



Iron Range

Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area



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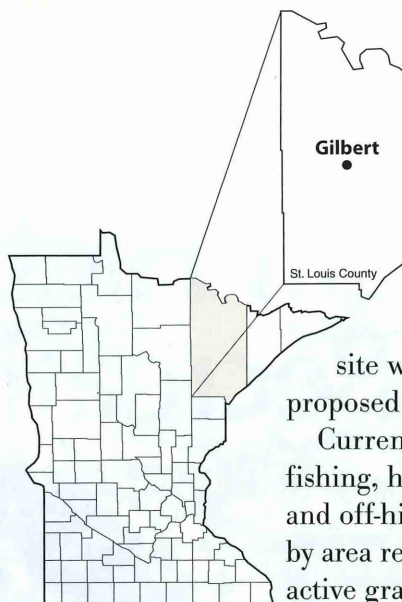
**An inactive mining area
becomes Minnesota's first
OHV Recreation Area**

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use is among Minnesota's fastest growing outdoor recreational activities

When completed, the Iron Range OHV Recreation Area located near Gilbert, Minnesota, will feature recreational trails, scramble areas, training and special events facilities for use by off-road motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles, and 4x4 jeeps and trucks. This user-funded facility will be operated by the DNR's Trails and Waterways Unit as a designated State Recreation

The Gilbert site

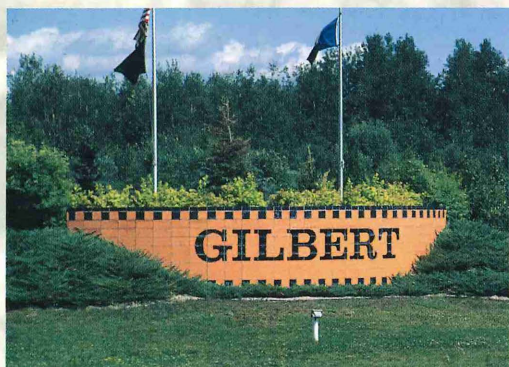
The site includes approximately 1,200 acres in northern St. Louis County. About half of the site is mineland, including inactive iron ore pits, ore stockpiles and tailings basins. This area was mined until 1981. The landscape has been dramatically altered by the extraction of iron ore, creating sizeable lakes, ore stockpiles, overburden piles, tailings basins and



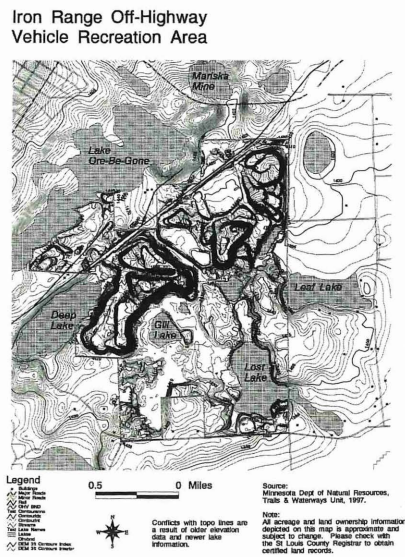
impoundments. Much of the mined area has revegetated naturally. The northern portion of the site will contain the majority of proposed OHV activity.

Current uses include hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife observation, and off-highway vehicle use, mostly by area residents. Timber harvest and active gravel mining leases occur in some areas. There is also some harvest of evergreen boughs and minnow trapping. According to city officials trespass, vandalism, loud parties, and illegal dumping have become increasing problems in recent years. The illegal discharge of firearms (within Gilbert city limits) and indiscriminate OHV use also presents a growing public safety hazard.

Once the area is developed, use of this facility is estimated at between 10,000 and 20,000 user-days per year. Based on this level of use **there is an anticipated positive economic impact of between \$200,000 and \$400,000 per year to the local economy.** This economic effect is expected to occur over a 3-5 year period as the site approaches full-use. Gilbert area businesses stand to benefit directly from this new economic activity.



