

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

390 North Robert Street, St. Paul, MN 55101
Phone (651) 602-1000; TDD (651) 291-0904

DATE: December 20, 2011

TO: Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

FROM: Tori Dupre, Senior Planner-Parks (651-602-1621)

SUBJECT: (2011-XXX) **Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail Master Plan**,
Dakota County, Review File No. 50016-1
Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Districts G (Carrie
Wasley) and H (Barbara Schmidt)
Metropolitan Council Districts 13 (Richard Kramer) and 15 (Steven T.
Chávez)

INTRODUCTION

Dakota County, the regional park implementing agency, submitted the Minnesota River Greenway regional trail master plan to the Metropolitan Council for review on November 2, 2011. The Council reviews park and trail master plans to evaluate their consistency with the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and its content criteria for regional trail master plans.

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* Planning Strategy 1 (page 2-28) describes the role of the master plan in the regional park system. The policy requires that any project proposed for funding in the Metropolitan Regional Parks Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) be consistent with a Metropolitan Council-approved regional park master plan.

The *Policy Plan* Siting and Acquisition Strategy 3 (page 2-15) addresses locating and acquiring new regional trails and specifies that new regional trails serve a regional audience based on visitor origin surveys, follow natural or linear features in areas of scenic appeal, and provide connections between the regional park system's features and facilities.

This report reviews the proposed Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail master plan based on its consistency with the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and recommends approval of the master plan.

AUTHORITY TO REVIEW

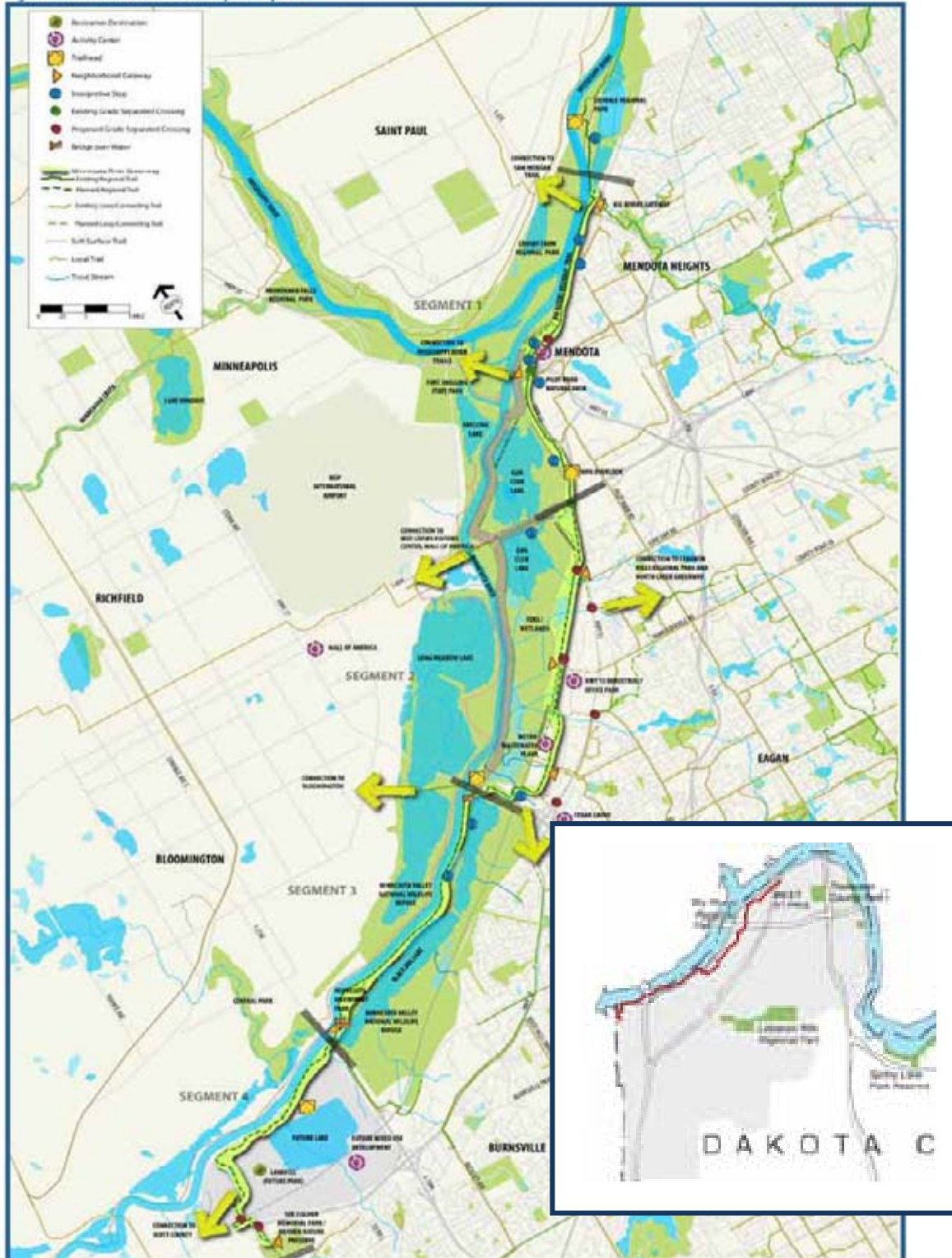
Minnesota Stat. 473.313 Subd. 1 requires Regional Park Implementing Agencies to "prepare, after consultation with all affected municipalities, and submit to the Metropolitan Council, and from time to time revise and resubmit to the council, a master plan and annual budget for the acquisition and development of regional recreation open space located within the district or county, consistent with the Council's policy plan."

