

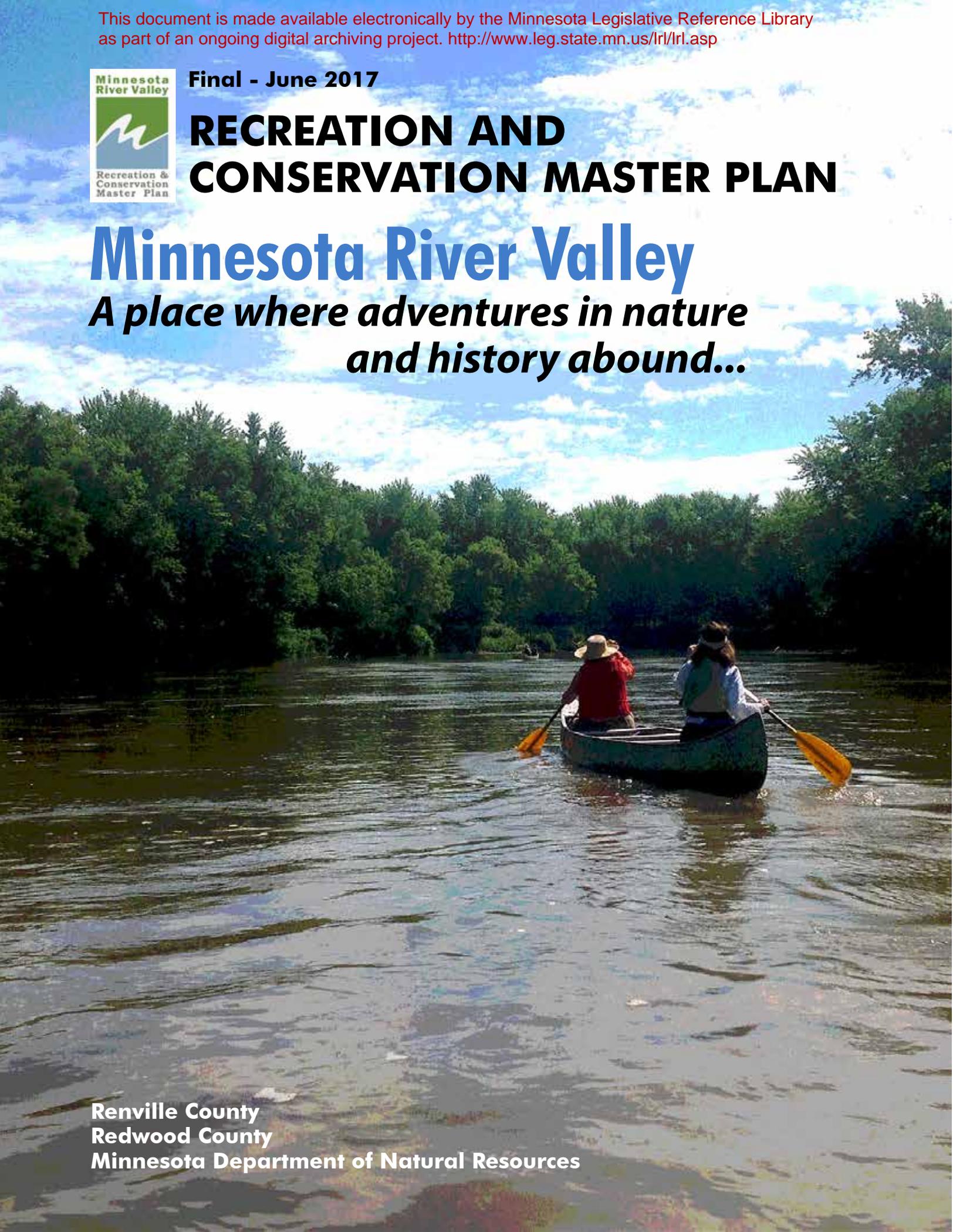


Final - June 2017

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION MASTER PLAN

Minnesota River Valley

***A place where adventures in nature
and history abound...***



**Renville County
Redwood County
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**

Photo – Ramsey Falls on the Redwood River



Final - June 2017

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Minnesota River Valley

a place where adventures in nature and history abound...



prepared for:

Renville County, Redwood County, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources



prepared by:

Great Outdoors Consultants

Robert Peccia & Associates

Red Canoe

I+S Group

Funding for this project was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR).

Photo - Precambrian crystalline rock with depression created by smaller rocks and erosion





Forward

Massive rock walls rising directly from the water to form the bank of the river. Similar rock walls, waiting for climbers or sightseers, stand in the county parks along the river. The rock making up these walls, at over three billion years old, is among the oldest exposed rock on our planet earth.

Horseback riding and hiking trails follow the river on the floodplain and climb the bluffs of the valley. A short hike from the main river channel alongside any one of the numerous streams brings the explorer to waterfalls.

Paddlers on the river can experience miles of wilderness without seeing a bridge or a power line. Although paddlers will see bald eagles, deer, otters, and waterfowl and might see a few cows grazing along the shore. Getting on or off the river

Photo - Canoeing on the MN River

is easy at the frequent landings.

Visitors who wish to camp along the river can find everything from primitive tent sites to fully equipped RV sites, motel, or Bed and Breakfast in a nearby town.

People who want to take it a bit easier can stay in their car and drive the miles of scenic Minnesota River Byway and connecting but equally scenic rural roads.

Not far from the main channel of the river, several historic monuments commemorate one of the most important Minnesota History events since European settlement: the 1862 war between the Dakota People and the United States.

Yet, this phenomenal collection of outdoor recreation opportunities, enveloped in historic significance, is largely ignored by the people who live right next door and is virtually unknown to anyone living outside the local area.

Most people in Minnesota, including local residents, think corn and soybeans when they think about Redwood County and Renville County. Yet, the Minnesota River and the valley that separate the two counties are home to what can and should be a premier outdoor recreation destination for our region and beyond. Every feature mentioned and described in the first five paragraphs of this forward is found in the Renville/Redwood section of the Minnesota River Valley. A place many locals refer to as Tatanka Bluffs.

Rightly our story should start a little over 13,000 years ago when glacial Lake Agassiz broke through its southern moraine and the resulting Glacial River Warren carved the valley, in some places five miles or more from bluff top to bluff top, that is now the home of the meandering Minnesota River.

A better, and more current place to start is about two decades ago when citizens, local to Redwood and Renville counties, began looking at outdoor recreation and history tourism as an economic engine and a possible solution to the loss of rural population that accompanied consolidation of farming into fewer and larger operations.

Forward page 2

Rivers, the original avenues of human migration and economic activity in the United States, have become the focus of urban revitalization and tourism across the nation. The question was asked; why could our Minnesota River, home to spectacular scenery and extensive history, not be the centerpiece of an outdoor recreation and tourism destination?

Answering the question; Why Not Our River? Resulted in a journey, as meandering as the Minnesota River itself, that leads us to this Master Plan.

The Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan was envisioned as a way to describe how a Minnesota River Outdoor Recreation and History Tourism Destination might look. The plan describes what the primary tourism features might be, provides a plan for getting from the situation now to that desired future situation, and to serve as a basis for seeking funding to implement the plan.

Much of what is needed in a destination tourism area is already in place. The Minnesota Legislature designated the Minnesota River State Trail in (2002). That State Trail should form the backbone of the Outdoor Recreation Destination. The State of Minnesota owns, in the form of Wildlife Management Areas, Aquatic Management Areas, Parks and Trails Properties, and Scientific & Natural Areas, an impressive amount of public land in the area. The existing Renville County Parks and Ramsey Park in Redwood Falls provide camping sites and trails and plenty of space for a wide range of additional outdoor recreation.

This Master Plan will provide a guide as to the additional, and renovated and improved features and facilities to make the Renville/Redwood county segment of the Minnesota River and its adjacent valley, the Tatanka Bluffs, into a highly desirable and much visited Outdoor Recreation and Tourism destination.

Many people and groups played a role in bringing this planning process into existence and in completing the Master Plan. While it is perhaps unwise to specifically credit individual groups given the many involved, two specific groups deserve mention and credit. The Tatanka Bluffs Corridor and its members played an immeasurable role in bringing the idea of a Tourism Destination to the public's attention and keeping it on the public discussion agenda. Without Tatanka Bluffs constant push to move the discussion forward, these efforts would likely not be taking place. Renville and Redwood Counties also deserve credit for partnering together and taking the initiative to obtain a grant from the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota's Resources to fund this planning process. Without the Counties' commitment of time and resources, this planning process would never have taken place.

Writing a Master Plan is only a first step, then the real work begins. The people of Renville County and Redwood County, and others from government agencies and other organizations concerned with tourism and outdoor recreation must look for ways and find the resources to implement this plan. If this work is done, our Tatanka Bluffs area will someday be a magnet for tourists, with the accompanying bustle of economic activity in our nearby towns, as much as it is known for corn and soybeans.

Ted L. Suss
Chairperson, Redwood county Parks and Trails Commission
March 2017



Photo - Minnesota River

MNDNR Forward

There is something about a major river like the Minnesota River that is magnetically attracting. The power of rushing water in the spring and the still quiet backwater pools in the summer can be mesmerizing.

The Minnesota River Valley scene is picturesque. Cattle are grazing in a lush green pasture with the river in the background. Straight rows of corn are growing next to the pasture. Not far away on the tree lined rock bluff a researcher carefully measures and records the vital statistics of a five line skink that was captured from under a flat rock. The skink is on the threatened species list and is quickly released to scurry back under the rock. On the river a group of canoeists silently glides past a sandbar where they see a few forked sticks sticking up in the sand that are evidence that recently a group of anglers was fishing. They were probably fishing for world class size catfish. On top of the bluff history minded visitors stop and read kiosks about the tragic history of the United States-Dakota War of 1862. Further down the valley a hunter stops at one of many wildlife management areas to scout for a good location for the fall hunting season. Not far away a family van enters into a county park and pulls into a camp ground for a few nights of camping and family fun. The thread that weaves all these activities together is the Minnesota River. The Minnesota River flows through the valley and this river is the state's

namesake. In fact the river created the valley when the river was known as the Glacial River Warren that drained a huge lake formed when a northern glacier melted. This current generation of people is only the latest population to identify this valley as a very special place. There are archeological sites that date habitation of the valley to thousands of years ago. Two State Parks bookend this section of the river valley.

There is something about a major river like the Minnesota River that is magnetically attracting. People are drawn to a major river. The power of rushing water in the spring and the still quiet backwater pools in the summer can be mesmerizing. The valley is far different than the prairie ecosystem through which it flows. Generations of local prairie residents have grown up "going to the river" to fish, hunt, hike, visit a historic site or state park or enjoy the ambience of a forested bluff. It was different than the prairie and the difference was an interesting attraction. It was part of a rural community where people knew each other as neighbors and didn't object to a hiker or an angler going across their land to the fishing hole.

Time has brought changes to the valley. It now seems to flood oftener. Land ownership has changed and access has diminished. The land is not all locally owned. Once abundant natural resources are now diminished. Rare geological formations are threatened. What hasn't changed is that people are still drawn to the magic of the river and the valley through which it flows. The management plan is an ambitious effort to maintain public access to a wide array of outdoor recreation opportunities, protect ecologically sensitive plants and endangered animals and maintain the agricultural tradition of the area. It is an effort to ensure that future generations will feel the magic of the river valley and find at their doorstep the outdoor recreation opportunities that psychologist suggest is therapeutic, rejuvenating and healthy.

It is an ambitious effort but for those of us who grew up "going to the river" it is an effort worth pursuing and accomplishing.

Dennis Frederickson, Director
DNR Southern Region
May 2017

Executive Summary



Photo - MN River Valley

The purpose of this Recreation and Conservation Master Plan is to create a shared vision to protect, restore, and enhance the natural, historical, and cultural resources of the Minnesota River Valley (the Valley) for current and future generations to explore and enjoy.

The Valley can provide economic opportunity to improve the quality of life for residents and develop an outdoor recreational destination promoting regional economic growth, recreation development, and tourism.

Renville and Redwood Counties collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) to create the Master Plan. Funding was provided in part by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). MN DNR and the Counties contributed staff time and other resources to the process. The plan addresses natural and cultural resources, interpretive services, recreational opportunities, and administrative activities. It also provides recommendations on a management unit designation of the area under the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation System (MN ORS).

Photo - Canoeing on the MN River



Figure 1.

MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY RECREATION NETWORK CONCEPTUAL DIAGRAM

Key Recommendations on the Diagram:

- Establish a Trail System to Connect Communities to Public Lands, Rivers, History, and Recreation
- Protect Important Habitat Areas
- Improve Access and Facilities to the Minnesota River
- Scenic Byway Connects People to Interesting Sites and Experiences
- Communities Provide Recreation and Tourism Services



Executive Summary (continued)

Master Plan Vision

The Minnesota River Valley in Redwood and Renville Counties is a shared landscape with:

- Nature-based recreation opportunities in a conserved agricultural prairie riverine ecosystem
- An outstanding example of natural, cultural, historical, and agricultural resource conservation
- Increased public access to diverse outdoor recreation opportunities
- Essential local and state partnerships that effectively lead conservation, nature-based recreation and tourism, management, marketing, and interpretation of the area
- Successful management and marketing that strengthens the rural regional economy, resulting in a higher quality of life for residents and visitors alike

The Valley is celebrated as a place where adventures in nature and history abound.

Desired Visitor Experiences

The Minnesota River Valley (MRV) is a beautiful landscape that has been taken care of and enjoyed for many generations. The Minnesota River and its landscape helps define local culture and lifestyle. Scenic roads, trails, parks, conservation lands, rivers, lakes, historic sites, and agritourism make up a recreation network that connects communities and other services that greatly enhance recreation opportunities in the Valley.

Outdoor activities in a beautiful natural setting create unforgettable memories, encouraging return visits. Scenic touring with many overlooks, interpretive stops and recreation sites benefit many people with varying degrees of physical abilities. Hunting and fishing opportunities are better than ever in the Valley with improved information and access to the river and public wildlife habitats. Anglers, boaters, paddlers and wildlife watchers will find numerous improved access sites to the river, its tributaries and natural areas.

Many residents and visitors enjoy camping in well designed and maintained public and private campgrounds with connections to the River and trails. The Minnesota River Valley has a rich history and culture that residents and visitors will enjoy exploring with improved programs,

information, and facilities. This collection of recreation experiences improves the quality of life for residents and draws visitors to the area again and again.



Photo - Morton Outcrops Scientific and Natural Area

Desired Resource Conditions

The Master Plan seeks to preserve historic/cultural resources and traditional lifestyles while enhancing ecological diversity. Programs, expertise and funds are sought to support private conservation-based agriculture and other private lands. Rare and sensitive ecological resources are protected. Habitat restorations occur in wetlands, woodlands, rock outcrops, and native prairie. Habitats are managed to strengthen wildlife populations which benefits recreation opportunities such wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing. Historic and cultural resources are protected and interpreted to increase their value and appreciation. Public park and conservation lands are strategically expanded to manage habitat while providing balanced recreation opportunities. The Minnesota River Valley is a beautiful natural landscape that is conserved for its own inherent value and for people to enjoy today and into the future.

Goals, Actions & Implementation

Master plan goals and actions were developed through a participatory and professional process including interested citizens, representatives from city, county, state governments, and consultants. The research section of the Master Plan describes the participatory process and research used to help define the goals and actions. The Master Plan has five general goals including:

- Recreation
- Conservation
- Culture & heritage
- Nature & culture interpretation/education
- Framework for land use

The implementation section of the Master Plan provides guidance for phasing, priorities, organization, responsibilities, support, and funding to achieve the Master Plan vision. The Minnesota River Valley in Redwood and Renville Counties is a regionally significant opportunity to continue the tradition of conservation, outdoor recreation, nature-based tourism, and sustainable agriculture for many generations to come.



Photo - MN River Valley National Scenic Byway



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Vision, Goals, Actions

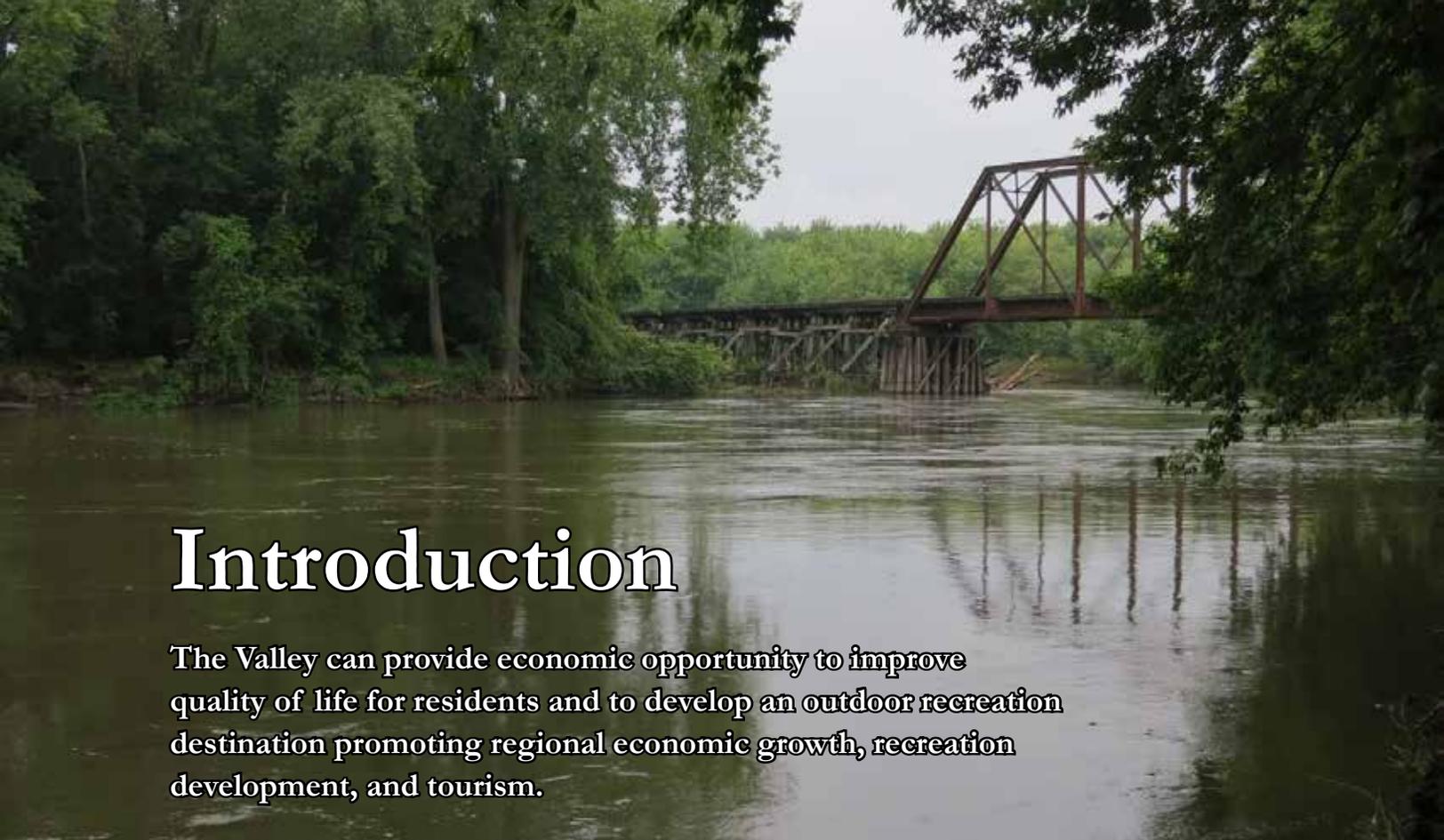
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Introduction

The Valley can provide economic opportunity to improve quality of life for residents and to develop an outdoor recreation destination promoting regional economic growth, recreation development, and tourism.

