City Of La Crescent
LA CRESCENT MINNESOTA
APPLE CAPITAL
1857
315 Main Street
La Crescent, MN 55947

City of La Crescent, MN

The Blufflands Plan

NOVEMBER 2017

"The La Crescent Community will establish an exceptional network of protected blufflands and recreational trails in and around the City of La Crescent. Our cooperative efforts will enhance the health of residents, visitors, natural eco-systems and our local economy."

- City of La Crescent Bluffland Plan Vision

MSA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

PREFACE

In 2016 the County of La Crosse, the La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC) and its regional municipalities, including the City of La Crescent, undertook an extensive process with planning consultant MSA Professional services, Inc. to prepare a plan for land conservation and recreational access in blufflands across the region. The planning process included interviews with critical stakeholders throughout the region and several large, public meetings to collect input and help refine plan recommendations. The Blufflands Plan was adopted by La Crosse County and the LAPC and work continues in 2017 to establish a formal, ongoing Bluffland Coalition to pursue the continued enhancement of our shared bluffland resources. The completed plan can be viewed on the Planning page of the La Crosse County website (see http://www.co.lacrosse.wi.us/zoning/planning/planning.asp).

In 2017 the City of La Crescent requested and received funding from the LAPC to engage the same consultant team at MSA to develop a more specific 'action plan' for the Minnesota side of the river. The regional plan had identified some lands highlighted for some method of conservation, and also a regional trail route around the City, but it lacked detail or prioritization of the various options for protecting lands from development and improving recreation access.

This plan provides that detail. It builds upon the public conversations and policy guidance of the regional Blufflands Plan, and also the 2016 La Crescent Comprehensive Plan, which calls for preservation of the blufflands and city vistas as well as site-appropriate public access to blufflands recreational opportunities and sustainable management of blufflands and parks. This plan was developed through consultation with a group of key local stakeholders familiar with the issues and challenges of land protection and trail investment. Those stakeholders are listed below.

It is important to note that this plan is a starting point for further discussions with bluffland landowners about the conservation of highly visible and sensitive lands. Any protection that occurs, whether through conservation easements or outright land purchase or other means, will occur cooperatively with willing property owners. Likewise, the plan identifies recreation improvements that require future budgeting decisions and also assistance from private donors and recreation advocates. This plan is intended to focus those efforts such that a more cohesive system of trails and recreation amenities is developed over time. Further extending the theme of collaboration and cooperation, it should be noted that some of the lands identified in this plan are outside the City of La Crescent, in La Crescent and Dresbach Townships. While this planning effort was City-led, implementation will require cooperation among multiple jurisdictions. It is the hope and expectation of the City of La Crescent that by establishing a vision and gathering stakeholders to work toward that vision each year, we can protect our valued blufflands for the benefit of all current and future residents of our shared community. See the Action Plan for details.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are extended to all those who contributed to the development of this plan.

- Linda Larson – City Resident, Planning Commission Member
- Donald Smith – City Resident, Planning Commission Chair
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With assistance from **MSA Professional Services, Inc.**

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BLUFFLAND CONSERVATION

BACKGROUND

HISTORY

The La Crosse-La Crescent region boasts a unique and beautiful landscape featuring dramatic stone bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River. These lands and features are part of a larger area known as the Driftless Area or Coulee Region, spanning portions of 35 counties across southeast Minnesota, southwest Wisconsin, northeast Iowa, and northwest Illinois. In the La Crescent area these bluffs and associated highlands are known by many as "Blufflands".

The bluffs were formed by the erosion of the surrounding valleys over tens of thousands of years, and, unlike much of the surrounding region, they were not smoothed flat by glaciers during the most recent ice ages and they lack the deposits of sediment "drift" typically left behind by glaciers. This is the source of the "Driftless Area" name.

Geologically older and more varied than the glaciated areas, the bluffs host unique biodiversity. According to Minnesota Department of Natural Resources's Tomorrow's Habitat Action Plan, there are156 Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) known or predicted to occur within the Blufflands. These SGCN include 82 species that are federal or state endangered, threatened, or of special concern.

Scenic America (a national nonprofit dedicated to preserving bucolic vistas) labeled the Upper Mississippi Blufflands as "one of the 10 last chance landscapes". This label was given because the Blufflands are a naturally occurring, beautiful phenomenon that faces harm, but has a "last chance" for preservation before it is lost or damaged. The primary "harm" facing the Blufflands is urban development that replaces open spaces and natural habitats with structures, roads and lawns, changing how the bluffs look and altering ecological conditions.

The La Crosse-La Crescent region has grown in population by roughly 40,000 people over the past 40+ years. As the region continues to grow, at a rate of about 800 new residents per year, the Blufflands face continued development pressure, especially for homes.

The bluffland scenic views are an essential component of the region's identity - this beauty helps draw people here, both to visit and to stay. As people continue to move to the region, and as La Crescent works to attract a share of this growth, it is important to protect and conserve the bluffland resource.

Photo Credit: Mississippi Valley Conservancy

BLUFF PROTECTION

In Southeastern Minnesota in 1998, a Blufflands Design Manual was initiated by Architectural Environments of Dakota, the State of Minnesota, and the Winona County Planning Department. The manual addresses issues concerning growth and development within the Blufflands with a focus on avoiding isolated residential housing developments (urban sprawl) to preserve the region's identity and natural resources. The Manual recommends tools ranging from comprehensive newspaper coverage of regional land-use issues to zoning ordinance recommendations in order to preserve the bluffs.

Although bluffland preservation has primarily been accomplished through land and easement acquisitions, several public entities in the region have worked to protect the bluffs through regulatory tools, using ordinances to prevent development.

Winona County Ordinance

Bluff is defined as lands rising at least 25 feet above the ordinary high water mark of a shoreland water body (if within 1,000 feet of a water body) or 100 feet from toe to top outside a shoreland area, with an average slope of 25% or greater. A Bluff impact zone is defined as including the bluff and lands within 20 feet of the top of the bluff. The top of the bluff is defined as the clear break in the slope, or, if ambiguous, it is defined as the upper end of a 100-foot segment with an average slope exceeding 18%. Structures must be set back 100 feet from the top of the bluff. Vegetative clearing is not permitted, and the Planning Department may require restoration of screening where it is insufficient.

The Winona County

Bluff Toe and Top Definitions

Source:Winona County Zoning Ordinance

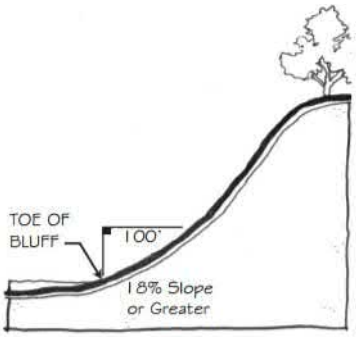


Figure 4.29 Toe of Bluff diagram

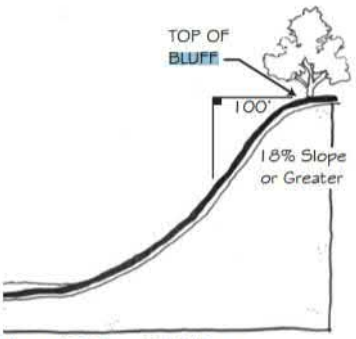


Figure 4.30 Top of Bluff diagram

Bluff Diagrams

Source:Winona County Zoning Ordinance

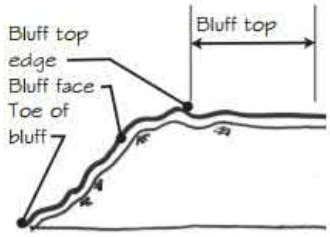


Figure 11.16 Bluff Features

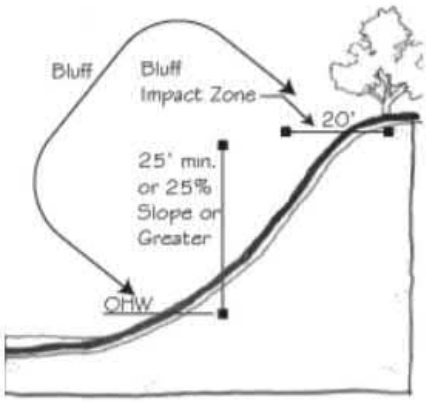


Figure 11.17 Bluff and Bluff Impact Zone relationship diagram.

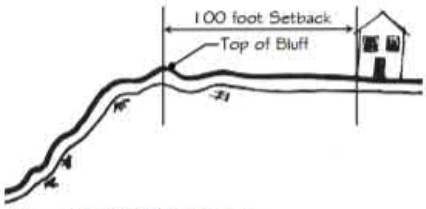


Figure 11.18 Bluff Setback

ordinance adds additional protections for the "Mississippi River Bluffs", defined as bluffs within one mile of Minnesota Highway 61. No development is allowed within 300 feet of the top of the bluff within this area, except as a conditional use permit with strict standards on grading, lighting, color, materials, height, etc.

Houston County Ordinance

Bluff is defined as lands rising at least 25 feet above the ordinary high water mark of a shoreland water body (if within 1,000 feet of a water body) or 50 feet from toe to top outside a shoreland area, with an average slope of 24% or greater. A bluff impact zone is defined as including the bluff and lands within 20 feet of the top of the bluff. The top of the bluff is defined as the clear break in the slope, or, if ambiguous, it is defined as the upper end of a 50-foot segment with an average slope exceeding 18%. Structures must be set back 40 feet from the top of the bluff and 25 feet from the toe of the bluff. Intensive vegetation removal is prohibited within 20 feet of the bluff top; limited pruning and clearing is allowed if it does not substantially reduce the screening of structures or other facilities as seen from the water.

City of La Crescent Ordinance

The City's ordinance mirrors the Houston County ordinance, except that it defines bluffs as slopes 30% or greater from the toe of the bluff (to a point 25 feet or more above the high water level) and further defines the slope must drain towards the waterbody. In the Conservation Development District, the principal building shall be set back 30 feet from the top of the bluff.

Township of La Crescent Ordinance

The Township's ordinance mirrors the Houston County ordinance, except that it defines bluffs as only those occurring within the shoreland, meaning within 1,000 feet of a lake or pond, and 300 feet of a river or stream. In other areas it would appear that the bluff-related regulations do not apply, and development can occur on slopes up to 24%.

In discussion with the Township of La Crescent, the regulation was to mirror the County's standards. The Township intends to correct the noted difference in the near future.

EXISTING PROTECTED BLUFFLANDS

The Blufflands are unique landforms. For the purposes of this plan, "bluffland" properties are those with terrain at or above 700 feet in elevation. As of 2016, more than 3,000 acres and nearly 240 parcels of Blufflands have been protected in the La Crosse - La Crescent Region. The portion of these lands in and near La Crescent includes about 100 acres of City parks and nearly 60 acres of County Park (Apple Blossom Overlook).

