

Minnesota Natural Resources

Department: Environmental
Assessment Files Regarding State
Parks

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# ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT HEARTLAND TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

#### I. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

A. Purpose of the Action - The Trail was established by an Act of the Minnesota State Legislature as a State Recreational Trail in 1973.

The Trail was officially designated the Heartland Trail by the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources on January 19, 1976.

The Federal Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, as administrator of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LAWCON), proposes to participate with the State of Minnesota in the upgrading of this multipurpose recreational trail.

- B. Location and Magnitude of the Project The trail is a 27.1 mile stretch of abandoned Burlington Northern Railroad grade between Park Rapids, in southwestern Hubbard County, and Walker, in northwestern Cass County, Minnesota (Map 1). Acquisition of the railroad right of way, which varies from 100-400 feet in width and totals approximately 372 acres, was finalized on May 23, 1974. It is proposed that the trail be upgraded with the assistance of LAWCON funds. The upgrading project mainly consists of blading, shaping, compacting, and rolling the 27.1 mile subgrade and surfacing it with an 8 foot wide by 3 inch thick bed of crushed limestone. The estimated cost of this development is \$180,000.
- C. <u>Timing of the Project</u> State funds are available for completion of the project. Private contractors have until September 2 of

this year to submit bids on the project. Project plans require that all work on the development be completed by November 15 of this year.

D. <u>Future Development</u> - This development plan consists of construction of two trail beds along the grade, to accommodate non-compatible uses. One bed will serve as a bicycle and snowmobile trail, while the second bed will serve the horseback rider and cross-country skier. Hikers will be able to use either bed.

Future developments will include construction of parking areas at Park Rapids and Walker. These areas will also have water and toilet facilities, as will as facilities for horses. Primitive camping and several rest areas along the trail may be provided, if this becomes necessary.

E. Recreational Needs to be Served by the Proposal - Hubbard County is located within Economic Development Region 2, while Cass County is in Economic Development Region 5 (Map 2). The 1974 Minnesota State Outdoor recreation plan (SCORP) estimated the mileage of hiking and snowmobile trails (except for a deficit of 587 miles of snowmobile trails in Region 5) in both regions to be adequate for 1975 requirements.

Projections of future use for the Heartland Trail or for trails within either region are not available. However, State Planning Agency population projections may give some indication of increased future use.

#### Population Projections

	1975	1980	1990	2000
Hubbard Co. Region 2	11,800 58,500	12,400 60,800	14,200 66,900	16,900 72,800
Cass Co.	18,800	19,400	21,200	24,100
Region 5	119,400	122,500	131,800	139,500

#### II. DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

A. Physical and Biological Environment - The topography varies from nearly level to heavily rolling. The latter topographic feature contains big cuts and fills, some of which offer excellent vistas of the surrounding landscape.

Soils in the more level western portion of the area are medium to coarse textured prairie soils formed from glacial outwash. As one goes east along the trail into the hilly area, the soils become medium textured forest soils which have developed from calcareous glacial till.

Climatic conditions are quite variable with January temperatures averaging 16°F (maximum) and -6°F (minimum) and July temperatures averaging 82°F (maximum) and 56°F (minimum). Average annual precipitation totals 26 inches. Average annual snowfall totals 47 inches, which accounts for approximately 16 per cent of the total precipitation.

Natural lake basins are a very important resource in the area.

As can be seen from Map 1 the trail is located adjacent to several lakes and also provides access to a number of other lakes.

No known economic concentrations of mineral resources are known to occur within the right of way for which fee title has been obtained. Flora in the western portion of the area is mainly stands of aspen, with some jack pine, interspersed among agricultural fields. The sandier soil of the more easterly hilly area is primarily forested, with the most important species being jack pine.

The area provides suitable habitat for a wide variety of terrestrial and aquatic fauna species. Some of the more common terrestrial species include the white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbit, racoon, red fox, and ruffed grouse. Important aquatic species found in the area include the mink, beaver, and several species of waterfowl. Fishes present include northern pike, largemouth bass, and several species of panfish.

No known rare or endangered species are known to occur in the area of immediate concern. However, the general area, particularly the eastern portion, is known to provide suitable nesting habitat for the bald eagle and the osprey.

