



Section 3

DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

3.3 Framework Components (continued)

Section 3.3.3: Parks and Open Space Framework

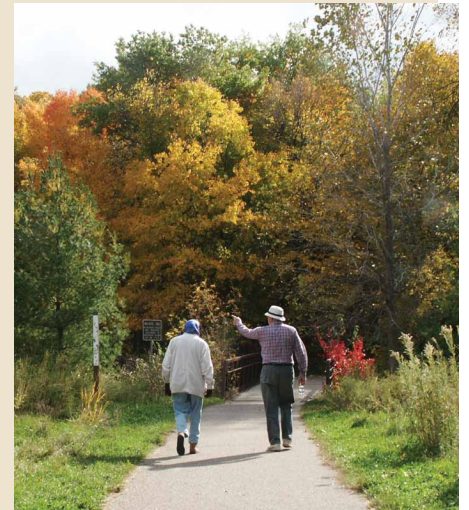
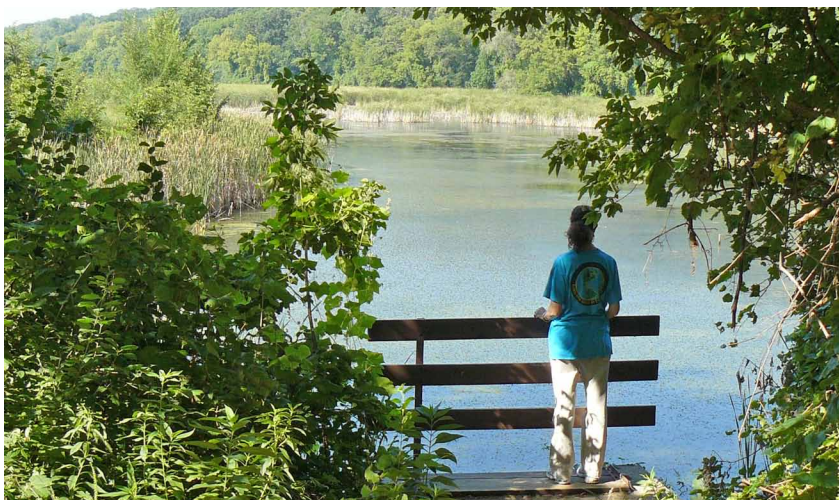
The aesthetic character of South Loop is influenced by the significant amount of natural open space that forms its entire east and southeast border. Most of this open space is within the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (MVNWR), which provides access to an extensive natural environment and nature-based recreation opportunities. Integrating aspects of this natural ecosystem into the more urban, developed areas of South Loop is a primary goal.

Key objectives regarding parks and open space include:

- To **preserve and enhance natural resources**.
- To **incorporate sustainable features and “green” infrastructure** throughout South Loop.
- To **establish a network of parks and trails** that enhances connections within and beyond South Loop, and improves access to the MVNWR.

- To incorporate parks into development that **creates amenity and value** for abutting properties.
- To **preserve existing cultural resources**.

Figure 3.34, page 3.64, illustrates the primary components of the proposed South Loop parks and open space system. Components are described in more detail.

