

V. CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Cottonwood County is named after the Cottonwood River. The word “cottonwood” is a translation of “Waraju”, the Dakota name for the river, reflecting the abundance of the tree found on the banks of the river. Situated in the southwestern portion of the State of Minnesota, Cottonwood County is bounded by Redwood and Brown counties on the north, Watonwan County on the east, Jackson County on the south, and Murray County on the west.

During the period of initial settlement, Cottonwood County was primarily covered by tall prairie grass. The prairie land was originally diverse and full of lush plant growth that enabled it to support many different types of animals. By 1900, a major part of the county was in farms and 92% of the land was improved.

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote of our unalienable Rights: “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,” and that governments are formed specifically to protect these rights. After basic public health, and safety, Americans have always turned to our cultural and recreational resources in the pursuit of happiness.

Today, Cottonwood County’s residents face the challenges and opportunities of preserving what is best of our communities and taking advantage of opportunities our local amenities present. Like all things of value, these amenities must be managed as sustainable resources so that those who come after us will be able to enjoy our historic places, conservation areas and parks as well.

A. Issues Summary

- Historic and cultural resources must be carefully managed so that future generations can benefit.
- Regulations need to be reviewed for compliance with the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA).
- Surface waters and aquifers are susceptible to contaminants which may harm human health.
- Shoreland development poses increasing challenges.
- Conservation of native grasslands and wildlife habitat needs to be balanced to minimize land use conflicts.
- County parks and trails provide opportunities for recreation.

A.1 Cultural and Recreational Strengths, Challenges and Future Direction

The County Committee identified issues concerning Cultural and Recreational Resources in Cottonwood County.

Cultural and Recreational Strengths

- Cultural activities and festivals
- Pre-historic cultural sites
- Public access to lakes and hunting areas
- Parks and recreation opportunities
- Walking and biking trails

Cultural and Recreational Challenges

- Lack of continual funds for maintenance
- Spreading costs over changing population bases
- Water quality issues
- Potential conflicts between conservation lands and residences
- Some recreation areas are not used as much as they could be
- Demographic shifts changing cultural expectations

Future of Cultural and Recreational Resources

- Support local community cultural and historic points of interest
- Support restoration of appropriate natural landscapes
- Diversify types of recreational activities available
- Increase the number of campsites available during peak demand
- Access to public waters should be carefully considered as new development occurs
- Surface water issues should continue to receive attention. All water and watersheds should continue to remain protected and preserved.
 - The County should continue to work with municipalities to develop well-head protection plans
- Future planning in this area should continue to focus on preserving existing facilities to prevent deterioration. The County should also examine expanding use of underutilized recreational areas.
 - Access funding from MN DNR and other sources to provide new uses such as ATV parks or snowmobile trails
- Continue coordinated development of the trails system.

B. Cottonwood County History

Cottonwood County was established by the Territorial Legislature on May 23, 1857. In 1858, Minnesota Territory became a State, and in 1858-1859, the County was surveyed by a Governmental Survey. The only sign of human habitation at that time was an occasional Native American teepee—prior to settlement this area was home to the Dakota tribe, and the Cheyenne before about 1750. The surveyors found one white man, Charles Zierke (a trapper known as “Dutch Charlie”) residing in the Southwest Quarter of Section 14 of Highwater Township.

Originally the County included twenty townships, but by an act of the state legislature in 1864, two of the northeastern townships were made part of Brown County. The 1860 census listed Cottonwood County as having a total population of twelve—six men and six women.

The first settlers coming into the county after the civil war settled in the northwest part of the county and were men and their families, men who had served in the Civil War, and others who came from foreign countries. The government did not have the means to pay the veterans bonuses, so they passed a homestead law for the benefit of the veterans. This law provided for the right of a veteran to take a homestead of 160 acres. They had to build a home of some sort and break up 10 acres of land; then they could leave it for a few months and come back and prove the claim by paying a small amount of money and get title to the land.

Cottonwood County was organized July 29, 1870, at the Village of Big Bend. Big Bend was located in the southeast quarter of Section 6, Township 105 North, Range 36 West, (in Great Bend Township, north of the Great Bend School). Big Bend was the first county seat and had the first post-office but ceased to exist when the railroad failed to come its way.

