

Regional Parks System Visitor Study

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Community Development Committee



2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

- Calls for a region-wide visitor study every five years to monitor changes in Regional Parks System use (p. 72)
 - Last visitor study conducted in 2008
- Importance beyond understanding Regional Parks System visitors
 - Important variables for funding formulas
- Council set aside funds in 2016 budget to conduct system-wide visitor study
 - Data to be collected at agency-level/system-level
 - Statistically representative sample
- Approach differed from 2008 effort
 - Exercise care in comparison
 - Survey tool
 - Data collection protocol

2016 Visitor Study

- Protocol and instrument piloted by University of Minnesota's Center for Changing Landscapes
 - Legacy funded project
- Council put forward request for proposal
 - ISG awarded contract
- Data collection in all 117 regional parks and trails open to the public
 - Memorial Day-Labor Day
 - Council and agencies provided intercept locations
 - Data collection was randomized fashion

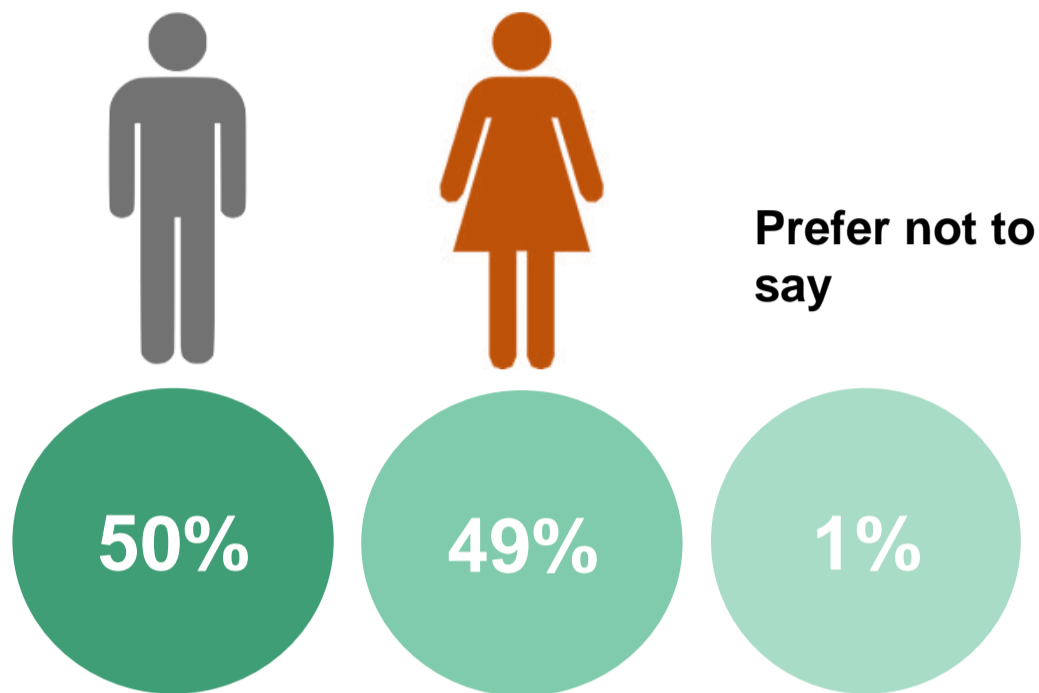


**Metropolitan Council:
Regional Parks System Visitor Study Report**

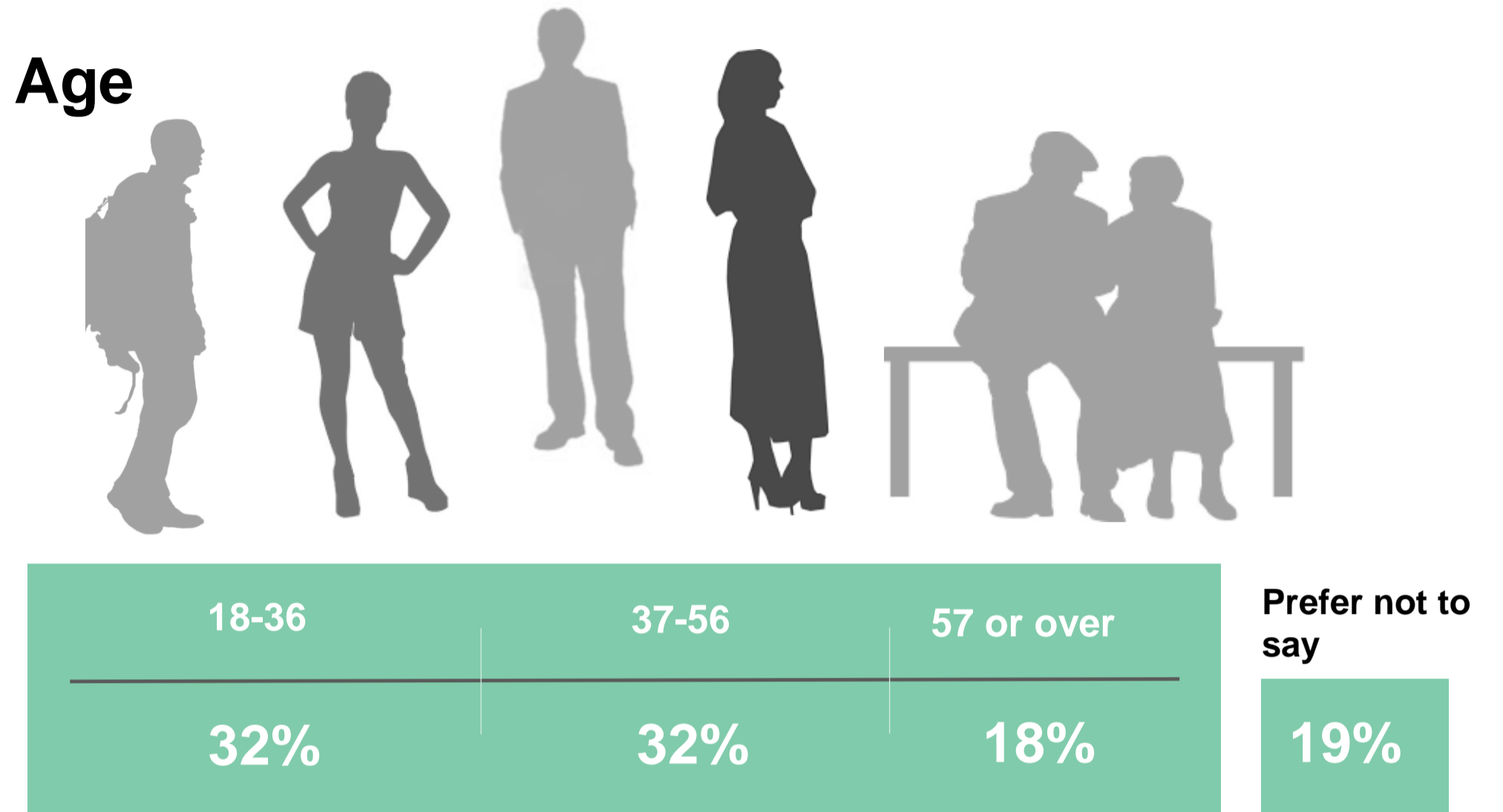
November, 2016

Respondent Summary: Unweighted Demographics

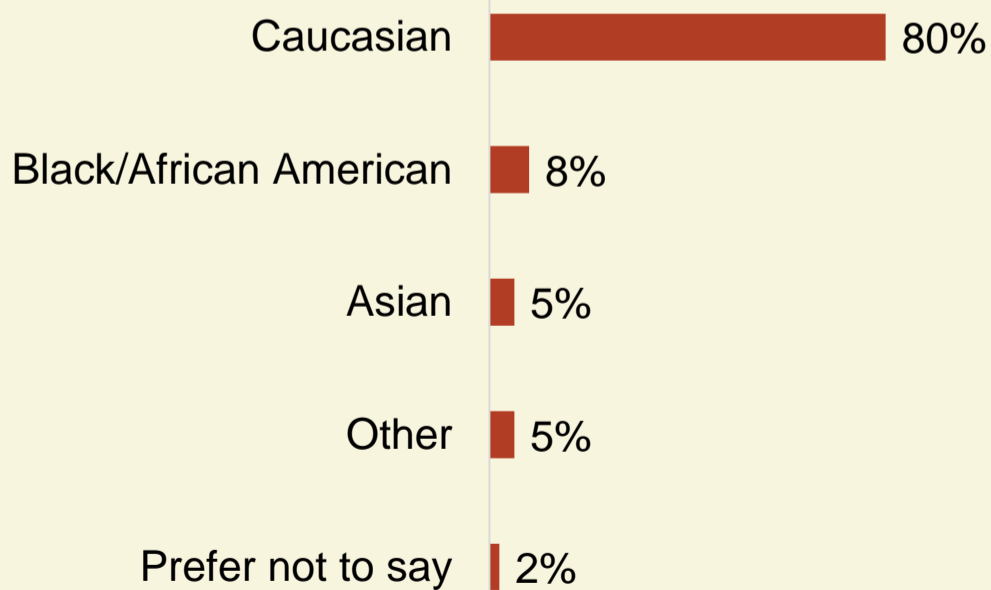
Gender



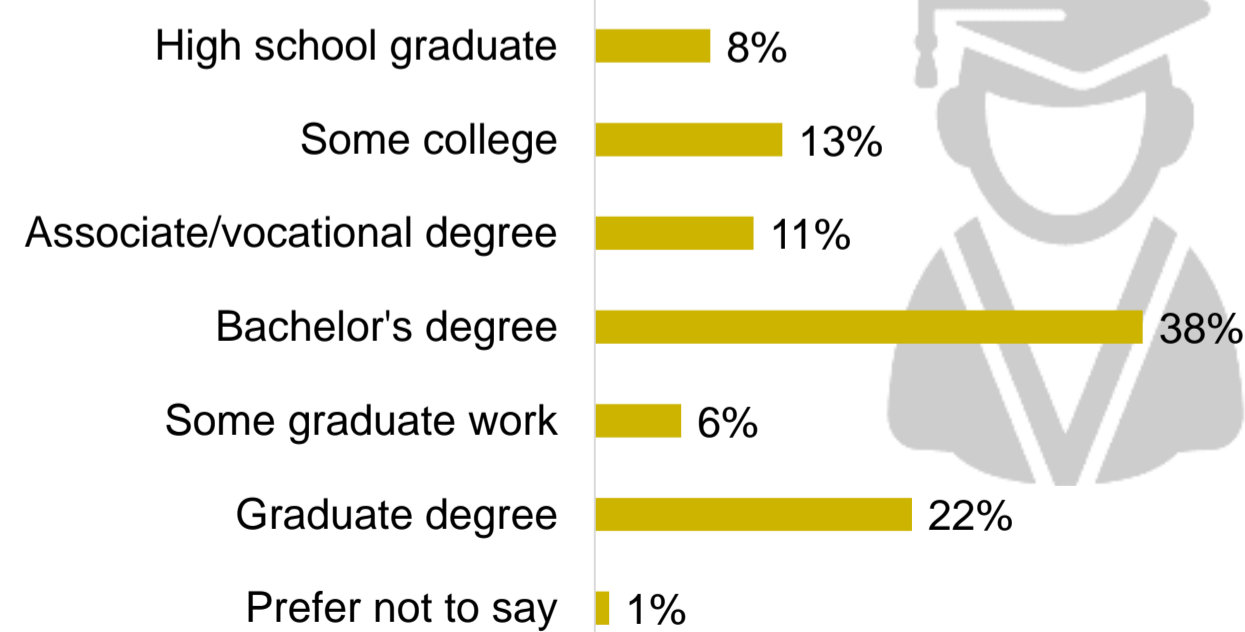
Age



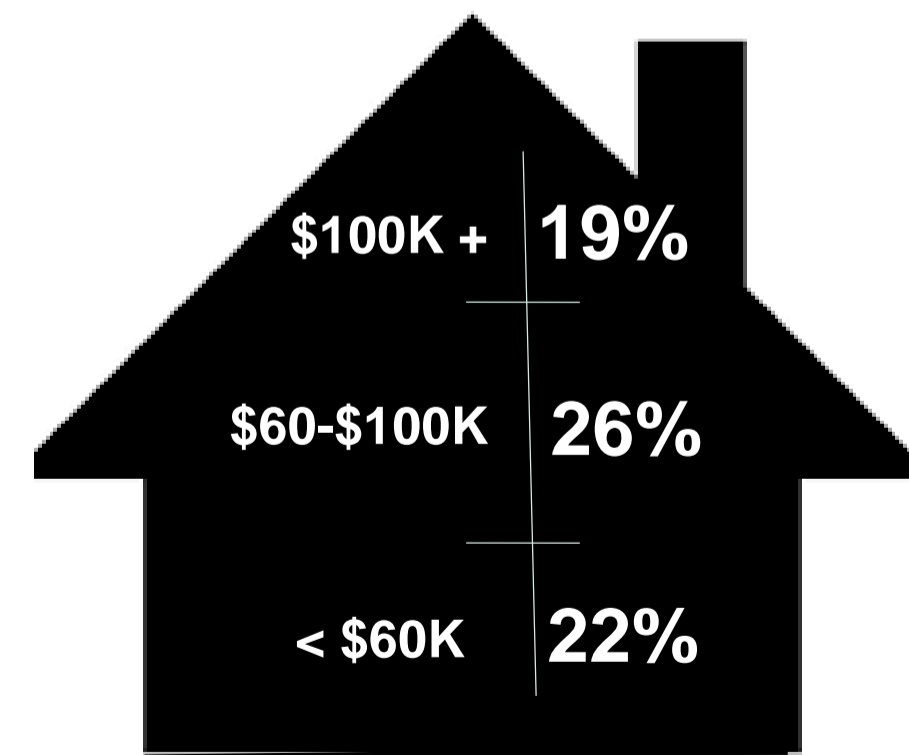
Race



Education



Household Income



Racial Representation

