Section 6: Cultural and Socioeconomic Resources

The area around Rochester was home to nomadic Sioux, Ojibwa, and Winnebago tribes of Native Americans. In 1851, the Sioux ceded the land to Minnesota Territory in the treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota. In 1853, the treaties were concluded, opening the land for settlement.

Since the time of early European settlement, people have been finding evidence of earlier human activity in the vicinity of Rice Lake. This evidence includes stone tools and pottery fragments, which have been found in significant numbers near the lakeshore and in the agricultural fields surrounding the lake.

With the signing of the treaty of Traverse des Sioux in 1851, the Dakota Indians ceded their land in western and southern Minnesota, including the Rice Lake area, to the United States Government. The Dakota were restricted to reservation lands bordering the Minnesota River from the Little Rock River near New Ulm to the Minnesota - South Dakota Border.

The Rice Lake State Park Management Plan indicates that in 1972, an archaeological excavation was conducted in the park by staff and students from the University of Minnesota, Department of Anthropology. The major excavation site was on the east shore of the eastern arm of the lake, a few hundred yards north of the Zumbro River branch outflow. The excavation uncovered a number of stone implements and pottery fragments, as well as some fire pits. Preliminary analysis suggested that the materials represent several different time periods, possibly from as early as the Archaic period (5,000 – 1,000 B.C.) to early historic times.

Transportation History – Roads, Trails and Rails

The first center of population in Minnesota was around the mouth of the Minnesota River, where trading posts in the Upper Mississippi River Valley had long maintained posts, such as flourishing communities of St. Paul, Fort Snelling, St. Anthony, Mendota and Stillwater. Following the development of river towns by steamboat travel, settlers began to move into the interior of Minnesota on small wagon roads south of these established settlements. This area became known as the Minnesota Triangle. The Minnesota Triangle region is the area bordered by Iowa on the south, the Mississippi River on the north and east, and the Minnesota and Blue Earth rivers on the north and west.

The only road in the entire region was a rough trading trail until the Minnesota legislature petitioned U.S. Congress in 1849 for the construction of a military post road through Mendota and Wabasha to the Iowa border. This road opened in 1852 and was the first surveyed road in Minnesota. In order to build more roads, Minnesota asked U.S. Congress to provide a road system as a means of defense against the warring Indian tribes (Chippewa and Sioux). The request was granted and roads were built by the war department, four of these were in the Minnesota Triangle region. In 1854, wherever there were roads in the Triangle, there were settlements. By 1857, railroads became a bigger priority than roads and the towns that prospered the most were those that attracted railroads.

Mail communication also helped drive road development. Mail service developed rapidly through the 1850s, and in 1854, seven new mail routes were created in the Triangle region. Stagecoaches were the main method used to carry mail, and therefore, they facilitated the development of many roads throughout the Minnesota Triangle region. The need for better mail and passenger service was very important in the opening of the first road west of the Mississippi River. By 1860, there were roads...
running throughout the Triangle region and the stagecoach was a part of everyday life. (Larsen, 1930. “Roads and Trails in the Minnesota Triangle, 1849-60.”)

**Figure 6.1 Maps depicting the Roads in the Minnesota Triangle, 1854 and 1860. (Larsen, 1930.)**
One of these early mail routes was started by Orville Lord, an early settler and stagecoach operator living in Rollingstone (now known as Minnesota City). According to Stagecoach Postal Contracts (Postal Contract 14015 of 1854-1858), Lord’s first run with mail and passengers was September 27, 1855, leaving Winona and heading out of the valley through Rollingstone and Minnesota City with a destination of St. Peter (Traverse des Sioux) to meet the Mendota – Big Sioux military road. By 1857, this lucrative route was running three times per week, each way. (Smith, 1884, reprinted 2004; and Hanson, 2011.)

In 1857, when the new mail contracts were open for bid, Lord lost his mail contract to “the stagecoach king,” Martin O. Walker. Walker was a successful stagecoach operator, making Chicago the center of a web of stagecoach routes connecting to all the fast developing areas of the Northwest Territories by the early 1840’s. (Matile, 2002.) In 1840, Walker and another stagecoach operator, John Frink, formed Frink, Walker, & Company, a successful business partnership that lasted until 1856. During their partnership, their company dominated stagecoach lines in Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Indiana and Missouri. After Frink and Walker split, Walker expanded into southern Minnesota.

