

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Report

For the Community Development Committee meeting of February 16, 2021

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of February 24, 2021

Subject: Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan Amendment and Boundary Adjustment, Three Rivers Park District, Review File No. 18427-2

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Three Rivers Park District's Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan Amendment.
2. Approve the boundary adjustment adding 31.2-acres to Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature in the City of Minnetrista.

Summary of Committee Discussion/Questions

Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst, presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission at its meeting on February 4, 2021. Kelly Grissman, Three Rivers Park District, was also in attendance and responded to a question.

Commissioner Harris requested additional information on how natural resources would be managed on parcels added to the special recreation feature. Grissman responded that all parcels would be managed consistent with Three Rivers Park District's policies on natural resource management, and consistent with how other (non-agricultural) portions of the special recreation feature are managed. She noted the largest of the parcels – the 28-acre Gen Olson property – is currently a mix of old fields and maple basswood forest. Natural resource management practices will include invasive species removal, oak wilt management, and reforestation.

The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission voted unanimously to approve the proposed actions.

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: February 4, 2021

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MPOSC District, Member: District B, Robert Moeller

Council District, Member: District 3, Christopher Ferguson

Policy/Legal Reference: Minnesota Statutes § 473.313; Planning Strategy 1, *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

Staff Prepared/Presented: Colin Kelly, AICP, Planning Analyst (651-602-1361)

Division/Department: Community Development/ Regional Planning

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Background

Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature is located in the western part of the Regional Parks System (Figure 1) in Hennepin County and the City of Minnetrista (Figure 2). Three Rivers Park District (Three Rivers) is the regional park implementing agency.

The Dakota Rail Regional Trail traverses much of the southern boundary of the special recreation feature. Kingswood Special Recreation Feature is approximately 0.5 mile north. Both special recreation features are planned to be connected by the Baker-Carver Regional Trail. A plan for this regional trail was approved the Council in 2015.

In 1999 and 2000, Three Rivers received 410 acres of property in the City of Minnetrista along the eastern shoreline of Whaletail Lake as a gift from Alfred P. and Leona Gale. This property was conveyed to Three Rivers for the purpose of establishing, operating and maintaining a public facility while preserving the farm character for park visitors. A master plan was prepared in 2000 and the park officially opened to the public in 2003. The official master plan boundaries have not changed since acceptance of the original land gift.

This acquisition master plan amendment proposes to add 31.2 acres to the official Gale Woods Farm master plan boundary. Three Rivers submitted its proposal to adjust the special recreation feature's boundary during the 2019-2020 Regional Parks System additions process. Through that process, the Council approved the addition to the regional park system. This proposed amendment is to update the master plan to account for this addition.

Figure 1: 2040 Regional Parks System Plan Map (2020), Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature location

