

# CHAPTER 6



# IMPLEMENTATION

## INTRODUCTION

Implementation for the Great Sauk State Trail extension will occur in phases, over multiple years, requiring agency and municipal coordination. Local and regional multi-modal advocates, residents, and community stakeholders will contribute insight to implementation of amenities and support facilities for the trail.

The planning process for this study expressly included a significant amount of involvement from municipalities, agencies, and other stakeholder groups to develop, review, and refine the plan. Sauk County has served as the primary project sponsor for this planning study; Sauk County will continue to serve as the primary project sponsor and will initiate coordination through implementation.

The following list are steps that will need to be completed before construction of the trail will begin. Likely, the trail will be constructed in phases per segment.

- » Feasibility and engineering analysis, including analysis of economic impact and detailed review of archaeological, historical and cultural resource impact with agency collaboration.
- » Funding sources will need to be identified and secured.
- » Land surveying and negotiation with property owners (as necessary) for easements or acquisition will need to occur. *Note that Sauk County will not acquire any land unless a landowner is willing to negotiate. In 2017, Act 59 of Wisconsin's budget bill amended Wisconsin's statutes to prohibit the use of eminent domain to establish or extend recreational trails, bicycle ways, bicycle lanes, or pedestrian ways.*
- » Detailed design and engineering of new facilities.
- » Coordination with other roadway, trail or capital improvements.

## GRANT PROGRAMS

The table below summarizes eligibility and grant-funded activities for federal and state trail grant opportunities.

ELIGIBILITY	STATE				FEDERAL		
	KNOWLES-NELSON STEWARDSHIP GRANT SUBPROGRAMS				Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)	Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE)
	Aids for the Acquisition and Development of Local Parks (ADLP)	Acquisition of Development Rights (ADR)	Urban Green Space (UGS) Grants	Urban Rivers (UR) Grants			
Local Governments (Towns, Villages, Cities, Counties)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tribal Governments	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lake sanitary districts and public Inland lake protection and rehabilitation districts			X				X
Nonprofit Conservation Organizations (Primary purpose = acquisition of property for conservation)	X	X	X	X			
Nonprofit Organizations (Primary purpose = promoting encouraging or engaging in trail activities)						X	
Incorporated Trail Organizations						X	
School Districts					X	X	
Regional Transportation Authorities							X
Transit agencies							X
Natural resource or public land agencies							X
Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) serving less than 200,000							X

Table 6.1 State and Federal Grants Matrix

Content provided by Wisconsin DNR

## FUNDING SOURCES

Identifying appropriate funding sources to construct the Great Sauk State Trail extension will require combining traditional, state, and federal grant sources, local contributions, private donations and potentially fundraising efforts. Future roadway and bridge improvement projects can be paired with trail construction or may include potential site preparation for future trail construction. Grant writing and fundraising efforts will likely be most successful through collaboration between Sauk County and local partners, demonstrating wide support and commitment across the region. The following is a list of federal and state grant programs that are applicable to implementing the Great Sauk State Trail extension.

### KNOWLES-NELSON STEWARDSHIP GRANT PROGRAMS

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Grant is an umbrella program that supports several DNR-administered grant programs. A key component of the Stewardship Fund is cooperation and partnership between the Wisconsin DNR and the agency applying for funds. These grant programs require that all land acquisition and development projects provide public access for outdoor recreation purposes. There are four Stewardship local assistance grant programs that local units of government are eligible to apply for that support nature-based outdoor recreation activities.

The following Stewardship Grant opportunities are potential sources for funding components of the trail construction:

#### *ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL PARKS (ADLP)*

ADLP funding may be used for both land acquisition and development of projects for nature-based recreation, including outdoor recreation trails. ADLP funds up to a 50% match for eligible projects which include:

- » Land acquisition for property with frontage on rivers, streams, lakes, estuaries, and reservoirs.
- » Development of picnic areas, recreational trails, and natural or scenic areas.

#### *URBAN GREEN SPACE (UGS) GRANTS*

UGS grants may be used for the purchase of land or easements in urban/urbanizing areas to preserve the scenic and ecological values of natural open spaces for nature-based outdoor recreation. UGS grants match 50% of funding for selected projects.

