

## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

Renville County is located approximately 80 miles southwest of the Twin Cities metropolitan area along U.S. Trunk Highway (TH) 212 in a part of Minnesota characterized by farms and traditional agricultural communities. With the Minnesota River as its southwestern border, the County is roughly triangular in shape and is 632,100 acres (982 square miles) in area. Figure 1 illustrates the location of Renville County.

### **PLANNING PROCESS**

Renville County's Comprehensive Plan is an on-going process to actively guide the physical and community development of the County over the long term. The Plan describes a shared vision of what the County should look like in the future and provides strategies to accomplish that vision. It addresses the comprehensive relationship among land use, transportation, housing, community development, parks and recreation, natural resources, and public facilities and services. It provides a legal and/or policy basis for zoning, housing and economic development programs, and a guide for investment in infrastructure.

The Plan recognizes and builds upon past and existing County and municipal planning efforts. It is a working document that is intended to be revisited and updated on a regular basis to incorporate new strategies as issues evolve.

The planning process was initiated by the Renville County Board of Commissioners in 2000 and a Comprehensive Plan Task Force assembled, composed of citizens, appointed and elected officials, and various agency staff. By process end, the Task Force included 59 members. Task force members were called upon to actively communicate with their neighbors and other County contacts about the planning process and to share gained knowledge and perspectives with the task force and staff as the plan progressed. The task force was also charged with advocating for the recommendations of the Plan before its adoption as County policy, after Plan adoption, and into the implementation phase.

The task force commenced work on the Comprehensive Plan in January 2001 with an "issues and opportunities" identification process. In March 2001, community stakeholders were interviewed in three focus groups, and the task force created a set of Draft County Vision Statements to guide the development of the plan. The task force met three times between June and September 2001 to formulate plan policy and implementation recommendations. An open house was held on November 15, 2001.

The public had an opportunity to review and comment on the Task Force plan at an open house November 1, 2001. A public hearing was held April 4, 2002. The Renville County Board of Commissioners adopted the *Renville County Comprehensive Plan* on June 25, 2002.

**NOTE: All figures referred to in the chapter are to be added.**

**Figure 1 — Base Map**

## **COUNTY PROFILE**

Renville County has 10 cities and 27 townships. The largest city is Olivia, the County seat. Olivia, Bird Island, Buffalo Lake, Hector, Danube, Sacred Heart, and Renville are located along TH 212 and the Twin Cities and Western rail line, which traverse the County east-west approximately across its middle. Fairfax, Franklin, and Morton are located along Trunk Highway (TH) 19, which travels east-west across the southern part of the County.

While Renville County does not have a regional urban center within its boundaries, it is within the market area of several centers, including Granite Falls to the west in Yellow Medicine County, Redwood Falls just south of the Minnesota River in Redwood County, New Ulm to the southeast in Brown County, Hutchinson to the northeast in McLeod County, and Willmar to the north in Kandiyohi County.

## **HISTORY**

Archaeological evidence along the Minnesota River indicates that the area's first residents were closely related to the Eskimo. Later, the Dakota made the area their home. In the 19th Century, pressure from European traders and settlers led to the Treaty of 1851. The subsequent Dakota government tensions culminated in the Conflict of 1862.

Renville County was named for Joseph Renville, born in 1779 at the Dakota Village of Kaposia, near the present-day city of South St. Paul. Renville was the son of a French-Canadian trader and Dakota Indian and served as soldier, government interpreter, scout, explorer, church elder, and leader in the area of what is now the County. He operated a trading post in 1833 at the mouth of what is known today as Mud Creek. In 1835, a mission was established at the site of Renville's home and store.

The first settler in the County, Louis La Croix, built a home in Birch Cooley Township in 1845. Renville County was officially established by the Territorial Legislature in 1855, and the first surveys of the County were conducted in Preston Lake and Boon Lake Townships. Renville County was declared an organized County in 1866, with the County seat temporarily located in Beaver Falls. The first school districts in the County were established at the first meeting of the Board of Commissioners held on April 2, 1867.

The present County boundaries were established in 1870. In 1889 a new courthouse in Beaver Falls was completed at a cost of \$3,939. The County seat remained in Beaver Falls until 1900. That year, after much competition, feuding, court action, and several elections, the County seat was established in Olivia. The present courthouse was completed on December 5, 1902, at the cost of approximately \$88,000.

## **DEMOGRAPHICS**

The 2000 Census reports the Renville County population at 17,154. Sixty percent of County residents live within the cities, as shown in Table 1. The remaining population is evenly dispersed across the 27 townships, with an average of about 250 people in each.

**TABLE 1  
POPULATION TRENDS  
RENVILLE COUNTY, 1960-2000**

	2000 Population	Percent of County Population	Percentage Change			
			70-80	80-90	90-00	60-00
Bird Island	1,195	7.0	4.8	-3.4	-9.9	-13.8
Buffalo Lake	768	4.5	3.2	6.1	4.6	8.6
Danube	529	3.1	18.7	-4.7	-5.9	7.1
Fairfax	1,295	7.5	-1.9	-9.2	1.5	-13.0
Franklin	498	2.9	-8.1	-13.9	12.9	-9.1
Hector	1,166	6.8	6.3	-8.5	1.8	-3.4
Morton	442	2.6	-7.1	-18.4	-1.3	-29.2
Olivia	2,570	15.0	9.8	-6.4	-2.0	9.1
Renville	1,323	7.7	19.2	-11.9	0.6	-3.6
Sacred Heart	549	3.2	-5.8	-9.5	-9.0	-21.1
Total City	10,335	60.3	5.5	-8.3	-1.3	-5.8
Total Township	6,819	39.7	-12.9	-19.8	-5.3	-44.5
Renville County	17,154	100.0	-3.5	-13.3	-2.9	-26.2

