



Board of County Commissioners Agenda Request

8A
Agenda Item #

Requested Meeting Date: May 25, 2021

Title of Item: Approve updated Recreation Plan

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REGULAR AGENDA	Action Requested:	<input type="checkbox"/> Direction Requested	
<input type="checkbox"/> CONSENT AGENDA		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approve/Deny Motion	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Item
<input type="checkbox"/> INFORMATION ONLY		<input type="checkbox"/> Adopt Resolution (attach draft)	<input type="checkbox"/> Hold Public Hearing* <i>*provide copy of hearing notice that was published</i>

Submitted by: Dennis Thompson	Department: Land
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Presenter (Name and Title): Dennis Thompson, Assistant Land Commissioner	Estimated Time Needed: 15 mins
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Summary of Issue:

The ACLD Recreation Plan is scheduled to be updated every ten years. It is now due for that update. The Second Generation Recreation Plan has been developed, approved by the Natural Resources Advisory Committee, and has gone through the public comment period.

Alternatives, Options, Effects on Others/Comments:

NA

Recommended Action/Motion:

Looking for County Board approval of the Second Generation Recreation Plan

Financial Impact:

Is there a cost associated with this request? Yes No

What is the total cost, with tax and shipping? \$

Is this budgeted? Yes No *Please Explain:*

**AITKIN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE
RECREATION PLAN**

2nd Generation

May 2021



AITKIN COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE RECREATION PLAN

Aitkin County Land Department

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Walt Ford - Rice Lake Refuge

Russ Reisz - DNR Wildlife

Brian Leitinger - DNR Forestry

Approved by the Aitkin County Board of Commissioners

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Acronyms

- ACLD – Aitkin County Land Department
- ATV – All-Terrain Vehicle
- DNR – Department of Natural Resources
- OHV – Off-Highway Vehicle
- OHM – Off-Highway Motorcycle
- ORV – Off-Road Vehicle

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The first generation of the Aitkin County Land Department's (ACLD) comprehensive Recreation Plan provided the framework that guided recreation management on county-managed lands in Aitkin County for the last ten years. The development process of that plan included an evaluation of current recreation demands and the identification of opportunities to enhance recreation opportunities while balancing natural resource protections and other competing land uses. The planning process included gathering public input to help inform the management of recreation in Aitkin County. The plan ensures that abundant recreation opportunities can continue to be offered in Aitkin County while addressing increasing demands, responding to emerging trail-based recreation interests and while protecting natural resources, wildlife, forests, and soils.

Aitkin County includes a number of local recreation clubs and sportsmen's groups that are important partners in managing recreational trails. Various snowmobile clubs and ATV clubs assist with maintaining grant-in-aid trail routes. Members of these clubs also serve as park and Trail Ambassadors to support monitoring efforts as well as participating in youth safety and training events.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Volunteer Trail Ambassador Program was established by the DNR Division of Enforcement, Parks and Trails, and Forestry. The program exists to promote safe, environmentally responsible operation of OHVs through informational, educational contacts and monitoring efforts.

The accomplishments over the last ten years are numerous and something the ACLD is very proud of. This second generation comprehensive Recreation Plan will build on those accomplishments and the infrastructure already in place to continue leading a proactive approach that supports recreation trails that are environmentally sensitive, economically beneficial and community supported. Here is a look at the next ten years...

Background

Aitkin County is in the lakes and forest region of North Central Minnesota. The county's population according to the last census figures (2019) is 15,886. The City of Aitkin, with a population of 1,993 is the county seat. Aitkin County encompasses a total of 1.2 million acres, which includes 365 lakes and over 600,000 acres of public land. Aitkin County is located in the center of the State of Minnesota, containing 100 of the first 300 miles of the Mississippi River and the northern shores of Mille Lacs Lake. The county is located two hours north of the Twin Cities and 90 minutes west of Duluth. The lakes and forests of the County draw many people to the area for recreational purposes. Major highways in the county include US 169, and MN 210 and 65. The county has 1,647 miles of road.

Over half of the land base in Aitkin County is in public ownership, including state lands such as Savanna Portage State Park and federal lands such as Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The Aitkin County Land Department is responsible for managing 222,000 acres of forestland. Aitkin County is rightfully proud of its vast expanses of forests and plentiful natural resources, and the county's commitment to the sustainable use of natural resources is exemplified in several ways. The forestland

managed by the Aitkin County Land Department (ACLD) was among the first public lands in the U.S. to be certified as “well-managed” based on the international standards of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The 394,000 acres of state-managed forests in the county are also certified. Long Lake Conservation Center (LLCC) located in Aitkin County is Minnesota’s oldest environmental and conservation learning center serving thousands of school age and adult students annually.

ACLD Staff

The successful development and management of recreation in Aitkin County relies upon many resources, the most important of which is human capital and the people and organizations that make quality recreation opportunities possible. The county Land Department includes a staff of highly skilled individuals with responsibilities for planning, managing, and monitoring the county lands and their diverse resources and public benefits. The Department is comprised of the Land Commissioner, Assistant Land Commissioner, Senior Forester, 3 Foresters, Forestry Technician, Recreation Forester, Recreation Technician, County Surveyor, Survey Technician, Assistant Survey Technician, GIS Coordinator, Land Survey and Mapping Technician, and Lands Clerk. Park Ambassadors, peace officers and designated County employees may, in connection with their duties imposed by law, diligently enforce the provisions of the County Parks and Recreation Ordinance and eject from parks, persons acting in violation of the ordinance.

History of Recreation Planning and Management

One of the first efforts in land use planning in Aitkin County was a study released in June 1941 to report on county land uses. The report noted the fact that in the region of Aitkin County there are “thousands of lakes and many beautiful streams which make certain areas a paradise for vacationists, hunters and fishermen.” The report further detailed, “past experience has shown that thousands of people from other parts of this state and other states like to come here for vacations and sports...indicat[ing] that instead of one major industry, N.E. Minnesota has three, namely: farming, timber, and recreation – all are worth promoting.”

Aitkin County was one of the first forested counties in Northern Minnesota to establish a countywide park system. Backed by the Board of Commissioners, a County Land Department and a six-member Park Commission were established in 1961 to administer the county’s park development program. The county was an early leader in developing snowmobile trails and was the first and only county to apply for federal funds in 1970 to develop 87 miles of trails.

After receiving financial support from a tax levy in 1963, the Park Commission set out to prepare a Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan for the county in 1966. The Plan was the first attempt to inventory all of the recreational resources in the county. The county enacted a five-year action program, based on an Economic Development Plan and a Resource Development Plan. In 1970, an updated and more detailed version of the land development plan and recreational facilities survey replaced the 1966 original. The recreation management plan had not been revised since that time, until work on a new plan began in 2008.

In recent years, the ACLD has renewed efforts to plan and manage diverse trail-based recreation opportunities. In 2003, legislation passed that required the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish at least 70 miles of new ATV/OHM trail. Aitkin and Itasca Counties applied for the

grant and submitted a joint proposal for a 70-Mile Trail Project. The proposal was selected as the best fit for the trail development project based upon the counties having demonstrated land availability, a high level of readiness and effective strategies for public involvement. The development of the 70-Mile Trail Project (now named the Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System) began in 2007 and has created opportunities to review the county's recreation trail resources and management plan. This review led to a desire by the County Board to develop a Comprehensive Recreation Plan to reflect changes in recreation interests and resources and to be prepared for managing recreation opportunities into the future. In 2008, the decision was made to complete an update of the county's recreation plan.

Aitkin County now offers over 220 miles of designated ATV trails for residents and summer visitors. The trails of Aitkin County are interconnected by the North and South Soo Line Trails, which allows users to access all of the trails mentioned: Lawler Loops, Axtell Technical Riding Area, Rabey Line, Blind Lake Trails, Hill City Trail, Solana ATV Trail, and Redtop Trail. In addition, there are over 600 miles of groomed snowmobile trails and 17 miles of groomed cross-country ski trails that traverse scenic forest and lake areas. Trails are also available for horse riding, hunting, and hiking. The county offers campgrounds, trailer and carry-in water accesses, fishing piers, trail shelters, and swimming beaches.

The Land Department has 983.8 acres of developed County parks. Long Lake Conservation Center is the largest with 760 acres. Vispo is the second largest with 141 acres. Jacobson Campground encompasses 47 acres. Snake River Campground is 25 acres in size. Aitkin Campground and Berglund Park are the smallest totaling 5.6 acres and 5.2 acres respectively.

Land Use, Climate, Geology, Soils and Watershed

Aitkin County is characterized by a forested landscape, intermixed with wetland and lowland habitats as well as agricultural and developed land use. Forestry and forest related industries, agriculture and tourism are the primary contributors to the county's economy.

The climate of Minnesota and Aitkin County helps support diversified recreation opportunities, including winter recreation as well as summertime activities. The temperatures in the state range from minus 60°F to 114°F. The total annual precipitation in Aitkin County is 24-30 inches, including a mix of rain and snowfall.

The soils of Aitkin County are influenced by glacial drifts and include a mixture of clay, silt, and sand. The county has areas of dense glacial till, boulders, and gravel deposits. There are also organic soils in lowland and peatland areas. The highest point in Aitkin County is Quadna Mountain, which is 1,589 feet above sea level.

Aitkin County is within the Upper Mississippi River Watershed and the county includes more than a dozen rivers and streams. The major navigable rivers that can be used for recreation are the Snake, Mississippi, Willow and Ripple.

Invasive Species

Invasive species are species that are not native to Minnesota and cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. There are a variety of regulations related to invasive species at the federal, state, and local levels and these are administered by many agencies.

Once established, invasive species out-compete native vegetation and can be difficult to eradicate. Whatever the recreation activity is, it is important to understand that most invasive species are spread by human activity including ATVing. When invasive species are found on recreation trails or in County parks, ACLD's Integrated Pest Management System is utilized to determine the appropriate management. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resource has a wealth of information on invasive species including identification guides designed specifically for Trail Ambassadors. That guide can be found at: https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/education_safety/safety/ambassador/ta_invasives_broch.pdf

Currently, the ACLD actively monitors and treats infestations of garlic mustard, buckthorn, spotted knapweed, and tansy in or near recreational infrastructure throughout the county.

SECTION ONE - FIRST GENERATION PLAN SUMMARY

Trail-Based Recreation in Aitkin County

The outcomes of the plan development process of 2010 included identifying opportunities and action steps to enhance trail-based recreation on county managed lands in Aitkin County. Below are the accomplishments and progress made for each action step.

Public Feedback Mechanisms

Action Step: Develop a survey tool and other public input and feedback mechanisms.

In 2010, there was a great need to understand the recreation user's interests. The recreation pulse of Aitkin County was unknown, and the development of surveying tools was an essential piece of information that was lacking. Throughout the past 10 years, the development of multiple surveying tools has been implemented to track the user bases found throughout Aitkin Counties' recreation resources. The most prominent surveying tools utilized to date are:

- Dovetail-Northwoods Regional ATV Trail Economic Impact Survey
- Traf-X Seismic Traffic Counters Study
- Campground Revenue Study

Monitoring and Enforcement Planning and Collaboration

Action Step: Implementation of written monitoring and enforcement plans.

Monitoring and enforcement are key strategies for reducing and managing the risk of environmental and social conflicts associated with recreation trails. In conjunction with the Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System, the Aitkin County Land Department has developed a collaborative approach to monitoring and enforcement of motorized recreation trails and regulations. This approach provides a model for effectively managing recreation conflicts. Trail uses are likely to change over time and monitoring can assist in identifying these changes. The approach used on the trail systems of Aitkin County in the past decade are:

- Local Civil Law Enforcement – Local law enforcement such as Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Conservation Officers and the Aitkin County Sheriff's Department, are able to effectively manage conflicts throughout the trail systems of Aitkin County.
- Aitkin County Land Department Staff – Foresters are utilized to educate users and carry out monitoring of trails to ensure proper infrastructure is upheld.
- Volunteer Trail Ambassadors – This is a program that promotes safety on the trail system through volunteers. The Minnesota Trail Ambassador Program is tailored to ATV based trail work.

Public Education and Promotion of Trails

Action Step: Develop trail system identities via maps, signs, logos, websites, etc.

Given the existing and potential recreation trail opportunities offered in Aitkin County, there is a constant development of trail system identities for aiding in the communication of areas with amenities to users. The Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System aided in the start of this process and further development of trail maps, signage, logos, websites and other communications tools are utilized to enhance public awareness of the recreation trails as well as the supporting services and amenities in Aitkin County. Further work to the trail system's identities in the future include updating mapping to further show ongoing connection of trails into and out of the county in correspondence with adjoining counties along with updates to websites and signage.

