

Public Workshop 2 Report 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.

Two Public Workshops were held to discuss opportunities to expand outdoor recreation and conserve natural and cultural resources in the Minnesota River Valley (MRV) area within Redwood and Renville Counties.

The first Public Workshop was held on February 15th, 2017, in Olivia, MN, at the Renville County Government Services Center. The second Public Workshop was held in Redwood Falls, MN, on February 16th, 2017, at the Redwood Area Community Center.

Public Workshop 2 Participation

| Workshop | Number of Participants | Organizations Present |
|------------------|------------------------|--|
| Feb 15 in Olivia | 33 | Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative MN Valley ATV Riders Renville County Sacred Heart MNDNR Renville County Water Management West Central Tribune Kandi-Ren Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) Amigo Riders City of Redwood Falls MN Pollution Control Agency City of Olivia Great Outdoors Consultants |

| Workshop | Number of Participants | Organizations Present |
|-------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Feb 16 in Redwood Falls | 26 | Redwood County City of Redwood Falls MN United Snowmobile Association (MNUSA) MNDNR Tatanka Bluffs Lower Sioux Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) MN Valley ATV Riders Redwood Gazette Renville Soil Water Conservation District Renville County Historical Society Great Outdoors Consultants I&S Group |
| Total | 59 | |

This report summarizes the input provided by individuals, and representatives of organizations, who provided input at these two public workshops, and through email/online comments following the workshops.

Goals & Actions

Participants were asked to rank goals and actions for the master plan. Participants helped rank actions by selecting them during the public meetings or through an online questionnaire. The project planning team will use this summary as part of the decision process to prioritize actions for the master plan. Approximately 59 people in the workshops and 50 people online helped rank the actions.

Summary of Actions Prioritized by Participants

The relative rank of each action under each goal has been indicated in the tables below based on the following criteria.

L = indicated as important by less than 1/3 of participants **or** received less than 1/3 of priority marks

M = indicated as important by more than 1/3 but less than 2/3 of participants **or** received more than 1/3 and less than 2/3 of priority marks

H = indicated as important by more than 2/3 of participants **or** received more than 2/3 of priority marks

The rankings from the public workshops and online survey are shown in the two right columns to be able to compare the differences. The yellow and green highlighted text indicates the top five actions for both the workshop and online participants. These results will aid the planning team in prioritizing actions in the final master plan.

Workshop Top 5 priorities

Online Top 5 priorities

| Goals & Actions | Priority Ranking | |
|---|------------------|---------------|
| Outdoor Recreation Goal: Create an expanded recreation network | | |
| <i>Common Actions</i> | <i>Workshop</i> | <i>Online</i> |
| A. Identify a working committee to create plans for recreation facilities inventory, improvement and maintenance, trail design and implementation | M | H |
| B. Expand Water-based facilities | M | H |
| C. Support development of visitor/interpretive centers | M | H |
| <i>County Actions</i> | | |
| D. Develop recreational facilities at Anderson Lake Co. Park | L | L |
| E. Develop Equestrian site | M | L |
| F. Support Mountain Bike Park Economic Feasibility Study | L | L |
| G. Improve signage and visitor facilities | M | M |
| H. Support Positive opportunities for Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) recreation | H | L |
| I. Designate the project area as a County Heritage Corridor | L | L |
| <i>MN DNR Actions</i> | | |
| J. Improve and increase access and signage on state lands in Valley | L | L |
| K. Bolster local capacity to identify trail alignments, to acquire, manage and maintain recreational facilities | L | M |
| L. Designate Valley or portions as a State Recreation Area (SRA) | L | L |
| M. Strategically increase and establish Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and Aquatic Management Areas (AMAs) | M | L |

| Goal & Actions | Priority Ranking | |
|--|------------------|---------------|
| Conservation: Create a connected network of high quality natural and or visual resource areas | | |
| <i>Common Actions</i> | <i>Workshop</i> | <i>Online</i> |
| A. Strategically increase conservation areas | M | M |
| B. Minimize public use impacts to landowners | H | L |
| C. Prioritize private lands conservation strategies | L | M |
| <i>County Actions</i> | | |
| D. Collaborate with DNR to implement habitat management plans | L | M |
| E. Protect sensitive bluffs lines and shorelines from development and erosion | M | H |
| <i>MN DNR Actions</i> | | |
| F. Work with Counties to improve habitat for Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) | L | M |
| G. Provide high level protection for sensitive and rare resources | L | M |
| H. Develop landscape level plan and model for desired future conditions | M | M |

