

# Glacial Lakes State Trail Master Plan Amendment

## Trail Extension into Downtown Willmar



**Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Parks and Trails**

July 2012



# Glacial Lakes State Trail

## Master Plan Amendment



### State of Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Trails

This master plan amendment has been prepared as required by 2010 Minnesota Laws Chapter 86A.09, Subdivision 1.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Trails would like to thank all who participated in this planning process.

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# Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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## Division of Parks and Trails Approval of the Master Plan Amendment for the Glacial Lakes State Trail

The Division of Parks and Trails develops plan amendments to update master plans to reflect current development and operational proposals for state trails. The plan amendment process assists in formulating, evaluating and documenting these proposals.

This amendment to the Glacial Lakes State Trail Master Plan (1993) addresses a trail extension from the existing trailhead in Willmar at the Civic Center to a new trailhead in downtown Willmar. A connection into Willmar is recommended in the 1993 master plan. This 3.5 mile extension will follow existing City trails and sidewalks into downtown Willmar, ending at a new trailhead at Selvig Park. This trail extension will provide easier, safer access for Willmar residents to the existing Glacial Lakes State Trail.

This amendment received input and comment from both within the Division of Parks and Trails and from the public. The planning process included a public review period. All comments received were reviewed and carefully considered by DNR staff. The amendment addresses the comments received and the Southern Region has recommended approval of this amendment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Courtland Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Courtland Nelson, Director  
Division of Parks and Trails

A handwritten date in black ink, "24 July 12". The date is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Date

## Purpose of the Amendment

The purpose of this amendment is to recommend development of a trail extension from the existing Glacial Lakes State Trail trailhead in Willmar at the Civic Center to a new trailhead in downtown Willmar at Selvig Park. The master plan for the existing Glacial Lakes State Trail (1993) recommends a connection into Willmar.

“Identify opportunities to connect the trail into Willmar; coordinate any efforts with the City’s Parks Department” page 5

This amendment confirms the importance and value of this connection to downtown Willmar while providing additional direction for the location of the alignment, development and management of the trail.

## Recommended Trail Uses

Bicycling, mountain biking, hiking/walking, dog walking, running/jogging, in-line skating/skate skiing, education and interpretation are envisioned as uses of this trail. These uses are among those currently allowed on the Glacial Lakes State Trail.

Because the trail extension travels into the downtown area of Willmar, snowmobiling and horseback riding will not be allowed uses on this section of the Glacial Lakes State Trail. These uses are not compatible with the trail setting in the City of Willmar and there is no meaningful destination for equestrian or snowmobile use.

## Legislative Authorization

The Glacial Lakes State Trail was originally authorized by the Minnesota Legislature in 1971. The trail extension is consistent with the authorizing language 85.015, Subd. 5(b). The authorizing language is as follows:

