LINKING COMMUNITIES:
THE MINNESOTA RIVER TRAIL

THE CENTER FOR CHANGING LANDSCAPES
COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE &
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INTRODUCTION

PROJECT SCOPE:

Recreation, natural and cultural resource protection, tourism, and community livability are promoted by designs for the Minnesota River State Trail by a University-DNR-community partnership using design, computer technology, and community participation.

This work augments the Department of Natural Resource’s master plan trail work with communities to create a whole systems approach to integrating state trails in communities and their landscapes. Future development patterns in the trail corridor were projected using computer technology. Site specific designs for the integration of the trail with trail communities that address such elements as trail head facilities, trail connections to natural and cultural sites, design of community trail systems that connect to the state trail, and alternative potential state trail corridor alignments.

State recreational trails are very popular because they create opportunities for Minnesotans to experience the natural environment, add to the livability of communities, and contribute considerably to the tourist economy. Valuable in and of themselves, state trails can leverage even more value if the larger context of natural resource systems, cultural amenities, future development patterns, and community form are considered and linked to trail corridors. High-quality recreational experiences, alignment alternatives, natural systems protection strategies, community aspirations and concerns, linkages to cultural and natural amenities, impact of current and future development patterns, the needs of a variety of trail users, specific site designs, and local trail designs were studied. The Granite Falls to Skalbakken proposed trail segment was selected based on timeliness, community interest, opportunities to enhance existing and create new amenities, and the need to remove trail development challenges.

A project team from the Center for Changing Landscapes, an interdisciplinary design center of the College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (CALA) and the College of Natural Resources (CNR) of the University of Minnesota, the Trails and Waterways Division of the DNR, users groups, and local community groups worked together. The DNR led work with communities and trail groups to ensure local and user input on recreational, tourism, and community issues. The Center for Changing Landscapes provided both technical and design expertise. CNR project team members used existing data, satellite imaging and sophisticated computer technology including neural network modeling methodology to project current land use trends and model land transformations that predict future land use scenarios. CALA project team members created design scenarios for the trail, trail connections, trail amenities, and the trail communities. The work was presented in public meetings for discussion, feedback, and final presentations.

The project has several products. These include maps of the ecology of the trail’s landscape and projections of future development and land use trends and designs that can be used by communities to make decisions that make local connections to the state trail and enhance local landscapes and community form.
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TRAIL ALIGNMENT

LOCAL TRAIL CONNECTIONS

SCENIC BYWAY

TRAILHEAD DESIGN

LANDSCAPE INTERPRETATION

CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

LINKING EXISTING AMENITIES

RIVER ACCESS AND VIEWING