

*Sherburne County  
Parks,  
Trails,  
and Open Space  
Policy Plan*



**Adopted June 28, 2005**

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## Executive Summary

In November 1997, Sherburne County adopted its first Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan for the county. The Plan was monumental in that it helped establish the first ever Sherburne County Park Commission to serve as a recommending body to the County Board on developing a county parks/trail system, but more important, it provided a framework and direction for the county to take toward identifying the issues, establishing policies, and developing protocol concerning parks, trails, and open spaces in Sherburne County. As identified in that plan, periodic reviews and amendments were recommended to ensure that it remains relevant and current with the ever-changing needs of Sherburne County. The changes that have occurred within Sherburne County in the eight years since the Plan was adopted have been dramatic. While a population increase was anticipated, the rate of growth surpassed even the high projections earlier made by the Minnesota State Demographic Center.

This proposed plan is intended to serve as a continuation of the existing County Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan, encompassing the same concepts and goals while incorporating a more specific strategy and vision for the development of a Parks and Trails system. As a result of various economic, ecologic, and social changes in the county and the state, many factors contributed in helping justify the need to make changes to the existing Plan at this time. The following factors are a summary of those changes which helped formulate some of the priorities, goals, statements, and recommendations that are within this Plan.

- ✚ Population Growth – Expected to be the fastest growing county through 2030
- ✚ Rising Land Prices – Land prices have dramatically increased in the past 10 years
- ✚ Declining Opportunities - The best sites for Regional Parks are in high demand
- ✚ Land Consumption/Higher Density – Fewer open spaces remain for recreation
- ✚ Leveraging Grants - Be in financial position to match grants as opportunities arise
- ✚ Safety - Higher population densities/traffic has resulted in greater need for trails
- ✚ Economic Development - Sherburne’s landscape and destinations are unique
- ✚ Sense of Urgency - The window of opportunity is small

Many of these same issues affecting Sherburne County are also affecting the cities, townships, and counties either within or adjacent to Sherburne County. As these local units of government continue to develop plans for public recreational areas, it will be increasingly important to work together through collaborative efforts in order to best provide quality and cost-effective public recreational opportunities now and in the future.

## **Section 1: Introduction**

### **Growth of Sherburne County**

Sherburne County is currently rated as the 40<sup>th</sup> fastest growing county in the United States and from 2000 to 2010 is expected to gain more households than any county in Minnesota. In addition, continued rapid growth is projected for at least the next 25 years when Sherburne's population in 2030 will grow to 121,920, nearly 3 times to what it was in 1990.

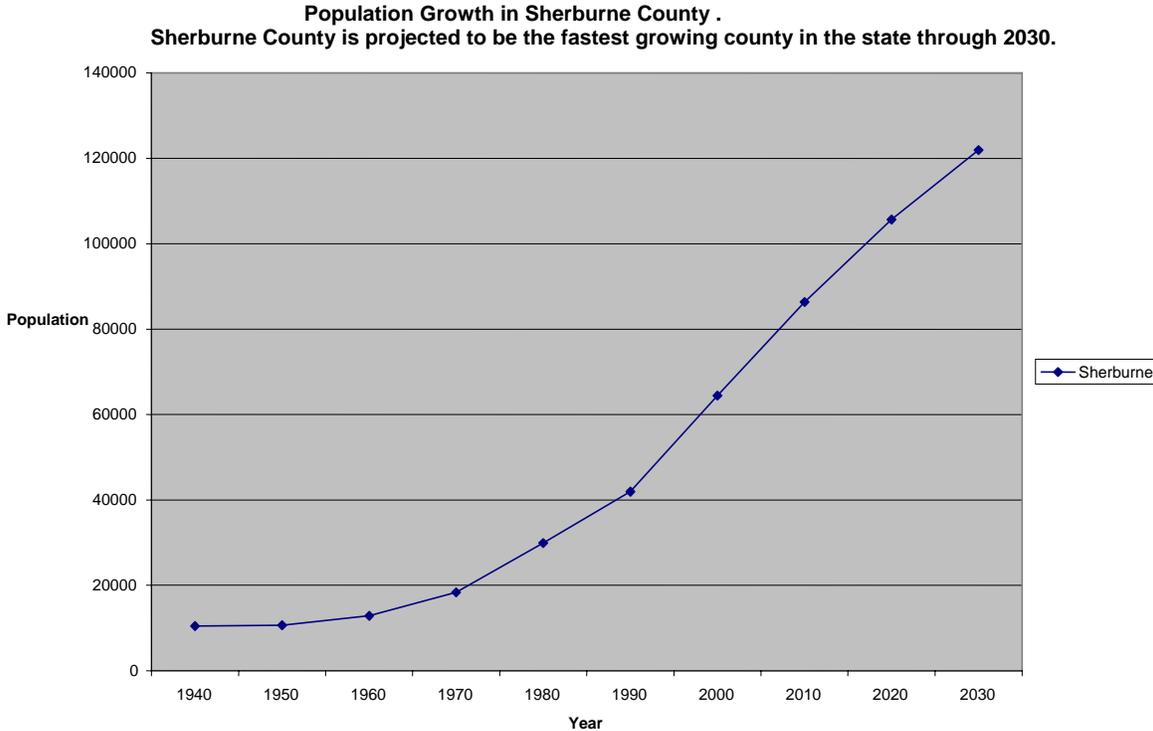
Considering these projected growth rates over the next 2 decades, it is clear that the population growth in the county will affect the local infrastructure and the space required for public services, but even more, it will forever change the rural landscape of the area and play a critical role in shaping Sherburne County's future appearance. Identifying and planning for current and future park, trail, and open space needs for the residents of Sherburne County at all levels including the township, city, and county level is evident.

The growth in Sherburne County can be attributed to a variety of reasons including location (between the Twin Cities and the St. Cloud metropolitan areas), good highway access (State Hwy. 10 and State Hwy. 169 corridors linking to the northwest sector of the metro area), and affordable housing. Another reason is that some people are simply trying to get out of the "urban" infrastructure to experience a "non-city" atmosphere in much of Sherburne County.

Coming with the growth has been an increasing demand for land. Regional assets that significantly contribute to the quality of life such as parks, trails, and open spaces are in equally high demand. Simultaneously, the natural amenities, the higher-quality vistas, and the unique natural resources that depict Sherburne County's landscape are becoming scarce. The 2003 Sherburne County Residential Survey statistically showed that residents by about a 2 to 1 margin feel that parks and trails are a very important aspect of their choice of residence and quality of life. Residents also expressed overwhelming support on the need for the county to preserve corridors near waterways as greenway space, protect sensitive plant communities and unique ecosystems, and to establish more biking and hiking trails as part of neighborhood development designs. Nationwide, there are numerous studies that show that protecting natural resources and open spaces improves quality of life, increases property values, and saves money by maintaining naturally occurring services such as storm water retention, groundwater supply, and high quality habitat for plants and animals.

Opportunities for establishing regional parks, trails, and open spaces still exist, however they are not only limited, but very likely will become cost prohibitive very soon. Since much of the most desirable land for parks is also sought for development purposes, the greater demand for these sites continues to drive up the land value. With escalating land prices, projected growth rates over the next 25 years among the highest in the nation, and the finite number of quality sites having potential to serve as large, regional parks, the window of opportunity is small. The urgency and need to identify and plan for future recreational and open space needs for the residents of this county is critical. This Plan was written to help address the issues identified above, to outline a framework for the acquisition, development, and maintenance of parks, trails, and open spaces in Sherburne County, and to assist in the protection of the significant resources in the county well into the future.

One of the goals of the Sherburne County Park Plan is to identify possible areas for future county parks. Sherburne County is currently the 2<sup>nd</sup> fastest growing county in Minnesota. Sherburne had an estimated 2003 population of 74,763 and a projected 2030 population of 121,920, a 63% increase, or an average expected increase of 1,746 persons per year.



**Current county park facilities will be inadequate to meet the needs of the growing number of residents. Sherburne County shall explore potential park sites before they are lost as a result of development or become cost prohibitive.**

Sherburne County’s priorities are to acquire land for new parks and to develop existing parks. The County park system will concentrate on passive recreational uses, to include trails, vegetative and animal habitats, and public interpretive facilities. The first priority of the Sherburne County park system is to identify potential land for acquisition. Sherburne County will concentrate on acquiring land in a geographically distributed pattern but must consider and be able to act on ideal opportunities as they arise.

**Historical Background**

Sherburne County was first established in 1856, after separating from Benton County. Throughout the areas history, dating back to the early inhabitants of the Cheyenne, Dakota, and Ojibwa Indians, there has been a rich history of individuals and events that have influenced Sherburne County’s past and present. Transportation systems and historic events such as the Zebulon Pike explorations of 1805, the common fur trading routes along the Mississippi, the historic ox-cart trail dated around the 1850’s, the Military Road, and the St. Paul - Minneapolis & Manitoba railway service beginning in the 1880’s have been historic in how Sherburne County survived and evolved. Today, with potential plans for the North Star Corridor commuter system, another mode of transportation is being considered. Providing alternative forms of energy has

also been a key in the area, with Sherburne County leading the way in utilizing coal, wind, recyclable waste, landfill gas, and nuclear energy alternatives. Sherburne County also has a rich history in agriculture, 4H, and conservation efforts. Opportunities to share with the public how these events in history have influenced the county can be found and acted on through interpretation of public parks and trails. This plan includes development of a strategy for sharing these events with the public.

In earlier years, the need to develop, or perhaps even consider a county park/trail system was never pursued as a primary objective for the county. Past attempts and/or discussions focused more on individual sites than the need for a system. In 1965, the federally managed Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge was established to help protect and restore the wildlife of the St. Francis River Valley. Today it consists of 30,700 acres and allows recreation where it is compatible with the wildlife and the land. Considering the acreage of the Refuge and the large amount of privately owned, undeveloped land in the county, the need and demand for acquiring more public land did not arise and was not an issue or priority of the public. Prior to the creation of the Wildlife Refuge, was the establishment of the Sand Dunes State Forest. The Sand Dunes originally was established largely to stabilize the soil and provide a new source of income for the area. Starting out as a state forest with just two square miles in 1943, it now contains nearly 6,000 acres. Over the years with increasing interest and use, the MN DNR's management focus has now shifted toward recreational use. Another historic event occurred when the Oliver H. Kelley Farm, consisting of 189 acres of woods and prairie, was acquired as an 1800's "living history farm" through a joint effort between the Grange and the Minnesota Historical Society. Whether past events such as these have had any influence on the needs or demands of a county park system is unknown, however, their facilities will undoubtedly play a major role in the future for providing some of the recreational demands that the public will seek.

In 1996, a County Park Committee was established to review and evaluate the county's park, trail, and open space needs. The committee's actions resulted in 2 primary outcomes. One, a Comprehensive Park, Trail, and Open Space Plan was drafted by a hired consultant. The original, proposed Plan was not accepted by Sherburne County, and thus became used and termed as a Study. After a variety of recommended changes were made to the original Plan, a revised "Park, Trail, and Open Space Plan" was proposed, and later adopted in 1997 by the County Board. With the adoption of the park plan, the second outcome of the Parks Committee was the establishment of a Sherburne County Parks Commission in 1998.

Since the creation of the first park committee, the county has been successful in some significant acquisitions of land for public parks, trails, and open spaces. In 1997, through a generous gift from Willard and Margaret Cox, the county was the recipient of a 230-acre land donation. This was the county's first land acquisition intended for future recreational use by the public. Not only was the acreage significant, but the land featured an authentic landscape that tied the areas history to the people's conservation values. Combined with the extraordinary natural resources of the site, ideal opportunities for regional park/trail development exist. In 1998 through a state grant, the county was successful in acquiring a 29-acre parcel of land located along the Mississippi River known as Bridgeview Park Reserve. With joint cooperation between the county, the developer (partial donation), and the MN DNR (State Grant), this partnership served as a showcase example of how protecting a significant piece of land can be accomplished with committed partners (see "Protecting Minnesota's Natural Treasures – Bridgeview Park Reserve"). In 1999, the county purchased 34.88 acres of land along the abandoned Burlington Northern Railroad corridor from the railroad company for future use toward a regional trail system. In 2001, with the help of 2 state grants, the Grams Regional Park was acquired totaling 113 acres.

Sherburne County is committed toward developing, maintaining, and improving these parks in a manner that 1) the public is comfortable with, 2) does not negatively affect the resources or features that exist, and 3) is consistent with the financial support that is available.

