



Houston OHV Project

Joe Unger, OHV Planner

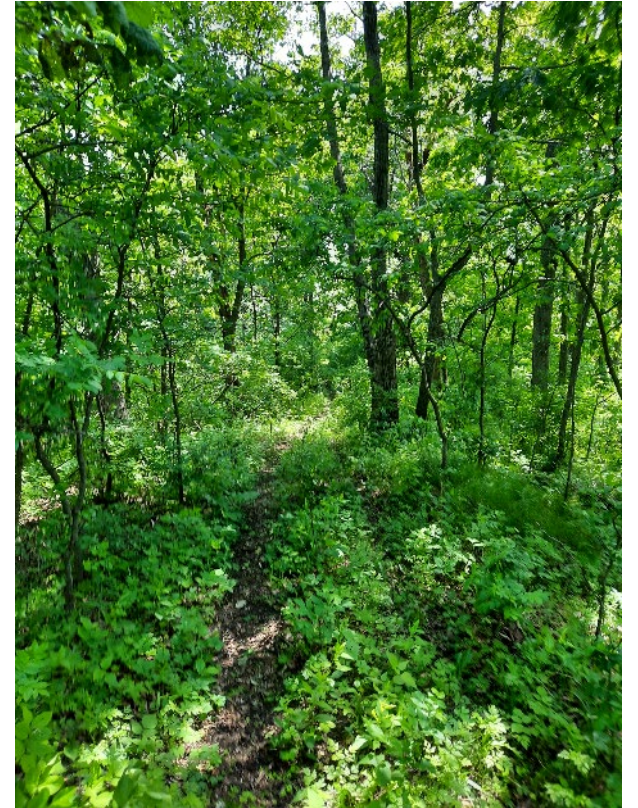
Kelli Bruns, Parks and Trails Regional Manager

Karen Umphress, Amateur Riders Motorcycle Association (club)

Project background

- 2008-The Rochester Rough Riders and MN Four Wheel Drive Association contact the city about potential OHV development.
- 2009-City, clubs and DNR begin discussing project
 - Dec. 2009-City passed a resolution that supports the project.
- Feb. 2010-City applies for first acquisition grant (FRTP-\$150,000).
- Aug. 2010-ORV and OHM clubs apply for Grant in Aid (GIA) acquisition grant (\$150,000 ORV, \$50,000 OHM).
- Oct. 2010-DNR interdisciplinary team visits the site, DNR summarizing findings in a letter to the city/club in Jan. 2011.
- Feb. 2011-City applies for second FRTP grant (\$150,000).
- May 2011-Site visit to the Appleton Recreational Park to understand how a trail system and small community interact with each other.
- June 2011-DNR and National OHV Conservation Council hold 3-day OHV recreation management meeting in Houston.
- Sept. 2011-City acquires (Kruckow) 70 acres for project.
- Jan. 2012-City, clubs and DNR hold a public open house in Houston.

- July 2012-Public hearing on change in land use for South Park.
- Spring 2013-City acquires (Houge) 40 acres for project.
- Dec. 2013-Federal Environmental Assessment completed for land use change.
- Feb. 2014-City acquires (Schultz) 10 acres for the project.
- Aug 2015-March 2016-Trail design by USFS Trails Unlimited Enterprise Team.
 - Trails Unlimited also hold a trail design and planning training in 2015 and a tractor training in 2016.
- 2017-Access easement acquired.
- 2018-Parking lot and trail head designed.
- 2019-GIA application for trail development submitted, Seven Step process begins.
- 2021-DNR completes review of GIA trail development application



- South Park was developed with Land and Water Conservation (LWCF) funds.
 - LWCF is a Federal program administered by the National Park Service to provide outdoor recreation opportunities
- Adding OHV use was considered a change in use and required a Federal Environmental Assessment.
 - Completed in 2013
- No LWCF funds were used for land acquisitions or trail development

Grant in Aid (GIA)

- Grant in Aid is a cost share program between DNR, a local government unit and a club.
- Provides up to 65% reimbursement for trail development and up to 90% reimbursement for trail maintenance.
- Funds may also be used for acquisition
- DNR provides financial (maintenance grants) and technical assistance throughout the life of the grant.
- Funding comes from OHV registrations and a portion of the unrefunded gas tax associated with OHV trail use.
- GIA trail development applications complete a 7-step review process.
- Over 70 OHV GIA trails statewide with several more in development.

GIA 7-Step Process for trail development

- Step 0: Club and LGU identify need for trail, approach DNR Parks and Trails (PAT) who provide technical assistance.
- Step 1: Club and LGU submit completed application to DNR Parks and Trails area supervisor. The area supervisor reviews the application to ensure it is complete.
- Step 2: Area supervisor provides DNR area interdisciplinary team with project description and map. Requests comments for the project. PAT works with the interdisciplinary team, the club and the LGU to address any concerns identified during the review
- Step 3: Parks and Trail presents the project to DNR Regional Management Team (RMT). RMT reviews interdisciplinary comments and PAT responses then decides if project should continue.

