General

This section provides the basic information about the park or trail and the organizations responsible for it.

Park/Trail ID #
15-020D

Funding Application
25-010F

Park/Trail Name
Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo

Last Update
June 09, 2025

Project Name
Trail Bridge Replacements

District
6

Existing Acres or Miles
624

Project Overview
There are 3 pedestrian bridges at Oxbow Park that connect the public to 70% of the parks hiking trails and more than half of the park's acreage. The bridges are now 45 and 50 years old and in need of replacements due to rapid deterioration and lack of ADA standards.

Project Description
Oxbow Park opened to the public in 1969 and is a valued community resource offering natural beauty, recreation, and education. It resides 7 miles west of Rochester and the world-renowned Mayo Clinic and serves the regions of Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin. Oxbow Park is a 622-acre natural resource-based park with 8 miles of hiking trails, picnic areas along the Zumbro River, a campground, and Zollman Zoo with over 30 species of native, non-releasable Minnesota, wild animals. Trail access across the Zumbro River invites the public into a beautiful mix of rare Maple Basswood Forest and restored prairies. In 1974, three footbridges were installed to provide pedestrian access across the river to 350 acres, more than 50%, of the parks prime natural resources located on the west and north sides. The bridges are located at the three major picnic areas in the park. These bridges remain the only internal access points for the public to those areas. For the purposes of this grant, the bridges identified on park maps will be referenced as follows: Bridge 1 (Main Picnic Area), Bridge 2 (Second Bridge Picnic Area), and Bridge 3 (Third Bridge Picnic Area). Each bridge was constructed using two 50-foot precast concrete double-beam spans supported by concrete abutments with integrated stairs and a midstream steel channel pier. Bridge 2 partially collapsed during flooding in 1980 caused by ice dams and debris destroying the center support structure and was subsequently rebuilt with a prefabricated steel truss bridge that clear spans the channel between the existing concrete abutments. Examples of the continual debris buildup are shown in pictures attached. Now over 50 years old, these structures are significantly deteriorated due to decades of seasonal flooding. The abutments of all three bridges are in poor condition, largely due to sub-standard original construction. The concrete is visibly deteriorated and soft, with the most severe degradation observed at Bridge 3. Previous repair efforts have failed, primarily because the remaining concrete substrate is of poor quality. As a result, any further repair attempts are expected to perform similarly poorly. According to professional assessments, all three bridges are approaching the end of their service life and should be fully replaced. Photos of the current bridge conditions will be included in the attachments. Crucially, none of the existing bridges meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, as all include stairs at both ends. This lack of accessibility excludes individuals with mobility challenges and severely limits maintenance and emergency access. Currently,

access to trails across the river for maintenance and emergency response units is extremely limited and currently only available via a steep easement on the northeast side of the property (shown on Access Highlights map attached). This route is not suitable for emergency vehicles beyond the initial easement access. Any Initial emergency response that must be on foot, or by UTV via back easement driveway, can take up to 20 minutes to reach a victim on the trail system across the river. In some cases, evacuation is even more challenging and may require a helicopter as the only viable means of extraction. In response, the park is seeking long-term improvements to enhance the bridge structure, riverbank integrity, resilience to seasonal flooding, and accessibility of these river crossings. At least one of the replacement bridges must be designed to accommodate both ADA accessibility and UTV access, which will most likely be Bridge 1. The feasibility of ADA-accessible trails across all three bridges is limited by the existing trail conditions across the river, which include steep grades and stair sections across from Bridges 2 and 3. Therefore it is known that not every bridge will lead to accessible trails on the other side, however, every bridge itself will meet ADA standards and allow for access up and over the bridge so everyone can enjoy being over the Zumbro River and traverse a short distance on the other side. The park also has a track chair available for the public to use which will give those with mobility difficulties the ability to access all but 1 trail segment across the river.

Project Area Maps

Project locations map
Bridge_grant_map_14e682.pdf
County Parks map
County_parks_map_05139b.PNG
Oxbow topo map
OxbowPark_TopoMap_5933fe.pdf
Site plans
OxbowBridgesGraphic_7.23.25_2ad7c9.pdf
Areas accessed by bridges
Access_highlights_31477d.pdf
Wetlands
Wetland_Zones_d0063a.png

Organization Olmsted County Parks and Trails Department	**Lead Contact Full Name** Karlin Ziegler	**Lead Contact Title** Parks and Trails Director
Mailing Address 1188 50th St SE	**City** Rochester	**State** Minnesota
Zip 55904	**Phone** 5073287086	**Email** karlin.ziegler@olmstedcounty.gov

Funding

Development Type
Both

Acres of Park Land to be Acquired
0

Funding Category:

- Legacy Development and Acquisition

Anticipated number of participants/users in Connecting People to the Outdoors project
0