Tourism and Economic Development

Action Step: Explore opportunities for enhanced tourism and economic benefits of recreation.

In the past ten years, Aitkin County has explored options to diversify tourism to aid in the economic revenue that could be brought into the local area. In 2010, tourism was identified as an economic driver for Aitkin County where the delivery of recreation resources could compete for economic capital flowing into the county. With the identification of tourism as an economic driver for Aitkin County, the development of off-highway trails for a recreation tourism base was identified as a source of economic benefit to the local economy. Aitkin County also identified the need to increase non-motorized recreation resources. One non-motorized resource that was identified and developed was the Mississippi River Trail: day trip trail sections. Marketing through web presences (internet) and social marketing (social media resources i.e. Facebook, Twitter, and other areas) is an ever-growing need. Other marketing strategies include use of local Chamber of Commerce, newspaper flyers, and local ATV clubs. Tourism development of 2010-2020:

- For motorized trails, the Northwoods ATV Trail System has an average of 30,000 ATV riders per season.
- Non-motorized recreation users saw the development of more campsites and the Mississippi River Trail – Day Use Trail sections.
- Web/marketing strategies included on-line camping reservations, new mapping, and flyers/advertising in major newspaper outlets.

Trail Signs and Maps

Action Step: Update and enhance trail maps and online recreation information.

With the development of a trails and recreation resource, the presence of quality, professional mapping and information is vital for overall effectiveness of the recreation use. The use of high quality and readily accessible information via mapping, site location history, or prevalent information is of a high value to the core of Aitkin County's recreation-based resources. The use of web or digital vectored maps were sought after to ensure recreation users' needs for location information was readily available when needed. Tools that were used from 2010 to 2020 were the use of intergovernmental Global Informational System mapping (GIS mapping), collaborations with local DNR parks and trails resources, local clubs for map distribution, and local vendors. Trail sign and mapping developments:

- Aitkin County Land Department website – ATV maps.
- Northwoods ATV Trail website.

- Universal informational kiosks throughout trail systems.
- Local club distribution of maps and information.
- Local vender distribution of maps and information.

Birding, Geocaching and Water Trails

Action Step: Explore emerging recreation trail possibilities.

Local input is sought at NRAC meetings where members embody all aspects of the natural resources and recreation focus points of Aitkin County. Exploration was done into local grants versus non-profit, county, state, and federal grant applications for trail establishment.

Co-Existing Recreation

Action Step: Integrate trail systems to offer maximized opportunities with minimized conflicts.

Aitkin County’s existing trail systems vary greatly in their creation. The use of strategizing similar interest groups (i.e. motorized trail clubs or users vs. non-motorized user groups) to finding common ground and agreements for use if co-existing recreation does take place. To support the efficient use of the opportunities that are available and to reduce the opportunity for trail user conflict, it is important for the county to clearly identify which uses are allowed on each trail and determine which recreation uses can co-exist on certain trails. Given the seasonality of recreation trail use (e.g., hiking in the summer and cross-country skiing in the winter), it is possible that at least some trails can continue to support multiple recreation types.

Action Steps for Specific Recreation Trail Types

The plan development and public input process helped to identify several action steps for specific recreation types in the county. The use of specific “Action Steps” for individual recreation entities helped to ensure effective and efficient methods of maintaining working relationships and upkeep of recreation infrastructure.

Snowmobile Trails

- Maintain existing trails with local clubs.
- Collaborate with clubs and partners to ensure maps are printed accurately.
- Continue to monitor and enforce ATV/OHV riding to comply with ordinance.
- Review trail signs and work with clubs and partners to improve consistency.
- Plan an annual (or as needed) meeting (or other form of communication) between the county, contracted loggers and snowmobile clubs to share information about planned forest management activities and to reach agreement on how to address trail use in the area during the activity.
- Provide information about trail conditions at the County website and maintain electronic communications with the clubs.
- Foresters to work with the Recreation Forester to contact snowmobile clubs when timber sales could affect snowmobile trails and should attempt to contact clubs before any logging starts.

Outcome of Action Steps: Aitkin County is home to over 640 miles of existing trails with local clubs throughout the county. Collaborating with the clubs to ensure maps are printed accurately, enforcing of

OHV riding ordinances, and reviewing trail infrastructure for signage and mapping updates continues. With the partnerships and collaboration with local snowmobile clubs, annual meetings are to be conducted to share information about planned forest management activities and to reach agreement on how to address trail use in the area during the activity. With information that is accumulated from local clubs to Aitkin County, this is to provide information about trail conditions at the County website and maintain electronic communications with the clubs. Aitkin County has continued to uphold a highly cohesive working relationship with local Snowmobile Clubs of Aitkin County. Enhanced Trail infrastructure in the past decade has taken place in the form of bridge replacements, trail re-routes, and shelter improvements throughout.

ATV/OHM Trails

- Complete the Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System in a manner that is environmentally sensitive, economically beneficial and community supported
- Develop trail maps and signs in conjunction with the completion of the Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System
- Continue to implement the monitoring and enforcement plan developed for motorized recreation trails to ensure compliance with the ordinance and all other rules and regulations and to reduce conflicts with property owners.
- Develop interpretive signage along the Soo Line trails.
- Support youth safety training.
- Establish grant-in-aid recognition for ATV routes.
- Actively pursue economic promotion of trail routes with local towns.

Outcome of Action Steps: Aitkin County now offers over 213 miles of Grant-In-Aid trails. Local communities actively promote OHV recreation in the area and see first-hand the economic benefits and commerce. The establishment of trails with enforcement and education included has resulted in positive local support. Parking areas have been established and there are over 35 informational sign locations throughout the Northwoods trail system to help orientate recreation users. The growth in trail and recreation user has doubled in the last 10 years and further work towards youth safety training areas are being considered.

The Axtell Technical Riding Area was developed and completed in 2016. Located off the North Soo Line Trail less than three miles northwest of McGregor, Axtell offers a variety of obstacles for ATV and OHM riders of all skill level including a hill climbs, mud pits, log crawls, and rock crawls just to name a few.

In 2017, the Northwoods ATV Trail was designated as a Trail of Regional Significance by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC). It was the first motorized trail to receive that distinction. The GMRPTC was established in 2013 to carry out system planning and provide recommendations to the legislature for grants funded by the Legacy parks and trails fund to counties and cities outside the seven-county metropolitan area for parks and trails of regional significance. Prior to the establishment of the GMRPTC, Greater Minnesota did not have an established history of comprehensive planning for regional parks and trails. Designation provides equal opportunity to apply for funding.

Equestrian Trails

- Explore possibilities for a designated equestrian trail that will meet the need of user groups.

- Identify opportunities to collaborate with a rider group or equestrian club on trail planning, development, and maintenance.

Outcome of Action Steps: Very little to date. Further evaluations are needed for 2020-2030 recreation planning and development.

Geocaching

- Develop guidelines and online registry process for caches located on county-managed lands.
- Identify opportunities to collaborate with local communities and geocaching interests to enhance geocaching opportunities in the county.

Outcome of Action Steps: Developed an application process. Worked with geocaching.com to require office review prior to placing new caches on County Land. Have two permanent caches on County Land. Have done the Geocaching Challenge for three years and there is opportunity to expand.

Birding/Wildlife Observation

- Explore opportunities to develop interpretive trails and other services to support birding and/or wildlife watching opportunities on county managed forestlands.

Outcome of Action Steps: Multiple pollinator and scenic outlooks have been established throughout the county. There are now 60 acres of pollinator areas in 12 locations across the county. Also have birding trails at Long Lake Conservation Center and Cornish Hardwoods Area. Conducted prescribed burn to improve habitat for sharp-tailed grouse.

Waterway Trails

- Evaluate existing accesses and campsites to identify opportunities for improvement.
- Investigate feasibility of outfitter and guiding services being developed in the region.

Outcome of Action Steps: The development of two designated water trails in Aitkin County was accomplished. The Mississippi Water Trail goes from Berglund Park to Waldeck Access, a distance of 13.3 miles. Sissabagamah Water Trail goes from the city park in Aitkin to the Mississippi River access, a distance of 2.3 miles. It winds through natural, undisturbed areas of the city.

Hiking/Hunter Walking Trails

- Evaluate opportunities to expand existing hunter walking trail opportunities.
- Continue to enforce enforcement and monitoring plan on ATV trails to ensure compliance with the county ordinance as well as applicable laws.

Outcome of Action Steps: Very little to date. Further evaluations are needed for 2020-2025 recreation planning and development.

Cross-Country Skiing

- Continue to maintain existing cross-country skiing opportunities.
- Explore possible expansion via land exchange.

Outcome of Action Steps: Enhanced trail infrastructure in the past decade has taken place in the form of trail reformation and clearing. Multiple pollinator and scenic outlooks have been established throughout

the county. Today, Aitkin County x-country ski trails offer 17.1 miles of trail with basic amenities.

Forest Access Roads

- Monitor road conditions and close roads as necessary due to season or safety concerns.
- Maintain road signs that indicate allowed uses.
- Evaluate and maintain a balance of motorized and non-motorized designations.
- Consider developing a map of forest access roads that are available for recreation.

Outcome of Action Steps: Continued work on the road system for multi-use activities. Continually fine-tuning the balance between motorized use and non-motorized use. Maintenance to the road systems are annual evaluations that indicate overall health of the infrastructure. Annually, more than \$50,000 is spent on maintenance and forest road projects. Further work to prioritize projects is to be considered in land management practices moving forward in the 2020-2030 planning.

Parks and Recreation Areas

- Inventory and evaluate existing campgrounds to determine current conditions and opportunities for enhancements.
- Consider development of enhanced online reservation information, including photos of campsites, GPS location information, trip planning functionality (e.g., MapQuest or Google), etc.

Outcome of Action Steps: An inventory system for ATV trails has been developed and campground reservations are done on-line.

Long Lake Conservation Center

- Continue to maintain and promote recreation opportunities as compatible with environmental education mission and purpose.

Outcome of Action Steps: Long Lake's purpose is to inspire a deep appreciation of nature so that all those who experience Long Lake build skills and respect the natural world surrounding them and accomplish life-long stewardship of the Conservation Center. LLCC welcomes hundreds of school kids from around the state each year and has since 1963. The infrastructure is also used by local clubs and the general public. Despite the closure in 2020-2021, LLCC remains a priority for the County and County Board. Active methods of promotion are carried out via staff and events that involve use of Long Lake properties. Further promotion comes through internal health promotion events pertaining to natural surfaced hiking/running events.

Conclusion

The County developed the 1st Generation Comprehensive Recreation Plan to help ensure that abundant recreation opportunities can be offered in Aitkin County while addressing increasing demands, responding to emerging trail-based recreation interests and while protecting natural resources, wildlife, forests, and soils. The planning process helped identify which recreation uses best fit which areas so that conflicts can be minimized and resources protected.

Aitkin County is interested in attracting a variety of outdoor recreation enthusiasts to the trails that are available in the county, while maintaining natural resource and wildlife habitat protections. Land use and trail management plans must be compatible with the county's Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

certification requirements. The trail system is supported by monitoring and enforcement plans and signs and trail markings support high quality trail user experiences.

Aitkin County includes a number of local recreation clubs and sportsmen's groups that are important partners in managing recreational trails. Various snowmobile clubs and ATV clubs assist with maintaining grant-in-aid trail routes. Members of these clubs also serve as park and trail ambassadors to support monitoring efforts as well as participating in youth safety and training events.

The county currently does not offer specifically designated trails on county-managed lands specific to snowshoeing, skijoring, dog sledding, or mountain biking. In accordance with the County Parks and Recreation Ordinance, county forest roads are open to highway licensed vehicle use unless gated or posted closed. County lands are also not compatible with paved trail development (e.g., for biking or rollerblading).

SECTION TWO – SECOND GENERATION PLAN



Introduction – Future Recreation Management in Aitkin County 2020-2030

The outcomes of Aitkin Counties' Master Recreation Plan development of 2010 led to identifying opportunities and action steps to enhance trail-based recreation. The success of the recreation base of Aitkin County has developed exponentially however, it is also a continuously changing element. The following action steps and identified areas are the targeted areas to be either maintained, enhanced, or established in Aitkin County for the following decade. Below are the individual areas identified and progress to be made for each action step.

GENERAL THEMES

Public Feedback Mechanisms

Action Step: Further development of surveying tools that incorporate remote accessibility via personal electronic devices and other public input.

