

Priority Regional Trails: A Policy Framework

The PRT concept is meant to focus attention of organizations, governments, and trail advocates on opportunities for trail development in Nebraska. In many of the PRT corridors, trail efforts are actively underway; in others, they remain possibilities that have in some cases been discussed but remain unimplemented. This section presents a policy framework to encourage PRT's to move from possibility to reality. The policy framework includes the following four areas:

- TRAIL FUNDING PRIORITIES
- STATE AGENCY POLICIES
- TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CONCEPT
- DESIGNATION OF NEW PRT CORRIDORS

Trail Funding Priorities

The Transportation Enhancements (TE) program has been the staple of trail funding both in Nebraska and around the country. The TE program, a part of the current Federal transportation funding program (currently TEA-21 as of 2003), provides federal funding for 80% of the cost of eligible enhancement projects. In Nebraska, applications are reviewed by Nebraska Department of Roads staff to be certain that they are eligible for funding, and referred to a TE Review Committee to consider applications in detail and make recommendations for funding. While funding set-asides are unwise, trail applications identified as part of PRT corridors or in areas eligible to be PRT's should receive special consideration or weighting through the review process.

Other sources of trails funding include Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF), the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), and the state Trails Development Assistance Act (TDA), all administered by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Project applications with PRT corridors, or park projects associated with PRT's, such as a trail system within a state park or recreation area along a regional trail corridor, should also

receive special priority in funding review procedures. Funds may be targeted to such projects by the NGPC.

In Nebraska, considerable private funds have been raised to develop trails. The Nebraska Trails Foundation (NTF), a 501(c)3 charitable organization, was created as a recipient for tax-deductible private contributions directed to trail development. The PRT designations should help guide decisions by the NTF and identify places to take advantage of emerging trail opportunities.

State Agency Policies

In addition to distributing federal grant funds, the regular programs of state agencies can contribute significantly to the realization of the PRT concept. Of state agencies the efforts of the Nebraska Department of Roads, the Game and Parks Commission, and the Department of Economic Development have the greatest potential impact on the development of trail corridors. The policies of these agencies should reinforce the emergence of the PRT's. Specific policy directions follow:

Nebraska Department of Roads

- Apply the new 28-foot pavement top standards to all state highways that meet traffic volume thresholds within designated PRT corridors.
- Consider PRT designations of state highway segments as an element in scheduling highway upgrades and setting regional priorities.
- Install Share-the-Road (STR) signage, consistent with the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), on all state highway segments within PRT corridors, and provide assistance to encourage county road and highway agencies to install Share-the-Road signage on county road segments of these corridors. Share-the-Road signage is also recommended for Nebraska Byways corridors. The Master Signage Plan illustrates those highways that should receive STR signage.



Oak Creek Trail between Valparaiso and Brainard. (Photo courtesy of Lower Platte South Natural Resources District)



Fremont & Elkhorn Valley Railroad. A pioneering Rail-with-Trail project along this heritage passenger line will connect Fremont and Hooper.

- Develop special Priority Regional Trail signage for installation on roads and trails in the PRT corridors, analogous to trail numbering systems in the MUTCD and the Nebraska Byway system. This mechanism can assist trail users and provide visibility to help local and regional groups organize funding and community support.
- Assist the Game and Parks Commission with railbanking filings. Often, NDOR, as the state's official transportation department, receives initial notice about pending railroad abandonments.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

- Provide technical support for trail development efforts within PRT corridors.
- Coordinate park funding and development projects with facilities within or connected to PRT corridors.
- Take a first-tier role in managing the conservation and assembly of strategic railroad corridors in PRT areas. Because of notification requirements under Section 809(c) of the 4R Act, NGPC often is one of the first agencies to hear of a prospective abandonment. The April, 2003 notice by the BNSF to abandon its Table Rock to Endicott line is an example of this. NGPC should continue to use this position to provide advice to regional agencies who might be potential trail sponsors of PRT's, and to take an active role in conserving key rights-of-way.
- In rare situations where a trail is of extraordinary value, furthers the mission of the Commission or other state agencies, and reinforces the utilization and value of NGPC properties, and where no local or regional agency with the capacity to complete the trail is present, the NGPC should consider initiating the development of the trail corridor itself. The Cowboy Trail was an example of such an opportunity, and has the status of a State Recreation Trail, administered much like a State Park. However, state budget reductions make it extremely difficult for NGPC to shoulder the primary cost of trail development, as it

has with the Cowboy Trail. Increasingly, the Commission may initiate such projects, but funding will require major participation by local and regional governments and agencies.

Nebraska Department of Economic Development

- Use tourism assistance funding to encourage marketing of Priority Regional Trails as they develop.
- Use location of a PRT as a criterion for considering application for related tourism and economic development projects in Community Development Block Grant applications.
- Encourage regional groups to apply for and use tourism marketing grants to promote trails.
- Encourage the organization of promotional highway associations on highways that connect several Priority Regional Trail corridors but are not part of the Nebraska Byway system. An example of such a connection is Nebraska Highway 14, whose north-south route connects four PRT corridors and three Trans-State Trail routes.

Technical Assistance Concept

Often, a vital need will be the creation of organizational capacity to carry out the regional trail program. Trails are most effectively developed from a base of local support. In some cases, local residents are aware of possibilities, but have difficulty getting over the obstacles of such daunting tasks as negotiating with railroads, assembling multi-governmental partnerships, applying for funds, and designing and maintaining a trail. In other cases, people in regions are simply not aware of the potential statewide value of their resources, or of the roles that trail development can play. Regional trails are more difficult to develop than community trails, because they involve a variety of jurisdictions and do not fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of any one group of constituents.

Fortunately, Nebraska has a wealth of organizations that can help assemble and develop regional trail corridors. Regional agencies such as Resource Conservation and Development Associations (RC&D's) and Natural Resource Districts (NRD's) have the ability and status to organize regional efforts, and NRD's often become the logical owners and managers of trails. But organizations that can assist local agencies and residents in these efforts include the:

- Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, which plays a vital central role in statewide trails coordination.
- Nebraska Department of Roads, which administers the TE program and maintains the office of the State Bicycle Safety Coordinator. NDOR retains a consultant who provides technical assistance to communities in the development of Transportation Enhancement applications.
- The National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (Rivers & Trails), which works with urban and rural communities to build local capacity for the development and management of trails. Rivers & Trails works directly with local groups on an application basis, and uses a facilitation technique to help reach consensus about regional plans. Rivers & Trails engagement with a community or region is typically for a one-year period, with the possibility of extension to a second year.
- The Nebraska Department of Economic Development, using its tourism field staff to forge public and private sector partnerships to promote existing and prospective trails and market their role in regional tourism.
- The Nebraska Trails Council, an association of local trails groups and interests such as the Lincoln-based Great Plains Trails Network or the Omaha-based Eastern Nebraska Trails Network. NTC can assemble groups and members with extensive experience in trails development and a great commitment to making trails happen.
- The Nebraska Trails Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization, created as a mechanism to receive tax-deductible contri-

butions and loan or grant funds for specific trail projects.