Source: U.S. Census

## Population Trends

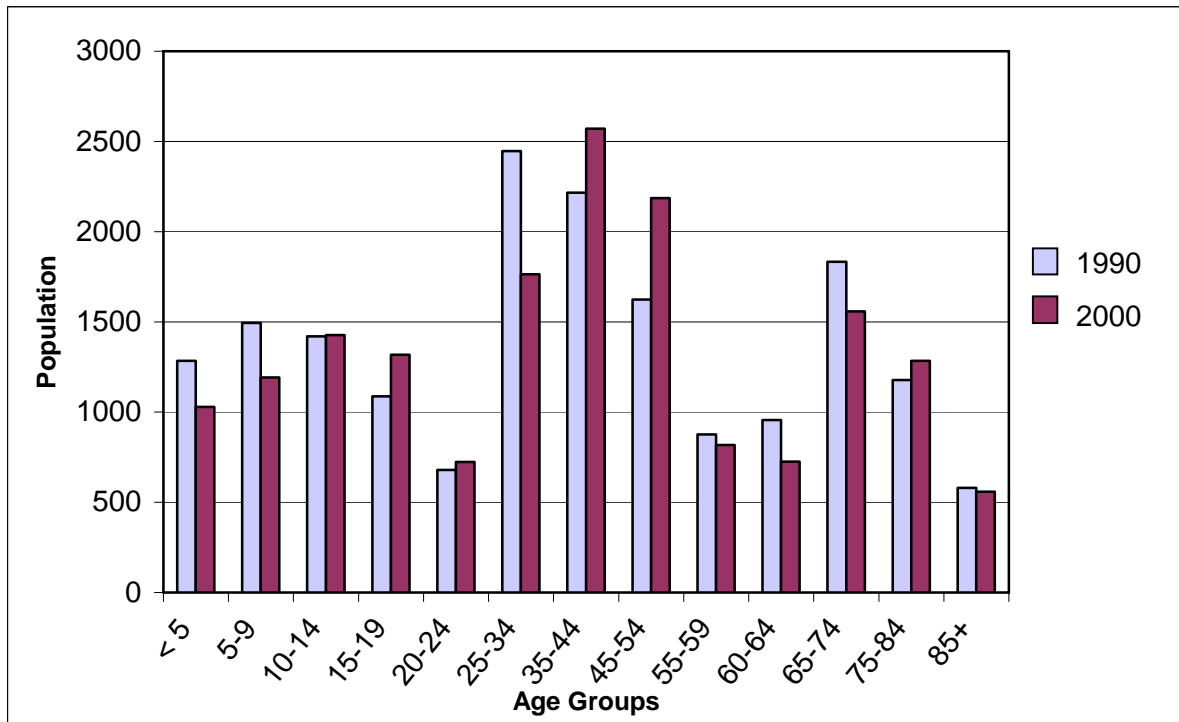
Renville County has experienced a continual decline in its population since 1960. The largest 10-year loss (13 percent) occurred between 1980 and 1990. Not only did the rate of population loss slow considerably in the 1990s, but the population increased in half of the cities in the County during that time.

Figure 2 illustrates the age structure of the 2000 population in Renville County. In 2000, 26.5 percent of the population was under 18 compared to 28.0 percent in 1990, and 19.8 percent of the population was over 65 years of age compared to 20.3 percent in 1990. The young adult age group (18-35 years of age) declined from 19.6 percent of the population in 1990 to 16.9 percent of the population in 2000.

## Diversity

Table 2 shows racial/ethnic change between 1990 and 2000, indicating four-fold increases both in the number of County residents who identify themselves as non-white and in the number of County residents who identify themselves as Hispanic. (Local level data distinguishing between white Hispanic and non-white Hispanics were not available at the time of print.) As of 2000, Hispanic persons represented five percent of the total County population, and up to nearly 10 percent in two of the cities. The growth in this population group follows state and national trends.

**FIGURE 2  
POPULATION BY AGE  
RENVILLE COUNTY, 1990-2000**



**TABLE 2  
RACIAL/ETHNIC CHARACTERISTICS  
RENVILLE COUNTY, 1990-2000**

	Total Population 2000	Non-White Population				Hispanic Population			
		1990		2000		1990		2000	
		No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Bird Island	1,195	35	2.6	38	3.2	30	2.3	31	2.6
Buffalo Lake	768	7	1.0	58	7.6	6	0.8	74	9.6
Danube	529	18	3.2	14	2.6	18	3.2	33	6.2
Fairfax	1,295	3	0.2	92	7.1	4	0.3	98	7.6
Franklin	498	6	1.4	18	3.6	1	0.2	7	1.4
Hector	1,166	6	0.5	52	4.5	3	0.2	61	5.2
Morton	442	30	6.7	44	10.0	4	0.9	27	6.1
Olivia	2,570	43	1.6	98	3.8	55	2.1	195	7.6
Renville	1,323	37	2.8	95	7.2	51	3.9	124	9.4
Sacred Heart	549	21	3.5	14	2.6	21	3.5	39	7.1
Total City	10,335	206	2.0	523	5.1	193	1.8	691	6.7
Total Township	6,819	45	0.3	546	8.0	23	0.3	185	2.7
Total County Population	17,154	251	1.4	1,069	6.2	216	1.2	876	5.1

Source: U.S. Census

## Households and Housing

Table 3 presents the change in households between 1990 and 2000. The County has experienced a growth in the percentage of non-family households and a reduction in household size.

**TABLE 3  
HOUSEHOLDS  
RENVILLE COUNTY, 1990-2000**

	1990	2000
Total Households	6,790	6,779
Family Households	71%	68%
Non-family Households	28%	32%
Households with individuals 65 years old and older	Not reported	33%
Average Household Size	2.55	2.48

*Source: U.S. Census*

In 2000, 81 percent of the occupied housing units in the County were owner-occupied, up slightly from 79 percent in 1990. Approximately 85 percent of the housing units in Renville County are single-family homes. During the last decade, most new housing construction was single family; however, some duplexes and four-plexes, as well as congregate housing has been built. Subsidized housing exists in all communities within the township. There are currently 90 apartment units designed specifically for seniors.

## ECONOMIC BASE

Agriculture continues to be the primary economic activity in the County, with a majority of the land devoted to agricultural use. Major crops include corn, sugar beets, soybeans, and canning crops. Many of the farms involved in dairy enterprises at one time now grow these cash or specialty crops. The major livestock enterprise is raising hogs, and turkey production has recently increased.

In 1999, Renville County ranked first in Minnesota for production of corn, soybeans, green peas, and sweet corn, and ranked fourth in sugar beet production and hog/pig production. In 1997, Renville County ranked second in the state for total cash farm revenue. Agricultural revenue increased between 1992 and 1997 as shown in Table 4.