Photo - Historic railroad bridge over the Minnesota River

Redwood and Renville County citizens care deeply about the Minnesota River Valley landscape, its people and its future. They cared enough to seek assistance through state and federal programs in 2009 to explore options for protecting and promoting its natural and cultural heritage. In 2013, a group of citizens, business owners, conservation groups and landowners came together to provide recommendations to the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) on how this might be done.

This Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan (Master Plan) was prepared to create a shared vision to protect, restore, and enhance the natural, historical, and cultural resources of the Minnesota River Valley (the Valley) for current and future generations to explore and enjoy. The Valley can provide economic opportunity to improve quality of life for residents by developing an outdoor recreation destination. Destinations such as these result in regional economic growth, recreation development, and tourism while protecting the resources it is based on.

Renville and Redwood Counties collaborated with the MN DNR to create the Master Plan. The Master Plan addresses natural and cultural resources, interpretive

services, recreational opportunities, administrative activities and provides recommendations on a management unit designation of the area under the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation System.



Photo - Agricultural fields in the Minnesota River Valley.

2016 Minnesota Statutes CHAPTER 86A. OUTDOOR RECREATION SYSTEM

86A.03 DEFINITIONS.

§Subd. 3. Outdoor recreation.

“Outdoor recreation” means any voluntary activity, including hunting, fishing, trapping, boating, hiking, camping, and engaging in winter sports, which is conducted primarily for the purposes of pleasure, rest, or relaxation and is dependent upon or derives its principal benefit from natural surroundings; “outdoor recreation” shall also mean any demonstration, structure, exhibit, or activity which is primarily intended to preserve, demonstrate, or explain a significant aspect of the natural and cultural history, and archaeology of Minnesota.

*Photo - Canoeing on the Minnesota River
Photographer: Scott Kudelka*



The Minnesota Legislature directed the MN DNR to develop a Master Plan for the Valley area in Redwood and Renville Counties as described in [2014 MN Session Law, Chapter 290—H.F. No. 2852, Sec. 65. MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY; MASTER PLAN](#). Redwood and Renville Counties determined to create a Master Plan for this same area in 2015, hiring a consultant to assist them. A collaborative effort of these entities developed this Master Plan. Sections within and addendums to the Master Plan may be different for the MN DNR in order to meet its planning requirements.

The Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan (Master Plan) will not define specific trail alignments or multi-use sites, but may discuss several preferred concepts and search areas. The Master Plan includes recommendations in five goal areas identified by a public input process. Key implementation actions are outlined.

The Master Plan is a catalyst for future conversations about how to invest in the Valley for ways to increase the value and benefits of valley resources for those who live in or visit the area. The shared vision in this plan creates a picture of what the Valley can become in the future.

Purpose

The long-term purpose of this plan is to:

- Develop an outdoor recreation destination that would promote regional economic growth, development, and tourism while respecting private lands and the agricultural heritage of the area.
- Enhance the conservation of the of the Minnesota River Valley area in Redwood and Renville Counties.
- Provide for the shared use, enjoyment, and understanding of these resources through a broad selection of outdoor recreational opportunities and recreational travel routes that connect units of the outdoor recreation system in the river valley.
- Outline impacts to the natural and cultural resources, interpretive services, recreational opportunities, and administrative activities in the area and provide recommendations on the unit designation of the area under the MN ORS act.

Scope of Master Plan

This plan addresses those lands in Renville and Redwood Counties that are in the Valley, bluffs, ¼ mile beyond blufflines of the Minnesota River and its tributaries 2 miles from their mouth; and connections to Upper Sioux Agency and Fort Ridgely State Parks. This plan includes:

- 65 miles of the Minnesota River and Water Trail
- Parks and Outdoor Recreation Areas
- Conservation Areas
- Culture and Heritage Areas
- Nature and Culture Education Areas
- Sustainable Agriculture and Agro-tourism
- Marketing for an Outdoor Recreation Destination

See the Master Plan Appendix section for a listing of state, county, and city public conservation and recreation lands in the project area. These lands include state Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), Aquatic Management Areas (AMA), State Parks (SP) and Waysides, Public Water Accesses (PWA), Water Trail Campsites, Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA), designated historic sites and monuments, county parks and city parks.

The Master Plan recommendations focus on the river valley, bluffs, and lands within in Renville and Redwood Counties, Minnesota. The two state parks mentioned above, while mostly located outside of Renville County (only small part of Fort Ridgely SP is in Renville County), are considered book ends to the project area and provide an added value to the Valley experience.

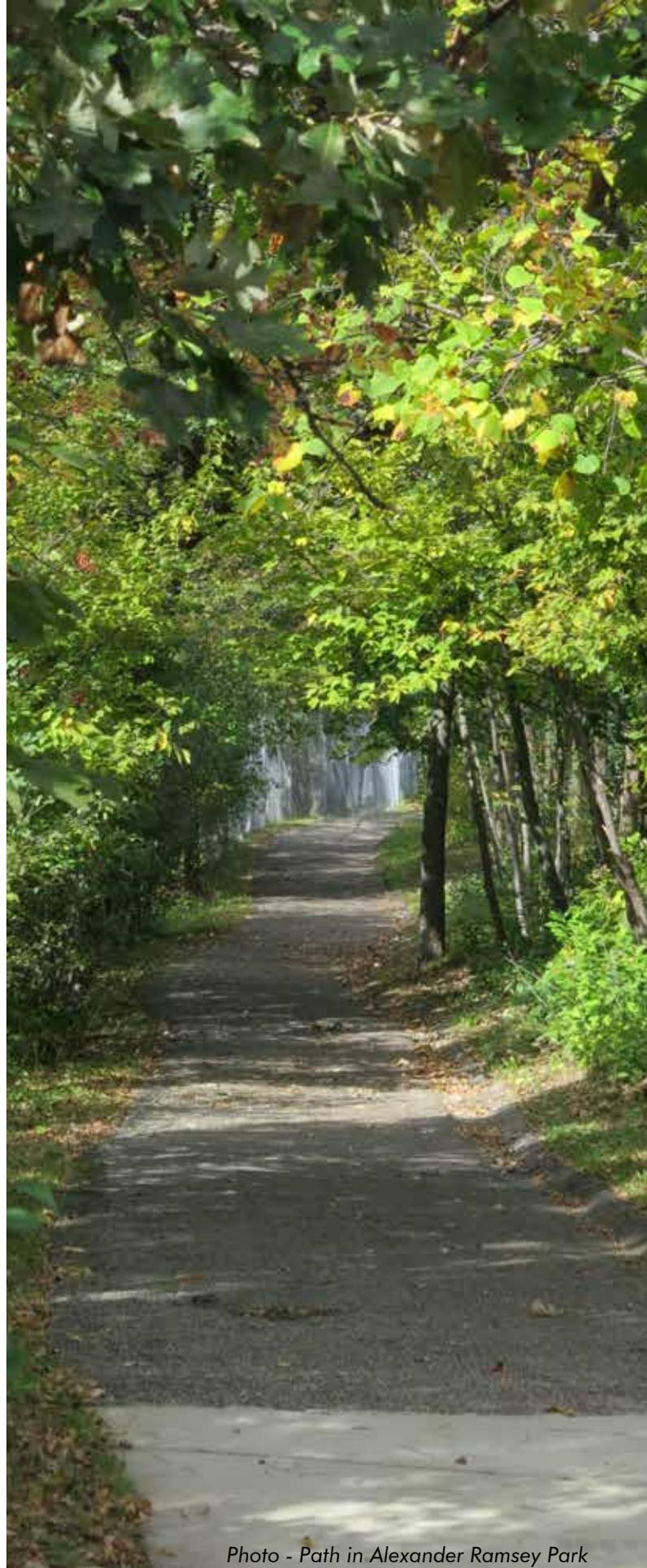


Photo - Path in Alexander Ramsey Park

Participants

This planning process was a collaboration between Redwood and Renville Counties and the MN DNR. Redwood and Renville Counties hired the consulting firm Great Outdoors Consultants to facilitate the public input process, provide national expertise, and coordinate development of the Master Plan. MN DNR participated in the public input process and provided materials, data and planning related to the natural and recreational resources in the project area.

Numerous individuals, agencies and interest groups contributed input on issues and opportunities for the Master Plan. A summary of contributors is listed in the research section and detailed in the public input reports listed in the reference section. The project planning team is grateful to all who took time to express their opinions and provide personal experience and knowledge.

Project Funding

Funding for this Master Plan was provided in part by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the [Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources \(LCCMR\)](#). MN DNR contributions to the Master Plan development included planning and GIS services. Funding through the [Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership](#) provided two interns for GIS analysis and biological research.

Future funding for this project may come through a variety of sources. State acquisition and easement funds may come through state bonding, LCCMR or other grants, Legacy funding, and landowner donations. County acquisitions and easements may come through similar funding sources and may include some direct county funds. Conservation and recreation groups may be another source of funding for specific types of projects or volunteers. Other state agencies such as the Minnesota Department of Health or Minnesota Department of Transportation may have programs that are complementary and could contribute funds to common goals.

Funding and staffing for project development and maintenance will require a long term commitment by all partners and local communities interested in the benefits that can be derived from creating a high quality outdoor recreation destination.



Photo - Master Plan Public Meeting

Desired Outcomes

- A Common Vision for a recreation and conservation network with connectivity in the Minnesota River Valley in Redwood and Renville Counties
- Increased protection, enhancement and management of natural and cultural resources on public and private lands
- Increased access to public lands for a broad range of outdoor recreation activities
- Increased inter-agency cooperation in development of an outdoor recreation destination



Graphic - Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Logo



Background

Minnesota lies at the center of North America where the prairie, boreal forest, and eastern deciduous forest meet.

Photo - Forest in Whispering Ridge AMA

Geography/Geology

The project area landscape has been shaped and influenced by glaciers, rivers, wind, and fire with fire being the most common natural disturbance before settlement. The Glacial River Warren cut through glacial drift and soft rock formations to form the river valley. In Redwood and Renville Counties, this erosion cut down to the Precambrian crystalline bedrock formations resulting in rock outcrops and pools unique to the area. Numerous waterfalls occur where the larger tributaries to the Minnesota River intersect the valley.

Agriculture is the main land use and occurs on flatter, upland portions of the project area. Tiling, grazing, crop production, timber harvest, and other human activities are now common in the area. Remnant prairie remains on hillsides and in lowland areas that were not prime for farming. The valley and its numerous tributaries provide a variety of topography and soil types, that provide opportunities for grass based agriculture, conservation, and recreation purposes. Changes in land use, artificial drainage, and climate have altered the hydrology of the area, which has in turn, changed the make-up of the river valley and its associated uplands.

Region

Minnesota lies at the center of North America where the prairie, boreal forest, and eastern deciduous forest meet. There are four major ecological provinces in Minnesota: the Eastern Broadleaf Forest (green), the Laurentian Mixed Forest (violet), the Prairie Parkland (yellow) and the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands (bright green). All four are parts of much larger systems that cover major areas of central North America. These ecological provinces are divided into subsections – distinct landscapes of Minnesota, defined by vegetation, geology, and other resource criteria.

Descriptions of the subsections are important for recreation and conservation planning purposes because they provide the context for trail alignments, trail development, resource management, and interpretation recommendations. The following description is drawn from the MN DNR website (mndnr.gov/ecs).

The entire project area (indicated by red oval in figure 2-1) is within the Minnesota River Prairie subsection. The subsection consists of a gently rolling ground moraine. The Minnesota River occupies a broad valley that splits the subsection in half. The valley was created

by Glacial River Warren, which drained Glacial Lake Agassiz. Agriculture is the predominant land use in this subsection.

Climate

The Minnesota River valley, like the rest of Minnesota, experiences a continental climate with extremes in temperature from summer to winter. At Redwood Falls, the average temperature ranges from a low of 4.0°F to a high of 22.0°F in January. In July the average low is 62°F and the average high is 84°F. ([U.S. Climate Data Website](#))

The project area receives on average 26.64 inches of rainfall (Redwood Falls data). Mean annual snowfall is about 35.1 inches in Redwood Falls. The average growing season is 157 days.

History and Land Uses

Before European peoples entered the River Valley it was a functioning prairie and river floodplain ecosystem with a wide diversity and abundance of plant and animal life. Dakota people and other Native American tribes lived in villages near the Minnesota River thriving on hunting, fishing and cultivation of food crops. The vast prairie landscape supported bison, elk, wolves and other wildlife. The Dakota claimed this area as their homeland and called it “Mni Sota” (Minn-ey-show-tah) meaning sky-tinted water.

Few Europeans entered the area before 1853 unless they came for government, geographical, geological and zoological documentation. Other records are found in the diaries and journals of fur traders who visited the area. Steamboats reached the area in 1853 on the Minnesota River near North Redwood.

The first land claims occurred around 1856 resulting in a wide range of Canadians and other Europeans settling in the area. The growing influx of people and a number of other factors resulted in the six week Dakota/ US War in 1862 which began in the Redwood Falls area and spread to surrounding counties. Most Dakota were forcibly removed from or fled the area. This tragic event shaped the future of the area and the people who live here. Settlement began in earnest two years later in 1864.

Over time agriculture became the major land use in the area. While rock in the valley made row cropping



Figure 2-1. The four ecological provinces in Minnesota: Eastern Broadleaf Forest (green), Laurentian Mixed Forest (violet), Prairie Parkland (yellow), and Tallgrass Aspen Parklands (bright green). Project area indicated with oval.

difficult, vast wetlands in the uplands prompted more grazing there in the past. The 1920’s massive ditch campaign changed this and the hydrology of the Minnesota River watershed forever. Tillable lands in the counties changed from about 50% to 98% today. The counties of Redwood and Renville are some of the most productive agricultural lands in the state. Grazing operations still flourish at a number of locations in the valley. This area is also known for its rich mineral content. These include Gneiss or Granite and Kaolin which are quarried in the area today.

Community

Redwood Falls, the county seat in Redwood County, is located along the Redwood River near its confluence with the Minnesota River. It is the largest community within the project area, with a population of 5,254 at the 2010 census. Other communities in or close to the project area that may provide services to visitors could include Belview, North Redwood, and Delhi in Redwood County, and Morton, Franklin and Sacred Heart in Renville County. In the 2010 census, Renville County population was 15,730 and Redwood County population was 16,059. A large portion of the 1,743 acre Lower Sioux Indian Community also falls within the project area.

Economy

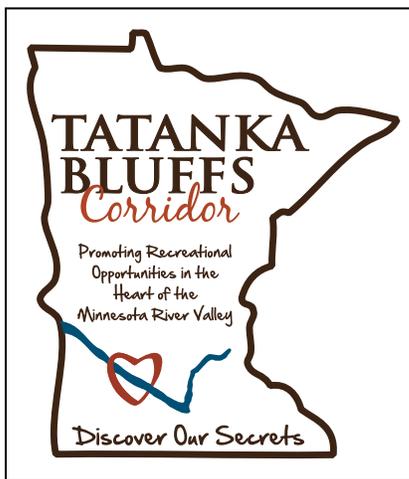
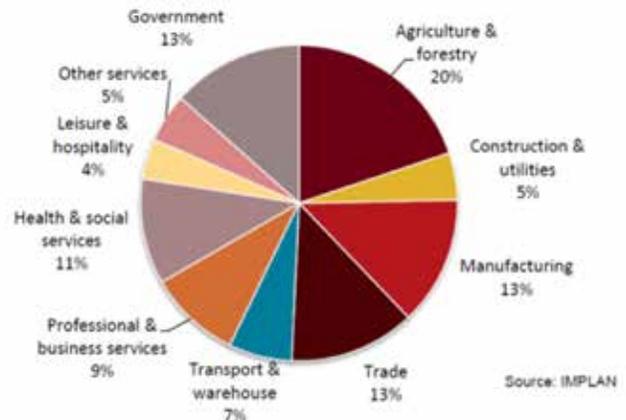
Redwood County is home to 528 businesses providing 6,474 jobs. Redwood County is part of the 23-county Southwest Minnesota Planning Region, which is projected to expand jobs by +2.7 percent from 2012 to 2022 with a gain of 5,685 new jobs.

The fastest growing industry is expected to be mining, although it's a relatively small industry, by 2022 there should be roughly 458 jobs. The largest increase in jobs is expected to come from the health care and social assistance industry, which may account for over 71 percent of total projected growth in the region from 2012 to 2022. The region is also expected to see significant employment growth in construction, professional and technical services, administrative support and waste management services – which includes temporary staffing agencies. In contrast, the region is expected to see declines in information and utilities.

In 2015, there were 5,797 jobs in Renville County. Job growth in Renville County has not kept pace with national and industry trends. The largest industry is agriculture and forestry, employing 20 percent of the workforce. In 2015, Renville County was the largest corn and soybean producing county in Minnesota. It is the second largest sugar beet producing county in the state. The chart below shows employment by industry.

As compared to the average greater Minnesota county, Renville County has a higher percentage of employment in agriculture and forestry, manufacturing and transportation and warehousing industries. It trails the average employment in the professional and business services and health and social services industries.

Figure 2-2. Employment Types in Renville County



Graphic - Tatanka Bluffs Logo

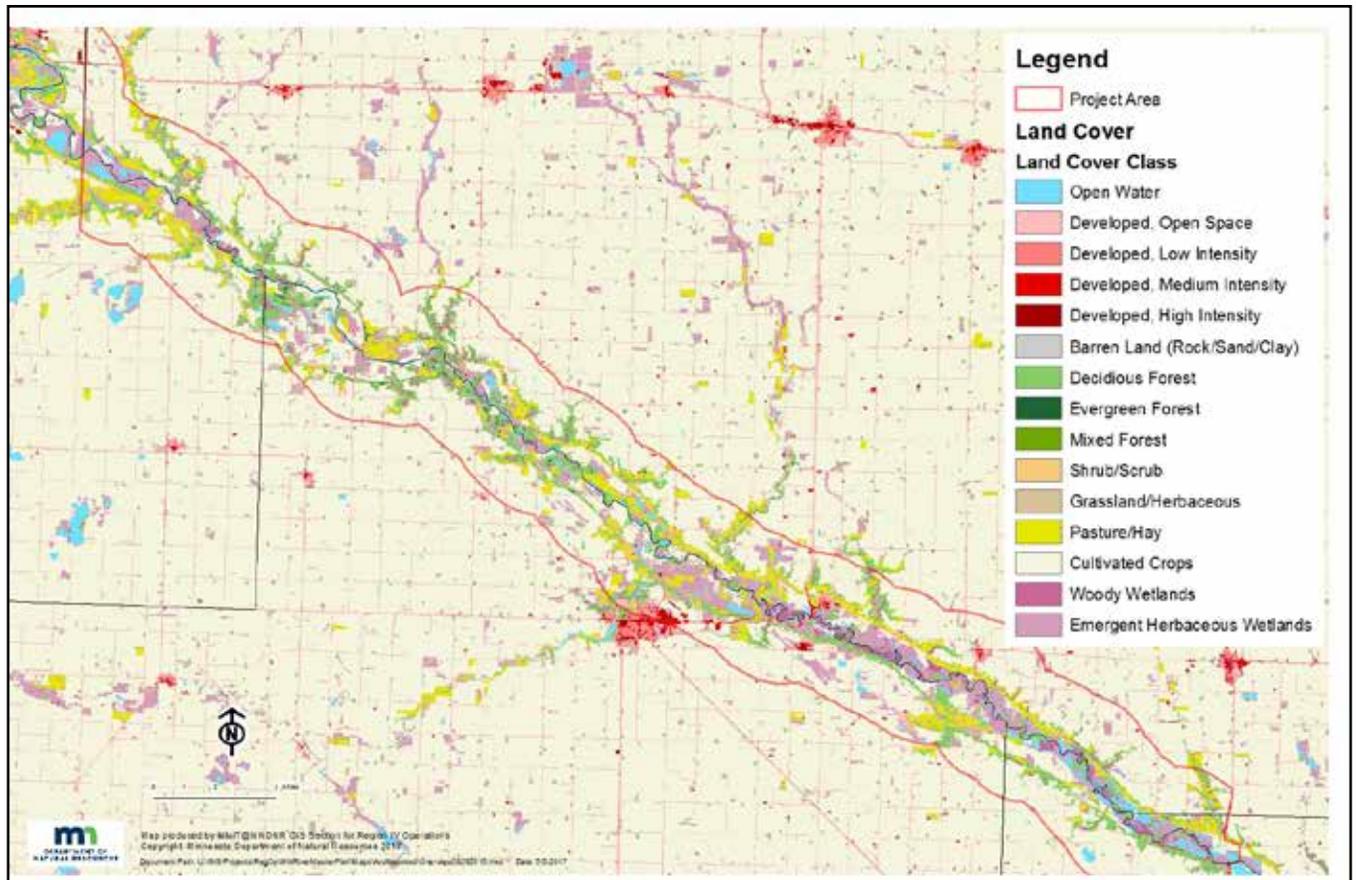


Photo - Corn Statue in Olivia, MN



Photo - Lower Sioux Agency State Historic Site

Figure 2-3. Land Use and Land Cover of the Minnesota River Valley



Land Uses

Land use information is taken from the 2011 Land Use Land Cover on the DNR website. The table below summarizes percent land use/land cover. It also compares percentages between the two counties individually and the project area as described above. The counties are very similar in composition, being mostly of agricultural land use. The valley, while still mainly agricultural, contains much higher percentages of open water, forests, herbaceous (grass/forbs), hay/pasture, wetlands and barren (includes rock) land covers. Categories in the table have been lumped with similar categories for ease of presentation.

| Land Use Type | Renville County | Redwood County | River Valley Area |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Open Water | 0.9 | 0.5 | 3.7 |
| Developed | 5.6 | 6.0 | 5.4 |
| Barren | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Forest | 2.2 | 1.7 | 11.7 |
| Herbaceous | 0.6 | 1.0 | 3.3 |
| Hay/Pasture/Crops | 87.1 | 87.1 | 63.2 |
| Wetlands | 3.5 | 3.6 | 12.5 |



Photo - Wetland in the Valley

Natural Resources

A detailed description of the most significant types of natural features in the Redwood and Renville County portions of the Valley is found in [Native Plant Communities & Rare Species of the Minnesota River Valley Counties](#). Additional information about wildlife species is in the Minnesota River State Trail Master Plan and the [MN Wildlife Action Plan, 2015-2025](#). Below is a brief summary of natural resources in the area from these documents.