No individual region is alone in trying to develop a regional or community trail. Yet, in multi-jurisdictional regional corridors, trail advocates perceive themselves as isolated, and sometimes powerless, as they try to bring their ideas to reality. A Technical Assistance Outreach Program can help catalyze development of the RTP corridors. The program should include the following steps:

- Designate an outreach coordinating agency. This might logically be the State Trails Coordinator in the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The Coordinator would be the quarterback of the process, most active in the early formative stages of the outreach process. As of 2003, funding is not available for this position. Nebraska communities should work with their State Senators to renew funding for the Trails Coordinator.
- Identify potential local or regional convenors or organizers of the PRT development process. Regional trail development should rarely be a state or federal initiative – a top down approach. Rather, the proper role of these levels of government should be to encourage and educate local and regional organizations, and to give them the tools needed to succeed in the trail development effort. Thus, the outreach process should identify the possible local organizers and sponsors of the program, and target initial information and assistance to them. Potential audiences for the outreach program should include:
 - City and county governments in potentially benefited communities.
 - Local Chambers of Commerce and economic development organizations.
 - Regional agencies such as RC&D's, NRD's, and councils of government.
 - Special interest groups, including specific businesses or recreational associations.
- Prepare an outreach package, targeted to these potential sponsoring or support groups. The package should include:



The Steamboat Trace Trail along the Missouri River near Brownville. (Photo courtesy of Nemaha Natural Resources District)

- This document, along with a special trail development prospectus that identifies individual trail opportunities in PRT regions. The prospectus would elaborate on the PRT material included in this plan, and should be intended to market and excite potential sponsors about the potential of their regional trail corridors.
- A description of agencies in the state ready and willing to offer assistance, along with names and phone numbers of contacts.
- An individualized review of trail acquisition techniques tailored to the needs of each PRT corridor. These techniques might include railbanking procedures, rail-with-trail negotiations and agreements, easement acquisition, and other methods.
- An on-line tool kit that helps individuals, governments, and organizations identify and capitalize on trail opportunities.

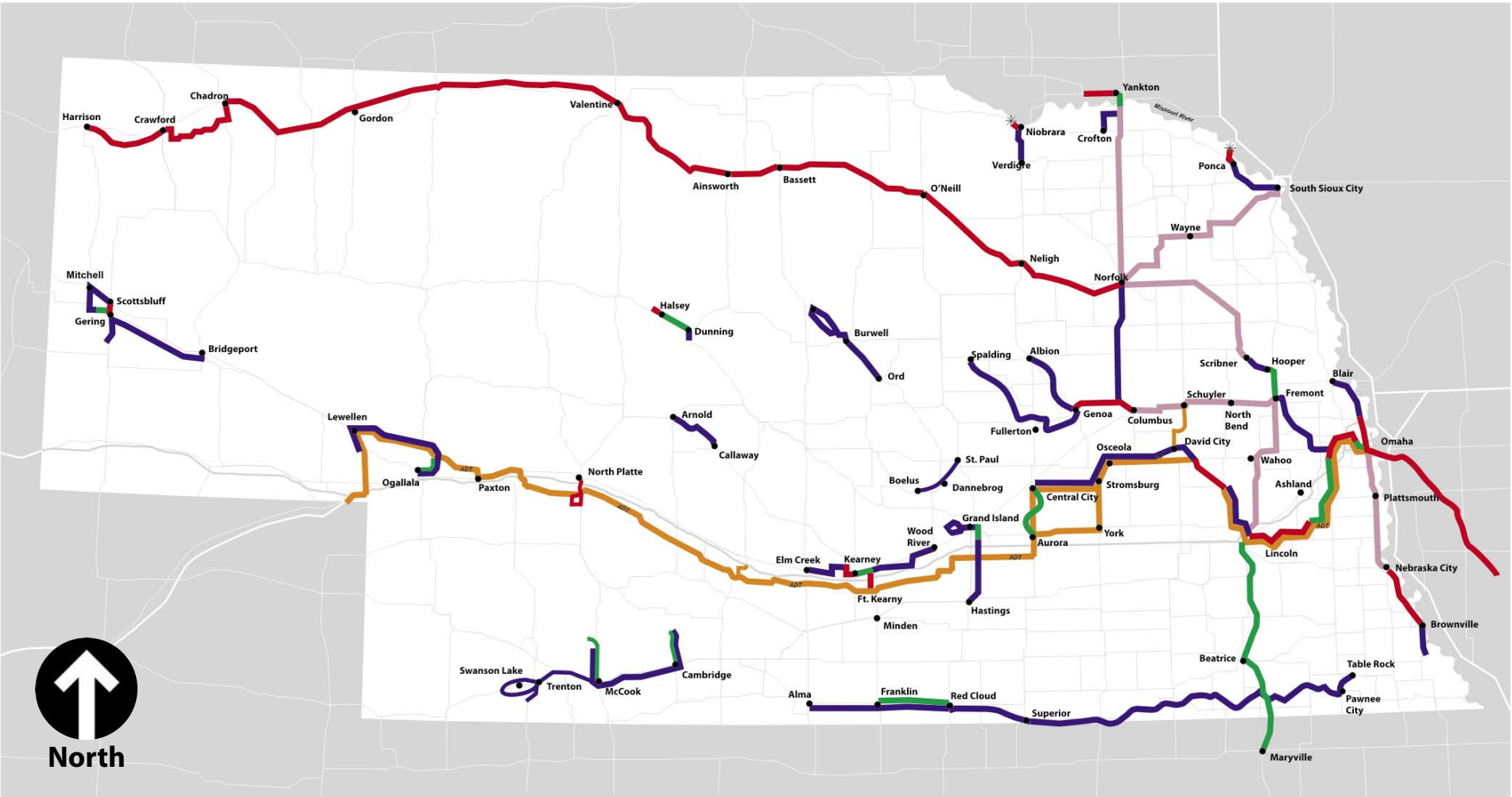
After the initial assembly and sending of the package, periodic follow-up contacts by the Coordinator to key local people, to monitor progress and offer help, encouragement, and advice. The outreach program is not intended to be a heavy-handed approach. If regions choose not to proceed with trail development, that is their prerogative. However, the process should give people the tools and assistance needed to fulfill the promise of regional trail development.

Designation of New Priority Regional Trail Corridors

The twenty Priority Regional Trail Corridors each present exciting trail development opportunities, and focus the various Resource Corridor possibilities presented in the original ANOD I Plan. However, it is by no means an exclusive list of all potential trail corridors in Nebraska. New PRT corridors can and should be considered and designated as the trail development process continues to mature.

