DRAFT SECTION 4(F) EVALUATION

LOWELL PARK

I. DESCRIPTION OF SECTION 4(F) RESOURCE

The Section 4(f) resource that could be affected by the proposed action is Lowell Park.

A. DETAILED MAP

Figure E-11 shows the relationship of the Build Alternatives to Lowell Park.

B. SIZE AND LOCATION

Lowell Park is located in downtown Stillwater along the St. Croix River and is about seven acres in size. The park is located east of the central business district and stretches from Nelson Street north to Mulberry Street. The park is bisected by Minnesota Trunk Highway (TH) 36 as it extends across the Lift Bridge. Lowell Park is located within the Stillwater Commercial Historic District and the Stillwater Cultural Landscape District. Both the Lift Bridge and the Commercial Historic District are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (Note: Separate Section 4(f) Evaluations have been completed for the Stillwater Commercial Historic District, the Stillwater Cultural Landscape District, and the Lift Bridge.)

C. OWNERSHIP AND TYPE

Lowell Park is owned by the City of Stillwater. The site was designated as Lowell Park in 1908. Mn/DOT owns a 60-foot roadway right-of-way for TH 36 as it bisects the park. The right-of-way generally includes Chestnut Street (which is about 40 feet wide, curb-to-curb), and the land adjacent to it from Main Street (TH 95) east to the Lift Bridge.

D. FUNCTION OF AND/OR AVAILABLE ACTIVITIES

Lowell Park surrounds Stillwater's entrance to the Lift Bridge and is used for a variety of activities. These range from large community events (Rivertown Spring and Fall Art Fairs, Lumberjack Days, Music on the Water Front) to more passive activities, such as picnicking and walking.

Figure E-11 – Lowell Park and Build Alternatives (8.5x11 – b/w)

DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING AND PLANNED USES

This heavily-used park is fully developed and includes a pavilion, picnic tables, benches, and drinking fountains. The park is landscaped and includes pedestrian walkways and lighting. The park also includes a vehicle access road (Levee Road) that runs parallel to the river. A parking area is located adjacent to the western edge of Lowell Park and is used by visitors to the park as well as by people destined for other downtown facilities.

The 1988 Stillwater Downtown Plan identified goals, objectives, and guidelines to direct future development in Stillwater. While the plan focused mainly on the central business district, preferred land uses were also identified for Lowell Park. The plan suggested that the city expand its riverfront park and open space system, and that the system should integrate Lowell Park, the city-owned Stillwater Municipal Barge Facility property south of downtown (planned for park use), and Kolliner Park, the City of Stillwater park on the east bank of the St. Croix River in Wisconsin.

In 1992, the city completed the Lowell Park Renovation Plan. The plan included conceptual drawings for the improvement and extension of Lowell Park, and for the parking area immediately west of the park. The plan proposed that vehicle and pedestrian circulation should be improved, park amenities/facilities should be enhanced and that the existing levee wall should be reconstructed. The Stillwater Comprehensive Plan (1995) includes goals and objectives similar to those set forth in the Stillwater Downtown Plan and the Lowell Park Renovation Plan, stating that Lowell Park should be preserved, enhanced, and restored, based on its setting, history, and recreational uses.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has reconstructed the levee wall at Mulberry Point at the north end of Lowell Park as a river flood control project. The levee wall on the south end was completed in late 1998. The city completed a Recreation Site Plan for Mulberry Point in 1999 that calls for adding recreational facilities to the area that would be reclaimed by the new levee wall.

Stillwater has recently considered several downtown development plans (Commercial Avenue Plaza, Parking, and River Trail Study), which include Lowell Park. In February 2004, the City Council approved "Plan D" of the downtown development plan for further development. "Plan D" includes construction of pedestrian facilities, a decrease in the number of public parking spaces, a 100-year flood wall, and an expansion of Lowell Park. Lowell Park would expand by approximately three-fourths of an acre along Water Street between Mulberry Street and Myrtle Street, north of the Lift Bridge. Enhancements to Lowell Park include a potential amphitheater and floating bandshell, a walking trail parallel to the St. Croix River, and a pedestrian plaza at the east side of Commercial Street into Lowell Park.