The 1870 census found only 534 people living in Cottonwood County; however, the area began to grow rapidly as people moved north and westward following the Civil War. The first railroad in the county—the St. Paul & Sioux City, later to become the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha Railway; Chicago & North Western; and today the Union Pacific—was constructed en-route to Sioux City, Iowa. In July of 1871, the first locomotive entered the villages of Mountain Lake and Windom. Three towns in Cottonwood County are on this rail line. Mountain Lake was platted and named in 1870. Windom was platted on June 20, 1871 (incorporated in 1875), and named in honor of U.S. Senator William Windom. Anticipating the growth and need for water, the first community well was dug in Windom in 1871. Also in 1871, the first schoolhouse was built and the county’s first physician arrived. Windom was designated the county seat by a vote of the people within the county in 1872. Bingham Lake was platted in 1875 and named in honor of the surveyor’s friend, and was incorporated in 1900.

The Currie branch of the Omaha railroad was built through Cottonwood County in 1900, and resulted in the development of Delft, Jeffers, Storden and Westbrook. The village of Delft was a direct result of the building of the railroad, and remains an unincorporated village. Land for the Village of Jeffers was platted in 1899, having been purchased from and named after a Mr. Jeffers who had homestead the land. The Village of Storden was incorporated in 1920. The Village of Westbrook was platted in June of 1900. This railroad line has since discontinued and the property is now farmland.

The 1875 census showed a county population of 2,870. The 1880 census showed that several small but thriving communities had developed, the county had a population of 5,553, and 867 farms were located throughout the county.

During the next twenty years the county grew even more rapidly, until the turn of the century at which time there was no more open land available. The population in 1890 was 7,414, and in 1900 was 12,069. The population of the county continued to grow, reaching 16,143 people by the 1940 census. Since then the population has been declining to fairly stable at today's 12,167.

B.1 Ethnic Heritage

The early base of Yankee and immigrant settlers, mixed with the constant flux of the modern economy, has produced a somewhat diverse ethnic heritage in today's residents.

From 1990 to 2000, the racial mix of the Cottonwood County population changed from 98.9% white to 95.2% white. The 2000 Census identified the largest area of growth as Asian or Pacific Islander—one race and in the “other race” category. The 2000 Census also counted persons who identified more than one race, which were counted in the non-white category. Persons of Hispanic origin (of any race) experienced growth from less than 1% of the population to 2.2%.

The 2000 Census also asked ancestry questions, with more than 36 different ancestries reported in Cottonwood County. German was the predominant ancestry reported at 44 % of the population, with Norwegian at 17%. The majority of the population reported they had ancestry in Europe. Exceptions were: French Canadian, Greek, and West Indian.

Religion also is an influence on culture. There are at least 17 different religious organizations serving Cottonwood County. Two of the nine Hutterite colonies in Minnesota are also located in the county, both within Mountain Lake Township. Originally migrating with other Germans from Russia in the 1870s, Hutterite colonies usually provide for between 60 and 160 persons, living in clustered housing and sustained by agriculture (<http://www.hutterites.org/>). Such a religious-based development pattern poses distinct challenges for land use regulation under the recent federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA).

B.2 Historic Sites

Many factors can determine how long a culturally significant building retains its beauty and luster. It takes people with a certain kind of desire to care for these buildings and to value the past that they represent.

The U.S. Department of Interior's National Register Bulletin defines cultural resources as a “building, site, structure, object, or district evaluated as having significance in prehistory or history.” As is the case in many counties, the largest threat facing these culturally significant structures is the lack of resources and willingness to properly maintain them. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) offers technical assistance to community organizations seeking to reuse and restore historic structures, including information on federal



investment tax credits that may be available for income-producing properties. There are about 6,000 properties in the state of Minnesota on the National Register of Historic Places, including within Cottonwood County:

- Isaac Bergen House, 1215 Mountain Lake Road, Mountain Lake; 1888
- Chicago, St Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Depot, 4th St and 1st Ave, Westbrook; c.1900
- Cottonwood County Courthouse, 900—3rd Ave, Windom; 1904
- Jeffers Petroglyphs, located in Section 9 of Delton Township; 3000 B.C. to A.D. 1750
- Mountain Lake Village Site, Mountain Lake Township; 3000 B.C. to A.D. 1200

