Root River Wildlife Management Area
The main unit of this WMA is located just north of the Root River and the city of Hokah. Its 443 acres include mixed hardwoods of oak, basswood, ash, cottonwood, elm and willow, upland fields, and scattered wetlands. Recreation is dominated by hunting, trapping, fishing and wildlife viewing. Hunting options include deer, small game, forest game birds, pheasant, waterfowl, doves, and turkeys.

Segment 4: Hokah to Mound Prairie
TH 16 continues west from Hokah on the southern side of the Root River. The abandoned railroad grade parallels TH 16 for several miles, then turns to the northwest to follow the river more closely. The railroad grade crosses a substantial area of wetlands as it follows the curve of the Root River around the base of the Mound Prairie bluff. TH 16 climbs steeply into the bluffs, passing between two units of the Mound Prairie Scientific and Natural Area (SNA). State forest lands, part of the large Richard J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood Forest, are located around the two units of the SNA.

On the north side of the river, County Highway 21 follows the edge of the bluffs, coming very close to the river at Bush Valley Road. West of this point, Highway 21 curves to the north and the Mound Prairie Wildlife Management Area is located along the bluff between the highway and the river.

The Mound Prairie SNA is off-limits to trail development, and the steep grades in that area would not be appropriate for a trail in any case. The Mound Prairie Wildlife Management Area, on the north side of the river, also presents a potential barrier to trail use, although trail options within the road right-of-way should be explored.

Given the constraints to trail development in this area, the trail search corridor is identified in Figure 8 as falling primarily within the Root River floodplain between TH 16 and County Highway 21, avoiding lands within the SNA but potentially crossing some of the state forest lands. As in Segment 3, the abandoned railroad grade offers the most desirable route in terms of scenic views and minimizing exposure to vehicular traffic.
Segment 4 Trail Communities and Connections

Mound Prairie Scientific and Natural Area
Mound Prairie SNA includes 257 acres located in two units bisected by TH 16. It contains three southwest-facing goat prairies separated by oak forests and the steep, rocky ravines of ancient stream beds on the north side of Highway 16. An additional three goat prairies are found on the south side. Stream terraces contain remnants of fine, glacial silt deposited when the valley floors were higher. The superb goat prairies support a highly diverse plant community that includes such rare species as white wild indigo, goat's rue, jewelled shooting star, Ohio spiderwort, and the narrow-leaved milkweed with its greenish flowers. The prairie vole, a rare mammal typically found in northwestern Minnesota, is found at this site. Removal of encroaching trees and brush by cutting and prescribed burning is enhancing the prairie and rare species habitat. Visitors can hike the goat prairies in early to late summer to find the rare species in bloom. Spectacular views from this outstanding prairie SNA make the upward climb well worthwhile.

Mound Prairie Wildlife Management Area
This WMA includes 329 acres in its main unit and an additional 49 acres in its west unit. Forested areas consist of mixed lowland hardwoods of oak, maple, basswood, ash, cottonwood, elm and willow. Upland fields consist of native warm season grasses. A large wetland complex exists on the unit. Recreation is dominated by hunting, trapping, fishing and general wildlife observations.

Richard J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood Forest
The Richard J. Dorer (RJD) Memorial Hardwood Forest is located within seven counties including: Dakota, Fillmore, Goodhue, Olmsted, Houston, Wabasha, and Winona. The state forest boundary is a statutory boundary and private landowners rather than the state hold most of the land within the forest. There are sections of the forest that are owned by the state, however.

State forests were created in order to produce timber, provide outdoor recreation, protect watersheds, and perpetuate rare and distinctive species of native flora and fauna. These forests are managed in a sustainable manner by the state in order to ensure a high quality forest. Various types of recreation are permitted on state forest lands.

Trails are permitted on state-owned state forest land. However, the trail location must be approved through a public participatory process, such as a public hearing. Several sections of the RJD Memorial Hardwood Forest are located near Mound Prairie.
Segment 5: Mound Prairie to Houston

West of the Mound Prairie SNA, County Highway 25 crosses the Root River, linking Highways 16 and 21. West of this point, the abandoned railroad grade runs very close to TH 16, with gaps in some locations. It may therefore be preferable to seek a trail alignment closer to the Root River.

As the trail continues west out of Mound Prairie, it could follow the abandoned railroad bed and then more closely follow the southern edge of the Root River. In this area, much of the railroad bed is no longer present, or is very close to the present Highway 16. Therefore, a more favorable trail experience could be had nearer the Root River.

If portions of the trail are located on the north side of the river, a new river crossing will be necessary. A former railroad bridge located about one-half mile east of Houston and currently used as part of the snowmobile trail system could be evaluated for potential reconstruction.

The trail would either enter Houston from the north, following the Trunk Highway 76 right-of-way, or from the west parallel to TH 16. It would join the existing Root River State Trail at Trailhead Park, which as the name implies, offers a broad range of services, including camping.

Segment 5 Trail Communities and Connections

City of Houston

Founded in 1852 by William McSpadden, the city of Houston was named after the famous general under whom McSpadden served during the Mexican War. McSpadden platted the town at the confluence of the main stem and the South Fork of the Root River, east of the present location. By 1854, settlers from Sweden, Norway, Germany, Ireland and New England arrived; steamboats serviced the town from the Root River until the early 1870’s.

In 1866, Mons Anderson, a La Crosse native, platted an addition just west of McSpadden’s settlement and donated his property to the Southern Minnesota Railroad under the condition that the railroad locate its depot in his new addition. As a result, the town moved west to its current location. By 1874, the town incorporated as a city and grew with the establishment of flour mills, lumberyards, restaurants, saloons, and hotels.
Known as a progressive community, Houston continued to grow into the twentieth century and by 1920 became the center of the county’s agriculture industry. The city operated one of the largest cooperative livestock shipping associations in the state, and was a dairy center with three cooperative creameries.

With the switch from rail to automobile traffic, the addition of Interstate Highway 90 fourteen miles north of the City in the 1970’s, and the agricultural crisis of the 1980’s, Houston began to see a decline in its economic prosperity. In response, the City created a Planning and Zoning Commission, Economic Development Authority, and Tree Board, which oversee and promote the assets of the City.

Houston’s population was 979 in 2010. The city offers a number of park and recreation opportunities. Trailhead Park marks the current terminus of the 60-mile Root River State Trail. The park features an 18-acre prairie, a picnic area with outdoor shelters, a campground, bandshell, recycled bicycle art, and the Houston Nature Center, which provides educational exhibits and programs as well as space for community meetings. Nature Center volunteers offer shuttle services for trail users and canoeists.

Houston is also a Tree City USA and Central Park is a living tribute to this status with many prominent shade trees. In addition to Central Park, the 80-acre South Park located at the southern edge of the city affords numerous hiking and picnicking opportunities. A variety of restaurants, coffee houses and shops provide amenities for trail users.

Houston is home to a number of annual events and festivals, most notably the Houston Triathlon, a canoe, bike and run race which takes place the third weekend in May, and the Houston Hoedown, which occurs the last full weekend in July.