

800529

# **Milwaukee Road Corridor Study**

## **Alternatives : Analysis and Recommendations**

LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE LIBRARY  
STATE OF MINNESOTA

### **ROOT RIVER TRAIL PROPOSAL**

GV  
10-1-80  
HE2  
RTH  
Vol. 2

**January, 1980**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION -----	2
INVENTORY SUMMARY -----	4
Survey of Adjacent Landowners	
Scenic Inventory	
Survey of Fire Department and Law Enforcement Officials	
Natural Resources	
Agricultural Suitability	
Historic and Prehistoric Records Check	
Trail Needs of Southeastern Minnesota	
ISSUES ANALYSIS -----	11
Factors Considered	
Distribution of Recreation Facilities	
Scenic Beauty	
Resource Protection	
Agricultural Potential	
Adjoining Landowner Inconvenience	
Acquisition and Development Costs	
Trail System Duplication	
State Land Utilization	
Legislative Mandate Satisfaction	
State Trail Qualification	
ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS -----	17
Ramsey to La Crescent Jct.	
Spring Valley to La Crescent Jct.	
Rushford to La Crescent Jct.	
Root River Jct. (near Lanesboro) to La Crescent Jct.	
Fountain to La Crescent Jct.	
Fountain to Cushing's Peak	
None of the ROW	
RECOMMENDATIONS -----	27

## MAPS

Map 1	Regional Location Map-----	1
Map 2	Milwaukee Road Corridor Study Area-----	3
Map 3	Root River Trail (PROPOSED)-----	28

## TABLES

Table 1	Summary of the Analysis of Alternatives-----	25
---------	--	----

## FIGURES

Figure 1	Right-of-Way Modification Alternatives-----	32
Figure 2	Routing Alternatives -----	33





## INTRODUCTION

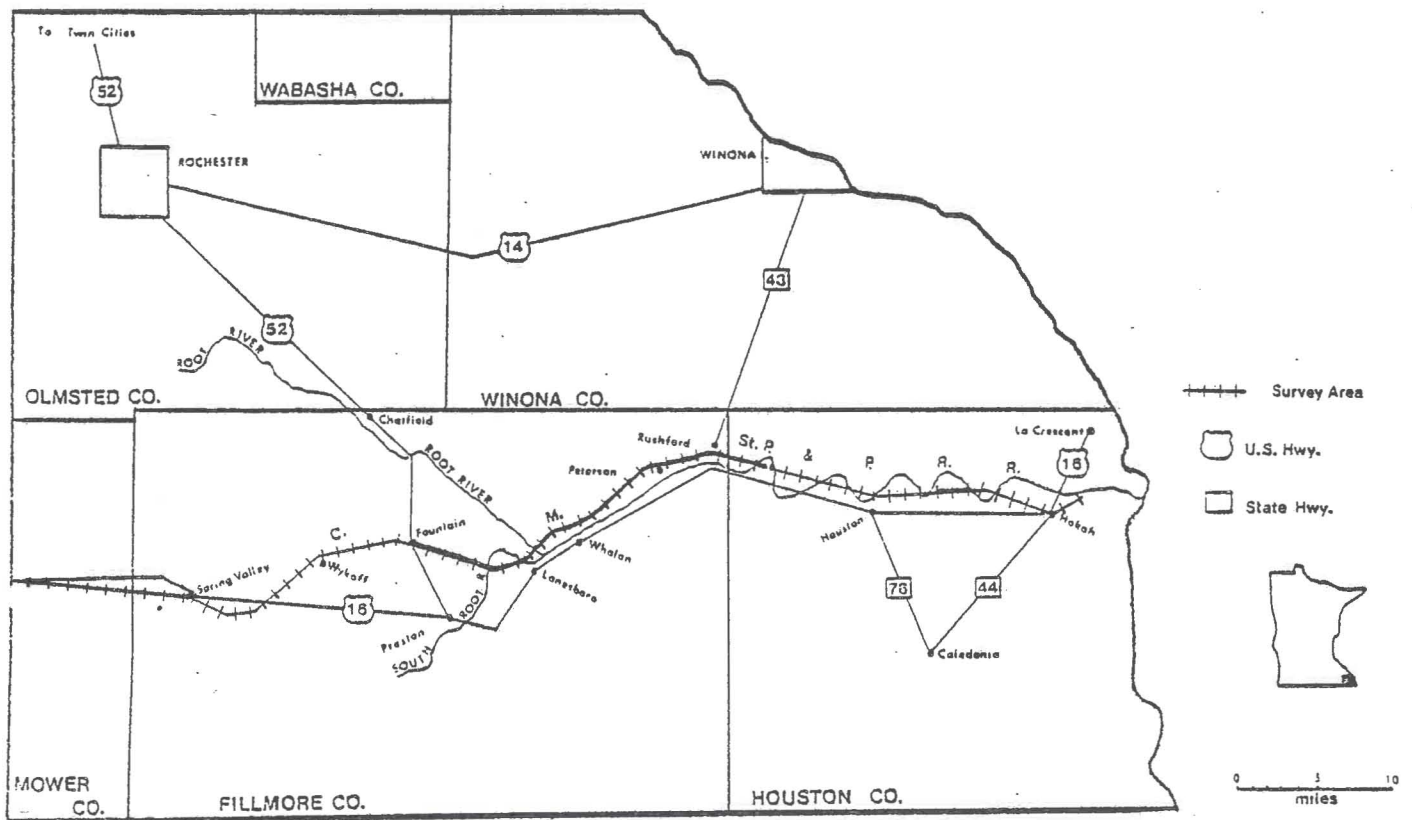
This is the second of two reports on the results of the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) feasibility study on the Milwaukee Road abandoned railroad right-of-way (ROW). The key question addressed by this study was "Should the DNR seek to acquire all or any part of the Milwaukee Road ROW between La Crescent and Ramsey for recreational trail purposes?"

The issues surrounding this question are complex, and the deadline imposed by the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) permits only a limited time to evaluate them. Nevertheless, the study, to the extent possible, dealt with all major factors. However, the timetable necessitated publishing our intent to purchase prior to publishing this document.

This document explains the process through which the DNR arrived at its recommendation. However, this report is not the DNR's final statement concerning the matter. The public meetings and hearings scheduled for January 1980 will give all of us a further opportunity to discuss the proposed acquisition.

The reader is referred to Milwaukee Road Corridor Study: Social and Physical Inventory (DNR, October 1979) for a fuller discussion of the individual elements summarized here.

# MILWAUKEE ROAD CORRIDOR STUDY AREA



Map 2

## INVENTORY SUMMARY

### Survey of Adjacent Landowners

In an attempt to determine the effects a trail might have on adjoining landowners, and to identify concerns related to the trail proposal, two telephone surveys were conducted: interviews with landowners whose properties are adjacent to the Milwaukee Road ROW between Spring Valley and a point east of Hokah, Minnesota; and interviews with landowners along the active Douglas, Heartland and Sparta-Elroy trails in Minnesota and Wisconsin. The former survey was conducted by a consultant and the latter by DNR Office of Planning staff.

