

3. Trail Alignments and Connections

Overview of the Trail Alignment Study Area

The CRVST is a legislatively authorized state trail which, when complete, will provide a connection between the Paul Bunyan State Trail in Crow Wing State Park and the Soo Line Trail, effectively linking the Central Lakes, Lake Wobegon, Soo Line, Paul Bunyan, Heartland, Cuyuna Lakes, and Mi-Gi-Zi Trails into one continuous recreational route. The trail will provide access to Charles A. Lindbergh State Park, Crow Wing State Park, the Crow Wing and Mississippi Rivers and many other natural and historic sites. It will connect the communities of Randall, Pillager, Baxter, Fort Ripley, and Little Falls. It will put Little Falls at the hub of an interconnected trail system of an estimated 400 miles.

In addition, the Camp Ripley/Veterans State Trail will be a part of the **Mississippi River Trail (MRT)** which includes over 3,000 miles of on-road pedestrian and bicycle pathways from the Mississippi River headwaters in Itasca, Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. Portions of the northern segment of the MRT are located within the CRVST study area. The Paul Bunyan State Trail is also part of the MRT route. The current MRT planning effort is being led by MnDOT. The route designations at this point are not fixed, and segments of the CRVST may become the MRT route in the future.

Portions of the CRVST study area also encompass the **Great River Road**, which offers 575 miles of historic and scenic touring for motorized vehicle use through the heart of Minnesota. The byway meanders along the Mississippi River in the Little Falls area on CSAH 52.

Camp Ripley has a dominant presence within the CRVST study area. Relevant to trail planning activities near the Camp is the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program, a federal program with influence on land ownership and land use surrounding the Camp. The ACUB was authorized by the fiscal year 2003 Department of Defense Authorization Act. The Act authorizes a military installation to enter into an agreement with a state, local government, or private conservation organization to limit encroachment on lands neighboring the installation. The Minnesota National Guard's ACUB program for Camp Ripley is known locally as "*Central Minnesota Prairie to Pines Partnership...preserving our heritage.*" The ACUB encompasses a three-mile buffer around Camp Ripley's boundaries, coterminous with the trail corridor study area. Since 2004, the National Guard, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), and the DNR have collaborated to protect over 12,000 acres of privately-owned land through easements and purchases, as well as about 16,500 acres dedicated for ACUB purposes by Morrison County and The Nature Conservancy.

It should be noted that DNR easements on private land are intended to maximize habitat protection and thus prohibit trail use, while easements held by BWSR could potentially allow trails, if landowners are interested in this option. Most easements within the trail study corridor are held by BWSR, and most future easements will be as well.



Planning Segments

For the purposes of this plan, the CRVST corridor has been divided into six primary planning segments, some with sub-segments, for ease of describing and discussing the resources and features along the trail corridor. Due to the large area this future trail covers, it is likely funding for the construction of the trail will be phased. Therefore, segments and sub-segments were developed in a manner that will facilitate the implementation of the trail in phases as funding becomes available. No alignments have been secured at the time of writing this plan.

The planning segments areas are illustrated in Figure 4 and identified as:

Segment 1: Crow Wing State Park to the City of Pillager

Segment 2: West Side of Camp Ripley from Pillager to Randall

Segment 3: South Side of Camp Ripley from Randall to Minnesota State Highway 371 (MN 371)

Segment 4: MN 371 to Crow Wing State Park

Segment 5: City of Little Falls Area

Segment 6: City of Little Falls to the Soo Line Regional Trail

This section of the plan includes:

- A description of landscape highlights for each trail segment listed above, segment criteria for the location of the trail corridor, and identification of trail alignment options;
- A map for each trail segment illustrating the search corridor and key features identified;
- A description and map of each community that may connect with the trail;
- Descriptions of county and state parks and trails or other recreational resources the trail will connect; and
- Discussion of next steps required for each segment based on the necessary implementation stages.

Cass County Trail Study

At the same time as the CRVST corridor study, Cass County initiated a study of a potential future regional multi-use trail connection between the City of Pillager and Baxter. Realizing the CRVST study area included the consideration of a state trail connection between Pillager and the Crow Wing State Park, and recognizing the City of East Gull Lake trail improvements and planning, Cass County felt the time was opportune to also consider this regional trail connection. Although there may be some overlap in potential trail alignment options between the CRVST Study and Cass County's Trail Study, the Cass County Trail is meant to fulfill a local and/or regional gap in the trail system between these communities, outside of the state trail function, and provide connections for trail planning initiatives of communities in the Gull Lake Metropolitan Area.

Segment 1: Crow Wing State Park to the City of Pillager

Description of Trail Environment

The northern segment of the CRVST will stretch from Crow Wing State Park to the City of Pillager with connections to the Paul Bunyan Trail, a potential Cass County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 18 trail with links to the Gull Lake trail system, and the communities of Baxter, Brainerd and Pillager. Key features of the landscape in this segment include the Paul Bunyan Trail, Crow Wing State Park, Mississippi, Crow Wing and Gull Rivers, Fisherman’s Bridge/Sylvan Dam, Pillsbury State Forest, a potential trailhead location in the City of Pillager, and existing trails, parks and other destinations within the communities of Baxter, Brainerd and Pillager.

The existing trailhead in Baxter for the Paul Bunyan State Trail is a major trail access/parking lot and rest area located on Excelsior Road. With a population of approximately 5,500, Baxter ranks as the trail region’s third largest city. As Brainerd’s western neighbor, Baxter is a major partner in a rapidly growing urban complex. While its residential areas are primarily suburban in character, the city contains a number of attractive lakes and many acres of natural landscape. The Mississippi River forms its southern boundary.

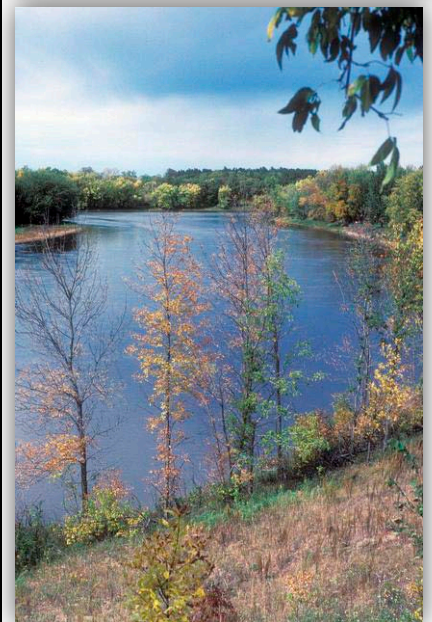
The Paul Bunyan State Trail in Baxter is currently in the planning stages for extension through Crow Wing State Park. The proposed alignment of this extension is shown in Figure 5. The state park is an important resource in this area, with hiking trails, camping, boat launch, interpretive displays, historic sites and scenic lookouts over the confluence of the Mississippi and Crow Wing Rivers. Motorized uses of trails within the park boundaries are prohibited. The portion of Crow Wing State Park south of the Mississippi River can be accessed from MN 371. The portion of the state park north of the river is accessible from Oak Road and Hazel Lake Road.

The landscape west of Baxter extending from the Camp Ripley border to the southern edge of Pillsbury State Forest is largely comprised of lakes, rivers, and wetlands, and some suburban development. This lakes area is especially scenic, with hilly terrain providing scenic views of the lakes and wooded areas. A large portion of the land surrounding the Gull River and portions of the Crow Wing River in this area is owned by Minnesota Power, a division of ALLETE, Inc., for hydroelectric operations. Fisherman’s Bridge and Sylvan Dam are located off of CSAH 36 on the Gull River. Fisherman’s Bridge offers access to fishing and a boat launch.

DNR’s Brainerd Area Wildlife office has been working with Minnesota Power for several years on the concept of creating a Wildlife Management Area along the Gull River through either fee title acquisition or a cooperative lease agreement. The Chippewa Agency site near the confluence of the Crow Wing and Gull rivers has been recommended as a future addition to Crow Wig State Park (see discussion under Cultural Resources).

