

Public comments – Chatfield Connector GIA trail proposal

Background

From February 17 to March 18, 2026, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) received 25 public comments on an off-highway vehicle (OHV) trail proposal called the Chatfield Connector. Notice of the public commenting period was published in a statewide news release on February 17, 2026. The table below summarizes the themes identified in public comments and presents the DNR’s responses.

Topic Area	DNR Response
Responsible Use, Stewardship and Landowner Relations: Commenters emphasized that OHV users are generally respectful of landowners and trail systems. Comments referenced responsible riding behavior, adherence to designated routes and participation in stewardship activities such as trail maintenance and clean-up efforts. Landowners who commented reported positive experiences with trail users and expressed support for continued or expanded trail use when properly managed.	The DNR recognizes the importance of responsible riding and stewardship in maintaining positive relationships between trail users and landowners. Education, signage and partnerships with local organizations support responsible use and help ensure trails are managed in a way that is compatible with adjacent land uses and long-term sustainability.
Planning, Partnerships and GIA Program Support: Some commenters provided detailed support for the proposal based on planning and programmatic considerations. These comments highlighted the value of the Grant-in-aid program, partnerships among agencies and local organizations and the use of existing corridors. Commenters viewed these factors as contributing to well-managed and sustainable trail systems.	The DNR acknowledges the role of the Grant-in-aid program and the importance of partnerships in developing and maintaining OHV trails. Coordination with local organizations and use of existing corridors are considered in trail planning to support effective management, maintenance and long-term sustainability.
Increased Trail Access and Connectivity: A prominent theme among commenters was the need for expanded trail mileage and improved connectivity in southern Minnesota. Commenters noted that the region currently has limited OHV opportunities compared to other parts of the state and emphasized that expanding the Chatfield system would reduce the need to travel long distances for riding. Many comments also highlighted that additional connections would create a more cohesive system and improve overall riding experience.	The DNR recognizes interest in expanded trail access and improved connectivity in southern Minnesota. The proposed Chatfield Connector is intended to enhance connectivity within the project area by linking to existing routes and expanding riding opportunities. Trail alignments are evaluated through established planning and environmental review processes to ensure they are feasible, sustainable and consistent with resource protection and long-term management goals.
Safety Considerations: Commenters identified safety as an important consideration, including the need for designated trails to reduce conflicts with motor	The DNR recognizes safety as an important consideration in trail planning. Providing designated trails can help reduce conflicts with motor vehicles

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vehicles. Some comments supported this expansion as a way to create safer and more structured riding environments, particularly by reducing reliance on non-designated public roads.	and improve overall user safety. Safety considerations are evaluated alongside environmental review, feasibility and long-term sustainability when reviewing trail proposals.
Infrastructure and Amenities: Public input included interest in additional infrastructure to support trail use, such as camping areas, staging locations and expanded riding opportunities. Commenters noted that these amenities could support longer visits and improve the overall recreational experience.	The DNR acknowledges interest in additional infrastructure to support trail use. Amenities such as staging areas and camping opportunities are considered as part of broader trail planning efforts based on site suitability, demand and resource considerations.
Economic and Tourism Benefits: Commenters frequently highlighted the economic benefits associated with trail expansion, including increased visitation and spending at local businesses such as restaurants, lodging and fuel stations. Several comments noted that trail users often travel from outside the area and contribute to local economies through overnight stays and multi-day trips.	The DNR acknowledges that OHV recreation can contribute to local and regional economies through tourism and increased visitation. Potential economic benefits are considered alongside environmental review, land management objectives and long-term sustainability when evaluating trail proposals.
General Support for Expansion: Many commenters expressed general support for the proposed trail expansion without providing detailed rationale. These comments often conveyed enthusiasm for the project and appreciation for existing trail opportunities in the Chatfield area.	The DNR acknowledges the general support expressed for the proposed trail expansion and appreciation for existing trail opportunities. Public input is considered alongside environmental review, feasibility and long-term sustainability when evaluating trail proposals.
Opposition to OHV/Environmental Concerns: A small number of commenters expressed concern that motorized recreation contributes to environmental degradation, including impacts to ecosystems, wildlife and climate. These comments emphasized a preference for conservation-focused investments and questioned whether OHV use is compatible with long-term environmental sustainability.	The DNR acknowledges concerns regarding potential environmental impacts associated with OHV use. Proposed routes are evaluated to avoid or minimize impacts to sensitive resources, including wetlands, wildlife habitat and water resources through established planning and environmental review processes to ensure long-term sustainability.
Fiscal Concerns/Resource Allocation: A small number of commenters questioned whether public funds should be used to expand OHV trails, suggesting that resources could be better allocated to other priorities such as fisheries management or maintenance of existing systems. Concerns were also raised about the state's ability to maintain current trail infrastructure and whether expansion could create additional financial burdens.	The DNR acknowledges concerns regarding the use of public funds and long-term maintenance of trail systems. OHV trail maintenance and development are supported through dedicated funding sources, including user-generated revenues such as registration fees. Funding availability, maintenance capacity and long-term sustainability are considered when evaluating trail proposals.

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User Group Access and Inclusivity: At least one commenter requested that the proposed trail system be open to additional user groups, particularly off-highway motorcycles. This reflects broader interest in inclusive access across different types of motorized recreation users.	The DNR acknowledges interest in expanded access for additional user groups, including off-highway motorcycles. User designations are determined based on trail design, environmental considerations and management objectives.
Regional Equity and Southern Minnesota Access: Commenters emphasized that southern Minnesota has fewer OHV riding opportunities compared to other regions of the state. Many noted that expanding the Chatfield system would help address this imbalance and provide more equitable access to motorized recreation opportunities closer to home.	The DNR recognizes interest in expanding OHV opportunities in southern Minnesota. Geographic distribution of trail opportunities is considered alongside environmental review, feasibility and long-term sustainability when evaluating trail proposals.