



SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA REGIONAL TRAIL PLAN

Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray,
Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, Rock



EDA

U.S. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

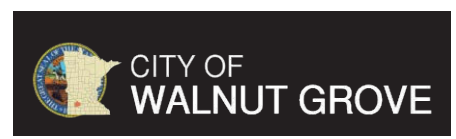
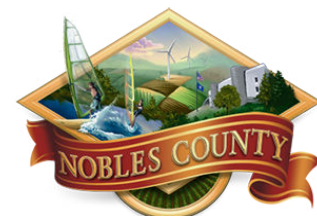


SRDC
SOUTHWEST REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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Lincoln County, Minnesota!

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INTRODUCTION

The Southwest Regional Development Commission (SRDC) has crafted this regional trail plan to bolster support for trails across Southwest Minnesota at local, regional, and legislative levels. The plan aims to secure equitable access to trail and recreational funding, enhance tourism, attract and retain residents, and foster collaboration among local trail groups to achieve regional goals and connections.

The primary objective of this initiative is to develop a cohesive vision for the region's trail network, elevate outdoor recreation awareness, and build on the successes of trail organizations. An integrated trail system is expected to boost tourism, which will, in turn, stimulate the growth of businesses and job opportunities catering to visitors and local attractions. This effort represents a strengthened collaboration between local trail groups, elected officials, state and local agencies, and national, state, and regional parks. The planning process prioritized engaging trail users and fostering local trail partnerships with communities, businesses, and governments to promote outdoor recreation and tourism in the region.

SRDC, also referred to as Region 8, encompasses nine counties in Southwest Minnesota: Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, and Rock. Known for its flat, windy prairie landscape, the region relies on agriculture and manufacturing, while also contributing to renewable energy production through wind, solar, ethanol, and biodiesel. Its western boundary is adjacent to South Dakota, and Iowa borders it to the south, with border issues often affecting regional economic development.



Region 8 Map

Trails can be found in various locations throughout the region, including the Touch the Sky Prairie Wildlife Refuge, Blue Mounds Trail, and Luverne Loop in Rock County; Camden Regional Trail, Garvin Park, and Twin Lakes Park in Lyon County; City of Jackson Trails and Belmont Park in Jackson County; the Casey Jones State Trail spanning Rock, Pipestone, Murray, and Redwood counties; Hole in the Mountain WMA & Park in Lincoln County; Pipestone National Monument and Split Rock Creek State Park in Pipestone County; Plum Creek Park and Ramsey Park in Redwood County; Lake Shetek State Park and End-O-Line Railroad Park in Murray County; and Kilen Woods State Park and Wolf Creek Trail in Cottonwood County. The accompanying “Region 8 Trails Map” provides a visual representation of these trail locations.

Additionally, segments of trails can be found in the cities of Pipestone, Marshall, Minneota, Mountain Lake, Lakefield, Fulda, Redwood Falls, Windom, and Worthington.

Definition of Regional Trail:

For this plan, a regional trail is any multi-use trail located in Region 8.

A multi-use trail is defined as a trail for the shared use and travel of bicycles, pedestrians, and other authorized non-motorized modes of transportation.



Why a new Trails Plan?

The Southwest Regional Development Commission (SRDC) initially created the Southwest Regional Trails Plan in 2000. This plan was updated in 2014 to incorporate ADA accessibility guidelines, a prioritized list of trail projects, and new local trail plans. Previously, these regional trail planning efforts involved only elected officials and state/local agencies. The current planning initiative represents a significant evolution, now incorporating a broader range of stakeholders including local trail groups, trail users, and national, state, and regional parks. This enhanced collaboration aims to foster trail-user engagement and create opportunities for local partnerships with communities, businesses, and local governments to boost outdoor recreation and tourism in the region.

The updated plan integrates local efforts to identify trail connections with a comprehensive vision for trail access across the nine-county region. This approach not only seeks to develop a cohesive and forward-looking plan but also aims to strengthen a region-wide support network.



Additionally, the Southwest Regional Trails Plan aligns with the priorities outlined in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for 2022–2027. It also supports goals from the Regional Economic Resiliency Plan, which was formally adopted in 2022.



Cottonwood County - photos by Jan Lasar (MN Trails Magazine)



PLANNING PROCESSES



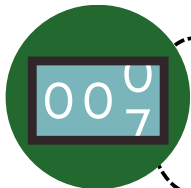
01. Establishing a Stakeholder Group

The first step in the planning process involved creating a regional stakeholder group. This step included identifying and inviting key stakeholders from local government agencies, community organizations, trail users, local chambers of commerce officials, county engineers, and businesses. Stakeholder input was gathered through quarterly meetings to build their vision for the regional trails plan.



02. A Current Trails Inventory

Throughout the summer of 2023, SRDC staff placed trail counters throughout the region in strategic locations determined by the stakeholder group's input and the desire to have a counter in each of the nine counties. These counters provided valuable data on trail users and the popularity of trails throughout the region.



03. Trail Counters

Throughout the summer of 2023, staff and recruited volunteers hit the trails for data gathering in intercept surveys. They spoke with people as they were using the trails, asking questions about their individual trail use and experiences. These intercept surveys provided details about the type and frequency of trail use, specifically on those trails in the priority corridors. The surveys also included questions about desirable aspects of trails, ideas for trail improvements, and if trail presence influences consumer spending.



04. Trail Intercept Surveys

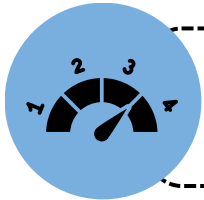
A thorough inventory and analysis of existing trails, natural features, and potential trail corridors was conducted. This research included reviewing all relevant state and local plans related to trails. The information collected in this phase guided the selection of potential trail corridors and helped determine future trail expansion priorities.

PLANNING PROCESSES



05. Interviews & Focus Groups

The SRDC identified and conducted 25 interviews and focus group sessions throughout our nine-county region. These sessions were conducted to gather in-depth insights from local residents. These sessions allowed participants to share their perspectives, concerns, and ideas more interactively and qualitatively. The information gathered from focus groups and interviews helped refine the trail plan and ensured that it aligns with community needs and aspirations.



06. Corridor Scoring

Trail corridor scoring played a pivotal role in the decision-making process regarding route planning and design. Trail corridor scoring involved the systematic evaluation of potential trail alignments based on a rubric with 20 scored criteria including community connectivity, accessibility, safety, and cost-effectiveness. Appendix page 116 provides the full list of criteria and scoring guidance. Each potential corridor is assessed and assigned a score reflecting its suitability for trail development. This scoring process helped prioritize corridors that align more closely with the goals and objectives of the trail plan. By integrating trail corridor scoring into the planning methodology, the regional trail plan ensured that trail alignments are thoughtfully chosen to maximize benefits for residents, visitors, and the natural landscape of Southwest Minnesota.



07. Ongoing Monitoring & Evaluation

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation are essential to assess the regional trails plan's effectiveness and the ability to make necessary adjustments. Performance indicators shall be established to measure progress towards goals and objectives, track trail usage patterns, and evaluate trail user satisfaction. Regular reviews and public feedback are essential to maintaining transparency and accountability in the planning process.



SW MN TRAILS TODAY

As part of the process of planning a regional trails network, it is important to understand where we currently are and what impacts multi-use trails and bike routes can have in terms of our quality of life, health, economic development, and tourism potential, and how to best position ourselves to leverage these benefits.

The Natural Environment

Southwest Minnesota is a treasure trove of natural splendor, where the land whispers tales of expansive prairies, lush farmlands, and a tapestry of shimmering lakes and meandering rivers. Once an uninterrupted sea of tallgrass prairie, the landscape now presents a charming mosaic of waving grasslands intertwined with fertile fields. This rich and varied environment is a haven for a multitude of plant and animal species, from the iconic big bluestem grasses that sway in the breeze to the graceful white-tailed deer and the vibrant pheasants that flit through the fields. The skies above are alive with the cheerful songs of cardinals and the bright flutter of goldfinches.

The region's allure extends to its waterways, where the Minnesota River and its myriad of smaller tributaries weave through the land. These lakes and rivers are not just scenic marvels; they are lifelines for wildlife and communities alike, nurturing vibrant aquatic ecosystems and offering a playground for activities like fishing, boating, and bird-watching. The wetlands scattered throughout the region are nature's unsung heroes, playing vital roles in flood prevention, water purification, and supporting a diverse array of wildlife.



Even as agriculture and urban development make their mark, Southwest Minnesota is embracing a future where conservation and progress go hand in hand. Dedicated organizations and agencies are working tirelessly to protect the remnants of native prairies, restore vital wetlands, and advocate for sustainable farming practices. This harmonious balance ensures that the natural beauty and ecological richness of Southwest Minnesota will continue to inspire awe and sustain life for generations to come.

STATEWIDE CONTEXT

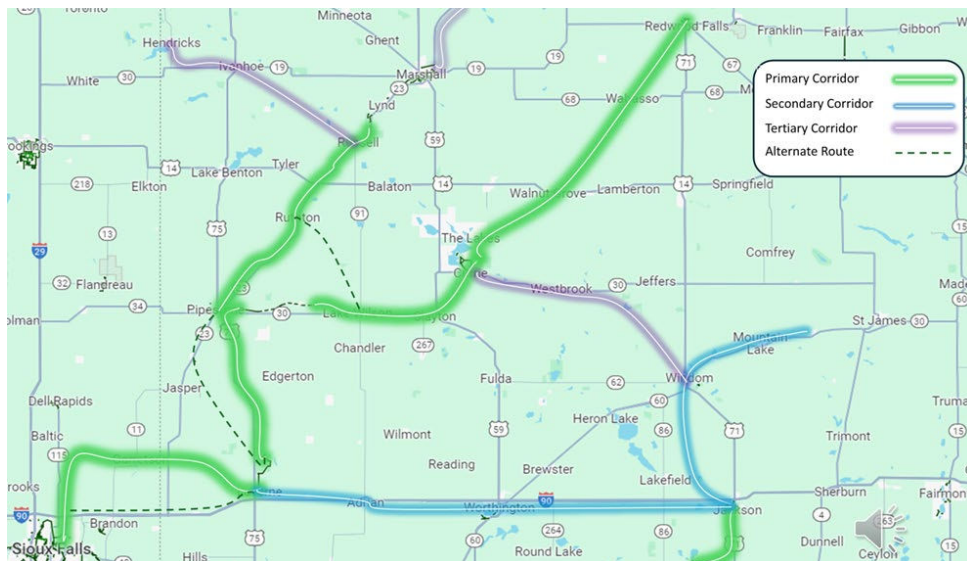
MnDOT

Minnesota’s highest priority corridors for a state bicycle route connect major metropolitan areas and top tourist destinations – often along the I-94 and I-35 corridors. The largest cities in Southwest Minnesota have populations of less than 15,000 and the tourist volumes do not compare to Duluth or the Twin Cities; thus, in a statewide context, this

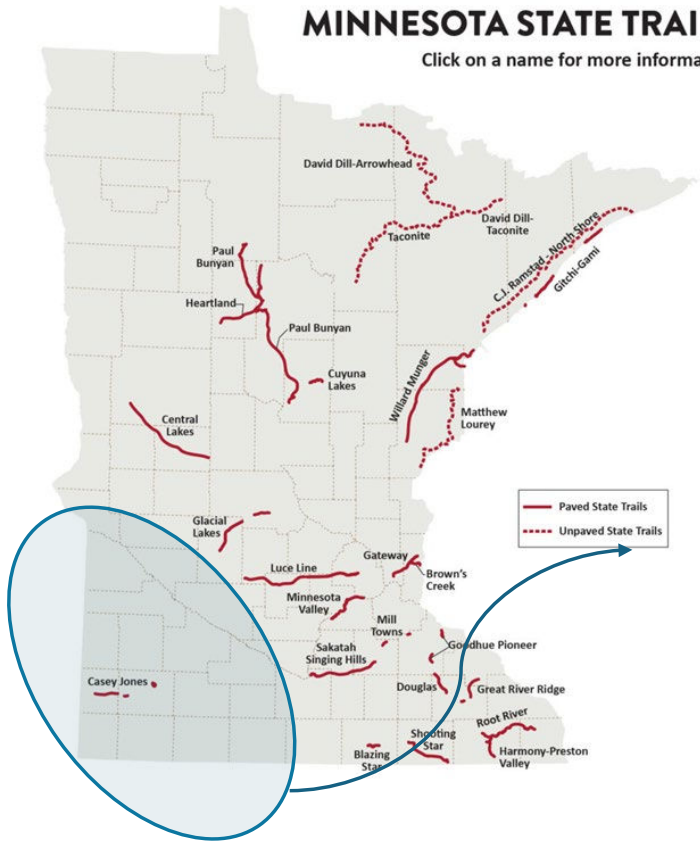
region only has medium to low priority corridors. When comparing the statewide priority corridors to the regional priority corridors, one sees most of the corridors overlap with the medium priority statewide corridors corresponding with the region’s primary corridors.

Comparing SRDC Region Priorities to State Priorities

Large overlap with medium and low priority trails in the state plan

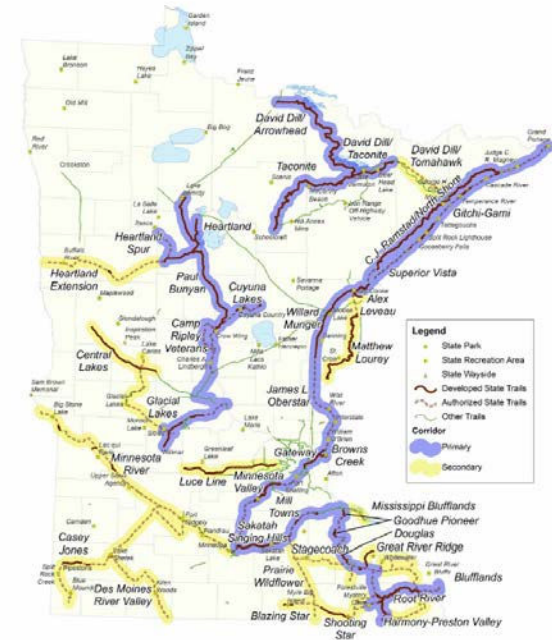


Existing State Trails vs Authorized State Trails



State trails in SW Minnesota are not as developed as other areas of the state.

m DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
State Trail Primary and Secondary Corridors



State Trail Investment Groups update 2/12/19

DNR

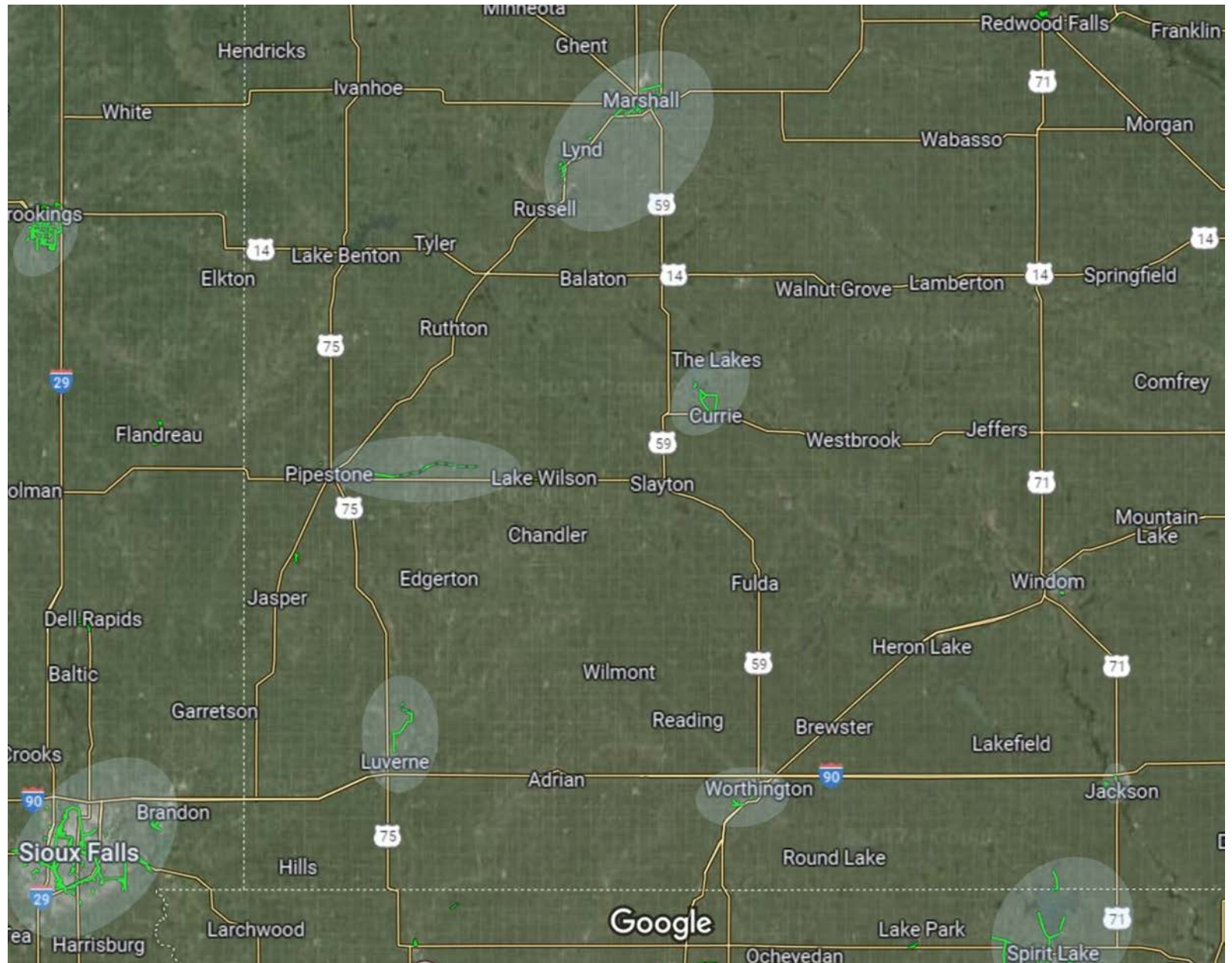
If completed, the Casey Jones Trail would be over 100 miles long and cover four counties in the region. As is evident on the map of existing state

trails, the DNR has done more to develop trails in other areas of the state and neglected trail development in the Southwest portion of Minnesota.

Trails in the Region

The Southwest Minnesota region features some of its longest trail segments on the Camden Regional Trail and the Pipestone to Woodstock segment of the Casey Jones State Trail. However, the current map reveals a collection of disconnected, short trail segments. This plan's vision is to address these gaps by prioritizing efforts to link these segments into a unified and attractive trail network. Our goal is to create a cohesive trail system that not only draws visitors but also encourages residents to stay and supports local business growth.

Based on insights from interviews and focus groups, the most requested amenities include restrooms, water stations, benches, rest areas, clear signage, and enhanced connections to other locations and destinations.



"Current trails are disconnected segments across the region."

STATE & NATIONAL TRENDS IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

National and statewide outdoor recreation trends reflect a dynamic shift in societal interests, highlighting an increased awareness of the mental health benefits of engaging with nature and the enduring influence of the COVID pandemic, which has accelerated the move toward more outdoor experiences. One notable trend is the growing commitment to sustainability and eco-conscious practices. As climate change becomes a more pressing concern, people are gravitating towards outdoor activities that not only immerse them in nature but also support conservation efforts. Activities like hiking, biking, and camping are flourishing as they provide a chance to connect with the environment while minimizing ecological impact.

Alongside this, there is a rising allure of eco-tourism destinations that emphasize responsible travel and preservation. This reflects a broader cultural shift towards sustainable living. Urban residents in Minnesota, seeking respite from the hustle and bustle of city life, are increasingly exploring the tranquil landscapes of Greater Minnesota. Whether it's a weekend retreat in a lakeside cabin or a day trip to a state park, these escapes offer a wealth of recreational opportunities, from hiking and camping to fishing and trail adventures. The allure of Greater Minnesota's natural beauty, coupled with improved transportation and a growing appreciation for nature's benefits, makes these rural getaways ever more attractive.

Minnesota, renowned for its stunning array of over 10,000 lakes, has also seen an evolution in water-based recreational activities. Beyond traditional boating and fishing, there's a surge in interest for stand-up paddleboarding (SUP), kayaking, canoeing, and sailing. These activities offer peaceful exploration and exciting adventures on the state's pristine lakes, rivers, and waterways. The growing fascination with ecotourism and wildlife watching further enriches the experience, with guided tours showcasing the state's diverse aquatic ecosystems and vibrant wildlife.

As a result, these outdoor activities and destinations are drawing increasing numbers of visitors from nearby cities, providing a boost to local economies and fostering a deeper appreciation for Minnesota's natural



7-Mile Park, Fulda, MN- photo by SRDC Staff

treasures. The revitalization of waterfront areas, the development of regional trails, and the expansion of recreational opportunities are gradually transforming the tourism landscape in Southwest Minnesota, making it a burgeoning hub for nature enthusiasts and adventurers alike.



Outdoor recreational event in Jackson, MN - submitted photo

STATE & NATIONAL TRENDS IN OUTDOOR RECREATION



Snowshoeing near Jackson - submitted photo

The connection between outdoor recreation and wellness has become increasingly evident, as people seek refuge from the pressures of modern life in the soothing embrace of nature. Activities such as hiking, biking, and birdwatching are celebrated not just for their recreational value but for their profound mental health benefits. Engaging with the natural world has been shown to reduce stress, enhance mood, and support overall well-being, leading many to view outdoor pursuits as essential to maintaining holistic health. This growing recognition has integrated outdoor experiences more deeply into daily life, transforming them from mere leisure activities into vital components of a balanced lifestyle.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a transformative impact on outdoor recreation, catalyzing a significant shift in how people engage with nature. As indoor facilities closed and travel restrictions were imposed, individuals turned to the great outdoors for safe, socially distant activities. This newfound appreciation for local natural spaces sparked a surge in outdoor participation and a renewed enthusiasm for exploring and enjoying the environment close to home. Even as pandemic restrictions have eased, this trend persists, driving ongoing innovation in outdoor recreation and programming. The pandemic's legacy continues to underscore the importance of outdoor spaces as vital venues for physical activity, social connection, and personal growth, reinforcing their role as a crucial component of a healthy, balanced lifestyle on a national scale.



*Jackson County - Belmont Park
photos by Jackson Co. Trail Group*



Mt. Lake- photos by Jan Lasar (MN Trails Magazine)



*Jackson County - photos by Jan Lasar
(MN Trails Magazine)*

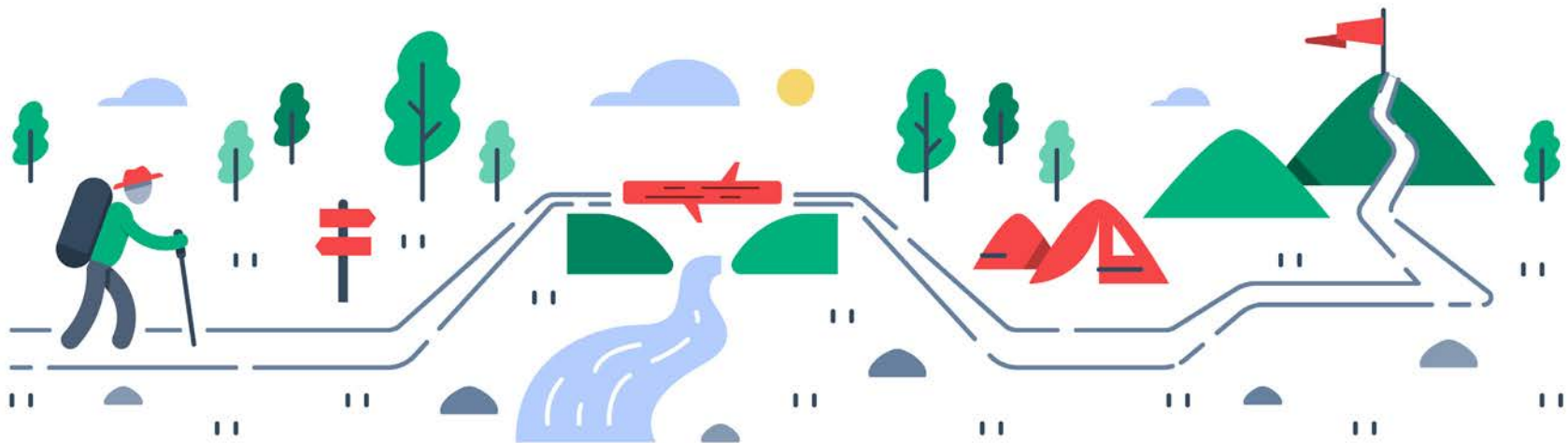
Impediments to Trail Use & Development

The development and use of trails are often impeded by several factors, ranging from logistical challenges to environmental concerns. One significant impediment is the lack of funding and resources for trail construction and maintenance. Building trails requires significant investment in materials, labor, and planning, and ongoing maintenance is essential to ensure their safety and usability. Without adequate funding from government agencies, nonprofit organizations, or private donors, many trail projects struggle to get off the ground or remain in good condition over time.

Another common impediment to trail use and development is land access and ownership issues. Securing land or right-of-way from landowners can be a complex and time-consuming process, especially when dealing with projects that involve long distances with multiple stakeholders. Additionally, conflicts may arise between different land uses, or private property rights, thus complicating efforts to establish or expand trail networks.

Furthermore, topographical constraints such as rugged terrain, steep slopes, as well as rivers and other bodies of water can present significant obstacles to trail development. Building trails requires careful engineering and design to ensure safety and minimal environmental impact. Designing and constructing bridges adds additional costs to a trails project. In some cases, the costs and technical challenges associated with overcoming these natural barriers can become a significant obstacle, leading to project delays or cancellations.

Lastly, local factors can influence trail use and development. Community engagement and support are crucial for the success of trail projects, as local residents may have varying opinions and priorities regarding trail placement, design, and management. Addressing concerns about project costs, potential trail routes, impacts on property, and stigma related to trail users requires open communication and collaboration between trail developers, stakeholders, and community members to ensure that trails are designed and managed in a manner that benefits all parties involved.



Responding to Challenges

Addressing the identified challenges to trail development requires a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes collaboration, and communication with local and regional stakeholders. To overcome land ownership and access rights challenges, regional planners must partner with counties, municipalities, and locals. Trail developers need to build up local stakeholders that can engage with locals and work to find a solution to move forward. These groups need to have transparent negotiations with private landowners and local government agencies. Establishing clear agreements, such as easements, can help secure access while addressing concerns about liability and zoning regulations. Additionally, promoting the benefits of trails, such as increased property values and tourism revenue, can garner support from the community and decision-makers, facilitating the acquisition of necessary lands.

A strategic approach to funding and resource management is essential for overcoming financial constraints in trail development. Trail developers can explore diverse funding sources, including state and federal grants, local community foundations, and local fundraising efforts. Leveraging state and federal grants can cover a substantial amount of trail construction. Moreover, prioritizing investments in high-scoring trail corridors, where there is established political will to build trails, can maximize the efficiency of available resources and ensure the long-term viability of trail growth.

Overcoming the stigma associated with out-of-area trail users needs to consist of education, community engagement, and inclusive messaging. Trail managers and local authorities can work collaboratively with recreational user groups and community organizations to foster a sense of shared stewardship and responsibility for trail use. Implementing outreach initiatives, such as educational campaigns, and creating local trail groups, can help promote responsible trail etiquette and environmental awareness among both residents and visitors.

Additionally, creating opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between diverse user groups can build mutual understanding and respect, reducing misconceptions and stereotypes about out-of-area trail users.

Emphasizing the economic benefits of tourism and outdoor recreation to local communities can also shift perceptions, highlighting the positive contributions of visitors to the local economy and the importance of welcoming all individuals to enjoy and appreciate the natural beauty of Southwest Minnesota. By creating local trail groups that foster a culture of inclusivity, respect, and shared responsibility, communities can overcome the stigma associated with out-of-area trail users and create a welcoming environment that benefits both residents and visitors alike.

Incorporating best practices in trail design, construction, and maintenance can minimize disturbance to natural habitats, and prevent erosion. Conducting thorough environmental assessments and engaging with experts and stakeholders can help identify sensitive areas and develop tailored mitigation measures. Embracing sustainable trail management practices, such as low-impact trail construction techniques, fosters environmental resilience while enhancing the recreational experience for trail users. By integrating environmental considerations into every stage of trail development, developers can create trails that not only provide recreational opportunities but also contribute to the preservation of natural landscapes for future generations.

Trail Development

Strategic Approach
Trail developers should explore diverse funding sources.

Overcoming stigma
Through education, community engagement, & inclusive messaging.

Economic Benefits
Highlight positive contributions of visitors to the local economy

Best Practices
Incorporate best practices in trail design, construction, and maintenance



EXISTING PAVED TRAILS

- Luverne
- Jackson
- Marshall
- Camden
- Worthington
- Windom
- Casey Jones State Trail
- Pipestone
- Belmont County Park
- Minneota Trails
- Mountain Lake Trails





Luverne city trail - photos by Luverne Chamber



LUVERNE, MN CITY LOOP

This trail project was initiated due to a strategic visioning process led by community members in 2010. During this process, community members noted that the city's proximity to Blue Mounds State Park could be leveraged for future development opportunities. In 2015, the City of Luverne partnered with the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, and alongside many stakeholder groups, put together a Master Plan that outlined trail development and its amenities in phases. In the years following, the city has leveraged the plan to apply for Legacy and Transportation Alternative funding.

The Luverne Loop was completed in 2022 and now offers community members 7.4 miles of uninterrupted trail around the city and a connection to the Blue Mounds Trail. This trail can be accessed either at the Trailhead at 601 E. Main Street or any of the parks along the trail corridor. The Luverne Loop's connection to the Blue Mounds Trail and Ashby Trail provides over 15 miles of trail in the Luverne area.

To celebrate the completion of the Luverne Loop, the City of Luverne hosted its first ever Tour de Loop on June 1, 2023. SRDC tabled at the event and completed 17 intercept surveys while promoting the regional trails planning process. With the local loop and local connections completed, the city is looking for opportunities to expand trails toward Sioux Falls and Pipestone.



