

Chapter 6

Parks

Parks are often cited as people's favorite places. They are the places people go to have fun, relax, and play. Whether it's a place to fish, take a quiet walk through the woods, or go on a vigorous run with the dog, a high-quality park and trail system has something for all ages and abilities.

Benton County has acknowledged the importance of providing park, trail, and open space opportunities that enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors. Parks and trails are essential to promoting community health and wellness, connecting individuals and families to ecological education and stewardship, promoting cultural understanding, and fostering economic viability.

The Parks chapter will serve as a implementation guide for future investments to the County's parks and trails.

Existing Conditions

Benton County includes a variety of county parks, trails, and natural areas that provide access to the outdoors for residents and visitors (see Figure 6.1). This system is further complemented by regional and local parks. The County's park and trail system is further defined throughout this section.

County Parks

County Signature Parks

Signature parks are larger in scale, provide active and passive recreation, and typically provide access to regional destinations such as lakes, rivers/creeks or forests. These parks are designed to serve a large number of park users throughout the county. Users are typically traveling longer distances (up to 30 minute travel sheds) to access these parks. Features unique to the County's signature parks might be a public beach, campgrounds, large rentable picnic shelters, multi-use open spaces, restroom facilities, and larger play areas. Today, there are two signature parks in Benton County:

Bend in the River (289 acres)

This land was acquired by the County in 2002 and is the largest county park in the system. The park includes 3,300 feet of undeveloped shoreline along the Mississippi River. Scenic views of the river bend and islands in the Mississippi River are one of the park's main attractions.



The County completed a master plan for the development of the park in December 2005 and amenities include restoration of the natural prairie, provision of picnic shelters, provision of hike and ski trails, wildlife viewing blinds and observation areas, and a preserved historic farmstead. A notable outcome of the Bend in the River Master Plan was the construction of a canoe landing.

Benton Beach (30 acres)

Features of the park include a campground with tent and RV sites, a restroom and shower house, and a picnic shelter. Lakeview Center is a 100-person capacity conference center with a two-story deck overlooking Little Rock Lake. Both the conference center and the picnic shelter are available for rent. For athletic and recreational facilities, the park provides a playground, horseshoe pits, sand volleyball courts, a softball field with backstop, a basketball court, and a disc-golf course.



County Community Parks

These parks are smaller and scaled for community or family gatherings, or for access to lakes. Typical amenities include passive open spaces, access to water bodies, picnic areas, and restroom facilities. Community parks generally have a closer service area, attracting visitors up to 15 minutes away.

Mayhew Lake Park (4.4 acres)

This park currently provides boat access to Mayhew Lake and has a picnic area. Amenities include an improved boat launch, fishing pier, picnic tables, and grills. Portable restrooms are provided.

Rose Anna Beach (0.6 acres)

This park serves as a neighborhood-scaled park, providing a picnic table, and a grill. During the winter months, the park provides access to Little Rock Lake.

St. Regis Park (0.6 acres)

This neighborhood-scaled park provides picnic tables, grills, and portable restrooms for park visitors to access Little Rock Lake for picnicking, fishing, and ice fishing. Limited vehicle access during the winter prevents erosion of the shoreline during the warmer months. Residents have indicated that future priorities for this area include: installation of hardy, native plants, educational or interpretive markers, and the installation of a canoe launch.



Rose Anna Beach (top image), St. Regis Park (bottom image)

County Natural Area Parks

These areas are intended for passive recreation uses such as walking and nature enthusiasts. These areas are unlikely to develop with recreational amenities. These areas are intended to be preserved, while providing residents access to nature. Future amenities may include non-paved trails, seating areas, informational kiosks, and picnic tables.

St. George Township Park (17 acres)

St. George Township Park is undeveloped at this time. Land was acquired through a generous donation by a county resident, and deed restrictions indicate the future use is for wildlife habitat and study of the natural area.

Wapicada Village / Mayhew Park (12.5 acres)

Wapicada Village / Mayhew Park is undeveloped at this time. The terrain and location in the Watab Creek floodplain make it difficult to access or develop as a viable park today. An abandoned railroad right-of-way, now privately owned, traverses the property.



Mayhew Lake Park

Regional and State Parks

Benton County does not have any regional or state parks. Regional and State parks in close proximity to Benton County that offer recreational options for residents include the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, Rum River State Forest, Crane Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, and St. Wendel Tamarack Bog Scientific and Natural Area.

Trails

County Trails

Benton County has developed some trails within its park system including at Bend in the River and Benton Beach. These internal trail networks provide pathways for walkers and runners within the signature parks. The County does not own or operate any trails outside of its current park system. The majority of the existing trails in Benton County fall under municipal jurisdictions and the state. However, this Comprehensive Plan recognizes the desire to build a more cohesive network of trails identified in the Regional Active Transportation Plan (2015).

These routes are identified in Figure 6.2.

State Trails

The Mississippi River defines Benton County's western border between Sherburne and Stearns County. The Mississippi River Trail (MRT) bikeway follows the river roughly 600 miles from its source at Itasca State Park to the Iowa border. Located largely on road shoulders, the route also includes segments of scenic state, regional and local trails. Minnesota's route, sometimes on both sides of the river, totals more than 800 miles. Portions of the MRT are located in the cities of Rice, Sartell, and Sauk Rapids (see Figure 6.3 and Figure 6.4). The MRT is intended to extend all the way to the Louisiana Delta Region at the Gulf of Mexico - some 3,000 miles.

Past Planning Efforts

A variety of plan documents were reviewed during the planning process. These plans and supporting planning/policy documents have been created over the last 10 years and provide a foundation for developing this chapter. The following is an inventory of relevant findings from this plan review.

Benton County Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan (2002)

This Plan identifies and prioritizes existing parks, trails and natural resource areas within the county that have a high potential for public use and enjoyment. In some respect, the plan today has been viewed as too aspirational from a programming and budgetary standpoint. The 2002 Master Plan provided a foundation for shaping the Parks Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan and its recommendations.

Regional Active Living Transportation Plan (2015)

The Public Health Divisions of Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright Counties, worked together under the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) to develop a Regional Active Transportation Plan (ATP) that identifies a set of strategies to be implemented by SHIP staff and/or community partners in the region for pedestrians and bicyclists. For this plan, a Regional Network was identified that connects the nodes and corridors in the region. The Regional Network represents high-level, conceptual connections between important regional origins and destinations and does not identify specific street routes, or facility types. The Plan serves as a guiding document in helping prioritize trail investments throughout the region.

