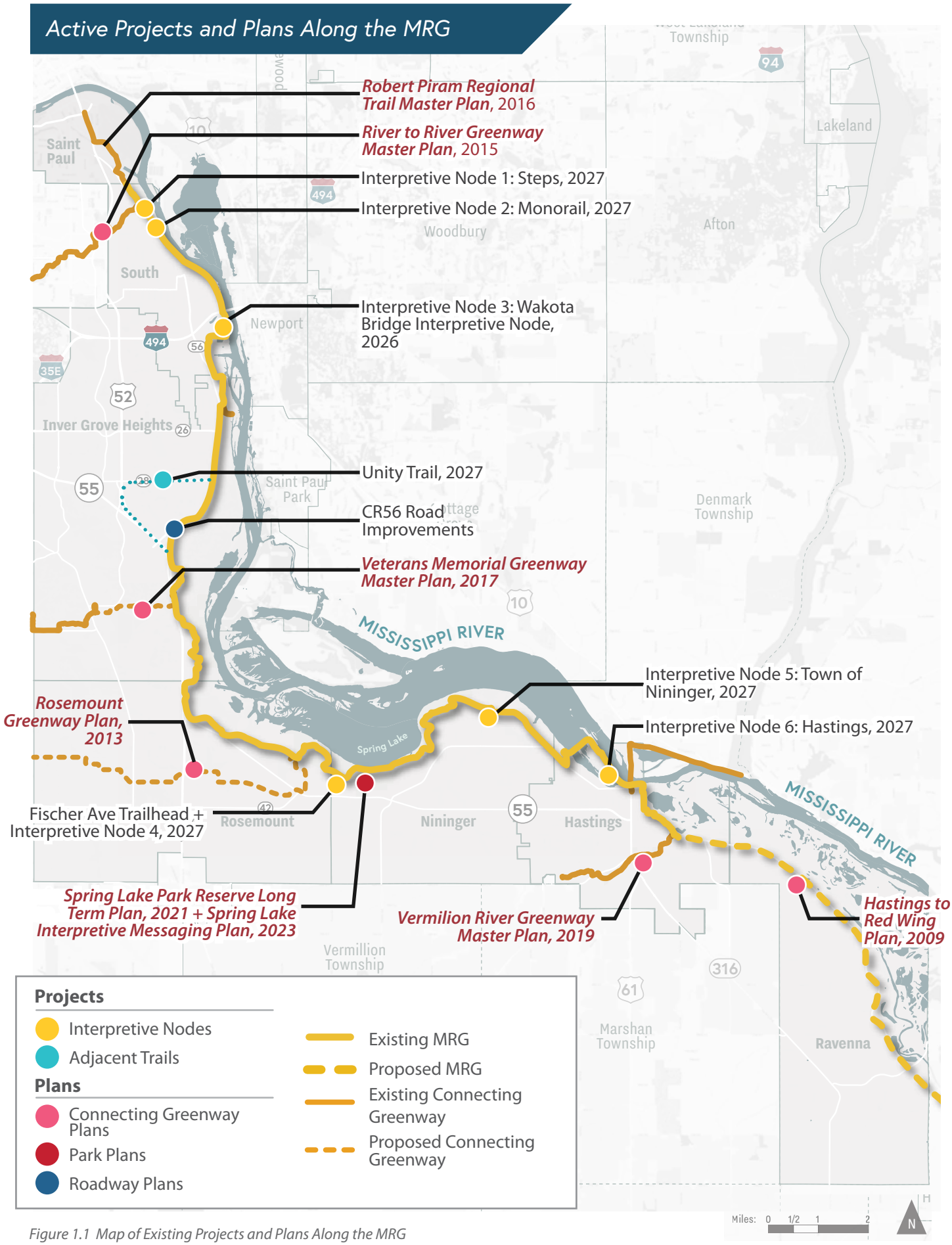
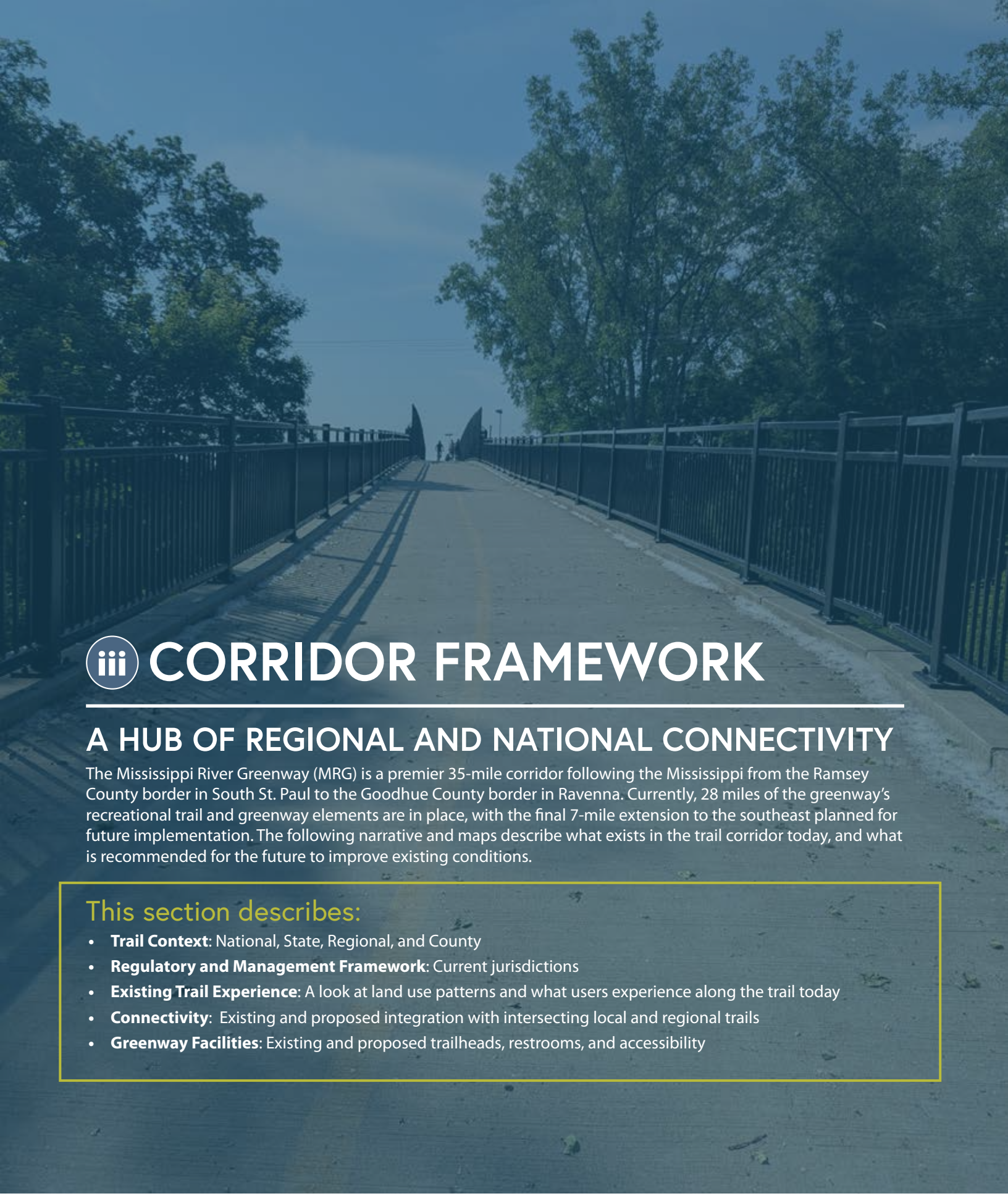


Figure 1.1 Map of Existing Projects and Plans Along the MRG



CORRIDOR FRAMEWORK

A HUB OF REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

The Mississippi River Greenway (MRG) is a premier 35-mile corridor following the Mississippi from the Ramsey County border in South St. Paul to the Goodhue County border in Ravenna. Currently, 28 miles of the greenway's recreational trail and greenway elements are in place, with the final 7-mile extension to the southeast planned for future implementation. The following narrative and maps describe what exists in the trail corridor today, and what is recommended for the future to improve existing conditions.

This section describes:

- **Trail Context**: National, State, Regional, and County
- **Regulatory and Management Framework**: Current jurisdictions
- **Existing Trail Experience**: A look at land use patterns and what users experience along the trail today
- **Connectivity**: Existing and proposed integration with intersecting local and regional trails
- **Greenway Facilities**: Existing and proposed trailheads, restrooms, and accessibility

TRAIL CONTEXT:

The Mississippi River Greenway (MRG) is a segment of an expansive recreation and transportation network, positioning Dakota County as a vital link in both statewide and national trail systems.

A National Destination: U.S. Bicycle Route 45

The MRG serves as a segment of the ***Mississippi River Trail (MRT),*** also known as ***U.S. Bicycle Route 45.*** This iconic route spans the entire length of the Mississippi River, from its headwaters at Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico.

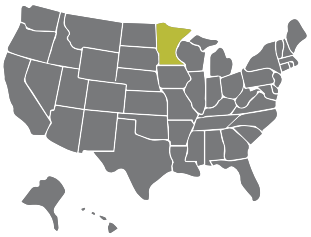
MRT | National





Figure 1.2 National Mississippi River Trail (Map from Urban St. Louis)

MRT | State



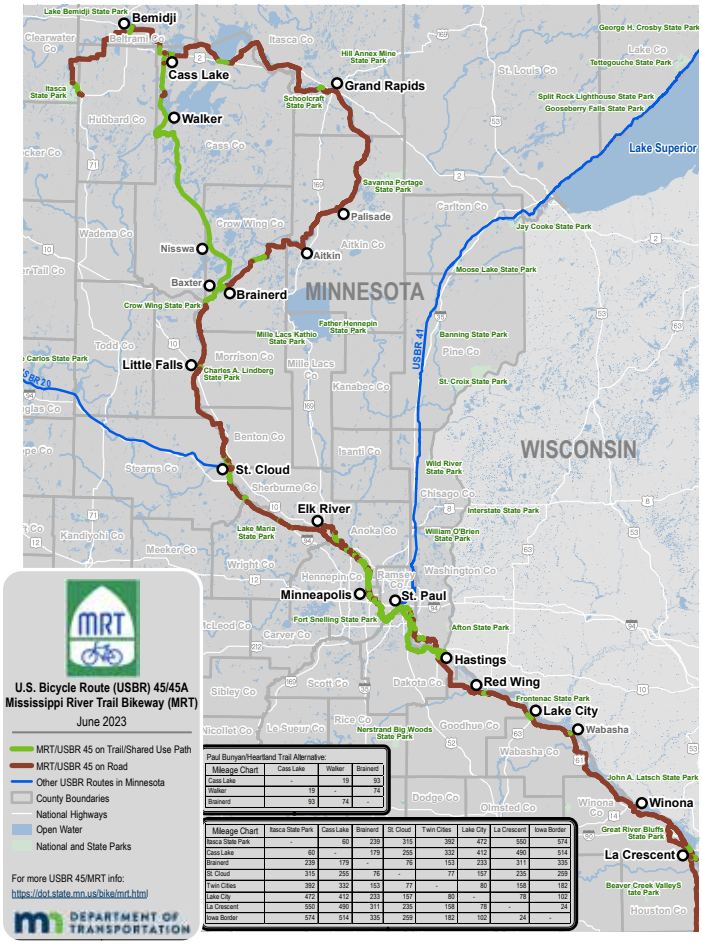


Figure 1.3 MN DOT Mississippi River Trail Route

The Backbone of the Dakota County System

Locally, the MRG is the largest corridor within Dakota County's ambitious ***250-mile greenway network***. It serves as a primary "spine" for the county, weaving together:

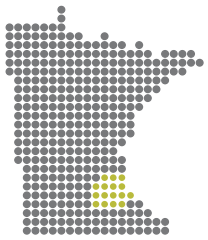
- **Natural Landscapes:** Providing seamless access to scenic riverfronts and regional parklands.
- **Community Hubs:** Linking residential neighborhoods directly to retail districts and employment centers.
- **Integrated Transportation:** Functioning as a non-motorized highway that promotes sustainable commuting and healthy lifestyles.

The Confluence of Networks

The MRG is more than just a path; it is the intersection where local neighborhood life meets national exploration. By bridging the gap between local city trails and interstate bicycle routes, the greenway provides residents with a backyard connection to the rest of the country.

By providing nearly 35 miles of uninterrupted, off-road cycling, the Dakota County segment represents one of the most accessible stretches of the entire 3,000-mile Mississippi River Trail.

MRT | Regional



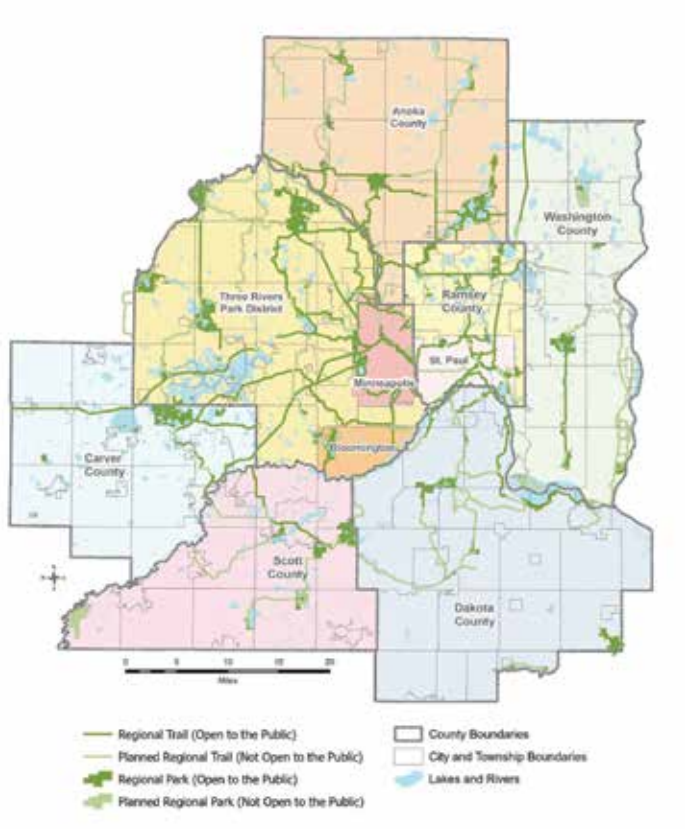


Figure 1.4 Metropolitan Council Regional Parks and Trails System (Source: Metropolitan Council)

MRT | County



***The Off-Road Advantage:**

While many segments of the 10-state MRT require cyclists to share the road with motor vehicles, the Dakota County section offers a distinct, high-quality experience with **28 miles of dedicated, off-road trail.**

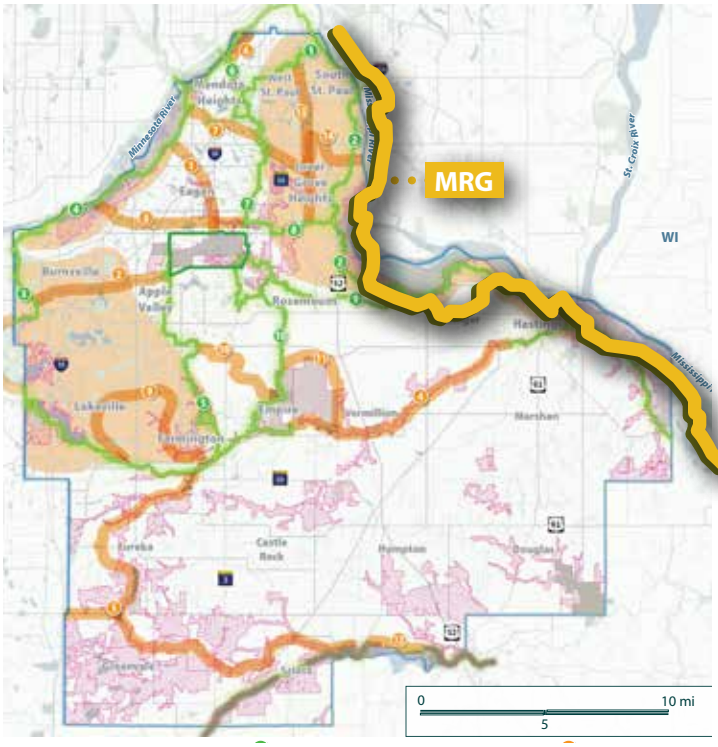


Figure 1.5 Dakota County Greenway System

REGULATORY & MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Mississippi River Greenway (MRG) operates within two significant overlapping jurisdictions that guide its conservation and development.

Mississippi National River & Recreation Area (MNRRA)

The MRG spans a major portion of the **MNRRA**, a 72-mile "partnership park" managed by the **National Park Service (NPS)**. Established in 1988, this model relies on coordination between the NPS and local partners to educate, coordinate management, and preserve resources.

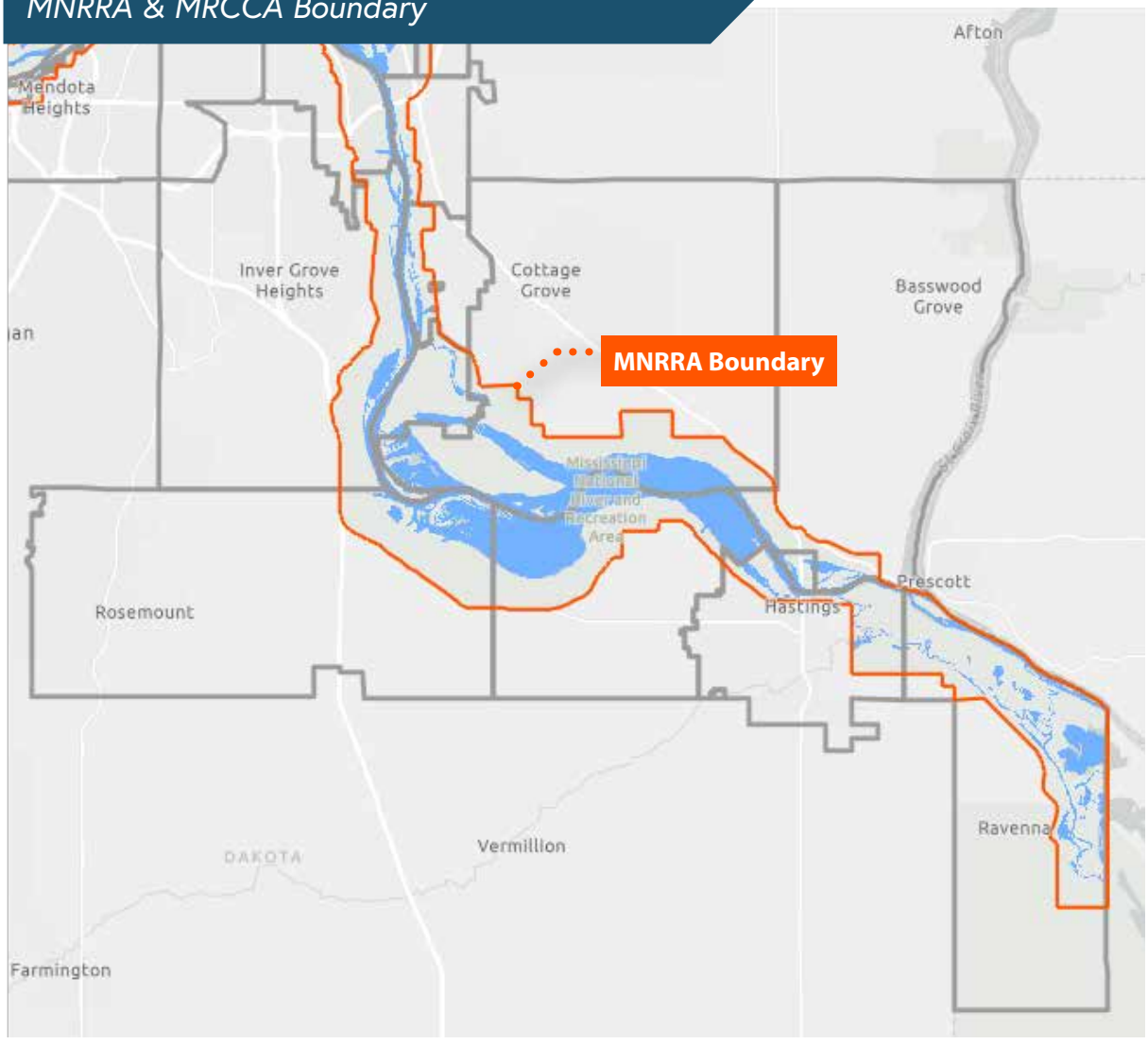
For more information about the MNRRA, visit https://www.nps.gov/miss/index.htm

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA)

Much of the trail is governed by the **MRCCA** designation (Minnesota Statutes, section 116G.15). This state-level protection ensures that development along the river prevents irreversible damage, balances utility and preservation, and adheres to strict standards.

For more information about the MRCCA, visit https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/waters/watermgmt_section/critical_area/index.html

MNRRA & MRCCA Boundary



**This Long-Range Plan is designed to align with the management goals of both the National Park Service and the Minnesota DNR to ensure the greenway remains a protected regional resource.*

Figure 1.6 MNRRA & MRCCA Boundary

EXISTING TRAIL EXPERIENCES

The goal for Dakota County greenways is to be away from roads, within a natural corridor, for at least 80% of the trail distance. The MRG trail covers several different experiences:



Levee Trail Experience

There are two levee areas—South St Paul and Hastings. They make up about 3 miles of trail. The Levee is characterized by close proximity to the river, long stretches of uninterrupted trail, and limited access points.



Natural Trail Experience

There are two major natural area experiences along the trail, spanning about 8 miles of the trail. Nature experiences along the trail include forested areas, native prairies, ravines, and river views.



Urban Roadway Trail Experience

The urban roadway portion of the trail follows Concord Boulevard for approximately 3 miles. This trail experience is characterized by the trail following along a county road, multiple road crossings, and passing suburban neighborhoods and big box retail.



Rural Roadway

There is one existing rural roadway experience along the MRG that spans appropriately 1.5 miles in Nininger. Another rural roadway experience is proposed through Ravenna. This portion of the trail passes through farmland along sparsely populated roadways.



Industrial Backyards Trail Experience

The industrial backyards experience follows about 6 miles of trail. These portions of trail pass factories, oil refineries, and other large industrial centers. There is a higher rate of fencing along the trail in these areas.



Figure 1.7 MRG Trail Experiences Map

CONNECTIVITY

The greenway serves as a link between diverse destinations and natural landmarks, including:

- **Suburban Communities:** Connecting the growing communities along the river through rural and industrial areas.
- **Ecological Treasures:** Providing access to the rugged beauty of Spring Lake Park Reserve, Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) and the Gores Pool DNR Wildlife Management Area (WMA) along the Mississippi River back waters.
- **Regional Parks:** Weaving together local and regional trail networks into a seamless recreation system brings people to the river.

Regional Trail Connections

One notable feature of the MRG is the lack of connections across the river. The Mississippi River is a natural barrier to the regional and local trail network; along the 28 miles of existing trail within Dakota County there are only two river crossings.



River to River Greenway connection

River to River Greenway

This trail connects the Mississippi River Greenway in Kaposia Landing to the Big Rivers Regional Trail in Lilydale. The 7.7 mile corridor links many public spaces including schools, parks, libraries, community centers, and more.



View from MRG near proposed Veterans Memorial Greenway Connection

Veterans Memorial Greenway

Trail connecting the Mississippi River Greenway to Lebanon Hills Regional Park through Eagan and Inver Grove Heights. This trail is a five-mile, east-west corridor traversing open rural space and residential neighborhoods with eight different interpretive nodes. A Veterans Memorial Greenway segment connecting to the MRG is scheduled for completion in 2028 or 2029.



Spring Lake Park near proposed Rosemount Greenway connection

Rosemount Greenway

This proposed trail will connect downtown Rosemount to the Mississippi River Greenway at Spring Lake Park Reserve. It is a 13 mile route almost entirely within the City of Rosemount that links various regional parks to the MRG and the Vermilion Highlands Greenway. Completion of Rosemount Greenway to MRG connection is expected within the next 10 years.



Hastings MN River Bridge

Point Douglas Trail (Washington County)

The Point Douglas Regional Trail in Washington County is a 3.5 mile paved trail that travels along Highway 61 to Point Douglas Park, and connects the Mississippi River Greenway to Prescott, Wisconsin.



Vermillion Falls

Vermillion River Greenway

This trail is approximately 5.6 miles long and links the Mississippi River Greenway from Ravenna Trail to Vermillion Falls Park through Hastings. There is a search corridor to extend this greenway west to connect it to the Vermillion Highlands Greenway, ending in the city of Farmington.

Connecting Regional Trails



Figure 1.8 Map of Regional Trails That Connect to the MRG



UP NEXT:

VISITOR SERVICES

02 VISITOR SERVICES PLAN

Section Content:

- i Trends In Recreation
- ii Visitor Services Recommendations
- iii Key Initiatives
- iv Public Art
- v Interpretation

i TRENDS IN RECREATION

OVERVIEW

Studying emerging trends in recreation helps to identify what users are seeking in parks and trails on a national level, what amenities to provide, and what facilities they desire most. The Mississippi River Greenway (MRG) is evolving to meet the shifting demands of modern trail users, from high-intensity adventure sports to tech-driven mobility.

This section describes: What activities, amenities, and facilities people want to see along the MRG; and what is popular on a national level that could help make the MRG a premium destination.

ANALYZING TRENDS IN RECREATION



Trail Running & Outdoor Adventure

Demand for off-road, trail-based recreation is rising rapidly. The MRG facilitates this through:

- **Soft-Surface Trails:** Access to rugged hiking and running terrain in Spring Lake Park and Pine Bend Bluffs.
- **Event Potential:** Opportunity for organized trail runs and amateur "adventure triathlons" (cycling, kayaking, and trail running).



Birding

Birding has become a premier activity, with nearly **37% of Americans** participating. The MRG is uniquely positioned along the **Mississippi River Flyway**, offering world-class sightings:

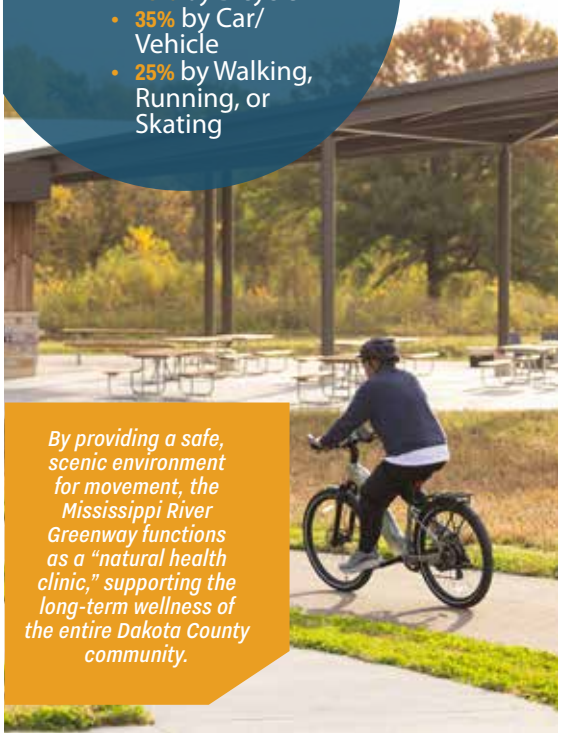
- **Migratory Path:** Warblers and songbirds use the river corridor for seasonal travel.
- **Bluff Thermals:** Eagles, hawks, and vultures frequently fly at eye level along the river bluffs.
- **Resources:** NPS Birding Guide (https://www.nps.gov/miss/planyourvisit/ptgkeybirdswildlife.htm) | FWS Upper Mississippi (https://www.fws.gov/refuge/upper-mississippi-river/visit-us/activities/birding)

These trends emphasize the need for a multi-functional greenway that supports both quiet nature observation and high-energy recreational events.

Current Trail Access Trends

A 2021 study reveals how visitors arrive at Dakota County trails:

- **40%** by Bicycle
- **35%** by Car/ Vehicle
- **25%** by Walking, Running, or Skating



By providing a safe, scenic environment for movement, the Mississippi River Greenway functions as a "natural health clinic," supporting the long-term wellness of the entire Dakota County community.

Physical and Mental Health: The Value of Active Living

The Mississippi River Greenway (MRG) provides the infrastructure necessary for both physical vitality and mental well-being.

Physical Health & Disease Prevention

Regular moderate activity is a proven defense against chronic conditions.

Mental Well-being & Resilience

Access to "green space" is linked to psychological benefits.

- **Nature's Impact:** Spending time along the river corridor increases positive emotions, reduces anxiety, and improves sleep quality.
- **Exercise as Therapy:** Consistent movement on the trail provides immediate stress relief, boosts energy levels, and enhances mood.
- **Built for Health:** Communities with robust trail infrastructure and "active living" programming foster populations that are measurably more active, happier, and healthier.

Interpretation: Connecting People to Place

Interpretation transforms the Mississippi River Greenway from a simple path into a meaningful narrative journey. As Dakota County evolves, preserving its natural and cultural history through landscape design, signage, and digital storytelling is essential to fostering a sense of place.

Key interpretive themes for the MRG include:

Heritage & Settlement

- **Indigenous History:** Telling the stories of pre-settlement landscapes and the enduring presence of Tribal groups.
- **Pioneer Foundations:** Documenting early European settlements, ferry crossings, and historic wagon roads.
- **Milestones & Myths:** Highlighting local legends, from the invention of Town Ball to the expansion of the St. Paul Stockyards.

Natural Wonders & Ecology

- **Geology:** Exploring the ancient forces that shaped the river bluffs and the wider landscape.
- **The Living River:** Showcasing the diverse wildlife, native plants, and the delicate ecology of the Mississippi Flyway.
- **Water Stewardship:** Educating users on the river's role in modern infrastructure, including drinking water systems and lock-and-dam operations.

Industry & Movement

- **The Working River:** Exploring the history of riverborne industry, railroad development, and the Mississippi's role as a national transportation artery.
- **Recreation & Vitality:** Promoting the benefits of active living, fishing, and boating as part of the river's long-standing recreational legacy.



By providing a safe, scenic environment for movement, the Mississippi River Greenway functions as a "natural health clinic," supporting the long-term wellness of the entire Dakota County community.





The Rise of E-Bikes

E-bikes are the fastest-growing segment in cycling, with Minnesota sales doubling.

- **Benefits:** Lowers barriers for those with physical limitations and increases cargo/child-carrying capacity.
- **Management:** Currently permitted on all Dakota County trails, though increased speeds require proactive safety management to protect pedestrians and traditional cyclists.

Interest in bikepacking—multi-day adventure cycling with camping gear—has surged

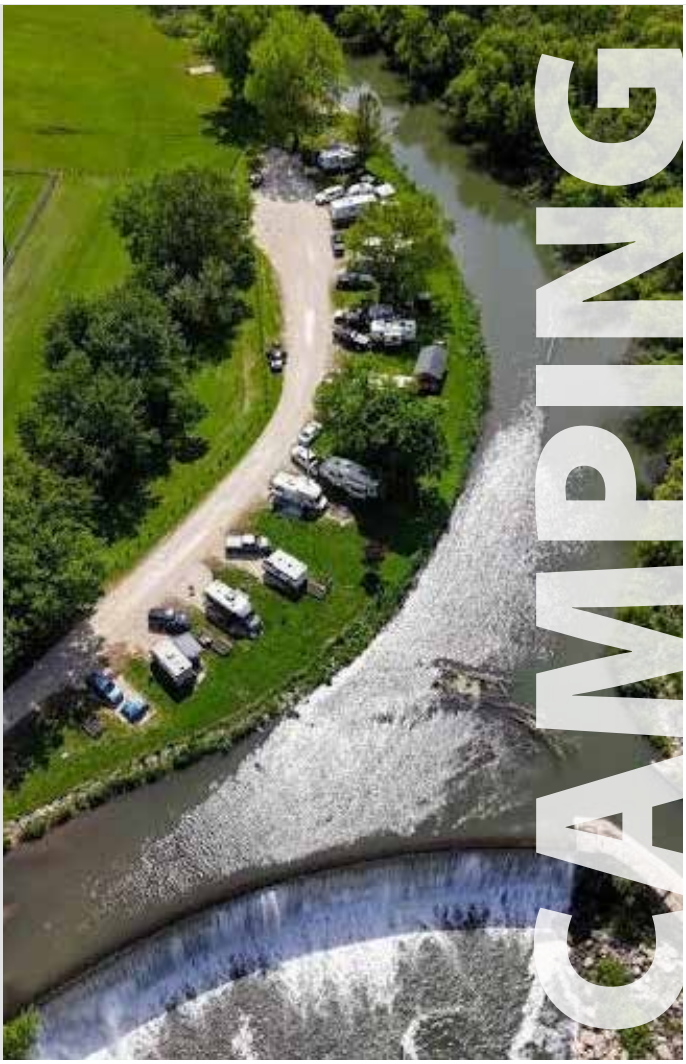
200% since 2015.



Bikepacking and Camping

Interest in bikepacking—multi-day adventure cycling with camping gear—has surged 200% since 2015.

- **The Opportunity:** The MRG serves as a vital link for weekend excursions from the Twin Cities or as a segment of the 3,000-mile Mississippi River Trail.



Need for Camping Facilities

There is the opportunity and desire for bike touring and camping along the MRG. Further study is needed to determine where these optimal spots along the corridor would be located. Some existing hospitality options exist today, but most are more formal (hotels/motels) and don't fully immerse visitors in the active lifestyle and surrounding beauty of the riverfront environment that the Mississippi River corridor offers to users.





ii VISITOR SERVICES RECOMMENDATIONS

CREATING AN ENJOYABLE GREENWAY EXPERIENCE

Visitor Services enhance the greenway experience. The greenway is more than a trail, but a place to view bison, stop and have a picnic, learn about the past, and explore natural spaces. Additional facilities and amenities are desired by users along the MRG to create connections, access, easy navigation, and provide comfort amenities like clean restrooms and drinking water are essential to shape spaces and experiences users will want to revisit again and again.

This section describes:

- **Greenway Design and Facilities**: Frequent access points and connections to local neighborhoods and businesses are essential to get users to the MRG. This spread looks at the trailheads and neighborhood gateways that exist today, the difference between the two, and maps out existing and desired amenities at each point along the MRG.
- **Additional Support Amenities**: Items like online mapping, wayfinding, trail closure information, and crossing treatments are necessary to create a cohesive and safe experience along the MRG.

Trailheads and Neighborhood Gateways

Frequent access is a priority for the Mississippi River Greenway. Two generalized types of greenway and trail access points are recommended:

- **Trailheads** are intended for regional and local access;
- **Neighborhood gateways** primarily are for local access at opportune locations.

Typically, access points will be at recreation destinations, activity centers and trail intersections. Here trail users will find support facilities such as water and restrooms as well as greenway information. Trailheads are the primary greenway access points and will serve people who drive, walk, bike or take transit to the greenway.

Trailheads should include:

- Water (accessible drinking water)
- Motor vehicle parking
- Secure bicycle parking/ bike repair stations
- Picnic areas and/or facilities
- Wayfinding and traffic control
- Restrooms
- Interpretation
- Benches
- Food where opportune
- Shelter and shade
- Local and/or regional trail connections

Existing Conditions:



Fahey Ave Trailhead



Pine Bend Bluffs Trailhead



Wakota Bridge Park Trailhead



'The Portland Loo' Self Cleaning Restroom

Self-Cleaning Restrooms

Explore options to provide self-cleaning restrooms at certain locations to reduce the need for frequent maintenance.



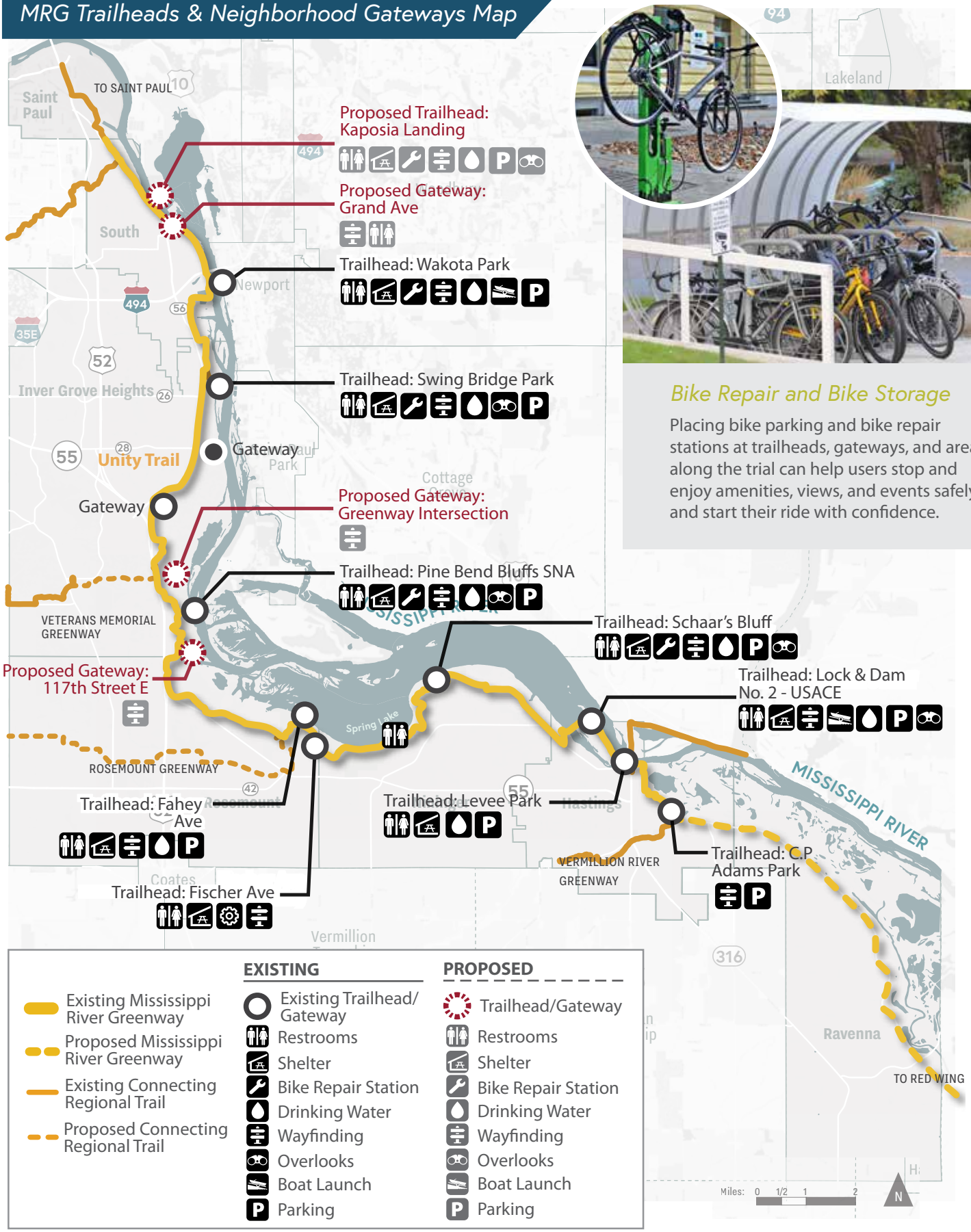
Mobile Restrooms

Explore options to provide mobile restroom facilities at certain locations to help support programs along the greenway.

