Becker County
Heartland Trail Feasibility Study

Becker County
by Houston Engineering, Inc.
Fall 2025

Becker • Clay • Otter Tail • Wilkin
PartnerSHIP 4 Health

FORESTRY • INDUSTRY • AGRICULTURE • TOURISM

Becker County, MN
Heartland Trail Feasibility Study

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I. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

The Becker County Heartland Trail Feasibility Study explores the opportunities, challenges, and community benefits of a proposed 12-foot multi-use trail segment serving Becker County, Minnesota from Dunton Locks County Park to Bucks Mill. This project evaluates alignment options, environmental conditions, funding sources, and stakeholder priorities to create a safe, accessible, and recreational corridor for bicyclists, walkers, and other active transportation users. Central to the study is a comprehensive public engagement process, which leverages local feedback, stakeholder meetings, and study advisory team meetings to ensure trail planning reflects the interests and needs of Becker County residents and visitors.

This feasibility study is designed to meet state trail standards, maximize funding and partnership opportunities, and support sustainable infrastructure. By identifying preferred trail routes and assessing design constraints, the study aims to provide clear recommendations that guide future engineering, environmental review, and grant applications. The Heartland Trail Feasibility Study will help the county pursue grant programs to accelerate project delivery and enhance local amenities.

Community input was encouraged throughout all phases of the study, with opportunities to contribute via a virtual engagement tools, open houses, and project website updates. The resulting recommendations will inform county leaders, Minnesota state agencies, and funding partners as Becker County advances toward a robust, connected trail network.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The 2019 Becker County Trail Master Plan envisions an east-west multi-use trail corridor traversing the county, ultimately extending to connect the communities of Park Rapids and Fargo/Moorhead. This regional vision prioritizes long-term connectivity between parks, towns, and recreational amenities. Rather than aligning the trail with the heavily trafficked Highway 10 corridor, Becker County is committed to establishing a more scenic route that highlights its lakes, natural beauty, and popular community destinations.

The segment from Dunton Locks County Park to Bucks Mill was selected because it passes key sites such as the WE Fest grounds, Shoreham dining area, Detroit Lakes golf courses, Bucks Mill Dam, and other notable amenities. This route also builds upon previously constructed trails that extend south from Detroit Lakes to Dunton Locks County Park. This route reflects public input and the county's goal to maximize access to natural and recreational features.

II. STUDY OBJECTIVES

1. **Identify and evaluate potential trail routes that maximize scenic and recreational value.**

2. **Engage the public, stakeholders, and trail users in the selection of the most suitable trail alignment.**

3. **Develop a trail route that is safe and accessible for all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and families.**

4. **Minimize impacts to private property, wetlands, and environmentally sensitive areas along the preferred route.**

5. **Ensure integration with community destinations and points of interest such as parks, event venues, and commercial areas.**

6. **Provide a foundation for future engineering, environmental review, and funding applications for trail construction.**

7. **Support local and regional connectivity within the broader Heartland State Trail network.**

8. **Identify a trail route that meets Minnesota state trail design standards and develop high-level cost estimates to help evaluate route options for final design and engineering.**

III. STEERING COMMITTEE TEAM & PLANNING PROCESS

Jim Olson . . . . . Becker County

Steve Skoog . . . . . Becker County

Mitch Lundeen . . . . . Becker County

Patrick Hollister . . . . . PartnerSHIP 4 Health

Kelcey Klemm . . . . . City of Detroit Lakes

Shawn King . . . . . City of Detroit Lakes

John Okeson . . . . . Lakeview Township

Rosemary Bruce-White . . . . . MN Dept of Transportation

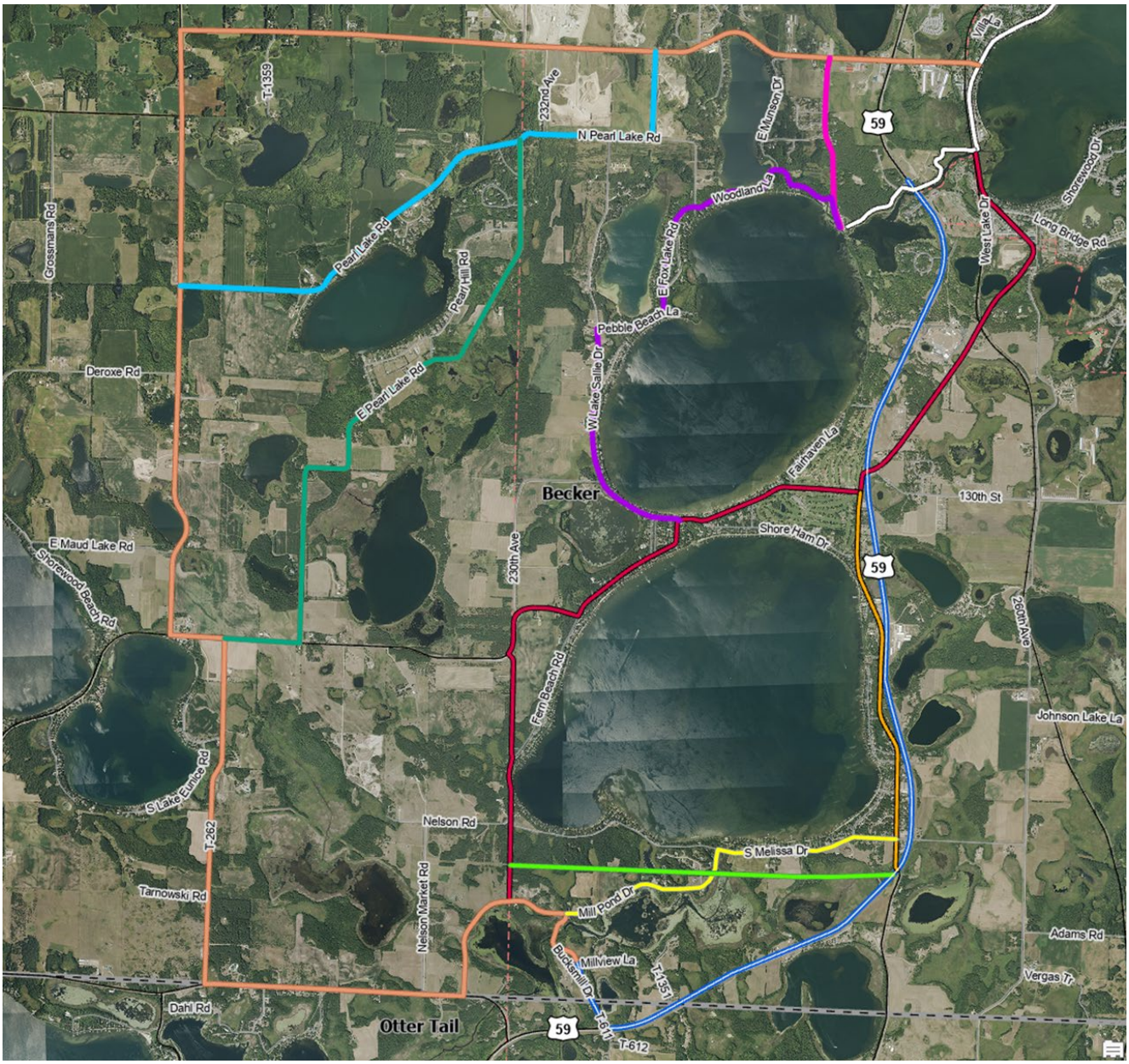
Mary Safgren . . . . . MN Dept of Transportation