Without limiting the consideration of new corridors, it is nevertheless helpful to define criteria that can frame new PRT's. In general, these trail corridors should meet one or more of the following criteria:

- They link a community or group of communities to a major recreational, historic, cultural, or amenity feature.
- They provide a connection between or among communities.
- They include features of special scenic value.
- They are of historic and cultural importance, or provide major opportunities for historical or cultural interpretation.
- They are connected to or related to the Nebraska Byways system.
- They provide an unusual opportunity to see an environment or part of the state that cannot be seen by road or other methods.
- They follow or relate to a river or stream corridor. The PRT's presented in this section do not generally presume the acquisition of shoreline easements along streams in the state. Yet, if these easements or trail rights can be secured, they represent superb opportunities for trail development.
- They extend or connect with a previously designated Priority Regional Trail.



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 by RDG Planning & Design

- Existing Trails / Trails in Construction Process
- Trail Corridor Secured / Planned Development
- Other Off-Road Trail Focuses
- American Discovery Trail (ADT) Development Program
- Possible Expressway / Trail Joint Use Corridors

Multiple-Use Trail Plan



Above: Share the Road Route.

Shared Use of the Road System

Both the regional network and trail systems that serve individual communities will include the joint or shared use of public roadways. The declining number of available exclusive rights-of-way in Nebraska, potential conflicts and litigation over railbanking, and the difficulty and expense of acquiring private property for trail development will make the use of shared rights-of-way, including utility easements and dedications, rails-with-trails, and road corridors, increasingly prevalent. Of these, streets and roads offer the most pervasive coverage and ability to serve communities and regions. Although most of the funding for trails in Nebraska has been devoted to exclusive, off-road trails, integration of non-motorized transportation into vehicular systems will represent a growing area of concentration.

Statewide trail development experience is beginning to display this trend. Sidepath trails, including a wide sidewalk adjacent to a street, are becoming popular in the Omaha and Lincoln metropolitan areas and in Kearney. While the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) standards generally oppose this kind of trail, they are growing in popularity because of their ability to follow transportation corridors and, with proper design, can serve as an important part of a community or regional trail system. Plattsmouth has used TE funds to develop a bicycle shoulder as a first part of a more complete system on Webster Boulevard at the northern entrance to town. The Priority Regional Trail system, discussed in detail above, also integrates Nebraska Byways as gateway links into a regional trail network. This section discusses overall policies for shared use or multi-modal roadways. The standards section considers specific requirements and design criteria for shared use facilities.

In the Nebraska trails system, shared use facilities fall within four categories: Nebraska Byways, Expressways and Highways, Sidewalk Trails (or sidepaths), and Share-the-Road (STR) Facilities.

Nebraska Byways

The Nebraska Byways system is fully integrated into the trans-state and regional trail concepts, and act as gateway corridors leading users to trailheads and gateway communities. In addition, the concept considers Byways to be potential supplementary routes for bicyclists. The policies for Byways are discussed in detail above and summarized below:

- Consider expanding the Byway system by extending two existing byway designations:
 - Expand the Platte River Scenic Trails Byway to include a Lincoln Highway byway designation. This would extend the Byway from its current terminus at Elm Creek east across the state and should include portions and remaining historical alignments of the Lincoln Highway, such as the Old Lincoln Highway segment in Elkhorn, Nebraska.
 - Expand the Heritage Highway westward along US 6 and 34 to McCook and potentially westward along the Republican River (US 34) and along Frenchman Creek (US 6) to the Colorado border. This incorporates segments of the historic DLD (Detroit-Lincoln-Denver) Highway, identified as one of the state's six historic highway corridors by the Nebraska Historic Highway Survey.

These expansions connect with PRT corridors, providing greater state trail continuity. As with other byway designations, extensions are dependent on local support and marketing efforts.

- Encourage the creation and increased activity of highway promotional associations on corridors outside of the Nebraska Byway system that connect several Priority Regional Trail corridors. These connecting corridors are typically north-south routes, such as Nebraska Highway 14. These promotional corridors should include scenic interest, the presence of communities that provide significant visitor interest and support services, intersections with regional trail corridors, and cross-state continuity.
- Complete shoulder development on Byway segments

located on the Priority Commercial System (PCS), and apply the 28-foot section to all other Byway segments. Table 4.1 reviews Byway status and consistency with this standard.

- Designate all Byway segments with Share-the-Road (STR) signage, consistent with standards in the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

Expressways and Highway Improvement Projects

Separated trails should be considered as part of major highway improvement and upgrade projects, or retrofitted on the right-of-way of existing expressways, in specific contexts. These settings include corridors that:

- Connect major endpoint cities and have intervening communities that offer supporting services and areas of interest. Typically, support communities should generally be located at most 15 miles apart on the average.

- Connect a major city or trailhead community to an important destination or recreational feature.
- Connect Priority Regional Trail corridors together and again have reasonable spaced support communities along the route.
- Lack an adjacent off-road trail opportunity that can perform the same function.

Expressway corridors that meet these criteria include:

- Nebraska Highway 35 from Norfolk to South Sioux City (future).
- US Highway 275 from Hooper to Norfolk (future FEVR Trail provides connection from Hooper to Fremont).
- US Highway 75 from Bellevue to Nebraska City (future; Keystone and Bellevue Loop Trails connect to Omaha trail system).
- US Highway 81 from Columbus to Norfolk (retrofit).
- Nebraska Highway 71 from Gering to Wildcat Hills (retrofit).

TABLE 4.1: SHOULDER OR ROAD SECTION STATUS OF NEBRASKA BYWAY LINKS

Byway	Link	On PCS		28-Foot Standard		Gaps
		Shoulders Installed	Shoulders Programmed	28-Foot Top Complete	28-Foot Top Programmed	
385 Gold Rush <i>(US 385)</i>	Colorado-SD Borders	Sidney to SD Border			Sidney to Chappell	Chappell to CO border
Bridges to Buttes <i>(US 20)</i>	WY Border to Valentine	WY Border to Valentine				
Outlaw <i>(N-12)</i>	Valentine to South Sioux City	Ponca to South Sioux City		Sparks-Springview; US 183 to N-137;	Valentine to Sparks; N-137 to Monowi; Niobrara to Ponca	Monowi to Niobrara
Western Trails <i>(US 26)</i>	Henry to Ogallala	Henry to Ogallala				
Platte River <i>(US 30)</i>	Paxton-Elm Creek	Paxton-Elm Creek				
Sandhills Journey <i>(N-2)</i>	Alliance-Grand Island	Alliance-Grant/Sheridan County Line; Ashby-Halsey; Dunning-Grand Island	Grant/Sheridan County Line to Ashby; Halsey-Dunning			
Loup Rivers <i>(N-91 and N-11)</i>	Dunning-Wood River			Brewster to Burwell	Dunning to Brewster; Burwell to Wood River	
Heritage Highway <i>(US 136)</i>	Edison-Brownville	Fairbury-Filley; Auburn-Brownville		Hebron to Fairbury	Edison to Hebron; Filley to Tecumseh	Tecumseh to Auburn
Lewis & Clark <i>(US 75)</i>	South Sioux City to Omaha	South Sioux City to Winnebago; Tekamah to Omaha		Decatur to north of Tekamah	Winnebago to Decatur; North of Tekamah	



Right: Sidewalk Trail along Blondo Street in Omaha

Sidewalk Trails

Sidewalk trails are typically developed on urban streets and usually involve a wider than normal sidewalk, typically 8 to 10 feet in width, to accommodate mixed trail traffic. They are frequently adjacent to curbs, but may be set back from the street channel by a parkway strip.

