

# CHAPTER 1



# INTRODUCTION

## DEVELOPING A WORLD-CLASS TRAIL PLAN AND PURPOSE

Building from the success of the 11.4-mile completed Sauk Prairie Segment of the Great Sauk State Trail, this master plan and planning process was initiated to identify a route and recommendations to extend the multi-use trail north and west to connect trail users to Devil's Lake State Park, the Baraboo Area, the Villages of North Freedom and Rock Springs, and terminating at the start of the 400 State Trail in Reedsburg. The Great Sauk State Trail extension will provide a safe and enjoyable recreational trail for pedestrians and bicyclists to traverse the unique landscape of the Baraboo River, the Baraboo Range, and of the Driftless Area. Once complete, the Great Sauk State Trail (GSST) extension will provide a world-class trail experience, showcasing the natural landscape and connecting communities in Sauk County.

The process for completing this plan intentionally involved a significant amount of community, stakeholder, agency, and municipal engagement during the 18-month process. This robust engagement process was key to understanding the issues and opportunities that this trail will present. Questions such as "Who will benefit most?" and "How will the design, route location, and amenities best support tourism, community development, and active living for those who live in and around the region?" were considered along the way.



Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department served as the project sponsor and project manager for this master plan effort. A consultant firm was hired in early 2023 to assist with the effort. The consultant firm and County staff worked collaboratively throughout the process, and are collectively referred to as the 'project team' in this document.



