

Public Input Report for Minnesota River Valley Recreation & Conservation Master Plan

Introduction

Redwood and Renville Counties are collaborating with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to create a recreation and conservation master plan for the Minnesota River Valley within the two Counties. The plan's purpose is to:

- Develop an outdoor recreational destination that would promote regional economic growth, development, and tourism while respecting private lands and the agricultural heritage of the area.
- Address the conservation of the natural and cultural resources of the Minnesota River Valley area in Redwood and Renville Counties.
- Provide for the shared use, enjoyment, and understanding of these resources through a broad selection of outdoor recreational opportunities and recreational travel routes that connect units of the outdoor recreation system in the river valley.
- Address the impacts to the natural and cultural resources, interpretive services, recreational opportunities, and administrative activities in the area and provide recommendations on the unit designation of the area under the Outdoor Recreation Act.

This report documents information provided by individuals, government agencies and organizations that have provided input related to the project. This report is a summary of input capturing the essence of provided comments.

Background

The Counties, recognizing the need to protect, restore, and enhance the natural, historical, and cultural resources of the Minnesota River Valley for current and future generations, applied for and received funding from the Minnesota Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) for the development of an outdoor recreation and conservation master plan along the Minnesota River Valley.

The Counties contracted with the Great Outdoors Consultants (GOC) team to develop this plan, in conjunction with the Counties, their residents, and stakeholders group, as well as with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Robert Peccia and Associates, Red Canoe LLC, and I&S Group assisted the GOC team with various aspects of the master plan.

Organizations that Provided Input

The following organizations have provided input for the project.

- Agricultural interests; including farmers, landowners
- Back Country Horsemen of MN
- City of Franklin
- City of Olivia
- Clean Up the River Environment (CURE)
- 4H Shooting Sports
- Lower Sioux Indian Community ~ Office of Environment
- Minnesota Deer Hunters Association
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Minnesota Horse Trail Riders Association
- Minnesota State Representative
- Minnesota United Snowmobilers Association (MNUSA)
- Minnesota Valley ATV Riders
- Minnesota Valley Snow Riders
- Minnesota Valley History Learning Center
- Montevideo Snow Drifters
- Redwood Area Chamber and Tourism Office

- Redwood Area Development Corporation (RADDC)
- Redwood County
- Redwood County Parks and Trails Committee
- Redwood County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Redwood Gazette
- Redwood Parks and Trails Committee
- Renville County
- Renville County Drift Runners
- Renville County Historical Society and Museum
- Renville County HRA/EDA
- Renville County Park Commission
- Renville County Register
- Renville County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Renville County Trail Committee
- Renville County Water/HHW Management
- Tatanka Bluffs Corridor/local advocates
- Upper Sioux Indian Community ~ Office of Environment
- West Central Tribune

Public Participation

Public participation and input in the development of the master plan was a key element of the planning process. Input was actively sought throughout the planning process through several different venues. Options for providing input included:

- Participating in an “in person” stakeholder interview
- Participating in one, or both, of the two public workshops
- Completing a Stakeholder interview form and emailing it to the project team
- Participating in a Stakeholder phone interview
- Sending comments directly to the project’s email address:
Comment@MNRiverValleyMasterPlan.org

Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholders have an on-going role in the ownership, use, conservation and planning for the MN River Valley area. Stakeholder interviews were held with representatives of non-profit organizations, government organizations, and individuals. Many of these stakeholders also participated in the public meetings. A total of 14 Stakeholders were interviewed in-person or over the phone early in the project. Some Stakeholders choose to provide their input by emailing completed stakeholder input forms to the project team.

The Stakeholders were asked the following questions:

- What would you like to see in an outdoor recreation and conservation master plan?
- What are the best opportunities for conservation in the Minnesota River Valley?
- What are the best opportunities for providing outdoor recreation in the Minnesota River Valley?
- What are important considerations for trail planning?
- Who should we engage in this project?
- Do you have other ideas or information you’d like to share?
- How can you help us promote participation in the project?

Public Workshops

Two public workshops were held to discuss opportunities to expand outdoor recreation and conserve natural and cultural resources in the Minnesota River Valley area within Redwood and Renville counties. To accommodate participants, the public workshops were held on two consecutive evenings, at different locations:

- Tuesday, September 27th, 2016, at the Renville County Building, Olivia, MN
- Wednesday, September 28th, 2016 at the Redwood Area Community Center, Redwood Falls, MN

40 participants signed in at the Olivia Public Workshop, and 43 participants signed in at the Redwood Falls Public Workshop. It should be noted that some participants chose not to sign in.

The same workshop agenda and meeting format and was utilized at both Workshops. The agenda included an open house period with exhibits, then a project overview presentation, followed by small break-out groups of 6-10 people. Members of the Planning Team facilitated each of the small groups to help them understand the exercise, answer questions and to help with time management. Individuals were asked to spend a few minutes reviewing and responding to several questions designed to identify additional opportunities and issues. Individuals then shared their opinions within their small group giving each person an opportunity to contribute. The small groups then presented a summary of their combined recommendations to the plenary. This allowed everyone in the meeting to contribute and listen to a broad range of opportunities and issues.

