

Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan - 2024

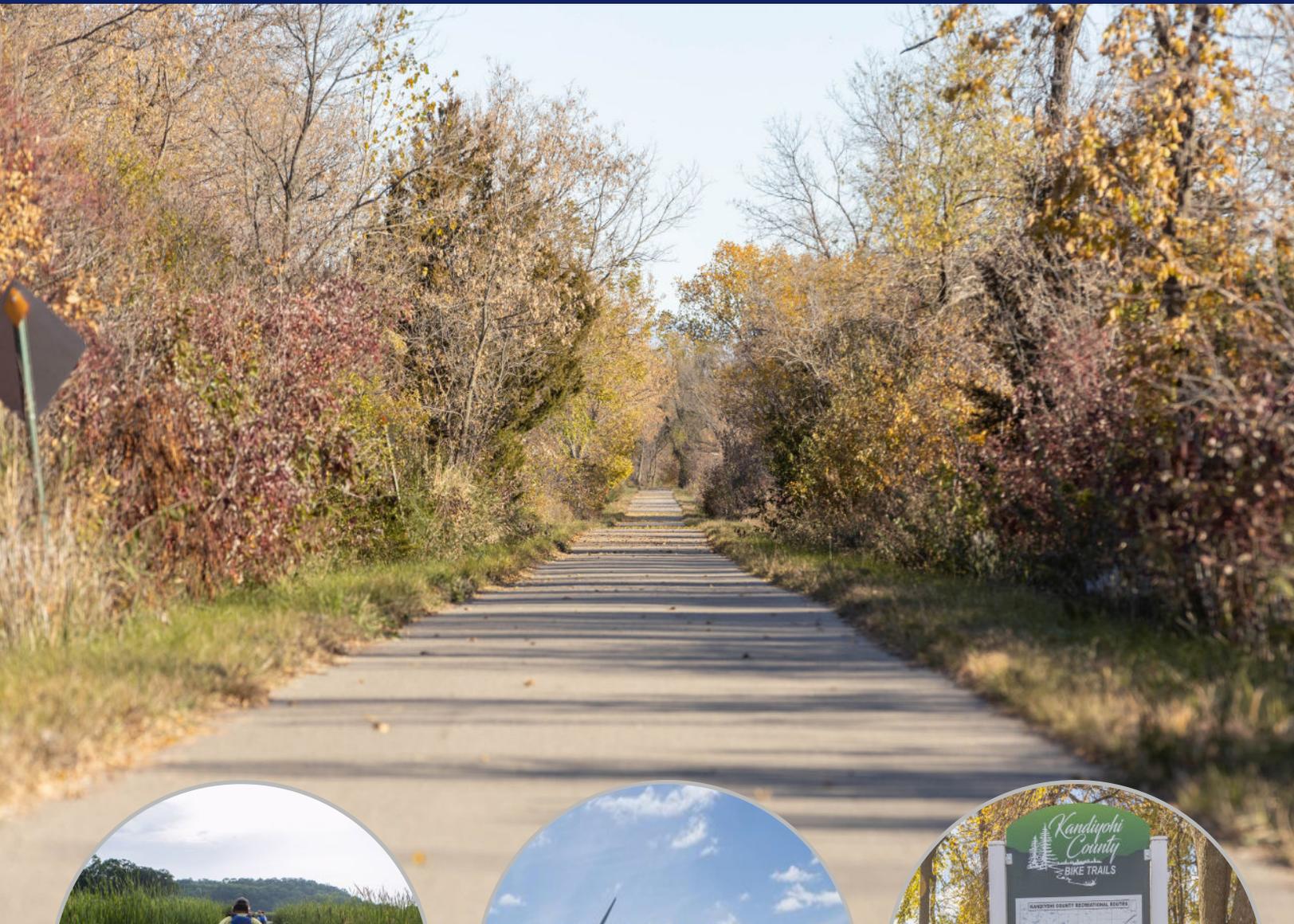


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Disclaimer:

The possible activities and trail developments noted within this plan are not guaranteed in any way. For any trail project, and especially for a larger trail project, to come to fruition, additional funding, beyond Kandiyohi County tax revenues, may be required. Kandiyohi County must also have adequate capacity to complete the work involved with project design and implementation.

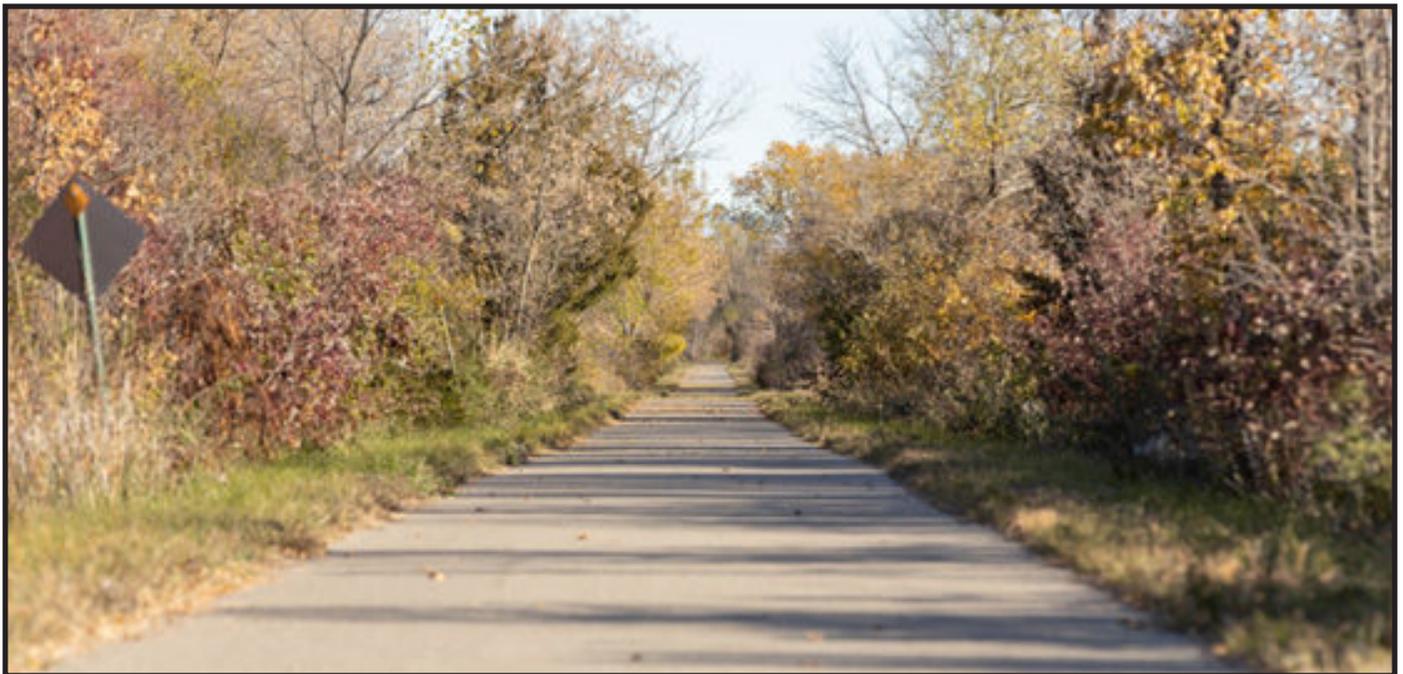
When possible, the development of new trails may occur as part of larger roadway projects. Additionally, new projects may be identified and these may take precedent over projects listed within this document.

Chapter 1

Purpose of the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan

The main objective of the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan is to determine and outline key priorities for biking and walking improvements within the County. This will help decision makers and funders understand Kandiyohi County's biking and walking goals for the coming decade (2023-2033). Furthermore, this updated plan achieves the following objectives:

1. Inventory current facilities and identify gaps and connectivity needs in the network.
2. Establish and articulate a long-range vision for an effective and economical bicycle and pedestrian trail network for Kandiyohi County.
3. Assure public policies and programs are in place to promote effective planning, funding, development, and management of the County's bicycle and pedestrian network.
4. Develop a 10-year overall plan with a 5-year list of implementation priorities and potential funding sources.
5. Establish a planning and implementation framework that facilitates desired trail improvements, management, and use consistent with the County's goals and priority projects.
6. Clearly articulate the County's role in supporting bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
7. Create connections to destinations of interest and necessity.
8. Ensure and improve trail safety.
9. Provide opportunity for public participation and stakeholder cooperation when determining needs and implementing projects.
10. Encourage healthy, active living.
11. Ensure equity and access when considering trail improvements.
12. Identify routine maintenance needs (Type of surface treatments, timing, funding, responsibility, etc.).
13. Add art, history, educational, and other points of interest.
14. Create parameters for public contributions toward trail and trail feature development and maintenance.
15. Identify opportunities to add value to County trail investments by developing connections to other local, regional, and state trails and by fostering quality relationships with those who manage them.
16. Encourage collaboration with other trail-involved individuals, groups, and organizations.
17. Identify issues and best practices for bicycle and other forms of non-motor transportation.



Note: The development or existence of the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails plan in no way implies that Kandiyohi County is obligated to fully-finance all identified bicycle and pedestrian projects. Nevertheless, the County is committed to facilitating important discussions with relevant stakeholders and aiding in the acquisition of the funding required for the successful execution of the prioritized projects.

Organization of the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan

The Kandiyohi County Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan is organized into the following five chapters:

Chapter One: The first chapter introduces the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan. Content includes an overview of the plan's purpose, a description of the planning process, shares the plan's vision statement, and provides a summary of the benefits associated with a quality trail network.

Chapter Two: This chapter profiles Kandiyohi County, presents demographic information and describes existing bicycle and pedestrian trails within the County and in key adjacent areas.

Chapter Three: Chapter three provides an overview of input received through Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan-related public engagement activities. These activities include the distribution, promotion, and collection of a widely distributed Kandiyohi County Trails survey as well as public interaction at two separate open house events. The chapter concludes with a summation of common themes derived from this public participation.

Chapter Four: This chapter includes a listing and description of Kandiyohi County's priority bicycle and pedestrian projects. A map of these projects is provided for the reader's reference. Both the project list and the map can be updated as projects are implemented and as priorities evolve.

Chapter Five: The final chapter of the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan outlines a number of implementation steps the county can take over the next 10 years to support trail maintenance, improvement, and development. Potential funding sources that might support trail improvements are identified in this chapter.



Pedestrian Bridge at Green Lake Outlet/Middle Branch of Crow River

Overview of Kandiyohi County

Kandiyohi County is situated in the southwest quadrant of the State of Minnesota. The county seat of Willmar is found along U.S. Highway 12, directly west of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, roughly two hours from downtown Minneapolis. While its agricultural land is significant, the northern half of Kandiyohi County is where most of its lakes, woodlands, and rolling hills can also be found. These features also present in southern Kandiyohi County to some extent. However, the landscape of this area, particularly in the southwest, is truly dominated by agriculture.

Located in the central part of the state, Kandiyohi County spans a diverse landscape that showcases a mix of agricultural plains, picturesque lakes, and rolling hills. It is bordered by several counties, including Meeker County to the east, Renville County to the south, Swift & Chippewa Counties to the west, and Pope & Stearns Counties to the north. The county's central Minnesota location provides convenient access to major transportation routes, putting it in easy reach for those from other areas of the state. With its blend of rural charm and natural beauty, Kandiyohi County offers a captivating location for residents and visitors to explore and appreciate.

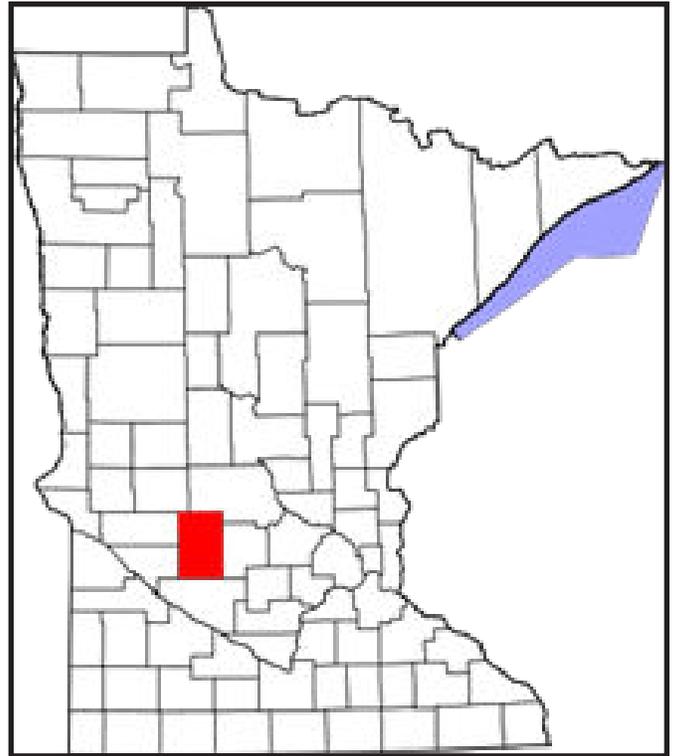


Image Showing Relationship of Kandiyohi County to the rest of the state.

The Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Planning Process

In the fall of 2022, it was determined that there was a need to update the existing Kandiyohi County Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan, which was approved and adopted in 2017. Since that plan's adoption, Kandiyohi County had made significant progress with trail system development. The Kandiyohi County Public Works Director emphasized a need to document this progress, update priorities, and be generally more competitive for various trail funding opportunities. This ultimately led to the Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners' decision to enter into a service agreement with Mid-Minnesota Development Commission, who would assist with the update of the existing plan.

A Kandiyohi County trails-focused task force was assembled to both assist with and guide plan development. This task force included citizens and professionals with significant experience from engineering, health, safety, tourism, and planning sectors. It also included several outdoors enthusiasts, including several bicycle enthusiasts. A list of task force members can be found in the following table:

Kandiyohi County Trails Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Task Force	
Mel Odens	Kandiyohi County Public Works Director
Jeremy Pfeifer	Kandiyohi County Assistant County Engineer
Justice Walker	City of Willmar Planning Director and Local Bike Enthusiast
Beth Fischer	Willmar Lakes Area Convention & Visitor's Bureau Executive Director and Local Bike Advocate
Melissa Hjelle	MnDOT District 8 Toward Zero Deaths Regional Coordinator
Donn Winckler	Former MMDC Executive Director & Planner and Local Bike Advocate
Chris Radel	Kandiyohi County Power Cooperative Data Analyst and Willmar Bikes organization Chairperson
Paul Tinklenberg	City of Willmar Public Works Foreman
Jeff Filipek	Kandiyohi-Renville County Statewide Health Improvement Coordinator and Local Bike Advocate
Brittany Schmalz	Kandiyohi-Renville County Statewide Health Improvement Coordinator and Local Bike Advocate
Eric Day	Mid-Minnesota Development Commission Executive Director and Local Bike Advocate
Kyle Ten Napel	Mid-Minnesota Development Commission Transportation Planner and Local Bike Advocate

The task force met several times to provide feedback and guidance on the contents of the plan. It was quickly determined that this plan should be an enhanced version of Kandiyohi's previous trails plan. While the group believed the new plan should remain primarily focused on walking and bicycling pathways, it was decided that the plan could also include some information on complimentary trails – especially “blue trails” (navigable waterways). It was decided that brief overviews should be provided for cross-country ski, horse, and snowmobile trails within the plan, and that readers interested in those activities should find, at a minimum, referrals to resources with more in-depth information. There was also a shared understanding that, while the plan would focus on Kandiyohi County-level projects, the continued successful development of the County's trail network would require collaboration between stakeholders at the county, city, township, and state levels.

As suggested above, to ensure local stakeholders were given ample opportunity to influence the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan, a survey was created. This survey asked respondents 16 separate questions, including questions on:

- Their level of participation in trail-related activities
- Their current level of county trail use
- Desired trail amenities
- Perceived trail benefits
- Basic respondent demographics

The trails survey was distributed to the public via social media, through the personal and professional networks of task force members, and through the networks of other key local individuals and influencers. A media release was distributed to all Kandiyohi County newspapers and radio stations in an effort to draw more attention to the survey. It was also made available at several events and gathering spots, including:

- Healthy Kids Day, held at the Kandiyohi County Area Family YMCA,
- The Home and Outdoor Living Expo, held at Willmar's Civic Center, and
- Game night at the Goat Ridge Brewing Company, in New London.

On more than one occasion, MMDC Planner Kyle Ten Napel also visited the downtown Willmar area in an effort to engage with more individuals, especially individuals perceived to be from communities of color. This in an effort to ensure survey results and the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan considered the needs of individuals with varied perspectives.

In addition to providing opportunities for survey distribution, this public interaction provided the occasion to interact with members of the public and have meaningful conversations on the Kandiyohi County trails topic. Numerous comments were taken as a result of these conversations and these, along with the survey results, have been used to influence trail plan priorities. In total, 513 individuals took part in the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Survey. Analysis of survey responses can be found in Chapter 3 of this plan.

Once public input was received and considered, the writing of the updated Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan could begin. With the original, 2017, plan providing a solid plan foundation, recent trail developments and public input were incorporated. As chapters were developed, the task force reviewed them and provided their input to refine and improve. Final formatting included the addition of trail related images to ensure an attractive, highly visual plan. Once all final revisions were made, the plan was presented to the County Board of Commissioners, for approval and adoption.

Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Plan Vision Statement

In order to provide direction for the development of the Kandiyohi County Bicycle & Pedestrian Trails Plan, the Task Force formulated the subsequent vision statement:

“A county where people and places are connected through a safe, convenient, and robust, recreational trail network which includes destination of interest or necessity.”



Kandiyohi County Public Works Director Mel Odens visits with a local resident at the Home and Outdoor Living Expo.

The Many Benefits of Quality Trails



Image of the Glacial Lakes State Trail



Trail development has become a popular way for states, counties, and cities to enhance their resident experience. While the degree of investment varies wildly, based on community size and geography, many localities have recognized the many benefits that come with a quality trail network. As the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020-2023 pushed more people to pursue individual and small group activities, and as the issue of equity has emerged as a larger priority, there is even more interest in trail development.

In many cases trail networks include narrow, off-road, paved or unpaved lanes designed for walkers, bikers, and other rollers (people who use wheelchairs, scooters, skates, etc.). Typically, trail networks also incorporate on-road routes, consisting of a wide shoulder to provide distance between the pedestrian or bicyclist and motor vehicle traffic. A newer trend also includes the incorporation of “blue trails”. A blue trail, also known as a water trail, is a river, stream, or other navigable waterway, or even a series of waterways, adopted by a community to provide opportunities for activities like canoeing, kayaking, or even river tubing (Learn more about Kandiyohi County’s blue trail development on page 29). In some areas, enthusiasts will also work with their local and state leaders to develop trails for other types of enthusiasts, like cross country skiers, horseback riders, and snowmobilers.

The development of trails, of all sorts, contributes to communities in various ways. The following pages provide explanations of how continued trail maintenance and development can contribute to wellbeing and support a high quality of life in Kandiyohi County.

Many Enjoy Kayaking the Crow River Watershed

Quality Trails Provide Opportunities for Recreation and Avenues for Healthy Living

Kandiyohi County’s trail network provides excellent opportunities for recreation and promotes healthy lifestyles. Physical activity is known to provide many physical benefits. Physical fitness is known to reduce instances of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other ailments that occur with greater frequency among those who are overweight or obese.

2020 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data indicated that Minnesota’s adult obesity rate was 30.7%, up from 30.1% in 2019. While the increase of 0.6% was not considered statistically significant, it did highlight ongoing public health concerns about obesity prevalence on both the state and national level.¹ Promoting physical activity among both children and adults has become a national health objective in the United States. Regular physical activity lowers the risk of chronic diseases and is an important strategy for reversing the obesity epidemic. According to the American Trails organization, a growing body of evidence shows that the built environment, including trail networks, can positively influence physical activity²



1 <https://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2021/obesity091521.html#:~:text=Data%20released%20today%20by%20the,a%20state%20and%20national%20level.>

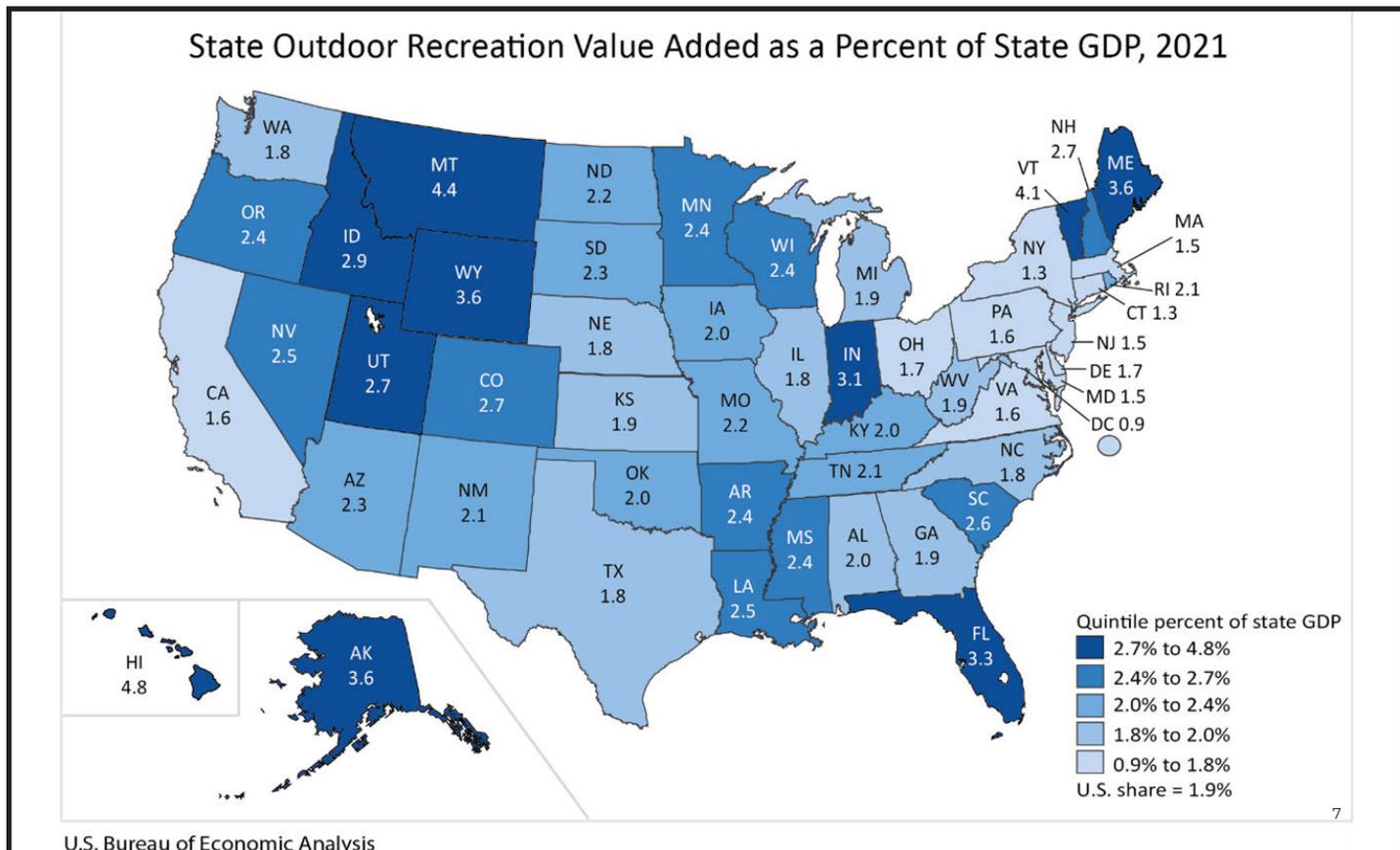
2 <https://www.americantrails.org/resources/the-power-of-trails-for-promoting-physical-activity-in-communities>

In addition to physical benefits, quality trails provide important mental health benefits. A survey taken by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy during the height of the Coronavirus Pandemic indicated that many people across the country sought out trails for stress relief. According to the survey, 46% of respondents said that access to open spaces had reduced stress levels and 66% said they were getting outside at the same level or greater than before the emergence of the coronavirus³. Minnesota-based Mayo Clinic, one of the world's leading healthcare providers, reports that regular exercise may help ease depression and anxiety by releasing "feel-good" endorphins, natural brain chemicals that enhance one's sense of wellbeing⁴. Trails provide an opportunity for exercise that is easily accessible for many people, regardless of age, ability, or income, provided they can be accessed relatively close to would-be trail users' location (home, workplace, school, etc.).

According to a 2023 report published by Mission Readiness, a group whose membership is comprised of more than 800 retired admirals, generals, and other top retired military leaders, 77 percent of American youth between the ages of 17 and 24 cannot qualify for military service due to being overweight or obese. The group emphasizes that it is more important than ever for our policy makers to promote healthy eating and physical activity⁵.

Quality Trails Provide Economic Benefits to Their Surrounding Communities

A well-established trail network increases opportunities for residents and visitors to spend their discretionary dollars locally. Many walkers, rollers, and bikers will be happy to stop into a local store, restaurant, or other establishment for a bite to eat and a cool drink. They may also decide to browse local shops and take the opportunity to make impulse purchases or return to the location later for a dedicated shopping trip or other activity. It is noteworthy that according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, outdoor recreation was responsible for 2.4% of Minnesota's Gross Domestic Product in 2021, the 17th highest percentage in the nation⁶.



3 <https://www.railstotrails.org/trailblog/2020/september/02/how-trails-and-outdoor-access-provide-important-mental-health-benefits/>
 4 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/depression-and-exercise/art-20046495#:~:text=Regular%20exercise%20may%20help%20ease,your%20sense%20of%20well%2Dbeing>
 5 <https://strongnation.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/1541/aab5fcd2-74e4-4b76-b260-010a5d9afcc9.pdf?1674578754&inline;%20file-name=%2277%20Percent%20of%20American%20Youth%20Can%20Qualify%20for%20Military%20Service.pdf%22>
 6 <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>
 7 [https://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/trends-performance/outdoor-recreation-economy-by-state/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20outdoor%20recreation%20contributed,gross%20domestic%20product%20\(GDP\).](https://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/trends-performance/outdoor-recreation-economy-by-state/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20outdoor%20recreation%20contributed,gross%20domestic%20product%20(GDP).)



Trails and Trail Networks Increase Property Values

Trails have a tendency to increase the value of nearby properties. Studies have confirmed that living near a trail or greenway will likely raise a property's value by three to five percent – and sometimes as much as 15 percent.⁸

Trail Networks Increase Community Appeal

Trails also make communities more attractive places to live. When considering where to move, many homebuyers consider the proximity of trails, parks, and other green spaces. It should then come as no surprise that site selectors – experts who partner with companies to assess the ability of various locations to meet their business needs – often consider the presence of trails and other attributes that contribute to a high quality-of-life for potential workers. They know that it will be easier to attract high-quality employees and job applicants to a community if it offers the comforts and other attributes workers, and their families, desire.

The opportunity to draw tourists from neighboring and more distant areas is another positive economic benefit. As a community draws visitors, there are more people to order food, purchase fuel and convenience items, shop in local stores and stay at local hotels, resorts, and campgrounds. While one may not consider a simple trail network a significant tourist magnet, it can contribute to a larger menu of amenities, including shops, restaurants, parks, lakes, and events that visitors often appreciate.



Biking enthusiasts enjoying the Cuyuna, MN area.⁹

Highly developed trail networks can even become tourist draws in and of themselves. The community of Cuyuna, MN provides an example of this. Over the course of over 25 years, through quality planning, trail infrastructure development, marketing, and other activities, the Cuyuna community has reinvented itself as a cycling hotspot. It now boasts a wide array of shops, restaurants, lodging, and complimentary activities that cater to bicyclists, of various sorts but to mountain bikers in particular, and to others who might be traveling with them.



Trail Networks Provide Viable Transportation Options

As communities provide access to trails, these trails can become viable transportation modes, especially for those who wish to travel to and from work, school, or other locations. Especially for those individuals and families who are health and wellness focused, are unable to drive due to age, licensure or other reasons, or who have limited financial means. Providing a safe trails network that provides linkages to key destinations is essential to convince people, those who have other options, to bike, walk, or roll to their destinations.

Willmar Resident Justice Walker often commutes to work by bike.

⁸ <https://www.nar.realtor/trails-and-greenways>

⁹ <https://www.exploreminnesota.com/article/explore-mountain-bike-trails-cuyuna>

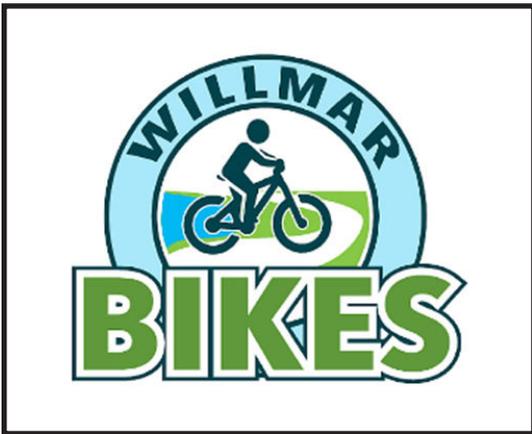
Trail Networks Increase Safety for Those Who Bike, Walk, and/or Roll

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 932 bicyclists were killed in crashes with motor vehicles in 2020. 88 percent of these deaths were among people 20 years and older. Deaths among bicyclists younger than 20 have declined 88 percent since 1975, while deaths among bicyclists 20 and older have almost quadrupled¹⁰.

Everyone has a vested interest in reducing the number of bicycle and pedestrian accidents, injuries and fatalities. The development of quality trails helps communities achieve this goal by putting greater distance between motor vehicles and bicyclists and other pedestrians. While off-road trails typically provide the greatest measure of safety, well planned on-road routes that provide wide shoulders can also provide significant safety increases.



Quality Trails Contribute to a Higher Quality of Life and Public Engagement.



As local leaders direct investments to quality trails, they give residents additional reason to take pride in their communities. Trails provide opportunities for positive community interaction. This could include informal encounters at the side of a trail or interactions among those who form or join user groups focused on trail use or advocacy. The Willmar Bikes organization provides an example of such a group. “Willmar Bikes is a bicycle and pedestrian education and advocacy group dedicated to making biking and walking fun, safe, and easy for everyone” in and around the Willmar Community.

As residents increase their community connectedness, through social interaction, they often feel more involved and satisfied with their community. They may take a more active role and become “doers”, supporting issues they consider important, trail-related and otherwise.

Trail-related engagement could include volunteering at a trail clean-up event, assisting with the development of a grant application to support trail development, fundraising to achieve a particular trail-related goal, or simply contacting local decision-makers to keep trail-related improvements high on the list of local priorities.