Results of the consultant survey show that opposition to a proposed recreational trail in southeastern Minnesota is widespread among both rural and urban landowners, with some variability in different geographic areas.

Trail-related problems reported by residents along existing trails are not as varied or numerous as those reportedly anticipated by survey respondents along the Milwaukee Road Corridor. Many of the problems anticipated by landowners near the Milwaukee Road ROW are rooted in a belief that ROW-related problems will be compounded if a trail is established on the ROW, as well as in uncertainty about the ability of the DNR to develop and operate a trail satisfactorily. Underlying this opposition is a belief that land, as it becomes available in rural areas, ought to be evaluated as farmland before it is considered for other uses---especially public uses such as outdoor recreation.

Although the survey results indicate general opposition among adjoining landowners to development of the ROW as a trail, a township-by-township analysis reveals some differences in the level of opposition. Perhaps because they would have fewer land use problems associated with the location of the ROW, residents in the area between Lanesboro and Rushford (Carollton Twp.-Rushford Twp.) may be less apt to strongly oppose trail negotiation with the DNR.

### Scenic Inventory

To identify the most scenic portions of the ROW, DNR personnel developed a list of criteria that contribute to overall scenic quality and rated the ROW against them. In addition, major landforms found throughout the 72-mile stretch between Spring Valley and La Crescent Jct. were identified.

The study concludes that from a visual appreciation point of view, acquiring the stretch between Fountain and Rushford would provide the best combination of individual site characteristics and environmental variety. On this stretch, the trail user would be exposed briefly to the rolling uplands, the transition zone from uplands to valley, and finally, a sizable portion of the valley floor environment. The only major landscape missed would be the Mississippi backwaters.

### Survey of Fire Department and Law Enforcement Officials

To determine the impact of trails on local fire departments and law enforcement agencies, DNR personnel interviewed by telephone



officials along three existing trails (Douglas, Heartland and Elroy-Sparta). The unanimous response from fire officials is that fire hazards along these trails are very minor and present no special problems for their departments.

Concerning law enforcement, none of the County sheriffs report an increase in workload as a result of the trails. Generally, the sheriffs all have favorable reactions to the trail. They report receiving only a minimal number of complaints regarding the trail, and are unanimous in stressing that none of these complaints have been of a serious nature.

#### Natural Resources

A literature search was conducted to identify rare natural elements along the ROW between Spring Valley and La Crescent. Found near the ROW are:

- 3 of Minnesota's 60 rare plants;
- 3 of Minnesota's 20 rare birds;
- 2 of Minnesota's 17 rare mammals;
- 4 of Minnesota's 13 rare amphibians and reptiles; and
- 1 of Minnesota's 14 rare butterflies.

The ROW also is significant geologically, because it travels through the "Driftless Area"--a unique area not covered by ice during the last glacial period.

A field survey of the ROW by DNR personnel concludes that three areas are especially unique and should be protected:

- Hokah Flats - 150 acres of high-quality marsh with a wide diversity of undisturbed plant communities.

- Money Creek Woods - containing good examples of mature oak and some maple-basswood forests.
- remnant tall grass prairie scattered between Ramsey and Spring Valley.

### Agricultural Suitability

To identify the agricultural potential of the abandoned ROW, Soil Conservation Service (SCS) data was used.

The SCS has developed a series of maps which show important farmlands on a county-wide scale. The maps are based primarily on soil characteristics.

Farmlands along the Milwaukee Road ROW are classified into three categories:

1. Prime farmlands which have the soil quality, growing season and moisture content necessary to sustain high crop yields when managed with modern farming methods.
2. Additional farmlands of statewide importance which have some limitations (such as steep slopes, wetness, or droughtiness) which can be overcome with comprehensive soil and water conservation practices.
3. Other lands which do not qualify in one of the previous categories, primarily because of steep slopes or persistent wetness.

A total of 52% of the 72 miles east of Spring Valley is considered prime farmland. The primary concentration of this category is between Spring Valley and Fountain and, to a lesser extent, between Rushford and Hokah. The study concludes that if the ROW

from Fountain to Rushford were considered as a proposed trail, approximately 18% would pass through prime farmland, 10% would be along additional farmlands of statewide importance, and 72% would be in the "other" category.

#### Historic and Prehistoric Records Check

To identify historic and prehistoric resources along the ROW, a records check was performed by the State Archaeologists's Office.

The search of the available records located 70 sites within a two-mile-wide corridor along the abandoned railroad grade. These include both prehistoric (pre-Euro-American settlement) and historic archaeological sites, some standing structures of possible historic significance, and the locations of proposed developments which never materialized ("paper" towns, claims, etc.). Based on this records check and on data gathered by a State Historic Preservation Office survey now underway, the prehistoric and historic archaeological potential of this area is high.

Because this records check covers only sites reported and recorded in the major files in the state, there are probably more sites within the corridor which have not been located. Where trail development might disturb areas off the existing roadbed, field reconnaissance to locate presently unknown sites would be desirable.

#### Trail Needs of Southeastern Minnesota

Of major concern to the DNR is the question of trail use. The Social and Physical Inventory shows that trail activities are quite

popular with Minnesotans. In fact, it is estimated that Minnesotans bicycled more than 56 million times in 1978 and that residents want an increase in bicycling opportunities more than any other outdoor recreation facility.

Bicycling and snowmobiling rank as the two most important trail activities within the state and southeastern Minnesota. Hiking and ski-touring follow them in importance within the state, but horseback riding is more important than either of them within southeastern Minnesota.

Based on a judgment of similarities of the resources and markets served by Wisconsin's Elroy-Sparta Trail and a potential trail along the Root River, it is estimated that a Root River Trail would receive 23,000 uses in its fifth year of operation.





## ISSUES ANALYSIS

### Factors Considered

Whether or not a trail should be developed upon the ROW is a complicated issue. This section reviews several factors, both positive and negative, that surround the proposal for a trail along the ROW. Many of them were discussed in detail in the Social and Physical Inventory published earlier. The rest reflect interests expressed by adjacent landowners, DNR personnel, and others concerned with the future of a potential trail along the ROW.

Factors are as follows:

1. Distribution of recreation facilities
2. Scenic Beauty
3. Resource Protection
4. Agricultural potential
5. Adjoining landowner inconvenience
6. Costs
7. Duplication
8. Utilization
9. Legislative mandate satisfaction
10. State trail qualification

### Distribution of Recreation Facilities

One of the goals of the DNR is to ensure a statewide distribution of recreation areas. The intent of this is to allow each Minnesotan an opportunity to experience the depth of the state's natural heritage. But a by-product is that the vast majority of Minnesotans will have recreation opportunities available to them in their immediate vicinity.