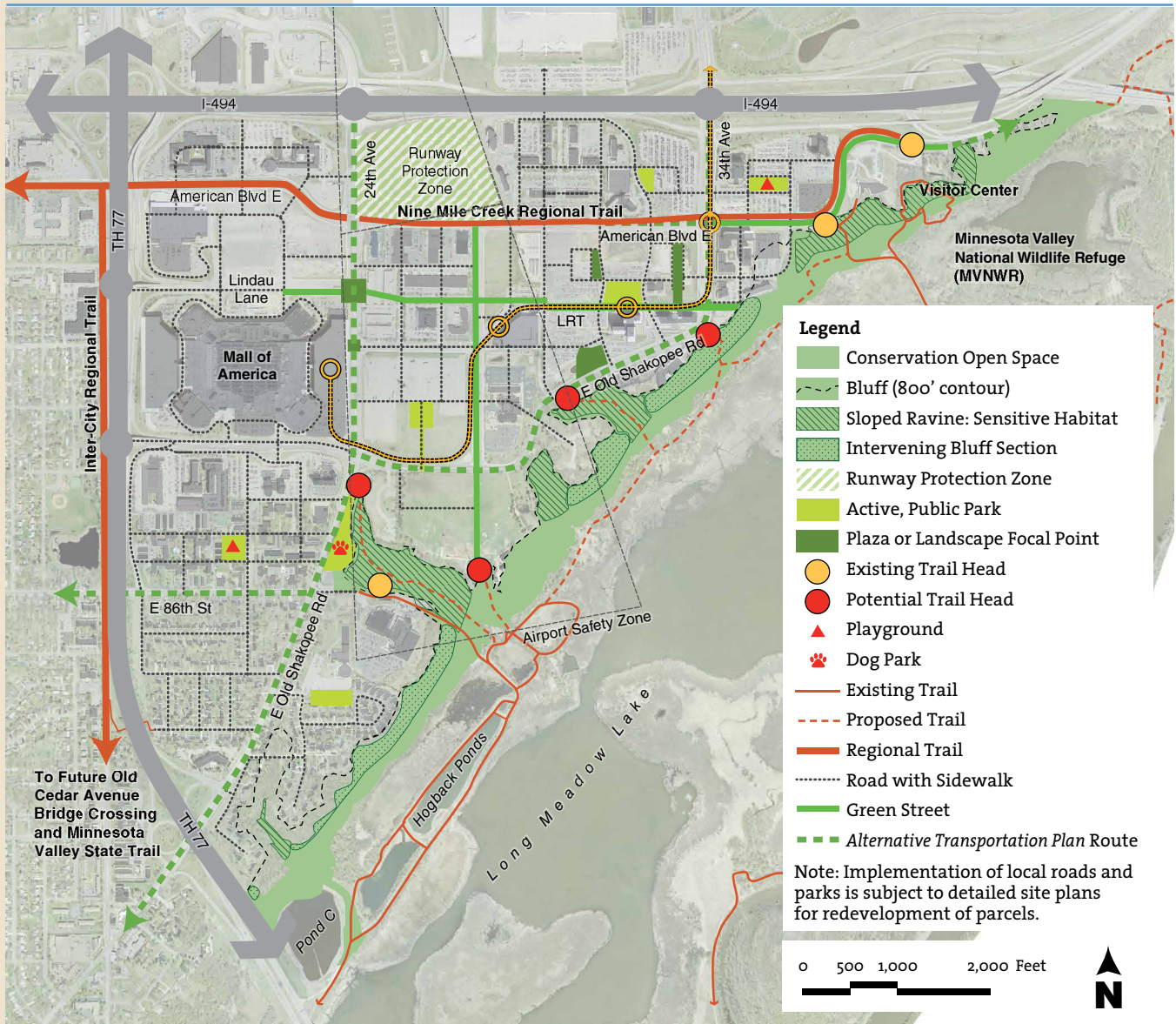


Ample nature-based recreational opportunities are a key asset of South Loop.



Bloomington Central Station Park serves as a focal point and gathering place in the District.

Figure 3.34 Parks and Open Space Framework



Source: Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC.

Preserve and Enhance Natural Resources

Most of the open space and sensitive natural resources are located adjacent to the river bluffs that form the east and south border of the District. Generally, these fall into three areas: the Minnesota River bluff, edge/transition areas, and the MVNWR.

Minnesota River Bluff

The City's *Bluff Report District Plan*, adopted in 1982, describes the bluff as approximately 100 feet in height, composed of coarse sandy loam soils, steeply sloped hillsides (18-35 percent) with a mix of vegetation, including deciduous forest, bluff top prairie, and floodplain forest at the base of the bluff. The Bluff in South Loop is further characterized by two

landform conditions: ravines and intervening lateral bluff sections.

A **ravine** is a small, narrow steep-sided valley that is larger than a gully and smaller than a canyon that is usually shaped by running water. Ravine ecosystems are cool, shaded environments with an over-story tree canopy that limits the growth of understory vegetation. Ravines provide protected habitat and relief from seasonal extremes. Development abutting ravines must provide sound stormwater management, use of native plant vegetation and setbacks from the bluff edge and steep slopes.