10 <https://www.iihs.org/topics/fatality-statistics/detail/bicyclists#:~:text=A%20total%20of%20932%20bicyclists,their%20lowest%20point%20in%202010.>

Chapter 2

In this chapter of the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan, a comprehensive overview of Kandiyohi County is presented. Section 2B gives an overview of county demographics, providing a comprehensive analysis of both current and projected population data. Later, Section 2C explores the area's existing trails network offering insights into the various trail types (e.g., local, county, and state trails) present within and adjacent to Kandiyohi County.

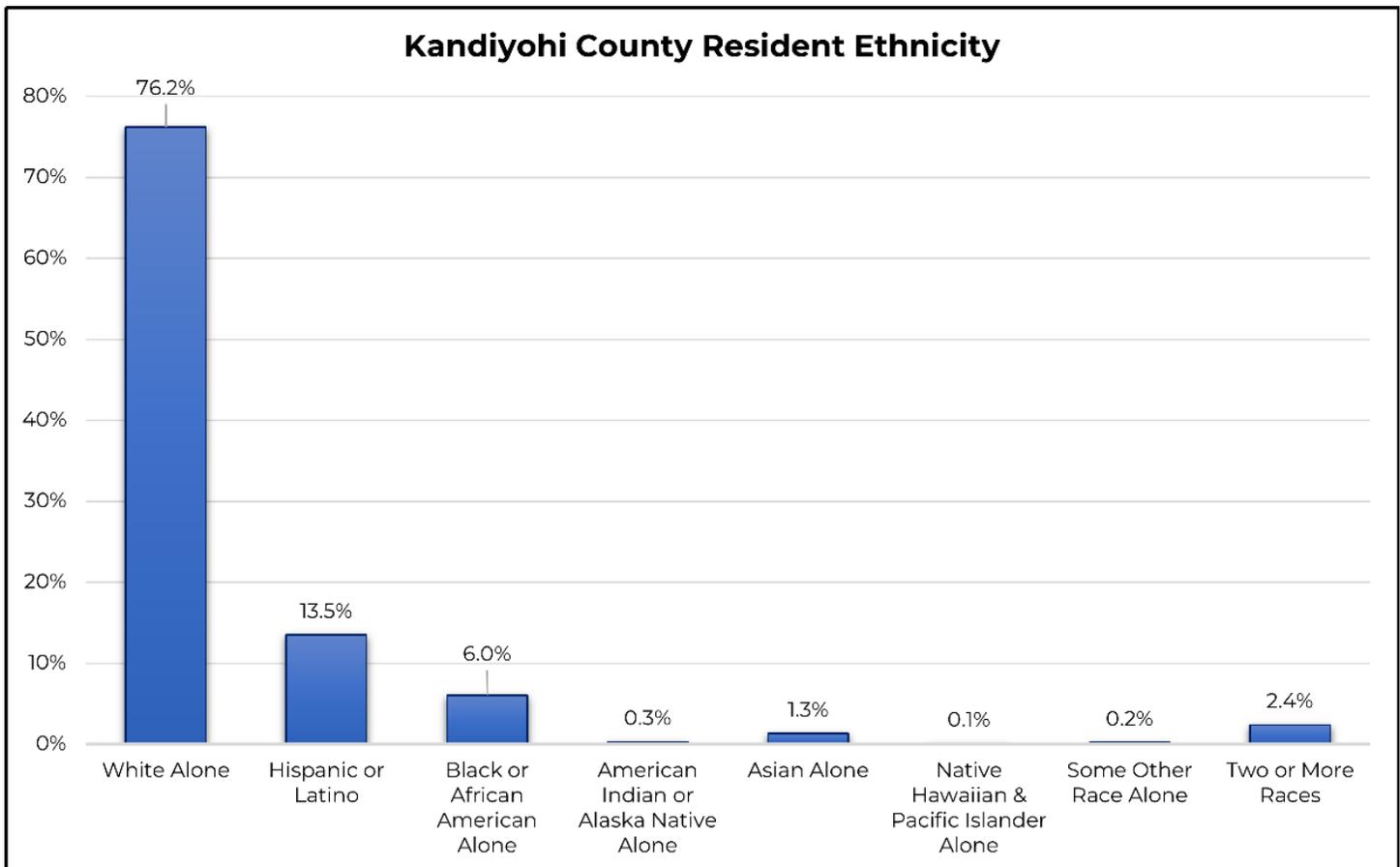
Kandiyohi County Demographics

Demographic data plays a crucial role in the development of a county trails plan. It gives valuable insights into the diverse needs and preferences of the local population. By analyzing demographic information, such as age, household income, and transportation availability, this data ensures that trail improvements accommodate the varied requirements of our different communities.

This approach supports equity by promoting accessible and inclusive modes of transportation. Trails can offer a sustainable alternative to more traditional means of transportation (e.g., travel by one's personal vehicle). They give residents of all backgrounds a means to engage in active, healthy lifestyles while reducing their reliance on cars. Through improved understanding of local demographics, we allow for the creation of a trail network that connects neighborhoods, schools, parks, and commercial areas. This helps to ensure everyone has improved opportunity to access the amenities of their communities and realize their benefits. In the end, a trail network that serves all demographics will contribute to a more balanced and cohesive community.

Race/Ethnicity, According to 2020 Data from the U.S. Census Bureau¹¹

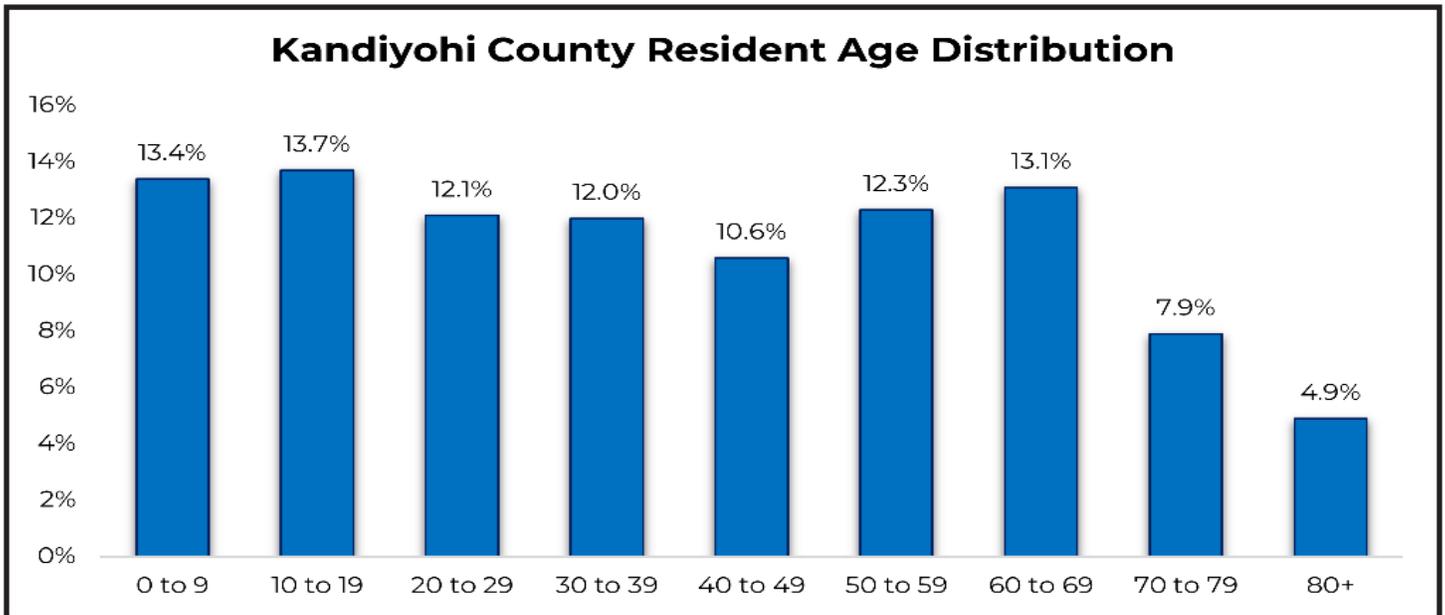
Despite its rural location, Kandiyohi County exhibits a fairly diverse demographic makeup. The county's population is composed predominantly of the following three races/ethnicities: White, accounting for 76.2% of the population, Hispanic or Latino, representing 13.5% of the population, and African American, comprising 6% of the total population. It is noteworthy that many of Kandiyohi County's Black/African American population is the result of the in-migration of East-African populations. It is also noteworthy that Kandiyohi County has a growing Asian population, which includes many Karen immigrants. Demographic data plays a crucial role in the development of pedestrian trails within the county. By understanding the racial and ethnic composition of the population, planners and developers can tailor trail infrastructure and amenities to cater to the needs, preferences, and cultural backgrounds of those who reside, work, and recreate within our communities.



¹¹ <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Race+and+Ethnicity&g=050XX00US27067&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2>

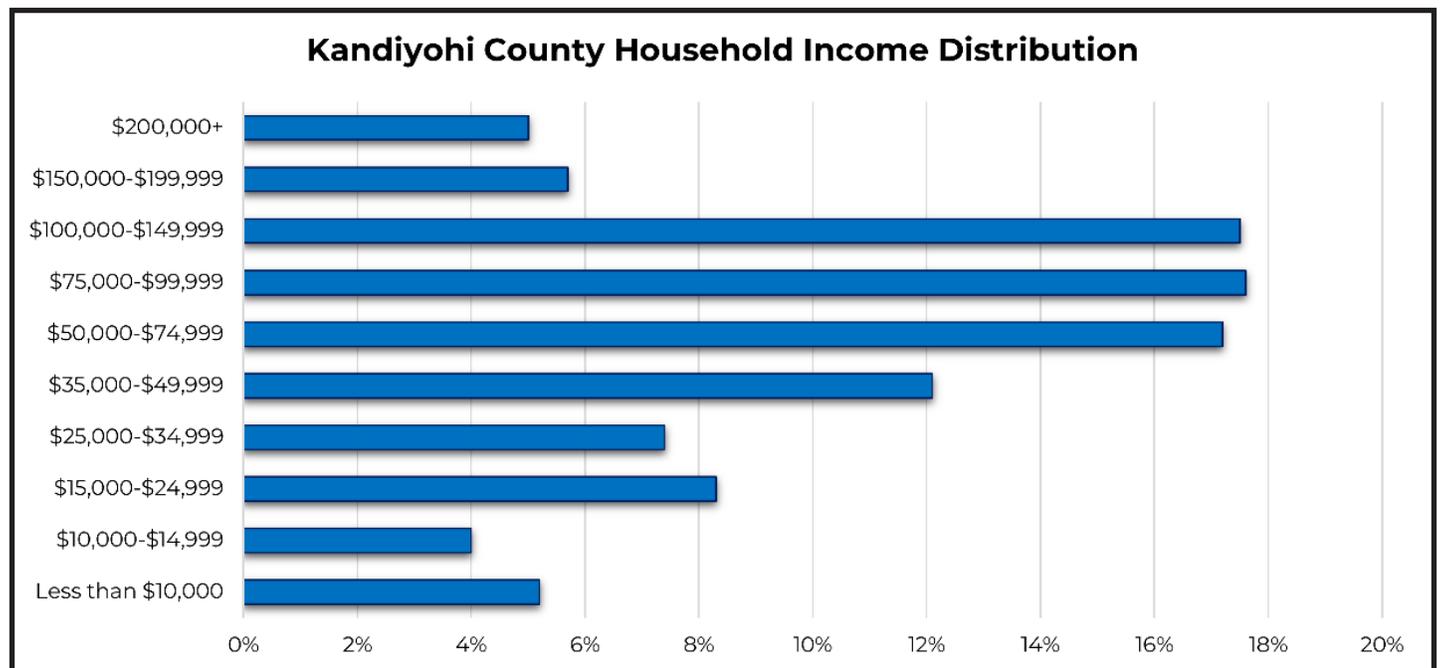
Age, According to 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates¹²

Understanding Kandiyohi County's age demographics is also important when considering the development of pedestrian trails. The specific needs, preferences, and activity/ability levels of different age groups should be considered. By incorporating age-appropriate elements into pedestrian trail design, Kandiyohi County can ensure that the trails meet the diverse needs and interests of all residents. This will enhance community engagement and promote healthy, active living across age groups.



Household Income, According to 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates¹³

Kandiyohi County's household income data can also inform pedestrian trail development. It provides insights into the economic conditions and spending power of the community. By understanding the distribution of household income planners can have a better understanding of trail infrastructure and amenity needs. This information can also guide decisions to improve trail accessibility. This might include providing public transportation connections, in addition to parking facilities near trail heads. By considering the needs of those with less financial means, planners can ensure options for both transportation and recreation that cater to the economic realities of the local population.

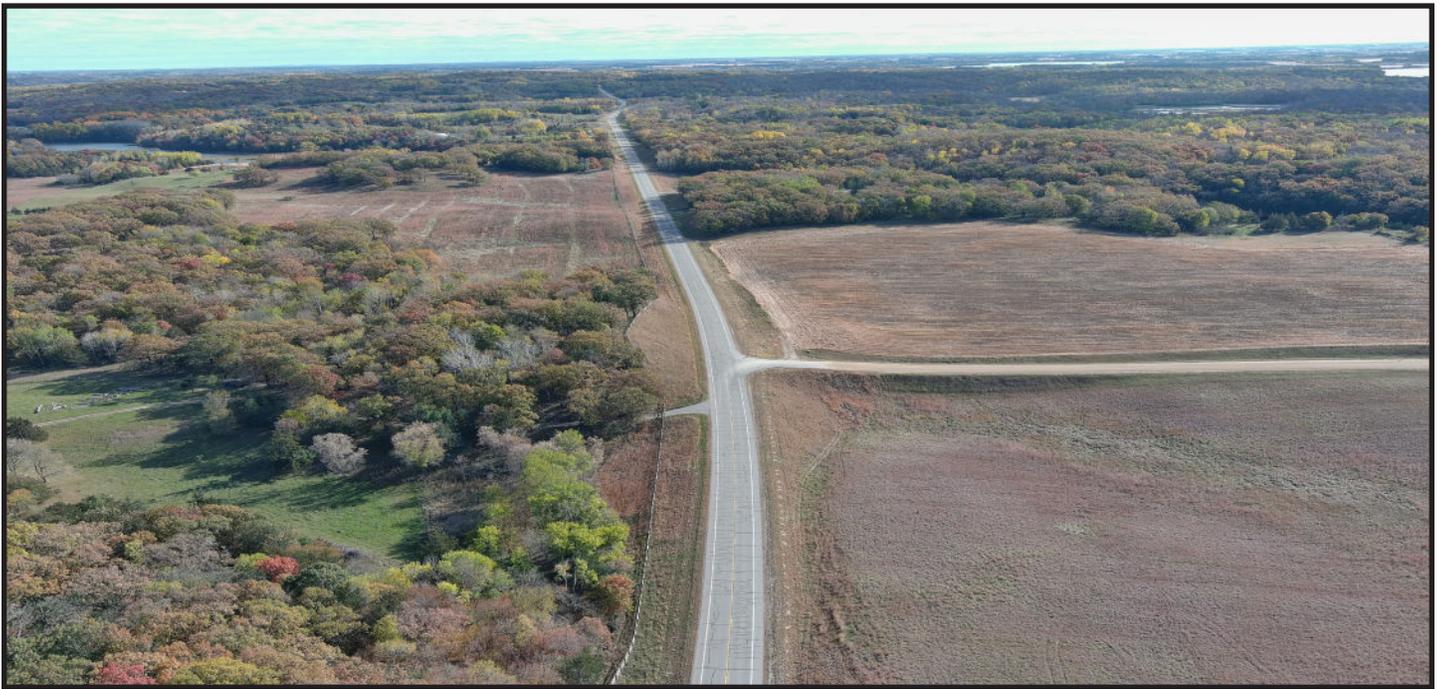
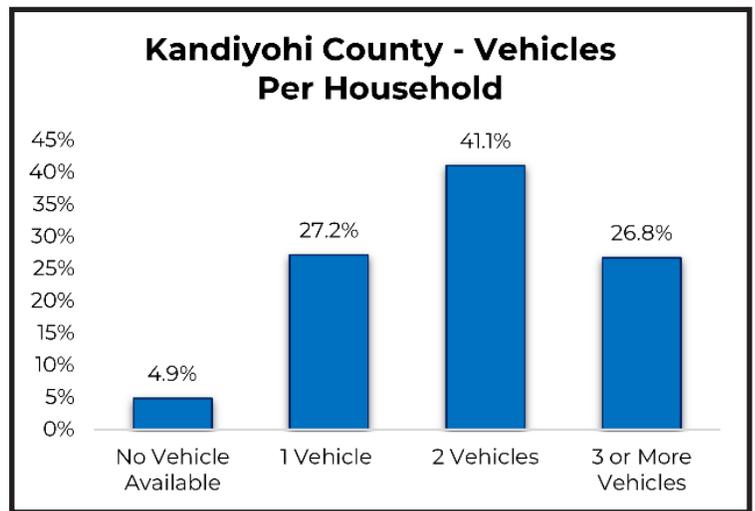


¹² <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Race+and+Ethnicity&g=050XX00US27067&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2>

¹³ <https://www.exploreminnesota.com/article/explore-mountain-bike-trails-cuyuna>

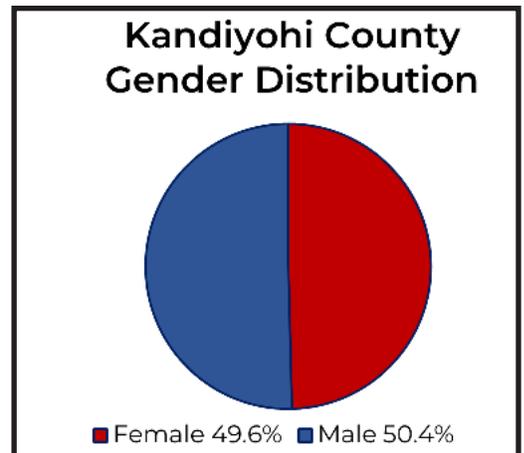
Number of Vehicles Per Household, According to American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates¹⁴

Transportation is often a primary barrier to services. Therefore, when considering trail network development, it is particularly important to have a good understanding of residents' ability to access personal vehicles. The following data provides an indication of the number of households who may lack adequate motor vehicle transportation. It is important to consider the fact that, for households with no or few vehicles, pedestrian trails can serve as key transportation corridors, providing safe and convenient routes to various Kandiyohi County destinations (e.g., places to work, train, shop, or recreate). By strategically planning and connecting pedestrian trails to key areas (e.g., schools, healthcare facilities, public transportation hubs, and commercial centers) the County can ensure residents without cars have reliable and accessible means of getting to their desired destinations. Not only does this reduction of transportation barriers improve mobility and independence for low vehicle households, but it also promotes equity and inclusivity within the community. In 2022, over 30% of households have one vehicle or less.



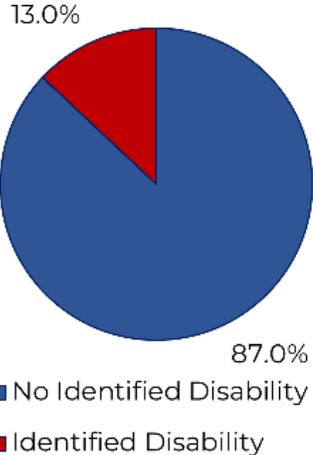
Gender, According to 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates¹⁵

By considering gender in trail development, the County can create inclusive and welcoming spaces and amenities that meet the unique requirements of different genders, promoting equality, comfort, and enjoyment for all users. Furthermore, consideration of gender demographics, along with race/ethnicity, income, age, and other demographics, fosters a sense of belonging and encourages diverse participation in trail network use and development. This enhances the overall trail experience while increasing community engagement. In 2022, Kandiyohi County was fairly gender balanced. It had a female population of 21,563 (49.6%) and a male population of 21,941 (50.4%).



¹² <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Race+and+Ethnicity&g=050XX00US27067&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2>
¹³ <https://www.exploreminnesota.com/article/explore-mountain-bike-trails-cuyuna>

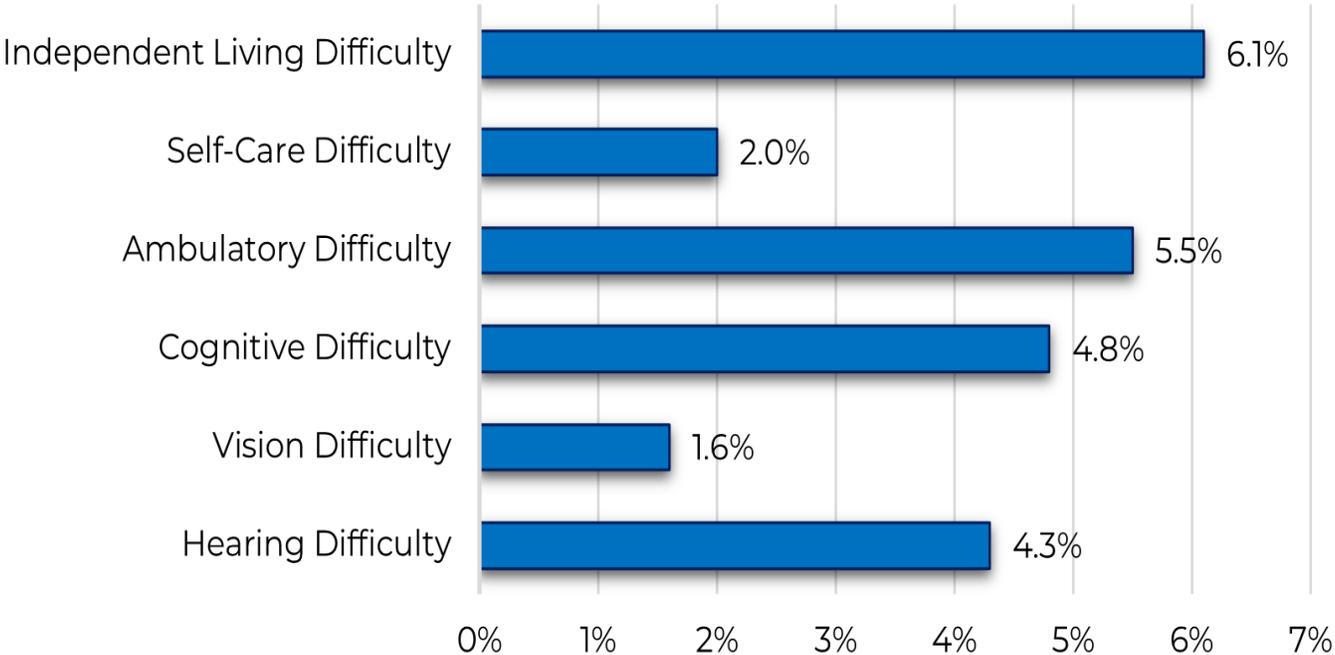
Kandiyohi County Disability Frequency



Ability/Disability Among Noninstitutionalized Population, According to 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates¹⁶

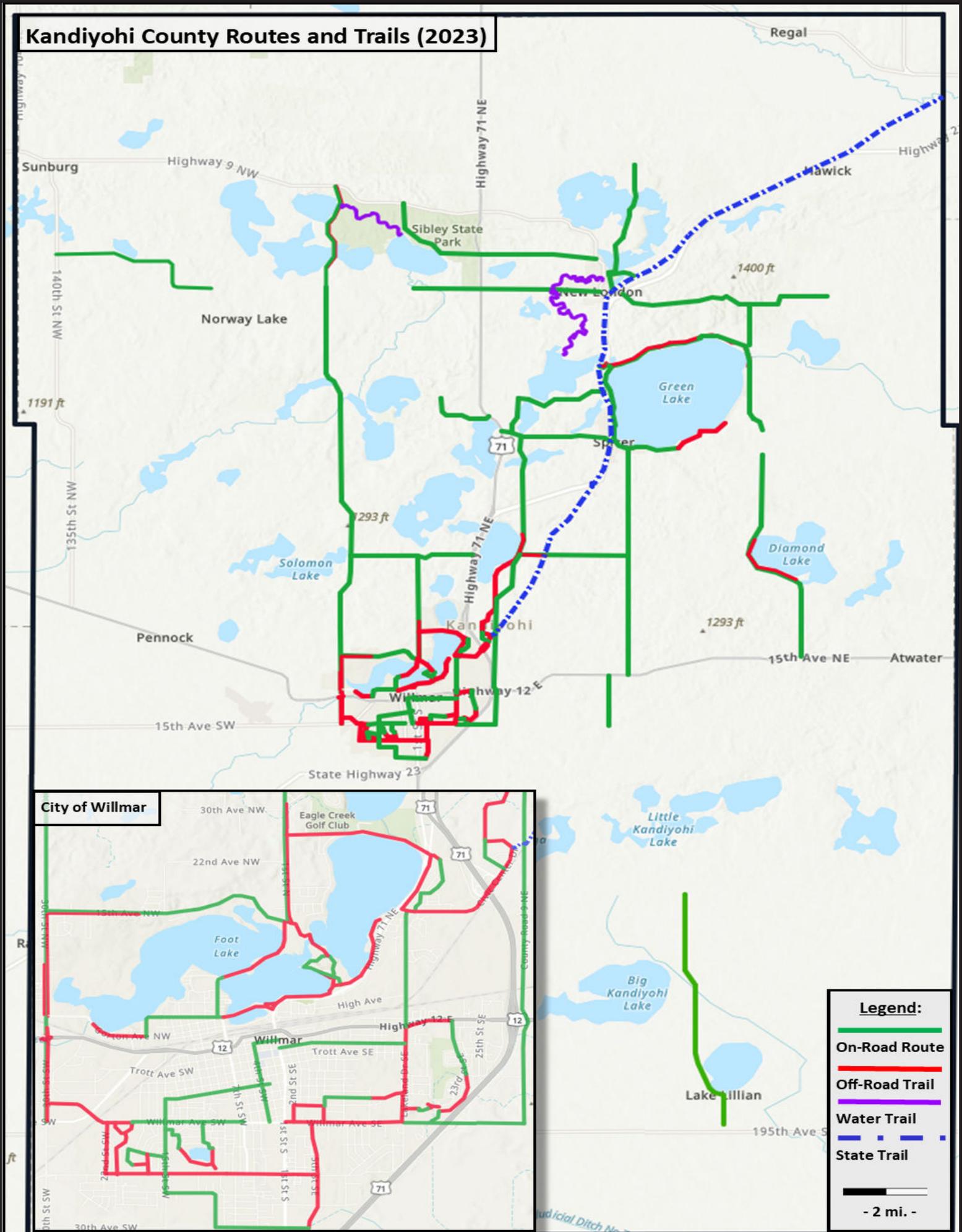
Knowledge of disability demographics provides a foundation for understanding the need for accessible parking, rest areas, restrooms and other trail amenities. By incorporating universal design principles, trail developers can foster inclusivity and remove barriers to physical activity. This creates an environment of equity and enjoyment for all. In 2022, 13% of the Kandiyohi County’s population indicated that they live with one or more disabilities.