Presettlement Vegetation

Pre Euro-American settlement, tallgrass prairie covered the largest portion of the lands outside the river valley bottoms. Mesic, tall grass prairie was the most prevalent community due to the moist, loamy soils. However, small areas of Oak Openings and Barrens did occur, associated with lakes, wetlands and streams that provided protection from fire.

Floodplain forests integrated with prairies and savannas covered a continuous corridor on the bottom of the Minnesota River Valley. Smaller streams such as the Redwood River lacked these floodplain forests of silver maple and instead had wet/mesic hardwood forests composed mostly of American elm, rock elm, red elm, basswood and green ash.

Vegetation Today

The Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS) surveyed native plant communities and rare plants within the Minnesota River Counties from 1987 to 2002. This data is continuously updated via monitoring and additional surveys. The information below is excerpted from [Native Plant Communities & Rare Species of the Minnesota River Valley Counties \(34 MB\)](#).

Locations of 21 rare plant species in the project area are tracked in the Minnesota Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) of Minnesota since records began in 1970. Twenty-one rare plant communities have been recorded in the project area.

One of the major groups of rare plant species documented within these two counties are species that occur on bedrock outcrops. Other large groups of rare plant species occur on upland prairies, savannas, and wet prairies. These species are rare due to land use changes to row crop agriculture, mining, invasive species introduction and habitat conversion over the



Photo - Hiking trail in Whispering Ridge AMA

last 150 years. The third group of rare plants in this project area occurs in calcareous fens. These wetlands form in unusual conditions of cold groundwater seepage and elevated mineral concentrations, and are among Minnesota’s rarest wetland habitats.

Several Basswood-Bur Oak-Green Ash forest stands can be found on the north side of the river along Hawk Creek, Middle Creek and Beaver Creek in Renville County. Other stands occur on the south side of the river on smaller streams such as at the junction of Ramsey Creek and the Redwood River in Redwood County. Portions of these stands were never grazed and contain a high biodiversity of native hardwood forest wildflowers.

Flood plain forests, remain mostly as small patches separated by heavily logged areas, cultivated fields or previously cultivated fields. Several high quality floodplain forest stands remain in the river valley in Redwood and Renville counties. Most remaining stands lack a dense, continuous canopy due to the die-off of American elms and recent logging. The invasive species of garlic mustard and common buckthorn have invaded many remnants in the area.

The rock outcrop plant communities in the project area are rarely seen elsewhere in Minnesota. These plant communities occur on the exposed igneous or metamorphic crystalline bedrock mentioned above.

Many of the plant species are adapted to frequent extreme drought. Many rock outcrops also have permanent and ephemeral wetland pools in shallow to deep depressions in the rock. These wetlands contain several rare plant species. Good examples

of bedrock outcrop communities, though small, are at the following sites: Vicksburg County Park and Cold Springs WMA (Renville County); Swede’s Forest Skink SNA, Cedar Rock WMA, and Cedar Mountain SNA (Redwood County). Each of these sites preserves different combinations of the plants and plant communities associated with rock outcrops.

The upland prairie, which once dominated this area, now covers less than 0.5% of the area Marschner mapped as prairie. The remaining remnants are small and scattered, often overtaken by Red Cedar trees due to the lack of fire and grazing. Many of these remnants remain in private ownership and some receive assistance through the State’s Prairie Bank Easement program for management and restoration.

Vegetation Management

Recommendations found in existing MN DNR or multi-agency plans for this area will apply to the appropriate DNR management units. See the Related Planning Efforts section for a listing of these plans.



Photo - Rock prairie pool. by Ron Bolduan

Water Resources and Fisheries

Numerous wetlands historically dotted the uplands. A large percentage of precipitation moved towards the river very slowly through the dense prairie sod and wetlands. In order to farm the rich prairie soils, most wetlands have been drained with intensive ditching and tiling; dramatically changing the hydrography from pre-settlement times. Precipitation now moves very quickly over the surface or through tiles into the Minnesota River and its tributaries.



Photo - Minnesota River

The project area receives water directly from three major watersheds of the Minnesota River Basin: the Yellow Medicine/Hawk Creek, Redwood River and the Middle Minnesota. Twelve larger streams meet the Minnesota River within the project area. Several form waterfalls and or steep rapids as they fall to meet the river. Land use choices, conservation practices and agricultural best practices are reflected in the poor though slowly improving water quality.

Much of the 65 miles of Minnesota River in this section already benefits from adequate soil erosion buffers due to Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in the 1990's. Watershed studies show that closing gaps and adding buffers to smaller streams, ravines, ditches and intakes will help improve impairment issues. MPCA monitoring indicates mercury or PCB in fish tissue, E. coli, Fecal Coliform, and Turbidity occur in most rivers and streams of the project area.

Monitoring also shows nitrate pollution above consumption standards in some groundwater within the project area in Renville County.

Flood plains

Much of the Minnesota River valley between the bluffs lies within the 100-year flood plain, defined as that land that is covered by the "100-year" or "regional" flood – that is, a flood that has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year. Flooding is a natural occurrence of a river's riparian zone and provides many benefits, including groundwater recharge, settling out sediment and supporting valuable wildlife habitat.

Flooding only becomes a concern to people when they impact the river's floodplain, either by adding structures or planting crops. People have added to flooding problems primarily by intruding on the flood plain and altering the natural channels of the Minnesota River and its tributaries. Development and land use changes in the watershed also increase the amount of impervious surface on the terrain and displace natural water storage on the landscape.

The Minnesota River has experienced many major floods, including events in 1881, 1952, and 1965, considered the most devastating flood to date. Recent flooding in July, 2015, temporarily stranded canoeists on the river near Fort Ridgely State Park.

Because of the large proportion of the valley floor located within the 100-year flood plain, it is unlikely that any trail alignment or other recreational lands within the valley could entirely avoid the flood plain. Trail or recreational development within flood plains must be undertaken with care, so that flood elevation levels are not increased and so that the trail or facility itself is designed to withstand periodic flooding.



Photo - Redwood River

Fisheries

The Minnesota River is an important Conservation Focus Area for DNR Fisheries. Angler use of the Minnesota River appears to be steadily increasing, with Walleye and Channel Catfish pursued most commonly. MN Department of Health fish consumption advice for fish in Reach 2 is present because of PCB and mercury persistence. Eight water access sites and 2 canoe carry-in access site are located on the river stretch within the project area.

There are several tributaries in the middle Minnesota River reach that receive ground water via springs and seeps as they drop in elevation from agriculture dominated uplands, over the Minnesota River bluff, to the floodplain confluence with the Minnesota River. Ramsey Creek (Redwood County) is designated as a trout stream tributary to Minnesota River. It is annually stocked with 300 two-year old Brown Trout *Salmo trutta* and 300 Rainbow Trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* yearlings. Ramsey Creek is managed as put-n-take trout fishery, meaning natural reproduction does not sustain the population. Fort Ridgely Creek, which flows through Fort Ridgely State Park, is a tributary managed for trout, but it is not a designated trout stream. It is managed as a put-n-take trout fishery and annually stocked with 300 two-year old Brown Trout and 300 Rainbow Trout yearlings.

Historical accounts of the river allude to clear water and a beautiful white sand substrate, with wild rice stands and bulrush beds along its banks. Today, habitat degradation resulting from the profound landscape changes of the past 150 years is the primary factor limiting the fishery resource and recreational value of the Minnesota River. Water quality and quantity related

Photo - Redwood River Falls



Photo - Catfish caught in the Minnesota River

issues characterize many of the currently acknowledged limiting factors. Turbidity, bacteria, and nutrients, particularly phosphorus and nitrogen, negatively affect water quality of the Minnesota River and its tributaries. No dams are located within the project focus area to the mouth of the river.

Invertebrates – Freshwater Mussels

Freshwater mussels play a vital role in marine ecosystems in Minnesota. These mollusks live on river and lake bottoms and filter oxygen and particles from the water. They modify the habitat around them to make it more suitable for both themselves and other aquatic organisms. Many species serve as important hosts to fish larvae and are critical to fishery success. These invertebrates are also an important food source for many animals such as several species of fish, muskrats, and raccoons.

Mussel populations are threatened by dams fragmenting river connections; stream channelization, dredging, and streambed destabilization; commercial harvesting; non-point and point water pollution and sedimentation; and zebra mussel infestations upstream in Lac Qui Parle Lake. Eleven mussel species of special concern occur in the project area; see Native Plant Communities & Rare Species document in Reference section for a listing. The primary causes for mussel decline in the Minnesota River are pollution and habitat degradation.

Wildlife

Mammals

Common mammal species in the valley area include: white-tailed deer, coyote, beaver, squirrels, raccoon, red and gray foxes, voles, badgers and mink.

Birds

The Minnesota River is a major migratory corridor in the Mississippi Flyway. It is a transition zone between the eastern woodlands and western prairie. It is also an important area for north-south migration. The numerous WMAs, SNAs, and AMAs provide important habitat for birds.

The project area is part of the [Upper Minnesota River Valley Important Bird Area \(IBA\)](#) consisting of the Valley (hereafter the Valley) extending from the City of Le Sueur in the northeast to Lac Qui Parle Lake on the west. The IBA contains globally significant bird habitat in an intensely agriculture area. Monocultures of corn and soybean extend for hundreds of miles in all directions from the IBA boundaries. In this intensely farmed area, the river valley corridor provides the only prime bird habitat in this part of Minnesota. The Valley is also a natural corridor for migrating birds such as vireos, chimney swifts, waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and passerine species such as warblers, thrushes, flycatchers and sparrows. At least 240 bird species have been documented in this IBA. See the [eBird](#) list for this IBA for a listing of species plus 21 additional taxa.

Common birds in the area include: various songbirds, eastern bluebird, western meadowlark, yellow shafted flicker, tree sparrows, king birds, red-winged blackbird, red-tailed hawks, bald eagle, wild turkey, ring-necked pheasant, owl, and Canada geese.

Photo - Deer in Lower Sioux Agency State Park



Photo - Mink on log by Ron Bolduan

Reptiles and Amphibians

Many amphibian species are found in the area. These include the eastern tiger salamander, mudpuppy, American toad, Great Plains toad, and four species of frogs. Frog species include Cope's gray treefrogs, gray treefrogs, boreal chorus frogs, and northern leopard frogs.

Turtle species in the area include snapping turtle, painted turtle, false map turtle, and spiny softshell turtle.

Numerous species of snakes are found in the project area. Common species include plains hog-nosed snake, milksnakes, western foxsnake, gophersnake, Dekay's brownsnake, red-bellied snake, plains gartersnake, and common gartersnake. Other reptile species found in the search area include common five-lined skinks and prairie skinks.

Insects and Pollinators

Insects and pollinators in the Valley project area have not received much study or monitoring. Three species, Iowa Skipper (*Atrytone arogos iowa*), Ottoe Skipper (*Hesperia ottoe*), Regal Fritillary (*Speyeria idalia*) are associated with wet to dry prairie plant communities and listed as endangered or special concern species.

Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) are identified and classified on a statewide basis. “Key habitats” are the habitats or native plant communities that SGCN rely on; these are defined by Ecological Classification System (ECS) subsection.

SGCN include animal species that meet the following criteria:

- Species whose populations are identified as being rare, declining, or vulnerable in Minnesota, including species with legal protection status (federal or state endangered or threatened species);
- Species at risk because they depend upon rare, declining, or vulnerable habitats;
- Species subject to specific threats that make them vulnerable (e.g. invasive species);
- Species with certain characteristics that make them vulnerable (e.g. highly localized distribution);
- Species with stable populations in Minnesota that are declining outside of Minnesota.

There are 93 SGCN in the Master Plan project area, 80 of which are listed as federal or state endangered, threatened, or of special concern. Birds make up the majority of these species because they are the most surveyed group. The Minnesota River Valley is a major migratory corridor in the Mississippi Flyway and its upland areas are designated as an important area for nesting prairie ducks. The area includes many state WMAs, AMAs, parks and SNAs that are important for SGCN. Key habitats in this subsection include prairie, non-forested wetlands, shallow lakes, cliff/talus areas, and rivers. The [Wildlife Action Network](#) is a map of

terrestrial and aquatic habitats, buffers and corridors that represent a diversity of habitats that support SGCN. The MN River Valley project area is within the Wildlife Action Network zone and generally rates a medium to High importance score.

A complete list of SGCN and key habitats by subsection is included in Minnesota’s State [Wildlife Action Plan: Tomorrow’s Habitat for the Wild and Rare](#).

Rare, Threatened, Special Concern Species

Minnesota County Biological Program (MCBS) initially surveyed rare animals in Redwood and Renville Counties in 1998 and 1999. Mammal, Bird, and Amphibian and Reptile surveys were completed. Insects were not surveyed. Surveys in 2015 and 2016 focused on the Five Lined Skink, Gophersnake and Plains hog-nosed snakes. Records are continually being updated and added to by MN DNR staff, volunteers and landowners. The chart below is a summary of species groups and their status. A complete list of R/T/SC species for Redwood and Renville County species can be found on the [reference tab of the project website](#).

Figure 2-5. Rare, Threatened, Endangered and Special Concern Species Summary

| Status | Birds | Fish | Insects | Mammals | Mussels | Plants | Reptiles/ Amphibians | Total |
|-----------|-------|------|---------|---------|---------|--------|-------------------------|-------|
| Watchlist | 11 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 21 | 2 | 39 |
| SPC | 17 | 3 | 10 | 8 | 3 | 34 | 6 | 81 |
| THR | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 27 | 2 | 44 |
| END | 5 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 11 | 17 | 1 | 39 |
| Total | 34 | 10 | 16 | 9 | 24 | 99 | 11 | 203 |

Natural Resource Impacts

Successfully developing an outdoor recreation destination will result in more people visiting the area and recreating on public lands. Without careful planning and visitor education, this could negatively impact the very things people are drawn to visit here.

However, there could be a number of positive outcomes due to the increased awareness through adequate interpretation of how unique and sensitive much of the area is in relation to the surrounding region. As more detailed planning occurs, attention will need to focus on mitigating actions and landscape capacity required for areas of more intense recreation activities and facilities.



Photo - Cactus in prairie

Providing opportunities for local residents and visitors to value nature, especially sensitive resources, will likely result in positive behaviors for resource protection and conservation.

Positive Impacts may include:

- Increased acres managed for larger conservation goals or a landscape approach
- Increased awareness of unique and rare features in valley, resulting in greater stewardship by residents and visitors
- Increased perennial cover on the landscape
- Reduced fragmentation of floodplain forests
- Increased buffering along all water bodies
- Increase number of prairie remnants managed
- Increase acres of native prairie restored and managed
- Increased protection of viewsheds and bluff lines

Negative impacts may include:

- Increased risk of invasive species spread due to trail construction, increased human and livestock visitation
- Reduced habitat values for some areas adjacent to trails (small percentage of overall area) due to wildlife disturbance, easier predator access, and habitat fragmentation
- Creation of user created "social trails" increasing habitat fragmentation
- Localized over hunting/angling/trapping of some wildlife populations due to increased visitation
- Degradation of some rock prairie communities due to trampling by humans and livestock
- Localized soil compaction and erosion from trail, parking and other recreation development
- Loss of habitat or agricultural lands to tourism development (although limited)
- Wildlife death or injury due to facility or trail construction and materials

Cultural Resource Impacts

Positive Impacts may include:

- Increased protection for cultural resources
- Increased interpretation opportunities will result in a greater appreciation and value for the history and culture of the area
- Additional cultural resource grants and volunteers may be secured to assist with interpretation in this area
- Greater exposure to the area through regional and national marketing
- New cultural resources may come to light due to additional emphasis and research in this area

Negative impacts may include:

- Increased visitation may result in more wear and tear on historic sites
- Increased soil erosion and site degradation may occur at popular sites lacking a design solution
- Increased risk of vandalism with more visibility and emphasis; alternatively, more visitation often leads to improved volunteer oversight



Photo - House ruins at Joseph R Brown Historic Site

Recreational Uses

Recreational uses in the valley consist of traditional non-motorized and motorized outdoor recreation activities. The most intensive uses occur in the state or county parks and Alexander Ramsey City Park in Redwood Falls. No formal documentation has been made of the overall outdoor recreation numbers in the project area, except as can be gleaned from

attendance records at the parks and number of hunting licenses issued in the area.

Traditional Outdoor Recreation

Two state parks on either end of the project area provide historic and natural backdrops for a variety of camping experiences including equestrian, tipis, camper cabins, RV, group and canoe-in sites. [Fort Ridgely State Park \(FRSP\)](#) on the east end had an annual attendance of 80,073 and 1,012 camping permits, with 92 percent from Minnesota in 2016. [Upper Sioux Agency State Park \(USASP\)](#) on the West end had an annual attendance of 36,675, and 1,061 camping permits with 88 percent from Minnesota. In 2016, Renville County Parks in the Valley documented 256 camping permits. About 80% of campers were from outside the county; 9 percent were from out of state.



Photo - Campground in Upper Sioux Agency State Park

Alexander Ramsey City Park, in Redwood Falls, offers camping in 31 sites with electric hook-up and a tenting area without electricity, May through mid-October. In 2016, reservation and drop in camping permits totaled 1,984. Approximately 85 percent of campers are from Minnesota. This park also offers a large waterfall, hiking trails, picnic area, a zoo, a near-by golf course and county historic museum.

