



**Draft - May 2017**

# **RECREATION AND CONSERVATION MASTER PLAN**

## **Minnesota River Valley**

***A place where adventures in nature  
and history abound...***

**Renville County  
Redwood County  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**

*Photo – Ramsey Falls on the Redwood River*



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# **RECREATION AND CONSERVATION MASTER PLAN**

**Minnesota River Valley**

*a place where adventures in nature and history abound...*



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*prepared for:*

Renville County, Redwood County, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources



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*prepared by:*

Great Outdoors Consultants

Robert Peccia & Associates

Red Canoe

I&S Group

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*Funding for this project was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR).*

*Photo - Precambrian crystalline rock with depression created by smaller rocks and erosion*





# Forward

Massive rock walls rising directly from the water to form the bank of the river. Similar rock walls, waiting for climbers or sightseers, stand in the county parks along the river. The rock making up these walls, at over three billion years old, is among the oldest exposed rock on our planet earth.

**H**orseback riding and hiking trails follow the river on the floodplain and climb the bluffs of the valley. A short hike from the main river channel alongside any one of the numerous streams brings the explorer to waterfalls.

Paddlers on the river can experience miles of wilderness without seeing a bridge or a power line. Although paddlers will see bald eagles, deer, otters, and waterfowl and might see a few cows grazing along the shore. Getting on or off the river

Photo - Canoeing on the MN River

is easy at the frequent landings.

Visitors who wish to camp along the river can find everything from primitive tent sites to fully equipped RV sites, motel, or Bed and Breakfast in a nearby town.

People who want to take it a bit easier can stay in their car and drive the miles of scenic Minnesota River Byway and connecting but equally scenic rural roads.

Not far from the main channel of the river, several historic monuments commemorate one of the most important Minnesota History events since European settlement: the 1862 war between the Dakota People and the United States.

Yet, this phenomenal collection of outdoor recreation opportunities, enveloped in historic significance, is largely ignored by the people who live right next door and is virtually unknown to anyone living outside the local area.

Most people in Minnesota, including local residents, think corn and soybeans when they think about Redwood County and Renville County. Yet, the Minnesota River and the valley that separate the two counties are home to what can and should be a premier outdoor recreation destination for our region and beyond. Every feature mentioned and described in the first five paragraphs of this forward is found in the Renville/Redwood section of the Minnesota River Valley. A place many locals refer to as Tatanka Bluffs.

Rightly our story should start a little over 13,000 years ago when glacial Lake Agassiz broke through its southern moraine and the resulting Glacial River Warren carved the valley, in some places five miles or more from bluff top to bluff top, that is now the home of the meandering Minnesota River.

A better, and more current place to start is about two decades ago when citizens, local to Redwood and Renville counties, began looking at outdoor recreation and history tourism as an economic engine and a possible solution to the loss of rural population that accompanied consolidation of farming into fewer and larger operations.

# Forward page 2

Rivers, the original avenues of human migration and economic activity in the United States, have become the focus of urban revitalization and tourism across the nation. The question was asked; why could our Minnesota River, home to spectacular scenery and extensive history, not be the centerpiece of an outdoor recreation and tourism destination?

Answering the question; Why Not Our River? Resulted in a journey, as meandering as the Minnesota River itself, that leads us to this Master Plan.

The Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan was envisioned as a way to describe how a Minnesota River Outdoor Recreation and History Tourism Destination might look. The plan describes what the primary tourism features might be, provides a plan for getting from the situation now to that desired future situation, and to serve as a basis for seeking funding to implement the plan.

Much of what is needed in a destination tourism area is already in place. The Minnesota Legislature designated the Minnesota River State Trail in (2002). That State Trail should form the backbone of the Outdoor Recreation Destination. The State of Minnesota owns, in the form of Wildlife Management Areas, Aquatic Management Areas, Parks and Trails Properties, and Scientific & Natural Areas, an impressive amount of public land in the area. The existing Renville County Parks and Ramsey Park in Redwood Falls provide camping sites and trails and plenty of space for a wide range of additional outdoor recreation.

This Master Plan will provide a guide as to the additional, and renovated and improved features and facilities to make the Renville/Redwood county segment of the Minnesota River and its adjacent valley, the Tatanka Bluffs, into a highly desirable and much visited Outdoor Recreation and Tourism destination.

Many people and groups played a role in bringing this planning process into existence and in completing the Master Plan. While it is perhaps unwise to specifically credit individual groups given the many involved, two specific groups deserve mention and credit. The Tatanka Bluffs Corridor and its members played an immeasurable role in bringing the idea of a Tourism Destination to the public's attention and keeping it on the public discussion agenda. Without Tatanka Bluffs constant push to move the discussion forward, these efforts would likely not be taking place. Renville and Redwood Counties also deserve credit for partnering together and taking the initiative to obtain a grant from the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota's Resources to fund this planning process. Without the Counties' commitment of time and resources, this planning process would never have taken place.

Writing a Master Plan is only a first step, then the real work begins. The people of Renville County and Redwood County, and others from government agencies and other organizations concerned with tourism and outdoor recreation must look for ways and find the resources to implement this plan. If this work is done, our Tatanka Bluffs area will someday be a magnet for tourists, with the accompanying bustle of economic activity in our nearby towns, as much as it is known for corn and soybeans.

Ted L. Suss  
Chairperson, Redwood county Parks and Trails Commission  
March 2017



Photo - Minnesota River

# MNDNR Forward

There is something about a major river like the Minnesota River that is magnetically attracting. The power of rushing water in the spring and the still quiet backwater pools in the summer can be mesmerizing.

The Minnesota River Valley scene is picturesque. Cattle are grazing in a lush green pasture with the river in the background. Straight rows of corn are growing next to the pasture. Not far away on the tree lined rock bluff a researcher carefully measures and records the vital statistics of a five line skink that was captured from under a flat rock. The skink is on the threatened species list and is quickly released to scurry back under the rock. On the river a group of canoeists silently glides past a sandbar where they see a few forked sticks sticking up in the sand that are evidence that recently a group of anglers was fishing. They were probably fishing for world class size catfish. On top of the bluff history minded visitors stop and read kiosks about the tragic history of the United States-Dakota War of 1862. Further down the valley a hunter stops at one of many wildlife management areas to scout for a good location for the fall hunting season. Not far away a family van enters into a county park and pulls into a camp ground for a few nights of camping and family fun. The thread that weaves all these activities together is the Minnesota

River. The Minnesota River flows through the valley and this river is the state's namesake. In fact the river created the valley when the river was known as the Glacial River Warren that drained a huge lake formed when a northern glacier melted. This current generation of people is only the latest population to identify this valley as a very special place. There are archeological sites that date habitation of the valley to thousands of years ago. Two State Parks bookend this section of the river valley.

There is something about a major river like the Minnesota River that is magnetically attracting. People are drawn to a major river. The power of rushing water in the spring and the still quiet backwater pools in the summer can be mesmerizing. The valley is far different than the prairie ecosystem through which it flows. Generations of local prairie residents have grown up "going to the river" to fish, hunt, hike, visit a historic site or state park or enjoy the ambience of a forested bluff. It was different than the prairie and the difference was an interesting attraction. It was part of a rural community where people knew each other as neighbors and didn't object to a hiker or an angler going across their land to the fishing hole.

Time has brought changes to the valley. It now seems to flood oftener. Land ownership has changed and access has diminished. The land is not all locally owned. Once abundant natural resources are now diminished. Rare geological formations are threatened. What hasn't changed is that people are still drawn to the magic of the river and the valley through which it flows. The management plan is an ambitious effort to maintain public access to a wide array of outdoor recreation opportunities, protect ecologically sensitive plants and endangered animals and maintain the agricultural tradition of the area. It is an effort to ensure that future generations will feel the magic of the river valley and find at their doorstep the outdoor recreation opportunities that psychologist suggest is therapeutic, rejuvenating and healthy.

It is an ambitious effort but for those of us who grew up "going to the river" it is an effort worth pursuing and accomplishing.

Dennis Frederickson, Director  
DNR Southern Region  
May 2017

# Executive Summary



Photo - MN River Valley

The purpose of this Recreation and Conservation Master Plan is to create a shared vision to protect, restore, and enhance the natural, historical, and cultural resources of the Minnesota River Valley (the Valley) for current and future generations to explore and enjoy.

The Valley can provide economic opportunity to improve the quality of life for residents and develop an outdoor recreational destination promoting regional economic growth, recreation development, and tourism.

Renville and Redwood Counties collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) to create the Master Plan. Funding was provided in part by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). MN DNR and the Counties contributed staff time and other resources to the process. The plan addresses natural and cultural resources, interpretive services, recreational opportunities, and administrative activities. It also provides recommendations on a management unit designation of the area under the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation System (MN ORS).

Photo - Canoeing on the MN River



Figure 1.

## MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY RECREATION NETWORK CONCEPTUAL DIAGRAM

### Key Recommendations on the Diagram:

- Establish a Trail System to Connect Communities to Public Lands, Rivers, History, and Recreation
- Protect Important Habitat Areas
- Improve Access and Facilities to the Minnesota River
- Scenic Byway Connects People to Interesting Sites and Experiences
- Communities Provide Recreation and Tourism Services



# Executive Summary (continued)

## Master Plan Vision

The Minnesota River Valley in Redwood and Renville Counties is a shared landscape with:

- Nature-based recreation opportunities in a conserved agricultural prairie riverine ecosystem
- An outstanding example of natural, cultural, historical, and agricultural resource conservation
- Increased public access to diverse outdoor recreation opportunities
- Essential local and state partnerships that effectively lead conservation, nature-based recreation and tourism, management, marketing, and interpretation of the area
- Successful management and marketing that strengthens the rural regional economy, resulting in a higher quality of life for residents and visitors alike

*The Valley is celebrated as a place where adventures in nature and history abound.*

## Desired Visitor Experiences

The Minnesota River Valley (MRV) is a beautiful landscape that has been taken care of and enjoyed for many generations. The Minnesota River and its landscape helps define local culture and lifestyle. Scenic roads, trails, parks, conservation lands, rivers, lakes, historic sites, and agritourism make up a recreation network that connects communities and other services that greatly enhance recreation opportunities in the Valley.

Outdoor activities in a beautiful natural setting create unforgettable memories, encouraging return visits. Scenic touring with many overlooks, interpretive stops and recreation sites benefit many people with varying degrees of physical abilities. Hunting and fishing opportunities are better than ever in the Valley with improved information and access to the river and public wildlife habitats. Anglers, boaters, paddlers and wildlife watchers will find numerous improved access sites to the river, its tributaries and natural areas.

Many residents and visitors enjoy camping in well designed and maintained public and private campgrounds with connections to the River and trails. The Minnesota River Valley has a rich history and culture that residents and visitors will enjoy exploring with improved programs,

information, and facilities. This collection of recreation experiences improves the quality of life for residents and draws visitors to the area again and again.



*Photo - Morton Outcrops Scientific and Natural Area*

### **Desired Resource Conditions**

The Master Plan seeks to preserve historic/cultural resources and traditional lifestyles while enhancing ecological diversity. Programs, expertise and funds are sought to support private conservation-based agriculture and other private lands. Rare and sensitive ecological resources are protected. Habitat restorations occur in wetlands, woodlands, rock outcrops, and native prairie. Habitats are managed to strengthen wildlife populations which benefits recreation opportunities such wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing. Historic and cultural resources are protected and interpreted to increase their value and appreciation. Public park and conservation lands are strategically expanded to manage habitat while providing balanced recreation opportunities. The Minnesota River Valley is a beautiful natural landscape that is conserved for its own inherent value and for people to enjoy today and into the future.

### **Goals, Actions & Implementation**

Master plan goals and actions were developed through a participatory and professional process including interested citizens, representatives from city, county, state governments, and consultants. The research section of the Master Plan describes the participatory process and research used to help define the goals and actions. The Master Plan has five general goals including:

- Recreation
- Conservation
- Culture & heritage
- Nature & culture interpretation/education
- Framework for land use

The implementation section of the Master Plan provides guidance for phasing, priorities, organization, responsibilities, support, and funding to achieve the Master Plan vision. The Minnesota River Valley in Redwood and Renville Counties is a regionally significant opportunity to continue the tradition of conservation, outdoor recreation, nature-based tourism, and sustainable agriculture for many generations to come.



*Photo - MN River Valley National Scenic Byway*



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## Vision, Goals, Actions

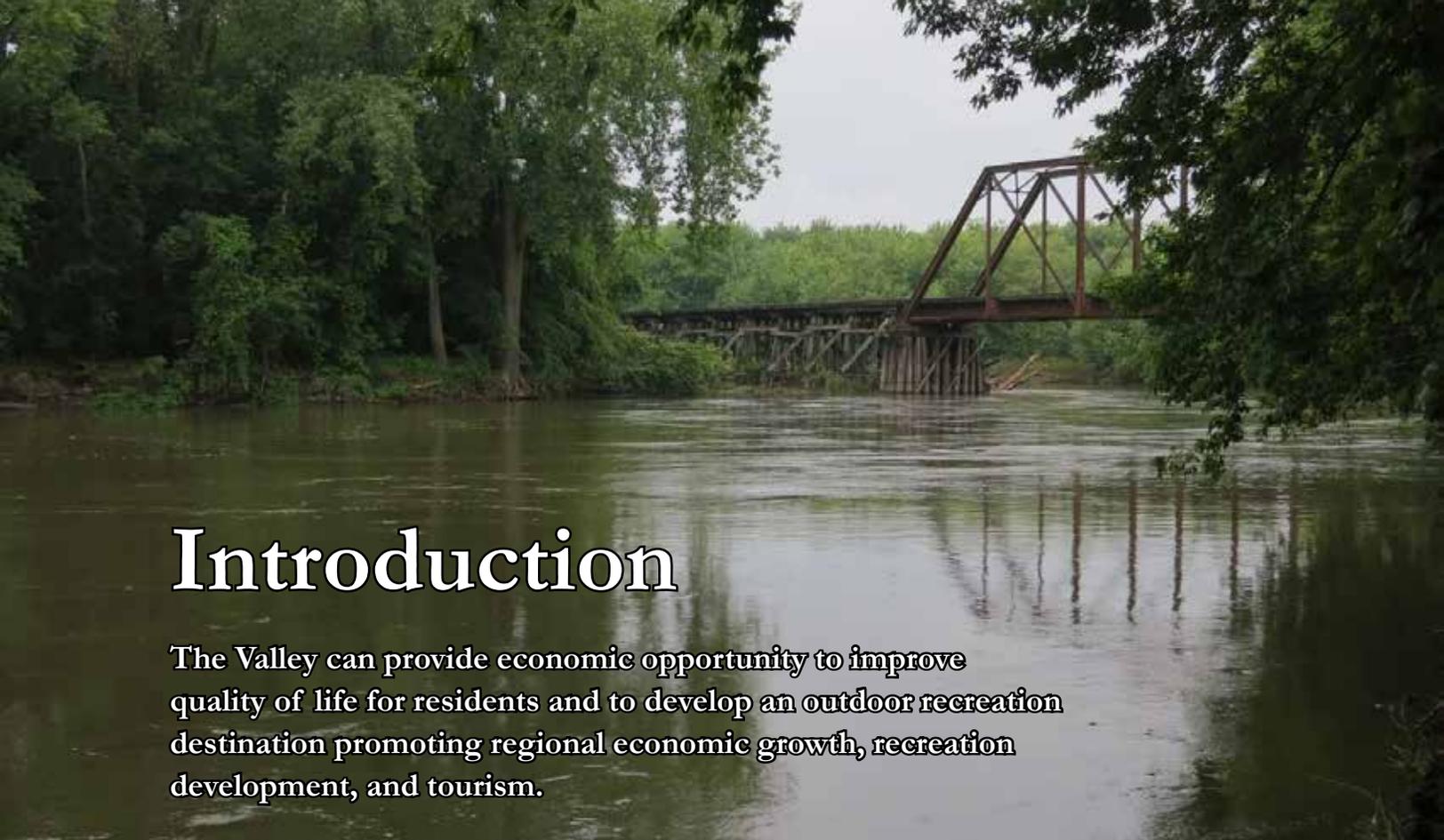
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# Introduction

**The Valley can provide economic opportunity to improve quality of life for residents and to develop an outdoor recreation destination promoting regional economic growth, recreation development, and tourism.**

*Photo - Historic railroad bridge over the Minnesota River*

Redwood and Renville County citizens care deeply about the Minnesota River Valley landscape, its people and its future. They cared enough to seek assistance through state and federal programs in 2009 to explore options for protecting and promoting its natural and cultural heritage. In 2013, a group of citizens, business owners, conservation groups and landowners came together to provide recommendations to the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) on how this might be done.

This Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan (Master Plan) was prepared to create a shared vision to protect, restore, and enhance the natural, historical, and cultural resources of the Minnesota River Valley (the Valley) for current and future generations to explore and enjoy. The Valley can provide economic opportunity to improve quality of life for residents by developing an outdoor recreation destination. Destinations such as these result in regional economic growth, recreation development, and tourism while protecting the resources it is based on.

Renville and Redwood Counties collaborated with the MN DNR to create the Master Plan. The Master Plan addresses natural and cultural resources, interpretive

services, recreational opportunities, administrative activities and provides recommendations on a management unit designation of the area under the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation System.



*Photo - Agricultural fields in the Minnesota River Valley.*

**2016 Minnesota Statutes CHAPTER 86A. OUTDOOR RECREATION SYSTEM**

**86A.03 DEFINITIONS.**

**§Subd. 3. Outdoor recreation.**

“Outdoor recreation” means any voluntary activity, including hunting, fishing, trapping, boating, hiking, camping, and engaging in winter sports, which is conducted primarily for the purposes of pleasure, rest, or relaxation and is dependent upon or derives its principal benefit from natural surroundings; “outdoor recreation” shall also mean any demonstration, structure, exhibit, or activity which is primarily intended to preserve, demonstrate, or explain a significant aspect of the natural and cultural history, and archaeology of Minnesota.

*Photo - Canoeing on the Minnesota River  
Photographer: Scott Kudelka*



The Minnesota Legislature directed the MN DNR to develop a Master Plan for the Valley area in Redwood and Renville Counties as described in [2014 MN Session Law, Chapter 290—H.F. No. 2852, Sec. 65. MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY; MASTER PLAN](#). Redwood and Renville Counties determined to create a Master Plan for this same area in 2015, hiring a consultant to assist them. A collaborative effort of these entities developed this Master Plan. Sections within and addendums to the Master Plan may be different for the MN DNR in order to meet its planning requirements.

The Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan (Master Plan) will not define specific trail alignments or multi-use sites, but may discuss several preferred concepts and search areas. The Master Plan includes recommendations in five goal areas identified by a public input process. Key implementation actions are outlined.

The Master Plan is a catalyst for future conversations about how to invest in the Valley for ways to increase the value and benefits of valley resources for those who live in or visit the area. The shared vision in this plan creates a picture of what the Valley can become in the future.

## Purpose

The long-term purpose of this plan is to:

- Develop an outdoor recreation destination that would promote regional economic growth, development, and tourism while respecting private lands and the agricultural heritage of the area.
- Enhance the conservation of the of the Minnesota River Valley area in Redwood and Renville Counties.
- Provide for the shared use, enjoyment, and understanding of these resources through a broad selection of outdoor recreational opportunities and recreational travel routes that connect units of the outdoor recreation system in the river valley.
- Outline impacts to the natural and cultural resources, interpretive services, recreational opportunities, and administrative activities in the area and provide recommendations on the unit designation of the area under the MN ORS act.

## Scope of Master Plan

This addresses those lands in Renville and Redwood Counties that are in the Valley, bluffs, ¼ mile beyond blufflines of the Minnesota River and its tributaries 2 miles from their mouth; and connections to Upper Sioux Agency and Fort Ridgely State Parks. This includes:

- 65 miles of the Minnesota River and Water Trail
- Parks and Outdoor Recreation Areas
- Conservation Areas
- Culture and Heritage Areas
- Nature and Culture Education Areas
- Sustainable Agriculture and Agro-tourism
- Marketing for an Outdoor Recreation Destination

See the Master Plan Appendix section for a listing of state, county, and city public conservation and recreation lands in the project area. These lands include state Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), Aquatic Management Areas (AMA), State Parks (SP) and Waysides, Public Water Accesses (PWA), Water Trail Campsites, Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA), designated historic sites and monuments, county parks and city parks.

The Master Plan recommendations focus on the river valley, bluffs, and lands within in Renville and Redwood Counties, Minnesota. The two state parks mentioned above, while mostly located outside of Renville County (only small part of Fort Ridgely SP is in Renville County), are considered book ends to the project area and provide an added value to the Valley experience.

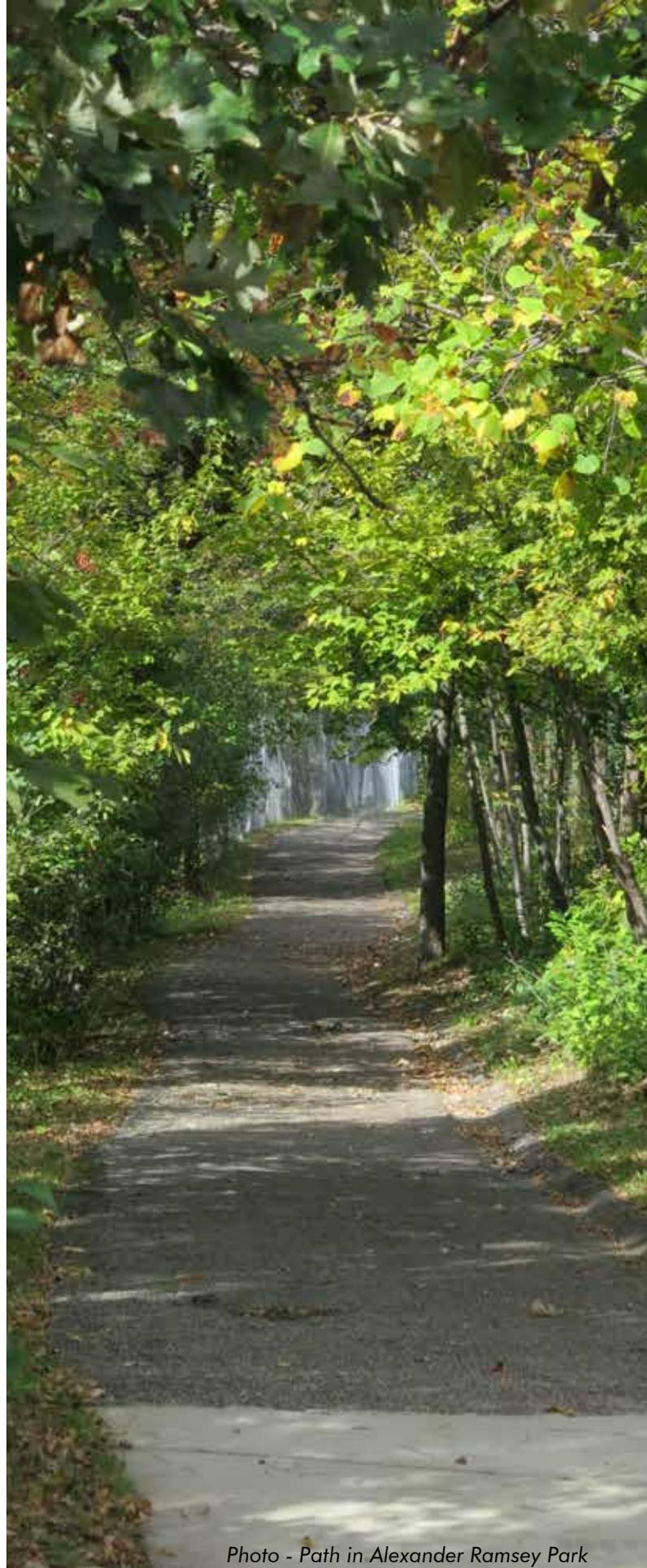


Photo - Path in Alexander Ramsey Park

## Participants

This planning process was a collaboration between Redwood and Renville Counties and the MN DNR. Redwood and Renville Counties hired the consulting firm Great Outdoors Consultants to facilitate the public input process, provide national expertise, and coordinate development of the Master Plan. MN DNR participated in the public input process and provided materials, data and planning related to the natural and recreational resources in the project area.

Numerous individuals, agencies and interest groups contributed input on issues and opportunities for the Master Plan. A summary of contributors is listed in the research section and detailed in the public input reports listed in the reference section. The project planning team is grateful to all who took time to express their opinions and provide personal experience and knowledge.

## Project Funding

Funding for this Master Plan was provided in part by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the [Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources \(LCCMR\)](#). MN DNR contributions to the Master Plan development included planning and GIS services. Funding through the [Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership](#) provided two interns for GIS analysis and biological research.

Future funding for this project may come through a variety of sources. State acquisition and easement funds may come through state bonding, LCCMR or other grants, Legacy funding, and landowner donations. County acquisitions and easements may come through similar funding sources and may include some direct county funds. Conservation and recreation groups may be another source of funding for specific types of projects or volunteers. Other state agencies such as the Minnesota Department of Health or Minnesota Department of Transportation may have programs that are complementary and could contribute funds to common goals.

Funding and staffing for project development and maintenance will require a long term commitment by all partners and local communities interested in the benefits that can be derived from creating a high quality outdoor recreation destination.



Photo - Master Plan Public Meeting

## Desired Outcomes

- ❑ A Common Vision for a recreation and conservation network with connectivity in the Minnesota River Valley in Redwood and Renville Counties
- ❑ Increased protection, enhancement and management of natural and cultural resources on public and private lands
- ❑ Increased access to public lands for a broad range of outdoor recreation activities
- ❑ Increased inter-agency cooperation in development of an outdoor recreation destination



Graphic - Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Logo



# Background

Minnesota lies at the center of North America where the prairie, boreal forest, and eastern deciduous forest meet.

*Photo - Forest in Whispering Ridge AMA*

## Geography/Geology

The project area landscape has been shaped and influenced by glaciers, rivers, wind, and fire with fire being the most common natural disturbance before settlement. The Glacial River Warren cut through glacial drift and soft rock formations to form the river valley. In Redwood and Renville Counties, this erosion cut down to the Precambrian crystalline bedrock formations resulting in rock outcrops and pools unique to the area. Numerous waterfalls occur where the larger tributaries to the Minnesota River intersect the valley.

Agriculture is the main land use and occurs on flatter, upland portions of the project area. Tiling, grazing, crop production, timber harvest, and other human activities are now common in the area. Remnant prairie remains on hillsides and in lowland areas that were not prime for farming. The valley and its numerous tributaries provide a variety of topography and soil types, that provide opportunities for grass based agriculture, conservation, and recreation purposes. Changes in land use, artificial drainage, and climate have altered the hydrology of the area, which has in turn, changed the make-up of the river valley and its associated uplands.

## Region

Minnesota lies at the center of North America where the prairie, boreal forest, and eastern deciduous forest meet. There are four major ecological provinces in Minnesota: the Eastern Broadleaf Forest (green), the Laurentian Mixed Forest (violet), the Prairie Parkland (yellow) and the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands (bright green). All four are parts of much larger systems that cover major areas of central North America. These ecological provinces are divided into subsections – distinct landscapes of Minnesota, defined by vegetation, geology, and other resource criteria.

Descriptions of the subsections are important for recreation and conservation planning purposes because they provide the context for trail alignments, trail development, resource management, and interpretation recommendations. The following description is drawn from the MN DNR website ([mndnr.gov/ecs](http://mndnr.gov/ecs)).

The entire project area (indicated by red oval in diagram) is within the Minnesota River Prairie subsection. The subsection consists of a gently rolling ground moraine. The Minnesota River occupies a broad valley that splits the subsection in half. The valley was

created by Glacial River Warren, which drained Glacial Lake Agassiz. Agriculture is the predominant land use in this subsection.

## Climate

The Minnesota River valley, like the rest of Minnesota, experiences a continental climate with extremes in temperature from summer to winter. At Redwood Falls, the average temperature ranges from a low of 4.0°F to a high of 22.0°F in January. In July the average low is 62°F and the average high is 84°F. ([U.S. Climate Data Website](#))

The project area receives on average 26.64 inches of rainfall (Redwood Falls data). Mean annual snowfall is about 35.1 inches in Redwood Falls. The average growing season is 157 days.

## History and Land Uses

Before European peoples entered the River Valley it was a functioning prairie and river floodplain ecosystem with a wide diversity and abundance of plant and animal life. Early Native Americans lived in villages near the Minnesota River thriving on hunting, fishing and cultivation of food crops. The vast prairie landscape supported bison, elk, wolves and other wildlife. The Dakota claimed this area as their homeland and called the river “Minnay sotar” meaning sky-tinted water.

Few Europeans entered the area before 1853 unless they came for government, geographical, geological and zoological documentation. Other records are found in the diaries and journals of fur traders who visited the area. Steamboats reached the area in 1853 on the Minnesota River near North Redwood.

The first land claims occurred around 1856 resulting in a wide range of Canadians and other Europeans settling in the area. The growing influx of people and a number of other factors resulted in the six week Dakota/ US War in 1862 which began in the Redwood Falls area and spread to surrounding counties. Most Dakota were forcibly removed from or fled the area. This tragic event shaped the future of the area and the people who live here. Settlement began in earnest two years later in 1864.

Over time agriculture became the major land use in the area. While rock in the valley made row cropping



Figure 2-1. The four ecological provinces in Minnesota: Eastern Broadleaf Forest (green), Laurentian Mixed Forest (violet), Prairie Parkland (yellow), and Tallgrass Aspen Parklands (bright green). Project area indicated with oval.

difficult, vast wetlands in the uplands prompted more grazing there in the past. The 1920’s massive ditch campaign changed this and the hydrology of the Minnesota River watershed forever. Tillable lands in the counties changed from about 50% to 98% today. The counties of Redwood and Renville are some of the most productive agricultural lands in the state. Grazing operations still flourish at a number of locations in the valley. This area is also known for its rich mineral content. These include Gneiss or Granite and Kaolin which are quarried in the area today.

## Community

Redwood Falls, the county seat in Redwood County, is located along the Redwood River near its confluence with the Minnesota River. It is the largest community within the project area, with a population of 5,254 at the 2010 census. Other communities in or close to the project area that may provide services to visitors could include Belview, North Redwood, and Delhi in Redwood County, and Morton, Franklin and Sacred Heart in Renville County. In the 2010 census, Renville County population was 15,730 and Redwood County population was 16,059. A large portion of the 1,743 acre Lower Sioux Indian Community also falls within the project area.

## Economy

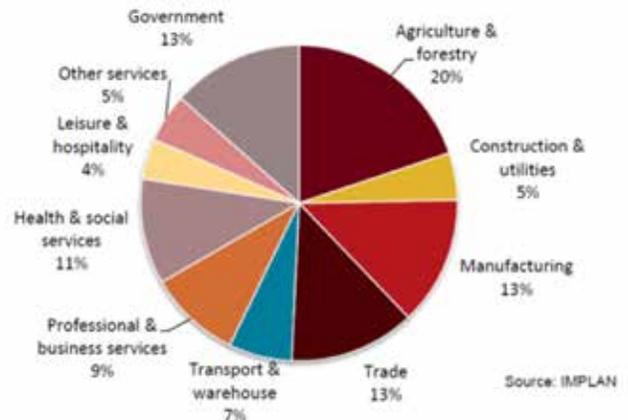
Redwood County is home to 528 businesses providing 6,474 jobs. Redwood County is part of the 23-county Southwest Minnesota Planning Region, which is projected to expand jobs by +2.7 percent from 2012 to 2022 with a gain of 5,685 new jobs.

The fastest growing industry is expected to be mining, although it's a relatively small industry, by 2022 there should be roughly 458 jobs. The largest increase in jobs is expected to come from the health care and social assistance industry, which may account for over 71 percent of total projected growth in the region from 2012 to 2022. The region is also expected to see significant employment growth in construction, professional and technical services, administrative support and waste management services – which includes temporary staffing agencies. In contrast, the region is expected to see declines in information and utilities.

In 2015, there were 5,797 jobs in Renville County. Job growth in Renville County has not kept pace with national and industry trends. The largest industry is agriculture and forestry, employing 20 percent of the workforce. In 2015, Renville County was the largest corn and soybean producing county in Minnesota. It is the second largest sugar beet producing county in the state. The chart below shows employment by industry.

As compared to the average greater Minnesota county, Renville County has a higher percentage of employment in agriculture and forestry, manufacturing and transportation and warehousing industries. It trails the average employment in the professional and business services and health and social services industries.

Figure 2-2. Employment Types in Renville County



Graphic - Tatanka Bluffs Logo

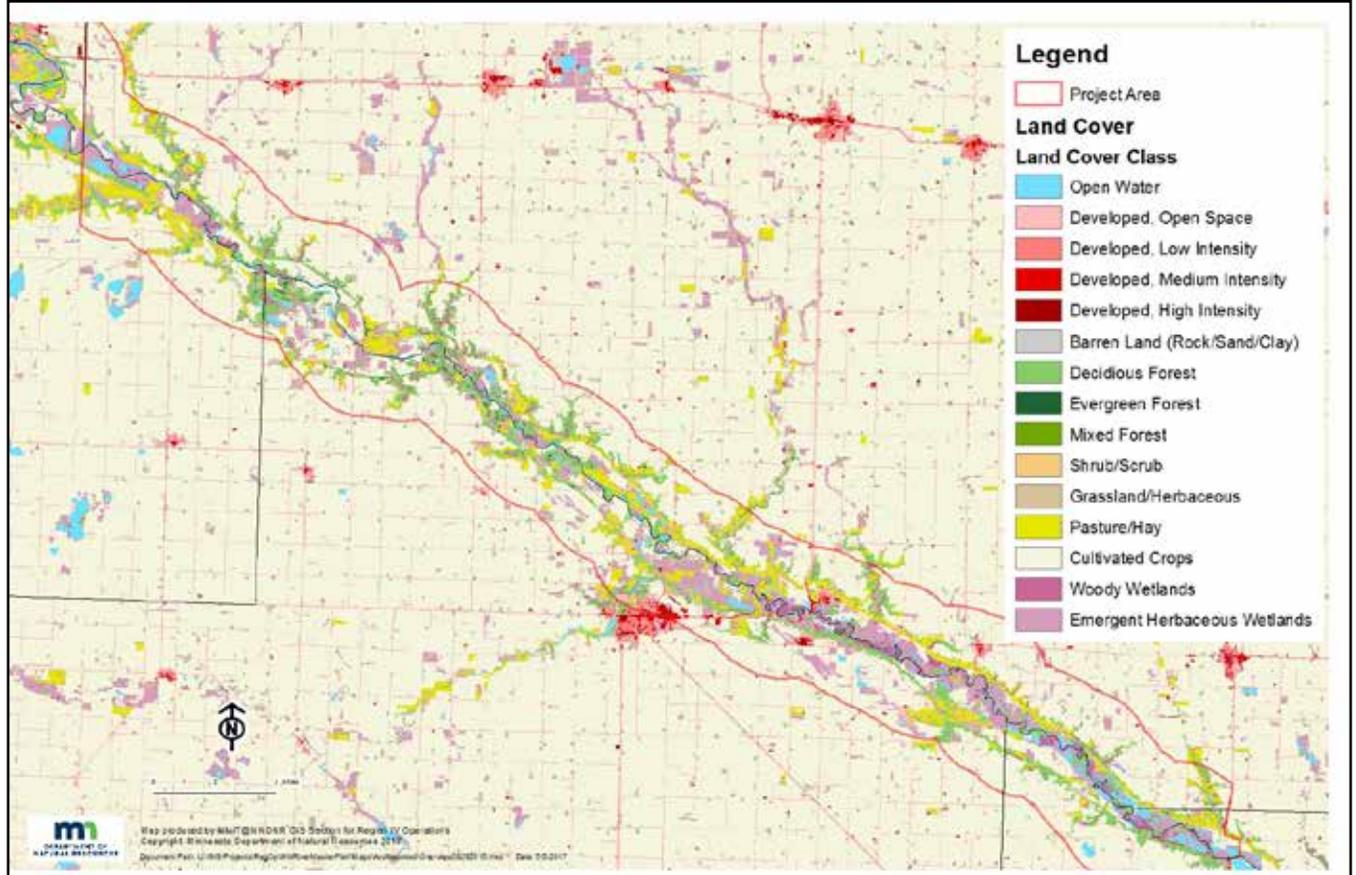


Photo - Corn Statue in Olivia, MN



Photo - Lower Sioux Agency State Historic Site

Figure 2-3. Land Use and Land Cover of the Minnesota River Valley



## Land Uses

Land use information is taken from the 2011 Land Use Land Cover on the DNR website. The table below summarizes percent land use/land cover. It also compares percentages between the two counties individually and the project area as described above. The counties are very similar in composition, being mostly of agricultural land use. The valley, while still mainly agricultural, contains much higher percentages of open water, forests, herbaceous (grass/forbs), hay/pasture, wetlands and barren (includes rock) land covers. Categories in the table have been lumped with similar categories for ease of presentation.

| Land Use Type     | Renville County | Redwood County | River Valley Area |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Open Water        | 0.9             | 0.5            | 3.7               |
| Developed         | 5.6             | 6.0            | 5.4               |
| Barren            | 0.1             | 0.1            | 0.2               |
| Forest            | 2.2             | 1.7            | 11.7              |
| Herbaceous        | 0.6             | 1.0            | 3.3               |
| Hay/Pasture/Crops | 87.1            | 87.1           | 63.2              |
| Wetlands          | 3.5             | 3.6            | 12.5              |



Photo - Wetland in the Valley

## Natural Resources

A detailed description of the most significant types of natural features in the Redwood and Renville County portions of the Valley is found in [Native Plant Communities & Rare Species of the Minnesota River Valley Counties](#). Additional information about wildlife species is in the Minnesota River State Trail Master Plan and the [MN Wildlife Action Plan, 2015-2025](#). Below is a brief summary of natural resources in the area from these documents.

### Presettlement Vegetation

Pre Euro-American settlement, tallgrass prairie covered the largest portion of the lands outside the river valley bottoms. Mesic, tall grass prairie was the most prevalent community due to the moist, loamy soils. However, small areas of Oak Openings and Barrens did occur, associated with lakes, wetlands and streams that provided protection from fire.

Floodplain forests integrated with prairies and savannas covered a continuous corridor on the bottom of the Minnesota River Valley. Smaller streams such as the Redwood River lacked these floodplain forests of silver maple and instead had wet/mesic hardwood forests composed mostly of American elm, rock elm, red elm, basswood and green ash.

### Vegetation Today

The Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS) surveyed native plant communities and rare plants within the Minnesota River Counties from 1987 to 2002. This data is continuously updated via monitoring and additional surveys. The information below is excerpted from [Native Plant Communities & Rare Species of the Minnesota River Valley Counties \(34 MB\)](#).

Locations of 21 rare plant species in the project area are tracked in the Minnesota Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) of Minnesota since records began in 1970. Twenty-one rare plant communities have been recorded in the project area.

One of the major groups of rare plant species documented within these two counties are species that occur on bedrock outcrops. Other large groups of rare plant species occur on upland prairies, savannas, and wet prairies. These species are rare due to land use changes to row crop agriculture, mining, invasive species introduction and habitat conversion over the



*Photo - Hiking trail in Whispering Ridge AMA*

last 150 years. The third group of rare plants in this project area occurs in calcareous fens. These wetlands form in unusual conditions of cold groundwater seepage and elevated mineral concentrations, and are among Minnesota’s rarest wetland habitats.

Several Basswood-Bur Oak-Green Ash forest stands can be found on the north side of the river along Hawk Creek, Middle Creek and Beaver Creek in Renville County. Other stands occur on the south side of the river on smaller streams such as at the junction of Ramsey Creek and the Redwood River in Redwood County. Portions of these stands were never grazed and contain a high biodiversity of native hardwood forest wildflowers.

Flood plain forests, remain mostly as small patches separated by heavily logged areas, cultivated fields or previously cultivated fields. Several high quality floodplain forest stands remain in the river valley in Redwood and Renville counties. Most remaining stands lack a dense, continuous canopy due to the die-off of American elms and recent logging. The invasive species of garlic mustard and common buckthorn have invaded many remnants in the area.

The rock outcrop plant communities in the project area are rarely seen elsewhere in Minnesota. These plant communities occur on the exposed igneous or metamorphic crystalline bedrock mentioned above.

Many of the plant species are adapted to frequent extreme drought. Many rock outcrops also have permanent and ephemeral wetland pools in shallow to deep depressions in the rock. These wetlands contain several rare plant species. Good examples

of bedrock outcrop communities, though small, are at the following sites: Vicksburg County Park and Cold Springs WMA (Renville County); Swede’s Forest Skink SNA, Cedar Rock WMA, and Cedar Mountain SNA (Redwood County). Each of these sites preserves different combinations of the plants and plant communities associated with rock outcrops.

The upland prairie, which once dominated this area, now covers less than 0.5% of the area Marschner mapped as prairie. The remaining remnants are small and scattered, often overtaken by Red Cedar trees due to the lack of fire and grazing. Many of these remnants remain in private ownership and some receive assistance through the State’s Prairie Bank Easement program for management and restoration.

### **Vegetation Management**

Recommendations found in existing MN DNR or multi-agency plans for this area will apply to the appropriate DNR management units. See the Related Planning Efforts section for a listing of these plans.



