

Section Three: Trailhead

In the *Two Harbors Comprehensive Plan (1998)*, development of a trailhead facility was proposed near Burlington Bay in Two Harbors. This area is notable because it is near to/or is an actual/proposed access point for several trail systems, including the Superior National Hiking Trail, the Lake Superior Water Trail, the Gitchi-Gami State Trail, the North Shore State Trail, and the Two Harbors Trail System. Additionally, two tourism marketing entities are located in the area—the R.J. Houle Center and the North Shore Scenic Drive National Scenic Byway.

Several meetings were held involving the representatives of most of these groups in the years after the completion of the Comprehensive Plan. Discussions were held regarding the scope of the trailhead, which groups would be involved, and how the facility could be funded. Ultimately however, no official plans were approved by an official body, the City of Two Harbors or otherwise.

When the City of Two Harbors revisited the Comprehensive Plan and other plans regarding the waterfront for the *Two Harbors Waterfront Planning Summary*, the idea of a trailhead resurfaced with the City Planning Commission. It gained even more interest from the Planning Commission when the City learned that federal money could be provided for trails in the City through Congressman Oberstar and Safe Routes to School.



What is a Trailhead?

trail·head [[tráył héd](#)] (plural **trail·heads**)

noun

start of trail: the start of a trail for walkers, sometimes with an information kiosk

The above definition, from an online dictionary, doesn't quite meet the scope of the trailhead originally planned as part of the first trailhead planning process (see inset on page 22). That group talked about a building that would house offices for some of the affiliated trails, restrooms, an information desk, and interpretive displays. Some discussion at the end of the original planning process indicated that people tended to believe that that idea was too large of a scope for the potential funding sources of the project.

Section Three: Trailhead

In November 2004, ARDC asked the possible participants to reassemble as a group to redefine the trailhead idea and to set a course of action for its implementation.

Potential Trailhead Users

The **Superior Hiking Trail (SHT)** is a footpath that begins directly north of Two Harbors and extends nearly to the Canadian border. The proposed trail is 205 miles long with 30 trailheads and 81 campsites. A group known today as the Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA) brought about the SHT in 1980. The SHTA is “dedicated to the completion, preservation and promotion of the Superior Hiking Trail.” The trail is ideal for hiking and camping; however, mountain bikes, horses and motorized vehicles are prohibited. A unique feature to the SHT is its buddy program. Individuals interested in connecting with other trail users may sign up to be a buddy on the trail website, <http://www.shta.org/>. There they post messages that other users can respond to. The SHT is also part of the larger North Country Trail system.

The **North Country Trail** is a footpath that crosses seven states, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Upper and Lower Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. This trail is 4,000 miles long, with as much of it still in development. The North Country Trail Association was formed to “develop, maintain, preserve and promote the North Country National Scenic Trail through a national network of volunteers, chapters, partner organizations and government agencies.” More information can be found at <http://www.northcountrytrail.org/>.

The **Lake Superior Water Trail** stretches along the shore of Lake Superior beginning in Duluth ending 108 miles later in Grand Marais. Several of the sections do not have boat access so experienced sea kayakers with proper training are best suited for this trail. The Lake Superior Water Trail Association is a nonprofit group organized to establish a non-motorized state water trail, educate the public, enrich experiences, protect and preserve natural resources and promote awareness. More information can be found at <http://www.lswta.org/>.



Section Three: Trailhead



The ***Gitchi-Gami State Trail*** is a non-motorized paved trail, that when completed, will span between Two Harbors and Grand Marais providing the public a safe route to walk or bike on rather than the adjacent Highway 61. In the late 1980's, concerned Cook County residents began addressing the issue of safety for bicyclists, in-line skaters, joggers and walkers. This group then formed the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association. The vision of the GGTA is to promote, plan and construct a premier recreational non-motorized paved trail that connects communities, state parks and attractions along the North Shore of Lake Superior." More information can be found at <http://www.ggta.org/>.



The ***North Shore State Trail*** is a 146-mile trail extending from Duluth to Grand Marais through St. Louis, Lake and Cook Counties. In the winter, snowmobilers primarily use this natural surface trail. In the summer, hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders use the trail, although standing water may inhibit use on some segments. Camping and fishing are allowed at designated places along the trail. Parking lots can be found off Highway 61 on the Lester River Road and near the city limits of Duluth at the Martin Road parking lot.