Figure 1.1 Existing State Trail Network in Wisconsin

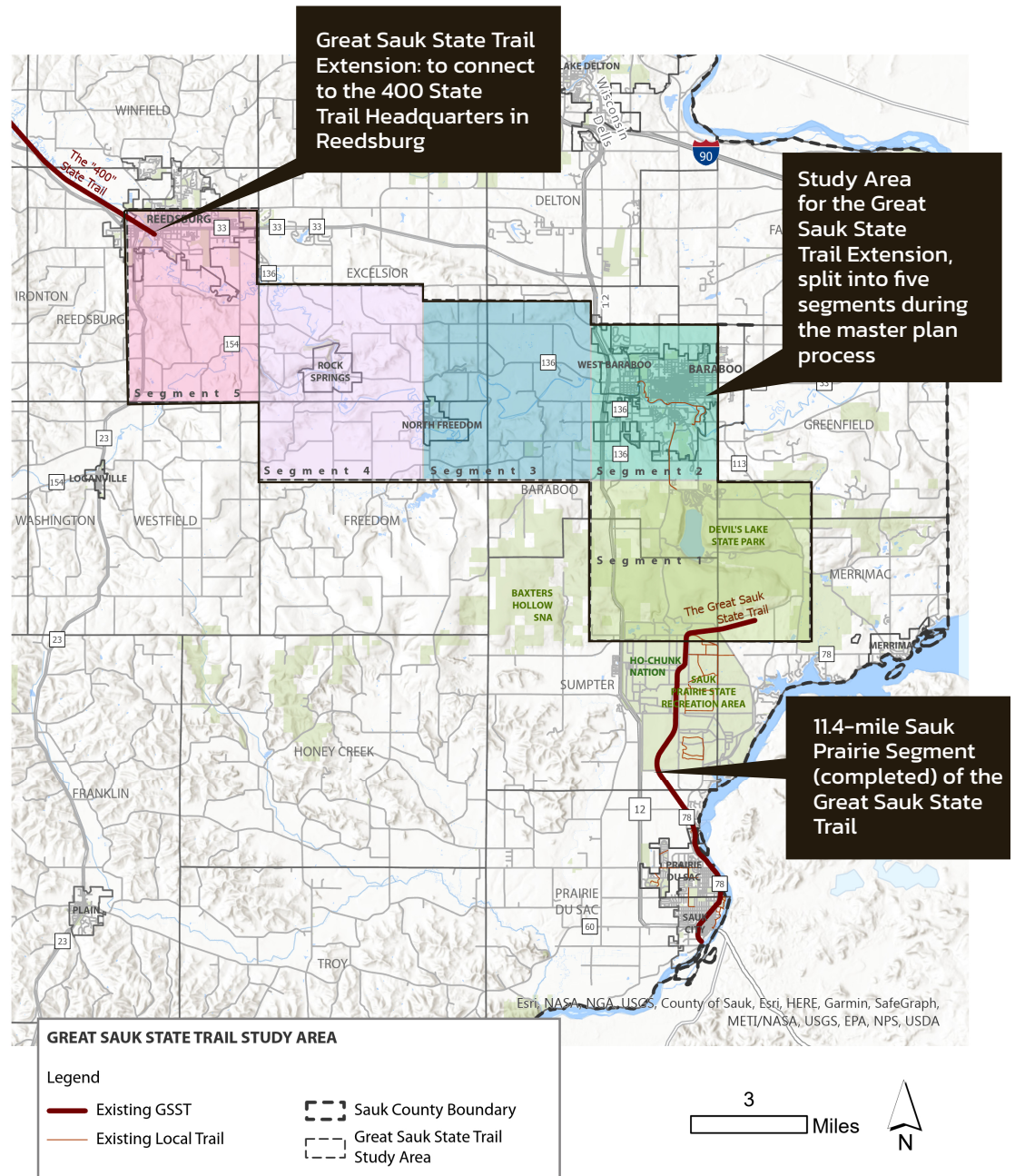


Figure 1.2 Project Study Area

# PROJECT TIMELINE

Planning for the GSST extension kicked off in January 2023 and the plan was adopted by the Sauk County Board of Supervisors July 16, 2024. The project consisted of seven key tasks. The team conducted three rounds of community engagement, starting by gathering ideas and input around the project area, collecting feedback on the route options midway through the project, and seeking input on the final plan document and route.

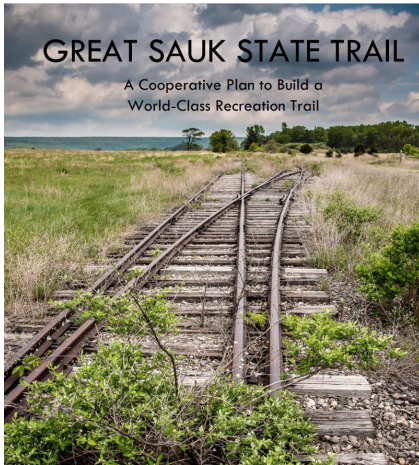


Figure 1.3 Project Schedule/Timeline

# REVIEW OF PREVIOUS PLANS

The following plans were reviewed early in the planning process to provide the project team with a background on what the community has already initiated in previous plans and documents. Overall, the idea for the Great Sauk State Trail, as a long-term vision to connect through Sauk County, has been identified for many years through many previous efforts.

## SAUK COUNTY PLANS



### GREAT SAUK STATE TRAIL

A Cooperative Plan to Build a World-Class Recreation Trail

### GREAT SAUK STATE TRAIL: A COOPERATIVE PLAN TO BUILD A WORLD-CLASS RECREATION TRAIL (2015)

Completed by Sauk County staff, the plan provided the framework and guidance to build the first segment of the GSST, known as the Great Sauk State Trail – Sauk Prairie Segment.

This first segment is an 11.4-mile paved trail connecting Sauk City through Prairie du Sac, and continuing through the Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area (formerly the Badger Army Ammunition Plant).

The Sauk Prairie Segment was further split into 3 Units with Tiers based on priority of construction:

- » Dane County Unit – Tier 2
- » Prairie du Sac/Sauk City Unit – Tier 1
- » Badger Unit – Tier 3

This plan projected that future segments of the GSST will be planned in succession: Devil’s Lake Segment, Baraboo Segment, and Reedsburg Segment.

### Phase I: Baraboo River Corridor Plan Summary

**CHAPTER 1**  
 Chapter 1 states the plan's purpose which is to "Protect, restore and enhance the natural resources of the Baraboo River Corridor and focus on opportunities that will not restrict future land development to establish the region as THE premier water recreation destination in south central Wisconsin."

