

Community Development Committee

Meeting date: March 17, 2014

Subject: Regional Park Usage Among Select Communities of Color

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: N/A

Staff Prepared/Presented: Raintry Salk, PhD, Senior Parks Researcher, (651) 602-1669

Division/Department: Community Development, Regional Parks and Natural Resources Unit

Proposed Action

Information item only. No action required.

Background

In 2008, a Metropolitan Council survey of regional park system visitors indicated that usage of our regional parks and trails was not representative of the overall demographic makeup of the region, specifically as it relates to communities of color. To address this inequity and inform the development of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* toward strengthening equitable usage of the Regional Parks System, as denoted in *Thrive MSP 2040*, a qualitative research project was conducted. The project sought to identify visitation barriers and suggestions to enhance visitation to the Regional Parks System among distinct subpopulations within the region.

A total of 16 focus groups were conducted in the metropolitan area, whereby 263 people participated in the study. Focus group sessions were facilitated by Metropolitan Council staff, audio recorded, and transcribed. Transcripts were qualitatively analyzed to identify major themes. Key barriers to visitation were identified, as well as suggestions to enhance visitation to the Regional Parks System. Differences across focus group types were also documented. A presentation of the major findings and a draft report will be provided, based on the report.

Rationale

This study was undertaken, in part, to assist policy formulation that responds to the direction put forward in *Thrive MSP 2040*, the Metropolitan Council's new regional development framework. *Thrive MSP 2040* states the Metropolitan Council will collaborate with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, regional park agencies and State partners to "*strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such as across race, ethnicity, class, age, ability and immigrant status*". This study sought to provide timely information collected from a diversity of residents, most notably across race, ethnicity and immigrant status.

Funding

This research was funded from the Council's operating budget for the Regional Park and Natural Resources Unit.

Known Support / Opposition

Not applicable.