



# A VISION FOR NORTH AND MIDDLE RIVERS



BOOKLET 5 OF 8  
GREATER DES MOINES  
WATER TRAILS AND GREENWAYS

# Table of Contents

**Booklet 1: Water Trails Strategies and Policies**

**Booklet 2: Beaver Creek**

**Booklet 3: Des Moines River**

**Booklet 4: Fourmile and Mud Creeks**

**Booklet 5: Middle and North Rivers**

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| One Vision          | 3  |
| Recommendations     | 4  |
| Key Projects        | 7  |
| Recommendation Maps | 8  |
| Symbology Explained | 12 |

**Booklet 6: Raccoon River**

**Booklet 7: South Skunk River and Chichaqua Greenbelt**

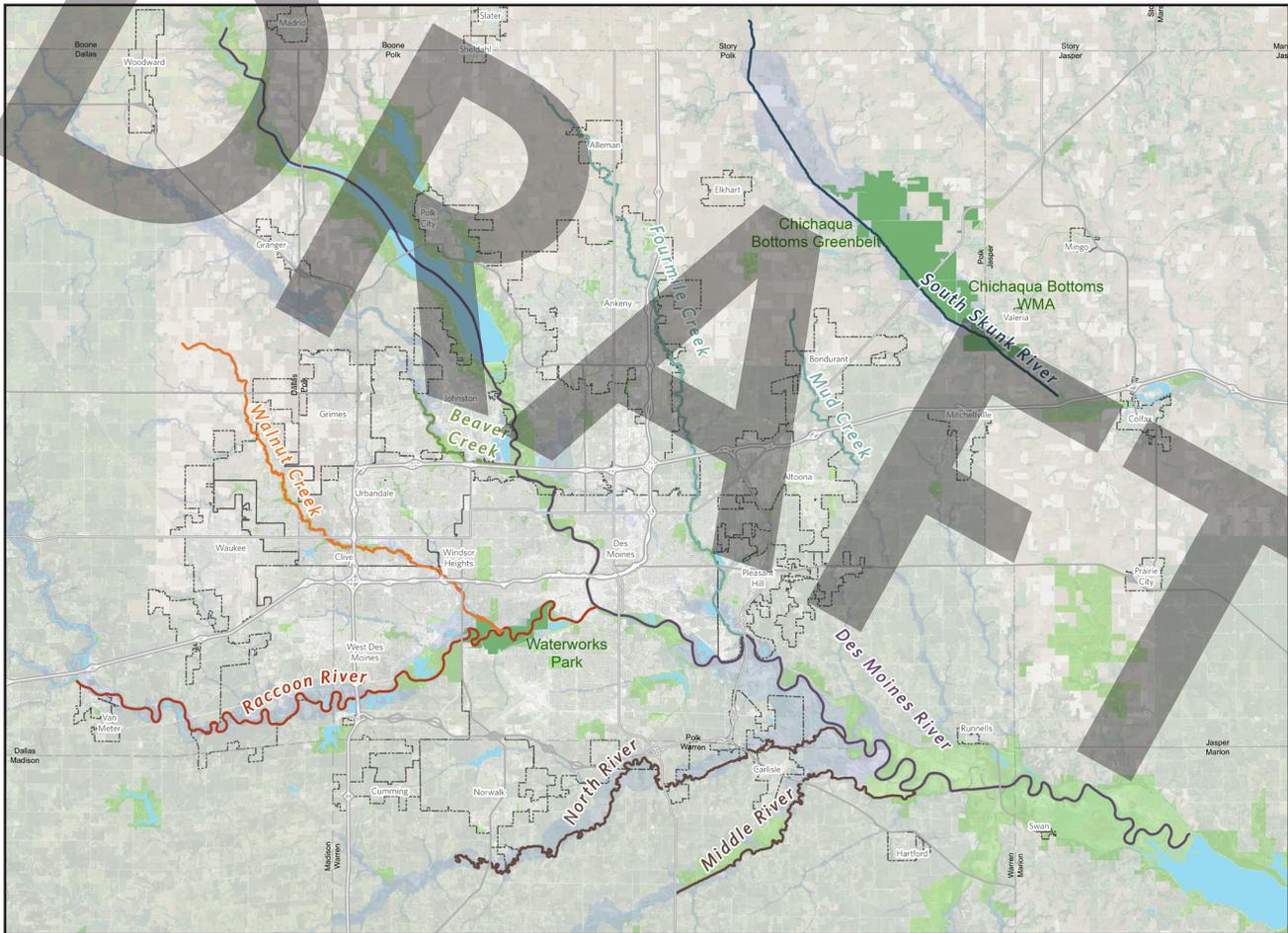
**Booklet 8: Walnut Creek**

# One Vision, Many Communities

The Greater Des Moines Water Trails and Greenways Plan establishes a regional vision for our rivers, creeks, and greenways. Through extensive community engagement and with the help of a strong steering committee, a clear regional vision emerged.