Figure 6.1. Existing County Parks

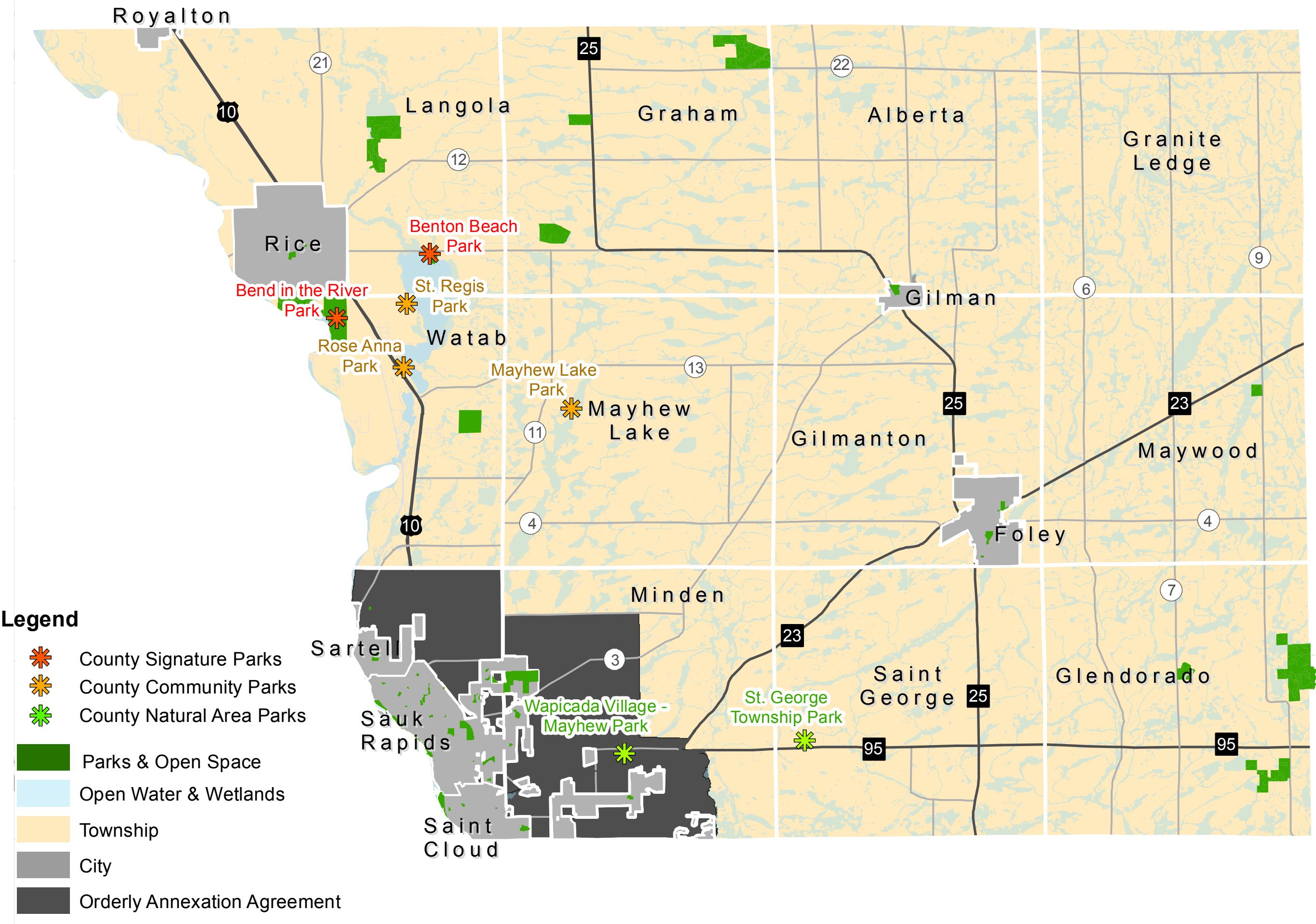


Figure 6.2. Regional Active Transportation Plan

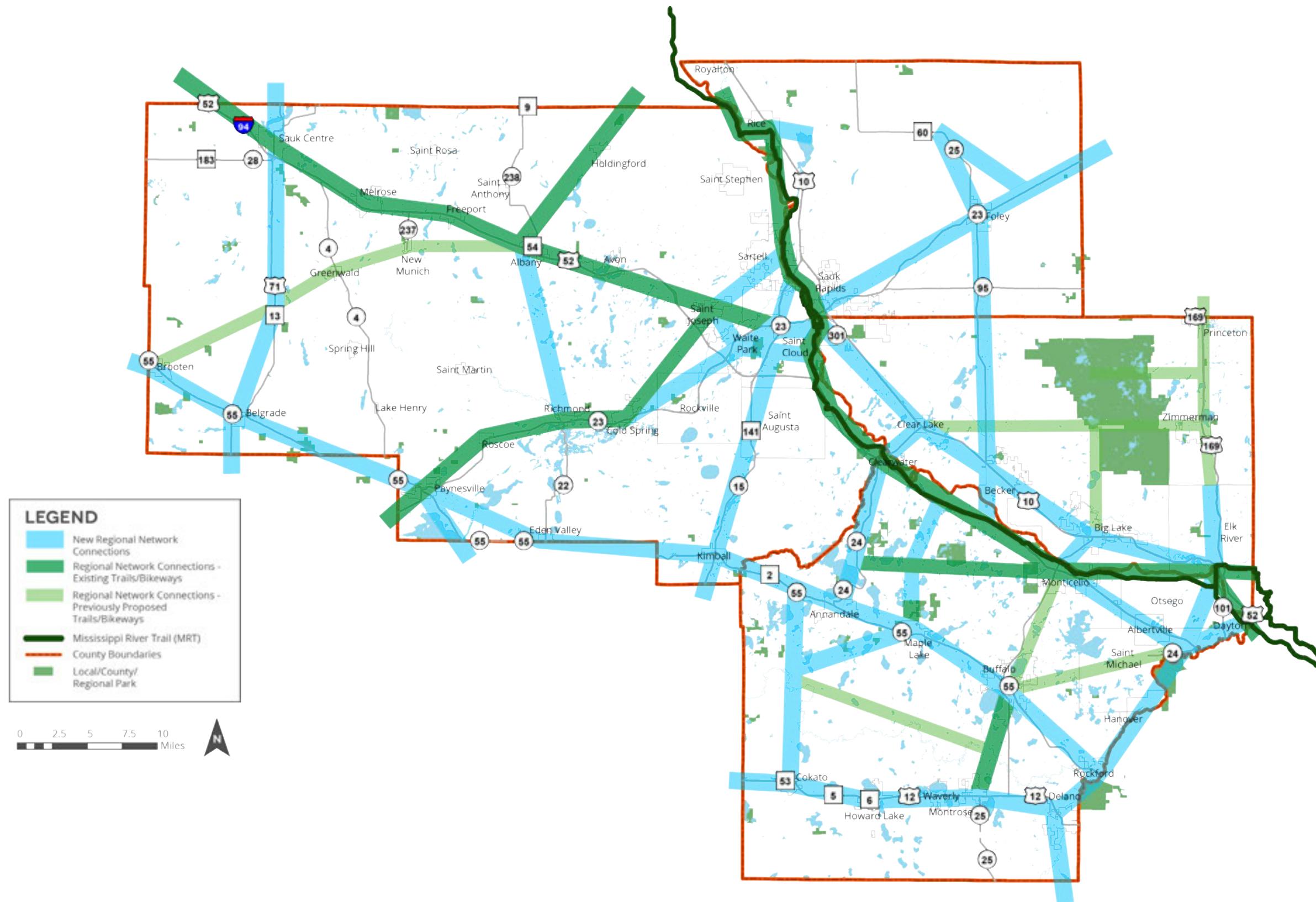


