

Cook County and Grand Portage, Minnesota

Cook County Comprehensive Trails Plan



Prepared By:



Cook County Comprehensive Trails Plan



Developed by the **Cook County Comprehensive Trails Planning Committee**

Input from the **Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe**

Facilitated by the **Cook County Planning and Zoning Department**

Written and Published by the **Arrowhead Regional Development Commission**

Adopted by the **Cook County Board of Commissioners** on April 12, 2016

This plan addresses both Cook County and the Grand Portage Reservation. Grand Portage lies within the boundaries of Cook County, but is managed by the Tribe and is not subject to Cook County's administration. However, for the purposes of brevity, this plan will be referred to as the Cook County Comprehensive Trails Plan.

Note: Due to various linked sources throughout, this document is best read digitally. A pdf version can be found at: www.arrowheadplanning.org/cookcountytrailsplan

Acknowledgements

The comprehensive trails planning process was made possible through time and energy dedicated by personnel at the USDA Forest Service, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Grand Portage, and Cook County, as well as volunteer members of the Cook County Comprehensive Trails Plan (CCCTP) Steering Committee and staff from the Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe. The plan was written and published by the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC). All photos in the plan are by ARDC, unless noted.

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The planning process was also made possible through the following sponsors:



This report was prepared using Federal funds under award NA14NOS4190055 from NOAA's Office for Coastal Management, U.S. Department of Commerce. The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NOAA's Office for Coastal Management, U.S. Department of Commerce or Minnesota DNR.

This project was also funded in part by the U of M Northeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership.

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Section One: Background and Process Description

Purpose

The Cook County Comprehensive Trails Plan seeks to create and maintain a quality system of trails for multiple use in order to contribute to the quality of life for residents and the quality of experiences for visitors in Cook County and the Grand Portage Reservation.

Setting

Cook County is located at Minnesota's most northeast corner, on the shores of Lake Superior and abutting Ontario, Canada. The Grand Portage Reservation is located on the County's most northeastern point. Together, this is noted as a particularly beautiful and wild place, with Minnesota's highest hills, widest beaches, deepest lakes, and biggest forests. Ninety-two percent of the County is in some type of public ownership - National Forest, State Forest, County Lands, Tribal Lands, several State Parks, and community parks. In addition, much of the County is part of a designated wilderness - the most visited wilderness in the United States - the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). Within the boundaries of the Superior National Forest, the BWCAW is more than a million acres of interconnected lakes and rivers on Minnesota's northern border.

The only incorporated city in Cook County is Grand Marais, the County Seat. Grand Marais is a full service community with restaurants, stores, and lodging. Other community nodes with



Caribou Rock Trail, Superior National Forest

similar services include Schroeder, Tofte, Lutsen, Grand Portage and Hovland.

The Gunflint Trail (County Road 12) is inland from Grand Marais, and has resorts, outfitters, restaurants and other service businesses. The Grand Portage community includes government facilities, stores, trails, camping opportunities, a marina, and a lodge-casino. The Grand Portage National Monument and Grand Portage State Park are also located here.

Cook County experiences a full four seasons with bright springs, spectacular summers, colorful autumns, and deep winters. Lake Superior's massive volume of water has a moderating effect on the County's coastline, cooling down summers and warming up winters when the wind is directed off of the world's largest freshwater lake.

All of these factors mean that Cook County is meant to be explored. Residents and visitors alike enjoy recreating here, and tourism is now a primary economic driver in the community. The hundreds of miles of trails winding through and among forests, hills, lakes, and wetlands are a primary way people connect with nature in Cook County.

Goals

The Cook County Trails Task Force seeks to ensure that trails in Cook County are:

- *Connected.* Trails are connected to each other and to commercial centers, campgrounds, trail hubs, parking, communities and other destinations.
- *Collaborative.* Trail user groups and trail administrators should collaborate in order to ensure quality experiences for users and to create economic efficiencies and sustainability.
- *Multi-use.* Trail use is maximized in all seasons by allowing compatible uses to exist in corridors where possible and appropriate.
- *Integrated at Trail Hubs.* Trail hubs with parking, safety features, information, amenities and connections to multiple trails have been identified and improved, or created, at key locations.
- *Safe.* Cook County trail users and administrators embrace a culture of safety. Safety concerns are examined and improvements are implemented when and where appropriate. Users are educated about trail rules and rule enforcement occurs when necessary.
- *Manageable.* Trails in Cook County are sustainable economically and all trails have a viable administrative and maintenance strategy.
- *Economically Beneficial.* Trails in Cook County positively impact the area's tourism economy while still providing quality recreation experiences and health benefits to residents.
- *Sustainable.* Trails in Cook County are constructed and maintained using known best practices that limit environmental impacts.

Process

In 2014 Cook County officials and local trail advocates began discussing the need for a comprehensive trails plan to help improve connectivity, expand trail administrator collaboration, improve trail safety, prioritize improvement projects, increase awareness, and generally improve the collaboration with management of the trails in the County. The County asked the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) to assist them with the development of the plan. In the summer of 2015 work began.

Three groups were formed to guide the process. The *user group committee*, composed of a wide variety of trail stakeholders, organizations, and trail users, met and discussed information about the current status of the existing trail system and what improvements were desired. Additionally, Cook County staff met with major user groups to gather direct feedback.

The geospatial sub-committee consisted of Cook County, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR), USDA Forest Service, and ARDC staff and focused on Geographic Information System (GIS) data management for trails. This committee discussed trail data maintenance, mapping, and recommendations for the plan. Throughout the life of this plan, continued collaboration between land managers from the Superior National Forest, MnDNR, and Cook County regarding data sharing is recommended.

The steering committee was composed of a broad group of stakeholders including Cook County Commissioners, DNR staff, and USDA Forest Service-Superior National Forest staff. This committee met monthly and discussed potential projects and developed goals, recommendations, and actions for Cook County's trail plan. Fiscal opportunities and economic realities were discussed. The steering committee was responsible for making final decisions on what to forward to the Cook County Board for adoption. Meetings were held with Grand Portage officials as well and tribal-centered recommendations were developed.

A public input period occurred in March of 2016, which included a public meeting on March 15, 2016. Many comments and questions were submitted and were addressed by the Steering Committee on March 31, 2016. The Plan was submitted for adoption by the Cook County Board of Commissioners on April 12.



Gunflint Snowmobile Trail System Bridge

Section Two: Trail Related Facilities

Cook County and the Grand Portage Reservation are home to trails with year round uses including hiking, biking, skiing, ATVing, snowmobiling, and paddling. Additional parts of the trail system infrastructure are trail affiliated sites and services, including campgrounds, lodging, and outfitters. The following section describes trail affiliated facilities and services within Cook County and the Grand Portage Reservation.

Federal Facilities

Grand Portage National Monument, located entirely within the Grand Portage Reservation, is rich in natural and cultural history. The Park protects two depots of the North West Company, the main depot on Lake Superior and the site of Fort Charlotte on the Pigeon River. The 8.5 mile Grand Portage trail connects the depots and contains most of the acreage of the Monument. The historical portage is now used as a hiking trail with two campsites available at the northern Pigeon River (Fort Charlotte) end. Campers must get a permit at the National Monument. Also part of the Monument, the Mount Rose Trail is a one mile round-trip hike. The Monument provides a self-guided brochure, highlighting geology and vegetation at 16 numbered posts along the trail. Both trails are non-motorized and not groomed for any specific uses in winter. Grand Portage is also the docking location for an Isle Royale ferry boat. Isle Royale National Park is technically in Michigan, but is much closer to Minnesota's North Shore. People use the ferry to access Isle Royale's camping, kayaking, lodging and hiking facilities in summer months. ([website](#))



Information Kiosk at Mt. Josephine Wayside

Established in 1909, the *Superior National Forest* ([website](#)) is known for its boreal forest ecosystem, numerous lakes, and a colorful cultural history. The Forest provides for a diverse community of plants and animals as well as products for human needs. Popular recreational activities include fishing, hunting, camping, canoeing, swimming, hiking, snowmobiling, and skiing. The USDA Forest Service maintains many hiking trails ranging from short interpretative paths to mid-length and long distance trails that facilitate an overnight camping experience. The Superior National Forest also facilitates many water routes by maintaining numerous portages inside and outside of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Additionally, the USDA Forest Service allows All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV) and/or Off Highway Vehicles' (OHV) on designated routes specified on the Superior National Forest Motor Vehicle Use Map. Some trails in Cook County are maintained through a partnership between the Superior National Forest, other entities and user groups. These include snowmobile trails maintained by user groups and the State of Minnesota, cross country ski trails maintained by collaborations of private lodging facilities or volunteer clubs and associations in partnership with the Forest. Finally, it is noted that the Superior National Forest maintains a network of facilities and infrastructure that supports trail use, including parking areas, campgrounds, access roads, scenic overlooks, interpretive waysides, canoe and boat accesses, and ranger stations.

The *Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness* (BWCAW) ([website](#)) is a unique area located in the northern third of the Superior National Forest. Over one million acres in size, it extends nearly 150 miles along the International Boundary adjacent to Canada's Quetico Provincial Park and is bordered on the west by Voyageurs National Park. The BWCAW contains over 1,200 miles of canoe routes, 12 hiking trails and over 2,000 designated campsites. Wilderness permits are required to camp in the BWCAW from May 1 through September 30 and can be reserved in advance. Free day-use permits are available at all entry points and Ranger Stations for those not camping in the Wilderness. Self-issue permits (available at no cost) are required in other months. Summer users must enter the BWCAW at a designated entry point determined by their permit. BWCAW routes are not designated - in general, users can go where they please once they depart from the designated entry point. Motor boats (with horsepower restrictions) are allowed on four wilderness lakes within Cook County – motors must stay within designated areas. Day use by motor boats requires a special permit that also can be reserved through the Forest's reservation system.

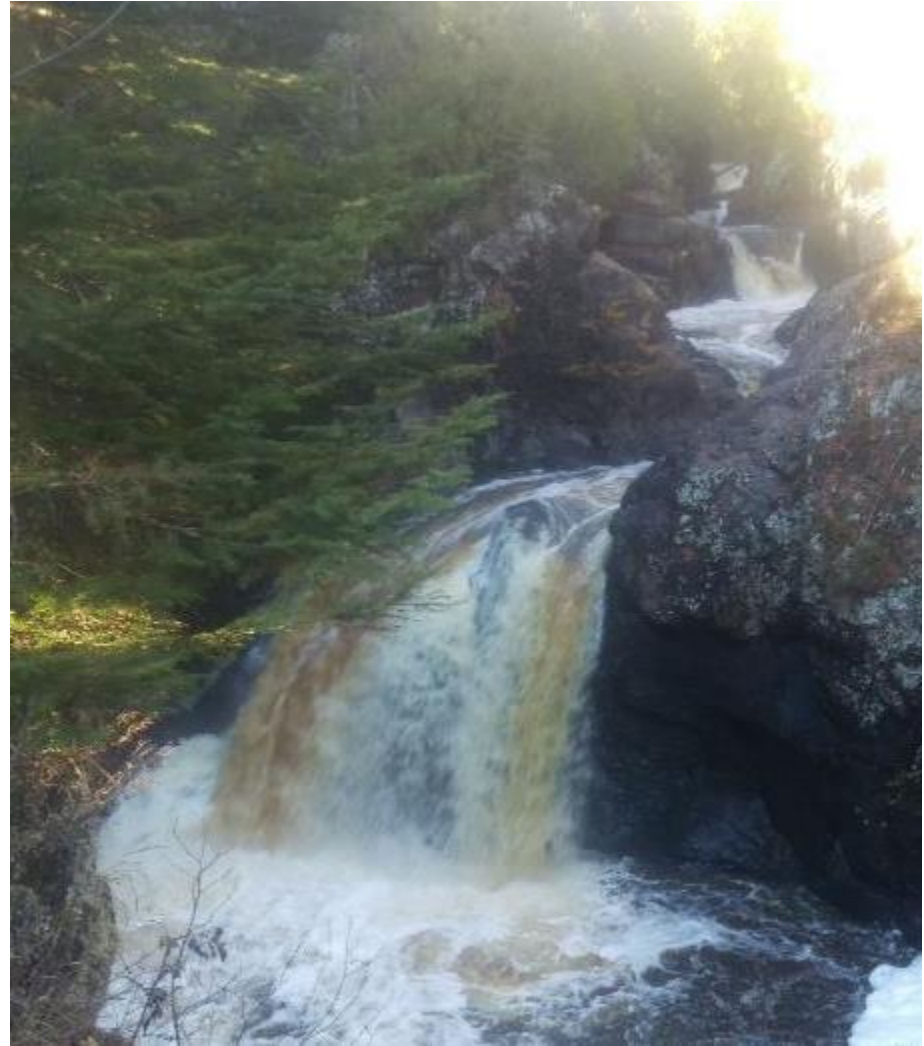
State Facilities

Temperance River State Park was established in 1957 and is located one mile north of Schroeder on Highway 61. This 5,007 acre park is home to many scenic views along Lake Superior and the Temperance River. Temperance River State Park offers cross country skiing, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, and snowshoeing. Two separate campgrounds have 60 campsites overall and there are sanitation facilities available within the campgrounds. Hiking is a main attraction with 22 miles of trails inside the park. The Gitchi-Gami State Trail runs through the State Park, and a main trailhead for the Superior Hiking Trail is located within the park. Snowmobiling

is very convenient as well, with easy access to the C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail. The Park serves as an access point for the Lake Superior Water Trail. ([website](#))

Cascade River State Park lies ten miles southwest of Grand Marais just off Highway 61. Park highlights include hiking, cross country skiing, camping, fishing, snowshoeing, and viewing several scenic waterfalls throughout the park. There are over 40 campsites available with seasonal sanitation facilities. There are also seven picnic areas and an enclosed picnic shelter available for guests. The Park maintains two miles of groomed snowmobile trails with access to local trails, including the C.J. /North Shore State Trail. Eighteen miles of hiking trails move through a variety of terrains. The Superior Hiking Trail also runs through the park. The Gitchi-Gami State Trail is planned to pass through the Park in the future, but that section of the Gitchi-Gami is not currently funded or programmed for a specific year. The Park serves as an access point for the Lake Superior Water Trail. ([website](#))

Judge C.R. Magney State Park is located about 14 miles Northeast of Grand Marais along Highway 61. There are nine miles of hiking trails within the Park that offer scenic views along the Brule River and a series of waterfalls including the mysterious Devil's Kettle Waterfall. Access to the Superior Hiking Trail is also available to hikers. The park includes two picnic areas and there are 27 campsites.



Cascade River Cataract, Cascade River State Park

Sanitation facilities are open seasonally within the State Park. Judge C.R. Magney State Park is open year round. The Park also manages the McFarland Lake Campground to the north with its five campsites, two picnic areas, and an ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant toilet. ([website](#))

Grand Portage State Park is located on Highway 61 just west of the United States/Canada border. There are four miles of hiking trails within the park. There is also a one half mile boardwalk to overlook the park's main attraction, High Falls Waterfall, which, at 120 feet, is the highest in the State of Minnesota. This park features a visitor center, a gift shop, and picnic areas overlooking the Pigeon River. Grand Portage State Park does not include any campsites. Uniquely, the Park is cooperatively managed by the State of Minnesota and the Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe. The visitor center features the history of the Grand Portage Ojibwe. ([website](#))

Grand Portage State Forest is located about 10 miles northeast of Grand Marais. The State Forest offers two small campgrounds: Devilfish Lake Campground offers five campsites, two ADA toilets, a dock, and a swimming area; and Esther Lake Campground, with three campsites, is a primitive, first-come, first served campground offering one ADA toilet and lake access. This State Forest provides a total of nine water access points, 30 miles of hiking trails via the Border Route Trail and the Superior Hiking Trail, 40 miles of snowmobile trails and 16 miles of designated ATV trails. This state forest also provides connections to recreational opportunities in neighboring Judge C.R. Magney State Park and the snowmobile trail connecting users to the Grand Portage Lodge and Casino. ([website](#))

Pat Bayle State Forest is an 180,000 acre forest located within the Superior National Forest boundaries. The State Forest is near the C.J. /North Shore State Snowmobile Trail and offers the Twin Lakes Campground which has two docks, lake access, swimming, fishing,



ATVs in the Grand Portage State Forest

and three campsites. There are eight miles of Class I ATV routes and eight miles of Class II ATV routes designated within the Pat Bayle State Forest. ([website](#))

Waysides

Highway 61 has several affiliated *waysides* up and down its length that serve highway users by providing parking, restrooms, information and interpretation. Some have scenic overlooks. Most have some type of affiliation with trails in Cook County. ([website](#))

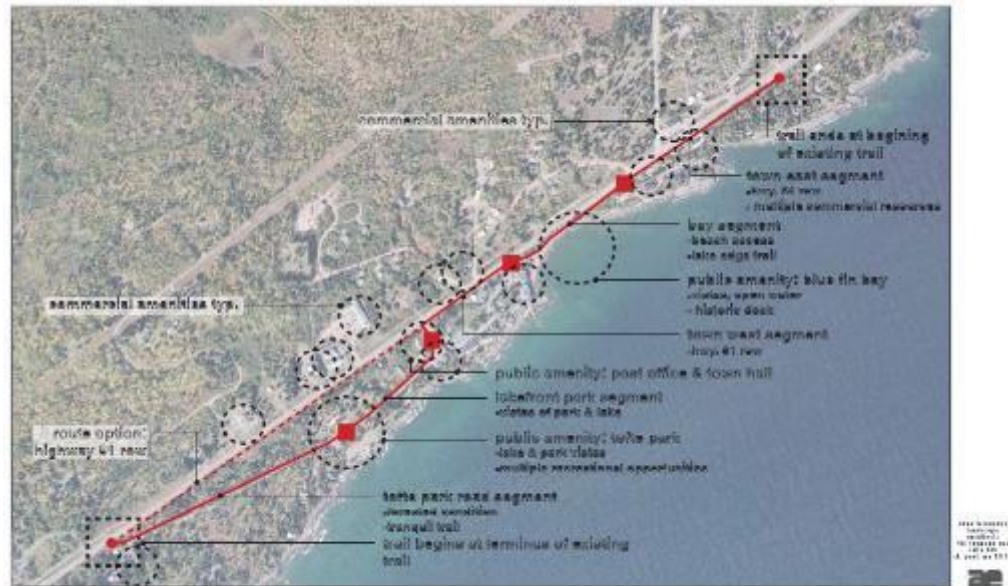
- The *Cross River Wayside* in Schroeder serves as a parking and access point to the Gitchi-Gami State Trail.
- *Father's Baraga's Cross*, also in Schroeder, while primarily a historic site, does provide access to the Lake Superior Water Trail.
- The *Ray Berglund State Wayside*, on the Onion River between Tofte and Lutsen, can provide access to the Gitchi-Gami State Trail and it is the starting point for a hiking trail (1/2 mile) that parallels the Onion River.
- *Cutface Creek Wayside* has restrooms and access to the Lake Superior shoreline. The site, and the adjacent new (2015) highway bridge, have been constructed to accommodate the development of the Gitchi-Gami State Trail through this area. This section of the Gitchi-Gami is a high priority for construction and funding is currently being sought.
- *Kadunce Creek Wayside*, east of Grand Marais, contains picnic facilities and is connected to the Superior Hiking Trail via a spur trail. In this area and east towards Hovland, there is a length of beach that is publicly accessible and provides a good launch for kayaks. Additionally, this section of Highway 61 has wide, paved shoulders and could be good for road bicycling.
- Further east in Grand Portage, the *Mt. Josephine Wayside* offers spectacular views of Lake Superior, the Susie Islands, and Isle Royale, as well as a rugged hiking trail to the summit of Mt. Josephine. Beginning in Grand Portage, the Mt. Josephine Trail climbs 700 feet and spans 1.5 miles from trailhead to the summit of the mountain.