West of the Gull River, the landscape is characteristic of a more rural setting, including agriculture, woodlands, and rural residential development. Many of the residential subdivisions in this area are platted up to the edge of the Crow Wing River, making trail development in this area challenging.

The Pillsbury State Forest is another important feature in this area, located north of MN 210 and approximately halfway between the Gull River and the City of Pillager. Pillsbury State Forest offers recreational facilities including the Walter E. Stark Assembly Area



Crow Wing State Park

and Horse Campground, with 27 miles of equestrian and nature trails, Shafer Lake, Green Bass Lake, and Rock Lake Campground. The trail system within the state forest is especially popular with equestrians and mountain bikers during the summer and cross-country skiers in the winter.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Connect with Paul Bunyan State Trail
- Utilize existing trail on northbound lane of MN 371
- Utilize opportunities on Minnesota Power land
- Connect to city-owned land in Pillager (future trailhead location)
- Utilize the existing CSAH 1 river crossing bridge through Pillager if possible
- Maximize views along the Mississippi and Crow Wing rivers where possible
- Utilize publicly owned land where possible
- Provide for both motorized and non-motorized uses
- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the landscape
- Minimize wetland impacts
- Avoid acquisition of high quality agricultural lands
- Avoid negative impacts on rare, endangered, or threatened species, and avoid fragmentation or disturbance of significant native plant communities

Trail Alignment Options

In order to facilitate implementation of this segment in phases, Segment 1 was split into two sub-segments. The first sub-segment, Segment 1A, runs from the Crow Wing State Park/Paul Bunyan State Trail to approximately CSAH 36 as illustrated in Figure 5. This sub-segment area was defined because it provides logical termini: Paul Bunyan State Trail to proposed CSAH 18 trail (near CSAH 36).

Key factors driving trail alignment options in this sub-segment include the location of the Mississippi River, the Paul Bunyan State Trail and extension to Crow Wing State Park, the large area of land owned by Minnesota Power surrounding the Gull River and along portions of the Crow Wing River, the Great River Energy powerline land, and the existing and proposed trail systems in this area. Several trail alignment options exist for Segment 1A as identified below. All alignment options illustrated in this sub-segment are identified as multi-use at this point. Further study is needed to determine how each use (motorized and non-motorized) can be accommodated. Discussions with Baxter city staff indicated that motorized trail users are currently allowed within county and state road rights of way through the community or users are allowed on city streets if traveling to a nearby trail.

Multi-use Trail (Segment 1A)

- Two options exist for connecting the CRVST to the Paul Bunyan Trail. The first is a connection to the existing Paul Bunyan State Trail in Baxter. The second is a connection across the Mississippi River within the Crow Wing State Park to connect to the proposed Paul Bunyan Trail extension within the state park boundaries.
- From the existing Paul Bunyan State Trail in Baxter, follow CSAH 48 to MN 210 to CSAH 36.
- From the existing Paul Bunyan State Trail in Baxter, follow County Road (CR) 170 to CSAH 36 (on the east side of the Gull River). At this point the trail could go north along CSAH 36 to MN 210 or if an agreement was reached with

CAMP RIPLEY/VETERANS STATE TRAIL

Minnesota Power, could travel through their land surrounding the Gull River to connect to CSAH 36 (on the west side of the Gull River).

- From the existing Paul Bunyan State Trail in Baxter, follow the Great River Energy easement corridor (south of CR 170) westerly to Minnesota Power land adjacent to the Mississippi River (south of CSAH 36). From this point, connect to CSAH 36 and to MN 210.
- From the Paul Bunyan State Trail extension through Crow Wing State Park, bridge the Mississippi River and connect to either Hardy Lake Road or Oak Road and travel north to CSAH 36 and to MN 210.

The second sub-segment, Segment 1B, runs from the junction of CSAH 36/MN 210 through the City of Pillager (see Figure 6). This sub-segment was defined because it provides logical termini (from the proposed CSAH 18 trail into the City of Pillager) to allow for phased construction.

Key factors driving trail alignment options in this area include several rural residential subdivisions adjacent to the Crow Wing River, the narrowing of land between MN 210, the BNSF railroad and the Crow Wing River, and the presence of Camp Ripley south of the river. Due to proximity of military training operations along the north side of the Camp, there are no opportunities for the CRVST on Camp Ripley land in this area.

Because of these constraints, there are few trail alignment options in this area. Trail alignment options described below are identified as multi-use at this point. Further study is needed to determine how each use (motorized and non-motorized) can be accommodated. Discussions with staff at the City of Pillager indicated the city does not currently have any restrictions on motorized trail uses through the community.

Multi-use Trail (Segment 1B)

- Follow MN 210 to CSAH 1 in the City of Pillager, with a connection to the land owned by the City of Pillager (east of the city, south of the railroad tracks) which may be used as a future trailhead.
- Use CSAH 1 through the City of Pillager, utilizing the CSAH 1 Bridge over the Crow Wing River. Discussions with county staff indicate the existing CSAH 1 Bridge is not wide enough to accommodate trail users. However, the bridge is scheduled to be re-decked in the next few years and depending upon the underlying structure, may be able to be widened to accommodate the trail, without a complete reconstruction of the bridge.
- Follow the existing grant-in-aid snowmobile route through the city which runs from MN 210, south along CSAH 1, east on Cedar Avenue, south on 2nd Street, east on CR 201, south on Servo Trail and west on Maple Avenue to connect back with CSAH 1.

Trail access

Crow Wing State Park offers parking and restroom facilities that could be used as a CRVST trailhead location for non-motorized trail uses. In addition, the southernmost trailhead of the Paul Bunyan State Trail is located on Excelsior Road in Baxter, northeast of the Camp Ripley/Veteran's State Trail study area. (As the Paul Bunyan State Trail is extended into Crow Wing State Park, it is expected to include an additional trailhead.)

As trail development and planning continues, potential additional locations for parking, restrooms and scenic views of the Crow Wing River, Mississippi River and Gull River

CAMP RIPLEY/VETERANS STATE TRAIL

should be explored. River view areas could serve as both rest areas and interpretive sites, depending on the location.

The City of Pillager owns land on the northeast side of town near the cemetery and has expressed interest in using this area for a future CRVST trailhead location. The land overlooks the Crow Wing River and is large enough to accommodate parking and restroom facilities as needed.

Pillager Dam is located southwest of the city along the Crow Wing River. The dam offers fishing, camping and a public water access.

Communities and Connections

City of Brainerd

The City of Brainerd is the county seat and largest city in Crow Wing County. More than 400 lakes are located within 20 miles of the city. The Mississippi River runs through the city in a northeast – southwest direction. The lakes and the river make the Brainerd area a popular vacation destination for water-based recreation such as fishing and boating. State highways 371B, 210, 18 and 25 all converge within the community.

History

Much of central Minnesota was originally the territory of the Ojibwe. A group of explorers led by Zebulon Pike were the first Euro-Americans to visit the region on December 25, 1805 while searching for the headwaters of the Mississippi River. Fur and logging brought settlers to the area in the mid-1800s. Brainerd was founded in 1870 when a Northern Pacific Railroad survey determined that its Mississippi River crossing should be located there. The township was named by John Gregory Smith, president of Northern Pacific Railroad, in 1870 for his wife, Anne Eliza Brainerd Smith, and father-in-law, Lawrence Brainerd. Brainerd was organized as a city on March 6, 1873. The state legislature revoked Brainerd's charter for six years on January 11, 1876 as a result of the election of local handyman Thomas Lanihan as mayor instead of Judge C.B. Sleeper. Brainerd functioned as a township during those six years.