Figure 6.3. Mississippi River Trail (Map 1 of 2)

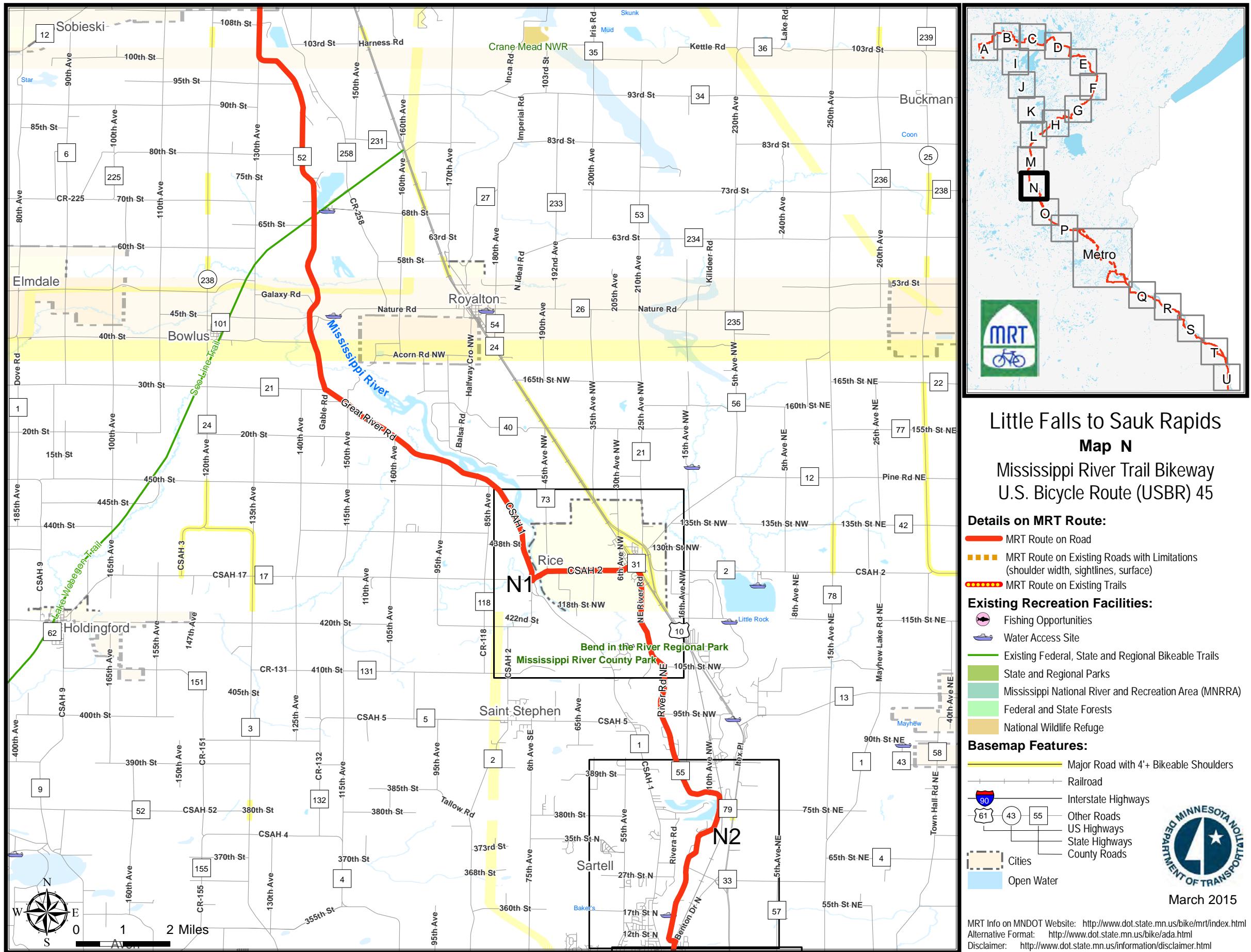
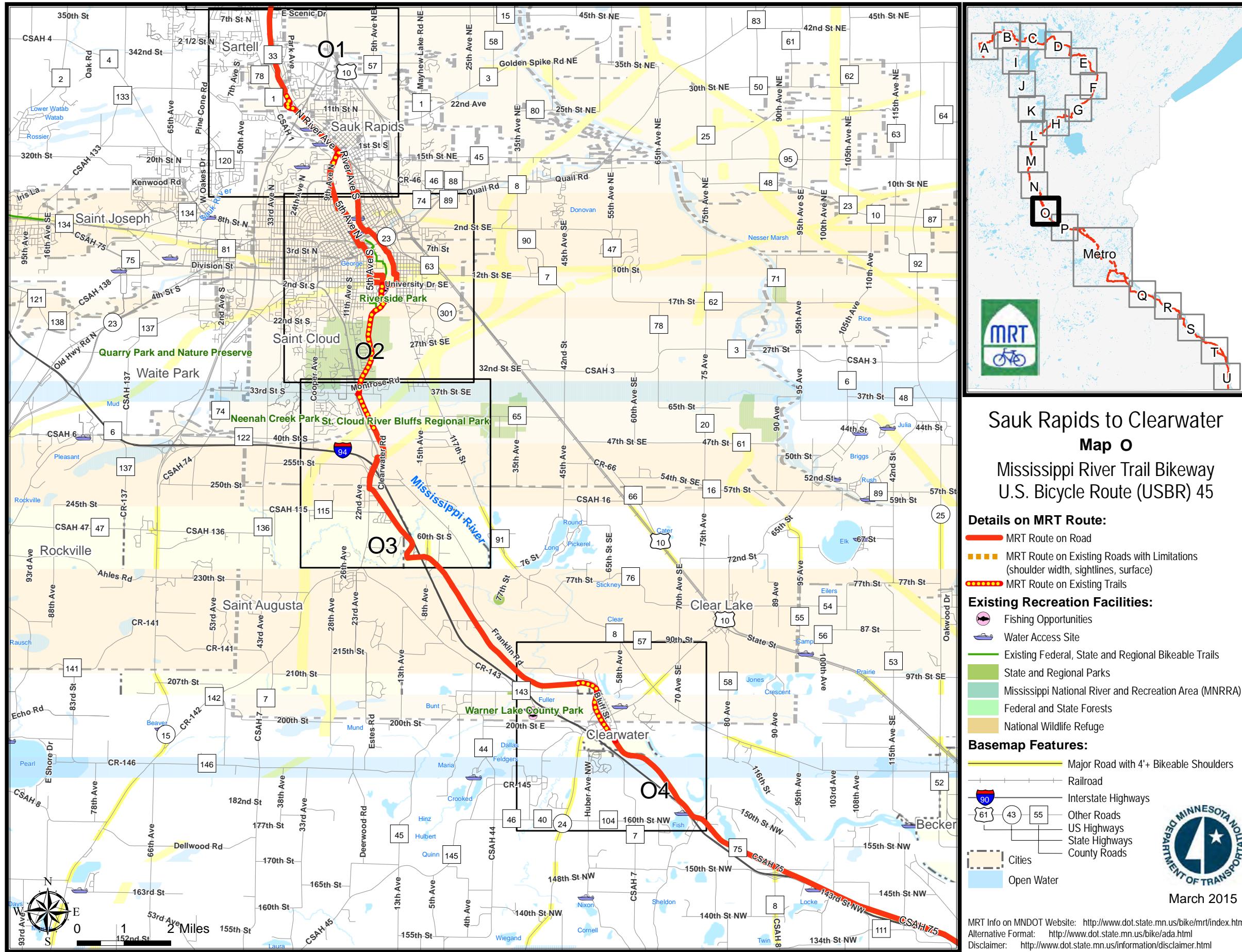


