

## Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Report

For the Community Development Committee meeting of January 19, 2021

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of January 27, 2021

**Subject:** Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan, Ramsey County

### Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Ramsey County Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan without the proposed boundary adjustment and proposed acquisitions.
2. Advise Ramsey County that the proposed boundary adjustment and associated 2,407.24-acre acquisition should be submitted to the Metropolitan Council as a system additions request in the next Regional Parks Policy Plan update, currently estimated for 2024.
3. Require that Ramsey County, prior to initiating any new development of the regional trail corridor, send preliminary plans to the Environmental Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division.
4. Advise the County to implement the advisory comments regarding Transportation as described in this report.

### Summary of Committee Discussion/Questions

Tracey Kinney of the Community Development Division presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission at its meeting on January 7, 2021.

Commissioner Jeremy Peichel requested information on wayfinding for water trails. Kinney responded that wayfinding will be provided throughout the regional trail corridor with an emphasis on trailheads. Scott Yonke, Ramsey County's Director of Planning and Development stated that wayfinding will also be expanded to include water trails. Commissioner Peichel asked if education on aquatic invasive species will be provided. Yonke responded that aquatic education would fit into new programming for the water trail. Commissioner Peichel asked if there is a plan for rental canoe and partnerships related to this. Yonke responded that watercraft rental, transportation, and partnership are areas that Ramsey County is interested in exploring as the master plan is implemented.

Commissioner Cecily Harris asked why this regional trail is not considered a regional park. Kinney responded that this regional trail has been in the regional system for over 20 years and over time the trail has acquired corridor land. Emmett Mullin, Regional Parks Manager, responded that new amenities are a way to attract new users and get them interested into the regional system. The Parks Unit is committed to continuing this conversation. Commissioner Harris asked if a process was in place to consider the master plan's proposed acquisitions before the next system addition process. Kinney responded that the acquisitions are long term prospects. The 4-year time frame of the next Policy Plan update and system additions conversation suits Ramsey County's anticipated timeframe. Commissioner Harris requested information on a water trail shuttle. Yonke responded that the master plan sets up an opportunity to plan for it. Mullin responded that the water trail study, included in the Policy Plan's 2020-2021 work plan, will allow for the Commission to explore a whole range of planning and programming topics.

Commissioner Bob Moeller asked about the location of the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP) property related to the regional trail master plan boundary. Kinney responded that the central segment of the regional trail is

comprised mostly of this property. Commissioner Moeller asked if any of the land is still hazardous. Yonke responded that the land has been cleaned and is no longer hazardous. Chair Yarusso stated that TCAAP land has been added to the trail over time.

Chair Yarusso asked about the watershed district's role in the planning for the water trail. Yonke responded that the County will be partnering with the watershed district on the water trail. The watershed district is responsible for the Creek including major restoration projects and management of the navigational channel.

Commissioner Kemery requested information about the ADA (American Disability Act) transition plan as well as the accessibility of the water trail and picnic areas. Kinney responded that there is an ADA transition plan and that all new development will be implemented to ADA standards. Yonke responded that redevelopment and new developed areas will comply with ADA. Commissioner Kemery requested that ADA innovations be considered throughout the design process.

Chair Yarusso requested information about transit plans to this area. Kinney responded that Metro Transit stated there is limited transit to this area due to COVID restrictions and population density.

Commissioner Anthony Taylor asked for more information about equity related to demographics and programming. Kinney responded that the master plan engagement was completed in 2018 and 2019, which is ahead of the equity analysis requirement. The public engagement for the master plan included public meetings at libraries among a number of other input opportunities. Ramsey County paired input gathered through the master plan with the Council's [2014 Regional Parks System Use Among Select Communities of Color Study](#) to shape the master plan. Yonke responded that the master plan sets up the opportunity to bring new programming to the trail. Commissioner Taylor requested that programming be rolled out in coordination with the infrastructure improvements.

The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission voted unanimously to recommend the proposed actions.

## Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: January 7, 2021

For the Community Development Committee meeting of January 19, 2021

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of January 27, 2021

**Subject:** Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan, Ramsey County, Review File No. 50223-1

**MPOSC District, Member:** District E, Jeremy Peichel

**Council District, Member:** District 10, Peter Lindstrom

**Policy/Legal Reference:** Minnesota Statutes § 473.313; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, Chapter 5, Planning Strategy 1

**Staff Prepared/Presented:** Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner (651-602-1029)

**Division/Department:** Community Development / Regional Parks

### Proposed Action

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2. Advise Ramsey County that the proposed boundary adjustment and associated 2,407.24-acre acquisition should be submitted to the Metropolitan Council as a system additions request in the next Regional Parks Policy Plan update, currently estimated for 2024.
3. Require that Ramsey County, prior to initiating any new development of the regional trail corridor, send preliminary plans to the Environmental Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division.
4. Advise the County to implement the advisory comments regarding Transportation as described in this report.

### Background

The Rice Creek North Regional Trail is located in the northwest corner of the Regional Parks System and Ramsey County (Figures 1 and 2). The Ramsey County section of trail is 4.75 miles in length and is part of a 14-mile regional trail corridor that extends from the Rice Creek - Chain of Lakes Regional Park in Anoka County to the Mississippi River by way of Long Lake Regional Park (Figure 3). The trail corridor has areas of high-quality natural resources including restored prairies, floodplain forests, and restored mesic and oak woods. The trail corridor also supports the ongoing management of Rice Creek and its water resources. The trail includes a variety of recreational opportunities including hiking, bicycling, cross country skiing, bird watching, canoeing and kayaking, fishing and many more. Rice Creek North Regional Trail has a master plan that was originally approved by the Council in 1999, with subsequent amendments in 2003, 2013, and 2015.

Ramsey County's Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan guides the development, preservation, management, and improvement of the trail. The

master plan is also proposing a significant boundary adjustment increasing the trail corridor acreage from 791.88 acres to 2,407.24 acres.

### **Rationale**

The proposed boundary adjustment will not be considered as part of this request since it exceeds the minor boundary adjustment criteria in Chapter 5, Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. The proposed boundary adjustment is contingent on its inclusion in the next Regional Parks Policy Plan update, which will be reviewed and considered through the Systems Additions process, currently estimated for 2024. If the Council approves the System Addition Policy Plan Amendment, then Ramsey County should develop a master plan or master plan amendment that includes acquisition, development and cost information prior to requesting funding.

More study is needed to determine acceptable size thresholds for associated acreage adjacent to regional trail corridors. For instance, if the proposed acreage of the Arden Hills Army Training Site (AHATS) and the Arden Hills Primer Tracer Site exceeds 500 acres, it may better serve the regional system for Ramsey County to propose this unit as a separate Regional Parks System Unit, such as a regional park or park reserve. The Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan is otherwise consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, particularly Planning Strategy 1 and other Council policies.

### **Thrive Lens Analysis**

The Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan advances the Thrive outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region. The master plan also advances the Thrive outcome of Equity by including master plan improvements requested through the public engagement process and recommendations from the Council's [2014 Regional Parks System Use Among Select Communities of Color Study](#).

### **Funding**

The proposed expansion of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail is not being considered by the Metropolitan Council as part of this master plan. The total cost to implement the regional trail not including this expansion, is estimated at \$38,300,000 for development, \$232,300 for 3-years of natural resource management, and \$466,500 annually for operations.

No Council funding is associated with the approval of this master plan at this time. Upon approval of the master plan and subject to further system additions approval, the County may apply for or use available funding sources, subject to their applicable terms and processes, to implement the eligible projects identified in the master plan.

### **Known Support / Opposition**

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners approved the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan at its September 15, 2020 meeting (Resolution B2020-184). The Cities of Arden Hills, Shoreview, and New Brighton have adopted resolutions in support of Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan.



