

TRAIL PLAN



NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL
SCENIC TRAIL

KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN

JANUARY 1995

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL



FINAL TRAILWAY PLAN for Kent County, Michigan

National Park Service
Ice Age, North Country, and Lewis and Clark National Trails
Madison, Wisconsin

Prepared by: William R. Menke
Coordinator, North Country NST

Approved by: Thomas L. Gilbert
Superintendent, North Country NST

Roger Sabine
Assistant Director of Planning
Kent County Road and Park Commission

Derek Blount
President, North Country Trail Association

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	1
II.	Background and Purpose of Trailway Plan	1
III.	Description of the Environment	2
IV.	Current North Country NST Status in Kent County	4
V.	Maps and Other Attachments	4
VI.	Mission Statement	5
VII.	Description of Final Trail Plan	5
VIII.	Summary of the Affected Environment	8
IX.	Trail Management, Operation, and Use Considerations	12
X.	List of Attachments	15

Final Trailway Plan

North Country National Scenic Trail-Kent County, Michigan

I. Introduction

In March 1980, Federal legislation authorized the establishment of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NST) as a component of the National Trails System (16 U.S.C. 1241 *et seq.*). It is one of only eight National Scenic Trails authorized by Congress. National Scenic Trails are long distance, non-motorized trails that follow major geographic features or pass through scenic areas and are patterned after the renowned Appalachian Trail

While the underlying concept of the North Country NST is similar to that of the Appalachian NST, in other ways it is uniquely different. It takes the visitor through a great variety of landscapes rather than following a major geologic feature. When completed, the North Country NST will extend approximately 3,240 miles from the vicinity of Crown Point, New York, to Lake Sakakawea State Park, on the Missouri River, in North Dakota, where it joins the route of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. See Appendix A.

Currently, over 1,238 miles of the trail are in place and certified as meeting the standards of a NST. Another 600-800 miles, some of which are on roads, are walkable but not yet certified.

The National Park Service (NPS) is responsible for overall administration of the North Country NST. Actual development and management of the trail, however, is accomplished through many cooperating Federal, State, and local agencies and private trail organizations. The North Country NST is truly a cooperative venture.

II. Background and Purpose of Trailway Plan

When Congress established the trail, a very general route was delineated. A Final Environmental Impact Statement (FES 75-85 dated October 3, 1975) was prepared by the former Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. This FES, titled *The North Country Trail—A Potential Addition to the National Trails System*, shows the trail as passing through Kent County and describes a very general route on page 49.

A slightly more refined, but still general route was shown in *The Comprehensive Plan For Management and Use of The North Country Trail - 1982* which envisioned approximately 45-50 miles of the trail route as passing through Kent County.

A June 28, 1990, letter from the Kent County Road and Park Commission requested technical assistance from the National Park Service for planning the North Country Trail route through Kent

County. It was June 1992, before the NPS could budget and respond to this request. At that time, a core planning team composed of key agencies and trail interest groups was formed.

In the fall of 1993, the NPS issued a draft *North Country National Scenic Trail Trailway Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) - Kent County, Michigan* for public review. It documented the proposed action, the alternatives to the action, and discussed the environmental effects of each action. The *Final Plan and EA*, was signed by the Midwest Regional Director on August 22, 1994.

During the planning and EA process, public comment was solicited through individual letters, press releases, open houses, and individual contacts. At the conclusion of the EA/Public Involvement process, Alternative 4 was selected and a *Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)* was issued by the NPS. A copy of the FONSI can be found in Appendix B.

The purpose of the trailway plan is to:

- 1) Summarize information from the EA that is specific to the selected alternative regarding the physical and social environment through which the trail passes, and provide this information for the local trail clubs and the county to use as they secure lands on which the trail can be constructed and subsequently maintain the trail.
- 2) Foster public involvement in developing and managing the trail, including adoption of the trail into public and private land use planning in the area of the trail.

III. Description of the Environment

Kent County is located in the southwest central part of Michigan's Lower Peninsula (See Figure 1) and includes the majority of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. Grand Rapids is the second largest city in the State. Kent County is Michigan's sixteenth largest county in land area with 862 square miles and consists of a mix of heavily urbanized and rural landscapes. In recent years, much development of rather large single family homes has occurred in the communities and rural areas surrounding Grand Rapids. Country subdivisions and platted condominiums are spreading, from township to township, outward from Grand Rapids. This development has been a major factor in assessing North Country Trail alternative alignments through the county. Outside of the developed areas, the county still appears quite rural. The population of Kent County is 500,631 according to the 1990 U.S. Census. Kent County has 13,113 acres of water comprised of 187 lakes and the Grand, Coldwater, Thornapple, Rogue, and Flat Rivers. This total does not include the numerous small streams and wetlands found throughout the county. Most of the lakes are found in the northeast part of the county.

Most of the county's major forests have been removed; first by lumbering operations along the Flat, Rogue, and Grand Rivers, then by general farming, and presently by the expansion and continued development of the metropolitan area. The remaining forests, located in the northern portions of the county, are predominantly pine and oak. Many of these stands of pine were planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930's for erosion control. Small scattered stands of hardwoods

(maple, hickory, and beech) are found throughout the remainder of the county where the characteristic landscape consists of large farms and orchards with the scattered woodlots and stream corridors.

The elevation of Kent County varies from 590 feet above sea level at Johnson Park, along the Grand River, to 1,075 feet above sea level at Fisk Knob, in the northern part of the county.

IV. Current North Country NST Status in Kent County

Between the time when the *Comprehensive Plan For Management and Use of The North Country Trail* was issued in 1982 and the present, the Kent County Road and Park Commission has taken a number of actions to facilitate the eventual construction of the North Country NST. These include development of a hostel, the addition of pedestrian lanes on bridges, etc.

The only other action associated with the North Country NST in the county has been the establishment of a 7-mile certified segment in Rogue River State Game Area, in the northwest part of the county. This segment was established through the cooperative efforts of members of the North Country Trail Association and the Wildlife Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and certified on November 8, 1985.

The balance of the route across the county has not been developed and, except for isolated public parks and another State Game Area, will have to cross private property.

V. Maps and Other Attachments

Appendix C contains 10 maps showing the Preferred Alignment and Corridor for Alternative Alignments if the Preferred Alignment Cannot be Negotiated. These maps incorporate changes and refinements made to the EA based on the input of landowners and others during the public involvement phase.

Appendix D is a listing of the 1:24,000 topographic maps covering the final route of the trail across Kent County. The master maps are located in the office of the National Park Service located at 700 Rayovac Drive, Suite 100, Madison, Wisconsin 53711, telephone 608-264-5610. A set of reproductions has been provided to the Kent County Road and Park Commission, the North Country Trail Association, and the Manager of the Muskegon State Game Area (Rogue River and Lowell). Additional copies can be made available upon request.

Aerial photomosaics showing the trail alignment and corridor, at a scale of 1:15,840, are also available. They are located at the Kent County Road and Park Commission office, 1500 Scribner Avenue, NW., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49504, telephone 616-242-6948.

VI. Mission Statement

When preparing the EA, the inter-agency team developed a mission statement for the Trail through Kent County. The final trail alignment was selected to fulfill the ideals expressed therein. A reading of it will convey the flavor of the Trail and key issues important to its' placement on the ground.

MISSION STATEMENT for NORTH COUNTRY NST in KENT COUNTY

The mission/purpose of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NST) in Kent County, Michigan, is to be a segment of and fulfill the objectives set by Congress for a NST. It will meet these objectives and the objectives of Kent County, the local Managing Authority; other agencies and partners; and the recreating public if it is designed to:

Be part of a county, State, and national system of trails.

Provide linkages and connections between natural features and areas, existing and potential recreation facilities, cultural and historic features, and communities.

Favor natural areas, open space, and landscapes which provide scenic diversity and support hiking, backpacking, camping, and multiple use recreation.

Be a feasible endeavor and achieve permanency through utilizing public lands, utilizing larger tracts of private lands, and designating maintenance responsibility during the planning process.

VII. Description of Final Trail Plan

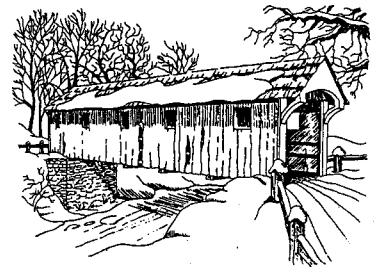
The selected route enters the southeast part of the county in the proximity of Baker Avenue and runs generally north through woodlot patches or along the transitional zone between these woodlot patches and cultivated fields. In places, it utilizes the upland riparian zone lying between wetlands and cultivated fields. In other places, the route utilizes wooded fencerows. One of the primary criteria considered when selecting this alignment was to utilize large ownerships so as to stay away from homes and farm

buildings to the greatest extent possible. In no case does the preferred alignment cross cultivated portions of fields for any great distance.

This alternative would pass under I-96 utilizing a very lightly used rail line owned and operated by Mid Michigan Railroad, Inc., of Greenville, Michigan. This short haul line is operated 1-2 times per day for transport of local products. Discussions in December, 1993 with Dale Carlstrom, General Manager, indicated that this line could potentially be abandoned at any time. Mr. Carlstrom indicated a great deal of interest in trails and a willingness to work with the partners should the line be abandoned. He is also willing to explore opportunities for joint use of the corridor--particularly south of Lowell. The selected trail alignment would follow this rail corridor to Lowell.

The trail route continues north by crossing the Grand River using the Division Street Bridge and passes through town via sidewalks and/or along city streets to gain access to public lands within Lowell State Game Area--east of the Flat River. Defining an exact route through the city of Lowell is not deemed necessary at this time. That step will be accomplished by marking the route in cooperation with city officials. Due to lack of sidewalks in some areas, parts would only be considered as connector segments until sidewalks were constructed or other routing was found.

Approaching Fallasburg County Park, the trail splits into two routes. This split route provides an approximate two mile loop trail for park day users. The first route utilizes parklands lying between McPherson Street and the Flat River. The trail crosses the river and enters the more developed part of the park on McPherson Street where the county used foresight to provide a wide pedestrian lane when the bridge was reconstructed a number of years ago. This pedestrian widening was done primarily in anticipation of the eventual passage of the North Country Trail.



The second route follows Covered Bridge Road, passing through the historic village of Fallasburg where hikers will have the opportunity to view a number of historical buildings and wayside plaques. Hikers will cross the Flat River and enter the park via the historic covered bridge. The Fallasburg Historical Society is acquiring and restoring additional buildings, including the old mill. The possibility exists that they will restore an old barn for use as a hiker shelter or hostel.

Leaving Fallasburg Park, the trail continues northwest through private ownership and then down an abandoned, county-owned portion of Downes Street. The trail then turns north following the lightly used railroad (which was previously followed between I-96 and Lowell) to near 3-Mile Road. Because this portion of the railroad is more heavily used than the portion south of Lowell, trail partners will need to work very closely with Mid-Michigan Railroad Inc.

Continuing north from 3-Mile Road, the alignment again uses the woodlot/riparian/wooded fencerow conditions described in the first paragraph to reach Wabasis Lake County Park. Except for the Downes Street and railroad portions, the trail again depends on the cooperation of farmers and other landowners.

At Wabasis Lake County Park, there is an already existing hostel which was developed to serve the North Country NST. There are also other hiker amenities such as drinking water, camping, swimming, etc. Leaving the park, the route continues north for another 3-4 miles, again utilizing the most opportune locations through private holdings as described earlier.

Near the community of Harvard in Section 6 of Oakfield Township, the trail begins its traverse to the west by following the grade of a long abandoned railroad--formerly part of the Toledo, Saginaw, and Muskegon (TS&M), this grade is now in private ownership but makes a very suitable trail location as the basic grade structure still exists and, for the most part, is a strip of trees and other shrubs. In most places, it is not being farmed and is still easily discernable on the ground, USGS maps, and aerial photos. Short deviations from the grade would need to be made in those few instances where development has occurred on the former right-of-way itself.

In the community of Cedar Springs, the trail crosses public school property, utilizing part of their system of trails, and then follows sidewalks along Northland Drive and 17 Mile Road to cross the U.S. Highway 131 freeway. This route is along the only streets, in this part of town, that have sidewalks. Also, 17 Mile Road is the most direct way to cross U.S. 131 and one of only a few potential routes.

After crossing U.S. 131, the alternative turns south along fencerows for 1/2 mile to regain the route of the TS&M for another 3-4 miles. Near Pine Island Drive, the advantage of following the TS&M is lost and the route continues west along a Consumers Power utility corridor for about 0.3 miles before turning north.

At this point, the route utilizes woodlots, passing west of Ke-Wag-A-Wan Lakes and in less than a mile gains access to Long Lake County Park. Hiker amenities such as water, swimming, restrooms, etc., are available. Only a short distance north of Long Lake Park, the trail reaches additional public lands in Rogue River State Game Area and thus connection with the existing North Country NST segment can be made.

It should be noted that the corridor of opportunity shown on the maps in Appendix C varies in width from fairly narrow, where the trail alignment is fairly well determined (such as in Rogue River State Game Area), to as much as 1 1/2 miles in width, encompassing a number of landowners. This width provides for flexibility in routing when working with the landowners.

Total distance traversed by the proposed alignment is approximately 63 miles--7.1 miles in Rogue River State Game Area, 3.2 miles in Lowell State Game Area, 0.7 miles in Long Lake County Park, 0.7 miles in Wabasis Lake County Park, 2.3 miles in Fallasburg County Park (both sides of loop), and 49 miles across lands in private ownership.

Reasons for Selection of the Final Route

During the EA process, the final route was rated second highest, in terms of its' ability to meet the eleven selection criteria, among all of the alternatives studied. The route was selected as the preferred route because it best met the aesthetic and natural factors associated with a NST. It is located in the

most scenic and undeveloped part of the county and offers a variety of scenery including agricultural operations, woodlots, wetlands, rolling hills, orchards, wooded fencerows, and a concentration of lakes.

It connects a number of parks, recreation facilities, and public lands such as: Middleville State Game Area in Barry County, a private campground on Tyler Creek, Pratt Lake, Lowell State Game Area, the historic community of Fallasburg, Fallasburg County Park, Wabasis Lake County Park, a private campground in Cedar Springs, Long Lake County Park, and Rogue River State Game Area.

It traverses the part of the county with the largest ownership patterns and offers the opportunity to follow the lightly used rail line south of Lowell. This particular rail line was not a major trunk line. Therefore, it wends its way through the landscape, providing for constantly changing views and eliminating the monotony factor often experienced by slow moving users (hikers and walkers) of rail trails. Across much of the northern part of the county, the long abandoned TS&M offers good trail construction opportunity. Even though it reverted long ago to private ownership, the grade structure is still in place.

The county also views this route as complimenting their other existing and potential trail systems, both in terms of location and types of use provided. With Kent Trails and the potential Grand Rapids-Cadillac Trail (White Pine) both being located in the western part of the county and designed as multi-use type trails, the selected route, located in the eastern part of the county and restricted to foot travel, provides the county with a wider variety of experiences and looping or connecting opportunities.

While the above paragraphs show many positive aspects to this selected route, there are also some drawbacks. The primary concern is the long stretches where private land must be crossed and the fact that completion of the trail is heavily dependent on the voluntary cooperation of the landowners. The National Park Service has no authority to purchase either fee simple ownership or easements for the North Country NST. Kent County and/or the North Country Trail Association could purchase lands or easements if funds were available, but only on a willing seller basis. Because of these restrictions, the support of the general public and especially of the landowners is crucial. In all likelihood, a trail following this corridor will be many years in the making.

Completion of the trail is heavily dependent on the voluntary cooperation of landowners.

VIII. Summary of the Affected Environment

This section describes, in general terms, the potential impacts to the area when the selected route alternative is implemented.

