

Committee Report

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Community Development Committee Meeting: May 15, 2023

For the Metropolitan Council: May 24, 2023

Business Item: 2023-101

Washington County Big Marine Park Reserve Long Range Plan Amendment and Council Consent to Drainage Easement

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Big Marine Park Reserve long range plan amendment.
2. Consent to a drainage easement for 3.4 acres of land within Big Marine Park Reserve as illustrated in Figure 3.

Summary of Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Discussion

Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner, presented the staff report to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission on May 4, 2023. Sharon Price, Washington County Land Acquisition Specialist, was in attendance and responded to questions.

Chair Yarusso asked about how the Council agreement and restrictive covenant affected this project. Price responded that this area of the park is not open to the public. The Carnelian Marine St. Croix Watershed District (Watershed District) is conducting monitoring in the area. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) owns the boat launch. When this part of the park opens to the public, Washington County is planning to take over the launch site. The Watershed District needs an easement to operate and maintain the drainage swale within the park reserve. The project site includes a Council agreement and restrictive covenant that places a high-level of protection on the parkland for regional recreation and open space.

Yarusso asked where the location of the private inholding is. Price responded that the inholding is southwest of the easement area. The 3.4-acre easement is for regional parkland only.

Emmett Mullin stated that this request would be a likely candidate for the Council's administrative approval of routine amendments process that is under development since it protects the lake and does not impact the implementation of the park reserves long range plan.

Commissioner Cecily Harris stated her support for the project since it protects the lake and improves access to the boat launch. She appreciates that the County has stepped up to do the work.

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

Motion by Commissioner Cecily Harris, seconded by Commissioner Tess Bouska. Motion carried.

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Washington County Big Marine Park Reserve Long Range Plan Amendment and Council Consent to Drainage Easement

District(s), Member(s):	District F, Cecily Harris District 12, Gail Cederberg
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
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 Big Marine Park Reserve long range plan amendment.
2. Consent to a drainage easement for 3.4 acres of land within Big Marine Park Reserve as illustrated in Figure 3.

Background

Big Marine Park Reserve is located within the northeast part of the Regional Park System (Figure 1), and the northern part of Washington County. The stormwater improvement project and proposed Council consent to drainage easement is located on the southeast side of Big Marine Lake along 177th Street North within May Township (Figures 2 and 3).

Big Marine Park Reserve provides public access to Big Marine Lake; as well as protects major wetland recharge areas, endangered species habitat, and the St. Croix Moraine landscape, which is distinguished by its characteristic rolling hills and wetland depressions. The County has acquired 857 acres of its total goal of 1,884 acres in the park reserve boundary, which is 96% natural resource area. Washington County completed an updated long range plan for Big Marine Park Reserve in 2010; and most recently amended the plan in 2021 ([Business Item 2021-223](#)).

Washington County is requesting a Council consent to drainage easement to grant to the Carnelian Marine St. Croix Watershed District. The Watershed District proposes to construct stormwater management features for the mitigation of road drainage that frequently flows across the public launch parking lot owned by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and generates large sediment plumes into Big Marine Lake during spring melt and summer storm events. The Council consent to drainage easement is accompanied by a related master plan amendment for the park unit to reflect this proposed modification of regional parkland use. This project will result in significant protection of the Big Marine Lake resource.

Rationale

As described in the Analysis section of this report, the Washington County Big Marine Park Reserve Long Range Plan Amendment and Council Consent to Drainage Easement 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.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Washington County Big Marine Park Reserve Long Range Plan Amendment and Council Consent to Drainage Easement advances the Thrive outcome of stewardship by investing in stormwater features to improve the water quality of Big Marine Lake segments as well as to ensure elements within the long-range plan can be implemented.

Funding

When Metropolitan Council funds are used, an agreement and restrictive covenant is recorded on the purchased property that provides a higher level of protection to ensure regional recreational open space use in perpetuity. The subject land in this business item includes a recorded Council agreement and restrictive covenant. Approval of this request would allow the stormwater improvement project to take place while allowing for the park reserve land to remain as regional parkland.