Minnesota Stat. 473.313 Subd. 2, authorizes the Metropolitan Council to review, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, master plans for the regional park system facilities. The Council reviews plans for their consistency with the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, and those plans found inconsistent with Council policy

are returned to the implementing agency, along with the Council's review comments, for revision and resubmission.

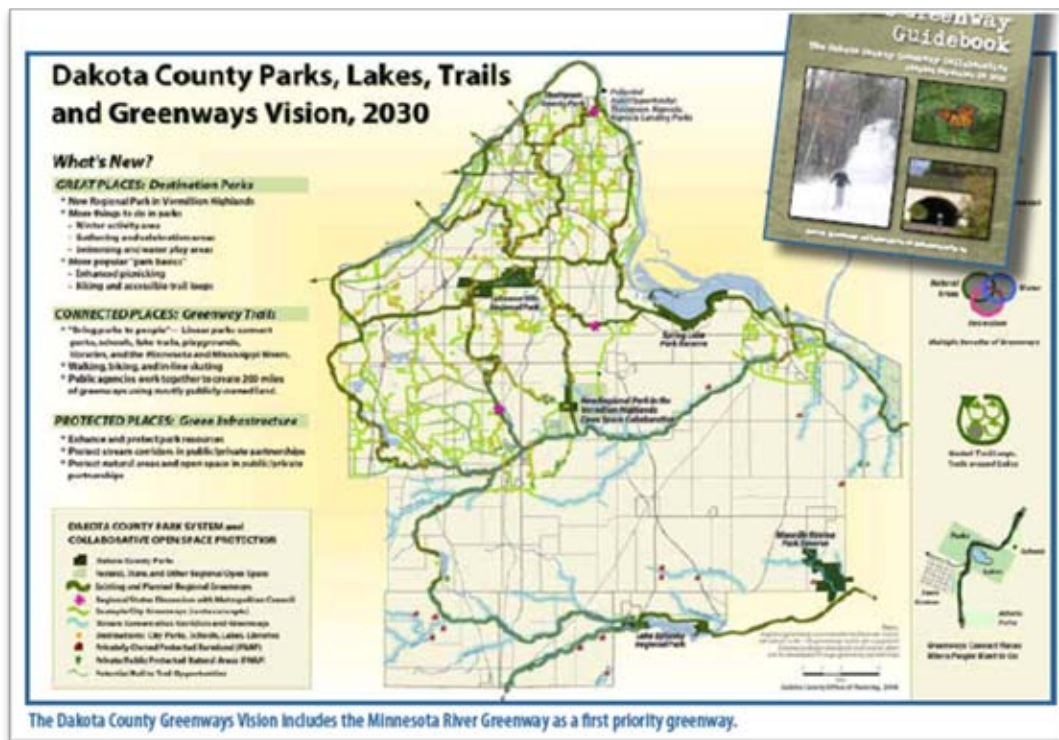
BACKGROUND

Figure 25. Minnesota River Greenway Concept Plan



The *Policy Plan* acknowledges the proposed regional trail in Dakota County as an extension of an existing regional trail (Big Rivers Regional Trail) southward to the Scott County border. The *Policy Plan* explains that greenways are similar to regional destination trails, and states that greenways, like destination trails, should maximize the amount of high-quality natural resources within the trail corridor boundaries.