Ray Berglund State Wayside

Community Parks

Tofte Town Park is a 4.8-acre park located on the North Shore of Lake Superior just off Highway 61 in Tofte Township, Cook County. The park currently serves as a place of community gathering and hosts a picnic shelter, vault toilets, picnic tables, a grill, bike racks, historical features, a pump station for the fire department, and a boat launch/dock facility which is used by both motorized watercraft and as a kayak launch to access the Lake Superior Water Trail. Additionally, a paved walking path that measures at about 960 feet meanders through the park. With ample facilities and access to Lake Superior, the site is a popular location for a number of community and private gatherings. A design project for the Park was conducted in 2015 that resulted in schematics showing enhanced facilities that could be developed on the existing site. Should the designs come to fruition, amenities would include a new shelter, interpretive signage, and improved connection to the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. Plans showing the designed route are outlined in more detail in the Tofte Town Park Master Plan Document. The Gitchi-Gami State Trail is planned to pass through or near the Park. ([website](#))



Preferred Route for the Gitchi-Gami State Trail through Tofte (2018 construction)

Should the designs come to fruition, amenities would include a new shelter, interpretive signage, and improved connection to the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. Plans showing the designed route are outlined in more detail in the Tofte Town Park Master Plan Document. The Gitchi-Gami State Trail is planned to pass through or near the Park. ([website](#))

Grand View Park is operated by the Town of Lutsen and contains a pavilion and picnic tables, charcoal grills, volleyball court, playground, outhouse, and fire rings. Park users can access a short section of Lake Superior shoreline as well, meaning the Park can serve as a Lake Superior Water Trail access point. Camping is not allowed. The Gitchi-Gami State Trail is planned to pass through or near the Park in the future. That section of the Gitchi-Gami is not currently funded or programmed for a specific year. ([website](#))

The *City of Grand Marais Parks and Recreation* Department oversees a large municipal year-round campground featuring 300 campsites, an adjacent forest with a nature trail, four bath houses, a baseball field, a playground, and a pavilion. The campground is adjacent to a one mile segment of the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. The Cook County Community Center hosts a skateboard park, playgrounds, a picnic area, tennis courts, and offers ice skating, hockey, and curling rinks. Along the shoreline in the City of Grand

Marais, the City operates a 19 slip marina and has developed Harbor Park, a park which includes sidewalks, park benches, public art, interpretation and serves as a popular public gathering place, often hosting live music. The Harbor Park area, extending to the US Coast Guard's Artist Point is a popular place for walking and interacting with Lake Superior. The US Coast Guard Station North Superior is located on Artist's Point in Grand Marais along the harbor. The area features a long breakwater, light house, Coast Guard Station, boat ramps and docks. The City also owns and administers the Gunflint Hills Golf Course, located up the Gunflint Trail. ([website](#))

Water Accesses

Water Access Points are prolific in Cook County. Ranging from concrete ramps with docks and mooring points to rough trails down to the water only fit for canoes or kayaks, these access points offer a multitude of viable water routes in the County. Accesses are administrated by multiple entities, including the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the USDA Forest Service (including BWCAW entry points), Cook County, Grand Portage Band, the City of Grand Marais, Lutsen Township, and Tofte Township. Access points on Lake Superior serve the Lake Superior Water Trail. Accesses typically offer parking and basic information. ([website](#))

Lutsen Mountains

Lutsen Mountains is an all-inclusive, year-round resort area that spans four ski hills, 1,000 acres, and numerous recreational uses located in the Town of Lutsen. The resort is promoted as the largest ski resort in the Midwest, hosting 95 runs, five terrain parks, 60 acres of tree skiing, a music and dining venue, spas, lodges, a mountain-top skier services (and summer wedding) facility, and a studio and condominium complex. Among these amenities, direct trail connections include the Superior Hiking Trail, the Gitchi-Gami State Trail, and the Honeymoon Loop Spur Adventure Trail. Discussions have been held regarding connecting Lutsen into a larger mountain biking resource. ([website](#))

Communities

Communities in Cook County include Schroeder, Tofte, Lutsen, Grand Marais, the Gunflint Trail, Hovland and Grand Portage. Each of these communities offers a wide array of tourism services including lodging, dining, museums, equipment rental, adventure outfitters, and more.

- **Schroeder, MN (Population: 187)**

Schroeder offers several lodging options, a seasonal bakery, several gift shops, a rentable town hall, a museum, nature programming at Sugarloaf Cove Nature Center, and access to the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. ([website](#))

- **Tofte, MN (Population: 226)**

Tofte offers a variety of lodging options, multiple restaurants, a small grocery store, a gas station, and two outfitters renting canoes, kayaks, paddle boards, bicycles, skis, and snowboards, in addition to providing shuttle services. Tofte is also home to a large community center and charter school that provides a playground, picnic pavilion, outdoor pizza oven, senior fitness, an outdoor ice skating rink, and more. A Superior National Forest District Ranger Station is located in Tofte. Additionally, Tofte is home to the North Shore Commercial Fishing Museum, has a Town Hall, emergency services, public access to Lake Superior at the Tofte Town Park, and provides access points to the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. ([website](#))

- **Lutsen, MN (Population: 190)**

Lutsen is an unincorporated community with many amenities. Lutsen provides many lodging opportunities, several restaurants, and all-seasons recreational opportunities at Lutsen Mountains. It offers alpine skiing, access to cross country skiing, gondola rides, alpine coaster rides, and alpine mountain biking in the summer months. Lutsen has a large golf course, Grandview Park, a gas station, a small grocery store, a general store offering fishing licenses, tackle and bait, and several gift shops. The Lutsen area is also home to the Ray Berglund State Wayside which features access to the Onion River and offers bicyclists several places to access the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. ([website](#))

- **Grand Marais, MN (Population: 1,340)**

In 2015, Grand Marais, MN was crowned the 'Coolest Small Town in America' by Budget Travel Magazine. It is a gateway to four seasons of outdoor recreation featuring numerous outfitters providing rentable equipment ranging from bicycles to climbing gear to canoes, lodging opportunities, renowned restaurants, several grocery options, gas stations, museums, art galleries, gift shops and more. The Harbor View Park, Artist's Point, and the municipal campground offer popular places to walk, interact with the Lake, and access the Gitchi-Gami State Trail.



The Grand Marais Waterfront

The City of Grand Marais has recently secured funding to construct a Highway 61 redesign project that will improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in the City in 2020. Currently, the Gitchi-Gami Trail offers a 1.5 mile segment of trail near the western terminus of City limits that extends to Harbor Park. There, cyclists will find well-marked on-road bike lanes on Wisconsin Street and Broadway that direct cyclists to cross Highway 61 where the Trail once again picks up and continues for four blocks to its current terminus at the intersection with the Gunflint Trail National Scenic Byway. Plans have been developed to extend this current terminus north along the Gunflint Trail to a local school facility increasing bike and walkability in this area of the City.



The Grand Marais Sidewalk Database – [Click here to learn more.](#)

The City maintains several miles of sidewalks. In cooperation with Cook County Moving Matters, the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) mapped all of the sidewalks and rated their condition. The resulting interactive map can be used to identify gaps in the system. ([website](#))

- **Gunflint Trail Community, MN**

The Gunflint Trail National Scenic Byway is a modern roadway that begins in Grand Marais and winds 57 miles northwest, nearing the border of Canada. It is known as the gateway to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) and has been named one of the world’s “50 places of a lifetime” by National Geographic. Along the Trail are many lodging opportunities at resorts, lodges, and campgrounds. Numerous outfitters supply bunkhouse accommodations, canoe, camping, and fishing equipment. Additionally, the Gunflint Trail sports restaurants and gift shops. Opportunities also include sled dog tours and the Chik-Wauk Museum and Nature Center. ([website](#))

- **Hovland, MN**

Hovland, between Grand Marais and Grand Portage, is an unincorporated community. It is home to a community center, businesses (including a restaurant), and the historic Hovland Dock on Chicago Bay. A MnDNR boat launch is located on Horseshoe Bay near Hovland. ([website](#))

- **Community of Grand Portage, MN (Population: 565)**

Grand Portage is an unincorporated community in Cook County, Minnesota, United States; located on Grand Portage Bay of the North Shore of Lake Superior. The community of Grand Portage offers lodging options, including the Grand Portage Lodge & Casino, which also offers a restaurant. The community is home to a gift shop, art gallery, a gas station, and provides in depth history of the Grand Portage Ojibwe at the Grand Portage National Monument Heritage Center and Grand Portage State Park. The Band currently maintains all trails in the Grand Portage area, including one snowmobile trail that connects into systems west of the community. ([website](#))

Trail Marketing

Over the decades the tourism in Cook County has increased its impact on the area economy, capitalizing on the outdoors, arts, and culture. As tourism forms a base for the Cook County economy, there are several *tourism groups and organizations* involved with evaluating the economy in the County and promoting tourism.

The following are some of the organizations promoting trail use in Cook County and the Grand Portage Reservation. Other groups that are associated with one particular trail use are listed in following sections of this plan.

- *Visit Cook County* is the destination marketing organization dedicated to promoting tourism to Cook County, Minnesota, including the communities of Hovland, Grand Marais, Gunflint Trail, Grand Portage, Lutsen, Tofte and Schroeder. The organization has a website which serves as a great tool to connect visitors to amenities, opportunities for recreation, lodging, dining and more. Visit Cook County also provides visitor information at two visitor centers in Grand Marais and Tofte, also has a very strong and interactive social media presence. ([website](#))
- The *North Shore Visitor* is a private organization that produces a small magazine style guide to the North Shore of Lake Superior. It includes information about lodging, dining, attractions, state parks, recreation and more. The North Shore Visitor's website is rich with information for travelers and tourists, and the organization also has a strong social media presence. ([website](#))
- The *Cook County Chamber of Commerce's* mission is to be the representative voice of county for-profit and non-profit businesses in working to improve the county economy and to address pressing county socioeconomic issues. The organization maintains a business directory. ([website](#)) The Chamber developed the *Go Cook County* initiative to advance economic prosperity

in Cook County. With tourism and recreation as drivers, this group published the Cook County Economic Analysis report in June of 2013 ([document](#)).

- The *Gunflint Trail Association* is historically known as one of the oldest tourism associations in Minnesota. Founded in 1936 by a group of business activists working to bring utilities to the Gunflint Trail area, a group of area stakeholders still remains active in making physical improvements along the Gunflint Trail, marketing the Gunflint Trail area, and providing a unified voice of tourism in northeastern Minnesota ([website](#)).
- The *North Shore Scenic Drive Council* is the oversight committee that guides the promotion and interpretation of the North Shore Scenic Drive, an All-American Road. The Council has representatives from the Counties, Cities, and tourism organizations along the Byway, and works to enhance the economic, cultural, social, and natural integrity of the route. As a part of its efforts, the North Shore Scenic Drive Council has an active social media presence ([website](#)).
- The *Grand Portage Lodge and Casino* promotes snowmobiling and provides trail maps to visitors.
- *Grand Marais Area Tourism Association* promotes tourism in Grand Marais.
- *Lutsen-Tofte Tourism Association* promotes tourism in western Cook County.
- *Superior National Forest Tofte and Gunflint District Ranger Stations* provide information to visitors, including information on the BWCAW, trails, camping, and other recreation features of the Forest.

Private Businesses

In Cook County trail users can find nearly anything they need to have fun in the outdoors. There are 16 outfitting businesses in Cook County, primarily serving the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. *Canoe Outfitters* sell specialized pre-packaged food, and rent canoes, packs, tents, sleeping bags, cooking gear and food containers, in “complete” or “partial” packages. Most canoe outfitters offer bunkhouses for the first and last night stays, vehicle shuttles, and full routing services. Some offer tow boat services on lakes allowing motorboats.

Several *equipment outfitting stores* offer kayaks, mountain bikes, cross country skis, hiking poles, snow shoes, winter fat tire bikes, stand up paddle boards, fishing equipment, clothing, and more, both for rent and for sale. ([website](#))



BWCAW Outfitter "Towboat" at American Point, Saganaga Lake

There are many *private resorts and campgrounds* in Cook County. These facilities offer additional options for trail users in the County that want to enjoy the area with more amenities. Most of these facilities are strung along the Lake Superior shoreline and the Gunflint Trail. ([website](#))

Cook County also has restaurants, general stores, gas stations, motels and lodging, repair shops, grocery stores, and other businesses that directly and indirectly support trail use. ([website](#))

Associated Stakeholders

Sugarloaf Cove, a 27 acre site located six miles south of Schroeder on Highway 61, contains an interpretive center, parking facilities, forest restoration sites, cobblestone beaches, and a one-mile interpretive hiking/walking trail that winds through the natural features of the cove area. Adjacent to Sugarloaf Cove Scientific and Natural Area, the cove area offers North Shore historical and nature programs and workshops throughout the year. The Gitchi-Gami State Trail is planned to pass near the cove area in the future, but that section of the Gitchi-Gami is not currently funded or programmed for a specific year. Sugarloaf Cove serves as an access point for the Lake Superior Water Trail. ([website](#))

The *Cook County Historical Society* does not administer any trails, but has interests in the historic backgrounds of several trails. Additionally, the Historical Society is a partner in informational kiosks at multiple waysides and trail parking areas. The Society maintains a museum in downtown Grand Marais. ([website](#))

The *Gunflint Trail Historical Society* operates the Chik-Wauk Museum and Nature Center at the end of the Gunflint Trail in partnership with the USDA Forest Service. There are 50 acres of grounds that include 2.2 miles of hiking trails. ([website](#))

Section Three: Trails

Cook County and the Grand Portage Reservation contain over 3,800 miles¹ of trails, a figure that does not account for the nearly endless water route possibilities in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. The following section describes the trail system by use.



Snowshoeing on the Superior Hiking Trail at Carlton Peak

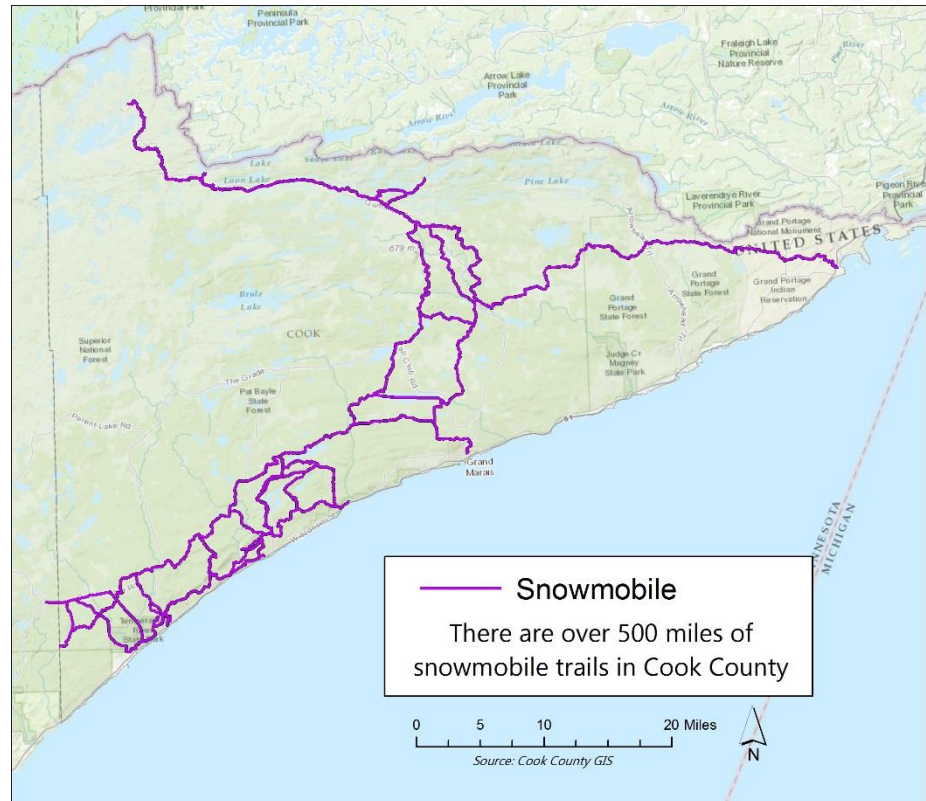
¹ Based on 2015 Cook County GIS files.

Snowmobiling

Snowmobiling is a popular pastime in Cook County, as it usually has ample snow to keep trails in good shape through the season. The C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail ([website](#)), administered by the MnDNR, is a 150 mile natural surface trail from Duluth to Grand Marais. The trail winds its way through boreal forests on the ridgeline overlooking Lake Superior. In winter, the trail connects with many communities in the area and thousands of miles of snowmobile club trails which are often maintained in partnership with the Superior National Forest and the State of Minnesota. ATV use is allowed on some portions of this trail, but none of those sections are in Cook County at the time of this plan’s publishing. In Cook County, most of the North Shore State Trail is located on Superior National Forest lands.

The Grand Portage Band maintains a snowmobile trail that allows users to access the Grand Portage Lodge and Casino.

Other snowmobile trails are classified as Grant-In-Aid (GIA) trails in Cook County. For these trails, state funding is awarded to local units of governments who in turn fund snowmobile clubs to maintain and groom the trails in partnership with the Superior National Forest. Popular GIA snowmobile trails include routes in the Gunflint Trail area and the trail connecting the Gunflint and Grand Marais area to the Grand Portage Band’s trail system and main corridor to the Grand Portage Lodge and Casino. Further west, GIA trails surround the North Shore State Trail in Tofte and Lutsen, creating many miles of loops of trails on the ridge above Lake Superior and providing access to communities and services.



The snowmobile clubs working with GIA trails in Cook County are:

- Cook County Ridge Riders Snowmobile Club. This club maintains and grooms the Gunflint system of snowmobile trails in central Cook County. ([website](#))
- Lutsen Trailbreakers. This group maintains several trails and multiple snowmobile trail access points surrounding Lutsen, including trails connecting to lodging and services in the community.
- Superior Timberwolves. This club administers trail loops around Tofte that also connect to the Lutsen Trailbreakers system and systems in Lake County.
- Grand Portage Trail Riders.

Several issues and opportunities regarding snowmobile trails were discussed in the development of this plan.