The **intervening lateral bluff sections** run parallel to the river bottoms with broad, south facing exposures. An example is the existing bluff south of East 86th Street adjacent to Cypress Semiconductor. The South Loop bluff woodlands had a high dominance of American elm and red oak. These areas have undergone successional change resulting from the loss of the elm. Succession has resulted in less desirable species such as white ash, hackberry, box elder, and buckthorn. Restoration of native species to stabilize succession areas is an important goal.

The Bluff Protection (BP) Overlay zoning districts and the *Bluff Report District Plan* provide a regulatory framework for development in sensitive bluff areas. The BP overlay zones encompass the area between the 722 and 800-foot contour elevations. Current regulations and policies focus on tree removal and

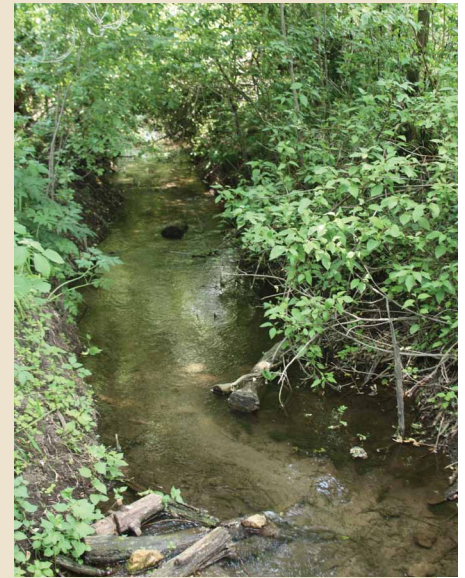
grading, building placement and height policies, and impervious surface coverage. Future site plan review will need to focus more on native species re-vegetation, establishment of buffers, and seep and stream protection.

Edge/Transition Areas

The transition zone between upland urban development areas and the natural bluff edge is characterized by an inter-mingling of ecosystems (aka “ecotone”) that provide a range of habitats that support a diversity of species. These areas perform an important ecological function and should be protected from development encroachment. Development sites located immediately adjacent to the bluff warrant careful site planning to ensure bluff edge/transition areas are adequately protected. These sites include: Spruce Shadows Farm, Long Meadow Circle, a portion of the Appletree Square property, and land southeast of the intersection of East Old Shakopee Road and 24th Avenue, where apartments were removed due to airport impacts.

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (MVNWR)

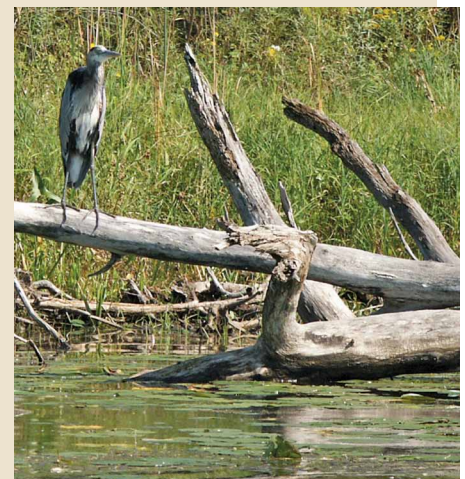
Established by the U.S. Congress in 1976, the MVNWR stretches over 50 miles from Fort Snelling State Park to beyond Belle Plaine, Minnesota. Its 14,000 authorized acres provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, fish, and other wildlife species. The MVNWR offers a variety of nature-based recreation and education opportunities for individuals and



A stream runs through a ravine.



A transitional edge lies between an upland area and a lateral bluff section.



The MVNWR provides extensive habitat for a variety of birds.



Hogback Pond lies within the Long Meadow Lake Unit of the MVNWR.

