

# Changes to the Great Sauk State Trail Plan based on public input on the open house draft.

## Changes approved by the Great Sauk Trail Commission on April 22, 2015

### 1 Executive Summary, Vision, and Goals

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#### **Purpose of the Cooperative Plan**

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The cooperative plan for the Great Sauk State Trail establishes and articulates a consistent vision for how the trail will be used and what message the trail conveys relative to the area's history, geology and ecology, in addition to providing a recreational resource. Currently, the Great Sauk State Trail is undeveloped, however, because of its proximity to Madison, Wisconsin and Devil's Lake State Park, there is considerable potential for this trail to become a local community asset and regional, or even national, attraction and destination.

This cooperative plan, while specific to the Great Sauk State Trail, is provided as a complement to other adopted plans with varying jurisdiction. Goals and policy direction provided in these plans, in turn, complement the overarching goal of establishing the Great Sauk Trail.

Functionally, this cooperative plan provides the framework for the trail route, users, amenities, and basic construction guidelines. The plan anticipates future connections to successive trail segments to eventually realize a connected regional trail system. Details, such as incorporating interpretive components for the trail or installation of trail features such as art sculptures and benches, are outside of the direct scope of this plan, but were considered during the planning process.

The cooperative plan also designates the Sauk Prairie Segment as a State Trail. This designation will enable the sale of State Trail passes to generate revenue for trail maintenance. The State trail designation will also place the trail in promotional materials generated by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources which reaches several million people each year, enables the promotion of the trail at trade shows, both in Wisconsin and adjoining states, and qualifies the Friend's Group to apply for a Friends Group Grant.

### 2 Project Background

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#### **Boundary and Context**

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The Great Sauk State Trail is conceptually divided into four segments: the Sauk Prairie Segment, Devil's Lake Segment, Baraboo Segment, and Reedsburg Segment. While this plan is for the Great Sauk State Trail, it applies only to the Sauk Prairie Segment.

The Sauk Prairie Segment is located in southeastern Sauk County and partially in northeastern Dane County, the Great Sauk State Trail – Sauk Prairie Segment spans a distance of approximately 13.6 miles, primarily along the former Union Pacific Railroad corridor. The trail connects Devil's Lake State Park and the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area to the Sauk County Villages of Prairie du Sac and Sauk City. In Sauk City, the trail will intersect with an existing bike trail, creating a connection to Middleton to the east and will continue south to a suggested trail head in the Lower Wisconsin Riverway in Dane County.

The Sauk Prairie Segment is divided in to three management units: the Badger Unit, Prairie du Sac | Sauk City Unit and the Dane County Unit. Section 3 of this planning document describes the

geographic location of each unit and within each unit trail users, route, access and management and development prescriptions.

The planning process suggested two 'feature loop' routes for day use hiking and biking opportunities that are close to a suggested trailhead in the vicinity of US Hwy 12 and a trail portal access point between downtown Prairie du Sac and the trail which runs along the Wisconsin River and a second trail portal located at the Sauk Prairie Area Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center on Phillips Blvd.

Overall, the Great Sauk State Trail – Sauk Prairie segment is a beginning to a larger effort of creating a regionally-connected trail that will connect multiple cities and, quite possibly, states.

The Great Sauk State Trail – Sauk Prairie segment is divided into units, each with their unique set of development and management considerations and trail users. **Section 3 – Development, Management and Use** describes the geographic location of each unit and defines more detailed criteria within.

## 3 Management, Development, and Use

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### Badger Unit Management, Development, and Use

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**Background** - Primarily located within the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant, the Badger Unit of the Great Sauk Trail plays an important role in defining the area's pre-settlement, settlement, war-time history, and post war-healing of the land. For local residents and tourist alike, the trail will provide access to the beauty of the land and offers a rare opportunity to share the area's unique history, ecology, and ongoing changes to the landscape. Within the boundary of the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant, the Badger Unit primarily traverses or is adjacent to land owned by the USDA's Dairy Forage Research Center, the Ho-Chunk Nation, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

**Trail Users** – It is anticipated that the Badger unit be primarily designated for non-motorized uses and will accommodate bicycling and pedestrian users based on trail conditions. The trail will not be maintained for winter users. A section of the trail at a point where it exits the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant to the north is reserved for possible future snowmobile use.