- Grand Marais Area Trail Access and Parking: Currently, accessing the C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail and the other snowmobile trails directly from the City of Grand Marais can be challenging. The State Trail does come into the north side of town, but does not have a route to the community's lakeside lodging facilities and only has limited parking opportunities at its eastern terminus. Adding to this issue is the fact that, due to Lake Superior's moderating effect, Grand Marais often has less snow than further up the hill inland. Sometimes there is not enough snow available in the City to operate snowmobiles.
- Gunflint Trail Access and Parking: Usable access points to the Gunflint Trail system for snowmobile trails are limited. Parking areas can fill up fast on popular weekends. Many users are finding unofficial access points to use, including unplowed forest roads.
- Devil Track Lake Area Trailhead. Many snowmobile trail users have discovered the open area of the former Cook County airport on Devil Track Lake as a parking area and access point. Formalizing parking in this area could be beneficial. If that is not possible another parking lot in this area should be developed.
- Trailheads and Parking. Snowmobile trail access points often share parking and information kiosks with the area's other trails and wayside rests. Parking can become tight and the amount of information provided at kiosks can be minimal. The only actual designated parking lot for the C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail is on the Caribou Trail (CR 4).



Off Highway Vehicles

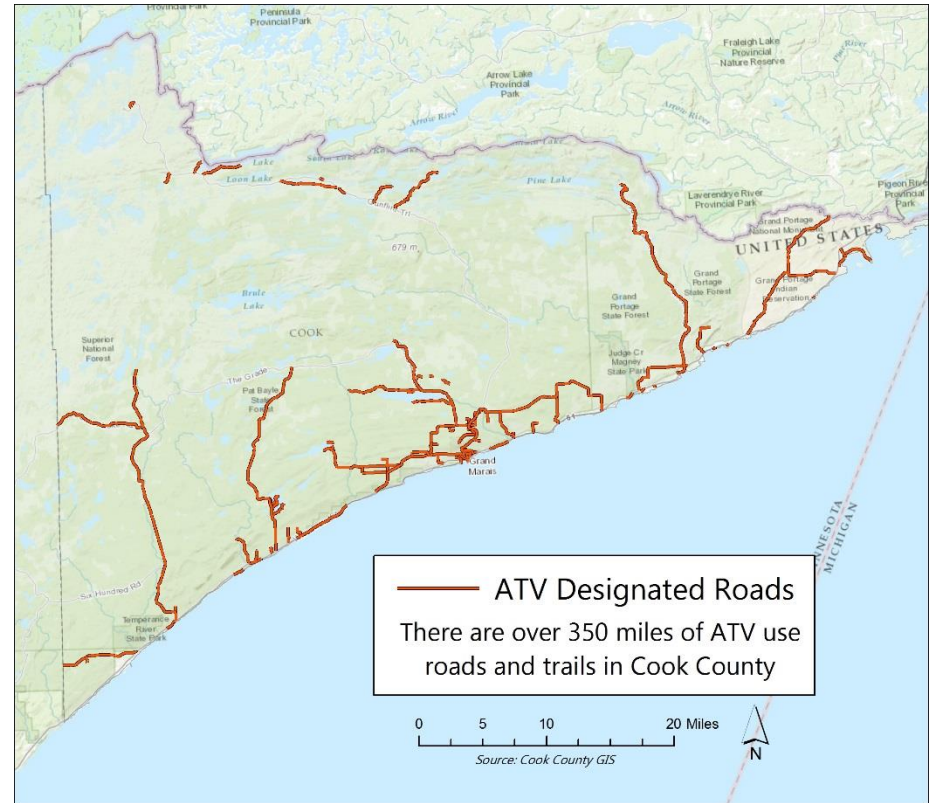
For the purposes of this plan, please note the following:

- OHV = Off Highway Vehicles include all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) OFF Highway motorcycles (OHMs) and Off-road vehicles (ORVs), such as 4x4s.
- ATV = All-Terrain Vehicle: Used to describe a wide variety of small all-terrain vehicles. The term ATV is used to describe 3-wheelers, 4-wheelers and side-by-sides or “quads”.
- OHM = Off Highway Motorcycle. Used to describe a wide variety of motorcycles capable of off road travel.

MnDNR OHV information may be found at [this website](#).

Within Cook County there is only one OHV designated trail. The Boyd Road Trail is located near Tom Lake in the Grand Portage State Forest. These trails are managed cooperatively by Cook County and the Cook County ATV Club². The trail allows ATVs and OHMs, but not ORVs.

Additionally, ATV, OHM, OHV use are allowed on many of the area’s roadways, including forest roadways that can offer interesting routes with scenic views, wildlife, and other interesting components. Cook County has allowed ATV use on some of the roadways or the roadway ditches under their jurisdiction, including a few specific portions of the Gunflint Trail. ORVs and OHMs must be “street legal” to use Cook County roads. The MnDNR allows OHV



² The Cook County ATV Club’s major goals are to identify areas where ATVs can be ridden legally, promote responsible riding, provide a positive impact on Cook County’s economy, and provide opportunities for social activities for ATV users.

use in the Grand Portage State Forest on forest roads. ([website](#)) The Superior National Forest allows OHV use on routes designated by the Motor Vehicle Use Map: [website](#)).

Issues and opportunities regarding OHV uses were discussed in the development of this plan, including:

- Collaborations between trail user groups, Cook County, the MnDNR, and Superior National Forest to look at opportunities for multi-purpose use on the C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail.
- Collaborating to maximize ATV and OHM trail riding opportunities in Cook County when appropriate and feasible
- Improving Trailheads and Parking. OHV access points often share parking and information kiosks with the area's other trails/roads and wayside rests. Parking can become tight and the amount of information provided at kiosks can be minimal.

Hiking, Walking, and Running

Hiking trails abound in Cook County and Grand Portage. As noted previously in this document, the Superior National Forest, Pat Bayle State Forest, Grand Portage State Forest, Grand Portage National Monument, and the County's four State Parks all offer a variety of hikes under their administrations and within their boundaries. Other, longer, trails in the County are multi-jurisdictional in nature. Notable trails include:

- Superior Hiking Trail. Commonly known as the SHT, this 310-mile (123 miles in Cook County) footpath largely follows the rocky ridgeline above Lake Superior south of Duluth to the Canadian border. There are trailhead parking lots every five to 10 miles making it ideal for both day hikes and backpack camping. No fees, reservations or permits required to hike or camp on the trail. Camping is allowed only at SHT designated campsites. The Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA) ([website](#)) builds, maintains, and manages the trail across all ownerships with the help of volunteers. A shuttle service is available from a private provider ([website](#)).
- Grand Portage Trail. Once a main component of the "Voyageur Highway" fur trade route, the Grand Portage is now primarily used by hikers. The 8.5 mile trail features two campsites available at the northern Pigeon River (Fort Charlotte) end. Campers must get a permit at the National Monument.
- North Country Trail. This long-distance trail spans the northern United States from New York to North Dakota. Some sections of the trail outside of Cook County are still in development. In Cook County, inside and outside of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, the North Country Trail uses the existing Superior Hiking Trail, Border Route Trail, and Kekekabic Trail, as they all connect to each other. The North Country Trail Association helps to build and promote the trail. ([website](#))



- Hunter Walking Trails. Some trails in Cook County are specifically designated for hunters, although others can hike on them if they choose (wear orange during hunting season). Most often these trails are managed for Ruffed Grouse hunting. All the trails are for non-motorized uses. ([website](#))
- Wilderness Hiking Trails. Within Cook County are three long distance hiking trails on the Superior National Forest in the BWCAW. These trails provide a wilderness experience and are maintained in a manner as to appear to be a part of the environment and not an intrusion. Additional information is available at Forest Service District Offices.
 - Border Route Trail. This rugged trail passes through the east end of the BWCAW on the Superior National Forest in Cook County. Its east terminus meets the Superior Hiking Trail in the Grand Portage State Forest. Heading west, the 65 mile long trail often follows a high ridgeline, offering stunning views of the BWCAW lakes that border Canada. The west terminus of the trail connects to the Kekekabic Trail via the Gunflint Trail. There are several spur trail access points in the middle portion of the Border Route as well. Campsites dot the trail corridor, often where the trail accesses a lake. The trail is maintained by the Border Route Trail Club. Due to its remoteness, the Border Route Trail sees fewer users and is maintained less often than other trails in Cook County. Expect windfalls, be trained in orientation, and be prepared for emergencies when using the trail. ([website](#))
 - Kekekabic Trail. The Kekekabic Trail is another remote and rugged wilderness trail. Affectionately called the “Kek,” this 44 mile path crosses the heart of the BWCA, well away from any roadways. The eastern half of the trail is in Cook County, the remainder is in Lake County. Users of the Kek should be trained in orientation and be prepared for emergencies when using the trail. The Kek should only be tackled by experienced hikers in good physical shape. The Kekekabic Trail Club assists in keeping the trail maintained. ([website](#))
 - Brule Lake/Eagle Mountain Trail. The Brule Lake/Eagle Mountain Trail is located on the edge of the BWCAW on the Superior National Forest. The trail can be accessed from both the north and south ends via the Brule Lake Road (FR 326) and the Grade (FR 170), respectively. The trail is about 10 miles in total length, including a spur that accesses the summit of Eagle Mountain, Minnesota’s highest point. Much of the trail is within the BWCAW and Wilderness permits are required throughout the year.

Additionally, many people of all ages enjoy *walking* for exercise and for going about their daily routines. Officials from MnDOT, Cook County, Grand Marais, Grand Portage and other local entities should seek to eliminate barriers to walking in Cook County communities. Pedestrian facilities should be addressed in community land use and transportation planning processes. In more developed areas, sidewalks should be in place and kept free of snow in the winter. In rural areas, wide shoulders on roadways should be strived for. Having these facilities can mean that residents and visitors can directly access some of the County’s trails without having to use an

automobile, therefore easing parking needs and opening trail opportunities to people that do not own cars for personal or financial reasons.

Running on roads, sidewalks, and trails is another popular activity. Running race events are often part of communities. Accommodating runners in Cook County should be a priority.

Issues and opportunities regarding hiking trails and walking routes in Cook County include:

- Superior Hiking Trail's use of private right of way. The SHT has negotiated the right to pass through some privately held land parcels in key locations. This can expose the trail to closure if the property owner desires it.
- Trailheads and Parking. SHT access points often shares parking and information kiosks with the area's other trails and wayside rests. Parking can become tight and the amount of information provided at kiosks is sometimes minimal.
- Roadway construction projects. Entities in Cook County should work to incorporate walking and biking elements into the construction and reconstruction/improvements of public roadways when possible.
- Collaboration with regard to road maintenance for roads accessing trailheads.

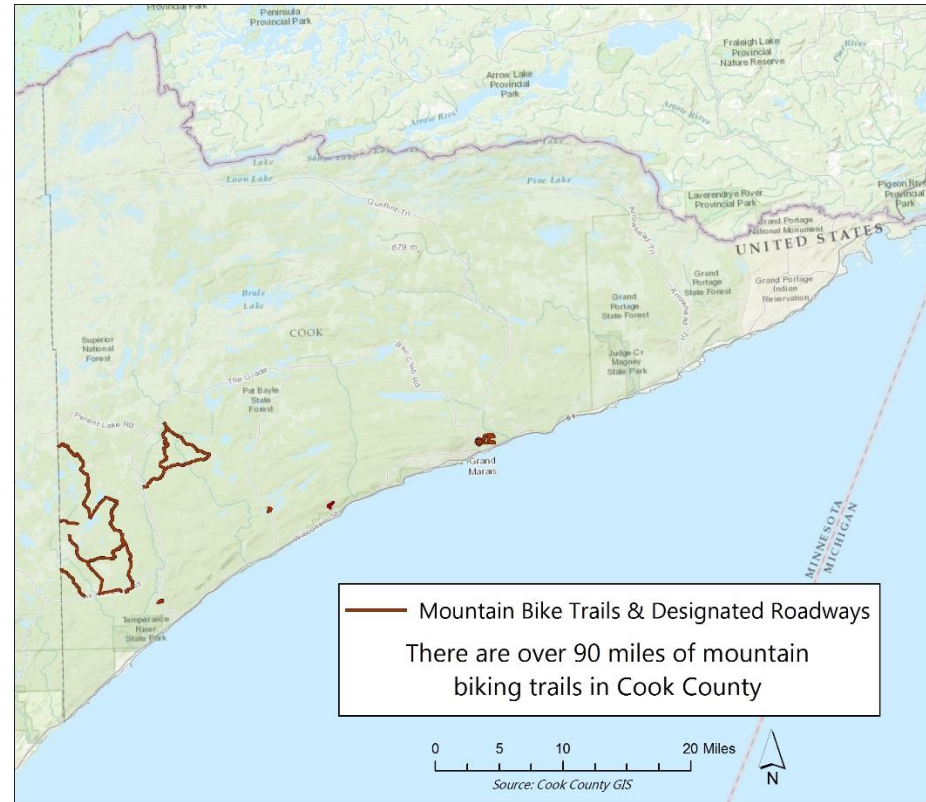


Superior National Forest Bog Walk

Mountain Biking

Mountain Biking is a rapidly growing activity in Cook County with multiple designated trail systems and gravel road opportunities. Mountain bike races, including the Lutsen 99er and the Sawtooth Challenge have become significant events. The Superior Cycling Association ([website](#)) maintains two main trail systems in collaboration with the Superior National Forest.

- Britton Peak is located just off the Sawbill Trail (now a roadway) north of Tofte. There are about 5.5 miles of single track trails located on the ridge above Lake Superior. Parking for these trails also serves the Superior Hiking Trail (two major overlooks are within short distances). These trails are not maintained for winter biking. In winter, the Sugarbush Cross Country Ski Trail system also is accessed from this area.
- The Pincushion Mountain bike system is located on the Gunflint Trail just north of Grand Marais. It shares access facilities with the Pincushion Mountain ski trail system. There are currently about 10 miles of single track trails at this site. These trails are not currently available or maintained for winter biking.



Another biking style in Cook County is gravel road cycling. The many miles of forest roads in the County offer opportunities for users on bike to explore the interior of the County on lightly used gravel/natural surface roads. These roads and routes are generally not designated for biking but can provide significant miles of scenic and interesting routes. Roads have been identified by Visit Cook County and the Superior National Forest that offer good connections and experiences ([map](#)). Additional information regarding gravel road riding options is available at Visit Cook County or Superior National Forest District Offices.

Issues and opportunities regarding mountain biking in Cook County include:

- Expanding existing mountain bike trail systems and creating connections. The Superior Cycling Association is seeking to connect the County's mountain bike trails to offer a more varied and longer trail system. The goal is to increase miles and connections to draw additional use, increasing mountain biking's economic influence and encouraging local residents to participate in trail maintenance activities. A mountain bike trail connecting Pincushion to Lutsen Mountains and to Britton Peak is a goal, with a long term vision to connect Cook County to Lake County Trails and eventually all the way to the City of Duluth. Cook County seeks to become an International Mountain Bike Association official destination.
- Long term trail maintenance. The Britton Peak and Pincushion Trail Systems are maintained by a group of volunteers in partnership with the Superior National Forest. An expanding system means more trail maintenance, recruitment of additional volunteers in collaboration with existing partnerships and the Northwoods Volunteer Connection should be a high priority. Recruiting more volunteers and/or raising funds for paid maintenance may be needed.
- Creation of a regional park featuring mountain biking at Sawtooth Bluff that has connections with the Cook County Community Center, ISD 166, downtown Grand Marais, Pincushion Mountain, and gravel road riding opportunities.
- Gravel road biking and ATV/OHM/OHV interactions. The area's forest roads are noted as being good biking resources, and they are also the primary resources for ATV/OHM/OHV users in the County. Safe riding opportunities for all users is the goal and needs to be emphasized across all user groups.

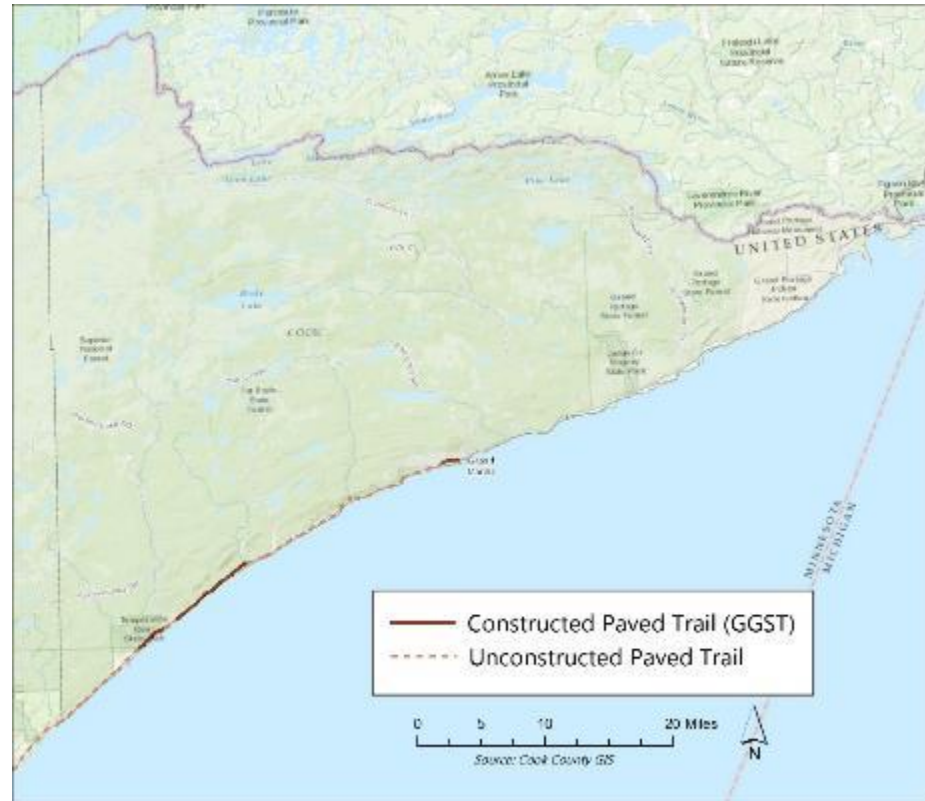
Britton Peak Trail



Paved Road/Paved Trail Bicycling

Paved *Road Bicycling* (including paved trails) is another popular activity in Cook County, although designated facilities are more limited. The *Gitchi-Gami State Trail (GGST)* is a paved, non-motorized trail that parallels the North Shore of Lake Superior. Planned to connect Two Harbors (in Lake County) to Grand Marais (88 miles), there are currently about 30 miles (2016) constructed miles of trail. The MnDNR is the administrator of the trail and the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association also promotes this facility. Their [website](#) includes an interactive map tour of the trail. In Cook County, completed segments include:

- Schroeder to Tofte (2.8 miles). This segment begins at an area of adequate parking on the inland side of Highway 61 in Schroeder. Heading east, the paved trail crosses through Temperance River State Park, with a spur route connecting to the Park's campground. From the State Park the trail continues to Tofte on the inland side of Highway 61, terminating near the Tofte District Ranger Station at a signed crossing of Highway 61 at Tofte Town Road.
- Tofte to Lutsen (7.3 miles). There is a one-mile gap in the Gitchi-Gami State Trail at Tofte. From the east side of Tofte, the trail begins again and heads out on the lakeside of Highway 61. After passing several residences and lodging businesses, the trail passes through a wooded area owned by MnDOT. At Lutsen, the trail goes under Highway 61 through a tunnel and uses a bridge to cross the Poplar River before terminating at an unimproved parking area at Ski Hill Road. An additional mile of trail is need to connect Ski Hill Road to Lutsen Town Center, an area with community businesses and Grand View Park.
- In Grand Marais, the Gitchi-Gami Trail is on the lake side of Highway 61 heading east to downtown Grand Marais, where cyclists can use striped bike lanes to maneuver through the community, cross Highway 61 at a stoplight, and continue west on paved



trail, which terminates at the Gunflint Trail intersection with 61. In Grand Marais, the Trail is administered and maintained by the City rather than the State through town.

