

Pine Center Trail Expansion
PROPOSED TRAIL DEVELOPMENT
February 21, 2020

Trail Suitability Analysis

Trail Suitability Criteria: As set forth in the Crow Wing County Comprehensive Recreation Trails Plan, County Environmental Services Specialists use the following criteria to evaluate trail proposals and to improve trail planning, design and maintenance. The criteria are designed to inform an objective evaluation process with flexibility to address the diversity of situations that exist. The results of the evaluation provide information about the potential impacts of the trail and mitigations that may be needed.

The County's professional Environmental Services Specialists utilize the following scoring scale: (5=Most desirable condition, 1= Least desirable condition):

- 1. Visual Quality and Landscape - *Scenic Features, Points of Interest:*** 5 of 5 – The proposed recreation trail expansion is located on existing forest trails that pass through managed hardwood forests scattered with small ponds and wetlands. The rolling topography of the hardwood forests and flat areas of wetland communities provides for scenic views and many opportunities for wildlife viewing, all while still preserving natural areas.
- 2. Trail Linkages and Networks - *Linkages to existing trails and systems:*** 5 of 5 – This proposed recreational trail expansion would add an additional two miles of trail to the existing, 20 mile long, Pine Center Grant-In-Aid (GIA) Trail. Regionally, the Pine Center Trail also connects to another 93 miles of designated GIA ATV Trails including the Fort Ripley Trail and the Southern Loop Trail.
- 3. Impacts on Adjacent Private Properties - *Need for easements, permits, or mitigations outside of county lands:*** 4 of 5 – The proposed trail expansion is entirely located within publicly owned lands but one area of the trail expansion falls within 50 feet of a unoccupied private parcel. In order to prevent user conflicts with private property, signs will be installed according to the Minnesota DNR's "Forest Access Signing and Placement Guidelines".
- 4. Proximity to Services - *Gas, food, lodging, water, campgrounds, and rest stops:*** 2 of 5 – The City of Pine Center, which is located along the existing Pine Center Trail, has access to food and water. Trail users looking for lodging and gas must either travel to Garrison or into Brainerd.
- 5. Public Support - *Clubs and User Groups:*** 2 of 5 – The proposed trail expansion has received letters of support from businesses located in Pine Center, but has not received any letters of support from local ATV clubs or any other sources.
- 6. Plan for Maintenance - *Available funds and partnerships:*** 4 out of 5 – The North Metro Trail Riders ATV Club plans to secure Crow Wing County as the local government unit sponsor for the trail expansion and plans to seek funding thru the MN DNR Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Grant-In-Aid (GIA) program. The funding would at least partially cover the cost of construction, signage, maintenance, monitoring, amenities, and enforcement. The remainder of funding would come from the club's existing financial account and any grant monies.
- 7. Public Safety Considerations - *Access for emergency services or hazards:*** 5 of 5 – The proposed trail expansion is located off of an existing minimum maintenance township road (Ox Cart Rd) that is wide enough to accommodate any type of emergency vehicles.

- 8. Availability of Parking Areas:** 3 of 5 – Currently, there are two designated parking areas for the Pine Center Trail. However, this trail proposal will eliminate the parking lot off of Coley Dr. The second parking lot, located off of County Road 2, will be improved to allow for additional parking.
- 9. Opportunities for Interpretive Information and Public Education Interpretive Info:** 5 of 5 – An existing trail head kiosk will be moved to the parking lot mentioned in #8 above. In addition, the newly proposed trails run near un-fragmented natural resource areas that are great wildlife viewing. It also occurs within one mile of several smaller lakes, all with minimal shoreline development.
- 10. Soil Conditions, Slope and Grade - Degree of impact and mitigations:** 5 of 5 – The trail proposal occurs in both glacial moraines and outwash plains. Within the moraine areas, the trail proposal consists mostly of rolling to steep topography consisting of loams and rocky material. In the outwash plain, the trail proposal consists of mostly flat to rolling topography consisting of sands to loams. Much of the native surface trail system in the moraine areas has rocky material (gravel, cobbles, and stones) mixed in with the loam, adding structure that usually improves soils used for trail treads, especially for heavier types of uses. The rocky materials resist compaction, drain well, and add traction.¹ The outwash areas, while requiring hardening techniques to eliminate wash-outs, are sustainable when properly maintained and managed. The North Metro Trail Riders ATV Club will maintain all designated trail surfaces to a safe and sustainable condition, usable for multiple recreation types. In order to reduce compatible use conflicts and limit the amount of activity during periods of historically wet and vulnerable trail conditions, the proposed trail system will be closed to recreation OHV use from November 1 thru May 14th and signed as such. Also, segments of the proposed trail system may be closed periodically following significant weather events that create unsafe and unsustainable trail conditions.
- 11. Rare, Threatened or Endangered Species or Habitats - Degree of risk and impact:** 4 of 5 – Crow Wing County utilizes the Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS), a collection of databases containing information about Minnesota’s rare natural features maintained by the Division of Ecological Resources within the Department of Natural Resources. The NHIS is continually updated and is the most complete source of data on Minnesota’s rare or otherwise significant species, native plant communities, and other natural features. On County owned and managed land only, the NHIS indicates that no species of conservation significance occurs within or near (less than one mile) the proposed recreation trail systems.
- 12. Wetlands and Public Waters - Degree of impact, permitting and mitigations:** 5 of 5 – No wetland impacts are to occur as part of this proposed trail expansion. All trail building and maintenance in the area incorporates concepts from the Voluntary Site-Level Forest Management Guidelines (Best Management Practices).
- 13. Cultural Resources or Historic Sites - Degree of risk and impact:** 5 of 5 – According to information from the Minnesota State Historical Society (MHS) and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), no known cultural or historic artifacts or sites occur on any parcels located within the proposed trail corridor.

¹ State of Minnesota, Department of Natural Resources, 2007. Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines. “General Properties of Native Soils for Native Surface Trail Use.” Trails and Waterways Division, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4052. p. 6.8-6.10.

² Species profile: Minnesota DNR. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Aug. 2017.

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/rsg/profile.html?action=elementDetail&selectedElement=ABNKC19030>

Trail Suitability Score for the Project: 54 out of 65.

Scoring Categories:

39 – 65; Trail Proposal deemed suitable for further planning and development

20 – 39; Trail Proposal may be suitable and should be reviewed for opportunities to reduce limitations and/or necessary mitigations.

20 or less; Trail Proposal is unlikely to be suitable for investing further planning efforts as proposed