Blue Mounds State Park- photos by Luverne Chamber

Parks and Recreation

- A** Trailhead
- B** Aquatics & Fitness Center
- C** Evergreen Park
- D** Blue Mounds State Park
- E** Dragonfly Park
- F** Prairie View Complex
- G** Luverne Public School
- H** Hawkinson Park
- I** Kolbert Park
- J** The Lake
- K** Blue Mound Ice Arena
- L** Rotary Park / Dog Park
- M** Redbird Field
- N** City Park
- O** Veterans Memorial Park
- P** Joe Roberts Field
- Q** Prairie Moon Park
- R** Longhorn Park
- S** Sitting Bull Park
- T** Mocassin Park
- U** Flag Park
- V** Riverside Park
- W** Buffalo Bill Park

Points of Interest

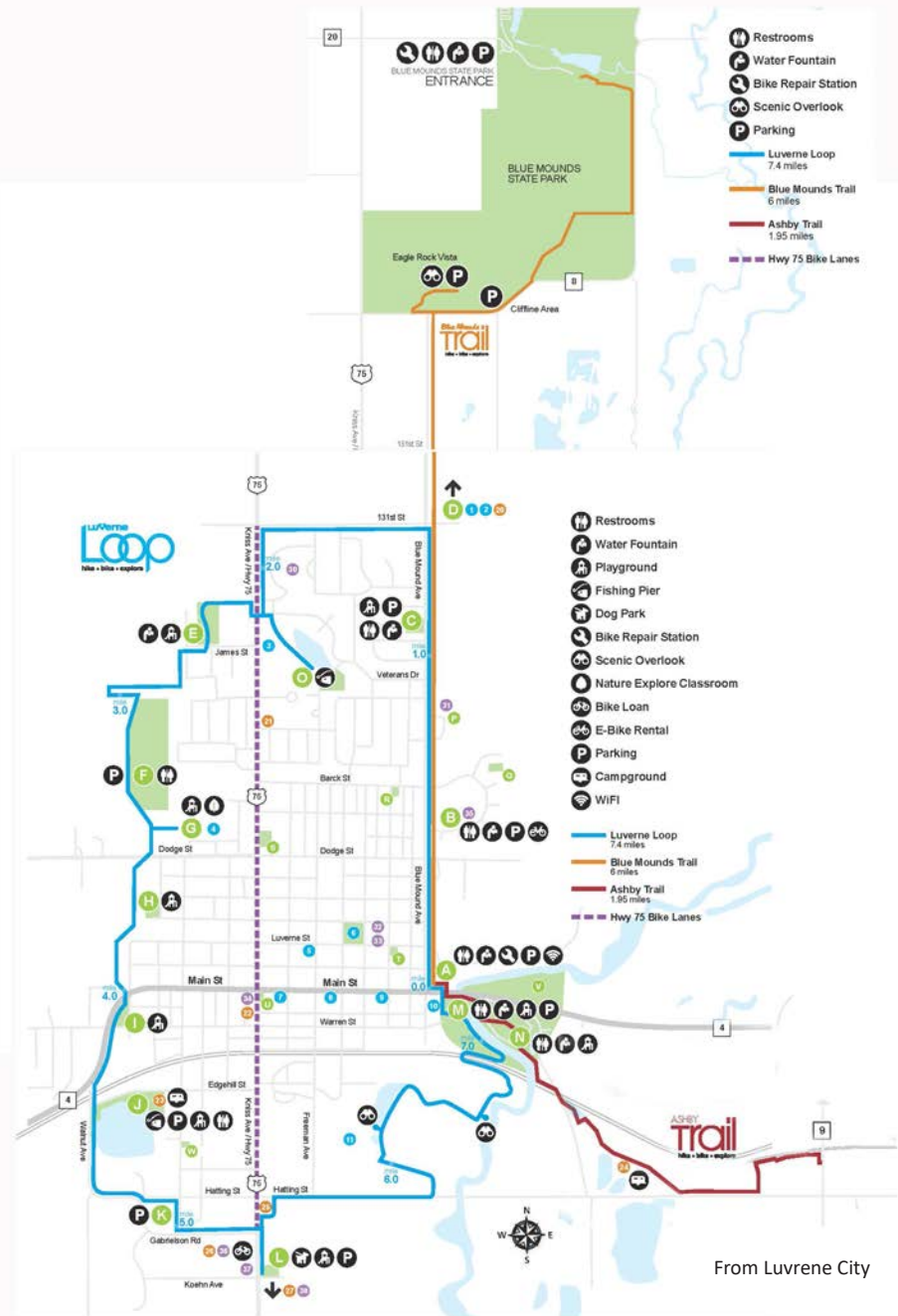
- 1** Eagle Rock Vista
- 2** Cliffline Area
- 3** MN Veterans Home
- 4** Luverne Public School
- 5** Hinkly House
- 6** Courthouse Square
Rock County Courthouse
Brandenburg Gallery
Herreid Military Museum
Luverne Area Chamber
- 7** Rock County Library
- 8** Palace Theatre
- 9** History Center
- 10** Farmers Market
- 11** Rock County Fairgrounds

Lodging and Camping

- 20** Blue Mounds State Park
- 21** Hillcrest Motel
- 22** Cozy Rest Motel
- 23** Luverne Campground
- 24** River Road Campground
- 25** Econolodge
- 26** GrandStay Hotel & Suites
- 27** Super 8 Motel

Visitor Services

- 30** Sanford Medical Center
- 31** Rock County Sheriff
- 32** Minnesota West
- 33** Luverne City Hall
- 34** Blue Mound Liquor
- 35** E-Bike Rental
- 36** Roll On Luverne Bike Loan
- 37** Visitor Center
- 38** Luverne Municipal Airport



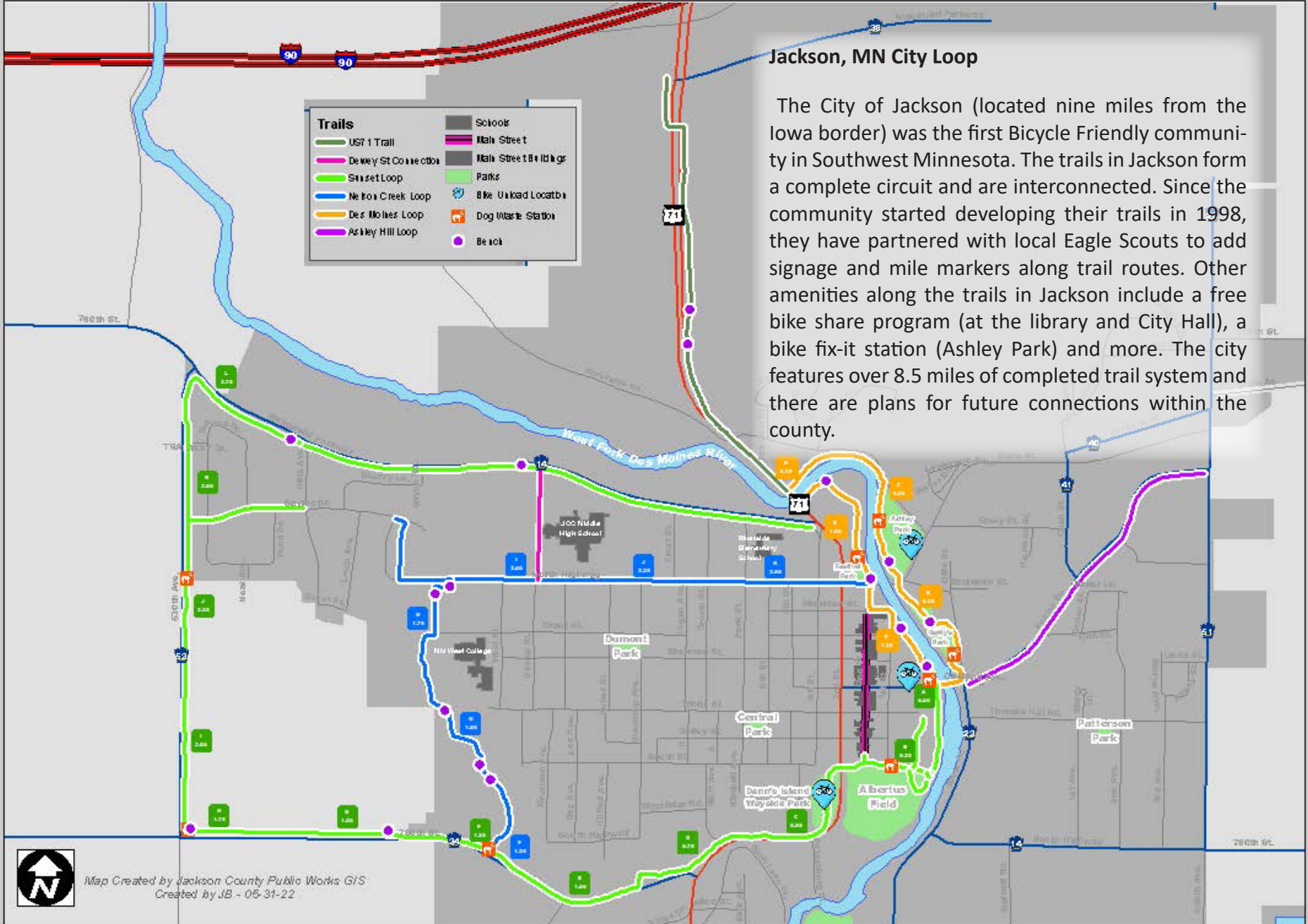
From Luverne City

City of Jackson Walking / Bicycle Trails

Jackson, MN City Loop

The City of Jackson (located nine miles from the Iowa border) was the first Bicycle Friendly community in Southwest Minnesota. The trails in Jackson form a complete circuit and are interconnected. Since the community started developing their trails in 1998, they have partnered with local Eagle Scouts to add signage and mile markers along trail routes. Other amenities along the trails in Jackson include a free bike share program (at the library and City Hall), a bike fix-it station (Ashley Park) and more. The city features over 8.5 miles of completed trail system and there are plans for future connections within the county.

Trails	
 US71 Trail	 School
 Dewey St Connection	 Main Street
 Sunset Loop	 Main Street Buildings
 Nelson Creek Loop	 Parks
 Des Moines Loop	 Bike Unload Location
 Ashley Hill Loop	 Dog Waste Station
	 Bench



Map Created by Jackson County Public Works GIS
Created by JB - 05-31-22

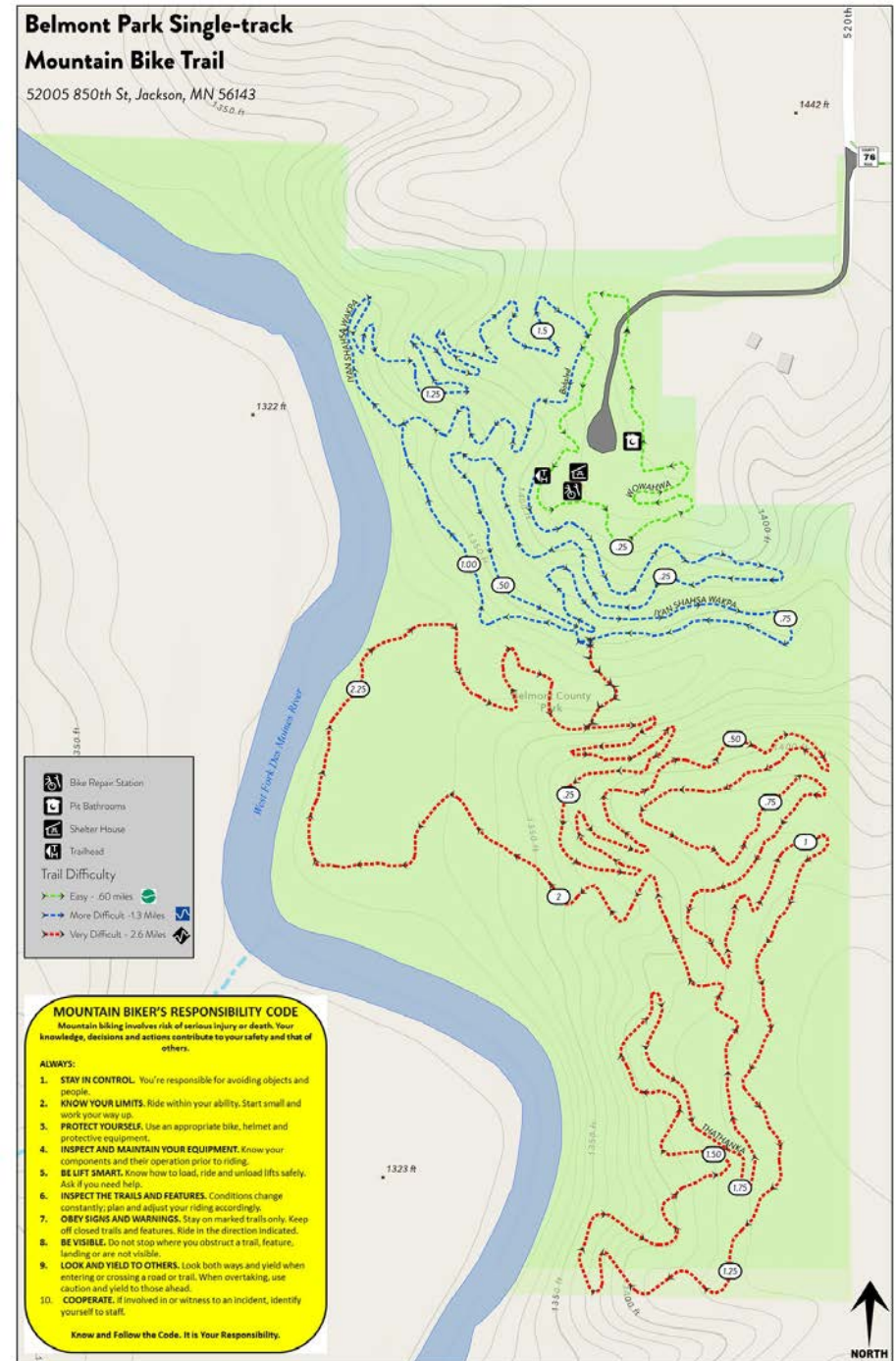
BELMONT COUNTY PARK: Mountain Biking Trail

This 80-acre park, located on the east bank of the Des Moines River in Northwestern Jackson County, immerses visitors in the majestic scenery of woodland trail. The mountain bike park has over 5 miles of off-road trails that stretch from beginner to expert levels. After six years of planning and development that included working with local trail groups and officials from the City of Jackson and Jackson County, the new single-track mountain bike park is now open.

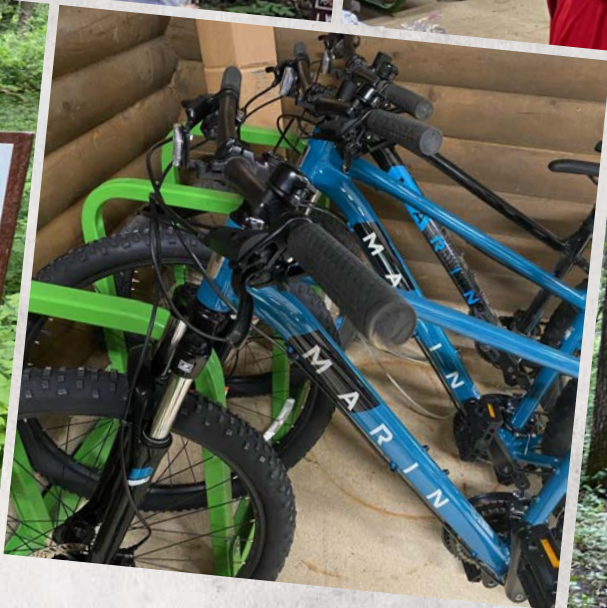
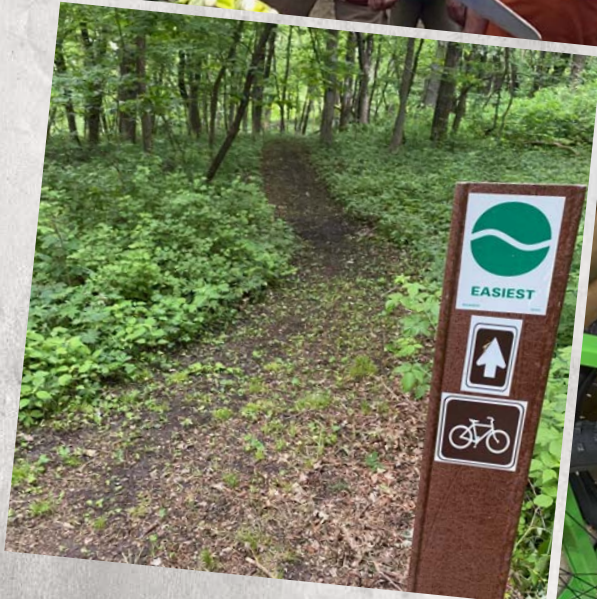
Much of the funding for the project, \$190,000, came from a grant from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources, but in addition, the Friends of the Jackson Trails Committee donated more than \$26,000, and Jackson County provided \$30,000.

“The off-road trail functions as a sort of bicycle rollercoaster, with all-natural surfaces that are no wider than 4 feet. The area was designed to accommodate mountain bikers of all skill levels. There’s a gentle, beginner-friendly trail surfaced with grass that’s about three-quarters of a mile long, which is mainly flat. The intermediate stretch starts going downhill, so cyclists can build up speed, but there are also a lot of switchbacks where people will end up going back and forth on the terrain. There are a few jumps, too, but the trail is still a relatively downhill stretch. That trail brings the biker near the Des Moines River, offering a majestic view that makes the climb worth it”.

*Article excerpt from the Worthington Globe,
Dated June 2, 2023.*



Belmont Trail Ribbon Cutting
Photo by Jackson Trail Group



MINNEOTA TRAILS

The Minneota loop consists of 1.59 miles of paved trail around the western and northern city borders with another 2.16 miles of on-street walking and biking connections to complete the circle.



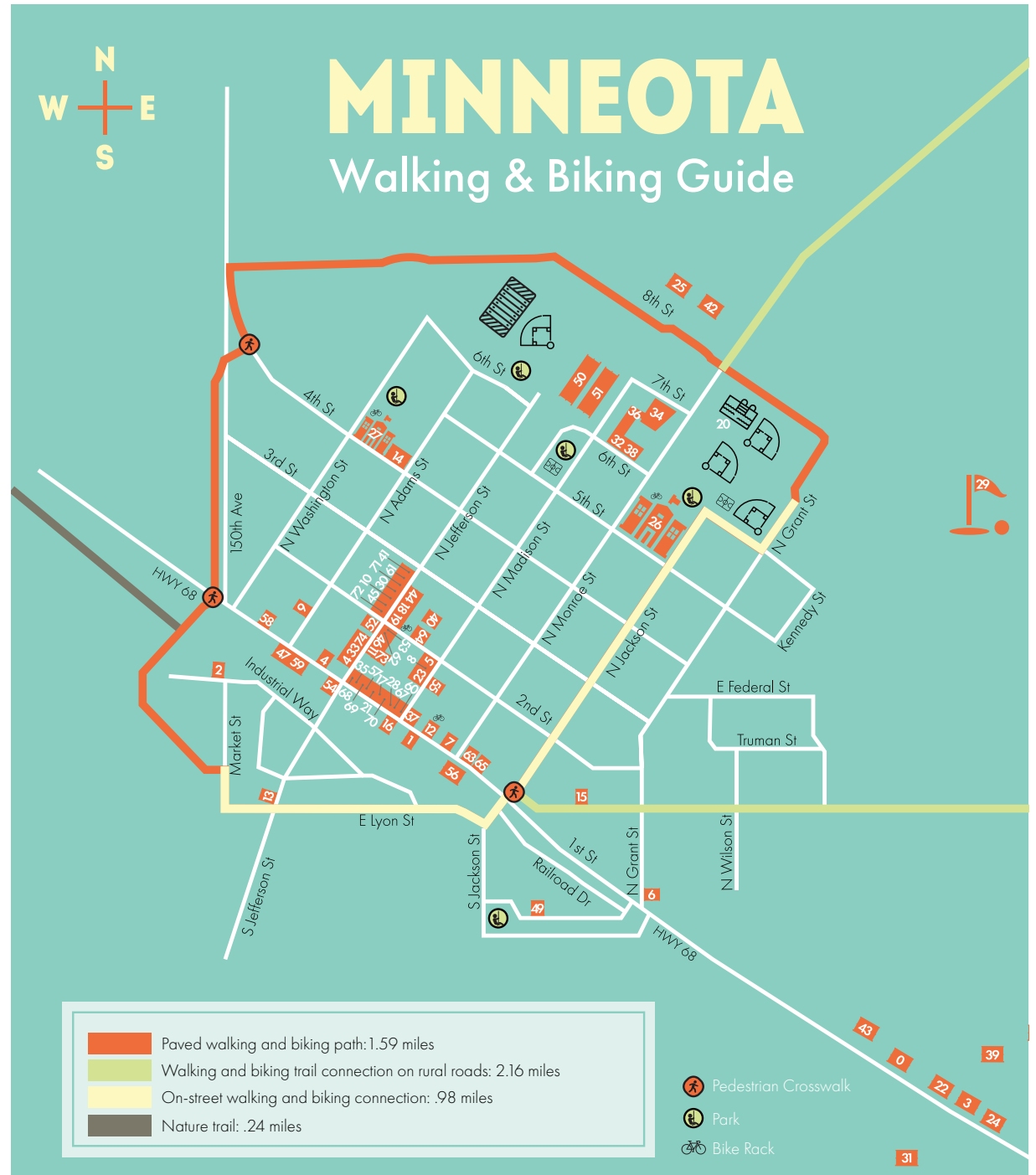
Trail near Hwy. 68



Walking trail by golf course



Trail wraps around the east side of school



Marshall, MN Trails

The city of Marshall (pop. 13,680) is considered a regional hub in Southwest Minnesota attracting locals, residents of nearby communities, and tourists that eat, shop, and visit the trails. The city has 11.7 miles of paved off-road trails, 2.7 miles, and 11.7 miles of on-street bike lanes. When combined with the full length of Camden Regional Trail (14.87 miles), they have 29.27 miles of trails and lanes for bikers. In 2023, with a grant from MnDOT, the city completed a Parks & Trails Active Transportation Action Plan, that included priority projects for further developing trails within the city.



CAMDEN REGIONAL TRAIL

The Camden Regional Trail spans 14 miles of paved pathways, linking the city of Marshall, the City of Lynd, and Camden State Park. On its eastern end, the trail connects key locations in Marshall, including Marshall High School, the Red Baron Center, Southwest Minnesota State University, and a network of bike lanes and sidewalks. Moving west, the trail extends for over ten miles between Wayside Park and Camden State Park. At Camden State Park, users can enjoy hiking and mountain biking trails, scenic viewpoints, and a swimming beach.

This trail was brought to life through the dedicated efforts of local advocates, including the City of Marshall, Lyon County, the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Council, and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) at Camden State Park, as part of the Healthy and Active Marshall Built Infrastructure Initiative. It serves as a prime example of successful planning, collaboration, and strategic direction. Lyon County played a crucial role in securing the trail's right of way, while the City of Marshall managed the construction within the park. To finance a significant portion of the trail outside the park, Marshall utilized its eligibility for legacy grants. Additionally, the city and county collaborated with the BNSF railroad to ensure safe crossings and worked with the Corps of Engineers on flood control projects along the corridor.



Camden Reg. Trail- photos by Marshall Chamber



WORTHINGTON, MN TRAILS



Between 1907 and 1911, Amelia Earhart spent her summers swimming and fishing in Okabena Lake and horseback riding at what is now Centennial Park. Over a century later, Okabena Lake remains a central feature of downtown Worthington, serving as the hub for various community events.

The city of Worthington began developing its trail system around Okabena Lake in the 1980s, with ongoing improvements scheduled through 2024 and beyond. Recently, Worthington secured Transportation Alternatives funds to build a new connection from Okabena Lake to the community at the intersection of Nobles and MN 60.

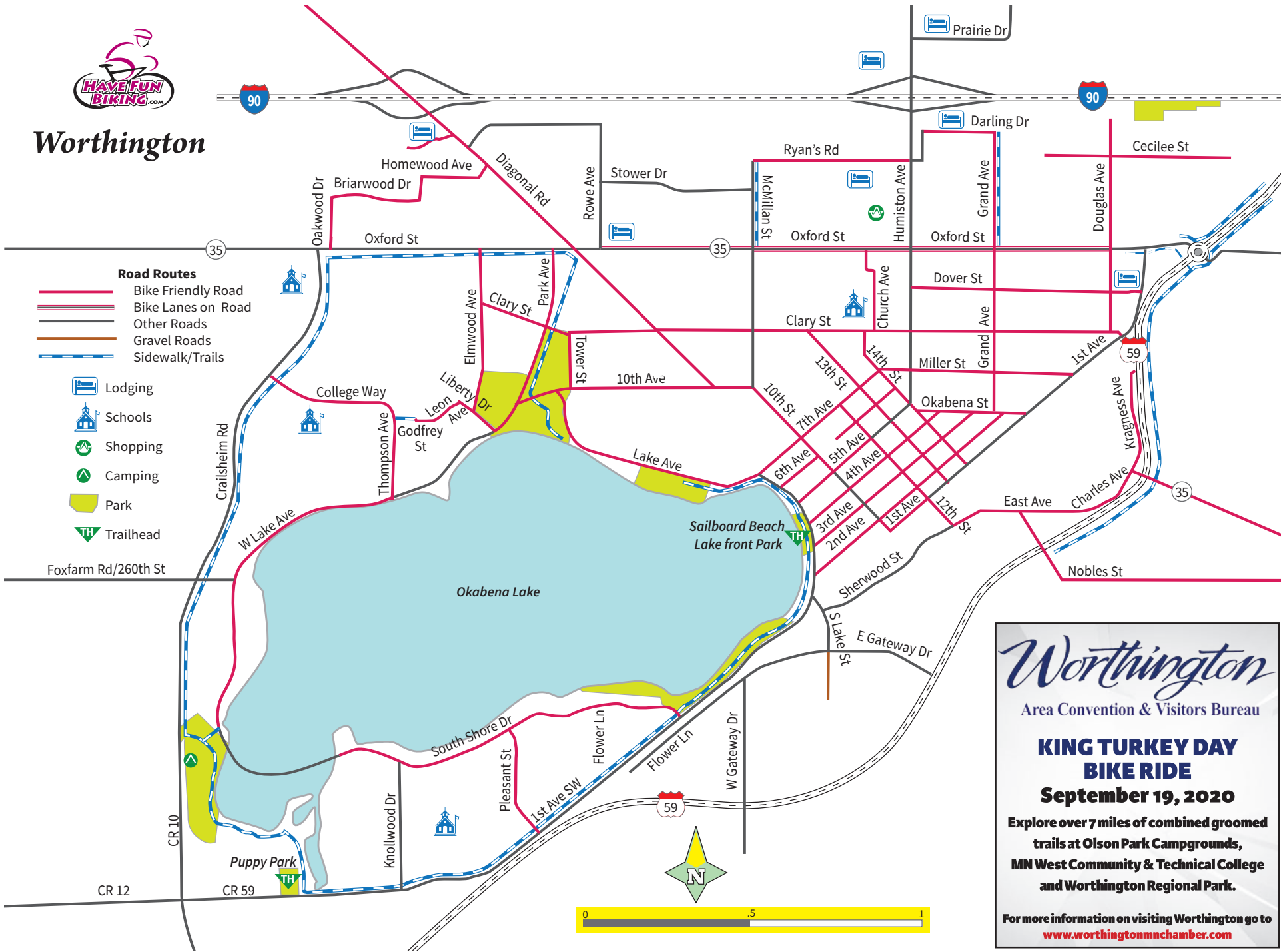
The Okabena Lake Trail extends approximately 5 miles and features both on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle paths. Trail users can enjoy scenic views while passing nine city parks and a campground. The city has invested heavily in enhancing these areas, adding picnic shelters, playgrounds, restrooms, docks, a swimming beach, a splashpad, a band shell, pedestrian bridges, and park benches. Additionally, the trail links to Worthington's downtown business district via city sidewalks, providing easy access to shops, restaurants, a brewery, and more.

Lake Okabena trail photos along Lake Street - photos by SRDC Staff





Worthington



Worthington
 Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

**KING TURKEY DAY
 BIKE RIDE**

September 19, 2020

Explore over 7 miles of combined groomed trails at Olson Park Campgrounds, MN West Community & Technical College and Worthington Regional Park.

For more information on visiting Worthington go to www.worthingtonmnchamber.com



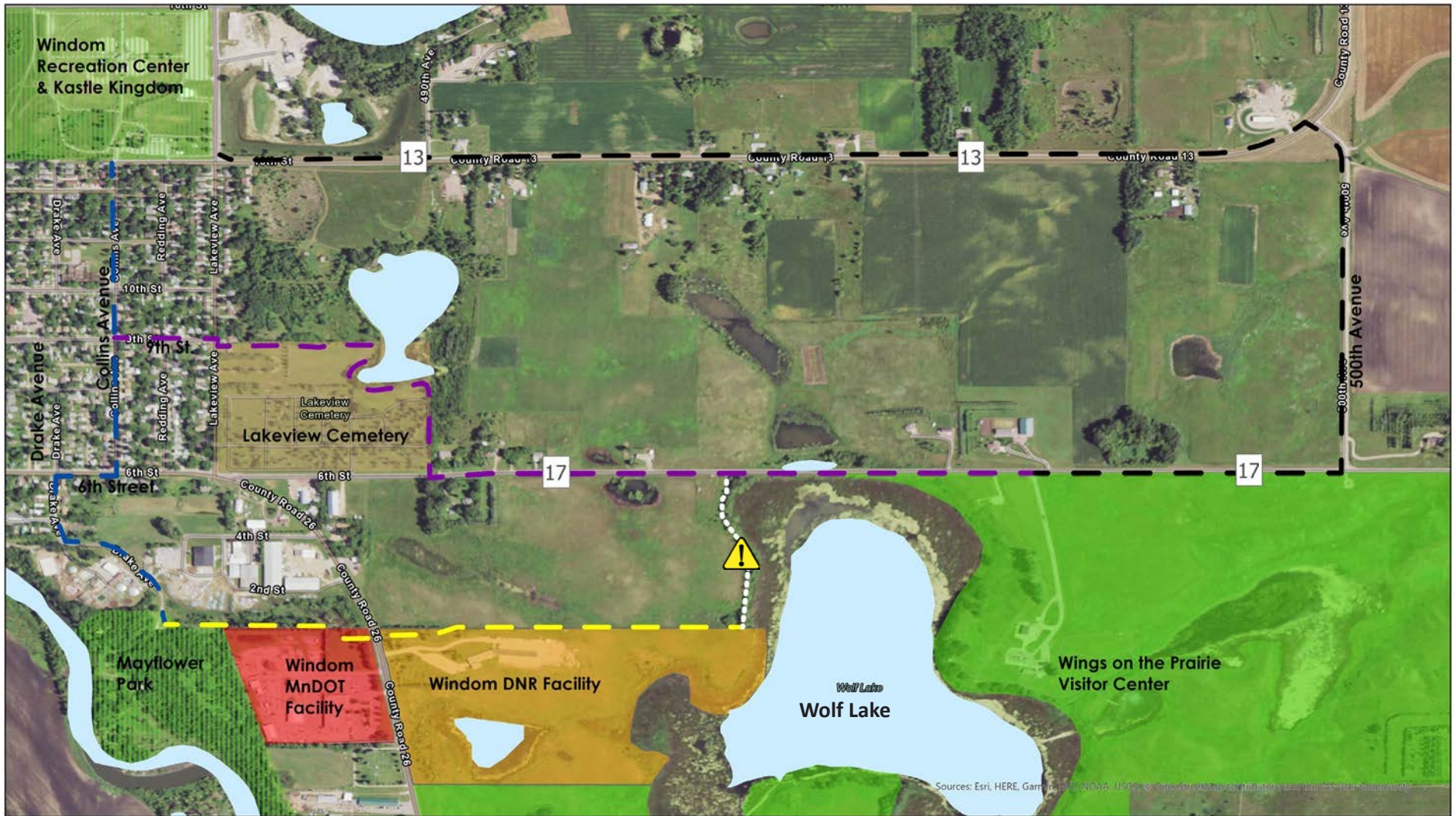
WINDOM, MN WOLF CREEK TRAIL CONNECTION PLAN

Located less than one mile east of Windom on County Road 17, Windom Wetland Management District works to increase waterfowl production and to preserve habitat for migratory birds, threatened and endangered native species, and resident wildlife. The district was established in 1990 and manages approximately 17,000 acres (about twice the area of Chicago O'Hare airport) of federally owned waterfowl production areas and refuges across thirteen counties in southern Minnesota.

