

Section 3: Trail Alignment and Development

Overview of the Trail Alignment

The Stagecoach State Trail is a legislatively authorized state trail which, when complete, will connect the towns of Rochester, Mantorville, Wasioja, and Owatonna. This trail also serves as a connection between the Douglas State Trail, Rice Lake State Park, and the legislatively authorized, but currently undeveloped Prairie Wildflower State Trail. The Stagecoach State Trail is projected to be approximately 36 miles long, however, final route selection will determine the actual length.

For the purposes of this plan, the trail corridor has been divided into seven planning segments for ease of describing and discussing the resources and features along the trail corridor. No alignments have been secured at the time of writing this plan. These segments are independent of development opportunities and priorities.

The planning segments from east to west are identified as:

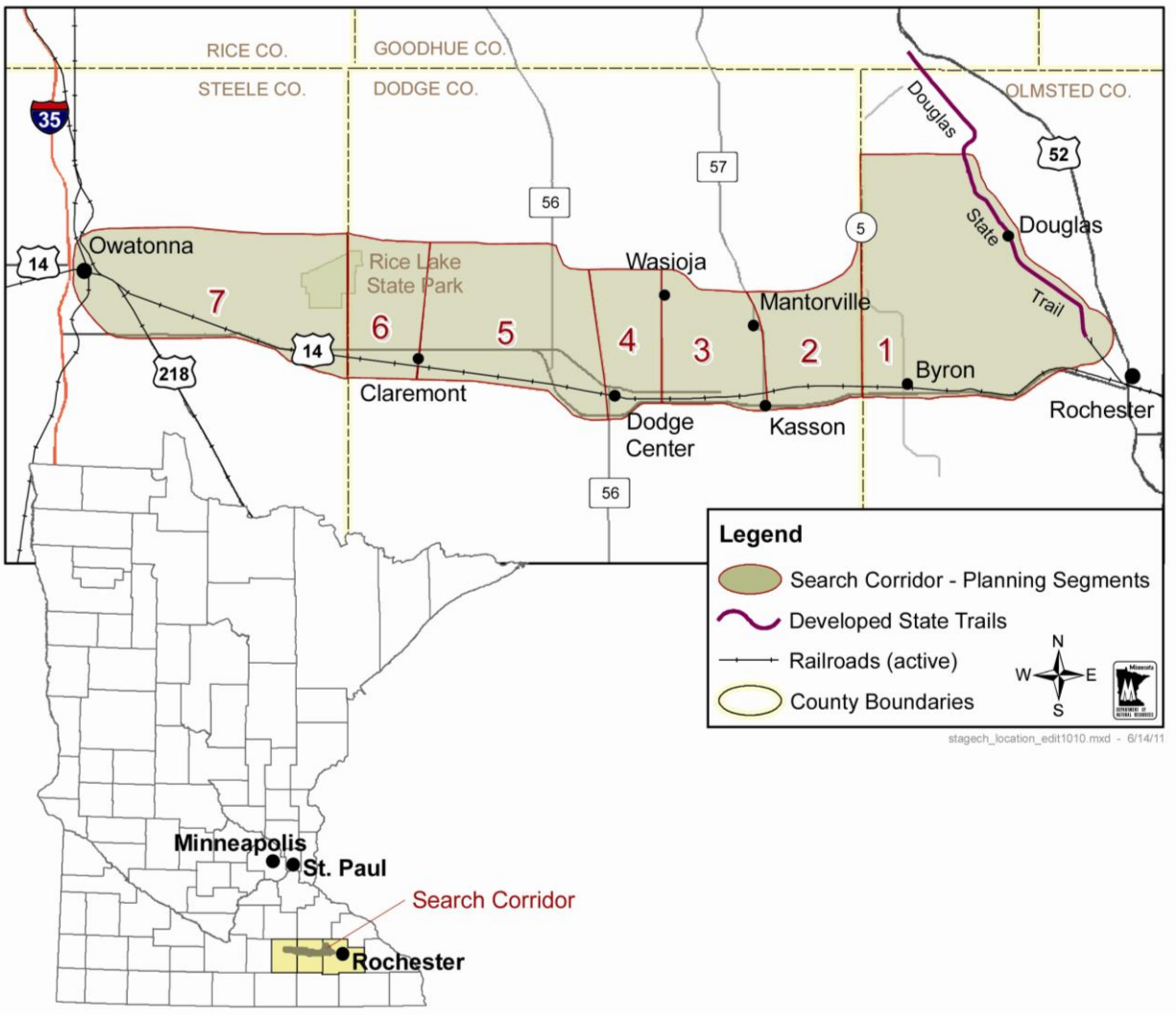
1. Douglas State Trail to Olmsted-Dodge County Border
2. Olmsted-Dodge County Border to Mantorville
3. Mantorville to Wasioja
4. Wasioja to Dodge Center
5. Dodge Center to Claremont
6. Claremont to Rice Lake State Park
7. Rice Lake State Park to Owatonna



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; and
- Descriptions and maps of county and state parks and trails or other recreational resources the trail will connect.

Figure 3.1. Stagecoach State Trail Overview Map with Planning Segments



Segment 1: Douglas State Trail (Rochester) to Olmsted-Dodge County Border

Description of the trail environment

The eastern terminus of the Stagecoach State Trail will be at a location along the existing Douglas State Trail. This location should share a trailhead including parking and restroom facilities at a minimum. Scope of the search corridor generally spans from the north end at Douglas, County Road 14, following Douglas State Trail southerly to the Rochester terminus, and further south to U.S. Highway 14 corridor, and westerly toward the Olmsted – Dodge County border, including areas encompassing the City of Byron, Oxbow Park and the South Branch Zumbro River.

Considering existing facilities, one option for trail connection is at the Douglas State Trail terminus in Rochester, and another option is located at the existing parking lot and Douglas State Trail trailhead located in Douglas. Other possibilities include creating a new trailhead between these two existing ones along the Douglas State Trail.

The existing trailhead in Douglas for the Douglas State Trail is located along County Road 14. Douglas is a small community and is primarily residential – rural residential in the close vicinity to the trailhead, but also is easily accessible from U.S. Highway 52, a major travel route to the City of Rochester. This location is suitable due to its accessible location and the potential for a more scenic route of the Stagecoach State Trail heading west toward the South Branch Zumbro River corridor. Upgrades or improvements to the existing facility may be necessary if this becomes a dual-trailhead.



The landscape heading west from Douglas is largely comprised of rural farmlands. Rolling hills provide scenic views of the farmlands and wooded stream valleys that become more pronounced toward the county boundary. The Zumbro River Valley is especially scenic which also includes some steep terrain that may be challenging, or even unsuitable, for trail development.

Where the Douglas State Trail terminates in Rochester, at County Road 4, near the intersection of Hwy 22/West Circle Dr. NW and Valleyhigh Road NW (CR 4), the immediate area is zoned as mixed commercial – industrial, with several residential neighborhoods nearby. Once outside of the city limits of Rochester, much of the landscape is rural farmland. This location is suitable due to the close proximity of residential areas and the potential connections with the existing and proposed routes that are part of the Rochester Trail System.

It may be appropriate to consider more than one alternative in this segment as there has been interested expressed by potential trail users groups to have an alignment for equestrian use along this portion of the trail. Some segments may not lend themselves to being able to occupy a parallel dual treadway for bicycle and equestrian use. However, separate, non-parallel treadways may be pursued, as alternatives or opportunities arise.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Connection to Douglas State Trail
- Shared trailhead/parking location with Douglas State Trail
- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the landscape
- Minimize wetland impacts
- Enhance riparian buffers
- 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 identified by the County Biological Survey or other resource inventories
- Use existing road right-of-way where practical or necessary, minimizing user exposure to traffic

Trail Alignment Options

- South Branch Zumbro River corridor
- County Road 14 in Douglas
- County Road 3 south to 66th St NW then westerly to South Branch Zumbro River corridor
- County Highway 4 to County Road 5 NW/County Highway 5
- Connection to, or through, Oxbow Park (Olmsted County Park)
- County Road 104 to County Road 4 or U.S. Hwy 14
- U.S. Highway 14, westerly to Byron, and on to county border
- Stemming from the Rochester terminus of Douglas State Trail, follow County Road 4 west toward Kalmar Reservoir and on toward Byron and county border
- County Road 104, potential corridor, as it planned to be upgraded to four-lane highway

Local Trail and Park Connections

The Stagecoach State Trail could connect to other local trails in Rochester and Byron to enhance recreational opportunities and experiences.

The state trail could connect with the existing or future stages of the local Byron Trail, which currently runs from a residential area to the high school campus along County Road 5 NW. Additional recreational trails are located within Byron, primarily through residential neighborhoods.

Oxbow Park is another potential connection point for the Stagecoach State Trail. Oxbow Park is located north of Byron, near the intersection of County Road 5 NW/County Highway 5 and County Road 105.

Trail Access – Parking Areas, Rest Areas and Interpretive Sites

A parking lot and a portable toilet are currently available at the Douglas State Trail in Douglas. Upgrades to the parking lot and toilets may be needed if this becomes a dual trail head.

Adequate parking and vault toilet facilities are at the Douglas State Trail, southern terminus in Rochester. Minor, if any improvements would be necessary at this location if it becomes a dual trail head.

Additional locations for parking and other amenities or support facilities may be necessary in the vicinity of the Olmsted and Dodge County boundary, depending upon trail location, (such as along County Highway 5 and Dodge County Road 16, Byron, Oxbow Park, etc).

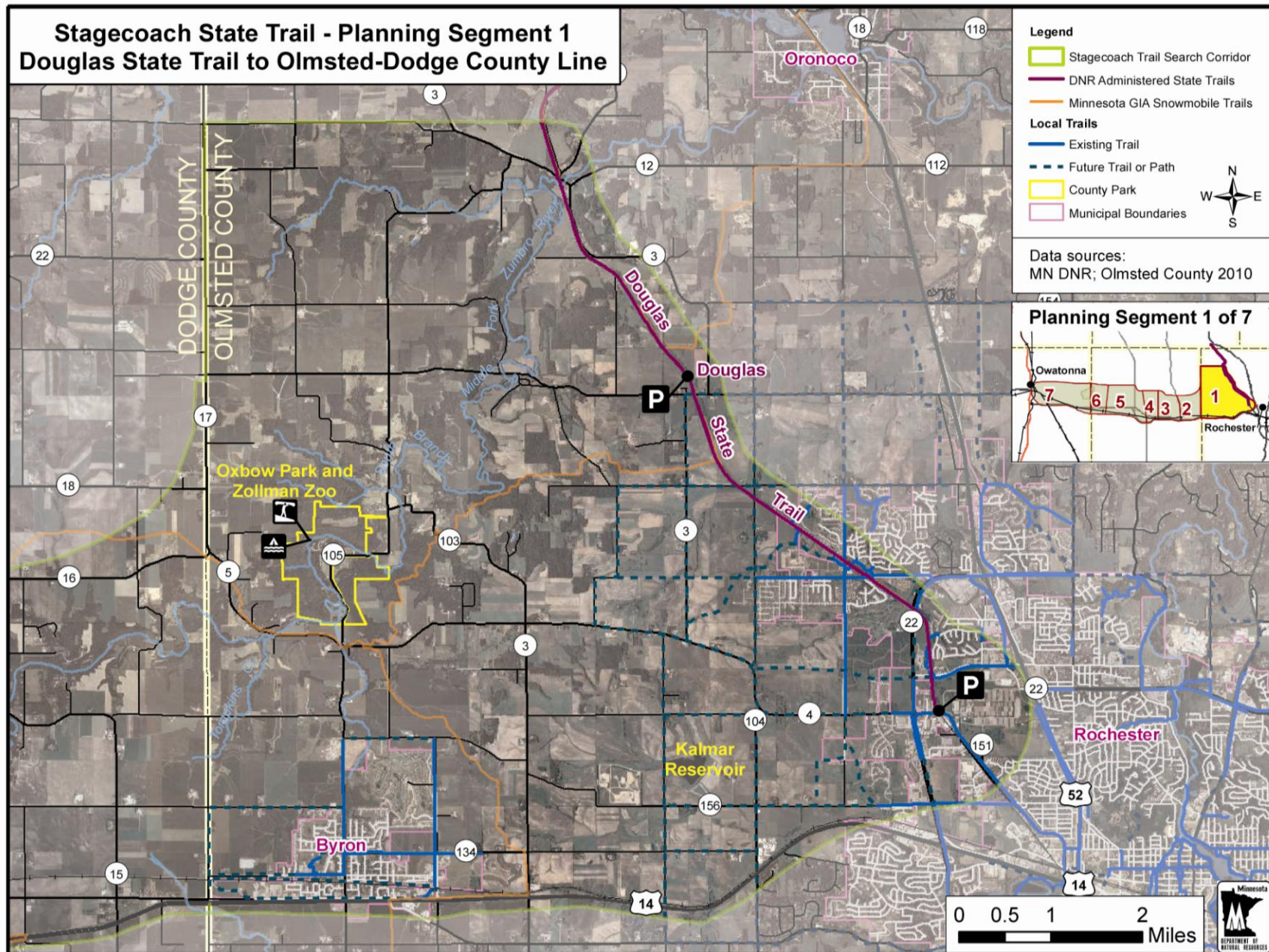


Douglas State Trail.



Douglas State Trail, asphalt and natural surface treadways, also described as “dual treadway.”

Figure 3.2. Planning Segment 1 Search Corridor: Douglas State Trail to Olmsted-Dodge County Line.



