

Blazing Star State Trail Master Plan

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Executive Summary

Trail Alignment

The Blazing Star State Trail is a legislatively authorized state trail which, when complete, will connect Albert Lea, Big Island State Park, Hayward, and Austin. The Blazing Star State Trail will be an important link in the emerging southeastern Minnesota trail system, providing linkage at Austin to the Shooting Star State Trail and the legislatively authorized Prairie Wildflower State Trail.

For purposes of planning, the trail has been divided into three segments: Albert Lea to Hayward; Hayward to 5.5 miles east of Hayward; and 5.5 miles east of Hayward to Austin.

A specific alignment has been determined for the segment from Albert Lea through Big Island State Park. Where an alignment has not been determined, a list of criteria and alternative corridors has been developed to guide the location of the trail. Once a specific alignment has been determined, a public workshop will be held to provide information, answer questions, and address issues and concerns.

Recommended/Allowable Trail Uses

The Blazing Star State Trail is a multi-use trail but the limitation of width dictate that not all uses can be accommodated at all times on the entire length of the trail. Following are the recommended trail uses: bicycling; hiking and walking; cross-country skiing; dog walking; running/jogging; in-line skating/skate skiing; environmental education/interpretation. Hunting, except where discharge of firearms is regulated by community ordinance or State Park rules and regulations, is allowed. Trail development will be accessible to people with disabilities wherever possible.

Trail Management

The plan contains recommendations for maintenance, enforcement, and interpretation of natural and cultural resources. The plan recommends that an adequate level of enforcement be provided via a multifaceted approach to help maintain a safe and secure trail environment and to encourage trail users to understand and obey trail rules and respect other trail users and adjoining properties. Interpreting the natural and cultural resources along the trail is also recommended.

Natural and Cultural Resources

The ecological value of the trail corridor will be enhanced wherever possible through intensive resource management and by offering technical assistance to adjoining landowners who wish to restore or preserve native vegetation. The resources within the trail right-of-way will be managed to provide a healthy diversity of prairie, wetland and woodland communities for wildlife habitat and for the appreciation of trail users and adjoining landowners. Native grasses, flowers, trees and shrubs will be planted and managed.

Planning Process: Purpose and Scope

Master planning for the Blazing Star State Trail was conducted in order to:

- ! Provide a unifying vision for trail advocates who are working to identify and secure a trail alignment and funds for development and maintenance of the trail.
- ! Document how the trail meets the legislative criteria (Minnesota Statutes 86A.05 Subdivision 4) for inclusion in the state trail system.
- ! Guide the development, management, maintenance and operation of the Blazing Star State Trail so that quality recreation experiences are provided.
- ! Provide a forum for open public discussion and debate concerning trail use; trail development options; trail maintenance and management issues; trail operations; and trail enforcement needs.
- ! Support partnerships and processes that will help carry out the plan and contribute to providing quality trail experiences.
- ! Inform the decision-making process by assessing the projected impacts of trail development on natural, cultural and historic resources, and on local communities.
- ! Satisfy the intent of Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 86A.05 which requires that a master plan be prepared for state trails.

Blazing Star State Trail Master Planning Process

STEPS IN THE PROCESS	WHO'S INVOLVED
Information Gathering and Issue Identification	Trail Association
Formulate Vision, Goals, and Design Concepts	Trail User Groups
Formulate Trail Development and Management Recommendations	Communities
Draft Plan and Internal DNR Review	Public Workshop Participants
Draft Plan and Public Review	Adjacent Landowners
Trail Plan Adopted - Implementation Begins	Elected Officials
Public Workshop for Each Segment After Alignment Is Determined and Before Construction Is Completed	Other Agencies
Evaluation and Adjustment The evaluation component will address trail user satisfaction, vegetation restoration success, interpretive success and an assessment of whether or not natural features have been preserved and enhanced.	

Trail Authorization

The Blazing Star State Trail was legislatively authorized in 1996, (Minnesota Statutes 85.015, Subdivision 19).

"(a) The trail shall originate in the city of Albert Lea and extend to the city of Austin

(b) The trail shall be developed primarily for hiking and nonmotorized riding."

The Blazing Star State Trail is one of the legislatively authorized state trails in the State Trail System. (See the map of Minnesota's State Trail System on the next page.) State trails are one unit of the state's outdoor recreation system established by the Legislature. In 1975, the Minnesota Legislature enacted the Outdoor Recreation Act (ORA) (Minnesota Statutes, Section 86A.05, Subdivision 4 and Section 85.015). This act established an outdoor recreation system comprised of eleven components or "units" classifying all state-managed recreation lands. The ORA requires that the managing agency prepare a master plan for the establishment and development of each unit. This plan fulfills this mandate.

The Blazing Star State Trail meets the following criteria established for state trails in the Outdoor Recreation Act, Minnesota Statutes 86A.05, Subdivision 4, State Trail; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration; designation.

"a. A state trail shall be established to provide a recreational travel route which connects units of the outdoor recreation system or the national trail system; provides access or passage through other areas which have significant scenic, historic, scientific, or recreational qualities; or establishes or permits travel along a historically prominent travel route or which provides commuter transportation.

b. No unit shall be authorized as a state trail unless its proposed location substantially satisfies the following criteria:

1. Permits travel in an appropriate manner along a route which provides at least one of the following recreational opportunities:

(i) "Travel along a route which connects areas or points of natural, scientific, cultural and historic interest."

The Blazing Star State Trail connects three communities (Albert Lea, Hayward, and Austin) and Big Island State Park managed by the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation. The state park contains significant points of natural, scientific, cultural and historic interest. The communities along the trail have numerous and diverse cultural and historic resources including several museums and interpretive centers.

(ii) *"Travel through an area which possesses outstanding scenic beauty."*

Trail users will enjoy views of rural pastoral landscapes. Big Island State Park will allow trail users to experience a diversity of natural environments including wetlands, oak savanna, big woods, and prairie. The vista of Albert Lea Lake from the trail will be a highlight.

(iii) *"Travel over a route designed to enhance and utilize the unique qualities of a particular manner of travel in harmony with the natural environment."*

The trail will be developed predominately for walking, bicycling, and in-line skating, all slower paced modes of travel that foster the opportunity to recreate in a natural setting.

(iv) *"Travel along a route which is historically significant as a route of migration, commerce or communication."*

A portion of the trail will parallel the railroad owned by the Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern (DM&E) Railroad. Built by the Southern Minnesota Railroad in 1869, this railroad "represents a significant historical property that characterizes the initial development of railroad transportation within the State of Minnesota." (Radford, Gonsior, George, & Allan, 2002).

(v) *"Travel between units of the outdoor recreation system or national trails system."*

The Blazing Star State Trail will connect to the Shooting Star State Trail and the Prairie Wildflower State Trail at Austin. The trail will also connect Big Island State Park to the Shooting Star State Trail, which connects to Lake Louise State Park.

2. *"Utilizes to the greatest extent possible, consistent with the purposes of this subdivision, public lands, rights-of-way and the like."*

Portions of the trail alignment will be located on existing state-owned land. Approximately 2.7 miles will be developed in Big Island State Park. Other portions may be developed in road rights-of-way.

3. *"Provides maximum potential for the appreciation, conservation, and enjoyment of significant scenic, historical, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which the trail may pass."*

Overlooks, waysides, and interpretive facilities are proposed to increase trail users' appreciation and understanding of the natural and cultural resources of the area. There is great potential for use of the trail for environmental education. Plant community restoration projects, wildlife habitat improvement projects, and development of learning stations are potential projects that would benefit students and trail users.

4. *"Takes into consideration predicted public demand and future use."*

The master plan evaluates and uses the current research and trends on existing use of trails and demand for trail opportunities. Current demographic data is taken into account. Information gathered at public workshops is also considered.

Vision for the Blazing Star State Trail

A state authorized, non-motorized, paved, multi-use recreational trail open to walkers, joggers, bikers, in-line skaters, cross-country skiers, and snowshoers. The trail will provide an experience different from the experience provided along the interstates. The trail corridor will be aesthetically pleasing; acquired, developed, and managed to enhance natural resource values; and connect the historically significant sites in Freeborn County. Interpretive information will enhance the trail experience by increasing trail users' appreciation of the significant resources along the trail such as oak savanna, archaeological resources, historical resources and watershed management. The trail will be a vital component of a system of trails in Freeborn County and neighboring counties.

Goals for the Blazing Star State Trail

Environmental

- ! Preserve and enhance the natural and cultural features of the trail corridor.
- ! Interpret the natural and cultural features of the trail and the Oak Savanna landscape.
- ! Design, construct, and maintain the trail in a way that protects and enhances the natural environment and minimizes the trail users' impact.
- ! Protect, restore, and manage plant communities, wildlife, soil, and water resources in a way that is appropriate to the Oak Savanna landscape.

Adjacent Landowner Relationships

- ! Develop and maintain the trail so that impacts to adjacent landowners are avoided or minimized.

Trail Integrity/Connectivity

- ! Provide a continuous, off-road, multi-use trail which serves as a component in the emerging southeastern Minnesota trail system.
- ! Connect regional tourist travel destinations and population centers.
- ! Connect state and local outdoor recreation lands and facilities.

Meeting Trail User Needs

- ! Provide access for a wide range of people with varying degrees of capabilities.
- ! Promote the safety and security of trail users.
- ! Work with local communities in developing, managing, and maintaining the trail right-of-way to mutually benefit both trail users and the community.
- ! Complement the character and economic vitality of the communities through which the trail passes.
- ! Involve local units of government, user groups, adjacent landowners, and other concerned citizens in the planning, design, and operation of the trail so that their needs are identified and addressed.
- ! Work cooperatively with other units of the DNR and public agencies to fulfill mutual objectives.

Summary of Recommended Blazing Star State Trail Uses

This page summarizes the recommended allowable uses for the trail. The Blazing Star State Trail is a multi-use trail, but the physical limitations of the corridor dictate that not all uses can be accommodated at all times on the entire length of the trail. Each use will be discussed individually in more detail on the following pages.

- P** **Bicycling**
- r** **Hiking and Walking**
- «** **Dog walking**
- ⌈** **Running/Jogging**
- }** **In-Line skating/Skate-skiing**
- Q** **Cross-country skiing**
- a** **Hunting, except where discharge of firearms is regulated by community ordinance or state park rules (Minnesota Rules 6100)**
- ∞** **Environmental Education/Interpretation**
- 2** **Trail development will be accessible to people with disabilities wherever possible**
- N** **Access for fishing**
- X** **Snowmobiling may be allowed for short segments**

Bicycling

Bicycling is a popular activity in Minnesota. According to the Executive Director of the Minnesota Coalition of Bicyclists, 175,000 bicycles are sold annually in Minnesota. Currently, there are at least 765 miles of public bike trails, with more being added every year. There are approximately 395 miles in the DNR state trail system that are paved and there are over 500 miles of mountain biking opportunities. Bicycling is recommended as a use on the entire length of the trail.