*Photo - Rock prairie pool. by Ron Bolduan*

## Water Resources and Fisheries

Numerous wetlands historically dotted the uplands. A large percentage of precipitation moved towards the river very slowly through the dense prairie sod and wetlands. In order to farm the rich prairie soils, most wetlands have been drained with intensive ditching and tiling; dramatically changing the hydrography from pre-settlement times. Precipitation now moves very quickly over the surface or through tiles into the Minnesota River and its tributaries.



Photo - Minnesota River

The project area receives water directly from three major watersheds of the Minnesota River Basin: the Yellow Medicine/Hawk Creek, Redwood River and the Middle Minnesota. Twelve larger streams meet the Minnesota River within the project area. Several form waterfalls and or steep rapids as they fall to meet the river. Land use choices, conservation practices and agricultural best practices are reflected in the poor though slowly improving water quality.

Much of the 65 miles of Minnesota River in this section already benefits from adequate soil erosion buffers due to Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in the 1990's. Watershed studies show that closing gaps and adding buffers to smaller streams, ravines, ditches and intakes will help improve impairment issues. MPCA monitoring indicates mercury or PCB in fish tissue, E. coli, Fecal Coliform, and Turbidity occur in most rivers and streams of the project area.

Monitoring also shows nitrate pollution above consumption standards in some groundwater within the project area in Renville County.

## Flood plains

Much of the Minnesota River valley between the bluffs lies within the 100-year flood plain, defined as that land that is covered by the "100-year" or "regional" flood – that is, a flood that has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year. Flooding is a natural occurrence of a river's riparian zone and provides many benefits, including groundwater recharge, settling out sediment and supporting valuable wildlife habitat.

Flooding only becomes a concern to people when they impact the river's floodplain, either by adding structures or planting crops. People have added to flooding problems primarily by intruding on the flood plain and altering the natural channels of the Minnesota River and its tributaries. Development and land use changes in the watershed also increase the amount of impervious surface on the terrain and displace natural water storage on the landscape.

The Minnesota River has experienced many major floods, including events in 1881, 1952, and 1965, considered the most devastating flood to date. Recent flooding in July, 2015, temporarily stranded canoeists on the river near Fort Ridgely State Park.

Because of the large proportion of the valley floor located within the 100-year flood plain, it is unlikely that any trail alignment or other recreational lands within the valley could entirely avoid the flood plain. Trail or recreational development within flood plains must be undertaken with care, so that flood elevation levels are not increased and so that the trail or facility itself is designed to withstand periodic flooding.



Photo - Redwood River

## Fisheries

The Minnesota River is an important Conservation Focus Area for DNR Fisheries. Angler use of the Minnesota River appears to be steadily increasing, with Walleye and Channel Catfish pursued most commonly. MN Department of Health fish consumption advice for fish in Reach 2 is present because of PCB and mercury persistence. Eight water access sites and 2 canoe carry-in access site are located on the river stretch within the project area.

There are several tributaries in the middle Minnesota River reach that receive ground water via springs and seeps as they drop in elevation from agriculture dominated uplands, over the Minnesota River bluff, to the floodplain confluence with the Minnesota River. Ramsey Creek (Redwood County) is designated as a trout stream tributary to Minnesota River. It is annually stocked with 300 two-year old Brown Trout *Salmo trutta* and 300 Rainbow Trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* yearlings. Ramsey Creek is managed as put-n-take trout fishery, meaning natural reproduction does not sustain the population. Fort Ridgely Creek, which flows through Fort Ridgely State Park, is a tributary managed for trout, but it is not a designated trout stream. It is managed as a put-n-take trout fishery and annually stocked with 300 two-year old Brown Trout and 300 Rainbow Trout yearlings.

Historical accounts of the river allude to clear water and a beautiful white sand substrate, with wild rice stands and bulrush beds along its banks. Today, habitat degradation resulting from the profound landscape changes of the past 150 years is the primary factor limiting the fishery resource and recreational value of the Minnesota River. Water quality and quantity related

*Photo - Redwood River Falls*



*Photo - Catfish caught in the Minnesota River*

issues characterize many of the currently acknowledged limiting factors. Turbidity, bacteria, and nutrients, particularly phosphorus and nitrogen, negatively affect water quality of the Minnesota River and its tributaries. No dams are located within the project focus area to the mouth of the river.

## Invertebrates – Freshwater Mussels

Freshwater mussels play a vital role in marine ecosystems in Minnesota. These mollusks live on river and lake bottoms and filter oxygen and particles from the water. They modify the habitat around them to make it more suitable for both themselves and other aquatic organisms. Many species serve as important hosts to fish larvae and are critical to fishery success. These invertebrates are also an important food source for many animals such as several species of fish, muskrats, and raccoons.

Mussel populations are threatened by dams fragmenting river connections; stream channelization, dredging, and streambed destabilization; commercial harvesting; non-point and point water pollution and sedimentation; and zebra mussel infestations upstream in Lac Qui Parle Lake. Eleven mussel species of special concern occur in the project area; see References for a listing. The primary causes for mussel decline in the Minnesota River are pollution and habitat degradation. See References for a listing of Mussel species found in the project Area.

## Wildlife

### Mammals

Common mammal species in the valley area include: white-tailed deer, coyote, beaver, squirrels, raccoon, red and gray foxes, voles, badgers and mink.

### Birds

The Minnesota River is a major migratory corridor in the Mississippi Flyway. It is a transition zone between the eastern woodlands and western prairie. It is also an important area for north-south migration. The numerous WMAs, SNAs, and AMAs provide important habitat for birds.

The project area is part of the [Upper Minnesota River Valley Important Bird Area \(IBA\)](#) consisting of the Valley (hereafter the Valley) extending from the City of Le Sueur in the northeast to Lac Qui Parle Lake on the west. The IBA contains globally significant bird habitat in an intensely agriculture area. Monocultures of corn and soybean extend for hundreds of miles in all directions from the IBA boundaries. In this intensely farmed area, the river valley corridor provides the only prime bird habitat in this part of Minnesota. The Valley is also a natural corridor for migrating birds such as vireos, chimney swifts, waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and passerine species such as warblers, thrushes, flycatchers and sparrows. At least 240 bird species have been documented in this IBA. See the [eBird](#) list for this IBA for a listing of species plus 21 additional taxa.

Common birds in the area include: various songbirds, eastern bluebird, western meadowlark, yellow shafted flicker, tree sparrows, king birds, red-winged blackbird, red-tailed hawks, bald eagle, wild turkey, ring-necked pheasant, owl, and Canada geese.

*Photo - Deer in Lower Sioux Agency State Park*



*Photo - Mink on log by Ron Bolduan*

### Reptiles and Amphibians

Many amphibian species are found in the area. These include the eastern tiger salamander, mudpuppy, American toad, Great Plains toad, and four species of frogs. Frog species include Cope's gray treefrogs, gray treefrogs, boreal chorus frogs, and northern leopard frogs.

Turtle species in the area include snapping turtle, painted turtle, false map turtle, and spiny softshell turtle.

Numerous species of snakes are found in the project area. Common species include plains hog-nosed snake, milksnakes, western foxsnake, gophersnake, Dekay's brownsnake, red-bellied snake, plains gartersnake, and common gartersnake. Other reptile species found in the search area include common five-lined skinks and prairie skinks.

### Insects and Pollinators

Insects and pollinators in the Valley project area have not received much study or monitoring. Three species, Iowa Skipper (*Atrytone arogos iowa*), Ottoe Skipper (*Hesperia ottoe*), Regal Fritillary (*Speyeria idalia*) are associated with wet to dry prairie plant communities and listed as endangered or special concern species.

### Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) are identified and classified on a statewide basis. “Key habitats” are the habitats or native plant communities that SGCN rely on; these are defined by Ecological Classification System (ECS) subsection.

SGCN include animal species that meet the following criteria:

- Species whose populations are identified as being rare, declining, or vulnerable in Minnesota, including species with legal protection status (federal or state endangered or threatened species);
- Species at risk because they depend upon rare, declining, or vulnerable habitats;
- Species subject to specific threats that make them vulnerable (e.g. invasive species);
- Species with certain characteristics that make them vulnerable (e.g. highly localized distribution);
- Species with stable populations in Minnesota that are declining outside of Minnesota.

There are 93 SGCN in the Master Plan project area, 80 of which are listed as federal or state endangered, threatened, or of special concern. Birds make up the majority of these species because they are the most surveyed group. The Minnesota River Valley is a major migratory corridor in the Mississippi Flyway and its upland areas are designated as an important area for nesting prairie ducks. The area includes many state WMAs, AMAs, parks and SNAs that are important for SGCN. Key habitats in this subsection include prairie, non-forested wetlands, shallow lakes, cliff/talus areas, and rivers. The [Wildlife Action Network](#) is a map of

terrestrial and aquatic habitats, buffers and corridors that represent a diversity of habitats that support SGCN. The MN River Valley project area is within the Wildlife Action Network zone and generally rates a medium to High importance score.

A complete list of SGCN and key habitats by subsection is included in Minnesota’s State Wildlife Action Plan: *Tomorrow’s Habitat for the Wild and Rare*.

### Rare, Threatened, Special Concern Species

Minnesota County Biological Program (MCBS) initially surveyed rare animals in Redwood and Renville Counties in 1998 and 1999. Mammal, Bird, and Amphibian and Reptile surveys were completed. Insects were not surveyed. Surveys in 2015 and 2016 focused on the Five Lined Skink, Gophersnake and Plains hog-nosed snakes. Records are continually being updated and added to by MN DNR staff, volunteers and landowners. The chart below is a summary of species groups and their status. A complete list of R/T/SC species for Redwood and Renville County species can be found in References.

**Figure 2-5. Rare, Threatened, Endangered and Special Concern Species Summary**

| Status    | Birds | Fish | Insects | Mammals | Mussels | Plants | Reptiles/<br>Amphibians | Total |
|-----------|-------|------|---------|---------|---------|--------|-------------------------|-------|
| Watchlist | 11    | 2    | 1       | 0       | 2       | 21     | 2                       | 39    |
| SPC       | 17    | 3    | 10      | 8       | 3       | 34     | 6                       | 81    |
| THR       | 1     | 3    | 2       | 1       | 8       | 27     | 2                       | 44    |
| END       | 5     | 2    | 3       | 0       | 11      | 17     | 1                       | 39    |
| Total     | 34    | 10   | 16      | 9       | 24      | 99     | 11                      | 203   |

## Natural Resource Impacts

Successfully developing an outdoor recreation destination will result in more people visiting the area and recreating on public lands. Without careful planning and visitor education, this could negatively impact the very things people are drawn to visit here.

However, there could be a number of positive outcomes due to the increased awareness through adequate interpretation of how unique and sensitive much of the area is in relation to the surrounding region. As more detailed planning occurs, attention will need to focus on mitigating actions and landscape capacity required for areas of more intense recreation activities and facilities.



Photo - Cactus in prairie

Providing opportunities for local residents and visitors to value nature, especially sensitive resources, will likely result in positive behaviors for resource protection and conservation.

### Positive Impacts may include:

- Increased acres managed for larger conservation goals or a landscape approach
- Increased awareness of unique and rare features in valley, resulting in greater stewardship by residents and visitors
- Increased perennial cover on the landscape
- Reduced fragmentation of floodplain forests
- Increased buffering along all water bodies
- Increase number of prairie remnants managed
- Increase acres of native prairie restored and managed
- Increased protection of viewsheds and bluff lines

### Negative impacts may include:

- Increased risk of invasive species spread due to trail construction, increased human and livestock visitation
- Reduced habitat values for some areas adjacent to trails (small percentage of overall area) due to wildlife disturbance, easier predator access, and habitat fragmentation
- Creation of user created "social trails" increasing habitat fragmentation
- Localized over hunting/angling/trapping of some wildlife populations due to increased visitation
- Degradation of some rock prairie communities due to trampling by humans and livestock
- Localized soil compaction and erosion from trail, parking and other recreation development
- Loss of habitat or agricultural lands to tourism development (although limited)
- Wildlife death or injury due to facility or trail construction and materials

## Cultural Resource Impacts

### Positive Impacts may include:

- Increased protection for cultural resources
- Increased interpretation opportunities will result in a greater appreciation and value for the history and culture of the area
- Additional cultural resource grants and volunteers may be secured to assist with interpretation in this area
- Greater exposure to the area through regional and national marketing
- New cultural resources may come to light due to additional emphasis and research in this area

### Negative impacts may include:

- Increased visitation may result in more wear and tear on historic sites
- Increased soil erosion and site degradation may occur at popular sites lacking a design solution
- Increased risk of vandalism with more visibility and emphasis; alternatively, more visitation often leads to improved volunteer oversight



Photo - House ruins at Joseph R Brown Historic Site

## Recreational Uses

Recreational uses in the valley consist of traditional non-motorized and motorized outdoor recreation activities. The most intensive uses occur in the state or county parks and Alexander Ramsey City Park in Redwood Falls. No formal documentation has been made of the overall outdoor recreation numbers in the project area, except as can be gleaned from

attendance records at the parks and number of hunting licenses issued in the area.

### Traditional Outdoor Recreation

Two state parks on either end of the project area provide historic and natural backdrops for a variety of camping experiences including equestrian, tipis, camper cabins, RV, group and canoe-in sites. [Fort Ridgely State Park \(FRSP\)](#) on the east end had an annual attendance of 80,073 and 1,012 camping permits, with 92 percent from Minnesota in 2016. [Upper Sioux Agency State Park \(USASP\)](#) on the West end had an annual attendance of 36,675, and 1,061 camping permits with 88 percent from Minnesota. In 2016, Renville County Parks in the Valley documented 256 camping permits. About 80% of campers were from outside the county; 9 percent were from out of state.



Photo - Campground in Upper Sioux Agency State Park

Alexander Ramsey City Park, in Redwood Falls, offers camping in 31 sites with electric hook-up and a tenting area without electricity, May through mid-October. In 2016, reservation and drop in camping permits totaled 1,984. Approximately 85 percent of campers are from Minnesota. This park also offers a large waterfall, hiking trails, picnic area, a zoo, a near-by golf course and county historic museum.

Usage of the MN River Water Trail, WMAs, AMAs and SNAs are not specifically monitored. Hunting and angling trends in Minnesota were analyzed in a [2014 report by the MN DNR](#). While Minnesota resident hunter and angler numbers have been fairly stable since 2000, the overall population's participation

follows national downward trends. The decline is at a slower rate in southern and northwestern Minnesota. The percent of Redwood and Renville County zip code population (age 16+) that is licensed to hunt in Minnesota, in 2010, ranged from 15.1 to 25 percent, which is higher than the statewide average of 12.6 percent. The percent that is licensed to fish in Minnesota, ranged from 30.1 to 50 percent, higher than the statewide average of 28.9 percent.

While this number is stable, the overall population's participation follows national downward trends. The decline is at a slower rate in southern and northwestern Minnesota. The percent of Redwood and Renville County zip code population (age 16+) that is licensed to fish in Minnesota, in 2010, ranged from 30.1 to 50 percent, which is higher than the statewide average of 28.9 percent. The percent of Redwood and Renville County zip code population (age 16+) that is licensed to hunt in Minnesota, in 2010, ranged from 15.1 to 25 percent, which is higher than the statewide average of 12.6 percent.

The *Minnesota River State Trail Master Plan* was completed for this section of the Valley in 2008 (Ortonville to Franklin) and 2015 (Franklin to LeSueur). The section of trail north of Franklin is classified as a partner-led trail in *MN DNR Parks and Trail Systems Plan*. Partner-led state trails may serve more local use than other state trails. Amenities that go beyond basic services for these trails may be provided in conjunction with partners or through outside fundraising. Only a few, disjointed miles of this trail have been purchased in the project area and none are developed at this time.

The [Statewide Bicycle System Plan](#) presents Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MNDOT) vision and goals for bicycle transportation. This plan functions as a guide for prioritizing future infrastructure investments and formal designation of state bicycle routes. One of three highest priority routes includes the Twin Cities to Mankato Loop via the Minnesota River and Northfield. The remainder of the Minnesota River is a medium priority. Strong local support and collaboration with Mndot and cycling groups may accelerate the development of bicycling road routes in the Valley.

Some historical equestrian group activities and trail riding in the valley is documented in a booklet called "The Amigo Riders – the first 50 years 1954 to 2004".



Photo – Cycling in the Valley by Jack Rayburn

Equestrian trails and camping are provided at both state parks and two Renville County parks. Local groups are interested in adding an equestrian camping site and trails that connect to existing camping sites.

The Minnesota River Water Trail was one of the state's first designated trails and recently celebrated its 50th year with a large event in Granite Falls MN. Paddling sports are one of the few that are showing increasing trends in the state and nationally. The river segment in the project area provides the industry standard numbers of accesses and canoe campsites for the 65 river miles. This stretch of the river provides a variety of paddling experiences from short, half-day easy paddles to longer overnight, very rustic situations with easy/medium rapids. River conditions can change dramatically with the season of the year and precipitation events. Paddling interests would like to see increased resources and amenities along the river.

A number of historical sites in the project area provide light hiking and interpretive opportunities. These include the Lower Sioux Agency Historic site and interpretive center east of the Lower Sioux Indian Community and the Birch Coulee Battlefield north of the city of Morton. The Historic Fort Ridgely site in Fort Ridgely State Park provides an interpretive center and partial fort layout restoration on the grounds with interpretation.

Nature observation, including birdwatching, wildflower viewing and geologic points of interests, is common in the valley. Several SNAs, WMAs and AMAs provide excellent opportunities all along the valley and receive low but regular visitation.

### Motorized Recreation

In 2016, Redwood County passed an OHV ordinance allowing ATV use of all County Roads. Renville County is in the process of an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) for an OHV park just northwest of Vicksburg County park. On state lands, the only motorized outdoor recreation is on Grant-in-Aid (GIA) snowmobile trails that have been grandfathered in due to prior existence or trail alignment.



Photo - Families Shorefishing by Ron Bolduan



Photo - ATV riding in the Valley



Photo - Paved trail in Alexander Ramsey Park



Photo - Snowmobile riding in the Valley

## Public Land Management

### State Lands

In 1975, the Minnesota Legislature enacted the Outdoor Recreation Act (ORA) (Minnesota Statutes, Section 86A.05, Subdivision 4 and Section 85.015). This act established an outdoor recreation system comprised of eleven components or “units” classifying all state-managed recreation lands. The ORA requires that the managing agency prepare a master plan for the establishment and development of some units. This plan fulfills this mandate in regards to multi-use recreation lands in the project area. The Minnesota River State Trail Master Plan provides for the establishment of a trail corridor in this same area with the potential for connecting larger blocks of public

### SNA Rules cover prohibited uses.

State Park, SRA and Trail Rules cover a wide variety of issues. SRA rules are currently the same as a State Park.

Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and Aquatic Management Areas (AMA) have slightly differing rules, but are both focused on habitat protection. Wild, Scenic and Recreational River rules apply to that portion of the river corridor in the project area northwest of the Redwood County State Aid Highway 11 bridge, near the city of Franklin.

Local MN DNR field managers are responsible for managing state lands within the specific project area of this Master Plan as well as outside the Valley. Private lands with conservation easements also receive technical assistance from MN DNR staff.



Photo - Hiking trail in Whispering Ridge AMA

recreation and conservation lands, as well as cultural sites.

Existing or potential ORS units in the valley, their legislated purpose, and some allowed uses are summarized in figure 2-1 below.

Dedicated funding sources used to acquire and manage state lands often legislatively limits the uses allowed. Each type of unit has a set of rules established through a legal rule making process. Each unit type will maintain existing rules even as it occurs within a larger designation such as an SRA. This helps provide a variety of experiences within the valley as a whole. Excellent mapping and signage will enable this approach to fit the needs of most outdoor recreationists in this shared landscape.



Photo - Minnesota River

## Significance and Uniqueness

The “U”-shaped valley of the Minnesota River tells a significant geologic story of glacial origin. A number of interesting and often unique points of geologic interest occur within the project area. Notably, some of the oldest rocks discovered at the earth’s surface occur near Morton, MN.

The mix of cultures and historic events that characterize this area are significant stories for the region; some had nationwide impacts. The area is considered homeland to the Dakota people. The interactions between the Dakota, the US Government and early European settlers during the civil war era shape the mid-west region’s character even today.

The Valley is a narrow corridor of native vegetation bounded on either side by a habitat desert. Its importance for migrating and resident native species of animals and plants cannot be overstated. The Valley area contains many special concern, rare, threatened or endangered species. The river corridor is designated an important core area for prairie ecosystem function. The large amount and quality of natural habitat and scenic vistas in the Valley create a prime area in SW Minnesota for traditional hunting and fishing, as well as a wide variety of other outdoor recreation activities.

## Constraints

The Valley with all its beauty, ecological importance and untapped recreational opportunity carries a wide range of small and large constraints and challenges for recreationists and land managers. The largest and perhaps the most impactful issues are watershed wide and outside the scope of this document for the most part. The altered movement of water over the landscape due to lack of year-round soil holding vegetation, extensive tiling, drainage ditches, impervious surfaces and changing precipitation patterns reduce the quality of outdoor recreation experiences.

These include degraded habitat for fish and mussels, safety issues during somewhat unpredictable flood events, less stability in water levels for paddlers over the season, and extra maintenance time and resources due to soil deposition at accesses or other recreation facilities. While there is not a lot to be done about precipitation patterns, a focused emphasis on agricultural soil and water conservation practice installation provides hope that water quality and quantity issues can improve over time.

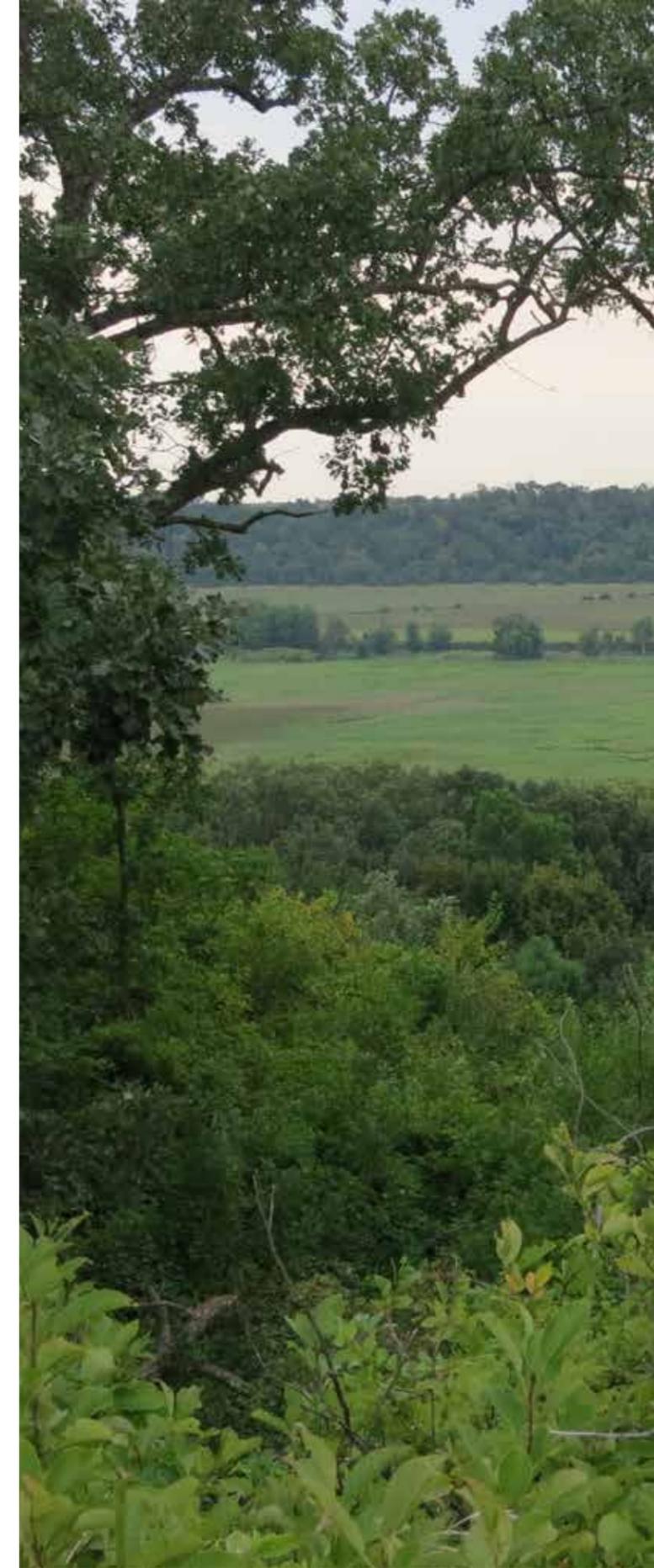
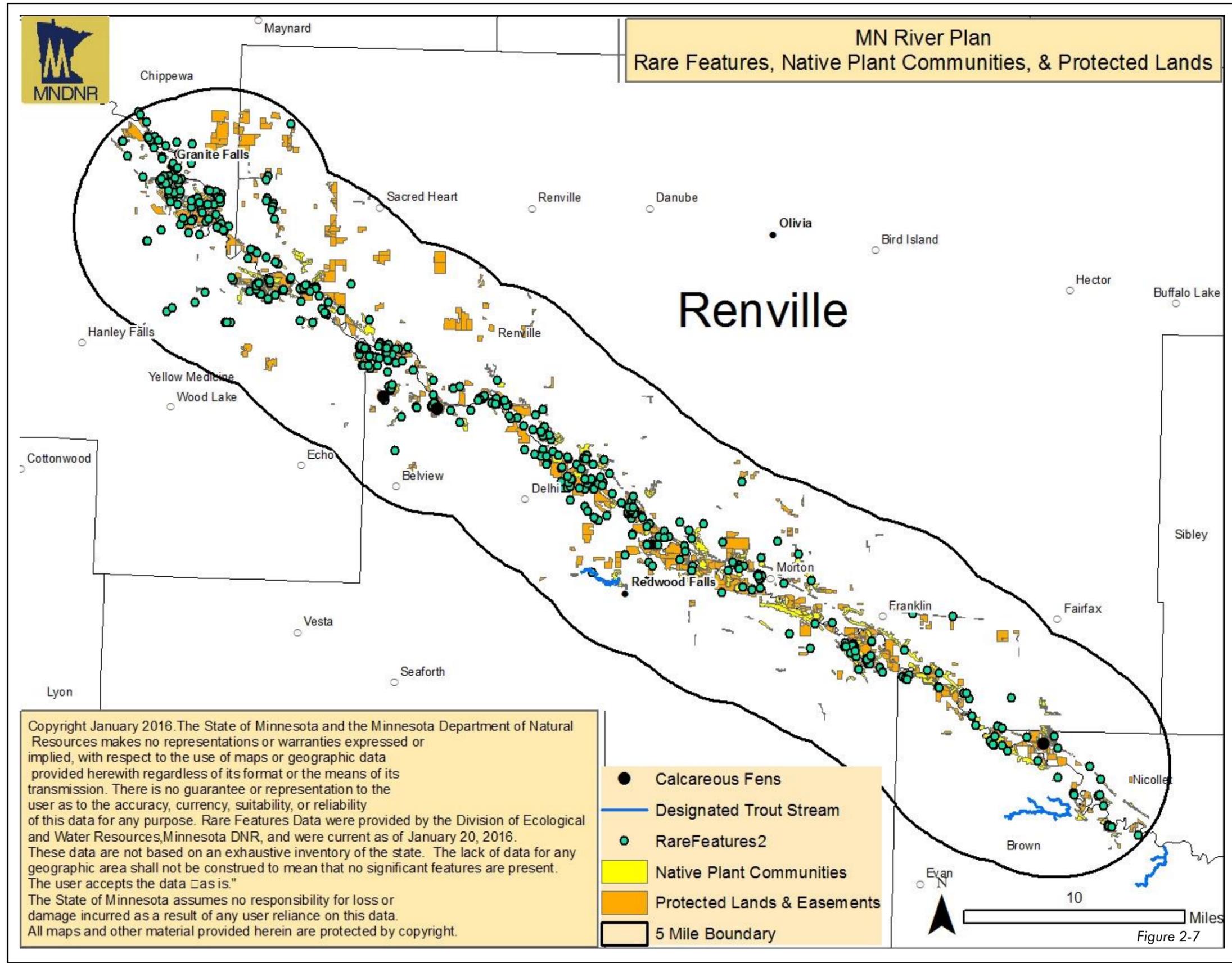
Other features that are permanent or beyond the scope of this project and may or may not affect the quality of the area include:

- Powerline easements in otherwise picturesque river valley vistas
- Road right-of-ways
- Land uses that contribute negatively to scenic or other desired qualities
- County and State policies
- Regulations associated with DNR units that define specific uses allowed
- Threat of invasive species increases with certain types of trails.
- Sporadic Cell phone coverage down in the valley
- Funding

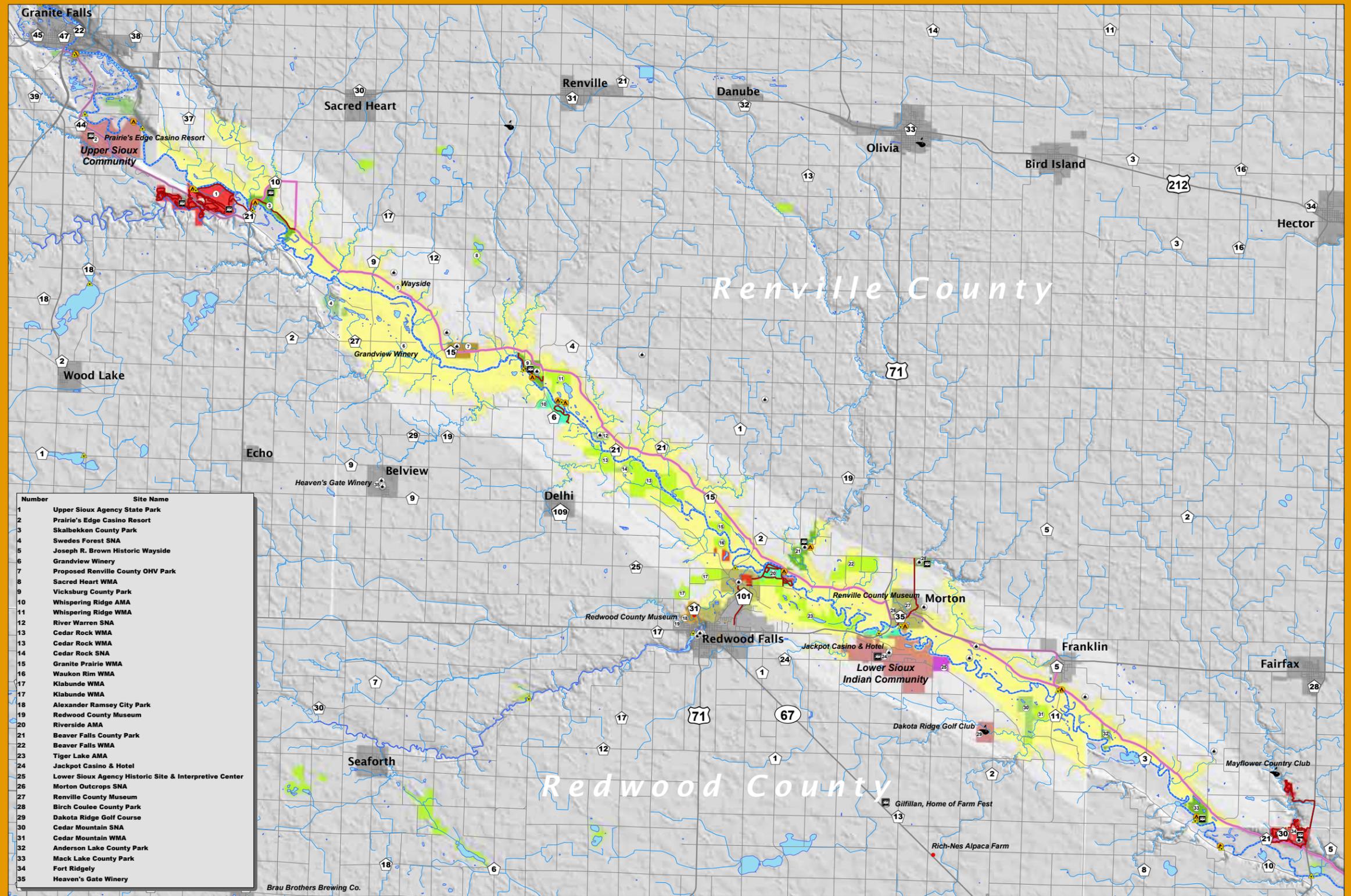
| Figure 2-6. Existing and Potential MN River Valley ORS Units |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Name   | Purpose   | Allowed Uses  |
| State Park   | Protect & perpetuate MN's natural phenomenon. Provide for use, enjoyment and understanding of resources   | Camping, hiking, horseback riding, wildlife watching, picnicking, group camping, bicycling, cross country skiing, snow shoeing, canoeing, , equestrian camping, photography, RV camping, interpretation, geocaching |
| State Recreation Area (potential)                            | Provide a broad selection of outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural setting  | Mountain biking, hunting, angling, rock climbing, horseback riding, rustic camping, geocaching, interpretation, photography, snowshoeing  |
| State Trail  | Provide a recreational travel route which connects units of the ORS and other points of interest  | Hiking, horseback riding, wildlife watching, bicycling, cross country skiing, snow shoeing, photography, hunting, interpretation, snowmobiling  |
| Scientific & Natural Area (SNA)                              | Protect and perpetuate natural features which possess exceptional scientific or educational value   | Wildlife watching, nature observation, photography  |
| Wildlife Management Area (WMA)                               | Protection & management of lands and waters for wildlife production   | Hunting, angling, wildlife watching, snowshoeing, photography, berry collecting, mushrooming, earthcaching  |
| Aquatic Management Area (AMA)                                | Protection & management of waters and adjacent lands for critical aquatic habitat and water quality   | Hunting, angling, wildlife watching, snowshoeing, photography, berry collecting, mushrooming, horseback riding by permit, earthcaching  |
| State Water Access (SWA)                                     | Provide public access to rivers and lakes which are suitable for outdoor water recreation   | Parking, boat launch, canoe access  |
| Wild, Scenic & Recreational River                            | Protect and maintain all or a portion of a river which together with adjacent lands possess outstanding scenic, scientific, historical or recreational value  | Fish, boat, canoe, kayak, swim  |
| State Historic Site  | Preserve, restore and interpret structures, locales, sites, antiquities and related lands which aptly illustrate significant personalities, events and features of history or archeology of the state or nation | Interpretation, photography   |
| State Wayside  | A place or area of natural, scientific, cultural or historic interest adjacent to a roadway   | Interpretation, photography   |

Photo - Rock outcrops in Swedes Forest SNA. By MN DNR





# Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan



| Number | Site Name  |
|--------|--|
| 1      | Upper Sioux Agency State Park                          |
| 2      | Prairie's Edge Casino Resort                           |
| 3      | Skalbekken County Park                                 |
| 4      | Swedes Forest SNA                                      |
| 5      | Joseph R. Brown Historic Wayside                       |
| 6      | Grandview Winery                                       |
| 7      | Proposed Renville County OHV Park                      |
| 8      | Sacred Heart WMA                                       |
| 9      | Vicksburg County Park                                  |
| 10     | Whispering Ridge AMA                                   |
| 11     | Whispering Ridge WMA                                   |
| 12     | River Warren SNA                                       |
| 13     | Cedar Rock WMA   |
| 13     | Cedar Rock WMA   |
| 14     | Cedar Rock SNA   |
| 15     | Granite Prairie WMA                                    |
| 16     | Waukon Rim WMA   |
| 17     | Klabunde WMA   |
| 17     | Klabunde WMA   |
| 18     | Alexander Ramsey City Park                             |
| 19     | Redwood County Museum                                  |
| 20     | Riverside AMA  |
| 21     | Beaver Falls County Park                               |
| 22     | Beaver Falls WMA                                       |
| 23     | Tiger Lake AMA   |
| 24     | Jackpot Casino & Hotel                                 |
| 25     | Lower Sioux Agency Historic Site & Interpretive Center |
| 26     | Morton Outcrops SNA                                    |
| 27     | Renville County Museum                                 |
| 28     | Birch Coulee County Park                               |
| 29     | Dakota Ridge Golf Course                               |
| 30     | Cedar Mountain SNA                                     |
| 31     | Cedar Mountain WMA                                     |
| 32     | Anderson Lake County Park                              |
| 33     | Mack Lake County Park                                  |
| 34     | Fort Ridgely   |
| 35     | Heaven's Gate Winery                                   |

● Sites - see list
▲ Public Water Access
— Existing Trails
■ Study Focus Area
■ DNR Aquatic Management Area (AMA)

● Area Attractions
▲ Water Trail Campsites
— Minnesota River Paddle Trail
■ Study Area
■ DNR State Park, Wayside, Trails

● Historical Sites
▲ Golf Courses
— Minnesota River National Scenic Byway
■ County Boundaries
■ DNR State Wildlife Management Area (WMA)

■ Campgrounds
■ Renville County Parks
■ DNR Scientific and Natural Area (SNA)

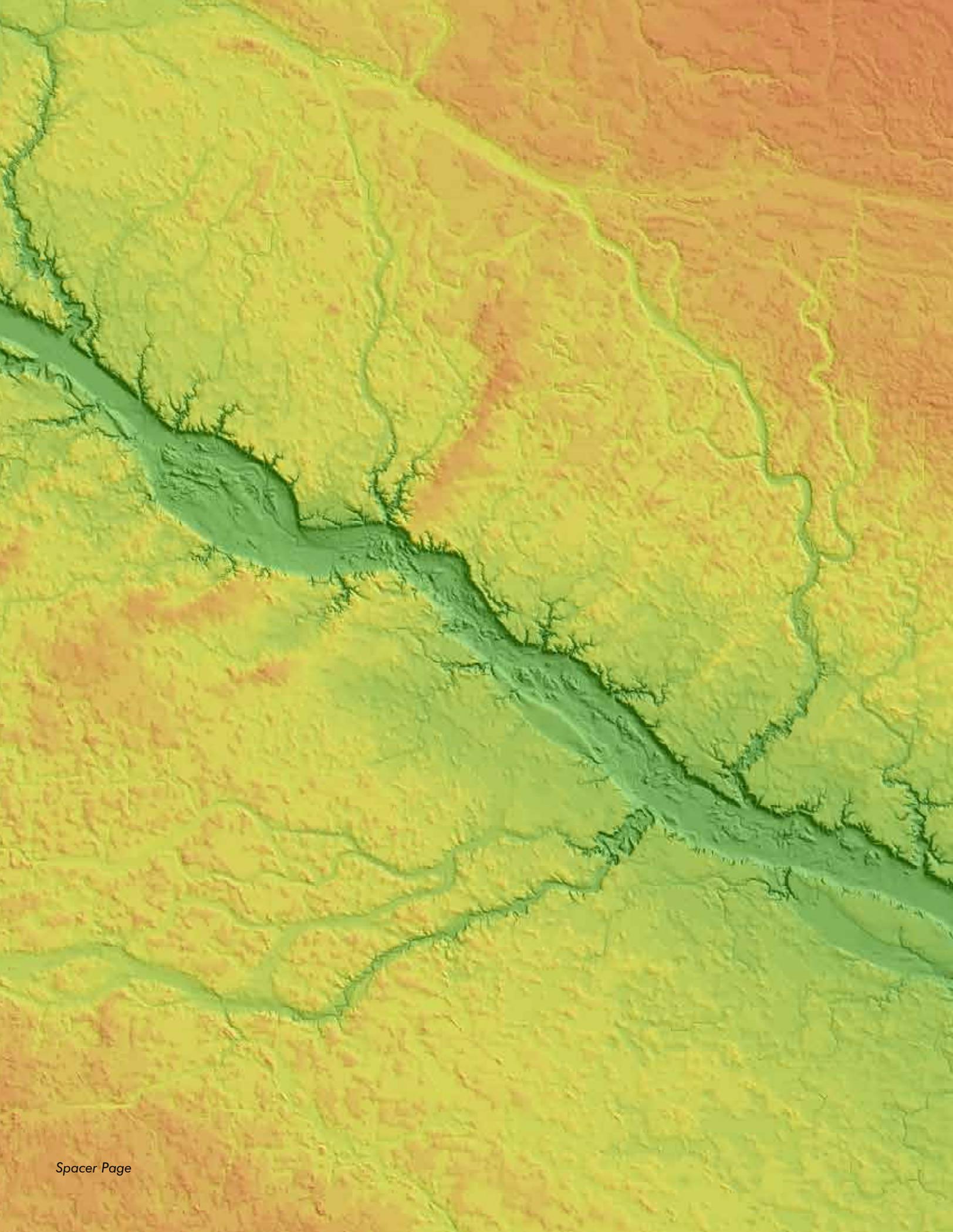
■ Redwood Falls Parks

0 2 4 Miles 4/30/17

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**Base Map**  
 Redwood County - Renville County - MNDNR  
 GOC - I&S - RPA - RC  
 Figure 2-8







# Research

An online survey was implemented to understand the opinion of both local residents and other residents from around Minnesota.