The Wolf Lake Trail includes a 0.8-mile paved loop and .25 miles of mowed trail. Amenities on this trail include an educational kiosk, two observation decks/platforms, a stationary dock, a floating dock, benches, an observation blind, interpretive signages, and a vault toilet. This trail is an excellent location for birding, hiking, photography, and wildlife observation. Plans call for building a trail connection between the city of Windom and the Wings on the Prairie Discovery Center at Wolf Lake Waterfowl Production Area.

Photos along Wolf Creek Trail- photos by SRDC Staff





Wolf Lake Connection Trail

Preferred Trail Corridors
July 2020

- Preferred Trail Corridors**
- Opportunity A —
 - Opportunity B —
 - Opportunity C —
 - Opportunity D —
 - Opportunity E —
 - Opportunity F —

- Landscape Designations**
- Water Features
 - Lakeview Cemetery
 - Windom Parks

- US Fish & Wildlife Service
- MN DNR Property
- MnDOT Property



CASEY JONES STATE TRAIL



Cyclists coming into Pipestone via the Casey Jones. The 13-mile paved segment from Woodstock to Pipestone was recently completed. Photo by SRDC Staff



Casey Jones Trail headed west out of Woodstock. Photo by SRDC Staff



*Casey Jones Reg. Trail near Lake Shetek St. Park-
photo submitted*

The Casey Jones State Trail holds the distinction of being the first trail legislatively authorized in Minnesota, with its enabling legislation passed in 1967 (Minn. Stat. § 8.5015, subdivision 2). Since its inception, the trail's route has expanded through subsequent legislative revisions to cover over 120 miles across Rock, Pipestone, Murray, and Redwood Counties, connecting 12 communities. As of 2024, only 16 miles of the trail are paved, with three main segments constructed.

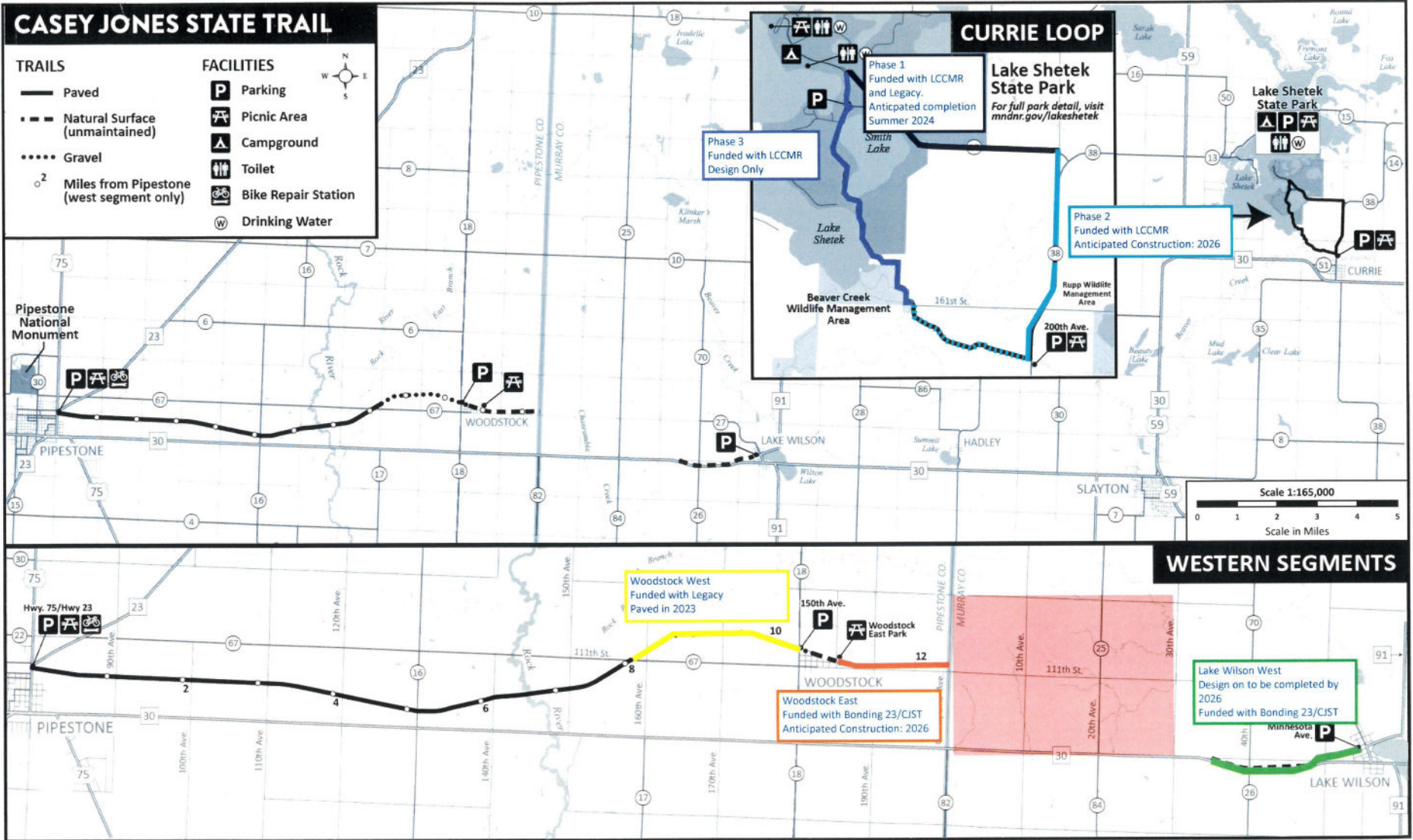
The longest segment extends 13 miles along a former railroad grade from Pipestone to the Pipestone/Murray County line on County Road 18. A second, shorter natural-surfaced segment runs 1.5 miles west from Lake Wilson. The third segment is a 6-mile paved loop connecting Lake Shetek State Park with the city of Currie.

In 2023, the Friends of the Casey Jones State Trail successfully secured \$1.32 million in bonding funds for further trail development. They are also exploring opportunities for land acquisition funding through the DNR and will be engaging with landowners between Woodstock and Lake Wilson to identify a potential route and secure the necessary land.

Reconstruction of the Currie Loop segments is slated to begin in 2024. Funding for this effort includes \$840,000 from a 2021 Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) grant and an additional \$800,000 from LCCMR in 2022. Furthermore, in the 2023 legislative session, the DNR obtained an additional \$1.3 million in bonding funds to extend the trail by two miles, either east of Woodstock or westward from the Lake Wilson trailhead.

Casey Jones State Trail





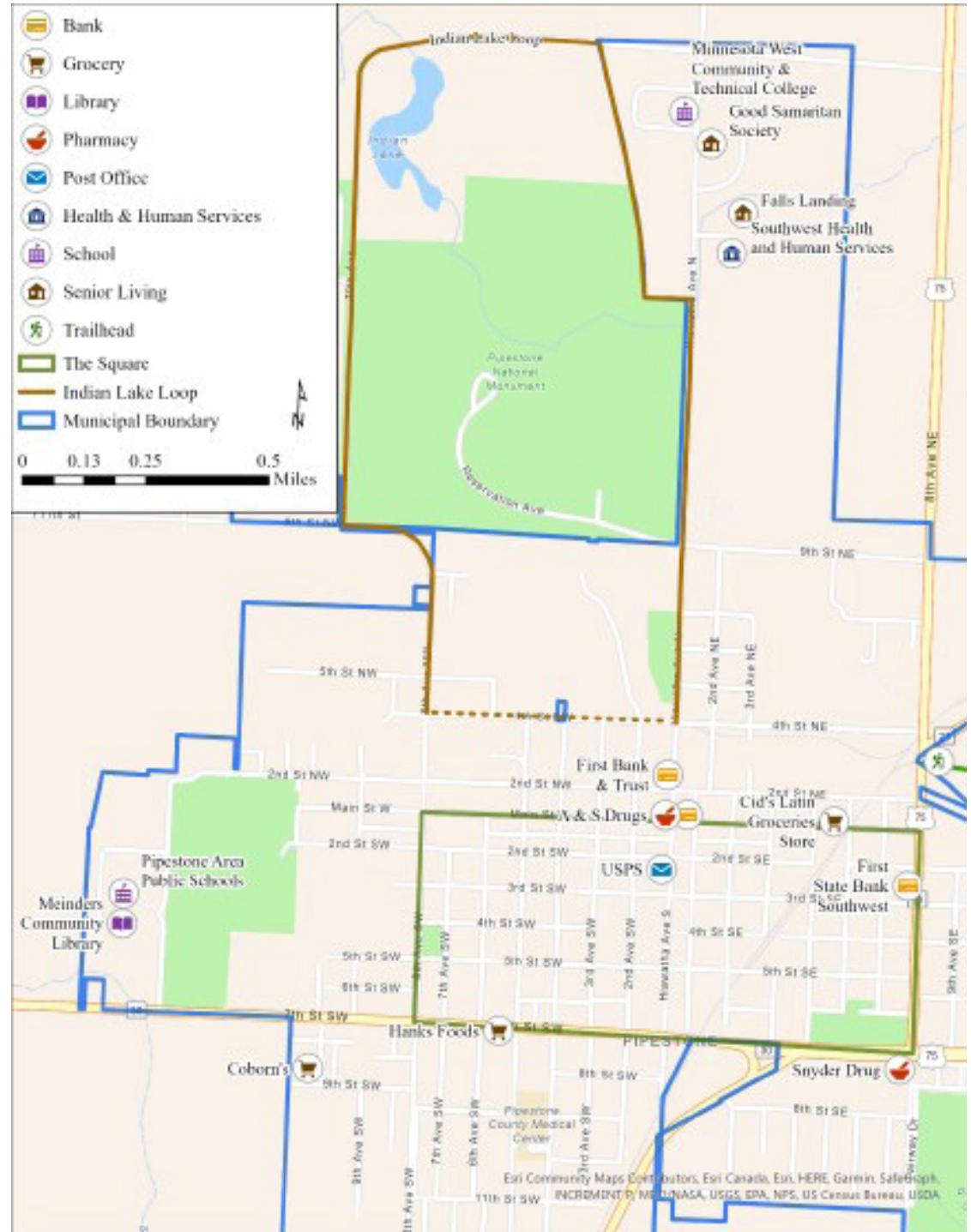


PIPESTONE, MN CITY TRAILS

In the City of Pipestone, the Indian Lakes Trail was first proposed in the Pipestone Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, which also led to the formation of the Pipestone Active Living Partnership. This partnership, comprising eleven groups and organizations including the City of Pipestone, worked together with other community organizations and civic leaders to promote active living principles in daily life.

The Indian Lakes Trail was developed in phases through a collaborative effort between the City of Pipestone and Pipestone County. The first segment, constructed by the county, extends from 9th St NW to Indian Lake. For the second segment, running from Indian Lake to the city limit north of Minnesota West Technical Community College, the county secured funding through the Federal Lands Access Program. The city then obtained Transportation Alternatives grant funding to build the third segment, which connects Minnesota West to N Hiawatha and follows an abandoned railroad corridor. This trail integrates with Pipestone's sidewalk network, offering residents extensive walking and biking options, and providing access to the Casey Jones State Trail.

The Pipestone National Monument, a key regional tourist attraction, features a 3/4-mile paved path that traverses prairie landscapes, passes ancient quarries still used by Native Americans, and leads to a waterfall at its midpoint.





Pipestone trails
by Grant Harms



MOUNTAIN LAKE TRAILS

The Mountain Lake Trail offers a 5-mile paved loop around the lake on the north side of town. Starting at Lawcon Park, the trail winds northward past the boat landing and beach, encircling the lake until it reaches County Road 44. It then follows County Road 44 into town, continues onto Golf Course Road, and shares the road until it loops back to Lawcon Park, where it re-connects with the off-road trail. The trail's initial segment was constructed in the early 1990s, and the entire loop was paved in 2011. The last 0.2 miles of the trail are on-road with an on-road marker to complete the loop.

Mt. Lake Trail - photos by Jan Lasar (MN Trails Magazine)



mountain lake trails *map*

Wildlife Area

The Wildlife Area is open to public hunting. Please be aware of hunters, especially between September and March, when it is advisable to wear bright colors when passing through this area.



points of interest

- 1** first island boy scout cabin
Cross the bridge and follow the path to the south edge of the island where there are remnants of a cabin. Constructed by the Boy Scouts in 1946, it was used for campouts by Boy Scouts and residents until destroyed by fire.
- 2** scenic overlook
The 220 acre shallow Mountain Lake was created in the late 1930s through the collaborative efforts of the Village of Mountain Lake and the Works Progress Administration. Its watershed is home to numerous plant and animal species.
- 3** eastern red cedar trees
This species of cedar is the only evergreen native to southwestern Minnesota. Cedars can live 800 years and have a rot resistant wood.
- 4** mountain lake watershed
The lake's watershed is about ten square miles in size. Half the water entering the lake comes from Eagle Lake through this stream. The surrounding wetland removes water borne pollutants before they enter the lake. This is critical because agricultural-based uses often produce high nutrient and sediment levels.
- 5** cottonwood trees
The cottonwood tree is where the county gets its name. These twin giants are over 75 years old, 130 feet tall, and combined weigh over 47 tons.
- 6** wetlands
The surrounding Type 2 wetland is without surface water most of the year, but generally saturated below the surface. The lake is a type 5 wetland which has water up to ten feet deep.
- 7** second island
Originally an 'island' only during high water, the swampy area on the west end was filled to create the peninsula, now a State Wildlife Management Area.
- 8** food forest
There are over 12 varieties of edible fruits and berries including plums, raspberries, currants, elderberries, serviceberries, and apples planted in three plots in Lawcon Park. Feel free to pick some fruit!

Total distance of trail: 5.2 miles
Total distance of bike loop: 3.5 miles
Trail is marked in one half and one mile increments.

TRAILS / FRIENDS GROUP CREATION

The process of developing a new regional trails plan has proven to be a catalyst for numerous communities, igniting a newfound enthusiasm for local trail initiatives. The collaborative nature of hosting focus groups in each of the counties that the SRDC serves has fostered continued conversations and efforts toward local and regional trail development.

In response to the regional trails plan, the community of Walnut Grove (Redwood County) has created a trails committee to lead efforts to engage the local community to build a local trail from their city to nearby Plum Creek Park to encourage and increase pedestrian and bicycle traffic in between the 2 destinations. The City of Fulda (Murray County) Trails Group has reached out to their local community and to MnDOT and worked to raise awareness of improving local trails in their community. The Friends of Jackson County Trails Group (Jackson County) is planning to engage with their community and the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks & Trails Commission on the regional designation of an off-road trail that would connect the City of Jackson and the Spirit Lake/Okoboji Area located across the state border in Iowa.

These grassroots organizations serve as the driving force behind the implementation of trail projects, rallying volunteers, securing funding, and fostering community engagement. As residents recognize the potential benefits of well-maintained trails, including improved access to nature, enhanced recreational opportunities, and a boost to their local economy, they become increasingly invested in the success of these initiatives. Through their collective efforts and the work of others in the region, these trail groups not only bring a regional trails plan to life but also cultivate a sense of pride and stewardship within their communities, ensuring that these trails remain cherished for generations to come.





SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL (SRTS) & ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION (TA) INITIATIVES IN THE REGION

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs and Active Transportation (AT) initiatives are aimed at promoting safe and healthy ways for children and adults to travel to school, work, or other destinations by walking, biking, or using other non-motorized means. Safe Routes to School specifically focuses on improving the safety and accessibility of routes for students to walk or bike to school. These programs typically involve collaboration between schools, local government agencies, community organizations, and parents to address barriers such as traffic congestion, unsafe crossings, and lack of infrastructure like sidewalks and bike lanes.

The objectives of Safe Routes to School include increasing physical activity among children, reducing traffic congestion around schools, improving air quality, and enhancing community cohesion. Activities under SRTS can include infrastructure improvements like building sidewalks and bike paths,



Roll into
spring
on
Bike to
School Day!



mnsaferoutestoschool.org

installing traffic signals or crosswalks, and implementing traffic calming measures. Education and encouragement programs also play a crucial role in teaching children pedestrian and bike safety skills and promoting the benefits of walking and biking to school.

Active Transportation Programs, on the other hand, encompass broader initiatives beyond school travel, advocating for walking, biking, and other forms of non-motorized transportation for daily commutes and recreational purposes. These programs aim to create environments that are conducive to active transportation through policy changes, infrastructure investments, and educational campaigns. They promote physical activity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and improve public health by encouraging people of all ages to incorporate active modes of transportation into their daily routines.

Infrastructure Grants

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) administers state infrastructure grants through Safe Routes to School (SRTS) and Active Transportation (AT) programs to support communities in improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and promoting safe, active transportation options. These grants are instrumental in funding projects that enhance safety around schools, such as building sidewalks, installing bike lanes, and implementing traffic calming measures. MnDOT's grant awards under SRTS and AT initiatives play a pivotal role in fostering healthier, more sustainable communities by encouraging walking and biking, reduc-

ing traffic congestion, and promoting environmental stewardship across the state of Minnesota.

In Southwest Minnesota, several communities have benefitted significantly from MnDOT's Safe Routes to School (SRTS) and Active Transportation (AT) infrastructure grants, enabling them to enhance pedestrian and bicyclist safety and promote active lifestyles among residents. Below is a list of recent infrastructure grant recipients.



SRTS Infrastructure Grant Awards

- Lakeview Schools, Cottonwood – 2008
- Marshall Schools, Marshall – 2018
- Russel-Tyler-Ruthton Schools, Tyler – 2022
- Pipestone Schools, Pipestone – 2011, 2013, & 2024
- Luverne Schools, Luverne – 2007
- Worthington Schools, Worthington – 2017
- Jackson Schools, Jackson – 2015 & 2022
- Windom Schools, Windom – 2011 & 2014

Active Transportation Infrastructure Grant Awards

- Pipestone County - 2017
- City of Pipestone – 2021
- City of Marshall – 2019, 2021, 2025, 2026, & 2028
- Lincoln County – 2023
- City of Slayton – 2024
- Rock County - 2026

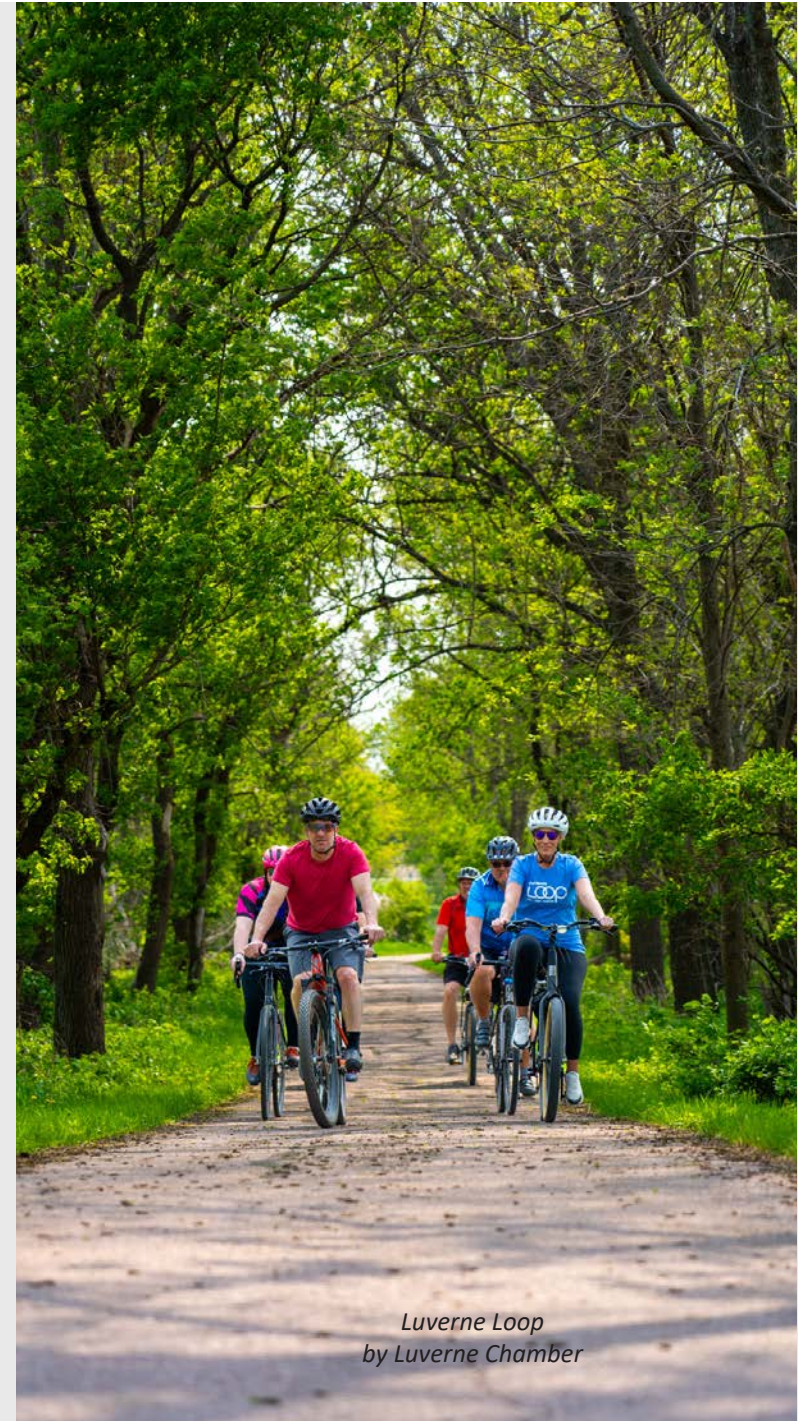


THE HISTORY

JUNE 3, 2023

From June 3 to June 18, 2023, SRDC collected pedestrian counts across the region. Staff placed a counter on a trail in every county during this time to help communities highlight the need for and usage of trails in Southwest Minnesota. The effort demonstrated that every county counts and every trail counts. The data provides baseline counts to measure progress in future counts.

On each day of the campaign, SRDC published a Facebook post of a different location or trail highlight that examined the trail location, provided some background information, and promoted the communities near the trail.



*Luverne Loop
by Luverne Chamber*

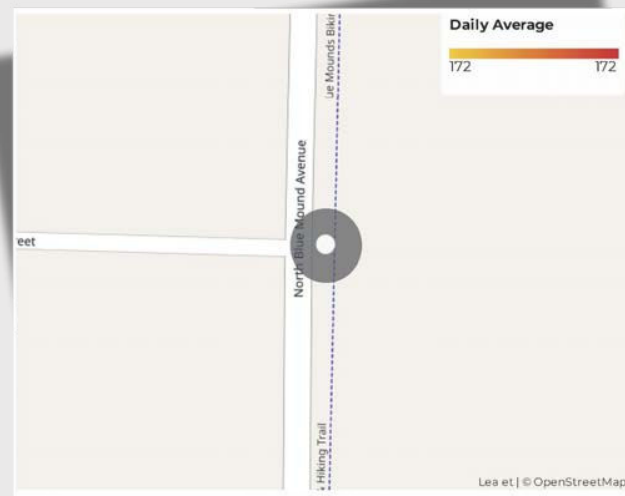
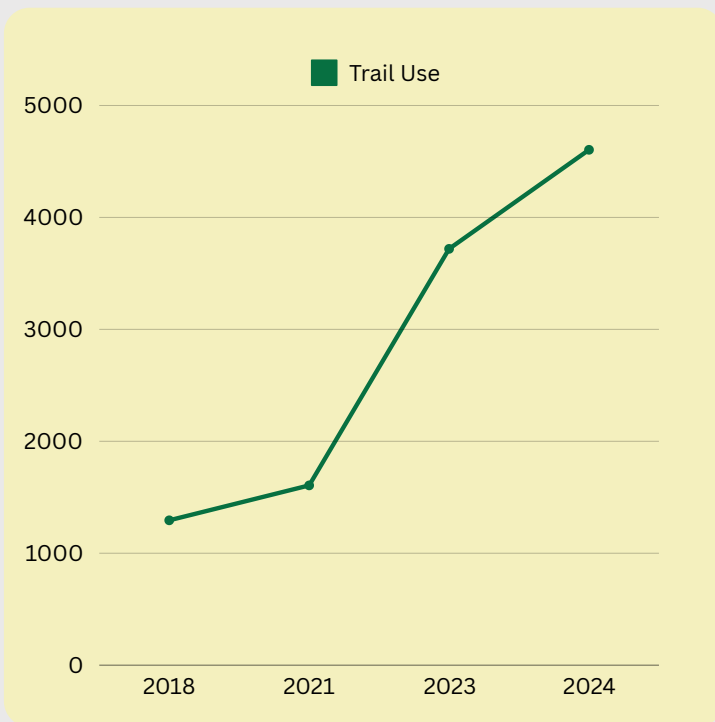
LUVERNE

LUVERNE LOOP

Daily Average: 207

Total Count: 3,719

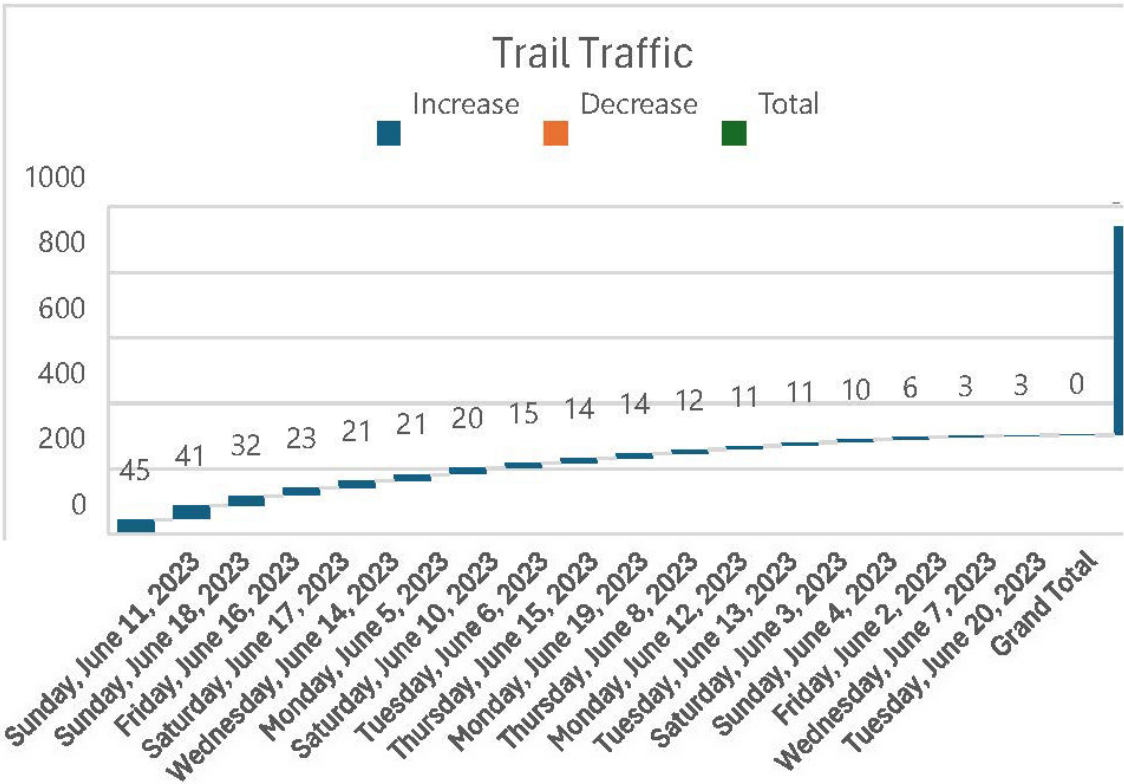
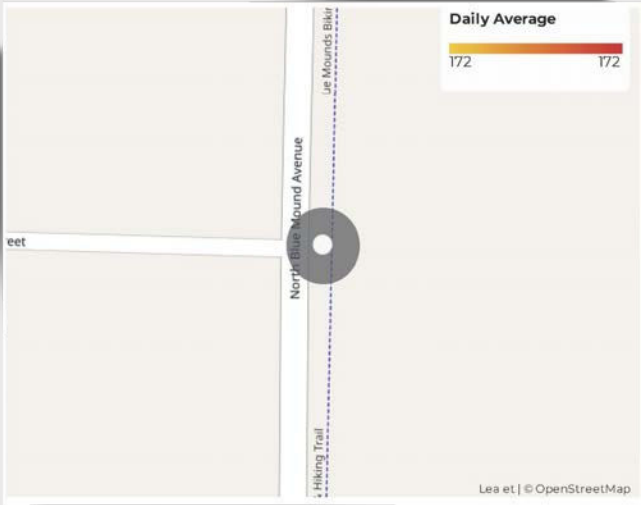
Peak Day: 584
(Tour de Loop)



