

**Lake Vermilion Trail Steering Committee**  
**Meeting #2 Notes**  
**1/6/16 – Minnesota DNR Office, Tower**

**Attendees**

Carol Booth – *Wakemup Village Resident, Cook*  
Joan Broten – *Office Manager, Minnesota DNR Parks & Trails, Tower City Council*  
Brad Dekkers – *DNR Parks and Trails, Tower*  
Greg Dostert – *Breitung Township*  
Russell Habermann – *Arrowhead Regional Development Commission*  
Cathi Hiveley – *Beatty Township*  
Linda Keith – *Clerk, City of Tower*  
Tyler Lampella – *St. Louis County Planning*  
Holly Larson – *National Park Service*  
Steve Lotz – *Vermilion Lake Township*  
Joe Majerus – *DNR Parks and Trails, Tower*  
Mark Olson – *Lake Country Power*  
Lee Peterson – *Greenwood Township Resident*  
Lisa Simenson – *Beatty Township*  
Elizabeth Storm – *City of Cook, Cook City Council*  
Jerry Storm – *Cook Lions*  
Sue Wolfe – *Owens Township*

**1. General Updates/Comments from Committee Members**

- a) Tower has an existing LCCMR grant for a trail between the harbor and the Mesabi Trail, but doesn't have any leftover funds.
- b) There is a 6 mile trail from Breitung Township to Tower.
- c) The Mesabi Trail will connect to part of the Tower Bike Trail. It will be complete next Spring from Soudan to the State Park.
- d) Carol spoke to John Galazen with the Cook Timberwolves Snowmobile Club; there could be ways to coordinate.
- e) CR 115 as a signed bike route: Carol spoke to County Engineering staff; a formal request to the County from ARDC should be made.
- f) Some people think that no one will use a trail such as this. The project needs to be promoted by more than just this roomful of people.

**2. Trail Development**

- a) New information
  - i. Wetland mitigation will likely be more expensive than anticipated, due to the higher costs of wetland credits than estimated in the Location Study. County staff considers the section between Cook and the lake as a very difficult area for development.

- ii. The Arrowhead State Trail legislation language is vague, and does not prohibit a paved trail. To use part of the corridor, the (approx. 30 year-old) Trail Plan would have to be amended. Much of the State Trail corridor is low and wet between Cook and the lake.
  - iii. Tower Area alignment: Pike Bay Drive and Two Rivers Road are potential route options. But the bridge on Hwy 77 will be a choke point, and Pike Bay Drive is rocky. Parts of the old highway exist. The Tribe wants to connect their trail to the Y-Store; they have an easement under the power line by CR 115. Lake Country Power has an easement from the landowners.
  - iv. Bois Forte should be involved in this committee. (Update: They have confirmed attendance for the next meeting.)
  - v. Carol spoke to Northwoods Friends of the Arts, and they are willing to work on a logo contest.
- b) Preferred Scope of Project: Due to the wetland difficulties directly north of Cook, focus on:
- i. The ridgeline that parallels the south shore of the lake between Wakemup Hill and Camp Vermilion
  - ii. The connection between the City of Tower and Fortune Bay Resort Casino
- c) Next steps: Subcommittees will be formed at the next meeting to continue trail planning. Holly and Russell will continue gathering information.

### **3. Regional Significance Designation**

- a) Criteria and process: The Greater MN Regional Parks & Trails Commission (GMRPTC) has a two-step process for obtaining Legacy funding for non-state parks and trails. First, an application must be submitted for regional significance designation, due in April. Then, if the trail or park is rated “high”, a project along that trail can be submitted for funding. Funding applications are due in mid-summer. This program does not require matching money, but prefers to have some local matching funds.
- b) Required master plan changes: A master plan that meets GMRPTC requirements must be adopted before a project is eligible for the above funding. The GMRPTC prefers that the Master Plan be adopted by the managing entity before the application for regional significance is submitted in April, but they will accept a draft. The Lake Vermilion Trail Plan and Location Study would need to be combined and modified to meet the requirements.
- c) The steering committee decided to apply this year for regional significance designation for the trail. Russell will start work on drafting the master plan.