**Local Landscape**

Sherburne County is located within the transition zone of two major ecosystems - deciduous hardwood forest and tall grass prairie. From an ecological classification system, most of Sherburne County is within the Anoka Sand Plain region with a small part of Santiago and Blue Hill Township in the Mille Lacs Upland region. Much of the county is relatively level with the exception of some scattered rolling to undulating areas. The county’s vegetative land cover is comprised largely of prairie grass openings, oak forests, and scattered wetlands. Two major transportation corridors (State Hwy 169 and State Hwy 10) extend through Sherburne County. Both have had direct influence on where residential and commercial growth has occurred.

**Public Process**

Input by the public was sought through several methods for updating of the Plan and included:

- Sherburne County Parks Commission (see below)
- Establishment of Sub-Committee
- Public Opinion Survey - November 2003
- Public Open Houses (4)
- Public Hearing
- Parks, Trails, and Open Space Inventory
- Collection of City/Township Park/Trail Plans
- Discussion with Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge officials.
- Discussion with Sand Dunes State Forest officials.

**Sherburne County Parks Commission (16 members):**

<b><u>Member</u></b>	<b><u>Representing</u></b>	<b><u>Member</u></b>	<b><u>Representing</u></b>
Kim Good	Baldwin Twsp.	Arne Engstrom	County Commissioner
Kyle Johnson	Becker Twsp.	Dan Tveite	Comm. District 1
Pam Thomas	Big Lake Twsp.	Derald Ewing	Comm. District 2
Tammy Walker	Blue Hill Twsp.	Jane Korte	Comm. District 3
Ole Ohlgren	Clear Lake Twsp.	C.Perry Schenk	Comm. District 4
David Johnson	Haven Twsp.	Robert Pokorny	Comm. District 5
Gary Doebler	Livonia Twsp.		
Laura Gibson	Orrock Twsp.		
Roger Johnson	Palmer Twsp.		
Tom Barthel	Santiago Twsp.		

**Sherburne County Staff**

Tim Edgeton	Parks Coordinator
Donna Primus	Administration
Jon Sevald	County Planner



### Other County Lands

Sherburne County owns 3 additional parcels of land acquired for the purpose of public recreation, education, or open space preservation. Rivercrest Landing consists of approximately 10 acres and is located along the St. Francis River in Big Lake Township. It was acquired for open space preservation and is intended to function as a future canoe access and/or resting area along the river. A 37-acre parcel along Goose Lake in Baldwin Township was acquired for open space preservation with limited park/trail use. In addition, a 63-acre parcel near County Road 4 in Becker Township was acquired for open space preservation with potential opportunities toward environmental education and limited trail use.

### City Park Facilities

There are 7 cities located within or partially within the border of Sherburne County. All are experiencing population growth and most are negotiating with nearby townships to expand city limits through orderly annexation agreements. Nearly all of the cities have developed a park/trail plan for current and future recreation needs. Each of the cities offer a variety of different parks and recreational facilities, generally reflecting the needs and demands experienced thus far. Many of the parks within each city are considered community parks, serving the local neighborhoods and are less than 5 acres in size. Most cities have parks for playgrounds/athletic complexes.

Among some of the primary recreational features of each city:

Becker has approximately 8 city parks. Their City Park features horseback riding, hiking/skiing trails, and disc golf. They also manage the 27-hole Pebble Creek Golf Course and the Becker Community Center, which features pool, waterslide, rock climbing, fitness room.

Big Lake manages about 12 parks including Lakeside Park, which is a 12 acre park on Big Lake that attracts swimmers from throughout the area. The park offers a sand beach, volleyball court, boat launch, picnic facilities, and skate park facility. A city trail system also exists.

Clear Lake manages Goenner Park, which provides a variety of recreational opportunities. Included at the park are 2 athletic fields, a pavilion center with kitchen, picnic tables, volleyball court, tennis court, playgrounds, and a hockey rink/in-line skate area.

Elk River has about 33 parks totaling 777 acres including 3 athletic complexes, a public beach at Orono Park, and a mountain biking park. Among other amenities their parks offer include picnic shelters, playgrounds, hiking/skiing, a band shell, and the Great Northern Trail.

Princeton has approximately 8 parks although none are located within Sherburne County boundaries. Some of the primary amenities their parks offer include athletic fields, playground equipment, picnic shelters and tables, a splash park, and a campground.

St. Cloud has approximately 78 parks with 8 located within Sherburne County including a new “Splash Pad – Wading Pool” and the well known Clemens-Munsinger Garden. In addition, a 185 acre parkland parcel is leased by St. Cloud from the state.

Zimmerman has approximately 14 types of parks/open space. Lions Park is their primary community park providing athletic fields, in-line skating, picnic shelters, and winter skating. They also have 4 swim beach accesses on Fremont Lake and a public access.

For a complete inventory of the city park facilities identified in this plan, refer to Figure 1.

### **Township Park Facilities**

The ten townships within Sherburne County are developing at different rates, have different land use patterns, and more importantly, have different perspectives on local park needs and priorities. Similarly, there are vast differences among townships in whether they have park committees, maintain park facilities, or have developed a park/trail plan. Palmer Township has levied for “parks” since 1979 and currently maintains a 37-acre recreational complex with athletic fields, underground sprinklers, pavilion, basketball court, volleyball court, and a concession stand. Livonia Township recently purchased a 40 acre parcel for future park use and Baldwin Township recently was the recipient of an 80 acre land donation for future park use. Both have recently proposed or adopted a township trail plan. Blue Hill Township is currently in the process of developing a Comprehensive Park and Trail Plan. Big Lake Township has maintained a 20-acre Township Park since 1988. It features picnic tables, pavilions, a playground, an athletic field, and a canoe access. For a complete inventory of the township park facilities identified in this plan, please refer to Figure 1.

### **Federal Recreational Facilities**

The Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge is part of a federal system managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for the purpose of preservation and public education of natural environments. The primary purpose of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge’s primary objective is to provide wildlife-dependent recreational uses that when compatible with this purpose can involve hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. The Refuge features some minimal maintenance trails for hiking and interpretive signage for public education.

### **State Recreational Facilities**

The Sand Dunes State Forest is part of a state system managed by the State of Minnesota’s Department of Natural Resources. It also functions, in part, for the purposes of preservation and public education of natural environments, including plant and animal habitats. The Minnesota State Forests are managed with multiple-use in mind. The Sand Dunes State Forest attempts to place equal management emphasis on wildlife habitat, timber sales, and public recreational use including camping, swimming, boating, and a variety of designated trail use types such as horseback riding, groomed cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling. The Sand Dunes State Forest features minimal maintenance trails and well maintained trails, depending on use and season.

<p>While county parks will be similar in nature to that of state and/or federal sites, it is the goal of the county park plan to also develop a system of recreational trails that connect with and provide safer access to the primary destinations of the area. In addition, the “plan” seeks to explore greater possibilities for semi-active recreational uses such as swimming beaches, fishing piers, picnic areas, environmental education, camping, and other uses.</p>
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### **Section 3. Goals and Objectives**

**The goals and objectives identified in this plan reflect the current and future steps necessary to implement**

#### **Goal 1**

**Promote awareness, encourage use, and relate the distinctions of the existing facilities and open spaces available for public use in Sherburne County.**

#### **Objectives:**

1. Encourage awareness of the opportunities and activities available at the existing facilities and open space areas, through direct-mail materials such as the *Environmental Educator* and through interactive web resources such as the Sherburne County Website.
  - Coordinate marketing of the Sherburne County Park System with the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, Sand Dunes State Forest, and the city and township park systems of the county through the use of maps, brochures, newspaper articles, and other forms of public communication. Sherburne County will partner with other agencies in promoting awareness and community interest in regional parks and ecological corridors that connect them.
  - Provide and support quality interpretive and recreational programming focusing on natural resources, water resources, cultural history, geology, and archaeology of Sherburne County, particularly that what is representative of or distinctive to Sherburne County.
2. Develop strategies and promotions which help depict Sherburne County as a destination, and a model for recreational and environmentally diverse experiences.
  - Inform the public of Sherburne County's local ecosystem and the unique features of the Anoka Sand Plain ecotype.
  - Identify and share significant historical themes of the area and within each park as they relate to the natural resources, landscapes, and people of the county.
  - Develop events that utilize Sherburne County's park and trail system. Support and sponsor these events in a reliable manner placing focus on recreational, educational, social, and health related benefits.
3. Develop and implement a marketing plan for outreach purposes to stimulate educational demand and recreational use of park/trail facilities by potential users.
  - Utilize local newspapers and publications, create website links, and be active in appropriate civic events for promoting the use of county parks and trails in the region.

## **Goal 2**

### **Identify, protect, and preserve Sherburne County's parks, trails, natural areas, and open spaces.**

#### **Objectives:**

1. Identify features of environmental significance including wetland complexes, waterways, natural plant and animal communities, and corridors for wildlife habitat. Protect and preserve areas of environmental significance to help maintain and/or enhance their sustainability, condition, and value to the local ecosystem.
  - Ecological information, such as the MN County Biological Survey, the Metro Wildlife Corridors map, Mississippi River Study, the Metro Greenways Plan, and Sherburne County's orthophotography maps will be used to prepare a preliminary map of core natural areas within Sherburne County.
  - Preserve existing pre-settlement landscape communities. Refer to Marschner map, which provides the best available and most objective data on native plant communities that existed in Sherburne County.
  - Design a system of parks, trails, and open space to incorporate and showcase examples of important natural communities and to protect and enhance biological diversity particularly rare and unique plants and animals (see County Biological Survey).
  - Periodically survey plants and animals in county parks to guide natural resource management strategies.
  - Highest quality natural areas will be prioritized, identified, and preserved to protect their intrinsic, fundamental value.
  - Policies identified in "Sherburne County Comprehensive Water Plan" will be considered during park and trail development to protect and preserve surface and groundwater resources.
2. Develop a master plan for parks, trails, natural areas, and open spaces that designate areas for active and passive recreational use.
  - Develop a plan for a countywide park system that establishes and maintains carrying capacities to maximize the quality of visitor experience and prevents degradation of the natural and artificial resources on the site.
  - Develop plan for a countywide trail system. City and township trails can connect to the county "backbone system". Primary purpose of these trails is to connect cities to each other and to areas of significant natural resources such as regional parks. The county trail system plan will be periodically reviewed and updated to accommodate such things such as land use changes, acquisition opportunities, and economic conditions.
  - Develop a system to prioritize trail construction.
  - Pursue planning grants for analysis and acquisition of future overland trail corridors.
  - Develop detailed plans of parks showing parking, boundaries, facilities/activities/uses, natural resource management schemes, development plans, trails and access points, and interim uses of parks and/or trails.
3. Where possible and appropriate, preserve and protect areas that have historic, archaeological, or geologic significance in Sherburne County.
  - Coordinate with the Sherburne County Historical Society and appropriate agencies and organizations in developing a database of such areas in the county.

4. Promote transition areas between parks, trails, natural areas, and open spaces and adjacent land uses.
  - Work cooperatively with landowners to monitor and minimize potentially negative effects of adjacent land uses impacting parks and open spaces.
  - The County will coordinate with various federal, state, city, and township agencies regarding land use planning in proximity to regional/county parks.
  - Work with private landowners to promote sound stewardship of private lands that buffer or ecologically connect public lands.
  - Work cooperatively with the Sherburne County Zoning Department on creating land development options that can result in creating, preserving, or setting aside open spaces as buffers.
5. Promote and encourage wise stewardship of dedicated open space for the enjoyment and use of Sherburne County residents and preserve and maintain the ecological integrity when creating, developing, and maintaining the system of parks, trails, and open space.
  - Active natural resource management will be used to maintain, restore, and improve the ecological integrity of the parks, trails, and open space.
  - Work with public agencies and specifically the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to be aware of and have provisions for Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species found within or near the Sherburne County Park and Trail system.
  - Controlled hunting and trapping will be considered as an effective and legitimate form of animal population management.
  - Development activities within parks will be designed to avoid completely or minimize to the greatest extent possible impacts on natural communities.
  - Ecological and recreational corridors should be contiguous whenever possible.
6. Promote the use of existing public recreational facilities to reduce the negative impacts resulting from inappropriate use of non-designated recreational sites.
  - Explore the possibilities of facilitating the creation of all terrain vehicles and snowmobile facilities as a means to reduce impacts in inappropriate locations. Minimizing environmental impacts, social impacts, and financial impacts to the county will be the guiding principals.
7. Develop policies and procedures that ensure that the system of parks, trails, and open space is protected for future generations.
  - Develop policies on non-park infrastructure (towers, utilities, through roads, etc.) to ensure long term protection and health of parks, trails, and open spaces.