Communities and Connections

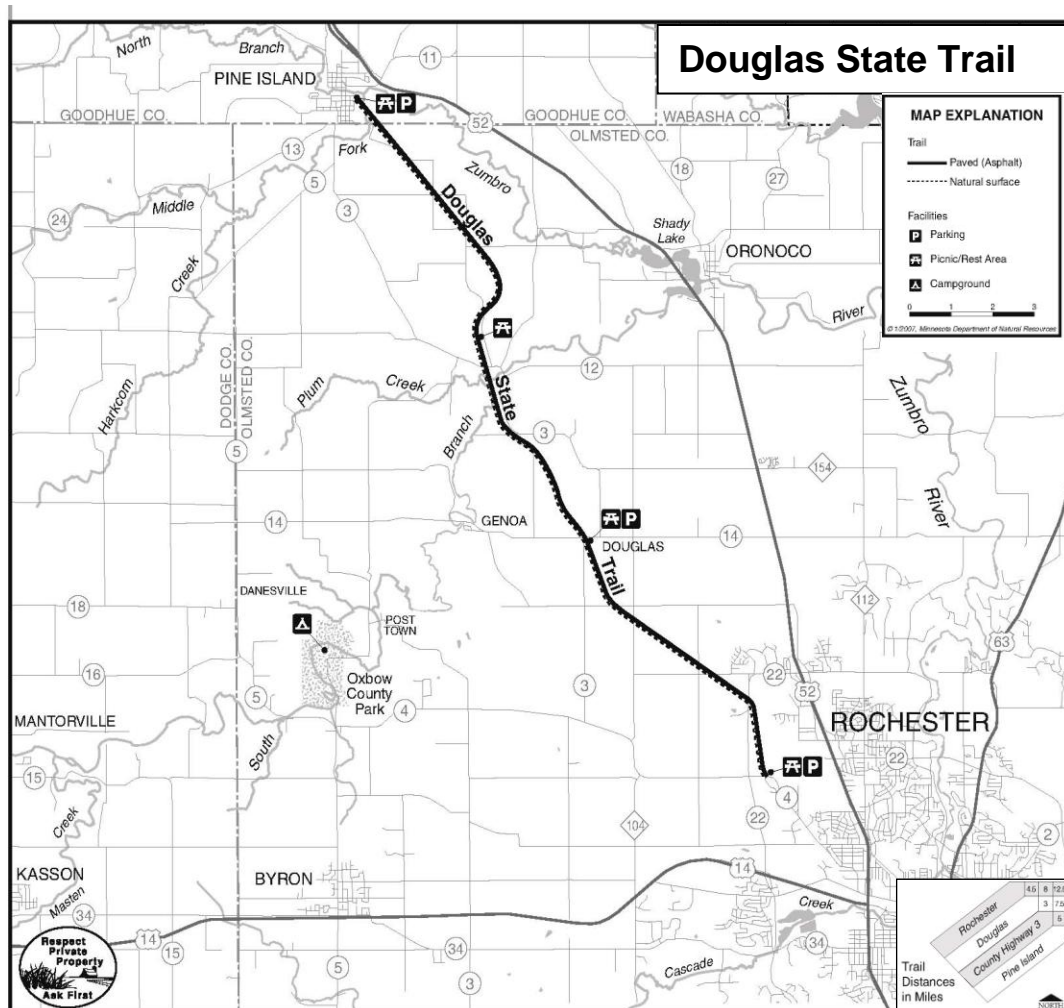
Douglas State Trail

The Douglas State Trail is a 12.5 mile, multiple use trail developed on an abandoned railroad grade. The trail consists of two separate, parallel treadways: one treadway is paved for multiple uses including bicycling, hiking, in-line skating in the summer; and the natural surface treadway is primarily used for horseback riding, mountain biking, and snowmobiling.

This trail crosses outstanding rural scenery, traversing some of the richest agricultural land in Minnesota. The northern trail terminus is located in Pine Island, and as the trail heads south, it travels through the small town of Douglas (for which the trail is named) and continues southerly and terminates in northwestern Rochester. Present access to the trail includes three parking lots with rest facilities.

According to a trail use and user surveys conducted by the DNR in 1997 and 2009 along the Douglas State Trail, approximately 80% of the trail users are local, traveling 10 miles or less to get to the trail. Bicycling was found to be the leading activity on the Douglas State Trail, with walking, running and in-line skating also cited as frequent uses.

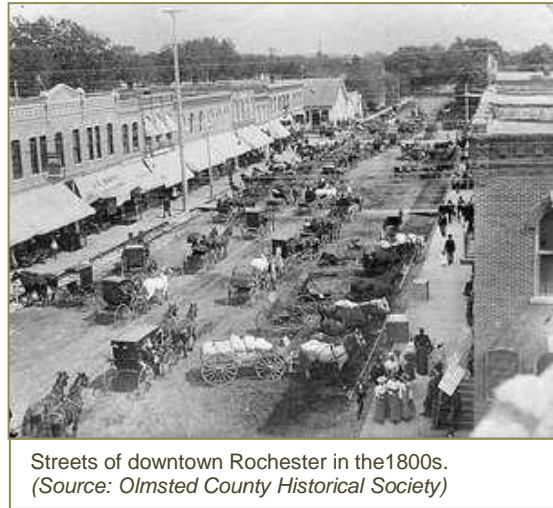
Figure 3.3. Douglas State Trail Map.



Rochester

Rochester is the county seat of Olmsted County. It was incorporated as a city on August 5, 1858 and was named after Rochester, New York by George Head, an early settler who is credited with founding the city of Rochester in 1854. He was one of the first to settle in the area of what is now part of the city's business district. By 1856, the population was 50, and by 1883 the city had 10,000 residents.

The city's location along the Dubuque Trail, a 272-mile stagecoach route from St. Paul to Dubuque, Iowa, aided to the growth of the city. Even more important for the growth of the city was the development of the Winona and St. Peter Railroad in 1864.



Streets of downtown Rochester in the 1800s.
(Source: Olmsted County Historical Society)

In 1863, Dr. William Worrall Mayo arrived in Rochester as a medical examiner of Civil War recruits. He often brought his sons, Will and Charlie, with him on medical calls, and they eventually became doctors themselves. When a tornado devastated the northern end of town, killing and injuring many people on August 21, 1883, the Mayo's worked with the Sisters of St. Francis to care for the victims. After this tragic event, Sister Mary Alfred offered to build and maintain a hospital if Dr. Mayo would provide medical staff. This action set in motion what would become the world-renowned Mayo Clinic.

Today, the Mayo Clinic forms the core of Rochester's economy and is the largest employer in the city, employing nearly 30,000 people and drawing over 2 million visitors to the city each year. The Mayo Clinic and its associated facilities, along with hotels, restaurants, and retail stores, comprise nearly all of downtown Rochester. The second largest employer is IBM, which houses one of the company's most important manufacturing centers in Rochester. The economy of Rochester is also influenced by the agriculture in the region. Food processing plants and multiple dairy producers are active in the area.

The population of Rochester was 85,806 at the 2000 Census. According to the 2010 Census, Rochester's population is 106,769. (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000; and MN Department of Administration, Office of Geographic and Demographic Analysis, 2011.)

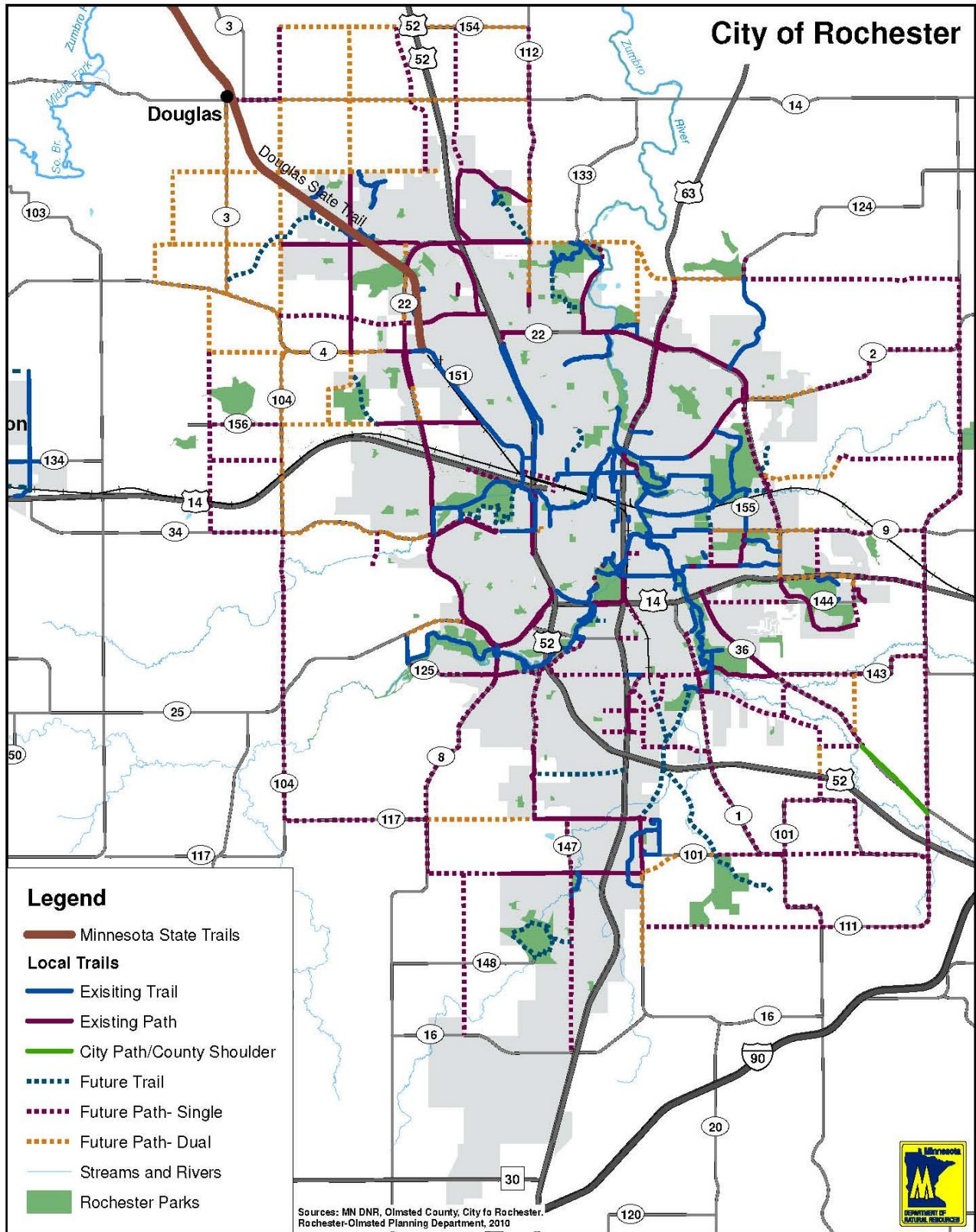
The City of Rochester has a large park system with more than 100 parks totaling more than 3500 acres, including playgrounds, neighborhood parks, community parks, sport complexes, open spaces and reserves. Rochester also has developed 85 miles of paved recreational trails available for walking, running, biking, in-line skating, wheelchair and stroller use.

Interrelationship to the Stagecoach State Trail

A specific alignment of the Stagecoach State Trail in Rochester has not been determined.

The eastern terminus of the Stagecoach State Trail could be developed in the western part of the City of Rochester, where the Douglas State Trail currently terminates. It may be possible to link to other local trails that are part of a larger local trail system throughout the City of Rochester. Rochester boasts a strong support for local trails and parks and has an extensive vision and bikeways plan in place.

Figure 3.4. City of Rochester map with existing and proposed recreational trails.



Douglas

Douglas is a small unincorporated community in Olmsted County, located approximately two miles north of the city limits of Rochester. The estimated population of Douglas is 45 people. Douglas includes an existing trailhead for the Douglas State Trail, which with a few improvements could also be a trailhead for the Stagecoach State Trail if the Stagecoach Trail branches off of the Douglas at or near this facility.

The landscape just off of the main road quickly becomes primarily agricultural with varied topography including rolling hills and riparian hardwoods in the Zumbro River Valley.

Interrelationship with the Stagecoach State Trail

A trail alignment or connection to the Douglas State Trail has not been determined. A connection in the Douglas community at the existing parking/trailhead for the Douglas State Trail is a viable option. [City labeled on Figures 3.3 and 3.4.]

Byron

Byron is located approximately eight miles west of Rochester in Olmsted County. The first settlers arrived in 1854. In 1865, when the Winona St. Peter Railroad, now known as the Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern Railroad (DM&E), was being built, it was decided to establish a station ten miles west of Rochester close to a community then known as Bear Grove. A New York Millionaire named S. W. VanDusen, purchased land near this station and platted a village he named Byron, after his hometown in New York. The railroad became the lifeline of the village and at one time, at least eight passenger trains stopped daily in Byron. The bustling village had a hotel, town doctor, cheese factory, brick yard, several general stores, and a saloon. Little remains of the original buildings as many were destroyed by fires.

Today, the City of Byron includes local industries in the form of farm services and printing. A grain elevator is situated next to the Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern rail line that runs through the city. Byron schools include an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school. A local trail has been established that leads from a residential neighborhood to the high school campus. Additional recreational trails are located within residential areas.