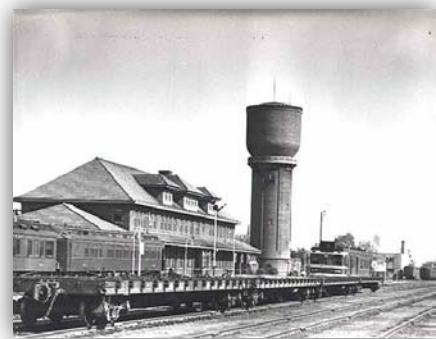
Brainerd expanded along with the railroads during the 1880s. The first paper mill was built in 1903 by the Northwest Paper Company. As it grew, Brainerd became a prominent center for railroad shipping and wood products. During the 1920s, roughly ninety percent of Brainerd's residents depended on the railroad. Labor unrest and relocation of railroad maintenance shops led to a decline in railroad employment.

Brainerd Today

The city's population at the 2010 Census was 13,590. The population has been steadily increasing over the last few decades, and doubles during the summer tourist season. The primary employers in Brainerd are Brainerd Public Schools and the paper and service industries. The city is also home to a major hospital, Central Lakes College and a regional airport.

In 2010, the median age in Brainerd was 32.2, lower than the surrounding communities and Minnesota as a whole (37.4).

Brainerd has a vibrant downtown area located just east of the river near the main railroad line. Brainerd is a Minnesota Main Street Community, part of a statewide program led by the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota that works to revitalize historic downtowns (<http://www.downtownbrainerd.com/>). The Brainerd Public Library and Brainerd History Group partnered to create a History Walk, a historic walking tour of



Brainerd Depot, c. 1952. Minnesota Historical Society



Parade in downtown Brainerd, c. 1958. Minnesota Historical Society

downtown with 35 locations over 1.4 miles. Guidebooks are available at the public library or online and audio tours are available for mobile devices.

Brainerd's Parks and Trails

Brainerd is home to 14 city parks with various amenities. As of 2004, roughly 303 acres or 6 percent of the city's land, were used for park and recreational uses, including trails. This translates to approximately 23 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. Lum Park has an RV campground with 18 sites. The Parks and Recreation Department operates other facilities such as athletic fields, fairgrounds and a civic center. There are also opportunities for both youth and adult organized sports. The City's comprehensive plan states that trail and park linkages should be considered whenever development and/or projects are discussed.

The Cuyuna Lakes State Trail is planned to extend for about 35 miles from Aitkin through Brainerd, connecting to the Paul Bunyan State Trail at the existing trailhead at the Northland Arboretum, with several options for routes through both cities (see http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/trails/cuyunalakes/cuyuna_plan.pdf).

In 2011 Brainerd was awarded a Federal Recreation Trail Grant and a DNR Regional Trail Grant to construct a 2.59 mile, 10-foot wide multi use bituminous trail that will connect to both the Cuyuna Lakes State Trail and the Paul Bunyan State Trail. The land acquisition and trail construction are part of a system of Mississippi Riverfront improvements and are intended to help establish Brainerd as a trail hub city in North Central Minnesota.

The Northland Arboretum

The Northland Arboretum encompasses over 500 acres that straddle the boundary of Brainerd and Baxter. This member-supported, non-profit organization was founded with the closure of the Brainerd Landfill in 1972. Left untouched, the 40-acre landfill site now supports a grassland. The arboretum owns a Norway Pine plantation to the north and leases land from Crow Wing County behind the Westgate Mall. The Nature Conservancy owns nearly 200 acres within the arboretum boundaries, one of Minnesota's primary examples of Jack Pine savanna.

Areas of interest at the Northland Arboretum include a visitor center, several demonstration gardens, the Monet Bridge and Pond, a DNR Landscaping for Wildlife project, a Secret Garden, and many flower beds maintained by volunteers. An orienteering course is available for amateurs and experts. The arboretum also provides 20 kilometers of hiking and cross-country ski trails.

City of Baxter

The City of Baxter is adjacent to Brainerd on the west and borders the west bank of the Mississippi River for about ten miles. The City is approximately 20.3 square miles in area with a little over one-fifth made up of water or wetlands. Baxter sits at the crossroads of two major highways, Trunk Highways 371 and 210. The traffic volumes and scale of commercial development along these corridors have made Baxter a kind of "downtown" of the lakes region.

History

Baxter developed gradually within the orbit of the larger city of Brainerd, which developed around the Northern Pacific Railroad's Mississippi River crossing. During the 1920s, the railroad operated a tie-treating plant in the area. The City of Baxter was

incorporated in 1939 and named for Luther Loren Baxter, an attorney for the railroad who also served in the Minnesota Legislature and as a colonel in the Civil War.

Baxter Today

In 1960, Baxter had approximately 1,000 residents. Growth has been steady over time and the City's 2010 population was 7,610. The median age in 2010 was 38.7, which is younger than the median age of Crow Wing County (42.4). Baxter also had a higher number of younger families and a higher household income than the neighboring cities and townships. Tourism and service industries are the major employment sectors in Baxter.

The completion of the Highway 371 bypass in 2002 has brought about the emergence of Baxter as the retail and commercial leader of the Brainerd Lakes region. Nearly all of the retail commercial development in the City is adjacent to Highway 371. Residential development is concentrated to the northwest of Highways 210 and 371 and along the Mississippi River in the southern portion of the City.

Parks and Trails

Baxter is home to five parks, which offer many opportunities for various types of recreation, including picnicking, ball fields, ice rinks, swimming, fishing, playgrounds and tennis courts.

The southern trailhead of the Paul Bunyan State Trail is located in Baxter near the Northland Arboretum, just north of Excelsior Road (see description above under Brainerd). This location has parking, a rest area and restrooms. An extension of the trail has been completed through the city, with a connection to Crow Wing State Park planned for completion in 2012. The City of Baxter's 2007 Comprehensive Plan Update identifies a series of recommendations for Public Land & Open Space Policy and Outdoor Recreation Policy. These recommendations include the following:

- Keep as much public land as possible under public ownership for recreational uses, both passive and active, and green space protection.
- Connect existing public lands with greenways and trails for environmental and recreational purposes.
- Continue to work with neighboring cities, townships, counties, and other relevant agencies to develop a coordinated and connected local, regional, and park/trail system.
- Develop and maintain a coordinated trail, parks, and public land system for passive and active users between residential and business development for recreational and transportation purposes while minimizing user conflicts. This may also connect to external recreational opportunities.

City of Pillager

Pillager is located in Cass County along the banks of the Crow Wing River just east of Lake Placid. Highway 210 and County Highway 1 are the only main routes in Pillager. The city is 0.7 square miles in area.

History

Pillager was settled in 1886 as a station of the Northern Pacific Railroad, a general store, a hotel and a blacksmith. It incorporated as a village on September 4, 1900. The town gets its name from the term Pillagers, which was applied to the Ojibwe of the area at the time.

Pillager Today

Pillager's 2010 population was 469. The largest employers in Pillager include Manion Lumber & Truss, a wholesale manufacturer of wood and floor trusses, and Pillager Public Schools. Pillager is home to multiple restaurants, cafes and specialty shops. The city's proximity to Pillsbury State Forest makes it a center for wood products and for outdoor recreation.

Initial Evaluation of Trail Alignment Options

The CRVST should connect to other local trails within Baxter, Crow Wing State Park, and Pillager to enhance recreational opportunities and experiences. As identified in the legislative authorization, the proposed multi-use CRVST should begin with a connection to the Paul Bunyan State Trail. A connection to the potential Cass County CSAH 18 trail would also add value by connecting the CRVST to the East Gull Lake trail system and beyond to other Gull Lake Micropolitan communities.

Whether through a connection to the Paul Bunyan State Trail in Baxter or a direct connection within Crow Wing State Park via connection to the Paul Bunyan trail extension in the state park, the CRVST will be connected to the Crow Wing State Park.