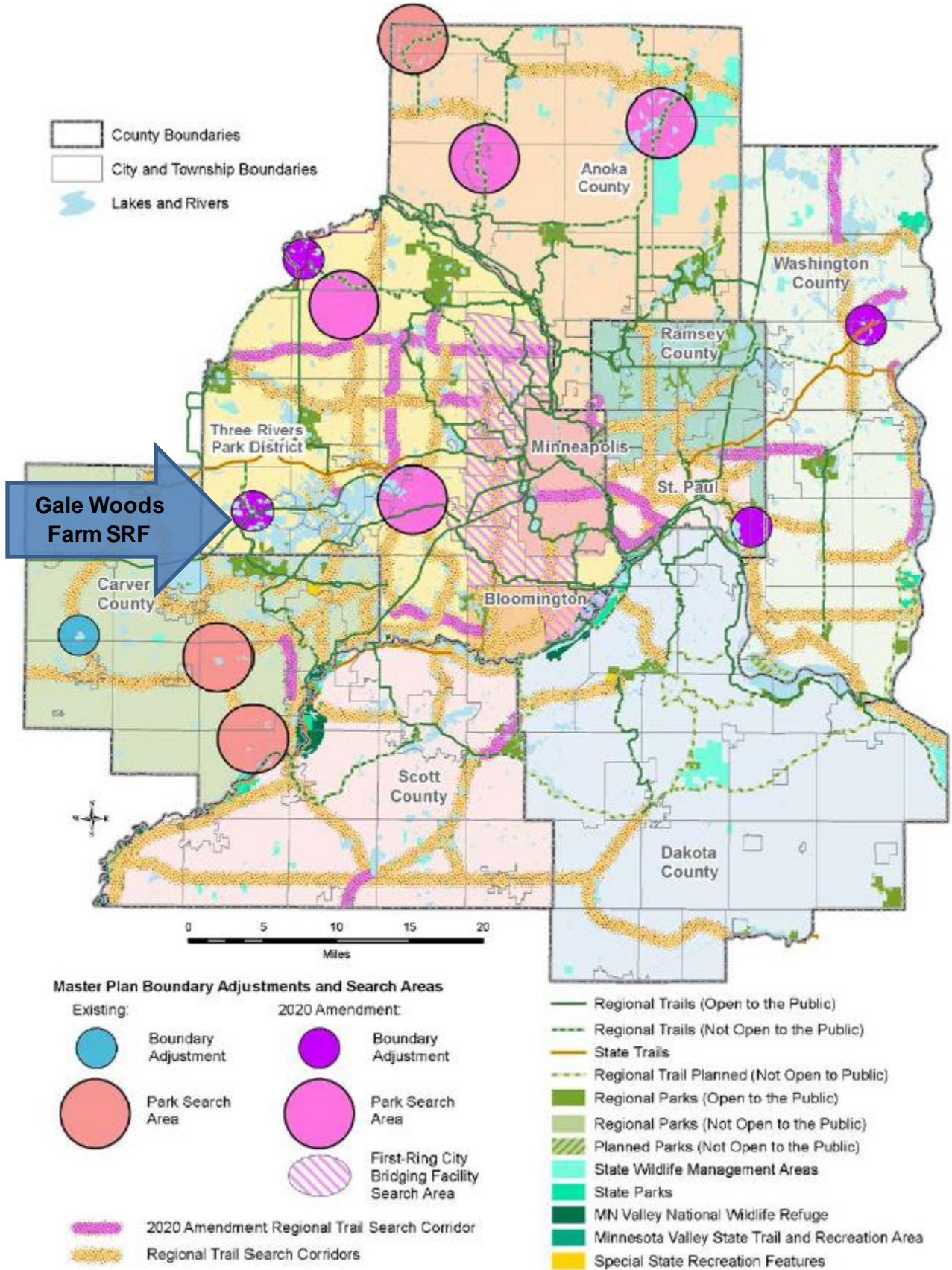
