

Public Land Use

Recommendation #1: LUGs within the region should establish a policy to coordinate all public land-use maps into one all-inclusive, regional land-use map for public lands.

- 1) Benefits to the region if implemented:
 - a. To local units of government: Better planning to accommodate the diverse recreational needs of a growing, aging population; better coordination between adjoining jurisdictions (comprehensive plans are in agreement); help future boards and councils to stay on course with long-term vision; map would create a basis for shared funding and requests for grants and donations.
 - b. To the community at-large: A well-planned, comprehensive network of recreational opportunities for a variety of user groups. Recreation and access to open space are recognized as crucial elements for a satisfactory quality of life.
 - c. To business: This region needs recreational diversity and environmental preservation if our current tourism-based economy is to flourish into the future. A 1997 study reported that owners of small companies rated recreation, parks and open space as the highest priorities in choosing a new location for their business. Businesses would get more bang for their donation dollars due to increased coordination. With a plan, there is a far greater probability that we would be able to create and maintain a healthy local tourism-based economy along with a high quality of life for residents and visitors.
- 2) Consequences to the region if not implemented:
 - a. To local units of government: Unplanned, uncoordinated, inefficient use of public land for a population that continues to grow; it's more expensive to do it alone; as compared with Cass County, Crow Wing County has a relatively small amount of public land to accommodate the recreational needs of a rapidly growing population.
 - b. To the community at-large: Studies show that a lack of coordinated recreational opportunities like safe walking and biking trails is contributing to an unhealthy way of life for many Americans and contributes to increased rates for obesity, diabetes and hypertension.
 - c. To business: New businesses will locate elsewhere. Corporate CEOs say quality of life for employees is the third-most important factor in locating a business, behind only access to domestic markets and availability of skilled labor. In another study, 70 firms that moved to or expanded within Arizona chose the state for its "outdoor lifestyle and recreation opportunities."
- 3) Ideas for incentives to encourage implementation: Funding for well-facilitated meetings with good food. Funding to cover mapping process.
- 4) Steps to implementation:
 - a. Counties would take the lead role and host bi-annual regional public land-use meetings that include all LUGs within the region. In addition to updating the regional map, these meetings would allow LUGs to discuss their plans with neighboring jurisdictions to find agreement, potential conflicts and cost-sharing

- opportunities. Create list of organizations and individuals to participate in discussion of, and creation of, a regional map for public lands
 - b. Put together a list of resources that would be helpful
 - c. Educate public about the process and the objectives
 - d. Submit annual report to Chamber detailing progress, road blocks, etc.
 - e. Create an award to recognize individual and organizational efforts
- 5) Timeline: Begin in January 2008; meetings would be in January and October of each year. New regional map should be created within a year, but the updating of this map would be an on-going process.
- 6) Best practices examples, if available:
- a. The cooperation shown by Cass and Crow Wing County officials with regards to the regional jail that now serves both counties
 - b. Cooperative/Collaborative process used by other initiatives (like the Brainerd Lakes Area Conservation Collaborative)
 - c. Consider using a "neutral" facilitator to assign responsibilities and to keep participants on task and on time.

Recommendation #2: LUGs should work together to develop permanent, dedicated funding options (as well as non-cash best practices) for the purchase of, and maintenance of, public lands in order to establish a state-of-the-art, regional, interconnected network of public parks, trails and open space necessary to meet the diverse, recreational needs of a growing, aging population.

- 1) Benefits to the region if implemented:
- a. To local units of government: Steady flow of dedicated monetary support for parks, trails and open space would allow LUGs to better plan for and implement the diverse recreational needs expressed by many citizens in their comprehensive plans: environmental preservation, healthy lakes, accessible parks, trails and open space, maintaining rural character and a sense of place, and improving their quality of life.
 - b. To the community at-large: Quality of life is improved. Well-maintained parks, trails and open space are often voiced as citizen priorities. In a 2002 survey by the Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance and Hamline University, Minnesotans ranked specific reasons why they choose a place to live. The number one reason was safety. Number two was community green space. This ranked higher than quality of schools, property taxes, commuting distance and the size of their lot.
 - c. To business - Businesses flourish in areas where people choose to live because of the high quality of life. Real estate industry analysts confirm quality of life as a determining factor in real estate values and economic vitality. One 1998 industry report calls livability "a litmus test for determining the strength of the real estate investment market... If people want to live in a place, companies, stores, hotels and apartments will follow." Businesses will have access to a healthier workforce. National polls have found that 55% of Americans would like to walk more instead of drive if there were safe walking alternatives. 55% would like to bicycle more, again, if there were safe bike trails available.