Segment 1A

Several trail alignment options have been identified for Segment 1A (between Crow Wing State Park and CSAH 36). The following several outstanding issues need to be studied further in order to select a preferred alternative(s) for this sub-segment:

1. Feasibility of a bridge over the Mississippi River in the Crow Wing State Park.
2. Specific alignment through Minnesota Power land surrounding the Gull River and along portions of the Crow Wing River.
3. Feasibility of using the Great River Energy easement corridor (south of CR 170) for the CRVST trail (i.e., what type of easement is this? Can it be used for a use other than utilities?) This alignment would need to avoid the DNR easement areas noted on Figure 5. Trail development in DNR easement areas is not allowed.

Based on the complexity of some of these outstanding issues, it is likely a feasibility study/more detailed alternatives analysis will need to be conducted for this segment as additional information is gathered and construction of this segment becomes more imminent.

This segment includes approximately 12 miles of multi-use paved trail, ATV trail and equestrian trail. It also includes 1-2 bridges for trail users depending upon the trail alignment selected. As indicated on Figure 5, there are several existing bridges within this segment area. The MN 371 bridge over the Mississippi River has existing accommodations for a trail; however, several other existing bridges are not able to accommodate the proposed state trail. In addition, some potential trail alignment options would require the construction of a new bridge over the Mississippi River in Crow Wing State Park, as noted on Figure 5.

Segment 1B

As noted in the trail alignments discussion above, there are fewer alignment options for the CRVST in Segment 1B. Therefore, a detailed alternatives analysis for this segment would not likely be required. The main issue that will need to be discussed by trail advocates before moving to preliminary design would be how the trail connects

through the City of Pillager to cross the Crow Wing River. Further investigation is needed to determine if the trail can be accommodated on a widened CSAH 1 deck (without requiring reconstruction of the entire bridge) or whether a new bridge for the trail would be required and if so, where that bridge would be located.

Segment 2: West Side of Camp Ripley from Pillager to Randall

Description of Trail Environment

South of Pillager, the CRVST is planned to continue south along the west side of Camp Ripley. This section of the trail study corridor spans the entire west side of Camp Ripley from just south of Pillager and the Crow Wing River through the City of Randall. The landscape heading south from Pillager to Lake Alexander is largely comprised of agricultural land, wooded areas and some lakes and wetlands. Some areas within this section include steep terrain and rolling hills. The landscape south of Lake Alexander changes significantly, including a Nature Conservancy preserve, several wetlands and wetland complexes, and some suburban development. The areas surrounding Enchanted Lakes is platted for rural residential development. However, only a few of these lots have been developed.

Due to the proximity and spacing of wetland areas south of Lake Alexander, trail development deviating substantially from the CSAH 1 right-of-way in this area would be difficult. Trail alignments should avoid major wetland areas that would be challenging, or even unsuitable for trail development.

Key features of the landscape in this area include:

- **Camp Ripley** – Camp Ripley is a 53,000 acre training facility for military, federal, state, local and civilian communities. Camp Ripley land is comprised of facilities, ranges and natural resources. Portions of the Camp are open to the public. Representatives from Camp Ripley have been an integral part of the CRVST study committee. This coordination has resulted in the identification of several areas along the west side of Camp, where Camp Ripley is willing to consider trail alignment options on existing Camp Ripley land. Training operations and military service roads in these areas would not be disturbed by the acquisition of land for a multi-use trail. Camp Ripley representatives suggested moving the Camp's boundary fence to the east, along portions of the west side, to allow for the acquisition of property for the proposed trail. These areas are illustrated on Figure 9.

Camp Ripley also owns several areas shown on Figures 9-11 designated as Camp Ripley Off-post Land. Camp personnel indicated they would also consider the use of portions of these off-post lands for the CRVST.

- **Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota Land** – The Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota exists to acquire, protect and enhance critical lands for the public's use and benefit. The Council has been instrumental in adding more than 10,000 acres of land to key areas within the state's vast network of parks and trails. The Council has acquired several parcels in this area that have been transferred to state agencies, including DNR.
- **Lake Alexander** – Two boat landings on the lake are located on the west shore off CSAH 3 and on the east shore of CR 204. Restaurants include The Castaway

Bar and Grill located along CSAH 3 approximately 3 miles east of CSAH 1 and The Landing located on Copper Road just east of CSAH 1.

- **Nature Conservancy Preserve** – On the south edge of Lake Alexander, The Nature Conservancy’s Lake Alexander Preserve is centered on an 180,000-acre mosaic of mixed oak forest, wetlands, ponds and stands of red and white pine. The unfragmented nature of the site provides important habitat to songbirds and other wildlife that are dependent on the forest's interior. The preserve is open to the public. Visitors can experience beautiful scenery while hiking and wildlife watching.
- **Three Finger and Round Lakes** – Located northeast of Randall, these lakes provide access to fishing and include a public water access on the west side of Round Lake.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Utilize Camp Ripley land where possible
- Utilize publicly owned land where possible
- Provide for both motorized and non-motorized uses
- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the landscape
- Minimize wetland impacts
- Avoid negative impacts on rare, endangered, or threatened species, and avoid fragmentation or disturbance of significant native plant communities

Trail Alignment Options

This segment was split into three sub-segments. Segment 2A runs south of the City of Pillager to Lake Alexander as shown in Figure 9. Due to the ability to utilize portions of Camp Ripley and off-post lands in this segment for trail use, only one trail alignment option has been identified. The alignment option described below is identified as multi-use at this point. Further study is needed to determine how each use (motorized and non-motorized) can be accommodated.

Motorized Trail (Segment 2A)

Following CSAH 1 south of Pillager onto land currently within the Camp Ripley boundary to approximately 350th Street and then crossing over to the west side of CSAH 1 to the Camp Ripley off-post land, then continue south through the off-post land to just east of 80th Avenue to the east side of CSAH 1 onto Camp Ripley land and continue south to a location approximately parallel to Lake Alexander.

Segment 2B runs from Lake Alexander to the northern city limits of Randall as shown in Figure 10. Several constraints within this area limit trail alignment options. These constraints include: inability to use Camp Ripley for trail development due to the proximity of military training operations/service roads in this area, and the proximity and location of wetland and lakes. The following alignment option is identified as multi-use at this point. Further study is needed to determine how each use (motorized and non-motorized) can be accommodated.

Multi-use Trail (Segment 2B)

Following CSAH 1 from Lake Alexander to the City of Randall. An opportunity to deviate from the CSAH 1 roadway alignment may exist near the Enchanted Lakes development. Because little development has occurred in this subdivision, particularly in areas along

CSAH 1, there may be an opportunity for trail acquisition on the west side of CSAH 1 in this area.

Segment 2C encompasses the City of Randall and is shown in Figure 11. Again, due to the proximity and location of wetlands, lakes and developed areas within the city, few trail alignment options have been identified. The alignments that have been identified were developed with the understanding of the need for trail facilities and economic development potential for the city. The following alignment options have been identified as multi-use at this point. Further study is needed to determine how each use (motorized and non-motorized) can be accommodated. Discussions with City of Randall staff indicate they are willing to consider motorized use within city limits.

Multi-use Trail (Segment 2C)

- Following CSAH 1 southerly into the City of Randall to connect with CSAH 104 and then heading easterly to MN State Highway 115 (MN 115).
- Following CSAH 1 southerly into the City of Randall, west on 1st Street, south on Superior Avenue through downtown Randall to MN 115, and then follow MN 115 easterly to the eastern city limits.

Trail Access

The distance of the trail study area between Pillager and Randall (Segments 2A and 2B) is approximately 17 miles. This is a long distance for trail users to travel with limited or non-existent opportunities for rest, water, restrooms, etc. There is a restaurant off of CSAH 1 near Lake Alexander, along with a public water access to Lake Alexander west of CSAH 1 on CR 204. However, limited parking facilities exist at both of these locations.

Future trail development efforts should investigate other opportunities for trail access areas between Pillager and Randall. Potential locations for trail access, parking and restrooms should be explored on Camp Ripley off-post lands directly adjacent to CSAH 1 on the west side and at the Minnesota Nature Conservancy Lands west of CSAH 1.