Figure 1: Rice Creek North Regional Trail in relation to the Regional Parks System

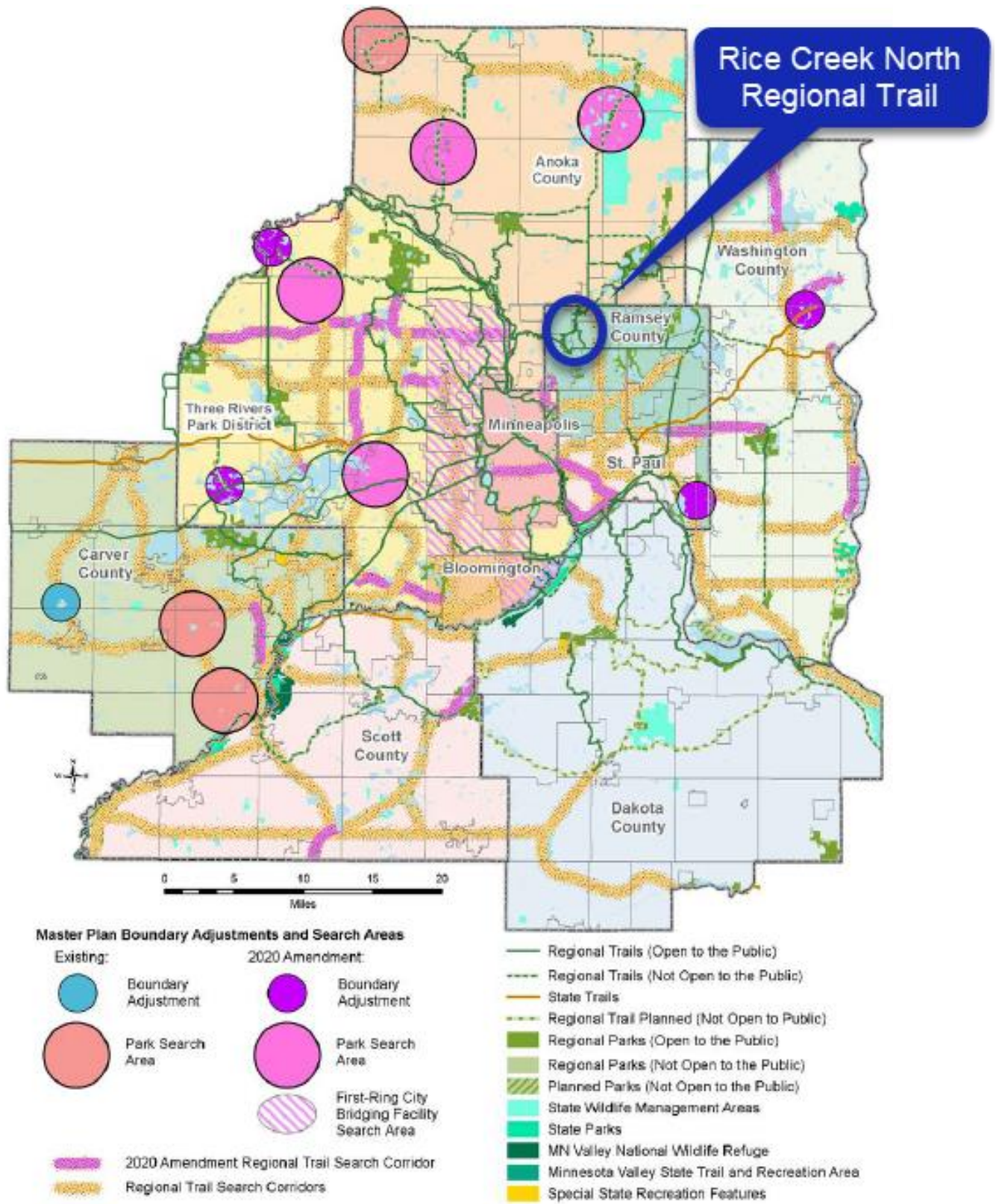




Figure 2: Rice Creek North Regional Trail in relation to Ramsey County

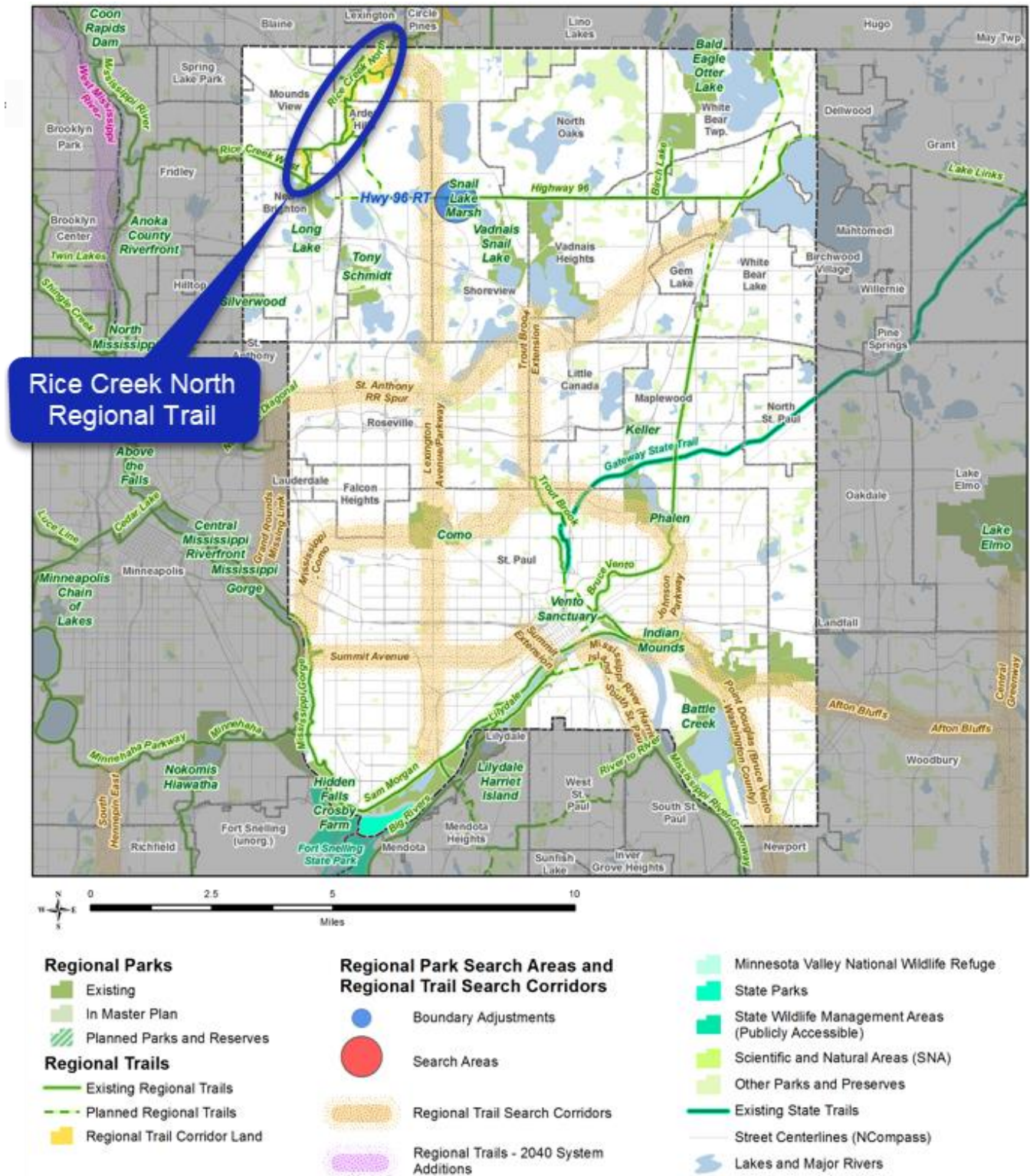
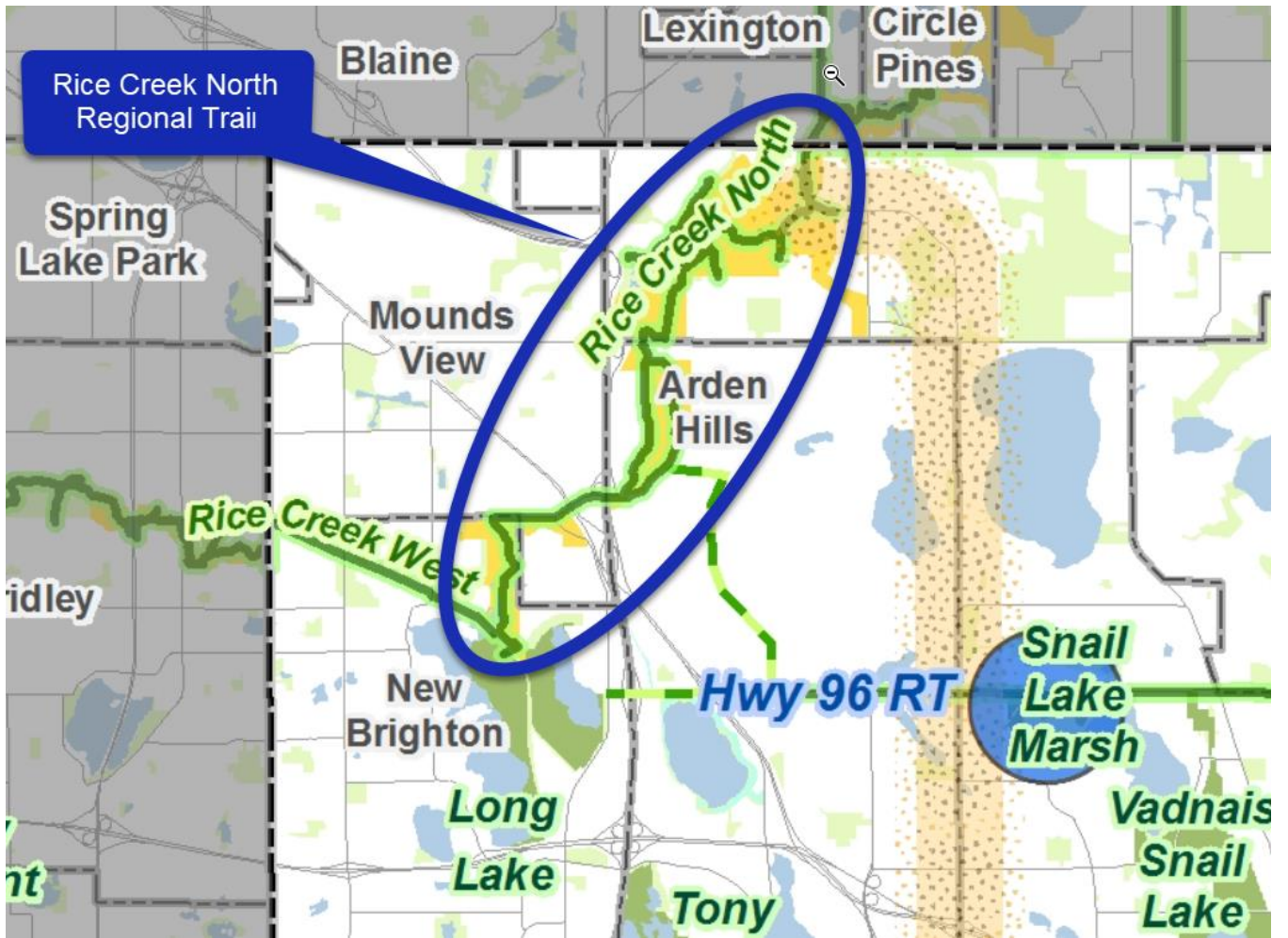


