

## Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail Designation Application Contents

### General Tab

*This is where the application process starts and an application number assigned, and all other tabs in the designation application, master plan and funding application flow from this tab. All fields are required.*

- Park or Trail Name: Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail
- District - 1
- Location Description:
- Park or trail address **Latitude** 46.7867° N, **Longitude** 92.1005° W
- GPS coordinates of park or trail [Autofills based on the address of the facility]
- Map of Park or Trail [Upload File Button]
- Facility Website: <https://duluthmn.gov/parks/parks-listing/waabizheshikana-the-marten-trail-western-waterfront-trail/>
- Lead Applicant Organization City of Duluth
- Have you applied for regional designation for this park or trail before? NO
- Lead contact person: Cliff Knettel
- Title: Senior Parks Planner
- Mailing address: 411 W. 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Ground Floor, Duluth, MN 55802
- Phone: 218-730-4312
- Email: [cknettel@DuluthMN.gov](mailto:cknettel@DuluthMN.gov)
- Joint Applicants [Up to 5, all must be a city or county in Greater Minnesota, with resolutions included]
- Other project supporters [Please list other project supporters such as advocacy or business groups, individuals, other units of government, etc.]  
St. Louis River Alliance, Fond du Lac Band, MN and WI DNRs, MM Pollution Control Agency

### Description Tab

Regional Significance Statement [Provide a short "elevator speech" describing the regional significance of the park or trail. Focus on the core vision, essential qualities and primary public values the park or trail offers. **75 Words Max.**]

Waabizheshikana: regional significance

- The St. Louis River estuary is the largest freshwater estuary in the U.S.
- The trail connects to local trails and neighborhoods and regional trails and destinations. Provides access to the National St. Louis River Water Trail.
- Secures access and protection of unique upland habitats along the St. Louis River.
- Interprets the historical utilization of the river by indigenous and immigrant cultures.
- Supports alternate modes of transportation.

Classification [One of five possible classes from Strategic Plan]

Regional Trail – Non-motorized

Overview/Description of Park or Trail (**500 word limit**) [Overview/description of park or trail should include:

Overview

Waabizheshikana is a 3.3-mile multi-use recreational trail that traces the shore of the St. Louis River Estuary in Duluth. Constructed in the 1980's, the Trail was based on the 1979 City of Duluth plan that envisioned a ten-mile riverfront trail extending to Jay Cooke State Park. The remaining seven miles of trail are in planning. The river was highly degraded with industrial pollutants: federal/state clean-up of the St. Louis River is approaching completion. Public access

to the riverfront is limited. The time is right to finish the trail and reconnect Duluth residents and visitors to the restored river. The northernmost 3.3 miles were recently restored to its original accessible 10-foot-wide gravel condition. The next 4.5 miles are accessible only via an excursion train service and is not open to pedestrians or bicycles. The majority of the southernmost 2.5 miles of riverfront lack any improved or designated access.

#### Groups served

The Waabizheshikana Master Plan will enhance public access to the river via a ten-mile riverfront bike/pedestrian trail, improve existing water access sites, and provide new water access sites tailored specifically for paddlers, including for a national audience that travels to access the St. Louis River Estuary National Water Trail. Facilities will be as accessible as practically possible regardless of income or physical ability.

#### Facilities

##### Existing:

Trail: 3.3 miles. The trail was widened, regraded, and resurfaced in 2016. The green corridor around the trail was cleared of invasive plant species and replanted with natives.

Tailheads: (3) Indian Point Campground, Riverside Park, and Chambers Grove Park

Proposed: seven miles of accessible trail starting just north of Riverside park and ending at Chambers Grove Park.

Trail Heads: seven new trail heads at Spirit Landing, Munger Landing, Blackmer Park, Slag Point, Mud Lake, Boy Scout Landing, and Perch Lake Landing.

#### Water Access:

Existing: at Spirit Landing, Munger Landing, Blackmer Park, Slag Point, Mud Lake, Boy Scout Landing, and Perch Lake Landing.

Proposed: Slag Point Park (Morgan Park) and Lower Spirit Mt. Riverside Park

#### Programs

Existing: St Louis River Alliance (Alliance) builds connections between community members and the river through education, outreach and events. The Alliance assists Minnesota and Wisconsin state agencies to implement the Remedial Action Plan for the St. Louis River Area of Concern.