#### *URBAN RIVERS (UR) GRANTS*

The Urban Rivers Program provides for economic restoration through the restoration or preservation of urban river fronts, increasing access to rivers, and preserving natural areas along the river. Eligible projects include purchase of land on or adjacent to rivers flowing through urban/urbanizing areas to preserve or restore the scenic and environmental value of rivers for nature-based outdoor recreation. UR matches 50% of funding for selected projects.

#### *ACQUISITION OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (ADR)*

The ADR grant program is intended for aiding in the purchase of development rights (easements)

for the protection of natural, agricultural or forestry values that would enhance nature-based outdoor recreation.

### TAP FUNDING

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a legislative program that was authorized in Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) in 2021. Projects that meet eligibility criteria for the Safe Routes to School Program, Transportation Enhancements, and/or the Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities Program are generally eligible TAP projects.

TAP provides reimbursement funding for programs and projects defined as transportation alternatives, including on- and off- road pedestrian and bicycle facilities such as the Great Sauk State Trail. TAP projects require project sponsors to pay 20% of project costs and must begin within four years of the date the funding is awarded.

- » ADLP funding may be used for both land acquisition and development of projects for nature-based recreation, including outdoor recreation trails. **ADLP funds up to a 50% match for eligible projects**



## FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Additionally, there are many federal grant programs that support a wide variety of outdoor recreation projects throughout the state.

### **LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (LWCF)**

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established by Congress in 1964 to fulfill a bipartisan commitment to safeguard natural areas, water resources and cultural heritage, and to provide recreation opportunities to all Americans. LWCF supports increased public access to and protection for federal public lands and waters — including national parks, forests, wildlife refuges and recreation areas — and provides matching grants to state governments for the acquisition and development of public parks and other outdoor recreation sites.

### **RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM (RTP)**

This program exists to encourage the maintenance and development of motorized, non-motorized, and diversified trails by providing funding assistance. Eligible projects include maintenance and restoration of existing trails; development and rehabilitation of trails and trailhead facilities and trail links; purchase and lease of trail construction and maintenance equipment; construction of new; acquisition of easements or property for trails; state administrative costs; and operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection related to trails. This

is a reimbursement program and a 25% cash or in-kind match for eligible elements of the project proposal is required.

### **RAISE FUNDING**

Under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (or RAISE) program provides funding for capital investments in surface transportation that will have a significant local or regional impact. The Merit Criteria are safety, environmental sustainability, quality of life, mobility and community connectivity, economic competitiveness and opportunity, state of good repair, innovation, and partnership and collaboration.

### **LOCAL COST-SHARE, GRANT MATCH**

The support of local communities both politically and financial are needed for the success of the trail. There are a number of ways that municipalities within the planned route may choose to financially support the segments of the trail within their jurisdictions.

### **CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT**

Local municipalities that may benefit from the construction of the GSST may want to consider a capital improvement budget allocation to contribute to the initial trail construction costs for parts of the trail within the municipality. This allocation should be used as a match for other funding sources whenever possible.

### **PUBLIC WORKS ASSISTANCE**

Local municipalities may consider leveraging trail construction assistance from their public works department to provide at-cost or in-kind services.

### **GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS**

General obligation bonds can provide local municipalities an opportunity to raise funds for projects that benefit the entire community.

## TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Regular maintenance of the trail will extend the life of the surfacing and reduce the overall long-term costs of total reconstruction. Regular trail maintenance also keeps trail users safe from hazards, allows the trail to be used by people with a wide variety of abilities, and provides a welcoming trail experience. People are more likely to use a trail that is in good physical condition, and having a maintenance plan in place is generally a requirement to receive federally funded grants.

A typical asphalt trail has a life expectancy of 20 years before reconstruction, if constructed correctly with an adequate depth of aggregate base. Seasonal or annual maintenance, weather, exposure to ultra violet light, trail usage by heavy vehicles, poor soils, and drainage can all affect the life cycle of a trail. Yearly condition inventory and budgeting for maintenance will stretch the life of the trail surface.

According to the Local Roadway Research Board, deferred maintenance can lead to a shorter service life and result in major rehabilitation or replacement needs quicker than planned (see Figure 4.2). Preventative techniques are typically applied to trails in “excellent” to “fair” condition to prevent them from falling in disrepair, resulting in a shorter life span, and requiring higher cost to rehabilitate or reconstruct the trail.

