

SECTION VI IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

OVERVIEW

Implementing the master plan for the St. Croix Valley Regional Trail will require significant initial and long-term capital investments for physical development, ecological stewardship, operations, and maintenance. Undoubtedly, implementation will occur over a number of years as funding and other resources become available and plans become refined and ready for implementation.

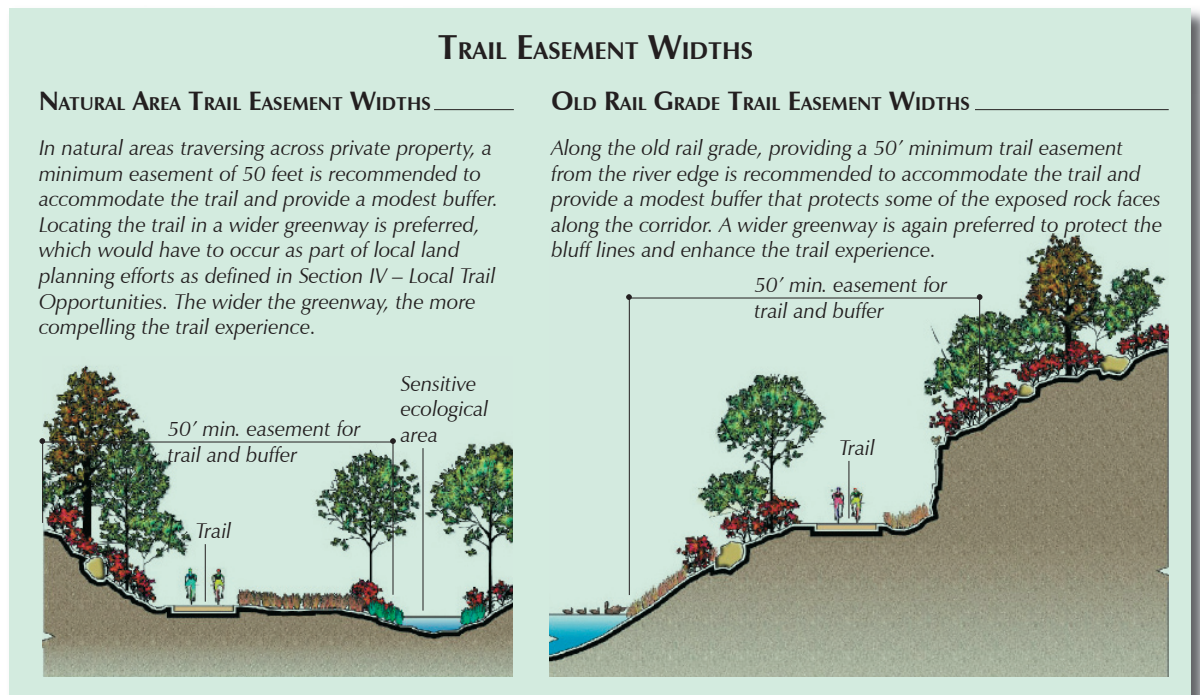
The following considers an overall strategy for implementing the master plan and managing the trail once it is completed. This section also considers Washington County's approach to operations and management as it pertains to the trail. Implementation components include:

- Acquisition Plan
- Development and Natural Resources Stewardship Cost Projections
- Implementation Strategy and Priorities
- Management and Operations
- Public Involvement in Implementing the Master Plan

This following considers each of these in greater detail.

ACQUISITION PLAN

As defined in Section III, three segments of the trail traverse across private property, exclusive of the Carpenter Nature Center. In each of these cases, a trail easement will be needed, either through direct acquisition or other arrangement. For planning purposes, a minimum easement width of 50 feet is recommended, as illustrated in the following graphic box.



