

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

Designation Application

General Section

Designation Application #: 15-091D Date Submitted: 06/30/2015

Park or Trail Name: Dakota Rail Trail

District #: 5 Map Coordinates (Latitude and Longitude): Latitude: 44.8844 Longitude: -94.1982

Location Description:

Railroad baron James J. Hill built the 43-mile Dakota Railroad corridor between the cities of Hutchinson and Wayzata in the 1800s to ferry passengers to his grand hotels along the shores of Lake Minnetonka and to ship freight from the countryside into the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Today, the abandoned rail corridor serves as a popular trail that extends through the metro region from Wayzata to the Carver County line west of New Germany. Seventeen miles of the Dakota Railroad corridor remain undeveloped as a trail in Greater Minnesota. This application is specifically for the 17 miles of undeveloped trail in Greater Minnesota that will extend from the corridor's terminus at the historic depot in the City of Hutchinson to the McLeod County/Carver County line where it will connect with the 26-mile metro section of the Dakota Rail Regional Trail. The trail will be ten feet wide and paved and extend through scenic agricultural landscapes of central McLeod County, passing by several lakes and offering breathtaking views of the adjacent countryside. The trail begins in the region's largest city, Hutchinson, and extends east, passing just south of the town of Silver Lake and then extending east through the town of Lester Prairie. In Hutchinson the Dakota Rail Trail will connect with the Luce Line State Trail providing another opportunity to travel on an independent trail west to the town of Cosmos in Meeker County and east all the way to Minneapolis.

Lead Applicant Organization: McLeod County

Lead Contact First Name: Al Last Name: Koglin

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Joint Applicant #1 Organization:

Joint Applicant #2 Organization:

Joint Applicant #3 Organization:

Joint Applicant #4 Organization:

Describe other project supporters:

The McLeod County Dakota Rail Trail has the support of cities and agencies within the County, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and neighboring counties and park districts. The communities of Hutchinson Lester Prairie and Silver Lake support the trail because it will provide new

opportunities for recreation and will inspire downtown development. The Department of Natural Resources supports the effort to develop the Dakota Rail Trail because it will provide a direct connection to the Luce Line State Trail. Carver County Parks and Three Rivers Park District support McLeod County's effort to develop the Trail because it will extend options for trail users on the eastern segments of the trail providing over 44 miles of continuous, paved trail between Hutchinson and Wayzata. The Crow River Snowmobile Club supports the trail's development because portions of the trail will be open for snowmobile use during the winter season.

Description Section

Regional Significance Statement:

Classification: Regional Trail (Motorized and Non-Motorized)

Total proposed length motorized (mi):

Total proposed length non-motorized (mi): 17

Overview/Description of Park or Trail:

McLeod County plans to develop its 17-mile segment of the Dakota Rail corridor into a multi-use, bituminous (paved) trail that will be suitable for bicycling, walking, running, in-line skating, commuting, dog walking and other typical non-motorized trail uses during the spring, summer and fall seasons. During the winter season, the trail may be open to snowmobile use if the governing land use authorities including cities, townships and McLeod County permit the activity. The trail will include rest stops with benches, bicycle racks and trash receptacles at approximately two-mile intervals along the corridor and will take advantage of natural overlooks or other scenic vistas. Trailheads with parking and additional amenities such as picnic tables may be developed in Lester Prairie and Hutchinson. Throughout McLeod County, the Dakota Rail corridor typically has a 100-foot right-of-way that is currently owned by the McLeod Regional Railroad Authority. The corridor extends through lush agricultural fields and around lakes and wetlands creating many opportunities for scenic overlooks. The Dakota Rail Trail will be a trail of regional significance because it will be located in a desirable setting, the scenic agricultural landscape of central McLeod County. The trail will be of significant length to provide multiple hours of recreation and will connect to the Luce Line State Trail and the Dakota Rail Regional trail. The Dakota Rail Trail will serve multiple communities with high-quality recreation opportunities, including direct connections to Lester Prairie and Hutchinson and it will come within close proximity to the Town of Silver Lake. The trail will bisect most of McLeod County and will therefore be within a short driving distance of many County residents. The Dakota Rail Trail will provide recreation opportunities for rural McLeod County as well as the regionally significant City of Hutchinson, with a 2013 population of 13,871. Hutchinson is a regional center that provides significant public services and amenities including the McLeod County Fairgrounds, a major regional hospital and large employers, such as 3M.

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:
 - 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, Trailhead restrooms, Benches along trail, Picnic shelters at trailhead |
| Motorized | |
| Existing Facility List | Proposed Facility List |
| | Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Trailhead restrooms, Picnic shelters at trailhead |

Master Plan Status Section

Master Plan Status: No Master Plan is Available

Describe Other Supportive Information:

McLeod County is preparing to develop a master plan for the Dakota Rail Trail in the upcoming months. As part of the master plan process the County intends to receive input from the public through open houses and other public meetings. The master plan will also provide the County with a concept-level cost estimate that will be useful for planning the trail's development. The entire corridor is over 17 miles long and it is likely that McLeod County will plan to develop the trail in phases as funding becomes available. A logical first phase will be to develop the trail from the Carver County line to

downtown Lester Prairie because this would allow McLeod County residents direct access to the already developed Dakota Rail Regional Trail in Carver and Hennepin Counties. Future phases may include the seven-mile segment from Lester Prairie to the south side of Silver Lake, and the nine-mile segment from Silver Lake to downtown Hutchinson.