The priority for facility development must be tempered by regional demand and access to population centers. Although 23,000 uses within the fifth year of operation is projected for a Root River trail, it is hypothesized that the location of the segment chosen will have a further effect on eventual use.

### Scenic Beauty

Those familiar with southeastern Minnesota are well aware of the inherent beauty of the regional landscape. Its deep river valleys and rolling, hardwood-covered hills are in stark contrast to northeastern Minnesota's conifers, and to the relatively flat agricultural lands of the western part of the state. Along the ROW considerable variety exists. Each of the trail alternatives captures in different ways the potential visual experience of the visitor to southeastern Minnesota.

### Resource Protection

Nineteenth century settlement of Minnesota has had a profound effect on the land. Where once vast hardwood forests could be found, acres upon acres of corn are harvested. Other pre-settlement vegetation patterns have experienced similar disruption. Although the railroad

cut and filled extensively as they adapted the land for freight, vegetation within the ROW was generally protected from the plow and other encroachments attendant upon the emergence of a nation. As outlined earlier in this report, parts of this ROW maintain flora and fauna from a time past and as such retain a genetic "pool" which we may need in the future. Areas singled out include:

1. Remnant tall grass prairie scattered between Ramsey and Spring Valley;
2. Money Creek Woods; and
3. Hokah Flats (between Houston and Hokah)

#### Agricultural Potential

Nearly 45% of the state's gross production is derived from agricultural products and Minnesotans are rightfully concerned about a resource so important to the state's economy. Although most concern is about land being transferred away from agricultural use (e.g., urban encroachment on farmlands), the railroad grade provides an opportunity to convert land to agricultural production.

Although encouraging regional tourism would have a positive economic impact, growing crops on the ROW would generate considerable sums of money that could eventually be distributed throughout the community. Therefore, each of the alternatives must be measured against the land's ability to produce crops.

#### Adjoining Landowner Inconvenience

The ROW runs diagonally through properties owned by a single individual in 28% of the cases reported to the social science research firm



hired by the DNR to survey adjacent landowners. In other words, use of the ROW by adjacent landowners could eliminate plowing and cultivating problems associated with triangulated farmland. Where possible, the alternatives analysis addresses this factor.

#### Acquisition and Development Costs

Many people have stated that in these days of increased taxes and "belt-tightening," it doesn't seem reasonable that the DNR should consider developing a project that could cost millions of dollars. The length of the alternative chosen will be in direct proportion to the amount of money needed to develop and operate as a trail.

#### Trail System Duplication

Needless duplication of state or local trail opportunities within a region is not just poor planning; given a finite amount of funding and the shrinking dollar, it is also fiscally irresponsible. Therefore, one basis for evaluation of the different trail alternatives is whether there are existing trails that they would duplicate. This is not to say that the trail should not connect to other trails--connecting trails in different areas is important to the development of a regional trail system.

#### State Land Utilization

Many people, not only in southeastern Minnesota, but throughout the state, believe that the DNR should make better use of the land it already owns. "If only the DNR would use these areas first," the argument goes, "we would have no objection to them acquiring more land." In close proximity to the ROW, six significant tracts of the Memorial Hardwood Forest exist: near Isinours Jct.; near Whalan;

just north of Peterson; just east of Rushford; Money Creek Woods; and finally Hokah Flats. Although these lands are generally on rugged topography, and are not suited to many types of trail use, they have considerable potential for use as areas of nature study, for spur trails, and as locations for rest stops, etc. The alternatives will be evaluated in light of their potential for use of adjacent state lands.

#### Legislative Mandate Satisfaction

The introduction to the Social and Physical Inventory (page 4) includes a discussion of the legislative intent regarding a Root River Trail. To summarize, the 1971 state legislature mandated a Root River Trail between Chatfield and Trunk Highway 26 (just south of La Crescent). This was in addition to the 1969 authorization to acquire abandoned railroad rights-of-way. All of the trail alternatives discussed in this report (except the "no action" alternative) satisfy the legislative mandate to a greater or lesser extent. All of the alternatives fall under the general authorization to acquire ROWs.

#### State Trail Qualification

In order for a trail to be authorized as a state trail, its proposed location must satisfy a number of criteria set forth in Minnesota Statute 86A.05, subdivision 4(a) and (b):

Subd. 4. State trail; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration designation. (a) A state trail shall be established to provide a recreational travel route which connects units of the outdoor recreation system or the national trail system, provides access to or passage through other areas which have significant scenic, historic, scientific, or recreational qualities or reestablishes or permits travel along an historically prominent travel route or which provides commuter transportation.

(b) No unit shall be authorized as a state trail unless its proposed location substantially satisfies the following criteria:

(1) Permits travel in an appropriate manner along a route which provides at least one of the following recreational opportunities:

(i) travel along a route which connects areas or points of natural, scientific, cultural, and historic interest;

(ii) travel through an area which possesses outstanding scenic beauty;

(iii) travel over a route designed to enhance and utilize the unique qualities of a particular manner of travel in harmony with the natural environment;

(iv) travel along a route which is historically significant as a route of migration, commerce, or communication;

(v) travel between units of the state outdoor recreation system or the national trail system; and

(2) Utilizes, to the greatest extent possible consistent with the purposes of this subdivision, public lands, rights-of-way, and the like; and

(3) Provides maximum potential for the appreciation, conservation, and enjoyment of significant scenic, historical, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which the trail may pass; and

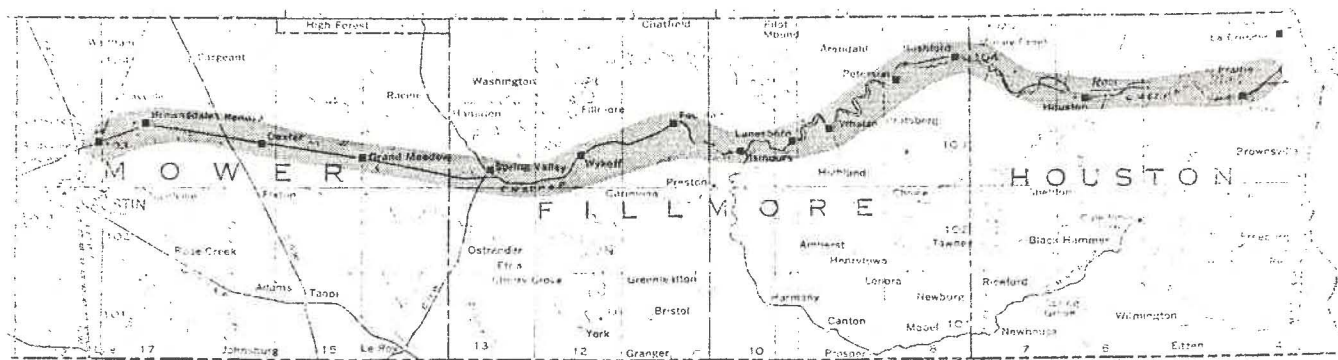
(4) Takes into consideration predicted public demand and future use.

