2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan 60% DRAFT

Community Development Community

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May 6, 2024   metrocouncil.org

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Advice

April 4, 2024 meeting

Overall

- Recommendation to outline what items get updated in the 4-year and 10-year cycle.
- Be sure to define our terms such as "Natural Systems" and "areas not well served"
- Define what tasks are the Council's responsibility versus the Implementing Agency's.

Awareness

- There is a need for building more awareness of the Regional Parks and Trails System.

Finance

- The Equity Grant Program is important, and we should continue to support this effort.
- Emphasize the Council's "Fiduciary responsibilities"

Community Development Committee Advice

April 1, 2024 meeting

Natural Systems

- When prioritizing acquisition, be sure to balance restoration efforts across the region.
- Define what "areas not well served" means for locating.

Climate

- Council members support the idea of telling a better story of the Regional Parks and Trails System and its impact on climate change and water.

Parks and Trails Planning Handbook

- Some concern about the potential lack of oversight from commissioners and council members.

Finance

- Consider the need to be financially accountable when working with Legacy and Environmental & Natural Resource Trust Fund dollars to ensure we are carrying out the system plan

Key Changes Proposed for 2050

Overall

- Language changes:
  - "Master" plan to "long-range" plan
  - Regional Parks System to Regional Parks and Trails System
  - Natural Resources to Natural Systems
  - Resident to Visitor

Introduction

- Addition of Parks and Trails Vision, Mission, Values, and Objectives
- Addition of Existing Conditions and Research and Engagement Summary

System Plan

- Elevate existing work through new policy and actions
- Consolidated Regional Park and Trail unit definitions into one-page summaries
- Proposed addition of two new unit classifications: Cultural Landscapes and Open Space/Natural Areas.

Key Changes Proposed for 2050 *cont.*

Natural Systems

- New policy and four actions associated with locating, acquiring, and protecting Regional Park and Trail lands in the region

- Reframe existing "Siting and Acquisition" policy and actions as an action underneath Natural Systems policy

Climate Resiliency

- New policy and six actions focused on Council research, agency coordination of operations, and public awareness and education

Planning and System Protection

- Sections remained largely unchanged

- Added language for Focused and Administrative/Minor Long Range Plan Amendments in Planning Section

- Proposed movement of content to the Parks and Trails Planning Handbook or Grant Administration Guide

Recreation, Facilities, and Programming

- Removal of static activities list and switching to a criteria-based evaluation system

- Added and modified actions that focus on cross-sector connection opportunities, fostering equity, and raising awareness of the Regional Parks and Trails System

Finance

- Chapter split into two parts: Actions and Statutory Requirements

- Proposed changes to funding strategies such as exploring increased Council funding commitment, exploring additional sources of funding, and reassessing funding program caps for implementing agencies

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Section One: Introduction

Draft Parks and Trails Objectives

Foster Equity and Belonging

Connect people with community, natural, and cultural landscapes to better support their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Take Care of What We Have

Reinvest in existing regional parks and trails to maintain and enhance visitor experiences.

Protect and Restore

Protect and restore natural systems to safeguard the well-being of all living things.

Adapt and Mitigate

Increase the region's resilience to climate change by adapting land management practices and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Meet Future Needs

Meet the growing demand for regional parks and trails through strategic and timely land acquisition and development.

Draft Existing Conditions

History of Inequitable Development

- Through partnership and coordination, the Regional Parks and Trails developed into the expansive system we recognize today. However, systemic racism has shaped the use and development of these spaces.