### **Minnesota Statutes 85.015, Subdivision 5.**

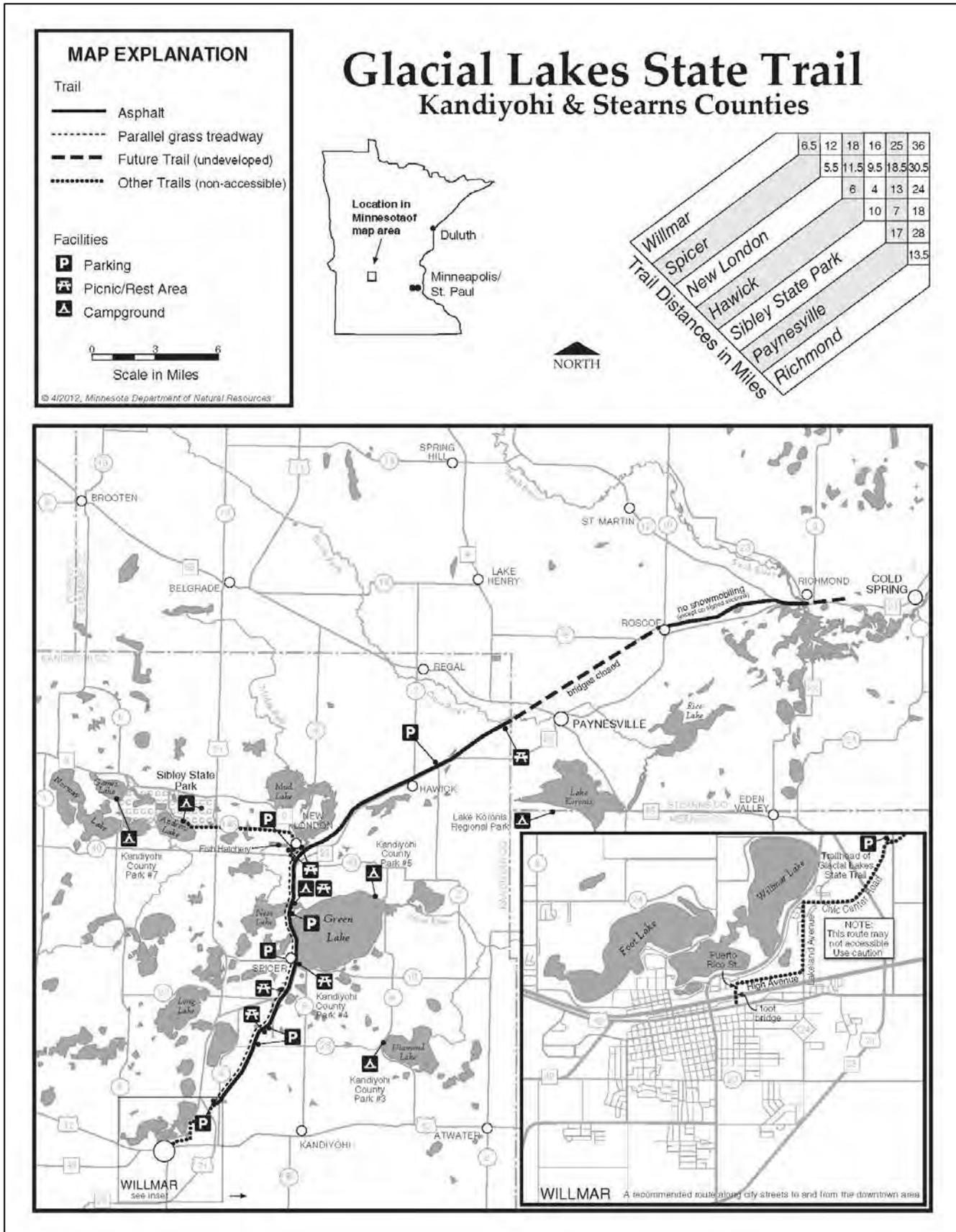
#### **Glacial Lakes Trail, Kandiyohi, Pope, Stearns, and Douglas Counties.**

- a) The trail shall originate at Kandiyohi County Park on the north shore of Green Lake in Kandiyohi County and thence extend northwesterly to Sibley State Park, thence northwesterly to Glacial Lakes State Park in Pope County, thence northeasterly to Lake Carlos State Park in Douglas County, and there terminate.
- b) A segment shall be established beginning in the city of Willmar, Kandiyohi County, and extending northeasterly into Stearns County.
- c) The trail shall be developed primarily for riding and hiking.

Glacial Lakes State Trail Master Plan Amendment  
 Figure 1. Minnesota State Trails System



Figure 2. Glacial Lakes State Trail – Kandiyohi & Stearns Counties



## Overview of the Glacial Lakes State Trail

### **Willmar to the Kandiyohi/Stearns County Line**

The Glacial Lakes State Trail is located on a former Burlington Northern Railroad grade. The trail is paved with asphalt for 22 miles between Willmar, Spicer, New London, Hawick and the Kandiyohi/Stearns County Line. The segment from the current trailhead in Willmar to New London has a parallel, grass treadway for horseback riding. The section of the trail from New London to the Kandiyohi/Stearns County line has grass shoulders to accommodate this activity.

### **Kandiyohi/Stearns County Line to 178<sup>th</sup> Avenue, just east of Richmond**

A five mile segment of this trail section from Richmond to Roscoe is paved with asphalt and is open to hikers, bikers and snowmobiles in the winter. The remaining portions of this trail segment are currently undeveloped and are used for snowmobiling in the winter.

### **178<sup>th</sup> Avenue to Rockville (Rocori Trail)**

A specific alignment for this segment has not been identified at this time. A local group with representatives from Richmond, Cold Spring and Rockville has formed to identify and acquire a trail alignment. They have named the trail the Rocori Trail.

### **Rockville to the intersection with the Lake Wobegon Trail**

A specific alignment has not been identified for this segment of trail.

## Overview of the Trail Extension

As shown on the map on page eight, the 3.5 mile extension of the Glacial Lakes State Trail will begin at the southern terminus of the trail at the parking lot near the Willmar Civic Center and follow Civic Center Drive to the signalized crosswalk at Business Highway 71. The trail will continue to follow current City trails connecting to Robbins Island Park. From Robbins Island Park, the trail will continue along city trails and sidewalks onto First Street and follow Becker Avenue west to its end at end at Selvig Park on 4<sup>th</sup> Street SW.