## Regional Vision

The water trails and greenways of Greater Des Moines will be a natural haven, healthy ecosystem, signature recreational destination, economic driver, and community focal point that welcome people of all ages, abilities, interests, incomes, and cultures to connect with their rivers, creeks, and greenways.



Greater Des Moines Water Trails and Greenways planning area

## This Booklet

The Greater Des Moines Water Trails and Greenways Plan looks at more than 150 miles of water ways. This booklet provides an overview of North and Middle Rivers, including recommendations to improve its environmental, recreational, and economic potential for the entire community. There are companion booklets for each waterway, as well as a strategies and policies booklet.

# Recommendations

The North and Middle Rivers are important waterways to the Lake Red Rock system. These rivers contribute to the water quality of Lake Red Rock, but currently provide a challenge with sediment transfer. The rivers are quite muddy and challenging to navigate due to the instability of the river banks causing major logjams throughout. Opportunities for the North and Middle Rivers primarily deal with conservation.

## Conservation and Greenspace

The major recommendation for these rivers is to support watershed improvements, including channel restoration, stream bank restoration, and floodplain protection. Additional improvements throughout the watershed would help to stabilize these rivers, offering the potential of a more navigable waterway in the future.

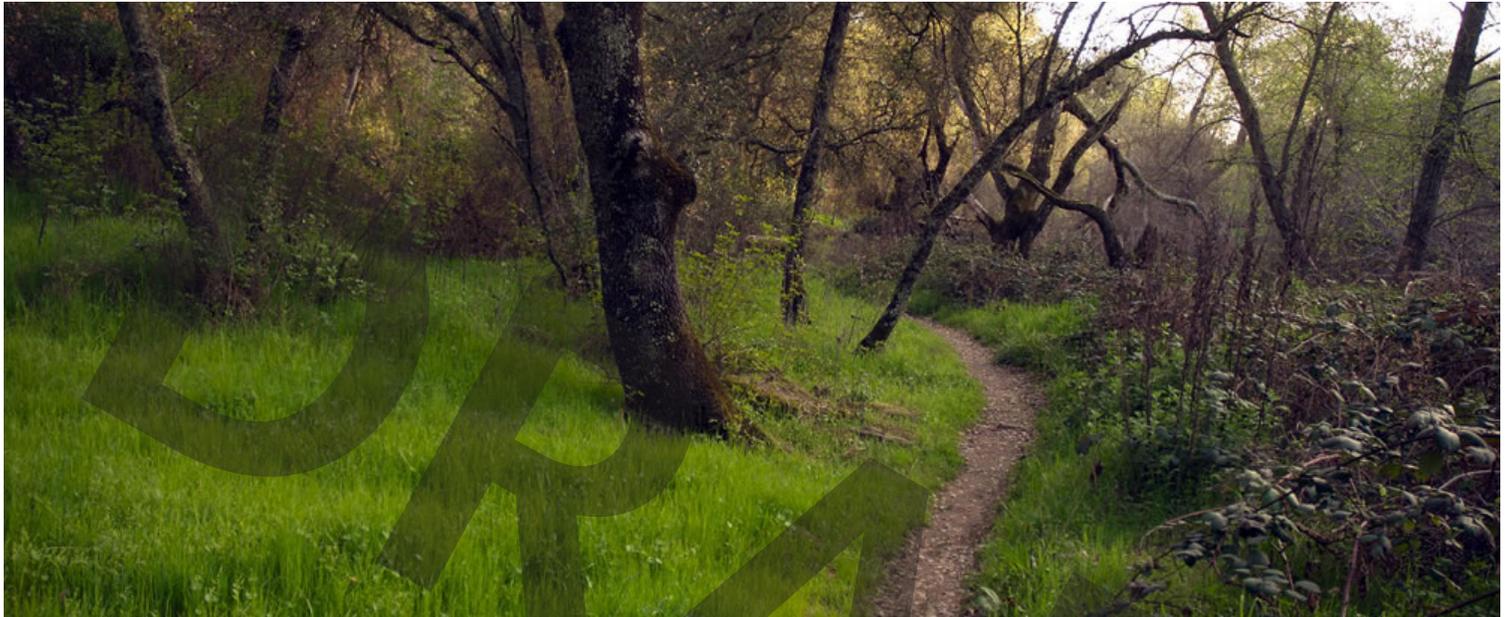
Currently there is a significant amount of land along the Middle River that has public ownership supporting floodplain protection and wildlife habitat improvement. This plan recommends extending this greenway corridor to include, at a minimum, the floodplain for both rivers. This would not only help improve the water quality of the rivers and Lake Red Rock, but also offer quality birding and other wildlife viewing. Soft trails for birding are recommended in the areas of public ownership.



## Uses

Boating, including paddling, in the North River is not recommended due to the large number of logjams. Instead, the river is better suited for birding, fishing, and other shoreline recreation. Access locations at the parks in Carlisle offer the best opportunities to provide access for fishing and to install general play features along the water.

