

# Information Item

Community Development Committee



Meeting Date: August 1, 2022

## Topic

Regional Parks System 2021 Annual Use Estimate

**District(s), Member(s):** All

**Policy/Legal Reference:** Minn. Stat. §§ 85.53, subd. 3 and 473.351, subd. 3; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

**Staff Prepared/Presented:** Darcie Vandegrift, Principal Researcher (651-602-1669)

**Division/Department:** Community Development

### Proposed Action

Information item; no action is proposed at this time.

### Background

The Metropolitan Council has prepared annual use estimates for the Regional Park System since 1995 in partnership with the ten regional park implementing agencies.

The Council bases its estimate of park visits on counts of visitors entering regional parks and trails from Memorial Day to Labor Day. No use estimate was done in 2020 due to the pandemic. The count is a collaboration between all ten regional parks implementing agencies, whose staff conduct the summer counts, and Council staff who complete the analysis.

An estimated 64.9 million visits were made to the Regional Parks system in 2021 representing a 2.6% increase from 2019. This increase was due entirely to increased trail use, up over 12%. Park use declined slightly overall. Slightly less than three-quarters of the visits were to regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features. The rest were to regional trails. The most visited regional park was Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, with 7.5 million visits. This total is slightly lower than the 2019 estimate of over 8 million visits.

The Council uses a four-year rolling average of counts to ensure a representative sample of each park and each trail. Off-season visits (winter, spring, and fall) are based on a survey asking visitors how often they visit during off-season months. The most recent survey was completed in 2021 and incorporated into the estimates for the first time this year.

At the Community Development Committee meeting, staff will provide a more detailed explanation of the methodology and findings for the 2021 use estimate. Staff will return to CDC in September to provide further information on the findings from the Visitor Study.