Classification Details Section

Classification: Regional Trail (Motorized and Non-Motorized)

Criteria #1 Provides a High-Quality "Destination" Trail Experience: The Dakota Rail Trail will provide a high-quality experience for trail users that will allow for safe, off-road recreation in a beautiful setting that will connect local communities across McLeod County. The Dakota Rail Trail will pass through the region's scenic agricultural landscape that is dotted with lakes and wetlands, taking advantage of several breathtaking vistas that will provide users the opportunity to experience the character of Central Minnesota. The trail become a highly regarded destination for residents in the region who are seeking places to ride bicycles or walk on paved trails for long distances. The trail experience will be enhanced by state-of-the art trail head facilities that will provide trail information, parking, drinking water and restrooms. Trail users on the adjacent segments of the Dakota Rail Trail come from all over the region and state to ride the state's most popular regional trail, making it a true recreation destination.

Criteria #2 Well-located to Serve Regional Population and/or Tourist Destination: The Dakota Rail Trail will be well located between two growing communities, a heavily used state trail and a popular regional trail, creating a tourist attraction and directly serving the regional population. Bicycle tourism is growing in Minnesota and well-designed, scenic trails are attractive to bikers who will travel great distances to ride on destination trails. The trail will be over 16 miles long providing access to a substantial distance of paved, off-road trail. In addition, the Dakota Rail Trail will connect to an additional 26 miles of regional trail and 68 miles of state trail on either end of the corridor. The Dakota Rail Trail will begin in the regionally significant community of Hutchinson, which has one of the largest populations in Central Minnesota, where it will be within one mile of the McLeod County Fairgrounds, which will increase its attraction as a recreation destination for the region. The Cities of Hutchinson and Lester Prairie are planning ahead for the trail's development because they are aware of the opportunities that popular trails provide for communities. Hutchinson recently completed a restoration of the Downtown Depot and developed a farmer's market on the site that will serve as the trailhead for the Dakota Rail Trail. This location is already a popular gathering spot for the City of Hutchinson and will increase in activity once the trail is developed. Lester Prairie has made substantial improvements to its downtown park including a new park shelter, Veteran's Memorial, walkways and picnic area. The Dakota Rail Trail will pass through the park providing direct access to downtown Lester Prairie and all the town's services, restaurants and businesses.

Criteria #3 Enhances Connectivity to Other Regional and State Level Trails within the Region, and Connects to Regional Destinations: The Dakota Rail Trail will create direct connections to two very popular trails. In Hutchinson the Trail will connect with the Luce Line State Trail providing access to an additional 68 miles of off-road trail. Two miles east of Lester Prairie at the McLeod County Line, the trail

will link up with over 26 miles of the existing Dakota Rail Regional Trail that extends across Carver County and through Hennepin County to Wayzata. The Dakota Rail Trail will provide users the opportunity to visit Sunrise Nature Park in Lester Prairie. Sunrise Nature Park is a unique, high-quality natural area on the east side town. The 50-acre park is home to several plant species that are not typically found in the area as well as restored native plant communities. The park has been designated as an Official Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation. Sunrise Nature Park, with its unique habitat and wildlife, along with two miles of walking paths, wildlife observation areas, and picnic areas, will provide a compelling destination for Dakota Rail Trail users.

Criteria #4 Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within a Region: The Dakota Rail Trail will provide opportunities for several hours of outdoor recreation along its scenic, off-road corridor. In addition, the trail will create a 85-mile continuous trail loop composed of the Dakota Rail Trail (Wayzata to Hutchinson, 43 miles) and the Luce Line State Trail (Hutchinson to Wayzata, 42 miles). It is anticipated that the Dakota Rail Trail, along with the Dakota Rail/Luce Line Trails loop, will draw tourists from the adjacent counties in Greater Minnesota, as well as the metropolitan area. The McLeod County Dakota Rail Trail will be paved and interest in paved trails is growing, in part because paved trails are embraced by local communities as opportunities for redevelopment and downtown revitalization tools. Significant efforts are being taken to pave segments of the Luce Line Trail in McLeod and Meeker Counties including a large segment that will be paved this summer in McLeod County.

Attachment List Section (only lists up to 10 documents)

| Type | Description |
|----------------------------|--|
| Agreement | DNR letter of lease agreement |
| Location Map | Dakota Rail Trail location map |
| Resolution | McLeod County Board of Commissioners Resolution of Support |
| Location Map | undefined |
| Location Map | undefined |
| site_map_uploads_2 | Trail corridor map |
| regional_map | Regional map |
| public_health_photos | |
| site_characteristic_images | Existing condition of corridor |
| site_characteristic_images | Existing condition of corridor |