A. Impacts on Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Species

In studying this route, the planning team found no evidence of any rare, threatened, or endangered (RT&E) species. In a letter dated March 11, 1993, (See Appendix H) the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service responded to our request for their opinion, under the consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act, regarding the presence of any RT&E species within the preferred corridor:

"Based on information presently available to the Fish and Wildlife Service, there are no listed or proposed species occurring within the area of the subject project. This presently precludes the need for further action on this project as required under Section 7 of the Act."

Footpath construction and use has the potential to cause some local disturbance to vegetation and wildlife, but usually this will be slight. In most instances, the trail alignment can be adjusted or relocated within the proposed corridor to reduce impacts, should anything of concern be identified.

B. Impacts on Soil and Water Resources

Trail construction, use, and maintenance will normally result in limited soil compaction or movement. Even in steep or unstable soil conditions, careful design and construction techniques, such as those shown in the National Park Service's *Trail Management Handbook* or the *AMC Field Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance* by Proudman and Rajala, will minimize erosion problems. Most of the soils along the proposed alignment are well suited for recreation and trails. Poorly drained soil in low areas is the primary limiting factor, creating a potential for compaction. Even here, however, because of the flatness, little erosion is expected. Wet areas are primarily an inconvenience for the trail user and will be avoided or crossed using appropriate structures to provide for dry footing.

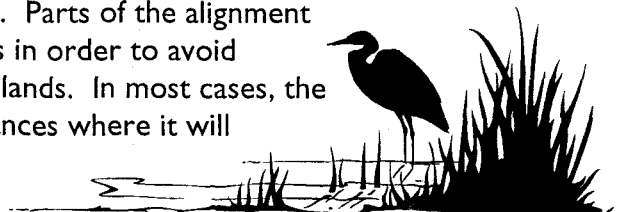
Minimum impact on water quality is anticipated in construction, use, and maintenance of the proposed route, so long as erosion control practices are applied. Experience has shown that with careful trail design and construction, water quality will not suffer.

C. Impacts on Floodplains

Executive Order 11988--Floodplain Management--governs potential impacts of Federal projects on floodplains. NPS regulations for implementing this order provide under Section 5, Scope, Part B-Excepted Actions, 2a: "... foot trails are excepted from compliance with this order."

D. Impacts on Wetlands

Wetlands are scattered along the selected trail alignment. Parts of the alignment were purposely selected to follow the fringes of wetlands in order to avoid infringement onto cultivated fields and prime agricultural lands. In most cases, the alignment is just outside the wetlands, but there are instances where it will have to cross a wetland for a short distance.



Any crossing of wetlands will be done using elevated boardwalks placed on piling, floating puncheon, or other approved techniques. Consultation with the Michigan DNR will be done to ensure compliance with the Goemaere-Anderson Act and any necessary permits will be obtained. Due to the low impact of typical trail construction and use, no adverse impacts are anticipated.

E. Impacts on Cultural, Historic, and Archeological Resources

Historic sites are listed in *Kent County's 1992 Master Plan for Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Natural Areas*. Most are well outside the corridor of opportunity. However, the proposed trail alignment would pass through Fallasburg Pioneer Village and cross the Fallasburg Covered Bridge (See Appendix E). Fallasburg Pioneer Village was listed on the State Register of Historic Places on August 22, 1985. Fallasburg Covered Bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on March 12, 1959 and included on the state register in 1972. A short, off-road segment of the trail passing through the extreme eastern end of the village will be carefully routed to avoid any impacts. Since the majority of the trail route within the register boundary, including passage across the covered bridge, is on a paved, public road, trail establishment will have no adverse impact on these sites. Rather, the historic sites and associated interpretation provide positive experiences for the trail user.

The planning team knows of no additional cultural, historic, or archeological resources along the proposed alignment. During early consultation with the Michigan State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), Dr. Katherine B. Eckert stated in an April 7, 1993, letter the opinion that "no above ground historic properties would be affected."

Generally, except for areas of higher elevation near a lake or other water body, the proposed trail alignment passes through areas unlikely to contain archaeologic sites. Because of the minimal earth disturbing nature of trail construction, use, and maintenance, it is highly unlikely that damage to any of the above resources would occur.

Trail location and construction impact a very narrow area--about 18-48 inches in width. Experience of NPS archeological experts, involved with trail construction, has shown:

During construction, even a carefully flagged trail location is often shifted slightly by the construction crew to avoid a tree, boulder, or other obstruction, or just to provide a better fit on the ground. Therefore an archeologic survey prior to construction is of little value. Experience has shown that a post-construction survey is more profitable. Should any suspect sites be identified, the trail will be relocated within the corridor or other mitigating measures can be taken.

Trails are normally constructed using a variety of hand tools rather than heavy mechanical equipment. Therefore, disturbance to the soil is minimal and spotting a cultural resource prior to damage occurring is much more likely. In the unlikely event that a trail construction crew discovers a suspicious looking site, work can be immediately stopped before damage occurs and an expert can look at the site before work resumes.

An archeologic survey is completed before work begins on any site where major earth disturbance is likely. This includes parking lots, excavations for major bridge footings, etc.

In a letter dated May 9, 1994, the Michigan SHPO agreed with this approach. See Appendix I.

F. Socioeconomic Impacts

Construction and use of a new trail across Kent County may produce both positive benefits and negative consequences. Negative social impacts are generally limited to a perceived, slight increase in nuisance level. Adjoining landowners typically have fears about vandalism, littering, and access to their property for more serious crimes when a new trail is being planned.

Past experience and formal studies have shown the level of these fears bears little relation to reality as the perceived impacts do not develop after the trail is constructed. In 1992 an extensive study, *The Impact of Rail Trails*, was conducted by the NPS in cooperation with Pennsylvania State University. This study showed that problems had not developed as feared and that the vast majority of landowners were more satisfied with the trail after it was in place than they were before it was in place. Additionally, adjoining landowners found that they personally made use of the trail.

The vast majority of landowners were more satisfied with the trail after it was in place....

Trail users and landowners alike normally find recreation and health and fitness opportunities to be the most important benefits of a trail. However, other benefits normally include aesthetic beauty, open space, and in some instances higher property values. Local communities enjoy bolstered economies and increased local pride among other benefits.

Many of the issues raised by adjoining landowners are legitimate concerns. However, they can be addressed through trail design solutions. These design solutions will be spelled out in Section X--Trail Management, Operation, and Use Considerations.

G. Impacts on Prime Agricultural Lands

The final trail alignment and surrounding corridor of opportunity passes through many miles of prime agricultural lands. However, it avoids open fields and follows wooded areas, fringes of wetlands, and wooded fencerows--areas that the landowners have not developed for agriculture. Since the trail alignment purposely seeks to avoid crossing fields, there should be little impact on prime agricultural lands.

H. Impacts on Developed Areas and Communities

The final trail alignment links the communities of Lowell and Cedar Springs as well as several county parks. Indirectly, this alignment also links with Rockford and Grand Rapids, due to its connection with the Grand Rapids-Cadillac (White Pine) Trail. These linkages provide increased opportunities for local recreationists. Additionally, studies have shown that recreation trails often bring increased economic activities to a community. Trailside businesses experience increased sales of food, drink, refreshments, lodging, and other goods and services. Often, new businesses are established to cater to the trail user.

I. Impacts on the Quality of Trail User Experience

One of the reasons for selection of the final trail alignment was because it provided the highest quality user experience. It is located in the more scenic areas of the county and passes through rural (Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)-Roaded Natural) environs rather than through industrial (ROS-Urban) areas.

IX. Trail Management, Operation, and Use Considerations

A. Type of Use--The National Trails System Act specifies that National Scenic Trails may not be open to motorized use by the general public. The 1982 comprehensive plan for the North Country NST explains that the trail is primarily intended to be a foot trail--travel on foot is the one use that must be provided for on all segments of the trail. Other non-motorized uses, such as cross country skiing, horseback riding, etc., are at the discretion of the local managing authority.

Because of the many private holdings which the trail must cross in Kent County, the final trail plan specifies the lowest impact trail possible--a foot travel only trail. This would include such winter uses as snowshoeing, and limited, ungroomed cross country skiing. A foot travel trail can be accommodated with very little impact on the land or the surroundings. The many fences can be easily crossed over or gone through using stiles. To provide for other uses requires the trail and associated fence crossings to be constructed to higher standards.

The final trail plan specifies a foot travel only trail.

The final decision on types of permitted use will be up to the local managing authority. However, permitted use must be consistent, from landowner to landowner, for significant, identifiable sections. It must be based on the most restrictive use permitted within a logical stretch of the trail. For instance, it must be the same from one major identifiable feature to another (from one trailhead to the next, or one town to the next).

B. Stiles--Where necessary, devices, called stiles, for crossing fences will be installed to avoid any damage to the fence or the possibility of leaving a gate open. There are a number of "through the fence" and "over the fence" type stiles that have proven effective in providing passage for the foot traveler while preventing passage by un-authorized users and livestock. The National Park Service can provide local trail builders with schematic plans for these stiles and the final design can be chosen or modified in consultation with the landowner.

C. Wetland Crossings--Crossing broad expanses of wetland will be avoided by careful trail location. For the most part, wetlands will be skirted. Where it is necessary to cross creeks, narrow wetland necks, and other seasonally wet areas, puncheon board walks and simple bridges will be used. The objective is to provide for minimum impact to wetlands and wet areas. This objective can be measured by dry boots. Many proven designs using native material or treated timbers and boards are available. Several designs are shown in the National Park Service's *Trail Management Handbook* and the *AMC Field Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance* by Proudman and Rajala.

In all instances, wetlands will be treated in accordance with National Park Service standards and guidelines and Michigan's Goemaere-Anderson Act. Any necessary permits will be obtained. See Appendix H-2.

D. Trail Design and Erosion Control--Impacts to soil and water have been discussed in section VIII. Careful design and construction techniques such as those shown in the National Park Service's *Trail Management Handbook* or the *AMC Field Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance* by Proudman and Rajala will minimize erosion problems and will be used.

In Kent County, the trail will be created by clearing a path through brush and woods, usually along the back sides of private properties. Vegetation is trimmed enough to keep it from touching the hiker or their pack (usually about four feet wide and eight feet high) with extra allowance for seasonal growth. Only brush and very small trees are cut. Larger trees will be left in place and the trail will wind between them. On flat ground, the path remains natural and ungraded. When the trail traverses sidehills, some "benching" may be done in order to provide a flat walking surface. Simple, native material erosion control devices are used when the trail is going up or down hills.

The trail clearing and the erosion control devices will be maintained two to three times per year using hand tools such as weed whips, lopping sheers, pruning saws, shovels, etc. Appropriate power tools such as weed trimmers, lawn mowers, and chain saws, for removal of large fallen trees and limbs, may also be used.

E. Signing--The trail will be marked with 2- by 6-inch vertical paint blazes or 4- by 7- inch plastic diamonds placed on trees facing the hiker coming from either direction. Small (3 1/2-inch) blue and gold North Country Trail emblems will be placed where the trail crosses minor roads and at about 1/2-mile intervals along the trail. Large (9-inch) North Country Trail emblems will be placed at major trailheads and major road crossings.

Other signs informing the public about what types of uses are appropriate and to remind the hiker to observe good manners and protect private property, leave no rubbish, start no fires, stay on the trail, camping status, etc., will be posted periodically-- if need be, at every change in ownership. Signing throughout the county will be standardized for consistency and clarity.

Maintaining signs will be done as part of routine maintenance two to three times per year.

F. Litter--Prevention and education will be accomplished through signing (see above), brochures and other literature, talks, etc. If littering does occur, it will be cleaned up every time the trail is maintained. Experience has shown that hikers leave very little litter and normally pack out what they pack in. Any concentrations of litter normally occur near roads and other access points and are, thus, easier to monitor and clean up as necessary.

G. Hunting--Granting permission for trail passage does not convey any hunting access or privileges. Land which is posted "closed" to hunting or fishing remains closed. This will be emphasized in signing and in literature.

The North Country Trail Association, the Kent County Road and Park Commission, and the National Park Service will strive to educate hunters and hikers regarding trespass and other potential conflicts and dangers during hunting season through a variety of informational techniques. Hikers will be asked to avoid the trail during the time of heaviest hunting and to wear bright colors in the fall. Hunters will be reminded of standard firearm safety practices such as not shooting at a sound and not shooting toward or down a known travelway.

While fall is the season for hunting, it is also considered by many hikers as the best season for their activity. Temperatures are moderate, insect pests are diminished, the air is crisp, and colors provide interest. Closing a section of the trail at this time is not desirable. However, as a last resort when absolutely necessary to obtain trail passage, some landowner agreements may include hiker restrictions for short periods during hunting season.

H. Archeologic Protection--An archeological survey will be required prior to any major construction activities. This is in accordance with the comments received from the Michigan SHPO. See section VIII-E.

As an extra precaution, trail construction crews will be oriented, to the extent possible, to spot both pre-historic and historic resources and instructed to immediately stop any disturbance activities until an archeologist can be consulted. If any sites are discovered, the trail will be relocated within the corridor or other mitigating measures will be taken.

I. Rail ROW--Measures needed to co-exist with the infrequent train passage near Lowell will be determined during negotiations with the railroad.

J. Passage through Lowell and Cedar Springs--The exact routing through the communities will be determined in cooperation with city officials. Factors to consider are presence of sidewalks, tree lined streets, services, historical features, points of interest, presence of parklands, etc. Eventual Challenge Cost Share projects with the two communities may be possible.

K. Rare, Threatened, and Sensitive Species--While there are no Federally listed species, the Michigan Natural Heritage Program (Michigan Natural Features Inventory) shows two locations along the trail corridor where State threatened species may occur. Prior to trail construction, direction contained in their letter of October 7, 1993 (Appendix H) should be followed.

X. List of Attachments

Appendix A--General Route of the North Country NST

Appendix B--FONSI

Appendix C--Maps 1 to 10 - Selected Alignment and Corridor for Alternative Alignment if the Preferred Alignment Cannot Be Negotiated

Appendix D--List of Topographic Maps

Appendix E--Detail map of Fallasburg Pioneer Village and Covered Bridge

Appendix F--Public Involvement Contacts and General Input

Appendix G--Specific Public Comments and NPS Response

Appendix H--U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Section 7 Letter and Michigan Natural Features Inventory Letter

Appendix I--Michigan SHPO Letter

Appendix J--Memorandum of Understanding with Kent County, Michigan DNR, and North Country Trail Association for the Construction, Operation, and Maintenance of the Trail.

Appendix K--Questions and Answers

NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL

VICINITY MAP



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
KENT COUNTY TRAIL CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES STUDY
North Country National Scenic Trail
Michigan

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared an Analysis of Alternatives and Environmental Assessment (EA) for development of the North Country National Scenic Trail in Kent County, Michigan. The proposed action is described as Alternative 4 in the EA.

The public review process has been completed. As a result of public review, including comments by affected individual private landowners, the final trailway plan reflects a few very minor modifications to Alternative 4 as depicted in the environmental assessment:

1. One minor expansion of the trail corridor shown in Alternative 4 was made in section 31, Solon Township, and section 6, Algoma Township. The additional land included within the corridor is within the property lines of an already affected landowner and was made at his request. No additional landowners are affected.
2. Ten minor adjustments in the preferred trail alignment within the corridor were made to accommodate landowner concerns and/or resource conditions not previously known.
3. Eight specific alternative trail alignments within the corridor were added because of landowner concerns. In these cases, the original alignment shown in the environmental assessment remains the preferred alignment.

Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 USC 470, as amended), as relevant to this level of trail planning, has been completed. Further compliance procedures will be necessary when segments of the trail are actually laid out on the ground, marked and opened for public use. These additional compliance procedures will assess the effects of foot traffic and trail use on any archeological sites which may be present and, if necessary, could include field surveys for possible archeological resources.

Compliance with the Endangered Species Act, as amended (16 USC 1531-1543) was completed in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on March 11, 1993. No listed or proposed species are known to occur within the area of the trail corridor.

