CITY OF BLOOMINGTON
MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY MASTER PLAN

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FOR DISCUSSION ONLY

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Disclaimer: The MN River Valley Master Plan includes original content as well as content "borrowed" from other plans and reports generated previously by the City of Bloomington, MnDNR, USF&W, Hennepin County and others. The City would like to express our sincere appreciation of all the work done previously by others to enrich this master plan document!

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Executive Summary

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SECTION 1: Purpose and Vision

Introduction

The Minnesota River Valley (MNRV), an approximately 4,000 acre natural expanse, serves as the 13 mile long southern border of the City of Bloomington, Minnesota, as shown in Figure 1. Most of this area is public land. The rugged character and remote expanses of the Minnesota River Valley provides residents of Bloomington convenient access to numerous opportunities for nature-based recreation. Visitors can learn about Minnesota's wildlife, plant communities, and rich cultural heritage while experiencing a sense of solitude uncommon in the midst of an urban area. However, many residents have a limited awareness of this gem of natural beauty – literally in Bloomington's backyard.

Figure 1: Location of the Minnesota River Valley in the City of Bloomington

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The *Minnesota River Valley Master Plan* is directly tied to the vision, mission, and value statements articulated in the City's Strategic Plan. Specifically, the Plan supports the following Strategic Plan value statements:

- We choose to shape the future rather than reacting to a changing environment.
- We are stewards of our environment, promoting sustainability of our many resources and the creation of inviting public spaces.

For more information on the City's Strategic Plan please visit:
http://bloomingtonmn.gov/cityhall/council/strategic/strategic.htm

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Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the City of Bloomington's *Minnesota River Valley Master Plan* is to create an implementation framework to enhance awareness and access to the Minnesota River Valley within the City of Bloomington while providing ongoing environmental protection and stewardship. The Plan focuses on city-owned land within the Valley and is organized into the following sections:

- Vision and Goals
- Historical Context
- Existing Conditions
- Opportunities and Challenges
- Implementation Plan

Vision and Goals

The City envisions a future where citizen awareness, understanding, and access to the Minnesota River Valley is expanded, but managed in a balanced manner that ensures the unique natural resources and character of the valley are protected and enhanced.

CALLOUT BOX

Vision Statement:

To enhance awareness, appreciation, and enjoyment of the Minnesota River Valley by ensuring that City-owned land in the valley is used and managed in a manner that balances resource preservation with appropriate access and utilization.

Guiding Framework

Goals for the Minnesota River Valley

The four goals listed below provide the framework for approaching the opportunities and challenges within the river valley and work toward achieving the plan vision.

1. **Enhance access to recreational opportunities in the Minnesota River Valley.**

   Public access to the Minnesota River Valley is provided by both the City of Bloomington and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS). The Plan identifies existing access points, evaluates their current condition, and makes recommendations for access improvements throughout the entire river valley area within the City.

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2. **Increase awareness and understanding of the Minnesota River Valley environment.**

   Many Bloomington residents are not aware of the important role the river valley plays in our ecosystem, the historic context of the river valley, or the recreational opportunities available within the river valley area. Increasing citizen awareness and understanding is important to build community support for the continued stewardship of the river valley.

3. **Improve utilization of land and resources in the Minnesota River Valley.**

   Use of the river valley must be considered in the context of this unique and varied river valley and bluff environment. It is essential to find the right balance between accommodating visitors and protecting the natural amenities that draw visitors to the area.

4. **Ensure protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources in the Minnesota River Valley.**

   The Minnesota River Valley features significantly in the natural landscape and cultural history of Bloomington, the region, and the State. The Plan sets a framework to ensure protection and preservation of the natural and cultural resources in the Minnesota River Valley, so they remain intact and flourish well into the future.

Guiding Principles

The City sees all four goals as complementary - many of the recommendations in this Plan serve multiple goals. For example, planning for a coordinated signage system will not only increase awareness of the river valley, but will also enhance access. However, the City also recognizes that activities associated with the four goals have the potential to come into conflict with each other. For example, providing increased access for residents has the potential to work against resource preservation activities. Furthermore, the City recognizes that the multiple agencies, organizations and citizens working to protect and enhance the river valley may have different priorities and missions. To mitigate these divergences, this Plan aims to abide by the following principles:

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Interrelationship between Goals and Guiding Principles

Mutual Respect and Cooperation

Multiple agencies, organizations, and citizens have interests and share common goals regarding the use and protection of the Minnesota River Valley. It's critical that we all work together in a respectful manner to achieve these goals. The framework set by the Plan aims to coordinate the efforts of all groups interested in the river valley to maximize effective and efficient stewardship in the river valley.

Balanced Approach

The prioritization of goals and implementation steps must be considered in the context of many, sometimes divergent interests. The Plan will set the framework to ensure the trade-offs and impacts of agency and resident actions are fully understood and considered. The City will also work to ensure that there is ample opportunity for many voices to be heard throughout the planning process.

Public Outreach Process

During the development of this Plan, input from stakeholders and the general public was obtained through a series of stakeholder and agency meetings, community open houses, an online user preference survey, a project webpage, and recurring update articles in the City's *Briefing* newsletter. Input received is compiled in Appendix XXXX and is also available on City website at www.BloomingtonMN.gov (key word search: XXXXX).

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SECTION 2: Historic Context

Many generations of Native Americans have called the Minnesota River Valley home – relying on the valley's rich resources for sustenance, shelter and transportation. Archaeological sites have been discovered in Bloomington spanning each of the three main traditions or periods of Native American presence in the valley. Specifically, the Dakota Indians had numerous villages in the Bloomington area all of which were greatly affected by the arrival of white European explorers and settlers.

European exploration of the Upper Mississippi River basin began in 1673 when French explorers Louis Joliet and Jacques Marquette reached the river near what is now Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Over the next 100 years the Mississippi River basin and its tributaries including the Minnesota River were explored by French fur traders as well as other European explorers who were beginning to make their way into the American West. In 1805, the Minnesota River Valley, was officially ceded to the U.S. government via the Louisiana Purchase. As a result, more white settlers were attracted to the region. The U.S. government encouraged this settlement and fortified the area with strategic defenses, including Fort Snelling. With the completion of the Fort in 1825, the Minnesota River became a very important strategic waterway to the West. Throughout this time period relations between white settlers and Native Americans were contentious and often violent. Through a series of questionable treaties, such as Treaty Traverse des Sioux, the U.S. government took control of almost all of the Native American land in the river valley. This culminated in the U.S. Dakota War of 1862 – a bloody six week war between the U.S. government and several bands of Dakota. The war ended with a mass execution of 38 Dakota men on December 26, 1862, in Mankato, Minnesota and the majority of the Dakota people were exiled from the state.

Meanwhile, white settlers continued to flood into the lower Minnesota River Valley, establishing cities and towns. These settlers also relied on the rich resources of the Valley. Specifically, the river served as an important transportation artery for the settlers. Steamboats were the primary means by which goods were moved between the newly established Minnesota River cities until the expansion of railroads into the area in the 1860's and 70's.
Throughout the 20th century the river transitioned from a transportation corridor into a recreation area enjoyed by the people of the Twin Cities. Prior to a large portion of the valley gaining Federal Refuge status in 1976, the area was utilized for other purposes, including housing duck hunting camps for area hunters. Today, walkers, bikers and birders are the primary users of the Refuge and City owned land in the valley.

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In 1834 Gideon Pond and his brother Samuel came to Minnesota to teach Christianity to the Dakota. The Ponds received government permission to establish a mission school near Lake Calhoun (current Minneapolis), where Chief Cloud Man's band of Dakota spent their summers. Beginning in 1839, conflicts between the Dakota and Ojibwe prompted Cloud Man to move his village to a spot near the Minnesota River in present day Bloomington. The village was one of several in the area, including the villages of Black Dog (Burnsville) Shakpe (Shakopee), and others. Gideon Pond moved to join them in 1843, establishing the Oak Grove Mission that would operate until 1852. Today, this site is one of three Bloomington properties that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

INSERT HISTORIC TIMELINES HERE

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Section 3: Jurisdiction & Management

A combination of public agencies, non-profits, community groups and private citizens own land or are involved in activities directly related to the Minnesota River Valley. Roughly 4,109 acres of river valley land are located within the City of Bloomington. The vast majority (3,406 acres) is publicly owned.

For purposes of this Plan, the "river valley" is broadly defined as the land below the bluff line. However, portions of several city parks located above the bluff line, abut and/or provide physical connections to the river valley, including: Forest Glen Park, Mounds Spring Park, Parker's Picnic Grounds, Pond-Dakota Mission Park, and Central/Moir/Harrison Parks.

While this plan focuses on the City-owned land, it also takes into consideration portions of the river valley located in the City that are owned by others. The jurisdiction and roles of the key partners directly involved with the Minnesota River Valley are described below.