Usage of the MN River Water Trail, WMAs, AMAs and SNAs are not specifically monitored. Hunting and angling trends in Minnesota were analyzed in a [2014 report by the MN DNR](#). While Minnesota resident hunter and angler numbers have been fairly stable since 2000, the overall population's participation

follows national downward trends. The decline is at a slower rate in southern and northwestern Minnesota. The percent of Redwood and Renville County zip code population (age 16+) that is licensed to hunt in Minnesota, in 2010, ranged from 15.1 to 25 percent, which is higher than the statewide average of 12.6 percent. The percent that is licensed to fish in Minnesota, ranged from 30.1 to 50 percent, higher than the statewide average of 28.9 percent.

While this number is stable, the overall population's participation follows national downward trends. The decline is at a slower rate in southern and northwestern Minnesota. The percent of Redwood and Renville County zip code population (age 16+) that is licensed to fish in Minnesota, in 2010, ranged from 30.1 to 50 percent, which is higher than the statewide average of 28.9 percent. The percent of Redwood and Renville County zip code population (age 16+) that is licensed to hunt in Minnesota, in 2010, ranged from 15.1 to 25 percent, which is higher than the statewide average of 12.6 percent.

The *Minnesota River State Trail Master Plan* was completed for this section of the Valley in 2008 (Ortonville to Franklin) and 2015 (Franklin to LeSueur). The section of trail north of Franklin is classified as a partner-led trail in *MN DNR Parks and Trail Systems Plan*. Partner-led state trails may serve more local use than other state trails. Amenities that go beyond basic services for these trails may be provided in conjunction with partners or through outside fundraising. Only a few, disjointed miles of this trail have been purchased in the project area and none are developed at this time.

The *Statewide Bicycle System Plan* presents Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MNDOT) vision and goals for bicycle transportation. This plan functions as a guide for prioritizing future infrastructure investments and formal designation of state bicycle routes. One of three highest priority routes includes the Twin Cities to Mankato Loop via the Minnesota River and Northfield. The remainder of the Minnesota River is a medium priority. Strong local support and collaboration with Mndot and cycling groups may accelerate the development of bicycling road routes in the Valley.

Some historical equestrian group activities and trail riding in the valley is documented in a booklet called "The Amigo Riders – the first 50 years 1954 to 2004".



Photo – Cycling in the Valley by Jack Rayburn

Equestrian trails and camping are provided at both state parks and two Renville County parks. Local groups are interested in adding an equestrian camping site and trails that connect to existing camping sites.

The Minnesota River Water Trail was one of the state's first designated trails and recently celebrated its 50th year with a large event in Granite Falls MN. Paddling sports are one of the few that are showing increasing trends in the state and nationally. The river segment in the project area provides the industry standard numbers of accesses and canoe campsites for the 65 river miles. This stretch of the river provides a variety of paddling experiences from short, half-day easy paddles to longer overnight, very rustic situations with easy/medium rapids. River conditions can change dramatically with the season of the year and precipitation events. Paddling interests would like to see increased resources and amenities along the river.

A number of historical sites in the project area provide light hiking and interpretive opportunities. These include the Lower Sioux Agency Historic site and interpretive center east of the Lower Sioux Indian Community and the Birch Coulee Battlefield north of the city of Morton. The Historic Fort Ridgely site in Fort Ridgely State Park provides an interpretive center and partial fort layout restoration on the grounds with interpretation.

Nature observation, including birdwatching, wildflower viewing and geologic points of interests, is common in the valley. Several SNAs, WMAs and AMAs provide excellent opportunities all along the valley and receive low but regular visitation.

Motorized Recreation

In 2016, Redwood County passed an OHV ordinance allowing ATV use of all County Roads. Renville County is in the process of an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) for an OHV park just northwest of Vicksburg County park. On state lands, the only motorized outdoor recreation is on Grant-in-Aid (GIA) snowmobile trails that have been grandfathered in due to prior existence or trail alignment.



Photo - Families Shorefishing by Ron Bolduan



Photo - ATV riding in the Valley



Photo - Paved trail in Alexander Ramsey Park



Photo - Snowmobile riding in the Valley

Public Land Management

State Lands

In 1975, the Minnesota Legislature enacted the Outdoor Recreation Act (ORA) (Minnesota Statutes, Section 86A.05, Subdivision 4 and Section 85.015). This act established an outdoor recreation system comprised of eleven components or “units” classifying all state-managed recreation lands. The ORA requires that the managing agency prepare a master plan for the establishment and development of some units. This plan fulfills this mandate in regards to multi-use recreation lands in the project area. The Minnesota River State Trail Master Plan provides for the establishment of a trail corridor in this same area with the potential for connecting larger blocks of public

State Park, SRA and Trail Rules cover a wide variety of issues. SRA rules are currently the same as a State Park. SNA Rules cover prohibited uses.

Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and Aquatic Management Areas (AMA) have slightly differing rules, but are both focused on habitat protection Wild, Scenic and Recreational River rules apply to a portion of the river corridor in the project area northwest of the Redwood County State Aid Highway 11 bridge, near the city of Franklin.

Local MN DNR field managers are responsible for managing state lands within the specific project area of this Master Plan as well as outside the Valley. Private lands with conservation easements also receive technical assistance from MN DNR staff.



Photo - Hiking trail in Whispering Ridge AMA

recreation and conservation lands, as well as cultural sites.

Existing or potential ORS units in the valley, their legislated purpose, and some allowed uses are summarized in figure 2-6 below.

Dedicated funding sources used to acquire and manage state lands often legislatively limits the uses allowed. Each type of unit has a set of rules established through a legal rule making process. Each unit type will maintain existing rules even as it occurs within a larger designation such as an SRA. This helps provide a variety of experiences within the valley as a whole. Excellent mapping and signage will enable this approach to fit the needs of most outdoor recreationists in this shared landscape.



Photo - Minnesota River

Significance and Uniqueness

The “U”-shaped valley of the Minnesota River tells a significant geologic story of glacial origin. A number of interesting and often unique points of geologic interest occur within the project area. Notably, some of the oldest rocks discovered at the earth’s surface occur near Morton, MN.

The mix of cultures and historic events that characterize this area are significant stories for the region; some had nationwide impacts. The area is considered homeland to the Dakota people. The interactions between the Dakota, the US Government and early European settlers during the civil war era shape the mid-west region’s character even today.

The Valley is a narrow corridor of native vegetation bounded on either side by a habitat desert. Its importance for migrating and resident native species of animals and plants cannot be overstated. The Valley area contains many special concern, rare, threatened or endangered species. The river corridor is designated an important core area for prairie ecosystem function. The large amount and quality of natural habitat and scenic vistas in the Valley create a prime area in SW Minnesota for traditional hunting and fishing, as well as a wide variety of other outdoor recreation activities.

Constraints

The Valley with all its beauty, ecological importance and untapped recreational opportunity carries a wide range of small and large constraints and challenges for recreationists and land managers. The largest and perhaps the most impactful issues are watershed wide and outside the scope of this document for the most part. The altered movement of water over the landscape due to lack of year-round soil holding vegetation, extensive tiling, drainage ditches, impervious surfaces and changing precipitation patterns reduce the quality of outdoor recreation experiences.

These include degraded habitat for fish and mussels, safety issues during somewhat unpredictable flood events, less stability in water levels for paddlers over the season, and extra maintenance time and resources due to soil deposition at accesses or other recreation facilities. While there is not a lot to be done about precipitation patterns, a focused emphasis on agricultural soil and water conservation practice installation provides hope that water quality and quantity issues can improve over time.

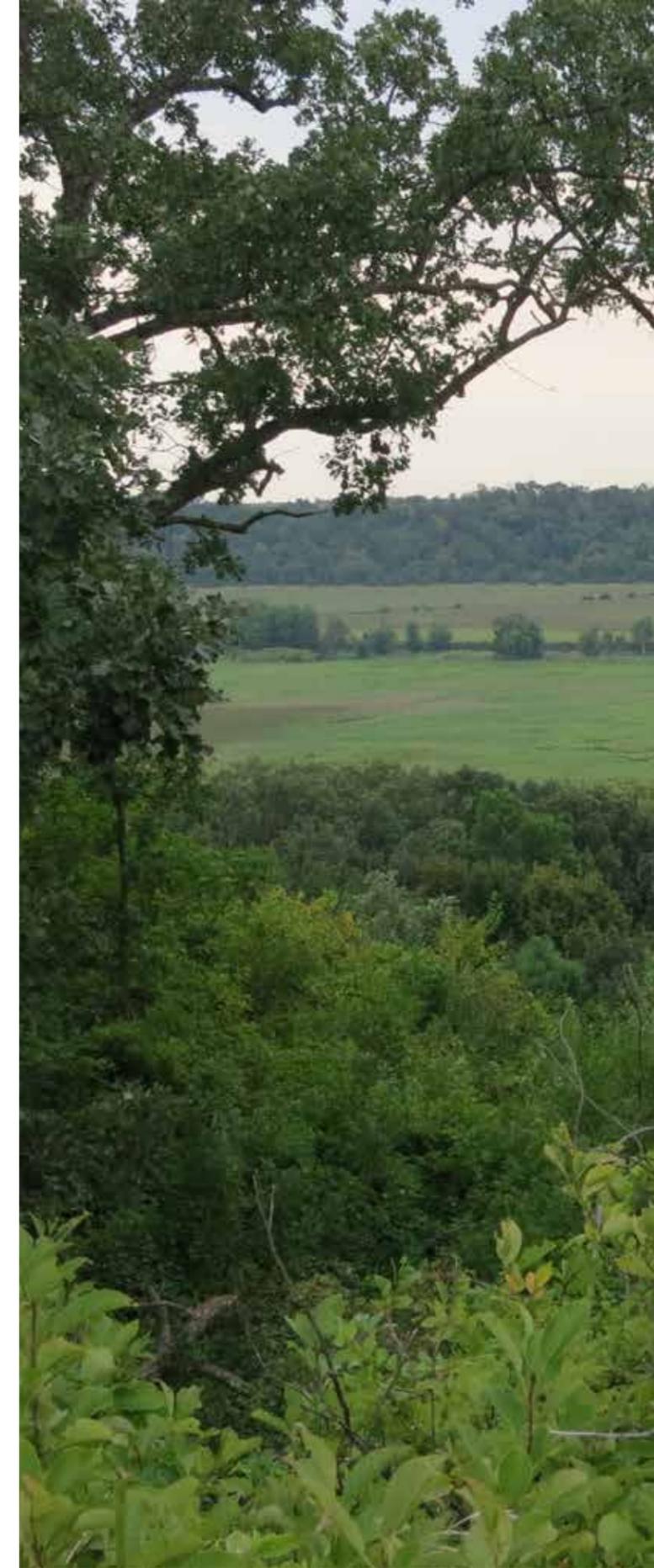
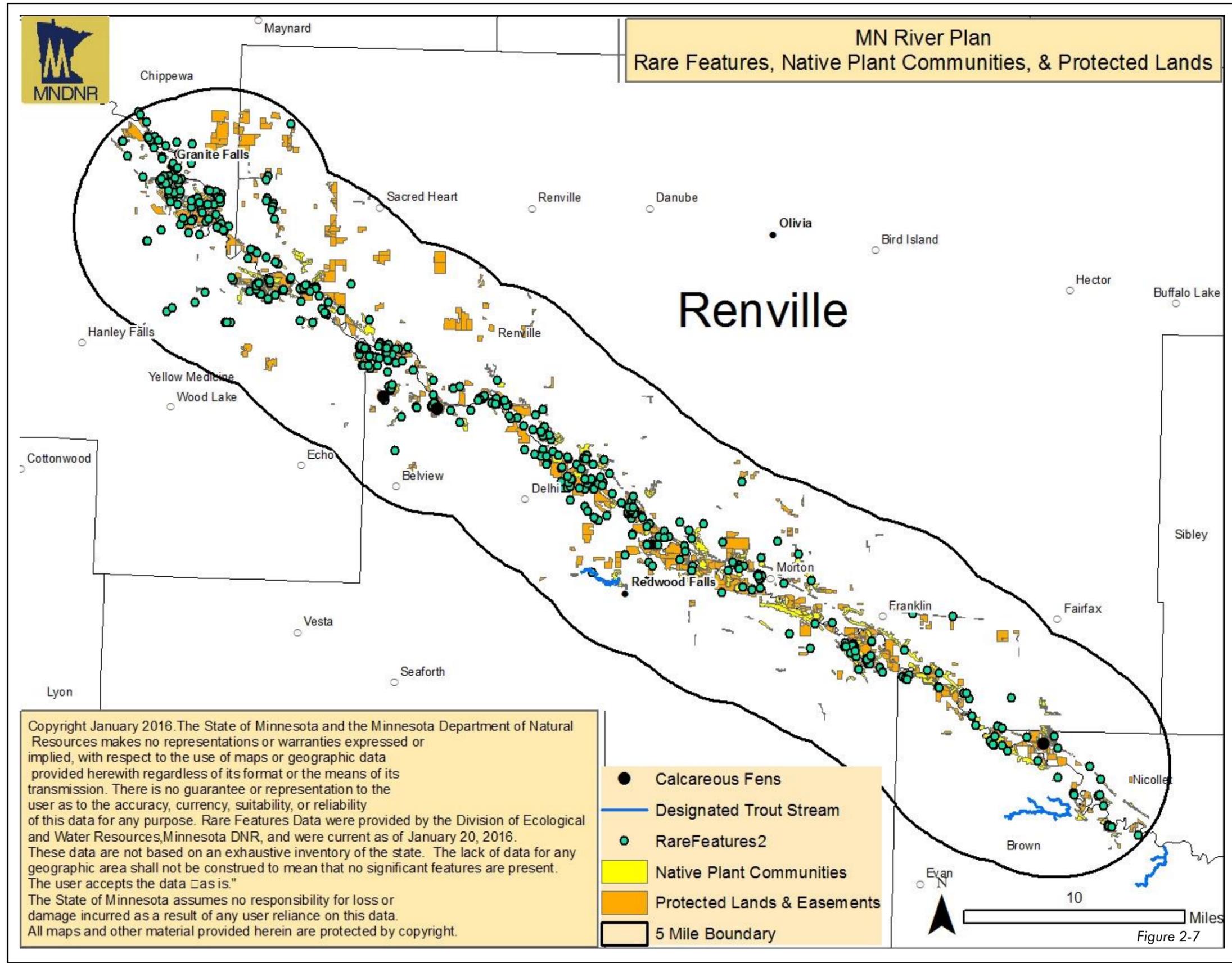
Other features that are permanent or beyond the scope of this project and may or may not affect the quality of the area include:

- Powerline easements in otherwise picturesque river valley vistas
- Road right-of-ways
- Land uses that contribute negatively to scenic or other desired qualities
- County and State policies
- Regulations associated with DNR units that define specific uses allowed
- Threat of invasive species increases with certain types of trails.
- Sporadic Cell phone coverage down in the valley
- Funding

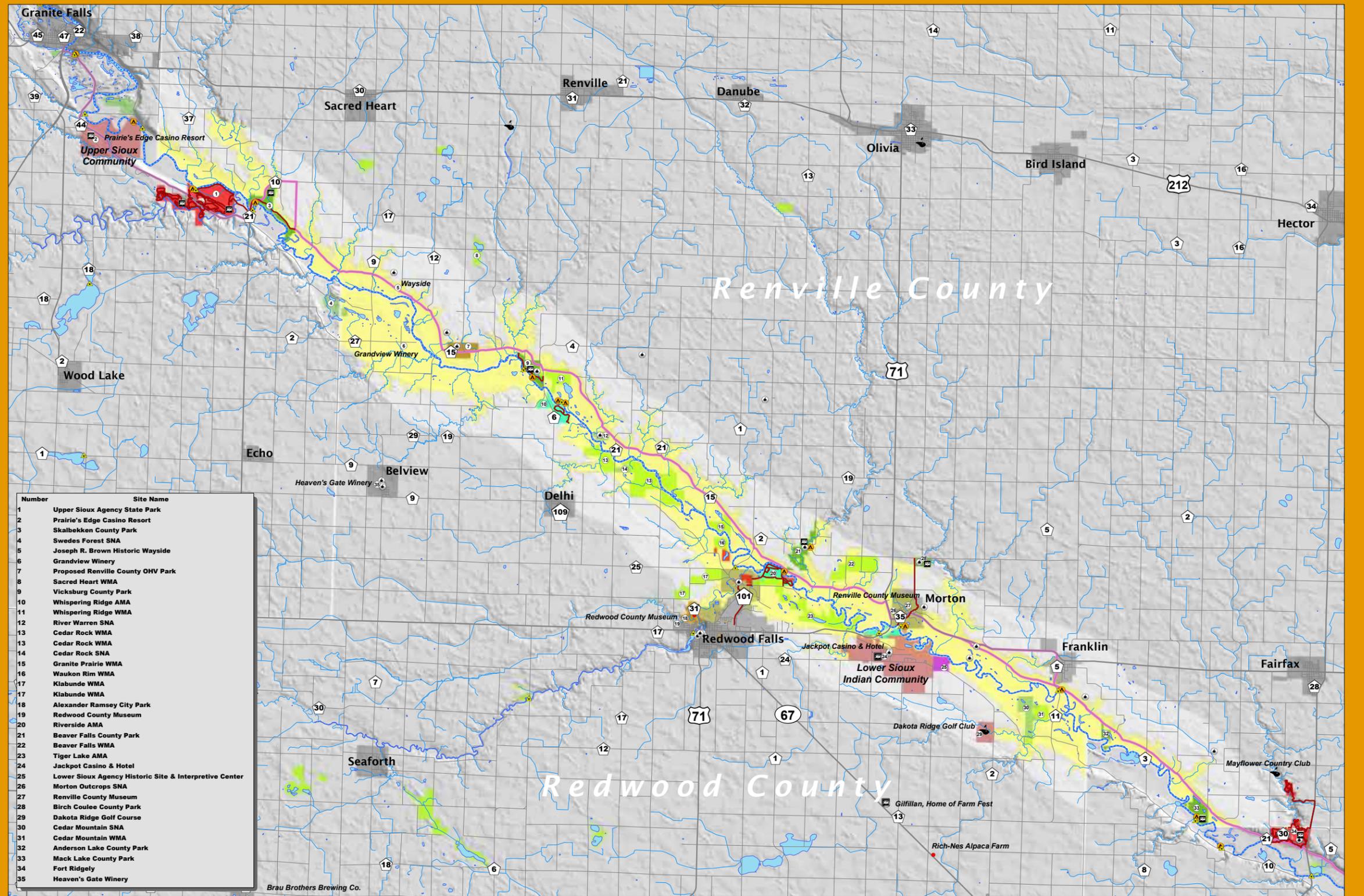
| Figure 2-6. Existing and Potential MN River Valley ORS Units | | |
|--|---|---|
| Name | Purpose | Allowed Uses |
| State Park | Protect & perpetuate MN's natural phenomenon. Provide for use, enjoyment and understanding of resources | Camping, hiking, horseback riding, wildlife watching, picnicking, group camping, bicycling, cross country skiing, snow shoeing, canoeing, , equestrian camping, photography, RV camping, interpretation, geocaching |
| State Recreation Area (potential) | Provide a broad selection of outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural setting | Mountain biking, hunting, angling, rock climbing, horseback riding, rustic camping, geocaching, interpretation, photography, snowshoeing |
| State Trail | Provide a recreational travel route which connects units of the ORS and other points of interest | Hiking, horseback riding, wildlife watching, bicycling, cross country skiing, snow shoeing, photography, hunting, interpretation, snowmobiling |
| Scientific & Natural Area (SNA) | Protect and perpetuate natural features which possess exceptional scientific or educational value | Wildlife watching, nature observation, photography |
| Wildlife Management Area (WMA) | Protection & management of lands and waters for wildlife production | Hunting, angling, wildlife watching, snowshoeing, photography, berry collecting, mushrooming, earthcaching |
| Aquatic Management Area (AMA) | Protection & management of waters and adjacent lands for critical aquatic habitat and water quality | Hunting, angling, wildlife watching, snowshoeing, photography, berry collecting, mushrooming, horseback riding by permit, earthcaching |
| State Water Access (SWA) | Provide public access to rivers and lakes which are suitable for outdoor water recreation | Parking, boat launch, canoe access |
| Wild, Scenic & Recreational River | Protect and maintain all or a portion of a river which together with adjacent lands possess outstanding scenic, scientific, historical or recreational value | Fish, boat, canoe, kayak, swim |
| State Historic Site | Preserve, restore and interpret structures, locales, sites, antiquities and related lands which aptly illustrate significant personalities, events and features of history or archeology of the state or nation | Interpretation, photography |
| State Wayside | A place or area of natural, scientific, cultural or historic interest adjacent to a roadway | Interpretation, photography |