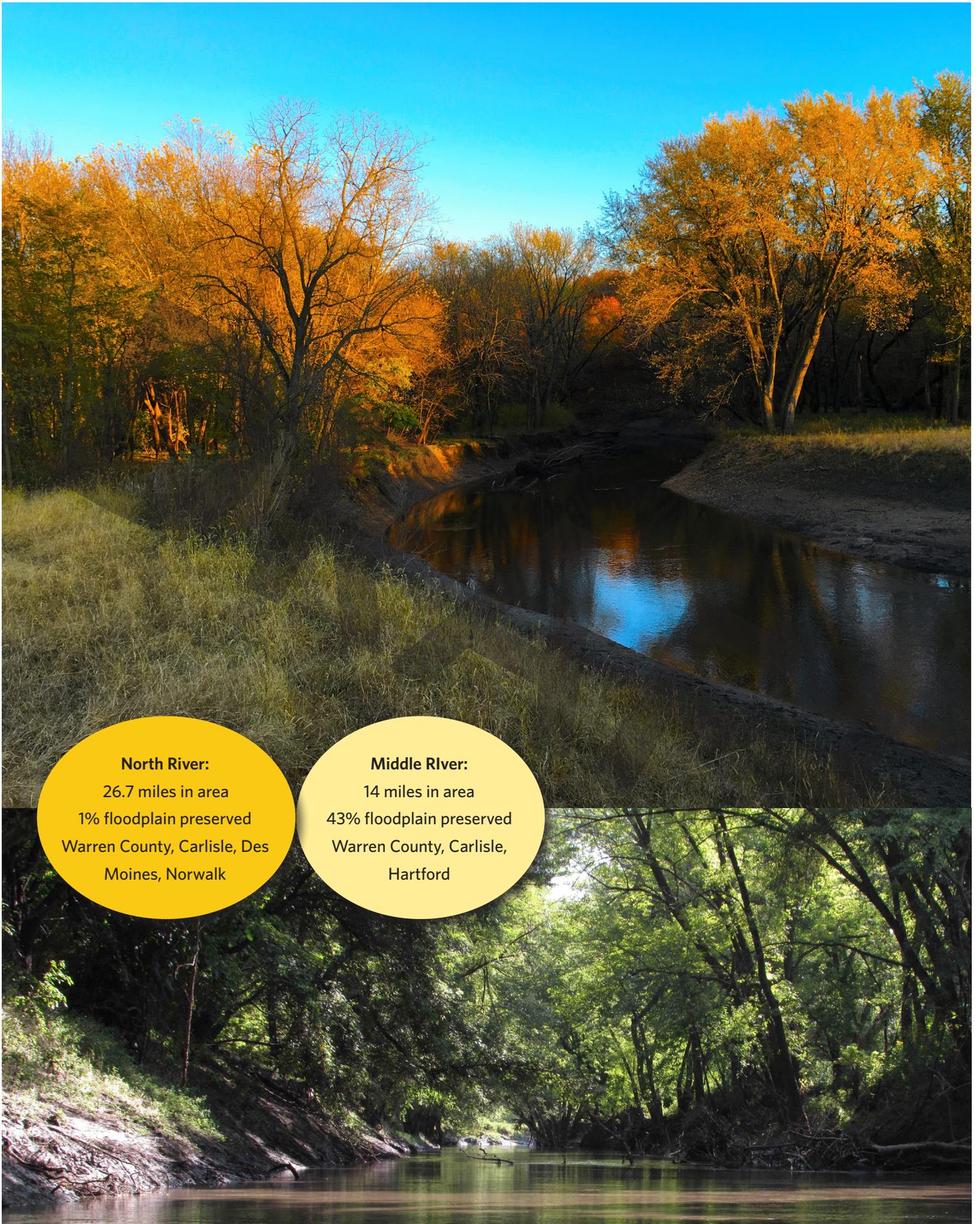
Paddling in the Middle River would be a challenging experience but could provide a 13-mile stretch with a stopping point mid-way to visit a vineyard. A connection from the river to Banner Lakes and Summerset State Park would provide access to the park's facilities and capitalize on existing amenities available in the area.



## Relevant Links

[State of the Rivers: North and Middle Rivers Report](#)

[Scotch Ridge Park Master Plan](#)



**North River:**

26.7 miles in area  
1% floodplain preserved  
Warren County, Carlisle, Des  
Moines, Norwalk

**Middle River:**

14 miles in area  
43% floodplain preserved  
Warren County, Carlisle,  
Hartford

# Key Projects

## North River

| Project      | Location           | Jurisdiction | Key Amenities   | Considerations  |
|--------------|--------------------|--------------|---|---|
| Activity Hub | Scotch Ridge Park  | Carlisle     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Natural playspaces</li> <li>Restrooms, trash cans, and lighting</li> <li>Interpretive signage</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect to trails and Carlisle</li> <li>Create family-friendly, multi-activity space with programming</li> </ul> |
| Activity Hub | Carlisle City Park | Carlisle     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wading area</li> <li>Fishing spaces and cleaning station</li> <li>Soft trails</li> </ul>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect to Carlisle</li> <li>Link programming to the river</li> </ul>  |