	Total Sample	Anoka County	COB	Carver County	Dakota County	MPRB	Ramsey County	City of Saint Paul	Scott County	Three Rivers Park District	Wash. County
Caucasian	80%	88%	87%	94%	91%	77%	82%	71%	88%	88%	88%

Key Findings

- **Race, ethnicity, age and income have the most noteworthy impacts on usage and experiences.**
 - **Race/ethnicity:**
 - Caucasians visit significantly more often (60 vs. 36 times per year)
 - Caucasians are significantly more likely to rate facilities quality, services and recreation opportunities as very good
 - Caucasians are significantly more likely to say they had no safety concerns
 - **Age:**
 - Under age 35: Significantly more likely to use the park or trail for commuting and visit significantly fewer times per year than the total (34 vs. 56)
 - Over age 55: Visit significantly more often (82 times per year) and are significantly more likely to rate facilities, services and recreational opportunities as good to very good
 - **Household income:**
 - HHI of \$100,000+: Visited significantly more frequently than the lower income segments, had fewer safety concerns and were significantly more likely to rate facility quality and recreation opportunities as very good
 - Those earning less than \$60,000 are significantly more likely to arrive using public transportation and to use parks or trails for commuting purposes
- **Those with disabilities are underrepresented.** Just 3% of respondents said that a member of their group had a physical or mental condition that could impact their participation in activities