**CHAPTER 2**  
 Chapter 2 has the general information on the communities and region, demographic data and situation land use within the study area. The study area and land use are expected to experience population growth due to its unique characteristics, including opportunities for recreation and tourism. High quality areas exist in the study area that are important to the community. According to projections from the Wisconsin Department of Administration, land use will see an important topic in both focus group meetings and at the public meeting. Stakeholder interviews revealed concerns with the quantity of habitat in the study area. The plan has a negative impact on water quality and creates a potential risk for pollution. Stakeholders are also concerned about development adjacent to the river being built that could lead to a degraded water flow.

**CHAPTER 3**  
 Chapter 3 is an overview and analysis of the natural resources, cultural and historic resources, infrastructure resources and recreational resources within the study area.

### PHASE I: BARABOO RIVER CORRIDOR PLAN (2016)

In 2001, the Baraboo River was restored to a free-flowing river after a series of dam removals, increasing the potential for recreation and spurring plans for improvements. The Baraboo River is the longest restored river east of the Mississippi River. This plan's purpose is to "Protect, restore and enhance the natural environment within the Baraboo River Corridor and focus on opportunities that will spur recreation, tourism, and development to establish the region as THE premier water recreation destination in south central Wisconsin."

- Some important points to note from this plan include:
- » North Freedom, West Baraboo, Baraboo and Sauk County would like to make the River a focal point in their communities and make it a true regional amenity.
  - » Includes an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the Baraboo River.

The plan recommends conducting a feasibility study to expand the Baraboo Riverwalk and/or trail throughout the corridor; creating a system of access points throughout the Baraboo River Corridor and associated tributaries for kayakers, canoers and fishers; and providing a host of support facilities and amenities to expand tourism within communities in which it resides.

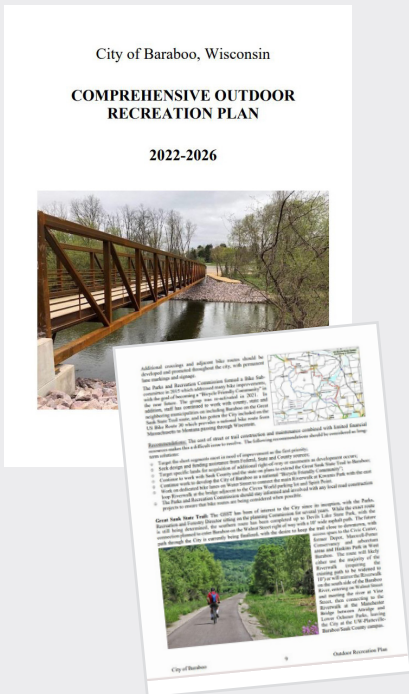
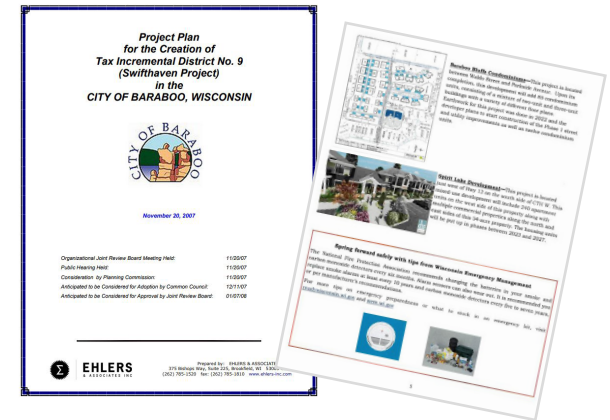




**RESILIENT BARABOO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STUDY (2022)**

This plan recommends a separated multi-use trail along South Boulevard Corridor, or a Bicycle Boulevard along residential streets in addition to strengthening the connections to the Baraboo River in Downtown Baraboo.

- » Key Site Concepts from this study identify a new pedestrian bridge over the Baraboo River, and park/public space improvements along the south side of the future bridge at Vine Street.
- » Goal 2.1: Increase connectivity to/from Devil's Lake State Park (DLSP) through creating comfortable and clear bike access to/from DLSP, clear wayfinding signage.
- » Goal 2.2: Increase connectivity to/from Baraboo River and south of River through the expansion of Ice Age National Scenic Trail and Great Sauk State Trail.