Photo - Rock outcrops in Swedes Forest SNA. By MN DNR





Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan



| Number | Site Name |
|--------|--|
| 1 | Upper Sioux Agency State Park |
| 2 | Prairie's Edge Casino Resort |
| 3 | Skalbekken County Park |
| 4 | Swedes Forest SNA |
| 5 | Joseph R. Brown Historic Wayside |
| 6 | Grandview Winery |
| 7 | Proposed Renville County OHV Park |
| 8 | Sacred Heart WMA |
| 9 | Vicksburg County Park |
| 10 | Whispering Ridge AMA |
| 11 | Whispering Ridge WMA |
| 12 | River Warren SNA |
| 13 | Cedar Rock WMA |
| 13 | Cedar Rock WMA |
| 14 | Cedar Rock SNA |
| 15 | Granite Prairie WMA |
| 16 | Waukon Rim WMA |
| 17 | Klabunde WMA |
| 17 | Klabunde WMA |
| 18 | Alexander Ramsey City Park |
| 19 | Redwood County Museum |
| 20 | Riverside AMA |
| 21 | Beaver Falls County Park |
| 22 | Beaver Falls WMA |
| 23 | Tiger Lake AMA |
| 24 | Jackpot Casino & Hotel |
| 25 | Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site & Interpretive Center |
| 26 | Morton Outcrops SNA |
| 27 | Renville County Museum |
| 28 | Birch Coulee County Park |
| 29 | Dakota Ridge Golf Course |
| 30 | Cedar Mountain SNA |
| 31 | Cedar Mountain WMA |
| 32 | Anderson Lake County Park |
| 33 | Mack Lake County Park |
| 34 | Fort Ridgely |
| 35 | Heaven's Gate Winery |

● Sites - see list
▲ Public Water Access
— Existing Trails

● Area Attractions
▲ Water Trail Campsites
— Minnesota River Paddle Trail

● Historical Sites
▲ Golf Courses
— Minnesota River National Scenic Byway

● Campgrounds

○ Study Focus Area
○ Study Area
□ County Boundaries

■ Renville County Parks
■ Redwood Falls Parks

■ DNR Aquatic Management Area (AMA)
■ DNR State Park, Wayside, Trails

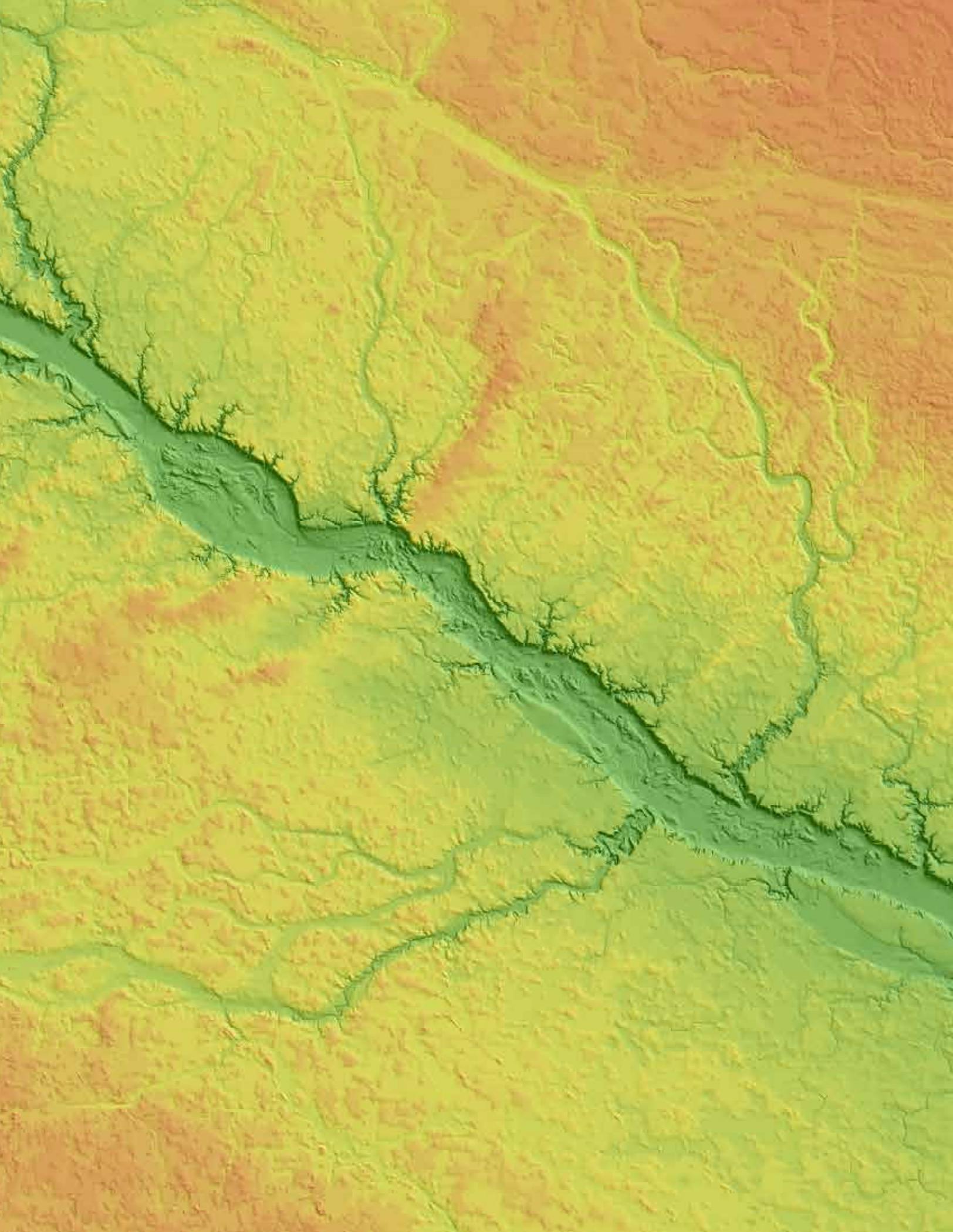
■ DNR State Wildlife Management Area (WMA)
■ DNR Scientific and Natural Area (SNA)

0 2 4 Miles 4/30/17

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Base Map
 Redwood County - Renville County - MNDNR
 GOC - I&S - RPA - RC
 Figure 2-8







Research

An online survey was implemented to understand the opinion of both local residents and other residents from around Minnesota.

Introduction

Extensive research was conducted as an integral part of preparing this Master Plan. A summary of these studies and key information is included in this section. An online survey was implemented to understand the opinion of both local residents and the greater Minnesota population. The results of this survey are also described in this section and were used to help define priorities. The Master Plan process included extensive public and agency outreach which was used to identify issues and opportunities throughout the Master Plan process. Detailed documentation for each of these research methods are listed in the reference section of the Master Plan.

Related Planning Efforts

MN DNR has developed plans and reports of differing scopes to develop priorities and guide our work. Following is a listing of the MN DNR plans that directly impact this project. Most of these plans involved extensive public input and work with partner organizations. The guidance provided within these plans will be used as applicable within the project area on existing and new state lands. The [Conservation Agenda](#) sets MN DNR's strategic direction for natural resources in the state and measures conservation

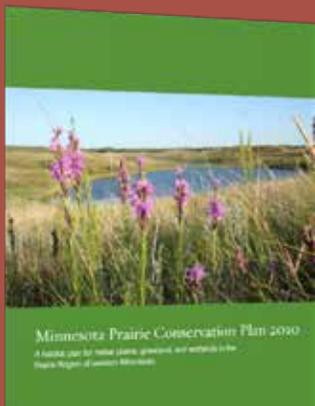
results.

[Division of Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2012 - 2022](#) communicates the Parks and Trails Division strategic priorities for the next 10 years. It identifies how the Division will accomplish goals and strategies outlined in the [Parks and Trails Legacy Plan](#).

[Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan](#) describes resource investment categories for state parks, state recreation areas, state trails and forest recreation areas. This helps guide what kinds of experiences and levels of service the DNR provides at these locations. [Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan](#) identifies core prairie conservation areas and creates a vision of a

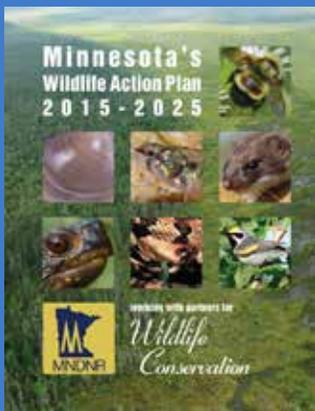


Photo - Beaver Falls County Park



Graphic - Cover of MN Prairie Conservation Plan

connected landscape from Canada to Iowa. The 25 year plan by multiple partners provides efficient future direction while building on past conservation actions. Implementing the plan uses local implementation teams who embrace a working lands approach to positively impact local grasslands and prairies. The entire Valley project area falls within a Prairie Core Area.



Graphic - Cover of MN's Wildlife Action Plan

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-25 is a partnership-based conservation plan to ensure the long-term health and viability of Minnesota's wildlife with a focus on species that are rare, declining, or vulnerable to decline. This plan provides maps and GIS (geographic information system) shapefiles for the Wildlife Action Network (WAN).

The WAN is composed of mapped terrestrial and aquatic habitats, buffers, and connectors that represent a diversity of quality habitats that support Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

Important Bird Areas (IBA) are voluntary and non-regulatory, and part of an international conservation effort aimed at conserving critical bird habitat. The entire Minnesota River Valley is an IBA.

Numerous general and game species plans influence management on the WMA and AMA units and public waterbodies in the project area. These plans include: Fish Habitat Plan: A Strategic Guidance Document maximizes DNR's ability to protect, enhance and restore habitats in the face of limited budgets and staff. The most cost effective way to achieve healthy aquatic habitats is to protect areas that are still functionally

intact.

Minnesota River Fisheries Management Plan 2013 – 2017 guides fishery management and research on the main stem of the Minnesota River. It contains long range goals for Minnesota River fishery and fish species objectives within each of the three uniquely different reaches (sections) of the river. This project area is in Reach 2 of the Minnesota River.

WMA Acquisition – The Next 50 Years is a citizen committee report that represents the direction that the Wildlife Management Area (WMA) land acquisition program should take for the next fifty years through 2052.

Shallow Lakes Management Plan identifies goals for management and protection of shallow lakes to meet objectives in MN DNR Duck plan (below) and the Division of Fish and Wildlife Strategic Plan.

Duck Recovery Long-Range Plan identifies challenges and suggests strategies for the MN DNR and its conservation partners for sustaining duck populations and their habitats.

Long Range Plan for the Ring-necked Pheasant in Minnesota

A Deer Plan which is under development.

Long Range Plan for The Wild Turkey in Minnesota

Scientific and Natural Area Program Strategic Land Protection Plan provides an approach for prioritizing lands to protect through designation as a SNA. One non-state planning effort that is particularly relevant to the interpretation aspect of this project is the 2014 Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance Interpretive Plan. It provides a number of ideas for strengthening existing interpretive messages and themes and some new ideas. A summary of southern Minnesota traveler characteristics is provided based on studies from the University Tourism Center and Davidson/Peterson Associates.

Online Survey Summary Results & Trends in Outdoor Recreation

An online public survey was facilitated as a component of the comprehensive public input process associated with the development of the Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan. The overarching goals of the survey were to provide another avenue for public input into the Master Plan, better understand existing recreational use and preferences in the planning area, and prioritize potential recreation and conservation concepts and goals for inclusion in the Master Plan. The complete online survey report is provided as a separate document (see references).

Regional and National Context

The Minnesota River Valley exists within a larger regional and national framework of outdoor recreation areas and opportunities. While the public survey was intended to yield planning area-specific information, it is also helpful to understand the area's role and niche within this larger context. This background information provides additional context to evaluate the results of the public survey, as well as another source of information to help inform the development of the Master Plan. A summary of several available and commonly cited regional and national recreation-related information sources is provided in the survey report.

Key takeaways from these other outdoor recreation sources of information include:

- Nature-based outdoor recreation continues to experience growth driven in part by population growth,
- The mix of outdoor recreation activities and preferences is changing and is expected to continue to change,
- Public lands and their corresponding resource values (recreational, aesthetic, cultural/historic, etc.) are highly important in providing recreation opportunities,
- The public is motivated to participate in outdoor recreation activities for a variety of reasons including being outdoors, experiencing nature, and getting away from regular/daily routine, and
- Partnerships are a vital tool in leveraging funding to maintain, enhance, and promote outdoor recreation opportunities.

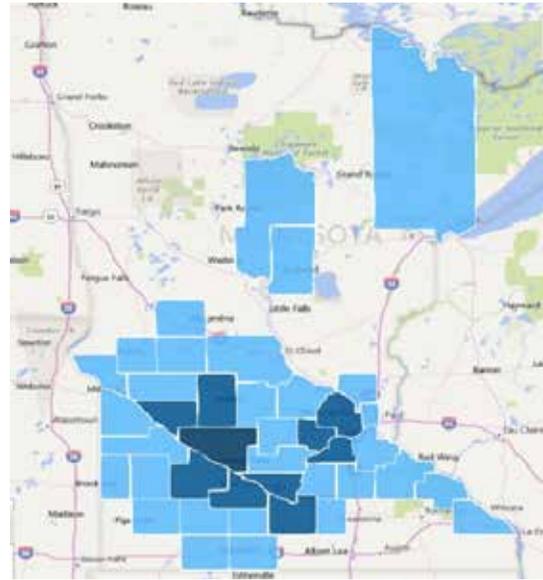


Figure 3-1. Counties where survey participants reside

Online Survey Participants Locations

Nearly all survey participants were from Minnesota (over 99%). Participants were from 42 of Minnesota's 87 counties. The top five counties from a participation perspective included:

Renville (25.6%)

Blue Earth (9.0%)

Brown (9.0%)

Redwood (7.7%)

Hennepin (6.3%)

At a more granular geographic level, participants were from 118 different Zip codes.

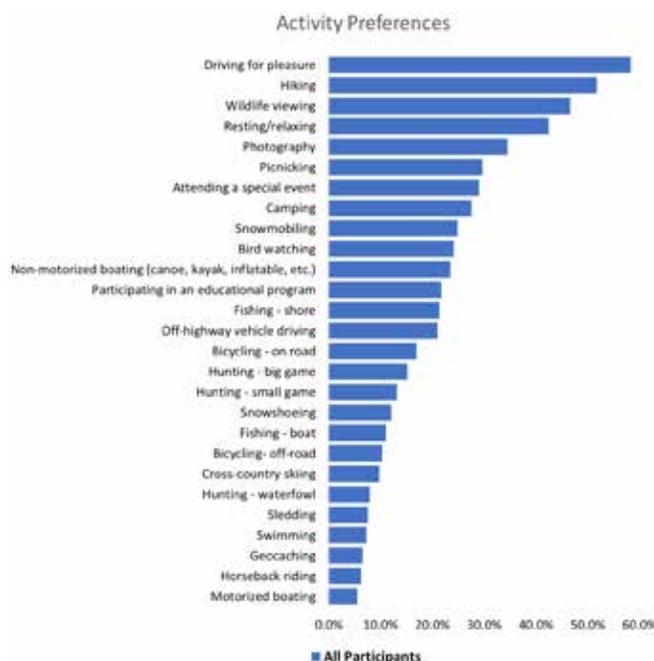
Public Survey Results

The public survey was available for approximately five weeks (October 3 through November 4, 2016). The planning team encouraged residents, past visitors, recreation and conservation groups, and other stakeholders to participate in the survey. In total, the planning team collected 382 usable surveys, a majority (99%+) of which were completed by Minnesota residents. Eighty-seven percent of survey participants were familiar (combined somewhat, very, or extremely familiar response categories) with the recreation opportunities available in the Minnesota River Valley. Additionally, slightly more than 93% of participants had visited the Minnesota River Valley in the previous 12 months.

Other key recreation characteristics of survey participants to the Minnesota River Valley include:

- Participants took an average of 53 trips to the area in the past 12 months,
- The average group size on a trip to the area was 3 people,
- Participants reported the highest levels of visitation to the area in May through October,
- Driving for pleasure, wildlife viewing, hiking, photography, and resting/relaxing are some of

Figure 3-2. Survey participant outdoor recreation activity preferences. Top four preferences include: driving for pleasure, hiking, wildlife viewing, and resting/relaxing.



the most common activities, and

- Participants are generally satisfied with their recreational experiences in the area.

The results of the public surveys indicate several opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism initiatives in the Minnesota River Valley, including:

- Promote niche activities (e.g., special events, camping, bicycling, snowmobiling, etc.) either on their own or as part of a suite of recreation opportunities available in the area,
- Improve and enhance specific elements of the recreation experience, in particular programs and information,
- Provide a network of outdoor recreation sites, programs, and affiliated businesses and organizations to serve local residents and visitors,
- Market to regional population centers within a 2 to 2.5-hour drive from the area (e.g., Minneapolis, St. Paul, Mankato, Sioux Falls, etc.), and
- Facilitate and promote partnerships and other joint efforts to enhance the outdoor recreation opportunities and attract visitors

The public survey also asked participants about their preferences regarding recreation experiences, as well as both recreation and conservation actions in the Minnesota River Valley. In terms of recreation, participants highlighted the river and scenic quality as important attributes of the area.

Participants also indicated a preference for:

- Driving, hiking, or off-road vehicle driving as the primary mode of transportation,
- Nature- and adventure-based experiences, and
- To be outdoors and to experience natural surroundings as their primary benefits of a trip to the area.

Given the importance participants placed on nature, the outdoors, and scenic quality, these features of the Minnesota River Valley should factor heavily into the planning scenarios for the area.

Survey participants were also asked to rank a series of 10 recreation and conservation goals associated

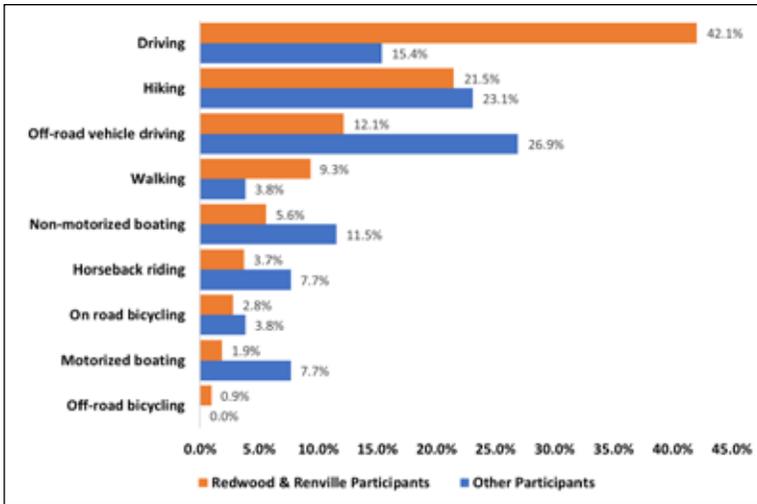


Figure 3-3. Survey participants referred modes of travel. Top four for Renville and Redwood County residents include: driving, hiking, OHV riding, and walking. Top four for others includes: OHV riding, hiking, driving, and non-motorized boating.

with the Master Plan. Through their priority ranking, participants indicated general support for enhanced recreation opportunities, quality of life, and acknowledgement of the agricultural heritage of the area. That said, all recreation-related goals were highly or moderately supported by at least 70 percent of survey participants.