Restrooms: Existing Facilities & Recommendations

Site	Owner	Type	Recommendation
Kaposia Landing	City of South Saint Paul	Port-a-Potty	Full Service Restroom
Grand Avenue Gateway	City Portable (Future City/ County)	Port-a-Potty	Enhanced portable restroom
Wakota Bridge	City/County	Full Service Restroom	
Swing Bridge Park	Dakota County	Full Service Restroom	
Pine Bend Bluffs	Dakota County	Full Service Restroom	
Fahey Ave Trailhead	Dakota County	Full Service Restroom	
Fisher Ave Trailhead	Dakota County	Full Service Restroom	
Long Bridge	Dakota County		Enhanced portable restroom
Schaar's Bluff	Dakota County	Full Service Restroom	
Lock & Dam 2	Army Corp of Engineers	Full Service Restroom	Enhance wayfinding and partnership with USACE
Levee Park	City of Hastings	Full Service Restroom	

MRG Trailheads & Neighborhood Gateways Map



Bike Repair and Bike Storage

Placing bike parking and bike repair stations at trailheads, gateways, and areas along the trial can help users stop and enjoy amenities, views, and events safely and start their ride with confidence.

Figure 2.1 Map of Trailhead Facilities on the MRG

GREENWAY SUPPORT FACILITIES:

Camping & Visitor Center



Figure 2.2 Possible camping and visitor center locations

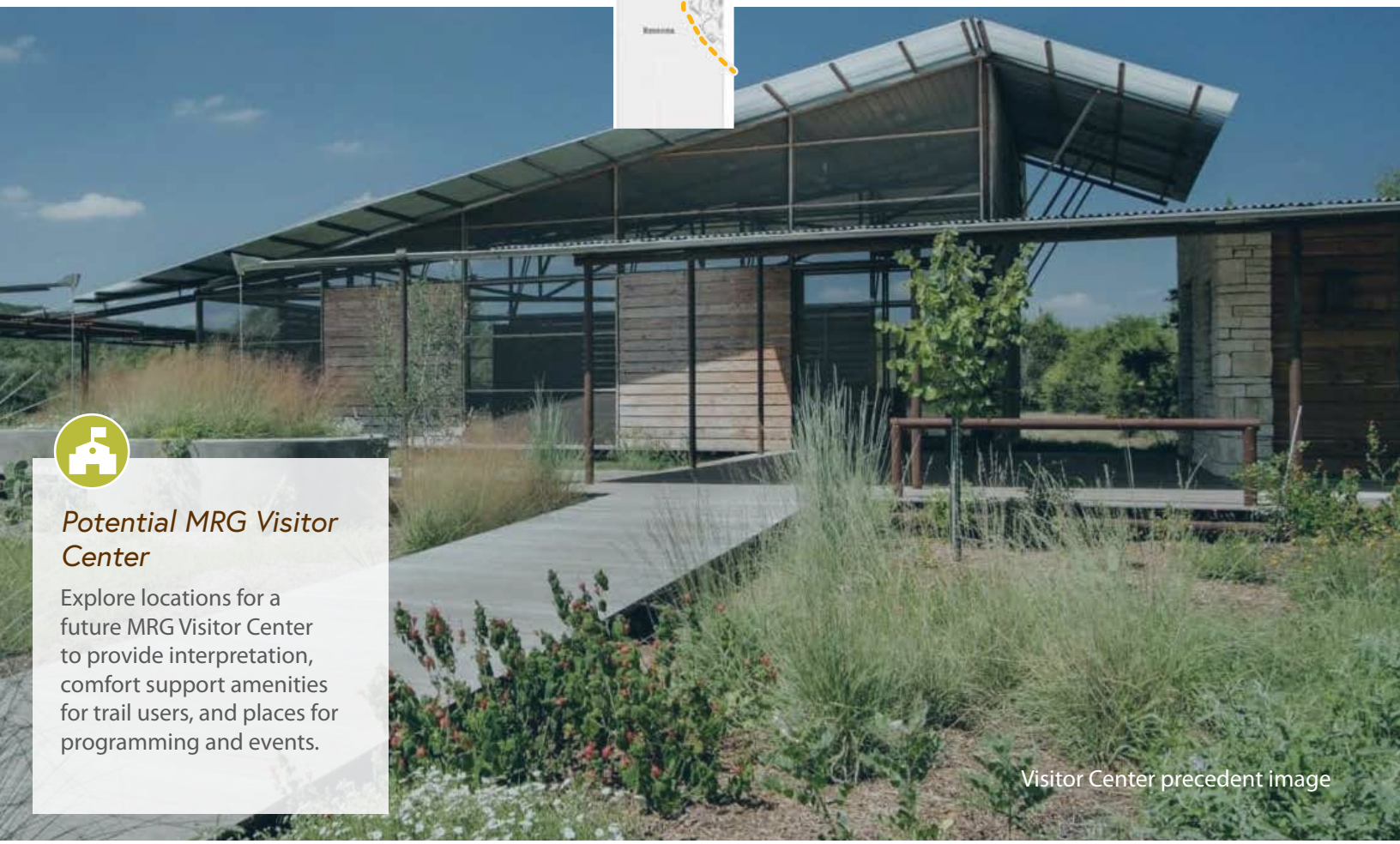
Bike lockers

Explore potential locations for secure bike parking for bike campers and other day tourists.



Explore Camping Opportunities

There is the opportunity and desire for bike touring and camping along the MRG. Further study is needed determine where these optimal spots are along the corridor would be located.



Potential MRG Visitor Center

Explore locations for a future MRG Visitor Center to provide interpretation, comfort support amenities for trail users, and places for programming and events.

Proposed E-Bike Route

Consider proposing an on-road, high-speed bike route specifically for use of E-bikes along the MRG. This solution would help resolve and mitigate conflicts between pedestrians and high-speed motorized bikes. Further study is recommended to pinpoint the best potential route.



On-Road E Bike Route precedent image

Explore On-Road Facilities

Consider the facilities/amenities that would be needed for an on-road route for motorized vehicles, such as wayfinding signage, mapping and route information, and means of displaying trail etiquette/rules.



Trail etiquette precedent image

(Map Placeholder for trail route Diagram)



Trail etiquette precedent image

Figure 2.3 Diagram of proposed E-bike route

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING ELEMENTS

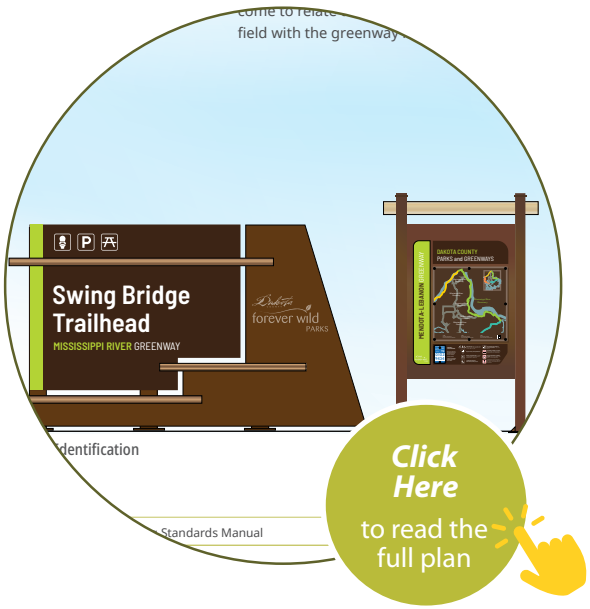
The following provides a high-level look at additional tools that need to be considered to support a successful greenway system and trail experience for users.

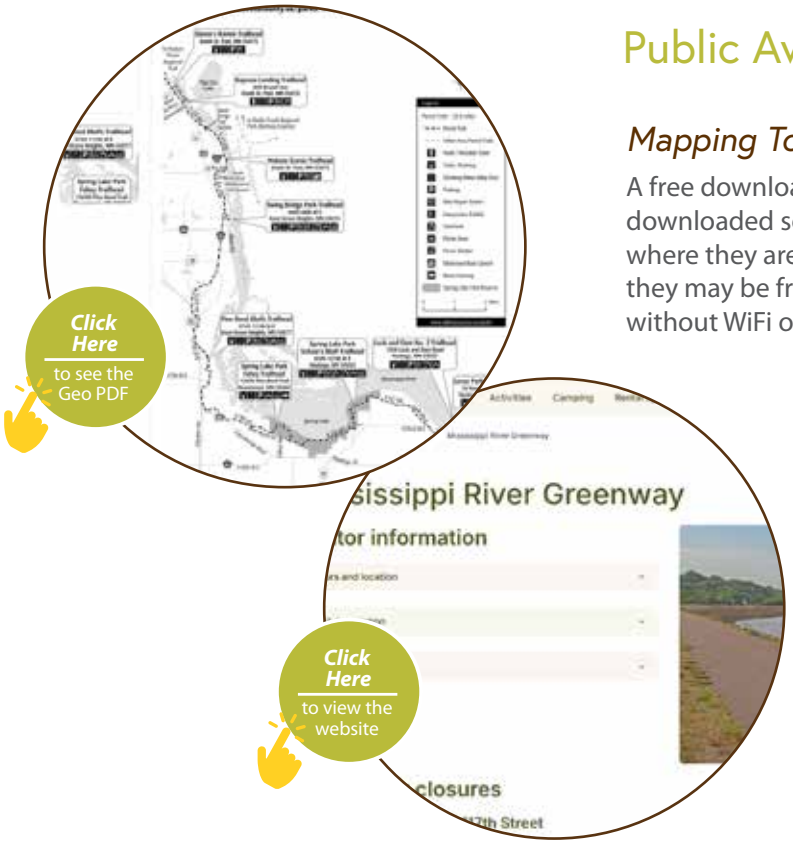
Wayfinding & Signage Plan

(Implementation underway at the time of this plan)

Wayfinding is the way people navigate from place to place. For the Dakota County Greenway System, a consistent wayfinding system is essential for orientation, navigation, and safety. Signage should be consistent across the system and should guide greenway users to local services, cultural destinations, transportation connections, activity centers, recreation destinations, cities, neighborhoods, and other landmarks.

In 2023, Dakota County created and adopted an extensive Greenways Wayfinding Signage Standards Manual. The manual establishes a greenway identity through wayfinding that is functional, accessible, and aesthetically appealing.





Public Awareness

Mapping Tools:

A free downloadable Geo PDF can be downloaded so trail users can track where they are on the trail and how far they may be from different amenities without WiFi or cellular connection.

Information:

Greenway information is available to the public on Dakota County's website. The website provides trail maps and informs trail users of:

- Trailhead locations
- Closures
- Restroom locations
- Trail conditions
- Trail connections
- Hours

KEY VISITOR EXPERIENCE INITIATIVES

Key initiatives are high-impact projects or programs that turn a long-term plan into clear actions. They bridge the gap between over-arching goals and the path to getting things implemented. These initiatives should be considered with every new greenway project proposal and are important for leveraging future corridor investments. A number of the items in this section stem from feedback received during community engagement efforts.

This section describes:

- **Emphasizing Accessibility:** The MRG should strive to provide an inclusive experience to all users.
- **Access**: Strategies for increasing access to the MRG and all that it has to offer.
- **Facilities**: Informed by community engagement responses, this section looks at way to improve what already exists, and what is desired by users with possible future improvements.
- **Interpretation and Wayfinding:** Examples of how to incorporate interpretation along the MRG.
- **Marketing:** Utilizing social media platforms and other strategies to communicate upcoming events and highlight the trail system.
- **Placemaking and Art:** Highlighting opportunities to incorporate public art along the MRG.
- **Staffing:** Recommendations for necessary staff increases to achieve future recommendations.
- **Programming**: The MRG has been identified as a key area for future programming opportunities.

ACCESS

Increase the ways in which trail users are able to access and experience the Greenway.

- Facilitate Mississippi River Greenway water tours
  - Bike-friendly ferry tours through local riverboat companies, cyclists can boat one-way and ferry back.
- Offer a peak-season weekend shuttle service
  - Stops at Kaposia Landing, Pine Bend, and Hastings Trailheads that allow less confident cyclists to experience the whole corridor.
- Improve online information on greenway access points, parking lots, construction detours, & public transit options
- Update google maps information and pop-ups
- Add bike parking at overnight locations
- Establish overnight camping sites near trailhead



Key facility improvements have been identified by trail users and stakeholders:

FACILITIES

- Add and improve fishing access
- Implement 'Family Zones' around trailheads
  - Slow traffic, play opportunities
- Add safe bike parking at overnight stay locations
- Improve trail infrastructure at low points to reduce flooding impacts
- Add bike-in paddle-in campsites along the greenway
- Add bicycle and paddle rentals
- Add a staffed Visitor Center along the greenway
  - Potential locations are Spring Lake Park Reserve, Swing Bridge Area, Downtown Hastings, and the Avent Property
- Add restrooms
  - Restrooms located every two miles along the trail: 3 typologies-heated trailhead restroom, self cleaning, and enhanced porta-potty



Emphasizing Accessibility

The Mississippi River Greenway should be designed to provide an inclusive experience for people of all abilities, consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The trail currently features a continuous paved surface that meets standards for firmness, stability, and slip resistance.

Existing road and trail crossings are constructed at-grade to ensure easy movement between segments. Crossings incorporate appropriate visibility, detectable warnings, and safety features in alignment with current accessibility guidelines.

Existing trailheads are developed to meet ADA requirements and include accessible parking stalls, accessible routes connecting parking to the trail, and accessible restroom facilities. Picnic areas provide accessible tables, firm and stable surfacing, and maneuvering space.

Proposed additions to the greenway corridor are to meet ADA requirements and standards.

INTERPRETATION & WAYFINDING

- Add small-scale interpretation
- QR codes that show historical photos, ecological information, poetry, stories, artwork



Low-impact QR Code interpretation

MARKETING

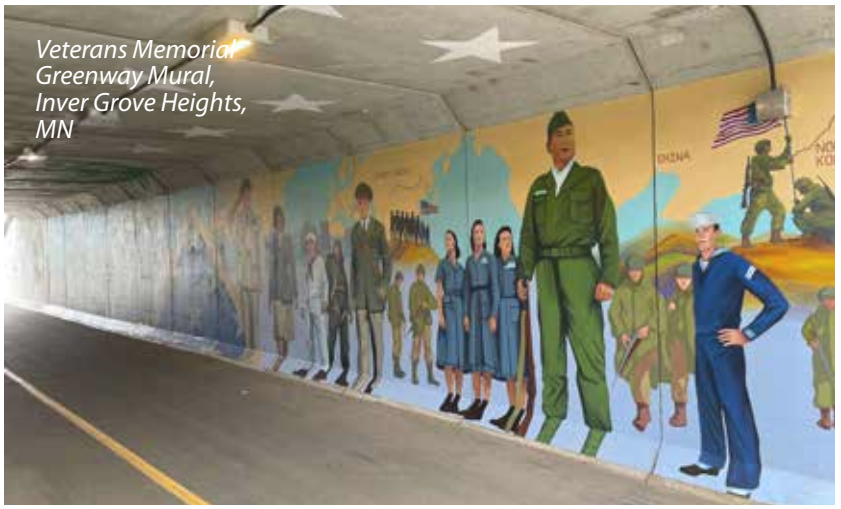
- Increase mentions of greenways on social media
- Advertise programming initiatives on social media and website
- Improve website access to greenway information





PLACEMAKING & ART

- Add public art on concrete barriers (South St. Paul Levee, Rosemount barrier)
  - Work with local artists and community members to design artwork (See page 58 for partnership opportunities)
- Create ephemeral art to activate the greenway
  - Pop-up art at trailheads
  - Seasonal art for winter activation
- Partner with community groups to create art installations



Veterans Memorial Greenway Mural, Inver Grove Heights, MN



Opportunities for art along the Mississippi River Greenway

STAFFING NEEDS TO IMPLEMENT

In order to facilitate these recommended programs and operate new facilities, ***Dakota County Parks & Recreation will need to increase staffing capacity. Potential staff positions could include:***

- A Greenway Community Liaison position
- Staff presence at community events
- A Special-Use Permits Facilitator position
- Continue to add O&M staff as necessary as programs and facilities are added to the system



PROGRAMMING

The Mississippi River Greenway has been identified as a key area for future programming opportunities:





Themed Group Bike Ride

1. **Add a large event along the greenway:** Bike Race, Greenway Day, Pedal + Paddle event, Music Event, Air Land River Show, Shore fishing Contest, Greenway marathon.
2. **Add small-scale programs along the greenway throughout the year:** Group rides, Bike classes, Themed rides, Overnight bike camping trips, Summer camps.
3. **Encourage local groups, businesses, and community members to engage with the greenway:** Greenway Ambassador Program, Concessionaire permits, Partnerships, Small grants for local organizations to run programs. (See page 58 for partnership opportunities)
4. **Provide online self-guided tour materials:** Trip guides, Points of interest, Historical information.



Programming Location Opportunities:

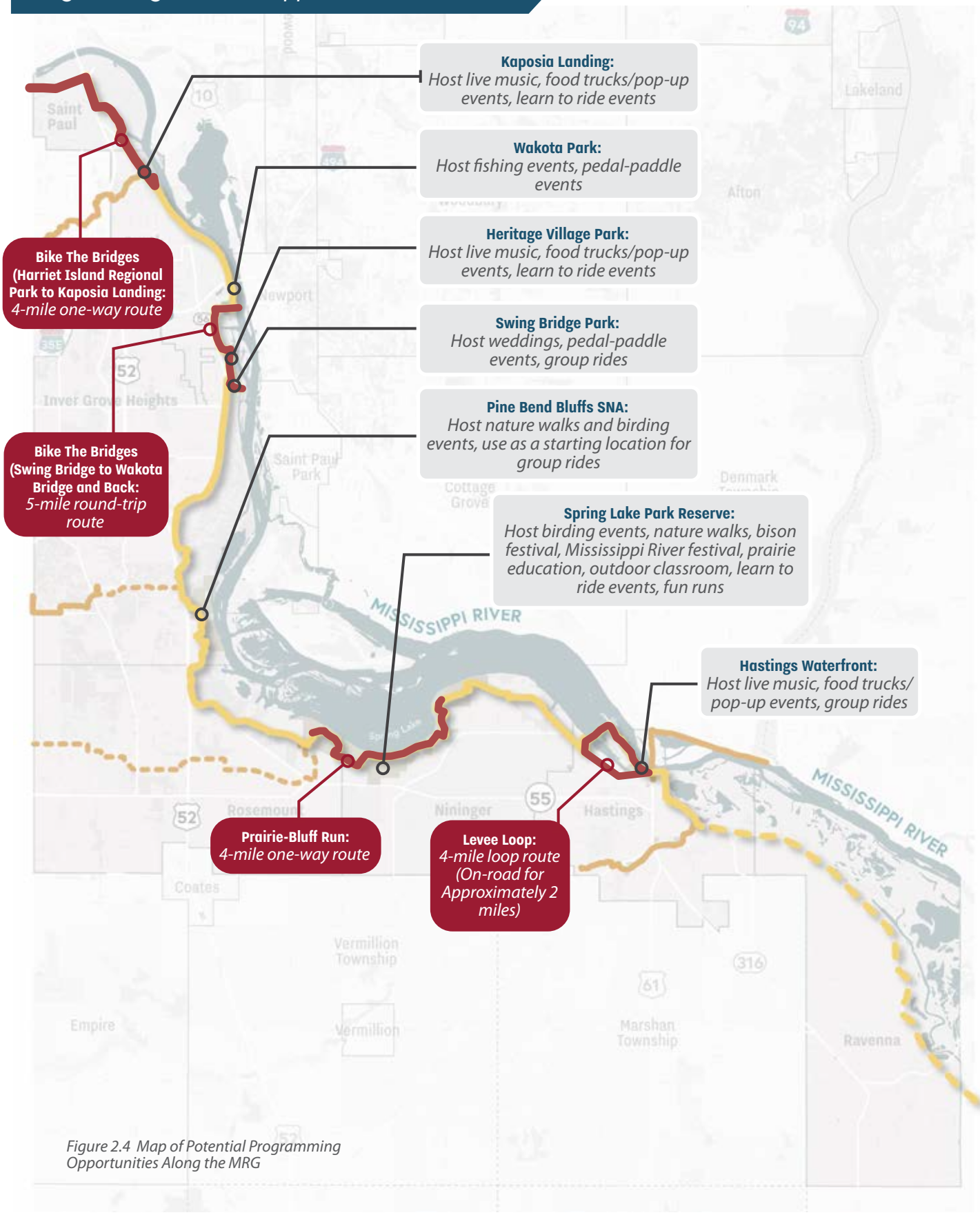


Figure 2.4 Map of Potential Programming Opportunities Along the MRG

POSSIBLE PROGRAMS/PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES:

The following table lists possible local organizations, businesses, and artists that could partner with Dakota County and local city/township personnel to activate the MRG with program offerings:

Art Programming

Organization/Artist	
Sprayfinger	Street art camps for youth
Juxtaposition Arts	Community and youth lead organization, do mural work around the twin cities
Biafra	Twin cities muralist
Adam Turman	Twin cities muralist
Indigenous Roots	Indigenous arts group, supports BIPOC artists around Twin Cities, have made many local murals
Tom Janssen	Twin cities muralist

Activity & Rental Programming

Organization/ Business	Event Types:
Move MN	Trail rides, Glow & Groove rides, Stoll & roll
Bicycle alliance of MN	• Host many large rides including: TC bike tour, Med City Meander, Kato bike fall fest, Albert Lea Rock-N-Roll, Rosewood Gamble, Three Rivers Trail Spin, etc. • Bike handbooks and 'rules of the road', Bike lessons for adults and youth, local clubs and teams, map resources, trip guidebooks
Joyful Riders Club	DJ Bike Rides, Group rides to movies, breweries, etc.
IPaddlePort	Self Service paddle rental
Mississippi Paddle Share	Self service paddle share, Available routes are A to B and loops, up to 8.5 miles.
Friends of the Mississippi River	Advocacy, volunteer events, recommended stops along the river (a few are along the MRG), art exhibitions
NPS	Get MRG on the 'places to ride' list! Offer guided 'bike with a ranger' tours.
MN DNR	Hiking club! Dakota county version of the Passport Club
Local Dakota County Bike Shops	Port of Hastings Outfitters, CAPD Bike Shop, Freewheel Eagan, Lowertown Bike Shop (St. Paul)



Joyful Riders Club social bike event



MN DNR hiking club promotional post

Precedent Comparison

The following table lists visitor services currently available in other park systems/ greenway associations as compared to Dakota County and the MRG.

Service Category	Service	Dakota County/ County Department	Great Rivers Greenway Nonprofit	Three Rivers Park District Special Park District	Raleigh, NC Greenways City Department	Detroit Greenways Coalition Nonprofit	Roanoke Valley Greenways Advisory Board
Info & Wayfinding	Bike rules and etiquette	X		X		X	
	Google maps Presence						
	Access Point Maps	X		X		X	X
	Trail Guides						X
Access & Transportation	Avenza Maps	?	X	X			
	Shuttle Service						
	Ferry Rides						
	Public Bike Rentals			X		X	
	Public E-bike Rentals						
	Access Point Maps		X		X		
Comfort & Convenience	Restrooms	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Rest Stops, Benches	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Fix-it Stations	X		X	X	X	
	Snow Plowing	X		X			
	Bike Racks	X	X	X	X	X	X
Programming & Education	Learn to Ride Classes			X			
	Yoga		X				
	Birdwatching		X				
	Guided Bike Tours			X	X		
	Themed Bike Rides				X		
	Camping			X			
	Walking / Running Programs		X		X		
	Interpretive Stops	X		X	X	X	X
	Public Art	X			X	X	X
	Paddle Share/ Rentals			X	X		
	Bike Races/Events		X		X		X
	Trail Passport Program						
	Bike Riding Lessons			X			
	Self Guided Experiences		X			X	
	Trip/ Adventure Guides		X				
	Storybook Walks		X				X
	Large Celebrations/ Events		X	X	X	X	X
Marketing & Outreach	Social Media Presence	?					

iv PUBLIC ART

HIGHLIGHTING LOCAL ARTISTS

Public art plays an important role in creating a meaningful experience along the Mississippi River Greenway. When artwork is thoughtfully integrated into the landscape, it can highlight local stories, celebrate cultural identity, and strengthen connections between users and the surrounding communities.

Along the greenway, art should support the Mississippi River Greenway's interpretive themes and stories. Art should be placed in locations that are easily accessible, for example, near trailheads or neighborhood gateways. Murals offer a strong opportunity to create a recognizable visual identity. Dakota County Parks is also launching an art initiative focused on tunnels and bridges across the county. As part of this effort, similar structures along the Mississippi River Greenway should be reviewed for potential installations.

The County welcomes collaboration with community partners who wish to place art adjacent to or visible from the trail. City initiated projects that enhance the greenway experience are encouraged. For any art proposed adjacent to and visible from the corridor, Dakota County Parks staff and representatives from the Public Art Advisory Committee (PAAC) should participate on artist selection panels. All externally led installations should align with the Mississippi River Greenway interpretive themes, as well as the Dakota County Public Art Blueprint goals and policies.

As a next step, preparing an updated art and interpretation plan for the Mississippi River Greenway is recommended.



Benjamin Lewis Sculpture Park in Hastings, MN along the MRG

Public artwork along the greenway

Lenticulars, recommended in the 2014 Mississippi River Design + Experience Plan, could help enhance MRRT Signature and connection to the river on the Lock Blvd Section in Nininger Township







v INTERPRETATION

EXPLORING INTERPRETIVE THEMES FOR THE MRG

Interpretation is storytelling. More specifically, interpretation along the Mississippi River Greenway means conveying the authentic nature of the places along the greenway. It is about setting context and connecting people emotionally and intellectually to this place, its stories, and each other. Interpretation along the Mississippi River Greenway has mainly been implemented based on a 2014 plan. This long-range plan brings new and updated interpretive themes and provides recommendations for future interpretive planning along the greenway, laying the foundation for next steps.

This section describes:

- **Interpretive Themes and Subthemes**: What are the main concepts, ideas, and themes that are highlighted by interpretation along the trail?
- **Corridor Timeline**: The history of the corridor in which the MRG is located plays a large role in the interpretative plan. What stories get told, what elements and locations are important to highlight, etc.
- **Recommendations and Opportunities**: What are the next steps to making interpretation along the trail a reality?

INTERPRETIVE THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

Building on previous planning and new, in-depth conversations with Dakota community leaders, elders, educators, artists, and others, this interpretive framework advances the interpretive approach for the greenway based on continued engagement with community members and county staff.

Main Theme

The main theme is the core concept that visitors should take away from their experience along the Greenway.

"Flowing Together: Stories of Nature, People, and Belonging"

This theme invites visitors to experience the Mississippi River Greenway as a dynamic, integrated system that connects people, cultures, and ecosystems across generations and into the future. The greenway is more than a path, it is a place where stories rise from the land, voices echo along the river, and everyone is invited into a deeper relationship with place.



Mural in Red Wing, MN

Subthemes

Four subthemes provide organizational structure and clarity to the messages that visitors encounter when they visit a location or site along the Mississippi River Greenway.

1. Honor the First Voices

Uplift Dakota people, stories, knowledge, and living presence.

This subtheme centers Dakota People as the original stewards of this place. It calls on visitors to listen, learn, and honor the enduring presence and cultural knowledge of the Dakota people, whose language, stories, and place names continue to shape this landscape.

Key Messages:

- This is Dakota homeland—Oceti Sakowin territory.
- The river is a sacred relative, not a "resource."
- Dakota stories and place names, like Mendota (Mdote), Grey Cloud Island, and Oheyawahe, reveal a deep spiritual connection to land.
- Indigenous communities are alive, active, and leading efforts in restoration and cultural renewal.

Potential Topics: Dakota homeland, sacred relationships, language, history and continuity, cultural practice and protocols, modern leadership

2. Follow the River's Rhythm

Engage with the land and river as living relatives and changing ecosystems.

This subtheme activates curiosity about the Mississippi River as a living, breathing relative and ecosystem. It invites people to see the landscape as dynamic—shaped by flood and drought, fire and freeze—and home to diverse life. It encourages stewardship through understanding.

Key Messages:

- The river is always moving, reshaping its banks and sharing its stories.
- This river corridor is a guide for migrating birds.
- Ecological restoration reconnects us with the land's original rhythms.
- Traditional ecological knowledge helps heal and guide future care.

Potential Topics: natural dynamics, plant and animal relatives, ecological restoration, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), climate change impacts, the river's voice (sensory experiences)

3. Weaving Many Stories

Celebrate the shared stories, cultures, and contributions that shape the communities along the river and greenway.

This subtheme highlights the Mississippi River as a gathering place—not only geographically, but culturally. It honors the layered presence of many communities over time and emphasizes interconnection, exchange, and resilience. It invites all people to see themselves as part of an ongoing, living story of place.

Key Messages:

- This land along the river has long been a meeting place of languages, traditions, and lifeways.
- The river connects diverse communities across time: Dakota people, settlers, immigrants, Black migrants, and others.
- Through collaboration, labor, creativity, and persistence, people have built and rebuilt their lives along these flowing waters.
- Our collective history is complex but filled with courage, care, and cultural richness.

Potential Topics: gathering places, cultural layers, work and survival, art and creativity, shared struggles and resilience, community contributions

4. We Shape This Place Together

Come together to care for the river, the land, and each other.

This subtheme is about collective belonging and stewardship. It encourages people to see the river and greenway not just as a personal escape, but as a shared space where connection and care grow across generations, cultures, and communities. Everyone is invited into the work of tending, respecting, and protecting this place.

Key Messages:

- This is a shared home that is built through collective effort and responsibility.
- Everyone belongs in nature and everyone can contribute to its care.
- Acts of stewardship, such as planting, learning, sharing, and protecting, build stronger communities.
- Together, we ensure this place thrives for future generations.

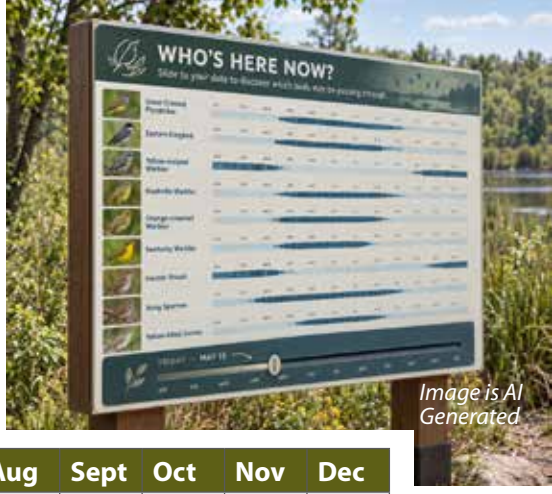
Potential Topics: shared responsibility, everyday acts of care, volunteerism and community work, inclusive belonging, future generations, practical guidance, restoration in practice

Focus: Birds

Bird Migration

Bird Migration chart with a slider, showing the expected arrival of select species. User could move a horizontal slider to their approximate date and see which birds might be in town.

This interpretive feature could be a weather-proof sign with select bird species and an expanded calendar.



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Species	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Empidonax Sp.												
Eastern Phoebe												
Great Crested Flycatcher												
Myiarchus sp.												
Eastern Kingbird												
New World Flycatcher sp.												
White-eyed Vireo												
Bell's Vireo												
Yellow-throated Vireo												
Blue-headed Vireo												
Philadelphia Vireo												
Eastern Warbling Vireo												
Philadelphia Vireo												
Red-eyed Vireo												



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Bird Zones

Possible signage showing what birds you are likely to hear in each area – there are four relatively distinct zones:

- **Urban**: Killdeer, crow, house sparrow, nighthawk, mourning dove, blue jay
- **Open Parkland/Prairie:** Robin, chipping sparrow, song sparrow, goldfinch, indigo bunting, cardinal, Baltimore oriole
- **Forest**: Red-eyed vireo, ovenbird, redstart, downy woodpecker, red-bellied woodpecker, wood pewee
- **Shoreline**: Great blue heron, ring-billed gull, pelican, bald eagle, mallard, great egret, green heron

Focus: Restoration

Picture a Forest without Buckthorn

Before and after restoration photos for visitors to visualize a forest without buckthorn. Ideally positioned in front of a forest with a current/former buckthorn infestation.



Image is AI Generated

HIGHLIGHTING HISTORY

Focus: Corridor Timeline

ca. 10,000 BCE
Earliest known American Indian tribes lived here

Mid-1600s
First Europeans arrived in this area

1750-1856
Black Dog's village of Mdewankanton Dakota along the Minnesota River

1750-1856
Black Dog's village of Mdewankanton Dakota along the Minnesota River

Through the 1800s
Kaposia village site of the Mdewakanton Sioux, Chief Little Crow V or Taoyateduta, in this area along the Mississippi River.

1837
Treaty ceding Dakota land east of the Mississippi River

1838-1847
Maȟpiya Hota Wiŋ (Grey Cloud Woman) lived on Grey Cloud Island, a significant person and site for Dakota people.

1849
Minnesota Territory established

1851
Treaty of Mendota

1853
Dakota County established

1854
Native Americans forced to reservations

1857
Hastings incorporated as a city

1858
State of Minnesota established

1858-1889
Town of Nininger

1862
U.S.-Dakota War and the forced removal of the Dakota from MN

1880s-2008
South Saint Paul Stockyards

1895
Rock Island Swing Bridge

1927
Lock and Dam #2

1959/2008
Wakota Bridge combines the names of the counties it connects: Washington and Dakota

1973
Spring Lake Park Reserve established. Dakota traditional knowledge and archaeology tell about people living here for thousands of years

1991
Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area

2004
Oheyawahe (Pilot Knob), a Dakota sacred site, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places



Cultural and Historical Depth

The corridor is situated within a landscape of immense historical and spiritual significance. The greenway follows the river's path between two major confluences: from Bdote (the meeting of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers) to the confluence with the St. Croix River. Along this route, travelers encounter:

- ***Sacred Landscapes:*** Areas of deep importance to Indigenous populations.
- ***Historic Landmarks:*** Sites marking early industry, transportation, and pivotal regional events.

RECOMMENDATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

The following recommendations for interpretive outcomes were developed from engagement with community members and county staff. The following opportunities were identified for integrating interpretation with other greenway development initiatives.

Form a Greenway Indigenous Advisory Group

- Include Dakota tribal representatives, THPOs, community organizations, and elders on an advisory group. Support regular meetings that guide the development of interpretive plans, features, and content.
- Develop a checklist for Indigenous engagement to promote meaningful collaboration and guidance that is reflected in project outcomes.
- Address safety concerns that some Indigenous community members expressed about feeling isolated on trails.

Audit current interpretive features and signage

- Establish an inventory of interpretive features, place names, archaeological/sacred sites along the corridor, and ecological features with Indigenous meaning. Assess the stories that are currently told and identify what is missing or misrepresented.
- Collaborate with tribes and elders to update the language and content for cultural and natural resource interpretation.

Develop a new Mississippi River Greenway Interpretive Plan

- Hire an Indigenous-led team of planners, designers, and engagement specialists to connect with communities, research currently untold stories, and develop an interpretive that creatively conveys multiple perspectives and stories.
- Outline stops and stories for an interactive online experience of the Mississippi River Greenway.

Design signage and interpretation with Indigenous designers/content creators

- Hire Indigenous artists and designers. Test prototypes with Indigenous communities and plan multilingual signage, audio, and non text formats.
- Work with Indigenous storytellers to gather oral histories, place based stories, and traditional ecological knowledge. Create content that can be used flexibly, such as on sign panels, audio tours, mobile apps, or guided walks.

Indigenous interpretive program

- All staff (parks, natural resources, interpretation, etc.) receive training in Dakota history, treaties, culture, protocols, and language. Partner with Dakota educators or culture bearers for ongoing professional development.
- Share learning with the public through events, programs, and other in-person and virtual engagement activities.

1. Public Art Blueprint: Parks and libraries are the first step and could deliver interpretive programming.

2. Lock & Dam #2: Develop interpretation in collaboration with site partners.

3. Improve cultural access: Many Indigenous community members did not grow up biking or visiting parks, which can limit park use and their comfort level with biking.

- Provide bike access programs and also transportation for urban youth to participate.
- Partner with schools (public, charter, and Indigenous-focused) to bring Indigenous students to the greenway for outdoor education and cultural connection.
- Use trailheads as outdoor classrooms, integrating cultural, ecological, and conservation-based learning.



UP NEXT:

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

03 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

i DEVELOPMENT VISION

The development vision for the MRG:

"Elevate the Mississippi River Greenway from a standard bike and pedestrian trail to a fully integrated, world-class linear park that serves as a premier destination for recreation, a vital transportation artery, and a resilient ecological corridor through an environmentally and fiscally responsible process."

Section Content:

i Development Vision
ii Proposed Greenway Development Projects

A RECAP OF THE LONG RANGE PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. Standardize and Complete the Vision
   - Protect and Restore
   - Enhance Water Quality
   - Enrich Experience
   - Establish Regional and Local Connections
2. Elevate the User Experience
   - Unique Amenities
   - Dynamic Programming
   - Local Connectivity
   - Responsible Growth
3. Establish Comprehensive Management Strategies
   - Resource Stewardship
   - Sustainable Operations
   - Dynamic Interpretation
4. Ensure Regional Funding
   - Position the Mississippi River Greenway to attract regional, state and federal grants
5. Integrate and Innovate



PROPOSED PROJECT TYPES:

Categories of project types within this section include:



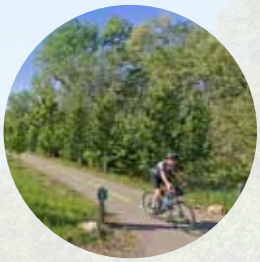
Overlooks:

Identifies locations along the MRG that take advantage of river views and vistas.



Trail Access Points:

- **Trailheads:** Larger-scale destinations along the trail with upscale amenities like restrooms, shelters, and bike/ped facilities.
- **Neighborhood Gateways:** Smaller-scale access points located along local streets and residential areas with minimal amenities, such as wayfinding signage.



Trail Alignment Improvements:

Analyzing potential opportunities to re-route the MRG away from busy roadways and closer to the river and other natural areas.



Environmental Restoration:

Boosting ecosystems with pollinator-friendly native plants and wildflowers, promoting healthier soils, and providing a more visually appealing experience.



