



Title: Six Mile Marsh Prairie Trail and Interpretation Discussion

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Purpose: At the January 28, 2021 Planning and Programs Committee Meeting, staff will lead a discussion regarding trail design and site interpretation for the Six Mile Marsh Prairie Restoration in Minnetrista.

Background: Beginning in 2013, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) undertook restoration of two former agricultural properties in the city of Minnetrista. The restoration of the site has been aimed at reducing nutrient loading to Six Mile Creek, which flows through Six Mile Marsh to the south of the property, and improvement of upland prairie, wetland, and woodland habitat within the site. Included in design plans for the restoration 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 to establish prior to inviting public access on the site.

Over the past eight years, the 210 acre property has been actively managed to support and enhance the restoration and now features 110 acres of native prairie, 10 acres of high-quality wetlands, and 10 acres of restored oak savanna. The remaining 80 acres is part of the Six Mile Marsh wetland complex. Since 2016, a trail has been mowed in the general alignment of the proposed trail which connects to the regional trail. This has offered MCWD staff the opportunity to observe the level of use from the regional trail and to contemplate the best possible trail alignment considering a number of site factors including potential trail uses, interpretive themes, and long-term site management.

Summary: The 2021 Capital Improvement Plan included \$172,851 carried forward from the original capital project budget to design and construct a public access trail into the Six Mile Marsh Prairie from the Dakota Rail Regional Trail. Given recent experience with trail design and site interpretation at Wassermann Lake Preserve and the greater investment into the Six Mile Creek-Halsted Bay (SMCHB) subwatershed as a focal geography, the Board of Managers approved a budget amendment of \$347,861 on December 17, 2020 that supports development of a more comprehensive site interpretation plan. District staff foresee a more thoughtful approach to determining the best possible trail alignment and development of rich and interactive interpretive elements that will complement that design.

At the January 28 PPC meeting, staff will lead a discussion of trail and interpretive design considerations. The Committee will be asked to provide input on elements such as the goals of inviting public into the site, the level of interpretation that feels most effective and suited to the site, and the overall positioning of the site within the greater SMCHB subwatershed.

This discussion will precede the development and release of a request for proposals (RFP) for trail and interpretation design. The RFP is planned for release in March 2021, following Board review and authorization, with planned summer 2021 construction.