Vital to People and Communities

- Regional Parks and Trails are important to people for multiple reasons including public health, social connection, and recreation opportunities. With changing demographics, the Regional Parks and Trails will need to assess ways to continue being a key service for current and future visitors.
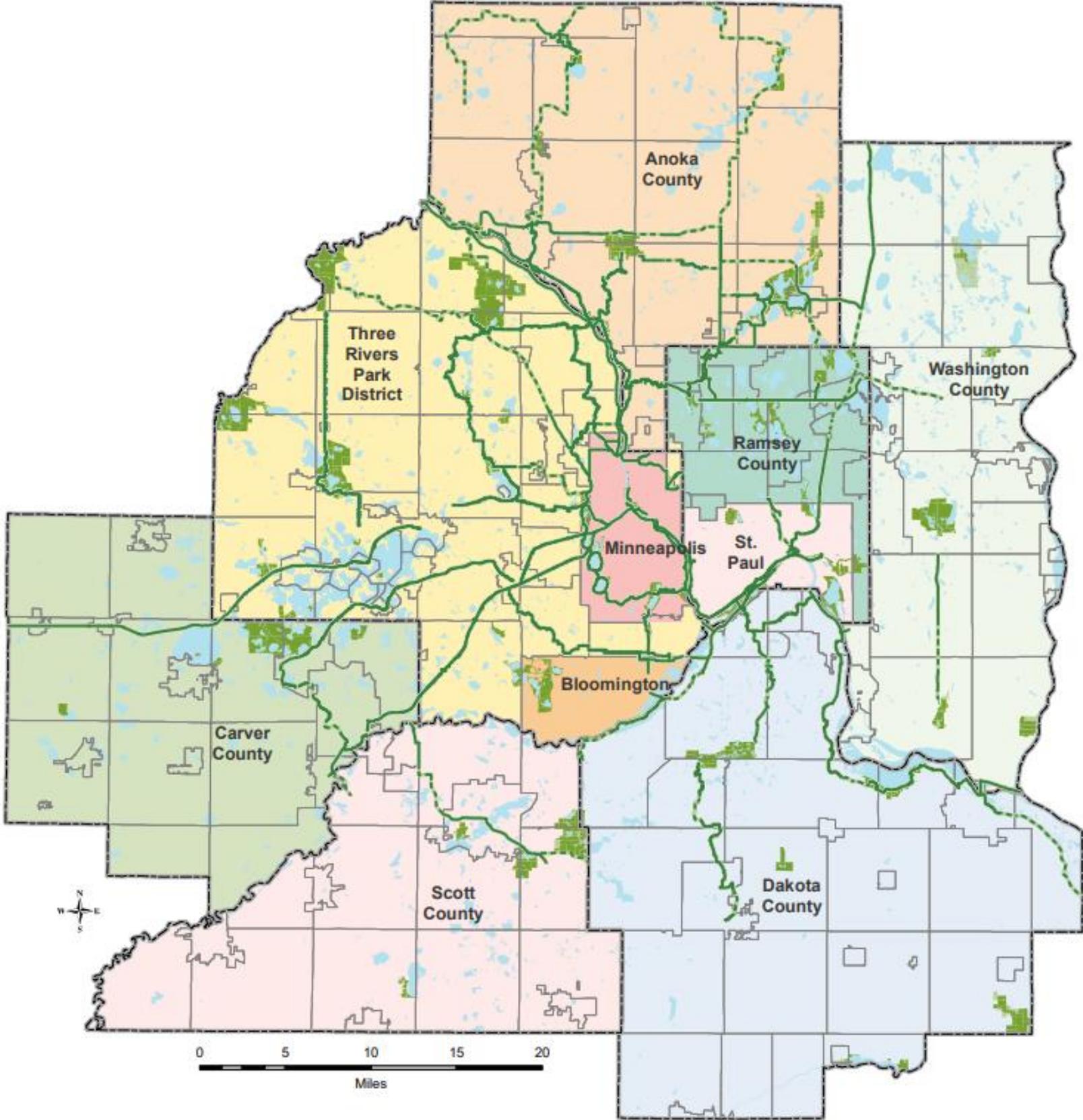
Climate is Changing

- Climate change has already begun to impact life in the Twin Cities with intensifying weather and increased heat in the region. The Regional Parks and Trails could be a tool in mitigation and adaptation strategies.

The System Faces Growing Pains

- Regional Parks and Trails have experienced rapid growth over the past few years, especially Regional Trails. This expansion must be balanced with the need to secure adequate funding for regular maintenance.

Section Two: System Plan

System Plan Policy and Actions

Policy: Maintain a robust and current set of data, maps, plans, processes, and applications to support regional parks and trails planning

Action 1: Review and Update System Plan, Classifications

On the four-year Parks Policy update schedule, the Council will review and update the system plan and evaluate the regional park and trail classifications to determine what is relevant and necessary in partnership with the Regional Parks and Trails Implementing Agencies.

Action 2: Identify and conduct research

Identify and conduct research to inform park policy, funding, and operations. Study results will contribute to understanding of visitors' needs, systems additions criteria, estimated visitation, equitable use, natural systems, and emerging issues.

Action 3: Annually update map datasets

Annually update map datasets to reflect the most current status of the system in coordination with the data "owners", our ten regional park implementing agency partners.

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Section Three: Natural Systems

Natural Systems Policy and Actions

Policy: Identify, protect, restore, and maintain lands with high-quality natural features, access to water, and/or restoration potential as part of the Regional Parks and Trails System

Action 1: Locating and Acquisition Priorities

Work with Implementing Agencies to locate and acquire lands with natural features, access to water, or restoration potential for conservation, recreation, and protection.

Action 2: Equity and Geographic Balance

Identify new regional park and trail lands in areas not well served by our current system.

Action 3: Natural Systems Research

Provide the Regional Park and Trail Implementing Agencies with research and data that will better inform restoration and protection of Natural Systems.

Action 4: Maintenance of Natural Systems

The Council will coordinate efforts with implementing agencies and external partners to protect, restore, and maintain natural systems across the Regional Parks and Trails System.

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Section Four: Climate Resiliency

Climate Resilience Policy and Actions

Policy: Adapt and enhance the Regional Parks and Trails System to promote resilience to climate change, including the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions.