Once in Randall, the city has several shops and restaurants for trail users (see discussion below).

Communities and Connections

City of Randall

The City of Randall is located in Morrison County along the Little Elk River about five miles from where it meets the Mississippi River. Randall, known as the “Gateway to Northern Minnesota,” is surrounded by many small lakes, providing numerous opportunities for year-round recreation. Highway 10 and State Highway 115 provide the main routes to the community. The city is 2.1 square miles in area. At the 2010 Census, Randall had a population of 650.

The city’s main park is Bingo Park, on both sides of the Little Elk River, with a paved walking trail, playground, volleyball courts, picnic shelter and the city’s community center. Other amenities and services include several cafes and bars, a supermarket, a well-known shoe store, antique shops and other retail. The community has a number of celebrations throughout the year.

History

Randall was established in the 1890s as a railroad community, named for railroad official John H. Randall. The first Europeans to settle in the area were from Northern Europe. A main line of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad bisects the town.

Potential Trail Alignments

City trail advocates have identified potential trail locations and concepts. Crossing the active railroad line poses a challenge for trail development. Snowmobiles and off-highway vehicles currently come through the city, and would be expected to use a state trail.

Initial Evaluation of Trail Alignment Options

The willingness of Camp Ripley to consider acquisition of portions of their property for the trail along the west side boundary and on off-post lands significantly reduces the need to study additional trail alignment options in this area. In addition, the constraints of the landscape, particularly in Segment 2B and 2C, do not provide many opportunities to deviate from existing roadway corridors for the trail. Therefore, additional detailed alternatives analyses for Segment 2 are not likely to be required. The main issue for local trail advocates to agree on is where to safely cross CSAH 1 to utilize Camp Ripley lands and off-post lands. In addition, design of the final trail alignment will need to avoid the DNR easement noted on Figure 10, on the east side of CSAH 1 just north of Randall. Trail development within DNR easement landholdings is not allowed.

The City of Randall hosted the Minnesota Design Team in the spring of 2012. One of the topics of discussion/study was CRVST alignments through their community. The Design Team's work includes substantial public involvement. Findings and recommendations from this visit regarding the state trail should be considered and incorporated as trail development for Segment 2C becomes more imminent.

Segment 3: South Side of Camp Ripley from Randall to MN 371 and MN 371 to Little Falls

Description of Trail Environment

The CRVST Study corridor east of Randall continues along the south side of Camp Ripley to MN 371. The landscape within this segment is a mixture of agricultural land, wooded areas, wetlands and lakes. Development in this area is limited to rural residential homesteads with the majority of residential developments located in Randall and along the Mississippi River. Key features of note within this segment area include:

- **Neitermeier Wildlife Management Area** – Located just northeast of Randall, this Wildlife Management Area (WMA) consists of grass fields, wetland with cattails, lowland grass and brush. Management of this unit focuses on maintaining and improving the habitat for a diversity of native plants and wildlife. Recreational opportunities exist throughout the year, including hunting, trapping, hiking, cross-country skiing, snow shoeing, and wildlife watching/photography.

CAMP RIPLEY/VETERANS STATE TRAIL

- **Green Prairie Fish Lake** – A public beach and boat access is located on the southwest shore of the lake off CR 212. The P&LS Lakeside Resort is located along Forest Road on the west side of the lake.
- **Otter Point Wildlife Management Area** – Located northeast of Little Falls, this WMA is a floodplain timber island in the Mississippi River. Management of this unit focuses on maintaining and improving the habitat for a diversity of native plants and wildlife. Recreational opportunities exist throughout the year, including hunting, trapping, hiking, cross-country skiing, snow shoeing, and wildlife watching/photography.
- **Camp Ripley Main Gate/Veterans Cemetery/Military Museum** – The Camp Ripley Entrance Walls are located on the northern and southern sides of MN 115 and on the western side of MN 371 at the junction of MN 115 and MN 371. The site, like other camp resources, is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. It consists of a series of long, elaborate, stone walls that mark the entrance to the Camp Ripley Military Reservation and define the southeastern corner of the Camp's cantonment area.

This newest Minnesota State Veterans cemetery, opened in 1994, is scenic and extremely well maintained. A memorial walk features memorials by service organizations and specific memorials such as Vietnam, Korea, and Purple Heart etc.

The Military Museum aims to enhance public understanding of how armed conflicts and military institutions have shaped our state and national experience. The museum also functions as a major repository in Minnesota for historical artifacts and records. Indoor and outdoor exhibits depict the stories and contributions of Minnesotans who served in all branches of service or on the home front, in time of peace and war, from the early frontier years to the present.

- **Belle Prairie County Park** – Northeast of Little Falls on CSAH 76 on the Mississippi River. Amenities include hiking trails, boat landing and parking, picnic shelter, playground, restrooms, scenic overlooks, and picnic areas with fire pits or grills.
- **Mississippi River Water Trail** – The Mississippi River is part of the Mississippi Headwaters Water Trail throughout the entire CRVST study area. State Water Trails are mapped by the DNR for canoeing, kayaking, boating and camping, with information on safety, river levels, access points, outfitters, and other resources for trip planning. See <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/watertrails/index.html>
- **MN 115** – The MN 115 Bridge over the Mississippi River near the Camp Ripley entrance is considered eligible for the National Register of Places. The bridge currently accommodates both vehicle and rail traffic. Due to its historic nature, it is unlikely the bridge can be expanded to accommodate a multi-use trail. Therefore, a separate bridge over the Mississippi River near this location would be required to accommodate the CRVST.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Tie in the veteran's theme and access to Camp Ripley's public attractions



- Utilize the MN 115 corridor
- Utilize publicly owned land where possible
- Provide for both motorized and non-motorized uses
- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the landscape
- Minimize wetland impacts
- Avoid negative impacts on rare, endangered, or threatened species, and avoid fragmentation or disturbance of significant native plant communities

Trail Alignment Options

Segment 3 was split into two sub-segments to facilitate the implementation of this segment in phases if needed. Segment 3A runs from the eastern border of the City of Randall to MN 371 as shown in Figure 10. The major factors influencing alignment options in this sub-segment relate to the presence and proximity of wetlands which are scattered throughout the area. Because of the landscape constraints, trail alignment options were selected near existing roadway corridors and/or utility corridors. The following alignment options are identified as multi-use at this point. Further study is needed to determine how each use (motorized and non-motorized) can be accommodated.

Multi-use Trail (Segment 3A)

- East of Randall along MN 115 traveling east to the Camp Ripley main gate, crossing the Mississippi River on a new bridge to connect with MN 371.
- A similar alignment option to that listed above would be to use MN 115 out of Randall to CR 212, then travel south around Green Prairie Fish Lake to CR 213 north back up to MN 115. This option would provide direct access to the public water access and picnic area at Green Prairie Fish Lake.

Multi-use Trail (Segment 3B)

Segment 3B runs from MN 371 near the Camp Ripley entrance to just south of US Highway 10 (US 10) in Little Falls as shown in Figure 14. Both multi-use and motorized-only trail alignment options were developed for this sub-segment.

- Following CSAH 13 from MN 115 southerly towards Little Falls, crossing US 10 and connecting to CSAH 52 to continue to the south.
- Following CR 213 from MN 115 southerly towards Little Falls and connecting to CSAH 13 just north of US 10, then continuing south on CSAH 13 and CSAH 52.
- From MN 115 on the east side of the Mississippi River, following CSAH 76 to CR 260 southerly towards Little Falls to Riverwood Drive to connect back to CSAH 76.
- From MN 115 on the east side of the Mississippi River, following CSAH 76 southerly towards Little Falls.

Motorized-Only Trail (Segment 3B)

- Following the east side of MN 371 from MN 115 to the Little Falls Industrial Park.

