

Committee Report

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Community Development Committee Meeting: August 15, 2022 **For the Metropolitan Council:** August 24, 2022

Business Item: 2022-215

Anoka County Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan Amendment and Land Conversion, Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Acquisition Master Plan Amendment

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Mississippi West Regional Park master plan amendment and land conversion.
2. Approve the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve acquisition master plan amendment.
3. Approve the removal of 3.65 acres of land within the Mississippi West Regional Park in exchange for adding 33 acres of land to Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve (Figures 3 and 4).
4. Consent to a temporary construction easement for 1.97 acres of land within the Mississippi West Regional Park as illustrated in Figure 3.

Summary of Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Discussion/Questions

Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner, presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission on August 4, 2022. Karen Blaska, Anoka County Park Planner, was in attendance and responded to questions.

Commissioner Peichel asked if there is an opportunity to connect both sides of the replacement parcel for wildlife access since it is bisected by Highway 35W. Blaska responded that Anoka County looked at a wildlife passage connector as part of this unit; however, decided against it in the short-term since no development was planned as part of this acquisition master plan amendment. Anoka County will continue exploring this concept in the future and in consultation with the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

Commissioner Dillenburg asked if the future Highway 10/BSNF railroad overpass would have a separated pedestrian bridge as part of the project. Kinney responded that the overpass consists of two roundabouts with a 10-foot pedestrian path on each side. Commissioner Dillenburg recommended that separated pedestrian access is preferred for people with strollers or mobility issues, to ensure safe crossing. Dillenburg asked if the highway noise will be mitigated from impacting the regional park. Blaska responded that Anoka County was considering screening and berming to lessen the noise.

Commissioner Harris asked about Rice Creek and its location with respect to the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve. Blaska responded that the creek ecosystem intersects the string of lakes in this area, including George Watch, Peltier and others. Commissioner Harris asked where Columbus Conservation Area is located. Chair Yarrusso responded that it is north of Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve. Commissioner Dillenburg asked about the hunting accommodation in the Columbus Conservation Area. Blaska responded that bow hunting was permitted at the conservation area and some hunting is permitted in the Regional Parks System to manage the deer population.

Chair Tony Yarusso said that he liked the land-for-land equally valuable exchange as compared to a facility exchange. Anoka County looked for land outside of the Mississippi West Regional Park since there are no inholdings.

Commissioner Dillenburg voiced concern about the pedestrian access on the bridge. Blaska responded that she will let the Anoka County Transportation Department know of her comment since they are still designing the overpass. Commissioner Piechel said that the City of Ramsey pedestrian bridge is nearby to the west. Commissioner Dillenburg said that most people would not go out of their way to access the pedestrian bridge if it is not in their immediate vicinity.

There was not a quorum present at the August 4 MPOSC Commission meeting. Based on the four Commissioners present, there was a consensus to move this item forward to the Community Development Committee.



Business Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Community Development Committee Meeting: August 15, 2022 For the Metropolitan Council: August 24, 2022

Business Item: 2022-215

Anoka County Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan Amendment and Land Conversion, Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Acquisition Master Plan Amendment

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| District(s), Member(s): | District A, Monica Dillenburg and District F, Cecily Harris District 9, Raymond Zeran and District 11, Susan Vento |
| Policy/Legal Reference: | Minn. Stat. § 473.313; <i>2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan</i> : Chapter 6, System Protection, Strategy 2 Conversions; Chapter 5, Planning Policy Strategy 1, Master Plans; and Chapter 4 Siting and Acquisition |
| Staff Prepared/Presented: | Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner (651-602-1029) |
| Division/Department: | Community Development / Regional Planning |

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Mississippi West Regional Park master plan amendment and land conversion.
2. Approve the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve acquisition master plan amendment.
3. Approve the removal of 3.65 acres of land within the Mississippi West Regional Park in exchange for adding 33 acres of land to Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve (Figures 3 and 4).
4. Consent to a temporary construction easement for 1.97 acres of land within the Mississippi West Regional Park as illustrated in Figure 3.

Background

Mississippi West Regional Park is located in the northwest part of the Regional Parks System, south of Highway 10 along the Mississippi River in the City of Ramsey and Anoka County. The 271-acre regional park includes shoreline, trails, parking, boat launch, and observation points. The park is connected to the Regional Parks System by the Mississippi River and Central Anoka Regional Trails.

Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve is located in the Cities of Centerville, Lino Lakes, and Columbus. It is a 4,133-acre park reserve containing significant native wildlife habitat and water resources (Figures 1 and 2). The Central Anoka and Chain of Lakes-Otter Lake Regional Trails are a few of the trails that link to the park reserve.

Anoka County Parks Department is requesting to permanently remove 3.65-acres of park land and to provide a 1.97-acre temporary construction easement in Mississippi West Regional Park for transfer to the Anoka County Highway Department. The land will be used for road right-of-way to create a Highway 10 and BSNF railroad overpass for the Ramsey Boulevard and Riverdale Drive interchange (Figure 3). The overpass was included in the City of Ramsey's [Comprehensive Plan](#) (Page 94) to accommodate safe pedestrian travel, as well as current and anticipated vehicle congestion in the area. The pedestrian overpass will create safer access to the park for walkers and bikers crossing Highway 10 and the railroad tracks. In exchange, the Anoka County Highway

Department will transfer 33 acres of land to Anoka County Parks for addition to the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve (Figure 4). The replacement land was originally acquired by the Anoka County Highway Department for an I-35W highway interchange that was not ultimately constructed. The transfer of the land to the Parks Department will allow for a higher level of management and protection, and an additional 350 feet of Rice Creek Shoreline.

Table 1. Land conversion, value; and natural resources and recreation

| Land Conversion | Value | Natural Resources & Recreation |
|---|----------|--|
| Mississippi West Regional Park Fee Title – 3.6-acre Temporary easement – 1.97 acres | \$56,600 | Removal of turf grass and restored native grasses. Limited recreation. |
| Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Replacement land – 33 acres | \$60,000 | 350 feet of Rice Creek. Limited non-motorized watercraft access. |

The land conversion request is accompanied by related master plan amendments for the two park units to reflect those same changes in boundaries.

Rationale

As described in the Analysis section of this report, the Anoka County Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan Amendment and Land Conversion, Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Acquisition Master Plan Amendment are consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (RPPP) including Chapter 6, System Protection Strategy 2 Conversions; Chapter 5, Planning Policy Strategy 1, Master Plans; and Chapter 4 Siting and Acquisition.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Anoka County Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan Amendment and Land Conversion, and the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Acquisition Master Plan Amendment advances the Thrive outcome of stewardship by investing in additional segments of Rice Creek for natural resource management. The amendment also advances the Thrive outcome of prosperity by planning for and investing in Highway 10 infrastructure that includes safe pedestrian crossings needed for quality of life and economic competitiveness.

Funding

While no regional park or trail funds were used, conversion of Regional Parks System lands to other uses is allowed only in limited circumstances and with approval of the Metropolitan Council. Approval of this request would allow the road project to take place while also allowing for Mississippi West Regional Park to continue to function according to the Council approved plan. Additionally, this land exchange would increase the size of Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve and provide for greater resilience of its natural resource foundation.



Figure 1. Mississippi West Regional Park and Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve in relation to the Regional Parks System