B.3 Cultural and Historic Points of Interest

- **Cottonwood County Historical Museum – Windom.** Established in 1901 as the Old Settlers Association and became the Cottonwood County Historical Society in 1949, affiliated with the State Historical Society. The Society’s mission is to collect, preserve, and disseminate the history of the county. A new building was constructed in 1998 and includes the Remick Gallery, (a changing-exhibit gallery showcasing local and regional artists along with thematic shows); an Exhibit Hall with 3,000 square feet of space dedicated to the interpretation of the county’s rich history; and an expanded research library.
- **Heritage Village – Mountain Lake.** Located on the southwest edge of Mountain Lake, near the intersection of County Road 1 and MN Highway 60, Heritage Village was established in 1972 to remember the Russian-Mennonite and German Lutheran immigrants who were early settlers to the area. Visitors stroll through 21 buildings filled with displays depicting the Mennonite experience in Mountain Lake. Many of the buildings were built in the 19th century and have been lovingly restored and preserved. A European style attached house and barn, and the Minnesota Hall of Fame Telephone Museum are located on the grounds. Heritage village is open afternoons in the summer.
- **Heritage House Museum – Westbrook.** This 1900 depot of the Chicago-Saint Paul-Minneapolis-Omaha railroad was restored in 1985 by volunteers of the community. Exhibits reflect and preserve the history of the community of Westbrook. Included is a log cabin from the late 1800’s that was located near Dutch Charley Creek.
- **Jeffers Petroglyphs.** The Jeffers Petroglyphs is the largest group of rock carvings in Minnesota. To ensure preservation of the Petroglyphs, the Minnesota Historical Society purchased the site in 1966. The carvings include: animals such as bison, rabbits, wolves, turtles, and elk; human stick figures; and various weapons such as spear points, arrowheads, axe heads, and lances. The carvings appear to date from two major archaeological periods, the Late Archaic-Early Woodland Periods of 3,000 BC to 500 AD and the Lake Woodland Period from 900 AD to 1975.
- **Red Rock Falls.** The unique feature is a 30-foot waterfall, one of the few in this part of the state. Pathways have been constructed above and below the falls in order to allow visitors to view the area of unique, scenic, and natural beauty. Red Rock Falls is located Red Rock County Park, section 36 of Germantown Township.



- **Mountain County Park.** Located approximately 2 miles southeast of the City of Mountain Lake, the park was once a large lake with an island emerging in the center. The island now called a “mountain” was the dwelling site of the earliest known inhabitants in the state, the Fox Lake Indians. Carbon 14 dating places organic material found on the mountain at more than 1,000 years older than any other dwelling yet discovered in Minnesota. A large amount of primitive tools, arrowheads, pottery, and other artifacts were removed and are on display at the Minnesota Science Museum in St. Paul. Replicas can be seen at the Heritage Village in Mountain Lake.

B.4 Festivals and Events

March

- **Farm & Home Show – Windom.** Held the second Saturday in March, featuring exhibits, entertainment, and a noon meal.

June

- **Riverfest – Windom** This celebration is held the second weekend in June and includes fireworks, a parade, an outdoor dance, concessions, a classic car show, softball and tennis tournaments, turtle races, petal tractor pull, and a fishing contest.
- **Pow Wow – Mountain Lake.** This celebration is billed as the longest-running town celebration in the State of Minnesota and is held the third weekend in June. Included is a parade, midway, road race, fitness walk, entertainment, booths, food stands; square dancing, pedal tractor pull, and cash prizes.
- **Fun Days – Westbrook.** For many years this festival was called “Hospital Days”. The celebration is held at the end of June or early July and includes a parade; food stands; and events that vary year by year. Proceeds help to maintain and improve the city park.

July

- **Relay for Life – Windom.** A yearly county-wide fundraiser for the American Cancer Society. Teams raise money by selling luminary bags in honor of cancer survivors, or in memory of a cancer victim. The relay is a walk on the path lighted by the luminary bags.