CAMP RIPLEY/VETERANS STATE TRAIL

- From MN 115/CSAH 47 on the east side of the Mississippi River to 165th Avenue, south on 165th Avenue to 193rd Street and then south on MN 371 into the Little Falls Industrial Park.
- From CSAH 46 near its junction with CR 261, travel west to connect with MN 371 and travel south on the east side of MN 371 into the Little Falls Industrial Park.
- Follow CSAH 46 to the east to CR 261, south on CR 261.
- From CSAH 46 to the east to CR 263, south on CR 263, west on CSAH 43 to CR 261 and south to the Little Falls Industrial Park.

Trail Access

Green Prairie Fish Lake is located south of MN 115 and offers a public boat access and swimming beach, picnic shelter and parking areas.

Camp Ripley offers several historic and cultural resources open to the public including the historic stone walls surrounding the main gate, the Veteran's Cemetery and the Military Museum. (See descriptions above under Description of Trail Environment). Access to these resources from the trail will be important in order to tie in the Veterans theme of the CRVST.

An additional trail access area in this segment is located at the Belle Prairie County Park. This county park offers parking, restroom facilities, picnic shelters, playground equipment, disc golf, hiking trails, and a public water access.

Along the west side of the Mississippi River, north of Little Falls is a cluster of historic and archaeological resources on state land (identified as Little Elk Historic Fort) which may offer an opportunity for an interpretive site, if a trail alignment is selected along this side of the river.

Additional rest areas consisting of a bench or pull-off areas of the trail may be located along this segment, as the right-of-way allows and as practical.

Initial Evaluation of Trail Alignment Options

Segment 3A

Several trail alignment options have been identified for Segment 3A (between Randall and MN 371). The following several outstanding issues need to be studied further in order to select a preferred alternative(s) for this sub-segment:

1. Ability to use the MN 115 road right-of-way due to the road's potential status as a historic military road
2. Feasibility of a new bridge over the Mississippi River near the MN 115 Bridge
3. Which side of the Mississippi River should the trail follow into Little Falls?

Based on the complexity of some of these outstanding issues, it is likely a feasibility study/more detailed alternatives analysis will need to be conducted for this segment as additional information is gathered and construction of this segment becomes more imminent.



Segment 3B

Similar to Segment 3A, there are several trail alignment options for Segment 3B. A key issue that will need to be studied further is which side of the Mississippi River the trail should follow into Little Falls. Another important issue is whether or not the motorized and non-motorized uses should be explored on the same general alignment or on a separate alignments (or sides of the river) in this segment.

It is likely an additional alternatives analysis will need to be explored for Segment 3B in order to identify a preferred alternative(s). However, the main issue that needs additional consideration is which side of the river the trail should be located. This can most likely be resolved easily through additional discussions with the public and trail stakeholders.

Segment 4: MN 371 (from MN 115) to Crow Wing State Park

Description of Trail Environment

The landscape between Camp Ripley and MN 371 from the Camp's main gate to Crow Wing State Park is comprised of smaller platted lots, some rural residential subdivisions and wooded areas adjacent to the Mississippi River. Farther east of the river (towards MN 371), the landscape is made up of larger tracts of agricultural land and residential homesteads. Features of note within this segment include:

- City of Fort Ripley – Fort Ripley is a small community located near the confluence of the Mississippi and Nokasippi Rivers. The population of Fort Ripley was 69 in 2010; the community includes a small number of residential homes and businesses.
- Fort Ripley Ruins/Nokasippi River Historical Monument - The establishment of Fort Ripley in 1848 represents the U.S. government's effort to establish control on the northern frontier. Construction began on the west bank of the Mississippi River across from this point a year before Minnesota became a territory. The government intended it to be a buffer between lands of the Dakota and the Ojibwe. A fire destroyed most of the buildings in 1877, and Fort Ripley was abandoned in 1880. The masonry ruins of a powder magazine are the only visible remains although a rich archaeological site still exists.
- Ripley Esker Scientific and Natural Area - This site contains an excellent example of an esker, which is a glacial deposit that forms a meandering, steep-sided ridge of stream sand and gravel. The esker protected at this site is approximately 0.75 mile long and is part of a 6.75 mile long esker system. Plant communities range from oak savanna remnant on the south side, to a diverse deciduous woodland on the north. A geological marker is found on the site next to the entrance. To best view this glacial formation, visit in early spring or late fall when the trees have no leaves and the prairie grasses have cured.
- Little Nokasippi Wildlife Management Area - This 345-acre WMA This WMA was established in 2006 as part of a cooperative effort by the DNR, The Nature Conservancy and Camp Ripley's Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) project. It consists of rolling hardwood (oak) forests and significant river frontage on the Nokasippi and Little Nokasippi Rivers. Hunting opportunities include deer, bear, small game, forest game birds, waterfowl, and turkeys. Wildlife viewing

opportunities include wetland and forest wildlife. The WMA's area is being expanded through acquisition of additional ACUB easements.

A key constraint driving trail alignment options in this segment is the proximity of the Mississippi River to MN 371 and the lack of public land between the two. There are several township roads that serve areas adjacent to the river. Trail alignments were suggested along these roadways as a means to provide an alternative option away from MN 371 in this area and to try to provide views of the river. Both multi-use and motorized-only alignments were suggested for this segment.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Connect to Fort Ripley and the Fort Ripley ATV trails
- Provide for both motorized and non-motorized uses
- Utilize publicly owned land where possible
- Utilize MN 371 Bridge over Nokasippi River
- Maximize views along the Mississippi River where possible
- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the landscape
- Minimize wetland impacts
- Avoid negative impacts on rare, endangered, or threatened species, and avoid fragmentation or disturbance of significant native plant communities

Trail Alignment Options

This segment was split into two sub-segments. Segment 4A runs between MN 371/MN 115 and Fort Ripley (see Figure 15). Segment 4B runs from Fort Ripley to the Crow Wing State Park (see Figure 16). These are logical termini so that each segment could be built independent of one another if funding is acquired in phases.

Multi-use Trail (Segment 4A)

- Continuing north from the intersection of MN 371/MN 115 along the west side of MN 371 to Fort Ripley
- Follow the west side of MN 371 to 253rd Street, continue west on 253rd Street, north on 139th Avenue, and east on White Pine Road back to MN 371 and into Fort Ripley

Motorized-Only Trail (Segment 4A)

- Continuing north from the intersection of MN 371/MN 115 along the east side of MN 371 to Fort Ripley and the Fort Ripley ATV Trails

Multi-use Trail (Segment 4B)

- Follow the west side of MN 371 out of Fort Ripley to the CSAH 27 entrance to the Crow Wing State Park
- Follow the west side of MN 371 out of Fort Ripley, turn west along Mississippi Shores Road and progressing north following a series of township roads, including Bedow Road, Staghorn Drive, Lawson Road, Matte Road, Killian Road, Town Hall Road, Lennox Road, DeRosier Road back to the west side of MN 371. Continue following MN 371 on the west side to the CSAH 27 entrance to Crow Wing State Park.

Motorized-Only Trail (Segment 4B)

- From Fort Ripley, continue on the east side of MN 371 (following the existing ATV trail) to the ATV crossing under the MN 371 Mississippi River bridge and the connection to Crow Wing State Park. (The regional ATV trail continues along MN 371B into Brainerd.) At this point Segment 4 meets Segment 1A. While ATV use is not allowed within state parks, ATV connections to the potential alignments shown in Segment 1A can be made along MN 371.

Trail Access

The Nokasippi River Historical Monument is located just north of the City of Fort Ripley. This area includes a gravel parking lot, public water access and historic marker identifying the Fort Ripley ruins.

Motorized trail users will have access to the existing Fort Ripley ATV trails, located just east of MN 371.

Rest areas consisting of a bench or pull-off area may be located along this segment, as the right-of-way allows and as practical.

Communities and Connections

City of Fort Ripley

Fort Ripley is located near the confluence of the Mississippi and Nokasippi rivers. The city is named for the fort that formerly stood on the opposite (west) bank of the Mississippi, from 1848 to 1877. The fort was named in honor of General Eleazar W. Ripley. The city was incorporated in 1927. Its population was 69 at the 2010 census, a slight decline from the 2000 population of 74. The city is 1.33 square miles in area. Its small business district includes a service station and a tavern.