### **Goal 3**

#### **Develop corridors and connections that will increase accessibility to existing and proposed facilities and open spaces.**

##### **Objectives:**

1. Develop minimum standards for detached at-grade and grade-separated non-motorized routes.
  - Consider and implement, where feasible, the Minnesota Bicycle Transportation Planning and Design Guidelines established by the Minnesota Department of Transportation as part of the minimum trail standards where supported and consistent with Sherburne County's goals and objectives.
  - Identify a county "backbone" trail system based, in part, on the required road design standards and excluding the use of expanded shoulders as designated bicycle routes.
  - Where appropriate, facilitate separated trails along county highways as they are constructed, to encourage and perpetuate safer trail use by a larger spectrum of the public.
  - Review turn backs or land vacations near county roads to consider incorporating them into the trail system, where appropriate.
  - Trails along county highways will be dependent on rural and urban design requirements. The Sherburne County Transportation Plan will be used to help identify potential projects.
  - The County will annually prepare a five-year trail construction program coordinated with the five-year road construction programs of the county, state, cities, and townships.
  - Trail standards will be determined for location, surface type, trail specifics (width, paintings, cross sections) and desired right-of-way widths.
2. Continue to pursue acquisition of the former railroad bed for a trail connection from Elk River to Princeton (Great Northern Trail).
  - Utilize the Sherburne County Regional Railroad Authority to help implement the acquisition and development of trails along the abandoned railroad corridor.
  - As opportunities arise, pursue the acquisition of abandoned railroad right-of-ways for future overland trails from willing sellers.
  - Research the appropriate strategies necessary for acquiring, developing, and maintaining trails along railroad corridors (ie Joint Powers Agreements with cities/townships).
  - Plan for and develop appropriate trail connection(s) from the former railroad bed to Grams Regional Park.
3. Encourage open dialogue between the townships, cities, and the county in planning for connections and corridors between neighborhood, local, and regional facilities.
  - Identify a coordinated system of trails and ecological corridors to connect significant areas of natural resources that are publicly owned (ie. Sand Dunes State Forest, Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, Metro Wildlife Corridor Program, abandoned railroad corridors, wildlife management areas, scientific and natural areas, and the St. Francis, Elk, Rum, and Mississippi River systems).
  - Consider developing a cost share approach for trail system development and maintenance.
  - The County will plan and develop trail connections between cities within Sherburne County and to adjacent cities/counties outside the county, where feasible and practical.

- The County will encourage the construction of needed state, regional, city, and township trails within the county.
  - Trails within developments should facilitate connection to existing or future public trail systems and allow passage where appropriate.
  - Sherburne County will work to identify opportunities for parkways, linear parks, greenway corridors in the County Comprehensive Plan as part of an end-use.
4. Integrate the Sherburne County Park and Trail system with the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge (SNWR), the Sand Dunes State Forest (SDSF), and other state, regional, city, and township planning efforts.
- Encourage and assist townships in developing comprehensive trail plans within their community to identify desired routes, plan for connected routes, and construct cost efficient routes that the local units of government can use for regional planning purposes.
  - Integrate city and township trail plans to assist in implementing the Regional Trail System plan to maximize cost efficiency, avoid duplication of services, and achieve connectivity to the public recreational opportunities in the region.
  - Identify specific access points into the SNWR and/or SDSF that can be considered for future public use and help link users of the SNWR, SDSF, the County Regional Park and Trail System, and other facilities and destination points within the region.
  - To expand level of service and accessibility, identify and assess necessary non-motorized trail connections to the Northstar Commuter Rail system.
5. Support and promote programs (e.g. Wildlife Corridors, Forest Legacy, Great River Greening) to help link significant ecological units within the county.
- Use ecological corridors of public or private owned open space to protect and enhance natural resources.
  - Conservation easements will be encouraged as a tool with willing landowners to ensure corridor existence.
  - Significant areas of private open space within the county will be identified and mapped.
  - Opportunities for outreach to interested landowners seeking land stewardship planning options or seeking technical or financial assistance will be identified.
6. Consider Sherburne County's Ditch system for potential regional trail routes.
- Where county ditches occur within designated regional trail corridors and where trails would be appropriate for the site, incorporate trails within or adjacent to the established ditch right of ways and/or setbacks that may be in place.

## **Goal 4**

### **Identify and develop a strategy for acquisition of critical areas.**

#### **Objectives:**

1. Identify areas of critical value based on their value to the park/trail system and benefit to park users.
  - Potential locations for parks will be identified based upon distribution of natural resources.
  - Water based recreation and public access to water bodies is highly desirable. Opportunities to acquire accesses are rare and should be aggressively sought.
  - Potential park sites will consider criteria of the State Grant Program as a means for qualifying for state grant funding.
  - Acquisition will be prioritized based on a number of factors including a willing seller, acreage (100 acres or larger is preferred), connectivity, level of threat, natural resource quality, available funding, opportunities to leverage such as grants, geographic location, surrounding land use, and proximity to other parks.
  - A Phase I environmental assessment will be completed prior to Sherburne County acquiring property to determine and/or identify potential contamination issues and if found, what mitigation strategies and costs will be necessary before acquisition.
2. Inventory and regularly review lands in county ownership for potential integration into park and trail system or for use in negotiating toward the acquisition of others.
3. Pursue funding for capital improvement and acquisition.
  - Acquisition of land will take precedence over development of facilities until sufficient land has been acquired to meet present and future park/trail/open space needs or until demand requires investment in infrastructure. Exceptions may occur as a result of funding sources that become available.
  - Maintaining existing infrastructure is as important as developing new facilities and the 5-year Capital Spending Plan will strive for a balance of new development with renovation.
4. Identify alternative methods for protecting identified critical areas.
  - Seek out sites for future park/trail use where current land use will change over time such as Elk River Landfill, Vonco Demolition Site, mining sites, airport buffer areas, etc. and evaluate them for potential park opportunities.
  - Maintain an inventory of tax forfeited lands and, where appropriate and feasible, integrate desirable parcels into the park/trail system or acquire them for future negotiations.
5. Identify and promote the preservation of historic and archaeologically significant features within Sherburne County.
  - Encourage the study of historic and archaeological features and artifacts through reconnaissance of development sites having high potential for such features and through cooperation with the programs of the Minnesota Historical Society and the Sherburne County Historical Society.

## **Goal 5**

**Develop diverse recreational facilities that offer multiple uses and opportunities which meet the local and regional needs.**

### **Objectives:**

1. Avoid duplication of services offered by agencies, businesses, non-profits, or other levels of government.
  - Sherburne County will develop recreational services and facilities that complement rather than duplicate federal, state, city, or township services.
  - Sherburne County recognizes that active recreational facilities (athletic complexes) should be provided by cities and townships, at their discretion. The county will not provide facilities for organized team sports.
  - Sherburne County will coordinate, when possible, with townships and cities for shared facilities and services (co-located parking, equipment, maintenance, and storage) that enhance the use and efficiency of county parks and trails, specifically in terms of sharing physical and financial resources.
  - Facilitate a coordinated system of Federal, State, regional, county, city, and township park, trail, and open space facilities and services that meet the needs of current and future residents.
  - Foster cooperative efforts with the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge and the Sand Dunes State Forest to promote greater utilization of existing federal and state facilities.
  - Promote integration of the Sherburne County Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan with city and township parks and trails.
  - Encourage development of township park boards, park plans, and park facilities that reflect the jurisdictions administrative and maintenance capabilities.
  
2. Continue to seek and determine the public's recreational needs in accordance with the changing demographics and growing population.
  - Conduct periodic surveys of residents to assess changing needs and expectations for parks, trails, and open space in Sherburne County. Use results to assist in planning future acquisition and development projects.
  - Utilize citizen surveys and focus groups as tools to assess awareness of parks and trails as well as to gauge interest in park/trail investments.
  - Appropriate recreational activities for county/regional parks, trails, and open space will be determined through the planning process.
  - Sherburne County will identify park and trail users/audiences and develop desired programs and services to be provided, and evaluate them as needed in order to reach and maintain the highest level of user satisfaction while maintaining integrity of natural resource features.

3. Promote physical fitness and social connectedness to reduce health related costs resulting from physical inactivity.
  - Support, encourage, and sponsor when feasible, potential programs and events that provide recreational opportunities and promote physical fitness in a safe environment.
  - Develop and provide appropriate recreational opportunities that promote physical fitness and are available in the county park/trail system throughout the year.
  - Consider adopting smoke-free policies within the County's park, trail, and open space system.
  - Design and build trails and greenways through neighborhoods and along rivers and other natural landscapes to create safe, attractive, and accessible places for recreation.
4. Provide special needs facilities and/or reasonable accommodations for citizens with special needs such as wheelchair accessible trails and touch stations for the visually impaired.
5. Provide a diversity of natural resource based recreational opportunities.
  - Horseback riding, mountain biking, snowmobiling, responsible all terrain vehicle use and off road machine use will be considered and encouraged in appropriate locations.
  - Where appropriate, human-made feature attractions will be considered and deemed appropriate in the Sherburne County Park system such as an archery range, disc golf, a water park, or a golf course.

## **Goal 6**

**Develop site specific plans for parks, trails, and open spaces that show interim and projected uses, phases of planning and development, facilities, activities, natural resource management plans, acreages and boundaries, and access points.**

### **Objectives.**

1. Prepare a detail master plan for each county park following pre-established standards having the following elements: boundaries, acquisition costs, natural resource management plans, proposed use and anticipated demand, developmental plans, identification of potential conflicts, services required, operations, volunteers/citizen support, park awareness, site specific natural resource inventory, restoration needs, surrounding land use, groundwater, drainage, erosion control plans, and special needs assessment.
  - Insure that county park facilities are accessible to the disabled in accordance with state and federal law.
  - Provide opportunities for city, township, and citizen input through public meetings during development of the master plan for each county/regional park.
2. Prioritize the development of county parks.
  - Develop facilities in county parks based on a five-year park development program.
3. Develop facilities within county parks that will enhance rather than adversely affect the natural resources and amenities.
  - Work toward preserving the unique historical, archeological, and geologic sites within the County.
  - Encourage multiple uses within parks while maintaining natural features of the park.
  - Potential park development impacts upon adjoining landowners properties will be minimized, where possible, by considering appropriate provisions and design standards.
4. Provide efficient maintenance and operation of clean, orderly, controlled, safe, and attractive parks and trails.
  - The county will provide well-maintained parks, trails, and open spaces which may involve contracting with vendors to provide necessary services.
  - Infrastructure maintenance plans will be developed which allows for routine and efficient maintenance and operation of parks and provides for periodic renovations or upgrades.

## **Goal 7**

### **Develop a funding strategy for the acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of Sherburne County parks, trails, and open space.**

#### **Objectives.**

1. The County will seek to develop a stable long-term funding program for acquisition, development, natural resource management, operations, and maintenance.
2. The County will keep public parks, trails, and open space facilities affordable.
3. The County will aggressively seek regional, State, and Federal funding for acquisition, development, and maintenance of regional parks, trails, and recreation facilities.
4. The County will foster support for leveraging funds with cities and townships of Sherburne County.
5. When possible, the County will consider state bonding opportunities for funding the acquisition and development of parks, trails, and recreational facilities.
6. The County will consider a plan to implement gradual increases in the general levy for increased park, trails, and open space activities in the County to be used in part for development and annual operational expenses.
7. The County will consider a future bond referendum to include acquisition and development expenses for current and future county parks, trails, and open space.
8. The County will work jointly with townships (and cities, if appropriate) to partner on the collection and distribution of park dedication fees.
9. The County will establish and annually re-evaluate appropriate and relative park dedication fees based on, in part, creating a nexus for parks and trails, the public needs for park and trail services, land acquisition costs, park/trail development expenses, and current and projected land values.
10. The County will study potential opportunities for creating revenue generating programs that offset costs for park/trail acquisition, development, and maintenance.
11. The County will encourage partnerships with the private sector and/or volunteers, specifically for trail support facilities (i.e. rest areas, parking areas, trail/park clean-up).
12. When appropriate, the County will consider user fees for special facilities, activities, rental equipment, rental space, etc.
13. The County, when appropriate, will coordinate its' efforts with the Mid-MN Mississippi Resource Conservation & Development Steering Committee (RCD) for funding opportunities.
14. The County will refer to the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan as a document in helping identify appropriate sites and projects that are most consistent with state grant programs and have the best chance to receive grant assistance.