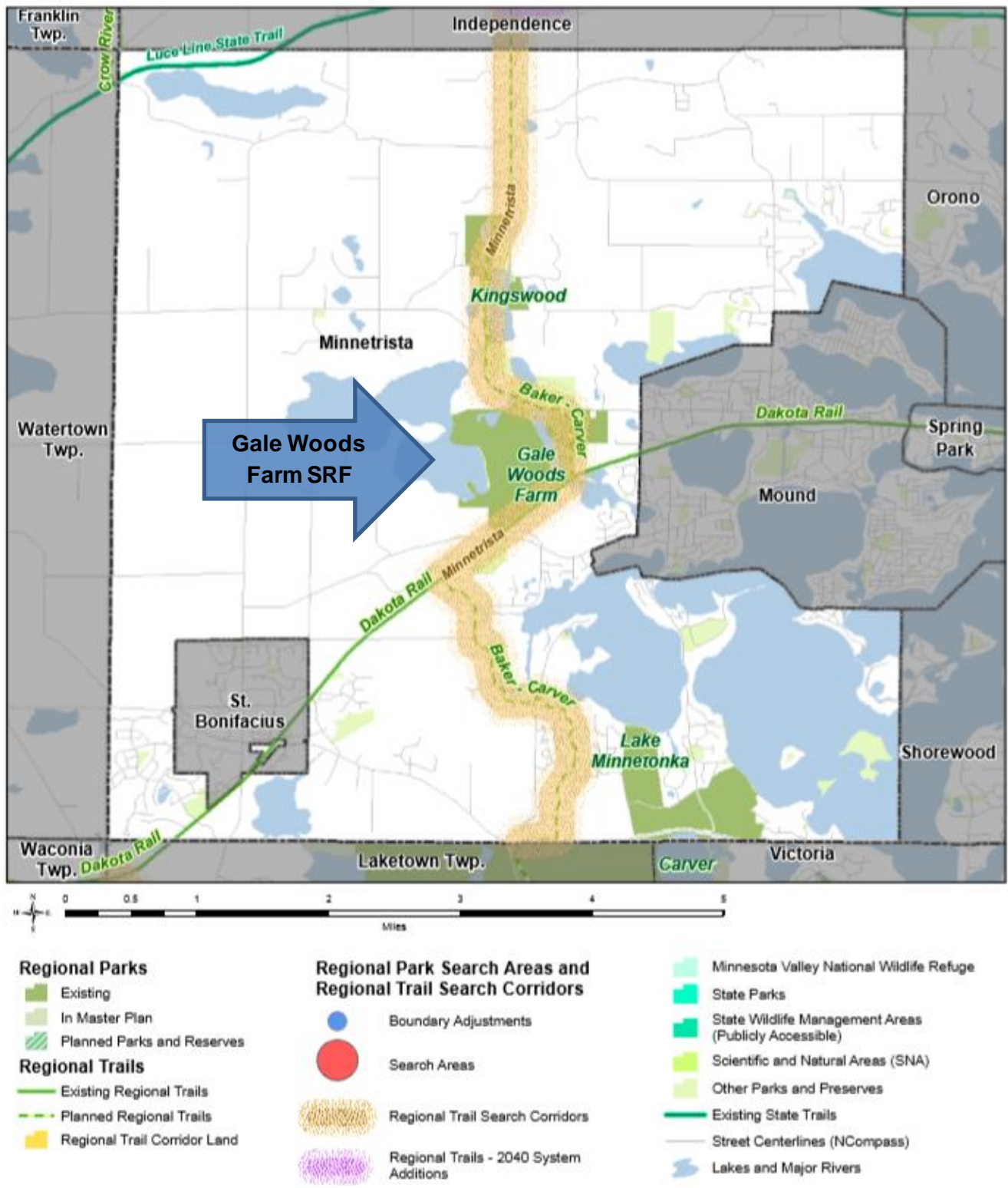