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The 760 Contour

The 760 foot elevation topographic contour line is……

Land Owners

The majority of the river valley below the bluffs is designated for public park and conservation uses. Two government agencies own and have jurisdiction over most of these lands – the City of Bloomington, and the United State Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), as shown in Figure 2.

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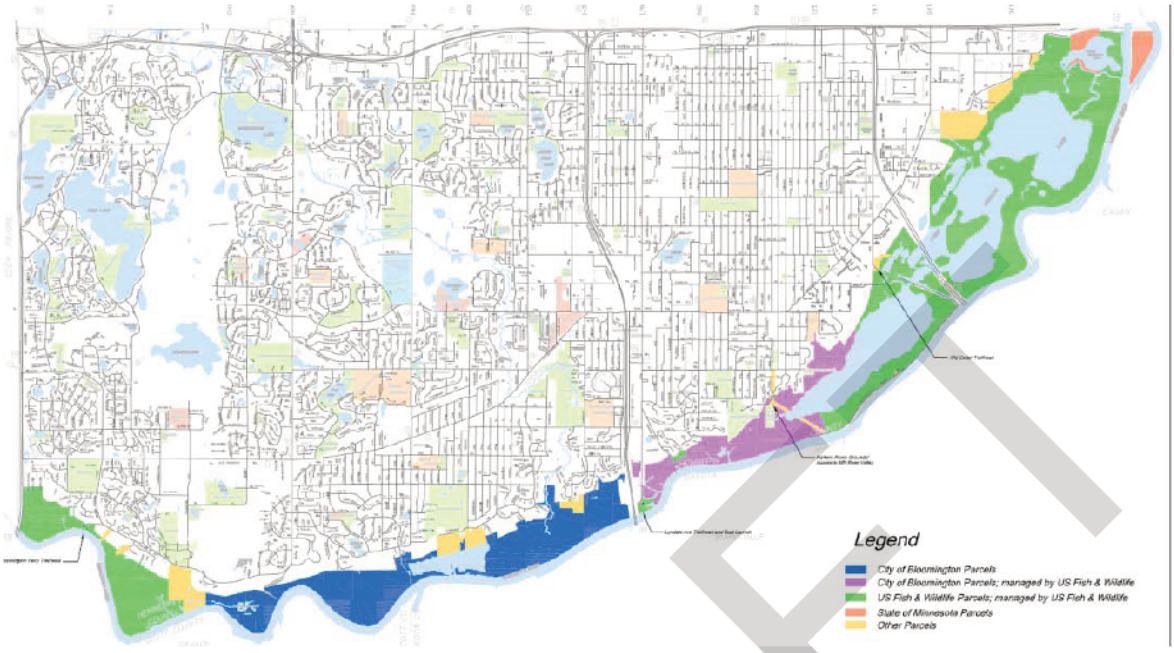
Figure 2: Property Owners in the Minnesota River Valley



City of Bloomington

The City of Bloomington owns approximately 1,130 acres of land in the river valley, roughly divided east and west of I-35W. Much of the City-owned lands are maintained in a natural condition. Facilities provided on City-owned land include neighborhood access points and trails, signage, and access roads for park and utility maintenance. The approximately 400 acres east of I-35W is under a management agreement with the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

The federally managed FWS owns approximately 2,100 acres of land within the City of Bloomington. They also manage the entire Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (MVNWR), which extends 72-miles from Fort Snelling, at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, to the City of Henderson in west-central Minnesota (verify). The land in Bloomington owned by the FWS and the City comprise the Long Meadow Lake and Bloomington Ferry Units of the MVNWR, as shown in Figure 3.

The FWS focuses on wildlife, habitat, and natural resource management and restoration as well as environmental education. They also provide trail maintenance, law enforcement and emergency response, and collaborate with utility companies to minimize damage to natural resources in the Valley. On their property, they maintain several major trailhead facilities, regional FWS headquarter offices, and a major visitors center.

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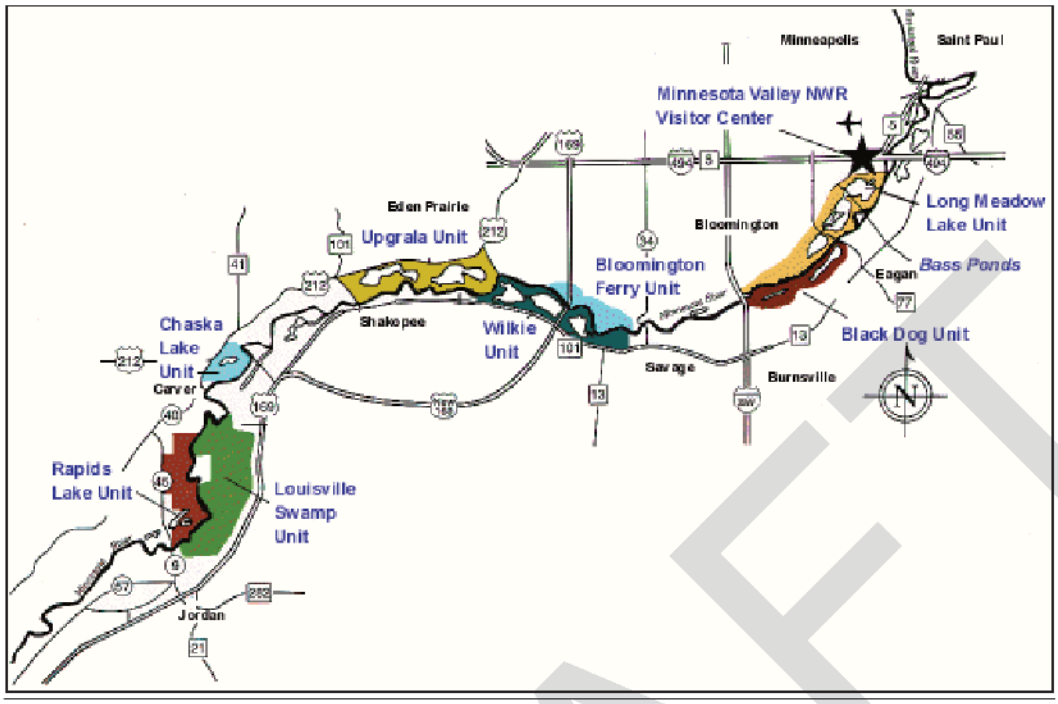
Figure 3: Units of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge in the Metropolitan Area



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FWS Memorandum of Understanding

Other Property Owners

Private Owners

About 700 acres in the river valley are under private ownership. Owners include the Twin Cities and Western Rail Road Company, private citizens, and organizations like the Minnesota Valley Chapter of the Izaak Walton League. Most of the privately held land consists of the portions of parcels along the top of the bluff that extend below the bluff line.

Public Owners

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) owns approximately 85 acres just south of I-494, as well other areas of public right-of-way at the I-3W, Highway 77 and Highway 169 river crossings. I-35W and I-494 river crossings.

Other Organizations Active in the Minnesota River Valley

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)

While the State operated MDNR does not own any property in the river valley, the agency is in the process of planning for the construction of the Minnesota Valley State Trail through the river valley. As shown in Figure 1, the Bloomington segment of the trail is planned to begin at the

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FWS Wildlife Refuge and end just west of Highway 169 river crossing. To accomplish the construction of the trail, MDNR must obtain easements to locate the State Trail corridor on land owned by the City and FWS and other property owners. They will also enter into cooperative agreements with both the City and FWS to define roles and responsibilities related to the design, implementation, and ongoing operation and maintenance of the State Trail facility. Once easements are in place, MDNR will be responsible for maintaining the land and State Trail facilities in the easement.

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District

The area of the Minnesota River Valley located within the City of Bloomington is also within the jurisdiction of the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District. The Lower Minnesota River Watershed District provides regulatory oversight regarding impacts to water quality.

Three Rivers Park District

Three Rivers Park District develops, operates and manages regional-oriented park and trail facilities in Hennepin County. Three trails in Bloomington, wholly or partly under the jurisdiction of TRPD, will connect to the Minnesota River Valley, as shown in Figure 8. These include: Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail, Intercity Regional Trail, and the Hyland Trail.

Special Interest Groups

In addition to the governmental agencies described above, there are several non-profit, special interest, and citizen-based groups with an active interest in the river valley. These groups provide a variety of services including community outreach and awareness, education, maintenance, and host events. City has ongoing working relationships with the following groups:

- Izaak Walton League of America
- Minnesota Off-Road Cyclists (MORC) - MORC is the local chapter of the International Mountain Bikers Association (IMBA) which advocates for off road bicycling, including trail stewardship and management.
- Friends of the Minnesota River Valley
- Pond Dakota Heritage Society
- The Bloomington Bicycle Alliance (BBA) The BBA is a newer group that has formed and advocates around bicycling issues in the City, and are primarily commuter oriented.
- Xcel
- MCES
- Centerpoint

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SECTION 4: Existing Conditions

The Minnesota River Valley offers visitors a sense of escape from the man-made urban environment. To be immersed in landscape surrounded by an array of plants, animals, and natural features, many of which are not found anywhere else in the region. Understanding the existing conditions in the river valley is an important step in planning for the area's future. This section of the Plan details what is known about the area's existing natural and cultural resources as well as existing recreational facilities and uses.

