Enhanced and Connected Network of Outdoor Recreation Facilities

Partnerships

Ecological Protection

Citizen Engagement, Education, and Outreach

Communication
The strategies are a range of responses to the opportunities for investment. They are not prescriptive nor are they exhaustive but lists of possibilities to be selected or rejected by decision-makers.

Detailed actions that allow decision-makers to take advantage of statewide opportunities are in five strategic areas Actions that can be applied in many different physical settings across Minnesota are listed first. Strategies for citizen engagement, education, and outreach are listed second, and strategies for improved communication are listed third. This section is organized into the following sections:

- Enhanced and connected network of outdoor recreation facilities
- Partnerships
- Ecological protection
- Citizen engagement, education, and outreach
- Communication

Enhanced and Connected Network of Outdoor Recreation Facilities

1. Create a Parks/Trails/Byway Network

The State’s scenic byways can be important integral parts of the State’s recreational network.

Strategies include:

- Reframing and redefining Minnesota’s Park and Trail Network as Minnesota’s Park, Trail, and Scenic Byway Network, a seamless recreational park/trail/byway network.

- Identifying segments where a byway can provide temporary connections between and among network “parts” where trail segments are planned but not yet built.

- Identifying and implementing byway segments to serve as connectors that span gaps between trails and park systems.

- Identifying and implementing byway corridors to serve as the park/trail/byway network’s backbone by spanning the long distances between the recreational assets located at great lengths from each other.

- Identifying and implementing places where byways provide gateways to important recreational sites.

- Extending the trail system by integrating the construction and funding of trail segments into byway construction or reconstruction projects where appropriate.

- Creating working alliances between and among park, trail, and byway groups to promote park/trail/byway use and to create the joint facilities described below.

2. Create Signature Park/Trail/Byway Network Facilities

Special places along the network of parks, trails, and byways across the State offer places to stop, points of entry into a number of the network’s park and trail systems, and places to gather information. Besides having historic or scenic importance, these special sites can be trailheads for water and terrestrial trails, rest stops for byway users, and gateways to local, regional, state, and federal parks and recreational areas.

Efficiencies, cost-effectiveness, and synergy among different types of recreational systems within the network could be created by these multi-use facilities that are larger, have more amenities, and use less land than a proliferation of single-use, less comprehensive facilities. These sites can improve access to information on the range of natural resource-based recreational opportunities available in the vicinity; provide extensive interpretation; reduce the abundance of parking lots; and reduce land acquisition, development, and management costs.

Although each site would have a recognizable signature identity, they would also have a distinctive character that reflects and supports its natural and cultural surroundings. Amenities offered could include comprehensive recreation information, interpretation, water, bathrooms, car parking, bike racks, and snowmobile spaces. The planned scenic byway-multi-trailhead facility at Beaver Bay is an example of this type of shared facility.

Implementation strategies for these special places include:

- Determining systems/facilities candidates for aggregated facilities within the larger recreational environment.
Conceptual graphics of a signature network facility at Beaver Bay. Efficiencies, cost-effectiveness, and synergy among different types of recreational systems within the network could be created by these multi-use facilities that are larger, have more amenities, and use less land than a proliferation of single-use, less comprehensive facilities. These special sites can be trailheads for water and terrestrial trails, rest stops for byway users, and gateways to local, regional, state, and federal parks and recreational areas.
Statewide Strategies

3. Use Road Projects to Help Build Trails
Roads can advance trail construction because they have land and other resources for building trails. Trail construction on the State's 22 scenic byways offers a particular opportunity for incorporating trails projects within road projects, because some roads run parallel to planned or existing trails.

Strategies include:
// Siting trail alignments on decommissioned roadbeds and bridges, alongside downgraded roads, and within wide right-of-ways.
// Incorporating trail construction into capital projects for both new and existing roads.

4. Use Abandoned Railroad Infrastructure for Trails
Although most of the State's abandoned rail lines have already been used for trails or been sold to private landowners, there are still some potential trail opportunities. Some private landowners of abandoned rail right-of-ways may be willing to sell a short but important needed segment. Although most train routes have been stable historically, new acquisition opportunities emerge periodically when rail routes are reconfigured as railroad companies merge or are discontinued because they are uneconomical, or when trains are rerouted within the existing rail network. These corridors, even when not very long, may be important segments because they can provide an important commuting link, bring trails into communities and through communities, or provide siting for a trail in a formerly tight configuration.