- B. <u>Historical and Archaeological Resources</u> No sites of either of these resources are listed as occurring, by the Minnesota Historical Society, within the right of way area.
- C. Transportation and Utilities The trail parallels state highway #34 along the entire 27.1 miles. Approximately 20 county, county state aid, and state trunk highways intersect the trail and provide access to it.
- D. <u>Socio Economic Factors</u> Employment in the 3 major job categories listed by the Minnesota State Planning Agency are:

	Cass Co.	Hubbard Co.
Wholesale and Retail Trades	20.5%	19.6%
Professional and Related Services	20.0%	22.9%
Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries	11.2%	11.8%

Based on 1970 population data, average annual family income in Hubbard County was \$7,025, and \$7,213 in Cass County. This compared to a statewide average of \$11,097.

Tourist-travel expenditures during 1974 totaled \$9,136,000 in Hubbard County and \$33,504,000 in Cass County. These expenditures accounted for 21.7 percent of the gross sales in Hubbard County and 56.5 percent in Cass County.

- E. <u>Land Use</u> The grade is presently being used as a trail, particularly by snowmobilers, but also for cross-country skiing, horseback riding and hiking.
- F. Existing Recreational Developments Existing developments

  consist of some previous brushing and leveling part of the grade,

  and some repair work on the bridges along the grade.

#### III. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

- A. Impact on the Physical and Biological Environment The proposal will have insignificant impact on the fauna and flora resources. The grade provided unsuitable habitat for these resources until the railroad ties and bed were removed in 1974. Since this time the grade has been used for recreational trail purposes.
- B. Impact on the Historical and Archaeological Resources No impact on these resources will occur.

- C. Impact on Transportation and Utilities Neither the major roadways to the area or the secondary roadways providing access to the trail will be impacted by the proposal.
- D. Impact on the Socio Economic Factors Since all of the land has already been acquired, no loss from the local tax revenue, or from agricultural production will occur. Beneficial impacts on the local economy will be realized. This will result from the local manpower needed to maintain the trail, and from the increased trail use which will further increase tourist-travel expenditures.

The addition of a variety of recreational opportunities in the area is having beneficial social impacts on the trail user. Increased incidence of trespassing and littering may occur on lands adjacent to the trail corridor and also increased noise levels, especially from snowmobiles, will result in negative social impacts.

- E. <u>Impacts on Land Use</u> Upgrading of the trail will provide additional opportunity for present recreational use of the trail, and provide a new trail for bicycle use.
- IV. MITIGATING MEASURES INCLUDED IN THE PROPOSED ACTION

Hydroseeding of 17 sites (3.05 acres) of steep slope along the grade with a mixture of sand dropseed, hairy vetch, Canada wildrye, timothy, and perennial ryegrass will be done to prevent soil erosion. This will also partially mitigate the acreage of vegetation directly lost.

Partial mitigation of the adverse social impacts can be accomplished by local law enforcement authorities. V. ANY ADVERSE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS WHICH CANNOT BE AVOIDED SHOULD THE PROPOSAL BE IMPLEMENTED

> The proposed development will unavoidably affect a minimal amount of flora and fauna resources. Other unavoidable environmental effects will be some increased littering, trespassing, and noise levels.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL SHORT-TERM USES OF MAN'S ENVIRONMENT AND VI. MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

> Short-term uses of the environment as they relate to the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity are not considered in terms of years. Trade offs are necessary in order to gain certain benefits.

#### Gains

- 1. Public ownership of a 27.1 The loss of 26.3 acres of mile corridor of railroad potential vegetation as grade to be managed as a multi-purpose recreational trail.
- The revegetation of 3.05 acres of grade for soil erosion control and wildlife habitat.
- 3. Improvement in the local economy from necessary maintenance employment for the trail and from increased tourist expenditures.

#### Losses

The loss of 26.3 acres of such, and for wildlife habitat purposes.

The expenditure of an estimated \$180,000 of public funds for the development proposal.

ANY IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES WHICH VII. WOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE PROPOSED ACTION SHOULD IT BE IMPLEMENTED

> Implementation of the proposal will result in a more permanent conversion of the grade from present recreational land use to a multi-purpose recreational trail.


Section 6(f) of the LAWCON Act requires a commitment to recreational and open space land use before money is granted from the fund for acquisition and development. Approval from the Secretary of the Interior is necessary before a change in land use of any LAWCON acquired or developed lands can be made.