Questions Discussed in Small Groups

- What outdoor recreation or heritage experiences would most likely attract people to visit the Minnesota River Valley who live in Redwood or Renville Counties? What information, facilities or programs are most important to facilitate these experiences?
- What are the most important conservation goals for the Minnesota River Valley?
- How can the agricultural community benefit from this project and contribute to it?
- Do you think people would be interested in experiencing current or future agricultural practices in the area (agri-tourism)?
- How can the business community help make the Minnesota River Valley a destination for both residents and visitors?
- Are there any developments or other land uses that should not happen in the Minnesota River Valley?
- What outdoor recreation or heritage experiences would most likely attract people to visit the Minnesota River Valley? What information, facilities or programs are most important to facilitate these experiences?
- What are the best ways to share information about the cultural and historical resources of the Minnesota River Valley?
- What is the best way for the Minnesota River Valley to compete with other destinations in Minnesota?
- What improvements can be made to make the Minnesota River area more attractive to experience?
- What should be the organizational strategy to coordinate improvement and conservation of the Minnesota River Valley?
- What types of trails should be created and where should they be located?

A general comment form was distributed to all public meeting participants. Individuals had the opportunity to provide additional comments on the form. They could leave the form with the Planning Team at the meeting or return it by email. The comment form was posted on the project webpage for others to use following the meetings. All materials displayed at the public workshops were posted on the project webpage for anyone to review. Providing meeting materials on the project webpage allowed people who could not attend the meetings to review the information and provide comments.

Summary of Public Input

The following is a summary of all public input received to-date and is organized in general master plan categories. Comments about this summary are welcome.

Summary of Public Input: Project Vision

- Focus on multi-use solutions
- Preserve the vitality of the land
- Diverse learning opportunities
- Interconnected trail system
- Seek solutions to increase and diversify uses of DNR lands
- Retain the character of the Valley
- Foster appreciation and value of the Valley
- Provide quality facilities
- Improve the quality of life for County residents
- Establish an outdoor recreation economy to retain and grow the population
- Gain support from the State Legislature and others
- Provide experiences, land and facilities for most recreation types – equal opportunity
- Improve the Minnesota River

Summary of Public Input: Outdoor Recreation

- Provide diverse outdoor recreation opportunities
- Increase and improve river access, all road crossings should have river access
- Provide signs on river or maps to show facilities and destinations
- Plan for OHV use of the scenic byway
- Support & opposition related to development of an OHV park
- Expand horseback riding opportunities and related facilities
- Establish a destination horse camp near Delhi, MN
- Bicycling & hiking opportunities with connections to communities
- Expand snowmobiling
- Water flow on the Minnesota River is inconsistent and has poor water quality
- Consider seasonal limitations such as hunting periods
- Consider a zip-line as an attraction and unique experience
- Recreation shuttle service
- Ropes course

- Outdoor recreation businesses to promote and provide organized experiences (i.e. wildlife tours, photography, etc.)
- Specialized parks to provide unique experiences
- Handicap accessibility to river fishing
- Improve facilities in existing parks
- Support and opposition for paving roads
- Important Considerations for Trail Planning
 - Provide access while being sensitive
 - Locate out of the floodplain where possible
 - Focus on safety
 - Respect and protect private property – methods to avoid trespassing
 - Natural surface trails
 - Connect communities and trails to recreation and other sites
 - Avoid dead-end trails
 - Provide parking to increase trail use
 - Provide restrooms & water sources
 - Quality sign and map program
 - Trail from Fort Ridgely to Upper Sioux Community
 - Connect state parks and county parks
 - Ongoing maintenance considerations
 - Access to scenic overlooks
 - Focus on multi-use trails
 - Hunting and camping trails
 - Future railroad tours

Summary of Public Input: Conservation

- Cooperate with private land owners to conserve valuable habitat and habitat connectivity
- Conserve floodplain areas
- Restore rare habitats including prairie & wetlands
- Limit use of highly sensitive habitats such as wetlands and rock outcrops
- Conserve and expand wild game (i.e. pheasants, etc.)
- Consider larger watershed issues while taking proactive actions within the Valley
- Better manage invasive species on conservation easements and lands
- Control soil erosion, especially in stream and river corridors
- Improve water quality
- Flood control

Summary of Public Input: Culture & Heritage

- Improve access to experience culture & heritage
- Provide Dakota cultural interpretation
- Provide historical (1862) interpretation
- Improved information
- Expand research and publishing
- Work with existing museums, Dakota Sioux Communities, and other organizations to provide programs and information

Summary of Public Input: Nature & Cultural Interpretation

- Improve interpretive signs & information
- Youth programs for conservation & traditional activities such as hunting and angling
- Programs connecting kids to nature
- Education & Interpretation about:
 - Watershed issues such as water flow, sediment and chemicals
 - Native American history and culture
 - Native plants & natural heritage
 - Settlement history
 - Natural history of the Minnesota River
 - Historic use of the river
- Methods to Interpret
 - Interpretive center, museums
 - Self-guided tour, audio
 - Apps, webpage
 - On-site interpretation
 - Programs, tours
- Nature observation destinations (blinds, etc.)
- Incorporate Dakota language into signs and information

Summary of Public Input: Land Use

- Control the scale and type of development
- Expand private land conservation programs
 - Diversify crops in the area and sell consumable produce to local residents
 - Rotational grazing
 - Cover crops & no-till farming
- Share knowledge of agriculture and agricultural conservation with visitors – agritourism
- Private land owners should benefit from providing conservation and visitor experiences
- Conserve bluff tops to preserve scenic quality
- Modify County land use regulations to allow appropriate recreation and tourism businesses in the Valley (i.e. lodging, food, wineries, agritourism)

Summary of Public Input: Master Plan Implementation

- Respect and include private land owners in a meaningful and ongoing manner
- Provide quality information for people related to:
 - Access public lands & the river
 - Be aware of sensitive areas
- Quality information and communication including:
 - Signs
 - Maps
 - Webpage
 - Videos
 - Single source for information