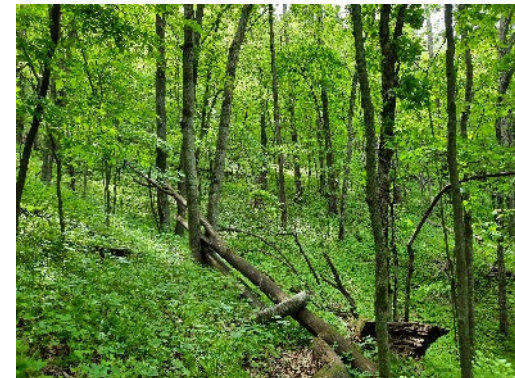
- Step 4: Parks and Trails requests an Environmental Review Needs Determination from the DNR Environmental Review Unit. The ER Unit compares the project to the mandatory environmental review categories in Minnesota Rules 4410. If environmental review is required, it will be completed prior to proceeding. If environmental review is not required, Parks and Trails will complete a 30-day public review.
- Step 5: Parks and Trails will present the project to the RMT for final review and support for funding.
- Step 6: Club and LGU will work with Parks and Trails to apply for any necessary permits and complete a final Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) review. If listed species are identified in the NHIS review, the trail alignment may be shifted slightly.
- Step 7: Parks and Trails will work with the club and LGU to monitor trail development.

State environmental review

- The DNR conducts an Environmental Review Needs Determination (ERND) for all OHV projects to determine if an EAW is required.
 - Step 4 of GIA process
- The ERND compares the project to required categories in M.R. 4410
- The ERND review determined that the project does not meet any of the thresholds that require Environmental Review (2019).
- A Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) review is required prior to trail construction.

Federal Recreational Trails Program (F RTP)

- Federal program administered by the US Department of Transportation
- Provides funding for trail development/land acquisition for trails
- The DNR accepts applications and works with the Minnesota Recreational Trails Users Association to recommend project funding
- Projects must complete an environmental review checklist



F RTP environmental review

- Requires the completion of environmental review checklist
 - NHIS review
 - Cultural resources review
 - Water wetland review
 - Land certification
 - EAW Needs determination
 - Note-Additional environmental review may be required if any resources are identified.



How is this project different than the average GIA project?

- GIA funds were first utilized for acquisition.
- Project also utilizes Federal Recreational Trails Program (F RTP) funds
- Project required a change in use for South Park that was developed with Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds.
- F RTP and GIA funds are being used to match each other, no city funds are required.
- Although different than many GIA projects, it is not unique.
- All three programs have their own review processes

Natural resource review

- 2010-DNR interdisciplinary team reviewed the site.
 - Comments: Erosion potential, potential for rare species, wildlife impacts, natural communities that are classified as moderate biodiversity significance, potential cultural resources.
 - Recommendations: Utilize technical experts in trail design to reduce erosion potential, Avoid steep south and west facing slopes, create large blocks of undisturbed forest for wildlife habitat and restrict invasive potential, minimize canopy cover damage, consider cultural resource interpretation.
 - Implementation: US Forest Service Trails Unlimited enterprise team contracted to provide a professional trail design (2015-2016).
- 2019-DNR GIA review found no new concerns

- GIA public review completed in spring 2020
- DNR received 123 comments, approximately 2/3 were in support of the project.
- Top concerns:
 - Noise (14 comments)-OHVs are limited by statute to noise. The noise study completed for the Federal EA found no significant noise impacts. The city or DNR may conduct future noise studies and limit use if noise becomes an issue.
 - Rattlesnake concerns(4 comments)-Trail development will follow the DNR's conservation action plan. During initial trail alignment, no rattlesnake habitat was identified. The trail may be rerouted if a rattlesnake den is identified.
 - Maintenance (11 comments)-Maintenance costs are reimbursed up to 90% through GIA. The DNR will periodically inspect the trail and may assist in heavy maintenance.
 - Bluff lands/erosion concerns (19 comments)-To address the steepness of the bluffs, professional trail designers were contracted to properly design the trail. They may be hired once again to help construct the trail. Proper drainage along the trail is important to shed water off the trail and reduce erosion potential.

Federal Environmental Assessment

- Completed in Dec. 2013 to allow motorized use on an 80-acre portion of South Park.
- Required by National Park Service as part of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
- EA used to inform, not decide
- Included noise study, cultural resource review and public review.
- No cultural resources were found during the review
- With the exception of one site, all noise modeling indicated noise would not exceed state limits.
 - One site exceeded nighttime noise limits by 1 dba, which is not noticeable by the human ear.
- Because the EA only examined the change in use, no trail layouts were considered.

Reimbursement plan

- If the project were not completed, the city would need to make reimbursements to fulfill the grant requirements.
- Aspects of the reimbursement plan would include, but not limited to:
 - Repayment of spent grant money,
 - Land ownership of lands purchased with grant money,
 - Future state grants.

Contract and deed language

F RTP/GIA Combined Grant Contract:

If Grantor finds that there has been a failure on the part of the Sub grantee to comply with the provisions of this Agreement, that reasonable progress has not been made, or that the purposes for which the funds were granted have not been or will not be fulfilled, Grantor may take action to protect the interests of the State of Minnesota and, if applicable, the United States, including, but not limited to, the refusal to disburse additional funds, requiring the return of all or part of the funds already disbursed and/or the retaking of all equipment and capital assets purchased by Sub grantee with funds provided to Sub grantee under this Agreement. This Agreement may be

Land title:

Now therefore, grantee, for a period of 20 years, covenants and agrees that the property may only be used for a motorized recreational trail system consistent with original grant application. If the property is transferred in any way including sale, lease, license, and/or easement to any other person or government unit for use for some other purpose, this property will revert to the State of Minnesota and remain open to the public.

- Long-term partnership between city of Houston, DNR and motorized recreation groups.
- To date, a thoughtful and open city process to consider project.
- Very high (perhaps unprecedented) level of investment and support for a local community from motorized recreation, including bringing national level experts to hold workshops and do trail design.
- National experts are planned to be brought back to do trail construction with no direct cost to the city.
- Is the terrain challenging? Yes, and the project has always acknowledged that...this is why the high level of support and national experts with experience in far more challenging environments. And it's what will make the trails interesting to ride, and bring people to Houston.

Thank You!

Joe Unger

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