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SAFETY TRAINING

The Iron Range OHV Recreation Area will provide safe, well-maintained indoor/outdoor training and practice riding facilities. Level “A” and “B” training facilities will be located in the flat tailings basins to ensure beginner safety. The goal is to increase public awareness of the importance of safety in enhancing OHV experiences. Training will focus on safety, driver education, vehicle maintenance, trail etiquette and ethics, and various youth-oriented topics and special activities. *RightRider* and *Tread Lightly* principals will be infused into all course offerings.



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VISITOR PROFILE



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Off-roading is a family sport. The average enthusiast is in his/her mid 30's, married and living in a 2.6 person household. Most own more than one OHV. Operators indicate that the median travel distance (half travel more, half less) to their favorite riding area was 80–100 miles. About 25 percent traveled 150 miles or more, especially on a long weekend or for vacation travel.

Park Operations

Days of operation

The Iron Range OHV Recreation Area will be operated seven days a week from May 1 to October 31. From November 15 to April 30 the area will be open Friday through Sunday. Winter OHV use will be limited to weekends, with the possibility of staging special ice races on frozen water bodies and/or holding snowmobile events subject to noise and environmental limitations.

Fees

There will be no fee for general admission or parking, except during some sanctioned special events. All active use areas will be fenced, and barriers erected to prevent unlawful entry or user trespass onto neighboring properties.

Regulations

Off-road trucks and jeeps, ATV's (or quads), and off-road motorcycles that possess the required safety equipment, mufflers, and spark arresters can use the area if they comply with State Noise Standards. All OHVs entering the riding area, except for competition vehicles, must display a current off-road sticker. Vehicles licensed in another state need not purchase a Minnesota sticker. Special operator and passenger safety equipment will be required for all user groups.



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KEY FEATURES

Year-round clubhouse for organized functions.

Multi-purpose training, practice riding and competitive event facilities.

Opportunities for snowmobile events, subject to local approval.

Picnic and rest areas overlooking scenic views and interpretive features.

Primary "backbone" trail system provides vehicle access and emergency access. Secondary trail system provides more challenging routes for all skill levels.

Second rail crossing to provide pedestrian access to Lake Ore-be-gone. Non-motorized trails may also be developed.

Full-time emergency medical technician on duty.

Vehicle wash facilities, pro-shop and concessions area. Public campground nearby.