## Introduction

Extensive research was conducted as an integral part of preparing this Master Plan. A summary of these studies and key information is included in this section. An online survey was implemented to understand the opinion of both local residents and the greater Minnesota population. The results of this survey are also described in this section and were used to help define priorities. The Master Plan process included extensive public and agency outreach which was used to identify issues and opportunities throughout the Master Plan process. Detailed documentation for each of these research methods are listed in the reference section of the Master Plan.

## Related Planning Efforts

MN DNR has developed plans and reports of differing scopes to develop priorities and guide our work. Following is a listing of the MN DNR plans that directly impact this project. Most of these plans involved extensive public input and work with partner organizations. The guidance provided within these plans will be used as applicable within the project area on existing and new state lands. The [Conservation Agenda](#) sets MN DNR's strategic direction for natural resources in the state and measures conservation

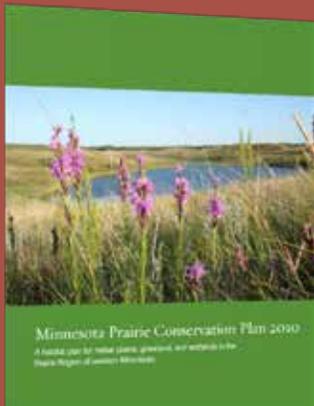
results.

[Division of Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2012 - 2022](#) communicates the Parks and Trails Division strategic priorities for the next 10 years. It identifies how the Division will accomplish goals and strategies outlined in the [Parks and Trails Legacy Plan](#).

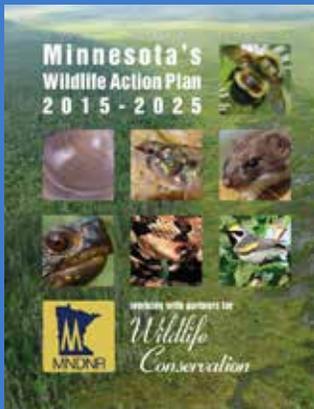
[Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan](#) describes resource investment categories for state parks, state recreation areas, state trails and forest recreation areas. This helps guide what kinds of experiences and levels of service the DNR provides at these locations. [Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan](#) identifies core prairie conservation areas and creates a vision of a



Photo - Beaver Falls County Park



Graphic - Cover of MN Prairie Conservation Plan



Graphic - Cover of MN's Wildlife Action Plan

connected landscape from Canada to Iowa. The 25 year plan by multiple partners provides efficient future direction while building on past conservation actions. Implementing the plan uses local implementation teams who embrace a working lands approach to positively impact local grasslands and prairies. The entire Valley project area falls within a Prairie Core Area.

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-25 is a partnership-based conservation plan to ensure the long-term health and viability of Minnesota's wildlife with a focus on species that are rare, declining, or vulnerable to decline. This plan provides maps and GIS (geographic information system) shapefiles for the Wildlife Action Network (WAN).

The WAN is composed of mapped terrestrial and aquatic habitats, buffers, and connectors that represent a diversity of quality habitats that support Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

Important Bird Areas (IBA) are voluntary and non-regulatory, and part of an international conservation effort aimed at conserving critical bird habitat. The entire Minnesota River Valley is an IBA.

Numerous general and game species plans influence management on the WMA and AMA units and public waterbodies in the project area. These plans include: Fish Habitat Plan: A Strategic Guidance Document maximizes DNR's ability to protect, enhance and restore habitats in the face of limited budgets and staff. The most cost effective way to achieve healthy aquatic habitats is to protect areas that are still functionally

intact.

Minnesota River Fisheries Management Plan 2013 – 2017 guides fishery management and research on the main stem of the Minnesota River. It contains long range goals for Minnesota River fishery and fish species objectives within each of the three uniquely different reaches (sections) of the river. This project area is in Reach 2 of the Minnesota River.

WMA Acquisition – The Next 50 Years is a citizen committee report that represents the direction that the Wildlife Management Area (WMA) land acquisition program should take for the next fifty years through 2052.

Shallow Lakes Management Plan identifies goals for management and protection of shallow lakes to meet objectives in MN DNR Duck plan (below) and the Division of Fish and Wildlife Strategic Plan.

Duck Recovery Long-Range Plan identifies challenges and suggests strategies for the MN DNR and its conservation partners for sustaining duck populations and their habitats.

Long Range Plan for the Ring-necked Pheasant in Minnesota

A Deer Plan which is under development.

Long Range Plan for The Wild Turkey in Minnesota

Scientific and Natural Area Program Strategic Land Protection Plan provides an approach for prioritizing lands to protect through designation as a SNA. One non-state planning effort that is particularly relevant to the interpretation aspect of this project is the 2014 Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance Interpretive Plan. It provides a number of ideas for strengthening existing interpretive messages and themes and some new ideas. A summary of southern Minnesota traveler characteristics is provided based on studies from the University Tourism Center and Davidson/Peterson Associates.

## Online Survey Summary Results & Trends in Outdoor Recreation

An online public survey was facilitated as a component of the comprehensive public input process associated with the development of the Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan. The overarching goals of the survey were to provide another avenue for public input into the Master Plan, better understand existing recreational use and preferences in the planning area, and prioritize potential recreation and conservation concepts and goals for inclusion in the Master Plan. The complete online survey report is provided as a separate document (see references).

### Regional and National Context

The Minnesota River Valley exists within a larger regional and national framework of outdoor recreation areas and opportunities. While the public survey was intended to yield planning area-specific information, it is also helpful to understand the area's role and niche within this larger context. This background information provides additional context to evaluate the results of the public survey, as well as another source of information to help inform the development of the Master Plan. A summary of several available and commonly cited regional and national recreation-related information sources is provided in the survey report.

#### Key takeaways from these other outdoor recreation sources of information include:

- Nature-based outdoor recreation continues to experience growth driven in part by population growth,
- The mix of outdoor recreation activities and preferences is changing and is expected to continue to change,
- Public lands and their corresponding resource values (recreational, aesthetic, cultural/historic, etc.) are highly important in providing recreation opportunities,
- The public is motivated to participate in outdoor recreation activities for a variety of reasons including being outdoors, experiencing nature, and getting away from regular/daily routine, and
- Partnerships are a vital tool in leveraging funding to maintain, enhance, and promote outdoor recreation opportunities.

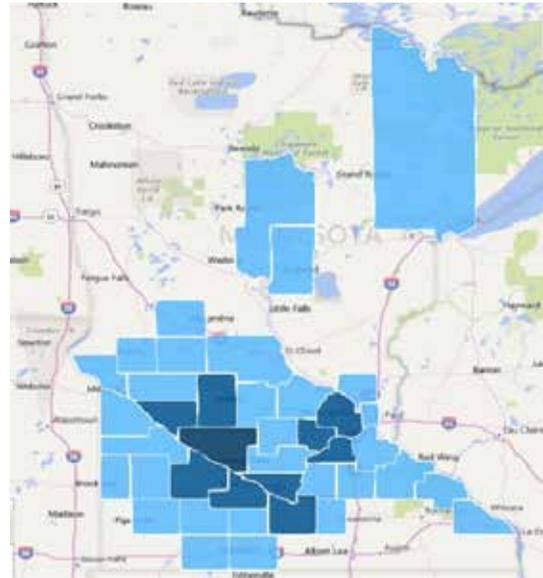


Figure 3-1. Counties where survey participants reside

#### Online Survey Participants Locations

Nearly all survey participants were from Minnesota (over 99%). Participants were from 42 of Minnesota's 87 counties. The top five counties from a participation perspective included:

Renville (25.6%)

Blue Earth (9.0%)

Brown (9.0%)

Redwood (7.7%)

Hennepin (6.3%)

At a more granular geographic level, participants were from 118 different Zip codes.

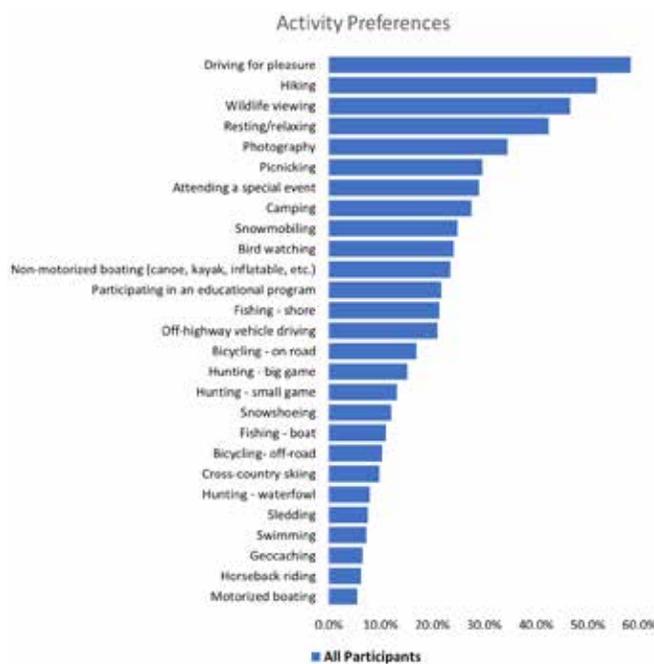
## Public Survey Results

The public survey was available for approximately five weeks (October 3 through November 4, 2016). The planning team encouraged residents, past visitors, recreation and conservation groups, and other stakeholders to participate in the survey. In total, the planning team collected 382 usable surveys, a majority (99%+) of which were completed by Minnesota residents. Eighty-seven percent of survey participants were familiar (combined somewhat, very, or extremely familiar response categories) with the recreation opportunities available in the Minnesota River Valley. Additionally, slightly more than 93% of participants had visited the Minnesota River Valley in the previous 12 months.

### Other key recreation characteristics of survey participants to the Minnesota River Valley include:

- Participants took an average of 53 trips to the area in the past 12 months,
- The average group size on a trip to the area was 3 people,
- Participants reported the highest levels of visitation to the area in May through October,
- Driving for pleasure, wildlife viewing, hiking, photography, and resting/relaxing are some of

Figure 3-2. Survey participant outdoor recreation activity preferences. Top four preferences include: driving for pleasure, hiking, wildlife viewing, and resting/relaxing.



the most common activities, and

- Participants are generally satisfied with their recreational experiences in the area.

### The results of the public surveys indicate several opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism initiatives in the Minnesota River Valley, including:

- Promote niche activities (e.g., special events, camping, bicycling, snowmobiling, etc.) either on their own or as part of a suite of recreation opportunities available in the area,
- Improve and enhance specific elements of the recreation experience, in particular programs and information,
- Provide a network of outdoor recreation sites, programs, and affiliated businesses and organizations to serve local residents and visitors,
- Market to regional population centers within a 2 to 2.5-hour drive from the area (e.g., Minneapolis, St. Paul, Mankato, Sioux Falls, etc.), and
- Facilitate and promote partnerships and other joint efforts to enhance the outdoor recreation opportunities and attract visitors

The public survey also asked participants about their preferences regarding recreation experiences, as well as both recreation and conservation actions in the Minnesota River Valley. In terms of recreation, participants highlighted the river and scenic quality as important attributes of the area.

### Participants also indicated a preference for:

- Driving, hiking, or off-road vehicle driving as the primary mode of transportation,
- Nature- and adventure-based experiences, and
- To be outdoors and to experience natural surroundings as their primary benefits of a trip to the area.

Given the importance participants placed on nature, the outdoors, and scenic quality, these features of the Minnesota River Valley should factor heavily into the planning scenarios for the area.

Survey participants were also asked to rank a series of 10 recreation and conservation goals associated

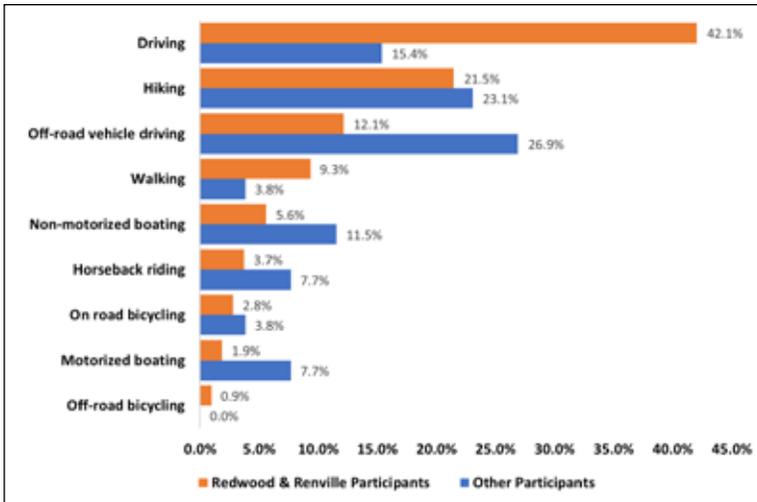


Figure 3-3. Survey participants referred modes of travel. Top four for Renville and Redwood County residents include: driving, hiking, OHV riding, and walking. Top four for others includes: OHV riding, hiking, driving, and non-motorized boating.

with the Master Plan. Through their priority ranking, participants indicated general support for enhanced recreation opportunities, quality of life, and acknowledgement of the agricultural heritage of the area. That said, all recreation-related goals were highly or moderately supported by at least 70 percent of survey participants.

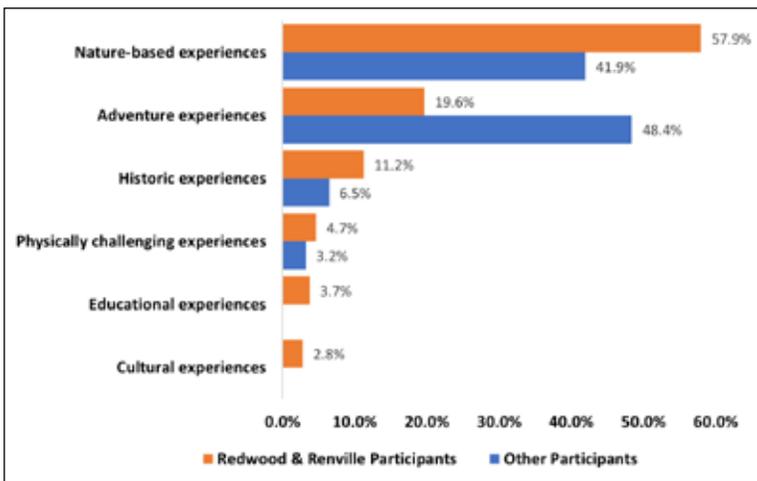


Figure 3-4. Survey participants priority experiences. Top four experiences include: nature-based experiences, adventure experiences, historic, and physical challenge.

About 43 percent of survey participants indicated that new conservation goals were needed in the area. These participants indicated the highest levels of support (as indicated by high or moderate prioritization) for new conservation goals that are focused on water quality, habitat management, and the protection of special status species.

- Master Plan Task Force Members**
- Redwood County Commissioners
  - Redwood County Parks and Trails Committee
  - Redwood Soil & Water Conservation District
  - Renville County Commissioners
  - Renville County Parks and Trails Commission
  - Renville County Housing & Economic Development Corporation



Photo - Geology hound by Ron Bolduan

## Public Outreach

Development of this master plan included extensive public and agency participation. Before starting the planning process, the MN DNR convened a Citizen Advisory Committee (2013) with a wide variety of stakeholders; their input was used in developing the Plan. Public input was actively sought throughout the planning process through several different venues. A [project webpage](#) was created as a portal to share information about the project and encourage participation in the process. Over 200 individuals and organizations joined a project email list to stay informed and contribute their opinions.

Renville and Redwood Counties formed a Task Force to provide advice during the entire master plan process. A series of stakeholder interviews were held with representatives of non-profit organizations, government organizations, and individuals, to ask specific questions related to solutions for the Master Plan.

The stakeholders were asked the following questions:

- ❑ What would you like to see in an outdoor recreation and conservation master plan?
- ❑ What are the best opportunities for conservation in the Minnesota River Valley?
- ❑ What are the best opportunities for providing outdoor recreation in the Minnesota River Valley?
- ❑ What are important considerations for trail planning?
- ❑ Who should we engage in this project?
- ❑ Do you have other ideas or information you'd like to share?
- ❑ How can you help us promote participation in the project?

Two sets of public workshops were held to provide information about the project and request input from participants. People who could not attend the workshops were able to review information on the project webpage and provide input by email or other means. The first set of public workshops focused on informing participants about the scope of the project and identifying both issues and opportunities that should be addressed. The second set of workshops focused on participant input on a draft set of master plan goals and actions. Detailed results from all outreach methods are available in the public input reports listed in the reference section of the Master Plan. All the public and agency input throughout the process was invaluable in defining Master Plan issues and solutions.



Photo - Participatory prioritization exercise in Master Plan public meeting

**Figure 3-5. Master Plan Public Workshops**

| Public Workshops            | Date                 | Number of Participants |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Workshop 1 - Olivia         | September 27th, 2016 | 40                     |
| Workshop 1 - Redwood Falls  | September 28th, 2016 | 43                     |
| Workshop 2 - Olivia         | February 15, 2017    | 33                     |
| Workshop 2 - Redwood Falls  | February 16, 2017    | 26                     |
| Total Workshop Participants |                      | 142                    |

**Organizations that contributed to the master plan process include:**

- Agricultural interests; including farmers, landowners
- Back Country Horsemen of MN (BCH-MN)
- City of Franklin
- City of Olivia
- City of Redwood Falls
- Clean Up the River Environment (CURE)
- 4H Shooting Sports
- Kandi-Ren Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP)
- Lower Sioux Indian Community ~ Office of Environment
- Lower Sioux Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO)
- Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA)
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR)
- Minnesota Horse Trail Riders Association (MTRA)
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- Minnesota State Representative
- Minnesota United Snowmobilers Association (MNUSA)
- Minnesota Valley All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Riders
- Minnesota Valley Snow Riders
- Minnesota Valley History Learning Center (MVHLC)
- Montevideo Snow Drifters
- Redwood Area Chamber and Tourism Office (RACT)
- Redwood Area Development Corporation (RADC)
- Redwood County
- Redwood County Parks and Trails Committee
- Redwood County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)
- Redwood Gazette
- Renville County
- Renville County Drift Runners
- Renville County Historical Society and Museum
- Renville County Housing and Redevelopment Authority/Economic Development Authority (HRA/EDA)
- Renville County Park Commission
- Renville County Register
- Renville County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)
- Renville County Trail Committee
- Renville County Water & Household

- Hazardous Waste (HHW) Management
- Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative
- Tatanka Bluffs Corridor/local advocates
- Upper Sioux Indian Community ~ Office of Environment
- West Central Tribune



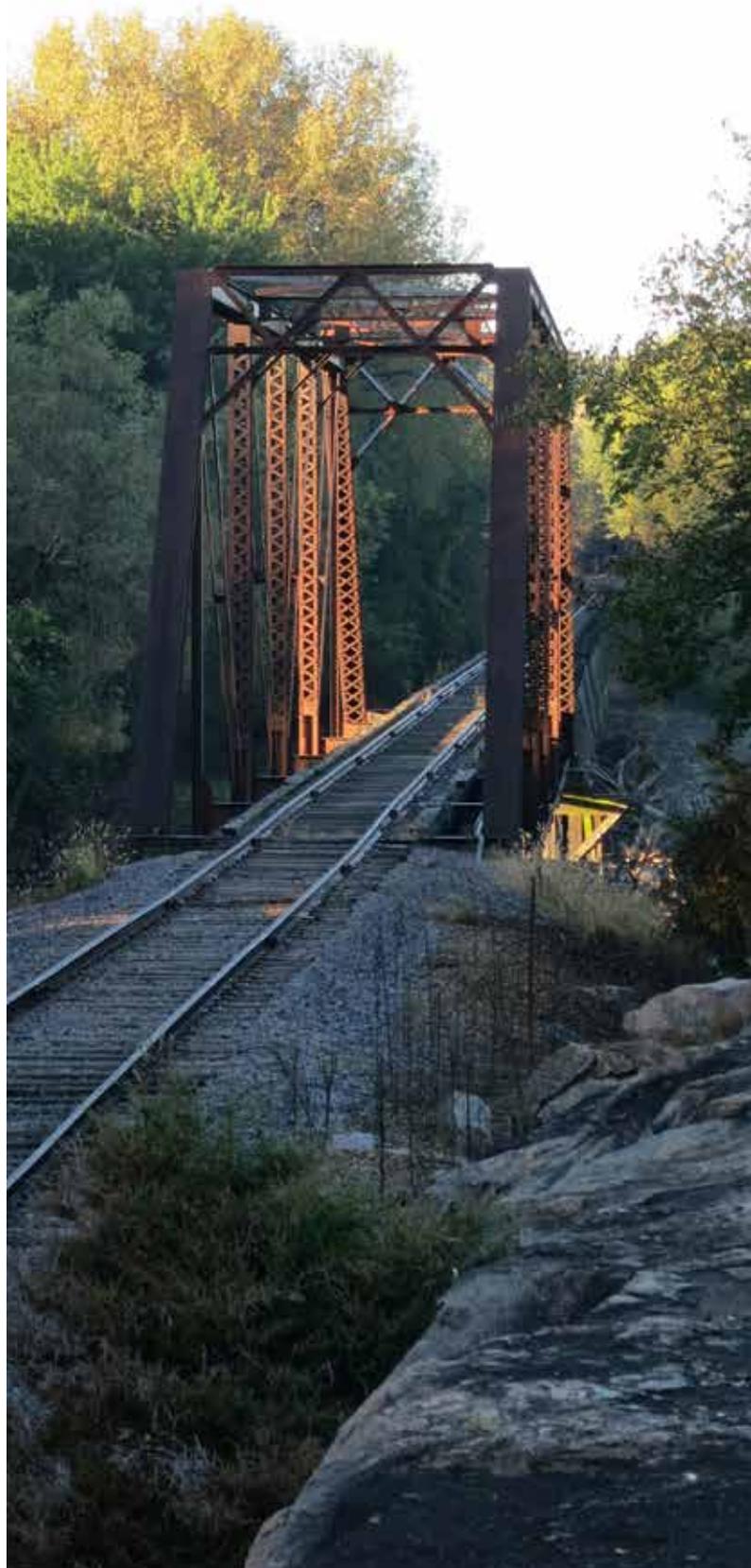
*Photo - Small group discussion in Master Plan public meeting*



*Photo - Crowd at Master Plan public meeting*



*Photo - Small group discussion in Master Plan public meeting*



*Photo - Historic railroad bridge in the Valley*

# Vision, Goals, Actions

Minnesota River Valley is a place where adventures in nature and history abound.

This section of the Master Plan establishes guiding statements and actions to realize a vision for an exceptional recreation experience and well-conserved Minnesota River Valley within Redwood and Renville Counties. The following implementation section provides guidance for phases, priorities, organization, responsibilities, support, and funding to achieve the Master Plan vision.



Photo - Canoeing on the Minnesota River

## Vision

The following statement provides an overarching vision for the master plan:

The Minnesota River Valley (Valley) in Redwood and Renville Counties is a shared landscape with nature-based recreation opportunities in a conserved agricultural prairie riverine ecosystem. The Valley is an outstanding example of conservation of natural, cultural, historical, and agricultural resources and increased public access to diverse outdoor recreation opportunities. Essential local and state partnerships lead to effective conservation, nature-based recreation and tourism, management, marketing, and interpretation of the area. Successful management and marketing strengthens the rural regional economy, resulting in a higher quality of life for residents and visitors alike. The Valley is a place where adventures in nature and history abound.

## Desired Resource Condition

The desired future condition of the diverse resources in the Valley is the preservation of historical/cultural resources and traditional lifestyles while enhancing and protecting ecological diversity.

Influences outside the Valley, such as drain tiling of row crop agricultural areas, directly impact water quality and flow rates within the Valley. While this plan does not directly address these larger watershed issues; land, road and trail management within the Valley should be optimized to both filter outside influences and minimize water impacts.

Programs, expertise, and funds should be sought to support private conservation-based agriculture and other private lands. These programs should directly benefit the land owner and nature. These well managed private lands could serve as an example and generate revenue through agricultural tourism (agritourism).

Rare and sensitive ecological resources should be protected and restored in habitats such as wetlands, rock outcrops, prairie, savanna and floodplain forests. Habitats should be managed to strengthen wildlife populations that also benefit recreation opportunities such wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing. Historic and cultural resources should be protected and interpreted to increase their value and appreciation.

Public park and conservation lands should be expanded to manage habitat while providing balanced recreation opportunities. While additional public lands



Photo - Trails in Beaver Falls County Park

are desirable, they should only be expanded with adequate resources to not only manage them but also improve both their habitats and recreation resources. The Minnesota River Valley is a beautiful natural landscape that should be conserved for its own inherent value and for people to appreciate.

## Desired Visitor Experiences

The Valley is a beautiful landscape residents have cared for and enjoyed for many generations. This connection to the Minnesota River and its landscape helps define the local culture and lifestyle. The Valley and its resources provide a quality of life with the opportunity to attract new residents and visitors.

Current parks and trails in the area provide limited recreation opportunities. A connected recreation network consisting of scenic roads, parks, conservation lands, rivers, lakes, historic sites, and agritourism connected to communities and other services will greatly improve recreation opportunities in the Valley. This will spur new participation, programs and businesses in outdoor recreation. A trail network with convenient access to recreation, interpretation and adventure opportunities will bring many benefits to residents and visitors. Walking and bicycling are two of the most popular forms of exercise and outdoor recreation in the United States, so expanding opportunities for these activities will benefit many people. Providing these activities in a beautiful natural setting creates memorable outdoor recreation experiences.



Photo - Prairie wetland with Blazing Star flowers by Megan Benage

**Residents and visitors can choose from a wide variety of travel modes and experiences:**

- Scenic touring in passenger vehicles
- Off-highway vehicles (OHVs) and bicycles with many overlooks
- Interpretive stops and recreation sites for larger groups with varying degrees of physical abilities
- Hunting and fishing opportunities that are improved with additional information and access to the river and public wildlife habitats
- Rivers and lakes with more and improved public access for education, fishing, boating and paddling
- Motorized recreation including OHVs and snowmobiles with a positive place to ride in a well-designed and managed setting.

Many residents and visitors enjoy camping in well designed and maintained public and private campgrounds with connections to the River and trails. The Valley has a rich history and culture that residents and visitors will enjoy exploring with improved programs, information and facilities. Frequent special events are held in the Valley to celebrate and introduce visitors to all its rich resources and experiences. This collection of recreation experiences improves the quality of life for residents and draws new visitors to the area.

## Goals & Actions

These goals and actions were developed through a participatory and professional process including interested citizens, city, county, state, and consultant staff. The research section of the Master Plan describes the participatory process and research used to help define the goals and actions.



Photo - Trail in Whispering Ridge AMA



Photo - Kayaking near Vicksburg County Park by Scott Kudelka

**The Master Plan has five general goals:**

- Recreation
- Conservation
- Culture & Heritage
- Nature and Culture Interpretation and Education
- Framework for Land Use

### Recreation

The master plan public survey identified experience types that could be provided. Nature-based recreation and adventure were the two highest ranked. The two top outdoor recreation benefits identified were: “to be outdoors” and “to experience natural surroundings”. Visitors ranked driving for pleasure; wildlife viewing; hiking; resting and relaxing in the top tier outdoor activities they participated in. In general, most survey respondents were satisfied with their experience and the existing recreation facilities, though some felt there was room for improvement, especially those from outside the area. Survey results, public input, outdoor recreation trends and professional expertise have led to the following recreation goals and actions.

**Goal:**

**Create an expanded recreation network for residents and visitors that complements the Valley’s diverse natural and cultural resources.**

The following actions support the above goal.

**Action: Plan and develop a recreational trail system to interconnect communities, parks, rivers, natural areas, and tourism related businesses.**

- Potential trail connections include those to the nearby towns of Redwood Falls, Morton, Franklin, Sacred Heart, Granite Falls, Delhi, Belview, the Upper Sioux, and Lower Sioux Indian Communities, County parks, historic sites, DNR lands, and



Photo - Family bicycle ride by Ron Bolduan

services such as restaurants, lodges and campgrounds. These connections will allow more people easy access to future state or regional trails and increase desirability of trail use in the area.

- Guiding principles for ecologically sustainable trails provide the underlying rationale for actions related to protecting, restoring, and managing natural environments associated with trail development. Applications of these principles will minimize the impact of trails on natural resources and sensitive ecological systems. The strict application of these guiding principles must be balanced with the desire to locate trails where they will be of high recreational value to the targeted users, who often want to be close to nature, enjoy beautiful scenery, and observe wildlife. This is an important consideration and underscores the need for resource managers, trail designers, and other interested individuals to work together to determine the most important values for any given trail alignment. There are seven core principles:

1. Avoid sensitive ecological areas and critical habitats.
2. Develop trails in areas already influenced by human activity.
3. Provide buffers to avoid/protect sensitive ecological and hydrologic systems.
4. Use natural infiltration and best practices for storm water management.
5. Provide ongoing stewardship of the trails and adjoining natural systems.
6. Ensure that trails remain sustainable.
7. Formally decommission and restore unsustainable trail corridors (DNR 2007).

- Trails in the area should be multi-use with some

temporal and spatial separation for safety or experience quality reasons. The following are recommended trail uses: bicycling, walking and running, dog walking, in-line skating/skate skiing, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, horseback riding, snowmobiling, OHV (non-state lands only), fishing access, environmental education, and interpretation. Hunting on trails in the area could be allowed on public lands except where regulated or prohibited by community ordinance or state park rules and regulations. Limitations of width, compatibility of uses, landowner agreements, land use restrictions, and resource constraints may dictate that not all recommended uses can be accommodated at all times for the entire length of the trail. Additional alternative trail alignments will be pursued as necessary to accommodate proposed uses. Trail development will be accessible to visitors with physical challenges wherever possible.



Photo - Campsite at Upper Sioux Agency State Park

**Action: Create plans for additional recreation facilities, parking areas, signs, and their maintenance**

- Identify existing and proposed park and recreation sites that are easily accessible and have demonstrated potential to offer new natural resource based recreation uses.
- Identify new recreation uses not currently available in the region that can increase quality of life for residents and support ecotourism and economic development.
- Identify renovations or improvements needed to existing sites to better meet current visitor demands and use trends.
- Complete a Mountain Bike Park Feasibility Study as a potential new outdoor recreation opportunity for the area.

- Collaborate to expand regional outdoor recreation safety and education programming, including new regional facilities. Examples could include summer camps, environmental education centers, archery range, paddling sports, and OHV training.
- Complete a study to determine the best location, style and standards for signs to create a unified wayfinding system for the Valley. The signs should be designed to work in conjunction with maps and information systems (webpage, apps, brochures) for the area.

### Action: Expand Water-Based Facilities

- Improve existing river access and recreation sites to increase opportunities for paddling, fishing, boating, special events, and gathering.
- Develop additional river and lake access and recreation sites to increase opportunities for paddling, fishing, boating special events, and gathering.
- Establish an information system for visitors to easily understand current water conditions and safety. This would provide information about water quality and flow rates with experience and safety recommendations.
- Create a plan for recreation experiences and facilities at Anderson Lake County Park. This park could serve as a regional training center for paddle sports and related activities.



Photo - Trail ride at Fort Ridgely State Park by Scott Roemhildt

### Action: Develop a Destination Equestrian Recreation Area

- Complete a feasibility study to locate and establish an equestrian recreation area with camping, facilities, services, trails, etc. This should be done in conjunction with existing equestrian groups and advocates.
- If the feasibility study is favorable, develop a master plan and environmental worksheet for the selected equestrian recreation area. The equestrian recreation area should be connected to the regional trail system.

### Action: Develop Positive Solutions for Motorized Recreation

- Establish a motorized recreation area with a trailhead, facilities and trails for a diversity of experiences and skills levels. The recreation area should serve as a regional training and practice area for OHV recreation for both youth and adults. Renville County is currently planning for this type of riding area.
- Develop a motorized recreation plan for the Valley to manage use of some county roads as OHV routes. The plan would establish destinations and parking for OHVs. An information and training program will help riders plan their experience in a safe and responsible way. Both Redwood and Renville Counties previously authorized use of some county roads for OHV use as long as riders follow adopted rules.



Photo - Launching canoes on the Minnesota River in Morton

## Conservation

The natural scenic beauty and relatively high quality of native plant communities in the valley is what draws people to this area. Public input for this project has resulted in high agreement that these resources should be protected and enhanced wherever possible on public and private lands. Several state programs have identified and ranked the Valley areas that are critical for species of greatest conservation need and general wildlife population sustainability into the future. A strategically connected network of these high-quality public and private lands can help ensure these resources function at a high level in to the future

**Goal: Create a connected network of high quality natural and or visual resource areas that support larger conservation goals, contribute additional scenic quality to the region, and provide balance with recreation activities where appropriate.**

The following actions support the above goal.

### Action: Strategically increase public and private conservation lands

- Identify lands with rare and sensitive resources and define long-term strategies to conserve them as public or private conservation lands. Create incentives for land owners to participate in private conservation programs or voluntary sale of land to public agencies.
  - Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)
  - Aquatic Management Areas (AMAs)
  - Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs)



Photo - Barred Owl by Ron Bolduan



Photo - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) sign in field by Scott Kudelka

- County parks
- Private lands with conservation objectives

### Action: Minimize public use impacts to landowners

- Maintain excellent communications with landowners and appropriate signage
- Build expectations and opportunities for public land users to reduce impacts to landowners
- Work with Enforcement agencies to resolve trespass issues

### Action: Collaborate with MN DNR to implement habitat management plans

- Several Renville County parks provide critical habitat for rare species and could benefit from additional management, in collaboration with MN DNR.

### Action: Protect sensitive bluff lines and shorelines from development and erosion

- Protecting bluff lines ensures scenic viewshed protection and can help reduce erosion in the waters flowing into the Minnesota River, improving important aquatic habitat
- Counties may need to explore ordinance or rule changes to protect these areas
- Agricultural best practices and cost sharing for buffering ravines and bluff lines can be emphasized

### Action: Work with Counties and private land owners to improve habitat for Species

## in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

- MN DNR can provide technical assistance to increase positive actions for SGCN
- In some cases, joint management may occur

## Action: Develop landscape level plan and model for desired future conditions

- These types of plans or models can provide details for possible landscape scenarios that will accomplish conservation goals and can more objectively identify key sites for various uses.

## Culture & Heritage

Participants in the master plan process voiced a strong interest in both protecting and sharing the rich cultural and historic heritage of the Valley. The area already has some quality programs, museums and public historic sites known to local residents. Information and experiences can be expanded and improved to share with more residents and visitors.

## Goal: Celebrate and highlight the unique cultural heritage and history of the area

The following actions support the above goal.

## Action: Integration of Scenic Byway Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

The following recommendations relate to several of the master plan goals but are combined here as they come from the *Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Comprehensive Plan*. This is a related master plan “designed to convey the Valley’s potential and thus assist with attaining national byway designation through the Federal Highway Administration. The plan is also, however, a rural tourism strategy to guide investments, marketing and interpretive development along the corridor.”

The *Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Comprehensive Plan* describes in detail an eight-point implementation initiative called RiverStories, the eight points are: Organizational Program; Resource Management; National Marketing Program; Tourism Product Development; RiverStories Interpretive Program; Valley Ventures Fund; Transportation Improvements, and; Recreation Investments. Additional

ideas for considerations can be found in the more recent *Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance Interpretive Plan, 2014*.

The Byway Comprehensive Plan makes a wide range of recommendations and actions. Some of the key actions related to the Byway in this area include:

- Develop and expand interpretive and educational opportunities: recommend signage and kiosk locations; develop interpretive information including brochures and audioguides; develop additional interpretive waysides and overlooks.
- Maintain and manage the areas gravel roads, which contribute greatly to the byways character.
- Improve the commercial gateways in adjacent communities.
- Develop strategies to protect the health and economic agricultural industry while increasing tourism including the development of an Agritourism Initiative and Agritourism Fund for the byway.
- Build the Agritourism product along the byway.
- Develop a tourism marketing program for the region.

Photo - Interpretive talk at tipi by Lower Sioux Historical Site





Photo - Statue on Lower Sioux Indian Community

- Develop a series of River Town events with all the events combining downtown activities and festivals with river oriented activities.
- Consider some form of Artists in Residence or Artists Retreat program for each of the communities.
- Develop a River Towns Main Street Program with assistance from the National Main Street Center
- Develop a targeted tourism marketing program directed to specialty shopkeepers in the Twin Cities or other urban areas.
- Work with local rail lines on a project to bring excursion rail service into the Valley.
- Improve bicycling trails throughout the Valley
- Seek funding to improve signing, visitor facilities and infrastructure in the county park system along the river.

**Action: Collaborate with Dakota Communities**

- Complete a study in conjunction with the Dakota Communities to identify how they can benefit from and contribute to recreation, tourism and conservation programs in the Valley. A consultant specialized in working with the Dakota culture should lead this effort.

**Action: Promoting agricultural heritage**

- Research and publish information related to the history of agricultural heritage of the Valley to be used in educational programs, interpretive materials and special events.
- Implement and record an oral history of farmers and land owners in the area to record their experience from their perspective.

**Action: Collaborate with local arts and heritage organizations**

- Expand opportunities for local art and hobbies through programs and special events in communities and at recreation sites during high visitation periods
- Hold special events to celebrate and inform people about the diverse heritage of the Valley

**Nature and Culture Interpretation and Education**

Education and interpretation are the bridge to enrich experiences, inform people about responsible recreation, and create appreciation for Valley resources. Quality nature and culture information greatly improve recreation experiences. Master plan participants expressed a strong interest in providing and receiving information on nature, culture, responsible recreation and safety.

**Goal: Expand natural and cultural resource education opportunities in the region to support local, state, and private groups that promote environmental stewardship.**

The following actions support the above goal.

**Action: Support Development of Visitor/ Interpretive Centers**

- Visitor and interpretive centers provide unique experiences and services for visitors. They should be carefully located to maximize their use and benefit. They should be developed as facilities and landscapes with multiple uses, such as meeting and presentation space. It's important they also benefit



Photo - Birch Coulee Battlefield Interpretive Sign by Ron Bolduan

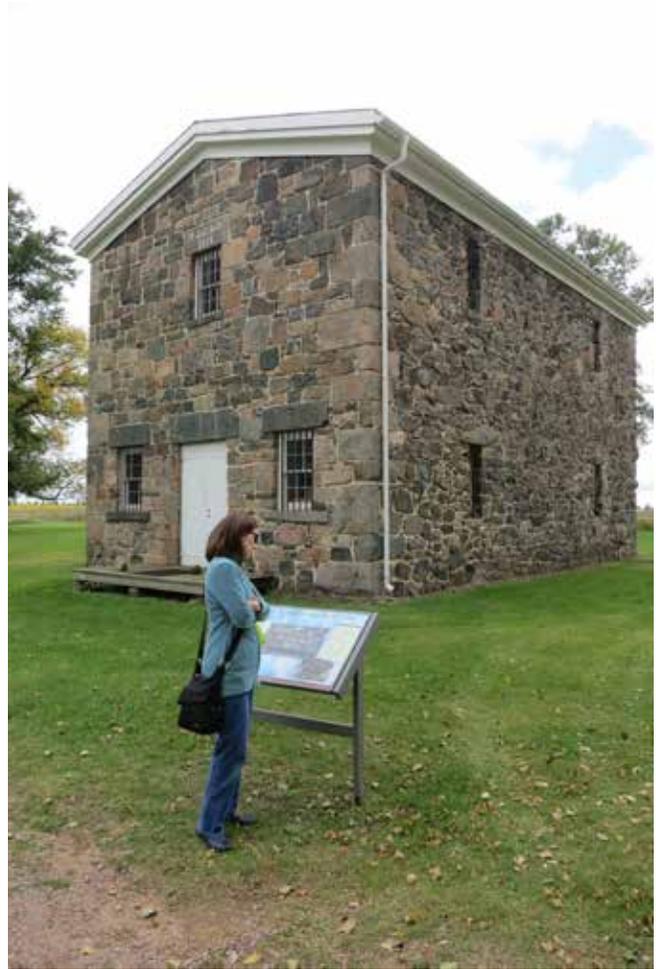
nearby communities and residents. A feasibility study should be conducted for each potential center to fully understand its location, benefits and costs. The Minnesota River Valley History Learning Center is a current work in progress that should be supported.

**Action: Collaborate with MN Master Naturalists to develop trained docents for MN River Valley**

- Many retired and other people enjoy sharing their love for nature, history and culture as volunteers. Government and private business staff also have the opportunity to share information with schools, residents and visitors. Quality materials and training programs can help prepare people to “share the wealth.”

**Action: Develop an Ecotourism and Cultural Heritage Tourism Program**

- A well-designed ecotourism and cultural heritage program can increase visitation, local participation in outdoor recreation and attract the right kind of private investments to the Valley. A tourism program for the area should focus on solutions and experiences designed to celebrate and conserve the Minnesota River Valley and its heritage. Private land and businesses owners should not only benefit from these programs but also invest in them. It’s important to respect private land owners who are not interested in tourism and have regulations that prevent the wrong kinds of investments.



*Photo - Interpretive sign at Lower Sioux Agency State Historic Site*



*Photo - Horse drawn wagon ride by Ron Bolduan*

## Framework for Land Use

Land owners, Redwood and Renville Counties, the State of Minnesota, among others; have been stewards of the Minnesota River Valley for generations. These stewards have taken care of the Valleys resources and created successful land use and environmental regulations over time. This strong focus on conservation must continue as the basis for a quality natural environment and quality of life. Tourism and recreation development in the area will bring opportunity but also change.

The quality of life for land owners and the natural environment must be conserved as the foundation for success.