EASEMENT REQUIREMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH EACH PRIVATE PROPERTY

The three segments of trail that traverse across private property include:

- Afton Alps trail segment (as defined on Trail Segment Detail Maps #5 and #6 in Section III) – 2,900 lineal feet of trail (3.3 acres)
- River loop trail segment (as defined on Trail Segment Detail Maps #10 in Section III) – 4,450 lineal feet of trail (5.1 acres)
- Old rail grade segment (as defined on Trail Segment Detail Maps #14 in Section III) – 5,325 lineal feet of trail (6.1 acres)

For each of these segments, a minimum of a 50 foot easement is recommended as the basis for negotiation and determining the cost for acquisition. Note that the master plan does allow Washington County Parks some flexibility on the final width of these easements to accommodate concerns of property owners and the realities of negotiating under a willing seller context. In some cases, such as near the existing private marina, acquiring property to the edge of the river may not be feasible.

In addition, Washington County Parks will work in concert with the City of Afton and Denmark Township on broader greenway planning initiatives associated with these trail segments to expand their scenic value and protect natural open space adjacent to the trail easement.

EASEMENT REQUIREMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH CARPENTER NATURE CENTER PROPERTY

Washington County will negotiate in good-faith with the Carpenter Nature Center Board for a trail easement through their property for mutual benefit. Whether that is best accomplished through formal acquisition of an easement or some other form of agreement has not been determined.

Under the assumption that the nature preserve will continue its focus on open space preservation, the actual width of the easement can be limited to only what is required to construct and maintain the trail. In general, a minimum 30 foot permanent easement is recommended, with a 50 foot construction easement also recommended. This trail segment is approximately 7,350 lineal feet.

TRAIL EASEMENT ACQUISITION COST PROJECTIONS

Given the rapidly changing land values and the sensitivity of the issue to local land owners, acquisition cost projections have not been established. Once the master plan has been adopted, Washington County Parks will maintain an open a dialogue with affected property owners to stay abreast of market rate acquisition costs and their level of interest in providing an easement. At the time of trail funding, Washington County will formally establish property values for review and approval by the Washington County Board and Metropolitan Council. To-date, no property owner has been individually contacted about acquisition or property valuations.

Cost projections for developing the trail are on a unit basis based on typical average costs for developing similar trails in Washington County and other counties and local municipalities. Typically, development costs to build the trail range average \$135,000/mile, with limited grading and site preparation costs included. For general trail development, this average cost is used, with additional line items associated with other development items. The following table defines the projected cost for developing the *optimal* trail route only. Alternate routes are not considered.

DEVELOPMENT COST PROJECTIONS

TRAIL DEVELOPMENT COST PROJECTIONS

The table provides cost projections for the optimal regional trail route. Alternative routes are not included in the estimate. Costs are based on 2005 dollars. (* Trails in St. Croix Bluffs are included as part of that master plan.)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	COST ESTIMATE
Trail	Development of 17.4 miles* of paved asphalt trail at 10 feet wide. Includes 2.5 inches of asphalt and 7 inches of Class 5 aggregate base. Also includes basic grade preparation. \$135,000/mile was used.	\$2,349,000
Trail Bridges	Two 60 foot span replacement bridges for old rail grade south of Carpenter Nature Center.	\$150,000
Trail Amenities	Basic support amenities, including information signage, trailhead kiosks, benches, picnic tables, and related.	\$90,000
Misc.	Extra construction related to trail development, including native vegetation reestablishment/enhancement, retaining walls, storm sewers, etc.	\$220,000
Total Master Plan Cost Estimate		\$2,809,000
Professional Fees (Survey, Design, Engineering) @ 15%		\$420,000
Total Overall Master Plan Cost Estimate		\$3,229,000

NATURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP COST PROJECTIONS

Cost projections for natural resource stewardship are not included under this master plan. Stewardship of natural areas adjacent to the trail will be part of larger programs associated with individual parks and natural areas. This includes St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park, Afton State Park, and Carpenter Nature Center.