Once Walker began running the contract for the Minnesota City to St. Peter line, he omitted Rollingstone/Minnesota City from the route on the premise that it was served by one of his other routes, the St. Paul – Winona – Lansing, Iowa Route. With Rollingstone/Minnesota City omitted, the route became known as the Winona – St. Peter Route. Possible layover rest stops at stagecoach home stations (main hotels or taverns, such as The Hubbell House) were located in Winona, St. Charles, Rochester, Mantorville, Claremont Township, Owatonna, Waterville and St. Peter. Taverns were located along the route as well that also served as relay stations, where stagecoach operators would change their horses. These taverns provided meals or a quick rest from the rigors of these trips. The Winona – St. Peter stage route was heavily used until the railroad came through in 1867-1870. (Hanson, 2011.)

The railroad came to Dodge County with the building of the Winona and St. Peter Railroad (now the Chicago and Northwestern) from Rochester to Kasson in 1856 (bypassing Mantorville and Wasiuja), and from Kasson to Owatonna in 1866. In 1890, a branch of this railroad was constructed from Kasson to Mantorville, a track 2.9 miles in length. This branch was discontinued in 1932.

Another line, later sold to the Chicago and Great Western Railway, was built from St. Paul to Lyle, near the Iowa border, which then in 1890, started a new line from Eden to Wasiuja and in 1897 also purchased the line built from Wasiuja to Mantorville. In 1935, the rail lines between Eden and Mantorville were discontinued. In 1890, most of the incoming freight to Mantorville was hauled by team from Wasiuja, having been delivered to Wasiuja on the branch line of the Chicago and Great Western from Eden. (Smith, H. A. 1884, reprinted in 2004.)
Socioeconomic Resources

Demographics

According to the US Census Bureau and the State Demographer, the three counties involved with the Stagecoach State Trail are experiencing growth and are projected to continue growing. The cities, with the exception of Claremont, are also growing. These trends point to the need to provide open space and recreational opportunities while opportunities exist. Population growth trends coincide with growing interest in “close to home” trail opportunities, as shown in DNR trail studies.

Table 6.1. Population Census Numbers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>1990 Census</th>
<th>2000 Census</th>
<th>2010 Census*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>70,745</td>
<td>85,806</td>
<td>106,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byron</td>
<td>2,441</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>4,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mantorville</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>1,054</td>
<td>1,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasson</td>
<td>3,514</td>
<td>4,398</td>
<td>5,931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasija Twp</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodge Center</td>
<td>1,954</td>
<td>2,226</td>
<td>2,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claremont</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owatonna</td>
<td>19,386</td>
<td>22,434</td>
<td>25,599</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*MN Department of Administration, Office of Geographic and Demographic Analysis, 2011

Financial and Health Benefits of Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Trails

Minnesotans, like the rest of the nation, enjoy the opportunities parks and trails provide for bonding with family and friends, being physically active, enjoying nature, and nourishing mental health and spiritual well-being (ARC, 2000; Kelly, 2008; Schneider, Schuweiler & Bipes, 2009). These benefits contribute to a high quality of life for Minnesota residents.

Communities that support recreational trails and respond to the needs of trail users have seen positive effects on their local economies. DNR trail studies indicate that tourists attracted to the trails also use local facilities for dining, shopping, and lodging. Although economic impact from parks and trails is a small component of Gross State Product (GSP), it is often concentrated in smaller communities where the impact is larger. Many of Minnesota’s rural communities have come to rely on nature-based tourism as a significant portion of their economic health. (Dallman, et. al., 2010.)

Minnesota DNR estimates that for five state trails surveyed between 2007 and 2009, summer spending totaled nearly $5 million. Most of that spending (95% in total) comes from the trail users who reside outside the local economy of the trail, and the spending represents “new” dollars to the local economy. Trail users who have traveled a long distance to the trail, not surprisingly, outspend local users by a factor of about 20 on a daily basis, primarily on food, travel and overnight accommodations.

Trails appear to increase property values and enhance the quality of life in the communities through which they occur. Homes close to trails have become increasingly desirable. A number of studies of existing bike trails have shown that the average value of property near the trails is similar to or slightly above the value of other properties in the area. (Della Penna, 2005.)
Health and Outdoor Recreation

Decreasing participation in outdoor recreation may contribute to poor health and associated high medical costs. In Minnesota, 62.8 percent of adults are either overweight or obese, and less than half meet recommended levels of physical activity.

In 2008, the Minnesota Department of Health developed the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP). The goal of SHIP is to promote healthy lifestyles and help Minnesotans live longer by preventing the leading causes of chronic disease: tobacco and obesity. With sustained funding, SHIP could move up to an additional 10% of the adult population into a normal weight category, significantly reducing costs related to health care. Additionally, community design will lead to more communities that are biking and walking friendly and more children who bike and walk to school. (Minnesota Department of Health, 2011.)

High-quality parks and trails can help mitigate these costs by providing inexpensive, safe and easy opportunities for physical activity while also improving the health and well-being of adults and children alike.