



Minnesota News



Kayaking on Rice Creek

PROJECTS AND PARTNERS 2010

1. Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota
Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota
2. Canby Trail
City of Canby
3. Chisago City & Lindstrom Trails
Chisago City
4. Green Corridor - Minnesota River Trail
Green Corridor Trail Committee
5. Mississippi River Connections
Mississippi River Trail, Inc.
6. Southwest Minnesota Trail Corridor Plan
Southwest Regional Development Commission
7. St. Martin Loop Trail System
City of St. Martin
8. The Great Rivers Confluence
Friends of Freedom Park
9. Trout Brook Trail Extension (North/South Trail Connection)
City of Little Canada

ABOUT US

The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program is the community assistance arm of the National Park Service. RTCA staff provides technical assistance to community groups and local, state, and federal government agencies working to protect natural areas and water resources and enhance close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities. We help communities plan, organize partnerships, and achieve on-the-ground success on projects they initiate.

Recent Successes

Rice Creek Water Trail – “A Glimmering Ribbon in the Twin Cities”

As paddles are dipped into the water and a series of canoes and kayaks flow like leaves after a spring rain, a group of teenagers and adults are experiencing a “water trail” for the first time. This experience is part of an outing of the Friends of the Mississippi, a non-profit organization that promotes and supports the River corridor and tributaries that flow into it. The “glimmering ribbon” is the Rice Creek Water Trail, a 17-mile route which has its beginnings with a chain of lakes in Lino Lakes, MN in the north and ends as a tributary to the Mississippi River in Fridley, MN in the south. The trail encompasses two counties, six communities and the Rice Creek Watershed area.

This water trail is entirely within the urban Twin Cities metropolitan area, although you would never know it from your canoe or kayak. Because of the work and support of a number of partnerships, for the first time in 60 years boaters can now paddle the 17 continuous miles on Rice Creek without having restricted access through the former Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP) site. This obstacle was a major factor in the recreational use of Rice Creek for many years. Just one year ago an all day outing on Rice Creek for its entire length would not have been possible.

Current Projects

1. Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota

Project Partner: Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota

RTCA Contact: Holly Larson

Location: statewide in Minnesota

Congressional Districts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

Project Goal:

Provide statewide leadership and a unified voice for bicycle education, advocacy, and efforts to make Minnesota more bicycle friendly so that more people will ride bicycles more often. One of BikeMN's long term objectives is to make Minnesota the most bicycle friendly state in the nation by 2015, which will require an increase in the number of bicycle facilities and improvements to existing facilities.

RTCA Role:

Assist in developing a new statewide, non-profit bicycle organization, the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota. Assist with creating a technical assistance program that helps communities and businesses become more bicycle friendly. This program will help develop BikeMN's partnerships, resources, and volunteer and staff capacity to assist communities; set up a program to train local government staff and BikeMN members; and provide technical assistance to transportation agencies, communities and school districts in developing and implementing complete streets policies.

2. Canby Trail

Project Partner: City of Canby

RTCA Contact: Holly Larson

Location: Canby, Minnesota

Congressional District: 7

Project Goal:

Develop a trail circling the city that connects four local parks, three playgrounds, five athletic complexes, three schools, a fitness center, pool, and a regional park.

RTCA Role:

Develop a trail plan for a four-mile walking, biking, and skating trail around the City of Canby

3. Chisago City & Lindstrom Trails

Project Partner: Chisago City

RTCA Contact: Holly Larson

Location: Chisago City and Lindstrom, Minnesota

Congressional District: 8

Project Goal:

Develop loop trails in Chisago City and Lindstrom that connect parks, schools, commercial and residential areas, and the regional Swedish Immigrant Trail. Develop the planned 20-mile Swedish Immigrant Trail.

RTCA Role:

Establish a trail organization that will help to raise local awareness and support for the regional Swedish Immigrant Trail. Develop a plan for the Swedish Immigrant Trail. Prepare a plan for a trail network for Chisago City and Lindstrom

4. Green Corridor - Minnesota River Trail

Project Partner: Green Corridor Trail Committee

RTCA Contact: Randy Thoreson

Location: MN River Corridor from Granite Falls to Ft. Ridgely State Park, Fairfax

Congressional District: 7

Project Goal:

Plan and develop 45-miles of the Minnesota-designated "waterways" trail of the Minnesota River.

RTCA Role:

To facilitate and provide input to the planning and development of the "waterways" trail of the Minnesota River - Segment (2).



Curved bridge on the GRR Trail

5. Mississippi River Connections

Project Partner: Mississippi River Trail, Inc.

RTCA Contacts: Diana Allen, Randy Thoreson

Location: Headwaters of Mississippi River in Minnesota to Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans

Congressional Districts: MN - 2,3,4,5,6,8

Project Goal:

Through connections with 18 National Parks and Trails, build a collaborative partnership that highlights and enhances 3,000 miles of trail (land and water) and 30,000 acres of open space along the entire Mississippi River corridor.

RTCA Role:

Provide technical assistance to the Mississippi River Parks and Trails Collaboration. Through facilitation, research, and coordination, the Mississippi River will be viewed as a valuable national natural resource and recreational corridor. This project will enhance local, state, regional, and national efforts to: 1) protect and preserve the Mississippi River and the Mississippi River Trail as a national landscape; 2) demonstrate the impact of partnership between public and private partners,.

