

# Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

## Designation Application

### General Section

Designation Application #: 16-036D      Date Submitted: 04/29/2016

Park or Trail Name: Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System

District #: 1      Map Coordinates (Latitude and Longitude): Latitude: 47.7393 Longitude: -90.6551

#### Location Description:

The Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System is located on the Sawtooth Mountain ridgeline above Lake Superior in Cook County. The existing system includes 15.5 miles of trail, currently existing in two clusters at Britton Peak in Tofte Township and at Pincushion Mountain near Grand Marais. A planned connection between these trail clusters will utilize the North Shore's ridgeline to create a 150+ mile mountain bike trail system in Northeastern Minnesota.

Lead Applicant Organization: Cook County

Lead Contact First Name: Jeff      Last Name: Cadwell

Mailing Address: Cook County Courthouse, Administrator's Office Room 1800, 411 W. 2nd Street

City: Grand Marais      State: MN      Zip: 55604

Phone: 218-387-3687      Email: jeff.cadwell@co.cook.mn.us

Joint Applicant #1 Organization:

Joint Applicant #2 Organization:

Joint Applicant #3 Organization:

Joint Applicant #4 Organization:

#### Describe other project supporters:

The Superior Cycling Association, which coordinates and supports the development of mountain bike trails in Cook County, is the strongest supporter of the Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System and works with multiple entities (i.e. USDA Forest Service, City of Grand Marais, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, North Superior Ski and Run Club, Sugarbush Trail Association, Visit Cook County, Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, etc.) in trail planning, development, and programming related to cycling facilities in the area. Lake County, Cook's neighboring county, has also showed support for Cook County mountain biking development efforts.

### Description Section

Regional Significance Statement: Riding the ridgeline above Lake Superior and connecting mountain bikers to numerous destinations, the Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System will serve as a destination

mountain bike facility that includes over 150 miles of singletrack trails as clusters, loops, and connectors. A significant portion of this system will be the North Shore Traverse Trail, a linear mountain bike trail with potential to span not only Cook County, but the entire Lake Superior ridgeline.

Classification: Special Recreational Feature Park

Total proposed acreage: 150

Overview/Description of Park or Trail:

Currently existing as 15.5 miles of trail at two trail clusters centered at Britton Peak in Tofte and Pincushion Mountain near Grand Marais, the Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System is a planned, 150+ mile, purpose-built mountain bike trail system traversing Cook County along the Sawtooth Ridgeline above Lake Superior's North Shore. To incorporate clusters, loops, and a County-wide mountain bike trail connector (proposed North Shore Traverse Trail), the system will utilize Cook County's large tracts of public land within the Superior National Forest, in an area noted for its historic connections to nature-based tourism in Minnesota and a culture of recreation-driven adventure. On public land with a ridgeline lending itself naturally to mountain bike recreation and featuring vast vistas of Lake Superior, the future Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System will offer incredible opportunity for a mountain bike destination unparalleled in size and type among a unique wilderness location in the context of the Arrowhead Region, Minnesota, and the Midwest. As Cook County is a tourism economy driven by outside visitors (who contribute to a 3-4 million visitor count along the North Shore annually), the mountain bike trail system would expand the County's current consumer market to the millennial generation, offering significant economic benefits to the tourism destination of Cook County. The scale of the mountain bike system will serve as a selling point for these visitors. Spanning 150+ miles upon completion and including multiple trail types (i.e. gravity trails, flow trails, etc.), the trail system will be a diverse network that can accommodate multiple skill levels (from beginner to advanced) and will require return trips to explore the system in its entirety. Development of the trail system will also coincide with development of other Cook County recreation areas, including a proposed recreation area called Sawtooth Bluff in Grand Marais; the partnership to create destination recreation areas will also enhance the possibilities for Cook County's strong and dedicated tourist populations. Within easy access of multiple state-level recreational facilities (i.e. Judge C. R. Magney State Park, Cascade River State Park, Temperance River State Park, George Crosby Manitou State Park, and the Gitchi-Gami State Trail), the mountain bike trail system will also be well-connected to encourage use. In addition, programming efforts aimed toward special mountain bike events, year-round use, and especially youth ridership will also provide popularity of the facility.

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: Special Recreational Feature Park	
Existing Facility List	Proposed Facility List
Mountain Biking Trails (natural)	Mountain Biking Trails (natural), Trail Signage, Trailhead Facilities (Kiosks, Bike Repair Stations, Parking, etc.)

Master Plan Status Section

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

Describe Other Supportive Information:

Fortunately, the Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System can utilize existing public land, warranting little to no cost for land acquisition; however, development and maintenance of the system will draw expense. While precise dollar values cannot be calculated for the entire system, maintenance can be estimated at \$200-300 per mile for annual trail upkeep (i.e. weed whipping, leaf blowing etc.), and development can be estimated between \$15k-\$100k per mile (average \$25k for cross-country trails, average \$65k per mile for gravity or flow trails, average \$60 per foot for boardwalk). As is common with mountain bike facilities, the trail system will rely on phasing through both design and development as different sections of the system are created.

