

FINAL DRAFT

2018

SAWTOOTH BLUFF

Regional Park Master Plan

City of Grand Marais and Cook County, Minnesota

Prepared by



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Sawtooth Bluff Steering Committee

Susan Abrahamson, Member of Original “Old Ski Hill Committee”

Myron Bursheim, County Commissioner

Jeff Cadwell, County Administrator

David Demmer, Member County Parks & Trails Commission

Lisa Kerr, County Land Commissioner/Parks & Trails Commission

Anton Moody, City of Grand Marais City Councilor

Mike Roth, City of Grand Marais Administrator

David Tersteeg, City of Grand Marais Parks Manager

Arrowhead Regional Development Commission Staff

Andy Hubley, Director

Barb Caskey, Principal Planner

Charlie Moore, Senior GIS Specialist

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"The main focus of a master plan should be on clearly describing the regional-level purpose and compelling features of the park or trail, along with what makes it a place that people will want to go to time and again."

- Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission



[Lake Superior and Minnesota's North Shore from
above Sawtooth Bluff | Source: Good Measure Media]

INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING CONTEXT

Introduction

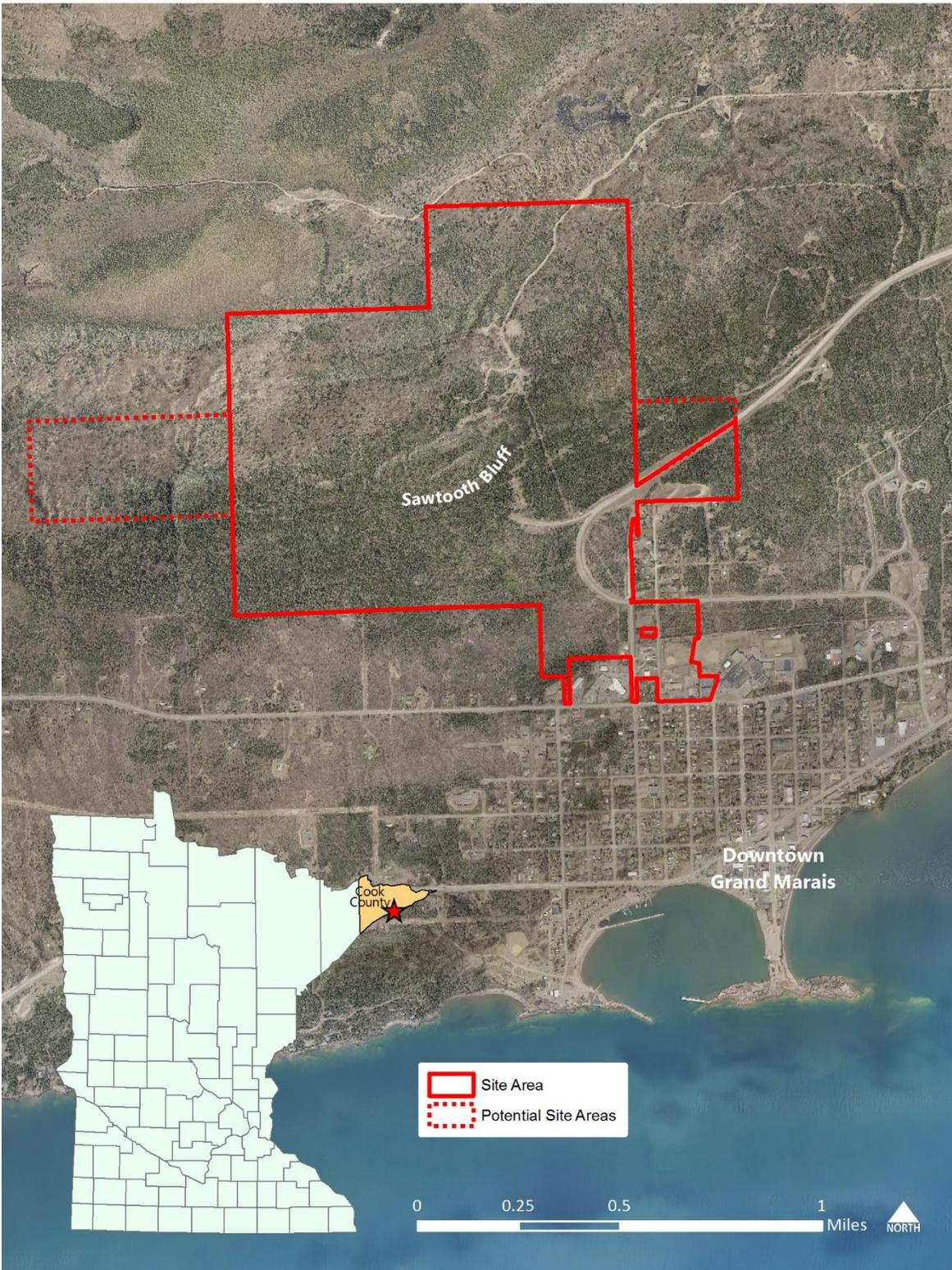
Overlooking Grand Marais on a hillside above Lake Superior, Sawtooth Bluff is a unique parcel of property in Cook County. The approximately 640-acre site is a combination of lands owned by Cook County and the City of Grand Marais. In a county where approximately 92% of the land is under the control of the State of Minnesota and the U.S. Forest Service, having a large parcel of land under local control provides a unique and valuable opportunity for community and regional enhancements.

Various proposals for development of the property have been proposed over the last fifty years, but none have come to fruition. The idea for Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park originates in the early 2000s, when local residents and officials recognized the potential of public land just outside the City of Grand Marais to be developed into a public recreation destination. In 2000, a community consensus process was conducted to develop specific recommendations. A consensus committee was convened to gather and analyze information pertinent to the property and to seek public input on interests and concerns. Through this process, the consensus committee developed a list of recommendations but no development occurred on the site.

In 2015, a large coalition of local stakeholders developed the Cook County Comprehensive Trails Plan. That effort documented all of the trails and affiliated facilities in the County, regardless of trail administrator. The Trails Plan discussed the development of a trail hub and connections at Sawtooth Bluff, as it was one of the few publicly owned properties under local control. In 2016, the City of Grand Marais successfully submitted an application to the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission to have the property designated as regionally significant. That process led the City and County to form a committee to examine the possibilities for the property and create a plan for its future.

The steering committee is comprised of representatives from Cook County and the City of Grand Marais, recreational specialists, and a property owner from the neighboring area. The committee conducted an examination of the site and its potential to become a more impactful regional asset. The steering committee sought and considered current input from stakeholders as well as historical information from the 2000 consensus process and the 2016 Trails Plan. This document is the result of the committee's work.