- » **Crack Filling:** Crack filling is a common practice applied to asphalt trails when cracks are wider than 3/8 inches. Crack sealing is a flexible latex product that is pumped into large cracks to help prevent water intrusion and damage to the sub-grade. Crack filling provides safety benefits for all users (e.g., pedestrians, bicyclists, inline skaters and skateboards), but does not fully address pavement quality or distress issues. Crack filling should be viewed as a short-term preventive maintenance technique.
- » **Thin Overlay:** An overlay consists of a thin layer of asphalt that is applied to the top of the surface. Thin overlays can be a costly technique, but are used to extend the service life of the pavement by 5 to 10 years and improve ride quality.

- » **Mill & Overlay:** A mill and overlay is also a common technique for major rehabilitation/reconstruction projects. This technique helps build structural capacity by milling the existing pavement and adding a new layer of asphalt. A mill and overlay can help extend the life of the trail by 10 to 15 years or restart its surface life, depending on the trail’s structural base and the depth of the mill and overlay.
- » **Mastic Products:** Mastic products are a form of seal coating that is applied to larger cracks that cannot be addressed with traditional crack filling treatments. In essence, mastic products serve as a joint sealer without jeopardizing the trails ride quality. These products are designed to dry fast (1 hour) and can extend the life of a trail by 3 to 5 years. This technique may be viewed as both a preventative maintenance and minor rehabilitation practice.

- » **Slurry Seal:** A slurry seal is a preventative maintenance procedure that provides a protective surface to the existing asphalt trail. More advanced applications are known as micro surfacing. This treatment includes a blend of oil and small aggregate that is applied to the trail (1/8 inch). By sealing the trail, the base of the trail is protected from water damage and the surface is protected from weather and wear. This treatment can last approximately 3 to 5 years, while a micro surfacing treatment can last more than 7 years. This type of application requires longer periods of time (6 to 8 hours) to dry before someone can use the trail.