**CITY OF BARABOO COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN 2022 – 2026 (2021)**

This plan addresses the task of ensuring that adequate park and recreational resources are available for both present and future residents of the City of Baraboo. Several goals in the plan are relevant to this planning process:

- » Goal 3: Develop a trail system linking schools, bike paths, parks, the Ice Age Trail and other community places of interest.
  - Objectives: Work with Sauk County and other area municipalities to expand the Great Sauk State Trail into the area.
- » Goal to become a Bicycle Friendly Community.

The plan also recommends working with Sauk County to extend the GSST into the City of Baraboo. A number of key considerations are noted:

- » A potential grade-separated crossing of the GSST from Oschner Park to the Elementary School is mentioned.
- » Five properties are identified for future acquisition for expansion of the Riverwalk to connect Lower Oschner Park to Mary Roundtree Evans Park are shown.
- » Bridge across Baraboo River at Vine Street is also shown.

In the Community Survey Results the most needed improvements for outdoor recreation were:

- » Expansion of the Riverwalk, more nature trails and areas (92%)
- » Connection between downtown and the Riverwalk via the Oak Street Overlook (89%)
- » Access to the Great Sauk State Trail (86%)



# 2042 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



## CITY OF REEDSBURG COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

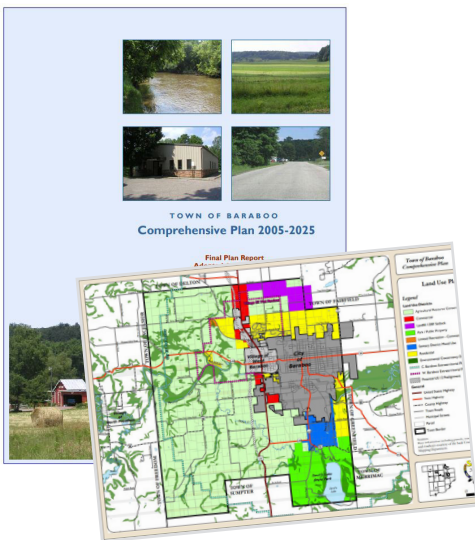
The transportation section of this plan includes some important recommendations relevant to the GSST planning process. These recommendations include:

- » “Continue to develop a comprehensive system of bikeways and/or multi-purpose trails which minimize conflicts between motor vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians”
- » “Continue to develop a comprehensive system of bikeways and/or multi-purpose trails that link neighborhoods, parks, schools, major commercial areas, and other communities while providing the opportunity for recreational activity.”
- » Promote bike and pedestrian network continuity within the region and support connections to regional bike and pedestrian networks (e.g., The ‘400’ State Trail, and The Great Sauk State Trail).”

A survey of Reedsburg residents also found that 68% of respondents supported additional recreational trails.

## TOWN AND VILLAGE PLANS

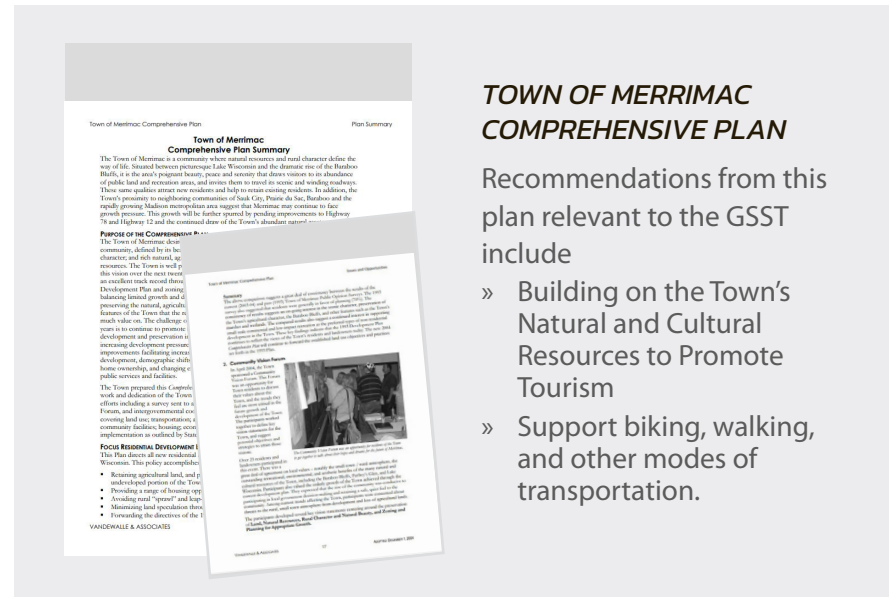
\* The Town of Sumpter’s Comprehensive Plan and the Town of Excelsior’s Comprehensive plan both reference the existing Great Sauk State Trail and mention that there are in progress plans to extend the trail.