Interpretation and Placemaking:

Prioritizing interpretive features to educate users on natural processes, the environment, and the history of locations along the MRG to highlight the overarching interpretive themes. Incorporating public artwork to enhance existing features or infrastructure (e.g. retaining walls) and beautify the space.

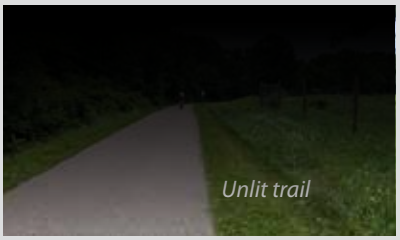
CREATE A *'CONTINUOUS CORRIDOR'*:

Focus on Improving Typical Greenway Infrastructure

Treatment Standards for Enhanced Connectivity:

One of the goals of this Long Range Plan is to enhance typical treatments for an elevated experience.

- Grade-Separated Crossings: These tunnels or bridges physically separate bike and pedestrian users from motor-vehicles by use of grades, directing bike/ped traffic over or under roadways and railways, completely separating the routes with underpasses and overpasses.
- Trail Lighting: Lighting is added in areas where it is needed to enhance the trail experience and provide safety and security. Areas to be lit include Lake Rebecca Park, Wakota Trailhead, Heritage Park, Kaposia Park, and parts of the levee.
- At-Grade Crossings: At-grade crossings are the most common, utilizing highly visible striping, signage, signals, and even physical barriers like curb bump-outs and bollards to keep bike and pedestrian users as separate from motor vehicle traffic as possible.

Typical Treatment:	Enhanced User Experience:
 *Bike tunnel*	 *Bike tunnel with mural*
 *Unlit trail*	 *Lit trail*
 *At-grade trail crossing*	 *Enhanced at-grade trail crossing*

ii PROPOSED GREENWAY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The MRG is a 35-mile greenway corridor that follows the Mississippi River. At times the trail provides vast views of the river; other times the trail is along a road where the river is nowhere in sight.

This chapter presents the physical context of the greenway corridor, existing conditions, trail character, and proposed improvements to activate the greenway and improve the trail experience.

This section describes: Individual projects along each of the six trail segments, with illustrative plans and precedent imagery.

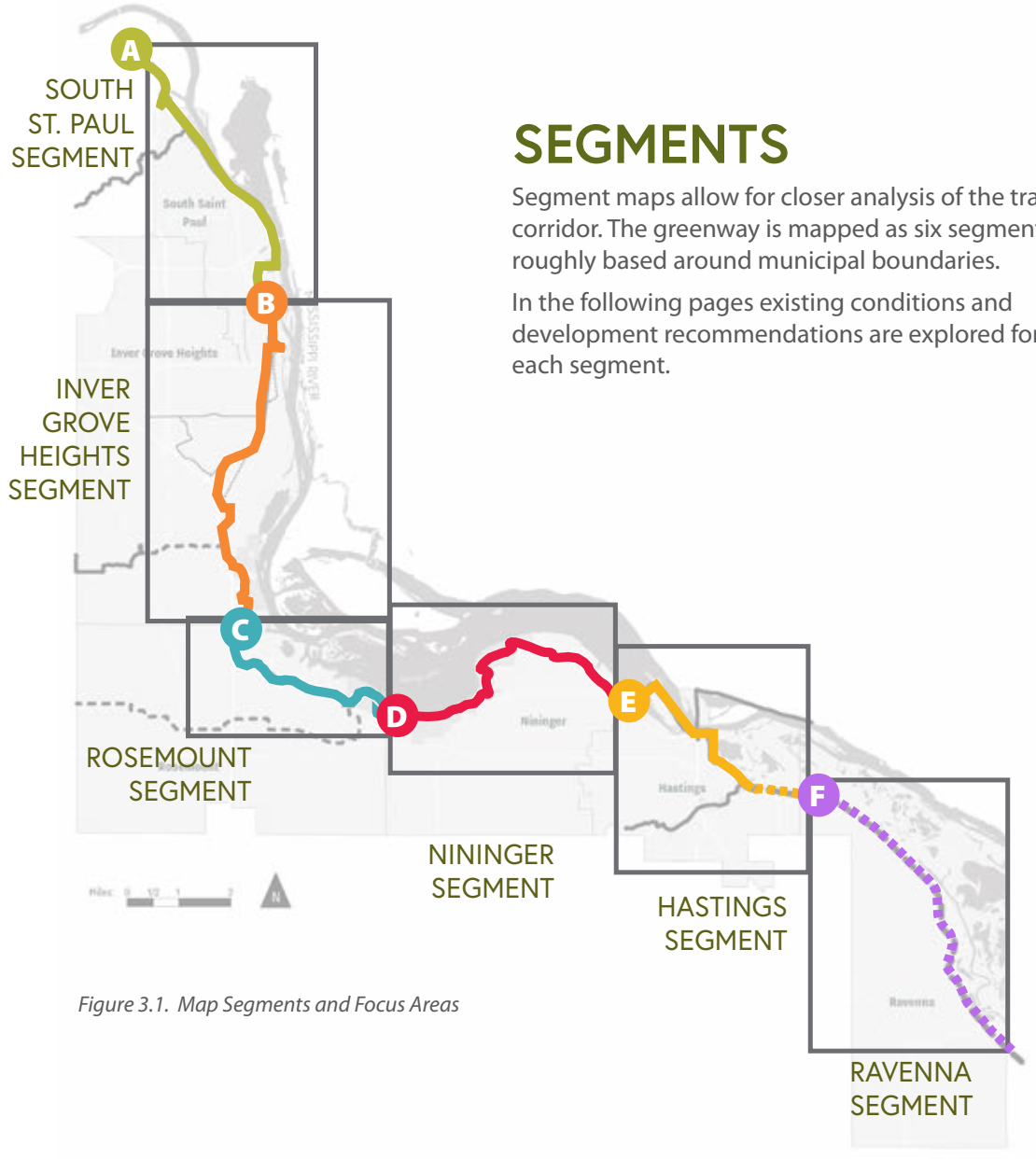
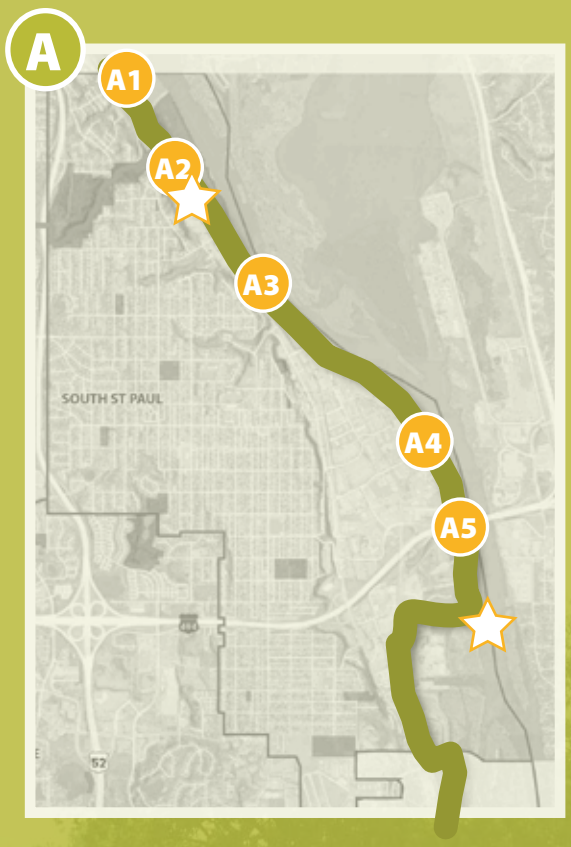


Figure 3.1. Map Segments and Focus Areas

SEGMENTS

Segment maps allow for closer analysis of the trail corridor. The greenway is mapped as six segments, roughly based around municipal boundaries.

In the following pages existing conditions and development recommendations are explored for each segment.



SOUTH ST. PAUL SEGMENT

5.01 miles off-road

The northernmost segment of the MRG starts at the border of St. Paul (Ramsey County) and South St. Paul (Dakota County) and runs 3.83 miles off-road, along the levee of the Mississippi River. Then, 1.18 miles of greenway trail follows the railroad and industrial backyards.

IMPROVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

A1 Dakota County Gateway Experience

A2 Kaposia Landing Improvements
- South St Paul Swing Bridge Plaza
- Additional River Overlooks and Shoreline Restoration
- Bryant Ave Bike and Pedestrian Crossing

A3 Levee Enhancements
- Overlooks - North and South
- Trail Artwork
- Habitat Restoration

A4 Wildflower Park Improvements

A5 Wakota Bridge Area Enhancements
- Wakota Bridge Trailhead
- Packer Preserve

★ Current Projects in this Segment (*To be completed by 2027*)



Interpretive Node 1: Kaposia landing River Access



Interpretive Node 2: Kaposia landing



Interpretive Node 3: Lily Lake Bumpout

This interpretive node sits just south of the Wakota bridge and is inspired by the G.M. Good Ferry that provided transportation between the east and west bank of the Mississippi River before the bridge was constructed. It will feature a shaded seating area, native planting, interactive interpretive elements, and accessible binoculars.

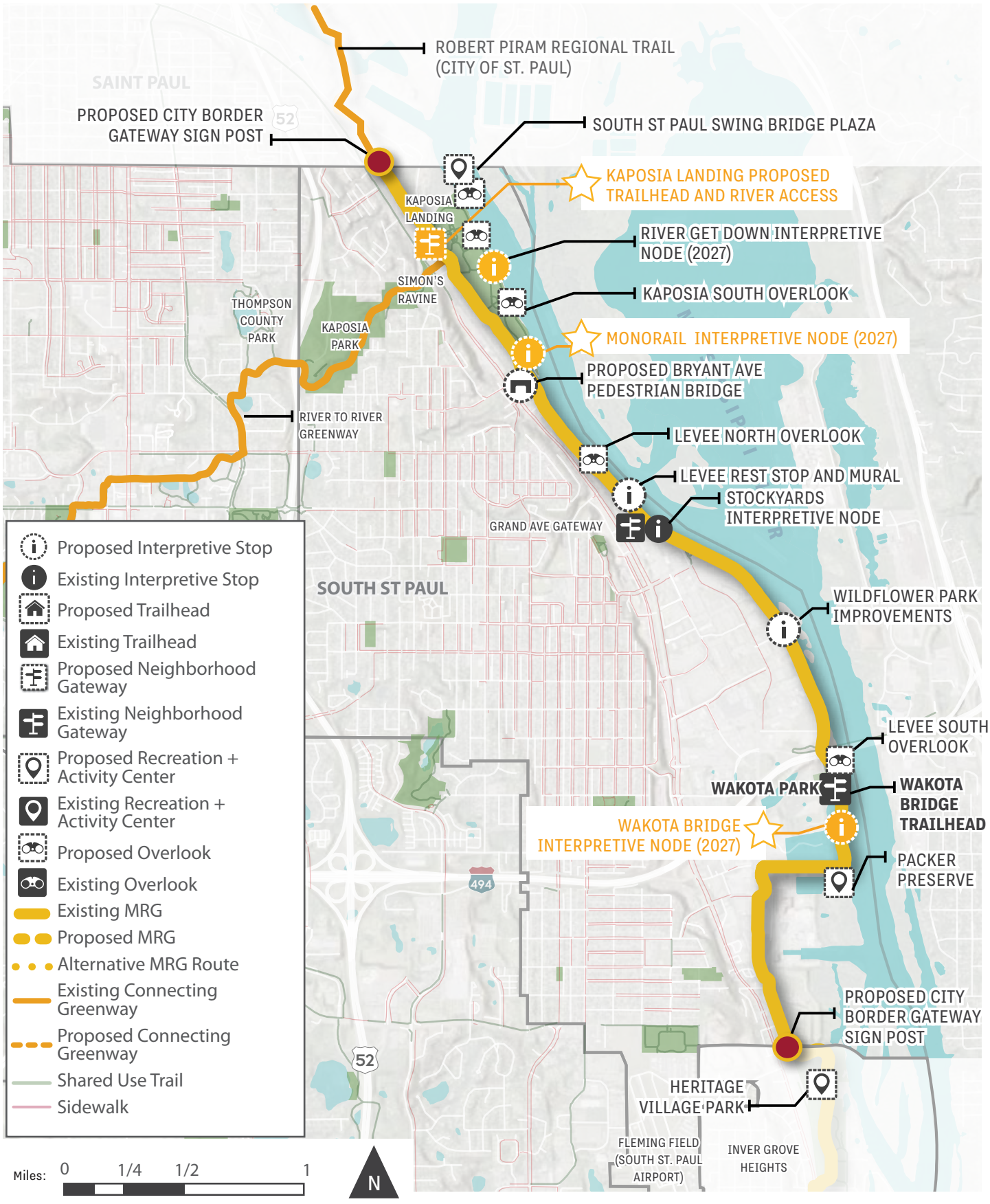
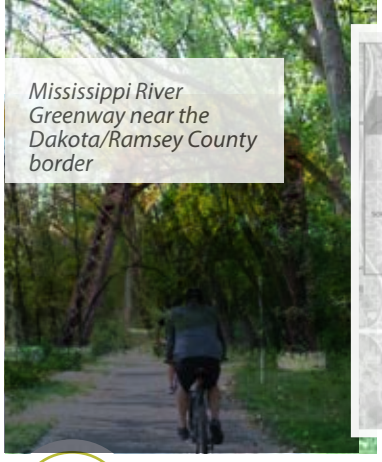


Figure 3.2. South St. Paul Segment Focus Area Map



Mississippi River Greenway near the Dakota/Ramsey County border

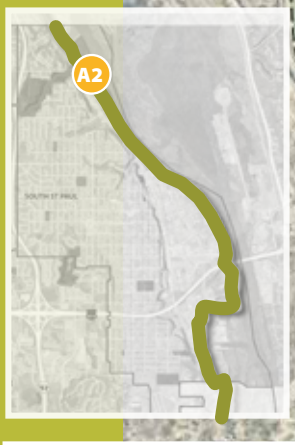


A1 Dakota County Gateway Experience

Install a gateway sculpture on the border of Dakota and Ramsey counties to alert visitors that they are now traveling on the Mississippi River Greenway and provide wayfinding for cyclists and walkers.

A2 KAPOSIA LANDING IMPROVEMENTS

A2 covers all improvements proposed within Kaposia Landing, see details on the following pages:



Trailhead building at Wakota Bridge

A2.2 *Additional River Overlooks and Shoreline Restoration*

Add additional overlooks along the shore at Kaposia landing to provide river and wildlife views. Consider bench seating and interpretation to provide respite and educational opportunities that enhance the trail's interpretive theme and highlight restoration work.



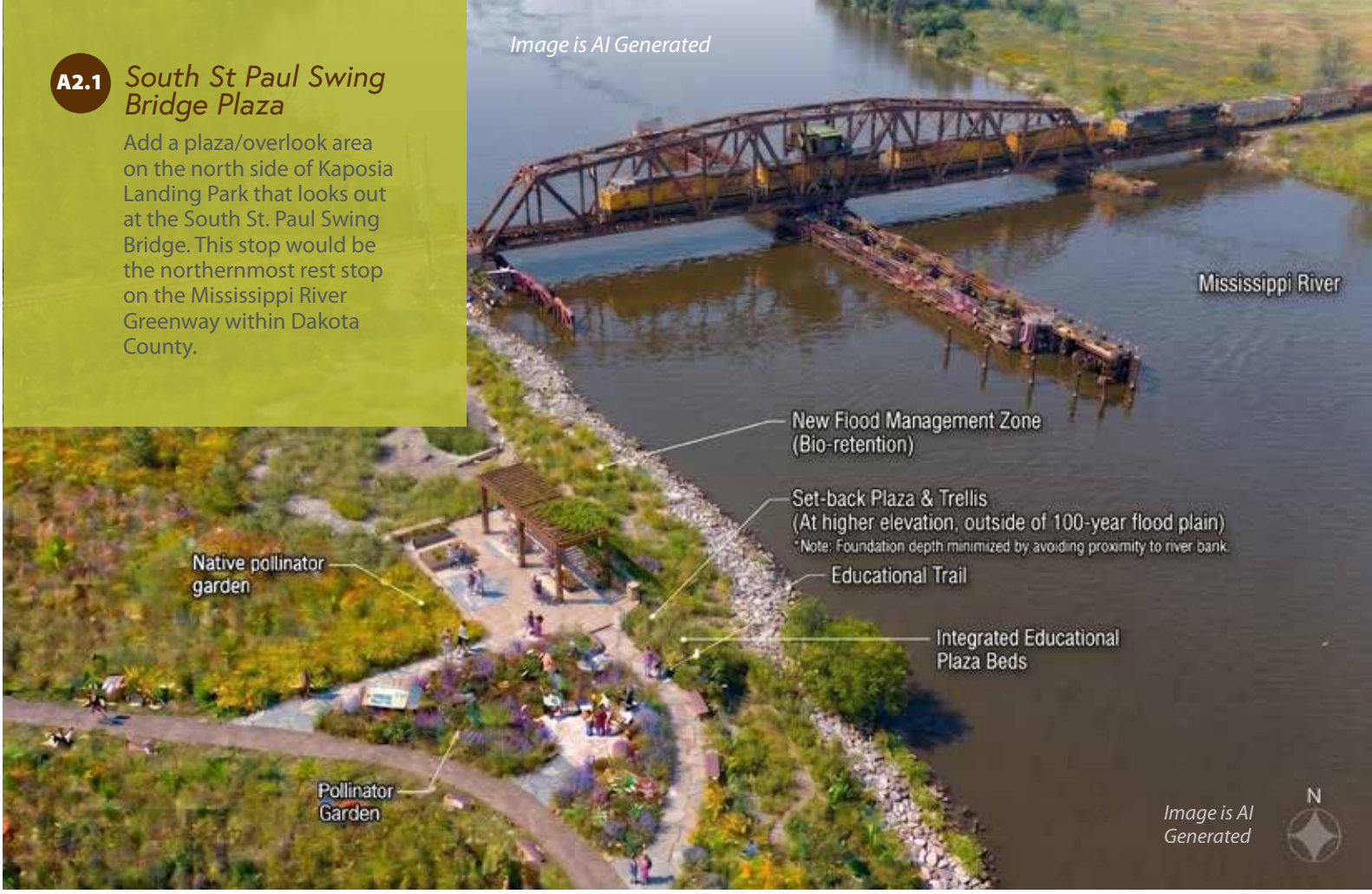
Image is AI Generated



Image is AI Generated

A2.1 South St Paul Swing Bridge Plaza

Add a plaza/overlook area on the north side of Kaposia Landing Park that looks out at the South St. Paul Swing Bridge. This stop would be the northernmost rest stop on the Mississippi River Greenway within Dakota County.



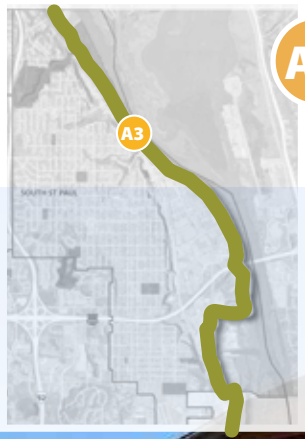
A2.3 Bryant Ave Bike and Pedestrian Crossing

The proposed enhancements will provide safe crossing and connection over the existing railroad corridor for those trying to reach the MRG from nearby neighborhoods and businesses.







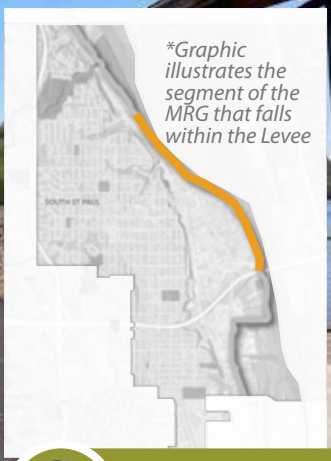


A3 Levee Enhancements

Complete a Levee Study that would identify access to the water and soften the levee slope, improve the appearance of the concrete barrier, and establish a landscape plan.

North Overlook





**Graphic illustrates the segment of the MRG that falls within the Levee*

A Feasibility Study is Recommended for this Project

A3.1 *Levee Overlooks*

The stretch of the Mississippi River Greenway located along the levee offers open views of the Mississippi River with distant views of the St. Paul skyline that are perfect opportunities for overlooks. Current lack of tree coverage and surrounding rip-rap materials leaves users exposed to the elements with no opportunities for shade or shelter from inclement weather. The addition of these observation points will provide guests with rest stop amenities like shade structures, bench seating, and viewing platforms to take in the scenic river vistas while also establishing connection points to nearby destinations such as Grand Ave.

Proposed

Southern Overlook



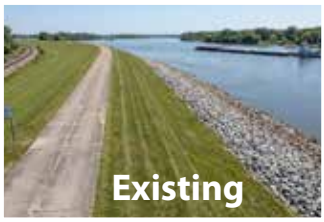


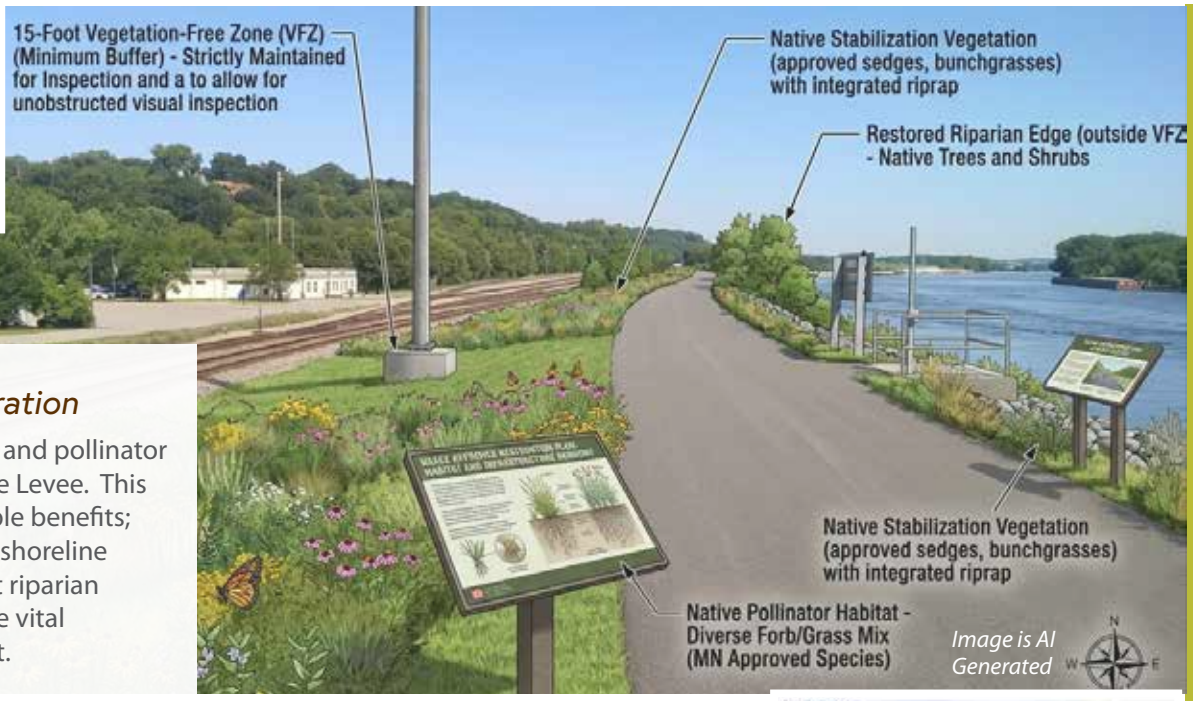


A3.2 *Enhanced Rest Stop and Mural*

Look for opportunities to enhance portions of the trail with public artwork. It turns standard infrastructure (like retaining walls, benches, and fences) into local destinations and can be educational and contribute to the interpretive narrative of the trail.

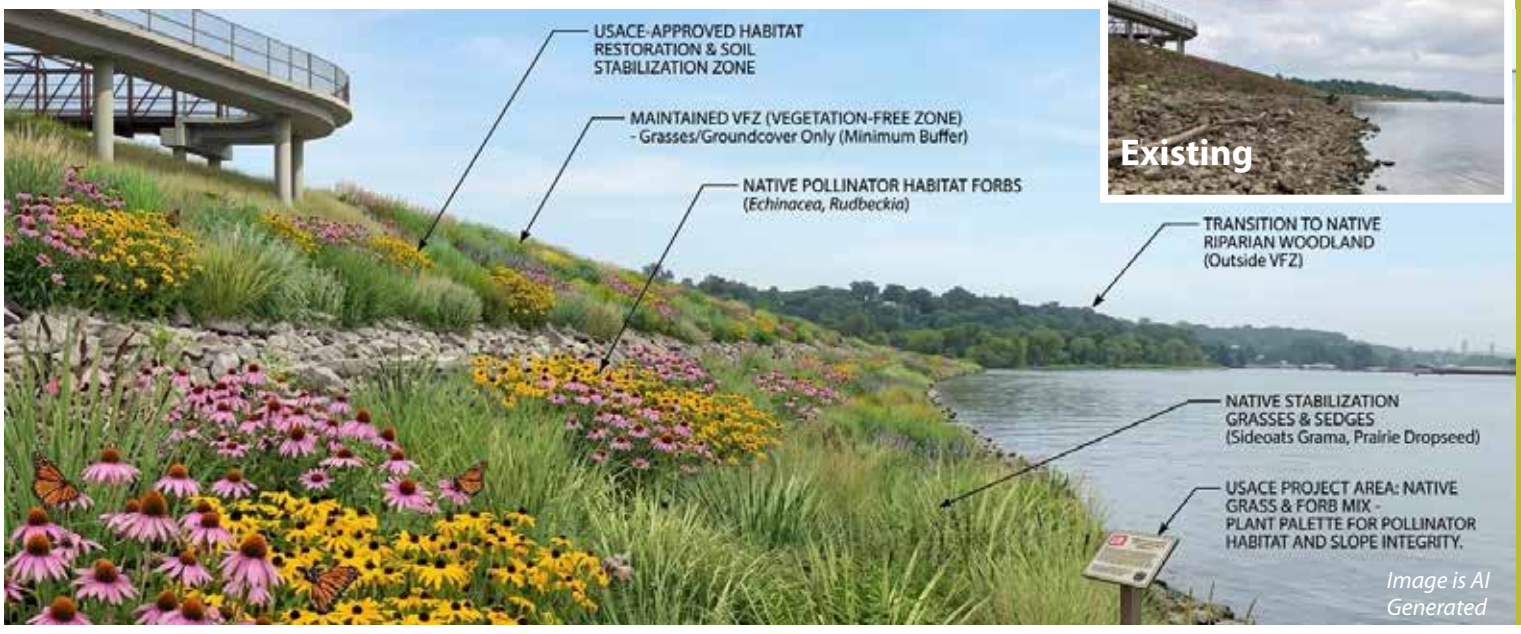






A3.3 *Habitat Restoration*

Incorporate native and pollinator plantings along the Levee. This effort poses multiple benefits; it would help with shoreline stabilization, boost riparian health, and provide vital ecosystem support.





A4 Wildflower Park Improvements

Wildflower Park improvements include interpretive opportunities that highlight pollinators and native plantings and an array of opportunities for showcasing public artwork.





A5 Wakota Bridge Area Enhancements





A5.1 *Wakota Bridge Trailhead*

Multiple improvements are planned at the Wakota Bridge Trailhead area in next few years including a public works facility and rental space, boat ramp improvements, and an interpretive node. The City of South St. Paul has hosted fishing derbies at this site; and it is a potential location for future fishing, cycling, and paddling events.



A5.2 *Packer Preserve*

This AI conceptual graphic and rendering shows a proposed river access south of the Wakota Trailhead. This concept proposes benches and picnic tables, native restoration plantings, a bird blind, and a fishing platform.

This level of river access is important to connect MRG users to the water, providing views of nature and wildlife, educational and interpretive opportunities, and scenic rest areas that help enhance the overall visitor experience.



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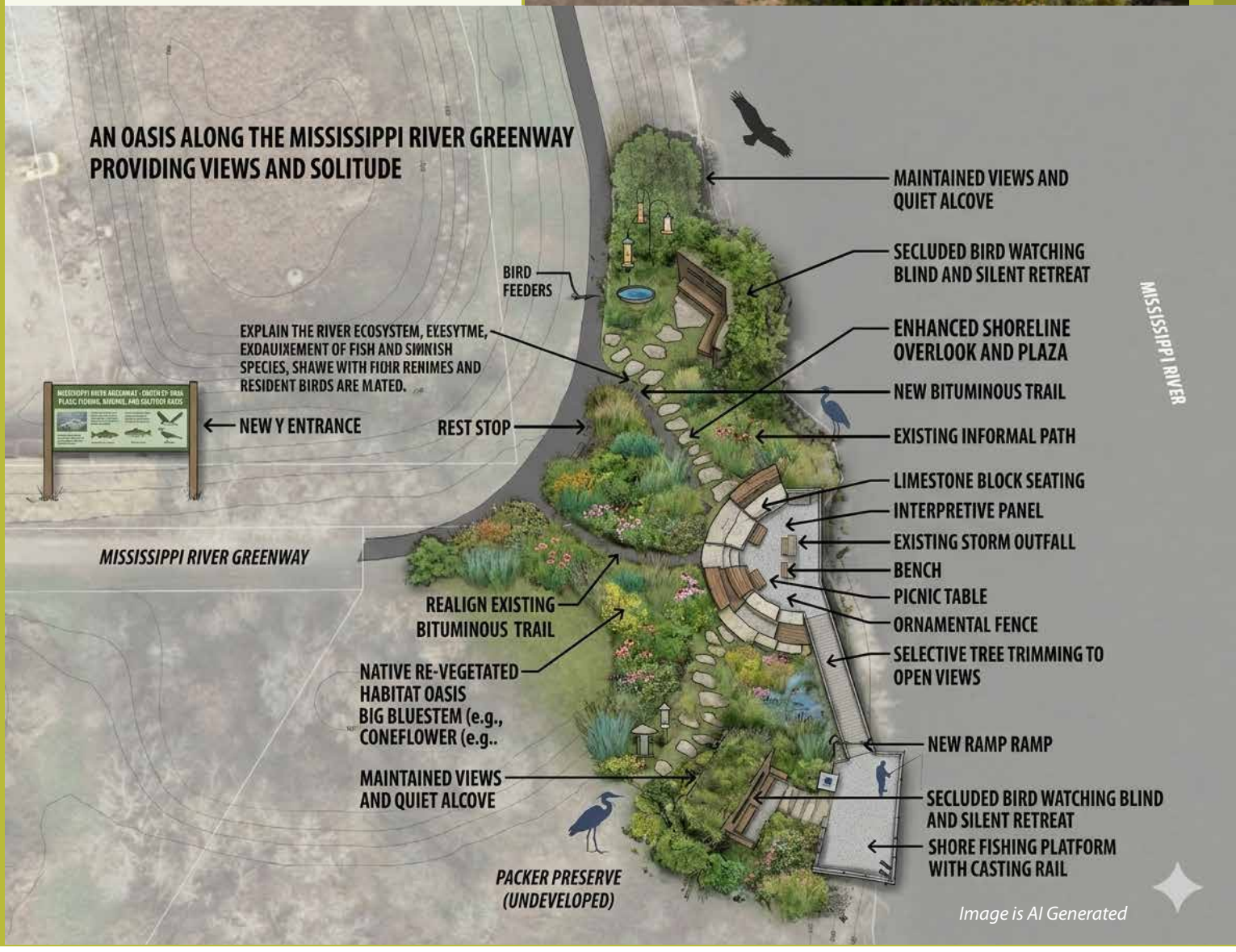

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INVER GROVE HEIGHTS SEGMENT

7.56 total miles - 4.55 miles along road / 3.01 miles off-road

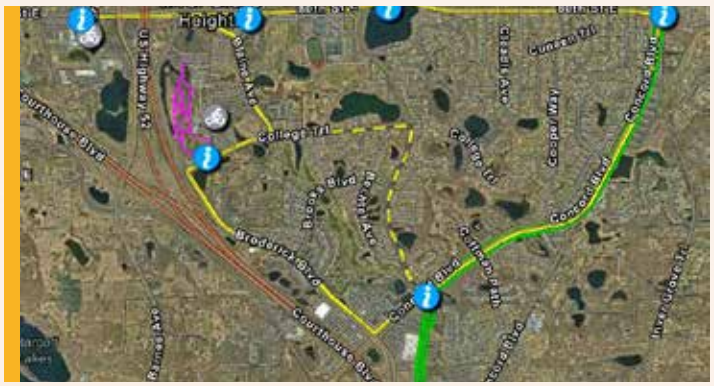
IMPROVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- **B1** Heritage Park – River Access/Floodway Restoration
- **B2** Swing Bridge Park Enhancements
- **B3** Dickman Alignment & Amenity Improvements
  - Rail Trail - Upper 71st St E
  - Dickman Trail
  - Water Quality Improvements and Overlook
  - Ernster Park and Overlook
- **B4** Concord Boulevard
- **B5** Concord Mosaic
- **B6** Old Concord Trail Alignment
- **B7** New Alignment Opportunity - 102nd St E to Powerline Easement
- **B8** Pine Bend Bluffs (Trail Loop & Overlook)
- **B9** Flint Hills North Overlook

★ Current Projects in this Segment (To be completed by 2027)



Digital Rendering of proposed pedestrian improvements along Concord Blvd



Map of proposed Unity trail with interpretive nodes

County Road 56 (Concord Boulevard) Improvements

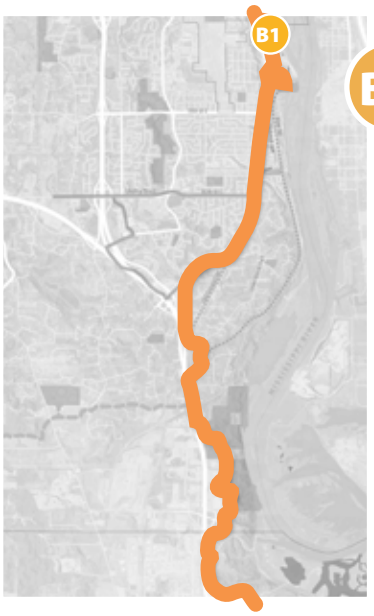
Dakota County project that will improve pedestrian and bicycle safety along County Road 56 (Concord Boulevard). Improvements will include raised crosswalks, truck aprons, medians, curb extensions, rapid flashing beacons, and crosswalk lighting.

Unity Trail

The Unity Trail will be a 5-mile loop along existing walkways in Inver Grove Heights with multiple interpretive nodes highlighting the contributions of Dakota County's diverse community. The project includes activities that highlight the themes of the Unity Trail and bike lending stations.



Figure 3.3. Inver Grove Heights Segment Focus Area Map



B1 Heritage Village Park River Access

This AI conceptual graphic and rendering shows a proposed river access area at Heritage Village Park. The concept features a boardwalk trail with interpretive signage opportunities, fishing access, a platform overlooking the riparian setting, soft surface trail zones for when water levels are low, and a kiosk with bike and ped amenities.