Current Projects

6. Southwest Minnesota Trail Corridor Plan

Project Partner: Southwest Regional Development Commission
RTCA Contact: Holly Larson
Location: 9 counties in southwest Minnesota: Rock, Nobles, Jackson, Pipestone, Murray, Cottonwood, Lincoln, Lyon, and Redwood
Congressional Districts: 1, 7

Project Goal:

Develop over 500 miles of hard surface trails in a region of Minnesota that currently has very few biking and walking trails. The envisioned trail system will connect many of the cities in the nine-county area, and will be designed for multiple uses, including biking, walking and roller-skating. Some trails will also provide for horseback riding, snowmobiling, and/or cross country skiing.

RTCA Role:

Complete an update and enhancement of the 2000 Southwest Regional Trail Corridor Plan, which will be developed through a new regional steering committee and public participation process. The project intends to initiate an ongoing, sustainable partnership that will advocate for the development and management of trails in southwest Minnesota, and promote their use.

“This is awesome! The Creek is more challenging than I thought it would be. I’ve seen birds I’ve never seen before. And I love that you can put your canoe on your car and be here in 15 minutes.”

-Rice Creek area resident

7. St. Martin Loop Trail System

Project Partner: City of St. Martin
RTCA Contact: Randy Thoreson
Location: Sauk River Valley, Central Minnesota
Congressional District: 6

Project Goal:

Develop a 6+ mile trail loop within the City of St. Martin that connects to the Sauk River and surrounding rural and agricultural areas.

RTCA Role:

Assist the City of St. Martin in the planning and developing a 6+ mile trail loop within and connecting the community to the Sauk River and surrounding rural and agricultural areas.

8. The Great Rivers Confluence

Project Partner: Friends of Freedom Park
RTCA Contact: Randy Thoreson
Location: Prescott, Pierce County, WI and Hastings and Washington County, MN
Congressional Districts: MN -6; WI-3

Project Goal:

Establish multi-state partnerships for the planning and implementation of a 17 mile trail (land and water) connecting the communities of Prescott, WI and Hastings, MN (including Pierce County, WI and Dakota and Washington County, MN).

RTCA Role:

Through connection and education, foster partnerships across national, state and local divisions; create and adopt a common vision of Great Rivers preservation, management and recreational experiences; and plan and construct new trails in the existing 17-mile trail gap (Eastern Minnesota and Western Wisconsin) within Mississippi River and St. Croix River Confluence area.



Trail work in Minnesota

9. Trout Brook Trail Extension (North/South Trail Connection)

Project Partner: City of Little Canada
RTCA Contact: Holly Larson
Location: City of Little Canada
Congressional District: 4

Project Goal:

Build two one-mile trail segments to extend the Troutbrook Regional Trail through Little Canada and Maplewood, Minnesota. These missing links will connect the regional parks and trails of northern Ramsey and southern Anoka County, including the Gateway Trail, Vadnais-Snail Lake Regional Park and the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes with downtown St. Paul and the Mississippi River.

RTCA Role:

Form a task force and conduct a feasibility study for the extension of the Trout Brook Trail, filling two one mile trail gaps in the regional trail system. A plan for the trail will then be created, pending a positive outcome for the feasibility study.

We're Here For You.

Could your project benefit
from RTCA Staff Assistance?
Contact us to find out.



Holly Larson
651-290-3003
holly_larson@nps.gov



Randy Thorson
651-290-3004
randy_thorson@nps.gov



Dave Thomson
402-661-1570
dave_thomson@nps.gov

2009 Nationwide Partnership Success

3,411 Miles of Trail Developed

2,664 Miles of River Conserved

87,385 Acres of Open Space and
Parkland Protected

97% Percentage of Community
Partners Satisfied

Find more information online
at
www.nps.gov/rtca



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Recent Successes cont.

Whitewater Country Loop Trail Segment Opens

The Whitewater Country Loop Trail, a planned 50-mile trail in Olmsted, Winona, and Wabasha Counties, is well on its way to being developed; another eight miles were paved in 2009. The Trail will connect Rochester and seven other communities to Whitewater and Carley State Parks and a regional park. Despite the slow economy, 2009 has been a banner year for this trail effort. The 8 new miles of multi-use trail in the “Great River Ridge” segment extend the 5-mile existing trail to a total of 13 paved miles, crossing over 30 bridges along a former railroad corridor between Plainview and Eyota. A parallel trail for equestrians and snow-mobilers is under construction. Additionally, five miles of the “Chester Woods” segment will open soon between the western edge of Rochester and Chester Woods County Park with an additional five miles being acquired. On the eastern side of the loop, agreements have been signed with all landowners along the Whitewater segment between St. Charles and Whitewater State Park. In total, 18 miles will be built between 2009 and 2010 and another 11 miles of trail corridor will be purchased and ready to develop. State and federal trail grants, and state bonds provided most of the funding.

This exciting trail development is the result of over a decade of dedicated planning and fundraising efforts by three neighboring trail groups, comprised mostly of volunteers. While it is difficult to sustain volunteer energy and project progress year after year, these projects received a needed boost in momentum when the three groups decided to work together, rather than separately. Five years ago the Great River Ridge Trail group of the Wabasha County Regional Railroad Authority, the Chester Woods Trail Committee of the City of Eyota, and the Whitewater Trail Committee of the City of St. Charles conceived the idea to connect the local trails they were planning into something unique in Minnesota: a long distance circular “loop” trail. They enlisted the assistance of the National Park Service’s RTCA Program and together the new tri-county trails group established a vision, identified mutual goals, developed their partnership, and created promotional materials. They also created the new name for their joint effort, which refers to the varied and scenic Whitewater River, whose three branches the trail will cross many times.

Among other recent accomplishments are the designation of the “Great River Ridge” trail segment as a State Trail and the 2008 approval of the Trail Master Plan by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The three trail groups continue to work together under a Memorandum of Understanding to develop and promote the trail. See www.whitewatercountryloop.com for further information.