Figure 1. Big Marine Park Reserve in relation to the Regional Parks System

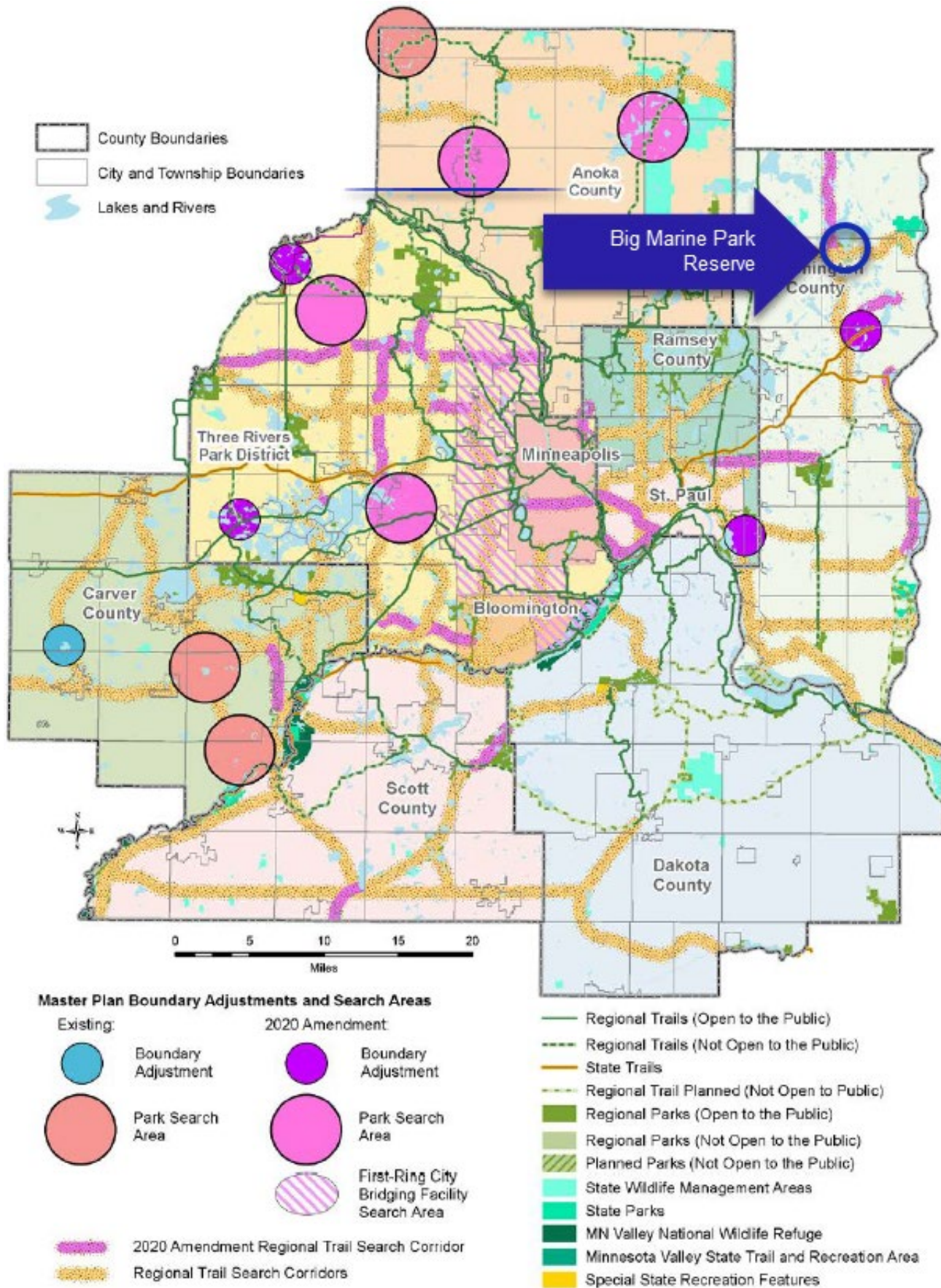


Figure 2. Big Marine Park Reserve in relation to Washington County