**TABLE 4  
RENVILLE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL REVENUE AND RANKING, 1992, 1997**

	1992 \$	1997 \$	1997 Rank
Total Cash Revenue	209,000,000	272,203,000	2
Crop Revenue	135,356,000	175,209,000	2
Livestock Revenue	62,974,000	87,623,000	17

*Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture*

While revenue and production are increasing, the number of farms and employment within agriculture is decreasing, a trend which is projected to continue. Table 5 demonstrates how farm consolidation and improved farming technology have decreased the number of farms and need for workers while increasing the average size of the farms. Actual acreage of land cultivated by farming changed little between 1992 and 1997. Table 6 presents the most recent economic and workforce data for the County. In 2000, the category which includes agriculture accounted for 13.1 percent of employed persons, compared to 31.9 percent in 1990.

**TABLE 5  
FARMS  
RENVILLE COUNTY, 1992-1997**

	<b>1992</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>Number Difference</b>	<b>Percent Difference</b>
Farms (total)	1,302	1,114	-188	14.4
Land in Farms (acres)	600,114	601,103	989	0.2
Average Size of Farms (acres)	461	540	43	9.0
Total Cropland (acres)	566,274	567,231	957	0.2
Average Age of Farmers	47	49	2	

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

**TABLE 6  
EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY AND WORKFORCE  
RENVILLE COUNTY, 1999**

	<b>Renville County</b>	<b>Renville County and Adjacent Counties</b>
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, and Mining	1,089	7,543
Construction	464	7,359
Manufacturing	1,640	26,044
Wholesale Trade Government	223	3,298
Retail Trade	868	13,368
Transportation and warehousing, and Utilities	488	5,080
Information	104	2,068
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	330	4,585
Professional, Scientific, Management, Administrative, and Waste Management Services	290	6,123
Educational, Health, and Social Services	1,647	26,028
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation, and Food Services	513	7,998
Other Services	363	5,280
Public Administration	288	3,163
Total Employment	8,307	117,937
Civilian Labor Force	8,634	122,487
Annual Average Unemployment	3.8%	3.7%

Source: U.S. Census

Most jobs are in one of the County's 10 cities, where major employers include the school systems, medical services, government offices, manufacturing, and other services. Table 7 lists the major employers by type within each of the cities in 2000.

**TABLE 7  
MAJOR EMPLOYERS BY CITY, RENVILLE COUNTY, 2000**

City	Business Name	Employed	Type of Business
Bird Island	BOLD School District	150	Schools
	Renville Co. Community Residence	60	Intermediate Care Facility
	Bob's Country Market/Bottle Shop	30	Grocery Store
	St. Mary's School	26	Schools
	Glesener's, Inc.	25	Intermediate Care Facility
	Athmann's Inn/ Island Ballroom	24	Eating Place
	Bird Island Manor Healthcare Center	22	Skilled Nursing Care Facility
Buffalo Lake	Buffalo Lake Nursing Home	111	Skilled Nursing Care Facility
	Minnesota Beef Industry, Inc.	106	Meat Packing Plant
	Farmers Co-op Elevator Co.	55	Farm Product Warehousing and Storage
	Buffalo Lake – Hector Schools	41	Schools
	Duane Kottke Trucking	40	Trucking
	Minnesota Energy, Inc.	20	Agricultural Chemicals
Danube	Renville Sibley Co-op Power Assn.	16	Utility
	Renville County West Schools	47	Schools
Fairfax	Fairfax Community Home, Inc.	68	Skilled Nursing Care Facility
	GFW Middle School	38	Schools
Franklin	Franklin Healthcare Center	82	Skilled Nursing Facility
	Cedar Mountain Elementary School	45	Schools
Hector	Suttle Apparatus Corp.	176	Telephone and Telegraph Apparatus
	Loftness Farm Equipment, Inc.	62	Farm Machinery and Equipment
	Union Oil Co-op	33	Gasoline Service Station
	Buffalo Lake – Hector Schools	30	Schools
Morton	Jackpot Junction Casino	500	Amusement Services
	Flexor	30	Industrial Supplies
Olivia	Renville County Government	190	Government Offices
	BOLD School District	144	Schools
	Renville County Hospital	81	Hospital
	Olivia Healthcare Center	68	Skilled Nursing Facility
	Mycogen Seed Co.	50	Corn
	City of Olivia Government	34	Government Offices
	Prairie Family Practice	24	Offices of Physicians
	Sheep Shedde Restaurant	22	Eating Place
Terry's Holiday Market	22	Grocery Store	
Renville	Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar	380	Beet Sugar Refining
	RenVilla Nursing Home	110	Skilled Nursing Facility
	Golden Oval	70	Poultry and Eggs
	Renville County West Schools	56	Schools
	ValAdCo	55	Hogs
	Co-op Farmers Elevator	40	Crop Preparation Services for Market
	Farmer's Co-op Oil	31	Gasoline Service Stations
	K & M Manufacturing & Repair Co.	27	Farm Machinery and Equipment
	H & L Motors, Inc.	21	New and Used Car Dealership
Sacred Heart	Warner Manufacturing Co.	70	Painter Tools and Products
	Renville County West Schools	45	Schools

Source: Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development



## SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Figure 3 highlights some of the key community facilities in Renville County.

### Schools

There are six school districts which educate students living in Renville County. Renville County is home to three of these, while two are located in Redwood County, and one in Sibley County. Table 8 provides school and enrollment information for the 2000-2001 school year. Table 9 lists private and parochial schools in the County.