Sawtooth Bluff Recreation Area



Background

Grand Marais, Minnesota is a unique community on the shores of mighty Lake Superior. As the only incorporated city in Cook County, it is home to residents, businesses, government facilities and many visitors. Its economy is primarily tourism driven, especially during the popular summer season.

In 2017, the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC), working with the Cook County Parks and Trails Commission, the City of Grand Marais and other local partners, launched efforts to create a vision for Sawtooth Bluff. This master plan has been developed based upon the Steering Committee's desire to create a "destination regional park" at this site.

DESCRIPTION

Sawtooth Bluff is a 640-acre publicly owned site located in the city limits of Grand Marais. This striking section of the Sawtooth Mountains rises over 900' above the Grand Marais harbor and has dramatic terrain features, incredible views of Lake Superior, and proximity to other local recreation systems such as Pincushion Mountain and the Grand Marais Recreation Area. There is a rare patterned fen (wetland) adjacent to the northwest portion of the site and a sheer bedrock cliff in its center. Access to the site is provided by the adjacent Gunflint Trail from below and from a County Road from above. The eastern portion of the site is owned by the City of Grand Marais and the western portion is owned by Cook County. It was home to a downhill ski operation in the 1950's and 60's, but is currently undeveloped, hosting only a set of communication towers near its northern property line and unofficial hiking trails.

REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

Overlooking Lake Superior and Grand Marais in Cook County, Minnesota, Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park could be a premier multi-use recreational facility offering visitors and residents active lifestyle opportunities and spurring economic growth while preserving and interpreting the unique natural resources present on the site. It could significantly contribute to northeast Minnesota's flourishing mountain bike trail system, creating a national and even international destination while offering camping, hiking, other trails, and support facilities.



[Sawtooth Bluff Cliffs | Source: Good Measure Media]

CLASSIFICATION AS A NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED REGIONAL PARK

Vision

The Sawtooth Bluff Steering Committee, following significant research, discussions, and public input, has created the following vision for the site:

Sawtooth Bluff should be developed as a County/City-owned park of regional significance offering multi-use amenities and trails to:

- provide healthy, active lifestyle opportunities for local residents;
- spur economic growth by attracting destination travelers; and
- preserve the diverse natural resources present on this site.

Guiding Principles

The Steering Committee developed guiding principles to ensure proposed development is consistent with the overall vision for the site and consistent with recommendations from the 2000 consensus process:

- As a park intended to be regionally significant, a package of amenities can be developed to draw people to the region, using the environmental features as a draw.
- The design of amenities would have a minimal impact on the natural environment of the area.
- Nothing would be built or developed without a maintenance plan in place.
- There is value in adding infrastructure with a defined revenue stream (campsites, as an example).
- Development should be designed to limit view shed impact while still offering stunning views to park users
- The intent of developing the park is to provide space and infrastructure for user groups.
- The emphasis should be on recreational development.
- Planned, limited, low-profile development on this site supporting recreation for residents and tourists may offer greater protection from unpopular development options than doing nothing.
- This site is large enough to accommodate multiple user groups while still leaving large areas of the designated park area undeveloped to preserve environmental assets (fen, wetlands, unobstructed views).

Summary Description of Park

Sawtooth Bluff is a striking section of the Sawtooth Mountains rising over 900' above the Grand Marais harbor. The dramatic terrain features include panoramic views of Lake Superior, a prime example the North Shore Volcanic Complex, semi-mountainous landscapes, multiple plant communities, unique hydrology and numerous habitats. A rare patterned wetland fen - a distinctive pattern of miniature ridges and pools arranged perpendicular to a slope - is located near the northwest corner of the property. This fen is notable as the only one occurring in northeast Minnesota. More information can be found at:

<https://fs.fed.us/wildflowers/regions/eastern/FallRiverPatternedFen/index.shtml>.

This site provides incredible opportunities for trails with superior scenic value, access to rare and stunning terrain, and protection of views both from and of this premier location. There are opportunities for hiking, biking, winter trails, camping, climbing, orienteering, natural interpretation and places for people to enjoy incredible scenic vistas right in Grand Marais. Sawtooth Bluff is in the city limits of Grand Marais, the only City in Cook County, which has over 1 million visitors annually. These visitors are here for scenery, hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, picnicking and camping, all of which would be provided at Sawtooth Bluff.

Currently the site is accessible by vehicle via the Gunflint Trail below the ridge and a County Road above it. The site is relatively undeveloped, with a few unofficial trails providing interior access. With more than 640 acres, there is ample room for many miles of trails, including accessible paved and gravel multi-use trails and purpose-built trails such as single track mountain bike trails, gravity mountain bike trails, hiking trails, rock climbing, groomed winter fat tire biking trails, and ski-joring. There is also an opportunity to enhance nearby existing snowmobile and hiking trails with parking facilities. Other facilities and trails could be a part of the Park if potential users can demonstrate a benefit and if the site can accommodate that use.

Sawtooth Bluff would provide natural programming including guided hikes, interpreted trails, access to rare biomes such as the patterned fen, birding and wildlife viewing, geology walks with interpretation of the North Shore Volcanic Complex and the unique hydrology of the side slope wetlands.

It is connected by public lands to the School/County recreation complex, the Cook County YMCA, and Pincushion Mountain trail system. The site is less than half a mile from the Grand Marais Harbor, and walkable to downtown Grand Marais. The Gitchi-Gami bike



[Sawtooth Bluff as seen from above Grand Marais]

trail is within half a mile. The BWCA is located 20 miles north on the Gunflint Trail. Cascade State Park is 10 miles West on Highway 61. The Grand Marais Recreation Area campground is approximately half a mile away and the Gunflint Hills Municipal golf course is one mile away.

[Example of a naturally fitting building]



Proposed Facilities

The following facilities are proposed for the site:

- A hub facility to serve all the Park's trails and campsites, which may include parking, changing rooms, bike repair stations, rentals, campground management facility (storage, office), information, restrooms, education facility (small outdoor amphitheater), vehicle and device charging station. Any buildings on the site would seek to be constructed in a manner that protects viewsheds. Proposed location in south-central portion of main park site.
- A paved road from 5th Avenue West to trail hub (about 0.5 miles).
- An accessible paved trail connecting the trail hub to the community center that includes a safety tunnel under 5th Avenue West in Grand Marais (about 1/2 mile).