| Goals & Actions | Priority Ranking | |
|---|------------------|---------------|
| Culture / Heritage: Celebrate and highlight the unique cultural heritage and history of the area | | |
| <i>Common Actions</i> | <i>Workshop</i> | <i>Online</i> |
| Identify working committee to support: | | |
| A. Integration of Scenic Byway Comprehensive Plan recommendations | M | H |
| B. Collaborating with Dakota Communities | H | H |
| C. Promoting agricultural heritage | H | L |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| D. Collaborate with local arts and heritage organizations | M | L |
| County Actions | | |
| | | |
| MN DNR Actions | | |

| Goals & Actions | Priority Ranking | |
|--|------------------|---------------|
| Nature and Culture Interpretation and Education: Expand natural and cultural resource education opportunities | | |
| Common Actions | Workshop | Online |
| Establish working committee to: | | |
| A. Collaborate with MN River Valley History Learning Center (MRVHLC) | H | M |
| B. Collaborate with Sustainable Agricultural Programs | H | L |
| C. Collaborate to expand regional outdoor recreation safety and education programming, including new regional facilities | M | H |
| D. Collaborate with MN Master Naturalists to develop trained docents for MN River Valley | L | L |
| County Actions | | |
| E. Develop an Ecotourism and Cultural Heritage Tourism program with MN River Valley focus | M | H |
| | | |
| MN DNR Actions | | |
| | | |

| Goal & Actions | Priority | |
|---|-----------------|---------------|
| Framework for Land Use: Develop a framework for outdoor recreation, cultural and education opportunities while respecting private property | | |
| <i>Common Actions</i> | <i>Workshop</i> | <i>Online</i> |
| A. Develop Landscape Potential Map to help access best practices and land uses | H | H |
| B. Establish Design Standards for public lands, trails, signs, roads, and commercial properties | M | L |
| Public Added: Grazing | L | |
| <i>County Actions</i> | | |
| C. Revise land use regulations for the MN River Valley to allow for agri-tourism, nature-based recreation and lodging | H | H |

| Goal & Actions | Priority Ranking | |
|---|------------------|---------------|
| Master Plan Implementation: Key Recommendations | | |
| <i>Common Actions</i> | <i>Workshops</i> | <i>Online</i> |
| A. Seek special designations for the area | H | H |
| B. Establish Advisory Board | M | H |
| C. Establish Non-Profit Foundation | L | L |
| D. Collaborate on Valley branding/sign development with Project Partners | M | L |
| <i>County Actions</i> | | |
| E. Dedicate resources for marketing and outreach expertise and resources to help develop informational materials to attract outdoor recreationists to the Minnesota River Valley (MRV). | H | H |
| <i>MN DNR Actions</i> | | |
| F. Designate DNR Internal MRV Working team | L | L |
| G. Assign two DNR personnel to participate in Partner Project Coordination | L | M |

| Team | | |
|--|---|---|
| H. Develop implementation plans for 2- 4 multi-use focus areas within 2 years of project designation | L | H |
| I. Develop desired future conditions model/plan for water, biodiversity and outdoor recreation for Valley area | H | H |
| J. Determine state land signage options unique for this area, to be included on all units within the designated project area | H | L |

Written comments from the Olivia Workshop

- There was a lot of concern expressed about potential trespass issues.
- Some people do not agree with the OHV park.
- The current quality of experience will change with increased use of the area.
- The OHV park could attract more visitors.
- Need more river access locations.
- Interest maintaining the equestrian heritage of the area.
- Conservation and water quality are key items for quality recreation to occur.
- How staff to manage the area be paid for?
- Multi-use and sharing requires group effort.
- Its positive to diversify recreation opportunities.
- Conservation is important.
- There are so many things to do, we need to work together to be successful.
- You have to be careful about designation because there is a lot of industry in the valley.
- Safety – cell phone service needs update and large predator safety
- Concern about co-existence between residents and visitors – education and enforcement
- Signage & Interpretation – unite city chambers to promote the area.
- Hydrology of the river valley. Older generations had a stronger connection to the river and it was critical part of livelihood
- Electronic promotion and apps
- Hold meetings on tribal lands to engage Dakota communities.
- Integrating all the work related the Scenic Byway
- How do we create sites on the MN River when it floods & destroys?
- Renville County has the trail – Co RD #15 – A great byway to drive along slowly & enjoy beauty and peace.
- Need a proposed trail to connect Renville County parks. Should be able to hike, bike or horseback ride between all parks. This would make the region significant.

