

# CHAPTER 9: Parks, Trails, and Historic Resources

The **Growth and Economic Vitality** Vision theme calls for developing tourism as a way to diversify the economy and for investing in the quality of life as a way to encourage population retention and growth.

The **Community** Vision theme reinforces the importance of investing in quality of life and calls for making physical connections between people and places as ways to create and sustain a sense of community among County residents.

The **Unique Character** Vision theme calls for fully realizing the potential of the scenic, natural, historic, and recreational resources that are special to Renville County.

The park, trails, and historic resources goals and policies below serve these elements of the Vision for Renville County.

## GOALS AND POLICIES

### PARK SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

***Goal 1:** Create a County park system that serves diverse recreational user interests, minimizes conflicts between users, makes best use of the special qualities and character of each park, and protects habitat, water quality, and sensitive resources.*

### Policies

1. Skalbekken Park:
  - a. Promote as multi-use recreational site for:
    - i. Day use for hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, bird watching.
    - ii. Horse trail riding.
    - iii. River recreation – canoeing, fishing.
    - iv. Camping, including horse camp.
  - b. Engage park users, recreational all-terrain vehicle (ATV) users, and natural resource technical advisors in investigation of opportunities for development and management of ATV trails separate from non-motorized use areas. Consider:
    - i. Restrictions on Wild and Scenic River protected areas.

- ii. Effect on habitat.
  - iii. Effect on geologic, cultural, or other outstanding features.
  - iv. Soil suitability.
  - v. Safety.
  - vi. Maintenance issues.
- c. Develop upper shelter house area into a wayside rest.
  - d. Continue to develop lower shelter house into a horse camping site.
  - e. Develop area south of Limbo Creek into a tent camping site with road and restroom improvements.
  - f. Develop camping area along river south of creek with improved road and restroom facilities.
  - g. Remove the south entrance to the park (emergency entrance only).
  - h. Create a canoe access/landing in the western side of the park.
  - i. Develop hiking/cross-country/biking trails to loop the park; avoid dead-end trails.
  - j. Separate horse and hiking trails from each other.
  - k. Survey and sign boundaries.
  - l. Identify and interpret historically significant sites including cabin dugout and sawmill site.
  - m. Identify, protect, and interpret sites of geological significance.
  - n. Enhance vegetative diversity and quality by developing natural prairie area and continuing native tree planting.
  - o. Work with Minnesota Trails Initiative to connect park with future trails.
2. Vicksburg Park (formerly Town and Country Park):
- a. Promote as a multi-use recreation site with significant historic character.
  - b. Promote as a site for snowmobile use.

- c. Prohibit ATV and other motorized use (except for snowmobiles) in accordance with Wild and Scenic River regulations; guide those to alternate sites.
  - d. Promote and enhance river-related recreation potential: maintain and improve the boat launch, develop a canoe landing.
  - e. Maintain facilities for picnicking.
  - f. Provide for some rustic camping, including horse camping.
  - g. Locate, design, and maintain trails to minimize erosion.
  - h. Separate hiking and horse trails from each other.
  - i. Identify and interpret features of historic significance including the Vicksburg ghost town, trading post site, and cemetery.
  - j. Identify, protect, and incorporate into trail planning and interpretation the unique physical characteristics of the park including rock outcroppings and Sacred Heart creek.
  - k. Identify opportunities for wildflower and prairie area development.
  - l. Survey and sign borders of park.
3. Lake Allie Park:
- a. Promote as a location for picnicking, biking, fishing, and camping (RV and tent).
  - b. Develop trails linking the golf course, boat landings, Luce Line State Trail, and Lake Preston.
4. Anderson Lake Park:
- a. Promote as a location for day activities including hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and bird watching.
  - b. Prohibit all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and other motorized vehicle use (except for snowmobiles) as inconsistent with protection of Minnesota River Valley. Guide those activities to areas where ATV trails are developed.
  - c. Monitor trails for erosion and correct as needed.
  - d. Properly maintain restroom and road.