August

- **Cottonwood County Free Fair – Windom.** This free five day fair is normally held the second week in August. Exhibits and judging of 4-H projects includes Livestock projects of beef, hogs, horses, sheep, goats, rabbits, chickens, ducks, and geese; and Non-Livestock projects including clothing, shop, aerospace, environmental, conservation, and foods are an important part of the fair. Food stands include the 4-H Stand; Cattlemens’ Beef-burger stand; Lions pop stand, Dairy Malt Stand, Knights of Columbus food stand, and other food stands. There are also Open Class exhibits and judging of crops, hand work, and foods. Exhibits and judging of FFA projects include livestock and crops. Children and adults enjoy the FFA Children’s Barn, and the fish, animals, and taxidermy exhibits in the Fish and Wildlife Building. Other events include the Commercial Exhibits; State Suffock Sheep Show; Lama Show; Cat Show; Dog Show; Pedal Tractor Pull; Grandstand events; Demolition Derby; Open Class Horse Show; Machinery and Vehicle exhibit area; Bingo; Midway and Concessions.

September

- **Utschtallung – Mountain Lake.** Utschtallung, which means "setting out" in German, is also known as Heritage Fair. This celebration of ethnic food and culture is held the second Saturday in September and features exhibits, and entertainment.

C. Natural Resources

The southwestern region of Minnesota has a conspicuous feature called the Coteau des Prairies, meaning “highland of the prairies” or “hill of grasses”, which bisects Cottonwood County. This is a ridge that extends northwest to southeast across South Dakota to Minnesota and on into Iowa, consisting of quartzite bedrock that is overlain by glacial sediment. The county can be delineated as having two classifications of original

vegetation: grasslands and hardwood forests. Grasslands were the predominant form of native vegetation, while hardwood forests are primarily river-bottom stands.

The total area in Cottonwood County is 648 square miles or 414,720 acres, according to the Minnesota State Planning agency, although according to an 1896 Cottonwood County Plat Book, the county consisted of 650.39 square miles or 416,250 acres, with 8,000 acres covered by water. A 1970 land use study reported that approximately 402,000 acres were directly related to farming practices, with approximately 74% actually used for cropland. The incorporated areas making up the six municipalities in Cottonwood County consisted of approximately 3,078 acres in the 1970 study. The remaining acres were woodlands or pastures, or used for other purposes. The most important land use within the county has been and will probably continue to be agriculture.

C.1 Water

There are about 30 bodies of water in Cottonwood County, which cover 5,824 acres of land and average about 170 acres each in size. Surface waters are typically undeveloped and most of the runoff and drainage water is not retained.

Cottonwood County has five major watersheds located within the county borders. The three larger watersheds include: the Cottonwood River Watershed which encompasses the north-central and western portion of the county covering 245.28 square miles or 38% of the county land area; the Watonwan River Watershed which covers the eastern portion of the county and contains 197.92 square miles or 31% of the county land area; and the West Fork Des Moines River Watershed located in the southwestern and central portions of the county covering 164.56 square miles or 25% of the county land area. The two smaller watersheds include the Middle Minnesota Watershed (also called the Little Cottonwood River Watershed) which starts close to the center of the County and continues to the very northeastern edge of Cottonwood County covering 39.27 square miles or 6% of the land area; and the smallest one, the Blue Earth Watershed which covers only 1.29 square miles in the southeastern corner of the county.

The following rivers and creeks make up drainage within these watersheds:

- Cottonwood River Watershed: Dry Creek, Dutch Charley Creek, Highwater Creek, Mound Creek, Pell Creek
- Watonwan River Watershed: Watonwan River, North Fork of the Watonwan River, South Fork of the Watonwan River
- West Fork Des Moines Watershed: Des Moines River, Heron Lake Outlet
- Middle Minnesota River Watershed: Little Cottonwood River
- Blue Earth River Watershed: no named streams

Typical land use and management practices have caused water quality degradation in all of the County's lakes. Due to the increase in nutrients in the water column, the County's lakes have seen an increase in algae blooms and other suspended sediments. With this decrease in water clarity, the sunlight is not able to reach all areas of the lake and this restricts many different kinds of plant growth. This not only eliminates a food supply for many game fishes, but it also favors the growth of less desirable species such as carp and black bullhead. These fish then cause greater destruction to the lake by uprooting other types of vegetation and sending more debris into the water column.