Written comments from the Redwood Falls Workshop

- How do we create sites on the edge flooding rivers?
- How do we integrate Scenic Byway into the master plan?
- Safety concerns expressed about overlap between hunting and other recreational activities.
- To help with tree control, expand grazing. Need more grasslands, no till and no tile in river bottom.
- Collaborate with existing groups and agribusiness.
- Concerns expressed about regulations on private landowners.
- Would like to see better ways to support snowmobiles and ATV activities.

- Need to prevent trespass and protect private property rights.
- Recreation rules need to be enforced. Registration fees are required – give tickets not warnings. Counties can apply for enforcement funding.
- Sharing multi-use trails needs to be done in a fair way, where all users share the cost and know how to be courteous.
- DNR gets lots of funding. Make sure that it continues.
- State owns a lot of land in the Valley, give examples of how things can work, and citizens will follow and support.
- Where is funding going to come from?
- Promote co-existence between residents and visitors. Hunter visitors are not following the rules.
- Want trails to connect 3 Renville County parks and Ramsey Park.
- Signage and interpretation needed to teach the hydrology of the river. Highlight the connection between land use and the River, personal choices and conditions of River.
- Make sure there is electronic promotion. Make an App.
- Bring Chambers and other economic groups together.
- Views expressed about OHV recreation area proposal.
- Driving is an important experience to provide opportunities for.
- With more state lands, how do we get mobility challenged folks to the River? Are we pushing folks back to the roads & bridges? Need to address this.
- Need better signage on the River for places & services nearby. Include identification of roads over the River so paddlers know where they are.
- Incorporate Tatanka Bluffs Committee experience and members
- Partnerships and collaboration with existing museums & interpretive centers to share and leverage programs.

Written comments received by email following the Feb. 15 & 16 Workshops

- I like the concept of focusing phase 1 activities within priority pods, but in 100percent agreement the master plan needs to show the complete trail connectivity through the entire Minnesota River Valley corridor landscape from state park to state park; connecting through all priority pods and existing Renville County river valley parks (Skalbekken to Mack Lake), including trail connections to Alexander Ramsey Park in Redwood Falls.
- Agree with "connectivity" at various levels and locations all along the MN River Corridor. Building connections with effective partnerships and "life after the Plan" is very important.
- I am trail coordinator for Nicollet County Trail Association, and the Minnesota River Valley Trail starts near Le Sueur connecting Nicollet, Blue Earth, Brown, and other Counties as it Travel to the Western side of The State and as a State Trail it should be Multi use under statute 85.015 its entire distance through Minnesota. As Nicollet County Trail Association Trail Coordinator, I would request that the trail be Multi Use under Statute 85.015 to allow use by all recreationalists including but not limited to; Snowmobiles, Horseback riders, Hikers, and Bicyclists for its entire distance.

- Email:

To me, it is essential that our Master Plan include a network of county and city trails and parks that connect the following parks Skalbakken, Vicksburg, Beaver Falls, Ramsey, Birch Coulee, Anderson Lake, and Mack Lake. This might need to be shown as Phase I, the trails marked in Red on the existing display maps, Phase II connecting the three upriver parks to the Redwood area loop trails and connecting to the Morton Loop, and Phase III, connect the Anderson Lake and Mack Lake parks the remainder.

The trails would be dual track, a hiking biking surface and a dirt horse trail. The GMRPTC (Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission) does not require paved trails as does MNDNR for state trails.

Also, if a destination horse camp is included in the Master Plan, as it should be, that site needs to be connected to these trails.

This combination of parks and trails could be regionally significant and earn GMRPTC designation as such.

At some time in the future, the Minnesota River State Trail could either connect to the two ends of this trail system, see the Luce Line Trail for historical precedent, or a Minnesota River State Trail running along a different route, Could connect to these trails which would serve as a loop from the state trail.