Dave Suppa . . . . . WE Fest

Mark Bjerke . . . . . WE Fest

The steering committee included the individuals listed above and was responsible for overseeing the planning process. This process involved six steering committee meetings that addressed major project elements, including public engagement, initial universal trail alternatives, trail screening criteria, and final trail concepts. Once the final concepts were developed, they were presented to the Becker County Recreation Advisory Committee, the Heartland Trail Committee, and the Becker County Commission for review and comment.

IV. TRAIL UNIVERSE OF ALTERNATIVES



Legend

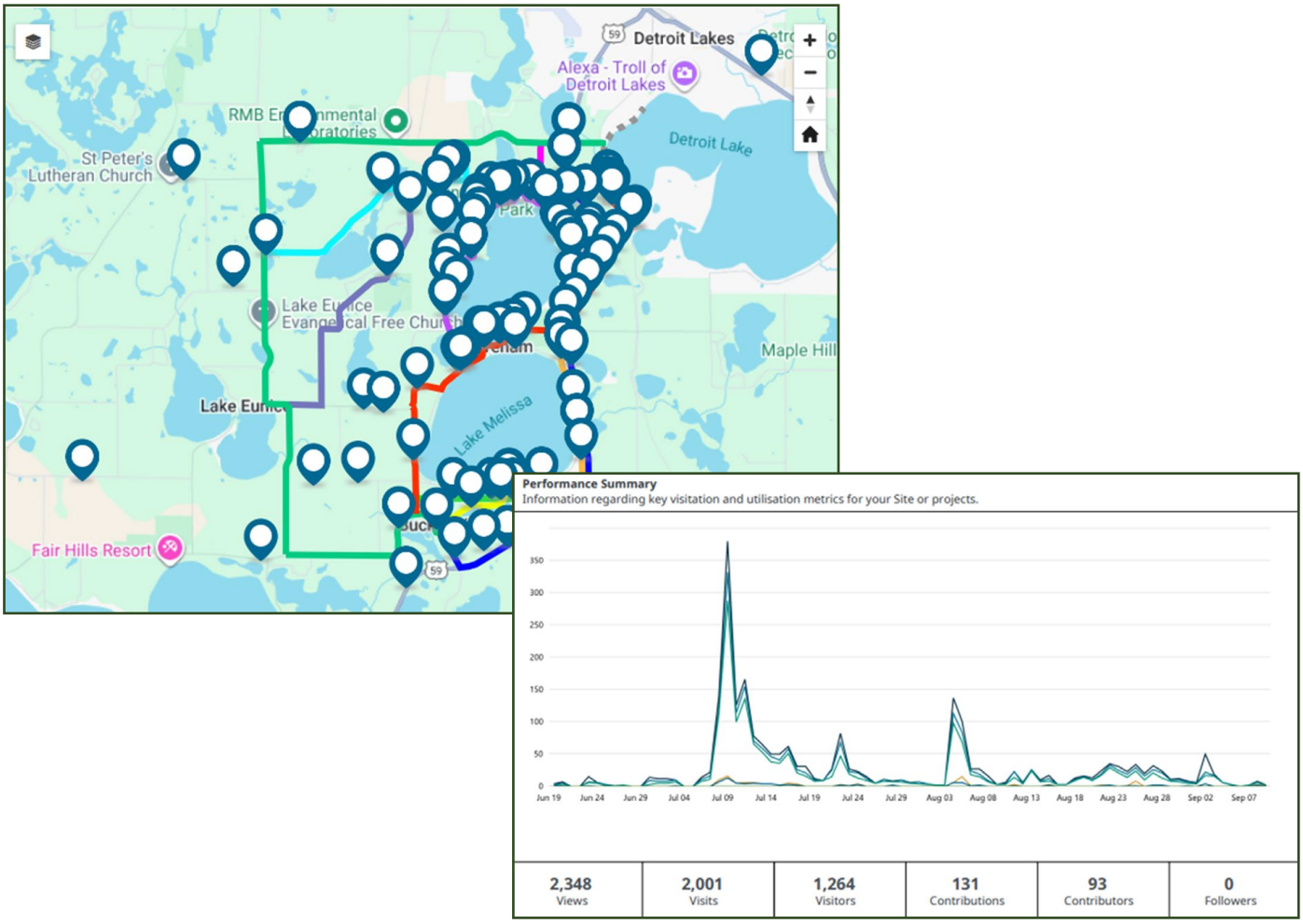
- CSAH 22 Route
- Highway 59 Route
- CSAH 17 Route
- ExistingTrail
- CSAH 6/CSAH 15 Route
- Melissa Dr/Mill Pond Dr Route
- PowerLineEaseme
- CSAH 19 Route
- Pearl Lake Rd Route
- Woodland Ln Route
- E Pearl Lake Rd Route

As an initial step in the planning process, the SAT developed a list of trail alternatives. This list represented a range of potential route options that could reasonably serve for the Heartland Trail. The purpose of creating this comprehensive list was to ensure that all feasible routing possibilities were considered before moving into a more detailed evaluation. These identified alternatives provided the foundation for further analysis, public discussion, and eventual screening to determine which routes best aligned with project goals and community priorities.

V. VIRTUAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Following the development of the trail universe of alternatives, the public was invited to provide input to help identify which routes were most preferred. To support this effort, an virtual interactive map was made available on the project website. This tool allowed participants to drop comment pins directly on the map, highlighting specific areas of interest, challenges, or opportunities related to the proposed routes. The online engagement generated significant participation, with the project website receiving 2,001 total visits from 1,264 unique users. Through the interactive map, community members submitted 105 pinned comments that offered location-specific feedback to guide the evaluation of alternatives.
The major themes from the public comments include:

- Preference for routes along the east sides of Lake Sallie and Lake Melissa, reflecting higher public interest in those alignments.
- Desire for more scenic trail routes that highlight natural features and recreational amenities.
- Concerns about limited roadway space in areas such as Shoreham and Woodland Lane, where trail alignment may create safety or design challenges.
- General interest in ensuring final trail concepts are connected to existing trail systems and community destinations.
- Emphasis on balancing accessibility with safety, particularly where trails would share space with roadways or pass through developed areas.

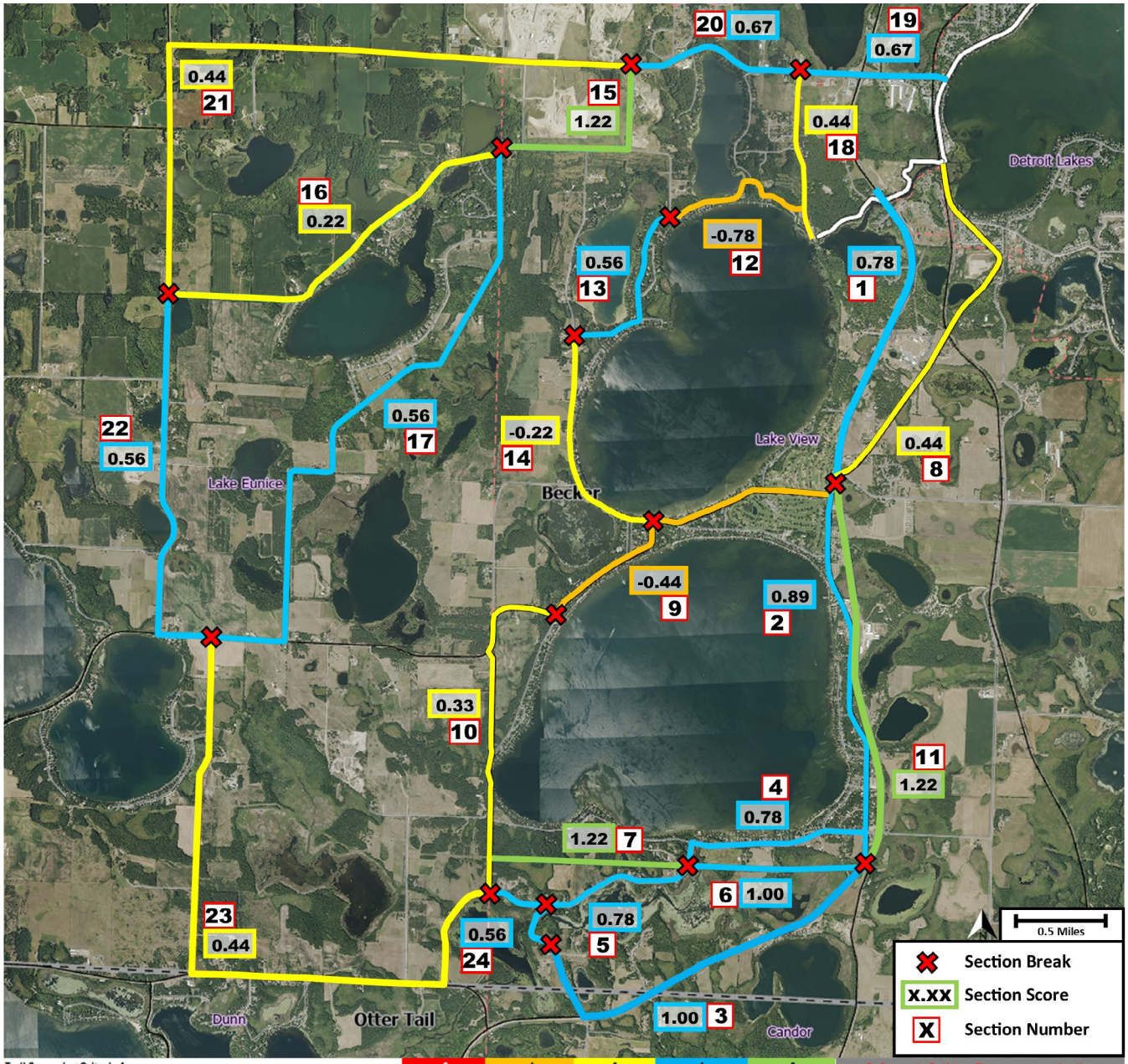


VI. TRAIL SELECTION SCREENING

Each of the 24 potential trail sections was screened and scored using a consistent evaluation framework. Sections were assessed against multiple criteria, including available right-of-way and roadway corridor space, presence of encroachments, parcel density and driveway frequency, grading needs, degree of separation from the roadway, safety factors such as traffic conflicts and highway crossings, anticipated public acceptance, potential environmental impacts, and the directness of the route to destinations and points of interest. Each criterion was scored on a scale from -2 to +2, with -2 representing the least favorable condition and +2 the most favorable. Scores were totaled and averaged to produce a final value for each section, which is shown in the corresponding map. Results were categorized into five ranges: not recommended (-2.0 to -1.2, red), low recommendation (-1.19 to -0.4, orange), possible trail facility (-0.39 to 0.49, yellow), good trail facility (0.5 to 1.2, blue), and great trail facility (1.21 to 2.0, green).