Key Findings

- **Parks differ from trails in terms of usage and visitor demographics.** Key distinctions include:
 - **Parks:**
 - More socializing
 - Larger groups of visitors of broader age ranges
 - Travelled farther from home to get to parks (18 miles vs. 8 miles for trails)
 - More likely to look for information prior to visiting
 - Indicated a wider variety of activity participation
 - **Trails:**
 - Significantly more solitary (63% go alone vs. 45% for parks)
 - Higher frequency of visits across seasons and significantly higher summer visits than parks, but less time spent per visit
- **Hiking, walking and biking are the most popular activities.** They are also the most commonly mentioned **primary reason** for visiting a regional park or trail.
 - **Dakota County** has the most breadth of activity participation, with **significantly higher participation in eight of 13 activities measured**
 - **Ramsey County, Scott County, Three Rivers Park District and Washington County** have the narrowest participation, with **significantly lower participation in six or more of the 13 activities measured**

Key Findings (Cont.)

- **Visitors are either very loyal to their park or trail, or simply prefer familiar surroundings.**
 - **Most respondents (89%) had visited the park or trail where they were surveyed before and visit it fairly regularly**
 - Visitors average 56 visits per year (52 parks and 68 trails)
 - 86% did not obtain any outside information prior to visiting, and the most frequently used information resource is previous personal knowledge
- **Overall, visitors are satisfied with facilities and feel safe.**
 - 95% rated the regional park or trail they visited good or very good in terms of facility quality, services and recreation opportunities
 - 91% said that they felt very safe during their visit

Visit Frequency Distinctions by Season

- At the agency level, **Scott County** stands out for significantly higher visits across three seasons, while **Anoka County, City of Bloomington and Washington County** exhibit significantly fewer visits in at least three seasons.