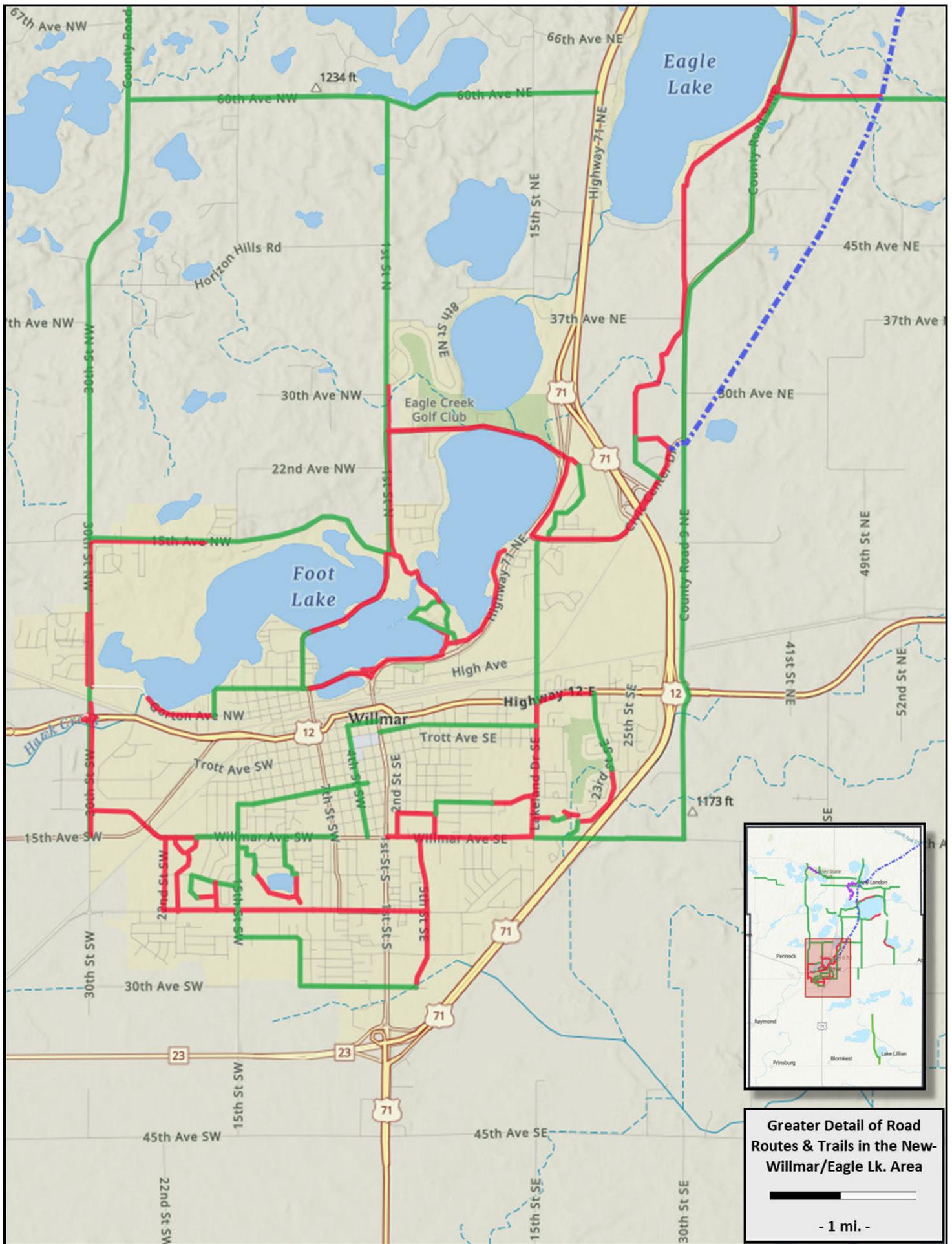
Disability by Type (Percentage of Total Population)

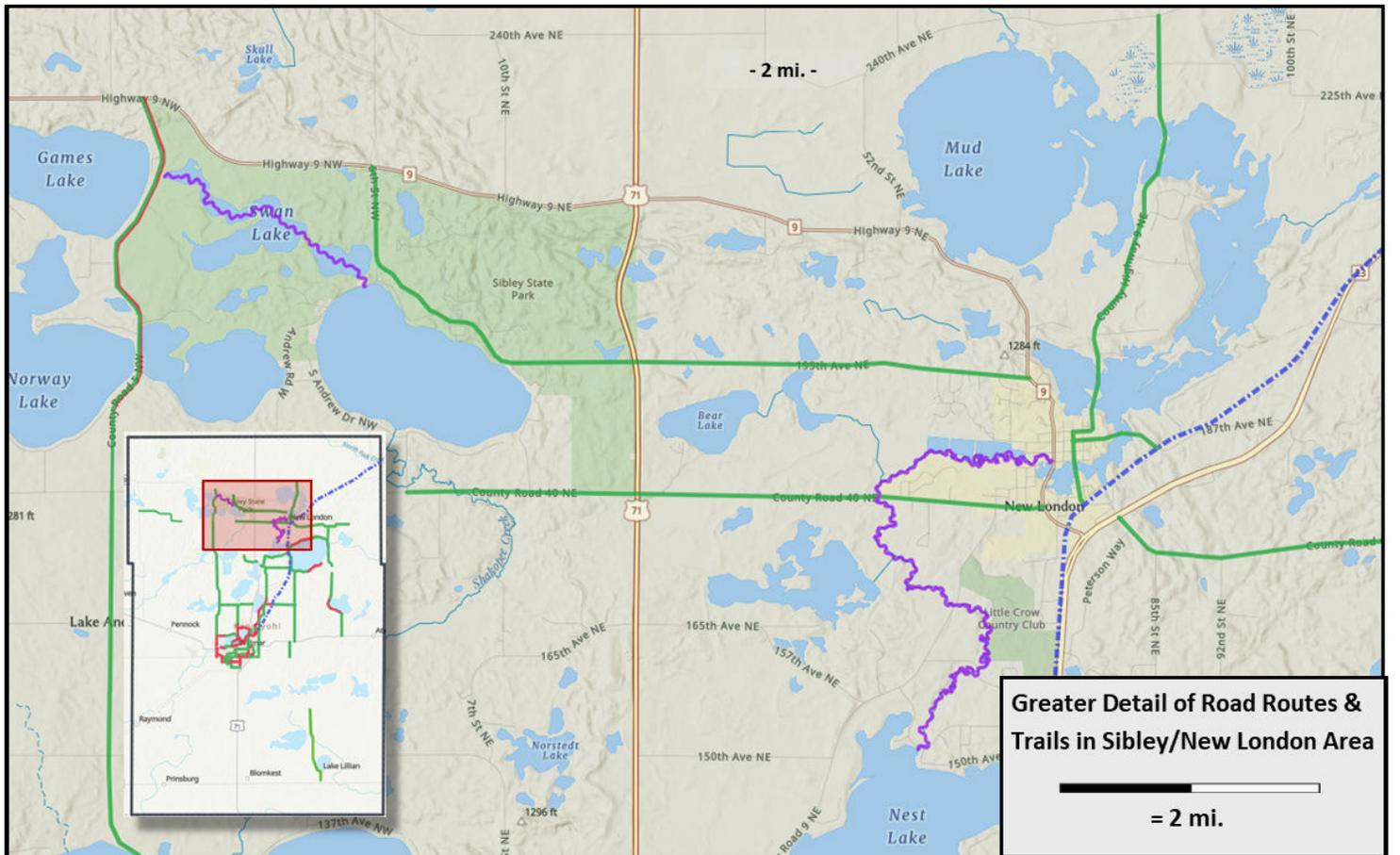
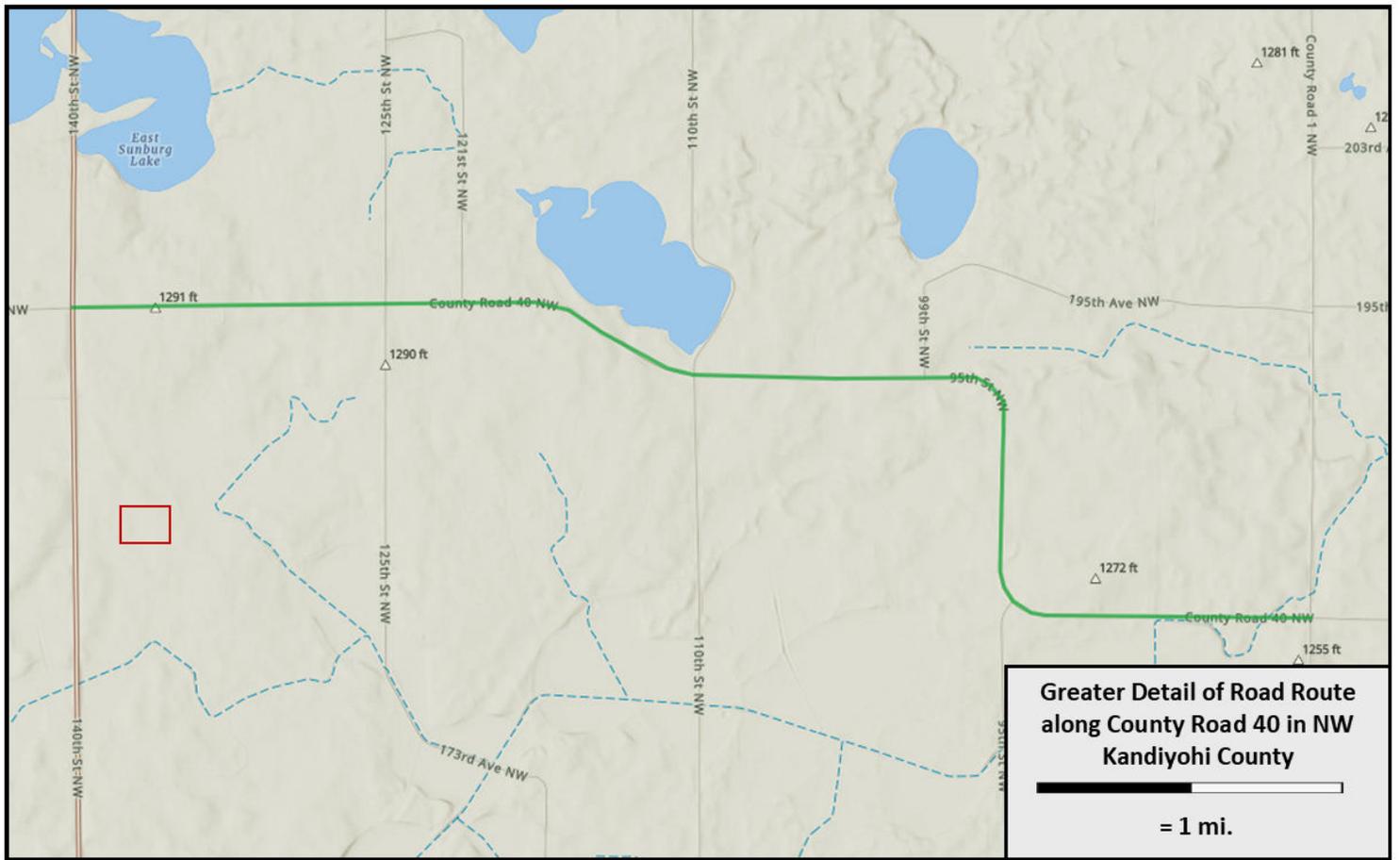


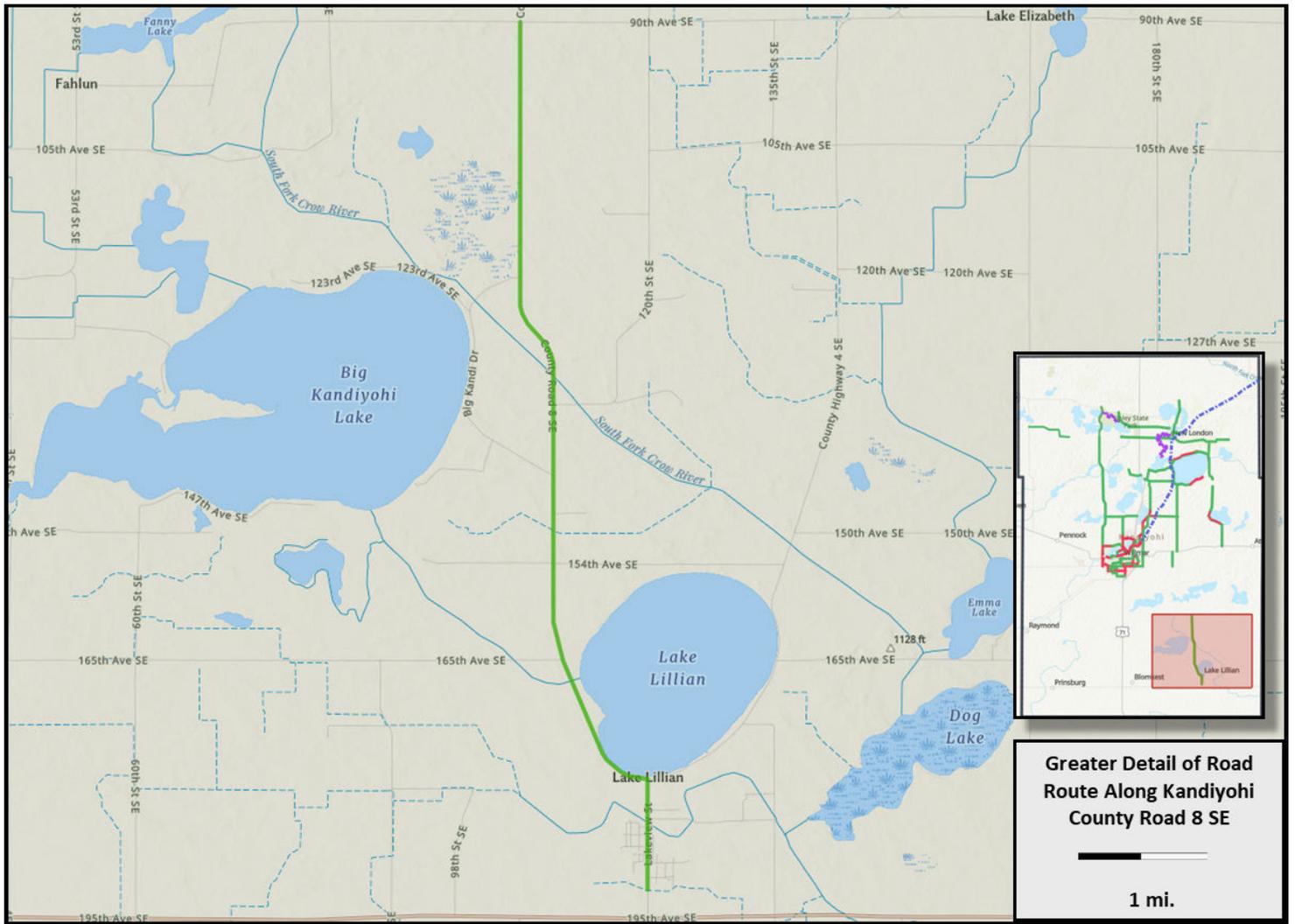
¹² <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Race+and+Ethnicity&g=050XX00US27067&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2>
¹³ <https://www.exploreminnesota.com/article/explore-mountain-bike-trails-cuyuna>

Kandiyohi County Routes and Trails (2023)









Existing Trails Found Within Kandiyohi County

This section of the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan describes the county's existing bicycle trails network. It is useful to be familiar with the existing network as it provides context for future bicycle and pedestrian trail development priorities.

Glacial Lakes State Trail

The Glacial Lakes State Trail takes center stage as the most prominent and most highly frequented trail within Kandiyohi County. This trail follows the path of a former Burlington Northern railroad grade, offering a generally level and generally wheelchair accessible pathway. Spanning 22 miles, the trail consists of a paved surface that connects Willmar, Spicer, New London, Hawick, and the Kandiyohi-Stearns County line (see Map 2A for reference). Additionally, a five-mile section from Richmond to Roscoe in Stearns County (approximately 10 miles east-north-east of Kandiyohi County's closest border) is also paved. A map, published by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, can be found on page 20 of this document.

The abundant lakes found in the area of the trail contribute to its status as a known tourist destination with trailside towns providing convenient access points and offering rest stops and various services to trail users.



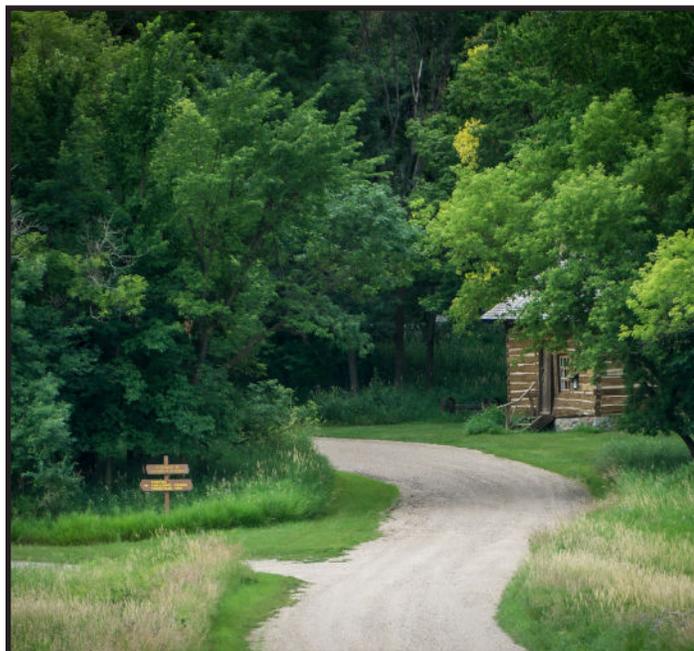
A bicyclist enjoys the Glacial Lakes State Trail near Willmar.¹⁷



The Trail crosses Nest Lake between Spicer and New London.

During warmer months, the trail is used by hikers/walkers, cyclists, horseback riders, and in-line skaters. Equestrian enthusiasts can enjoy the ten-mile stretch of grass treadway that runs parallel to the trail between Willmar and New London. Additionally, the section from New London to the Kandiyohi/Stearns County line provides grass shoulders that accommodate horseback riding.

In winter, the Glacial Lakes State Trail is groomed for both snowmobile riders and cross-country skiers. It also provides vital linkages to an extensive network of club-groomed snowmobile trails, those within the Kandiyohi County Grant-in-Aid Trail System and beyond, effectively connecting snowmobilers to hundreds of miles of interconnected routes.



¹² <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Race+and+Ethnicity&g=050XX00US27067&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2>

¹³ <https://www.exploreminnesota.com/article/explore-mountain-bike-trails-cuyuna>

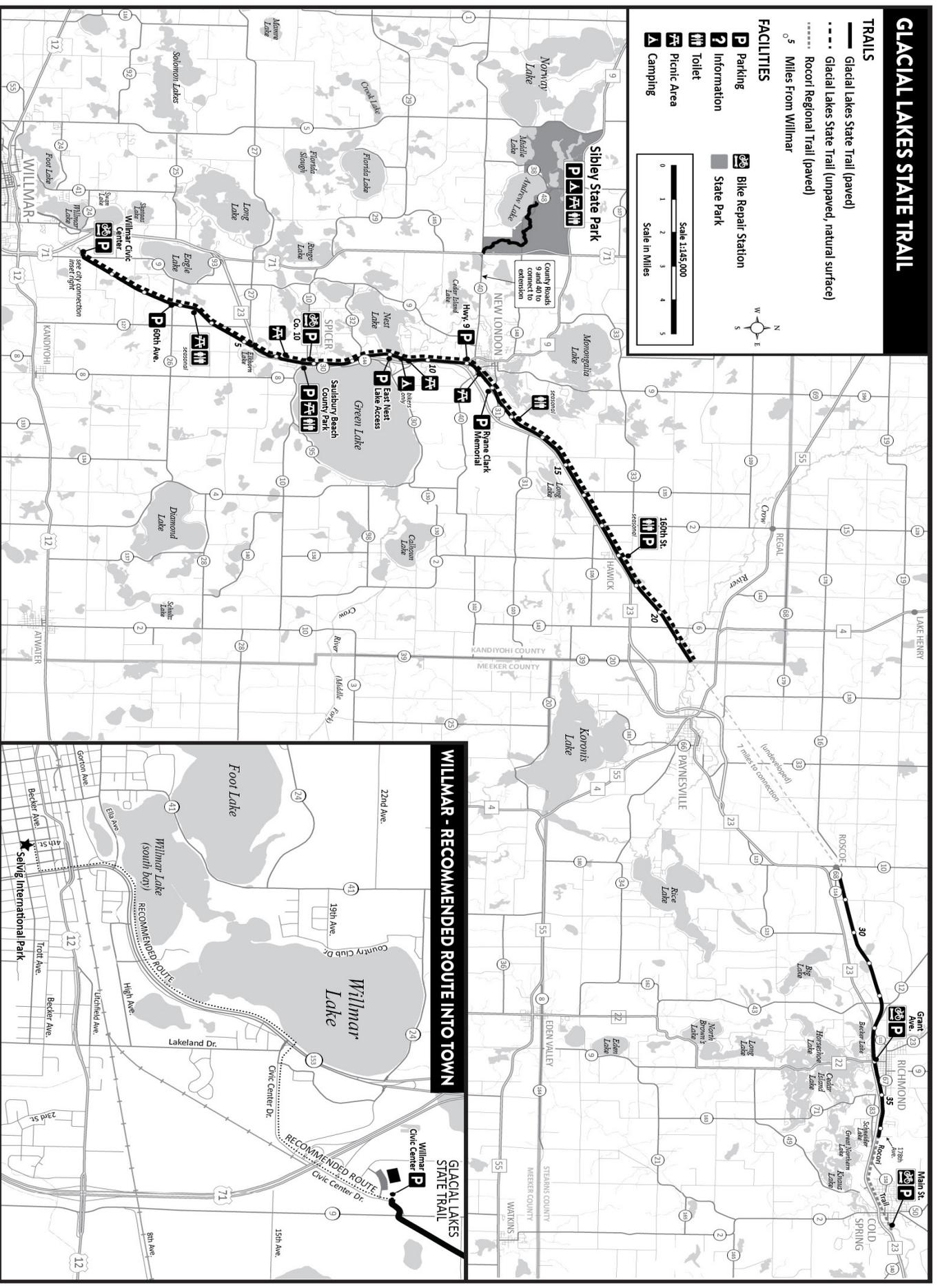
GLACIAL LAKES STATE TRAIL

TRAILS

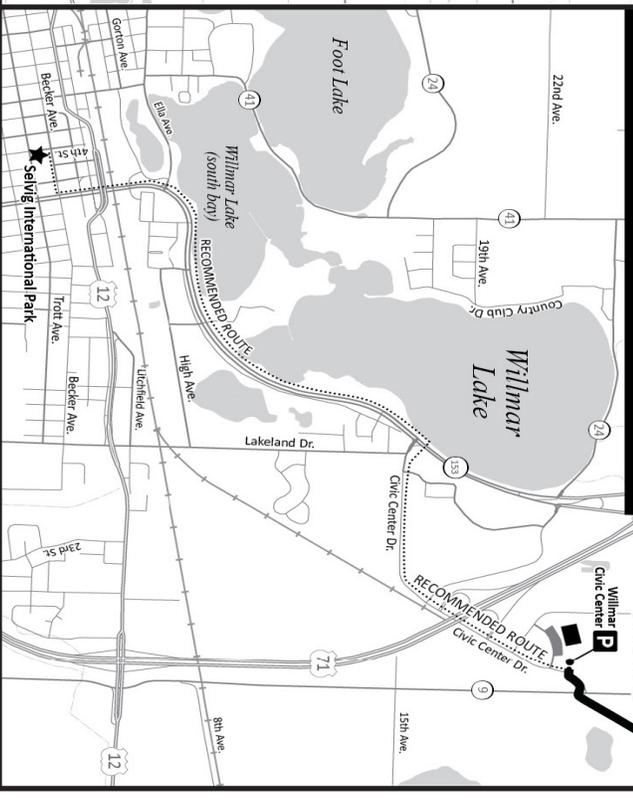
- Glacial Lakes State Trail (paved)
- Glacial Lakes State Trail (unpaved, natural surface)
- Rooroot Regional Trail (paved)
- 5 Miles From Willmar

FACILITIES

- Parking
- Information
- Toilet
- Picnic Area
- Camping
- Bike Repair Station
- State Park



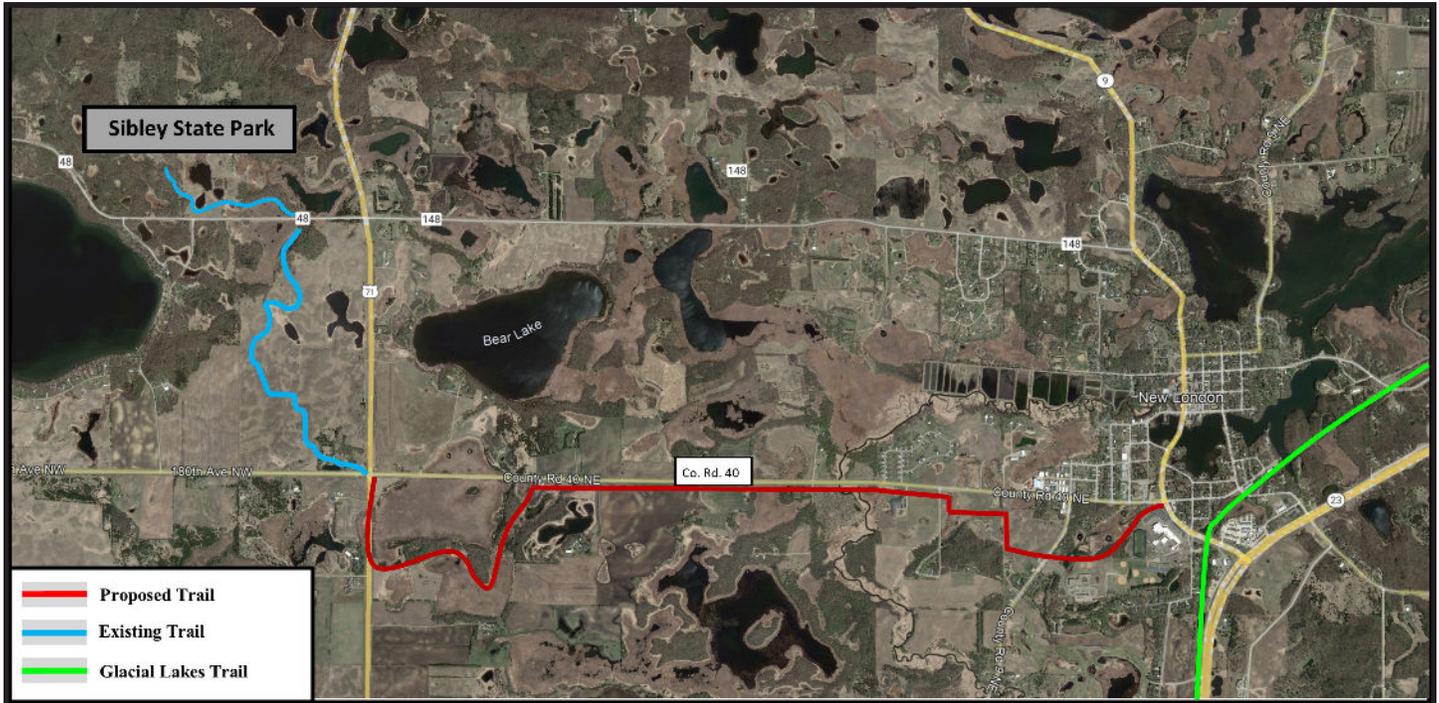
WILLMAR - RECOMMENDED ROUTE INTO TOWN



© 2023, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Glacial Lakes State Trail Map (2023)¹⁸

Connecting from the north end of New London, a three-mile stretch of paved shoulder along County Road 148 provides walkers, runners, and rollers a connection to Sibley State Park (more information on this park can be found below). However, to improve safety and access, Minnesota's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is joining with landowners, the New London-Spicer School District, and local elected officials to develop an off-road Glacial Lakes State Trail extension. This extension would better connect the Glacial Lakes Trail and the City of New London to Sibley State Park, enhancing accessibility and recreational opportunities for trail users while also preserving the natural beauty of the area.



In May 2023 the Minnesota Legislature approved a \$3 million appropriation for this trail project. However, an additional \$3.1 million is needed to fully fund this trail extension (entire project estimated at \$6.1 million). Local MN Representative Dave Baker has publicly committed to sponsoring a bill for the next legislative session to seek the remaining funds. A May 27 West Central Tribune article can be found in the appendix of this plan.¹⁹

Kandiyohi County-Owned Trails

While Kandiyohi County is home to numerous trails, some have been developed and are maintained by the County itself, often with additional funding from other entities.

Eagle Creek Trail

In June of 2023, it was announced that a 0.8 mile trail connection would be constructed in the fall of 2023 to complete a loop around Willmar Lake, on the city's north side. The project, funded in part with a \$250,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, will be built within Kandiyohi County's right-of-way, along Kandiyohi County Road 24, along the south edge of the Eagle Creek Golf Club.

The new segment of the trail on Kandiyohi County Rd. 24, will connect two existing trails.¹⁹



¹² <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Race+and+Ethnicity&g=050XX00US27067&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2>

¹³ <https://www.exploreminnesota.com/article/explore-mountain-bike-trails-cuyuna>



Eagle Lake Trail

The Eagle Lake Trail forms another convenient loop for bicyclists and pedestrians. It connects key destinations such as Willmar High School, Civic Center, the Eagle Lake area, and the Glacial Lakes State Trail. This 2.5-mile off-road trail, which measures a full 10 feet wide, was successfully completed in 2015. The project involved the collaboration of various stakeholders and funding contributions from Kandiyohi County, the City of Willmar, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and both Dove and Green Lake Townships. The project received substantial financial support - \$300,000 - from the Federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). Thanks to the collective efforts and investments from these entities, the Eagle Lake Trail has become a valuable addition to the region's recreational infrastructure, benefiting residents and visitors alike.

In 2023, additional Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding was requested to extend the Eagle Lake Trail at the northeast side of Eagle Lake. While this application was denied, due to the limited availability of TAP funding, Kandiyohi County has been encouraged to reapply to support this project.

Green Lake Trail

Situated in the northern region of Kandiyohi County, adjacent to the City of Spicer, Green Lake covers a vast expanse acreage (5,561 acres). This beautiful lake attracts visitors from across the state and beyond. Along its shores, a dedicated on-and-off-road bicycle and pedestrian trail/route provides a separate path for outdoor enthusiasts to explore. Notably, this trail forms a 13-mile loop branching off from the Glacial Lakes State Trail, further expanding the opportunities for outdoor recreation and exploration in the area. Four miles of this paved trail will be overlaid with new asphalt in 2024. At the same time, updates will be made to ramps along the trail to comply with current Americans with Disabilities Act standards.



A dedicated bicycle and pedestrian bridge is provided where Green Lake empties into the Crow River.²⁰ (Above)

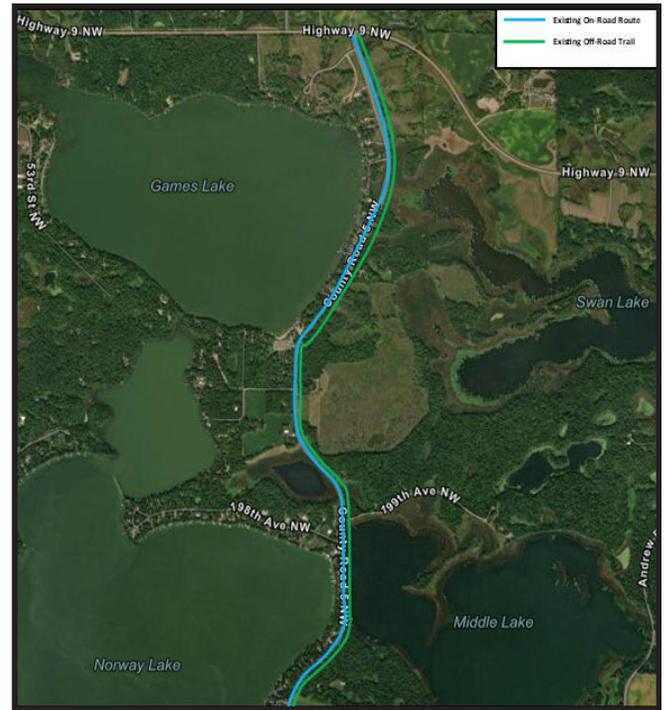


12 <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Race+and+Ethnicity&g=050XX00US27067&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2>

13 <https://www.exploreminnesota.com/article/explore-mountain-bike-trails-cuyuna>

Norway/Games Lake Trail

In 2017 and 2018, a new trail was constructed along east side of County Road 5, which runs adjacent to the eastern shores of both Games and Norway Lakes. The project encompassed the creation of a 2.57-mile long, 10-foot wide paved off-road trail. Kandiyohi County successfully secured \$345,762 in Federal TAP grant to bring this project to fruition. By providing a dedicated bicycle and pedestrian pathway, the trail effectively reduces congestion along the roadway, particularly benefiting the vicinity near Games Lake County Park, which draws significant motor vehicle traffic, including traffic from large recreational vehicles and vehicles towing boats and other large trailers.