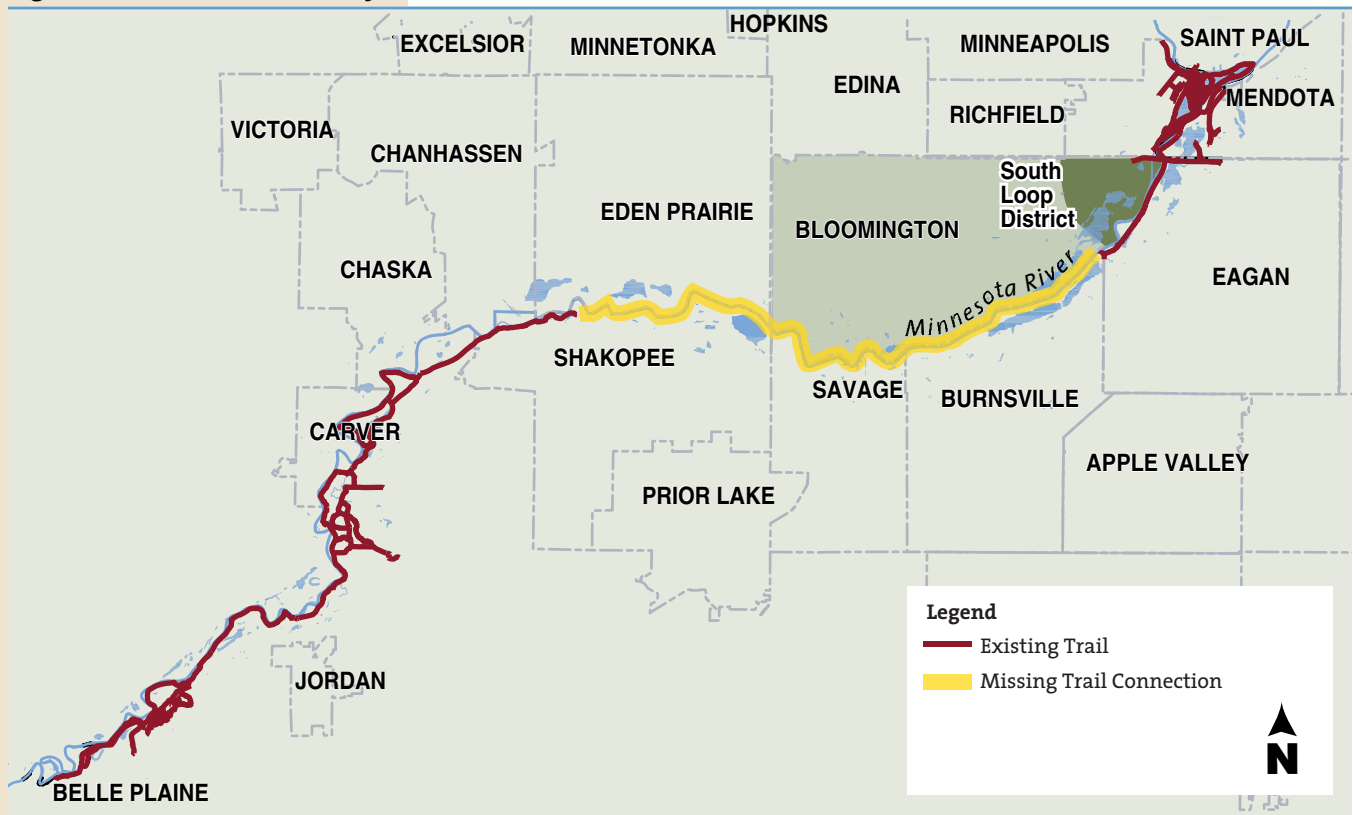
families. The Bloomington Visitors Center, opened in 1990, is a gateway to the Refuge and also houses the MVNWR Headquarters offices.

The portion of the MVNWR within South Loop lies within the Long Meadow Lake Unit and is defined by the official floodplain. This area includes Long Meadow Lake, the Hogback and Bass Ponds and is characterized by the steep bluff face, wooded ravines, and bottomlands consisting of flood plain forest, wetland complexes, and the Minnesota River. The MVNWR is owned and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Minnesota Valley State Trail

The idea of a trail system along the Minnesota River was first proposed by Governor Floyd B. Olson in 1934. Now officially named the Minnesota Valley State Trail, it is located within the MVNWR and planned to follow the Minnesota River between Fort Snelling State Park and Big Stone State Park. See **Figure 3.35**, below. Portions of the trail alignment exist or have been designated. However, the alignment for a major section in the middle, including the portion in Bloomington, has not been officially designated. Efforts to identify the final alignment of this “missing link” are progressing under the guidance of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, who is charged with managing the trail.

Figure 3.35 Minnesota Valley State Trail Connections



Source: City of Bloomington, 2010.