Each alternative must be evaluated against those criteria.

## ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

The following trail development alternatives were evaluated according to the factors discussed in the preceding section:

1. Ramsey Jct. (near Austin) to La Crescent Jct.
2. Spring Valley to La Crescent Jct.
3. Rushford to La Crescent Jct.
4. Root River Jct. (near Lanesboro) to La Crescent Jct.
5. Fountain to La Crescent Jct.
6. Fountain to Cushing's Peak
7. None of the ROW



### Ramsey to La Crescent Jct.

This is the longest trail alternative, extending 102 miles across approximately one-third of the width of the state. As such, it has importance not only to southeastern Minnesota but to south-central Minnesota as well. Because it goes to the outskirts of Austin, it has the best potential to serve residents of the Austin-Albert Lea area. Further, because its length encompasses the area

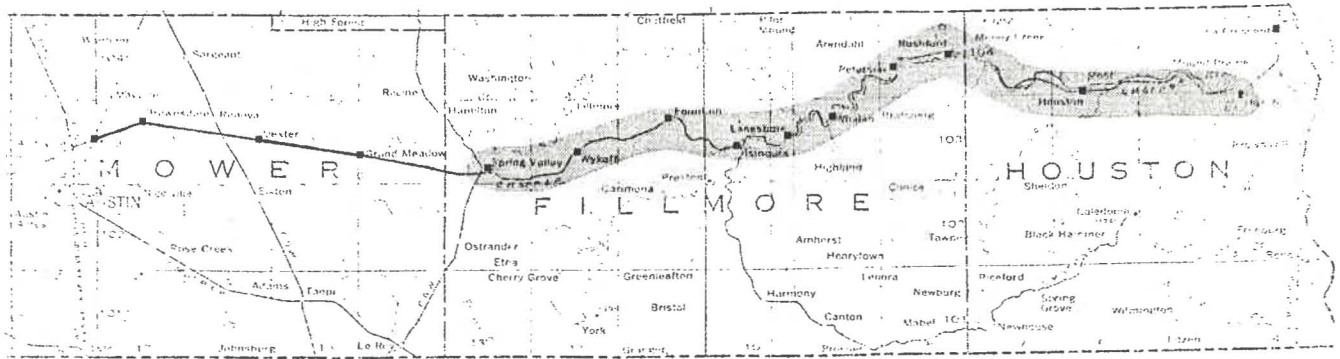


of the other alternatives, it ranks high in scenic value and rare resources including native prairie remnants between Ramsey and Spring Valley.

However, this segment, particularly between Ramsey and Fountain, traverses considerable prime agricultural lands, and therefore would deprive the local community of a corresponding potential economic impact. In addition, acquiring and developing the entire ROW as a trail would obviously cost more than any of the other proposals.

Because current grant-in-aid snowmobile trails are found only west of Dexter and east of Peterson, this alternative would serve to unite these systems, but unfortunately the ROW between Ramsey and Dexter, and between Peterson and La Crescent, would present a somewhat duplicative experience to the trail user. It would, however, create a unique summer use recreation facility. To the extent that it encompasses all of the ROW available between the Root River junction with the South Branch Root River (near Lanesboro) and La Crescent, this segment satisfies the legislative mandate to develop a Root River Trail.

In conclusion, the DNR feels that, while this alternative could qualify as a state trail, there are several drawbacks.

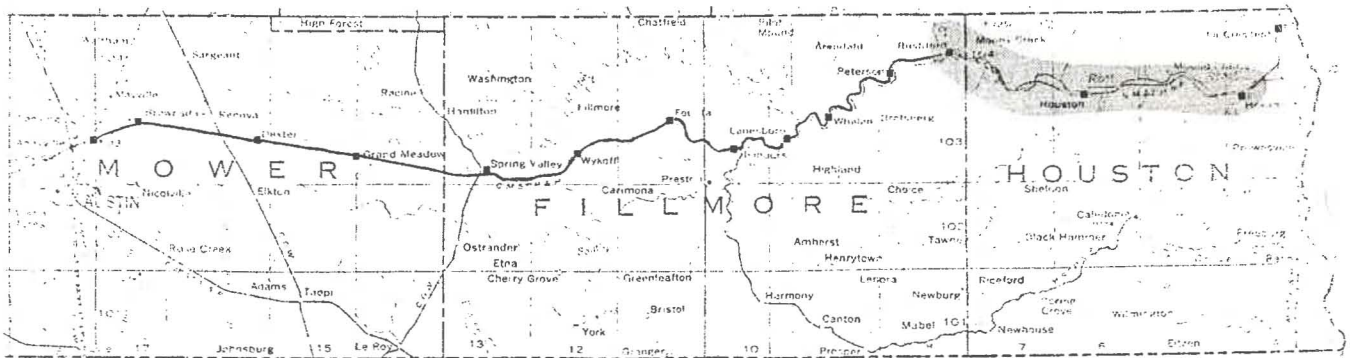


### Spring Valley to La Crescent Jct.

This trail alternative is approximately 72 miles in length. As with the first alternative, this one would allow Minnesotans a cross-sectional view of the region, extending from rich relatively flat agricultural lands to the west into the Root River Valley and finally terminating at the threshold of the Mississippi River. Its terminus being some 30 miles from Austin, its importance to that community is diminished somewhat, but because it could be linked to a state trail currently proposed from Spring Valley toward Stewartville and Rochester, it could have good access to that metro area.

Its variety of terrain ranks this alternative with the highest in scenic value. This alternative, along with those remaining to be discussed, does not include the native prairie remnants between Ramsey and Spring Valley and therefore ranks somewhat lower in its potential to protect rare resources. A major advantage over the Ramsey-La Crescent alternative is that it would traverse much less "prime" agricultural land and presumably would cost 30% less

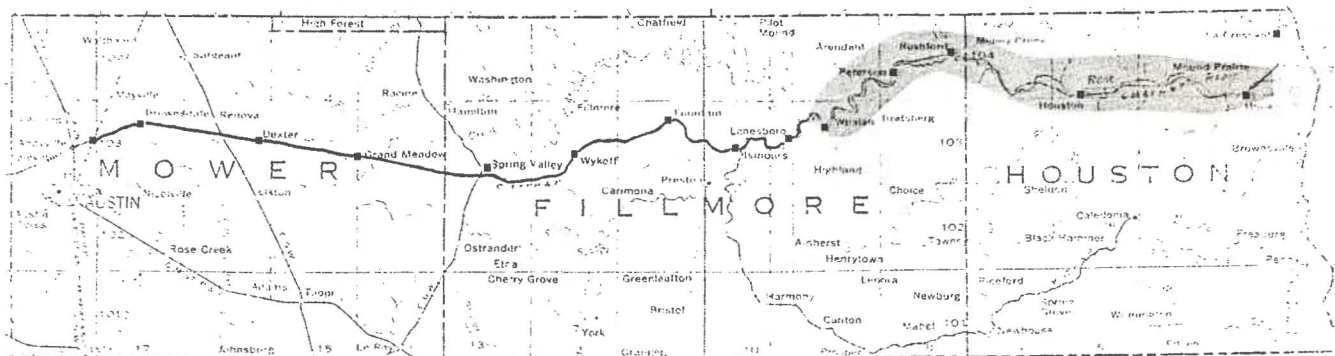
to acquire and develop. This alternative could also link the Spring Valley to Stewartville State Trail with grant-in-aid trails east of Peterson. And for the summer user it would provide a continuous bicycling potential of 85 miles between Stewartville and La Crescent. No potential access to adjoining state land is lost by eliminating the Ramsey to Spring Valley segment. This alternative also satisfies the legislative mandate to develop a Root River Trail. The DNR believes that this segment of ROW could also qualify as a state trail.