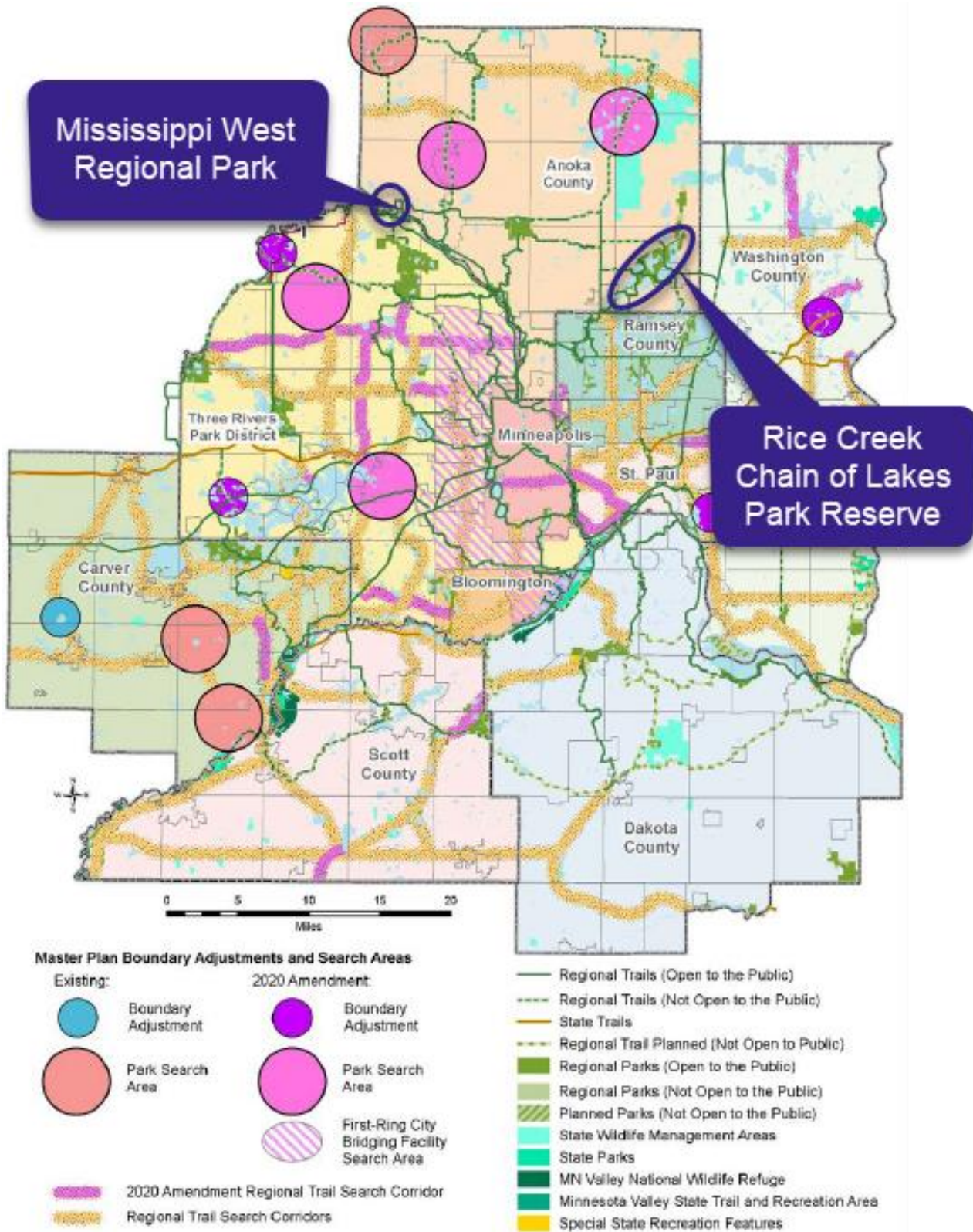