Figure 3: Rice Creek North Regional Trail in relation to other regional parks and trails



## Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that master plans for destination regional trails address 14 items: boundaries, acquisition costs, demand forecast, development concept, conflicts, public services, operations, partner engagement, public engagement and participation, equity analysis, public awareness, accessibility, stewardship plan, natural resources, and Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area. The following analyzes the master plan against those requirements.

### *Boundaries*

The Rice Creek North Regional Trail boundary is comprised of 792-acres of linear corridor stretching from the county boundary at County Road J in the north to the Long Lake regional trail to the south (Figure 4).

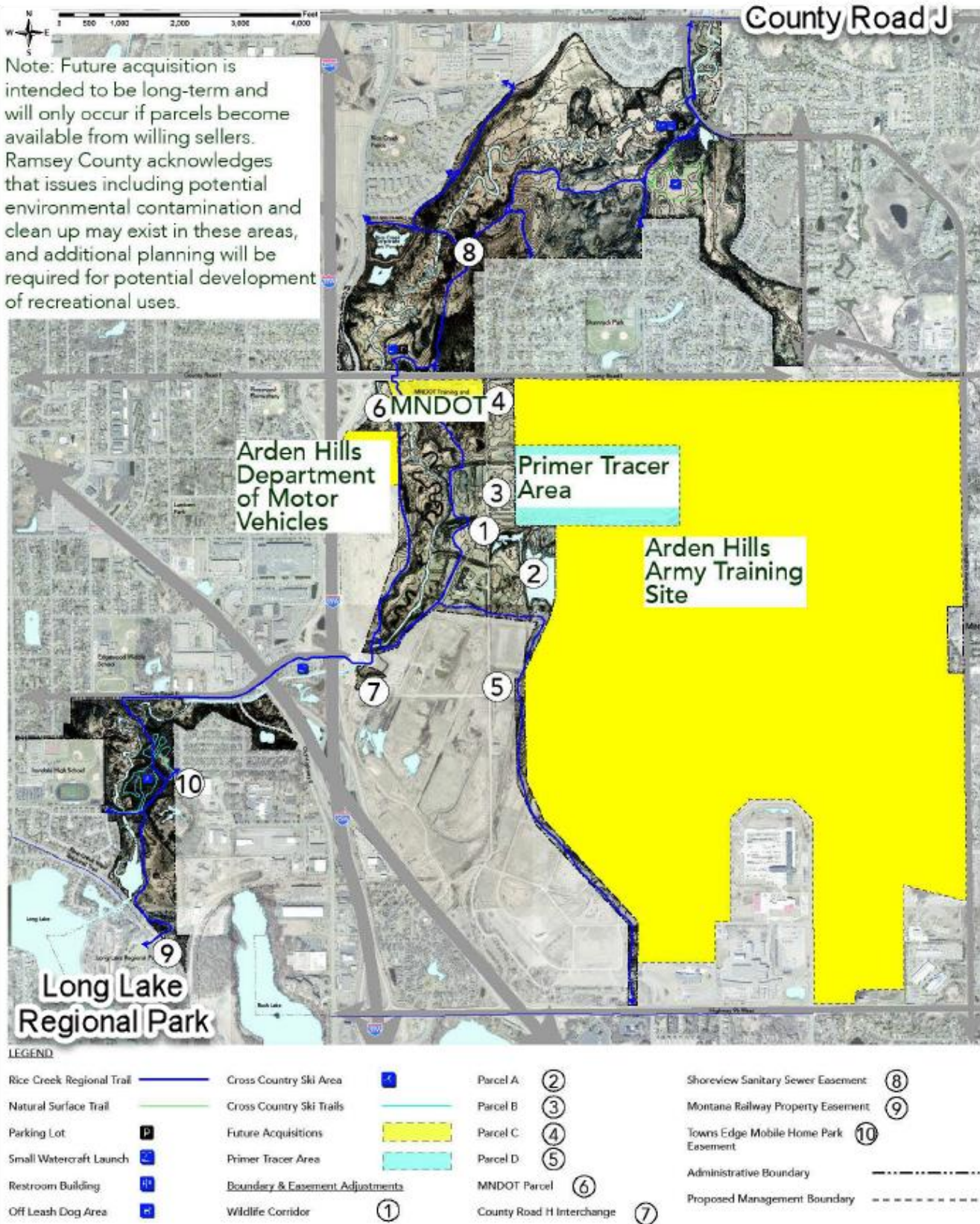
### *Acquisition Costs*

The master plan is proposing a significant boundary adjustment increasing acreage from 791.88 acres to 2,407.24 acres. This boundary adjustment will not be considered as part of this request since it exceeds the minor boundary adjustment criteria in Chapter 5, Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. The proposed boundary adjustment should be requested during the next Regional Parks Policy Plan update, as part of the Systems Additions process, currently estimated for 2024. If the Council approves this system addition, then Ramsey County should develop a master plan or master plan amendment that includes this specific area.

While not included as part of this staff report, the proposed administrative boundary for future expansion areas are publicly owned properties consisting of the Minnesota Department of Transportation Arden Hills Training Center and Truck Station, Arden Hills Department of Motor Vehicles, Arden Hills Army Training Site (AHATS), and the Arden Hills Primer Tracer Site. Acquisition of these parcels will only occur if the land becomes available from willing sellers. The acquisition of these parcels is complex due to constraints such as property ownership and existing conditions. Cost for these acquisitions will likely not be known until the property is ready to be acquired and all existing conditions are considered (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Boundaries and Proposed future acquisitions



### *Demand Forecast*

Rice Creek North Regional Trail sees approximately 269,710 visits per year, according to the 2019 Regional Parks System Use Estimate. This places Rice Creek North at the lower end of the spectrum among Ramsey County regional trails.