Ownership	Acres	Parcels
City of La Crescent	99.9	5
Winona County	57.4	11
Houston County	0	0
TOTAL	**157.3**	**16**

LEGEND

- Bluffland Trail (Existing Trail)
- Other Trail
- Existing Protected Blufflands*
- Non-Bluffland* Parks, Conservation and/or Public Lands
- Potential Bluffland Dry Prairie
- County Boundary

(*) Bluffland Properties include those with lands at or above 740-FT in elevation.
(+) Easements may not be accessible to the public.

PRIOR PLANNING

BACKGROUND

This Blufflands Plan builds upon work and policies in the City of La Crescent Compehensive Plan, adopted in September 2016.

The Comprehensive Plan includes a series of Goals and Objectives in service to the following *Natural Systems, Open Spaces and Recreation Vision Statement*, describing La Crescent as residents desires it to be in the year 2035:

"The City of La Crescent is known not only for its exceptional driftless landscape, but also its commitments to clean air, clean water and environmental stewardship. By expanding public access to blufflands and waterways, adding uses that ehance utilization of City parks, and attracting businesses that serve recreation needs, the City has cultivated a reputation for outdoor recreation opportunities. Recreational users have become active participants in the sustainable management of the region's parks, blufflands and waterways."

This Plan is an extension of the Comprehensive Plan, offering details to define how the bluffland assets will be protected and improved.

The following objectives from the Natural Resources, Open Spaces and Recreation section of Comprehensive Plan are especially relevant and deserve reinforcement in this plan.

1.2 Blufftops overlooking and visible from La Crescent and the approaching highways will be permanently protected from further development.

1.3. Existing residential development on blufftops and hillsides in and around the City will be obscured by mature trees.

2.1. There will be more hiking and biking trails and users in the bluffs around La Crescent.

2.3. Public access improvements to natural areas will be designed to prevent or repair ecosystem damage and will be long-lasting with minimal maintenance requirements.

2.4. Downtown La Crescent will serve as a trailhead for a system of regional hiking, biking and boating trails.

2.7. Parks and trails in the region will be clearly identified and easy to find and navigate.

2.8. As access to natural areas increases, there will continue to be wild and secluded places with limited human visitation.

4.1. City parks will include features accesible by wheelchair and/or by visitors with limited mobility

The Land Use Chapter of the City's Comprehensive Plan also designates most of the land around the City, including all undeveloped blufflands, as "Bluffland Conservation" (see the map on the following page) and features the following language describing the City's land use intentions for that area:

The Bluffland Conservation (BC) category is intended to protect from development most of the blufflands immediately surrounding the City, and especially those blufftops visible from the City and the approaching highways.

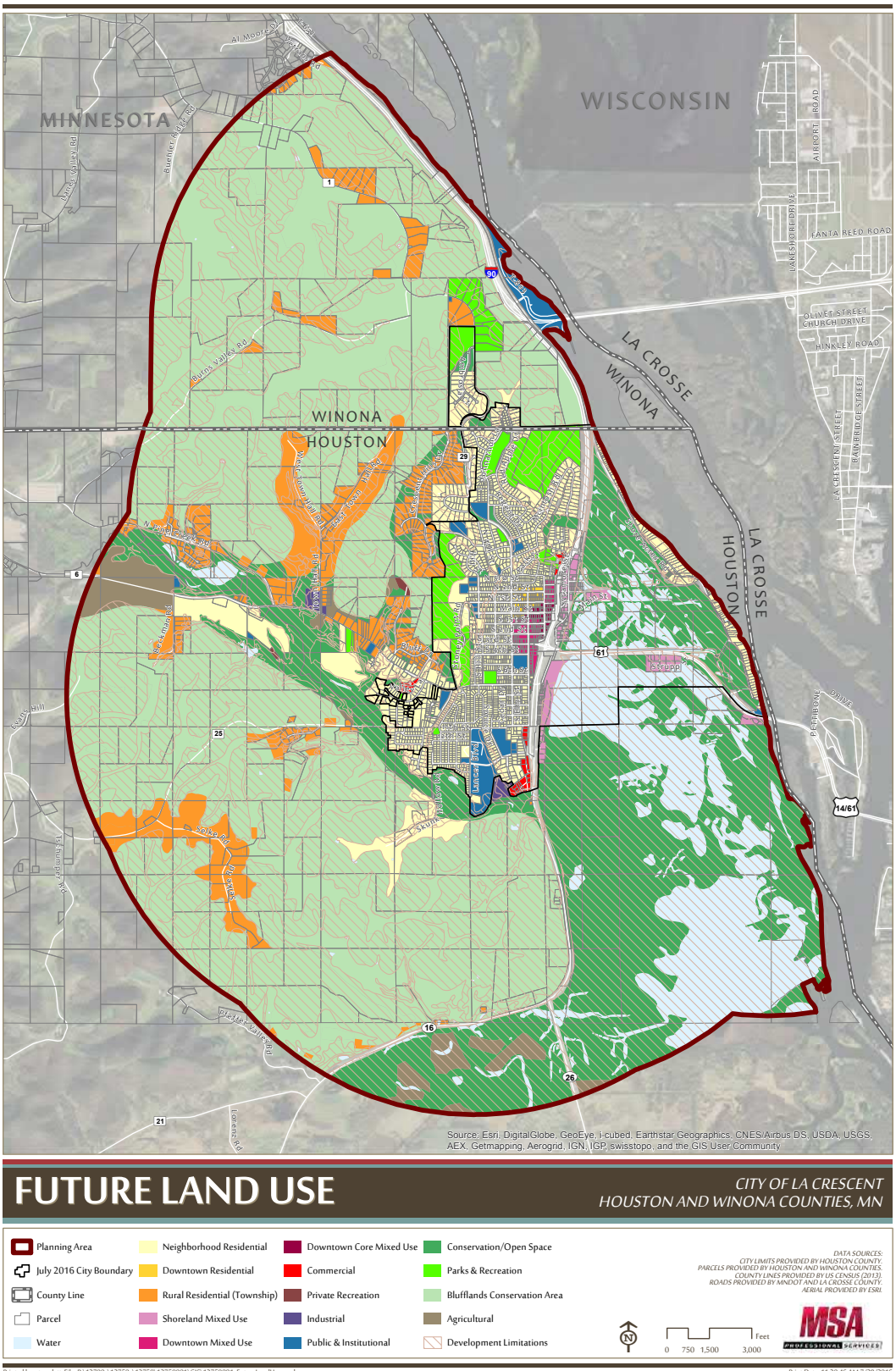
The development of new housing is discouraged in areas designated as Bluffland Conservation Area. The preferred development density is no more than one (1) dwelling unit per twenty (20) acres of contiguous land under single ownership. In limited cases, the use of conservation subdivisions or cluster developments may be acceptable. The development of commercial and manufacturing uses is strongly discouraged in BC areas, with the exception of agricultural or recreational businesses.

The City is strongly opposed to any new buildings or site clearing on bluff areas visible from the City and the approaching highways, including all of the State and Federal routes.

Any new development in less prominent areas shall be located in order to minimize its visibility from the County highways and town roads, in order to protect these "secondary" corridors that today offer exceptional scenic beauty.

The City is opposed to any new mining, agricultural, or business uses in this area that would dramatically increase truck traffic through City neighborhoods

Future Land Use Map City of La Crescent Comprehensive Plan (2016)



Regional Bluffland Planning Effort

THE BLUFFLANDS: A Plan For Conservation and Recreation Throughout the La Crosse - La Crescent Region (completed 2016)

THE BLUFFLANDS plan was an initiative of the La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC) to organize a regional approach to the conservation and recreational use of our blufflands. The LAPC assembled for this planning effort a steering committee representing key City, County and Town/Township communities, plus the Seven Rivers Regions Outdoor Recreation Alliance and Mississippi Valley Conservancy. It was developed to be used by public and private stakeholders throughout the region to guide the acquisition of conservation land and easements, coordinate restoration activities and recreation access improvements such as trailheads and trails, and establish an organizational structure for continued regional coordination and action.

A broad Coalition was recommended in the plan, to ensure the continued engagement and coordination of all parties that have a stake in the success of The Blufflands. Two types of membership were suggested - Charter Members and Associate Members. It is a central function of the proposed Coalition to facilitate discussion among core stakeholders whenever a potential acquisition is to be considered. The purposes of this discussion are to evaluate the importance of the land as suggested by this plan, to determine likely recreational uses (again with guidance from this plan), and to identify which entities should be involved in the acquisition process. After the initial discussion about the parcel, a land trust may or may not be involved in the acquisition, depending upon the need to establish a conservation easement (as is the case for lands acquired with the more conservation-oriented funding sources) and whether the acquisition fits the mission, priorities and interest of a land trust.

Per this completed regional plan, La Crescent could be either a Charter Member or Associate Member, for purposes of funding, coordination and participation. Charter Members would make specific funding commitments (most of that to be spent locally) and have a greater opportunity to benefit from that Coalition, including access to regionalized funding assistance for specific improvement projects.

See the 2016 LAPC Blufflands Plan for more detail.

If a Bi-State "Blufflands" Coalition is not formed, the City of La Crescent should work to establish a group representing municipalities and counties from Winona to the Iowa border.

TRAIL USE & DESIGN

BACKGROUND

It is a fundamental premise of this plan that the blufflands are a valuable recreation resource, to be used for walking, running, hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, picnicking, wildlife observation (e.g. birding) and more. These activities benefit recreation users individually, and the City as a whole by attracting visitors and residents.

Recreational use in the blufflands is almost entirely about trails. This section offers guidelines on trail use and design to assist in site selection and recreational use programming.

Trail Use Compatibility and Conflict Management

The Blufflands can host many different types of recreational activities. An understanding of the compatibility of those uses is the foundation for trail design decisions and the effective distribution of uses across the region.

As documented in the regional Blufflands Plan, conflict occurs when the goals of one recreation participant interfere with the goals of another recreation participant in the same location. For example, the goal of a mountain biker to ride fast through a forest may conflict with a day hiker's goal of a tranquil stroll through the same forest. The actual amount of conflict that occurs when the hiker and mountain biker encounter one another is dependent on a host of factors, including each user's experience level, previous experience with similar situations including the frequency of encounters, feeling of attachment to the trail they are riding, design of the trail, proximity to one another, duration of their meeting, and tolerance of the other person's behavior.

Recreation activities interact in a variety of ways. Some activities positively impact one another and are complementary. For example, camping increases hiking activity on nearby trails. Other recreation activities are merely compatible, having a neutral impact on the pursuit of another recreation activity. These activities are called supplementary. Most activities, however, have the potential for conflict with other activities. Users from these different groups may experience conflicts over competition for space, trail infrastructure, viewscapes, and soundscapes. In minor cases, these conflicts are called competitive interactions. In more extreme cases, two activities may be completely incompatible and interactions between them are described as antagonistic.

The regional Blufflands Plan cites work and findings by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for Wisconsin's State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which is relevant in La Crescent. Based on a series of focus groups with recre-

ational use experts, including recreation managers, Wisconsin DNR staff developed Compatibility Ratings and organized them into a table (shown below) that describes the perceived level of conflict from the perspective of users. Green shading represents generally complementary recreation interactions, while red shading represents generally antagonistic interactions. The primary take-away is that motorized recreational uses are not very compatible with non-motorized recreational uses.