#### Rushford to La Crescent Jct.

This alternative extends for approximately 27 miles along the bottomlands of the Root River. As such, it is somewhat removed from both the Austin-Albert Lea area and Rochester. It would allow the visitor to experience one important element of southeastern Minnesota but would fail to include others--most importantly the farmland on the upland plains to the west and the transition between the uplands and the river bottom.

This alternative includes Money Creek Woods and Hokah Flats, both identified for their natural resource value. This alternative also eliminates those important farmlands between Ramsey and Fountain. Another positive point is that this alternative would cost approximately 30% of the cost of acquiring and developing all of the ROW. Although it does not parallel known summer trails, this alternative does duplicate winter trail alignments now in operation through the DNR's grant-in-aid program and it fails to take advantage of all DNR land along the ROW. Furthermore, its length is at the minimum for successful existing trails in rural areas. However, it does satisfy the legislative mandate for a Root River Trail. The DNR believes that this alternative could qualify as a state trail but also notes its limitations.

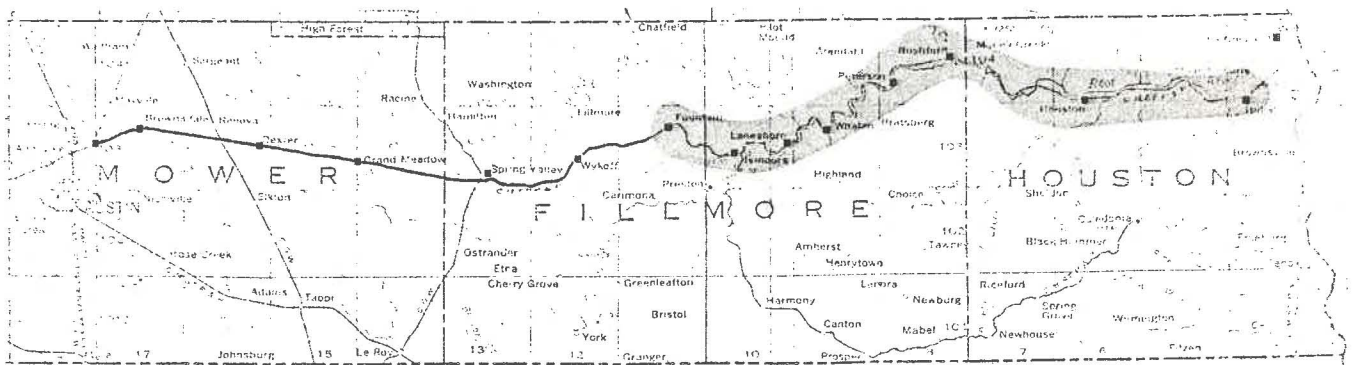


#### Root River Jct. (near Lanesboro) to La Crescent Jct.

This alternative is approximately 42 miles and, as with the previous two alternatives, uses all of the ROW that parallels the Root River (the Root River travels southeasterly from Chatfield and begins



to parallel the ROW near Lanesboro). Like the last alternative, this alternative is somewhat removed from the Austin-Albert Lea area and Rochester. Although the alternative does not traverse all of the major landscape elements along the ROW, it is quite scenic and includes both Money Creek Woods and Hokah Flats. It also eliminates the farmlands between Ramsey and Fountain. The projected cost of acquiring and developing this alternative is approximately 40% of the entire ROW. Finally, it would duplicate some winter trails in the area and not reach potential connection points with some state-owned land. Again, this alternative satisfies legislative mandate and qualifies as a state trail.

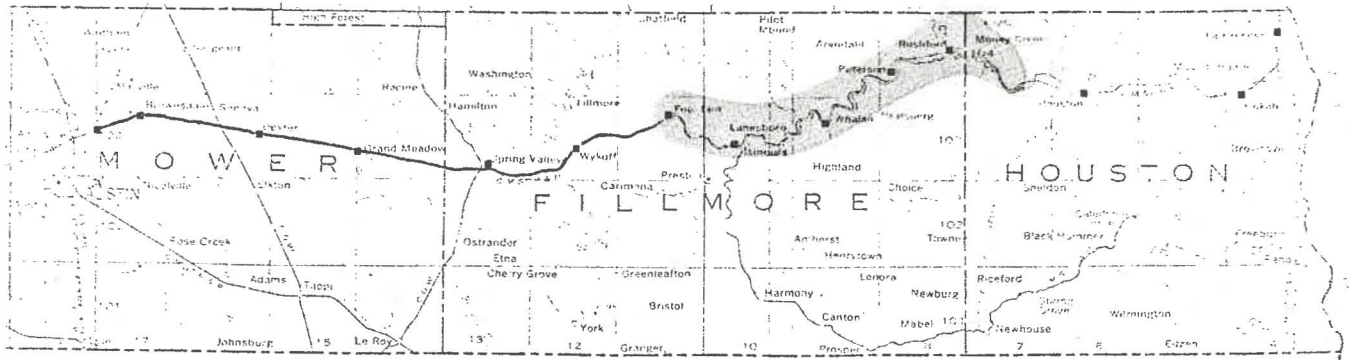


#### Fountain to La Crescent Jct.

This alternative includes approximately 57 miles, extending from the rolling farmlands down and through the Root River valley to the edge of the Mississippi River. This trail alternative would allow the user a significant scenic southeastern Minnesota experience. Its western terminus is located on U.S. Highway 52, allowing adequate direct automobile access to Rochester. This alternative encompasses both Money Creek Woods and Hokah Flats and avoids the rich agricultural lands between Ramsey and Fountain. Acquisition and development costs would be approximately 60% of the cost of buying and developing the entire ROW. There would be some duplication

