

# Executive Summary

## **Background**

The River to River Greenway encompasses 7.6 miles of paved trail from Kaposia Landing along the Mississippi River in the east, to the northwest at Lilydale where the Mississippi flows downstream of the confluence of the Minnesota River. The Greenway is adjacent to 830 acres of publicly accessible lands owned by cities of Mendota Heights, West Saint Paul and South Saint Paul, Dodge Nature Center, and Independent School District 197. Originally named the North Urban Regional Trail, this Greenway was made contiguous in 2015 when many pre-existing trails through city parks were linked with a continuous paved path, but adjustments will occur in the next few years with additional trailhead parking, grade separated crossings, and new alignment opportunities.

Prior to European settlement, the area was covered by hardwood forest, oak savanna and prairies, with wetlands occupying small depressions on the landscape. Farming practices and subsequent development eliminated any native prairie that once occupied open areas. The steep slopes of ravines leading to floodplain forest along the River encompassed maple basswood hardwood forest. With the onset of post-WWII development, many wetland depressions became ponds or small lakes with increased runoff from upland impervious surfaces. Subsequently, many of these were altered (excavated) for increased stormwater-holding capacity as development expanded.

Within the current urban and suburban landscape, many of the lands remaining with native plant cover are highly degraded due to the introgression of invasive species, the expansion of impervious cover from surrounding development, and the disruption of corridors conducive to the movement of wildlife. Current opportunities to ameliorate these challenges include the removal of invasive vegetation, enhancement of forests with native forbs and shrubs, addressing ravine erosion issues, and conversion of underutilized turf lawns to prairies and native plantings with high pollinator value. Some existing prairie restorations and native plantings within the Greenway Corridor contribute to its natural resource quality. These plantings could be expanded and enhanced with additional funding. Future long-term projects could address degraded wetlands to facilitate the return of native wet meadow and pond shoreline plantings to bring in more diversity and facilitate improvements in water quality for hydrologically connected systems within the Greenway.

This Natural Resource Management Plan aims to provide a foundation for future natural resource restoration and enhancement projects on the public lands outlined along this

greenway. Additionally, this document aims to provide structure and precedent with guiding principles governing future partnerships for natural resource projects and management on non-County owned lands adjacent to County Greenways that involve public lands owned by municipalities, non-profits, and school districts. Recommendations for structuring future collaborations around cost share for obtaining extramural funding are presented.

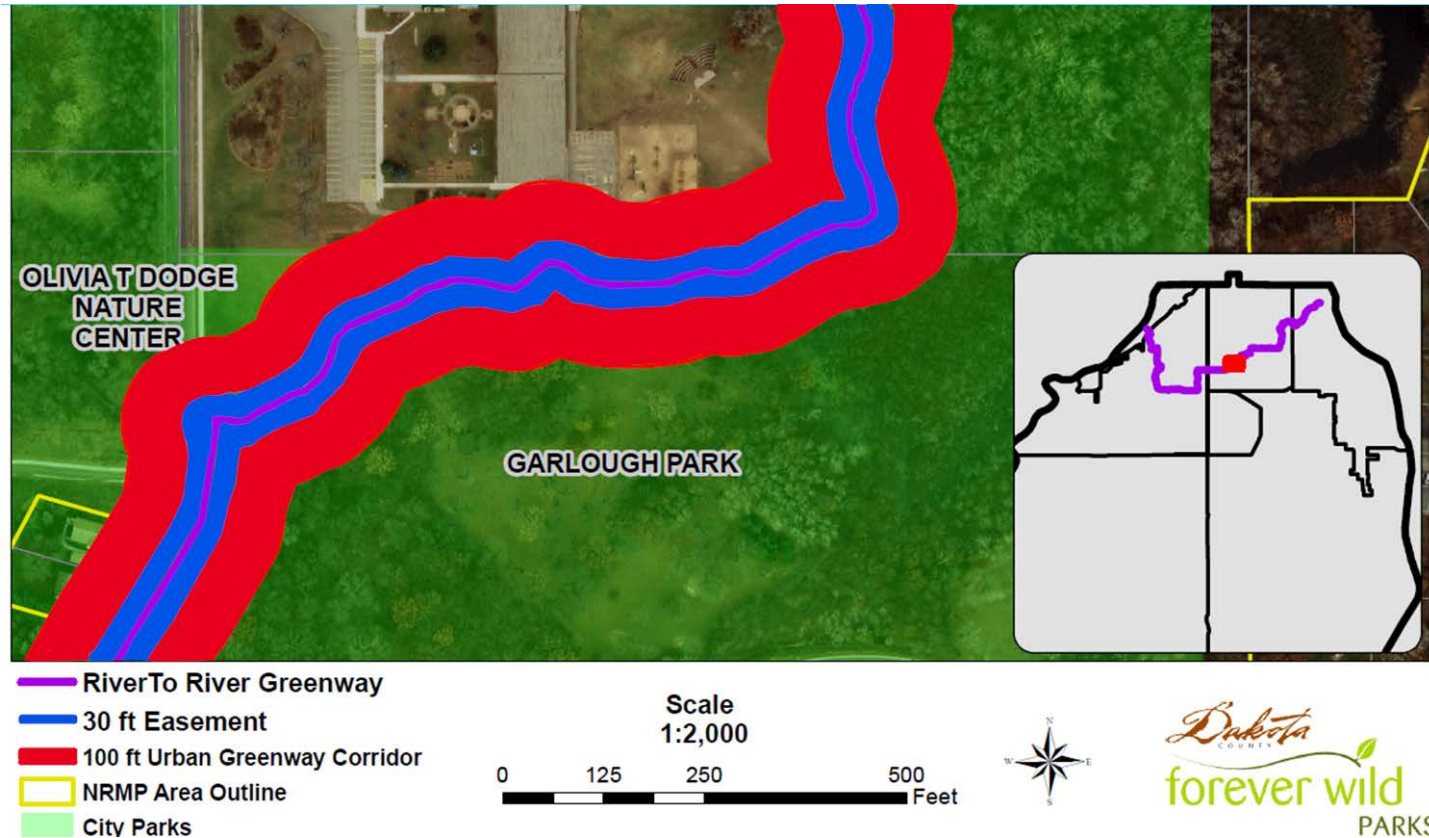
### **Natural Resource Management Plan Recommendations**