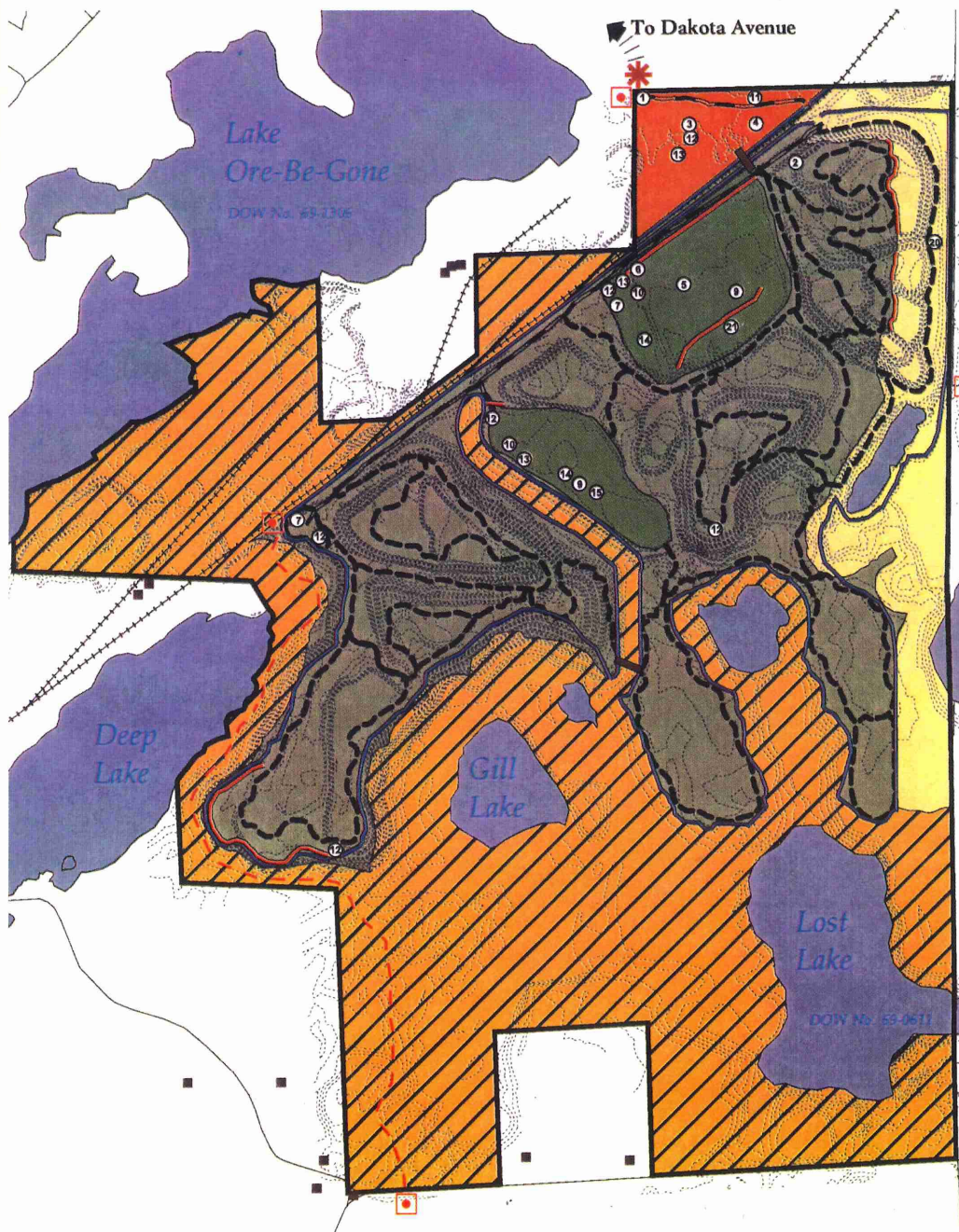
Final Design Plan

IRON RANGE OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE RECREATION AREA

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Legend

- Project Site Boundary
- ✱ Main Entrance
- Bridge
- Staging/Main Parking
- Gates
- ~ Noise Berms
- ~ Fencing
- - - Backbone Trail Structure
- - - Emergency Access
- = Main Interior Road (2-way)
- ~ Existing Roads
- - - Railroad
- Lakes
- Special Event Areas/Parking
- ① Entrance Kiosk
- ② Maint Garage
- ③ Contact Station/Admin Support
- ④ Vehicle Wash-Off Area
- ⑤ Multi-purpose Event Area
- ⑥ Clubhouse/Classroom/Interpretive Center
- ⑦ Restrooms/Sanitary Facilities
- ⑧ Scoring/Official Towers
- ⑨ Concessions
- ⑩ Motorcycle/ATV Storage
- ⑪ Day Use Area
- ⑫ Parking/Staging Areas
- ⑬ Training Areas
- ⑭ Advanced Training Area
- ⑮ 4x4 Obstacle Course (Rockcrawl)
- ⑯ Sand/Mud Drags
- No Motorcycle or ATV Use
- No OHV Use
- Trail Area
- Buildings

October 1998

Sources:
Reactions, OHV Consulting
LSA Associates, Inc.
J.J. Van Houten & Associates
Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources,
Trails & Waterways Unit

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Activities and special events

Multi-purpose event area

A multi-purpose event area will accommodate ATV, 4x4, and motorcycle events.



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4x4 rock crawl and obstacle course

This 4x4 activity can take place either on natural terrain (e.g., rocks, felled trees) or can be man-made. The obstacle course provides a good location to train new owners of these vehicles to safely negotiate rough terrain.

Tough-truck competition

An obstacle course containing jumps, turns, hills and obstacles, including mud, will be developed to permit the staging of tough truck competitions. Permanent or temporary facilities may be used for timed competitions, or for vehicle testing on a daily basis.

Sand/mud drags

Sand and mud drags are typically a 4x4 or dune buggy event held on a straight track. Unlike a standard drag race, sand and mud drag tracks are typically 100 yards or less.