- e. Maintain culvert system to address recurring flooding problems.
  - f. Coordinate with Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Fort Ridgely State Park planning to identify potential for joint use and trail connections.
  - g. Make enhancements to the park.
5. Mack Lake Park:
- a. Promote as a site for:
    - i. Day activities including hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, bird watching, and fishing.
    - ii. Limited rustic camping.
  - b. Develop hiking and groomed ski trails.
  - c. Prohibit all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and other motorized vehicle use (except for snowmobiles) as inconsistent with protection of Minnesota River Valley. Guide those activities to areas where ATV trails are developed.
  - d. Identify and develop interpretative materials for special features including the log house.
  - e. Coordinate with Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Fort Ridgely State Park planning to identify potential for joint use and trail connections.
  - f. Develop recreation potential of river for canoeing and river fishing. Develop a boat landing area.
6. Beaver Falls Park:
- a. Promote as a site for:
    - i. Day activities including hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, and bird watching.
    - ii. Rustic camping sites and horse camp.
  - b. Engage park users, recreational all-terrain vehicle (ATV) users, and natural resource technical advisors in investigation of opportunities for development and management of ATV trails separate from non-motorized use areas. Consider:

- i. Effect on habitat.
  - ii. Effect on geologic, cultural, or other outstanding park features.
  - iii. Soil suitability.
  - iv. Safety.
  - v. Maintenance issues.
- c. Develop bike trails within the park.
  - d. Develop groomed cross-country skiing trails.
  - e. Identify opportunities for overlook deck and hiking trails near falls, rock outcropping along the creek.
  - f. Develop trails to historic sites in and near the park.
  - g. Separate hiking, biking, and horse trails from one another.
  - h. Identify any needed improvements, including interpretive materials, for the historic schoolhouse and courthouse site.
  - i. Survey park to determine where public parkland is now in agricultural production and plant into native vegetation, terminate any agreements allowing agricultural use, and return land to open space park use.

7. Birch Coulee Park:

- a. Promote as a site with significant historic character and education opportunity, for:
  - i. Picnicking, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, bird watching.
  - ii. Camping.
- b. Develop recreational vehicle (RV) camping site in level area at middle of the park.
- c. Install playground equipment to serve families with children.
- d. Maintain existing trails along creek and bridges.
- e. Develop groomed trails for cross-country skiing.

- f. Develop trail connections to Fort Ridgely, the Renville County Museum, and the Scenic Byway.
  - g. Coordinate with Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) to promote the park in conjunction with the Birch Coulee Battlefield State Historical Site.
  - h. Work with MHS and special event groups, such as tribes conducting powwows at the historic site, to market other recreational opportunities in the County.
8. Promote each park on the river as part of the chain of river/Scenic Byway recreational resources.
  9. Continue to investigate opportunities for additional facilities, separate from existing County parks, for motorized recreation such as ATV and motorcycle use.
  10. Define the County's park resources as preserving areas of significant natural resources appropriate for compatible activities including picnicking, fishing, non-motorized trail use, nature-observation, and limited camping. Support the provision of adequate facilities for highly organized land-intensive recreation, such as athletic fields, by municipalities and local service organizations.

**Goal 2:** *Plan investments in park and recreation facilities to meet basic user expectations, maximize efficiency, and make timely and visible progress on achievement of objectives.*

## **Policies**

1. Develop a five-year capital improvement plan for each park.
  - a. Prioritize improvements as follows:
    - i. Correct health-safety deficiencies and critical environmental threats.
    - ii. Preserve existing improvements.
    - iii. Develop facilities to serve most immediate unmet user demands and address conflicts between user groups.
    - iv. Develop facilities at parks that offer the best opportunity for capturing current and future visitors to existing major recreational attractions, i.e., Birch Coulee park proximity to Birch Coulee Historic Site; Anderson Lake, Mack Lake, and Birch Coulee parks proximity to Fort Ridgely State Park; Skalbekken proximity to Upper Sioux Agency State Park;

connecting trails to develop additional facilities in an efficient progression and to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

- b. Schedule park investments to rehabilitate existing parks in an equitable and timely manner.
2. Coordinate improvement programming with other agencies for park and recreational facilities in or near the County, including local municipalities, DNR, and MHS.
3. Coordinate with on-going planning and implementation of the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway corridor management plan by the Scenic Byway Alliance planning for the Minnesota River Valley State Trail, Green Corridor Project, and Minnesota River Waterway Trails.
4. Identify and aggressively seek funding resources for parkland/trail acquisition and planned park improvements.
5. Continue to charge camping fees; investigate day use and/or seasonal fees. Consider fee in lieu of parkland dedication for new development.

## **PARK MANAGEMENT**

**Goal:** *Manage parks in ways that protect the environmental quality of the resource while optimizing user enjoyment.*

### **Policies**

1. Plan the design and development of park facilities, including roads and parking lots, to avoid impact to wetlands, rock outcroppings, natural prairie, and other sensitive vegetation.
2. Site facilities at locations that are screened from scenic vistas, lakes, and rivers.
3. Design parking lots and other impervious surface to prevent stormwater from running directly into lakes, rivers, or creeks.
4. Monitor for erosion within parks and correct or abandon trails experiencing erosion problems.
5. Route, design, and construct all new trails to prevent erosion.
6. Prohibit off-trail horse riding, motorcycle and dirt bike-riding, snowmobile, and ATV use in areas that cause soil erosion and damage vegetation.