In rights-of-way, the development cost estimate includes a cost item for vegetation reestablishment and enhancement. Thereafter, stewardship of natural vegetation in rights-of-ways would be budgeted through the Washington County Transportation Department.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY AND PRIORITIES

Implementation of the master plan will occur over an extended period of time coordinated with funding appropriations. Ideally, full development of the trail under one phase would be the most efficient and serve the broadest public need. However, uncertainty as to funding availability, and timeframes associated with easement acquisition, roadway upgrades, and local approvals may require development phasing, as the following considers.

PHASING PRIORITIES

The general strategy for phasing development is to work from south to north. The primary reason for this is the critical nature of securing a trail easement along the old rail grade from Point Douglas to and through the Carpenter Nature Center before larger-tract properties are further divided up, making acquisition and development of a trail corridor that much more challenging. Washington County Parks also places high value on connecting Point Douglas County Park and St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park together via a trail to expand use opportunities of both of these parks. Once this segment is completed, the phasing plan continues north, as the following listing defines.

PHASING SCHEDULE:

- Phase 1 – Point Douglas Park to St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park
- Phase 2 – St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park to Afton State Park – Quadrant Avenue and River Loop Branches
- Phase 3 – Afton State Park to City of Afton
- Phase 4 – St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park to Afton State Park – St. Croix Trail Branch

Quadrant Avenue Branch is listed as a higher priority than the St. Croix Trail Branch due to the more accommodating grades, making that route more family-friendly. Notably, both routes are key aspects to the overall trail master plan due to the different experiences and level of difficulty they offer.

Trail development within Afton State Park and St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park will be consistent with their master plans, which will take into consideration the timing of trail development associated with this master plan.

The timing of developing a bike route (widened shoulder) on St. Croix Trail is directly associated with and part of future road upgrading, which as of 2005, could be after 2015. Nonetheless, the bike route remains an important aspect of the overall regional trail master plan and its expedient development would have considerable value to those user groups.

MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

The Washington County Parks Division is charged with the management and operation of the County's park and trail system. This includes the St. Croix Valley Regional Trail as defined under this master plan. The Washington County Board of Commissioners establishes policies and goals for the park and trail system and through an annual budgeting process provides capital and operating funds for parks. The Parks and Open Space Commission, appointed by the County Board of Commissioners, serves as an advisory committee advocate for an improved and enhanced park and trail system in the County. The specific responsibilities of the Parks Commission include:

- Review proposals and make recommendations concerning park and trail acquisition and development
- Review and make recommendations concerning recreation programming, fees for facility use and park use policies
- Recommend enhancing natural resources in County parks and regional trail corridors
- Provide input into the County Park Policy Plan and Park Master Plans for park development site planning
- Perform fact-finding tasks as directed by the County Board.

A copy of the specific wording of the related ordinance is available through Washington County staff.

ORDINANCES

Public use and enjoyment of the County park and trail system, including the St. Croix Valley Regional Trail, is controlled by Ordinance No. 93, Park Ordinance, (the Ordinance) which was last amended on December 12, 2000. The Ordinance incorporates pertinent Minnesota statutes, and addresses the following issues:

- Regulation of Public Use
- Regulation of General Conduct
- Regulations Pertaining to General Parkland Operation
- Protection of Property, Structures, and Natural Resources
- Regulation of Recreation Activity
- Regulation of Motorized Vehicles, Traffic and Parking

A copy of the ordinance is available through Washington County.

ENFORCEMENT

Trail users will be informed of trail rules and regulations in a variety of ways. Kiosks and signs will be strategically located to address specific information about allowable trail uses, permitted and prohibited activities, fees, and directions. The Washington County Sheriff's Department responds to emergencies and criminal complaints.

GENERAL OPERATIONS

The Parks Division has an annual operations and maintenance budget of approximately \$1,750,000 to operate and maintain the County's park and trail system with approximately 12.5 permanent employees. In addition, approximately 62 seasonal employees are hired each year as life guards, maintenance workers and gate attendants.

Washington County's annual report of facts and figures for 2001 reported that 180,000 visits were made to St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park, which is in the study area. Development of the St. Croix Valley Regional Trail is expected to increase use of the park and also bring many more visitors to the area just to use the trail.