Shoreline Boardwalk Precedent Image



Grade-Separated Crossing Precedent Image



River Viewing Station Precedent Image

Proposed

Upper deck observation deck

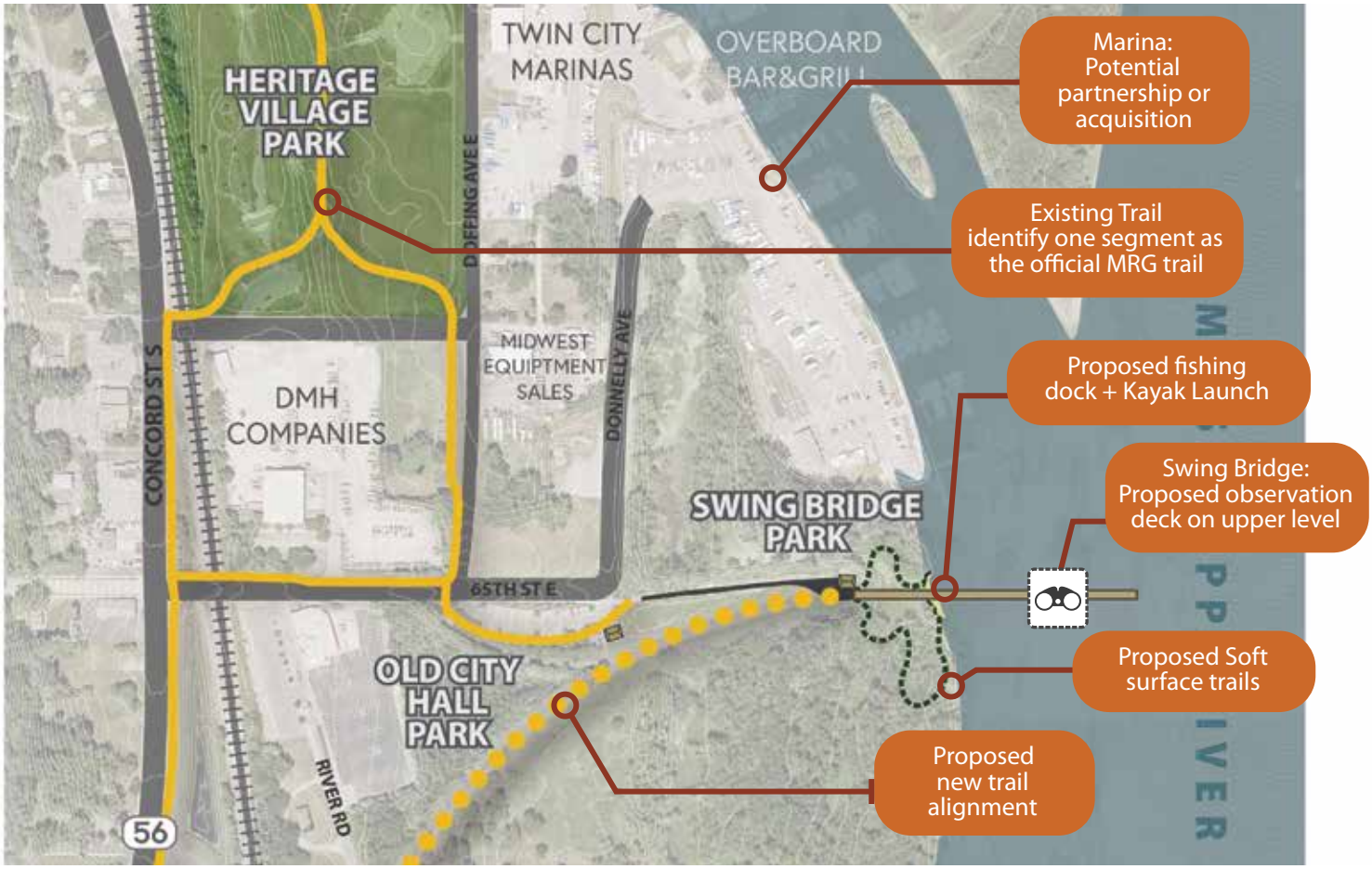


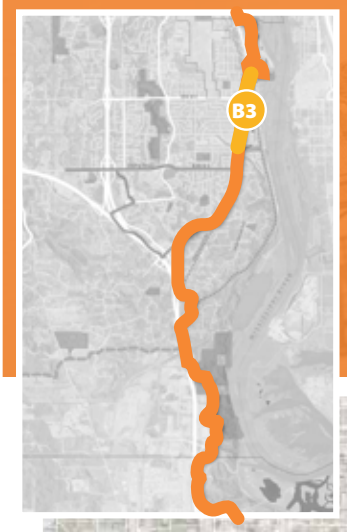
Image is AI Generated

B2 Swing Bridge Park Improvements

This enlargement highlights potential improvements and partnership opportunities at the Rock Island Swing Bridge Trailhead. Proposed improvements include:

- Soft surface trails providing river access
- A kayak launch
- Create an elevated viewing platform
- Enhance marina function

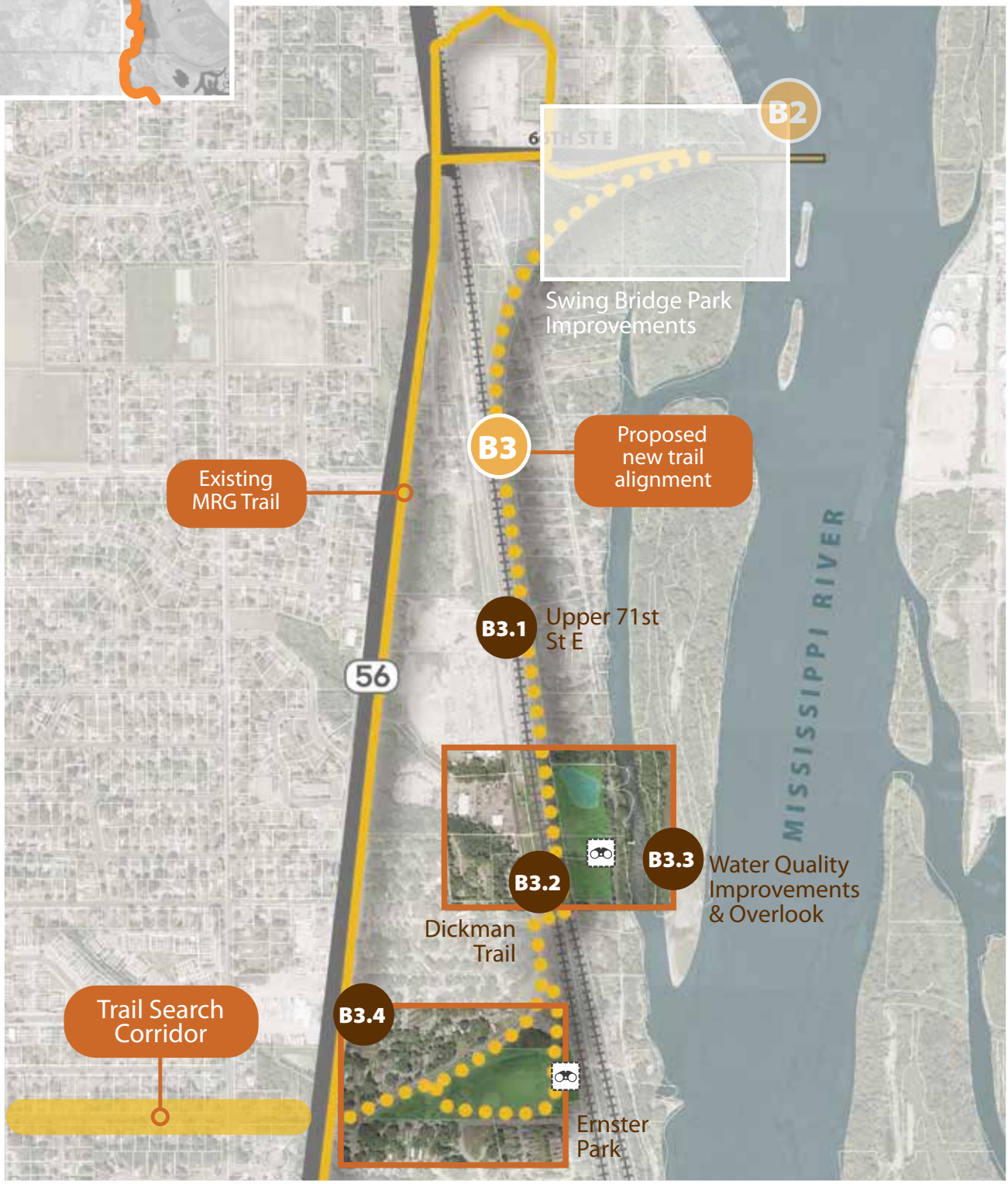




B3 Dickman Alignment & Amenity Improvements

The proposed alignment would follow the historic swing bridge rail corridor parallel to the existing railroad. The trail would cross the tracks near active railroad, continue south along Dickman Trail past Ernster Park, then reconnect with the current trail near Concord Boulevard.

To the west, a future connection to the Mississippi River–Lebanon Hills Greenway is shown within the highlighted search corridor.





B3.1 *Proposed Rail Trail - Upper 71st St E*

The proposed Rail Trail parllel to Dickman Ave keeps the MRG off the nearby roadway and navigates it away from the adjacent neighborhoods. The AI rendering below shows additional tree plantings to create a vegetative buffer from the active railroad tracks.



Historic Railroad Corridor Signage Opportunities



Image is AI Generated



B3.2 *Proposed Dickman Trail*

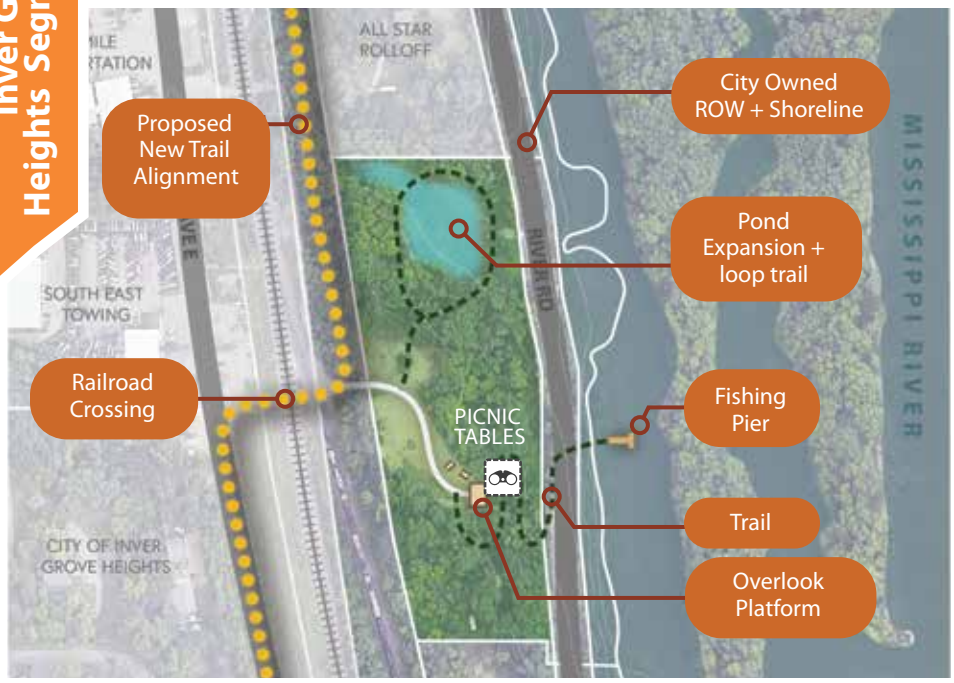
The proposed trail segment along Dickman makes use of the underutilized powerline corridor and turns it into an enjoyable and safe separated trail that continues adjacent to the existing railroad tracks. The AI rendering features wayfinding to help users navigate the experience.



Image is AI Generated





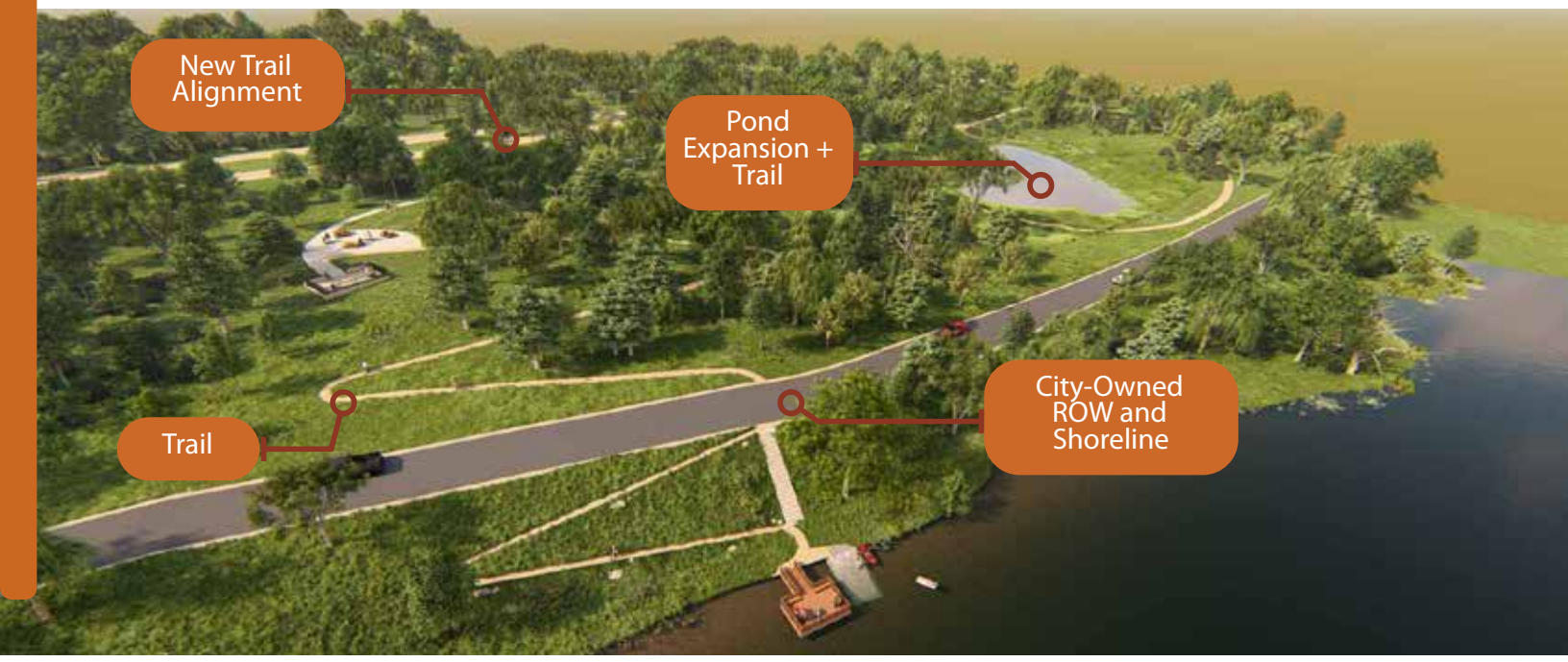


B3.3 *Water Quality Improvements and Overlook*

This graphic illustrates a proposed stormwater pond expansion, consistent with planning by the Lower Mississippi River Watershed District. Funding would be in partnership with the county, city, and watershed district. Additional site improvements on this City of Inver Grove Heights parcel may include:

- An overlook trail and viewing platform
- A soft surface trail descending the bluff
- A fishing pier and dock extending into the river

The city has limited public shoreline along the river, so these areas of public access are valuable water touchpoints.



B3.4 *Ernster Park*

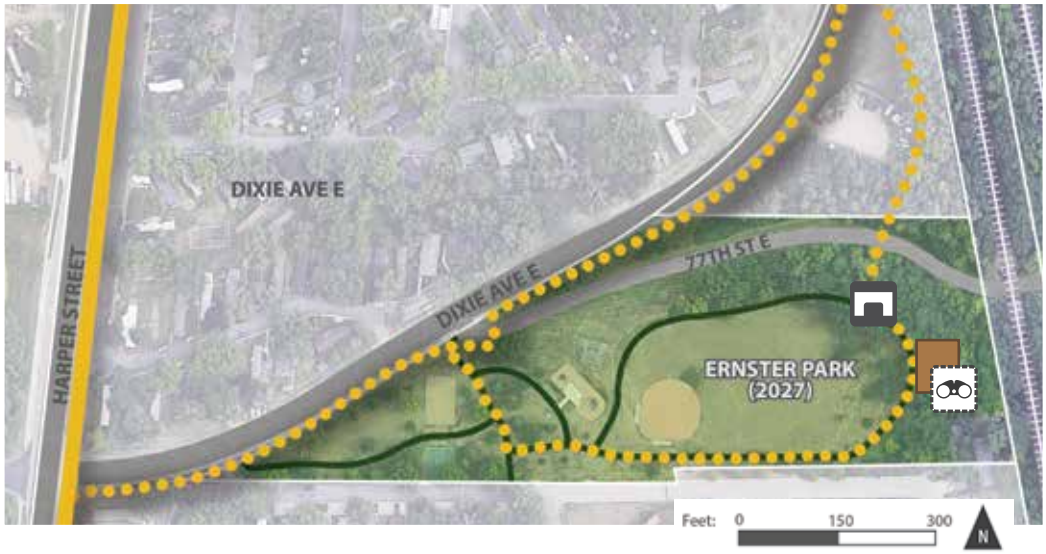
Ernster Park, is located just off the existing MRG trail today. Current trail users pass by the park without visual access. The map below shows a proposed passive connection with an alternative route along Dixie Ave E. The second figure proposes an additional longer-term route that bring users through the park to enjoy all that it has to offer.





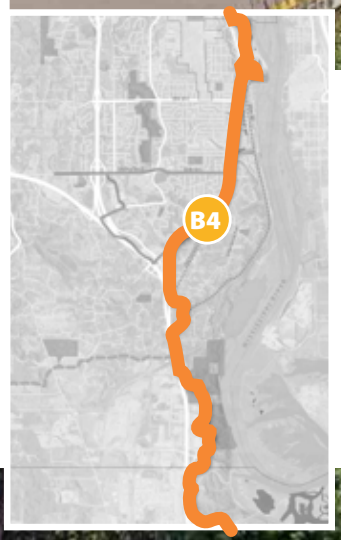
West Rail Corridor Long-Term Alignment

This enlargement depicts how the proposed trail alignment may pass through and integrate with Ernster Park.



Proposed - Parkway North





B4 CONCORD BOULEVARD

The proposed trail enhancements along Concord Boulevard include:

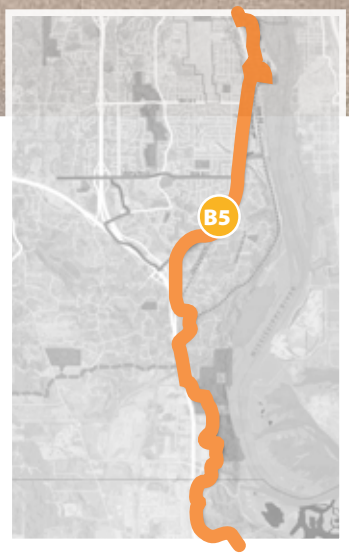
- Additional plantings in existing green spaces that create an improved vegetative buffer to separate bike and pedestrian traffic from vehicles.
- Implementing a central median where the existing center turn lane is unnecessary
- Improved signage/wayfinding
- A high visibility crossing along parkway north with a pedestrian refuge to help user safely cross the busy roadway.

Proposed - Parkway South



Proposed

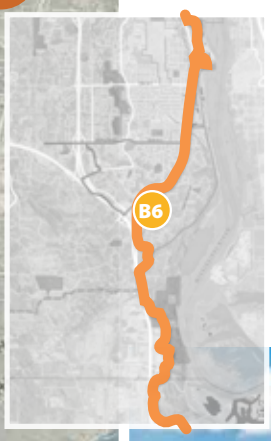




B5 Concord Art Mosaic

Existing infrastructure like retaining walls, bridges, and safety barriers offer opportune real estate for adding bright, colorful, playful public artwork or interpretive experiences throughout the trail system. This infrastructure is needed and often already exists along an established trail such as the MRG, and public artwork is one way to turn it into a unique destination. The AI rendering above shows a pollinator-themed mosaic on the concrete barrier along Concord Boulevard, celebrating the environmental enhancements this long-term plan could bring to life.





B6 OLD CONCORD TRAIL ALIGNMENT

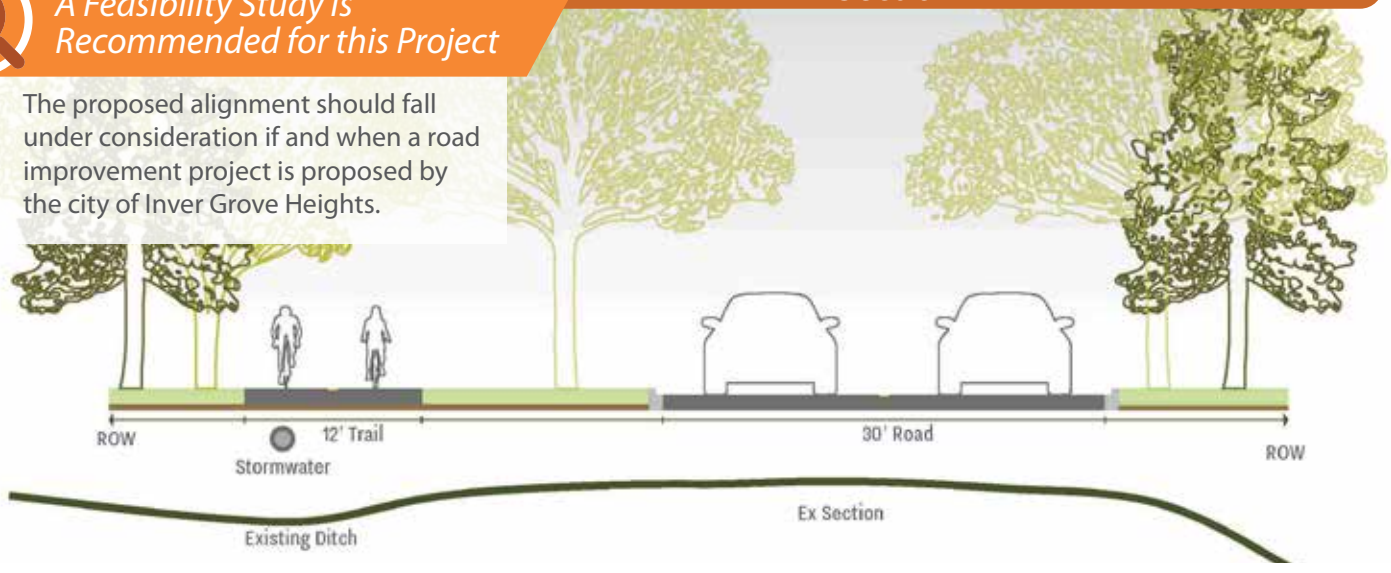
This enlargement and section illustrate a proposed realignment of the Mississippi River Greenway along Old Concord Boulevard. Shifting the trail to a lower volume roadway, would significantly enhance bicyclist comfort. The design fills the existing roadside ditch to accommodate the trail within the right of way.

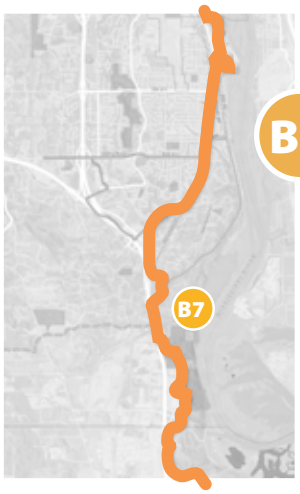


A Feasibility Study is Recommended for this Project

The proposed alignment should fall under consideration if and when a road improvement project is proposed by the city of Inver Grove Heights.

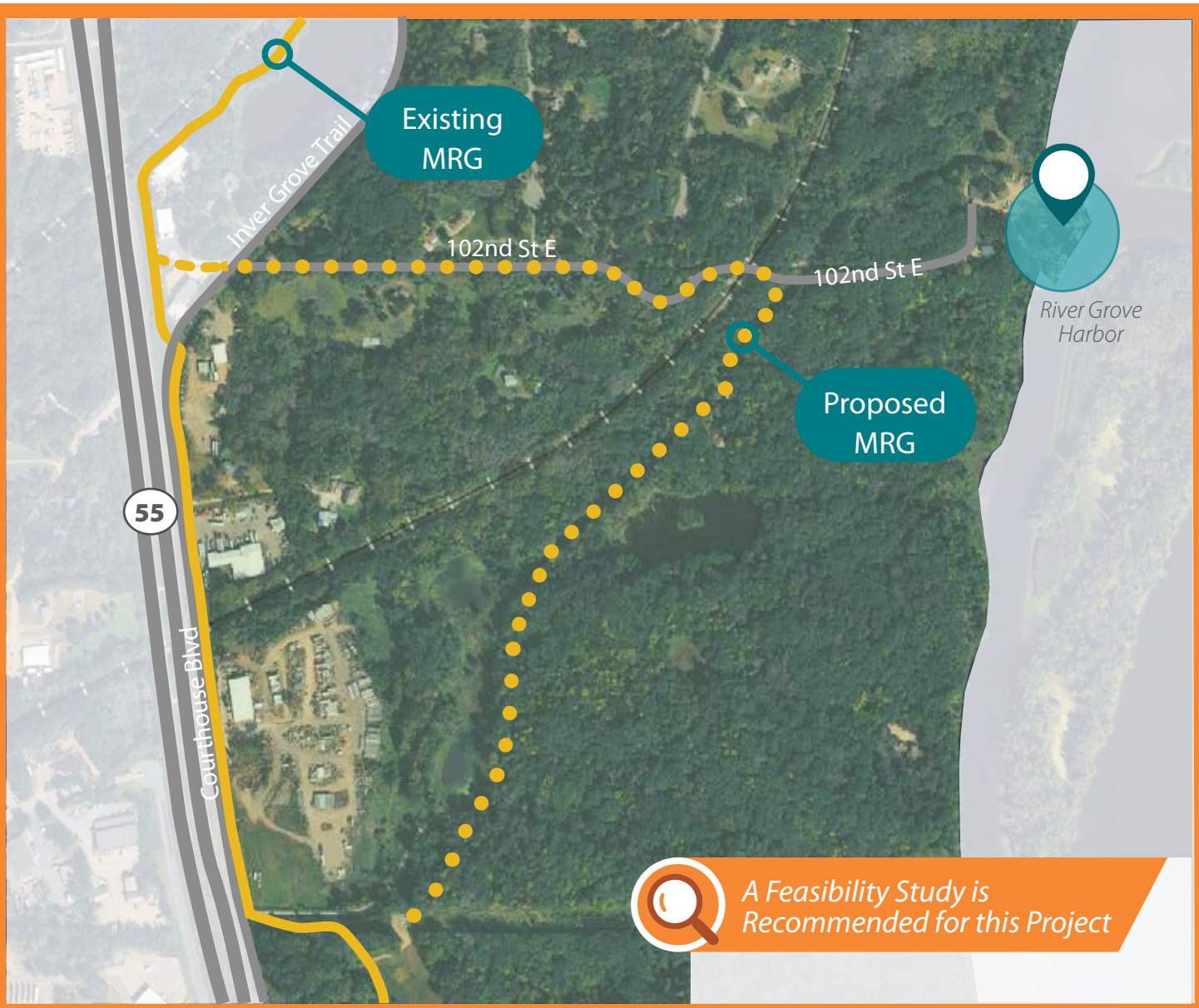
Section





B7 New Alignment Opportunity - 102nd St E to Powerline Easement

The following river access loop should be considered in the event the DNR Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) expands to the north trail along 102nd Street E and south through open and natural area connects the MRG to the River Grove Harbor and river users, and moves the trail off of the busy roadway, away from local industrial land uses, and through scenic terrain for a more enriching experience.



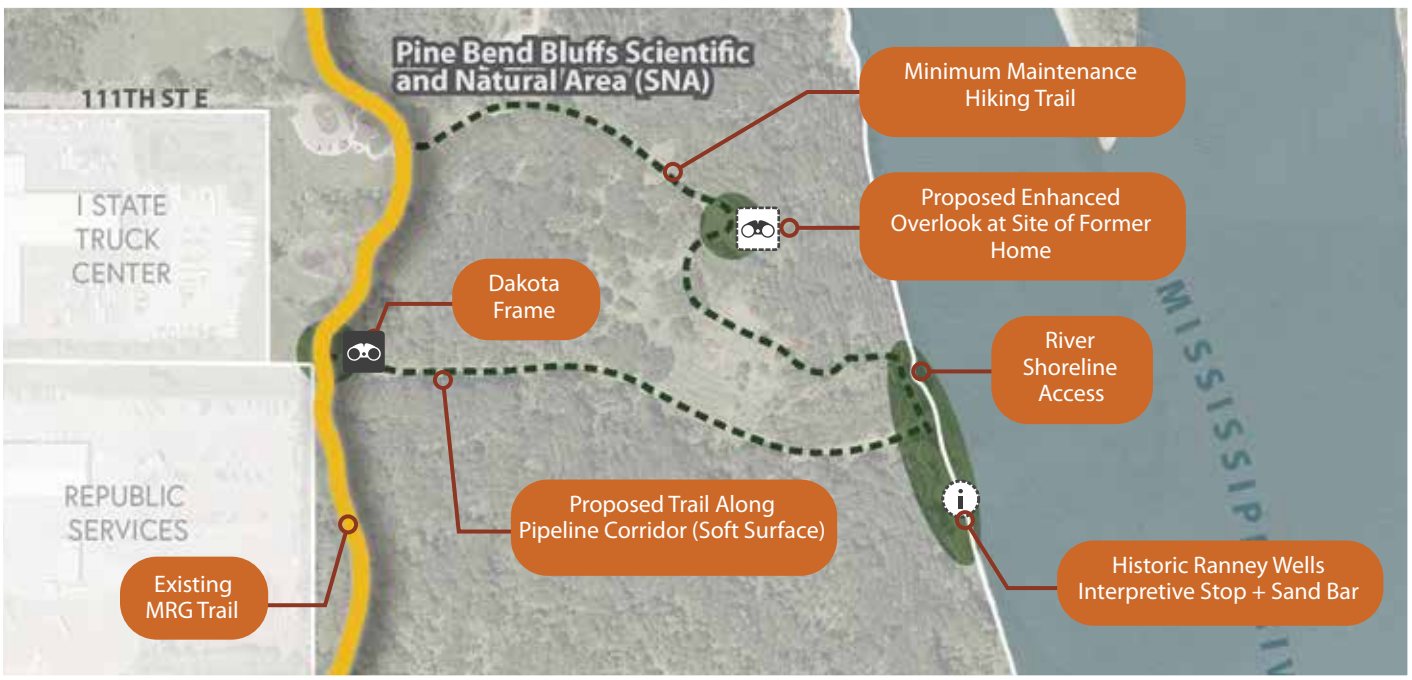
B8 Pine Bend Bluffs

This enlargement outlines a series of proposed improvements to Pine Bend Bluffs SNA along the MRG. New soft surface trails would create loop connections between the trailhead, the Dakota Frame, bringing users closer to the river's edge.

A new interpretive stop and nearby sandbar access are proposed to enhance educational and recreational experiences.



Trail on the pipeline corridor: Image is AI Generated







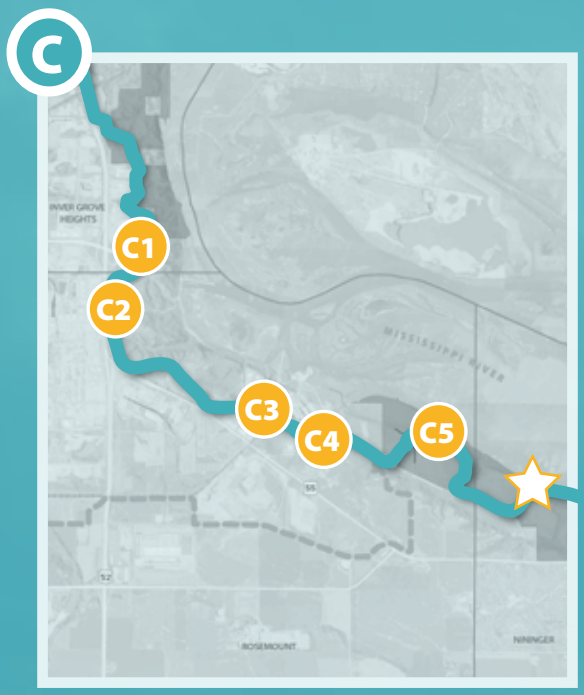
B9 Flint Hills North Overlook

In partnership with Flint Hills Resources the plan recommends a study to evaluate feasibility of a river overlook that provides a destination view of the Mississippi River.





Image is AI Generated



ROSEMOUNT

4.6 total miles - 2.34 miles along road / 2.28 miles off-road

IMPROVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- C1 Pine Bend Cemetery Interpretation
- C2 Flint Hills South Overlook
- C3 Worlds Longest Map or Mural
- C4 Pine Bend Road Re-Alignment
- C5 Fahey Interpretive Trailhead / Spring Lake Regional Park Access Improvements
  - Fahey-River/Bison Observation Tower
  - SLPR River View East Overlook

★ Current Projects in this Segment (To be completed by 2027)



Digital rendering of Fischer Ave Trailhead

Fischer Avenue Trailhead

A new trailhead at 13580 Fischer Ave, Nininger Township in Spring Lake Park is recently completed. This trailhead includes a picnic shelter, parking lot, upgraded roadway, bathroom, outdoor classroom, and a new paved trail that will connect to the existing trail and form a loop around the bison enclosure. There is potential for a river overlook near this site.



Rendering of future Fischer Ave interpretive node

Interpretive Node 4: Fischer Ave Trailhead

An interpretive site that will add an outdoor classroom near the site of the new Fischer Avenue trailhead.



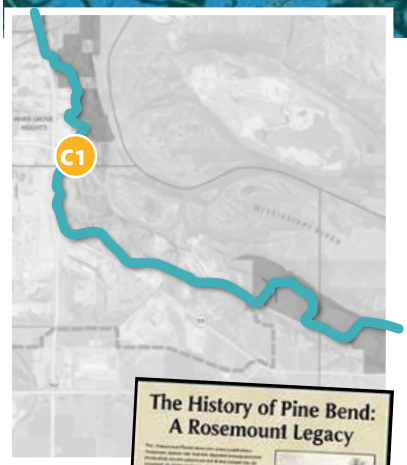
Figure 3.4. Rosemount Segment Focus Area Map

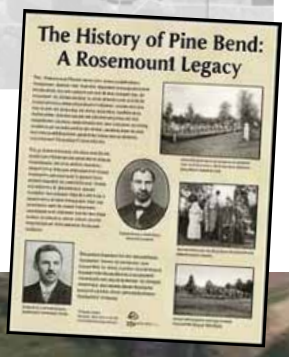


C1 Pine Bend Cemetery Interpretation

This interpretive concept for the Historic Pine Bend Cemetery aims to transform a passive historical site into an active educational and contemplative space. Located in Rosemount, Minnesota, adjacent to the Mississippi River Greenway and the Flint Hills Restoration Area, the cemetery is a primary cultural touchstone for the early history of the region.

- **Preservation and Respect:** Define the cemetery's boundaries with a high-quality wrought iron fence to honor the interred and guide public use.
- **Education and Engagement:** Utilize the site's location on a major regional trail (Greenway) to introduce diverse audiences to local history.
- **Contextualization:** Connect the private stories of the cemetery to the larger regional historical forces, including the Mississippi River, immigrant settlement, and industrial development.
- **Ecological Stewardship:** Demonstrate the link between cultural heritage and natural restoration by intertwining interpretive elements with a native prairie restoration zone.





Proposed interpretation at Pine Bend Cemetery

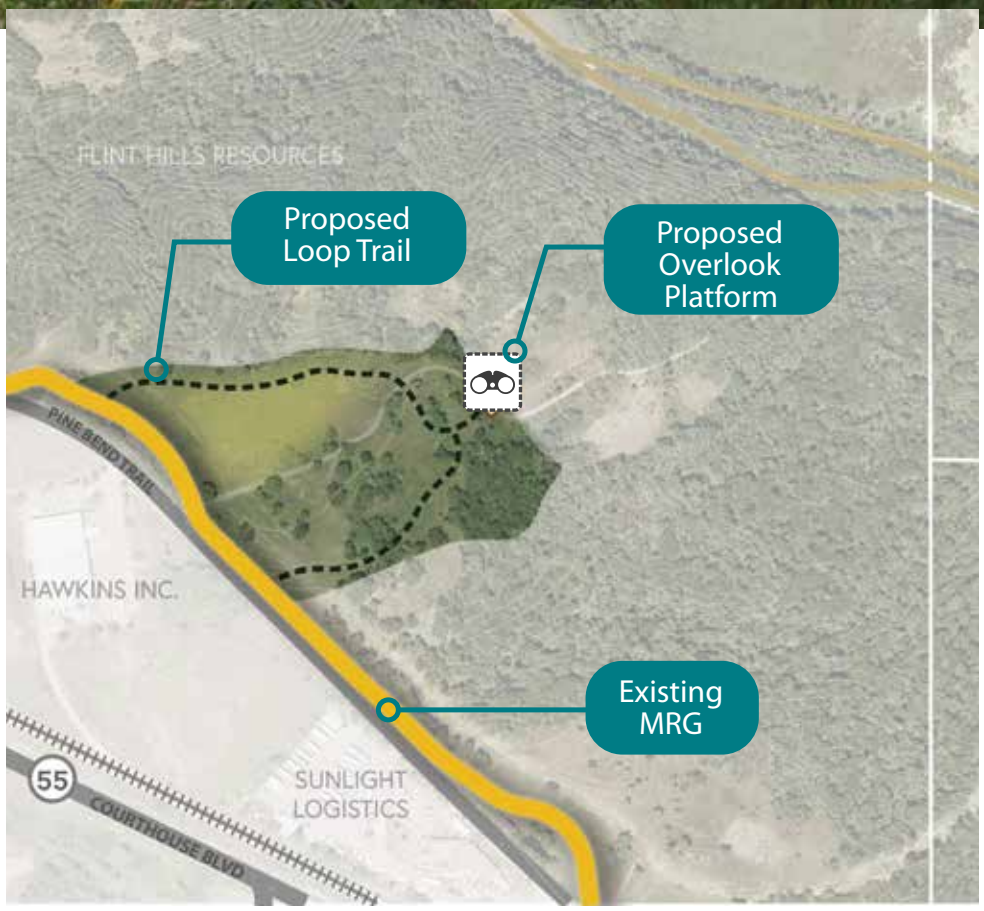


Image is AI Generated

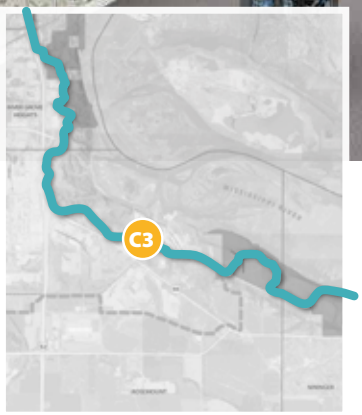


Image is AI Generated

C2

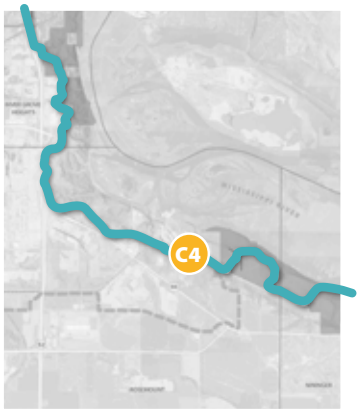






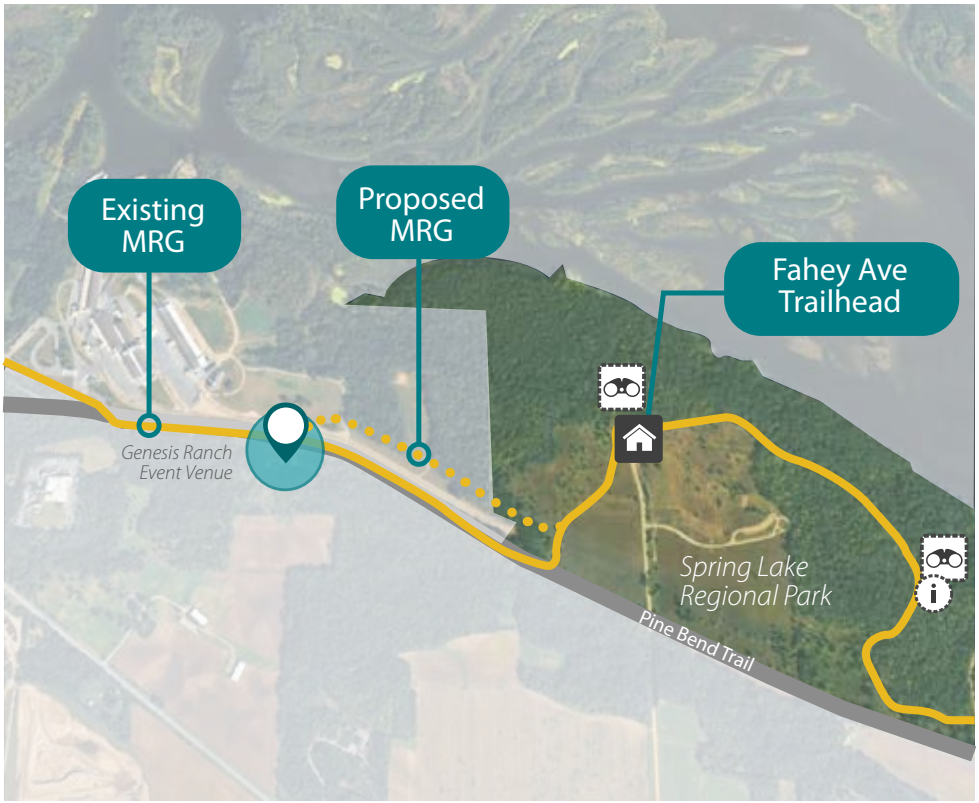
C3 World's Longest Map or Mural

The one-mile concrete barrier wall in Rosemount along Pine Bend Trail provides an opportunity for public art. The AI graphic shows what the wall could look like if it were painted with a map of the Mississippi River. This map mural has the potential to be "the longest map in the world!"