**Goal: Develop a framework for outdoor recreation, cultural and, education opportunities while respecting private property**

The following actions support the above goal.

### Action: Develop sustainable agricultural programs

- Support a sustainable agriculture program for existing agricultural lands in the corridor, with the first priority being lands immediately adjacent to the River. The program could help protect and conserve natural resources, improve water quality, enhance profitability, and improve life on the farm. Information is available through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (see Master Plan references).

Photo - Vineyard and restaurant at Grandview Winery



### Action: Revise land use regulations for the MN River Valley to allow for agritourism, nature-based recreation and rural lodging

- Plan for and manage land uses in the Valley to balance agriculture, conservation, recreation, and tourism. Revise land use regulations through public processes, as needed.
- The Minnesota River National Scenic Byway

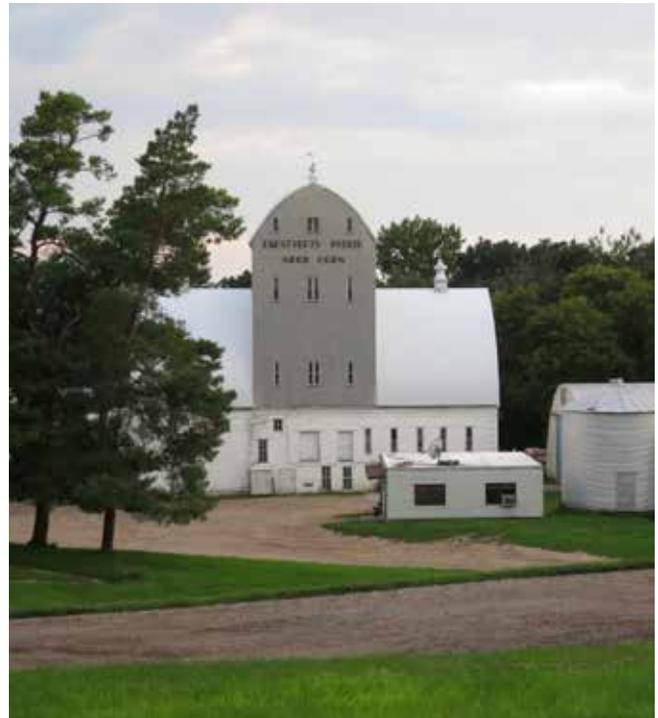


Photo - Historic buildings at Enestvedt's Seed Farm

Comprehensive Plan (refer to Cultural /Heritage section) makes a wide range of recommendations and actions regarding the regions agricultural heritage and industry. As outlined in the Plans Segment 3 Granite Falls to Mankato Implementation Program, the following should be implemented:

- Develop strategies to safe guard the health and economic viability of local family farms, including grass-based farms, while increasing tourism. Include the development of an Agritourism Initiative and Agritourism Fund for the byway.
- Build the Agritourism product along the byway. Example might include: farm and or ranch tours; small organic farming providing local farm to table products; farm stay lodging,

bed and breakfast or similar rural farm or ranch based lodging opportunities; equestrian experiences; etc.

- Support small farms as they make important contributions to the character of the Byway.

**Action: Establish design standards for public lands, trails, signs, and roads**

- Develop landscape and architectural guidelines for the overall development of: parks, recreation sites, historic sites, architectural structures; signage including identification, wayfinding, regulatory and interpretive; site furnishings (benches, picnic tables, tables, trash receptacles, fencing, lighting, etc.) and; site features and materials (roads, trails, paving, walls, planting, etc.). These guidelines provide for an overall aesthetic and design consistency unifying the many public sites and areas. These guidelines can also be used by private land owners as an example of quality design.

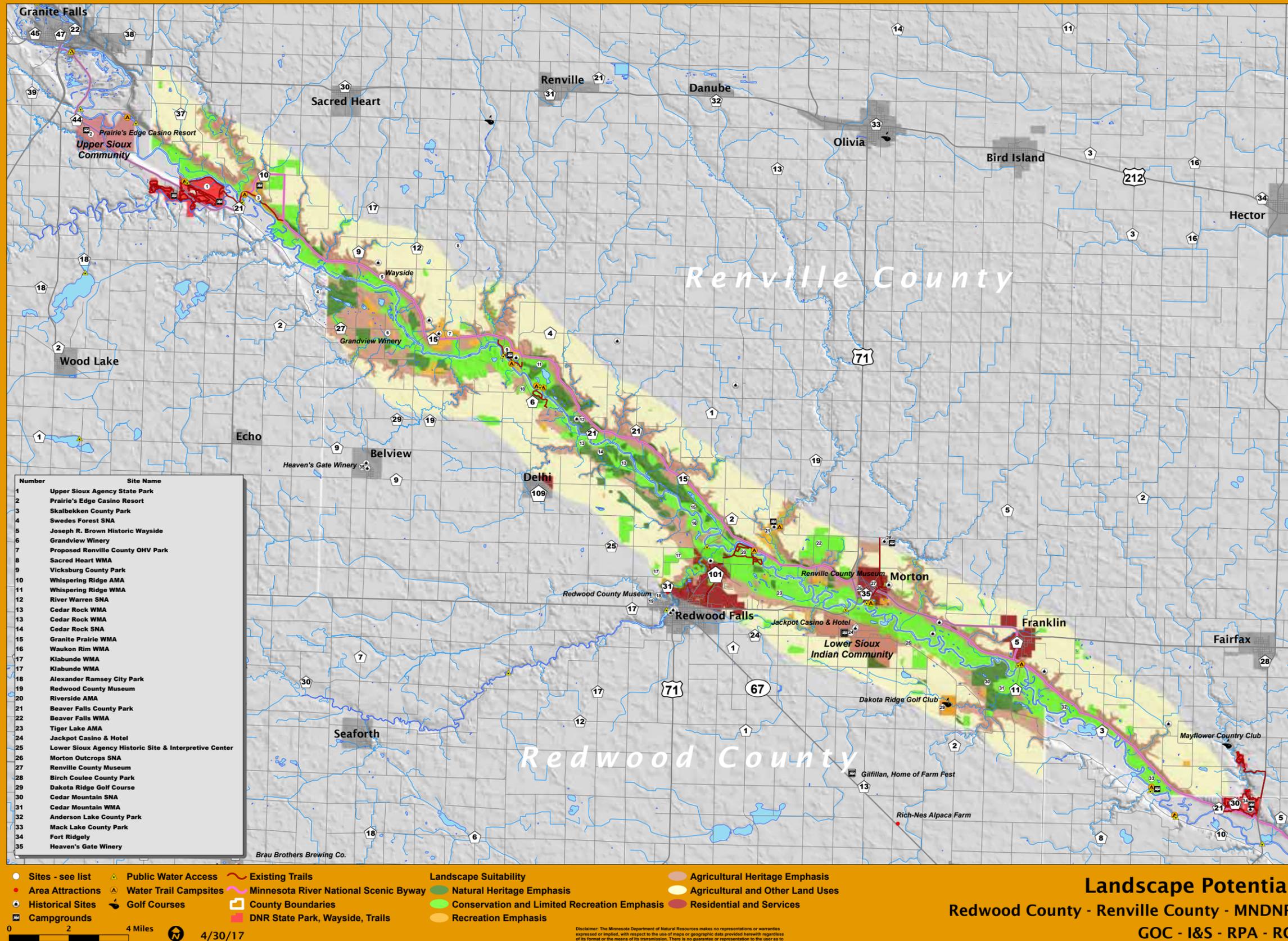


*Photo - Autumn in the Valley by Alex Watson*



Figure 4-1.

Figure 4-2



## Landscape Potential Map

This analysis map considers potential conservation, recreation, heritage, and other land uses in the Valley.

### Natural Heritage Emphasis

- High Protection Areas
- SNA
- Native Prairie Bank
- Wetlands

### Conservation and Limited Recreation Emphasis

- WMA
- AMA
- Habitat Complex
- Conservation Easements
- River and Lakes
- Floodplain – 100 year

### Recreation Emphasis

- County Parks
- City Parks
- Multi-Use Areas & Trails
- Proposed OHV Park
- Gravel Pits – potential recreation development and restoration lands

### Agricultural Heritage Emphasis

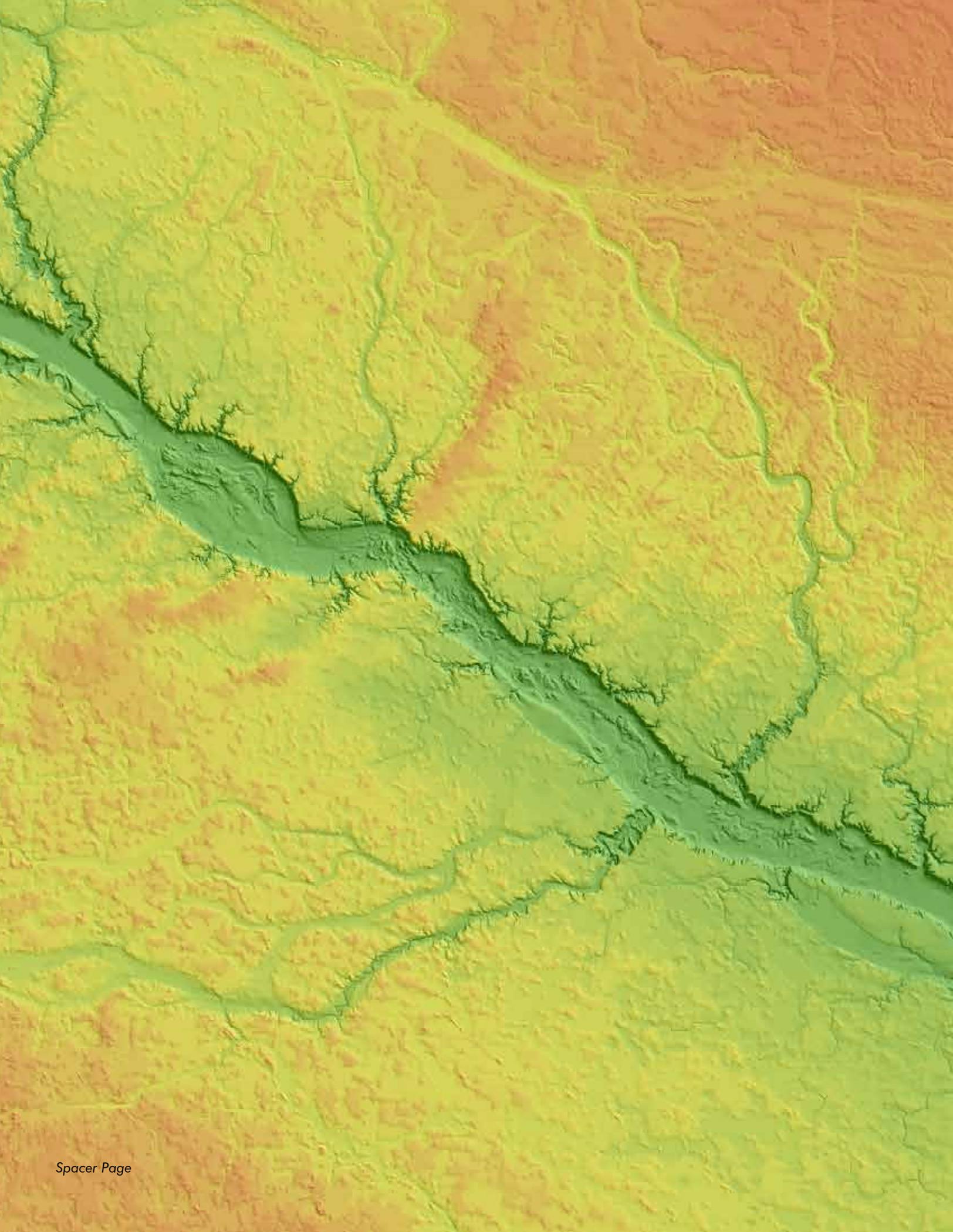
- Conservation Focused Agriculture
- Historic sites
- Lower Sioux Community
- Agritourism (Winery)

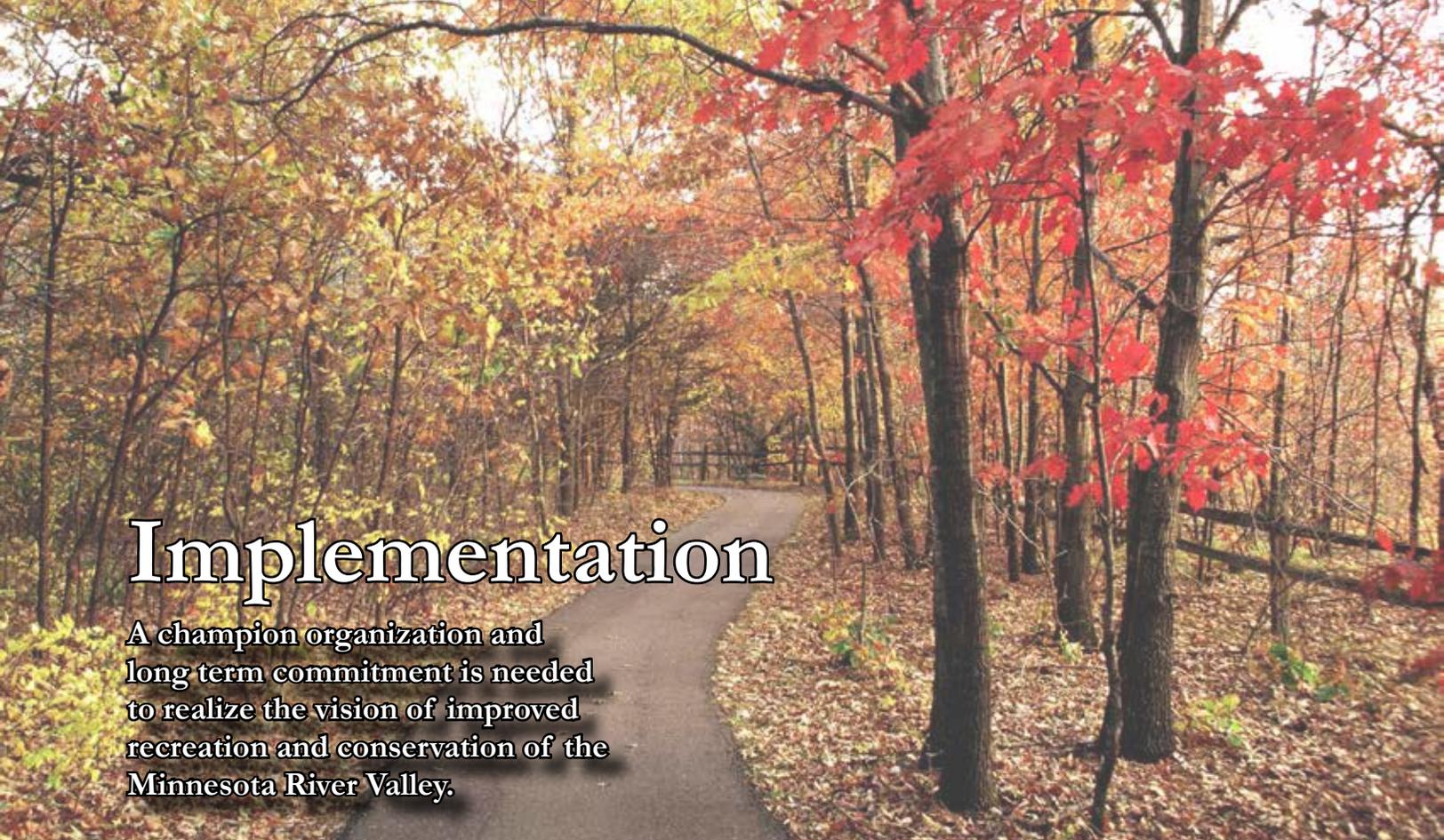
### Agricultural and Other Land Uses

- Traditional Agricultural lands
- Residential
- Other Uses

### Residential and Services Emphasis

- Communities
- Developed Areas
- Museums
- Lodging
- Food
- Fuel
- Shopping





# Implementation

**A champion organization and long term commitment is needed to realize the vision of improved recreation and conservation of the Minnesota River Valley.**

*Photo - Path with fall colors by Ron Bolduan*

This Master Plan creates a 20 plus year strategy to achieve its vision, goals and actions. Achievements in the future, will be built on the previous work and vision of county residents, county and state government.

A plan with long-term vision requires ongoing commitment, organization and a strategy to stay on track. The Valley benefits from having many organizations committed to achieving the solutions outlined in the Master Plan. These organizations include but are not limited to: business leaders, historical societies, recreation and conservation groups, agricultural community, Dakota communities, local communities, Redwood County, Renville County, MN DNR and the Minnesota State Legislature.

The people of Minnesota have invested in professional agencies and funding mechanisms to support visions just like the one for the Minnesota River Valley. Establishing an organization of these groups and individuals is the essential first step to ensure the shared vision is achieved.

Implementation will be a multi-phase process. Phases may operate separately or parallel to each other depending on resource availability and willing landowner sales or easements. The first phase will focus on four segments along the river valley. These

areas center on existing multi-purpose recreation sites such as county, city and state parks or higher population centers, such as Redwood Falls and Morton. Detailed planning for public lands around these focus areas and identification of willing landowners will be done in partnership with landowners, county, state and local governments to determine where additional multi-use parcels are best placed on the landscape. Implementation plans will be developed for each focus area. A MN DNR Master Plan Addendum will be provided to describe the implementation process further.

The second phase will focus on creating contiguous recreational trails between the multi-purpose focus areas. Local capacity will be built to identify best alignments. Coordination between DNR, the Counties and Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Council (GMRPTC) will categorize recreation potential into local, regional and state responsibility.

A third phase will involve capacity building for local partners to manage and maintain trails or facilities and provide interpretive opportunities. All phases should include development of trails, trailheads and interpretive sites. Partnerships with local historical groups and the Dakota communities will be key for interpretive site identification, design, and development.

## Recommended Designations and Management Category

Designations such as Regional Park Designation, County Heritage Area or National Heritage Area offer innovative methods for citizens to partner with local, state, or federal governments to shape the long-term future of their communities.

Formal designations give added recognition to an area in terms of its natural, cultural or recreational value as well as a tangible measure of protection. Research has shown that, at least in the case of cultural heritage, there are additional advantages beyond just a label. These range from pride to positive benefits in property values. Designations can help increase the understanding and respect for the area. Special designations:

- Are an expression of the communities' appreciation of the value of the area or site;
- Do not restrict property use;
- May give added protection where desired;
- Can open up additional funding sources;
- Involve a collaborative approach that retains local control over use

Designations can help promote Heritage Tourism which focuses on the experience of preserving of a distinct place and its stories. Agritourism is a subset of Heritage Tourism.

Designations within the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation System help people understand for which types of uses the land is being considered. A designation also:

- Indicates that a certain level of inquiry has taken place to access the appropriateness of the area for the proposed use
- Shows there has been public input and legislative communication about the designation
- Provides some certainty about the area's future potential
- Clarifies available funding sources for acquisition, development and, maintenance
- Brings to local communities the numerous economic and social benefits of recreation systems
- The concept of multi-purpose recreational focus areas specifically meets the local request for more and greater flexibility of recreational uses than already exists in the Valley



Photo - Minnesota River tributary

## Organizational Framework

The process to improve and conserve the Minnesota River Valley was initiated by county residents and business leaders with a vision to conserve the best of the Valley and to improve the lives of current and future residents. It is essential these private residents continue to play a leadership role to implement this Master Plan. The business and tourism community bring a very important perspective to the project and ultimately make the most effort to promote the area as a great place to live and visit. Likewise, the effort needs entrepreneurs to invest in new and innovative recreation, agritourism and conservation businesses and lands.

### Agritourism

Agritourism is generally defined as activities that include visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation to enjoy the rural setting, be educated, or be involved in a special activity. This may include an overnight stay, corn mazes, hands-on U-pick, Winery/Vineyard, horseback, sleigh, or tractor rides to name a few.

The vast majority of the Valley is privately owned. Therefore, it is critical the agricultural and land owner community participate in and benefit from this effort. Existing community groups such as hunters, anglers, recreationists, agricultural cooperatives, historical societies, health organizations, conservationists and cultural advocates should have a role in the project. They too should contribute to and benefit from the effort.

Renville and Redwood Counties initiated the master plan process and should continue to play a leadership role in its implementation. This will require political, financial, and human resource commitment from both Counties. The Counties can seek grants and resources from other sources to assist with their role. The Minnesota State Legislature also directed MN DNR to prepare a Master Plan for the Valley, which

### State Recreation Area

A State Recreation Area (SRA) purpose is defined in law as an area which is established to provide a broad selection of outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural setting which may be used by large numbers of people.

demonstrates their commitment to assist with solutions. The MN DNR will designate a representative to serve on an Advisory Board. Additionally, a multi-disciplinary DNR team will work with partners to develop implementation plans for four key areas around existing multi-purpose recreational areas of county, state and city parks. Conservation areas will also be included in this planning. These plans will refine objectives for the consideration of a new SRA unit and recommend best uses and ownership within a smaller focus area. While MN DNR will play an important role implementing the Master Plan, long-term success will depend on both county and private sector commitment and leadership.

The first implementation action of the Master Plan is to organize an Advisory Board, or similar group, to represent organizations committed to the Master Plan and direct priority actions. This Advisory Board could be established as part of a facilitated workshop and through memorandums of understanding (MOU) between the cooperating organizations.

The most important resource in implementing the Master Plan will be professional and volunteer efforts. Human resources are essential to complete priority tasks and actions identified by the Advisory Board. The most successful outdoor recreation and conservation projects in the nation have a vision, master plan, leadership, funds and staff assigned to the effort. Long term success is enhanced with an independent non-



Photo - Group paddling event

profit organization to assist with fundraising, outreach, specific actions, and programs. Most regionally significant recreation and conservation areas have a non-profit organization as part of the organizational solution. The other key action is to be designated as a "Regionally Significant Park" by GMRPTC to be eligible for additional funding.



Photo - Wooden bridge crossing by Ron Bolduan

## Implementation Strategy

A successful strategy to implement the master plan is essential to build support and confidence. The following table provides a prioritized list of actions and suggests lead organizations. Multiple actions will be in progress at any one time. Prioritization of the actions was determined through stakeholder and project Planning Team input. The priority of the actions will likely change based on available resources, collaborator interest, changes in land use and management policies, and availability of property from willing land owners. A more detailed description of the actions is provided in the vision, goals and actions chapter of the Master Plan.

The following table is just a starting point and meant to be a dynamic tool that can change to help the process keep on track. As local partnerships begin to work on these items it may become apparent that particular actions need to be moved into a different phase. Due to the large geographic area involved and the wide variety of activities, some areas might be working at different speeds and thus in different phases.

**Figure 5-1. Master Plan Implementation Strategy**

| Phase / Action   | Priority | Category                   | Lead Agency |
|--|----------|----------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Phase 1</b>   |          |                            |             |
| Establish Advisory Board to implement the Master Plan  | 1        | Organization               | All         |
| Designate DNR internal MRV working team  | 2        | Organization               | MN DNR      |
| Seek special State designation for the Valley and designate the project area as a County Heritage Corridor                             | 3        | Designation                | All         |
| Assign two DNR personnel to participate in Partner Advisory Board  | 4        | Organization               | MN DNR      |
| Dedicate resources for marketing and outreach expertise and resources to help develop informational materials and maps                 | 5        | Marketing/ Information     | County      |
| Collaborate with Dakota Communities  | 6        | Culture & Heritage         | All         |
| Develop implementation plans for 2- 4 multi-use focus areas and conservation areas within 2 years of project designation               | 7        | Recreation                 | MN DNR      |
| Integration of Scenic Byway Comprehensive Plan Recommendations   | 8        | Culture & Heritage         | All         |
| Develop an Ecotourism and Cultural Heritage Tourism Program  | 9        | Interpretation & Education | County      |
| Plan and develop a recreational trail system to interconnect communities, parks, rivers, natural areas, and tourism related businesses | 10       | Recreation                 | All         |
| Provide protection for sensitive and rare resources  | 11       | Conservation               | All         |
| Develop positive solutions for motorized recreation  | 12       | Recreation                 | County      |
| Minimize public use impacts to landowners  | 13       | Conservation               | All         |
| Expand water-based facilities  | 14       | Recreation                 | All         |
| Support development of visitor/interpretive centers  | 15       | Interpretation & Education | All         |
| Revise land use regulations for the MN River Valley to allow for agritourism, nature-based recreation and lodging                      | 16       | Land Use                   | County      |
| Protect sensitive bluff lines and shorelines from development and erosion  | 17       | Conservation<br>Land Use   | County      |
| <b>Phase 2</b>   |          |                            |             |
| Establish a non-profit foundation to help implement the Master Plan  | 1        | Organization               | County      |
| Establish design standards for public lands, trails, signs, and roads  | 2        | Land Use                   | All         |

**Figure 5-1. Master Plan Implementation Strategy (continued)**

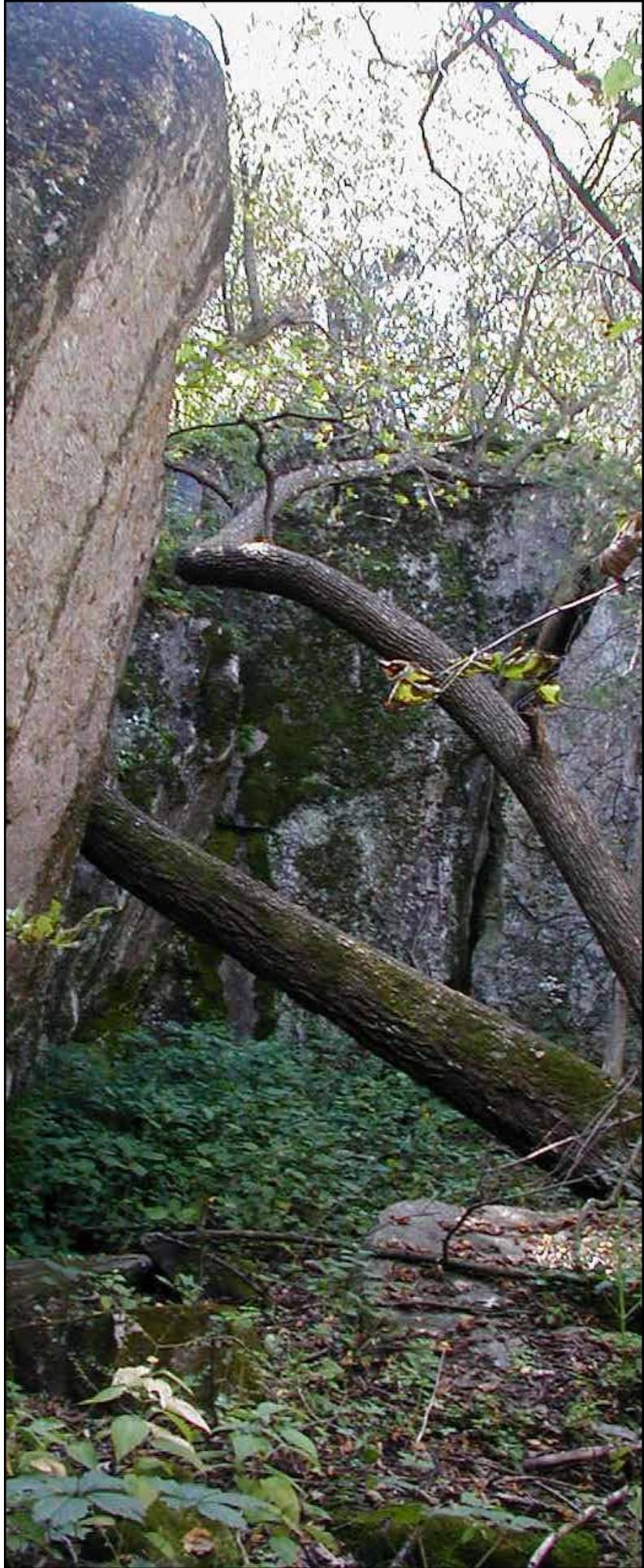
| Phase / Action  | Priority | Category                   | Lead Agency |
|---|----------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Promote agricultural heritage   | 3        | Culture & Heritage         | All         |
| Support sustainable agricultural programs   | 4        | Land Use                   | All         |
| Collaborate with DNR to implement habitat management plans  | 5        | Conservation               | County      |
| Bolster local capacity to identify trail alignments, to acquire, manage and maintain recreational facilities              | 6        | Organization               | MN DNR      |
| Create plans for additional recreation facilities, parking areas, signs, and their maintenance                            | 7        | Recreation                 | All         |
| Develop a destination equestrian recreation area  | 8        | Recreation                 | County      |
| Strategically increase public and private conservation lands  | 9        | Conservation               | All         |
| Collaborate on Valley branding/sign development with project partners   | 10       | Marketing/ Information     | All         |
| Develop desired future conditions model/plan for water, biodiversity and outdoor recreation for Valley area               | 11       | All                        | MN DNR      |
| Determine state land signage options unique for this area, to be included on all units within the designated project area | 12       | Marketing/ Information     | MN DNR      |
| <b>Phase 3</b>  |          |                            |             |
| Collaborate with local arts and heritage organizations  | 1        | Culture & Heritage         | All         |
| Collaborate with MN Master Naturalists to develop trained docents for MN River Valley                                     | 2        | Interpretation & Education | All         |
| Work with Counties and private land owners to improve habitat for Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)            | 3        | Conservation               | MN DNR      |

Notes:

- Under the Lead Agency column, “All” includes Redwood County, Renville County and MN DNR.
- The priority rankings in the table only represent a relative level of importance.
- Multiple actions can be implemented at a time.

*Photo - Fishing on the Minnesota River*





*Photo - Trees seeking sun in Whispering Ridge AMA*

# Contributors Appendixes References



*Photo - Sign in Beaver Creek Recreation Area*

The following professionals contributed in many ways to the development of the master plan. Creating the master plan was a team effort with strong partnerships between the following organizations. Funding for the Master Plan was provided in part by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). MN DNR contributions to the plan development included planning, resource technical assistance and GIS services. Funding through the Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership provided two interns for GIS analysis and biological research.



*Photo - Planning Team for the Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan*



*Photo - Shoreline fishing on the Minnesota River*

**Figure 6-1. Master Plan Contributors**

| Name                | Title/ Department  | Organization   | Contact Information               |
|---------------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| Scott Wold*         | Director<br>Environmental Office                                 | Redwood County                                       | Scott_W@co.redwood.mn.us          |
| Mark Erickson       | Retired  | Renville County                                      |                                   |
| Scott Refsland*     | Director<br>Division of Environment and<br>Community Development | Renville County                                      | scotr@renvillecountymn.com        |
| Dennis Frederickson | Director, Southern Region  | Minnesota Department of Natural<br>Resources (MNDNR) |                                   |
| Sarah Strommen      | Assistant Commissioner   | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Cathi Fouchi*       | Regional Planner, OSD  | MNDNR  | cathi.fouchi@state.mn.us          |
| Megan Benage        | Regional Ecologist, EWR  | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Brenda Black        | Executive Assistant  | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Brad Bolduan        | SNA Prairie Specialist, EWR                                      | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Lisa Gelvin-Innvaer | Nongame Specialist, EWR  | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Gene Jeseritz       | Assistant Area Fisheries Supervisor,<br>FAW                      | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Todd Kolander       | District Manager, EWR  | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Jeff Zajac          | Area Wildlife Manager, FAW                                       | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Jeremy Losinski     | Area Supervisor, PAT   | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Naoko Meyer         | Region 4 GIS Coordinator, MNIT                                   | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Cory Netland        | Area Wildlife Supervisor, FAW                                    | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Greg Russell        | Regional Manager, FOR  | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Benjamin Schaefer   | State Program Administrator, Prin.,<br>LAM                       | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Brian Schultz       | Assistant Regional Fisheries<br>Manager, FAW                     | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Skip Wright         | District Manager, EWR  | MNDNR  |                                   |
| Drew Stoll*         | Executive Director   | Great Outdoors Consultants                           | Drew@GreatOutdoorsConsultants.com |
| Cindy Wheeler       | Recreation Planner   | Great Outdoors Consultants                           | cynthiawheeler@comcast.net        |
| Andy Brandel PE     | Principal  | ISG  | andy.brandel@is-grp.com           |
| Amanda Prosser      | Senior Landscape Architect                                       | ISG  | amanda.prosser@is-grp.com         |
| Phil Hendricks      | Senior Landscape Architect                                       | Robert Peccia and Associates                         | phil.hendricks@rpa-rtc.com        |
| Kelley Savage       | Landscape Architect  | Robert Peccia and Associates                         | ksavage@rpa-rtc.com               |
| Nick Ladas          | Graphic Designer   | Robert Peccia and Associates                         | nick@rpa-hln.com                  |
| Sergio Capozzi      | Public Opinion Survey Specialist                                 | Red Canoe LLC  | smcapozzi@gmail.com               |

\* Organization leads at end of project

### Figure 6-2. Appendixes

The documents and information listed below are master plan appendixes.

| Document Title  | Publishing Organization | Publish Date |
|---|-------------------------|--------------|
| MRV Master Plan Public Survey Summary Report                                | Red Canoe               | Jan, 2017    |
| MRV Master Plan Public Input Report 1                                       | GOC                     | Jan, 2017    |
| MRV Master Plan Public Input Report 2                                       | GOC                     | March, 2017  |
| Table of Existing Public Lands and Facilities in the Minnesota River Valley | RPA                     | May, 2017    |

Note: The above appendixes can be viewed at: [www.mnrivervalleymasterplan.org/master-plan](http://www.mnrivervalleymasterplan.org/master-plan)

### Figure 6-3. References

The documents and information listed below were referenced in development of the master plan.

| Document Title  | Publishing Organization                                | Publish Date               | Weblink   |
|---|--|----------------------------|---|
| An Economic Argument for Water Trails   | Natalie Warren, River Management Society               | 2015                       | <a href="http://www.river-management.org/assets/WaterTrails/economic%20argument%20for%20water%20trails.pdf">http://www.river-management.org/assets/WaterTrails/economic%20argument%20for%20water%20trails.pdf</a>   |
| Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Selected Age Groups by Sex for the United States, States, Counties, and Puerto Rico Commonwealth and Municipios | US Census Bureau                                       | Accessed November 11, 2016 | <a href="http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF">http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF</a>   |
| Chippewa River TMDL Implementation Plan, Chippewa River Watershed Project   | MPCA   | 2016                       | <a href="https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/wq-iw7-06c.pdf">https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/wq-iw7-06c.pdf</a>   |
| Conservation in the Middle Minnesota Valley: A Blueprint and Action Plan  |  | 2010                       | <a href="https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&amp;rct=j&amp;q=&amp;esrc=s&amp;source=web&amp;cd=1&amp;ved=0ahUKEwjdb-3777OAhUBcSYKHZt9BZIQFggeMAA&amp;url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lccmr.leg.mn%2Fprojects%2F2008%2Ffinals%2F2008_03e_conservation_middle_mn_valley.pdf&amp;usg=AFQjCNGSiSW1PRb20OIE8g-Cu_Yx91B8yg&amp;sig2=JO_QJXijBKAHZyr0DELH0w">https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&amp;rct=j&amp;q=&amp;esrc=s&amp;source=web&amp;cd=1&amp;ved=0ahUKEwjdb-3777OAhUBcSYKHZt9BZIQFggeMAA&amp;url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lccmr.leg.mn%2Fprojects%2F2008%2Ffinals%2F2008_03e_conservation_middle_mn_valley.pdf&amp;usg=AFQjCNGSiSW1PRb20OIE8g-Cu_Yx91B8yg&amp;sig2=JO_QJXijBKAHZyr0DELH0w</a> |
| County Trail System Design: Redwood, Renville, Brown, & Lyon Counties   | UMN  | 2010                       | <a href="http://www.changinglandscapes.umn.edu/projects">http://www.changinglandscapes.umn.edu/projects</a>   |
| Financial Characteristics. 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates   | US Census Bureau                                       | Accessed November 11, 2016 | <a href="http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_09_5YR_S2503&amp;prodType=table">http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_09_5YR_S2503&amp;prodType=table</a>   |
| Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails System plan and Work Plan   | Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission | 2016                       | <a href="http://www.gmrptcommission.org/our-work.html">http://www.gmrptcommission.org/our-work.html</a>   |
| Hawk Creek/Beaver Creek TMDL Project  | MPCA   | 2015                       | <a href="https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/tmdl/hawk-creekbeaver-creek-fecal-coliform-turbidity-tmdl-project">https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/tmdl/hawk-creekbeaver-creek-fecal-coliform-turbidity-tmdl-project</a>   |
| MDA Energy & Sustainable Agriculture Program  |  |                            | <a href="https://www.mda.state.mn.us/about/divisions/amd/esap.aspx">https://www.mda.state.mn.us/about/divisions/amd/esap.aspx</a>   |
| Minnesota Administrative Rules – Natural Resources Department   | MN DNR   |                            | <a href="https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/?agency=158">https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/?agency=158</a>   |

## References (continued)

| Document Title   | Publishing Organization           | Publish Date | Weblink   |
|--|-----------------------------------|--------------|---|
| Minnesota River State Trail Master Plan, Big Stone Lake to Franklin, DNR - Part 1                                      | MN DNR                            | 2008         | <a href="http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/trails/minnesota_river/minnesota_river1.pdf">http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/trails/minnesota_river/minnesota_river1.pdf</a>   |
| Minnesota River State Trail Master Plan, Big Stone Lake to Franklin, DNR - Part 2                                      | MN DNR                            | 2008         | <a href="http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/trails/minnesota_river/minnesota_river2.pdf">http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/trails/minnesota_river/minnesota_river2.pdf</a>   |
| Minnesota River Valley Birding Trail Guide Website   | Audubon Minnesota                 | Current      | <a href="http://mn.audubon.org/birds/birding-minnesota">http://mn.audubon.org/birds/birding-minnesota</a>   |
| Minnesota River Valley Birding Trail Regions and Loops Overview  | Audubon Minnesota                 | Current      |   |
| Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance Interpretive Plan  | Byway Alliance                    | 2014         |   |
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Photo - View of valley by Ron Bolduan



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# Minnesota River Valley Public Survey Summary Report

*A Companion Document  
Prepared in Support of the  
Minnesota River Valley  
Master Plan*

January 2017



Prepared by:



**Minnesota River Valley  
Recreation and Conservation  
Master Plan**

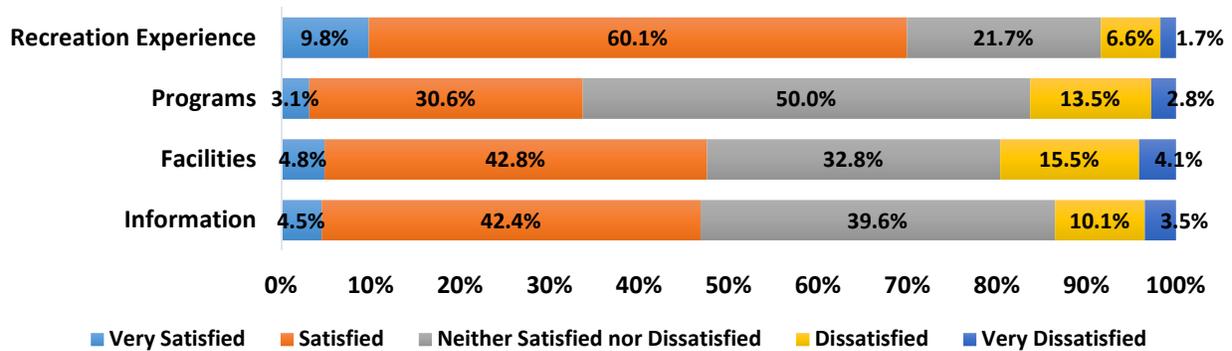


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Other key recreation characteristics include:

- Participants took an average of 53 trips to the area in the past 12 months
- The average group size on a trip to the area was 3 people
- Participants reported the highest levels of use in May through October
- Driving for pleasure, wildlife viewing, hiking, photography, and resting/relaxing are some of the most common activities
- Participants are generally satisfied with their recreational experiences



The results of the public surveys indicate several opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism initiatives in the Minnesota River Valley, including:

- Promote niche activities (e.g., special events, camping, bicycling, snowmobiling, etc.) either on their own or as part of a suite of recreation opportunities available in the area,
- Improve and enhance specific elements of the recreation experience, in particular programs and information,
- Provide a network of outdoor recreation sites, programs, and affiliated businesses and organizations to serve local residents and visitors,
- Market to regional population centers within a 2 to 2.5-hour drive from the area (e.g., Minneapolis, St. Paul, Mankato, Sioux Falls, etc.), and
- Facilitate and promote partnerships and other joint efforts to enhance the outdoor recreation opportunities and attract

**Master Plan Recreation and Conservation Priorities**

The public survey also asked participants about their preferences regarding recreation experiences, as well as both recreation and conservation actions in the Minnesota River Valley. In terms of recreation, participants highlighted the river and scenic quality as important attributes of the area. Participants also indicated a preference for:

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- Driving, hiking, or off-road vehicle driving as the primary mode of transportation,
- Nature- and adventure-based experiences, and
- To be outdoors and to experience natural surroundings as their primary benefits of a trip to the area.

Given the importance participants placed on nature, the outdoors, and scenic quality, these features of the Minnesota River Valley should factor heavily into the planning scenarios for the area.