Throughout the past 10 years, the development of multiple surveying tools has been implemented to track the user bases found throughout Aitkin Counties' recreation resources and allow for insight into the pulse of the recreation resource. With further enhancements of technology and use of personal digital devices, user feedback uploads from a variety of sources will be readily available. Example may include:

- QR code signs with internet surveying/questionnaire tools (rate system of trail)
- ATV Trail Economic Impact Survey (anecdotal information from business')
- Traf-X Seismic Traffic Counters Study (quantitative data via non-bias counting technology)
- Aitkin County Campground Revenue Study (quantitative data via actual campground revenues)
- Web design incorporation of attached QR Rate Trails (via survey software such as Survey Monkey, Datahub, Survey Junkie, Doodle Survey, etc.)

Monitoring and Enforcement

Action Step: Implementation of written monitoring and enforcement plans.

Monitoring and enforcement remain key strategies for reducing and managing the risk of environmental and social conflicts associated with recreation trails. Throughout the upcoming decade, enforcement efforts will continue to focus on educating Aitkin County recreation users in the parks and on the trails.

- Law Enforcement – Local law enforcement such as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Conservation Officers and the Aitkin County Sheriff's Department are able to effectively manage conflicts throughout the trail systems of Aitkin County.
- Aitkin County Land Department Staff – Foresters are utilized to carry out monitoring of trails and to ensure proper infrastructure is upheld on the trails. They also serve as educators.
- Volunteer Trail Ambassadors – This is a program that promotes safety on the trail system through volunteers. The Minnesota Trail Ambassador Program is tailored to ATV-based trail work.
- Civilian-Based Enforcement – Local recreation users and other natural resource recreation users are encouraged to report un-safe or negative behavioral use of recreation infrastructure. If

unlawful, local law enforcement should be notified. Anything else should be reported to the ACLD.

Planning and Collaboration

Action Step: In the past ten years, the establishment of a multitude of recreation resources has required continuous collaboration and planning.

The need for collaboration and planning has fallen idle and is now better addressed on a “when needed basis”. Future needs for additional planning and collaborative efforts in the county regarding recreation resources may be limited.

- Identify areas for improvement followed by methods to mitigate the problem.
- Opportunities for collaboration are brought to advisory groups or outside committees.
- Follow up to the planning & collaboration process will produce action steps.
- Guidance from Mississippi Headwaters Board 2019 Comprehensive Plan.
- Wait for next areas of collaboration as they present themselves.

Education and Promotion

Action Step: Updates to trail system identities via maps, signs, logos, websites, emergency location services etc.

With the developed recreation opportunities that are offered in Aitkin County, further development of new areas within the trail systems or recreation resources is a constant. Promoting recreation resource in Aitkin County as “Family Friendly” will be addressed, where appropriate, in future advertising campaigns.

- There is a recognized need to increase the development and updating of maps and signage throughout the recreation resources to ensure users have the ability to explore the majority of opportunities that exist throughout the county.
- Further work to promote the recreation resources in Aitkin County through updates to web-based advertising along with public and private business promotion through connections of recreation trails to business centers.
- The use of private business advertisement allows for further exposure with minimal government tax-based expenses.

SPECIFIC RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

ATV/OHM Trails

- Completion of Mille Lacs Connector Trail.
- Exploration and feasibility of OHM single track trails.
- Continue enforcement and monitoring of ATV trails to ensure compliance with county ordinances and applicable laws.
- Northwoods Regional Trail expansion to multi-county recognized trail.
- Feasibility study of eastern Aitkin County ATV connector trail.

- ATV trail tread conversions and restructuring – class 1 trails to class 2 trails

Equestrian Trails

- Third Guide
 - Information kiosk development.
 - Improved trail tread.
 - Additional signage and marking of trails.
 - Campsite development.
- Cornish Ridge Back Trails
 - Feasibility and usage study.
 - Research on trail parameters.
 - Development of mapping, area history, and marking of trails.

Waterway Trails

- Mississippi River Trail
 - Continuation of day use segments in Aitkin County. Signage along the river currently underway. Mississippi Headwaters Board has already signed from Palisade to Aitkin Campground.
- Snake River
 - Explore opportunities for use.
 - Trail information and day use planners for recreation users.
- Ripple River
 - Aid in establishing water trail that connects City Park to County Campground.

Hiking/Hunter Walking Trails

- Chipper Road Corridor.
- Expansion of walking areas specifically designed for non-motorized use.
- Trail tread rehabilitation from motorized use.
- Evaluate opportunities to expand existing hunter walking trails.
- Identify funding sources to aid in the development and maintenance of non-motorized hunting trails.
- Market Aitkin County hunting trails as destination hunting.

Park & Recreation Areas

- Sissabagamah Creek confluence.
- Explore what types of recreation opportunities are possible/allowed.
- Installation of fishing piers/docks where feasible.

Cross-Country Skiing

- Continue to maintain existing 17.1 miles of cross-country ski trails that are open to public use with the purchase of a MN DNR GIA “Ski Pass”.
- Explore possible land exchange for expansion of cross-country ski sections that would utilize ATV trails that are closed for the winter. This would be on a rotational basis (Termed “Revolving Ski Trail” by ACLD).

Fat Tire Bike Trails

- Identify low impact fat tire bike trails with favorable trail attributes (topography, scenic vistas,

etc.)

- Develop winter use low impact fat tire bike trails utilizing public lands.
- Capture fat tire bike trail usage with data collectors.
- Complete feasibility study to determine need and desired use of trails.
- Construct year-round use trail system if recreation usage shows as desired use in Aitkin County.

Sled Dog Trails

- Identify size of recreation user group interest and club affiliates in Aitkin County
- Feasibility study if gauged interest is sufficient

Primitive Camping

- Identify unique scenic areas for campsite viewing vantage points.
- Identify emergency services needed for establishment of camp areas.
- Establishment of 6 primitive campsites throughout Aitkin County properties.
- Establishment of campsites off recreation trails already on landscape.

In addition to the Aitkin County forest road system of more than 300 miles and the more than 600 miles of groomed snowmobile trails, the county has a number of existing trails and recreation facilities.

Motorized Recreation Trails:

Blind Lake ATV Trail
Hill City Connector ATV Trail
Lawler Loops ATV Trail
Moose River/Emily Connector ATV Trail
Rabey Line ATV Trail
Red Top ATV Trail
Solana ATV Trail
Soo Line ATV Trails (North and South)

Campgrounds:

Aitkin Campground (Aitkin) 9 sites
Berglund Park Campground (Palisade) 9 sites
Jacobson Campground (Jacobson) 12 sites and 2 Camper Cabins
Snake River Campground (South of McGrath) 12 sites

Hiking and Cross-Country Ski Trails:

Long Lake Conservation Center Hiking and Cross-Country Ski Trails
No Achen Cross-Country Ski Trail
Vispo Property Hiking and Cross-Country Ski Trails
Jacobson Campground Walking Trail

Hunting/Fishing Trails:

Hunter/Walker Trails (Non-Motorized Forest Roads) - 13 miles
Snake River Walking/Fishing Trail
Twin River Springs Walking/Fishing Trail
Chipper Road
Third Guide

Recreation Facilities:

Jacobson Wayside Rest
Browns Lake Snowmobile/ATV Shelter
Lake Accesses (Carry-in and Trailer)

Swimming Beaches:

Lone Lake
Round Lake

Regional and National Trails

Northwoods Regional ATV Trail System

- 215 miles of natural surface trail in Grant-in-Aid sponsored status.
- Developed in Aitkin and Itasca Counties.
- Extensions of trail connection to Crow Wing County in 2021.
- Connects with Soo Line Trails and other existing routes to make continual looping trails with destination areas.
- Uses: ATV/OHM (primary), walking, horseback riding (secondary).

North Soo Line Trail

- 148-mile natural surface trail.
- Located in Carlton, Aitkin, and Cass Counties.
- Connects with South Soo Line Trail.
- Runs through Hill River State Forest, Bowstring State Forest, and Chippewa National Forest.
- Possible connection to Rabey ATV Line (in Aitkin County), Blind Lake ATV Loop (in Aitkin County), Willard Munger State Trail, Cuyuna Lakes State Trail and Taconite State Trail.
- Uses: snowmobiling, ATV/OHM

South Soo Line Trail

- 126-mile natural surface trail.
- Located in Carlton, Pine, Aitkin, Mille Lacs and Morrison Counties in MN and Douglas County in WI.
- Connects to Red Top ATV Loop (in Aitkin County) and North Soo Line Trail.
- Runs through Solana State Forest and near Mille Lacs State Park and General Andrews State Forest.
- Possible connection to Willard Munger State Trail and Cuyuna Lakes State Trail.
- Uses: snowmobiling, ATV/OHM

Cuyuna Lakes State Trail

- Eight miles of paved trail from Crosby to Riverton.
- One mile passes through the City of Aitkin along State Highway 169.
- 25-mile single track mountain bike trail system.
- Duel treadway trail.

North Country National Scenic Trail

- 4,600-mile trail (not completed).
- Located in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota.
- Possible connection to Willard Munger, Taconite, Paul Bunyan, and Heartland State Trails in Minnesota.
- Uses: hiking, biking, snowmobiling.

Emergency Management

Emergency events may occur on county-managed lands and recreation trails. To minimize the negative impacts of emergency events, it is important to be prepared for them to the extent possible and to plan trails to allow for Emergency Medical Service (EMS) access.

Tips for Emergency Medical Service (EMS) preparedness includes:

- **Pre-plan** for trail rescue by equipping vehicles with maps of trails in your service area. Mark the access points and make sure you know the limitations for vehicle access.
- **Know the capabilities** of trail surfaces to support vehicle traffic. A trailhead wide enough for an ambulance or rescue truck may not stay that wide or be able to support the vehicle weight.
- **Request additional resources** early, like an ATV with rescue trailer, so it is ready if the ambulance cannot access the patient.
- **Always have the essentials** with you for assessment and the treatment of life threats. Patients are invariably much closer or much further from the trail head than anticipated.
- **Warn other trail users** of an on-trail emergency. Ask them to slow down before passing the incident or reroute as needed.
- Leave at least **one person at the ambulance**. After finding the patient, you may realize that the safest and easiest extrication point is different than the ambulance location.
- **Schedule a training exercise** to locate, access, and extricate a simulated injured trail user from a remote trail. Apply those lessons to preplanning for a future incident.

Source: <http://www.ems1.com/ems-products/patient-handling/tips/500771-Accessing-Patients-on-Trails/>

Helicopter Evacuations

It is possible that a helicopter evacuation could be necessary in response to an emergency on a recreation trail in Aitkin County. To address this possibility, the county should coordinate with local emergency service providers and first responders to evaluate existing access and evacuation preparedness plans.

The following table (Table 1) indicates the specifications for planning and constructing helicopter landing sites (helispots) according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

Table 1: Specifications for Planning and Constructing Helispots

Helicopter Type	1	2	3
Touchdown Pad Dimension	30' x 30'	20' x 20'	15' x 15'
Safety Circle Diameter	110'	90'	75'

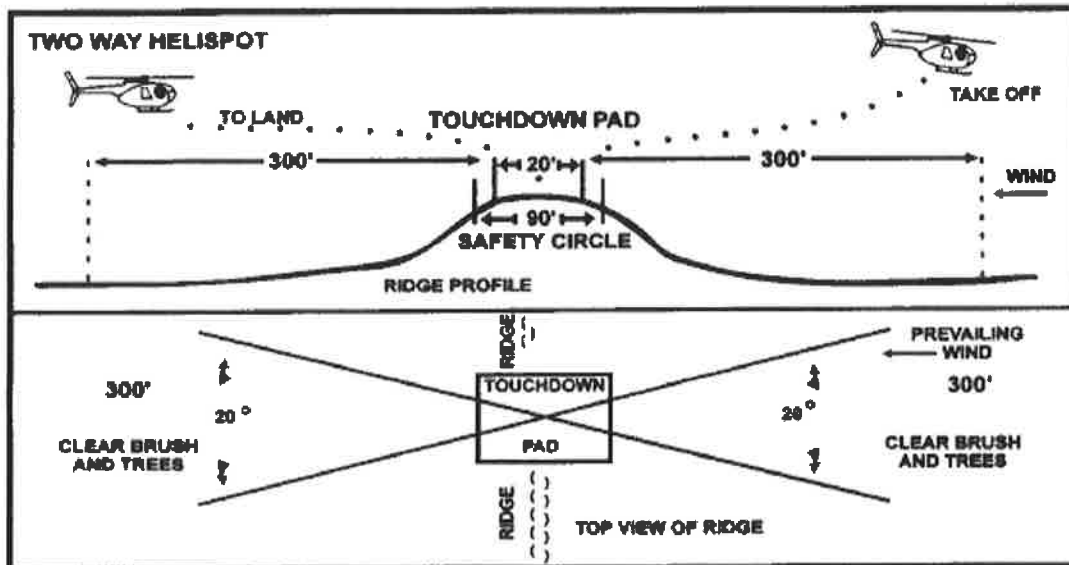
Source: NIFC, 2006; www.nifc.gov/ihog/chapters/2006chapter08.pdf

Type 1 are the heaviest helicopters with a weight >12,501 lbs. and 15 or more passenger seats.