The EA has been reviewed, resulting in the following conclusions:

1. The proposals, individually or cumulatively, do not constitute actions which normally require preparation of an environmental impact statement (40 CFR 1502.3; 516 DM 6, Appendix 7.3). The action is not a categorical exclusion under the contemplation of 40 CFR 1501.4 and 1508.4.
2. The proposed actions will not have a significant (40 CFR 1508.27b) effect on the human environment. Scheduled and routine monitoring and trail maintenance will serve to identify and mitigate any possible negative environmental impacts. There are no adverse impacts on public health, public safety, rare or endangered species, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. There are no irreversible commitments of lands or other natural resources. Implementation of the actions will not violate any Federal, State, or local law.

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that implementation of the proposal will not constitute a major Federal action which will significantly affect the quality of the human environment, and that an environmental impact statement is not required and will not be prepared.

William W. Kent
Regional Director, Midwest Region

8/22/94
Date

Appendix C

Appendix C includes 10 township plat maps showing the Preferred Trail Alignment and the Corridor for Alternative Alignments (if the preferred alignment cannot be negotiated).

These maps incorporate changes and refinements made to the railway plan based on the inputs of landowners and others during the public involvement phase.

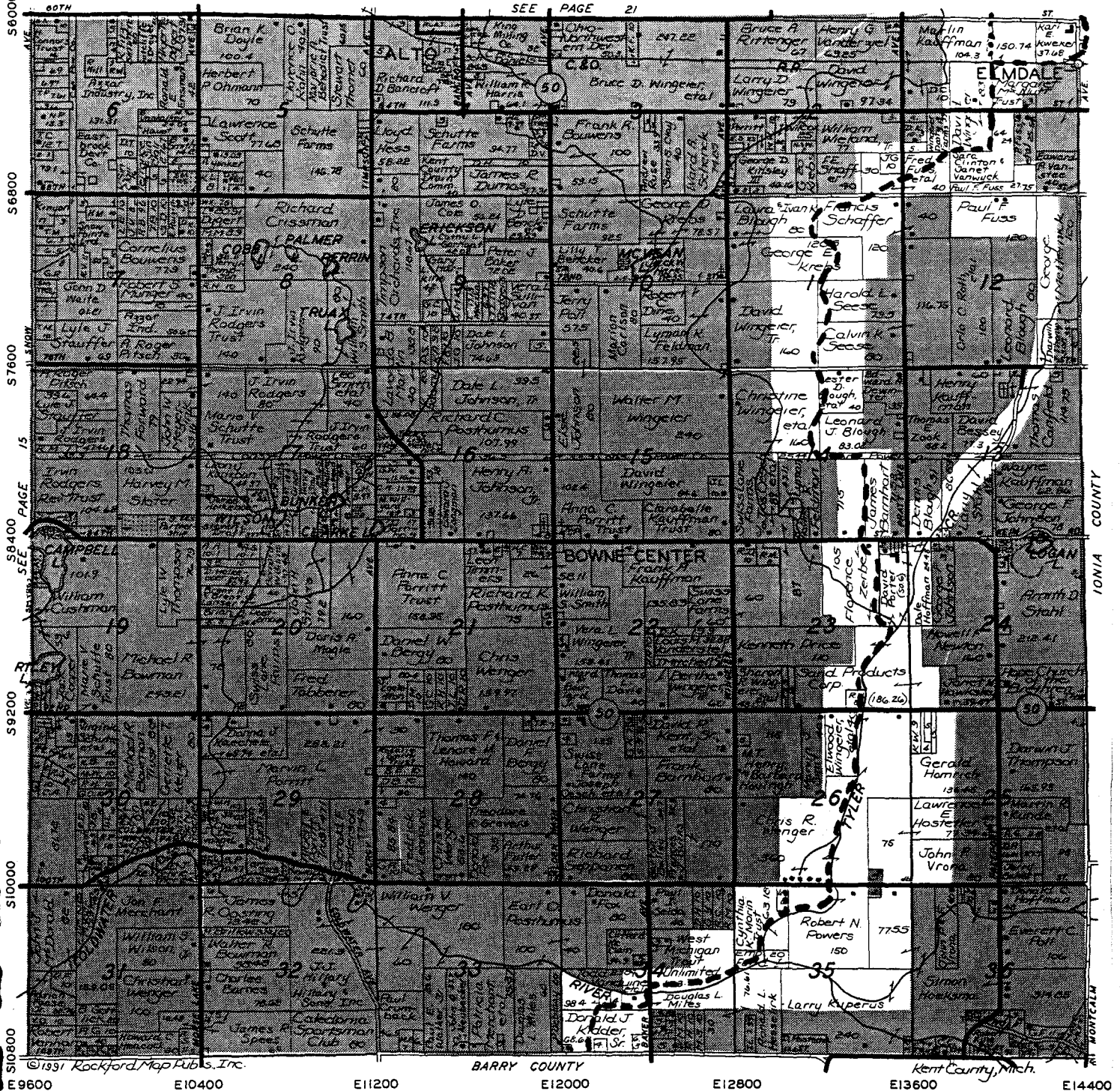
NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN - SELECTED ROUTE

16

BOWNE

T.5 N.-R.9 W.

SEE PAGE 21



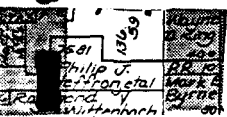
LEGEND

..... Alternate Trail Alignment

- - - Preferred Trail Alignment

Corridor for Alternative Alignments
(if preferred alignment cannot be negotiated)

MWR/Sept. 1994/649-80,002
Sheet 1 of 10

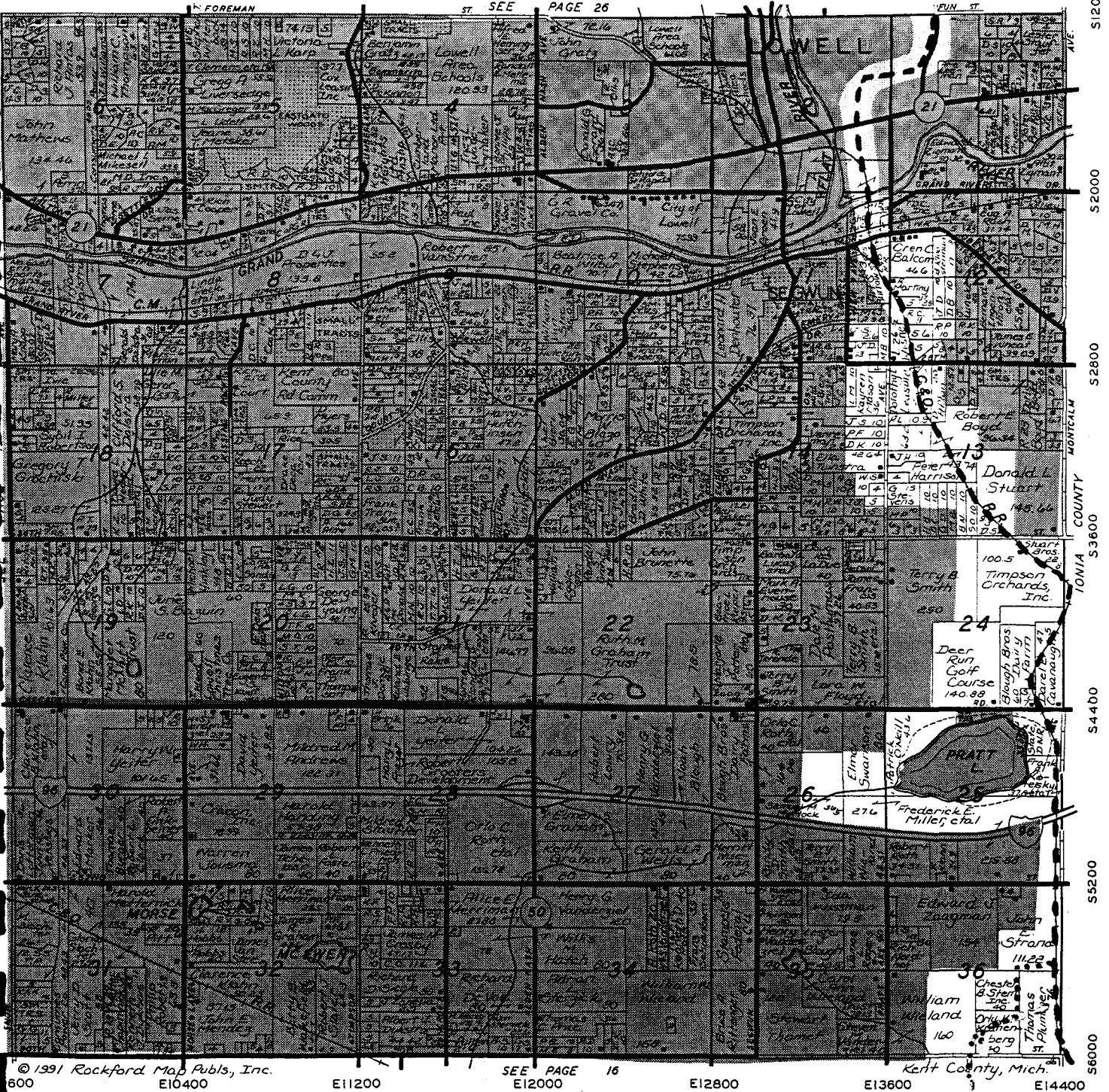


NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN - SELECTED ROUTE

LOWELL

T.6N.-R.9 W.

21



LEGEND

..... Alternate Trail Alignment

- - - Preferred Trail Alignment

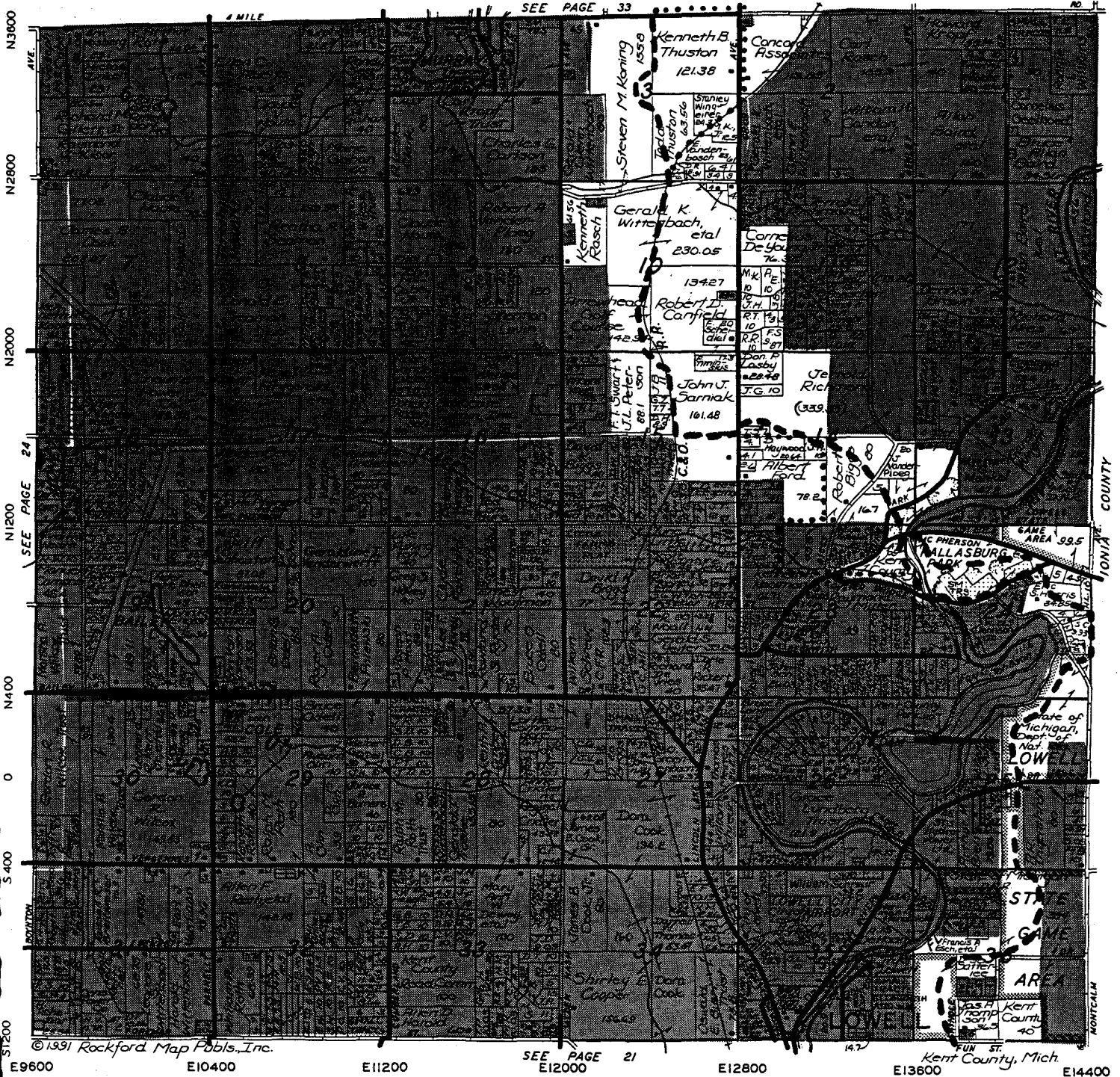
Corridor for Alternative Alignments
(if preferred alignment cannot be negotiated)

MWR/Sept. 1994/649-80,002
Sheet 2 of 10

NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN - SELECTED ROUTE

VERGENNES

T.7 N.-R.9 W.