Classification Details Section

Classification: Special Recreational Feature Park

Criteria #1 Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience: Set on the unique topography of Lake Superior's ridgeline, the Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System travels within an area filled with adventure, connecting multiple trail clusters and providing access to numerous "destination" facilities - state parks (Temperance River State Park, Cascade River State Park), trails (Gitche-Gami State Trail, Superior Hiking Trail, North Shore State Trail), and more - which are set entirely within the Superior National Forest. With a rolling and diverse terrain, the current trail system is built for recreationists year-round, but in combination with other amenities contributes to an estimated annual North Shore visitor

count of 3-4 million people. Built and maintained by a dedicated user group in partnership with the USDA Forest Service, the mountain bike system is currently diverse and serves as a destination for a growing number of residents and tourists alike. These visitors travel time and again from all corners of Minnesota and beyond to experience a landscape that easily lends itself to an exciting and unique mountain bike facility. Though fragmented in its current form, the system serves its regional audience well through its facilities. However, enhancements aimed at creating one unified system traversing the North Shore would elevate such an experience. Connecting communities, state parks, trails, and more while offering 150+ miles of designated mountain bike trails, the future of the Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System will only enhance the future of a growing facility seemingly meant to treat its users to a uniquely northern Minnesota experience.

**Criteria #2 Provides a Natural and Scenic Setting Offering a Compelling Sense of Place:** The Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System's place among forested, rock-cropped land that parallels the vast vista of Lake Superior provides a compelling sense of place unto itself, but it is the interspersed historical and cultural features ingrained into Cook County's natural ridgeline features that further enhance the place hosting Cook County's trail system. These features include the Cross River Heritage Center in Schroeder, Tofte Town Park, the historic Lutsen Mountains Resort, and Lighthouse Point in Grand Marais, among others. These features would all be accessible via the mountain bike trail system's ample community connections. On top of these, the rich association of natural resources to Cook County's history (mining, logging, and fishing) make experiencing the Superior National Forest firsthand a glimpse into historic Cook County itself.

**Criteria #3 Well-located to Serve a Regional Need and/or Tourist Destination:** The natural features of Cook County have made the area surrounding the proposed Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System a tourist destination since early development in the 1800s, when wealthy individuals would travel up Lake Superior's shoreline to camp and hunt in the north woods. Given this history of inherent tourism and the resulting development of established connections between communities through roads and trails, all of Cook County serves as a regional tourist destination, but Cook County's only designated city - Grand Marais - serves as its centerpiece as a well-established regional tourist center. Hosting a year-round population of 1,340 people in a rather low-density region, the city lends itself as a travel destination contributing to the 3-4 million yearly North Shore visitors. To the existing Pincushion Mountain Trail System, which currently serves as the easternmost arm of the Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System and is the proposed site for the Sawtooth Bluff development, the bike ride from Grand Marais is about two miles. Once the trail system is expanded, this would only serve as one of several entrances into the mountain bike trail system within Cook County, which would also draw tourists from state parks, communities, and other area facilities stretching along the ridgeline above Lake Superior.

**Criteria #4 Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within the Region:** The Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System is truly a one-of-a-kind feature in the Northeast Region of Minnesota. While mountain bike trails exist in this region, due to the availability of large tracts of public land, a mountain bike facility of unparalleled size and type can be created in the rural wilderness environment of Cook County that is not possible to create in other areas, like the urban environment used in the creation of Spirit Mountain in the City of Duluth. In fact, one of the only nearby facilities that could be comparable is located at Split

Rock Lighthouse State Park, and this trail runs eight miles, is situated more than 30 miles from the nearest segment of Cook County singletrack trails, and is not purpose-built for mountain biking. Other mountain bike facilities in the region include opportunities to ride along gravel roads or snowmobile trails, but these roads and trails are also not purpose-built for mountain biking. In turn, they do not adequately meet the need or offer significant potential for hosting world-class mountain bike events, which are desired among Cook County residents and visitors. The Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System would fulfill this gap in service and offer a recreational option which has potential not yet fully realized in northeastern Minnesota.

Attachment List Section (only lists up to 10 documents)

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
site_map_uploads_2	Existing mountain bike trail system in Cook County
Photo	Existing Britton Peak Mountain Bike Trails
Photo	Existing Britton Peak Mountain Bike Trails
regional_map	State- and regional-level parks and trails within 30 miles of the Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System
Photo	Existing Britton Peak Boardwalk
public_involvement_photos	Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System Steering Committee Meeting Summaries (including visioning session)
Photo	Existing Britton Peak Boardwalk, Considering Cedar Roots and Rock
Photo	Existing Pincushion Mountain Mountain Bike Trails
public_involvement_photos	News Release for Cook County Mountain Bike Trail System Public Visioning Session
Photo	Existing Pincushion Mountain Mountain Bike Trails