Type 2 are 6,000-12,500 lbs. and 9-14 seats

Type 3 are up to 6,000 lbs. and 4-8 seats.

Figure 1. Example of a Two-Way Helispot (Type 2)



Source: NIFC, 2006; www.nifc.gov/ihog/chapters/2006chapter08.pdf

Trail Suitability Matrix

Background

The Trail Suitability Matrix has been designed to support the development of the Aitkin County Comprehensive Recreation Plan. The Matrix provides a framework for evaluating recreation areas, trails, and resources in the county to determine which activities and recreational uses are suitable for each area. The suitability of a given recreation type for a given area depends upon a number of factors, including soil types, the occurrence of rare species or habitats, proximity to residential areas and other site characteristics. Identifying suitable uses for each area is an important step for supporting the development of a comprehensive plan for trail-based recreation on county-managed lands.

Description

Different types of recreation require different conditions and create various types of impact at the local and landscape scale. While most types of recreation are suitable somewhere, not all types are suitable everywhere. By evaluating which recreational activities are suitable for specific sites, designated uses can be planned to minimize negative impacts and to manage trail construction and maintenance costs. Appropriate trail layout and design also creates better user experiences and safer trail conditions.

Trail Suitability Criteria

The Trail Suitability Criteria describe the site characteristics to be considered when identifying appropriate recreation activities for a given area. The criteria also help support the overall goals for the Comprehensive Recreation Plan, including:

- Guiding recreation trail management on county managed lands,
- Evaluating current recreation demands to identify opportunities to enhance recreation opportunities while balancing natural resource protections and competing land uses, and
- Providing an opportunity to gather public input to help inform the management of recreation trails.

Evaluation Process

The following table (Table 1) lists the Trail Suitability Criteria and the ranking system for determining if a given area is (1) suitable for a specific use, (2) suitable with mitigations, or (3) not suitable. The ranking system distinguishes between motorized and non-motorized recreation types. Based upon maps that illustrate existing recreation resources as well as soil conditions, wetland areas, known occurrences of rare species and habitats, residential areas, public waters and services (gas, food, lodging, parking), the following criteria are applied and areas can be ranked for their suitability for motorized and non-motorized recreation activities.

Table 2. Trail Suitability Criteria

	Motorized Recreation			Non-Motorized Recreation		
	1 Suitable	2 Suitable with Mitigations	3 Not Suitable	1 Suitable	2 Suitable with Mitigations	3 Not Suitable
Visual Quality and Landscape	Diverse, dramatic or high interest scenic features.	Few high interest scenic features.	No high interest scenic features.	Diverse, dramatic or high interest scenic features.	Few high interest scenic features.	No high interest scenic features.
Trail Linkages and Networks	Critical link in existing system or opportunity for important new link	Linking is possible but would require significant mitigations.	No significant linking opportunities	Critical link in existing system or opportunity for important new link	Linking is possible but would require significant mitigations.	No significant linking opportunities
Existing Trail Use	Current, well maintained and appropriate trail use	Current trail use, but trail is not well or easily maintained or trail is underutilized.	No current use and/or trail not compatible with use.	Current, well maintained and appropriate trail use	Current trail use, but trail is not well or easily maintained or trail is underutilized.	No current use and/or trail not compatible with use.
Proximity to Residential Areas	Trail is at least 2 miles from sensitive residential areas	Trail is at least 1 mile from sensitive residential areas	Trail is less than 1 mile from sensitive residential areas	No limitations	No limitations	No limitations
Proximity to Services (gas, food, lodging, campgrounds, rest stops)	Services available within 20 miles of trailhead	Services available within 40 miles of trailhead	Services available within 60 miles of trailhead	No limitations	No limitations	No limitations
Access to Drinking Water	No limitations	No limitations	No limitations	Water available at trailhead, parking area or camping area	Water available within 1/2 mile of trailhead, parking area or camping area	Water available within 2 miles of trailhead, parking area or camping area

(Table 2. Continued)

	Motorized Recreation			Non-Motorized Recreation		
	1 Suitable	2 Suitable with Mitigations	3 Not Suitable	1 Suitable	2 Suitable with Mitigations	3 Not Suitable
Safety Considerations and Access for Emergency Services (lighting, night use of trails)	No safety hazards and sufficient access for emergency services	Some safety hazards and/or some barriers to emergency service access	Significant safety hazards and/or severely limited emergency service access.	No safety hazards and sufficient access for emergency services	Some safety hazards and/or some barriers to emergency service access	Significant safety hazards and/or severely limited emergency service access.
Trailheads, Gates and Signage	Existing, well-maintained	Need minor repair or replacement	Absent and/or in dis-repair	Existing, well-maintained	Need minor repair or replacement	Absent and/or in dis-repair
Availability of Parking Areas	Adequate capacity and well-maintained parking area (including trailer spaces)	Limited capacity and/or difficult to maintain parking area	No parking area and/or no appropriate area to developing parking	Adequate capacity and well-maintained parking area (including trailer spaces)	Limited capacity and/or difficult to maintain parking area	No parking area and/or no appropriate area to developing parking
Opportunities for Public Education	Areas for interpretive signs or other educational services	Few opportunities for public education	No opportunity for public education	Areas for interpretive signs or other educational services	Few opportunities for public education	No opportunity for public education
Soil Conditions, Slope and Grade	Gentle grades, stable soils and no cross slopes	Some areas of sensitive soils, steep slopes or steep grades	Significant areas of sensitive soils, steep slopes or steep grades	Gentle grades, stable soils and no cross slopes	Some areas of sensitive soils, steep slopes or steep grades	Significant areas of sensitive soils, steep slopes or steep grades
Rare, Threatened or Endangered Species or Habitats	No records of RTE Species or Habitats	Known RTE species or habitats but with limited risk of disturbance	Sensitive RTE species or habitats are present and could be impacted	No records of RTE Species or Habitats	Known RTE species or habitats but with limited risk of disturbance	Sensitive RTE species or habitats are present and could be impacted
Wetlands and Public Waters	No wetlands, shorelines or water crossings	Limited wetlands, shorelines or water crossings*	Extensive wetlands, shorelines or water crossings*	No wetlands, shorelines or water crossings	Limited wetlands, shorelines or water crossings*	Extensive wetlands, shorelines or water crossings*
Cultural Resources or Historic Sites	No sensitive sites	Some sites, but well protected	Sensitive sites vulnerable to disturbance	No sensitive sites	Some sites, but well protected	Sensitive sites vulnerable to disturbance

Criteria that Apply to All Trails:

	ALL TRAILS		
	1 Suitable	2 Suitable with Mitigations	3 Not Suitable
Visual Quality and Landscape	Diverse, dramatic or high interest scenic features.	Few high interest scenic features.	No high interest scenic features.
Trail Linkages and Networks	Critical link in existing system or opportunity for important new link	Linking is possible but would require significant mitigations.	No significant linking opportunities
Existing Trail Use	Current, well maintained and appropriate trail use	Current trail use, but trail is not well or easily maintained or trail is underutilized.	No current use and/or trail not compatible with use.
Proximity to Residential Areas	Trail is at least 2 miles from sensitive residential areas	Trail is at least 1 mile from sensitive residential areas	Trail is less than 1 mile from sensitive residential areas
Proximity to Services (gas, food, lodging, campgrounds, rest stops)	Services available within 20 miles of trailhead	Services available within 40 miles of trailhead	Services available within 60 miles of trailhead
Safety Considerations and Access for Emergency Services (lighting, night use of trails)	No safety hazards and sufficient access for emergency services	Some safety hazards and/or some barriers to emergency service access	Significant safety hazards and/or severely limited emergency service access.
Trailheads, Gates and Signage	Existing, well-maintained	Need minor repair or replacement	Absent and/or in dis-repair
Availability of Parking Areas	Adequate capacity and well-maintained parking area (including trailer spaces)	Limited capacity and/or difficult to maintain parking area	No parking area and/or no appropriate area to developing parking
Soil Conditions, Slope and Grade	Gentle grades, stable soils and no cross slopes	Some areas of sensitive soils, steep slopes or steep grades	Significant areas of sensitive soils, steep slopes or steep grades
Rare, Threatened or Endangered Species or Habitats	No records of RTE Species or Habitats	Known RTE species or habitats but with limited risk of disturbance	Sensitive RTE species or habitats are present and could be impacted
Wetlands and Public Waters	No wetlands, shorelines or water crossings	Limited wetlands, shorelines or water crossings*	Extensive wetlands, shorelines or water crossings*
Cultural Resources or Historic Sites	No sensitive sites	Some sites, but well protected	Sensitive sites vulnerable to disturbance

Streamlined Criteria for “Summer Only” Trails and Scoring System for GIS Mapping Analysis:

Summer-Only Trail Mapping and Scoring						
	Summer-Only Motorized			Summer-Only Non-Motorized		
	1 Suitable	2 Suitable with Mitigations	3 Not Suitable	1 Suitable	2 Suitable with Mitigations	3 Not Suitable
Existing Trail Use	Current, well maintained and appropriate trail use 1 Point	Current trail use, but trail is not well or easily maintained or trail is underutilized. 2 Points	No current use and/or trail not compatible with use. 3 Points	Current, well maintained and appropriate trail use 1 Point	Current trail use, but trail is not well or easily maintained or trail is underutilized. 2 Points	No current use and/or trail not compatible with use. 3 Points
Proximity to Residential Areas	Trail is at least 2 miles from sensitive residential areas 1 Point	Trail is at least 1 mile from sensitive residential areas 2 Points	Trail is less than 1 mile from sensitive residential areas 3 Points	No limitations	No limitations	No limitations
Rare, Threatened or Endangered Species or Habitats	No records of RTE Species or Habitats 1 Point	Known RTE species or habitats but with limited risk of disturbance 2 Points	Sensitive RTE species or habitats are present and could be impacted 3 Points	No records of RTE Species or Habitats 1 Point	Known RTE species or habitats but with limited risk of disturbance 2 Points	Sensitive RTE species or habitats are present and could be impacted 3 Points
Wetlands and Public Waters	No wetlands, shorelines or water crossings 1 Point	Limited wetlands, shorelines or water crossings 2 Points	Extensive wetlands, shorelines or water crossings 3 Points	No wetlands, shorelines or water crossings 1 Point	Limited wetlands, shorelines or water crossings 2 Points	Extensive wetlands, shorelines or water crossings 3 Points
Soil Conditions, Slope and Grade	Gentle grades, stable soils and no cross slopes 1 Point	Some areas of sensitive soils, steep slopes or steep grades 2 Points	Significant areas of sensitive soils, steep slopes or steep grades 3 Points	Gentle grades, stable soils and no cross slopes 1 Point	Some areas of sensitive soils, steep slopes or steep grades 2 Points	Significant areas of sensitive soils, steep slopes or steep grades 3 Points
Total Score						

Northern Minnesota is home to a number of existing state and regional recreation trails, including those already managed by the Aitkin County Land Department. The Aitkin County Second Generation Comprehensive Recreation Plan incorporates the potential to link to these trails and the need to address existing land management plans and objectives.