Decommissioned rail bridges also can provide opportunities for trails. In the future when current rail lines are upgraded to accommodate high-speed rail, some bridges may become available.

Rail corridor strategies include:
// Monitoring rail line changes.
// Identifying abandoned rail corridors, with particular attention to growth areas such as the Metropolitan Area and the growth counties in Greater Minnesota.

5. Integrate and Connect Local, Regionally Significant, State, and Federal Trails
Currently the State's fragmented trail network has many trail providers and trail systems, many incomplete or unbuilt trails, snowmobile trails that are dependent upon yearly permits from private landowners, and local trails that do not connect to each other or to any regional or state facilities.

Strategies to create a more complete, connected trail network include:
// Identifying places where a trail segment from one trail system can contribute to another; for example, a local trail could provide a segment of a regional trail.
// Acquiring more permanent trail corridors for snowmobiles.
// Identifying trails that can serve different seasonal uses; a winter trail and a summer trail could use the same or parallel alignments within a corridor.

The many trails along Lake Superior's edge provide an opportunity to integrate and connect local, regionally significant, state, and federal trails.
6. Connect with Short Trail Segments

Because some state and regionally significant parks are located close to regional centers, there are opportunities to link communities to parks, just as the Blazing Star State Trail links Albert Lea to Myre/Big Island State Park. In areas of Greater Minnesota where the longer, more traditional state and regional trails are not practical, creating a short trail that starts in a regional center is an option. Besides encouraging commuting for recreation opportunities, these shorter trails can provide other opportunities for commuting to work and to school, if they are linked to community trail systems. An example of a commuting-for-work and commuting-for-recreation trail is the proposed trail connection from the transit stop in Golden Valley to the Luce Line State Trail.

Strategies include:
// Identifying routes to nearby parks.

7. Strengthen Water Trails

Potential investments for Minnesota’s four thousand miles of water trails range from simply making them more visible to upgrading facilities, including:
// Posting signature trail signs along roads, on bridges, and in local, regional, and state parks.
// Marking water trails on federal, state, regional, and local park maps.
// Creating and posting water trail maps and interpretive materials at access points and in the parks and other public places along the trails.
// Using sustainable design, installation techniques, and management practices in creating and retrofitting new and existing boat access points and their parking lots.
// Making water trails a part of the network facility sites.
// Creating more access points on existing public lands.
// Providing more rental kayaks in parks to promote water trail use and accommodate the growing interest in kayaking as reflected in the growing number of registered kayaks in the State.

Partnerships

1. Create Partnerships for Enhanced Programming and Management

Partnerships create opportunities to improve the services offered, provide more extensive interpretation, make seamless connections, improve efficiency, and reduce costs. For example, local citizens and the DNR work together to run the mill at Old Mill State Park during one weekend every fall and the Nicollet Historical Society helps staff Fort Ridgely State Park.

Examples of partnership opportunities include:
// Creating alliances with local active-living efforts.
// Pursuing relationships with tribal governments on access to and management of recreation facilities, similar to the Grand Portage agreement, wherever appropriate and desirable.

City of New Ulm Conceptual Graphic, Riverside Park Trailhead. An example of a city park that could be a water and terrestrial trailhead.
2. Create Recreational Resources by Partnering on Natural Resource Acquisition Projects

As non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies work to acquire areas of natural resource significance, there may be opportunities to integrate a recreational agenda into some projects. An example of this is Dakota County’s corridor efforts, which integrate wildlife habitat acquisition, water quality protection, and trail development.

3. Improve Physical Facilities through Partnering at the Local Level

Local additions and enhancements to the network can be provided through partnerships with local systems and programs.

Examples include:

// Using local trails segments as pieces in the regionally significant/state network.

// Using local park sites for trailheads and water trail accesses.

// Creating alliances with local park and trail providers, Safe-Route-to-School initiatives, State Health Improvement Program grantees, and other recreational efforts where appropriate, to work together to build trails to improve access to and the use of parks and trails located in close proximity to local communities.

4. Provide Transit Access to Parks and Trails

Because there is very little current transit access to parks and trails, strategies to increase that access include:

// Considering recreational access as part of the light- and heavy-rail passenger service planning efforts by identifying the station-to-park trail connections needed to improve access.

// Exploring the use of dial-a-ride service to serve parks.

// Partnering with organizations that have buses and vans to provide park shuttle service during times of high park use, such as weekends and holidays.