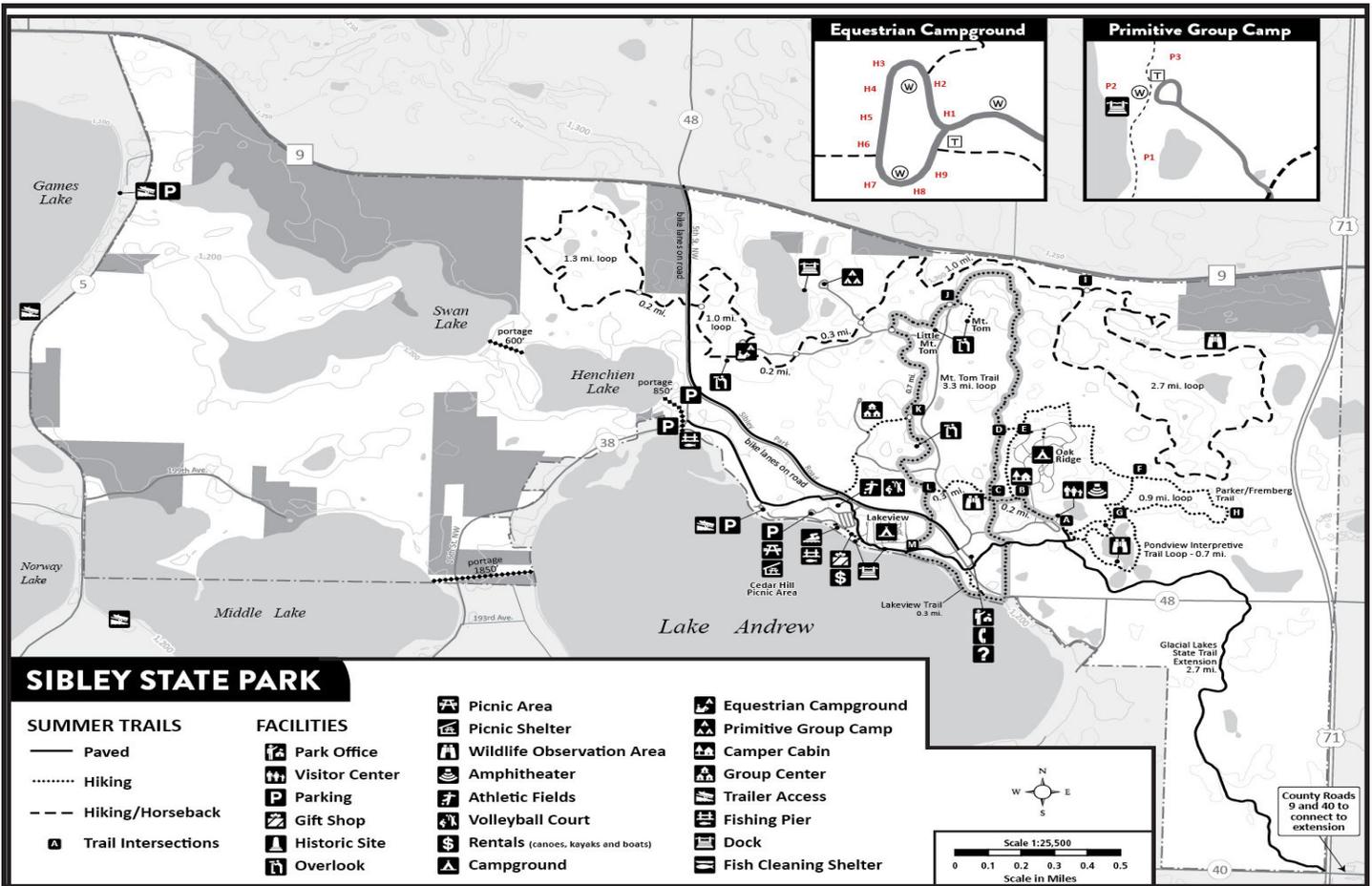
A stretch of the Norway/Games Lake Trail extends between Norway and Middle Lake (Middle Lake Pictured) Sibley State Park.²¹

At over 2,500 state-owned acres and with over 250,000 visitors per year, Sibley State Park is one of the largest and most popular parks in West-Central Minnesota. Boasting 132 drive-in campsites, group sites that can collectively accommodate up to 100 people, an equestrian campground, and several primitive “camper cabins”, Sibley State Park’s campers number in the tens of thousands each year. The park also features a wide range of other amenities that cater to visitors’ needs (see Map 2B for reference). These include:

-  18 miles of scenic hiking trails, including some wheelchair accessible trails.
-  8.7 miles of horse trails, offering a delightful equestrian experience.
-  5 miles of well-maintained off-road bicycle trails and on-road routes.
-  An interpretive center that provides valuable insights into the park’s flora, fauna, and history.
-  A swimming beach situated on the shores of Lake Andrew, providing a refreshing spot for water-based recreation.
-  The Mt. Tom observation deck, offering a vantage point to enjoy breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape.

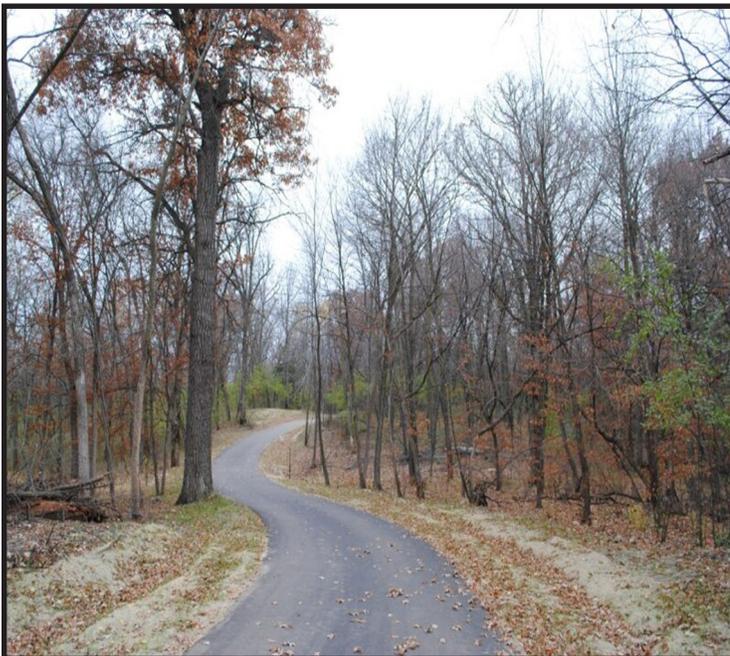
With its abundance of amenities and natural beauty, Sibley State Park provides a diverse range of activities and experiences for visitors to enjoy. A “snapshot virtual tour” of the park can be found at: https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/destinations/state_parks/virtual_tours/sibley/vt_sibley.html.

²¹ <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Race+and+Ethnicity&g=050XX00US27067&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2>



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Sibley State Park Map (2023).²²

In preparation for an eventual Glacial Lakes State Trail extension to Sibley State Park, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources developed a 2.7 mile bicycle and pedestrian trail through the southeastern portion of the park. This trail currently terminates at a U.S. Highway 71 trail underpass.



A Short Trail Brings Visitors to the Mount Tom Observation Tower (Above).

Sibley State Park Portion of Glacial Lakes State Trail Extension (2022).²³ (Left)

12 <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Race+and+Ethnicity&g=050XX00US27067&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2>

13 <https://www.exploreminnesota.com/article/explore-mountain-bike-trails-cuyuna>

City of Willmar's Trails

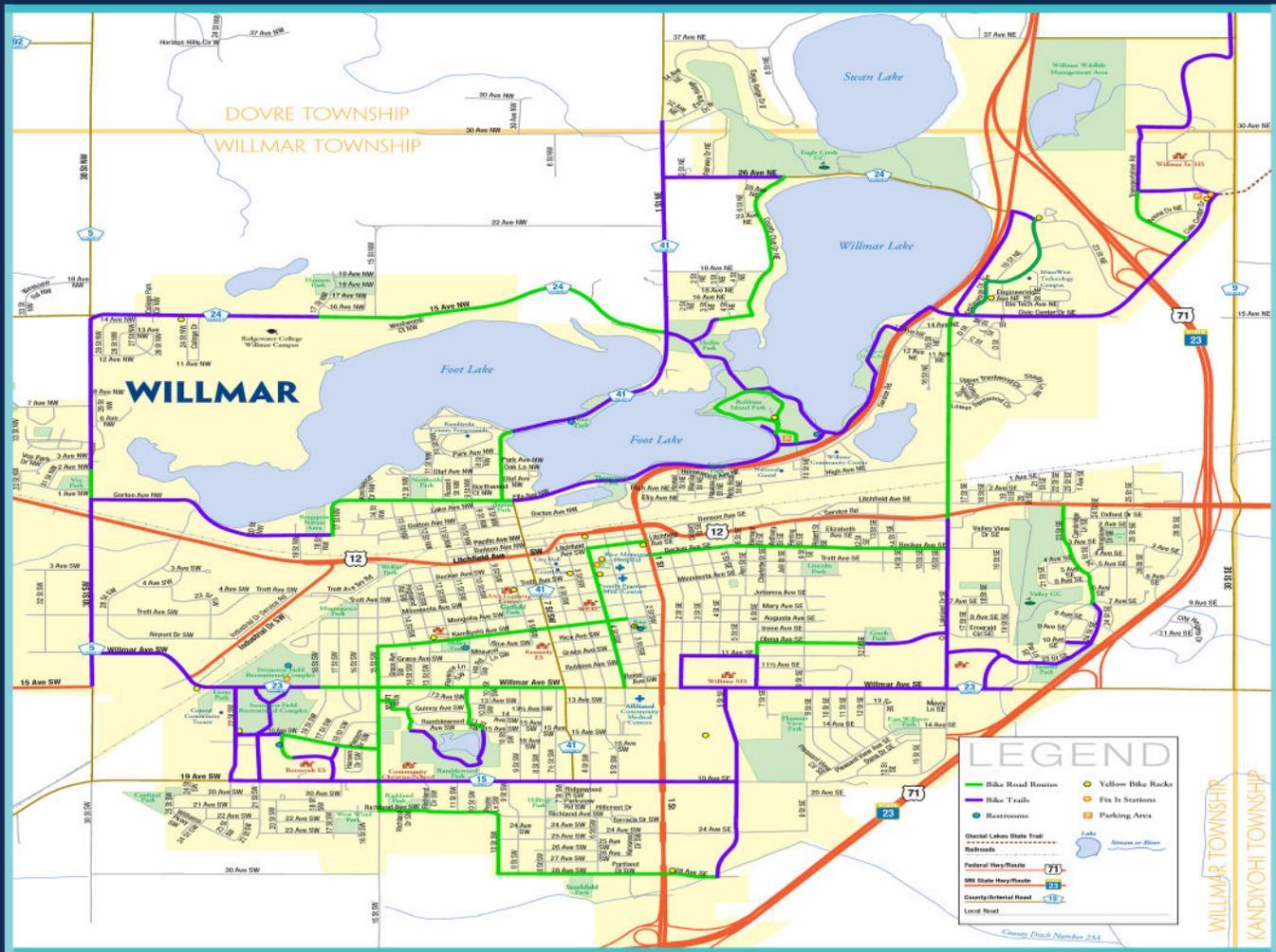
Located near the center of Kandiyohi County, the community of Willmar enjoys a robust trail network. It includes a combination of on-road bicycle routes and dedicated off-road trails (see Map 2C for reference). In 2011, to enhance recreational opportunities and connectivity, the City of Willmar adopted the Willmar Trails and Pedestrian Plan ([https://www.willmarmn.gov/Willmar%20Trail%20&%20Pedestrian%20Plan%20\[8-22%20Final%20Public%20Draft\].pdf](https://www.willmarmn.gov/Willmar%20Trail%20&%20Pedestrian%20Plan%20[8-22%20Final%20Public%20Draft].pdf)). Additionally, in 2015, seeing a need that the Willmar community could do more with its park system, the city completed a Parks and Recreation Master Plan to guide system-wide improvements, including improvements to trails (https://www.willmarmn.gov/parks_and_trails/index.php).

Recently, the City of Willmar has collaborated with the Willmar Bikes bicycle and pedestrian advocacy group, with funding and support from the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership of Kandiyohi and Renville County, to improve established bike routes via improved signage. Routes are now color coded and named after a local feature. For example, the community's Brown Turkey route, located on Willmar's west side, pays homage to the local poultry industry.

Continued collaboration with the City of Willmar will ensure quality trail connections between local city, county, and state trails. This will remain a key priority for Kandiyohi Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Plan implementation. By fostering quality connections with other trail systems, Kandiyohi County will promote seamless integration and accessibility for residents and visitors giving them better opportunity to enjoy the diverse trail offerings in the region.



Willmar Bike Trails



WILLMARMN.GOV | WILLMARLAKESAREA.COM

<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcjpcglclefndmkaj/https://www.willmarmn.gov/WLA%20bike%20map.pdf>

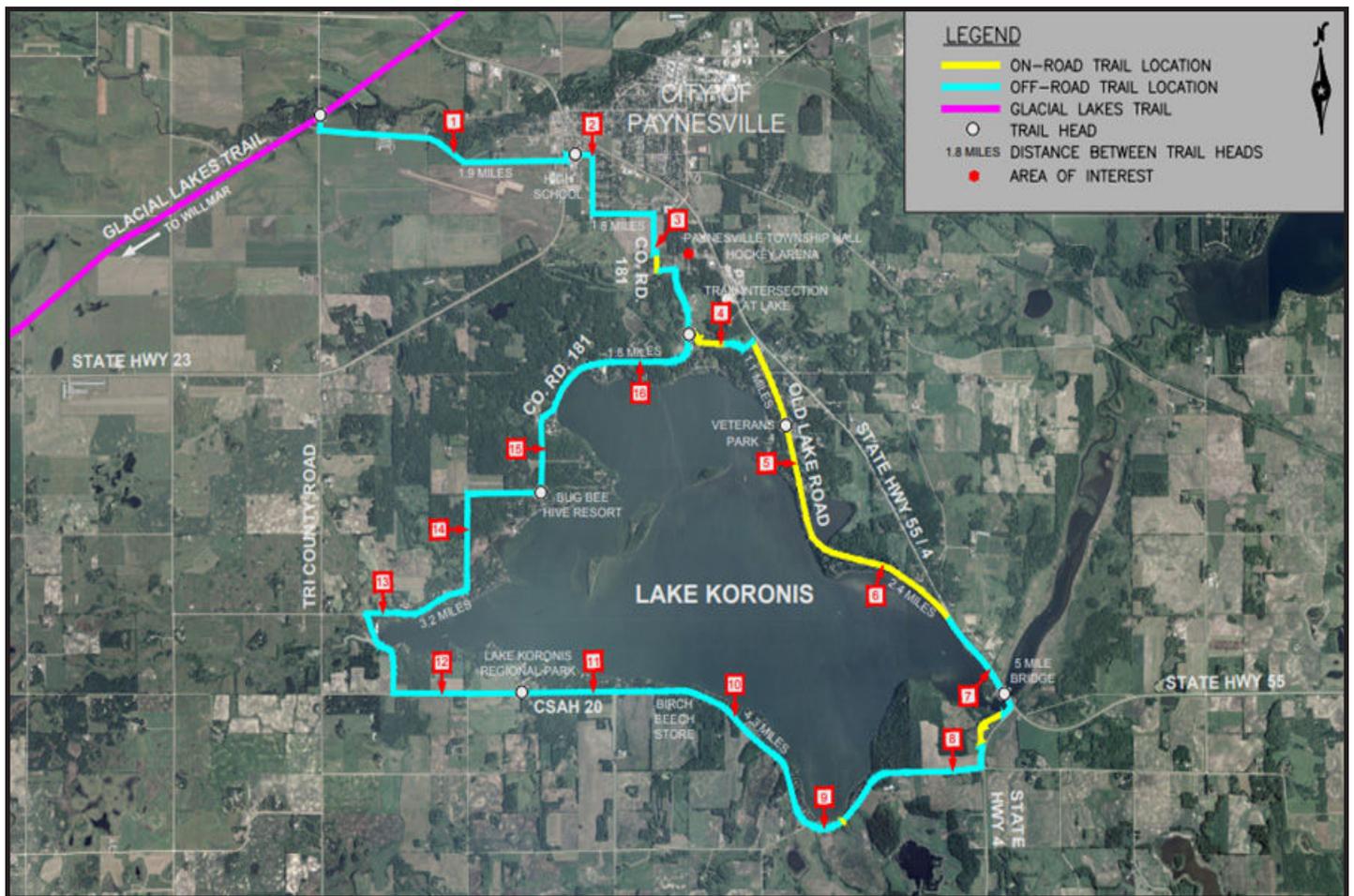
Neighboring Trails

Lake Koronis Recreational Trail

While it lies in the adjacent Meeker and Stearns Counties, the Lake Koronis Recreational Trail is popular within the region. This 25-mile trail can be accessed from the Glacial Lakes State Trail, west of Paynesville, MN. The trail loop includes both on- and off-road segments. It was completed in eight phases between 2002 and 2012. For more information on the Lake Koronis Trail, visit:

www.paynesvillearea.com/lktrail/koronistrail.htm.

A Lake Koronis Regional Trail Segment

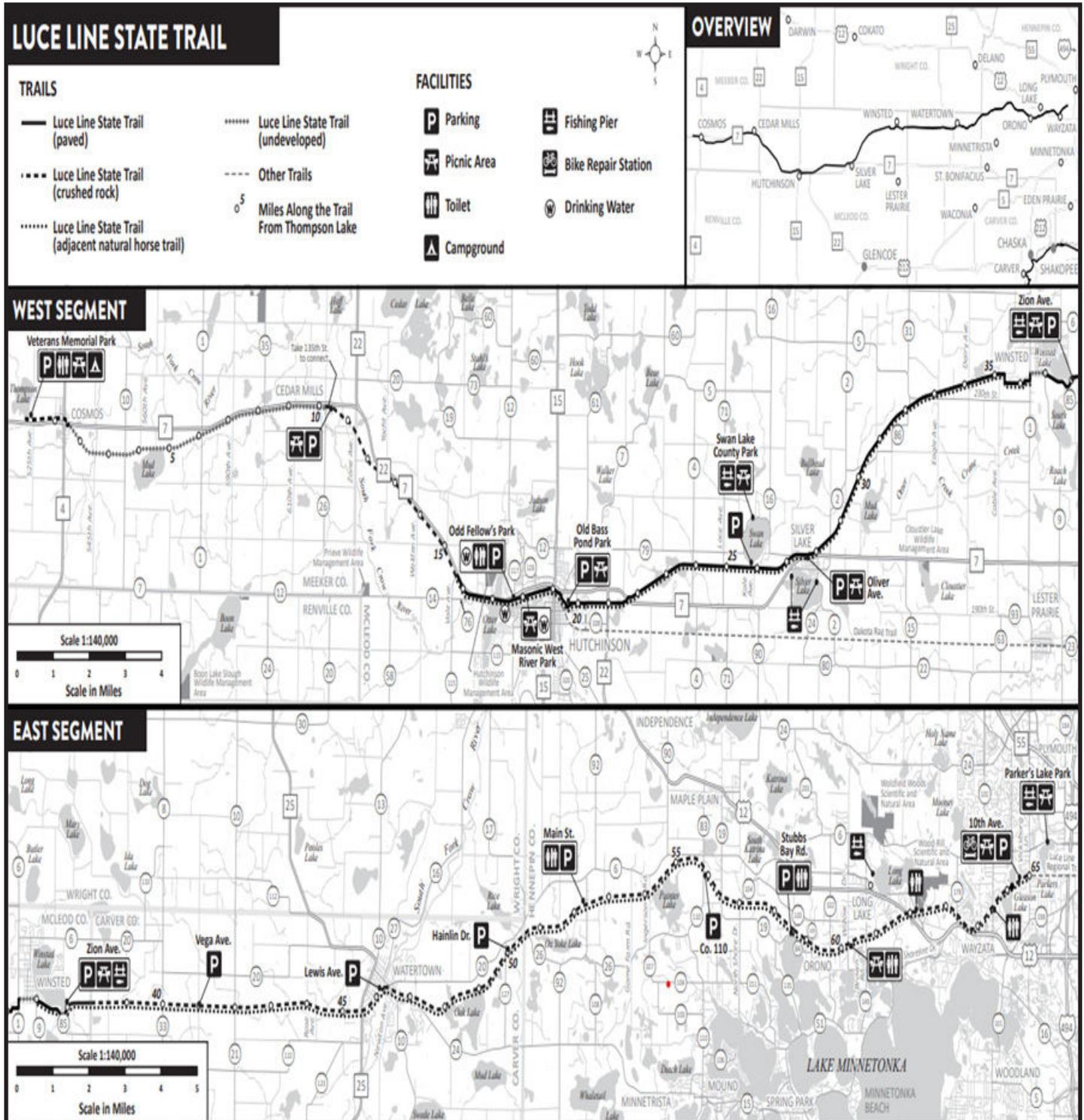


Lake Koronis Regional Trail Map.²⁴

12 <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Race+and+and+Ethnicity&g=050XX00US27067&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2>

Luce Line State Trail

Also just beyond Kandiyohi County's borders, the Luce Line State Trail is a 63 mile long trail that connects Thompson Lake, approximately 1.5 miles east of Kandiyohi County, to the western edges of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The trail includes both paved and crushed limestone segments. Like the Glacial Lakes State Trail, the Luce Line State Trail also offers a parallel trail for horseback riding and is open to cross-country ski and snowmobile traffic during the winter months.²⁵



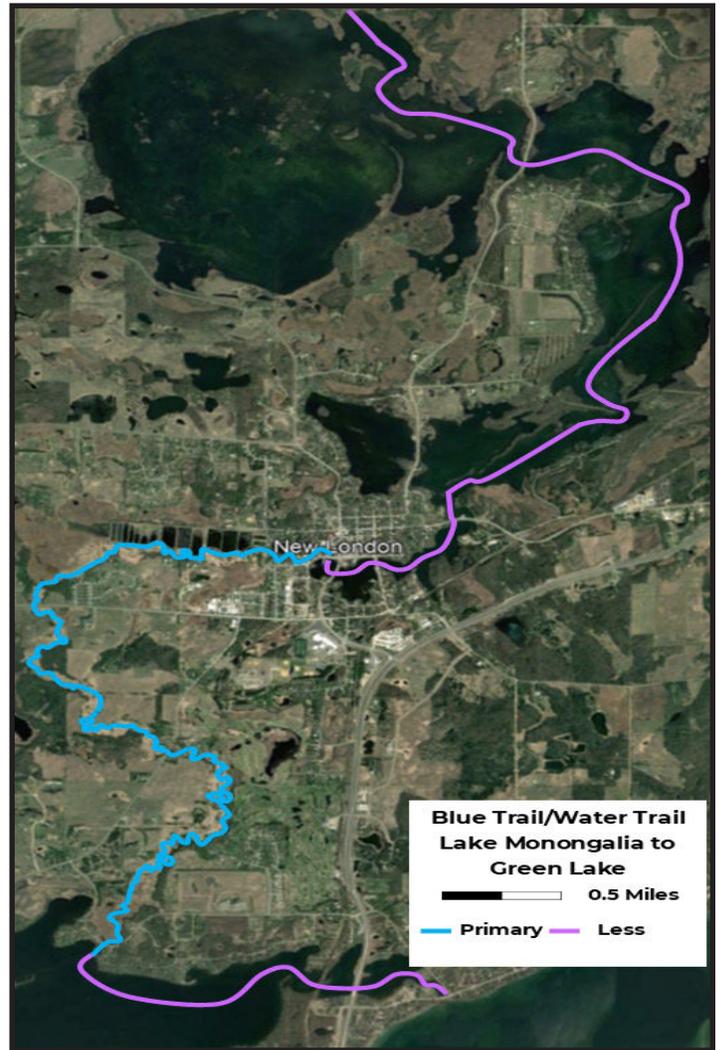
Luce Line State Trail Map from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (2023).²⁶

12 <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Race+and+Ethnicity&g=050XX00US27067&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2>

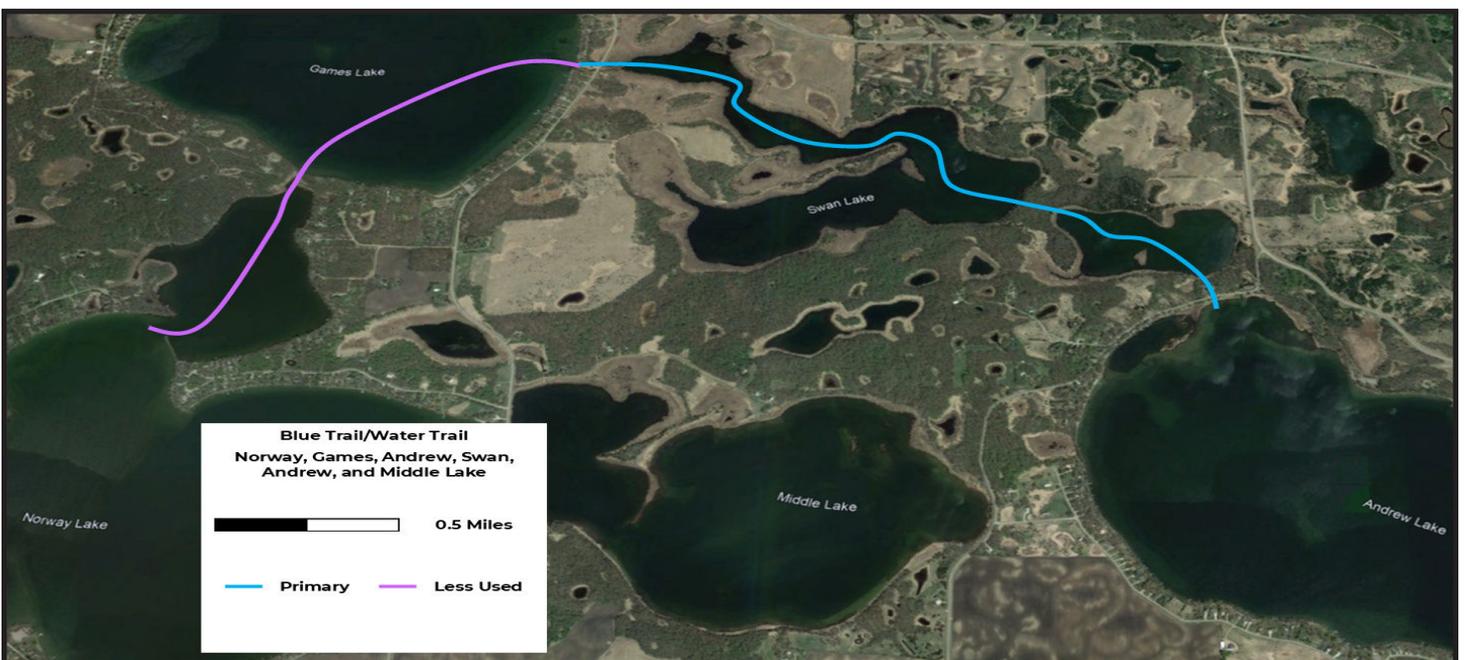
13 <https://www.exploreminnesota.com/article/explore-mountain-bike-trails-cuyuna>

Water Trails

Kandiyohi County is home to 360 lakes²⁷ as well as the Middle Fork of the Crow River, a 40+ mile waterway that originates in Belgrade, north of Kandiyohi County. This river enters Kandiyohi County at Mud Lake. From there, works its way through Lake Monongalia, New London's Mill Pond, Nest Lake, and eventually Green Lake before streaming into northern Meeker County, where it empties into the Crow River's north fork. A favorite section among water sports enthusiasts, as well as those who are new to paddling, is the six-mile stretch between New London's Mill Pond dam and Nest Lake, near Spicer. While not currently designated as a Minnesota State Water Trail, this route provides sparkling water, beautiful scenery and a relatively calm, easy paddling and outdoor recreation opportunity.



Kayakers enjoy recreating on the Middle Fork of the Crow River (top left). Paddlers can travel, with portages, from Lake Monongalia's north side, through New London's Mill Pond. Then they may portage and travel downstream toward Green Lake (top right). Another, almost completely circular route can be accessed from Norway Lake, Games Lake, Lake Andrew, and Middle Lake (below)

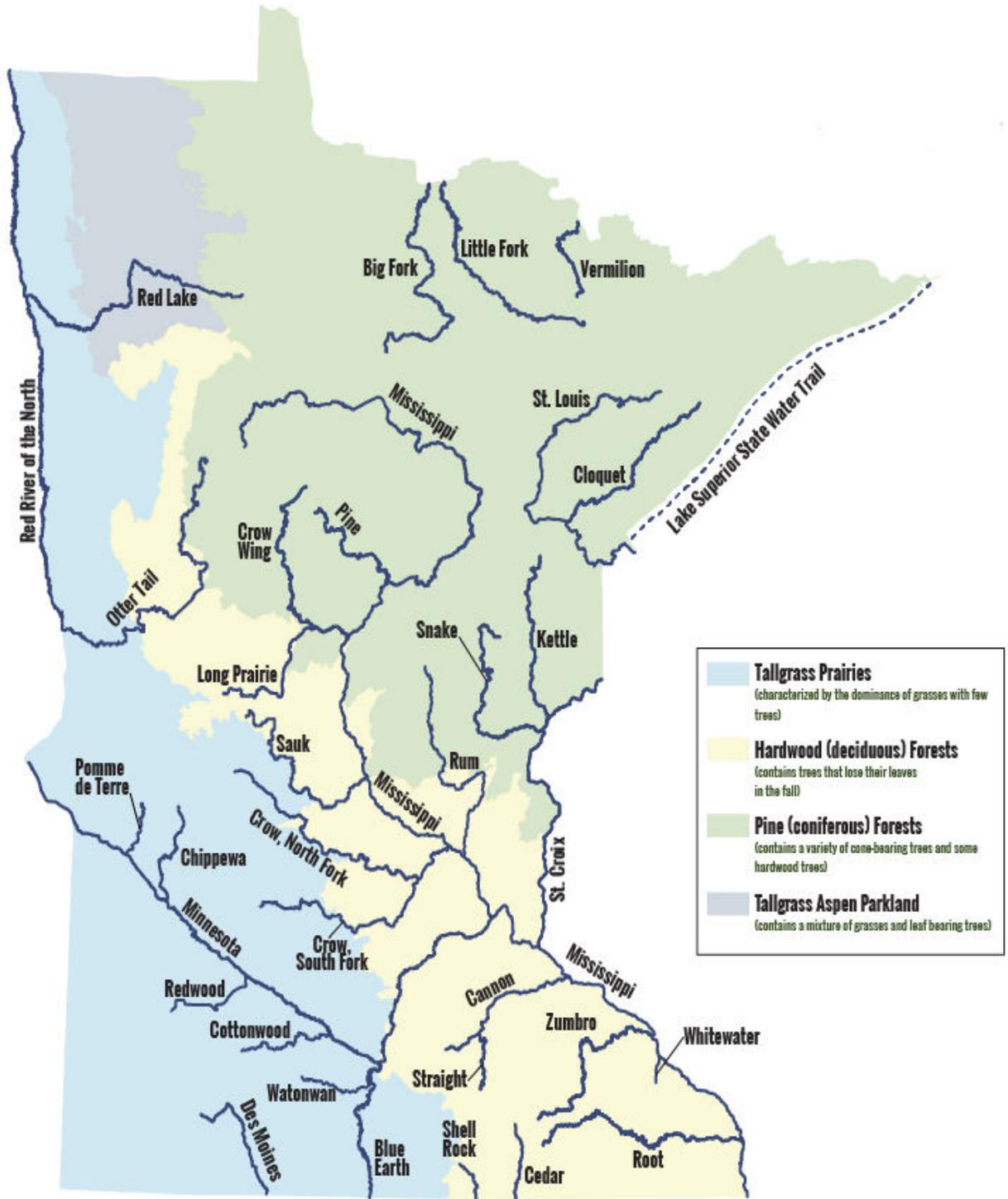


27 <https://kandiyohi.com/living/lakes-recreation/#:~:text=If%20lake%20life%20is%20your,County%20has%20the%20perfect%20spot.>
 28 <https://www.willmarlakesarea.com/listings/middle-fork-crow-river/>

Minnesota State Water Trails

Minnesota is currently home to 35 state water trails, with over 4,500 miles of terrific paddling. These water trails are managed by Minnesota’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR) specifically for canoeing and kayaking. The DNR manages hundreds of related facilities statewide. They include public water accesses, campsites, rest areas, and portages. The DNR also provides free maps and online river level reporting. Additionally, Minnesota’s DNR ensures safety by providing signage and buoys, removing waterway obstructions (e.g., fallen trees), and enforcing rules and regulations. Minnesota’s Water Trails Program looks to partner with communities by providing technical assistance including designing and developing facilities along water trails.

