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President, Friends of the Mill Towns Trail

Timeline of the Mill Towns Trail— 26ish miles from Cannon Falls to Faribault, Minn.

April 2025

1850 - 1910 Thirty mills operating along Cannon River

1970s Abandonment of rail line. First discussion of walking trail.

1992 First bike trail discussion – which leads to Cannon Valley Link Trail group being created

1995 Rice, Dakota and Goodhue Counties and Faribault, Northfield and Cannon Falls contribute planning money to the effort

1996 Adopted Mill Towns Trail name (replacing “Cannon Valley Link Trail”)

1998 Northfield to Dundas paved – 2 miles (west of Cannon River)

2000 Designation of State Trail during Legislative session. Joint Powers Board formed (with representatives from 3 cities and Rice County)

Two Eagle Scout projects – Memorials to John Libenstien and Lynn Cybyske

2001 - 2002 ProSource hired by Joint Powers Board to work on land acquisition and appraisal.

Snowmobiles and condemnation arise as big issues

2005 DNR Master Plan approved (needed for property transfer to occur)

2006 Trailhead in Faribault built and dedicated

2007 Dundas trailhead constructed

2009 Bridge over Cannon River installed and dedicated to Peggy Prowe (total cost: \$794,000 – paid for through \$334K federal grant (from 2004), \$345 state bonding money from 2006, and \$113K Friends group)

2010 Riverside Trail in Northfield built and dedicated to Maggie Lee – 250 feet

Curtis Peschek memorial

501(c)(3) status updated – nonprofit status preserved

2011 Conversations with Canadian Pacific

First meeting about Dundas trailhead kiosk - \$10K from Friends dedicated to project

2012 Hwys 21 & 3 underpasses in Faribault built and dedicated

2013 Parks & Trails Council bought 70 acres of land by Cannon Falls – 40 were subsequently purchased by DNR for the trail, the rest purchased by county

Continuing conversation with Canadian Pacific about Dundas to Faribault land purchase

- Bridge along Northfield to Dundas trail washed out in flooding – replaced with a culvert
- 2014 Lake Byllesby to Cannon Falls (including bridge) – design work begins
Ongoing negotiations with Canadian Pacific RR
- 2015 Lake Byllesby to Cannon Falls delays: high water spring 2014, material fabrication behind schedule, Dakota County needing to do work on dam in 2015, Northern Long Eared Bat!
Worked on acquiring properties on west side of Cannon River between Northfield and Dundas (failed in 2016)
- 2016 Canadian Pacific sale finalized – 6 miles of property acquired by DNR from Dundas to Faribault
1.9 miles of trail completed in Cannon Falls between Hannah’s Bend Park and Dakota County Park and pedestrian bridge next to dam – Cost: \$1.3 million
Dundas Kiosk installed at trailhead
- 2017 Dedication of Cannon Falls 2 miles of trail
Mill Towns Trail information available on DNR website
- 2018 Dedication of related projects: Northfield East Side trail and Dundas Sculpture by Mac Gimse
- 2019 Construction in Faribault of approx. 3/4 mile of trail that includes a bridge over Cannon River and connection between trailhead and city trails - \$1.2 million
Waterford Township obtained \$106k grant for Waterford Iron Bridge feasibility study
County Rd. 88 in Randolph area (Hwy 56 to Lake Byllesby) will be redone – DNR working with Dakota County for possible inclusion of 3 miles of trail in project
Kiosk at Cannon Falls Trailhead – DNR will supervise work, Friends group will fund
- 2023 MN Legislature awarded \$8.19 million to Mill Towns Trail for land acquisition, design and construction of trail from Northfield to Waterford
- 2024 2.35 miles of trail constructed from Riverside Park (in Northfield) to roundabout on Hwy. 246
- 2025 Dundas area – 1 mile of new trail from Mill Park to Co. Rd. 8 built, with parking at southern end