- An unobtrusive campground with approximately 30 sites for RVs and trailers as well as tents within the campground.
- Up to 20 miles of purpose-built, single track mountain bike trails that move about the site. The trails would offer a variety of types and difficulty levels, attracting both expert and beginner mountain bikers. Some of the trails would be groomed for winter “fat-tire” biking as well.
- Three miles of hiking trails, including a connection to the Superior Hiking Trail. Dispersed campsites could be a part of the hiking trail system, bringing approximately 5 sites in addition to the campground.
- An engineered, gravel trail loop for people with less mobility, including older folks and young families – approximately 10 cart-in or bike-in campsites could be a part of this trail in addition to the campground.
- A fenced, semi-cleared, approximately 2.5 acre dog park allowing off leash activities.
- A disc golf course – semi cleared trail moving through woods with typical baskets.
- A bike skills park that could include ramps, jumps and other challenges.

Future development could potentially include:

- A small parking lot off Old Ski Hill Road that provides additional access to trails for users and emergency vehicles.
- A mountain bike trail connection to Pincushion Mountain (1.5 miles), which has additional mountain bike trails.
- A designated sliding hill.
- A skijoring loop, perhaps integrated with disc golf or the dog park.
- Additional snowmobile trail parking.
- A rock climbing area at the exposed bed rock cliffs if this area is deemed suitable for rock climbing.
- Residential development in areas adjacent to the Gunflint Trail.

Development of the proposed facilities would be in partnership with established user groups and organizations.

No development is anticipated adjacent to the patterned fen. Any future development would be initiated by the U.S. Forest Service.

The Regional Park could serve as the base for many events and education opportunities, including mountain biking festivals/races, rock climbing lessons, nature presentations, and much more.

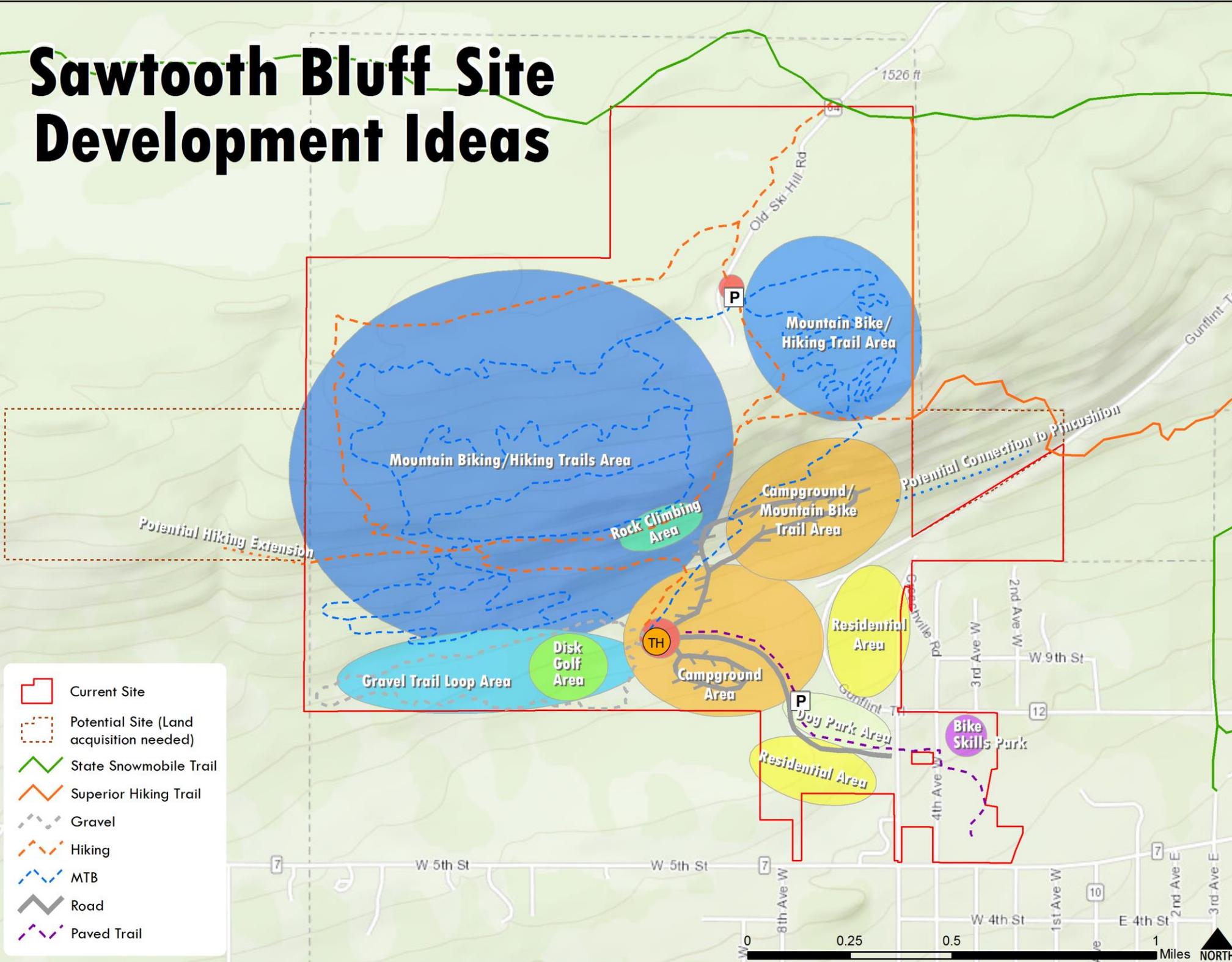
Total Acreage or Mileage

Over 640 acre park, up to 20 miles of mountain bike trails, three miles of hiking trails, 1.5 miles of gravel and disc golf trails, a 2.5 acre dog park, 30 drive-to campsites, 10 cart-in/bike-in campsites and 5 dispersed trail campsites, one mile of paved trail.

Acquisition and Development Status

This site is already owned by the City of Grand Marais and Cook County. There are two additional parcels, one on the west (78 acres) and one to the east (21 acres), which could potentially be acquired and added to the park at a future date. No existing, maintained recreation facilities exist on the site at this time. Residential Development has been identified as a possible development option to help with the need for housing in the area. If this option were to move forward the proposed Residential Development areas would be removed from this project area and developed separately.

Sawtooth Bluff Site Development Ideas



-  Current Site
-  Potential Site (Land acquisition needed)
-  State Snowmobile Trail
-  Superior Hiking Trail
-  Hiking
-  MTB
-  Road
-  Paved Trail



Regional Context

Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park would fit well into the existing recreation and natural resource infrastructure of Minnesota's North Shore. It would be one of the few facilities not under state or federal control, allowing it to be more responsive to local needs and trends.