**Goal 8.**

**Identify a variety of mechanisms to assist in the implementation of this Plan.**

**Objectives.**

1. The Plan will be incorporated into the Sherburne County Land Use Plan.
2. The Plan will be incorporated into the Sherburne County Transportation Plan.
3. The Sherburne County Parks Commission will take initial leads on implementing the plan, with the County Zoning Department and the Public Works Department having significant roles.
4. The County Public Works Department will work in partnership with the Parks Commission on park/trail design, park/trail construction, and trail connections.
5. The County Parks Commission will work in partnership with the Public Works Department, and specifically GIS Staff, with developing and implementing natural resource inventories and management plans.
6. The County Zoning Department will take the lead on reviewing development proposals that may affect parks, trails, and open spaces.
7. The County Parks Commission will work jointly with the Sherburne County Sheriff Department and Sherburne County Attorney on rule enforcement and legal counsel.
8. Coordinate with the local units of government within the county including townships and cities, the state (Sand Dunes State Forest), and the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge.
9. Coordinate with the Central MN Parks and Trails Coordinating Board, adjacent county organizations, the County Parks Association, Greenway Program, Metro Wildlife Corridor Program, Great River Greening, and other interested groups and programs whose goals are consistent with the Sherburne County Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan.

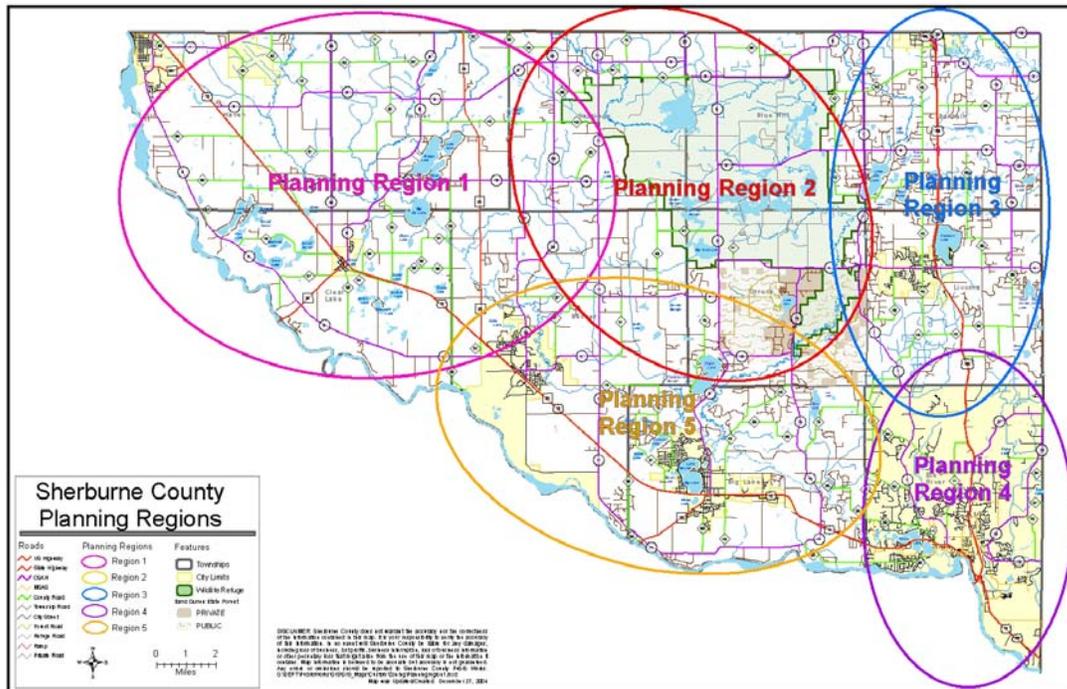
## Section 4. Planning and Acquisition

The mission statement of the Sherburne County Park Commission is to plan for the acquisition, preservation, restoration, and when appropriate, the enhancement of the natural resources of Sherburne County. These resources shall be used for the recreation, education, and enjoyment of present and future generations of Sherburne County citizens. Finding appropriate sites for regional/county park facilities can require significant planning efforts. Many different factors must be considered when determining which sites are best suited to provide natural resource based outdoor recreational opportunities. These factors must also be balanced to create a system meeting the county's current and long-term needs. The primary criteria which these factors are based on are size, geographic distribution, and the presence of significant natural amenities. The factors listed below (not in order of priority) provide an overview of the primary considerations involved when identifying potential sites for the Sherburne County Park, Trail, and Open Space system.

### Location

Planning for and developing a system of parks and trails that is geographically distributed is a primary goal of Sherburne County. Since ideal and/or desirable sites having natural amenities, good availability, and desirable acreages are not necessarily evenly distributed, acquiring properties in a perfect geographic distribution is impossible. The county is divided into 5 overlapping Planning Regions as a guide to help acknowledge the diverse land use, opinions, needs, and opportunities. Each of the regions reflect similar issues and opportunities that exist based on such things as zoning and land use, population density, geologic land forms, and demographics. With different Planning Regions identified, the key ecologic, historic, and educational sites within each region that have the most potential can be identified, prioritized, and planned for.

**Sherburne County Planning Regions**



## Natural Resources

According to definitions cited in federal law, natural resources are defined broadly to include land, fish, wildlife, biota, air, water, ground water, drinking water supplies, and other such resources. These items are more than just amenities that contribute to the quality of life, they are the fabric of our society. Natural resources can make the difference in how people view a region, a community, and a backyard. Their presence can make the difference in how far people are willing to travel for viewing, hiking, and simply being at these sites. Identifying and protecting the unique natural resources of Sherburne County is a primary goal of the park plan. Determining the appropriate natural resource sites that are most representative of the area and best capture Sherburne County's landscape requires well researched planning using a variety of resources and maps. Ideal sites can compete in being legitimate choices for people to visit and can serve as an economic draw to the region. Among some of the county's top natural resources are its' oak woodlands, dry prairies, gravel deposits, floodplain forests, and the various water bodies including the many lakes, rivers, and wetlands.

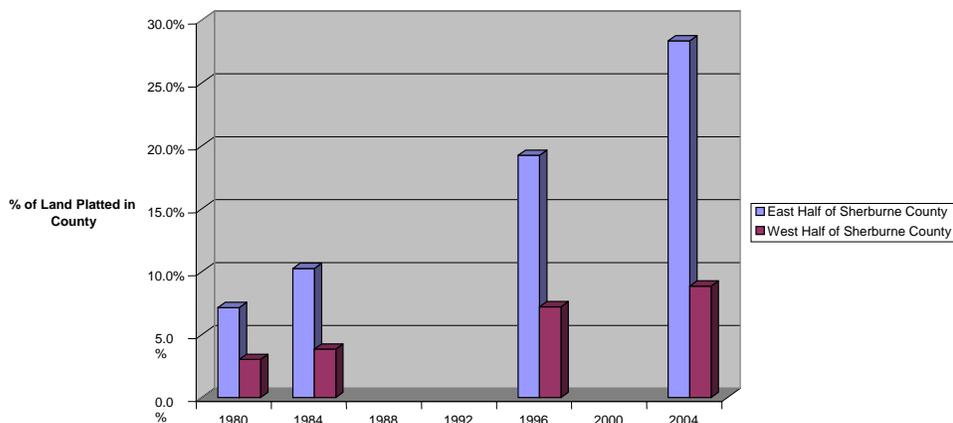
## Water Recreation and Access

Seeking available sites that offer forms of water recreation and/or water access is a primary objective. Examples include developing canoe and boat access facilities on public lakes, rivers, and waterways and providing swimming areas at public lakes.

## Local Needs, Interest, and Opportunity

With growth patterns significantly different between eastern and western Sherburne County, local needs and demands for parks and open spaces can be quite different based on population, housing densities, and available public open space opportunities. At the same time, good opportunities that arise in less developed areas need to be strongly considered before they become cost prohibitive and/or no longer available. The local interest and support will also influence the type of projects pursued. The results from 2003 public opinion survey, for example indicate large support for neighborhood trails. Similarly, potential park sites having desirable amenities must first have an interested and willing seller.

**Land Consumption Trends  
East vs West**



## **Acreage and Parcel Size**

The following guidelines are applied by Sherburne County for the selection and acquisition of regional and/or county parks/trails relating to size. The guiding principles are summarized below.

- 1) Regional Parks should be at least 100 acres in size. Larger sites of 200 acres or more are preferred. Sites that are sustainable, provide high quality wildlife habitat, and feature opportunities for natural resource based recreation will generally involve larger parcels.

Exceptions to that include sites that offer or provide:

- a) water based recreation or water access
  - b) historic, cultural, or geologic significance to the site
  - c) a special use that would not be otherwise available within a reasonable distance
  - d) significant, sensitive, or unique natural resources
  - e) good potential for future expansion of parks or open space via adjacent property
- 2) Regional and/or County Parks should contain a diversity of resources, either natural or artificial, that contribute to the outdoor recreation experience. Sites should be able to provide natural resource based recreation and, where possible, contain unique or unusual geologic features or historical significance.
  - 3) Regional and/or County Parks should consider the proximity to similar public facilities owned by Federal, State, City, Township, or other local units of government.
    - a) Sherburne County will avoid the duplication of services and park uses that are otherwise planned or currently provided by local units of government.
    - b) Sherburne County will consider sites that would be contiguous to other local units of government if it is supported by affected parties and would enhance the value and desired use of the sites in question.
  - 4) Land acquired for public trail use should meet the minimum requirements established by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Minnesota Department of Transportation regarding necessary trail width for safe public use.
  - 5) Land that serves as, or helps establish, a local or regional trail connection for public trail use should strongly be considered.

## **Funding and Leveraging**

Finding new sites and projects that are cost-effective is an ultimate goal of the county. Desirable sites for future parks, trails, and open space cannot be considered simply on the merits of protecting a rare ecosystem nor can they be ruled out based on their acquisition costs. Natural resources are finite, non-renewable amenities that cannot be replaced or re-created. Being responsible, resourceful, and effective with available public funds is critical in helping acquire and develop cost-effective parks, trails, and open spaces. Being in a position for the County to leverage its resources as opportunities arise is equally important and can result in significant cost-savings. Leveraging local funds and resources with available grants, programs, donations, and interested partners should be considered whenever possible to best allocate the financial resources.

With the acquisition of regional parks, users of these parks will come from throughout the geographic region. Although a park may be located within a particular township or city, residents from local communities surrounding it will also share in its use and its benefits. In addition, it is safe to assume that a regional/county park may not be feasible or practical to acquire in every township or city of the county. Therefore, to foster and promote good relationships among local units of government, Sherburne County encourages the collaboration and shared use of resources from a geographic perspective.

### **Level of Urgency**

Prioritizing potential sites for parks, trails, and open spaces is subject to the landowner's intentions and plans for the property, geographic location and function, connectivity value, and activities affecting imminent land exchange. As changes do occur, affecting availability, size, cost, or ecologic value, sites must be re-evaluated to identify potential changes in its desirability.

## Section 5. Financial Support

There are multiple finance options which are available for helping fund the acquisition, development, and maintenance of parks, trails, and open space. No single source should be relied upon to adequately fund the Sherburne County park system. Incorporating and implementing all of these options, as they become feasible, should be considered as part of a sound, comprehensive funding strategy. New finance opportunities should be aggressively sought and innovatively applied as they become available. Below is a list of the methods to consider.

### 1. Grant Programs

A variety of grant programs provide significant amounts of money for parks, trails, and open space. Grants generally require a cash match from the local unit of government of 50% of the total project cost. A portion of matches can sometimes be provided in in-kind and/or technical services. Most of the available grants are restricted to helping fund only acquisition and development costs. Examples of available grants include 1) Outdoor Recreation Grant, 2) Regional Park Grant, 3) Natural and Scenic Area Grant, 4) LCMR (Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources, 5) Greenways Program, 6) Metro Wildlife Corridor Program, 7) Transportation Enhancement Program, and 8) Local Trail Connections Grant.