### **4. Funding**

- a) Government grant application schedules and match requirements were presented in a handout (attached).
- b) Potential local matching funding/in kind sources: Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability, Northwoods Friends of the Arts (logo contest), Sportsmen’s Club,

Lake Vermilion Resort Association, Lake Country Power (Operation Roundup) and Minnesota Power (similar program to LCP), Natural Harvest Food in Virginia (roundup), IRRRB, LCCMR, and Transportation Impact Fund

- i. Enlist Gary Cerkvenik from Virginia to assist in finding funding.
- c) Strategy for funding: The committee considered the timing of grant schedules and wants to try to submit an application for a first phase project in October 2016 for the Transportation Alternatives Program, likely for acquisition only, if that is allowed. Depending on the outcome of the regional significance designation application, the committee would like to be ready to apply for either DNR Local, Regional and/or Federal Trails funding in March 2017, and/or Regional Trails funding through the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission in the Summer of 2017.
  - i. Subcommittee: Linda Keith and Carol Booth

## **5. Management Structure/Political Support**

- a. The committee discussed the options for trail management and decided to explore the options of County management and management through the Mesabi Trail structure, the St. Louis and Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority first. The idea of a “Friends of the Trail” non-profit organization to assist the government entity that hopefully takes over the trail should also be considered. A joint powers board is also a possibility, but the committee would like to pursue that option after the County and Mesabi Trail options are thoroughly deliberated. More information is needed before approaching the cities and townships again regarding a joint powers board, or a similar multi-government agreement. It would not necessarily have to be a taxing authority. The following management structures were considered less likely or suitable: City/Township combined management, management by only a non-profit, City/County combined management, and State management. These options may warrant further consideration later, if the preferred options do not work out.
  - i. Approach to County option:
    - 1. Lee will ask Rukavina to join the committee.
    - 2. The Resort Association will talk to County commissioners.
    - 3. Linda could talk to Commissioner Ellison, Carol to Frank Jewell.
    - 4. Holly and Russell will discuss the project with the Planning, Lands and Minerals as well as the Public Works directors, and the County administrator.
    - 5. Russell will reach out to Andy Holak to re-engage with the committee.
    - 6. The committee will look to demonstrate cost-benefit of the trail.
    - 7. A project fact sheet or talking points should be prepared for the county department directors and commissioners.
  - ii. Approach to Mesabi Trail/Regional Railroad Authority
    - 1. Carol and Russell spoke to Bob Manzoline, and the Mesabi Trail’s management is focused on getting from Biwabik to Embarrass.

2. The committee will propose a separate working group for the Lake Vermilion Trail, so as not to detract from the Mesabi Trail's current efforts.
  3. Holly and Russell will discuss proposal with Bob Manzoline and other representatives of the Railroad Authority first.
  4. Representatives from the committee will present about the Lake Vermilion Trail to the Board and provide a formal written request.
  5. Carol Booth, Caroline Owens, Dusty, and Tom Rukavina (if available) will work on this option.
- iii. Subcommittee: Linda Keith, Joan Broten, and Carol Booth

**6. Trail Corridor Acquisition (Purchase)**

- a. Holly introduced a document, "Information for Landowners" (attached), from a trail project in southeast Minnesota as an example of a handout that local volunteers could use when approaching landowners about the offer to purchase an easement or a corridor for the trail. This document could be modified for this project, if the committee desires such a handout. Holly also offered to find an experienced acquisition specialist to provide volunteers with training. Discussion of this item was tabled due to lack of time.

**NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10<sup>th</sup>, 10 am – 12 pm, at the Greenwood Town Hall**

## FUNDING

### GOVERNMENT FUNDING SOURCES

There are three primary sources of government funding that are commonly used for trail development in Minnesota: state grants, federal grants, and state bonding. Depending on the program, these funding sources can pay for 50 - 100% of trail corridor acquisition, trail development and major rehabilitation costs. It is possible to match federal grants with state grants, but most grant programs want to see some local investment. Some grant programs require a “cash” match, but some allow “in kind” donations of labor and materials to make up all or part of the local match. Communities often commit staff time from Public Works, Parks or Highway Departments, use of construction equipment, and/or materials such as gravel to make up their in kind match. Some grants allow volunteer time to count as match.