Figure 6.4. Mississippi River Trail (Map 2 of 2)



St. Cloud Area Planning Organization's (APO) Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

The St. Cloud APO is a regional body responsible for transportation planning in the entire urbanized area and is independent of the individual cities/counties in the region. The APO is responsible for developing and maintaining a twenty-year transportation plan for the St. Cloud metropolitan area, which includes portions of Benton County. The most recent Plan (Year 2040) was adopted October 21, 2014. The LRTP discusses bicycle and pedestrian initiatives. These initiatives include a regional network of trails and sidewalks that safely move people throughout the region. As it pertains to Benton County, this Plan provides policy direction for helping achieve a multimodal network within the St. Cloud metropolitan area (i.e., Sartell and Sauk Rapids).

Local Comprehensive Plans

The Cities of St. Cloud, Rice, Sartell and Sauk Rapids have adopted comprehensive plans or parks and trail master plans. These plans provide a framework for establishing their local park and trail system through goals, policies, and the identification of specific needs and projects. For example, the City of Rice adopted a Parks & Trails Master Plan in 2017. This plan identifies various improvements to the local system, including trail improvements along County Roads that connect downtown Rice to the Mississippi River.

Influencing Factors

How people play and spend leisure time has changed over the last 10 to 20 years. Benton County recognizes the ever-changing recreational needs of the county. Some of the influencing factors that have shaped how people play and spend leisure time locally and nationally include:

- People are increasingly busy and have more demands on personal time
- Importance of place and desire to make memorable experiences
- People want to share their experiences on social media
- Concerns for safety in public places and neighborhoods
- Governments and agencies have tight budgets
- Interest in staying active while aging
- Higher frequency in new residents moving to the community
- Popularity of trails and information recreation
- Increased interest in specialized recreation facilities and aquatics
- Increase of technologies leads to disconnection from nature
- Popularity of non-traditional recreation activities
- Green alternatives to traditional landscaping and for water quality

Emerging Trends & Opportunities

Benton County recognizes changing and emerging trends that are influencing how people play and use park facilities. The following list includes trends that have emerged locally and nationally over the last ten years that serve as potential opportunities for Benton County. Whether the trends are on the rise or in decline, they are worth noting as they may affect Benton County residents in one way or another.

Access to Water

Benton Beach and Bend in the River have become popular tourist destinations in part due to their relationship to water (e.g., the Mississippi River). Visitors and residents are participating in more non-motorized water activities, such as canoeing and paddle boarding. As the County improves its park system, consideration should be given to creating better access to the river and lakes. As part of this effort, the County will need to be aware of invasive species, and ongoing implications to erosion and sedimentation.



Active Living

A healthy recreation and park system equals healthy residents. People who engage in regular physical activity are healthier and happier. When people have access to parks, trails, and recreation, they exercise more. In addition, increased exposure to natural areas has been linked to improved physical and psychological health. Benton County's Public Health Department can serve as a resource in helping promote active living goals, while seeking funding opportunities to enhance the park and trail system.

Fiscal Constraints

Many communities are dealing with tight budgets due to the economic downturn in the past ten years, as well as the impacts of the retiring baby boomer generation. In an effort to address these fiscal constraints, some counties are deferring maintenance in the upkeep of their parks and recreation system. This approach can result in a backlog of operations and maintenance costs that lead to a negative perception and decreased use of the park system.

Residents and stakeholders have expressed the importance that parks and trails play in their quality of life. Numerous studies have shown that residential property values increase as investments are made to the park and trail systems. Parks and trails can also positively affect commercial property and can be catalysts for development. For example, bike trails are growing in popularity and trail heads are being promoted as tourist destinations by other counties. New businesses (e.g., restaurants, bike shops, bed and breakfasts, and gift shops) are looking to locate along these corridors to meet the needs of visitors.

Greenway Corridors and Trail Connections

Today, trails have become part of greenway corridors that provide wildlife habitat and movement corridors, open space vistas, water treatment benefits, and the opportunity to interpret local history and culture. As part of the County's trail planning efforts, best practices should be applied that enhance and protect natural resources and water quality.

Natural Resource Management

The need and awareness to be environmentally sensitive in the way residents and visitors impact the county's natural surroundings is ever increasing. Benton County recognizes that in order for change to occur it must start by adopting goals and standards to protect resources for future generations. These goals are reflected in Chapter 3.