LEGEND

- Alternate Trail Alignment
- - - Preferred Trail Alignment

MWR/Sept. 1994/649-80,002
Sheet 3 of 10

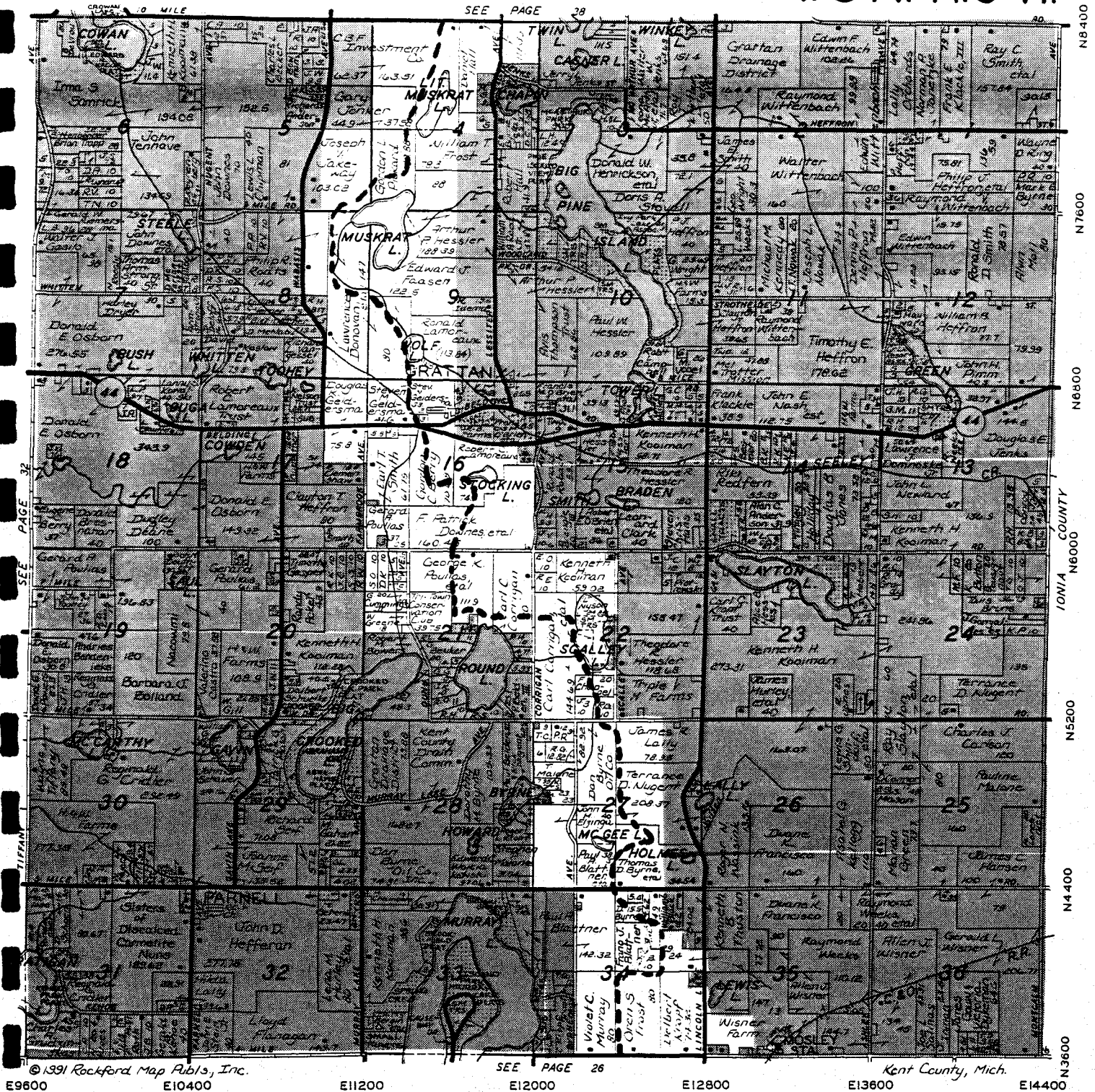
Corridor for Alternative Alignments
(if preferred alignment cannot be negotiated)



NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN - SELECTED ROUTE

GRATTAN

T.8N.-R.9W. 33



LEGEND

..... Alternate Trail Alignment

--- Preferred Trail Alignment

Corridor for Alternative Alignments
(if preferred alignment cannot be negotiated)

MWR/Sept. 1994/649-80,002
Sheet 4 of 10

NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN - SELECTED ROUTE

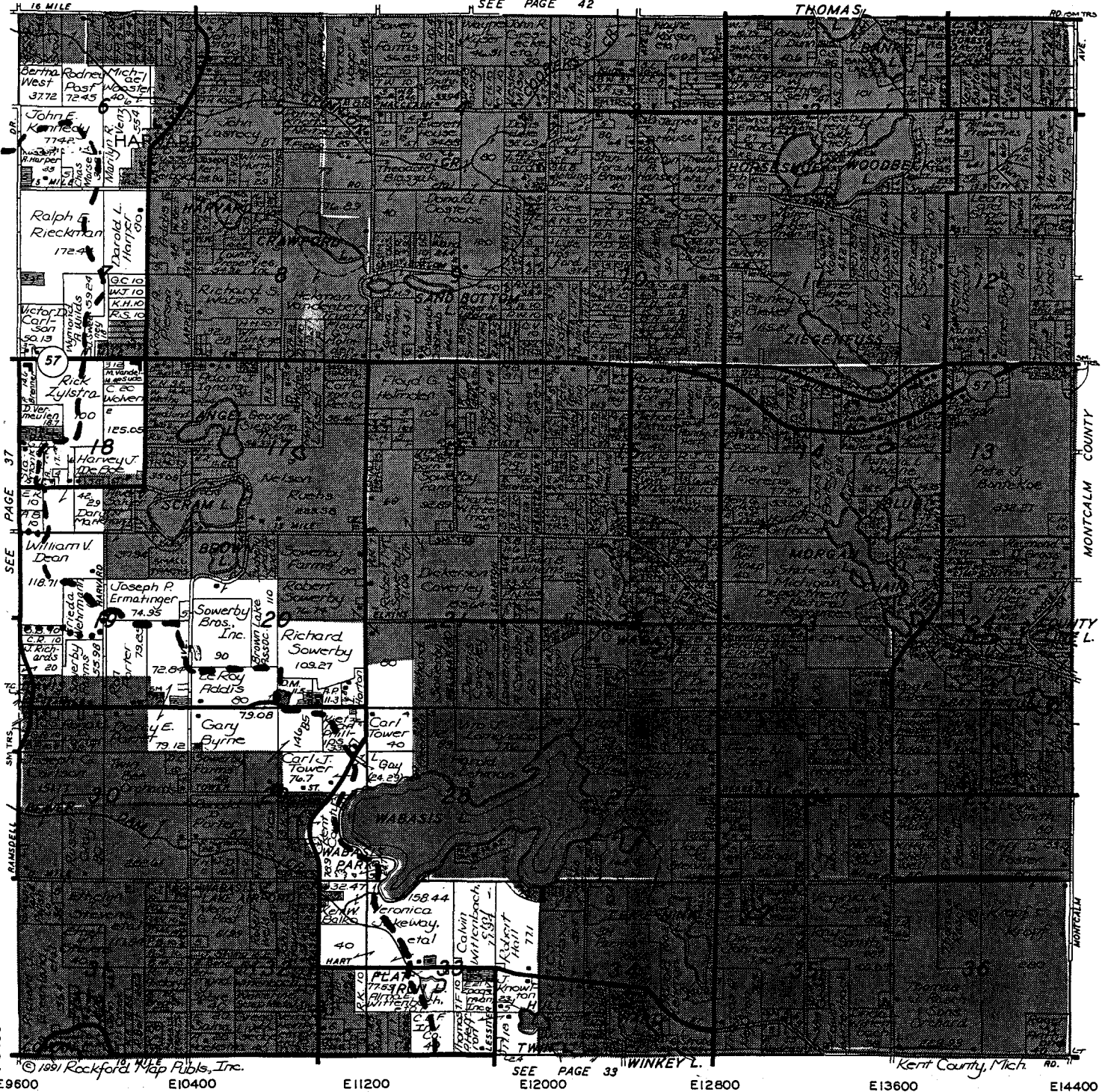
OAKFIELD

T.9 N.-R.9 W.

SEE PAGE 42

THOMAS

RD. COM. TRS.



LEGEND

..... Alternate Trail Alignment

- - - Preferred Trail Alignment

Corridor for Alternative Alignments
(if preferred alignment cannot be negotiated)

MWR/Sept. 1994/649-80,002
Sheet 5 of 10

SEE PAGE 33

WINKEY L.

Kent County, Mich.

RD. 11

E9600

E10400

E11200

E12000

E12800

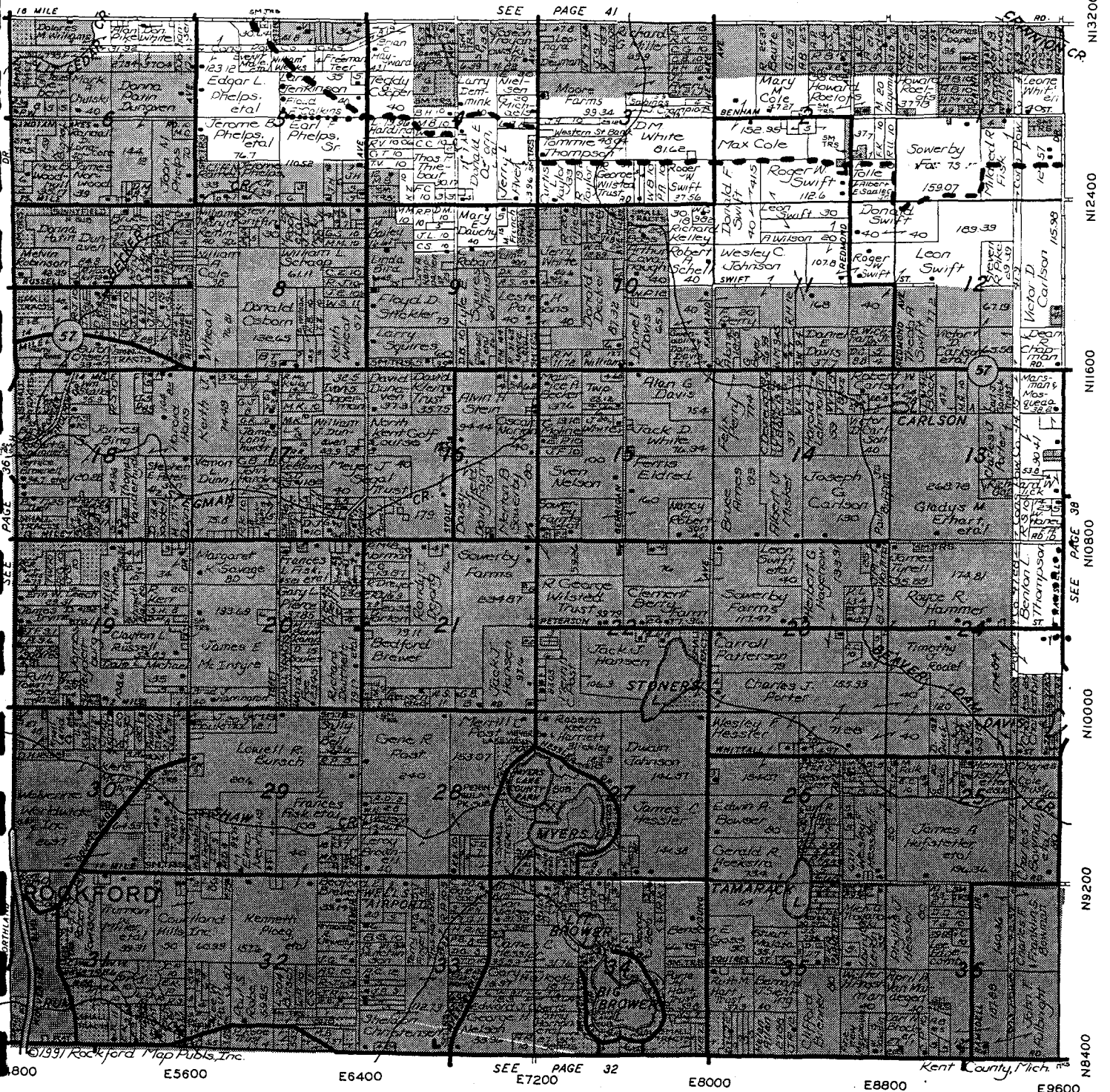
E13600

E14400

NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN - SELECTED ROUTE

COURTLAND

T.9 N.-R.10 W. 37



LEGEND

..... Alternate Trail Alignment

--- Preferred Trail Alignment

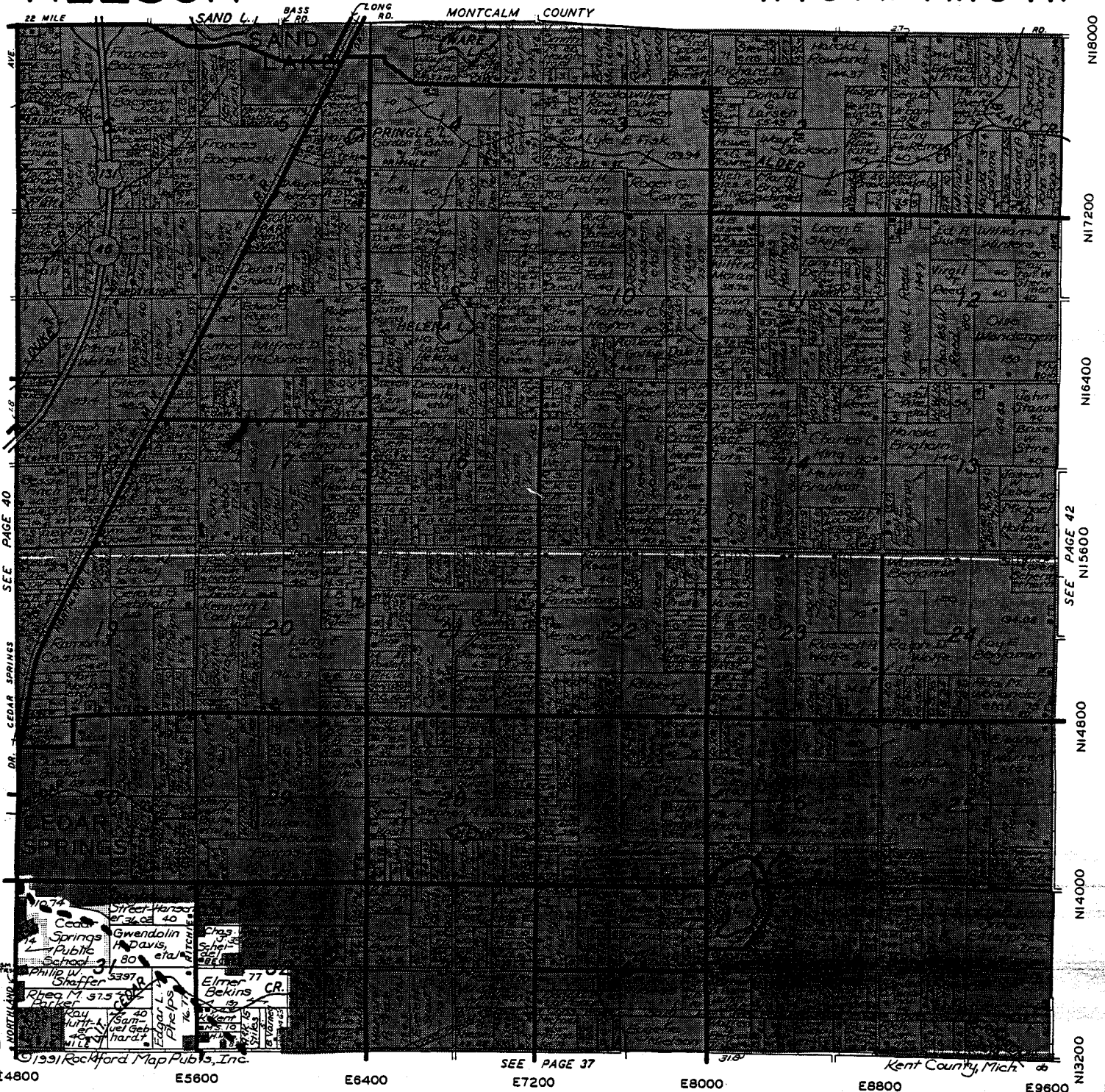
Corridor for Alternative Alignments
(if preferred alignment cannot be negotiated)