Survey participants were also asked to rank recreation and conservation goals associated with the Master Plan. Through their priority ranking, participants indicated general support for enhanced recreation opportunities, quality of life, and acknowledgement of the agricultural heritage of the area. That said, all recreation-related goals were highly or moderately supported by at least 70 percent of survey participants.

**Top 3 Priority Recreation Goals**

Develop a planning framework that allows community access to recreation, cultural and educational opportunities, supporting an enhanced quality of life for local residents.



Respect and support the communities' agricultural heritage, while encouraging agricultural practices that benefit natural systems and provide for private recreation, cultural and education opportunities.



Create an expanded outdoor recreation network for residents and visitors that complements the region's diverse natural and cultural resources.



**Top 3 Priority Conservation Goals**

Improving water quality in the Minnesota River and its tributaries



Habitat management



Protecting rare, threatened or special concern species



■ High ■ Moderate ■ Low

Only about 43 of survey participants indicated that new conservation goals were needed in the area. For these participants, new conservation goals with the highest levels of support (as indicated by high or moderate prioritization) should be focused on water quality, habitat management, and the protection of special status species.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Survey Questions

Appendix 2 – Open-Ended Survey Responses

Redwood and Renville counties, in cooperation with the planning team (Great Outdoors Consultants, I&S Group, Robert Peccia and Associates, and Red Canoe), facilitated an online public survey as a component of the comprehensive public input process associated with the development of the Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan. The overarching goals of the survey were to provide another avenue for public input into the Master Plan, better understand existing recreational use and preferences in the planning area, and prioritize potential recreation and conservation concepts and goals for inclusion in the Master Plan.

## **Regional and National Context**

The Minnesota River Valley exists within a larger regional and national framework of outdoor recreation areas and opportunities. While the public survey was intended to yield planning area-specific information, it is also helpful to understand the area's role and niche within this larger context. A summary of available regional and national recreation-related information is provided below (note: these sources represent several of the most commonly available and cited sources of outdoor recreation information; that said, the list is not intended to be comprehensive of all available sources). This background information provides additional context to evaluate the results of the public survey, as well as another source of information to help inform the development of the Master Plan.

Key takeaways from these other sources of information include:

- Nature-based outdoor recreation continues to experience growth driven in part by population growth,
- The mix of outdoor recreation activities and preferences is changing and is expected to continue to change,
- Public lands and their corresponding resource values (recreational, aesthetic, cultural/historic, etc.) are highly important in providing recreation opportunities,
- The public is motivated to participate in outdoor recreation activities for a variety of reasons including being outdoors, experiencing nature, and getting away from regular/daily routine, and
- Partnerships are a vital tool in leveraging funding to maintain, enhance, and promote outdoor recreation opportunities.

## **Minnesota State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan**

The Minnesota State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) establishes a vision and strategic framework for providing and managing nature-based outdoor recreation in the State (MDNR 2014). The SCORP identifies four overarching strategies that respond to the existing opportunities and challenges facing outdoor recreation in the State, including:

1. Connecting people to the outdoors,
2. Acquiring land and creating opportunities,
3. Taking care of existing outdoor recreation resources, and
4. Coordinating among partners.

While the SCORP does not detail current recreation participation and other characteristics, these strategic directions are predicated on observed trends and expected demographic and corresponding future recreation demands and needs. In particular, the SCORP notes ongoing population changes that will influence outdoor recreation participation, including:

- Slowed overall population growth (compared to previous decades),
- Demographic shifts in age, racial, and ethnic population composition, and
- Changes in recreation activity participation and preferences between less- and more-densely populated areas of the State.

In addition, the SCORP acknowledges that state and federal funding for outdoor recreation has been reduced in the past decade. As such, meeting existing and future outdoor recreation demand and needs may be challenging from a financial perspective. These financial challenges highlight the need for new, creative, and innovative ways to generate the funds needed to support, maintain, and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities within the State.

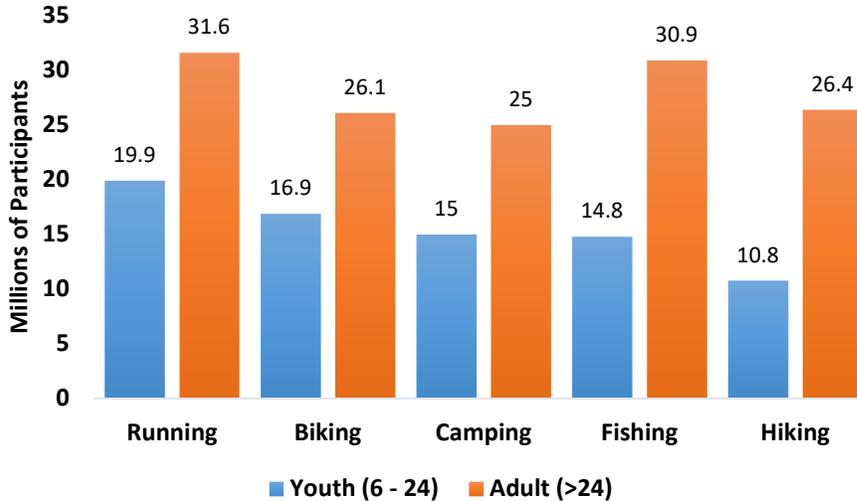
## **Outdoor Recreation Participation Topline Report 2016**

The Outdoor Foundation (supported by the Outdoor Industry Foundation), compiles and publishes an annual summary of outdoor recreation participation. As noted in the 2016 Topline Report, almost half of all Americans participated in one or more outdoor activities in 2015, the most recent year for which data is available (Outdoor Foundation 2016). The participation rate has been relatively consistent over the past decade (2006 - 2015), though the overall number of participants has increased based on population growth. Figure 1

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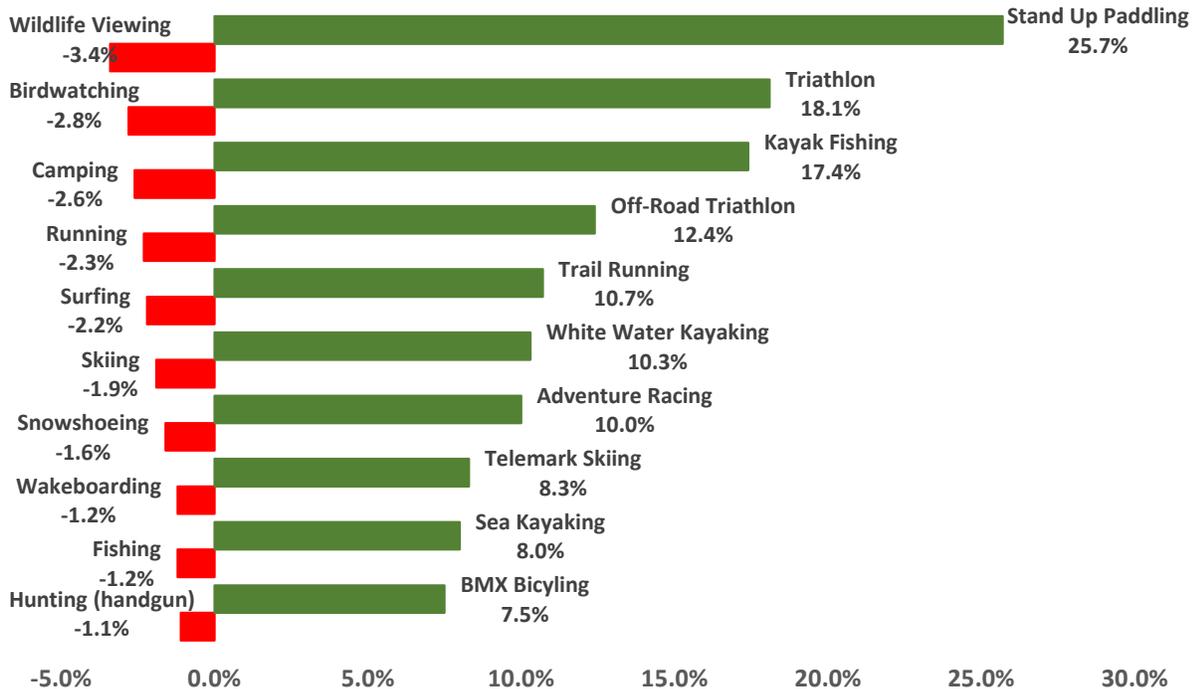
displays the top five outdoor recreation activities in the US based on the number of participants.

**Figure 1. Most Popular Youth and Adult Outdoor Recreation Activities (2015)**



The Topline Report also identifies activities with increasing or decreasing participation. Figure 2 summarizes the activities with the highest levels of participation increases and decreases in the previous 3-years.

**Figure 2. 3-Year Participation Trends for Activities with Significant Growth or Declines**



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**Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures: A Technical Document Supporting the Forest Service 2010 Resource Planning Act Assessment**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS) previously compiled outdoor recreation participation statistics and trends every 5-years (this process has largely been discontinued and replaced by the National Visitor Use Monitoring program). The last assessment was developed and published in 2012 (Cordell 2012). The assessment provides another perspective on outdoor recreation participation rates at the regional and national level.

Based on recreation data collected via the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (last completed by the Forest Service in 2009), the assessment provides baseline estimates of current (2008) recreation use across a broad spectrum of outdoor activities. Table 1 provides a summary of national participation by activity (i.e., the number of participants per activity), some of which are available or may be available in the future in the planning area.

**Table 1. National Recreation Participation Estimates for Select Activities**

| <b>Activity</b>                  | <b>Estimated Number of Participants</b> |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Developed Site Use               | 192,739,000                             |
| Wildlife Viewing/Photography     | 189,418,000                             |
| Visiting Interpretive Sites      | 157,403,000                             |
| Swimming                         | 143,204,000                             |
| Bird Watching                    | 81,449,000                              |
| Hiking                           | 78,256,000                              |
| Fishing                          | 72,714,000                              |
| Motorized Watercraft Activities  | 61,960,000                              |
| Motorized Off-Highway Activities | 47,937,000                              |
| Non-Motorized Boating            | 39,800,000                              |
| Hunting                          | 27,909,000                              |
| Challenge Activities             | 25,134,000                              |
| Downhill Skiing                  | 23,729,000                              |
| Equestrian Activities            | 16,393,000                              |
| Motorized Snow Activities        | 9,440,000                               |
| Non-Motorized Winter Activities  | 7,778,000                               |

Overall, participation in outdoor recreation activities is anticipated to increase by 2060, at least from a number of participants perspective. Based on current

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data, the five activities projected to experience the highest and lowest growth include:

Highest Growth

- Developed skiing
- Undeveloped skiing
- Challenge activities
- Equestrian activities
- Motorized water activities

Lowest Growth

- Visiting primitive areas
- Motorized off-road activities
- Motorized snow activities
- Hunting
- Fishing

However, and as noted in the assessment, recreation activity preferences and choices are changing and are likely to shift to a broader mix of activities compared to the past. The continued change in preferences/activity choices, along with demographic changes, points to the need for adaptive management of public landscapes that proactively addresses demand for a diverse suite of activities, access, and other nature-based opportunities.

## **Public Participation in the Survey**

The Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan public survey was made available to the public via the project website (<http://www.mnrivervalleymasterplan.org/>) for approximately five weeks (October 3 through November 4, 2016). A copy of the online survey is provided in Appendix 1. The planning team encouraged residents, past visitors, recreation and conservation groups, and other stakeholders to participate in the survey by visiting the project website and clicking the “Online Survey” link.

In total, 405 people initially visited and started the survey. After a review of the resulting data, there were 382 usable surveys; 23 participants visited the survey, but did not proceed beyond the introduction to the survey (i.e., the survey software, provided by Survey Monkey, logs all visitors to the online survey website as a participant whether or not they actually proceed beyond the introductory page of the survey). These 23 survey forms are considered unusable since they are essentially blank and do not contain responses to the survey questions.

When reviewing the public survey results, it’s important to note that it was not designed by the Counties and planning team to be a statistically valid survey due to agreed upon project preferences and tradeoffs. The survey team did not control the distribution of the survey (i.e., it was not sent to a pre-selected

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random sample population) and participants could self-select whether or not they participated. As such, while overall participation was good and generally resulted in a sufficient number of usable surveys to allow statistical testing, the results should not be assumed to meet commonly employed statistical validity targets.

Additionally, the survey was structured to solicit input from the public, including residents of Redwood and Renville counties, but with a focus on past and potential future visitors to the Minnesota River Valley (i.e., potential visitors within a 3-hour drive of the planning area). So, while some level of participant segmentation is possible based on the survey questions (e.g., Redwood/Renville county residents compared to other Minnesota residents), no subpopulations were individually targeted during the survey administration process. As such, no subpopulations responded in sufficient numbers to draw statistically valid results from the data at the subpopulation level. Nonetheless, results specific to Redwood/Renville county residents and other visitors are provided when possible.

None of this should imply that the survey results are unimportant to the development of the Master Plan. Rather, the survey responses and summarized results are one factor to consider when making decisions about Master Plan goals and content, and as such should be evaluated in the perspective of the planning process as a whole. Furthermore, the results should be balanced with additional data sources and dialogues from the overall planning process, including planning team discussions, public meetings and workshops, other forms of public input, and research and analysis. While survey results are not statistically valid, they do represent an important and detailed source of information relative to the priorities and concerns of both residents and visitors to the Minnesota River Valley.

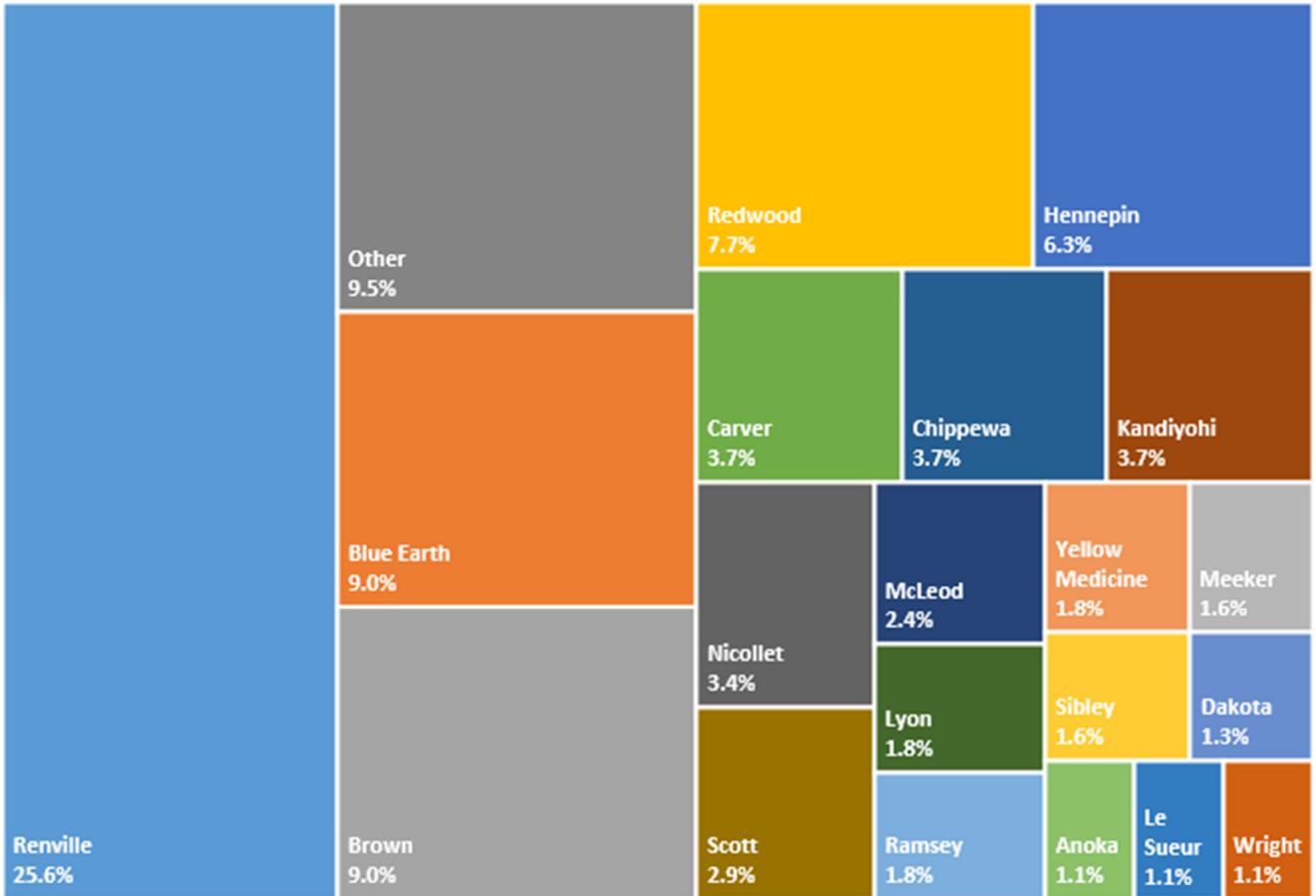
### **Geographic Participation**

Nearly all of the survey participants (99.2%) were residents of Minnesota. For analysis purposes, the small number of completed surveys by out-of-state participants does not allow for segmentation of the summary results (e.g., state residents compared to out-of-state visitors). In general, the out-of-state participants are not included in the geographic and demographic analyses reported here. This allows the survey results to be compared to state-wide data available from the US Census Bureau.

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In-state participants reported being from 42 different Minnesota counties. The project area counties of Redwood (7.7%) and Renville (25.6%) accounted for about a third of all survey participants. Blue Earth (9.0%), Brown (9.0%), and Hennepin (6.3%) counties accounted for over a fourth of survey participants. Figure 3 displays the county summary of survey participants.

**Figure 3. Survey Participation by Minnesota County**



*Other Counties: Lac Qui Parle, Martin, Stearns, Big Stone, Cottonwood, Goodhue, Lincoln, Rice, St. Louis, Stevens, Cass, Crow Wing, Douglas, Jackson, Martin, Murray, Pope, Wabasha, Waseca, Watonwan, and Winona. Each of these counties accounted for less than one percent of survey participants. Minneapolis/St Paul area is located in Hennepin and Ramsey counties.*

Three-hundred and twenty-seven survey participants provided valid Zip codes. The distribution of Zip codes generally mirror the geographic range of counties, though provide a more granular exploration of the location of survey participants. Individually, there were only four Zip codes that accounted for more than five percent of survey participations: 56001 (Blue Earth County) -

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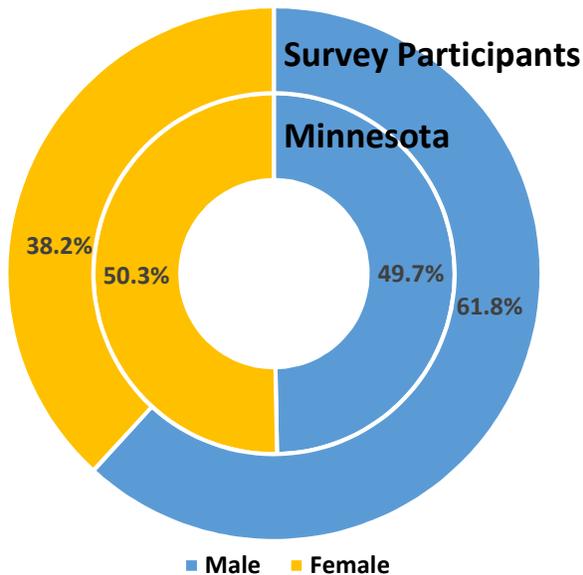
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8.0%, 56073 (Brown County) – 8.0%, 56277 (Renville County) – 7.0%, and 56283 (Redwood County) – 5.5%. Figure 4 provides a side-by-side comparison of survey participant counties and Zip codes. As displayed in the maps included in Figure 4, most (though not all) survey participants are from counties/Zip codes in proximity to the Minnesota River Valley planning area.

**Demographic Summary of Survey Participants**

There were more male participants in the survey than women participants. Compared to the split of men and women at the state level (US Census Bureau 2016), men are overrepresented in the survey results (Figure 5). It is not uncommon for men to be overrepresented in outdoor recreation surveys

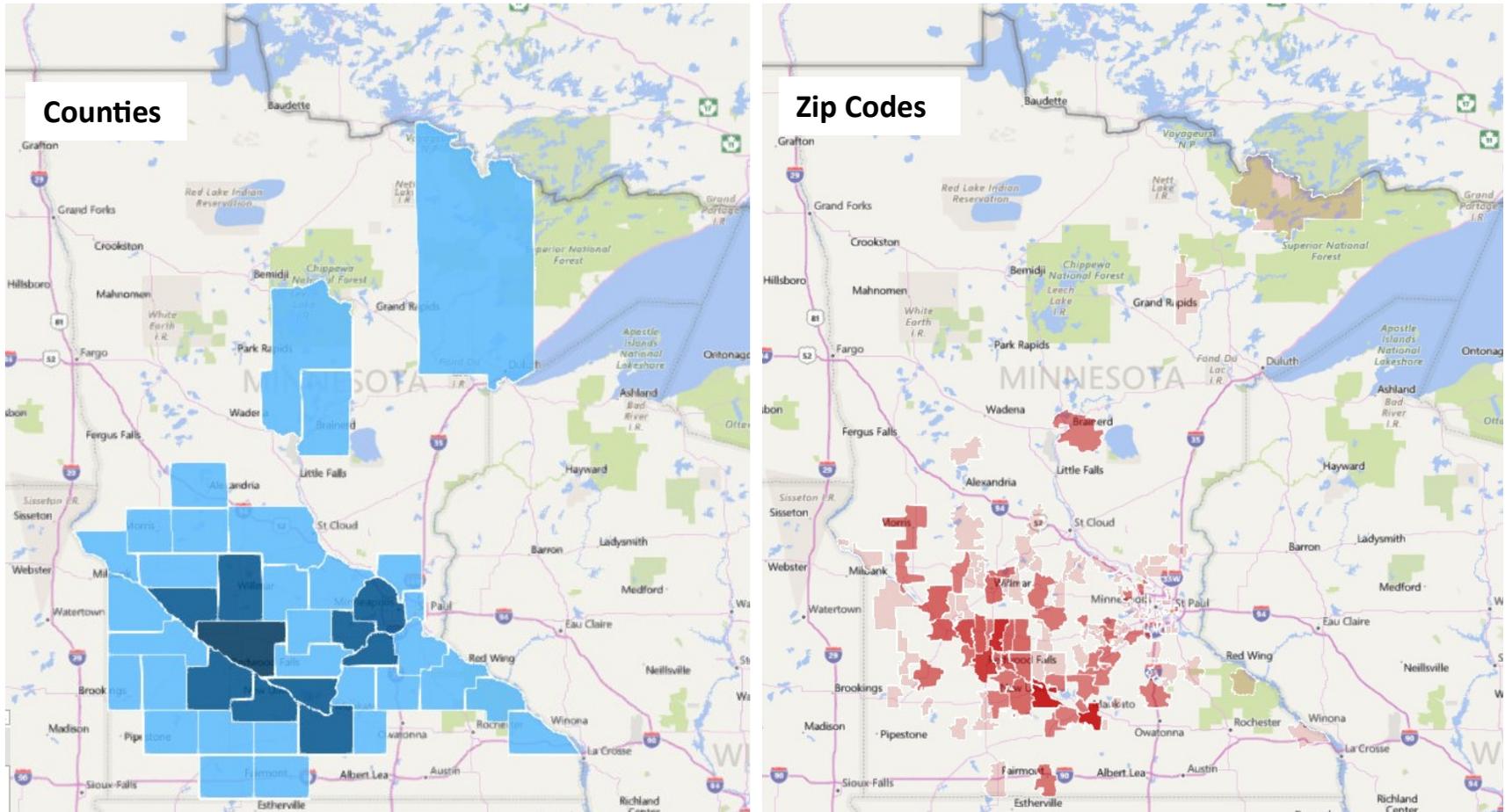
Figure 5. Participation by Gender



About two-thirds (66.4%) of survey participants were older (over 45), while the remaining third (33.6%) were younger (under 45). The age bracket with the largest percentage of participants was 55 to 59 (18.8%). On average, survey participants tended to be older than statewide residents (under 45: statewide – 43.9%, survey participants – 33.6%; over 45: statewide – 56.1%, survey participants – 66.4%; US Census Bureau 2014a).

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Figure 4. Counties and Zip Codes of Survey Participants

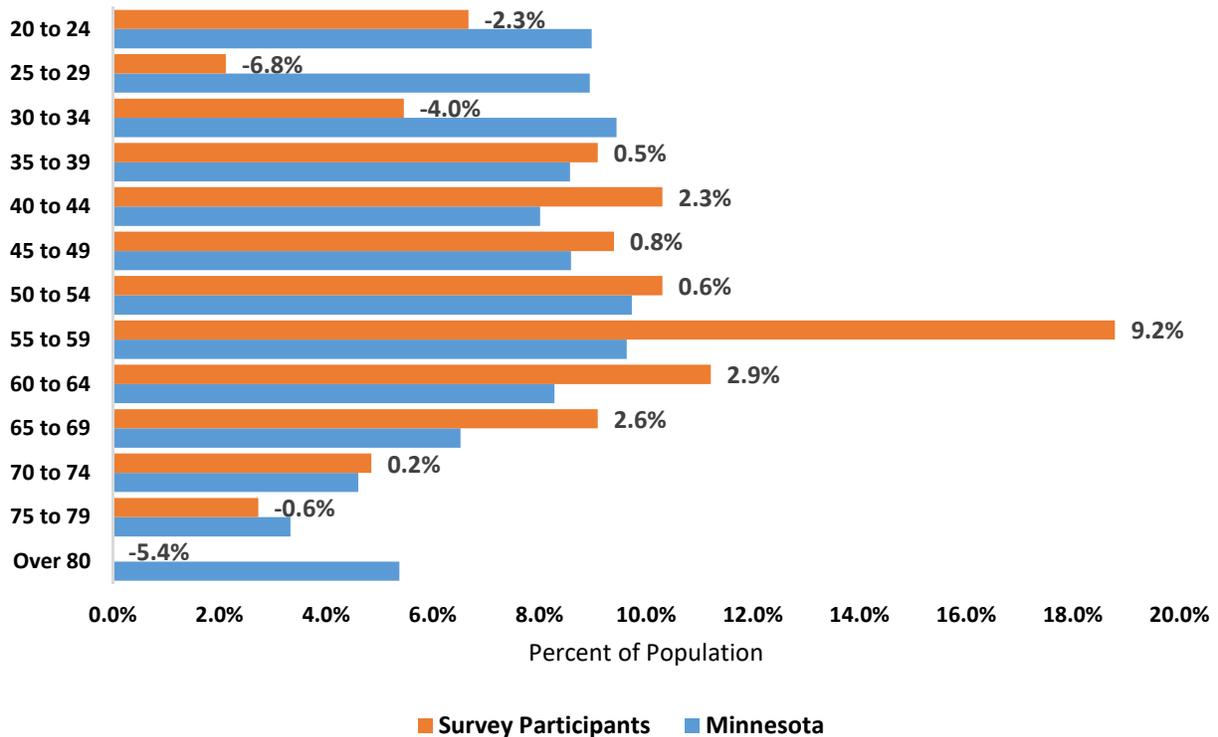


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Figure 6 displays survey participation by age bracket, as well as statewide population percentage by age. The percentages included on Figure 6 indicate the difference between survey participants and Minnesota residents in each age bracket (negative percentage indicates overrepresentation by survey participants, while positive percentage indicates underrepresentation by survey participants). Note, the under 19 age bracket is not included on Figure 6 because at the state-level it represents over 26 percent of all residents. Including it overly influences the data making the statewide data skew extremely young compared to survey participants, in particular since youth participants (under 19) were not specifically engaged in the survey administration process to participate in the survey.

**Figure 6. Participation by Age**

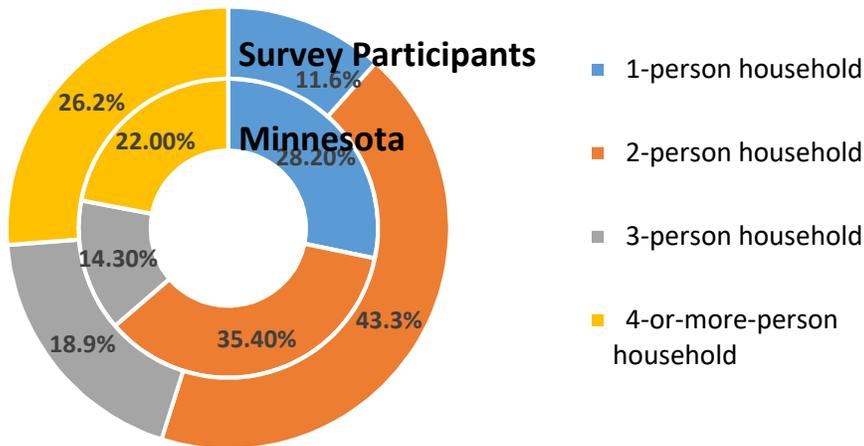


A number of survey participants (43.3%) live in 2-person households. More than a quarter of survey participants (26.2%) live in 4-or-more person households. All participant household sizes outpaced the percentage of statewide resident household sizes, except in the 1-person household bracket (US Census Bureau 2014a). Figure 7 displays the percentage of survey participants by household size, as well as the statewide percentage of residents by household size.

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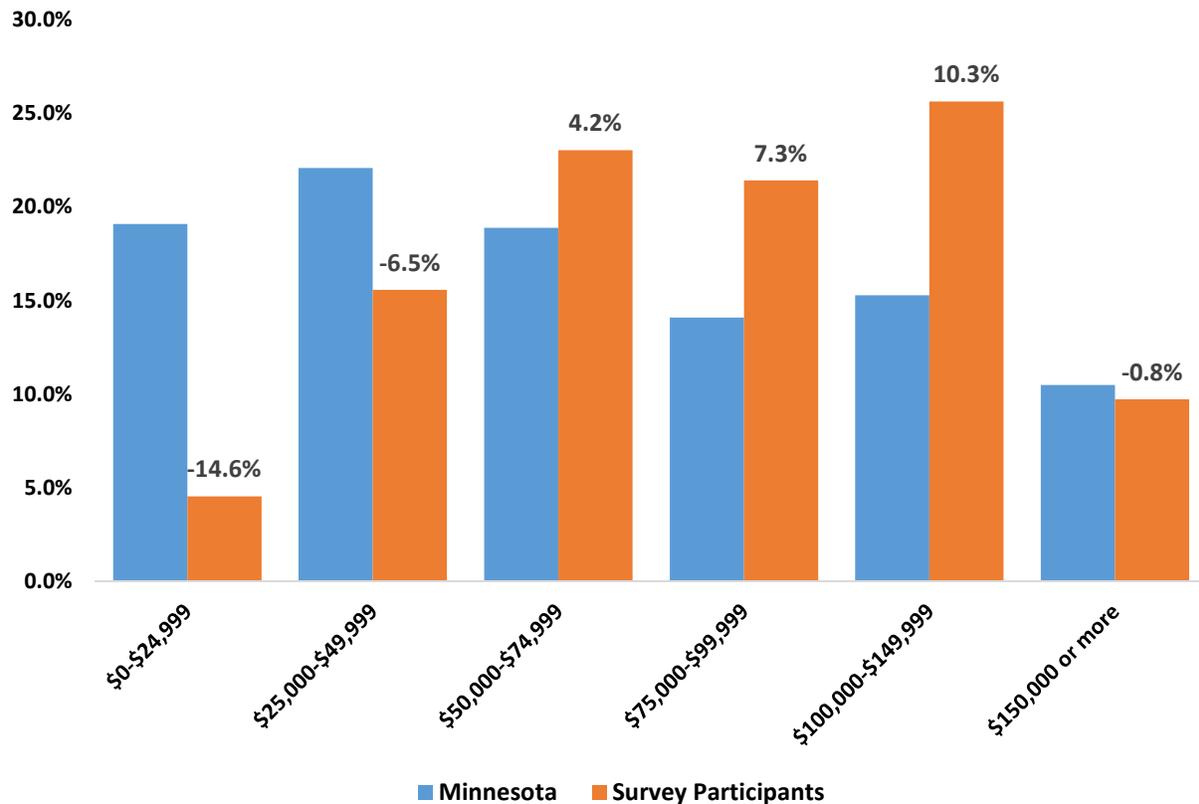
Figure 7. Participation by Household Size



Most survey participants reported household incomes between \$50,000 and \$149,999 (70.1%). Compared to the household incomes at the state level, participants with household incomes in this range are overrepresented in the survey results (i.e., a higher percentage of survey participants fall into this category compared to the percentage of households at the state level) (US Census Bureau 2014b). Figure 8 displays the percentage of survey participants and statewide residents by household income. Similar to Figure 6, the percentages included on Figure 8 indicate the difference between survey participants and Minnesota residents in each household income bracket (negative percentage indicates overrepresentation by survey participants, while positive percentage indicates underrepresentation by survey participants).

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Figure 8. Participation by Household Income



### Recreation Characteristics

The public survey focused on participants' current recreation use and preferences of the Minnesota River Valley. Overall, more than 93 percent of survey participants reported having visited the planning area in the past 12 months. As might be expected, participants from Redwood and Renville counties were slightly more likely to have visited the planning area (96.5%) compared to participants from other locations (91.8%). The small group of participants (6.6%) who had not visited the planning area in the previous 12 months gave several reasons for not visiting, including (16 participants provided a response to this question):

- Nothing to do there (5 responses)
- Poor snow conditions (4 responses)
- Too busy/no time to visit (3 responses)
- Have never been there (2 responses)
- Unaware of opportunities (1 response)
- More to do in other areas of the State (1 response)

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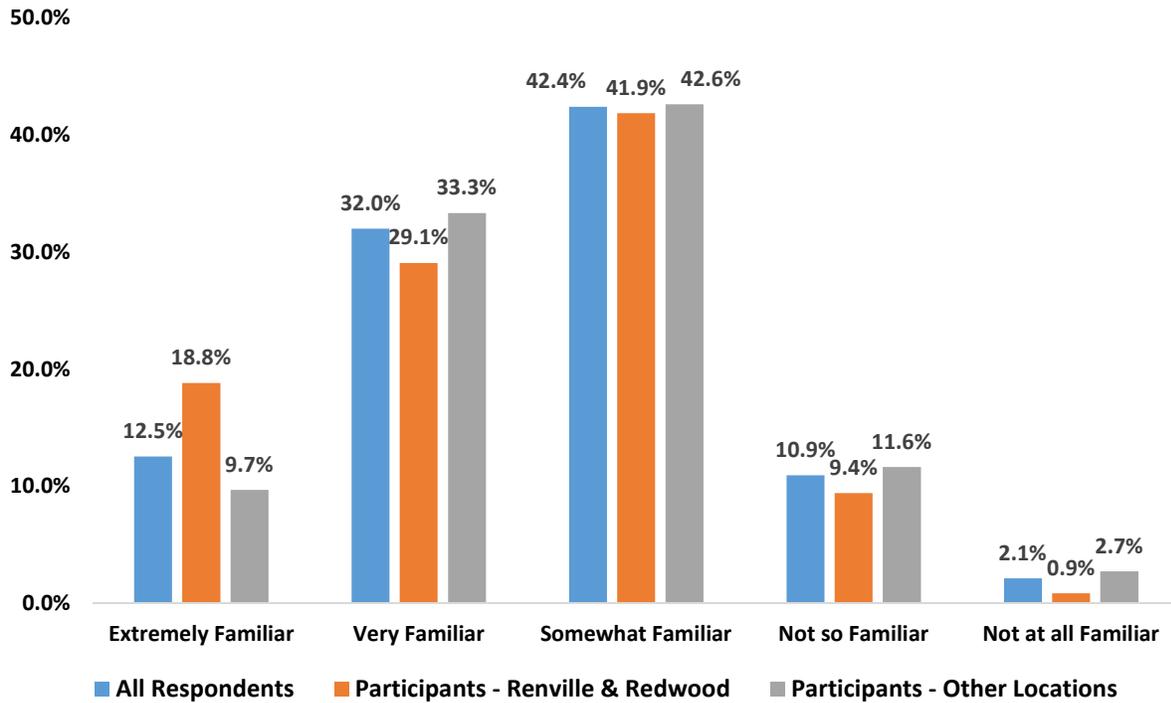
While these participants had not visited the Valley in the previous 12 months, nearly 60 percent indicated they were moderately likely to visit in the next 12 months.

**Familiarity and Perceptions about the Minnesota River Valley**

Survey participants were asked about their familiarity with the Minnesota River Valley and its outdoor recreation, cultural/heritage, and tourism opportunities. Overall, nearly 87 percent of survey participants were familiar (combined “somewhat,” “very”, and “extremely” familiar response categories) with the Minnesota River Valley. Both residents (defined as survey participants from either Redwood or Renville County) and visitors to the area (defined as survey participants from other counties/states) had a high degree of familiarity with the planning area (89.7 % and 85.7% respectively). Figure 9 displays familiarity levels for all survey participants, as well as residents and visitors. More residents were “extremely familiar” with the planning area (18.8%) than visitors (9.7%) as might be expected given their proximity to the area’s opportunities. Numbers of both groups were at least “somewhat familiar” (41.9% and 42.6% respectively) with the Minnesota River Valley. Since residents and visitors alike could self-select, it makes sense that those participants who opted to participate in the survey would have some level of familiarity with the area (i.e., people with less familiarity were likely less inclined to answer questions about a location they did not know very much about).

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**Figure 9. Familiarity with the Minnesota River Valley and its Opportunities**



Area residents (i.e., survey participants from Redwood and Renville counties) were asked several questions about their perceptions of the Minnesota River Valley. The first two of these questions asked participants to indicate: 1) the first thing that comes to mind about the Minnesota River Valley, and 2) what makes the Minnesota River Valley unique (both questions were open-ended, meaning participants could write in their own response; non-summarized responses are provided in Appendix 2). While participants provided different responses to each of these questions, both the beauty and overall scenic quality of the area were some of the most cited responses to both questions. Figure 10 provides side-by-side comparisons of word clouds for each question (a word cloud summarizes the frequency of terms with those most mentioned terms appearing larger, bolder than less frequently mentioned terms). The most cited terms to the first question (“first thing that comes to mind”) include river, beauty, scenic, fishing, and peaceful, while the most cited terms to the second questions (“what makes the Minnesota River Valley unique”) include history, landscape, beauty, resources, diverse, and scenic.

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**Figure 10. Perceptions about the Minnesota River Valley**  
First Thing

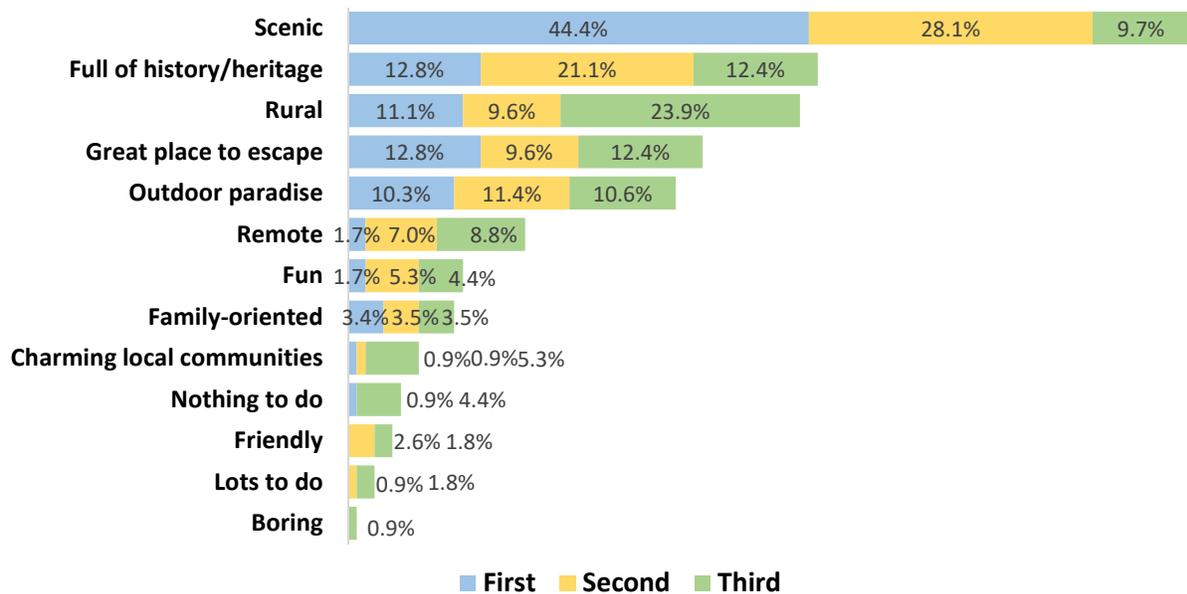


Unique



Finally, participants (residents only) were asked to pick three terms that best describe the Minnesota River Valley. Similar to the previous open-ended questions, the scenic quality, along with the history of the area were the top responses (combined first, second, and third ranked terms). In general, more participants chose positive responses to this question compared to the negative options (“nothing to do,” “boring”). Figure 11 provides a summary of first, second, and third choice terms that best describe the Minnesota River Valley.