Hiking and Walking

On state trails, hiking or walking is second only to biking in numbers of summer use. Pushing strollers or walking for low-impact cardiovascular fitness is popular on state trails. The Blazing Star State Trail will be developed with relatively flat grades that will be easy for most people to walk and hike. Hiking and walking are recommended as a use on the entire length of the trail.

Dog Walking

Dog walking will be allowed on the trail as long as dogs are leashed and owners properly dispose of pet wastes. State trail rules require all pets to be attended and restrained by a leash not more than feet in length but do not specifically address owners' responsibility to remove and dispose of pet feces properly. Dog walking is a recommended use on the entire length of the trail.

Running/Jogging

Many people use the state trails for running or jogging. Besides the individuals who regularly use the trails for exercise, nearby school track and cross-country running teams sometimes use the trails for training. Running and jogging are recommended uses on the entire length of the trail.

In-Line Skating

The participation rate in Minnesota is still strong, according to 1998 American Sports Data. Based on a 3 year average, Minnesota was in the top ten list of states in participation rates. Minnesota ranked eighth in total number of participants in the sport and ranked fourth in participants per 100 people.

In-line skaters need a smooth, wide surface, such as asphalt, and prefer trails with no surface debris, twigs or stones. In-line skating is recommended as a use on the entire length of the trail.

Cross-country Skiing

Cross-country skiing will be allowed on the Blazing Star State Trail.

Snowmobiling

Snowmobiles may be allowed on short segments of the Blazing Star State Trail, especially when necessary to maintain the integrity of the snowmobile system.

Hunting

During legal hunting season only - Currently, state trail rules allow hunting within the trail right-of-way, except where restricted by local ordinance. The current rule states: “*No firearm or bow and arrow shall be discharged within the trail at any time, except for the purpose of lawful hunting during the period from September 15 to March 30 only. No rifle, shotgun with slug, or bow and arrow shall be discharged upon, over, or across the trail treadway at any time.*” Hunting is not allowed in state parks (Minnesota Rule 6100), and this rule takes precedence over state trail rules within state park boundaries. Communities may restrict firearms or bow and arrow discharge, or trapping, by ordinance. These ordinances also take precedence over state trail rules.

Environmental Education/Interpretation

Use of the Blazing Star State Trail for environmental education, both for individual trail users and formal groups is encouraged. Schools or organizations that wish to use the trail can work with DNR staff on specific projects.

Interpretation and education opportunities will also be available at several locations along the trail. Interpretation of the natural and cultural resources can add rich dimensions to the trail experience.

Opportunities for Trail Use by Individuals with Disabilities

The nearly level slopes of the Blazing Star State Trail will be ideal for accessible use along with the fact that the trail will be paved. In new facility construction, such as adjoining parking areas or rest areas, the DNR designs barrier-free facilities.

Fishing

The trail can be used as access for fishing.

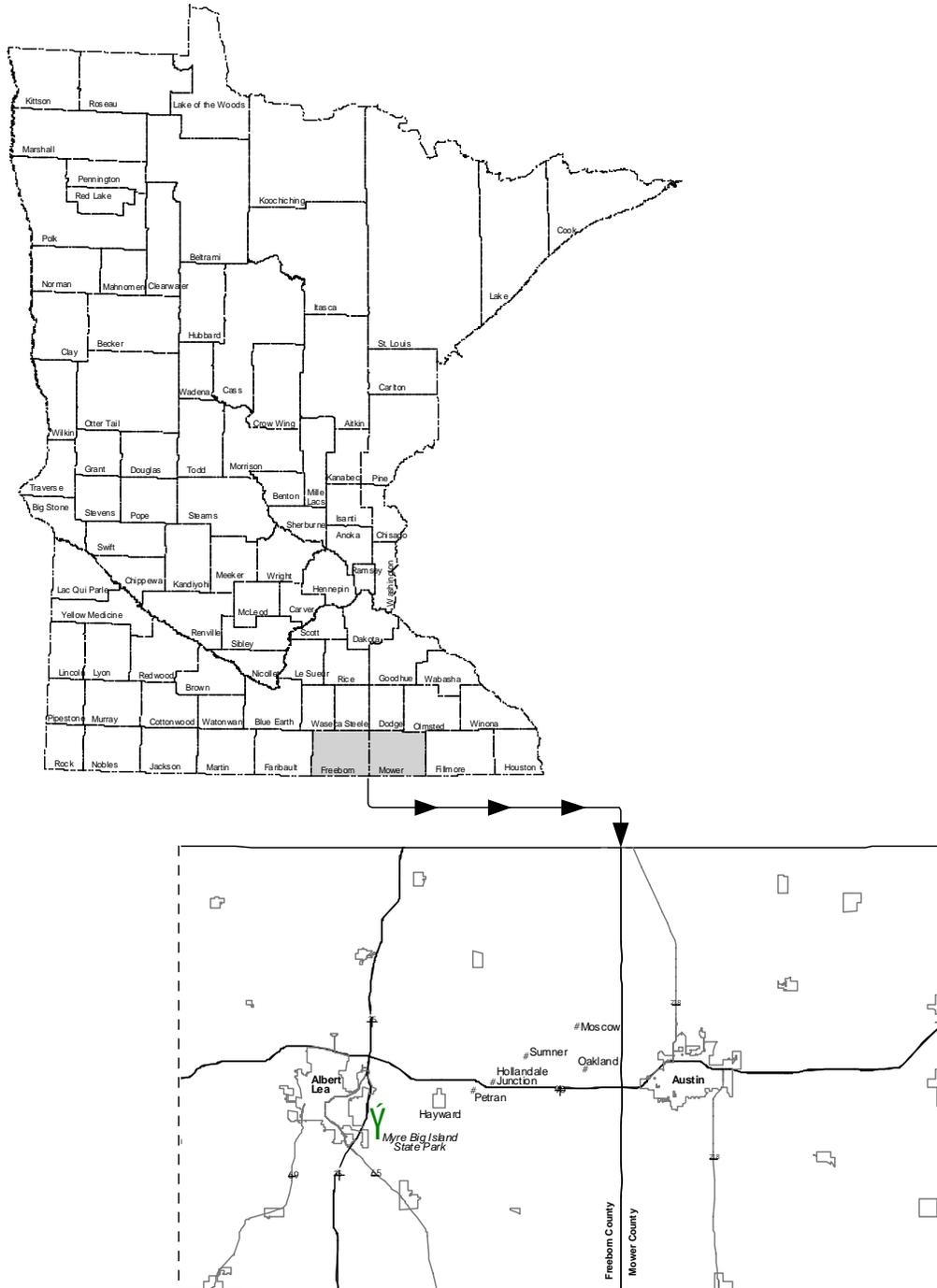
Trail Alignment

Overview of the Trail Alignment

The Blazing Star State Trail is a legislatively authorized state trail which when complete will connect Albert Lea, Big Island State Park, Hayward, and Austin. Two additional state trails converge at Austin, the Shooting Star State Trail and Prairie Wildflower State Trail.

For purposes of the master planning process, the trail has been divided into three segments:

1. Albert Lea to Hayward
2. Hayward to 5½ miles East of Hayward
3. 5½ miles East of Hayward to Austin



Segment 1: Albert Lea to Hayward

Description of the Trail Environment and Trail Alignment

A specific alignment has been determined for most of this segment of trail. This segment will begin at Frank Hall Park in Albert Lea and proceed easterly along the south side of the active rail line. The trail will then cross under I-35 at the freeway bridge. The trail will be benched in between the south pier and the south abutment on the embankment slope. Once on the east side of I-35, the trail will head south in the I-35 right of way for approximately a half mile until it reaches Big Island State Park. Trail users will have the opportunity to experience prairie, wetlands, oak savanna, and the big woods in this park. The trail will head in an easterly direction, veering north to cross Albert Lea Lake at the existing railroad crossing of the lake. A boardwalk would be constructed on the north side of the active rail tracks. This site will be one the highlights of the trail. It provides a fantastic vista of Albert Lea Lake and is an excellent spot for birdwatching. A birdwatching viewing area and interpretive information should be developed at this location. The trail will leave the park and continue easterly to Hayward.

Trail Access and Parking Areas, Rest Areas, Interpretive Sites

Albert Lea	<p><i>Albert Lea trail access/parking/rest area</i> Frank Hall Park will serve as the trail head in Albert Lea. Parking, restrooms, picnic sites and water is available here. The development of trail orientation information is recommended for this site.</p>
Big Island State Park	<p><i>Big Island State Park trail access/rest area</i> The park will serve as a trail access and rest area. Rest areas will be located near the contact station, at the picnic area, and at the intersection of the Blazing Star and the Esker Trail. See map on page 20. Trail users will be able to enjoy wildlife and wildflower observation as well as the other recreational and educational amenities the park provides.</p>
	<p><i>Albert Lea Lake rest area and interpretive site</i> This site could be a focal point for the interpretation of the management of Albert Lea Lake and the issues associated with shallow basin management, such as sedimentation, and restoration activities. Watershed management issues and bird identification are also relevant topics to interpret at this site.</p>

Segment 2: Hayward to 5 ½ Miles East of Hayward

Description of the Trail Environment and Trail Alignment

The city park in Hayward will serve as a trailhead. Parking, restrooms, water, and trail orientation and interpretive information will be developed at this site to serve trail users. A specific alignment has not been determined for this segment of trail. The landscape is more varied in this segment and has more hills and valleys than the first segment. The concept for the trail alignment in this segment is for the trail to connect Hayward to Petran to the abandoned townsite of Sumner. Remnants of old stagecoach abutments can be seen in this area. A historic school house and stagecoach barn can be seen Sumner. Views of degraded oak savanna are present in this area. The trail will then connect Sumner to Moscow. (See the 5.5 miles east of Hayward to Austin segment.)

Criteria for locating trail alignment

Provide access to main street in Hayward

Minimize impact on wetlands

Minimize acquisition of high quality agricultural lands

Use existing public right-of-way where necessary (for connections)

Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the landscape

Minimize trail user exposure to vehicular traffic

Avoid negative impacts on rare and endangered species, and minimize fragmentation or disturbance of significant native plant communities identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey

Connect Hayward to Petran to Sumner

Alternative corridors for future trail alignments

Railroad right-of-way

CSAH 46 right-of-way

CSAH 30 right-of-way

CSAH 25 right-of way

Township road rights-of-way

Edges and boundary lines

A combination of above

Trail Access and Parking Areas, Rest Areas and Interpretive Sites

Hayward

Hayward trail access/parking/rest area

The city park in Hayward will serve as a trailhead. Parking, restrooms, water, and trail orientation/interpretive information will be developed at this site to serve trail users.