Ecological Protection

1. Continue and Expand the Natural Resource Protection Role of Parks and Trails

By statute state parks must play a role in natural resource protection; many park locations were chosen to protect a particular landscape type. Increasingly, local and regional parks are being created in landscapes that need protection and trail corridors are being sited to provide wildlife corridors.

Strategies to enhance the natural resource protection role of parks and trails include:

// Considering regional, regionally significant, and local parks and trails as potential natural resource protectors.

2. Create a Green Legacy: Green Parks, Trails, and Recreation Areas

Located in areas of important, sensitive, and beautiful natural resources, outdoor recreation parks and trails are susceptible to damage from inappropriate design, installation, management, and use.

Strategies to green park and trail systems include:

// Requiring a site plan review for natural resource impact as part of new and retrofitting project processes.

// Using local materials from the region for construction projects whenever appropriate and possible.
3. Use Parks and Trails as Environmental Educators

Parks and trails offer opportunities to educate the public by demonstrating sustainable design, construction, and management practices through the interpretation of the natural resource protection and restoration strategies employed. Strategies to use the park and trail systems as educational venues for sustainable practices include:

- Requiring a site plan review for the identification of educational opportunities as part of the design process for new and retrofitting projects.
- Integrating the identified educational opportunities into the project scope.
- Providing on-site interpretive materials of the what, why, and how of the natural resource protection strategies used in projects.

Citizen Engagement, Education, and Outreach

1. Improve Accessible Facilities

Many park and trail facilities are accessible to those with disabilities, but there also are many that do not meet the current accessibility standards. Strategies to increase accessibility include:

- Bringing facilities up to current accessibility standards.
- Evaluating trails for strategies that would increase wheelchair access by making retrofits over time.

2. Accommodate Families

Many regionally significant, regional, or state parks have playground equipment and a sand box for small children. Some have active areas like volleyball courts and rock climbing places, or they provide rental equipment like kayaks, canoes, and snowshoes, which appeal to youth, young adults, and others who prefer more active recreation. More child, youth, and young adult-centered facilities would allow for greater use by families with young children and teenagers, young adults, and grandparents with grandchildren. Strategies to increase and improve family-friendly facilities include:

- Assessing current facilities for family friendliness.
- Implementing family-friendly facilities through retrofits and the design of new facilities.
Statewide Strategies

3. Improve and Enhance Group Camping
Many campsites in state parks are group campsites, which are usually separate from the active day-use parts of the park that accommodate group activities, such as the picnic grounds, the picnic shelter, the boat launch, the fishing pier, the playground, and the swimming beach. Most group campsites are groupings of individual campsites with places for a tent. Each individual site is equipped with a picnic table and a small fire ring for cooking. Many are primitive sites with a vault toilet nearby. Typically there are no group facilities—no central gathering place, no playground for children, no group cooking facilities, and no common eating place. A few permit small campers, but most of the group camp areas allow only tent camping. Some are a distance from parking and have carts for hauling camping gear.

Strategies for expanding and enhancing group camping experiences include:
// Retrofitting primitive group campsites with spaces and facilities for group activities, like Crow Wing State Park’s screened picnic shelter and Great River Bluffs’ large campfire ring.
// Allowing small trailers or pickup campers in some group campsites, as at Lake Bemidji State Park.
// Increasing the Group Camp inventory by acquiring former privately held camps as they come up for sale.

4. Engage Citizens, Interest Groups and Communities in Park and Trail Planning, Inventorying, and Monitoring
Diverse stakeholder involvement is critical to effective parks and trails planning and management. An informed and engaged citizenry will lead to better stewardship of outdoor recreation resources by citizens and by park and trail managers. Citizens, interest groups, and communities can help with the identification of management goals and objectives, the development of indicators and standards of quality, the implementation of inventory and monitoring programs, the selection of site design or management strategies, and traditional plan reviews.

Strategies include:
// Seeking out and engaging citizens, interest groups, and communities in meaningful dialogue throughout planning processes.
// Considering and addressing local impacts and the needs of traditionally underrepresented populations in decision-making and management actions.
// Facilitating cooperation through collaborative planning approaches that engage diverse stakeholders promote mutual learning, resource pooling, and creative problem solving.
// Implementing inventory and monitoring that engages stakeholders (public, private, cooperators) to cooperatively determine indicators, standards, and timeframes through initial planning and ongoing participation.

Retrofitting some of these sites with true group facilities will enhance their function as places for groups to recreate. This need will grow as Minnesota grows more diverse; many new Minnesotans from non-European backgrounds prefer recreating in large extended-family groups.