### 2. Taxes

Through the general levy, the County Board has the ability to fund the acquisition, development, and maintenance of county parks, trails, and open spaces. This mechanism has been in place since 1994 in Sherburne County. The taxed amount currently being levied toward parks, trails, and open space is about \$67,000 per year or about \$2.65 per household - less than \$1 a year per resident.

### 3. Park Dedication of Lands

The dedication of lands for public parks and trails is regulated according to state law (MS 2002, Sect. 394.25 subd.7, as revised by S.F. No.484) and administered under the Sherburne County Park Dedication Ordinance. The dedication of land for public parks as a result of a subdividing of land and/or land development can be applied by counties in the State of Minnesota, where it meets the criteria as stated in the statute. Examples of acceptable land dedication include lands that create or connect trails, lands that result in an aggregation of public parks/trails, or lands that contain rare natural resources that may benefit from protection or limited use. The county may choose to accept a per lot cash fee as set by ordinance for some or all of the new lots created in the subdivision. Dedication fees can be used to pay for the acquisition of parks, trails and open space and for their development costs. Dedication fees cannot be used toward park/trail maintenance. The county will encourage partnerships between townships (and cities, if appropriate) to fund park and trail projects and to assist in utilizing the funds in an efficient manner.

### 4. User fees

Where appropriate, the county may choose to establish user fees, which typically will include park entrance fees or activity fees.

## 5. Partnerships with Cities/Townships

Establishing partnerships, combining available resources, and collaborating the efforts of county, city, and township officials and staff is critical to the success of future parks, trails, and open space in Sherburne County. Avoiding the duplication of services and planning efforts will further assist in getting the maximum benefit from budgeted funds, particularly as local units of government face tighter budgets and reduced funding.

## 6. State Bonding

When possible, the county will consider state bonding opportunities toward acquisition and development of parks, trails, and recreational facilities. Opportunities for the county for state bonding projects include collaboration with the Central Minnesota Parks, Trails, and Open Space Coordinating Board.

## 7. Bond Referendum

The county may choose to place a bond referendum for parks, trails, and open space before the voters in a general election. This allows voters to have direct involvement on deciding how much money should be allocated to parks, trails, and open space.

## 8. Donations/Gifts

The county can seek and/or accept land donations from private landowners or corporations toward public parks, trails, and open space.

## 9. Partnerships with Non Profits

The county may choose to partner with non profit organizations who specialize in acquiring and/or preserving land for parks, trails, and open space. Non profits can often provide technical and financial support as well as assist in negotiations and fund raising. Examples of organizations of this type include the The Conservation Fund, MN Land Trust, The Trust for Public Land, and Minnesota Parks and Trails Council.

## 10. Volunteer Assistance

Although not a source of funds, volunteers and other forms of in-kind services can reduce the operational costs of parks and trails.

In addition to the above options, a variety of alternative methods can be considered and encouraged for preservation and management of quality open space including conservation easements, deed restrictions, leases, donations, stewardship programs, Greenway Programs, and the Metro Wildlife Corridor Program. Although not implemented as a county tool for land preservation, the restrictions that exist due to the “Wild and Scenic River” classification along parts of the Mississippi River and the Rum River help preserve these areas from development.

## **Section 6. Benefits**

### **Health and Wellness Benefits**

Physical inactivity plays a significant role in the most common chronic diseases in the United States, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and diabetes; each of these is a leading cause of death. Researchers have found that the mere presence of a trail can increase physical activity among adults. Trails and greenways create healthy recreation and transportation opportunities by providing people of all ages with attractive, safe, accessible places to bike, walk, hike, job, skate or ski. In doing so, they make it easier for people to engage in physical activity.

According to “Active Living by Design”, a survey of U.S. adults indicated that people with access to neighborhood parks were nearly twice as likely to be physically active as those without access to parks. Trails and greenways provide natural, scenic areas that cause people to actually want to be outside and physically active. In findings from “Active Living Research”, on average, residents in highly walk-able neighborhoods took twice as many trips as people with less walk-able neighborhoods.

According to the Surgeon General’s “call to action,” less than one-third of Americans meet the federal recommendation of at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five days a week and 40 percent of adults engage in no leisure time physical activity at all. Both the Surgeon General’s “call to action” and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Report emphasize the connection between exercise and health. In addition to helping control weight, physical activity helps control cholesterol levels, slows bone loss associated with advancing age, lowers the risk of certain cancers, and helps reduce anxiety and depression. As a society, the problems of physical inactivity are well documented. One in four adults are considered obese, with obese individuals having a 50-100% increased risk of premature death.

### **Safety**

Trails connect neighborhoods and schools so children can cycle or walk to their friend’s homes or to school. In Sherburne County, the abandoned railroad bed (Great Northern Trail) is located within blocks of many of the Elk River and Zimmerman schools and provides an ideal opportunity in offering safe trail links for children and would promote physical activity. With additional research indicating that the proportion of young people who are overweight has more than doubled in the last 20 years, Sherburne County has a tremendous opportunity to reduce this trend locally.

### **Economic Development**

The recreation and tourism industry is an important aspect of economic development. Due to the proximity of and placement between St. Cloud and the Twin Cities metropolitan area, opportunities exist for Sherburne County to capture a part of the public sector that passes through the Highway 10 and Highway 169 corridors, seeking and/or considering recreational activities elsewhere. Providing recreational destinations in Sherburne County can contribute to and/or enhance the economic health of the state of Minnesota and capturing a part of the recreational market traveling “up north” can provide economic benefit to the county.

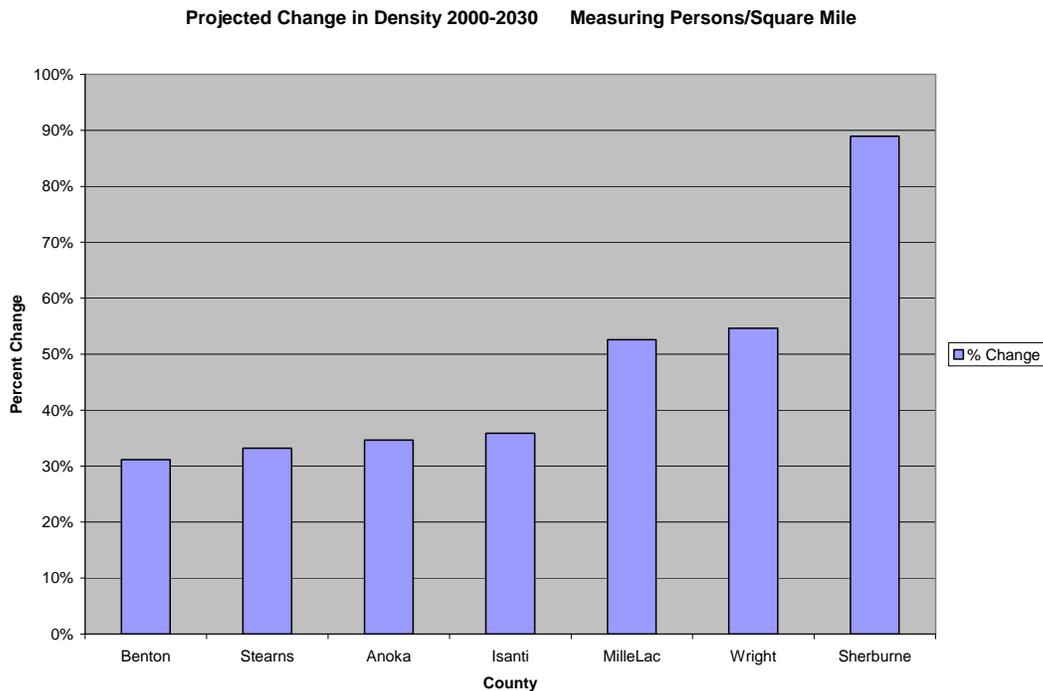
## Economic Benefits of Green Infrastructure

There are many findings and scientific facts that document the economic benefits provided with green infrastructure. In northern Minnesota, lake clarity was shown to positively affect property values where a 1-meter decline in lake clarity would subtract over \$130 million from all lakeshore property values. In Saskatoon, Canada, a river view adds \$1.2 million annually to property values in the community. In Maryland, the conversion of developable pasture to privately owned conservation land increased the value of nearby residential property by over \$3,000 per acre. In Portland, OR, a home within 1,500 feet of any open space can sell for over \$2,000 more than a home located farther away. Research is consistent that living near parks, trails, and open spaces will enhance property values. Beyond that, parks and open space serve as safeguards from flood damage and erosion; they help prevent noise, air, and light pollution; and they help make a positive impact on the community by attracting tourism, business investments, and local housing projects.

## Quality of Life

According to results from the Sherburne County 2003 Residential Survey, by a 63% to 32% margin, residents agreed that county parks and trails were a very important aspect of their choices of residence and their quality of life. By even greater margins, residents agree that the County should preserve corridors adjacent to waterways and wetlands as greenway space and for the County to be more active in protecting sensitive plant communities and unique ecosystems. Parks, trails, and open space directly contribute to the quality of life by providing social, physical, anecdotal, and environmental benefits.

Quality of life will be affected by increased population in certain aspects. Compared to surrounding counties, from 2000-2030 Sherburne County residents will experience the greatest change in density, resulting in nearly double the residents per square mile in a 30 year period.



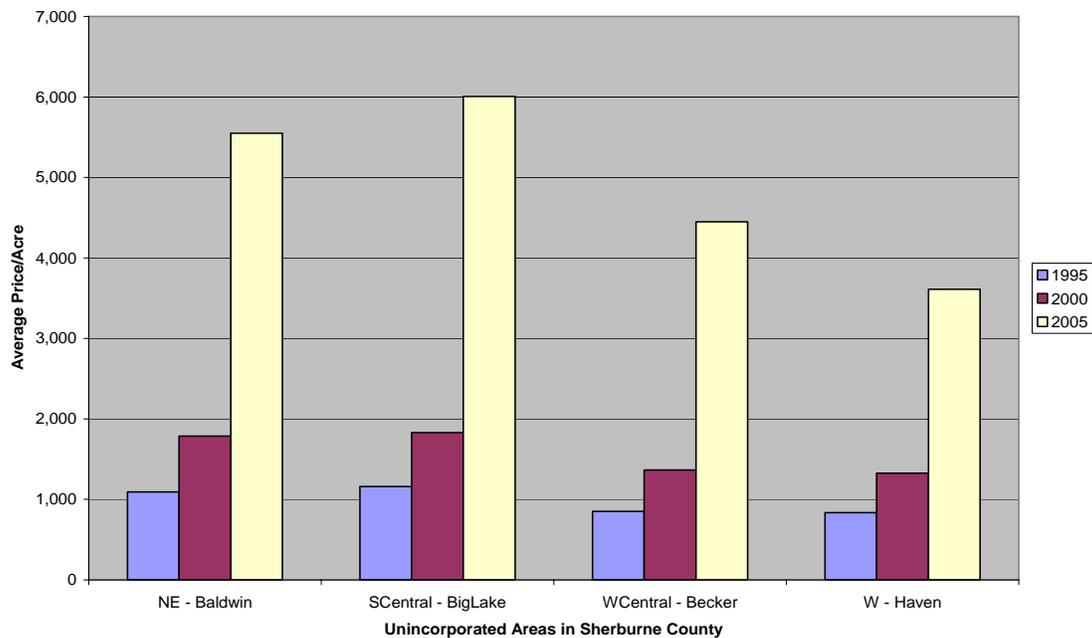
The number of persons per square mile in Sherburne County will influence the type of services, amenities, and opportunities that residents desire and are willing to support for continued quality of life. Parks, trails, and open spaces will become even more valuable, as densities increase.

Residents Per Square Mile (Actual and Projected)							
County	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
Anoka	365	462	575	704	816	896	948
Benton	52	63	74	84	96	104	110
Isanti	38	54	59	71	82	90	96
MilleLac	28	32	33	39	46	53	60
Sherburne	43	69	96	148	198	242	280
Stearns	71	81	88	99	110	121	132
Wright	58	87	104	136	166	191	210

**Planning for the Future**

With growth projections indicating that Sherburne County will be the fastest growing county in the state through 2030, developing and implementing a park, trail, and open space plan that emphasizes acquisition first and development second allows the county to be in a position to develop the sites as public demands increase. Future generations will have few opportunities to acquire significant park and open space acreage. By 2030, even fewer quality sites will remain. By planning for the future and focusing on acquisition now, significant economic savings can be made before land costs are cost prohibitive. Land value trends indicate continued increases are likely. With Sherburne County having three times the population in 2030 compared to 1990, the potential demand and expectation for public parks, trails, and open spaces, particularly in current unincorporated areas, will directly affect the areas desirability. Identifying the appropriate steps to provide for these future recreational demands and implementing a timely strategy that meets those needs is a critical step for Sherburne County.