MWR/Sept. 1994/649-80,002
Sheet 6 of 10

NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN - SELECTED ROUTE

NELSON

T.10N.-R.10W. 41



LEGEND

..... Alternate Trail Alignment

— Preferred Trail Alignment

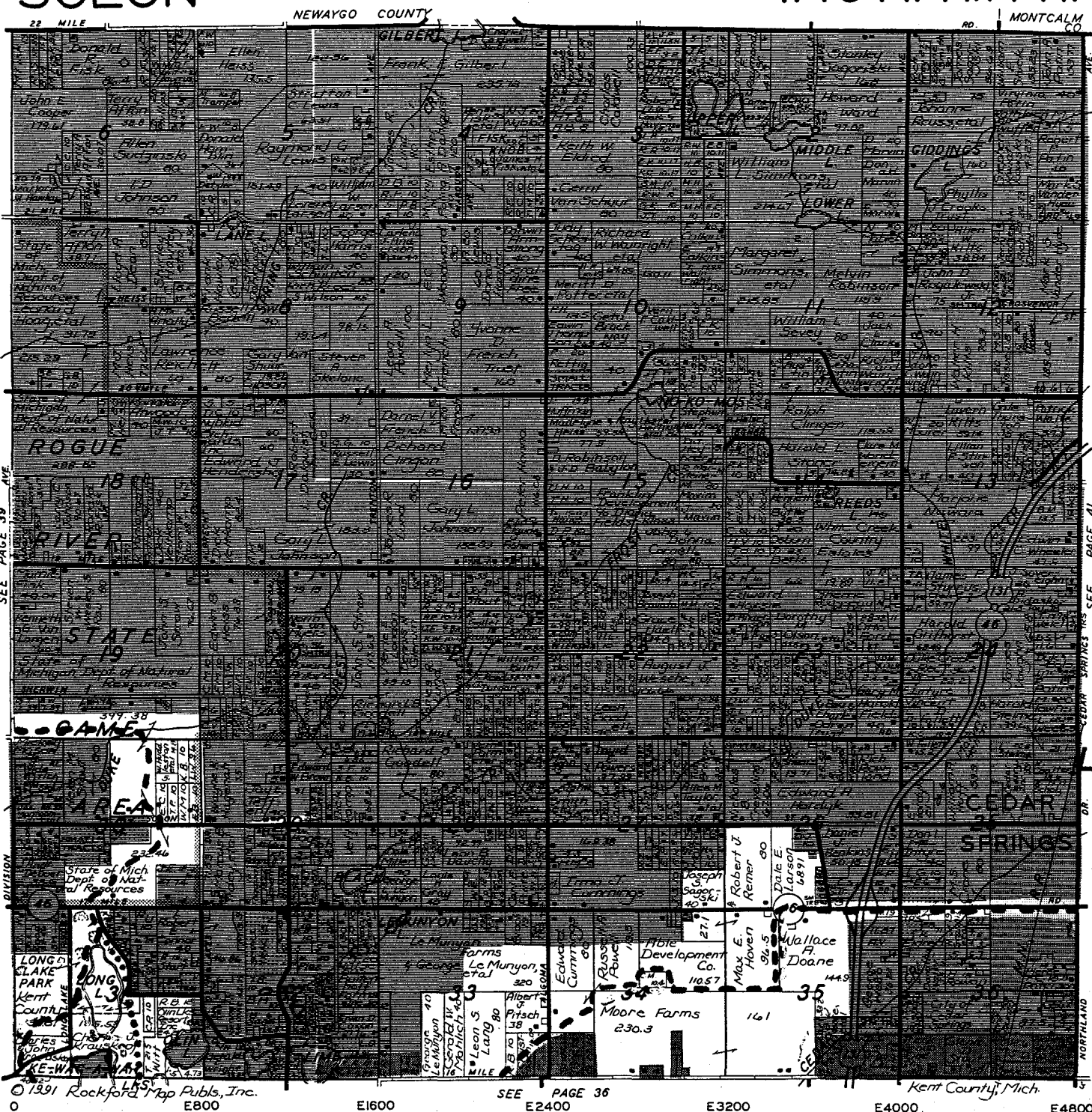
Corridor for Alternative Alignments
(if preferred alignment cannot be negotiated)

MWR/Sept. 1994/649-80,002
Sheet 7 of 10

NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN - SELECTED ROUTE

SOLON

T. 10 N.-R. 11 W.



LEGEND

..... Alternate Trail Alignment

--- Preferred Trail Alignment

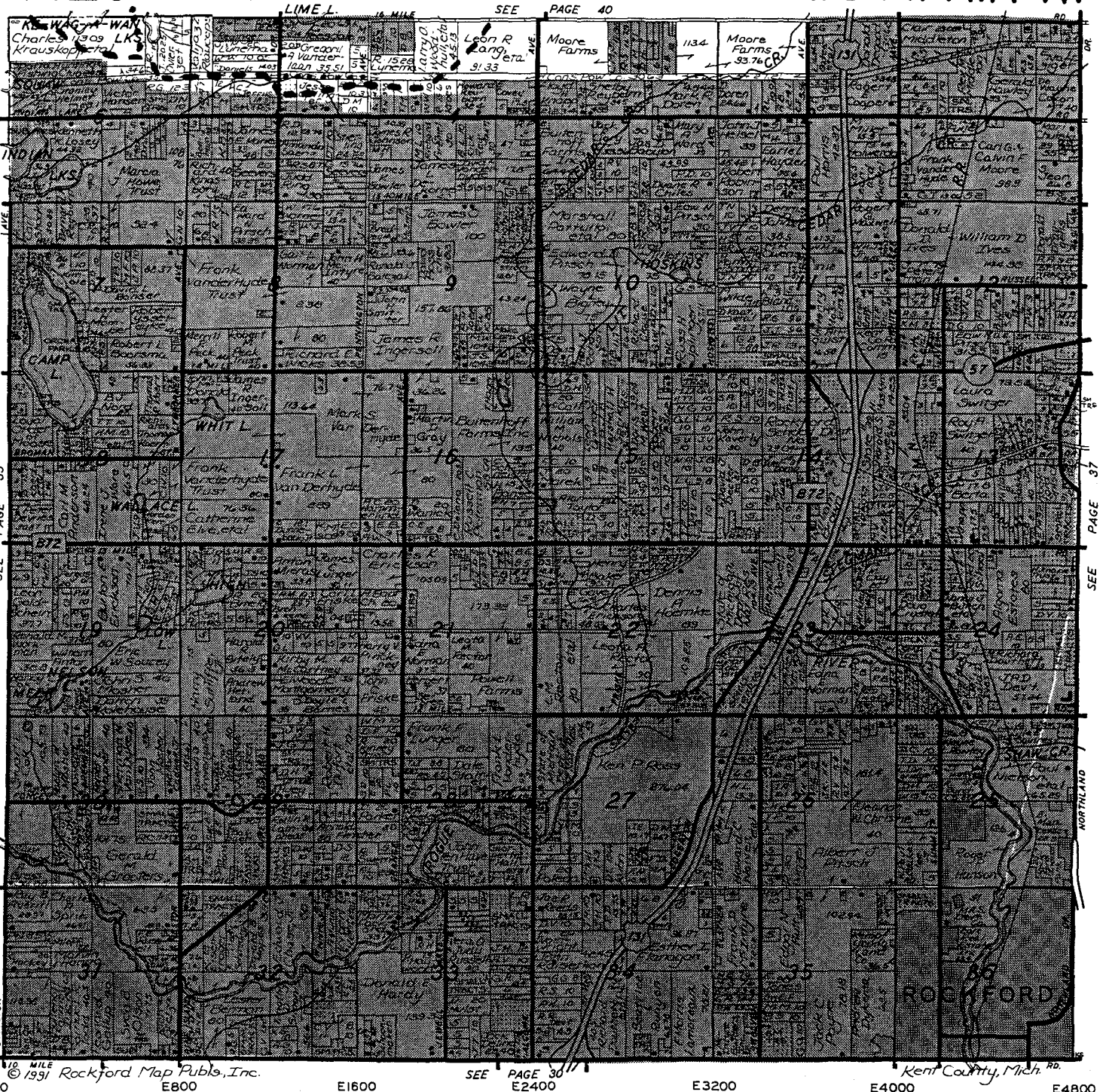
Corridor for Alternative Alignments
(if preferred alignment cannot be negotiated)

MWR/Sept. 1994/649-80,002
Sheet 8 of 10

NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN - SELECTED ROUTE

ALGOMA

T.9 N.-R.11 W.



LEGEND

..... Alternate Trail Alignment

--- Preferred Trail Alignment

Corridor for Alternative Alignments
(if preferred alignment cannot be negotiated)

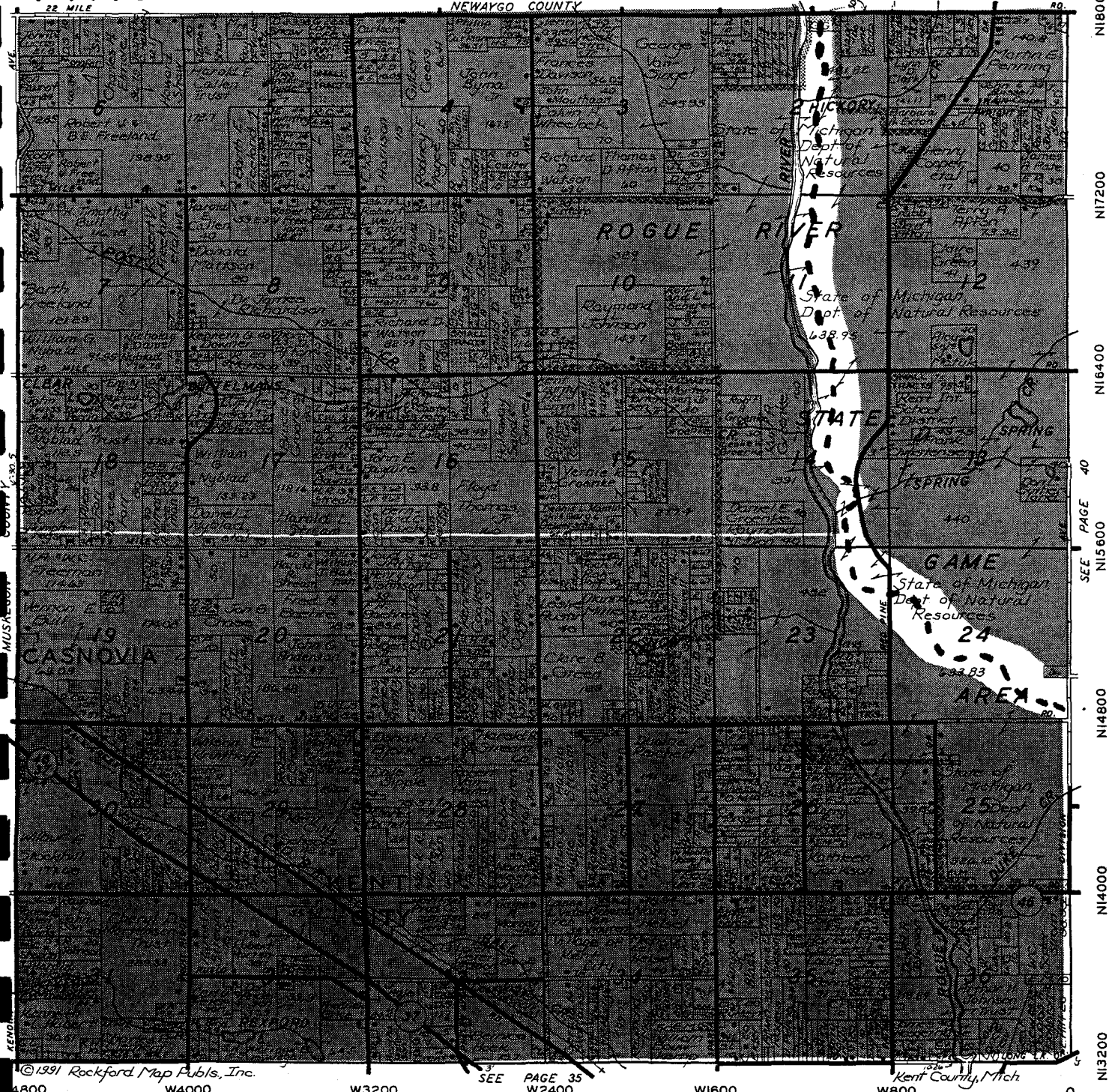
MWR/Sept. 1994/649-80,002
Sheet 9 of 10

NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN - SELECTED ROUTE

TYRONE

T. 10N.-R. 12W.

39



LEGEND

..... Alternate Trail Alignment

- - - Preferred Trail Alignment

Corridor for Alternative Alignments
(if preferred alignment cannot be negotiated)

MWR/Sept. 1994/649-80,002
Sheet 10 of 10

©1991 Rockford Map Pubs, Inc.
4800 W4000

W3200

SEE PAGE 35
W2400

W1600

W800

Kent County, Mich

N18000

N17200

N16400

N15600

N14800

N14000

N13200

SEE PAGE 40

Appendix D

North Country NST Quadrangle Maps (E to W)

<u>State</u>	<u>Name of Quad Map</u>	<u>Lat. (W)</u>	<u>Long. (N)</u>	<u>Map Type</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>County 2</u>	<u>In Stock</u>
MI	Freeport	85 15'	42 45'	7.5	Kent		Y
MI	Lowell	85 15'	42 55' 30"	7.5	Kent		Y
MI	Smyrna	85 15'	43 00'	7.5	Kent	Ionia	Y
MI	Cannonsburg	85 22' 30"	43 00'	7.5	Kent		Y
MI	Evans	85 22' 30"	43 07' 30"	7.5	Kent		Y
MI	Cedar Springs	85 30'	43 07' 30"	7.5	Kent		Y
MI	Sparta	85 37' 30"	43 07' 30"	7.5	Kent		Y
MI	Sand Lake SW	85 37' 30"	43 15'	7.5	Kent	Newaygo	Y

Public Involvement Contacts and General Input

The following agencies and individuals were actively involved during the EA phase of preparing this plan or were contacted for their input regarding trail alignment, location, trail uses, environmental impacts, etc., for the trail across Kent County.

National Park Service

Bill Menke, Coordinator, North Country NST (planning team co-leader)

Barbara Nelson-Jameson, Midwest Region, Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (planning team co-leader)

Tom Gilbert, Superintendent, Ice Age, North Country, and Lewis and Clark National Trails: Participated in initial scoping meetings, development of the planning process, and provided periodic input.

Kent County

Roger Sabine, Assistant Director of Planning and Landscape Architecture, Kent County Road and Park Commission (planning team member)

Kent County Road and Park Commission: Briefed by Mr. Sabine on a number of occasions. Formally briefed by Bill Menke, Barbara Nelson-Jameson, Pat Allen, and Mr. Sabine.

Michigan DNR

Mark Mandenberg, Landscape Design Specialist, Recreation and Trails Section, Forest Management Division (planning team member).

Hector Chiunti, Chief Recreation Services Branch: Participated in initial scoping meetings early in the process. Also provided input through Mr. Mandenberg.

Phil Wells, Trailways Program Manager, Recreation Services Branch: Participated in initial scoping meetings early in the process.

Bill Fuchs, Wildlife Technician, Rogue River State Game Area: Provided information regarding future trail/road plans in the game area. He also discussed the planning effort and trail passage through Rogue River and Lowell State Game Areas with his supervisor. Discussed improving existing trail sections in Rogue River State Game Area with Mr. Menke.

North Country Trail Association

April Scholtz, former Executive Director (planning team member)

Patricia Allen, Executive Director (planning team member)

Darlene Snyder, President, Western Michigan Chapter (planning team member)

Allen Adsmond (planning team member)

Art and Mary Holland: Participated in initial scoping meetings and scouting of potential routes.

West Michigan Chapter Members: During two presentations by Ms. Nelson-Jameson and Mr. Menke, they provided input on potential routing, preferred usage, etc.

Rails to Trails Conservancy

Roger Storm, Coordinator, Michigan Chapter (planning team member)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Staff in the East Lansing, Michigan, field office provided an opinion on threatened and endangered species in a letter dated March 11, 1993, signed by Charles M. Wooley, Field Supervisor.

Michigan State Historic Preservation Officer

Contacted by letter seeking input on historic features along the preferred alignment. Provided input on above ground historical properties. Provided State and National Historic Register information regarding Fallasburg Pioneer Village and Fallasburg Covered Bridge and provided the information for Appendix E. Suggested a procedure for archeological survey and concurred with NPS methodology.

Townships

Every township in the county along the four alternative routes studied during the EA phase was contacted to inform them of the planning process and seek their input. Township officials were invited to the open house meetings.

North Country Trail Association members met with every township to discuss, in general terms, the North Country Trail and the favored alignment through their township.

W. Greg Dean, Oakfield Township Supervisor: Provided input on trail alignment during a personal meeting with Ms. Nelson-Jameson and Mr. Menke on June 10, 1993.

Dorothy Bishop, Nelson Township Supervisor, Provided input on trail alignment during a personal

meeting with Ms. Nelson-Jameson and Mr. Menke on June 10, 1993.

Cities

The cities of Lowell and Cedar Springs, through which the preferred alternative passes, were contacted to inform them of the planning process and seek their input. City officials were invited to the open houses.