Sustainable Features and Green Infrastructure

Development in South Loop will incorporate a variety of best practices and low-impact design approaches to minimize impacts on natural site characteristics and integrate natural elements throughout the District. Sustainable development techniques may serve multiple functions, from managing drainage and runoff to creating natural character and fostering public and private gardens to improve access to locally grown food.

Stormwater Management

All development is subject to Local, State and/or Federal regulations to manage stormwater runoff. This is particularly important in South Loop, as runoff drains directly to the Minnesota River.

The stream running through Forest Glen Park (aka “Ike’s Creek”) in particular should be protected from stormwater impacts. Maintaining cool water temperatures and high water quality is essential to sustain sensitive plants and fish (e.g., watercress and trout) in this creek.

In addition, airport zoning restricts surface ponds that hold standing water in runway zones to minimize the potential for bird strikes.

Consequently, stormwater should be managed through low-impact design techniques, such as rain gardens, green roofs, rainwater harvesting and reuse, and permeable pavements that slow, reduce, and filter storm runoff. These techniques can be installed as part of private

site development or as part of larger, public street or park projects.

Natural Character

As South Loop develops, a key challenge will involve retaining and preserving some of its natural character and integrating natural elements into more intensely developed areas. Existing natural features can be retained through careful site planning. Low-impact site design and use of native plants and local building materials can ensure new development fits – aesthetically and ecologically – and works with, not against, the natural features and drainage systems on a site. Well-landscaped streets can extend the natural elements of the bluff edge throughout the District.

Urban Agriculture

Interest in locally grown food, and community gardening in particular, has noticeably increased in recent years. As South Loop evolves into a more complete neighborhood, interest in incorporating community gardens within the neighborhood landscape will likely grow. A community garden in South Loop would provide gardening opportunities to the 2,700 new residents projected to reside here by 2030, as well as some of the 2,000 existing residents. New residents will mostly live in townhomes, condominiums, and apartments, most without yards for gardens.

One opportunity to create a future community garden site is the Spruce Shadows Farm property.



Ceridian is a good example of sensitive site and landscape design adjacent to the bluff.



Urban agriculture is practiced by residents at the Harrison Park community gardens.



Central Station Park combines plaza space with open green areas that can accommodate larger gatherings.

A garden could be created as part of redevelopment of the site and could be designed as part of a park space, satisfying the park dedication required with property development. The garden could also serve as an educational or demonstration site for sustainable gardening and development practices (composting, permeable pavements, recycled building materials, etc.).

Smaller scale, private urban agriculture can also occur on patios and roofs of private development. Planted (green) roofs can also function to reduce the amount of impervious surface and thereby reduce stormwater runoff and help to insulate buildings reducing the urban “heat sink” effect.

Establish a System of Inter-Connected Parks and Trails

South Loop is envisioned as a place with attractive places to relax and recreate – where residents, visitors, and employees can comfortably get around on foot or bike. Establishing this network will involve creating new parks and landscaped plazas, new trailheads to access the MVNWR, and connecting these features via an expanded pedestrian and bicycle network.

New Parks and Plazas

There are currently three public parks in South Loop: River Ridge Playground, located south of 86th Street near Trinity School; Bloomington Central Station Park, located across from the Light Rail Transit station in the heart of the planned Bloomington Central

Station neighborhood; and Forest Glen Park encompassing the ravine just southeast of the intersection of East Old Shakopee Road/Killebrew Drive and 24th Avenue. As new development occurs in South Loop, new public parks and private plazas will be created to increase the aesthetic appeal and value of adjacent properties, help manage stormwater, and become places to gather, relax, and recreate.

Proposed new parks, plazas and focal points are shown on **Figure 3.34**, page 3.64, and include:

Active Parks – Four new parks are proposed that can become central gathering places as surrounding blocks redevelop with a higher density mix of uses. These parks can provide for a range of recreation uses. The two parks proposed within residential neighborhoods should include playgrounds. One is located just north of 86th Street in an area where existing multiple family housing is anticipated to redevelop over the next 20 to 30 years. The other is located in the proposed new residential neighborhood northeast of the intersection of 34th Avenue and American Boulevard. Other new parks are shown in areas where large blocks are anticipated for future redevelopment. Locations shown on the **Figure 3.34**, page 3.64, are conceptual. Specific park locations will be determined in conjunction with private development of surrounding blocks.