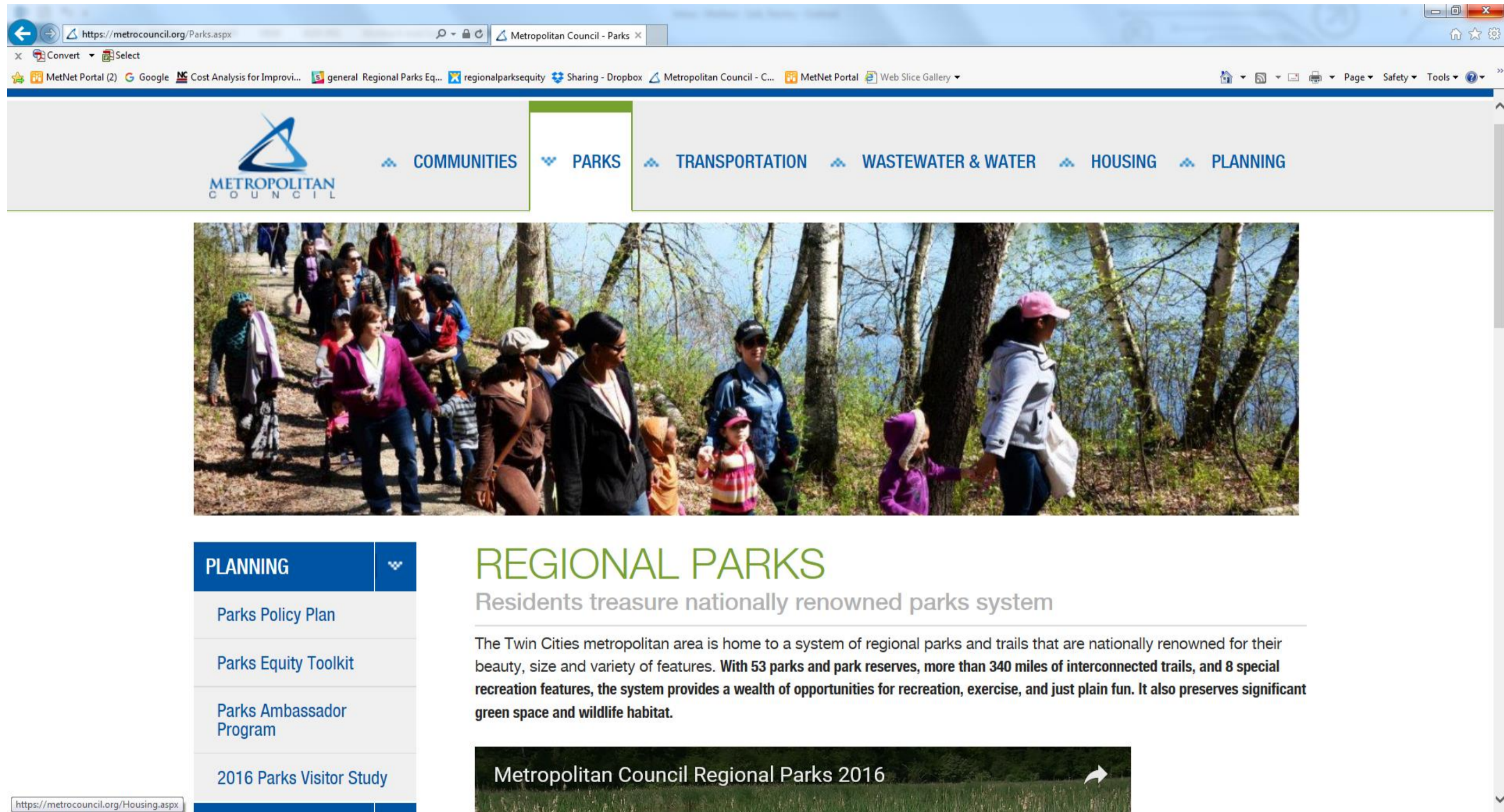
Visits Relative to TOTAL Sample				
Significantly Higher Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - City of Bloomington - Carver County - Dakota County - Scott County - Three Rivers Park District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scott County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scott County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None
Average Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board - City of Saint Paul 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carver County - Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board - Ramsey County - City of Saint Paul - Three Rivers Park District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carver County - Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board - Ramsey County - City of Saint Paul - Three Rivers Park District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anoka County - Carver County - Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board - Ramsey County - City of Saint Paul
Significantly Fewer Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anoka County - Ramsey County - Washington County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anoka County - City of Bloomington - Dakota County - Washington County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anoka County - City of Bloomington - Dakota County - Washington County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - City of Bloomington - Dakota County - Scott County - Three Rivers Park District - Washington County

Next steps

- Additional analysis in-house
 - Update use estimate multipliers and funding formula information
 - Seasonal visitation
 - People/vehicle
 - People/bus
 - Local/non-local visits
 - Exploratory analysis and continued data mining
 - Inform decision-making
 - Provide additional information to regional park implementing agencies

Visitor Study Report

- Full 90-page [report](#) available online



The screenshot shows the Metropolitan Council website's 'Parks' page. The navigation menu includes COMMUNITIES, PARKS (highlighted), TRANSPORTATION, WASTEWATER & WATER, HOUSING, and PLANNING. Below the menu is a large photograph of a diverse group of people walking on a dirt trail in a wooded area. To the left of the main content is a sidebar menu under the heading 'PLANNING' with the following items: Parks Policy Plan, Parks Equity Toolkit, Parks Ambassador Program, and 2016 Parks Visitor Study. The main content area features the heading 'REGIONAL PARKS' and the sub-heading 'Residents treasure nationally renowned parks system'. Below this is a paragraph of text: 'The Twin Cities metropolitan area is home to a system of regional parks and trails that are nationally renowned for their beauty, size and variety of features. With 53 parks and park reserves, more than 340 miles of interconnected trails, and 8 special recreation features, the system provides a wealth of opportunities for recreation, exercise, and just plain fun. It also preserves significant green space and wildlife habitat.' At the bottom of the main content area is a video player with the title 'Metropolitan Council Regional Parks 2016' and a play button icon.