**Trail Users** – It is recommended that the section of trail within the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant be designated for non-motorized uses and will principally accommodate bicycling and pedestrian users in the summer with possible snow-shoeing, cross-county skiing and fat-wheeled bike riding in the winter, based on trail conditions. Snowmobile uses may be accommodated on the Great Sauk State Trail corridor within the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area.

The section of trail beginning at a point where the trail exits the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant to the north to a point concluding at Halweg Road is designated for snowmobile use in addition to the aforementioned non-motorized uses. This section of trail will be built to accommodate winter snowmobile use within the trail right-of-way with an unpaved (grassed) surface reserved for snowmobile use where feasible.

**Trail Route and Access** - Access may be provided by a trail head located in the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area. Ancillary access will be provided where the trail crosses roads. The trail will primarily follow the former rail corridor.

**Management and Development Prescriptions.** It is anticipated that the final as-built alignment of the trail will follow the former rail corridor. The Great Sauk Trail Commission and public input during the planning process recommends that this section of the trail be paved. Trail development within the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area will be determined by the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area master plan. The section of trail that will accommodate snowmobile uses, as described under trail users above, will be built with an unpaved surface (grassed) reserved for snowmobile use where feasible.

## Prairie du Sac | Sauk City Unit

### Management, Development, and Use

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**Background** - This section of the trail will serve as a catalyst for the Village of Prairie du Sac to explore opportunities to become a “trail town” destination, particularly when the larger, regional trail connections are made. This trail section will re-orientate downtown development to incorporate a trail-side focus in addition to the current street-side focus. The primary trail user experience in this section will be more urban-like, with associated amenities such as direct access to a public library, as well as opportunities to experience local arts, culinary finds, and other related engagements typically found in small, rural downtowns. The plan recommends periodic trail connections to the street side to encourage access between trail and downtown amenities, and one primary village ‘trailhead portal’ to serve as the main connection between the trail and street-side downtown.

In the Village of Sauk City, situated at the entrance of Sauk County, the Sauk Prairie Riverway Welcome Center serves as a portal for the Sauk Prairie Riverway community. The Welcome Center provides public parking, restrooms, WI-FI, brochures of attractions, restaurants and unique retail in Sauk Prairie area. Great Sauk State Trail passes will be sold and staff will provide trail users with bike routes to accommodate outing needs.

The welcome center is an attraction in itself, with a 1,400 gallon aquarium which showcases various species of fish in the Wisconsin River, along with a 20 foot sculpted tree that holds a life-size eagles nest. Tourists will be encouraged to make their first stop, the Sauk Prairie Riverway Welcome Center when visiting The Great Sauk Trail.

Once connected to the Great Sauk State Trail, users can travel north through the Village of Sauk City at a diagonal to connect once again to the Sauk City river trail or may choose to travel on to the Village of Prairie du Sac.

South of the US Hwy 12 | Phillips Blvd., the trail will serve as a trail connection to the Lower Wisconsin Riverway in Dane County and will provide a permanent route for snowmobiles to connect to routes east of Sauk City. This section will provide access over the Wisconsin River via a converted rail to trail bridge. This section of the trail will also serve to connect employees of businesses in the Sauk City Business Park to the Great Sauk State Trail and the Sauk City river trail system.

~~**Trail Users** - The Prairie du Sac | Sauk City Unit will accommodate a mix of bicycling and pedestrian users.~~

**Trail Users** - The section of trail beginning at State Road 78 north of the Village of Prairie du Sac to and concluding at US Hwy 12 in Sauk City is designated for non-motorized uses and will principally accommodate bicycling and pedestrian users in the summer with possible snow-shoeing, cross-country skiing and fat-wheeled bike riding in the winter, based on trail conditions.

The section of trail beginning at a point where the trail exists the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant to the south to a point concluding at State Road 78 is designated for snowmobile use in addition to the aforementioned non-motorized uses. This section of trail will be built to accommodate winter snowmobile use within the trail right-of-way with an unpaved (grassed) surface reserved for snowmobile use where feasible.