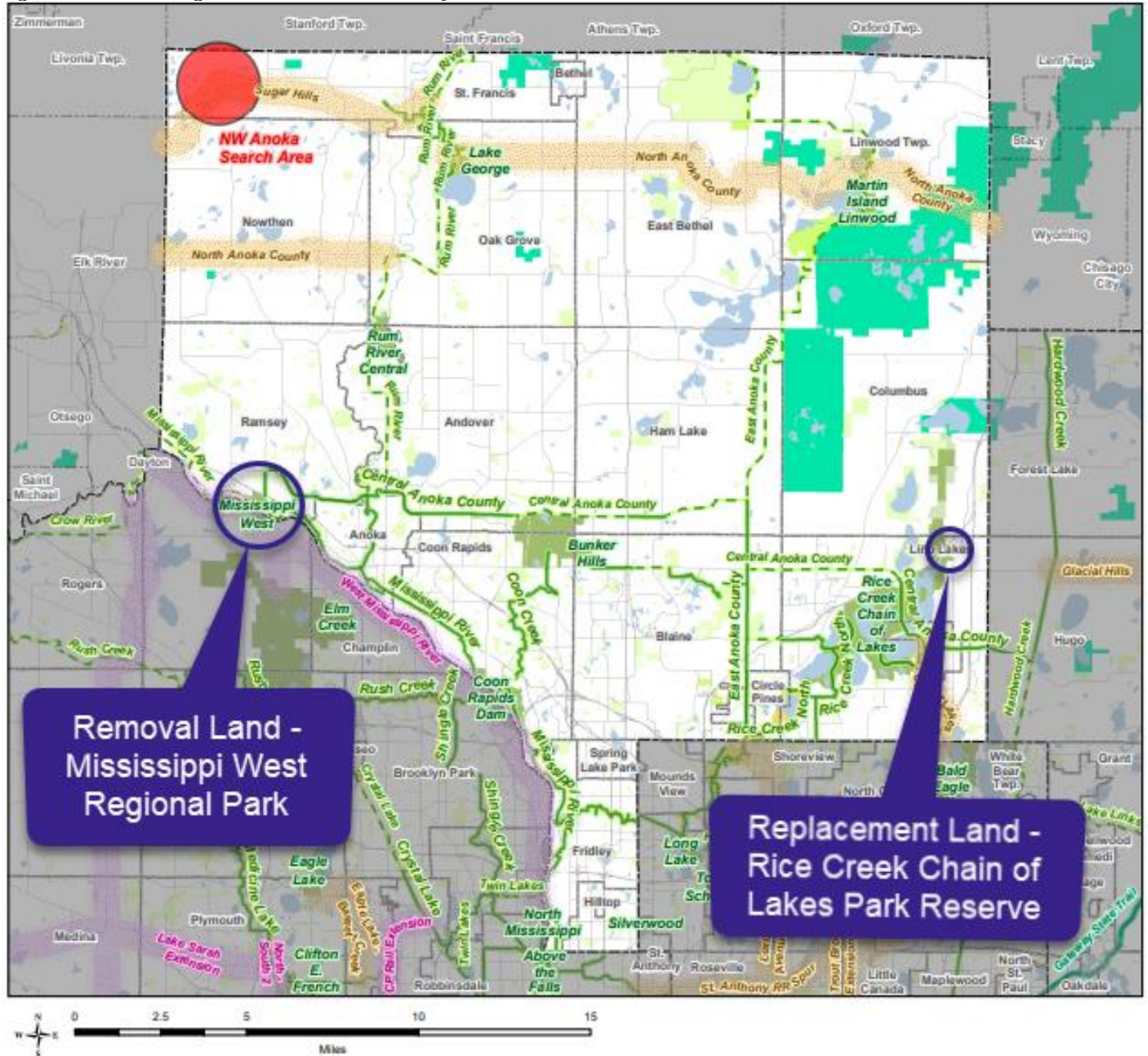