MAINTENANCE

Maintenance of facilities and lands is essential to protect public investment, enhance natural resource qualities and achieve the County's goals of providing users clean, safe, enjoyable year round park experiences. Washington County Parks Division has a clearly defined maintenance program. Reporting to the Park Director are the Parks Manager and Planner. Reporting to the Parks Manager are the Maintenance Supervisor, Parks Coordinator, and office staff. The Maintenance Supervisor oversees five maintenance workers, 12 seasonal maintenance workers, and six park attendants. In addition, the Washington County Transportation Department will provide assistance to maintaining the trail segment located in roadway rights-of-way.

As defined under its master plan, St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park has a maintenance facility that functions as an equipment and supply storage area. The facility also provides an indoor work area to perform minor vehicle and equipment maintenance, as well as serving as a place to conduct park maintenance operations. It is expected that this facility will support trail maintenance activities.

Accomplishing the maintenance needs of the St. Croix Valley Regional Trail will be challenging. As trails and other park land and facilities are further developed, new or expanded maintenance services will need to be provided. Washington County recognizes the need to remain committed to the maintenance needs of parks and trails. It is unlikely that existing staff and budget resources will be sufficient. Although increased funding is critical, perhaps even more important is increasing the number of staff. As an example, trail development and natural resource management have an initial cash intensive need, but ultimate success requires hands-on stewardship for many years to achieve desired results. This takes staff with the knowledge and time to commit to this stewardship. Traditional and non-traditional funding and staffing sources will have to be pursued to meet the maintenance needs of the park and the master plan objectives.

OUTREACH AND MARKETING

Washington County continues to expand its outreach effort, in an effort to improve public awareness of its park and trail facilities, programs, and services. This outreach effort has various components, including the following:

- **Printed Materials:** Washington County has developed and distributes on a regular basis brochures and maps, including trail and park maps and picnic, camping, and other brochures. Park and trail fliers are also distributed to County departments, libraries, community agencies, and other contacts throughout the community.
- **Electronic Communication:** Washington County has a web page to inform citizens about the County's functions and services (e.g., Park Commission meetings, the master planning process, trails, park facilities, and programs). In addition, the public can contact the Parks office through the County's e-mail system.
- **Other Outreach:** Other forms of outreach and marketing include displays at the Washington County Fair, articles in the County Commissioners' quarterly newspaper, the production of flyers and brochures and the display of information at County Service Centers and park kiosks. The County also publishes news releases and advertisements in local community and metropolitan area newspapers that highlight upcoming programs and facility openings. The County also promotes park and trail use through feature articles and presentations to other County departments and local agencies.
- **Marketing Initiatives:** Washington County will be developing a comprehensive marketing plan to increase public awareness, understanding, and use of park facilities, services and programs. In addition, the marketing plan will identify the need to expand and diversify marketing and communication efforts to advance park use by minority populations and special needs groups.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN IMPLEMENTING THE MASTER PLAN

Public interest in the trail is expected to remain high in the years to come, especially as it relates to the impact the trail will have on individual properties. Public involvement and comment will continue to be sought during the design and construction phase to ensure that every precaution against avoidable impacts is taken in a good-faith manner. In addition, forums for broader public input (e.g., open houses and presentations) are also envisioned as needed to communicate and exchange ideas with interested citizens.

The objectives associated with involving citizens in the implementation process include:

- Determine who the stakeholders are and their interest in a particular segment of the trail
- Understand their needs and unique perspectives
- Identify and understand concerns and problems
- Develop alternatives and find appropriate solutions with input from stakeholders

In addition, Washington County has an appointed Parks and Open Space Commission that advises the County Board on development initiatives within the county. The public is welcome to attend its regularly scheduled meetings. Also, Washington County is continuing to develop numerous tools to provide a consistent level of communication with interested citizens, as previously defined.

End of master plan.