

# Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

## Designation Application

### General Section

Designation Application #: 16-022D      Date Submitted: 04/29/2016

Park or Trail Name: Luverne Loop & Blue Mounds Trail (LL/BMT)

District #: 5      Map Coordinates (Latitude and Longitude): Latitude: 43.6733 Longitude: -96.2028

#### Location Description:

The Luverne Loop and Blue Mounds Trails are located near Luverne, MN in Region 5. Situated in the extreme southwest corner of the state, Luverne serves as the gateway into Minnesota. Luverne (population 4745) is the county seat of Rock County (population 9520). Luverne lies at the crossroads of two major federal highways; Interstate 90 and U.S. Highway 75 (the King of Trails Scenic Byway) are main routes through the city, carrying travelers from coast to coast and border to border across the United States. Iowa borders Rock County to the south and South Dakota to the west. The regional center of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, population 250,000, is 25 miles west on Interstate 90. The Luverne Loop is a proposed trail that circles the outskirts of the city and connects to the existing Blue Mounds Trail, which ultimately connects Main Street in Luverne to the Blue Mounds State Park.

Lead Applicant Organization: City of Luverne

Lead Contact First Name: Holly      Last Name: Sammons

Mailing Address: 305 E. Luverne St.

City: Luverne      State: MN      Zip: 56156

Phone: 507-449-5033      Email: [hsammons@cityofluverne.org](mailto:hsammons@cityofluverne.org)

Joint Applicant #1 Organization: Rock County

Joint Applicant #2 Organization:

Joint Applicant #3 Organization:

Joint Applicant #4 Organization:

#### Describe other project supporters:

The City of Luverne convenes a joint committee that has been working on trail planning and development for 3 years, including the County, and supporting organizations: Luverne Area Chamber, Luverne Public Schools, the Luverne Initiatives of Tomorrow, and local bicycle enthusiasts. Other supporters: Sanford Health, Rock County Fair Board, Luverne Rotary Club, and Southwest Health & Human Services. Overwhelming public support has been received. The City will own and manage the Luverne Loop Trail. Rock County is the sponsoring agency for phase 2 of the Luverne Loop for the Transportation Alternatives Program grant. The Blue Mounds Trail, constructed in 2003 with TE funds, is jointly managed by the City of Luverne and Rock County.

## Description Section

Regional Significance Statement: The Luverne Loop & Blue Mounds Trails (LL/BMT) combine to create a regionally significant trail where users can experience the stunning Blue Mounds: the 1.5-mile long red Sioux quartzite cliffs that erupt from the prairie and rise to nearly 100 feet above the plains. The rising cliffs, grazing bison, and the prickly pear cactus offer just a glimpse of the beauty of the prairie trail users can expect to experience in Luverne and southwest Minnesota.

Classification: Regional Trail (Non-Motorized)

Total proposed length (mi): 6 (BMT- one way) + 7.1 (LL) = 13.1 (construction length) + 6 (BMT- turn around) = 19.1 Miles (total trail experience)

Overview/Description of Park or Trail:

The Blue Mounds Trail is an existing 6 mile trail that originates on Main Street Luverne and connects to Blue Mounds State Park 1 mile north of Luverne. The paved trail also connects to 13 miles of hiking trails and a 1 mile interpretive trail in the state park. This state park is the 9th most visited tourist attraction in all of southern Minnesota, with about 88,000 annual visits and 15,000 annual overnight visits. It is unique in Minnesota for its resident and genetically pure buffalo herd, and its stunning 90ft. tall Sioux quartzite rock outcrops. Luverne is the gateway community for the park. Blue Mounds State Park features 71 semi-modern campsites, 40 sites with electrical hookups, 14 cart-in campsites, a primitive campground, and 2 tipis to add to the overall outdoor recreation experience. The Blue Mounds Trail gives bikers and hikers a rare opportunity to experience Minnesota's ever-changing tall grass prairie. The Luverne Loop is a proposed 10ft wide paved 7.1 mile trail that connects points of interest around Luverne and connects directly to the Blue Mounds Trail at two different intersections. The Loop is proposed to be developed in three phases; Phase 1 in 2016, Phase 2 in 2017, and land acquisition for Phase 3 is anticipated to be completed this year. Because the Luverne Loop will circle the outskirts of the city, primarily on park lands and open spaces instead of road rights of way, it will be much more scenic than typical park-to-city connections. It will pass by several attractive landscapes, including four neighborhood pocket parks and recreation areas. The trail will traverse atop a 20ft. man-made berm, offering an unique birdseye perspective of conservation and farm lands. With no natural lakes in the county, the trail will offer water experiences with rest/interpretive stops at three public ponds, along the Rock River, and along a tributary of Poplar Creek. A highlight of the Loop will be a half-mile segment through park and conservation land along the river, where future shoreline and habitat restoration between the trail and the river is planned. The Loop will connect users with the residential and commercial access points of the community, circle back to Main Street and ultimately connect back up with the Blue Mounds Trail. The highlight of the Loop is its ability to take people to scenic parts of the community that you cannot experience unless you are on foot or on a bike. A critical component of linking the Luverne Loop and Blue Mounds Trail together will be the development of a new trailhead at Redbird Field. The existing Blue Mounds trailhead lacks adequate parking, restrooms, and basic amenities. The proposed trailhead will not only offer basic amenities such as parking and restrooms, but will also include signage, wayfinding, a shade structure/picnic shelter, bike racks, drinking fountains, benches, and a bike fix it station. Maps and concept drawings are included in the attachments.