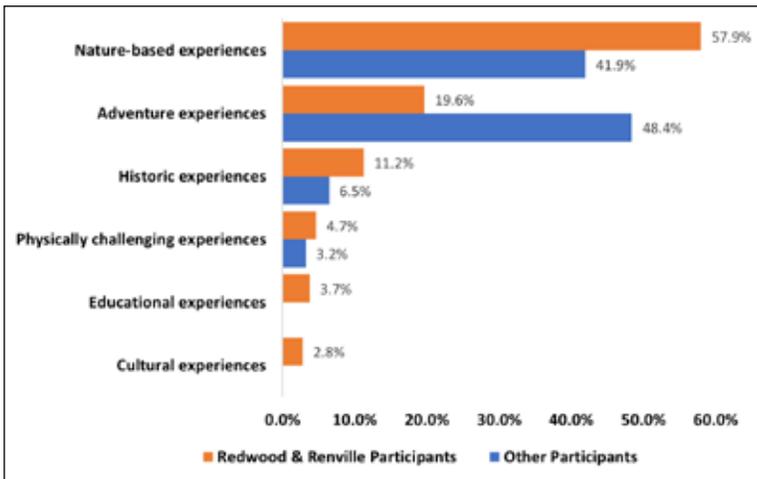


Figure 3-4. Survey participants priority experiences. Top four experiences include: nature-based experiences, adventure experiences, historic, and physical challenge.

About 43 percent of survey participants indicated that new conservation goals were needed in the area. These participants indicated the highest levels of support (as indicated by high or moderate prioritization) for new conservation goals that are focused on water quality, habitat management, and the protection of special status species.

- Master Plan Task Force Members**
- Redwood County Commissioners
 - Redwood County Parks and Trails Committee
 - Redwood Soil & Water Conservation District
 - Renville County Commissioners
 - Renville County Parks and Trails Commission
 - Renville County Housing & Economic Development Corporation



Photo - Geology hound by Ron Bolduan

Public Outreach

Development of this master plan included extensive public and agency participation. Before starting the planning process, the MN DNR convened a Citizen Advisory Committee (2013) with a wide variety of stakeholders; their input was used in developing the Plan. Public input was actively sought throughout the planning process through several different venues. A [project webpage](#) was created as a portal to share information about the project and encourage participation in the process. Over 200 individuals and organizations joined a project email list to stay informed and contribute their opinions.

Renville and Redwood Counties formed a Task Force to provide advice during the entire master plan process. A series of stakeholder interviews were held with representatives of non-profit organizations, government organizations, and individuals, to ask specific questions related to solutions for the Master Plan.

The stakeholders were asked the following questions:

- ❑ What would you like to see in an outdoor recreation and conservation master plan?
- ❑ What are the best opportunities for conservation in the Minnesota River Valley?
- ❑ What are the best opportunities for providing outdoor recreation in the Minnesota River Valley?
- ❑ What are important considerations for trail planning?
- ❑ Who should we engage in this project?
- ❑ Do you have other ideas or information you'd like to share?
- ❑ How can you help us promote participation in the project?

Two sets of public workshops were held to provide information about the project and request input from participants. People who could not attend the workshops were able to review information on the project webpage and provide input by email or other means. The first set of public workshops focused on informing participants about the scope of the project and identifying both issues and opportunities that should be addressed. The second set of workshops focused on participant input on a draft set of master plan goals and actions. Detailed results from all outreach methods are available in the public input reports listed in the reference section of the Master Plan. All the public and agency input throughout the process was invaluable in defining Master Plan issues and solutions.



Photo - Participatory prioritization exercise in Master Plan public meeting

Figure 3-5. Master Plan Public Workshops

| Public Workshops | Date | Number of Participants |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Workshop 1 - Olivia | September 27th, 2016 | 40 |
| Workshop 1 - Redwood Falls | September 28th, 2016 | 43 |
| Workshop 2 - Olivia | February 15, 2017 | 33 |
| Workshop 2 - Redwood Falls | February 16, 2017 | 26 |
| Total Workshop Participants | | 142 |

Organizations that contributed to the master plan process include:

- Agricultural interests; including farmers, landowners
- Back Country Horsemen of MN (BCH-MN)
- City of Franklin
- City of Olivia
- City of Redwood Falls
- Clean Up the River Environment (CURE)
- 4H Shooting Sports
- Kandi-Ren Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP)
- Lower Sioux Indian Community ~ Office of Environment
- Lower Sioux Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO)
- Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA)
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR)
- Minnesota Horse Trail Riders Association (MTRA)
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- Minnesota State Representative
- Minnesota United Snowmobilers Association (MNUSA)
- Minnesota Valley All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Riders
- Minnesota Valley Snow Riders
- Minnesota Valley History Learning Center (MVHLC)
- Montevideo Snow Drifters
- Redwood Area Chamber and Tourism Office (RACT)
- Redwood Area Development Corporation (RADC)
- Redwood County
- Redwood County Parks and Trails Committee
- Redwood County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)
- Redwood Gazette
- Renville County
- Renville County Drift Runners
- Renville County Historical Society and Museum
- Renville County Housing and Redevelopment Authority/Economic Development Authority (HRA/EDA)
- Renville County Park Commission
- Renville County Register
- Renville County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)
- Renville County Trail Committee
- Renville County Water & Household

- Hazardous Waste (HHW) Management
- Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative
- Tatanka Bluffs Corridor/local advocates
- Upper Sioux Indian Community ~ Office of Environment
- West Central Tribune



Photo - Small group discussion in Master Plan public meeting



Photo - Crowd at Master Plan public meeting



Photo - Small group discussion in Master Plan public meeting

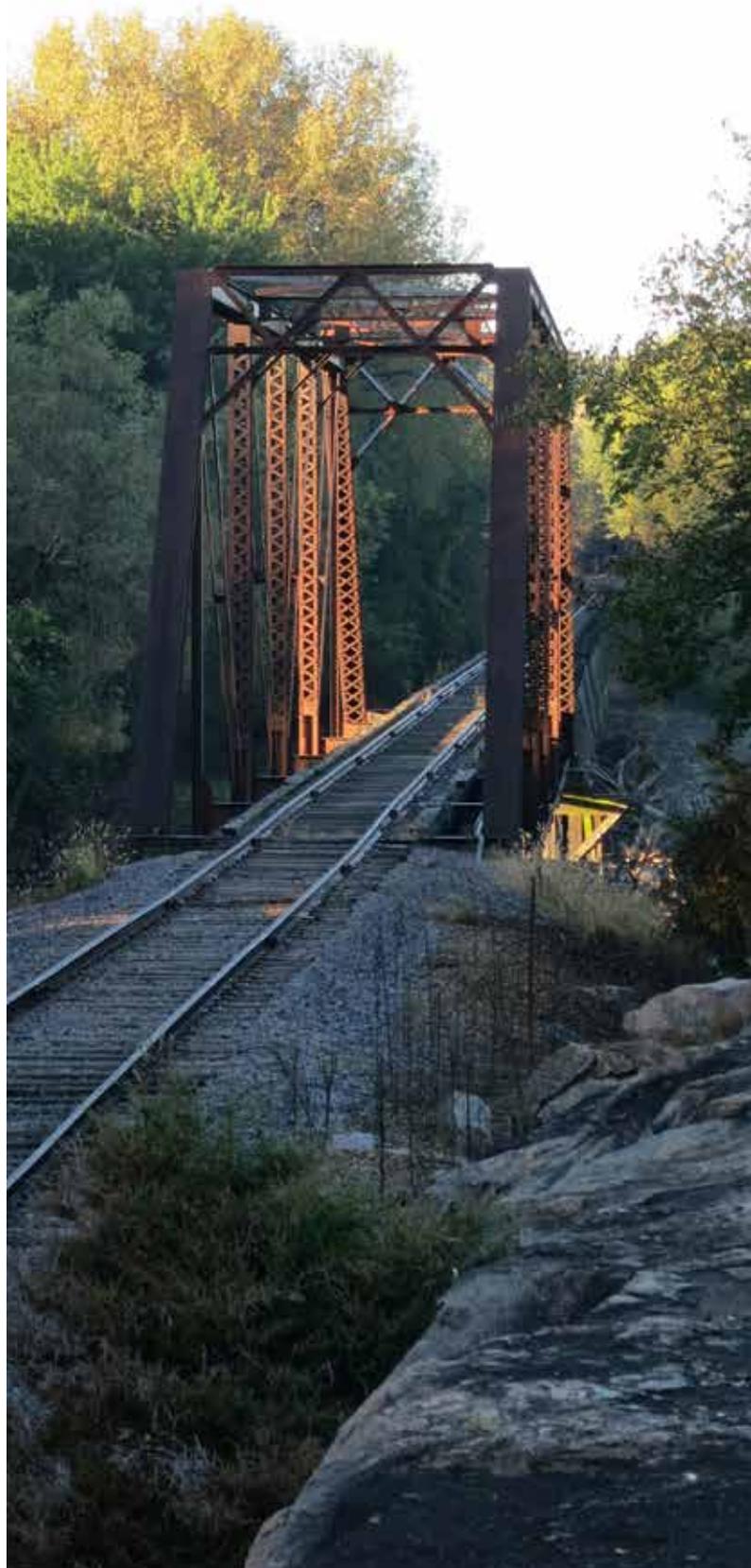


Photo - Historic railroad bridge in the Valley

Vision, Goals, Actions

Minnesota River Valley is a place where adventures in nature and history abound.

This section of the Master Plan establishes guiding statements and actions to realize a vision for an exceptional recreation experience and well-conserved Minnesota River Valley within Redwood and Renville Counties. The following implementation section provides guidance for phases, priorities, organization, responsibilities, support, and funding to achieve the Master Plan vision.



Photo - Canoeing on the Minnesota River

Vision

The following statement provides an overarching vision for the master plan:

The Minnesota River Valley (Valley) in Redwood and Renville Counties is a shared landscape with nature-based recreation opportunities in a conserved agricultural prairie riverine ecosystem. The Valley is an outstanding example of conservation of natural, cultural, historical, and agricultural resources and increased public access to diverse outdoor recreation opportunities. Essential local and state partnerships lead to effective conservation, nature-based recreation and tourism, management, marketing, and interpretation of the area. Successful management and marketing strengthens the rural regional economy, resulting in a higher quality of life for residents and visitors alike. The Valley is a place where adventures in nature and history abound.

Desired Resource Condition

The desired future condition of the diverse resources in the Valley is the preservation of historical/cultural resources and traditional lifestyles while enhancing and protecting ecological diversity.

Influences outside the Valley, such as drain tiling of row crop agricultural areas, directly impact water quality and flow rates within the Valley. While this plan does not directly address these larger watershed issues; land, road and trail management within the Valley should be optimized to both filter outside influences and minimize water impacts.

Programs, expertise, and funds should be sought to support private conservation-based agriculture and other private lands. These programs should directly benefit the land owner and nature. These well managed private lands could serve as an example and generate revenue through agricultural tourism (agritourism).

Rare and sensitive ecological resources should be protected and restored in habitats such as wetlands, rock outcrops, prairie, savanna and floodplain forests. Habitats should be managed to strengthen wildlife populations that also benefit recreation opportunities such wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing. Historic and cultural resources should be protected and interpreted to increase their value and appreciation.

Public park and conservation lands should be expanded to manage habitat while providing balanced recreation opportunities. While additional public lands



Photo - Trails in Beaver Falls County Park

are desirable, they should only be expanded with adequate resources to not only manage them but also improve both their habitats and recreation resources. The Minnesota River Valley is a beautiful natural landscape that should be conserved for its own inherent value and for people to appreciate.

Desired Visitor Experiences

The Valley is a beautiful landscape residents have cared for and enjoyed for many generations. This connection to the Minnesota River and its landscape helps define the local culture and lifestyle. The Valley and its resources provide a quality of life with the opportunity to attract new residents and visitors.

Current parks and trails in the area provide limited recreation opportunities. A connected recreation network consisting of scenic roads, parks, conservation lands, rivers, lakes, historic sites, and agritourism connected to communities and other services will greatly improve recreation opportunities in the Valley. This will spur new participation, programs and businesses in outdoor recreation. A trail network with convenient access to recreation, interpretation and adventure opportunities will bring many benefits to residents and visitors. Walking and bicycling are two of the most popular forms of exercise and outdoor recreation in the United States, so expanding opportunities for these activities will benefit many people. Providing these activities in a beautiful natural setting creates memorable outdoor recreation experiences.



Photo - Prairie wetland with Blazing Star flowers by Megan Benage

Residents and visitors can choose from a wide variety of travel modes and experiences:

- ❑ Scenic touring in passenger vehicles
- ❑ Off-highway vehicles (OHVs) and bicycles with many overlooks
- ❑ Interpretive stops and recreation sites for larger groups with varying degrees of physical abilities
- ❑ Hunting and fishing opportunities that are improved with additional information and access to the river and public wildlife habitats
- ❑ Rivers and lakes with more and improved public access for education, fishing, boating and paddling
- ❑ Motorized recreation including OHVs and snowmobiles with a positive place to ride in a well-designed and managed setting.

Many residents and visitors enjoy camping in well designed and maintained public and private campgrounds with connections to the River and trails. The Valley has a rich history and culture that residents and visitors will enjoy exploring with improved programs, information and facilities. Frequent special events are held in the Valley to celebrate and introduce visitors to all its rich resources and experiences. This collection of recreation experiences improves the quality of life for residents and draws new visitors to the area.

Goals & Actions

These goals and actions were developed through a participatory and professional process including interested citizens, city, county, state, and consultant staff. The research section of the Master Plan describes the participatory process and research used to help define the goals and actions.



Photo - Trail in Whispering Ridge AMA



Photo - Kayaking near Vicksburg County Park by Scott Kudelka

The Master Plan has five general goals:

- ❑ Recreation
- ❑ Conservation
- ❑ Culture & Heritage
- ❑ Nature and Culture Interpretation and Education
- ❑ Framework for Land Use

Recreation

The master plan public survey identified experience types that could be provided. Nature-based recreation and adventure were the two highest ranked. The two top outdoor recreation benefits identified were: “to be outdoors” and “to experience natural surroundings”. Visitors ranked driving for pleasure; wildlife viewing; hiking; resting and relaxing in the top tier outdoor activities they participated in. In general, most survey respondents were satisfied with their experience and the existing recreation facilities, though some felt there was room for improvement, especially those from outside the area. Survey results, public input, outdoor recreation trends and professional expertise have led to the following recreation goals and actions.

Goal:

Create an expanded recreation network for residents and visitors that complements the Valley’s diverse natural and cultural resources.

The following actions support the above goal.

Action: Plan and develop a recreational trail system to interconnect communities, parks, rivers, natural areas, and tourism related businesses.

- ❑ Potential trail connections include those to the nearby towns of Redwood Falls, Morton, Franklin, Sacred Heart, Granite Falls, Delhi, Belview, the Upper Sioux, and Lower Sioux Indian Communities, County parks, historic sites, DNR lands, and



Photo - Family bicycle ride by Ron Bolduan

services such as restaurants, lodges and campgrounds. These connections will allow more people easy access to future state or regional trails and increase desirability of trail use in the area.

- Guiding principles for ecologically sustainable trails provide the underlying rationale for actions related to protecting, restoring, and managing natural environments associated with trail development. Applications of these principles will minimize the impact of trails on natural resources and sensitive ecological systems. The strict application of these guiding principles must be balanced with the desire to locate trails where they will be of high recreational value to the targeted users, who often want to be close to nature, enjoy beautiful scenery, and observe wildlife. This is an important consideration and underscores the need for resource managers, trail designers, and other interested individuals to work together to determine the most important values for any given trail alignment. There are seven core principles:

1. Avoid sensitive ecological areas and critical habitats.
2. Develop trails in areas already influenced by human activity.
3. Provide buffers to avoid/protect sensitive ecological and hydrologic systems.
4. Use natural infiltration and best practices for storm water management.
5. Provide ongoing stewardship of the trails and adjoining natural systems.
6. Ensure that trails remain sustainable.
7. Formally decommission and restore unsustainable trail corridors (DNR 2007).

- Trails in the area should be multi-use with some

temporal and spatial separation for safety or experience quality reasons. The following are recommended trail uses: bicycling, walking and running, dog walking, in-line skating/skate skiing, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, horseback riding, snowmobiling, OHV (non-state lands only, where appropriate), fishing access, environmental education, and interpretation. Hunting on trails in the area could be allowed on public lands except where regulated or prohibited by community ordinance or state park rules and regulations. Limitations of width, compatibility of uses, landowner agreements, land use restrictions, and resource constraints may dictate that not all recommended uses can be accommodated at all times for the entire length of the trail. Additional alternative trail alignments will be pursued as necessary to accommodate proposed uses. Trail development will be accessible to visitors with physical challenges wherever possible.



Photo - Campsite at Upper Sioux Agency State Park

Action: Create plans for additional recreation facilities, parking areas, signs, and their maintenance

- Identify existing and proposed park and recreation sites that are easily accessible and have demonstrated potential to offer new natural resource based recreation uses.
- Identify new recreation uses not currently available in the region that can increase quality of life for residents and support **ecotourism** and economic development.
- Identify renovations or improvements needed to existing sites to better meet current visitor demands and use trends.
- Complete a Mountain Bike Park Feasibility Study as a potential new outdoor recreation opportunity for the area.

- Collaborate to expand regional outdoor recreation safety and education programming, including new regional facilities. Examples could include summer camps, environmental education centers, archery range, paddling sports, and OHV training.
- Complete a study to determine the best location, style and standards for signs to create a unified wayfinding system for the Valley. The signs should be designed to work in conjunction with maps and information systems (webpage, apps, brochures) for the area.

Action: Expand Water-Based Facilities

- Improve existing river access and recreation sites to increase opportunities for paddling, fishing, boating, special events, and gathering.
- Develop additional river and lake access and recreation sites to increase opportunities for paddling, fishing, boating special events, and gathering.
- Establish an information system for visitors to easily understand current water conditions and safety. This would provide information about water quality and flow rates with experience and safety recommendations.
- Create a plan for recreation experiences and facilities at Anderson Lake County Park. This park could serve as a regional training center for paddle sports and related activities.



Photo - Trail ride at Fort Ridgely State Park by Scott Roemhildt

Action: Develop a Destination Equestrian Recreation Area

- Complete a feasibility study to locate and establish an equestrian recreation area with camping, facilities, services, trails, etc. This should be done in conjunction with existing equestrian groups and advocates.
- If the feasibility study is favorable, develop a master plan and environmental worksheet for the selected equestrian recreation area. The equestrian recreation area should be connected to the regional trail system.

Action: Develop Positive Solutions for Motorized Recreation

- Establish a motorized recreation area with a trailhead, facilities and trails for a diversity of experiences and skills levels. The recreation area should serve as a regional training and practice area for OHV recreation for both youth and adults. Renville County is currently planning for this type of riding area.
- Develop a motorized recreation plan for the Valley to manage use of some county roads as OHV routes. The plan would establish destinations and parking for OHVs. An information and training program will help riders plan their experience in a safe and responsible way. Both Redwood and Renville Counties previously authorized use of some county roads for OHV use as long as riders follow adopted rules.



Photo - Launching canoes on the Minnesota River in Morton

Conservation

The natural scenic beauty and relatively high quality of native plant communities in the valley is what draws people to this area. Public input for this project has resulted in high agreement that these resources should be protected and enhanced wherever possible on public and private lands. Several state programs have identified and ranked the Valley areas that are critical for species of greatest conservation need and general wildlife population sustainability into the future. A strategically connected network of these high-quality public and private lands can help ensure these resources function at a high level in to the future.

Goal: Create a connected network of high quality natural and or visual resource areas that support larger conservation goals, contribute additional scenic quality to the region, and provide balance with recreation activities where appropriate.

The following actions support the above goal.

