

# Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

## Designation Application

### General Section

Designation Application #: 16-012D      Date Submitted: 04/29/2016

Park or Trail Name: Northwoods ATV Trail

District #: 1      Map Coordinates (Latitude and Longitude): Latitude: 46.7092 Longitude: -93.4868

#### Location Description:

Aitkin County is characterized by a forested rolling landscape, intermixed with wetland and lowland habitats as well as agricultural and sparsely developed land use. Forestry and forest related industries, agriculture, and tourism are the primary contributors to the county's economy. Geography: Aitkin County is located in the center of the State of Minnesota, containing nearly 100 miles of the Mississippi River and the northern shores of Mille Lacs Lake. The lakes and forests of the County draw many people to the area for recreational purposes. Aitkin County encompasses a total of 1.2 million acres, which includes 365 lakes and over 600,000 acres of public land. The Aitkin County Land Department (ACLD) is responsible for managing 222,000 acres of forestland. Watershed: Aitkin County is within the Upper Mississippi River Watershed and the county includes more than a dozen rivers and streams. The major navigable rivers that can be used for recreation are the Snake, Mississippi, Willow and Ripple Rivers. Population: Aitkin County is a fast-growing county in the lakes and forest region of North Central Minnesota. The county's population according to the last census figures is 17,400. Recent estimates by the state demographer predict that the county's population will grow 65 percent by 2030. The City of Aitkin, with a population of 2,000 is the county seat. Major Highway and Access Routes: The county is located two hours north of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and 45 minutes east of Duluth. Major highways in the county include US 169, and MN 210 and 65. Recreation Infrastructure: The Northwoods Regional ATV trail offers over 200 miles of interconnected designated ATV trails for residents and summer visitors including: the North and South Soo Line trails, Rabey Line, Blind Lake Trail, Solana Loop, and the Redtop. The County offers three campgrounds on the trail system ranging from rustic sites on the Snake River, to camper cabins on the Mississippi, to RV sites with electricity and showers in the town of Palisade. In addition, ACLD manages groomed snowmobile trails, cross-country ski trails, horse trails, hunting access, hiking, boat accesses, fishing piers, and swimming beaches. In addition, ACLD manages 600 miles of groomed snowmobile trails, cross-country ski trails, horse trails, hunting access, hiking, fishing piers, and swimming beaches.

Lead Applicant Organization: Aitkin County Land Department

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Joint Applicant #1 Organization:

Joint Applicant #2 Organization:

Joint Applicant #3 Organization:

Joint Applicant #4 Organization:

Describe other project supporters:

### Description Section

Regional Significance Statement: The NWR trail is a \"destination trail\" with 200 miles riding opportunities providing for a full array of riding skills. Connected to 6 counties and their communities, the trail opens thousands of acres of forested public lands but was engineered to be light on the environment. The trail is fully developed with services. In 2016, a technical riding area will be built and a planning for a spur to the resorts on Mille Lacs.

Classification: Regional Trail (Motorized)

Total proposed length (mi): 211

#### Overview/Description of Park or Trail:

Aitkin County maintains over 200 miles of designated ATV trails for summertime riding, including the North and South Soo Line trails, Rabey Line trail, the Blind Lake ATV trail, Hill City Connector, Blind Lake Connector, Solana Loop, and the Redtop Loop trail. The North and South Soo Line trails, were created when the County purchased the Right-of-Way, which was formerly the Soo Railroad. These trails were improved and provide a backbone connector which traverses diagonally northwest to southeast from Cass Lake to Moose Lake and from Moose Lake to east to Royalton. In 2010, Aitkin County established the Northwoods Regional ATV trail system by in collaboration with Itasca County in an effort to unify the trail system and develop progressive and varied riding opportunities into one interconnected trail system. Formerly called the 70-Mile Trail Project, in 2010 legislators renamed the trail Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System. The trail includes connecting routes incorporating the North and South Soo Line trails along with loops off of the main routes. The first of these opened in 2010. The trail system is also one of the few trails designed and designate for Off-High Motorcycle (OHM) use. Loop trails such Redtop, Solana, and Blind Lake provide varied riding experiences through managed forests with rolling terrain, wetland crossings, and abundant wildlife sightings. Additional amenities such as bridges, puncheons, picnic areas, and scenic overlooks were added to improve the riding experience while protecting natural resources. All of the communities (Hill City, Jacobson, McGregor, Palisade, McGrath, and Lawlser) on the trail system within Aitkin have embraced the Northwoods Regional ATV trail and have provided safe, and signed routes to legally allow ATVs to obtain goods and services. Kiosks with maps and consistent signage help identify the routes for visitors. In 2016, National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC), MN DNR and the county will be constructing a technical riding area on a 40 acre property. Public hearings and approvals are in place. The site will include rock and log crawls, mud holes, hill climbs, etc. to provide a structured challenge area experience. Additional connector spurs to Emily, Grand Rapids are in the works. In 2016, the legislators have approached the Northwoods

to examine the possibility to connect the resorts on Mille Lacs Lake (Malmo, Glen, and Isle) to help diversify tourism due to the economic issues with the walleye fishing closure on the lake.