Figure 2. Land exchange in relation to Anoka County



Regional Parks

- Existing
- In Master Plan
- Planned Parks and Reserves

Regional Trails

- Existing Regional Trails
- Planned Regional Trails
- Regional Trail Corridor Land

Regional Park Search Areas and Regional Trail Search Corridors

- Boundary Adjustments
- Search Areas
- Regional Trail Search Corridors
- Regional Trails - 2040 System Additions

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

- Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge
- State Parks
- State Wildlife Management Areas (Publicly Accessible)
- Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA)
- Other Parks and Preserves
- Existing State Trails
- Street Centerlines (NCompass)
- Lakes and Major Rivers

Figure 3. Land removal and temporary construction easement in relation to Mississippi West Regional Park

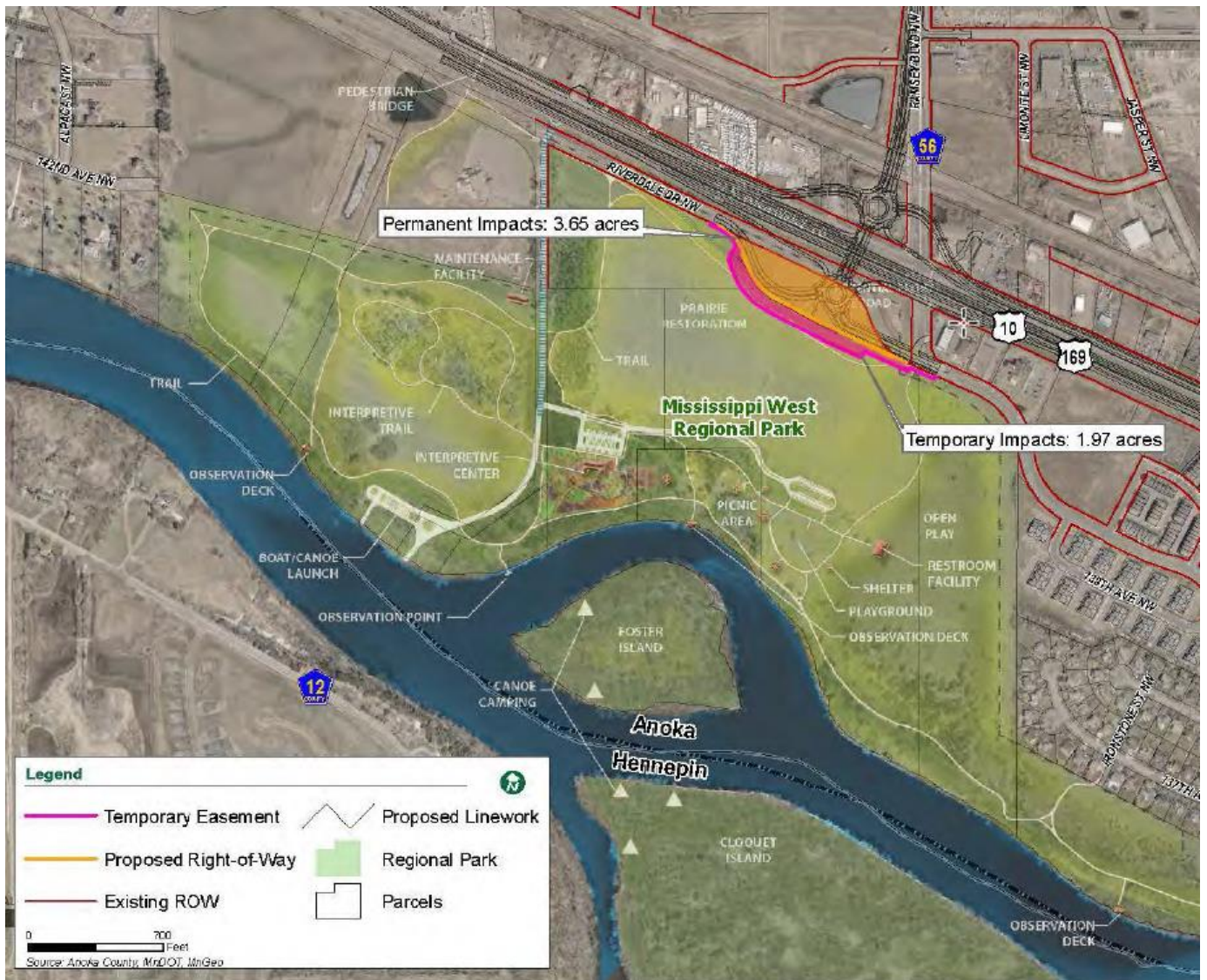


Figure 4. Replacement land located in Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve



Analysis

This land conversion proposes to remove land from Anoka County's Mississippi West Regional Park in exchange for land located adjacent to Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve. The RPPP guides for land exchanges in System Protection Chapter 6, Strategy 2, Conversion of Regional Parks System Lands to Other Uses.

Land Exchange

The Regional Parks Policy Plan's System Protection Chapter 6, Strategy 2, Conversion of Regional Parks System Lands to Other Uses requires that lands in the Regional Parks System only be converted to other uses if approved by the Metropolitan Council through an equally valuable land or facility exchange.

The RPPP states that in exceptional circumstances, the Metropolitan Council may accept an equally valuable land addition to another unit of the Regional Parks System where:

- The replacement land has comparable or better natural resource characteristics
- The replacement land has comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land being converted
- No other reasonable alternative exists and where all other provisions of this policy can be met.

The Council considers conversion of regional park land to other uses only if the conversion will not harm the Regional Parks System. The following section evaluates the proposal against criteria outlined in the RPPP to determine whether Regional Parks System lands may be exchanged for park land in another unit of the Regional Parks System.

Issues with respect to the existing park system unit, Mississippi West Regional Park

1. Whether the regional park system unit can continue to function as originally planned, meeting Council standards for sites and site attributes established for the particular type of park system unit (regional park, park reserve, trail greenway or special recreation feature).