Figure 1. Ramsey County 2019 Regional Trail Use Estimate

<b>Regional Trail Unit</b>	<b>Est. Visits, 2019</b>
<b>Bruce Vento Regional Trail</b>	491,514
<b>Lakes Link Regional Trail</b>	400,352
<b>Highway 96 Regional Trail</b>	356,456
<b>Rice Creek North Regional Trail</b>	269,710
<b>Rice Creek West Regional Trail</b>	242,205
<b>Trout Brook Regional Trail</b>	65,972

### *Development Concept*

Proposed improvements for the Rice Creek North Regional Trail generally encompass enhanced trailheads, additional internal trails, improved water trail facilities, and unifying features. The master plan and this staff report describe the development concept in three sections including the north, central, and south segments (Figure 5).

#### **Trailheads**

- New multi-season trailhead site in the central segment of the corridor reusing and repurposing Building 189
- Enhancement of existing trailheads to accommodate restroom buildings, additional parking and site amenities
- Development of new trailhead access locations

#### **Trails**

- 12.22 miles of bituminous trails
  - 7.75 miles existing
  - 4.47 miles proposed
- 12.75 miles proposed combined off-road cycling and hiking trails
- 12-miles of combined cross-country ski trails (winter), and walking/ hiking trails (summer)
  - 1.24 miles existing
  - 10.66 miles proposed
- Additional trail infrastructure and bridges to create trail loops and connections to surrounding neighborhoods for safe road and intersection crossings

#### **Water Trail**

- Improved access to Rice Creek for canoeing and kayaking

#### **Other Improvements**

- Additional interpretive and educational programming amenities
- Habitat restoration
- Off-leash dog area improvements

## **Unifying Features**

The development concept also features improvements that are unifying features for the regional trail. These features include lighting, wayfinding, and trail amenities.

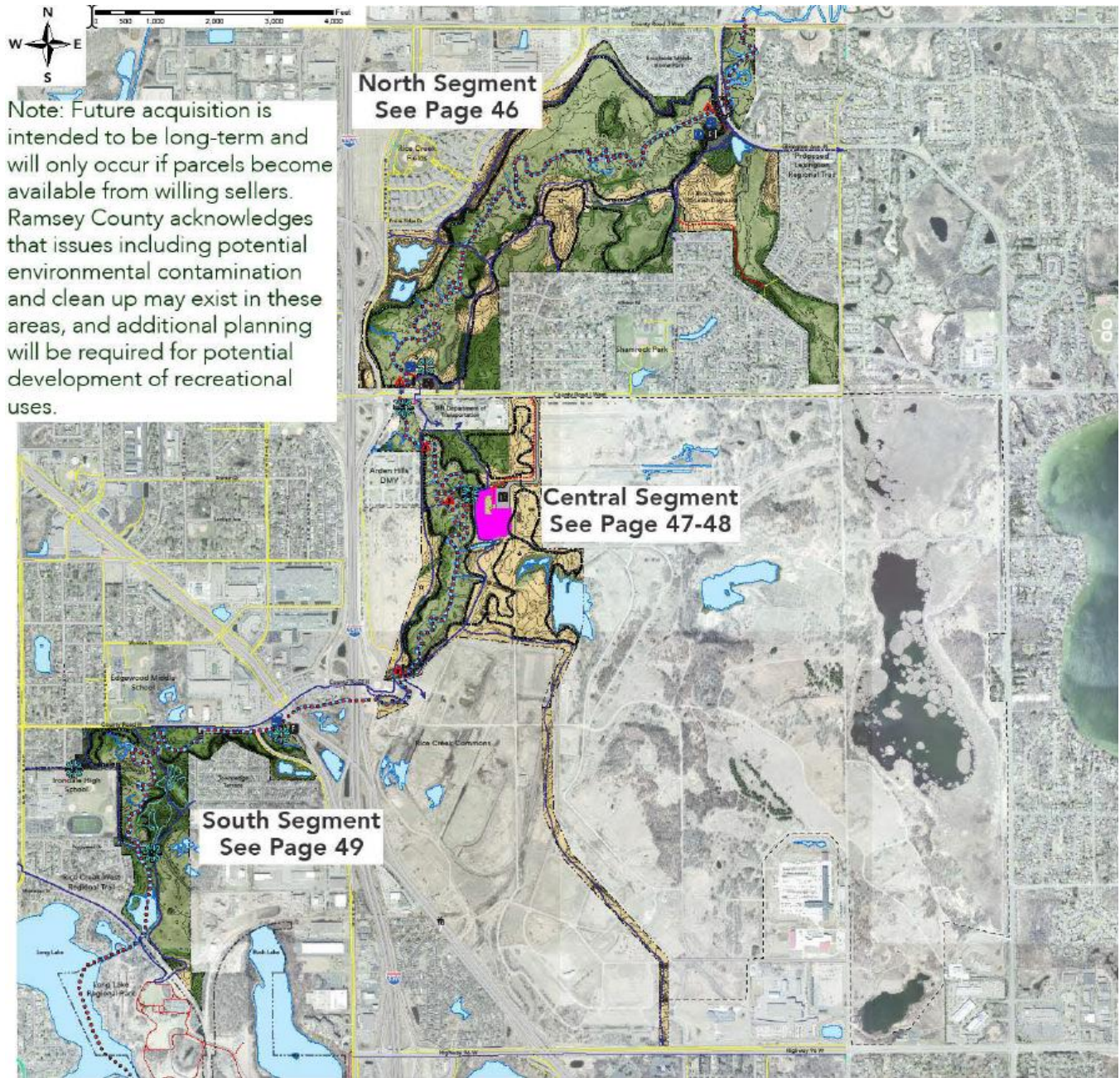
*Lighting:* New lighting will be provided at trailhead and parking lot areas or other high-use recreation areas that may be multi-seasonal.

*Wayfinding:* Wayfinding for the Rice Creek North Regional Trail will be consistent with the existing wayfinding used for the trail. All trailheads, parking lots, and community access points will have updated signage to aid in the accessibility of the trail and knowledge of where its amenities are located.

*Trail Amenities:* Trail amenities will be used when appropriate including benches, additional drinking fountains, pedestrian and bicycle amenities, additional wayfinding, nature interpretation and educational signage, and landscaping.



Figure 5: Overall Regional Trail Development Concept



## North Segment

The north segment of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail includes trail loop development and safe road crossings. These improvements are in direct response to public engagement advice requesting to improve trail use safety through limited road crossings (Figure 7).

### Trailheads

- Improvements to the County Road I trailhead
- Additional parking options at the Lexington Avenue North trailhead

### Trails

- 1.3 miles of new 10-12' wide bituminous multi-use trails and boardwalk
- 5.5 miles of new combined off-road cycling and hiking trails
- 5 miles of new combined cross-country ski and hiking trails
- Two bridge structures
- Enhanced crossings at the County Road I trailhead, Fairview Avenue, and County Road I West

### Water Trail

- Upgrades to portages and canoe/kayak launch sites at both Lexington Avenue North and County Road I

### Other Improvements

- Improvements to the Rice Creek Off Leash Dog Area according to the 2018 Off Leash Dog Area Master Plan
- Enhanced wayfinding signage throughout the trail segment
- Interpretive and educational signage along the regional trail
- Site amenities throughout the north segment
- Additional benches and rest areas to comply with the Active Living Ramsey Communities Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan

Figure 6: Legend for Figures 7-10

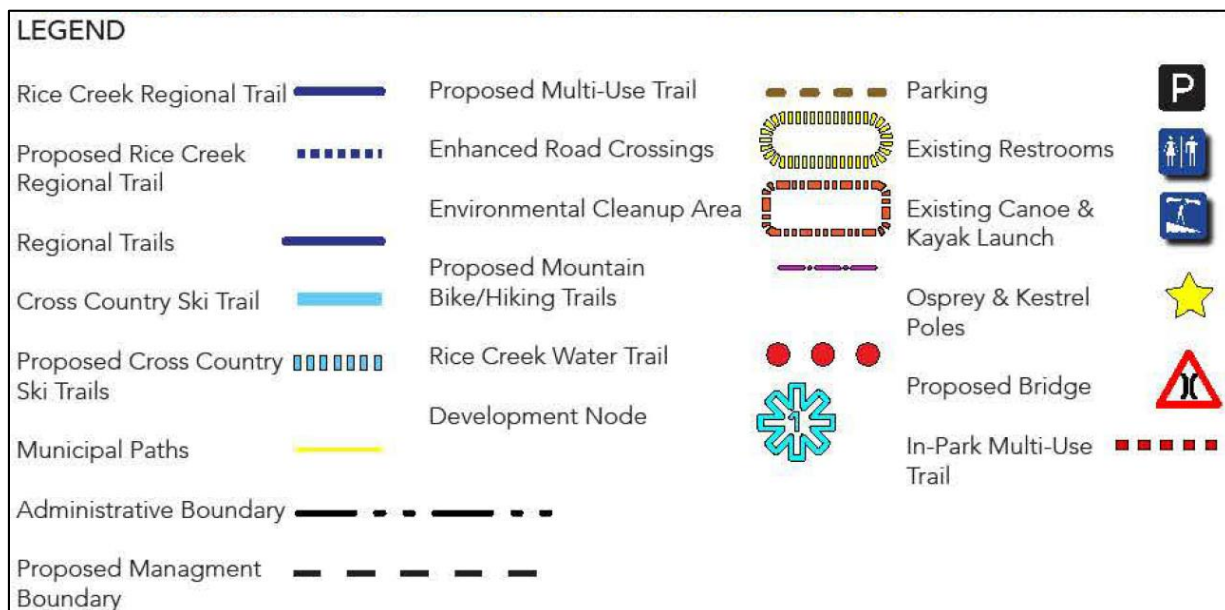




Figure 7: North Segment of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Development Concept





## **Central Segment**

The central segment of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail will serve as a destination for all kinds of recreation. New improvements include a multi-season trailhead along with an entry road, parking lot, cross country ski staging area, and outdoor recreation area (Figures 8 and 9).

### **Trailhead**

- Multi-Season Trailhead: The multi-season trailhead will include Building 189, an outdoor recreation area, and parking lot.
  - Building 189 will be reused and repurposed for several possible recreational purposes including a trailhead facility, indoor recreation, civic space, nature center, interpretive and educational programming, satellite maintenance area, and training facilities.
  - The outdoor recreation area adjacent to Building 189 will provide traditional park setting to welcome everyone and introduce them to the trail corridor. Some of the recreational uses will include picnic tables, pavilions, fire pit, public art, creek access, and play amenities.
  - Additional parking will be required to service the multi-season trailhead and outdoor recreation area in the central segment of the trail. It is anticipated that the existing parking lot will have capacity for 100-200 vehicles which will be informed by the results of the building assessment.

### **Trails**

- 2.55 Miles of new in park bituminous trails
- 4.3 miles of new combined off-road cycling and hiking trails
- 5 miles of new combined cross-country ski and hiking trails
- Four additional bridge structures to accommodate a looped trail system for all trail types
- Two enhanced crossings along County Road I
- An enhanced crossing at Highway 96 where the future trail spur will link into the Highway 96 Regional Trail

### **Water Trail**

- A new portage and kayak/canoe launch site south of County Road I for users who are uncomfortable going through the culvert system, or for use at times when the culvert is not passable
- A development node near the creek connecting to the multi-season trailhead offering various trail connections, benches, wayfinding signage, canoe and kayak access to the creek, and educational/interpretive programming along the creek
- A canoe and kayak launch site located south of County Road H

### **Other**

- Enhanced wayfinding signage throughout the trail segment
- Interpretive and educational signage along the regional trail
- Additional benches and rest areas to comply with the Active Living Ramsey Communities Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan
- Site amenities throughout the south segment

Figure 8: Central Segment of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Development Concept

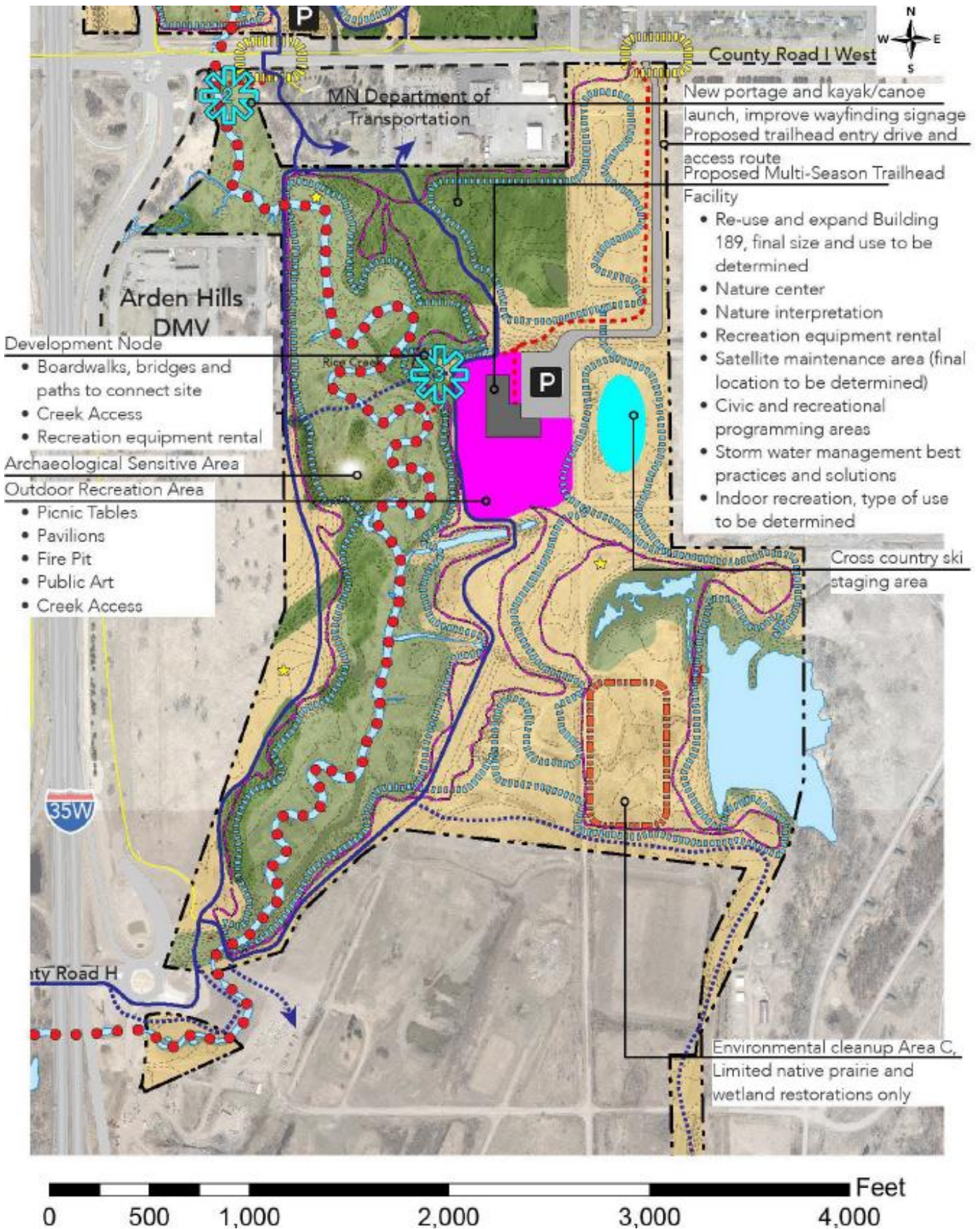
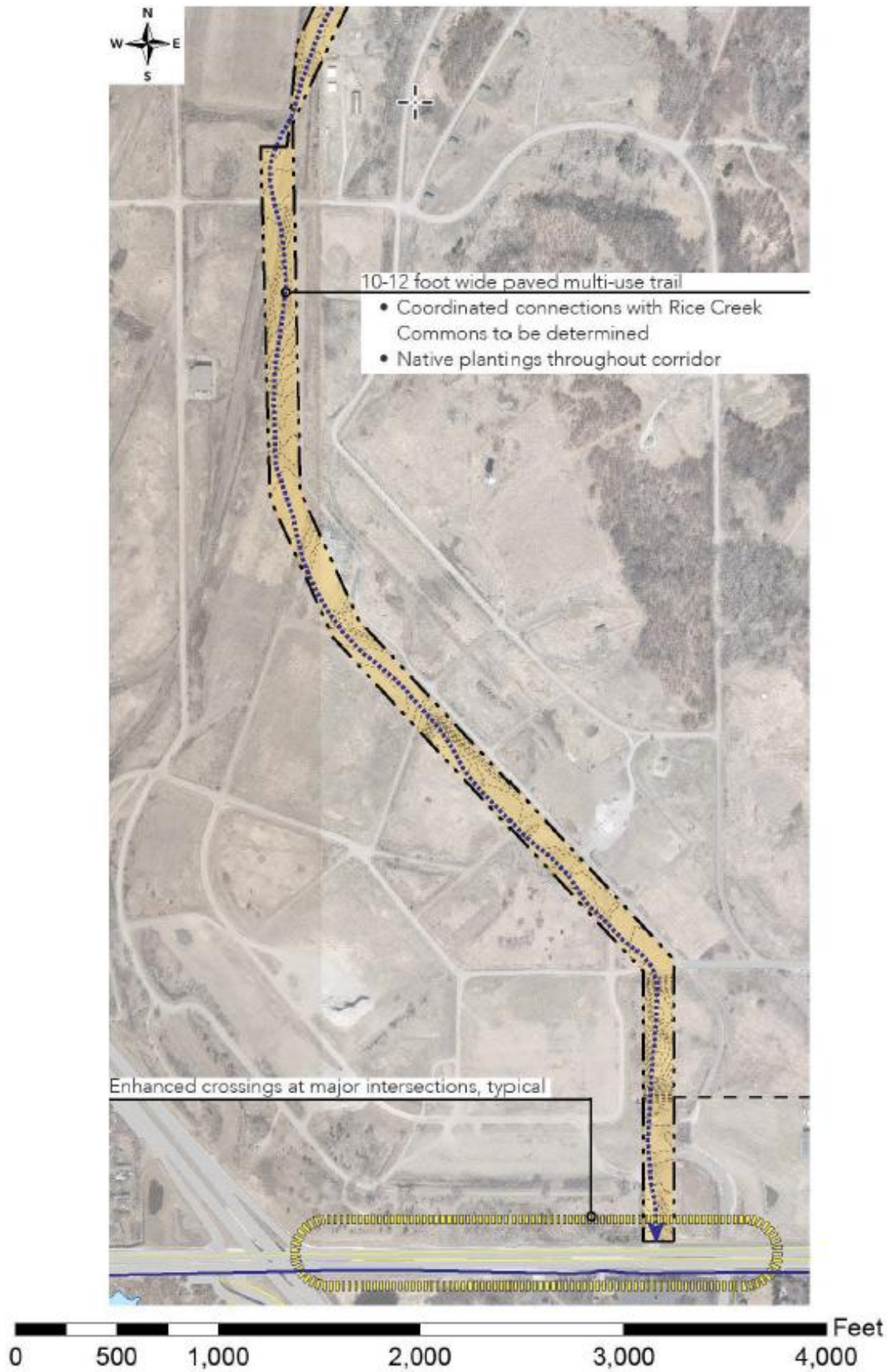