They provide an avenue by which Minnesota communities can attract out-of-town visitors while also providing an amenity for local residents. Currently, while both the North and South Forks are designated, the Crow River’s Middle Fork is not designated as a Minnesota State Water Trail.



Map of Minnesota Water Trails Map provided by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.²⁹

²⁹ https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/watertrails/location_map.html

Other Complimentary Trail Systems

Horseback Riding

In addition to state and local (county and city-maintained) bicycle and pedestrian trails and blue/water trails, Kandiyohi County is home to other complimentary trail systems. This includes trails used by equestrian enthusiasts. The primary public horseback riding locations include segments of the Glacial Lakes State Trail as well as Sibley State Park. A horse pass is required for riders age 16 and older on MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR)- managed horse trails, including the Glacial Lakes State Trail. To learn more about how to purchase a Minnesota Horse Pass, see a map of locations where State-maintained horse trails and campgrounds can be found, and examine trail etiquette and safety expectations, visit: https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/horseback_riding/horsepass.html. Additional information on horseback riding opportunities across the state can be found at the Minnesota Trail Riders Association website: <https://mntra.org/>.



As mentioned, Sibley State Park also provides a riding opportunity. The park currently maintains approximately seven miles of horse trails, which begin and end at the park's Horse Trail Center. For trail maps and additional information on Sibley's horse trail and horse camping amenities, please visit: https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/park.html?id=spk00265#homepage.

As mentioned, Sibley State Park also provides a riding opportunity. The park currently maintains approximately seven miles of horse trails, which begin and end at the park's Horse Trail Center. For trail maps and additional information on Sibley's horse trail and horse camping amenities, please visit: https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/park.html?id=spk00265#homepage.



Snowmobiling

Given its Minnesota location, it's no surprise that Kandiyohi County is a popular area for snowmobilers. More than 200 miles of groomed trails are maintained in the county³². These, in addition to Kandiyohi County's many lakes, which provide additional opportunities during our coldest months. While snowmobiling may not seem relevant to the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails plan it's worth mentioning that those involved with the sport often spend a great deal on their hobbies. In addition to purchasing their machines, which can cost upwards of \$20,000, riders often purchase additional gear (e.g., helmets and other riding apparel) and sled accessories. They also support area hotels, gas stations, convenience stores, and restaurants.



30 https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/horseback_riding/index.html

31 <https://www.campsite reservations.com/campground/united-states/minnesota/sibley-state-park>

32 <https://snowtracks.com/reporter-areas/willmar-kandiyohi-county-minnesota/>



In 1973 the Minnesota Legislature, recognizing the recreational and economic value of snowmobiling to many in our state, delegated the responsibility of administering a cost-sharing program for the development and maintenance of snowmobile trails to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The goal of this program was the creation and maintenance of locally initiated trails that were financially assisted by the state. This program is popularly known as the grants-in-aid—or GIA—Program. Through this program, grants are awarded to local governments, often county units, who are referred to as grant sponsors, to ensure GIA trails are prepared and ready for use, adequately groomed, and closed at the end of the season. Funding for the GIA Program, needed for grooming machines, signage, and fuel, comes from snowmobile registration and trail pass fees. However, the majority of trails are managed by local snowmobile club

members who volunteer countless hours to trail maintenance and signing. Kandiyohi County is home to at least three of these organizations, including the E-Z Riders Snow Club, the Sno Skippers, and the West Central Snow Drifters. To gain contact information for any of these organizations, visit: <https://www.willmarlakesarea.com/trail-reports/>. To learn more about Minnesota's snowmobile regulations, registration information, and opportunities, including an interactive snowmobile trail map, visit: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/snowmobiling/index.html>. Those who visit this site will discover the ability to view snowmobile trails found in every corner of the state. Page 31 provides a view of snowmobile trails found within Kandiyohi County

Cross-Country Skiing

Another activity enjoyed by a number of Kandiyohi County residents is cross-country skiing. Kandiyohi County's lakes often provide a terrific space for this activity during our region's coldest months. However, there many enthusiasts who also enjoy skiing at Sibley State Park or the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center, located in rural Spicer, at Lake Florida's southeastern edge (see page 32 for more information on Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center's trail, activity, and programming, or visit their website, found at: <http://www.prairiewoodselc.org/index.html>).

The Willmar Nordic Ski Club also provides a cross-country ski venue, in collaboration with the Willmar High School Ski team, on Eagle Creek Golf Course and on adjacent state land bordering Swan Lake. Over five kilometers of trails are marked and groomed for both classic and freestyle skiing³⁵.

To learn more about the Willmar Nordic Ski Club, please visit their social media page, found at: <https://www.facebook.com/WillmarNordicSkiClub/>



Two PWELC Cross-Country Ski Enthusiasts³³

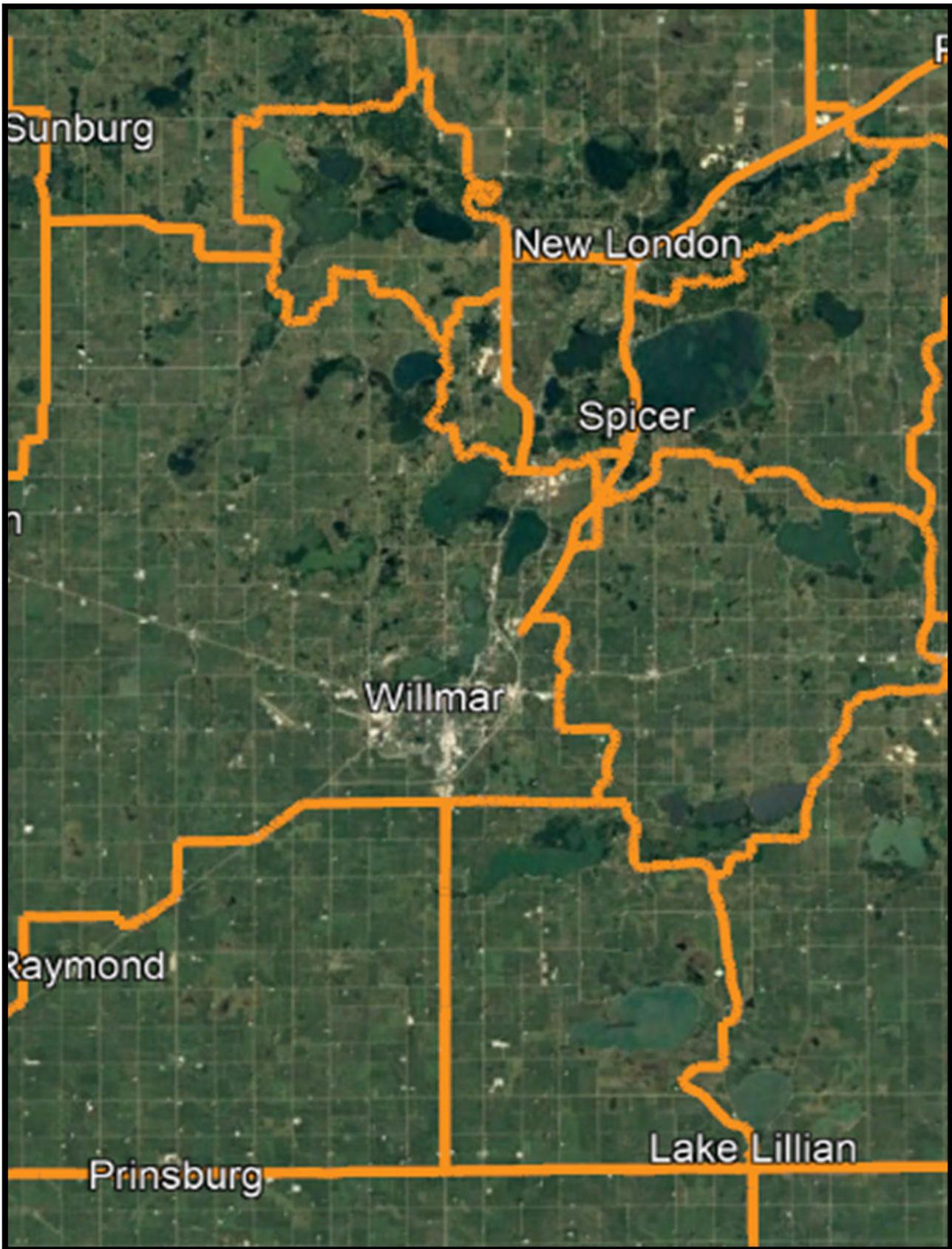


Cross Country Skiing at the Eagle Creek Golf Course (left)³⁴, and the Willmar High School Nordic Ski Team (Right)

33 <http://www.prairiewoodselc.org/photos.html>

34 <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=5103224059781030&set=pb.100064897981713.-2207520000>.

35 <https://www.willmar.k12.mn.us/cms/lib/MN01909723/Centricity/Domain/385/Nordic%20Home/xc%20club%20report.pdf>



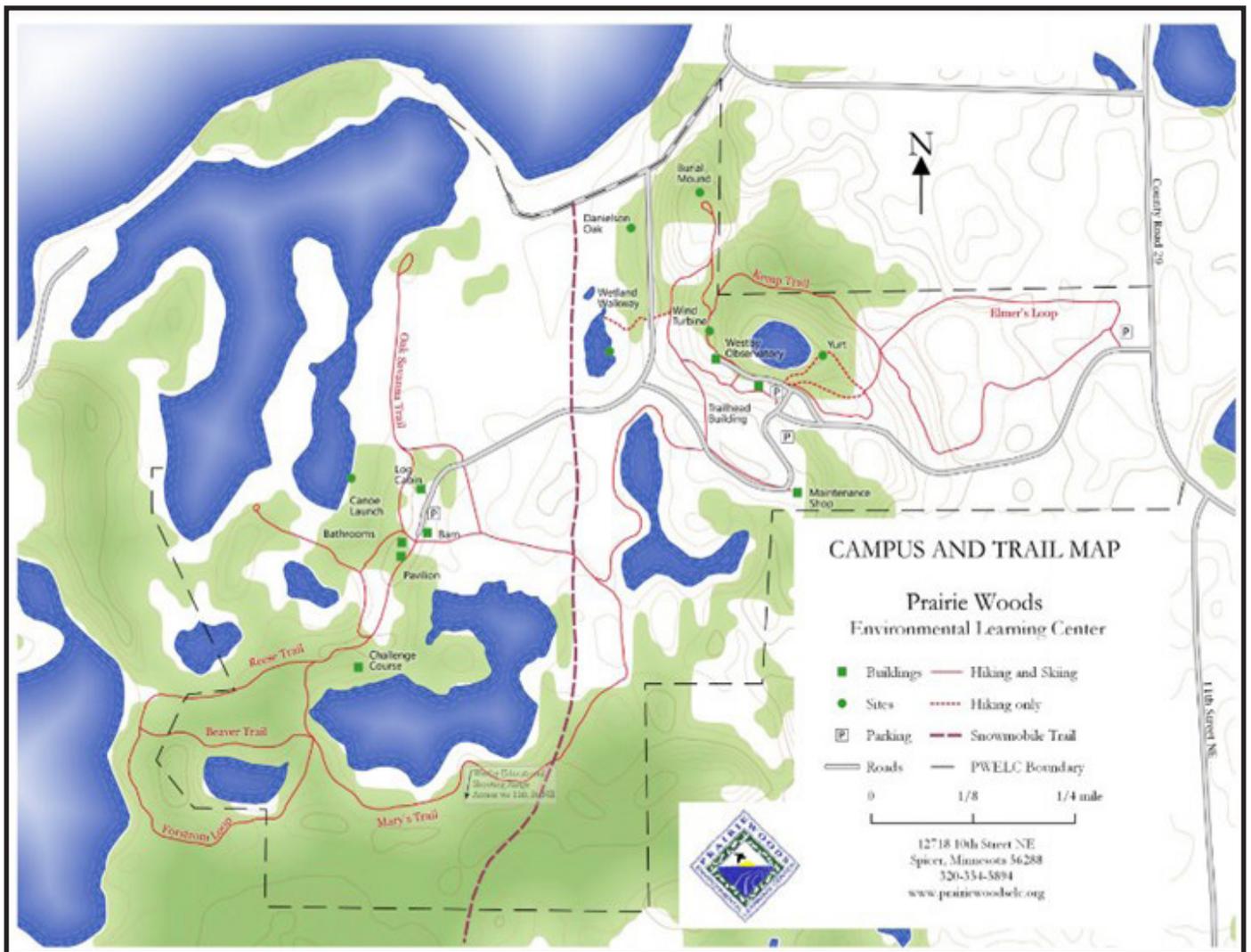
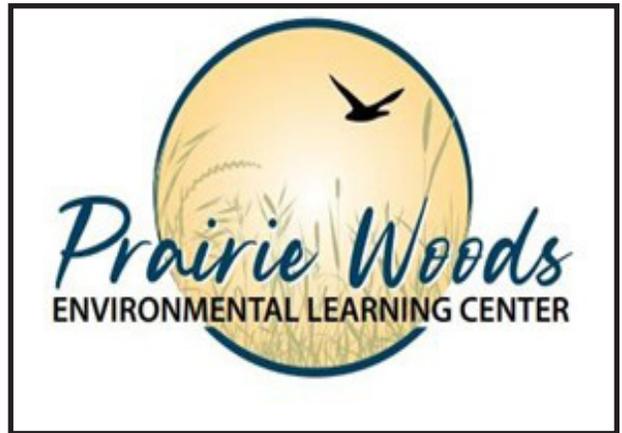
Established Snowmobile Trails Found in Kandiyohi County, from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Interactive Snowmobile Trails Map

https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/snowmobiling/interactive_map/index.html

Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC)

is a regional center for environmental education and outdoor recreation located in beautiful Kandiyohi County in west-central Minnesota, providing an “exciting array of hands-on learning adventures for all ages, as well as beautiful facilities for meetings and special events.”³⁶

Prairie Woods maintains approximately 10km of trails over rolling glacial terrain, through woods and prairies, near ponds and wetlands. The trail network covers much of PWELC’s 500 acre site. Trails are open for walking, mountain biking, and hiking during daylight hours during the spring, summer, and fall months. Trails are groomed for cross-country skiing during the winter. Equipment rentals are possible on a reservation basis.



Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center Campus Map³⁷

³⁶ <http://www.prairiewoodselc.org/index.html>
³⁷ <http://www.prairiewoodselc.org/campus%20map.html>

Chapter 3

Chapter Three describes the public engagement strategy undertaken for the development of the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan. It also provides a summary of public input received.

Note: Trail priorities have been established by the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Planning Task Force. This group determined priorities after consideration of input received via survey responses and other public engagement. Established Kandiyohi County trail network priorities can be found in Chapter Five of this plan.

Incorporated Public Engagement Strategies

Several public engagement strategies were incorporated into the planning process. This was to ensure that the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan was driven by significant resident input. It was agreed that this updated trails plan would have little meaning or value if it wasn't largely reflective of community desires. Specifically, incorporated strategies included:

1. The Development of a Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan Task Force: As discussed in Chapter 1, this task force was assembled to both assist with and guide plan development. The group included citizens and professionals with ample experience from a handful of trail-related sectors (e.g., engineers, safety and healthy living advocates, outdoors and bicycle enthusiasts, a visitors bureau professional, and local/regional community planners). More information on the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Planning Task Force can be found in Chapter 1 of this plan.

The task force met on several occasions to provide their input and guidance. Their direction was largely based on the public input received via other engagement strategies as well as members' personal/professional observations and expertise.

2. Participation in Community Outreach Events: In an effort to engage Kandiyohi County residents in meaningful conversation on the topic of Kandiyohi County's Trail Network, County and MMDC staff participated in two separate outreach events. First, a booth was secured at the Home and Outdoor Living Expo, which was held at Willmar's Civic Center on April 1, 2023. Originally, this was to be a two-day event (March 31 – April 1). Unfortunately, events were cancelled on March 31, due to inclement winter weather.

County and MMDC staff had additional public engagement at an outreach event conducted at Goat Ridge Brewery, a known location for gathering and socialization within the community of New London (no beverages containing alcohol were consumed by plan-involved individuals during this event). Each of these intentional events provided a good opportunity for trail-related dialogue. A summary of common conversation themes and comments taken from these events can be found on page 36.

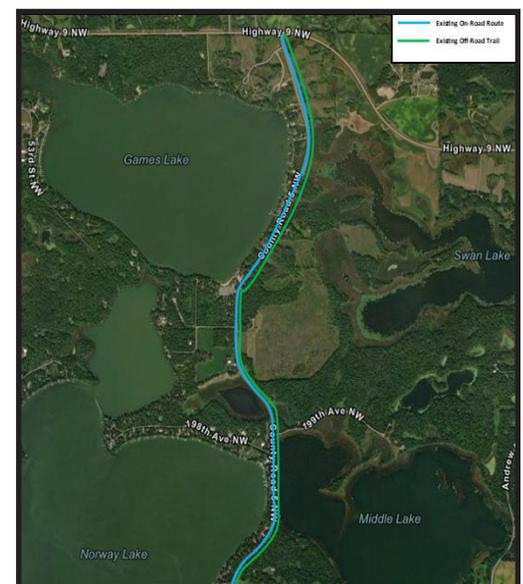
3. The Creation, Distribution, and Analysis of a Kandiyohi County Trails-Focused Survey: To give a larger number of Kandiyohi County residents an opportunity to provide input into the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan, the planning task force developed a 16 question survey. This survey, which can be found in its entirety in Appendix B of this document asked respondents about their current trail use, typical and desired destinations, preferred trail amenities, demographics, and more. The Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan survey was made available electronically, via SurveyMonkey, believed to be the most popular cloud-based survey tool that has the ability to help users create, send, and analyze surveys.

Once the survey was developed using the SurveyMonkey platform, both a link and a corresponding quick response (QR) code were generated. Multiple strategies were then employed to make this link and QR code widely available to the general public. They included:

 The crafting of a media release, which was sent to Kandiyohi County's print and broadcast media. This release informed local media of the survey and its purpose. It was accompanied by a request to share the news of the survey with each outlet's news audience.

 Distribution via social media (i.e., Facebook), using MMDC's own page, as well as several local community based sites.

 Distribution via the extensive email networks (both personal and professional) of task force members. This included distribution to a multitude of cities and organizations located within Kandiyohi County. Those who received the email request were encouraged to forward it onto their own networks.



When it was determined that additional effort would be needed to solicit responses from priority populations (e.g., people of color), the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Task Force made a concerted effort to reach out to these populations. This included the promotion of the survey opportunity at Healthy Kids Day, an annual event held for kids and their families at the Kandiyohi County Area Family YMCA. Furthermore, MMDC Planner Kyle Ten Napel visited Willmar's downtown area, which is the home and/or workplace of many of Kandiyohi County's people of color, to visit with locals and request their survey completion. Completion assistance was provided, as needed, to help address any barriers related to the ability to read English.

In total, 513 individuals participated in the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Survey. A full account of survey results can be found in Appendix B of this plan. However, charts summarizing survey responses can be found on pages 37 through 43.

Bicycle & Walking Trail Public Input Themes:

-  Interest in the creation of more looped routes, particularly routes that connect or circle area lakes but also longer on-road routes for those who prefer to bike greater distances, to eliminate the need for "out and back" trips.
-  Desire for improved connectivity between existing trail segments.
-  A general desire for more trail destinations (e.g., scenic viewing points), trailside enrichment (e.g., art, educational signage) and opportunities/amenities that support complimentary activities (e.g., bird watching).
-  A desire for additional trail/route information and signage along trails.
-  An expressed need for more comfort-focused amenities (e.g., restrooms, water stations).
-  Significant interest in the maintenance of Kandiyohi County's existing trails.
-  Desire for additional parking options for those who must drive to connect with the trail system.
-  A need for shaded trailside rest areas (e.g., benches and/or picnic tables).
-  Requests for the addition of equipment and/or supplies to encourage better user management of pet waste (e.g., dog waste bags and disposal bins).
-  Interest in the creation of better trail connections.

While mentioned less often, other ideas included the addition of trailside bike repair stations, the creation of additional offroad riding opportunities for both cyclists/mountain bikers and ATVs, and the mitigation of nuisance insects throughout Kandiyohi County's trail system. Paper and device-friendly maps also received mention.

Blue Trail/Water Trail Public Input Themes:

-  Desire for the development of a portage between Middle Lake and Norway Lake.
-  Interest in the addition of rental equipment for the enjoyment of water trails (e.g., kayak rentals).

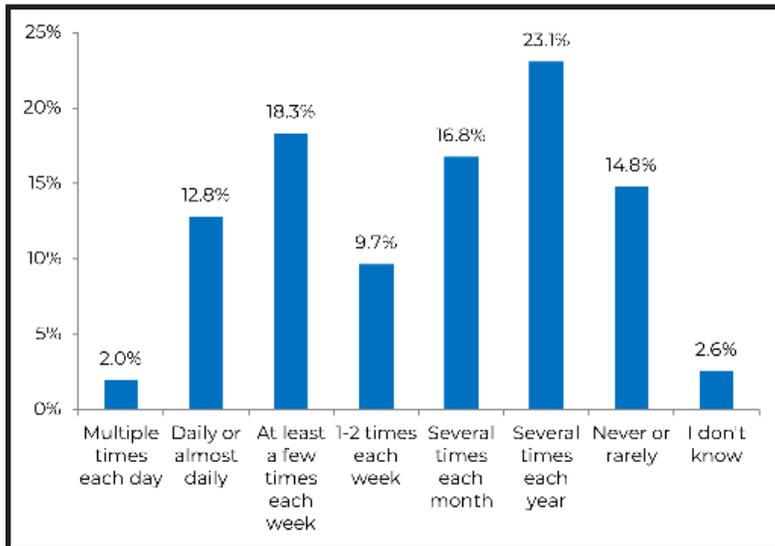
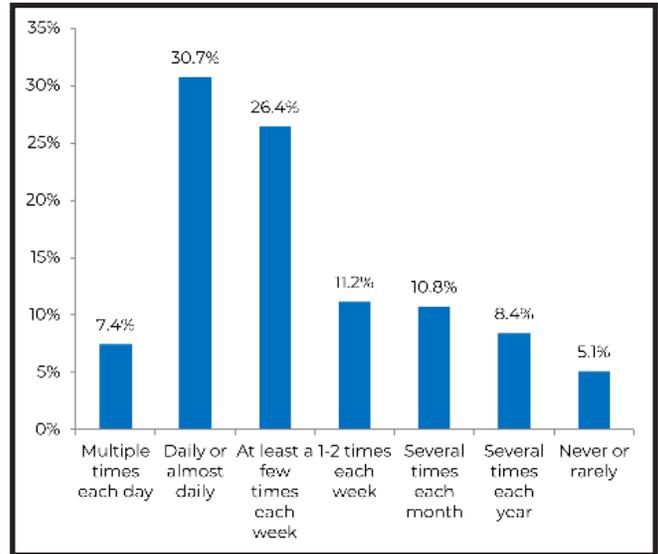


Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan: Summary of Survey Results

While the complete results of the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan, including all answers to open-ended questions, can be found in Appendix B, the following pages provide an overview of survey results.

Question 1: On average and weather permitting, how often do people in your household walk, run, or roll (bike travel by wheelchair, skate)? This can include walking or biking for fun, exercise, transportation to work/school, etc. (511 Responses)

Almost 65 percent of survey respondents indicated that they walk, run or roll at least a few times each week. This relatively high number indicates that many already incorporate walking and biking into their leisure, exercise, or transportation modes.

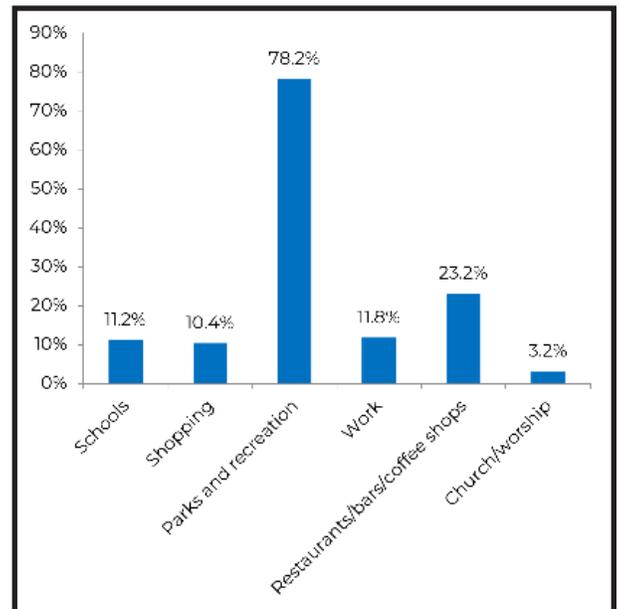


Question 2: How often do you use a county trail (on-road or off-road routes) for this activity? (507 Responses)

This question referred respondents to the activities inquired about in Question 1. Over 80 percent of respondents indicated that they use a county trail at least several times each year. Almost 43 percent indicated they use a county trail at least one time per week. A small number, less than three percent, indicated that they were not sure if their activities touched county trails or not, indicating some uncertainty surrounding trail jurisdiction (whether the trail(s) used is/are managed by the county, a city, etc.)

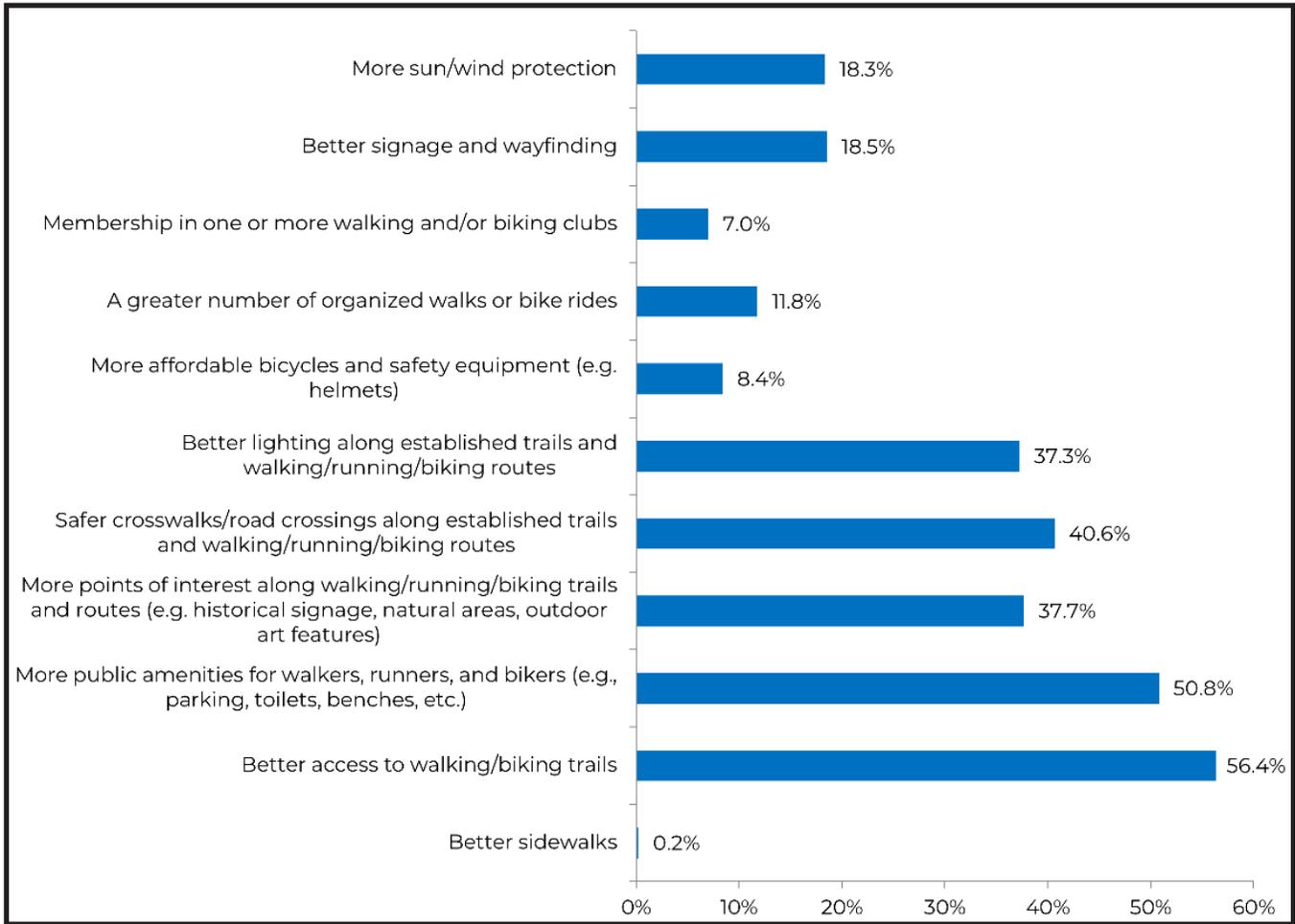
Question 3: To where within Kandiyohi County do you or your family members normally walk or bike? (430 Responses)

By a large margin, most respondents indicated that they walk or bike primarily for parks and recreation activities. This indicates intentionality. Most respondents are likely walking or biking for enjoyment and not necessarily for transportation. That said, a significant number of respondents indicated that they walk or bike for transportation to school, work, stores, and food/drink establishments. Therefore, it will be important to consider connectivity when considering trail network improvements.