**Land Value Trends - Average Value Per Deeded Acre (Minimum 10 Acre Parcel)**



Source: Sherburne County Assessor Department

## **Section 7. Natural Resource Management, Maintenance, and Protection**

One of the primary goals for the Sherburne County Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan is to develop a parks, trail, and open space system that offers diverse natural resource, recreational, and educational experiences. Featuring the unique natural resources, landscapes, and ecosystems representative of Sherburne County is an outcome sought as a result of implementing this plan. Acquiring areas for their natural resources is the first step in a long-term proactive commitment to maintain and enhance the resources that the County's Parks, Trails, and Open Space system will be built around. For each unit acquired, a natural resource management plan will be developed and incorporated into the county's Master Plan. Natural resource management should involve the consideration of vegetative communities, mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Obtaining baseline data of these amenities and conducting periodic follow up work to regularly assess the current status of the plants and animals is a recommended action of this plan.

### **Natural Resource Inventories**

There are significant amounts of high quality, natural plant/animal communities located in Sherburne County that have not yet been fragmented or otherwise disturbed. Unfortunately, many of these are being lost as a result of land use changes and urban development. Utilizing existing maps and resources such as Marschner's map (derived from bearing tree data, circa 1855) and the Biodiversity map (MN DNR), most of these sites can be identified, reviewed, and prioritized to determine when, and where proactive steps should be considered for preserving the resource.

### **Natural Resource Management**

Identifying acceptable methods for restoring, preserving, and managing the natural resources in a manner that balances ecosystem sustainability, multiple use recreation, and environmental education is critical for a sustained, regional park system that emphasizes natural resources. Using baseline inventories of the county's natural resources, strategies can be adopted which help maintain or enhance the resource. Depending on the goals and objectives, a variety of stewardship practices can be considered which typically have specific goals, outcomes and results. Examples may include selective tree harvests to eradicate non native species, conducting prescribed burns to favor desirable wildflowers and native grasses, applying an herbicide to control exotics, or simply leaving an area undisturbed. When identifying the available options, consideration must be given to all existing resources including the vegetation, water, and wildlife as well as the users and adjacent landowners. Developing policies concerning wildlife management is especially important, particularly for deer, where populations can quickly escalate within a protected open space and negatively impact the vegetation. Incorporating steps into a management plan that monitors, regulates, and manages population levels using tools most suited and appropriate for the site such as hunting, trapping, and releasing of wildlife is recommended.

### **Sustainability vs Use**

When managing the natural resources involving parks, trails, or open space, identifying the anticipated level of use, the designated user groups, and ultimately what the sites primary objectives are, is critical in helping develop a long-term management plan appropriate for the amenity. As with sites that are planned for featuring multiple recreational opportunities along with showcasing environmental amenities, striking a balance that allows for continued recreational use with minimal impact to the resource can be challenging. Safety considerations, compatibility issues, natural resource sustainability, adjacent land use, and maintenance requirements can each influence how a site is managed.

Annually monitoring parks, trails, and open spaces to identify potential conflicts with overuse or misuse is a necessary part of the overall plan.

### **Maintenance**

To achieve cost-effective maintenance of a park/trail system and its resources, the use and sharing of equipment, staff, and other available resources among Sherburne County Departments and local city and township services is necessary.

### **Protection**

To effectively protect a designated natural resource can require outreach, education, signage, and compliance checks by authorized personnel. Adopting a park ordinance is further recommended to assist in the rule enforcement, public compliance, and natural resource protection.

## Section 8. Regional Trail System

From the Sherburne County 2003 Residential Survey, by a resounding 81% to 14% margin, residents agree in establishing biking and hiking trails as part of designing neighborhood developments. Respondents also identified “trails” as the top recreational need that the County should provide and address when updating its Park Plan.

Trails serve multiple functions. They serve as transportation corridors as well as opportunities to provide physical exercise. Trails can also provide an opportunity to enjoy nature at a quiet pace in a beautiful setting. Trails can be part of ecological corridors linking significant areas of natural resources. Using trails to link people safely to some of Sherburne County’s primary destination points can provide significant recreational, social, economic, and environmental benefits that all contribute to the quality of life.

Identifying regional trail corridors such as the abandoned Burlington Northern Railroad bed from Elk River to Princeton (Great Northern Trail) located west of State Hwy. 169 and the corridor extending from Elk River to St. Cloud along the Mississippi River, can offer opportunities for future connections to many of the county’s primary destination points such as the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, the Sand Dunes State Forest, local lakes, and various Regional, County, and local parks/trails. Developing a regional trail system that incorporates city/township parks and trails as well as connects with adjacent county/city trail systems should be fostered to enable safer routes, more destination points, and a more cost-efficient system of trails between the partners involved.

There are many existing and proposed trail systems that should be considered when determining regional trail corridor routes. Many of the cities within the county are currently following a trail plan for their community and some of the townships have also adopted trail plans. Examples of existing trail segments that are already in place include the detached surfaced trail along County Road 1 in Elk River, the designated routes through some of the residential developments in Baldwin Township, and the various city trail systems. Other specific routes that are currently being planned or discussed include the Xcel Trail in Becker and the extension of the Great Northern Trail in Elk River. Recently constructed bridges and overpasses with designated pedestrian/bike crossings should also be considered and would include those located at the intersections of County Road 9 and State Hwy. 169, County Road 33 and State Hwy. 169, and County Road 15 and State Hwy. 10, as well as the bridges located along State Hwy. 24 and State Hwy. 25 over the Mississippi River. Incorporating existing trails, where appropriate, into a regional trail system can help establish local partnerships, reduce duplication, and enhance trail value.

Strong consideration should also be given to regional trail corridors being planned to connect into Sherburne County. Many of the counties surrounding Sherburne County either already have regional trail corridors connecting to Sherburne County, or have trail corridors proposed.

-  Anoka County has 2 regional trail corridors planned that would connect to Sherburne County from the east: the North Anoka County Regional Trail and the Mississippi River Regional Trail.
-  From the south, Wright County currently has 3 proposed regional trails that would connect into Sherburne County (Clear Lake/Clearwater, Monticello, and Elk River/Hwy. 101).

- ✚ The Saint Cloud Area Bicycle Plan, which incorporates several communities' plans together including those of St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids, and Benton County, connects to Sherburne County in several locations from the west and the north. In addition, the Central MN Regional Park and Trails, which operates in cooperation with the St. Cloud Area Joint Planning District Joint Powers Agreement, has identified trail connections between Stearns, Benton, and Sherburne County in its' Plan.
- ✚ From the northeast, Mille Lacs County has long supported the Soo Line Trail, located less than 10 miles from Sherburne County.

Current trail opportunities within the county consist primarily of constructing trails within county road right-of-ways at the time of roadway upgrade or reconstruction. When considering this option, to ensure there is adequate space for a trail at the edge of a road right of way and based on existing county road policies due to slope and drainage requirements, an additional 10 feet of right of way is needed for a trail, which, if sought, requires more negotiations regarding acquisitions, easements, and design work. Expanded shoulder widths can also be considered for functional, recreational use. These options can adequately serve transportation needs but do not (in most cases) provide aesthetically pleasing experiences or provide safe, options for families, the elderly, and other trail users. The county should explore options for incorporating off-roadway trail systems along utility corridors (transmission lines, pipelines right of ways), along abandoned railroad right of ways, and through residential developments at the time of development. The former Burlington Northern railroad bed has been identified as a future trail corridor and parcels along it are being pursued. Since there are multiple landowners involved along this corridor and varied interests exist, it is important to act on acquisition opportunities as they arise from willing sellers as well as to be creative in developing alternate routes, where necessary. Using development incentives in new residential developments to include amenities (such as recreational trails) in exchange for higher densities should be seriously explored, if off-road trails are desired. By considering a variety of trail placement locations, design tools, and acquisition methods, a regional trail system is still very feasible but must be planned soon to prevent missed opportunities.

Trails like roads, require certain design standards and can have significant environmental impacts. Efforts should be made to adopt minimum standards that are consistent with state and/or federal guidelines, and the grants they sponsor. Depending on the location, designated use, and type of surface, trail standards should be developed that the county can share and/or negotiate with engineers, developers, and various units of government that the county may partner with.

Connecting local trails to a regional trail system is imperative in realizing the benefits that trails can provide. It is Sherburne County's role to consider, adopt, and implement appropriate methods for developing a regional trail system that provides an alternative mode of transportation for non-motorized traffic, meets the publics' current and future demands, and provides connections to the areas primary destination points in a safe manner for people of all ages.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: References**

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## **Appendix B: Definitions**

### Definitions for Types of Public Open Spaces

National Wildlife Refuge – Referring to a “System” of federal lands administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service created to conserve fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats. When compatible with their mission, the priority uses allowed on these lands involve hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and environmental education. An example in Sherburne County is the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge.

State Forest – Referring to Minnesota's state forests which are managed to produce timber, provide outdoor recreation, protect watersheds, and perpetuate rare and distinctive species of native flora and fauna. State forests often contain recreation areas with campgrounds and day-use areas, in addition to the hunting and other unstructured outdoor activities. An example in the county is the Sand Dunes State Forest.

Wildlife Management Area (WMA) – Referring to a parcel of land managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources managed for wildlife production and open to the public for hunting and wildlife watching. WMA's can range from a prairie or wetland to a forest or swamp. There are currently 6 WMA's located in Sherburne County.

Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) – Referring to a parcel of land managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources open to the public for nature observation and education. SNA's are not meant for intensive recreational activities. As a general rule there are no trails, restrooms, or other facilities in an SNA. There are currently 5 SNA's located in Sherburne County.

Regional Park – In part, as a result of a new Regional Park Grant Program created by the DNR, the term regional park often indicates a county owned park. The general criteria used by this program defines a non-metro regional park as 100 or more acres, with exceptions based on use characteristics, special features, etc. That it serve at least a regional clientele, provide recreational activities, and, if possible, offer special or unique features. In addition, a regional park should provide public natural resource based recreational opportunities that are not otherwise available within a reasonable distance.

County Park – Generally considered smaller in size than a regional park but can range from around 20 acres to over 60 acres or more. Most county parks serve users from more than one community, provide a variety of recreational facilities, and are large enough to accommodate recreational activities while protecting the natural character of the park and providing an adequate buffer between activity areas.

Community Park – Usually larger than 10 acres but can be 100 acres or more. Typical facilities found in a community park include picnic tables, picnic shelters, grills, beach, and boat access; in addition to facilities for basketball, softball, tennis, horseshoes, volleyball, etc.

Neighborhood Park – Usually from 1 acre to 10 acres in size. In addition to playground equipment for young children, these areas may have open play areas and facilities for basketball, softball, tennis, horseshoes, volleyball, etc. for older children and adults.

Township Park – Although not defined or identified in the state grant program, locally it is referred to as any land owned by the township for park and/or recreational activities. Few limitations exist on the primary uses of township parks, their facilities, or their sizes.

Mini-Park (“tot lots”) – Usually less than 1 acre in size. Most of these small parks have playground equipment for young children but can also feature benches, flowers, etc. in a downtown area.

### Definitions:

Conservation Easement: A conservation easement is a voluntary and permanent agreement between a landowner and a qualifying private or governmental organization that sets forth specific restrictions on development and land use. In Minnesota the legal basis of easements as conservation tools is provided in Minnesota Statute 84C. Conservation easements may be established on a parcel of land to ensure its availability for agriculture, forest, recreational or open space use, protecting natural resources, maintaining or enhancing air or water quality, or preserving the historical, archaeological or cultural aspects. The easement is a contract filed in the public records. The terms are negotiated between the landowner and conservation organization that will monitor and enforce the easement. The landowner who establishes the easement and all future owners of the property are legally obligated to abide by its terms.

County Biological Survey (CBS): Is a systematic survey of rare biological features conducted by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The goal of the survey is to identify significant natural areas and to collect and interpret data on the distribution and ecology of rare plants, animals and natural communities.

County Park: County parks are lands owned by Sherburne County as natural resource based parkland that are not regional parks or regional park reserves. The Bridgeview Park Reserve, which is 29 acres in size, is an example of a County Park in Sherburne County.