What is the Acquisition and Development Status?

- New Park or Trail (no land acquired or developed)
- Existing Park or Trail
  - Land Acquisition
    - Status: LL- 85% acquired. BMT- 100% acquired
    - Percentage of Land Acquired: 85%
  - 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 (Non-Motorized)	
Existing Facility List	Proposed Facility List
Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Asphalt paved trail (less than 10 feet), Natural-surfaced trail - user created, Trailhead parking, Benches along trail, , Asphalt paved trail (less than 10 feet), Trailhead parking, Benches along trail	Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Trailhead restrooms, Benches along trail, Picnic shelters at trailhead, Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Trailhead restrooms, Benches along trail, Picnic shelters at trailhead

Master Plan Status Section

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

Describe Other Supportive Information:

A Master Plan for the Luverne Loop Trail was adopted by the Luverne City Council on 12/08/2015. This plan was created to meet the requirements of the application process/evaluation protocol for trail projects seeking regional designation. This plan includes the general requirements as well as additional direction and vision for future trail development in the years to come. A copy of the plan is included in the Attachments.

## Classification Details Section

### Classification: Regional Trail (Non-Motorized)

Criteria #1 Provides a High-Quality "Destination" Trail Experience: The LL/BMT offers majestic views of the Blue Mounds, the 1.5-mile long, red Sioux quartzite cliffs that rise over 90ft. above the plains. The BMT is a destination unto itself being in an appealing scenic setting that highlights the major landscape features of the region. The landscape around Luverne is unique in that it is the only part of the state in the Inner Coteau ecological subsection, consisting of dissected moraines capped by thick loess deposits, with exposed bedrock outcrops. Nearly 88,000 tourists come to view the Blue Mounds annually. The BMT meanders through one of the largest prairie parks in the state and offers users to experience a high concentration of rare features as compared to any other area in the region such as: native prairie grasses, rare rock outcrops, unusual geology, a bison herd with rare genetics, and endangered aquatic species. The LL will pass by several attractive local landscapes: pocket parks; the top of a 20ft. man-made berm; three public ponds, the Rock River, and a tributary of Poplar Creek; and a segment of RIM land. The Rock River corridor is listed by DNR as being of moderate biodiversity significance. Trail users will have convenient access and secure parking for both trails via the BMSP or Redbird Field, along with access to support services such as restrooms, water fountains, and a proposed bike fix-it station at Redbird Field. Since the two trails intersect with each other at two different locations, trail users will experience continuity while using the trails and experience seamless transition through the assistance of way finding signage. MnDOT has approved RRFBs at both US-75 crossings. The trail width, shoulders, clear zones, and crosswalk staging areas will help avoid user conflicts, and the flat terrain will provide good visibility.

Criteria #2 Well-located to Serve Regional Population and/or Tourist Destination: The LL/BMT system offers 13.1 miles of paved, non-motorized trails in and near the City of Luverne, where 50% of the county residents reside within one mile of the trail, the trailhead and key access points. Luverne, population 4745, is the county seat and largest city in Rock County, population 9520. It is the commercial, employment, educational and entertainment center for the county, and a population and tourist center for the multi-county region. Luverne is the 2nd largest city in the four Minnesota county area surrounding Luverne; only Worthington is larger, 33 miles away. This 4-county area, about 2400 square miles, has a population of approximately 49,000. Luverne draws a regional clientele for its Medical Center & Minnesota Veterans Home (1/5 in the state). With its strategic location on I-90, Luverne receives tourists from many states and is the gateway to the popular Blue Mounds State Park. The BMT also connects to 13 miles of hiking trails in BMSP and a 1 mile self-guided spur trail that leads to the Interpretative Center. Luverne has great potential to attract trail and park visitors for day trips from the rapidly growing Sioux Falls (SD) metro area, 25 miles away. Sioux Falls, population 250,000, is the largest retail center between Denver and Minneapolis, and has a primary market area of 570,000 consumers and draws tourists from a four state area. Sioux Falls is among the top 50 fastest growing cities in the U.S. and has 32 miles of trails/bikeways, but they offer an urban experience, and since no rural areas surrounding Sioux Falls have bike trails, Luverne can fill that need. The 60-mile round trip from Sioux Falls is within day-trip range for advanced recreation bicyclists and within overnight range for moderate recreational bicyclists.