The Grand Marais Parks and Recreation Department operates a large (300 site) campground with amenities just to the south of this site on Lake Superior's shore. The City is working towards acquiring Regional Significance and expanding the campground. The City notes that its existing campground is always full on summer weekends and additional campsites developed at Sawtooth Bluff would immediately be in demand.

Pincushion Mountain is a site just east of Sawtooth Bluff on Forest Service property. It is home to several miles of mountain bike trails and several miles of groomed Nordic ski trails. Amenities include parking, an information kiosk, and restrooms. The trails are maintained with the assistance of long-standing user groups – the North Superior Ski and Run Club and the Superior Cycling Association. Which Superior Cycling Association, in conjunction with the Forest Service and the County, will have an almost 16 mile Single Track Mountain Bike Connector trail from Britton Peak to Lutsen Mountains finished by 2019, with sights set to eventually connect to Pincushion Mountain. Pincushion is close enough to Sawtooth Bluff (just 1.5 miles) to be connected to and served by the facilities at Sawtooth Bluff, an excellent complement of resources.

The Superior Hiking Trail is a regional (300+ miles) natural surface trail connecting Cook County all the way to Duluth on the Lake Superior ridgeline. At Sawtooth Bluff the trail currently follows an unnatural straight path along the east property line of Sawtooth Bluff and then shares a corridor with the C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail – primarily a snowmobile facility. The Sawtooth Bluff steering committee invites the trail to be realigned through the site, taking better advantage of the natural ridgeline and its stunning views. A spur trail could connect the Superior Hiking Trail to the proposed trail hub facility at Sawtooth Bluff, adding amenities for hikers. Dispersed hiking campsites with minimal facilities (tent pads, open air biffies) could be added to the trails.

C.J. Ramstad/North Shore State Trail primarily is a snowmobile facility, but does allow other uses (hiking, biking, horse riding) at times and where it isn't going through wetlands. The Sawtooth Bluff steering committee recommends keeping the trail at its current alignment in order to separate potentially incompatible motorized uses from the non-motorized uses at Sawtooth Bluff. Additional snowmobile parking could be added near the school and ample parking already exists a few miles away at Devil Track Lake.

Cutface Creek State Wayside is located three miles west of Grand Marais. It is operated by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and is only open in summer months. It has parking, beach access, and restrooms. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) is planning to connect Grand Marais to Cutface Creek with a paved trail in 2019. The trail, traveling down Lake Superior's shore, would be non-motorized and part of the Gitchi-Gami State Trail.

The MnDNR operates several State Parks in Cook County. Cascade River State Park is several miles west of Grand Marais. It features camping and hiking trails, as does Judge C.R. Magney State Park east of Grand Marais. Temperance River State Park on the far west end of Cook County has hiking, camping, and a connection to the Gitchi-Gami State Trail. Grand Portage State Park, operated in conjunction with the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa at the Canadian border, features hiking trails, but no camping.

The Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa operates a campground at their Lake Superior marina facility. Some small private campgrounds are located on the North Shore as well. Inland, on the Gunflint Trail, the USFS operates several campgrounds, trails, canoeing portages, and boat landings. Most of these facilities are well away from Grand Marais. The George Washington Forest ski trails are the closest to Sawtooth Bluff at six miles, the nearest campground is at Devil Track Lake, to the west and north of Sawtooth Bluff.

These many features make up a significant network of park and trail features in Cook County. The proposed Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park complements existing facilities by connecting and serving some of them and by providing resources that most of the other parks do not have (rock climbing and mountain biking). It also should be noted that summertime camp sites on all of the North Shore cannot meet the demand from visitors. Currently campsites must be reserved months in advance. Adding more campsites at Sawtooth Bluff would help address that need.



["Patterned Fen" adjacent to Sawtooth Bluff property |

Source: Good Measure Media]