**TABLE 8  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS, RENVILLE COUNTY**

School District	District Number	District County	Renville Cities Served	School Locations	Enrollment 2000-2001
Bird Island-Olivia-Lake Lillian	BOLD ISD #2534	Renville County	Bird Island, Olivia	Elementary/Middle School – Bird Island Elementary – Olivia High School – Olivia	1,105 <i>K-8 737</i> <i>9-12 368</i>
Buffalo Lake-Hector	BLH ISD #	Renville County	Buffalo Lake, Hector	Elementary/Middle School – Buffalo Lake High School – Hector	620 <i>K-5 262</i> <i>5-12 358</i>
Renville County West	RCW ISD #2890	Renville County	Danube, Renville, Sacred Heart	Elementary – Sacred Heart Middle School – Danube High School – Renville	943 <i>K-4 311</i> <i>5-8 303</i> <i>9-12 329</i>
Cedar Mountain	ISD #2754	Redwood County	Franklin	Elementary – Franklin Secondary – Morgan High School – Morgan	282 <i>K-6 36</i> <i>7-12 246</i>
Redwood Valley	ISD #2758	Redwood County	Morton	Elementary – Redwood Falls Middle School – Redwood Falls High School – Redwood Falls	1594 <i>K-4 564</i> <i>5-8 505</i> <i>9-12 515</i>
GFW	GFW ISD #2365	Sibley County	Fairfax	Elementary – Gibbon Middle School – Fairfax High School - Winthrop	1045 <i>K-4 346</i> <i>5-8 309</i> <i>9-12 390</i>
Eci' Nompa Woonspe Charter School	Charter School #4028	Renville County	Morton	Morton	46 <i>K-4 0</i> <i>5-8 21</i> <i>9-12 25</i>

**TABLE 9  
PRIVATE AND PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS, RENVILLE COUNTY**

School	City	Age Level
St. Mary's Parochial School	Bird Island	K-8
St. Andrew's Parochial School	Fairfax	K-5
St. John's Lutheran School	Fairfax	K-8
Head Start Center	Olivia	3-5 year olds
Head Start Center	Franklin	3-5 year olds

**Figure 3—Cultural Resource Map**

Finally, Table 10 identifies the colleges, university, technical schools, and community colleges in the region.

**TABLE 10  
REGIONAL POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS**

<b>Name of School</b>	<b>Type of Institution</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Distance from Renville County Border</b>
Minnesota State University – Mankato	Public University	Mankato	40 miles
Minnesota State University – Marshall	Public University	Marshall	40 miles
Minnesota State University – St. Cloud	Public University	St. Cloud	60 miles
University of Minnesota – Morris	Public University	Morris	70 miles
University of Minnesota – Twin Cities	Public University	Minneapolis/ St. Paul	90 miles
Gustavus Adolphus College	Private College	St. Peter	40 miles
Crowns College	Private College	St. Bonifacius	50 miles
St. Benedicts College	Private College	St. Joseph	60 miles
St. Johns University	Private College	St. Joseph	60 miles
South Central Technical College – Mankato/North Mankato	Community/ Technical College	Mankato/ North Mankato	40 miles
South Central Technical College – Faribault	Community/ Technical College	Faribault	50 miles
Ridgewater Community and Technical College	Community/ Technical College	Willmar	20 miles
Ridgewater Community and Technical College	Community/ Technical College	Hutchinson	10 miles
Minnesota West Community and Technical College – Canby	Community/ Technical College	Canby	50 miles
Minnesota West Community and Technical College	Community/ Technical College	Jackson	70 miles
Minnesota West Community and Technical College	Community/ Technical College	Worthington	70 miles
Minnesota West Community and Technical College	Community/ Technical College	Granite Falls	2 miles
Minnesota West Community and Technical College	Community/ Technical College	Pipestone	70 miles

### **Community Services, Organizations, and Facilities**

Each City has a number of facilities and services for its residents. Table 11 lists many of the community and recreational opportunities and organizations active in civic life.

**TABLE 11  
SERVICES AND ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN  
RENVILLE COUNTY CITIES**

<b>City</b>	<b>Community Services</b>	<b>Recreational Services</b>	<b>Community Organizations</b>
Buffalo Lake	Police, fire, first response, ambulance, community center	Park, tennis court, softball field, community center	American Legion Auxiliary, Lions Club, Senior Citizens, Community Club, 4-H Clubs, Girl Scouts, Rod and Gun Club, B.L. EDA
Hector	Police, public library, senior dining, volunteer fire, volunteer ambulance, high school	2 city parks, tennis courts, basketball courts, outdoor swimming pool, ice skating rink/ warming house, baseball/ softball field	Hector EDA, Lions Club, Lioness Club, Kiwanis Club, American Legion Club, Boy/ Girl Scouts, BL-H Boosters, Friends of the Library and Arts Council, BLH FFA
Bird Island	Police, public library, volunteer fire, volunteer first response, community center	4 city parks, tennis courts, indoor swimming pool, ice skating rink/ warming house, Frogtown Fitness Salon, Renville Rangers Shooting Club, baseball/ softball field complex, snowmobile trail, 9-hole golf course (within 5 miles)	B.I. EDA, Civic and Commerce Association, Lions and Lioness Clubs, Boy and Girl Scouts, American Legion Club, Renville County Ag Society
Olivia	County hospital, police, public library, volunteer fire, municipal liquor and lounge, community center, airport, high school, County government offices	9-hole golf course, city parks, tennis courts, softball fields, bowling alley, ice rink, indoor swimming pool, picnic area, camping	Olivia EDA, Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis, American Legion Club, VFW Club, Jaycees, Lions and Lioness Clubs, 4-H, Boy/ Girl Scouts, BOLD FFA
Danube	Police, fire, first response, community center	Park, tennis court, softball fields, hockey rink/ warming house, picnic area	Women's Civic Club, American Legion Auxiliary, Lions Club, Senior Citizens, Danube Full-o-Pep 4-H Club, Danube EDA
Renville	Police, fire, ambulance, public library, senior nutrition program, Meals on Wheels, public transit, municipal liquor, municipal water, community center, high school	3 city parks, golf course, volleyball courts, skating rink/ warming house, tennis courts, athletic fields, swimming/ wading pool, picnic area	Renville HRA, Renville EDA, Historic Renville Preservation Commission, Jaguar Booster Club, Renville Celebration Committee, Jolly Seniors, Renville Civic Club, Renville County Genealogical Society, Lions Club, Renville Ministerium, American Legion, Boy/ Girl Scouts, Masonic Lodge, VFW Auxiliary, RCW FFA
Sacred Heart	Police, fire, injury response team, community center	2 city parks, baseball field, skating rink and warming house, tennis and basket ball courts, picnic area	S.H. EDA, Jaycees, Lions, Legion, Legion Auxiliary, VFW, Senior Diners, Senior Citizens, Senior Card Club, Habitat for Humanity, Women's Club, Today's Ladies Club, BDRSH Baseball Booster Club, Snowflyers Snowmobile Club
Morton	Police, fire, first response	Community park, tennis courts, volleyball, basketball, baseball, softball, ice rink/ warming house, playground, Historic Birch Cooley Monuments, picnic area	Lions/ Lioness Clubs, 4-H, St. John's Altar Society, United Methodist Women, Zion Lutheran Ladies Aid, United Methodist Youth, American Legion, Morton EDA, Senior Citizens
Franklin	Police, fire, ambulance with EMTs, community library	Ballpark, boat landing, camping, tennis courts, playgrounds, hiking, cross-country skiing, volleyball, basketball, hunting, snowmobile trails, river fishing, picnic area	Franklin EDA, River Valley Recreational Club, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, American Legion, Lions, Women's Civic, Jaycees
Fairfax	Police, fire and rescue, ambulance, public library, senior nutrition program, Meals on Wheels, public transit vehicle, municipal natural gas and electric utilities, municipal liquor, community center	Memorial Park, Lions Park, Ft. Ridgely State Park, municipal swimming pool, tennis courts, basketball courts, picnic areas, baseball stadium, skating rink, softball fields, 2 golf courses, bowling, groomed snowmobile trails	Lions/Lioness Clubs, Boy/ Girl Scouts VFW, American Legion Service Club, 4-H, Railroad Depot Association, Civic & Commerce, MN River Valley Recreational Trail Association, MN Valley Sno Riders, Civic League, Fairfax Baseball Association, Youth Police Explorer Program, Senior Citizens Organization, Fairfax Long Range Planning Committee, Fairfax HRA, Fairfax EDA, GFW FFA