Initial Evaluation of Trail Alignment Options

Relative to other segments of the CRVST study area, Segment 4 has fewer trail alignment options. This is mainly due to the constraints identified in the trail environment section above. Only one motorized trail alignment option has been identified which follows MN 371 on the east side. This alignment matches in with the existing ATV trail located in this area. The multi-use trail alignments only vary on their ability to secure township road right-of-way to facilitate views of the Mississippi River. Further investigation will be needed to see if trail development in these areas would be feasible or if the trail alignment should be located near MN 371. The MN 371 corridor does not provide the most scenic trail environment but due to the constraints in this segment, it may be the only viable alternative for the CRVST.

Segment 5: Little Falls Area

Description of Trail Environment

The study corridor for this section of the CRVST runs from approximately US 10 on the north side of Little Falls, to just south of the Charles Lindbergh State Park, effectively covering most of the City of Little Falls. Located on the banks of the Mississippi River, Little Falls is one of the oldest cities in Minnesota, with an estimated population of 8,500. This is an urban area with many varied historical sites and attractions, as well as many scenic and recreational opportunities. The communities and connections section below describes the many points of interest within the City of Little Falls. In addition, other key features of the landscape within Segment 5 of the CRVST study area include:

- Popple Lake Wildlife Management Area - This WMA is a wetland area with cattails, low land grass and brush, with some oak woods along its edges. Recreational opportunities exist throughout the year, including hunting, trapping, hiking, cross-country skiing, snow shoeing, and wildlife watching/photography.
- Charles A. Lindbergh State Park – Located on the Mississippi River this 570-acre park was established in 1931 in memory of Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr., congressman and father of the famous aviator. Lindbergh State Park offers visitors a wooded campground, hiking and skiing trails, and a quaint picnic area. The picnic area includes a historic Work Projects Administration (WPA) picnic shelter and a stone water tower. The Lindbergh house contains many of the family's mementos. The Lindbergh Visitor Center is near the home and showcases the lives and careers of three generations of Lindberghs in Minnesota.
- Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Memorial Museum – Situated on the bank overlooking the Mississippi River, the Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Memorial Museum offers a stunning view of its surroundings. It also interprets the history of Morrison County, Minnesota. Named for lumberman Charles A. Weyerhaeuser, who played a prominent part in the area's history, the museum property is home to natural prairie gardens, a Victorian-style fountain, and a gazebo overlooking the river.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Utilize existing river crossings where possible (i.e., MN State Highway 27 (MN 27))
- Provide for both motorized and non-motorized uses
- Utilize publicly owned land where possible
- Maximize views along the Mississippi River where possible
- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the landscape
- Minimize wetland impacts
- Avoid negative impacts on rare, endangered, or threatened species, and avoid fragmentation or disturbance of significant native plant communities

Trail Alignment Options

Since implementation of the portion of the CRVST through Little Falls may occur as one phase, this segment was not split up into sub-segments. Figure 18 illustrates Segment 5. The following discussion outlines trail alignment options for the entire length of Segment 5. Existing on-street bike lanes through the City may serve as connecting links for the State Trail, but would not be designed or managed as state trail segments.

Multi-use Trail

- Following CSAH 13 south, crossing US 10, continue south along CSAH 52 through Little Falls to Charles A. Lindbergh State Park.
- Following CSAH 13 south, crossing US 10, continuing south along CSAH 52, then turn west onto an existing utility corridor south of the intersection of CSAH 52/9th Avenue NW. Continue southwesterly along the utility corridor, then turn south on 13th Street SW, west on MN 27, south on 15th Street SW, west on Falcon Road and south on Fountain Road/125th Avenue which borders the west side of Charles A. Lindbergh State Park, then connect through the state park to the Great River Road (CR 224) on the south side of the park.
- On the east side of the Mississippi River, from US 10, follow CSAH 76 south to either CR 258 or to 140th Avenue (via CR 258 to 11th Avenue to 140th Avenue).
- The MN 27 Bridge across the Mississippi River could function as a crossing point for any of the above trail alignment options to be combined.

Motorized-Only Trail

- From the east side of MN 371, east on the northern boundary of the city's industrial park, south through the industrial park on 18th Street, to 4th Street, then west on 4th Street to its connection with US 10, south on US 10 to the Soo Line Regional Trail. (Deep ditches on the east side of US 10 may create challenges in this area.)
- From CSAH 76 travel south on 4th Street to US 10 or to a connection across the MN 27 bridge.
- From CSAH 43 south, east on 153rd Street, south on 180th Avenue, west on CR 256 to either travel north on 133rd Street, west on 4th Street to US 10 or travel south from CR 256 to 160th Avenue then west on CSAH 35 to US 10.

Communities and Connections

City of Little Falls

The City of Little Falls is located at the confluence of the Mississippi River, US Highway 10, and State Trunk Highways 27 and 371. The city is the county seat of Morrison County, and is 6.3 square miles in area.

History

Established in 1848, Little Falls is one of the oldest cities in Minnesota. The “little falls” that gives the city its name attracted the attention of traders, explorers and entrepreneurs. The Little Falls Mills and Land Company was formed in 1849 and built the first in a series of dams to tap the river’s power. The electricity produced by the dam drew many industries to Little Falls. The Pine Tree Lumber Company, operated by Charles Weyerhaeuser and R.D. Musser, and Hennepin Paper Company received logs driven down river from the northern “pineries.” The village was officially incorporated in 1879. The Little Falls Dam continues to serve as a hydroelectric station, generating power for the surrounding areas.

Little Falls Today

Little Falls’ population at the 2010 Census was 8,343. The city has grown steadily over the last few decades. Major employers in Little Falls include Camp Ripley, United Family Health Care, the Little Falls School District and boat building companies Crestliner and Larson Boats.

The median age of Little Falls in 2010 was 41.9, slightly higher than the median age of Morrison County (40.6) and Minnesota as a whole (37.4).

Little Falls is well known as the boyhood home of Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr., the first person to fly solo and non-stop across the Atlantic Ocean. Lindbergh spent summers in a house on the west bank of the Mississippi south of town. In 1931 the Lindbergh family gave the summer house and surrounding 110 acres to the State of Minnesota in recognition of Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr., Republican congressman and father of the famous aviator. The 1906 home still contains the original furniture and family possessions and has a full-scale replica of the Spirit of St. Louis cockpit. The house and 17 acres of adjacent land are managed by the Minnesota Historical Society. Charles A. Lindbergh State Park, now 570 acres in size, is located just south of the Lindbergh home. The State Park provides parking areas, hiking trails, camping and a visitor’s center.

Also situated on the west bank of the Mississippi River is the Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Memorial Museum operated by the Morrison County Historical Society, with exhibits, archives and other resources. Named for lumberman Charles A. Weyerhaeuser, who played a prominent part in the area’s history, the museum property is home to natural prairie gardens, a Victorian-style fountain, and a gazebo overlooking the river.

The Linden Hill Historical Event Center consists of the two neighboring homes of lumbermen Charles A. Weyerhaeuser and Richard “Drew” Musser, built in 1898, near Maple Island Park. The site offers guided home tours, conferences, retreats, and other programs.

The Minnesota Fishing Museum (MFM) is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the heritage and history of freshwater fishing in Minnesota. The MFM features over 8,000 artifacts in two large display rooms, the O’FISH-L Gift Shop plus



Downtown Little Falls, c. 1925 and 1930.
Minnesota Historical Society.

CAMP RIPLEY/VETERANS STATE TRAIL

tourism and DNR information. The MFM and the DNR partner in the MinnAqua education programs.

The Pine Grove Zoo is home to a variety of exotic, native and domestic animals. Located in one of the last standing white pine groves in Minnesota, the zoo contains many walking trails, a petting stable and picnic and playground areas.