Future: In draft form at the time of this application, the Waabizheshikana Heritage Interpretative Plan developed in collaboration with the Fond du Lac Band will provide an experience that highlights the ecology, history, and cultures of the trail corridor and St. Louis River estuary.

#### Relationship to other parks and trails

Connects the Lake Superior Zoo, Spirit Mountain Recreation Area, and the Indian Point Campground to each other and to area neighborhoods. Existing trail connects to the Willard Munger State Trail, which connects to the Duluth Traverse and Superior Hiking Trail. Proposed expansion connects to Riverside Park, Chambers Grove Park and several new trail heads and water access points.

Total Acreage or Mileage 10

Miles complete = 3.3

#### Acquisition and Development Status

The Master Plan for the development of the trail extension and trailhead was approved by the Duluth City Council in March 2020. The Trail Interpretation Plan is in draft form and is being routed to stake holders. Approval by the City Council is expected in late March.

#### Acquisition

Land ownership is primarily the City of Duluth or along existing trail easements granted to the City of Duluth. The City will need to secure easements or acquire land from US Steel, as well as secure easements from private property owners. Once the Interpretive Plan is complete, it will be implemented in phases in conjunction with other cleanup and/or parks-related or private development projects.

The Duluth Natural Areas Program is a city program that designates certain lands with environmental value as permanently protected natural places. The St. Louis River Natural Area is comprised of 1200 acres along the shoreline of the St. Louis River between Chambers Grove Park and the Irving neighborhood through which the trail will travel. Much of this acreage is tax forfeit and managed by St. Louis County. The City is partnering with the EPA GLRI and St. Louis County to acquire these acres for permanent protection.

The City of Duluth Property Services Office manages nearly all transactional elements related to City property, including: access permitting, leasing, development (of property and facilities), user group agreements, sales and purchases. This office coordinates and supports property projects and initiatives across various departments and divisions across the City, as well as working in partnership with contractors, community user groups and non-profits.

## Facility Listing Tab

### Facility Listing

(Check all that apply)

**General Site characteristics:** describe key site characteristics, especially geologic, landform features that give the park its sense of place.

The St. Louis River, the largest U.S. tributary to Lake Superior, becomes a 12,000-acre freshwater estuary as the river approaches Duluth and Superior. The section along the trail is characterized by wilderness-like areas. A freshwater estuary is ecologically unique: providing habitat for a rich variety of fish, aquatic invertebrate, bird, and other wildlife species.

Erosion of the high bluffs and irregular shorelines above the river are composed of volcanic rock with exposed veins of minerals in the cracks which formed when the volcanic basalt cooled. Seventeen streams cascade down these volcanic ravines providing breathtaking waterfalls and rock formations.

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### Criteria #1 Provides a High-quality Destination Trail Experience (limit to 300 words):

- A highly scenic and natural setting.  
The Trail traces the shoreline of the St. Louis River. Uplands are a mix of 17 distinct native plant communities and over 150 bird species. Old growth oak and maple forests provide stunning color displays in the fall and habitat for myriad species: mammals include black bear, deer, porcupine, bats, and occasional wolves. Reptiles and amphibians

are found in the wetlands and streams. The estuary is principal migratory flyway and dozens of bird species nest in the area and hundreds migrate through. Across the estuary are scenic views of the Superior Municipal Forest.

- A destination unto itself  
Waabizheshikana is the only trail that follows, and provides access to, the river and the only linear trail along the estuary. This unique location provides an accessible experience for all abilities and provides opportunities for cultural, historical, and ecological interpretation. Facility upgrades will provide access for paddlers navigating the St. Louis River National Water Trail.
- Minimal disruption to travel  
The existing trail crosses no roadways. When extended roadway crossings will be minimal, [how many?]. The trail will parallel Hwy 23 between Perch Lake and 28<sup>th</sup> Ave West on the river side. There is one at-grade railroad crossing on the existing trail that will be rerouted.
- Rail-to-trail corridor  
One new segment is traversed by two parallel tracks – one close to the shore, another on the hillside above. The City owns the lower tracks as well as a trail easement that extends down to the river’s edge. In this slim corridor, the land ranges from twenty feet to as little as 5 feet. If the City can devise a way to build a safe and enjoyable trail it will provide a unique opportunity to give users an experience very close to the river.