The manpower, materials, and funds necessary to implement the proposed action will also be irretrievably committed.

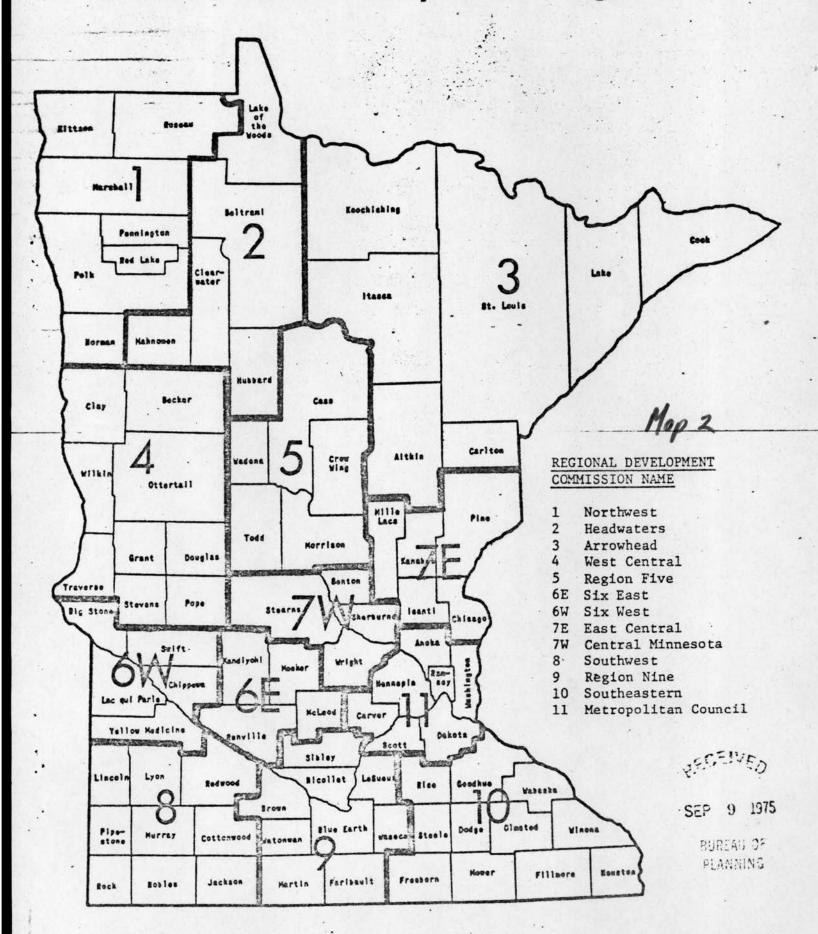
#### VIII. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

Major alternatives considered for the action are: (A) no action,

- (B) project of a smaller scope and, (C) project of a larger scope.
- (A) No Action A no action development course would result in vegetative overgrowth and deterioration of the grade as a trail. Since the land has already been acquired for trail purposes, such action would result in a waste of previously expended economic resources.
- (B) Project of a Smaller Scope This would mean that either the rate at which the crushed limestone is applied would be decreased or that the entire 27.1 mile would not be surfaced. Neither action, particularly the latter, would prove to be economically feasible.
- (C) Project of a Larger Scope Action previously considered here was to develop the trail from Park Rapids to Cass Lake, to where the abandoned grade runs. However, right of way ownership along the stretch from Walker to Cass Lake has not been completed and also present plans to re-route state trunk highway 371 would also result in the re-routing of the trail.



# Minnesota Development Regions



State Planning Agency Office of Local & Urban Affairs 9/30/74 AGREEMENT
between
MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
and
MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This Agreement, entered into this 27th day of December , 1971, by and between the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, acting through the Commissioner of Natural Resources, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Chapters 84 and 85, hereinafter called the Department, the Minnesota Historical Society, acting through its Director, hereinafter referred to as the Society, to coordinate effective efforts to develop, maintain and administer for public benefit historic sites, historic districts and monuments and archaeological sites as they now exist as individual entities or as parts of large state land areas administered by the Department of Natural Resources, hereinafter referred to as state land, do hereby define areas of responsibility and authority on state land.