- The new bridge at Cutface Creek (2015) has been constructed by MnDOT to accommodate the Gitchi-Gami State Trail in the future. It has a separated path and the approaches have been graded for the trail.
- In Grand Portage there is a relatively short paved route connecting community destinations.
- Another bicycling opportunity in Cook County is on paved road shoulders. These facilities are limited, however. West of Grand Marais, the generally narrow shoulders and high traffic amounts mean Highway 61 is not a desirable bicycling destination. To the east, however, between Grand Marais and Grand Portage, Highway 61 has wide, paved shoulders. This section of roadway passes broad Lake Superior view sheds and undeveloped beaches, making for a great cycling experience. Other paved roads in the County, including the lower part of the Sawbill Trail, the Gunflint Trail, County Road 7, and Devil Track Road are not desirable locations for most cyclists due to narrow shoulder widths. Within Grand Marais, several roads and streets are also very bikeable. Off of Highway 61, Grand Portage has a short section paved shoulder available for biking by its residents.

Issues and opportunities regarding road biking in Cook County include:

- Completion of the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. The paved trail is a great way for residents to be active and this type of bicycling is popular with tourists, including seniors and younger families. A completed paved trail would be a significant economic asset to Cook County. Currently, the trail's completion is advancing slowly due to its expense and the needs of many trails around the State. Cook County should work with MnDNR, the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association, and the State Legislature to expedite its construction. Currently planned projects include:
 - Elimination of the one mile gap in Tofte. The Minnesota DNR has secured some of the funding that is needed to construct paved trail between the west and east ends of the community. A community design process determined a preferred route and the MnDNR is now working to complete engineering documents for trail construction. Additional funds may be need to complete the project.
 - Construction of the trail extending west from Grand Marais to Cutface Creek. This project has some funds in place, and as stated, the bridge has been constructed to accommodate the trail. The Gitchi-Gami Trail Association has requested funding through the State bonding process to secure the rest of the funds needed for this section.
 - Plans for additional segments have been reviewed and discussed in the 2015 Gitchi-Gami State Trail Plan Update and Scoping Project document. Go to www.ggta.org for more information.
- Biking in the City of Grand Marais and other communities should be promoted. Road construction and maintenance should be done in a fashion that does not create barriers to biking and biking should be incorporated into future planning processes. This

has been addressed in the Grand Marais downtown area through a community design process in 2015. The City and MnDOT have worked together to plan a much more bikeable and walkable system surrounding Highway 61. It includes separate bike lanes, shortened pedestrian crossing lengths and aesthetic improvements. The City and MnDOT secured funding for the project, which is set for construction in 2019.

- Wider paved shoulders on roadways should be promoted in Cook County and Grand Portage, especially in areas of higher populations. Paved shoulders offer a route for residents and visitors to be active through biking and can connect visitors with bigger facilities such as the Gitchi-Gami State Trail directly from their motel room or campsite, easing crowding at parking locations. Wider paved shoulders should be advocated for when rural roadways are resurfaced or reconstructed. Land use and transportation plans should incorporate biking facilities.
- Long distance bicycle touring does occur in Cook County, as cyclists will use Highway 61 and the Gitchi-Gami State Trail on cross-country or other long treks. In addition to safe routes, available campsites are important to these users and long distance trekkers often cannot predict where they will end up each evening. Campground administrators should consider a “no turn away” policy for these cyclists to ensure they can find places to stay for a single night. Generally, these users travel light and their camping gear is low-impact and does not require extensive space. It can be noted that as of April 2016, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has begun a planning process to designate a national bike route – US Bike Route 41 – that will stretch from St. Paul to Grand Portage. Addressing long distance cyclists will be a part of that process.



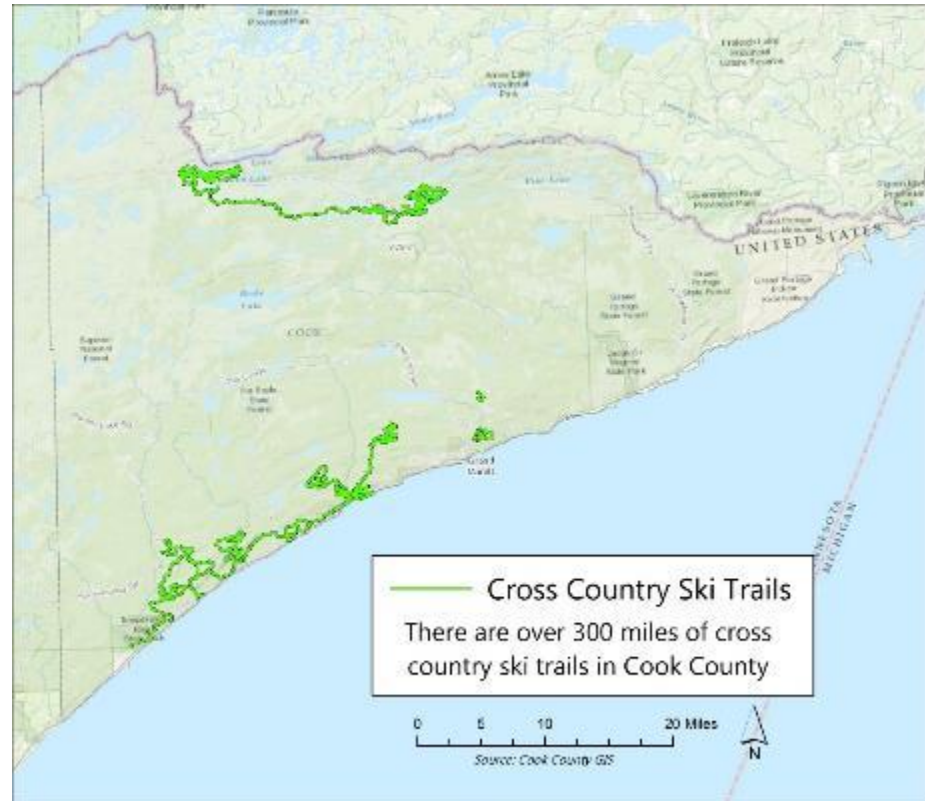
Gitchi-Gami State Trail near Tofte

Skiing

Skiing is a popular activity in Cook County. Downhill runs are found on the hills of Lutsen Mountains and cross country skiing opportunities are spread throughout the County. Visit Cook County ([website](#)), the Superior National Forest, and businesses in the County provide information about the trails and there are resorts and equipment outfitters near all of the trail systems. Some resorts and outfitters provide shuttle services for visitors. Ski trails in the County are administered and maintained in a variety of ways and some trails receive State of Minnesota Grant-In-Aid funding (similar to snowmobile trails). Most ski trails in Cook County are maintained by small, non-profit, trail associations that often use volunteers for maintenance. Note – ski trails are traditionally measured in kilometers (km).

Ski trails include:

- The Banadad Trail System. The Banadad Trail Association maintains and grooms 43 km of trail in partnership with the Superior National Forest near the central part of the Gunflint Trail. As authorized by the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act of 1978, the Banadad Trail is groomed by snowmobile. Skiers are required to have a Minnesota Ski Pass and a BWCAW day permit (free and available at Superior National Forest permit boxes located at either end of the Banadad). Public parking is found at both ends of the Banadad and is free.
- Central Gunflint Ski Trails. This is a network of cross country ski trails on the Superior National Forest that is maintained by Golden Eagle Lodge and Bearskin Lodge under a Special Use Permit with the Superior National Forest, Gunflint Ranger District. One section of trail in the BWCAW is also groomed by snowmobile as authorized by the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act of 1978. A Central Gunflint Ski Pass, available for a fee at Golden Eagle or Bearskin Lodges is required as well as BWCAW day permit if traveling on the wilderness section of trail. There are 98 km of groomed trails. Lighted night skiing is also available.



- The Upper Gunflint Ski Trails have 70 km on the Superior National Forest and maintained under a Special Use Permit between Gunflint Lodge and the Superior National Forest, Gunflint Ranger District. A ski pass is required and available for a fee at multiple resorts in the area offer lodging and are directly connected to the trail system.
- Bally Creek Ski Trails are cross country ski trails stemming from a public parking lot and access on USFS Rd. #158 next to Bear Track Camp. They consist of 25km of groomed ski trails with spur trail linking Cascade State Park. Dogs are welcome on a 1km skijoring trail and a 4k snowshoe loop. The trails are maintained by Bear Track Outfitters in partnership with the Superior National Forest. A Minnesota Ski Pass is required.
- Just north of Grand Marais, the Pincushion Mountain Trail System is a series of maintained loops offering a variety of distances and difficulties. There are 25 km of trails on the hills overlooking Lake Superior. Pincushion's ski facilities are managed by the North Superior Ski and Run Club in partnership with the Superior National Forest. A Minnesota Ski Pass is required.
- The George Washington Memorial Forest ski trail is a three kilometer loop and publicly maintained by the Superior National Forest. It is located off the Gunflint Trail just north of Grand Marais. Skijoring (skiing while being pulled by a dog) and snowshoeing are allowed on this trail. This trail is open to the public free of charge.
- The Sugarbush Trail System is just off the Sawbill Trail (County Road 2) north of Tofte. There are 77 km of ski trails maintained by the Sugarbush Trail Association in partnership with the Superior National Forest near Oberg Mountain, Britton Peak, and the "Moose Fence" site. The trails provide views of Lake Superior at some locations. A Minnesota Ski Pass is required.
- The Norpine Trail Association trail system runs from the Ski Hill Road (Cook County 5) east along the shore including the Hall/Massie loops, trails across Hwy 61 at Solbakken Resort to Cascade Lodge. The trail system continues north on the historic Pioneer Loop, Lookout Mountain to loops near Deeryard Lake. The 57 km of trails are maintained by Norpine in partnership with the Superior National Forest. A Minnesota Ski Pass is required.

Issues and opportunities regarding skiing in Cook County include:

- Maintaining and grooming ski trails are big tasks and nearly all the ski trails in Cook County are maintained by volunteers. Cook County's aging population means that volunteer pool may be shrinking. Clubs are working hard to get people involved.
- There are many resources that promote skiing in Cook County. Maps and real-time trail condition reports should be consolidated into one definitive source. More accurate GPS mapping of ski trails should be developed as part of that effort.
- Additional and better maintenance equipment is needed. Ski trail administrators should collaborate with Cook County and other administrators when making purchases and seek out ways to share expensive equipment when appropriate. Storage buildings and maintenance sheds could also be a part of this discussion. See Recommendations Type 1: Policies.
- New and improved connections between trail systems should be considered.

- Backcountry skiing (ungroomed cross-country and downhill skiing) is a growing activity around the nation. Cook County could look for ways to promote this activity.



Photo Courtesy of Visit Cook County

Water Trails/Paddling

Water Trails abound in Cook County, but there is actually only one truly designated route – the Lake Superior Water Trail ([website](#)). The Minnesota portion of the Lake Superior Water Trail extends from the St. Louis Bay in Duluth to the Pigeon River on the Canadian border, a distance of approximately 150 miles. Cooperative efforts in Ontario, Wisconsin, Michigan and First Nations will develop a Water Trail completely around Lake Superior, primarily for use by sea kayakers. The development and maintenance of the Water Trail is a joint effort of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Lake Superior Water Trail Association of Minnesota. There are a few designated kayak campsites along the North Shore, but most services and facilities available to kayakers will be in State Parks, public boat accesses, and communities. Of course, as the world’s biggest freshwater lake that stays a chilly temperature year round, caution is imperative. Having knowledge of where emergency take outs are located is a good idea – the North Shore’s cliffs and rocks mean that you cannot exit the lake just anywhere if the wind comes up. Motorized and sail powered crafts also travel on Lake Superior, but for long distance travelers, there are only a few safe harbors along the route. Grand Portage, Grand Marais, and Taconite Harbor are the primary protected locations. The boat landings at Horseshoe Bay and Tofte and the rock beach at Sugarloaf Cove offer only very limited protection.

Inland, lakes and rivers offer endless possibilities for paddlers. There are 35 official BWCAW entry points in the County, and routes based from those points can take adventurers to secluded spots (including those in Ontario’s Quetico Provincial Park) that are miles from the nearest roadway. Wilderness recreation requires careful planning and preparation and involves some risk. Wilderness travel offers great personal freedom, but also requires self-reliance and good judgement. Portages and campsites are maintained by the Superior National Forest. BWCAW travelers must have a valid permit (available at the USDA Forest Service’s Tofte and Gunflint Ranger Stations and outfitter-cooperators) and must camp in a site designated by the presence of a fire grate and a latrine (in the snow free season). Motorboats are permitted on specific lakes per the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act of 1978. In Cook County these lakes include East Bearskin, portions of Saganaga (both limited to boats with 25 hp motors) and Clearwater and portions of Sea Gull (both limited to 10 hp motors). Day use motor permits are needed for these lakes in the BWCAW.

Water travel routes are also available outside the BWCAW boundary in Cook County. Opportunities outside the BWCAW offer some benefits. Permits are not required and you can start and end your trip wherever and whenever you choose. Routes outside the BWCAW in Cook County include: Gunflint Lake, Little Gunflint Lake, Little North Lake, and North Lake; Moss Lake; Cascade Lake; and many others. Information on campsites outside the BWCAW is available from the Superior National Forest: [website](#).

Cook County operates watercraft accesses at two Saganaga Lake locations (parking, latrines), Clearwater Lake (parking) Leo Lake (parking) and Chicago Bay (parking). The County also manages a water access site and day use area (swimming/picnic) at McFarland Lake.

Issues and opportunities regarding water routes in Cook County include:

- Crowding at the Clearwater Lake access is noted as an issue.
- Promotion of river routes, including whitewater routes if accompanied by proper safety measures, could occur.

Canoeing on Brule Lake, BWCAW



Dog Sledding

Mushing is a popular activity in Cook County, and has a rich history here. The area is home to more sled dogs than any other place in the United States outside of Alaska³. The history of mushing goes back to Native American use, the fur trade, and John Beargrease and others delivering mail in the late 19th Century. Cook County Dog Musers, a non-profit organization, has over 25 kennels as members. In eastern Cook County there are over 100 miles of trails for use by mushers. Cook County mushers have been pioneers in the sport, including Tim White of Colvill, a designer of modern racing sleds, and Mark Nordman, who is currently the Iditarod Race Marshall.

Some kennels offer their use to visitors interested in mushing or seeking to access remote areas of the County, including the BWCAW, by dogsled. Resorts partner with kennels to offer mushing and/or dog sled rides to customers. Some kennels are very involved in racing. Cook County is home to part or all of the routes for three race events, including the Gunflint Mail Run, the Dog Days of Winter (formerly Mush for a Cure), and the John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon. Some resorts offer mushing as an activity for guests.

Called *skijoring*, cross country skiing while being pulled by a dog or two is a good way to cover some territory and get you and your pets some exercise. Only a few groomed ski trails allow skjoring, but unplowed roads and packed mushing trails can be utilized for this activity in Cook County.

Photo courtesy of Frank Moe



Mushing in a Cook County Race

Established in 1980, the [John Beargrease Sled Dog Marathon](#) is the longest sled dog race in the lower 48 states. The nearly 400 mile event is a qualifier for the famed Iditarod race in Alaska. The organization hosts a Mid-Distance race as well; like the marathon mushers, the mid distance racers also travel through the rugged hills of the North Shore of Minnesota. Check points and road crossings are easily accessible to the public and provide many opportunities for viewing and cheering on the canine and human athletes. Close to 500 volunteers from around the country come together each winter to assure the event happens. Much of the race miles and multiple checkpoints are on trails in Cook County.

³ According to Cook County Dog Musers, a non-profit organization

Fat Tire Biking

This growing sport uses mountain bikes with oversized tires to keep riders on top of packed snow trails. Sales of fat bike tires have grown by more than six-times in terms of both dollar and unit sales since 2013⁴.

Currently the mountain bike trails that are located on Superior National Forest lands are not allowed to be groomed for winter use by fat tire bikes. Discussions could be held with the Superior National Forest to determine if there are ways to mitigate the impact of groomed bike trails. Unplowed forest roads do offer opportunities for fat bike enthusiasts.

Mushing, skijoring, and fat tire biking all have limited designated areas to use, but all three require the same types of facilities (relatively slow speeds, non-motorized). People enjoying these types of use could collaborate to identify and maintain key routes and promote their use for the sport of their choice. Also, snowshoeing can be an effective way of packing trails for fat tire bike use.

Note that bicycles are a mechanized form of transportation and their use is prohibited in the BWCAW as per the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act of 1978.



Winter Biking (photo courtesy of Superior Cycling Association)

⁴ NPD Group, October 2015

Snowshoeing

Snowshoes are notable because of their ability to use ungroomed snow routes. They are not allowed on groomed ski trails. State Parks and the Superior National Forest generally allow snowshoes on their hiking trails and Grand Portage State Park has six miles of designated snowshoe trails. Lutsen Mountains has snowshoe areas as well. Another popular snowshoe activity is to travel North Shore river valleys. The frozen rivers allow access to areas never viewed by summer visitors. Steep canyons and frozen waterfalls are highlights. Also, snowshoeing and winter camping in the BWCAW is an activity enjoyed by those with the proper permits, experience, and equipment. Finally, the Superior Hiking Trail sees significant snowshoe use in areas with open and usable access points.



Kadunce Creek State Wayside: Lake Superior often does not freeze, offering a winter kayaking opportunity.

Horseback Riding

Summertime equestrian uses of ski and snowmobile trails occur in the upper Gunflint area where a stable is maintained for use by clients of local lodging facilities. Additionally, the Sawtooth Mountain Riders, a Saddle Club in Cook County, promotes riding among its members. The Club holds rides around the County on forest roads, and maintains an arena at the Gunflint Trail Horse Park in Grand Marais. The Club seeks to increase the horseback infrastructure in Cook County. Currently the CJ Ramstad/North Shore State Trail is designated as equestrian trail, but has limited use due to wetlands. Additionally, the club would like to see horse camping facilities developed in Cook County. In other locations in Minnesota, campsites for horse riders are located near, but not adjacent to, regular campsites and offer room for trailers. Some sites include manure disposal facilities. Developing/designating horseback trails and facilities could be beneficial to the Cook County economy by drawing additional visitors to the area.