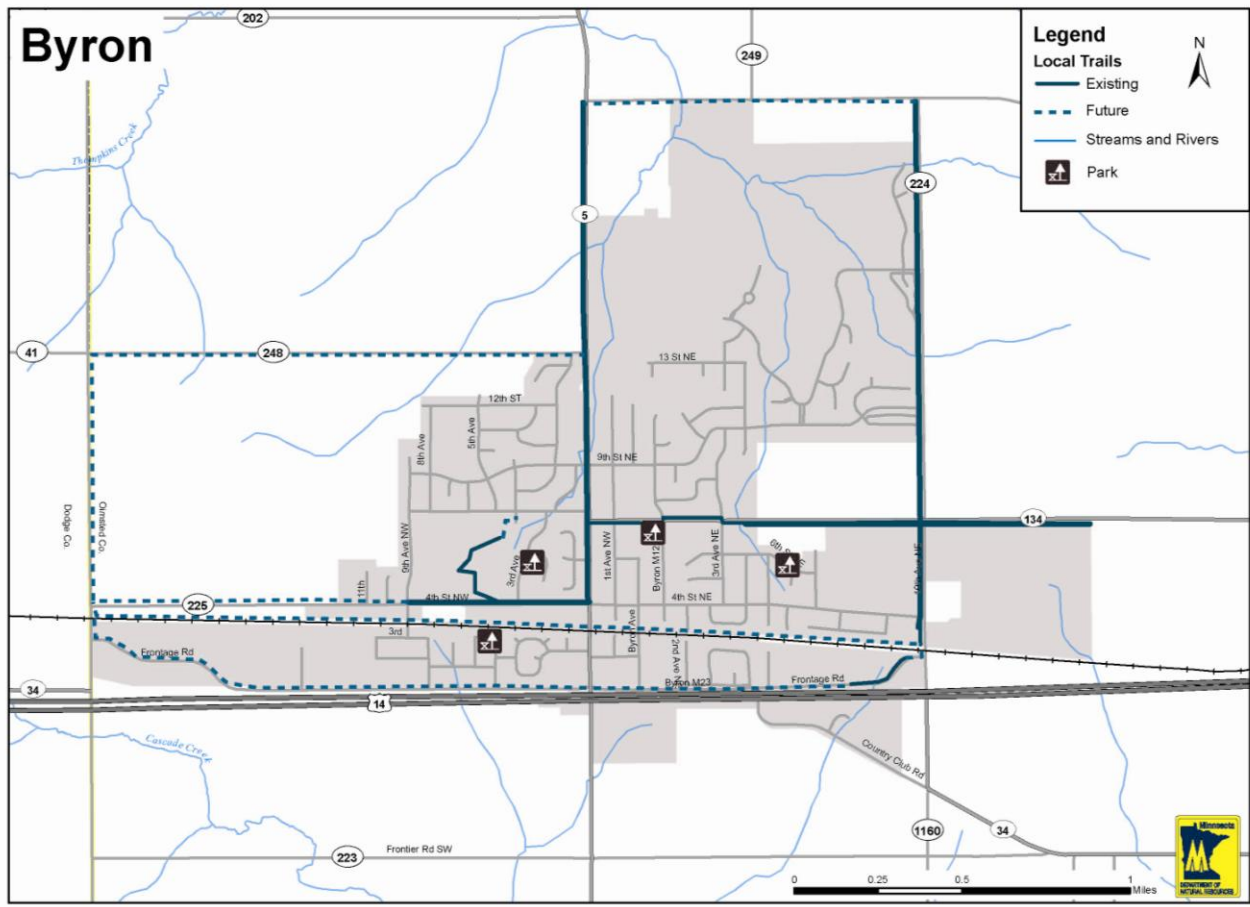
The population of Byron was 3,500 at the 2000 Census. The 2010 population was 4,914. (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000; and MN Department of Administration, Office of Geographic and Demographic Analysis, 2011.)

Interrelationship to the Stagecoach State Trail

A trail connection or alignment to or through Byron has not been determined. Establishing an alignment that connects to the City of Byron remains a viable option.

The City of Byron has constructed several local multi-use recreational trails.

Figure 3.5. City of Byron Map.



PAT 2/18/11 P:\TAW\Stagecoach\MAPS\City Maps\StagecoachCities.mxd

Oxbow Park and Zoo

Oxbow Park, administered by Olmsted County, is located in the Zumbro River Valley, 3.5 miles north of Byron. The park consists of over 620 acres, which includes eight miles of developed hiking trails, four different picnic areas, six separate picnic shelters and playground equipment. The park also has a semi-primitive campground with 29 campsites, one group camp site, ten electrical campsites, running water, restrooms and shower facilities.

The South Branch of the Zumbro River flows through the park. A large bend in the river, called an “oxbow” because of its resemblance to an ox yoke, gave the park its name. An “oxbow” of the river within the park has been preserved through bank stabilization and now surrounds the main picnic area.

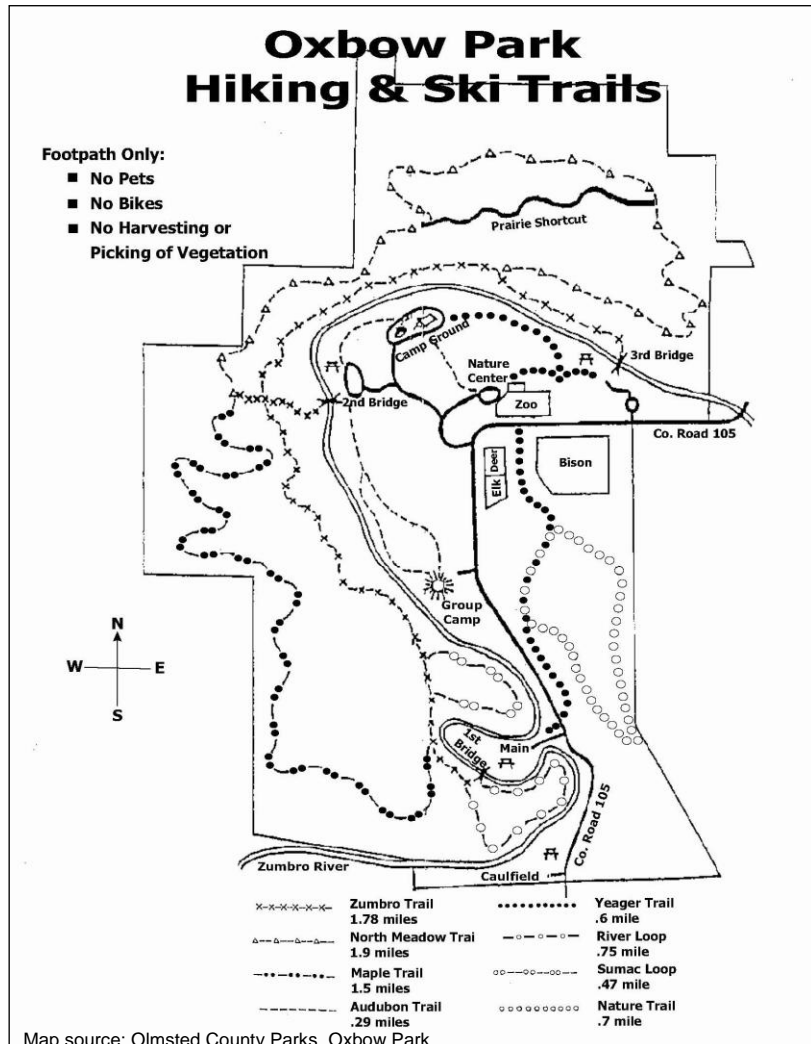
The Dr. Paul E Zollman Zoo is located within the park boundary and houses over 30 native Minnesota animal species. Most of the animals are permanently injured or surplus from other facilities and cannot be released to the wild. These animals provide opportunities for learning and enjoyment and are utilized in environmental education programs at the park.

Oxbow Nature Center, also located in Oxbow Park, offers expanded educational and recreational programs and activities. The building includes a classroom, snake exhibit, and displays natural artifacts.

Oxbow Park and Zoo is a popular local destination for outdoor recreation. This park was frequently identified in public comments as a desired connection for the trail, and was often suggested as a potential trailhead location. Trail users are attracted to the park for its beautiful scenery, amenities, activities and wildlife viewing.

The area around and within Oxbow Park includes a concentration of rare and natural features that would be taken into careful consideration prior to any development plans. Currently, the park offers foot paths or hiking trails, where bicycles, pets or other activities such as berry picking, are prohibited. Other trail uses may or may not be compatible with the existing uses of park lands.

Figure 3.6. Oxbow Park Map.



Interrelationship with the Stagecoach State Trail

A trail alignment to or through Oxbow Park has not been determined. Public comments identified this as a favorable destination or trail connection. Oxbow Park's relationship with the Stagecoach State Trail will depend upon the trail alignment location. Oxbow Park could be an important part of the future trail if the alignment reaches the park boundary or runs through it. However, if a trail alignment is not found near, to, or through the park boundary, it will not have a direct relationship to the trail.

Potential routes for the Stagecoach State Trail include staying outside the park boundary, following the northern park boundary, or going through the park by following the existing road. The alternatives included provide options that will continue to be considered as the trail alignment develops. However, support and agreement from Olmsted County Parks will be necessary in order for these options to be feasible.

Since there has been such strong public interest in having the Stagecoach State Trail connect with Oxbow Park, it remains as an option for consideration.

Segment 2: Olmsted – Dodge County Border to Mantorville

Description of the Alignment and Landscape

From the Olmsted-Dodge County border, the trail will continue westerly toward Mantorville. Route options include stemming from the Oxbow Park and County Road 5 area, or the City of Byron area.

The terrain in the area between the county border and Kasson – Mantorville area is diverse and scenic with steep to rolling hills and valleys, crossing numerous streams with views of rolling hills in the distance. Much of the landscape is cultivated farmland with pockets of suburban-like residential developments along with stands of hardwoods in the riparian zones. The northern edge of this search corridor includes more hills and streams than the southern area, however, both offer opportunities for scenic views.

Mantorville Township has officially expressed support for the Stagecoach State Trail to travel through the Township.

An exact alignment has not been determined for this segment. However, several alignment options exist.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way for the trail that showcases features of the natural landscape
- Minimize wetland impacts
- Enhance riparian buffers
- 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 identified by the County Biological Survey or other resource inventories
- Use existing road right-of-way where practical or necessary, minimizing user exposure to traffic
- Provide scenic route into Mantorville
- Provide a trailhead facility in Mantorville
- Connect to Riverside Park and Welcome Center in Mantorville (potential trailhead site)
- Connect to existing local trails, Sunrise and/or Sunset Trails
- Potential connection through Kasson and local trails then to Mantorville
- Connect to Mantorville Historic District, and provide some interpretation of historic resources (coordinate with Minnesota Historical Society, Dodge County Historical Society)

Trail Alignment Options

- Northerly route – from Olmsted County Line, along County Road 16, to 260th Ave. to 608th St./5th St. into Mantorville

- Southerly route - 625th St from Byron toward Kasson – Mantorville School Campus, to Sunrise Trail, to Riverside Park in Mantorville
- Follow South Branch Middle Fork Zumbro River corridor

Trail Access – Parking Areas, Rest Areas and Interpretive Sites

Riverside Park in Mantorville presently includes parking, toilets, picnic tables, beverage vending machine, playground equipment, access to river. Utilizing this park as a trailhead for the state trail is well supported by the community and the Dodge County Trail Association.

The Historic District in Mantorville is adjacent to Riverside Park.

Alternative locations for rest areas or parking in Kasson may also be considered if the trail travels to or through Kasson.

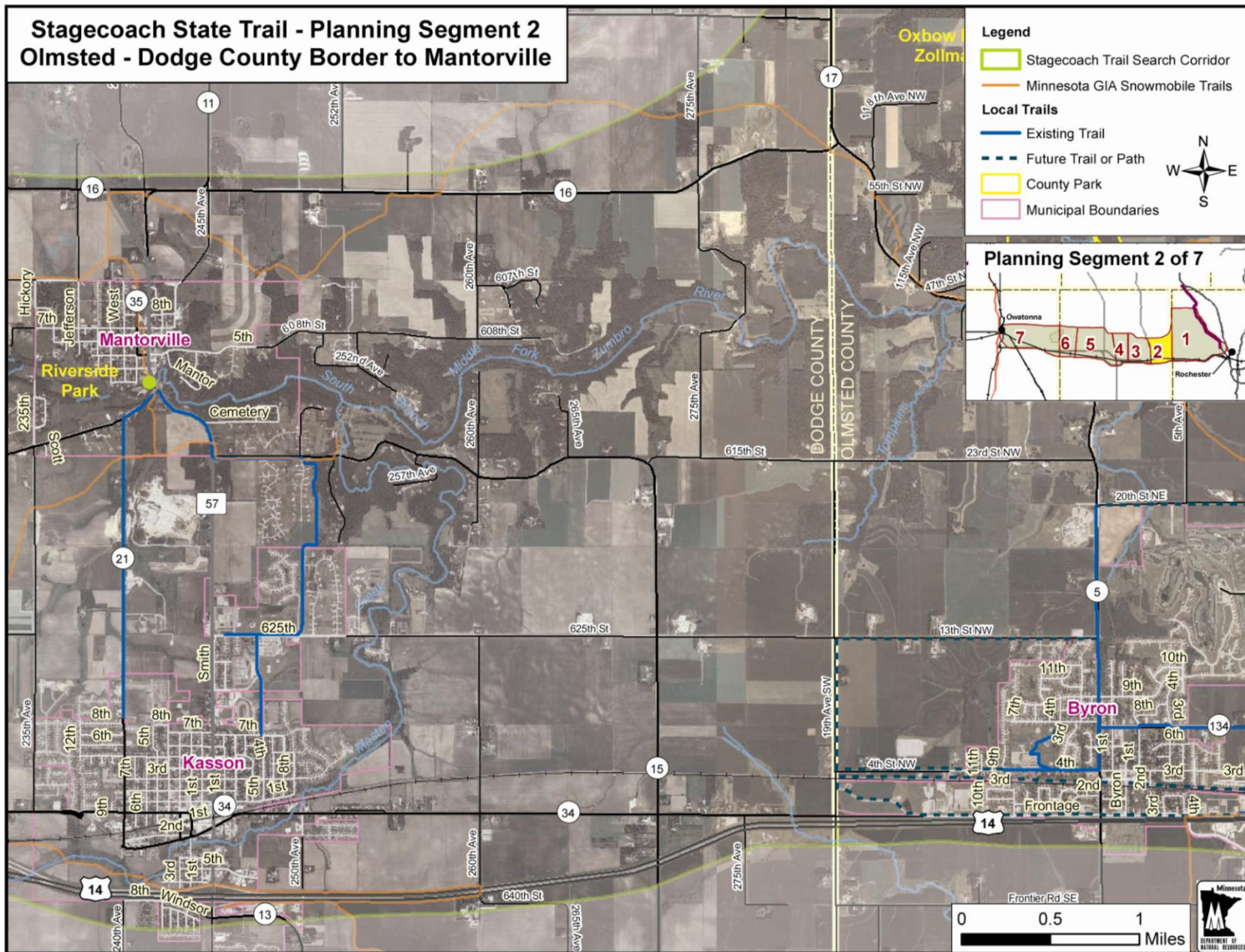


Covered bridge at Riverside Park leads to Goat Island, Mantorville.
(Source: Mantorville Chamber of Commerce.)