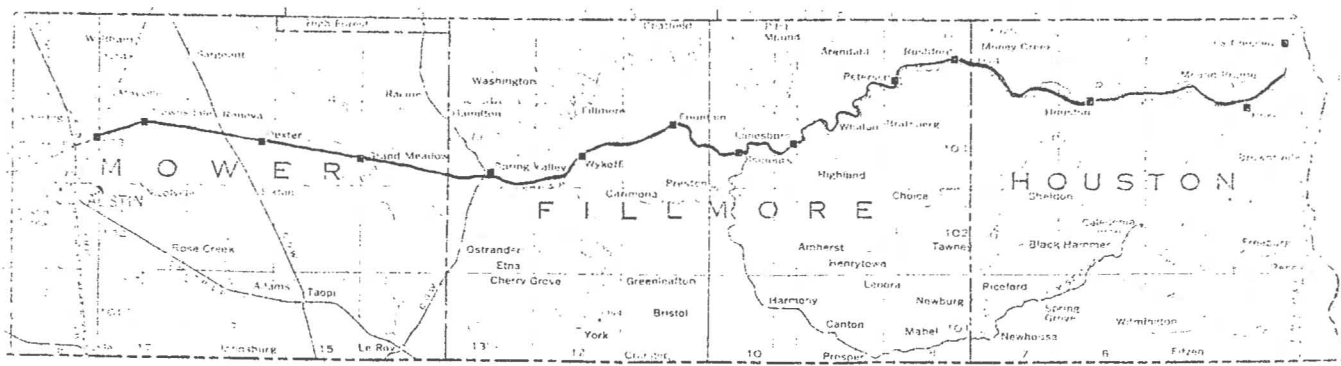


of winter trails, but it would provide a unique summer trail. It would also provide access to all six DNR holdings within the area. This segment also satisfies legislative mandate. The DNR believes that this alternative would qualify as a state trail.



#### Fountain to Cushing's Peak

This alternative extends approximately 37 miles from the edge of the agricultural lands to the west, down to the Root River Valley. According to the DNR's visual analysis, most of this segment has the optimum combination of scenic views and landscape variety in a segment of less than 40 miles. Although it provides access to DNR's Money Creek Woods, it does not provide access to the environmentally important Hokah Flats. It does, however, rank most favorably of those considered thus far, in terms of pre-empting as little agricultural land as possible. It would cost approximately 35% of the amount necessary to acquire and develop the entire ROW. Except for Hokah Flats, this alternative would link all DNR holdings along the ROW. Because this segment does not include all of the ROW that parallels the Root River, it only partially satisfies the legislative mandate for a Root River Trail. In conclusion, the DNR believes that this alternative would qualify as a state trail.



### None of the ROW

If none of the ROW were developed, obviously the greatest agricultural potential might be realized, and of course no funds would be necessary. However, Minnesotans would be deprived the opportunity to experience scenic southeastern Minnesota on family-safe recreational trails. In addition, access to rare environmental resources would be discouraged and in some cases the resource itself lost forever to the plow. The potential access to state lands would be lost. Finally, the legislative mandate to develop a Root River Trail would not be carried out.

Table 1

## Summary of the Analysis of Alternatives

<u>ALTERNATIVES</u>	<u>OBJECTIVES</u>											OVERALL SUMMARY
	Distribution of Recreation Facilities Scenic Beauty	Resource Protection	Respects Agricultural Potential	Sensitive to Adjoining Landowner Inconvenience	Minimizes Acquisition & Development Costs	Avoids Trail System Duplication	State Land Utilization	Legislative mandate satisfaction	State trail Qualification			
All of Row	E	E	E	L	L	L	L	E	VG	VG		VG-
Spring Valley to La Crescent	E	E	VG	G	L	G	G	E	VG	VG		VG-
Rushford to La Crescent	VG	G	VG	VG	G	E	L	VG	VG	G		G+
Lanesboro to La Crescent	VG	VG	VG	VG	G	VG	G	VG	VG	VG		VG-
Fountain to La Crescent	VG	E	VG	VG	G	G	G	E	VG	VG		VG-
Fountain to Cushing's Peak	VG	VG	G	E	VG	VG	E	VG	G	VG		VG
None of ROW	L	L	L	E	E	E	E	L	L	L		G+

E - Excellent satisfaction of objective

VG - Very good satisfaction of objective

G - Good satisfaction of objective

L - Low satisfaction of objective



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The DNR recommends that two segments of the abandoned railroad ROW be purchased and developed for recreational trail use. The priority recreation uses provided for on these segments would be bicycling in the summer and snowmobiling in the winter. The first segment runs from Fountain through Lanesboro, Whalan, Peterson and Rushford to a point approximately one mile beyond Money Creek Woods (Twp. 104, R.7, Sect. 25 near Cushing's Peak), for a total distance of about 37 miles. The second segment runs from a point four miles east of Houston (Twp. 104, R.5, Sect. 31) through an area identified as Hokah Flats to a point approximately two miles west of Hokah (Twp. 103, R.5, Sect. 2), for a total distance of approximately 5 miles. The total acquisition for trail development would be approximately 42 miles of the 102-mile ROW.

To tie these segments together, and to tie the trails and the Root River valley area to other segments of the state trail system, use of the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) bicycle program and the DNR grant-in-aid snowmobiling program is recommended.

The segment from Fountain to Cushing's Peak is recommended for a number of reasons:

1. It utilizes the lowest percentage of "prime" or "important" farmland (SCS categories) of any continuous segment of reasonable trail length (30-40 miles).
2. It has higher scenic quality than the vast majority of the remainder of the right-of-way.
3. Few highways parallel the right-of-way within the segment.