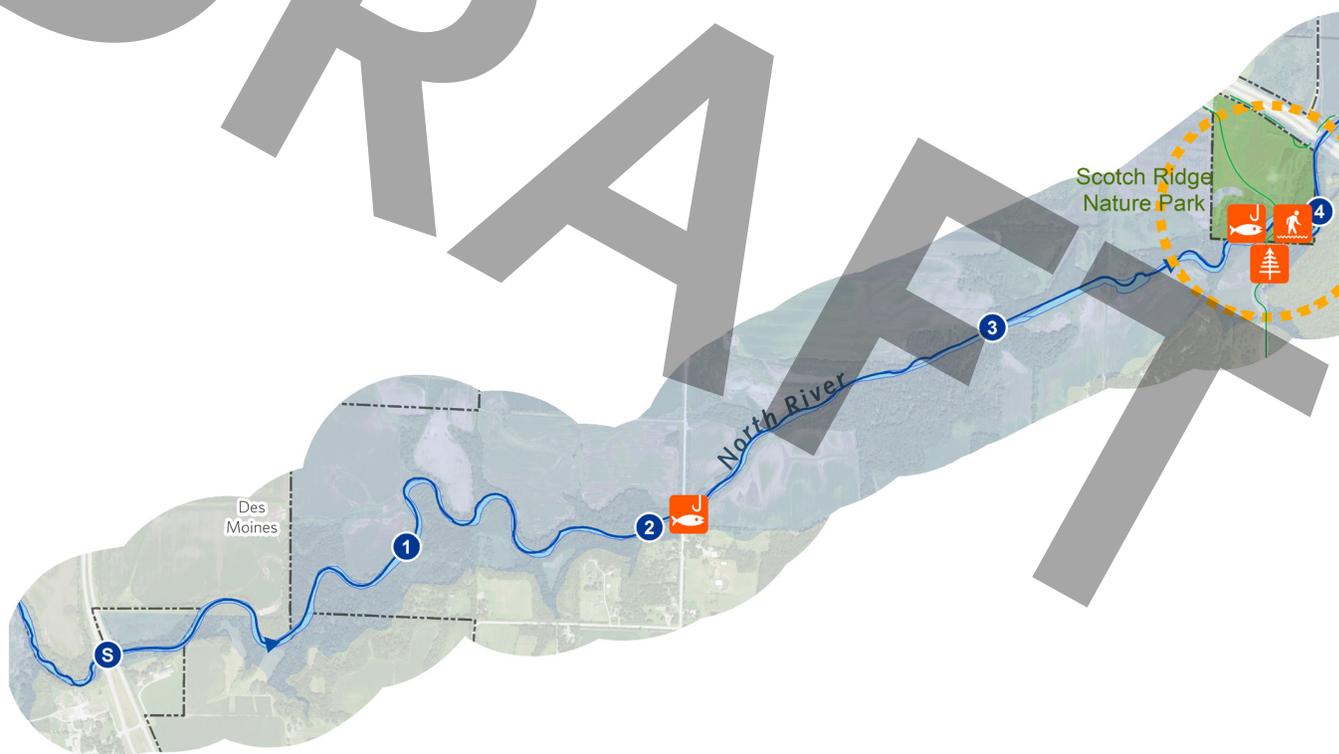
## Middle River

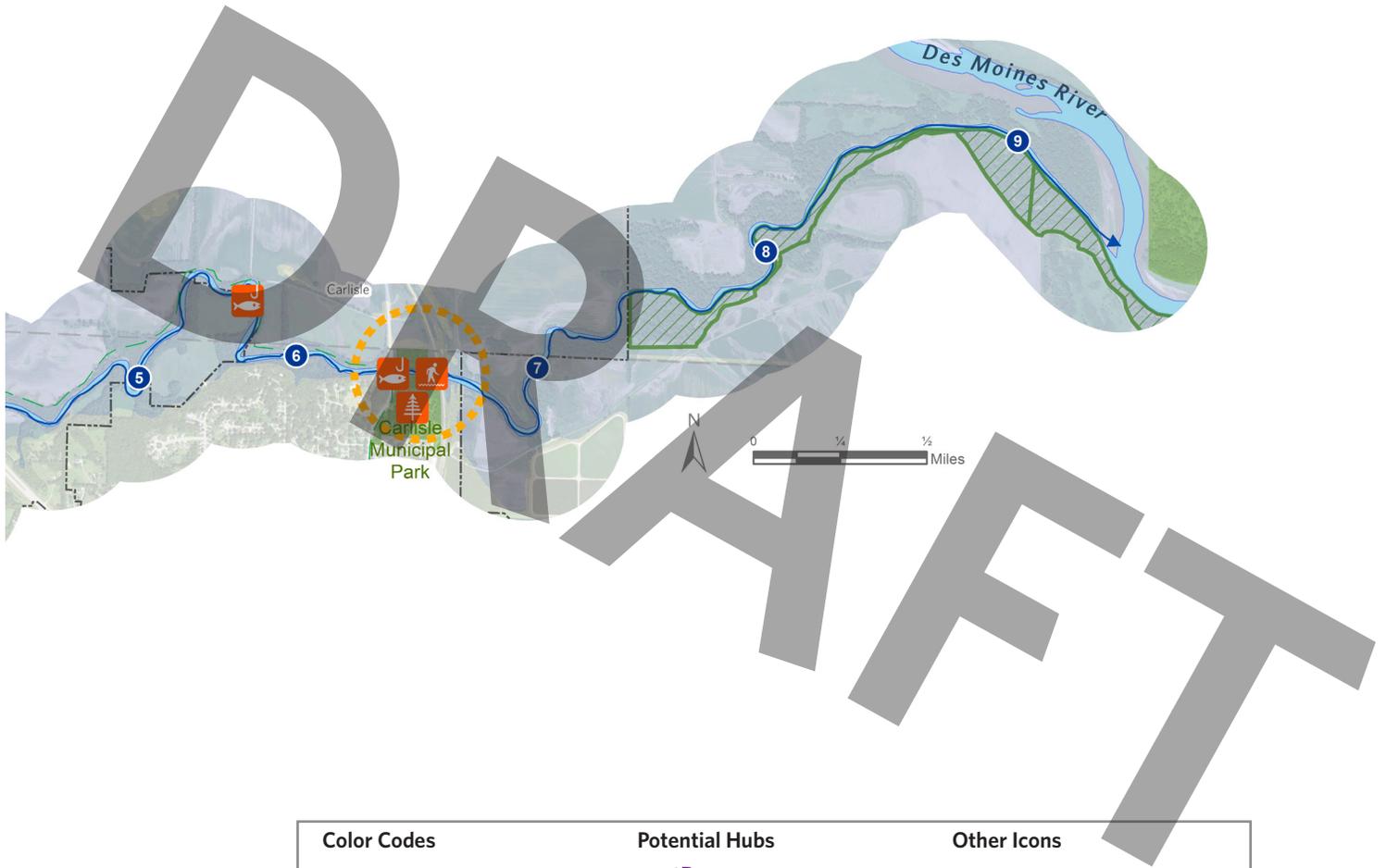
| Project      | Location                | Jurisdiction  | Key Amenities   | Considerations  |
|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|---|---|
| Activity Hub | Banner Lakes State Park | State         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry-down access</li> <li>Fishing spaces</li> </ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Covering a long stretch of the river, this is a great opportunity to better connect the two</li> </ul> |
| Soft Trails  | Banner Flats            | State         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpretive signage for birding and nature walks</li> </ul>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conserve the natural character of the area</li> </ul>  |
| Economic Hub | Summerset Winery        | Warren County | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry-down access</li> <li>Walking paths to the winery</li> <li>Programming</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with the winery early and plan together</li> </ul>  |

# North River

## Experience

The North River has areas that are incredibly natural with great blue herons being a common sight. It is not an easily accessible river, however. The banks are largely privately owned, and the frequency of logjams makes it difficult to paddle.