The trail sections along the east and south sides of Lake Sallie and Lake Melissa received the highest scores in the evaluation. These alignments stood out due to strong public preference, scenic value, and greater opportunities for roadway separation and safety. As a result, they are considered the most favorable trail facility options for advancing into the final concept development.

Heartland Trail Routing Study: Section Score Map



Trail Screening Criteria Area	-2	-1	0	1	2
ROW/Roadway corridor area	Less than 40 feet	40-50 feet	50-65 feet	66 feet to 100 feet	Over 100 feet
Encroachments in ROW/Roadway corridor area	Utility Poles	Many/no utility poles	several/no utility po	Only a few	None
Parcel Density (Driveways)	over 40/mile	25-40/mile	15-25/mile	10-15/mile	less than ten/mile
Grading Needs – amount of work to develop a trail bench	High	Mod/High	Moderate	Moderate/Low	Low
Roadway separation – the more separated the more comfortable and trail like	Shared Street	Shoulder	Curb-side	5-10 feet	more than 10 feet
Traffic Conflicts/High Traffic/High Speed/Highway crossings – safety	High	High/Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/Low	Low
Public Acceptance	Mostly Negative	General Negative	Neutral	General Positive	Mostly Positive
Environmental conflicts – wetlands, etc	Many Conflicts	Some Conflicts	Limited	Minor conflicts	No conflicts
Directness of trail to Destinations/Points of Interest	None	Limited	Some	Good	Great
Overall Average	Not Recommended	Low Recommendation	Possible trail facility	Generally a good trail facility	Great trail Facility

- -2.0 to -1.2 (Not Recommended)
- -1.19 to -0.4 (Low Recommendation)
- -0.39 to +0.49 (Possible trail facility)
- +0.5 to +1.2 (Generally a good trail facility)
- -1.21 to +2.0 (Great trail facility)

Each trail section was individually scored in each category and then averaged for an overall score. Please see the link below or packet to view corresponding section scoresheets.

VII. OPEN HOUSE

A public open house was held on from Monday August 25th from 4:30 PM to 6:30 PM at the Detroit Lakes Pavilion. Approximately 50 people attended the Open House where there were information boards and maps provided for people to discuss with consultant and county staff. In addition, a presentation was provided with a question-and-answer session afterward. The Open House allowed for attendees to provide their input and to have a conversation about the trail routing study. Comments that were received during the Open House included the following.

- There were many attendees concerned about the trail options in the Shoreham and Woodland Trails alternatives.
- A few attendees did discuss the benefits of trails on the west side of Lake Sallie and Lake Melissa.
- **North Section:** General preference for Highway 59 although some were concerned about traffic along Highway 59. Discussion included finding ways to take the trail off Highway 59 where possible and utilizing the WE Fest campground area for a trail option.
- **Middle Section:** There was a split among participants on whether using Highway 17 or 59 would be best along this section.
- **South Section:** Most people at the Open House preferred the Electrical Highline section on the east portion of the route while most attendees seemed to prefer Mill Pond Road on the west section of this section.

Photos Courtesy of Detroit Lakes Tribune

VIII. RECOMMENDED TRAIL CORRIDORS

The recommended trail route options were developed by combining public feedback, section scoring results, input from open house participants, and guidance from advisory committees and the county commission. These recommendations reflect both the technical evaluation of trail feasibility and the community's priorities for scenic quality, accessibility, and safety. The Becker County Trail Routing Feasibility Study recommendations are broken down into three sections as explained fully below. The accompanying maps illustrate the general locations of the recommended routes and highlight key opportunities and challenges associated with each corridor.

VIII. RECOMMENDED TRAIL CORRIDORS

North Trail Section

Recommended Route along Highway 59

The recommended route for the north section follows Highway 59, running along the west side of the roadway. This alignment begins at the existing trail in Dunton Locks Park and extends north to the roundabout at the intersection of Highway 59 and Highway 22. This trail corridor will have at least thirty feet of separation from the roadway and has the opportunity to weave through the WE Fest grounds when slope and wetland concerns arise. The corridor was identified as the preferred option due to its directness, available space, and potential to provide a continuous, safe connection. The following opportunities and challenges were documented as part of the evaluation.

Opportunities

- **Generally flat terrain:** The relatively level ground along this corridor minimizes the amount of grading required, reducing construction costs and simplifying trail design.
- **Wide right-of-way:** A broader roadway corridor provides flexibility for trail placement, allowing for safer separation from vehicle traffic and more consistent trail width.
- **Direct route:** By following Highway 59, the trail offers a straight and efficient connection between destinations, which strengthens its appeal for both recreational and transportation use.
- **Fewer intersections and driveways:** Limited driveway and intersection conflicts improve user safety, reduce crossing delays, and maintain a more continuous trail experience.

Challenges

- **Slope and wetland concerns:** Certain areas may require additional engineering and environmental review due to potential wetlands and minor slope adjustments, which could increase project complexity and cost.
- **Higher traffic speeds:** Highway 59 carries higher-speed traffic, which may require enhanced design treatments such as greater trail separation, barriers, or landscaping to ensure user comfort and safety.
- **Less scenic environment:** Compared to lakefront or wooded alignments, this corridor has fewer natural or recreational features along the route, which may reduce its appeal for users seeking a more scenic trail experience.
- **Crossing the water channel and navigating the WE Fest entrance:** Just south of the existing trail, the alignment must cross a water channel and then continue through the area near the WE Fest event entrance and underpass. This presents design and safety challenges related to both waterway crossing and managing potential traffic congestion during large events.

