

Frequently Asked Questions: David Dill/Arrowhead State Trail Master Plan

What is a State Trail? What is the David Dill/Arrowhead State Trail? Where does it go?

Minnesota state trails are authorized by the legislature to connect units of the outdoor recreation system or provides access to other areas which have significant scenic, historic, scientific or recreational qualities. The David Dill/Arrowhead State Trail was authorized in 1975 and is a 125-mile long natural surface trail connecting the David Dill/Taconite State Trail, just west of Tower to the Blue Ox Trail, just south of International Falls.

What is a master plan? What should I expect to see in the plan?

A master plan is a guidance document for a unit, such as a state trail. The document outlines what uses are permitted along the trail and how the DNR will manage those uses. A master plan also discusses other features such as trail connections and ecological conditions along the trail. The master plan does not automatically open the entire trail to all uses. Some areas may be deemed too wet for summer use while other areas may require upgrades to allow for summer use. Some winter uses may be incompatible with other winter uses. The master plan simply provides an avenue for the DNR to open the trail, or sections of the trail, to the permitted uses.

What planning has been done in the past?

The DNR completed a master plan for the trail in 1980. This plan was revised in 1983. A master plan for the David Dill/Taconite State Trail, which provides a southern connection to the David Dill/Arrowhead State Trail, was completed in 2017. In 2015, the DNR's Parks and Trails Division completed a system plan for units that it manages, including state trails. In the system plan, the David Dill/Arrowhead State Trail was identified as a division-led core trail. This means that the Parks and Trails Division will continue to provide investments for a safe and enjoyable experience for trail users.

How is the David Dill/Arrowhead State Trail currently used?

Snowmobiling is the primary use for the trail. Other uses include cross country skiing, snowshoeing, biking, hiking, horseback riding and hunting and fishing access.

What changes should I expect to see?

The new plan will allow the DNR to consider off-highway vehicle use along the trail. However, the trail will not automatically be open to OHVs, nor will the entire trail permit the use. Existing uses such as snowmobile and non-motorized use will remain. The DNR divided the trail into eight planning sections to determine the feasibility of allowing new motorized use. The feasibility was determined reviewing social and environmental aspects specific to the trail section. The new plan also updates management objectives for the trail.

Who manages the trail? What about the land the trail is on?

The trail is managed by the DNR Parks and Trails Division. Because of the length of the David Dill/Arrowhead State Trail, there are multiple land managers along it. The majority of the trail crosses public lands that are managed by the DNR Divisions of Forestry, Parks and Trails and Ecological and Water Resources as well as the US Forest Service and County. The rest of the trail crosses private lands where the DNR has an agreement with the land owner for the trail.

Why develop a new master plan?

Since the first master plan was completed, recreation trends have changed. For example, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) were in their infancy when the first master plan was completed. Today, ATVs are a highly popular form of trail recreation. Fat-tire biking is also quickly becoming popular. Because recreation is ever evolving, the DNR frequently reviews its masterplans for state parks and state trails. By reviewing the current master plan and completing a new one, the DNR may adapt to those changes.

How can I be involved?

You can be involved by reviewing the draft plan and submitting your comments during the initial review period between June 24, 2021-July 23, 2021 or by attending an information meeting on July 7 from 6-8 PM at the Cook Community Center, 510 Gopher Drive, Cook, MN 55723. If you have a comment, you may email it to joe.unger@state.mn.us or mail it to Joe Unger, Parks and Trails, 500 Lafayette Rd, St. Paul, MN 55155. Parks and Trails may also reach out to interested clubs and organizations to get feedback from their membership. Once the review period ends, the DNR will review all comments received and may edit the plan to address the comments.