7. Continue to manage appropriate lands as Minnesota Scenic River and Project River Bend Management Districts.
8. Convert cropland in parks to natural landscape.
9. Continue to consult with the DNR and Renville County SWCD staff to develop and carry out vegetation management practices that protect and restore native vegetation, promote self-sustaining habitat and plant communities, remove hazards, control erosion, protect scenic value, and enhance user enjoyment.
10. Control plant diseases, noxious weeds, and insect manifestations in an environmentally conservative manner.
11. Identify and implement measures to protect natural resources in parks from damage, theft, and vandalism.
12. Maintain law enforcement within parks to ensure appropriate use, behavior, and public safety.
13. Provide kiosks at park entrances, with maps, park rules, fee boxes, and historic and natural interpretive information.
14. Identify locations for and install lighting but only to the level necessary for park user safety and security.
15. Fund a parks manager position.

## **TRAILS**

**Goal:** *Create a multi-use trail system that connects recreational and cultural resources within the County and to nearby destinations, with the primary emphasis on the Minnesota River Valley.*

## **Policies**

1. Support and participate in trail planning with federal, state, regional, and local trail planning groups such as the Minnesota River Valley Recreational Trail Association, the Minnesota Trail Initiative, and the Minnesota River Waterway Trails Project.
2. Coordinate corridor trail planning with existing and future trails within state and County parks and in municipalities.
3. Coordinate trail development with improvements to the road system, public drainage system, and other public infrastructure.



4. Provide trail opportunities for all user modes (e.g., pedestrian, biking, in-line skating, equestrian, snowmobiling) whenever feasible. Accommodate pedestrian and bicycle users on all trail corridors, allowing in-line skating if design requirements for safety can be met. Support action by private equestrian and off-highway vehicle interests to develop separate corridor trail facilities.
5. Support state, regional, or local development of trails in these corridors:
  - a. FairRidge trail between Fairfax and Fort Ridgely State Park.
  - b. Minnesota River Valley State Trail along the Scenic Byway.
  - c. Along County Road 18 to connect the Scenic Byway in the City of Morton with the Birch Coulee Historic Site, Birch Coulee Park, and the Renville County museum and monument.
  - d. Linking Lake Allie, Lake Preston, the golf course, boat landings, and the Luce Line State Trail.
  - e. Connecting Skalbekken Park to Granite Falls/Upper Sioux Agency trail.
  - f. Minnesota River Waterway Trails located along the Minnesota River.
6. Identify trailheads and develop with parking, picnic tables/shelters, restroom facilities, and drinking water. Coordinate with Scenic Byway, County park development planning, and snowmobile trail sponsors.
7. Ensure trail safety by designing in conformance with established design standards: national AASHTO or state Mn/DOT bicycle design standards.
8. Identify and aggressively seek funding resources for trail planning and development.
9. Plan for adequate funding for park maintenance and operation and grant cash matches including maintenance commitments.

## **SCENIC BYWAY**

**Goal:** *Develop the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway, a National Scenic Byway, to encourage tourism in the County and provide recreational and scenic enjoyment to County residents.*

## Policies

1. Maintain active County involvement in the Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway Alliance (Alliance) and encourage participation by County municipalities, chambers of commerce, non-profits, and advocacy groups. Promote aggressive implementation of the Scenic Byway corridor management plan.
2. Advocate for continued public participation to ensure that property owners, business, and agricultural operators' interests are well-represented as the Scenic Byway plan is implemented.
3. Continue existing land development practices; as needed, strengthen regulations and incentives which protect the scenic beauty and natural features of the Minnesota River Valley.
  - a. Require any development in the Byway corridor to be as visually unobtrusive to users of river, parks, and Byway as possible.
  - b. Require landscaping to screen uses which are difficult to site in unobtrusive locations, specifically mining operations.
  - c. Require enforceable reclamation plans for extraction operations before permitting these operations.
  - d. Develop mechanisms to protect identified significant natural features from development, including mining.
  - e. Restrict commercial signage. Promote the Mn/DOT Specific Service Sign Program or similar language that advertises and provides direction to area businesses in a manner that is consistent and understandable with minimal impact on scenic/rural character of the corridor.
  - f. Promote the continued and expanded use of scenic easements to preserve lands which are highly visible and have outstanding scenic natural or historic value.
  - g. Continue to control siting of wireless communication towers to protect visual enjoyment of parks and river valley.
  - h. Develop performance standards to guide the future development of river and recreation businesses such as bicycle or canoe rental to ensure that such development does not detract from the natural and scenic character of the Scenic Byway and river corridor.
4. Develop management strategies in consultation with the Alliance to determine the future of gravel roads, which have been identified through the corridor management planning

process as one of the most appealing features of the Byway segment that includes Renville County.