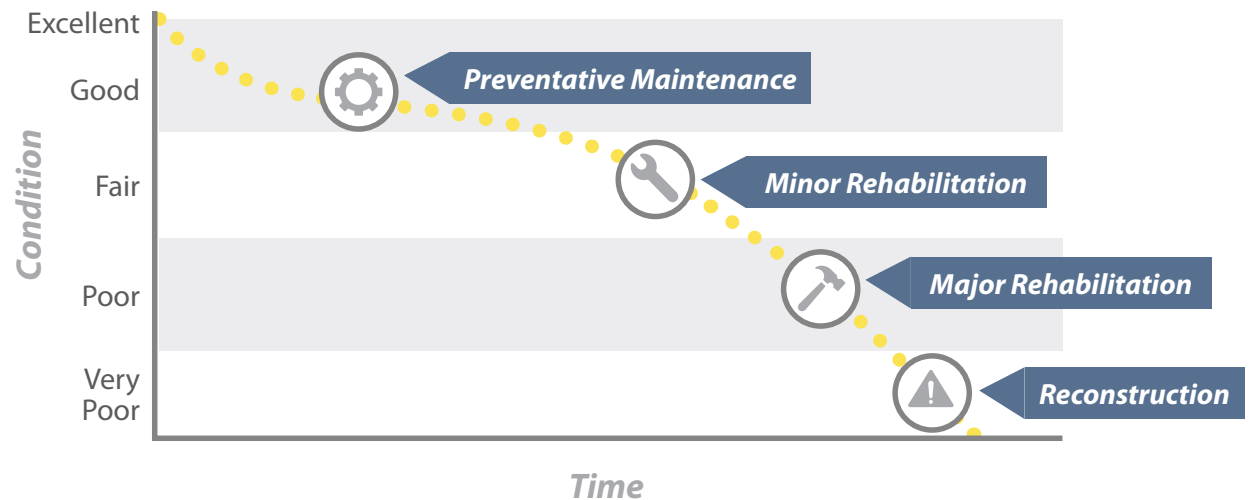


Figure 6.1 Maintenance Needs

Maintenance Activity	OPTIMAL FREQUENCY							Notes
	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually	Spring/Fall	After Storm	Other	
<b>General Maintenance</b>								
1	Safety inspection	X					X	
2	General debris and trash pickup	X					X	
3	Vandalism inspection	X						
4	Encroachments							Ongoing
<b>Pavement</b>								
1	Pavement survey					X		Conduct Spring and Fall surveys
2	Crack sealing							Reactionary
3	Fog seal							As Needed
4	Sealcoat							As Needed
5	Slurry seal							As Needed
6	Overlay							As Needed
7	Reconstruct							As Needed
8	Inspect pavement markings				X			As Needed
9	Repaint pavement markings							As Needed
<b>Vegetation</b>								
1	Mowing- clear zones, trailhead areas	X	X					
2	Brush trimming/ overhead trimming				X			Spring activity
3	Clear zone weed control							As Needed
4	Sight line trimming at intersections		X					Roads, other trails, driveways, etc.
5	Tree removal						X	As Needed
6	Rain garden maintenance		X				X	
7	Trail sweeping/ blowing					X	X	As Needed
8	Seeding				X	X		Spring activity
9	Root cutting							Monitor root activity along trail

Maintenance Activity	OPTIMAL FREQUENCY							Notes	
	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually	Spring/Fall	After Storm	Other		
<b>Drainage</b>									
1	Erosion repair			X		X	X		After spring snowmelt, storm cleanup
2	Culvert/ catch basin clearing			X			X		Storm cleanup
3	Ditch maintenance (clear of debris, trash, branches)				X		X		Spring activity
4	Standing water repair				X		X		
<b>Structures</b>									
1	Bridge inspection (non-structural inspection)				X				
2	Tunnel inspection (non-structural inspection)				X				
3	Boardwalk inspection				X				
4	Railroad crossing inspection				X				Notify owner (railroad) of problems
5	Retaining walls				X				

Table 6.2 Maintenance Activity Table for Trails

## **LIMESTONE SCREENING SURFACE MAINTENANCE**

Some sections of the trail may be constructed with a limestone screening surface rather than asphalt. Limestone screening can provide a trail surface that can be used by nearly every type of trail user including snowmobiles.

If the surface of a limestone trail becomes loose and un-compacted over time, it can be wetted, reshaped and re-compacted, provided the finer screenings have not sifted to the bottom and the larger particles floated to the top. The limestone should be regraded on a yearly basis at a minimum; seasonally to maintain an evenly graded surface.

## **SNOW/ICE REMOVAL**

Sauk County does not plan to clear ice and snow from the Great Sauk State Trail. However individual municipalities may choose to conduct snow and ice removal to allow for trail use year-round in areas where the GSST passes through their jurisdiction. In many communities, residents are required to shovel the sidewalk in front of their homes. In communities where the recommended route will replace a sidewalk, the municipality will need to address local snow removal policies to either provide clearing for residents or enact policy adjustments that address this requirement with regards to trails.

## **TRAIL PASS REQUIREMENTS**

Currently all bicyclists are required to obtain a State Trail Pass prior to using any state trail, including the Great Sauk State Trail. Trail passes can be purchased at self-serve stations along trails or at businesses throughout the state. Today, the Sauk Prairie Chamber of Commerce, Prairie du Sac Village Hall, Sauk County Clerk's Office and the Sauk County Parks and Recreation Office all sell passes. Funds from trail pass fees are used for ongoing trail maintenance. Pedestrians are not required to obtain a trail pass.

Where the Great Sauk State Trail overlaps an existing local sidewalk or trail, it is recommended that the County suspends enforcement of the trail pass requirement for bicyclists. This policy change will require County Board approval, and should be studied further to understand specific outcomes for impacted communities.

## **EVALUATION AND MONITORING**

Information gathered on trail users and trail use can help to inform planning and marketing efforts for the trail, as well as provide guidance for future trail expansions and the development of other trail systems. Having access to this information can also help to make the case for additional funding for trail improvements and expansion.

Ideally, depending on funding and staff availability, a combination of occasional user intercept surveys paired with manual counts and longer term strategically placed automated user counting methods should be used to create the most complete picture of trail use. Data from either Streetlight, Replica, or similar programs can be used to reaffirm data collected and to elaborate more broadly about who users are and where they are coming from, in addition to trail use patterns and statistics.

### **SURVEYS**

» **Visitor intercept:** Visitor intercept surveys collect in-the-moment feedback as someone is leaving an event, attraction, or destination. This is a form of quantitative research that involves short on-the-spot interviews of trail users to gather information about their trail use and experience. The survey could be conducted at trailhead parking lots or at common roadway intersection exit points of the trail. This type of data collection ensures that the responses are coming from current



trail users and avoids some of the potential issues with misremembering that may come from later follow up. Drawbacks of this type of data gathering are that it can be time and resource intensive and as a result does not lend itself well to a large-scale sample size.