History

The history of Cook County and Grand Portages are an important part of the community and its culture. Trails, including the Grand Portage, the border canoe route, the John Bearskin historical mushing trail, and the Lake Superior Water Trail are a major component of that history. Including historical interpretation on those trails where appropriate is an opportunity in Cook County. Additionally, chaining together historical sites and interpretation locations can create a virtual “History Trail” supported by mobile device apps or paper maps. Cook County supports historical stakeholders’ efforts to create such trails.

Art

Cook County and Grand Portage have a thriving art culture. The natural and historical features of the County have incubated and attracted artists of all kinds. Award winning photographers, nationally known painters, traditional Native American artists, and many others all make Cook County and Grand Portage home. The Grand Marais Art Colony is the oldest such colony in Minnesota and is still thriving ([website](#)). The North House Folk School teaches traditional crafts and arts to students from all the over the world ([website](#)). Grand Portage National Monument holds events featuring traditional crafts and skills. The Grand Portage Band displays Native art at Grand Portage State Park and its other facilities. Cook County seeks to support the community’s art as it pertains to trails. Featuring local art on signage and at trail hubs is a unique opportunity. Chaining together studios and art displays could create a virtual “Artist’s Trail” that could be supported by mobile device apps or paper maps.

Section Four: Recommendations

The Cook County Comprehensive Trails Plan Committee seeks to implement the following actions. Detailed descriptions are in the table following the general summary.

Recommendations Type 1: Policies

Guidelines, regulations, and other policies and administrative matters were reviewed and discussed by the Cook County Trails Committee. Ideas regarding economic impacts, environmental rules, funding, maintenance agreements, long range planning, trail construction standards, training requirements, education, sign standardization and language, insurance, volunteer coordination, and other points were examined. Note these recommendations are currently just suggested actions and that existing laws, regulations, and policies of the landowner or land managers remain in place until further notice. Full details of the recommendations stemming from the discussion and user group input are found in the recommendation table under Type 1: Policies, but some recommendations stand out.

Explore the creation of a cooperative trail maintenance system in Cook County and Grand Portage. Representatives from all trail modes and locations should gather and work to devise a cooperative maintenance system that would ease workloads, save money, and address equipment shortages. Considerations could include the development of a central maintenance body that would buy, store, and lend/rent expensive maintenance equipment on behalf of all the involved trail entities. The entities would work with that body to prioritize equipment use and ensure all trails are maintained. The central maintenance body could also hire and manage professional trail maintenance staff or non-profit maintenance crews (such as the Minnesota Conservation Corps) if it is determined to be warranted. Note that the maintenance addressed here likely does not include snow grooming. As all trails require grooming on tight timelines after snowfalls, individual trail administrators would continue to be responsible for their own trail grooming.

Consider the creation of a Cook County Parks and Trails Department or equivalent body. Cook County will need to take an active role in implementing the recommendations of this plan. The County itself currently has very limited trail and parking administration/maintenance responsibility, but, many of the recommendations in this document are multi-jurisdictional in nature and would not likely be proposed by any entity other than the County. Creating a Parks and Trails Department could give the County a platform for leading these improvements and the County could assist trail management entities with maintenance, volunteer organization, grant management, and equipment ownership and maintenance. In addition to the Cook County Board of Commissioners, the Department could receive oversight from an appointed commission of stakeholders. The Department would be the entity

responsible for seeing that the recommendations in this plan are implemented and updated over time. They would be responsible for developing plan amendments and seeing that amendments are reviewed and adopted by the County Board. The new department could also take on the role of managing the County's Grant-in-Aid agreements with user groups and clubs. The department could ensure that all GIA trails are maintained to the required level of the State. A Parks and Trails Department would involve some expense, although it is likely that the initial investment would be minimal, growing only when opportunities are identified. This strategic investment could enable significant economic growth in the area through increases in trail use. The Department could initially be staffed through minor organizational restructuring at the County and grow as needed. A County Parks and Trails Department could be the entity that staffs the cooperative trail maintenance body referred to earlier in this section.

Continue to *encourage and enable collaborations* between land management entities, Cook County, user groups, tourism promotion organizations and other groups as identified to ensure the availability of high quality recreation facilities in Cook County into the future. User groups are encouraged to develop long range plans in close collaboration with land management agencies to work towards development of mutually beneficial objectives and goals. As budgets and priorities evolve at federal, state, and other government levels, these collaborations may be needed to make sure trails, campgrounds, access routes, and other vital recreation sites are kept open to the public and maintained at a level that reflects the values of Cook County and its residents and visitors. Having a County Parks Department could provide a platform for maintaining federal and state level sites and roads through unique collaborations. This platform could include working with clubs and user groups on the maintenance of low-level forest roads, which serve as de-facto trails for many users.

Work to collaboratively *review State Park trail systems* and develop ideas enhancing their connectivity and use. The Cook County Trails Task Forces seeks to collaborate with the MnDNR regarding State Park trail systems and work with other trail entities to determine if trails can be integrated, expanded, or improved through collaboration with nearby non-State Park trails. State Park trails that could become a part of a bigger system that is maintained by a collaboration with user groups, such as the National Forest does, could be a benefit to all parties. State Park trails could possibly diversify their uses, including having more trails available for winter uses, and have those trails maintained by trained volunteers. Expanded use of State Park trails as connections into the larger Cook County system could open up the typically very modern and well maintained parking areas, restrooms and other services already offered at the Parks to users, easing pressure at other trail hubs. It could also show more users what State Parks have to offer.

Complete an *economic impact study* regarding trails in Cook County. Seek to work with the University of Minnesota and/or other partners to review what the current trails' impact is on the economy of Cook County. Seek to determine how the improvements recommended in this plan would increase that economic impact.

Due to vegetation clearing and traffic, trails can be a significant contributor to the introduction and expansion of *invasive species*. Cook County, state and federal land managers, trail maintenance officials, volunteers, and trail users should work together to review best practices regarding invasive species and to implement projects and education opportunities to address this issue. Related to this issue is the potential use of *herbicides* for trail maintenance. Trail and public land administrators should review herbicide use and determine if action is warranted. Note that the Superior National Forest only uses herbicides in the control of invasive species.

Cook County and all of its trail partners and users should strive to have all trails and related facilities be as *sustainable and inclusive* as possible. This includes using Americans with Disabilities Act best practices where possible and using local materials and contractors for projects when possible. It also means reaching out to minorities and people that don't often use trails in order to allow them to more easily enjoy Cook County's trail bounty.

Trail stakeholders in Cook County should work together to ensure recreational routes are *properly signed* for safety and navigation purposes. Routes are a part of the critical trail infrastructure and the maintenance of these roads is an opportunity for additional collaboration. Note signs on County roads are administered by the Cook County Highway Department.

Additional policy recommendations are found on the next page.

Lake Superior shore near Grand Marais



#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
1A	Seek a process and funding for ensuring that Superior National Forest attractions continue if the Forest were to cease maintenance.	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	Superior National Forest	Cook County should monitor National Forest plans and work to acquire funding to continue use of facilities. This action would be enhanced by the creation of a County Parks Department.
1B	Establish a County Parks Department or equivalent entity	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Consider the development of County Parks department in order to manage Trail Hubs, work with other trail partners, advocate for trails in the County, and possibly administer a centralized maintenance facility.
1C	Collaboratively identify and seek grant funding	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Cook County should actively monitor grant programs, apply for grants when appropriate, assist other entities with grant applications, and serve as the grant fiscal agent when needed. This could ease the burden on trail clubs. Communication among all groups should occur when new funding sources are identified.
1D	Collaboratively work to ensure NEPA guidelines and rules are met, particularly by smaller volunteer organizations	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Cook County and other larger entities with experience should assist smaller entities with required documents and processes involving federal environmental rules or best practices. Knowledge of trails standards differences between federal, state, and other funding sources should be shared.
1E	Review State Park trail opportunities for collaboration	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	MnDNR	All Cook County Trail Entities	The MnDNR should review State Park trail systems and work with other trail entities to determine if trails can be integrated, expanded, or improved through collaboration with nearby non-State Park trails.
1F	Collaborate with Superior National Forest on Long-range Recreation Planning	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Trail entities should participate in and collaborate with Superior National Forest planning efforts. Cooperatively address concerns.
1G	Monitor GIA funding benchmarks	Type 1: Policies	Cook County Snowmobile Clubs	Cook County	GIA User Groups, MnDNR	Cook County should monitor Grant-In-Aid trail maintenance and ensure all recipient groups are meeting minimum maintenance benchmarks.
1H	Connect volunteers with entities needing them and continue to educate volunteers about safety standards	Type 1: Policies	Cook County Ski Clubs	Northland Volunteer Connection	Cook County, user groups, land management agencies, Volunteer Connection	Federal and other entities' standards for training volunteers (e.g. chainsaw training) should continue to be communicated to potential volunteers. Use the Northwoods Volunteer Connection to connect volunteers with entities needing them.
1I	Continue to follow trail construction standards in Cook County and develop	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Construction standards for all trails should be created and implemented across the County. Widths, slopes, surface, drainage, and other components being constructed in a standard way can create a cohesive system and ensure long term success of new trails.
1J	Create maintenance plans for all trails that include strategies for engaging volunteers into the future	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities, Volunteer Connection	Requiring that all trail groups develop a long term maintenance plan will ensure that each trail has a realistic system in place for maintaining trails into the future and that financial issues or unsafe conditions should not arise. Maintenance Plans would address aging volunteer bases, financial sustainability, MCC assistance, potential for shared resources, and more.
1K	Review powerline right of ways for trail connection opportunities	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County GIS	Power Line Companies, Land Owners, Trail Entities	Work with power companies and land owners to determine trail use possibilities. Powerline corridors are already cleared of brush and trees, which could contribute to the reduction of trail building and maintenance costs.
1L	Designate and Preserve Historic Trails	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County Historical Society	All Cook County Trail Entities	There is a desire to designate and preserve the historic character and significance for trails within the county. Future construction and maintenance on trails deemed historical will need to address historical preservation. A possible outcome of this action item will be to develop a system for providing treatment and maintenance of historical trails.
1M	Work to connect trail systems to developed communities and services	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Work ensure that, when possible, trails connect to communities, residents, businesses, and other services in order to maximize economic impact and convenience.
1N	Expand use of ISD 166 Trails	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	ISD 166	City of Grand Marais	Promote, map, and connect other trails to the ISD 166 trails. School district trail connections will provide a more comprehensive network in the Grand Marais area.
1O	Educate users on trail rules and etiquette and enforce rules when necessary	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Improve signage on trail kiosks and digital sources. Create a collaborative team to determine additional education steps. Work with law enforcement entities to enforce rules when necessary. Determine if problem areas exist and request enforcement as identified.
1P	Standardize trail signage	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	In order to accommodate emergency personnel and to ease confusion, a standard system of trail signage, location markers, and information materials should be developed by a collaborative team and implemented.
1Q	Implement ADA facilities when possible	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	All trail entities should examine all improvement projects to determine if the trail or trail sections can be constructed to ADA standards. All entities should work to provide ADA accessibility in at least some of their facilities.
1R	Collaborate regarding liability insurance and emergency maintenance funding	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee, Cook County Snowmobile Clubs	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Cook County should lead a process to examine liability insurance costs and concerns, particularly by volunteer based organizations, and determine if a collaborative solution is feasible. The County should consider working with user groups to create a trail emergency maintenance fund.
1S	Assist with user group planning	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Assistance could be provided by larger entities to smaller user groups in the area of planning. The County could provide technical assistance in mapping and routing options to encourage user groups to plan future development of trails.
1T	Explore a centralized maintenance structure for all Cook County user administered trails	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Determine the feasibility of creating one body to coordinate maintenance of trails maintained by user groups. Efficiencies would be created through the sharing of storage facilities, equipment, personnel, and volunteers.
1U	Continue to promote Cook County trails	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Visit Cook County	Cook County, user groups, tourism groups	Look for events and activities that can promote the trails for tourism and volunteer recruitment.
1V	Establish a working group to implement Cook County Comprehensive Trails Plan	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Consider the creation of an ongoing group that would be responsible for the implementation and updating of this plan. That group could serve under or simply be the proposed Cook County Parks Commission.
1W	Develop a Plan Amendment Process	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Create a policy on how this Plan is regularly reviewed, updated, and amended.
1X	Complete an economic impact analysis on Cook County trails.	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	University of Minnesota, all Cook County Trail Entities	The County should contact the University of Minnesota and work with them to analyze Cook County's trails and trail users to determine what the impact of the trails is on Cook County's economy. This type of study has been done in the past for other locations.
1Y	Work to make Cook County trails as sustainable and inclusive as possible.	Type 1: Policies	Public	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Use Americans with Disabilities Act best practices where possible and use local materials and contractors for projects when possible. Reach out to minorities and people that don't often use trails. Consider using Ojibwe wording on signage in addition to English. Consider using QR codes or other methods to provide audio readings of signage and interpretive panels.
1Z	Work to limit the impact trails have on invasive species introduction and expansion, review the possible use of herbicides for trail maintenance	Type 1: Policies	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Stakeholders should work together to review invasive species best practices and work to implement steps to address this issue. Educate trail maintenance volunteers and trail users. The same entities should review the possible use of herbicides for trail maintenance purposes.

Recommendation Type 2: Multi-Use Trail Hubs

A desire to identify and improve existing trail hubs and to create new ones in key locations is a priority of the Cook County Trails Committee. The Committee identifies Trail Hubs as sites that provide access to multiple trail systems and offer, or have the potential to offer, important features, including parking, information, and services. The Committee envisions a network of trail hubs spread through the County that have uniform aesthetic features tying them together and identifying them as Cook County Trail Hubs. Trail Hubs could offer a variety of levels of service, ranging from a few key “primary” hubs to several “secondary” hubs. All hubs should strive to meet accessibility standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) whenever feasible.

Primary Hubs should:

- Serve multiple trail systems and be used year round
- Offer ample, organized parking
- Offer a large information kiosk that should feature, in addition to information about the immediately adjacent trails, items on:
 - The entire Cook County trail system
 - Trail access points that are near, but not connected to the hub
 - Trail safety and etiquette
 - Emergency contacts
 - Area businesses
 - Area trail clubs, their membership programs, and volunteer opportunities
 - Local history
 - Local art
- If feasible, have lighting (lighting should not inhibit night sky views and could be charged by renewable resources)
- Have bicycle repair tool stations (if biking is a use)
- Have picnic facilities/shelters
- Have latrines/rest rooms and, if feasible, potable water

Secondary Hubs should:

- Be strategically located
- Serve at least one trail system and use
- Offer parking
- Offer a small information kiosk with items on:
 - Immediately adjacent trails
 - Other nearby trails
 - Trail safety and etiquette
 - Emergency contacts
 - Local history
- Latrine

Dog friendly trails and dog parks were expressed as a desire during the public input process of this document. Dog facilities could be considered when trail hubs are developed. The possibility of creating dog parks in Cook County would be enhanced if interested dog owners led the planning and development process, perhaps through an established organization like Go Dog North Shore.

COMPREHENSIVE TRAILS PLAN

Constructing and maintaining these trail hubs will be a significant effort. There will be some expense; access routes, parking lots, kiosks, and other features will require regular attention. Some of the sites already have some of these features that are maintained by the site's administrators. Cook County may need to provide additional assistance and funding for new features and/or new or improved sites and their accesses.

Trail hub amenities could include history and art components. A partnership between the County and the Grand Portage Band could seek to have trail hub signage wording to be in both English and Ojibwe languages. Cook County could consider taking a primary role in snowplowing trail hubs and the access roads to them. A partnership could be formed with the Superior National Forest, MnDNR, and other managers of trail hubs on this initiative.

More details on potential hub locations are found on the following page.

Britton Peak Trail Hub



Primary Trail Hubs

Primary Trail Hubs should serve multiple trail systems and multiple use types. Primary Hubs should be used and open year round, offer ample parking, have a large information kiosk, picnic facilities, a latrine, and be lit at night (possibly powered with on-site renewable sources and using technology that does not impact night skies). Where appropriate, Primary Hubs may incorporate historic information and public art installations. Acknowledging Cook County's history and recognizing the contribution of the Grand Portage Band to the area community, signage at trail hubs could feature both English and Ojibwe languages. Bike related Hubs could have bicycle repair tool stations (possibly installed and maintained by user groups). The kiosks should have a uniform design and offer information, maps, information on trail safety and etiquette, and could include: directions to access nearby trail systems, a directory of nearby related businesses, as well as information on trail clubs and volunteer opportunities. Primary Trail Hubs should be spread out around the County and should separate motorized and non-motorized uses where possible. Site amenities should be developed with Americans with Disabilities Act considerations where possible. Hubs serving winter uses should have a plan as to how they will be cleared of snow. Sites that could be considered for development include:

1. *Britton Peak.* Above Tofte on the Sawbill Trail (CR 2), Britton Peak's current parking area offers access to multiple hiking trails, mountain bike loops, and cross-country ski trails. It has a latrine. If improved, the site could offer a bicycle repair station. Parking may need to be expanded, winter crowding has been identified as an issue here. Efforts should be made to improve parking facilities for the area's snowmobile trails at another location, such as the Temperance River site (see #1 on following page) in order to separate uses at Britton Peak and alleviate crowding.
2. *Oberg Mountain.* Near Lutsen, inland from Highway 61 on the Onion River Road, Oberg Mountain's existing parking area could become a Primary Trail Hub. It serves the Superior Hiking Trail and two Superior National Forest hikes (Oberg Mountain and LeVeaux Mountain). In winter it is a key access to an extensive cross country ski system and snowshoeing is encouraged on the hiking trail. Opportunities exist for additional partnership with regard to road maintenance of the Onion River Road which is the primary access route for the Oberg Mountain Trail Hub.
3. *Devil Track Lake.* On the northeast shore of Devil Track Lake is the site of the former Cook County Airport. Located just off a paved County Highway, it is generally clear of trees and could offer ample parking for vehicles, including vehicles with trailers. There is a commercial property adjacent to the site that could host a private business that provides services to trail users (fuel, food). The site offers direct access to snowmobile trails and is centrally located amongst roads that are designated for ATV use. This Primary Trail Hub would be focused on motorized uses and could be promoted as the primary snowmobile and ATV trail/route access point for Grand Marais residents and visitors. The site is currently owned by Cook County, but there may be some use requirements associated with that ownership. If for any reason this site cannot be used as a Trail Hub, a nearby site at Meridian Road could be considered.
4. *South Brule River.* A parking area currently exists on the South Brule River just off the Gunflint Trail (CR 12). The lot is primarily used by snowmobilers, but summer uses of nearby forest roads include ATVs and gravel road cyclists. Another site, adjacent to the crossing of the North Brule River on the Gunflint Trail is the site of a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp. That site could add a historical

component to a Trail Hub, but it is felt that site's condition and other factors would make Trail Hub development challenging at that location.