Successful management must seek to understand and mitigate conflict, and focus on compatibility. Those uses that fall in the "somewhat com-

Spectrum of Interaction Types and Their Recreational Outcomes

Source: WI DNR 2005-2010 SCORP

Interaction Type	Key Characteristics	Outcome	Example
Complementary	Increasing compatibility with increased use	No conflict	Hiking and camping
Supplementary	Neutral interaction - no impact on compatibility	Minor conflict	Hiking and birding
Competitive	Decreasing compability with increased use	Conflict	Hiking and mountain biking
Antagonistic	Activities completely incompatible	Strong Conflict	Hiking and ATV riding

Average Recreation Activity Compatibility Ratings

Source: WI DNR 2005-2010 SCORP

	INTERACTS:										
PRIMARY USE:	ATV Riding	Hunting	Snow-mobiling	Horseback Riding	Mountain Biking	Cross-Country Skiing	Linear Trail Biking	Hiking	Wildlife Watching	Camping	Average Compatibility
ATV Riding	X	5.3	6.5	5.1	5.5	4.9	5.5	6.1	6.9	7.5	6.0
Hunting	3.3	X	3.7	4.7	4.3	5.3	5.7	5.4	6.0	6.3	5.0
Snowmobiling	4.3	4.0	X	4.0	4.8	4.3	5.8	5.3	6.3	7.2	5.1
Horseback Riding	2.2	3.5	3.0	X	3.8	4.9	4.5	6.3	7.3	7.7	4.8
Mountain Biking	3.1	3.6	4.7	4.8	X	5.7	8.1	6.1	7.4	8.0	5.7
Cross-Country Skiing	1.8	3.6	2.6	3.3	4.2	X	5.6	4.9	8.1	8.5	4.7
Linear Trail Biking	2.6	3.9	5.5	5.3	8.2	7.1	X	7.4	8.0	8.7	6.3
Hiking	2.4	3.5	3.5	5.7	4.7	6.1	6.5	X	8.9	9.2	5.6
Wildlife Watching	2.2	3.2	2.9	6.4	5.2	7.6	6.8	8.6	X	8.3	5.7
Camping	3.9	4.1	5.0	7.5	7.8	8.2	8.2	8.9	8.5	X	6.9
Average Compatibility	2.9	3.9	4.2	5.2	5.4	6	6.3	6.6	7.5	7.9	

a. Compatibility ratings are for how column activity interacts with the row activity. Ratings should therefore be read horizontally across rows.

b. Ratings below 4.0 (highly competitive or antagonistic) are highlighted in red, ratings between 4.0 and below 7.0 are highlighted in yellow (moderately to mildly competitive), and ratings 7.0 (supplementary or complementary) and above are highlighted in green. Results are based on responses from 23 Wisconsin recreation professionals.

patible" (with ratings of 4.0-7.0 for both uses), such as mountain biking and hiking, have the greatest potential for improved compatibility.

It is a recommendation of this plan that the most challenging bike trails, including freeride and downhill single-track trails are not compatible with other uses and should be located away from the most heavily-used trailheads to minimize conflicts with other uses.

It is also recommended that the City should continue to include some hiking-only trails in more secluded areas that serve the interests of those seeking solitude and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Trail Specifications

Trail design parameters (e.g. width, material, maximum slope, etc.) are offered here to guide decisions on which lands to add to the City bluffland network, how to fund those acquisitions, and how to improve them for recreational use.

Best Practices - All Trail Types

In general, all trails should be constructed as loops rather than out and back, except for those connecting trails or following a linear greenway or existing path. As trails are developed and improved, the most convenient and accessible trails should typically be the easiest ones, meaning flat to shallow slopes and short loops ("green circle" routes). More challenging trails, in slope and length, can be located anywhere – popular trailheads should offer access to a range of difficulties.

Trails should be sited and designed to avoid the development of rogue trails. This means avoiding routes that offer an easy shortcut between two points, either by limiting the use of switchbacks and/or by designing around or adding vegetation where rogue trails are likely to occur.

The standard vertical clearance for any trail is at least 9 feet, and those trails requiring grooming (such as cross country skiing) needing up to 15 feet vertical clearance (depending on grooming equipment). Even though the criteria below are listed by individual trail types, it is more efficient to allow for multiple user groups on individual trails. Therefore, the more restrictive recreation trail standards should apply to shared use trails.

The ideal trail grades vary depending on recreational user group, as well as trail type/material. For the purposes of this review, trail grades are categorized as described in the callout box above right. Trail construction on grades over 75% is difficult and expensive to build and maintain, and thus, are not recommended for trail construction. Soil composition is also important to trail construction with sandy soils being very poor trail base and clay soils being the best and most sustainable. The general rule is the fewer the amount of binders (clay) in the soil the lower compaction rate, resulting in higher maintenance needs. Binders can be added to soils to make them more sustainable, but the majority of the time most binder applications will not work on trails with grades over five percent.

Trail Slope

Flat (< 5.0% slope)
Shallow (5.1%-10.0% slope)
Moderate (10.1%-25.0% slope)
Steep (25.1%-40.0% slope)
Very Steep (Over 40% slope)

Trailhead amenities, specifically bathroom facilities, are largely dictated by cost of construction and maintenance. The general rule of thumb is the higher the expected use, the more need there will be for rest room facilities at a trailhead. For example, rest room facilities with flush toilets are recommended at any trailhead that is both easily accessible (i.e. at the edge of an urban neighborhood) and providing access to multiple trails. Conversely,

Trail Specifications by Recreation Use Summary

Source: Trail Design Specialists, from The Blufflands Plan for the La Crescent Region

SUMMER	Width *(feet)*	Height *(feet)*	Length *(feet)*	Material	Grade	Potential Shared Uses
Foot Traffic						
Walking	6.0+	9.0	1.0-5.0	Paved / Compact Gravel	Flat - Shallow	bicycle, hiking, skateboards, roller blades, runners, wildlife viewing
Hiking (day use)						
urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	0.25-10.0	Natural Surface	Flat - Shallow	runners, cross country cyclists
less urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	0.25-10.0	Natural Surface	Flat - Very Steep	runners, cross country cyclists
Running						
urban	6-10	9.0	1.8; 3.1; 6.2	Natural / Compact Gravel	Flat - Shallow	walkers, cross country cyclists
less urban	> 1.5	9.0	1.8; 3.1; 6.3	Natural Surface	Flat - Steep	walkers, wildlife viewing, cross country cyclists
Wildlife Viewing (including Birding)	2.5-4.0	9.0	0.25-1.0	Natural Surface (paved / compact gravel)	Flat - Moderate	none
Bicycle Traffic						
Urban	7.0	9.0	1.0-5.0	Paved / Compact Gravel	Flat - Shallow	bicycle, skateboards, roller blades, runners
Cross Country						
urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	>5; >15; 30-50	Natural Surface	Flat - Shallow	walkers, hikers, runners, birding/nature viewing
less urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	>5; >15; 30-50	Natural Surface	Moderate - Steep	walkers, hikers, runners, birding/nature viewing
Freeride	> 2.0	9.0	0.5-2.0	Natural Surface	Moderate -Very Steep	downhill cyclists
Downhill	> 3.0	9.0	0.06-0.5	Natural Surface	Steep - Very Steep	free ride cyclists

WINTER	Width *(feet)*	Height *(feet)*	Length *(feet)*	Material	Grade	Potential Shared Uses
Snowshoeing	2.5-4.0	9.0	*0.5-5.0*	Natural Surface	Flat - Moderate	
Cross Country Skiing (groomed trails)	6.0-12.0 (4.0 / track)	9.0-15.0	0.5-3.0 (typ); > 15.0	Natural Surface (Compact Gravel)	Flat - Moderate	cross country skiing
Skate Skiing	6.0	9.0-15.0	10.0-30.0	Packed Snow Surface	Flat - Moderate	cross country skiing
Snow Biking						
urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	0.5-3.0	Natural Surface	Flat - Shallow	walkers, hikers, runners, snowshoe/skate skiers
less urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	10-15	Natural Surface	Moderate - Steep	walkers, hikers, runners, snowshoe/skate skiers

a constructed natural surface trail on the top of the bluff designated for cross country biking, hiking or birding might only need a porta-potty, or no facilities at all. Those trails with low use and minimal parking often have no facilities.

Summer Trails – Foot Traffic

- **Walking trails** are wide, typically 6+ feet in width, and are often paved but can also be compacted gravel. Distance can range from 1 to 5 miles. The preferred terrain is typically flat to shallow grades. These types of trails or path ways are frequently shared by people on foot, bicycle, skate boards, roller blades and people with different types of accessibility issues. These are ideal trails for educational/informative walks, especially for school children.
- **Hiking trails** are design for those seeking a natural experience generally on a single track. These are generally natural surface trails with 1.5 to 4 feet in width. Trail distance can range from 0.25 mile to 10 miles (assuming day use only). This type of trail is commonly shared with runners and off road cyclists. The preferred terrain for this type of trail varies quite a bit, but the general rule is the closer the trail is to an urban area, flatter or shallower grades are preferred. As the trail gets further out then the preferred terrain can range from moderate grades to very steep.
- **Running trails** should always be constructed of natural surface or compacted gravel. Many runners will complain about suffering from joint problems associated with running on paved trails and pathways. Preferred width will vary based on proximity to an urban area. Trails close to an urban setting should be between 6 to 12 feet wide, while trails located further away can be as narrow as 1.5 feet wide. Preferred terrain is also dictated by proximity to urban areas. Flatter or shallower grades are found closer to an urban setting, while moderate to steep grades are found further out. Distance can vary greatly. Often property size and terrain dictate distance; however, all running trails should be set at popular distances for runners (3K, 5K, 10K, etc.). This is especially true if collegiate events are to be held on the trail. These trails are commonly shared with walkers and off road cyclists.
- **Wildlife Viewing, including birding, trails** should be located near areas where birds or animals are most active (wetlands, bluff areas, prairies). Users of this type prefer the trails not be shared with any other user. The typical width for this trail is 2.5 to 4 feet. The trail should be constructed natural surface, but in some cases may be paved or compacted gravel. The terrain is generally flat to moderate; however, steeper grades may be found as long as good ground cover is present. Viewing stands should be considered near nesting sites. Trail length is usually 0.25-1.0 mile.

Summer Trails – Bicycle Traffic

- **Urban cyclists** prefer trails or paths that are paved or use compacted gravel. Usual widths are 6+ feet and located on flat to shallow terrain. Distance can range from 1 to 5 miles. These types of trails or pathways are frequently shared by people on foot, skate boards, roller blades and people with different types of accessibility issues.
- **Cross country cycling** is also known as mountain biking or linear trail biking. This user prefers trails of constructed natural surface with widths ranging from 1.5 to 4 feet. Preferred terrain is dictated by proximity to urban areas. Flatter

or shallower grades close to an urban setting and moderate or steep grades further out. Rocky challenging terrain is also commonly preferred with experienced riders. These trails are often shared with walker and runners. Length of trail is dictated by challenge level. Easier trails are often less than 5 miles, while moderate trails are up to 15 miles and advanced trails up to as much as 30-50 miles. However, it is not uncommon to have short (less than a mile) of advanced trail interspersed with moderate trails. This works well to challenge more skilled riders in areas with limited distance opportunities.