- » **Self-selecting:** These are surveys that require trail users to take initiative to participate in the survey. These can be useful to gather information on specific user experiences with lower effort. Self-selecting surveys do not result in a random sample and will generally yield a relatively small number of responses from people with stronger positive or negative experiences. Providing a drop box for survey forms at a trailhead will yield higher results than requesting participants mail surveys back. Providing a QR code or web address directing to a digital survey is likely going to yield the best results, granted there is wifi or cell service near trailhead locations.









Technology Type	Common Manufacturers	User Type	Duration	Typical Uses
<b>Infrared (Active and Passive)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TRAFx</li> <li>• EcoCounter</li> <li>• TrailMaster</li> </ul>	 <i>Does not automatically distinguish between peds/bikes.</i>	Short or long	Sidewalk or shared-use path
<b>Pneumatic Tubes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EcoCounter</li> <li>• MetroCount</li> <li>• TRAFx</li> <li>• Road Sys</li> </ul>		Short	On-road
<b>Inductive Loop</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EcoCounter</li> <li>• Road Sys</li> </ul>		Long	On-road or paved shared-use path
<b>Magnetometer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TRAFx</li> </ul>		Long	Shared-use path
<b>Piezoelectric</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MetroCount</li> </ul>		Long	On-road
<b>Radar Sensors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensys Networks</li> </ul>		Long	On-road
<b>Thermal Imaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FLIR</li> </ul>		Long	On-road
<b>Video Imaging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miovision</li> </ul>		Short or long	On-road

Table 6.3 Trail Count Methods (<https://altago.com/wp-content/uploads/Innovative-Ped-and-Bike-Counts-White-Paper-Alta.pdf>)

## TRAIL USER COUNTS

Visits to trails can be difficult to count, as people who visit trails travel different distances on trails and may begin and end their trail visit at any number of access points. To address this variation, counts should be taken at various points along a trail. Manual and automated counting and extrapolations provide a measure of traffic and gauge overall trail activity. These methods have been adapted from how transportation agencies monitor motor vehicle use.

- » **Manual User Counts** are done by an individual can provide a snapshot of data at a particular moment in time.
  
- » **Automated User Counts** are generally collected through electronic devices that detect the number of users passing by a location. Each type of automated counting device provides different levels and types of information. These allow for user counts over longer periods compared to manual counts, but can vary significantly in cost, accuracy, and effort.
  
- **Tube Counters** can be placed on paths and use air pulses when the tube is passed over to detect activity.
  
- **Infrared Sensing Counters** create an invisible ribbon across a pathway that can detect activity that passes across it.
  
- **Cameras** that automatically take photos and/or videos when activated by motion or a heat source can provide details in each photo that could be used to detect users' activity type and physical characteristics. This count method still requires some amount of either programming or physical counting based on the photos and videos taken.
  
- **Induction or inductive loop** sensors use an electromagnetic communication or detection system built in to a pathway which uses a moving magnet or an alternating current to induce an electric current in a nearby wire to count users.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Sauk County has served as the primary point of contact for this planning study, and will likely remain as the primary sponsor of the project. However, they cannot complete this ambitious trail without continued coordination with the many affected municipalities and agencies acting within the Great Sauk State Trail corridor. The planning process for this study expressly included a significant amount of involvement from relevant municipalities, agencies and organizations to develop, review, and refine the plan, with the intention of creating a foundation for future collaboration.

## LOCAL MUNICIPAL COLLABORATION

Sauk County will continue to coordinate with local municipalities to implement the trail and will also ask for local municipal coordination to seek grant funding. Sauk County will provide planning, engineering and construction support for the trail implementation, as well as lead the effort to apply for grant funding. Local municipalities should incorporate the Great Sauk State Trail into future Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning, as well as recognize the trail in future bicycle, pedestrian, or other multi-modal planning efforts done at a local level. Projects to complete spur trails will be lead by the local municipality with jurisdiction of the area.

## JOINT MAINTENANCE AGREEMENTS

Sauk County will initiate joint maintenance agreements or memorandums of understanding with the municipalities and agencies that the trail passes through to define ownership, maintenance, and policies regarding the trail corridor.