Figure 9: Central Segment of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Development Concept – Continued.





## **South Segment**

The southern segment of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail will include the fewest changes due to its relatively small size and large wetland complex that is not suitable to development (see Figure 10). There will be improvements to the existing County Road H parking lot and canoe/kayak access site, along with additional trail development and access points to the regional trail.

### **Trailheads**

- An additional trailhead with benches, restrooms, drinking fountains, and improved wayfinding signage near the Poppyseed Drive entrance

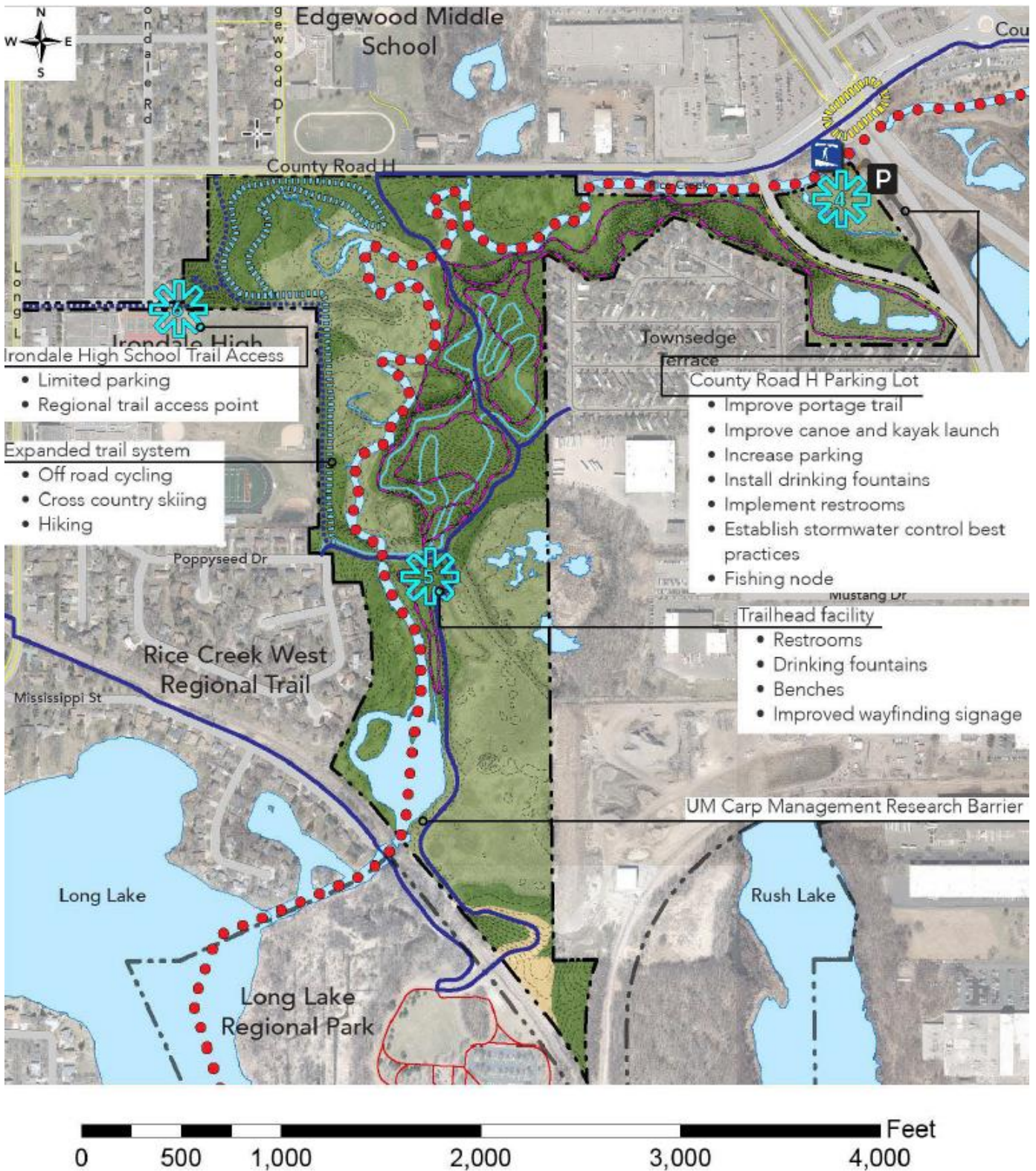
### **Trails**

- 0.65 miles of new bituminous trails, which would make additional connections to County Road H and Irondale High School
- 2.9 miles of new combined off-road cycling and hiking trails
- 0.82 miles of new combined cross-country ski and hiking trails for a total of 2.06 miles of cross-country ski trails in the south segment of the regional trail
- An additional access point at Irondale High School

### **Other Improvements**

- Enhanced wayfinding signage throughout the trail segment
- Interpretive and educational signage along the regional trail
- Additional benches and rest areas to comply with the Active Living Ramsey Communities Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan
- Site amenities throughout the south segment

Figure 10: South Segment of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Development Concept



### *Conflicts*

No major conflicts will affect the viability of the master plan recommendations. Minor conflicts that have anticipated solutions include conflicts with ski trail crossings, archaeologically sensitive areas, environmental cleanup areas, and regional trail crossings.

### **Ski trail crossings**

The shared access road from County Road I to the multi-season trailhead will present minimal conflicts. There is one cross country ski trail which crosses the road and shall be signaled appropriately to stop trail users, vehicles will also have warning signs implemented.

### **Archaeologically sensitive areas**

There is an archaeologically sensitive area located within the central segment near the Arden Hills Department of Motor Vehicles. This area will be protected, and any trail development will avoid this area.