AASHTO design guidelines tend to discourage sidepaths or sidewalk trails, citing such concerns as bicycles traveling at excessive speeds on wide sidewalks; counterflow issues and ambiguities about who has the right-of-way at intersections; motorists turning in front of bicyclists; inability of the cyclist traveling in the reverse direction to read road signs; and possible harassment of cyclists legally using the roadway by motorists who believe they should be on the sidepath. The AASHTO standards nevertheless consider sidewalk trails acceptable in certain limited circumstances, such as continuing a trail along high speed or high volume roadways with inadequate space for bicyclists, and uninterrupted by driveways and intersections for long distances; and on long narrow bridges (AASHTO, 1999).

Despite these concerns, cities are finding sidewalk trails to be an acceptable and popular way to provide trail access on busy urban streets. Sidewalk trails should be incorporated where appropriate into major street projects, consistent with a community's transportation and trails plan, and funded through the Surface Transportation Program as part of that project. Along existing major streets or roads, sidewalk trails should also be eligible for TE funds. However, the design of these trails should clearly address safety concerns raised by AASHTO. Standards to improve the safety of sidewalk trails are included in the standards section of this plan.

Share-the-Road (STR) Routes

Share-the-Road routes share use of the physical space of a street or roadway channel by bicyclists and motor vehicles. In urban settings, pedestrians will utilize a sidewalk either adjacent to a curb, or separated by a landscaped area from the street channel. STR routes ordinarily involve three settings:

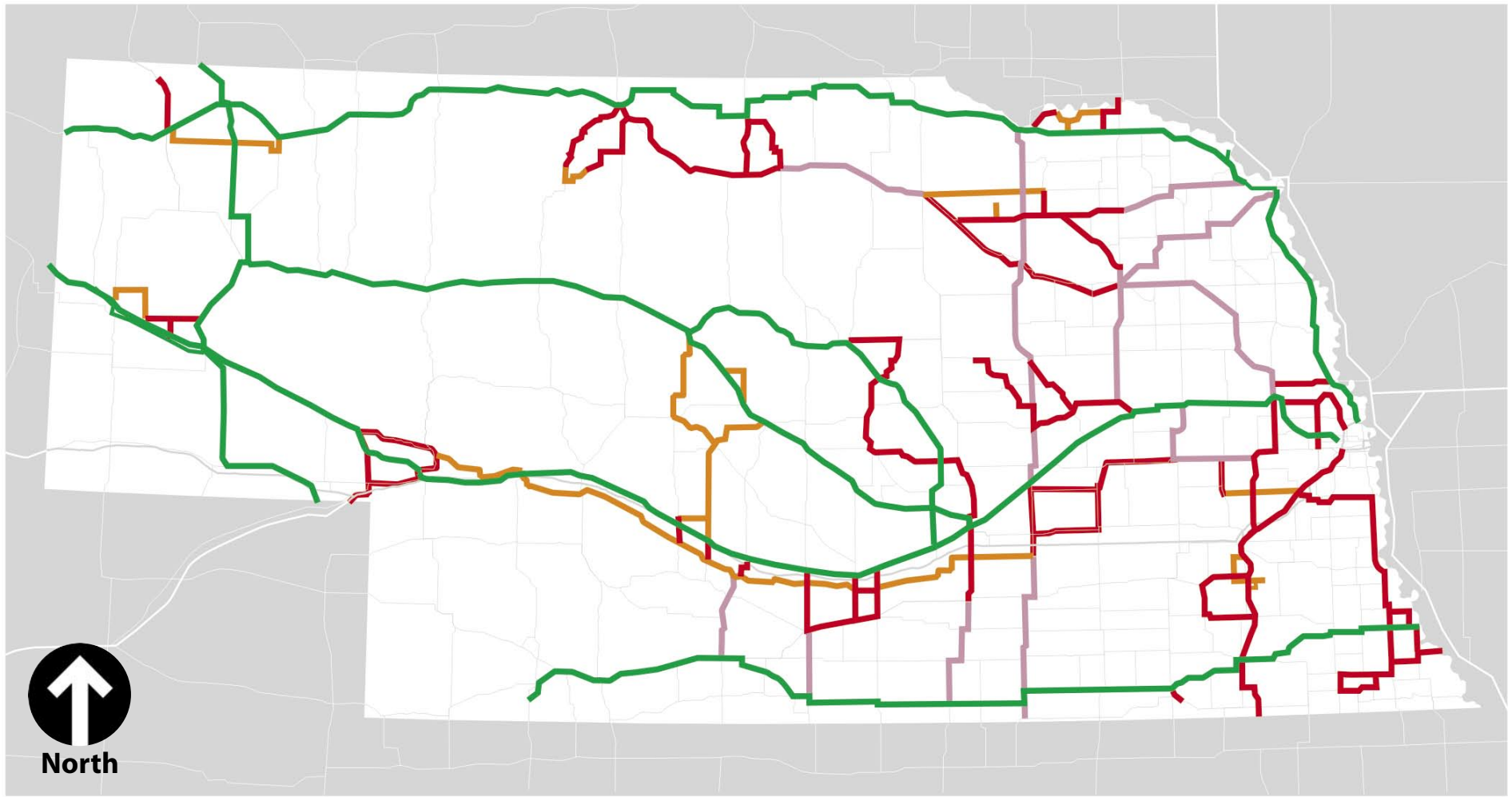
- Shoulders, in which space is provided to the side of a

moving lane for non-motorized traffic, or for emergency stopping by motor vehicles. In Nebraska, shoulders are by far the most common type of STR facility. The state's Priority Commercial System provides paved shoulders on nearly all its mileage. Shoulders are less common in urban corridors, but are used in some settings. In at least one instance, TE funds were used to provide a bicycle shoulder (Webster Boulevard in Plattsmouth). Shoulders have also been used on strategic segments of road off the PCS.

- Bike lanes, which provide a clear, unobstructed path for bicycles, usually defined by road markings. Bike lanes may be located on streets with or without parking, and are typically located between moving lanes and a parking lane. Streets with bike lanes should be free of obstructions or hazards for bicyclists (such as sewer grates with openings parallel to the line of travel), and should include features that adapt to their needs (such as bicycle-sensitive sensor loops).
- Shared roadways, where a street is signed to indicate that bicycles and motor vehicles are sharing the same roadway, but no other pavement markings are provided. As with streets with bike lanes, shared roadways should be free of obstructions or hazards for bicyclists (such as sewer grates with openings parallel to the line of travel), and should include features that adapt to their needs (such as bicycle-sensitive sensor loops).