Bicycle Club in front of the Hubbell House, Mantorville, Minnesota. Circa 1880's. (Photo provided by Dodge County Historical Society and the Hubbell House.)

Figure 3.7. Planning Segment 2 Search Corridor: Olmsted-Dodge County Border to Mantorville.



Communities and Connections

Mantorville

Mantorville is the county seat of Dodge County, and located approximately 15 miles west of Rochester. The flowing Zumbro River, the hilly acres of woodland layered with limestone and the rich, fertile soils add to the beauty of the area.

Mantorville is named after brothers Peter and Riley Mantor, who arrived in 1853. A group of homesteaders explored and settled in the area in 1854. Mantorville was platted in 1856 and incorporated in 1857.

The entire 12-block area of downtown Mantorville is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The town's history is evident by the limestone buildings in its historic downtown area. Mantorville Limestone was a popular building material and shipped to numerous locations throughout the United States. Many of the original limestone buildings remain viable to the community today, such as the original Dodge County Courthouse, completed in 1871, the oldest working courthouse in Minnesota; and the Hubbell House, built in 1856, is a fine dining establishment with a Civil War era atmosphere. Other original buildings include the Mantorville Saloon and the Opera House.



In 1855, the population was about 100, by 1857 the population grew to 500, and by 1860 the population jumped to 760. The population at the 2010 Census was 1,926. (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000; and MN Department of Administration, Office of Geographic and Demographic Analysis, 2011.)

Today, Mantorville is a quaint hamlet, reminiscent of a time in the past. Visitors and residents enjoy the relaxed atmosphere and simplicity. Melodramas at the historic Opera House and the famous Hubbell House Restaurant continue to attract locals and tourists alike. Mantorville offers a high quality of life and is rich with opportunities for growth, enjoyment and development.

Interrelationship with the Stagecoach State Trail

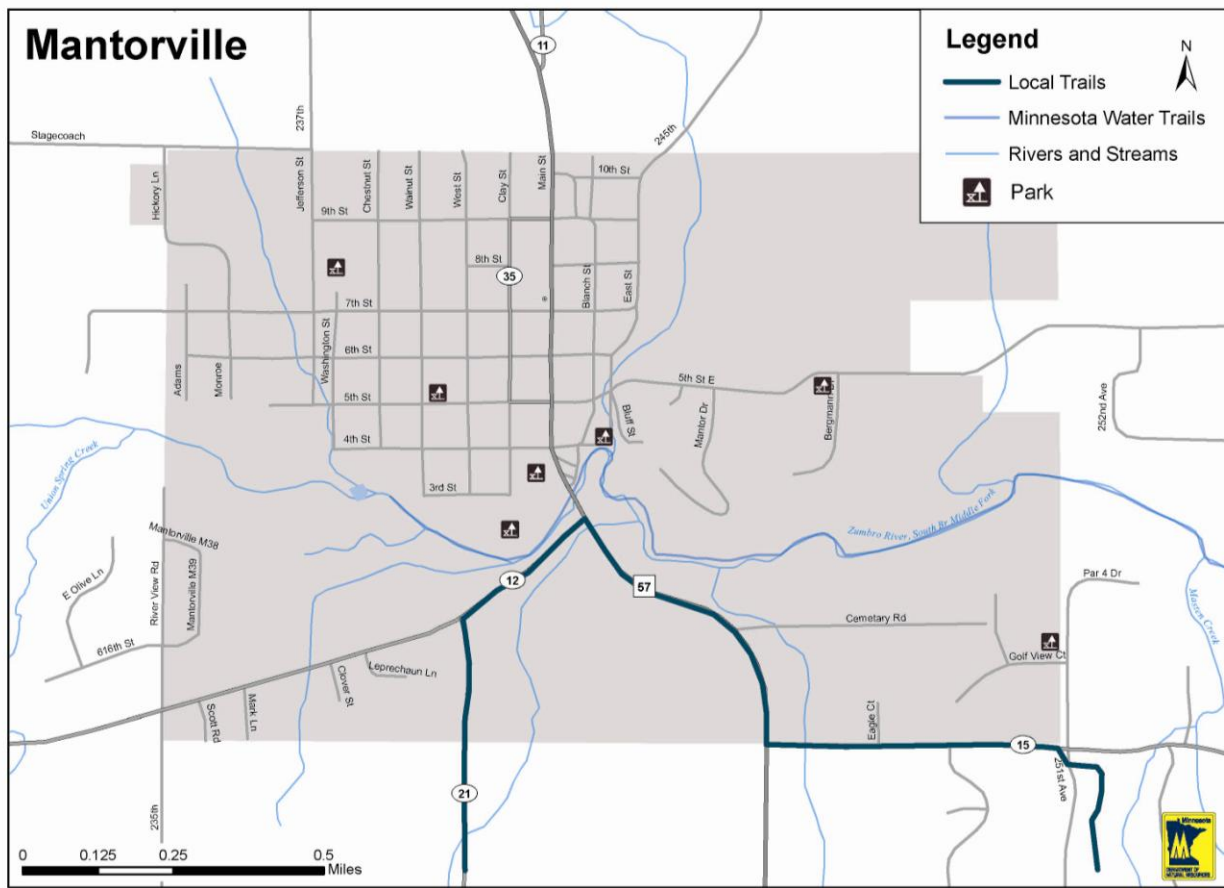
An alignment through Mantorville has not been determined. Routes being considered that are believed to be part of the original stagecoach road include the north side of 5th Street, east of the junction with MN Hwy 57. According to the National Register of Historic Places, the "Mantorville and Red Wing Stage Road" was possibly located along this corridor. Other documents indicate that the Red Wing to Mantorville Stage Road entered Mantorville from the north, following what is now known as County Road 11 and a portion of 245th Ave to connect to Main Street, stopping at the Hubbell House. It is believed that multiple stage roads, original county roads (years 1854-1857) and territorial roads passed through the heart of Mantorville during the mid-1800s. (Hanson, 2011.)

The City of Mantorville currently maintains six city parks and a Welcome Center near Riverside Park and the historic downtown area at the intersection of Highway 57 (Main Street) and 4th Street. Riverside Park is a potential location for a trailhead, with existing parking spaces and wheelchair accessible restroom facilities. Riverside Park has a rich history of its own as the original site of the Chicago Great

Western Railroad depot and lumber mill, which may be featured through interpretive displays. Today, the park includes a playground, swings, picnic tables, accessible sidewalks, and a carry-in canoe access and shore fishing opportunities along the South Branch Middle Fork Zumbro River. Additional amenities could be added to the park area with trail development in order to better accommodate trail users and visitors.

The City of Mantorville, through the mayor and other city officials, has expressed interest and support in pursuing a trail route along 5th Street to Riverside Park, which follows in part what was believed to be the historic stagecoach route in town. The DNR will continue to work with the City and associated interest groups on establishing a trail route through Mantorville, while also seeking additional information regarding historic stage roads through the area.

Figure 3.8. City of Mantorville Map.



Kasson

Kasson is located approximately 13 miles west of Rochester. The City of Kasson, named for Irish Pioneer Jabez Hyde Kasson, was incorporated on February 24, 1870. Kasson was a prairie at the time, and early settlers began planting trees.

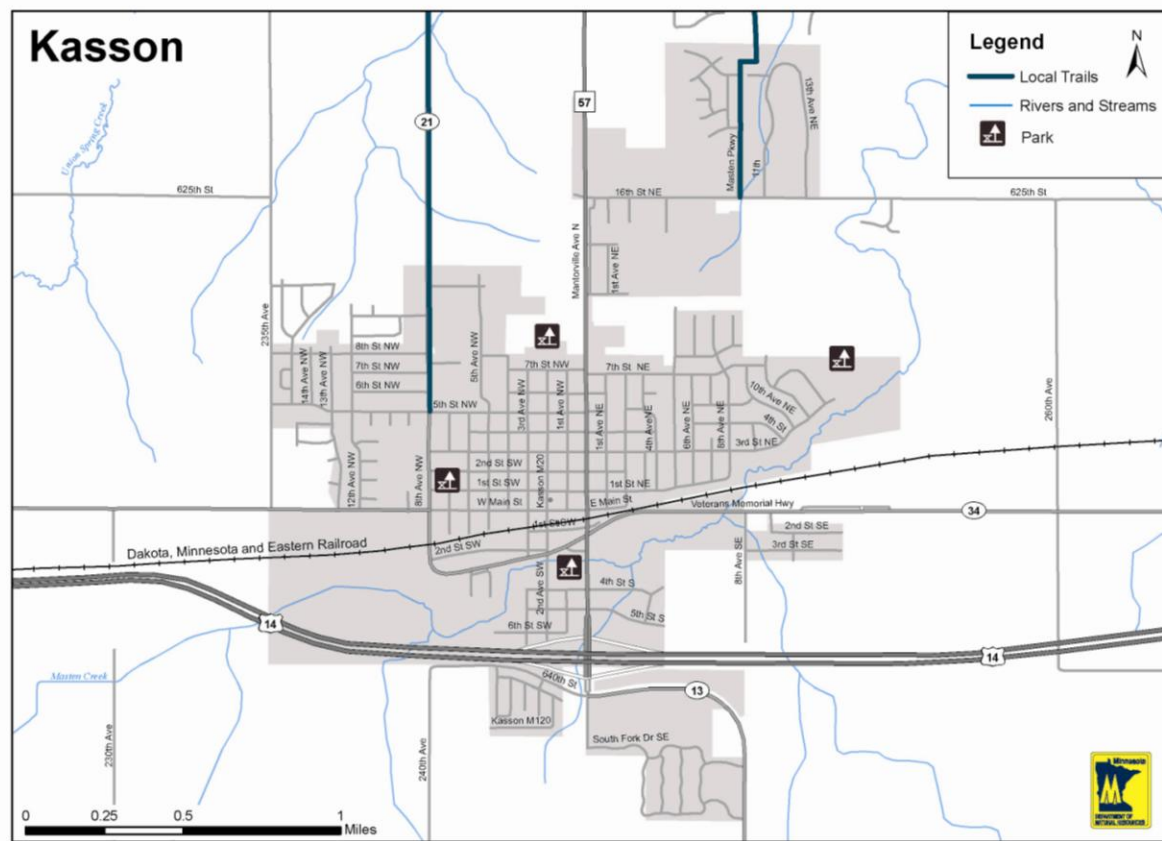
When the Winona and St. Peter Railroad reached this place in the fall of 1865, this village was laid out by Kasson and others, the plat being recorded October 13, 1865, and in November the first passenger train came to Kasson. The village was incorporated on February 24, 1870, and again on April 22, 1916, separating from the township on March 21, 1917. Kasson had a station of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway, and its post office opened in 1866. (Minnesota Historical Society, 2009)

Today, the City holds the "Tree City USA" designation for its ongoing tree propagating and maintenance program. Kasson has several historic attractions, three of which are on the National Register of Historic Places, including the Municipal Building, Kasson Public School, and an original limestone water tower built in 1895. The population at the 2010 Census was 5,931. (MN Department of Administration, Office of Geographic and Demographic Analysis, 2011.)

Interrelationship with the Stagecoach State Trail

An alignment through the area has not been determined. Potential alignment options include providing a connection directly to or through the city of Kasson. If the Stagecoach State Trail does not directly connect with the city, it will likely be connected through the local trail system, which also connects to the City of Mantorville.

Figure 3.9. City of Kasson Map.



Segment 3: Mantorville to Wasioja

Description of the Alignment and Landscape

Mantorville to Wasioja is a relatively short distance of approximately 3 miles. Heading west out of Mantorville toward Wasioja will likely include several river or stream crossings over varied terrain. Some areas include steep ravines to the South Branch Middle Fork Zumbro River where new bridges would be required in order to span river crossings. A significant portion of the original stagecoach road was likely located along what is now appropriately named Stagecoach Road.