## **Health Care Facilities**

Health care facilities exist in each of the County's 10 cities, with a concentration in Olivia, including, Renville County Hospital, Renville County Human Services, Renville County Public Health, and the Prairie Family Practice Medical Clinic. Clinics are located in Hector, Renville, Fairfax, and Franklin. Nursing homes are located in Olivia, Bird Island, Buffalo Lake, Fairfax, Renville, and Franklin.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

Figure 4 depicts many of the County's natural resources. Figure 5 shows general soil information for Renville County, as mapped by the National Cooperative Soil Survey, a joint effort of the United States Department of Agriculture, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station. The Soil Survey is the source for much of the following information.

### **Topography and Soils**

Renville County's topography originated as a tall grass mosaic prairie and wetland complex. Due to the wetland and prairie origins, an extensive network of drainage ditches and drain tile are located in the County. Due to intense row cropping, the land is left susceptible to wind and water erosion for extended periods of time. Soil erosion by wind and water are a major concern to the sustainability of Renville County soils.

Most of Renville County is very flat, with 95 percent of the area possessing a median slope of less than one percent. The central portion of the County is the flattest, with the west side containing slightly more relief. Steeper slopes and rocky outcroppings are found along the bluffs of the Minnesota River Valley. The soils are generally fine-textured. Soil conditions along with flat topography result in very slow natural drainage which has been addressed by an extensive system of drain tiling and open ditches.

According to the Renville County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), erosion of topsoil is a problem for the County, which has a total of 540,000 acres designated as crop land, with 441,800 acres of this in row crop farming. Crops leave the land susceptible to wind erosion, and certain farming practices contribute to the severity of wind erosion. In 1995, the Renville SWCD estimated that approximately 3,888 miles of field windbreaks would be needed to adequately control wind erosion. Since then, about two to five windbreaks have been constructed per year. Currently, 30 percent of crop land is utilizing some form of conservation tillage to reduce the effects of wind erosion.

The SWCD has reported 158,000 acres of cropland in the County as being susceptible to water erosion, with losses of more than three to five tons of soil a year (depending on soil type) per acre or an annual loss of nearly 20 tons per square mile. There are numerous techniques that help prevent erosion and conserve valuable topsoil and agricultural land and several federal and state programs to promote their use.

**Figure 4—Natural Resource Map**

**Figure 5—General Soils Map**

## **Vegetation**

Renville County originally contained lands classified as Upland Prairie, Prairie Wetland, and Floodplain Forest. Upland Prairie covered the majority of the land, while Prairie Wetlands were spread throughout the County. Floodplain Forests were found near major and minor watercourses, mostly established along the Minnesota River Valley. Nearly all of the original vegetation and quality wetlands have been replaced by current agricultural land uses, except near the Minnesota River.

## **Geology**

Like much of Minnesota, Renville County contains thick layers of glacial drift deposits that overlie the bedrock underneath. These layers can range from less than 100 feet thick near the Minnesota River to over 400 feet in the northeast part of the County.

Glacial drifts supplied the area with deposits of aggregate materials. High-quality granite deposits line the Minnesota River corridor. Additionally, numerous aggregate mining pits are generally located along the river, TH 71, and the northern County border. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is in the process of mapping aggregate resources for counties in Minnesota. This will eventually provide more specific information about the location of aggregate within Renville County.

## **Groundwater and Watersheds**

Groundwater generally flows from north to south in Renville County with the Minnesota River. The northeast portion of the County is an exception to this, where groundwater flows east toward the Mississippi River. In some areas, surface water bodies and lowlands create localized groundwater flow gradients that influence shallow aquifers.

Four major watersheds exist within Renville County, including the South Fork Crow River, Hawk Creek, High Island Creek, and Middle Minnesota Watersheds. Three of these major watersheds flow south to the Minnesota River, while the South Fork Crow River Watershed flows east from the northeast part of the County to Mississippi River. The Hawk Creek Watershed covers the entire western half of the County.

Precipitation is the source for nearly all groundwater, which reaches the aquifer by infiltrating the soil or through low-lying drainage and ponding sites. The non-permeable bottoms of lakes, wetlands, and streams limit these water bodies from significantly recharging aquifers. Still, groundwater and surface waters share a continuous cycle of recharging and discharging, as some surface waters recharge aquifers while others receive water from the aquifers.

The general flatness of the land in Renville County allows for high infiltration if the soil is permeable. However, the fine-textured soils are drained by an extensive ditch system which along with the few lakes in the County contributes to greater groundwater discharge. Finally, recent and future efforts to reclaim and preserve wetlands helps minimize the loss of



groundwater recharge due to ditches. Overall, Renville County is identified as an area of new groundwater gain.