## FRIENDS OF THE GREAT SAUK STATE TRAIL

The Friends of the Great Sauk State Trail was established in 2015 as a non-profit with a mission to enhance, promote, manage, and advocate for the development of the GSST, with oversight provided for the Friends' group by Sauk County. The Friends of the Great Sauk State Trail was integral during the first phase of planning for the Sauk Prairie Segment, and also played a vital

role in fundraising and branding for this segment. The Friend's group will continue to play a very important role in the implementation of the GSST extension, however new community members within the geography of the extension area should be engaged to lead the effort.

## ASSOCIATION OF SAUK COUNTY SNOWMOBILE CLUBS

The Association of Sauk County Snowmobile Clubs was engaged as part of the GSST planning process. After active discussions and participation at the Phase 2 open house events, the project team met with the Snowmobile Association to discuss how to work collaboratively to accomplish some overlapping goals of snowmobilers and future trail users. The Snowmobile Association expressed interest in finding ways to collaborate with Sauk County to find ways to access the Villages of Rock Springs and North Freedom for routes. The Association is very active in snowmobile trail management in the county. Club volunteers have the responsibility of securing trail easements, placing necessary signage on the trails, and maintaining trail equipment. It was acknowledged that there could be benefit to working together to create shared use (snowmobile, bicycle and pedestrian) trail segments for funding, maintenance, and stewardship efforts.

A barrier to creating a shared trail network for snowmobile, bicycle and pedestrian use relates to surface treatments. Snowmobile routes require a cleared, vegetated or gravel surface path in winter months for optimal use. Early on

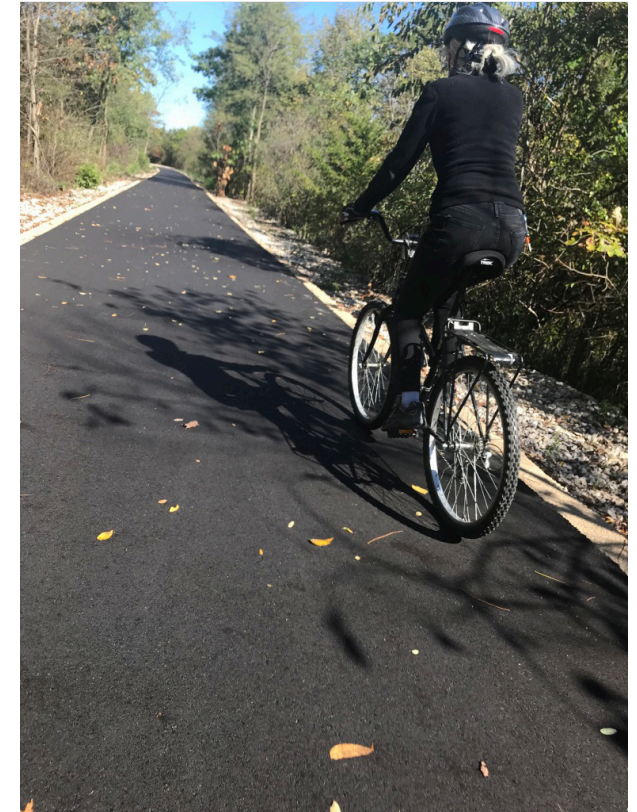
in the process of planning the GSST extension, a goal was set to build a fully paved path, in the interest of creating a trail that is accessible to bicyclist, pedestrians and people with disabilities or who use mobility devices. Creating a trail corridor with two adjacent surfaces is a challenge, as it will require more width to build and will be even more challenging to find areas with sufficient grade that can serve both purposes. After discussion with the Snowmobile Association, the GSST project team decided to expand the possibilities of future trail surface selection through rural areas to include limestone screening (similar to other nearby state trails such as the 400 State Trail or Military Ridge State Trail). Sauk County is committed to continued collaboration with the Association of Sauk County Snowmobile Clubs to find ways to pool resources and ensure that user groups are not in conflict.

## BARABOO BICYCLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The City of Baraboo formed the Baraboo Bicycle Advisory Committee in 2021 in response to preliminary route proposals by Sauk County. The committee consists of ten avid bicyclists from the Baraboo community who met a number of times to develop a potential route for the GSST through the City of Baraboo. The Committee expressed strong support during engagement activities for the trail to be routed through the City to connect to local businesses.