5. *Sawtooth Bluff*. There is a desire to create a trail hub just north of Grand Marais near the base of Sawtooth Bluff (old ski hill site). This trail hub could have information indicating connections to ski, hiking, snowmobile, and ATV trails, facilities, and maps. The site is owned by the City of Grand Marais and is adjacent to a significant amount of Cook County lands. This location could be the center point of the Cook County Trail Hub system, offering shelters, camping, and training and education facilities. A variety of trails could radiate from here, including gravity (downhill) mountain biking and a winter biking trail system. The site could integrate other types of development, with possibilities including residences, businesses, and park features. A fenced dog park could be created. Stakeholders should work together to create a master plan for the site using a public design process.
6. *Hovland*. A trail hub at a to-be-determined location in the Hovland area could be a good option for eastern Cook County. Trail connections to the site would have to be established. A Highway 61 wayside could be a part of the design and the site could offer interpretation and directions to the historic Hovland Dock. The Hovland area has a significant mushing component, which could be highlighted.
7. *Grand Portage*. A hub at Grand Portage would primarily focus on snowmobiling, but the Grand Portage Trail (hiking) and Mt. Josephine Trail (hiking) could also be highlighted.

Secondary Trail Hubs

These hubs would not be as busy as Primary Trail Hubs, would not have multiple use, or would be small in size. Secondary hubs would serve at least one trail system, offer parking, and have a small information kiosk with materials describing immediately adjacent trails, other nearby trails with directions on how to access them, emergency information with a location sign, trail safety and etiquette, up to date maps, and possibly local history stories. The kiosk should in some way reflect the site's status as an official Cook County Trail Hub. Possible Secondary Trail Hubs could be:

8. *Temperance River/600 Road*. On the Sawbill Trail where the 600 Road crosses the Temperance River, a potential Primary Trail Hub could serve as a motorized use focused hub for the western part of Cook County. The North Shore Snowmobile Trail moves through here and ATV routes are nearby. A small National Forest campground is near here as is a cross country ski trail. The Beargrease sled dog race event uses this site as a checkpoint. Significantly expanding this site for snowmobile trailer parking could serve to ease crowding at other locations
9. *Mid-Gunflint Trail*. A Secondary Hub could be in the Poplar Lake area on the mid-point of the Gunflint Trail. Existing facilities in this area include a community center, fire hall, restaurants with conveniences and fuel, and lodging. The primary use of this trail hub would be snowmobiling and it should provide ample parking and direct access to the snowmobile trail. Nearby trails would include hiking facilities, including the South Lake Trail and Caribou Rock Trail, both spurs of the Border Route Trail. The South Lake Trail is also popular for accessing snowshoeing, ice fishing, and winter camping opportunities in the BWCAW. The South Lake Trail access currently does not

have a convenient parking lot for users and it can create congestion on the Gunflint Trail. Parking for the South Lake Trail could be a part of this hub if the site is located near the northwest corner of Poplar Lake.

10. *Clearwater Lake.* Currently, the Clearwater Lake water access (one of the few operated by Cook County) is often overcrowded, causing frustrations with users and neighbors. The site is an access point for both paddlers and motor boat users, accessing multiple popular canoe routes in the BWCA as well direct access to campsites on Clearwater Lake. Additionally, there is a Border Route spur trail at nearby Daniels Lake that does not have any designated parking and users often park on the County Road, including in winter as anglers use the trail to access trout fishing lakes. Finally, there is also a snowmobile spur trail in this same area of the Clearwater Lake Road with a very small parking lot. Cook County should further study this situation and seek to identify a solution, perhaps by identifying and possibly acquiring additional property in the area to consolidate and expand parking, place an information kiosk there and work to connect trails directly to that location.
11. *Trail's End.* The terminus of the Gunflint Trail (CR 12) is at Trail's End Campground, a USDA Forest Service facility, on Gull Lake. There is an outfitting business nearby that includes lodging and a restaurant. The business operates from May to September. The Sea Gull Nature Trail is accessed from this site and the snowmobile trail system is nearby. The Sea Gull Lake and Saganaga Lake BWCAW entry points can be accessed from this location.
12. *Pincushion Mountain.* This site off the Gunflint Trail on the hill above Grand Marais is a focus point for non-motorized trails. The site could directly serve mountain bikes, hikers, and cross-country skiers. Collaborating partners should identify the range of facilities that are desired at this location. Located at the start of the Gunflint Trail, it could also serve as wayside information station for that roadway's attractions and businesses. The site does provide access to a scenic overlook of Lake Superior and Grand Marais.
13. *Downtown Grand Marais.* The heart of Cook County might just be the downtown Grand Marais waterfront. This site has open space, parking, hiking trail access, bike lanes, restaurants, stores, outfitters, and lodging. Placing a Cook County Trail themed information kiosk at a strategic location could be helpful to visitors and bring attention to the County's trail opportunities. The kiosk should provide visitors with directions to the nearest trail access points, either directly or by motor vehicle.
14. *Cook County (ISD 166) School.* The Cook County School site on Grand Marais' hillside has trails on its property used for teaching activities and for exercise. Adjacent to the school is the YMCA and its fitness facilities, sports fields and courts, the community center, and a playground. A kiosk could be provided at this site that invites use of the existing trails and promotes active living.
15. *Tofte Town Park.* This community park currently features a walking trail, parking, Lake Superior access, picnic tables, restrooms, charcoal grills, and trash bins. It is poised to be a direct access point for the Gitchi-Gami State Trail, as the Tofte connection is scheduled to be constructed through Tofte in 2018.
16. *Lutsen.* At the intersection of Highway 61 and Ski Hill Road (leads to Lutsen Mountains) is a currently unimproved parking lot with a small information kiosk adjacent to the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. This site could be improved to be a Secondary Trail Hub that communicates the opportunities at Lutsen Mountains as well. A secondary hub could be located at Lutsen's Grandview Park instead of, or in addition to, the Highway 61/Ski Hill Road site.

17. *Moosehorn Lake Trail*. Located up the Arrowhead Trail (CR 16), this site has been proposed to be a hub for ATVs using routes in the Grand Portage State Forest. There is a desire to create an ATV trail hub just west of County Road 16 in the area of Jackson Lake Road. The State Forest sees significant use and adequate space for parking is needed. The Moosehorn Lake Trail and the Superior Hiking Trail could be accessed here as well.
18. *Spruce Creek*. There is a desire to create a trail hub near Spruce Creek within Cascade River State Park. This would create a destination connecting all the Ski Trails within the Park as well as ski trails outside the Park. Park vehicle permits could be required.
19. *Lima Mountain Road*. There are several ATV routes in the area of the Lima Mountain Road off of the Gunflint Trail. A trail hub with information and parking could be located on this road at a location that is already a large cleared gravel area.
20. *Skou Road*. Near Schroeder, this site serves users of the area’s snowmobile trails.
21. *Caribou Trail*. This location just inland from the Lutsen commercial area is the primary MnDNR operated access point for the C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail.
22. *Otter Lake Road*. This site in the Grand Portage State Forest offers access to snowmobile trails, the Superior Hiking Trail, and the Border Route Trail.
23. *Grand Portage Trail Center/Mineral Center*. In the central area of the Grand Portage Reservation is a small parking area that serves several trail loops for use by Grand Portage Band members

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
2A	Develop a collaborative, uniform network of Primary and Secondary Trail Hubs throughout Cook County	Type 2: Multi-Use Trail Hubs	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	A series of Primary Trail Hubs and Secondary Trail Hubs should be established throughout the County and in Grand Portage.
2B	Designate Primary Trail Hubs	Type 2: Multi-Use Trail Hubs	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Primary Trail Hubs could be considered for: Sawtooth Bluff, South Brule River, Devil Track Lake, Oberg Mountain, Britton Peak, Hovland area, and Grand Portage.
2C	Designate Secondary Trail Hubs	Type 2: Multi-Use Trail Hubs	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Secondary Trail Hubs could be considered for: Pincushion Mountain, Trails' End, Mid-Gunflint Trail, Downtown Grand Marais, Tofte Town Park, ISD 166 Trails, Jackson Lake Road, and others
2D	Complete a Master Plan for the Sawtooth Bluff site	Type 2: Multi-Use Trail Hubs	CCCTP Steering Committee	City of Grand Marais	Cook County, trail entities	The City of Grand Marais and Cook County should conduct a major master plan process for Sawtooth Bluff. The process should identify potential uses, users, facilities, trail locations, funding sources, maintenance needs, and other components.

Recommendation Type: 3: Mapping/GIS

Mapping and data development regarding trails is a primary responsibility of the trail administrators and land managers in Cook County. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) spatial data analysis and mapping is an activity and resource that is regularly evolving as technology improves and trails change and grow. Cook County has a primary interest in this activity as an entity with an interest in all trails, not just the ones they administrate or maintain and it is an entity with a full time GIS staff person. The County is responsible for GIS layers showing landownership, a primary data layer that feeds into many other mapping applications

The County struggles with maintaining complete and accurate trail and trail related data, most of which is supplied by other sources. Partners in the effort to maintain this data include the United States Forest Service, Superior National Forest, MnDNR, local tourism entities, Grand Portage Band, and the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC). The County seeks to align trail related business needs with trail data requirements and to engage trail partners in developing standards for data management and sharing. A working group made up of aforementioned entities should be established to carry out these duties. The group can work to ensure sharing and can address standardization of data across jurisdictions.

One key objective of this group is the development of a GIS data model for trails. Such a data model would ensure data consistency and data integrity necessary to support the maps, apps, and reports stakeholders need. Data typically associated with trails includes things such as trail uses allowed, trail widths, responsible party, trail surface material, updated grooming status, and much more. In addition to ensuring local needs are met, alignment with regional, state, and national GIS data standards for trails should be considered.

Cook County is currently implementing an enterprise GIS build around the Web GIS concept. This design includes a convenient single point of access to current authoritative GIS content and can serve as the common place of entry for users to discover and use trail related data, maps, and apps. Visit Cook County has developed maps and trail condition reports and should continue to be a leader in providing trail information to visitors. In addition to members of the Geospatial work group, Cook County will collaborate with CCVB where appropriate in the design of individual web apps for recreational trails. For any map products outside the scope of the County, Cook County will provide easy access to authoritative trail data necessary for a 3rd party to develop custom maps and apps for CCVB. The Geospatial work group would be responsible for establishing workflows and requirements necessary to keep trail data current. Doing so will ensure trail maps and apps stay relevant to all users. Spatial data accuracy will be addressed by the Geospatial work group as part of the data standards development and data management workflows.

Cook County and other stakeholders should continue to expand the use of trails markers using the U.S. National Grid system. This system helps dispatchers reach the location of an emergency.

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
3A	Develop Standard GIS data model	Type 3: Mapping/GIS	CCCTP Steering Committee	MnIT	DNR Coastal Program, Superior National Forest, Cook County, ARDC	Create a standard GIS data model that can be adopted for all trail data within the County. Recommendations will need to be developed for improving spatial data accuracy and alignment. The data model should meet both business and user requirements and be available to all trail users. The standardized model will create uniformed, understandable trail information and close any gaps or inaccuracies in the trail network database. Maintaining data standards when updating GIS data will be important. Determining current status of trail data will be difficult and may require ground truthing and re-surveying for accurate alignment. All data trail data will be accurate and standardized which will be useful for analysis and future development of trails.
3B	Develop a Comprehensive Map and App Product that can support information distributors	Type 3: Mapping/GIS	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	MnIT, Visit Cook County, ARDC, Land Managers, Trail Administrators	Cook County should seek to produce a core data set for trails that can be a single point of reference for internet and/or mobile apps through an ArcGIS Online website. That site could be used by Cook County and others to create more focused maps and apps that have specific audiences, such as trail users and tourists. The map layers could include information about facilities that support trails as well, including fuel stations, potable water availability, and grooming/maintenance statuses. Visit Cook County has developed maps and trail condition reports and should continue to be a leader in providing trail information to visitors. Data that Visit Cook County develops should be made available to the County to add to the base information.
3C	Accurate GPS Data for All Trails	Type 3: Mapping/GIS	Cook County Ski Clubs	Cook County	DNR, USFS, All Trail User Groups/Associations	Obtain accurate GPS data for all trail systems. This action item correlates with the standard GIS data model. Future data gathered should comply with data accuracy standards in order to have reliable and accurate GIS trail data.
3D	Distribute accurate information regarding seasonal trail closings	Type 3: Mapping/GIS	Cook County ATV Clubs	Cook County	All Cook County Trail Entities	Continue to provide users with more accurate maps showing up to date information on seasonal trail closings and changes to allowed uses.

Recommendation Type 4: Snowmobile Trails

The snowmobile trail system in Cook County is extensive and interconnected. Issues and opportunities regarding snowmobile trails generally address collaboration efforts, policy decisions, and improvements to existing trails and facilities serving the trails. A primary need identified in this planning process was improved snowmobile trail access in or near the City of Grand Marais. Currently, the C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail's eastern terminus is in Grand Marais, but its endpoint has little parking space available and there is not a designated route from the trail endpoint to Grand Marais' business and lodging area on Highway 61 and the Lake Superior shore. Additionally, it is notable that Lake Superior has a tempering effect on Grand Marais weather, often lessening snow levels in the City compared to just a few miles inland and up the ridgeline, particularly early and late in the snowmobile season (generally December 1 to March 31).

The Cook County Trails Committee looked at several alternate endpoints in and near Grand Marais that could offer connectivity and ample parking space. Sites at the City Business Park, the old ski hill, and others were determined to be flawed for a variety of reasons. Instead, the Committee is recommending that a primary snowmobile trail access point be created further inland at a point near Devil Track Lake. One possibility is the site of the former Cook County Airport. This site has a direct connection to the snowmobile trail system, has ample space, is accessed by a well maintained paved road, and has nearby private property that is zoned commercial that could host businesses that serve trail users. There is some complexity with the County's ownership of the site – use restrictions on the deed may mean using the site for recreation will be impossible. More investigation is needed.

If the Devil Track Lake site cannot work, there is another site nearby that is closer to the North Shore State Trail. Located on the Meridian Road, the site already is home to a trail maintenance shed. This area could be improved to offer more parking and be developed as a Primary Trail Hub. Please see Recommendation Type 2 for more information on trail hubs.

Other snowmobile trail recommended actions include examining the need and potential for adding trail hubs that would serve snowmobiles near the central Gunflint Trail fire station and/or the South Brule River, the Sawbill Trail, the Cascade area off Highway 61, and the Arrowhead Trail. The Committee wants to see more businesses, such as restaurants, lodging, and other services that are near or adjacent to Snowmobile facilities. Finally, the Committee is recommending that steps be taken to improve existing trails to a standard that minimizes impacts to hydrologic and biologic functions of water resources. Projects must comply with regulatory considerations. It also should be noted that sales of non-oxygenated premium gasoline are an important part of viable motorized routes. Cook County should collaborate with trail partners to educate users about the location of fuel stations.

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
4A	Work to ensure snowmobile trail service and amenity needs are met	Type 4: Snowmobile Trails	Cook County Snowmobile Clubs	Visit Cook County	Cook County Chamber of Commerce, Grand Portage, Cook County	Most of the County's businesses that serve tourists are not located near snowmobile routes. Often, the businesses are near the Lake Superior coast, which often has poor snow cover. Cook County should explore how to connect snowmobilers with service businesses, particularly gasoline stations. Trail stakeholders should work to educate motorized trail users about the location of fuel stations and otherwise seek to eliminate fueling concerns if appropriate.
4B	Improve wet and brushy areas on snowmobile trails	Type 4: Snowmobile Trails	Cook County Snowmobile Clubs	Snowmobile User Groups	Cook County, Trail Maintenance Volunteers	Working within regulations and using best practices, improve snowmobile trails through wetland areas. Stabilizing trail sections or rerouting around wetlands may be needed. Beaver activity may need to be addressed. Volunteers are needed to help clear fallen trees and brush from trails. Snowmobile clubs should participate in the County's examination of centralized maintenance facility possibilities. Cook County could assist with wetland delineation efforts.

Recommendation Type 5: ATV/OHM/OHV Trails⁵

Most use by off road vehicles in Cook County takes place on designated Superior National Forest, State Forest, and County roads where those entities have determined their use is acceptable. However, users in Cook County have worked to bring more designated off road ATV/OHM trails to the area. Those users and Cook County should continue to collaborate with the Superior National Forest and MnDNR to explore opportunities for ATV/OHM trails in Cook County. User groups should work with the County, National Forest, and MnDNR to identify new desirable connections and determine if new trail construction is feasible and appropriate.

Establishing an off road ATV/OHM trail connecting established ATV/OHM trails in neighboring Lake County to Grand Marais has been identified by ATV enthusiasts as a priority. Cook County should continue to collaborate with the Superior National Forest and MnDNR to explore opportunities for ATV trails connecting Lake County to Grand Marais and include the consideration of opportunities for multipurpose use on the C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail in areas that are suitable and feasible.

Cook County is not recommending any public trail development for ORVs (Off Road 4x4s, SUVs) at this time.

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
5A	Connect ATV Routes to commercial centers	Type 5: ATV/OHV Trails	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	ATV Associations, Visit Cook County	Identify appropriate ATV routes connecting to commercial centers including: Schroeder, Tofte, Lutsen, Grand Marais, Hovland, and possibly Devil Track/Meridian Road. Educate users about the locations of specific businesses destinations.
5B	Continue to collaborate with the Superior National Forest and MnDNR to explore opportunities for ATV trails in Cook County	Type 5: ATV/OHV Trails	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County, Superior National Forest, MnDNR	ATV Associations, Snowmobile Clubs	Continue to collaborate with the Superior National Forest and MnDNR to explore opportunities for ATV trails in Cook County and consider opportunities for shared use on the C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail when appropriate.
5C	Continue to seek out ways to connect ATV trails in Lake County to Grand Marais using as many off road trail segments as is feasible	Type 5: ATV/OHV Trails	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County, Superior National Forest, MnDNR	ATV Associations	Continue to identify routes that will connect ATV users on Lake County trails to Grand Marais and explore opportunities to have such routes use off road trail segments where feasible.

⁵ See page 19 for definitions.

Recommendation Type 6: Hiking, Walking, and Running

Hiking trails are well represented in Cook County with many short and medium length trail systems spread out through the County and Grand Portage, primarily under State and Federal administration. The Superior Hiking Trail, Border Route Trail, and Kekekabic Trail provide longer distance hiking options and are maintained by volunteer user groups in collaboration with the Superior National Forest. These three longer routes connect and are designated as part of the North Country Trail, adding another layer of user group and administration assistance.

The Cook County Trails Committee is generally satisfied with the amount and variety of hiking opportunities in the area. Hikes range from short, flat walks appropriate for beginners, young families, and seniors to long distance treks with campsites in remote areas. The Committee recommends the continued maintenance of that system, but does have a few improvements to recommend. One is the overall improvement of trail hubs in the County. More information on that can be found in the section regarding Recommendation Type 2. Cook County should support the continued work of the North Country Trail and advocate for continued trail use in the County and the development of additional North Country Trail sections outside the County.