### **Environmental cleanup areas**

There is a capped environmental cleanup area within the central segment of the corridor that will be protected. No recreation access will be allowed within this area to minimize impacts to the soil cap. It is anticipated that limited natural resource projects will be implemented in this area to provide sustainable ground cover.

### **Regional trail crossings**

Existing high use transportation roadways adjacent to the corridor create conflicts at trail crossings. Additional planning studies will be required to determine appropriate solutions for safe crossing at road intersections.

### *Public Services*

New public services will be needed to accommodate the existing and new multi-season trailheads as well as a Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant Groundwater Recovery System (TGRS). There is a TGRS facility located in the Rice Creek Commons area of the central segment that is cleaning groundwater. Utilities needed to service this facility will be located within the trail corridor for temporary electric and water discharge within the Arden Hills Army Training Site area.

- Existing trailhead will need new or upgraded utilities.
- New multi-season trailhead will need new or upgraded utilities, access road, and sewer and water extensions.
- TGRS facility will need new or upgraded utilities.

### *Operations*

Operations and maintenance of the regional trail will be the responsibility of the Ramsey County Parks & Recreation Department. The annual operating budget for the trail is \$466,500.

### *Partner Engagement*

Partner agencies were consulted throughout the planning process and comments were incorporated into the development concept. Specifically, Ramsey County consulted with the Cities of Arden Hills, Mounds View, Shoreview, and New Brighton. Each municipality supported the master plan through



adopted resolutions. Ramsey County also engaged the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission, and the Army and National Guard.

### *Public Engagement and Participation*

Ramsey County Parks & Recreation conducted two engagement processes for the Rice Creek North Regional Trail including the 2018 Parks & Recreation System Plan and the master plan. The master plan engagement activities took place from June 2018 through January 2019, and included five public engagement meetings, one online survey, and a 30-day public comment period. To reach the widest possible audience, 3,740 mailings were sent out to residents in the immediate area surrounding Rice Creek North Regional Trail. Twitter, Facebook, and other social media was used to announce meetings and on-line surveys.

The themes that emerged from the public comments focused on safety, development, and programming improvements.

### **Safety**

- Enhanced lighting
- Safer crossings at all road intersections

### **Development**

- The desire to make Building 189 a multi-season destination within the regional parks system
- Additional “in-park” trails requested to accommodate, hiking, off-road cycling, bird watching among other traditional recreational uses
- Enhanced trailheads to accommodate additional parking, restrooms, and Rice Creek water trail access
- Additional “in-park” trails to create loops, as well as a linking trail through Rice Creek Commons to connect with the Highway 96 Regional Trail
- Destination cross country ski system along with race and/or event staging areas and lighting for extended hours use
- Access into the Arden Hills Army Training Site for expanded recreational opportunities

### **Programming**

- Programming to be determined, centered in and around Building 189
- Ramsey County addressed the above public comment themes through the creation of the master plan including new recreational infrastructure to expand the existing uses, off-road cycling, and programming.

### *Equity Analysis*

Ramsey County conducted an equity analysis for the master plan process and improvements. They included information on project data, public engagement and participation, and evaluation.

### **Project Data**

The public engagement area for the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan was intended to reach as wide of an audience as possible. The Ramsey County Parks & Recreation department focused on gathering information both from citizens who live near the trail corridor as well as county-wide. There was also a focus area of any residents living near the regional trail corridor's boundary.

Ramsey County, as of 2017, had a population of 537,893. The mean household income of the county was \$60,301, with a poverty rate of 15%. The subset of the population living in a census tract within 1 -

mile of the trail corridor had a population of 74,252 with a median income of \$81,094 and a poverty rate of 7.1%.

The area immediately surrounding the trail in general is a far less diverse area within Ramsey County with 81.39% of residents identifying as white compared with 63.06% overall.

Additional data for neighborhoods within the immediate surrounding focus area also shows a higher percentage of financial wealth, more educational opportunity, a higher percentage of population in both the 45-64 and 65+ age categories and a lower percentage of population in both the under 18 and 18-44 age categories compared to the rest of the county.

### **Public Engagement and Participation**

Through the engagement process, Ramsey County tried to reach all portions of the community by mailing out information to all residents surrounding the trail corridor, posting engagement events to the Ramsey County website, publishing updates to the county's social media posts, and updates to the project in the county newsletter. Engagement efforts involved the public to influence the development plan during the listening portions and generation of concepts (involved concept drawn from International Association for Public Participation's *Public Participation Spectrum*).

Through public engagement Ramsey County learned that there is a desire for recreational amenities and programming. Some of these themes include:

- Cross country skiing: There is a desire for an expanded cross-country ski trail and looped trail system, along with a destination trailhead that could possibly host events, races, and classes.
- Off road cycling: There is a desire for off-road cycling opportunities.
- Building 189: Building 189 was identified as having historical significance.
- Enhanced road crossings: Access between park segments need to have safer crossings.
- Programming: There is a desire for varied programming.
- Expansion of paved trails: There is a desire for expanded multi-use trails with loops and more access.

### **Evaluation Summary**

As part of the evaluation summary, Ramsey County included future awareness building considerations, equitable master plan improvements, and future programming concepts.

*Awareness building:* The County will employ a complete suite of communications tools including translation to increase awareness of the regional trail and recreational opportunities.

*Equitable master plan improvements:* The master plan included the recreational amenities and programming desired as a part of engagement process and included many of recommendations from the Council's [2014 Regional Parks System Use Among Select Communities of Color Study](#).

- Trailheads include increased parking, prominent wayfinding, entrance signs, and lighting.
- The outdoor recreation area located near the multi-season trailhead include programming and event spaces, large picnicking and group shelters, play amenities.

#### ***Public Awareness***

Ramsey County Parks & Recreation will use a variety of tools to promote awareness and use of the regional trail including media and transit access.

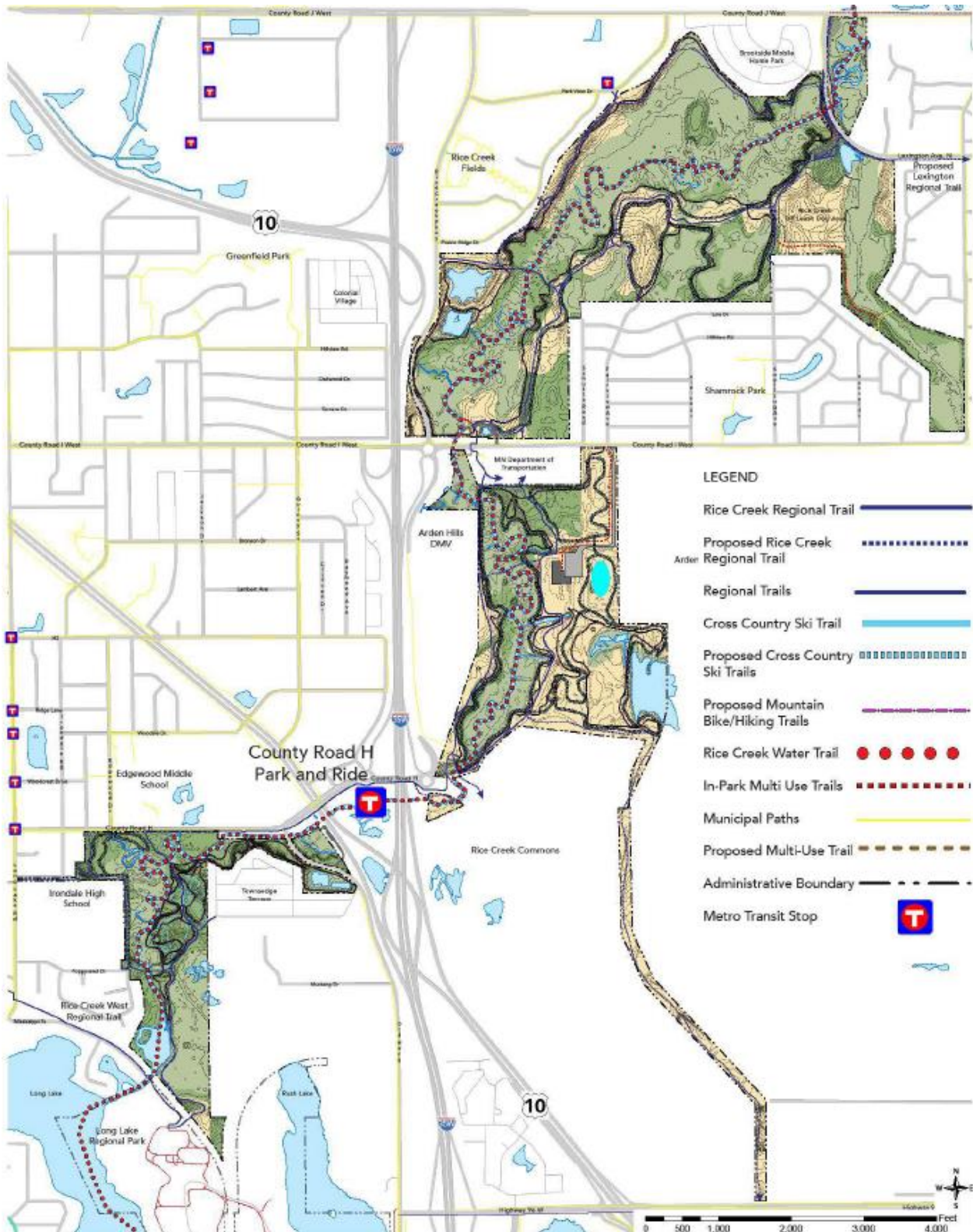
Ramsey County uses electronic and print communication to build awareness including websites, trail maps, brochures, email notification, Twitter, Facebook, and press releases to local newspapers.