Sumner interpretive site

The story of the abandoned townsite should be interpreted.

Segment 3: 5 ½ Miles East of Hayward to Austin

Description of the Trail Environment and Trail Alignment

A historical marker near Moscow commemorates the first church service held in Freeborn County in 1856.

Criteria for locating trail alignment

Connect to the Austin trail system

Minimize impact on wetlands

Minimize acquisition of high quality agricultural lands

Use existing public right-of-way where necessary (for connections)

Work with willing landowners to acquire right-of-way that showcases features of the landscape

Minimize trail user exposure to vehicular traffic

Avoid negative impacts on rare and endangered species, and minimize fragmentation or disturbance of significant native plant communities identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey

Alternative corridors for future trail alignments

Railroad right-of-way

CSAH 46 right-of-way

CSAH 34 right-of-way

CSAH 25 right-of way

Township road rights-of-way

Edges and boundary lines

A combination of above

Trail Access and Parking Areas, Rest Areas, Interpretive Sites

Austin

Austin trail access/parking/rest area

Todd Park will serve as the trailhead for the Blazing Star State Trail and the Shooting Star State Trail. Amenities located in Todd Park include: picnic shelters/pavilions, picnic tables, water, playground, parking, rest rooms and other recreation opportunities. Development of a kiosk with trail orientation and interpretive information is recommended for this access/rest area.

Interrelationship of the Blazing Star State Trail and Big Island State Park

Park Highlights

Big Island State Park hosts a diversity of plant and animal life. The park has prairie, oak savanna, wetlands, and northern hardwood forest. The park is an excellent place to observe wildlife. There is an abundance of bird and wildflower species throughout Big Island State Park. The landscape includes glacial features, such as the esker in the northern part of the park. One of the largest prehistoric artifact collections in the state is housed in the park. Owen Johnson, a conservationist and amateur archaeologist, was instrumental in establishing the park and assembling the artifact collection. A diversity of recreational opportunities are available in the park including, camping, picnicking, hiking, mountain biking, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing.

Role of the Park

Development of the Blazing Star State Trail will impact the use of the park. There will likely be an increase in the number of users. The park is likely to become more of a destination park vs a transit park. Local use is likely to increase as well. The park will serve as a destination for trail users, but will not be promoted as a major access to the trail. That role will be provided by Albert Lea, Hayward, and Austin.

Criteria for Location of the Trail Alignment

The following objectives were identified to guide the location of the trail alignment through the park:

Provide access to the park

Provide access to the contact station (within .1 mile of the trail) in order to provide the trail user

service including orientation to the area, restrooms, water, merchandise and other park information

Develop a wayside rest area in the vicinity of the contact station and picnic area

Provide connection to the campground

Provide a good location for a road crossing

Protect archaeological resources

Minimize impact to wetlands and where possible, restore wetlands

Use existing corridors where possible

Avoid severing plant communities and avoid impact to oaks

Trail Alignment

The trail will enter the park at the northwest corner. It will follow an existing park trail to the contact station. This section of trail will provide vistas of an oak savanna landscape. The trail will pass by the contact station providing trail users with access to information about the park and its resources. A small rest area will be developed in the vicinity of the contact station and include a small kiosk and a picnic table. Trail users who want to use the park for a longer stay, will be encouraged to use the picnic area. From the contact station, the trail will proceed easterly, skirt a wetland and come within close proximity to White Fox campground. A spur trail linking the campground to the Blazing Star will be developed. Orientation information about the park and the trail should be provided in this location. The Blazing Star State Trail will continue through the park following existing park trails for most of the distance. The Blazing Star State Trail will intersect the park's Esker Trail. Blazing Star Trail users will be able to park their bikes at a rest area and hike the Esker Trail. The Blazing Star State Trail will intersect the railroad tracks just west of where the tracks cross Albert Lea Lake. A bridge over the railroad tracks will be developed and the trail will be constructed north of the railroad tracks on a boardwalk. A portion of the existing snowmobile trail alignment in the park will be used for the Blazing Star State Trail. Some realignment of the park's trail system will occur in order to ensure continuity of the snowmobile trail system.

Interrelationship of the Blazing Star State Trail and Albert Lea

History

The town of Albert Lea was named for the lake bordering it on the southeast. Albert Miller Lea was a lieutenant with the First United States Dragoons and served as a surveyor and map maker for an expedition exploring southern Minnesota in 1835. The first settlers arrived in 1855. The city was platted in 1856. Albert Lea was incorporated in 1878. The first industry in Albert Lea was a grain mill located at the outlet of Albert Lea Lake. The meat packing industry was very significant to the growth and prosperity of Albert Lea. Frank Hall was elected as the first mayor and served four terms. He donated land to the city which today is the park that bears his name and will serve as the trailhead for the Blazing Star State Trail. He was responsible for the development of two general stores, a livery barn, the Opera House and the Freeborn Hotel. There are numerous buildings associated with the early commercial and social history of the town that are on the National Register of Historic Places. A self-guided historic walking tour encourages people to explore this historic downtown.

The Community Today

Albert Lea, the Freeborn County seat, is located at the intersection of I-90 and I-35, 90 miles south of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The population has remained relatively stable over the last ten years, the 2000 census indicating the population of Albert Lea to be 18,356, a .3% percent increase from the 1990 census.

Albert Lea has a diverse economic base. Agriculture, particularly the production of corn, soybeans, potatoes, and hogs is the predominant industry in the surrounding area. Industries in the community include the manufacturing of store fixtures, processed meat/food products, deli foods and condiments, machined parts, wood and packaging products in addition to many others. Health care, education, and retail also provide significant employment opportunities.

There are approximately 40 park and recreation areas totaling over 300 acres. Recreational facilities include neighborhood park play fields, playground equipment, basketball courts, tennis courts, fishing areas natural open spaces, picnic areas, softball and baseball diamonds, trails, and an outdoor aquatic park. The Albert Lea Civic Theater, housed in a historic building, offers entertainment all year. The Pelican Breeze, a double decked tour boat provides an opportunity for an outing on Albert Lea Lake. The twelve acre Albert Lea Audubon Nature and Wildlife Preserve is open to the public. The preserve can be explored on walking trails and visitors can observe a variety of wildlife and wildflowers. The Freeborn County Historical Museum and Pioneer Village is another significant attraction and educational opportunity. The pioneer village includes a one room country school house, log cabin, general store, blacksmith shop, country church, as well as other buildings from pioneer days. The museum houses displays that tell the history of Freeborn County. The Story Lady Doll and Toy Museum is located in Albert Lea and houses a unique collection.

A variety of special events in the community, such as July 4th, Eddie Cochran events, the Freeborn County Fair and the Big Island Rendevous, the largest reenactment of the fur trade period in the state, are big attractions and are both educational and enjoyable.

The Blazing Star State Trail will be connected to the city's trail system illustrated on page 23. The Blazing Star State Trail is an important resource enhancing the quality of life for community residents.

Trail Alignment

The Blazing Star State Trail will begin at Frank Hall Park on Albert Lea Lake. The City of Albert Lea developed the first segment of the Blazing Star State Trail which borders the north shore of Albert Lea Lake. The trail is tucked in between Front Street and the lake, and then circumnavigates the ponds on the north shore of the lake. The next segment of trail will be developed in the right-of-way of the Dakota, Minnesota, and Eastern Railroad to I-35, pass under the freeway, parallel the freeway for a short distance, then connect to Big Island State Park.

Role of the Community

Frank Hall Park, located on Albert Lea Lake, will serve as the trail head for the Blazing Star State in Albert Lea. Parking, restrooms, picnic sites, water, a public boat access to the lake, fishing pier, cruise boat dock and tennis courts are located in the park. The addition of a kiosk with trail orientation and interpretive information would be desirable. Information about Albert Lea Lake, the history of Albert Lea and the bird species that can be commonly observed on the lake would be pertinent topics. The city of Albert Lea and the county are doing shoreland restoration projects that are readily observable by trail users. Interpretation of these efforts would provide a valuable educational opportunity for trail users.

The community provides food, lodging, cultural amenities, recreational opportunities such as the water park, and other services for trail users.

Interrelationship of the Blazing Star State Trail and Hayward

History

Hayward is named for one of the town's early settlers, David Hayward, who moved from Postville, Iowa and settled here. Hayward was settled around 1855, but the town wasn't formally incorporated until 1925. Initially, wheat was the primary crop grown by farmers in the surrounding area. Production of more diverse crops including onions, potatoes, and carrots soon followed. Dairy and livestock production also became important to the farm economy. Hayward provided services for the agricultural community. Warehouses were built in town for storing crops. A Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad station was located in the community. A post office was established in 1864. By 1911 the community included the railroad station and post office, three stores, elevator, creamery, blacksmith shop, feed mill, bank, hotel, and residences.

The Community Today

Hayward is a small town, population 246, located 4 miles east of Albert Lea. The community is surrounded by small family farms and is noted for its rural hospitality. Businesses in the community are predominately agriculture related and include major manufacturing, retail, and services. Stores and restaurants provide opportunities for trail users. The city park located in the center of town provides recreational opportunities including ball fields, tennis courts, volleyball, playground equipment, and a picnic pavilion.

Trail Alignment

The exact trail alignment between Big Island State Park and Hayward, and between Hayward and Austin has not been determined. However, the alignment coming into and going out of town. will connect to the city park which will serve as a trailhead and rest area for trail users. A connection from the trailhead to the business district will be made. Two alternatives are being considered for this connection, a signed route on streets or a trail around the eastern edge of town. Trail users will appreciate access to the towns retail and restaurant opportunities.

Role of the Community

Hayward will serve as a trailhead and rest area for trail users and provide parking, rest rooms, and trail orientation and interpretive information. A restroom building is planned for construction in 2003. It will include restrooms and information in the vestibule area. Planned future developments include a parking lot, landscaping and bicycle racks.

Interrelationship of the Blazing Star State Trail and Austin

History

Austin was incorporated as a village in 1868 and as a city in 1871. The city was named after the first settler in the area, Austin R. Nichols, a trapper who staked his claim and built a log cabin in 1853.

Railroads played an important role in building the community of Austin. Along with other small railroad lines, Austin had a station of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad. The many rail lines helped the city become an important rail center.

In 1891, George Hormel started a food processing business in Austin. It was originally named George A. Hormel and Company and is now the Hormel Foods Corporation. The food products have become household names with the most recognizable of the products being SPAM®, Dinty Moore® beef stew, and Cure 81® Ham, to name a few.