Dog Park and Ravine Trailhead – This proposed new park is located southeast of the intersection of East



A proposed new park will be designed as a dog park.

Old Shakopee Road/Killebrew Drive and 24th Avenue. It will abut the existing Forest Glen Park, which encompasses a steep, wooded ravine and stream. Creation of the new park will involve consolidation of four separate parcels currently owned by the Metropolitan Airports Commission. The park will cover about one acre and will be designed as a dog park with limited picnic facilities, a small parking lot, a trailhead and a natural surface trail through the ravine and Forest Glen Park, leading into the MVNWR.

Plazas and Landscape Focal Points

– Most plazas and landscaped focal points are features of private development, although public landscaped nodes may be created at key intersections. A prominent public plaza is proposed at the intersection of 24th Avenue and Lindau Link. This plaza will function as a visual gateway to both the MOA and Lindau Link. (See **Section 3.2.2, the 24th Avenue Gateway Corridor**, pages 3.21 - 3.25.) **Figure 3.34, page 3.64**, shows three private landscaped areas planned in the BCS development.

Refuge Access and Trailheads

Currently, access into the MVNWR is provided in three locations in South Loop: the Bass Ponds access, near the intersection of East Old Shakopee Road and 86th Street, and two near the MVNWR Visitors Center located at the east end of American Boulevard. To improve access to the MVNWR, four new trailhead locations are proposed between

the three existing access points, including:

Dog Park and Ravine Trailhead –

This new park is envisioned as a dog park and trailhead, with limited picnic facilities, and a small parking lot. A proposed natural surface trail through the ravine will follow the stream through Forest Glen Park and into the MVNWR. This park is also near the east terminus of the 86th Street Bikeway, which connects to the Inter-City Regional Trail.

This new park is located near the east terminus of the existing bikeway along 86th Street, which connects to the proposed Inter-City Regional Trail route along Old Cedar Avenue.

Spruce Shadows Farm Trailhead –

When this property redevelops, 28th Avenue will be extended to provide access into the development site and a proposed new trailhead located near the bluff edge. The location of the trailhead and alignment of the connecting trail into the MVNWR will be determined in cooperation with the Refuge staff and property owner. It should be incorporated into the site redevelopment plan.

30th Avenue Trailhead – This trailhead is proposed off East Old Shakopee Road near the intersection with 30th Avenue. There is an existing service road leading into the Refuge here that could be redesigned to accommodate a pedestrian trail.

34th Avenue Trailhead – This trailhead is proposed off East Old Shakopee Road where it curves to the north to merge with 34th



MVNWR kiosk provides information about the refuge.



Improving access to the MVNWR is an important objective.

Avenue. The trailhead will provide convenient access into the MVNWR for nearby residents and employees. Like all the trailheads and connecting trail segments, locations and alignments will need to be coordinated with the Refuge staff and any affected property owners.

The City will work cooperatively with the MVNWR to ensure trailheads (kiosks, etc.) and alignment of new access trails are compatible with MVNWR plans and design standards. It is critical that trails be designed in a manner that minimizes impacts on the natural environment. Generally, trails through ravines should be natural-surfaced and designed to minimize negative impacts, such as erosion and vegetation loss. See *Figure 3.36, below, for details.*

All trailheads are proposed to include kiosks providing information about the MVNWR and trail maps. Trailheads should also include lighting, some seating, and bicycle racks. Other amenities, such as

vehicle parking, picnic shelters, and drinking fountains, may be provided where space and utilities are available.