REDWOOD COUNTY

PLUM CREEK PARK

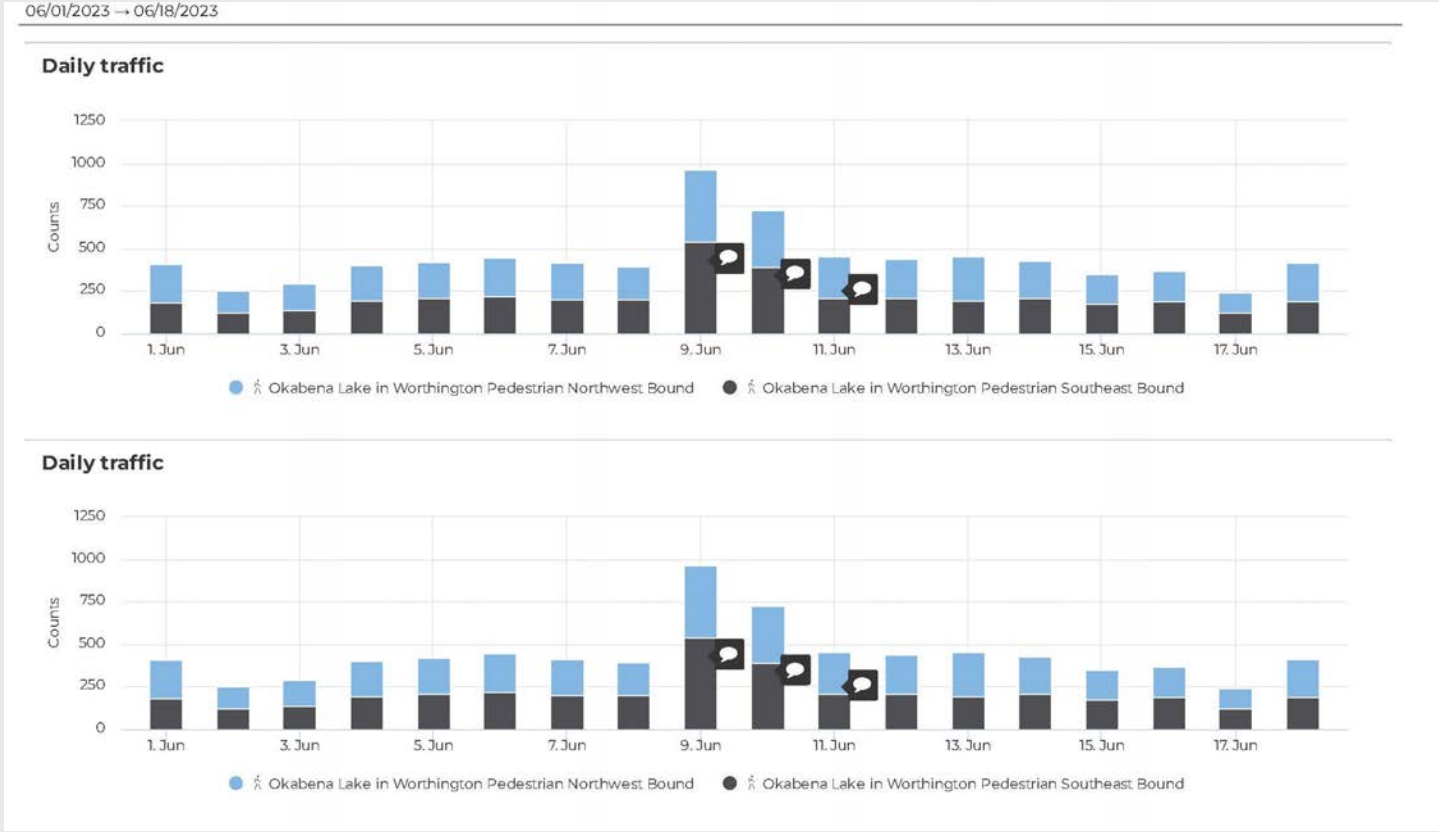
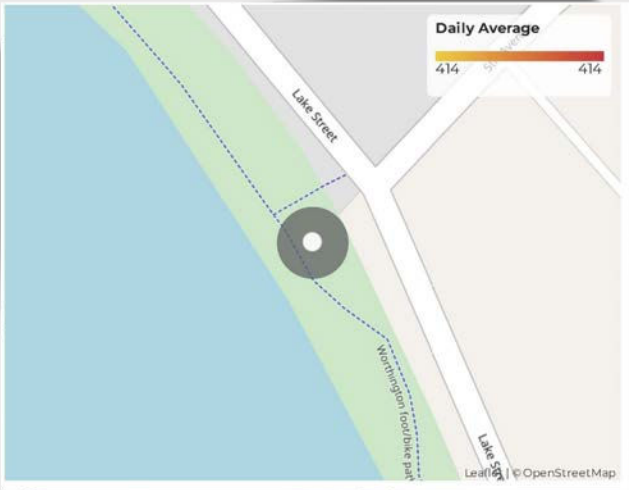
Daily Average: 17
 Total Count: 638
 Peak Day: 45
 (A Sunday)



NOBLES COUNTY

OKABENA LAKE IN WORTHINGTON

Daily Average: 438
 Total Count: 7,878
 Peak Day: 967
 (June 9 during Wgtn. Windsurfing Regatta)



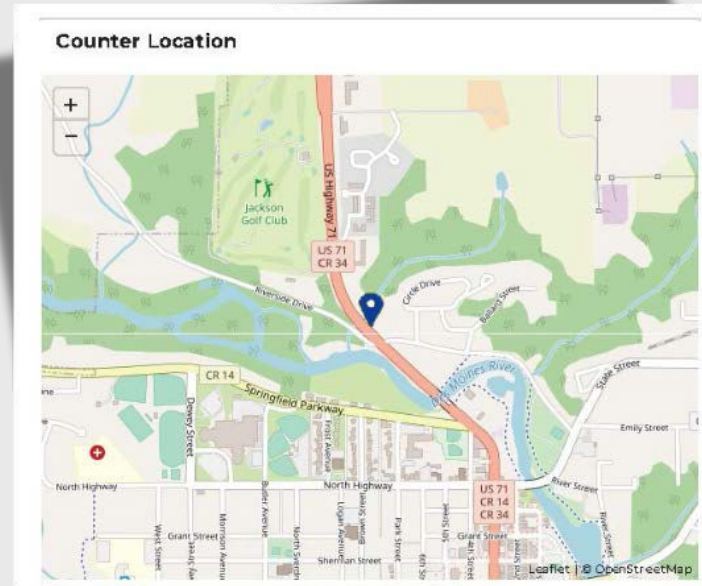
JACKSON COUNTY

CITY OF JACKSON

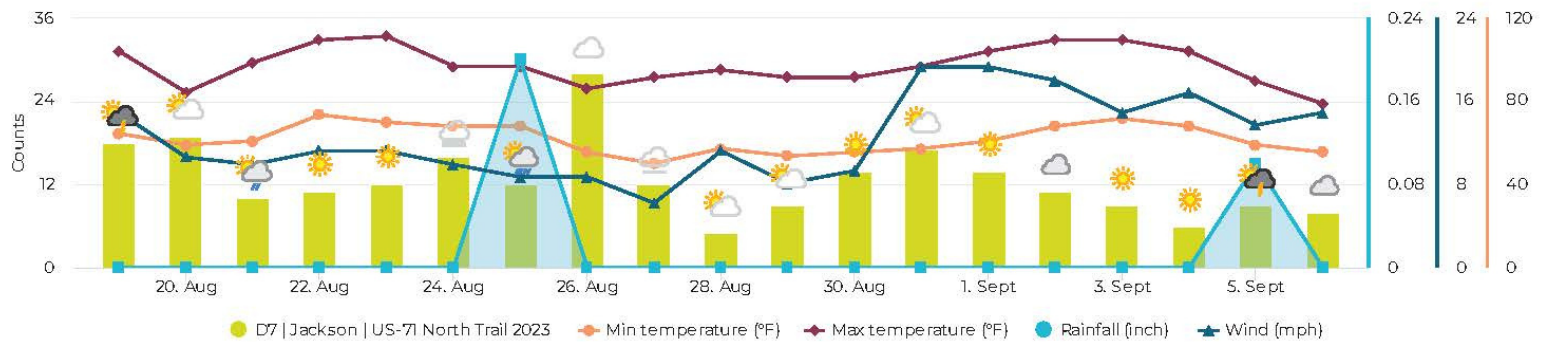
Daily Average: 16

Total Count: 240

Peak Day: 28
(a Sunday)



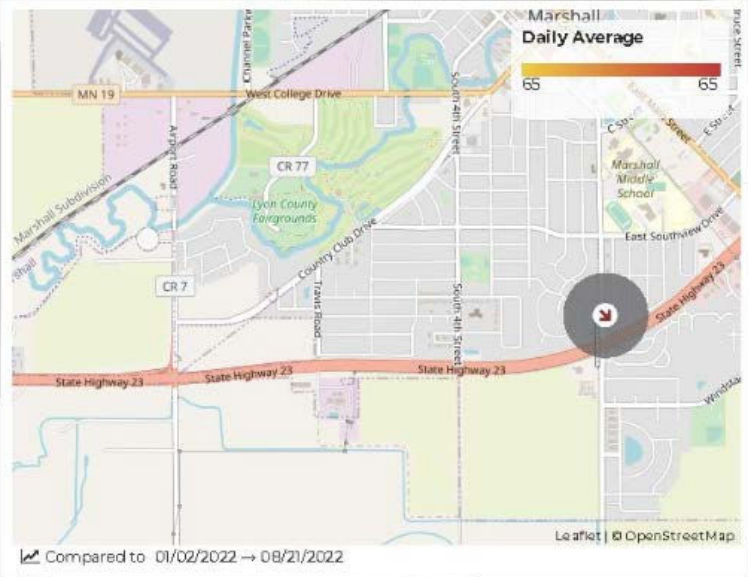
Weather



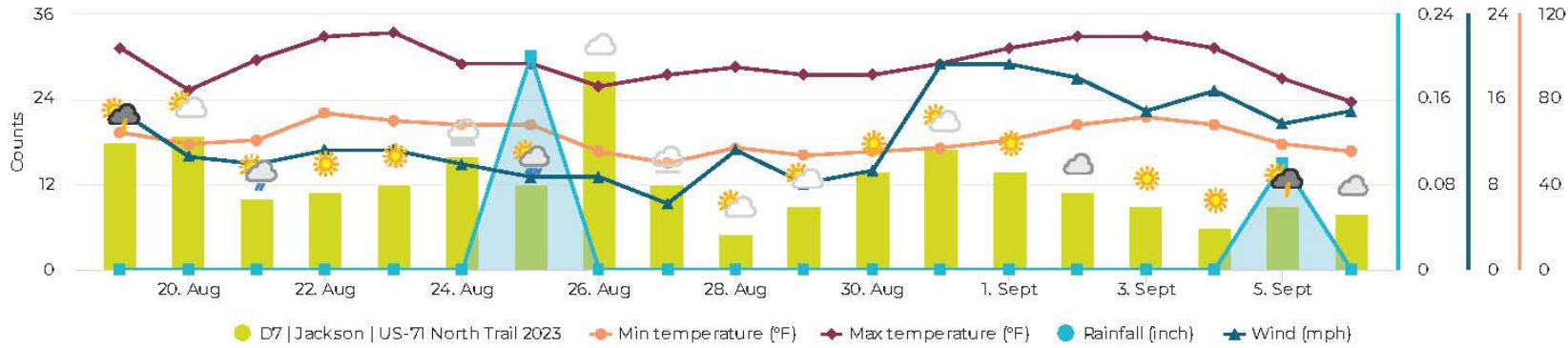
COTTONWOOD COUNTY

WOLF LAKE TRAIL AT WINDOM WETLAND

Daily Average: 15
 Total Count: 231
 Peak Day: 27
 (a Sunday)



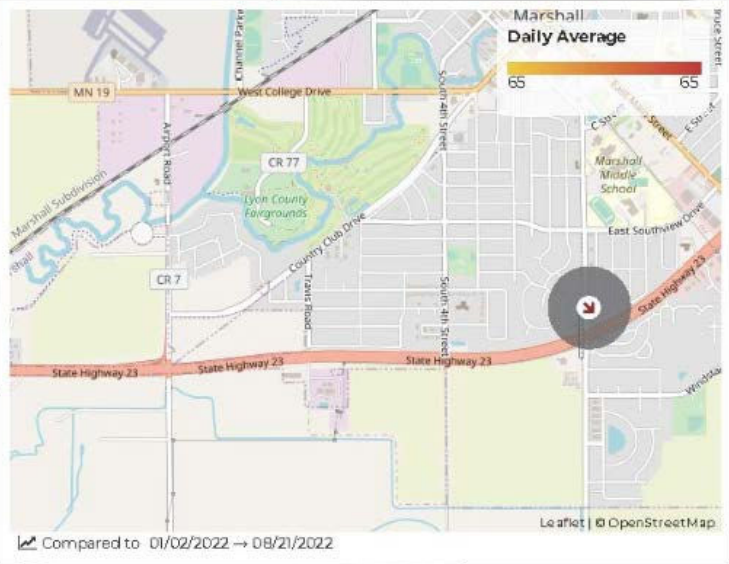
Weather



LYON COUNTY

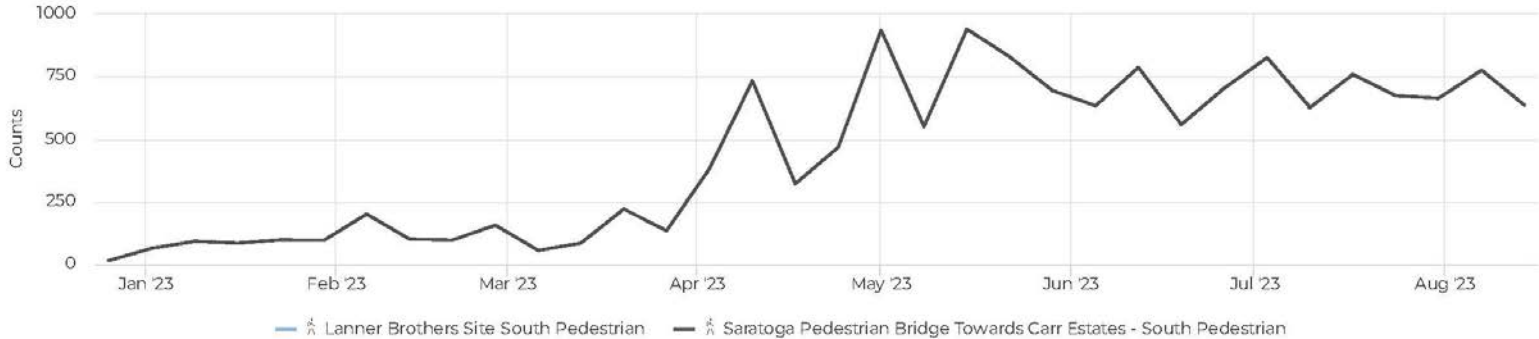
CAMDEN REGIONAL TRAIL

Daily Average: 103
 Total Count: 1,643
 Peak Day: 159
 (Mon., June 12)



January 1st, 2023 → August 20th, 2023

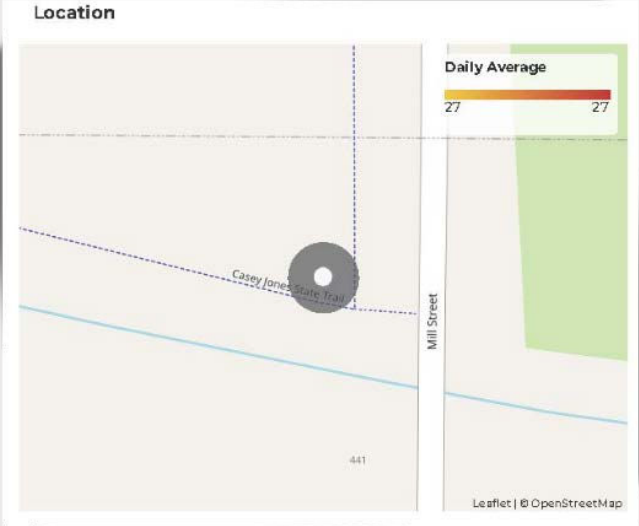
Weekly traffic



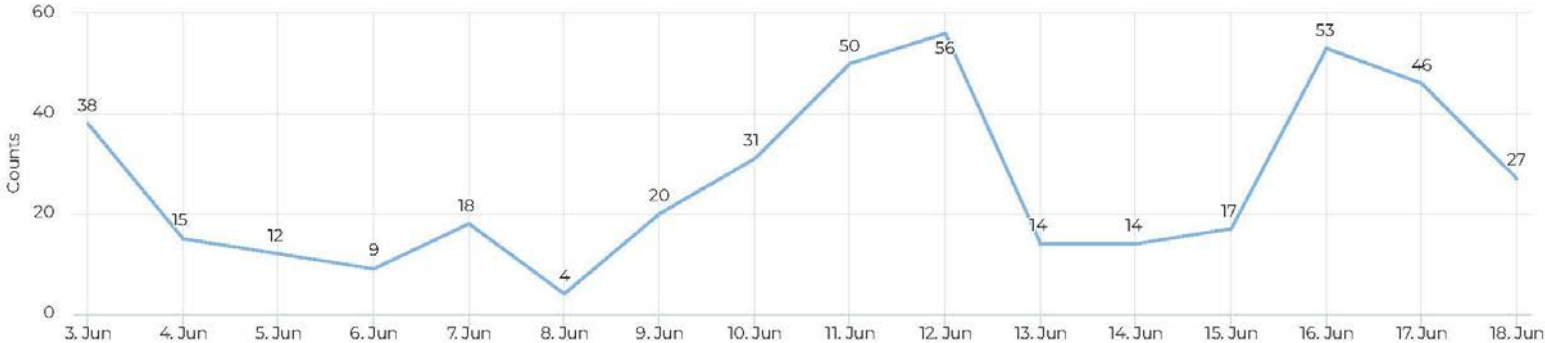
MURRAY COUNTY

CASEY JONES STATE TRAIL CURRIE LOOP

Daily Average: 27
Total Count: 424
Peak Day: 56
(Mon., June 12)



Daily traffic



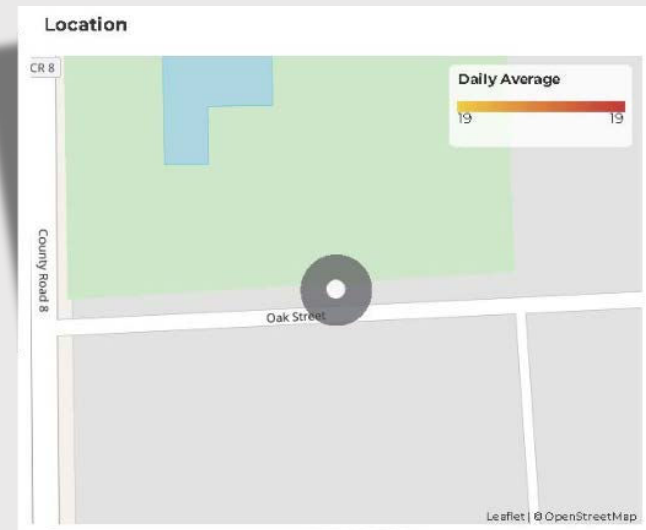
LINCOLN COUNTY

TYLER ON THE OAK STREET CONNECTION

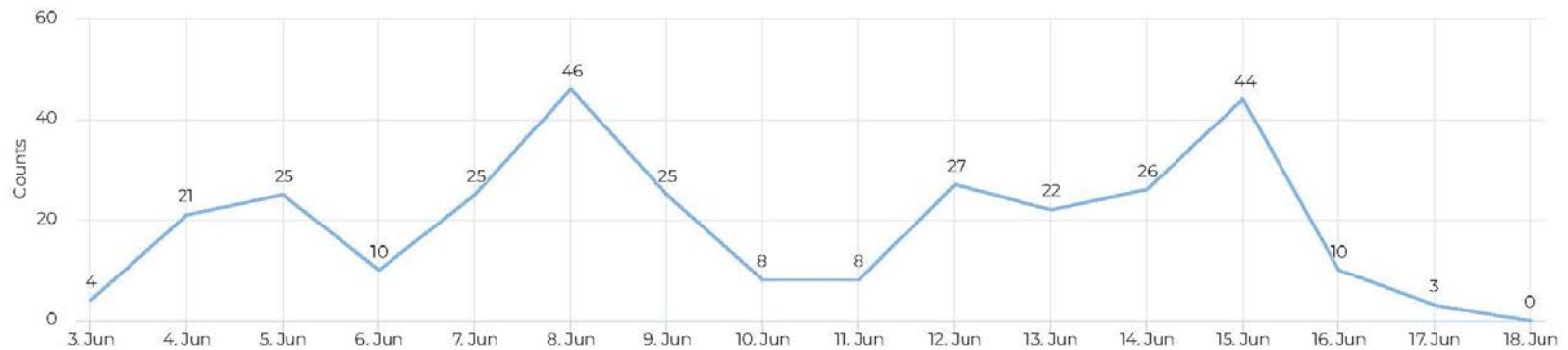
Daily Average: 19

Total Count: 304

Peak Day: 46
(Thurs., June 8)



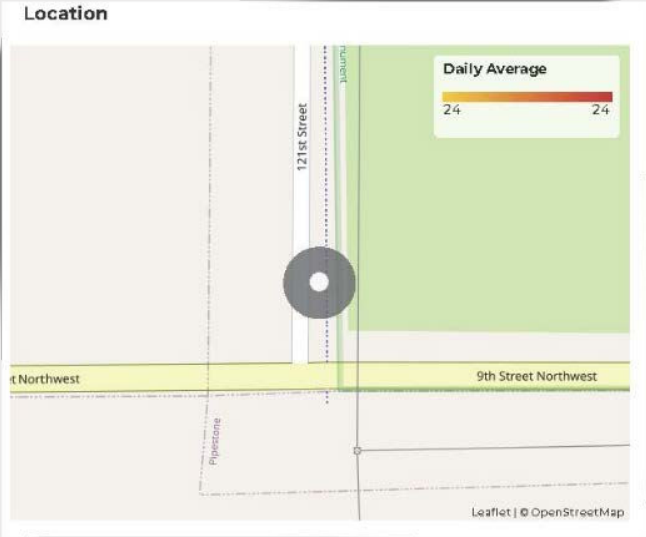
Daily traffic



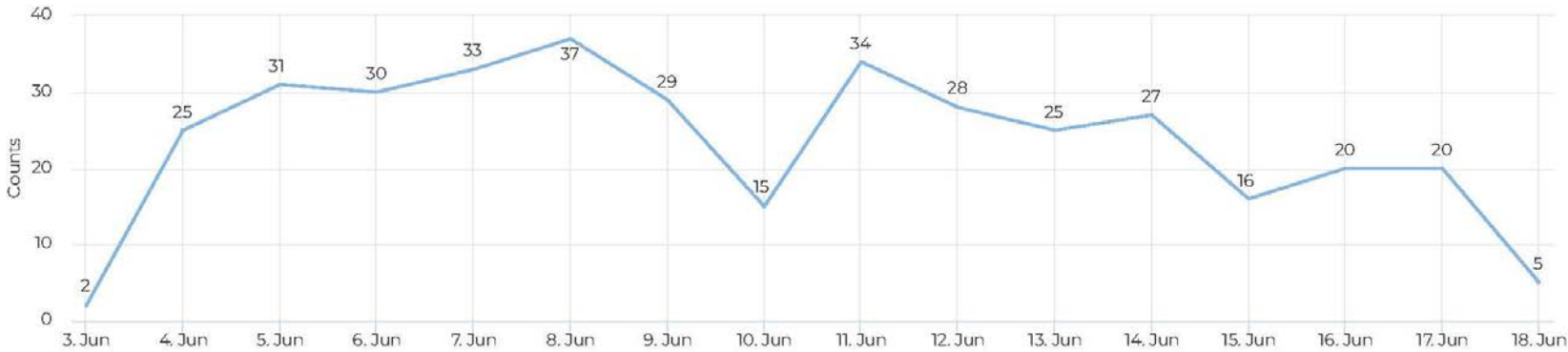
PIPESTONE COUNTY

INDIAN LAKES TRAIL

Daily Average: 24
Total Count: 377
Peak Day: 37
(Thurs., June 8)

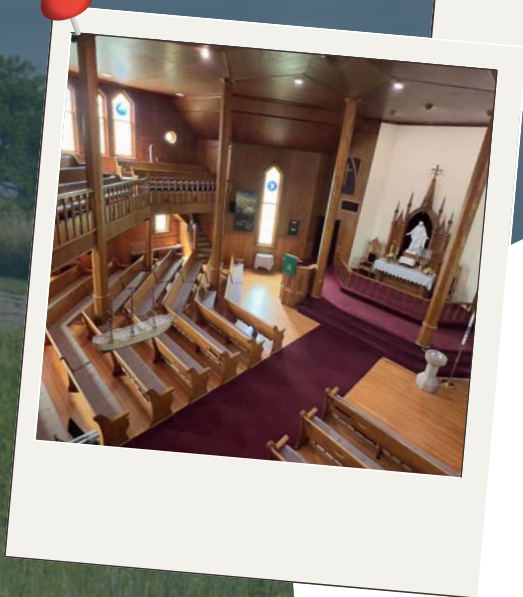


Daily traffic





Tourism Market Analysis



Tourism in Minnesota

Attractions

In Minnesota, half of the state's tourist attractions focus on outdoor recreation or nature, with 12 of the most-visited spots being state or national parks, according to the Explore Minnesota 2017 Report. Tourism in the area thrives on its outdoor activities, natural resources, and historical landmarks.

Region

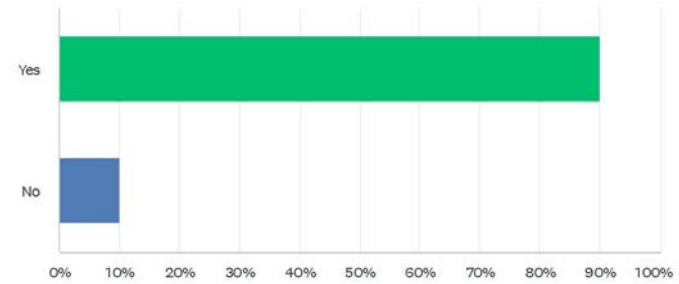
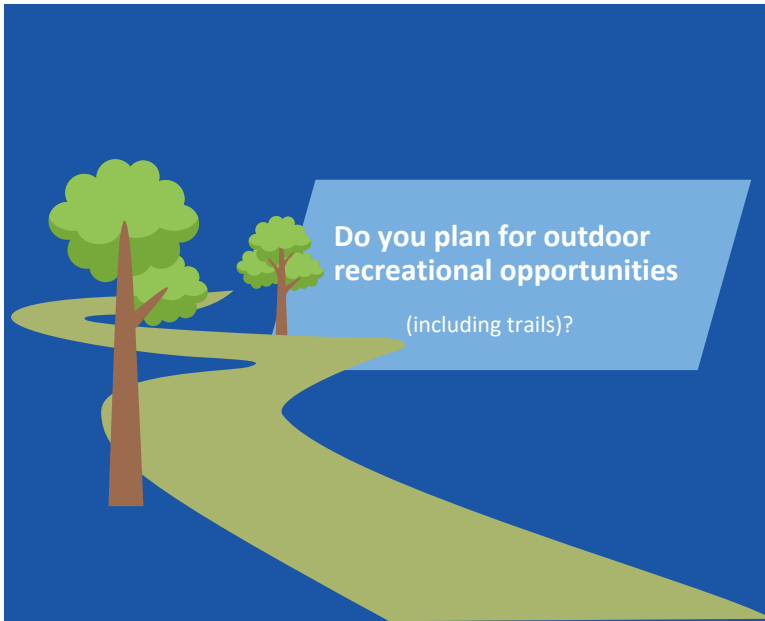
The region features a National Monument, five State Parks, one State Trail, five Regionally Designated County Parks, one Regionally Designated Trail, 39 County Parks, and numerous multi-use, bike, hiking, horse, and snowmobile trails. It also boasts the largest municipal park in the state, several historical sites, a nationally acclaimed museum and pageant, and a variety of significant festivals. Campgrounds are a vital part of the region's tourism sector.

Recreation

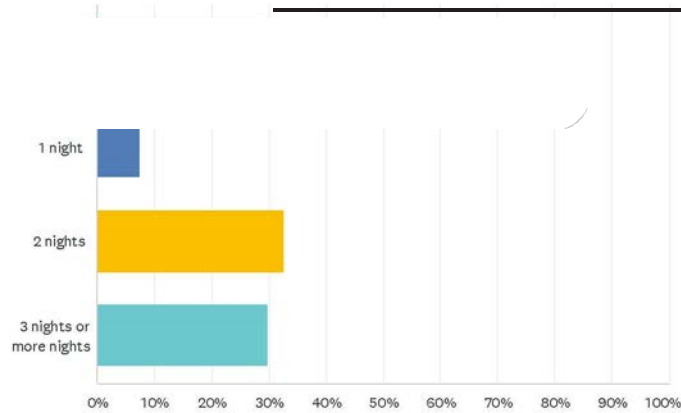
While outdoor recreation and nature-based activities are key to the region's tourism, the pandemic caused a significant drop in tourism revenue. This occurred despite national trends showing a shift from out-of-state travel to local trips (within about 100 miles) and increased use of parks and trails. The region's appealing trail systems in the tri-state area (South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa) suggest that potential tourism dollars might have flowed to nearby areas with better trail access.

Industries

Despite facing economic challenges and disruptions, there are promising opportunities for new investments and innovations. This project aims to aid economic recovery from the pandemic by diversifying Southwest Minnesota's tourism and outdoor recreation sectors, guiding businesses interested in developing along trail corridors, and leveraging community and legislative support for key regional projects. These efforts will help build long-term economic resilience by enhancing tourism opportunities in the Southwest region and making it more robust against future economic shocks.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	90.00%	99
No	10.00%	11
TOTAL		110



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Day Trip	29.91%	32
1 night	7.48%	8
2 nights	32.71%	35
3 nights or more nights	29.91%	32
TOTAL		107



Tourism Market Potential

The current trails in southwest Minnesota are utilized by both residents and visitors for activities such as biking, walking/hiking, rollerblading, and nature watching. Trails within a community or connecting communities can attract visitors and have a direct economic impact on the region. The descriptions of community trails below outline the offerings for visitors and their potential positive economic impact on the corresponding communities.