Figure 2: Regional Parks System, City of Minnetrista, Hennepin County



Rationale

The Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan Amendment is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, including Planning Strategy 1 – Master planning, and other Council policies, as described in the attached Analysis.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan Amendment advances the Thrive outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation. This master plan amendment also advances the Stewardship outcome through responsibly managing the region's finite resources including conserving quality natural resources.

Funding

The estimated acquisition cost for the 28.0-acre Gen Olson property is \$585,000. There are no costs associated with the remaining 3.2 acres of Boys and Girls Club property (0.9 acre) and Three Rivers Park District property (2.3 acres).

Approval of this acquisition master plan amendment does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. The approval will allow Three Rivers Park District to request acquisition funding as described above.

Known Support / Opposition

The City of Minnetrista adopted a resolution of support for the master plan boundary adjustment on November 9, 2020. There is no known opposition to the acquisition master plan.

Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that acquisition master plans include:

- a demonstration of the proposed unit's consistency with Siting and Acquisition Strategy 1: Priorities and
- boundary and acquisition costs to include a list of parcels to be acquired; the estimated total cost for their acquisition; and information on natural resources, site suitability and other conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the boundaries.

Additional content typically included in regional park master plans is included at the discretion of the regional park implementing agency and is included here for context and Council consideration.

Consistency with Siting and Acquisition Strategy 1: Priorities

Existing portions of Gale Woods Farm and the proposed boundary adjustment are consistent with the Regional Parks Policy Plan's Siting and Acquisition Strategy 1, which states "lands with natural resource features, access to water, and/or restoration potential will be a priority of the Regional Parks System."

Gale Woods Farm and its boundary expansion are located to protect existing natural resources and upon acquisition, the expanded areas will be restored to reflect the natural communities of the region.

Gale Woods Farm protects the eastern shoreline of Whaletail Lake and encompasses Lake Flanagan. A carry-in boat access and fishing pier are available within the special recreation feature on Whaletail Lake.