### PRIVATE FUNDING SOURCES

To raise local funds, communities sometimes work with a private foundation or non profit organization to launch a capital campaign, during which they solicit donations from corporations, private foundations, businesses, philanthropic organizations, and individual donors. A list of potential non government funding sources is included in the Appendix.

Consider that in Minnesota in 2012, 72% of total charitable giving came from individuals, 10% came from private foundations, 13% from corporate foundations and giving programs, and 5% from community/public foundations. Given these statistics, it is wise to devise a fundraising campaign for your trail project that includes solicitations from individuals.

## Common Government Funding Sources for Trail Acquisition & Development

### DNR Administered Reimbursement Programs:

1. **Regional Trail Grants:** For greater MN only, must be of regional or statewide significance, \$5000-\$250,000 grant awards, 25% non state cash match, shares \$1.005 mil total w/Local Trail Connections program, lottery & Trust Fund \$, due the end of March
2. **Local Trail Connections:** For short trail links, \$5000-\$150,000 grant awards, 25% non state cash match, shares \$1.005 mil total w/Regional Trail Grant program, lottery & Trust Fund \$, due the end of March
3. **Parks & Trails Legacy Grants:** For greater MN only; regional or statewide significance reqd.; \$20K min, no max. grant award; no match required, but desired; \$7.5 mil total; sales tax \$, 1st step--regional significance application due June; if accepted, project applications expected to be due late Aug/Sept.
4. **Outdoor Recreation Grants:** For facilities in local parks, including internal park trails; \$35K - 65K average grant awards, 50% cash or in kind match; Fed. LAWCON & State \$, \$379K total, due the end of March
5. **OHV, Snowmobile & Cross Country Skiing Grant-In-Aid:** primarily for maintenance by clubs, but some trail development funded; small grants; gas tax & license fee \$, due the end of Nov.

### MnDOT Administered Programs:

6. **Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Grants (formerly Recreational Trails, Transportation Enhancements & Safe Routes to School):** programs were combined; trail projects now compete with some types of road projects; Fed. Hwy. \$, For MnDOT District 8, 1st step--Letter of Intent due Oct; if invited, applications due Jan.
7. **Safe Routes to School:** New State-funded grant source, 2015-17: \$350K total available for Planning Assistance Grants, due Jan 2016; \$100K available for Mini Grants and Bicycle Fleets, due winter 2016; amount available for Infrastructure grants unknown. SRTS projects also eligible for TAP, above.

### State Bonding:

8. **State Bonding:** For all types of capital improvement projects; has primarily funded State Trails, but also some regional & local trails; usually passed in even years; no match; \$18 mil for State Trails, \$4 mil for metro trails, and \$100K for Greater MN trails in 2014; need Senate & House Bill sponsors & widespread legislative support



# Root River Trail Extension Project, Houston County Trails

## Information for Landowners

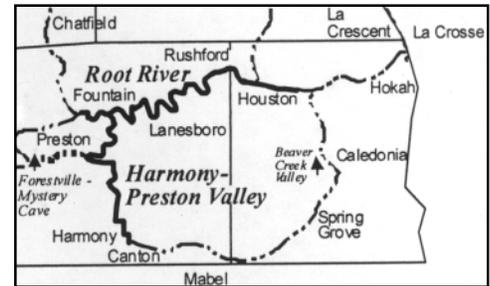
### The Goal:

We are a group of people from Houston County working to get the Root River Trail extended from Houston to La Crescent through Hokah. **The goal is to provide a place where people can be out safely enjoying the unique natural beauty of this area in all seasons while improving their personal health and well being.**

We've been working for almost 15 years on this because we really believe that this trail will be a benefit to all of us who live and work in Houston County.

We want this trail because we think it will:

- Improve the quality of life for local residents,
- Provide a safe path for recreation, and for commuting to work or school, and
- Showcase the scenic, historic and natural assets of Houston County.



The trail will be part of the Blufflands State Trail System, connecting the whole region.