- **Downhill cycling** trails are designed to allow riders to negotiate obstacles and rugged terrain while using gravity to supply speed and momentum. This type of trail is always constructed of natural surface with steep to very steep terrain. Trail width varies by challenge and obstacle type. Trails averaging less than three feet in wide are preferred. Typical trail lengths are 100 yards to 0.5 mile. These trails area often shared with free ride cyclists and are directional in nature.
- **Freeride cycling** is an evolution of cross country cycling, incorporating steep terrain both up and down with challenging obstacles (such as rocks and logs) with banked turns and some jumps. Preferred trail width is typically less than two feet wide and are constructed of natural surface. Length can vary, but is often 0.5 mile to 2 miles. Terrain is often moderate through very steep. These trails are discouraged for shared uses due to the challenging nature of the trail type, as well as they are often directional, allowing only one-way movement.

Winter Trails

In most cases winter use can utilize some of the same trails that are popular for summer use. Those will be outlined below. The most popular of the silent winter pursuits are snowshoeing, cross country skiing and fat tire /snow biking.

- **Snowshoeing**, while not as popular as skiing is a winter activity enjoyed by many who hike trails in the summer. Bird and animal watchers often use this method to continue their activities year round. While generally using summer hiking trails, many users continue beyond the trails and explore cross country. The trail is shared by those that use it in the summer, including hiking, cross country biking and birding/animal watching. Distance is limited by the depth and pack of the snow, but trails generally range from 0.5 mile to 5 miles. Preferred terrain is flat to moderate.
- **Cross-country skiing** is primarily made up of traditional kick and glide skiing and skate skiing. Traditional skiing can also be split into groomed trail skiing and back country skiing. For this Plan, the City will focus on groomed trail skiing. These trails are typically constructed using natural surface or on occasion with compacted gravel. In order to be maintained by grooming equipment, trail widths generally range from 6 to 12 feet. Yet, a single trail is generally four feet wide. If there are multiple, parallel tracks there should be a 2-foot separation between tracks. Trail distance varies by challenge level with beginner trails being 0.5-3.0 miles and more challenging trails being as long as 10-15 miles. Terrain can vary from flat to moderate. These types of trails don't allow any other types of use as the track is set by the skiers guides, which would be impacted by other uses. However, summer use can include walking, biking and running.

- **Skate skiing** often takes place on the same trails as traditional skiing. Skate skiing requires a packed surface so modern skate ski trails are always groomed. Often there will be a track-set for traditional skiing at the sides and groomed for skate skiing in the center. Trail width for skating is the same as traditional skiing – typically a six-foot corridor. Terrain for this activity is generally flat to moderate. Skate skiers move much faster than traditional skiers and as such distances can range from 10-30 miles (It should be noted most cross country ski trails regardless of type are typically measured in kilometers). Preferred terrain is flat to moderate. Summer use can include walking, biking and running.
- **Fat tire/Snow biking** is relatively new but growing in popularity and should be considered as possible on the City's trails. This type of cycling is typically done on existing cross country bike trails, but can be on walking, running or groomed skate skiing trails. Most riders prefer groomed trails while others prefer un-groomed trails. Whether groomed or un-groomed, this use should occur on constructed trails typically 1.5 to 4 feet wide. Trail distance is dictated by the summer trail type, but generally range from 0.5-3.0 miles near urban areas and more challenging trails of 10-15 miles long in less urban areas. Terrain is very similar to cross country biking with the snow pack increasing the challenge levels. These trails are often shared with walkers, runners, snow shoe and skate skiers.

Looking north toward Eagles Bluff Park, over Veteran's Park
Photo Credit: Jason Valerius

ACQUISITIONS & EASEMENTS

IMPROVEMENTS

This section offers guidelines for the protection of additional lands not currently protected from development.

Respect for Property Rights

This plan is a vision for the future of the La Crescent-area Blufflands, as lands to be protected from further urban development, and also to enhance public access for recreation and enjoyment of this resource. But it is important to point out the central role of property owners as collaborators in pursuit of this vision. The protection of lands not currently in public ownership will occur only with the consultation and support of willing property owners.

Design to the Site

Every site is unique and each should be evaluated for both natural resource value and recreation suitability. Many sites have areas deserving protection from recreational use, such as dry bluff prairies or steep, erodible slopes, and also areas that are suitable for recreation use. The siting and design of trails should be based on evaluation of the site and should involve a trail design specialist.

Who Should Acquire the Land or Easement?

The regional Blufflands Plan (see page 6), proposes a case-by-case discussion among key local partners to determine which entity has the capacity to take a lead role in acquiring land and/or easements. In La Crescent, the City of La Crescent and Minnesota Land Trust will be the active participants in most land or easement acquisitions.

Priority Tiers

There are, across the wider region, thousands of acres of land that could be added

Ecological Resources

The Blufflands are a critical migratory corridor for forest songbirds, raptors, and waterfowl, such as Henslow's sparrows, prothonotary warblers, red-shouldered hawks, Louisiana waterthrushes, and peregrine falcons. It is also important reptile habitat.

Many bluff tops and slopes contain steep "goat prairies", "oak savanna" and "american chestnut forest" communities. All three are incredibly rare natural communities. These remaining natural communities, although relatively small in area, are known or are predicted to have over 150 Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), including 82 species that are federal or state endangered, threatened, or of special concern.

to the system of protected blufflands. Based on the 2016 Blufflands Plan, there are three general tiers of properties to focus limited acquisition resources towards.

- **Tier 1**: Lands that offer views of and are visible from the La Crescent and the Mississippi River, and/or provide direct access or linkages to these lands from the City, and/or close a gap between protected lands, especially to facilitate connection of the La Crescent Bluffland Trail (see the next section).
- **Tier 2**: Lands that are contiguous to protected parcels or Tier 1 targets and provide opportunities to expand trail systems and/or contiguous habitat protections, but may not have views to/from the cities and/or the Mississippi River and are not necessary to completion of the La Crescent Bluffland Trail.
- **Tier 3**: Lands that do not have views of or from the Mississippi River, but extend contiguous habitat and recreation lands, and/or have bluff faces visible from I-90.

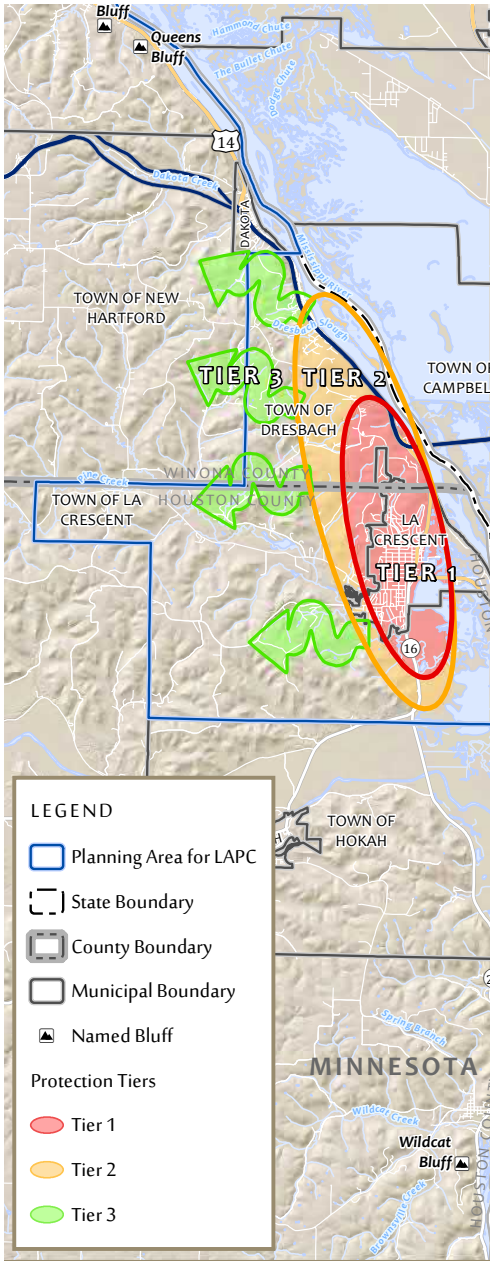
Bluffland Parcel Identification

This plan also identifies six specific parcels in the Tier 1 and Tier 2 areas recommended for ownership or easement acquisition. Lands identified as targets meet at least one of the following criteria.

