

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

Designation Application

General Section

Designation Application #: 15-059D Date Submitted: 06/16/2015

Park or Trail Name: Mesabi Trail

District #: 1 Map Coordinates (Latitude and Longitude): Latitude: 47.4634 Longitude: -92.5275

Location Description:

Located between Grand Rapids and Ely making connection to 28 communities.

Lead Applicant Organization: St. Louis and Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority

Lead Contact First Name: Bob Last Name: Manzoline

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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:

Classification: Regional Trail (Motorized and Non-Motorized)

Total proposed length motorized (mi):

Total proposed length non-motorized (mi): 145

Overview/Description of Park or Trail:

The Mesabi Trail, located in northeastern Minnesota between the cities of Grand Rapids and Ely, is a premier bicycle trail winding through some of the state's prettiest regions. When completed, the trail will traverse approximately 145 miles connecting 28 communities. The trail is governed, administered and maintained by the St. Louis and Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority (RRA) in cooperation with the Itasca County Railroad Authority. The RRA is a local unit of government created by State Statute with

taxing authority. The trail is also supported by the non-profit group Club Mesabi who organizes trail volunteers, events, marketing and promotional efforts. Currently approximately 110 miles of trail are complete offering convenient accessibility at numerous entry points. The longest continuous paved section connects Grand Rapids to McKinley (about 75 miles); then continuing on from Biwabik to Hwy 135 past Giants Ridge Golf & Ski Resort (another 15 miles); trail segments and spurs are located within the communities of Grand Rapids, Chisholm, Eveleth, Aurora, Tower, Soudan and Ely. The trail passes through or makes connection to two national forests, three state forests, four state parks, twenty four city parks & facilities, thirteen local attractions, thirty eight lakes & waterways. The attached map gives specific trail location, access, mileage and trail information. The attached Mesabi Trail Master Plan provides further description of the trail setting, opportunities, use and connections. For more information visit the trail web site at Mesbitrail.com. The RRA, Club Mesabi and trail volunteers take great pride in the trail's ADA accessibility, mapping, way-points, maintenance and welcoming trail users to this area. The trail is also supported and promoted by the local tourism bureaus of Grand Rapids (west trail), Iron Trail (central trail) and Ely (east trail). The Mesabi Trail is included and featured within many state and national publications such as MN Office of Tourism, Rails to Trails, Home & Away. Trail users will find a 10 foot wide bituminous surface (asphalt paved) trail that hosts many summer activities such as biking, inline skating, walking, swimming, horticulture, berry picking, mushroom gathering, geocaching, rock hounding and organized activities such as cancer walks, heart walks, reunions and scouting badges. Winter activities are more limited to cross-country skiing, snowshoeing. 26 miles of trail are designated for snowmobile use. Wheeled trail users eighteen (18) years of age and older are required to purchase a Wheel Pass. Information gathered from Wheel Pass sales indicates trail users have arrived from thirty six (36) US states and thirteen (13) countries. Trail counters have been placed along the trail count users traveling between destinations and to avoid local users such as daily walkers, bikers and commuters. Trail counter numbers FY 2014 exceeded 180,000. A trail User Survey was conducted in year 2014 by the University of Minnesota to gather specific trail user data. The results of the User Survey have not been officially released, however; preliminary numbers will be discussed under Section 5, Criteria 2 of this application.

What is the Acquisition and Development Status?

- New Park or Trail (no land acquired or developed)
- Existing Park or Trail
 - Land Acquisition
 - Status: ongoing
 - Percentage of Land Acquired: 83%
 - 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 and Non-Motorized)	
Non-Motorized	
Existing Facility List	Proposed Facility List
, Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Benches along trail	Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Benches along trail
Motorized	
Existing Facility List	Proposed Facility List
	Designated natural-surfaced trail - purpose built for specific use

Master Plan Status Section

Master Plan Status: Master Plan meeting requirements of strategic plan is available

Describe Other Supportive Information:

The Master Plan has guided trail development, location and construction since year 1998. Section 7 of the Master Plan was added to summarize Mesabi Trail development and construction and is periodically updated.

Classification Details Section

Classification: Regional Trail (Motorized and Non-Motorized)

Criteria #1 Provides a High-Quality "Destination" Trail Experience: The existing 120 mile long Mesabi Trail and planned 35 mile long new trail segments provide a multitude of trail experiences and as seen in Criteria 2 below, the trail is an established destination attraction for local and non-local trail users. The Mesabi Trail Master Plan provides in great detail the trails scenic setting, natural landscapes, cultural and historic features. The trail connects communities, provides a transportation corridor, promotes healthy lifestyles and is ADA compliant. The trail traverses multiple landscapes, natural settings, state parks, state, county and federal forests, lakes and streams. The trail travels through many cultural settings that are interpreted including Native American, European settlers, logging era, former iron mining era and current iron mining operations. The trail uses many former travel corridors that are interpreted by way of signs along the existing trail most notably the Vermillion Trail Portages, Swan River Logging Company, Duluth, Mesaba & Northern Railroad, Great Northern Railroad, Duluth, Mesabi & Iron Range Railroad. The Mesabi Trail provides users with a unique experience traveling from the

Mississippi River to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area making connection with most destination aspects related to Northeast Minnesota excepting for Lake Superior. This Criteria is limited to 300 words which is not adequate to detail the trail setting and refer the reader to the Mesabi Trail website, attached Master Plan, map and other trail information for a better understanding of the quality experiences the Mesabi Trail has to offer.