**Figure 11. Descriptions of the Minnesota River Valley**



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### **Trip and Activity Characteristics**

Survey participants who had visited the Minnesota River Valley in the previous 12 months were asked about their trip and activity characteristics. On average, the participants visited the Valley about 53 times in the previous 12 months (Table 2). Participants from Redwood and Renville counties took more trips on average (85.3 trips) in the past 12 months than participants from other locations (34.8 trips). As indicated by the median values, these averages are not likely indicative of visitation levels for the majority of participants. In fact, majorities of both participant groups (57.7% - participants from Redwood and Renville counties, and 80.0% - participants from other locations) reported taking fewer than 24 total trips to the Valley in the previous 12 months. On the other end of the spectrum, almost 23 percent of participants from Redwood and Renville counties and 15 percent of participants from other locations indicated they took more than 100 trips to the Valley in the previous 12 months. These high value responses substantially influence the average number of trips reported in Table 2.

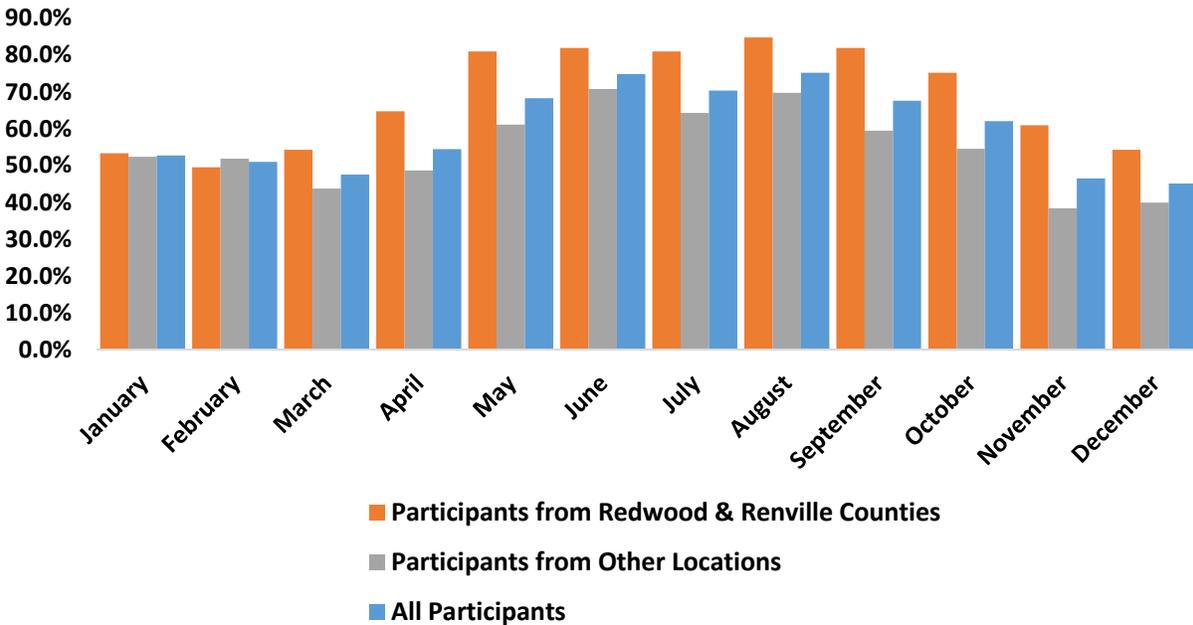
**Table 2. Number of Trip Characteristics**

|  | Minimum | Maximum | Average | Median |
|--|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| <b>Participants from Redwood/Renville Counties</b> | 1       | 365     | 85.3    | 20     |
| <b>Participants from Other Locations</b>           | 1       | 365     | 34.8    | 6      |
| <b>All Participants</b>                            | 1       | 365     | 53.1    | 10     |

Survey participants reported visiting the Minnesota River Valley during all months of the year and annual visitation patterns were similar across all participant groups. Figure 12 summarizes reported monthly visitation preferences. Note, the bars and corresponding values displayed in Figure 12 are not indicative of the number of trips per month; rather the percentage of survey participants who reported visiting the planning area in each month. More participants indicated they visited the planning area during the summer months (June, July, and August) compared to the rest of the year. They also reported slightly higher visitation during winter months (January and February), though these levels are only slightly higher than shoulder season months (e.g., March, April, October, November) and are substantially lower than the summer months.

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Figure 12. Monthly Visitation Preferences



On trips to the Minnesota River Valley, participants reported an average group size of about 3 (Table 3). The median group size was different for each participant group (2 for participants from Redwood and Renville counties, and 3 for those from other locations), as well as the range of group sizes (1 to 7 compared to 1 to 12). This difference may be due to the nature of the planning area as a local amenity for participants from Redwood and Renville counties compared to a destination for participants from other locations. That is, group size may be larger for participants from other locations since they may be more likely to travel with friends and family to a destination. In comparison, those participants from Redwood and Renville counties may be more inclined to make routine trips with smaller groups since the planning area and its amenities represent a local, close-to-home opportunity.

Table 3. Number of People per Trip

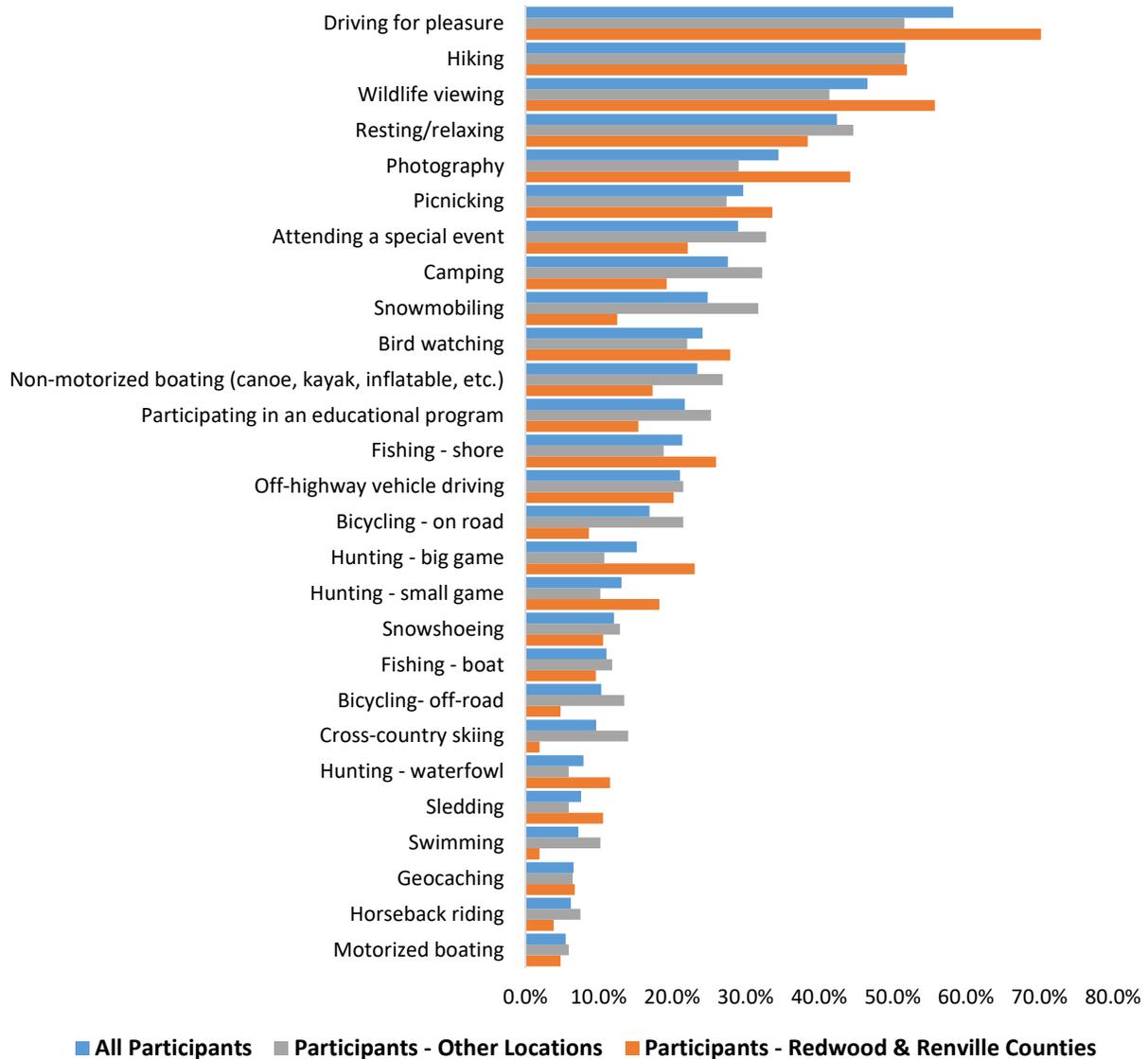
|   | Minimum | Maximum | Average | Median |
|---|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| Participants from Redwood/Renville Counties | 1       | 7       | 2.9     | 2      |
| Participants from Other Locations           | 1       | 12      | 3.3     | 3      |
| All Participants                            | 1       | 12      | 3.1     | 3      |

During their trips to the Minnesota River Valley, respondents indicated they participated in a range of outdoor recreation activities. Figure 13 displays activity preferences for survey participants (note: survey participants could

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select multiple activities in their response to this question). The top three activities for all survey participants were driving for pleasure (58.3%), hiking (51.7%), and wildlife viewing (46.6%).

**Figure 13. Activity Preferences**



The top three activities for participants from Redwood and Renville counties were driving for pleasure (70.2%), wildlife viewing (55.8%), and hiking (51.9%). The top three activities for participants from other locations are similar and include driving for pleasure (51.6%), hiking (51.6%), and resting/relaxing (44.6%). Resting/relaxing may be a top activity for participants from other locations seeing as the planning area is a destination (i.e., perceived as a

vacation/get-away area) as opposed to a local amenity for these participants. That said, more than a third (38.5%) of participants from Redwood and Renville counties also identified resting/relaxing as an activity they participate in while in the planning area. So, locals may also identify the planning area as a place to get away from their normal routine for relaxation purposes.

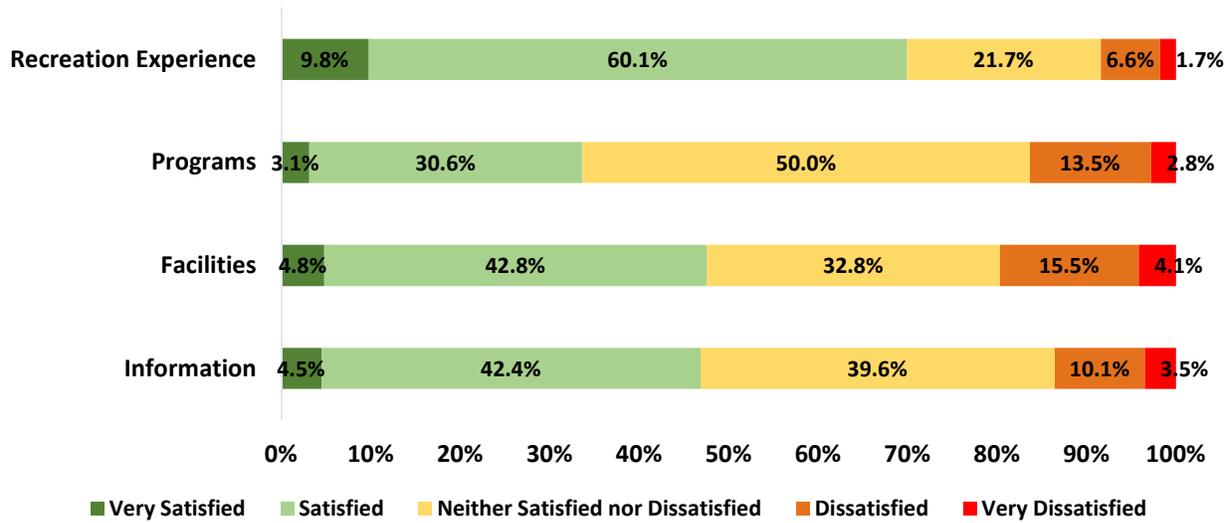
### **Satisfaction**

Finally, participants in the public survey were also asked about their satisfaction with several elements of their experience in the Minnesota River Valley, as well as potential enhancements that would increase their satisfaction/enjoyment. Figure 14 displays participant satisfaction with their overall recreation experience, as well as with the information, facilities, and programs currently available in the planning area. In general, the majority of participants were satisfied (combined “very satisfied” and “satisfied” response categories) with the overall recreation experience. However, participants indicated reduced satisfaction levels with specific elements of their recreation experience. More than half of the participants were either neutral (i.e., neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) or dissatisfied (combined “dissatisfied” and “very dissatisfied” response categories) with the current programs (e.g., historical tours, environmental education, etc.), facilities, and information (e.g., website, maps, brochures, etc.) in the planning area. The survey did not ask participants specifically about their awareness or experience with these elements of their recreation experience so the high “neutral” ratings may indicate a lack of awareness/experience or simply a neutral rating. In either case, there is likely room for improvement in the planning area’s programs, facilities, and information.

Figures 15 through 18 summarize participant satisfaction levels specifically with information, facilities, programs, and the overall recreation experience in the planning area (by Redwood/Renville County and other location participants). In general, most participants tended to be satisfied with their overall recreation experience (Figure 15), as well as with the facilities in the planning area (Figure 17). Participants from other locations were more likely to be satisfied with information in the planning area compared to participants from Redwood and Renville counties (Figure 16). Both participant groups had neutral (i.e., neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) satisfaction ratings for programs (Figure 18). From a customer experience and information standpoint, neutral ratings may be indicative of areas of potential growth and improvement.

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Figure 14. Satisfaction – All Participants



The potential for improved facilities and information is echoed in the open-ended responses participants provided about potential improvements or enhancements to their recreation experience. While participants provided a range of ideas, the top three items that would help make their recreation experiences in the Minnesota River Valley more special included improved/enhanced information, more hiking and biking trails, and more OHV trails/park. Table 4 provides a summary list of potential enhancements. Note, only those comments made by three or more participants are included and uncategorized comments (i.e., those comments that did not contain a specific suggestion or address a specific topic) are not included in the totals provided in Table 4. All open-ended responses to this question are provided in Appendix 2.

**Table 4. Summary of Potential Recreation Enhancements**

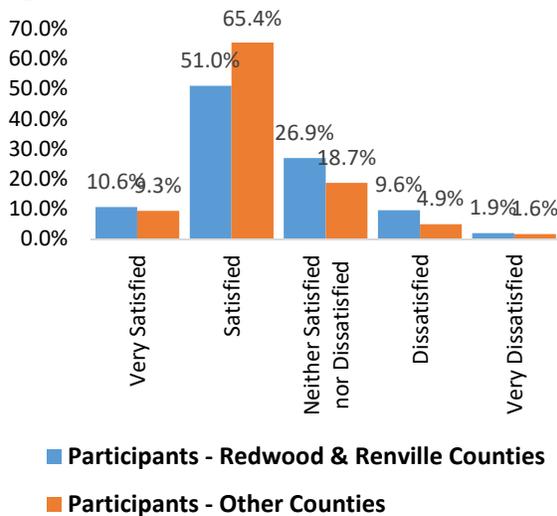
| Category/Summarized Comments                 | Number of Similar Comments |
|--|----------------------------|
| Improved/enhanced information                | 20                         |
| More hiking/biking trails                    | 20                         |
| More OHV trails/park                         | 13                         |
| Improved roads                               | 8                          |
| Increased river access (boating and fishing) | 8                          |
| Maintain public lands                        | 5                          |
| More horseback riding trails                 | 3                          |
| More snowmobile trails                       | 3                          |

Another indicator of overall satisfaction is the percentage of survey participants who would recommend a trip to the Minnesota River Valley to a

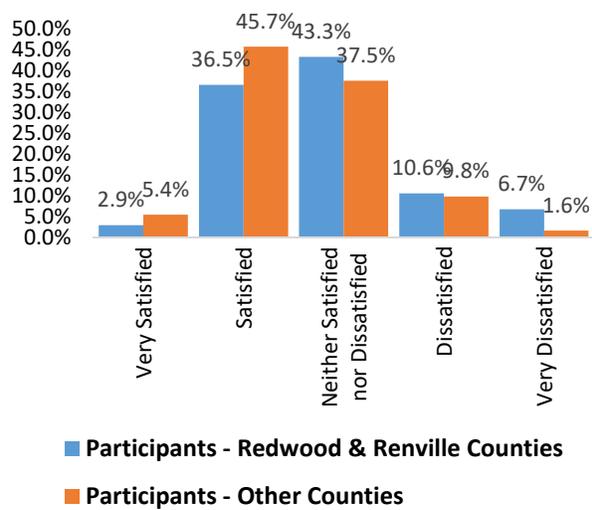
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family member, friend, or colleague. Survey participants provided an average score of 8 on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not at all likely” and 10 being “extremely likely,” when asked how likely they would be to recommend the area to a family member, friend, or colleague. In total, more than 79 percent of survey participants provided a score of 7 or higher on this scale. So, while other survey responses indicate that there is room for improvement with certain aspects of the recreational experience in the Minnesota River Valley, the overall experience is enjoyable and worth recommending. This knowledge may be leveraged to encourage current visitors to share their experiences, and create excitement and positive perceptions of the area for potential visitors.

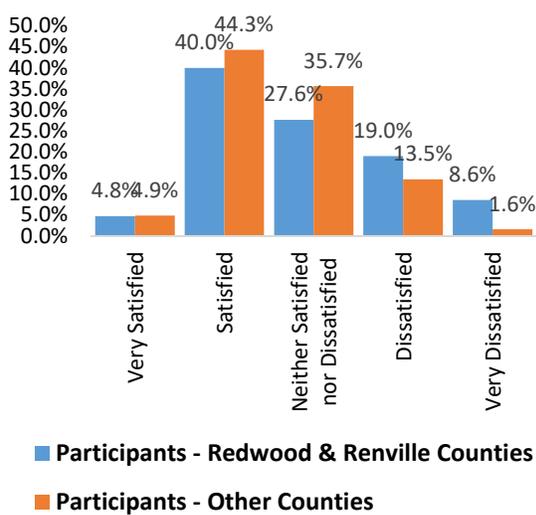
**Figure 15. Satisfaction – Overall Experience**



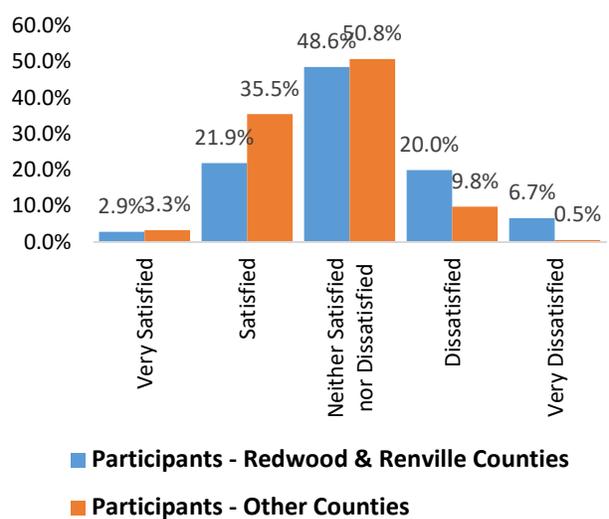
**Figure 16. Satisfaction – Information**



**Figure 17. Satisfaction – Facilities**



**Figure 18. Satisfaction – Programs**



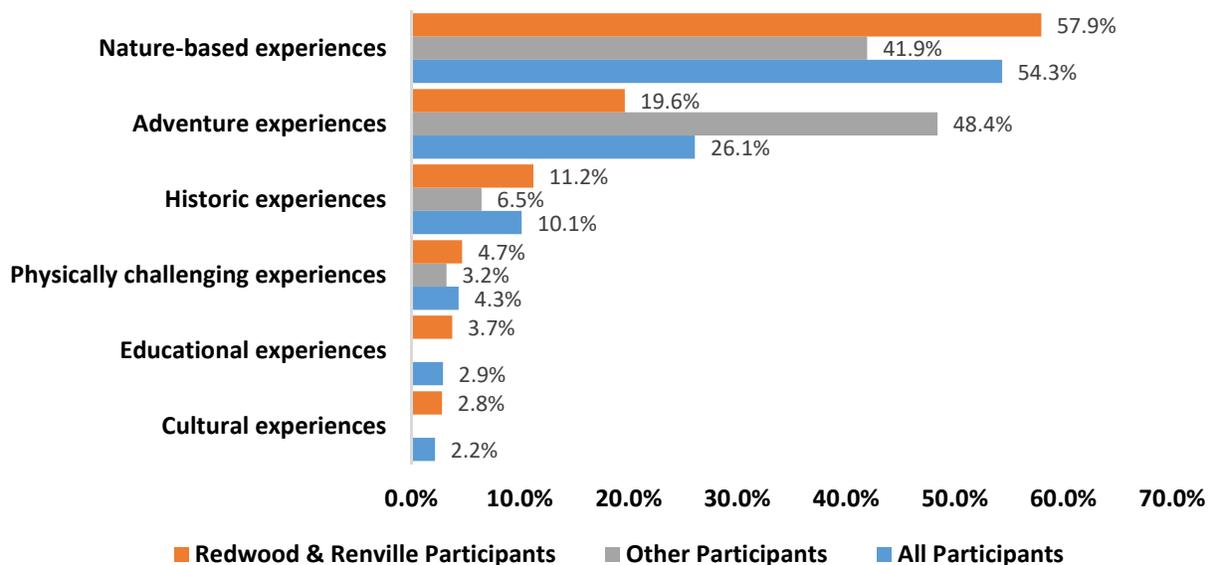
## Participant Input and Priorities for the Planning Process

Several of the survey questions asked participants about their preferences and priorities regarding recreation and conservation in the Minnesota River Valley. This type of information can be used to help develop the goals, objectives, and actions of the Master Plan. As noted previously, these survey results should be considered along with all of the other data and information to help inform the decision-making process of the Master Plan.

### Desired Experiences and Benefits

Participants in the survey were asked about the types of experiences they prioritize, in particular when visiting the Minnesota River Valley. “Nature-based experiences” were the clear “top” experience for all survey participants (54.3%), with survey participants from Redwood and Renville counties identifying “nature-based experiences” as their top priority (57.9%). The second most prioritized type of experience was “adventure experiences” for all participants. Adventure experiences were also the top priority for survey participants from other locations (48.4%). Figure 19 provides a summary of experience priorities for all survey participants, as well as those from Redwood and Renville counties and those from other locations.

**Figure 19. Prioritized Experiences**

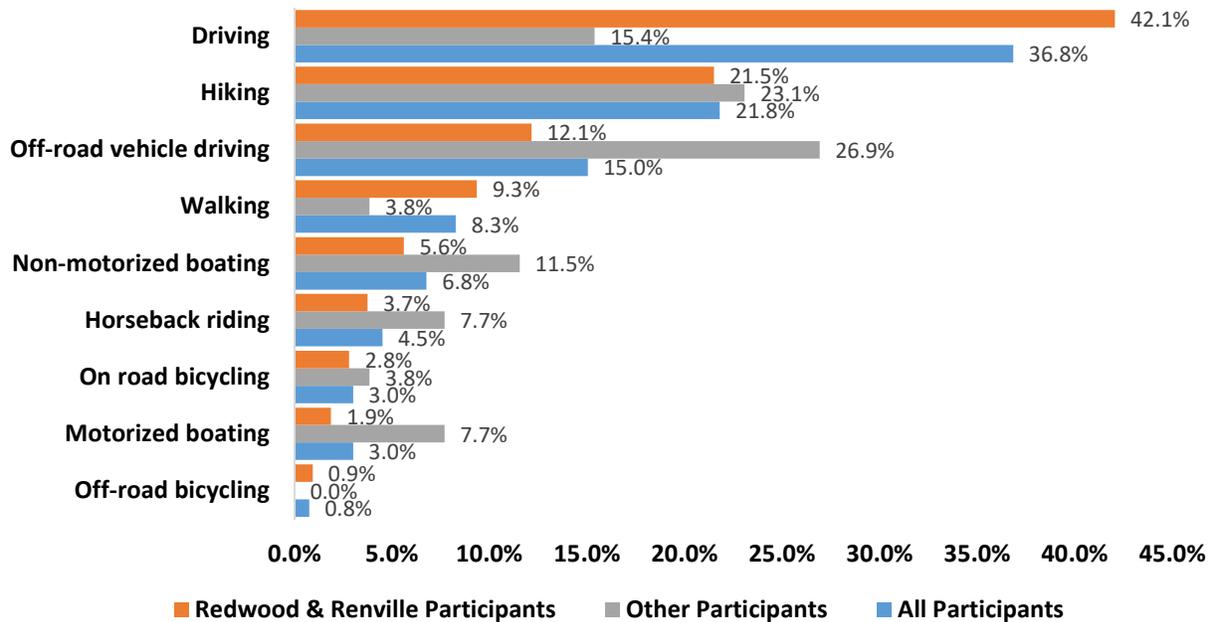


Another component of the recreation experience is the mode of travel by which participants engage in the experience. For survey participants, “driving” was

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their preferred mode of travel (36.8%). The next two most preferred modes of travel for all survey participants included hiking (21.8%) and off-road vehicle driving (15%). Participants from Redwood and Renville counties generally preferred driving (42.1%), while visitors from other locations indicated a preference for off-road vehicle driving (26.9%) and hiking (23.1%). Figure 20 shows mode of travel preference for survey participants.

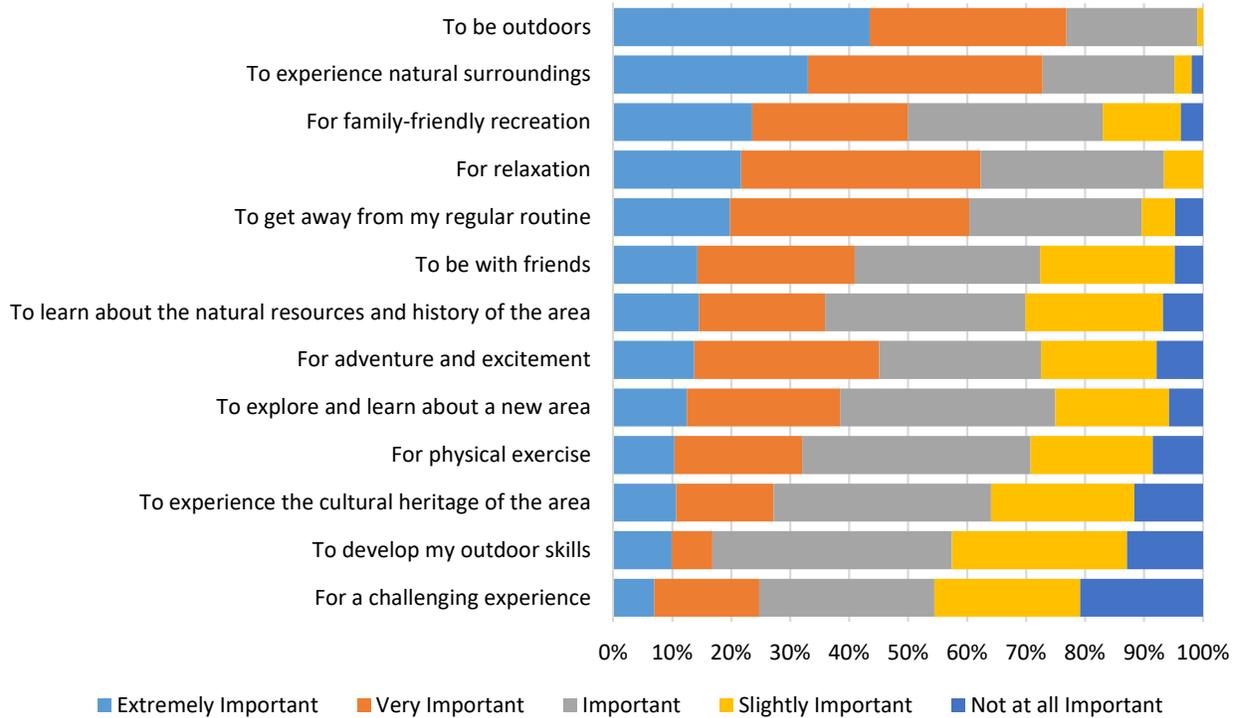
**Figure 20. Preferred Modes of Travel**



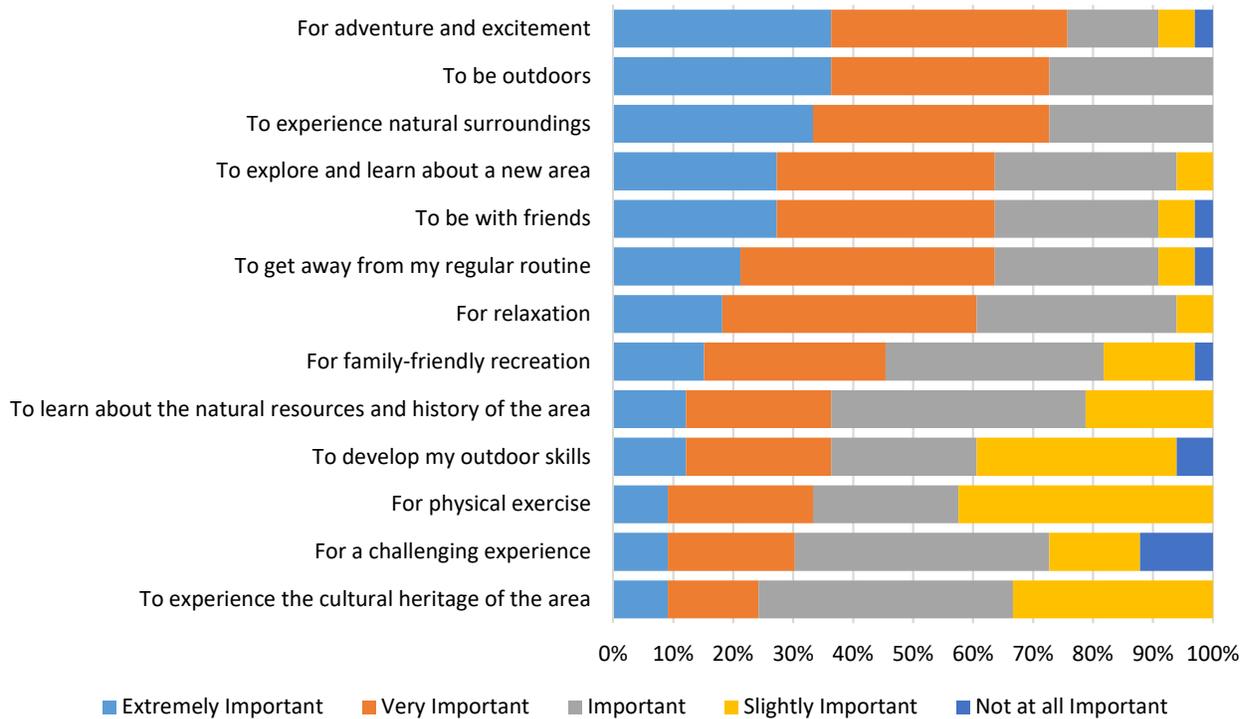
Participants in the survey were asked about the benefits of their recreational experiences. This question was phrased specific to the planning area for participants who self-identified as being from Redwood and Renville counties, while participants from other locations were asked more generally what benefits they look for from their outdoor recreation experiences. Overall, each of the benefits listed under this question received the support of more than 50 percent of participants (combined “extremely important,” “very important,” and “important” response categories). This points to multiple reasons or motivations behind why participants engage in outdoor recreation, in particular in the Minnesota River Valley. Figures 21 (participants from Redwood and Renville) and 22 (participants from other locations) show the levels of support for each outdoor recreation benefit.

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**Figure 21. Importance Levels with Outdoor Recreation Benefits – Redwood and Renville County**



**Figure 22. Importance Levels with Outdoor Recreation Benefits – Other Locations**



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Interestingly, both participants from Redwood and Renville counties, as well as those from other locations selected the same two “top” benefits: “to be outdoors” and “to experience natural surroundings.” Each of these benefits had the highest combined levels of importance (again, combined “extremely important,” “very important,” and “important” response categories). Focusing just on the “extremely important” response category reveals a slight difference between survey participants from Redwood and Renville counties and those participants from other locations. Both groups included “to be outdoors” and “to experience natural surroundings” in their top three benefits; however, participants from Redwood and Renville counties rounded out their top three benefits with “for family-friendly recreation,” while participants from other locations included “for adventure and excitement” in their top three “extremely important” benefits.

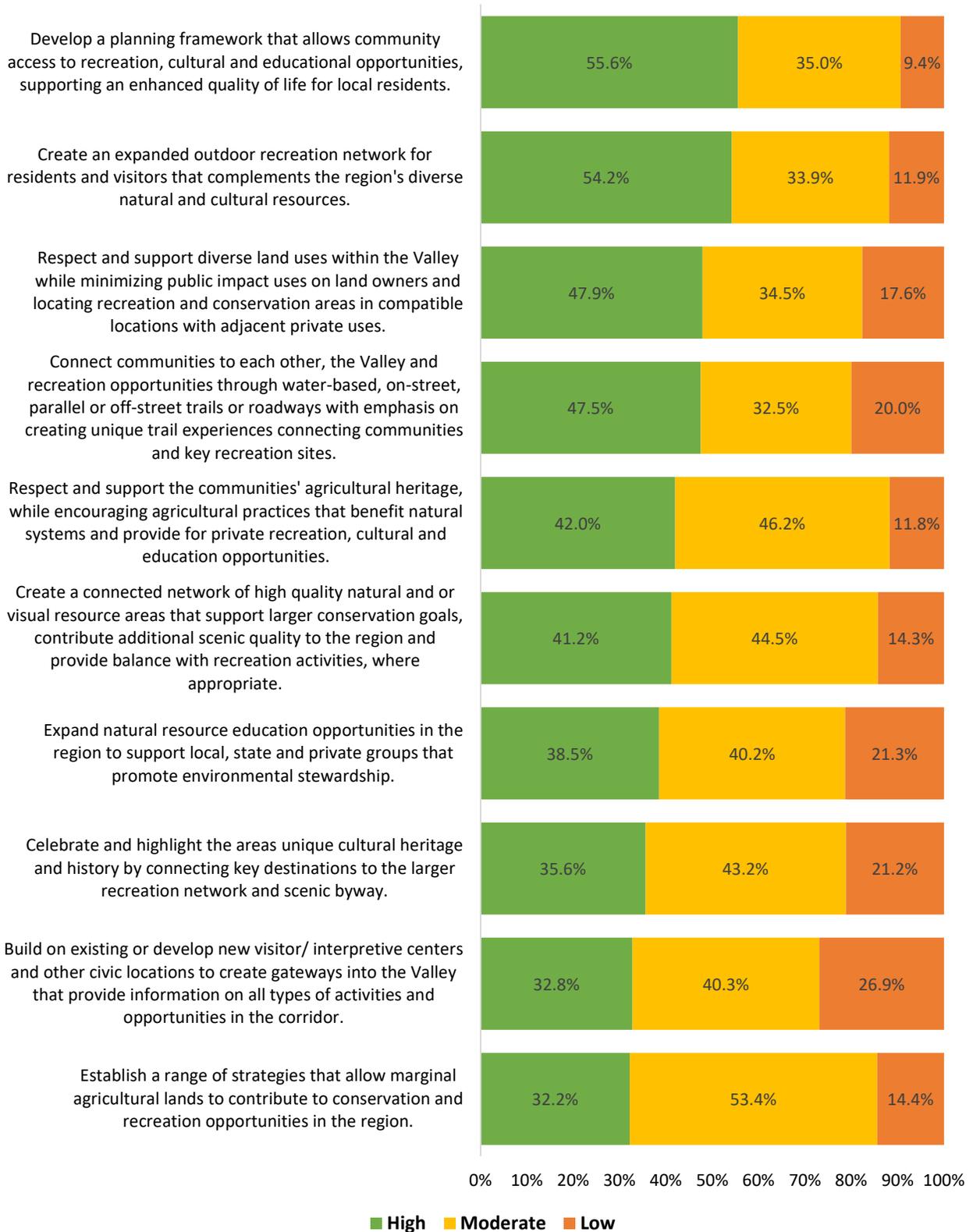
Looking at the slight or no interest categories also highlights other similarities and differences between survey participants from Redwood and Renville counties and those from other locations. Specifically, both groups placed lower importance on developing outdoor skills and experiencing the cultural heritage of the area. Both of these benefits were in the bottom three in terms of overall importance (combined “slightly important” and “not at all important” response categories) for each group of participants. The least important benefit (again, as gaged by the total combined “slightly important” and “not at all important” categories) was difference for each group. Participants from Redwood and Renville county placed the least importance on a challenging experience, while participants from other locations placed the least importance on physical exercise.

### **Prioritization of Master Plan Goals**

Survey participants from Redwood and Renville counties were asked a series of questions pertaining specifically to the Master Plan. These questions were targeted to local residents (i.e., survey participants living in Redwood and Renville counties) given their role in helping to develop, support, and subsequently implement the Master Plan. Participants were asked to identify a priority level (high, moderate, low) for each of the potential Master Plan goals listed in this question. Figure 23 summarizes the goal priorities of survey participants. The top two goals, as gaged by the percent of respondents indicating they were a “high” priority included:

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**Figure 23. Prioritization of Master Plan Goals**



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1. Develop a planning framework that allows community access to recreation, cultural and educational opportunities, supporting an enhanced quality of life for local residents (55.6%), and
2. Create an expanded outdoor recreation network for residents and visitors that complements the region's diverse natural and cultural resources (54.2%).

While assessing the list of goals from the perspective of “high priority” ranking focuses on the most important goals to survey participants, it is also informative to look at the goals in terms of broadest support (i.e., combined “high” and “moderate” priority response categories) or in other words, those goals with the lowest levels of “low priority” responses. Looking at the results through this lens, highlights three other goals (in addition to the two listed above) that received broad support from survey participants. These include:

1. Respect and support the communities' agricultural heritage, while encouraging agricultural practices that benefit natural systems and provide for private recreation, cultural and education opportunities (low priority - 11.8%),
2. Create a connected network of high quality natural and or visual resource areas that support larger conservation goals, contribute additional scenic quality to the region and provide balance with recreation activities, where appropriate (low priority - 14.3%), and
3. Establish a range of strategies that allow marginal agricultural lands to contribute to conservation and recreation opportunities in the region (low priority - 14.4%).

Overall, the participants’ prioritization of Master Plan goals points to a desire to enhance the existing outdoor recreation opportunities within the planning area, while recognizing and protecting the agricultural heritage and practices that have traditionally defined the area.

### **Support and Prioritization of Conservation Measures**

Survey participants from Redwood and Renville counties were also asked about their conservation priorities for the Minnesota River Valley. This question was split into two parts: 1) the first part asked about the adequacy of current conservation measures, and 2) the second part asked about prioritizing potential new conservation measures. Note, only those respondents who

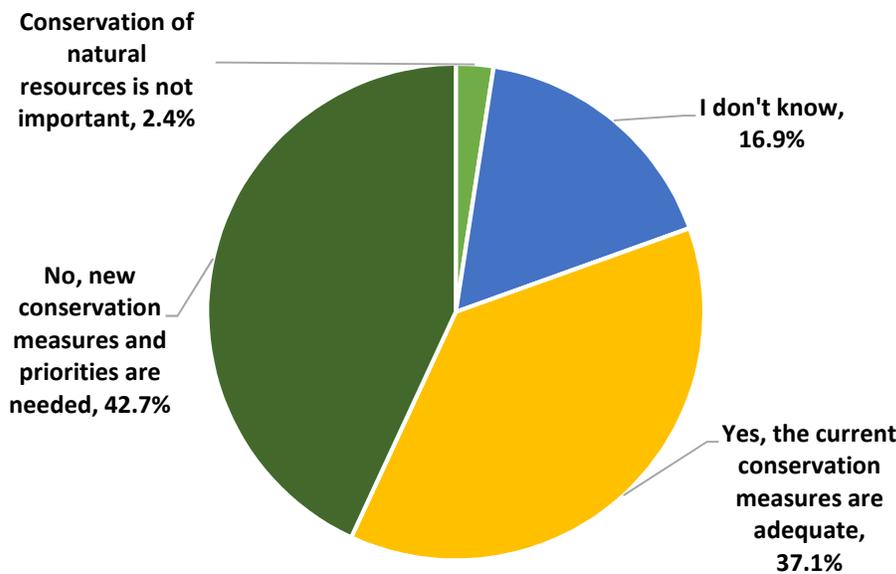
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indicated that new conservation measures were needed answered the second part of this question.

A plurality of participants (42.7%) indicated that new conservation measures and priorities are needed in the Minnesota River Valley. More than one-third of respondents thought that the current conservation measures are adequate to protect important natural resources in the Valley. Figure 24 summarizes participant responses regarding the adequacy of current conservation measures.