VIII. RECOMMENDED TRAIL CORRIDORS

County 22 Section – Secondary Recommended Route

As a secondary option, the recommended route along County Highway 22 would run along the west side of the roadway from the current trail to the roundabout. This segment would maintain a four- to six-foot separation from the roadway, with curb and gutter features similar to the existing trail section that runs on the west side of Detroit Lake. This alignment is considered an alternative to the Highway 59 route should issues arise with its implementation. The following opportunities and challenges were identified for the County 22 corridor.

Opportunities

- **Positive public perception:** Public feedback indicates that this corridor is viewed favorably, reflecting support for a trail alignment that serves both residents and recreational users.
- **Less traffic compared to Highway 59:** County 22 carries lower traffic volumes and slower speeds than Highway 59, making it a quieter and more attractive option for users seeking a safer and less stressful riding or walking environment.

Challenges

- **Bridge crossing:** Extending the trail along this corridor would require addressing a bridge location, which may involve structural modifications or new construction to safely accommodate trail users.
- **Slope and wetland concerns:** Certain areas may present grading difficulties or potential conflicts with wetlands, increasing permitting requirements and construction effort.
- **Multiple driveways on the northern half:** Numerous residential and commercial driveways in the northern portion create potential trail conflicts, frequent crossings, and reduced continuity for users.
- **Sharp corner section:** A tight curve along the corridor presents both design and safety challenges, requiring careful alignment and additional treatments to maintain visibility and trail user comfort.

Lake Sallie Campground Section (WE Fest)– Local Route Option

A trail alignment through the WE Fest Lake Sallie Campground was strongly considered because of its scenic value and potential to provide an attractive experience for trail users. However, this corridor presents two significant challenges: the trail would need to be closed during events on WE Fest property, and its use would rely on a revocable lease agreement that could be terminated if the landowner pursued future development. Due to these limitations, this alignment is recommended only as a local trail option rather than as part of the formal Heartland Trail route.

Heartland Trail North Section Concept

Highway 59 North Section $$$$

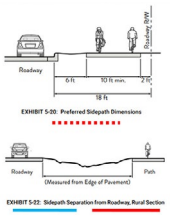
— Slope concern and wetland concerns
— Higher traffic speeds
— Less scenic

+ Generally flat
+ Generally wide right of way
+ Direct route
+ Less intersections and driveways

Highway 22 North Section $$$$

— Bridge Crossing
— Slope and wetland concerns
— Multiple driveways on northern half
— Sharp corner section

+ Positive public perception
+ Generally wide ROW
+ Less traffic compared to Hwy 59



Highway 59 Trail (>30' Separation)
Highway 22 Trail (<6' Separation)
Highway 22 Trail (>6' Separation)
Existing Trail

Middle Trail Section

Middle Section – Recommended Route along Highway 17

The recommended route for the middle section follows Highway 17, extending from the roundabout at the intersection of Highway 59 and Highway 22 south to South Melissa Drive. The alignment would run along the west side of the roadway until North Melissa Drive, where it would cross to the east side of the highway for the remainder of the segment. This section will have around four to six feet of separation with curb and gutter. This corridor was identified as the preferred option based on its directness, lower traffic volumes, and availability of nearby points of interest. The following opportunities and challenges were identified for the Highway 17 segment.

Opportunities

- **Lower traffic:** Highway 17 experiences less traffic compared to Highway 59, creating a safer and more comfortable trail environment for users.
- **Ability to interact with Highway 59 right-of-way:** The corridor connects directly to Highway 59, allowing for flexibility in alignment planning and an option to cross over the Highway 59 ROW if issues arise in final design.
- **Direct route:** The alignment provides a straightforward north-south connection, supporting efficient travel for both recreational and transportation purposes.
- **Points of interest:** The route passes by several attractions, such as a golf course and flea market, which enhance the trail's appeal and provide destinations for users.

Challenges

- **Utility conflicts:** Existing underground and overhead utilities along the corridor may require relocation or design accommodations, increasing project cost and complexity.
- **Narrow right-of-way:** Portions of Highway 17 have limited roadway corridor width, creating challenges for placing the trail with sufficient separation from traffic.
- **Multiple driveways on the southern half:** A higher concentration of driveways in the southern portion of the corridor introduces safety concerns and reduces the continuity of the trail experience.

Middle Section – Secondary Route along Highway 59

As a secondary option, the trail could follow Highway 59 from the roundabout at the intersection of Highways 59 and 22 south to South Melissa Drive. This alignment would remain on the west side of the highway, with at least 30 feet of separation from vehicle traffic to provide user comfort and safety. While considered a feasible alternative, this option is less favored compared to Highway 17 due to traffic conditions and scenic considerations. The following opportunities and challenges were identified for the Highway 59 corridor.