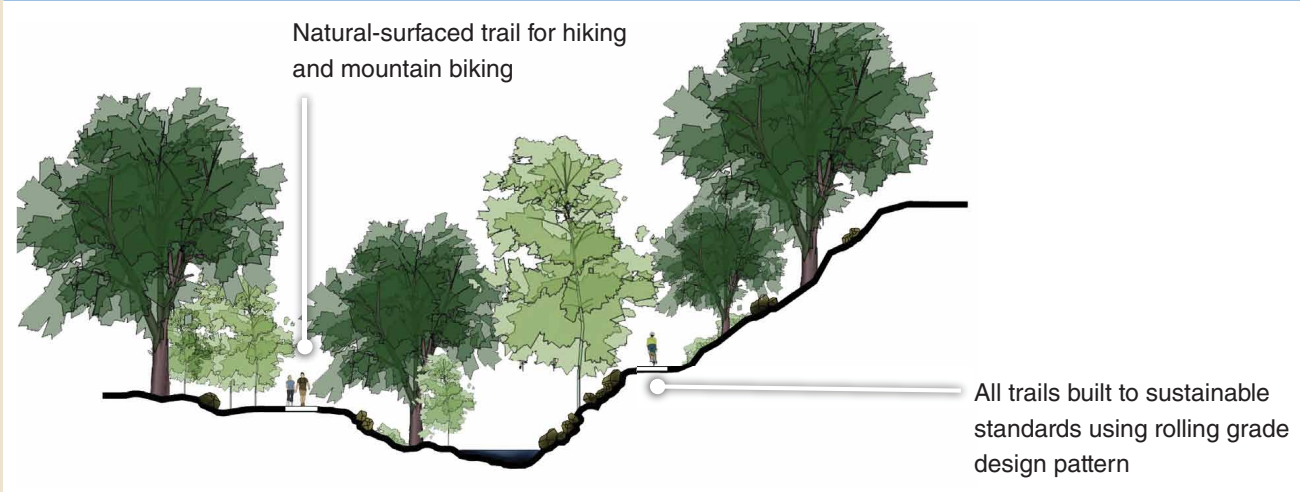
Pedestrian and Bicycle Trail Network

The City's *Alternative Transportation Plan (ATP)*, adopted in 2008, recommends a hierarchical network of pedestrian and bicycle routes throughout Bloomington. The pedestrian and bicycle routes proposed for South Loop correspond to the routes recommended in the ATP and should be designed in accordance with the guidelines described in that plan. See *Figure 3.34, page 3.64.* This plan also recommends that all new or reconstructed streets in South Loop follow a multi-modal model, that incorporates transit, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and landscaping.

Key components of the South Loop trail network include:

Lindau Link – The proposed extension of Lindau Lane between the Mall of America (MOA) and BCS

Figure 3.36 Natural-Surfaced Trails in Greenway-Type Setting



Source: City of Bloomington, *Alternative Transportation Plan, July 2008, page 3.39.*

will provide a key east-west corridor through the heart of South Loop. It will be designed as a multi-modal street, with transit, pedestrian and bicycle amenities, and ample landscaping to give it a “greenway” character. While the segment between 24th and 28th Avenues will accommodate motor vehicles and transit, the segment through BCS, between 28th and 34th Avenues, will likely be designed for only pedestrians and bicyclists. A center median will be designed to manage stormwater.

East American Boulevard – The segment of American Boulevard east of 34th Avenue is the main access to the MVNWR Headquarters and Visitors Center. It also connects to an existing trail along the I-494 bridge across the Minnesota River, providing connections to trails in Dakota County and the east metro area. This segment of American Boulevard will be enhanced to make it more parkway-like in character by adding landscaping and improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

East-West Connectors – The primary east-west routes through South Loop include American Boulevard and East Old Shakopee Road. These provide important connections within South Loop and to other parts of Bloomington and beyond. American Boulevard, west of 34th, includes an existing off-road pedestrian/bicycle trail that extends across Bloomington and connects to the proposed Inter-City Regional Trail. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities recommended in the ATP will be

implemented on East Old Shakopee Road in conjunction with road reconstruction projects.

Another key east-west connector is 86th Street. While it does not extend through South Loop, the on-street bicycle lanes make 86th Street a key bicycle route through Bloomington. It also connects with the Inter-City Regional Trail proposed along Old Cedar Avenue that will extend north to Richfield and the Minneapolis Chain-of-Lakes, and ultimately, south to Dakota County via the Long Meadow Lake crossing. The east end of 86th Street terminates at East Old Shakopee Road near the existing Bass Ponds trailhead into the MVNWR and the proposed new park and ravine trailhead.