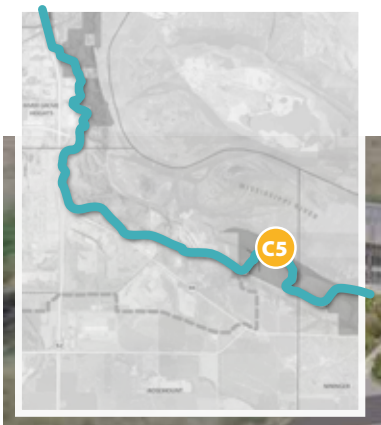
C4 Pine Bend Road Re-Alignment

Shift trail away from Pine Bend road east of the event venue (Genesis Ranch) if Dakota County acquires part of the Land Spec Property along Pine Bend. (The goal is to achieve 80/20 trail away from roads)



A Feasibility Study is Recommended for this Project

The proposed alignment should fall under consideration if and when a road improvement project is proposed by the city of Rosemount.



C5 Fahey Interpretive Trailhead/Spring Lake Park Reserve Access Improvements

C5.1 *Fahey-River/Bison Observation Tower*

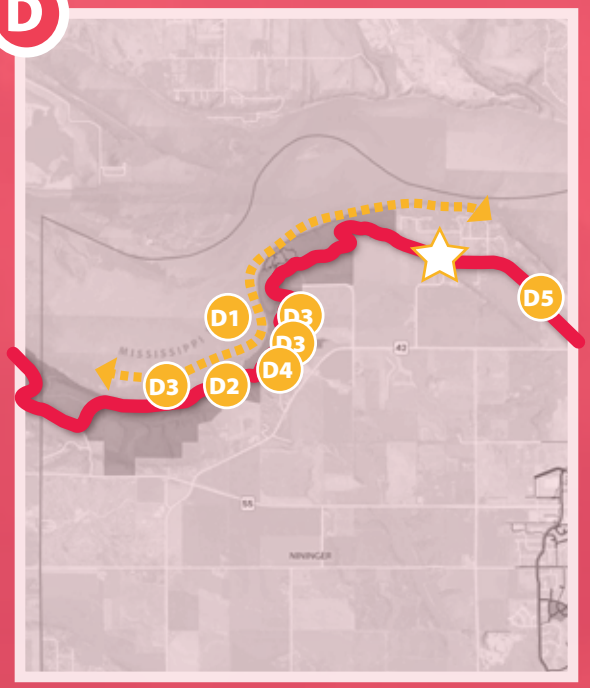
The AI rendering above shows proposed SLPR Entry enhancements including parking lot/circulation improvements, additional rest-stop amenities (a shelter, bench seating area with signage an interpretation, bike parking, etc.) and an ADA accessible observation tower overlooking the waterfront.

C5.2 *SLPR River View East Overlook*

The AI rendering below shows a paved accessible bike and pedestrian trial segment along the lake front with an overlook and educational signage.



D



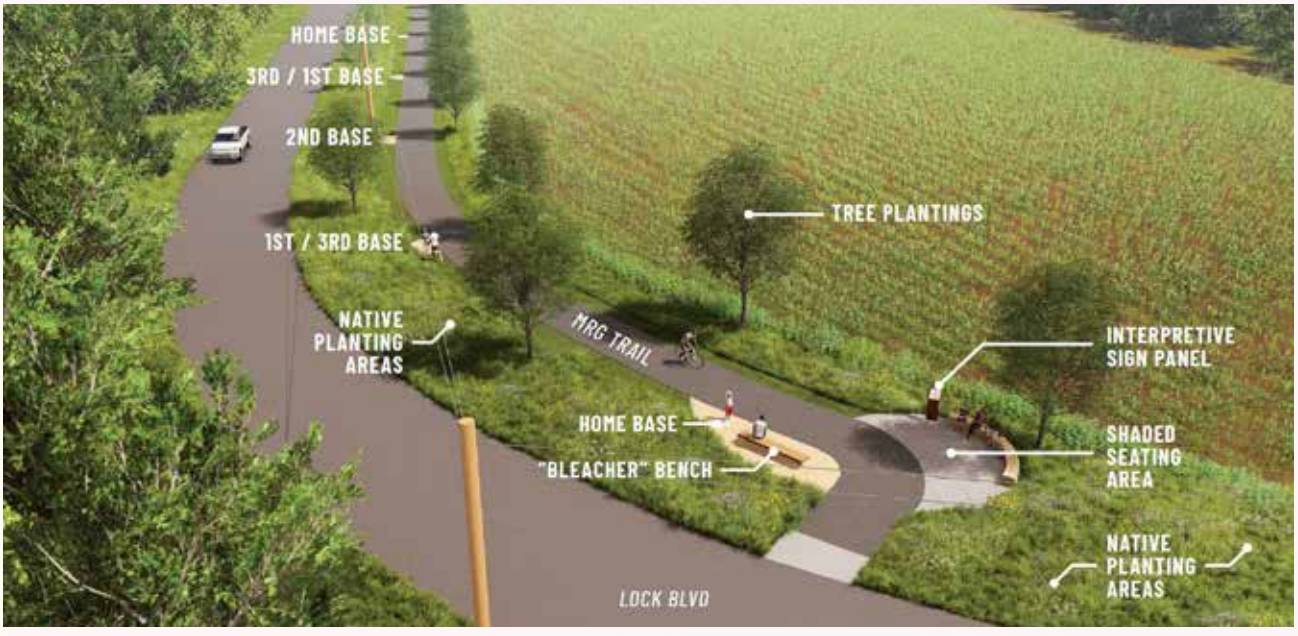
NININGER

6.4 total miles - 1.6 miles along road / 4.8 miles off-road

IMPROVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- D1 Restoration/Invasive Species Removal (Improved Views)
- D2 Long Bridge Portable Restroom
- D3 River/Lake Overlook Plazas
- D4 Fisher Ave Ravine Bridge
- D5 Long-Term Trail Alignment Opportunity

Current Project in this Segment (To be completed by 2027)



Rendering of Nininger interpretive node

Interpretive Node 5: Town of Nininger

The town of Nininger is known as the birthplace of town ball in Minnesota. This interpretive node will take inspiration from that legacy and will include a shaded seating area, ballpark themed bases, a baseball 'bleacher' looking over the field, and ballpark themed artifacts.



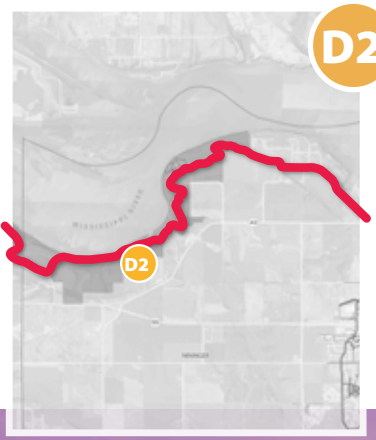
Figure 3.5. Ninnger Segment Focus Area Map



D1 Restoration/Invasive Species Removal

Improving Views Along the Waterfront

Prioritize the restoration of native plant species along the riverfront and the removal of invasive species, targeting areas for vegetation removal along the trail where the potential for river views and vistas exist.

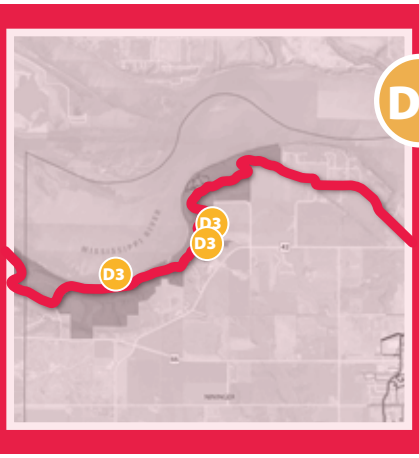


D2 Long Bridge Portable Restroom

Add an enhanced portable restroom unit near Long Bridge to help support everyday use and possible future programming/events. Consider self-cleaning options to reduce the need for maintenance and help ensure guests have a good experience with the amenities along the trail.







D3 River/Lake Overlook Plazas

Add 3-5 new river/lake overlook plazas between Fischer Trailhead and Schaar's Bluff to highlight water views, provide an enjoyable resting/ picnicking spot, and implement interpretive features that educate users and promote the story of the Mississippi River Greenway.

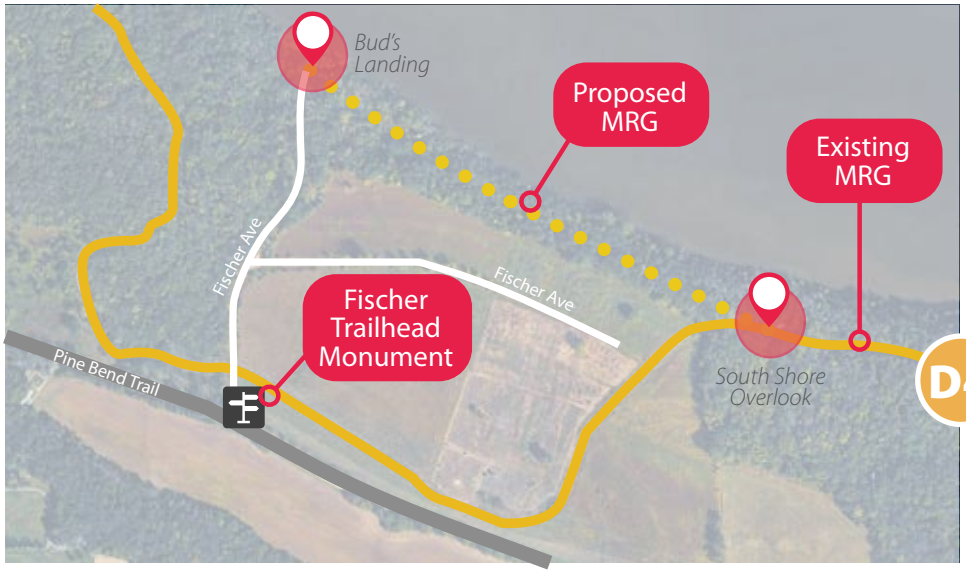


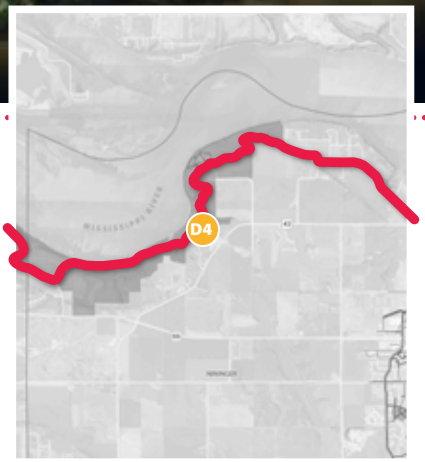
Image is AI Generated

Mississippi River Greenway



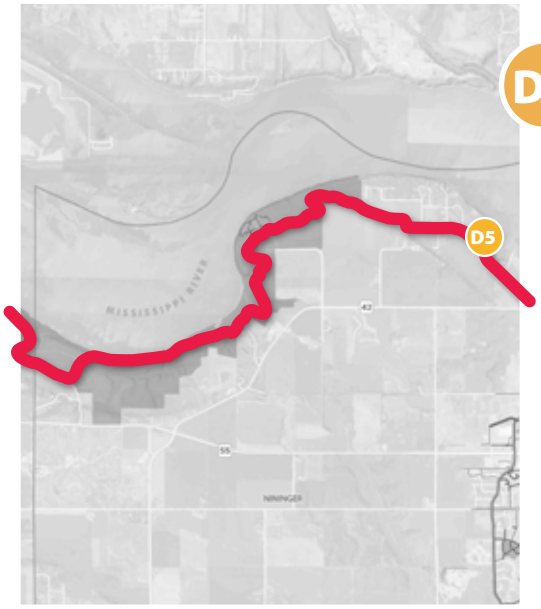
Existing South Shore Overlook





Fisher Ave Ravine Bridge

Add ravine bridge over Fisher Ave that will loop from Bud's Landing to the existing South Shore Overlook for a scenic trail connection.



D5

Long-Term Trail Alignment Opportunity

Relocation Away from Lock Blvd

If land along Lock Blvd transitions to suburban development, the City is encouraged to work with city/township developer to relocate trail away from Locke Blvd following the ridge bottom and river edge if possible.

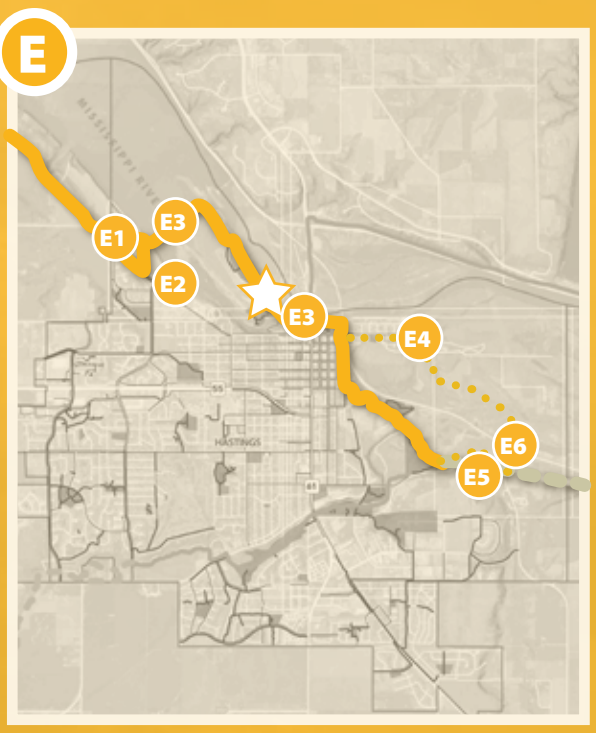




A Feasibility Study is Recommended for this Project

The proposed alignment should fall under consideration if existing rural land in this area becomes available for development.





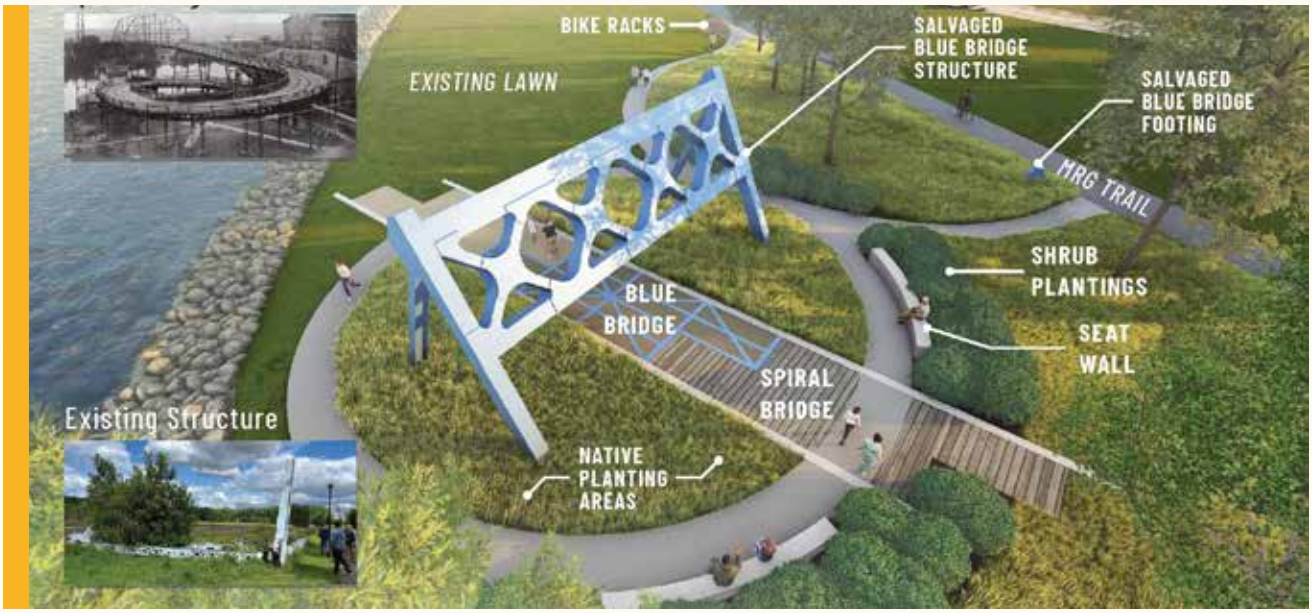
HASTINGS

4.5 total existing trail miles (1.14 miles along road / 3.36 miles off-road) + 1.2 miles proposed on-road

IMPROVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- E1 River Hills On-Road Bike Route
- E2 Avent Property Restoration
- E3 Levee Enhancement
- E4 Lake Isabel 5-Mile Loop
- E5 Short-Term Interim Connection Option
- E6 Roberts Wastewater Treatment Plan Site Concept

★ Current Project in this Segment (To be completed by 2027)



Rendering of Hastings interpretive node

Interpretive Node 6: Hastings

The sixth planned interpretive node will pay homage to the spiral bridge that once connected residents of Hastings to the east bank of the Mississippi and will use salvaged parts of the 'blue bridge' that took its place. It will include native plantings, bike racks, pathways, and seat walls.

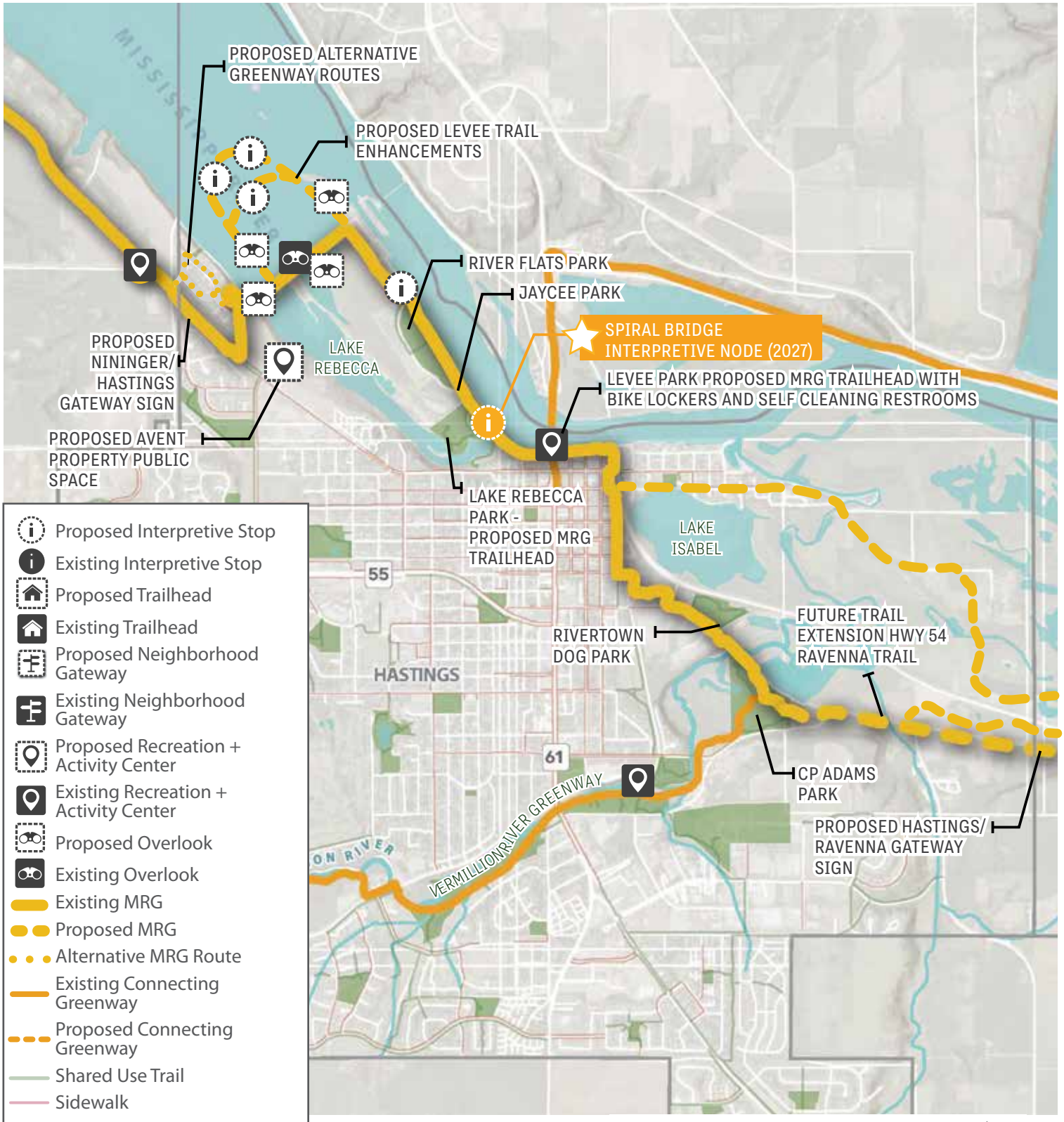
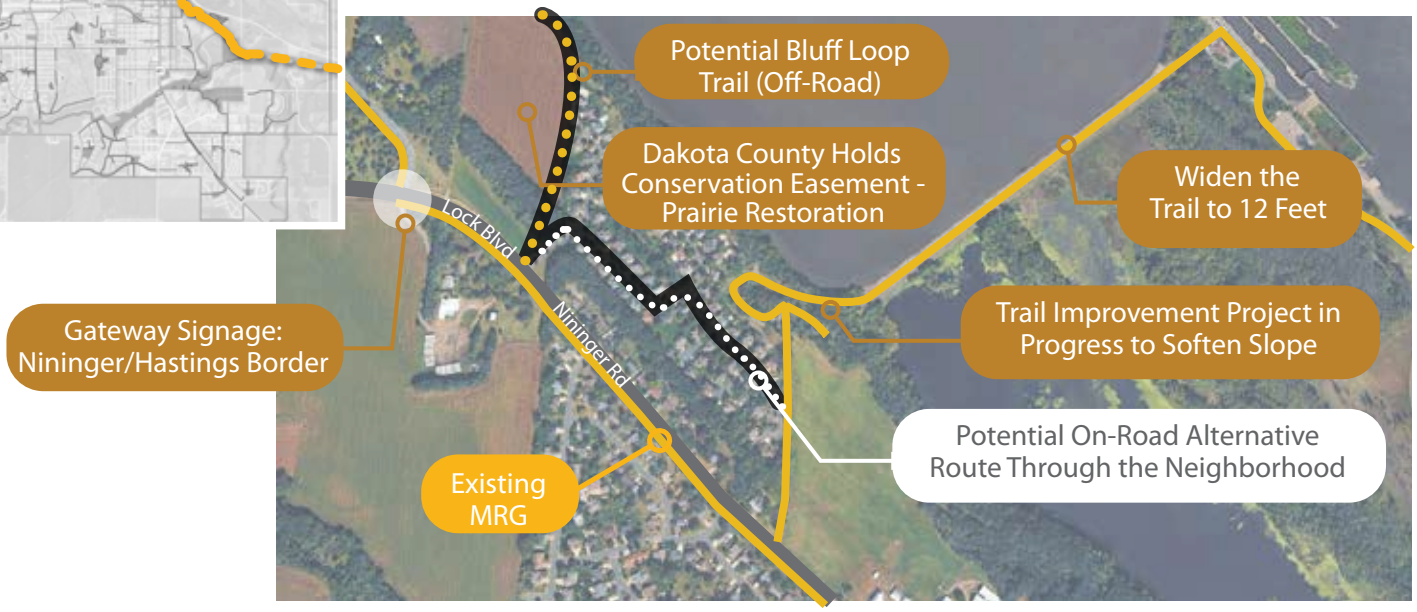


Figure 3.6. Hastings Segment Focus Area Map



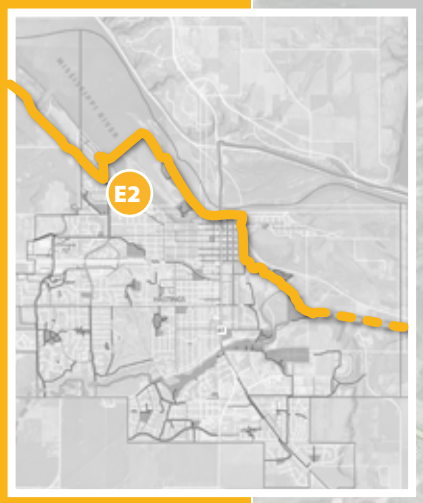
E1 River Hills Bike Route

In order to continually improve the off-road greenway experience, the MRG may be moved to a new alignment if suburban development extends into Nininger and the northern part of Hastings. These potential new greenway routes would be realized through development.



E2 Avent Property Restoration

Explore possibilities for an event center, park, oak savanna restoration, and more on the Avent Property. The AI generated plan below starts to explore ideas for what is possible in this space.



A parkland restoration area and event space on the Avent Property



E3 Levee Enhancement Study

This graphic represents a proposed partnership between Dakota County and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the Hastings Lock and Dam area, along the Mississippi River. The goal of this project would be to enhance the Mississippi River Greenway trail system and improve public access, provide educational opportunities, and restore natural habitats through a partnership between Dakota County and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

Park Entry & Trailhead (Mainland Side)

This area serves as the main entry point, featuring developed amenities and direct access to the existing Mississippi River Greenway.

- **Expanded Parking:** Increased parking capacity to accommodate visitors.
- **Trailhead and Interpretive Area:** A formalized access to the trail and lock & dam:
  - Picnic amenities.
  - Informational signage regarding the greenway and local history.
  - Improved Restroom facilities. (co-branded)

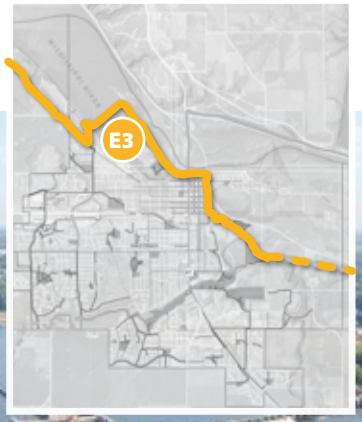
Habitat Restoration & Shoreline (Island Perimeter)

A significant portion of the project focuses on dynamic habitat management and aesthetic improvements along the river side of the island.

- **Levee Native Plantings and Beach Restoration:** A lengthy corridor focusing on:
  - Replacing invasive species with native vegetation.
  - Restoring public-facing beaches.
- **Shore Fishing:** Dedicated areas for river fishing access.

USACE Partnership

Work with the Army Corps of Engineers and the City of Hastings to re-imagine the levee condition with swimming spots, native plantings and shoreline restoration, wetland improvements and bird blinds, and picnic/rest areas.





Observation Decks & Viewing Platforms

To enhance the wildlife viewing experience, several specialized, elevated, and accessible structures are proposed throughout the site.

- **Great Blue Heron Colony Observation Deck:** Located on the mainland side for clear views of a nearby rookery.
- **Eagle Nest Viewing Platform:** Positioned on the loop trail for viewing an active bald eagle nest.
- **Riverbend Vista Platforms (x2):** Located along the soft surface trail, offering scenic views of the river bend.
- **Forest Floor Viewing Platform:** An accessible platform designed for low-to-the-ground observation within the woodland area.
- **Floodplain Edge Blind:** A specialized structure at the junction of different habitats, ideal for unobtrusive bird watching and photography.



Trail System Development

The plan proposes three distinct trail experiences to create loops and diverse environments.

A. Hastings Island Loop Trail (could also be a there and back with one boardwalk connection)

- Trail Type: A primary loop that utilizes a combination of newly constructed boardwalks (spanning from the mainland) and the existing elevated levee-top trail.
- Features:
  - River and Bird Viewing: Elevated views from the levee.
  - Forest Floor Overlook: Accessible overlooks into the island's forested interior.
  - Wetland Interpretive Site: A specific point of interest focused on the internal island wetland habitat.
  - Canoe/Kayak Portage: provide a formalized canoe and kayak access/portage into Lake Rebecca allowing bypass of lock for paddlers.

B. Soft Surface Trail (Mainland/ Floodplain)

- Trail Type: An unpaved, natural-surface trail winding through the mainland's forested floodplain.
- Features:
  - Accessible Nature Viewing: Areas designed for easy wildlife viewing.
  - Extended Soft Surface Trail: A secondary loop exploring the dense floodplain woods.

C. Mississippi River Greenway

- Trail Type: The existing paved, multi-use greenway trail that serves as the backbone connecting to the new improvements.



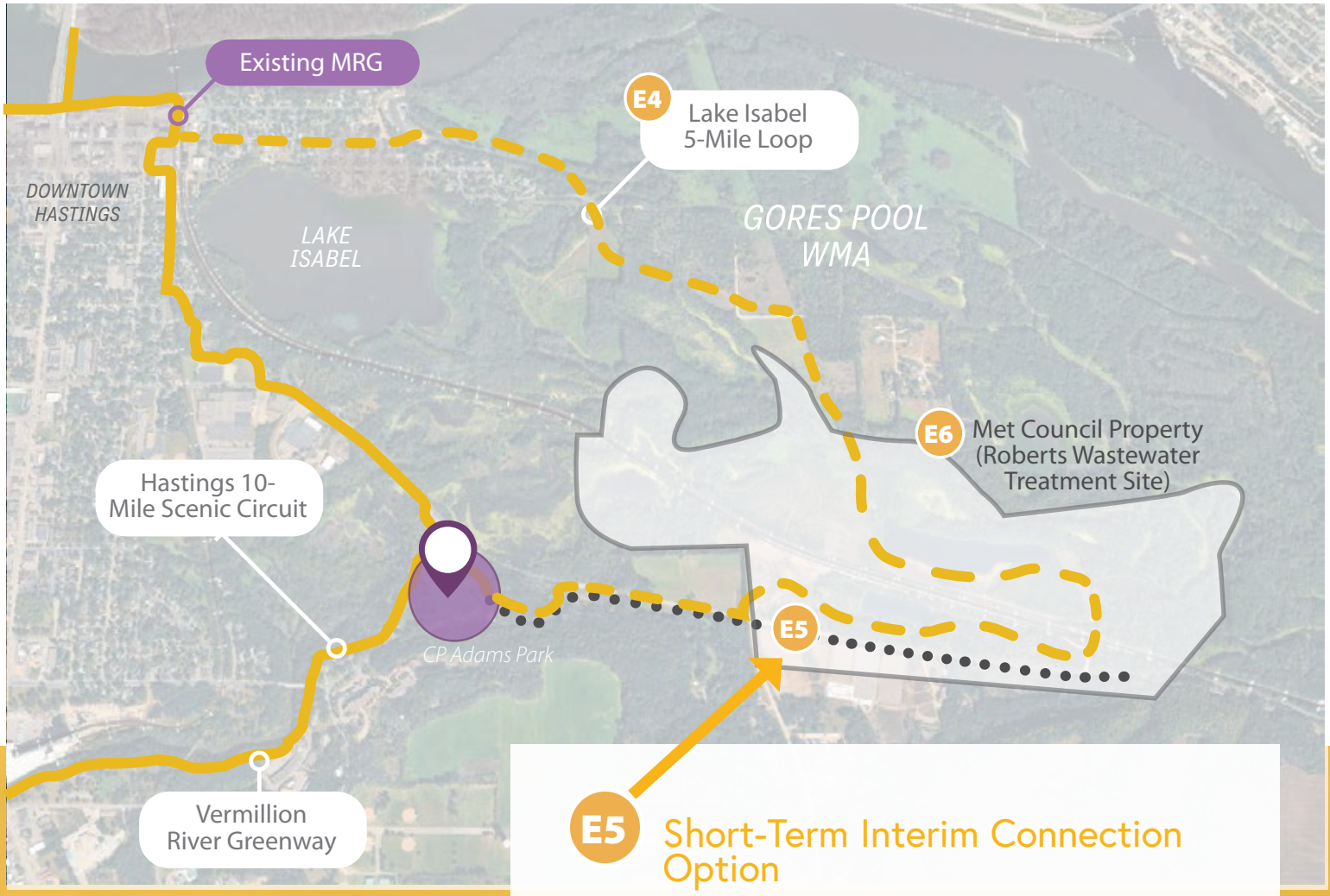
Levee with native plantings and fishing pier



Levee with beach and fishing pier

E4 Lake Isabel 5-Mile Loop

The Proposed Lake Isabel 5-Mile Loop would branch-off of the existing MRG/Hastings Scenic Circuit, directing users through an existing neighborhood adjacent to the historic downtown area until it reached the Gores Pool Wildlife Management Area. It would then traverse scenic natural habitat away from busy roadways, over to the former wastewater treatment site where a number of site restoration opportunities are proposed (see the following page), and link to existing CP Adams Park. The proposed trail loop would utilize roughly 1.7 miles of existing trail.



E5 Short-Term Interim Connection Option

Develop an off-road interim connection to CSAH 54 from CP Adams Park as a short-term recommendation providing access to on-road bike route south of Hastings toward Goodhue County.

E6 Metropolitan Council - Vermillion River Land Concept

This existing Met Council wastewater treatment site might become available as a potential conservation area. The site offers prime opportunities for educational programming, access to the Vermillion River, and interpretation to learn about the importance of habitat, restoration, and natural processes. The AI generated concept plan below gives an example of the sites







F RAVENNA

IMPROVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- E4 Hastings Five Mile Loop
- E5 CSAH 54 to CP Adams Park Interim Connection
- E6 WWTP Site Concept

Prepare a Future Alignment Study to determine how the Mississippi River Greenway extends to Red Wing

- **Review Alternative Alignments as Necessary**

A Feasibility Study is Recommended for this Project



Figure 3.7. Ravenna Segment Focus Area Map



UP NEXT:

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

04 LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

i NATURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

Section Content:

- i Natural Resources Inventory
- ii Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP)
- iii Water Resources Protection

OVERVIEW

This chapter will explore a variety of natural systems along the greenway including land cover, native plant communities, and water resources and identify protection and management strategies for these systems.

The Mississippi River Greenway runs through a wide variety of landscapes from restored Oak Savanna to River Bottom Forests. It is a priority to conserve, restore, and protect these vital natural areas.

This section describes: The current natural resources inventory, a landscape management plan, and water resources protection plan



Prairie Rose near the trail

The Mississippi River Greenway winds through a variety of natural habitats and cultural landscapes. The area has had a long history of use by Indigenous people, as evidenced by the density of cultural resource sites recorded by the office of the state archaeologist throughout the route of the trail.

At the time of European contact, the bluffs and uplands on the west side of the Mississippi River were a mosaic of savanna-like "oak openings and barrens", prairies, and deciduous forests dominated by oak, maple, basswood, and hickory. With the advent of European settlement, much of land was altered in successive waves of agricultural expansion and urbanization.

Since the development of the modern highway system in the 1950s, urban and suburban land uses have expanded rapidly throughout the county, replacing agricultural land. The least disturbed land remains on the bluffs and floodplains bordering the Mississippi River.

The following section provides an overview of the Mississippi River Greenway Natural Resources Management Plan (the NRMP) that was completed in 2025, and recommendations for trail-side enhancements as well as future studies.

TERRESTRIAL RESOURCES

Due to these patterns of development, the northern 10 miles of trail through South Saint Paul and Inver Grove Heights are largely urbanized. Beginning at Inver Grove Heights and continuing south, development thins and the trail passes through some of the highest quality natural areas in the metropolitan area. This area is home to 11 different types of native plant communities and has over 2,000 acres of land preserved by a variety of public and private entities, and includes the Pine Bend Bluffs Natural Area and Spring Lake Park Preserve. South of Hastings, the trail continues to trace the bluff where there are many high-valued habitats still intact, from mesic hardwood forests, to floodplain forests and marshes. These high quality natural areas are connected by several large conservation planning areas including Dakota County's Conservation Focus Areas, the Metropolitan Council's Conservation Corridors, and the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area.

These are high value areas for wildlife preservation. The NRMP describes the value of these lands in terms of habitat. The NRMP lists 31 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) that are either known to exist or are likely to exist in the habitats along the trail. The MRG also lies at the heart of the Mississippi River Flyway, which is a migration route for over 325 species of birds, including 40% of the shorebirds and waterfowl in North America; 20 of the 31 SGCN species are birds. Wide floodplains and forested bluffs give migrating species space to rest and forage on their journey, and they provide nesting sites for species that breed in Minnesota. These natural lands are also home to a number of listed pollinators, such as the lead plant flower moth, Leonard's skipper, the rusty patched bumble bee, and the monarch butterfly.

Fluvial & Aquatic Resources

Following the edge of the Mississippi River, the MRG passes a variety of waterbodies, wetlands, and small ephemeral drainages. In the urbanized areas, most of the runoff is channeled into municipal stormwater systems that outfall directly into the river. Small wetlands and stormwater basins dot Inver Grove Heights. At various points, the trail encounters floodplain wetlands, namely at the swing bridge, Lake Rebecca in Hastings, and the Vermillion River floodplains that border the trail corridor from Hastings to Ravenna. Water resources are protected by two watershed organizations. The northern third of the trail is within the Lower Mississippi River Watershed Management Organization jurisdiction. The southern two thirds of the trail passes through the Vermillion River watershed which is protected by the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization.

The trail intersects or passes approximately 40 ravines along the river bluffs. From Pine Bend through Spring Lake Park Reserve, the trail traverses a series of deep ravines. In general these ravines are well vegetated and many of them are protected by detention and diversion features that prevent erosion. However, the pre-conditions for erosion are present at a number of locations.

Present Day Trail Side Conditions

Urbanized parts of the trail pass through neighborhoods and municipal parks. The trail follows transit corridors and levees along the river. These areas, especially the levees, have a lot of hard surfaces; pavement, concrete, and riprap with little shade, only the occasional cottonwood or boxelder. The parks and boulevards have a high abundance of turfgrasses and allied weeds. They also contain a high abundance of invasive species. The most common are common buckthorn, black locust, smooth brome, reed canary grass, and Siberian elm.

Many of the high quality natural areas have also undergone changes. Due to a lack of wildfires and a warmer and wetter climate, areas of former savanna and prairie have undergone a process called mesophication; which is the succession of dry, fire-dependent landscapes to dense shrubland or forest. Non-native shrubs like buckthorn and Tatarian honeysuckle have invaded the forests. Common buckthorn has the ability to invade native forests, taking advantage of edge disturbances such as roads, trails, and homesteads to start colonizing the shrub layer.



NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Mississippi River Greenway Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) is a comprehensive plan for managing the natural lands in the MRG. The full plan includes management goals and priorities for the entire corridor as well as a five-year plan and a long-term workplan.

The NRMP identifies 22 natural area nodes where opportunities exist to improve habitat within the trail corridor or adjoining parks and other natural areas. Work scopes were prepared for 21 project areas within these nodes and 13 of these projects have received LCCMR and Raise grant funding. (See figure of NRMP planned work). The following pages provide a high-level summary of content that can be found in the full NRMP. Click the link to the right to view the full plan.