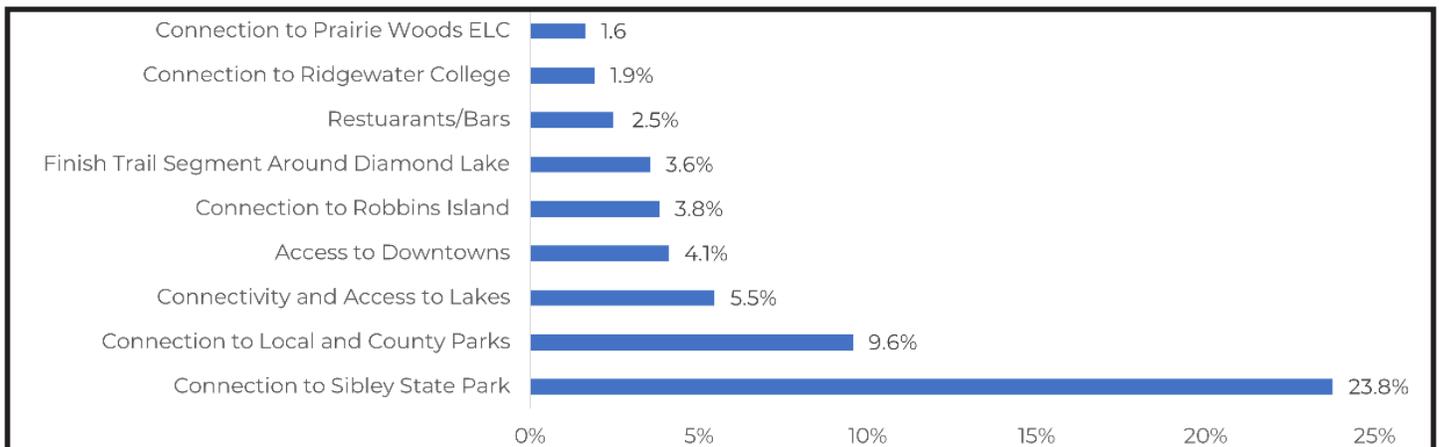
Question 4: What would encourage you or someone else in your household to walk, roll, or run more often? Please select all that apply. (476 Responses)

Almost 65 percent of survey respondents indicated that they walk, run or roll at least a few times each week. This relatively high number indicates that many already incorporate walking and biking into their leisure, exercise, or transportation modes.



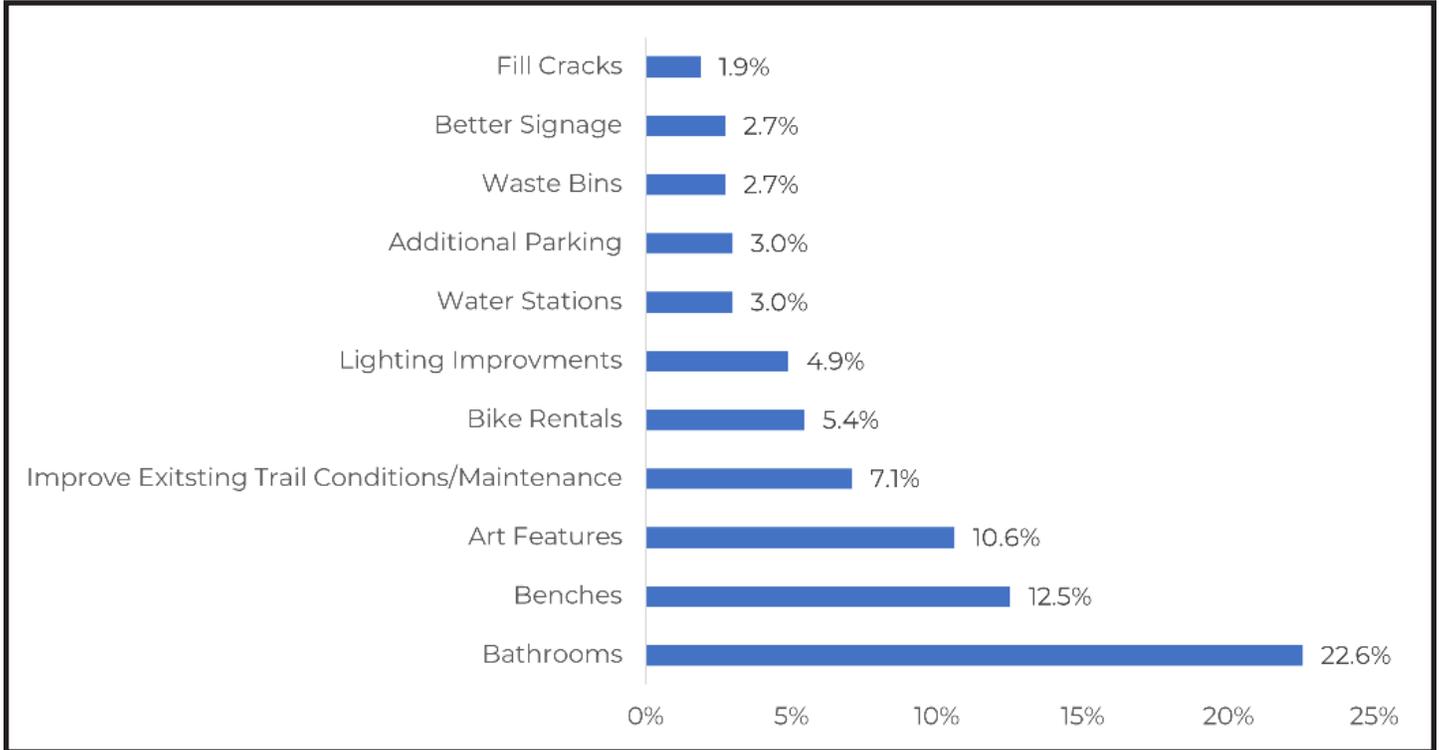
Question 5: What destinations would you like to see better connected by on- or off-road trail? (366 Responses)

The following graph depicts the destinations most commonly indicated by survey respondents. Sibley State Park was, by far, the most frequent answer, with almost 24 percent of respondents indicating it was a destination to which they would like to see better trail connections. Parks and lakes were the next most common answers, respectively. This supports the notion that most respondents are currently interested in trails for their recreational value, rather than for their potential to meet transportation needs.



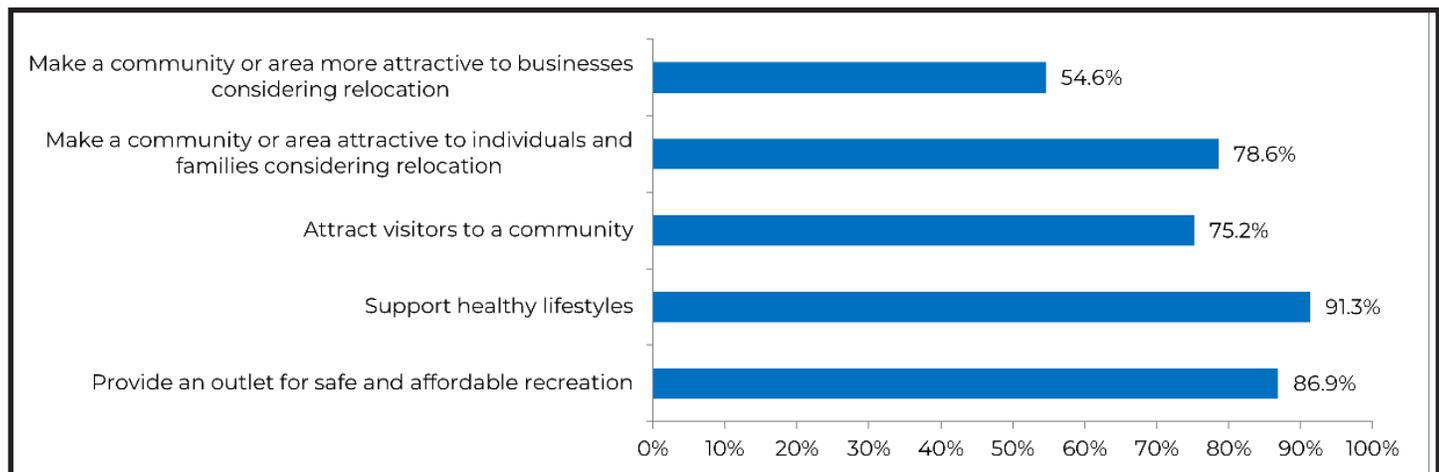
Question 6: When considering existing trails and routes, where would you like to see improvements (trail condition improvements, added park amenities, toilets, benches, educational or artistic features, bike rentals, etc.)? (368 Responses)

Similar to the previous graphic depiction, the following chart depicts the desired trail improvements most commonly indicated by survey respondents. Over 22 percent indicated a desire for bathroom facilities along Kandiyohi Counties trails. Other more common mentions include benches, which might be used during a break, and art features, which might create destinations or add interest. It should also be noted that, while over seven percent indicated desire for improved Trail Conditions/Maintenance, two percent indicated their specific maintenance desire for pavement cracks to be filled.



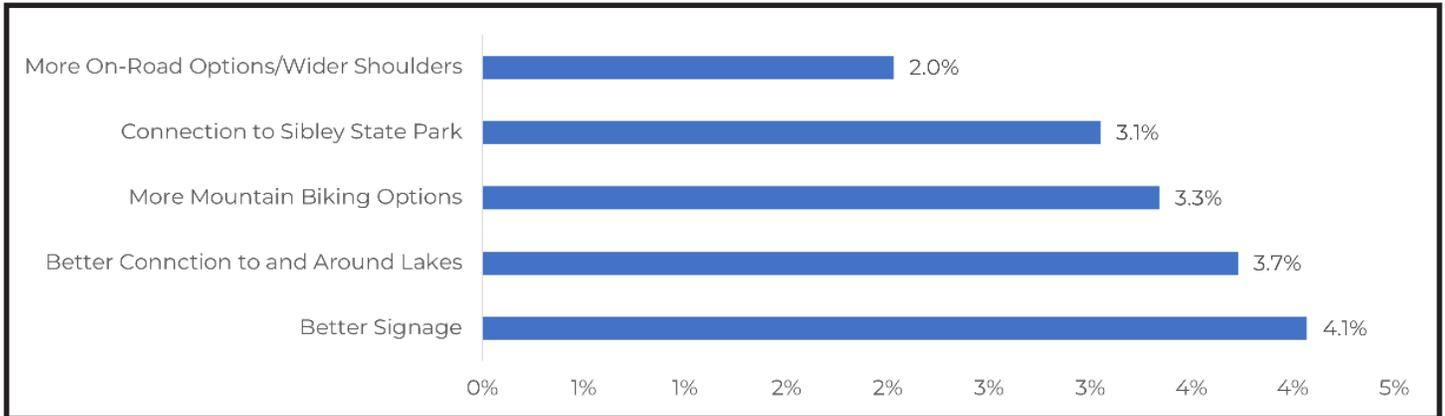
Question 7: Generally speaking, I think a healthy trail system can _____. Please select all that you think apply. (499 Responses)

When asked to indicate how they thought a healthy trail system might impact their community, over 90 percent indicated that positive effects include the support of healthy lifestyles. Almost 87 percent indicated their belief that trails can provide an outlet for safe and affordable recreation. Additionally, over three quarters indicated they thought a healthy trails system can attract visitors and make a community attractive to individuals and families considering relocation. Finally, over half of respondents indicated that a quality trails system can make an area more attractive to businesses considering relocation. These trail benefits should be considered and voiced when determining the value of any trail network expansion or improvements.



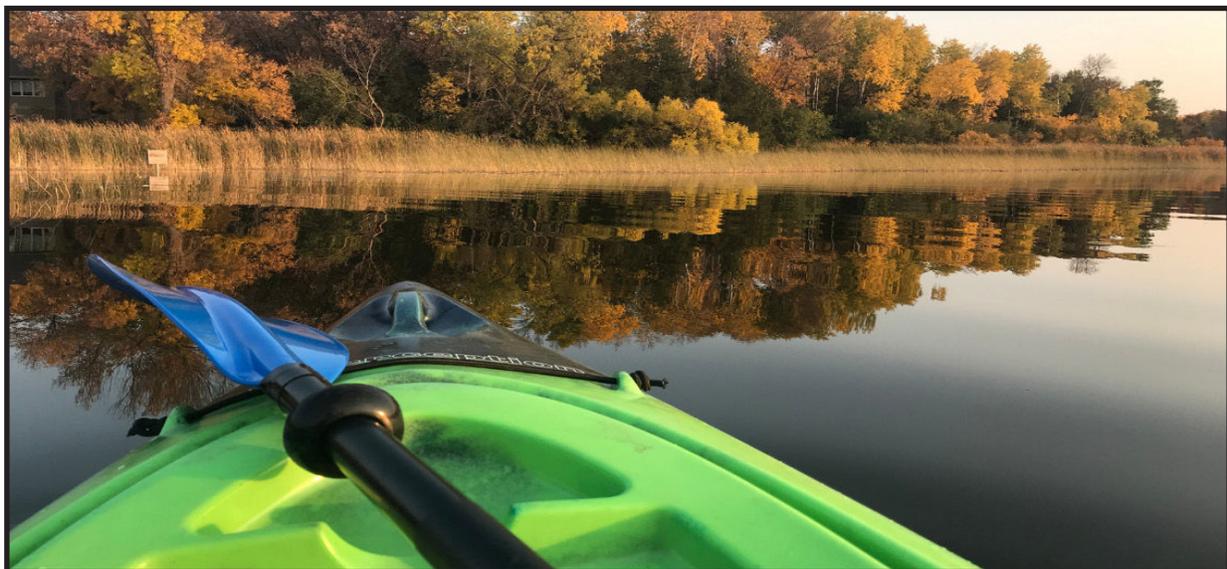
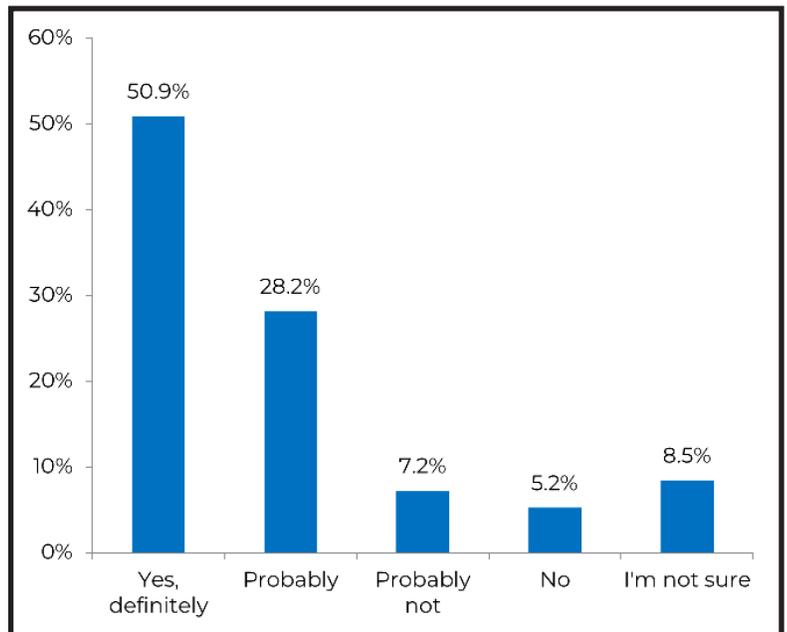
Question 8: What other thoughts can you share on Kandiyohi County's on-road and off-road trails? (295 Responses)

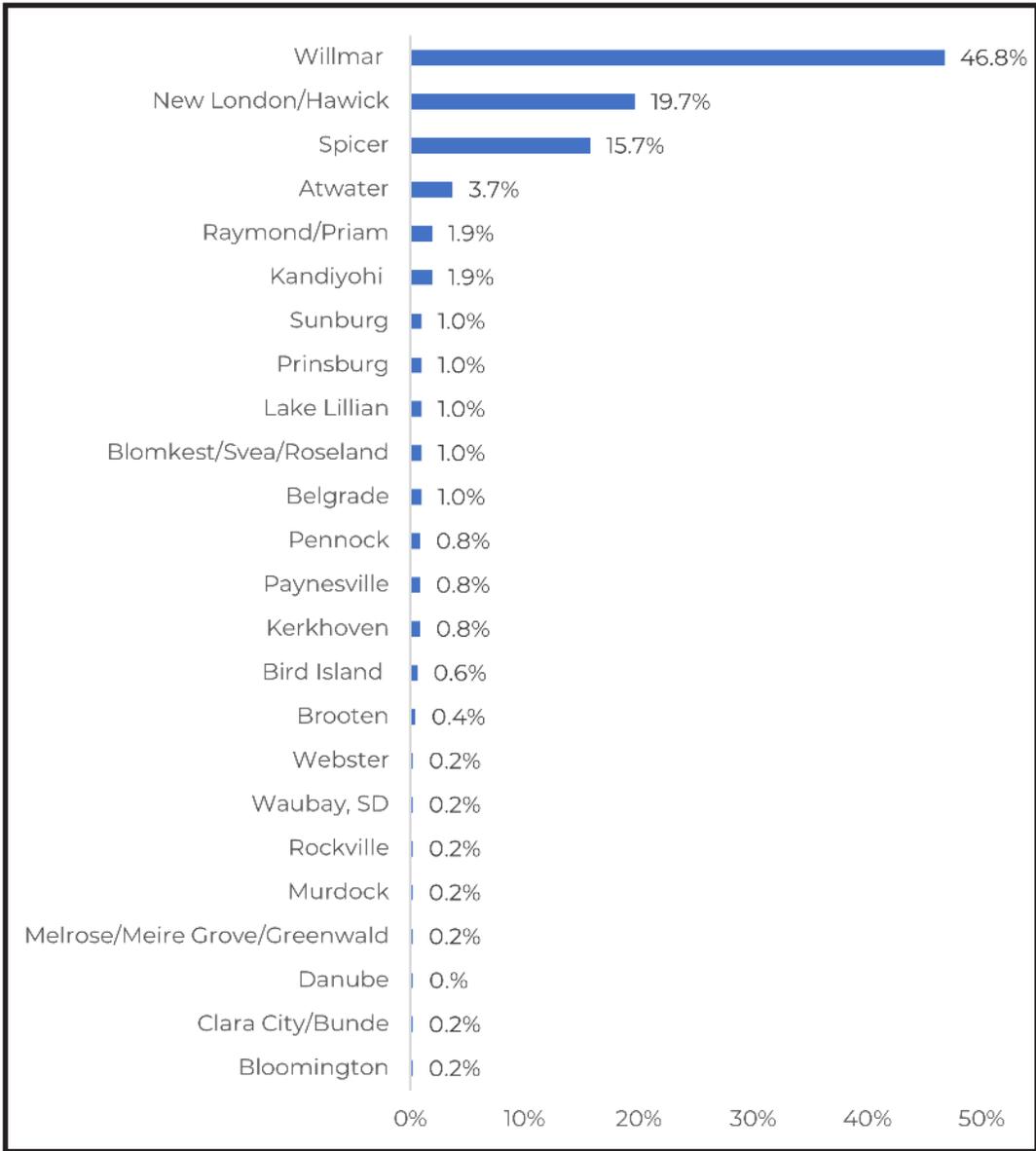
Each of the unique answers provided to this open-ended question can be found in [Appendix B](#). However, several more common themes have been derived. Commonality was found in interest for improved trail signage. Better connectivity to and/or around area lakes and Sibley State Park was also desired. While the number of responses was relatively small, there was notable mention given to the desire for more on-road options (wider shoulders) to allow for biking and walking. Also, the desire for more mountain biking options was mentioned by multiple survey respondents.



Question 9: If you knew more about Kandiyohi County's canoe and kayak waterways (also known as blue trails), would you be more likely to use them? (497 Responses)

Over three quarters of survey respondents indicated that they would be more likely to take advantage of Kandiyohi County's "blue trails" if they knew more about them, with just over half answering "Yes, definitely." Only about 13% indicated that they would not, or at least probably not, take advantage of Kandiyohi County's blue trails. This seems to indicate potential for the development of the county's waterway amenities as a feature for recreation and leisure.





Question 10: Please enter your household's zip code. (483 valid responses)

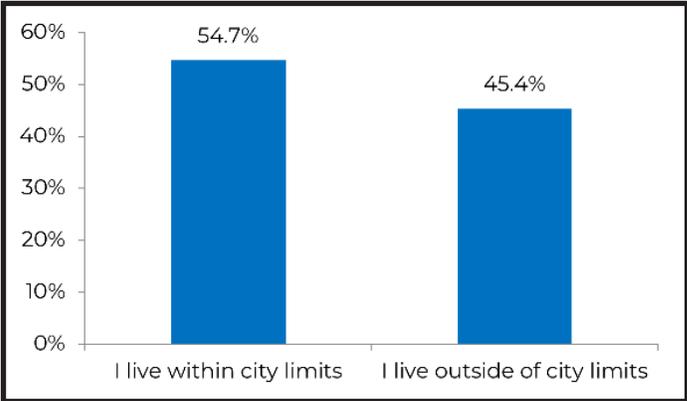
Almost half (46.79 percent) of survey respondents indicated they had a Willmar residence. Just under 20 percent indicated they lived within the New London/Hawick zip code, and almost 16 percent indicated they lived in Spicer. The communities of Atwater, Raymond/Priam, and Kandiyohi were all indicated by more than one but less than four percent of respondents. Other communities, both within and outside of Kandiyohi county, received few mentions.

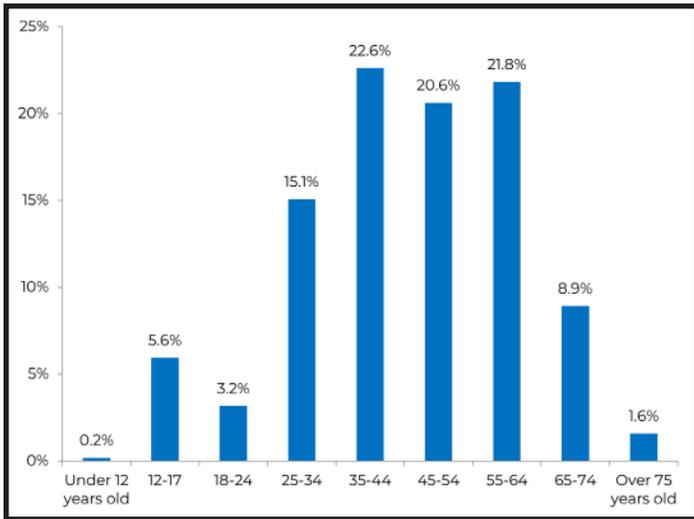
It should be noted that several zip code answers were set aside, as the zip code was not valid. This may have been due to a respondent input/keying error.

It should also be considered that some respondents, who indicated residences further from Kandiyohi County, may be frequent or regular visitors to the area (cabin visitors, vacationers, etc.)

Question 11: Do you live within your town's city limits or is your home in the country? (505 Responses)

To better understand the lifestyles of survey respondents, they were asked to indicate if they reside within or outside of their zip code's city limits. Interestingly, while a recent Kandiyohi County Housing study indicated the almost 63 percent of Kandiyohi County's residents reside within city limits, just under 55 percent of survey respondents indicated they live in town. This shows that the survey received somewhat of a disproportionately higher response from those who live outside of town.





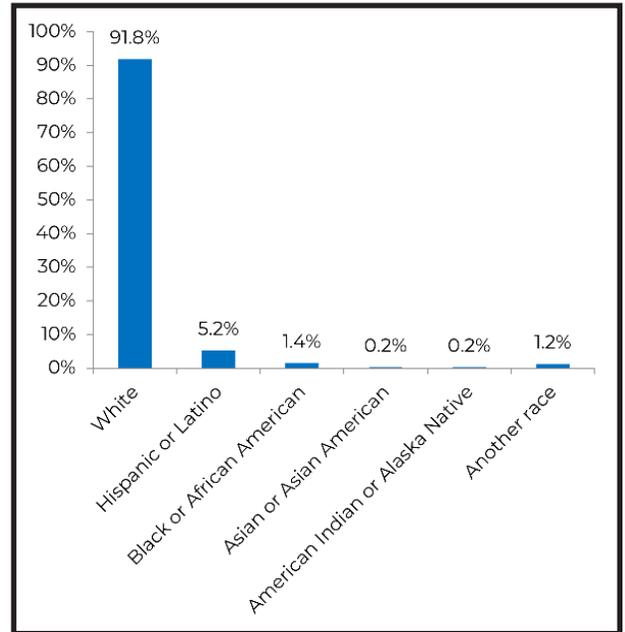
Question 12: What is your age? (504 Responses)

As the needs and interests of trail users are often different at various life phases, it was determined that it would benefit the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan to have a better understanding of respondents' ages. This chart shows a relatively healthy distribution of respondents, across age groups. While not within the largest category of respondents, noteworthy is the fact that more than 10 percent indicated that they were over age 65.

Question 13: Please specify your ethnicity. (498 Responses)

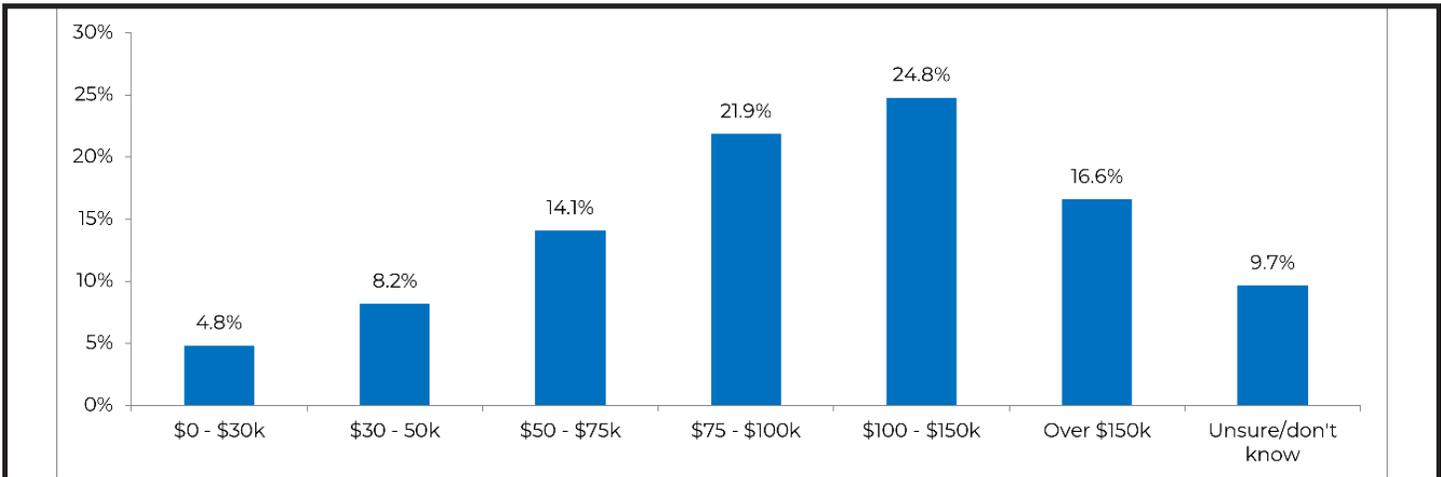
Despite specific outreach to priority populations, including communities of color, the vast majority of survey respondents (almost 92 percent) identified as White. Just over five percent identified as being of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity and less than two percent identified as Black or African American, Asian or Asian American, American Indian or Alaska Native, or another race.

While response rates were lower among people of color, their trail-related needs can and should be considered when developing Kandiyohi County's trail network. This could mean ensuring network access to specific neighborhoods that are home to higher concentrations of people from priority populations or including culturally appropriate amenities (e.g., artistic features that reflect or commemorate a wide variety of cultures).



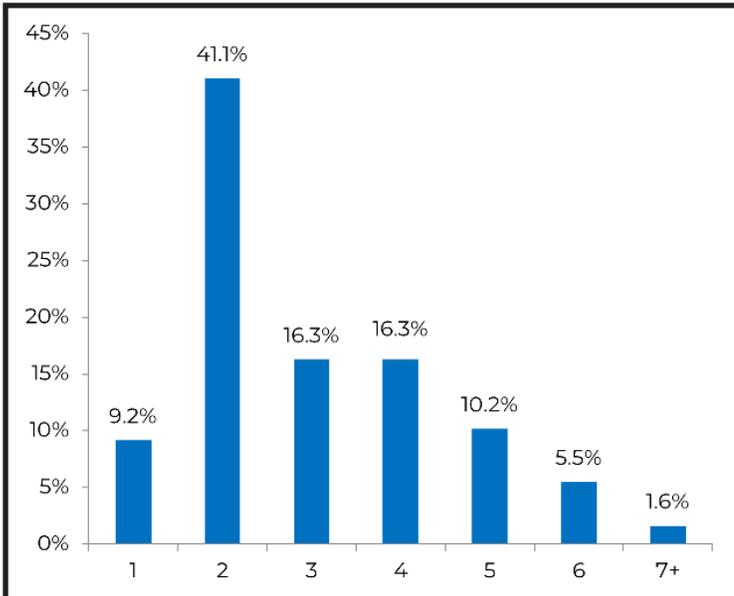
Question 14: What is your household's estimated annual income? (476 Responses)

According to the United States Census Bureau, the median income of Kandiyohi County's households was \$67,798 in 2022. The majority of respondents to this survey indicated household incomes beyond that amount. Over 63 percent indicated a household income of at least \$75,000. This suggests that the typical respondent is more affluent than the median. However, it does not necessarily mean that the average trail user or person interested in being a trail user is of higher means. The needs of those with more limited earnings must be considered when planning trail improvements, especially with regard to access. It should also be considered that providing trail access alone will not assure that all Kandiyohi residents will have their own bicycles available to them. This should be considered when determining locations of any bike-share facilities and when considering trail amenities for those who walk.



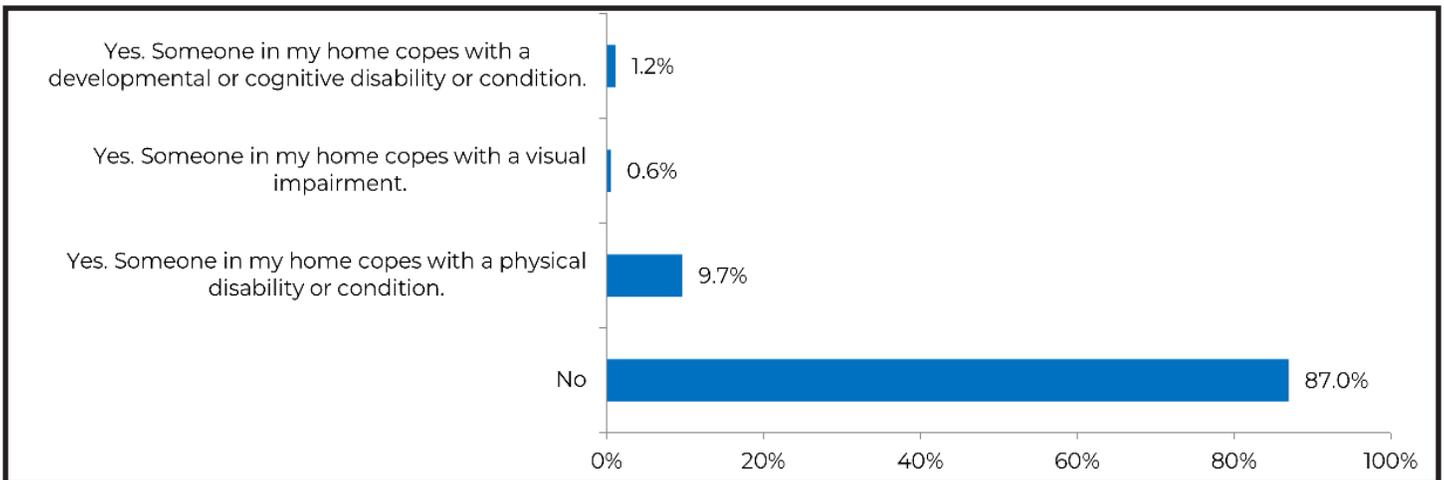
Question 15: How many people, including yourself, live in your household? (492 Responses)

Over 41 percent of respondents indicated they live in a two-person household and just over nine percent indicated they live alone. The remaining half (49.8 percent) indicated they live in a household with three or more people. Most often, this would indicate that the respondent lives in a home that includes individuals from more than one generation, often children or aging adults. The needs of families should be considered when developing Kandiyohi County's trail network. This could include adding amenities such as bathroom facilities, including a wide variety of art features, especially those that might appeal to younger trail users, and ensuring good visibility along the trails where they intersect with motor vehicle traffic.