One of the goals of the Cottonwood County Comprehensive Plan should be to work in conjunction with the Cottonwood County Comprehensive Water Plan to protect and preserve the County's ground and surface waters. Instituting well-head protection is also a means of safeguarding public water supply by preventing contaminants from entering the area that contributes water to well fields. The highest yielding aquifers are also often those most susceptible to contaminants which may harm human health. The County should work with all incorporated municipalities in Cottonwood County to develop well-head protection plans (See Chapter IV. Infrastructure & Public Facilities).

C.2 Floodplains

Floodplains are areas which have had a history of frequent flooding. The Floodplain zone district has been established in the County Zoning Ordinance for land mapped as flood hazard areas by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These maps are currently only available on paper, rather than a digital format. Enforcement of restrictions on building in FEMA floodplains is a requirement to participate in FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

Development activity in flood-prone areas should be avoided. For example, high risk areas could receive a permanent vegetative cover in order to help alleviate problems caused by flooding. Some communities have adopted a No Adverse Impact (NAI) floodplain management approach, which extends beyond the floodplain to manage development in the watersheds where flood waters originate. NAI requires new development to mitigate potential impacts before disaster strikes.

Local units of government must undertake and approve coordinated all-hazard mitigation planning to be eligible for state and federal mitigation funds to prevent future flooding or other natural disasters.

C.3 Shoreland

The uncontrolled use of shoreland in the County affect public health, safety and general welfare, not only by contributing to pollution of public waters, but by also impairing the local tax base. Therefore it is in the best interest of the public to provide for the wise use and development of the shoreland of public waters. This responsibility was recognized by Cottonwood County by adopting Shoreland Regulations. These regulations apply to land 300 feet back from rivers and 1000 feet back from lakes in the county.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) identifies three river types in Cottonwood County, which are addressed in the Cottonwood County Zoning Ordinance (Transition River Segments, Agricultural River Segments, and Tributary River segments). The lakes within Cottonwood County are classified as Natural Environment, Recreational Development and General Development lakes. Guidelines for the development of lakes were developed by the DNR and adopted by the County in its zoning code.

Natural Environment Lakes are generally small and often shallow, with limited capacities for development and recreational use. Recreational Development Lakes are normally medium sized lakes with varying depths and shapes. Often these lakes have capacity for accommodating residential and recreational-oriented commercial uses. General Development Lakes are generally large, deep lakes. They are often extensively used for recreation and can become heavily developed along the shores, including second and third tier development.

Most lakes in the County have areas that are unsuitable for development, such as wetlands or soils not capable for development (septic systems, wet soils, strength). Before development occurs, a detailed study of a lake in question should be completed, identifying the areas that would create the least environmental impact. If development occurs, consideration should be given to public access as part of the development.

C.4 Conservation Areas

The conservation of land and wildlife habitat is and should continue to be important to Cottonwood County. The importance placed on conservation lands in Cottonwood County in the past is evident in the amount of state and federally owned acreage within the County. According to the Cottonwood County Water Plan, the MN DNR, and the Cottonwood County Farm Service Agency, the following statistics show the acres retained as of December 1, 1999:

- 17 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) – 5,800 acres
- 12 Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) – 2,952.6 acres
- 545 Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts totaling 10, 039 acres

- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) – 2,427 acres (+400 pending)
- Division of Waters – 291 acres (in and around Mountain Lake)
- Division of Trails and Waterways – 55 acres (water access sites)
- Division of Fisheries – 184 acres (Warren Lake and Bingham Lake)
- 14 Habitat Easements – 557.3 acres



Cottonwood County should actively monitor management plans for conservation areas to minimize the potential for land use conflicts. Wildlife management areas, for example, require isolation from residential development to preserve hunting opportunities. WMAs are attractive to housing development, since they provide open scenic areas and buffers from other development.

Conservation overlay zoning districts have been used in a variety of settings and may help Cottonwood County protect important wildlife areas that are threatened by development and other changes in land use. An overlay zoning districts could, for example, buffer a riparian corridor with a sliding setback for new structures along creeks and wetlands, protecting water from development and the development from flooding while leaving the underlying zoning district in place.

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C.5 Corridor Management

Transportation corridors provide plant and animal wildlife with a continuous string of habitat, in addition to (and often connecting) riparian corridors.