Ultimately, the project team determined that the preferred route for the Great Sauk State Trail will not be planned to pass completely through

Baraboo, but will connect to the City through two spur trails (the Baraboo Spur and the West Baraboo Spur). It is strongly recommended that the Baraboo Bicycle Advisory Committee and the City of Baraboo continue to work together to develop a city-wide bicycle and pedestrian plan that will best connect residents and visitors to the Great Sauk State Trail from within the city, and also support a city-wide vision for pedestrian and bicycle connectivity overall.



## HO-CHUNK NATION

The Ho-Chunk Nation has continued to serve as a key stakeholder in the planning and development of the GSST. The Sauk Prairie Segment of the GSST is located at the border of land that was recently rematriated to the Nation and the state-owned Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area. Historically, the area south of Devils Lake (Day-wa-kun-chuck, or Spirit Lake) provided an area for growing traditional crops, gathering medicinal plants and harvesting seasonal game. This area is also the site of ancestral burial, effigy mounds, and other intact earthen sites recognized by the Ho-Chunk.

The Ho-Chunk Nation was integral to the planning of the Sauk Prairie Segment of the GSST and made substantial financial contributions to the construction of the Sauk Prairie Segment. During trail planning for the GSST extension, the project team met with Ho-Chunk Nation representatives and presented draft route options to the Ho-Chunk legislative body. A collaborative study between Ho-Chunk Nation, the Wisconsin DNR and Sauk County resulted in high-resolution LIDAR imaging to inventory potential sacred sites within Devils' Lake State Park and the surrounding area.

Moving forward, Sauk County is committed to continued collaboration with the Ho-Chunk Nation to ensure that trail routing and decision-making for the future trail design aligns with Ho-Chunk Nation values and goals for sharing or interpreting cultural sites, minimizing land disturbance, and restoring and managing the land with native plants and methods.

## WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Several miles of the proposed GSST trail route passes through, or is adjacent to WI DNR-owned land. WI DNR staff were engaged and consulted throughout the planning process and provided key direction for trail routing preferences through Devil's Lake State Park, as well as coordinated feedback with the Ice Age Trail Alliance.

In parallel to the GSST extension master plan effort, the WI DNR has initiated a regional planning approach based on Ecological Landscapes. Ecological Landscapes (ELs) are regions of the state that are distinguished by unique ecological characteristics and management opportunities. There are 16 identified ELs in Wisconsin. Portions of the GSST, notably the Devils Lake / Sacred Earth Segment falls within the Central Sand Hills Region. The DNR is currently drafting the regional master plan for the Central Sand Hills Region. Devils Lake State Park was included in this planning process, and draft documents of the master plan refer to the desire to continue the GSST through the park and/or surrounding DNR properties. The routes proposed in this plan through Devils Lake State Park were determined through collaboration with WI DNR staff, and the final preferred route was chosen by the DNR. While Sauk County will work with the DNR to support the overall planning of the trail through the park and DNR lands, the DNR will be the final decision maker for the trail location in the park and will serve as the project sponsor for construction activities within the State Park boundaries.

## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION / WISCONSIN AND SOUTHERN RAILROAD COMPANY

Several Bureaus of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) were engaged as part of the stakeholder team during the planning process to provide guidance for areas where potential trail routing will intersect or be located adjacent to active rail lines. These were Transit, Local Roads, Railroads & Harbors Bureau and Systems Planning and Operations Division.

The planning team also connected with the Wisconsin and Southern Railroad (WSOR). WSOR is a Class II regional railroad operated by Watco (headquartered in Madison) that spans Southern Wisconsin and Northeastern Illinois. WSOR is an economic engine for Sauk County; public safety and industrial development are key priorities for future growth.

The Sauk Prairie Segment of the GSST was a Rails-to-Trails project constructed entirely along a formerly active Union Pacific rail line. WSOR operates the Reedsburg Subdivision, which stretches around 55-miles between Madison and Reedsburg. The Reedsburg line is currently in operation with 1-2 freight trains per day transporting food products, grain, fertilizer, limestone, lumber, steel, plastic, aggregates, salt, pulpboard, paper and chemicals.