Ecosystem Context

To get a broad view, this section briefly describes the Minnesota River Valley in context relative to North American, the Midwest, and the Twin Cities metropolitan region.

Prairie Pothole Region

The Minnesota River Valley is located in the lower stretches of the vast Prairie Pothole region, which extends across the northern plains of the United States and Canada. The region is characterized by thousands of shallow wetlands, known as potholes, created by glacier activity approximately 10,000 years ago. This region stretches from central Iowa to Canada, as shown in Figure 4. The Prairie Pothole region is one of the largest critical bird habitat areas (i.e. waterfowl production regions) in the country. In addition to supporting waterfowl hunting and birding, prairie potholes absorb surges of rain, snow melt, and floodwaters thereby reducing the risk and severity of downstream flooding.

Figure 4: Prairie Pothole Region

Source: http://wikipedia/commons/1/1e/PrairiePotholeRegionMap.gif

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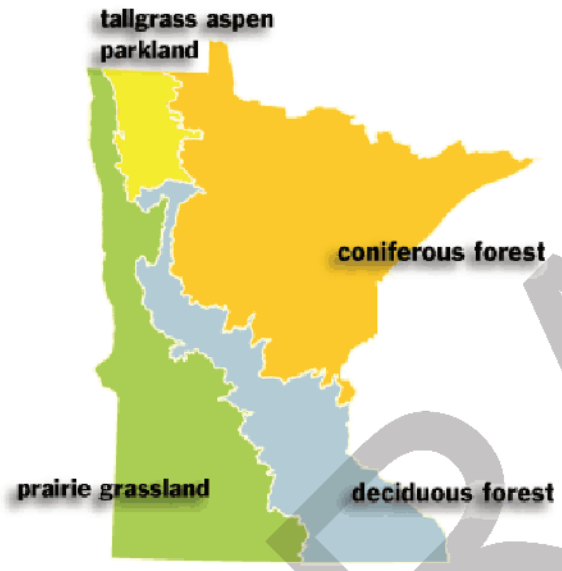
Mississippi Headwaters/Tall-grass Prairie Ecosystem

The Mississippi Headwaters/Tall grass Prairie ecosystem covers much of Minnesota and North Dakota, with small sections extending into Iowa and Wisconsin. This ecosystem incorporates four major biomes (i.e. areas with similar climate, plants and animals): tallgrass prairie, mixed-grass prairie, eastern deciduous forest, and northern coniferous forest. These biomes are roughly divided into four zones across Minnesota (see Figure 5). The western stretch of the Minnesota River Valley passes through prairielands before reaching the deciduous forestlands that encompass the Metro Area.

Figure 5: Biomes of Minnesota



Source: https://www.minnesotafunfacts.com

Twin Cities Metropolitan Region

The Minnesota River Valley forms one of the largest contiguous natural areas in the metro region. While it is an important recreational destination, it also serves important commercial functions for transporting goods. It has special significance for Bloomington because it forms the City's entire south/southeast border; it is figuratively and literally the City's "backyard"!

Natural Resources

The Minnesota River Valley contains a vast number of native plant communities, unique soils, and habitat for numerous animal species. The diversity and quality of ecological resources make it a unique and special regional resource.

Ecologically Significant Areas

Ecologically significant areas are those areas that have a high likelihood of hosting native species of plants and animals. The river valley's numerous ecologically significant areas need to be

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taken into careful consideration when making decisions about land use in the valley, to ensure they are protected from fragmentation and degradation. Among these types of natural areas found there are:

- Mixed Emergent Marsh
- Lowland Hardwood Forest
- Black Ash Swamp
- Water Lily Open Marsh
- River Mud Flats
- Oak Forests
- Wet Meadow
- Willow Swamp
- Floodplain Forests

Each of these areas contains its own unique characteristics and resident plant and animal species. The following areas have been identified as having high potential to house rare plant and animal species:

- Mixed emergent marsh
- Water Lily Open Marsh
- Willow Swamp
- Oak Woodland/Brushland
- Floodplain Forest have been.

Figure 6: Ecologically Significant Areas map

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Natural Resources Inventory of the City of Bloomington

In 2005, Hennepin County Department of Environmental Services conducted a detailed natural resources assessment within the City of Bloomington. The project classified and assessed the relative ecological quality of the remaining natural and semi natural areas in Bloomington and recommend potential natural resources management considerations. The Plan draws on this report. Please visit Hennepin County's website to read the entire report.

Animals and Plants in the Valley

Native Species

The lower Minnesota River Valley is home to numerous species of native plants, mammals, fish, reptiles and amphibians. It is also one of the largest and most important bird habitats in the Upper Midwest, with more than 250 different species of birds migrating through or residing in the river valley each year.

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Blanding Turtle

Great Blue Heron

Endangered Species

More than a dozen species on the Federal Endangered list have been found in the Minnesota River Valley including plants, fish, mussels, and insects. Hundreds more floral and faunal species on federal and state threatened and sensitive species lists also reside in the valley. Preserving intact high-quality habitat is important to ensuring their survival.

Invasive Species

Non-native, exotic (i.e. invasive) species can be found in many areas of the river valley. Flora such as purple loosestrife, leafy spurge, garlic mustard, and European buckthorn are among the more aggressive non-native species that are competing with native plants for important resources for survival. There are multiple ongoing efforts lead by the City of Bloomington and other organizations to remove and control invasive species in the Valley.

European Buckthorn

Garlic Mustard

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Plants and Animals by the numbers:

- 50 species of mammals
- 30 species of reptiles and amphibians
- 120 resident bird species
- 130 migrating bird species

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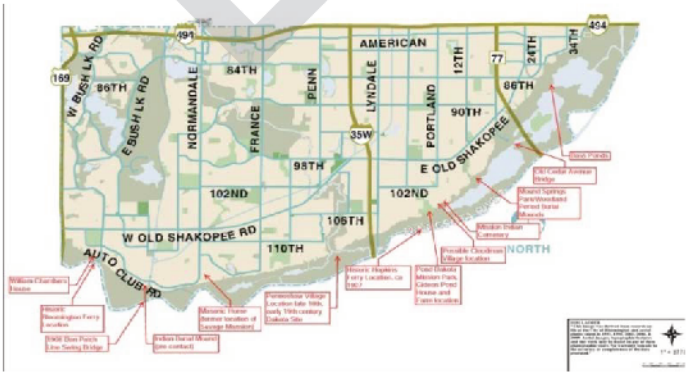
- 12 species from the Federal endangered species list
- 100+ species from the Federal and State threatened and sensitive species list

Cultural & Historic Resources

As described in Section 2, Bloomington has a long, rich connection to the Minnesota River Valley. Evidence of this history remains in the many historic sites and areas shown in Figure 7. Expanding awareness and understanding of the cultural history of the river valley is an important goal of this Plan. At the same time, these resources must be protected from degradation and treated with care and respect. For a complete description of each cultural/historic resources highlighted in Figure 7, please see Appendix X [Mark's list]

1. Bloomington Ferry (former town location)
2. Bloomington Ferry
3. Bloomington Ferry Bridge
4. Other Historic Ferry Locations
5. Dan Patch Swing Bridge
6. Lyndale Avenue Marina
7. Bloomington Auto Club
8. Pond Dakota Mission Site
9. Pond Dakota Mission Park and Associated Features
10. Dakota Cemetery
11. Cloud Man Village Location
12. Karboka (Dakota) Village Site
13. Old Cedar Avenue Bridge
14. Cedar Avenue Swing Bridge
15. Bloomington Bass Ponds
16. Xinta Club Cabin Site
17. Quinn Cabin Site
18. Nine Mile Creek Outlet
19. Mound Springs Park
20. Mound Locations throughout the Valley
21. Pre-Settlement Archeological Sites
22. Steamboat Landing Locations
23. Various Historic Home Sites
24. Hunting Camp Locations

Figure 7: Location of Important Known Historic Sites (add numbers to key to list above)



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Existing Activities and Facilities

Most visitors to the Minnesota River Valley engage in some form of nature-based outdoor recreation, education, or historic/cultural activities. Existing activities provided in the Minnesota River Valley fall into three broad categories:

Trail-based Uses

Trails are the most popular means for visitors to access and explore the river valley. Trail users represent a broad range of ages, abilities, and interests. While the number of trail user increases during the warm weather months; trails are used year-round. MNRV trails are primarily used for:

- ***Hiking*** - The MNRV trails are a popular with hikers, who enjoy the secluded natural setting.
- ***Trail Running*** - The changing topography and natural setting make the MNRV trails an outstanding location for trail running.
- ***Mountain Biking*** - The MNRV trails are a popular destination for mountain bikers in the metropolitan area. The single track trails along the bluff appeal to both recreational and expert bikers. The river valley is increasingly used year round for mountain biking as fat tire bikes have become more popular. Fat tire bikes can be ridden in snow, and are not hindered by the loose sand on many of the trails in the warmer months.
- ***Cross-Country Skiing and Snowshoeing*** - The MNRV trails provide opportunities for skiers and snowshoers in the winter although trails are not groomed (i.e. tracked) for these specific activities.