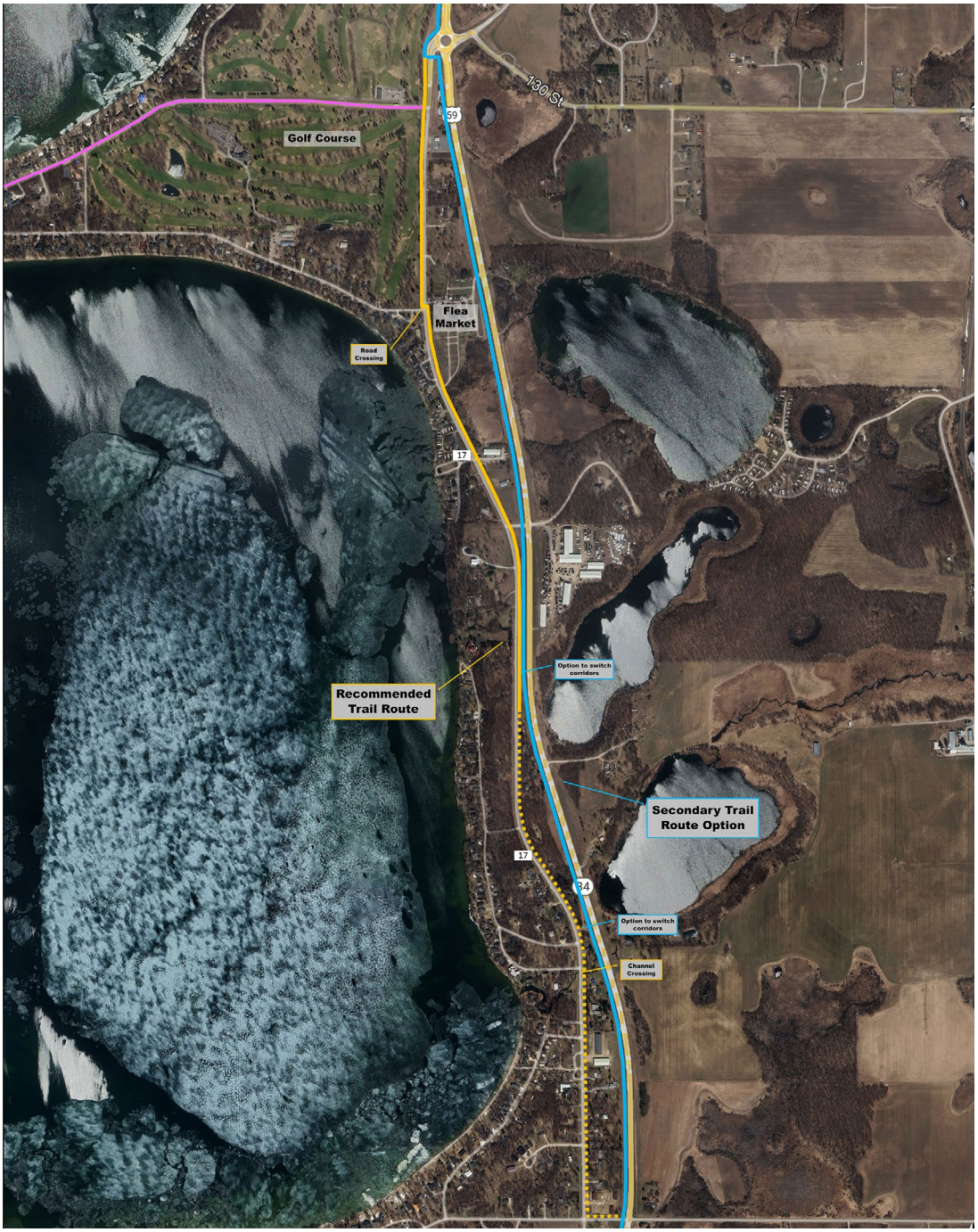
Opportunities

- **Generally flat terrain:** The corridor has few grading concerns, allowing for simpler construction and alignment with reduced need for extensive earthwork.
- **Wide right-of-way:** The availability of roadway corridor space provides flexibility for trail placement and supports safer separation from adjacent traffic.
- **Direct route:** Following Highway 59 offers a straight connection through the area, supporting convenience and efficiency for trail users.
- **Fewer intersections and driveways:** Compared to other options, this corridor has fewer crossing points, which reduces conflict areas and creates a more continuous trail experience.

Challenges

- **Higher traffic speeds:** Highway 59 carries fast-moving traffic, which may reduce user comfort and require design measures such as greater trail separation, barriers, or landscaping.
- **Less scenic environment:** Unlike routes closer to natural or recreational features, this corridor offers fewer scenic amenities, which may limit its appeal for users seeking a more recreational experience.

Heartland Trail Middle Section Concept



Highway 59 Middle Section $$$$

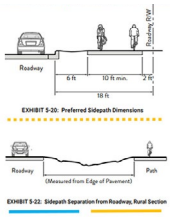
— Higher traffic speeds
— Less scenic

+ Generally flat
+ Generally wide right of way
+ Direct route
+ Less intersections and driveways

Highway 17 Middle Section $$$$

— Utility conflicts
— Narrow ROW
— Multiple driveways on southern half

+ Lower traffic
+ Ability to interact with Hwy 59 ROW
+ Direct route
+ Contains points of interest (Golf course, flea market, etc.)



Highway 59 Trail (>30' Separation)
Highway 17 Trail (<6' Separation)
Highway 17 Trail (<6' Separation)
Potential Bicycle Enhancements to Shoreham (On Street)

South Trail Section

South Trail Section Recommended Route - South Melissa Drive/Mill Pond Drive

The recommended route for the south section follows South Melissa Drive and Mill Pond Drive, extending from Highway 17 east to Bucks Mill Drive. The alignment would run along the south side of the roadway with a separation of four to ten feet between the trail and vehicle traffic. This corridor was identified as the preferred option due to its favorable conditions and ability to create a direct connection in the southern portion of the project area. The following opportunities and challenges were identified for the South Melissa/ Mill Pond Drive segment.

Opportunities

- **Generally clear and flat terrain:** The corridor requires minimal grading or complex construction, reducing costs and simplifying design.
- **Lower traffic volumes:** Compared to major highways, the roadway experiences less traffic, creating a safer and more comfortable environment for trail users.
- **Direct route:** The alignment provides a straightforward east-west connection that efficiently links users between Highway 17 and Bucks Mill Drive.

Challenges

- **Crossing narrow culvert:** The trail alignment must address a narrow culvert crossing, which may require structural improvements or replacement to safely accommodate users.
- **Narrow right-of-way:** Some portions of the corridor have limited space between the roadway and property boundaries, creating challenges for maintaining consistent separation from traffic.
- **Driveway conflicts:** While fewer than in other corridors, the presence of some driveways still introduces potential trail interruptions and points of conflict that must be managed through design.

