ROOT RIVER STATE TRAIL EXTENSION
HOUSTON TO LA CRESCENT
MASTER PLAN

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Trails
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The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Trails Division would like to thank all who participated in this master planning process. Many individuals and groups in trail communities have been working for many years to help establish this trail. The Houston County Trails Committee has played a leading role in these efforts and continues to do so. Many DNR staff, city, county, state and federal officials, trail association members and local citizens contributed their time and energy to the planning process as well.

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Executive Summary

Trail Alignment and Development

The Root River State Trail is one of the oldest and most popular rail-trails in Minnesota, legislatively authorized in 1971 and developed in the early 1980s. The Root River Trail is now a segment of the Blufflands Trail System, extending through Fillmore, Olmsted, Winona, and Houston Counties.

The proposed trail segment will begin at the current terminus of the Root River State Trail in the City of Houston and will follow the Root River Valley through the City of Hokah to Miller’s Corner (the junction of Minnesota Trunk Highways 16 and 26). From that point the trail will turn north and parallel Highway 16 to the city of La Crescent. The easternmost segment, known as the Wagon Wheel Trail, will extend from U.S. Highway 61 in La Crescent to the Mississippi River, then south to the Highway 14/61 bridge across the Mississippi to La Crosse, Wisconsin, providing a connection to over 100 miles of Wisconsin state trails.

An alignment for the Wagon Wheel Trail segment has been identified. Throughout the remainder of the trail search corridor, specific alignments have not been finalized and will depend upon further discussions with landowners, road authorities, communities and managers of public landholdings.

The trail will be approximately 18 miles in length when complete. It is currently envisioned that the certain segments of the trail will be paved, while others may initially be surfaced with limestone screenings, which produce a hard surface when rolled. There are advantages and disadvantages to each type of trail surface, and these will continue to be evaluated as trail segments are designed.

Recommended Trail Uses

The Root River State Trail Extension is a multi-use state trail and will allow all the uses allowed on the existing Root River State Trail, including bicycling, hiking and walking, running, and similar uses. Hunting will be allowed except where regulated by community ordinances. Snowmobiling and horseback riding will be allowed on specified segments of the trail. (Snowmobile use is currently planned between Miller’s Corner and Houston, and a small portion of the trail near Hokah is planned for horseback riding.)

Trail Management

The plan contains recommendations for maintenance, enforcement, and interpretation of natural and cultural resources. Trail maintenance is critical to provide and sustain the quality experience trail users expect and appreciate. The plan recommends that an adequate level of enforcement be provided via a multifaceted approach, to help maintain a safe and secure trail environment. It
is also a goal to encourage trail users to understand and obey trail rules, respect other trail users and respect adjoining properties.

**Natural and Cultural Resources**
The ecological value of the trail corridor will be enhanced wherever possible through intensive resource management. The vegetation within the trail right-of-way will be managed to provide a healthy diversity of native woodland, wetland, and prairie communities for wildlife habitat and for the enjoyment of trail users and adjoining landowners. Native flowers, grasses, trees and shrubs that are consistent with the natural plant communities of the area will be planted and managed. Areas disturbed during construction will be seeded with native plants. Cultural resources will be preserved and managed for interpretive purposes. Some native plant community management may include cooperative efforts with adjacent land owners. Trail users will have opportunities to experience the history of the Blufflands region through existing historical and proposed interpretive sites.