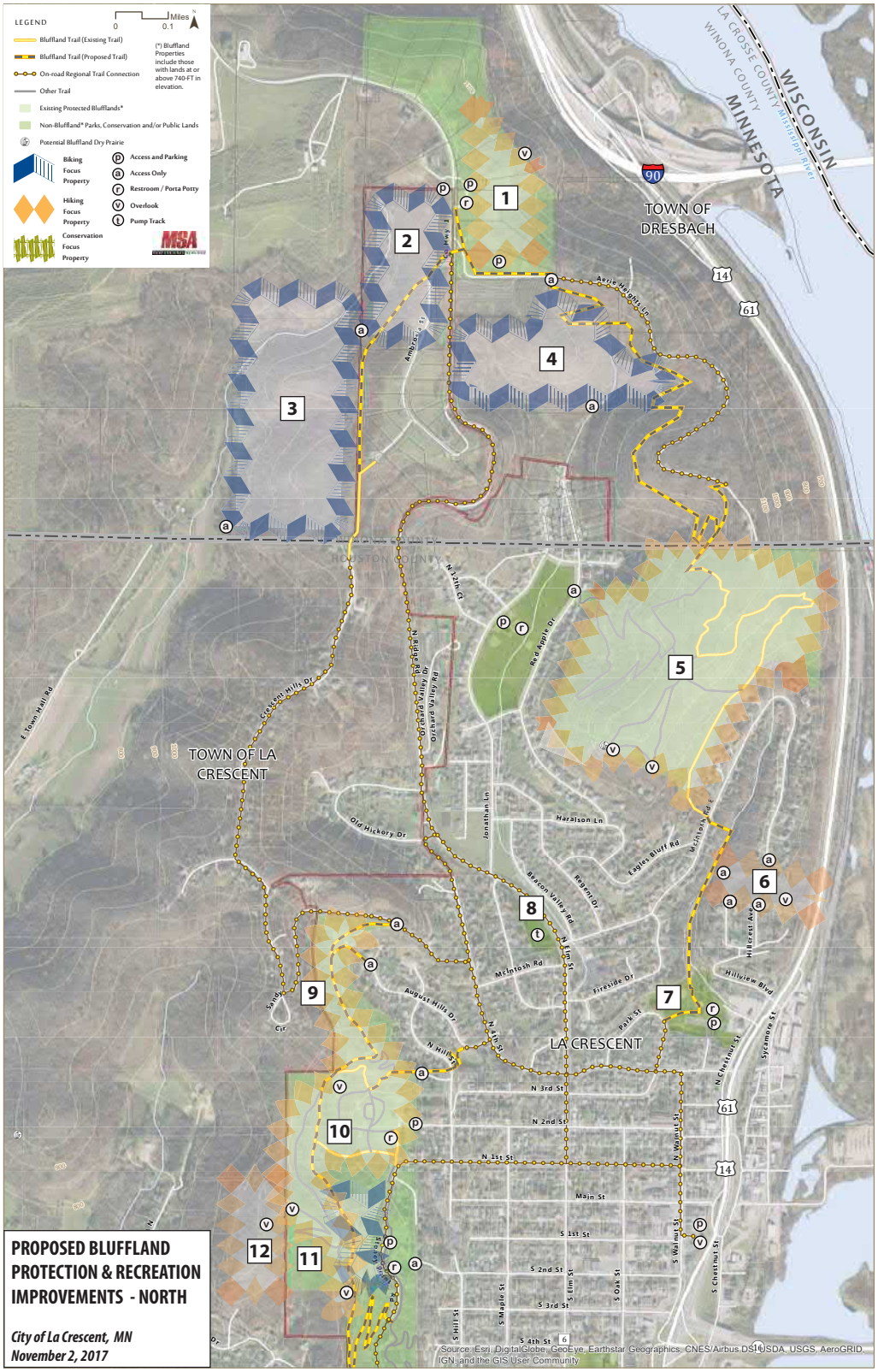
Target Criteria

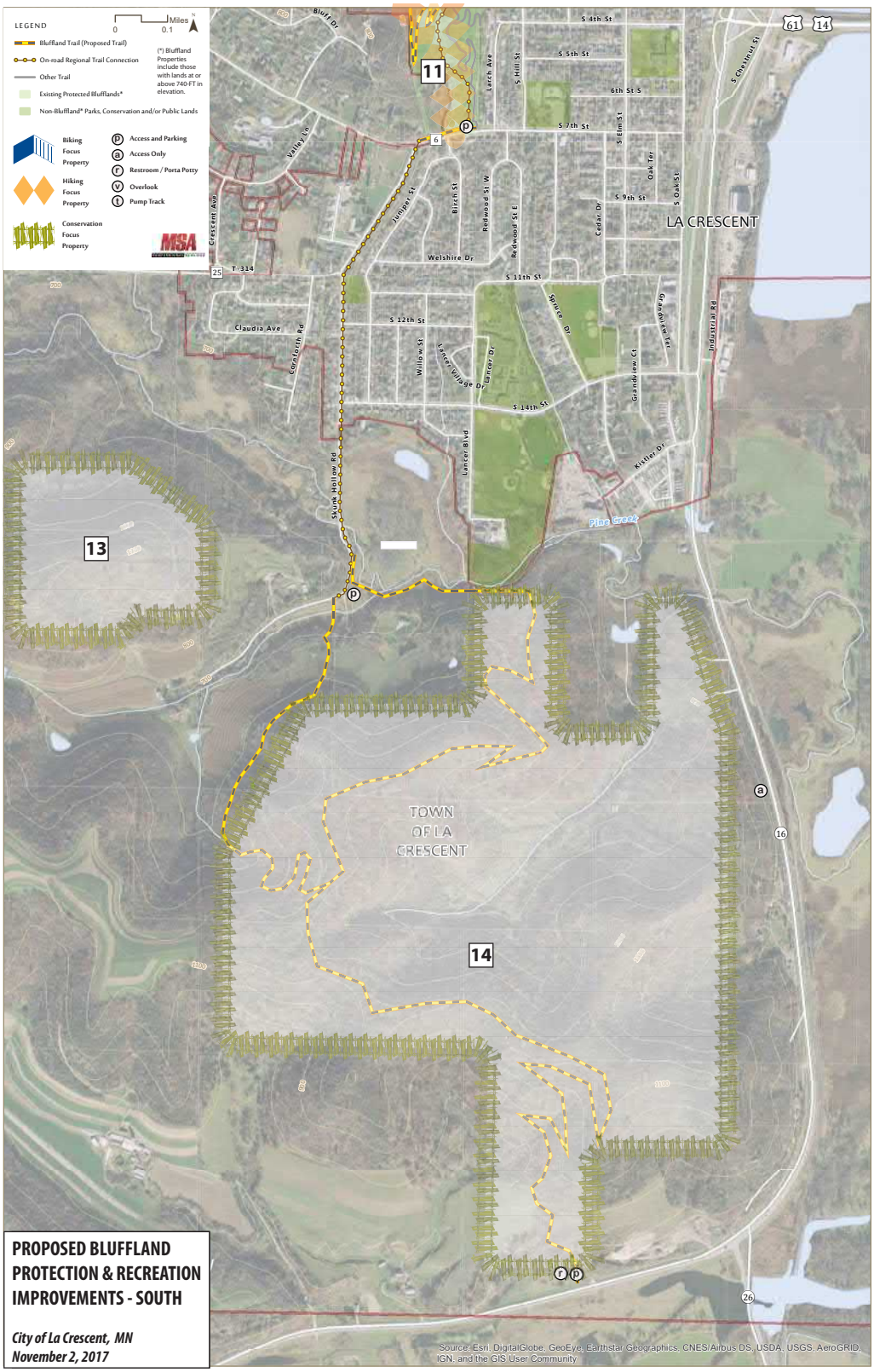
1. Lands with unique or important natural features.
2. Lands that close a gap in the proposed La Crescent Bluffland Trail.
3. Lands that improve connectivity among existing Blufflands properties, either for habitat protection or recreation trails.
4. Lands that improve pedestrian and/or vehicle access to existing Blufflands properties in the Tier 1 or Tier 2 areas.
5. Lands that are desirable for mountain biking, vehicle access (at both the top and base of the bluff desired), and includes sections with slopes of 25% to 50% or steeper.
6. Contiguous lands under common ownership with lands that meet one or more of the above criteria.

Acquisition Tiers



Proposed Bluffland Protections and Recreation Improvements *(North Section)*





Proposed Bluffland Protections and Recreation Improvements *(South Section)*

Proposed Bluffland Sites

The following sites are proposed for protection and recreation improvements.

A total of six sites are identified as "new", meaning they are not currently protected by easement or public ownership and are targeted here for protection from development. The method of protection, whether by outright purchase or easement acquisition, should be determined case by case, through discussion with the property owner and the Minnesota Land Trust.

It is important to note that every one of the bluffland sites identified here has some areas that are environmentally significant and/or sensitive and every site requires an evaluation for conservation and restoration needs and the appropriate siting of recreation improvements.

SITE 1

EXISTING PUBLIC SITE

Location: Apple Blossom Overlook County Park

Property Type: Recreation / Conservation

Current Ownership: Winona County

Property Characteristics:

- Size: 57 acres
- Elevation (total change): 900 – 1,220 FT (320 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Open Field and Woodlands

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Walking/Running, Day Hiking, Wildlife Viewing, and Cross Country Biking (Bluffland Trail only)
- Winter: Cross Country Skiing, Snowshoeing, and Snow Biking

Amenities:

- Existing: Kiosk, Accessible Overlook
- Proposed: Accessible Trail(s) and Rest room

SITE 2

EXISTING PUBLIC SITE

Location: Unnamed City Park – CTY HWY 1

Property Type: Recreation

Current Ownership: City of La Crescent

Property Characteristics:

- Size: 24 acres
- Elevation (total change): 1,000 – 1,200 FT (200 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Open Field and Woodlands

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Freeride Biking
- Winter: Snow Biking

Amenities:

- Existing: None
- Proposed: Parking

SITE 3

PROPOSED NEW SITE

Location: Ambrosia St

Property Type: Recreation / Conservation

Current ownership: Fruit Acres, Inc. and Mark A Nigogosyan (Judy L Klevan)

Property Characteristics:

- Size: 70 acres (parcel(s) = 138 acres)
- Elevation (total change): 840 – 1,170 FT (330 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Woodlands

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Freeride Biking and Downhill Biking
- Winter: Snow Biking

Amenities:

- Existing: None
- Proposed: Parking

Special Note:

- This site is not necessary for making a continuous bluffland trail connection.

SITE 4

PROPOSED NEW SITE

Location: CTY HWY 1 / Aerie Heights Ln)

Current Ownership: Leidel's Orchard Inc. and John E. Gillis

Property Type: Recreation / Conservation

Property Characteristics:

- Size: 44 acres (parcel(s) = 66 acres)
- Elevation (total change): 870 – 1,150 FT (280 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Woodlands

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Freeride Biking, Downhill Biking and Cross Country Biking (Bluffland Trail only)
- Winter: Snow Biking (Bluffland Trail only)

Amenities:

- Existing: None
- Proposed: Parking

SITE 5

EXISTING PUBLIC SITE

Location: Eagles Bluff Park

Property Type: Recreation / Conservation

Current Ownership: City of La Crescent

Property Characteristics:

- Size: 113 Acres
- Elevation (total change): 760 – 1,170 FT (410 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Woodlands and Stone Outcropping

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Walking/Running, Day Hiking, Wildlife Viewing, and Cross Country Biking (Bluffland Trail only)
- Winter: Cross Country Skiing and Snow Biking (Bluffland Trail only)

Amenities:

- Existing: Overlook
- Proposed: Parking (or utilize Old Hickory Park Parking Lot and Street Parking), Rest room, Kiosk

SITE 6

PROPOSED NEW SITE

Location: McIntosh Rd / Riverview Ave/ Hill Crest Ave

Property Type: Conservation / Passive Recreation

Current Ownership: James J Hurley

Property Characteristics:

- Size: 7.5 acres
- Elevation (total change): 710 – 810 FT (100 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Woodlands

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Walking/Running and Wildlife Viewing
- Winter: None

Amenities:

- Existing: None
- Proposed: Accessible Trail(s), Parking, Overlook

SITE 7

EXISTING PUBLIC SITE

Location: Veteran's Park

Property Type: Recreation

Current Ownership: City of La Crescent

Property Characteristics

- Size: 8 acres
- Elevation (total change): 660 – 680 FT (20 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Open Field Park

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Walking/Running, Cross Country Biking (Bluffland Trail only)
- Winter: Snow Biking (Bluffland Trail only)

Amenities:

- Existing: Parking, Picnic Shelters, Softball Field, Skate Park
- Proposed: Accessible Trail, Rest rooms, Pickleball Courts

SITE 8

EXISTING PUBLIC SITE

Location: John S Harris Park

Property Type: Recreation

Current Ownership: City of La Crescent

Property Characteristics:

- Size: 2 acres
- Elevation (total change): 720 – 730 FT (10 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Open Field Park

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Pump track (option 1)
- Winter: None

Amenities:

- Existing: None
- Proposed: Porta Potty

SITE 9

EXISTING PUBLIC SITE

Location: Vollenweilder Park

Property Type: Conservation / Passive Recreation

Current Ownership: City of La Crescent

Property Characteristics:

- Size: 19 acres
- Elevation (total change): 820 – 1,020 FT (200 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Woodlands

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Walking/Running, Day Hike, Wildlife Viewing, and Cross Country Biking (Bluffland Trail only)
- Winter: Cross Country Skiing, Snowshoeing, and Snow Biking (Bluffland Trail only)