Luverne

With the completion of the Luverne loop in 2022 the community now offers 7.4 miles of uninterrupted trail around the city and a connection to the Blue Mounds Trail, for its residents and tourists alike. Access points at the Trailhead at 601 E. Main Street or any of the parks along the trail corridor, make it a trail that's easy to find for those who are out of the area. Furthermore, the Luverne Loop's connection to the Blue Mounds Trail and Ashby Trail provides over 15 miles of trail in the Luverne area. This local trail network helps to put Luverne on the map even more by provid-

ing longer trail options and a link to the popular Blue Mounds Park. As a result, they can attract people who may be looking for longer trail riding and training options as well as families looking for fun day or weekend options.

Additionally, Luverne's Aquatics and Fitness Center offers e-bikes for rent, making their trails more accessible for everyone. As we can see from the trail counter data, Luverne had a daily average of 207 counts on their trails in June of 2023, approximately a year after the trail loop was completed. One of these days, the Tour de Loop, showed usage at 584 counts, which implies the likelihood of visitors from out of the region. With the trailhead right off Main Street, the businesses in Luverne get visitors who may be there to use the trails. Take 16, a popular brewery located on Main Street has seen an increase in people stopping by on their way to or from the trail. A bicycling group even got started that meets at Take 16 for regular rides.



Marshall

The Marshall trails cover a vast area of the city, including a trail to Camden State Park, offering plenty of opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy fresh air, exercise, and explore shops and points of interest.

The Camden Regional Trail is a paved, multi-purpose trail that starts at Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU) and runs through town until it reaches Camden State Park.

There are approximately 4 miles of paved trails connecting Marshall High School and SMSU campuses to bike lanes in the city. These provide a safe means for students from both campuses to travel around the city without a motor vehicle, as well as offering a free recreational and exercise option.

On the west end of the city, there are around 10 miles of paved trails connecting Victory Park to Camden State Park along Highway 23, providing a safe route to the park.

For those seeking more adventurous recreation, there are various mountain biking and hiking trails near the city of Marshall. One is near Victory Park, crossing the bridge over the Redwood River, while the slightly more challenging ones are located at Camden State Park.

The development of trails in Marshall has led to a bike rental program through the Marshall Area YMCA, as well as the opening of The Bike Shop, which provides various services to bicyclists in the area. Since the trails extend throughout the city, students and others who don't have vehicles can access various businesses.



Wolf Creek - Windom, Mn

The Wolf Lake Trail, a trail one mile east of Windom at the Windom Wetland Management District, has a .0.8-mile paved loop and 0.25 miles of mowed trail, and offers plenty of wildlife for hikers, photographers, and trail enthusiasts.

In addition to hiking, wildlife observation, photography, and nature education, there is ample off-trail space for hunting and fishing.

It provides an educational kiosk, two observation decks/platforms, a stationary dock, a floating dock, benches, and an observation blind, interpretive signage, and a vault toilet.

A potential connection from Wings on the Prairie Discovery Center to the city of Windom, would help bring more people to this wildlife refuge and increase trail user movement into the city for a potential economic boost to the community.

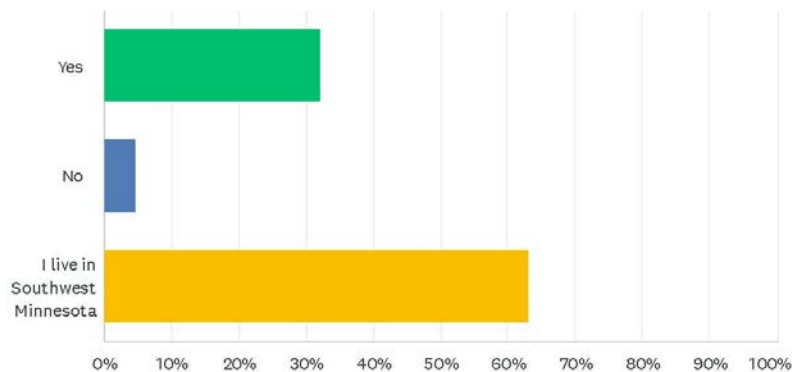


Trail User Types

Many of the people we spoke with in our focus groups and interviews use the trails, but the frequency and intensity of their trail use varies. Some don't mind traveling to get to the trails, while others prefer a trailhead or access point closer to home. When we combine this information with data from our intercept surveys and economic tourism surveys, we see that there are many different types of people who use the trails in Southwest Minnesota regularly, whether they are local residents or tourists.

The intercept surveys mainly had responses from local residents, while the economic tourism surveys showed that many people from outside the region travel to Southwest Minnesota to use the trails, or they travel long distances within the region. During our six-week outreach effort, we collected 238 surveys from trail visitors. Out of these, 147 (63%) were from Southwest Minnesota residents, while 86 (37%) were from visitors to the region.

Are you staying overnight?

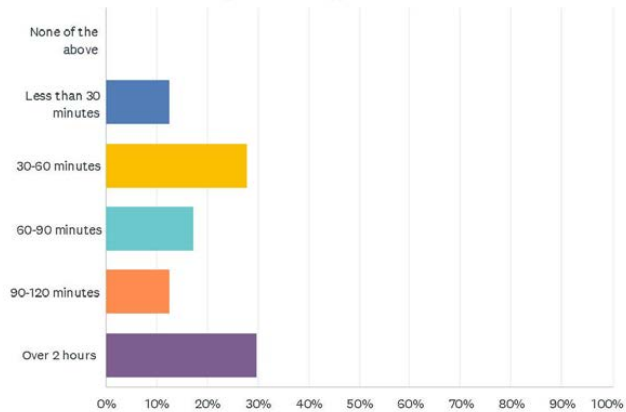


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	32.19%	75
No	4.72%	11
I live in Southwest Minnesota	63.09%	147
TOTAL		233

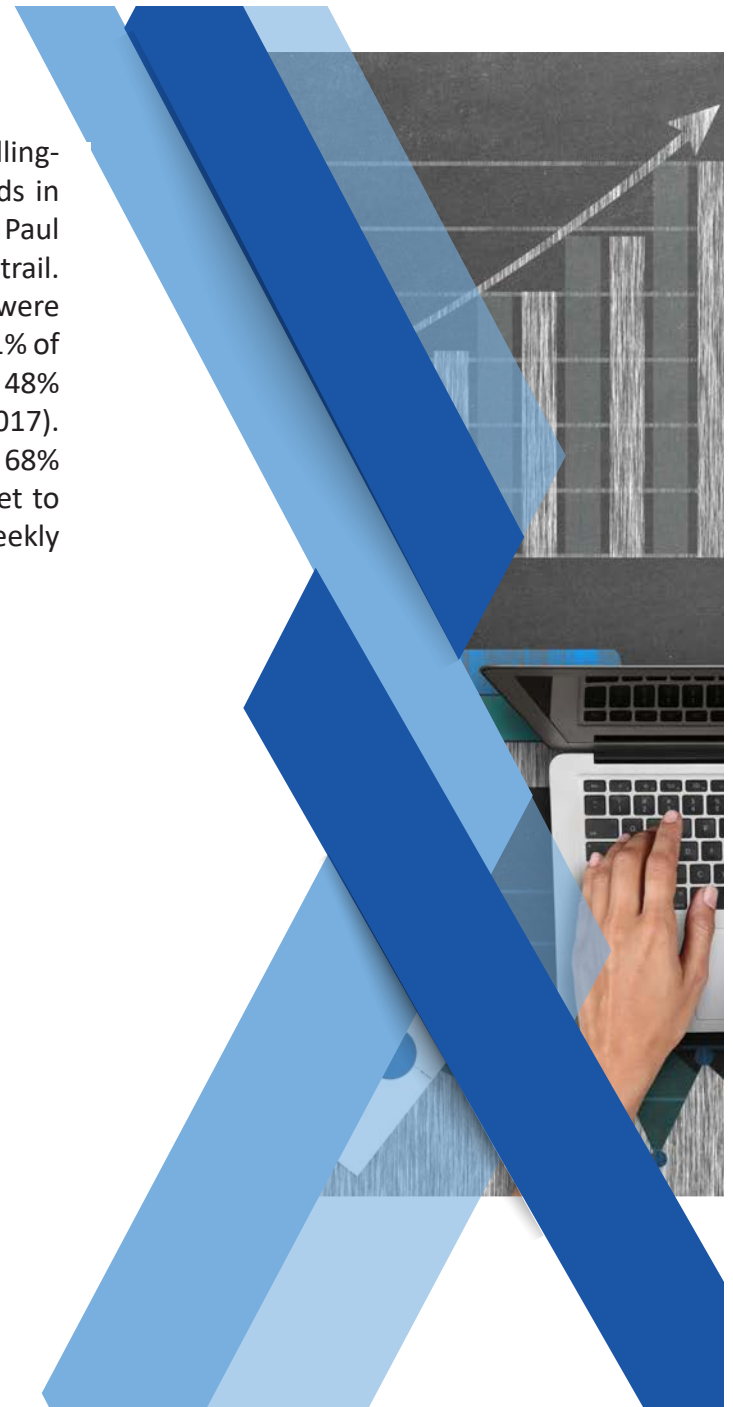


In our tourism survey responses, 60% of the respondents have indicated their willingness to travel over an hour to access a trail. This pattern is consistent with trends in other parts of the state. For example, over half of the trail users on the Heartland, Paul Bunyan, Root River, and Harmony-Preston Trail live more than 50 miles from the trail. Specifically, 70% of trail users on the Root River trail in Southeastern Minnesota were more than 50 miles from home according to a MnDNR 2014 report. Furthermore, 51% of state park visitors live more than 100 miles away from home (MnDNR – 2017), and 48% of overnight state park visitors stay in private resorts or campgrounds (MnDNR – 2017). According to the DNR’s 2017 Minnesota Outdoor Activities Survey Findings Report, 68% of Minnesotans are willing to travel 45 minutes or more for activities that they get to do less frequently – from once a month to only a few times a year. For daily or weekly activities, 32% of Minnesotans are willing to travel this amount of time.

How much time are you willing to travel to access a trail?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
None of the above	0.00%	0
Less than 30 minutes	12.50%	13
30-60 minutes	27.88%	29
60-90 minutes	17.31%	18
90-120 minutes	12.50%	13
Over 2 hours	29.81%	31
TOTAL		104



The data suggests a promising increase in the number of visitors traveling from other parts of Minnesota to experience the trails and parks in Southwest Minnesota. This region offers a unique combination of scenic beauty, cultural richness, and natural allure, enhanced by well-maintained and interconnected trails.

Our surveys and focus groups indicate that the primary draw for trail users is walking or hiking, with bicycling as a popular secondary activity. Other activities such as running, rollerblading, and walking pets are also common. Most respondents prefer a relaxed trail experience in natural, peaceful, and scenic environments. Given that many of Southwest Minnesota's trails are located in rural areas and small towns, they are especially appealing to those seeking a serene retreat. Tourism surveys reveal that visitors are most interested in bicycling, exploring local trails, and visiting state parks, suggesting that the region is already drawing tourists to its outdoor amenities.

Our intercept and tourism surveys, along with focus groups and interviews, show that trail users come from diverse backgrounds and age groups. This includes multigenerational families on vacation, high school cross-country teams training, and elderly residents from care facilities enjoying nature. Recognizing that both residents and tourists from various demographics benefit from and contribute to the economic impact of our trails underscores their value to Southwest Minnesota.



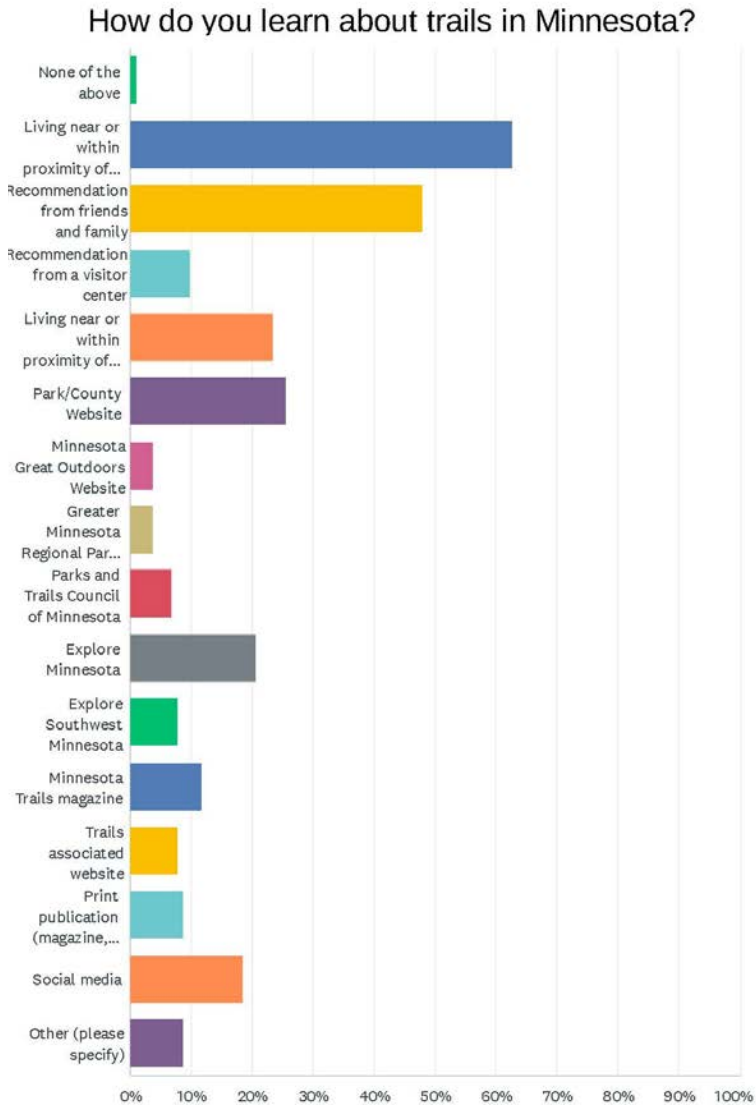
Intercept & Tourism Surveys Trends

While many trail users are local residents, some travel from other cities, counties, and even states to experience the trails in Southwest Minnesota. Out-of-town visitors often discover these trails through online resources or recommendations from friends and family. A tourism survey indicated that proximity to existing trails and word-of-mouth recommendations are the primary ways people learn about the trails in the region.

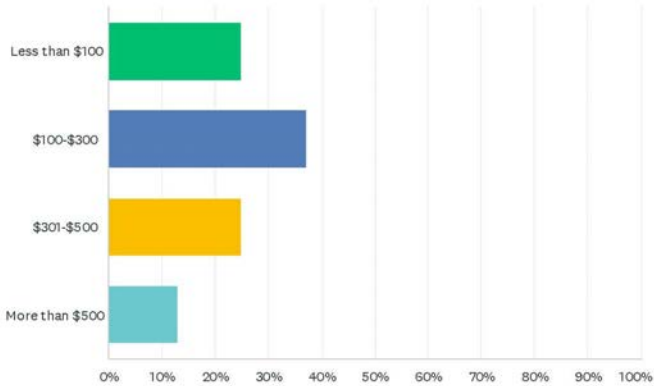
Intercept surveys revealed that 85% of on-site trail users were walking, while 15% were bicycling. Tourism survey data showed that nearly 80% of trail tourists use the trails primarily for bicycling, with 70% using them mainly for walking. This suggests that some individuals engage in both activities.

The intercept surveys also identified that the main factor influencing the decision to visit a trail is its proximity to home. Other important considerations include scenic views, trail difficulty, and surface type. Additionally, amenities along the trail and nearby businesses or attractions also play a role in users' decisions.

When asked about desired improvements, the most common request was for better maintenance, including filling cracks and keeping the trails clear of weeds and debris. Users also expressed the need for more water stations, restrooms, and occasional shelters, particularly on longer trail segments.

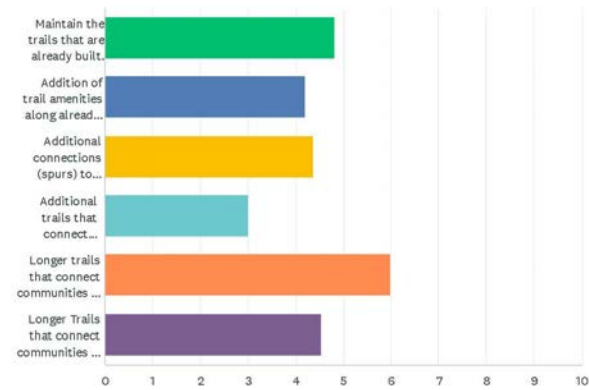


How much are you willing to spend on the following items for overnight trips to access outdoor recreational opportunities (including transportation)?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than \$100	25.00%	27
\$100-\$300	37.04%	40
\$301-\$500	25.00%	27
More than \$500	12.96%	14
TOTAL		108

Rank in order how you believe trail investments should be prioritized (one being the highest priority)



	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL	SCORE
Maintain the trails that are already built.	38.24% 39	21.57% 22	23.53% 24	16.67% 17	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	102	4.81
Addition of trail amenities along already built trails.	17.65% 18	23.53% 24	20.59% 21	38.24% 39	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	102	4.21
Additional connections (spurs) to already built trails.	11.76% 12	33.33% 34	36.27% 37	17.65% 18	0.98% 1	0.00% 0	102	4.37
Additional trails that connect communities to nearby destinations.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	1	3.00
Longer trails that connect communities to each other.	100.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	1	6.00
Longer Trails that connect communities and destinations	31.37% 32	21.57% 22	19.61% 20	26.47% 27	0.00% 0	0.98% 1	102	4.55



Many trail intercept trail users responded that they purchased, or would like to purchase, various equipment as a result of their trail use. The most popular purchases were walking/running shoes, bikes, and e-bikes. These were closely followed by active wear, bike accessories, auto supplies – such as bike racks, and park memberships or passes. As a result of these responses, we can see how the presence of trails can drive economic demand for certain products and services, opening the possibility for an increase in local businesses and jobs. Supporting this hypothesis, there are many economic effects from visiting trail users, as outlined in the Trails Benefits section below.

Trail Benefits

Overview of socio-economic benefits to trails

The region has been affected by economic challenges and upheavals. Most counties in Southwest Minnesota have been experiencing ongoing population decline, a trend that is expected to persist. Outmigration is a significant factor contributing to the changes in population in the region. In addition to outmigration, the region has a notably higher proportion of residents who are 65 years and older. The combination of outmigration and an aging population presents challenges for economic development. Employers will continue to face difficulties in accessing a diverse pool of workers. These issues jeopardize the region's ability to attract new developments or encourage existing companies to grow. The departure of young, educated professionals from the region in search of job opportunities underscores the importance of regional development initiatives.

As part of this project, the staff contributed to the planning and facilitation of a stakeholder workgroup encompassing the entire region. This workgroup supports infrastructure projects for trails and aims to promote further expansion of the trails network. Through increased trail construction and connectivity, as well as a comprehensive approach to outdoor tourism in the region, this project aims to establish the foundation for creating and preserving jobs, supporting businesses along the region's trail corridors and communities, and attracting public, private, and philanthropic investments.

One direct outcome of a regional trails plan is the enhanced competitiveness of our trails when seeking infrastructure funding, which will lead to trail expansion. Building a connected regional trails system will result in the establishment of new businesses and jobs in the bike retail and rental industry, as well as in other businesses and services that are popular among recreational trail users, such as restaurants, breweries/wineries, retail, and convenience stores.



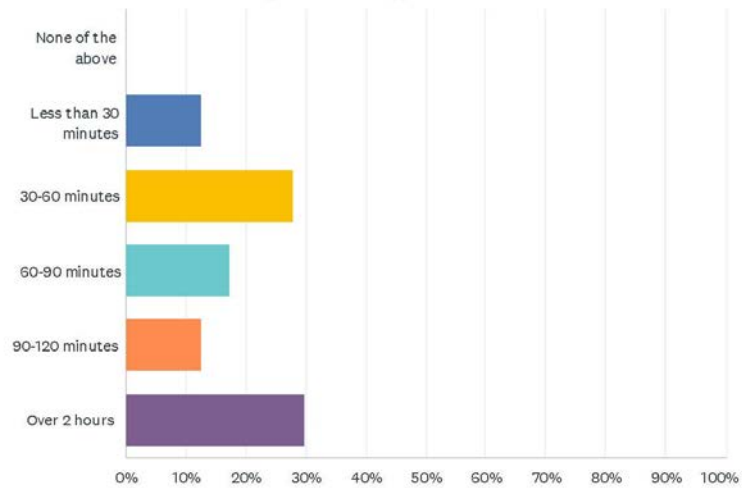
The region currently boasts two bike retail shops and three bike rental establishments in trailhead communities that will be directly affected by trail planning. Additionally, our staff has identified potential for new bike retail or rental locations near major trailheads that are underserved at present. Furthermore, the development of a connected regional trail system is expected to generate more job opportunities across various industries popular with recreational trail users, such as shops, bars, restaurants, campgrounds, lodging, and entertainment venues.

A 2009 study by the MN Department of Employment and Development, titled "Economic Impact of Recreational Trail Use in Different Regions of Minnesota," cited a 2008 University of Minnesota survey showing that Southern Minnesota trails attracted 26,417 walkers/hikers and 6,475 bicyclists. These figures ranked second in the state for trail usage, surpassed only by the Metro area. The study also revealed that spending at Southern Minnesota trails totaled \$537,582, supporting over 7,000 full-time and part-time jobs. Out-of-state visitors contributed approximately \$439 million statewide—20% of total trail spending—while Minnesota residents traveling to other regions spent around \$492 million, representing 23% of total trail spending.

Potential money spent per trail user type (spending habits)

Out of our tourism survey respondents, 37% said that they are willing to pay \$100-\$300 on items for overnight trips for outdoor recreational opportunities.

How much time are you willing to travel to access a trail?

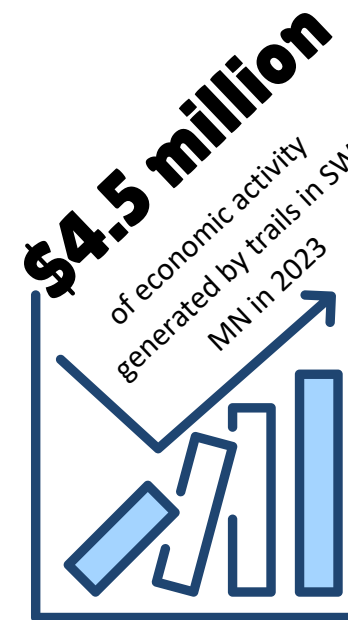


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
None of the above	0.00%	0
Less than 30 minutes	12.50%	13
30-60 minutes	27.88%	29
60-90 minutes	17.31%	18
90-120 minutes	12.50%	13
Over 2 hours	29.81%	31
TOTAL		104

The recent tourism survey has shed invaluable light on the economic vitality generated by trail usage in Southwest Minnesota. The data revealed that regional residents, passionate about their local trails, spend an average of \$125.80 per person per trip. In contrast, visitors, drawn by the allure of our picturesque landscapes, spend an average of \$216.90 per person per trip. While visitors predominantly invest in lodging, residents tend to splurge on dining experiences. The University of Minnesota Extension embarked on a comprehensive analysis of this survey data and trail counters to unravel the full scope of economic impacts. By extrapolating daily trail usage over the entire warm season and focusing on respondents who indicated trails as their primary motivation for visiting, the Extension meticulously calculated the direct, indirect, and induced economic effects of trail use. The direct economic impact from trail-related expenditures during the warm season was a remarkable \$3.2 million. Additionally, indirect and induced impacts reached \$1.3 million, benefiting various sectors such as restaurant suppliers and real estate companies. In total, trails in Southwest Minnesota generated an impressive \$4.5 million in economic activity in 2023, encompassing \$1.3 million in labor income and supporting 59 local jobs.

When compared with other regions in Minnesota, these economic impacts highlight similar beneficial trends in how trails influence communities. A particularly noteworthy success story is the remarkable transformation experienced by Ironton and Crosby, former mining towns that have been

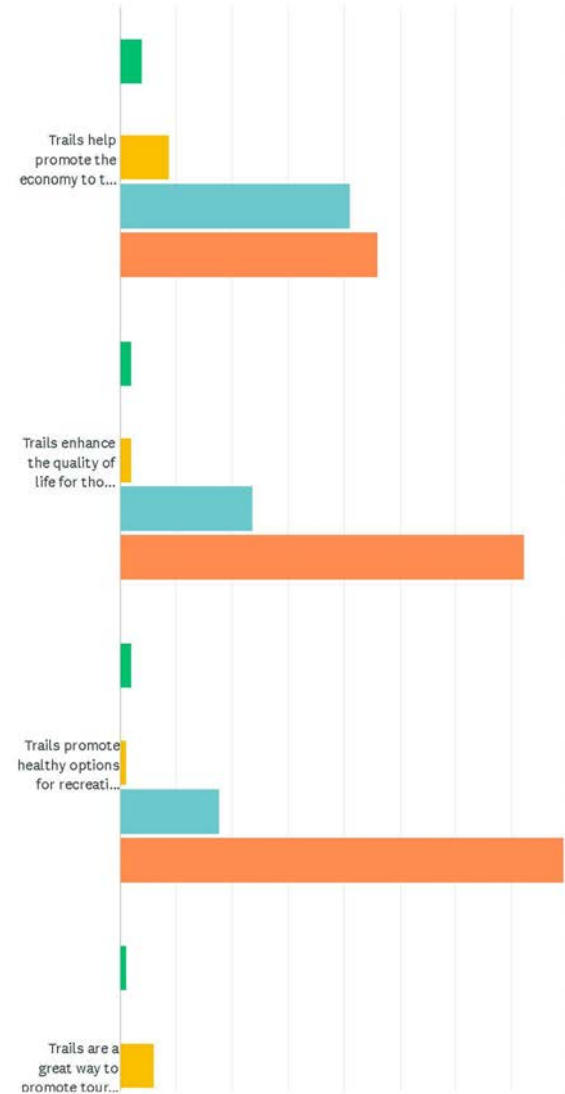
rejuvenated by the introduction of 25 miles of mountain biking trails within the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area. These trails attract a substantial number of biking enthusiasts each year, spurring a vibrant growth in local businesses, including new restaurants, breweries, and other enterprises. The economic uplift in this region has been significant, with direct benefits from visitor spending and additional indirect and induced effects arising from the proliferation of new businesses and job opportunities. Given these promising results, it is highly anticipated that expanding trails and trail networks in Southwest Minnesota will similarly invigorate the local economy through a cascade of direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts.

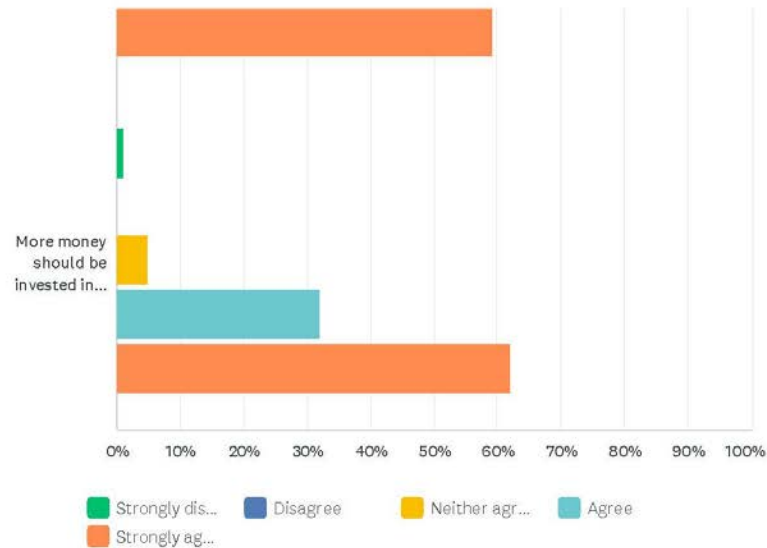
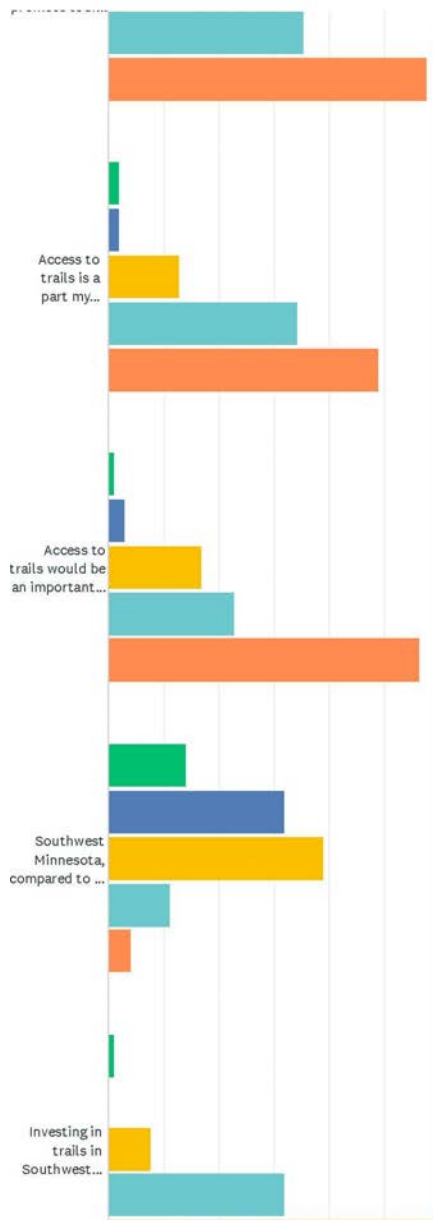


Tourism Benefits of Parks & Trails

The results of our tourism survey also echo similar sentiments towards tourism and economic effects in the region when it comes to trails and trail development. Over 60% of our respondents said that more money should be invested in trail development and maintenance in SW MN. Around 58% agreed that trails are a great way to promote tourism of SW MN, with 60% agreeing that investing in trails in SW MN will make the region more competitive in tourism. However, the questions that received the highest percentages of agreement were not those solely focused on economic growth and benefit. Almost 80% of our respondents agreed that trails promote healthy options for recreation, with 72% agreeing that trails enhance the quality of life of residents that live near them. This corresponds to the high number of focus group and interview responses that included “improved mental and physical health” as a reason for using trails. The parks and trails council of MN reports that people who live near parks and trails are 50% more likely to be physically active. Considering the impact that physical activity has on our health, the American Heart Association found that every \$1 spent on bike trails and walking paths saves an estimated \$3 in health costs. Improved physical and mental health of residents, increases the opportunity for thriving economies in those communities. Healthy people can physically and mentally contribute more to their communities.