There is strong public interest in being able to accommodate multiple uses along this segment, including equestrian use such as horseback riding or carriage driving (stagecoach re-enactment or tourism functions), along with hiking and biking. A dual treadway may be pursued, parallel or not, to accommodate the interested uses in this segment.

The landscape includes varied terrain with gentle to rolling hills and some steep slopes closer to the streams and rivers. Potential deer wintering areas have been identified between Mantorville and Wasioja, where typically these locations provide sufficient cover and food sources for less than 50 deer. Much of the land outside the city limits is cultivated farmland. Historic limestone quarries provided the limestone for the Dodge County Courthouse, Hubbell House, Opera House, and many other buildings in the historic district within Mantorville. Active limestone quarries remain in the area.

An exact alignment has not been determined for this segment. However, several alignment options exist.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the natural landscape
- Avoid negative impacts on rare, endangered, or threatened species, and avoid fragmentation or disturbance of significant native plant communities identified by the County Biological Survey or other resource inventories
- Enhance riparian buffers
- Use existing road right-of-way only where necessary, minimizing user exposure to traffic
- Follow original stagecoach road from Mantorville to Wasioja and/or abandoned rail line as close as possible, as directed by legislation (The Chicago, Great Western (CGW) railroad was abandoned in 1935)
- Provide interpretation and connections to historic sites/districts in Mantorville and Wasioja

Trail Alignment Options

- Use abandoned rail line (Mantorville to Wasioja), where remnants remain intact

- Follow original stagecoach road as closely as possible, which may include portions of Stagecoach Road or County Road 16 between Mantorville and Wasioja (Winona - St. Peter Stage Road route likely followed County Road 16 with possible routes also following what is now named Stagecoach Road)
- Use of other County and Township roads rights-of-ways
- Follow Zumbro River corridor, in general

Trail Access – Parking Areas, Rest Areas and Interpretive Sites

Mantorville

Riverside Park in Mantorville is a potential location for a trailhead with parking, rest facilities including toilets, and it is adjacent to the Mantorville Welcome Center, which provides walking tour maps of the Historic District. The Historic District of Mantorville includes 25 sites or buildings and the walking tour includes additional points of interest.

Heading out of Mantorville towards Wasioja includes hilly terrain that may prove challenging for developing an accessible trail.

Wasioja

Six sites within Wasioja, including the remains of the Wasioja Seminary, the Civil War Recruiting Station, and school house, are listed on the National Historic Register. Additional historic points of interest include the First Baptist Church, Andrew Doig House, and Wildwood cemetery. These historic sites provide interesting interpretive opportunities that correlate with the stagecoach era and theme of this trail.

Wasioja Seminary

In 1858, Free Will Baptists founded a seminary in Wasioja, called “Minnesota Seminary.” Its structure of native limestone was completed in 1860, and the Minnesota Seminary opened in November of that year with an enrollment of more than 300 students. By 1861, the school had been renamed Northwestern College and offered classes on all levels from primary to collegiate. A number of students and faculty enlisted to fight in the Civil War at what was then the law office of Captain James George. Although its enrollment had declined by over half, the school continued to operate. In 1868, the Free Will Baptists ceased their sponsorship and it was reopened as the Groveland Seminary. In 1872, it closed and was reopened in 1875, this time by the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. The school closed for its last time in 1894, and in 1905, a fire destroyed the building, leaving the ruins that stand today.

Civil War Recruiting Station

This building was built in 1855 by Colonel James George, a Mexican War veteran, to serve as his law office and as a bank, the building was the meeting center of the village of Wasioja in the late 1850's. In April, 1861, this building was converted to use as a Civil War recruiting station. Recruits from the Wasioja Station, numbering over 200, formed the nucleus of Company C of the Second Minnesota Volunteer Infantry Regiment. They were sworn in by Colonel James George, who later led them at the battle of Chickamauga, Georgia.



The Civil War Recruiting Station, located in Wasioja, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In the years following the Civil War, this building was used as a jail, office, storeroom, post office and private residence. The Dodge County Historical Society purchased the building in the early 1960's in order to preserve what was by that time the only remaining Civil War recruiting station left in Minnesota. In 1987 the Society restored the building to its original appearance. The recruiting station stands today as a reminder of the sacrifices made by the men of Minnesota who fought and died to preserve the Union.

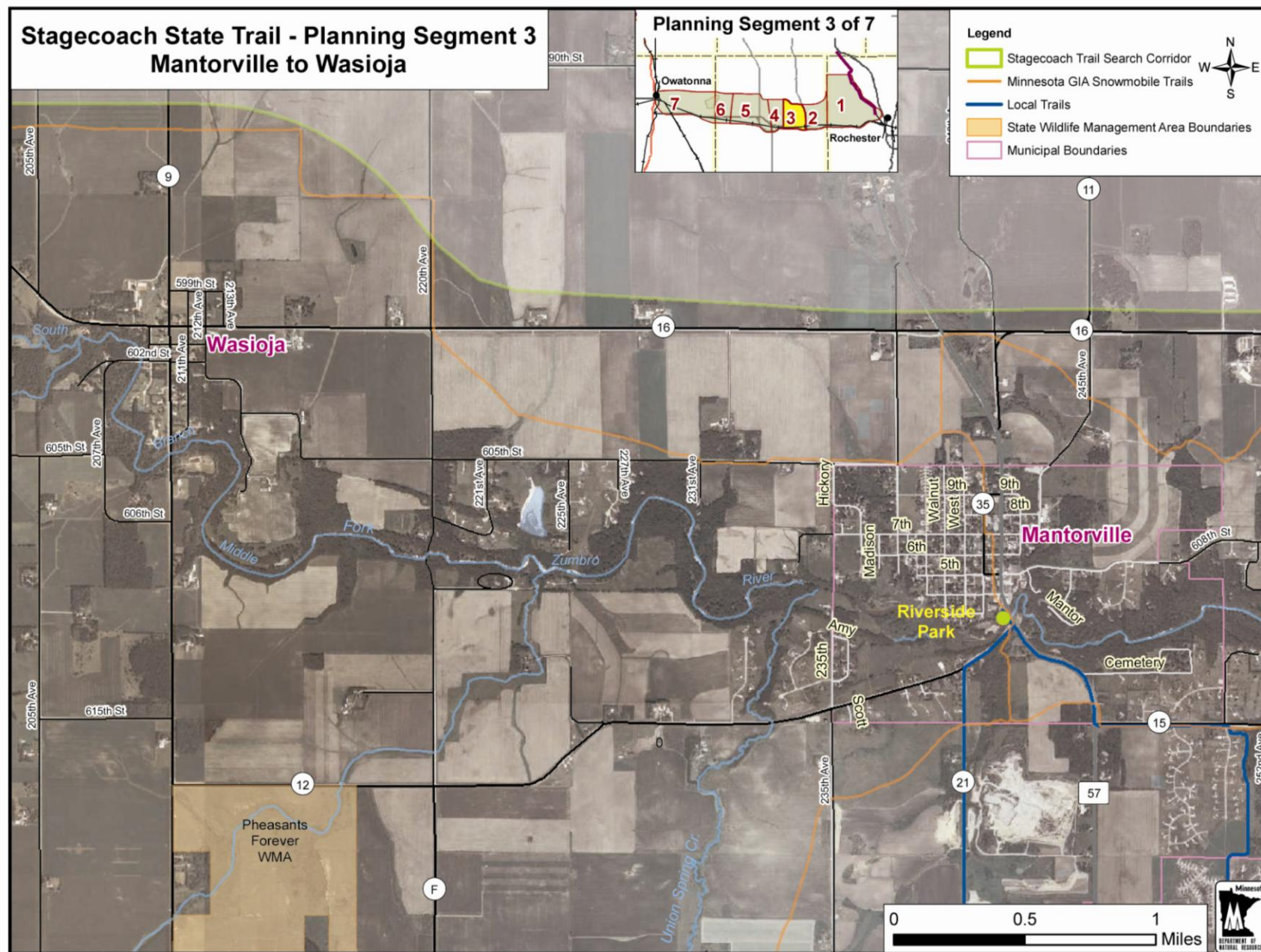


Union Soldier, portrayed by Wasioja native Ryan Peterson, during Wasioja Civil War Days, June 2011. Photo by Curt or Andie Sanders. ©Sanders Portrait Art, Rochester, MN.



Fife and Drum Corps marching to Civil War battle re-enactment during Wasioja Civil War Days, June 2011. Photo by Curt or Andie Sanders. ©Sanders Portrait Art, Rochester, MN.

Figure 3.10. Planning Segment 3 Search Corridor: Mantorville to Wasioja.



Communities and Connections

Wasioja

In October 1854, the town of Wasioja, named after the Sioux pronunciation of the Zumbro River, was settled. According to *Nicollet's map of 1843*, the river was referred to as Wazi-Oju. This once was a prosperous town that rivaled the economy and population of Mantorville. The grid pattern of streets in the town remains as all other evidence of a successful business district has been destroyed. In 1854, early settlers from New England, New York, and other eastern states founded Wasioja Township. E. P. Waterman, a major figure in the development of Mantorville and Dodge County, built the first house. His law offices were located in Wasioja where he performed marriage ceremonies.

According to the *History of Dodge County*, Wasioja was a young city with a prosperous future. The village of Wasioja was platted in 1856. In 1862, the business district housed law offices, a dozen shops, a hotel, blacksmith shop, gristmill, furniture store and its own newspaper, "the Wasioja Gazette." It also had a station of the Chicago Great Western Railroad and post office from 1856 – 1911. With such economic diversity and opportunity, the town was in close competition with Mantorville for the county seat.

Founded by Free Will Baptists, Wasioja had a strong moral and educational component unlike other rural communities. Early settlers made a point early on to build a strong religious and educational ethic within the hearts and minds of Wasioja citizens. The construction of a Baptist church, schoolhouse and seminary set the standards for the community. With a powerful commitment to these standards, the town was considered a temperance town, fighting for the abolition of alcohol. The first women's crusade on record in the State of Minnesota occurred in Wasioja. A group of female temperance reformers fought against the indulgences of the community.

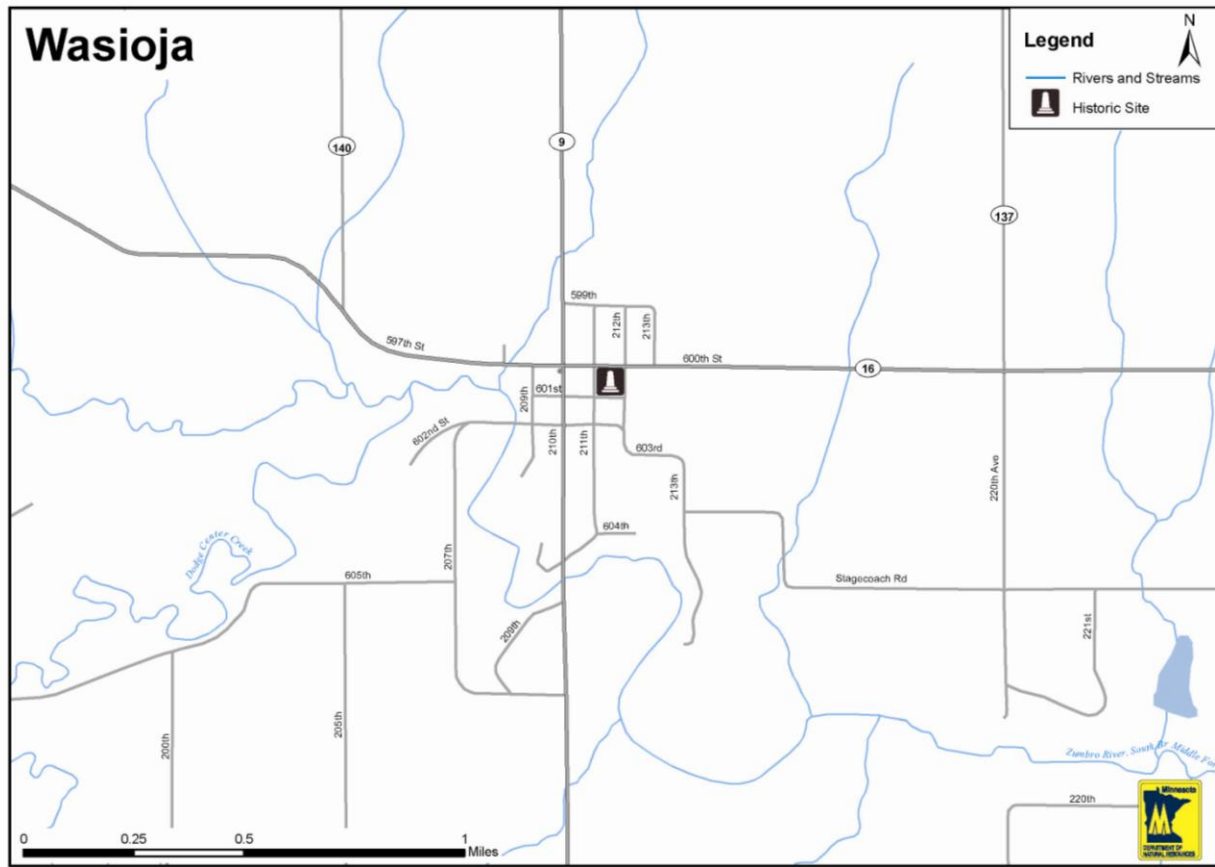


Old Settlers' meeting at the Wasioja Seminary, 1890.
Minnesota Historical Society.