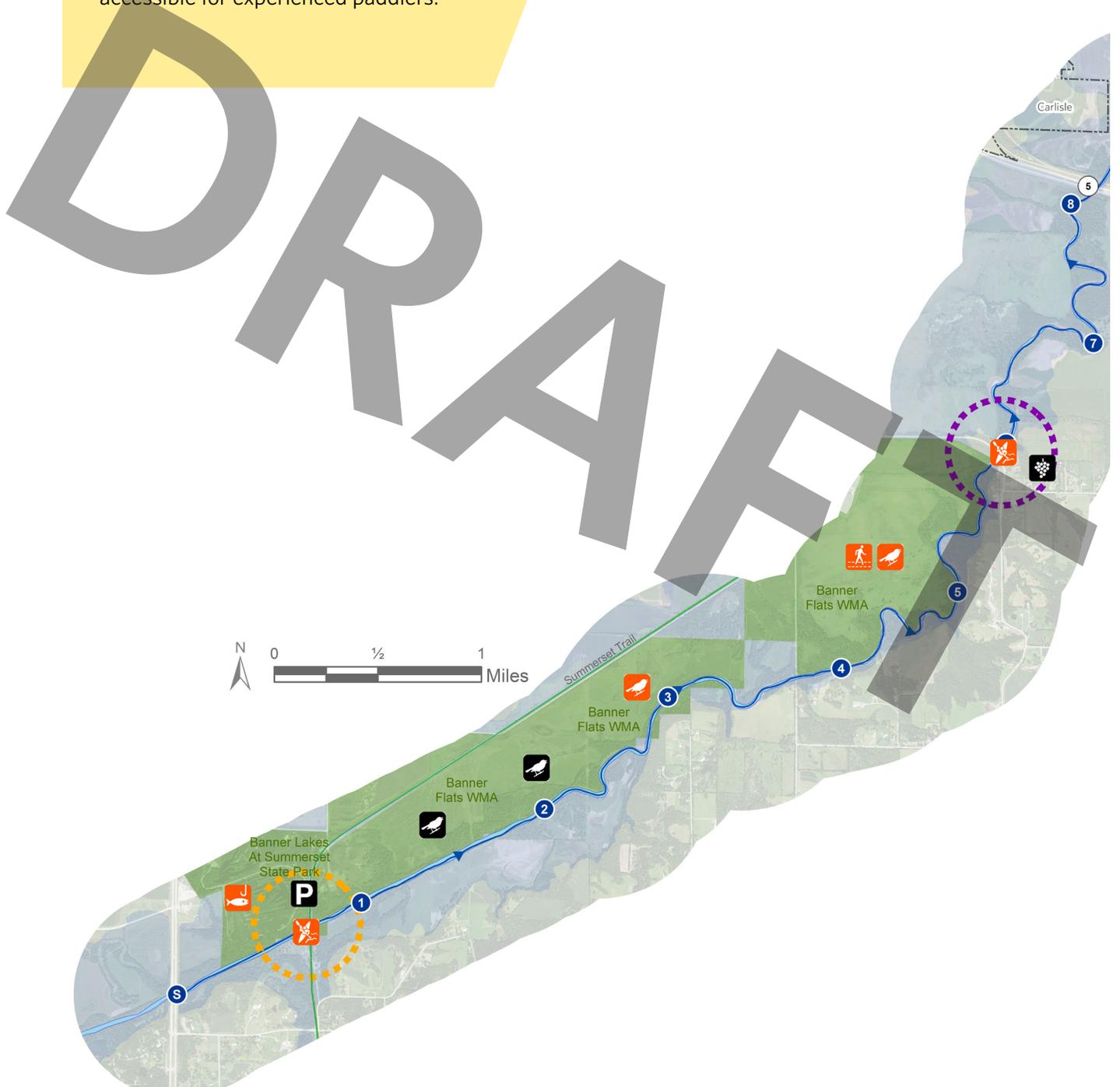


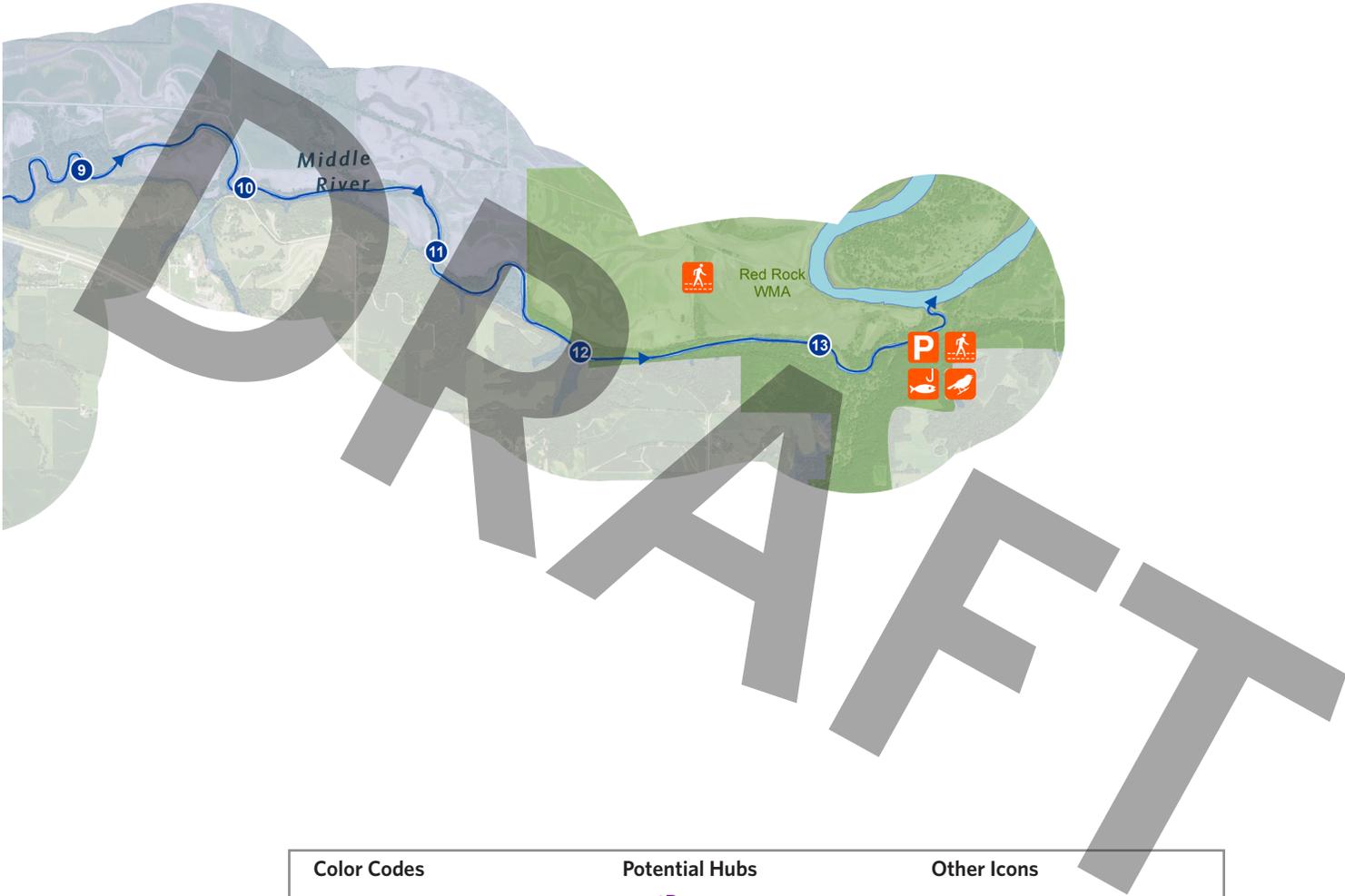
| Color Codes       | Potential Hubs    | Other Icons                          |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Existing          | Economic Hub      | Mile Marker                          |
| Potential         | Activity Hub      | North River                          |
| Modifications     |                   | County Boundary                      |
| <b>Amenities</b>  |                   | Conservation and Park Land (Public)  |
| Carry-down Access | Restrooms         | Floodplain                           |
| Boating Access    | Water Fountain    |                                      |
| Fishing Access    | Parking           | <b>Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities</b> |
| Wading Access     | Vineyards         | Existing                             |
| Birding           | Conservation Area | Future                               |