Reconnecting with Nature

A larger emphasis is being placed on regional destinations, especially at the county level. Regional destinations provide a different level of service that cannot be offered at the city level. County parks typically provide opportunities to reconnect with nature in larger, rural landscapes and serve visitors at a regional scale. Benton Beach and Bend in the River serve this role.

Safety

Safety was listed as a key value to the Benton County Park Commission as part of this process. Residents value the safety they feel living in Benton County and desire parks and trails that promote safety. Future investments in the parks should take into consideration Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED are design principals that help reduce crime (e.g., lighting and open sight lines).



Placemaking & Memorable Experiences

More communities are building parks and facilities that facilitate placemaking opportunities (e.g., festivals, concerts, events, and places to gather). The Project for Public Spaces (www.pps.org) describes "Placemaking" as a process that facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution. The rise of social media has also played a significant role in how people capture (e.g., sharing photos) their memorable experiences. Residents have cited Benton Beach and Bend in the River as two county amenities that have shaped memorable experiences in the county park system.

Future Needs

In order to evaluate the future needs of Benton County's parks and trails, several methods were utilized:

- **Peer County Comparison:** A peer review of similar counties was conducted to better understand emerging trends and needs at a county level.
- **Travel Shed Analysis:** The County parks were evaluated using a level of service analysis to determine if residents have adequate access to recreational opportunities.
- **Park Dedication Review:** An overview of the County's Park Dedication Fee was documented to determine available resources for future park and trail improvements.
- **Park Commission Engagement:** The Park Commission was actively engaged throughout the planning effort. Their input was utilized to help share the plan's recommendations.

Peer County Comparison

The counties selected for the Peer County Comparison include Freeborn, Goodhue, Isanti, McLeod and Steele County (see Table 6.1). The survey focused on the size of their system, emerging needs, department organization, and operations and maintenance needs.

Peer Review Findings

Findings from the peer review indicate the following:

- Benton County's park system is similar in size to its peer counties (see Table 6.2).
- There is a growing demand for more walking trails or pathways within the Benton County Parks and peer counties.
- The peer counties are experiencing a decrease in outdoor picnic rentals. However, the counties are seeing an increase in rental facilities that offer modern amenities (e.g., air conditioning and restrooms).
- The demand for camping sites has risen, in addition to electrical sites for recreational vehicles/campers.
- County residents and visitors are looking for a stronger connection to nature through passive open spaces.

Table 6.1. Peer Community Context Comparison

Context	Benton	Freeborn	Goodhue	Isanti	McLeod	Steele
Population (2017)	40,128	30,550	46,562	39,553	35,884	36,828
Households (2017)	16,012	13,121	19,205	14,710	14,675	14,489
Persons Per Household (2017)	2.44	2.28	2.38	2.66	2.41	2.50
Acres	260,986	461,426	498,888	289,970	324,334	276,487
County Seat	Foley	Albert Lea	Red Wing	Cambridge	Glencoe	Owatonna
County Seat Population (2017)	2,717	18,032	16,572	8,868	5,519	25,922

- Benton County and the peer counties are seeing a stronger demand for mountain bike trails, which has resulted in competing interests and conflicts between other users (hikers and skiers).
- The peer counties are placing a larger emphasis on creating regional destinations, while maintaining existing assets and amenities. This has resulted in the counties pursuing regional designation for their parks through the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission.
- The peer counties are actively chasing grant funds to help offset costs. Park Master Plans have played an important role in helping secure funding.
- There is a growing demand by County residents to see more investments in the park system.

Travel Shed Analysis

The following information offers one lens through which to view the state of Benton County's park system. Typically park planning is done through a level-of-service analysis, which measures the number of parks and their size, the type of amenities offered in each park, and a resident survey/assessment to determine their needs. These findings help shape specific recommendations for each park.

This analysis looks closer at the County's Signature Parks (Bend in the River and Benton Beach) and their service areas from an access/mobility perspective. Figure 6.5 and Figure 6.6 demonstrate that both of these parks are within a 10 to 30 minute driving radius. This standard is used as a typical baseline for assessing gaps in the county system. Based on these radii, Benton County's Signature Parks serve most if not all of its residents. Underserved areas include far reaching areas along Benton County's eastern border.

The travel shed assessment assumes that everyone has access to the County's Signature Parks by vehicle. Accessing these parks by bus, bike or foot is limited. Benton County should explore opportunities that provide better connections for these users. The Transportation Chapter in this Comprehensive Plan and the Regional Active Living Transportation Plan (2015) provides guidance on how to improve these connections.

Table 6.2. Peer Community Park System Comparison

Park System	Benton	Freeborn	Goodhue	Isanti	McLeod	Steele
Number of County Parks	4	4	1	6	6	4
County Park Acreage	338	266	25	684	571	23
State/Regional Parks (Acres)	0	0	78	244	0	0
Indoor Regional Recreational Center	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total Park Acres	338	266	103	928	571	23
Percent of Park Acres to County Area	0.13%	0.06%	0.02%	0.32%	0.18%	0.01%