The groundwater aquifers do not yield an abundance of water; however, with the population dispersed across the County, no single aquifer is overburdened at any one point by public or private wells. Additionally, a stable or declining population minimizes impacts on groundwater withdrawal.

## **River**

The Minnesota River forms the southern boundary of Renville County and is designated as a state Wild and Scenic River through most of the County.

The river landscape includes areas of granite outcrops, some of which are among the oldest rocks discovered in North America, dating back more than three billion years. Maple, elm, cottonwood, and willow grow along the banks of the river. The high granite domes beyond the river are forested with cedar and oak.

Several waterfowl and wetland bird species use the Minnesota River corridor for nesting, breeding, and resting during migration. Pheasants and Hungarian partridge find thick cover in the river valley for nesting and for protection from harsh winter storms. The river also supports a large fish population, including carp and other rough fish, walleye, northern pike, and small mouth bass.

In the late 1980's, the Minnesota River drew attention because of its algal blooms, sediment, and unhealthy fish populations. The attention led to the development of the Minnesota River Assessment Project (MRAP). The MRAP concluded in 1992, and it provided several recommendations to restore the Minnesota River.

The Minnesota River basin encompasses 16,770 square miles and is divided into 13 sub-watersheds, three of which are located in Renville County. The three sub-watersheds consist of the Hawk Creek, High Island, and Middle Minnesota River. Renville County has benefited from the development of Clean Water Partnership programs taking place within two of the three sub-watersheds. Through extensive water quality monitoring and assessment, these programs have helped to provide the information necessary to identify the problems and opportunities specific to each of the sub-watersheds. This information, combined with the MRAP study, has been used to guide projects that promote the protection and improvement of water quality within Renville County's creeks and the Minnesota River.

## **Lakes**

The County has two major lakes that are used for various recreational purposes. Survey information conducted in 1994 is presented in Table 12 below. Other lakes in the County include Boon, Hodgson, and Phare Lakes all in the northeast, and Mud Lake in the southeast.

**TABLE 12  
RECREATIONAL LAKES  
RENVILLE COUNTY**

Lake	Size	Depth	Nearest City	Public Access(es)
Allie	451 acres	12 feet	Buffalo Lake	State owned boat ramp and parking area located on southeast corner of lake County boat ramp on north end near golf course
Preston	670 acres	11 feet	Buffalo Lake	State owned boat ramp and access located on West side of lake, one mile North of County Road 25.

*Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources*

## Wildlife

The conversion of the prairie and wetland complexes to cropland in Renville County devastated the bountiful wildlife population that once existed here. The steep slopes of the Minnesota River Valley and its major tributaries are the only areas left in native form that provide sufficient habitat for wildlife. Those species that could adapt to the land use change survived in limited populations, and those that could not disappeared. The existing intensive agricultural land use has resulted in a low biological diversity in large areas of the County.

In recent years, the federal Farm Program and the State of Minnesota legislature have provided programs such as Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Conservation Enhancement Program (CREP), and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). These programs are aimed at removing marginal agricultural lands from crop production and converting them to wildlife habitat. These programs have provided the County with a tremendous opportunity to increase wildlife habitat and wildlife populations. About 98% of Renville County land is held in private ownership, so any meaningful wildlife habitat programs will have to target that ownership.

Renville County has a small amount of land held by the Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in wildlife habitat (about 0.5%). Additional acres should be purchased to provide additional wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities associated with public ownership of these areas.

The conversion of habitat to agricultural use over the years is reflected by reductions in the County's once sizable pheasant and duck populations.

The soils, topography, and interspersed cover types along the Minnesota River Valley does provide good habitat for many wildlife species, such as deer, fox, squirrels, cottontail rabbits, pheasants, waterfowl, and nongame species.

Open land wildlife, including Hungarian partridge, ring-necked pheasant, bobwhite quail, sharp-tailed grouse, meadowlark, field sparrow, killdeer, cottontail rabbit, and red fox find habitat in cropland, pasture, meadows, and areas that are overgrown with grasses, herbs, and shrubs.

The habitat for woodland wildlife, including wild turkey, ruffed grouse, thrushes, woodpeckers, owls, tree squirrels, porcupine, raccoon, white-tailed deer, black bear, and moose, include areas of hardwoods or conifers or a mixture of these and associated grasses, legumes, and wild herbaceous plants.

Finally, areas of open, marshy or swampy shallow water areas, bogs, or flood plains that support water-tolerant plants serve as habitat for ducks, geese, herons, bitterns, rails, kingfishers, muskrat, otter, mink, and beaver.

Renville County has 10 State-owned wildlife management areas, together covering about 860 acres. These management areas provide habitat for small game, deer, waterfowl, and upland game and nongame wildlife. They are open to the public for hunting and trapping.

Throughout the County, programs that help restore highly erodible land re-establish certain habitat for wildlife.

## **Climate**

The climate of Renville County is generally characterized by drastic temperature ranges up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit between summer and winter. Winters are usually long and cold with little precipitation, while summer tends to be rather mild with occasional periods of extreme heat and humidity. Precipitation occurs more frequently during the summer and averages approximately 26.4 inches per year, as recorded at Olivia.

## **PARKS AND RECREATION**

### **Parks**

There are seven County parks within Renville County, as shown in Figure 3. Six of these are located near the Minnesota River Valley along the County's southern boundary. The remaining park is in the northeast section on the west shore of Lake Allie

Table 13 lists the parks with their facilities, attributes, and locations.

**TABLE 13  
RENVILLE COUNTY PARKS**

<b>Park Name</b>	<b>Size (acres)</b>	<b>Buildings and Structures</b>	<b>Other Facilities and Amenities</b>
Skalbekken	403	2 shelters, 3 restrooms, various foundations of possible historical significance, log house	horse tie and bunker, numerous trails
Vicksburg	241	4 restrooms, some old foundations	playground equipment
Lake Allie	4.4	1 restroom, 1 shelter, 1 temporary dock, 1 storage building	campground with electric hook-ups and water spigots, playground equipment, waste dump
Anderson Lake	101.39	NONE	wayside rest
Mack Lake	263.69	restroom, log house, shelter	picnic area, hackberry plantation, agro forestry project
Beaver Falls	302	4 restrooms, 2 shelters, shop, barn, 3 sheds	playground equipment, hitching posts
Birch Coulee	25.1	1 shelter, 2 restroom buildings	well, walking bridge

Lake Allie Park is currently being renovated to include a sanitary dump station, new shower/bathroom facilities, a waste treatment system, new electric and water hook-ups for campers, stabilization of lake shore, restoration of beach and shoreline, reconstruction of roads, improved signage, installation of safer playground equipment, and an additional accessible fishing pier. The renovation will be phased in through 2005.

