

City of Houston Grant-in-Aid Off Highway Vehicle Trail Proposal Project Summary

Sponsor: City of Houston

Proposer: City of Houston

Rochester Rough Riders
Golden Eagles Cycle Club
North Metro ATV Club
South Metro ATV Club
Twin Cities Trail Riders

All –Terrain Vehicle Association of Minnesota
Amateur Riders Motorcycle Association
Minnesota 4-Wheel Drive Association

Jeff Klein, Trail Administrator
Milo Bjerke, Trail Administrator
Tom Steiger, Trail Administrator

Project Location: Houston County
Houston T103N, R06W, Sections 4 & 5

Project Dimensions: Total of all trail segments = 7.5 miles
7.5 miles new trail through City of Houston and privately owned land
with existing trail easement

Project Description:

This proposal would establish 7.5 miles of grant-in-aid (GIA) off-road-vehicle (ORV), all-terrain-vehicle (ATV), and off-highway-motorcycle (OHM) trail immediately south of the City of Houston, and within city limits. Parking will be outside of city limits off of a graveled county road. An access easement has been purchased from this parking lot to access the city land and proposed trail system. Two additional points for emergency medical service (EMS) access have been identified, with EMS access off city streets.

Project History:

This project was initiated in the Fall of 2009, when the Houston city administration and OHV clubs approached Minnesota Department of Natural Resource Division of Parks and Trails with an opportunity to develop an OHV trail system adjacent to the City of Houston. A city hearing was held on August 9, 2010, where the OHV clubs and the DNR Parks and Trails staff provided information about potential trail opportunities. On August 23, 2010, the Houston City Council

passed a resolution approving sponsorship for the OHV trail. The city was able to gain support for additional land acquisition to increase the park land and, subsequently, the length of the proposed trail. In the following years, the city was able to add 120 acres to existing city owned park land.

The original city park land under consideration (referred to as South Park in this proposal) was developed in the 1970s with federal funding for acquisition (Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965). At the time of purchase, South Park was not designated for motorized vehicle use. In 2013, the city went through the process of adding motorized recreation to the existing land use for an 80 acre portion of South Park, an action requiring a federal Environmental Assessment completed by WSB & Associates, Inc. on behalf of the City of Houston and submitted to US National Park Service. That process included meetings, commenting, and public review. The Environmental Assessment is included as an attached supporting document to this proposal.



View of the valley below and the City of Houston from a planned overlook point.

The DNR Area Team gathered for site visits on October 7 and 29, 2010 to consider potential environmental effects of an OHV trail system within a general footprint of potential acquisition. During those visits, comments were generated regarding the sensitive nature of the landscape, which includes comments on the terrain, vegetation, wildlife, and soils. The environmental

concerns were conveyed in a letter to the Sponsors by the DNR Parks and Trails Division on January 28, 2010. Specifically, concerns from the Area Team included the following issues: high erosion potential (this was regarded as the greatest potential issue); potential of the project area to impact state listed and rare species due to locations identified in the Natural Heritage Database on adjacent bluffs; potential of disturbance in general to wildlife from noise, vehicle traffic, and creation of trails; potential to impact the classification of 'moderate in biodiversity significance' by the Minnesota Biological Survey through possible introduction of invasive species by greater use and trail development; potentially impacting areas of cultural resource interest through trail development.

Some of these concerns are addressed by the Environmental Assessment (EA) for land use change in South Park. The soils are rated by the County Soil Survey as poorly suitable for trails without significant engineering, as they are considered highly erodible throughout the site due to parent materials soils are formed in and relief. Parent materials are primarily sandstone and colluvium (see EA page 7 for details). Due to soil and landscape structure, developing trails in this location will require significant hardening and engineering to ensure sediment does not enter water bodies. Addressing rare and state listed species, eight species were revealed to occur within an approximate one mile radius of the 80 acres addressed in the EA (page 9). A portion of the vegetation of this proposal is considered by the Minnesota Biological Survey as 'moderate in biodiversity significance' (noted on EA page 8). This means that the forest and bluff prairie of this area may contain occurrences of rare species, moderately disturbed native plant communities, or landscapes that have strong potential for recovery of native plant communities and characteristic ecological processes. Addressing potential cultural resources, a Phase 1 Archaeological Survey was completed in July 2013. This field survey indicated that there were no historic properties associated with the 80 acres covered by the EA (page 10, Appendix D for field survey report).



Vegetation types within this project area are of moderate biodiversity significance (as rated by the Minnesota Biological Society) with bluff prairie in foreground and mature forest in background of this photo.



The proposed trail alignment is along this ridgetop, which has unique rock formations and scenic vistas.

Due to the challenge of developing a Grant-in-Aid trail in this location, it was agreed upon by the Sponsor, the clubs, and DNR Parks and Trails that an outside group with experience in developing trails in challenging locations design the trail alignment. The goal was development of an alignment maximizing user satisfaction, minimizing environmental concerns, and which can be sustainably maintained.