Within Aitkin County, there are state, county, and federally administered lands that provide recreation opportunities, including Savanna Portage State Park and the Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

Figure 2. State Trails Maps

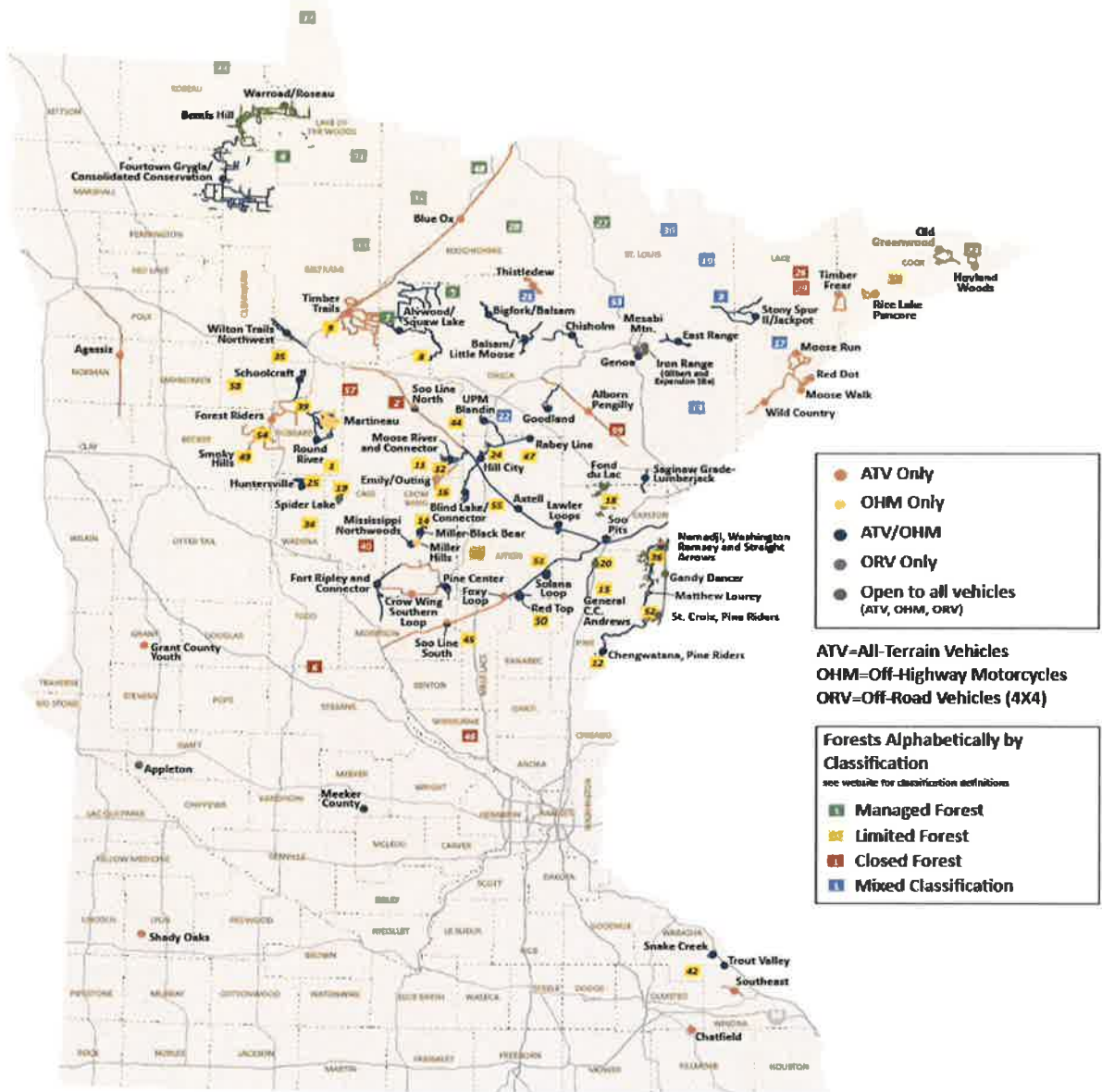


Figure 3. OHV Trail Locations Map

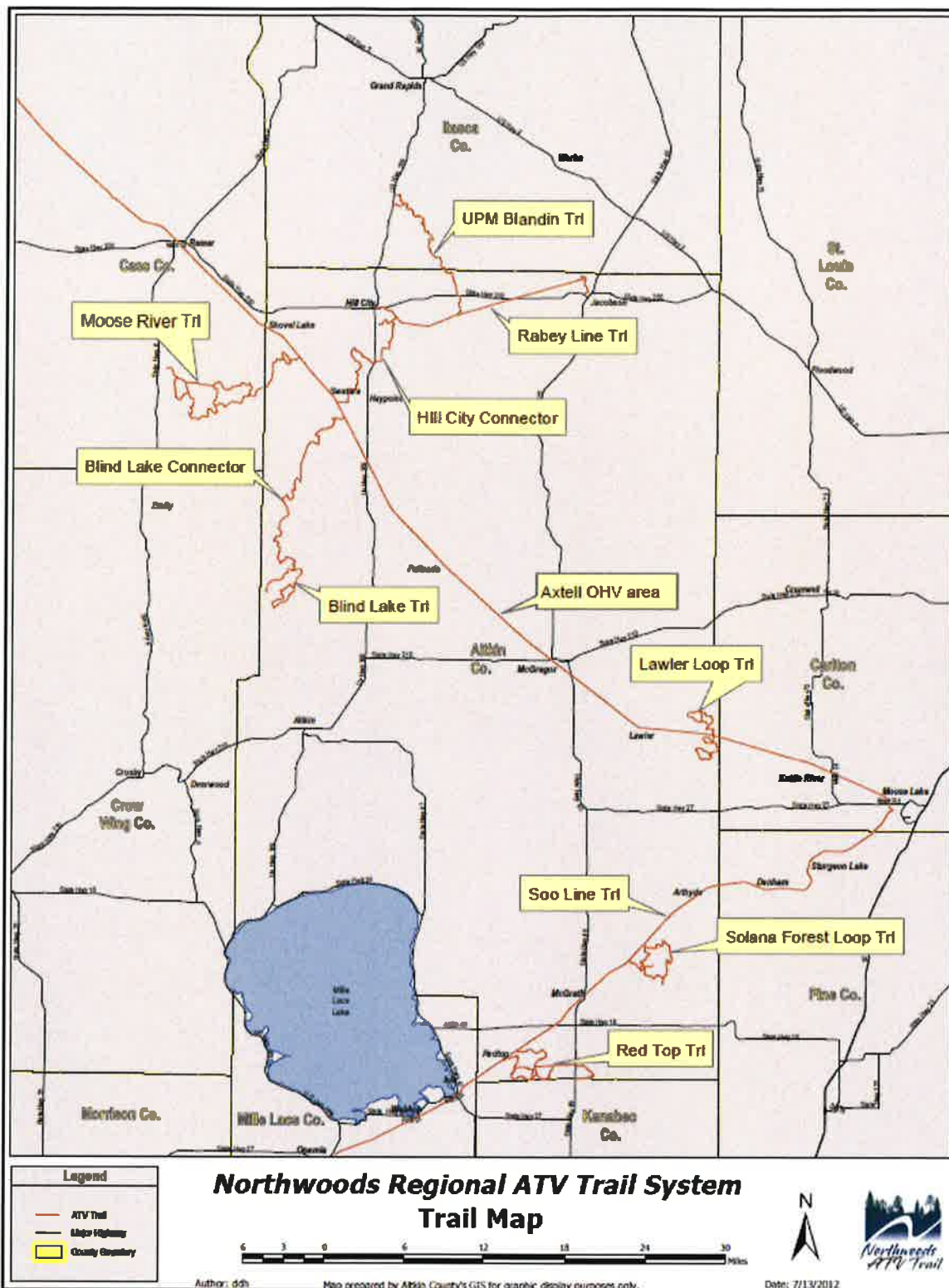


Figure 5. ACLD Maintained Forest Roads

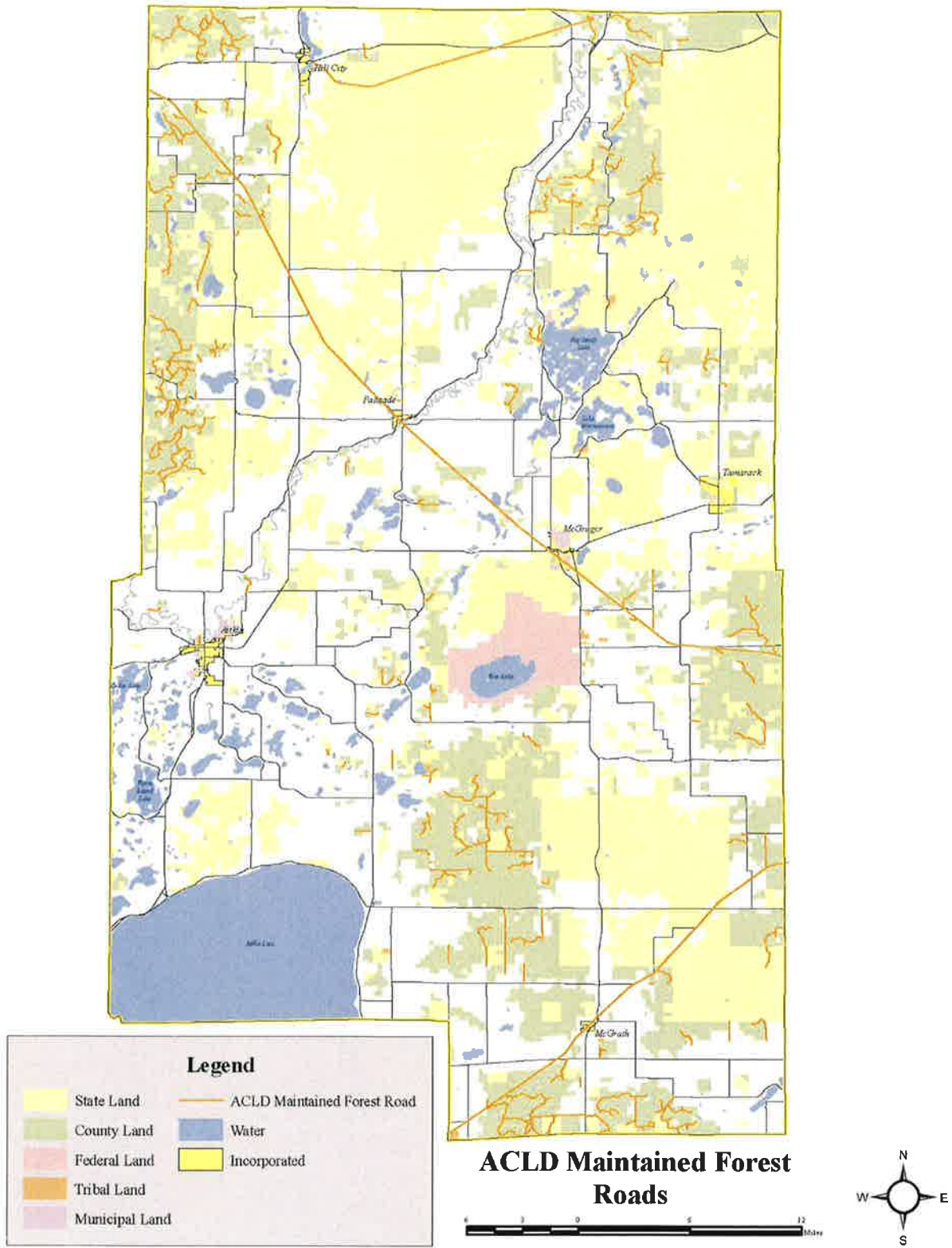
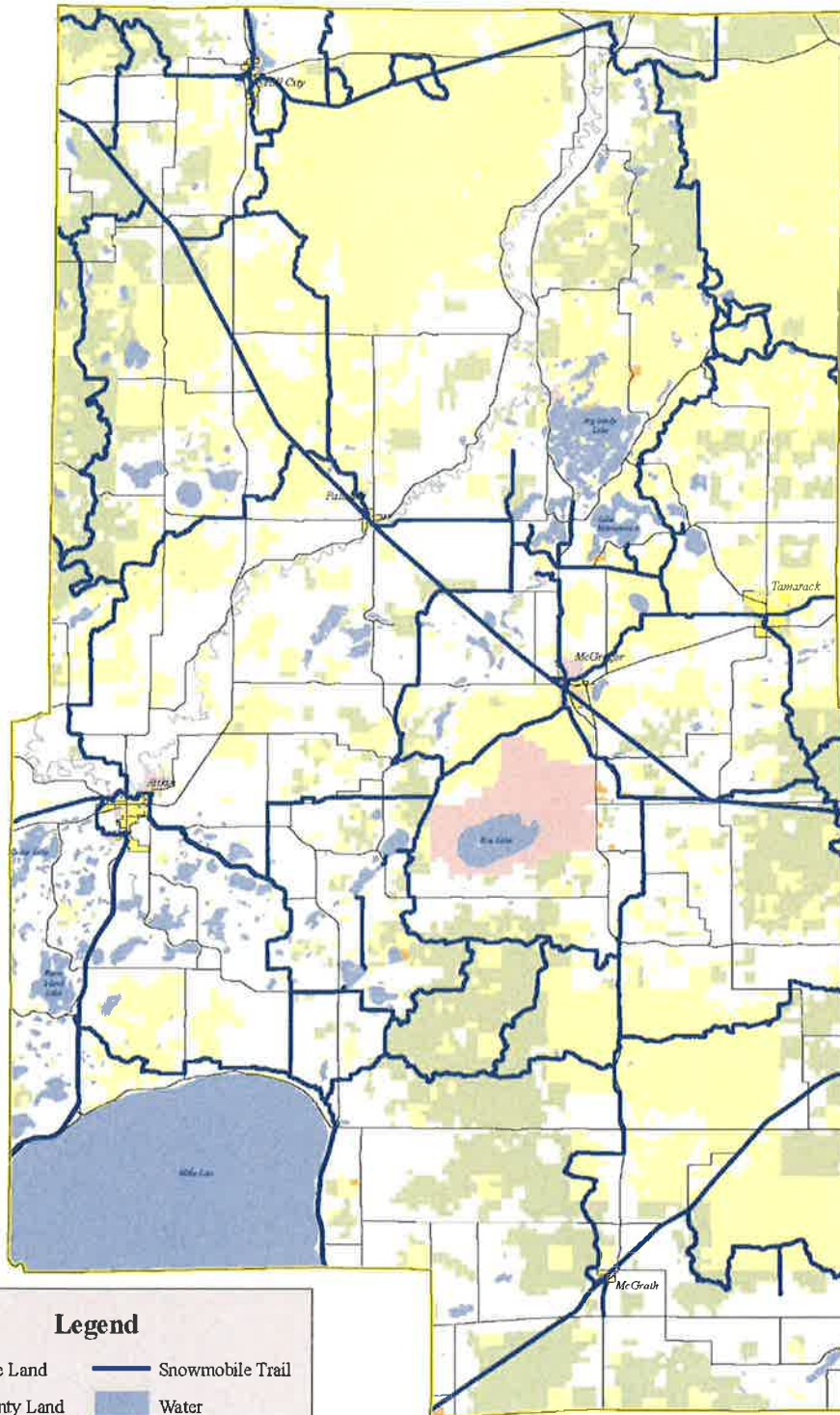


