

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

#### CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusion about the Root River and Luce Line Trails, are based on the results of the landowner survey and the information gathered in the inquiry of professionals.

1. About three-fourths of all landowners view the Root River and Luce Line Trails as a desirable feature (73%). This rating is much higher than the opinions of continuing owners before trail development (63% to 44%) and new owners when purchasing adjacent property (87% to 71%).
2. The increase in the desirability rating on the Root River is due to a change in the attitude of farmland residents who owned property prior to trail development. The increase on the Luce Line is because of 1) a change in the attitude of continuing residents, and 2) a growing percentage of owners that are new residents who overwhelmingly rate the trail desirable.
3. A majority of all owner (85%) do not experience major problems with the trails. However, loss of privacy, trespass, litter, and property access are of some concern for 25% to 33% of the owners.
4. The concerns of continuing owners before trail development, were much greater than the current problems experienced by these same owners.
5. New owners rate the trails higher in desirability and experience fewer problems than do continuing owners. As older residents are replaced, the desirability rating may increase and the perceived problems decrease.

6. Suburban residential and small town commercial owners rate the trail higher in desirability and have fewer problems than do farmland owners. The suburban Luce Line has a higher desirability rating than the rural Root River (81% to 52%). Trails with large numbers of adjacent rural landowners may experience lower desirability ratings, at least until they are established for a few years.
7. The vast majority of owners (80%) believe the trails do not increase the rate of violent crime. Law enforcement agents, conservation officers, and trail managers report few incidents of crime or other major problems on the trails.
8. Most owners state that summer and winter trail users cause few problems. However 40% of the Luce Line respondents want the DNR to patrol the trail more often.
9. A majority of the owners (74%) think the DNR does a good job maintaining the trail. However, the Luce Line has a small problem with adjacent property detracting from the visual quality of the trail.
10. A vast majority of owners (87%) believe the trails contribute to an increase or have no affect on the value of their property. Most farmland residents (56%) think the trails have no affect on their value, while two-thirds of the suburban residential owners (61%) state an increase as a result of the trails. New owners feel the trails have a more positive affect on adjacent property values than do continuing owners.
11. According to appraisers and real estate agents, trails are a positive selling point for suburban residential property, hobby farms, farmland proposed for development, and some types of small town commercial property. Trails have no affect or a slight negative impact on agricultural farmland and small town residential property.
12. A majority of Root River respondents (57%) feel the trail benefits the local economy. This reflects the optimism in the Lanesboro community for the trail to improve economic growth by promoting tourism.
13. A majority of landowners (88%) use the trail for bicycling, hiking and jogging, and cross-country skiing. However, most do not want to add more activities such as motorized trail bikes, night-time use, or camping. Adjacent landowner would prefer to restrict hunting and snowmobiling.
14. About one-third of the landowners have been approached by trail users asking for help. The most frequent requests were for directions, phone, and water.

15. Professionals offered several suggestion or comments about the two trails:
  1. Limit the number of activities on the Luce Line Trail.
  2. Provide additional parking and location signs.
  3. Assess the problem with bicycle accidents on the Root River Trail.
  4. Involve local law enforcement agencies in the early planning stages of trails.
  5. Add a section of trail along the South Branch of the Root River to Preston.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations in this study include both site specific suggestions for the trails and general observations.

#### Trail Recommendations

The increased desirability rating by adjacent landowners indicates that overall trail management has been successful since conversion. However, a few suggestions are appropriate in order to improve on the trail experience for adjacent landowners and trail users.

1. The number of activities should be restricted on the Luce Line. The trail experiences heavy use and sometimes user conflicts occur with walkers, cross-country skiers, and snowmobiles in winter. Landowners do not want to add other activities and would prefer to limit snowmobiling and hunting.
2. The DNR should assess the need for off-street parking for Luce Line Trail users at Co Rd 19 or Co Rd 110. Individuals are now parking on the side of the road and causing minor damage to the shoulders.
3. On the Luce Line, 40% of all landowners and 62% of farmland owners want the DNR to patrol more often. Conservation officers regularly monitor the trail, but due to the increased number of users in recent years, additional time may be needed to patrol the sections with heavy use.
4. The most frequent trail user requests to landowners, is for directions, phone, and water. A couple of low keyed location maps that indicate available facilities on or near the trail, would be helpful for visiting trail users.