# ROOT RIVER TRAIL

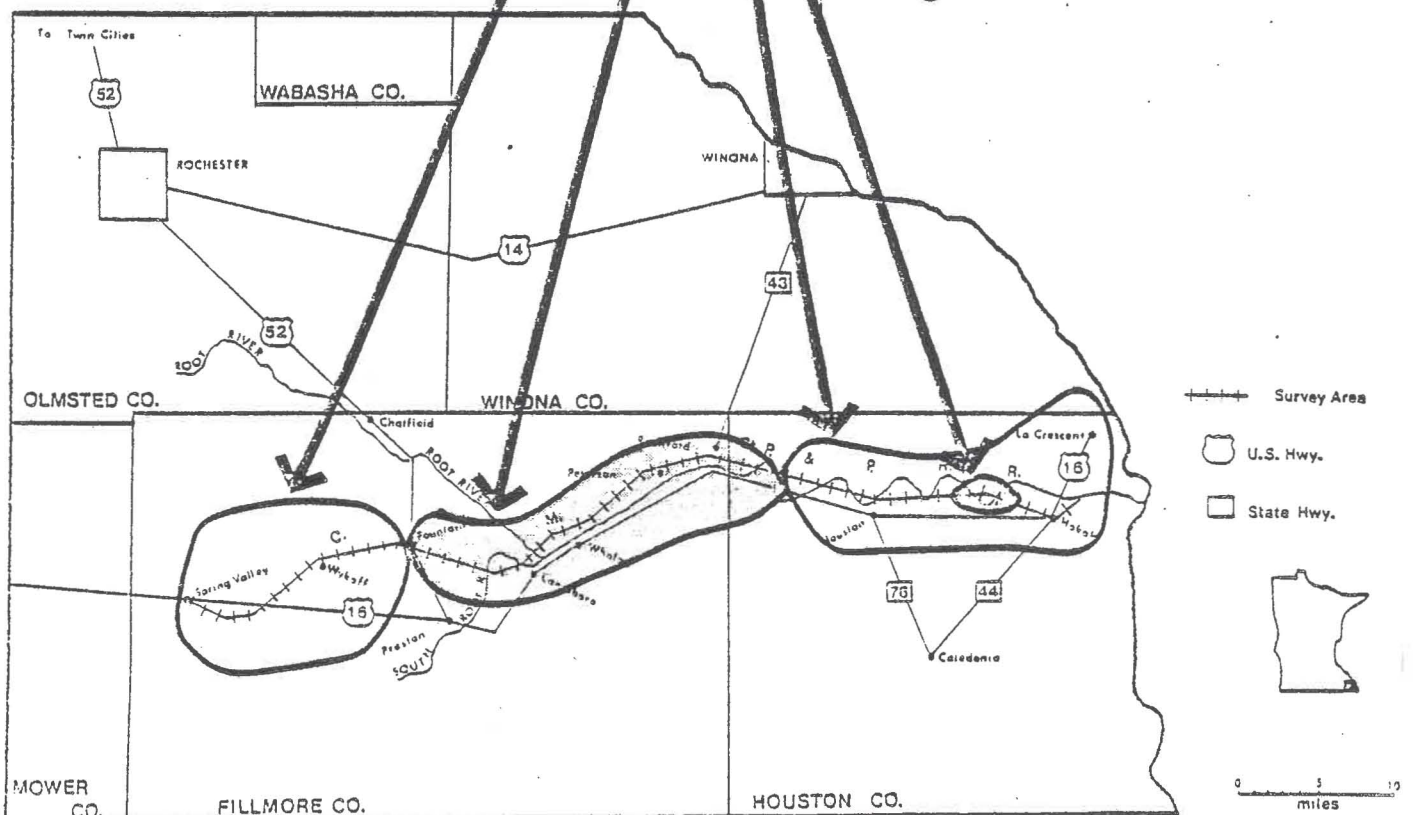
(PROPOSED)

Prioritize DNR's  
Grant-in-Aid snowmobile  
program & Mn/DOT's  
on-road bikeway program

Develop family-safe  
off-road recreational trail

Prioritize MN/DOT's  
on-road bikeway program

Develop trail segment on  
RR grade



4. It has been identified as an area of considerable interpretive potential.
5. It complements (rather than competes with) existing grant-in-aid trails in Fillmore and Houston counties.
6. It would establish a recreational clientele for the DNR/Forestry tract known as Money Creek Woods and other DNR/Forestry parcels adjacent to the ROW.
7. It would provide a continuous safe family recreational opportunity of reasonable length.
8. It partially fulfills the legislative mandate to develop a Root River Trail from La Crescent to Chatfield.
9. Of all the segments surveyed, this segment seems to pass through an area of somewhat lower landowner concern about recreational trail development.

Although there is very little "prime" or "important" agricultural land along the segment from Fountain to Cushing's Peak, there is one significant farmland area just west of Rushford. The Department can bypass that area by means of a trail built along the existing highway but physically separated from the highway shoulder. This would require the assistance of Mn/DOT, and a slight change in their policy for trail development. Based on discussions with Mn/DOT officials, the DNR believes that this can be accomplished.

The five-mile segment near Hokah Flats is also recommended, for many of the same reasons cited above. But most importantly, it would capitalize on its high scenic qualities and high environmental education potential as it passes through 120 acres of DNR land. The only alternative to using the ROW would be to have a dead-end spur trail from U.S. Highway 16 into the flats area.

While that plan might reduce landowner concerns about our proposed project, it would detract from the user's enjoyment and appreciation of the area.

Obviously, to make the trail system in the Root River valley usable, these two separated segments would have to be connected and integrated with existing and proposed regional trails. The DNR would work with Mn/DOT to ensure that on-the-shoulder bicycle trails were provided to connect the two segments. In addition, the DNR would seek Mn/DOT's help in providing an on-the-shoulder bicycle trail between the eastern terminus of our trail development in Hokah Flats and La Crescent. This would link the trail with the Mn/DOT bikeway from Minneapolis to La Crescent currently under study. It would afford bicyclists traveling from the Twin Cities area an opportunity to extend their trip up the Root River valley. Finally, Mn/DOT's cooperation would also be necessary to link the proposed project with a north-south DNR trail originating in the Rochester area.

Consideration must also be given to connecting the separate segments for winter use. Grant-in-aid trails exist between Money Creek Woods and Hokah for snowmobilers. The proposed development would allow users to travel from Hokah to Fountain on a combination of grant-in-aid and DNR trails. Between Fountain and Spring Valley there is less grant-in-aid trailway. The DNR would prioritize this area for additional grant-in-aid snowmobile trail development in the next biennium. That would then connect the entire trail between Spring Valley and La Crescent for winter snowmobiling recreation.

Where appropriate, the provision of wildlife cover will be actively promoted, as will the establishment of tree species for windbreak and privacy purposes.

Although considerable interest has developed in the ROW from Spring Valley to Austin, the DNR does not recommend acquisition of this segment for a trail. That segment of the abandoned railroad ROW passes primarily through "prime" and "important" farmland. It appears that the highest and best economic use of that land is agriculture. However, there are reported to be significant stretches of prairie along the abandoned railroad ROW between Spring Valley and Austin. These prairie segments present certain scenic research and genetic values and some consideration for preserving some of them should be given, possibly by other means. The DNR recommends that Mn/DOT conduct further studies of the feasibility of developing an on-the-shoulder bicycle trail between Spring Valley and Austin. The DNR will also reevaluate its grant-in-aid program priorities in this area.

Finally, although the DNR is proposing to acquire 42 miles of ROW, there appear to be places within the two identified segments where the trail could be accommodated on state, county, or township road rights-of-way, or otherwise located in such a manner that portions of the railroad grade would not have to be used.

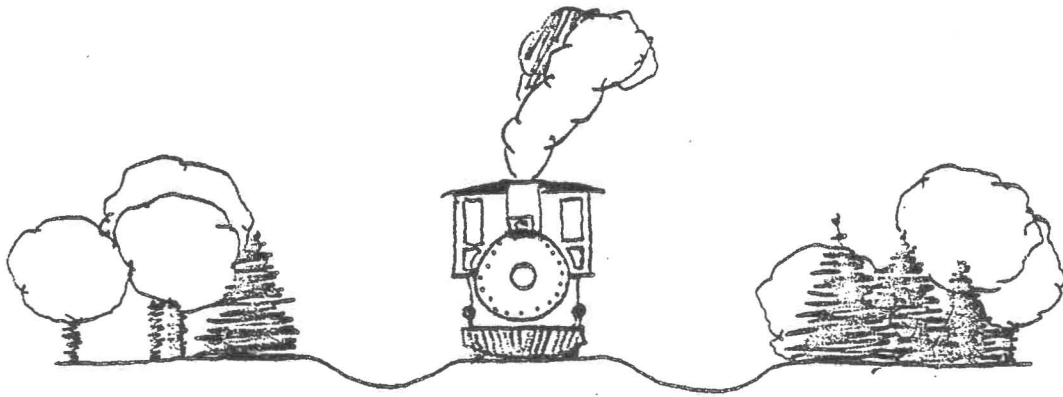
Some of those places have been identified and will be considered for further study if the DNR acquires the two identified segments.