Rights-of-way surrounding the railroads within Cottonwood County provide the County with essential prairie remnants. This, in turn, provides a functional wildlife habitat. However, these corridors may be threatened by herbicide drift from agricultural and railroad maintenance practices. The use of chemicals from farming operations may blow onto the corridor and potentially kill beneficial wildlife habitat. Also, abandoned railroad ties left along the rail lines make the use of fire to keep up the vitality of the prairie an unsafe choice. This leads to the additional use of chemicals by the railroads to control unwanted weeds and further destruction of the prairie remnants may result. It would be in the county's best interest to work with the Union Pacific Railroad and the DNR in order to provide proper management of the railroad corridor.

Road corridors provide efficient, continuous habitat as well. Proper policies regarding allowable mowing and spraying dates, as well as proper vegetation management, will allow many different types of bird species time to nest. This will have positive effects on bird populations such as pheasants and mallard ducks living within these corridors.

Cottonwood County could also consider restoring native plant species such as prairie grasses and flowers within various road rights-of-way. The restoration of such native plant species will aid in the decreased need for weed control in these areas as well as provide considerable nesting cover for wildlife, such as pheasants.

D. Parks and Recreation

Cottonwood County owns and operates six County Parks. The municipalities of Jeffers, Mountain Lake, Storden, Westbrook, and Windom also own and operate parks within their boundaries. These parks, along with the County's undeveloped parks and conservation lands, provide a great deal of opportunity for recreation throughout Cottonwood County. Park and recreation areas provide recreational opportunities such as walking, hiking, fishing, swimming, playing ball games, picnic areas, and bird watching. Cottonwood County has many good hunting areas, but hunting is not allowed in any of the parks.

Many residents are becoming more interested in active recreation. As well, new types of recreation become more or less popular with changes in residents' interests and demographic makeup. For example, the City of Mountain Lake has proposed the development of an ATV and off-road motorcycle park. The County's responsibility in regards to parks is to enhance the condition of natural resource-based parks and recreational activities in the County, and to identify ways to preserve these resources. The County parks and trails should be developed to complement the opportunities supported by other park and recreation providers in the region.

Implementing the Comprehensive Plan, the County should examine ways to further promote their parks and their respective resources. A system of coordinating the County Parks and the Municipal Parks together is also recommended. The yearly County information guide published by the Citizen Publishing Company is an aid in this.

D.1 County Park System

- **Dynamite Park.** A 3.06-acre park which became located within the city limits of Windom when the area was annexed. This park serves as a playground with an asphalt basketball court and an assortment of playground equipment. It also has an enclosed shelter house, picnic tables, and toilet facilities.
- **Mountain Park.** A historic park consisting of 24 acres. This park has a well, toilets, trails, some playground equipment, picnic tables, and a shelter house.
- **Pats Grove.** This is an 80-acre parcel and is a primitive park, which offers open, hiking trails and picnic areas in a natural setting.
- **Red Rock Falls Park.** A very picturesque 13-acre park with trails along the falls, a shelter house, picnic tables, playground equipment, and toilet facilities.
- **South Dutch Charley Park.** A 24 acre park with lots of trees, a well, a shelter house, picnic tables, some playground equipment, toilet facilities, and electrical service for 5 campers.
- **Talcot Lake County Park.** A 40 acre park along the shore of Talcot Lake in the Southwestern corner of the County. There is a swimming area with a sandy beach but is not staffed by a lifeguard. Development includes 53 camping sites with water and electricity, plus addition area for tenting. Facilities include bathroom facilities with showers for campers and swimmers, an enclosed shelter house, picnic tables, outdoor charcoal grills, a sand volleyball court, and a trail. A dump station for campers is also available at the park. The park is open from the first of May through the fall, maintenance personnel are available on a daily basis, and the entry station is staffed in the summer months. A seasonal pass is required at a minimal cost.

Talcot Lake is the largest lake in Cottonwood County and provides Northern Pike, Perch, Crappies, Walleye, and Bullheads for those interested in fishing, and the park has a fish cleaning house. A man-made fish pond is part of the campground for youngsters to try their luck at fishing. Fishing bait is available in nearby towns. There are fishing docks in the County Park, and along the south shore of the Lake in the DNR area. There is also a public boat launching pad in this area just east of the park. There is a very short trail in the park area, and no other developed trail. Wildlife such as deer, birds, geese, ducks, mink, etc. can be seen in the area. It is a good area for bird watching.