Criteria #2 Well-located to Serve Regional Population and/or Tourist Destination: Northeast MN is also described as Minnesota's "Arrowhead" comprised of St. Louis, Lake, Cook, Itasca and Koochiching counties basically bordered by the Mississippi River on the west, Lake Superior on the east & south and Voyageurs National Park, BWCA & Canada on the north. The Arrowhead is what we consider the region served by the Mesabi Trail. The Mesabi Trail is located approximately in the north-south center of the Arrowhead and extending from the Mississippi River to the BWCA for a distance of approximately 140 miles. As seen on the map attachment, approximately 110 miles of the trail is complete with the majority extending from Grand Rapids to about Biwabik. It is our intention to complete the remaining trail segments between Biwabik and Ely or approximately 35 miles of new trail. In year 2014 the University of Minnesota conducted a "User Survey" of Mesabi Trail users. The User Survey report will be released in July 2015. Preliminary User Survey data indicates the number of non-local visits (non-local meaning more than one days travel time to the trail) is 31,061 per year and the number of local visits is 186,365 per year. The User Survey data is based on trail counters located a minimum of 4-6 miles between trail destination points, meaning the local trail or community users traveling less than 8 miles per day are not included in the survey. The Mesabi Trail is so located to connect a ribbon of communities located across the MN Iron Range. Each of the 28 communities will be connected to the trail providing trail users convenient access and the communities providing support services to the trail users. As shown on the map attached, access points are well signed and provide users with parking, information, direction to services, water, restrooms, food.

Criteria #3 Enhances Connectivity to Other Regional and State Level Trails within the Region, and Connects to Regional Destinations: There are two regional trails in Northeast MN being the Mesabi Trail and the State Taconite Snowmobile Trail. The Taconite Trail is located between Grand Rapids and Ely following a tract many miles north of the Mesabi Trail. The State Gitchi Gammi trail, located along the shore of Lake Superior, is progressing and will hopefully one day reach adequate length to become regionally significant. The Mesabi Trail Master Plan and Development and Construction placed a high priority on making direct connection to existing trails, parks, campgrounds, historic sites and so forth. The success of this work is seen on the Mesabi Trail website and map attachment. Mesabi Trail has connected to 4 state parks, 24 city parks & facilities, 13 local attractions, 9 campgrounds, 12 beaches. The Mesabi Trail has made many more lesser connections that may go unnoticed but are important to local communities such as providing a trail to the Coleraine swimming beach or the Soudan soccer field. Mesabi Trail has made connections with many local paved trails varying in length from 1 to 6 miles as follows: Grand Rapids Gunn Park Trail - 3 mile in length Nashwauk La Rue Pit Trail - 2 miles in length Hibbing Carey Lake Trail - 4 miles in length Iron World Trail - 2 miles in length Chisholm Lakes Trails - 4 miles in length Virginia Lakes Trails - 3 miles in length Aurora Trail - 3 miles in length Embarrass Campground Trail - 2 miles in length Tower McKinley Park Trail - 6 miles in length Ely Trezona Trail - 3 miles in length The Mesabi Trail has also designated certain sections of the trail for winter snowmobile

use in order for the communities of Coleraine, Hibbing, Chisholm, Buhl and Fayal to make connection to the State Taconite Snowmobile Trail.

Criteria #4 Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within a Region: Minnesota's Arrowhead Region has historically and continues to be a place where Minnesotans and visitors from the Central United States and Canada come to recreate and tour. The Arrowhead provides literally thousands of recreational opportunities such a resorting, boating, fishing, skiing, snowmobiling camping, touring, hiking, hunting and the list goes on. There is only one significant paved trail within the Arrowhead with a length greater than 20 miles and that is the Mesabi Trail.

Attachment List Section (only lists up to 10 documents)

Type	Description
Master Plan	Appendix 1
Location Map	Year 2015 Mesabi Trail Map
Master Plan	Mesabi Trail Master Plan and Development & Construction
Resolution	Resolution supporting Mesabi Trail application
Master Plan	Amendment
Master Plan	Master Plan
Master Plan	Appendix 2
Master Plan	Appendix 1
Location Map	Year 2015 Mesabi Trail Map
Master Plan	Mesabi Trail Master Plan and Development & Construction