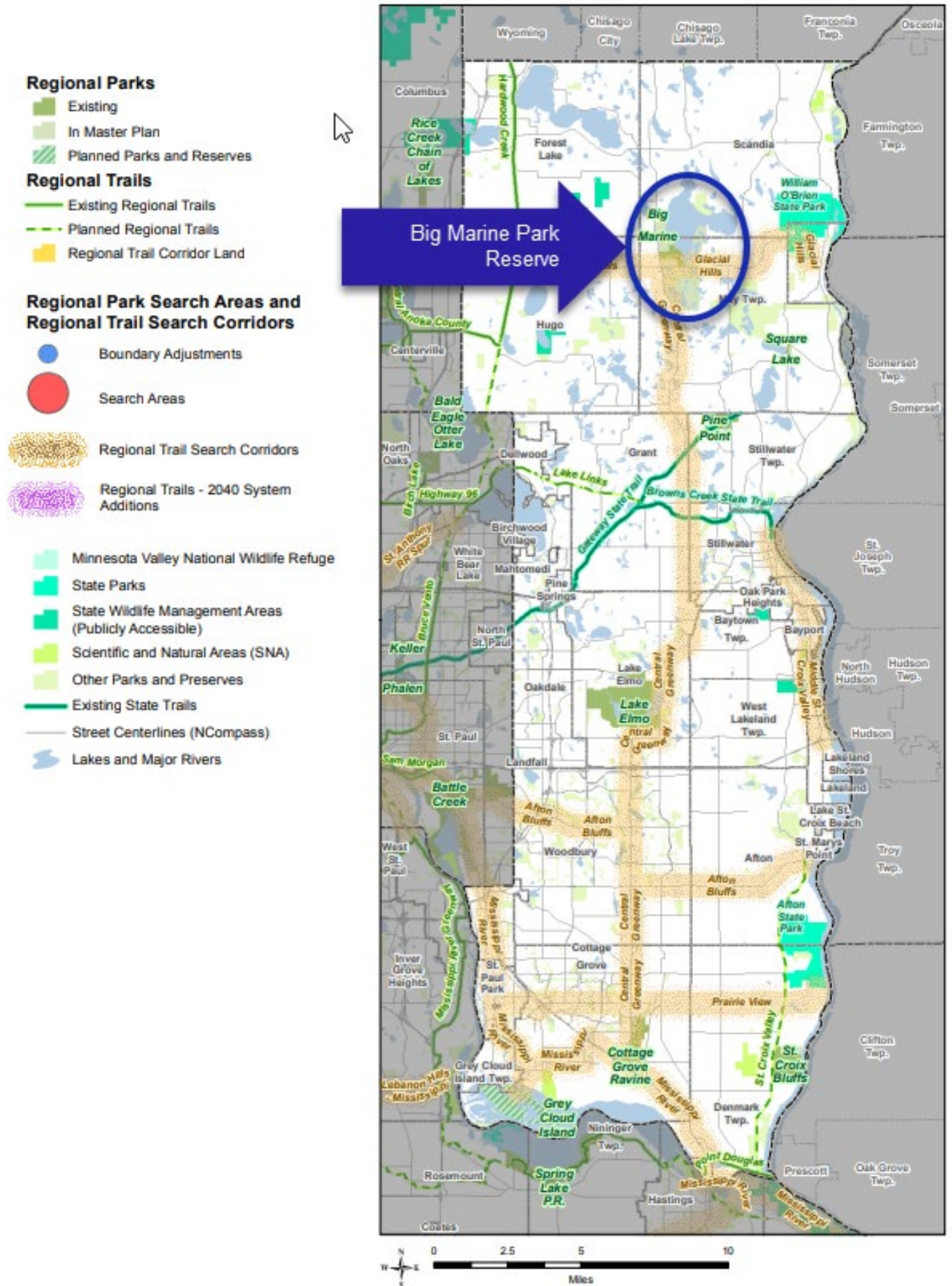


Figure 3. Project location in relation to Big Marine Park Reserve

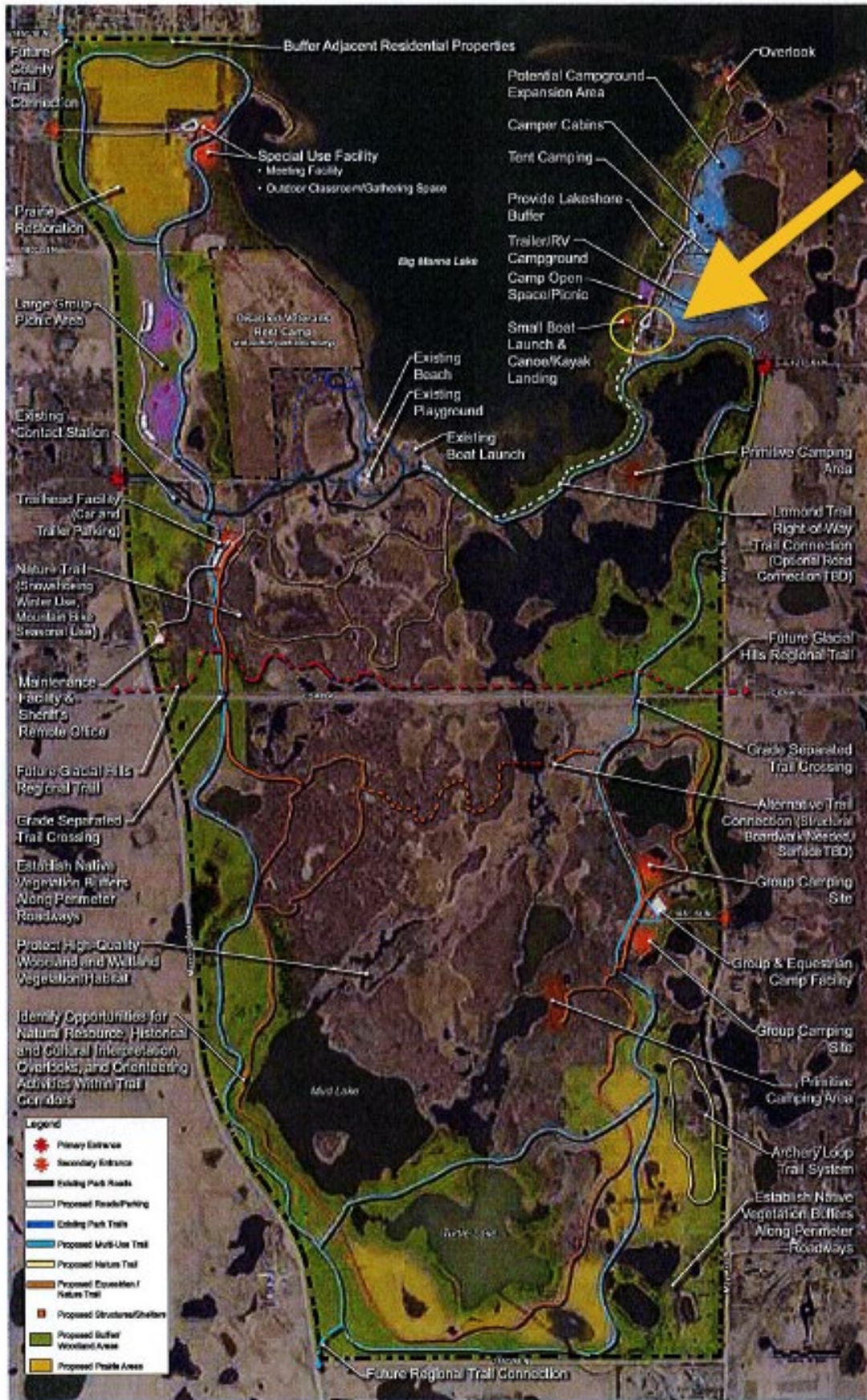
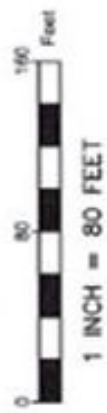


