

Public comments – Seven Beavers Connector GIA trail proposal

Background

From February 17 to March 18, 2026, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) received 23 public comments on an off-highway vehicle (OHV) trail proposal called the Seven Beavers 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
Increased Trail Access and Connectivity: A prominent theme among commenters was the need for expanded trail mileage and improved connectivity between existing systems. Commenters noted that connecting trail segments would create more cohesive, efficient and desirable riding experiences.	The DNR recognizes interest in expanded trail access and connectivity. The Seven Beavers Connector has been proposed, in part, to link existing trail segments and enhance connectivity within the project area. Proposed 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.
Economic and Tourism Benefits: Commenters frequently highlighted the economic benefits associated with trail connection, including increased visitation and spending at local businesses such as restaurants, lodging, fuel stations and retail establishments. Several comments noted that trail users often travel from outside the area and contribute to local economies through multi-day visits.	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 Connection: Many commenters expressed general support for the proposed trail connection without providing detailed rationale. These comments often conveyed appreciation for existing trail systems and enthusiasm for continued growth of recreational opportunities in the region.	The DNR acknowledges the general support expressed for the proposed trail connection and appreciation for existing OHV trail systems. Public interest is considered alongside environmental review, feasibility and long-term sustainability when evaluating trail proposals.

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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, such as habitat restoration and water resource protection, and questioned whether OHV use is compatible with long-term environmental sustainability.	The DNR acknowledges concerns regarding potential environmental impacts associated with OHV use. Environmental protection is a key component of trail planning, and proposed routes are evaluated to avoid or minimize impacts to sensitive resources, including wetlands, wildlife habitat and water resources. Trail proposals are reviewed through established planning and environmental review processes to ensure they are sustainable and consistent with the DNR's land management objectives.
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 infrastructure. Concerns were also raised about the state's ability to maintain current trail systems and whether connections could create additional financial burdens.	The DNR acknowledges concerns regarding the use of public funds and long-term maintenance of trail systems. OHV trail development and maintenance are supported through dedicated funding sources, including user-generated revenues such as registration fees, which are intended to support motorized recreation opportunities. The DNR considers long-term maintenance capacity, funding availability and system sustainability when evaluating trail proposals.
Social, Family and Quality of Life Benefits: Public comments described OHV trails as valuable for social connection, family recreation and overall quality of life. Commenters shared experiences of riding with family members and friends, emphasizing the role of trails in creating meaningful interactions, outdoor engagement and shared experiences across generations.	The DNR acknowledges the social, family and quality of life benefits described by commenters. Providing outdoor recreation opportunities that support a range of user experiences is an important consideration in trail planning, alongside environmental review, feasibility and long-term sustainability.
Responsible Use, Stewardship and Landowner Relations: Several 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.	The DNR recognizes the importance of responsible riding and stewardship in supporting positive relationships between trail users and landowners. Education, signage and partnership with local organizations are key components of promoting responsible use and long-term trail sustainability.
Landowners who commented generally expressed positive experiences with existing trail users, noting respectful behavior and minimal issues. These commenters supported connection and indicated that trail use can coexist with private landownership when properly managed.	The DNR recognizes the importance of maintaining positive relationships with landowners. Trail proposals are evaluated to ensure compatibility with adjacent land uses, and ongoing management emphasizes responsible use and communication to support long-term coexistence.

Topic Area	DNR Response
Planning, Partnerships and GIA Program Support: Some commenters provided detailed support for the proposals based on planning and programmatic considerations. These comments highlighted the value of the Grant-in-aid (GIA) program, partnerships among agencies and local organizations, use of existing corridors and alignment with broader strategic planning efforts. Commenters viewed these factors as contributing to well-managed and sustainable trail systems.	The DNR acknowledges the value of the GIA program and the role of partnerships in developing and maintaining OHV trails. Coordination with local organizations and alignment with broader planning efforts are important considerations in evaluating trail proposals.
Safety Considerations: Commenters identified safety as an important consideration, including the need for designated trails to reduce conflicts with motor vehicles and improve overall user safety. Some comments supported connection as a way to create safer, more structured riding environments.	The DNR recognizes safety as an important consideration in trail planning. Providing designated trails can help reduce user conflicts and improve overall safety, and these factors are considered alongside environmental and management considerations when evaluating proposals.
Infrastructure and Amenities: Public input included interest in additional infrastructure to support trail use, such as camping areas, staging locations and multi-day riding opportunities. Commenters noted that expanded amenities could encourage 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.