Michigan Mountain Bikers

Dwain Abramowski, Executive Director: Attended both the first and second open house series. Provided input on trail usage.

Sierra Club

Invited to open houses.

West Michigan Environmental Action Council

Invited to open houses.

Michigan Trail Finders

Invited to open houses.

Media

Press releases and invitations were sent to 43 area contacts.

General Public

Press releases announcing the planning process and inviting the public to open houses were sent to 43 media contacts. See Appendix G regarding generalized and specific public comments and our response.

Specific Public Comments and NPS Response

I. Summary of Input Received During the Public Involvement Process:

- A total of 134 interested individuals attended the two open house meetings in early October.
- Written comments were received from 99 individuals or organized groups either during the open houses or by mail or documented telephone conversations.
- There is an approximately equal split between those favoring and those opposing the trail location as shown in Alternative 4.
- Those opposing the Alternative 4 route are concerned primarily with loss of privacy, littering, fires, noise, trespass off the trail, vandalism, unauthorized hunting access and/or reduction in their personal hunting experience through hikers spoiling a chance, and unauthorized ATVs and snowmobiles.
- Landowners rightfully wanted a say about where the trail would cross their land.

II. National Park Service Response to the above General Concerns:

LOSS OF PRIVACY:

Every effort will be made to minimize this concern when laying out the exact location of the trail across any parcel of land . Effort will be made to screen homes and related developments from the trail through natural screening, following the back side of the property, etc. The landowner will be intimately involved in working with the trail organizations to select the location which best meets his or her needs.

It is difficult to project the level of use for the North Country Trail through Kent County. Since the trail is still being developed, no statistics for levels of use, especially on private lands, are available at this time. Based on patterns of use on other long distance trails, such as the Appalachian Trail, the North Country Trail segments located within or near populated areas will receive more use than those in more remote areas. As additional trail is developed and the trail becomes better known, increased use can be expected. In the near term, it is doubtful that a landowner would even notice hikers using the trail unless they specifically watched the trail throughout the daylight hours.

LITTERING, NOISE, TRESPASS, FIRES, AND VANDALISM:

These concerns can be grouped together under the general topic of "nuisance" impacts. Landowner concerns of this nature are consistent with concerns of landowners nationwide when a new trail is being developed. Adjoining landowners typically have fears about vandalism, littering, and access to their property for more serious crimes.

Past experience and formal studies have shown the level of these fears bears little relation to the reality as the perceived impacts do not develop after the trail is constructed. In 1992 an extensive study, *The Impact of Rail Trails*, was conducted by the NPS in cooperation with Pennsylvania State University. This study showed that problems had not developed as feared and that the vast majority of landowners were more satisfied with the trail after it was in place than they were before it was in place. Additionally, adjoining landowners found that they personally made use of the trail.

Hikers and walkers fall within the segment of our population that tends to be very sensitive to environmental issues. Experience has shown that hikers leave very little litter and normally pack out what they pack in. In fact, they are the kind of people who pick up litter left by others. Prevention and education will be accomplished through signing, brochures and other literature, talks, etc. If littering does occur, it will be cleaned up every time the trail is maintained. Any concentrations of litter normally occur near roads and other access points and are, thus, easier to monitor and clean up as necessary.

While there can be no guarantee that hikers will not stray from the trail, it is unlikely that this will happen. Signs informing the public about what types of uses are appropriate and to remind the hiker to observe good manners and protect private property, leave no rubbish, start no fires, stay on the trail, camping status, etc., will be posted periodically--if need be at every change in ownership. Maintaining signs will be done as part of routine maintenance two to three times per year. Anyone deliberately leaving the trail lands would fall under the trespass laws of the State of Michigan and would be subject to prosecution.

UNAUTHORIZED HUNTING and/or SPOILING A LANDOWNER HUNTING EXPERIENCE:

Granting permission for trail passage does not convey any hunting access or privileges. Land which is posted "closed" to hunting or fishing remains closed. This will be emphasized in signing and in literature. Unauthorized hunting would again fall under the trespass laws of the State of Michigan.

The North Country Trail Association, the Kent County Road and Park Commission, and the National Park Service will strive to educate hunters and hikers regarding trespass and other potential conflicts and dangers during hunting season through a variety of informational techniques. Hikers will be asked to avoid the trail during the time of heaviest hunting and to wear bright colors in the fall. Hunters will be reminded of standard firearm safety practices such as not shooting at a sound and not shooting toward or down a known travelway. Closure of the trail during the two weeks of gun deer season may be appropriate.

The likelihood of a hiker accidentally spoiling a landowners hunting chance is not great. The chance that a hiker would pass through the exact area, at the exact time a landowner was hunting is very remote. Many who are both hunters and hikers of long distance trails agree with this conclusion.

ATV's and OTHER UNAUTHORIZED USES:

The North Country National Scenic Trail is restricted to non motorized uses. However, there is nothing that can absolutely prevent determined ATV users from occasionally gaining access. Trail design measures will be incorporated to minimize the chance of this occurring. The trail will wind among trees and remain narrow to prevent travel by 4X4 highway type vehicles. Three and four wheelers present a more difficult problem. Techniques to prevent ATV passage, such as large boulders, barricade posts, stiles, etc. will be incorporated at all road crossings. Regarding stiles, there are a number of "through the fence" and "over the fence" type structures that have proven effective in providing passage for the foot traveler while preventing passage by un-authorized users and livestock.

While design measures can minimize problems, long term success is best achieved through education, peer pressure, landowner/neighbor observation, and vigorous law enforcement to reduce the likelihood of an ATV user getting by unobserved and with no consequences.

In summary, many of the issues raised by adjoining landowners are legitimate concerns. However, they can be addressed in a number of ways and generally do not prove to be serious concerns in the long run. The partners in the North Country Trail effort do not want to experience any of these concerns any more than do the landowners and will do everything they can to prevent unauthorized uses, illegal actions, and nuisance actions from occurring.

III. Specific Public Comments and NPS Response:

This section describes minor revisions and refinements made to the Preferred Trail Alignment and Corridor for Alternative Alignments as shown in the Final Trailway Plan, based upon specific public and landowner comments on the draft plan and EA.

1. Mr. Charles Kraskopf identified a problem with the original trail alignment where it crossed the narrow isthmus of land between Ke-Wag-A-Wan and Long Lakes in Section 31, Solon Township.

The Corridor for Alternative Alignments (corridor) was extended farther west in the above section and also in Section 6, Algoma Township to include more of the Kraskopf property. This allowed a new preferred trail alignment that stays farther south and west, than the originally proposed route, thus bypassing the area of concern. An alternative trail alignment is also shown crossing the eastern part of the Kraskopf property.

2. Mr. Jack Spoor is concerned about the proposed trail alignment following the old TS&M grade crossing the north end of his property in Section 5, Algoma Township and the potential for hikers to view his deck.

The old grade still constitutes the best trail alignment, is heavily vegetated, and is a considerable distance from the house. It will continue to be shown as the preferred trail alignment. However, an alternative alignment will be shown following the Consumers Power right-of-way or the small farmer access road—both of which are just north of the grade.

3. Misters Carl and Calvin Moore (Moore Farms) identified a problem with the original trail alignment where it followed the old TS&M grade across their farm in Section 34, Solon Township. Their pivot irrigation system and farming practices have obliterated part of the old grade. The wheels of the pivot actually follow the alignment of the old grade, thus making the original trail alignment unfeasible.

A new preferred trail alignment is shown skirting the north side of the Moore property thus voiding the problems caused by the pivot irrigator. This new alignment will be located at the extreme south side of the Powell property—just north of a row of young white pine and cottonwood. It will then cross the Able Development property for a short stretch to regain the old grade.

4. Mr. Morris is concerned about the trail alignment skirting his 1-acre home lot in Section 35, Solon Township.

A new preferred trail alignment is shown. It will stay west of Morris on the Max Haven property and then follow 17 Mile Road to the east. This arrangement provides for less impact than the original alignment.

5. Mr. and Mrs. Larry Jenkinson and Mr. Floyd Calkins are concerned about the proposed trail alignment following the old TS&M grade across their properties located in Section 5, Courtland Township.

Since their homes are not close to the grade and since the grade still constitutes the best long term trail

alignment, it will continue to be shown as the preferred trail alignment. However, an alternate trail alignment is shown following the lightly wooded areas on the extreme west end of the two properties and then the extreme south side of the Calkins property.

6. The original trail alignment was shifted slightly to skirt the small acreage belonging to Mr. Max Bird in Section 4, Courtland Township.

7. Mr. Donald Osborn was concerned and Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Avery identified a problem with the original trail alignment following the old TS&M grade across their properties in Section 4, Courtland Township. The Avery's concern stems from their recent construction of a new home directly on the grade and the fact that the grade is now their one quarter mile long driveway, thus making the original trail alignment unfeasible.

The old TS&M grade across the Osborn property is wooded and would be a good trail route except for the fact that it does nothing to void the problem with the new Avery house and driveway. A new preferred trail alignment is shown as either skirting north of the Osborn and Avery properties or following the north extremity of the Avery property.

8. Mr. and Mrs. D. M. White identified a problem with the original trail alignment following the old TS&M grade across their property in Section 3, Courtland Township. There are two houses very close to the grade and 1/8 mile of it has been converted to driveway, thus making the original trail alignment unfeasible.

The preferred trail alignment has been shifted slightly to leave the grade just west of the White property where it will then follow along the south side of the wooded grade (or fencerow) on the extreme north side of property belonging to Roger Swift.

9. Mr. Bob Sowerby (Sowerby Farms) identified a problem with the original trail alignment following the old TS&M grade across their property in Section 1, Courtland Township. The grade is no longer in place due to farming practices. Its former location is now a cultivated field, thus making the original trail alignment unfeasible.

A new preferred trail alignment is shown following the wooded fencerow and woods skirting the west, south, and east sides of the Sowerby Farm. On the south side it will temporarily loop a little farther south on the Donald Swift property to get around a small wetland.

10. Mr. and Mrs. Russell Harper identified a problem with the original trail alignment following the old TS&M grade across their property in Section 6, Oakfield Township. The grade is occupied by a mobile home belonging to their daughter and son-in-law, thus making the original trail alignment unfeasible.

A new preferred trail alignment is shown, passing north of the Harpers, on the property of John Kennedy.

11. The original trail alignment was shifted slightly to skirt the small acreage belonging to Mr. A. Dean in Section 18, Oakfield Township.

12. Mr. William Dean is concerned about the proposed trail alignment across his property in Section 19, Oakfield Township.

The original alignment still appears to be the best route and will continue to be shown as the preferred trail alignment. An alternative alignment which skirts to the west has been identified.

13. Mr. Bob Sowerby (Sowerby Farms) is concerned about the proposed trail alignment across his property in Section 20, Oakfield Township.

With only minor adjustment, a trail alignment which skirts the Sowerby property by staying west and south on Darcy Porter and LeRoy Addis respectively is feasible and will be followed. This may require a temporary walk on about 1/8 mile of Nugent Avenue.

14. Mr. Joe Jakeway, Mr. Philip Radts, Mr. Lawrence Donovan (landowners) and Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Harig (lease cabin from Donovan) are concerned about the proposed trail alignment across their property in Sections 5 and 8, Grattan Township.

The original alignment still appears to be the best route and will continue to be shown as the preferred trail alignment. We will work with the four parties to identify a route which impacts them the least and will skirt as far away as possible from the Harig cabin.

15. A block of landowners in Sections 3, 10, and 15, Vergennes Township are concerned about the proposed trail alignment across their properties.

The original alignment passes through the Koenig and Thurston properties to gain access to a lightly used Mid-Michigan rail line and then an abandoned road right-of-way owned by Kent County. The rail line and the road right-of-way are then followed through the properties of all of the remaining parties of concern.

The original alignment still appears to be the best route and will continue to be shown as the preferred trail alignment. An alternate alignment will be shown following 4 Mile and Lincoln Lake Roads to skirt the Koenig and Thurston properties and gain access to the rail line. Mid-Michigan Railroad is generally agreeable to working out a trail alignment in their right-of-way. Therefore, we see no further reason to abandon the remainder of the original alignment.

16. Mr. Jerrold Richmond is concerned about the proposed trail alignment across his property in Section 14, Vergennes Township.

The original alignment still appears to be the best route and will continue to be shown as the preferred trail alignment. An alternate alignment will be shown passing through smaller ownerships just south of Richmond.

17. Mr. Robert Biggs is concerned about the proposed trail alignment across his property in Section 14, Vergennes Township.

The original alignment still appears to be the best route and will continue to be shown as the preferred trail alignment. An alternate alignment will be shown passing west and south of Biggs. This will involve negotiating with seven additional landowners—six outside the original corridor.

18. Mr. Thomas Plummer is concerned about the proposed trail alignment across his property in Section 36, Lowell Township.

After more detailed study, it appears as though the route across Plummer may be quite wet. Therefore, a revised preferred alignment continuing south for another 3/4 mile along the Mid-Michigan Railroad and then 1/2 mile west along the the main C&O Railroad will be shown. An alternative alignment north and west of Plummer (still within the original corridor) will also be shown.

19. Mr. Robert Powers is concerned about the proposed trail alignment across his property in Section 35, Bowne Township.

The original alignment, along Bear Creek, still appears to be the best route and will continue to be shown as the preferred trail alignment. An alternate alignment will be shown passing northwest of the Powers property.

NORTHWEST REGIONAL OFFICE	
☐	Regional Director
☐	Secretary
☐	Deputy Regional Director
☐	Administrative
☒	Operations
☐	Public Affairs
☐	Training
☐	Records Management
☐	Telephone Room
☐	Mail Room
☐	Janitor
☐	Security
☐	Food Service
☐	Transportation
☐	Medical Services
☐	Legal Services
☐	Financial Services
☐	Information Systems
☐	Other
Action Taken & Date	
CC	MWRD, PED 3/18/93 98.
	Supt. Ice Box 3/18/93 98.
	MWRD, Fiscal Mgt 3/18/93 98.

NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMISSION

JERRY C. BARTNIK
LARRY DEVUYST
PAUL EISELE
JAMES P. HILL
DAVID HOLLI
JOEY M. SPANO
JORDAN B. TATTER



JOHN ENGLER, Governor

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Stevens T. Mason Building, P.O. Box 30028, Lansing, MI 48909

ROLAND HARMES, Director

October 7, 1993

Mr. Thomas L. Gilbert
Manager, Ice Age, North Country,
and Lewis and Clark National Trails
700 Rayovac Drive, Suite 100
Madison, WI 53711

RECEIVED

OCT 14 1993

A T R

Dear Mr. Gilbert:

Your request for information was checked against known localities for special natural features recorded in the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) database, which is part of the Natural Heritage Program, Wildlife Division. The MNFI is an ongoing, continuously updated information base, which is the only comprehensive single source of existing data on Michigan's endangered, threatened, or otherwise significant plant and animal species, natural plant communities, and other natural features.

However, this database is not yet complete for all areas of the state, since some areas have not been significantly or thoroughly surveyed for natural features. Further, populations of plants and animals, and natural communities are constantly changing. Therefore, absence of known records in the MNFI database should not be taken as a definitive statement on lack of special features at a site. In some cases, the only way to obtain a definitive statement on the status of natural features is to have a competent biologist perform a complete field survey.

The presence of listed species does not necessarily preclude development but may require alterations in the development plan. An endangered species permit will be required from the Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division, if any listed species would be taken or harmed.

If the project is located on or adjacent to wetlands, inland lakes, or streams, additional permits may be required. Contact the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Land and Water Management Division, P.O. Box 30028, Lansing, MI 48909 (517-373-1170).

The following is a summary of the results of the MNFI review of the site(s) in question:
Kent County, Proposed North Country Trail Route.