Community Today

The 2001 population of Austin, the county seat of Mower County, was estimated to be 23,314. Austin is located in western Mower County at the junction of U.S. Highway 218 and Interstate 90, twenty miles east of Interstate 35. It is approximately 100 miles south of the Twin Cities.

Many businesses thrive in the community of Austin due to the food industry and agriculture. The Hormel Foods Corporation, a Fortune 500 company, is headquartered in Austin. The main plant is still located in the city and employs 1,500 people. There are many other food producing companies in the city including Quality Pork Producers and Austin Packaging Company. A Weyerhaeuser branch that produces corrugated packaging for food companies is also located in town. Mayo Health Care Systems is also an important employer.

Austin supports a strong retail community as well. The historic downtown area has many specialty shops and restaurants. Other shopping can be found at the Oak Park Mall, approximately five minutes from the downtown district. Also located in town is the Hormel Spam® Museum that attracts more than 200,000 visitors annually.

Austin has more than 26 community parks located throughout the city with various amenities at each one. The J.C. Hormel Nature Center, a standout among the parks, is comprised of 278 acres of prairies, woodlands, and wetlands. A fully staffed interpretive center showcases native Minnesota plants and animals along with other hands-on displays. There are approximately 10 miles of nature trails with cross-country skiing provided in the winter. Bikes are not allowed on the paths within the Nature Center.

Trail Alignment

There is not a definitive trail alignment for bringing the Blazing Star State Trail into the city of Austin because the alignment between Hayward and Austin has yet to be determined. However, the trail should connect to Todd Park, which is proposed to serve as the trailhead for the Blazing Star State

Trail as well as the Shooting Star State Trail. The Blazing Star State Trail could follow one of the proposed city trails leading to Todd Park from the west. See the Austin map on the next page. Todd Park would serve trail users well as amenities located here include shelters/picnic pavilions, picnic tables, a playground, soccer fields, softball/baseball diamonds, an 18-hole disc golf course, 5-6 parking lots, and the Izaak Walton Cabin that can be rented for events.

Austin's existing trail system follows the Cedar River through town and connects various community parks. At Mill Pond Park, the trail leaves the river and follows a northeasterly course through the city where it eventually enters Todd Park.

The proposed city trail system will link existing community trails, neighborhoods, community parks, surrounding cities and the Blazing Star and Shooting Star State Trails. The existing and proposed trails can be seen on the map on the next page.

Projected Trail Use

State Trail Use As an Indicator of Future Use

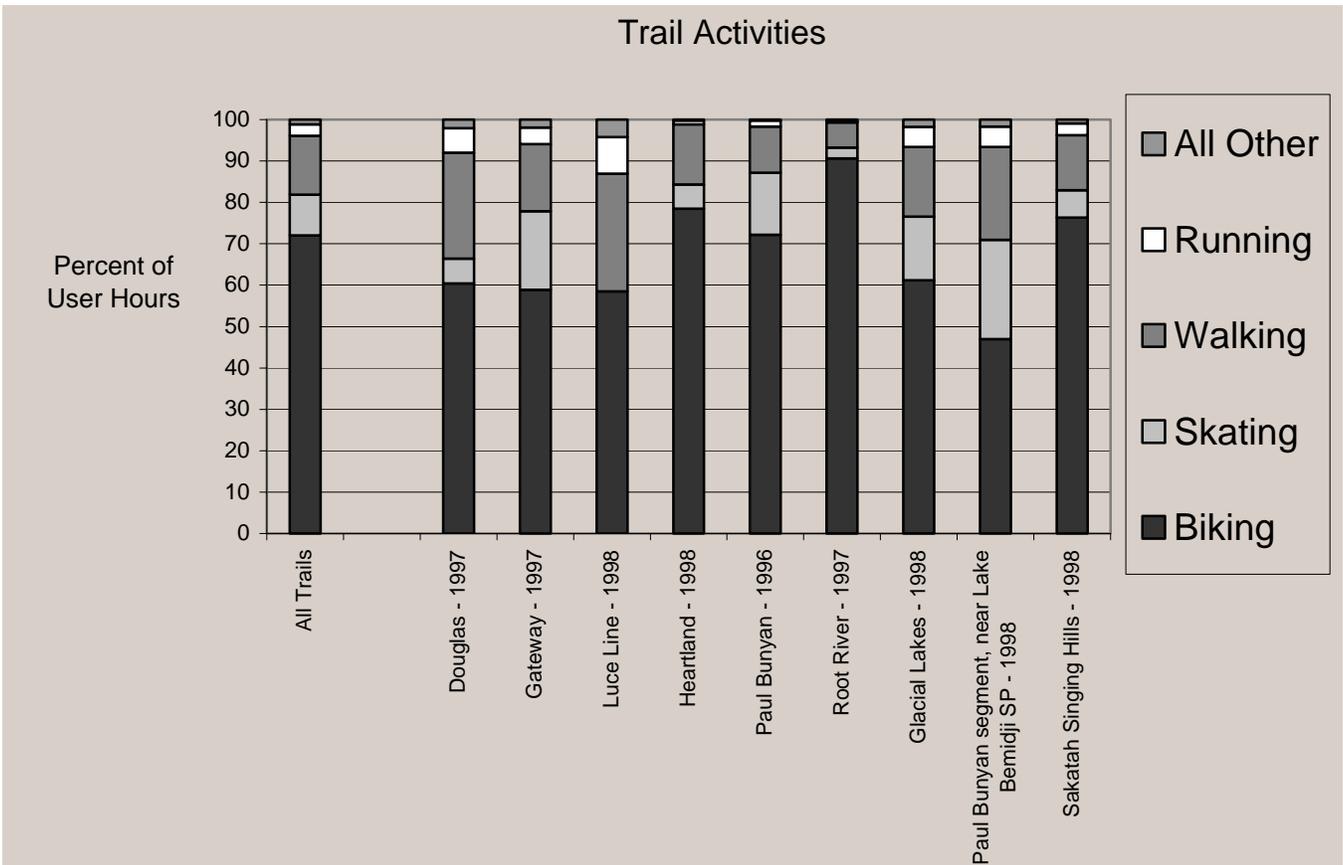
It is anticipated that the number of trail users and pattern of use will be similar to what is occurring on other state trails. The following table summarizes the summer use (Memorial Day to Labor Day) for the other asphalt trails in the state system. Use is measured in user hours. (A trail user spending one hour on the trail is a user hour.)

Trail User Hours

	<u>Total Seasonal User Hours</u>	<u>Miles of Trail in Survey</u>	<u>User Hours per Trail Mile</u>
<u>High Local Use</u>			
Douglas - Summer 1997	42,910	12.5	3,433
Gateway - Summer 1997	181,952	18.5	9,835
Luce Line - Summer 1998	65,120	29.0	2,246
<u>High Tourist Use</u>			
Heartland - Summer 1998	125,381	27.0	4,644
Paul Bunyan - Summer 1996	155,268	46.4	3,346
Root River - Summer 1997	178,761	40.8	4,381
<u>Mix Local/Tourist Use</u>			
Glacial Lakes - Summer 1998	33,858	18.0	1,881
Paul Bunyan segment, near Lake Bemidji State Park - Summer 1998	17,488	5.3	3,300
Sakatah Singing Hills - Summer 1998	95,634	38.0	2,517
<i>All Trails</i>	<i>896,373</i>	<i>236</i>	<i>3,806</i>

It is anticipated that the Blazing Star State Trail will experience use patterns similar to the Sakatah Singing Hills State Trail, located between Mankato and Faribault. This trail receives approximately equal use by tourists and local users. This means that approximately 50% of trail users come from the local area and 50% come from beyond the local area.

The use pattern observed on other state trails can also provide insight into the mix of trail activities that can be expected. As the table below illustrates, bicycling will most likely be the predominant activity, followed by walking and then in-line skating.



Trail Maintenance

Adequate maintenance of the Blazing Star State Trail is critical to provide and sustain the experience trail users appreciate. Maintenance activities are numerous and diverse, as the following list illustrates. Specifically, maintaining the Blazing Star State Trail will include:

- Monitoring trail conditions, which includes scheduling and documentation of inspections; monitoring the condition of railings, bridges, trail surfaces, and signage; hazard tree inspection; and removal of debris such as downed trees.
- Scheduling of maintenance tasks
- Mowing of vegetation: shoulders, rest areas, parking lots, and parallel treadways
- Winter grooming and plowing
- Tree and shrub pruning
- Trash removal
- Trail repair – fixing washouts and controlling erosion are examples
- Maintaining bridge decking and railings
- Trail drainage control
- Trail surface maintenance
- Repair of animal damage to trail or facilities
- Checking and repairing fence lines and gates
- Mowing and brushing farm crossings
- Cleaning out ditches and culverts, replacing failing culverts
- Controlling noxious weeds
- Maintaining equipment
- Painting posts and picnic tables
- Graffiti control and vandalism repair, especially to signs
- Maintaining boundary signs, and working to resolve encroachment issues
- Coordination of volunteer efforts
- Training and supervision of employees, Minnesota Conservation Corps, or Sentence-to-Service crews doing maintenance work
- Sweeping asphalt surfaces

Recommendation 1: Additional maintenance funds will be required to maintain the trail after it is developed.

Recommendation 2: The Division of Trails and Waterways is responsible for maintenance and management of designated state trails. However, a portion of this trail crosses Big Island State Park, which is managed by the Division of Parks and Recreation. To assure appropriate protection of state park resources, view sheds and facilities immediately adjacent to the trail, trail managers will work with park staff to establish standards and parameters for maintenance activities on state trails within or segments of state trails passing through state parks. Local trail managers will plan, schedule and coordinate maintenance activities following these guidelines with the appropriate park manager.

Recommendation 3: A memorandum of understanding will be developed between the two Divisions to address these trail maintenance issues, as well as other issues related to the operation of the state trail within the state park.

Recommendation 4: DNR, Trails and Waterways should pursue the development of cooperative agreements with cities to maintain the trail within or adjacent to the city, where possible.

Information and Education

Identification of Services



Trail users benefit from knowing where they can obtain services (medical assistance, telephones, gasoline, food, lodging, rest rooms, campgrounds, repair facilities, or other retail) and local businesses benefit from an increase in customers. A listing of the services available in each community developed, maintained and updated by the community could be displayed on information boards at parking areas in each community.

Trail User Orientation

Trail users must have good information about the trail system so they can make choices about destinations appropriate for their time frame, skill level, need for services such as food and lodging, and the type of scenery and other recreational opportunities available along the route. This type of information should be displayed on information boards at parking areas, in communities, and at trail junctions. It should be available on maps, and on the DNR Website (<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us>). It should include distances between communities, options for other trail connections, and locations of services.

