



## Designation Administrative Review

**Park/Trail Name**

Great Northern Trail

**Park/Trail ID:**

22-016D

**District**

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**Classification**

Regional Trail (Motorized and Non-motorized)

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**Location Description**

The Great Northern Trail is a 30-mile rails-to-trails project located within the Great Northern Railroad alignment between Elk River and Milaca. The southern 8.5 miles of the trail are constructed as a paved bike and pedestrian trail from Elk River to Zimmerman, with a stand-alone 2-mile segment within the City of Princeton. The extension project includes the remaining 19.5 undeveloped sections. The completed trail will provide an important regional connection between the Mississippi River Regional Trail and the planned Ports to Plains Trail, creating a 100+ mile loop between the cities of St. Cloud, Elk River, and Milaca. The trail will also connect visitors to important natural, recreational, and cultural resources along the corridor, such as the Milaca mountain bike trails, the Rum River Blue Trail, the Town of Brickton historic site, and the Princeton Railroad Depot.

**Regional Significance Statement**

What makes this trail regionally significant is its connection to the Great River Regional Trail and Plains to Port Regional Trail, completing a 100-mile loop between Elk River, Milaca, and St. Cloud. The Great Northern Trail will become another asset in the region and beyond, connecting communities with parks and open spaces. Along with bolstering open space networks, the trail will provide safe routes to schools and increase access to nature.

Description: Trail Overview Map

[http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/22-016D/01\\_Trail\\_Overview\\_Map\\_c56552.jpg](http://dms.gmrptcommission.org/uploads/applications/22-016D/01_Trail_Overview_Map_c56552.jpg)

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**Facility Website**

<https://www.co.sherburne.mn.us/Facilities/Facility/Details/Great-Northern-Trail-7>

**Organization**

Sherburne County

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**Lead Contact Person**

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**Title**

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# Evaluation

## Application Status (\*approval for eteam evaluation):

Review Complete

ID	Ranking Comments	Rank
145	<p>-30-mile rails-to-trails project -The completed trail will provide an important regional connection between the Mississippi River Regional Trail and the planned Ports to Plains Trail, creating a 100+ mile loop between the cities of St. Cloud, Elk River, and Milaca. -Good Partnerships -112% increase in the BIPOC population. Approximately 48,200 residents live within 3 miles of the trail extension and will benefit from improved access to trails and open space -Good drone pictures -EXCELLENT MASTER PLAN</p>	High
334	<p>. At first glance this looks like a commuter trail designed to provide alternate transportation opportunities between local communities. Further examination shows numerous connections to local parks, regional trails and natural resources facilities.. . The project has the support of local governments and the business communities in the area, making the trail a potential economic plus. . There are some potential land acquisition issues that may complicate long term development and completion. . I did not see a maintenance plan. . I don't see this as a true destination trail but I think the benefits are strong for local and regional use. .</p>	Medium
144	<p>Though this existing and proposed trail consists of a relatively straight former rail corridor, there are some interesting features along the route and some vegetative screening and road separation that make it more inviting. The key positive element to the proposal is the possibility of this segment being part of a much larger trail connecting with the St Cloud regional area. The population of Sherburne County is rapidly increasing and this trail would provide needed recreational opportunities.</p>	High
313	<p>Although this trail doesn't look very scenic or nature-based, there are some sections that could be very pleasant. The proposed trailheads look very modern and functional. There are many possibilities for regional connections, as well as historic locations along the trail for tourists. This would provide for a regional draw.</p>	Medium
142	<p>Since almost the beginning of GMRPTC's designation process this committee has discussed these railroad beds that traverse the state thru numerous counties as potential Trails. The debate has centered on "should the bed be considered as a whole. And if so Isn't that a state trail. Or should the segments be considered separately and if so does each segment qualify</p>	Low

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as a regional trail or a component part of a state trail. To my knowledge the question has not been resolved. I believe that the question is above our (the E-Team's) pay grade. The answer in my opinion is Strategic and far reaching. That said I think this segment should not be considered as regional but instead a component of a statewide trail and thus should not be considered for regional designation. Thus my ranking reflects my current understanding.

**Consensus Ranking Comments:**

There was extensive discussion about how great it is to see so many agencies coming together to provide a continuous experience, but also that more sections of the trail weren't included. The connection that this trail provides to other named trails, creating a large loop between the Cities and St. Cloud, was a very positive factor. The energy for this project has the potential to help make the creation of those other, stalled trails a reality. This trail will be challenged by land acquisition. The rail-trail segments are sometimes marginal from a natural resource perspective. The alternate routings (when land can't be acquired) are even less so, particularly as a road-adjacent trail is not consistent with Greater Minnesota system priorities.

**Final Ranking:**

High