- 2) Consequences to the region if not implemented:
 - a. To local units of government: LUGs continue to meet budget challenges by cutting some services to finance others like parks, trails and open space needs. Some services get cut completely due to inadequate funding.
 - b. To the community at-large: Quality of life deteriorates.
 - c. To business: With deteriorating quality of life, people leave the region and workforce choices for local businesses diminish.

- 3) Ideas for incentives to encourage implementation: Have new development pay for new parks, trails and open space needed to accommodate the needs of a growing population. This has been done through parks dedication ordinances where every time a parcel of land is subdivided to accommodate growth, developers are required to donate 10% of the land or 10% of the value of the land to the LUG for park, trail and open space needs.

- 4) Steps to implementation:
 - a. Request each County prepare permanent funding concepts for discussion. For example, there is currently a \$66 annual fee in Cass County for each improved parcel for solid waste and recycling. If an additional \$15 were applied to this fee to be dedicated to supporting public land, this would raise \$300,000 per year in Cass County alone.
 - b. Present concepts to joint gathering in 2007 of Cass County and Crow Wing County Boards
 - c. Put together team of funding experts to flesh out funding concepts in relation to objectives of the regional master map referred to in recommendation #1
 - d. Educate the public
 - e. Report back to Chamber on recommendations by team

- 5) Timeline: Concepts are created by October 2007 to present to Boards of Cass and Crow Wing Counties. Follow-up meetings for a funding team begin in January 2008. By the end of February 2008, a draft of recommendations is submitted to the Chamber.

Recommendation #3: All LUGs within the region should adopt at the very least a "no net loss" policy for public lands. A higher, more preferred standard would be a policy of "no net loss per capita" for public lands.

- 1) Benefits to the region if implemented:
 - a) To local units of government: LUGs are viewed as respectful of the desires of their citizens, who continually express their priorities for a community vision that includes environmental preservation, healthy lakes, accessible parks, trails and open space, maintaining rural character, a sense of place and a high quality of life. This would give LUGs political cover to make hard decisions that would stop over-development of the region.
 - b) To the community at-large: Rural character and a sense of place are maintained, which citizens voice as priorities for the region. Preserving these attributes is especially necessary in rapidly growing Crow Wing County where there is currently only 2.31 acres of public land per person. Double the population, which it is predicted to do in 20 years, and you have just 1.6 acres per person. Is that

enough to meet the diverse recreational needs? Cass County is in better shape with regards to public land. In Cass County, there is currently approximately 25 acres of public land per person.

- c) To business - Again, an abundance of parks, trails and open space are directly correlated with a high quality of life. A perceived high quality of life attracts a healthy, well-educated, highly motivated, abundant work force. Businesses like consistent policy throughout the region so they know what they're working with.
- 2) Consequences to the region if not implemented:
 - a) To local units of government: LUGs will be viewed as short-sighted -- placing short-term economic gains (from the sale of public lands) above all else, including a long-term community vision that has been expressed by citizens who vote. Many elected and appointed officials could find themselves without jobs after the next election.
 - b) To the community at-large: Recreational opportunities diminish. Rural character, open space, quality of life and a unique sense of place disappear from a region associated with those very qualities. Public has already suffered loss of Potlatch lands for recreation.
 - c) To business: If public lands are sold off for short-term solutions to financial woes, there will be a long-term irreversible decline of the region's healthy tourism-based economy. Businesses related to the tourism industry will suffer first. Since the region's economic driver is tourism and recreation, all businesses will eventually feel the negative impact.
 - 3) Ideas for incentives to encourage implementation: Cass County already has a policy of "no net loss" of public lands. This could be used as a model for other LUGs in the region.
 - 4) Steps to implementation:
 - a) Find out which LUGs have policies on preserving public land acres, and if they don't why not?
 - b) Educate LUGs about the benefits of a "no net loss" policy and a "no net loss per capita" policy.
 - c) Accumulate resolutions of support from local businesses and citizens supporting at the very least a "no net loss" policy for public lands.
 - d) Campaign to get all LUGs within the region to support a "no net loss" policy for public lands.
 - 5) Timeline: Begin discussions in January 2008 and have policy adopted by all LUGs by Fall of 2008