The Glacial Lakes State Trail extension will use the alignment of existing city trails. Many of these trails are located on widened city sidewalks on relatively flat terrain, are already paved and are generally eight to ten feet wide. As the city trails used for the Glacial Lakes State Trail extension are in need of improvement, they will be upgraded to state trail standards to the greatest extent possible. The City of Willmar plans to keep the trail clear of snow during the winter.



Willmar Civic Center Trailhead



Robbins Island Park

## Glacial Lakes State Trail Master Plan Amendment

Improvements will be made to road crossings at the First Street Bridge and at the intersection of Ella Avenue and TH 71. According to the *City of Willmar Comprehensive Plan: Trails and Pedestrian Plan Addendum*, at Ella Avenue, “An existing mid-block crossing will be replaced with a new pedestrian striping, signals, curb cuts, and refuge island at the signalized intersection of Ella Avenue and TH 71, which will make this crossing safer and more accessible.” Improvements are also planned on segment pathways from the First Street Bridge to Robbins Island Park.

The City of Willmar will upgrade the trail segments from the First Street Bridge into downtown Willmar to state trail standards wherever it is feasible to do so. The City of Willmar will work to fill in any gaps located along the proposed state trail extension.

In the short term, a kiosk with interpretive and directional signage will be provided by the City at the new trailhead in Selvig Park. The businesses throughout downtown Willmar provide many of the amenities that may be needed by trail users. Selvig Park currently has a sitting area with benches and a fountain. In the future, Selvig Park may be expanded to provide a larger trailhead. Additional amenities and interpretive information may be provided along the trail if needed.