Shoulders have been used extensively in Nebraska as part of basic NDOR standards, but bike lanes and shared roadways have received little application. Increasingly, city trail plans, responding to the need that a trail system provide safe transportation to schools, parks, activity centers, and other facilities, have included future designations for STR routes in their recommendations. STR improvements should be both eligible and encouraged for TE and other transportation funding, provided that:

- Any application for funding for an STR route must include a local Trail or Non-Motorized Transportation Master Plan, and proposes a project consistent with standards included or incorporated by reference in the state trails plan.
- The application must show how the facility is integrated into a balanced local or regional transportation system.



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- — Byways and Potential Extensions
- — State Highways in PRT Corridor
- — County Roads / Roads on ADT Route
- — Other Important Links

Share-the-Road Signage Plan



Other Trail User Groups

While the majority of trail users are pedestrians, bicyclists, and in-line skaters, other groups also should be served by trail facilities. These groups include:

- Users of Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV).
- Snowmobilers.
- Equestrians.
- Canoeists, kayakers, and other non-powered light boats.
- Cross-country skiers.

This section considers policies and actions to meet the needs of these groups.

Cross country skiers. (Photo courtesy of NEBRASKALand Magazine, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.)

OHV Users

OHV users are a major constituency for recreational trail development, and generally feel underserved by the existing deployment of facilities. Major issues for the OHV user community include:

- Major service gaps in the eastern and extreme southwestern parts of the state. George Fogg in his definitive Park Guidelines for OHVs (National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, 2002) discusses service area criteria for OHV users. Fogg suggests that OHV enthusiasts measure service areas by driving time rather than distance, and will typically find a two-hour drive to an extensive facility acceptable. A strong relationship exists between the size and quality of the facility and the size of the facility's service area. The closest major Nebraska facility to the heavily populated eastern part of the state is Headworks Park in Genoa. This is marginally a two-hour drive from the Omaha metropolitan area. Many eastern Nebraska users utilize the River Valley OHV Park in Council Bluffs, part of the Omaha metropolitan area. However, River Valley is not open to larger OHV's. Most users conclude that the eastern part of the state, with a preponderance of OHV demand, is relatively poorly served. In addition, a service gap also emerges in the southern Panhandle. This area is served by the Pine Ridge District of the Nebraska National Forest; the smaller facility in Sutherland also serves the Panhandle, but its relatively limited offerings produce a smaller acceptable service area.
- Instability of Current Arrangements. The state's largest OHV facilities are Headworks Park at Genoa; and the Pine Ridge, McKelvie, and Bessey Districts of the Nebraska National Forest. While these facilities offer a variety of settings and abundant mileage of roads and trails, they also have constraints that affect their current use now and could have a greater impact in the future. Use at Headworks is limited by hunting seasons and future problems could arise because of environmental and species preservation requirements. The three National Forests involve

multiple users and, in the case of Pine Ridge and Bessey, experience relatively high user volume. This, in turn, is leading to the development of management plans that again could limit OHV use. As a result, the OHV community is not fully in control of its destiny in the state, and external forces or decisions could act to reduce current levels of service.

- Appropriate Facility Model. Two overall models exist for OHV facilities: a linear approach that includes long distance travel, similar to bicycle use; and a nodal model that advocates the development of destination facilities. Some users argue that a trail system should allow full access, and the linear trails should either be available to or developed for OHV users; others contend that nodal facilities like OHV parks respond far better than linear trails to OHV user preferences.
- Development Instrumentality and Financing. Issues of development responsibility and facility ownership are significant questions. Some OHV facilities are owned and/or operated by state parks departments, while others are private or private nonprofit operations. Financing is also a significant issue. Facilities for motorized trail users are not eligible for TE funding, although they can be financed by Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grants. Nebraska has a well-organized and active OHV association, the Nebraska Off-Highway Vehicles Association, or NOHVA. This group has successfully worked with other ownership agencies, including the Loup Public Power District at Headwaters, and the U.S. Forest Service at the national forests, on operating arrangements. NOHVA also has access to potential development funds.

Facility Models

Policy development for OHV facilities should consider two models: a linear model, analogous to multi-use trails, providing long, point-to-point or loop experiences; and a nodal model, directed toward OHV parks as destination facilities.



Above: Off-highway vehicle riders. (Photo courtesy of Dan Nitzel, Nebraska Off-Highway Vehicle Association.)



Photo courtesy of Dan Nitzel, Nebraska Off-Highway Vehicle Association.

Linear Model

Advantages of the linear model include:

- Potential of long-travel distances.
- The possibility of seasonal joint use with other constituencies. Certain trails might be open to warm weather use by “conventional” trail user groups, and available to motorized users for off-season recreation.
- A sense of equity. Some OHV users believe that equity is served if trails developed at public expense are open to all public recreational groups.

Disadvantages of this model include:

- The quality of the user experience. Most multi-use trail corridors are relatively flat and generally maintain easy grades to meet the needs of primary user groups. OHV users, on the other hand, usually prefer topographic challenges. The typical trail setting creates distance, but not necessarily interest.
- Noise effects and conflicts with neighbors. OHVs tend to be noisy and create environmental effects that can lead to conflicts with neighboring owners. Because the boundary of a linear trail corridor is very long, the number of neighbors who might be affected by OHV use is maximized.
- Incompatibilities with other users. Most trail users, motorized and non-motorized, agree that these user groups are largely incompatible. While seasonal sharing is possible, true shared use of the same trail corridor would seriously degrade the experience for both groups.
- Funding sources. Motorized recreational vehicles cannot use facilities funded by the TE program, the major funding source for trails development in Nebraska.

Nodal Model

Advantages of this approach include:

- User preferences. Most OHV users appear to favor the diversity of experience that a park offers over a linear trail. This includes topographic variety, the ability to develop a series of loops and features that apply to the range of OHVs, and the ability to develop necessary support facilities.
- Opportunity for exclusive development and management of conflicts. A dedicated OHV facility provides users with the assurance that outside decisions or imperatives will not limit their activities. A properly designed facility can manage boundary conditions by providing appropriate buffering and landscaping.
- Ability to accommodate a variety of users. The OHV galaxy is made up of many types of vehicles. Some existing facilities (Council Bluffs, Headworks) are only open to specific OHV groups, typically ATVs. A nodal facility can be large enough to accommodate a variety of groups, including snowmobiles, with special facilities, clearances, and trail designs that meet the needs of each.
- Economic potential. National experience demonstrates that OHV parks can be both self-supporting and create significant economic benefits for surrounding areas. A Colorado survey completed in 2000 indicated that OHV users spent an average of \$100 per day for day trips and \$265 daily for overnight trips.

Disadvantages of the nodal approach include:

- Site acquisition costs. A quality OHV facility requires a large parcel of land to provide the variety of settings necessary to attract users from relative long distances (two- to three-hour driving time) and to provide the support facilities and buffering necessary to create an acceptable and functional park. Minimum acceptable size appears to be in the range of 300 acres, with a larger parcel being highly desirable.