If any significant deviation from the typical trail design occurs resulting in a change in user experience, it should be noted on the informational kiosks to assist trail users in understanding what the trail experience will be. For example, if there is a change when the trail enters a community.

Trail Rules and Regulations and Trail Courtesies

Trail courtesy and safety display boards aimed at educating trail users about appropriate behavior, promoting safe trail use, and protecting the quality of the trail environment should be developed. These user-friendly versions of the rules applying to state trails should be posted at information kiosks along the trail, and included in trail maps.

Volunteer patrols could be used to distribute information on appropriate trail behavior and etiquette relative to specific problems such as unleashed dogs, or all trail users keeping to the right and warning others when passing.

Interpretation of Natural and Cultural Resources

There are many natural and cultural resources of significance and interest along the trail. These include creeks, rivers, wetlands, vegetation and wildlife of the Oak Savanna Landscape. In addition, there are several places that tell the history of this region. Providing information about these resources can add enjoyment to the trail experience.

An interpretive theme is identified for state trails during the planning process. The interpretive theme helps tie together spatially separated interpretive sites and provides continuity in the messages. Agriculture is the dominant activity in the region influencing land, water, economics, social lives etc. Agricultural scenes will dominate trail user's views. An agricultural context should be applied to the trail's educational themes. For example, preserving prairies and savannas in an agriculturally dominated landscape; agriculture's role in the local communities - historical and current; agriculture's impact on water resources; ways agriculture has changed to be more environmentally sound (what more can be done?) etc. The Land Stewardship Project is a potential reference and resource.

The recommended interpretive theme for the Blazing Star State Trail is:

The relationship through time of the agricultural landscape present today with the prairie/savanna landscape present at the time of European settlement. The significance of the remnant prairie/savanna to the past, present, and future should be emphasized.

Other interpretive elements include:

The importance of ecological greenway corridors to the rural landscape and how their significance can be enhanced.

! Railroad history

! Pre-contact history and archaeological resources of the region

Interpretive signs will be developed in consultation with other DNR divisions, and the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). Some initial ideas are listed in the development summary. Additional sites will be interpreted over time.

Each state park has interpretive themes, programs, and signage for interpreting its cultural and natural resource setting, covering the themes identified for the state trail as well as others. Coordination between the Divisions of Parks and Recreation and Trails and Waterways in developing interpretive displays and programming will benefit park visitors and trail users.

Environmental Education

The trail has great potential for environmental education. Learning stations with curriculum and hands on projects could be developed and used by students.

Trailside Art

The use of sculpture along the trail can be an effective way to provide interpretive information about the resources and history of the trail. Practical and functional objects such as benches, gates, water fountains, and tables, can be designed in a way so that they are attractive aesthetically and provide information about the area through design and use of materials. Sculpture or earth works for purely aesthetic purposes can also fulfill this purpose. The following illustrations provide examples of ways art can be integrated into trail development. The illustrations are from a brochure entitled *Art and The Travelling Landscape, Millennium Sculpture and the National Cycle Network*, Sustrans, Bristol, England.



Benches can be works of art and interpretive displays as well as functional amenities.



Art can be used to define access points, entryways and gateways to the trail and/or communities.



Information and Education Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Develop a kiosk design that reflects the interpretive theme for the trail that can be used in the communities along the trail.

Recommendation 2: Community services information, trail orientation, and trail rule and trail courtesy information should be developed and installed on a kiosk at the same time the trail is developed.

Recommendation 3: Trails and Waterways should work cooperatively with a community arts group to develop trailside art in the right-of-way within communities.

Recommendation 4: Trails and Waterways should serve as a catalyst to find schools to use the trail for environmental education purposes.

Recommendation 5: Interpret the natural and cultural features along the trail.

- Include information on the fishing opportunities of the trail. The Division of Fisheries local offices and MinnAqua staff should be consulted as resources.

Enforcement

Enforcement activities are a vital aspect of maintaining a safe and secure trail environment. Enforcement of state trail rules and regulations, information and education, trail design, trail maintenance, and the mix of trail uses are all factors that contribute to the maintenance of a safe, secure trail environment. DNR has the primary responsibility for law enforcement on DNR owned and operated recreation areas.

Adequate enforcement was cited by participants of the planning process as a way of resolving potential problems and addressing concerns. User conflicts, unauthorized uses of the trail, trail users leaving the treadway designated for their use, were among the concerns identified during the planning process as likely areas where enforcement attention would be needed.

Funding for law enforcement on state trails has not kept pace with the need created by new trail development. When miles are added to the system, funds for the additional law enforcement needed have not been appropriated. A negative impact on public safety and natural resources can result due to the lack of sufficient law enforcement. A solution promoting law enforcement coverage with trail development must be found.

Recommendation 1: Provide an adequate level of enforcement via a multifaceted approach, to help maintain a safe and secure trail environment, and to encourage trail users to understand and obey trail rules, and respect other trail users and adjoining properties.

Recommendation 2: Develop on-site information that targets important trail courtesies and rules necessary for a safe and enjoyable experience, specific to uses of a particular segment and problems and conflicts occurring there.

Recommendation 3: Use increased visibility of Trails and Waterways staff during peak use times for an enforcement effect.

Recommendation 4: Additional enforcement officers are required to address the enforcement needs of the expanding trail system.

Recommendation 5: Trails and Waterways will include the cost of enforcement when providing information about the cost of the trail when communicating with legislators, trail advocates, and local government officials.

Recommendation 6: Trails and Waterways will work with state park staff to coordinate enforcement and oversight of other trail related activities so that the safety of trail users and successful operation of the state trail will be ensured. This will be addressed in the operational memorandum of understanding between the Division of Trails and Waterways and the Division of Parks and Recreation. (See Recommendation #3 page 34).

Oak Savanna Subsection

The Blazing Star State Trail is located in the Oak Savanna subsection of the state's ecological classification system. See the map on the next page. An ecological subsection is defined by vegetation, geology, and other resource criteria. A description of the subsection is important for trail planning purposes because it provides the context for trail alignment recommendations, trail development recommendations, and resource inventory and resource management recommendations. The source of the following description of the Oak Savanna subsection is from the DNR website <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us>

Climate

Annual normal precipitation ranges from 28 inches in the north to 31 inches in the south, and growing season precipitation ranges from 12.5 to 13 inches. The average growing season length ranges from 146 to 156 days.

Hydrology

Most of this subsection has a fairly well developed drainage network. This is due to the nature of landforms within the unit. There are few lakes in this subsection. They are found in the moraines that form the western side of the unit.

Presettlement vegetation

Bur oak savanna was the primary vegetative community, but areas of tallgrass prairie and maple-basswood forest were common. Tallgrass prairie was concentrated on level to gently rolling portions of the landscape, in the center of the subsection. Bur oak savanna grew on rolling moraine ridges at the western edge of the subsection and in dissected ravines at the eastern edge. Maple-basswood was restricted to the portions of the landscape with the greatest fire protection, either in steep, dissected ravines or where stream orientation reduced fire frequency or severity (Albert 1993).

Present vegetation and land use

Presently, most of the area is farmed. Urban development is accelerating along the northern boundary.

Natural disturbance

Fire is the most important disturbance within the subsection. Tornados and high wind events also created significant disturbances. Flooding in river and stream valleys periodically created and still create problems.

Conservation concerns

Wetland preservation and restoration is one of the primary concerns. Preservation of existing wetlands is important for flood control, pollution filtering, and wildlife habitat. Another concern is water quality.

Geology

Glacial deposits from the Wisconsin Ice Stage cover Freeborn County. The Wisconsin Ice Stage was the last glaciation to extend over most of Minnesota. The Wisconsin Ice Stage consisted of numerous substages and lobes and shaped much of the present day landscape of Minnesota. A significant glacial feature is the Bemis Moraine, formed by the Des Moines Lobe. A moraine is a hill-like feature that was formed from unsorted rocks and soil that accumulated at the edge of a melting glacier. The Bemis Moraine runs north - south through the county. Big Island State Park is located in the Bemis Moraine. Another set of moraines, known as the Altamont Moraine was formed within the Bemis Moraine when the Des Moines Lobe melted 13,000 year ago. This moraine also runs north and south. Albert Lea is located in the Altamont Moraine.

Another interesting geological feature is the esker located in the northern end of Big Island State Park. An esker is winding ridge of sorted sands and gravels. It was formed as a glacier melted and streams formed within the glacier. These streams carried sand and gravel to the end of the glacier, where the streams speed slowed. Sand and gravel were dropped at the glacial edge forming a ridge. A hiking trail has been developed to allow exploration of the esker.

Albert Lea and Fountain lakes were also formed by glacial activity. They are ice block basins in till set in a preglacial valley. This means they were formed by the melting of a large chunk of ice which broke off from the glacier and was buried in till. The meltwater filled the depression.

Water Resources

Watersheds

The trail is located in two watersheds; the Cedar River and Shell Rock River. The Shell Rock River drains 246 square miles (157,440 acres). Seventy-eight percent of the land in the watershed is in agricultural production. The Cedar River drains 711 square miles or (455,040 acres).

Lakes

There are 19 lakes in Freeborn County. The trail will start on the north end of Albert Lea Lake in the City of Albert Lea. The trail will also have access to and a vista of the lake in Big Island State Park. Fountain Lake in the City of Albert Lea is located just north of the start of Blazing Star State Trail in Albert Lea and will be connected to it via the city trail system.

Albert Lea Lake

Albert Lea Lake is a shallow, fertile warm water lake. It is a natural lake, 2,654 acres in size. It was formed from a chunk of ice that broke off from a retreating glacier and melted, filling the depression. The lake was enlarged and deepened by the construction of a dam in 1864. Sediment began filling the lake by the end of the 1800s. The maximum depth is six feet and the average depth is 3.5 feet. Algae is the dominant type of vegetation. Water clarity, measured by Secchi disk, is 1 foot. Lack of clarity indicates pollutants including phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment. For comparison purposes, other lakes in southern Minnesota have measures of clarity two to four times greater (Albert Lea Lake Technical Committee).

Fountain Lake

Fountain Lake is 534 acres in size. The maximum depth is 14 feet. The water clarity is 1.6 foot as measured by Secchi disk.

Rivers

Cedar River

The Cedar River flows north to south through Mower County and flows through Austin. The city has developed trails along the river.

Turtle Creek

Turtle Creek flows through Freeborn County and has been ditched to help control flooding.