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Bloomington Parks and Recreation Division Mission Statement: "The Mission of the Bloomington Parks and Recreation Division is to enhance the quality of life, health and wellness of our patrons through innovative and diversified parks, arts, recreation, leisure and cultural opportunities. This is accomplished through the stewardship of the community's parks and natural areas, and through the provision of quality recreational facilities and programs at an affordable price."

Cultural and Nature-based Activities

A majority of visitors to the MNRV participate in some form of nature-based recreation. This can range from informal, individual use, to formally organized group or educational programs offered by natural resource professionals. Popular activities include:

- ***Bird-Watching and Wildlife Observation*** - The river valley's large and varied habitat is home to many species of birds and animals that attract bird watchers and wildlife observers year round. While these activities do not require special facilities, amenities such as benches, interpretive or educational signs, and boardwalks or observation platforms enhance visitor comfort and experience.

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- ***Environmental Education*** – The river valley functions as an outdoor classroom for local and regional schools. Most formal environmental education programs that take place in the river valley are provided by the FWS, who offers a broad spectrum of year-round environmental education events and classes.
- ***Historical and Cultural Education and Interpretation*** - There are numerous historical and cultural sites in the river valley ranging from pre-settlement sites, to Native American burial grounds, to settler homesteads. Education and interpretation related to these sites is generally provided through organized events, guided tours, and special facilities, such as interpretive signs.

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The primary City facility focused on historic and cultural-based interpretation is Pond-Dakota Mission Park, which is the site of the historic Oak Grove Mission and the 1856 Gideon and Agnes Pond House. Programs are offered year-round that highlight the life and times of the Ponds, the Dakota people, and the missionaries who worked with the Dakota people during the mid-nineteenth century. For information on other sites see Figure 7 and Appendix XXXX.

Water-based Recreation

The City property in the river valley has frontage on both the Minnesota River and several inland lakes (Long Meadow Lake, Coleman Lake). Activities that depend on access to water fall into two categories: boating and fishing.

- ***Boating*** - Boaters, canoers, and kayakers can access the Minnesota River at the FWS's Russell A. Sorenson Landing, located at the terminus of Lyndale Avenue just east of the I-35W bridge. FWS currently restricts boats on inland lakes, including Long Meadow Lake and Coleman Lake, due to disturbance of wildlife and waterfowl.
- ***Fishing*** - People fish both directly from the water's edge along the Minnesota River or the inland lakes or use the Russell A. Sorenson Landing to fish by boat. The Minnesota River is home to several species of fish including: northern pike, largemouth bass, walleye, carp and crappie.

Existing Facilities

There are few man-made facilities located in the Minnesota River Valley. Given the predominance of trail-based uses, most existing facilities consist of trails and access points to enable public use of the river valley. Access locations fall into two groups: trailheads and neighborhood access points.

Trailheads

Trailheads are larger, more developed access points. They typically include off-street parking and identity and informational signage. Major trailheads often include pedestrian amenities, such as picnic tables or benches, trash receptacles, lighting, and sometimes public restrooms. They might also include more extensive signage, such as interpretive signs. Minor trailheads have

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some similar amenities, but generally do not include permanent restrooms. Major and minor trailheads in the Valley are described in Table 1and locations shown on Figure 8.

Table 1: Major and Minor Trailheads

Name	Jurisdiction	Amenities
Major Trailheads		
Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Visitors Center	USWF	Minnesota River Valley National Wildlife Refuge headquarter offices and visitors center. Features include an auditorium, exhibit and classroom facilities, restrooms, visitor information and store, interpretive signs/kiosk.
Old Cedar Avenue Trailhead	USWF	Paved parking lot, informational kiosk, and trail connections, including boardwalk.
Russell A. Sorenson Landing	USWF	Paved parking lot, informational kiosk, boat launch, and trail connections
Bloomington Ferry Road Trailhead	USWF	Paved parking lot, informational kiosk, pedestrian/bicycling bridge over Minnesota River, and trail connections
Minor Trailheads		
Bass Ponds	USWF	An upper paved parking lot is available for public use. A lower lot is gated and only opened for special events. Trail connections.
Pond Dakota Mission Park	City of Bloomington	Parking and trail connections
Harrison/Moir/Central Park/106th Street	City of Bloomington	Combination of on and off street paved parking, and trail connections

Neighborhood Access Points

Neighborhood access points are smaller than trailheads and primarily serve residents in the surrounding neighborhood. Generally, they do not provide off-street parking and typically only include identity and informational signage. However, some access points include amenities such as bike racks, benches, and trash receptacles. City-owned neighborhood access points are described in Table 2 and locations shown on Figure 8.

Table 2: Neighborhood Access Point

Name	Jurisdiction	Existing Amenities
Mound Springs Park	City of Bloomington	Street parking, paved maintenance road and old parking lot, trail connections
Pond Dakota Mission Park	City of Bloomington	Parking (part paved, part unpaved), portable toilets, historic buildings, interpretive signs, trail connections

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Parker's Picnic Grounds	City of Bloomington	Paved parking, picnic tables, trail connections
Hopkins Road	City of Bloomington	Trail connections
Central Park	City of Bloomington	A pedestrian only trail (part paved, part unpaved) along Nine Mile Creek provides a connection to the MNRV. A small parking lot is provided at 106th Street, informational signs.
Queen Avenue	City of Bloomington	On-street parking, informational signs, pedestrian only trail connection
Normandale Boulevard	City of Bloomington	Trail connections, historic swing bridge

Maintenance Roads

Maintenance roads are needed to provide access to storm sewer facilities. The City owns and maintains three maintenance roads in the river valley. Public use of these maintenance roads is prohibited, as the roads are not designed for safe pedestrian or bicycle use and tend to have very steep grades. Maintenance roads are located Overlook Drive, Lyndale Avenue, and Indian Mounds Park, as shown on Figure 8.

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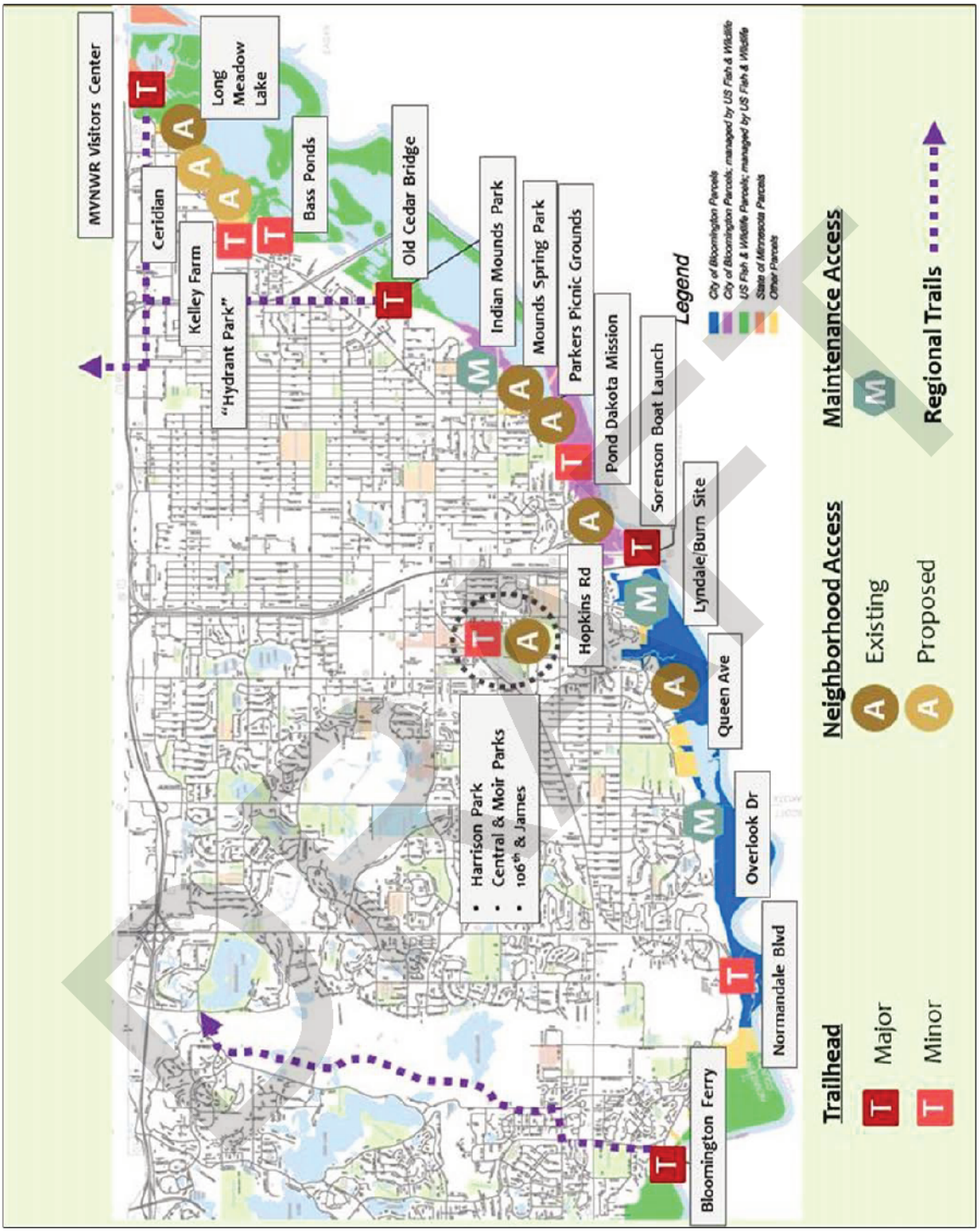
Figure 8: Existing Facilities