- 1. The Society or State Archaeologist agrees to provide research and analysis to determine the sites of historic and/or archaeological significance to be set aside, identified and marked with suitable inscriptions for preservation and interpretation on state land. These sites shall be delineated on any inventory and classification of sites prepared by the Society. This process will directly relate to the funding and staff time available for this purpose determined by the Minnesota Historical Society.
- 2. The Department desires to prepare master plans for the development of facilities, essential to public access and use for recreational purposes as well as updated resource management plans on such land under its jurisdiction so as to avoid and minimize depredation or damage to the historic and/or archaeological areas on such land. Such plans shall be furnished to the Society for their information and guidance. Agreement between the Department and the Society must be reached on plans relating to historical areas before development can proceed. Unless objections are received within 30 days, agreement will be assumed. The Department shall present copies of all developmental plans affecting sites delineated as historical or archaeological on any inventory and classification of such areas to the Society prior to advertising for bid on any construction so that the Society may make studies and investigations of the archaeological and historical values.
- 3. When archaeological or historic sites are known or, based on investigations, are suspected to exist on state land or waters the Society upon request from the Department shall obtain for the Department a licensed, qualified professional archaeologist to help preserve these sites.
- 4. The Department shall notify the Society at least forty days prior to the offering for sale or lease state lands under its jurisdiction, timber, minerals, or gravel or the altering of any body of water within designated historic and/or archaeological sites or areas.
- 5. The Department of Natural Resources will enforce the provisions of the Linnesota Field Archaeology act of 1963, Linnesota Statutes 138.31 to 138.42, and to subsequent Amendments to these statutes on state land under its jurisdiction.

- 6. The Society and the Department may prepare and install interpretive exhibits (in existing buildings or proposed buildings) which, in its judgement, on lands or waters administered by the Departments of Natural Resources which the Society and Department jointly determine are suitable for such purposes, and costs of such features shall be met by any funds appropriated for such purposes to either the Department or the Society.

  7. The Society shall identify original sites or buildings of historical or archaeological significance deserving preservation, restoration or reconstruction on state land administered by the Department of Natural Resources. The Society and the Department jointly shall determine which buildings or sites are
- suitable for such historical purposes, and decide on alterations in them to render them more suitable for interpretative and public service purposes. Costs of development shall be met by any funds appropriated for such purposes to either the Department or the Society.

  8. The Department shall administer, develop, maintain, and operate all buildings, facilities and utilities as required for public accommodation and compatible recreation features, and enforce all rules and regulations and operate special fee services in these state parks as authorized by statutes... Except
- 9. This Agreement imposes no liability upon the State, the Commissioner of Natural Resources, or any other officers, employees or agents of the State for the acts or ommissions of any officer, employee or agent of the Society.

in those historical areas as described in Minnesota Session Laws 1969, Chapter

- 10. This Agreement is in force until amended or repealed by mutual agreement between the Department and the Society.
- 11. This Agreement shall supercede Agreement number 2 entered into by the State and the Society on the 14th day of August, 1968.
- 12. To keep this Agreement in force the Department and Society agree to meet at least semi-armually to review the operation of this Agreement and to correct problems that may have arisen because of it.
- 13. This Agreement shall be subject to the Minnesota Historic Sites Act of 1965 and to subsequent amendments to that statute.
- . 14. Nothing in this Agreement shall be contrary to existing Minnesota Statutes nor to Rules and Regulations as adopted by each agency.
- 15. This Agreement shall be in effect until rescinded or superceded by joint agreement of the two agencies affected.

II WITHESS	WHEREOF,	the respe	ectiv	e a	authorities	affix	their	seals	and	signatures
this	27th		day	of	Decembe	r	19	_71	•	

Robert L. Hernst

Commissioner

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.Dept. of Latural Resources

Russell ". Fridley

Director

Historical Society

#### HEARTLAND TRAIL

### PRELIMINARY MANAGEMENT PLAN

#### I. PURPOSE

The creation of the Heartland Trail will provide for the public a recreational, all season, multi-purpose trail within the right-of-way of the abandoned Burlington Northern Railroad extending from Park Rapids to Walker to Cass Lake.

#### II. ACQUISITION

A. The DNR is now in the process of acquiring title to the abandoned railroad right-of-way. A section of the trail right-of-way in Walker which was not abandoned, is being examined for an alignment that will connect the two segments. Extension of the trail into the city limits of Cass Lake will be investigated. When State Highway #371 is upgraded between Walker and Cass Lake, the trail location may be altered requiring additional right-of-way.