Question 16: Do you or does anyone in your household cope with a disability that affects their ability to use a trail? (487 Responses)

While a significant majority of respondents indicated that no one in their home has a disability that affects their ability to use a trail, almost 10 percent indicated that they do have or live with someone who has a physical disability or condition. Small numbers also indicated that someone in their home has a cognitive or developmental disability or a visual impairment. It will be important for decision makers to ensure there is ample opportunity for all to enjoy and benefit from the trail system, including those with disabilities. Kandiyohi County should continue to monitor trail condition to ensure compliance is maintained with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). However, while the ADA provides a good basis for trail design, opportunities to go above and beyond this minimum standard should also be considered to the extent possible.



The public input described in this chapter was used by the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Planning Task Force when determining priorities for the future development of County trails. These priorities are outlined in Chapter Four of this plan.

Chapter 4

The intent of Chapter 4 is to outline the bicycle and pedestrian trail projects and amenities the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Plan Task Force deemed the highest priority for the County. This determination was made after great consideration of the wealth of public input received. More general, system-wide, priorities are described first, followed by descriptions of specific trail segment development opportunities that could come to fruition in the coming five to 10 years, funding and logistics permitting. Implementation steps and potential funding sources will be described later, within Chapter Five of this plan.

Kandiyohi County Trail System-Wide Priorities

The Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Task Force identified six trail system priorities. While improvements and developments not featured on this list may come to pass as a result of new funding and opportunities, it is the intent of this plan to express desire and intent for the following:

1. Maintenance of Kandiyohi County's existing trails
2. Improved trail-to-trail and trail to community connectivity
3. Creation of more looped trail routes
4. Incorporation of unique trail destinations and points of interest
5. Addition of trail amenities
6. Installation of improved trail signage

Maintenance of Kandiyohi County's Existing Trails

While the addition of new trail segments and amenities generates enthusiasm, it is just as important to ensure existing trails remain in good condition. Surfaces must be kept smooth and walkable/rideable, without rough areas that could cause bicycle accidents or trips and falls. Adjacent vegetation must also be maintained in such a way that it does not interfere with visibility or access. Litter must be avoided and removed when found. However, it must be acknowledged that County staff time is limited. To help support this effort, it may be feasible to develop an "Adopt a Trail" style opportunity, which gives local residents and trail users the opportunity to assist with the removal of litter and take care of very basic maintenance tasks. These volunteers could also report more significant trail maintenance and safety concerns.

Improved Trail-to-Trail and Trail to Community Connectivity

Most who use Kandiyohi County's trails use them for leisure and recreation rather than for travel to and from work, school, or other destinations of necessity. However, by making it easier to connect from one trail to the next, Kandiyohi County can accommodate both types of trail users. Improved trail connectivity will allow recreational users better opportunity to incorporate route variety into their routines while also making it easier for those who want or need to walk or bike to their intended destinations.

It is also important to connect walkers and bicyclists with neighborhoods, parks, schools, and businesses. These are the places where people are and/or the places where people want or need to travel to. With improved community connectivity, more individuals will be able to take the opportunity to walk or bike to their destination for any number of economic, environmental, health, or other reasons.

Creation of More Looped Trail Routes

Most trail users, especially recreational users, prefer circular trail routes that largely avoid the need for out-and-back trips, otherwise known as "backtracking". Looped routes typically begin and end in the same place but follow a non-repeating route around an area. Since there is a constant flow of new scenery, these routes often seem more interesting to walkers, runners, bicyclists and, in the case of water trails, to kayakers, paddleboarders, and canoeers. Looped routes also tend to change direction more frequently than out-and-back routes. This allows the trail user to reduce time spent battling headwinds or coping with sun in their eyes.

Looped walking/running and bicycle routes can include roadside walking/riding, off-road trails, or a combination of the two. They can be relatively short (e.g., the circular walking trail found at Robbins Island Regional Park, on the north side of Willmar), or can stretch for great lengths. Often times, pedestrians and bicyclists enjoy routes that circle area lakes.



A construction crew repairs a section of paved trail.



The Green Lake Loop provides an example of a circular, or "Looped" route around a Kandiyohi County Lake.



Different loop types and sizes will appeal to different audiences. While a smaller loop might be enjoyed by a more casual users, families with young children, or individuals with more limited mobility, a larger loop might appeal to fit, long-distance users who prefer less crowding as they strive to put more distance behind them while running or pedaling at a high rate of speed. Different interests and types of users should be considered when determining appropriate loops. As mentioned when discussing trail-to-trail connectivity, trails should be developed when there is an opportunity to connect other walking and biking routes to form loops. The incorporation of wide shoulders and appropriate signage/markings should also be considered when planning road construction projects to create attractive on-road loops. As with all projects, analysis of each project's cost will need to be weighed against the benefits the project provides when determining the potential of such projects.

Incorporation of Unique Trail Destinations and Points of Interest

Often times, those who walk, roll, run, hike, or bike enjoy having a destination in mind. These provide a way to measure progress and reward accomplishment. While one might think of a hiking trail that leads to a beautiful waterfall or mountain vista, destinations can also be as simple as a bench with some shade and the view of a pleasant scene, such as a flowery meadow, lake, or smaller wetland. Person made features, such as bridges, memorials, and buildings can also serve well as destinations for trail users, as can businesses that provide refreshment (e.g., ice cream shops, breweries).

In addition to providing destinations, a well-designed trail should also include as many points of interest as practical and feasible along its entire length. Points of interest can add character to a trail or route while also providing a natural opportunity for a break to rest, rehydrate, or simply reflect. In addition to simple benches and shaded areas, points of interest could include natural features or vistas; interpretive signs that inform on local flora, fauna, history, and/or geology. They can even include public art installations or, for more fitness-minded trail users exercise stations. When trails offer a wide variety of interest points, they offer broader appeal; a little something for everyone.



This Bridge, which Crosses the Glacial Lakes State Trail, Provides a Point of Interest between Spicer and New London, MN

When trails offer a wide variety of interest points, they offer broader appeal; a little something for everyone.



Interpretive signage and art installations can add interest and enrichment. Above, an education-focused sign found in Sibley State Park (Left) and a millstone turned art piece found near the portage trail at New London, MN's Mill Pond dam area (Right).



GEOCACHING



One fun and inexpensive way to encourage trail use and add trail interest is to incorporate a geocaching activity. Geocaching is an outdoor recreational activity in which participants use a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver or mobile device and other navigational techniques to hide and seek containers, called “geocaches” or, simply “caches”, at specific locations marked by coordinates all over the world. A typical cache is a small, waterproof container that contains a logbook and a pen or a pencil. The geocacher signs the log with their established code name and dates it to prove that they were able to discover the cache. After signing, the cache is returned to the exact place where it was discovered. Sometimes, caches also include small toys or other trinkets with no real monetary value. These items are meant to be exchanged. When the geocacher discovers the cache, they replace one trinket with another. While there are many people who prefer to geocache independently, this activity often provides a good opportunity for family bonding.

In 2016, game developer Niantic collaborated with the gaming giant Nintendo to capitalize on the geocaching phenomenon with the release of Pokémon Go. This augmented reality mobile game also uses mobile devices with GPS to locate, “capture”, “train”, and even “battle” virtual creatures, called Pokémon,



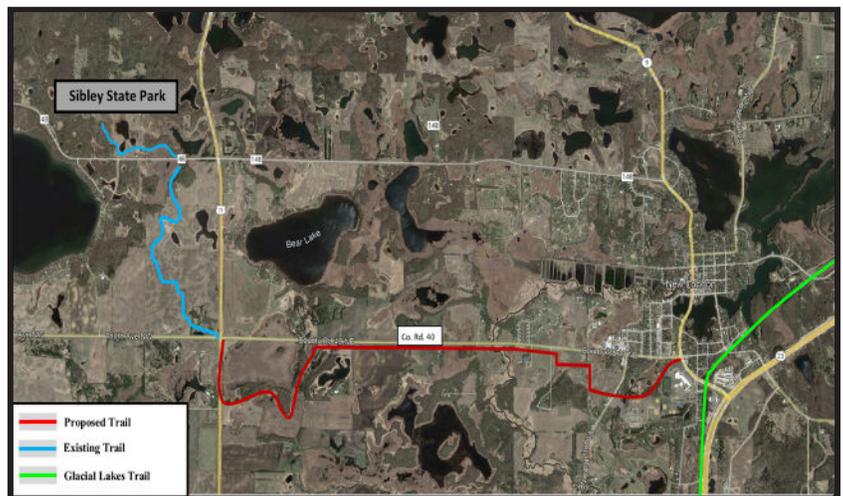
Prioritized Trail Projects

During the planning process, potential trail projects were identified through discussion with the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan Taskforce, which included staff from Kandiyohi County’s Public Works department. These discussions were heavily informed and influenced by public input, including responses to the Kandiyohi County Trails Survey as well as conversations had and comments shared during public engagement events. For additional details regarding the survey and open houses, please refer to Chapter Three of this plan. Prioritized trail projects are described in the following pages. It is important to note that their inclusion in this plan does not indicate definitive development or funding commitments from Kandiyohi County. Instead, the intent is to describe a collection of potential projects that the County would be inclined to support should funding and strong stakeholder assistance/collaboration become available. Given uncertain project timing, cost estimates have not been included. Trails development priorities include:

Completion of a Trail that Connects the Glacial Lakes State Trail to Sibley State Park

Length: Approximately 3.5 miles

In 2022, a new, long-awaited, 3-mile, paved multi-use trail was completed within the borders of Sibley State Park. That trail connected the park’s visitor center to its southeast corner, at the intersection of U.S. Highway 71 and Kandiyohi County Road 40. A pedestrian underpass was also installed, allowing trail users to safely cross both roadways without traffic. However, the completion of a trail to connect that underpass to the Glacial Lakes State Trail is still needed. While a capital investment bonding bill approved during the 2023 session of the Minnesota State Legislature included \$3 million for the development of this important, three-and-a-half mile trail link, the total cost of the project is expected to be over \$6 million. While the State’s bonding will allow the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to begin planning and design work, additional funding will be needed to bring the trail to fruition.





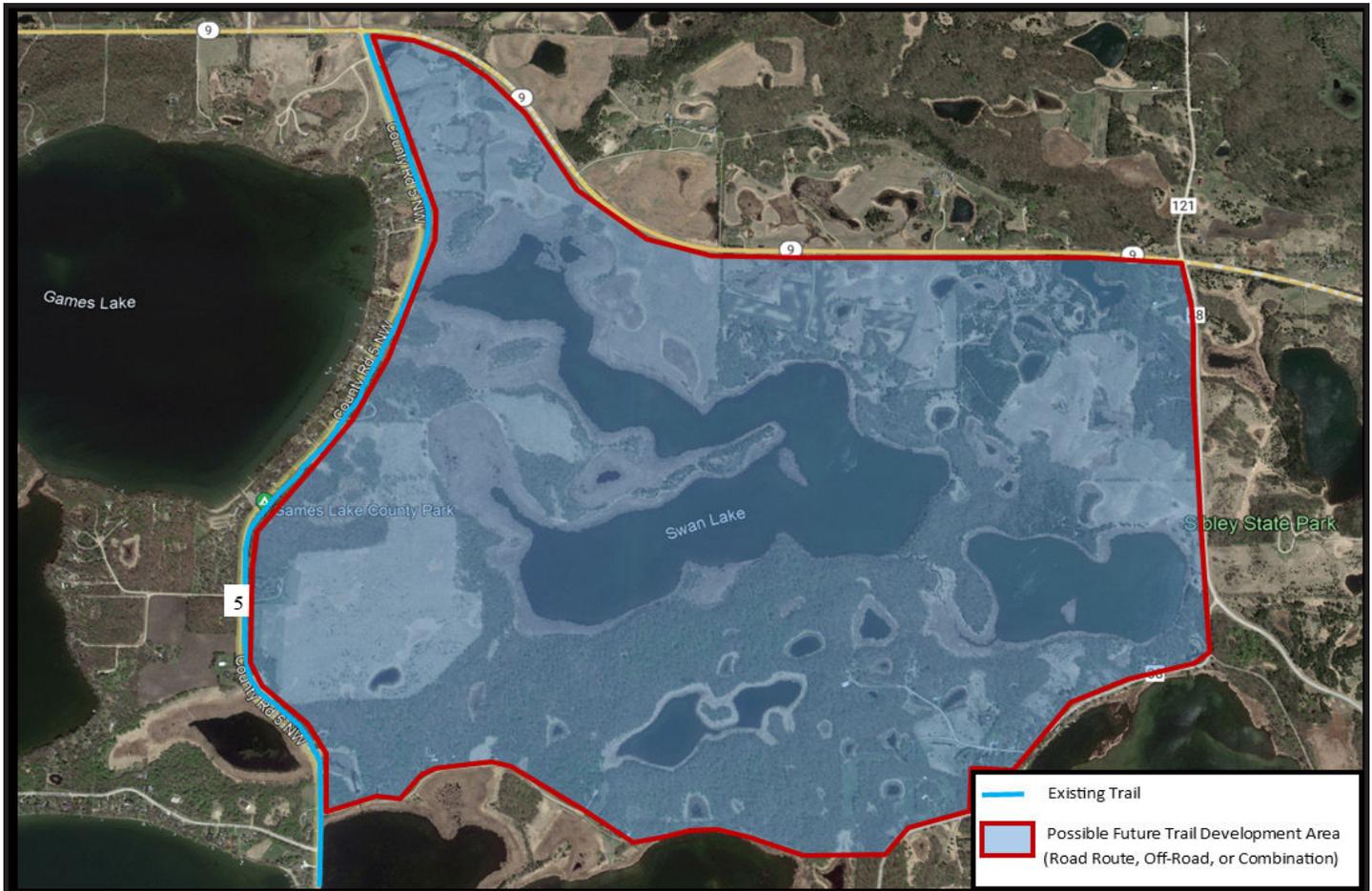
A segment of Sibley State Park Trail, Completed in 2022



A pedestrian underpass allows trail users to cross U.S. Hwy. 71 and Kandiyohi County Rd. 40 without traffic

Completion of a Trail to Connect the West Side of Sibley State Park to Kandiyohi County Road 5

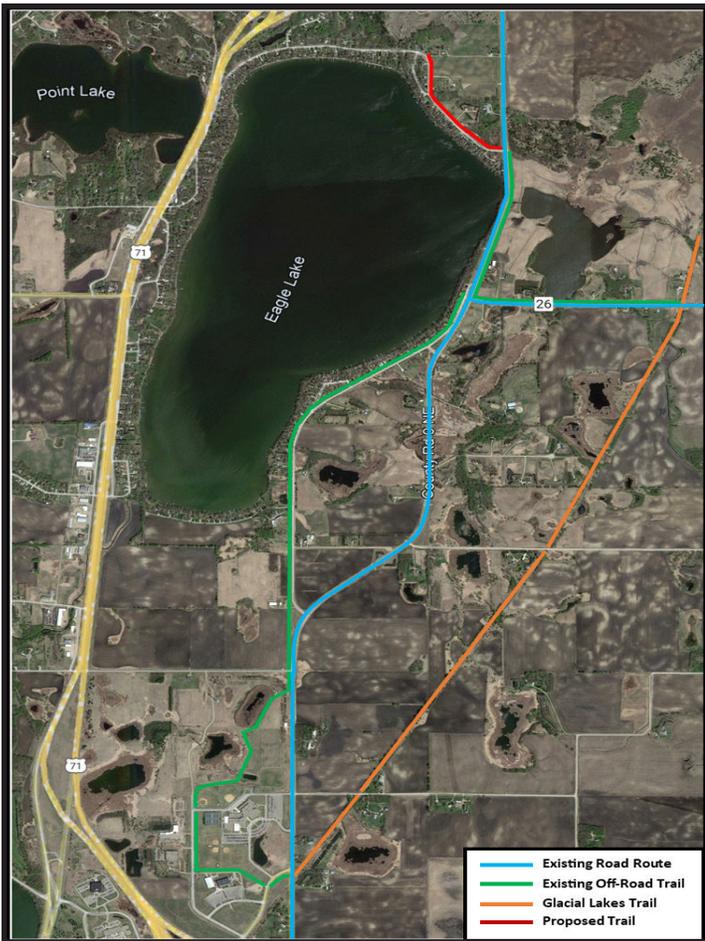
Trail Length: Approximately 1.7 - 2 miles (dependent on course taken)



A trail connecting Sibley State Park's west side to the existing trail along Kandiyohi County 5 would provide an enjoyable route between Sibley State Park and both Nor-way Lake and Games Lake, including Games Lake County Park. In the above image, an area of possible trail development is shown. A new trail, which could include both on-road and off-road segments, would carry users through a scenic portion of Kandiyohi County, with lake, prairie, and prairie pothole views. This trail could draw and serve vacationing and recreating visitors as well as County residents. This would be an ambitious and expensive project. As such, this trail's development should be considered an aspirational goal.



Games Lake County Park provides recreation opportunities along Kandiyohi County Road 5 and Norway/Games Lake Trail.



Addition of a Northeast Segment to the Eagle Lake Trail

Trail Length: Approximately 0.5 miles

The addition of this shorter trail segment would improve safety for walkers and bikers along a relatively busy roadway near Kandiyohi County's popular Eagle Lake. It would also improve trail users' ability to create a looped route around the lake, which lies just north of Willmar, Kandiyohi County's largest and most diverse community.



Kandiyohi County's Eagle Lake, seen here at dusk

Extension of Trails Around Diamond Lake

Trail Length: Approximately 4.7 to 6.1 miles (dependent on course taken)

Diamond Lake is another of Kandiyohi County's popular recreational lakes. It is also home to Diamond Lake County Park and two public water access (i.e. boat launch) facilities. Many bikers and walkers enjoy traveling around the lake for leisure or exercise. Since the completion of the 2017 Kandiyohi County Bicycle & Pedestrian plan, the first phase of a lake loop route has been constructed at Diamond Lake's west and southwest sides. Additional segments of off-road trail, on-road route (wide road shoulders), or a combination of these would improve safety for those circling the lake serving local residents and area visitors/vacationers.



Adding a Bike Route to Connect Eagle Lake and Diamond Lake

Trail Length: Approximately 5.2 miles

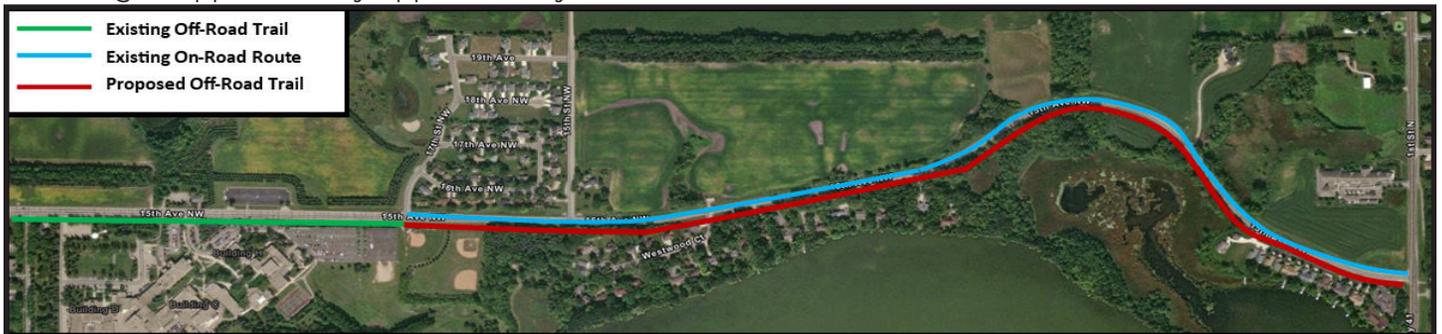
Providing an on-road bike lane or off-road trail along Kandiyohi County Road 26 would be advantageous, especially to more serious cyclists who prefer longer treks. A trail of this nature would improve safety and capitalize on existing trails County at either end, as well as the Glacial Lakes State Trail.



A west-facing view of Kandiyohi County Rd. 26

Development of an on- or off-road trail connecting Robbins Island Regional Park to Ridgewater College

Trail Length: Approximately Approximately 2.1 Miles



A trail along Kandiyohi County Road 24 would improve safety and make for a more enjoyable experience for many who wish to bike or walk along that route. Included along this stretch of roadway, along with several residential developments, is the largest community college within the immediate area. As a result, traffic along this roadway can be fairly heavy at times, which can make walking and biking more hazardous, particularly toward the east, where curves in the road limit driver and pedestrian visibility. Like the proposed Eagle Lake to Diamond Lake route, this new trail would be connected by other County trails at each end. It would provide a welcome connection and the opportunity for an additional looped route.



Curves along Kandiyohi County Road 24 limit visibility and increase the risk for vehicle-pedestrian and vehicle-cyclist crashes

Add a Trail Along 153rd Avenue NE,

Trail Length: Approximately 0.5 miles

The addition of a relatively short off-road trail along 153rd Avenue NE, in New London Township would branch off of the Glacial Lakes State Trail, terminating at or near the Church of Our Lady of the Lakes. This trail would provide improved access to the Glacial Lakes State Trail for over 50 local households.

Just off Minnesota State Highway 23, this stretch of 153rd Avenue is fairly narrow and is known to be fairly busy at times, especially before and after weekend church services. An off road trail, such as the one described and depicted by the red line within the image below could help to improve safety for walkers and bicyclists (the Glacial Lakes State Trail is shown in green).



An east-facing view of 153rd Avenue NE, from the State Trail

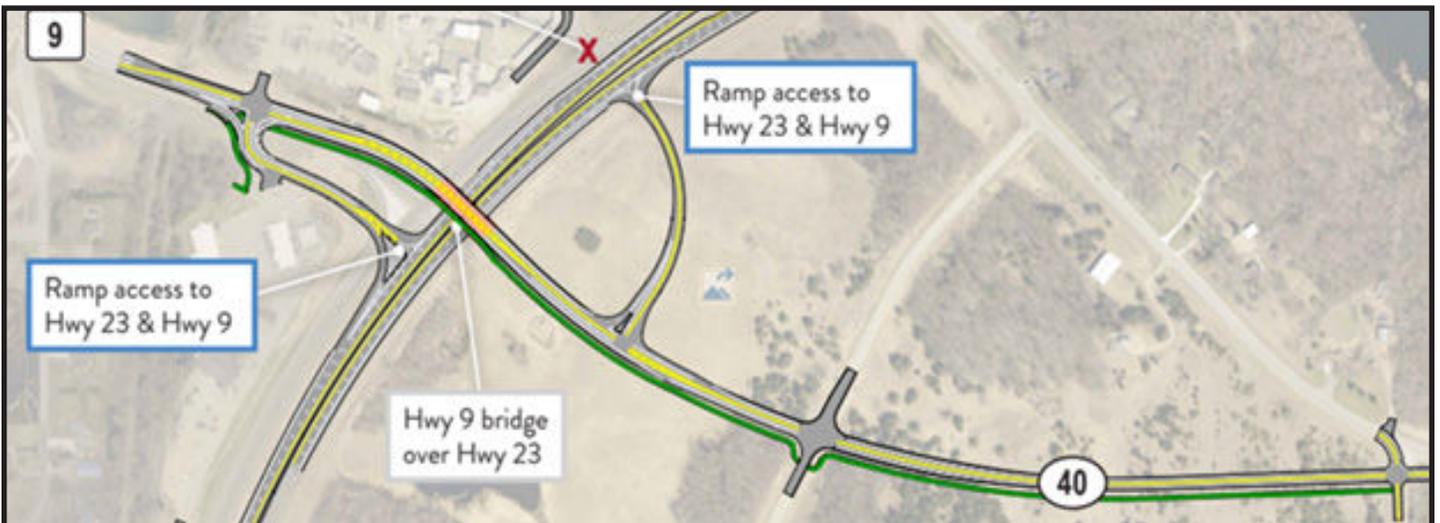


Capitalize on the New Interchange at the Intersection of MN Highway 23 and County Highway 9

Trail Length: To Be Determined

To improve traffic safety, the Minnesota Department of Transportation has, with considerable public input, made the decision to build an interchange at the intersection of Highways 23 and 9, in New London. This construction is currently slated for 2028-2029 (subject to change). Drafted improvements currently include a trail across the busy state highway for walkers and bicyclists, depicted below by a green line.

This interchange, with trail inclusion, will provide good access to new developments, including the Bethesda North Point senior living and care community, on the east/southeast side of Highway 23. As depicted above, the trail will initially extend as far as 85th street NE. This development may provide the county with additional opportunities to thoughtfully expand the trail network and further improve connectivity for New London area walkers and bikers.



An excerpt from MnDOT's project draft with the bicycle and pedestrian trail depicted in green

Explore Further Development and Improvement of Kandiyohi County's Blue/Water Trails

In addition to improving and developing Kandiyohi County's bicycle and pedestrian trails, there is some opportunity for the County to further improve opportunities for recreation and economic development via the improvement of Kandiyohi County's water trails. It is notable that over 50 percent of survey respondents provided the multiple choice answer of "Yes, definitely" to the question "If you knew more about Kandiyohi County's canoe and kayak waterways (also known as blue trails), would you be more likely to use them?" Another 28 percent answered with "probably". This indicates serious interest in blue/water trails.

It is believed that multiple entities might be willing and able to collaborate with Kandiyohi County for this blue water trail development. These might include the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Middle Fork Crow River Watershed District, local Chambers of Commerce, Mid-Minnesota Development Commission, Kandiyohi County Economic Development, the Willmar Lakes Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, state and local elected officials, and more. It's possible that this collaboration could eventually lead to state water trail designation. State Water Trails include rivers that have historic and scenic values and appropriately mark points of interest, portages, campsites, and all dams, rapids waterfalls, whirlpools, and other serious hazards that are dangers to canoe and watercraft travelers. The State Water Trail Designation could result in additional state and/or federal protections for these waterways and, potentially, for funding to support maintenance and to make desired improvements.

 Some improvements along Kandiyohi County's blue/water trails could include:

 The creation of a legal portage between Middle Lake and Norway Lake.

 Enhancing common blue/water trail launching and landing points to ensure quality access for all, including people with disabilities.

 Improving parking infrastructure for waterway users at the most frequently used access points.

 Improving trail signage (e.g., informational signage, wayfinding and distance markers, etc.).

It is noteworthy that, while the middle fork of the Crow River does not yet have a State Water Trail designation, portions of both the north and south forks have been added to the list of Minnesota's water trails.



38 <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/d8/projects/hwy23newlondon/documents/Draft%20concept%20interchange8.30.22.pdf>
39 <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/project-development/subject-guidance/wild-scenic-rivers/process.html>

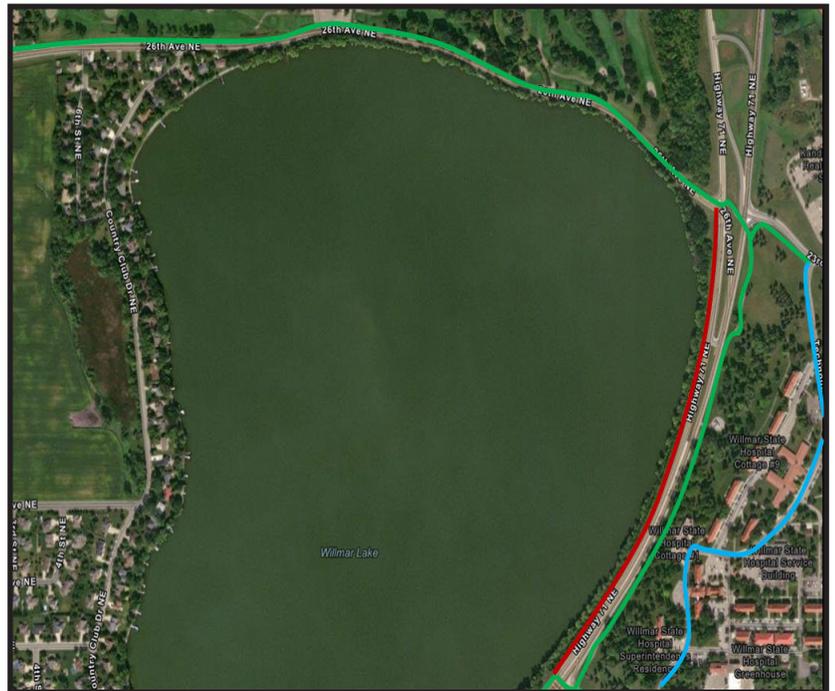
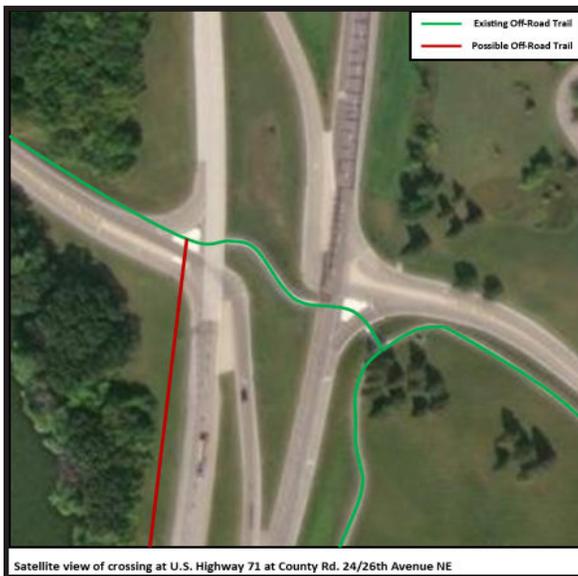
Addition of a Segment, West of U.S. Hwy. 71, to Improve Safety

Trail Length: Approximately 0.6 miles

In 2023, Kandiyohi County Public Works completed a Willmar Lake Trail segment, improving user safety along a relatively narrow stretch of Kandiyohi County Road 24/26th Avenue NE. This new segment now carries those traveling between Willmar Lake and Eagle Creek Golf Course. Previously, this busy stretch of road had been difficult and dangerous for on-road walkers and bikers to navigate, limiting its recreational use.