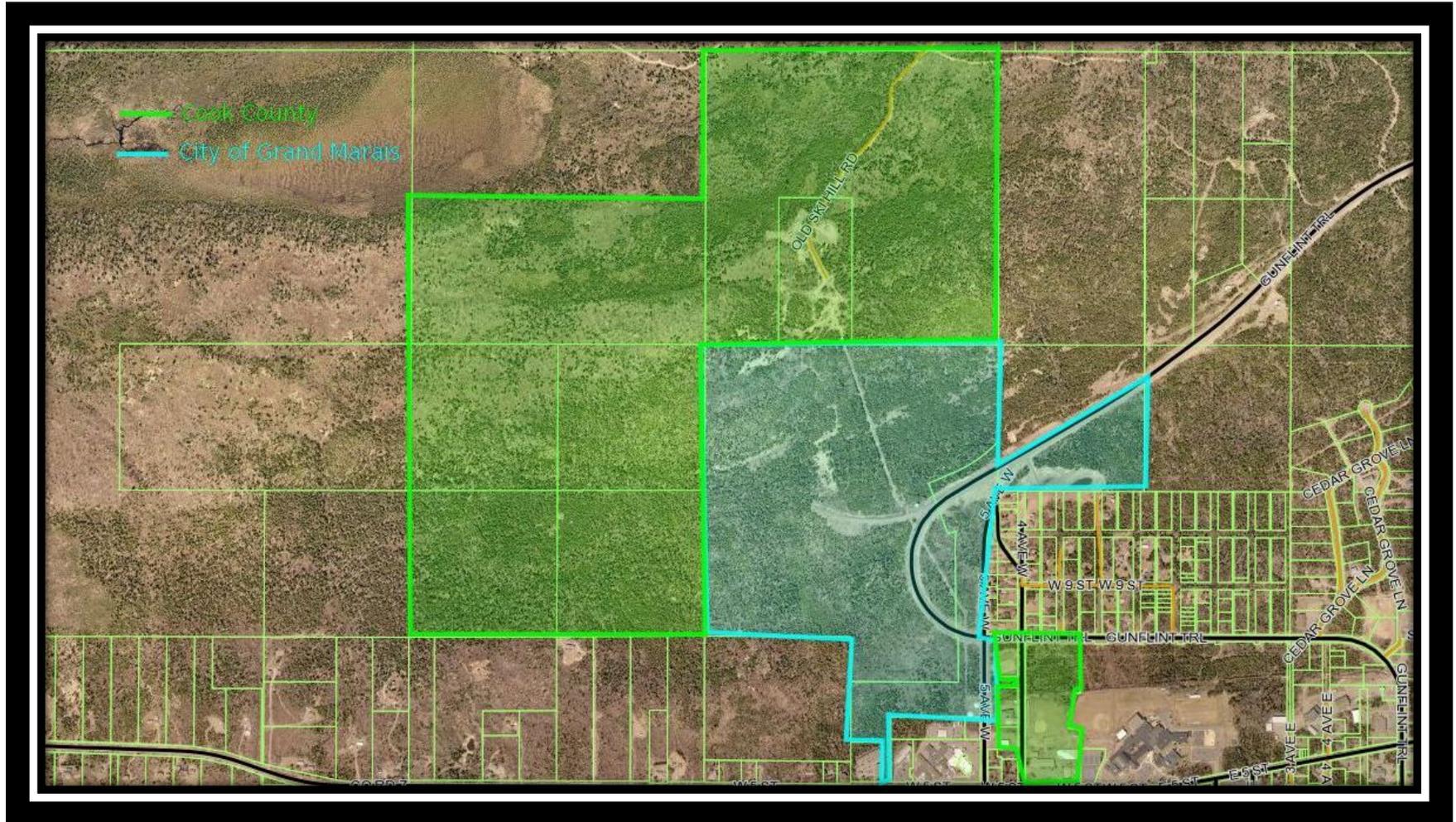
SITE CHARACTERISTICS

Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park would be set on the ridgeline above Lake Superior in Grand Marais, providing dramatic views of Grand Marais and Lake Superior. The site is located on the northwest side of Grand Marais, north and west of the Gunflint Trail, a National Scenic Byway. The site is generally sloped towards the lake, with some areas of slope quite dramatic with grades over 15%. It is forested with mostly smaller mature trees clinging to shallow soils and bedrock. Exposed bedrock dominates the landscape at the center of the property, where the slope becomes a cliff. Flatter but still inclined land is located on the southern portion of the site, and fairly flat lands make up the northern portion, which includes some wetlands. The wetland on the very northern portion of the site is a unique “patterned fen”, a distinctive pattern of miniature ridges and pools arranged perpendicular to a slope. This fen is notable as the only one occurring in northeast Minnesota.

Current uses of the site are few. There is a set of communication towers accessed from the north via Old Ski Hill Road, an electric utility corridor moves through the site from Grand Marais to the towers, and some user developed, unmapped, and unofficial hiking trails. The only roads near the site are the Gunflint Trail to the east and Old Ski Hill Road on the far north.

The Superior Hiking Trail and CJ Ramstad/North Shore State Trail snowmobile trail travel just to the east and north of the site. There are two private properties adjacent to the site, one on the west and one on the east, which eventually could be acquired and added to the park. Adjacent to the site, across the Gunflint Trail to the east, is additional publicly owned property containing the area’s community center, fire hall, playground, YMCA and public schools. Those facilities would remain with a paved trail being proposed to connect the community center to the trail hub.

Project Area By Ownership



Recreation Trails surrounding Project Area





[View of Grand Marais from above Sawtooth Bluff | Source: Good Measure Media]

TRENDS AND PUBLIC VALUE

Public Involvement Summary

The Consensus process that addressed the site in the 2000 study was a public process that included input from a wide spectrum of community members. The results of the study were reviewed and used in development of this plan. The 2015 Cook County Comprehensive Trails Plan was led by a large committee of stakeholders and included public review and input. That plan recommended that Sawtooth Bluff be explored as a trail hub with significant trail development.

The Sawtooth Bluff Steering Committee was formed by the County and City in 2017. This group conducted a survey in the fall of 2017 that sought stakeholder and public input regarding the future of the site. The survey was conducted through an internet based interactive map that allowed respondents to indicate on a map of the Sawtooth Bluff site where they wanted improvements to occur and to provide a narrative description and comments. Respondents also provided feedback and ideas to the Steering Committee via emailed comments. Stakeholder groups were emailed to invite comments and the interactive site was publicized via press releases and social media. Ideas received ranged from “do nothing” to residential development. Popular ideas for improvements suggested by respondents were a dog park, disc golf, and trails. The results of all stakeholder and public input were summarized and provided to the Steering Committee for review and consideration.

Once the Steering Committee formulated their ideas and created a draft master plan, the draft plan was posted online for written public comment and community outreach was conducted through media outlets and local groups. Stakeholders were asked to review the draft plan and provide comments to the committee online or by mail. A public input session was held on March 26, 2018 at the Cook County Courthouse, where the draft plan was presented and public comments were recorded and addressed. A total of 77 responses were received via the online survey or written comments. The Steering Committee reviewed the comments and made final changes to the plan in April of 2018.

Regional Demographic Information

Cook County, like much of northeast Minnesota, has an aging population. In 2010, the percentage of the people living here over the age of 45 was 57.1%, much higher than the average state-wide percentage (40%). This contributes to workforce shortages and other concerns, such as a lack of available volunteer firefighters. The proposed Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park, with modern trails and

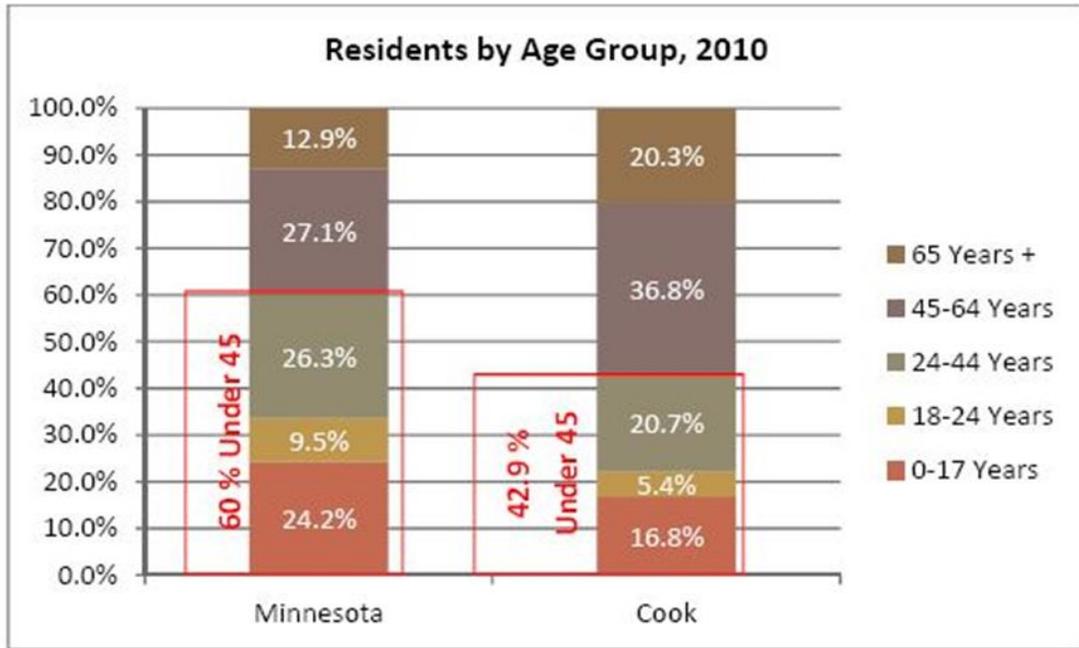
recreation facilities, could contribute to recruiting younger residents and families to Cook County. Trending activities like mountain and winter biking, for example, could mean that younger workers would be more attracted to the County as it offers the recreation facilities they are seeking.