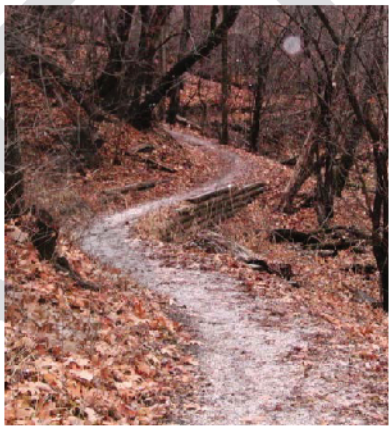
Trails

There are a number of trails extending into the river valley from the access points described above. Some trails traverse the bluff as they meander down into the river valley bottomlands. The City provides two types of natural surface trails on its property:

- ***Single-track trails*** that run primarily along the upper bluff areas. These trails are typically two to three feet wide with two to three foot clear zones on each side. The trails have been in place for decades and many started as deer trails. The trails are suitable for mountain biking and hiking, however they are not compliant with the standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

- ***Aggregate trails*** that run along the river bank. Many of these trails are former farm roads, and are often twelve to twenty feet in width.

Aggregate Trail



Single-Track Trail

Signs

There are a variety of signs serving multiple functions throughout the river valley. Most signs are concentrated at access points. However, signs conveying directional, mileage, and use limitation information are placed intermittently along trails. The majority of signs on City property provide information about the location (identity and context) and use regulations. More extensive signage, including interpretive signs, is provided in select locations such as Pond Dakota Mission Park.

There is considerable variation in the quality and quantity of signs throughout the river valley. Many existing signs are in need of maintenance or replacement. Some locations host a large number of regulatory signs that have been added over time in response to various issues. There is also a general lack of coordination in sign design and installation. As a result, the signs may not effectively communicate important information and, in some locations, create visual clutter that detracts from the visitor experience.

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SECTION 5: Opportunities and Challenges

The existing conditions in the Minnesota River Valley present both opportunities and challenges to the City's vision for the area. This section lays out the overarching opportunities and challenges as well as specific opportunities and challenges organized around the four goals.

Overarching Opportunities and Challenges

Challenges

Creating a Seamless Experience

Jurisdictional control is complicated in the Minnesota River Valley area. The different agencies that own and maintain land and facilities in the Valley have different missions, regulations, and sometimes priorities. However, most visitors do not differentiate ownership as they enter and move through the Valley. The challenge for the City and its partner agencies is to sufficiently coordinate facility design, use regulations, and maintenance to create a seamless experience for visitors.

Limited Resources

Securing adequate funds to make improvements and achieve a basic level of maintenance is an ongoing challenge. Providing additional facilities or programs will require capital and staff resources. It is equally crucial to maintain these investments over time. Currently, limited funds are provided through the City's General Fund for routine maintenance, and periodic capital improvements are funded through the City's Parks Capital Fund.

Consistent Maintenance

All facilities intended for public use should receive a consistent, minimum level of maintenance. If the City decides to condone access and use at any location, the facility should be maintained and signed to clearly convey that it is open and safe for public use. Unkempt access points (tattered signs, weeds, broken pavement, etc.) convey a poor image and potentially invite unwanted users. The challenge for the City is to ensure adequate maintenance funding can be secured for existing as well as any future capital investments made in the Valley. This is an especially challenging task in the Valley, because the frequent flooding that occurs along the river can create unexpected maintenance needs.

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If public access or use is not condoned, the area should be clearly marked as such, and existing improvements (parking lots, paths, etc.) should be removed, unless needed for non-public use (City maintenance, utilities).

Opportunities

Interagency Cooperation

The City, FWS, and MnDNR already have a strong history of working together to leverage funding and create efficiencies through coordination and cooperation. For example, the City and the FWS entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 1997 whereby the FWS assumed responsibility for natural resources and wildlife management on City-owned land east of Lyndale Avenue. The agreement allows the City access to the specialized skills and expertise of the FWS staff to augment the City's limited resource management capabilities. A pending update to the MOU provides an opportunity to continue to strengthen interagency coordination, so more efficiencies and cost savings can be realized.

SIDEBAR on Mn Valley State Trail

The City supports the MDNR's plan to extend the Minnesota Valley State Trail across the City's MNRV properties. The State trail will consist of two trails within a trail corridor to accommodate a broad spectrum of users. The two trails include: a multiple-use ADA compliant trail and a natural surface trail. The natural trail is currently proposed to follow the same alignment as the existing trail, with the multiple-use trail being placed along a different alignment within the same trail corridor. Due to public concerns about paving the multiple-use trail, it is important that the MDNR undertake a public input process for the trail project to address these concerns. For more information on the State Trail planning process please see the MDNR website [add link here]

Leverage Partnerships

There are many active citizens and interest groups working to enhance and preserve the Minnesota River Valley. The City also has a strong history of working together with these groups to leverage volunteer time and expertise. For example, in the mid-1980s, the City worked with the Minnesota Conservation Corps to improve and stabilize the single track trails, including the installation of timber retaining walls to support trails. In recent years, the City has partnered with the mountain biking community and area bike shops to assist in trail maintenance and to host fat tire bike races in the river valley during the winter.

Bloomington's Implementing Agency Status

The City of Bloomington is an implementing agency in the Metropolitan Council's Regional Parks System. The City currently owns and operates portions of the Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Regional Park Reserve, for which the State and Metropolitan Council provide grants to

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fund improvements, operations and maintenance of the Park Reserve. There is an opportunity to explore if the City's 1,131 acres of MNRV parklands could be incorporated into the Metropolitan Regional Parks System. Park Reserve designation would provide additional protections to the MNRV.

Goal Related Opportunities and Challenges

Goal 1: Enhance access to recreational opportunities

Challenges & Opportunities

Access West of I-35W

As shown in Figure 8, the City provides several access points into the Valley east of I-35W, but access west of I-35W are limited. The vast majority of properties abutting the river valley west of I-35W are privately owned. Securing funding to acquire private property or easements to provide additional access points is a challenge.

Maintenance Access Upgrades

The City and FWS currently have adequate access to maintain their respective properties in the river valley. The general public is currently not allowed to use City and FWS maintenance roads. There is an opportunity to explore the possibility of upgrading these facilities, so they can be used by the public.

Enhancing the Trail Network

There are multiple regional and local trails that connect to the Minnesota River Valley, as shown in Figure 9. Fostering these connections will enhance access to the Valley and greatly expand opportunities for recreational and commuter bicycling. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to explore how new local trails could improve connectivity within the Valley. For example, a new natural surface trail along the bluff west of I-35W could improve local trail connectivity in this area.

Figure 9: Map illustrating regional trail connections

Goal 2: Increase awareness and understanding

Challenges & Opportunities

Creating Attractive and Coordinated Signage

Having multiple agencies and groups working in the river valley makes it challenging to craft consistent and up-to-date messaging and create a coordinated identity for the Minnesota River

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Valley. Currently each agency creates and maintains its own signs and many existing signs focus on long lists of regulatory restrictions which may make users feel unwelcome. It will be challenging to create a unified signage plan for the area while at the same time incorporating logos and other established signage policies of multiple agencies.

Existing Events and Activities

The City, the FWS, and other groups all host popular and well-attended events as well as cultural and natural resource based education opportunities in the Valley year round. People who participate and enjoy these events serve as ambassadors of the Minnesota River Valley to their friends and families. There are opportunities to enhance and expand on programming by working with the City's partners in the Valley.