Recommendation #4: LUGs should work together to design and implement a regional state-of-the-art parks and trails system that:

1) is appropriate for a rapidly growing, rapidly urbanizing, rapidly aging region;

2) meets the requirements of intelligent growth -- it is environmentally, economically and socially appropriate;

- 3) includes multiple-use, seasonally managed, destination trails whenever possible, and single-purpose facilities in areas where motorized and non-motorized uses don't mix well;**
- 4) comes with adequate funding for enforcement and maintenance;**
- 5) balances the desires of motorized trail users with those of non-motorized trail users; and**
- 6) creates a process to close trails where uses are incompatible with community desires or environmental concerns.**

- 1) Benefits to the region if implemented:
 - a. To local units of government: Provides a clear priority for limited public funds; multiple-use trails help reduce costs.
 - b. To the community at-large: A range of trail options contribute to a high quality of life. Again, studies show that Americans will be more active (and more healthy) if safe walking/biking/in-line skating/skiing trails are made easily accessible.
 - c. To business: Trails could connect business centers allowing customers to get there without hopping in their cars all the time
- 2) Consequences to the region if not implemented:
 - a. To local units of government - A continued outcry for public trails from both motorized and non-motorized enthusiasts.
 - b. To the community at-large - A lack of transportation/recreation options and a continued dependence on our roads and automobiles for getting around the region; limited opportunities for a healthy, active lifestyle.
 - c. To business - Loss of potential revenues from trail enthusiasts visiting the area (both motorized and non-motorized)
- 3) Ideas for incentives to encourage implementation: A Highway 210 demonstration project for a multiple-use trail from Pillager (in Cass County) to Baxter (in Crow Wing County). If this works, more multiple-use trails can be implemented.
- 4) Steps to implementation:
 - a. Use the regional master map referred to in recommendation #1
 - b. Review the Wisconsin model and other best practice examples
 - c. Educate the public
- 5) Timeline: Begin in January 2008 with follow-up meetings as necessary. This recommendation is closely tied to Recommendation #1: the creation and implementation of a regional master map for public lands. A plan for future parks, trails and open space would be part of the process creating and maintaining a regional master map for public lands.

Recommendation #5: LUGs within the region should support independent audits of sustainable forestry practices on public lands. Studies show that sustainably managed forest lands (that are also available for public recreation) can be more profitable than the revenues generated by the sale of the land for development potential.

- 1) Benefits to the region if implemented:
 - a) To local units of government: Provides independent, science-based recommendations for best management practices of public land holdings; audit of sustainable forestry practices may become a format for auditing other "public good" activities under the jurisdiction of LUGs
 - b) To the community at-large - Properly managed and profitable public forest lands means that they will continue to be available for public recreation and enjoyment for generations to come
 - c) To business - Sustainable management of our public forests can expand/protect a significant existing industrial base in the region
- 2) Consequences to the region if not implemented:
 - a) To local units of government - Lawsuits; a loss of revenue.
 - b) To the community at-large - A sick forest; possible sale of public forest lands to developers; a loss of recreational lands
 - c) To business - Inconsistent production of forest products and businesses like consistency.
- 3) Ideas for incentives to encourage implementation: Review studies showing the economic, social and environmental benefits of sustainably managed public forest lands that are used for recreation. Chamber of Commerce should request an annual report on audits of sustainable forest practices in the region.
- 4) Steps to implementation:
 - a) Survey LUGs within the region to find out which ones are promoting independent audits of sustainable forestry practices within their jurisdiction; Gather data from LUGs that are.
 - b) Educate public about profitability potential of sustainably managed forest lands (that are also available for public recreation) versus selling off mismanaged forest lands for development potential
 - c) Submit annual report to the Chamber of Commerce
- 5) Timeline: Begin in January 2008. Policy should be adopted within one year.