New Trail Miles to be Acquired
0

Types

New Trail Miles Developed
0

Miles of Trail Restored or Improved
0.5

Trail head facilities developed
0

Number of trail bridges/culverts to be developed/restored
3

Number of vault toilets built
0

Number of Shower/restrooms
0

Number of campsites built
0

Acres of prairie restored
0

Acres of invasive species removed
0

Number of Connecting People to the Outdoors Programs created/administered
0

Project Outcomes

Evaluation of Impact
The proposed bridge improvements will significantly enhance accessibility, allowing nearly all visitors, including those with limited mobility, to access the trail system across the river. In addition, the new structures will greatly improve the efficiency of maintenance operations and improve emergency response efforts. By incorporating modern, flood-resilient designs, the replacement bridges are expected to minimize debris accumulation during high water events, helping to prevent erosion, reduce flow diversion, and eliminate potential hazards for river-based recreation. The project will incorporate comprehensive site assessments, public surveys, and community engagement to ensure the final design aligns with both environmental considerations and the needs of park users.

Legacy Pillars:

- Connect People and the Outdoors
- Take Care of What We Have

Connection to Pillars
This project directly supports the grant pillars of Taking Care of What We Have and Connecting People and the Outdoors. Replacing the aging bridges is critical to ensuring ongoing visitor safety, enabling higher-quality trail maintenance, and maintaining reliable access to key areas of the park. The new bridges will support continued improvements to ADA accessibility, expanding inclusive recreational opportunities for all visitors. Additionally, the project will contribute to riverbank stabilization, improved water quality, and enhanced habitat protection by reducing debris buildup and erosion during flood events. These improvements will also create safer conditions for water-based recreation, aligning with the parks long-term goals for sustainability and public access.

The bridges also provide access to rare natural resources, including a high-quality Maple-Basswood Forest and expansive restored prairie ecosystems, enriching both environmental education and ecological preservation. The park, which includes a zoo and a range of recreational and natural resource features, serves as a major attraction not only for local residents but also for Mayo Clinic patients and visitors, who

often seek outdoor experiences during their stays. With a consistent regional draw spanning a 150-mile radius, and a steady stream of visitors from around the world, the park plays a unique and vital role in connecting people to nature on a local, regional, and global scale.

Connection to a Regionally Substantial Component of the Master Plan
Oxbow Parks Master Plan recognizes the importance of new pedestrian bridges at Oxbow Park as necessary replacements for structures that have reached their end of service life. As Oxbow Park continues to add new amenities such as the nature center and campground, the number of visitors is also expected to keep increasing substantially in the park. The Rochester area continues to grow and those visiting the area for vacation or clinic appointments are also on the rise. Oxbow Park has become a popular option for vacations and for short-term visitors to the clinic. Studies have shown that a large percentage of the population engage with the outdoors via low impact recreation such as hiking and walking.

Patients at the clinic have a wide variety of illnesses and disabilities and look to find respite and wellness to fit their needs. With the improved bridges, visitors will have many opportunities to connect with nature and immerse themselves in the unique features that represent Southeast Minnesota landscapes. Olmsted County is heavily involved in Park Rx America, which works with healthcare providers to prescribe time in nature as part of their physical and mental health plans. Forest bathing and naturalist led wellness walks are becoming popular programs, with our forest land being the star attraction.

Project Readiness

Project Lead
Project lead will be Karlin Ziegler, Olmsted County Parks and Trails Director, with the assistance of Lonnie Hebl, Oxbow Park Manager. The Parks Department has several staff with a long history of constructing many of the park buildings/structures and landscaping in-house. Parks staff have the expertise to provide daily onsite management of the construction progress, and have done so with many large grant projects in the last 5-10 years. Ziegler also has close connections and access to other departments within the county for assistance and expertise including Planning, Public Works, Facilities, and Finance Departments just to name a few. A competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) was completed, and SEH (Short Elliott Hendrickson Inc.) design firm was hired as the lead design consultant to complete the concept design shown in this grant application.

Implementation Timeline
It is expected that the construction design, reviews and permitting will take at least 6-8 months due to all the shoreline, wetland, and environmental studies that will be required for this project. Construction company should be hired by mid-summer of 2027 so part of the grading work can begin on one side of the river. Construction and bridge installation can be completed during the window of summer 2027 through winter 2028. Finishing work and landscaping is anticipated to happen in fall of 2028 and spring of 2029.

Availability for Public Use
Oxbow Park is open to the public year-round from 5am -10pm daily. There are no entrance or parking fees in the park or zoo. Our mission is to provide free, inclusive park experiences where individuals and families of all socioeconomic backgrounds can gather, play, and connectwithout any financial burden. Oxbow Park provides school and public programming to thousands of visitors every year. An estimated 250-300,000 people visit the park each year from our region and all over the world. There are many opportunities for education and recreation in the park land that lies on the other side of the river from the main hub of the park. Groups such as Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Summer of Service, Opportunity Services, and schools from a 150-mile radius continually come to Oxbow Park for programming and volunteer opportunities. Trail systems are never shut down for exclusive use by any individuals or organizations.