What is the Acquisition and Development Status?

- New Park or Trail (no land acquired or developed)
- Existing Park or Trail
  - Land Acquisition
    - Status:
    - Percentage of Land Acquired: 100%
  - Development Status
    - No Development
    - Some Development, but more Proposed
      - New Facilities Proposed
      - Existing Facilities to be Upgraded
    - Fully Development

Facility Listing Section

Classification: Regional Trail (Motorized)	
Existing Facility List	Proposed Facility List
Camping-cross-section of camper types, Electric/water/sewer RV sites, Electric/water campsites, Non-electric campsites, Group campsites, Tent only sites, Camper Cabins, Picknicking and picnic shelters, Walking Trails (paved), Hiking Trails (natural), Biking Trails (paved), Mountain Biking Trails (natural), Cross-country Skiing Trails, Horseback Riding Trails (natural), Swimming, Lake Access for power boats, Canoeing Facilities, Fishing Piers, Visitor Center, Nature Center/Interpretation Trails, Play areas, Outdoor Amphitheater, Dog Parks, Archery/Shooting ranges, Climbing (natural/man-made), Zip Lines, Restrooms/sanitation building, Roads and Parking Areas, Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Asphalt paved trail (less than 10 feet), Aggregate surfaced trail (10 feet or more), Aggregate surfaced trail (less than 10 feet), Aggregate surfaced trail, Natural-surfaced trail - user created, Natural-surfaced trail - purpose	Camping-cross-section of camper types, Electric/water/sewer RV sites, Electric/water campsites, Electric campsites, Non-electric campsites, Group campsites, Tent only sites, Camper Cabins, Picknicking and picnic shelters, Walking Trails (paved), Hiking Trails (natural), Biking trails (paved), Mountain Biking Trails (natural), Cross-country Skiing Trails, Horseback Riding Trails (natural), Swimming, Lake Access for power boats, Canoeing Facilities, Fishing Piers, Visitor Center, Nature Center/Interpretation Trails, Play Areas, with an outdoor theme, Outdoor Amphitheater, Dog Parks, Archery/Shooting ranges, Climbing (natural/man-made), Zip Lines, Restrooms/sanitation building, Roads and Parking Areas, Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Aggregate surfaced trail (10 feet or

<p>built for specific use, Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Trailhead restrooms, Benches along trail, Picnic shelters at trailhead, Metal Bridge with wooden deck over the Willow River (Haypoint, MN) Rustic Campground 12 sites on trail with 2 Camper Cabins (Jacobson, MN) Rustic Campground 12 sites on trail Snake River (McGrath, MN) Full Service Campground 9 sites with electricity on trail (Palisade, MN; including fishing pier, picnic pavilion, trestle) Picnic areas with BBQ pedestals &gt;1,300 feet of puncheon trail (pressure treated wood, wetland crossings) 211 miles of designed ATV trail with multiple surfaces (gravel, class 5, sand, natural surface) 8 Trailhead parking areas 5 Kiosks (roofed) , Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Asphalt paved trail (less than 10 feet), Aggregate surfaced trail (10 feet or more), Natural-surfaced trail - user created, Natural-surfaced trail - purpose built for specific use, Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Trailhead restrooms, Benches along trail, Picnic shelters at trailhead</p>	<p>more), Natural-surfaced trail - purpose built for specific use, Benches along trail, New Facilities include a 28 acre technical riding area with man-made mud pit, hill climb, rock and log crawls, sand pit, concrete climb, sand whoops, log bridge, etc. (summer 2016). , Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Aggregate surfaced trail (10 feet or more), Natural-surfaced trail - purpose built for specific use, Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Trailhead restrooms, Benches along trail, Picnic shelters at trailhead</p>
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Master Plan Status Section

Master Plan Status: Existing Master Plan is Available (but needs to be updated to meet strategic plan)

Describe Other Supportive Information:

The Aitkin County Comprehensive Recreation Trail Plan was written 2010 for all Aitkin County managed lands (attached). The existing Master Plan was designed to have a ten year view. The Northwoods Regional ATV trail was a prominent component of that plan. The current alignment of the Northwoods ATV Trail was completed in 2011. In the interim there have been trail expansions, economic impact studies, trail surveys, and public stakeholder meetings. These components would be part of the master plan update is slated for 2020.