# Middle River

## Experience

The Middle River is bordered by public land, highlighted by Banner Lakes State Park with the Summerset Trail running alongside it. While logjams are an issue here, it is accessible for experienced paddlers.





| Color Codes       | Potential Hubs    | Other Icons                          |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Existing          | Economic Hub      | Mile Marker                          |
| Potential         | Activity Hub      | Middle River                         |
| Modifications     |                   | County Boundary                      |
| <b>Amenities</b>  |                   | Conservation and Park Land (Public)  |
| Carry-down Access | Restrooms         | Floodplain                           |
| Boating Access    | Water Fountain    |                                      |
| Fishing Access    | Parking           | <b>Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities</b> |
| Wading Access     | Vineyards         | Existing                             |
| Birding           | Conservation Area | Future                               |

# Symbology Explained

## Carry-down Access



Carry-down accesses are for non-motorized paddling such as kayaking, tubing, or canoeing. Site design involves many factors, and should first look at the Iowa DNR's *Developing Water Trails in Iowa* guidelines. Lesser accesses are denoted by the portage symbol, and may not require the same level of infrastructure or amenities.

- Lighting and trash cans
- Parking
- Restrooms
- Launch types
- Watercraft and bicycle lockers
- Interpretive and wayfinding signage



## Wading Access



Wading spaces are where we can get our feet wet. They can be designed for mucking among natural vegetation and sandbars or as play spaces with steps and stones. No matter the design, wading areas allow us the opportunity to physically connect to the water and nature.

- All ages access
- Restrooms/showers
- Benches and resting points in view of access



## Fishing



Fishing is a popular activity all along the creeks and rivers. Creating access points can provide safe and comfortable areas that support anglers. Rock outcroppings, docks, and other designs offer different experiences. Universal design is critical since fishing is often a multi-generational activity.

- Restrooms
- Lights and trash cans
- Spaces for relaxing
- All-ages/abilities design
- Parking and bicycle parking



## Respite



Areas to relax, take in the view, and enjoy the river allow people to find a moment of respite in the metro. These areas can be natural greenspaces or more urban like the Principal Riverwalk depending on the context of the area and desire of the community.

- Benches with a view
- Picnic areas and tables
- Paths and trails along water



## Economic Hub

Water trails can play a role in developing economic hubs. These hubs typically represent the convergence of multiple assets, such as a river, trails, residential and economic clustering, and other factors. These are destinations that draw in visitors for multiple reasons. The scale changes for smaller or rural communities, but the economic impacts remain. These hubs are opportunities for supportive development along the rivers.

- Event spaces
- Parking
- Restrooms
- Launch types
- Bicycle parking
- Public art
- Restaurants and shops
- Liveries/outfitters
- Shuttle service



## Activity Hub

Activity hubs leverage existing attractions into destinations where multiple activities converge. These hubs take advantage of nearby parks and trails to create spaces for longer visits and multiple activities. Often multi-generational and family-friendly spaces, these hubs should be planned with a diverse audience in mind and combine several different reasons to visit.

- Play spaces
- Educational opportunities
- Areas to eat, relax and play
- Programming
- Restrooms and trash cans
- Lights
- Bicycle parking
- Wayfinding



## Conservation Area

A key component to fully enjoying the rivers and creeks is ensuring their natural quality and sustainability over time. Creating connected spaces for habitats, restoring wetlands and reducing flooding, and educating the next generation of river stewards are central pieces to the long-term health of the waterways.