### **Golf Courses**

There are four golf courses in the County, including the Olivia Golf Course in Olivia, the Mayflower Golf Course near Fairfax, the Stoney Creek Golf Course near Renville, and the Oakdale Golf Course near Lake Allie.

### **Scenic Byway**

Renville County is included along the route of the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway. This state-designated road follows the path of the Minnesota River through 14 counties, offering the scenic, natural, cultural, historical, and recreational qualities of the road and valley to tourists and

residents. Attractions such as museums, historic sites, state parks, and rich farmland are promoted as part of the experience of driving this scenic byway.

Points of interest along the segment of the scenic byway that passes through Renville County include the Joseph R. Brown Memorial, the Rudi Memorial, Minnesota’s first Natural Preservation Route, the Schwandt Memorial, Beaver Falls County Park, Morton Monuments, the Renville County Historical Museum, and Fort Ridgely State Park.

## Historic Places

Notable historic sites are included in Figure 3.

The Renville County Historical Museum is located in Morton. The museum has a total of seven buildings. The modern museum building was completed in 1988 and contains archives and exhibits of the history of the County. Two historic school houses were built around 1885; one is used to display glassware and dishes. A farm machinery building houses early farm equipment and a country store. St. John’s Episcopal Church, built in 1891, was the first Episcopal church in Beaver Creek and was moved from there to the museum site. Additionally a blacksmith shop and an 1869 Scandinavian log cabin illustrate life in Renville County in the late 19th century.

Various other historical sites can be found in the County, particularly near the Minnesota River Valley. These include historic markers of the area Conflict of 1862, the Birch Coulee Monument near Beaver Falls, Historic Fort Ridgely, and the ruins in the Beaver Falls County Park, which was the first County seat of Renville County. Table 14 lists the resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

**TABLE 14  
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
RENVILLE COUNTY**

Site Name	Location	Date Listed on NRHP
Birch Coulee Battle Site	Off County Highways 18 and 2, Birch Coulee Township	6/4/76
Minneapolis & St. Louis Depot	Park Street and Second Avenue, Fairfax	7/24/86
Renville County Courthouse	500 East DePue Avenue, Olivia	6/13/86
Lars Rudi House	County Road 12, Sacred Heart Township	7/24/86
Joseph R. Brown Memorial	County Road 15, Sacred Heart Township	8/3/86

## Trails

Trails within Renville County include informal trails within County parks and trails within Fort Ridgely and the Birch Coulee Historical Battlefield Site. A new recreational trail is planned to connect the Fairfax Depot Park to Fort Ridgely State Park. The trail will be an 11-mile paved route designed for walkers, joggers, bicyclists, inline skaters, and cross-country skiers and will

meet the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). State funding continues to be sought for the Minnesota Valley Trail, which is proposed to follow the Minnesota Valley Scenic Byway corridor.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **Roads**

Renville County is served by a grid of U.S. Highways and County Roads. Principal arterials include U.S. Trunk Highways 212 and 71 and State Trunk Highways 19, 4, and 23. Twenty-one County roads are blacktopped, while gravel or paved County and township roads serve outlying rural areas. The figure in Appendix B illustrates the road system of Renville County.

TH 212 crosses east/west on the northern side of the County. Seven of the County's 10 cities are clustered along the route of TH 212. Trunk Highway 71 runs north/south through the center of the County, intersecting with TH 212 at Olivia. Trunk Highway 19 provides an east-west route along the south side of the County, passing through Fairfax, Franklin, and Morton, the County's remaining three cities. Trunk Highway 4 connects TH 19 to TH 212.

Renville County maintains approximately 712 miles of roadway. Of these miles, 445 miles are on the County State Aid Highway (CSAH) system, with the remaining miles on the County Road (CR) system. The primary difference in designation between a CSAH route and a County Road relates to its function and funding. The County State Aid Highway System originated to provide an integrated network of secondary roads serving the state's rural transportation needs. Routes qualifying as, or designated as, a CSAH are eligible to receive state funding for maintenance and construction activities.

Approximately 400 miles of roadway in the County system are paved and approximately 312 miles are gravel roadways. Because the economy of Renville County is based predominantly on agriculture, this system of roads is critical to maintain access to farm markets, agricultural processing facilities, and regional centers of business.

### **Rail**

Two railroad lines cross the County, the Twin Cities and Western (TC & W) Railroad (Class II line to the north following TH 212) and the Minnesota Valley Regional Rail Authority/Minnesota Prairie Line Railroad (Class III to the south that follows TH 19).

### **Public Transit**

The Heartland Express provides public transit within the County. Buses provide daily on-demand service Countywide, generally between 7:15 a.m. and 5:15 p.m. Monday through Friday. A regular route servicing Willmar in Kandiyohi County originates in Bird Island and travels through Olivia before running north to Willmar. A regular route from Fairfax to

Redwood Falls began in early 2001 and runs one day a week. One bus services Fairfax alone, generally running between 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on weekdays. New routes are currently being considered. Heartland Express owns three buses and leases one; two of these run continually all day.

A volunteer service supports regular bus routes and currently utilizes 20 to 25 drivers. This service accommodates riders who are not included on current bus routes or are in need of a ride during hours that the buses are not functioning. Riders are charged 15 cents per mile for travel within the County and 32 cents per mile outside of the County. Rides are scheduled well in advance, whenever a volunteer is readily available.

## **Air**

Two airports are located within the County, one near Olivia and one outside Hector. The Hector Municipal Airport (1D6) is open to the public and also services flights for agricultural operations (aerial spraying). There are 15 aircraft based at the Hector Municipal Airport, 13 of which are single-engine planes. Eighty-six percent of the flights are local general aviation and 14 percent are transient general aviation.