Classification Details Section

Classification: Regional Trail (Motorized)

Criteria #1 Provides a High-Quality "Destination" Trail Experience: 600,000 acres of public lands in Aitkin County draw adventurers sportsmen, tourists, and wildlife enthusiasts to enjoy the north woods. The forested landscapes, 365 lakes, 100 miles of the Mississippi River (MHB designated as "Remote" and "Scenic"), etc. provides as a stunning palette of recreation opportunities. The sparse population (âˆˆ 15,000) and vast spaces can be formidable to cohesively provide for managed tourism. The concept of the Northwoods Regional ATV trail system (NWRT) is to connect communities and public lands in our

region, including Isle, Moose Lake, McGregor, Hill City, and Remer; with current plans involving connections to Emily, Grand Rapids, and the resorts on Mille Lacs Lake (Malmo, and Glen). Besides connectivity between communities via corridor trails, NWRT contains scenic forest "loop" trails on public lands that provide users with an in-the-woods experience on trails specifically designed for ATV use. There are currently two technical riding areas being developed in abandoned sand pits adjacent to the trail system that will provide a more challenging riding experience (designed water holes, hill climbs, obstacle courses, etc.). The diversity of riding opportunities provided by NWRT make it a destination for ATV riders from across the U.S. and Canada.

**Criteria #2 Well-located to Serve Regional Population and/or Tourist Destination:** It is less than a 2-hour drive from the Twin Cities and an hour from Duluth via State Highways 169, 65 and 210. NWT is connected to the Lake Mille Lacs resort area and will soon have connections to Grand Rapids and the Brainerd Lakes region. MN DNR has stated that "Destination Trails" can provide at least "three days" of unique riding experiences. The NWRT provides that and much more. The Northwoods Region ATV Trail has proven that it draws groups from all over North America to ride the system. Other well known regional destination ATV trail systems in the US such as the Hatfield and McCoy systems (West Virginia) still depend on trailering ATVs from trailhead to trailhead, while other states have opened ATV riding on forest roads. The NWRT in sharp contrast is 200 mile interconnected trail system. Riders are drawn to the area to experience the wild and remote forests, lakes, and wildlife by professionally designed and engineered trails. The NWRT is nearly entirely on public lands (>99%) which has the long term commitment of the State and Counties to support these lands ecologically, sustainably, and for the public benefit.

**Criteria #3 Enhances Connectivity to Regional and State Level Trails within the Region, and Connects to Regional Destinations:** NWRT by concept and design is expandable and each new community connection opens on-trail user access to more trail systems. The North and South Soo portions of the system are converted rails to trails which pass through communities (i.e., Isle, McGregor, McGrath, Lawler, Moose Lake, Palisade, Remer, etc.) acting as the "backbone" or "straight paths" to services while the majority of the riding experiences are the loop trails, technical riding areas, connector trails, etc. The access to public lands vast areas of public lands and the commitment of the County and communities to support and promote this trail make it a premier regional destination.

**Criteria #4 Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within a Region:** One of the first efforts in land use planning in Aitkin County was a study released in June 1941. The report noted the fact that in the region of Aitkin County there are thousands of lakes and many beautiful streams which make certain areas a paradise for vacationists, hunters and fishermen. The report further detailed, past experience has shown that thousands of people from other parts of this state and other states like to come here for vacations and sports; indicating that instead of one major industry, N.E. Minnesota has three, namely: farming, timber, and recreation all are worth promoting. The amenities in Aitkin County and the county-managed lands support forest-based and dispersed recreation and outdoor experiences. Aitkin County Land Department has renewed efforts to plan and manage diverse trail-based recreation opportunities. In 2003, legislation passed that required the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish at least 70 miles of new ATV/OHM trail. Aitkin and Itasca Counties applied for the

grant and submitted a joint proposal for a 70-Mile Trail Project. ACLD's proposal was selected as the best fit for the trail development project based upon the counties having demonstrated land availability, a high level of readiness, and effective strategies for public involvement. The development of the 70-Mile Trail Project (renamed by the legislature (2010) as the Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System) began in 2007 and has created opportunities to review the county's recreation trail resources, promote outdoor tourism, and manage forest resources to include recreation planning.

Attachment List Section (only lists up to 10 documents)

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
regional_map	Recreation Compass Maps showing relation to other trails
feature_uploader_280	Lawler Loops
Other	2016 Technical Challenge Riding Area draft plans
feature_uploader_281	UPM Trail Map
feature_uploader_279	Moose River Connector Map
feature_uploader_276	Photo on Trail
feature_uploader_283	South Soo Map
Other	A case study for Responsible Recreation: An ATV Trail Case Study by Dovetail Partners, Inc.
feature_uploader_282	North Soo Map
Location Map	Location map added from general tab