The population of Wasioja Township was 963 at the 2000 Census. The 2010 Census population was 914. (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000; and MN Department of Administration, Office of Geographic and Demographic Analysis, 2011.)

Wasioja Township has officially expressed support for the Stagecoach State Trail to travel through the township.

Figure 3.11. Wasioja Township Map.



Segment 4: Wasioja to Dodge Center

Description of the Alignment and Landscape

The landscape is primarily agricultural, intersected with streams and rivers. Dodge Center Creek and South Branch Middle Fork Zumbro River are the most scenic watercourses in this area. Dodge Center Creek has a wooded riparian zone which provides habitat for a variety of wildlife. Potential deer wintering areas have been identified between Mantorville and Wasioja, where these locations typically provide sufficient cover and food sources for less than 50 deer.

An exact alignment has not been determined for this segment. Several options are being considered for this portion of the trail. The City of Dodge Center has expressed interest and support for the Stagecoach State Trail to connect to their community and serve as a destination and trailhead for trail users.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the natural landscape
- Minimize wetland impacts
- Enhance riparian buffers
- 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 identified by the County Biological Survey or other resource inventories
- Use existing road right-of-way only where necessary, minimizing user exposure to traffic
- Scenic route, follow Zumbro River valley or Dodge Center Creek
- Preferred connection to Dodge Center
- Preferred connection to Claremont Township and City of Claremont

Trail Alignment Options

- Follow abandoned rail line between Wasioja and Eden and between Eden and Dodge Center (future Iron Horse Trail – a north-south local trail proposal, following an abandoned railroad)
- Country and township roads – such as following County Road 16, which was likely part of the Winona – St. Peter Stage Road
- Follow as closely as possible South Branch Middle Fork Zumbro River and Dodge Center Creek for a more scenic route
- South along County Road 9 to U.S. Highway 14, then west following adjacent to U.S. Highway 14, north/northwest to Rice Lake State Park

Trail Access – Parking Areas, Rest Areas and Interpretive Sites

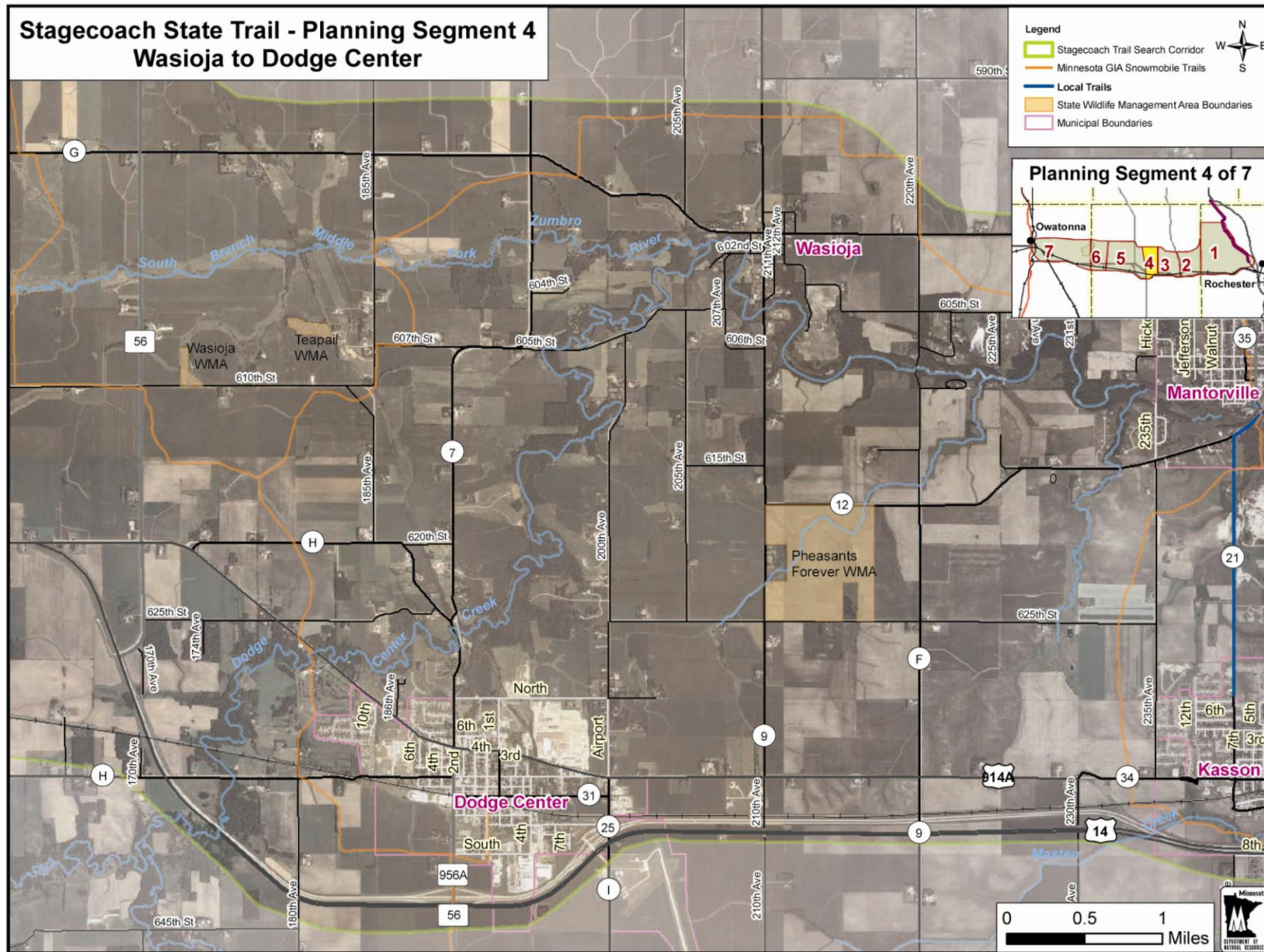
Rest areas consisting of a bench or pull off area of the trail may be located along this segment, as the right-of-way allows and as practical.

North Park in Dodge Center could be considered as a potential trail connection and/or trailhead for the Stagecoach State Trail.



Civil War battle re-enactment during Wasioja Civil War Days, June 2011.
Photo by Curt or Andie Sanders. ©Sanders Portrait Art, Rochester, MN.

Figure 3.12. Planning Segment 4 Search Corridor: Wasioja to Dodge Center.



Communities and Connections

Dodge Center

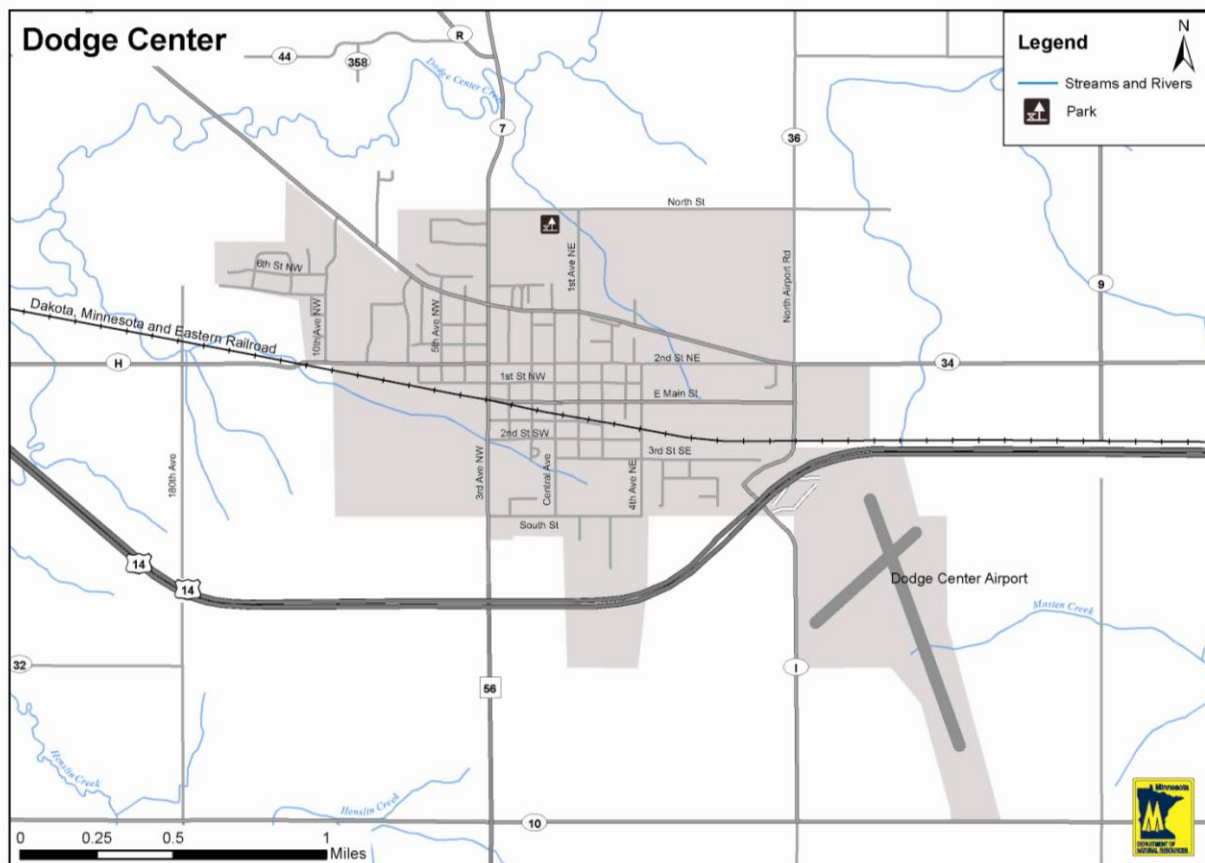
Dodge Center was platted in 1869, and incorporated in 1872 when the railroad was built through this area.

Today, the largest employer in Dodge Center is McNeilus, a manufacturer of ready-mixed concrete mixer trucks, garbage trucks, and related apparatus. McNeilus is a division of Oshkosh Truck Corporation.

The City’s school district combined with the towns of Claremont and West Concord in 1990 to form Triton Public Schools. Dodge Center is home to Triton Primary and Triton High School, the intermediate school is located in West Concord. Dodge Center also has a Parks Board which manages four parks.

The population of Dodge Center was 2,226 at the 2000 Census. The population at the 2010 Census was 2,670. (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000; and MN Department of Administration, Office of Geographic and Demographic Analysis, 2010.)

Figure 3.13. City of Dodge Center Map.



PAT 2/18/11 P:\TAW\Stagecoach\MAPS\CITY MAPS\Stagecoach\Cities.mxd

Segment 5: Dodge Center to Claremont

Description of the Alignment and Landscape

An exact alignment has not been determined for this segment. Several options are being considered for this portion of the trail.

The landscape between Dodge Center and Claremont consists of primarily agricultural lands with gentle hills, with slightly greater slopes along Dodge Center Creek. Several minor drainages originate within this search area and drain into the South Branch Middle Fork Zumbro River. Deer wintering areas have been identified near both Dodge Center and Claremont, where these locations typically exhibit heavy tree cover or marsh vegetation that provide sufficient cover and food sources for larger numbers of deer (50-100, or more).

The City of Claremont has expressed support for the Stagecoach State Trail and the Planning and Zoning Committee has discussed route options within the city limits. Options include a trail connection to Westside Park.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the natural 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 identified by the County Biological Survey or other resource inventories
- Enhance riparian buffers
- Use existing road right-of-way only where necessary, minimizing user exposure to traffic