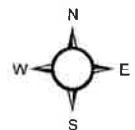
Figure 6. ACLD Snowmobile Trails



Legend

	State Land		Snowmobile Trail
	County Land		Water
	Federal Land		Incorporated
	Tribal Land		
	Municipal Land		

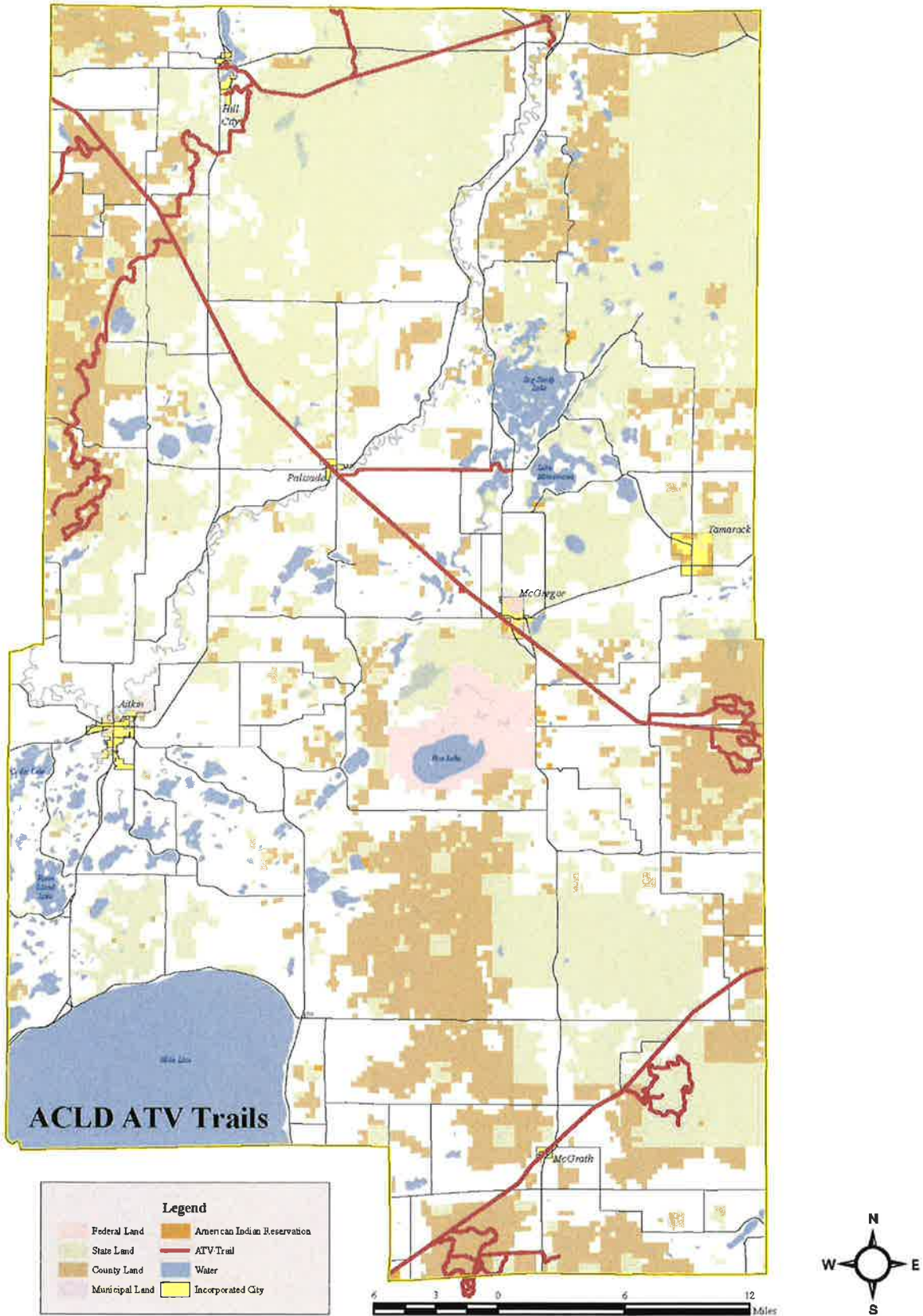
ACLD Snowmobile Trails



Map prepared by Aitkin County for graphic display purposes only.
 Aitkin County assumes no liability for any errors, omissions or inaccuracies herein contained.

Date: 7/15/2020

Figure 7. ACLD ATV Trails



Map prepared by Aitkin County for graphic display purposes only. Aitkin County assumes no liability for any errors, omissions or inaccuracies herein contained.