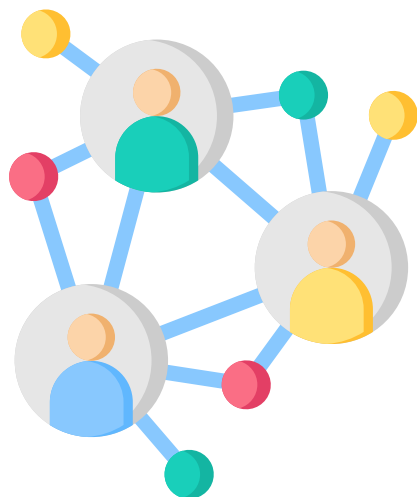
Mark if you disagree, neither agree or disagree, or agree with the following statements.





	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL
Trails help promote the economy to the communities near them.	3.92% 4	0.00% 0	8.82% 9	41.18% 42	46.08% 47	102
Trails enhance the quality of life for those living near them.	1.98% 2	0.00% 0	1.98% 2	23.76% 24	72.28% 73	101
Trails promote healthy options for recreation.	1.96% 2	0.00% 0	0.98% 1	17.65% 18	79.41% 81	102
Trails are a great way to promote tourism in Southwest Minnesota.	0.98% 1	0.00% 0	5.88% 6	35.29% 36	57.84% 59	102
Access to trails is a part my decisions to visit an area.	1.96% 2	1.96% 2	12.75% 13	34.31% 35	49.02% 50	102
Access to trails would be an important decision when choosing to relocate.	0.99% 1	2.97% 3	16.83% 17	22.77% 23	56.44% 57	101
Southwest Minnesota, compared to the rest of the state of Minnesota, has equal or similar access to trails.	14.00% 14	32.00% 32	39.00% 39	11.00% 11	4.00% 4	100
Investing in trails in Southwest Minnesota will make the region become more competitive in tourism in Minnesota.	0.97% 1	0.00% 0	7.77% 8	32.04% 33	59.22% 61	103
More money should be invested in trail development/maintenance in Southwest Minnesota.	0.97% 1	0.00% 0	4.85% 5	32.04% 33	62.14% 64	103

Public Outreach Workgroup



Forming a regional stakeholder workgroup for the Southwest Minnesota Regional Trails Plan required carefully assembling representatives from counties, cities, trail organizations, and other key stakeholders. The goal was to work together on creating and executing the trails plan, with a focus on improving connectivity, expanding recreational opportunities, and boosting economic growth throughout the nine-county area.

To develop the Southwest Minnesota Regional Trails Plan, the SRDC first sought representation from all nine counties in

the region to ensure comprehensive input in the planning process. County commissioners and staff are vital for identifying existing trails, assessing infrastructure needs, and exploring funding opportunities. Their local expertise and political influence are essential for tackling trail connectivity challenges effectively.

Cities within the region are also key participants, offering insights on trail usage, access points, and community engagement strategies. City parks and recreation departments, along with elected officials, will work to align municipal objectives with the regional trail plan, ensuring that both urban and rural residents benefit from a consistent and integrated approach.

Trail advocacy groups, nonprofits, and recreational enthusiasts bring valuable perspectives on trail design, user needs, and maintenance priorities based on their extensive experience. Their contributions are crucial for ensuring that the plan addresses the diverse recreational interests and environmental considerations of Southwest Minnesota's residents.

Additionally, involving local chambers of commerce, economic development authorities (EDAs), and tourism boards is essential for maximizing the economic impact of the trails plan. Chambers of commerce advocate for trails as amenities that enhance community livability and attract businesses and residents. EDAs leverage trail development to draw investments and support local businesses by highlighting improved connectivity. Tourism boards promote the region as a destination for outdoor enthusiasts, showcasing the scenic beauty and recreational opportunities of an interconnected trail network.

By forming this multidisciplinary workgroup, the Southwest Minnesota Regional Trails Plan aims to build consensus, streamline decision-making, and foster a unified vision for the region's trail network. Collaborative efforts among counties, cities, trail groups, and other stakeholders will help create a cohesive, accessible trails system that enhances quality of life, supports tourism, and drives sustainable economic growth across Southwest Minnesota.

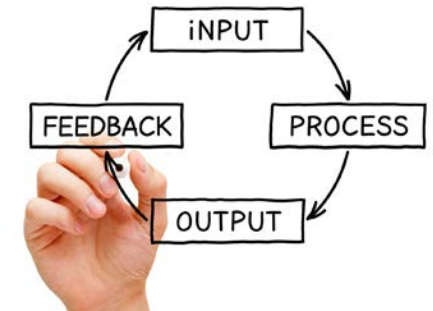


Newly paved portion of Casey Jones Trail coming into Woodstock

Map Input

During stakeholder workgroup meetings held both in person on January 26, 2023, and virtually on February 2, 2023, participants actively engaged in providing valuable feedback regarding the future development of trails in Southwest Minnesota. This input was specifically focused on identifying preferred locations and routes for new trails across the region. Stakeholders from various counties contributed insights based on local knowledge and community needs, which were instrumental in shaping trail development plans moving forward.

The feedback collected during these meetings was integrated into mapping exercises for each county within the nine-county region. These maps now illustrate the proposed routes and locations identified by stakeholders, providing a visual representation of the community's aspirations for expanding the trail network. By incorporating stakeholder input directly into the mapping process, the Southwest Minnesota Regional Trails Plan ensures that future trail developments align closely with local preferences, enhancing accessibility, connectivity, and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike across the region.



Partner Assistance

The University of Minnesota Extension staff completed the Economic Analysis of the Tourism Survey. This analysis marks a critical step in translating the data gathered from the Southwest Minnesota Regional Trail Tourism Survey into actionable insights. Through rigorous analysis of survey responses, including demographic profiles, trail usage patterns, and economic impact assessments, the Extension staff aims to quantify the trails' economic contributions across the nine-county region.

By analyzing data collected from the tourism survey, the Extension staff assessed the direct and indirect economic benefits generated by trail-related activities. This includes evaluating expenditures on accommodations, dining, retail, and other services by trail users, as well as estimating job creation, retention, and overall economic stimulus attributable to trail-related tourism. The economic analysis will provide policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders with a comprehensive understanding of the trails' role in supporting local economies, informing future investment decisions, and promoting sustainable development strategies throughout Southwest Minnesota.



Total Effect

In total, trails in Southwest Minnesota generated \$4.5 million of economic activity in 2023 included \$1.3 million in labor income. The trails supported 59 jobs.

Table 5: Total Economic Contribution, Trail Users in Southwest Minnesota

Category	Output	Employment	Labor Income
Direct	\$3,230,140	40	\$893,920
Indirect	\$806,910	10	\$223,060
Induced	\$510,890	9	\$141,870
Total	\$4,547,940	59	\$1,258,850

Chart 1: Top 10 Industries Affected, Indirect and Induced Effects, Sorted by Output





Table 2: Trail User Counts in Southwest Minnesota, Warm Season

Trail	Average Daily Use	Adjustment for Round Trip	Estimated Number of Users
City of Worthington (Okabena Lake)	438	33%	26,451
City of Luverne (Loop)	207	50%	18,941
City of Marshall (Camden Trail)	103	50%	9,425
City of Currie (Casey Jones Trail loop)	27	50%	2,471
City of Pipestone (Indian Lake Trail)	24	50%	2,196
City of Tyler	19	50%	1,739
Redwood County (Plum Creek Trail)	17	50%	1,556
City of Windom (Wolf Lake Trail)	15	50%	1,373
City of Jackson	13	50%	1,190
Total			65,338

Table 3: Distribution of Trail Users in Southwest Minnesota

Category	Count
Total trail users	65,338
-Resident trail users (63%)	41,222
-Visitor trail users (37%)	24,116
Trail users with trails as primary purpose	19,570
-Residents primary purpose (27%)	11,130
-Visitors primary purpose (35%)	8,440

Table 4: Total Spending, Trail Users in Southwest Minnesota

Category	Residents	Visitors	
Restaurants/bars	\$367,065	\$435,765	
Lodging	\$0	\$615,862	
Shopping	\$311,568	\$258,736	
Recreation-related	\$224,083	\$121,265	
Groceries	\$173,217	\$223,861	
Equipment rentals	\$14,645	\$12,520	
Entertainment/attractions	\$286,891	\$119,380	
Other	\$21,959	\$43,329	
Total	\$1,399,428	\$1,830,718	\$3,230,146

Stakeholder Focus Groups and Interviews

Conducting focus groups and interviews for the regional trails plan in Southwest Minnesota focused on reaching out to groups in all 9 counties of our region. The SRDC completed 25 focus groups and interviews. Given the diverse demographics and terrain of Southwest Minnesota, it's imperative to engage with various stakeholders, including local residents, community leaders, and outdoor enthusiasts. Identifying key themes such as accessibility, safety, and recreational preferences is essential for developing a comprehensive trails plan that caters to the region's unique identity. Additionally, we were able to leverage technology and online platforms to better facilitate broader participation and engagement, especially considering the geographical spread of communities in the region.

Furthermore, fostering open dialogue and active listening during focus groups and interviews is crucial for capturing nuanced perspectives and insights from participants. Encouraging candid feedback and creating a supportive environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing their views was essential, leading to more robust data collection and informed decision-making. By incorporating diverse geographical voices, the resulting plan can effectively communicate the region's desires and preferences, while not fixating on one or two population centers.

From our series of focus groups and individual interviews, we got some common denominators in answers to our questions. Most of our participants see trails as a safe option away from roads, and a shared space used for recreation and fitness. Many of our participants are motivated to use trails that are easily accessible, safe and well-maintained, have good signage, are quiet, and scenic. The most popular trails with these individuals and groups are nature and family friendly. Some of the common barriers identified to using local trails were poor maintenance including safety issues at access points and crossings, lack of amenities like restrooms and water, and a general lack of awareness of trails in the area. Overall, the people we talked to agree on the following focus areas for trail improvements: 1.) trail maintenance 2.) Destinations on or near trails, such as restaurants or fun shops and information 3.) More trails connecting communities 4.) Connections and overall development of the trails system in Southwest Minnesota.



Trail Intercept Survey

The Trail Intercept Survey for the Southwest Minnesota Regional Trails Plan was designed to gather real-time data and feedback directly from trail users as they engage with the trail network across the nine-county region. This survey methodology involved intercepting trail users at various points along the trails to capture their insights, preferences, and experiences. The SRDC received 50 completed intercept surveys.

Firstly, the survey focused on understanding the demographics of trail users, including their age, gender, residency, and group size. By collecting this demographic data, planners and stakeholders can gain insights into the diversity of trail users and tailor future trail developments and amenities to better serve them.

Secondly, the Trail Intercept Survey delved into the motivations and activities of trail users. It explored why individuals choose to use the trails, whether for recreational activities such as hiking, biking, or for other purposes like commuting or enjoying nature. Understanding these motivations will help prioritize enhancements that align with the primary interests and needs of trail users.

Moreover, the survey gathered feedback on trail conditions, signage, and amenities directly from users. Participants provided input on what they appreciate about the trails and any areas where improvements could enhance their experience. This real-time feedback is invaluable for identifying immediate issues that may impact user satisfaction.

By implementing the Trail Intercept Survey as part of the Southwest Minnesota Regional Trails Plan, stakeholders can gather comprehensive and actionable data that guides future trail development, enhances user experiences, and strengthens the trails' role as a community asset across the region.



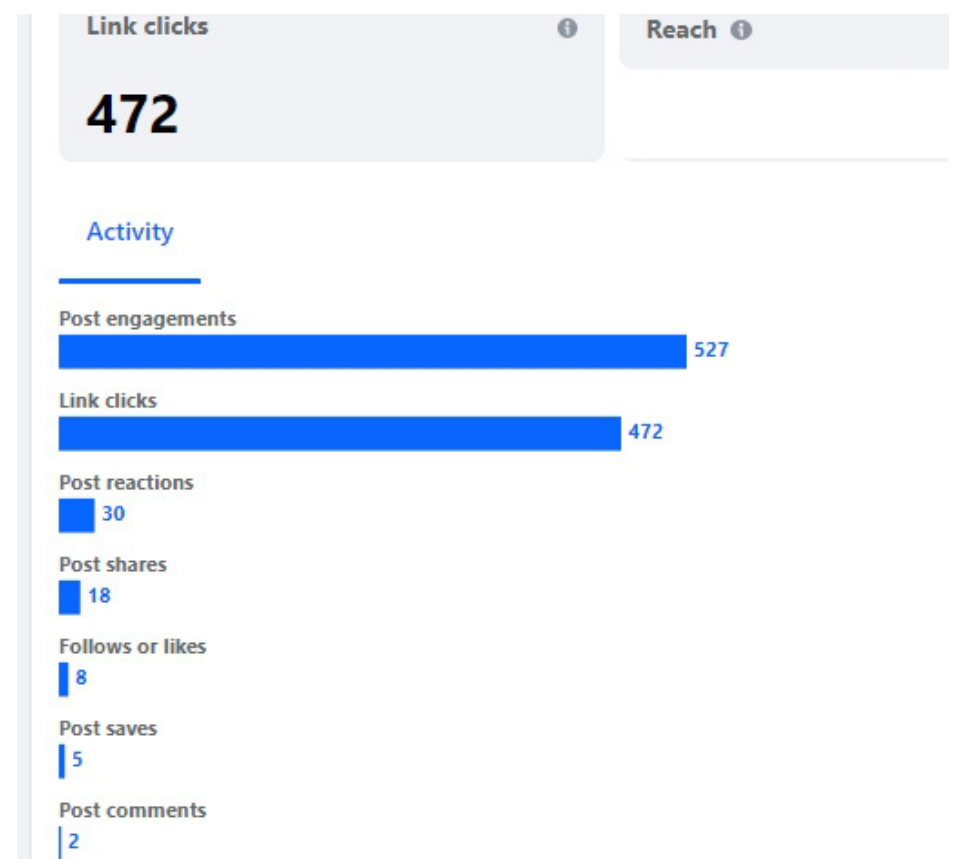
Tourism Survey

The Southwest Minnesota Regional Trail Tourism Survey plays a pivotal role in understanding and enhancing the region's appeal as a destination for outdoor enthusiasts and travelers. This comprehensive survey aims to gather insights from visitors and tourists that travel to the nine-county area to assess their trail usage patterns, identify opportunities for improvement, and gauge the economic impact of trails on our local communities.

First, the survey delved into the demographics and preferences of trail users, capturing data on age, gender, residency, and frequency of trail visits. Understanding these demographics will help tailor trail amenities and marketing efforts to better meet the needs of diverse user groups, ensuring trails remain accessible and attractive to all.

Moreover, the survey assessed the economic impact of trail tourism on local economies. By measuring spending on accommodations, dining, retail, and other services related to trail visits, stakeholders can quantify the trails' contribution to job creation, tax revenue, and business growth across Southwest Minnesota. This data is crucial for advocating for trail funding, attracting investments, and demonstrating the trails' role in supporting sustainable tourism development in the future.

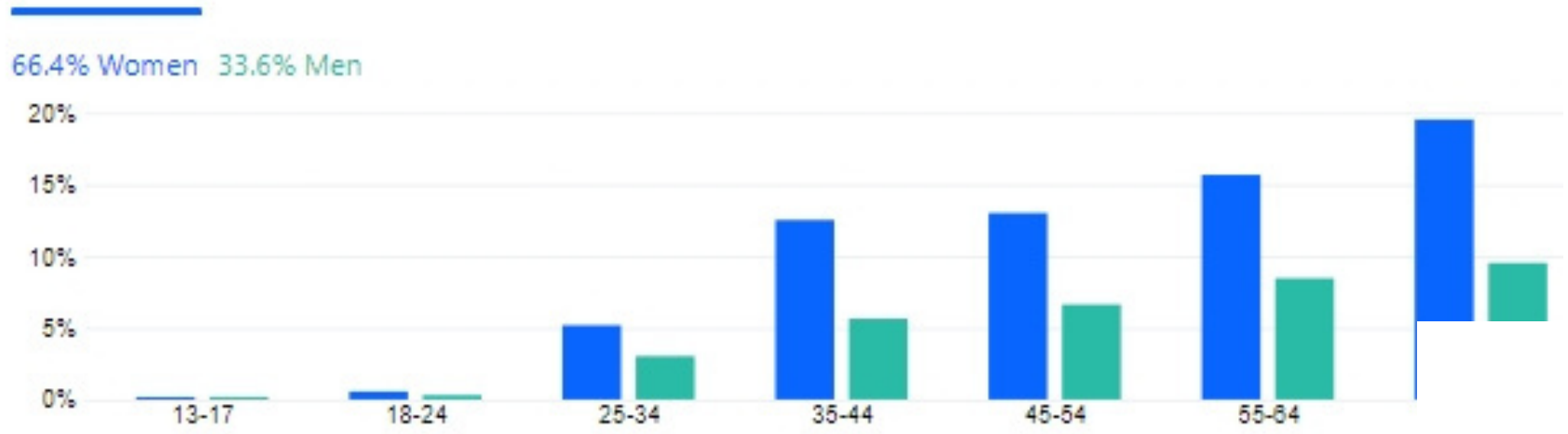
Ultimately, the Southwest Minnesota Regional Trail Tourism Survey aims to harness tourist input to strengthen the region's trail network as a driver of economic growth, and community pride. As well as promoting the interconnectivity of more outdoor recreation opportunities in the region. By engaging residents, visitors, and local businesses in this process, the survey will lay the groundwork for a sustainable and vibrant trail tourism strategy that benefits all stakeholders in Southwest Minnesota.



Tourism Survey

This ad reached 15,917 people in your audience.

People Placements Locations



People Placements Locations



Regional Trail Network Branding

Branding our regional trail network is a way for our region to boost local pride, attract visitors, and enhance the outdoor experience. The main avenue for the branding campaign is through a new trails website. We're utilizing drone footage to highlight our local trails.

Developing a website for the SW Minnesota trail network is crucial for establishing a strong, recognizable brand and enhancing user experience. A well-designed website will serve as a central hub for information, descriptions and insights into local landmarks and amenities. This not only aids in navigation but also fosters a sense of connection and discovery for both locals and visitors.

Furthermore, a robust online presence helps solidify the trail network's identity by providing a platform for storytelling through engaging content, including edited drone footage, photos, and user-generated experiences. Ultimately, a professional, user-friendly website reinforces the trail network's brand, making it more accessible and appealing to a wider audience.



Drone footage offers a stunning perspective that can significantly elevate the presentation of a trail network. By capturing sweeping aerial views and dynamic shots of the trails, surrounding landscapes, and unique natural features, drone footage provides a captivating and immersive experience for viewers. This visual content can be prominently featured on the website, creating an engaging way for potential visitors to explore the trails from the comfort of their homes. High-quality drone footage can also showcase the beauty and variety of the trails, helping to attract outdoor enthusiasts and tourism.

Beyond the website, drone footage can be leveraged across various platforms to enhance the trail network's brand visibility. It can be shared on social media, included in promotional videos, or used in digital ads, effectively reaching a broader audience and generating excitement. Additionally, incorporating drone footage into marketing materials and presentations can make a compelling case for the trail network's appeal, fostering increased interest and community support.





SW Minnesota Trail Vision

Corridor Scoring

SRDC referenced other trail plans to draft a scoring rubric to prioritize regional trail corridors. Staff reviewed the contents of each scoring category and then requested participants give feedback via menti.com at the stakeholder meeting held on September 29, 2022. Within the four categories of 1) Community Connection, 2) Deliverability, 3) Planning and Support, and 4) Potential Tourism Impact, participants voted on what criteria was the most important to them to include.





Mentimeter Results:

- **Community Connection** -- Trail Experience was the top choice (33%) and Cultural experiences was 2nd (17%)
- **Deliverability** – Ease of land acquisition was the top choice (22%), and Maintenance was 2nd (20%)
- **Planning and Support** – Connectivity (23%) and Demand (21%)
- **Potential Tourism Impact** – Economic potential (22%) and Destination (21%)

At a later meeting, staff asked stakeholders who should conduct the scoring. They decided that staff would be best suited to score the corridors because they had access to the whole picture through the survey, focus groups, interviews, data collection, and review of state and local plans. Stakeholders would then give final approval to the results.

In June 2024 staff scored the corridors, then averaged their scores together.

Corridors / 100 Points Possible	Averaged Score	Rank
Jackson to Okoboji	83	1
Casey Jones - Shetek State Park to Redwood Falls	80	2
Casey Jones - Pipestone to Shetek State Park	77	3
Casey Jones - Luverne to Pipestone	73	4
Luverne to Sioux Falls	72	5
Camden Trail to Pipestone	60	6
Jackson to Windom to Mountain Lake	57	7
Luverne to Jackson	46	8
Windom to Casey Jones	44	9
Camden Trail to Cottonwood	37	10
Hendricks to Camden Trail	36	11

Priority Corridors Based on Scoring

Let's consider the Casey Jones Trail completion as one corridor. With that adjustment, we have three primary trail corridors: 1) Jackson to Okoboji, 2) Casey Jones – complete the trail, and 3) Luverne to Sioux Falls. Then three secondary corridors: 1) Camden Regional Trail extension to Pipestone, 2) Jackson to Windom to Mountain Lake, and 3) Luverne to Jackson. Finally, we have three tertiary corridors: 1) Windom to Casey Jones Trail, 2) Camden Regional Trail to the city of Cottonwood, and 3) Hendricks to Camden Regional Trails.



Scoring Criteria

Community Connections

1. **Wayfinding.** How easy is it to locate the potential corridor?
2. **Trail Experience.** Does the project provide users with a high-quality trail experience and/or destination?
3. **Fills Gaps.** Does the project fill gaps in recreational opportunities in the region and/or county?
4. **Community Enhancement.** How does the project enhance the communities along or near the corridor?
5. **Cultural/Natural Considerations.** Does the project consider the preservation, ethics, and/or interpretations of cultural and/or natural resources along the corridor?
6. **Avoidance of Dead-End Trails.** Does the project provide physical connections between other trails, resources, or destinations?
7. **Accessibility.** Does the project address access, use, and benefits of the trail by persons with disabilities, senior citizens, and other groups?

Deliverability

1. **Local Champions.** Are there local champions/partnerships with trail experience that will work to advocate for this trail?
2. **Ease of Land Acquisition/Easement.** Are there landowners willing to sell/donate land and/or entities willing to provide land easements for the project corridor?
3. **Fiscal Responsibility.** Is there a local entity(ies) willing to be a fiscal host for potential project funding/grants?
4. **Maintenance/Operations Responsibilities.** Is there a plan for maintenance of the trail? Is there a local entity(ies) committed to the long-term maintenance of the trail?
5. **Level of Planning/Design.** What is the level of planning that has been completed for this trail? Is there a plan in place?
6. **Corridor Objections.** Have there been any previous objections to this trail corridor or is there anticipated objections to the corridor? If so, what are the objections and how were they resolved/addressed?
7. **Reconstruction.** Does the project involve reconstruction of already in place trails, sidewalks, or paths?

Scoring Criteria

Planning & Support

1. **Level of Community Involvement.** How has the community been involved in the planning and/or support of the project?
2. **Level of Community Investment.** How invested are community members in the project? Has there been volunteer assistance or involvement through project funding, donations, in-kind services, etc.?
3. **Connectivity.** Is the project included in other plans and/or does it increase the connectivity to other trail/sidewalk routes and/or destinations that already exist or are in the works?
4. **Demand.** Is there clear user demand for the trail corridor?
5. **Amenities.** Has there been consideration and/or planning for appropriately placed amenities along the route?
6. **Resource Protection.** Does the project protect and enhance natural resources or consider avoidance of problem areas or mitigation of unavoidable damage to other resources?
7. **Partnerships.** Does the project demonstrate coordinated partnerships?

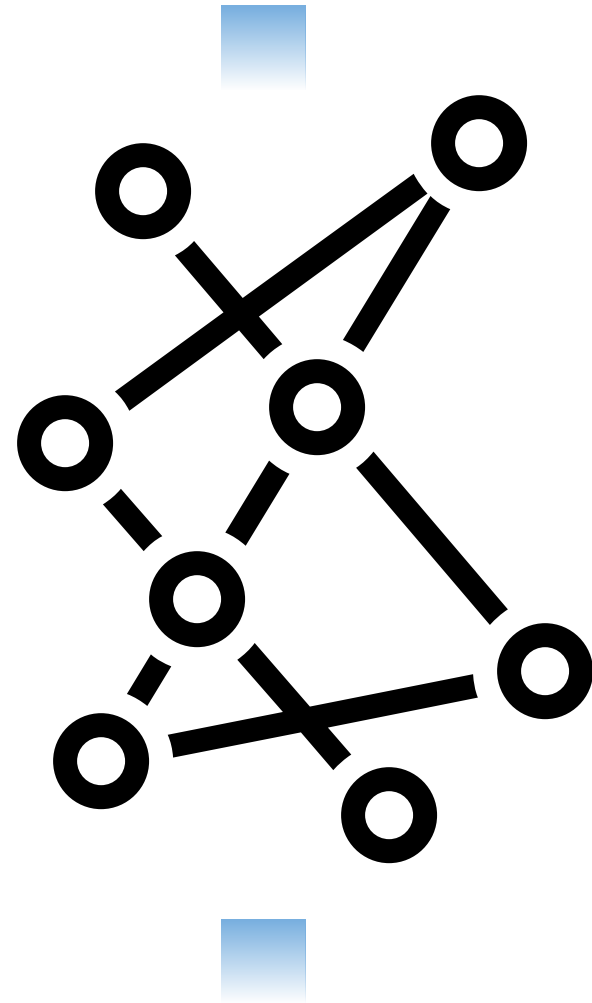
Potential Tourism Impact

1. **Destination.** Does the project connect to a touristic destination and/or create a high-quality tourism potential?
2. **Businesses.** Are there current businesses along the corridor that meet the demands of potential trail users?
3. **Economic Potential.** Are there opportunities and support for future businesses along the trail corridor to meet the demands of potential trail users?
4. **Proximity of Other Experiences.** Are there unique experiences within proximity of the corridor that complement the project and could be a tourism draw?
5. **Unique Experiences.** Are there points of interest along the trail route that would provide users with a unique experience?
6. **Usage.** What would be the difficulty level of the trail route (consider distance, elevation gain, and terrain)? Does this level pair with user demand?
7. **Benefit to Most.** To what degree does the project provide the greatest number of compatible recreation/tourism purposes? What types of users will benefit from this project?

Corridor Connections

During stakeholder meetings held in person on January 26, 2023, and virtually on February 2, 2023, participants provided feedback on maps of the region about where they wanted to see trails built in the future. Their feedback was used to make maps of each county in the region with all the routes they identified. Staff then took that information and made more generalized route connectors on the Regional Priority Corridors maps to show key connections participants would like to see. These spurs and corridors are not intended to provide exact routes for trails. Rather, they illustrate the major connections people want to see that would have the greatest impact to the region. As cities, counties, and other organizations plan for specific trails, they have multiple options for how they will build out the corridors. This plan is not prescriptive for how those routes should take shape.

Zooming in on counties



Lincoln County

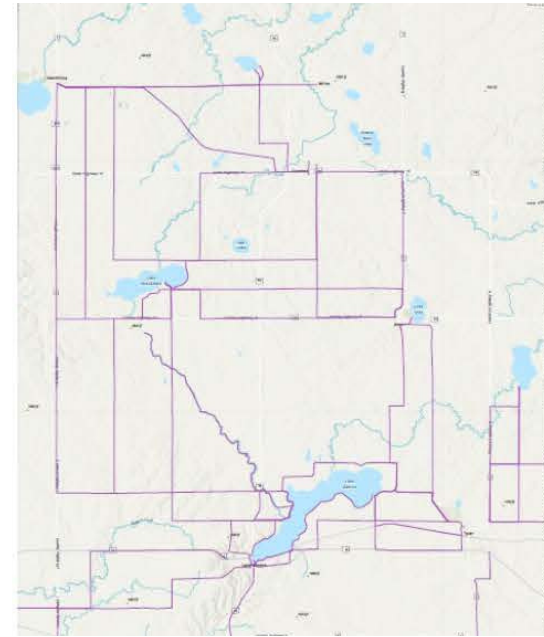
Lincoln County has no trails except 1.1 miles of trail within Hole in the Mountain Park in Lake Benton. In 2012, a county task force completed its *Lincoln County Comprehensive Trail Plan* to spur development and designate specific routes.

As Lincoln County explores how to implement its plan, building a trail that connects with the Camden Regional Trail is the highest priority. The next priority is to connect their cities, parks, and lakes. Refer to their plan for an in-depth examination of the key connections the county would like to create.

The City of Tyler has been identified in numerous routes in the Lincoln County Comprehensive Trails plans and from stakeholders across the region in our Regional Trails Workgroup meetings. Despite not having a designated “trail,” the city has an interest in providing safe spaces for community members to walk and bike. In 2019, the city held its first Walkable Community Workshop, made possible through a partnership between the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) and the Lincoln County Active Generations, and funded by a grant from MnDOT (Minnesota Department of Transportation). This group would become the future Safe Routes to School Steering Committee.

During the 2020-2021 school year, this group, along with the City of Tyler and the RTR school district, worked with SRDC to complete their first Safe Routes to School Plan. During this process, Oak Street was prioritized due to its incomplete sidewalk sections and its use as a priority route for students to walk/bike to the new school. Once the new school was built and the new school year started, SRDC conducted hazard observations on this route and observed students walking in the road before crossing to get to the new school.

Tyler used all this information and completed sidewalk connections on Oak Street. This newly built connection allowed the City of Tyler to also leverage its Safe Routes to School Plan to access infrastructure funds for new sidewalks along County Road 8, further enhancing the community’s connections and giving its pedestrians and cyclists more opportunities to walk/bike around the city.





Cottonwood County

In the short term, the trail project with the most support and planning is to build a connection between the city of Windom and the Wings on the Prairie Discovery Center at Wolf Lake Waterfowl Production Area, a US Fish and Wildlife Service property (*Windom-Wolf Lake Connection Trail Plan*). In the future, stakeholders expressed an interest in connecting to Fulda, to the Casey Jones trail in Currie, and south to Jackson; however, there were no organized efforts to build those trails when this report was written.

