



**Title:** Six Mile Marsh Prairie Trail Interpretive Plan

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**Purpose:** At the May 12, 2022 Board of Managers meeting, staff will provide a presentation and facilitate a discussion around the experiential elements of the Six Mile Marsh Prairie Trail project, with a particular focus on seating at the final interpretive location along the trail, an area that the Board requested additional exploration during its construction contract award.

**Summary:**

Beginning in 2011, MCWD purchased and restored three formerly agricultural parcels located adjacent to Six Mile Marsh upstream of Halsted Bay, known as the Six Mile Marsh Prairie Restoration. The restoration, completed in 2013, targeted both a reduction in nutrient loading to Six Mile Marsh and habitat restoration of on-site prairie, wetland, and woodland ecosystems. Included in the original design plans for the restoration of the site was a proposed future trail alignment that would serve as a spur trail from the Dakota Rail Regional Trail which lies on the property's western boundary. However, construction of the spur trail was deferred to allow the restoration time to establish prior to providing public access on the site.

In May 2021, the Board of Managers initiated design of a pedestrian trail and interpretive program to provide public access to the site, tell the story of the site's history and its restoration, and put the project in context of the Six Mile Creek Halsted Bay focal geography and broader watershed. The design was first approved by the MCWD Board of Managers in September 2021. Following an unsuccessful initial bid, minor modifications were made to the design and bid package and the project was rebid in February 2022. The bid process returned four responsive bids and, at the April 14, 2022 Board meeting, the contract was awarded to G. Urban Companies.

The bid structure consisted of a base bid to include the trail and entry signage, four add alternates for interpretive features throughout the site, and a fifth add alternate for modified trail surfacing. The bid response was such that, depending on the combination of base bids and alternates, the Board could choose to either stay within the established construction budget by awarding the base bid and limited (one to two) add alternates or amend the budget and award more of the add alternate features.

At the April 14, 2022 meeting, staff recommended that the Board not award the alternative trail surfacing material regardless of the decision whether to amend the budget. Staff also facilitated a discussion around the options for awarding the four interpretive features. Based on this discussion, the Board awarded the contract for the base bid and the four interpretive features and directed staff to return with a budget amendment.

At the meeting there was some discussion amongst the Board regarding the sky lounge interpretive feature. This feature is located at the trail's easternmost point and aligns with a long view across the restored prairie towards Six Mile Marsh. The loungers are one component of a two-part interpretive feature. First, trail users will encounter a topographic relief map of the watershed with content about the restoration and its connection to the watershed as a whole and water quality improvements throughout the subwatershed. Then, users will encounter a small spur trail leading off of the main trail and down-grade to the sky loungers. These loungers allow trail users to pause, rest and take in the vastness of the prairie landscape. The loungers would be at two positions—one that allows users to look out over Six

Mile Marsh and the other with a slightly reclined position to allow views of the sky and marsh together. The idea here is that people pause to contemplate the interaction of sky, land, and water. The experience of the watershed moment as a whole is intended to be multisensory – encouraging users to feel, see, and listen to the range of connections across the landscape.

The Board raised some concerns regarding the sky loungers as designed, primarily around accessibility, maintenance, and potential for vandalism. Staff were directed to evaluate alternative seating options for the watershed moment and return to the Board in consideration of issuing a change order to modify this interpretive feature. Staff have worked to evaluate alternative seating options that achieve a similar design intent while addressing the concerns raised by the Board. At the May 12, 2022, staff will present the alternatives and facilitate a discussion around the options to proceed at the watershed moment.