Natural Resources Management Plan

Click the icon below view the full NRMP for the Mississippi River Greenway.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Implement the projects that have received funding,
2. Pursue the scoped projects that have not received funding including; MNDOT Land adjacent to Pine Bend Elementary School (Node 9), Flint Hills Resources (Node 11), Spring Lake Park (Node 13-14), Benjamin Easement (Node 16), Benjamin to Lake Rebecca Trail Section (Node 17), Lake Rebecca Park (Node 18), Levee Park (Node 21).
3. Develop the partnerships necessary to implement the NRMP projects
4. Plan for long-term maintenance of restored areas.

IN-CORRIDOR RECOMMENDATIONS

While the NRMP prioritized work in parks or protected areas adjacent to the corridor, additional opportunities exist within the 30-foot greenway buffer for improving habitat by:

1. Reducing the abundance and spread of invasive species
2. Supporting native pollinators

LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE & ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Restorations will require ongoing monitoring and maintenance, and thus a long-term commitment to funding and effort, to maintain their restored condition. Maintaining restoration projects utilizes a process called adaptive management. Adaptive management is a method of working with the land that is responsive to changing weather patterns and developing plant communities. It involves a cycle of maintenance, monitoring, and planning that helps identify ecological issues like invasive species, erosion, and disease that can quickly derail a restoration.

- Every restoration project needs a budget for long-term monitoring and maintenance.
- Develop a monitoring routine that includes the collection of standardized vegetation data, invasive species maps, and management actions undertaken for each restoration area.
- Data should be stored in a centralized location so management history will survive grant deadlines and staff turnover.
- Staff time will need to be devoted annually to review data and plan for future maintenance activities.

OPERATIONS

Institute a Lights Out policy for all lighting within the Mississippi River Greenway in accordance with Audubon Minnesota: Lights Out Minnesota | Audubon

- Down shield all exterior lighting.
- Dim or turn off all unnecessary lighting from midnight to dawn during bird migration seasons.

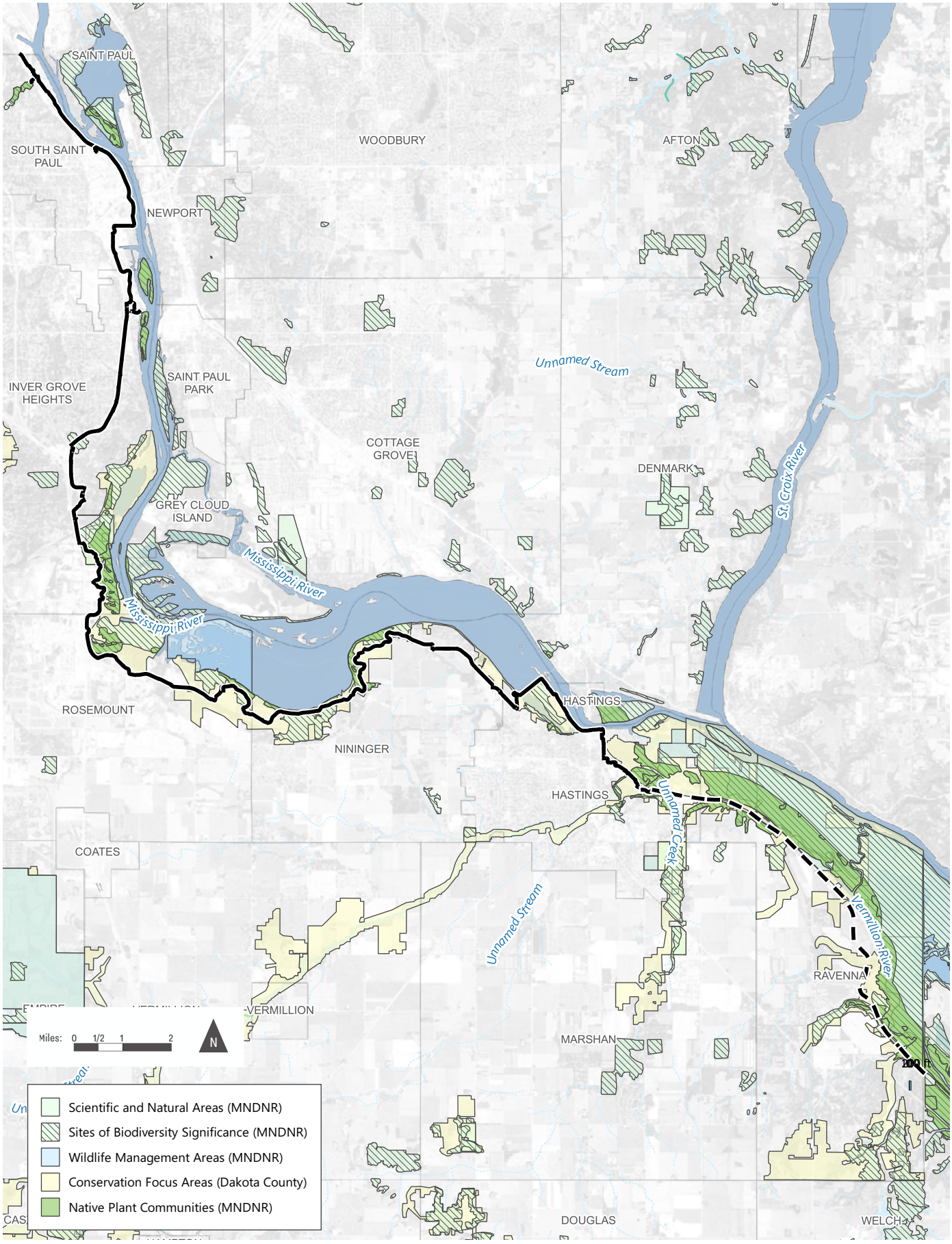


Figure 4.1. Map of Natural Resources along the MRG

LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE & ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

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  - Down shield all exterior lighting.
  - Dim or turn off all unnecessary lighting from midnight to dawn during bird migration seasons.



Early summer flowers near the trail

Strategic Partnerships

Develop City-County Conservation Collaboratives for cost-sharing and co-management on MRG projects on city-owned land.

Develop Joint Powers Agreements (JPAs) or Supplemental Maintenance Agreements (SMAs) to manage restorations with adjoining private land owners.

Seek SMAs for establishing and maintaining native habitat within MNDOT right-of-ways or Xcel utility easements.

GREENWAY ZONES

Existing Photos





Urban/Industrial Backyards

These sections of the trail are characterized by an overall lack of green space. They are narrow and often bounded by fencing or transportation routes, such as city streets and active railways. Work in these areas should consist of:

- Removal of invasive species including; Siberian elm, black locust, common buckthorn, Tatarian honeysuckle
- Installation of bee lawns in turfgrass areas where mowing and sightlines are a concern
- Conversion to native prairie, or enhancement with native wildflower seed
- Tree planting to reduce the urban heat island effect
- Dependent on maintenance agreements with the city or county transportation department to maintain plantings.
- CCCC Program in Inver Grove Heights



Levees

Approximately 3.7 miles of trail follows levees, river embankments or earthen dams along the edge of the river. These sections of trail are often the most exposed, hot, and desolate, with wide expanses of riprap or concrete walls. Opportunities exist here to improve the vegetation in ways that are compatible with the stability of the river banks. The landward side of the levee in South Saint Paul has been colonized by invasives like leafy spurge. This area could be enhanced with native grasses, or a combination of native grasses and forbs for pollinator forage.

- Implement project plans from the NRMP
- A study should be conducted in coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers, to identify opportunities for adding native habitat.

- Example: dry prairie levee conversion in South Saint Paul



Suburban/Boulevards

These are sections of the trail where development is less dense and more green space exists adjacent to the trail and therefore more opportunities exist to enhance the local vegetation.

- Removal of invasive species
- Conversion to native prairie
- Maintenance agreements with utility companies, and MnDOT become increasingly valuable in the suburban corridors.
- Opportunities exist along Highway 52 to enroll land in efforts like the Monarch CCAA.



Rural/Parks

These are areas where contiguous green space exists beyond the immediate trail corridor and meaningful habitat improvement projects can be accomplished. This work will require coordination with local municipalities, the state, or large private landholders. Many of these areas are discussed as priorities for improvements in the NRMP.

- Implement project plans from the NRMP.



Rare/High Quality Habitat

These are the areas of highest quality habitat which contain rare plants, animals, or unique native plant communities. These are the highest priority areas for protection and restoration that were identified in the NRMP, such as the Pine Bend Natural Area, Spring Lake Park, and Lake Rebecca. These areas are most appropriate for large scale restoration efforts, like efforts to re-establish fire and reverse mesophication. These are also the most beneficial areas to protect, by controlling invasive species adjacent to the trail. Work in these areas may require coordination with partners like MnDNR, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, or large private landowners.

Goals:

- Implement project plans from the NRMP.
- Reverse the effects of mesophication with brush removal and the re-introduction of fire.
- Extensive buckthorn and invasive shrub removal efforts.
- Develop maintenance agreements with large private landowners, such as Mosaic LLC, C.F. Industries, and Flint Hills Resources, for restoration of large tracts of high quality habitat on adjoining private land.

Figure 4.2. Greenway zones and NRMP map



WATER RESOURCES PROTECTION

The Lower Mississippi River Watershed Management Organization, conducted a study of the drainages that empty into the Mississippi River to identify sources of pollution and feasible solutions. The study encompasses most of the northern third of the trail from South Saint Paul to the Pine Bend Scientific Natural Area. See the hatched area on the water resources map (Figure 4.4). The study investigated ravines, outfalls, and drainage ways for erosion and proposed new stormwater infrastructure to treat runoff before it enters the river. The study did not identify any active erosion within the study area, but it did identify several locations that should be actively monitored, including several ravines within the Pine Bend Bluffs area.

- Conduct a similar review of the southern two thirds of the trail, from the Pine Bend SNA to the Goodhue County line, to identify opportunities for bluff stabilization and water quality improvement projects within the existing or proposed corridor.
- Develop an erosion monitoring plan for the ravines adjacent to the trail (see pink zones on figure 4.4).
- The development and siting of the eastern extension corridor should proceed with a high level review of wetlands and rare species to identify alternatives and avoidance measures early.

- Require wetland delineation
    - Construction steps: 1) Avoid wetland impacts 2) minimize impacts 3) mitigate impacts
- Run an NHIS query

EXISTING WATER RESOURCES

Plant Selection for a Healthy Aquatic Environment

Future plant selection along the MRG corridors will be important for maintaining a healthy and thriving environment that protects existing water resources.

A focus on native species with staggered bloom seasons will help to:

- Promote native habitat
- Keep invasive plant species out of the corridor
- Promote water quality
- Lessen maintenance needs
- Sustain pollinators

Click the link to view an example list of recommended plant species

Short Grass Dry Prairie Mix:

Click the icon below to learn more:



Figure 4.3. Water Resources Map



LEVEE RESTORATION PLAN
(SOUTH ST PAUL & HASTINGS)

Restoring vegetation on a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) levee is a delicate balancing act. The goal is to find a balance between "Mother Nature's aesthetics" with "Uncle Sam's engineering rigors." The gold standard for these projects is ETL 1110-2-583 (Guidelines for Landscape Planting and Vegetation Management at Levees). The primary goal of the Corps is visibility and structural integrity: if a tree root creates a seepage path or a bush hides a groundhog hole, the levee fails its mission.

Here is a structured framework for a natural vegetation plan that satisfies both ecological goals and USACE requirements.

1. The Critical Concept: The Vegetation-Free Zone (VFZ)

Before picking seeds, you must respect the geometry. The USACE defines a **Vegetation-Free Zone** that must be kept clear of all woody vegetation (trees and shrubs).

- **The Levee Prism:** The actual mound of the levee.
- **The 15-Foot Buffer:** A corridor extending 15 feet outward from both the landside and waterside "toes" (the bottom edges) of the levee.
- **Permitted Growth:** Only perennial grasses and low-growing groundcovers are allowed here to ensure inspectors can see cracks, boils, or animal burrows.

2. Recommended Plant Palette

Since trees are off-limits on the levee itself, "natural" restoration focuses on **native grasslands and pollinator habitats.**

Category	Purpose	Examples
Primary Grasses	Soil stabilization & erosion control.	Sideoats Grama, Blue Grama, Buffalo Grass.
Native Wildflowers	Pollinator support & aesthetics.	Purple Coneflower, Black-eyed Susan, Coreopsis.
Cover Crop	Short-term stability while perennials take root.	Sterile Oats or Regreen (Wheat x Wheatgrass hybrid).

What to Avoid

- **Invasive Species:** Avoid aggressive non-natives like Crown Vetch or Kentucky Bluegrass if you want a true "natural" restoration.
- **Deep-Rooted Woody Plants:** Any species that develops a woody root system (Willow, Cottonwood, etc.) Is a red flag for the Corps.
- **Bunch Grasses (Large):** Some large bunch grasses can obscure the ground surface during inspections; stick to mid-to-short height varieties.


Crown Vetch


Kentucky Bluegrass

3. Implementation Strategy

A successful plan isn't just about what you plant, but how you prepare the site.

- **Soil Preparation:** Most levee soils are highly compacted "engineered fill." You may need a light discing or harrowing to a depth of 2–3 inches—just enough for seed-to-soil contact without compromising the levee's compaction.
- **Hydroseeding vs. Drill Seeding:** Drill seeding is generally preferred for levees as it places the seed at a precise depth, though hydroseeding with a bonded fiber matrix is excellent for steep slopes.
- **The "Managed Forest" Approach (Outside the VFZ):** Beyond the 15-foot buffer, you can transition into native shrubs (Serviceberry, Elderberry) and eventually hardwood trees (Oaks, Sycamores) to create a naturalized riparian corridor.

The USACE will inspect the levee annually. To keep your "natural" plan from being flagged as "overgrown":

- **Mowing Schedule:** Mow at least twice a year. Once in late spring (after ground-nesting birds have fledged) and once in late fall. This prevents woody saplings from taking hold.
- **Invasive Management:** Spot-treat thistles and woody volunteers (like invasive Bradford Pears or Autumn Olive) immediately.
- **Animal Control:** A "natural" levee is a magnet for burrowing animals. Your plan should include a protocol for filling burrows with bentonite or compacted soil to prevent "piping" during a flood event.

A Note on Variances: While the 15-foot VFZ is the national standard, some Districts allow for "Legacy Trees" or specific environmental variances. However, these are notoriously difficult to get approved and usually require significant engineering offsets (like overbuilt seepage berms).

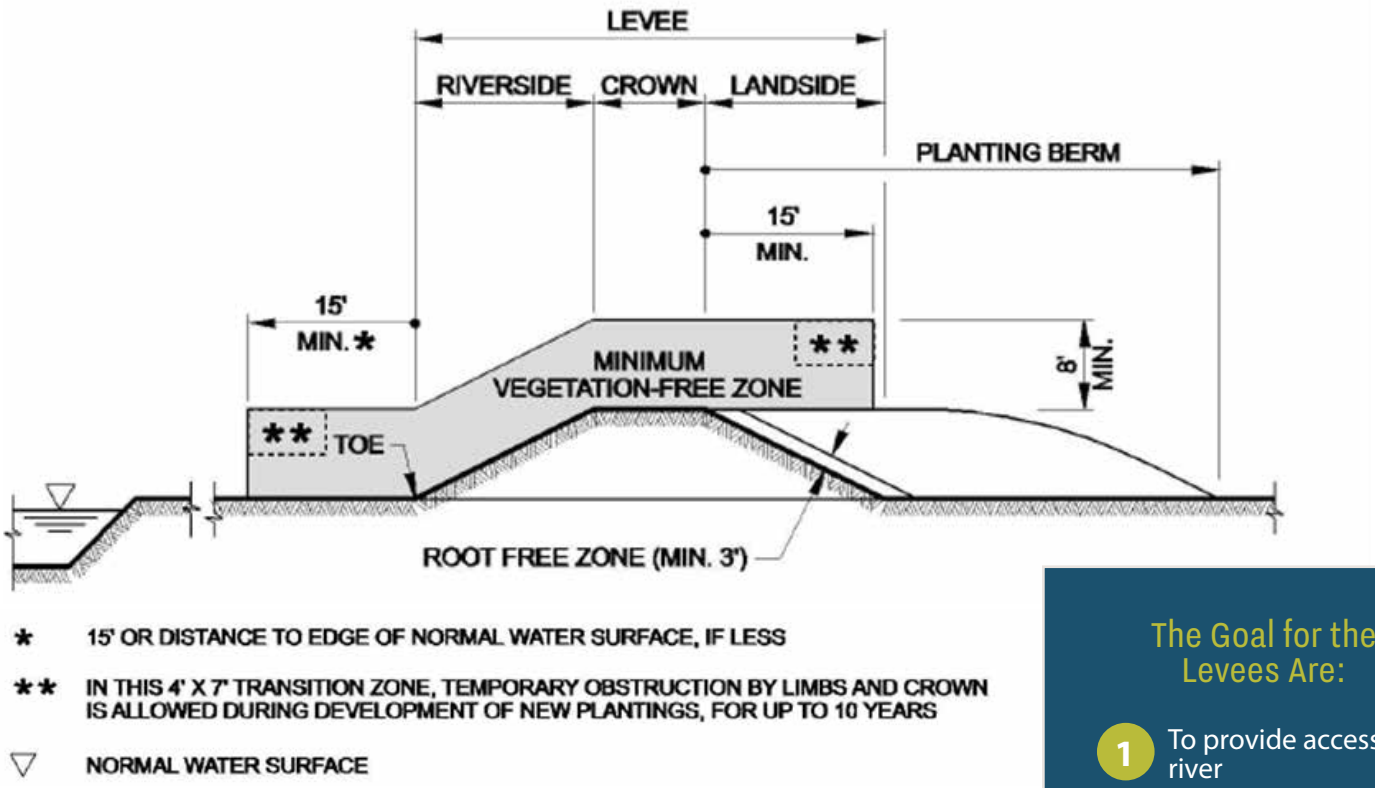


Figure 4.4. Detail of a Levee section with planting berm

The Goal for the Levees Are:

1. To provide access to the river
2. To be more ecologically functioning
3. To be more aesthetically pleasing



UP NEXT:

OPERATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

05 OPERATIONS & IMPLEMENTATION

i A LONG-RANGE VISION

This chapter will describe and outline the steps that need to be taken to make the future vision for the MRG a reality.

This section describes: Programming precedents and partnership opportunities, acquisition maps, balancing expected costs with budgets, exploring funding opportunities, estimating the costs of desired projects, and operations and maintenance expectations.

Section Content:

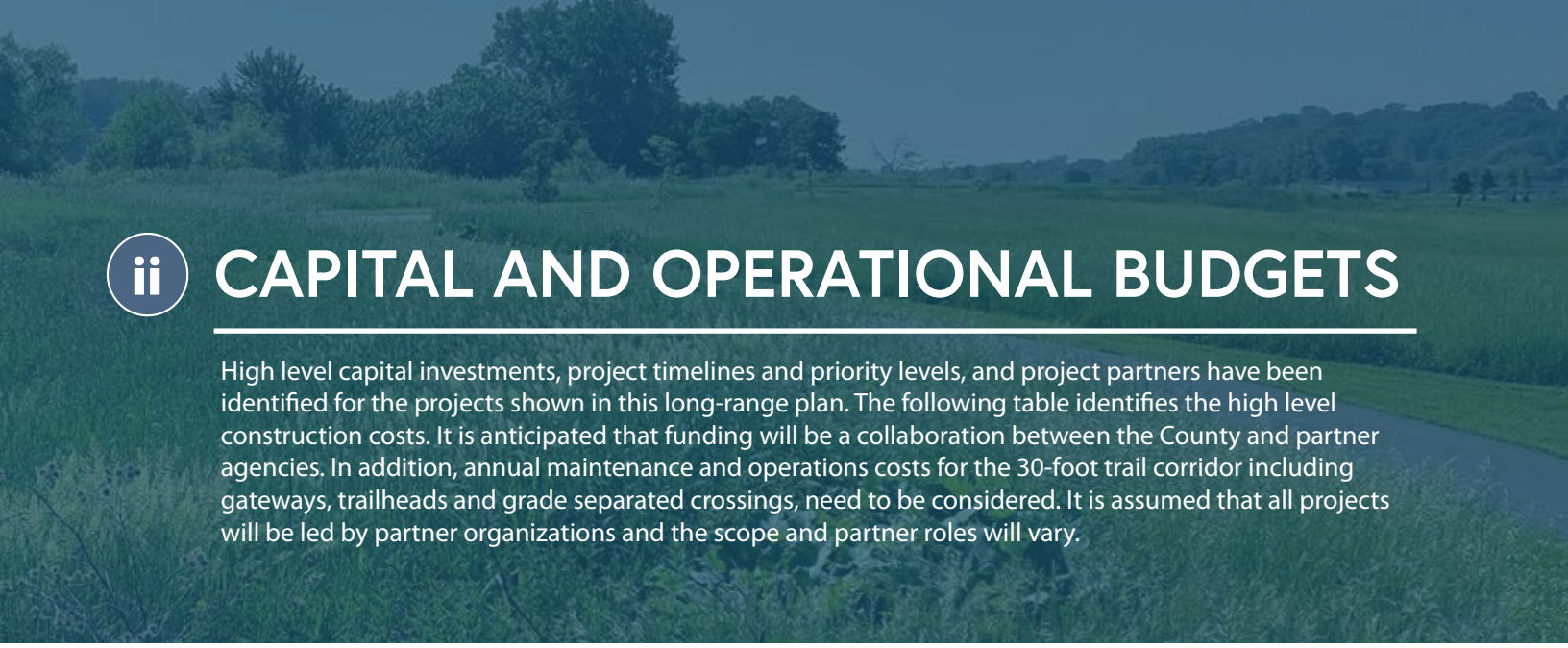
i A Long-Range Vision
ii Capital and operational budgets
iii Funding



Wakota Bridge

This plan is a long-range vision for recreation, transportation, and natural resource improvements for the Mississippi River Greenway. Accomplishing this vision depends on multi-agency collaboration. Without continued coordination between the communities and agencies in the Mississippi River Greenway corridor, it is unlikely the greenway could be realized as envisioned. Working collaboratively will enable Dakota County, cities, and other agencies to leverage resources to build, operate, and maintain the greenway.

While the regional trail corridor will be the jurisdictional and operational responsibility of Dakota County, the larger greenway corridor will be governed in many ways, depending on the situation. Similarly, responsibilities for land acquisition, construction, stewardship, operations and maintenance, and programming will depend on the particularities of each segment.



CAPITAL AND OPERATIONAL BUDGETS

High level capital investments, project timelines and priority levels, and project partners have been identified for the projects shown in this long-range plan. The following table identifies the high level construction costs. It is anticipated that funding will be a collaboration between the County and partner agencies. In addition, annual maintenance and operations costs for the 30-foot trail corridor including gateways, trailheads and grade separated crossings, need to be considered. It is assumed that all projects will be led by partner organizations and the scope and partner roles will vary.

COST ESTIMATE

The following table shows estimates of cost to implement proposed projects along the Mississippi River Greenway. The table is organized by trail segment, followed by projects listed within the development chapter.

***Feasibility Study Recommended**

PROPOSED FACILITIES / CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS				
	Project Name	**Timeline**	**Capital Cost**	**Partners**
	Corridor-Wide Projects			
	Add Wayfinding Signs at Each City Border (5)	2027 Implementation	(Fully Funded)	Cities
	South St. Paul Projects			
	Dakota County Gateway sign	Short-term	(Fully Funded)	
	Kaposia Landing MRG Trailhead			
	South St Paul Swing Bridge Plaza	Long-Term	$1m	City of SSP
	(2) Additional River Overlooks	Long-Term	$1m	City of SSP
	Shoreline Restoration	Long-Term	$500k	City of SSP
	Bryant Ave Bike and Pedestrian Crossing	Mid-Term	$2m	City of SSP
	Kaposia River Get-Down Interpretive Node (Planned)	*2027 Completion*	(Fully Funded)	
	Monorail Interpretive Node (Planned)	*2027 Completion*	(Fully Funded)	
	Levee Enhancements			
	Rest Stop and Mural	Short-Term	$1m	Cities, USACE
	(2) Overlooks (North and South)	Mid-Term	$2m	Cities, USACE
	Habitat Restoration	Long-Term	$1m	Cities, USACE
	Wildflower Park Improvements	Long-Term	$500k	City of SSP
	Wakota Bridge Area Enhancements			
	Wakota Bridge Trailhead	Long-Term	$$$$	
	Packer Preserve	Long-Term	$$$	
	Lily Lake Bumpout Interpretive Node (Planned)	*2027 Completion*		

Table 5.1 Cost estimate table

Identify yearly amortization of costs for major capital maintenance or full facility replacement approximately every 20 years. Identify natural resource projects and costs in the greenway.

	Project Name	Timeline	Capital Cost	Partners
	Inver Grove Heights Projects			
	Heritage Village Park River Access	Mid-Term	$$$	
	Swing Bridge Park Improvements	Mid-Term-Long-Term		
	Dickman Alignment and Amenity /Improvements			
	Rail Trail - Upper 71st St E	Short-Term	$	
	Dickman Trail	Short-Term	$	
	Water Quality Improvements and Overlook	Mid-Term	$$$	
	Ernster Park Connection and Overlook	Mid-Term	$$	
	Unity Trail Connection	*2027 Completion*		
	Concord Blvd Parkway Improvements (North & South)	Short-term	$$	
	Concord Blvd Overlooks (Planned)	*2027 Completion*		
	Concord Blvd Mosaic	Short-Term	$	
	Old Concord Blvd New Trail Alignment	Mid-Term	$$	
	Potential 102nd St E to Powerline Easements Alignment	Long-Term	$$$	
	Veterans Memorial Greenway Connection	Long-Term	$	
	Pine Bend Bluffs Loop Trail and Interpretation	Mid-Term	$$	
	Flint Hills North Overlook	Mid-Term	$$	
	Rosemount Projects			
	Pine Bend Cemetery Interpretation	Mid-Term	$$$	
	Flint Hills South Overlook	Mid-Term	$$	
	Longest Map Mural on Concrete Wall	Short-Term	$	
	Pine-Bend Road Realignment	Long-Term	$$	
	Fischer Ave Interpretive Node (Planned)	*2027 Completion*		
	Fischer Ave Trailhead (Planned)	*2027 Completion*		
	Fahey Interpretive Trailhead/Spring Lake Park Reserve (SLPR) Access Improvements			
	Fahey-River/Bison Observation Tower	Long-Term	$$$	
	SLPR River View East Overlook	Mid-Term	$$	
	Nininger Projects			
	Restoration/Invasive Species Removal (Improved Views)	Ongoing	$	
	Long Bridge Portable Restroom	Short-Term	$	
	River/Lake Overlook Plazas	Mid-Term	$$	
	Fisher Ave Ravine Bridge	Long-Term	$$$$	
	Long-Term Trail Alignment Opportunity	Long-Term	$$	
	Hastings Projects			
	River Hills Bike Route	Short/Long-Term	$50k	
	Avent Property Restoration	Long-Term	$5m	City of Hastings
	Levee Enhancement Projects	Mid/Long-Term	$$$$	
	Swing Bridge Interpretive Node (Planned)	*2027 Completion*		
	Lake Isabel 5-Mile Loop	Mid-Term	$$	
	Short-Term Interim Connection	Short-Term	$$	
	Roberts Wastewater Treatment Plan Site Concept	Mid/Long- Term	$$$	

OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE PLAN

Like other aspects of the greenway, management and operations will be a collaboration between the County, cities and other partners. Responsibilities will vary by greenway segment. While this master plan defines general responsibilities for each greenway segment, formal joint powers agreements between Dakota County and collaborating agencies will need be needed to outline specific agency responsibilities. These agreements will outline who has control of the trail right-of-way as well as who will operate and maintain the trail and how they will do it.



Management

The Dakota County Parks and Open Space Department is charged with operation of the County's parks system and will be the lead agency for coordinating greenway and management operations. The Dakota County Board of Commissioners establishes policies and goals for the park system and through an annual budget provides capital and operating funds for the department. The Park and Recreation Advisory Committee, appointed by the Board of Commissioners, advises the County on park and recreation trail issues.



General Operations

Dakota County operates and maintains the 30-foot regional trail corridor and County-owned trailheads. Where there are efficiencies or context-specific needs, cities maintain portions of the corridor under joint powers agreements. Operations are delivered by a combination of permanent staff, seasonal staff, contracted services (e.g., portable toilet servicing), and volunteers. Concessions and occasional programming are managed through special use permits; any bike or kayak share would be operated by a third party through a separate agreement.

Dakota County recognizes that as facilities expand, it will need to increase staffing. Based on current staffing, each mile of greenway costs approximately $4,000/year to maintain. Greenway maintenance requires 1 FTE per every 13.8 miles of greenway (10.5 miles in more complex stretches). Maintenance requirements will grow as more interpretive nodes, fishing spots, and other elements are implemented as trash will need to be emptied, facilities cleaned, and general maintenance happens as needed.

Operating hours

Operating hours for the wider Mississippi River Greenway, including trailheads and neighborhood gateways, are from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. Through travel is permitted 24 hours a day daily.



Maintenance

Maintenance of facilities and lands is essential to protect public investment, enhance natural resource quality and achieve the County's goals of providing recreational users clean, safe, enjoyable year-round experiences. The Dakota County Parks and Open Space Department has a clearly defined maintenance program and reporting hierarchy led by the manager of park development and maintenance, who reports to the parks director.

Regular maintenance activities for the greenway will include:

- Sign maintenance
- Trash collection
- Sweeping and blowing
- Trail repair
- Bridge repair
- Trailhead facility repair and maintenance
- Mowing
- Tree trimming
- Natural resource management
- Winter trail clearing



Pavement management

Pavement deteriorates as it ages. Regular pavement maintenance can prolong the life-span of the greenway trail in a cost effective manner. At left is an outline of recommended activities. PCI - Pavement Condition Index, in coordination with the Dakota County Department of Transportation is taking place on county trails, greenways, and parking lots approximately every 15 years.

Pavement Maintenance Activities
Original construction of the paved trail
Seal coating
Routine Maintenance: crack filling, minor patching, minor curb repairs
Total reconstruction

Table 5.2 Pavement maintenance activities

Ordinances

Public use and enjoyment of the County park system is controlled by Ordinance 107, Park Ordinance, which was last revised May 23, 2023. The ordinance incorporates pertinent Minnesota statutes and addresses the following issues:

- Regulation of public use
- Regulation of general conduct
- Regulations pertaining to general parkland operation
- Protection of property, structures and natural resources
- Regulation of recreational activity
- Regulation of motorized vehicles, traffic and parking



Enforcement and security

Visitors are informed of park and trail rules and regulations through strategically located kiosks and signs that address specific information about hours, trails, permitted and prohibited activities, fees and directions. Dakota County Parks, Lakes and Trails officers will patrol the park in motor vehicles, on bicycles and on foot. Officers will also educate visitors and enforce ordinances. Local law enforcement and public safety agencies will be responsible for emergency and criminal complaints within the greenway.

Conflicts

The surrounding land uses and the greenway are generally compatible and no unusual conflicts affect the viability of master plan recommendations. Minor conflicts will arise from private encroachment or neighboring residents' sensitivity to greenway, recreation or maintenance uses. Dakota County will work with individual landowners to resolve these issues case by case.

Public services

No significant new public services will be needed to accommodate the greenway. Proposed trailheads and neighborhood gateways are served by the existing road network. In the event that city utilities are not easily accessible at gateway and trailhead locations, options such as solar-powered lighting, self-composting toilets or wells will be explored. Stormwater will be treated on site. As greenways are built, accommodations for installing continuous trail lighting later will be considered.



FUNDING

Funding will be a collaboration among the County, cities, and other agencies as applicable, with an emphasis on seeking outside funding such as through state and federal grants. Cost share roles will be determined by the strengths of each agency and circumstances of each project. In-kind contributions of land, easement, design, engineering, construction and maintenance and operations are encouraged and will be outlined in individual joint powers agreements between agencies.

It is anticipated that most future capital projects will be well positioned to secure regional, state and federal funds for recreation, transportation, water and habitat and that these sources will account for a majority of capital construction costs. In many cases, but not all, Dakota County, as the regional agency, will be in the best position to pursue outside funding.

Examples of outside funding sources
National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program
Minnesota Department of Transportation
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment funds
Watershed management organizations
Foundations and nonprofits
Statewide Health Improvement Program or similar programs

Table 5.3 Outside funding sources example table

Funding for operating and maintaining the 30-foot regional trail easement and trailheads primarily will be Dakota County's responsibility. In situations where there are efficiencies in local jurisdictions performing maintenance and operations, Dakota County will enter a joint powers agreement outlining responsibilities and cost sharing.

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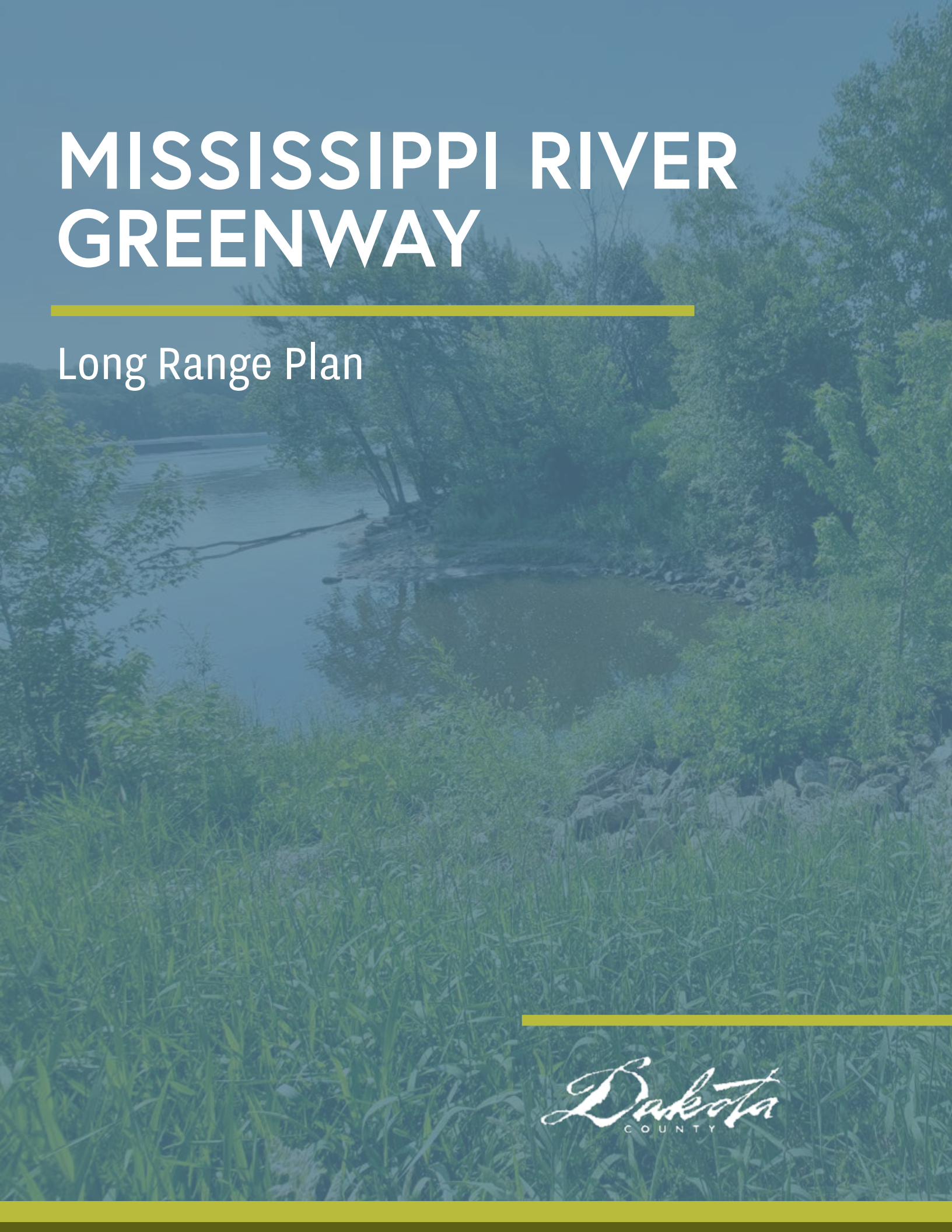


MISSISSIPPI RIVER GREENWAY

Long Range Plan

Dakota COUNTY

APPENDIX A

MET COUNCIL ELEMENTS

The following pages display background information and research that was conducted as a part of fulfilling Met Council Requirements within the project such as identifying existing partner agencies and organizations, conducting an equity analysis, and analyzing existing land uses.

DEMAND FORECAST

Statement of need

- Trails are the number one desired recreation facility in poll after poll. Trails can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities, they are inexpensive for users, and they are often close to home. The Minnesota Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan notes that the interest and demand for more trails is being felt at all levels of government.
- According to 2024 Met Council counts, greenways see more use than parks in the Dakota County System. The Mississippi River Greenway is the busiest greenway in the system - it provides key access to natural ares, parks, and The Mississippi River in an area where river access and views are limited - and use is projected to continue growing.
- The 2050 population of Dakota County is expected to see 19% growth from 2020. Assuming use rates are stable—a conservative assumption—in 2050, annual visitation can be expected to be at least 834,715. This estimate does not take into account increased use based on population increases in communities outside of Dakota County, current recreation trends, and increased use resulting from better connectivity to other regional and local trails.