VIII. RECOMMENDED TRAIL CORRIDORS

South Section Secondary Route - Highway 59

As a secondary option, the south section of the trail could follow Highway 59, extending from South Melissa Drive to Bucks Mill Drive and then north to connect with Mill Pond Drive. The alignment would remain on the west side of the highway with a minimum of 30 feet of separation from the roadway to improve user comfort and safety. While this corridor provides strong regional connectivity potential, it is less favored compared to the South Melissa Drive/Mill Pond Drive route due to traffic and roadway conditions.
The following opportunities and challenges were identified for the Highway 59 alignment.

Opportunities

- **Generally flat terrain:** Minimal grading would be required, simplifying construction and design.
- **Wide right-of-way:** Adequate corridor space provides flexibility for alignment and safer trail placement away from traffic.
- **Direct route:** The alignment offers a straight connection across the southern section, supporting efficiency and ease of use.
- **Fewer intersections and driveways:** Reduced conflict points improve both trail continuity and safety for users.
- **Regional connectivity:** This route provides a logical southern connection toward Pelican Rapids and the Heart of the Lakes Trail, strengthening regional trail system integration.

Challenges

- **Gravel section between Highway 59 and Mill Pond Drive:** Portions of this corridor are not fully paved, requiring improvements and potentially higher costs to bring conditions up to trail standards.
- **Higher traffic speeds:** Highway 59 carries fast-moving vehicles, which may reduce trail user comfort and require additional separation, barriers, or landscaping treatments for safety.
- **Crossing at Bucks Mill Dam culvert:** A new culvert crossing at Bucks Mill Dam is expected to begin construction soon, and routing the trail in this area may require additional coordination and design modifications to safely integrate the trail crossing with the new structure.

South Section – Third Option along Power Line Easement

A third potential option for the south section would utilize the existing power line easement to create a trail corridor extending from Highway 59 to Mill Pond Drive. This alignment would provide a more natural experience in a wooded setting, away from traffic and roadway constraints. However, significant design and coordination challenges limit its feasibility compared to other alternatives. The following opportunities and challenges were identified for this alignment.

Opportunities

- **Wooded/natural setting:** The alignment offers a scenic, natural trail environment with fewer roadway distractions, enhancing the recreational experience.
- **Positive public perception:** Initial community feedback indicates strong support for this alignment, largely due to its natural character and separation from busy roadways.
- **No traffic or driveway conflicts:** Unlike road-adjacent corridors, this route avoids vehicle crossings and driveways, promoting continuous and safe trail use.
- **Direct route:** The alignment provides a straightforward connection from Highway 59 to Mill Pond Drive, serving both recreational and transportation purposes effectively.

Challenges

- **Required easements:** Trail development would depend on securing permission and legal agreements from the utility company and private landowners within the easement area.
- **Conflicting public property:** Coordination may be required with existing uses or restrictions within the corridor, especially where land ownership overlaps with public or utility interests.
- **Wetland crossing and higher cost:** The route would intersect a wetland that requires a boardwalk structure for trail passage, significantly increasing construction costs and long-term maintenance needs.
- **Slope concern:** Certain portions of the corridor include uneven terrain that may require grading, stabilization, or other design treatments to create a safe and accessible trail.

Heartland Trail South Section Concept

South Melissa Dr. and Mill Pond Dr.

— Crossing narrow culvert
— Narrow ROW
— Few conflicting driveways

+ Generally clear and flat
+ Lower traffic
+ Direct route

$$$$

Power Line Trail

— Required easements
— Conflicting public property
— Wetland crossing
— Slope concern

$$$$

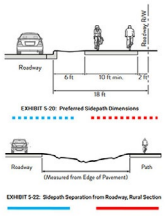
+ Wooded/natural setting
+ Positive public perception
+ No conflicting traffic or driveways
+ Direct route

Highway 59 South Section

— Gravel section (Hwy 59 to Mill Pond Dr.)
— Higher traffic speeds

$$$$

+ Generally flat
+ Generally wide right of way
+ Direct route
+ Less intersection and driveways
+ General direction to Pelican Rapids and Heart of the Lakes Trail



- Highway 59 Trail (<6' Separation)
- Highway 59 Trail (>30' Separation)
- Melissa/Mill Pond Trail (6'-10' Separation)
- Melissa/Mill Pond Trail (<6' Separation)
- Highway 17 Trail (<6' Separation)
- Powerline Trail (No Adjacent Roadway)

IX. FUNDING

Minnesota Active Transportation Program

The Minnesota Active Transportation Program (AT Program) is a state-funded initiative that supports communities in expanding infrastructure for walking, biking, and rolling. This grant serves projects that make neighborhoods safer and more accessible for all ages, directly benefiting the Heartland Trail's aim to connect people to destinations via improved multi-modal pathways and amenities.

- **Matching requirement:** 20% local funding match required
- **Award range:** Estimated annual statewide appropriation is $24 million; individual awards range based on project scope and annual solicitation guidelines
- **Eligible applicants:** Cities, counties, school districts, tribal governments, and park authorities
- **Eligible projects:** Trail construction, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, Safe Routes to School infrastructure, planning assistance for active transportation networks, and demonstration projects
- **Deadlines:** Solicitation timeline typically includes webinar in October, application due by late November, award announcements in January, project startup in spring, with project completion within up to four years

Minnesota DNR Recreational Trails Program

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Recreational Trails Program, funded by the Federal Highway Trust Fund, offers financial assistance for the maintenance, development, and acquisition of recreational trails for motorized, non-motorized, and diversified uses. This grant is highly suitable for creating and restoring trail connections, building new segments, and developing facilities that support trail users along the Heartland Trail corridor.

- **Matching requirement:** 25% cash or in-kind match required for eligible project elements
- **Award range:** $2,500 minimum, up to $200,000 maximum for trail grants; equipment grant maximum is $75,000
- **Eligible applicants:** Units of government (cities, counties, park authorities), preferably in partnership with local trail organizations
- **Eligible projects:** Construction, restoration, and maintenance of motorized and non-motorized trails; development of trail linkages, trailheads, and accessible facilities; acquisitions of land or easements for trail use; and trail-related education and safety programs
- **Deadlines:** Applications due February 28, 2025; grant awards announced in summer 2025; funds available October 2025

Projects must be completed by June 30, 2027. This program prioritizes trail linkages and collaborative projects that serve both motorized and non-motorized users and encourages partnerships with youth corps for labor and stewardship work.