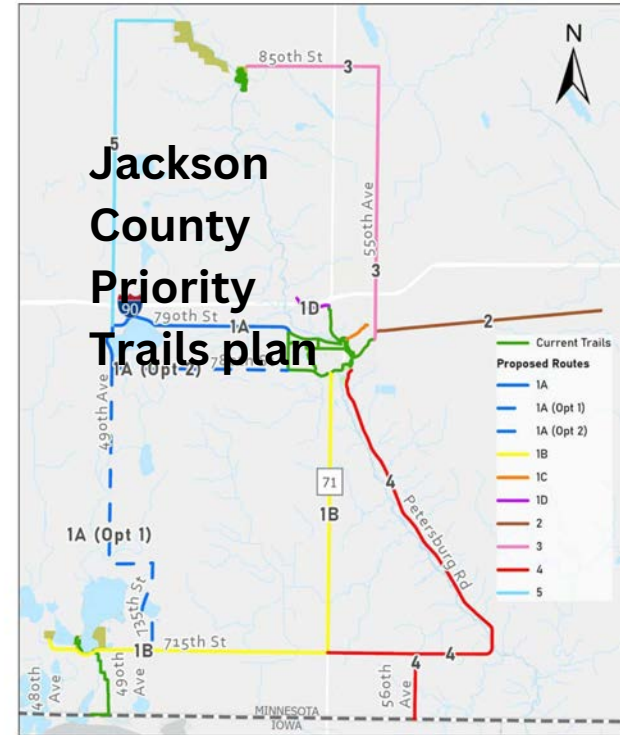


Jackson County

Jackson County boasts many opportunities for future trail development. With its mix of rolling prairies, picturesque lakeshores, and lush forests, the county offers ample opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts to explore and connect with nature. The County recently established a new mountain bike trail at Belmont County Park and the cities of Lakefield and Jackson are strong supporters of trails. The Friends of Jackson County Trails was established in 1999 and over the years has written many grants to expand trails throughout the county.

Expanding trails throughout the county could enhance other recreational activities such as hiking, and biking, and it could work to lure trail enthusiasts from the Spirit Lake/Okoboji tourist destination located just across the border in Iowa. With the completion of the trail loop in the City of Jackson, locals are now looking to expand the trail in all four cardinal directions. Their top priorities are to connect with Spirit Lake/Okoboji and to head North over an old railroad bridge that crosses Interstate 90.

In 2023 the county completed the Jackson Parks & Trails Master Plan with funding from Minnesota Department of Transportation's Active Transportation Program, with planning assistance from Terra Soma, LCC & HDR, In.





Redwood County

The Cities of Lambertson, Wabasso, Revere, and Walnut Grove provided match funding for this trail plan. These communities are located along a potential route to either form the Casey Jones trail or to provide a connecting route, once it has been completed.

Plum Creek Park in Redwood County has a Casey Jones trailhead, but no Casey Jones trail. The plan is to connect Plum Creek Park to the Currie Loop and Walnut Grove. This park opened in 1969, and since then has grown to become a regional destination. The park features a wide variety of campsites, a large swimming/kayaking/paddle boarding lake, playgrounds, a 9-hole disk golf course, baseball fields, volleyball courts, and over two miles of hiking trails! The Lake Laura Trail alone is 1.75 miles long and takes users on a unique natural hike around Lake Laura.

Plum Creek Park is also adjacent to the Laura Ingalls Wilder Pageant grounds, which features several events in the summer, including the annual Wilder Pageant and the Loose Gravel Music Festival.

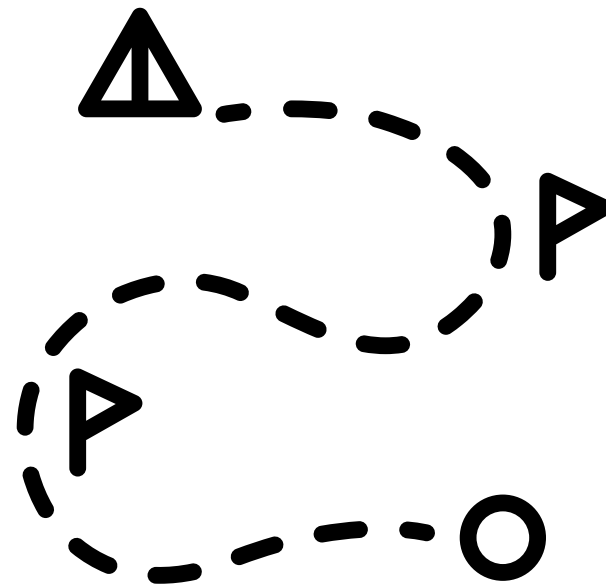
Redwood Falls is home to the largest city park in Minnesota. Ramsey Park is 256 acres and has five shelters, a zoo, multiple playgrounds, fishing areas, and 3.5 miles of hiking trails. Stakeholders would like to see Ramsey Park connected to Wabasso, Revere, Lambertson, and Walnut Grove to complete the northeast segment of the Casey Jones Trail.

Murray County

The Friends of the Casey Jones trail have prioritized reconstructing the 6-mile Currie Loop trail and connecting Lake Wilson to Woodstock in the short term (2024 – 2028). The Currie Loop goes through Shetek State Park and has a trailhead at End-O-Line Museum with an adjoining wide sidewalk that leads into the City of Currie.

A midterm goal for Casey Jones is to link Lake Wilson to Hadley. Then the long-term goals are to link Hadley to Slayton and then Slayton to the Currie Loop following along Beaver Creek.

A long-term vision for other trails is to create a loop around the lake in Fulda and then create a connection between Windom and Fulda that follows the Des Moines River and goes next to Talcot Lake.



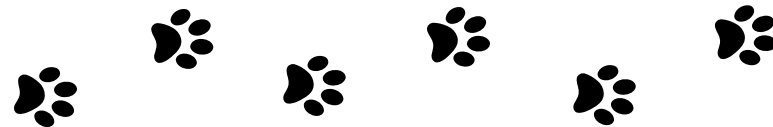


Pipestone County

Efforts on trail development in Pipestone County are focused on the City of Pipestone’s internal trail connections, finishing the Casey Jones trail to the Murray County line, with funding in place to complete this portion in 2026, and heading toward Luverne either on Highway 75 or to Split Creek Park then to Blue Mounds State Park.

Within the City of Pipestone, the Pipestone National Monument is a major tourist attraction in the region, and it has a 3/4-mile-long paved path. It cuts through a prairie, past ancient quarries still used by Native Americans today, and in front of a waterfall at the halfway point. They want this tourist attraction linked with the trail network throughout the city and to the Casey Jones Trailhead.

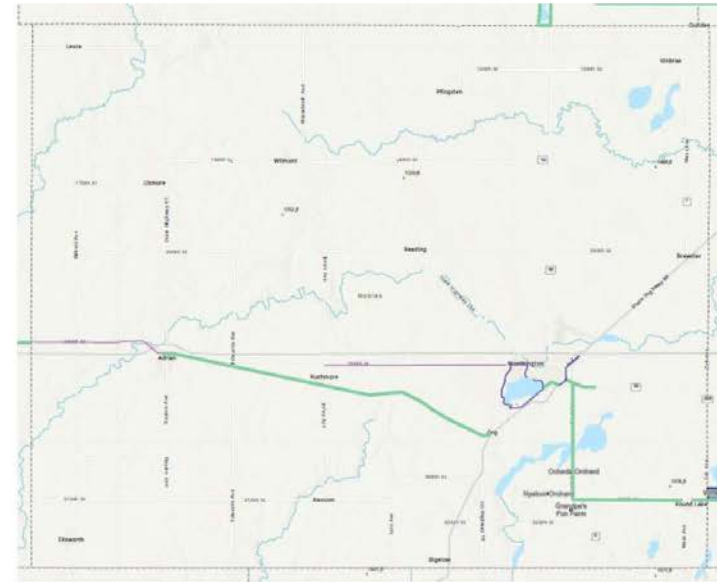
When this report was written, the Friends of the Casey Jones Trail group was exploring the idea of applying for regional designation for the route between Luverne and Pipestone. Doing so would unlock funding from the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Commission (GMPRTC) – a source unavailable for state trails.



Nobles County

In Nobles County Worthington is the only city with trails. The Okabena Lake trail spans around 5 miles of trails and includes both on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. More recently, Worthington was awarded Transportation Alternatives funds to construct a connection from Okabena Lake to the community at the intersection of County Road 10 and MN 60.

Linking the Worthington trail network to Adrian, Luverne had historical efforts that collapsed and have not been revisited. Building a trail to Jackson would also be a good corridor; however, no current efforts exist to create routes that exit Worthington to the east or the west.





Lyon County

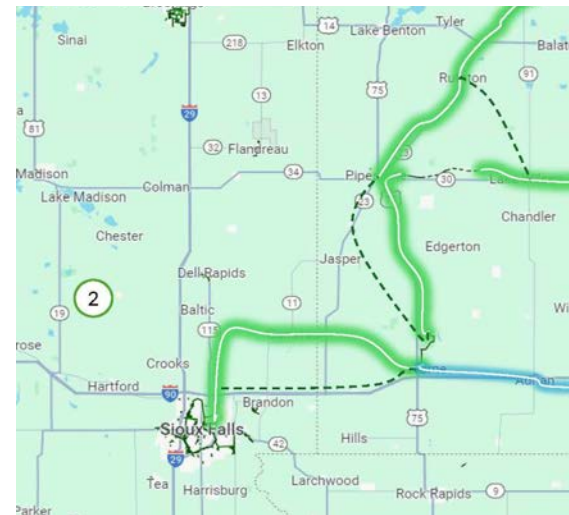
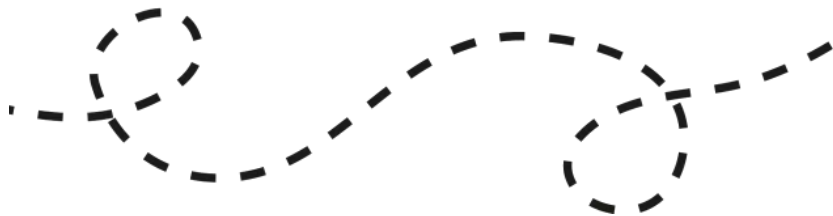
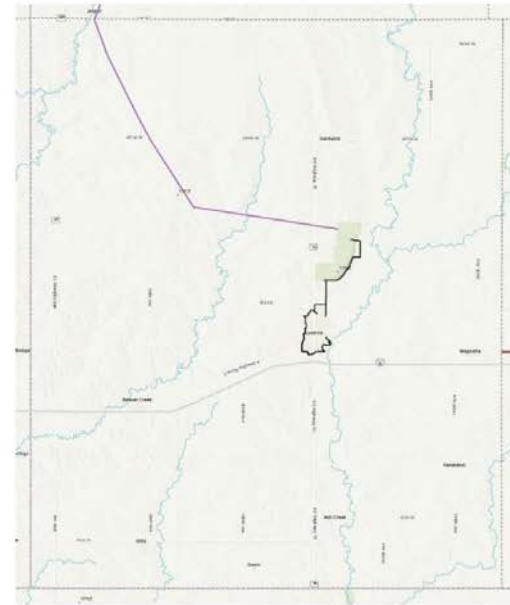
The Camden Regional trail includes 14 miles of pavement connecting the City of Marshall, the City of Lynd, and Camden State Park. On the east end, the trail connects Marshall High School, the Red Baron Arena, Southwest Minnesota State University, and a network of bike lanes and sidewalks in Marshall. The trail then features over ten miles of paved trail between Wayside Park and Camden State Park. Once at Camden State Park, trail users can explore the hiking/mountain biking trails, scenic views, and a swimming beach.

The Camden Regional Trail was initiated by local champions led by the City of Marshall, Lyon County, Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Council, and the DNR (Department of Natural Resources) at the Camden State Park through the Healthy and Active Marshall Built Infrastructure Initiative. This trail is a fitting example of what can be accomplished with planning, collaboration, and strategic direction. Lyon County was key in acquiring the right of way for the trail, while the City of Marshall handled the construction within the park. To fund a substantial portion of the trail outside of the park, Marshall leveraged its eligibility for legacy grants. The city and county also worked with the BNSF railroad to establish safe railroad crossings and to work through the Corp of Engineers' flood control project along the corridor.

Rock County


Luverne is at the center of trail development in Rock County. The Luverne Loop was completed in 2022 and now offers community members 7.4 miles of uninterrupted trail around the city and a connection to the Blue Mounds Trail. The Luverne Loop's connection to the Blue Mounds Trail and Ashby Trail provides over 15 miles of trail in the Luverne area.

With the local loop and local connections completed, the city is looking for opportunities to expand trails toward Sioux Falls and Pipestone as the top priorities, with the possibility of building toward Adrian and Worthington in the long-term.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

- Key Connections and Priority Routes
- What are our plans to get priority routes created
- Suggested Outreach & Key Marketing Takeaways
- Road Map for Implementation
 - Roles for Cities, Counties, Trails groups and more



Maintenance Agreement Best Practices

1. Creating a trail maintenance agreement between multiple jurisdictions is crucial for ensuring clarity and accountability. Here are some items that should typically be included in such an agreement.

Parties Involved: Clearly state the names and contact information of all participating jurisdictions or entities

1. **Scope of Agreement:** Define the purpose and scope of the agreement, specifying which trails or trail systems are covered.

Responsibilities of Each Party:

1. **Maintenance Responsibilities:** Outline who is responsible for routine maintenance tasks such as clearing debris, repairing surfaces, signage, etc.
2. **Emergency Response:** Specify responsibilities during emergencies, such as search and rescue operations or rapid repairs after natural disasters.
3. **Financial Responsibilities:** Detail how costs will be shared, including funding for regular maintenance and unforeseen repairs.
4. **Access and Permissions:** Clarify access rights for maintenance personnel from each jurisdiction, including any permits required.
5. **Communication Protocols:** Establish procedures for communication between jurisdictions, including points of contact and methods (regular meetings, email updates).
6. **Shared Governance:** How decisions will be made about the trail. Will all jurisdictions pass a Memorandum of Understanding or should a Joint Powers Board be established. Define procedures for the decision-making process.
7. **Term and Termination:** Specify the duration of the agreement and conditions under which it can be terminated or renewed.
8. **Insurance and Liability:** Address insurance requirements and determine how liability will be shared or mitigated.
9. **Amendments and Modifications:** Outline how the agreement can be amended or modified, including procedures for completing them.
10. **Signatures and Approval:** Ensure that the agreement is signed by authorized representatives from each jurisdiction.
11. **Attachments:** Include any maps, schedules, or additional documents that clarify the agreement's terms.

Funding Opportunities & Recommendations

Funding opportunities for trails in Southwest Minnesota can come from various sources, including state grants, federal grants, LCCMR (Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources) opportunities, and other funding sources.

State Grants: Minnesota offers several grant programs through the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) that support trail development and enhancement. The State Trail Grant-in-Aid program provides funds to local units of government for acquiring, developing, and maintaining trails. This program is competitive and requires matching funds from local entities. Additionally, the Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program allocates funds from the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment to enhance parks and trails, including those in Southwest Minnesota. These grants typically prioritize projects that enhance outdoor recreation opportunities and improve trail connectivity.

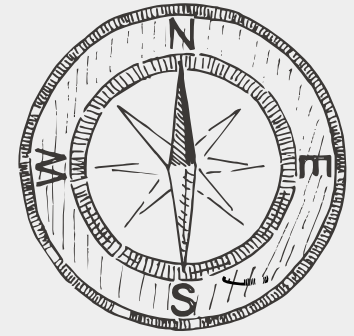
Another state grant opportunity is the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Active Transportation Infrastructure grant program. This grant is meant to support the development of infrastructure that enhances pedestrian and bicycle transportation options, including trails, throughout the state. This competitive grant program aims to improve safety, accessibility, and connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists, thereby promoting active transportation modes. Projects eligible for funding include the construction and improvement of multi-use trails, bike lanes, sidewalks, crosswalks, and related infrastructure. MnDOT prioritizes projects that demonstrate a clear need, provide significant community benefits, and align with state transportation goals such as enhancing mobility, reducing vehicle miles traveled, and improving public health outcomes. Successful applicants typically engage in comprehensive planning, collaborate with local stakeholders, and provide matching funds to leverage state resources effectively. The Active Transportation Infrastructure grants presents a valuable opportunity for communities in Southwest Minnesota to enhance their trail networks and support active lifestyles through sustainable transportation infrastructure development.




Federal Grants: The Federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) provides funding for projects that enhance non-motorized transportation alternatives, including trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, and other infrastructure. Administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), TAP aims to improve the quality of life, economic competitiveness, and environmental sustainability of communities across the United States. In Minnesota, TAP funds are distributed through MnDOT and support a wide range of projects that promote safe and accessible transportation options beyond traditional motor vehicles. Local governments can apply for TAP funding, which requires a local match and adherence to federal guidelines regarding project eligibility, environmental impact, and public involvement. TAP grants are highly competitive, emphasizing projects that enhance connectivity, improve safety, and encourage active transportation modes, making it a crucial resource for communities in Southwest Minnesota seeking to expand and improve their trail networks.

LCCMR: The Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) funds projects that provide multiple environmental benefits, including trails and outdoor recreational facilities. Projects must align with state priorities and demonstrate a clear environmental benefit. LCCMR funding is competitive and requires detailed project proposals outlining environmental impacts, community benefits, and budgetary needs. Trail projects in Southwest Minnesota can compete for funding alongside other environmental initiatives supported by the LCCMR.

Other Funding Sources: Beyond state and federal grants, trails in Southwest Minnesota can seek funding from local foundations, private donors, corporate sponsorships, and crowdfunding platforms. Local businesses and community organizations often support trail development as part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives. Additionally, crowdfunding platforms provide opportunities for grassroots funding campaigns that engage local residents and trail users in supporting specific trail projects. Building partnerships with local stakeholders and leveraging community support can enhance the viability of securing funding from these alternative sources.



Navigating these funding opportunities requires thorough planning, community engagement, and alignment with funding criteria to successfully support trail development and enhancement.



Trail Management Best Practices

Best Practices in Trail Management Techniques

The following are recognized as best practices in managing trails to help ensure that trails are safe, and enjoyable for all users now and into the future.

- **Clearing Vegetation:** Regularly trim back overhanging branches and encroaching vegetation to maintain trail width and clearance for users.
- **Erosion Control:** Install and maintain water bars, check dams, and other erosion control structures to prevent trail damage from water runoff.
- **Trail Surfacing:** Repair trail surfaces by filling in ruts, smoothing out rough spots, and adding fresh gravel or material where needed.
- **Signage and Marking:** Ensure trail markers, signs, and trail blazes are clear, visible, and regularly maintained to prevent confusion for users.
- **Bridges and Structures:** Inspect and repair bridges, boardwalks, and other structures to ensure safety and longevity.
- **Trash and Litter Removal:** Regularly remove trash and litter from the trail and surrounding areas to maintain cleanliness and preserve the natural environment.
- **Trail Clearing:** Remove fallen trees, branches, and other obstacles from the trail to keep it passable and safe for users.
- **Trail Drainage:** Clean and maintain drainage features such as ditches and culverts to prevent water from pooling and causing trail damage.

User Education: Educate trail users about Leave No Trace principles and proper trail etiquette to minimize their impact on the environment and trails.

These practices help ensure that trails are sustainable, safe, and enjoyable for all users while preserving natural resources and ecosystems.

Best Practices in Trails Planning and Development

Local trail planning and development play a vital role in enhancing quality of life, promoting outdoor recreation, and preserving natural resources in our communities in Southwest Minnesota. Effective trail planning requires a multifaceted approach that integrates community engagement, partnerships with local governments, and strategic leveraging of state and federal resources. By actively involving stakeholders, collaborating with government agencies, and accessing external funding sources, trail planners can create sustainable, inclusive, and interconnected trail networks that benefit residents and visitors alike.

Effective local trail planning and development begins with robust community engagement practices. Community involvement is crucial for understanding the needs, preferences, and concerns of local residents, user groups, and stakeholders. By actively seeking input through public meetings, surveys, and workshops, trail planners can gather valuable insights that inform decision-making and ensure that trails are designed to meet the diverse needs of the community. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership and stewardship among residents, encouraging them to take pride in their trails and become actively involved in their own community's enhancement through trail expansion and upkeep.

Partnering with local governments is essential for the success of trail development initiatives. Collaborating with cities and counties allows trail planners to build a local stakeholder group to navigate the process, and access vital resources such as land and funding. Local governments often play a central role in land-use planning and infrastructure development, making them key stakeholders in trail projects. By building strong partnerships with local officials

and agencies, trail planners can align trail development efforts with broader community goals and priorities, ensuring that trails contribute positively to the overall quality of life throughout Southwest Minnesota.

Additionally, leveraging state and federal grants is another crucial aspect of trail planning and development. State and federal agencies often provide funding opportunities and technical assistance for trail projects through rigorous grant programs. By actively pursuing grants and other funding sources, trail planners can supplement local resources and maximize the impact of trail development efforts. Also, engaging with state and federal agencies enables trail planners to stay informed about best practices, regulations, and funding opportunities in trail planning and management. By leveraging state and federal support, local trail projects can achieve greater scale, sustainability, and long-term viability.

Finally, taking a more regional approach to trail planning is essential for creating interconnected trail networks that serve larger geographic areas and diverse communities. By collaborating with neighboring municipalities, counties, and regional planning entities, trail planners can identify opportunities for connectivity, coordination, and resource-sharing across jurisdictional boundaries. A regional approach allows trail planners to address common challenges and leverage shared resources. Moreover, regional trail networks can attract visitors, stimulate economic development, and promote tourism, thereby benefiting the entire region. By embracing a regional perspective, trail planners can create more resilient, equitable, and interconnected trail systems that enhance quality of life for residents and visitors alike.



REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN SUMMARY

The Southwest Minnesota Regional Trails Plan employs a detailed and systematic methodology to develop a plan for a future regional trail network. The planning process began with establishing a stakeholder group, conducting a thorough trails inventory, and placing trail counters to gather usage data. Subsequent phases included intercept surveys and in-depth interviews to collect user feedback and local insights, which informed the prioritization of potential trail corridors through a rigorous scoring system. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will ensure that the plan remains effective and responsive to community needs.

The current state of trails in Southwest Minnesota highlights a mix of long segments like the Camden Regional Trail and the Casey Jones State Trail, alongside many short, disconnected trails. The plan envisions connecting these segments into a unified network, enhancing regional connectivity. The area's natural environment, characterized mostly by prairies, lakes, and rivers supports many diverse recreational opportunities, but trail development has been less prioritized compared to other regions of Minnesota.

Addressing trail development challenges involves tackling funding constraints, land access issues, and topographical barriers, while also engaging with local communities to overcome stigmas and foster support. The plan incorporates best practices in trail maintenance and emphasizing community involvement as the best way to move toward a regional trail network. By addressing these impediments and leveraging funding and collaboration, the plan aims to create a well-connected and resilient trail network that enhances the quality of life and attracts visitors to Southwest Minnesota.

To move forward, Southwest Minnesota stakeholders must shift focus to a regional effort. Engaging local businesses, municipalities, and community organizations will be crucial for building support and ensuring that improvements align with regional needs and opportunities. Additionally, leveraging legislative support and securing funding for cornerstone projects will be essential for long-term success.

The SRDC needs to work with Explore Southwest Minnesota and other regional and local stakeholders to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy to attract visitors from both within and outside the region. Highlighting the unique features of Southwest Minnesota's trails and outdoor attractions through targeted campaigns can draw more tourists and boost local economies. By fostering partnerships and maintaining a focus on quality and future connectivity, the region can create a resilient tourism infrastructure that can thrive in the future.

End Notes

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Jackson Parks and Trails Master Plan, Jackson County, Terra Soma, LLC & HDR, Inc., 2023.

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Luverne Loop Trail Master Plan. United States, National Parks Service, City of Luverne, 2015.

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Marshall Bike Trails, Visit Marshall, 2024. Marshall Bike Trails - Visit Marshall (visitmarshallmn.com)

Pipestone Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, City of Pipestone, Big Muddy Workshop, Inc. and Banner Associates, Inc., 2011.

Statewide Bicycle System Plan, Minnesota Department of Transportation, 2016.

Tourism benefits of Parks & Trails, Parks & Trails Council of MN.

Windom Wetland Management District, Explore Minnesota, 2024.

Windom-Wolf Lake Connection Trail Plan, United States, National Parks Service, City of Windom, 2020.

2017 Minnesota Outdoor Activities Survey Findings Report, MN Department of Natural Resources, 2017.

2017 State Parks Visitor Survey, MN Department of Natural Resources, 2017.

140,000 direct jobs supported by outdoor recreation in Minnesota, Outdoor Industry Association, 2017.





Themes from Focus Groups

When you hear the term, Pedestrian / Biking trail, what does that term mean to you? What does it describe?

- Off road trail
- Shared space - walkers, bikers, runners
- Safety
- Recreation
- Fitness

Are you familiar with any local trails in your area? Do you currently use them, or have you used them in the past? Why/why not? (What do you use them for? What could you use them for?)

- Blue Mound Trail
- Luverne loop
- Pipestone
- Casey Jones
- Camden regional trail
- Worthington
- Spirit Lake trails
- Belmont
- Currie
- Mountain Lake
- Ramsey Park - Redwood Falls
- Kilen Woods
- Sioux Falls

Used for:

Exercise: walking, biking, running, taking pets out

What could they be used for?:

- Organized runs and bike rides
- Education/nature classes
- Skiing and snowshoeing in winter

What do you think of when you see the photo? What words or images come to mind? Why do you think this is?

Picture comparison:

Picture 1:

- Wide
- Safe
- Family Friendly
- Scenic
- Nature



Picture 2:

- Wide
- Boring
- Open
- Commuter path
- No shade



Picture 3:

- Wide
- Safe
- Well-maintained
- In a park
- Shade
- Family Friendly



Most people prefer the trails shown in pictures 1 and 3

What would motivate you to use a trail like this? Think about what the experience would look like and feel like for you to consider it?

- Accessibility
- Scenery
- Safety
- Nature
- Well-maintained
- Quiet
- Good signage

What are some of the barriers of using your local trails?

Lack of trails in some areas - poor accessibility in others
Lack of signage
Awareness of trails
Safety - traffic at access points and crossings, and trail damage (poor maintenance)
Some aren't ADA compliant
Lack of amenities like restrooms and water

When you go on vacation, do you ever seek out trails like these? Reasons why or why not?

Some yes, always
For some it depends on the purpose of the vacation
Many will seek out trails once they get somewhere, may not necessarily plan it in advance
If camping, then definitely

What else do you have for us? Do you have any comments you want to share with the whole group?

Would be nice to have trails that connect communities - for example, a connection from Luverne to Worthington or Sioux Falls, or Jackson to Spirit Lake. As well as connections between small communities.
There should be a focus on maintenance of trails
A more developed trails system in the SW could bring in lots of tourists and can be great for economic development
Would like some sort of destination on or near a trail - restaurant, ice cream shop, etc.



Themes from Interviews

What's your connection to this trail (these trails)? Do you use these trails and what for?

Walking
Biking
Recreation

How do you view the trail(s) in your community? What do you think they bring to your community?

Safe Connections
Family Time
Recreation
Growth
Positive

How does being out on a trail make you feel? What do you like about trails?

Relaxed
Refreshed
At peace

What is most important to you when it comes to choosing a trail? Does the presence of a trail help you decide whether to visit a particular park or city?

Accessibility
Location
Convenience
Little or no traffic
Yes, most like to visit places that have trail options

Does trail location matter? Where would you like to see trails in your area?

Yes, location matters for most

Place with scenic value

Along destinations

Connecting to areas of interest such as lakes

Connecting to areas where there's high traffic, work areas

What sorts of amenities/entertainment/scenery do you want/hope to see from trails in your area?

Access to drinking water

Restrooms

Benches and rest areas

Good signage

Connection to another location/destination

Do you think your trail is accessible to most people in the area? What might prevent someone from using a trail in your area? What can city do to improve this?

Most think that the trails in their area are accessible

Some are not accessible

1.) In isolated, remote areas

2.) Some do not meet ADA guidelines - non-paved hiking trails in Blue Mounds State Park

3.) Some are in need of maintenance - Currie loop

What can cities do to improve?

1.) Keep trails maintained

2.) Have better access points to trails

3.) Have lighting in remote areas for evenings

What do you think your city can do to improve trails/trail systems in your area?

Adding more trails

Expansion of existing trail systems

More signage

Continuous maintenance

Build in extra lanes on major highways that connect trails, for safety

**What do you think is the biggest benefit of having a trail in your area?
Health and Wellness - physical and mental**

Recreational opportunities

Safe place to walk and bike

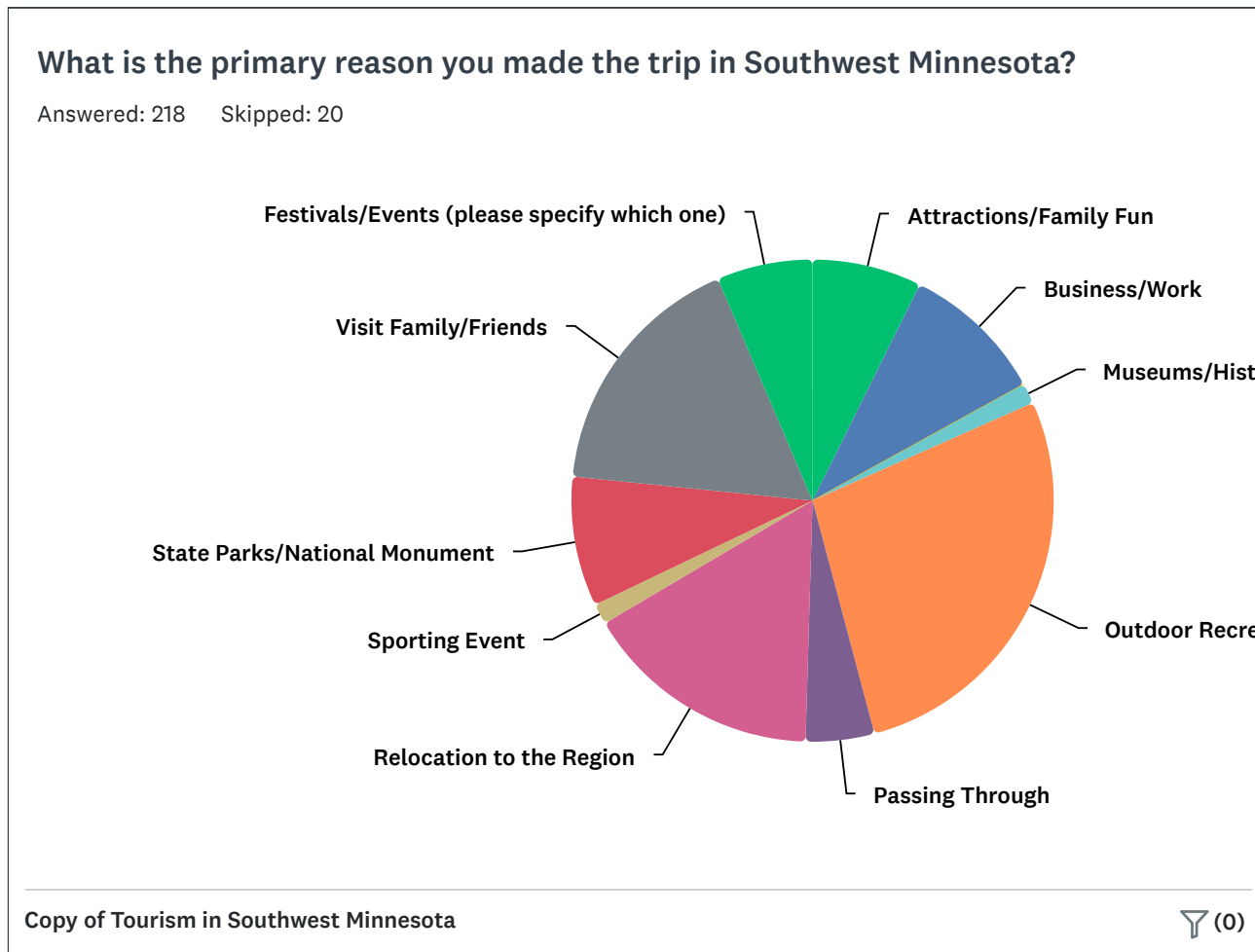
In some places, alternative option to driving

Do you see any drawbacks of trails in your area? What might be some negative thoughts about trails?