Figure 6.5. Bend in the River Travel Shed

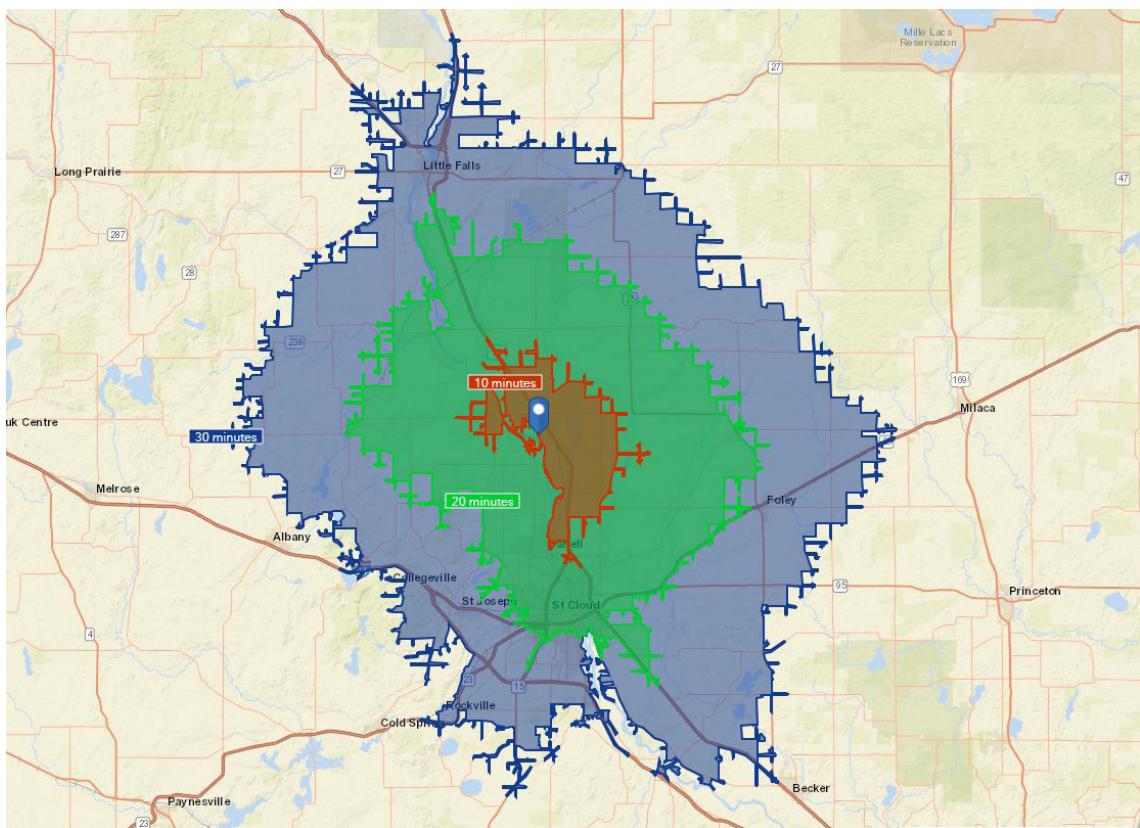
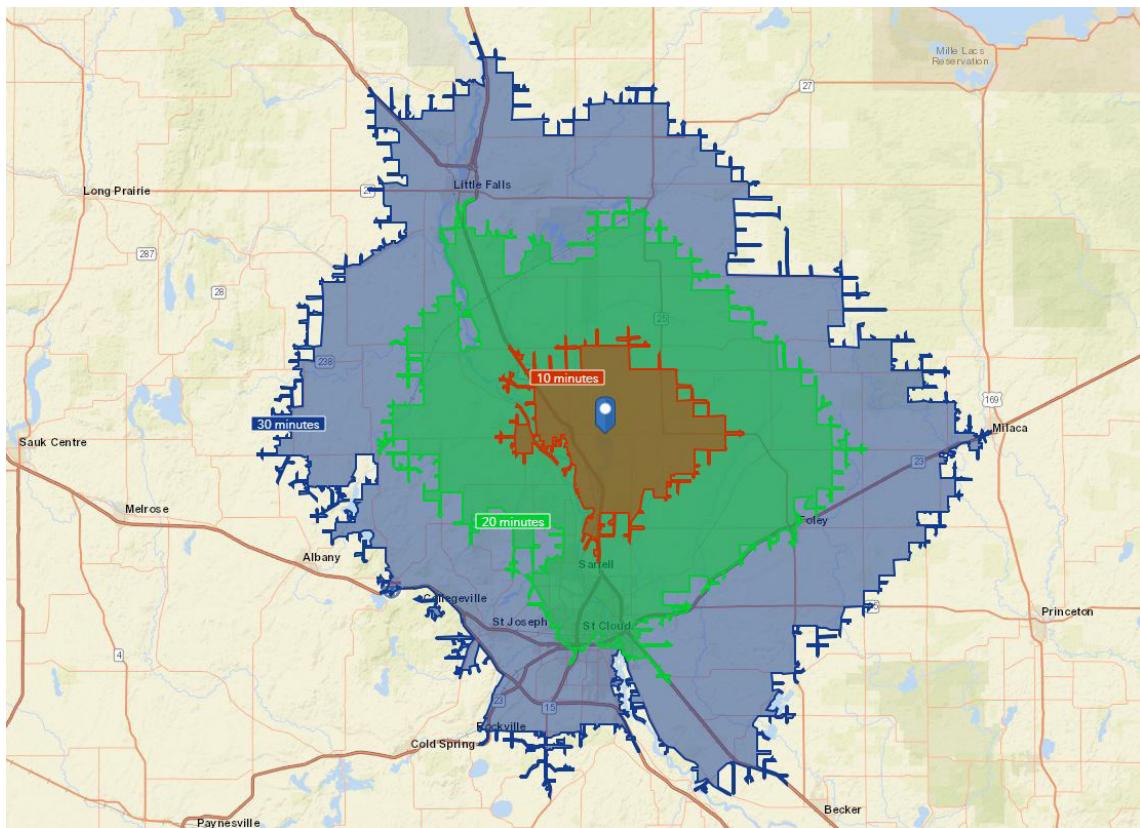


Figure 6.6. Benton Beach Travel Shed



Park Dedication Review

The County's existing Park Dedication ordinance and fees collected to date were evaluated to determine available resources for future park and trail improvements. It was also an opportunity to educate stakeholders on how these funds can be used according to state law.

Minnesota State Law

As part of the land development process, Benton County may require a developer to dedicate land to the township for park and recreation purposes (Minnesota State Statute 394.25 Subd. 7 applies to a County and 462.358 Subd. 2b applies to a City). This requirement is typically addressed in a County's Development Code or subdivision ordinance, and referred to as a park dedication. A park dedication ordinance recognizes that with development there is an increased need for parks and open spaces. At its discretion, a county or city may require a developer to meet those needs by choosing one or more of the following options:

- Pay a fee to the municipality (known as a fee in lieu) for future park investments;
- Donate land for park and recreational purposes;
- Construct recreational facilities; and/or,
- Privately reserve land within the subdivision for public park and recreation purposes.

Benton County's Park Land Dedication

Benton County approved a Park Dedication ordinance in 2004 (see sidebar), requiring dedication of park land or park dedication fees with all new development. Since the establishment of the park dedication ordinance, Benton County has collected an annual average of \$4,000 in fees (see Table 6.3).

The fees are collected if the County Board, at its discretion, accepts a per lot cash fee in lieu of land. Historically, this has been the most common approach. The fee may be up to 10 percent of the

Benton County Park Land Dedication

**(Development Code Section
10.12.2 - Ord. #373, adopted
2/17/04)**

All new residential plats, including plats associated with planned unit developments, shall be subject to the park dedication requirements prescribed in the Benton County Development Code. In all new subdivision plats, up to 10% (ten percent) of the gross area shall be set aside and dedicated by fee title or easement to Benton County for public recreation space.

In lieu of land dedication, the County Board and Director may require a financial contribution. Historically, this has been the most common approach.