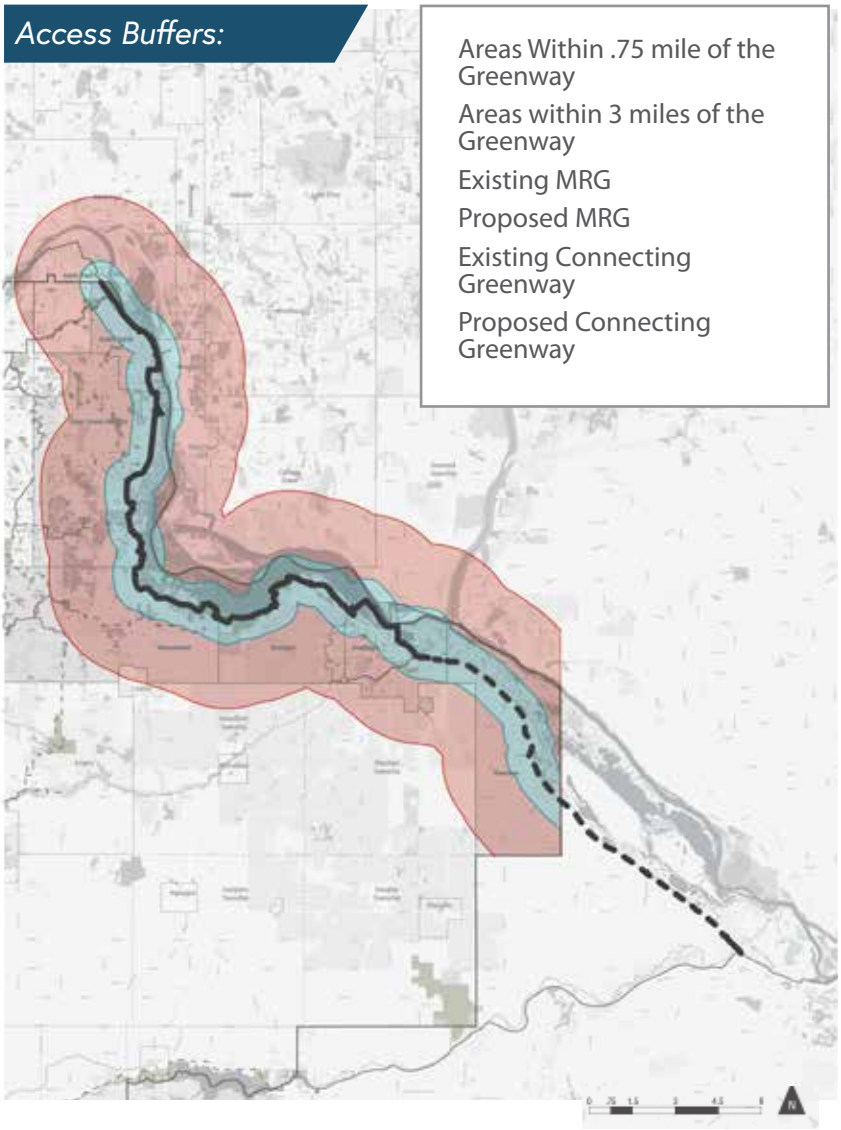


Figure APPENDIX A.1 Map of Access Buffers

The Mississippi River Greenway faces a unique set of barriers due to is location between the Mississippi River, a rail corridor, and many industrial areas. Due to these barriers, someone who lives within .75 or 3 miles of the greenway may have to travel farther to access the trail. More detailed maps of access points can be seen in Chapter 2, Corridor Context.

DEMAND FORECAST

City or Township	2020	2050 Projection	% Change
Apple Valley	56,374	61,500	9%
Burnsville	64,317	76,600	19%
Castle Rock Township	1,350	1,540	14%
Coates	147	140	-5%
Douglas Township	748	840	12%
Eagan	68,855	79,200	15%
Empire	3,177	4,300	35%
Eureka Township	1,373	1,520	11%
Farmington	23,632	27,300	15%
Greenvale Township	796	930	17%
Hampton	744	820	10%
Hampton Township	832	1,060	27%
Hastings (Dakota part)	22,152	26,500	20%
Inver Grove Heights	35,791	42,500	19%
Lakeville	69,490	89,500	29%
Lilydale	809	1,050	30%
Marshan Township	1,153	1,440	25%
Mendota	183	354	93%
Mendota Heights	11,744	12,900	9%
Miesville	138	154	12%
New Trier	86	108	26%
Nininger Township	865	1,070	24%
Northfield (Dakota part)	1,261	1,730	37%
Randolph	466	540	16%
Randolph Township	760	840	11%
Ravenna Township	2,354	2,450	4%
Rosemount	25,650	38,800	51%
Sciota Township	460	540	17%
South St. Paul	20,769	21,500	4%
Sunfish Lake	522	530	2%
Vermillion	441	430	-3%
Vermillion Township	1,290	1,570	22%
Waterford Township	538	630	17%
West St. Paul	20,615	24,100	17%
Dakota County Total	**439,882**	**524,986**	**19%**

2024 Metcouncil:

PARKS	Users
Lake Byllesby Regional Park	258,100
Lebanon Hills Regional Park	646,536
Miesville Ravine Park Reserve	119,964
Spring Lake Park Reserve	161,564
Whitetail Woods Regional Park	93,684
Thompson County Park	300,000
TOTAL	**1,579,848**

GREENWAYS	Users
Big Rivers Regional Trail	253,223
Mississippi River Greenway Regional Trail	701,441
River to River Greenway Regional Trail	333,656
Lake Marion Greenway Regional Trail	103,282
Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail	134,128
North Creek Greenway Regional Trail	82,011
TOTAL	**1,607,741**

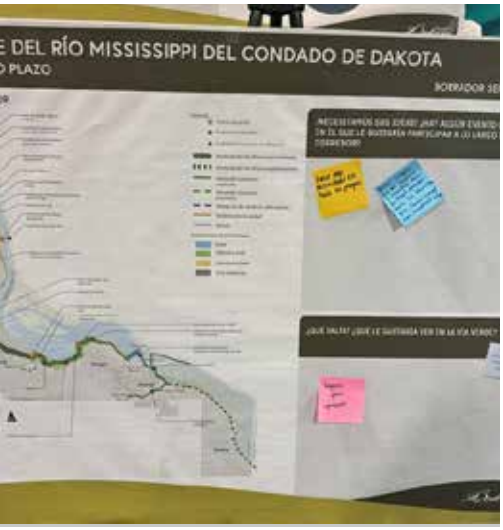
**Population Projections for Dakota County. Municipalities adjacent to the Mississippi River Greenway highlighted.*

Historic Greenway use Counts:

GREENWAYS	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2022	2023	2024
Big Rivers	142,700	132,100	116,400	151,400		140,607		253,223
Minnesota River				67,100		104,766		134,128
Mississippi River	27,00	110,000	110,000	207,700		251,911	530,701	701,441
North Creek						52,782		82,011
River to River	32,700	20,700	19,900	110,800		310,658		333,656
Lake Marion								103,282



South St. Paul Dia de los Muertos event



Spanish engagement board

EQUITY ANALYSIS & ACCOUNTABILITY

This plan integrates a data-driven equity analysis to identify and reduce barriers to access. By mapping demographics, poverty levels, and commuting patterns within the service area, Dakota County is prioritizing investments in historically underserved communities.

Addressing Barriers to Access

Dakota County recognizes that income, language, transportation, and racial inequities have historically limited participation in both trail use and the planning process. To bridge these gaps, the County utilized targeted engagement strategies:

- **Meeting People Where They Are:** Rather than relying on traditional town halls, staff attended established community celebrations like the Día de los Muertos event in South St. Paul and the Residents of Color Collective (ROCC) Resource Fair.
- **Removing Language Barriers:** Outreach included multilingual staff and translated materials to build trust and ensure clarity for non-English speakers.
- **Low-Barrier Participation:** Providing free, easy-to-access digital tools—including an interactive map open from November 2025 through [Month] 2026—to accommodate varying schedules and transportation needs.

Summary and Accountability

The feedback gathered from these diverse voices has directly shaped the plan's priorities for safety, wayfinding, and amenities. Dakota County is committed to long-term accountability through:

- **Transparent Communication:** Sharing the approved Long-Range Plan with the specific community groups and partners who informed its development.
- **Inclusive Implementation:** Ensuring that as resources become available, project design and construction continue to reflect the needs of the entire community.
- **Ongoing Partnership:** Maintaining active relationships with residents and stakeholders to ensure the greenway remains a welcoming space for everyone.

By centering equity in the planning phase, Dakota County ensures that the Mississippi River Greenway serves as a bridge to opportunity and health for all residents, regardless of background.

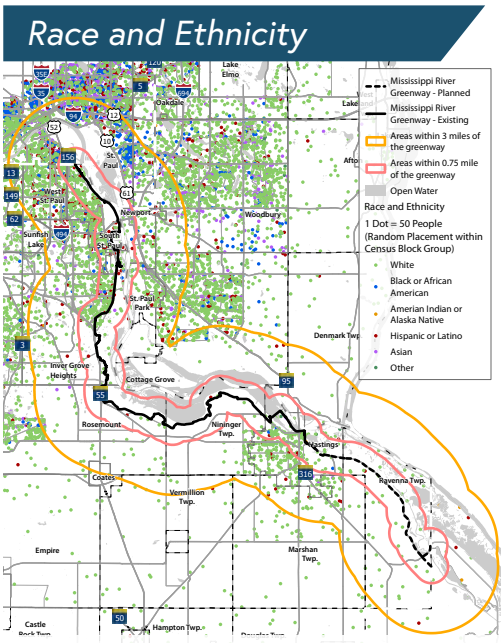


Figure APPENDIX A.2 Race and Ethnicity

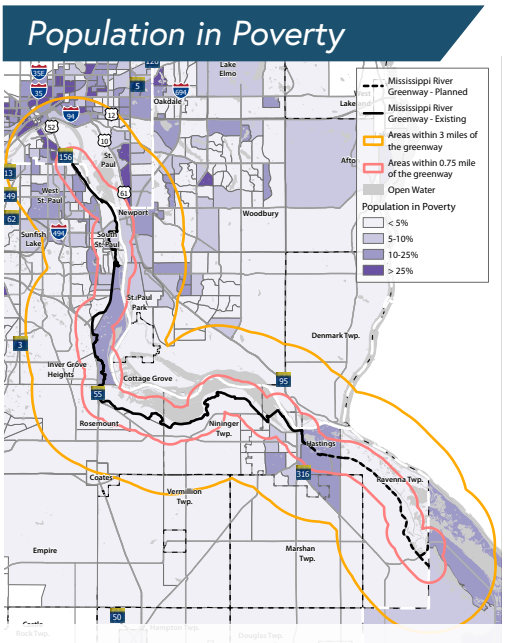


Figure APPENDIX A.3 Population in Poverty

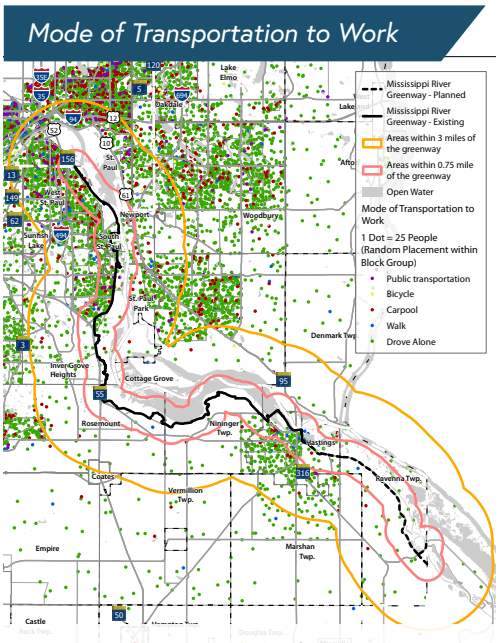


Figure APPENDIX A.4 Mode of Transportation to Work

MRG PARTNER AGENCIES & ORGANIZATIONS

The Mississippi River Greenway (MRG) is a collaborative achievement, made possible through the coordination of federal, state, and local entities. These partners provide the regulatory oversight, environmental stewardship, and jurisdictional support necessary to maintain this regional asset.

Federal Partners

National Park Service (NPS)

Provides leadership and coordination for the MNRRA partnership park.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

Manages river navigation and Lock and Dam 2 in Hastings.

State Partners

MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Manages the Pine Bend Bluffs SNA and regulates the MRCCA and river fisheries.

MN Department of Transportation (MnDOT)

Oversees U.S. Bicycle Route 45 (Mississippi River Trail) and commercial navigation.

MN State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

Consults on the protection of archaeological and historic resources.

Mississippi River Parkway Commission

Manages the **Great River Road** (*a 3,000 mile National Scenic Byway, a collection of state and local roads that follow the course of the Mississippi River from Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico*) National Scenic Byway in collaboration with state DOTs.

Tribal & Non-Profit Partners

Prairie Island Indian Community

A sovereign Dakota tribal government providing cultural preservation and ecological stewardship along the river.

National Audubon Society

Leads bird habitat restoration, surveying, and education within the Mississippi Flyway.

Dakota County

Leads the 200-mile regional greenway vision and long-term planning for the MRG.

Municipalities & Townships

The cities of South St. Paul, St. Paul, Inver Grove Heights, Rosemount, and Hastings, along with Nininger and Ravenna Townships, provide local trail connections and land-use coordination.

Watershed Organizations

The Lower Mississippi River WMO and Vermillion River Watershed JPO manage stormwater and water quality within the corridor.

Add St. Paul and Goodhue County as adjacent connection trails.

This multi-jurisdictional framework ensures that the greenway is managed as a holistic system, balancing transportation, recreation, and the protection of natural and cultural resources.

EXISTING LAND USE

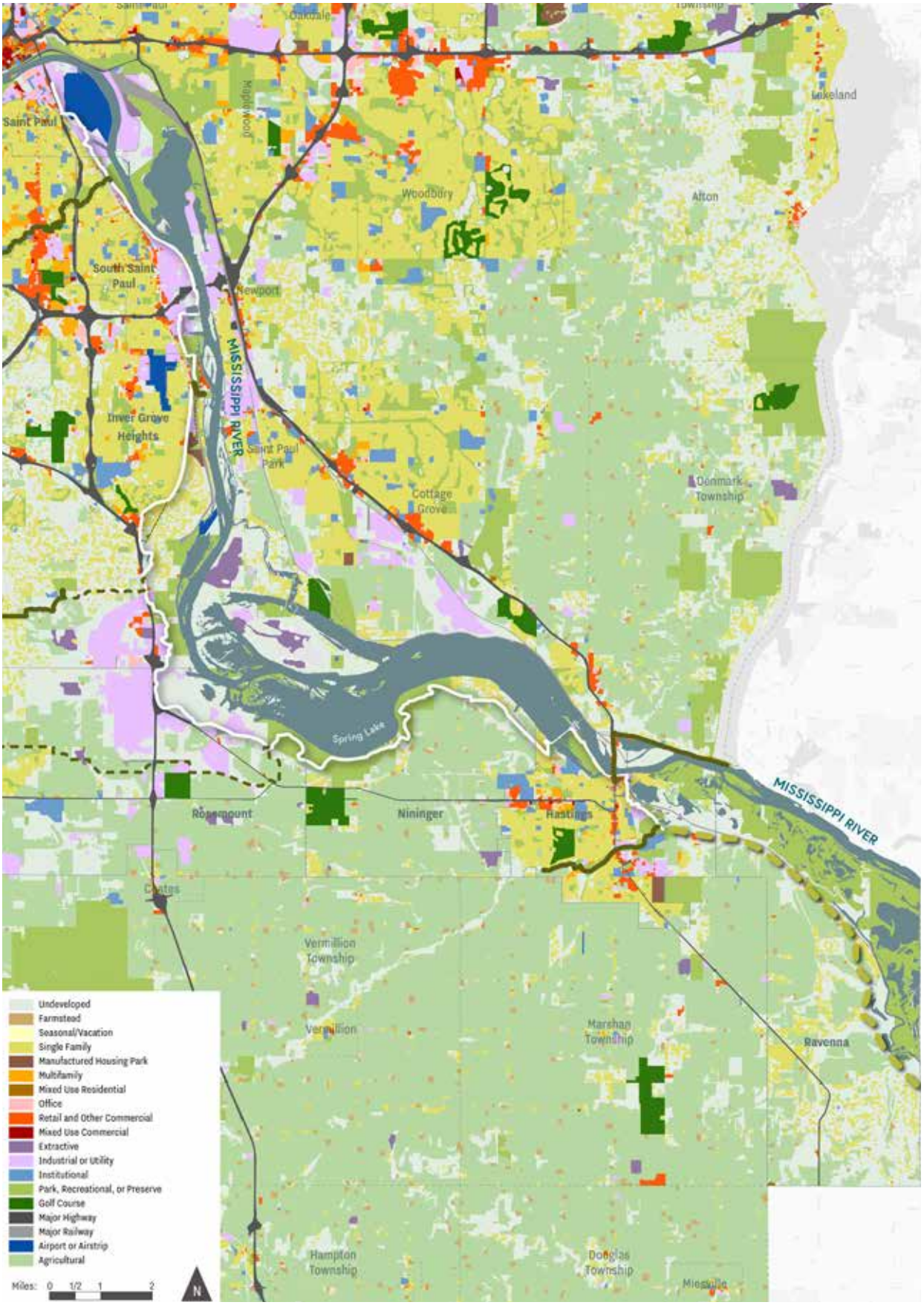
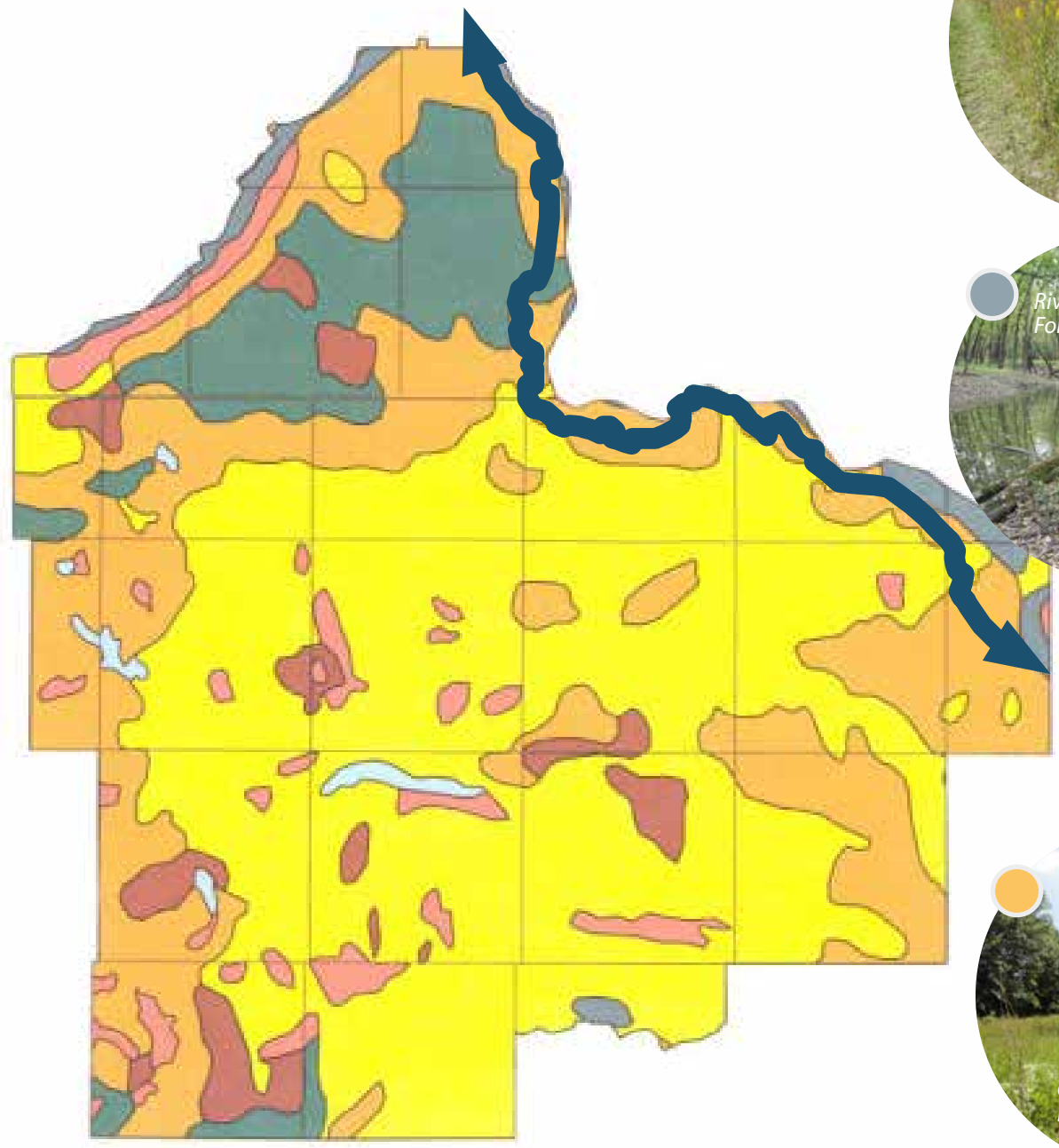


Figure APPENDIX A.5 MN DNR Map of Existing Land Use

THE VEGETATION OF DAKOTA COUNTY

At the time of the public land survey





Mesic Prairie



River Bottom Forest



Oak Openings and Barrens

HARDWOOD FOREST

Upland Deciduous Forest - bur oak, white oak, red oak, northern pin oak, elm, basswood, ash, maple, hornbeam, aspen, birch (Oak Forest, Maple-Basswood Forest, White Pine-Hardwood Forest, Black Ash Swamp, Tamarack Swamp.

River Bottom Forest - elm, ash, cottonwood, boxelder, silver maple, willow, aspen, hackberry (Floodplain Forest).

BRUSHLAND

Brush Prairie - grass and brush of oak and aspen (Oak Woodland-Brushland, Dry Oak Savanna).

Oak Openings and Barrens - scattered trees and groves of oaks of scrubby form with some brush and thickets (Dry Oak Savanna; also includes many areas that have succeeded to Oak Forest or Oak Woodland-Brushland).

Aspen-Oak Land - aspen, generally dense, and small in most places, with scattered oaks and few elms, ash and basswood (Oak Forest, early successional stage, Aspen Forest).

GRASSLAND

Prairie - (Dry Prairie, Mesic Prairie).

Wet Prairies, Marshes and Sloughs - marsh-grasses, flags, rushes, wild rice, with willow in some places (Willow Swamp, Emergent Marsh, Wet Prairie, Calcareous Seepage Fen, Wet Meadow, Seepage Meadow; also includes areas that have succeeded to Aspen Woodland).

Open Water

Figure APPENDIX A.6 MN DNR Map of the Vegetation of Dakota County at the Time of the Public Land Survey (1847-1855)





Existing wayfinding signs on the trail. These sign types are old versions of the 'Trail Guide'/'Ped Guide' signs and 'Kiosk Signs' identified in the Wayfinding Signage Standards Plan.

Wayfinding + Signage Plan

Wayfinding is the way people navigate from place to place. For the Dakota County Greenway System, a consistent wayfinding system is essential for orientation, navigation, and safety. Signage should be consistent across the system and should guide greenway users to local services, cultural destinations, transportation connections, activity centers, recreation destinations, cities, neighborhoods, and other landmarks.

In 2023, Dakota County created and adopted an extensive Greenways Wayfinding Signage Standards Manual. The manual establishes a greenway identity through wayfinding that is functional, accessible, and aesthetically appealing.

Read the full plan here:

https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks/About/TrailPlanning/Documents/GreenwayWayfindingSignageStandards.pdf



Image from the Dakota County Wayfinding Signage Standards Manual



Image from the Dakota County Wayfinding Signage Standards Manual

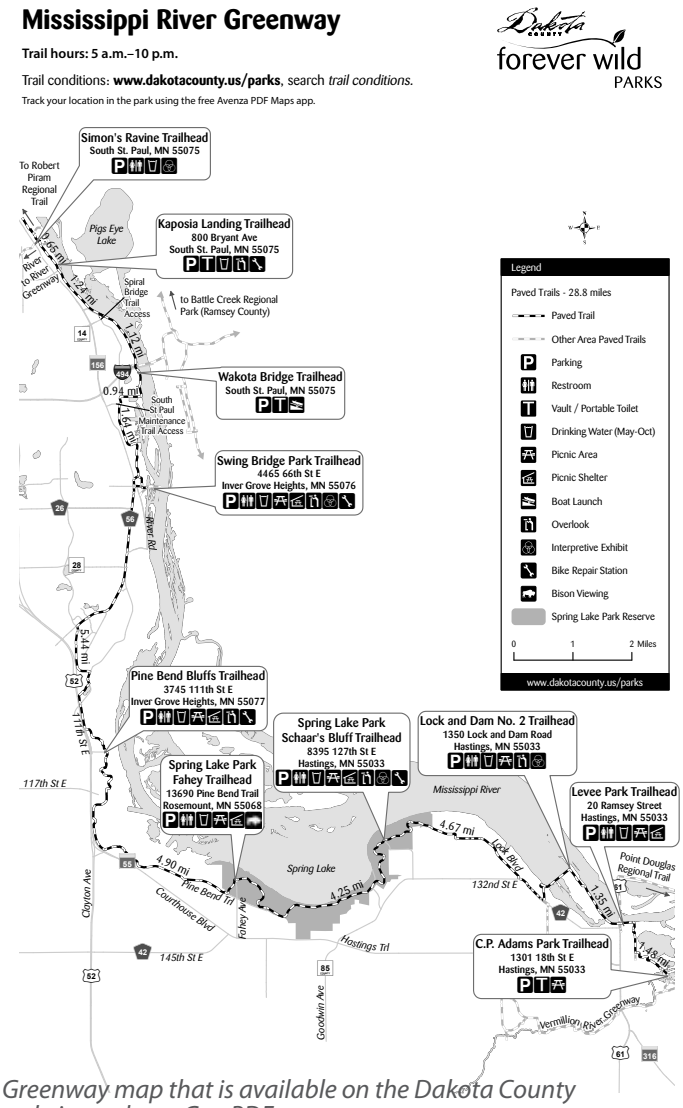
Public Awareness

A free downloadable Geo PDF can be downloaded so trail users can track where they are on the trail and how far they may be from different amenities without WiFi or cellular connection.

- The GeoPDF can be found here: https://store.avenza.com/products/mississippi-river-greenway-trail-map-dakota-county-minnesota-map?srsltid=AfmBOorB6vTZoQxQ2qip2mhL2owQmigNa0P25knqy9tRdjIuglJw8Uj5
- Information
- Greenway information is available to the public on Dakota County's website: https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks/parksTrails/MississippiRiver/Pages/default.aspx

The website provides trail maps and informs trail users of:

- Trailhead locations
- Closures
- Restroom locations
- Trail conditions
- Trail connections
- Hours
-
- Dakota County has the opportunity to improve online communication and online maps and information about the greenway, with up to date trail opening and closures.



Greenway map that is available on the Dakota County website and as a Geo PDF.

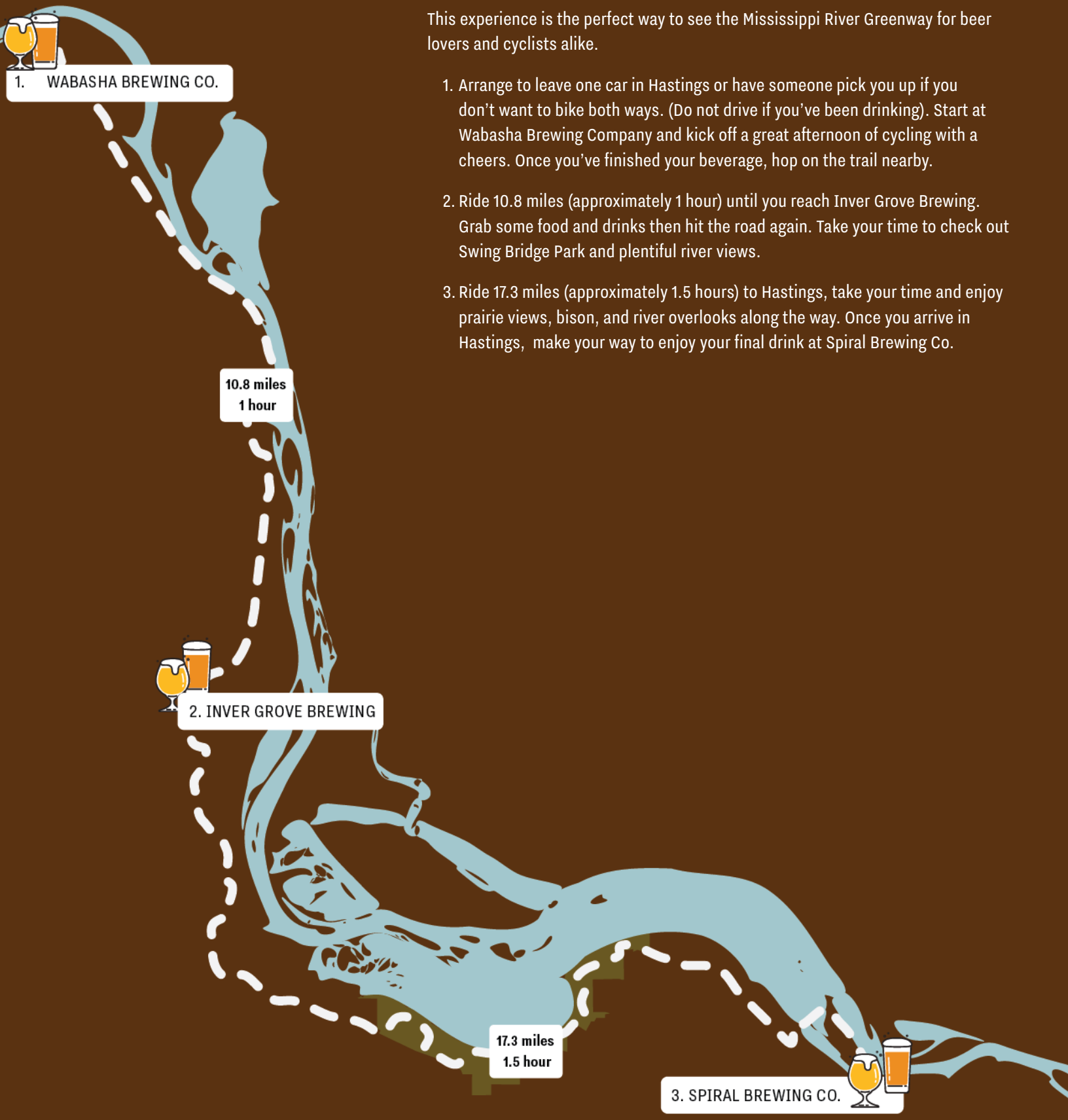


Four of the wayfinding elements on The Mississippi River Greenway: Dakota County greenway system trail stripe, 'Ped Guide' style sign, 'Trail Guide' style sign, Identification Sign.

EXPERIENCE 1: OVERNIGHT BIKEPACKING TRIP



EXPERIENCE 2: BEER-BLUFF BIKE TOUR



This experience is the perfect way to see the Mississippi River Greenway for beer lovers and cyclists alike.

1. Arrange to leave one car in Hastings or have someone pick you up if you don't want to bike both ways. (Do not drive if you've been drinking). Start at Wabasha Brewing Company and kick off a great afternoon of cycling with a cheers. Once you've finished your beverage, hop on the trail nearby.
2. Ride 10.8 miles (approximately 1 hour) until you reach Inver Grove Brewing. Grab some food and drinks then hit the road again. Take your time to check out Swing Bridge Park and plentiful river views.
3. Ride 17.3 miles (approximately 1.5 hours) to Hastings, take your time and enjoy prairie views, bison, and river overlooks along the way. Once you arrive in Hastings, make your way to enjoy your final drink at Spiral Brewing Co.

EXPERIENCE 3: EARLY BIRDER

Hundreds of bird species live in the prairies, forests, and water along the trail. This trail experience takes you to a number of birding hot-spots that are only accessible by the Mississippi River Greenway. Early mornings during the spring and fall are the best time to go birding in this area.



1. Start at Pine Bend Bluffs (a) or Fahey Avenue Trailhead (b) depending on how far you want to travel. Look out for American Redstarts and Downy Woodpeckers in Pine Bend Bluffs and take a moment to walk the trails at Fahey Avenue to look for The American Goldfinch, Indigo Bunting, and Franklin's Gull.

2. As you continue through Spring Lake Park Reserve, listen carefully for the Tree Swallow's high-pitched chirps and keep your eyes peeled for Common Nighhawks hunting nearby. Take out your binoculars at the Spring Lake Overlook and search for waterfowl like the Ring Necked Duck and the American White Pelican that can be seen swimming in the waters of the Mississippi River.

3. Continue riding to Hastings where you can find Red-Winged Blackbirds and Cedar waxwings hanging out around Lake Rebecca. Look near the levee and the dam for Least Sandpipers, Ruddy Ducks, and Tundra Swans.



EXPERIENCE 4: FAMILY PLAY AND PICNIC DAY

Small Children (2.2 mile round trip)

1. Park at Schaar's Bluff where you can play at the playground and explore trails.
2. Ride to the Spring Lake Overlook where you can enjoy a picnic lunch next to a beautiful view of The Mississippi River.
3. Head back to Schaar's Bluff to play more and head home.

Older Children (5.7 mile point to point, 11.4 mile round trip)

1. Park at Schaar's Bluff
2. Ride to the Spring Lake Overlook where you can enjoy scenery, bring binoculars to get a closer look at the landscape.
3. Continue riding along the trail and see if you can spot the Spring Lake Bison.
4. Enjoy a picnic lunch at Fahey Ave Trailhead before heading back to Schaar's Bluffs.



ACQUISITION MAP

(INFORMATION TO BE UPDATED)

POTENTIAL ACQUISITION NEEDS			
Property ID	**Timeline**	**Capital Cost**	**Partners**
X	X	$	
X		$	
X		$	
X		$	
X		$	
X		$	

(MAP TO BE UPDATED)

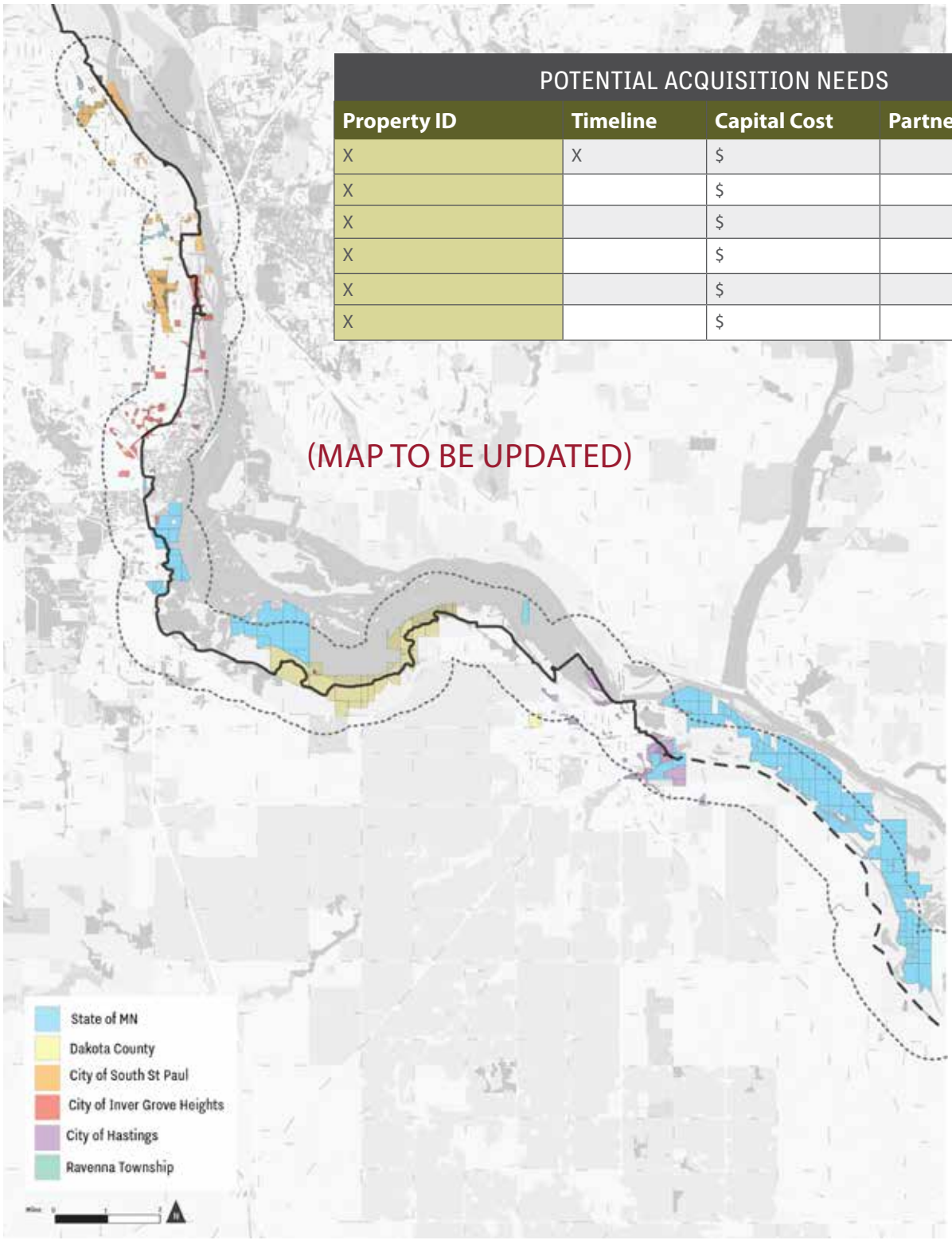


Figure APPENDIX A.7 Acquisition map



UP NEXT:

APPENDIX B
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

APPENDIX B

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

To ensure the Mississippi River Greenway reflects the needs of its diverse users, Dakota County implemented a comprehensive engagement strategy targeting residents, regional neighbors, and agency partners.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Early and continuous outreach allowed the project team to understand current usage patterns, address safety concerns, and build advocacy for future enhancements. Three primary methods were used to reach a broad demographic, including youth, seniors, and BIPOC community members:

- **Trail-Side Outreach:** Yard signs with QR codes were installed along the corridor during different seasons to capture feedback from active trail users.
- **Interactive Online Mapping:** A digital platform allowed residents to pin specific comments—highlighting both "hidden gems" and areas needing improvement—at their convenience.
- **In-Person Pop-Ups:** Face-to-face events fostered direct dialogue and reached community members who prefer non-digital participation.

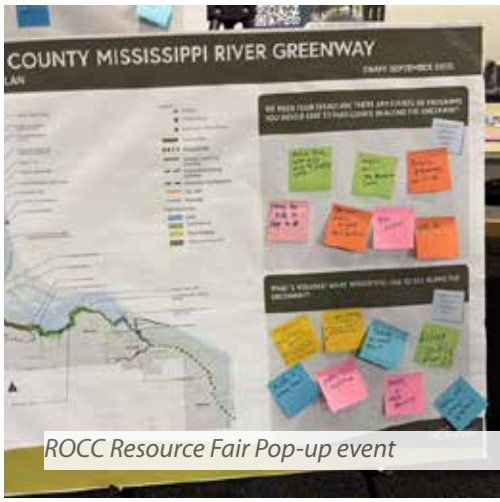


Dia de los Muertos Pop-up event

PARTNER & AGENCY COLLABORATION

Because the greenway crosses multiple jurisdictions, staff collaborated closely with local and regional stakeholders to align priorities:

- **Municipal Coordination:** Meetings were held with South St. Paul, Inver Grove Heights, Rosemount, Nininger Township, Hastings, and Ravenna Township to identify local opportunities and collaborative solutions.
- **Expert Stakeholder Workshops:** Staff engaged with visitor services, operations and maintenance teams, and the Dakota County Planning Commission to address long-term management and safety.
- **Technical Mapping:** Partners utilized a specialized version of the interactive map to provide technical feedback on specific locations and agency intersections.