The Dakota County 2030 comprehensive plan supports the greenway and regional trail through the *Countywide Greenways Vision*, connecting land resources, water resources and natural resources in a recreational setting. The County adopted a Greenway Guidebook that establishes a collaborative approach to greenway governance, stewardship, design and operation.



The proposed 17-mile regional trail extends from Dakota County's border with Scott County to the City of St. Paul, following the Minnesota River. It will access unique cultural and natural resources within the Cities of Burnsville, Eagan, Mendota Heights, Mendota and Lilydale. Also, it will connect to St. Paul's Lilydale Regional Park and to Harriet Island. This regional trail corridor is a part of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) planning for the Minnesota Valley State Trail, extending from St. Paul to LeSueur MN. The master plan describes the regional trail in the following four segments: Segment 1 from Lilydale Regional Park, south to I-494 (5 miles); Segment 2 from I-494 to Cedar Avenue (4 miles); Segment 3 from Cedar Avenue to I-35W (3.5 miles) and Segment 4 from I-35W to Scott County (4 miles).

Figure 33. Minnesota River gateway segment 1 concept plan



Figure 37. Minnesota River gateway segment 2 concept plan



Figure 40. Minnesota River Greenway segment 3 concept plan



Figure 41. Minnesota River Greenway segment 4 concept plan



Much of the proposed regional trail lies within the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Fort Snelling State Park, in St. Paul's regional parks, or in Burnsville's local parks. The broader greenway corridor contains 26 known archaeological sites and 11 historical properties that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

MASTER PLAN ANALYSIS

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that master plans for regional destination trails address the following twelve items.

1. Boundaries and Acquisition Costs

The master plan addresses the parcels to be acquired, the estimated acquisition costs and schedule for the proposed regional trail. It also describes the trail corridor's natural resources, suitability, special assessments and other acquisition considerations.

This review evaluates the proposed regional trail portion of the broader greenway. While the County will be responsible for the 30-foot trail, the broader greenway corridor will be governed by other partner agencies such as the Minnesota DNR. The proposed trail will include a 30-foot paved trail within a 100 to 300-foot greenway corridor, depending upon the location, and will connect or follow natural resource areas where possible.

The corridor's acquisition will occur in phases, and the anticipated schedule depends upon funding and the County's acquisition priorities identified in the plan. The master plan states that it is essential that Dakota County secure land for the 30-foot trail alignment and the trailheads. The master plan identifies the corridor parcels that need to be protected by ownership type, from public to private.

The proposed trail corridor includes approximately 14.2 acres of private land. The County will work with the private landowners to protect the trail corridor through ongoing negotiations regarding trail easements, and land acquisition through bargain sales or donations.

The master plan estimates the private land acquisition costs to be approximately \$90.00 per linear foot, or approximately \$1,845,000. Actual acquisition costs will vary based on strategy, ranging from direct purchase, easement purchase, land donation, or bargain sale. The acquisition schedule will correspond to the project phases and available funding.

2. Demand Forecast

The master plan addresses how the trail will meet the recreational demand as identified by Council and Dakota County. The master plan indicates that the 13 communities in the trail corridor are some of the most densely populated in the metropolitan area, having a 2009 total population of over one million. The proposed trail will fulfill recreation needs in this part of the County. Dakota County's past resident surveys have clearly shown that trails are the number one desired recreation facility.

The Metropolitan Council's 2009 visit estimate for the existing portion of the regional trail, the 4.5-mile Big Rivers Regional Trail, was 142,000 visits. Based on the current use patterns, the trail would have 539,000 annual visits, if the entire regional trail was

open today. With the projected 2030 population of 1,191,200, a 16 percent increase, the annual visits can be expected to surpass 625,000.

3. Development Concept

The master plan addresses the trail development schedule and cost estimates. Dakota County will implement the trail development in phases with first and second priorities identified, and long-term trail improvements and enhancements. The top priority projects are those that form the basic, continuous trail. Secondary priorities add trail enhancements such as grade-separated trail crossings at roadways. Long-term priorities add an underpass, landscaping and resource restoration, trailhead and gateway, or trail entrance with restroom, wayfinding, water, benches and parking.