The Superior Hiking Trail crosses many private parcels of property in Cook County. For some of these, the right-of-way can be rescinded if the property owner desires. Trail stakeholders should work together to address any issues that arise on the Superior Hiking Trail.

Cook County should continue to advocate for walkers and runners. Sidewalks and widened road shoulders should be included in road construction efforts when possible. Critical sidewalk connections should be constructed when identified.

Snowshoeing is a popular winter use on hiking trails. State Parks and the Superior Hiking Trail are two locations where snowshoeing is encouraged. These locations can be good spots to exercise dogs (following leash rules where they are in place) in the winter as well.

Additional details on the following page.

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
6A	Improve pedestrian connectivity in Cook County Communities	Type 6: Hiking, Walking & Running	CCCTP Steering Committee	City of Grand Marais	Cook County, Moving Matters, MnDOT	An effort should be made to maximize pedestrian connectivity in Schroeder, Tofte, Lutsen, Grand Marais, Howland, and other areas as identified in the County. Improving walking routes could directly connect lodging areas, neighborhoods, and parks to existing trails, eliminating the need for a motor vehicle trip. Providing signage indicating where trail connections are located could assist in this effort. Additionally, good pedestrian connectivity encourages more residents and visitors to walk when going about their routine activities, increasing exercise levels. Sidewalks should be kept free of snow in winter. Note that MnDOT and Grand Marais are cooperating on a project in 2019 or 2020 that will address pedestrian safety on Highway 61 through the community.
6B	Support the completion of the North Country Trail as a hiking route	Type 6: Hiking, Walking & Running	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	Cook County, Superior Hiking Trail Association, Border Route Hiking Club, Superior National Forest.	Cook County should support the North Country Trail's efforts to be completed. Currently the trail moves through Cook County as a hiking trail, but in areas west of the County, thru-hikers must use road shoulders and paved trails. When appropriate, Cook County should advocate for projects that move the trail onto a true hiking facility.
6C	Consider the potential development of a new hiking trail connecting Lake Superior to Eagle Mountain in the area of Cascade River	Type 6: Hiking, Walking & Running	Public	User Group	MnDNR, Superior National Forest, Cook County, Superior Hiking Trail Association	Interested citizens should organize a group to explore a new trail connecting Minnesota's highest and lowest points.
6D	Work to widen paved shoulders on key pedestrian routes when possible	Type 6: Hiking, Walking & Running	Public	Cook County	Communities	Cook County should work to provide wide paved shoulders on roadways such as the Sawbill Trail, CR 7, Caribou Trail, and others as identified in order to provide safe pedestrian, bicycle, and running infrastructure.

Recommendation Type 7: Mountain Biking Trails

Mountain biking is a growing sport in Cook County and the nation. Through increased usage and event promotion Mountain Biking is increasing its impact of the Cook County economy. There are two nodes of mountain bike trails in the County – Pincushion Mountain near Grand Marais and Britton Peak near Tofte. The Cook County Trails Committee recommends that these nodes be connected to each other in the future. The expansion should include access routes into communities. Connecting the trail nodes would provide better access to services, lodging, and camping facilities and communities. It would create a longer, more diverse trail system that would encourage more visitors and get visitors to stay longer, helping the area economy. Britton Peak to Lutsen is about 10 miles and Lutsen to Pincushion is about 20 miles. Additional expansions could have the Britton Peak node connected to points south and west into Lake County and eventually all the way to the extensive mountain bike trail system in the City of Duluth. Connections eastward to Grand Portage could also be considered if the Grand Portage Band is supportive.

Regardless of where expansions occur, it is a desire of the Cook County Trails Committee that a minimum of 50 miles of total singletrack mountain bike trails be created in the area. In a similar vein, the Superior Cycling Association and other stakeholders are striving to have the County become a designated International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) Ride Center. This would make Cook County stand out world-wide as a destination. Increasing the trail mileage would assist with the designation effort. One possible area for trail expansion would be Sawtooth Bluff, just north of Grand Marais. The property here is owned by the City of Grand Marais and it is adjacent to property owned by Cook County. See Recommendation Type 2 for more details.

Much of the existing miles of mountain bike trail in Cook County are on National Forest System lands. The Superior Cycling Association (SCA) works with the Superior National Forest to maintain and administer those trails. It would be beneficial for the SCA and the FS to develop a long term plan to solidify the direction of new trail development efforts and to ensure long term maintenance of the trails. The SCA also wants to partner with other organizations to help promote mountain biking in marketing materials and at key events throughout the County.

Forest roads, particularly those administered by the Superior National Forest, are another bicycling opportunity in Cook County. These roads have natural or gravel surfaces and are maintained at varying levels. Roads have been identified by Visit Cook County that offer good connections and experiences ([map](#)). Strategic new connections between forest roads could be considered in order to make connections between roads and offer longer ride opportunities. This type of road biking is often call "gravel grinding." Cook County could work with a potential gravel grinder user group to further identify key routes, possibly including a designated road route that spans the County between the Lake County boundary and Grand Portage. Part of the gravel grinding infrastructure could include

campsites on routes that would allow users to go “bikepacking” in the County. A gravel grinder user group could be a subset of the Superior Cycling Association, or be a stand-alone group. A similar approach could be used for winter “fat tire” biking.

More information is below.

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
7A	Connect Mountain Bike Destinations	Type 7: Mountain Biking Trails	CCCTP Steering Committee	Superior Cycling Association	Superior National Forest, Lake County, COGGS	Connect Britton Peak, Lutsen, and Pincushion Mountain Bike Trails to each other and eventually connect those trails to Lake County and Duluth systems..
7B	Seek to have a minimum of 50 miles of designated, single track mountain bike trails, and become a IMBA-Designated Ride Center	Type 7: Mountain Biking Trails	Cook County Bike Clubs	Superior Cycling Association	IMBA, Cook County, Superior National Forest, Visit Cook County	The Superior Cycling Association should work to build additional miles of single track and review the IMBA application and work with partners to achieve the necessary requirements.
7D	Promote the use of identified USDA Forest Service Roads as bicycle routes	Type 7: Mountain Biking Trails	Cook County Bike Clubs	Visit Cook County	Superior National Forest, Superior Cycling Association	Continue promoting the use of existing forest routes, particularly those routes that connect to existing single track systems, could garner more users and increase the economic impact of mountain biking in Cook County.
7E	Promote Mountain Biking at Events	Type 7: Mountain Biking Trails	Cook County Bike Clubs	Superior Cycling Association	Visit Cook County, Chamber of Commerce, Community Event Organizers	The Superior Cycling Association should coordinate with event organizers to help promote the cycling network throughout the County.
7F	A collaboration should occur between bike clubs and the USDA Forest Service to develop a long-range plan for biking trails.	Type 7: Mountain Biking Trails	Cook County Bike Clubs	Superior Cycling Association	Superior National Forest	The entities should work to establish a long term plan in order to ensure trail use into the future.

Recommendation Type 8: Road Bicycling Trails

Road bikes that use paved road shoulders and paved trails are a popular way to recreate and exercise. In Cook County, longer routes that are safe for road biking are limited. The key feature is the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. This paved, non-motorized facility parallels the North Shore of Lake Superior and is planned to extend from Two Harbors in Lake County to Grand Marais, about 86 miles. About 30 miles have been constructed. In Cook County the trail extends from Schroeder to Lutsen with additional segments in Grand Marais. The only road shoulders in the County that are generally safe for cyclists are on Highway 61 between Grand Marais and the International Boundary, and the new portion of Devil Track Road (CSAH 8).

The Cook County Trails Committee supports the MnDNR and Gitchi-Gami Trail Association's efforts to fully complete the trail's construction between Two Harbors and Grand Marais. Sections of trail between Ski Hill Road and Lutsen Town Center and between Grand Marais and Cutface Creek are the top current priorities. Cook County supports legislative fund-seeking efforts for trail construction. The Committee also recommends that the section of Highway 61 between Grand Marais and the International Boundary be signed by MnDOT as a bike route. MnDOT should work to ensure the shoulders in this section are kept as clear as possible and that the shoulder's paved surface remains rideable. The one area of narrow shoulders in this roadway section, between the Brule River crossing and Hovland, should be expanded. Cook County should also work to ensure that paved shoulders are created and/or maintained on some key routes in order to promote cycling and make needed connections. These routes include the Sawbill Trail (CR 2) between Tofte and the Britton Peak mountain bike trails, Ski Hill Road (CR 5) between the Gitchi-Gami State Trail and Lutsen Mountains, County Road 7 between Grand Marais and the rural residential area west of the City, and the Gunflint Trail (CR 12) between Grand Marais and Pincushion Mountain recreation area. Safe biking facilities should be incorporated into future land use and transportation planning processes.



Gitchi-Gami State Trail

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
8A	Complete the Gitchi-Gami State Trail (GGST) through Cook County	Type 8: Road Bicycling Trails	CCCTP Steering Committee	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	Gitchi Gami Trail Association, MnDOT, Cook County, Moving Matters, Town of Schroeder, Town of Tofte, Town of Lutsen, ARDC, Cook County Chamber of Commerce	Currently there are around 12 miles total of constructed GGST in Cook County out of 39 miles planned. Constructing the trail through Tofte, in Lutsen, and between Grand Marais and Cutface Creek are priorities. Partners should work together to seek funding for the remainder of the trail. Details about the future construction of the trail can be found in the 2015 Gitchi Gami State Trail Plan Update and Scoping Project Document.
8B	Improve, designate and promote Highway 61 between Grand Marais and International Boundary as a bike route	Type 8: Road Bicycling Trails	CCCTP Steering Committee	MnDOT	Visit Cook County, Gitchi-Gami Trail Association, Superior Cycling Association, Grand Portage Band	MnDOT should sign Highway 61 between Grand Marais and the International Boundary as a bike route and should consider striping methods of designating the shoulders as a bike route as well. Partners should promote this section as a bikeway. The paved shoulder between Hovland and the Brule River should be widened.
8C	Seek to widen paved shoulders on key routes in Cook County in order provide additional safe bicycle infrastructure	Type 8: Road Bicycling Trails	Public	Cook County	User groups, communities	When possible, Cook County should widen paved shoulders on key routes, including the Sawbill Trail, Caribou Trail, CR 7, and others in order to provide additional safe infrastructure.

Recommendation Type 9: Ski Trails

Cross country ski trails are spread throughout Cook County. Many trails are groomed and maintained by private entities or volunteers in collaboration with public land managers. Maintenance issues and opportunities are the bulk of the current discussion surrounding these trails with virtually no new trail miles being recommended. Additionally, opportunities for ungroomed backcountry skiing abound in the County, including in the BWCAW.

The Cook County Trails Committee recommends that all the ski trail maintenance groups along with other trail administrators and Cook County explore acquiring new maintenance equipment and implementing cooperative maintenance efforts. This level of collaboration could create efficiencies, ease workloads, and save money. Specifically, the need for a side mower was discussed. Additionally, cooperative efforts regarding storage of equipment could be explored. See Recommendation Type 1: Policies for more details.

Increasing volunteer participation is another priority for ski trails. Increasing the number of younger volunteers, in particular, is a need. High school skiers could be engaged as volunteers. The private trail maintenance model that is employed on the Gunflint Trail could be examined as a possibility for other trail groups. Resource sharing needs to be a priority. See Recommendation Type 1: Policies for more details.

The Committee recommends that the private ski maintenance groups on the Gunflint Trail be better incorporated into trail planning and implementation efforts. Improving skiing related information is also desired. While multiple groups share current trail conditions on sites such as Visit Cook County, it should be ensured that all trail systems are updated regularly. Additionally, there is a need to increase the level of real time information, particularly grooming status reports.

Backcountry (BC) skiing is a popular activity in other areas of the nation. This activity includes cross country-style skiing on access trails to hills that accommodate downhill-style skiing on ungroomed slopes. BC skiing enthusiasts should seek to work with existing skiing user groups and willing land managers to determine if BC skiing infrastructure development and maintenance is feasible in Cook County.



Photo courtesy of Ellen Pillsbury

Skiing on the Upper Gunflint system

As dogs are generally not allowed on groomed ski trails, stakeholders should work together to educate dog owners as to where they can use trails in the County during times with snow cover.

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
9A	Integrate Grooming Status into Data Models and improve trail condition reporting	Type 9: Ski Trails	Cook County Ski Clubs	Ski User Groups, inc. Private	Cook County, Visit Cook County	Grooming schedules and reports should be added to trail condition updates around the County, providing real-time information to users. A clearinghouse for this information would need to be identified and trail managers would need to be instructed to regularly update the information.
9B	Work with willing land managers to determine feasibility of backcountry skiing facilities	Type 9: Ski Trails	Public	Cook County	User groups, land administrators	Backcountry skiers should work with willing land managers to determine if this type of infrastructure development and maintenance is feasible in Cook County.

Recommendation Type 10: Mushing

Other winter trail uses or potential uses include mushing, snowshoeing, skijoring, and fat tire biking, uses that are often not allowed to use groomed ski trails. Those uses are generally allowed on groomed snowmobile trails, but the difference in speeds between snowmobiles and these other uses may cause unsafe situations. Mushers do regularly use sections of trails and forest roads for their dogsled runs. These routes could be identified and designated. Mushing could be a compatible use with skijoring, snowshoeing, and fat tire biking and the designated mushing routes could be cross promoted.

Mushing trails should be identified and inventoried so that kennels can work with the County, State, Tribal and Federal governments to formally recognize, permit, and protect those trails. Partnerships between mushers and other potential trail users, including ATV clubs, snowmobilers, and fat tire bikers should be sought out. "Sled dog crossing" and other appropriate trail signage should be considered as part of trail safety plans. Determinations of what amenities mushers would like to have on the trails, at trail crossings, and trail parking areas/access points (such as tie-off posts) should occur. Finally, the historic Old Dog (John Beargrease) Trail corridor should be identified and re-established where possible. The historic trail could be interpreted at the potential Hovland trail hub.

10A	Identify and designate common mushing routes	Type 10: Mushing	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County Mushers	MnDNR, Cook County, Superior National Forest	If it is determined to be beneficial, routes commonly used by mushers should be identified and mapped in order to accommodate their use and assist with route planning and management and to potentially promote mushing trail use by compatible uses.
10B	Explore the addition of compatible uses on mushing routes	Type 10: Mushing	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	MnDNR, Cook County, Superior National Forest, Mushers, Superior Cycling Association	Review mushing routes and determine their compatibility with fat tire biking, snowshoeing, and skijoring. Promote mushing routes for those uses if determined to be feasible.
10C	Explore re-establishing the Historic Old Dog (John Beargrease) Trail	Type 10: Mushing	Cook County Dog Mushers	Cook County Dog Mushers	Cook County Historical Society	Historic trail sections should be identified and a determination about the feasibility of re-creating the trail should be made.
10D	Explore improved safety signage for mushing trails	Type 10: Mushing	Cook County Dog Mushers	Cook County Dog Mushers	Cook County	Work with the appropriate entities to ensure dog sled safety is addressed in all signage safety discussions and initiatives.



Photo by Travis Novitsky

Recommendation Type 11: Fat Tire Biking

Fat tire biking is growing in popularity and deserves special consideration for future winter trail decisions in Cook County and Grand Portage. The growth of this activity for both residents and visitors could have positive impacts on the recreation opportunities and economy in Cook County. Cook County should support the identification and promotion (through a partnership with Visit Cook County) of potential winter biking routes. Grand Portage State Forest and National Forest roadways are some of the potential areas that could be examined. Many forest roadways see light, but regular, amounts of snowmobile traffic that would essentially create a decent surface for fat tire biking within a few days of a snowfall. Some mushing trails also could be compatible with winter biking.

Additionally, Cook County should seek to work with the Minnesota DNR to add fat tire biking as a use at one or more State Parks in the County. Grooming of existing hiking trails in the Parks could be undertaken on a small scale as a pilot project. Determinations could be made about the fat tire grooming’s impact on trail conditions, winter Park usage rates, and budgets. Groomed fat bike trails could be compatible with snowshoe trails.

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
11A	Identify areas and routes suited to fat tire biking and explore designation and promotion	Type 11: Winter Biking	CCCTP Steering Committee	Superior Cycling Association	Cook County, MnDNR	Identify lands that could accommodate groomed fat tire biking trails. Possibilities would include Forest Roads, State Parks, and the Grand Portage State Forest.



Recommendation Type 12: Paddling

Paddling is one of the most popular activities in Cook County and Grand Portage. Little formal infrastructure is needed other than access points, parking and portages. The BWCAW garners most of the attention, but other paddling opportunities exist. The opportunities outside of the BWCAW offer some benefits. Permits are not needed and you can start and end your trip whenever and wherever you choose. Party size is not limited – in the BWCAW the maximum number of people in your group is nine. On routes outside the BWCAW, you can have 10 or more people, perhaps a necessity for some youth groups or Scout troops, for example. Paddling outside the BWCAW could be promoted as an option for large groups. Interested parties should work with the Superior National Forest at the Tofte and Gunflint Ranger Districts to identify the best routes. Official backcountry campsites (latrine, fire grate, picnic table) do still have limits of nine people.

The Lake Superior Water Trail could benefit from some enhancements. Additional water access campsites, and more kayak put-ins and take-out points should be considered. Having regular take-outs are a key safety factor on the world’s largest lake. Long stretches with no official put-ins and take-outs exist between Lutsen and the Cascade River and between the Reservation River and Grand Portage.

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
12A	Establish additional campsites and put-ins/take outs for the Lake Superior Water Trail	Type 12: Paddling	CCCTP Steering Committee	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	Cook County, Grand Portage Band	Paddling on the Lake Superior Water Trail should be promoted throughout the County - Additional campsite creation and improvements should be considered. Additional take out locations could be established for urgent weather considerations, including locations with the Grand Portage Reservation.



Angling on Ottertrack Lake, BWCAW

Recommendation Type 13: History and Art

Cook County supports efforts by the Cook County Historical Society, Gunflint Trail Historical Society, the Grand Portage Band, and any other historic preservation stakeholders’ efforts to provide historical interpretation on trails and at trail hubs where appropriate. Efforts to establish and/or enhance “virtual historic trails” through the use of mobile apps or paper maps is also supported.

Natural history and geologic interpretation is also welcomed in Cook County. Information regarding these items should also be considered where appropriate.

Cook County also supports its artist community and any efforts to share local art with residents and visitors. Cook County will look for ways to add art installations to trails or trail hubs when appropriate.

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
13A	Support the development of virtual history trails around Cook County	Type 13: Art and History	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County Historical Society	Cook County, Superior National Forest, MnDNR, Tourism Entities, Grand Portage Band, Grand Portage National Monument	Support historic preservation stakeholders’ efforts to provide historical interpretation on trails and at trail hubs where appropriate. Support efforts to establish and/or enhance virtual “history trails” through the use of mobile apps and paper maps. Include natural history interpretation.
13B	Use local artists when improving trails and facilities	Type 13: Art and History	CCCTP Steering Committee	Cook County	Local artists, tourism organizations	Incorporate local art into trails and trail hubs where appropriate. Support efforts to establish and/or enhance virtual “art trails” through the use of mobile apps or paper maps.