Action: Strategically increase public and private conservation lands

- Identify lands with rare and sensitive resources and define long-term strategies to conserve them as public or private conservation lands. Create incentives for land owners to participate in private conservation programs or voluntary sale of land to public agencies.
 - Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)
 - Aquatic Management Areas (AMAs)
 - Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs)



Photo - Barred Owl by Ron Bolduan



Photo - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) sign in field by Scott Kudelka

- County parks
- Private lands with conservation objectives

Action: Minimize public use impacts to landowners

- Maintain excellent communications with landowners and appropriate signage
- Build expectations and opportunities for public land users to reduce impacts to landowners
- Work with Enforcement agencies to resolve trespass issues

Action: Collaborate with MN DNR to implement habitat management plans

- Several Renville County parks provide critical habitat for rare species and could benefit from additional management, in collaboration with MN DNR.

Action: Protect sensitive bluff lines and shorelines from development and erosion

- Protecting bluff lines ensures scenic viewshed protection and can help reduce erosion in the waters flowing into the Minnesota River, improving important aquatic habitat
- Counties may need to explore ordinance or rule changes to protect these areas
- Agricultural best practices and cost sharing for buffering ravines and bluff lines can be emphasized

Action: Work with Counties and private land owners to improve habitat for Species

in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

- MN DNR can provide technical assistance to increase positive actions for SGCN
- In some cases, joint management may occur

Action: Develop landscape level plan and model for desired future conditions

- These types of plans or models can provide details for possible landscape scenarios that will accomplish conservation goals and can more objectively identify key sites for various uses.

Culture & Heritage

Participants in the master plan process voiced a strong interest in both protecting and sharing the rich cultural and historic heritage of the Valley. The area already has some quality programs, museums and public historic sites known to local residents. Information and experiences can be expanded and improved to share with more residents and visitors.

Goal: Celebrate and highlight the unique cultural heritage and history of the area

The following actions support the above goal.

Action: Integration of Scenic Byway Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to several of the master plan goals but are combined here as they come from the *Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Comprehensive Plan*. This is a related master plan “designed to convey the Valley’s potential and thus assist with attaining national byway designation through the Federal Highway Administration. The plan is also, however, a rural tourism strategy to guide investments, marketing and interpretive development along the corridor.”

The *Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Comprehensive Plan* describes in detail an eight-point implementation initiative called RiverStories, the eight points are: Organizational Program; Resource Management; National Marketing Program; Tourism Product Development; RiverStories Interpretive Program; Valley Ventures Fund; Transportation Improvements, and; Recreation Investments. Additional

ideas for considerations can be found in the more recent *Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance Interpretive Plan, 2014*.

The Byway Comprehensive Plan makes a wide range of recommendations and actions. Some of the key actions related to the Byway in this area include:

- Develop and expand interpretive and educational opportunities: recommend signage and kiosk locations; develop interpretive information including brochures and audioguides; develop additional interpretive waysides and overlooks.
- Maintain and manage the areas gravel roads, which contribute greatly to the byways character.
- Improve the commercial gateways in adjacent communities.
- Develop strategies to protect the health and economic agricultural industry while increasing tourism including the development of an Agritourism Initiative and Agritourism Fund for the byway.
- Build the Agritourism product along the byway.
- Develop a tourism marketing program for the region.

Photo - Interpretive talk at tipi by Lower Sioux Historical Site





Photo - Statue on Lower Sioux Indian Community

- Develop a series of River Town events with all the events combining downtown activities and festivals with river oriented activities.
- Consider some form of Artists in Residence or Artists Retreat program for each of the communities.
- Develop a River Towns Main Street Program with assistance from the National Main Street Center
- Develop a targeted tourism marketing program directed to specialty shopkeepers in the Twin Cities or other urban areas.
- Work with local rail lines on a project to bring excursion rail service into the Valley.
- Improve bicycling trails throughout the Valley
- Seek funding to improve signing, visitor facilities and infrastructure in the county park system along the river.

Action: Collaborate with Dakota Communities

- Complete a study in conjunction with the Dakota Communities to identify how they can benefit from and contribute to recreation, tourism and conservation programs in the Valley. A consultant specialized in working with the Dakota culture should lead this effort.

Action: Promoting agricultural heritage

- Research and publish information related to the history of agricultural heritage of the Valley to be used in educational programs, interpretive materials and special events.
- Implement and record an oral history of farmers and land owners in the area to record their experience from their perspective.

Action: Collaborate with local arts and heritage organizations

- Expand opportunities for local art and hobbies through programs and special events in communities and at recreation sites during high visitation periods
- Hold special events to celebrate and inform people about the diverse heritage of the Valley

Nature and Culture Interpretation and Education

Education and interpretation are the bridge to enrich experiences, inform people about responsible recreation, and create appreciation for Valley resources. Quality nature and culture information greatly improve recreation experiences. Master plan participants expressed a strong interest in providing and receiving information on nature, culture, responsible recreation and safety.

Goal: Expand natural and cultural resource education opportunities in the region to support local, state, and private groups that promote environmental stewardship.

The following actions support the above goal.

Action: Support Development of Visitor/ Interpretive Centers

- Visitor and interpretive centers provide unique experiences and services for visitors. They should be carefully located to maximize their use and benefit. They should be developed as facilities and landscapes with multiple uses, such as meeting and presentation space. It's important they also benefit



Photo - Birch Coulee Battlefield Interpretive Sign by Ron Bolduan

nearby communities and residents. A feasibility study should be conducted for each potential center to fully understand its location, benefits and costs. The Minnesota River Valley History Learning Center is a current work in progress that should be supported.

Action: Collaborate with MN Master Naturalists to develop trained docents for MN River Valley

- Many retired and other people enjoy sharing their love for nature, history and culture as volunteers. Government and private business staff also have the opportunity to share information with schools, residents and visitors. Quality materials and training programs can help prepare people to “share the wealth.”

Action: Develop an Ecotourism and Cultural Heritage Tourism Program

- A well-designed ecotourism and cultural heritage program can increase visitation, local participation in outdoor recreation and attract the right kind of private investments to the Valley. A tourism program for the area should focus on solutions and experiences designed to celebrate and conserve the Minnesota River Valley and its heritage. Private land and businesses owners should not only benefit from these programs but also invest in them. It’s important to respect private land owners who are not interested in tourism and have regulations that prevent the wrong kinds of investments.

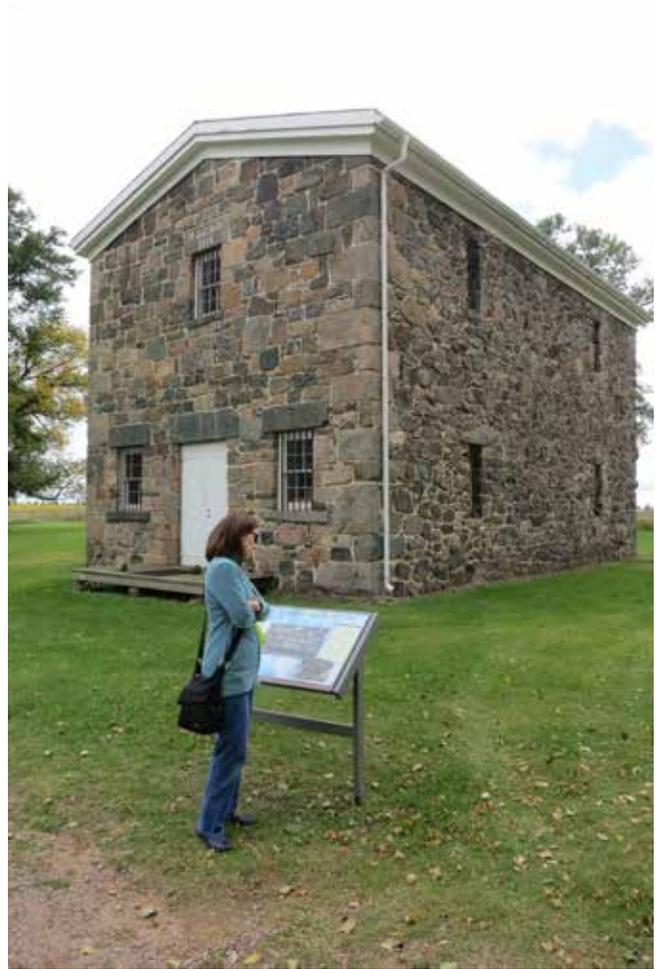


Photo - Interpretive sign at Lower Sioux Agency State Historic Site



Photo - Horse drawn wagon ride by Ron Bolduan

Framework for Land Use

Land owners, Redwood and Renville Counties, the State of Minnesota, among others; have been stewards of the Minnesota River Valley for generations. These stewards have taken care of the Valleys resources and created successful land use and environmental regulations over time. This strong focus on conservation must continue as the basis for a quality natural environment and quality of life. Tourism and recreation development in the area will bring opportunity but also change.

The quality of life for land owners and the natural environment must be conserved as the foundation for success.

Goal: Develop a framework for outdoor recreation, cultural and, education opportunities while respecting private property

The following actions support the above goal.

Action: Develop sustainable agricultural programs

- Support a sustainable agriculture program for existing agricultural lands in the corridor, with the first priority being lands immediately adjacent to the River. The program could help protect and conserve natural resources, improve water quality, enhance profitability, and improve life on the farm. Information is available through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (see Master Plan references).

Photo - Vineyard and restaurant at Grandview Winery



Action: Revise land use regulations for the MN River Valley to allow for agritourism, nature-based recreation and rural lodging

- Plan for and manage land uses in the Valley to balance agriculture, conservation, recreation, and tourism. Revise land use regulations through public processes, as needed.
- The Minnesota River National Scenic Byway

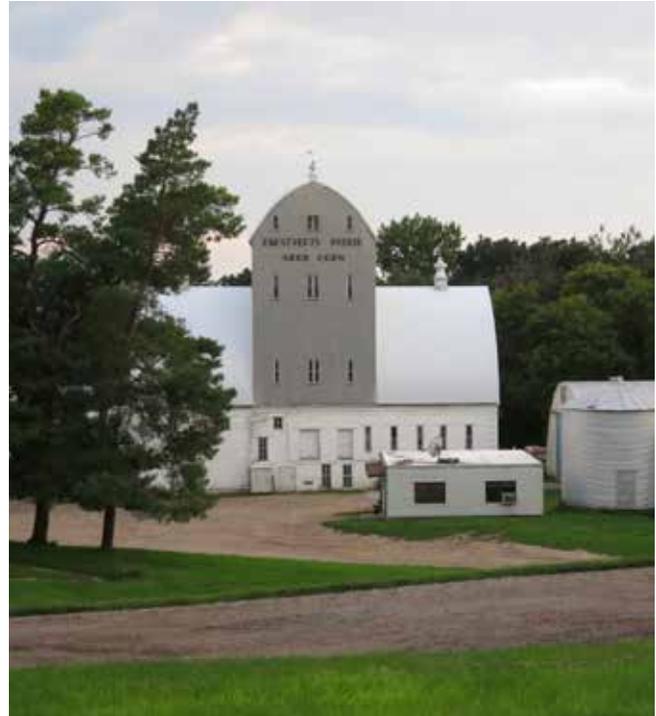


Photo - Historic buildings at Enestvedt's Seed Farm

Comprehensive Plan (refer to Cultural /Heritage section) makes a wide range of recommendations and actions regarding the regions agricultural heritage and industry. As outlined in the Plans Segment 3 Granite Falls to Mankato Implementation Program, the following should be implemented:

- Develop strategies to safe guard the health and economic viability of local family farms, including grass-based farms, while increasing tourism. Include the development of an Agritourism Initiative and Agritourism Fund for the byway.
- Build the Agritourism product along the byway. Example might include: farm and or ranch tours; small organic farming providing local farm to table products; farm stay lodging,

bed and breakfast or similar rural farm or ranch based lodging opportunities; equestrian experiences; etc.

- Support small farms as they make important contributions to the character of the Byway.

Action: Establish design standards for public lands, trails, signs, and roads

- Develop landscape and architectural guidelines for the overall development of: parks, recreation sites, historic sites, architectural structures; signage including identification, wayfinding, regulatory and interpretive; site furnishings (benches, picnic tables, tables, trash receptacles, fencing, lighting, etc.) and; site features and materials (roads, trails, paving, walls, planting, etc.). These guidelines provide for an overall aesthetic and design consistency unifying the many public sites and areas. These guidelines can also be used by private land owners as an example of quality design.



Photo - Autumn in the Valley by Bob Beck



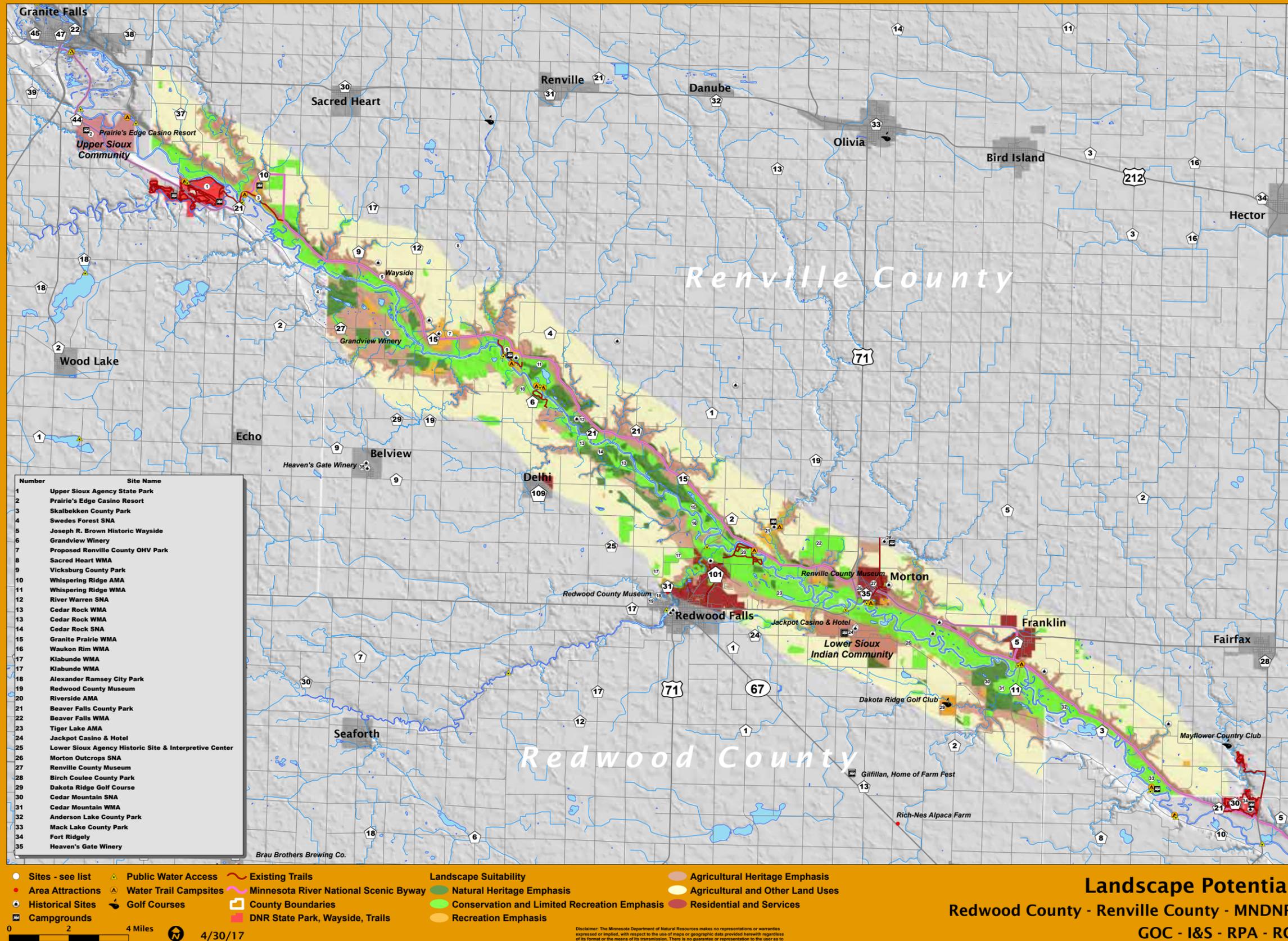
Figure 4-1.

MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY RECREATION NETWORK DIAGRAM

Key Recommendations on the Diagram:

- Establish a Trail System to Connect Communities to Public Lands, Rivers, History, and Recreation
- Protect Important Habitat Areas
- Improve Access and Facilities to the Minnesota River
- Scenic Byway Connects People to Interesting Sites and Experiences
- Communities Provide Recreation and Tourism Services

Figure 4-2



Landscape Potential Map

This analysis map considers potential conservation, recreation, heritage, and other land uses in the Valley.

Natural Heritage Emphasis

- High Protection Areas
- SNA
- Native Prairie Bank
- Wetlands

Conservation and Limited Recreation Emphasis

- WMA
- AMA
- Habitat Complex
- Conservation Easements
- River and Lakes
- Floodplain – 100 year

Recreation Emphasis

- County Parks
- City Parks
- Multi-Use Areas & Trails
- Proposed OHV Park
- Gravel Pits – potential recreation development and restoration lands

Agricultural Heritage Emphasis

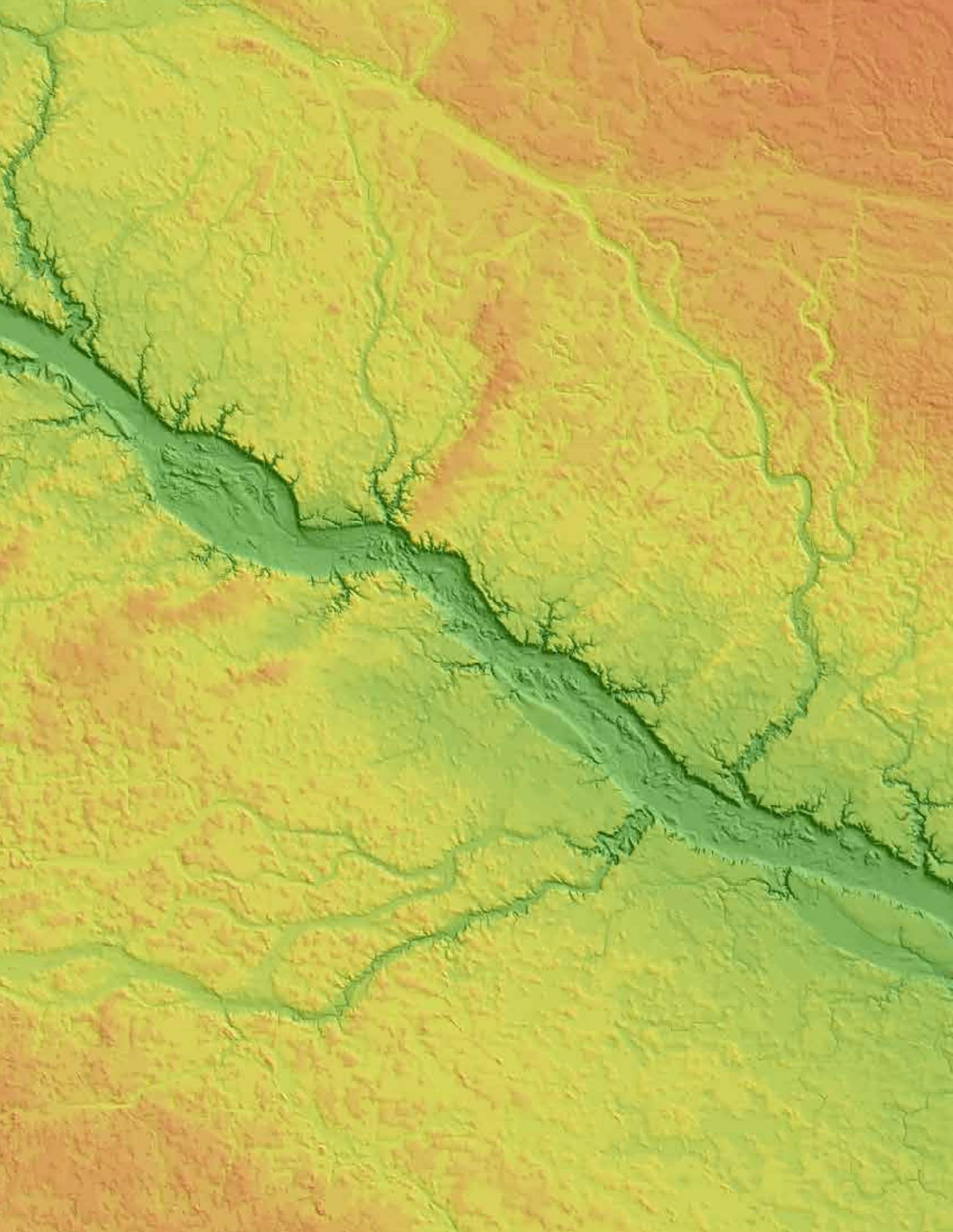
- Conservation Focused Agriculture
- Historic sites
- Lower Sioux Community
- Agritourism (Winery)