The County will implement the project segments, beginning with the top priorities, as funding opportunities become available. The County intends to fund the trail development in coordination with the cities, the federal government and the state of Minnesota.

Dakota County will design the proposed trail to function as a regional destination trail for nature-oriented recreation and non-motorized transportation. The greenway width will range from 100 feet to more than 1.5 mile throughout the corridor. The minimum trail width will be 30-feet to meet safety and access guidelines and provide year-round trail use.

This graphic represents a typical section of proposed regional trail and the broader greenway.



The master plan provides estimated development costs by trail segment and priority ranking. Therefore, the total development costs for the first priority segments are an estimated \$5,786,368. The total development costs for the entire trail are an estimated \$12 million dollars. This total cost includes first and second priority segments, and long-term trail enhancements in today's dollars.

4. Conflicts

The master plan addresses the potential conflicts with existing land uses or proposed projects affecting the trail, including the steps necessary for resolution. The master plan indicates that the surrounding land uses are generally compatible with the proposed trail. Dakota County will work with individual landowners to resolve issues and concerns with the trail construction, maintenance and safety on a case by case basis.

The master plan identifies where the trail will cross roads and railroads, and the need for grade-separated crossings to reduce conflicts between trail users and motorized traffic.

The Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES) identified a potential conflict at the Seneca wastewater treatment facility in Egan, where the proposed trail crossed Comanche Road, the treatment plant facility's only access to and from the regional facility. The County acknowledged the concern and identified a grade-separated crossing at this location in the master plan text, development costs and graphics. The County is committed to working with MCES as the trail is built near the treatment plant and interceptor facilities.

5. Public Services

The master plan indicates that no new public services (non-recreation services and facilities) will be needed to accommodate the trail. Proposed trailheads and neighborhood gateways are currently served by the existing road network. Dakota County will consider options such as solar lighting if municipal utilities are not accessible at these trailhead and gateway locations. As the County continues to build the trail system, it will consider options for future trail illumination, an essential component for trail safety and navigation.

6. Operations

The master plan addresses the rules, regulations or ordinances affecting the trail, including estimated operations and maintenance costs, and sources of revenue to operate and maintain the trail.

Dakota County enforces its park ordinance that defines and regulates park and trail rules and use. It identifies facility operation and hours, permitted recreation activities, vehicle traffic and parking, park and trail rules, regulation and enforcement. The County will communicate these rules on kiosks and signs to provide information on hours, trails, permitted activities and fees. The County officers patrol the park and trail facilities, educate visitors, enforce ordinances and respond to emergencies.

The Dakota County Parks and Open Space Department will be the lead agency for coordinating the regional trail and management operations, and the County will fund the park and trail operations through the annual budget. Dakota County will develop a joint powers agreement with the partner agencies for future facility maintenance.

The master plan identifies the annual maintenance and operations costs for the 30-foot trail corridor including gateways, trailheads and grade separated crossings for each trail segment. The annual trail maintenance cost is an estimated 255,000.

7. Citizen Participation

The master plan addresses the citizen participation process that the County incorporated in planning the regional trail. The County led a 12-month master planning process that included 14 members from a technical advisory group including the following communities and agencies. The County established a project website that provided an interactive map and a virtual open house to collect feedback and comments from the public on the proposed trail and greenway. The County notified over 2,000 residents within a quarter-mile of the greenway, inviting them to two public open houses and held a workshop to present interpretive themes. The County met with stakeholders including the technical advisory group communities, the MCES staff, the DNR staff and Xcel Energy.

Cities	Technical Advisory Group Members	
	Govt.	Dakota County
Lilydale	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Dakota Co Historical Society
Mendota	MN Dept of Natural Resources	Dakota Co Dept of Public Health
Mendota Heights	Lower MN River Watershed District	Dakota Co Parks & Open Space Dept
Eagan	Fort Snelling State Park	Dakota Co Office of Planning and Analysis
Burnsville	Minnesota Historical Society	

8. Public Awareness

The master plan addresses the County's approach to make the public aware of the services available when the trail is open. Dakota County uses many communication tools to promote the parks and trails including websites, mailings, press releases, brochures and wayfinding systems.