Ramsey County also collaborates with Arden Hills, Shoreview, New Brighton, Mounds View, and the Metropolitan Council to promote the trail through their websites, newsletters, and brochures.

Metro Transit access to the Rice Creek North Regional Trail is very limited and offers poor access to the regional trail corridor for users that are dependent on public transportation. Currently, there are two lines (Route 250 Express Bus and Route 25) that provide limited service access to the corridor (Figure 11). The northern portion of the regional trail corridor has almost no access to close Metro Transit amenities. Additional Metro Transit stops and hours of operation should be considered throughout the regional trail corridor to increase access opportunities.



Figure 11: Transit access to Rice Creek North Regional Trail



### *Accessibility*

The master plan includes bicycle, cost, and use supports to increase accessibility to Rice Creek North Regional Trail.

Ramsey County is implementing two plans to increase bicycle access to the trail including the 2016 All Abilities Transportation Program and the Ramsey County Pedestrian & Bicycle Plan. The All Abilities Transportation Program is an organization-wide approach to building an all abilities transportation network that is anticipated to increase options to access the regional trail. The Ramsey County Pedestrian & Bicycle Plan establishes a vision and strategy for providing safe and comfortable facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists throughout the county.

Parks and trails are generally free of charge, while other department recreation options, such as golf and ice hockey, are fee-based.

Ramsey County Parks & Recreation is committed to providing universal accessibility at all trail facilities. The department is implementing an ADA Transition & Implementation Plan to bring its sites and facilities into compliance with the requirements of Title II of the American with Disabilities Act of 1990, and updated 2010 standards.

### *Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area*

No part of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail boundary lies within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area; therefore, these requirements do not apply.

### *Stewardship Plan*

Current stewardship efforts within the corridor include land cover restoration, wildlife management, and water resources management.

Current restoration efforts within the corridor prioritize 8.6 acres of oak woods and 43 acres of mixed woodland restoration within the south segment, located south of County road H. This project started in 2016 involving woody invasive species removal consisting mainly of buckthorn and seeding of native grasses and forbs throughout the oak woodlands and in late 2018 within the 13-acre oak woods located in the central section.

Wildlife management within the corridor includes deer management, bird monitoring and the provision of nesting structures.

Surface and groundwater monitoring and regulatory authority within the corridor is completed by local, state, and federal agencies, primarily the Rice Creek Watershed District. The parks department must consult with the watershed district if development projects have the potential for an impact on wetlands, groundwater or an increase in stormwater volume to contributing surface waters within the corridor. Areas located within the TCAAP plume and where there is surface/ ground water interaction will be recognized when planning within the corridor.

Soils contamination and remediation has occurred in and around the former Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant, including south of the wildlife corridor located in the central section of the corridor. In 2017, Ramsey County completed soil remediation of approximately 92 acres of former Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant land that was transferred into the regional corridor.

## *Natural Resources*

The trail corridor provides areas of high-quality natural resources including restored prairies, floodplain forests, restored mesic and oak woods, as well as the ongoing management of Rice Creek and its water resources.

The public land survey native vegetation within the Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor included extensive floodplain wetlands with scattered savannas, mixed woods, prairies, and oak woodlands. Much of the native vegetation within the Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor was altered because of channelization of Rice Creek for agricultural use during the turn of the 20th century, except for some oak woodlands. These segments of native oak woodlands have not been disturbed and are of utmost priority for restoration, preservation, and protection. In addition to the native oak woods, other current vegetation within the corridor consists of the following land cover types: shrub swamp, converted native prairie, mixed woods, wetland, old field, cultivated conifers, active use areas, and open water consisting of Rice Creek, open water wetlands, and storm water ponds.

Major surface waters within the corridor include streams, ditches, and wetlands. Rice Creek is a stream typified by broad wetland floodplains, a meandering channel approximately 25-40 feet wide, and stagnant oxbows on average 2 feet deep with laterally eroding banks.

## **Consistency with Other Council Policies and Systems**

**Environmental – Wastewater** (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – The construction of any new or updating of existing paths, trails, bridges, or any other construction project may have an impact on multiple Metropolitan Council Interceptors in multiple locations. To assess the potential impacts to our interceptor system; prior to initiating any project, preliminary plans should be sent to Tim Wedin, Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager (651-602-4571) at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services.

**Livable Communities Act – Housing** (Ashleigh Johnson 651-602-1106) The master plan is consistent with the Council's *2040 Housing Policy Plan*. There are no subsidized affordable housing developments nearby, however there are single-family naturally occurring affordable (NOAH) homes, priced below \$293,500, adjacent to the trail. Nearby NOAH housing includes Towns Edge Mobile Home Park, which connects directly to the trail. Overall, the plan does a great job of detailing how they engaged nearby and county residents and incorporated their input into the plan and subsequent development decisions.

**Transportation – Trails** (Steve Elmer 651.602.1756) – The Master Plan should be aware of the following points related to the Regional Bicycle Transportation System.

Since the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment was approved in 2013, the Council established the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN) in its 2014 update to the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan* that provided a regional planned network vision for serving the region's daily bicycle travel needs. The RBTN consists of prioritized corridors and alignments which are one of the criteria used in the Council's biannual Regional Solicitation for distributing federal U.S. DOT transportation funds. Many regional trails in the region that are designated alignments on the RBTN have received funding through the Regional Solicitation.



### Advisory Comments

Council staff recommend updating the master plan to acknowledge the relationship to the RBTN. Specifically relating to this Master Plan, the existing through trails that have developed from and run throughout the length of this Master Plan area, from Long Lake Regional Park to County Road J, are designated as Tier 1 or Tier 2 priority alignments on the RBTN. The proposed regional trail extension in the Master Plan Central Section, connecting south to County Road 96 is a Tier 2 alignment on the RBTN. The intent of the RBTN Tier 2 alignment through the South Segment was to represent the later-constructed regional trail, but currently does not match that existing trail alignment; that will be corrected with a simple administrative adjustment to the RBTN.

All trails included in the Master Plan are “off-road cycling trails,” so Council staff recommends using ‘off-road mountain biking trails’ to make that distinction from the more typical asphalt-paved, multi-use trails throughout the Regional Park System.

**Transportation – Transit** (Steve Baisden 612-349-7361) – Pre-COVID multiple express routes operate nearby along I-35W with service to both downtown Minneapolis and downtown Saint Paul. Park-and-rides are located along the corridor and some bus stops are near Co Rd J/85<sup>th</sup> Ave.

Metro Transit is open to discussing opportunities to provide connections as the regional transit system expands, where appropriate. However, given the current transit investments in the area, the low residential density that exists in this area now, this master plan will likely have no ridership impact on nearby existing transit routes.

**Research – Demographics** Todd Graham (651-602-1322) – The Ramsey County Parks & Recreation Department has identified that this Regional Trail will mainly serve the six most proximate cities (table 2 of the master plan). Council staff concur with the Park Department’s assessment of population growth and usership growth.