Additionally, a section of trail located south of US Hwy 12 to the Dane County Unit is designated for snowmobile use in addition to the aforementioned non-motorized uses. This section of trail will also be built to accommodate winter snowmobile use within the trail right-of-way with an unpaved (grassed) surface reserved for snowmobile use where feasible.

**Trail Route and Access** - Multiple access points will be provided, with no single access being a primary access. Trail access points are located in the Northridge Business Park; adjacent to the Veterans Memorial Park; north of the State Rd 60 bridge; and at the intersection of State Rd 78 and Grand Ave. A major trail head located, at the municipal parking lot and adjacent to the Ruth Culver Library, will serve as the primary portal between the trail and street-side downtown Prairie du Sac.

Within the Village of Sauk City there will not be a principle access point, however, ancillary access will be provided where the trail crosses roads. It is recommended that trail connections between downtown Sauk City, the Chamber of Commerce, and local businesses be developed and connected to the Great Sauk State Trail including local restaurants and gas/convenience store connections as part of a designated snowmobile route.

**Management and Development Prescriptions** - The final as-built alignment of the trail will follow the former rail corridor. All access points and the primary downtown portal will need to be constructed. In order to protect critical bald eagle roosting habitat during the winter, a gate and informational signage will be installed at the following access points: North of the State Rd 60 bridge; at the downtown Prairie du Sac portal; and at the intersection of State Road 78 and Grand Avenue. These gates will be controlled by the Village of Prairie du Sac based on typical annual critical relevant environmental factors.

Vegetation management along the Wisconsin River in the Village of Prairie du Sac will be minimal and prior to the removal of any large trees that may be utilized by eagles for roosting, technical data/research should be consulted.

The section of the trail from southern boundary of the Badger Unit to ~~US Hwy 12~~ the Dane County Unit will be paved. ~~The section of the trail from US Hwy 12 | Phillips Blvd. to the Sauk City rail bridge will be surfaced with crushed limestone to accommodate snowmobile use.~~ The section of trail that will accommodate snowmobile uses within the trail right-of-way and the trail will be built with an unpaved surface (grassed) reserved for snowmobile use where feasible.

#### **Dane County Unit Management, Development, and Use**

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**Background** - This unit of the trail will serve as a trail connection to the Lower Wisconsin Riverway in Dane County and will provide a permanent route for snowmobiles to connect to routes east of Sauk City. Once this phase is completed, it is anticipated that snowmobile accessibility will no longer be needed in the Village of Prairie du Sac section. This section will provide access over the Wisconsin River via a converted rail to trail bridge.

~~**Trail Users** - The trail in this section will be designed to accommodate snowmobiles as the primary user, with bikers/pedestrians utilizing the trail in summer.~~

**Trail Users** - The Dane County Unit is designated for motorized and non-motorized uses and will principally accommodate bicycling and pedestrian users in the summer with possible snow-shoeing, cross-country skiing and fat-wheeled bike riding in the winter, based on trail conditions. This Unit will also accommodate snowmobilers as a primary winter trail user.

**Management and Development Prescriptions** - The final as-built alignment of the trail will follow the former rail corridor. This section of the trail will consist of a crushed limestone surface. Future consideration may be given to paving this section if utilized as part of a future regional bike network. An existing railroad bridge will be upgraded to accommodate multiple users including snowmobilers as the primary winter trail user.

## 5 Implementation Recommendations

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### Estimated Cost

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Based on the tiers for project priorities and phasing and applying estimated costs, the following table demonstrates estimated cost per tier:

<b>Tier 1</b>
Southern boundary of the former BAAP to the Sauk City Rail Bridge Estimated total cost: 1.2 million
<b>Tier 2</b>
Including the Sauk City Rail Bridge trail into Dane County estimated cost of rail bridge upgrade 1.5 million estimated cost of trail construction \$460,000 Estimated total cost 2.0 million
<b>Tier 3</b>
Southern boundary of the former BAAP up to Devil's Lake State Park Estimated total cost 1.3 million