Date: 5/6/2021

Figure 8. No Achen Ski Trails

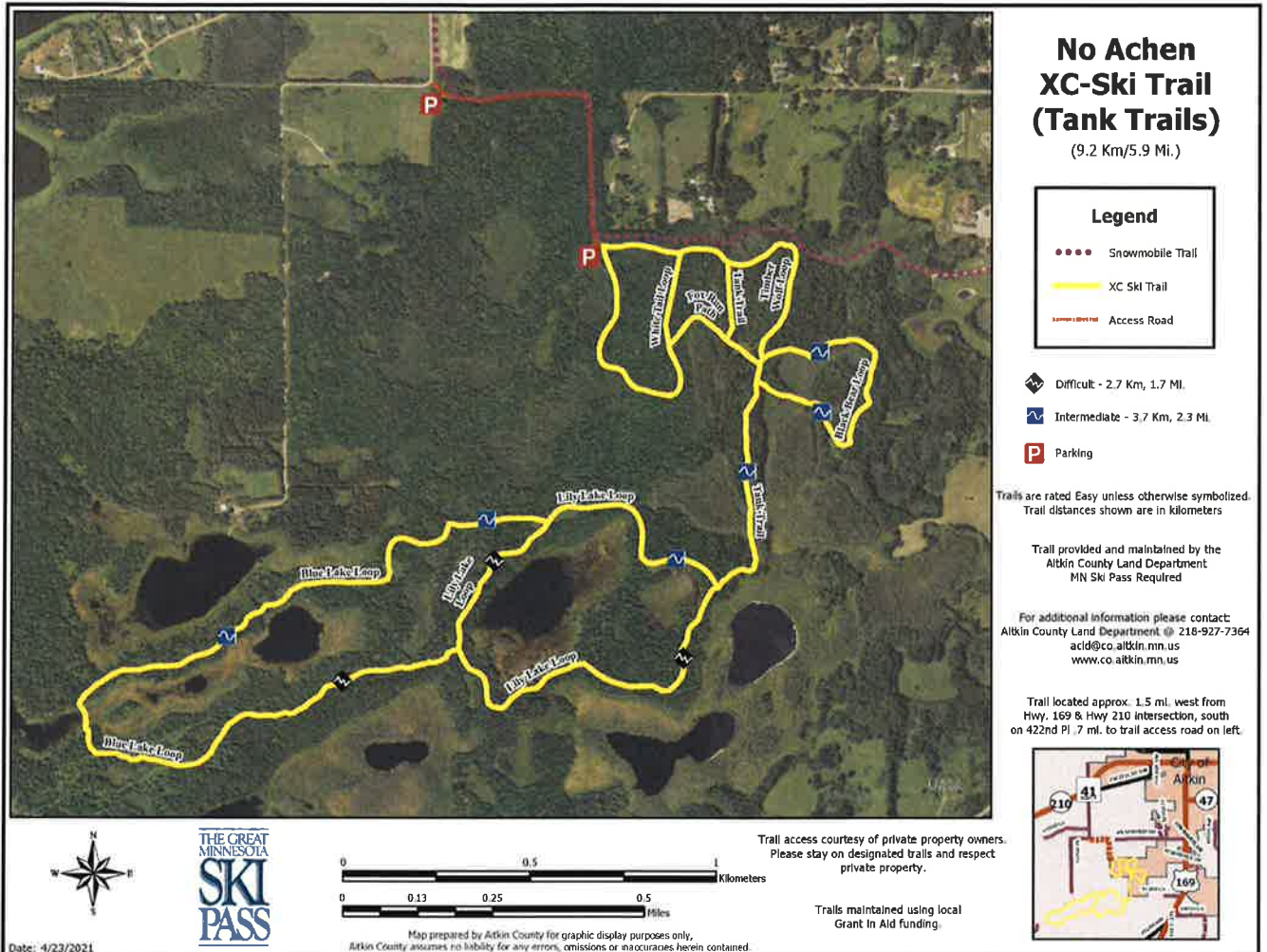


Figure 9. LLCC Ski Trails

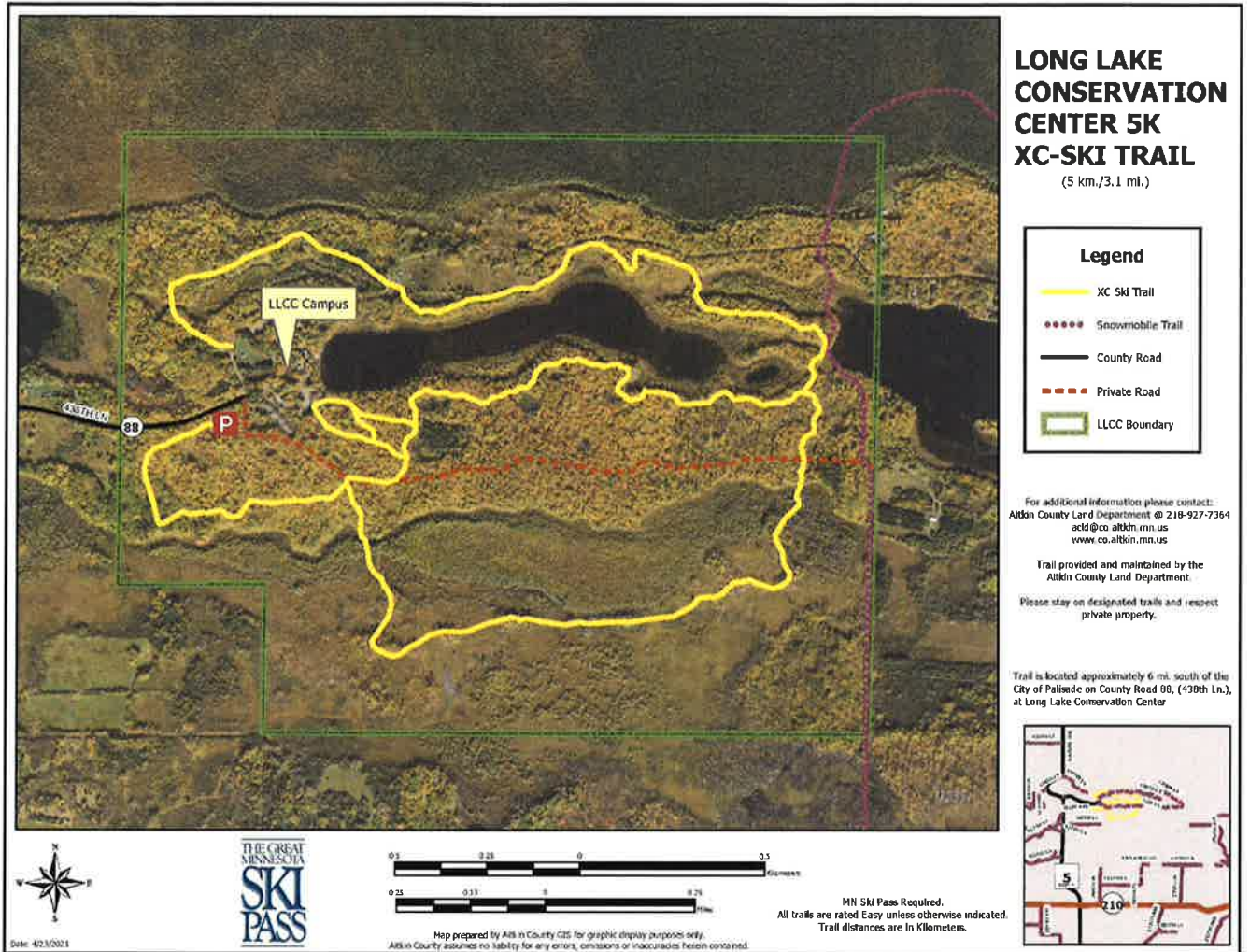


Figure 10. Vispo Ski Trails

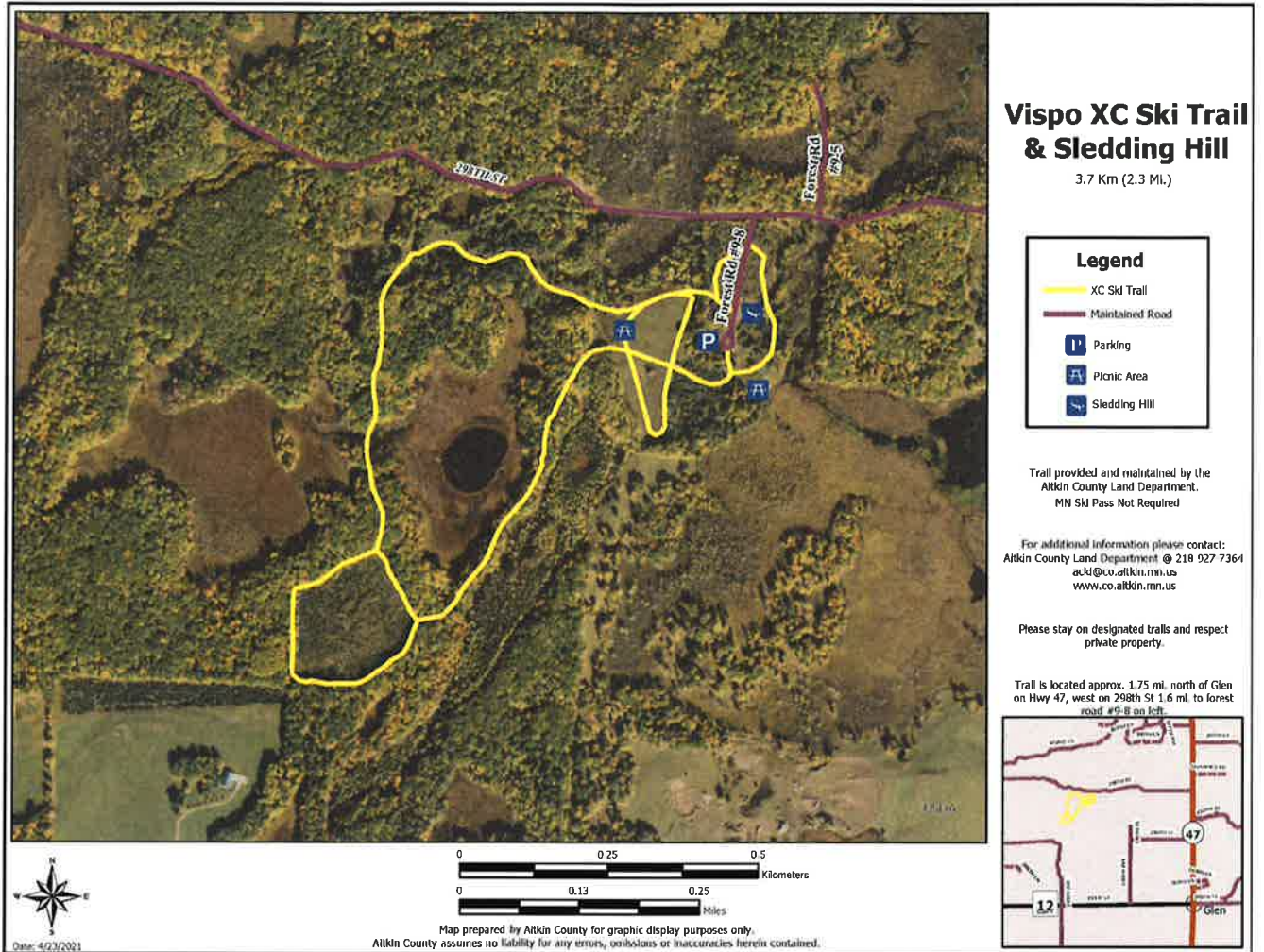
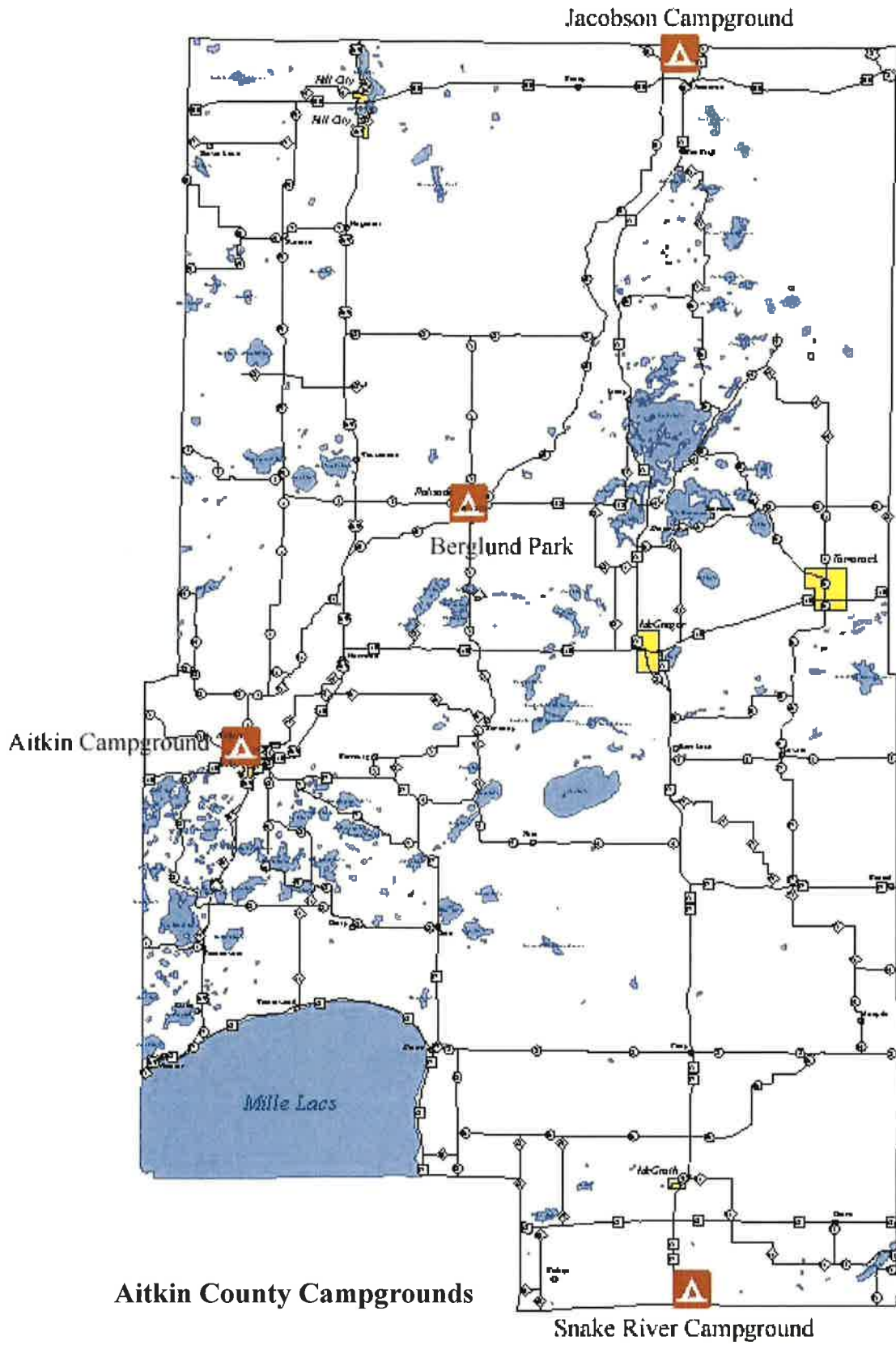


Figure 11. Aitkin County Campgrounds



Comments received for the "Recreation Plan – Second Generation 2021-2032" review. April 12, 2021, Long Lake Conservation Center.

Comment	Commenter	ACLD Response
Spelling and word choice errors: p. 6 Remove 'began" p. 7 Climate "for" should be "from" p.9 "in to" change to into and add "ing" to word adjoin	Brian Napstad Shamrock Township	Grammar and spelling have been corrected
Q. Does the county land department enforce the rules	Brian Napstad Shamrock Township	ACLD helped develop the enforcement plan. Under action steps it should read "with enforcement <u>plan</u> and education...
p. 13 Trail ambassadors are not enforcement	Frank Turnock Salo Township	The word "enforcement" has been deleted on page 13 and wherever else it appeared with Trail Ambassadors. The following paragraph was added on page 5. "The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Volunteer Trail Ambassador Program was established by the DNR Divisions of Enforcement, Parks and Trails, and Forestry. The program exists to promote safe, environmentally responsible operation of OHVs through informational, educational contacts and monitoring efforts."
Nice job	Bob Lake Spencer Township	Thanks!
Good details	Judy Blomberg Spencer Township	Much appreciated!
Cross country Trail maps need a context of where in the County these trails are located. Maps should include parking locations.	Brian Napstad Shamrock Township	Three new cross-country trail maps have been added with context to their location in the county and parking areas mapped.
Highway 3 Trail is being constructed. Can the trail be located on the map.	Brian Napstad Shamrock Township	County Road 3 trail has been added to the map.
Well written and will help us get grants	Frank Turnock Salo Township	Let's hope so!
Comprehensive and well put together	Bob Marcum Salo Township	Thank you!

Comments received for the “Recreation Plan – Second Generation 2021-2032” review. April 12, 2021, Long Lake Conservation Center.

P16. Include a Mille Lacs Connector Trail map	Brian Napstad Shamrock Township	The Mille Lacs Connector Trail is still in the works of trail delineation. The risk of improper alignments could lead to legal litigations and will be an amended page inserted into the Recreation Plan when the trail layout has been solidified.
Maps to be updated in a living document	Bob Lake Spencer Township	We will make sure this happens.
Use, °F instead of spelling it out	rpc	Edit has been made
P.7 change “for” to “from”	Walt Ford	Word choice has been corrected
In reviewing the document, the plan does a good job of identifying the Miss. River as a trail for day use. Maybe there could be some mention about future signage as I have already signed from Palisade to Aitkin Campground. Also, I don’t know if this is the appropriate document, but some mention of following the MHB 2019 Comprehensive Plan when establishing trails and campgrounds.	Tim Terrill	Page 20 under “Waterway Trails”, mention of signage by Mississippi Headwater Board from Palisade to Aitkin Campground. Page 19 reference guidance from Mississippi Headwater Board 2019 Comprehensive Plan.
Pg 10 - "sales" might need to be clarified for the average person. Timber harvesting permit? It may have been in the original report and missed!	Mark Jacobs	Word “timber” added before the word “sales”. At the end of the sentence, word “sales” substituted with words “any logging”.
Pg 15 - define the mechanism for citizen reporting?	Mark Jacobs	“If unlawful, local law enforcement should be notified. Anything else should be reported to the ACLD” was added to the last bullet point on page 13.
Pg 17 - Cornish Ridgeback Trail - where is it (personal curiosity)?	Mark Jacobs	The interest from multiple non-motorize recreation users comes at the location of the “Twin River Springs” areas and would look to utilize Forest road trails and previous logging operation roads such as defined Skid roads or Logging roads. This area holds favorable sand ridges and overlooks.

Comments received for the “Recreation Plan – Second Generation 2021-2032” review. April 12, 2021, Long Lake Conservation Center.