Little Falls also has numerous parks and public space available for picnics, trails, ball fields, playgrounds and gardens. Maple Island Park, situated along the riverfront, is a popular gathering place, with expansive views of the river and the dam. Downtown Little Falls offers a vibrant business district with numerous restaurants and shops. Several large murals depict the logging era and Main Street in the early 1900s. A historic walking/driving tour provides an overview of the city's many historic sites and buildings.

Trail Connections and Trailheads in Little Falls

Little Falls has been a strong supporter of trail development and of bicycle tourism. The city is a partner in the Mississippi River Trail effort. A system of on-street bicycle lanes connects parks, schools and the downtown. Existing city policy in Little Falls does not favor motorized trail use through town. However, city leaders feel this interest may be changing to consider allowing motorized (ATVs and snowmobile) traffic in town.

The City desires to bring CRVST users into their community for access to restaurants, lodging, shopping, parks, and other amenities such as historic and cultural resources. A trailhead location should be identified as a central meeting place for trail users and with adequate parking to serve both motorized and non-motorized trail users. The Maple Island Park could be used as a trailhead location due to its proximity to downtown, available parking facilities and access to the City's visitor center with maps and community information.

The Little Falls Park Board and community trail supporters have expressed strong interest in bringing both non-motorized and motorized trails along the east side of the Mississippi River to and through the city's downtown. The TH 27 (Broadway) bridge was identified as a potential crossing spot for bicycle and other non-motorized trail uses, which would continue south on Lindbergh Drive (Morrison County 52) toward the Soo Line Trail. ATV and snowmobile use could be directed to the south and east along an alignment that would cross US 10 and head toward the airport property and ultimately to the ATV/snowmobile portion of the Soo Line Trail. Potential trail alignments are shown in Figure 18.

The MN 27 Bridge has been identified as an obstacle for trail traffic crossing the river. Improvements to the MN 27 Bridge are programmed in MnDOT's 10-year Plan. Close coordination with MnDOT on future bridge improvement plans and schedule will be necessary to coordinate the additional width necessary to accommodate trail uses on this bridge.

City trail supporters also support a new bridge crossing the Mississippi River (south of the historic MN Hwy 115 bridge at Camp Ripley) to allow trail users to enter Little Falls on the east side of the Mississippi River and access the community in the preferred downtown alignment.

The Charles A. Lindbergh State Park and Charles A. Weyerhauser Museum are additional amenities located in Little Falls, as discussed above.



Maple Island Park, Little Falls

Initial Evaluation of Trail Alignment Options

Segment 5

Based on discussions with City of Little Falls staff and trail supporters (see above), several options exist for motorized and non-motorized trail alignments through this segment. Therefore, it is likely a feasibility study/more detailed alternatives analysis will need to be conducted as additional information is gathered and construction of this segment becomes more imminent.

Segment 6: Little Falls to the Soo Line Regional Trail

Description of Trail Environment

Segment 6 extends from just south of Charles A. Lindbergh State Park to the Soo Line Regional Trail, northwest of the City of Royalton. The majority of the landscape in this area is agricultural land and wetlands, rivers and lakes, with the exception of several smaller platted residential lots bordering the Mississippi River. Key features located in this segment include:

- **Crane Meadows National Wildlife Reserve** – Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, approximately three miles east of MN 371 was established in 1992 to preserve a large, natural wetland complex. The refuge is located in central Minnesota and serves as an important stop for many species of migrating birds. Located within a large watershed that includes Rice, Skunk and Mud Lakes, Platte and Skunk Rivers, Rice and Buckman Creeks, and sedge meadow wetlands, it harbors one of the largest nesting populations of greater sandhill cranes in Minnesota. Recreational activities include hiking and wildlife viewing.
- **Blanchard Dam** – The Dam is located on the Mississippi River near the City of Royalton. Blanchard is a hydroelectric station owned and operated by Minnesota Power. The dam sits slightly upriver from the former Soo Line rail bridge over the Mississippi. The bridge now carries the Soo Line Recreational Trail.
- **Soo Line ATV Trail and Recreational Trail** – The Soo Line South ATV Trail runs for 114 miles between Superior, Wisconsin and US 10 near Royalton. It includes a 12-mile paved segment between the cities of Isle and Onamia, just south of Lake Mille Lacs, with an adjoining ATV trail. The trail connects two of Minnesota's most beautiful state parks, Father Hennepin State Park on the east of Lake Mille Lacs and Mille Lacs Kathio State Park on the west. The Soo Line South ATV Trail connects with the 148-mile Soo Line North ATV Trail southwest of Moose Lake. (See <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ohv/trail/detail.html?id=44>)

The trail segment west of the US 10 trailhead, is known as the Soo Line Recreational Trail. This trail is paved and is open only to non-motorized use. It crosses the Mississippi at the Blanchard Dam and extends for about 10 miles through the city of Bowlus to meet the Lake Wobegon Trail just north of Holdingford.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Connect to Soo Line Recreational and ATV Trails



Soo Line Trailhead at US 10

- Utilize existing river crossings where possible (e.g., Soo Line Trail bridge near Blanchard Dam and CSAH 26)
- Maximize views along the Mississippi River where possible
- Provide for both motorized and non-motorized uses
- Utilize publicly owned land where possible
- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the landscape
- Minimize wetland impacts
- Avoid negative impacts on rare, endangered, or threatened species, and avoid fragmentation or disturbance of significant native plant communities

Trail Alignment Options

In order to connect to other trails, or trail access locations, it is likely Segment 6 will need to be built in one phase. Therefore, this segment was not split up into sub-segments. Figure 20 illustrates Segment 6. The following discussion outlines trail alignment options for the entire length of Segment 6.

Multi-Use Trail

- Following CSAH 52 and CR 224 (Great River Road) south to the Soo Line Trail.
- Following CR 258 south to the Soo Line Trail.
- Following 140th Avenue south, turn west on 103rd Street to connect with CR 258 south to the Soo Line Trail.
- Follow 140th Avenue south, turn east on 103rd Street, south on 150th Ave, west on CR 231 to CR 258 and continue south to the Soo Line Trail.

Motorized-Only Trail

- Follow US 10 south from Little Falls to the Soo Line Trail on the east side of US 10.
- Follow CSAH 35 easterly from US 10, turn south on 170th Avenue and west on CSAH 34 to the Soo Line ATV Trail.

Trail Access

Two trail access areas exist within Segment 6. The first is the Blanchard Dam and Soo Line Trail Bridge over the Mississippi River. Access to view the river, dam and connect to the Soo Line Trail (for non-motorized trail users) is located off CR 224. A small gravel parking lot is available. However, through the development of the CRVST it may be desirable to increase the parking lot area in this location and add restroom facilities so that this area could function as an access point to the CRVST and to the Soo Line Regional Trail.

The second trail access area in this segment is located along the east side of US 10, just south of the Soo Line Trail bridge over US 10. This area serves as the Soo Line Regional Trailhead. It includes a large paved parking area with a portion of the parking area tailored to accommodate vehicles with trailers for motorized trail uses. The trailhead also includes trail maps and restroom facilities.

Utilizing these existing trailhead locations as much as practical is the most feasible option for CRVST trail access in this area.

Initial Evaluation of Trail Alignment Options

Several trail alignment options have been identified for Segment 6. The following outstanding issues need to be studied further in order to select a preferred alternative(s) for this segment:

1. Which side of the Mississippi River should the non-motorized trail be located on?
2. Is there potential for the Soo Line Trail west of US 10 to carry both motorized and non-motorized trail uses in the future?
3. Is there adequate right-of-way along US 10 for motorized trail use within this area?

It is likely a feasibility study/more detailed alternatives analysis will need to be conducted for this segment as additional information is gathered and construction of this segment becomes more imminent. However, the complexity of these issues are low and it is anticipated that with little additional effort and coordination, the issues could be resolved.