The Olivia Regional Airport (OVL) is located on the west side of the city. The airport is open to the public and also services air freight, agricultural operations (aerial spraying), charter flights, flight instruction, aircraft rental, and aircraft sales. Twelve aircraft are based at OVL all of which are single-engine airplanes. Of all flights serviced by the airport, 93 percent are local general aviation and six percent are transient general aviation.

Outside of the County, other regional and municipal airports are located in Redwood Falls, Granite Falls, Willmar, and Hutchinson. The closest international airports are located in Rochester and the Twin Cities.

## **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The key issues and opportunities that face Renville County in this new century are presented below. These surfaced during the meetings of the Comprehensive Plan Task Force and the focus group interviews. A complete listing of issues raised during the issues identification phase of the planning process is found in Appendix A.

## **LAND USE**

Development needs to be encouraged in the County but within and as part of the orderly growth of communities. Directing development to municipalities strengthens the economic vitality of those communities, protects productive agricultural land, maintains County character, preserves natural resources, and utilizes public infrastructure in the most cost-effective manner.

Within the rural areas of the County, there will be continuing issues surrounding how to manage development in ways that maintain the rural quality of life, avoid conflict between land uses, and minimize negative impacts of development on infrastructure and the environment. The land uses for which careful planning is of concern in Renville County include feedlot operations, mining operations along the Minnesota River, and residential development along water resources and in scenic areas.

## **ECONOMICS**

The farm economy and continual decline in the population are the essential underlying economic issues facing the County. The key to future growth and sustainability of the County will be diversification of the economy and increase in family-supporting employment opportunities. There is opportunity now to look at the County's economic potential in new ways.

Tourism related to agriculture and to Minnesota River Valley recreation and natural resources is an economic development opportunity. There is also potential in the vast clay and aggregate resources and for agriculture-based alternative energy development.

Issues include the relationship between the County and business/industrial development activities of its municipalities, the need for funding, and a need for consolidated action on behalf of the agricultural industry at a state and national level.

## **TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

The County's existing road network provides good mobility, and there are few problems associated with it. However, there are locations in need of safety and capacity improvements. Safety concerns are chiefly related to heavy truck traffic during the fall harvest, as well as to winter storm conditions. The biggest challenge is the cost of maintaining the County road system.

As noted, the road system generally serves the needs of goods movement very well. The restoration of rail service along the southern corridor of the County is an opportunity to support economic development in this area.

The transit system in the County will see growing demand as the population continues to age. Maintaining mobility options for older persons is essential to allowing them to live independently and to have their health, social, and daily living needs met. The cost of providing transit service over a large, low-density area will be an ongoing issue for the County.

Maintenance cost is an issue as well for the extensive public ditch system which is integral to the overall farm drainage network. The management of these ditches is also related to water quality objectives.



## **TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

It is the information age; however, the infrastructure for information is poor in Renville County today. There are concerns with the quality of telephone service, including wireless service, and lack of high-speed internet access. New communications technology has great potential for telecommuting, off-site learning, and on-line marketing of County businesses and visitor destinations, as well as being a service people want in their homes for personal shopping, entertainment, and communication. The barriers to investment in communications infrastructure must be overcome if the County is to capture this economic development potential and meet contemporary quality of life expectations.

## **HOUSING**

There is good value in the existing housing stock, but affordability is still a barrier for many families. There is a gap between the cost of constructing new housing and what moderate-income people can afford. Job opportunities and affordable housing choices go hand in hand in helping retain the County's young people and attract new families.

Concerns about the availability of senior housing will continue to grow as the population ages. A particular deficiency is the lack of assisted-living options. The difficulty and/or cost of maintaining a home as owners age is evidenced in instances of poor housing conditions throughout the County.

There are also some concerns about the adequacy of temporary seasonal housing for migrants, the maintenance of rental housing, and the quality of manufactured home parks.

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

County residents are, on the whole, well served by their public agencies and facilities, but there is a continual challenge to meet demands and control costs, both of which continue to increase. The aging of the population and the increase diversity will have an impact on the types of services needed and how to best deliver those services. The sheer number of agencies, organizations, programs, and places that serve the public poses significant challenges for coordination, cooperation, and quality.

Currently in Renville County good medical care is available, but there is concern about the future ability to retain and recruit enough health care providers. School systems in the County are good, but declining enrollment and budget financing are concerns. County residents are generally healthy and satisfied, but there are too many public health/social issues affecting County youth, families, and seniors. There are mobility, language, and information barriers that impede full community access to the medical, education, social, and other services that are intended for all residents.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

There is great opportunity to improve many aspects of environmental quality in Renville County. These improvements would contribute to the attractiveness of Renville County for both residents and visitors.

Poor surface water quality and quantity attributable to agricultural practices are a key environmental issue for the County, affecting ecosystems, public health, recreational opportunities, and the potential for successful tourism promotion. Several conservation practices are available to improve water quality and quantity through the Renville Soil and Water Conservation District. A tremendous opportunity exists for a much broader application of conservation practice participation throughout the County. Conservation practices not only provide resource protection but also improve and enhance wildlife habitat and native plant communities.

Fertile farmland, in fact some of the world's most productive, is Renville County's number one economic resource. Conservation practices not only provide resource protection but also improve and enhance wildlife habitat and native plant communities.

The County is blessed with the Minnesota River Valley and its unique resources, including ancient rock outcroppings, forests, wildlife, and overall scenic beauty. The protection and enhancement of these resources is a major opportunity for an enhanced quality of life in Renville County. The potential for growth in the mining industry in the Minnesota River Valley presents issues of compatibility between economic development and preservation of natural resources. Wise land use management will need to be used in future mining endeavors to adequately protect the scenic and economic resources.

## **PARKS AND RECREATION**

Renville County has a large amount of parkland that too few people know about or use. The parks need to be developed, effectively managed, and promoted. The time is ripe for this work as planning for tourism through the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway corridor management process continues, the Minnesota Valley recreation trail is being pursued, and tourism in general continues to grow in the state. Park development is a great opportunity to provide more recreational and environmental education opportunities for County residents in their own backyard.

The amount of work that is needed in the parks poses issues of priorities and funding. Park development will likely exacerbate existing conflicts between users of the parks, as choices must be made about what will be allowed and how different activities will be controlled.

There is also potential for tourism and for increased awareness and enjoyment of the County's historic resources.