This size in turn creates significant expense, particularly in areas where land is in relatively high demand.

- Externalities and environmental impact. As a noisy use with significant environmental effects, OHV parks can produce significant opposition and operating conflicts with neighboring owners. This in turn limits the variety of sites that might be available.
- Ownership and management. An OHV park must be owned and operated by a specific entity. Such a facility is outside of the mission of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Ideally, a development and operating entity must be created to manage such a facility.

Conclusions:

- A nodal approach is a far more appropriate model for Nebraska to pursue in meeting the needs of its OHV user community.
- The linear approach may have very limited applications, such as very lightly used portions of linear trails that run parallel to highways and railroads, and have minimum additional environmental effects on neighboring owners.

OHV Policy

This analysis leads to the following overall policy directions for OHV facility development:

- The state priority for OHV development should be on the acquisition and development of a quality OHV facility to serve the Eastern Nebraska market.
- The Nodal Model is the appropriate design approach to meet needs of the OHV user community.
- A new dedicated Eastern Nebraska OHV Park should be developed by a private, nonprofit entity, with the support and guidance of NGPC and other trail constituencies,

including non-motorized recreational groups.

- Current operating arrangements between NOHVA and owners and managers of existing facilities (Loup Public Power District at Headworks and the US Forest Service at the National Forests) should be maintained and strengthened. These should establish clear times and conditions of operation that provide the OHV community with stable, long-term assurances about the use of these facilities.
- NOHVA should work with the US Army Corps of Engineers to expand the area available for OHV use at Harlan County Reservoir.
- NOHVA or a spin-off development entity should explore joint development with Nebraska tribes of tribal land in northeast Nebraska for an OHV park. Land on the Winnebago and Omaha reservations has many of the criteria that create excellent OHV facilities, including varied topography, and development could provide a significant source of tourism and supply revenues for the tribes.
- The OHV community and NGPC, through the SCORP process, should monitor emerging needs for OHV facilities in the Panhandle, and consider repeating an OHV park development model if the need for such a facility emerges.
- NOHVA should work with other local agencies to take advantage of development opportunities for OHV facilities. For example, trail development by the City of Grand Island at the Cornhusker Ordnance Plant could include development of an OHV facility. While this site is very flat and is not optimal as a destination OHV park, it can meet a specific regional need.
- Multiple-use recreational trails should not be pursued as an approach to addressing OHV needs. Funding constraints and user conflicts create problems for the use of facilities that would be mediocre for OHV enthusiasts in any case.





A Development Model for an Eastern Nebraska OHV Park

The trails plan recommends the following development model for a quality OHV facility in the eastern part of the state:

- The facility would be developed by a public/private partnership, with a development corporation created by NOHVA acting as the primary partner in the project. The development corporation may follow the model of community development corporations that have been effective in urban redevelopment projects across the country. These corporations include nonprofit boards of directors, but are legally independent of their parent organization. In this case, the OHV Development Corporation is organized to sponsor the project, buy or lease land, arrange financing, develop, and ultimately manage the facility. The Nebraska Snowmobile Association should also be a participant in the development corporation process.
- The development corporation would work in concert with other trail advocacy groups on land acquisition and financing strategies. The Nebraska Trails Foundation could act as an entity to receive tax-deductible contributions and provide interim financing to option or secure land, much as it has done for multiple-use trail projects like the Oak Creek and Homestead Trails. This arrangement can both assist the new development corporation with implementation and forge a much stronger community of interest among all sectors of the state's trail community.
- At early stages in the process, the Development Corporation, with the assistance of the NGPC, should investigate liability issues. If necessary, NOHVA and the Nebraska Trails Council would become the primary initiators of appropriate legislative relief. NGPC can play an informational role, but must stay neutral through the legislative process.
- The OHV Park Development Corporation would work with the NGPC and other state agencies to define site criteria and investigate and evaluate potential sites. In this model, the state plays a role that focuses on providing technical

support and consulting. Joint venture possibilities with northeast Nebraska tribes in the market area should be thoroughly explored and could be extremely beneficial to both parties.

Possible site criteria include:

- Location in the eastern part of the state, within an average driving time of 1.5 hours of the Omaha and Lincoln markets.
 - A minimum size of 300 acres and a desirable size of 600 acres. The park should be large enough to provide designed trail loops up to 20 miles in length.
 - Separation of ½ mile from an adjacent pre-existing residential use.
 - Desirable sites would exclude unique or irreplaceable environments, such as habitats for threatened or endangered species, and should incorporate rolling or hilly terrain for maximum variety and interest.
- The Development Corporation ultimately identifies the preferred site for acquisition, based on compliance with specific site criteria and availability, and options or purchases the site. Close coordination with neighboring property owners is critical before the site is acquired.
 - The Development Corporation may form a partnership with a local, regional, or tribal government agency. Such a partnership might include a land lease, whereby the corporation leases land for a long period, but underlying ownership remains with the tribal or public partner. The NGPC considers land acquisition and site development of this facility a priority for RTP funding.
 - The Development Corporation prepares a design that meets design criteria and is subject to review and approval by NGPC. Park Guidelines for Off-Highway Vehicles by George E. Fogg, FASLA (National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, 2002) is strongly recommended as a detailed guide to park design. The site design should incorporate conservation planning techniques and should be master planned, although it can be developed incrementally. The design process should identify major envi-

ronmental resources and constraints (including wetlands, wooded areas, erodible soils, native plant communities, and wildlife habitat) and incorporate their preservation into the facility design.

- The Corporation, in cooperation with the Nebraska Trails Foundation, develops a business plan and financial proformas, and arranges financing for the project. Primary funding sources include:
 - RTP funds.
 - Private or foundation contributions, managed through the Nebraska Trails Foundation.
 - NOHVA or other state and national organizations.
 - Investments in the facility by stakeholders on an asset basis.
 - Debt financing with debt service derived from operating revenues.
 - Partnerships with regional, county, or tribal agencies.
 - In-kind contributions, particularly for construction and landscaping.
 - Community Development Block Grants if associated with a tribal project.
- The Development Corporation assumes site management and develops the facility. The revenue stream from user and camper fees is directed to debt service, maintenance, and improvement of the facility.

Snowmobiles in Nebraska

Snowmobiles are a major recreational constituency and transportation user group in several upper Midwestern states, including northern Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, and also make up a significant user group in Nebraska. Snowmobiles are sometimes categorized with OHVs in trail planning processes, and share a number of characteristics, including a willingness or need to drive relatively long distances to facilities, and operations at relatively high speeds that create incompatibilities with non-motorized user groups. Snowmobiles generate state tax revenues that go into a specific fund administered by the

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. As of late 2003, this fund has \$185,000 available for leasing snowmobile trails. Unused funds carry over to subsequent years.