Amenities:

- Existing: None
- Proposed: Parking

SITE 10

EXISTING PUBLIC SITE

Location: Vetsch Park

Property Type: Recreation / Conservation

Current Ownership: City of La Crescent

Property Characteristics:

Size: 25 acres
Elevation (total change): 740 – 1,050 FT (310 FT)
Current land cover and use: Open Space, Prairie, Woodlands

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Walking/Running, Day Hiking, Wildlife Viewing, and Cross Country Biking (Bluffland Trail only)
- Winter: Cross Country Skiing, Snowshoeing and Snow Biking (Bluffland Trail only)

Amenities:

- Existing: Parking
- Proposed: Accessible Trail(s), Rest room, Kiosk, (Accessible) Overlook

SITE 11

EXISTING PUBLIC SITE

Location: Stoney Point Park

Property Type: Recreation / Conservation

Current Ownership: City of La Crescent

Property Characteristics:

- Size: 59.5 acres
- Elevation (total change): 680 – 1,110 FT (430 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Woodlands, Open Space

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Walking/Running, Day Hiking, Wildlife Viewing, Cross Country Biking (Bluffland Trail only), (and Freeride/Downhill Biking - should Dog Park be moved to new location), pump track (option 2)
- Winter: Snow Biking

Amenities:

- Existing: None
- Proposed: Parking, Rest room, Kiosk, Overlook and Dog Park

SITE 12

PROPOSED NEW SITE

Location: Future Extension of Stoney Point Park

Property Type: Conservation / Passive Recreation

Current Ownership: Gross Revocable Trust

Property Characteristics

- Size: 20.2 acres
- Elevation (total change): 780 – 1120 FT (340 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Woodlands

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Walking/Running and Wildlife Viewing
- Winter: None

Amenities:

- Existing: None
- Proposed: Overlook

SITE 13

PROPOSED NEW SITE

Location: Forested Bluff South of Pine Creek

Property Type: Conservation

Current Ownership: A&K Development LLC; Tamara J Fay & Sherry Ready

Property Characteristics

- Size: 110.0 acres (parcel(s) = 299.8 acres)
- Elevation (total change): 780 – 1130 FT (350 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Woodlands

Proposed Uses: None

Amenities: None

SITE 14

PROPOSED NEW SITE

Location: Forested Bluffs - South of City Limits (North/West of HWY 16)

Property Type: Conservation / Passive Recreation

Current Ownership: Jeffery & Nancy Zadow; A&K Development LLC; Betty Lou Hein; Barry & Travis Zenke; Mark & Nanette Anderson; Leo, Emma, & Austin Little Sam (Winnebago Indian Reservation)*

Property Characteristics:

- Size: 580.0 acres (parcel(s) = 724.0 acres)
- Elevation (total change): 700 – 1130 FT (430 FT)
- Current land cover and use: Woodlands, Farmland, Open Land

Proposed Uses:

- Summer: Walking/Running, Wildlife Viewing, Cross Country Biking (Blufflands Trail only)

Winter: None

Amenities:

- Existing: None
- Proposed: Parking and Porta Potty (at entry along HWY 16)

** Land conservation efforts and/or trail planning will occur only with the involvement and consent of property owners, especially with Native American Reservation lands.*

Proposed Recreation Type Summary

It is the intent of this Plan to provide a diversity of lands and recreation uses within and near the City of La Crescent. The list below summarizes the potential uses by site described in the previous section. See Page 10 for further details for trail specifications per use.

Walking/Running

- Bluffland Trail – Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path or On-Road, Linear Trail (6-10 Miles)
- Site 1 (Apple Blossom Overlook Park) – Natural Surface (grass/dirt), Looped and Linear Trails (up to 3 miles), Some Accessible Trails
- Site 6 (Eagle Bluff Park) – Natural Surface, Looped Trails (up to 3 miles)
- Site 7 (Private Landowner) – Natural Surface (grass/dirt) or Crushed Stone, Looped Trail (up to 0.5 Mile), Some Accessible Trails
- Site 8 (Veteran's Park) – Paved Trail (up to 0.25 mile)
- Site 10 (Vollenweilder Park) – Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path (Bluffland Trail), Linear Trail (up to 0.5 miles)
- Site 11 (Vetsch Park) – Natural Surface (grass/dirt) or Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path (Bluffland Trail only), Looped Trails (up to 1 miles), Some Accessible Trails
- Site 12 (Stoney Point Park) - Natural Surface (grass/dirt) or Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path (Bluffland Trail only), Looped and Linear Trails (up to 3 miles)
- Site 13 (Future Extension of Stoney Point Park) - Natural Surface, Looped and Linear Trails (up to 0.5 miles)
- Site 15 (Forested Bluffs South of City Limits) - Natural Surface (grass/dirt) or Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path (Bluffland Trail only), Looped and Linear Trails (up to 3 miles)

Day Hike/Wildlife Viewing

- Bluffland Trail – Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path or On-Road, Linear Trail (6-10 miles)
- Site 1 (Apple Blossom Overlook Park) – Natural Surface, Looped and Linear Trails (up to 3 miles Total), Some Accessible Trails
- Site 6 (Eagle Bluff Park) – Natural Surface, Looped Trails (up to 3 miles)
- Site 10 (Vollenweilder Park) – Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path (Bluffland Trail), Linear Trail (up to 0.5 mile)
- Site 11 (Vetsch Park) – Natural Surface or Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path (Bluffland Trail only), Looped Trails (up to 1 mile)
- Site 12 (Stoney Point Park) - Natural Surface or Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path (Bluffland Trail only), Looped

and Linear Trails (up to 3 miles)

- Site 13 (Future Extension of Stoney Point Park) - Natural Surface, Looped and Linear Trails (up to 0.5 mile)
- Site 15 (South Bluff) - Natural Surface (grass/dirt) or Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path (Bluffland Trail only), Looped and Linear Trails (up to 3 miles)

Cross Country Biking

- Bluffland Trail – Wide Paved/ Crushed Stone Path or On-Road, Linear Trail (6-10 miles)

Downhill / Freeride Biking (single track)

- Site 2 (Unnamed Park – CTH HWY 1) – Easy/Intermediate Ride, Skills Course (?), 100-125 Feet Grade Change, mostly Open/Prairie
- Site 3 (Private Landowners) – Intermediate/Difficult Ride, 200+ Feet Grade Change, Mostly Wooded
- Site 4 (Private Landowners) – Intermediate/Difficult Ride, 100-150 Feet Grade Change, Mostly Wooded
- Site 12 (Stoney Point Park) – Easy/Intermediate Ride, 100 Feet Grade Change, mostly Wooded

Snow Biking

- Bluffland Trail – Wide Paved/ Crushed Stone Path or On-Road, Linear Trail (6-10 miles)
- Site 1 (Apple Blossom Overlook Park) – Natural Surface, Looped and Linear Trails (up to 3 miles)
- Site 2 (Unnamed Park – CTH HWY 1) – Natural Surface, Easy/Intermediate Ride, 100-125 Feet Grade Change, mostly Open/ Prairie
- Site 3 (Private Landowners) – Natural Surface, Intermediate/Difficult Ride, 200+ Feet Grade Change, Mostly Wooded
- Site 4 (Private Landowners) – Natural Surface, Intermediate/Difficult Ride, 100-150 Feet Grade Change, Mostly Wooded
- Site 12 (Stoney Point Park) – Easy/Intermediate Ride, 100 Feet Grade Change, mostly Wooded

Cross Country Skiing / Snowshoeing

- Bluffland Trail – Wide Paved/ Crushed Stone Path, Linear Trail (up to 6 miles)
- Site 1 (Apple Blossom Overlook Park) – Natural Surface, Looped and Linear Trails (up to 3 miles)
- Site 6 (Eagle Bluff Park) – Natural Surface, Looped Trails (up to 3 miles)
- Site 10 (Vollenweilder Park) – Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path (Bluffland Trail), Linear Trail (up to 0.5 mile)
- Site 11 (Vetsch Park) – Natural Surface or Wide Paved/Crushed Stone Path (Bluffland Trail only), Looped Trails (up to 1 mile)

TRAILS & ACCESS POINTS

IMPROVEMENTS

La Crescent Bluffland Trail

One of the priority recreation improvements in the City of La Crescent and beyond is establishment of the Bluffland Trail that traverses the bluffs from north to south. The maps on pages 17-18 show an approximate proposed route for this trail.

It is a long term goal to establish this bluffland trail as a shared use trail across its entire length, meaning it can be used by both hikers and bikers, and to provide some form of access and connection to/from all public-access parcels in the City with this regional trail. In some cases, an amendment to a pre-existing easement may be needed to allow for biking and other uses. This needs to be discussed with Minnesota Land Trust early in the planning process for specific sites, to determine the feasibility of a change.

Note that the trail routes as shown on the maps are conceptual only, and mostly serve to identify those parcels that the trail would most likely cross. Detailed trail alignments will be worked out parcel by parcel as lands are acquired and improved, taking care to avoid endangered species and rare habitat areas. Trail alignment, design and construction should use strategies to prevent the development of rogue trails, for example by avoiding obvious shortcuts.

This trail is intended to be accessible to most people. Except where conditions and conservation needs require otherwise, this trail should generally have a "shallow" slope and be wide enough (at least 6 feet) to allow users to pass comfortably.

It will be important to establish and reinforce good trail etiquette by all users, both through recreational clubs, and with signage.

(photo courtesy of Outdoor Recreation Alliance/Riley Seebeck/Flow Photo)

Biking-Oriented Trails

It is apparent, from public outreach and a review of current bluffland resources, that the supply of trails that allow biking use is inadequate as compared to the demand for such use.

Whereas the La Crescent Bluffland trail is proposed as a shared-use trail that allows bikers in a touring mode, other new trails dedicated primarily to biking use would be a valuable addition to the City. This could eventually include downhill and freeride trails, in areas of lesser ecological importance deemed appropriate for the more extensive disturbance typical with such trails.

Focus on User Experience

As the City of La Crescent is gradually transformed into a renowned recreation destination, it will be important to make improvements to the overall user experience, especially for occasional or first-time users. The following techniques should be applied throughout the region.

Loops, Loops, Loops

Most trail users prefer loop routes rather than two trips on the same route. Loop routes should be a priority of site planning and trail improvements.