F. ACCESS AND USAGE

Vehicle access to the park is provided by several city streets, including Nelson Street, Chestnut Street, Myrtle Street, and Mulberry Street. The park includes a paved roadway (Levee Road) on its eastern edge adjacent to the river. TH 36 runs along Chestnut Street through the middle of the park and provides access to Levee Road. Several parking areas for the park and other downtown businesses and facilities are adjacent to the west side of Lowell Park.

Lowell Park is easily accessed by pedestrians and bicyclists, as it is located in downtown Stillwater. The park includes paved sidewalks. Pedestrian/bicycle access from Wisconsin is also provided by the 5-foot sidewalk on the south side of the Lift Bridge.

Lowell Park provides no boat access to the St. Croix River. The park did provide boat access to the river in the past; however, this access was recently closed as part of the improvements to the levee wall. According to the City of Stillwater, there are no plans for future boat access at the park.

The City of Stillwater has estimated that 250,000 people visit the park annually, with the largest attendance occurring during the summer Lumberjack Days festival.

G. RELATIONSHIP TO SIMILAR LAND IN THE AREA

Across the Lift Bridge in Wisconsin is Stillwater-owned Kolliner Park. Kolliner Park is a relatively large property (about 49 to 58 acres, depending on the level of the river) located adjacent to the St. Croix River. The park is relatively undeveloped and is valued primarily for its natural setting. The park is visible from Lowell Park and downtown Stillwater. Access to Kolliner Park property is provided from Lowell Park via the existing Lift Bridge. The park was closed in 1979 due to increased vandalism and traffic congestion at the east end of the Lift Bridge. Pedestrian/bicycle access across the bridge is provided via a narrow 5-foot sidewalk on the south side of the bridge.

The Stillwater Municipal Barge Facility property, located along the St. Croix River just south of Lowell Park, is designated as future city parkland. Although the property has been used for barge and commercial operations until recently, the city has identified the site as future parkland and completed a Master Plan for the property in December 1998. The Master Plan proposes the development of the site into a waterfront park with a focus on passive recreation. The city would eventually like to connect the Stillwater Municipal Barge Facility property and Lowell Park, creating a continuous strip of park/open space along the St. Croix River. A small, undeveloped trail currently links the two properties; however, it passes through two privately-owned properties.

A new Stillwater park, a yet un-named planned park recently donated to the City of Stillwater, is located directly adjacent to downtown Stillwater, southwest of Lowell Park and northwest of the Stillwater Municipal Barge Facility property. The future parkland parcel is planned to include sitting areas and playground equipment, a terraced amphitheatre, pathways, and plantings. Construction of parkland is currently anticipated for the summer of 2004.

Several other public parks are located along the Lower St. Croix River, including Minnesota and Wisconsin Interstate State Parks, William O'Brien State Park (MN), St. Croix Boomsite Park (MN), Mile Long Island (MN), St. Croix Islands Wildlife Area (WI), Afton State Park (MN), and Kinnickinnic State Park (WI). These parks are considered to be natural recreation areas, oriented towards hiking, camping, canoeing, and swimming. In contrast, Lowell Park is an urban park located in the heart of downtown Stillwater and has both active and passive uses.

H. APPLICABLE CLAUSES AFFECTING OWNERSHIP

There are no known restrictions on property ownership relevant to Section 4(f) considerations.

I. UNUSUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Stillwater has a rich history as the "Birthplace of Minnesota". Downtown Stillwater has a multitude of historic sites and structures and has been locally and nationally designated as an historic district. Lowell Park is located within the downtown Stillwater Commercial Historic District and is adjacent to the Lift Bridge, both of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Views of the Lift Bridge are among the many attractions that draw visitors to the park. The Lift Bridge is one of two remaining examples in the Upper Midwest of a tower-and-cable highway lift bridge with truss spans and is considered an icon by the City of Stillwater.

Another unusual characteristic of Lowell Park is that it is located adjacent to the St. Croix River. The river in this area is part of the Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway (a Section 4(f) resource itself), so designated for its outstanding scenic and recreational values. The river is a popular place for boating, camping, and other water-related recreational activities. Lowell Park is directly adjacent to the St. Croix River and provides a view of the river and its activities. The river's natural beauty, numerous recreational activities, and accessibility to a large urban population contribute to Lowell Park's value as a recreational resource.