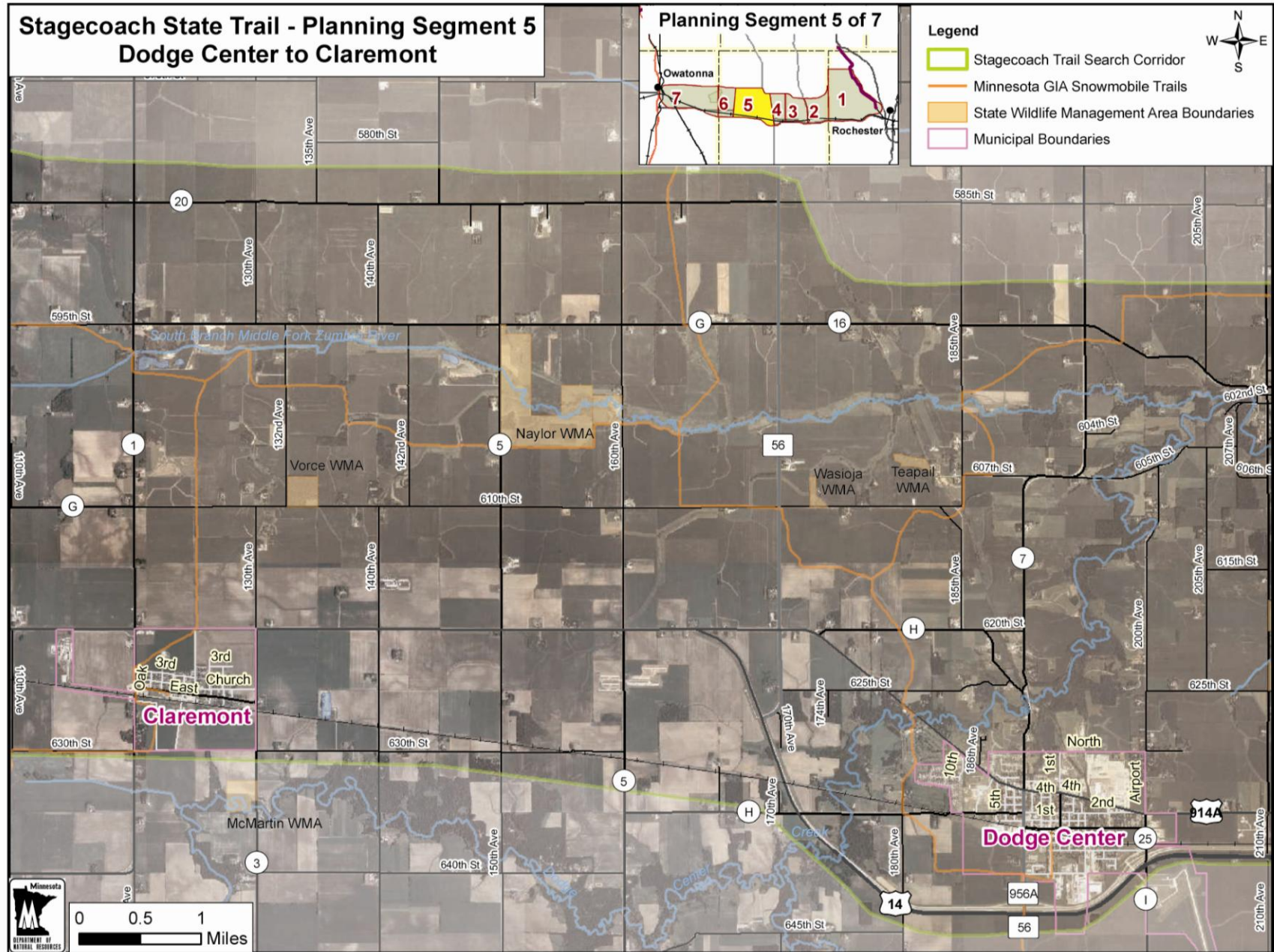
Trail Alignment Options

- Follow existing U.S. Hwy 14 Corridor between Dodge Center and Claremont
- Follow northerly edge of proposed U.S. Hwy 14 corridor between Dodge Center and Claremont
- Utilize segments of city, county or township road rights-of-ways, such as following County Road 16, which was likely part of the Winona – St. Peter Stage Road
- Connect to local parks

Trail Access – Parking Areas, Rest Areas and Interpretive Sites

Potential trailhead locations include: West Park in Dodge Center, located on 2nd Street NW, which currently has restrooms, playground equipment, picnic pavilion, and parking facilities; and Westside Park in Claremont, located along County Road 3 between Main Street and Oak Street, which currently has restrooms and parking facilities.

Figure 3.14. Planning Segment 5 Search Corridor: Dodge Center to Claremont.



DNR, PAT June 2011
Stagecoach_planning_Seg5.mxd

Communities and Connections

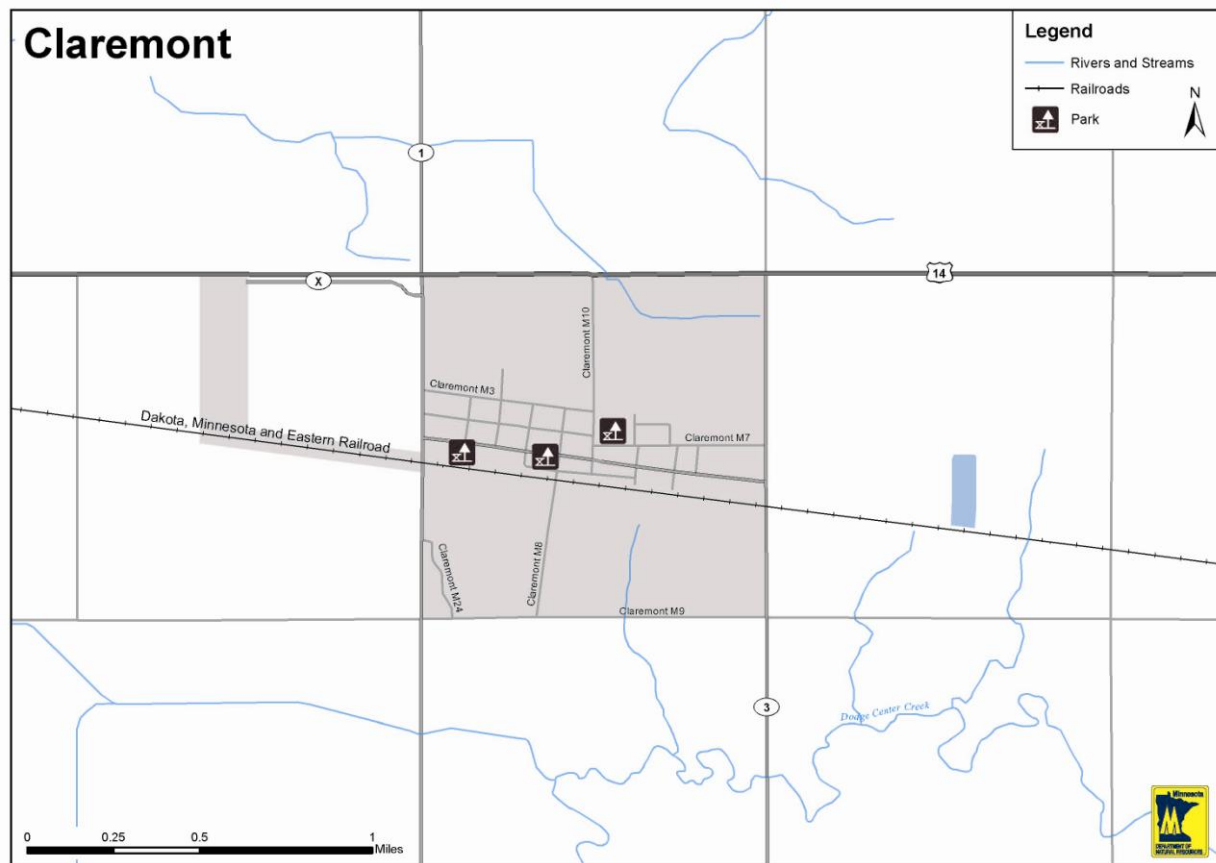
Claremont

The Village of Claremont was incorporated in 1878. The Winona and St. Peter Railway Company is credited with building the town of Claremont and obliterating the hamlet of Rice Lake, on the north shore of Rice Lake.

The population of Claremont was 620 at the 2000 Census. The population is declining with a population estimate of 548 at the 2010 Census. (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000; and MN Department of Administration, Office of Geographic and Demographic Analysis, 2011.)

The City of Claremont has officially expressed support for the Stagecoach State Trail to travel through the city limits.

Figure 3.15. City of Claremont Map.



PAT 2/17/11 P:\TAW\Stagecoach\MAPS\CITY MAPS\StagecoachCities.mxd

Segment 6: Claremont to Rice Lake State Park

Description of the Alignment and Landscape

The landscape from Claremont to Rice Lake State Park is relatively level to gentle rolling hills, with the slightly more varied terrain closer to Rice Lake State Park. Much of the land is cultivated farmland with some more wooded areas within the park boundary and along the rivers and streams. Rice Lake is the headwaters of the South Branch Middle Fork Zumbro River.

The small village of Rice Lake was a promising young town on the north shore of Rice Lake. The settlement of Rice Lake was platted in 1856, and included a post office, blacksmith shop, tavern, church and a few stores and pioneer houses. Rice Lake was also known as a stagecoach stop between Wasioja and Owatonna, along what was known as Ridge Road, now County Road 20. Then in 1865, the Winona and St. Peter Railroad tracks were laid several miles to the south, bypassing the small village of Rice Lake and subsequently creating the City of Claremont. All that remains of the former village of Rice Lake is the Rice Lake Church.

The Rice Lake Church is currently under efforts of restoration by the non-profit Rice Lake Church Restoration and Preservation Group, which is made up of a group of citizens, most of whom farm nearby and attended the church until it closed in the 1970s. (Kennedy and Westenberg, 2008.)

An exact alignment has not been determined for this segment. However, several alignment options exist.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the natural landscape
- Minimize wetland impacts
- Enhance riparian buffers
- 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 identified by the County Biological Survey or other resource inventories
- Use existing road right-of-way only where necessary, minimizing user exposure to traffic
- Additional criteria are provided below for locating the trail within or to Rice Lake State Park

Trail Alignment Options

- Country and township roads –
 - County Road 1 to County Road 20 to Rice Lake State Park
 - County Road 1 to 105th Avenue to Rice Lake State Park and historic Rice Lake Church
 - From Wasioja, following County Road 16 and County Road G west to Rice Lake State Park
- Connect to Historic Rice Lake Church site on eastern boundary of State Park

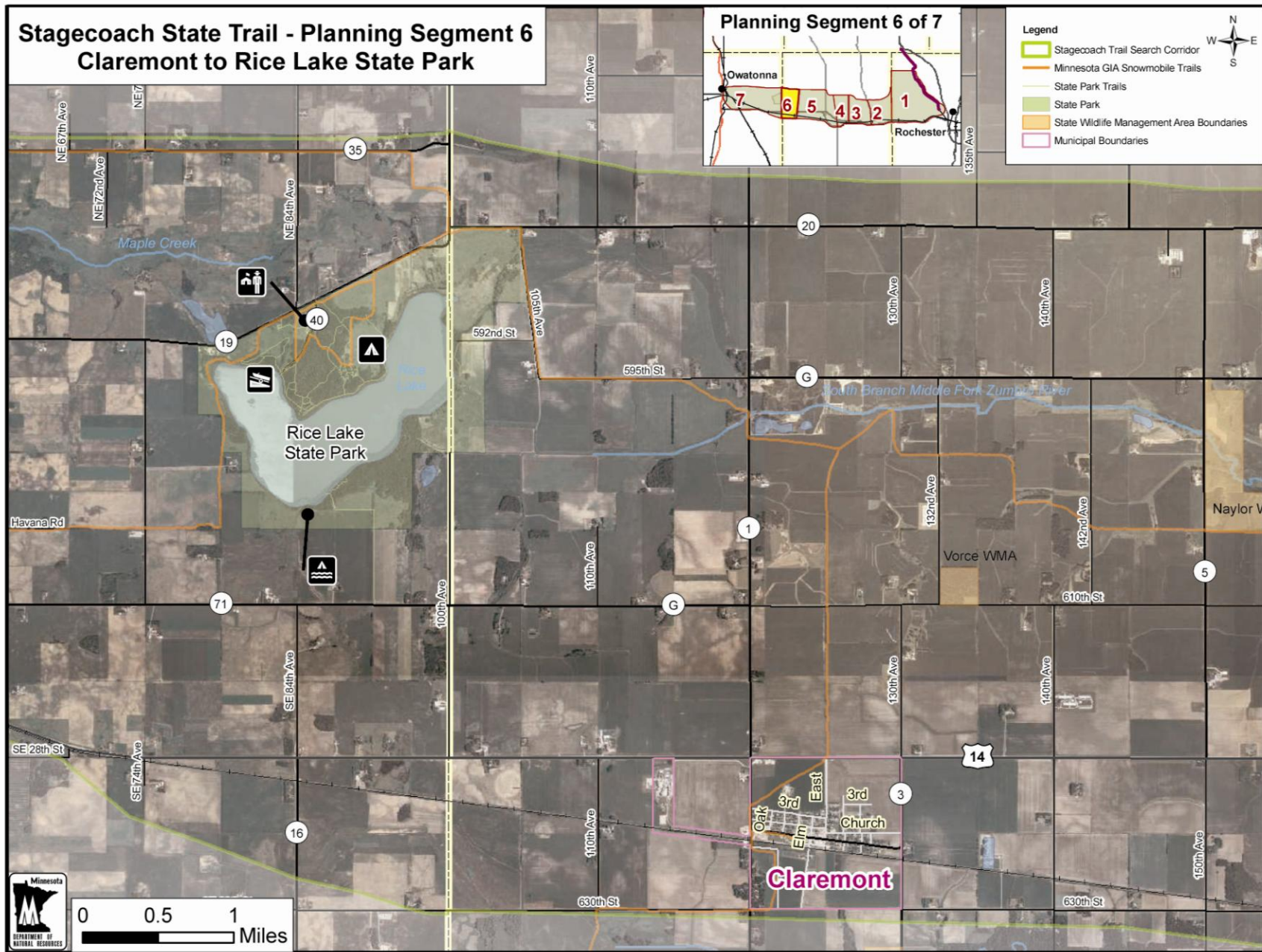
- Follow as closely as possible South Branch Middle Fork Zumbro River – most scenic route, to Rice Lake State Park
- Follow as closely as possible historic stagecoach routes (where known and feasible), most of which may be incorporated into the current road system (such as County Road 16)
- Within Rice Lake State Park
 - Entry off of County Road 19, along existing snowmobile trail and former driveway corridor
 - Use main entrance road to vehicle/visitor check in office
 - Use existing park roadways or other existing corridors
 - Consider multiple entry points versus main road only with trail branching within park boundary

Trail Access – Parking Areas, Rest Areas and Interpretive Sites

A trailhead is proposed to be located in Rice Lake State Park. Currently, the state park provides a number of amenities that can jointly be used to serve trail users. Some modifications and improvements may be necessary to accommodate the increased use. Parking, restrooms, benches, drinking water, and picnic tables are currently available. The park also offers camping facilities.

Interpretive sites include Historic Rice Lake Church, its cemetery, and historical and cultural elements identified within the state park, as described below.