Restoration projects within public lands along the River to River Greenway Corridor amount to approximately **\$1.9 million** in project costs. **Table 7 (pg. 93)** illustrates the Restoration Priorities and site-specific restoration sequencing of all major sites within the Greenway Corridor. Briefly, the biggest priority for all woodlands and forests along the River to River Greenway is to remove invasive shrubs such as buckthorn and honeysuckle. Secondly, additional native trees and shrubs could be removed from oak woodlands and former grasslands currently experiencing woody encroachment. The highest priority for grasslands is to restore prairie in currently unrestored areas and determine the best underutilized turf areas for smaller prairie restorations and pollinator plantings. Finally, the highest wetland priorities are those that will have the greatest impact on water quality or public visibility, such as stormwater pond shoreline restorations (concurrent with buckthorn removal, but challenges exist with establishing emergent vegetation due to fluctuating water levels) and isolated wetlands proximal to trails (Marthaler Park). Next priority wetlands include those with the ability to control hydrology via water control structures (Valley Park), while the larger tracts of wetlands on Dodge's Lilly Property are a longer-term management consideration.

The implementation of natural resource projects outlined in **Table 7** of the Plan is subject to external grant funding. In the case of restorations occurring on non-County Lands, the County would seek to establish Joint Powers Agreements and Supplemental Maintenance Agreements with project Partners to define roles in restoration, enhancement and maintenance activities. State grant opportunities for funding natural resources related work require initial financial investment in the form of grant match. As a typical scenario, Dakota County would seek partnership contributions amounting to half the grant cash match associated with restoration on non-County lands. Thus, for a hypothetical \$100,000 restoration project funded by a state grant, a 20% cash match contribution (\$20,000) would be shared 50/50 between the County and project Partners (\$10,000 each). Partner contributions could deviate from this default scenario and would depend on the site's position relative to the Greenway (see **Executive Figure 1** and **Executive Table 1 below**). Greenway Corridors of 100-300 feet are defined based upon Greenway Guidebook (County Board Resolution No. 10-487), and Natural Lands are defined as public lands immediately outside this Greenway Corridor that form continuity with

respect to natural vegetation and wildlife habitat. Ongoing maintenance of the native plantings on non-County lands would be the responsibility of the Landowner.

**Executive Figure 1: River to River Greenway Corridor Terms Defined**



**Executive Table 1: Greenway Roles and Responsibilities**

Greenway Roles / Location	30-foot Easement	100 – 300-foot Corridor	Natural Lands Beyond Corridor
<b>Grant Match Cost Share</b>	County	County and Landowner have equal cost share (50/50).	County/Landowner have 25/75 cost share. County may assist more in high value areas.
<b>Restoration Project Management</b>	County	County/Landowner Partnership	Landowner. County may assist.
<b>Maintenance</b>	County	County. Landowner may assist.	Landowner.

Given the above Greenway Roles and Responsibilities, **Executive Table 2** (below) exhibits Funding Scenarios for natural resource restoration activities based upon the cost estimates presented in **Table 7** and were constructed with the following assumptions:

- Dakota County assumes 100% of the costs associated with Easements (~3% of total Greenway Study Area of 830 acres) and with restoration in Thompson County Park (either internally or grant funded, depending on the scenario);
- The County assists in 50% cost share for grant match within 100 ft Urban Greenway Corridor (11% of total Greenway Study Area), or 50% of total costs if no grant is obtained;
- The County assists with 25% cost share for grant match outside the 100 ft Urban Greenway Corridor (~86% of the Greenway Study Area), or 25% of total costs if no grant is obtained;
- All other restoration costs not described above are the responsibility of the respective Landowner and are summed as Implementation Cost Estimate for Partners.

The following Table outlines potential cost scenarios for initial restoration implementation (**Table 7**), assuming the roles and responsibilities above:

**Executive Table 2: Restoration Implementation Funding Scenarios**

<b>Grant Funding Scenario</b>	<b>Implementation Cost Estimate for County</b>	<b>Implementation Cost Estimate for Partners</b>	<b>Grant Funds</b>	<b>Total Cost Estimate</b>
<b>No Grant Funding</b>	\$950,000	\$920,000	\$ -	\$1,870,000
<b>50% Grant Funded</b>	\$570,000	\$550,000	\$750,000	\$1,870,000
<b>100% Grant Funded</b>	\$190,000	\$180,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,870,000

This initial Greenway NRMP seeks to establish general parameters for cost share roles and responsibilities between Dakota County and landowner partnership organizations. The guiding principles determining County contributions for initializing implementation of natural resource restoration projects on non-County owned land within established Greenway Corridors will establish a preferred policy approach, directed by the County Board’s approval of the Plan and future Joint Powers Agreements during implementation of the Plan’s activities.