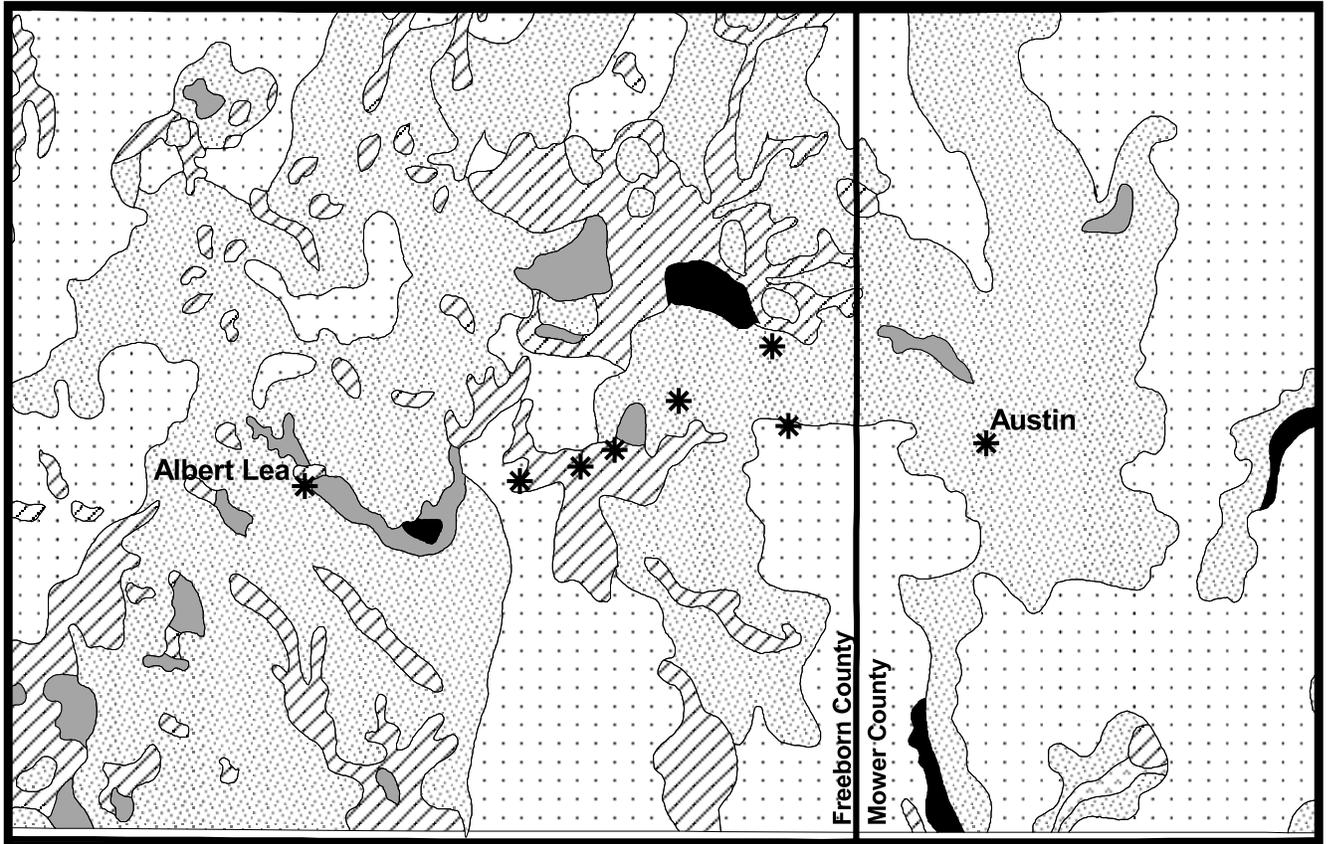
Recommendation 1: How can the trail be used as a tool to help in the management of water, especially in the management of runoff and flood control? This question should be asked as the specific alignment for the trail is determined and as the trail is developed and managed. Specific considerations include: managing trail right-of-way acquisition, development and management to slow runoff, store and absorb water; restore wetlands; develop interpretive displays that communicate the importance of wetlands, wetland preservation, and restoration.

Recommendation 2: Minimize trail development and maintenance impacts to water resources through the use of mulching, geo-textiles, silt screens, and seeding to establish vegetation. Appropriate erosion control measures should be taken to minimize the potential impacts on adjacent water resources.

Vegetation

Vegetation of Freeborn County at the Time of the 1853 - 1854 Public Land Survey

The map below illustrates the vegetation of Freeborn County as interpreted by Francis J. Marschner using the Public Land Survey records from 1853 - 1854. The contemporary names used today for the natural community types defined by Marschner are listed in parentheses after Marschner's names.



Pre-settlement Vegetation

-  Prairie
-  Oak openings and barrens
-  River Bottom Forest
-  Wet Prairie
-  Big Woods - Hardwoods (oak, maple, basswood, hickory)
-  Lakes (open water)
-  Undefined
-  Cities along proposed trail alignment

N

The majority of the county was covered by prairie and oak openings and barrens. In addition, there were scattered areas of wet prairie and a two small pockets of Big Woods.

Oak openings and barrens (dry oak savanna, mesic oak savanna, jack pine barrens, oak woodland-brushland, oak forest) – Most of central and eastern Freeborn County were included in the oak woodland and brushland vegetation type, a transition type between the prairie and deciduous forest. Fire, both naturally occurring and human set, more than any other natural disturbance, influenced the position and extent of this community. These areas were typified by a landscape ranging from small groves of trees among open prairies to scrub forests and dense shrub thickets of hazel. Dominant trees consisted of bur oak and northern pin oak. White oak and black oak were also common.

Prairie (dry prairie, mesic prairie) - Tall-grass or mesic prairie characterized by big bluestem and Indian grass covered much of Freeborn county. (Nearly all of this area has been cultivated or converted to pastures of eurasian grasses). Representative of the true prairie ecosystem, these areas blended into areas of oak woodland and brushland. Midsize grasses such as little bluestem were dominant on drier areas.

Wet prairies, marshes, and sloughs (wet prairie, seepage meadow, wet meadow, calcareous seepage fen). Large prairie wetlands were in the floodplains of all major waterways. Rushes, sedges, cattails, blue-joint grasses and cordgrass dominated these areas.

Upland deciduous forest (maple-basswood forest, oak forest, lowland hardwood forest, white pine-hardwood forest, northern hardwood –conifer forest, black ash swamp). There were two small pockets of upland deciduous forest. Upland deciduous forests were dominated by sugar maple, basswood, elm, and also included moist forests dominated by red oak. This forest type was called the “big woods” by early settlers in the south-central part of the state, where it covered a contiguous area of over 3,000 square miles. These trees are fire sensitive and were partially protected by natural firebreaks of water courses and rough topography.

Special Concern, Threatened or Endangered Plant Species

A search of the Minnesota Natural Heritage data base indicated the endangered, threatened or special concern species that have been documented within the trail corridor area.

Latin Name	Common Name	MN Legal Status
<i>Asclepias sullivantii</i>	Sullivant's Milkweed	Threatened
<i>Baptisia alba</i>	White Wild Indigo	Special Concern
<i>Baptisia bracteata</i> var. <i>leucophaea</i>	Plains Wild Indigo	Special Concern
<i>Eryngium yuccifolium</i>	Rattlesnake-Master	Special Concern
<i>Rudbeckia triloba</i>	3-lobed Coneflower	Special Concern
<i>Platanthera praeclara</i>	Western Prairie Fringed Orchid*	Endangered
<i>Valeriana edulis</i> var. <i>ciliata</i>	Valerian	Threatened
<i>Arnoglossum plantagineum</i>	Tuberous Indian-Plantain	Threatened
<i>Cypripedium candidum</i>	Small White Lady's Slipper	Special Concern
<i>Sanicula trifoliata</i>	Beaked Snakeroot	Special Concern
<i>Oxypolis rigidior</i>	Cowbane	NON
<i>Echinochloa walteri</i>	Walter's Barnyard Grass	NON

* = Also listed federally, Federal Legal Status is Threatened.

NON = Animal or plant with no legal status, but which may be rare and about which the Natural Heritage & Nongame Research Program is gathering data for possible future listing.

These species are protected by state law, and should be considered during all phases of the trail planning, development, and maintenance process. Their specific locations should be identified and threats to these species addressed in the trail alignment identification process, and in trail development and management.

Interrelationship of the Blazing Star State Trail and the Prairie Passage Program.

The Blazing Star State Trail will intersect with the Prairie Passage Program in the I-35 right-of-way between Albert Lea and Big Island State Park. I-35 is a Prairie Passage route. Prairie Passage is partnership of six states (Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas) that includes a network of signed highways, prairie natural areas, and prairie-related cultural and historic sites that provide a connection to and understanding of the North American prairie. Goals for the corridor include protection of remnant native grasses and wildflowers; planting of native grasses and wildflowers along highway rights-of-ways; and education to promote awareness of the prairie landscape and natural and cultural resources along the Prairie Passage route. Approximately ½ mile of the Blazing Star State Trail will be located in the I-35 right-of-way after it passes under the freeway bridge.

Big Island State Park is a signed Prairie Passage site and is included in *A Guide to Minnesota's Prairie Passage Route and Sites*. Informational kiosks are located at the Travel Information Center south of Albert Lea on I-35 as well as along Trunk Highways 23 and 75 in western Minnesota. Informational kiosks are also located in Blue Mounds and Camden State Parks. An interpretive trail is located in Camden State Park. Other brochures feature Prairie Passage sites and other native prairies in

southwestern Minnesota and west-central and northwestern Minnesota. A series of three posters are also a part of the Prairie Passage Program in Minnesota. Prairie Learning trunks are available from the State Park Interpretive Program in New Ulm

Railroad Right-of-Way

There are high quality prairie remnants located in railroad rights-of-way throughout the state. Railroad rights-of-way have been identified in this plan as potential trail alignment. The vegetation within railroad rights-of-way being considered for trail alignment should be assessed in order to determine if there are any high quality prairie remnants and impacts should be avoided, if possible or minimized.

Vegetation Management Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Use native plant species, consistent with the native plant communities of the Oak Savanna subsection to vegetate areas disturbed by erosion, overuse, and construction and in the landscaping of parking areas and waysides.

Recommendation 2: The vegetation within railroad rights-of-way being considered for trail alignment should be assessed in order to determine if there are any high quality prairie remnants and impacts should be avoided, if possible or minimized.

Recommendation 3: Avoid planting and try to eradicate any of the plants listed below. These plants are aggressive introduced species which will crowd out native species.