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Hill climbs

Hill climb competitions can be held on a variety of slope grades depending upon the skill level of competitors and the classification of the competing vehicles. Several locations are suitable for timed hill climbs, subject to noise and soil erosion considerations.



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Motorcycle races

Sponsorship of longer events such as the Motorcycle Grand Prix, Enduro Races, and Hare Scrambles will be considered subject to space, noise, and environmental limitations.

Observed trials

Observed trials are the "ballet" of motorcycle events. This competition is performed at very slow speeds, requiring expert balance, agility, and concentration. The equipment is quiet, lightweight, and highly-specialized. The object is to navigate an array of natural and/or man-made

obstacles without touching the ground or falling off of the motorcycle. The terrain at the OHVRA is ideally suited for trials events and could accommodate both international events and smaller stadium-type trials.

Snowmobile events

Snowmobiles may be permitted access for special events. Winter use of the Special Events area will require the approval of the Advisory Committee and the Gilbert City Council.

Bicycle motocross or mountain bike events

BMX race courses are generally man-made for participants who ride off-road bicycles. Tracks may be built on downhill slopes to provide added speed and to ease the burden on competitors. BMX courses are usually very short (100 yards) with many jumps and corners. The overall size requirement is approximately 1-2 acres.

Community events

The City of Gilbert may wish to sponsor various community-related events to promote the facility and boost local tourism. Community events such as picnics, parades, movies, bonfires, or dances could be conducted subject to DNR Special Permit approval. Dual-sport (motorcycle) scenic touring meets or antique car shows could also be staged. Local civic and fraternal groups may also wish to sponsor fund-raising events.

Nature hiking trail

Consideration will be given to developing a network of hiking, biking, and equestrian trails throughout undeveloped portions of the site subject to funding availability and environmental limitations. These trails could provide visitor access to natural features (e.g. lakes, wetlands) and allow for multiple-use of the 1,200 acre site.

Environmental education

This area has tremendous potential for environmental learning in cooperation with area teachers, naturalists, and environmental learning centers. Local educators can guide the development of grade-specific curriculum, programs and interpretive materials for use at the site. DNR staff will assist in conducting volunteer-directed programs that serve area schools in conjunction with their regular curriculum or extra-curricular training programs. Historical and cultural resource interpretation will also add to the visitor's recreation experience.

SKILL LEVEL AND TRAIL DIFFICULTY



The Iron Range OHVRA will accommodate all skill levels

A range of riding skills exist within the ranks of the OHV community ranging from novice to expert. Consequently, a system of trails will be developed featuring varying degrees of difficulty. The Iron Range OHV Recreation Area will provide trails for **three** levels of difficulty:

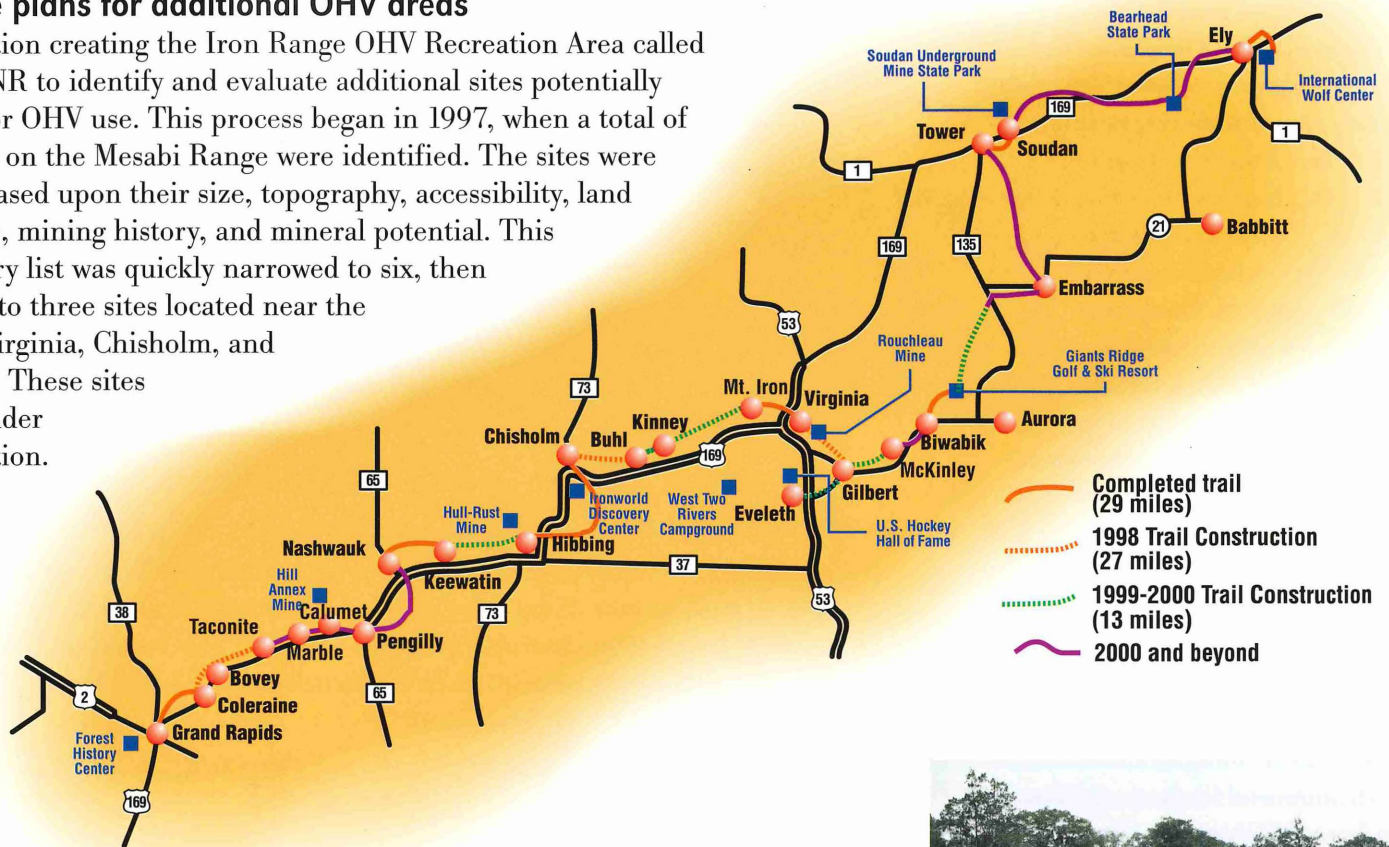
- **Green circle (easiest)** This is the most highly-developed class of trails (almost roadlike) with no steep hills and few obstacles. Intended for novice riders who have mastered the basic skills necessary for safe operation on well-developed trails. Also intended for those lacking the experience or desire to ride more difficult trails. Approximately 10% of trails will be classified as “easiest.”
- **Blue square (more difficult)** Suitable for the majority of intermediate riders, more difficult trails are narrower with steeper hills and switchbacks and some moderate obstacles. Intended for OHV enthusiasts with well-developed skills seeking a reasonably challenging trail ride. Riders subjected to higher degree of risk and exposure. Approximately 80% of trails will be classified as “more difficult.”
- ◆ **Black diamond (most difficult)** Most primitive class of trails requiring a high-level of skill and experience. Very steep grades, narrow trails, sharp alignments, rough or loose tread surfaces, and substantial obstacles. Suitable only for proficient or expert riders to test their machines—and their own skills and abilities. Approximately 10% of trails will be classified as “most difficult.”

The above symbols are commonly used to indicate levels of difficulty.

Growing recreational opportunities

Tentative plans for additional OHV areas

Legislation creating the Iron Range OHV Recreation Area called for the DNR to identify and evaluate additional sites potentially suitable for OHV use. This process began in 1997, when a total of eight sites on the Mesabi Range were identified. The sites were selected based upon their size, topography, accessibility, land ownership, mining history, and mineral potential. This preliminary list was quickly narrowed to six, then narrowed to three sites located near the cities of Virginia, Chisholm, and Coleraine. These sites remain under consideration.