**The Trail Extension Corridor:  
From Houston  
through Hokah  
to La Crescent  
& La Crosse**

### Who we are:

The trail extension effort is being led by people from Houston, Hokah, La Crescent, and all of the townships in between. Some of us may be your neighbors, or people you grew up with. We are spending our free time volunteering for this effort because we see this as a great thing for our towns and families. We started around 1992, and became an official subcommittee of the Houston County Economic Development Authority (EDA) in 2004. Partners in our effort are the Houston County Board of Commissioners, the EDA, , and the Cities of Houston, Hokah, and La Crescent. Townships have also been involved.

**Root River Trail Extension Project,  
Houston County Trails**

c/o Joyce Iverson, Community  
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## Root River Trail Extension Project, Houston County Trails

# Information for Landowners

### **What we're looking for:**

We're trying to piece together a corridor of land that we can buy to extend the Root River Trail from where it now ends at the Houston Nature Center through Hokah to La Crescent. The first phase we're working on is from Houston to Mound Prairie. We want to discuss with you the possibility of buying some of your land. We're looking for a 50-foot wide corridor. The maximum grade for the trail is 8%, so we have to figure out how to get up and down hills. In a few cases where the land is flat and there are no drainage issues, a 30 foot width can work.

### **What part of my land are you interested in buying?**

We want to work with you to find a linear corridor that we can buy that will cause the least interference with your business and life. Along property boundaries, along a road or river, or in between fields are the most common places where landowners have sold land for other trails. We don't want to go through the middle of your field or yard. We'll work with you to come up with a solution for crossing farm roads, cattle passes, driveways, etc. Any needed fencing will be paid by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Trees and/or bushes can be planted between you and the trail to block view, if desired.

### **Who will be able to use the trail?**

The trail will be open to public use, for walking, running, biking, rollerskating, and possibly horseback riding and snowmobiling, in certain segments. At any rate, in segments where a snowmobile trail already exists, it would not be displaced. Part of this depends on the type of surface chosen for the main trail, which hasn't been decided yet. If the surface is gravel, then snowmobiles may be allowed on the main trail. If it is asphalt, a second parallel trail would be provided with a snowmobile-friendly surface. The width of the corridor that we can buy and the presence of hills and wetlands influence this decision.

It hasn't been decided yet whether horse use is desired or possible for the length of the trail corridor. Some residents in the Hokah and Houston areas have shown interest. How horses would be accommodated also depends on the issues listed above. Horses would either be accommodated on a separate, parallel dirt or gravel trail, or on a gravel shoulder to the trail. A horse trail would most likely merge with the walking/biking trail to cross bridges.

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## Information for Landowners

### Why should I sell?

**Leave a Legacy.** You can do something now that will benefit your family and your community for generations to come. Here's how:

### Benefits for You and Your Family:

- A place to enjoy life—and your family. People are often so busy making a living that they forget to enjoy the people, places and things around them. A trail close to home makes it easier to take a break from your busy schedule to take a bike ride with your family. Take an evening stroll with your spouse. Enjoy a sunny summer day in our beautiful area.
- Kids complain that they're bored, with nothing fun to do, and no way to get there. You'll feel better sending your teenager or grandkids to town—to the library, ballfield, community center, school—biking on a nice trail, than taking their chances riding on the highway. And maybe they won't bug you for a ride so often if they have an alternative way to get around.
- We all need to take care of our health. Physical activity helps ward off heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other illnesses. For retired folks, schoolkids, and people who don't get enough physical activity in their work, a trail is a convenient and low cost place to get some exercise. People with a trail close to their home tend to use it. (Even those that didn't think they would before it was built.)
- When we were kids, we had more freedom to discover the world for ourselves—the chance to explore the river bank, a small stand of forest, the ducks in the marsh. A public trail corridor gives you and your family a place to rediscover the things that fascinated you as a kid.
- The market value of your land may increase with the development of a trail adjacent to it.