The master plan discusses options for a wayfinding and interpretive sign system for the entire trail, and highlights the National Park Service system of interpretive signs. The master plan includes recommendations for a system-wide regional trail interpretive plan that incorporates stakeholder input, interpretive themes and consistent design standards.

9. Accessibility

The master plan addresses Dakota County's commitment to provide activities, access and resources to all trail visitors. The regional trail will be a continuous multipurpose, bituminous trail designed to meet federal, state and county trail standards. The trail will be constructed to specifications of 10 to 12 feet wide, with a three-foot clear zone on both sides, and will accommodate walking, jogging, inline skating and bicycling. The trail will be maintained for winter use and illuminated where possible.

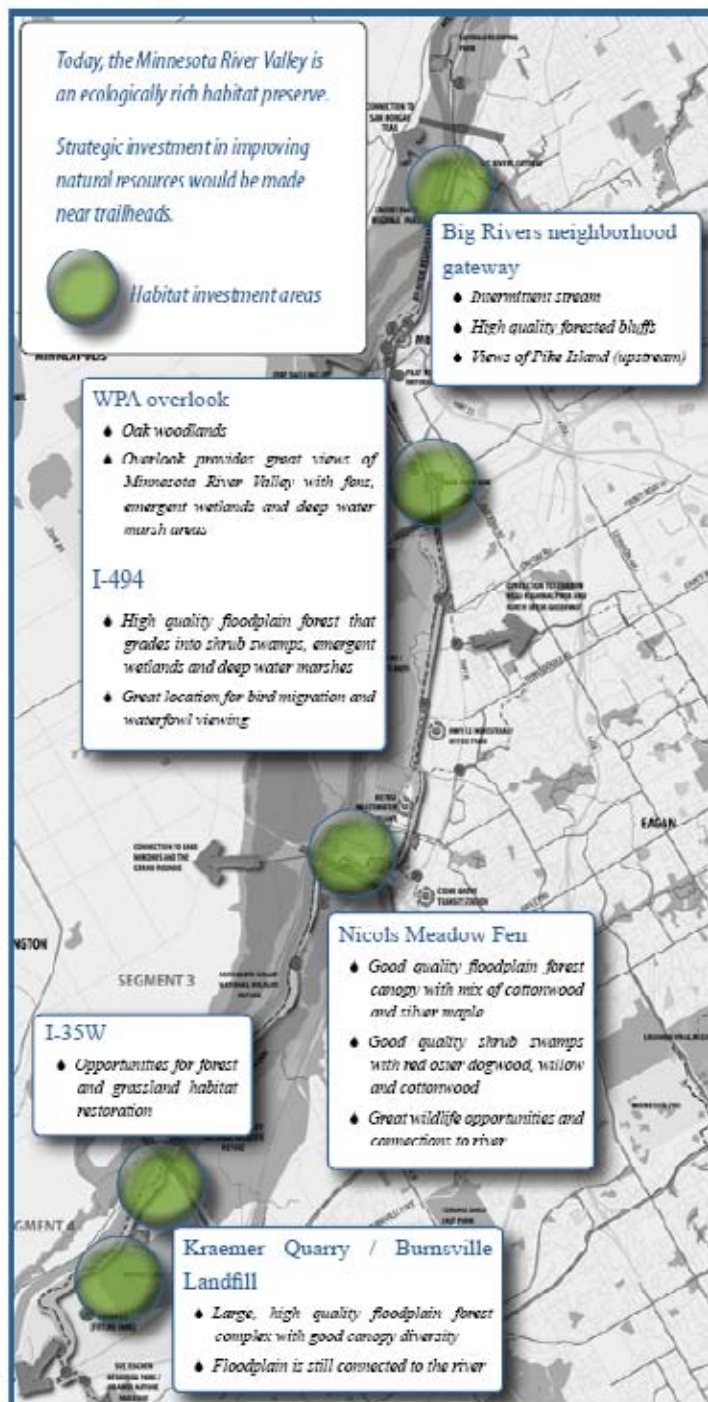
Frequent access is a priority for the Minnesota River regional trail and the County will provide two types of access. Trailheads are intended for regional and local access, while gateways are intended for local access. Access points will be at recreation

destinations, activity centers and trail intersections where support facilities will provide water, restrooms and trail information.