Soon to be finished trail segments will connect the Iron Range OHVRA to the 132-mile Mesabi Trail

When completed, the Mesabi Trail will provide a link to the Iron Range OHV Recreation Area. The Mesabi Trail, a 132-mile multi-use recreational trail stretching between Grand Rapids and Ely, links more than 20 range communities and offers a wide variety of learning and interpretive opportunities. Connections to other trails and trail systems will also permit long-distance destination travel.



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Trail to connect OHVRA to Sherwood Forest Campground

An OHV trail connecting the Sherwood Forest Campground with the Iron Range OHV Recreation Area will be constructed by the City of Gilbert with assistance from the DNR. This trail will permit OHV campers to travel between the campground and the OHV recreation area without trailering their vehicles. Sound berms will be installed as needed to reduce noise effects on adjacent properties.

MONITORING PROGRAM

Checks and measures

Facility monitoring will attempt to answer legitimate questions and to respond to concerns and conditions that may arise. Social, economic, and environmental variables will be tracked over time—recording measurable changes in baseline conditions. Various assumptions and hypotheses that can be tested as critical variables (for example, soils, vegetation, wildlife) are monitored, providing a system of measurements—supplemented with visitor counts and user data—that help correlate impact assessments.

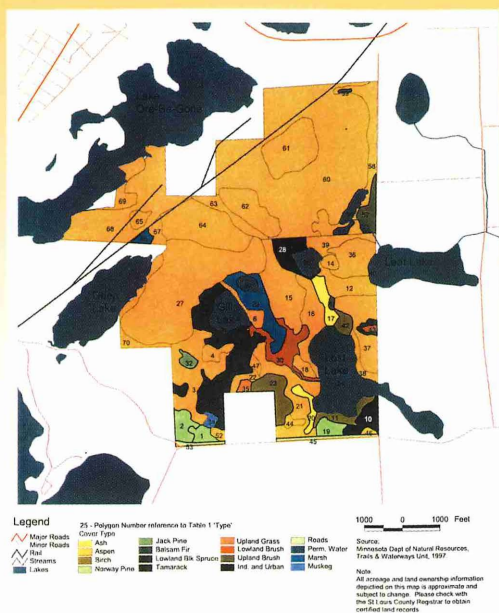
Noise reduction

Although on-site simulations and sound testing have shown that the OHVRA can be developed and operated without exceeding either the noise design criteria or State Noise Standards, area residents are understandably concerned. Even current sound levels have given rise to annoyance. The DNR is committed to meeting all applicable standards, including those related to noise, dust, and air quality. Careful trail planning, design, engineering, and construction will help minimize noise complaints.

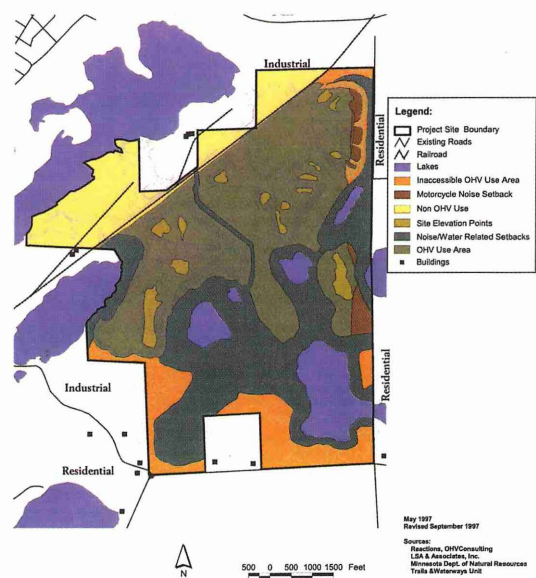


Photos: Minnesota DNR, Trails and Waterways Unit.