Options for all Users

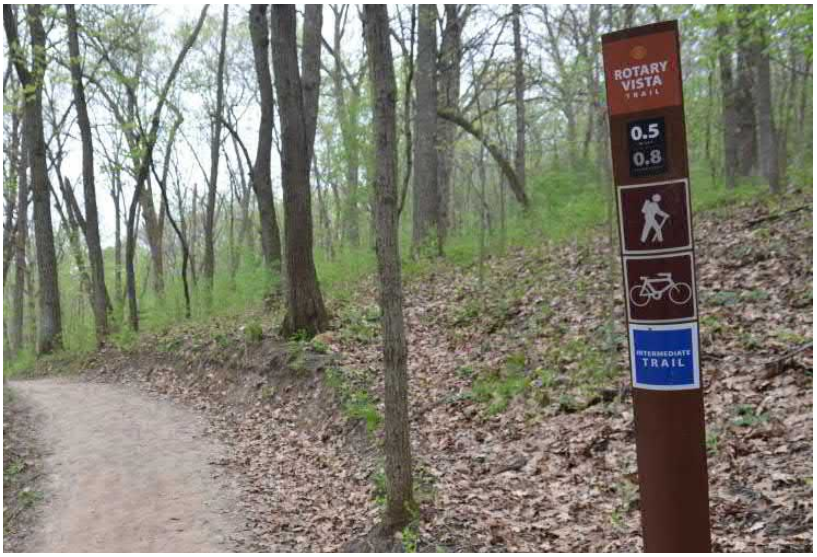
The City's network of protected lands should be a recreation resource for anyone and everyone in the region. The most popular sites and trailheads should offer easy routes with short loops, minimal slopes and wide paths. This should include, on some sites, well-maintained gravel paths that are wheelchair-accessible. At the other end of the difficulty spectrum, there should be more challenging and technical routes for experienced hikers and bikers. There should also be a selection of trail options that allow bikes and that do not allow bikes at most of the major trailheads.

Maintenance and Access Control

Popular trails can be damaged quickly by users when conditions change, especially during seasonal warm-ups when the trail is soft. Likewise, treefalls or washouts can lead people to find alternate routes, forging rogue trails. These risks can be minimized with a routine of trail inspections and repair, and with access control gates at popular trailheads with signs that clearly communicate the reason for the closure.

Trail Signage

All users, and especially new users, want to know what they're getting into before setting off on a hike. Trails should



A trail marker on the City of La Crosse's Rotary Vista Trail showing trail name, distance to the trailhead, permitted uses, and difficulty rating

be graded for difficulty in a uniform way across the region (green circle, blue square, black diamond). Trailhead signage should communicate those ratings, as well as trail length, total elevation change, and permitted uses. Trail marker posts along the way should be used on most trails to give people the confidence that they're on the right trail and information about their distance to or from the trailhead. See the next section about signage.

Trail Access Improvements

The region's trails are often accessed via improved trailheads - sites with parking, trail maps, and sometimes a toilet facility of some sort. Two types of trailhead are recommended. A "Level 1" trailhead at major Bluffland access points that accommodates higher visitor volumes and multiple use types. A "Level 2" trailhead is recommended for more remote sites with low to moderate traffic. A third category of trail access is also identified, allowing pedestrian or bike access from a connecting roadway but lacking any vehicle parking, major signage or other improvements. See the maps on pages 17-18 for existing and proposed trail access locations. All trailheads and access points should be named by the street location (e.g. "McIntosh Road Access") or by park name (if only one access point exists).

Level 1 Trailhead

Level 1 trailheads are those that are likely to attract the most users due to their location and/or the number of trails and uses they provide access to. These trailheads should have the following amenities:

- Gateway ID sign
- Regional Blufflands Map (if applicable)
- Site Map
- Trail Rules and Etiquette sign
- Parking for at least ten vehicles
- Convenient access to a short, easy trail
- Permanent or temporary toilet
- Rest area with benches, picnic tables, and/or flat rocks

The following Level 1 trailheads are recommended. **Entirely new locations are bolded.** Some new locations are for existing protected lands, but most are for sites not yet acquired.

- Apple Blossom Overlook Park (Site #1)
- Eagle Bluff Park (Site #5 - some amenities served by Old Hickory Park)
- Veteran's Park
- Vetsch/Stoney Point Park (Sites #9/10)
- **HWY 16 - T. La Crescent, MN (Site #14)**

Level 2 Trailhead

Level 2 trailheads are recommended for lower-volume access points and should include the following amenities:

- Gateway ID sign
- Site Map
- Trail Rules and Etiquette sign
- Parking for at least five vehicles
- Temporary toilet (case-by-case)
- Rest area with benches or natural seating (e.g. flat rocks)

The following Level 2 trailheads are recommended. **Entirely new locations are bolded**. Some new locations are for existing protected lands, but most are for sites not yet acquired.

- **Ambrosia Street (Site #2/3)**
- **Skunk Hollow Road - T. La Crescent, MN (Sites #13/14)**

Other Access Points

Trails sometimes cross existing roads or utilize a segment of existing road, sidewalk, or off-street path in the public right-of-way as part of a designated trail route. In these cases, there is access to the trail for

hikers and bikers from that public road. These locations should have signs to identify the trail, at minimum. If there is access to multiple trails from or near the access point, a small map kiosk sign post is recommended. If parking is not permitted on the adjacent roadway, that restriction should be clearly signed near the trail entrance.

Trash Collection

Trash receptacles are generally not advised at any locations that do not also have on-site staff. They tend to become a maintenance headache, even in some cases attracting illegal dumping. All users at all trailheads should be encouraged to "pack it in, pack it out".

SIGNAGE

IMPROVEMENTS

A successful park signage system performs multiple functions — it provides effective information and direction for people to navigate around the park; encourages learning experiences; helps maintain the image of the park; and communicates park rules.

Signage Types

The sign types that should be incorporated in the City network are described below.

Identification Gateway Signs
Gateways, entry features or identity signs are located at the entry points of parks, to identify the site and mark arrival into a park or unique area. A gateway sign should be provided at the entrance to all Level 1 and Level 2 trailheads. The sign should include the name of the park and City logo. If established as a part of the La Crescent - La Crosse Bluffland network, the sign should also include the logo of The Blufflands, and access point (i.e., the road name from which the trail/trailhead will be accessed from). Pedestrian-only access points shall provide an identification sign (in lieu of a gateway sign) that establishes the location as "Trail Access" point.

Vehicular Directional
These signs are intended to direct vehicular traffic to a desired destination or activity. These signs can be added to existing light poles or attached to a standalone 4x4 square post. This should be coordinated with a Citywide effort to sign destinations within the area. If and when a regional Blufflands Coalition confirms a regional Blufflands logo, this should be incorporated into or added to these signs.

Pedestrian Directional Signs
This sign is intended to direct pedestrians and cyclists on a trail or sidewalk towards adjacent facilities/amenities by communicating through graphic icons, text and arrows. Generally, this can be achieved on a 4x4 pole, but may be the size of the map kiosk type 1.

Park Rules Sign
The rules sign displays information about site specific rules, county ordinances, and any prohibited uses. This sign can be designed to a scale appropriate for both pedestrian walk-up traffic and vehicular traffic. The sign content is fixed and communicates the rules that are standard to all facilities.

Interpretive Signs
These signs provides information about cultural, historic, geological or ecological attributes of a site. Each site should have at least one sign describing how it came to be protected, so that various owners and donors get appropriate recognition.

The artwork and content of these signs should be engaging and creative. A successful educational sign has 75% graphics and 25% text. Text should be limited to less than 200 words.

Mile Marker and Trail Crossing
The mile marker sign provides visual navigation to trail users by communicating trail mileage, acceptable trail activities, and trail name. See Page

25 for an example mile marker sign that should be established in the La Crescent park system.

Kiosk Map
The site map kiosk helps visitors orient themselves within a site and plan their visit. This map should at a minimum display the specific park map, plus the surrounding conservation lands (with or without recreation facilities). At larger sites consider a map that shows the entire bluffland network, including those in Wisconsin.

Signage Design

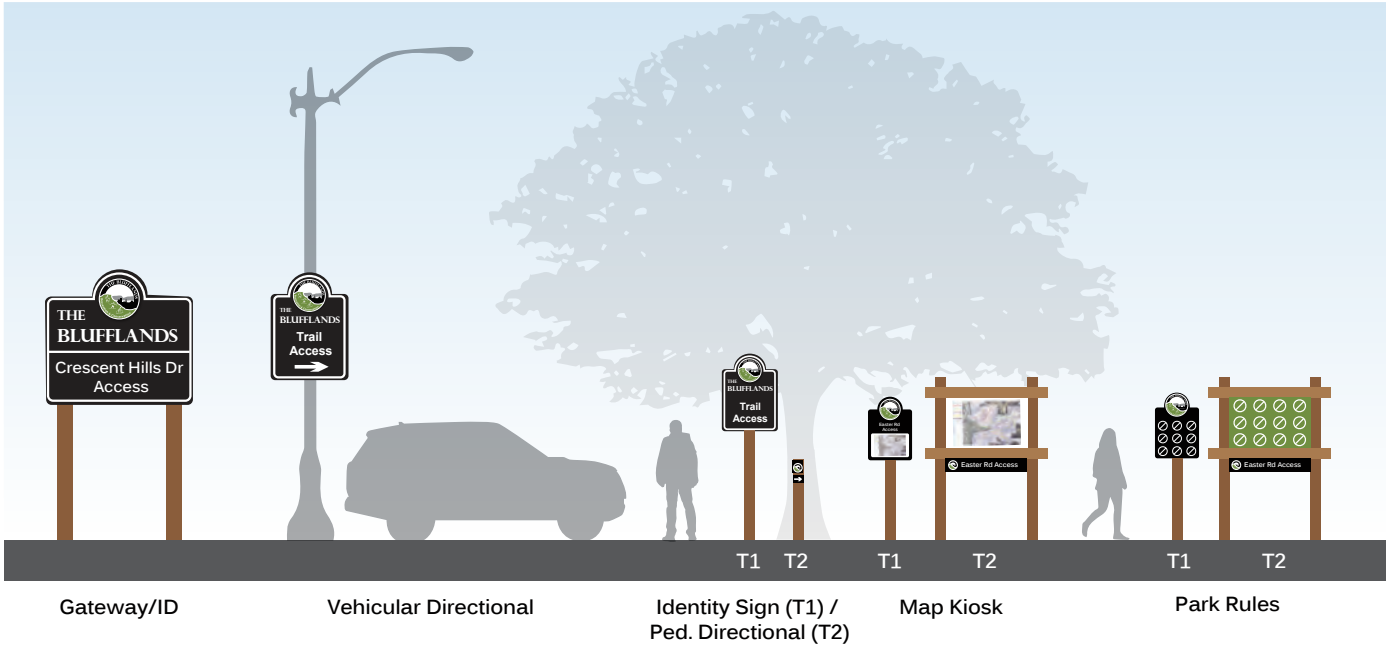
As shown above right, the City currently has a standard Identification Gateway Sign found at multiple City parks, while the pedestrian access points use a variety of sign designs. In some cases, the pedestrian access points are not signed at all.

The City should continue using their gateway identification signs (upper left), and should consider establishing a complementary sign for the pedestrian access identification signs.

If and when a regional Blufflands Coalition forms, the City could add a separate sign below the City Gateway sign identifying the site as a part of The Blufflands regional network. See the proposed design and logo from the 2016 Blufflands Conservation and Recreation Plan.

Existing City Park Signage

The Blufflands Signage System



Looking south toward the south bluff
Photo Credit: Jason Valerius

ACTION PLAN

IMPLEMENTATION

The Blufflands Vision articulated in this plan will be realized only through coordinated effort of many stakeholders. The table on the next pages offers a basic road map of actions over the short-, mid-, and long-term towards establishing a continuous bluffland trail and park system in the City of La Crescent and beyond.