Design Standards
SEH Consulting Firm completed the design concept of the three park bridges. SEH has collaborated with many departments in Olmsted County on numerous design projects and are well versed in the industry and

state standards. Paths and structures will be designed for sustainability, low environmental impacts, accessibility, and ADA compliance. Paths will meet the minimum 5-foot width and percent grade and extend to the parking lot. All other accessible areas will be considered in the pathways to connect all components. Bid alternatives will be given to contractors to determine if concrete or bituminous paths will provide the most cost effective and sustainable surfacing for the floodplain. During the design phase a draft will be presented to Bill Botten, or another ADA expert, to review the plans before final design. Project lead will also work closely with the Olmsted County Planning Department and township planning to ensure all permits and standards are properly met. Known wetland areas are already being assessed, and this firm has great experience with environmental permits and regulations.

Sustainability Plan
The new bridges will be included in the regular inspection schedule in coordination with the Olmsted County Public Works Highway Department. Based on the findings and recommendations from these inspections, funding may be allocated in the Countys five-year Capital Improvement Plan, pending approval by the County Board. Additionally, the County Parks and Trails Department maintains dedicated funds within the general budget to address unexpected maintenance or repair projects that are smaller in scope and cost.

Project Cost Breakdown
The construction of each bridge area is anticipated to cost $1,325,000. Construction level design and engineering soft costs are $180,000 or 4% of the estimated construction costs. The bridge superstructures cost $700,000 each for a total of $2,100,000. Site work including bridge removals, excavation, and substructure work is estimated at $1,593,052. ADA pathways, either bituminous or concrete, leading from parking lots to the bridges are $300,000. A contingency of just under 3% or $112,000 is being provided for unforeseen problems that may arise.

Funding Request Breakdown

Grant Funding Request
$2,750,000

Local Match #1
$1,535,003

Funder #1
0

Local Match #2
0

Funder #2
0

Local Match #3
0

Funder #3
0

Local Match #4
0

Funder #4
0

Local Match #4
0

Funder #5
0

Non-Eligible Local Match
85000

Non-Eligible Item Description
Archeology reviews will be started by the county prior to a grant contract and are estimated to cost $20,000 per site based on the assumption of both phase I review and phase II site sampling. We have also estimated $25,000 for potential wetland credits needed, also to be completed prior to contract execution.

Total Funding
$4,285,003

Percentage of local match
0.36

Completion Timeframe
24

Funder #1
Olmsted County Board of Commissioners
Funder #1 Resolutions

County Board Resolution
25-89_Approve_Parks_and_Trails_Legacy_Grant_Application_0e5caa.pdf

Funder #2
NA

Funder #3
NA

Funder #4
NA

Funder #5
NA
Budget Worksheet

Budget worksheet
project_budget_OX_Bridges_75ce77.xlsx

Attachments

Doc Name	Description	Url
Project Area Map	Project locations map	Bridge_grant_map_14e682.pdf
Project Area Map	County Parks map	County_parks_map_05139b.PNG
Funder Resolution One	County Board Resolution	25-89_Approve_Parks_and_Trails_Legacy_Grant_Application_0e5caa.pdf
Project Area Map	Oxbow topo map	OxbowPark_TopoMap_5933fe.pdf
Budget Worksheet	Budget worksheet	project_budget_OX_Bridges_75ce77.xlsx
Project Area Map	Site plans	OxbowBridgesGraphic_7.23.25_2ad7c9.pdf
Project Area Map	Areas accessed by bridges	Access_highlights_31477d.pdf
Project Area Map	Wetlands	Wetland_Zones_d0063a.png
Additional Attachment	Bridge 1 photo	Bridge_1_abutment_5807e2.jpeg
Additional Attachment	Bridge 1 photo (2)	Bridge_1_decking_cd90ce.jpeg

Additional Attachment	Bridge 1 photo (3)	Bridge_1_stairs_e143a3.jpeg
Additional Attachment	Bridge 1 photo (4)	Bridge_1_steel_reinforcements_4a3a1e.jpeg
Additional Attachment	Bridge 2 photo	Bridge_2_abutment_4a2b56.jpeg
Additional Attachment	Bridge 2 photo (2)	Bridge_2_abutments_8f6f42.jpeg
Additional Attachment	Bridge 3 photo	Bridge_3_debris_buildup_3cca94.jpeg
Additional Attachment	Bridge 3 photo (2)	Bridge_3_decking_217f81.jpeg