Table 6.3. Benton County Park Dedication Fees Collected

Year	Collected
2012	\$4,200
2013	\$3,000
2014	\$4,800
2015	\$4,800
2016	\$600
2017	\$1,800
2018	\$7,100
Average	\$3,757

median undeveloped lot value as of the date of final plat approval, as determined by the Benton County Assessor.

Per State Statute (394.25 Subd. 7), the County must use at least 75 percent of these funds in the township or city where the collection occurred. The township board may agree to allow the County to use these funds outside of the township in a manner that is consistent with the comprehensive plan, master plan, or capital improvement program. The Parks chapter also provides a long-term plan for future park and trail improvements that (in conjunction with other master plans) forms the nexus for establishment of park dedication.

Using Park Dedication Funds

Table 6.5 summarizes Benton County's 2018 Year End balance for the park dedication fees based on the 75/25 percent statutory requirements. A few townships (i.e., Gilmanton, St. George, and Watab) have utilized their funds in recent years (see Table

6.4). Benton County's park dedication funds may be relatively small in nature; however, these funds still serve as a resource for implementing new parks and amenities. To help maximize these dollars, the Township(s) and County should work together to find projects that provide regional benefits.

Table 6.4. Park Dedication Fees Spent

Year	Townships	County
2012	\$0	\$0
2013	\$0	\$0
2014	\$0	\$0
2015	\$10,722	\$0
2016	\$0	\$0
2017	\$8,000	\$0
2018	\$0	\$0
Total:	\$18,722	\$0

Table 6.5. Benton County 2018 Year End (YE) Balance of Park Dedication Fees

Township	75% Portion			25% Portion		
	Township \$ Collected	Township \$ Spent	Township YE Balance	County \$ Collected	County \$ Spent	County YE Balance
Alberta	\$0	\$0	\$900	\$0	\$0	\$1,223
Gilmanton	\$0	\$0	\$2,800	\$0	\$0	\$3,600
Glendorado	\$1,350	\$0	\$2,700	\$450	\$0	\$900
Graham	\$0	\$0	\$2,700	\$0	\$0	\$600
Granite Ledge	\$0	\$0	\$4,050	\$0	\$0	\$1,350
Længola	\$900	\$0	\$2,250	\$300	\$0	\$1,200
Mayhew Lake	\$0	\$0	\$5,339	\$0	\$0	\$1,761
Maywood	\$900	\$0	\$6,075	\$300	\$0	\$2,025
Minden	\$450	\$0	\$8,438	\$150	\$0	\$2,813
St. George	\$375	\$0	\$375	\$125	\$0	\$6,325
Sauk Rapids	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Watab	\$1,350	\$0	\$11,587	\$450	\$0	\$5,118
Totals	\$5,325	\$0	\$47,214	\$1,775	\$0	\$26,914

It is important to recognize these projects need to align with State Statute requirements (Minnesota State Statute 394.25 Subd. 7). Per State Statute, funds can be used for the acquisition and development or improvements of parks, recreation facilities, playgrounds, trails, wetlands, or open space. Funds cannot be used for ongoing operation, maintenance, or redevelopment of existing parks, recreational facilities, playgrounds, trails, wetlands, or open space.

Moving forward, the Townships and County should work together in maximizing their park dedication funds. To achieve this objective, both parties should consider the following:

- Determine the Township's recreational needs and develop objective standards for the amount of recreational lands and facilities that will be needed to meet growth and development. At that time, redirect park dedication funds to those needs.

- Utilize existing park dedication funds as a local match for grant applications.
- Identify park needs that provide regional benefits to multiple Townships within a specified area. Utilize park dedication funds to meet those needs; however, this may require a Township(s) to redirect their park dedication funds to an improvement outside of their jurisdiction.

Table 6.6 is a tool the County and Townships can use to evaluate and budget for new improvements. In general, the capital costs can be viewed as eligible projects that can be funded with park dedication fees if they provide a "new" recreational amenity. Ineligible projects include operation and maintenance needs. State Statute should be reviewed to determine what constitutes as an eligible project.

Table 6.6. Planning Level Cost Estimates

Park Element	Capital Cost	Annual O&M Cost	Estimated Life (Years)	Notes & Assumptions
New Park Development				
County Park	\$90,000/Acre	\$550/Acre	25-50	
General Grounds & Landscaping				
Mowed Turf Grass (Irrigated)	\$60,000/Acre New Sod \$34,000/Acre New Seed	\$1,000/Acre	15-30	Includes mowing, trimming, fertilizing, weed control, aerating & overseeding.
Mowed Turf Grass (Non Irrigated)	\$30,000/Acre New Sod \$2,000/Acre New Seed	\$800/Acre	15-30	Does not assume hydroseed. Includes mowing, trimming, fertilizing, weed control, aerating & overseeding.
Irrigation	\$25,000/Acre	\$1,300/Acre	25	
Contractual Landscape Maintenance	\$6.50 Sq. Ft. (\$282,600/Acre)	\$.25 Sq. Ft. (\$9,250/Acre)	20	
Prairie Restoration	\$5,000/Acre	\$300/Acre		
Naturalized Shoreline	\$100/LF	\$400/Acre		

Park Element	Capital Cost	Annual O&M Cost	Estimated Life (Years)	Notes & Assumptions
Rain Garden	\$10/Sq. Ft.	\$300/Acre		Low end - high end could be up to \$20/Sq Ft
Woodland / Slope Restoration	\$4,000/Acre	\$400/Acre		Assumes restoration of existing wooded area. \$20,000/Acre if new tree planting required
Park Building & Shelters				
Buildings with Restrooms	\$300-\$400/Sq. Ft.	\$11,000/Bldg./Yr.	40	Includes all buildings
Picnic Shelters	\$150-\$200/Sq. Ft.	\$3,800/Bldg./Yr.	40	Includes all shelters
Trails & Surfaces				
Trails (10 Ft. Wide Asphalt)	\$50/LF	\$5,280 Per Mile	30	
Parking Lots (Asphalt)	\$2,500-\$3,000/Stall	\$20-\$25 Per Stall	40	
Sidewalks (Concrete)	\$30/Linear foot			Assumes 6 foot wide sidewalk
Natural Surface Trails	\$30/Linear foot if limestone ADA or \$5/Linear foot if rustic footpath	\$500/Mile	-	
Park Amenities				
Lighting	\$15,000		15	Includes 2-3 pedestrian scale light posts
Nature Play Areas	\$50,000-\$100,000	\$1,000/Site	20	Assumes 1 to 2 signature features and remainder natural materials
Community Gardens	\$10,000-\$20,000/Acre	\$800 Acre	-	
Off-Leash Dog Park	\$10,000-\$50,000 Acre	\$800 Acre	15-20	
Fishing Pier	\$25,000		20	Includes 100' long wood pier with railings
Dock	\$10,000		20	Includes 40' long metal dock
Swimming Beach	\$15,000		25	Includes grading and sand
Splash Pad	\$600,000	\$5,000	15-20	
Amphitheater	\$800,000		50	Assumes open stage and seating for 200+
Disc Golf Course	\$25,000		25	

All costs are planning level costs in 2018 dollars and do not necessarily reflect additional costs, such as engineering, design, construction administration, and staff time.

