

Public Comment Summary for Draft Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan

The public comment period for the draft Master Plan was from 8 May – 8 June 2017. A copy of the draft plan was available on the project website. Paper copies were also available at four public locations: Redwood Falls Public Library, Redwood County Environmental Office, Renville County Environmental Office and the New Ulm DNR Regional Office. An open house was held in Redwood Falls on 8 June 2017 at the Redwood Falls Public Library. Redwood County, Renville County, and MN DNR staff were available to answer questions from the public. Various maps and graphics from the draft plan and several paper copies of the plan were displayed. A comment form was available for submitting comments.

Nineteen individuals signed in at the open house. Several other people did not sign in. Meeting attendees represented landowners, County Historical Society, Area Chamber and Tourism, Tatanka Bluffs, County Park Board, the local paper, Equestrian groups, and the Regional Area Development Corporation. Five comments were received via email and 9 were submitted at the open house.

The table below summarizes the public comments received via email and at the open house. Comments ranged from very positive to very negative. Topics of Public Comments were:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Funding | 8. Tourism |
| 2. Transportation infrastructure | 9. Health and Outdoors |
| 3. OHV – Off Highway Vehicles | 10. Project Leadership |
| 4. Promote Rich History | 11. DNR operations |
| 5. Agricultural Landowner rights | 12. Graphics |
| 6. Facilities | 13. Designations |
| 7. Trails | 14. River Condition |

Table 1 Public Comment Topic Summary

No.	Date Received	Comment Topics from Above List													
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	05/28/17								X						
2	06/01/17									X					
3	06/05/17	X									X	X		X	
4	06/06/17			X			X	X				X	X	X	
5	06/08/17		X				X								X
6	06/08/17			X					X						
7	06/08/17				X				X						
8	06/08/17	X													
9	06/08/17							X							
10	06/08/17	X				X		X							
11	06/08/17*														
12	06/08/17						X								
13	06/08/17							X							
14	06/05/17*														
	Total	3	1	2	1	1	3	4	3	1	1	2	1	2	1

*Did not specifically address the Master Plan

Below, the topics of public comments are consolidated with an explanation of how they were addressed in the plan, if applicable.

*Concern about project **funding** for suggested actions was expressed in several comments.*

The known, existing funding sources for suggested actions are listed in the Introduction section on page 4. As implementation begins, more specific funding sources will need to be identified and secured for specific actions. Since this is a long-term plan, identifying specific funding sources for every potential action would be of little value as time passes and funding sources and their priorities change.

*The condition of and the need to upgrade the **transportation infrastructure** supporting access into the project area was commented on.*

This is a topic that the Counties will need to assess and work in partnership with the State Department of Transportation, County Highway departments, and Township Boards. It is beyond the scope of this Master Plan to address this topic specifically. Insuring good communication between the Counties, proposed project advisory board, and various road authorities will be essential.

*Concerns about **OHV** access in the area received both positive and negative comments.*

OHV and other motorized outdoor recreation is addressed in the Background section on page 18. Both counties are working with OHV interest groups to create a positive experience within their land base. The MN DNR works with Grant-in-aid snowmobile trail groups to provide alignments. [The Minnesota River State Trail Master Plan](#) recommends ATV uses where appropriate when this trail is developed (This Master Plan is listed in the Reference section page 55). Under the Recreation Goal section on page 36, OHV recreation suggested actions are listed.

*One comment encouraged the promotion of the **rich history** of the area.*

This topic is addressed in the Vision, Goals, Actions section under the Culture and Heritage goal on page 38 – 39.

*Concern that **agricultural/private landowner rights** be maintained was expressed.*

This has been an important theme in all public input sessions held for this Master Plan and we have tried to be clear about this being a key value and product of the master plan. In the Vision, Goals, Actions section starting on page 32, conservation of agricultural resources and a traditional rural lifestyle is part of the desired future conditions. On page 33, supporting conservation –based agriculture and other private lands is important to the goals of the master plan. Minimizing public use impacts to landowners is an action item on page 37. Implementation of land/easement purchases will depend on willing landowner sales and easements as stated on page 45.

*Several comments were received around the concept of improving current **facilities** before or rather than creating new facilities for recreation and other services.*

Under the Vision, Goals, Action section on page 35 in the Recreation goal area an action is identified to create additional facilities. Part of this exercise as described below it is to identify existing facilities first, accessing maintenance and/or improvements to meet current and near term projected needs. This is the fiscally responsible approach. Expansion would begin to occur as visitation or need grows sometime in the future for many facilities. This assessment of current facilities may show there are some missing amenities which could be beneficial to the goal of the project. At that point, funds would need to be secured to proceed.

*Strong comments were received both for and against a **public trail system** in the area that would connect communities to sites of interest, conservation areas or recreation areas along the river corridor.*

Page 34 in the Master Plan lists the action for developing a recreational trail system. These systems are built through local effort with willing landowners. The [Minnesota River State Trail Master Plan](#) lists the suggested uses for a state trail along the river corridor. These are generally non-motorized but may include some alternate tread ways for motorized where appropriate. A majority of people participating in the public input of this Master Plan voted to include this action as a priority. No specific route for a trail system is identified in the plan – only a general layout showing which features should be connected.

*Improving **Tourism** via various actions also received both positive and negative comments.*

While a few were negative towards inviting strangers into the area a few were excited about the potential for increasing visitors and tourism efforts.

Tourism is specifically referenced on page 40 in the Culture and Heritage section as an action which should involve and benefit private landowners, while respecting those not interested in these types of activities.

*The Minnesota Department of **Health SHIP** program is interested in partnering on trail signage projects where appropriate and urges consideration of LGU policies which might impact the public's ability to access the resources the plan proposes to develop and promote.*

Counties will continue to work with local public health groups to identify areas of overlapping interest and opportunities for collaboration. All LGU policies are set in open public meeting formats and the Counties encourage public health agencies to comment and provide input on existing and future policies.

*Encouragement was given for **project leadership** to be local and for coordination with MN DNR.*

The Implementation Strategy on page 48 lists priority actions and the lead agencies. While this document is meant to be dynamic, County leadership is clearly identified. Collaboration with Dakota Communities is referenced on page 39 as a specific action item.

*Encouragement was given for internal coordination within **MN DNR operations** and collaboration to benefit the larger community.*

The action item on page 38 recommends the development of a landscape level plan for desired future conditions that will more specifically identify best sites for conservation and recreation. The lead for this implementation planning is MN DNR in partnership with the Counties and local interests. This is expected to occur during the first phase of the implementation.

***Graphic** on third page from cover with shaded relief does not show entire area. Tatanka Bluffs logo may not be the most current.*

Shaded relief graphic is a back drop meant to show the stark elevation differences and interesting features in the valley. Zooming out to include the entire project area tends to dilute that effect. New logo for Tatanka Bluffs was found.

*Concerns were expressed about the various possible **designations** that were suggested for the area in the Master Plan.*

Each designation category has its pros and cons. These are just recommendations at this point. Additional discussions will occur with project partners, local interested parties and local officials/legislators before action is taken.

*The **Minnesota River's unreliable condition** was mentioned as a potential problem.*

The river's condition is acknowledged as a constraint that affects the quality of recreation experience of paddlers and others recreating in the river valley on page 20. Many recreation areas around the Country experience changing conditions which may at times restrict some user's ability and while this needs to be considered it should not prohibit possible recreational uses.

A copy of public comments is available upon request to Comment@MNRiverValleyMasterPlan.org .