Corridor: A narrow tract of land forming a connection between two larger pieces of land or destinations. As used in this plan corridors can be ecological connections, potential trail locations or both. Trail corridors illustrate a general location for proposed trails but not the exact alignment. For example a trail corridor may follow a county road but the precise location (which side of the road, width, etc.) is not identified. Ecological corridors connect larger areas of habitat and provide important pathways for the movements of animals and plants. For example streams form important ecological corridors and facilitate the movement of animals from one area to another. Sometimes corridors are wide enough so that they can serve as both trail and ecological corridors.

Ecosystem: A dynamic complex of plant, animal, fungal, and microorganism communities and their associated nonliving environment interacting as an ecological unit.

Exotic or Invasive Species: An organism that is out of its naturally occurring range or environment and occupying the habitat of a native species. Often time exotic species have no natural predators in their new environments and spread rapidly to the detriment of native plants and animals.

**Joint Powers Agreement:** A joint powers agreement is used when two or more governmental units want to work together in a long-term relationship regarding a complex issue. It is a legally established relationship specifying how certain activities will take place, how decisions will be made, the roles and responsibilities of each party, at the authorities of each party (or a body specially created for managing the Joint Powers Agreement), and termination procedures. Minn. Stat. 471.59 spells out the requirements of a Joint Powers Agreement.

**Maintenance:** Means routine activities required to keep a facility operational. Maintenance activities include things like mowing, emptying garbage containers, serving restrooms, plowing snow, etc.

**Native Species:** An animal or plant indigenous to a particular region.

**Natural Community:** Groups of native plants and animals that interact with each other and the surrounding non-living environment, generally in ways not greatly altered by humans or by introduced plants or animals. (MN DNR). For example an Oak Forest is a natural community composed of oak trees, shrubs, grasses, flowers, birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals all interacting in a certain set of environmental conditions.

**Off Highway Vehicles (OHM):** Includes all terrain vehicles (ATV's) and off-highway motorcycles (OHMs)

**Open Space:** Land that is largely free of man-made structures, where ground cover is such that rain may enter the soil to replenish groundwater. May include but is not limited to natural areas, parks, and agricultural lands.

**Phase I Environmental Assessment:** A records search and visual inspection of a property for potential environmental problems (such as leaking barrels, uncapped wells, etc.) commonly conducted prior to land acquisition.

**Regional Park:** Regional parks contain natural resources sufficient to provide an array of outdoor recreation opportunities. Typically Regional Parks are 200 – 500 acres in size, although some are as small as 100 acres. The area must be large enough to buffer recreation activities from adjacent land uses. The Oak Savanna Land Preserve and the Grams Regional Park are the two regional parks in Sherburne County.

**Snowmobile Trail:** Snowmobile trails in Sherburne County are Grant in Aid Trails. These are cooperative agreements between landowners and either the Department of Natural Resources or local snowmobile clubs. The DNR provides funding for maintenance and signs while the snowmobile clubs carry out maintenance activities and sign installation. There are no permanent rights of way or easements for these trails and they exist at the largess of the landowner and may be revoked at any time.

**Wildlife Corridor:** An area of continuous native vegetation designed to promote connectivity and movement of wildlife between isolated natural areas; or a series of patches of natural vegetation that may serve as “stepping stones” that promote connectivity and movement of wildlife between natural areas.

## Appendix C: Parks, Trails, Open Space Inventory

### County/Regional

#### **Oak Savanna Land Preserve**

Acres: 140  
Location: Becker Township

The Oak Savanna Land Preserve is considered Sherburne County's first regional-type park in the county and is part of a complex that is anticipated to evolve into a regional facility providing outdoor recreation, environmental education, and historical insight of Sherburne County and the Anoka Sand Plain landscape. The county acquired approximately 270 acres in 1997 through a generous gift from Willard & Margaret Cox, of which 140 acres are designated specifically for park use. The remaining 130 acres will be home to the Sherburne County's Historical Society "Heritage Center" and is being considered as a potential site for a new Sherburne County Fairgrounds facility. To the east and adjacent to the Oak Savanna Land Preserve, is the Becker City Park and the city's Pebble Creek Golf Course. With the combined facilities and open spaces noted above, the area has a tremendous opportunity to serve as a public destination point attracting both local and regional use. The primary functions of the park are to provide opportunities for environmental education, recreation, and wildlife viewing.

Currently, the Oak Savanna Land Preserve features a series of mowed trails that meander through oak woodlands, original sand dune "blowouts", restored prairie, and pine stands. Much of the wooded area of the park is identified on the County Biological Survey map as an *Oak Woodland*, indicating its' ecologic significance and rarity. Most of the remaining area of the park is in the process of being restored with native trees, shrubs, grasses, and wildflower plantings. Designated trails are marked specifically for non-motorized recreation, such as hiking, biking, birding, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. To assist with natural resource management and to enhance species diversity, the park is divided into parcels based on species composition, landscape features, size, and use. With rapid residential growth being anticipated from within and around the City over the next 20 years, significant increases in the demand for recreational trails, open space views, and environmental education is expected, resulting in greater use of the Oak Savanna Land Preserve. A conservation easement enforced by the Minnesota Land Trust outlines the permitted uses, improvements, and changes that can be made to the park and permanently protects it from any activity that would interfere with the Conservation Values of the Protected Land. The Sherburne County Park Commission, with the assistance of the Oak Savanna Land Preserve Advisory Committee, is responsible for developing and implementing a park plan that provides recreational and educational opportunities, while protecting the resources and amenities that the site offers.

In the future, the primary expenses anticipated for the park, include annual maintenance, trail development (2.5 miles), and land management costs. Having bituminous trail surfaces (or similar) along designated trail segments will allow for broader use of the site (such as rollerblading), improve accessibility (allow use by wheelchair), and improve safety (hiking, biking) but may result in higher maintenance costs. Mowing, fencing, garbage disposal, trail clearing, and signage are examples of some of the primary maintenance costs. The anticipated improvements planned for the site include installation of portable restrooms, benches, prairie restoration work, prescribed burning, selective tree harvesting, installation of interpretive kiosks, lighting, tree planting, and literature.

# Oak Savanna Land Preserve



## Bridgeview Park Reserve

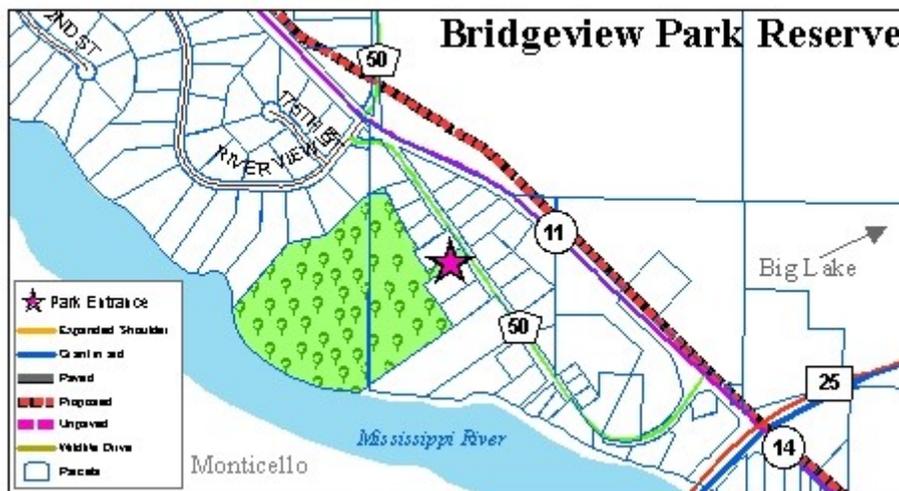
Acres: 29  
Location: Big Lake Township/Becker Township

The Bridgeview Park Reserve was acquired in 1998, through a cooperative effort between Sherburne County, a developer, and the MN Department of Natural Resources. The park is slightly over 29 acres in size and borders Big Lake Township and Becker Township. The land consists of primarily oak woodland and brushland with approximately 1,200 feet of shoreline along the Mississippi River. The land has been identified on the MN Department Natural Resources, County Biological Survey Map as a rare “natural plant community”. With the biological significance of the vegetation and its’ strategic location of the land along the river, Sherburne County’s main objective is to preserve the land in its natural condition and provide public access for educational and low-impact recreational opportunities.

In February 2000, a committee was formed to develop a management plan for the site. The management plan was adopted in May 2001 and currently provides a framework for the county to consider when developing and/or maintaining the property. Considering the proximity of a nearby residential development and limited access to the property, the most likely users of the land will be local residents but it will be open to the public. Historical events that took place in and around the surrounding area involving the Ojibwa and Dakota native Americans, the Pike Expeditions, and the Ox-cart trail offer some exceptional opportunities for historical interpretation.

Currently, the county maintains a small parking lot and a system of trails within the park. The trails are maintained for summer use only, however the park remains open to the public in the winter. Establishing a canoe access along the river has been discussed as a potential project in the future.

In the future, the primary expenses anticipated for the park involve annual maintenance costs and some minimal development costs. Mowing, garbage disposal, and signage are the main maintenance costs. The anticipated improvements planned for the site include installation of portable restrooms, prairie restoration work, selective tree harvesting, installation of interpretive kiosks, and parking area resurfacing improvements.



## Grams Regional Park

Acres: 113  
Location: Livonia Township

Grams Regional Park was acquired in 2001 and became Sherburne County's second regional type park. Acquisition of the park became feasible when Sherburne County was awarded 2 state grants (Regional Park Grant and a Natural and Scenic Area Grant). The park is located in the east-central part of the county on Lake Fremont, just outside Zimmerman's city limits and ½ mile east of Hwy. 169. Acquisition of park property on a lake was key in that it was one of the few remaining parcels in the county having significant acreage and with significant lake front.

The site offers a variety of landscape features and scenic vistas which reflect the deep, broad, irregular troughs formed during glacial periods creating hills, valleys, and diverse vegetation types. Remnants of this original vegetation still exist today on the site with nearly 20 acres of tamarack bogs, swamps, and fens. Views overlooking Lake Fremont, Blue Hill - located 10 miles away, and land to the south provide an unparalleled sight line. Approximately 1,000 feet of lakeshore along Lake Fremont provide future opportunities for swimming beaches and water based recreation.

Since its' acquisition the county has begun developing trails, installed a parking area, and installed a hand pump drinking fountain. As the state grants imply, future use of the site allow for both active recreational park use (per Regional Park Grant guidelines) and for passive recreational use (per Natural and Scenic Area Grant guidelines) including environmental education, wildlife viewing, and open space preservation.

The park is designated as a regional park and is intended to provide the recreational needs from the surrounding area, as the needs evolve. The initial expenses anticipated for the park involve annual maintenance costs including mowing, garbage disposal, and signage as well as some trail development expenses. Picnic tables, a picnic shelter, lighting, portable restrooms, and cooking grills are anticipated in the near future. As the surrounding area grows, developed facilities for regional use providing opportunities for water based recreation, non-motorized forms of recreation, and environmental education should be planned for.

### Grams Regional Park



## **Other County Owned Sites**

### **Goose Lake**

Acres: 37  
Location: Baldwin Township

Acquired in 2000 as a donation to the county for future park and open space use. Much of the site is comprised of wetland and entails part of Goose Lake. There are no current trails or facilities at the site. The site currently serves as public open space and provides wildlife habitat.

### **Rivercrest**

Acres: 10  
Location: Big Lake Township

Acquired in 2002 for future use as public open space, Rivercrest is located along the St. Francis River. The site was also acquired as a potential resting stop while canoeing the river. The parcel offers a combination of oak forest cover and wetlands. The site currently is undeveloped.

### **Big Oak**

Acres: 63 Acres  
Location: Becker Township

The site was acquired in 2004 as a gift. The parcel is comprised largely of wetlands and provides outstanding waterfowl habitat. Currently there are no trails on the parcel. The site offers future opportunity for wildlife viewing and environmental education opportunities.

## **Federal**

### **Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge**

Established in 1965 to help protect and restore the wildlife of the St. Francis River Valley, the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and encompasses 30,700 acres of land. Located on oak savanna, wetlands, and big woods habitats, it is home to an astounding array of wildlife and provides excellent opportunities for wildlife oriented recreation. The Blue Hill and Mahnomen Trails, located on County Road 9, provide 9 miles of grass trails which provide good hiking and songbird viewing in the spring and fall, and cross-country skiing in the winter. Hunting and fishing are permitted in designated areas during state seasons. Canoeing is permitted in designated parts of the St. Francis River. The Wildlife Drive is open mid-April thru October during daylight hours. Environmental education programs are available for organized groups and the public to learn about the Refuge. The Refuge encompasses considerable amounts of Blue Hill, Orrock, and Santiago Townships and extends slightly into Baldwin and Becker Townships.