Education and Interpretation

The City currently provides cultural, historical and natural resource based education and interpretive programming based out of Pond Dakota Mission Park. There are opportunities to expand programming to other areas of the river valley and to work the City's partners in the Valley to enhance educational programing.

New Technologies

New technologies have significantly expanded the way information is disseminated and received. For example, phone applications and websites like SeeClickFix allow citizens to easily send reports on maintenance needs to the City and FWS while social media can be used to share wildlife sightings. There is an opportunity to harness new technologies to reach new and broader audience of potential users in the Valley.

Existing Media Outlets

The City provides several sources for community residents to learn about people, places, and events going on in Bloomington such as the Briefing City newsletter and Bloomington Today YouTube/cable TV show. There is an opportunity to use these existing platforms to better promote and educate people about the Minnesota River Valley.

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Events and Programming in the Minnesota River Valley

River Rendezvous

River Rendezvous is the largest living history education event in the upper Midwest, with more than 9,000 school kids participating annually.

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Winter Fete

Pond-Dakota Mission Park Programming

Other things?

Many winter recreation opportunities take place in the river valley including the Pond Dakota Winter History Festival, snowshoe walks, and other programming

Winter fat tire bike race, fishing/training of youth by FW, snow-shoeing in the valley, running the valley, canoe races on the MN River, etc.

Goal 3: Improve utilization of land and resources

Challenges & Opportunities

User Groups Conflicts

The Minnesota River Valley draws visitors year round for a variety of activities. Occasionally, user groups have conflicting needs and expectations. For example, bird watchers and nature photographers come to experience the unique species of birds supported by the valley's natural habitat. Bird-watching often requires stealthy, quiet movement within the landscape. On the other hand, the mountain biking community enjoys the ability to experience a wide variety of terrain in a semi-secluded area. The City and its partner agencies are committed to providing opportunities to accommodate a broad spectrum of users. Finding a balance between the different needs and expectations of diverse users groups in is an ongoing challenge.

Trail Use Restrictions

Each agency operating in the Valley has their own policies and use regulations. This is challenging, because the dueling sets of policies and regulations sometimes conflict. Providing consistent regulations is important to simplify enforcement, as well as to establish clear and understandable expectations for users, who generally are not aware of who has legal jurisdiction over any particular location within the river valley.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Urban Initiative

The Fish and Wildlife Service recently rolled out a new program called the *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Urban Initiative*. This initiative will establish measures to help define and achieve standards of excellence for urban refuges, create a framework for creating new urban partnerships, and establish a refuge presence in ten demographically and geographically varied cities in the country. The Minnesota River Valley National Wildlife Refuge was named as a participant in this program. This initiative may expand opportunities for the City and FWS to work together to achieve mutual objectives.

Minimize "Footprint"

The City's overarching vision and public sentiment regarding the appropriate level of facilities in the river valley are generally consistent. Throughout the public input process, users overwhelming expressed their wishes that the City refrain from making significant changes or developing intense park uses in the Valley. Instead, opportunities to improve public use of the Valley pursue strategies that rely on minimal physical development. While select improvements are desired to enhance recreational experience and user comfort and safety, they must be balanced against the need to protect wildlife and preserve the natural beauty of the river valley.

Goal 4: Ensure protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources

Challenges & Opportunities

Striking an appropriate balance

The City recognizes that increasing the number of people who can use and access the Valley has the potential to come into conflict with protecting and preserving the unique natural resources in the area. There are times of the year when certain activities should be curtailed; for example bicycling on trails when they are muddy can be damaging. None of the agencies currently have the ability to monitor and enforce such use limits. It will be an ongoing challenge to strike an appropriate balance between use of Valley and environmental stewardship.

Available Natural Resource Information

The City benefits from work previously done by Hennepin County, the FWS, and others to inventory and document details of the river valley environment. The City has the opportunity to use this data as the basis for preparing resource maintenance and preservation plans.

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The *Natural Resources Inventory of the City of Bloomington, Minnesota* provides a wealth of information regarding land cover types, assessments of the ecological quality of specific areas, and recommendations for potential natural resource management considerations. This inventory should be used to establish management plans to protect sensitive plant communities on City property (i.e., calciferous fens, kittentails), undertake invasives management programs, and

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removal of deadwood to reduce fire danger. Developing maintenance plans is crucial to enhance the overall health of natural resources in the river valley.

Engaged Interest Groups

There are several citizen groups and non-profit organizations actively engaged in varying aspects of preservation and maintenance of the Minnesota River Valley, including the Izaak Walton League, Friends of the Minnesota River Valley, Great River Greening, the Bloomington Geezer Squad, MORC and others. While their focus and priorities may differ, all of these groups place a high value on preserving and protecting the natural resources in the river valley. The City has an opportunity to work with and leverage the efforts of these organizations to achieve the Plan's vision.

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Buckthorn Busts - The Parks and Recreation Division annually invites volunteers to participate in a Buckthorn Bust, as all day where volunteers assist City staff with removing Buckthorn from City owned lands. Buckthorn busts have occurred at many locations within the Valley including Parkers Picnic Grounds, Pond Dakota Mission Park and Forest Glen Park.

Long-standing Partnerships

The City and the FWS have a long-standing partnership focused on management of natural resources in the river valley. This understanding was formalized in a 1997 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) whereby FWS committed to provide certain resource management tasks on City-owned property in the river valley. The City and the FWS are currently engaged in discussions regarding updating the MOU. The two entities now have the opportunity to use the process of updating the MOU to start a conversation regarding how to address some of the opportunities and challenges laid out in this Plan.

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SECTION 6: Implementation Plan

The Minnesota River Valley Master Plan establishes an overall vision for the protection, preservation and use of the MNRV. This Implementation Plan sets an overall strategy and identifies baseline priorities to achieve the plan vision and long-term goals. It identifies cost considerations and potential sources of funding to carry out priority tasks.

Top Priorities

In the absence of an established framework to enhance and manage this vast resource, it is clear that further study is needed to identify meaningful priorities and estimate costs of potential physical and program improvements. Likewise, while the City has a history of engaging in projects and activities in the MNRV, there is no comprehensive budget earmarked for capital improvements, programs, or routine maintenance.

Top priority projects fall into several inter-dependent categories, including:

- **System-wide plans**
- **Process and management related activities, and**
- **Site specific improvements**

There are also activities and projects that are currently underway that relate to or inform the top priority projects listed in this plan. These ongoing activities and projects should be completed first before tackling the listed top priority projects.

System-wide plans

Additional study is needed to fully understand needed improvements related to three systems that affect the entire MNRV in Bloomington. Since these three systems overlap, additional study focused on one system will likely inform and benefit another. Areas where additional study is recommended include:

- ***A master trail plan***. This would involve an inventory and assessment of existing trails in the MRV to determine the need and opportunity for new connecting trail segments, user amenities and facilities, signs, and safety and maintenance concerns.
- ***A master sign plan.*** This would involve working with other agencies with facilities in the MVRV (FWS, MDNR, Three Rivers Park District) to develop system-wide sign guidelines to coordinate the design and placement of signs as well as the information conveyed. To make the user experience as seamless as possible regulations, maps, wayfinding, and identity signs need to provide consistent and clear information.

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- ***A comprehensive maintenance plan***. This would identify existing conditions and needs related to routine maintenance of physical improvements (i.e. signs, trails, parking areas, benches, etc.) as well as management of natural resources (i.e. invasive species and erosion control). It would also identify existing and potential partnerships with citizen and interest groups engaged in ongoing maintenance and resource preservation efforts.

Process and Management Priorities

These involve activities the City engages in, often with partners. These efforts are intended to clarify responsibilities and approaches for activities that are shared or benefit from multiple agency cooperation.

- **Update Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** – Established in 1997, the MOU assigns the FWS responsibility for natural resource and wildlife management on City-owned land east of Lyndale Avenue. This benefits the City by providing access to the specialized natural resource skills and expertise of the FWS staff to augment the city's limited resource management capabilities. A pending update to the MOU provides an opportunity to continue to strengthen interagency coordination, improve efficiencies, and realize cost savings.
- **Seek inclusion in the Metropolitan Regional Parks System** – Designating the City-owned land in the MNRV as a Regional Park Reserve would provide additional natural resource protections and make the area eligible for grant funding through the State and Metropolitan Council specifically earmarked for lands within the Regional Park System. Bloomington is an implementing agency in the Metropolitan Council's regional Parks System and owns and operates portions of the Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Regional Park Reserve. As a Regional Park Reserve, this facility has received grant funding that has been crucial to implementing improvements, operations, and maintenance. While the process to obtain Regional Park Reserve designation is fairly involved and would require consultant assistance, if successful, designation would provide access to resources that would greatly augment the City's capability to protect, maintain, and manage this unique asset.
- **Strengthen partnerships with interest groups** – The City has a solid history of working cooperatively with various citizen and interest groups who are actively engaged in a variety of efforts in the MNRV ranging from natural resource protection, to education and events, to trail maintenance. These partners provide invaluable volunteer time and skills that leverage the City's limited resources to carry out these activities. Many of these partnerships operate on an informal basis, as opportunities and needs arise. In some cases, these partnerships could be strengthened by establishing clear expectations and defined roles. For example, MORC, a long-time partner focused on biking in the MNRV, has expressed interest in establishing a more formal agreement with the City – like a

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MOU –to carry out trail maintenance and user education. To be effective, more formal partnerships will require a higher level of staff oversight.