10. Stewardship Plan

The master plan addresses the County's program to manage the corridor's natural resources. Given the trail corridor length, the County will work with partner agencies to implement a resource stewardship plan. The master plan identifies five key habitat investment areas as priorities for restoration (figure 48) where the County will focus restoration and protection efforts near trailheads to provide opportunities for trail users to observe the projects. These projects will include stream restoration, wetland restoration, invasive plant removal, and native plant restoration. The estimated total

Figure 48. Habitat investment areas



cost of these resource restoration projects is \$450,300.

11. Natural Resources

The master plan includes a natural resource inventory (NRI) that is consistent with the DNR's Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS). The master plan indicates that the Minnesota River corridor is rich in cultural and natural resources. The vegetation along the trail is primarily wetland that including calcareous fens, with some prairie, woods and remnant floodplain forests.

The DNR's County Biological Survey identified many areas within the river valley as some of the highest quality habitat in the country. The river valley has numerous state and federal endangered plant species, and four trout streams. The County used the MLCCS information during the trail master planning process and conducted resource field verification.

REVIEW BY OTHER COUNCIL DIVISIONS

The Metropolitan Council staff reviewed the master plan for potential issues with the other regional systems plans for water resources management, wastewater and transportation (including aviation). The Council staff found that the proposed trail is compatible with the regional systems plans. However, the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES) staff had concerns with the trail's proximity near two essential regional facilities, the Seneca wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) and the adjacent regional maintenance facility (RMF) in the City of Eagan.

Environmental Services (Bryce Pickart, 651-602-1091)

The MCES staff found that the master plan, showing a grade-separated road crossing at Comanche Road in the text, graphics and cost estimates, is acceptable and satisfies the Council's safety concerns.

Comanche Road provides access to and from the Seneca WWTP and the adjacent RMF, two essential regional facilities that serve the County and the greater metro area. The proposed trail alignment crosses MCES property north of RMF and south of the Seneca WWTP. The Council's safety concerns include frequent truck traffic (deliveries) to and from the Seneca WWTP, as well as periodic heavy truck and equipment traffic during construction projects.

The master plan indicates that the County will work with MCES to discuss the trail alignment, alternatives and final designs to protect access to the wastewater treatment plant facility, and to acknowledge any necessary WWTP expansions.

Environmental Services, Sewers (Roger Janzig, 651-602-1119)

The proposed trail alignment crosses the following six Metropolitan Council-owned gravity interceptors.

1. (8360) in Mendota; interceptor built in 1985; 6 inch DIP
2. (3-ET-37) in Eagan; interceptor built in 1965; 36 inch RCP
3. (7032) in Eagan; interceptor built in 1970; 54 inch RCP/CIPP
4. (7031) in Eagan; interceptor built in 1971; 42 inch Steel Pipe
5. (9003) in Eagan; interceptor built in 1996; 32 inch HDPE

6. (8560) in Burnsville; interceptor built in 1987; 14 inch PVC

The Council recommends that Dakota County contact Scott Dentz (MCES interceptor engineering manager, 651-602-4503, to review preliminary project plans and assess any potential impacts to our interceptor system prior to project initiation. The County may mail engineering drawings and detail to Scott at 3565 Kennebec Drive, Eagan MN 55122-1058.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Minnesota River Greenway regional trail master plan from Dakota County is consistent with the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.
2. The estimated costs to implement the regional trail master plan total \$14,295,300 which includes cost estimates for acquisition, \$1,845,000, construction, \$12,000,000, and stewardship (resource restoration), \$450,300.
3. The proposed trail alignment crosses Comanche Road, the access to the Seneca WWTP the adjacent RMF, where a grade-separated road crossing addresses the MCES safety concerns. Dakota County will work with MCES on the proposed trail alignment, alternatives and final designs to protect the access to the Seneca WWTP and the RMF.
4. The proposed trail alignment affects six regional interceptors and related easements. Dakota County will work with MCES as trail engineering and detail are prepared and will provide the information to MCES staff for review, to maintain the integrity of these regional wastewater interceptor facilities.
5. The Council's action of the master plan allows Dakota County to be eligible to request regional funding for the trail's acquisition, development, operations, maintenance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail Master Plan.
2. Require Dakota County to provide trail alignment plans to MCES for review to protect the access to the Seneca WWTP and adjacent RMF.
3. Require Dakota County to provide trail development plans to MCES for review and comment to ensure the integrity of the wastewater treatment interceptor system.