### *Criteria #2: Be Well-located to Serve Regional Population and/or Tourist Destination*

*Much of the corridor located in close proximity to regional population center being served, with a high concentration of the population residing within three miles of the trail corridor or its primary trailheads/key access points.*

Local/regional appeal: Duluth is the fourth largest City in Minnesota and serves the regional population of 279,601. The Trail will provide waterfront access and increase connectivity from Duluth’s western neighborhoods that are below Grand Ave and underserved by trails and water access. Duluth is the regional hub for the North and South Shores of Lake Superior, Iron-Range, and “northwoods” of northeastern Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin. The City is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the state, attracting approximately 6.7 million visitors throughout all 4-seasons

If one is looking for exercise, adventure, or solitude, appropriate activities are available year-round. Warm weather activities include hiking, biking, kayaking, stand up paddling, rowing, fishing, duck hunting, birding, swimming, camping, and picnicking. Winter activities include skiing, winter fat biking, skijoring, snow shoeing, ice skating, ice fishing, ice kiting, dog sledding, and snowmobiling.

*Length and connections:* When complete the trail will be 10 miles and establishes a regionally important, high quality, continuous waterfront bike/pedestrian linkage from the Gitchi Gammi State Trail to the Lakewalk and the Cross City Trail all the way to Jay Cooke State Park, some 30 miles. Other trail connections provide access to trails at the top of the bluff, adding additional miles. The trail will connect the St. Louis River Estuary National Water Trail (16.5 miles from Fond du Lac Dam to Lake Superior with 11 routes that cover 73 miles) to the St. Louis River State Trail that goes From Fond du Lac to Round Lake (52 miles) and the Lake Superior State Water Trail that extends from Canal Park to the Pigeon River on the Canadian Border, a distance of approximately 150 miles.

### *Criteria #3: Enhance Connectivity to Regional Destinations*

*Must achieve some level of all three of these:*

- *Connects to/complements state trails and/or other regional trails*
- *Connects to multiple local, regional, and state parks, recreation facilities, and natural resource areas*
- *Connects to multiple public interest destinations*

The Trail provides gateways to the St. Louis River waterfront, linking to a larger network of existing local and regional, land and water trails.

- State/regional trails: the Munger State Trail, the Cross City Trail, the Duluth Traverse Trail, the Superior Hiking Trail, the St. Louis River Estuary Water Trail, U.S. Bicycle Route 41,
- Recreational destinations: Spirit Mountain Recreational Area, the Lake Superior Zoo, Indian Point Campground, Magney Snively Natural Area, and Jay Cooke State Park.

- Additional points of interest that are otherwise hard to access but will be enhanced by the Trail: DWP Multi-use Trail, Tallas and Clough Islands, Spirit Lake Marina, the Riverside Marina, Blackmer Park, the former US Steel Plant, Slag Point (manmade landform), Mud Lake, and the Oliver Bridge, to name a few.
- Local: Currently, the only way the St. Louis River Corridor neighborhoods are connected is via Trunk Highway 23. The Trail will enhance the sense of community by creating a linear system that links the waterfront to seven adjacent residential neighborhoods, and providing transportation alternatives to nearby businesses, recreational destinations, and public green spaces. Creating the missing links within the trail will provide a better connection to the larger network of trail systems throughout the City.

*Criteria #4: Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within a Region (limit to 300 words):*

The Trail is a unique opportunity to explore one of the world's largest freshwater estuaries. The St. Louis River Estuary is

#### Additional Supportive Information

Provide any pertinent information that will help the Commission in its evaluation of the regional significance of a park or trail. This is especially important when no master plan is available. Also provide any information related to previously completed cost estimates for acquisition, development, operations, maintenance, and programming. Also indicate if any development phasing has been considered.

#### St. Louis River Estuary National Water Trail (Estuary Trail).

Development of Waabizheshikana is integral to the development of the Estuary Trail. The Estuary Trail connects the St. Louis River State Water Trail and Lake Superior State Water Trail. The Estuary Trail was designated in 2020 and is a unique opportunity to recognize a premier paddle destination that appeals to a wide range of skill levels and interests. Representatives from the Duluth and Superior, WI, St. Louis and Douglas counties, state regulatory agencies, economic development & tourism groups, and user groups provided input for the concept. A National Water Trail will target and capture segments of the National and regional recreation and tourism markets.