### TOWN OF BARABOO COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2005 – 2025 (2005)

The Town of Baraboo’s comprehensive plan has a stated goal to “improve all modes of transportation access between different parts of the community, including biking and walking opportunities.”

The plan references supporting collaboration with Sauk County and property owners to extend the Ice Age Trail through the Town of Baraboo. This plan also recommends improvements to create a better bike path and sidewalk system.



### TOWN OF MERRIMAC COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Recommendations from this plan relevant to the GSST include

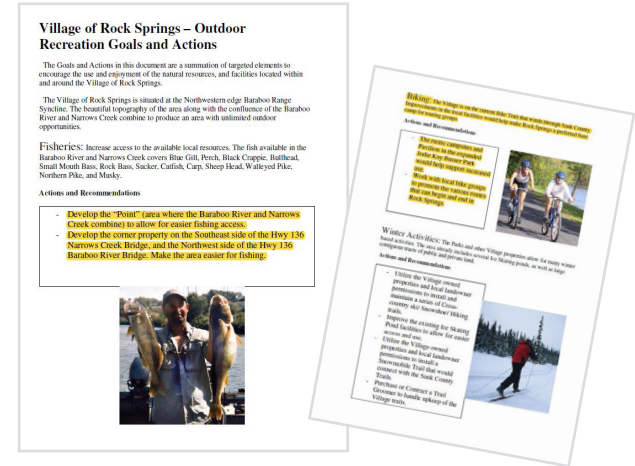
- » Building on the Town’s Natural and Cultural Resources to Promote Tourism
- » Support biking, walking, and other modes of transportation.

## VILLAGE OF ROCK SPRINGS OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (2010)

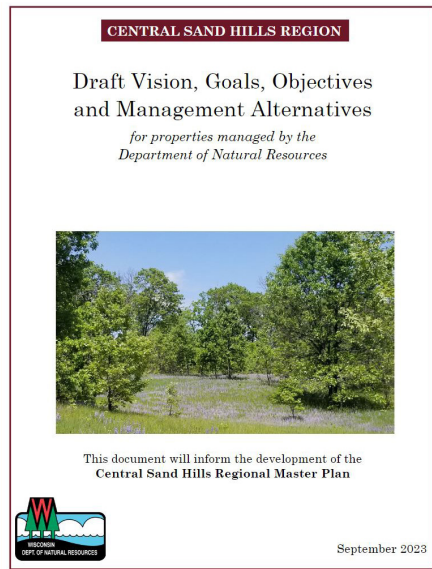
This plan makes several mentions of plans or goals that could connect to the development of the GSST. These include:

- » Installing a trail on the lower portion of Weidman’s Park that connects to Vielhuber addition, the wayside, and the Northern Quarry area.
- » Installing a more permanent footbridge to connect the Fireman’s Park, Downtown Area, Jodie Kay Busser Park, and Ableman’s Gorge Trail.
- » Improvements to rustic campsites and Pavilion in the expanded Jodie Kay Busser Park to help support increased use.
- » Work with local bike groups to promote the various routes that can begin and end in Rock Springs.

The plan mentions that the Village is on a Bike Trail that winds through Sauk County, and that improvements in the local facilities would help make Rock Springs a preferred base camp for touring groups.