- In Bowne Township (T5N R9W Sect. 34/35) there is an occurrence of the state-threatened Virginia bluebells (*Mertansia virginica*). A survey should be completed in this area before any of the trail construction begins. The trail should be routed so as not to impact any the population in the area.
- In Lowell Township (T6N R9W Sect. 25), the area is rich in important natural communities such as southern swamp, emergent marsh, and bog. There is also one state-threatened plant in this area. The area should not be impacted as long as the trail remains in the path of the old railroad grade.

- In Vergennes Township (7N R9W Sect. 24) in the Fallsburg Park area there five plants that are of concern. These should not be impacted if the trail continues on existing trails and no new areas are impacted.

Thank you for your advance coordination in addressing the protection of Michigan's Natural Resource Heritage. If you have further questions, please call me at 517-373-1263.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Weise

Thomas F. Weise
Endangered Species Coordinator
Wildlife Division

TFW:cjm

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

RICHARD H. AUSTIN

• SECRETARY OF STATE



LANSING

MICHIGAN 48918

Bureau of Michigan History, State Historic Preservation Office
Michigan Library and Historical Center
717 West Allegan Street
Lansing, Michigan 48918-1800

May 9, 1994

RON COCKRELL
REGIONAL HISTORIAN
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
MIDWEST REGION
1709 JACKSON STREET
OMAHA NB 68102-2571

MIDWEST REGIONAL OFFICE	
Regional Director	
Secretary	
Deputy Reg. Director	
Administration	
Operations	
Plan. & Resource Prog.	✓
Rec. Mgmt.	
Public Affairs	
ISO Office	
Public Health Services	
Action taken & date	

RE: ER-930280 North Country National Scenic Trail, Kent County (NPS Reference:
H4217 (MWR-PC))

Dear Mr. Cockrell:

We are writing in response to a letter from Mr. William Schenk, Acting Regional Director, regarding the draft "North Country National Scenic Trailways Plan: Analysis of Alternatives and Environmental Assessment, Kent County, Michigan." As Mr. Schenk mentioned, Dr. Dean Anderson of the Office of the State Archaeologist has recently spoken with Dr. Mark Lynott about the project. This discussion was very useful in helping us understand the project and the proposed approach to trail construction and the preservation of archaeological sites.

Given the very minimal ground disturbance involved in trail construction, we agree that conducting a survey after trail construction is a prudent means of protecting archaeological sites from the effects of foot traffic and trail use. We request that you submit a map of the trail route to us after the trail has been constructed. We will review the trail route at that time and comment on any archaeological concerns.

Thank you again for your assistance in the review process. If you have any questions, please contact Kristine Wilson, Environmental Review Coordinator at (517) 335-2721.

Sincerely,

Kathryn B. Eckert
State Historic Preservation Officer

KBE:DLA:kw

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN THE
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
AND
KENT COUNTY ROAD AND PARK COMMISSION,
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, and
NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

FOR THE
ACQUISITION, DEVELOPMENT, OPERATION, MAINTENANCE, AND PROTECTION
OF THE
NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL
IN
KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN

Article I - Background and Objectives

This agreement is made and entered into, by and between the National Park Service, hereinafter referred to as the "NPS," the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, hereinafter referred to as the "DNR," the Kent County Road and Park Commission, hereinafter referred to as "Kent County Parks," and the North Country Trail Association, hereinafter referred to as the "NCTA" in furtherance of the purposes of and pursuant to the powers and authorities contained in the National Trails System Act of October 2, 1968, as amended [16 U.S.C. 1241 et seq.], hereinafter referred to as the "Act."

This agreement is for the purpose of cooperating in the completion and long-term management of the North Country National Scenic Trail in Kent County, Michigan, hereinafter referred to as the "Trail," and clarifying the responsibilities of each party.

On March 5, 1980, Congress amended the Act to authorize and establish the North Country National Scenic Trail as a component of the National Trails System [94 Stat. 67; 16 U.S.C. 1244(a)(8)]. The trail extends approximately 3,200 miles from the vicinity of Crown Point, New York, to the Missouri River in North Dakota, in the vicinity of Lake Sakakawea State Park and

Garrison Dam. The trail traverses portions of seven States: New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota. The Secretary of the Interior was assigned administrative responsibility for the Trail.

The Act provides, in Section 7(h) [16 U.S.C. 1246(h)], that when determined to be in the public interest, the Secretary of the Interior may enter into written cooperative agreements with States or their political subdivisions, landowners, private organizations, or individuals to operate, develop, and maintain any portion of a national scenic trail either within or outside a Federally-administered area.

Because the Trail involves only a small portion of Federal lands and the Act provides that the development, operation, and maintenance of the Trail shall be a cooperative venture, the Secretary of the Interior has determined it to be in the public interest to enter into this agreement.

The Secretary of the Interior has delegated overall administrative responsibility for the Trail to the NPS. The NPS, in cooperation with public and private interests, completed a Comprehensive Plan for Management and Use of the Trail in September 1982. The NPS is responsible at the Federal level for carrying out the provisions of the Act as they relate to the Trail by coordinating, guiding, and assisting the efforts of others to acquire, develop, operate, protect, and maintain the Trail in accordance with the comprehensive plan.

Kent County Parks is the agency primarily responsible for providing and maintaining county outdoor recreation resources, including trails. In June 1990, Kent County Parks initiated this project by requesting technical assistance from the NPS for planning the North Country Trail corridor through Kent County. The projected 63 miles of the Trail within the county and Kent County's active involvement with the project form the basis for their participation in the development and management of the Trail.

The DNR is the State agency responsible for providing and maintaining outdoor recreation resources of Statewide significance, including trails, in Michigan. The Trail passes through both the upper and lower peninsulas of Michigan with a projected total length of 875 miles. This is more than any other State and amounts to about 27 percent of the total projected length of the Trail. Michigan's Statewide significance of the Trail and the involvement of State lands and recreation facilities in the route of the Trail, form the basis for the DNR's participation in the development and management of the Trail in Kent County. Currently, a certified segment of the North Country Trail is located in the Rogue River State Game area and a proposed segment has been recommended for the Lowell State Game Area in Kent County.

The NCTA is a private, nonprofit corporation composed of individual members and affiliated organizations. It was formed in 1981 and incorporated in the State of Michigan on April 8, 1985, under Act 162, Public Acts of 1982, pertaining to nonprofit corporations. Its purpose is to help acquire, build, maintain, promote, and protect the Trail. It does this primarily by organizing and coordinating private sector involvement in such efforts, including fund raising and the recruiting, organizing, and training of volunteers to build and maintain the Trail.

Article II - Statements of Work

A. The NPS, Kent County Parks, DNR, and NCTA agree:

1. To coordinate their activities and programs related to the Trail to assure that the efforts of each party complement those of the other, with the objective of completing and maintaining the Trail across Kent County and incorporating it into the official route of the Trail. The parties will communicate and meet as needed to review their activities and programs and discuss ways of improving the effectiveness of their mutual efforts.

2. To cooperate with the other parties in actively pursuing Trail publicity and public relations, giving due credit to the roles of each.

3. That the planned route for the Trail consists of an approved corridor, generally 1/4 to 1 mile wide, within which the Trail shall be located and lands or interests in lands may be secured or permanently acquired by cooperators for the purpose of establishing the Trail. The authorized Trail acquisition width will normally be between 100 and 1,000 feet. Larger areas shall be considered if they have scenic, environmental, or ecological significance to the Trail. Temporary routes may be designated to serve the needs of users to connect between permanent existing segments. Temporary routes normally will only be secured by agreement, lease, permission, or other temporary arrangements with the owner or governmental body having jurisdiction over the lands involved.

B. The NPS agrees to:

1. Provide overall leadership for the planning, acquisition, development, operation, maintenance, and protection of the Trail as a component of the National Trails System, ensuring that the activities of the other parties conform to the provisions of the Act and the policies and procedures in the Comprehensive Plan for Management and Use of the Trail.

2. With the advice, assistance, and agreement of the other parties--identify, plan, map, and publish any route revisions which may become necessary.

3. Prepare, as appropriate and with input from the other parties, standard NPS planning documents for the Trail, including an environmental assessment, implementation and management plan, interpretive prospectus, etc.

4. Acquire or accept title to lands for the purpose of protecting the Trail to the extent it may have authority to do so.

5. Develop or assist in the development of the Trail, including appropriate recreation and interpretation facilities, to the extent it has authority to do so. All management and recreational activities will be the primary responsibility of the area land managing agency, as outlined in the Comprehensive Management Plan and any subsequent amendments or clarifications of the Plan.

6. Ensure compliance with applicable Federal environmental, cultural resource, and other laws and regulations (National Environmental Policy Act, Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act, etc.).

7. Respond to requests from the other parties to this agreement for technical assistance and advice on Trail related matters including but not limited to design, construction and maintenance techniques, interpretation, protection, etc.

8. Maintain official records of the route of the Trail.

9. Review applications for certification and certify qualified new or relocated segments of the Trail, provided such segments follow the planned route of the Trail in Kent County and are developed, managed, and marked in accordance with the broad guidelines in the Comprehensive Plan for Management and Use of the North Country National Scenic Trail.

10. Supply sufficient quantities of the official Trail marker, including necessary replacements, to managing authorities responsible for certified trail segments.

11. Develop and issue Federal regulations for the Trail, as may be necessary, in consultation with

the other parties to this agreement and with other affected entities, as specified in section 7(i) of the Act.

12. Recognize the NCTA, other cooperating private voluntary interests, individuals, and landowners, as appropriate, as Volunteers-in-Parks (VIPs) through execution of agreements for individual and sponsored voluntary services. The purposes of VIP agreements are to formalize the commitment of volunteers to the Trail and provide them with the protection enjoyed by Federal employees in circumstances of tort claims and injury compensation. Recognition of the NCTA or any other organization or individual as a VIP shall be contingent on their agreeing to meet the record keeping and reporting requirements of the program.

13. Provide limited financial assistance, when deemed to be appropriate and in the public interest, to cooperating public and private interests to encourage participation in the acquisition, protection, operation, development, or maintenance of the Trail.

14. Provide tools, equipment, safety equipment, supplies, and materials to the NCTA for use by volunteers in building and maintaining the Trail.

C. Kent County Parks agrees to:

1. Participate in the operation, maintenance, and protection of the Trail ~~throughout Kent County.~~
~~Kent County will have primary responsibility for determining the exact location of the Trail on~~
county owned lands.

2. Advise and assist the NPS, DNR, and NCTA in planning any necessary revisions to the Trail route in Kent County.

3. Provide for law enforcement along the Trail on county properties (as budgets allow) and work with the Kent County Sheriff to encourage response to law enforcement violations along the Trail throughout the county.
4. Participate in the appraisal of any lands bought by any of the parties to this MOU.
5. List, show, and promote the Trail as a National Scenic Trail on all appropriate county maps, brochures, etc. Development of such textual materials shall be a cooperative effort by all parties and the prominent roles of the other parties to this agreement shall be recognized.

D. The DNR agrees to:

1. Participate in the planning, acquisition, development, operation, maintenance, and protection of the Trail and trail revisions on DNR lands.
2. Apply to the NPS for certification of all qualified Trail segments on DNR lands.
3. Recognize the Trail as a significant recreation resource and natural resource management consideration in the planning and management of all DNR lands and programs in Kent County.

E. The NCTA agrees to:

1. Take the leadership role in coordinating and securing the involvement of private interests and private sector resources in the planning, acquisition, development, operation, maintenance, and protection of the Trail. This includes, but is not limited to, recruiting, organizing, training, and directing volunteers to work on the trail; acquiring, protecting, and managing Trail lands; and raising the funds necessary to support these activities through corporate, foundation, individual, and other private donations as well as securing available governmental assistance.

2. Advise and assist the NPS in planning any necessary revisions to the Trail route, as well as temporary routes.
3. Assist NPS, Kent County Parks, and DNR in coordinating with local governmental officials and landowners regarding the Trail route and use of the Trail. This includes seeking rights of way for the trail through private lands.
4. Construct and maintain the Trail across private lands for which it is the managing authority and across public lands in accordance with state and federal laws, regulations, Department policies, and mutually agreed upon management plans.
5. Apply to the NPS for certification of all qualified Trail segments for which NCTA is the managing authority and assist Kent County Parks with the certification application when they are the managing authority.
6. Inspect the Trail, throughout Kent County, twice per year and perform routine maintenance as needed to ensure that the Trail is in good repair and suitable for public travel and recreation. On trail rehabilitation projects which are more than routine in nature, NCTA will coordinate and seek assistance from NPS, Kent County Parks, and the DNR.

Article III - Term of Agreement

This agreement shall continue in effect for 5 years from the date of the last signatory party unless terminated at an earlier date in accordance with Article V. At the expiration of this agreement, it may be successively renewed for additional periods of 5 years or less by mutual agreement of all parties after reviewing its benefits.

Article IV - Key Officials

The key NPS officials are the Manager, Ice Age, North Country, and Lewis and Clark National Trails, and the Coordinator, North Country National Scenic Trail, both located at 700 Rayovac Drive, Suite 100, Madison, Wisconsin 53711.

The key Kent County Parks officials are the Director of Planning, Kent County Road and Park Commission and the Assistant Director of Planning, Kent County Road and Park Commission, both located at 1500 Scribner NW., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49504.

The key DNR officials are the Director, the Chief, Forest Management Division, the Chief, Wildlife Division, and the State Trails Coordinator, Department of Natural Resources, all located at Box 30028, Lansing, Michigan 48909.

The key NCTA officials are the President, currently Mr. Derek Blount, 906 North Alexander, Royal Oak, Michigan 48067, and the Executive Director, Ms. Pat Allen, 2215 Sylvan Drive SE., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506.

Article V - Termination

This agreement may be terminated upon 60 days advance written notice given by one party to the others, or it may be terminated earlier or revised by mutual consent of the parties. Termination of this agreement does not affect any operation and maintenance agreements which any of the parties may have with other cooperators.

Article VI - Standard Provisions

The obligation of the NPS, Kent County Parks, the DNR, and NCTA to perform the responsibilities specified in this agreement is contingent upon the necessary funds being available through governmental appropriations or other sources. No legal liability on the part of the NPS, Kent County Parks, the DNR, or NCTA to carry out such responsibilities shall arise unless and until funds are available to cover the expenses associated with performing the responsibilities specified herein.

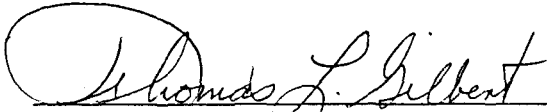
Additional NPS Provisions

Nothing in this agreement shall affect or interfere with fulfillment of the obligations or exercise of the authority of the NPS or any other Federal Agency to manage the lands along the Trail route (within the boundaries of areas they administer) and the programs under their jurisdiction in accordance with their basic land management responsibilities.

No member of or delegate to Congress, or resident Commissioner, shall be admitted to any share or part of this agreement, or to any benefit that may arise therefrom, but this provision shall not be construed to extend to this agreement if made with a corporation for its general benefit.

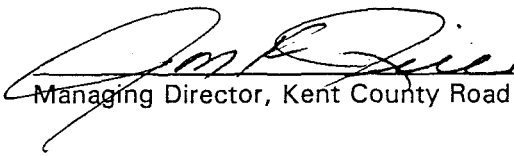
During the performance of this agreement, the participants agree to abide by the terms of Executive Order 11246 on nondiscrimination and will not discriminate against any person because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The participants will take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed without regard to their race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have executed this Memorandum of Understanding as of the last date written below.