The Estuary Trail is a unique opportunity to explore one the world's largest wild and scenic freshwater estuaries. Routes includes backwaters and bays, white water rapids, wide open water, and wetlands and sloughs all providing scenic views surrounded by accessible public lands. The trail extends 16.5 miles from Fond du Lac Dam to Lake Superior and sports 11 distinct routes that provide up to 73 miles of exploration, most of them in loops. Visitors can immerse themselves in landscapes ranging from the working port to complex, diverse, wild ecosystems. Users can do as long or as short a paddle experience as they want. The urban nature provides exceptional access to information, both hazards and opportunities. Visitors can access accommodations, outfitting, guides, food and beverages, shopping, museums, equipment rental, and even health care via water access on Waabizheshikana.

The Estuary Trail connects people to the river. The Water Trail and proposed Waabizheshikana Heritage Trail creates a platform for river stakeholders to collaboratively enhance recreational and educational opportunities, support restoration and conservation projects, increase community support and stewardship for the River, and create river management techniques that enrich river user experiences and preserve the river's natural and cultural environment.

The full range of access points allows paddlers to put in and take out approximately every two miles at varied points on both sides of the river. These put-in and take-out points in many cases allow access to other experiences as well. Access points are accessible via public transportation as well as cycling paths. On the Minnesota side, many access points allow access to either the Munger Trail or the Waabizheshikana for walking and cycling. On the Wisconsin side they allow access to the Superior Municipal Forest, a great place for walking, hiking, and cycling as well.

#### Waabizheshikana Heritage Trail

The St. Louis River holds cultural memory and spiritual meaning for indigenous people going back thousands of years. It's been home to European and American migrants seeking livelihood and a place to start anew. It's also been a sustaining habitat for plants and animals in and out of the water. Today, everything visitors see along the trail has a history and holds a story worth hearing. Since no one narrative can hold these many legacies, the interpretive plan present many cultural perspectives on the river, its past, present, and future.

The plan creates an arts and heritage trail experience for a range of audience interests and backgrounds. By integrating artworks, historical accounts, and highlights from the natural world, this plan aims to cultivate new ways of seeing the landscape from diverse and sometimes unexpected perspectives. Proposed experiences draw attention to the wildlife, geography, and ecology of the river landscape that have made this an attractive destination for people and wildlife for millennia.

The plan identifies and overlays a flexible and connected network of places and experiences onto the seven proposed trail segments. Since the segments will be built over time, as implementation resources allow, the interpretive elements and content have been organized in a way that they will be ready for implementation concurrently with trail construction. Interpretive features have been organized around a series of River Places, landmarks comprised of trailheads, overlooks, and pause points— each of which could host art, gathering spaces, or nature play areas. A set of interpretive elements—story poles, cairns, freestanding signs, and concrete inlays—have been designed from a materials palette drawn from the natural estuary and from products of the industries that made the City of Duluth. By telling the stories of the estuary with materials that are of the location, the interpretive elements are both true to their place and durable.

The combinations of materials, fabrication techniques, and cultural content described promise to further enrich storytelling along Waabizheshikana. When people on the trail see Ojibwe plant and animal names engraved into steel, for example, they are seeing different cultures juxtaposed and joined together at the same time. This and other techniques will illustrate ways of sharing stories and ideas that go beyond words and images. Likewise, the merging of these forms respects the gifts of the natural world and the hard work and cultural contributions of Duluth’s many residents through time—a vision that honors the past while presenting a bold challenge for the future.

**Budget:** Estimated costs are provided in the Mini-master Plan and are based on preliminary designs. Costs could vary extensively depending on results from additional analysis including but not limited to geotechnical investigation, survey data, shoreline stability, as well as design details that will be developed as part of the final design. Further onsite analysis will be necessary before proceeding into the design phase.

The opinion of probable cost has been prepared on the basis of the design team’s experience, qualifications, knowledge of the site and understanding of the project. It also takes into account constructability as well as site access challenges. The Mini-master Plan includes a breakdown of trail construction costs as well as the costs of the water access sites.

**Phasing:** Waabizheshikana, the Estuary Trail, and the Heritage Trail will be phased concurrently in seven segments as resources allow.

### **Attachments Tab**

Please upload any attachments that weren’t uploaded elsewhere here. Attachments should be uploaded as PDF, JPG, PNG, TIFF, Microsoft Word, Excel or Powerpoint files.