## AGENCY PLANS



### CENTRAL SAND HILLS REGIONAL MASTER PLAN (2024, DRAFT)

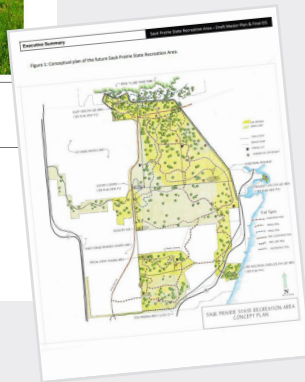
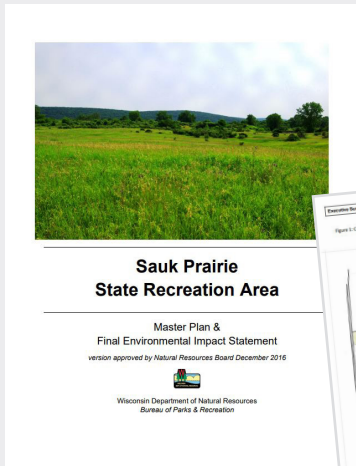
The Wisconsin DNR is completing plans for their properties based on the ecological landscape designations. The Great Sauk State Trail extension study area falls within the Wisconsin’s Central Sand Hills Ecological Landscape. The Wisconsin DNR is in the process of completing the plan for this ecological landscape and anticipates completion in the Fall of 2024. Devils Lake and the surrounding DNR owned lands are an important focus of this draft plan. The plan references the intention of routing the GSST through the park and the collaborative effort underway to find a suitable option. The draft plan document is currently structured with Alternatives, setting up multiple scenarios of different options throughout the plan for various projects. The alternatives listed for the GSST are as follows:

**Alternative 1:** Status quo. Do not attempt to site the Great Sauk State Trail in DLSP.

**Alternative 2:** Identify a corridor for the Great Sauk State Trail through the park from Sauk Prairie SRA to the north boundary of the park

Input shared by the Wisconsin DNR on this draft seems to indicate strong support for Alternative 2, and there is particular interest in the possibility of the GSST creating a safe bike and pedestrian connection to the Lake’s South Shore Day Use Area that would reduce overall vehicle congestion.

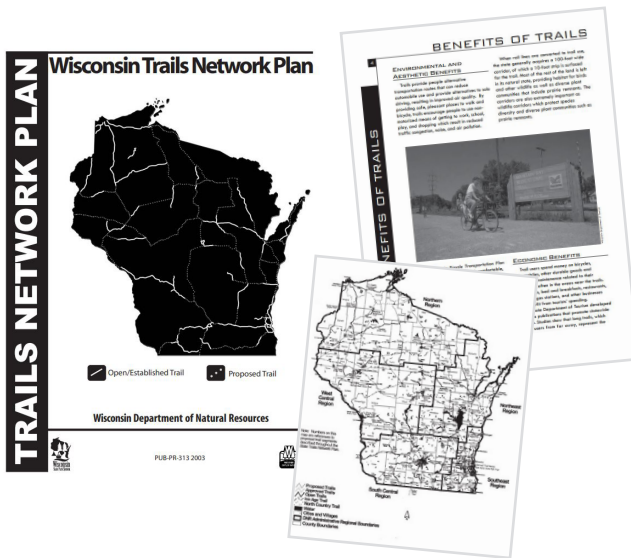




### SAUK PRAIRIE STATE RECREATION AREA (SPSRA) MASTER PLAN (2016)

This revised master plan document and final EIS contains descriptions of the proposed use and management of the property, potential impacts, alternatives evaluated, the public's inputs and perspectives on the draft document and the department's responses. This plan references plans to have up to 15 miles of bike trails within the SPSRA.

- » "Two trail connections will be established to Devil's Lake: one for on-road bikes (that will connect via Burma Road) and one for hiking."
- » Creating access points to the Great Sauk State Trail from SPSRA.
- » The proposed Day Use Area is mentioned which if constructed could be a point of interest along the trail.
- » Concept Plan for the SPSRA shows a few bike/hike trails in the northern section.



### WISCONSIN STATE TRAILS NETWORK PLAN

Initially approved in 2002 and updated in 2003, the Wisconsin State Trails Network Plan describes a vision of a statewide network of interconnected rail trails into which smaller state, county, municipal, partnership and private trails feed; and provides guidance to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for land acquisition and development. The Great Sauk State Trail is part of the Network Plan Corridors shown on the Wisconsin Trails Network Plan by the DNR.

★ Other plans which were reviewed but did not include material specifically relevant to the GSST Extension Plan include: City of Baraboo Comprehensive Plan, City of Reedsburg Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Town of Freedom Comprehensive Plan, and the Town of Reedsburg Comprehensive Plan.