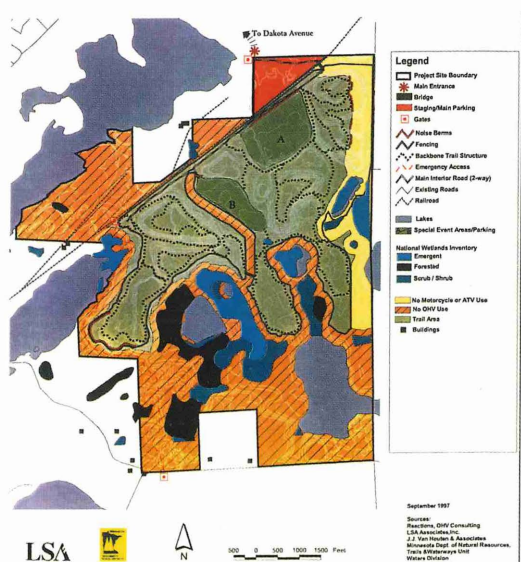
VEGETATIVE COVER TYPE MAP



NOISE AND WATER-RELATED SETBACKS



NATIONAL WETLANDS INVENTORY MAP



Planning the site

Environmental concerns

A series of design alternatives were developed which incorporated noise and riparian area setbacks, in response to public concerns. Upon discovery of the St. Lawrence Grapefern (*Botrychium rugulosum*) in Fall 1997, and the subsequent decision to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), two additional alternatives were prepared in addition to evaluating the "no-build" project alternative. The EIS



Minnesota DNR, Ecological Services.

was narrowly scoped—focusing on proposed activities within the two tailings basins where the grapefern was found. The EIS evaluated and disclosed potential effects associated with each of the alternatives on grapefern populations and identified habitat. Socio-economic impacts, relative to the project, were also addressed in the EIS. The DNR and

Advisory Committee members selected the "Limited Design Plan" because it fulfills project intent without significantly impacting state-listed ferns—and because it reduces vehicle noise by eliminating competitive motocross events.

Issues and concerns

During the planning process, Gilbert area residents voiced concerns about law enforcement, speeding, accidents, litter, noise, dust, and lake pollution. Adjacent private property owners were concerned about the potential for trespass and how the Iron Range OHV Recreation Area might impact the local tax base. The Local Area (Citizen's) Advisory Committee, early in the planning process, resolved that no substantial costs shall accrue to Gilbert taxpayers. The Recreation Area will be constructed and operated with funds derived from OHV license and registration fees, and from unrefunded fuel taxes. Every effort has been made to avoid, minimize, and/or to mitigate potential social, economic, or environmental impacts resulting from the construction and day-to-day operation of this facility.

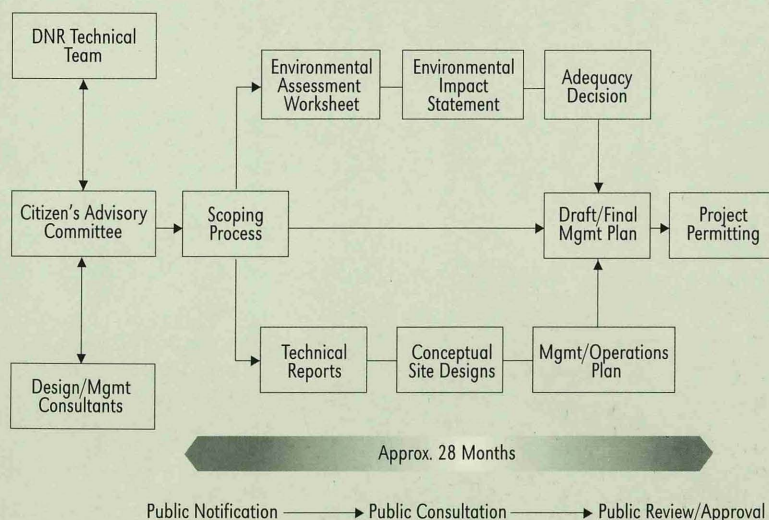
Public participation

Opportunities for public participation were provided throughout the 28-month project planning and environmental review process. Public meetings, mailings, and question and answer sessions were well-attended by interested groups and individuals. A telephone survey of approximately 200 persons was conducted to obtain a representative statistical sample of local public attitudes and opinions regarding the project. Public participation greatly influenced the final project design.