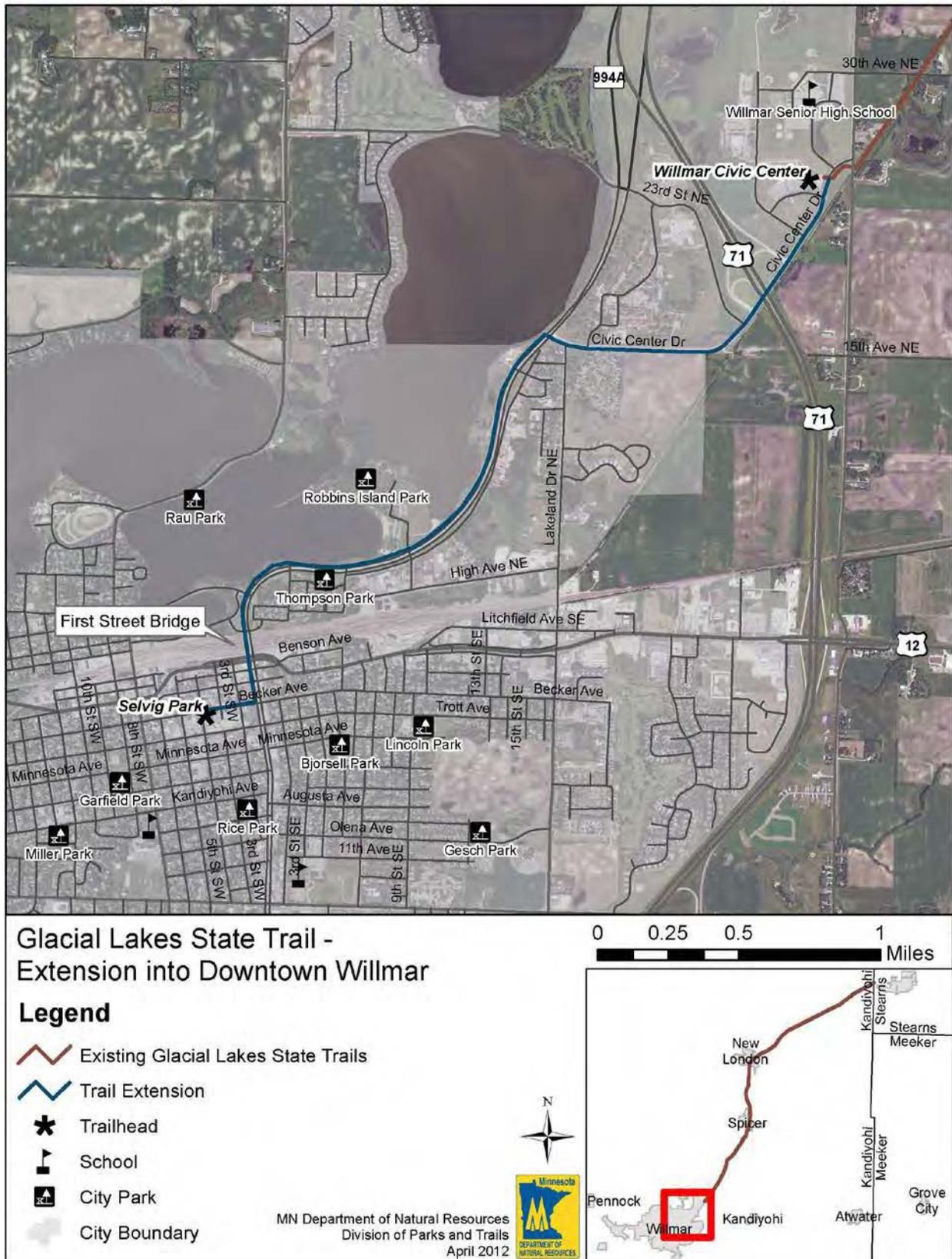


Selvig Park



Example of an informational trailhead sign

Figure 3. Glacial Lakes State Trail – Extension Overview



## Justification for the Trail Extension

The City of Willmar and the DNR have been in contact about extending the Glacial Lakes State Trailhead into downtown Willmar. The City views the Glacial Lakes State Trail as a significant asset to Willmar and believes that it needs to be fully connected to the City's trail system. *The City of Willmar Comprehensive Plan: Trails & Pedestrian Plan Addendum* expresses the hope that this project would be done in conjunction with the improved pathway segment from the First Street Bridge to Robbins Island Park. The project will close a major gap in the City's trail system and will provide a safe walking and bicycling opportunity between downtown Willmar and the Glacial Lakes State Trail.

The Glacial Lakes State Trail is widely used by community members along with tourists and bicyclists from around the state. There is a large amount of public support and demand for this trail extension. Local trail users, users of the state trail system and economic and tourism organizations have also supported the development of this trail extension.

### The trail extension is consistent with the legislation authorization

This extension of the Glacial Lakes State Trail is consistent with the legislative authorization. The legislation laid out in Minnesota Statutes 85.015, Subd. 5(b) reads: "A segment shall be established beginning in the city of Willmar, Kandiyohi County, and extending northeasterly into Stearns County." By placing the new trailhead in Willmar's downtown area, the extension will bring trail users closer to the heart of the city and create a more logical terminus for the Glacial Lakes State Trail.

The original Master Plan for the Glacial Lakes State Trail states on page 52 that "trail access should ideally be located near or within the communities along the trail. This way the services a town has to offer are readily available for the trail user and local businesses can benefit." It goes on to say, "the westernmost access to the proposed addition to the Glacial Lakes State Trail is about 2 miles north of Willmar at the new Civic Center. This access will be temporary in nature until a trail connection can be developed into Willmar."

### Trails have a positive impact on local economies

Communities that support recreational trails and respond to the needs of trail users have seen positive impacts on their local economies. DNR trail studies indicate that tourists attracted to the trails use local facilities for eating, shopping and lodging.

The 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.

Communities that have trails through them seem to have an enhanced quality of life and increased property values. 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 trail is higher than the average value of other properties in the area. A 2005 study in Massachusetts found that the average values of homes that were located on rail-trails were similar to or slightly above the value of other properties in the area and these homes sold faster.

#### Trails promote healthier lifestyles

The trail extension will provide additional opportunities for people to exercise. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s *Trails for Health: Promoting Healthy Lifestyles & Environments* states that “providing access to places for physical activity, such as trails, increases the level of physical activity in a community”, leading to a healthier community. Because the trail extension will connect downtown Willmar to MinnWest Technology Campus and the high school, walking or commuting by bicycle to work and school will be easier and safer for many residents.

#### The extension will bring more users to the trail

The trail extension will pass through many diverse neighborhoods in Willmar, connecting these communities to each other, to downtown Willmar and beyond. It will allow for easier, safer travel to a regional population center and will allow many more users to access the Glacial Lakes State Trail. It will also offer other recreational opportunities for trail users by providing a safe connection from Willmar to Sibley State Park. The trail extension from the Willmar Civic Center to downtown will provide access to two more lakes, Willmar Lake and Foot Lake.