5. The Isinours Unit parking lot near the Root River Trail is generally used by only the local residents. Signs that indicate the location of the parking lot for visitors, may help to relieve some of the congestion in Lanesboro. This may be more of a problem in the future, after the trail is completed.
6. There are several blind road intersections on the Root River Trail. Road signs that indicate a trail crossing, may prevent accidents, when the trail experiences heavier use.
7. Several bicycle accidents have occurred on the steep grades in the Lost Lake State Game Refuge near Lanesboro. Design modification need to be made to prevent further problems. In the future, land exchanges with adjacent landowners should be evaluated for trail design and user safety.
8. The DNR should study the option for an additional section of trail along the Root River to Preston.

#### General Observations

Planners of proposed rail-trails should address the concerns of local officials and residents before the start of organized opposition. Conclusions reached in this study can be helpful in reassuring adjacent landowners that their fears are exaggerated. Problems anticipated by owners along the Root River and Luce Line in the past are similar to concerns expressed on other proposed rail-trail projects across the country. The findings of this study can be used as evidence that these fears are largely unfounded. Results that planners may find helpful include:

1. Landowners who had many concerns before trail development, now experience few problems or incidents of crime.
2. The desirability rating for the trails has increased since development. New and continuing owners as well as residential, commercial, and farmland owners, rate the trails higher in desirability.
3. After experiencing the impact of the trails for a few years, a vast majority of owners believe the trails increase or have no affect on the value of their property.

Although these findings can be useful in the conversion process, planners should be aware of how the political, social, and economic factors at proposed trails may differ from the study sites in Minnesota. Other parts of the country may have a more or less favorable environment for trail development.

Planners should sell the advantage of the proposed trails to the local officials and the general public in order to generate support. Depending on the situation, trails can offer several opportunities:

1. Increase the recreational opportunities in the area.
2. In some communities, contribute to the economic growth by promoting tourism.
3. Increase the residential property values in areas that are experiencing growth.
4. Improve the image and desirability of local communities.
5. Preserve plant and animal habitats and the historical and cultural heritage of the area.

However, in order to realize these benefits, officials and residents of the area must be included early in the planning stages. Involving local people can not only help in converting additional trails, it can also generate a better quality project.

#### **AREA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Limited research has been conducted on the rail-trail impact on nearby property. Further study in this and related areas, will help to resolve the conflicts over land use between recreation enthusiasts and nearby residents, especially the rural landowners. The goal is to plan for the optimum use of land that is in harmony with it's surroundings and which meets the needs of people.

Several opportunities exist for focused and broad-based research on railroad trails.

1. In this study, the desirability rating improved over time for two trails in Minnesota. Additional research is needed on more types of trails (rural, suburban, and urban) in other states to confirm this trend.
2. Businesses in Lanesboro experience some economic benefits from the Root River Trail and anticipate more, once the trail is completed. Additional information is needed about the trail's economic impact on small communities.
3. Since the full impact has not been experienced on the Root River Trail, a follow-up study would be valuable in five to ten years in order to determine any changes in landowner attitudes.
4. This study determined the landowner attitudes about property values and problems with crime. Additional research would be valuable on the comparison of the actual crime rate and the land values of adjacent property with nearby neighborhoods in a metropolitan area. On urban trails, the crime rate may be a critical factor in the desirability rating. A model for this research could be the study on the Burke-Gilman Trail in Seattle, Washington.
5. The Luce Line Trail may allow too many different types of recreational activities. Research on the compatibility of trail activities may help to prevent user-to-user conflicts.
6. On the first 30 miles, the Luce Line Trail has approximately 70,000 user occasions each summer. Answers are needed on the carrying capacity of trails in order to limit user conflicts, prevent trail damage, and maintain a quality experience for the user.
7. The reasons for trail user accidents may be due to poor trail design, improper maintenance, infrequent monitoring, trail activity conflicts, or too many users. Research in this area would be valuable in identifying conditions that are unsafe for trail users.
8. Rail-trails experience many difficulties in the conversion process. A comparison of the problems during development of rail-trails with trails along streams and other natural corridors, would be interesting.