They are grouped as follows:

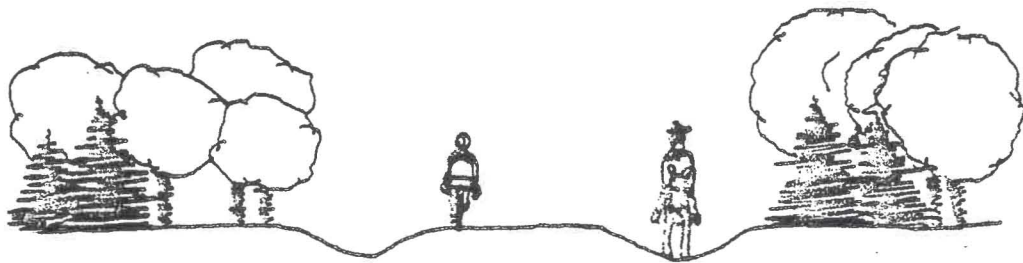
- (1) Location of Trail Starting and Ending Points: the beginning and ending points have been identified as Fountain and a point one mile east of Money Creek Woods. These could be further refined if other suitable locations can be identified.



FORMER USE



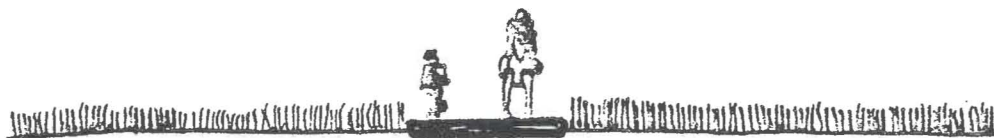
TYPICAL  
DEVELOPMENT



MINIMUM  
RIGHT-OF-WAY

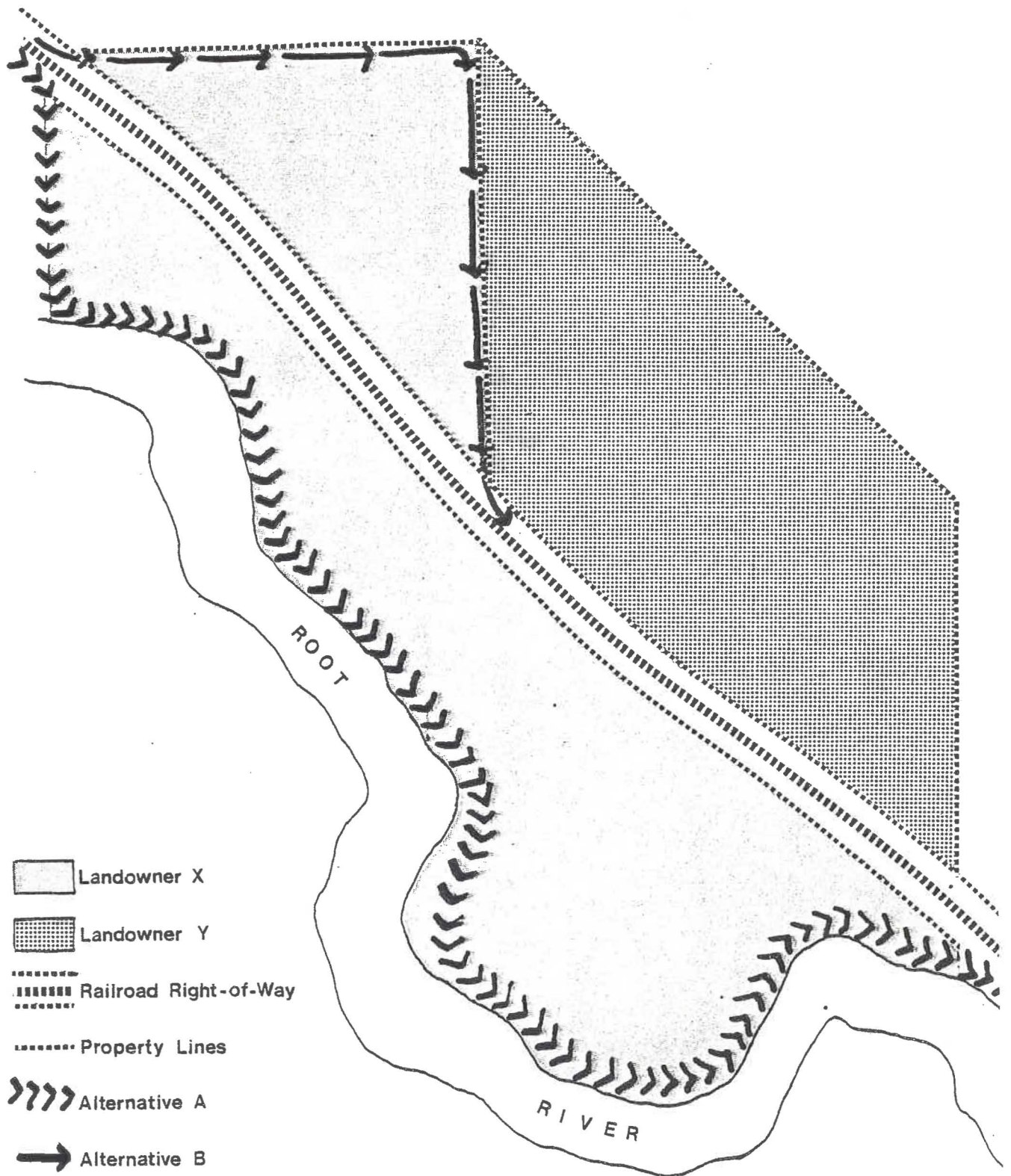


MINIMUM  
RIGHT-OF-WAY  
WITH GRADE  
LEVELED



## Right-of-Way Modification Alternatives





## Routing Alternatives

- (2) In-city Alternatives: opportunities may exist in Lanesboro, Whalan, Peterson and Rushford to avoid using the railroad grade by following city streets or other public lands.
- (3) Farmland Bypasses: there appear to be places where the trail could be rerouted to avoid potential land use conflicts.

Trail alignment and other details would be worked out through the master planning process required by the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1975 (M.S. 86A), which would occur only after the purchase of railroad grade segments by DNR. A citizen's advisory group would be asked to assist in working out alternatives in the planning process. The DNR would do everything possible to accomodate the movement of farm equipment.