Public Health Values

The Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park could address many aspects of public health. Located so close to the community and connected to neighborhoods by trails and sidewalks, it could be easily accessible to residents and visitors. The variety of trails

and facilities provide several options for being physically active regardless of their skill and mobility levels. It could offer winter opportunities for biking and snowshoeing. Programming could be offered at the trail hub site to educate people about the benefits of being active and be offered in conjunction with training to beginners for their sport of choice.

The site would primarily be left in its natural state, providing people with uninhibited views and a variety of landscapes, connecting people to the abundant natural resources on this site and offering respite from the trials of daily life. Education programs, the campground, picnic facilities, the disc golf course and, in particular, the dog park, offer significant opportunities for community members and visitors to interact and learn about one another.



Economic Development/Tourism Opportunities

Grand Marais and Cook County are reliant on tourism in their economies. With limited non-public lands, a climate and landscape that is not conducive to agriculture, no known viable ore bodies of value, and changes in the wood products industry, tourism has become the principle industry in the area. Having up to date facilities that meet a wide variety of trends and provide opportunities is imperative. Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park is very near to Grand Marais' restaurants, lodging facilities, its existing campground, a local brewery, retail stores, and services. The Park's premier facilities could be a significant draw for tourists, bringing additional business to those entities. The Park could offer year-round opportunities with groomed winter biking trails, skijoring, winter camping, and winter programming.

Recreational Trends Information

Mountain biking is a growing sport in the nation. Several new facilities have been recently built or are being planned in northeast Minnesota and the area just across the Canadian border in Thunder Bay, Ontario. This is creating a concentration of facilities that can become a national or even international destination for mountain biking. Grand Marais and Cook County with its existing and planned trails, its scenic beauty, and existing tourism industry contributors can be a major hub within that network of trails. Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park supports that vision with additional mountain bike trails and modern trail hub facilities. Winter biking is also a growing activity.

Camping on the North Shore is still very much in demand and the community knows that any campsites created for the Park could be well used. Disc golf is a growing sport, particularly with youth. Providing a healthy outdoor activity for area youth is a positive step. Dog parks are being built with regularity in the region and are being well used.

CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA

Facilities seeking regional designation and funding from the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) must demonstrate how they align with the 4 criteria established in the GMRPTC Strategic Plan. The following section demonstrates how the proposed Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park could meet each of the designated criteria.

Criteria #1: Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience

This unique park space includes 640 acres and 1 mile of Sawtooth Bluff ridge line overlooking Grand Marais and Lake Superior. There is ample space to provide world class trail facilities for mountain biking, hiking, skiing, camping, climbing, and just enjoying the views. The land is currently where the Superior Hiking Trail and the North Shore state trail connect to Grand Marais. Both of these systems would benefit from the development of trail head facilities in this important location. The natural beauty of the place and its proximity to town would make this trail head an important regional draw. The park could also have space for camp sites for Superior Hiking Trail users. A mix of accessible hiking trails and purpose built trails such as single track, gravity trails, ROCK climbing, fat tire biking and skijoring could be provided. Trail development is made less complicated due to the local ownership of the property. Cook County is home to experienced trail developers and maintainers that have already identified this location as capable of providing world class experience. These groups have the capacity to not only design the system right, but also maintain the system for continued enjoyment. Users of the trails would benefit from the unique views of Lake Superior and the Grand Marais harbor, and the varied terrain of the Sawtooth Bluff. Both above and below the ridge, there are locations for user facilities including parking, restrooms, picnic areas, play areas, and shelters to take advantage of the amazing views. These facilities could be a home base for a variety of programming including nature walks, geology tours, trail maps, and natural education series. The ridge could provide a location for a boulder crawl style climbing area.

Criteria #2: Preserves a Regionally-Significant and Diverse Natural or Historic Landscape

Views of Lake Superior and Grand Marais from the prominent, undeveloped and relatively accessible ridgeline ridge are unparalleled. The ridge itself is an excellent example of the North Shore Volcanic Complex- a formation of 1.1 billion year old igneous rock that parallels Lake Superior. The steep topography (rising over 900' in less than 1.5 miles) yields not only semi-mountainous landscapes but also multiple plant communities, unique hydrology and numerous habitats. A rare patterned wetland fen that is known to contain rare flora and fauna is located on the northwest corner of the property. Numerous ephemeral streams pour from this wetland basin over the

cliffs and disappear into the fractured columnar basalt to reappear as springs that line the base of the cliff. Slide slope wetlands line as the drainages proceed down to Lake Superior. These channelized wetlands provide crucial storm water retention for the town below. Multiple plant communities follow the steep contours.

Hardwood forests of poplar and birch provide excellent habitat for white-tail deer, wolf, and bear. Thick stands of balsam fir are home to snowshoe hare, bobcat and occasional Canadian lynx. The large wetland complex provides habitat for moose and the rare northern bog lemming. Bald Eagles soaring along the ridgeline are common. The site is aligned with the autumn migration routes of numerous raptors. The historic Gunflint Trail begins its inland climb on the site. Remnant runs of the former Ski Hill can be found along the hillside. The City of Grand Marais had historically used the property's numerous springs as the source of their drinking water.