Figure 4. Project location



PREPARED: 03-21-2023
 WASHINGTON COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS
 SURVEY DIVISION
 11660 MYRON ROAD NORTH
 STILLWATER, MN 55082
 651-430-4300



WASHINGTON COUNTY	
Parcel PID:	0503120110009
Parcel Area	3.0 AC/330,718.90 FT
Total PE	0.38 AC/17,144.90 FT

Analysis

This plan amendment proposes a Council consent to easement to add stormwater improvement features to Big Marine Park Reserve. The RPPP guides for land exchanges in System Protection Chapter 6, Strategy 2, Conversion of Regional Parks System Lands to Other Uses.

Council Consent to Easement

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 the Council will consider a consent to easement or land conversion in which no land was required to be exchanged, if the:

- **Council approved masterplan continues to operate as planned after the improvement**
- **Proposed change does not change the above-ground use from regional recreation open space nor does it adversely impact the quality or function of the natural resources.**

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, Big Marine Park Reserve

- 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, park reserves:

- 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 1000 acres in size,
- 80% of unit managed as natural lands that protect the ecological functioning of a native landscape

The project will allow the park reserve to function as originally planned and continue to meet Council standards for park reserves. The Big Marine Park Reserve's overall acreage will continue to consist of 1,884 acres with over 80% managed as natural lands that protect the ecological functioning of a native landscape.

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

The project site consists of herbaceous and woodland natural areas, a Minnesota Department of Natural Resources public boat launch, and a township gravel road. The surrounding natural area will remain intact, and it will continue to be restored to forest, prairie, and wetland according to the 2010 Big Marine Park Reserve long range plan.

- 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 project will not create a loss of site or function, nor will it affect implementing the long-

range plan within the project area. The project will improve the water quality of Big Marine Lake by eliminating the large sediment plumes, improving the treatment of stormwater from the township Road, and reducing erosion of the public access site (Figure 5).

The proposed project is needed to implement the long-range plan which includes taking care of Big Marine Lake, providing access to the public launch site, adding additional road access, and adding an internal park trail. The improvements will allow the park reserve land to remain as regional parkland while improving the water quality of the lake and function of the road.

Figure 5. View of sediment runoff of the township road



Issues with respect to the alternative use:

1. The land area needs of the proposed project

The project area encompasses 3.4 acres within the Big Marine Park Reserve that is owned by Washington County, the Department of Natural Resources, and a private landowner.

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

The project is sited to mitigate road stormwater runoff that generates large sediment plumes into Big Marine Lake during spring melt and summer storm events. The improvements include regrading the road area, as well as constructing a vegetated swale, infiltration basin, and basin overflow along the north side of the township road.

3. Whether the proposed project is consistent with Council policies



The Washington County Big Marine Park Reserve Long Range Plan Amendment and Council Consent to Easement 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 project provides a greater benefit to the region since the water quality of Big Marine Lake will be improved. The project allows the long-range plan to be implemented, as well as continued access to the Big Marine Lake public boat launch.

Consistency with Other Council Policies and Systems

There are no additional comments.