The history of Lowell Park adds to its unique characteristics. Lowell Park was created in 1908. Prior to its development as a park, the property was the site of city commercial and logging establishments. Park improvements were made to the southern portion of the park in 1911. In 1916, Elmore Lowell hired a landscape architecture firm to prepare park plans for the northern portion of the park. Lowell Park is also a contributing element of the Stillwater Commercial Historic District and the Stillwater Cultural Landscape District discussed under separate 4(f) reports.

II. IMPACTS ON THE SECTION 4(F) RESOURCE

A. NO-BUILD

A new bridge across the St. Croix River would not be constructed under the No-Build Alternative. While the No-Build Alternative would not require the acquisition of any property from Lowell Park, use of the park would continue to be affected by increasing congestion on TH 36 and the Lift Bridge. Congestion is currently a problem in downtown Stillwater and across the Lift Bridge to Wisconsin, and it is projected to become even more problematic without changes to the existing conditions. The noise, visual intrusion, difficult access, and emissions resulting from this congestion, which intrude upon the pleasurable use of the park, would worsen under the No-Build Alternative.

B. BUILD ALTERNATIVES

Construction of the Build Alternative bridges would not physically impact Lowell Park. If the Lift Bridge is converted to a pedestrian/bicycle facility or depending upon how vehicular traffic is excluded from the Lift Bridge, there may be temporary construction impacts to Lowell Park. If the Lift Bridge is converted to a pedestrian/bicycle facility, minor changes to the bridge approach in Lowell Park would be required to prevent vehicle use. Access to Lowell Park from Chestnut Street (the approach roadway to the Lift Bridge through Lowell Park) to Levee Road may also be affected, pending disposition of the Lift Bridge.

Below is a discussion of each Build Alternative and their impact on Lowell Park. Because Lowell Park would remain intact for each Build Alternative, there would not be a negative effect on the surrounding Stillwater Commercial Historic District in regards to the contribution of Lowell Park (see separate Section 4(f) Evaluation).

Alternatives B-1 and C

Construction of the Alternative B-1 bridge would not result in the acquisition of land from Lowell Park. However, maintaining the Lift Bridge for local vehicular use would continue to affect Lowell Park. Although congestion would be less compared to the No-Build Alternative, vehicular traffic would continue to contribute to the noise, visual intrusion, access concerns, and emissions which intrude upon the use of the park.

Maintaining the Lift Bridge as a pedestrian/bicycle facility would not substantially impair the recreational purpose or use of the park. Pedestrian use of the park would also most likely be enhanced by elimination of the road (Lift Bridge approach) through the park with conversion of the Lift Bridge to a pedestrian/bicycle facility. It is anticipated that the TH 36 right-of-way where the road would be abandoned through the park would become available for park use.

The only permanent changes to Lowell Park would be changes in the visual setting due to construction of the Alternative B-1 bridge or Alternative C bridge. Refer to Chapter 7 of the SDEIS for a discussion of visual impacts.

Alternative D

Maintaining the Lift Bridge as a pedestrian/bicycle facility with Alternative D would not substantially impair the recreational purpose or use of the park. Pedestrian use of the park would also most likely be enhanced by elimination of the road (Lift Bridge approach) through the park with conversion of the Lift Bridge to a pedestrian/bicycle facility. It is anticipated that the TH 36 right-of-way where the road would be abandoned through the park would become available for park use.

The only permanent change to Lowell Park would be changes in the visual setting due to construction of the Alternative D bridge and TH 36/95 interchange near downtown Stillwater. See Chapter 7 of the SDEIS for a discussion of visual impacts.

Alternative E

Construction of Alternative E itself would not result in the direct acquisition of land from Lowell Park. However, conversion of the Lift Bridge and Chestnut Street to a one-way roadway for westbound traffic and continued rehabilitation of the Lift Bridge would require temporary occupancy of Lowell Park during rehabilitation of the Lift Bridge. Mn/DOT owns a 60-foot roadway right-of-way for TH 36 as it runs through the park. The right-of-way includes Chestnut Street (which is about 40 feet wide) and the land adjacent to it from Main Street (TH 36/95) to the Lift Bridge. Although much of the construction activity associated with repair and rehabilitation of the Lift Bridge would likely occur within the right-of-way or within the river, some temporary use of park property (e.g., adjacent to the bridge abutment and at the river's edge) might be required for the storage and operation of construction equipment, staging, etc. Potential impacts on the park could include erosion and sedimentation, vegetation impacts, dust and noise impacts, and temporarily restricted access to some portions of the park. Any land used in the park would be returned to a condition at least as good as that which existed prior to the action.