Pg 19 - 13 miles non-motorized trail, how many trails? They are typically shorter length by design	Mark Jacobs	Overall trail mileage is 13, but trails are in multiple locations – Snake River Campground, Jacobson Campground, Chipper Road, Vispo, etc.
Nice work ACLD staff!	Mark Jacobs	Thanks!
What will happen to promotion of Aitkin County’s recreational resources without an economic development coordinator. In Past Ross Wagner would do advertising	Anne Marcotte	County hired an Economic Development Coordinator and that individual will be promoting Aitkin County’s recreation resources. For 2021, there will be ATV ads in two separate publications.
Get more lodging in recreational areas if possible, need private enterprise to help develop budget lodging and food and beverage establishments	Jim Berg	County hired an Economic Development Coordinator. We are hoping the individual in that position will explore the lack of lodging and food establishments along the trail.
Is there continuing contact with local school children after they come to LLCC for their initial session	Jessica Perrine	At this time, no further contact is not made. Question would be what is the purpose of the continued contact? Feedback about their experience or something else?
To get more people using the trails, you need parents to introduce their children to them	Jessica Perrine	We could not agree more, phrase “Promoting recreation resource in Aitkin County as “Family Friendly” will be addressed, where appropriate, in future advertising campaigns” on page 16.
Have kids and parents continue to use LLCC routinely throughout the year	Jessica Perrine	The new LLCC Manager will be working on branding and marketing campaigns for all potential users of LLCC.
Before money is spent on building new trails, should do maintenance on ATV trail system that is already in place.	Galen Tveit	This is always the intent before the construction of new trails are to be established. Construction of new trails usually has to meet a certain criterion that would provide an economic impact or diversification to a local economically stressed community within Aitkin County or surrounding community
People want high quality interconnected trails more than they want more miles of trails	Galen Tveit	Noted, something ACLD strives for. We understand more is not always better and that people want quality trails. We hope this Plan helps directs that.
Need trails marked where they cross lakes like they have in Crow Wing County	Galen Tveit	We will reach out to the snowmobile club regarding the request.
Add total acres of parkland as well as total amount of acres in developed parks.	DJT	The following has been added to page 7. “The Land Department has 983.8 acres of developed County parks.

Comments received for the “Recreation Plan – Second Generation 2021-2032” review. April 12, 2021, Long Lake Conservation Center.

		Long Lake Conservation Center is the largest with 760 acres. Vispo is the second largest with 141 acres. Jacobson Campground encompasses 47 acres. Snake River Campground is 25 acres in size. Aitkin Campground and Berglund Park are the smallest totaling 5.6 acres and 5.2 acres respectively”.
Use the community connection program to offer natural and environmental learning activities to youth in our area - this would level the economic hurdle for many children of low income families and provide exposure to an idea of community stewardship - example is bird watching, mushroom hunting, animal track identification are all things that can happen close to home along park river banks and in fields that don’t require a big cost.	Jessica Perrine	All great ideas however developing specific activities/classes is beyond the scope of this Recreation Plan. Community Education and LLCC would be better situated to address this. We will let them know of the request.
Develop walking trails along a scenic route through or around town to promote activity outside.	Jessica Perrine	Excellent idea however we are somewhat limited to trail development on County tax-forfeited lands. This would be something to take up with the City of Aitkin.
For summer camps, consider day camps where no overnights are planned to avoid covid restrictions and risk.	Jessica Perrine	This would best be addressed through LLCC and although the Second-Generation Plan does not specify future goals or accomplishments for LLCC, it remains a priority for the County and County Board. Despite the closure in 2020-2021 due to COVID, LLCC currently has a new manager whose job it is to promote and market LLCC as best as possible. With fiscal responsibility in mind, the new manager will be developing operational plans for moving forward now that the Center is open again.
Develop birding activities at different age levels and provide initial resources to	Jessica Perrine	Birding trails have been established in the County however, developing specific activities/classes for birding, wildlife tracking,

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start a club for assistance to county in wildlife tracking or management.		or management is beyond the scope of this plan. We will reach out to LLCC and Community Ed regarding this.
Develop a fee for service program to direct small land-plot owners in healthy management of woods, waterways and native plant management to promote biodiversity.	Jessica Perrine	This already exists through the Soil and Water Conservation District. Kyle Fredrickson is the forester on staff who, for a fee, works with private landowners to develop management plans that address landowner goals including woods and wetlands. There is no acre limit for this service.
When listing out committee members, I would appreciate having Commissioner included by my and Brian names, other members should be identified by which district they represent and/or entity.	Anne Marcotte	Changes have been made
List of Commissioners, I would appreciate being identified as vice- chair.	Anne Marcotte	Changes have been made
I see no mention of the trail of regional significance distinction we received a few years back. It should be discussed as to why and how this is a valuable accreditation. Should it be used to gain funding for trail maintenance?	Anne Marcotte	Paragraph on this has been added to the bottom of page 13.
No reference to Mississippi Headwaters Board and the river signage enabling user to clearly identify distance to landings. Expansion of signage. Include scheduled river events: Bet your glasses- I believe this is the name- coming up this spring. Should we be expanding planned river events? Should we be expanding our relationship with MHB?	Anne Marcotte	MHB and Waterway Trails mentioned on page 19 & 20. Specifically reference the river signage initiative. Planning river events like ‘Paddle Your Glass Off’ is beyond the scope of this plan.
The ATV Park in McGregor should be identified as a successful expansion to our trails.	Anne Marcotte	This has been added to page 11. “The Axtell Technical Riding Area was developed and completed in 2016. Located off the North Soo Line Trail less than three miles northwest of McGregor, Axtell offers a variety of obstacles for ATV

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		and OHM riders of all skill level including a hill climbs, mud pits, log crawls, and rock crawls just to name a few”.
Great Job	Anne Marcotte	Thank You!
Under ACLD Staff, Dan Haasken is GIS Coordinator. Add David Wolfe’s position	Randy Quale	Correction has been made
Well written plan	Walt Ford	Thanks – much appreciated!
Lack of any acknowledgement of the threat that ATVs pose for the introduction of invasive terrestrial plant species. There needs to be some sort of plan to contend with that realistic possibility, especially important because the plan talks about Aitkin County's abundant natural resources and the need to be sensitive to the environment.	Walt Ford	Information on invasive species has been added to pages 7 and 8.
Aitkin County Land Department Staff and the Trail Ambassadors should provide training in identifying invasive species. While I suspect the ACLD staff are already trained in this, I suspect the Trail Ambassadors are not.	Walt Ford	Information on invasive species identification guides for Trail Ambassadors and how to get them has been added to page 8.
Accomplishments were accurately described on pages 8-13	DNR Parks & Trails	Thank you!
As described on pages 10-11, we agree that the working relationship between ACLD, DNR, clubs and contractors is cohesive	DNR Parks & Trails	Thank you, we have tried to foster great working relationships with all stakeholders and will continue to.
As referred to on page 16: o ACLD is being awarded 2021 GIA funding to produce and install mile markers (emergency markers) along the entire Northwoods ATV trail system.	DNR Parks & Trails	The mile marker project has been started and will be completed this summer. We also expect progress on the Mille Lacs Connector Trail this summer. Trail tread conversion is mentioned on page 16.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We are aware of and helping assess the East Mille Lacs ATV Trail development project. ○ ATV trail tread conversions are an ongoing statewide topic of discussion. 		
<p>Snowmobile trails are not mentioned in the “second generation plan”, maybe because there are no proposed actions. ACLD continues to be a successful partner in managing GIA snowmobile trails by being responsive to trail conditions and reroute needs, and continuously assessing and communicating ways to improve the system</p>	DNR Parks & Trails	<p>That is correct, we did not identify any action items for snowmobile trails in this update however, ACLD will continue to work with local clubs and partners to ensure we have safe and enjoyable trails to ride in Aitkin County.</p>
<p>Pages 12, 17, 18- ACLD has approached us with three proposals:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop additional Public Water Accesses on ACLD property consistent with DNR permitting requirements and guidelines. DNR Parks and Trails can offer assistance installing boat ramps if resources are available. 2. Develop water campsites on the Mississippi River between Grand Rapids and Aitkin. A private citizen, who identified 23 potential campsites on state-owned land between river miles 1131 and 1143, proposed this. This proposal will require extensive DNR review. 3. Enhanced Mississippi River signage (noted as “continuation of day use segments” on page 17). This is led by Mississippi Headwaters Board and supported by ACLD. DNR Parks and Trails has approved water trail signs for various locations on state-owned land along the river. DNR crews install the signage. 	DNR Parks & Trails	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Very good information to know, thank you! 2. We have been in contact with the individual regarding potential campsites along the river and understand it will take extensive DNR review. 3. The Mississippi Headwaters Board has been an invaluable partner as well as DNR Parks & Trails. We look forward to future collaborations.
Page 20:	DNR Parks & Trails	Snowmobiling and OHM have been added for both the North and South Soo Line.

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Correction: North Soo Line and South Soo Line are both also open to OHM and snowmobiles		
There was no reference to the one-mile paved segment of the Cuyuna Lakes State Trail (CLST) that was developed in the city of Aitkin. The CLST is authorized from Brainerd to Aitkin as a dual treadway. (Statute and Map added at end of this letter)	DNR Parks & Trails	Info on the CLST has been added on page 23.
The Division of Fish and Wildlife also reviewed the document. Wildlife area staff work with Aitkin County Land Department on trails, and routinely collaborate on maintenance where possible, including ongoing conversations about linking hunter-walking trails. However, any activities on state lands administered by the Division of Wildlife must be consistent with state rules.	DNR Fish & Wildlife	We appreciate the collaboration and will work with the Division of Wildlife should we have any planned activities on land administered by the Division of Wildlife.
Thanks for the opportunity to comment on this plan.	Patty Thielen DNR Forestry	Absolutely, the feedback we received has been great!
DNR appreciates the county’s commitment to recreation management, starting with your first plan published in 1941. Some of the reviewers remembered how Aitkin County led the state in promoting forest stewardship.	DNR	Thanks!

The Division of Ecological and Water Resources governs the state’s management of public waters, wetlands, threatened and endangered species and invasive species. Any development of trails must meet these permitting requirements. Trails can act as a way to spread terrestrial invasive species. Trail planning and maintenance can be a means to spread the word about managing and mitigating invasive species.

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The Division of Enforcement provides for safe use of public recreational facilities, including assistance in emergency management. DNR Conservation Officers have the responsibility to help locate and stabilize anyone requiring attention. As a first responder, Conservation Officers inform Emergency Management Services of the resources required by the incident. The inclusion of the landing zones for helicopters in the plan supports that work. The Division of Forestry manages most of the state owned lands in Aitkin County. Any county work on, state administered forestry lands will require DNR review, and consideration of DNR activities, as well as state rules. Some state administered lands are designated school trust lands, which are managed to raise revenue for public education. A lease may be required for crossing state forest lands.

The Division of Lands and Minerals administers leases to cross or use state lands. Lands and Minerals also issues leases for mineral exploration. Trails proposing to cross DNR administered state lands (including school trust lands) require review by DNR’s regional review process. Proposals to cross state lands will also require review of funding requirements, including state bonding, federal grants; and grants in aid (GIA). Aitkin County has existing state metallic minerals leases and there is a high potential for other state nonferrous metallic minerals. Therefore, the state must protect the ability to issue leases for mineral exploration.

The Division of Parks and Trails manages public water accesses, state trails, state parks and recreation areas. The division also administers the state’s grant in aid (GIA) program for several types of trails. Area Parks and Trails staff reviewed the Aitkin County Comprehensive Recreational Trail plan.

Cuyuna Lakes Trail Statute and Map

85.015 STATE TRAILS.

Subd. 24. Cuyuna Lakes Trail , Crow Wing and Aitkin Counties. (a) The trail alignments shall originate in Crow Wing County at the Paul Bunyan Trail in the city of Baxter and shall extend in an east-northeasterly direction to the city of Riverton, Crow Wing County, where they shall connect to the Sagamore Mine segment of the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area. The trail alignments shall then continue in a northeasterly direction, generally along and using former railroad rights-of-way insofar as practical, to connect with the main body of the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area, the communities of Ironton and Crosby in Crow Wing County, and the Croft Mine Historical Park. The trail alignments shall then continue in an east-northeasterly direction, generally along and using former railroad rights-of-way insofar as practical, to the city of Cuyuna in Crow Wing County, and then continue east to the city of Aitkin, Aitkin County, and there terminate.

(b) The trail shall be developed as a multiuse, multiseasonal, dual treadway trail

1mi. Segment of CLST Developed in 2011 in partnership with Aitkin Co.