According to the RPPP Chapter 4 Siting and Acquisition, regional parks:

- Must serve a regional audience, based on visitor origin and service-area research on regional trails,
- Provide for geographic balance,
- Conserve a diversity of high-quality natural resources that support outdoor recreation activities,
- Be at least 100 acres; typically 200-500 acres in size,
- Accommodate a variety of outdoor recreation activities

The proposed land exchange will allow for the regional park to function as originally planned and continue to meet Council standards for regional parks. The Mississippi West Regional Park's acreage will be reduced from 271 to 268 acres.

2. Whether environmental features (wildlife habitat, water quality) will be adversely affected and can be protected with the new use

The removal land in Mississippi West Regional Park consists of restored native grassland with maintained turf along Riverdale Drive, the park road and the existing trails. This land was previously farmed and when the County took over ownership, the fields were restored to native grasslands. While the restored grassland will be reduced by about 3 acres due to the road project, the loss will not affect its overall functionality as habitat or as a natural resource (Figure 5). There are no large environmental or natural features of interest that will be affected by this project. Additionally, storm water generated from the road project will remain within the right-of-way and outside the park boundary, protecting the water quality of the Mississippi River.

Figure 5. View of removal land



3. Whether the loss of site or function will be made up through acquisition of a site with comparable characteristics adjacent to or in the immediate area of the current location

The replacement land is contiguous to the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve, in Lino Lakes. This land is currently owned by the Anoka County Transportation Division and has been set aside for roadway purposes. The land has excellent natural resource characteristics since it is part of the Rice Creek ecosystem and similar limited recreational opportunity as it is a mix of water, wetland, and upland.

Issues with respect to the alternative use:

1. The land area needs of the proposed project

The Highway 10 overpass project will remove 3.65 acres of regional park land for permanent road right-of-way and allow for a temporary 1.97-acre construction easement. (Figure 3). Through the engineering process, the designers were able to minimize the road project as much as possible, but still allow for the safety, operational, and congestion improvements needed along the roadway.

2. Whether the specific site requirements for the proposed project are unique to the area proposed for conversion

The Highway 10 overpass road project was sited at this intersection to improve pedestrian safety crossing the BSNF rail line and Highway 10, as well as alleviate anticipated congestion issues.

3. Whether the proposed project is consistent with Council policies

The Anoka County Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan Amendment and Land Exchange is consistent with the requirements of the RPPP including Chapter 6, System Protection, Strategy 2 Conversions.

4. Whether the proposed project is of greater benefit to the region than having the regional park system unit remain in place

The Highway 10 project provides a significant benefit to the park by building a highway overpass with a pedestrian and bicycle safe crossing, to access the park more safely.

Acquisition Master Plan, Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve

Anoka County requests to add 33 acres to the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve in exchange for removing 3.65-acres of park land from the Mississippi West Regional Park. The land being added to the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve will remain in an undeveloped state because of its location in relation to the park and its high-quality natural resources; therefore, this



acquisition master plan is guided by the criteria described below in Chapter 5, Planning Policy Strategy 1, Master Plans, and it is evaluated for its consistency with Chapter 4: Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 1, including size/service area requirements of the RPPP (Figure 4). The following analysis describes the required criteria.

1. Boundaries

The addition of 33 acres will expand the northeastern boundary of the park reserve providing a higher level of protection and it includes an additional 350-feet of Rice Creek (Figure 6).

2. Acquisition Costs

The 2022 appraised land value of the replacement land is \$60,000. There are no costs associated with this acquisition since it is part of an equally valuable exchange between County Departments. Additionally, there are no special assessments or contamination issues with the parcel.

3. Acquiring lands with natural qualities most desirable for outdoor recreational activities

The replacement land adds quality natural resources from the Rice Creek ecosystem to the park boundary. This property consists of 10 acres of upland, 21 acres of wetlands, 2 acres of open water and about 350 feet of the Rice Creek. The property has limited access from land and adds to the natural resource protection afforded by the park reserve (Figure 7).

4. Distribution of regional parks

The expansion of creek shoreline protection will increase the land in the park reserve managed for natural resources.

5. Size/service area requirements

This acquisition will close a gap in the park reserve boundary and add 33 acres to the existing 4,133 acres, making the Park Reserve 4,166 acres in total which exceeds the 1000-acre minimum identified in the RPPP for park reserves.