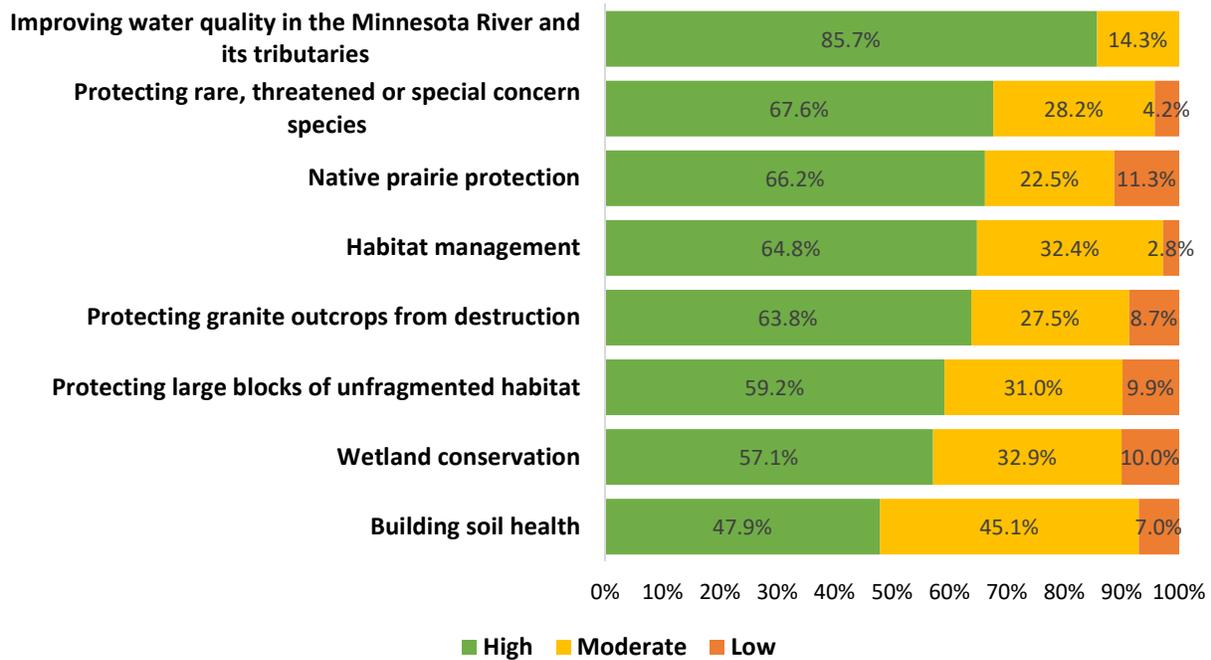
**Figure 24. Adequacy of Current Conservation Measures**



For those participants who indicated that new conservation measures are needed, a majority (85.7%) identified improving water quality as a high priority measure (no respondents indicated this as a low priority measure). Most of the potential measures ranked high in terms of overall support (combined “high” and “moderate” priority), with native prairie protection as the only potential measure being identified by slightly more than 11 percent as a low priority. The only potential measure to be identified as a high priority by less than 50 percent of participants was building soil health. That said, this measure still received a high degree of overall support (again, combined “high” and “moderate” priority response categories). Figure 25 displays prioritized support for the potential conservation measures that may be included/addressed in the Master Plan.

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Figure 25. Prioritization of Potential Conservation Measures



**Other Ideas and Input**

Survey participants were provided the opportunity to share other ideas and input they felt was important to consider in the development of the Master Plan. In total, approximately 133 participants wrote a response to this last request for information. The responses ranged from highly detailed with multiple suggestions to very brief with no actionable information. Several participants suggested a multi-use approach that acknowledges diverse recreation opportunities, but also the local communities and businesses in the planning area, as displayed in the following responses (slightly edited for reporting purposes):

*“Hiking, biking, off road ATV trails that connect towns would be great. Also, more campsites that could be set up for these types of trips with families or friends. Campsites with camp areas and fishing opportunities would draw a lot of people to this area if it was set up properly and bring a lot of business into these communities during summer months. Also, would make it a much more desirable area to live.”*

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*“I would like to see multi-use trails that include off-road vehicle trails. Destination trails are the best where a person or group of people can travel from town to town, possibly camp or hotel/motel in a town and learn about the cultural and historical aspects of the area. Designated trails for ATV’s keep riders on legal trails that are rider safe, sustainable, and enforceable. Keeping riders on designated trails helps protect the local forests, lakes, hills, etc. which is better than allowing people to travel at will on any portion of the Minnesota River Valley.”*

However, most of the comments were specific to an activity, facility, or other aspect of the recreation setting in the planning area (all comments/responses to this question are provided verbatim in Appendix 2). For reporting purposes, these comments were grouped into several categories. Each of these category types is listed in Table 4. Note, only those comments made by two or more participants are included in the table. Additionally, uncategorized comments (i.e., those comments that did not contain a specific suggestion or address a specific topic) are not included in the totals provided in Table 4.

**Table 4. Summary of Additional Ideas and Input**

| Category/Summarized Comments                                 | Number of Similar Comments |
|--|----------------------------|
| <u>Facilities (56.9% of responses)</u>                       |                            |
| Add ATV park/facilities                                      | 13                         |
| Add more trails - snowmobile                                 | 11                         |
| Add more trails - non-motorized                              | 9                          |
| Create multiple use trail system                             | 7                          |
| Keep golf course at Fort Ridgely open                        | 7                          |
| Add more trails - motorized                                  | 6                          |
| Connect towns to trails                                      | 4                          |
| Add new canoe/kayak access                                   | 4                          |
| Add more trails (general)                                    | 4                          |
| Add river camping  | 2                          |
| Add more trails - mountain biking                            | 2                          |
| Add more campsites   | 2                          |
| <u>Recreational Use (14.6% of responses)</u>                 |                            |
| Increase non-motorized recreation/limit motorized recreation | 8                          |
| <u>Nature/Environment (10.2% of responses)</u>               |                            |
| Conserve natural setting/preserve nature                     | 5                          |

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| <b>Category/Summarized Comments</b>                  | <b>Number of Similar Comments</b> |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Address pollution (river)                            | 5                                 |
| <u>Limit Development (5.1% of responses)</u>         |                                   |
| No new development                                   | 3                                 |
| Keep some undeveloped areas for recreation           | 2                                 |
| <u>Education and Information (5.1% of responses)</u> |                                   |
| Need better on-site information                      | 3                                 |
| Preserve Native American and early settler history   | 2                                 |
| <u>Maintenance (4.4% of responses)</u>               |                                   |
| Pave roads/Scenic Byway                              | 3                                 |
| <u>Promotion/Marketing (3.6% of responses)</u>       |                                   |
| Need increased marketing and promotion               | 3                                 |

Similar to many of the other survey responses, participants generally support additional recreation opportunities and associated enhancements in the planning area. The responses to this question also point to a shared desire among participants for the Master Plan to take a balanced approach to recreation, while protecting the natural setting and encouraging the vitality of local communities.

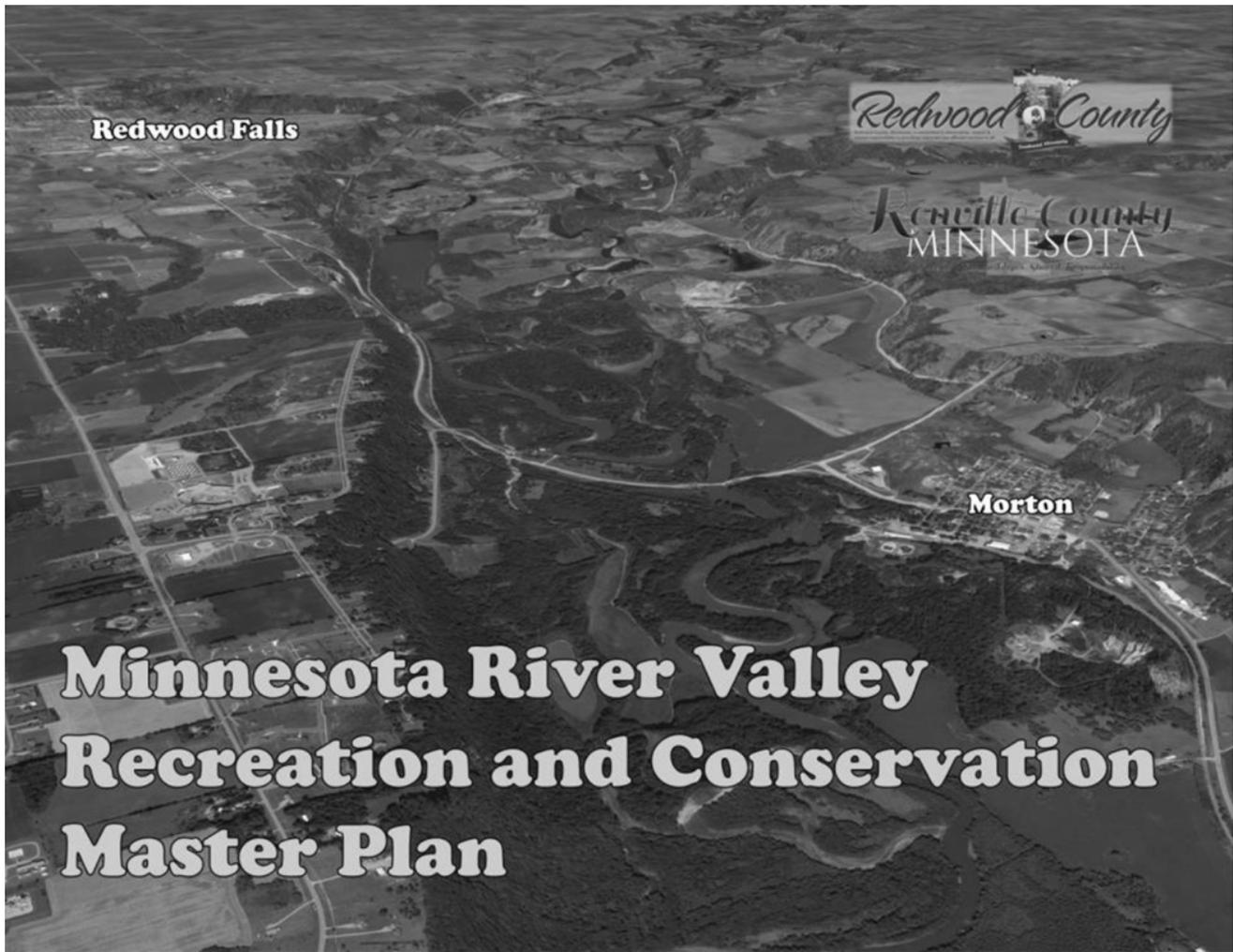
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# **Appendix 1**

## Survey Questions

*This appendix includes the public survey questions. The survey was administered online and the version included in this appendix was exported from the online survey tool. Note: the online version of the survey included skip-logic that is not captured in the exported version of the survey (i.e., all questions are provided, but without the skip-logic context).*



Renville and Redwood Counties, in collaboration with Minnesota DNR and other partners, are in the process of developing a Master Plan for recreation, conservation and preservation of heritage in the Minnesota River Valley. The Master Plan will inform and guide future investment and conservation decisions within the MN River Valley corridor. As part of the Master Plan development process, the project is conducting a public survey of both residents and potential visitors to the Minnesota River Valley corridor to understand your preferences on the future recreational, conservation and educational experiences.

Please visit the [project webpage](#) to better understand both the project and what the Minnesota River Valley has to offer. The [project webpage](#) includes a [map of the Master Plan Area](#), as well as [photos of the Valley](#). If you have other comments or input, please visit the [project webpage](#) for contact information.



## **Project Location**

*All answers and other information provided in this survey will be kept in strict confidence and will only be used in statistical combination with all others who provide responses.*

To begin the survey, please click "Next" below.

\* 1. Do you currently live in Minnesota?

Yes

No

\* 2. In which county do you live?

Renville County

Redwood County

Other (please specify)

3. In what State (or Country) do you live?

4. One of the purposes of the Minnesota River Valley Recreation and Conservation Master Plan is to create a shared vision for the Valley as an outdoor recreation, cultural, and natural heritage destination. This purpose can be achieved through a mix of opportunities. Please indicate a priority level for each of the Master Plan goals listed below.

|  | Low Priority          | Moderate Priority     | High Priority         |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Create an expanded outdoor recreation network for residents and visitors that complements the region's diverse natural and cultural resources.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Establish a range of strategies that allow marginal agricultural lands to contribute to conservation and recreation opportunities in the region.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Respect and support the communities' agricultural heritage, while encouraging agricultural practices that benefit natural systems and provide for private recreation, cultural and education opportunities.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Develop a planning framework that allows community access to recreation, cultural and educational opportunities, supporting an enhanced quality of life for local residents.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Build on existing or develop new visitor/ interpretive centers and other civic locations to create gateways into the Valley that provide information on all types of activities and opportunities in the corridor.                                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Connect communities to each other, the Valley and recreation opportunities through water-based, on-street, parallel or off-street trails or roadways with emphasis on creating unique trail experiences connecting communities and key recreation sites. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Expand natural resource education opportunities in the region to support local, state and private groups that promote environmental stewardship.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Celebrate and highlight the areas unique cultural heritage and history by connecting key destinations to the larger recreation network and scenic byway.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Respect and support diverse land uses within the Valley while minimizing public impact uses on land owners and locating recreation and conservation areas in compatible locations with adjacent private uses.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Create a connected network of high quality natural and or visual resource areas that support larger conservation goals, contribute additional scenic quality to the region and provide balance with recreation activities, where appropriate.            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

5. Another purpose of the Master Plan is to address conservation priorities in the Valley. In your opinion, are the current conservation measures adequate to protect important natural resources in the Valley?

- Yes, the current conservation measures are adequate.
- No, new conservation measures and priorities are needed
- Conservation of natural resources is not important.
- I don't know.

6. Please indicate a priority level for each of the conservation measures listed below.

|  | Low priority          | Moderate priority     | High priority         |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Wetland conservation   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Protecting rare, threatened or special concern species             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Native prairie protection  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Habitat management   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Building soil health   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Protecting large blocks of unfragmented habitat                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Improving water quality in the Minnesota River and its tributaries | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Protecting granite outcrops from destruction                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other (please specify)

7. How familiar are you with the outdoor recreation, cultural/heritage, and other tourism opportunities in the Minnesota River Valley?

- Extremely familiar
- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Not so familiar
- Not at all familiar

8. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the Minnesota River Valley region?

9. In your words, what makes the Minnesota River Valley region unique?

10. How familiar are you with the outdoor recreation, cultural/heritage, and other tourism opportunities in the Minnesota River Valley?

- Extremely familiar
- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Not so familiar
- Not at all familiar

11. Which terms best describe the Minnesota River Valley? (select 3)

|                            | First                 | Second                | Third                 |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Scenic                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Outdoor paradise           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Great place to escape      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Charming local communities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Rural                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Full of history/heritage   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Remote                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Friendly                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Fun                        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Family-oriented            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Boring                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Lots to do                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Nothing to do              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Other (please specify)

12. In the past 12 months, have you visited the Minnesota River Valley?

Yes

No

13. How many times did you visit the Minnesota River Valley in the previous 12 months?

14. During which months did you visit the Minnesota River Valley? (check all that apply)

January

July

February

August

March

September

April

October

May

November

June

December

15. On a typical trip to the Minnesota River Valley, how many people are in your group?

16. What activities do you typically participate in while visiting the Minnesota River Valley? (check all that apply)

Non-motorized boating (canoe, kayak, inflatable, etc.)

Photography

Geocaching

Motorized boating

Picnicking

Camping

Driving for pleasure

Resting/relaxing

Snowmobiling

Fishing - shore

Hiking

Cross-country skiing

Fishing - boat

Off-highway vehicle driving

Snowshoeing

Hunting - waterfowl

Bird watching

Sledding

Hunting - small game

Horseback riding

Bicycling - on road

Hunting - big game

Attending a special event

Bicycling- off-road

Wildlife viewing

Participating in an educational program

Swimming

Other (please specify)

17. Overall, how satisfied are you with the following elements of your current recreational experiences in the Minnesota River Valley?

|  | Very dissatisfied     | Dissatisfied          | Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | Satisfied             | Very satisfied        |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Information (e.g., website, maps, brochures, etc.)               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Facilities (e.g., campgrounds, trails, boat launches, etc.)      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Programs (e.g., historical tours, environmental education, etc.) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Overall experience   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

18. What enhancements to the Minnesota River Valley would make your recreation experience more special?

19. Why not?

20. How likely are you to visit the Minnesota River Valley in the next 12 months?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Moderately likely
- Slightly likely
- Not at all likely

21. In general, what type of experiences do you prioritize when selecting an outdoor recreation destination?  
(select one)

- Nature-based experiences
- Historic experiences
- Cultural experiences
- Adventure experience
- Physically challenging experiences
- Educational experiences
- Other (please specify)

22. What is your preferred mode of travel for the experience you indicated in the previous question?

- Driving
- Off-road vehicle driving
- Hiking
- Horseback riding
- Non-motorized boating
- Motorized boating
- Off-road bicycling
- On road bicycling
- Walking
- Other (please specify)

23. How important is each of the benefits listed below to you when choosing an outdoor recreation destination?

|  | Not at all important  | Slightly important    | Important             | Very important        | Extremely important   |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| To be outdoors   | <input type="radio"/> |
| To explore and learn about a new area                        | <input type="radio"/> |
| For relaxation   | <input type="radio"/> |
| To get away from my regular routine                          | <input type="radio"/> |
| For adventure and excitement                                 | <input type="radio"/> |
| For a challenging experience                                 | <input type="radio"/> |
| For family-friendly recreation                               | <input type="radio"/> |
| For physical exercise  | <input type="radio"/> |
| To be with friends   | <input type="radio"/> |
| To experience natural surroundings                           | <input type="radio"/> |
| To develop my outdoor skills                                 | <input type="radio"/> |
| To learn about the natural resources and history of the area | <input type="radio"/> |
| To experience the cultural heritage of the area              | <input type="radio"/> |

Other (please specify)

24. What type of experiences do you prioritize when selecting the Minnesota River Valley as an outdoor recreation destination? (select one)

- Nature-based experiences
- Historic experiences
- Cultural experiences
- Adventure experience
- Physically challenging experiences
- Educational experiences

Other (please specify)

25. What is your preferred mode of travel for the experience you indicated in the previous question?

- Driving
- Off-road vehicle driving
- Hiking
- Horseback riding
- Non-motorized boating
- Motorized boating
- Off-road bicycling
- On road bicycling
- Walking
- Other (please specify)



28. What is your gender?

Female

Male

29. What is your age?

under 19

20 to 24

25 to 29

30 to 34

35 to 39

40 to 44

45 to 49

50 to 54

55 to 59

60 to 64

65 to 69

70 to 74

75 to 79

80 or older

30. How many people currently live in your household?

31. What is your approximate average household income?

\$0-\$24,999

\$25,000-\$49,999

\$50,000-\$74,999

\$75,000-\$99,999

\$100,000-\$124,999

\$125,000-\$149,999

\$150,000-\$174,999

\$175,000-\$199,999

\$200,000 and up

32. What is your postal Zip code?

33. Please use this space to share any other ideas, thoughts, or comments related to the development of the Minnesota River Valley Master Plan.

34. If you are interested in joining the electronic mailing list to receive updates on this project, please enter your name and email address below (all names and emails will be stored separately from survey responses and kept confidential).

Name

Email

## **Appendix 2**

### Open-Ended Survey Responses

*Participant responses to the public survey's open-ended questions are provided in this appendix.  
These responses have not been edited or modified.*

## What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the Minnesota River Valley region?

- "River bottom cruise" Our family has always enjoyed the river valley as it is part of my history and we live so close to it. I hear a new story every time I take this road with one of my parents.
- A lot of WMA areas that are restricted for multiple uses.
- A region or area that most people do not know what is hidden out there in the river valley. Such poor access to the river valley most people have no idea how many neat things are right out there back door.
- A road that needs to be paved to permit bikers and motorcycles to enjoy the valley.
- Agriculture
- An area of beauty that would be enjoyed by many more people if it was linked together with tarred roads.
- beautiful scenery-abundant wildlife-
- Beautiful valley, but polluted river.
- Beauty!
- Big Eddy
- canoe and kayak
- Canoeing the river; natural areas & habitat loss; historical value to the State & Nation.
- Catfish
- Catfish
- Catfish days in Franklin using river for having fun!!it
- DakotaConflict
- Dakotah Conflict of 1962
- Dakotatribes. Proper perspective on plaques and signs referencing the Dakotaconflict. Not war not uprising. Telling the truth from the Dakotaperspective. The entire river valley was the Dakotahomeland. They lived on both sides of the valley. I just wondering how much does are being ruined and destroyed are you going to preserve Dakotamedicinal and say redwood plants. Posters signs about significance of plants the Dakotatranslation.
- DakotaUprising - historic site.
- don't know
- driving in the river valley - the views
- fall color
- farming
- Fishing
- Fishing
- fishing and eagle watching
- Fishing and snowmobiling are excellent ways to observe wildlife. There is also an abundance of rock that could be used for infrastructure.

- Fishing, 4 wheel trails, park shelter
- Fishing, nice place to go and relax. Pretty
- Fort Ridgely
- Fort Ridgely
- Ft. Ridgley
- Home
- HOME!!!
- How beautiful it is in the valley
- In need of conservation protection
- Indians, nature, water
- It is my home. People that drive down my road and wreck it by destroying the road with their vehicles or destroy fences that farmers use are not punished harsh enough. The DNR owns TOO MUCH LAND already in Redwood - so much land that 1 Conservation Officer couldn't possibly keep up with enforcement and maintenance of all the property. Please, please get under control what is already owned before you decide to incorporate MORE unpatrolled, unenforced areas.
- IT'S BEAUTY
- Minnesota River
- Minnesota River and the wetlands around it.
- Mn river
- Mud
- Native Americans
- natural beauty
- Natural Beauty
- Natural beauty. Lots of trees, rock formations, some wetlands and others that contrasts starkly with the surrounding agricultural mono-culture.
- Naturally beautiful and untouched
- Nature, wildlife, history
- only meaningful habitat/recreation area available in a extremely converted region of the state.
- Parks and lack information on them. No access to the river.
- peace and quiet
- peace and quiet, solitude
- Peaceful area
- Peaceful area where one could go to enjoy nature. People have for years gone to the river bottom to clear their head and get away. It has an energy that restores the soul.
- Peaceful enjoy the bald eagles go camping 4 wheeling look at trees reunions having fun
- peaceful, quiet, sounds of nature
- Poor roads! Bad road ditch management!

- Pristine wilderness that needs to be left as is. We don't need the MN DNR to waste more money buying land that no one uses. It's a sad waste of public funds. You don't consider developing the BWCA so don't do it here !!
- Quiet evenings.
- Ramsey Park
- Recreation
- River
- river bottom roads
- river, hunting, natural habitat
- rock outcrops
- Scenic
- Scenic and diverse
- Scenic and peaceful
- Scenic and the only large block of wildlife habitat in SW MN.
- scenic beauty of the area
- Scenic Byway
- scenic drive on roads and through parks on ATVs.
- Sioux uprising
- Slow winding trails beside a slow winding river
- sunday drives in river vally
- The beautiful scenery and the granite outcrops.
- The beauty
- The beauty & tranquility. It's so pretty and peaceful.
- The beauty of the area
- The county parks
- The glacier formed landscape and the uniqueness and history of the valley
- The Minnesota River
- The Minnesota River, Dakotaheritage and mono-crop agriculture
- The MN river
- The Renville Parks, the Scenic Byway and the historical spots along the way.
- The River
- The river and scenic road plus all the wild life in it.
- The River Bottom area, County Parks along the river bottom.
- The river,the bridges that cross the river, and the towns that are along the river!
- The scenery of the valley
- The valleys and wildlife
- The vista views of land and wildlife.
- To use the area for Motor sports. More snowmobile trails and an ATV park.
- tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities
- Trees

- Undesterbed beauty is the reason I bought property here
- Various Renville Parks along the river, snowmobile trails, etc.
- Very scenic and unique area of the state needs to be preserved and great educational opportunity and Indian History 1
- We need to stop adding chemicals and silt to the river from fields, it was once a clean, sandy bottomed river.
- west of fort ridgelyit is not even talked about
- Wildlife

### **In your words, what makes the Minnesota River Valley region unique?**

- A natural mix of Agriculture and wilderness areas and should be left as is.
- American Indians used the valley as the center of thier lives because it contained most everything that they needed to survive including shelter from storms.
- Amount of Rim/CRP/CREP acres.
- Beautiful nature. Very historic (especially to a lot of families who live near the valley) Peaceful. Animals galore.
- Beautiful scenery
- constant changes
- Dakotaculture
- Dakotapeople were killed. camps were raided so this land could be stolen. Horrific things were done to the Dakotathat should be common knowledge. But this is not the case. MN river has the highest level of pesticides. Highest numbers for turbidity. Highest levels of e coli bacteria. The river is at times not even at safe levels of recommended exposure limits. It's the most polluted river in MN. The third most polluted river in the nation. Now those caregivers that need to be improved.
- Different than the surrounding area
- different world 6 miles from home
- Diverse and friendly people enjoying natural life
- Diversity of natural resources found in the valley.
- granite outcroppings along the valley
- grasses, wild flowers, wildlife!! aquatic species, bugs, parks, state WIA for hunting, everything that you would never really see in cities that don't have a river valley near them. The list could go on and on!
- Great River Warren, Granite Rock Outcrops, Native history, wilderness experience in the south western part of the state.
- Green in spring and summer, beautiful fall colors in autumn. Peaceful and reverent. Where you go to get away from the hustle and bustle of every day.
- Heavily wooded river bottom surrounded by agriculture
- History

- History ... Natural, cultural, & US.
- Horse trails
- How it was formed and the ever changing from year to year
- If the roads in Renville were paved like they are in other countys!
- It has beautiful scenery, great fishing that is hard to access. Creating some recreational paths along the river valley should become a priority and would make this are much more desirable to live
- It is a place that has a lot of diferant things to do!!
- It is no commercil
- it is the biggest thing in southwest mn.
- It sets within a very highly productive farm community which has drained most of the original wetlands.
- IT'S BEAUTY AND EASE OF ACCESS TO ENJOY.
- It's beauty and history.
- It's beauty that needs to be enjoyed.
- Its close to many small cites.
- It's diverse beauty
- It's glacial and geological history
- It's peacefullness
- its really no different than any other river valley region
- It's the only "non-flat" area in this region. Those hills provide opportunities for recreation that are not available in many other areas of this region.
- Landscape
- Large
- Locality and oppportunity
- Many things to do fishing rich Indian history Agriculture wildlife scenic etc
- native americans
- Natural beauty created by ancient River Warren.
- Natural resource close to home
- no opinion
- Our history, the natural beauty of the area, the actual valley itself - and not the flat plains in other parts of MN
- out door fun
- Parks and river
- peace and quiet, solitude
- Pivotal battles and events of the DakotaWar occurred there.
- recreation choices
- river valley surrounded by miles of fields
- rocks, trees,habitat, fishing, and a gateway for wildlife to move.
- Scenery

- Scenic, but still user friendly
- Scenic, wildlife, river
- seeing bald eagles is not unusual!
- Soil & Wildlife
- The activities that can be had there.
- The age of the valley; connection to the Agassiz major event; eceological variety & diversity; outdoor hiking, hunting, water opportunities
- The beautiful scenery and the granite outcrops.
- The beautiful setting
- The beauty of the natural landscape.
- The beauty of the river bottom
- The beauty of the trees and ponds, also the historical sites.
- The bluffs, trees, and ravines. The large CREP parcels
- The combination of an important history (the DakotaConflict) and it's scenic value.
- The diverse geological landscape
- The fact that it is undiscovered by many of the people who live in this are.
- The fact that the Minnesota River begins and ends with a wildlife refuge. That you can paddle the river and rarely see another paddler. The bald eagles and other wildlife all along the river.
- The granite rock outcrops are so unique in this part of the state.
- The history from glacial river Warren to present. And the beauty.
- The history of how the valley was formed; the history of the settlement of the valley; and the many recreational opportunities that are possible here.
- The history of our area and the connection to the land. People are out and about in our area and care about our land.
- The landscape
- The Nature and trails around. Also the way it was formed and the different features within the rocks in County parks that are fun to see.
- the only terrain relief in SW mn,
- The resources, both animal and rock that is available.
- the river
- The river aND the views.
- The river and the eagles
- The river would enjoy more places to go 4 wheeling the bluffs the history sand bars
- The terrain - the opportunities that exist for many various uses by various groups (working together, of course)
- the trees, valley and landscape, rocks
- The unpatrolled areas. The overgrown, unmaintained properties that are owned by the State/ DNR.
- The valley itself

- The variety of scenery and state/county parks
- The volcanic eruption that gave us the gneiss, the glacial aquatic eruption that unveiled and created a unique ecological system and the cultural eruption that gives us a unique cultural history of conflict and a century and a half of ongoing reconciliation.
- The wild life
- Topography and scenery amongst flat farmland of SW MN
- Trees and water. An area that should be accessed more by motorized vehicles.
- Upper Sioux reservation. Lower Sioux reservation. Granite quarries.
- Valley's and prairie land
- Very diverse area for many purposes.
- Warer

**What enhancements to the Minnesota River Valley would make your recreation experience more special?**

- 45 mph tared road
- An ATV park and trails
- An updated river road through Renville County, it's the only county without a tared road.
- At the entrance to the parks and throughout the parks, a bigger/better visual map of the trails and roads or walking paths. Birch Coulee might have one where you can get a good history of the area. Every major road through the river bottom could have a huge sign that says You are now entering the beautiful Minnesota River Valley
- atv trails & snowmobile trails. also leaving private ownerships of land. there is plenty of dnr owned land that can be turned into what you are envisioning.
- ATV-UTV-Dirt Bike Park!
- being able to use dnr lands for horseback activities
- Better signage / more (controlled) areas to go off-road
- Boat landing by Franklin needs a proper toilet. Gravel part of Scenic Byway needs to be a hard surface for safety of tourists.
- Canoe and kayak launches and landings built. Paved bike trails. Fishing piers.
- Clean up/ maintain the land that is already owned. The way the current public land looks, you can't even walk through it without coming into contact with invasive weeds.
- Clear more trees, specifically cedar trees. They are NOT native to the river valley.
- connecting trails
- Development of ATV trails and parks. Possibly an adjacent campground.
- do not let trucks drive on scenic highway road

- everything is privately owned, nearly impossible to deer hunt and even access on shore fishing spots.
- Hiking and biking trails, which would create access. More and detailed information about what recreational opportunities are available. Opportunities to experience these things with others.
- I would like clearer maps of the area. Easier DNR website to see what is going on. Trails fixed after they have been washed out. I like the Fort Ridgely golfing
- I would like to see herds of Buffalo roaming through the valley.
- I would like to see more bike routes. Running on both sides of the river and also connecting Redwood and Renville counties via 101/1.
- If there is more public land to hunt and less "city" people hunting it.
- Inform
- It is a great area but is underutilized, under-promoted and could be so much more. Please consider adding bike trails through the area.
- join parks together with 4X4 & horse trails
- keeping commercial development out
- Keeping the Fort Ridgely golf course open. More historical interpretation at Upper Sioux State park.
- launches and landings for canoe and kayak on the Minnesota and 5 major tributaries so that they can be utilized better. Also parking for vehicles other than along the side of the road. Wider shoulders on the roads for biking.
- Leave it alone
- less dust bike trails
- Maintain the facilities that are there. Improve user experience with improved signage or branding the MN River Valley experience.
- Make Fort Ridgely look like a fort by restoring at least some of the buildings. Consider using some of the barracks buildings as overnight lodging, even if the units are on the Spartan side.
- Modern Campgrounds. More trails for snowmobiling, horseback riding, hiking, biking and an ATV park.
- More ATV trails on public land
- more boat landings. more access to river between Skalbekken and Vicksburg county parks.
- More corroborative information... How to plan day trips, family weekends etc.
- More CRP, less public development
- more educational offerings to take advantage of on weekends
- More emphasis on the history.
- More history
- More history information
- more hunting areas and also atv trails

- More info. And availability of it.
- more information
- more marketing
- more recreational land
- More scenic trails
- More shore fishing areas.
- More trail options - particularly biking (paved and unpaved) and hiking opportunities would be wonderful. Both short trails (1-2 miles) for a quick walk and longer options along the river for a full-day hike/bike would be wonderful.
- More trails (bike and hiking)
- More trails for ATV and snowmobiles.
- More trails for biking and walking. Maps showcasing the trails.
- More trails that are well-kept for walking on.
- More trails to walk along Granite outcrops and highpoints to view the river.
- more trails, camping sites, access to scenic views. All of these things are waiting out there to be explored but most of us people have a hard time accessing them and where to
- More trailsfor ATV.
- More view points
- More walking trails
- More winter things to do
- No ATV vehicles
- None
- None
- Off road vehicle access and trails
- OHV park
- OHV park should come to the area
- Organized tours with guides
- pave roads    have parks open year around
- Paved road
- Paving the entire Scenic Byway
- Protect scenic and natural places, enhance outdoor experiences through walking/biking trails and paddling opportunities.
- Set aside more lands for wildlife and recreation. Slow the flow of water from the upstream landowners to help mitigate flooding and bank erosion
- Signs to businesses from the scenic byways. More lodging opportunities and public access to wildlife areas
- Takeouts for canoe/kayak; marked (minimally) hiking trails; historical/ecological self guided walks
- tar road, Hiking trails, more landing's boats

- Water quality. Truth about Dakota conflict. Signs that show bathroom in Dakota. Plant names in Dakota. ADA accessible
- water quantity reduction, water quality improvement, repair of tributaries and additional acres returned back to wildlife habitat. Additional canoe access.

**Please use this space to share any other ideas, thoughts, or comments related to the development of the Minnesota River Valley Master Plan.**

- A true multiple use trail in the river corridor would be very unique and very popular, or perhaps a motorized trail on one side and a non-motorized on the other side. Another approach could be a paved trail along one side and a natural surface trail on the other side, let the user groups decide what surface type they prefer and who they want to share it with.
- Access to trails should be allowed from towns near the river. There should also be access areas/parking lots located at various locations to allow easy access and be able to handle trailers for bicycles, off road vehicles and snowmobiles.
- Add more snowmobile and dirt bike trails,
- Add more trails
- Allow snowmobile travel on any trails that are developed
- An ATV park is needed.
- An ATV park would better be located on the plains in an area well away from any dwellings (1 mile minimum) by utilizing unproductive land or reclaiming old mining areas which may be surrounded by crop land. A berm should be surrounding the area to deflect noise upwards. Machine noise standards must be enforced by an inspection and issued permit to use the facility. The best use for the Valley is to support nature activities. Pave the roads that follow the river in the Valley.
- ATV and snowmobile trails are of great interest to us. Bike and hiking trails also interest us but as we age we need other opportunities to explore the Valley.
- ATV park, more fishing areas (boat access) more restrooms, and more advertizing the Valley.
- Be sure to include snowmobile and atv trail riding opportunities.
- Better utilize local Chambers and Scenic Byway groups to help spread the word about the Valley. They are already promoting tourism.
- Bicycle riding is when I use the trail the most, with that being said I STRONGLY believe that snowmobiles are critical to the plan as they bring in much needed revenue to the area communities along the trail!! Snowmobiles must be in this long te plan!!
- BIKING, HIKING, REST STOPS, PICNIC AREAS, AND SAFETY.
- Build a Bike trail connecting communities and commercial oppourtunities will follow
- Connecting trails open to horse and off road vehicles.

- Create activities that draw people in, like arts, arts n crafts, animals, nature, family, musical bands, golf gatherings, food, food, food. Give people a reason to drive the river valley.
- Develop trail system that would be multi use and scenic
- Do not develop it. Leave it alone.
- Fight to keep and promote fort ridge lay golf course
- Fort Ridgely is such a strong point in the MN river valley. We can not afford to see this great park decay. The golf course and the entire park need to be preserved!
- Get upper sioux and lower sioux involved
- Give up your obsession with having an ATV park/trail for this plan. How many times do your own citizens have to tell you at hearings about how disruptive this would be for many other users? Seriously, I feel you only value loud jerks who want to rip up the valley. What's up with your commitment to doing that? It's gross. Yuck. I'm not sure why I'm even bothering--you seem hellbent on ruining the valley I love. I moved back to Minnesota in 1996 to be near it and you're going to \*\*\*\* it up for me.
- Glad to hear of this! Always looking for a new place or destination to travel to and visit! Always up for an adventure. Make sure you allow advertising dollars to let people know. And we will come
- Golfing at Fort Ridgely. It gets people outside without the pressure of having to know what you are doing.
- Hiking, biking, off road atv trails that connect towns would be great. Also more campsites that could be set up for these type of trips with families or friends. Campsites with camp areas and fishing opportunities would draw a lot of people to this area if it was set up properly and bring a lot of business into these communities during summer months. Also would make it a much more desirable area to live.
- I actively use parks and private property to access trails along the Minnesota River. I invite friends and everyone who will let me enter the conversation to visit the historical aspects of this area. Starting at Fort Ridgely along with their displays and instructional video and guides.
- I already shared my idea of having Gold Mine Lake accessible. How many know there was an active mine there?
- I am a member of the Minnesota Rovers Outdoors Club (actually, the president). We are forwarding this survey to our members. I expect that at least some people would be willing to know more about this development.
- I believe an OHV park would greatly benefit the area by keeping dollars here. I know many people who trailer their OHM / ATV's north to ride on trails. By creating a place to ride around here, the money will stay in the region. Restaurants, hotels, gas stations etc....
- I believe the area would experience more tourism if the Scenic Byway was paved and a trail would be added.

- I do occasionally look at the DNR website for information, however having an information board at parking locations is useful and important (maps, events, hours, anything unique to see).
- I grew up with fort ridgley, hiking golfing
- I have concerns about ATV usage and the damage caused. Need hiking and biking trails to encourage access to the valley's many natural features.
- I have fished on the Minnesota River and there are a variety of fish on it other than just CATFISH. Organized canoe trips would be great. Places such as the Grandview Winery really open the eyes of people going out to eat and promote the beauty of the river valley. Also, for the few such as myself, a place to ride dirt bikes and 4-wheelers with the kids to do for an afternoon would be great. With all the farmland in Redwood/Renville, there is no place to ride for fun. You would rather have me drive 1 1/2 hours to go to Appleton to spend my money? Why not have an Appleton ATV like park right here?
- I helped organize an indigenous water walk of the area in March of 2016. I was horrified to learn the the confluence of the MN River pollutes the Mississippi. the agricultural practices of SW MN have a huge impact on everyone down river. I hope your new plan addresses this proactively.
- I live in the MN River valley near Marsh Lake, but I visited this area 5+ x year
- I love the area, especially for snowmobiling . It's a family favorite! Please make more trails!
- I often find myself saying to people of the MN river valley "there's lots to do here, if you know where to go. and, you have it to yourself; not like in the cities where you have people all over the place." I've taken friends from the cities canoeing on the MN river, and they marvel "where are all the people?" that may be an uncommon advantage our area has for tourism; opportunities for solitude.
- I received the survey link through a snowmobile assn. As we are new to the sport we would like to travel to your area in the future by making a day or even an overnight visit. I don't think about your area as a boating destination, but might consider it as a fishing destination. We also like to ride bikes and a trail would be nice. I have been to Birch Coolie and other Dakotarelated sites as both a child on school outings and visiting with a group of adults.
- I think a bike trail incorporated in with a tar road would be accepted better by rivervalley landowners because tourists would not be as likely to wonder off and trespass onto private property.
- I think a off road riding area for motorcycles and atvs would be a great addition to this area. It would bring lots of people from outside the area and would promote tourism. There are no oppurtunites currently available in this area of the state and people are hungry for this type of recreation. I think the DNR can create and manage a great facility just like the Gllbert OHV area in northern Minnesota.
- I think an ATV trail would be great!!

- I think that there needs to be more focus from the state (MN DNR) on the importance of the MN River Valley as a whole to our communities and citizens on MN. Currently the river seems to be used as a giant drainage ditch, which can no longer reach the flood plain. Its sad to think that within my short life I can already see the impacts of upland areas on the river proper - and to abuse the resource that gave us this rich land seems crazy!
- I think this is a great idea. I think hiking trails through some of those woods focusing on gaining access to the granite outcroppings would be nice.
- I think trails for ATVs would bring more people into the area. Not everybody is physically fit to walk a lot of the trails. So being able to use some sort of motorized vehicle would enable everyone to enjoy the area.
- I think we should keep it a sacred, secret place and not commercialize it.
- I would like to see more connectivity (via a multi-use trail) between communities and "nodes" and upgrades to "nodes" to make them more attractive to users.
- I would like to see more opportunities for off-road bicycling. I'm not talking about a flat road. I mean trails that are narrow, winding through the trees, many elevation changes, similar to the trails in Lebanon Hills, Murphy Hanrehan, and Elm Creek. I'm also an avid snowmobiler and want to see more done to provide access to snowmobile trail systems that can connect to a trail corridor along the river.
- I would like to see multi-use trails that include off-road vehicle trails. Destination trails are the best where a person or group of people can travel from town to town, possibly camp or hotel/motel in a town and learn about the cultural and historical aspects of the area. Designated trails for ATV's keep riders on legal trails that are rider safe, sustainable, and enforceable. Keeping riders on designated trails helps protect the local forests, lakes, hills, etc. which is better than allowing people to travel at will on any portion of the Minnesota River Valley. Be as comprehensive as you can on your planning.
- I would like to see the addition of more snowmobile trails and the development of an ATV trail system from Fort Ridgely extending to Upper Sioux.
- I would suggest adding some swings to the super tall trees. This is something that myself and many others want to do but we have no place to do that. Either we don't have a tall tree or we don't know anybody with a tall tree. It would also be extremely awesome to find random swings in the trees.
- I'd like to see the River Valley remain much the same with an emphasis on water quality and wildlife habitat. Any trails should be non motorized and be close to the existing roads. This is such a special and unique area and shouldn't be exploited. If possible more educational opportunities related to the history of the area and some of the unique plants without disturbing the area too much.
- I'm big into powersports so snowmobile & atv/rov recreational areas are awesome in my opinion
- I'm pleased to hear there is something in the works to enhance this area!!