Talcot Lake itself is a Wildlife Management Area, and is therefore regulated by State of Minnesota rules. There are areas of the lake where no motorized boats are allowed; and the fall hunting season has specific lake rules. Jet skis are not allowed on any area of the lake. For winter fishing, a car or pickup is allowed on the ice, but no ATV's or Snowmobiles are allowed.

D.2 Outdoor Sports

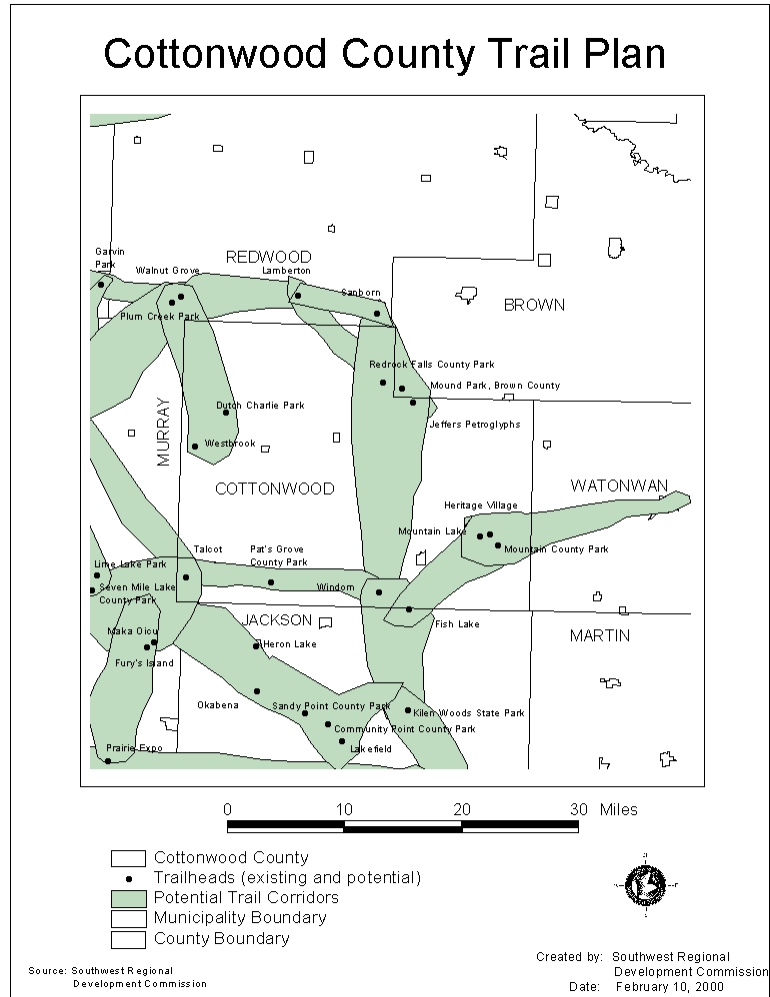


- **Canoeing.** The Des Moines River is a designated canoe route, with three canoe accesses in Windom.
- **Fishing.** Residents of Cottonwood County have several lakes for enjoying the challenge of summer fishing and winter fishing, and other water-related activities. Handicapped accessible fishing piers are located at Cottonwood Lake, Fish Lake, and Double Lake. Other lakes include: Bean Lake, Bingham Lake, Clear Lake, Eagle Lake, Long Lake, Mountain Lake, Oaks Lake, South Clear Lake, String Lakes, and Summit Lake. Sheldorf Creek is a DNR designated Trout Stream.
- **Golf.** The Windom County Club is tucked neatly in the valley along the banks of the Des Moines River on the northwest edge of Windom. The Mountain Lake Golf Course is located on the northwest edge of Mountain Lake. The Rolling Hills Golf Course (sometimes referred to as the Westbrook Golf Course) is actually in Murray County, a few miles west of Westbrook.
- **Gun Club.** The Sun Valley Gun Club is located northwest of Windom and is known for its many trap-shooting activities, but also has an NRA-approved rifle range and pistol range. There is also a gun club in the Mountain Lake area.
- **Windom Arena.** A 50,000 square foot multi-purpose facility built in 1976 offering year-round recreation, including racquetball courts; wallyball; indoor batting cage and golf driving range; two ice rings for hockey and figures skating; horse shows; auto shows; auctions; and special county fair events.
- **Swimming.** Mountain Lake has an indoor swimming pool at the school. The cities of Westbrook and Windom have outdoor swimming pools. There is a nice beach at Cottonwood Lake and at Talcot Lake, but are not staffed with a lifeguard. Bean Lake is known for its nice sand bottom.