Consistency with Other Council Policies and Systems

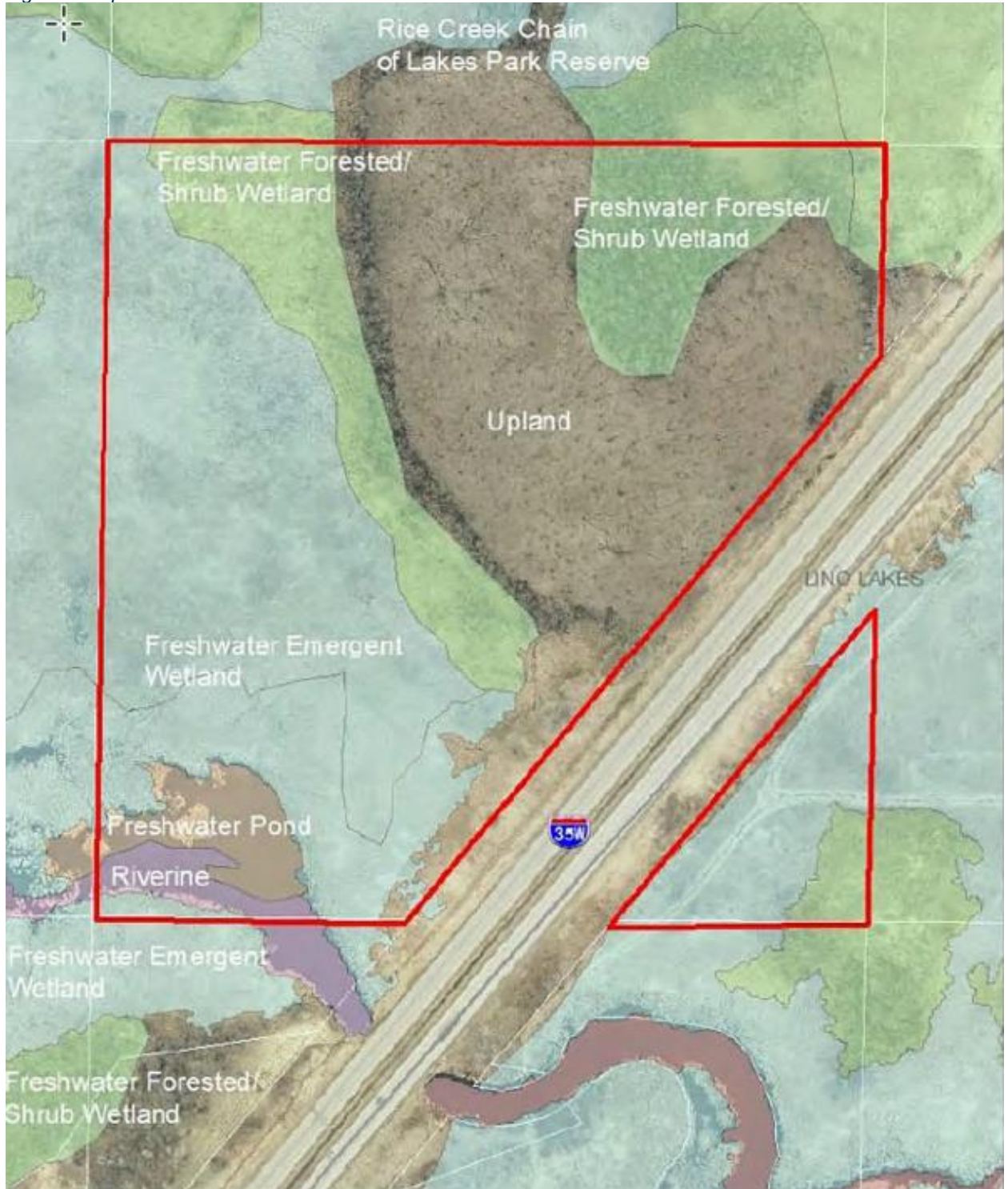
There are no additional comments.