Railroad right-of-way is under public ownership and managed by the WisDOT Transit, Local Roads, Railroads & Harbors Bureau. The WSOR has an exclusive lease to the Reedsburg Subdivision to



operate it for freight rail purposes only. The WSOR is the operator, maintainer, and responsible party for incidents and liability. Any shared uses must be approved by WisDOT, WSOR and Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission (WRRTC).

Due to concerns related to trespassing and safety, WSOR has communicated preference for future routing of the GSST to be on land away from the rail corridor (outside of the rail right-of-way). In discussions and in comments provided to the project team, WSOR has also encouraged the use of existing at-grade or existing grade-separated railroad crossings where the GSST will need to cross railroad tracks. Where the GSST is located near the active rail line, efforts should be made to install fencing and signage to deter trespassing on railroad tracks by trail users.

Segments of the preferred routes for the GSST extension will require construction of trail segments within or adjacent to rail right-of-way. Rails-with-Trails route segments are shown through Devil's Lake State Park, as well as in the segments from the Village of Rock Springs to Reedsburg. Routes identified in the master plan process will require further negotiation with WSOR, Wisconsin DOT, and WisDNR to determine feasibility, safety measures, and maintenance agreements for these segments as they are built.

The preferred and alternate routes shown in this master plan also identify nine total locations where the GSST could cross the active rail line. At these locations, Sauk County will work with WSOR and WisDOT to identify appropriate upgrades and improvements for safety.

As progress continues on making the GSST a reality, conversations between Sauk County, Wis DOT, and WSOR should continue.

## RAILS-TO-TRAILS AND RAILS-WITH-TRAILS

Rail-trails or Rails-to-Trails are multi-use trails developed on former railroad corridors. Wisconsin is a leader in Rails-to-Trails projects, with the Elroy Sparta State Trail serving as the first rails-to-trails project in the nation. Today, Wisconsin has 111 total rail-trails spanning around 1,948 miles.

An emerging alternative is rails-with-trails, which are trails adjacent to or within an active railroad corridor. The rail-with-trail concept provides even more opportunities for the creation of trail systems that enhance local transportation systems, offering safe and attractive community connections. Again, Wisconsin is a leader in rails-with-trails projects: as of September 2023, there are 24 completed rails-with-trails projects in the state, with 65.41 miles of trail constructed alongside or within rail right-of-way.

Constructing a trail near an active rail line requires additional safety measures to ensure adequate distance between moving railcars and trail users, as well as fencing to deter trespassing on railroad tracks. For more information about rails-to-trails and rails-with-trails, see the following links:

- » [Rails to Trails Conservancy](#)
- » [US Department of Transportation Rails with Trails Report](#)

## RAIL TRAILS IN WISCONSIN

- Wisconsin alone has 111 total rail trails totaling approximately 1,948 miles of trail.
- Wisconsin has 24 completed rails-with-trails projects, with 65.41 miles of trail completed alongside or within rail right-of-way.
- The first rails-to-trails project was constructed in the State of Wisconsin with the Elroy-Sparta State Trail in 1967.

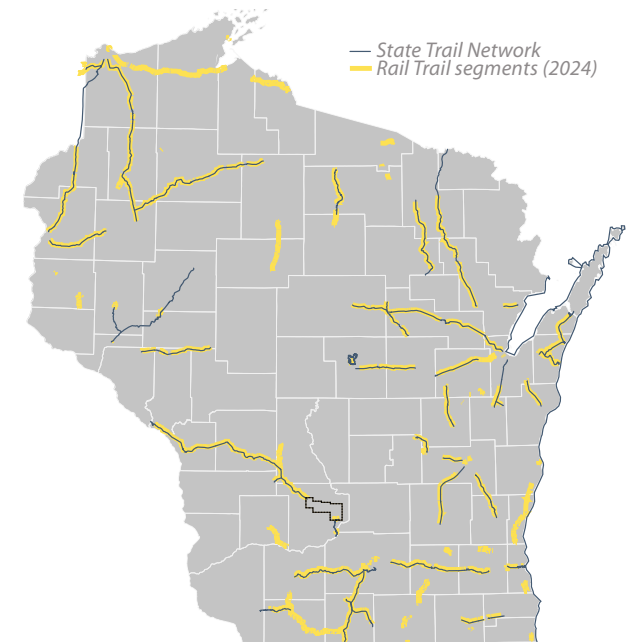


Figure 6.2 Rail trails in Wisconsin (Rails to Trails Conservancy, 2024)