Criteria #3 Enhances Connectivity to Regional Destinations: The LL/BMT connects directly to Blue Mounds State Park and several other public interest destinations including: 7 local parks, an outdoor Nature Explore classroom, the school's outdoor recreation complex, 2 ponds that will offer fishing, the County fairgrounds, Blue Mound Ice Arena, hotels and restaurants in the US-75 commercial corridor near I-90, the Main Street business district, the regional Medical Center, the Minnesota Veterans Home, and the school. The hospital, school and Veterans Home are the three largest employers in the city. The existing Blue Mounds Trail passes the indoor Aquatics and Fitness Center. The Luverne Loop will also pass by Creamery Pond, a hidden gem and unique natural resource based area in Luverne that is proposed to include fishing piers, canoe/kayak launches, and a plethora of outdoor recreation fun for people of all ages. Links to future proposed (state and local) trails will only further enhance the outdoor recreational experience that begins in the Luverne area. Proposed trails that would connect with the LL/BMT include: The Casey Jones State Trail, a 100+ mile trail corridor from Schoeneman County Park (1 mile south of Luverne) to Redwood Falls; an east-west trail from Sioux Falls (SD) through Luverne to Worthington and Jackson to the Des Moines River State trail; a trail link to the south to Gitchie Manitou State Preserve (IA), Blood Run National Historic Landmark (SD/IA), and the 844-acre Big Sioux Wildlife Area (SD/IA), all within about 30 miles of Luverne.

Criteria #4 Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within a Region: The southwest quadrant of the state offers very few state or regional level trail or park experiences. Due to the scarcity of trails, there is not much of an existing trail network to connect. The existing trails are short, and the gaps large. Only a few small segments of the Casey Jones and Minnesota Valley State Trails exist in the area southwest of the Minnesota River valley and west of Mankato. Only 3 state trails are authorized for this large area, and will take decades to be developed. The southwestern-most nine-county region in Minnesota lags behind most of the rest of the state in the development of hard surface trails, with about 85 miles of city and county trails in total. These trails are scattered across 9-county area, mostly in 1 to 6 mile segments, with none over 11 miles. There is only one paved trail in Rock County: the BMT. The adjacent counties in Northwest Iowa have only a few short trails as well. The Sioux Falls metro area, with its 32 mile trail system, draws many Rock County and Southwest Minnesota residents there to use the trails. A connected trail system in Southwest Minnesota with access to our multiple outdoor recreational opportunities will allow Minnesotans to stay close to home for their recreational experiences, rather than traveling to trail related tourism in South Dakota. The Luverne Loop, when complete, and the existing Blue Mounds Trail will combine to offer the longest contiguous trail available in the Southwest Minnesota that connects people with natural resources based outdoor recreation close to their home- a gap that we are hoping to continue to fill in the years to come.

Attachment List Section (only lists up to 10 documents)

Type	Description
Photo	Quartzite cliffs erupt out of prairie at Blue Mounds
Photo	The Luverne Loop will connect to the starting point of the Blue Mound Trail at the intersection of Main St. and Blue Mound Ave.

Photo	Proposed Wayside Rest Areas & Amenities along the Luverne Loop
Photo	The interpretive center, formerly the home of Frederick Manfred (a historical novelist), has been remodeled to assist visitors in understanding the native prairie and the culture of the Plains Indians
Photo	Children marvel at the size of the cliffs along the Blue Mounds Trail
Photo	The Luverne Loop will pass through Kolbert Park
Photo	Luverne Loop Logo & Design Standards
Photo	DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr and Lt. Governor Tina Smith stop for a photo on the Blue Mounds Trail during the Prairie Pedal Tour in 2015
Photo	View of the Blue Mounds Trail from Luverne to the Blue Mound State Park
Photo	The Luverne Loop traverses the outskirts of the city connect multiple public interest destinations