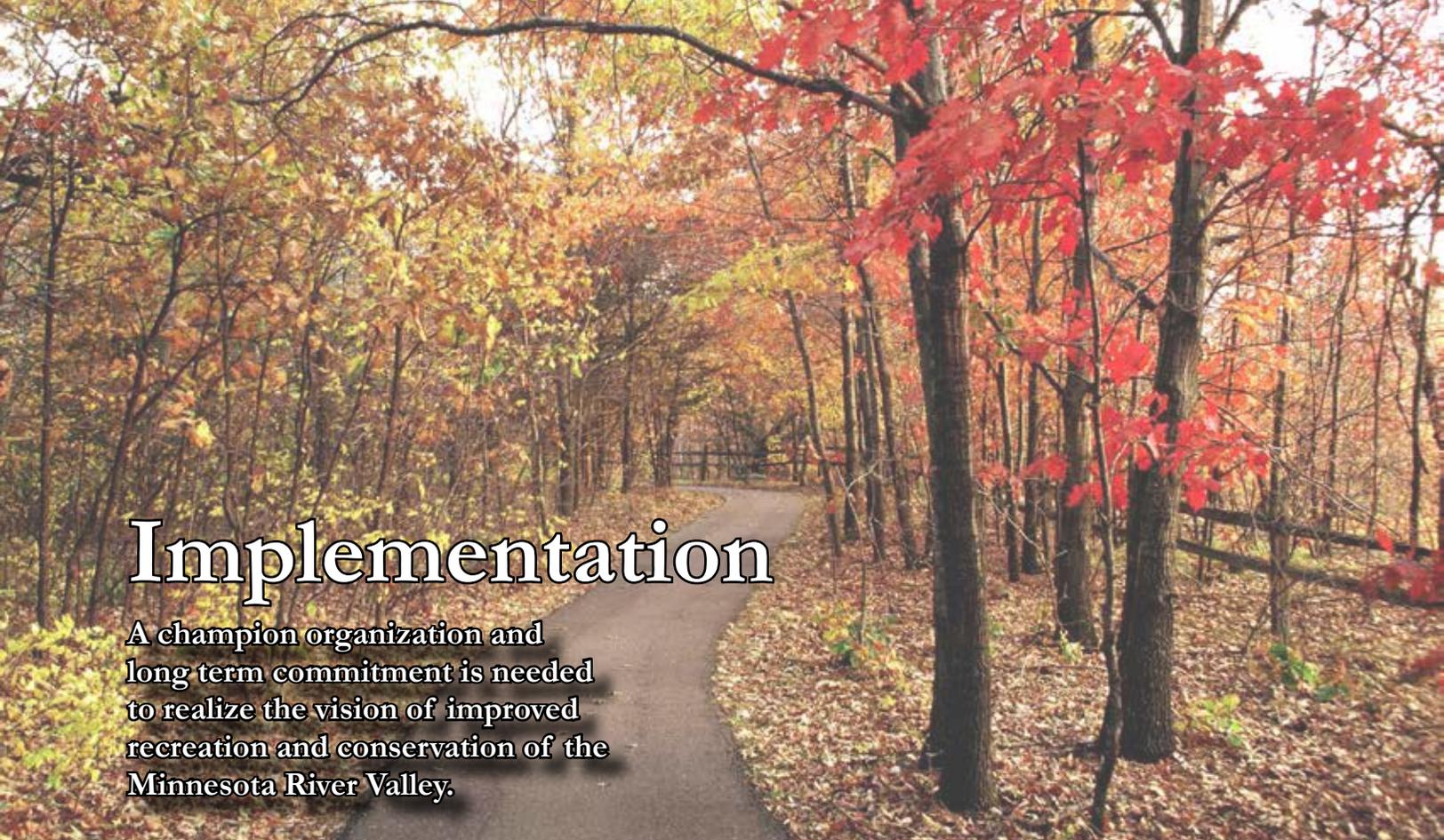
Agricultural and Other Land Uses

- Traditional Agricultural lands
- Residential
- Other Uses

Residential and Services Emphasis

- Communities
- Developed Areas
- Museums
- Lodging
- Food
- Fuel
- Shopping





Implementation

A champion organization and long term commitment is needed to realize the vision of improved recreation and conservation of the Minnesota River Valley.

Photo - Path with fall colors by Ron Bolduan

This Master Plan creates a 20 plus year strategy to achieve its vision, goals and actions. Achievements in the future, will be built on the previous work and vision of county residents, county and state government.

A plan with long-term vision requires ongoing commitment, organization and a strategy to stay on track. The Valley benefits from having many organizations committed to achieving the solutions outlined in the Master Plan. These organizations include but are not limited to: business leaders, historical societies, recreation and conservation groups, agricultural community, Dakota communities, local communities, Redwood County, Renville County, MN DNR and the Minnesota State Legislature.

The people of Minnesota have invested in professional agencies and funding mechanisms to support visions just like the one for the Minnesota River Valley. Establishing an organization of these groups and individuals is the essential first step to ensure the shared vision is achieved.

Implementation will be a multi-phase process. Phases may operate separately or parallel to each other depending on resource availability and willing landowner sales or easements. The first phase will focus on four segments along the river valley. These

areas center on existing multi-purpose recreation sites such as county, city and state parks or higher population centers, such as Redwood Falls and Morton. Detailed planning for public lands around these focus areas and identification of willing landowners will be done in partnership with landowners, county, state and local governments to determine where additional multi-use parcels are best placed on the landscape. Implementation plans will be developed for each focus area. A MN DNR Master Plan Addendum will be provided to describe the implementation process further.

The second phase will focus on creating contiguous recreational trails between the multi-purpose focus areas. Local capacity will be built to identify best alignments. Coordination between DNR, the Counties and Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Council (GMRPTC) will categorize recreation potential into local, regional and state responsibility.

A third phase will involve capacity building for local partners to manage and maintain trails or facilities and provide interpretive opportunities. All phases should include development of trails, trailheads and interpretive sites. Partnerships with local historical groups and the Dakota communities will be key for interpretive site identification, design, and development.

Recommended Designations and Management Category

Designations such as Regional Park Designation, County Heritage Area or National Heritage Area offer innovative methods for citizens to partner with local, state, or federal governments to shape the long-term future of their communities.

Formal designations give added recognition to an area in terms of its natural, cultural or recreational value as well as a tangible measure of protection. Research has shown that, at least in the case of cultural heritage, there are additional advantages beyond just a label. These range from pride to positive benefits in property values. Designations can help increase the understanding and respect for the area. Special designations:

- Are an expression of the communities' appreciation of the value of the area or site;
- Do not restrict property use;
- May give added protection where desired;
- Can open up additional funding sources;
- Involve a collaborative approach that retains local control over use

Designations can help promote Heritage Tourism which focuses on the experience of preserving of a distinct place and its stories. Agritourism is a subset of Heritage Tourism.

Designations within the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation System help people understand for which types of uses the land is being considered. A designation also:

- Indicates that a certain level of inquiry has taken place to access the appropriateness of the area for the proposed use
- Shows there has been public input and legislative communication about the designation
- Provides some certainty about the area's future potential
- Clarifies available funding sources for acquisition, development and, maintenance
- Brings to local communities the numerous economic and social benefits of recreation systems
- The concept of multi-purpose recreational focus areas specifically meets the local request for more and greater flexibility of recreational uses than already exists in the Valley



Photo - Minnesota River tributary

Organizational Framework

The process to improve and conserve the Minnesota River Valley was initiated by county residents and business leaders with a vision to conserve the best of the Valley and to improve the lives of current and future residents. It is essential these private residents continue to play a leadership role to implement this Master Plan. The business and tourism community bring a very important perspective to the project and ultimately make the most effort to promote the area as a great place to live and visit. Likewise, the effort needs entrepreneurs to invest in new and innovative recreation, agritourism and conservation businesses and lands.

Agritourism

Agritourism is generally defined as activities that include visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation to enjoy the rural setting, be educated, or be involved in a special activity. This may include an overnight stay, corn mazes, hands-on U-pick, Winery/Vineyard, horseback, sleigh, or tractor rides to name a few.

The vast majority of the Valley is privately owned. Therefore, it is critical the agricultural and land owner community participate in and benefit from this effort. Existing community groups such as hunters, anglers, recreationists, agricultural cooperatives, historical societies, health organizations, conservationists and cultural advocates should have a role in the project. They too should contribute to and benefit from the effort.

Renville and Redwood Counties initiated the master plan process and should continue to play a leadership role in its implementation. This will require political, financial, and human resource commitment from both Counties. The Counties can seek grants and resources from other sources to assist with their role. The Minnesota State Legislature also directed MN DNR to prepare a Master Plan for the Valley, which

State Recreation Area

A State Recreation Area (SRA) purpose is defined in law as an area which is established to provide a broad selection of outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural setting which may be used by large numbers of people.

demonstrates their commitment to assist with solutions. The MN DNR will designate a representative to serve on an Advisory Board. Additionally, a multi-disciplinary DNR team will work with partners to develop implementation plans for four key areas around existing multi-purpose recreational areas of county, state and city parks. Conservation areas will also be included in this planning. These plans will refine objectives for the consideration of a new SRA unit and recommend best uses and ownership within a smaller focus area. While MN DNR will play an important role implementing the Master Plan, long-term success will depend on both county and private sector commitment and leadership.

The first implementation action of the Master Plan is to organize an Advisory Board, or similar group, to represent organizations committed to the Master Plan and direct priority actions. This Advisory Board could be established as part of a facilitated workshop and through memorandums of understanding (MOU) between the cooperating organizations.

The most important resource in implementing the Master Plan will be professional and volunteer efforts. Human resources are essential to complete priority tasks and actions identified by the Advisory Board. The most successful outdoor recreation and conservation projects in the nation have a vision, master plan, leadership, funds and staff assigned to the effort. Long term success is enhanced with an independent non-



Photo - Group paddling event

profit organization to assist with fundraising, outreach, specific actions, and programs. Most regionally significant recreation and conservation areas have a non-profit organization as part of the organizational solution. Another key action is to gain “regionally significant park” designation through the GMRPTC for all or some of the Renville and Redwood County parks along the river valley. This enables these parks to be eligible for additional funding sources.



Photo - Wooden bridge crossing by Ron Bolduan

Implementation Strategy

A successful strategy to implement the master plan is essential to build support and confidence. The following table provides a prioritized list of actions and suggests lead organizations. Multiple actions will be in progress at any one time. Prioritization of the actions was determined through stakeholder and project Planning Team input. The priority of the actions will likely change based on available resources, collaborator interest, changes in land use and management policies, and availability of property from willing land owners. A more detailed description of the actions is provided in the vision, goals and actions chapter of the Master Plan.

The following table is just a starting point and meant to be a dynamic tool that can change to help the process keep on track. As local partnerships begin to work on these items it may become apparent that particular actions need to be moved into a different phase. Due to the large geographic area involved and the wide variety of activities, some areas might be working at different speeds and thus in different phases.

Figure 5-1. Master Plan Implementation Strategy

| Phase / Action | Priority | Category | Lead Agency |
|--|----------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Phase 1 | | | |
| Establish Advisory Board to implement the Master Plan | 1 | Organization | All |
| Designate DNR internal MRV working team | 2 | Organization | MN DNR |
| Seek special State designation for the Valley and designate the project area as a County Heritage Corridor | 3 | Designation | All |
| Assign two DNR personnel to participate in Partner Advisory Board | 4 | Organization | MN DNR |
| Dedicate resources for marketing and outreach expertise and resources to help develop informational materials and maps | 5 | Marketing/ Information | County |
| Collaborate with Dakota Communities | 6 | Culture & Heritage | All |
| Develop implementation plans for 2- 4 multi-use focus areas and conservation areas within 2 years of project designation | 7 | Recreation & Conservation | MN DNR |
| Integration of Scenic Byway Comprehensive Plan Recommendations | 8 | Culture & Heritage | All |
| Develop an Ecotourism and Cultural Heritage Tourism Program | 9 | Interpretation & Education | County |
| Plan and develop a recreational trail system to interconnect communities, parks, rivers, natural areas, and tourism related businesses | 10 | Recreation | All |
| Provide protection for sensitive and rare resources | 11 | Conservation | All |
| Develop positive solutions for motorized recreation | 12 | Recreation | County |
| Minimize public use impacts to landowners | 13 | Conservation | All |
| Expand water-based facilities | 14 | Recreation | All |
| Support development of visitor/interpretive centers | 15 | Interpretation & Education | All |
| Revise land use regulations for the MN River Valley to allow for agritourism, nature-based recreation and lodging | 16 | Land Use | County |
| Protect sensitive bluff lines and shorelines from development and erosion | 17 | Conservation Land Use | County |
| Phase 2 | | | |
| Establish a non-profit foundation to help implement the Master Plan | 1 | Organization | County |
| Establish design standards for public lands, trails, signs, and roads | 2 | Land Use | All |

Figure 5-1. Master Plan Implementation Strategy (continued)

| Phase / Action | Priority | Category | Lead Agency |
|---|----------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Promote agricultural heritage | 3 | Culture & Heritage | All |
| Support sustainable agricultural programs | 4 | Land Use | All |
| Collaborate with DNR to implement habitat management plans | 5 | Conservation | County |
| Bolster local capacity to identify trail alignments, to acquire, manage and maintain recreational facilities | 6 | Organization | MN DNR |
| Create plans for additional recreation facilities, parking areas, signs, and their maintenance | 7 | Recreation | All |
| Develop a destination equestrian recreation area | 8 | Recreation | County |
| Strategically increase public and private conservation lands | 9 | Conservation | All |
| Collaborate on Valley branding/sign development with project partners | 10 | Marketing/ Information | All |
| Develop desired future conditions model/plan for water, biodiversity and outdoor recreation for Valley area | 11 | All | MN DNR |
| Determine state land signage options unique for this area, to be included on all units within the designated project area | 12 | Marketing/ Information | MN DNR |
| Phase 3 | | | |
| Collaborate with local arts and heritage organizations | 1 | Culture & Heritage | All |
| Collaborate with MN Master Naturalists to develop trained docents for MN River Valley | 2 | Interpretation & Education | All |
| Work with Counties and private land owners to improve habitat for Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) | 3 | Conservation | MN DNR |

Notes:

- Under the Lead Agency column, “All” includes Redwood County, Renville County and MN DNR.
- The priority rankings in the table only represent a relative level of importance.
- Multiple actions can be implemented at a time.

Photo - Fishing on the Minnesota River



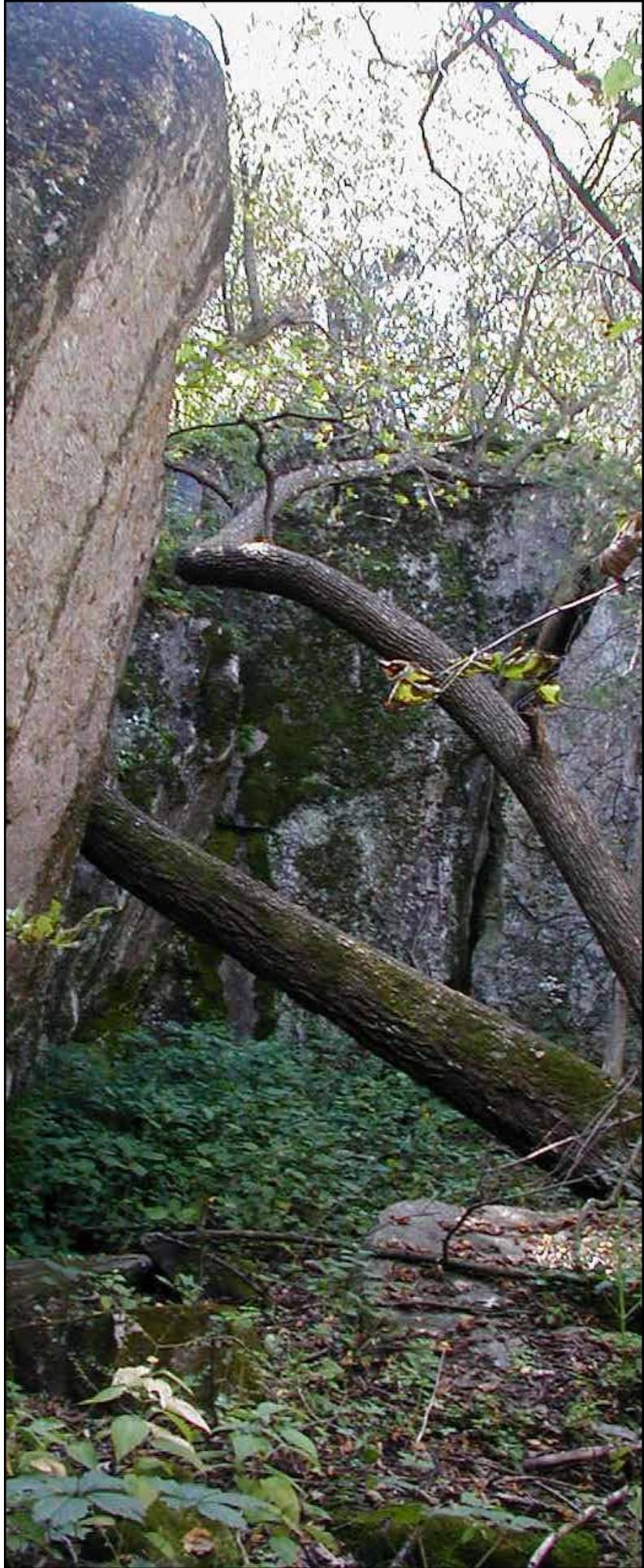


Photo - Trees seeking sun in Whispering Ridge AMA

Contributors Appendixes References



Photo - Sign in Beaver Creek Recreation Area

The following professionals contributed in many ways to the development of the master plan. Creating the master plan was a team effort with strong partnerships between the following organizations. Funding for the Master Plan was provided in part by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). MN DNR contributions to the plan development included planning, resource technical assistance and GIS services. Funding through the Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership provided two interns for GIS analysis and biological research.



Photo - Planning Team for the Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan



Photo - Shoreline fishing on the Minnesota River

Figure 6-1. Master Plan Contributors

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Figure 6-2. Appendixes

The documents and information listed below are master plan appendixes.

| Document Title | Publishing Organization | Publish Date |
|---|-------------------------|--------------|
| MRV Master Plan Public Survey Summary Report | Red Canoe | Jan, 2017 |
| MRV Master Plan Public Input Report 1 | GOC | Jan, 2017 |
| MRV Master Plan Public Input Report 2 | GOC | March, 2017 |
| Table of Existing Public Lands and Facilities in the Minnesota River Valley | RPA | May, 2017 |

Note: The above appendixes can be viewed at: www.mnrivervalleymasterplan.org/master-plan

Figure 6-3. References

The documents and information listed below were referenced in development of the master plan.

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Photo - View of valley by Ron Bolduan



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