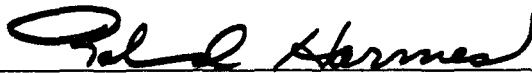
Manager, Ice Age, North Country, and Lewis and Clark National Trails
National Park Service

11/20/95
Date



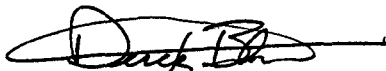
Managing Director, Kent County Road and Parks Commission

11/14/95
Date



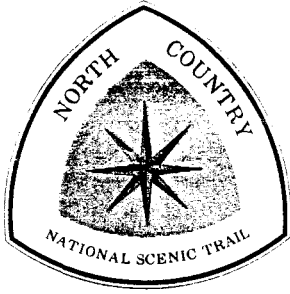
Director, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

9-20-95
Date



President, North Country Trail Association

10-10-95
Date



NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

A Cooperative Partnership

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

WHAT IS THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL?

In March, 1980 Federal legislation authorized the establishment of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NST) as a component of the National Trails System. It is one of only eight trails authorized by Congress to be National Scenic Trails. National Scenic Trails are long distance, non-motorized trails, patterned after the renowned Appalachian Trail, that follow major geographic features or pass through scenic areas.

In many ways, the North Country NST is similar in concept to the Appalachian NST. In other ways, it is uniquely different as it takes the visitor through a great variety of landscapes rather than following a major geologic feature. When completed, the North Country NST will extend approximately 3,200 miles from the vicinity of Crown Point, New York to Lake Sakakawea State Park, on the Missouri River, in North Dakota, where it joins the route of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

Currently, just under 1,200 miles of the trail are in place and certified as meeting the standards of a NST. Another 600-800 miles, some of which are on roads, are walkable but not yet certified.

EXACTLY WHAT IS THE CORRIDOR AND WHAT ARE ITS LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS?

The corridor was selected because it connected other recreation resources and provided for scenic trail passage. It is an opportunity area within which the North Country Trail Association or Kent County will attempt to obtain trail passage. Passage may be obtained by various agreements, easements, deed restrictions, or outright purchase. These can be donated or purchased from willing sellers only.

The corridor itself has no legal standing; it is not a recorded instrument. It simply defines the limits of the National Park Service's, Michigan Department of Natural Resources', Kent County Road and Park Commission's, and North Country Trail Association's involvement with the project. The National Park Service has no authority to purchase lands or easements for the North Country Trail. The corridor was deliberately designed wide enough so that if one landowner is not interested in the project, perhaps his or her neighbor will be. There is no intention of acquiring the entire corridor--just a trailway that is approximately 50 - 1000 feet in width depending on circumstances and natural resource features. As stated previously, lands for the trail will be acquired only from willing sellers. Designation of a corridor carries no threat which would cause a landowner to change their lifestyle.

Designation of a corridor carries no threat which would cause a landowner to change their lifestyle.

Landowners will be fully involved in determining exactly where the trail crosses their land.

WHY OR HOW WAS THE EXACT TRAILWAY SELECTED AND HOW WILL IT BE APPLIED?

As stated earlier, the corridor was selected to connect a number of parks, recreation facilities, and public lands. The trailway itself was placed within the corridor to avoid conflicts with farming practices and undue invasion of privacy.

It avoids passing through the middle of fields. Consequently, the trailway is normally located at the back sides of farms (away from occupancy sites), along or through wooded areas, skirting the edges of wetlands, and along wooded fencerows. When determining the exact location of the trail route, every effort will be made to minimize this concern through taking advantage of natural screening. If a landowner agrees/desires to be part of the project, they will be fully involved in determining exactly where the trail crosses their land.

WHAT USES ARE ALLOWED ON THE TRAIL? HOW ARE UNDESIRABLE USES CONTROLLED?

The North Country Trail is built primarily for pleasure walking and hiking. However, in places other uses such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, horseback riding, and bicycling are appropriate and are allowed. On all public lands, local managers determine the uses that will be allowed in accordance with their management objectives and the capability of the land to accommodate the various resources.

Through the Environmental Assessment/Public Involvement Process, it was determined that the primary uses of the trail in Kent County would be hiking, backpacking, snowshoeing, and ungroomed cross country skiing. Horses and bikes will not be allowed on this segment of the trail. Trail design measures and various structures such as barriers, stiles, gates, or fences can be strategically placed along the trail to discourage undesirable uses from occurring.

Snowmobiles, ATV's, and other motorized vehicles are not allowed on any National Scenic Trail.

WHAT LEVEL OF TRAIL USE CAN BE EXPECTED?

It is difficult to project the level of use for the North Country Trail through Kent County. Since the trail is still being developed, no statistics for levels of use, especially on private lands, are available at this time. Based on patterns of use on other long distance trails, such as the Appalachian Trail, the North Country Trail segments located within or near populated areas will receive more use than those in more remote areas. As additional trail is developed and the trail becomes better known, increased use can be expected. In the near term, it is doubtful that a landowner would even notice hikers on the trail unless they specifically watched the trail throughout the daylight hours.

HOW IS THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL MANAGED?

The North Country NST is a cooperative project of many public agencies and private organizations.

○ National Park Service:

The National Park Service (NPS) is responsible for overall administration of the North Country NST and has primary responsibility for planning the trail and interpreting the landscape through which it passes. NPS provides color brochures describing the trail and the signs to mark its location. Actual development and management of the trail, however, will be accomplished through many cooperating Federal, State, and local agencies and private trail organizations. When viewed in this manner, it can be seen that the North Country NST will become a collection of Federal, State, County, Township, and private trails.

○ Michigan Department of Natural Resources:

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has responsibility for an integrated system of trails within the State and directly manages segments of the North Country Trail occurring on state owned lands. These include seven State Forest segments, five State Park segments, and one State Game Area segment. The one State Game Area segment is The Rogue River State Game Area, within Kent County.

It is anticipated that the trail will also pass through Lowell State Game Area. Otherwise, the DNR anticipates little direct involvement with the North Country NST in Kent County.

○ North Country Trail Association:

The North Country Trail Association (NCTA) is the primary citizens organization formed to support efforts to develop and promote the North Country NST. The NCTA is a private, nonprofit corporation composed of individual members and affiliated organizations. It was formed in 1981 and incorporated in the State of Michigan on April 8, 1985. National headquarters are in White Cloud, Michigan. Its purpose is to help acquire, build, maintain, promote, and protect the Trail. It does this primarily by organizing and coordinating private sector involvement in such efforts as fund raising and the recruiting, organizing, and training of volunteers to build and maintain the Trail. It is anticipated that the West Michigan NCTA Chapter which currently has about 75 members will accept responsibility for much of the trail construction and maintenance within Kent County.

○ Kent County Road and Park Commission:

One of the responsibilities of the Kent County Road and Park Commission is to manage a system of County Parks and Trails. They are responsible for planning, acquisition, and management of recreation facilities necessary to meet the needs of the citizens of the County. It is anticipated that they will become the Local Managing Authority for any segment of the trail completed in Kent County.

○ Local Municipalities:

It is possible that governmental entities such as Townships or Cities could be the Local Managing Authority for portions of the trail should they desire. If the route of the North Country NST fulfills a trail network need for a municipality, they could work to complete that section of trail. At the very least, it is hoped that municipalities, civic groups, and individuals will volunteer to perform routine maintenance of a section of the trail through the "Adopt-A-Trail" program.

HOW IS THE TRAIL BUILT, WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE, AND HOW WILL IT BE MAINTAINED?

Development and maintenance of the Trail is a cooperative effort of many public and private agencies. In Kent County, volunteers organized by the North Country Trail Association will assume the bulk of the responsibility for trail development and maintenance. Kent County has a strong, active NCTA Chapter that has built over seven miles of the North Country Trail, in the Rogue River State Game Area, since the mid 1980's. They also maintain many miles of the trail in the Manistee National Forest. Work crews from publicly sponsored programs also build trail. NCTA will assume responsibility for routine maintenance and will welcome volunteers to "Adopt" a certain trail segment.

Trail construction generally consists of clearing a path through brush and woods, usually along the back sides of private properties. Vegetation is trimmed enough to keep it from touching the hiker or their pack (usually about four feet wide and eight feet high) with extra allowance for seasonal growth. Only brush and very small trees are cut. The trail winds between existing trees which are left in place. On flat ground, the path remains natural and ungraded but when traversing steeper slopes, some "benching" may be done, in order to provide a flat walking surface, and simple, native material, erosion control devices are used when the trail is going up or down hills. Puncture board walks and simple bridges are used to cross seeps and water courses. Where necessary, devices, called stiles, for crossing fences are installed to avoid any damage to the fence or the possibility of leaving a gate open.

The Trail is marked with short vertical paint blazes or small plastic diamonds placed on trees facing the hiker coming from either direction. Small blue and gold, 3 1/2 inch North Country Trail emblems are placed where the trail crosses roads and at about 1/2 mile intervals along the trail. Other signs informing the public of what types of

uses are appropriate and to remind the hiker to: observe good manners and protect private property....leave no rubbish....start no fires....stay on the trail...etc are provided. Once a trail is developed, the chapter has scheduled work days to keep the trail cleared and signed and to monitor the trail for safety and misuse. The trail will also be periodically visited by public land managers, in this case, the Kent County Road and Park Commission and occasionally the National Park Service.

Law enforcement along the trail is provided by the County Sheriffs Department and others that have legal jurisdiction over the areas through which the trail passes.

WHAT FACILITIES WILL BE PROVIDED FOR TRAIL USERS?

○ Camping and Drinking Water:

These are typically provided at intervals of about 10 miles along the Trail. In Kent County, these needs can be met at existing public and private campgrounds and parks and in communities along the way. Facilities at Tyler Creek Campground, Lowell State Game Area, Fallasburg County Park, Wabasis Lake County Park, Long Lake County Park, Rogue River State Game Area, and in the communities of Lowell and Cedar Springs are examples. In addition, a hostel exists at Wabasis Lake County Park.

If additional facilities are eventually warranted and no public land is available, negotiations with landowners for specific low impact campsites on larger tracts of private property where they are unobtrusive and buffered from surrounding developments will be initiated.

○ Parking Areas:

Trail access parking areas have been provided along the Trail on many of the segments located on public land. Similar trailheads are included in the planning for new trail segments and may include toilets, drinking water and informational sign boards.

○ Food and Supplies:

Hikers who are out for more than a few days need to resupply their food and sometimes replace equipment. They also enjoy a break in the routine of eating trail food and sleeping on the ground. These long distance hiker needs can be met in the stores, restaurants, B and B's, etc. located in the communities along or near the trail.

IS A PERMANENT RIGHT-OF-WAY BEING PRESERVED?

Yes and no. While this is the ideal arrangement, the principal parties do not currently have the where-with-all to do this in all cases. The National Park Service has no authority to acquire lands for the North Country NST. Once the route is approved, it is possible that other entities may endeavor to purchase either fee simple or scenic easements to protect the trail permanently. Any purchases will be on a **WILLING SELLER/WILLING BUYER** basis only. Tax deductible easements can be donated to either the National Park Service or to other qualified entities but again would be on a **WILLING DONOR** basis only.

When permanent easements are not possible, "handshake" agreements are sometimes used on an interim basis.

ARE LANDOWNERS LEGALLY LIABLE FOR INJURIES TO TRAIL USERS?

If you sell or donate your land or an easement to the North Country Trail Association, the National Park Service, or to Kent County, then the liability rests with them. If you do not do either of the above, but merely grant permission for the trail to cross your land, you will be protected by Michigan's very strong recreation liability law--Michigan Statute 300.201. Landowners who do not receive "valuable consideration" for allowing recreational use of their land are liable only for injuries caused by gross negligence or willful and wanton misconduct intending to harm recreationists.

Landowner liability protection is afforded in a number of ways.

Additional protection can be afforded to landowners who sign up with the National Park Service as a Volunteer In the Park (VIP). These individuals are then considered to be federal employees and would have the backing of the Federal Government regarding any potential tort action against them. In order to receive this protection, a landowner would have to execute a letter or other simple, written agreement allowing the trail for a certain period of time--probably 5 years or more.

IS HUNTING ALLOWED ALONG THE TRAIL?

In areas of public land such as National and State Forests, State Game Areas, etc. hunters often use the trail for access to hunting areas. However, any hunting must be done in accordance with all applicable seasons and regulations of the State through which the trail is passing. Normally trail use is restricted to non-consumptive activities such as bird watching, nature photography, etc.

Granting permission for trail passage does not convey any hunting access or privileges. Land which is posted "closed" to hunting or fishing remains closed. This will be emphasized in signing and in literature. Unauthorized hunting would fall under the trespass laws of the State of Michigan.

The North Country Trail Association, the Kent County Road and Park Commission, and the National Park Service will strive to educate hunters and hikers regarding trespass and other potential conflicts and dangers during hunting season through a variety of informational techniques. Hikers will be asked to avoid the trail during the time of heaviest hunting and to wear bright colors in the fall. Hunters will be reminded of standard firearm safety practices such as not shooting at a sound and not shooting toward or down a known travelway. Closure of the trail during the two weeks of gun deer season may be appropriate.

The likelihood of a hiker accidentally spoiling a landowners hunting chance is not great. The chance that a hiker would pass through the exact area, at the exact time a landowner was hunting is very remote.

WHAT ABOUT LITTERING, NOISE, TRESPASS, FIRES, AND VANDALISM?

These concerns can be grouped together under the general topic of "nuisance" impacts. Landowner concerns of this nature are consistent with concerns of landowners nationwide when a new trail is being developed. Adjoining landowners typically have fears about vandalism, littering, and access to their property for more serious crimes.

Past experience and formal studies have shown the level of these fears bears little relation to the reality as the perceived impacts do not develop after the trail is constructed. In 1992 an extensive study, *The Impact of Rail Trails*, was conducted by the National Park Service in cooperation with Pennsylvania State University. This study showed that problems had not developed as feared and that the vast majority of landowners were more satisfied with the trail after it was in place than they were before it was in place. Additionally, adjoining landowners found that they personally made use of the trail.

Hikers and walkers fall within the segment of our population that tends to be very sensitive to environmental issues. They tend to have a strong land ethic and respect the rights of others. Prevention and education will be accomplished through signing, brochures and other literature, talks, etc. If littering does occur, it will be cleaned up every time the trail is maintained. Experience has shown that hikers leave very little litter and normally pack out what they pack in. Any concentrations of litter normally occur near roads and other access points and are, thus, easier to monitor and clean up as necessary.

While there can be no guarantee that hikers will not stray from the trail, it is unlikely that this will happen. Signs informing the public about what types of uses are appropriate and to remind the hiker to observe good manners and protect private property, leave no rubbish, start no fires, stay on the trail, camping status, etc., will be posted periodically--perhaps at every change in ownership if need be. Maintaining signs will be done as part of routine maintenance two to three times per year. Anyone deliberately leaving the trail would fall under the trespass laws of the State of Michigan and would be subject to prosecution.

HOW LONG BEFORE I AM CONTACTED AND HOW LONG WILL IT BE BEFORE THE TRAIL IS COMPLETED?

Because the FONSI has now been signed, it is possible that you may be contacted at any time. Practically speaking, however, it could be months or even years before you are contacted. This depends on a complex set of circumstances including: volunteer availability and interest, funding availability, and the priorities set by the various partners in this project as to which part of the county to first concentrate our efforts. It is our intent to complete a several mile long, useable segment of trail in one location before moving on to another segment--rather than jumping all over the county from individual landowner to individual landowner.

If you are anxious to have your property become part of the trail, or there is a personal advantage (such as a conservation easement donation/tax reduction), please initiate the contact by calling or writing to one of the partners--preferably the North Country Trail Association or the Kent County Road and Park Commission.

All of the partners to this project recognize that the development of a trail of this magnitude will take a very long time. It will not be completed in the next year or the next several years. It will happen slowly as landowner agreements are reached and may take 10, 20, or even 50 years before the trail might reach 100 % completion. This is not unusual for a project of this size. Some of our National Parks, for example, have been established since the early 1900's but some parcels still remain to be acquired. In the meantime, where lands cannot be acquired, the trail will be established on a temporary basis--following along road right-of-ways and on other areas of less than permanent rights.

January 23, 1995