Short Term (2018-2022)	Responsibility
ACTION #1: Adopt this Plan and formally review the plan, specifically the action steps, on an annual basis during the budgeting process.	City Staff Planning Commission Park & Rec Committee
ACTION #2: Establish a more formal local process for coordination between the City, Townships, Counties, property owner(s), the Outdoor Recreation Alliance (ORA), and the Minnesota Land Trust to evaluate, conserve, and improve bluffland sites.	City Council Townships Counties Minnesota Land Trust
ACTION #3: Coordinate with the Township of La Crescent to establish zoning regulation that will further protect blufflands and their appearance from below.	City Staff Planning Commission Township Staff & Board
ACTION #4: Make contact with owners of land potentially affected by this plan to share this plan, build trust, and explore mutual interests. Periodic check-ins are recommended (e.g. bi-annually), especially with property owners open to potential easement/land acquisition by the City of La Crescent for conservation and/or recreational purposes.	City Staff Planning Commission
ACTION #5: Improve the uphill shoulder on Crescent Hills Drive to provide at least eight feet for a protected walking/biking lane.	City Staff City Engineer
ACTION #6: Sign all existing park facilities and bluffland easements per the recommendations in this Plan.	City Staff
ACTION #7: Extend the Bluffland Trail segment from Veteran's Park to Eagles Bluff Park. Per this Plan, this path should be crushed stone or paved.	City Staff

Short Term Continued (2018-2022)	Responsibility
ACTION #8: Seek designation for Apple Blossom Overlook as a regionally significant park facility per the Greater Minnesota Regional Park and Trails Commission. Once designated, coordinate with Winona County to fund park improvements, specifically creating a cross country skiing track(s) in the park.	City Staff City Council Winona County Staff
ACTION #9: Develop the Bluffland Trail from Crescent Hills Drive through Vollenweilder Park, connecting to Vetsch Park. Per this Plan, this path should be crushed stone or paved.	City Staff Park & Rec Committee

Mid Term (2023-2029)	Responsibility
ACTION #10: Redevelop Veteran's Park per the Master Plan.	City Staff City Council
ACTION #11: Develop Stoney Point Park and update Vetsch Park per the Master Plan.	City Staff City Council
ACTION #12: Improve the unnamed park at Ambrosia Street (Site #2) by establishing mountain bike trails, adding a small parking lot, and extending the Bluffland Trail through the site (connecting Crescent Hills Drive to Apple Blossom Overlook Park). Evaluate again the potential for acquisition (land or easement) of Site #3 while planning facilities for Site #2.	City Staff Township Staff Winona County Staff
ACTION #13: Sign all bluffland on-road routes identified in the maps on pages 17-18.	City Staff Consultant
ACTION #14: Acquire and develop Site #7. If acquired, establish formal trails that connect to all existing streets, and consider a paved path providing an accessible overlook at the highest point (see Page 17 for reference).	City Staff

Long Term (2030+)	Responsibility
ACTION #15: Work towards extending the Bluffland Trail through the bluffs south of the current City limits (west/north of HWY 16). Consider both property acquisition and easements as necessary to both protect and add recreational amenities.	City Staff Township of La Crescent Houston County
ACTION #16: Work towards preserving bluffs east of the City (Tier 3), including those surrounding HWY 6 (e.g., Site #14).	City Staff Township of La Crescent Houston County

FUNDING

IMPLEMENTATION

Most of the projects identified in this plan will require funding assistance – the City does not have the capacity to realize these ideas solely with general municipal funds. Land conservation is costly and the Minnesota Land Trust is a critical partner with the City to evaluate lands and help put together funding packages. Site improvements can also be costly, and there are grant programs for which the projects in this plan may be eligible. Several of those programs are described below.

All of these efforts can and should be supported by local citizen fundraising and advocacy also. The City should actively partner with the Outdoor Recreation Alliance and/or facilitate the creation of a local Friends of the Parks group or similar to help promote and complete projects that will put La Crescent "on the map" as an outdoor recreation destination.

Grant Opportunities

Grant Name	Grantor	Grant Description	Eligible Projects	Suggested Local Eligible Projects	Local Match	Grant Allowance	Deadline
Parks & Trails Legacy	Greater Minnesota Regional Parks & Trails Commission	The Commission will evaluate, rank, and determine funding recommendations for regionally-significant projects of highest merit. Only parks or trails that are formally designated as part of Greater Minnesota Regional Park and Trail System become eligible for funding. To be designated as a Regional Park, a master plan must be completed.	Acquisition of land for future development of recreation facilities, protection/preservation of high value land for public use, critical park inholding; Trail development and connections; Trailhead improvements; Accessibility enhancement; Motorized trail development; Construction of trails on public or private lands where a minimum of a 20 year easement must be obtained; Restoration of existing trail facilities; Resurfacing and trail repair or trailhead restoration; Construction or restoration of trail bridges; Natural resource restoration along trails; Construction of Recreational Facilities and Support Facilities	Apple Blossom Overlook Park	None required; Percent of Local Match is a scoring metric	N.A. (Approx. $8 Million / Year Available)	31-Jul
Environment & Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)	Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR)	The fund requires a competitive, multi-step proposal and selection process, beginning with the LCCMR issuing a RFP for selected funding priorities based on its 6-year strategic plan. The RFP is open to everyone with innovative ideas for environment and natural resources projects that could provide multiple ecological and other public benefits. Proposals can be submitted according to the procedures outlined in each RFP. The LCCMR reviews, evaluates, and ranks all proposals submitted. A selection of the highest ranked proposals are invited to present before the LCCMR. Finally, based on the total dollars available, a subset of the proposals are chosen to recommend to the legislature.	The assets of the fund shall be appropriated by law for the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's air, water, land, fish, wildlife and other natural resources; Capital projects for the preservation and protection of unique natural resources;	Fee purchase and/or easement for preservation of premeire bluffs (e.g., Site 14)	N.A.	No Min. or Max. Amount (Up to 5.5% of existing value of ENRTF - Approx. $50 Million was available in 2017)	21-Mar (1.5 years process)

Grant Opportunities Continued

Grant Name	Grantor	Grant Description	Eligible Projects	Suggested Local Eligible Projects	Local Match	Grant Allowance	Deadline
Local Trails Connections Program	Minnesota DNR	To provide grants to local units of government to promote relatively short trail connections between where people live and desirable locations, not to develop significant new trails. Funding for this grant program is from "In Lieu Of" lottery proceeds.	Acquisition and development of trail facilities. Projects must result in a trail linkage that is immediately available for use by the general public. Trail linkages include connecting where people live (e.g. residential areas within cities, entire communities) and significant public resources (e.g. historical areas, open space, parks and/or other trails). Acquisition of trail right-of-way is eligible only when proposed in conjunction with trail development.	Site 6 trail improvements; Veterans to Eagles Bluff Trail	25%	$5,000-$150,000	31-Mar
Outdoor Heritage Fund	Minnesota DNR	Thirty-three percent of the sales tax revenue from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy amendment is distributed to the Outdoor Heritage Fund. Those funds "may be spent only to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forest and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife."	Habitat restoration or enhancement projects on public lands or waters or private land protected by permanent conservation easement. Acquisitions (fee title and permenant conservation easements) with land acquired in fee must be open to all seasons of hunting and fishing. Total project cap of $575,000.	*TBD*	10%	$5,000 - $400,000	12-Sept (Cycle 1); 26-Jan (Cycle 2 - if funds remain)
Outdoor Recreation Grant Program	Minnesota DNR	To increase and enhance outdoor recreation facilities in local and community parks throughout the state.	Park acquisition and/or development / redevelopment including, internal park trails, picnic shelters, playgrounds, athletic facilities, boat accesses, fishing piers, swimming beaches and campgrounds. All park projects must meet requirements for perpetual outdoor recreation use.	Any; Stoney Point	50%	$5,000-$150,000	31-Mar
Regional Trail Grant Program	Minnesota DNR	To provide grants to local units of government to promote development of regionally significant trails outside the seven-county metropolitan area. Funding for this grant program is from "In Lieu Of" lottery proceeds.	Acquisition and development of trail facilities outside the seven-county metropolitan area that are considered of regional or statewide significance. Acquisition projects require a perpetual easement for recreational purposes. Development projects require a 20 year maintenance commitment by the project sponsor.	Bluffland Trail connection from Eagles Bluff Park to Apple Blossom Overlook; Bluffland Trail connection over South Bluff	25%	$5,000-$250,000	31-Mar
Federal Recreation Trail Program	Minnesota DNR	To encourage the maintenance and development of motorized, non-motorized, and diversified trails by providing funding assistance.	Motorized and non-motorized trail projects; maintenance/restoration of existing recreational trails; development/ rehabilitation of recreational trail linkages, including trail side and trail head facilities; environmental awareness and safety educationprograms relating to the use of recreational trails; and redesign/relocation of trails to benefit / minimize the impact to the natural environment.	Trailhead improvements, including Veterans and Stoney Point	25%	$1,000-$150,000	28-Feb
Greater Minnesota Transportation Alternatives	Minnesota DOT	To support alternatives to automobile transit, including pedestrian and bicycle facilities, access to public transportation and enhanced mobility, community improvement activities, environmental mitigation, and safe routes to schools.	Construction, planning, and design of on-road and off-road trail facilities for non-motorized forms of transportation, including: sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian and bicycle signals, traffic calming techniques, light and other safety-related infrastructure, ADA compliance, and conversion of abandoned railroad corridors into trails. Per Minnesota rules, engineering activities and the purchase of right-of-ways are not eligible.	Site 6 trail improvements; Veterans to Eagles Bluff Trail	20%	$100,000-$1,000,000	31-Oct
People For Bikes Community Grant Program	People For Bikes	Supports bicycle infrastructure projects and targeted advocacy initiatives that make it easier and safer for people of all ages and abilities to ride.	Bike paths, lanes, trails, and bridges, Mountain bike facilities, bike parks and pump tracks, BMX facilities, end-of-trip facilities (e.g., bike racks, bike parking, bike repair stations and bike storage), programs that transform city streets, and campaigns to increase the investment in bicycle infrastructure	Pump Track, mountain bike trails in Stoney Point and other sites	51%	≥ $10,000	Two Grant Cycles: Dec / July
IMBA Grants Program	IMBA	Provides assistance to International Mountain Bicycling Association chapters and supporting organizations for trail and bike projects.	These grants support projects that maintain and improve the sustainability of local trails, preserve the environment and enhance conservation in the mountain bicycling community.	Pump Track, mountain bike trails in Stoney Point and other sites	N.A.	N.A.	30-Aug
Cross Country Ski Trail Grants-in-Aid (GIA)	Minnesota DNR	Supports the maintenance and grooming of crosscountry ski trails. The ski pass is required on all ski trails receiving funding from the ski GIA program.	Grants are awarded annually for cross-country ski trail maintenance and winter grooming. The program is not currently considering funding for capital improvement projects or adding new trails into the GIA program.	Apple Blossom Overlook Park	N.A.	N.A.	30-May