Figure 3.16. Planning Segment 6 Search Corridor: Claremont to Rice Lake State Park.



Communities and Connections

Rice Lake State Park

Park Highlights

Rice Lake State Park is open for camping and day-use activities year-round. Currently, the park is 1,071 acres in size and includes a campground, group campground, public water access, hiking, snowmobile and cross country ski trails. In 2010, it is estimated that the park had over 32,800 annual visitors, with over 5,000 overnight (camping) visitors.



History

American Indians established camp sites here for food gathering, especially harvesting wild rice, which grew here and gave the lake its name. Well traveled trails to and from the lake were evident and one in particular was mentioned by early white settlers as running southeast from Rice Lake, perhaps to a wooded area on another branch of the Zumbro River.

Rice Lake is the headwater source for the South Branch Middle Fork Zumbro River. The lake was first dammed to provide energy for the water-powered mill located further to the east at Wasioja. Occasionally, Rice Lake became depleted, requiring the mill to shut down.

Along the northern boundary of the park, a stagecoach route followed "Ridge Road" in the mid-1800s where the promising village of Rice Lake was located. Today, all that remains of this village is the Rice Lake Church, built in 1857, located on the northern boundary of the park, along Dodge County Highway 20.

Role of the Park

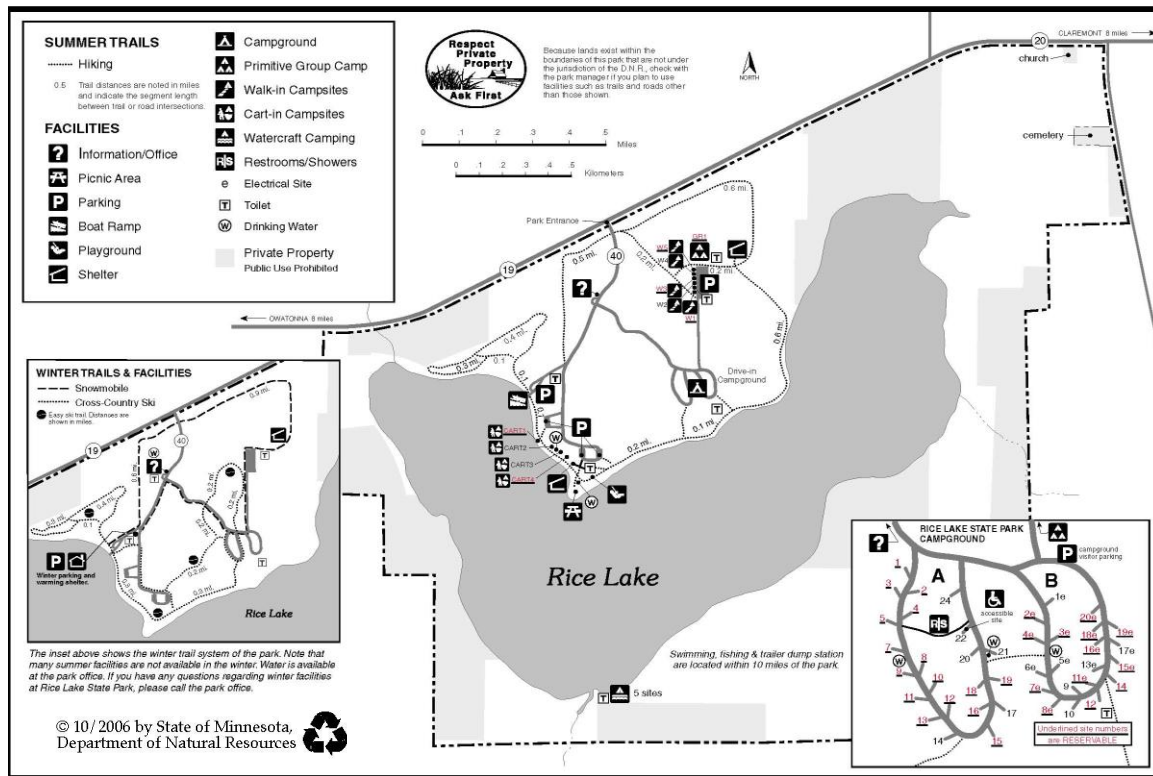
The park may serve as a trailhead for the Stagecoach State Trail. The Stagecoach State Trail may simply connect to the existing entrance road, or it may traverse the park. Once inside the park, the trail may continue on as the Stagecoach State Trail, or it could create a connection to any new or existing trails within the park boundary. Several scenarios are being considered as viable options.

Criteria for Trail Location within Rice Lake State Park

The following objectives were identified to guide the location of the trail alignment through the state park:

- Provide a paved trail corridor within the park
- Use existing corridors where possible
- Connect to Rice Lake State Park, including historic church site at east boundary
- Provide parking for trail users
- Provide a rest area for trail users
- Provide trail and park orientation information
- Provide a trail connection to existing facilities – campground, picnic areas, Rice Lake boat access, visitor center, etc
- Protect archaeological resources in the park
- Avoid segmenting natural plant communities

Figure 3.17. Rice Lake State Park Map.



Route Options within Rice Lake State Park

- Develop a trail entrance to the park off of County Road 19, west of the historic church site, entering the park along the existing snowmobile trail corridor, which was once a former driveway before becoming part of the park. The trail could then branch off to the west using an existing hiking trail corridor, and/or head south further into the park, passing by the group campsite and toward the drive-in campground area and park road. The trail could also follow the existing roads in the park to the main entrance road.
- Add the trail along the main entrance road. This option is suitable to being able to keep track of visitors and keeping one entry and exit point for all visitors. Bike trails could then be developed within the park using existing corridors or creating new trails, if desired.
- Utilize an existing corridor west of the main entrance road, which was formerly a driveway and now serves as a snowmobile trail. The trail could then branch off to the south or east to connect with the main entrance road and other roads or trails within the park boundary.

Whichever option succeeds or combination thereof, minor improvements to the park may be needed. Existing facilities are expected to be able to accommodate the new use at the park. However, picnic or rest facilities may become more in demand.

The Stagecoach State Trail is not addressed in the existing Rice Lake State Park Master Plan. Before a specific trail alignment to or through the park can be developed, the state park master plan must be amended or updated to include state trail features and facilities.

Segment 7: Rice Lake State Park to Owatonna

Description of the Alignment and Landscape

An exact alignment has not been determined for this segment. Several options are being considered for routing the trail. It is most ideal to find a scenic route that provides trail users an enjoyable experience that exhibits great views of the rolling landscape and unique mixture resources in the area.

An exact alignment has not been determined for this segment. However, several alignment options exist.

Criteria for Trail Alignment

- Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the landscape
- 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 identified by the County Biological Survey
- Use existing road right-of-way where practical or necessary, minimizing user exposure to traffic
- Trailhead in State Park location, use of existing facilities
- Locate trail corridor along a scenic route
- Connect to Owatonna local trails, parks and other recreational facilities
- Connect to authorized Prairie Wildflower State Trail (Owatonna)
- Minimize wetland impacts
- Enhance riparian buffers

Trail Alignment Options

- Follow County Road 19/Rose Street, toward Owatonna (which was likely the location of the Winona – St. Peter Stage Road around 1856)
- Follow County Road 35/Dane Road, to Owatonna
- Scenic routes may generally follow or provide views of the Maple Creek corridor from Rice Lake to Owatonna
- Connect to local Owatonna trail (Buxton Trail System) on north side of the city, near or at Kriesel Park

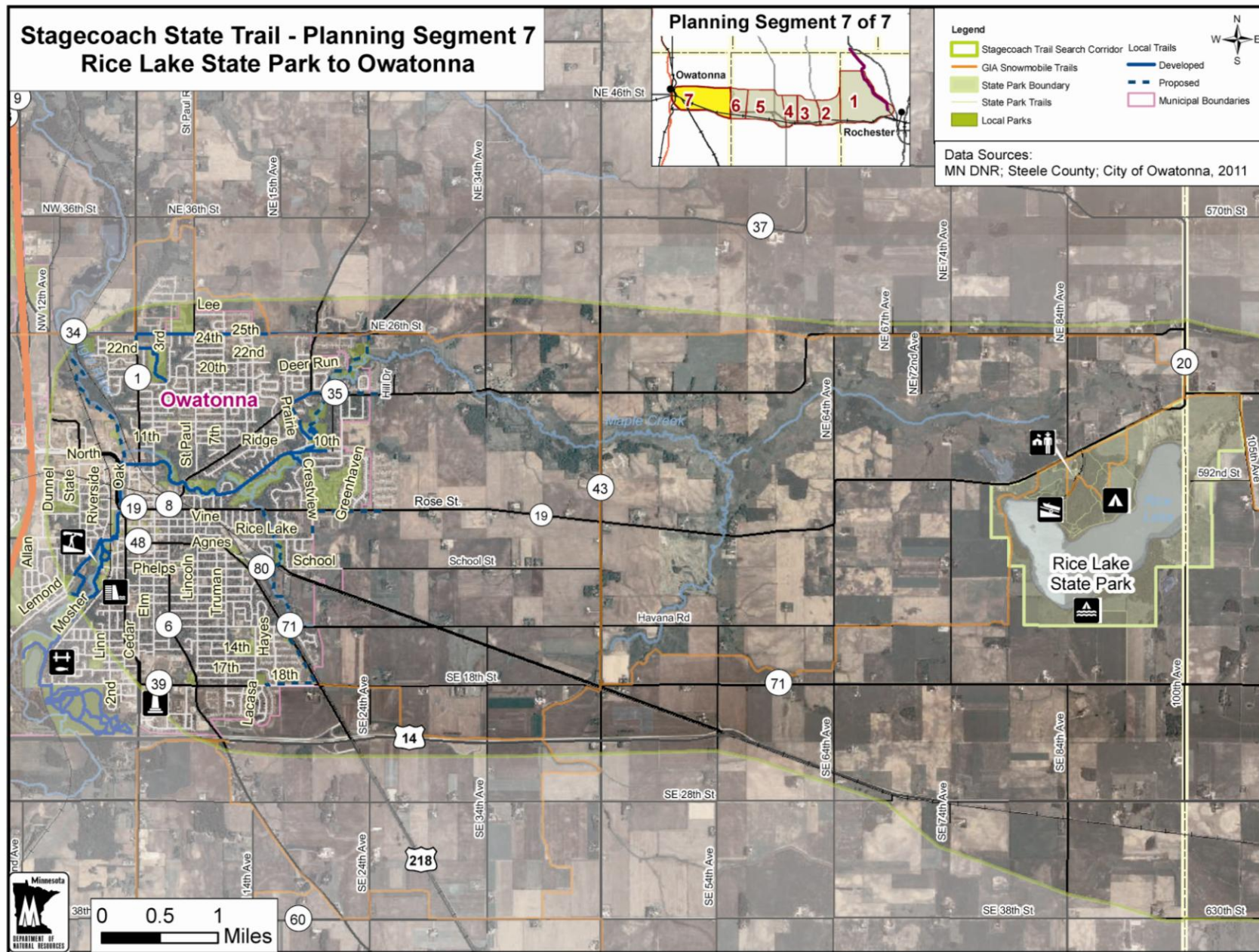
Trail Access – Parking Areas, Rest Areas and Interpretive Sites

Owatonna has an extensive network of local parks and recreational multi-use trails located throughout the city limits. Connecting the Stagecoach State Trail to one of the existing local trails, and thus linking into the expansive park and trail system of Owatonna, would provide for a unique and meaningful experience for all trail users.

One option would be to connect the Stagecoach State Trail to the Buxton Trail along Dane Road, before the trail heads north into Kriesel's Woods Park or south into Mineral Springs Park, where then the trail expands and continues to travel throughout the city. Mineral Springs Park is also a potential interpretive site as it is important to the cultural history of Owatonna.

Another option would be for the trail to connect at the more northern trail section, planned to be constructed in 2009, located along County Road 8/26th Street. This trail also is planned to connect to the Buxton Trail as it heads into Kriesel Park, Kriesel's Woods Park, and on to other trails. Multiple interpretive opportunities for interpretive sites and environmental education exist in these local parks.

Figure 3.18. Planning Segment 7 Search Corridor: Rice Lake State Park to Owatonna.



Communities and Connections

Owatonna

Prior to settlement by Europeans, Native Americans camped on the banks of the river they called “Ouitunya,” which means “straight,” its namesake today. Shortly after the 1851 Treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota, where the Dakota Indians relinquished their tribal lands in this region to the United States Government, the first European settlers arrived. The first government surveys of the area that is now Steele County were conducted in 1854. Owatonna was platted in 1855, consisting of 120 acres into 21 blocks, including a town square and a station of the Chicago and North Western Railway. Owatonna was incorporated as a town in 1858, and then as a city in 1865.

The population of Owatonna was 22,434 at the 2000 Census. The population at the 2010 Census was 25,599. (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000; and MN Department of Administration, Office of Geographic and Demographic Analysis, 2011.)

Owatonna is an economic center of southern Minnesota, with diverse industries. The largest employer is Federated Insurance, with over 1,500 employees, followed by Viracon, with just over 1,400 employees, both of which have headquarters based in Owatonna.

Trail Alignment

Potential alignments for bringing the Stagecoach State Trail into the City of Owatonna include making a connection to one of the existing or future local bicycle trails that will also lead users into the local parks system. The Stagecoach State Trail will provide a recreational connection between Owatonna and Rice Lake State Park.

Figure 3.19. City of Owatonna with existing recreational parks and trails identified.