Action 1: Climate Research

Council Parks and Research staff in partnership with the ten Regional Park Implementing Agencies will conduct research on the Regional Parks and Trails System's role in climate change.

Action 2: Coordination of Climate Awareness

Convene Regional Park Implementing Agencies and other Council Divisions to develop strategies for increasing public awareness of the Regional Parks and Trails System's role in climate mitigation and adaptation through partnerships and storytelling.

Action 3: Citizen Science

Develop strategies to involve community members in data collection, climate work, and education regarding the Regional Parks and Trails System.

Action 4: Climate and Environmental Justice

Incorporate equity into the climate change conversation by gathering diverse perspectives and shaping them into future actions.

Action 5: Climate Action Plan Support

Support implementing agency efforts in climate work by coordinating the implementation of their Climate Action Plans.

Action 6: Operations and Efficiency

Promote further coordination between implementing agencies to improve operational efficiency and emerging strategies to adapt to climate change.

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Section Five: Planning

Planning Policy and Actions

Policy: Promote long-range planning and help provide integrated resource planning across jurisdictions

Action 1: Long-range plan requirements

Regional park implementing agencies are required to prepare a long-range plan for each Regional Parks and Trails System facility they own and/or operate.

Action 2: Enhanced multimodal access

Promote enhanced multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit system, where appropriate.

Action 3: Cost sharing

Projects may share costs, if they are consistent with a Council-approved long-range plan.

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Section Six: System Protection

System Protection Policy and Actions

Policy: Protect public investment in acquisition and development by assuring that every component in the system is able to fully carry out its designated role as long as a need for it can be demonstrated.

Action 1: Local Comprehensive Plans

Local comprehensive plans may need to be changed if planned land uses would have a negative impact on current or planned regional park lands or facilities.

Action 2: Conversions

Conversion of Regional Parks and Trails System lands to other uses is allowed only in limited circumstances and with approval of the Metropolitan Council.

Action 3: Telecommunication towers

Telecommunication towers will only be allowed in regional parks or reserves if there is no alternative location and if mitigation efforts are made to minimize the impact on Regional Parks and Trails System lands and users.

Action 4: Placement of utilities

Regional wastewater infrastructure and other utilities on Regional Parks and Trails System lands should be placed in ways that minimize negative impacts on the regional park, park reserve, special recreation feature, or regional trail, its facilities, and its users.

Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming

Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions

Policy: Foster a sense of belonging by providing a wide spectrum of leisure and play opportunities while connecting people, places, and the natural world.

Action 1: Increase equity in programs, activities, and places

Develop opportunities, programs, and spaces that strive to uplift community connections to the outdoors while counteracting barriers and harm placed on underrepresented communities found in the most recent visitor study.

Action 2: Build the relationship between people and natural systems

Support the conservation and restoration of natural systems, alongside leisure, play, and creative opportunities in ways that connect people to each other and the outdoors.

Action 3: Establish and broaden cross-sector opportunities

Provide a wide spectrum of connections and partnerships in the outdoors through recreation, arts, programming, transit, public health, education, stewardship, and community.

Action 4: Raise awareness of Regional Parks and Trails

Expand how we connect people to parks and trails with a deep focus on underrepresented communities through intentional outreach.

Section Eight: Finance

Finance Policy and Actions

Policy: Administer and provide financial oversight of the state and regional funding to the ten regional park implementing agencies in support of the regional parks and trails system.

Action 1: Regional and State Bonds Funding Formula
Regional Parks Bonding Program Funding will be distributed based on a defined formula.

Action 2: Equity Considerations
Equity is a consideration in Regional Parks System funding and investment.

Action 3: Transit Corridors
Regional trail corridors that may be used for transit in the future are eligible for Regional Parks System funding only if it is clear the corridor will be used as a trail for at least 10 years.

Action 4: Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund
The Council will use the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund to help fund the acquisition of Regional Parks and Trails land.

Action 5: Other funding
The Council will actively seek funding opportunities from the state and other sources.

NEW: Action 6: Regional Funding Commitment
The Council will actively analyze its regional funding budget strategy and pursue increasing regional funding commitment for the system wherever possible

Finance Statutory Requirements

Policy: Administer and provide financial oversight of the state and regional funding to the ten regional park implementing agencies in support of the regional parks and trails system.

Distribution of funds
Funds will be granted only to regional park implementing agencies

Regional and State bond funds
Bond funds are used for acquisition, development, redevelopment, and natural resource restoration within the Regional Parks System units

Parks and Trails Legacy Fund
Parks and Trails Legacy Funds spending must conform to the statewide Parks and Trails Legacy Plan

Operations and Maintenance
The Council will distribute Operation and Maintenance appropriations to agencies

5 Year CIP

Cost to complete the system

Questions, Discussion, Advice

Questions:

- What do you find exciting about the 60% Draft of the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan?

- Is there anything missing from this draft?

- What advice or recommendations do you have for staff?

Thank you

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