Site-specific Improvements

These include projects and activities at specific locations where public access is provided on City-owned land. The Parks Asset Inventory, currently in progress, will identify existing facilities at these locations, assess current conditions, and identify potential improvements. Once completed, it will serve as a valuable tool to prioritize needed physical improvements at specific sites and accurately estimate implementation costs. Specific projects can then be incorporated into the City's annual Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Appendix XXXX describes potential improvements at trailheads on City property. However, these are very preliminary and should be refined once the Parks Asset Inventory is completed.

Ongoing Projects and Activities

The City is currently engaged in several projects related to the MNRV that will have direct impacts on the priority activities described above. Completing these projects before starting on other priorities makes practical sense and will increase efficiency.

- **Parks Asset Inventory** – As noted above, this project is underway and anticipated to be completed in 2016, depending on available staff resources. The results of this inventory can be used to prioritize and budget for physical improvements at specific locations in the MNRV.
- **Minnesota Valley State Trail** – The MDNR is in the process of developing plans that will identify the precise alignment of the State Trail and its design characteristics. It is prudent to have the State Trail alignment clearly defined before the City attempts to identify the best locations for connecting trails. These connecting trails would be included in the master trail plan effort described above. Likewise, MDNR will have certain sign requirements that will need to be considered in establishing a comprehensive set of sign design guidelines and use regulations. These will need to be incorporated into the master sign plan described above.
- **Old Cedar Avenue Bridge** – In Spring 2014 the City hired a consultant to develop plans for the rehabilitation of the Old Cedar Avenue bridge. Construction is anticipated to begin in Spring 2015 and continue through Fall 2016. This trailhead serves as a convergence point for the State Trail, the Intercity Regional Trail, and FWS Refuge trails. As such, signs at this trailhead will need to be designed in coordination with multiple agencies. The outcome of this sign design effort can serve as a model, and should thus be completed prior to developing a comprehensive sign plan that can be used throughout the MNRV.

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Recommendations and Implementation Steps

Table 6.1 provides more detailed descriptions of specific projects identified to achieve the stated vision and goals of the MVMP. This is intended to augment the discussion regarding top priorities in the section above. The descriptions outline potential tasks involved in each activity, key implementation and coordinating partners, and if the task will require funding beyond what is currently available through the City's CIP, existing grants, or partners. It should be noted that while some of the listed implementation tasks listed below do not require an increase in funding they all will require dedicated staff time. This means these tasks must be analyzed to see where they should be prioritized within department plans for other projects and initiatives.

Table 6.1: Recommended Implementation Activities

Recommendation	Implementation Task	Partners	Requires Increased Funding	
1. Create a comprehensive maintenance plan	a A comprehensive maintenance plan will involve: • Using the results of the Park Asset Inventory to asses existing Valley facilities. • Preparation of a schedule and cost estimates for upgrades and replacements • Identification of the necessary level of funding to perform routine natural resource management and maintenance of MNRV property. • Identification of opportunities to work with partners to address maintenance needs for both existing and proposed facilities. • Exploring the creation of a process to identify and report maintenance issues via the web or mobile phone technology.	FWS, DNR, MnDOT, TRPD	Yes	**High staff priority** Timing: Dependent on funding
2. Update the Memorandum of Understanding	a Reaffirm and strengthen MOU; update language and clearly define City and FWS roles and responsibilities	FWS	No	**High staff priority** Timing: ????

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3. Plan for trail connectivity and other bicycle amenities	a	Work with an outside consultant and partner agencies to create a master trail plan. This task would include: • Inventory of existing trails and significant natural areas • Map overlays to identify where the two areas map overlap • Identify trails to be improved, realigned, and/or abandoned over time • Identify connections between the State Trail and other regional trails • Identify areas for specialized mountain biking use (i.e. a mountain bike skills course, mountain biking loops, etc.) • Identify areas where the state trail can be utilized by natural trail users as a shared resource, such as the Nine Mile Creek crossing and within flood prone areas	FWS, TRPD, DNR	????	**High staff priority** Timing: ????
	b	Continue to coordinate with FWS on the Old Cedar Avenue Bridge rehabilitation project and trailhead improvements.	FWS	No	**High staff priority** Timing: Ongoing
	c	Complete connection of Intercity Regional Trail to Old Cedar Avenue Bridge trailhead.	TRPD	No	**High staff priority** Timing: Ongoing
4. Create a seamless user experience	a	Develop a task force with public agency stakeholders to identify complementary and conflicting rules and regulations between agencies prior to working on a master sign plan.	FWS, DNR, TRPD	No	**High staff priority** Timing: Dependent on City Council input regarding how this should rank it department work plans
	b	Work with an outside consultant and partner groups to prepare a master sign plan. This task will include: • Conduct an inventory of existing signs and prepare a schedule for upgrades and replacements • Build on work completed as part of the Old Cedar Avenue Bridge to develop a consistent brand for signs in the Valley	FWS, MDNR, TRPD	Yes	

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5. Retain the Valley's Natural Character	a	Explore feasibility of including the City owned land in the river valley as a Park Reserve in the Metropolitan Council's Metropolitan Regional Parks System. This will address the following issues: • Researching if the City owned land can meet the 80/20 threshold (i.e. 80 percent natural area, 20 percent developed area) required for park reserves. • Inventory existing paved areas and identify where pavement can be removed and restored to vegetation.	FWS, Metropolitan Council	**Yes**	**High staff priority** Timing: Dependent on funding
6. Support the Minnesota DNR's Minnesota Valley State Trail	a	Execute a cooperative agreement to address roles and responsibilities regarding construction and maintenance of the State Trail.	DNR	**No**	**High staff priority** Timing: Dependent DNR decision making
	b	Work to ensure that the chosen State Trail alignment through City property maximizes the potential to connect to existing and planned regional and local trails.	DNR, FWS, TRPD	**No**	**High staff priority** Timing: Ongoing
7. Strengthen partnerships with interest groups	a	Identify opportunities to partner with community groups to achieve shared goals.	Community groups (See pg XXX)	No	
	b	Identify opportunities to work with partner groups to apply for grant funding		No	
	c	Continue to leverage existing partnerships to maximize maintenance capacity.	FWS, MORC, Friends, etc.		
	d	Continue to partner with Minnesota Off-Road Cyclists (MORC) to improve, maintain and police trails in the MNVR		No	
8. Expand Environmental & Cultural Education	a	Work cooperatively with FWS to implement their Urban Refuge Initiative.	FWS	No	
	b	Build on opportunities to expand cultural and environmental educational aspects in conjunction with established community events (i.e., River Rendezvous)	Pond-Dakota Heritage, Bloomington Historical Society	Yes	
	C	Continue to facilitate work of partner groups to provide events (guided hikes, lectures, etc.) focused on and in the MNRV.	Friends, Pond-Dakota Heritage	No	

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9. Leverage Existing City Media Outlets to Promote the Valley	a	Develop a web page on BloomingtonMN.gov focused on the MNRV. Including history, current activities/events, maps, use regulations, links to affiliated agencies, etc.		???
	b	Establish a regular column in the Briefing devoted to river-related topics, stories, and "fun facts" and means to routinely solicit input		???
10. Explore Possibility for other recreational amenities	a	Consider appropriate locations for other recreational amenities or opportunities such as non-motorized watercraft such as canoes and kayaks	FWS, DNR	????

There are several privately-owned parcels located within the MNRV that the City and the DNR have an interest in acquiring to complete gaps in the trail system. These are described in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 - Minnesota River Valley Parkland Acquisition/Trail Easement List

PROPERTY ADDRESS	PURPOSE
345 East 104th Street	Inclusion in Pond-Dakota Mission Park. City owns surrounding properties.
2915, 3001, 3215 & 3321 Overlook Drive	Facilitate future natural surface bluff trail. Only southernmost portions of the properties are needed.
3810 York Avenue	Facilitate future natural surface bluff trail. Only southernmost portion of the property needed.
1110 Humboldt Avenue South	Facilitate future natural surface bluff trail. Only southernmost portion of the property needed.
10801 Hopkins Road	City owns Hopkins trailhead to the northwest as well as the properties to the west, south and east. This property is owned by the FWS and is isolated from other FWS properties.

