

Stewartville Area Bluestem Trail

Stewartville Area Bluestem Trail Frequently Asked Questions



Who is leading up this effort?

The Bluestem Trail Project is being led by a local citizens group known as the Stewartville Area Bluestem Trail Group. This group will be responsible for working with landowners, building public support, coordinating with public agencies and fund raising.

What is the Project Concept?

The concept is to develop a trail connection between Stewartville and Rochester to enhance the local trail system for area residents and to potentially attract tourism business. This link would provide connections through Rochester to facilities such as the Douglas Trail and a future trail to Chester Woods Park. The Bluestem Trail would become part of the Southeast Minnesota Blufflands Trail System.

Options for a trail route starting on either the northeast or northwest side of Stewartville will be studied, with connection options in the Rochester area including planned trails near the Gamehaven Scout Camp, near the Willow Creek Reservoir north of the Airport, or on the southwest side of the city near Mayowood.

What type of Trail Uses are Envisioned?

Among the uses being considered are a range of non-motorized uses include walking, cycling, skating, cross-country skiing and horseback riding. The concept of snowmobile use will also be evaluated, with the understanding that adding motorized vehicle use adds significantly different dimensions that will have to be considered.

Who would ultimately manage the trail?

Once developed the corridor will be managed and maintained by the Division of Parks and Trails of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

What is a typical width?

A basic trail for non-motorized use would involve a 10-12' path on a minimum easement or right of way of 25 ft. In areas of severe slope or unstable soils additional width would be needed. If the trail is planned to accommodate horseback riding or snowmobiles, an additional 25' would be needed for a second treadway.

Typical Hours of Operation

State Trail facilities are typically open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

How would the trail affect Landowners?

Establishment of the Bluestem Trail will rely heavily on the cooperation and generosity of local landowners. Participation in the program is strictly voluntary.

The property rights and concerns of private landowners are paramount, as is maintaining traditional uses of the land. Establishment of the trail will not establish any new land use controls on private lands or impose additional or more restrictive environmental or zoning regulations.

As part of an agreement to allow development of a trail on one's land, features to enhance privacy or access can be negotiated. For example, installation of fencing or vegetative screening can be included in an agreement, and even more substantial improvements such as a bridge to a previously inaccessible portion of land could be considered.

How would ownership of the trail area be structured?

There are a number of options available for structuring an agreement to permit the use of one's land for a trail. These can range from a simple, informal handshake to the donation of an easement or property or the outright purchase of an easement or property.

Easements, land donations, and bargain sales may offer landowners reductions on federal and state income taxes, as well as on federal estate taxes and local property taxes. In some situations, donations and bargain sales may generate tax benefits that equal or outweigh what would be received in a conventional sale.

How are Liability Concerns dealt with?

During trail development a Permission Form, which will include a liability waiver, will be executed between the Trail Group and the landowner each time permission is requested to enter the property, at times to be prearranged with the landowner.

In regards to trail use, legal mechanisms exist in Minnesota to protect landowners against liability claims. The State of Minnesota has laws that substantially limit liability for landowners who open their land to the public for recreation use as long as they do not charge a fee and do not maliciously or intentionally create hazards to potential users. The specific state statute that

addresses the issue of liability for public recreational use is Chapter 604A, Subdivisions 20 to 27.

Property Values

Studies undertaken to assess impacts of trails on property value have found that property values typically increase slightly or remain constant. The Fillmore County Assessor, in response to questions about the Root River Trail, studied the impact and found that proximity to the trail has not affected the taxable value of adjacent lands and appears to increase the sale-ability of land.

Safety

Trails have excellent safety records compared to other public and private facilities. Although landowners are often apprehensive about trails bringing an increase in crime, four studies conducted between 1979 and 1997 on various trails across the country concluded that landowners adjacent to trails experience negligible crime as a result of trails. There is a great deal of evidence, both locally and nationally, that indicates trails do not attract crime.

Privacy, Trespassing, Litter, Vandalism

Trail users are generally respectful of private property and landowner privacy, and they are interested in preserving the natural beauty of the area and maintaining recreational access to the landscape.. Trail use is a very directed, "through" activity, which means users tend to stay on a trail and not loiter or enter adjacent property. Steps will be taken to minimize the trail's impact on your property by siting the trail away from areas of concern such as residences, agricultural fields, or other intensive-use areas.

Have additional questions or want more information?

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