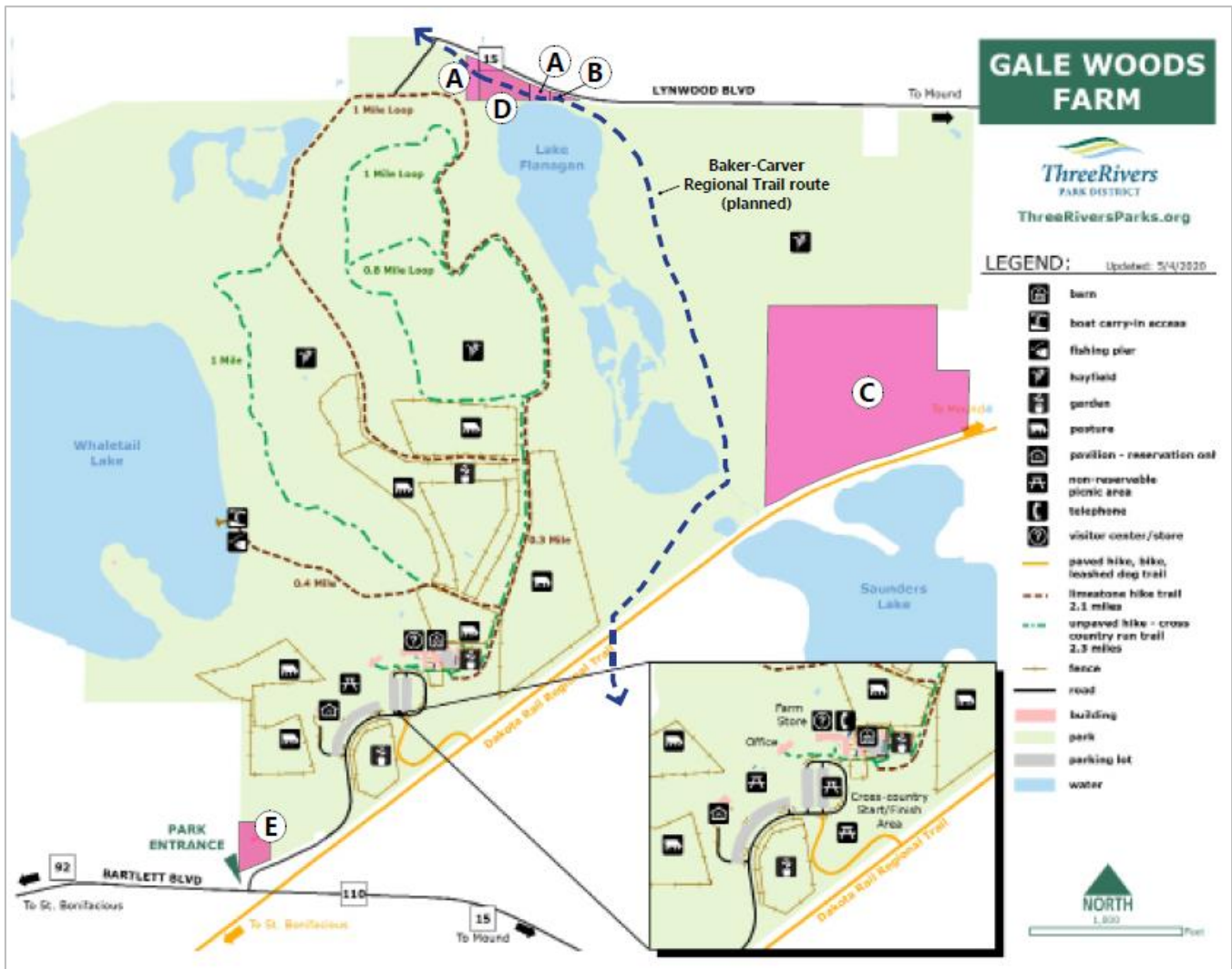
Boundaries and Acquisition

The boundary of Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature includes 410 acres currently owned by Three Rivers and 31.2 acres that are owned by a combination of owners, including the Boys and Girls Club, Gen Olson and Three Rivers Park District. The properties are located immediately adjacent to existing park boundaries.

This boundary expansion includes a variety of acquisition scenarios and allows for:

- Additional natural resource protection and consistent management of existing and new natural areas, especially those natural areas which cross the park boundary.
- Potential securing of associated Baker-Carver Regional Trail land.
- Protection of existing parkland as one property (property C in Figure 3) is land locked.
- More logical and straight-forward boundaries which are easier to manage and convey to the public.

Figure 3: Boundaries and Acquisition Location (AMPA Fig. 1)



Upon approval of the boundary expansion, all properties will become part of the official master plan boundary, and all (with the exception of those currently under Three Rivers ownership) will become park inholdings.

Boys and Girls Club

Partial acquisition of Properties A and B (totaling 0.9 acres) is anticipated through a land exchange agreement with the Boys and Girls Club (Camp Voyagers) located across County Road (CR) 15 from the northern boundary of Gale Woods Farm (Figures 4, 5). This exchange allows Three Rivers to retain all property south of CR 15 and the Boys and Girls Club retain all property north of CR 15 and provides parkland for the Baker-Carver Regional Trail route. No significant acquisition costs are foreseen with this exchange; however, an administrative lot split or reconfiguration would be required.

Figure 4: Boys and Girls Club, Property A (AMPA Fig. 3)



Figure 5: Boys and Girls Club, Property B (AMPA Fig. 4)



Gen Olson

Currently for sale by a willing seller, this property measures 28 acres (Figure 6). Acquisition for the expansion is estimated at \$585,000 (plus related acquisition costs) based on a recent appraisal.

Figure 6: Gen Olson, Property C (AMPA Fig. 5)



Three Rivers Park District

Three Rivers retains ownership of Properties D and E (totaling 2.3 acres) which were acquired without Met Council funding (Figures 7, 8)

Figure 7: Three Rivers Park District, Property D (AMPA Fig. 6)



Figure 8: Three Rivers Park District, Property E (AMPA Fig. 7)



Future Acquisition Opportunity

At the CR 110 main entrance of Gale Woods Farm, there exists a Hennepin County road right-of-way remnant that extends approximately 600 feet (1.5 acres) (Figure 9). Should a road right-of-way vacation opportunity become available, it shall be considered in line with the spirit of the master plan and become part of the official master plan boundary. When the right-of-way is vacated and conveyed to Three Rivers, an additional master plan amendment would not be required. Upon transfer of ownership, Three Rivers will assume maintenance control of the park entrance road including associated pavement management responsibilities.

Figure 9: Right of Way Acquisition Opportunity (AMPA Figure 2)



Stewardship Plan

Stewardship activities will begin as soon as the transfer of title occurs for newly acquired properties. Four of the properties are vacant (A-D) and one (E) includes structures Three Rivers is currently using and plans to continue to use as storage. Stewardship activities include the inventory, cleanup, reuse and disposal of any found objects associated with previous use, vegetative cleanup including mowing, removal of exotic plant materials, cleanup of any debris such as old wood and barbed wire fencing, tree trimming, and general native plant restoration.