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Iron Range OHV Recreation Area Planning Process—Gilbert Site



1998 Iron Range OHV Recreation Area—Local Area Advisory Committee Members

Bill Aho, Iron Trail Convention and Visitor's Bureau

Liz Prebich, Commissioner, St. Louis County Board

Lois Campbell, Minnesota 4-Wheel Drive Association

Bob Cass, All-Terrain Vehicle Association of Minnesota (ATVAM)

Senator Jerry R. Janezich, Minnesota State Senate

Representative Tom Rukavina, Minnesota House of Representatives

Chuck Neil, Izaak Walton League

Al Mathwig, Amateur Rider Motorcycle Association (ARMCA)

Ann Bjorgo, MNDNR, Trails & Waterways

Edward Schneider, Mayor, City of Gilbert (ex-officio)

Area tourist attractions

The Iron Range OHV Recreation Area complements existing outdoor recreational opportunities

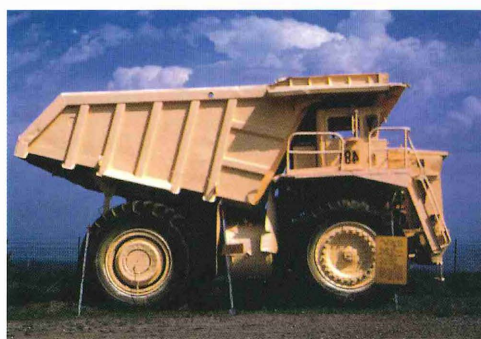
The Iron Range OHV Recreation Area is located proximate to a number of notable tourist attractions including Ironworld (Chisholm), the U.S.



Iron Trail Convention and Visitor's Bureau.

Hockey Hall of Fame (Eveleth), Hill Annex, McCarthy Beach and Tower-Soudan State Parks, Hull-Rust Mineview (Hibbing), Mineview In The Sky (Virginia), Giant's Ridge (Biwabik) and the Minnesota Museum of Mining (Buhl). The region also features a mix of campgrounds, destination golf and ski resorts, trophy fishing lakes, museums, National Register Sites and a variety of colorful cultural celebrations. Snowmobile trails criss-cross the area in winter (Taconite and Arrowhead State Trails, Laurentian Trail, Aurora-Biwabik Trail, East Range Trail) and spur trails link snowmobilers to communities throughout the region. The nearby Superior National Forest provides year-round recreational opportunities for area residents and visitors. The St. Louis and Itasca County Land Departments also provide recreation opportunities on substantial acreages of tax-forfeited and fee lands that they

administer. The Iron Range OHV Recreation Area will complement existing outdoor recreational opportunities by providing an officially-designated OHV riding and special events area.



Minnesota Office of Tourism.

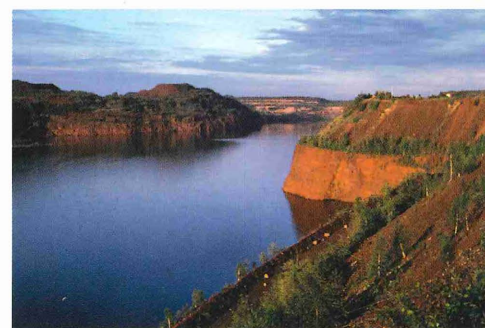
The quad cities area

The 'Quad Cities' of Gilbert, Virginia, Mountain Iron and Eveleth owe their origins to the discovery of iron ore and their growth to eastern capital and immigrant labor. **Gilbert** is the youngest of the Quad Cities and its roots can be traced to Sparta, a mining community platted in 1896. Sparta grew to 1,000 residents, but having been platted over a rich ore body it was sold to a mining company. In 1908, most of the buildings were moved to the present-day Gilbert site, a new townsite incorporated on 2,240 acres of both platted and unsettled territory.



Gilbert, Minnesota. Minnesota DNR, Trails and Waterways Unit.

Gilbert is located in central St. Louis County. The OHVRA lies within the Gilbert city limits just across Lake Ore-be-gone. Lake Ore-be-gone is a man-made pit lake which provides a scenic and recreational backdrop to the city's busy main street and urbanized commercial center.



Minnesota Office of Tourism.

For more information, contact:

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Telecommunication Device for the Deaf:

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