Providing non-primitive group camping experiences gives new outdoor opportunities to a wider range of people who don't want to camp primatively—inter-generational groups, people with physical limitations, seniors, and people new to camping. Group Centers in eight state parks provide opportunities for modern group camp experiences, as do some regionally significant parks such as Hok-Si-La and Lake Ojiketa City Parks. Most of these facilities are former Works Progress Administration, Campfire Girls, or Scout camps.
Communication

1. Enhance Message Quality and Delivery of Communication Materials

Most parks and trails have descriptive information available to help users and potential users, on the internet, at the site, or both. The type and quality of the information varies across type and within systems. Information about regionally significant parks and trails has the largest range of information. Some are well documented; others are not. The DNR’s materials describing parks and trails are formatted similarly for state parks, but the information describing facilities and the information on the map varies. Information varies with trail types. State water trail information is much more extensive than horse trail information.

Strategies to improve descriptive materials and maps include:
// Creating a data standard for information collected on the State’s parks and trails so that the many concurrent data collection efforts are more compatible.

// Creating a minimum standard for park and trail information to be provided and an order for listing them. For example, the DNR has a protocol for listing park facility information so one can easily check to see if there is a volleyball court, camping facilities, a playground, etc.

// Creating web materials that can be printed in color or in black and white. Reading maps can be easier if the different kinds of trails and types of facilities are color-coded, but black-and-white versions also should be available to ensure accessibility for those who don’t have the capacity to print in color and to provide inexpensive copies for distribution at the facilities.

// Creating park and trail interactive electronic applications for devices such as smartphones, netbooks, etc.

// Improving interpretive materials and posting them at access points and in the parks and other public places along terrestrial and water trails.

2. Create Integrated Park/Trail/Byway Communication Materials

Great progress has been made to have information about recreation that is comprehensive and accessible, but much of it is still uneven and fragmented. The digital revolution has provided opportunities to make information more accessible via the internet and to improve the quantity and quality of the information, creating new information tools like posted virtual tours and comment sites. But the information tends to be funded separately and produced separately by individual recreation providers and promoters. Some system efforts have well developed material; others do not.
Impact of information is limited because it is often focused on one type of facility or experience and doesn’t integrate information about other recreational opportunities offered by the same recreation provider or by another system, even if it is close by. The separate brochures, maps, and websites for a park or a park system, a bike trail, horse trails and camps, ATV trails, etc. can make understanding all the recreational opportunities and how they are related to each other challenging.

Strategies to integrate communication materials include:

- Identifying the State's byways as an integral part of the State's park and trail network through signage, maps, and other promotional and informational efforts.

- Creating a common vocabulary to name and describe features across system and facilities. It should be easy to understand the difference between a group camp, a group center, and a modern camp.

- Marking the presence of other systems within facilities: If a biking trail or water trail goes through a park, it should be clearly identified by trail name in the park and on the park’s map.

- Exploring ways to secure resources to produce brochures, websites, and interactive applications (“mobile apps”) that address multiple recreation opportunities.

5. Improve Way Finding

Familiar brown signs posted along interstates and other major highways and roads help visitors find their way to state parks; but finding your way to most regionally significant parks or to parks from communities is often problematic.

Strategies to guide the visitor include:

- Posting signs on county roads or in communities to help visitors find their way to the park and back if they have left the park to buy supplies or take advantage of other recreational opportunities in the area. Signs that give distances are particularly helpful.

- Painting symbols directly on the road surface improves difficult routes; for example, following the painted ducks makes finding Crex Meadows easy.

- Including a map on how to get to the park as part of the park map available on the website and in the park is also helpful. The Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park map is a good example of this.

- Making water trails more visible to the general public and to park and terrestrial trail users by posting signature trail signs along roads, on bridges, and in state and regional parks at water access points.

3. Develop Information to Serve Multiple, Diverse Audiences

To welcome and facilitate participation among diverse age and ethnic groups before, during, and after visits and create the desire for additional visits:

- Create marketing materials that target diverse audiences with appropriate languages and pictures with a focus on experiences and benefits, rather than activities.

4. Develop and Launch an Integrated Inclusive Marketing Campaign in Focused Outlets

Inclusive marketing strategies include:

- Engaging cooperative marketing campaigns across providers within regions.

- Targeting institutions and organizations where audiences can be reached.

- Delivering customer service training across providers to ensure providers understand how to welcome diverse age and ethnic groups.

- Targeting the children in families with limited English speaking and reading skills as they serve as translators and the impetus for family interest and participation in recreation.