Demand Forecast

The inclusion of the additional 31.2 acres does not alter the existing use or demand forecast for Gale Woods Farm as the properties will generally remain in their current development state and additional

public facilities, with the exception of the Baker-Carver Regional Trail through Properties A, B and D, are not envisioned. However, park visitation will likely increase at the time the Baker-Carver Regional Trail is implemented. This visitation forecast is discussed in the respective regional trail master plan.

Development Concept

The requested boundary amendment does not alter the existing recreation development concept. However, the previously approved Gale Woods recreation development concept did not specifically identify the Dakota Rail Regional Trail along the southern boundary or the Baker-Carver Regional Trail route through the eastern portion of the park as neither were envisioned at that time. These routes, connections and support facilities located within Gale Woods Farm were solidified or approved as allowed recreational development amenities as part of the respective regional trail master planning processes and are subsequently recognized in this Gale Woods Farm master plan amendment as well.

Conflicts

Presently, no known conflicts exist regarding the proposed boundary expansion of Gale Woods Farm property.

Public Services

Gale Woods is located between CR 15 and CR 110, west of Mound and immediately east of Whaletail Lake. Access to Gale Woods is from CR 110.

Properties included in the boundary expansion have an underlying agriculture zoning classification, as defined by the City of Minnetrista. Gale Woods Farm currently operates under a conditional use permit (CUP). Three Rivers will work collaboratively with the City of Minnetrista to amend the CUP, if necessary, to revise the CUP boundaries with the park boundaries.

The proposed park expansion is not within the proposed Metropolitan Urban Service Area. City water and sewer services are not proposed nor required for this boundary expansion.

Mass transit, specifically buses, do not service Gale Woods Farm. Bus service is available in Mound, approximately two miles east of Gale Woods and the properties included in the boundary expansion. The Dakota Rail Regional Trail provides multi-modal transportation access to the park.

Operations

Gale Woods is operated as a special recreation feature within the Regional Park System. Three Rivers Ordinances and policies will extend to the additional parkland to ensure the quiet, orderly and suitable use and enjoyment of Park District properties. Three Rivers public safety services will also be extended to these properties in addition to local law enforcement agencies. No staffing or operational budgets will be impacted by this boundary expansion.

Public Engagement and Participation

The original park boundary was limited to the original 410-acre donation which was politically and publicly supported at the time of donation (2000). The adjacent property owners and broader community are supportive of Gale Woods Farm, and are now interested in working with Three Rivers to amend and expand the boundary.

While public engagement specific to this boundary amendment request was not sought, other Three Rivers research indicates that there is broad support for land acquisition and natural resource protection. In fact, the Three Rivers' 2018 General Population Survey findings indicated that 84% of respondents support acquiring land for future parks and 88% of respondents support preserving open space. In addition, the 2018 Park Visitor Survey findings indicated that 93% of respondents support improving natural resources and 78% of respondents support acquiring land for future parks and trails.

Partner Engagement

Three Rivers Board of Commissioners approved updating the Gale Woods Farm master plan to reflect current ownership and proceeding land exchange and proceeding land exchange for Properties A and B, and pending purchase agreement for Property C. The City of Minnetrista is aware of the potential Boys and Girls club land exchange as well as the immediate acquisition opportunity. No opposition is envisioned as part of the land exchange and the property owner for Property C has indicated that they have discussed the acquisition opportunity with their City of Minnetrista elected officials and do not foresee opposition due to the development potential and access challenges of the property. Upon receipt of a purchase agreement, Three Rivers will further coordinate the appropriate approvals with the City of Minnetrista.

Equity Analysis

Three Rivers shares Met Council's goal to strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability - inspiring a legacy of stewardship that also strengthens friendships, families, health and spirit.