Criteria #3: Well-located and Connected to Serve Regional Population and/or Tourist Destination

This site would be spectacular located anywhere, but it is made even more valuable due to its proximity to downtown Grand Marais, Lake Superior, and the Gunflint Trail. Grand Marais is already a well-established tourism hub as the only City in Cook County, which has over 1 million visitors annually. This well-known harbor town on Lake Superior is at the intersection of two scenic byways, Highway 61 and the Gunflint Trail. Many BWCA users have a Grand Marais stop on their itinerary. According to a survey conducted by the U of M Center for Changing Landscapes, visitors to Cook County are here for scenery, hiking, wildlife viewing, picnicking and camping, all of which would be provided here. The same 2015 survey detailed that visitors had planned to but were unable to find adequate/easy accommodations for activities of biking, horseback riding, ATV riding and snowmobiling during those trips, which could include access to rental equipment. This park could draw on the desires of a robust group of existing tourists, as well as attract new ones for the one of a kind trail facilities offered. The site is the perfect location for a trail head hub, as identified in the Cook County Trails Plan. The North Shore State trail enters Grand Marais at this location. Snowmobile riders can use this connection to access many miles of trails in Cook County, and also connect to trails throughout Northeast MN. The over 300 miles of Superior Hiking Trail connect to the park. Sawtooth Bluff could be an important trail hub for day hikers and long-distance hikers. The park can also add to the limited camping sites for SHT users.

Criteria #4: Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within the Region

While the site would contain several activities that compliment area recreation facilities, the fact that the property is owned by local government units means that this regional park could offer facilities for uses that are otherwise nonexistent in Cook County. Winter biking, skijoring, interpretive walks (including ADA complaint) and a dog park would be facilities that could be offered that are currently not adequate or otherwise found in abundance here in the County. Winter biking (fat biking) is in the midst of exponential growth. In order to designate the use of winter biking on trail systems located on Federal Land, the trail association and sponsors must complete relatively extensive environmental review with the land manager. Local partners such as the Superior Cycling Association are interested in building trails that would be designated for winter biking as well as connections into the nearby Pincushion Mountain Bike Trail System for summer riding. While an arrangement exists between user groups that allows dog owners to use an equestrian arena located within the Sawtooth Bluff property, this is far from ideal as the location is small, has no grass, and waste has become an issue. Once again, a local user group is interested in establishing a dog park that would be better suited for the use.



[View of Gunflint Trail from above Sawtooth Bluff | Source: Good Measure Media]

OPERATIONS PLAN

Joint Organizations Responsibilities

Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park would be jointly operated by Cook County and the City of Grand Marais through a joint powers agreement. A resulting joint powers board would be responsible for the facility. The board would include elected officials from each entity. Cook County has a staff member dedicated to its land and recreation that could work to coordinate the initial development phases for the Park and co staff the Joint Powers Board. The City of Grand Marais has a parks department that has experience with operating and maintaining parks, trails, and campgrounds. The Cook County Highway Department could maintain the Old Ski Hill Road parking lot. The mountain bike trails could be maintained through a partnership with the Superior Cycling Association. This organization would primarily use volunteers to ensure the trails are maintained for safe and environmentally sensitive riding. This volunteer model is used on most mountain bike trails in the region. The hiking trails could be maintained by the Superior Hiking Trail Association. This organization manages and maintains all 300+ miles of the Superior Hiking Trail, including spurs.

All other necessary maintenance funding would be raised and distributed by the joint powers board. Much of this funding is expected to be raised through user fees - camping fees in particular. Based on its campground management experience, Grand Marais is confident that campsites would generate funding for maintenance expenses.

Grand Marais and Cook County have significant experience with joint powers agreements and have worked together in the past on multiple initiatives. That experience has resulted in the development of agreements that clearly define expectations and delineate roles and responsibilities. Lessons learned through previous experience would allow Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park to operate smoothly.

DEVELOPMENT/ACQUISITION PLAN

Development Plan Overview

The City and County Joint Powers Board would lead the effort to develop the park. Funding would be identified to locate, engineer, and construct the initial access road to the proposed trailhead. A parallel, ADA accessible paved trail would be constructed as part of the project. A tunnel under 5th Avenue west and the paved trail would be extended to connect to the Community Center. Extending sewer, water and other utilities to the trail hub site would also be a part of the project.

From the trail hub, trails would be invited to connect to the site. Most of the trail system mileage would be developed in partnership with an identified user group. For example, the Joint Powers Board would work with the Superior Cycling Association to design new mountain bike trails, create a long-term maintenance plan and agreement, find trail construction funding, and construct the trails. Much of the maintenance for the trail system would be the responsibility of the Association. Hiking trail development would be in cooperation with the Superior Hiking Trail Association. New user groups would be created for the disc golf course and the dog park. Users would be expected to participate in the planning, funding, construction, and maintenance of those facilities. No trail or park facility would be developed without a viable long-term maintenance plan that involves an established user group. User group participation and activities would be primarily volunteer-based. The Joint Powers Board would not be responsible for funding user group activities.

Rock climbing facilities on the site could be developed in conjunction with a user group, or, more likely, in cooperation with a concessionaire business. The Joint Powers Board would recruit that business and ensure it has viable business plan that includes rock climbing facility development, proper safety procedures, and adequate insurance.

The Trail Hub, campground, and gravel trail would be developed differently. The Joint Powers Board would be directly responsible for the design, funding, construction and maintenance of those facilities. Trail hub amenities would be developed in concert with trail development. Bike repair stations, changing rooms, rest rooms, map kiosks, and other facilities would be developed as the park's trails grow. Campground maintenance facilities, offices, and restrooms/showers would be developed as the Joint Powers Board secures funding and develops the campground and the gravel trail that includes campsites. Campsite fees would be used to help generate funding for these facilities.

Priorities for facility development would be based on the timing of the user groups' abilities to begin their participation in the process. The user groups would initiate their development efforts with the Joint Powers Board.

Acquisition Plan Overview

Grand Marais and Cook County already own the property required to create Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park. The land is zoned recreational and the planned improvements would fit into that zone. There are two adjacent parcels that could be added to the site protecting the natural resources they contain, and potentially allowing additional trails. One of the properties is on the west side of the site and is privately owned. The site is inaccessible by motor vehicle, not near any existing utilities, and having little development potential for any other use than recreational. The current owner has expressed a desire to sell and Cook County is actively seeking ways to acquire the property. The Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park does not require acquisition of this property to fully meet its goals, however.

Another privately owned property is on the east side of the site, adjacent to the Gunflint Trail. That site is privately owned, but zoned recreational, meaning it could not be developed for residential or commercial purposes. It is proposed that the Joint Powers Board seek to acquire that property, but, again, it is not required for this plan.

Acquisition and Development Costs to date

To date, only planning work has been completed for the Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park. From September 2017 to May 2018, the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC), a planning consultant, facilitated a planning process develop this plan at a total cost of \$15,000. Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Grant STAR funding supported 50% of these costs (\$7,500) with matching funds provided by the City of Grand Marais (\$3,500) and Cook County (\$3,500).

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Development Strategy

The primary approach to development of Sawtooth Bluff is phased implementation, with development of infrastructure planned for the first phase and development of specific amenities planned, funded and implemented in partnership with user-groups during subsequent phases.