A United States Forest Service group, Trails Unlimited, LLC., was contracted to develop a trail design. Trails Unlimited, LLC. designs and develops trails that offer both rider enjoyment and challenge while maintaining integrity of the site, including meeting regulatory standards for the watershed and rare species. The concerns of the DNR Area Team were highlighted and taken into consideration prior to onsite work in Summer of 2015. The alignment with design considerations was completed in August of 2015, with the accompanying report provided in March of 2016 (supporting document: Design and Layout of Houston OHV Trail).

The proposed trail would be open to class 1 ATVs, class 2 ATVs (side-by-sides), OHMs, and ORVs. The trail would be located on primarily city land. The trail system is considered new trail.

There is history of multi-use on the property and this includes ATVs using logging roads and traveling cross-country.

Roles:

The City of Houston is the sponsor of the project and land owner. The State is a partner in the project, providing development and acquisition funding through the Grant-in-Aid program, as well as the specialized construction and maintenance services of the DNR Roving Crew. The Off-Road-Vehicle (ORV), All-terrain vehicle (ATV), and Off-Highway-Motorcycle (OHM) clubs are partners in the development of a trail system by applying for grants, working with the DNR to design a manageable trail system, and maintaining the trail once built.

The City of Houston, as landowner, will maintain public use of this land as a multi-use park. These uses include: picnicking, primitive camping, walking, cross-country skiing, sliding, biking, and hiking. An archery range, day use facilities (toilet, picnic tables, fire ring), and camping spots are part of the land use, however, at this time the proposed trail alignment does not connect to this more highly developed area which is indicated on the map as an EMS access location.

Trail Design:

The proposed trail was designed by Trails Unlimited, LLC. Trails Unlimited is a branch of the USDA Forest Service which specializes in OHV trail system design, ground layout, and construction. Trails Unlimited, LLC. has designed OHV trails throughout the United States on public lands where they have become experts on designing trails that are enjoyable for different groups while also taking into account various environmental concerns (sensitive soils, terrain, federally endangered and threatened species, and others).

Water quality and erosion control best management practices described in the DNR GIA manual, and the DNR's 2007 publication "*Trail Planning, Development and Design Guidelines*" will be used for trail and landscape sustainability including: using rolling grades and broad-based dips to quickly shed water from the trail, placement of gravel, crushed stone, pavers or other hardening materials where needed, and vegetating side drainage areas. Best management practices will be used, including shaping the trail to minimize erosion, placement of features to drain water off the trail, and construction practices that minimize sediment discharge. When climbing slopes, water bars and tread hardening will be necessary to limit erosion. The attached document *Design and Layout of Houston OHV Trail* (US Forest Service Trails Unlimited Enterprise Unit, 2015) contains additional recommendation on design and construction techniques.

The trail was designed with input from the ORV, OHM, and ATV user groups and includes a rocky area where riders can travel off trail for additional challenge (Rock Crawl).



Looking downhill through the trees at the planned rock crawl (this area will be downhill of the birch trees), an approximately 0.7 acre area, where ORV riders can ride off trail and challenge themselves with rocky terrain.



Location of future parking lot and access point for trail.

Trail Construction, Maintenance and Monitoring Responsibilities:

The City of Houston is the sponsor of the trail and landowner of 238 acres in which 6.8 miles of the trail is proposed to be developed. Construction of the trail will be completed with the onsite guidance of Trails Unlimited, LLC. with assistance by the OHV clubs and the specialized DNR Roving Crew. Members of the OHV clubs will perform trail construction and on-going maintenance to ensure a safe and enjoyable trail for all users.

Trail maintenance responsibilities will be performed by the OHV clubs proposing the trail. Up to 90% of the maintenance costs are eligible for reimbursement through the Minnesota Trail Assistance (Grant-In-Aid) program. Maintenance responsibilities can be augmented by DNR crews.

The sponsor, club, and the DNR will share monitoring responsibilities, supplemented by volunteers with the DNR's Trail Ambassador program. A monitoring plan for the first year will be developed and implemented to provide heightened attention during this critical time to issues such as trail sustainability/weather events, sound, parking lot and trail access management, and other issues of interest to the Houston Trail System Advisory Committee.

Trail Benefits:

This trail would greatly expand the grant-in-aid designated OHV trail system in Southeast Minnesota, where there are limited public OHV trail riding opportunities and no state sponsored opportunities in Houston County. It would be the only public trail for ORVs and OHMs in the southeast part of the state. This trail system would be unique for the state and draw in tourists regionally.

Public Review:

The DNR invites written public comment on the proposal, dates to be determined. Copies of the proposal during that time will be available on the DNR website (www.mndnr.gov/input) as well as at the DNR Rochester Parks and Trails office.

Written comments on the proposal may be e-mailed to jess.althoff@state.mn.us or mailed to Jess Althoff, Area Supervisor, 3555 9th St. NW, Suite 350, Rochester, MN 55901. For more information, or to request a printed copy of the proposal, please call or email Angela Yuska, Parks & Trails Specialist at 507-206-2846 (angela.yuska@state.mn.us) or the DNR Information Center at 1-888-MINNDNR (toll free).