ROCC Resource Fair Pop-up event

*This collaborative approach ensures the Long-Range Plan is not only a community-driven vision but also a technically viable roadmap supported by local and regional leadership.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PROCESS

Community engagement was a critical component of the Mississippi River Greenway planning process. Because the Greenway serves a wide range of users, meaningful public input helped ensure the project reflects community needs and priorities. Engaging the public early and through multiple methods allowed the project team to better understand how people currently use the trail, identify opportunities and concerns, and build support for future improvements along the corridor.

To reach a broad audience, three primary engagement methods were used:

- **Yard Signs Along the Trail**
  - Yard signs were placed directly along the Greenway to engage current trail users within the project area. The signs included project information and a QR code linking to the online engagement platform. Signs were installed during the month of October and again for an additional engagement period, helping to increase visibility of the project and encourage participation from people actively using the corridor.
- **An Online Interactive Map**
  - An online interactive mapping survey allowed community members to provide location-specific feedback along the Mississippi River Greenway. Participants could identify areas they enjoy, note safety concerns or challenges, and suggest improvements directly on the map. This method offered flexible, anytime participation and generated valuable spatial data to inform planning and design decisions.
- **In-Person Pop-up Events**
  - In-person pop-up engagement occurred at two community events: Día de los Muertos at South St. Paul High School on October 30 and the ROCC Resource Fair at Dakota Lodge on November 16. These events allowed for direct conversation with community members, relationship-building, and engagement with individuals who may not otherwise participate through online or self-guided methods.

Together, these engagement methods provided multiple ways for community members to learn about the project and share input. The feedback gathered through online, on-site, and in-person outreach will help guide future improvements along the Mississippi River Greenway and ensure the corridor meets the needs of its users.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The following pages provide a summary of what we heard from the community.

Online Interactive Map (Maptionnaire)

This interactive online map was open from October 2025 to December 2025. During that time, we received **256 total visitors**, **44 submitted respondents**, and **206 bounce visitors** (see chart below). Figure 4.1 shows a break down of the types of responses we received.



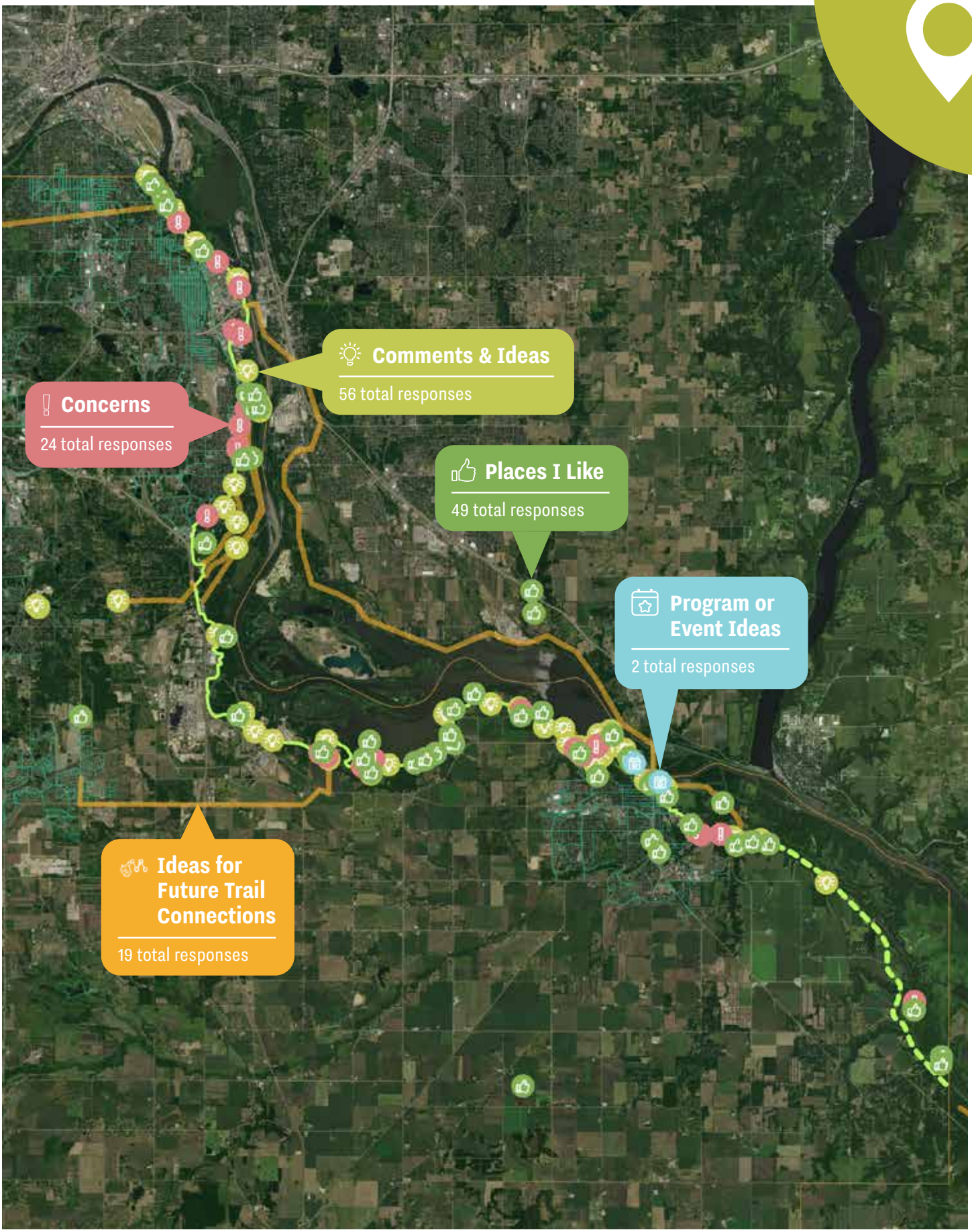
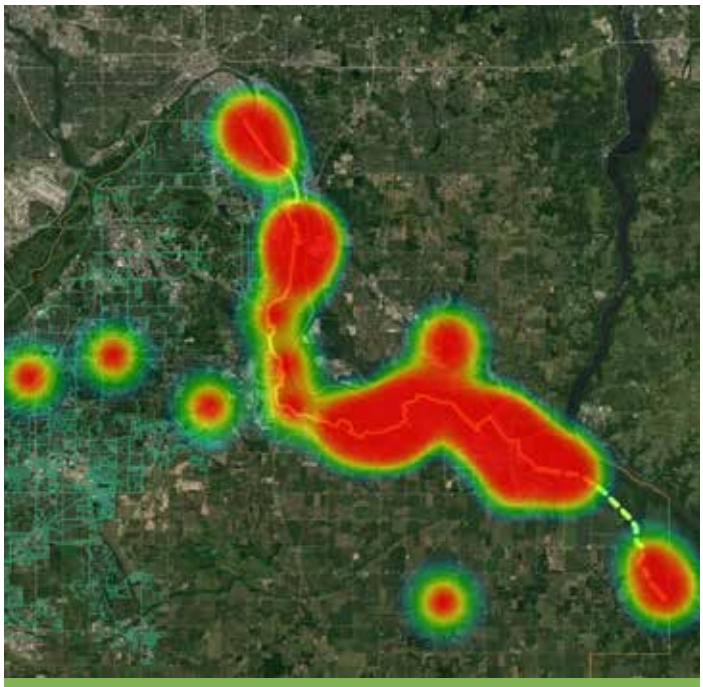


Figure APPENDIX B.8 Online Interactive Map with All Submitted Responses

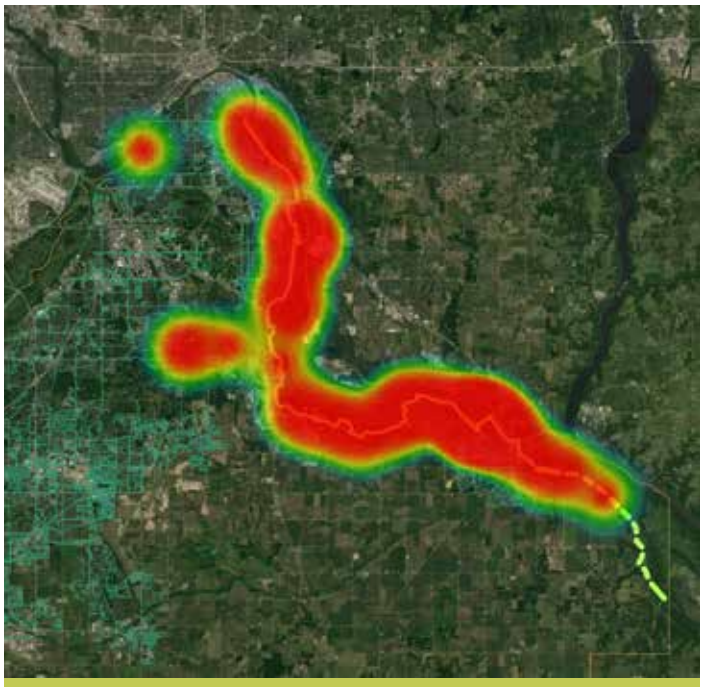
Heat Maps

Places I Like: Respondents favorite places, features, or improvements along the greenway



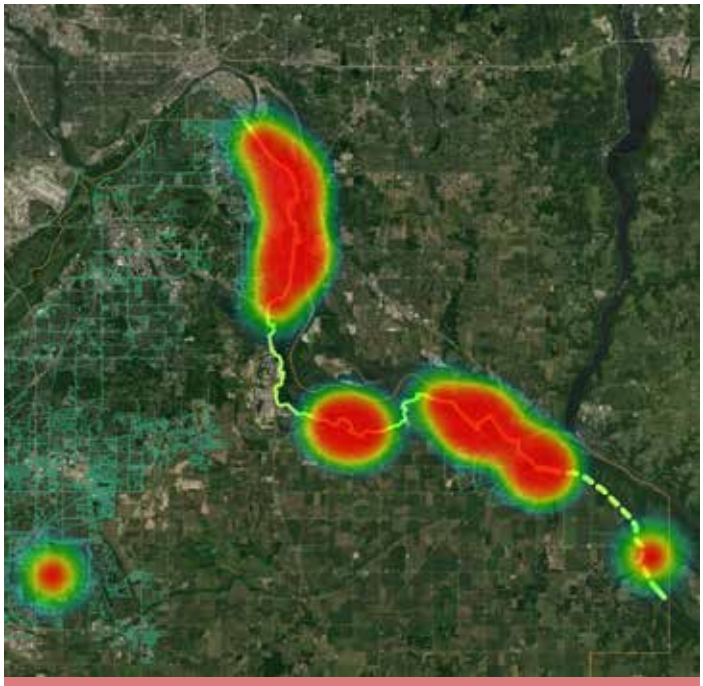
49 *Comments*

Comments & Ideas: Ideas for future improvements or something respondents would like to see change



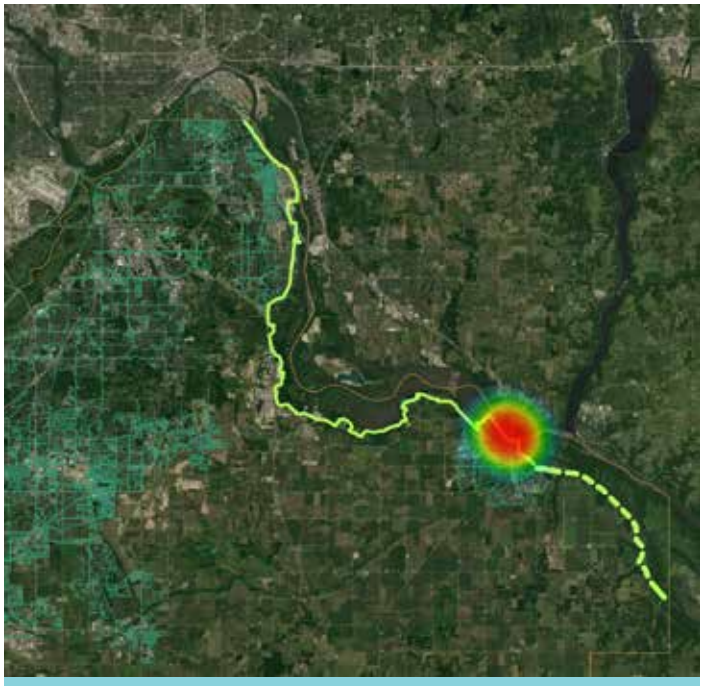
56 *Comments*

Concerns: Issues or standing concerns that respondents may have with particular features or areas



24 *Comments*

Program or Event Ideas: Ideas for future programming or event ideas along the greenway



2 *Comments*

"Places I like" Detailed Map



Places I Like:	
Key	**Comment**
1	I like being able to bike from Hastings to St Paul.
2	I really like the water bottle filling station at Kaposia - more options like this with the top fill option would be awesome.
3	Solid trail by the Mississippi that connects to other trails nearby. Well lit, interesting nature to observe throughout the year.
4	Great views of river.... a little ugly
5	New Splash Pad will bring more users to area
6	Cold Beer and great views
7	Winding trail through woods.
8	I Luke the old bridge & view of the river.
9	Rock Island swing bridge is a great stopping point when you're coming from the cities
10	Like route or alternative to avoid riding on concord.... Also avoids riding by King of Diamonds
11	N/A
12	I like taking Old Concord Blvd sometimes because there is less ambient noise from Hwy 52 than along Cahill. The existing route along Cahill is handy for shopping or stopping at restaurants.
13	Love the view and walking or along the bluff
14	N/A

Places I Like:

Key	Comment
15	More overlooks would be great
16	Like new connection
17	N/A
18	Like trail loop for Bison Area
19	Love the Bison
20	Riding through the woods, bridges with overlooks
21	Trail through the woods. View of the river.
22	N/A
23	Scenic bridge
24	Absolutely one of the best trails in the twin cities area. Please make more secluded and dramatic trails!!!
25	Spring lake park
26	Trail through the woods.
27	N/A
28	N/A
29	N/A
30	Farmland.
31	Not a fan of biking along the road.
32	Great view of river and damn
33	Fun to look at barges
34	Like overlook but should be improved
35	I enjoy the river and the beauty of nature between the Confluence Hotel and Lock and dam #2 in Hastings
36	Food, hotel
37	I like seeing the barges & other boating activity.
38	City park with staged events
39	I like the train activity.
40	Ice cream shop and deli
41	Vermillion Falls - scenic
42	N/A
43	Alignment is consistent with previous plan to connect Hastings and Red Wing
44	United Heroes League
45	I would love to see the trail extended
46	Connecting the trail to Red wing is great! This will connect the Twin Cities trail system to the Cannon Valley trail, the future Mississippi bluffs trail, and the future goodhue pioneer trail (which will connect all the way to Rochester)
47	This extension is a great idea
48	Boat landing and fishing
49	N/A

"COMMENTS OR IDEAS" Detailed Map



Comments or Ideas

Key	Comment
1	Would like to see a more Bike/Walk friendly connector between Lilydale Trailhead and South St Paul
2	I would like there to be signage or markings differentiating between Dakota County Parks maintained trail and St. Paul Parks maintained trail.
3	N/A
4	Put a foot bridge here that connects Concord/Bryant to the MRT. There are constantly people walking/biking on this bridge, and vehicles frequently speed and do not stop at the posted stop signs - a bridge people can safely walk or bike over here is far overdue.
5	Improve access to river along levee for fishing/river viewing etc
6	Build bridge to island
7	Provide access to edge of water.... fishing/birding?
8	Promote businesses along greenways
9	Add connection to/from marina/restaurant
10	Host pop-up bier garden/food
11	Restore floodplain forest
12	Add kayak/canoe access at pier
13	N/A

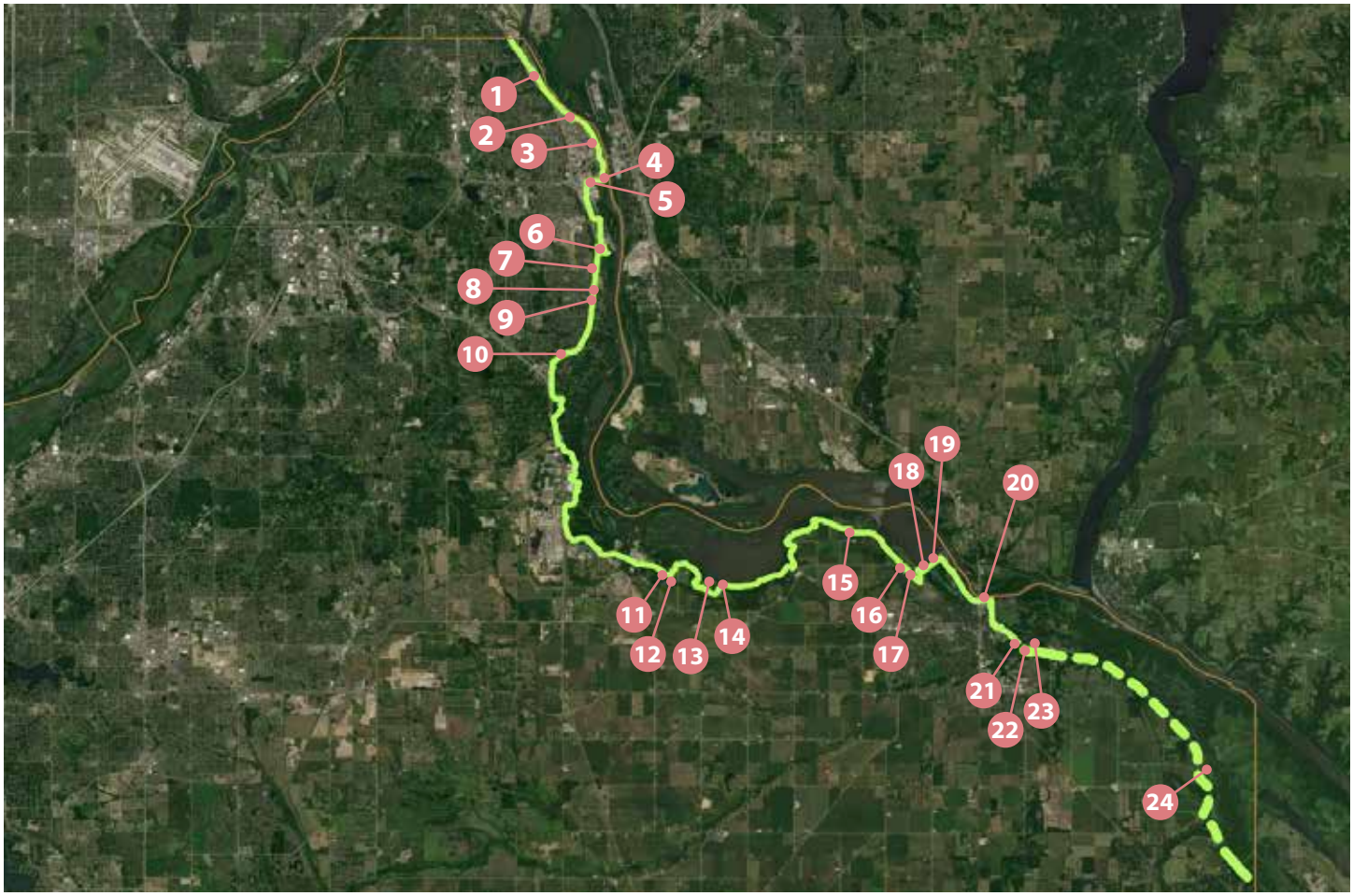
Comments or Ideas

Key	Comment
14	Would be great to avoid concord through this stretch
15	Add trail or bike lanes when Inver Grove Trail is reconstructed as alternative to riding on Concord!
16	Rail corridor would be ideal if it was ever available
17	Very interested in seeing this portion of the trail completed
18	FINISH the Connection to Lebanon Hills!!!
19	FINISH the Connector to Lebanon Hills!!!
20	Add little library with river and nature themed books
21	Partner with Flint Hills to reopen the ski hill
22	Paint a mural on the road divider
23	More garbage cans along the whole trail. Then maybe lazy people will pickup after they're dogs.
24	Need connector trail from downtown Rosemount. County Rd 42 too busy and dangerous to bike along.
25	Improve facilities to serve trail/greenway use better
26	Add elevated bison viewing spot of greenway
27	Manage invasive plants to improve views from trail to river
28	Add another overlook
29	I agree with the other commenter, a campsite would be a really awesome and open up some really fun opportunities to explore the greenway.
30	Bicycle/Hiker campsite please! With the Mississippi River Greenway it would be so helpful to have a place to camp for the night along the trail. None of the other campsites in this area are close to the trail and all Dakota County Parks have 2 night minimums on the weekend and do not have a no turn away policy which is really tough for bicycle touring because weather and mechanical failures can upset even the most thought out plan. I've used the site at Three Rivers' Carver Park Reserve and Stearns County's Rockville County Park and those both came in very handy for a couple of times I biked more than a day entering or leaving the metro area on a longer trip or for a one night out and back to check that I pack the right things for a longer trip. It's right along the Mississippi River Trail route where I have met multiple people who ride hundreds of miles along it throughout the years.
31	Please restrict E Bikes from trail. The speed and disregard for pedestrians on the trail makes them dangerous. At the least please post signs establishing rules for the bikers. A couple examples are slow down when approaching pedestrians and sound horns or shout a warning when approaching from rear
32	I would like to see more dog poop stations. Designated off leash dog areas
33	N/A
34	What is this? A different trail from the existing trail?
35	Create round-about with future development slow cars coming into residential area - transition speed limit to 35
36	Less people taking the shortcut through the neighborhood streets and more people using the bike trail
37	Add alternate on-road route signs to avoid crossing CSAH 42 twice - maybe painted symbols
38	Add trail to avoid crossing 42
39	Repurpose the old farm site of a Mississippi River Greenway/Great River Road - Visitor and Event Center
40	Poop station / trash can
41	Smoother / easier elevation change and turn
42	Create an overlook
43	This section is very slippery and icy due to poor draining and refreezing
44	N/A
45	Add Birding/improved rest areas along levee
46	Provide a board walk connection to the new island
47	Add hiking and birding overlooks to wetland area

Comments or Ideas

Key	Comment
48	Improve access and amenities to support popular fishing picnic area
49	Please include a 12 month porta potty between the Confluence Hotel and Lock and dam #2
50	Poems by local artists on the trail downtown
51	Move the 5 mile marker sign so that it us not in front of the historic landmark. This sign is in the way if you want to take a photo. Somebody really messed up when they decided to put this mile marker sign in this particular place.
52	Like more direct trail vs going through parking lot
53	N/A
54	Consider putting trail on north side and pulling away from road now that wastewater plan is no longer being built here
55	Preserve at-grade rail crossing for access to WMA/Open Space/Lake
56	Land is for sale could be a good stop on future trail/greenway

"Concerns" Detailed Map



Concerns

Key	Comment
1	Needs a safe pedestrian access to the trail from concord and Bryant
2	Condition of trail here is not good. Uneven surface and cracks
3	The smell around this area can be offensive at times.
4	Why is the color of water so different? Pollution issue?
5	It gets really dark in this section. If possible, it would be nice if some lights were installed along the darker areas of the trail.
6	Strip Club
7	Crossing improvement needed
8	I don't like riding through neighborhoods and along a road.
9	I agree with the other comment here. Riding along the road in this section is by far the least enjoyable section of trail. I always leave the trail and ride on Inver Grove Trail and River Rd.
10	Trail along concord is not a great experience
11	Signage along this section is subpar. I missed the turn and just biked on the road to downtown Hastings somewhere near here.
12	Prohibit E Bikes from trail
13	N/A
14	N/A

Concerns

Key	Comment
15	N/A
16	Directional signage could be improved.
17	I don't like riding along the road.
18	This section is in really bad shape
19	This section deeply needs repaving. It's so rough right now. We should make sure all of the existing trail is highly maintained before expanding it.
20	More signage needed to direct to trail to Prescott, WI
21	Interactions with disc golf course at CP Adams Park. A trail along the road would be better when factoring in all users.
22	No good trail to bike south of Hastings. I typically use the gravel roads West of the greenway.
23	It is nice to keep the trail away from the road and near the railroad or natural amenities and nice views if possible
24	N/A

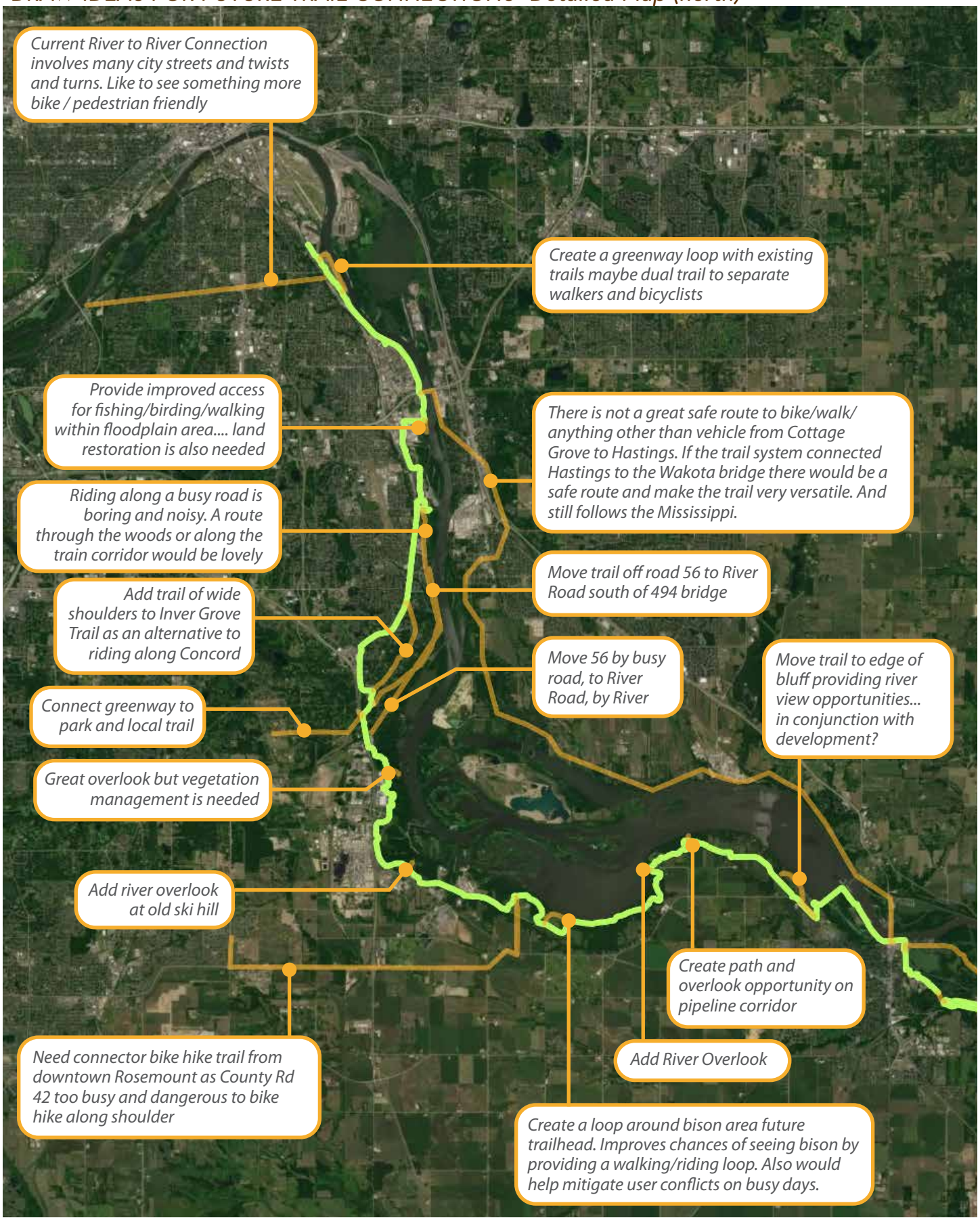
"PROGRAM OR EVENT IDEAS" Detailed Map



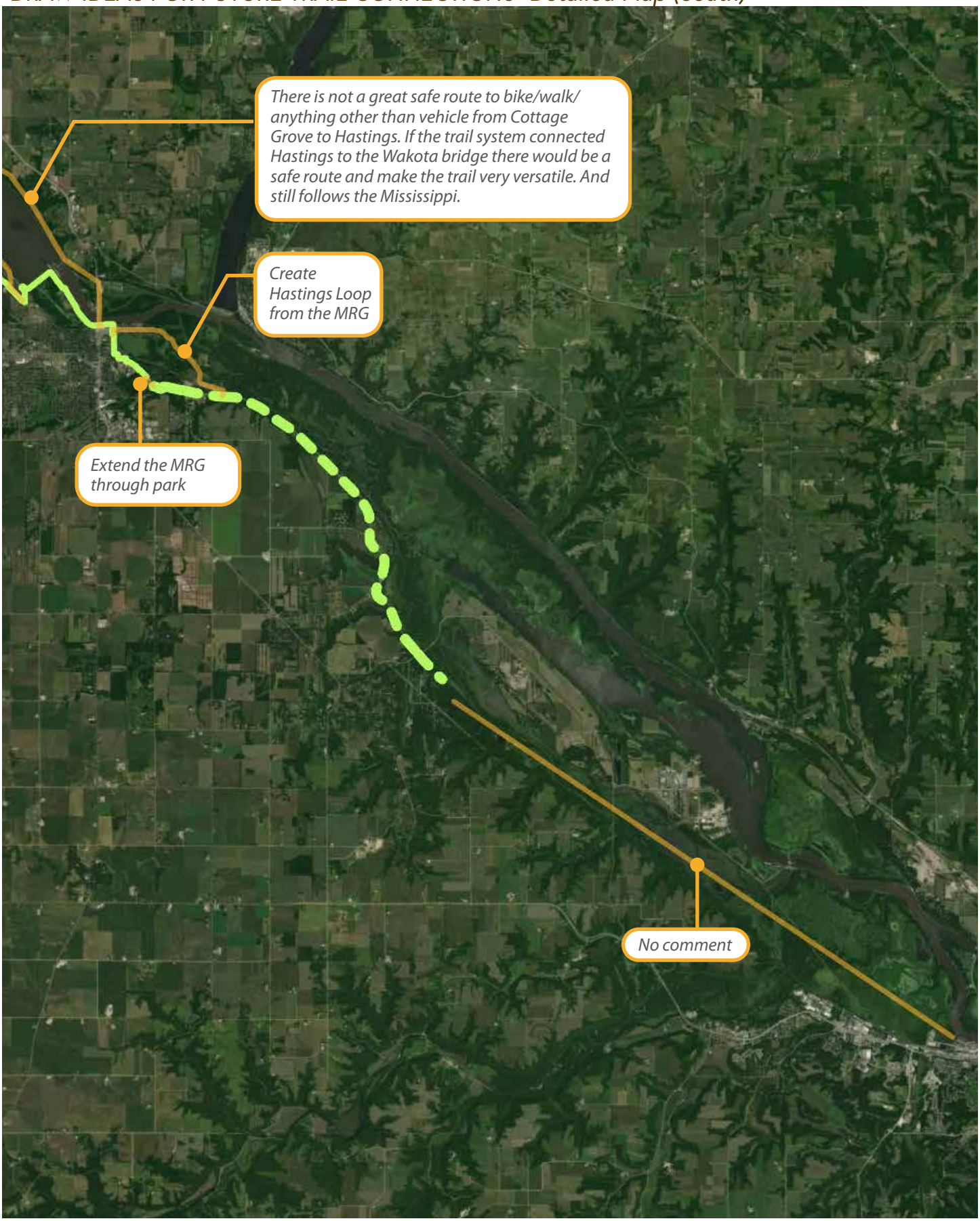
Program or Event Ideas

Key	Comment
1	Please keep this our little nature retreat in Hastings, walkers,bikers, and fishermen love it
2	Host a ride with MN Bike Alliance - Like the Twin Cities/Mankato/Albert Lea bike tours

"DRAW IDEAS FOR FUTURE TRAIL CONNECTIONS" Detailed Map (north)



"DRAW IDEAS FOR FUTURE TRAIL CONNECTIONS" Detailed Map (South)



In-Person Pop-up events

Two in-person open house events were held to gather community feedback on the Mississippi River Greenway. Engagement materials were provided in both English and Spanish to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for a broad audience.

Event 1: Día de los Muertos Celebration

South St. Paul High School | 6:00–9:00 PM
Project team members interacted with approximately 30 community members and received 18 written comments. This event provided an opportunity to engage with a diverse group of residents in a familiar, community-centered setting.

Event 2: ROCC Resource Fair

Dakota Lodge at Thompson Park | 6:00–9:00 PM
The project team interacted with approximately 15 attendees and received 7 written comments. This event allowed for more focused, one-on-one conversations with participants.
Overall, the open house events provided valuable qualitative feedback and helped build awareness of the Mississippi River Greenway project while engaging community members in a welcoming and accessible environment.

Comment Summary

What do you like/not like about the greenway today:

Community members enjoy the river views, access to nature, and opportunities for bison and bird watching that currently exist along the greenway.

What events or programs would you like to participate in along the Greenway:

Community members would like to see more kid-friendly activities, bicycle rentals and riding lessons, pedicab rides, and a county trail 'passport' program.

What's missing?

Community members would like to see public art, fishing docks, increased access to nature and the river, facilities (restrooms, fix-it stations, and water), improved lighting, increased parking, birding opportunities, and places to sit.



Image from Día de los Muertos Celebration

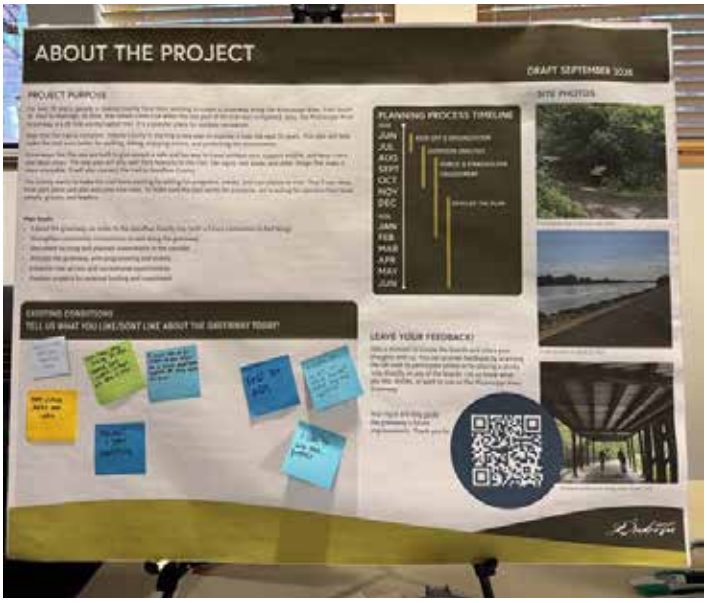


Image of Community Engagement Board at ROCC Resource Fair

Individual Comments

Tell us what you think of the greenway today.

#	Comment
1	I like to bike in the forest and by the water
2	I like to see the Buffalo
3	Feed the birds
4	I would like to be closer to the river so a sand edge instead of rocks would be nice.
5	Animal and star watching
6	More fishing docks and areas
7	We like the swing bridge. Would love more views of the river.

Event or Program Ideas

#	Comment
1	Pedicabs
2	Bike rentals
3	Some sort of trail passport or 'patches'
4	Things to stop and do with kids.
5	Bike lessons and learn to ride programs
6	Candle walks! See Brooklyn Center
7	Kid-friendly activities

What's Missing

#	Comment
1	Public art
2	Fishing docks - call Jose (651)210-5925
3	Fishing and ice cream trucks
4	Birding and eagle watching
5	Drinking water and repair stations
6	Bathrooms, splash pad/parks, fishing docks, and shaded stops.
7	More lighting
8	Games along the trail and soccer fields for families that go with their kids.
9	Make more activities in all the parks.
10	Places to park.



UP NEXT:

APPENDIX C
ADDITIONAL IDEAS & ELEMENTS

APPENDIX C

ADDITIONAL IDEAS & ELEMENTS

The following items are additional ideas, concepts, and project elements that are not included in the Development Chapter or elsewhere in the report but should still be documented as a part of the project process.

SOUTH ST. PAUL SEGMENT

Location Map:



Kaposia Landing MRG Trailhead

The Kaposia Landing Park concept plan identifies a variety of proposed park improvements, including new pickleball courts, native plantings, and an amphitheater.

LEGEND

1. Plant additional trees at dog park
2. Add new paddle share station
3. Add new kayak launch
4. Add new food truck station
5. Add food and drink area
6. Add new pickleball courts
7. Add new bituminous trails
8. Add new amphitheater
9. Expand parking
10. Add new picnic area
11. Native Plantings
12. Enhance pedestrian crossing at bridge
13. Shoreline enhancement restoration
14. Explore long-term feasibility of roadway connection across tracks



Concept rendering from South St Paul 2024 Parks Master Plan

Levee Enhancements



DRAFT

South St. Paul Rial Bridge - Plaza and Bridge Enhancements









General Overlooks and Enhancements

















Digital renderings of proposed improvements

INVER GROVE HEIGHTS SEGMENT

Example of proposed improvements to Concord Blvd pedestrian infrastructure:

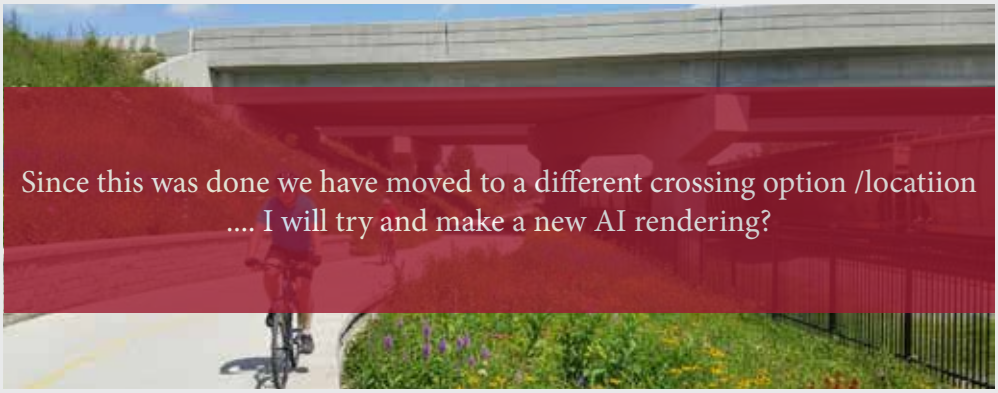


Location Map:



Veterans memorial greenway connection

A trail underpass is proposed to connect the Mississippi River Greenway to the Veterans Memorial Greenway under Hwy 52. This AI generated image shows a conceptual trail underpass:



Source: Gemini 3, proposed road underpass connection to Veterans Memorial Greenway

Flint Hills North Overlook



Flint Hills Ski Hill Overlook



ROSEMOUNT SEGMENT

Pine Bend Cemetery Interpretation





Avent Lake Rebecca Concept





Gores Pool WMA Winter Activation Map



Conceptual Winter Recreation Plan: An integrated conservation landscape supporting a

END:

END OF APPENDICES