- Educational programming
- Interpretive signage
- Habitat connectivity
- Wetlands restoration
- Floodplain management

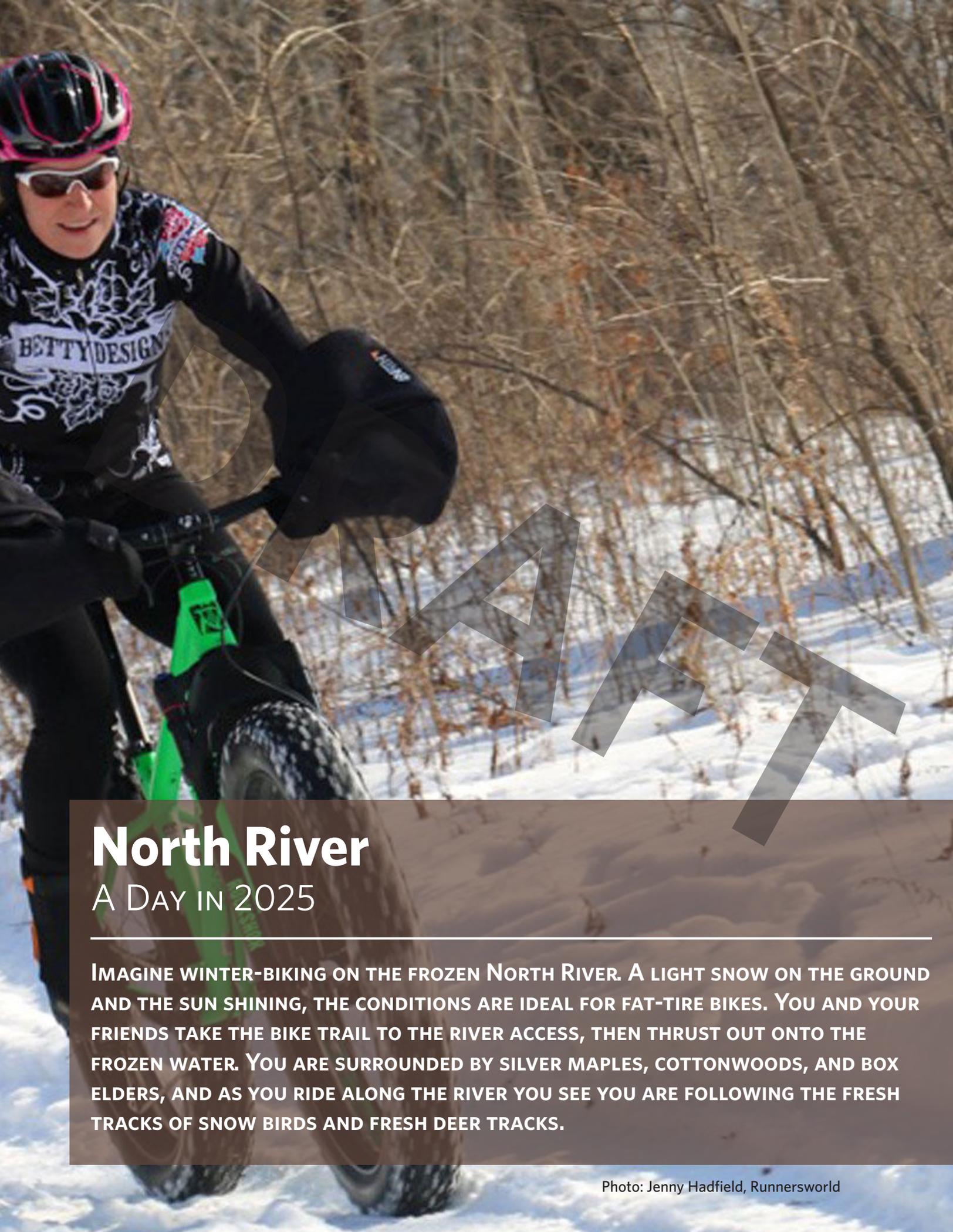


## Soft Trails

Unpaved walking, hiking, and birding trails give people access to nature and offer a much different experience than paved trails. They also do not disrupt wildlife connections and can provide the opportunity for education programming.

- Educational programming
- Interpretive signage for history or birding
- Maintenance and conservation





# North River

A DAY IN 2025

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IMAGINE WINTER-BIKING ON THE FROZEN NORTH RIVER. A LIGHT SNOW ON THE GROUND AND THE SUN SHINING, THE CONDITIONS ARE IDEAL FOR FAT-TIRE BIKES. YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS TAKE THE BIKE TRAIL TO THE RIVER ACCESS, THEN THRUST OUT ONTO THE FROZEN WATER. YOU ARE SURROUNDED BY SILVER MAPLES, COTTONWOODS, AND BOX ELDERS, AND AS YOU RIDE ALONG THE RIVER YOU SEE YOU ARE FOLLOWING THE FRESH TRACKS OF SNOW BIRDS AND FRESH DEER TRACKS.