## **State**

Through various land acquisitions by the state, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources provides a variety of public open spaces and recreational opportunities in Sherburne County.

## Sand Dunes State Forest

The Sand Dunes State Forest currently consists of approximately 6,000 acres. It was originally established, in part, to help stabilize the soil in the 1940's. With increasing interest and use, the MN Department of Natural Resources management focus has now shifted toward more recreational use, however, as with all of Minnesota's State Forests, their management approach remains multiple-use. One of the Sand Dunes priorities is to manage and provide for good wildlife habitat to support game and non-game wildlife. Timber management and forest health management is also important in providing an economic benefit and a renewable resource for the public. Interest and support for managing and providing for public recreational opportunities in the Sand Dunes State Forest has grown significantly with the added population of the surrounding area. The Sand Dunes currently offers a variety of recreational activities including boating, fishing, camping, and picnicing, as well as a horse camp area. Approximately 50 miles of multi-use trails are available within the Sand Dunes for snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and horseback riding. The Sand Dunes State Forest is located entirely within Orrock Township.

## Wildlife Management Areas

Wildlife management areas (WMA's) are the crown jewels of Minnesota's wildlife management operation. Over 1,300 public wildlife areas provide recreation for hundreds of thousands of upland, waterfowl, and deer hunters each year. And their 1.1 million acres of habitat provide living quarters for most of Minnesota's game and nongame wildlife species. An increasing number of wildlife watchers are finding that WMA's offer some of the state's best opportunities to see sandhill cranes, herons, prairie chickens, shore birds, and waterfowl. Ranging from prairies and wetlands to forests and swamps, WMA's are managed for wildlife production and are open to public hunting and wildlife watching. There are currently 6 WMA's located in Sherburne County.

<u>Wildlife Management Area</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Location by Township</u>
Kunkel WMA	43	Blue Hill
Foxhole WMA	40	Becker
Santiago WMA	83	Santiago
Fremont WMA	170	Livonia
Sand Prairie WMA	700	Haven
Vietnam Memorial WMA	80	Baldwin

## Scientific and Natural Areas

Minnesota's living museum of Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA's) has a thousand stories to tell – of Minnesota's lands and waters, plants and animals, past and future. The SNA program preserves natural features and rare resources of exceptional scientific and educational value. Although SNA's are open to the public for nature observation and education, they are not meant for intensive recreational activities. There are currently 5 SNA's located in Sherburne County.

<u>Scientific and Natural Area</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Location by Township</u>
Clear Lake	78	Clear Lake
Harry W. Cater Homestead Prairie	133	Haven
Mississippi River Islands	73	Elk River
Rice Lake Savanna	80	Palmer
Uncas Dunes	745	Orrock

**City/Township**

75 City owned parks totaling 1,444 acres. (\* denotes within Sherburne County)  
4 Township owned parks totaling 174 acres.

<u>Unit of Government</u>	<u>Approximate No. of Parks</u>	<u>Estimated Total Acreage</u>
City of Becker	8	167
City of Big Lake	12	153
City of Clear Lake	1	5
City of Elk River	33	777
*City of Princeton	0	-
*City of St. Cloud	8	83 (+185 leased w/State)
City of Zimmerman	13	74
Township of Baldwin	2	81
Township of Becker	0	-
Township of Big Lake	1	20
Township of Blue Hill	0	-
Township of Clear Lake	0	-
Township of Haven	0	-
Township of Livonia	1	40
Township of Orrock	0	-
Township of Palmer	1	34
Township of Santiago	0	-

**Private Recreational Facilities**

In addition to the public recreation areas, there are several privately owned facilities offering a variety of recreational activities including golf courses, campgrounds, sportsman’s clubs, and shooting ranges.

Campgrounds

Wapiti Campgrounds  
Shady River Campgrounds  
Big Oaks Campgrounds  
Riverwood

Hunting/Gun Clubs

Del Tone Hunt Club  
Elk River Gun Club  
Minnetonka Gun Club  
Minnesota Sportsmans Club  
Wild Marsh Gun Club

Golf/Trailer Parks

Air Stream Park  
Carefree Country Club  
Travelers Country Club of Clear Lake  
Travelers on the Mississippi Country Club

Golf Courses

Elk River Country Club  
Fairway Shores  
Pinewood

Scout Camps

Girl Scout Council  
Camp Grunholm – Boy Scouts

## **Appendix D: Synopsis of Public Meetings**

The Sherburne County Park Commission hosted 4 Open Houses in February and March of 2005 to obtain public input on the proposed Park Plan draft and Park Plan maps. Using the Sherburne County Environmental Educator to advertise, a February 7<sup>th</sup> Open House was held at the Palmer Township Hall and a February 22<sup>nd</sup> Open House was held at the Livonia Township Hall. In March, an Open House Invitation was posted in the various newspapers covering Sherburne County for March 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Palmer Township Hall and for March 24<sup>th</sup> at the Livonia Township Hall. Prior to the Open Houses, drafts of the Park Plans and maps were accessible at the Sherburne County “Parks” website. For the March meetings, copies of the Park Plan drafts and maps were mailed to each city and township governmental unit in the county as well as to the Department of Natural Resource offices responsible for the Sand Dunes State Forest, the United States Fish and Wildlife office for the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, and the Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District.

A summary of the primary questions and/or concerns that were mentioned at these open houses are noted below. The number of residents attending the Open Houses was small.

Clarification of the biodiversity maps, what the areas identified as being biodiverse meant, and how biodiverse areas differed from natural plant communities identified on the Minnesota County Biological Survey Map.

A growing concern with the lack of pedestrian trails available for the general public to use in the county. Road shoulders should not be considered or relied on as primary pedestrian routes for the public to use in the future (to get to public recreation sites) due to current and growing safety issues.

Park dedication amounts collected from developments by the county should be reviewed to make them equal to comparable land values (ie. 10% of plat acreage) or reviewed to make them comparable to neighboring communities.

Trail planning needs to be done in conjunction with transportation planning and by considering wetlands and other landscape features.

Terminology for county parks, regional parks, land preserves, park reserves should be clear and consistent.

A better understanding of what the Sand Dunes State Forest and Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge is, how the 2 sites differ, and how each entity fits in with a County Parks and Trail System.

Additional awareness of existing parks is needed. Many people are not familiar with the county parks of Sherburne County.

## **Appendix E: Public Opinion Poll Summary**

In 2003, a Sherburne County Residential Public Opinion Survey was conducted by Decision Resources Ltd. on issues pertaining to parks and recreation issues in Sherburne County as well as land use and development issues. The results of that survey are summarized in the “2003 Residential Study”. Below are summaries and conclusions of Decision Resources Ltd. based on the survey results pertaining to parks, trails, and open space.

“Sherburne County residents could be characterized as “fiscally conservative Greens.” While they are generally resistant to proposals requiring tax increases, residents place a high priority on both preservation and recreational needs.”

In prioritizing recreation needs and activities Sherburne County could provide, trails were clearly identified as the top need with 39% pointing to trails, 14% saying more parks, and 5% each identifying motorized trails and more open space. This being an open ended question, the interest in public trails is very apparent.

“More than three quarters of the sample agreed with four park and recreation policies: 1) acquiring more land along the Mississippi River, if available, for parkland trails and wildlife habitat; 2) preserving corridors adjacent to waterways and wetlands as greenway space; 3) establishing biking and hiking trails as an important part of designing neighborhood development; and 4) more County action in protecting sensitive plant communities and unique ecosystems.”

“By a 63%-32% margin, residents indicated that county parks and trails were a very important aspect of their choice of residence and their quality of life.”

“One issue, though, divided the populace: by a 50%-42% margin, respondents thought the County should take a more active role in acquiring land for motorized trails for ATVs and snowmobiles.”

“County residents enthusiastically supported Sherburne County purchasing the rail corridor and developing a twenty mile non-motorized trail from Elk River to Princeton. By a 70% to 23% margin, respondents supported County action.”

One method for the County to raise funds for parkland acquisition, which showed a 2 to 1 endorsement by respondents, was by issuing bonds backed by County revenue sources.

All three of the potential recreation development projects discussed in the survey were supported by the majority of the respondents: 1) development of the Oak Savanna Land Preserve to include paved trails, an interpretive education center, lights, and restrooms; 2) acquisition of parkland for a regional swimming facility; 3) acquisition of parkland along the Mississippi River for trails and historical interpretation areas.

The typical resident would support a \$13.50 per year tax increase to fund the acquisition, development, and maintenance of County parks and trails in Sherburne County. (Authors Note: In the 1994 residential survey, the average resident would support a \$10.40 yearly property tax increase for twenty years.)

**Appendix F: Cost Estimates for Acquisition of Additional Parks and Trails**

The following is an estimate of what it would cost, in today’s dollars, to acquire the land for three regional parks averaging 200 acres each and construct approximately 30 miles of trails as shown on Figure 2 of the Sherburne County Parks, Trails, and Open Space Plan. This is a theoretical exercise designed to give the Board of Commissioners, Parks Commission, and county staff a starting point for planning a financial strategy in implementing a plan.

Establishing and identifying the need for 3 new regional parks is purely based on geographic distribution in attempting to have a regional park in each of the planning regions. With Grams Regional Park and the Oak Savanna Land Preserve meeting the criteria as a Regional Park, three remaining planning regions could be considered as sites for future Regional Parks. In terms of natural resource based recreation, three focus areas to consider future acquisition of parkland would be 1) land along the Mississippi River corridor, 2) land near the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge or Sand Dunes State Forest (to compliment and add to different uses featured at these facilities), and 3) water based recreation in the western part of Sherburne County.

Estimates are based on best available information from comparable land sales and from comparable trail/road construction costs. Development costs (roads, swimming beaches, recreational facilities, etc.) for parks have not been included since, in part, development plans have not been written yet and because of the priority and focus on parkland acquisition.

Based on current land values, the acquisition cost of acquiring between 400-800 acres for regional park use is \$4,000,000 to \$12,000,000. If 9M were needed, it is anticipated that a portion (perhaps 50%) would be acquired through grant programs, which would require 4.5M of county funds being leveraged toward the grants, or a smaller portion being combined with local townships or cities to match the grants. While land donations are not common, opportunities for them could occur. Land donations should not be relied on however, when developing a strategy to fund park acquisition, due to their uncertainty.

Based on current trail construction costs, the construction cost for installing approximately 40 miles of surface trail is estimated around \$3,400,000. Again, it must be noted that these are not expenses borne solely on Sherburne County residents since parks and trails are generally funded through various federal, state, and regional grants programs, as has been the history thus far in Sherburne County. Furthermore, while acknowledging that a sense of urgency is important, it will take many years to implement the plan which means that the costs will be spread out over decades, but increase over time with inflation.

Cost Estimates for Parkland Acquisition @ \$15,000/acre	
600 acres (3 Regional Parks averaging 200 acres)	\$ 9,000,000

Cost Estimates for Proposed County/Regional Trails @ \$15/ft	
Great Northern Trail – Acquisition and Development	750,000
Oak Savanna Land Preserve – 3 miles	250,000
Xcel Trail	400,000
“Mississippi” Trail Corridor	1,600,000
Grams Park Trail segments	240,000
Trail Connections to Regional Destinations	<u>160,000</u>
Total Estimate	\$ 3,400,000

Total Cost Estimate for Parkland Acquisition and Trail Construction   \$12,400,000

## **Maps and Figures**

### **Figure 1. Sherburne County Public Parks, Trails, and Open Space Inventory**

**A. Federal, State, and Regional Level**

**B. Local Level – Primarily for Local Use**

**C. Regional/Local Public Waterway Accesses & Resources**

### **Figure 2. Sherburne County Trail Corridor Routes**

### **Figure 3. MN County Biological Survey; Rare Plants and Animals in Sherburne Co.**

### **Figure 4. Biodiverse & Regionally Significant Plant Communities in Sherburne Co.**

### **Figure 5. Sherburne County Shoulder Width Map**

### **Figure 6. Land Development Patterns**

### **Figure 7. Sherburne County Public Recreation Areas**