Primary issues that affect snowmobile use in Nebraska include:

- Unreliable winter weather. Snowmobiling is more prevalent in parts of the country to Nebraska’s north, where snow cover is more reliable. Climatic trends over the past decade have trended toward less snowfall, although it is difficult to tell whether this is a long-term or short-term condition. The lack of snow during recent years has caused snowmobiling Nebraskans to seek more friendly surroundings in other states.
- Roadside prohibition on state highways. In Nebraska, snowmobiles are not allowed on state highway rights-of-way.
- Snowmobile prohibitions on most multiple-use trails. Trails or trail facilities developed with TE funds do not permit operation of motorized vehicles, including snowmobiles.
- User preferences. While snowmobiles share some operating characteristics (speed, perceived noise and emissions), they also share many preferences and characteristics with non-motorized users, most notably bicyclists, equestrians, and cross-country skiers. These include:
 - Preferences toward relatively long, continuous distances of at least 20 miles. Unlike OHV preferences, point-to-point linear trail operation is perfectly acceptable to snowmobilers.
 - Access to support services along the trail.
 - Acceptability of flat or gentle grades.

Use Venues and Policies

States in “snowmobile country” maintain extensive networks of groomed and marked trails for snowmobile use. These can combine rural and transportation uses, and include lightly trav-



Photo courtesy of Nebraska Snowmobile Association



eled and minimum maintenance roads, roadside right-of-way, utility easements, and exclusive trails. Funding exists for the acquisition and/or leasing of trails through a fund capitalized by taxes on the sales of snowmobiles and administered by the NGPC. In Nebraska, use venues may include:

- County roads and road rights-of-way.
- Seasonal use of multiple-use trails.
- Easements on public and private lands.
- State parks and other large regional park facilities, including use of frozen lakes.
- Joint development with an OHV facility.

Policies for these specific contexts follow.

Roads and Road Right-of-Ways

- Snowmobile trail planning and development will concentrate on the northern third of the state, where winter snow cover is likely to be more consistent.
- Road corridors should concentrate on low-volume roads that are not state highways. Because of traffic volumes and use characteristics, state highway right-of-ways should not be used for snowmobiles. Snowmobile trail corridors may include off-road paths within right-of-way lines on county roads with volumes below 1,000 vehicles per day; and on-road use of minimum maintenance roads.
- Snowmobile systems should be planned on a county-by-county basis, developed by partnerships of the Nebraska Snowmobile Association, local snowmobilers, and county boards and engineer's offices. Snowmobile plans should identify road and easement segments that meet identified design standards. After the network is planned, maps should be published and distributed to illustrate individual county systems.
- General design guidelines are included in the standards section of this plan. All roadside snowmobile trails should be graded to provide safe, highly visible crossings at intersections, and laid out to avoid hazards such as culverts.

- Snowmobile trails should be identified by a signage system, established as a statewide standard. In addition, traffic control signs, such as stop and yield signs, should also be provided as part of the system's development.
- Snowmobile system surveying, planning, and development are encouraged with RTP funding.

Multiple-Use Trails

- The NGPC and NDOR should explore the possibility of seasonal use of multiple-use trails in certain contexts by snowmobiles. Seasonal use of multiple-use trails appears logical, because snowmobiles share long-distance, linear use characteristics with bicyclists, and winter use under snowpack conditions would help the system serve another user group. On the other hand, TE funding cannot be used for motorized recreation. Even on remote, undeveloped segments of the Cowboy Trail, TE funds were used to deck the bridges, potentially preventing their legal use by snowmobiles.
- Trails that have not been developed with TE funds may be opened to snowmobile use with a minimum of 5 inches of snow cover. Possible segments that could be available to snowmobile use include areas within state parks and recreation areas, trails funded by the RTP; facilities operated by the Corps of Engineers, US Forest Service, NRD's, and other regional or federal agencies; and trails such as the White River Trail that have been developed by private groups.
- Multiple-use trails opened to snowmobile use should generally be segments that parallel highways. Segments that cross through private property should be opened to snowmobilers only with the written agreement of all adjacent property owners.
- Snowmobile use on multiple-use trails must be limited to four-stroke engines.

Easements and State Parks and Recreation Areas

- Planning and development of county-wide snowmobile trail systems should encourage dedication of easements for snowmobile use on private land. Counties, RC&D's, and NRD's may be recipients of easements. County assessment policy should encourage donation of easements for snowmobiles and other trail purposes.
- A minimum snow cover, typically 5 inches, should be required to activate easements. Signage and marking of trails on easements should be consistent with other standards established for roadside segments.
- Snowmobile user groups should work with major public property owners, including NGPC, federal agencies, NRD's, and others to investigate opportunities for snowmobile trail development within parks and other properties.
- Snowmobile use on public properties must be limited to four-stroke engines.
- Snowmobiles and ATV's are currently permitted on frozen lakes in a number of State Recreation Areas, including Bluestem, Branched Oak, Conestoga, Olive Creek, Pawnee, Stagecoach, Wagon Train, Enders, Medicine Creek, Red Willow, and Swanson Reservoirs; Box Butte, Calamus, Fremont Lakes, Gallagher Canyon, Johnson Lake, Lake Maloney, Lake McConaughy, Lake Minatare, Lake Ogallala, Lewis and Clark Lake, Louisville Lake, Merritt Reservoir, Oliver Reservoir, Rockford Lake, Shwerman Reservoir, Summit Lake, Sutherland Reservoir, Willow Creek Lake, and Walgren Lake. Provisions for operation include:
 - Limitations on vehicle size and configuration.
 - Equipment requirements, including lighting, brakes, muffler, and safety flags.
 - NGPC discretion to close access to all or any part of the lakes.
 - Assumption of sole risk by the operator of the vehicle.
 - Operator's responsibility to inspect ice conditions.
 - No harassment of wildlife.

- Safe and reasonable speeds and operation that does not cause discomfort, hazard, or damage to people or property.
- Limitations on operating hours.

OHV Parks and Other Opportunities

- The Nebraska Snowmobile Association should partner with NOHVA and an OHV park Development Corporation as a co-developer and user of a new OHV facility. In a successful partnership, the OHV park will incorporate trails that meet snowmobile design standards.
- The Association and local snowmobile user groups should monitor other local opportunities, such as recreational trail development at the Cornhusker Ordnance Depot.

Equestrians

Equestrians represent a significant user group with facilities that are frequently integrated into the development of multi-use trails. Specific trail and facility requirements and criteria for equestrian trails are included in the Constituent Standards chapter of this plan. Equestrians are a low-impact user group and are fully compatible with non-motorized users of multiple-use trails. However, specific requirements of horses generally require development of a parallel equestrian track in trail corridors. Specific issues that emerge among equestrians include:

- Gaps in service. The Nebraska Horse Trails Guide, published by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission in 2003, indicates that Nebraska has over 350 miles of public horse trails or multi-use trails open to equestrians. Over two-thirds of this mileage is in the northern tier of the state, including the Cowboy Trail, the Pine Ridge, and the Fort Robinson region. Only about 17 miles of public trails are located in the Omaha region, while about 75 miles (including the Oak Creek and MoPac East Trails) are within the Lincoln market area. The southern tier of the state has virtually no equestrian facilities. Like OHV users, equestrians are generally a mobile user group, who will drive some



Photo courtesy of NEBRASKALand Magazine, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



Above: Equestrians on Cowboy Trail bridge east of Valentine. (Photo courtesy of NEBRASKALand Magazine, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.)

distance to reach a quality facility. However, improved equestrian opportunities in the eastern Nebraska/Omaha metropolitan area and along the southern tier of the state would benefit this constituency.