<i>Acer ginnala</i> (Amur maple)	<i>Eleagnus angustifolia</i> (Russian olive)
<i>Lonicera tartarica</i> (Tartarian honeysuckle)	<i>Lonicera morrowii</i> (Exotic honeysuckle)
<i>Lonicera x bella</i> (Exotic honeysuckle)	<i>Rhamnus cathartica</i> (Common buckthorn)
<i>Rhamnus frangula</i> (European buckthorn)	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i> (Black locust)
<i>Ulmus pumila</i> (Siberian elm)	<i>Agropyron repens</i> (Quackgrass)
<i>Alliaria petiolata</i> (Garlic mustard)	<i>Berteroa incana</i> (Hoary alyssum)
<i>Bromus inermis</i> (Smooth brome)	<i>Carduus acanthoides</i> (Plumeless thistle)
<i>Carduus nutans</i> (Musk thistle)	<i>Centaurea maculosa</i> (Spotted knapweed)
<i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i> (Ox-eye daisy)	<i>Cirsium arvense</i> (Canada thistle)
<i>Coronilla varia</i> (Crown vetch)	<i>Daucus carota</i> (Queen Anne's lace)
<i>Euphorbia esula</i> (Leafy spurge)	<i>Glechoma hederacea</i> (Creeping Charlie)
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i> (Bird's foot trefoil)	<i>Lythrum salicaria</i> (Purple loosestrife)
<i>Melilotus alba</i> (White sweet clover)	<i>Melilotus officinalis</i> (Yellow sweet clover)
<i>Pastinaca sativa</i> (Wild parsnip)	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i> (Reed canary grass)
<i>Poa compressa</i> (Canada bluegrass)	<i>Poa pratensis</i> (Kentucky bluegrass)
<i>Vicia villosa</i> (Hairy vetch)	

Recommendation 4: Use new plantings of local, habitat appropriate native species, wherever possible, to screen unsightly areas, deter encroachment by adjoining landowners, deter trespassing by trail users and help retain snow cover along the trail as well as improve the quality of the trail corridor.

Recommendation 5: Restore, or if necessary recreate native communities along the trail to minimize maintenance, minimize the use of pesticides, control noxious weeds, and enhance natural species abundance and biodiversity for enhanced user experience.

Recommendation 6: A wetland mitigation plan will be prepared to address any identified impacted wetlands.

Recommendation 7: Develop a detailed resource management plan with a description of desired future conditions, outlines of vegetation management practices to attain these conditions, and opportunities for cooperative projects. A more detailed inventory of native plant communities and species found within the trail right-of-way will be needed.

Recommendation 8: Minimize size of canopy opening and disturbance to soils and native plant communities during construction of the trail. Protection of native plant communities is a key component of efforts to protect Minnesota's natural biodiversity.

Recommendation 9: Coordinate vegetation management and interpretation with Prairie Passages in the vicinity of the I-35 corridor. There is an opportunity here to make trail users aware of the prairie resource- the need for protection, restoration, and the cultural heritage associated with the landscape as well as make them aware of the Prairie Passage Program.

Continue to work with MnDOT and build on the existing Prairie Passage information and kiosks so that they continue to reflect the national Prairie Passage logo, etc. MnDOT and DNR own the artwork and it is available to be used for interpretive efforts. This work could be used on interpretive kiosks along the Blazing Star State Trail.

Recommendation 10: Work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on potential cooperative projects, including land acquisition, within the Blazing Star Corridor and the adjacent I-35 Prairie Passage Route/Big Island Site.

Recommendation 11: Coordinate interpretive efforts with the Shooting Star State Trail so that the stories and the management complement and support one another in fact and in a complementary style or format.

Wildlife

The majority of the land adjacent to the trail is agricultural. The greatest diversity of wildlife can be found where the trail traverses Big Island State Park.

Mammals

The state of Minnesota recognizes 58 nongame mammals in the state. These species include those that generally are not hunted, are protected by law, or may be killed throughout the year. Nongame mammals that live in Freeborn and Mower Counties include eastern chipmunks, thirteen-lined ground squirrels, several species of bats, and a variety of shrews, mice and voles. Of the 20 species for which the DNR has set hunting or trapping seasons, many are found in southern Minnesota. White-tailed deer, red fox, muskrat, beaver, raccoon, striped skunk, white-tailed deer, gray and red fox, muskrat, opossum, and squirrels are found in Freeborn and Mower counties. Species likely to be seen by trail users include white-tailed deer, opossum, and squirrels.

Reptiles and amphibians

Eastern and red-sided garter snakes, northern red-bellied snakes, and northern brown snakes are found in the area. Species of turtles found in the area include western painted and snapping turtles. Leopard and wood frogs, and eastern tiger salamanders can be found in the area.

Birds

Spring and fall migration is a good time to see a variety of birds, especially in Big Island State Park. American kestrel, marsh hawk, red-tailed hawk, rough legged hawk, great horned owl, and bald eagle can be seen. Shore and wading birds that can be seen include common egret, great blue heron, American bittern, sora and Virginia rail, wood duck, mallard, blue-winged teal, and Canada goose. Songbirds include the indigo bunting, eastern bluebird, rose-breasted grosbeak, northern oriole, and eastern wood pewee. Waterfowl, such as pelicans and cormorants can be seen on Albert Lea Lake.

Fish

The most significant fisheries resource in the trail vicinity is Albert Lea Lake. A 2000 survey of Albert Lea Lake conducted by the Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Division indicated the following species present in the lake.

black bullhead	black crappie
bluegill	buffalo
common carp	channel catfish
common shiner	goldfish
green sunfish	largemouth bass
northern pike	orangespotted sunfish
quillback	tadpole madtom
walleye	white crappie
white sucker	yellow bullhead
yellow perch	

Rough fish dominates the fish community. However, the survey report noted that gamefish have increased over the last sixteen years. Walleye and channel catfish are increasing. One reason for this increase may be the fact that stocking has been done in Fountain Lake and fish have immigrated from Fountain Lake to Albert Lea Lake. Numbers of channel catfish are increasing. Black and white crappie populations have increased. Bluegill and yellow perch are also present. The survey report noted a decline in the abundance of most rough fish except for buffalo and white sucker.

Special Concern, Threatened or Endangered Animal Species

A search of the Minnesota Natural Heritage database indicated the endangered, threatened or special concern species that have been documented within the trail corridor area.

Latin Name	Common Name	MN Legal Status
<i>Emydoidea blandingii</i>	Blanding’s Turtle	Threatened
<i>Elaphe vulpina</i>	Fox snake	NON

NON = Animal or plant with no legal status, but which may be rare and about which the Natural Heritage & Nongame Research Program is gathering data for possible future listing.

These species are protected by state law, and should be considered during all phases of the trail planning, development and maintenance process. Threats to these species should be addressed in the trail alignment identification process, and in trail development and management.

Wildlife Management Areas

There are six wildlife management areas (WMAs) in Freeborn County. Wildlife Management Areas are publicly owned land that are acquired and managed for a diversity of habitats. Most of the Freeborn County areas are relatively small, and located adjacent to lakes. They provide a combination of wetland, grassland, and oak woods habitat. These WMAs have been acquired and are managed to benefit wildlife in intensively farmed areas. The closest WMA to the trail corridor is Carex WMA located northeast of Moscow. This area is a complex of potholes, large marsh, shrub swamp, and small oak forest. Two State Game Refuges are located in the county. State Game Refuges were established to protect and benefit game species before season lengths and limits were well understood and effectively used as population management tools. Game refuges were critical to waterfowl and game species management. One of these refuges, the Albert Lea State Game Refuge is located adjacent to Albert Lea Lake. It was established to benefit all game species- waterfowl, deer and upland game. It is significantly and substantially important to waterfowl. The refuge includes both public and private land. The other, Moscow State Game Refuge, is located adjacent to Turtle Creek, near the Freeborn/Mower County line. It was established to benefit all game species. All the land within the refuge is privately owned.

Wildlife and Fisheries Management Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Trail construction at water crossings should be timed so that it does not coincide with spawning or migration of fish species. Silt plumes that may result can negatively affect fish and habitat, or native mussel species. When at all possible, use bridges rather than culverts because it keeps the stream intact. Create angling and education opportunities where the trail intersects fishing opportunities.

Recommendation 2: Develop interpretive signs regarding the fisheries resource at locations along the trail in cooperation with the Division of Fisheries, MnAqua Program,

Recommendation 3: Implementing the recommendations for vegetation management will have a positive impact on wildlife, as habitat will be created.

Recommendation 4: Work with citizens and sporting groups for habitat improvement within the trail right-of-way and encourage adjacent cooperative efforts that support a broader enhancement.

Cultural Resources

Historical Resources

The area through which the trail will pass is rich in archaeological and historical resources. A framework developed by the State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society will be used to provide an overview of the history of the area and to provide a context for the archaeological and historic resources that are present along the trail. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has identified cultural period contexts (See table below) to assist in describing and determining the significance of cultural resources. Artifacts from all contexts of the Pre-Contact and Contact Periods have been found in the area. The most significant contexts for the trail in the Post-Contact Period are the Early Agriculture and River Settlement (1840 - 1870) and Railroads and Agricultural Development (1870 - 1940).

Table 3: Outline of Cultural Periods in Minnesota (Adapted from Minnesota State Park Cultural Resource Management Program Annual Report – 2001)

Pre-Contact Period	Paleoindian Tradition	9,500 B.C. - 6,000 B.C.
(9500 B.C. - A.D. 1650)	Archaic Tradition	6,000 B.C. - 500 B.C.
	Woodland Tradition	c.a. 500 B.C. - A.D. 1650
	Plains Village Tradition	1000 - 1500
	Mississippian Tradition	1000 - 1650
	Oneota Tradition	1000 - 1650
	Contact Period	American Indian
	Euroamerican	1650 - 1837
Post Contact Period	Early Agriculture and River Settlement	1840 - 1870
	Railroads and Agricultural Development	1870 - 1940



*Scrapers recovered from intensive archaeological testing.
a-b, side/end scraper; c-d, end scrapers
(Gronsjor, George & Radford, 2003)*

PRE-CONTACT PERIOD (9500 B.C. - A.D. 1650)

Paleoindian Tradition (9500 B.C. - 6,000 B.C.)

This period includes the earliest human activity in Minnesota . There is not a lot of evidence of the human activity that occurred during this time period. The evidence includes scattered surface finds of stone tools and some projectile points. Evidence suggests that they were hunters and gatherers and traveled across the landscape.

Archaic Tradition (6,000 B.C. - ca. 500 B.C.)

More distinctive settlement patterns developed during this period due to the diversity of plant and animal communities that resulted from climatic changes. Documented sites from this tradition are not common, but the existing evidence suggests distinctive settlement patterns. Evidence of this tradition include chipped stone tools, pecked and ground stone tools, axes, and gouges for woodworking Native copper tools and decorative items made from copper have also been found from this tradition.

Woodland Tradition (ca. 500 B.C. - A.D. 1650)

This cultural tradition was marked by the use of pottery and the burial of the dead in earth mounds. People became more sedentary during this time. Horticulture began and the population expanded. The number of sites from this tradition are more numerous than from earlier traditions. Large village sites were present during this time.