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Costs

The primary purpose of this Plan is to define a strategy to make improvements to City-owned property and facilities located in the MNRV so that Bloomington residents and visitors alike can better experience and appreciate this incredible resource. This Plan identifies a number of improvements and activities that are not covered by existing funding sources. Historically, improvements in the MNRV have been done on an as-needed basis. To improve and sustain the parklands, wildlife and facilities located in the MNRV, additional resources are needed. Before funding sources can be identified and secured, it is important understand the costs associated with capital improvements, maintenance, operations and programing efforts.

Capital Costs

Capital costs are fixed, one-time expenses incurred on land acquisition, facility construction/reconstruction, and purchasing equipment used in rendering services. The City of Bloomington maintains a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to plan for capital cost expenditures throughout the City. The CIP has a 20-year horizon and is reviewed annually. It classifies projects into two time frames:

- Short term improvements (0 to 5 five years) which reflect the highest priority improvements and have a realistic opportunity for being funded.
- Mid to long term improvements (6 to 20 years) which includes projects that are not currently funded or need further evaluation to more clearly define priority.

It is critical to note that few of the projects and activities recommended in the MVMP have been fully explored and included in the CIP. Most of the first priority projects identify in this Plan consist of studies, which are not budgeted for through the CIP. However, the outcome of these studies will be to identify capital projects that should be considered for inclusion in the CIP.

Examples of typical capital costs are described below.

Land Acquisition/Easement Costs

Costs for trail easements or fee titles for land acquisition are dependent upon current property values which serve as a starting point for negotiations with property owners. The estimated 2014 market values for the potential property acquisitions listed in Table 6.2 totals $3.12 million.

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Facilities and Infrastructure Costs

The City currently provides a number of facilities and infrastructure in the MNRV. The vast majority of these facilities are related to trails and trailheads. To develop accurate estimates of the value of existing facilities as well as new improvements recommended in this Plan, an inventory of existing assets should be completed. As discussed above, City staff is currently undertaking a park asset inventory that will review all assets on City property in the MNRV.

For illustrative purposes current cost estimates for typical trailhead facilities and infrastructure improvements is provided in Table 6.3. Not all amenities listed are needed or proposed for every trailhead in the MNRV. The estimates are intended to illustrate the range of improvements that may be considered at any location and associated costs.

Table 6.3 – Estimated Capital Costs for Typical Trailhead Improvements

FACILITY	DESCRIPTION	ESTIMATED COSTS
Trailhead	• Security gate/bollards to restrict vehicle access	$2,500
	• Signs (identity, regulatory, maps/wayfinding)	$2,000
	• Landscaping and plantings	$1,000
	• Bike rack	$400
	• Bench	$400
	• Picnic table	$750
	• Bicycle repair station	$2,000
	• Parking (per space)	$2,000
	• Drinking fountain (assumes water utility is located within 150' of fountain location)	$7,500
	• Permanent rest rooms building	$450,000
	• Chemical toilet enclosure	$2,000
	• Trash receptacle (wildlife resistant)	$300
	• Security lighting (assumes electrical utility within 150')	$4,000
Interpretive signs	Interpretive signs (educational, cultural, history, etc.) (cost per sign)	$250 to $750
Reconstruct natural surface trails	Reconstruct trails to address erosion and usability concerns (cost per mile)	$30,000
New natural surface trails	Construct new trails including plant material removal and grading (cost per mile)	$80,000
Reconstruct bituminous surface trails	Grind and overlay of existing bituminous trails surface (cost per mile)	$250,000
New bituminous surface trails	Construct new trails including plant material removal, grading, sub-surfacing and bituminous installation (cost per mile)	$680,000

**These are 2015 cost estimates. Additional costs for design, inflation and contingency are not included.*

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Maintenance Costs

As with all parks in the City parks system, resources for ongoing maintenance must be factored into the overall budget. Properly maintaining facilities is cost effective. Maintenance extends the useful life of infrastructure meaning the City has to make fewer capital investments. Routine maintenance is also needed to manage natural resources in a manner that produces a healthy and sustainable environment. Typical natural resource management activities include: invasive species removal, enhancing wildlife habitat, burning prairies, and erosion control. Absent sufficient resource management, the environment can degrade to the point where substantial restoration expenses are required.

One of the recommended priority actions is the development of a comprehensive maintenance plan. Such a plan can reduce maintenance costs because it would identify opportunities to coordinate projects to achieve economies of scale. It will also identify opportunities to leverage partnerships and various funding sources to most effectively apply limited resources to the highest priority projects.

Currently, the City performs minimal maintenance and has no earmarked funding for comprehensive maintenance in the MNRV. Any increase in maintenance activity in the MNRV would require shifting resources from other facilities in the park system or an increase in funding.

Operations and Programming Costs

The City currently expends very limited dollars on operations and programming in the MNRV. While the City does provide support for periodic events, educational and interpretive programming, use of the MNVR is an untapped resource for City programming.

SIDEBAR:
Events in the MNRV:

- River Rendezvous is a living history event held in the Fall at Pond Dakota Mission Park demonstrating the lifestyles of people living in the area between 1830 and 1870.
- Winter Fete Celebration – As part of this annual event, the City has co-sponsored winter "fat-tire" bike races in the MNRV upstream of Lyndale Avenue. City costs for these races have been limited to promotional costs and the provision of a chemical toilet.

The FWS offers a variety of nature-based educational and interpretive programming through the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. It is recommended that the City work with FWS and the DNR to explore opportunities to expand FWS programming onto City-owned property in the MNRV. The renovation of the Old Cedar Avenue Bridge and trailhead

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may create spaces conducive to nature-based educational and interpretive programming. This and Pond-Dakota Mission Park would be excellent locations for joint programming opportunities.

Costs for educational and interpretive programming in the MNRV would be dependent upon the types of programs offered. Programming can run the gambit from pre-registered classes held over several months, to free one time drop-in events. Typical programming costs would include: staffing, equipment, supplies and post-program evaluation. Related operational costs often include: advertising, registration administration, insurance and overhead. Costs associated with the rental of chemical toilets and potable water would also be considered operation costs.

In implementing an educational and interpretive programming in the MNRV, the City would likely need to subsidize costs in order to offer a variety of free and fee-based programming.

Funding

This Plan was initiated in response to the City's recognition that very little attention has been paid to one of Bloomington's most unique resources. Key goals are to increase awareness, access and usage of the MNRV. To achieve these goals, the City must secure ongoing funding to provide quality facilities and experiences for the increasing number of users. This section identifies potential sources of funding to cover the costs described in the previous section related to capital improvements, maintenance, operations and programming.

Current Funding Sources

The City budgets for planned public improvements through its 5-year Community Investment Program (CIP), also known as the Capital Improvement Plan. Funding for projects identified in the CIP comes from a variety of sources. Typical funding sources for City park projects include:

- **City General Fund** – the City's tax-levy supported General Fund includes funding for maintenance of City parklands including City property in the MNRV. The City for several years has provided maintenance of the Russell A. Sorenson landing boat ramp (i.e. removal of silt following spring flooding) through the General Fund. Maintenance staff also addresses periodic maintenance concerns including repairs at various trailheads and removal of deadfall on trails.
- **Storm Utility Fund** - Maintenance of segments of the MNRV is accomplished through the efforts of volunteers, such as trail maintenance carried out by MORC and invasive species removal by other volunteers. Funding to support these initiatives is provided through the City's Storm Utility Fund.
- **Park dedication funds** – the City receives park dedication fees when properties are platted for development or redevelopment. Over the past twenty years, the City has

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received an average of $200,000 per year in park dedication fees. These fees are then placed in the City's Parks Capital Fund, which are then used for capital projects within the City parks system, including the MNRV. Park Capital Funds have been used previously to make periodic improvements in the MNRV including trail reconstruction, trail bridge installation and natural resources restorations.

- **Grants** – the City routinely applies for grants to undertake capital improvements in the parks system. Grant funding is available from Federal, State, and Regional/Local sources. The City has used grant funding for projects in the MNRV like invasive species removals and trail construction.
- **City Strategic Priority funds** – The City annually sets aside a dedicated portion of the tax levy for specific projects that the City Council deems a priority. The positive performance from the previous year's budget is often added to the Strategic Priority Fund. Occasionally parks projects are funded via Strategic Priority funds.

Potential New Funding Sources

If the City's MNRV parklands were approved for inclusion in the Metropolitan Regional Parks System, the new MNRV Park Reserve would be eligible for new funding sources for capital improvements. The State of Minnesota and the Metropolitan Council provide capital funding grants through bonding, LCCMR appropriations and Parks and Trail Legacy Fund grants for the Metropolitan Regional Parks System.

The City also works in cooperation with the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District to undertake improvement projects within the river valley. Funding for the projects is provided by both the City and watershed district.

APPENDICES

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