- a. Advocate for paving of gravel roads where appropriate to respond to safety, tourism, and property owner concerns.
  - b. Develop ways to coordinate trail development with future road development and improvements.
  - c. Participate in Alliance-planned gatherings of county highway engineers to consider road management along the Scenic Byway.
5. Identify opportunities for pullouts, parking areas, safety improvements, and roadside amenities along the Byway in Renville County.
  6. Support efforts to educate Byway travelers about potential safety hazards in the Byway area related to farming, goods movement, and gravel extraction.
  7. Strongly support funding for the Minnesota River Valley Trail and continued funding for trails and bicycle routes along and connected to the Byway. Design facilities along rural roads in ways that protect the character of the road while providing for safe trail use.
  8. Support the development of excursion rail service into the Valley.
  9. Use Alliance support to seek funding for improvements to the County parks along the river.
  10. Encourage municipalities, agricultural, and business operators to take advantage of the Byway themes and activities in order to capture economic benefit within the County. Support efforts to:
    - a. Improve gateways into and main streets of cities.
    - b. Develop distinctive shopping, dining, and lodging opportunities.
    - c. Develop farm stay opportunities within the County.
    - d. Develop a series of rivertown events (downtown activities, festivals, river-oriented activities).
  11. Participate in preparation of a comprehensive sign plan for the Byway to ensure consistency of the directional and logo signs, compatibility between local signage and Byway signage, incorporation of Byway logo and themes into park and road signs, and coordinated installation of signage throughout the corridor.

12. Adopt and build upon the marketing themes developed for the Scenic Byway as marketing concepts for Renville County as a whole.
13. Support aggressive marketing of the Byway as presented in the Scenic Byway corridor management plan. Ensure that the packaging of the Byway for marketing includes good representation of the stories that Renville County's people, communities, land, and historic sites have to tell.
14. Seek Alliance consultation and support for funding when designing interpretative material for and kiosks within County parks and historic and natural resources along the Byway. Support key Byway interpretative emphases on agriculture, valley geology, flood plains and river ecosystems, and County park system.
15. Encourage development of Agritourism activities such as farm tours and co-op tours.

## **CULTURAL/HISTORIC RESOURCES**

**Goal:** *Develop Renville County's cultural and historic resources.*

### **Policies**

1. Encourage the efforts of the Renville County Historical Society and local historic preservation and education organizations to promote historic preservation and education in Renville County.
2. Encourage the ongoing program by the Renville County Historical Society to identify, describe, and map historically and culturally significant resources.
3. Develop a plan for protection, rehabilitation and restoration, and interpretation of historic resources including priorities, tools, and funding sources.
4. Evaluate facilities and develop priorities for improvement based upon importance of the resource, cost effectiveness, and location with regard to parks, trails, and the Scenic Byway.
5. Coordinate with land development to ensure that sites with high potential for historic or archaeological resources are recognized and appropriately investigated prior to disturbance.
6. Support the recommended creation of the Minnesota Valley History Learning Center.

## RECREATIONAL PROMOTION

**Goal:** *Increase visibility of Renville County's recreational opportunities, including historic opportunities, to attract visitors and increase enjoyment by regional residents.*

### Policies

1. Develop a marketing theme and signage program to direct travelers to County parks and other sites of interest.
2. Feature recreational and historic resources in the marketing plan for tourism as recommended in Chapter 4, Community Development. Involve the County EDA, Parks Commission, Historical Society, municipal chambers of commerce, local hospitality businesses, Scenic Byway Alliance, and Minnesota Office of Tourism.
3. Identify audiences and opportunities to market recreational resources, including:
  - a. Minnesota Office of Tourism.
  - b. Local and other web pages.
  - c. A County newsletter.
  - d. Events such as powwows, 10Ks, bike events.
  - e. Special interest organizations.
  - f. Local point of sale advertisement.
4. Continue to work with schools, service clubs, and other local organizations to develop naturalist, recreational, and cultural education programs at County parks and historic sites as a way to increase use of these resources by regional residents.