It is important that the master plan point out how the connectivity of the parks through the trails enhances visitor experience for hiking, biking, and horseback riding.

It is also important that the master plan call out existing park features that lend themselves to connectivity, specifically horse camps in Skalbakken and Vicksburg and Beaver Falls. It is also important that the Master Plan identify other features as rock climbing, camping, and paddler access to the Minnesota River.

I note that thee parks are all now connected for OHV via county roads that now permit such vehicles to travel public roads in both Redwood and Renville County.

On an unrelated note but still Master Plan connected.

The Tatanka Bluffs Committee is attempting, with very little money and no staff, to serve as a two-county outdoor recreation promotion body. Restructuring that body could easily provide an oversight entity for Master Plan implementation.

- Email:

Local people simply do not see their own back yard as special. As much as we need to bring outsiders here, we need to change local attitudes.

Your friend is correct, what we have is not unique. However, it is rather special. I have taken people from all over the United States on the river and they have marveled at the Rock outcrops along the shore.

I have talked with horseback riders at Renville County Parks who travel from the twin cities because the trails are so special to them. One group of riders explained how they spend a three day weekend riding here every summer and rather than load the horses each day to ride in a different park, they would prefer to spend the day riding from park to park and camping in each one.

Two summers ago, I provided ground support for a group of young people who canoed the entire MN River. After dropping them on the river at Upper Sioux State Park near Granite, I was to meet them in north Redwood that night. Along with a passenger who needed a rest day off the water due to tendinitis, we slowly drove along the river including Cty 15. For most of the way, we drove about 15 MPH passing through Skallbakken, Vicksburg, the Joseph Brown site and on to Beaver Falls. We spent about four hours. My passenger, from central Illinois was amazed at the beauty of the area.

The entire paddling group stayed at my house for e three day break and borrowed my car to retrace that drive on one of those days with my original passenger as a tour guide.

Not long before this canoe trip, Loran started talking about camper cabins spaced along the river. When I suggested these to this group of young paddlers, they got very excited. Other than staying at my house those nights, they mostly camped out. They thought camper cabins would be a great addition to the river.

Back to the local opinion that our area is "nothing special" I hear that all of the time. I think that will change as we promote our area to outsiders.

A few years ago, I was traveling by motorcycle through Illinois. I stooped at a freeway visitor center and asked the volunteer hostess to tell me about the most interesting thing to see within about twenty miles of the freeway. Her response, "there isn't anything very interesting around here" she suggested things two and three hours away. Not being one to give up easily, I asked her where she would take an out of town visitor if they only had four hours together. She enlisted the aide of another volunteer who immediately said Bishop Hill. Next exit and then seven miles away.

At Bishop Hill I found a delightful village of artisans and old buildings and not only spent a few hours there, but have revisited the site and referred many people to go visit. Bishop Hill was less than ten miles from where this lady lived. She hardly knew it existed and it did not occur to her to send visitors.

We don't have mountains, but we have a beautiful area with many fine features that can and will attract visitors if we market it properly. Eventually people will travel to our outdoor recreation area all the way from places like Redwood Falls.

- Email:

I looked over the survey and it is obvious that the most important element to cleaning up the river valley and creating a recreational and wildlife area is missing.

The missing element is "COWS". I will keep saying this in any forum presented by the DNR. When the DNR takes over it has no interest in returning the valley to the pristine condition it was in prior to RIM (Reinvest in Minnesota), CREP (Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program), and ultimately the DNR. The only thing the valley will be is an overgrown disaster area subject to flooding, mass erosion and mudslides.

Buffalo have been gone for over 150 years. These animals were the ultimate recycling machine and the next best thing is cows. They keep the noxious weeds down, keep the tree infestation down and reseed, breakup the soil, and continually re-fertilize enabling healthier grasses which filters and reduces the runoff.

Metro area bureaucrats need to get off their duff and get a real education and pass that education on to the public.

I attended the last Master Plan meeting. Not a single person in that meeting had ever ridden the valley to see what it was and what the mess it is. I chatted with the facilitator from Wyoming. He has the same concerns since Wyoming did the same thing of getting rid of the cows pressured by the do-gooders. In his words, it ended in disaster.

To make it short, the current Master Plan associated with the survey is an overly expensive pipe dream.