Minnesota Transportation Alternatives Program

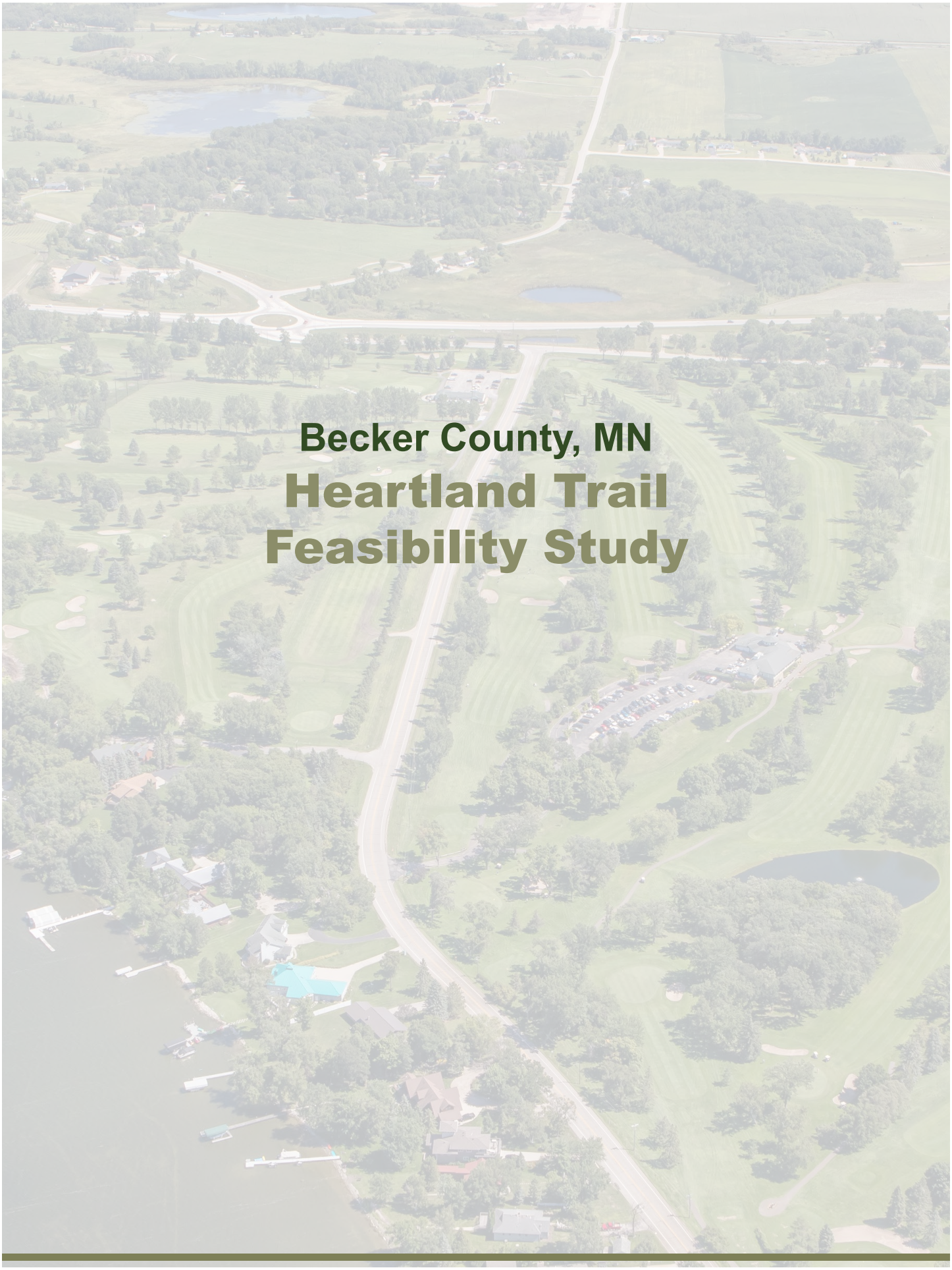
The Minnesota Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a federal funding initiative administered by MnDOT that supports projects enhancing pedestrian, bicycling, and Safe Routes to School infrastructure. The program is ideal for the Heartland Trail as it funds trail construction, safety improvements, and community connectivity projects that promote active transportation and reduce reliance on automobiles.

- **Matching requirement:** 20% local or state funding match required
- **Award range:** Typically $100,000 minimum to $1,000,000 maximum per project
- **Eligible applicants:** Local governments, school districts, transit agencies, tribal governments, nonprofits with transportation authority, and regional transportation planning organizations
- **Eligible projects:** Construction and planning of pedestrian and bicycle facilities, recreational trails, Safe Routes to School programs, infrastructure related to historic preservation and environmental mitigation, and streetscape improvements
- **Deadline:** Annual solicitation with Letters of Intent due by early November and full applications due by mid-January; awards announced in spring

X. IMPLEMENTATION & COST ESTIMATES

It is recommended that the Heartland Trail Feasibility Study be a guide for final design and construction of a trail from Dunton Locks to Bucks Mill. These cost estimates are based off material cost, grading, tree removal, and address larger challenges that include culvert extensions, bridge widening, etc. These cost estimates also include a range of 10%-35% contingency.

Highway 59 North Section	$700,000 – $850,000
Highway 22 North Section	$2,750,000 – $3,400,000
Lake Sallie Campground North Section	$300,000 - $400,000
Highway 59 Middle Section	$650,000 - $800,000
Highway 17 Middle Section	$900,000 - $1,100,000
South Melissa Dr/Mill Pond Dr South Section	$850,000 - $1,050,000
Powerline South Section	$2,400,000 - $3,000,000
Highway 59 South Section	$1,100,000 - $1,400,000



Becker County, MN

Heartland Trail Feasibility Study