Parks Commission Engagement

The Park Commission was actively engaged throughout the planning process and served as a guiding body in creating this chapter. The planning consultant met with the Parks Commission on five occasions to discuss various aspects of the plan.

- July 26, 2018
- October 16, 2018
- February 6, 2019
- March 27, 2019
- April 24, 2019

As part of these meeting discussions, the following objectives were identified to help guide the Parks Commission in their future decision making:

- Maintain and enhance Benton County's Signature Parks and County Community Parks before adding new County parks to the system.
- The County will only take on the responsibility of managing and maintaining the existing County Parks and natural areas. Townships may choose to build new parks with their park dedication funds (in accordance to state statute) or through other financial resources. However, the Townships will

be the sole party responsible for managing and maintaining these parks over time.

- Find opportunities to maximize and use the park dedication funds (both county and township) that enhance the County's Signature Parks and Community Parks.
- Townships who choose to use or transfer their park dedication funds should provide the County a township resolution.
- Find opportunities to start implementing the Regional Active Living Transportation Plan (2015) to provide better pedestrian and bicycle access between county parks, townships, and cities. A short-term priority should include better connections between the City of Rice, Mississippi River, and Bend in the River. The City of Rice's 2017 Parks and Trails Master Plan should serve as a guide in helping inform this connection.
- Actively pursue funding opportunities (e.g., grants) that will support improvements to the County parks and trail system.
- Formalize internal roles and responsibilities in planning, maintaining, and managing Benton County's parks and trails.



Next Steps

Parks are not mere expenditures, but an investment in the future well-being of individuals and groups, as well as the continued attractiveness and viability of the County. Based on the future needs assessment, stakeholder input, staff direction, and guidance from the Parks Commission, the Parks chapter calls for a generalized list of projects that will focus on short-, mid-, and long-term action items (see Table 6.7). These projects were informed by the objectives established by the Parks Commission in the previous section.

The goal of this type of implementation strategy is to prioritize larger initiatives. The County and Parks Commission will need to continue to evaluate individual park needs on an annual basis and program these improvements in a fiscally responsible manner.

The priorities have been summarized into three categories:

- **Planning Initiatives:** Planning initiatives typically include master plans, environmental studies or engineering design. These type of initiatives are typically done to help set the stage for future capital investments. These types of initiatives help support a grant application by demonstrating to the grantee that the project has been fully conceptualized and planned accordingly.
- **Capital Investments:** Capital investments are physical improvements to the built or natural environment. This may include new buildings, land acquisition, environmental restoration, or park amenities (e.g., benches, signage or playground equipment). Capital investments should be programmed or considered as part of future Capital Improvement Plans (CIPs).

- **Policy & Staffing:** The implementation of planning initiatives and capital investments require time and resources. In that respect, this category has identified additional staffing needs to help formalize a parks department and carry out the priorities identified in this plan. This may also include policy revision to better align and support emerging trends and park needs.

Ongoing Projects

Equally important to the initial capital costs for a project are ongoing operations and maintenance costs. Adequately budgeting operations and maintenance ensures that facilities fulfill life expectancy and that parks remain safe and welcoming. Investing in the park system is an important aspect of retaining and attracting residents, while improving their quality of life.

In addition to the priority projects, Benton County should consider the following on-going initiatives.

- Continue a regular patrol of parks to provide for the safety of park users.
- Periodically update and distribute the list of available public park facilities, park maps, and trail maps to the community and interested groups. This can be achieved online or through various marketing materials.
- Continue to actively engage the Parks Commission as the guiding body for recommendation to the park and trail system.
- Identify and program improvements as part of the County's Capital Improvements Program.

Table 6.7. Priority Projects**Short-Term Priority Projects (1 - 3 Years)**

Planning Initiatives	Capital Investments	Policy and Staffing
Update the Park Master Plan for Benton Beach & Bend in the River.	Design, install and maintain standardized park signage for all County parkland and trails.	Dedicate one full-time staff member to oversee park master planning and day-to-day planning needs.
Investigate the feasibility of implementing a county trail system that compatible with the Active Transportation Plan recommendations.	Create improved trail and pedestrian connections within the existing park systems.	Update the County Park Dedication Fee ordinance.
Seek a regional designation for Bend in the River through the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC).	Develop and implement a program (e.g., skiing and snow showing paths) for year-round use in the County's signature parks.	Begin prioritizing and programming investments through the Capital Improvement Programs process.
	Collaborate with the City of Rice in expanding the Mississippi River Trail (as identified in their 2017 Parks Mater Plan) by implementing an off-street paved trail along CSAH 2 between the Mississippi River, Bend in the River, and downtown Rice.	

Mid-Term Priority Projects (4 - 7 Years)

Planning Initiatives	Capital Investments	Policy and Staffing
Explore methods to integrate parks and trails with the networks of adjacent communities (cities and counties) and State facilities.	Implement improvements and recommendations from the Benton Beach and Bend in the River Master Plans.	Expand park staff to two full-time staff members to oversee park master planning and day-to-day planning needs.
Develop a Park Master Plan for Rose Anna Beach.	Begin investing in trail improvements that adhere to the Regional Active Living Transportation Plan and feasibility report recommend as part of the short-term priority projects.	Formalize a Parks Department as it's own group or within a similar department (e.g., Public works).
Develop a Park Master Plan for Mayhew Lake Park.	Re-establish a swim area at Benton Beach.	

Long-Term Priority Projects (8 - 10+ years)

Planning Initiatives	Capital Investments	Policy and Staffing
Seek opportunities through public or private funds for the establishment of a new county park.	Implement improvements and recommendations from the Bend in the River and Benton Beach Master Plans.	Expand park staff to two full-time staff members to oversee park master planning and day-to-day planning needs.
Investigate the feasibility of implementing a county trail system that is in unison with Active Transportation Plan's recommendations.	Implement improvements and recommendations from the Rose Anna Beach and Mayhew Lake Park Master Plans.	

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