Some property owners don't want trails going by their property - trails users are littering, loud, etc

Additional maintenance expenses to the community

Tourism Survey Appendix



Are you staying overnight in So...

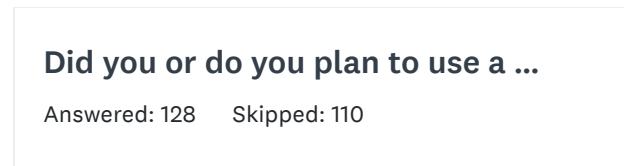
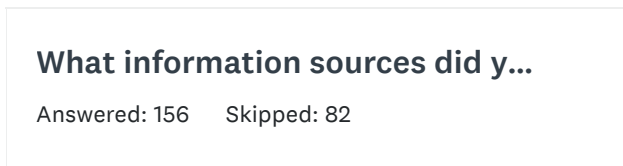
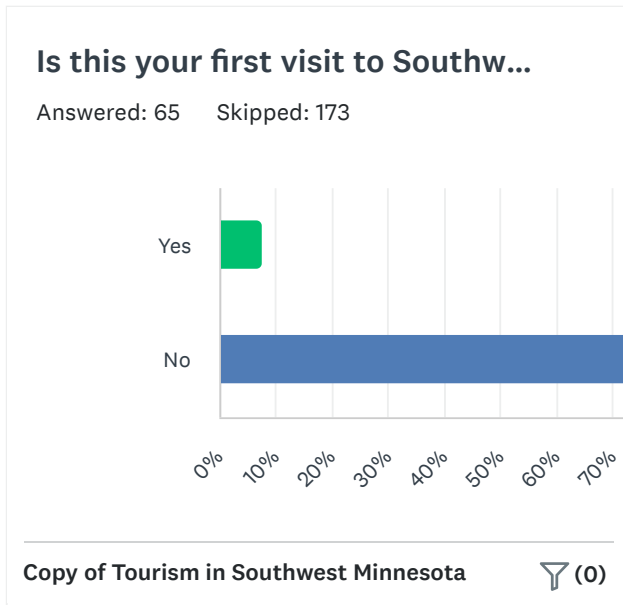
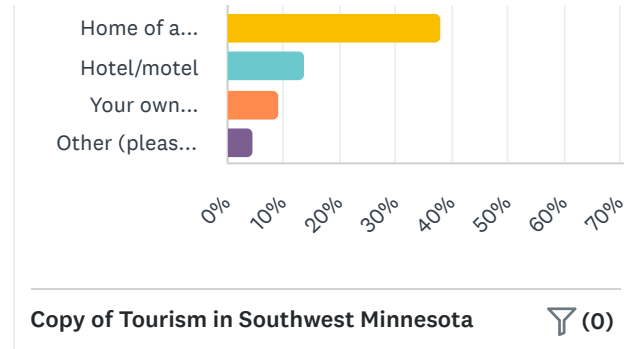
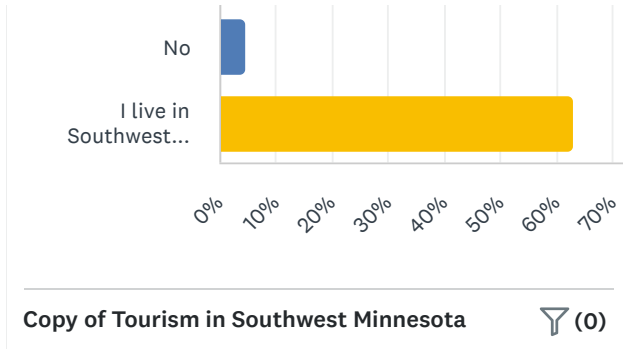
What type of accommodation a...

Dashboard Share Link

https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-kkg_2BO0B

COPY

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How would you rate your trail experience in Southwest Minnesota

Answered: 96 Skipped: 142

3.7★
average rating

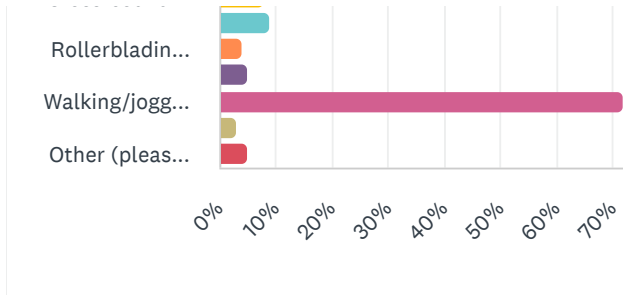


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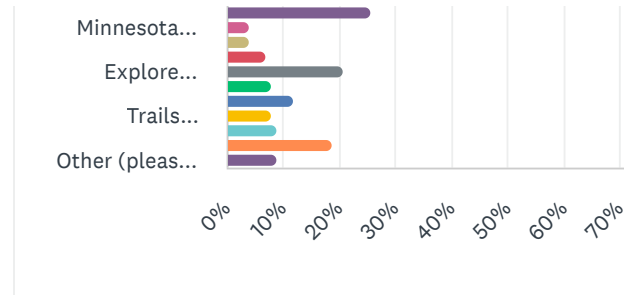
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How do you typically use trails...

How do you learn about trails i...



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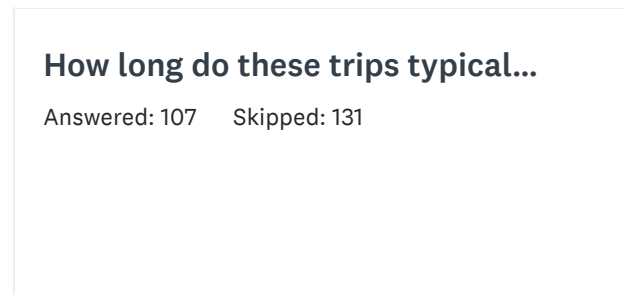
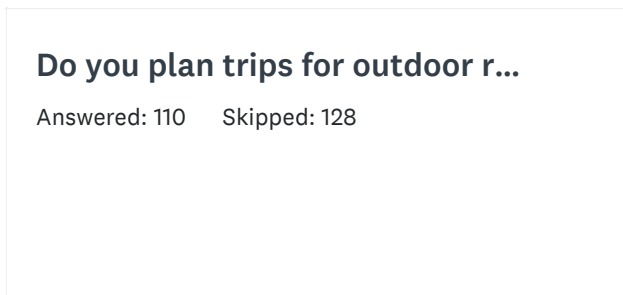
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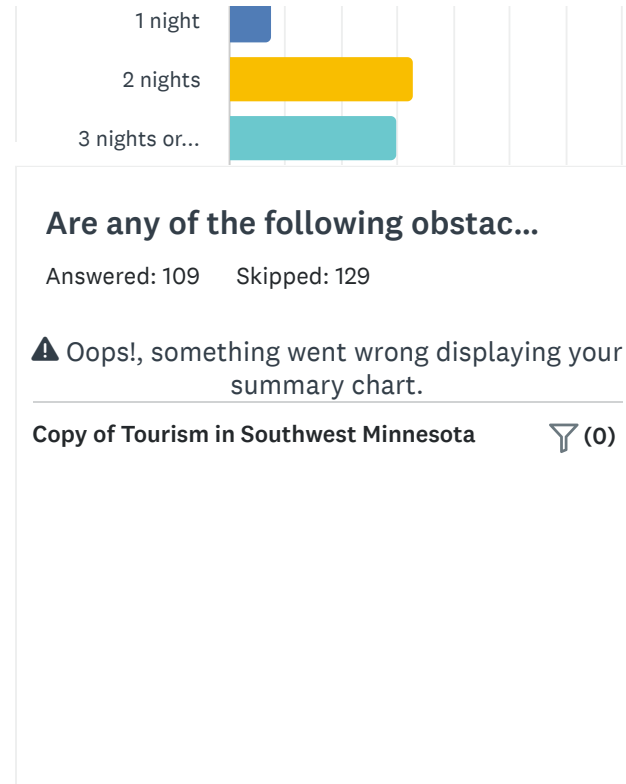
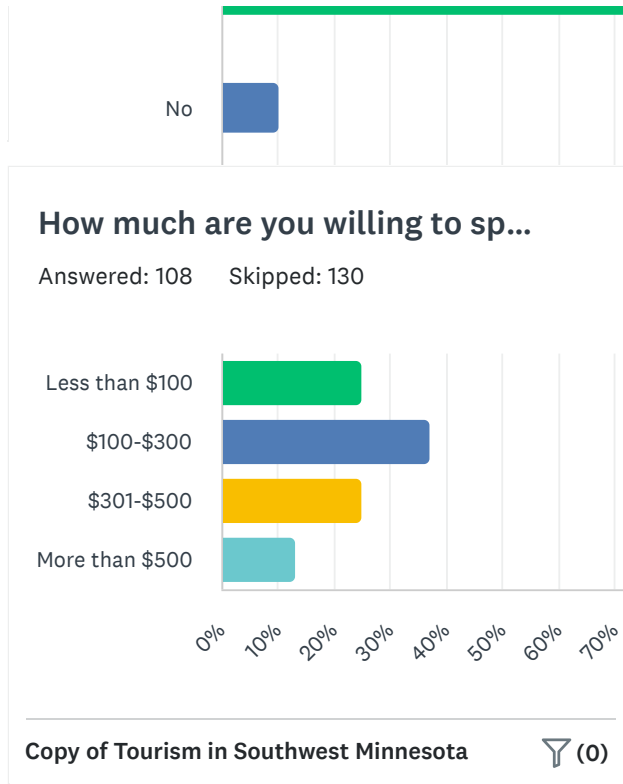


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Economic Contribution of Trails in Southwest Minnesota

Brigid Tuck, Senior Economic Impact Analyst and Kathryn Leys, Extension Educator
August 2024

Introduction

Southwest Minnesota features scenic, wide-open prairie landscapes. Visitors in the region can view herds of bison, climb quartzite cliffs, fish on lakes and streams, take a spin on a train turntable, and camp at several of Minnesota’s state parks.¹

The region is also home to several multi-use trails. There are state trails, such as the Casey Jones State Trail, along with local trails, including the Plum Creek trail in Redwood County and the Okabena Lake trail in Worthington. The trails provide outdoor and recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors in the region.



The Southwest Regional Development Commission (SRDC) was interested in understanding more about trail use, trail needs, and visitor and resident trail experiences. The ultimate goal is to create a trail plan including a shared, regional vision of trail networks in the region. In this process, the SRDC asked University of Minnesota Extension to measure the current economic contribution of the trails. This report provides a summary of the analysis.

For this report, Southwest Minnesota includes Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, and Rock counties.

Overview of the Approach

Economic impact includes direct, indirect, and induced effects. Direct effect is spending directly for the project or activity. In this analysis, it is the spending by visitors and residents using the trails in the region. To measure total spending related to the trails, Extension needed two pieces of information – one, the number of trail users and two, spending per user. The SRDC, with partners, performed trail counts on nine trail systems in the region. They provided those trail counts to Extension. The SRDC also conducted a survey of trail users, which contained questions regarding spending during trail use. These two data points were used to quantify the direct effects of trail users.

Indirect and induced effects are also known as “ripple” effects. Spending for goods and services in the supply chain generates indirect effects. For example, while in the region using the trails, visitors dine out at local restaurants, causing restaurants to buy more of their supplies. Spending by the restaurants’ employees — spurred by their paychecks — generates induced effects. Workers are paid and then purchase items, such as health care, housing, and groceries.

Economic impact terms

Direct effect: initial change

Indirect effect: business-to-business impacts

Induced effect: consumer-to-business impacts

¹ <https://www.exploreswmn.com/>

Extension used the input-output model IMPLAN to measure the economic contribution of trails in Southwest Minnesota. Input-output models capture the flow of goods and services within an economy. Once the pattern is established, the model can show how a change in one area of the economy (say construction spending) affects other parts of the economy (such as manufacturing and health care).

Economic Contribution

Direct Effect

As mentioned, Extension calculated the direct effect of trail users by multiplying the number of trail users by average spending per user. Spending patterns, in turn, differ by the type of user, specifically for visitors (those spending the night or traveling from outside the region) versus residents.

Spending Patterns

To get an estimate of spending by trail users, the SRDC conducted a survey, which received 238 responses. Of those, 147 (63 percent) reported being residents of Southwest Minnesota and 86 (37 percent) reported being visitors.

On average, trail users who were residents reported spending \$125.80 per person per trip. Meanwhile, trail users who were visitors reported spending of \$216.90 (Table 1). For residents, dining out was their highest expenditure, while visitors spent the highest amount on lodging. Remember, respondents identified themselves as living in the region, which is geographically quite large, so they could travel more than an hour or two and still be in the region.

Table 1: Spending Per Person Per Trip, Trail Users in Southwest Minnesota

Category	Residents	Visitors
Restaurants/bars	\$33.00	\$51.60
Lodging	\$0.00	\$73.00
Shopping	\$28.00	\$30.70
Recreation-related	\$20.10	\$14.40
Groceries	\$15.60	\$26.50
Equipment rentals	\$1.30	\$1.50
Entertainment/attractions	\$25.80	\$14.10
Other	\$2.00	\$5.10
Total	\$125.80	\$216.90

Trail User Counts

The SRDC partnered with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and EcoVisio to count trail users. Trail counters were placed on nine trails within the region. Based on those trail counts, Extension estimated there were 65,338 trail users in the warm months of 2024 (Table 2). The counters provided a count of the average daily use of each trail. From there, Extension extrapolated for a 183-day season (April 1 to October 1). Extension then modified the counts to adjust for multiple passes by the same counter (adjustment for round trip). For most of the trails, the majority of users pass by the same counter twice. The one exception is the Lake Okabena trail in Worthington, where people may pass the counter multiple times given the trail’s use by families and children.

Table 2: Trail User Counts in Southwest Minnesota, Warm Season

Trail	Average Daily Use	Adjustment for Round Trip	Estimated Number of Users
City of Worthington (Okabena Lake)	438	33%	26,451
City of Luverne (Loop)	207	50%	18,941
City of Marshall (Camden Trail)	103	50%	9,425
City of Currie (Casey Jones Trail loop)	27	50%	2,471
City of Pipestone (Indian Lake Trail)	24	50%	2,196
City of Tyler	19	50%	1,739
Redwood County (Plum Creek Trail)	17	50%	1,556
City of Windom (Wolf Lake Trail)	15	50%	1,373
City of Jackson	13	50%	1,190
Total			65,338

For purposes of economic contribution, it is also important to understand the motivation of trail users. Those in the region with a primary intention to use the trail generate economic activity attributable to the trail. If people are in the region primarily for another reason, say camping at a state park, and then use the trail as part of the visit, their spending is attributable to the state park. In the survey, 27 percent of residents and 35 percent of visitors indicated the trails were a primary driver in their visit, resulting in a count of 19,470 users (Table 3).

Table 3: Distribution of Trail Users in Southwest Minnesota

Category	Count
Total trail users	65,338
-Resident trail users (63%)	41,222
-Visitor trail users (37%)	24,116
Trail users with trails as primary purpose	19,570
-Residents primary purpose (27%)	11,130
-Visitors primary purpose (35%)	8,440

Total Direct Effect

In total, trail users spent an estimated \$3.2 million in Southwest Minnesota in the warm season (Table 4). This is the direct effect of trail users.

Table 4: Total Spending, Trail Users in Southwest Minnesota

Category	Residents	Visitors	Total
Restaurants/bars	\$367,065	\$435,765	
Lodging	\$0	\$615,862	
Shopping	\$311,568	\$258,736	
Recreation-related	\$224,083	\$121,265	
Groceries	\$173,217	\$223,861	
Equipment rentals	\$14,645	\$12,520	
Entertainment/attractions	\$286,891	\$119,380	
Other	\$21,959	\$43,329	
Total	\$1,399,428	\$1,830,718	\$3,230,146

Total Effect

In total, trails in Southwest Minnesota generated \$4.5 million of economic activity in 2023 (Table 5). This included \$1.3 million in labor income. The trails supported 59 jobs.

Table 5: Total Economic Contribution, Trail Users in Southwest Minnesota

Category	Output	Employment	Labor Income
Direct	\$3,230,140	40	\$893,920
Indirect	\$806,910	10	\$223,060
Induced	\$510,890	9	\$141,870
Total	\$4,547,940	59	\$1,258,850

Trail users directly spent \$3.2 million, with indirect and induced effects of \$1.3 million. This \$1.3 million in economic activity was at businesses that might not be visited by a trail user, but still benefit from the trails in the region. For example, an accounting firm might handle bookkeeping and payroll for restaurants that serve trail users and might file taxes for workers at that restaurant. A trail user probably does not bike up to the accounting firm's entrance and walk in for service, but the fact that they are in the region means the accounting firm stays in business.

The top industries that benefit from trail users in this way are shown in Chart 1. The real estate, utilities, and management of companies industries top the list. Real estate includes mortgage payments by homeowners, rental payments by businesses and residents, and real estate transactions costs (such as listing agents). Indirect effects reflect the rents that businesses who serve trail users paid. Induced effects reflect the housing workers paid for with their income from serving trail users.

Chart 1: Top 10 Industries Affected, Indirect and Induced Effects, Sorted by Output



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The Role of Multi-Use Trails in Southwest Minnesota's Economy

Multi-use trails contribute to the economy through trail user spending and associated ripple effects. In addition, the presence of trails can also contribute to overall economic development and growth in the region.

Traditional economic development efforts focused on business attraction and retention. As the economy has shifted, however, economic development initiatives have shifted as well. In recent years, economic development has shifted toward residential recruitment. The idea is that residents bring jobs with them.²

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the greatest constraints on economic growth in Greater Minnesota has been workforce availability, pushing economic development efforts even more in the direction of residential recruitment. In a MinnPost article, researcher Kelly Asche noted, "Now we have to think 'OK, wait, we have jobs, how do we incentivize people to fill these jobs' and that's a totally different ball game because we're talking about childcare. We're talking about housing. We're talking about all these quality of life issues."³

The demand for workers is increasingly a pressure in Southwest Minnesota. In 2023, there were 3,288 more job vacancies than people seeking work (Chart 2). Employers and communities are becoming increasingly creative in recruiting employees. And the economy needs people to be available to work.

Chart 2: Job Vacancy and Unemployment Statistics, Southwest Minnesota Planning Region
(Source: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development)



Contributing to quality of life

A main component of residential recruitment is marketing the community's quality of life. Quality of life is an umbrella term that can include a wide variety of factors. Research into quality of life in rural communities shows scenic beauty, quality of environment, positive atmosphere for raising kids, desire to live in a rural setting, small-town atmosphere, and recreational opportunities are top factors in location decisions.⁴

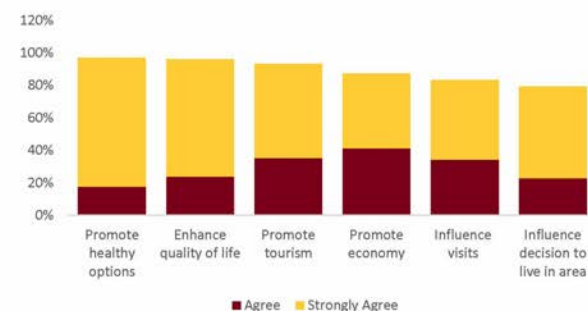
² Bodin, C., Linscheid, N., Winchester, B. (2021, September). Greater Minnesota's resident recruitment advantage. Minnesota Economic Trends. Department of Employment and Economic Development. Retrieved from <https://mn.gov/deed/newscenter/publications/trends/september-2021/greater-minnesota.jsp>

³ Kaul, G. (2021, November 17). The worker shortage is affecting every corner of the state. But it's hitting Greater Minnesota especially hard. *MinnPost*. Retrieved from https://www.minnpost.com/greater-minnesota/2021/11/the-worker-shortage-is-affecting-every-corner-of-the-state-but-its-hitting-greater-minnesota-especially-hard/?fbclid=IwAR14f0ciX7Vz4V23xvbgQAiW9p2Doaj7old19D50mNoldk_PclA4HwXm058s

⁴ Johnson, J. & Rasker, R. (1995). The role of economic and quality of life values in rural business location. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 11(4), 405-416.

Respondents to the survey indicate trails play an important role in quality of life and residential recruitment. Ninety-six percent of survey respondents indicated trails enhance quality of life (Chart 3). Meanwhile, 87 percent indicated trails improve the economy and 79 percent said trails would influence their decision to move into a community.

Chart 3: The Role of Trails, Trail Survey Respondents, Summer 2024



Improving health outcomes

Survey respondents (97 percent) were most positive about the role trails play in promoting healthy options. Medical research demonstrates that regular exercise and physical activity has positive impacts on health outcomes. A review of more than 220 studies showed that regular exercise decreases mortality by 13 percent and improves health-related quality of life.⁵ These improved health outcomes lead to savings. Adults who began exercise in or before middle age saved anywhere from \$824 to \$1,874 annually on health care costs after retirement.⁶

Notes on the Analysis

Average spending per person for residents was higher in this survey than in similar University of Minnesota Extension studies. The study did have a relatively smaller sample size, which is worth noting. It also could be that since the region is larger than a typical study (i.e., a county), people can travel larger distances and spend more on a trip compared to other studies.

Learn more at extension.umn.edu/community-development

⁵ Posadzki, P., Pieper, D., Bajpai, R., Makaruk, H., Konsgen, N., Neuhaus, A.L., & Semwal, M. (2020). Exercise/physical activity and health outcomes: an overview of Cochrane systematic reviews. *BMC Public Health* 20, 1724. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09855-3>

⁶ Coughlan, D., Saint-Maurice, P.F., Carlson, S.A., Fulton, J., & Matthews, C. (2021). Leisure time physical activity throughout adulthood is associated with lower Medicare costs: evidence from the linked NIH-AARP diet and health study cohort. *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine*, 7(1). doi: 10.1136/bmjsem-2021-001038

Corridor Scoring Criteria

Community Connections

Trail Experience

The proposed trail provides users with a high-quality trail experience and/or destination.

0-points: The proposed trail has nothing that would attract either first-time or recurring visitors.

3-Points: The proposed trail has some things that may attract new visitors.

5-Points: The Proposed Trail provides a high-quality experience and/or destination that attracts new and returning users.

Cultural/Natural Considerations

The proposed trail takes the preservation, ethics, and/or interpretations of cultural and/or natural resources along the corridor into consideration.

0-points: The proposed trail does not include any considerations for the preservation, ethics, and or interpretations of the cultural and or natural resources.

3-Points: There may be some considerations of the preservation, ethics, and or interpretations of the cultural and or natural resources. However, the connection to the trail user and their involvement is unclear.

5-Points: The proposed trail corridor includes considerations of the preservation, ethics, and or interpretations of the cultural and or natural sources. The role of the trail user is clear and outlined in the proposal.

Accessibility

The project addresses access, use, and benefits to persons with disabilities, seniors, and other traditionally underserved groups.

0-points: It is cumbersome for persons with disability, seniors, and other traditionally underserved groups to access, and use the proposed trail.

3-Points: The proposed trail can be accessed by people with disabilities, seniors, and other traditionally underserved groups.

5-Points: The proposed trail/trailhead has multiple access points and is connected to neighborhoods where people with disabilities, seniors, and other traditionally underserved groups live.

Fills Gaps

The proposed trail fills gaps in opportunities in the regional and/or county and/or enhances the communities along or near the corridor.

0-points: The proposed trail corridor does not bring any new recreational opportunities to the communities adjacent to the corridor.

3-Points: The proposed trail brings some new recreational opportunities to a community adjacent to the corridor. There is some community enhancement.

5-Points: The proposed trails bring new recreation opportunities that are in demand to the adjacent and nearby communities. The construction if the trail would not only enhance the communities along the corridor but those nearby as well.

Wayfinding

It is easy to locate and access the potential trail.

0-points: The proposed trail would be difficult to locate and access.

3-Points: The proposed trail can be located and accessed by local community members and experienced trail users. There may be some signage at the access point. There may be a trailhead.

5-Points: The proposed trail can be located and accessed by new users with minimal navigation assistance. There is a proposed trailhead and there is signage that navigates people from outside the community to it.

Deliverability

Ease of Land Acquisition/Easement

There are landowners that are willing to sell, donate or provide easements for potential trail corridors.

0-points: The proposed trail is entirely on private property. Property owners are against the proposed trail or have not indicated an interest in granting easements for trail construction.

3-Points: Some of the proposed trail is on private land. There has been minimal opposition to trail construction and some of the private landowners have expressed interest in granting easements for trail construction along the corridor.

5-Points: Land has already been purchased and or easements have already been granted along the entire corridor.

Maintenance/Operations Responsibilities

There is a plan and or agreement for continued maintenance of the trail.

0-points: There has been no discussion or correspondence with any of the adjacent entities/potential trail owners regarding trail maintenance.

3-Points: Entities along the corridor have been in discussion regarding the maintenance of the trail. There has been no written or verbal commitment.

5-Points: There is verbal and written commitment to the maintenance of the potential trail corridor.

Corridor Scoring Criteria

Fiscal Responsibility

There is a local entity willing to be a fiscal host for future funding.

0-points: There are no entities along the potential trail corridor with the capacity to apply for and administer future grants.

3-Points: At least one entity has expressed interest and/or agreement in applying for and administering future grant funds.

5-Points: At least one entity has agreed to apply for and administer future grants. Co-applicants and potential co-sponsors have also been contacted and they have expressed their interest and/or agreement in applying for these grants.

Local Champions

There are local champions/partnerships with experience willing to work and advocate for the potential trail.

0-points: There are no community members or groups with experience willing to work and advocate for the potential trial.

3-Points: There are some community members or groups with experience willing to work and advocate for the potential trial.

5-Points: There are community members or groups with experience willing to work and advocate for the potential trial. These community members or groups are organized and are keeping track of the progress of the proposed trail.

Level of Planning/Design

There are plans, and potentially, designing and engineering steps already taken on the trail corridor.

0-points: There has been no level of planning or design done for the proposed trail corridor.

3-Points: There has been some planning, design and preliminary engineering completed for the proposed trail corridor.

5-Points: Planning design and engineering for the trail corridor have been completed for the proposed trail corridor.

Planning & Support

Demand

There is a clear user demand for the potential trail.

0-points: There is no demand for the potential trail corridor.

3-Points: There is some demand for the potential trail corridor. Few stakeholders have shown interest.

5-Points: There is a clear demand from various stakeholders within and outside potential corridors' adjacent communities.

Connectivity

0-points: There is no connection to other trails, sidewalk systems, or destinations that already exist.

3-Points: There are potential connections via trail spurs to other trails, sidewalk systems, or destinations that already exist.

5-Points: There are multiple direct connections to other trails, sidewalk systems, and destinations that already exist.

Level of Community Involvement

Community members have been involved and are invited in the continued planning of the potential trail.

0-points: Community members have not been involved or invited in the continued planning of the potential trail. Community members are unaware of the potential trail corridor.

3-Points: Community members have been involved in the planning of the potential trail in the form of surveys or focus groups.

5-Points: Community members have been involved in planning the potential trail and are informed on the proposed trail's progress.

Amenities

The potential trail considers either currently available or future appropriate amenities.

0-points: There are either no current or planned amenities along the potential trail corridor.

3-Points: There is at least one current amenity along the potential corridor. There are plans for future complementary amenities along the corridor in the future.

5-Points: There is a complete network of current and/or planned amenities along the potential corridor.

Corridor Scoring Criteria

Resource Protection

The potential trail aims to protect or enhance or protect the natural resources along the corridor.

0-points: The construction of the proposed trail takes away from the natural resources along the corridor.

3-Points: The construction of the proposed trail includes some mitigation techniques that protect the natural resources along the corridor.

5-Points: The construction of the proposed trail includes mitigation techniques that protect and enhances the natural resources along the corridor.

Potential Tourism Impact

Economic Potential

There are opportunities and support for future businesses along the potential trail

0-points: The proposed trail would have no positive economic impact along the proposed trail corridor.

3-Points: There are current businesses along the corridor that could benefit from the construction of the potential trail.

5-Points: There has been some form of indication that the construction of the proposed trail corridor would lead to new businesses and/or the expansion of current businesses.

Destination

The potential trail connects to a touristic destination and/or creates a high-quality tourism potential.

0-points: The proposed trail would have no positive economic impact along the proposed trail corridor.

3-Points: There are current businesses along the corridor that could benefit from the construction of the potential trail.

5-Points: There has been some form of indication that the construction of the proposed trail corridor would lead to new businesses and/or the expansion of current businesses.

Unique experience

There are points of interest along the potential trail that provide unique experiences.

0-points: The proposed trail has no points of interest along the corridor.

3-Points: There is some points of interest along the corridor.

5-Points: Using the trail is a unique experience along the entire corridor with many points of interest.

Proximity of other experiences

There are unique experiences within proximity of the potential trail.

0-points: There are no unique experiences within an hour drive of the potential trail corridor.

3-Points: There is another unique experience within an hour drive of the potential trail corridor.

5-Points: There are other unique experiences that are adjacent to or near the proposed trail.

Businesses

There are current businesses along the corridor that potential trail users demand.

0-points: There are no current businesses along the potential corridor that would meet potential trail user demands.

3-Points: There is at least one business that meets more than one trail user demand for lodging, entertainment food etc. There is at least one trail user demand not being met.

5-Points: There are already multiple options for lodging, entertainment, food, and other trail user needs along the corridor.



Produced by the