Continued use of the Lift Bridge for vehicular traffic would continue to contribute to the visual, noise, and access concerns associated with the park being bisected by TH 36. Vehicular traffic on the Lift Bridge and approach roadway through Lowell Park associated with Alternative E would also contribute to emissions which intrude upon the use of the park.

Similar to the other Build Alternatives, the only permanent change to Lowell Park would be changes in the visual setting due to construction of the Alternative E bridge. Refer to Chapter 7 of the SDEIS for a discussion of visual impacts.

C. POTENTIAL MITIGATION ITEMS

Potential mitigation items applicable to all Build Alternatives are summarized in the introduction to the Section 4(f) evaluations and described in Chapter 14 of the SDEIS. Upon identification of a Preferred Alternative, a mitigation package will be identified by the lead agencies from the list of mitigation items as well as additional mitigation items identified by agencies or the public during the SDEIS comment period. Additional potential impacts associated with the mitigation package items for the Preferred Alternative will be presented in the Supplemental Final EIS.

III. AVOIDANCE ALTERNATIVES

Use of Lowell Park would depend upon the final disposition of the Lift Bridge with Alternatives B-1 and C. Use of Lowell Park would occur with conversion of the Lift Bridge to a pedestrian/bicycle facility via minor modifications to the bridge approach in Lowell Park to prevent vehicular use. Thus, although conversion of the Lift Bridge to a pedestrian/bicycle facility would likely enhance pedestrian use, this would result in the use of Lowell Park with Alternatives B-1 and C. Continued operation of the Lift Bridge for local vehicular traffic with Alternatives B-1 and C would require a transfer in ownership and removal of the Lift Bridge from the trunk highway system. This would not result in any physical impacts to Lowell Park.

However, local traffic congestion would contribute to noise, visual, and access concerns which intrude upon the park use. Changes to the visual setting resulting from construction of a new bridge to the south are unavoidable with Alternatives B-1 and C.

Conversion of the Lift Bridge to a pedestrian/bicycle facility is the only option being considered in regards to the disposition of the Lift Bridge with Alternative D. Thus, use of the Lift Bridge, and therefore Lowell Park, cannot be avoided with Alternative D. Operation of the Lift Bridge and approach roadway for two lanes of one-way westbound traffic with Alternative E would not require acquisition of park property and would keep the Lift Bridge on the trunk highway system. However, vehicular traffic would continue to contribute to noise, visual, and access concerns which intrude upon the park use. Changes to the visual setting resulting from construction of a new bridge near the park are also unavoidable with Alternatives D and E.

IV. MEASURES TO MINIMIZE HARM

As indicated above, none of the Build Alternatives or potential mitigation items relevant to all the Build Alternatives would result in the permanent use of land from Lowell Park. The anticipated impacts are associated with Alternative E and the repairs and rehabilitation to the Lift Bridge. However, activities associated with the repairs and rehabilitation of the bridge would be temporary and measures would be taken to minimize to the effects on Lowell Park. Conversion of Chestnut Street east of Main Street (TH 36/95) and the Lift Bridge to a two-lane, one-way facility for westbound traffic would not result in any modifications to the park. As discussed in Section II.B, impacts on the park could include erosion and sedimentation, vegetation impacts, dust and noise impacts, and temporarily restricted access to some portions of the park during roadway reconstruction and Lift Bridge rehabilitation. Appropriate mitigation, including landscape restoration as necessary, would be provided for these temporary construction impacts. (Additional information on the handling of construction impacts is provided in Chapter 12 of the SDEIS.)

To the degree possible, changes to the visual setting of Lowell Park caused by construction of all the Build Alternative bridges would be minimized by bridge type designs that are compatible with the surrounding landscape. The bridge type design, pending identification of a Preferred Alternative and resolution of the bridge-type discussion, could provide a complementary fit with the surrounding landscape and visual setting of the Stillwater area.

V. COORDINATION

Extensive agency coordination has occurred throughout the SDEIS process, as described in the Introduction to the Draft Section 4(f) Evaluations. Coordination related to discussion of impacts has occurred with federal, state, and local government agencies and non-governmental groups through the Stakeholder Resolution Process. Further coordination will continue with the City of Stillwater as owners of the park.