#### The trail extension meets the goals laid out in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*

The “Additional Guidelines for Improving Trails of State and Regional Significance” section of the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* includes several strategies to enhance trails of state and regional significance for commuting. Recent studies have shown that trail development increases commuting and the most common form is by bicycle. Bicycle commuting leads to improved air quality due to reduced emissions, reduced traffic congestions, and improved health and monetary savings for the individual commuter. The strategies identified in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* to enhance trails for commuting are:

- Support existing state and regional trails to better serve commuters;

- Expand existing state and regional trails as well as develop new trails to better serve commuters;
- When redeveloping bridges and roads, accommodate commuter access wherever feasible;
- Ensure state and regional trails are part of a statewide network to maximize their value for commuting;
- Link state and regional trails to transit opportunities, including buses, park and rides, light and commuter rail;
- Develop closer cooperation and understanding between transportation and recreation staff, including cross-training and cooperative projects; and
- Partner with local trail providers to promote commuting opportunities

## City of Willmar

### History

Willmar was founded in 1870 when Leon Willmar – a Belgian acting as a European bondholder of the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad Company – purchased the title to Section 1 of Willmar Township. When the railroad tracks reached the community, it grew rapidly. By the close of 1870, a grain elevator, hotel, lumberyard, a jewelry store and several other business were in operation. Willmar was established as the county seat of Kandiyohi County in 1871 and incorporated as a city in 1901.

### The Community Today

Willmar's 2010 population was 19,610, an increase of 6.9% from its 2000 population. Willmar is the seventh largest non-metro city in Minnesota and is the fastest growing multicultural city outside of the metro area. The Hispanic population of Kandiyohi County is expected to grow 128% between 2000 and 2030. This changing diversity is a significant growth factor for Willmar.

The main industries in Willmar are agricultural production, agri-business and health care. The largest employers in the City are the Jennie-O Turkey Store, Rice Memorial Hospital and the Willmar Regional Treatment Center. A transit system with regularly scheduled buses connects residential and commercial areas. Multiple public and private schools are located throughout the city. Ridgewater College, a two-year community and technical school, offers more than 100 educational programs, transfer options and continuing education courses in Willmar.

Willmar is home to over 30 neighborhood parks offering many recreational opportunities within the city, including walking and hiking trails, numerous sports facilities, playgrounds and fishing piers. Robbins Island Park is Willmar's largest park at 55 acres. It is located between Willmar and Foot lakes and has a swimming beach, picnic shelters, a nature trail and a boat access. The trail extension will connect to Robbins Island Park on its way to a new downtown trailhead at Selvig Park. Selvig Park is located at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> Street

Southwest and Becker Avenue and currently has a sitting area with several benches, a fountain and a flagpole.

Downtown Willmar has many small shops and restaurants located among historic buildings. Willmar Design Center leads community improvements such as downtown beautification, storefront enhancement and landmark restoration by connecting local citizens and business owners. They have the goal of making downtown Willmar a destination. The Willmar Design Center's Downtown Connections Committee has an interest in extending the Glacial Lakes State Trail into downtown Willmar and has been in contact with the DNR.

Willmar Walks, three measured walking paths around the downtown area have been laid out by the Willmar Design Center. The three routes are 1, 1.5 and 2 miles. Brochures that show historic buildings and other points of interest along the trails are available at local businesses. All three routes pass near Selvig Park.

One historic district, the Willmar State Hospital is located in Willmar just off of Civic Center Drive and near the trail extension. The complex is on the National Register of Historic Places. Today, the hospital complex is owned by a private collaborative business community called MinnWest Technology as part of an effort to save and reuse the buildings. Several other buildings in Willmar are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## Recommendations

### ***Trail Development and Maintenance***

***Recommendation:*** Develop and rehabilitate existing city trails to be consistent with recommended design and guidelines detailed in the DNR's "Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines" manual.

***Recommendation:*** Connect the Glacial Lakes State Trail to Robbins Island Park on its route to Selvig Park in downtown Willmar.

***Recommendation:*** Plow the Glacial Lakes State Trail extension to allow for winter use.

***Recommendation:*** Develop the Glacial Lakes State Trail extension to current ADA standards when possible.

### ***Information and Education***

***Recommendation:*** Use the existing kiosk and trail logo design to reflect the interpretive theme for the trail.

***Recommendation:*** Community services information, trail orientation, trail rules and trail courtesy information should be developed and installed on a kiosk at the new trailhead at Selvig Park.

## **Public Review**

The draft amendment was available for public review from June 14 to July 16, 2012. Copies of the amendment were available for review at the Spicer, Hutchinson and St. Paul DNR offices. The draft amendment was also posted on the DNR website. Only one comment was received during the public review period. This comment addressed the wording of a sentence and was incorporated into the final document.

The City of Willmar held an open house in December 2011 as part of the planning process for their Downtown Comprehensive Plan. Many Willmar residents attended and showed their support for the proposed extension of the Glacial Lakes State Trail into downtown Willmar.

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