D.3 Trails

The *Southwest Minnesota Regional Trails Plan* inventoried existing trails in Cottonwood County in 1999. Potential trail heads were identified as well as potential trail corridors. Recreational trailheads (beginning or ending places for trails) in Cottonwood County include: Dutch Charlie County Park, Fish Lake, Heritage Village in Mountain Lake, Jeffers Petroglyphs, Mountain Lake (lake), Mountain County Park, Red Rock Falls County Park, Talcot County Park, Westbrook, Windom, and Mound Park in Brown County.

Cottonwood County has a well-established network of snowmobile trails. While pedestrian and bicycle trails are beneficial to residential health and safety, they are often set at a lower funding priority level, in favor of essential services. Trail development will be considered as funding opportunities become available.



- **Mountain Lake Trail.** The walking and bicycling Mountain Lake trail has been a work in progress since the mid 90's. With available monies from the Lake Commission and currently from a DNR Trails Grant, the trail is advancing toward completion. Beginning in LAWCON Park on the southeast corner of the Lake, the trail follows along the east and north shorelines. The wetland area at the west end of the Lake is traversed with a raised boardwalk. The finished trail currently ends at the DNR boat landing on the southwest corner of the lake. The proposed last section will finish the four-mile loop back to LAWCON Park.
- **Red Rock Falls County Park Trail.** This grass-walking path is less than one mile and runs throughout the County Park. The path goes by the Falls, picnic area, and playground equipment.
- **Mound Creek Park, Brown County Trail.** This grass-walking trail connects the lake with the disc golf course.
- **Dutch Charlie County Park Trail.** This grass-walking path is less than one mile and connects all the campsites within the park. The trail goes over a little bridge and all throughout the park.
- **Jeffers Petroglyphs Trail.** This is a 1.75-mile gravel/grass-walking path. The trail goes by the Petroglyphs and Virgin Prairie.

- **Talcot Lake County Park Trail.** This grass and sand walking path connects the campsites with the beach. The trail goes by a small pond and follows the beach of Talcot Lake.
- **Witt Memorial Park in Windom.** Witt Memorial Park sports a roller-blading court, spearheaded by Windom Hockey Association Boosters in 1995 and was completed in 1997. It includes a 60 by 175 foot cement pad and sideboards.
- **Snowmobile Trails.** The Big Bend Snow Riders Club, local, county, and state officials have worked with area farmers and landowners to develop groomed snowmobile trails for the enjoyment of snowmobile enthusiasts. The Windom Area Chamber of Commerce provides information on the snowmobile trail. There are 125 miles of County and Grants in Aid snowmobile trails in Cottonwood County (1999 DNR data).
- **Proposed Windom Municipal Recreation Area trail.** Windom plans to develop 3 miles of paved trail that will connect two city parks, the Community Center and several residential areas. The paved trail will be used for walking, bicycling, and roller-blading within the recreation area. Landscaping such as wildflowers and natural prairie vegetation and trees would be planted along the trails. Rest areas with park benches would be scattered throughout the trail system. A gravel parking lot would be built along the east side of the project.

Potential bicycle and pedestrian corridors identified in the Region Plan for Cottonwood County include:

- Westbrook North to Walnut Grove
- Jeffers Petroglyphs to Red Rock Falls County Park
- Windom to Sanborn to include Jeffers Petroglyphs and Red Rock Dells
- Mountain Lake East to St. James
- Mountain Lake to Mountain Park and South to Fish Lake
- Windom to Fish Lake to Kilen Woods State Park
- Windom to Talcot Lake area
- Jeffers Petroglyphs and Red Rock Falls to Lamberton
- Windom Municipal Recreation Area Trail