North-South Connectors – Most of the existing trails through South Loop have an east-west orientation. Three roads – 24th, 28th, and 30th Avenues – serve as the primary north-south connectors through South Loop. Making these roads more pedestrian and bicycle friendly, and connecting with the east-west routes can establish a complete, inter-connected trail network throughout South Loop.

Minnesota Valley State Trail

This trail was authorized in 1969 by the State Legislature to establish a continuous 72-mile trail corridor from the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers in Fort Snelling State Park to the City of Le Sueur. See **Figure 3.35**, page 3.66. In 2001 the Legislature approved the extension of the trail from Le Sueur



Complete streets are designed to accommodate multiple modes of travel, including pedestrians and bicycles.

upriver to its source at Big Stone Lake State Park. The trail is in the Minnesota Valley State Recreation Area created in 1994 and managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Division of Parks and Recreation.

In 1984, a comprehensive, multi-agency planning effort culminated in publication of the *Comprehensive Plan for the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Recreation Area and State Trail*, updated in 2004. This plan sets broad guidelines for development of the trail as a multiuse corridor connecting the already established units of the state recreation area and the various units of the MVNWR. The plan designated several alternative alignments for the trail on both sides of the river. While many segments of the trail are in place, a critical gap exists through the cities of Bloomington and Eden Prairie. Efforts are underway to identify and secure an alignment for this "missing link."

Preserve Existing Cultural Resources

The bluff and adjoining Minnesota River have always played a significant role in the settlement of Bloomington; providing food, shelter, fuel, and transportation. Prehistoric mounds found on the bluff and in the floodplain provide evidence of human settlement dating back several thousand years. Prehistoric habitation of the area focuses on Woodland and Mississippian period cultures. Prior to 1852, the bluff and river bottoms were settled by the

Mdewakanton Dakota (commonly referred to as the Dakota or Sioux).

Native American Burial Mounds

An archaeological survey conducted in 1880 and reported in 1911 in N.H. Winchell's *The Aborigines of Minnesota*, identified fifteen mound groups in Bloomington. A follow up archeological survey conducted by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1972 found that all but five of the mound groups identified by Winchell had been destroyed. Loss of burial mounds can be attributed to agricultural activities (plowing, cultivating, grazing), land development activities (grading and clearing), natural erosion, and creek or river re-channelization. The remaining burial mounds are protected by Minnesota regulations.

Partners

The City partners with several other governmental agencies in matters related to parks, trails, and natural resources. Primary partners include:



Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (MVNWR)

The MVNWR is part of the national wildlife refuge system managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. One of only five urban refuges in the U.S., the MVNWR was established in 1976 to provide habitat for

migratory waterfowl, fish, and other wildlife species threatened by commercial and industrial development. Management focuses on restoring wetlands, grasslands, and oak savannas, enhancing aquatic plant diversity through water level management, grassland management, exotic species control, and water quality monitoring.

Maintaining a close working partnership with MVNWR staff is essential to ensure that urban development in South Loop does not impact the sensitive resources and habitat in the MVNWR.

www.fws.gov/midwest/MinnesotaValley/index.html



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

The mission of the DNR is to conserve and manage the state’s natural resources, to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life. The DNR manages the Minnesota Valley Trail.

www.dnr.state.mn.us/index.html



Three Rivers Park District

The Three Rivers Park District is an independent, special park district

charged with acquiring, developing and maintaining large park reserves and regional parks and trails in the west suburban metropolitan area. It is one of ten implementing agencies of the Metropolitan Regional Park System, established in 1974.

www.threeriversparks.org

Watershed Districts

All development must manage stormwater in compliance with the City’s *Surface Water Management Plan*. This plan is intended to meet the requirements for a local watershed management plan, as required by various district, metropolitan and state organizations. South Loop is under the jurisdiction of the following two watershed management districts:

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD) - The LMRWD, organized in 1960, encompasses 64-square miles of the Minnesota River Valley, eastward from Carver, Minnesota, to the confluence with the Mississippi River at historic Fort Snelling, near the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

www.watershreddistrict.org

Richfield-Bloomington Watershed Management Organization (RBWMO) – The RBWMO, formed in 1983, covers an area of 7.55 square miles, with 3.3 square miles (43 percent) located in Bloomington.

www.rbwmo.com