- Increasing tourism and use of the resource will increase advocacy to restore water quality. This can be accomplished by more access points and opportunities to fish from shore and from other water craft. Also canoe and kayak usage will need more points to enter and camp or stop for a while.
- it is fine to have the area as a multi use area with no motor vehicles, but try not to limit the space for the facilities.
- It is great to work with Redwood Falls County!!
- It seems to me that our area has been 'forgotten' when it comes to maintaining and promoting the parks and trails. The DNR puts money into the parks in the northern part of the state but is quick to want to pull the plug on features of the parks in this area. There needs to be more public input and control plus much better marketing for the parks, trails and campgrounds in this area.
- It was not clear how Renville and Redwood Counties fit into the entire Minnesota River Valley Master Plan.
- It's extremely important to me to have trails for Winter and Summer and I support multi-use trails.
- It's important to have recreational opportunities like bike and horse trails, but not all people want a developed recreation experience. It is important to keep certain places 'wild' and undeveloped. If trails were in these areas they should be simple foot paths. Not everyone wants to hike on a 6 foot wide mowed path or paved trail.
- Keep it simple, open and wild.
- Keep snowmobiles and their paid for trail passes in mind when building new trails
- keep the golf course open at "FORT RIDGELY"
- Keep the trails natural. Do NOT pave them....
- Landowners are not excited about more tourism.
- Leave it alone, Use the currently owned DNR land to develop something
- let USE & ENJOY it - not SAVE IT for future gen to look at on their elec. devices
- maintain and develop snowmobile trails throughout the river bottoms so one can have an enjoyable experience with friends and family.
- Make the trails accessible, have maps, keep bikes and horse trails separate. Try to accommodate as many interests as possible.
- Make it everyone can use it. Include motorsports. Lots of people don't get around well and depend on motorized vehicles to enjoy the great outdoors. Don't just make it for hikers and bikers.
- master plan must work towards improvement of the river in regards to water quality and quantity. Redwood and Renville counties have shown little regard to the river in the past. Present agricultural drainage management is unchanged and degradation of the river continues. I would be very skeptical of county involvement in management of the Minnesota River Master Plan. Their past and present treatment of the river and the valley has resulted in degraded resource we see today.

- more multi use trails (snowmobile, atv) that connect (park to park)
- More people and families are camping in modern RVs and horse trailer campers that need bigger and more level areas to camp and electricity is becoming a must. Generators running all the time are taking away the pleasure to be there. Most are still LOUD!
- More people powered activities and less gasoline powered activities. Thanks
- More public hunting land. Places to drive atv's. More spots for waterfowl. Better boat landings.... especially the boat landing near North redwood needs to get fixed. More crp grasses in the river valley to help clean up the water in the river, less water runoff.
- More snowmobile trails
- More Snowmobile trails
- Motorized vehicle travel (summer and winter) and mountain bike/fat tire bike travel are popular ways for people to get outdoors; any ways to expand these are beneficial to many.
- My wife and I both grew up in Sacred Heart and we have family out there still so we are out quite often. My wife and her brothers own land in the Minnesota river bottom. We like to go for atv rides when we are out and are very interested in the progress of the atv park in Renville. We don't feel there should be private land taken for public trails unless the owners are willing to sell their land. I know the parks welcome the horse riders, but we wish they would also stay on public lands and not trespass onto land that they do not own. It would be nice if the county approves someplace for atvs.
- None
- Non-motorized vehicles should be a priority in the Mn River Valley plan. Exercising in natural surroundings should also be a priority
- not in favor of a trail only for bikes and walking
- Paving trails and roads and installing motorized vehicles (ATV) in the river bottom would both destroy the natural beauty, the habitat resource, and the relaxing experience we currently have.
- Planning is nice, but we need to get the funding to make it happen!
- Please consider adding a bike trail to the area. It would be beautiful and the closest bike trails now are in Willmar or Hutch area.
- Please continue to develop xc ski and bike trails (road bike, but off-road) as well as hiking trails. Provide more regular updates on winter trail conditions. Limit number of special events at the parks, such as fund-raisers, as this really spoils it for the rest of us on a beautiful Saturday morning.
- Please include snowmobile trails to allow travel to areas unavailable to the public at other times of the year, and to provide economic support to local businesses.
- Please keep the golf course open. It is one of the nicest nine hole courses I have ever golfed
- Please save the golf course at fort ridgely

- Please stay out and leave it in its beautiful natural state
- Please, please control what is already owned by the DNR before you incorporate any more ideas and recreation into this area. People will have a much better experience if you finally decide to maintain what is currently owned publicly. Talk to the people that LIVE in the MN River Valley. You are not doing a good job of keeping them informed of what has or will happen to THEIR home(s).
- Put a herd of Buffalo in Beaver Falls park.
- Rock climbing and more firearm areas. How about some hiking trails
- Should be more Indian sites and early settler sites identified and historic importance noted. I will say, it is getting better. This is a VERY important part of our Minnesota history.
- slow traffic down no trucks
- STOP ANY POLLUTION TO THE RIVER AND VALLEY
- Tap into the Birch Coulee and Wood Lake Battlefields. Develop a battlefield tour (driving) for Dakota War sites.
- tar the road speed limit 45
- Thank you for developing a master plan! We need more river access for boating and river camps / hikes!
- There are not a lot of choices for outdoor recreation in our area.
- The area of the plan is a little far from where I live. However with the proper development and activities I would probably be enticed to visit the area. My wife and I are always looking for things to do that are a reasonable drive from Minneapolis.
- The DNR recently made the decision to close the Fort Ridgely golf course. I think this course is a major attraction within the valley, as do many other locals and traveling campers who visit the area. I think there are other opportunities for additional recreational activities to this park to attract additional visitors to the river valley, without having to close the golf course. Closing this course will only add to the reasons not to visit the park, and/or the river valley.
- The gravel roads on the byway to be black topped to access the area by motorcycles in the summer
- The master plan should include a proposal for management of natural resources. A major portion should be about the control and eradication of garlic mustard. There is currently no visible effort for control of this invasive species. This plant is spreading out of control and I believe now is the time to do something about it. It has already overtaken Flandrau State Park and is in the process of spreading. Where it is present it is destroying forest biodiversity.
- The Minnesota River Valley has snowmobile trails to Belle Plain I would like to see that extended to the west.
- The Minnesota River Valley is a great area for hunting. The wild turkey thrives in this area and we must protect this area so our grand and great grandchildren will be able

to experience hunting and hearing the wild turkey call in the mornings. And they can see the abundant wildlife that calls the valley home.

- The narrative of the requests would lead me to believe that this is the "final" plan. Is that really the case? Shouldn't there be several levels of citizen input before anything is finalized? Most question/input options were only for a positive response. Shouldn't there be some way of saying what is NOT desired.
- the peaceful environment should not be spoiled by increasing the areas open to atv's, snowmobiles, and motorized boats.
- The recreational and outdoor use of the valley would be so much more enhanced with a full length all purpose recreational trail. It is the one feature the valley is seriously lacking. The valley would be so much more appreciated if a well managed trail existed. Eco-tourism would explode.
- The Renville/Redwood counties stretch of the river is well-suited for over night canoe/camping trips. Adding a couple of canoe campsites at the locations of the Renville parks and access to potable water at these locations would help make this a popular canoe route with more people.
- The Scenic Byway in Renville in it's current condition (gravel) is not conducive to tourist's safe travels. Dust is thick making it hard to see other vehicles, bikers and hikers. Many tourists are reluctant to drive on gravel and will turn around where tar road ends and gravel begins. Bikers and hikers are at risk of being hit because of the poor visibility. Also, the dust raised by other vehicles makes it hard to enjoy the scenic surroundings. This safety issue needs to be addressed before trying to increase tourism. We are excited to hear of some new positive ideas of the use of the MN River Valley. It is a beautiful part of our state and many would benefit from seeing and using it.
- The title of your Master Plan is deceiving - the Minnesota River is much larger than two counties. Many of your questions combine too many factors for meaningful feedback. It would have been helpful to define 'recreation' as it seems there were other things missing like biking, birding, guided nature walks etc. It seems as if this survey was slanted to economic development and ATV recreation.
- The valley needs to be expanded more. Currently it is setup for more horseback riding. I would like to see more hiking and biking trails. This would draw many different people to the parks. One long trail through the valley would be a dream from granite to Mankato.
- The water trail is the original MN River Trail. I highly recommend enhancing access to it and building around the concept of the river itself being the trail. Upland conservation and acquisition should be a priority from the standpoint that it protects the river itself. Hiking, wildlife viewing, and hunting opportunities abound on WMAs in the valley and they are a better experienced independent of a developed trail. One can blaze a trail anywhere on a WMA.

- There are SOOOOO many plans already completed for the MN river valley, how will this one be different, How does this one consult the other ones?
- There is absolutely no place for an ATV park in this beautiful valley. What we need is access for more silent sports such as hiking trails, on and off road biking, canoeing, snowshoeing, etc. and also events where people can learn these silent sports. Thank you for bringing new focus to our region.
- there might be opportunities in the future to connect outdoor rec and environmental opportunities with a revised "Praire SPortsmen" Pioneer Public TV program
- There needs to be pressure put on people that abuse there assumed "Right to the Land" who don't adhere to the 16 foot natural buffer zones. This needs to come through at a county level, and be strictly enforced. I can't start a garden in a county highway right of way...this is comparable to what is happening at an alarming scale when you travel on the river.
- This is a great area for snowmobile trails.
- This plan needs to focus on CONSERVING the Minnesota River Valley, not on putting in an off-highway vehicle (OHV) park. Many people have bought land in the Minnesota River Valley to hunt, enjoy nature, and get away from the hustle and bustle of the world and this plan needs to be very careful not to destroy that. I am suspicious that this plan will be used to bolster support for funding an OHV park, which has much opposition. Do we really need a plan? Agri-tourism, outdoor recreation, cultural and heritage experiences, and other aspects of the plan should and do happened organically, with local people creating businesses supported by local people (example: winery in Belview). This plan doesn't tell us much more than we already know about what is good and what is "lacking" (depending on your opinion) in the Minnesota River Valley. I feel like the citizens of Redwood and Renville Counties will have this plan shoved down our throats whether we like it or not. Does this plan provide the funding, the training, the resources to create businesses and jobs? No. Our focus needs to be on securing the funding, training, and resources needed to bring new businesses and jobs to the area.
- Use of human occupations and sites from early European Settlers and evidence from past sites from Valleys occupants that go back 7000 years and more could be a tourist attraction if properly presented. There is an abundance of materials that would be of interest including the variety of plants, trees, river life, and how these were utilized by both groups and somewhat still respected by today's inhabitants. A Knowledgable unbiased mpresentation would be the key.
- We feel the inclusion of a snowmobile trail along the river is important to get folks out to enjoy out Minnesota winters. The scenery is terrific and the trail is a good way to experience the outdoors.
- We have bicycle the valley from Ortonville to Minneapolis a couple of times, riding gravel and paved roads on a route that follows the river as closely as possible. We camp and visit the historic attractions.

- We have friends there and so are likely to visit
- Web-based information, directions, ideas easily apprehend-able with smart phones.
- When considering a location to live and work I look at outdoor recreation space, if the MN River valley had more outdoor recreation and parks I would want to live closer to them
- When I was in my teens I used to ride motorcycle and ATV in the Renville park. It would be great to have an area to ride class 1 & 2 ATV trails in the area. We do this today but unfortunately we go to northern MN where there are many trails and welcome this type of activity. This generates revenue for their area. For example I have spent approximately \$1500 - \$2000 ytd in their local areas.
- would like to see ATV trails connected through the area - state that have much the same access as do snowmobiles. need to maintain some challenge riding areas but also have touring. emphasis on nature. not just there to turn up the dirt. we love the outdoors and nature!
- Would like to see snowmobile trails as part of the development plan
- Would love to see more access to public hunting.
- You could use the buffer zones that Gov Dayton wants farmers to have along water ways as trails especially in winter as snowmobile trails to expand the trail system.

## Public Input Report for Minnesota River Valley Recreation & Conservation Master Plan

### Introduction

Redwood and Renville Counties are collaborating with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to create a recreation and conservation master plan for the Minnesota River Valley within the two Counties. The plan's purpose is to:

- Develop an outdoor recreational destination that would promote regional economic growth, development, and tourism while respecting private lands and the agricultural heritage of the area.
- Address the conservation of the natural and cultural resources of the Minnesota River Valley area in Redwood and Renville Counties.
- Provide for the shared use, enjoyment, and understanding of these resources through a broad selection of outdoor recreational opportunities and recreational travel routes that connect units of the outdoor recreation system in the river valley.
- Address the impacts to the natural and cultural resources, interpretive services, recreational opportunities, and administrative activities in the area and provide recommendations on the unit designation of the area under the Outdoor Recreation Act.

This report documents information provided by individuals, government agencies and organizations that have provided input related to the project. This report is a summary of input capturing the essence of provided comments.

### Background

The Counties, recognizing the need to protect, restore, and enhance the natural, historical, and cultural resources of the Minnesota River Valley for current and future generations, applied for and received funding from the Minnesota Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) for the development of an outdoor recreation and conservation master plan along the Minnesota River Valley.

The Counties contracted with the Great Outdoors Consultants (GOC) team to develop this plan, in conjunction with the Counties, their residents, and stakeholders group, as well as with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Robert Peccia and Associates, Red Canoe LLC, and I&S Group assisted the GOC team with various aspects of the master plan.

### Organizations that Provided Input

The following organizations have provided input for the project.

- Agricultural interests; including farmers, landowners
- Back Country Horsemen of MN
- City of Franklin
- City of Olivia
- Clean Up the River Environment (CURE)
- 4H Shooting Sports
- Lower Sioux Indian Community ~ Office of Environment
- Minnesota Deer Hunters Association
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Minnesota Horse Trail Riders Association
- Minnesota State Representative
- Minnesota United Snowmobilers Association (MNUSA)
- Minnesota Valley ATV Riders
- Minnesota Valley Snow Riders
- Minnesota Valley History Learning Center
- Montevideo Snow Drifters
- Redwood Area Chamber and Tourism Office

- Redwood Area Development Corporation (RADC)
- Redwood County
- Redwood County Parks and Trails Committee
- Redwood County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Redwood Gazette
- Redwood Parks and Trails Committee
- Renville County
- Renville County Drift Runners
- Renville County Historical Society and Museum
- Renville County HRA/EDA
- Renville County Park Commission
- Renville County Register
- Renville County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Renville County Trail Committee
- Renville County Water/HHW Management
- Tatanka Bluffs Corridor/local advocates
- Upper Sioux Indian Community ~ Office of Environment
- West Central Tribune

## Public Participation

Public participation and input in the development of the master plan was a key element of the planning process. Input was actively sought throughout the planning process through several different venues. Options for providing input included:

- Participating in an “in person” stakeholder interview
- Participating in one, or both, of the two public workshops
- Completing a Stakeholder interview form and emailing it to the project team
- Participating in a Stakeholder phone interview
- Sending comments directly to the project’s email address:  
Comment@MNRiverValleyMasterPlan.org

## Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholders have an on-going role in the ownership, use, conservation and planning for the MN River Valley area. Stakeholder interviews were held with representatives of non-profit organizations, government organizations, and individuals. Many of these stakeholders also participated in the public meetings. A total of 14 Stakeholders were interviewed in-person or over the phone early in the project. Some Stakeholders choose to provide their input by emailing completed stakeholder input forms to the project team.

The Stakeholders were asked the following questions:

- What would you like to see in an outdoor recreation and conservation master plan?
- What are the best opportunities for conservation in the Minnesota River Valley?
- What are the best opportunities for providing outdoor recreation in the Minnesota River Valley?
- What are important considerations for trail planning?
- Who should we engage in this project?
- Do you have other ideas or information you’d like to share?
- How can you help us promote participation in the project?

## Public Workshops

Two public workshops were held to discuss opportunities to expand outdoor recreation and conserve natural and cultural resources in the Minnesota River Valley area within Redwood and Renville counties. To accommodate participants, the public workshops were held on two consecutive evenings, at different locations:

- Tuesday, September 27th, 2016, at the Renville County Building, Olivia, MN
- Wednesday, September 28th, 2016 at the Redwood Area Community Center, Redwood Falls, MN

40 participants signed in at the Olivia Public Workshop, and 43 participants signed in at the Redwood Falls Public Workshop. It should be noted that some participants chose not to sign in.

The same workshop agenda and meeting format and was utilized at both Workshops. The agenda included an open house period with exhibits, then a project overview presentation, followed by small break-out groups of 6-10 people. Members of the Planning Team facilitated each of the small groups to help them understand the exercise, answer questions and to help with time management. Individuals were asked to spend a few minutes reviewing and responding to several questions designed to identify additional opportunities and issues. Individuals then shared their opinions within their small group giving each person an opportunity to contribute. The small groups then presented a summary of their combined recommendations to the plenary. This allowed everyone in the meeting to contribute and listen to a broad range of opportunities and issues.

#### Questions Discussed in Small Groups

- What outdoor recreation or heritage experiences would most likely attract people to visit the Minnesota River Valley who live in Redwood or Renville Counties? What information, facilities or programs are most important to facilitate these experiences?
- What are the most important conservation goals for the Minnesota River Valley?
- How can the agricultural community benefit from this project and contribute to it?
- Do you think people would be interested in experiencing current or future agricultural practices in the area (agri-tourism)?
- How can the business community help make the Minnesota River Valley a destination for both residents and visitors?
- Are there any developments or other land uses that should not happen in the Minnesota River Valley?
- What outdoor recreation or heritage experiences would most likely attract people to visit the Minnesota River Valley? What information, facilities or programs are most important to facilitate these experiences?
- What are the best ways to share information about the cultural and historical resources of the Minnesota River Valley?
- What is the best way for the Minnesota River Valley to compete with other destinations in Minnesota?
- What improvements can be made to make the Minnesota River area more attractive to experience?
- What should be the organizational strategy to coordinate improvement and conservation of the Minnesota River Valley?
- What types of trails should be created and where should they be located?

A general comment form was distributed to all public meeting participants. Individuals had the opportunity to provide additional comments on the form. They could leave the form with the Planning Team at the meeting or return it by email. The comment form was posted on the project webpage for others to use following the meetings. All materials displayed at the public workshops were posted on the project webpage for anyone to review. Providing meeting materials on the project webpage allowed people who could not attend the meetings to review the information and provide comments.

## Summary of Public Input

The following is a summary of all public input received to-date and is organized in general master plan categories. Comments about this summary are welcome.

### Summary of Public Input: Project Vision

- Focus on multi-use solutions
- Preserve the vitality of the land
- Diverse learning opportunities
- Interconnected trail system
- Seek solutions to increase and diversify uses of DNR lands
- Retain the character of the Valley
- Foster appreciation and value of the Valley
- Provide quality facilities
- Improve the quality of life for County residents
- Establish an outdoor recreation economy to retain and grow the population
- Gain support from the State Legislature and others
- Provide experiences, land and facilities for most recreation types – equal opportunity
- Improve the Minnesota River

### Summary of Public Input: Outdoor Recreation

- Provide diverse outdoor recreation opportunities
- Increase and improve river access, all road crossings should have river access
- Provide signs on river or maps to show facilities and destinations
- Plan for OHV use of the scenic byway
- Support & opposition related to development of an OHV park
- Expand horseback riding opportunities and related facilities
- Establish a destination horse camp near Delhi, MN
- Bicycling & hiking opportunities with connections to communities
- Expand snowmobiling
- Water flow on the Minnesota River is inconsistent and has poor water quality
- Consider seasonal limitations such as hunting periods
- Consider a zip-line as an attraction and unique experience
- Recreation shuttle service
- Ropes course

- Outdoor recreation businesses to promote and provide organized experiences (i.e. wildlife tours, photography, etc.)
- Specialized parks to provide unique experiences
- Handicap accessibility to river fishing
- Improve facilities in existing parks
- Support and opposition for paving roads
- Important Considerations for Trail Planning
  - Provide access while being sensitive
  - Locate out of the floodplain where possible
  - Focus on safety
  - Respect and protect private property – methods to avoid trespassing
  - Natural surface trails
  - Connect communities and trails to recreation and other sites
  - Avoid dead-end trails
  - Provide parking to increase trail use
  - Provide restrooms & water sources
  - Quality sign and map program
  - Trail from Fort Ridgely to Upper Sioux Community
  - Connect state parks and county parks
  - Ongoing maintenance considerations
  - Access to scenic overlooks
  - Focus on multi-use trails
  - Hunting and camping trails
  - Future railroad tours

#### Summary of Public Input: Conservation

- Cooperate with private land owners to conserve valuable habitat and habitat connectivity
- Conserve floodplain areas
- Restore rare habitats including prairie & wetlands
- Limit use of highly sensitive habitats such as wetlands and rock outcrops
- Conserve and expand wild game (i.e. pheasants, etc.)
- Consider larger watershed issues while taking proactive actions within the Valley
- Better manage invasive species on conservation easements and lands
- Control soil erosion, especially in stream and river corridors
- Improve water quality
- Flood control

#### Summary of Public Input: Culture & Heritage

- Improve access to experience culture & heritage
- Provide Dakota cultural interpretation
- Provide historical (1862) interpretation
- Improved information
- Expand research and publishing
- Work with existing museums, Dakota Sioux Communities, and other organizations to provide programs and information

### Summary of Public Input: Nature & Cultural Interpretation

- Improve interpretive signs & information
- Youth programs for conservation & traditional activities such as hunting and angling
- Programs connecting kids to nature
- Education & Interpretation about:
  - Watershed issues such as water flow, sediment and chemicals
  - Native American history and culture
  - Native plants & natural heritage
  - Settlement history
  - Natural history of the Minnesota River
  - Historic use of the river
- Methods to Interpret
  - Interpretive center, museums
  - Self-guided tour, audio
  - Apps, webpage
  - On-site interpretation
  - Programs, tours
- Nature observation destinations (blinds, etc.)
- Incorporate Dakota language into signs and information

### Summary of Public Input: Land Use

- Control the scale and type of development
- Expand private land conservation programs
  - Diversify crops in the area and sell consumable produce to local residents
  - Rotational grazing
  - Cover crops & no-till farming
- Share knowledge of agriculture and agricultural conservation with visitors – agritourism
- Private land owners should benefit from providing conservation and visitor experiences
- Conserve bluff tops to preserve scenic quality
- Modify County land use regulations to allow appropriate recreation and tourism businesses in the Valley (i.e. lodging, food, wineries, agritourism)

### Summary of Public Input: Master Plan Implementation

- Respect and include private land owners in a meaningful and ongoing manner
- Provide quality information for people related to:
  - Access public lands & the river
  - Be aware of sensitive areas
- Quality information and communication including:
  - Signs
  - Maps
  - Webpage
  - Videos
  - Single source for information

## Public Workshop 2 Report Minnesota River Valley Recreation & Conservation Master Plan

### Introduction

Redwood and Renville Counties are collaborating with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to create a recreation and conservation master plan for the Minnesota River Valley within the two Counties. The plan's purpose is to:

- Develop an outdoor recreational destination that would promote regional economic growth, development, and tourism while respecting private lands and the agricultural heritage of the area.
- Address the conservation of the natural and cultural resources of the Minnesota River Valley area in Redwood and Renville Counties.
- Provide for the shared use, enjoyment, and understanding of these resources through a broad selection of outdoor recreational opportunities and recreational travel routes that connect units of the outdoor recreation system in the river valley.
- Address the impacts to the natural and cultural resources, interpretive services, recreational opportunities, and administrative activities in the area and provide recommendations on the unit designation of the area under the Outdoor Recreation Act.

Two Public Workshops were held to discuss opportunities to expand outdoor recreation and conserve natural and cultural resources in the Minnesota River Valley (MRV) area within Redwood and Renville Counties.

The first Public Workshop was held on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017, in Olivia, MN, at the Renville County Government Services Center. The second Public Workshop was held in Redwood Falls, MN, on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017, at the Redwood Area Community Center.

### Public Workshop 2 Participation

| Workshop         | Number of Participants | Organizations Present  |
|------------------|------------------------|--|
| Feb 15 in Olivia | 33                     | Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative<br>MN Valley ATV Riders<br>Renville County<br>Sacred Heart<br>MNDNR<br>Renville County Water Management<br>West Central Tribune<br>Kandi-Ren Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP)<br>Amigo Riders<br>City of Redwood Falls<br>MN Pollution Control Agency<br>City of Olivia<br>Great Outdoors Consultants |

| Workshop                | Number of Participants | Organizations Present   |
|-------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Feb 16 in Redwood Falls | 26                     | Redwood County<br>City of Redwood Falls<br>MN United Snowmobile Association (MNUSA)<br>MNDNR<br>Tatanka Bluffs<br>Lower Sioux Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO)<br>MN Valley ATV Riders<br>Redwood Gazette<br>Renville Soil Water Conservation District<br>Renville County Historical Society<br>Great Outdoors Consultants<br>I&S Group |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>59</b>              |   |

This report summarizes the input provided by individuals, and representatives of organizations, who provided input at these two public workshops, and through email/online comments following the workshops.

## Goals & Actions

Participants were asked to rank goals and actions for the master plan. Participants helped rank actions by selecting them during the public meetings or through an online questionnaire. The project planning team will use this summary as part of the decision process to prioritize actions for the master plan. Approximately 59 people in the workshops and 50 people online helped rank the actions.

### Summary of Actions Prioritized by Participants

The relative rank of each action under each goal has been indicated in the tables below based on the following criteria.

**L** = indicated as important by less than 1/3 of participants **or** received less than 1/3 of priority marks

**M** = indicated as important by more than 1/3 but less than 2/3 of participants **or** received more than 1/3 and less than 2/3 of priority marks

**H** = indicated as important by more than 2/3 of participants **or** received more than 2/3 of priority marks

The rankings from the public workshops and online survey are shown in the two right columns to be able to compare the differences. The yellow and green highlighted text indicates the top five actions for both the workshop and online participants. These results will aid the planning team in prioritizing actions in the final master plan.

## Workshop Top 5 priorities

## Online Top 5 priorities

| Goals & Actions   | Priority Ranking |               |
|---|------------------|---------------|
| <b>Outdoor Recreation Goal: Create an expanded recreation network</b>   |                  |               |
| <i>Common Actions</i>   | <i>Workshop</i>  | <i>Online</i> |
| A. Identify a working committee to create plans for recreation facilities inventory, improvement and maintenance, trail design and implementation | M                | H             |
| B. Expand Water-based facilities  | M                | H             |
| C. Support development of visitor/interpretive centers  | M                | H             |
| <i>County Actions</i>   |                  |               |
| D. Develop recreational facilities at Anderson Lake Co. Park  | L                | L             |
| E. Develop Equestrian site  | M                | L             |
| F. Support Mountain Bike Park Economic Feasibility Study  | L                | L             |
| G. Improve signage and visitor facilities   | M                | M             |
| H. Support Positive opportunities for Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) recreation  | H                | L             |
| I. Designate the project area as a County Heritage Corridor   | L                | L             |
| <i>MN DNR Actions</i>   |                  |               |
| J. Improve and increase access and signage on state lands in Valley   | L                | L             |
| K. Bolster local capacity to identify trail alignments, to acquire, manage and maintain recreational facilities                                   | L                | M             |
| L. Designate Valley or portions as a State Recreation Area (SRA)  | L                | L             |
| M. Strategically increase and establish Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and Aquatic Management Areas (AMAs)                                      | M                | L             |

| Goal & Actions   | Priority Ranking |               |
|--|------------------|---------------|
| <b>Conservation:</b> Create a connected network of high quality natural and or visual resource areas |                  |               |
| <i>Common Actions</i>  | <i>Workshop</i>  | <i>Online</i> |
| A. Strategically increase conservation areas   | M                | M             |
| B. Minimize public use impacts to landowners   | H                | L             |
| C. Prioritize private lands conservation strategies  | L                | M             |
| <i>County Actions</i>  |                  |               |
| D. Collaborate with DNR to implement habitat management plans  | L                | M             |
| E. Protect sensitive bluffs lines and shorelines from development and erosion                        | M                | H             |
| <i>MN DNR Actions</i>  |                  |               |
| F. Work with Counties to improve habitat for Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)            | L                | M             |
| G. Provide high level protection for sensitive and rare resources                                    | L                | M             |
| H. Develop landscape level plan and model for desired future conditions                              | M                | M             |

| Goals & Actions   | Priority Ranking |               |
|---|------------------|---------------|
| <b>Culture / Heritage:</b> Celebrate and highlight the unique cultural heritage and history of the area |                  |               |
| <i>Common Actions</i>   | <i>Workshop</i>  | <i>Online</i> |
| Identify working committee to support:  |                  |               |
| A. Integration of Scenic Byway Comprehensive Plan recommendations                                       | M                | H             |
| B. Collaborating with Dakota Communities  | H                | H             |
| C. Promoting agricultural heritage  | H                | L             |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| D. Collaborate with local arts and heritage organizations | M | L |
| <b>County Actions</b>                                     |   |   |
|   |   |   |
| <b>MN DNR Actions</b>                                     |   |   |

| Goals & Actions  | Priority Ranking |               |
|--|------------------|---------------|
| <b>Nature and Culture Interpretation and Education: Expand natural and cultural resource education opportunities</b>     |                  |               |
| <b>Common Actions</b>  | <b>Workshop</b>  | <b>Online</b> |
| Establish working committee to:  |                  |               |
| A. Collaborate with MN River Valley History Learning Center (MRVHLC)   | H                | M             |
| B. Collaborate with Sustainable Agricultural Programs  | H                | L             |
| C. Collaborate to expand regional outdoor recreation safety and education programming, including new regional facilities | M                | H             |
| D. Collaborate with MN Master Naturalists to develop trained docents for MN River Valley                                 | L                | L             |
| <b>County Actions</b>  |                  |               |
| E. Develop an Ecotourism and Cultural Heritage Tourism program with MN River Valley focus                                | M                | H             |
|  |                  |               |
| <b>MN DNR Actions</b>  |                  |               |
|  |                  |               |

| Goal & Actions  | Priority        |               |
|---|-----------------|---------------|
| <b>Framework for Land Use:</b> Develop a framework for outdoor recreation, cultural and education opportunities while respecting private property |                 |               |
| <i>Common Actions</i>   | <i>Workshop</i> | <i>Online</i> |
| A. Develop Landscape Potential Map to help access best practices and land uses  | H               | H             |
| B. Establish Design Standards for public lands, trails, signs, roads, and commercial properties   | M               | L             |
| Public Added: Grazing   | L               |               |
| <i>County Actions</i>   |                 |               |
| C. Revise land use regulations for the MN River Valley to allow for agri-tourism, nature-based recreation and lodging                             | H               | H             |

| Goal & Actions  | Priority Ranking |               |
|---|------------------|---------------|
| <b>Master Plan Implementation: Key Recommendations</b>  |                  |               |
| <i>Common Actions</i>   | <i>Workshops</i> | <i>Online</i> |
| A. Seek special designations for the area   | H                | H             |
| B. Establish Advisory Board   | M                | H             |
| C. Establish Non-Profit Foundation  | L                | L             |
| D. Collaborate on Valley branding/sign development with Project Partners  | M                | L             |
| <i>County Actions</i>   |                  |               |
| E. Dedicate resources for marketing and outreach expertise and resources to help develop informational materials to attract outdoor recreationists to the Minnesota River Valley (MRV). | H                | H             |
| <i>MN DNR Actions</i>   |                  |               |
| F. Designate DNR Internal MRV Working team  | L                | L             |
| G. Assign two DNR personnel to participate in Partner Project Coordination  | L                | M             |

| Team   |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| H. Develop implementation plans for 2- 4 multi-use focus areas within 2 years of project designation                         | L | H |
| I. Develop desired future conditions model/plan for water, biodiversity and outdoor recreation for Valley area               | H | H |
| J. Determine state land signage options unique for this area, to be included on all units within the designated project area | H | L |

### Written comments from the Olivia Workshop

- There was a lot of concern expressed about potential trespass issues.
- Some people do not agree with the OHV park.
- The current quality of experience will change with increased use of the area.
- The OHV park could attract more visitors.
- Need more river access locations.
- Interest maintaining the equestrian heritage of the area.
- Conservation and water quality are key items for quality recreation to occur.
- How staff to manage the area be paid for?
- Multi-use and sharing requires group effort.
- Its positive to diversify recreation opportunities.
- Conservation is important.
- There are so many things to do, we need to work together to be successful.
- You have to be careful about designation because there is a lot of industry in the valley.
- Safety – cell phone service needs update and large predator safety
- Concern about co-existence between residents and visitors – education and enforcement
- Signage & Interpretation – unite city chambers to promote the area.
- Hydrology of the river valley. Older generations had a stronger connection to the river and it was critical part of livelihood
- Electronic promotion and apps
- Hold meetings on tribal lands to engage Dakota communities.
- Integrating all the work related the Scenic Byway
- How do we create sites on the MN River when it floods & destroys?
- Renville County has the trail – Co RD #15 – A great byway to drive along slowly & enjoy beauty and peace.
- Need a proposed trail to connect Renville County parks. Should be able to hike, bike or horseback ride between all parks. This would make the region significant.

### Written comments from the Redwood Falls Workshop

- How do we create sites on the edge flooding rivers?
- How do we integrate Scenic Byway into the master plan?
- Safety concerns expressed about overlap between hunting and other recreational activities.
- To help with tree control, expand grazing. Need more grasslands, no till and no tile in river bottom.
- Collaborate with existing groups and agribusiness.
- Concerns expressed about regulations on private landowners.
- Would like to see better ways to support snowmobiles and ATV activities.

- Need to prevent trespass and protect private property rights.
- Recreation rules need to be enforced. Registration fees are required – give tickets not warnings. Counties can apply for enforcement funding.
- Sharing multi-use trails needs to be done in a fair way, where all users share the cost and know how to be courteous.
- DNR gets lots of funding. Make sure that it continues.
- State owns a lot of land in the Valley, give examples of how things can work, and citizens will follow and support.
- Where is funding going to come from?
- Promote co-existence between residents and visitors. Hunter visitors are not following the rules.
- Want trails to connect 3 Renville County parks and Ramsey Park.
- Signage and interpretation needed to teach the hydrology of the river. Highlight the connection between land use and the River, personal choices and conditions of River.
- Make sure there is electronic promotion. Make an App.
- Bring Chambers and other economic groups together.
- Views expressed about OHV recreation area proposal.
- Driving is an important experience to provide opportunities for.
- With more state lands, how do we get mobility challenged folks to the River? Are we pushing folks back to the roads & bridges? Need to address this.
- Need better signage on the River for places & services nearby. Include identification of roads over the River so paddlers know where they are.
- Incorporate Tatanka Bluffs Committee experience and members
- Partnerships and collaboration with existing museums & interpretive centers to share and leverage programs.

#### Written comments received by email following the Feb. 15 & 16 Workshops

- I like the concept of focusing phase 1 activities within priority pods, but in 100percent agreement the master plan needs to show the complete trail connectivity through the entire Minnesota River Valley corridor landscape from state park to state park; connecting through all priority pods and existing Renville County river valley parks (Skalbekken to Mack Lake), including trail connections to Alexander Ramsey Park in Redwood Falls.
- Agree with "connectivity" at various levels and locations all along the MN River Corridor. Building connections with effective partnerships and "life after the Plan" is very important.
- I am trail coordinator for Nicollet County Trail Association, and the Minnesota River Valley Trail starts near Le Sueur connecting Nicollet, Blue Earth, Brown, and other Counties as it Travel to the Western side of The State and as a State Trail it should be Multi use under statute 85.015 its entire distance through Minnesota. As Nicollet County Trail Association Trail Coordinator, I would request that the trail be Multi Use under Statute 85.015 to allow use by all recreationalists including but not limited to; Snowmobiles, Horseback riders, Hikers, and Bicyclists for its entire distance.

- Email:

To me, it is essential that our Master Plan include a network of county and city trails and parks that connect the following parks Skalbakken, Vicksburg, Beaver Falls, Ramsey, Birch Coulee, Anderson Lake, and Mack Lake. This might need to be shown as Phase I, the trails marked in Red on the existing display maps, Phase II connecting the three upriver parks to the Redwood area loop trails and connecting to the Morton Loop, and Phase III, connect the Anderson Lake and Mack Lake parks the remainder.

The trails would be dual track, a hiking biking surface and a dirt horse trail. The GMRPTC (Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission ) does not require paved trails as does MNDNR for state trails.

Also, if a destination horse camp is included in the Master Plan, as it should be, that site needs to be connected to these trails.

This combination of parks and trails could be regionally significant and earn GMRPTC designation as such.

At some time in the future, the Minnesota River State Trail could either connect to the two ends of this trail system, see the Luce Line Trail for historical precedent, or a Minnesota River State Trail running along a different route, Could connect to these trails which would serve as a loop from the state trail.

It is important that the master plan point out how the connectivity of the parks through the trails enhances visitor experience for hiking, biking, and horseback riding.

It is also important that the master plan call out existing park features that lend themselves to connectivity, specifically horse camps in Skalbakken and Vicksburg and Beaver Falls. It is also important that the Master Plan identify other features as rock climbing, camping, and paddler access to the Minnesota River.

I note that thee parks are all now connected for OHV via county roads that now permit such vehicles to travel public roads in both Redwood and Renville County.

On an unrelated note but still Master Plan connected.

The Tatanka Bluffs Committee is attempting, with very little money and no staff, to serve as a two-county outdoor recreation promotion body. Restructuring that body could easily provide an oversight entity for Master Plan implementation.

- Email:

Local people simply do not see their own back yard as special. As much as we need to bring outsiders here, we need to change local attitudes.

Your friend is correct, what we have is not unique. However, it is rather special. I have taken people from all over the United States on the river and they have marveled at the Rock outcrops along the shore.

I have talked with horseback riders at Renville County Parks who travel from the twin cities because the trails are so special to them. One group of riders explained how they spend a three day weekend riding here every summer and rather than load the horses each day to ride in a different park, they would prefer to spend the day riding from park to park and camping in each one.

Two summers ago, I provided ground support for a group of young people who canoed the entire MN River. After dropping them on the river at Upper Sioux State Park near Granite, I was to meet them in north Redwood that night. Along with a passenger who needed a rest day off the water due to tendinitis, we slowly drove along the river including Cty 15. For most of the way, we drove about 15 MPH passing through Skallbakken, Vicksburg, the Joseph Brown site and on to Beaver Falls. We spent about four hours. My passenger, from central Illinois was amazed at the beauty of the area.

The entire paddling group stayed at my house for e three day break and borrowed my car to retrace that drive on one of those days with my original passenger as a tour guide.

Not long before this canoe trip, Loran started talking about camper cabins spaced along the river. When I suggested these to this group of young paddlers, they got very excited. Other than staying at my house those nights, they mostly camped out. They thought camper cabins would be a great addition to the river.

Back to the local opinion that our area is "nothing special" I hear that all of the time. I think that will change as we promote our area to outsiders.

A few years ago, I was traveling by motorcycle through Illinois. I stooped at a freeway visitor center and asked the volunteer hostess to tell me about the most interesting thing to see within about twenty miles of the freeway. Her response, "there isn't anything very interesting around here" she suggested things two and three hours away. Not being one to give up easily, I asked her where she would take an out of town visitor if they only had four hours together. She enlisted the aide of another volunteer who immediately said Bishop Hill. Next exit and then seven miles away.

At Bishop Hill I found a delightful village of artisans and old buildings and not only spent a few hours there, but have revisited the site and referred many people to go visit. Bishop Hill was less than ten miles from where this lady lived. She hardly knew it existed and it did not occur to her to send visitors.

We don't have mountains, but we have a beautiful area with many fine features that can and will attract visitors if we market it properly. Eventually people will travel to our outdoor recreation area all the way from places like Redwood Falls.

- Email:

I looked over the survey and it is obvious that the most important element to cleaning up the river valley and creating a recreational and wildlife area is missing.

The missing element is "COWS". I will keep saying this in any forum presented by the DNR. When the DNR takes over it has no interest in returning the valley to the pristine condition it was in prior to RIM (Reinvest in Minnesota), CREP (Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program), and ultimately the DNR. The only thing the valley will be is an overgrown disaster area subject to flooding, mass erosion and mudslides.

Buffalo have been gone for over 150 years. These animals were the ultimate recycling machine and the next best thing is cows. They keep the noxious weeds down, keep the tree infestation down and reseed, breakup the soil, and continually re-fertilize enabling healthier grasses which filters and reduces the runoff.

Metro area bureaucrats need to get off their duff and get a real education and pass that education on to the public.

I attended the last Master Plan meeting. Not a single person in that meeting had ever ridden the valley to see what it was and what the mess it is. I chatted with the facilitator from Wyoming. He has the same concerns since Wyoming did the same thing of getting rid of the cows pressured by the do-gooders. In his words, it ended in disaster.

To make it short, the current Master Plan associated with the survey is an overly expensive pipe dream.