### III. USES

- A. Between Park Rapids and Walker, the trail will be constructed to accommodate hikers, skiers, horseback riders, bicycle riders and snowmobilers.
- B. Between Walker and Cass Lake, the trail will be constructed to ac-
  - C. Uses may be extended later as demanded.

## IV. CONSTRUCTION

- A. Due to damage to the grade during salvage operation, extensive grading will be necessary, hazards removed and the grade restored to it's original elevation several places to recapture vistas.
- B. Between Park Rapids and Walker, two trail beds will be constructed to accommodate non-compatible users: one bed for the bicyclist and snowmobilers; and the other for horseback riders and cross country skiers. Hikers will be able to use either bed. (See typical)

C. Between Walker and Cass Lake, trail users will use one bed. (See typical)

D. The right-of-way will be landscaped. Grasses will be planted on undisturbed areas. Other vegetative material will be planted for aesthetic effect, wildlife habitat and erosion control.

E. The bridges appear to be in good condition, however, all must be decked and have railings installed. The bridge at Akeley presents safety problems and will be, therefore, evaluated.

F. Parking areas will be constructed in Park Rapids, Walker and Cass Lake. Besides providing parking, these areas will have toilets and water facilities. Facilities will be provided for horses.

G. Primitive camping will be provided by DNR where private enterprise does not respond to the need.

H. At least 5 rest areas are needed. Communities located on the trail will be encouraged to provide these facilities.

Signs which appear in the Division of Parks and Recreations' <u>Trail</u>
 Manual will be used.

J. Due to the nature and use of abutting lands, little fencing will be needed. Where requested by adjoining landowners, the fence shall meet the Divisions' fencing policy now being written.

## V. MAINTENANCE

Men and equipment will be employed year around to maintain the trail beds and the facilities.

VI. Constructing an access to the Heartland Trail from another trail will require written permission from the Trail Coordinator.

## VII. OTHER USES OF RIGHT-OF-WAY

Existing easements within the right-of-way will be reviewed. Future requests for use of the right-of-way will be approved on their individual merit.

VIII. A brochure depicting the trail and surrounding area will be printed.

#### HEARTLAND TRAIL

#### Introduction

The Heartland Trail is one of eleven DNR's corridor trails. In its completed form this recreation trail will provide many visitors to enjoy 50 miles of an abandoned railroad, that extended from Park Rapids to Cass Lake.

### Description

Much of the trail's 50 miles is "cross country". Even so, it connects many communities such as Dorset, Nevis, Akeley, and Wilkinson.

From Park Rapids to Walker the country is interspersed farmland and woods.

The timber types here are either aspen or jack pine. From Walker to Cass Lake the trail goes thru mostly Jack Pine. One large swamp is noteworthy.

The topography varies from nearly level to heavily rolling, the later having big cuts and fills. From many of the high fills one has excellent vistas.

The entire area is sandy. Short segments of the trail have sugar sand.

Within the several miles of the trail lies the southern boundary of the Paul Bunyan State Forest providing much for the recreationists: snowmobile and equestrian trails; campgrounds, fishing, hunting. The trail traverses the western edge of the Chippewa National Forest which has snowmobile, ski, automotive trails, campgrounds, hunting and fishing.

## Pre Acquisition

Burlington Northern abandoned	its trackage in	shortly after DNR begun
negotiations with the company	to acquire the right-of-w	ay. A company by the
name of	from	was contracted

by BN to remove the steel and ties. To the amazement of BN and DNR staff, this company constructed a road along the edge of the ties - damaging much of the grade, obstructing culverts, etc. DNR obtained an easement from Park Rapids to Walker and was able to partly level the road Bed with large dozers before forced to stop because of deep frost.

A number of public meetings were held. The Public Warehouse Commissione held hearings on October 26, 27, 1971 in Walker. Hearings were held by DNR in July of 1973 in Park Rapids and Cass Lake. Representative Glen Sherwood called a public meeting in Walker in Nevember 1975 for discussion of trail alignment, design, and managment.

DNR personnel met many times with local units of government, clubs and private citizens. Hubbard County Commissioner voted \$20,000 while the Commissioner of Cass County voted \$10,000 to be used for the establishment of the Heartland Trail.