Acquisition and Development Cost Projections

Because the entire 640 acre parcel is already publicly owned, no funding would be required for acquisition at this time. There is the potential to acquire two adjacent parcels at a later date to expand the park but completion of the park as design is not dependent upon acquisition. Anticipated development costs for proposed phase 1 amenities, not listed in priority order, have been estimated at the following:

Sawtooth Bluff Development Project Cost Estimates			
Development Idea	Quantity	Unit Expense (\$)	Expenses, Projected (\$)
Mountain Bike Trails	20 Mi.	\$ 65,000.00	\$ 1,300,000.00
Hiking Trail Construction	3 Mi.	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 45,000.00
Gravel Trail Construction	1.5 Mi.	\$ 200,000.00	\$ 300,000.00
Disk Golf Course	18 holes	\$ 1,025.00	\$ 18,450.00
Dog Park (fencing, amenities)	N/A	N/A	\$ 29,000.00
Campground/Trail Hub	30 sites, parking, amenities	N/A	\$ 1,500,000.00
Paved trail, road, and underpass	1 mi	N/A	\$ 2,000,000.00
TOTAL			\$ 5,192,450.00

PROGRAMMING PLAN

Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park would offer ample opportunities for outdoor education and community events. Associated clubs and concessionaire businesses can offer lessons on mountain biking, winter biking, hiking, rock climbing and disc golf. An amphitheater could be at the trail hub, offering a venue for these opportunities. Local schools and other existing or new organizations could also lead education efforts that take advantage of the park. Events could include: group rides and hikes; biking, hiking, and rock climbing classes and festivals; races and more.

Annual Programming Costs and Revenues

An estimate has not yet been developed for annual revenues from programming fees. The Sawtooth Bluff Steering Committee has continually emphasized the value of adding amenities with defined revenue streams to support continued operations; i.e. user fees from the campground would support operational costs. As implementation costs for each amenity are defined, funding streams to support implementation and ongoing operations or maintenance would also be identified.

User Metrics

The Joint Powers Board would establish plans and protocols to track visits to the park. While campsite data can be easily tracked, the Joint Powers Board would partner with user groups to track usage of specific amenities within the park (disc golf, dog park, mountain bike trails, paved trails, etc.) Methodology may include annual visitor counts, deploying trail counters and user surveys conducted by volunteers.

OUTREACH AND MARKETING PLAN

Being an established tourism center, Grand Marais and Cook County have ample resources to market Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park. Over the decades the tourism in Cook County has increased its impact on the area economy, capitalizing on the outdoors, arts, and culture. As tourism forms a base for the Cook County economy, there are several tourism groups and organizations involved with promoting tourism.

- Visit Cook County is the destination marketing organization dedicated to promoting tourism to Cook County, Minnesota, including the communities of Hovland, Grand Marais, Gunflint Trail, Grand Portage, Lutsen, Tofte and Schroeder. The organization has a website to connect visitors to amenities, opportunities for recreation, lodging, dining and more. Visit Cook County also provides visitor information at visitor centers in Grand Marais and Tofte, and has a strong social media presence.
- The North Shore Visitor is an organization that produces a magazine style guide to the North Shore of Lake Superior. It includes information about lodging, dining, attractions, state parks, recreation and more. The North Shore Visitor's website has information for travelers and tourists, and the organization has a social media presence.
- The Cook County Chamber of Commerce's mission is to be the representative voice of county for-profit and non-profit businesses in working to improve the county economy and to address pressing county socioeconomic issues. The organization maintains a business directory. The Chamber developed the Go Cook County initiative to advance economic prosperity in Cook County. With tourism and recreation as drivers, this group published the Cook County Economic Analysis report in June of 2013.
- The Gunflint Trail Association was founded in 1936 by a group of business activists working to bring utilities to the Gunflint Trail area. A group of area stakeholders still remains active in making physical improvements along the Gunflint Trail, marketing the Gunflint Trail area, and providing a unified voice for tourism in northeastern Minnesota.
- The North Shore Scenic Drive Council is the oversight committee that guides the promotion and interpretation of the North Shore Scenic Drive, an All-American Road. The Council has representatives from the Counties, Cities, and tourism organizations along the Byway, and works to enhance the economic, cultural, social, and natural integrity of the route. As a part of its efforts, the North Shore Scenic Drive Council has an active social media presence.
- Grand Marais Area Tourism Association promotes tourism in Grand Marais.

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

Funding sources which may support the development of Sawtooth Bluff Regional Park include but are not limited to, the following:

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) Legacy Amendment Funds: In 2008, Minnesota voters passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment (Legacy Amendment) to the Minnesota Constitution, which increased the state sales tax to partially provide funding for parks and trails development in Minnesota. Established in 2013, the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) took over allocation duties of Legacy Amendment parks and trails funds. The GMRPTC ranks projects with high, medium, or low merit based on standards set forth in their strategic plan, and then grants regional designation and determines funding recommendations based on these rankings. Find more information at www.gmrptcommission.org

Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB): Among providing other development opportunities, IRRRB's Culture and Tourism Grant Program supports non-profits by supporting strong arts, culture, heritage and recreational activities in the IRRRB service area, including Cook County. For more information, visit www.mn.gov/irrrb.

Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program: This program funds projects within the Lake Superior coastal zone, which includes the coastal zone in Lake County. These are federal funds that are distributed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The grants must be matched (50%) by non-federal funds. Additional information: <http://www.mndnr.gov/mlscp>

Recreational Trails Program (RTP): Enacted in July 2012 under the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), the Recreational Trail Program (RTP), as a part of Federal surface transportation funding, provides financial assistance for the development and maintenance of recreational trails and trail-related projects solely located within Minnesota. The grant coordinator works for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and funding is available for acquisition, construction, and management of recreational trail facilities. Find more information at www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_federal.html.

Regional Trail Grant Program: Established in Minnesota Statutes 85.019, the Regional Trail Grant Program issues state funds from \$5,000 to \$250,000 to promote development of regionally significant trails outside the seven-county metropolitan area. Administered by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, grants are reimbursement-based up to 75 percent of eligible project costs, and recipients must provide a non-state cash match of at least 25 percent. Other state funds or grants, such as Parks and Trails Legacy Grants, cannot match these grants. Find more information at www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/trails_regional.html

SAWTOOTH BLUFF

Regional Park Master Plan

Andy Hubley

Arrowhead Regional Development Commission

221 West 1st Street

Duluth, MN 55802

ahubley@ardc.org

218-529-7512



FINAL DRAFT