While the new trail segment has greatly improved safety for walkers and bicyclists, crossing U.S. Highway 71 to connect to the next trail segments along the busy highway's east side, continues to be a challenge. A large number of motor vehicles travel this stretch of four-lane, divided highway, where the posted speed is 55 miles per hour. Despite a wide median, which provides a good deal of refuge for walkers and bicyclists, crossings must be well-timed. While technically possible, it may be cost prohibitive or otherwise impractical to improve pedestrian safety at this crossing to the extent desired.

As an alternative, to further improve safety, it may be prudent to invest in the development of a trail extension along Willmar Lake, along Willmar Lake, west of U.S. Highway 71 and between Civic Center Drive and County Road 24. This would give trail users opportunity to cross U.S. Highway 71 at an existing stoplight, while also providing means to completely circumnavigate Willmar Lake with a high degree of safety.



Prioritized Trail Amenities

In addition to prioritizing trail and trail segment development, the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan Taskforce has used public input to identify a number of trail amenities that will improve the trail experience and entice additional trail users. These amenities include:

Restrooms

A number of specific trail amenities were identified as priorities by the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan Taskforce. However, through public engagement, it became apparent that trailside restroom facilities were desired by many. Whether permanent structures or portable units, restrooms can add convenience and comfort while improving accessibility for those with conditions that result in more frequent or regimented toileting needs. Restrooms can also promote safety, cleanliness, and a more family-friendly environment. By incorporating well-maintained and accessible facilities at trailheads and/or other appropriate locations that ensure accessibility for maintenance personnel, Kandiyohi County can encourage more, and more enjoyable, trail use.



A two-room vault toilet, similar to the one pictured here, will be installed at the Glacial Lakes State Trailhead, near Willmar's Civic Center.



Water Stations

Water stations serve an important trail infrastructure function and are another vital amenity for trail users and any four-legged friends who might have accompanied them on their trek. These stations improve the safety and wellbeing of trail users, especially in warmer months, by providing access to potable water, giving users the opportunity to avoid or even treat dehydration and/or heat exhaustion. Water stations also provide a venue for trail users to wash their hands and moisten neck gaiters, headbands, and other cooling apparel. Furthermore, water stations promote environmental sustainability by encouraging the use of reusable water bottles and reducing reliance on disposable plastic bottles.

The Water Station Shown Here is Designed for Pet as Well as People.

Rest Areas

Comfortable rest areas, particularly those that offer shade or basic shelter from the elements, can significantly enhance bicycle and pedestrian trails. These rest stops can offer essential relief from the midday sun and even provide minimal shelter during unexpected rain or hail events. More often, these stops provide a simple sanctuary, giving an opportunity to rest, recharge, and even reflect. Additionally, these stops can become spaces that encourage social interaction, promoting a sense of community with other trail users, thereby enhancing the overall trail experience.

The design of a rest area can vary widely. They could be as simple as a large sitting-height boulder placed within a shaded area along the trail. Rest areas can also be highly involved, offering restroom and water station facilities, picnic areas, waste bins, and even playgrounds. Most often, rest areas are something in-between. It will be important for County decision makers to ensure that rest area investments are right-sized and are appropriate for any considered location.



The picnic table (right, top) and bench (right, bottom), both offer a place to relax as well as a measure of protection from the midday sun. Incorporating one of these units, along with a waste bin, may prove to be a right-sized rest area approach in many instances, especially in wide-open areas with little natural shade.

Art

In addition to providing interesting landmarks for trail users, art installations help to provide a more engaging, immersive user experience. They create a visually stimulating and thought provoking environment. On an art walk or art-focused trail, users encounter various artistic media along their journey. These might include sculptures, murals, mosaics, and even writings that evoke emotion, ignite curiosity, or spark creativity. While one piece may be representative of a serious societal condition or event, another may be more whimsical, intended only to encourage a smile.

Art can transform any trail into a dynamic and vibrant outdoor gallery, where users are naturally encouraged to pause, reflect, and engage. These spaces create unique, memorable experiences that move the trail user beyond the physical act of walking or cycling, fostering a deeper connection between the user and the area. Given their uniqueness, art walks/trails can also be inviting to out-of-town visitors, who may also visit local establishments and have a positive economic impact.

When considering art installations, it will be important for the County to consider things like appropriateness and durability. It would be wise to request the assistance of those with more knowledge in this area. One such entity is the Southwest Minnesota Arts Council (SMAC). This organization is a good source of both funds and technical services that empower local organizations, educational institutions, and individuals to sponsor and/or create and promote the arts in their communities. More information on the SMAC organization can be found at: <https://swmnarts.org/>. Local schools, artists, and enthusiasts should also be recruited to take part in the incorporation of art projects so that the end result is an artistic feature that better reflects the local culture.



Signage and Wayfinding

Proper signage and wayfinding markers can be important features for a variety of reasons. Clear and visible signage helps trail users navigate and adhere to their intended path, reducing the risk of getting lost or confused. Wayfinding signage provides useful information about trail distances, points of interest, trailheads, and amenities, empowering users to more effectively plan their excursion.

Quality signage can also provide specific location information, which can be used as a reference in the case of an emergency and can help trail users avoid hazardous areas. By investing in proper signage and wayfinding, Kandiyohi County can create a more user-friendly environment that encourages exploration, reduces potential risks, and enhances the overall enjoyment and accessibility of its trail system.

A sign found along the Glacial Lakes State Trail. This sign includes a detailed map, informs on permitted trail uses and informs on a requirement for a Minnesota Horse Trail Pass.

Trail Applications

It is vital that all trails be updated on commonly used trail applications, or “apps” to ensure accurate and up-to-date information for less familiar trail users. By having trail information readily available on an application, in addition to the County’s website, Kandiyohi County can ensure users have access to the latest trail condition, closure, and other relevant information. This could even include pointing out and advising caution around known patches of poison ivy or other irritating vegetation. When users have better information, they’re able to make better, more informed decisions and plan their trip more effectively.



While there are many, AllTrails is one of the most widely used trail applications in the United States (This should not be considered an endorsement)



First Aid Stations

When located along Trails, first aid stations can provide users with some basic supplies and information that can be accessed during emergencies until professional help can arrive. These stations help to ensure the safety and well-being of trail users.

While simple first aid stations may resemble little more than a basic first aid kit, more advanced first aid stations may now include an Automated External Defibrillator (or AED). These can be potentially life saving devices in the case of a cardiac emergency. Modern AED cabinets now have the ability to automatically contact authorities and summon assistance, so that the person who accessed the cabinet can focus on tending to the person in peril.

By prioritizing user safety and instilling confidence, first aid stations contribute to a positive and secure trail experience.

This AED Unit, found within the City of St. Cloud, MN, automatically and immediately summons assistance when the unit is accessed.



Chapter 5

This chapter of the Kandiyohi Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails plan guides plan implementation by outlining key action steps that should be implemented by Kandiyohi County and other involved trail stakeholders to assure continued trail network development. The chapter also provides information on a number of potential funding sources that might support goal attainment. It should be understood that it may be difficult to fund and implement all identified trail priority projects in the short term. However, it is important to be ready to proceed with projects when the timing is right and/or when opportunities present (e.g., new grant opportunities or complimentary development projects).

Implementation

The value and success of the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan will largely be determined by the extent to which stakeholders (Kandiyohi County and other trail-interested parties) are able to organize, secure funding, and bring projects to fruition. Kandiyohi County's Public Works Department will play a large role by budgeting for and facilitating projects. Ultimately, the support of Kandiyohi County's Board of Commissioners will be required as, to a significant degree, County funds will be required. In addition to appropriate funds, the Board must be willing to agree to the terms attached to any dollars provided by grantors or other financial contributors to complete projects at a reduced County expense. These terms may include reporting, funder acknowledgment, or other requirements. Requirements may be relatively minor or quite significant, and so each funding opportunity should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis before accepting any outside trail dollars.



To maintain adequate trail network development progress, and successfully implement this Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan, the following action steps are recommended.

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1. **Continue to Engage the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan Taskforce, or a Similar Group –** Although the task force was assembled specifically to assist with the development of this plan, they offer a good deal of useful perspective and expertise. Having this, or another trails-focused volunteer group meet on an occasional basis, perhaps quarterly, would help to ensure continuous implementation progress. This group could help to identify trail network issues, find and help with the pursuit of funding opportunities, engage the broader public, and determine short-term priorities. This group could be facilitated by Kandiyohi County staff or by an outside professional or volunteer to reduce additional staff burdens.
2. **Improve/Increase Trail Signage –** Chapter Four highlighted numerous trail projects that included the installation of trail route signage along trails and, in the case of roadside routes, along designated roadways. This activity may include placement of directional signs, mile markers, informational signs that point trail users to local businesses or amenities like restrooms. Additionally, interpretive signage could be installed to provide trail users with educational information on locations' history, geology, flora, or fauna. This type of signage could make trail use a more enriching experience. While Kandiyohi County's Public Works Department would likely be responsible for the installation of the signage, the Task Force could help to identify specific sign locations and content. If installed thoughtfully, in such a way that avoids unnecessary cluttering, trail signage will enhance user-friendliness, ensuring a more enjoyable and convenient user experience.



Simple Bike Route Signs Can Help Riders Adhere to On-Road Trail Routes (Above)

Example of an Interpretive Sign from Minnesota's Minneopa State Park (Below)



Existing Kandiyohi County Trail Map Sign.

3. **Establish an “Adopt-a-Trail” or Similar Program** – Adopt-a-Trail programs, at their most basic level, can be thought of as being similar to Minnesota’s Adopt-A-Highway Program, with which many are familiar. These programs encourage trail-focused volunteerism and even sponsorship that could help Kandiyohi County maintain and improve trail segments. While Adopt-a-Highway programs typically concentrate solely on litter cleanup, a tailor-made Adopt-a-Trail-style program could provide opportunities for other tasks, like mowing, basic tree trimming, sign and feature maintenance. These programs can also provide an avenue to identify and report maintenance needs or suggest trail improvements (e.g., added amenities and locations for them). Furthermore, Adopt-a-Trail groups can assist with the fundraising and grant-writing necessary to improve trails. While coordination would be necessary, it might be possible to use a County-supervised volunteer for this purpose. This proactive approach to trail care and development would encourage community involvement and investment while fostering a sense of trail ownership.



What is an “Adopt-a-Trail” Program and How Could It Help Kandiyohi County’s Trails?

An Adopt-a-Trail program is a volunteer program that allows members of the public to be active participants in preserving the beauty and recreational value of trails. Volunteers could assist Kandiyohi County staff as they work to keep trails safe and looking great for all to enjoy. This volunteer force could be comprised of individuals but could also incorporate assistance from interested community organizations, church groups, businesses, schools, or families.

Adopt-a-Trail volunteer responsibilities could include but might not be limited to:

- Picking up and bagging trailside litter,
- Clearing small debris and/or encroaching vegetation,
- Monitoring the condition of the trails, amenities, and signs, and reporting issues to County staff, and/or
- Participating in trail beautification or improvement projects

Basic tools and equipment (e.g., gloves, trash bags, trash grabbers/reach tools) could be supplied by the County or volunteers could be encouraged to provide their own. Volunteers could be recognized via simple signage, acknowledgement by the Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners, or by other means.

It should be acknowledged that any program of this sort will require coordination. While this coordination responsibility could be given to County staff, it may be more advantageous to incorporate coordinating staff who are volunteers themselves. This may be a terrific volunteer opportunity for a person or persons who prefer to volunteer from home or who are unable to perform more physical tasks.



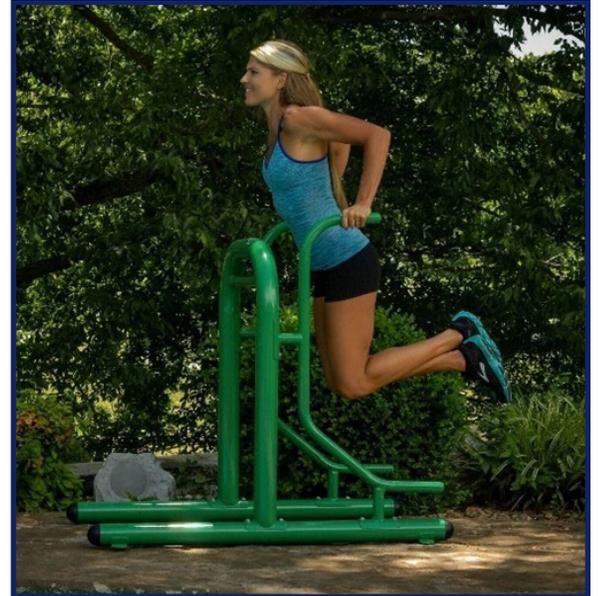
The community of Shoreview, MN is one example of a community with an active Adopt-a-Trail program

4. **Add Trail Amenities** - Throughout the planning process, the desire for added trail amenities was shared by many. In addition to signage, which was previously discussed, desired amenities include, but are not limited to, trail-adjacent motor vehicle parking facilities, restroom facilities, water stations, benches, lighting, and bike racks. Along with these trail amenities, art installations, trailside fitness stations, or other, less traditional amenities could also be considered.

When possible, new and existing trails should be enhanced with these amenities, as this will help to draw people, from within Kandiyohi County's borders and beyond, to the trails and assure a more comfortable, enjoyable experience. Amenity additions and improvements could be prioritized by County staff, with assistance and input from any involved trails taskforce or Adopt-a-Trail volunteers. These groups could also raise funds to support the improvements.



A Bike Repair Station, Bench, and Informational Sign, Found along Kandiyohi County's Green Lake Trail



Outdoor sculptures, like this one found in Bemidji, MN (left) can add interest, attract visitors, and reflect local culture. Fitness stations (right) can also add value and give trail users a chance to include upper muscle groups.

5. **Establish a Trails Fund** – The County should consider the establishment of a ‘trails fund’ that would receive an annual allocation as a line item within the county budget. Accumulating funds over time, this dedicated fund could fund projects in their entirety or provide the local match typically required to compete for grants that would support more ambitious projects. Additionally, while parameters would need to be established and contributor expectations managed, a trails fund could serve as a central depository for donations from trail enthusiasts or dollars raised through events and/or other fund development. The trail fund could be structured in such a way that provides donors with the opportunity to give for specific projects or for more general trail needs at County discretion. The establishment of this trails fund could help to ensure a sustainable and reliable source of funding for the ongoing improvement and expansion of the trail network, while also giving the community an easy way to contribute.



6. **Provide Trail Condition Reports** – It is recommended that Kandiyohi County staff collaborate with other stakeholders to develop a process for trail condition reports. These reports could be made by trail volunteers and other trail users and collected by County staff or even a volunteer, who would post the report using a highly accessible platform. This platform could be an existing trails application, a Kandiyohi County Trails-focused social media site, or even a page on the Kandiyohi County website. Problems would then be addressed by County staff, as needed. It will be important to inform trail users on how to view and submit trail condition reports. This could be accomplished by posting simple signage at common points of trail entry and exit. By taking a proactive approach, the County will ensure the timelier identification and resolution of problems and improve upkeep and safety along the entire trail network.



7. **Ensure Appropriate Trail Use & Enforcement** - To ensure trail users have a good understanding of trail rules and expectations, multiple communication methods should be employed. Strategically placed kiosks and signs will offer precise details regarding permitted trail uses, allowed and prohibited activities, and directions for paying fees or procuring any necessary permits. Printed materials and web-based resources, including maps, can also disseminate similar information to the public. Beyond written materials, quick response (QR) codes could take trail users to a website that includes videos that describe trail expectations in multiple languages.

The responsibility to enforce regulations, handle emergencies, and address criminal activity would typically fall under the purview of the Kandiyohi County Sheriff's Office. Through signage and other means, it is advisable to inform the public of how to report vandalism and unsafe or unlawful behavior. By employing these comprehensive measures, the County can enhance trail users' awareness, compliance, and safety, fostering a positive trail experience for all.

8. **Prioritize Safety** - Future trail decisions should always be made with consideration for user safety. This involves ensuring that trails are appropriately sized and ensure good visibility. Trail-road intersections should have adequate lighting and clear signage to alert motorists of crossing bicyclists and pedestrians.

Safety will also be improved as more people are attracted to Kandiyohi County's trail network. Illegal and/or inappropriate activity is less likely to occur when there are others who may report it. Additionally, increased use results in an increased number of individuals available to provide aid and/or call for help during medical emergencies, etc.

By keeping safety a top priority, Kandiyohi County can support an environment in which all trail users can feel secure, while also ensuring the harmonious coexistence of trails and roadways.

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9. **Revisit and Add to the Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan** – By keeping key components of this plan (e.g., maps and priorities) current, the County will be better able to adapt to changing circumstances, evolving needs, and emerging opportunities. This while maintaining the plan's overall integrity and effectiveness. As improvements and additions to Kandiyohi County's trail network are made, this progress should be noted. Likewise, as new priorities are identified, they should be stated. This will help to ensure that future staff and County leadership have the guidance they need for continued trail network development. Additionally, it will provide the documentation needed to support funding requests from various grantors. Therefore, from time to time, it will be wise to attach a short, County Board-approved addendum to this plan, to ensure that both progress and updated priorities are more officially noted.
10. **Trail Collaboration** - Kandiyohi County will engage with local communities, neighboring counties, and the State of Minnesota when they move to update existing or develop new trail plans for their respective areas. This collaboration will help to ensure plans include quality connections to Kandiyohi County's trail network.



Potential Funding Sources

To effectively expand and implement projects within Kandiyohi County's trail network, it will be necessary to identify and access resources beyond the County's taxpayer revenues. A variety of funding sources could be available to support trail projects. These include:

Donations (Time, Talent, and Money)

People often take great satisfaction in contributing to projects or causes they find important. Kandiyohi County enjoys many trail users and it may be beneficial to give these users opportunities to support the further development of the County's trail network. This could include:

- ◆ Providing opportunities for small financial contributions toward favored trail amenities, such as benches, restrooms, bike repair stations, interpretive signage, or art projects.
- ◆ Giving individuals, families, and/or the business community opportunities to sponsor new or existing trails or rest areas.
- ◆ Incorporating fundraising events or other efforts that attract the support of more trail or outdoor enthusiasts, as well as the businesses who benefit from them.
- ◆ Providing volunteer opportunities to support trail upkeep (e.g., an "Adopt-a-Trail" style program or staff-led "trail cleanup and maintenance" days that incorporate less organized/more casual volunteers).

As discussed, in addition to considering an Adopt-a-Trail opportunity, Kandiyohi County should consider the development of a trails fund that would provide an opportunity for those who would like to contribute financially. These donations could support a new trail or project. However, funds received could also be used to help with ongoing trail expenses or contribute toward local match requirements for trail-related grants.

It will be important for the County to place some general parameters around any monetary trail donations. This will help to avoid situations in which a potential funder seeks to donate toward a project that would be hard to implement, an amenity that is difficult to maintain, or another undertaking that is contrary to this Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails Plan. It will also be necessary to ensure proper procedures and oversight are in place to manage the fund. This could be done by the County directly or, as an alternative, another fiscal host could be determined (e.g., An organization who could perform this service for a fee or a "Friends of Kandiyohi County Trails"-type organization).

Local Government Match

The following pages describe a number of grant opportunities that might support trail development. However, it is unusual for the cost of a trail project to be completely covered by such grants. To be competitive in the grant application process, local government units are commonly required to provide a local match. This local match usually ranges from 20 to 50 percent of the total anticipated cost of the project for which outside funding is sought. The match can often come from tax revenues, local donations, or some combination thereof. Additionally, it is typical for grantors to require a plan for continued maintenance to be a prerequisite for any trail-related grant application. This ongoing trail care would also need to be funded locally.

Identifying stakeholders who are willing to share in costs and/or maintenance has become an increasingly popular and even necessary way for local governments to justify funding and commit to trail projects.

Competitive Grants

Each year, millions of dollars are granted to communities and organizations across the state of Minnesota for the acquisition, development, construction and renovation of parks and trails. However, securing this funding has become increasingly competitive. Many grantors will require an official community, such as this Kandiyohi County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, that incorporates public input to identify priority projects. Even when this is not strictly required the existence of a current trails plan will signal that Kandiyohi County is serious about and invested in trail development. This may earn the county additional points during any grant application scoring process.

Below and continued on the pages that follow are some of the primary grant sources for trail-focused projects. It should be noted that grant funding details periodically change, and new funding sources occasionally become available. Therefore, this listing is not meant to be all-inclusive.

1. The U.S. Department of Transportation's Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

Website: www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails

Description: The Recreational Trails Program provides funds to the States to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational trail uses, with special consideration for projects involving urban youth worker programs (e.g., the Minnesota Conservation Corp.)

Eligible Projects: Acquisition and development of new trails, contracted maintenance on existing trails, development of permanent trailside facilities, and equipment purchases.

Level of Assistance: Maximum grant of \$150,000, with the average grant ranging from \$30,000 to \$85,000. The grantee must cover at least 25% of the total project cost.



2. MN Department of Natural Resources' Local Trails Connection Program

Website: www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_local.html

Description: The Local Trails Connection Program provides grants to local units of government to promote relatively short trail connections between where people live and desirable locations, not to develop significant new trails.

Eligible Projects: Eligible projects include acquisition and development of trail facilities. Projects must result in a trail linkage that is immediately available for use by the general public.

Level of Assistance: Grants range from \$5,000 to \$250,000, with the grantee covering at least 25% of the total project cost.

3. MN Department of Natural Resources' Regional Trail Grant Program

Website: www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_regional.html

Description: The Regional Trail Grant Program provides grants to local units of government to promote development of regionally significant trails outside the seven-county metropolitan area.

Eligible Projects: Land acquisition and development of trail facilities outside the seven-county metropolitan area that are considered of regional or statewide significance.

Level of Assistance: Grants range from \$5,000 to \$300,000, with the grantee covering at least 25% of the total project cost.

4. MN Department of Natural Resources' Outdoor Recreation Grant Program

Website: www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/outdoor_rec.html

Description: The Outdoor Recreation Grant Program provides funds to increase and enhance outdoor recreation facilities in local and community parks throughout the state. Regional parks are not eligible for funding under this program.

Eligible Projects: Park acquisition and/or development/redevelopment including, internal park trails, picnic shelters, playgrounds, athletic facilities, boat accesses, fishing piers, swimming beaches and campgrounds.

Level of Assistance: Grants range from \$10,000 to \$350,000, with the grantee covering at least 50% of the total project cost.

5. Parks & Trails Legacy Grant Program

Website: https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/pt_legacy.html

Description: The Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program provides funding for parks and trails of regional significance outside of the seven county metropolitan area.

Eligible Projects: Land acquisition for development of trails or outdoor recreation facilities; development, redevelopment, or rehabilitation of existing trails or outdoor recreation facilities; and protection or restoration of natural resources within parks and trails. Projects must be located within Greater Minnesota.

Level of Assistance: There is no minimum or maximum request. Applicants are not required to provide a match, but projects with non-state cash contributions will receive additional consideration. Past grants have ranged from \$20,000 to \$1.5 million.

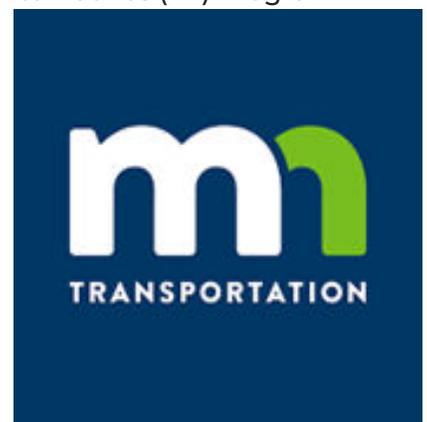
6. MN Department of Transportations' Greater Minnesota Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program

Website: www.dot.state.mn.us/ta/

Description: The Transportation Alternatives Program is a competitive grant opportunity for local communities and regional agencies to fund projects for pedestrian and bicycle facilities, historic preservation, Safe Routes to School and more.

Eligible Projects: Construction, planning, and design of on-road and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized transportation, including sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian and bicycle signals, traffic calming techniques, lighting and other safety-related infrastructure, and transportation projects to achieve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Also the conversion and use of abandoned railroad corridors for trails, the construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas, and several community improvement activities.

Level of Assistance: Grants are recommended to range from \$100,000 to \$1 million. The grantee must cover at least 20% of the total project cost.



7. MN State Park and Road Program

Website: www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/parkroads.html

Description: The State Park Road Account Program exists to help local governments improve access to public recreation facilities. It provides financial assistance for enhancing county state-aid, county, township, and city roads that serve as access points to state parks and other outdoor recreation areas.

Eligible Projects: The program supports the establishment, location, relocation, construction, reconstruction, and improvement of County State Aid Highways that provide access to state parks, state trails, state scientific and natural areas, state wilderness areas, state forests, state wildlife management areas, and state water access sites. Additionally, it covers the reconstruction, improvement, repair, and maintenance of county, township, and city roads that offer access to public lakes, rivers, state parks, and state campgrounds.

Level of Assistance: There are no specific minimum or maximum amounts set for project requests. Approximately \$4,000,000 will be available statewide for calendar year 2024. Costs for construction and right-of-way acquisition are reimbursable for up to 100% of eligible expenses. However, preliminary and construction engineering costs are not reimbursable and are the responsibility of the local unit of government.

Potential Funding Sources

In addition to these major grant programs, there are various, traditionally smaller grant opportunities regularly offered through different stakeholders. While they each have a unique focus, they can assist with implementing projects prioritized within the Kandiyohi County Trails Plan. Some of these smaller grant opportunities include:

1. Minnesota Recreation & Park Foundation New Initiative Grant Program

Website: <https://mnrpf.org/grants>

Description: The Minnesota Recreation & Park Foundation awards up to \$4,000 to members organizations working to develop new and innovative programs. These grants spur innovation in the park and recreation field at the local, regional, and state level.



2. Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grants Program

Website: <http://legacy.mnhs.org/grants>

Description: The Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grants Program supports projects that to preserve and enhance access to Minnesota's cultural and historical resources and to support projects of enduring value for the cause of history and historic preservation across the state, including parks and trails-related projects that preserve and promote historic and cultural resources.



3. PeopleforBikes Community Grant Program

Website: <https://www.peopleforbikes.org/grant-guidelines>

Description: PeopleforBikes Community Grant Program funds bicycle infrastructure projects, including bike paths, lanes, trails, and bridges; mountain bike facilities; Bike parks and pump tracks; BMX facilities; end-of-trip facilities (e.g., bike racks, bike parking, bike repair stations, bike storage). Awards range up to \$10,000 and require a local match of 50%.



4. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Grants

Website: www.railstotrails.org

Description: The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy offers grants to help organizations and government agencies accelerate their trail network plans. Funder priorities may vary from year to year. In 2023, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy awards will prioritize projects and programs that help to achieve the organization's vision for equitable trail networks as essential community infrastructure.



5. Southwest Minnesota Arts Council

Website: <https://swmnarts.org/grants/>

Description: The Southwest Minnesota Arts Council offers several grant opportunities to help communities incorporate art into their communities. Grant deadlines and matching requirements will vary by grant.



6. Willmar Area Community Foundation

Website: <https://www.communitygiving.org/foundation/wacf/grants/>

Description: The Willmar Area Community Foundation is a nonprofit community foundation that administers a variety of funds for individuals and organizations throughout the Willmar area. Each fund has a unique funding priority. However grant categories include Arts and Entertainment as well as Community Development, both of which may provide possibilities for trial-focused applications.



7. Southwest Initiative Foundation

Website: <https://swifoundation.org/>



Description: Southwest Initiative Foundation is a nonprofit community foundation that administers numerous grants to support communities throughout the 18-county Southwest Minnesota area. Most grants are awarded through their more than 120 community foundations and designated fund partners, which have their own grant application guidelines.

8. MN Department of Health’s Statewide Health Improvement Partnership

Website: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ship/index.html>

Description: In 2008, Minnesota lawmakers recognized that controlling healthcare costs would require more than just changes in medical care. Additional prevention-focused investments were also needed. With bipartisan legislative support, Minnesota passed a groundbreaking health reform law. A key component of that reform was to create the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP). The intent of SHIP is to improve health by reducing risk factors that contribute to chronic disease, resulting in reduced healthcare costs. To achieve this, SHIP has assisted a number of communities with Active Living Transportation (ALT) plans, which help identify the improvements needed to provide an environment conducive to walking and biking as part of daily living. SHIP has also made other small investments to encourage healthy living. Recently, SHIP worked with the City of Willmar, with assistance from the Willmar Bikes organization, to fund the purchase of themed route signage, which was installed along several community bicycle routes.



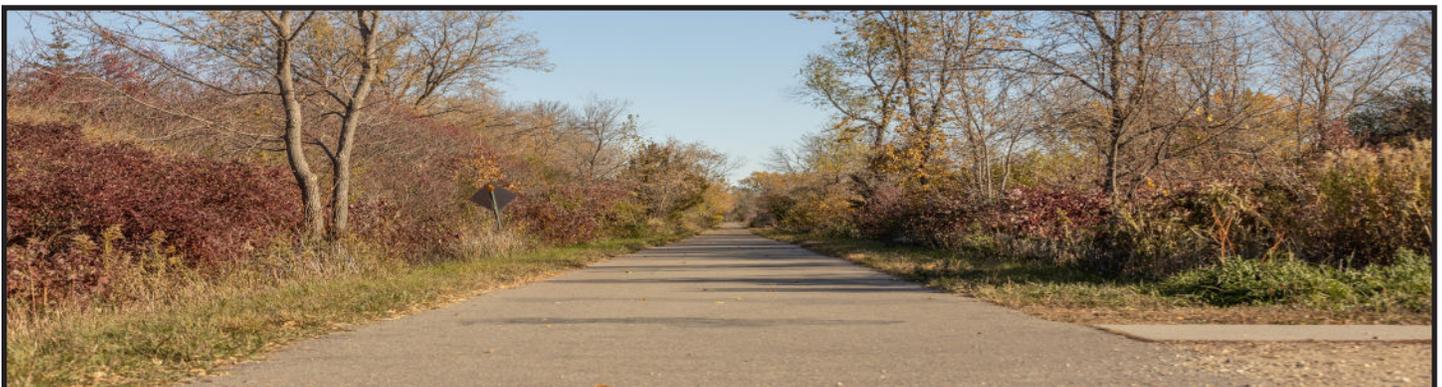
9. Minnesota Safe Routes to School

Website: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/mnsaferoutes/>



Description: Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a comprehensive program intended to help children safely travel to and from school by foot or bicycle. This is achieved through infrastructure improvements, education and promotional activities, and more. The program follows the 6 “E’s” of active transportation planning, including Evaluation, Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and Equity. Each year, the MN Department of Transportation awards dollars to communities for SRTS planning and infrastructure projects (e.g., redesigned roadways, improved crossings and access points). They have also provided small grants to help fund miscellaneous equipment (e.g., bike racks, bicycle fleets, crossing guard equipment).

To achieve Kandiyohi County trail network goals, it will be essential to explore these and other funding sources and to keep abreast of funding partners and opportunities, as they may change over time.



The Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners and Mid-Minnesota Development Commission would like to thank all of those who contributed to the development of this plan!