Figure 6. Replacement land parcel



Figure 7. Replacement land environmental features



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Anoka County, Minnesota

DATE: March 8, 2022

RESOLUTION #2022-33

OFFERED BY COMMISSIONER: Look

**RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT FOR MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT FOR
 ANOKA COUNTY'S MISSISSIPPI WEST REGIONAL PARK**

WHEREAS, Anoka County and the Metropolitan Council share common goals in providing quality natural areas for outdoor recreation; and,

WHEREAS, the County of Anoka ("County") has worked with the Metropolitan Council in a cooperative effort to develop a facility exchange plan leading to the County's conveyance of parkland for right-of-way purposes, which constitutes a minor boundary adjustment; and,

WHEREAS, in exchange for the conveyance of land, the County will construct a paved trail within Mississippi West Regional Park of equal value as the conveyed land; and,

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council requires an updated master plan, including Restrictive Covenants placed on trail parcels, in connection with the boundary changes to the regional park:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Anoka County, by and through its Board of Commissioners, does hereby adopt the Master Plan Amendment to the Mississippi West Regional Park Master Plan, a copy of which is on file in the Parks Department, and authorizes its submission to the Metropolitan Council for its approval so that park development will be eligible for future Metropolitan Council grant funding.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Anoka County agrees to work with the Metropolitan Council to record any restrictive covenants as required.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Metropolitan Council and Anoka County Parks Department.

STATE OF MINNESOTA)
 COUNTY OF ANOKA) ss

I, Dee Guthman, Deputy County Administrator, Anoka County, Minnesota, hereby certify that I have compared the foregoing copy of the resolution of the county board of said county with the original record thereof on file in the Administration Office, Anoka County, Minnesota, as stated in the minutes of the proceedings of said board at a meeting duly held on March 8, 2022, and that the same is a true and correct copy of said original record and of the whole thereof, and that said resolution was duly passed by said board at said meeting.

Witness my hand and seal this 9th day of March 2022.


 DEE GUTHMAN
 DEPUTY COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

| | YES | NO |
|------------------------|-----|----|
| DISTRICT #1 – LOOK | X | |
| DISTRICT #2 – BRAASTAD | X | |
| DISTRICT #3 – WEST | X | |
| DISTRICT #4 – MEISNER | X | |
| DISTRICT #5 – GAMACHE | X | |
| DISTRICT #6 – REINERT | X | |
| DISTRICT #7 – SCHULTE | X | |





BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Anoka County, Minnesota

DATE: June 14, 2022

RESOLUTION #2022-85

OFFERED BY COMMISSIONER: Reinert

**RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT FOR MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT
 FOR ANOKA COUNTY'S RICE CREEK CHAIN OF LAKES PARK RESERVE**

WHEREAS, Anoka County and the Metropolitan Council share common goals in providing quality natural areas for outdoor recreation; and,

WHEREAS, the County of Anoka ("County") has worked with the Metropolitan Council in a cooperative effort to develop a land exchange plan leading to the County's conveyance of parkland within the Mississippi West Regional Park for highway right-of-way purposes, which constitutes a minor boundary adjustment; and,

WHEREAS, in exchange for the conveyance of land for highway purposes, the County will replace the parcels with land of equal value located adjacent to Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve; and,

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council requires an updated master plan, including restrictive covenants placed on the replacement parcels, in connection with the boundary changes to the regional parks:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Anoka County, by and through its Board of Commissioners, does hereby adopt the Master Plan Amendment to the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve Master Plan, a copy of which is on file in the Parks Department, and authorizes its submission to the Metropolitan Council for its approval so that park development will be eligible for future Metropolitan Council grant funding.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Anoka County agrees to work with the Metropolitan Council to record any restrictive covenants as required.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Metropolitan Council and Anoka County Parks Department.

STATE OF MINNESOTA)
 COUNTY OF ANOKA) ss

I, Rhonda Sivarajah, County Administrator, Anoka County, Minnesota, hereby certify that I have compared the foregoing copy of the resolution of the county board of said county with the original record thereof on file in the Administration Office, Anoka County, Minnesota, as stated in the minutes of the proceedings of said board at a meeting duly held on June 14, 2022, and that the same is a true and correct copy of said original record and of the whole thereof, and that said resolution was duly passed by said board at said meeting.

Witness my hand and seal this 14th day of June 2022.


 RHONDA SIVARAJAH
 COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

| | YES | NO |
|------------------------|-----|----|
| DISTRICT #1 - LOOK | X | |
| DISTRICT #2 - BRAASTAD | X | |
| DISTRICT #3 - WEST | X | |
| DISTRICT #4 - MEISNER | X | |
| DISTRICT #5 - GAMACHE | X | |
| DISTRICT #6 - REINERT | X | |
| DISTRICT #7 - SCHULTE | X | |