- Funding eligibility questions. Questions are sometimes raised about the eligibility of trails or trail corridors that accommodate equestrians for TE funds. The TE program does not restrict equestrian access to trails. TE funding does require funded projects to have a primary transportation use, but this does not preclude use by equestrians. Three major TE funded trails in the state (Cowboy, MoPac East, and Oak Creek) allow shared trail use or accommodate equestrians in a parallel track.
- User conflicts. Some users, including both equestrians and other trail users, raise concerns about bicycles frightening horses and causing a loss of rider control. Many riders prefer a parallel trail track, and such paths have been developed along the MoPac East Trail in Nebraska and the Wabash Trace Nature Trail in Southwest Iowa. Additionally, paved trails are unsuitable to equestrian use. Shared trail use has demonstrably worked in many places around the county as well, and is most applicable along unpaved or granulated stone regional trails. Here, bicycles are unlikely to be moving at high, road bike speeds and the surface is friendly to horse. Reasonable prudence, good etiquette, and cautionary signage can help maintain the safety of these multi-use trails.
- Access to state parks and recreation areas. Some equestrians feel that public equestrian use is overly restricted in state parks and recreation areas. Facilities like E. T. Mahoney, Platte River, and Ponca State Parks maintain concessions that control equestrian access, preventing or discouraging riders from using their own horses. Other facilities like Fremont Lakes have settings that equestrians consider desirable, but are not open as horse trails due to concern over erosion.
- Support facilities. Multi-use trails such as the Cowboy are officially open to equestrians, but can be less useful to

them if they lack such support facilities as water, shelter, parking, and maneuvering areas for trailers; are adjacent to highways; or pass through urban areas.

Policies for Equestrian Trails

Policies for the state equestrian trail system include:

- A systematic audit, completed by the NGPC, the Nebraska Horse Trails Committee, and the National Park Service, of equestrian access availability and opportunities on major state and federal lands in the state. The NGPC has begun the process of evaluating its park facilities for additional equestrian facilities. This process will evaluate current access policies and create new opportunities within state parks and recreation areas for equestrian use. A focus of this effort should be on parks and recreation areas within relatively underserved parts of the state, including the Omaha metropolitan market and the southern tier of Nebraska.
- Integration of equestrian access into the planning, design, and development of multi-use trails. This will be a particular priority in areas that are relatively underserved by existing trails. Opportunity areas include the development of a southern tier trans-state trail, including the pending BNSF abandonment between Table Rock and Endicott; the Homestead Trail; the north extension of the Back to the River Trail to Boyer Chute; rural extensions of the Cottonmill Trail along the Big Bend of the Platte River; canal roads along the American Discovery Trail route; and the Proposed Willa Cather Trail between Red Cloud and Franklin. Many of these corridors serve the metropolitan and southern tier markets.
- Identification and development of segments of the Cowboy Trail with equestrian focuses. While these segments would remain in multiple use, they would be featured as especially friendly as horse trails. The equestrian focus segments would include trailer parking, shelter, and water at end points. The best segments for use are those that are separated from Highway 20, and avoid significant

areas of paved, urban surface. Some examples are Stuart to Bassett, Long Pine to Ainsworth, and Arabia Ranch to Valentine.

- Coordinated private fund-raising efforts for support facilities with the Nebraska Trails Foundation. Development of support features for recreational equestrian use is eligible for some forms of state-administered funds, including RTP and Land and Water Conservation grants, but will require substantial private fund-raising. The NTF can be a logical vehicle for collecting and disbursing these contributions through a dedicated fund-raising campaign.

Canoe and Kayaking Trails

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has designated nine canoe trails in different parts of the state. In Nebraska, rivers are publicly owned; however, the shores are private property unless they are located in parks and other public lands. Written and on-line information provides guidance about river characteristics, access points, scenery, and available services. Outfitters are active along some of the canoe trails, most notably the Niobrara and, to a more limited degree, the Cedar and Dismal Rivers. However, along several of the corridors, use of canoe trails is something of a self-guided adventure. In addition, canoeing and kayaking interests have not created a defined advocacy group such as the Nebraska Trails Council, NOHVA, or the Nebraska Horse Council. This lack of constituent advocacy has limited the development of support facilities. Yet, canoeing and kayaking on Nebraska's rivers is a recreational activity with tremendous potential. The state's rivers are generally easy flowing streams, providing opportunities to people of limited canoeing ability. They also provide a variety of environments, ranging from the winding streams of the Sandhills, surrounded by receding planes of rolling dunes, to the wooded banks of the Elkhorn. Outfitting and support services also provide significant business opportunities. These enterprises make up a significant part of the local economy of Valentine, but are less in evidence in other parts of the state.

Urban areas also provide some opportunities for canoeing and kayaking. In the Omaha metropolitan area, the Papio-Missouri

River Natural Resources District commissioned a canoe access study along the Elkhorn River. This study is being coordinated with a parallel land trails master plan for the western part of Douglas County. The P-MRNRD has also considered the possibility of canoe access on at least portions of the Papio Creek system. Policies that can reinforce the state's canoe trail system include:

- Creation of a canoeing and kayaking trail advocacy organization. Natural constituents for this association include outfitters, sporting goods businesses, canoeists, regional agencies, NRDs, and local and county governments. This kind of private support group is necessary to complement public efforts to designate and develop trails.
- Improve access to and user-friendliness of canoe trails. Improvements include signage directing users to access points and upgraded camping and launch areas. These improvements may be developed by NRD's, counties, cities, or appropriate regional agencies. Some enhancement efforts are already underway, such as the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District's canoe trail development plan for the Elkhorn River.
- Investigate new canoe trail opportunities, including urban canoeing. Creek systems, including the Papillion Creek system in the Omaha metropolitan area and the Salt Creek system in the Lincoln region may provide opportunities for urban area canoeing. Other streams may provide at least seasonal canoe opportunities. Some of these may include the North Platte in the Nebraska Panhandle and eastern parts of the Republican River. Major irrigation or power canals, such as the Tri-County and Loup Power Canals, are also periodically open to canoeing. A state advocacy organization could play a valuable role in calling attention to these activities.
- Coordinate canoe trails with Priority Regional Trail corridors. Several of the PRT corridors include both overland and water components. Marketing efforts, signage, linkages, and support facilities should relate these complementary recreational facilities.



Above: Canoeing on the Calamus River. (Photo courtesy of NEBRASKA-Land Magazine, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.)