More information can be found at

http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_trails/north_shore/index.html.

The ***Two Harbors Trail System*** is largely undeveloped and is the focus of Sections 1 and 2 as well as the appendix of this document.

The ***R. J. Houle Center*** is located on Trunk Highway 61 on the east side of Two Harbors, near Burlington Bay. This facility has a large parking lot and a small log building in which employees provide visitors with information on local attractions, historic places, lodging and dining. More information can be found at <http://www.lakecnty.com/>. It is important to note that Lake County, the primary funder of the facility, is phasing out its contributions over the course of the next few years.



The ***North Shore Scenic Drive (NSSD)*** was granted All-American Road status from Two Harbors to Grand Portage in 2000. All American Road status was extended into Duluth's Canal Park in 2002, resulting in a 154-mile continuous designation of All-American Road on the North Shore. The North Shore Scenic Drive Council (NSSDC) has been carrying these designations forward since 1999 and is now gaining momentum for project development along the Drive. This route is well known as the home of

Section Three: Trailhead

Grandma's Marathon. Tourists and residents alike will find a variety of shops and restaurants along their way. The mission of the NSSDC is *"To cooperatively enhance the economic benefits of travel along Lake Superior's North Shore and improve the quality of the route, while preserving its cultural, social, and natural integrity."*

More information can be found at <http://www.northshorescenicdrive.com/> and at <http://www.ardc.org/projects/nssd/>.

2004 Trailhead Planning Process

The potential trailhead participants met on December 3, 2004 at the Two Harbors City Hall. In general the group settled on the following set of ideas:

- ▶ A trailhead should be developed in Two Harbors
- ▶ The trailhead should be in the Burlington Bay waterfront planning area
- ▶ The Trailhead should provide connections to the future Two Harbors Trail System, the future Gitchi-Gami Trail, the existing North Shore State Trail (snowmobile), and the existing Lake Superior Water Trail
- ▶ The trailhead should generally be located at or near the existing R. J. Houle Information Center
- ▶ The trailhead should provide information, maps, and parking
- ▶ The trailhead should have staffed information if possible
- ▶ The trailhead should have restrooms
- ▶ The trailhead should provide picnic tables
- ▶ The trailhead should be designed in an aesthetically pleasing and environmentally sensitive manner
- ▶ The trailhead should work to allow snowmobiles, but in a safe manner that isn't damaging to the other types of trails
- ▶ A 30 mile per hour snowmobile speed limit should be set within the Two Harbors City limits

The 2001 Lake County Visitor Center Feasibility Study

The Lake County Visitor Center Feasibility Study (2001), prepared by Business Plans, Inc., was a process that examined the potential for the creation of a large visitor center and trailhead near the site of the R. J. Houle Center in Two Harbors. The plan stated that the center should have a large lobby, a boardroom, a 25-30 seat viewing room, and 1,800 square feet of rental office space. The center was to offer interpretive exhibits, lake access, trip planning assistance, promotional space for supporting businesses, food and beverages, and souvenirs. The project had an estimated price tag of \$1,000,000. It called for a lodging tax (50 percent) in addition to sales, fees, and rental space revenue. It was to be managed through a non-profit organization with a volunteer board of directors. It was generally thought that involved trail organization would use the office space.

Section Three: Trailhead

- ▶ Burlington Bay Beach should be analyzed to determine sources of pollution that force it to be closed, making it less effective as a trailhead for the Lake Superior Water Trail
- ▶ Trailhead should use the signage and interpretation framework of the North Shore Scenic Drive Interpretive Plan
- ▶ Opportunity for a bicycle rental business in the Burlington Bay area of Two Harbors should be encouraged-kayak rental is also be encouraged, but it is acknowledged to be less likely due to liability concerns

Trailhead Recommendations

A more detailed action plan for the implementation of the ideas above will be a part of the Two Harbors Waterfront Action Plan. The trailhead idea will be a part of that document's preferred alternative for the Burlington Bay planning area. The Waterfront Plan will be completed early in 2005.

Appendix A: Detailed Segment Description

The Two Harbors Planning Commission has broken down the proposed trail system into 35 distinct segments. These segments enable planning staff to match segments to the most appropriate funding source. Smaller segments also allow staff to determine the best alternatives if funding does not permit construction of all segments or if some segments become impossible to construct due to landscape issues or if right-of-way cannot be acquired.

Map 4: Two Harbors Trails