Recommendation Type: 14: Grand Portage Trails

The primary east-west snowmobile route on the Rengo Road is nearly the only trail currently promoted by Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe for public use on tribal lands as it connects Cook County’s other snowmobile trails to the Grand Portage Lodge and Casino. There is a fairly short hiking trail at Mt. Josephine as well. The longer Grand Portage Trail is maintained by the National Park Service and there are trails at Grand Portage State Park. A walking and biking route is located along the main roads in the community.

At the location known as Grand Portage Trail Center, there are several shorter trail loops. These loops were developed as cross country ski loops, but have become primarily used by snowmobiles over the years. Those loops could have the potential to return back to being cross country ski trails in order to offer a more significant experience. These trails could be wide enough to accommodate both skiers and fat tire bikers. In February of 2015, Grand Portage Lodge and Casino hosted “The Frostbiter” fat tire bike races for Easter Seals, featuring 20 mile, and 40 mile groomed loops. Fat tire biking is an interesting potential trail use on the Band’s system and could be more widely developed, promoting more tourism and economic benefit to the Band’s businesses and lodging facilities. Promoting skiing on the loops could have a similar effect.

Mountain biking on Reservation roads could be promoted by the Band in the summer. These roads are quite remote and access some interesting sites and view sheds. Road biking could be promoted as well, as Highway 61 through the Reservation has wide shoulders and relatively light traffic. Biking Highway 61 offers wonderful views of Lake Superior, Mt. Josephine, Pigeon Point, and the Susie Islands. There is an existing paved walking and biking route through the Grand Portage Community, connecting important destinations. The Band is seeking to expand that route to additional sites.

The Reservation Tribal Council is the entity responsible for implementing any trail recommendations on Tribal lands. It is their job to determine if promoting the Band’s lands for additional public use by non-Band members would be beneficial to the community. If the trails are kept available for use by Band members only, that is their right and that right is respected. Respect for the Band’s natural resources, spiritual locations, and historic sites must be maintained at all times.

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
14A	Explore multi-use trail designation for existing snowmobile trails (to include fat tire biking and skiing)	Type: 14 Grand Portage Trails	Grand Portage Staff	Grand Portage	Potential band member ski club	Shorter existing snowmobile trial loops located at the Grand Portage Trail Center could be designated as multi-use loops giving access to band members seeking cross country skiing and fat tire biking opportunities.
14B	Promote paved trail use and non-motorized transportation	Type 14: Grand Portage Trails	Grand Portage Staff	Grand Portage	Cook County	There is an existing paved walking and biking route through the Grand Portage Community, connecting important destinations. Expanding this route to additional sites is recommended. Bicycling through Grand Portage on Highway 61 could be promoted.

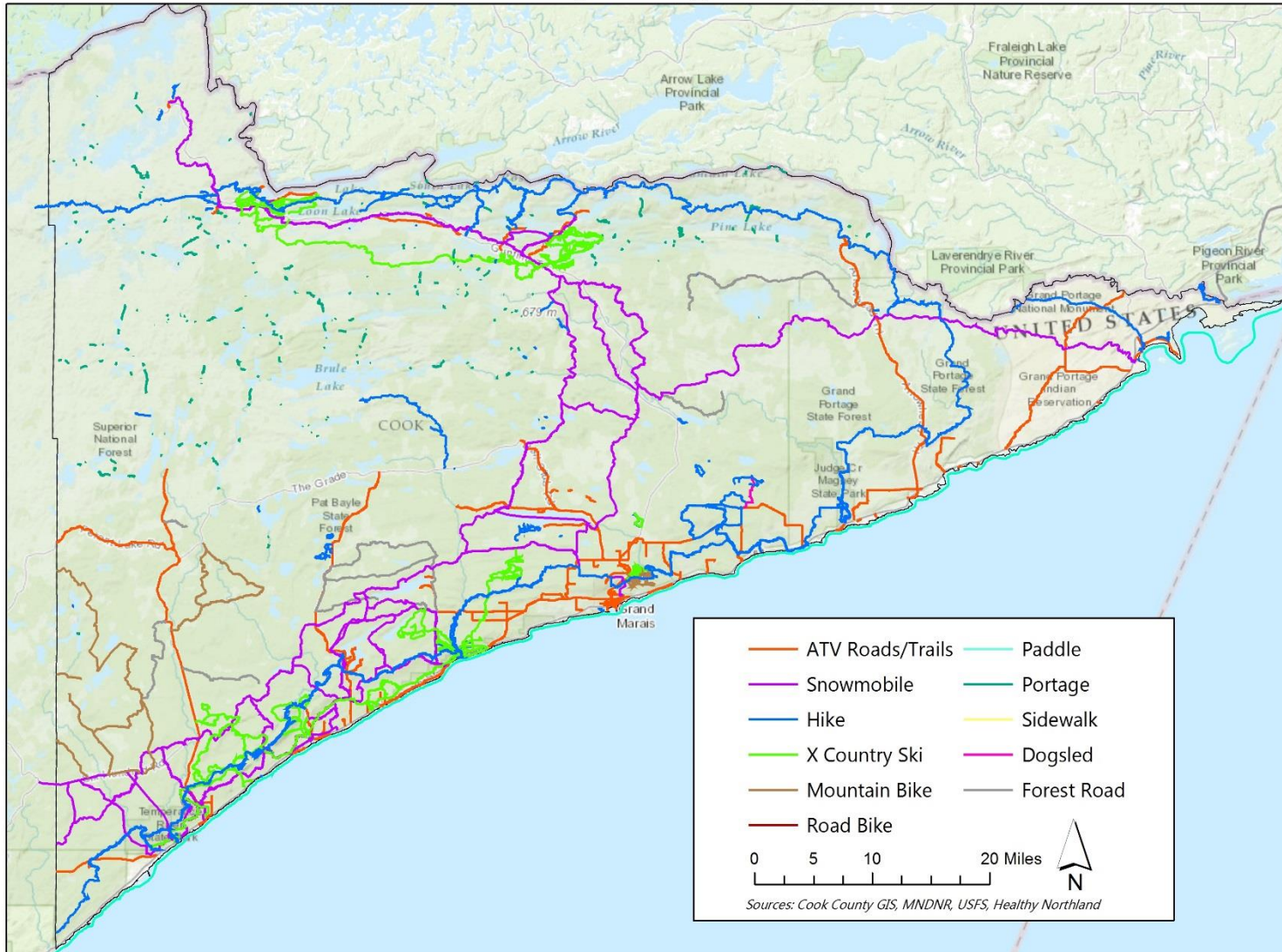
Recommendation Type 15: Horseback Trails

Cook County’s saddle club, the Sawtooth Mountain Riders, seeks to increase riding opportunities and horse related tourism in the area through development/designation/improvement of trails and campsites for equestrian uses. The club should work with willing land managers to determine if this type of infrastructure development and maintenance is feasible in Cook County.

#	Action Item	Recommendation Category	Action Item Source	Lead Agency	Partners	Description
15A	Work with willing land managers to determine feasibility of horse facilities	Type 15: Horseback Trails	Sawtooth Mountain Riders	Sawtooth Mountain Riders	Cook County, land managers	The club should work with willing land managers to determine if this type of infrastructure development and maintenance is feasible in Cook County.

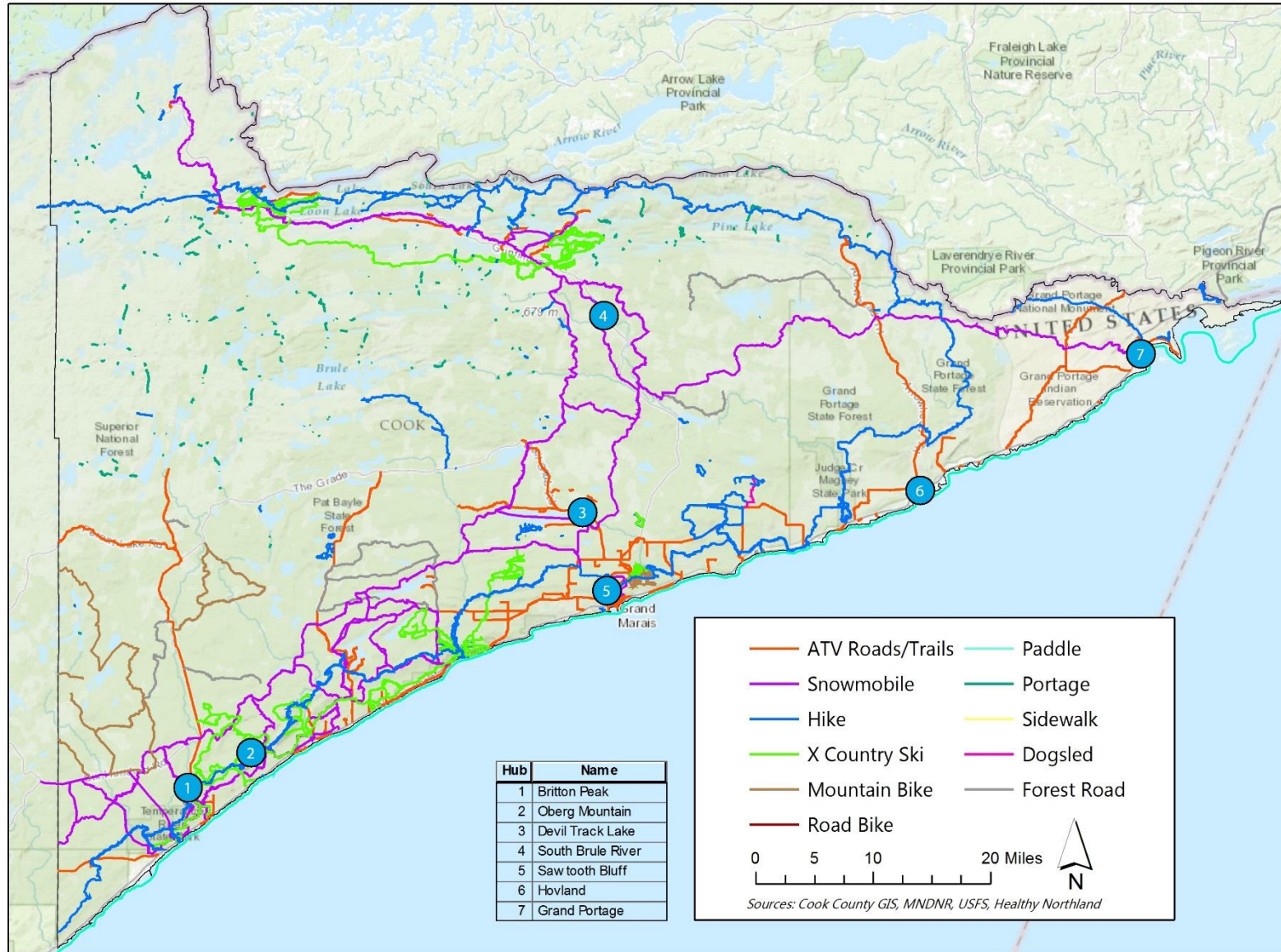
Appendix 1: Map of Existing System

Cook County Existing Trail System

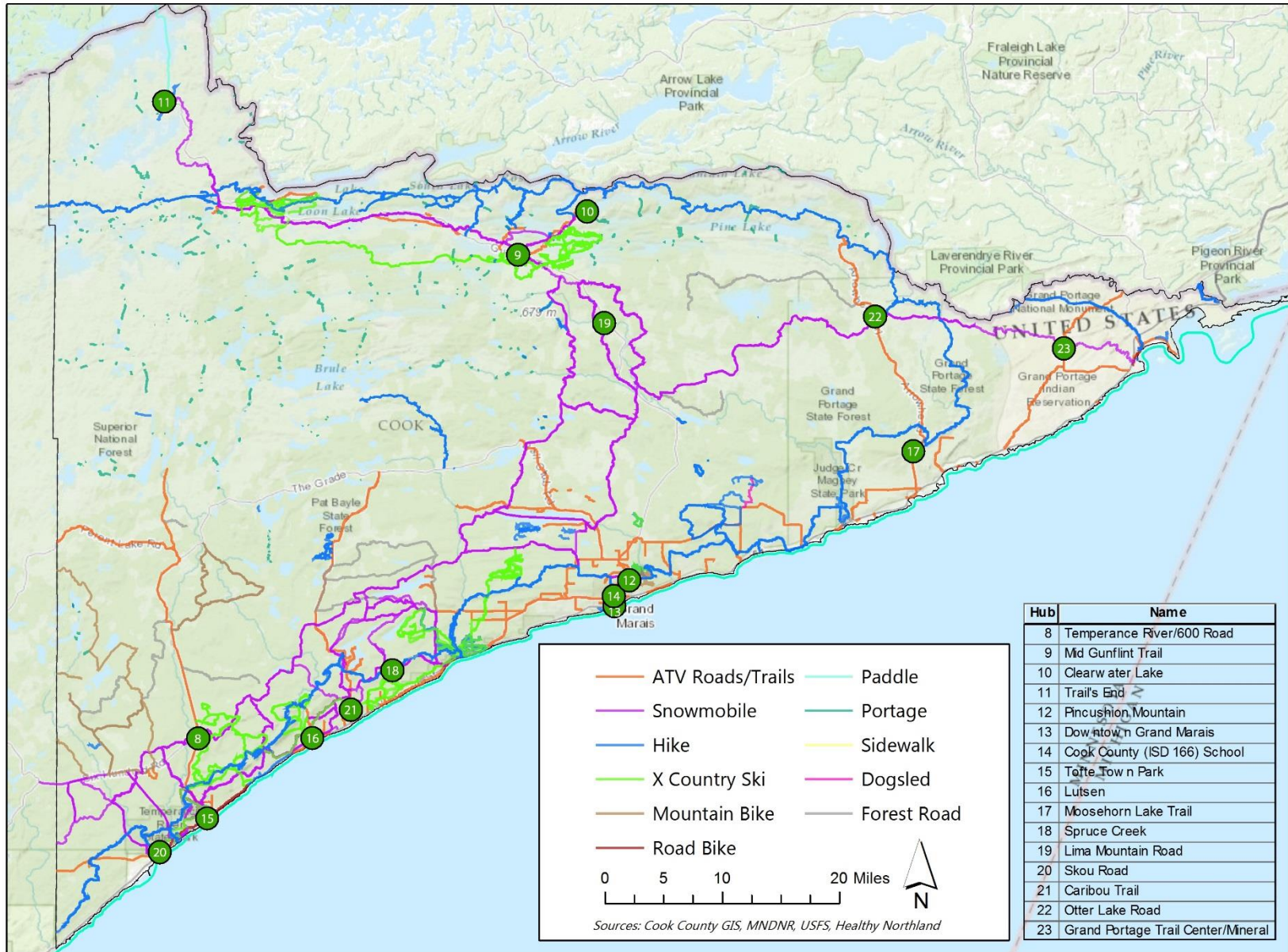


Appendix 2: Maps of Trail Hub Recommendations

Recommended Primary Trail Hub Locations



Recommended Secondary Trail Hub Locations



Appendix 3: Funding Sources

Funding Sources

One of the major constraints for a trail system project is funding. Most trail networks are built using a combination of federal, state, and local sources. Opportunities available to expand the Cook County Trail System include, but are not limited to, the following.

- **Recreational Trails Program (RTP):** Enacted in July 2012 under the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), the Recreational Trail Program (RTP), as a part of Federal surface transportation funding, provides financial assistance for the development and maintenance of recreational trails and trail-related projects solely located within Minnesota. The grant coordinator works for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and funding is available for acquisition, construction, and management of recreational trail facilities. Find more information at www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_federal.html.
- **Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program:** This program funds projects within the Lake Superior coastal zone, which includes the coastal zone in Cook County. These are federal funds that are distributed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The grants must be matched (50%) by non-federal funds.
- **Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) Legacy Amendment Funds:** In 2008, Minnesota voters passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment (Legacy Amendment) to the Minnesota Constitution, which increased the state sales tax to partially provide funding for parks and trails development in Minnesota. Established in 2013, the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) took over allocation duties of Legacy Amendment parks and trails funds. Looking to fund regionally significant trails outside of the seven-county metropolitan area, the GMRPTC ranks projects with high, medium, or low merit based on standards set forth in their strategic plan, and then grants regional designation and determines funding recommendations based on these rankings. Find more information at www.gmrptcommission.org.
- **Regional Trail Grant Program:** Established in Minnesota Statutes 85.019, the Regional Trail Grant Program issues state funds from \$5,000 to \$250,000 to promote development of regionally significant trails outside the seven-county metropolitan area. Administered by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, grants are reimbursement-based up to 75 percent of eligible project costs, and recipients must provide a non-state cash match of at least 25 percent. Other state funds or grants, such as Parks and Trails Legacy Grants, cannot match these grants. Find more information at http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_regional.html.

- **Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB):** Among providing other development opportunities, IRRRB's Culture and Tourism Grant Program supports non-profits by supporting strong arts, culture, heritage and recreational activities in the IRRRB service area, in which Cook County is located. For more information, visit <http://mn.gov/irrrb>.
- **International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Grants:** Outlining numerous resources, IMBA lists potential funding sources from all levels directed specifically to mountain biking and trail development. Find more information at <https://www.imba.com/resources/grants>.
- **Minnesota Snowmobile Trails Assistance Program (Grants in Aid):** The program is popularly known as the grants-in-aid – or GIA– program. The DNR has been delegated the responsibility of administering the funds appropriated by the legislature for the GIA program. The Minnesota Snowmobile Trails Assistance Program provides funding mostly for maintenance and grooming, through capital improvement grants for snowmobile trails are also available. Find more information at http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/gia_snowmobile.html
- **Minnesota Off-highway vehicle grants-in-aid (GIA):** First authorized in 1984, Minnesota's Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Trails Assistance Program—popularly known as the Grant-in-Aid (GIA) Program—is a cost-share program to facilitate development and maintenance of trails for use by All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), Off-Highway Motorcycles (OHMs), and Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs) at the initiative of enthusiast groups or clubs, with the support and participation of local government sponsors. Off-highway vehicle organizations apply through counties, cities or townships. All aspects of OHV trail development and maintenance are eligible to receive GIA funds, including project administration, site planning, trail improvements, land acquisition for trail development, and trail maintenance. For more information, visit http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/gia_ohv.html
- **Minnesota Cross country ski trail grants-in-aid (GIA):** The cross-country ski GIA program supports the maintenance and grooming of cross country ski trails. Grants are awarded annually for cross-country ski trail maintenance and winter grooming. The program is not currently considering funding for capital improvement project or adding new trails into the GIA program. Local units of government – such as counties, cities, and townships – are eligible grantees. Many local units of government act as a sponsor for private trail organizations, such as ski clubs. Find out more at http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/gia_crosscountry.html

COOK COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE TRAILS PLAN 2016

COOK COUNTY AND GRAND PORTAGE, MINNESOTA

Prepared for **Cook County and Grand Portage**
Prepared by the **Arrowhead Regional Development Commission**

For more information regarding this project, visit ArrowheadPlanning.org/CCCTP