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## Root River Trail Extension Project, Houston County Trails

# Information for Landowners

### Benefits for Your Community:

- A trail can offer a place for your neighbors, friends, and fellow Houston County residents to spend time with their families.
- The trail will give kids and teenagers a way to ride their bikes to town that is off of the county roads and state highways, so there may be fewer riding on the road shoulders. They'll have a safer place to be, and you might not have to veer around so many bikes as you drive to work or on errands.
- When people live near a trail, they tend to use it. When individuals increase their physical activity and are healthier, the whole community is healthier. When people get diseases that they may have been able to avoid if they were physically active, health insurance companies have to pay to treat those diseases. Everyone's health insurance rates are higher when a lot of people are inactive. In addition, a good portion of our state taxes go to health care, so we all pay more when people are inactive.
- The trail can bring outside money into the county. Visitors who come to ride or walk a trail also spend money locally. This brings new customers to your town's shops and restaurants, helping them stay open for business and keeping the local economy going. It might even encourage local graduates to stick around, start a new business, and raise their families in Houston County.
- Visitor spending brings sales and lodging tax revenues to your county, city and township. This helps them plow the roads and pay the school teachers with less of a burden on local taxpayers.



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## Root River Trail Extension Project, Houston County Trails

# Information for Landowners

### Who would buy the corridor of land?

Houston County would buy a linear corridor of land from you for the trail. Since the Root River Trail is a designated State Trail, the County will then sell the corridor to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The Trails & Waterways Unit of the DNR would build and manage the trail and the corridor.

### What's the purchase process?

The first step is for the County to purchase an option on the land desired for the trail corridor. The price can either be specified in the option document, or it can say, "for an amount equal to the fair market value as determined by a certified appraiser." The option would say that you won't sell the land to anyone else, and that you will allow the County to buy the land. The option document would also state any special accommodations that would be made to meet your needs, such as gates, fencing, cattle passes, plantings, etc. The County will also be buying options on adjacent pieces of land from other property owners to form a continuous corridor. Once options are in place for the corridor, the County will buy all of the pieces of land for which they have options. The purchasing process will follow the County's normal acquisition process, as required by County law. The County will then resell the corridor to the DNR. If the County is unable to raise enough money for the land purchase, the option would expire at the end of five years. As you can see, the acquisition process can take awhile.

### What price would you pay?

We want to work with you to give you a fair deal for land you are willing to sell. The County will hire an appraiser—someone used to working with land in Houston County, at no cost to you. They will visit your property, and you are welcome to accompany the appraiser on his inspection to point out what you think is important. The appraiser will determine the "fair market value," based on many different factors. The County will offer you the appraised value for the corridor of land they wish to buy. If you desire, you could also have a separate appraisal done by an appraiser of your choosing, at your own expense.



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## Information for Landowners

### What would the trail look like?

The trail itself would be hard-surfaced (asphalt or crushed stone) and 10 feet wide. In some sections, there may be a second, parallel dirt or gravel trail for horses and/or snowmobiles next to that 10-foot trail. The trail would have shoulders about 2 feet wide, planted with grass or other ground cover. Any additional land in the corridor would likely be left as it is, or planted with non-invasive local native plants. On hillsides, cut and fill construction may be necessary. Retaining walls and other construction methods may be used on steep hillsides.

### What if people stray onto my land and get hurt?

Minnesota, like almost all states, has a recreational use law that limits property owners' responsibility if a trail user happens upon your land. In general, as long as no one is charging to use the land, and you haven't placed a deliberate hazard in the way, you wouldn't be responsible. The injured person would have to prove that you were guilty of "willful and wanton misconduct." For more details, see the "Rail-Trails and Liability" report, or ask your contact person for more legal information.

### What about litter and vandalism?

There are 500 miles of paved multi-use trails in Minnesota. It is generally found that trail users are pretty clean people. They tend to stick to the trail, and use only trailheads and official rest areas, and pick up after themselves. DNR will do the rest. On the existing trails in south-east Minnesota, neither littering, nor trespassing, nor any other illegal activity has been a big problem. Because trails attract people who want to use the area for legitimate activities, trails tend to decrease the amount of litter and vandalism, not increase it.

### Other questions or concerns?

We want to work with you to address all of your concerns. Just ask. We'll try to find answers to your questions, and solutions to your concerns. Contact the Acquisition Committee member who has spoken to you, or contact Joyce Iverson. Her contact information is listed below.

**Thank you for your time, and for considering this request.**

**Your Contact Person is:** \_\_\_\_\_

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