Gale Woods Farm provides a unique regional recreation offering not found elsewhere within the Regional Parks System. It operates a community supported agricultural program and works closely with community partners to engage urban youth in sustainable agriculture, food production and animal care in order to create connections to nature, develop confidence and build life skills. Gale Woods Farm also works with these partners in the first-ring suburbs supporting school and community gardens, growing produce for K-12 cafeterias and provide outreach education in school classrooms. In addition, skill-based classes in cooking, gardening and fiber arts provide opportunities for adults of all ages to connect to Three Rivers and parks in unique ways.

Accessibility

Gale Woods Farm is located directly at the intersection of the Dakota Rail Regional Trail and the future Baker – Carver Regional Trail off of CR 110. It is accessible by car, foot and bike. At this time, Metro Transit does not provide service to the park although it is desired.

Natural Resources

Protecting lands with natural resource features, access to water, and/or restoration potential is a priority for the Regional Parks System – and can be achieved within the existing park and within the proposed expansion. Gale Woods Farm offers a unique opportunity to showcase how farming supports land stewardship. The park is a mix of pastures, gardens and orchards and is managed for both food production and high-quality natural habitat. Hayfields provide habitat for ground nesting birds, forested pastures mimic native Oak savanna ecosystems and the gardens include native pollinator species. This provides an opportunity for visitors to experience and learn about sustainable farming practices and adjacent natural areas.

Three Rivers' 2040 System Plan calls for protecting existing high-quality natural resources and connecting them to each other through buffers and natural resource corridors – this park and boundary expansion supports this goal. The park and its boundary expansion are located to protect existing natural resources - especially those identified as high quality - and, upon acquisition, the expanded areas will be restored to reflect the natural communities of the region.

The protected and restored areas will provide opportunity for carbon sequestration, urban island heat affect reduction and places for people to connect to nature close to home - which can positively affect mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing. Gale Woods Farm includes wetlands and floodplains under

protection which when restored, will provide opportunities to contribute to a resilient region by offsetting flooding, improving water quality and providing wildlife habitat.

Much of the land included in the expansion request is undeveloped and includes natural areas/resources that extend from the master plan boundary onto the properties proposed for inclusion in the official master plan boundary. Ownership and inclusion of the properties within the boundary helps ensure that these natural areas, in whole, will be protected and consistently managed as one ecosystem unit.

Consistency with Other Council Policies and Systems

Community Development – Housing (Ashleigh Johnson 651-602-1106) – The acquisition master plan amendment is consistent with the Council's *2040 Housing Policy Plan*. The plan amendment does include the acquisition of private land; however, this land is guided for the 2021-2030 decade to be Rural and Park, Public and Semi Public, and does not affect single or multi-family housing. There are also no affordable housing developments within a half -mile of this regional park.

Community Development – Local Planning Assistance (Jake Reilly 651-602-1674) – The information included in the proposed Master Plan Amendment is complete. The proposed acquisitions are compatible and consistent with Regional Land Use Policy described in *Thrive MSP 2040* and the City of Minnetrista's Comprehensive Plan authorized in 2019.

Community Development – Research (Todd Graham 651-602-1322) – The Park District has identified that the current Master Plan includes park visitation estimates and demand forecast discussion. The Park District states: "The inclusion of the additional 31.2 acres does not alter the existing use or demand forecast for Gale Woods However, park visitation will likely increase at which time the Baker-Carver Regional Trail is implemented. This visitation forecast is discussed in the respective regional trail master plan." Council staff concur with this assessment.

Environmental Services – Sewer (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – This acquisition master plan amendment focuses exclusively on a 31.2-acre boundary expansion. The proposed park expansion is not within the proposed Metropolitan Urban Service Area and therefore, City water and sewer services are not proposed nor required for this boundary expansion. There are no Metropolitan Council Environmental Services facilities in the vicinity of this proposed park boundary expansion; therefore, there is no impact.