Mississippian Tradition (1000 - 1650)

The northward spread of the Mississippian Culture around 1000 A.D. brought a new way of life to southern Minnesota. Although still dependent on hunting and fishing, agriculture dominated this culture. A major center of this new culture was the lower Illinois Valley and to the east of present day St. Louis.

These early farmers worked the sandy soils of the river bottoms and terraces with bone hoes and other hand tools. Their settlements were typically large villages of 600 to 800 inhabitants surrounded by fields of corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, and tobacco. Refined pottery and the continued use of burial mounds also characterized this culture.

Oneota Tradition (1000 - 1650)

This tradition was common in southeastern and south-central Minnesota. The Woodland Tradition adopted cultural elements from the nearby Mississippian people defining this tradition. .

Plains Village Tradition (1000 - 1500)

Maize and squash were farmed. Bison was a staple resource. Unique ceramics were developed and defined this tradition.

Archaeological Evidence of the Pre-Contact Period in the Vicinity of the Trail

Albert Lea Lake provided a desirable environment for habitation. This is reflected in the number of archaeological sites, over 30, identified in the boundaries of Big Island State Park.

Evidence of these early people include numerous artifacts found in the area including projectile points, axes, other stone tools, and pieces of pottery. Big Island State Park houses one of the largest Pre-Contact Period artifact collections in the state.

An archaeological investigation has been completed for the trail segment between Albert Lea, through Big Island State Park. Artifacts uncovered near Albert Lea Lake included projectile points, chipped stone scrapers and flakes discarded during stone tool manufacture. Evidence of habitation included fire-cracked rock and pottery. The site was occupied many times between 4000 and 1500 years ago.

CONTACT PERIOD (A.D. 1650 - A.D. 1837)

European trade goods enter the archaeological record including beads, bells, knives and ceramics. Evidence of French trade goods appear in the 1670s. The fur trade brought both French and British traders to the area. During the 1690s and early 1700s, the French established trading posts in Mississippi River. Between 1763-1805, British traders and explorers came to Minnesota.

POST-CONTACT PERIOD (1837 - 1945)

In 1837, the Dakota relinquished their claims to the lands east of the Mississippi. The 1851 treaties of Mendota and Traverse des Sioux took all of southern Minnesota away from them. Two years later, the Dakota reluctantly left their homes along the Mississippi and other area rivers and moved to a narrow reservation of land along the Minnesota River Valley. Additional pressure and abuse by the government and some of its officials led to war with the white settlers in 1862, known as the U.S. Dakota Conflict of 1862. At the end of the war, they were removed to the Dakota Plains.

Early Agriculture and River Settlement (1840 - 1870)

There were early farmers in Freeborn and Mower Counties during the end of this period. The three communities had their beginnings during this time.

The trail will pass in the vicinity of a historic farm site owned by William Coyne as indicated on an 1878 county plat. It was gone by 1940 and no evidence remains.



Source: History of Freeborn County Minnesota, 1882, Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Company

Stagecoach routes provided transportation between communities. See the map above. These historic routes can provide inspiration for trail routes, in keeping with the vision for the trail.

Much of the area the trail passes through is rich and productive agricultural land. The stories associated with past crop production, dairy farming, creameries, barns and other buildings provide important topics for interpretation of the history of this area.

Railroads and Agricultural Development (1870 - 1940)

Agricultural Development

The coming of the railroad spurred population growth and agricultural and industrial development.

Railroad History

A portion of the trail segment located between Albert Lea and the eastern boundary of Big Island State Park will parallel the DM&E Railroad and cross it near Albert Lea Lake. This railroad is significant

historically. It was known as the Southern Minnesota Railroad when constructed between Ramsey and Albert Lea in 1869. The Southern Minnesota Railroad was purchased by the Central Railroad Company of Minnesota in 1879 and then sold to the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad in 1880. “This early southern Minnesota railroad is a significant cultural resource property that has been determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places based upon discussion between the State Historic Preservation Office and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Trails and Waterways Division Cultural Resources Program (Tumberg and Skaar, 2002).”

Railroad History Timeline
1869 - Southern Minnesota Railroad
1879 - Central Railroad Company
1880 - Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad
1997 - I&M Rail Link Railroad
2002 - Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern Railroad (DM&E)/Iowa, Chicago and Eastern (IC&E)

This railroad is associated with one of the first four railroad charters granted by the Minnesota Territorial Legislature. In 1857, a charter was granted to the Southern Minnesota Railroad Company. It was a while before actual construction began. During 1866, the Southern Minnesota Railroad Company completed development between the Mississippi River at Grand Crossing to Houston. By 1868 tracks were laid to Lanesboro and by 1870 extended through the City of Albert Lea to Winnebago City in Faribault County. In 1878, through the Southern Minnesota Railway Extension Company, the Southern Minnesota Railroad company initiated development west of Winnebago City to a terminus along the Minnesota western border. In 1880, the Southern Minnesota Railroad Company and the associated Southern Minnesota Railway Extension Company were purchased by the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railway Company. They continued to operate the line until the late 1970's when the corridor between the Mississippi River and the Village of Ramsey was abandoned. Some portions were abandoned and other portions purchased by other companies, including the I&M Rail Link. The Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern (DM&E) Railroad purchased the line in 2002. Most of the Root River State Trail between Fountain and Houston is developed on the abandoned grade of the Southern Minnesota. In Albert Lea, the former Southern Minnesota depot has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

National Register of Historic Sites

There are a number of sites on the National Register of Historic Places in Freeborn and Mower Counties. These resources need to be considered in the location, design and interpretation of the trail.

Freeborn County

Albert Lea Commercial Historic District

Albert Lea City Hall	Henry J. Harm Jewelry Store
Albert Lea State Bank	Johnson Laundry Co. Building
Armstrong Block	Lex Berglund Garage and Auto Showroom
bakery	Ludvig Olson Tailor Shop
Beatrice Bessesen Theater Building	men's clothing store
Bessessen Building	Morlea Dairy Building
bindery and printers	North Annex to Skinner-Chamberlain Store
Blackmer Building	paint and wallpaper store
two boot and shoe stores	printing shop
Borland Grocers/Ransom Building	saloon
Century Building	Skinner-Chamberlain Store
seven commercial buildings	Southern Minnesota Gas & Electric Co. Building
confectionery store	Syndicate Block
drug store and grocery store	telephone exchange
dry goods and grocery store	Upin Building
Fireman's Hall and Masonic Temple	Wedge-Jones Building/Lembke Department Store
First National Bank	Wedge-Spicer Drug Store
furniture and printing shops	Wiegand Building
furniture store	Woolworth Building
harness shop	

Mower County

Cook Hormel House
 Paramount Theatre
 Arthur W. Wright House

Chicago Milwaukee Saint Paul and Pacific Depot
 Clarks Grove Cooperative Creamery
 Lodge Zare Zapadu No. 44
 H.A. Paine House
 Albert C. Wedge House

Recommendation 1: DNR will consider methods to avoid or minimize the potential project effects on the railroad corridor.

Socioeconomic Resources

Economic

The region's economy is primarily based on agriculture. The presence of food processing industry, retail trade, manufacturing, and construction companies also define the economy.

Population

The population of Freeborn and Mower counties is about the same. The 2001 population of Freeborn County was estimated to be 32,569 and the population of Mower County 38,715. The majority of each county's population resides in the communities that will be connected by the Blazing Star State Trail. The population of Albert Lea is 18,364 and the population of Austin 23,376.

Regional Recreation and Tourism Opportunities

Overnight Recreational Opportunities

Camping

There are 4 campgrounds in Freeborn County - the trail will go past two. One campground is in Big Island State Park, the other is privately owned. There are several campgrounds in the vicinity of Austin.

Non-Camping (Hotels/Motels/Resorts/Bed and Breakfast)

There are over 21 privately owned businesses that provide overnight accommodations (non-camping) in Freeborn and Mower counties - 11 in Freeborn and 10 in Mower.

Traditional Day-Use Recreational Opportunities

County Parks

There are four county parks in Freeborn County. Two are on Fountain Lake, one is on Albert Lea Lake and the fourth is on Lower Twin Lake.

Watercraft Access and Fishing Piers

There are twelve water accesses and two fishing piers in Freeborn County. There is one fishing pier in the city of Austin in Mower County.

Visitor Information Centers, Interpretive Centers and Museums

Museums in Freeborn County include the Alden Museum which includes an early 20th century home, historic farm implements and a store. The Hollandale Heritage Huis in Hollandale interprets the history of Hollandale and its Dutch settlers. The Myrtle Museum has information on the history of Myrtle. Greibrok's Mini History Farm and Country Fair has a unique collection of toys. The Czech Brick Hall National Registry houses information on the history of this historic building including numerous photos. Freeborn County Historical Society Museum, Library and Pioneer Village document the history of Freeborn County. The Story Lady Doll and Toy Museum in Albert Lea houses a unique collection of historic dolls, storybook dolls and ethnic dolls.

Museums in Mower County include the Spam Museum and the Mower County Historical Museum, the Rydjour Bike Museum documents the history of bicycles.

Trail Opportunities

Big Island State Park provides summer and winter trail opportunities. There are 16 miles of hiking trail and 7 miles of mountain biking trail. Winter opportunities include 8 miles of cross country ski trails and 7 miles of snowmobile trails.

The city of Albert Lea has developed trails in the city.

Hormel Nature Center has ten miles of hiking trails which are also used as cross-country ski trails in winter. The City of Austin has developed a comprehensive trail plan and is in the process of implementing it. The city has developed trails along the Cedar River.

When complete, the Shooting Star State Trail will connect Austin to Le Roy. Currently 8 miles of trail are developed between Le Roy to Taopi.

Lake Louise State Park has 11.6 miles of hiking trails, 9.7 miles of horseback riding trails, 3 miles of cross-country ski trails, and 9.6 miles of snowmobile trails.

Snowmobiling

There are over 250 miles of snowmobile trails in Freeborn County and 200 miles of trails in Mower County. These trails are part of the statewide grant-in aid snowmobile trail system totaling over 20,000 miles. Development and maintenance of these trails are funded by snowmobile registration and a portion of the unrefunded gas tax attributed to snowmobile use. Local snowmobile clubs develop and maintain these trails with funds distributed by a local government sponsor.

Other Recreational and Tourism Opportunities

Fishing

County lakes for recreational use include Pickeral Lake, Freeborn Lake, Bear Lake, Geneva Lake, Twin Lake and State Line Lake.

Hunting and Trapping

Wildlife Management Areas in Freeborn and Mower counties provide hunting and trapping opportunities.

Arts

Albert Lea Art Center presents a series of plays each year. Opportunities for experiencing the arts in Austin include performances by the Austin Symphony Orchestra and events at the Paramount Theater which is an arts and film center.

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