GNEISS / PRAIRIE BANKS

MINNESOTA FALLS:

AREA CHARACTER ANALYSIS

ALIGNMENT STRATEGY
AREA CHARACTER ANALYSIS:
OPPORTUNITIES & CONSTRAINTS

WORLD WAR MEMORIAL PARK:
World War Memorial Park is a 100-acre park south of downtown Granite Falls. Created in 1925, it was improved in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration. Highway 67 divides this historic park into two sections. The northern section is along the river and has a local trail, monumental stone entry, boat launch, picnic area, pavilion for large gatherings, swimming beach, and boarded-up beach house in disrepair.

OPPORTUNITIES: Access to the river and the park’s many amenities make this an attractive destination for trail users and a potential trailhead location. Interpretation of the park’s history and geology could be an interesting addition to trail user’s experience.

CONSTRAINTS: Creating a trailhead in the park’s main section would compromise the park’s integrity and historic character. Poor sight lines make crossing busy Highway 67 hazardous.

MEMORIAL PARK CAMPGROUND:
Located across Highway 67 from the park’s main entrance, the campground area features gneiss outcroppings and a lake. Existing facilities include campsites, picnic structures, restrooms, and parking.

OPPORTUNITIES: The campgrounds’ unique location within the gneiss formations and its facilities make this an attractive stop for trail users and a potential trailhead location.

CONSTRAINTS: Making the crossing of Highway 67 less hazardous is an important safety issue. Reduced speeds, striped crosswalks, and/or flashing lights are needed.

GNEISS OUTCROPPINGS:
Estimated at 3.8 billion years old, these landscape features are some of the oldest exposed rocks on earth.

OPPORTUNITIES: The gneiss formations provide an opportunity to interpret the geologic history of the region by highlighting this compelling ancient landscape.

CONSTRAINTS: These outcroppings are best viewed as objects at a distance, which has implications for the trail alignment. The trail should not run adjacent to or on top of the mounds.
WORLDWAR MEMORIAL PARK

MEMORIAL PARK CAMPGROUND

GNEISS OUTCROPPINGS
AREA CHARACTER ANALYSIS:

OPPORTUNITIES & CONSTRAINTS

MINNESOTA FALLS DAM:
The Minnesota Falls Dam is a remaining vestige of the nineteenth century Minnesota Falls settlement that was dismantled when the county seat was moved to Granite Falls and the mills were burned.

OPPORTUNITIES: Despite its limitations on access, this historic settlement site has value as an amenity along the trail. The settlement site could be interpreted at a rest stop along the trail that overlooks the dam.

CONSTRAINTS: Physical access to the dam site is not possible because the dam is flanked on both sides by private land and is in a federally designated flood plain.

GNEISS OVERLOOK:
As the trail leaves the river bottoms to ascend the gneiss prairie bluff, a splendid panorama of the Glacial River Warren Valley is revealed. The City of Granite Falls, the bluffs that form the northern edge of the glacial river bed, and the present day Minnesota River are within the glacial river bed and are all clearly visible. Numerous gneiss outcroppings and the remnant native prairie vegetation are visible on the hill itself.

OPPORTUNITIES: Locating an overlook along the trail’s long ascent to the bluff top would provide trail users an opportunity to view the river valley and a place to stop and rest as they pedal up the hill.

CONSTRAINTS: The ascent to the bluff top is long and challenging. This steep, sensitive, and relatively undisturbed landscape may require special design solutions to accommodate the construction of the trail.

BLUFF TOP VIEW & HIGHWAY 23 RIGHT OF WAY:
On the bluff top the right-of-way along Highway 23 offers another opportunity for siting an overlook. This breathtaking view from the one hundred foot tall bluff top provides an expansive view of the Minnesota River Valley and the City of Granite Falls.

OPPORTUNITIES: This overlook could be used as a rest area. It could also interpret the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Native Prairie Bank Program.

CONSTRAINTS: The best views of the valley are from lands enrolled in the Native Prairie Banks Program and the DNR’s Conservation Easement Lands Program that restrict access and use.
TRAIL ALIGNMENT STRATEGY:
In the Gneiss / Prairie Banks two potential alignments were identified.

TRAIL ALIGNMENT: POTENTIAL SPINE TRAIL
The option one trail alignment connects to the local Memorial Park Trail which is being built and links the trail to park amenities. It:

- Crosses under the Highway 212 Bridge and passes the Highway 23 WPA overlook and the Yellow Medicine County Historical Society,
- Parallels Highway 67 to Memorial Park,
- Follows the Memorial Park Trail (phase two) past the boat launch to the eastern park limits,
- Proceeds south on the XCEL Energy utility right of way to the Granite Falls Golf Club boundary,
- Follows the Memorial Park Trail (phase three) and links back to a long and gradual switchback past rock outcroppings and wetlands,
- Climbs the bluff along Highway 23,
- Provides a view of Granite Falls and the gneiss valley at three interpretive rest areas, and
- Arrives at the bluff top at the Upper Sioux Community.

TRAIL ALIGNMENT: POTENTIAL ALTERNATE SPINE TRAIL
The option two trail alignment:

- Skirts the local trail to Memorial Park (phase two),
- Climbs the long, difficult hill on a separate right of way parallel to Highway 23,
- Provides views of the rock outcroppings and wetlands and a long view of Granite Falls and gneiss valley,
- and
- Arrives at the top of the bluff at the intersection of Highway 23 and State Highway 274.
TRAILHEAD OPTIONS:
Two potential sites for trailheads were identified in the Minnesota Falls: Gneiss / Prairie Banks.

INTERPRETIVE CENTER & TRAILHEAD:
The first trailhead option is located at the Yellow Medicine County Historical Museum; it:
- Works for both proposed trail alignments,
- Uses the cultural assets and the existing facilities associated with the museum, and
- May be too close to the trailhead in downtown Granite Falls.

PARK TRAILHEAD:
The second trailhead is located at the Memorial Park Campgrounds; it:
- Works only for the first alignment option, and
- Links the trail with the lake, the river, the campsites, the beach, the restrooms, the picnic facilities, and the parking at Memorial Park.

TRAIL RESOURCES:
The resources close to the proposed trailhead include:
- The Yellow Medicine County Historical Museum,
- A “canotidan” or the hole in the rock where the little people live,
- Picnic areas and restrooms in Memorial Park,
- River access for swimming and boating,
- Campgrounds,
- Exposed ancient gneiss outcroppings, and
- Native plant communities.