Parks Research Update: 2023 Annual Use Estimates & 2025 Visitor Study

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Community Development Council
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Use Estimates Background

• Produced annually since 1995.
• Used in formulas to calculate each implementing agency’s share of Regional Parks & Trails System grant program dollars
• Allows for monitoring trends over time
• One of two ongoing research responsibilities: Other is Visitor Study, approximately every 5 years
2023 Annual Use Estimates

- The estimates include data from 128 regional parks, trails, park reserves and special recreation features.
- Third year of multipliers from the 2021 Visitor Study
- Annual estimated visitation is one way to demonstrate the value of the Regional Park System. Others include climate mitigation and public health benefits
Calculating Annual Use Estimates

Raw Counts
• Parks staff count all people entering all parks and trails at designated locations
• Schedule has randomized times, days, and entrances, Memorial Day to Labor Day

Expansion
• Averaged with previous three years to account for weather, flooding
• Counts are “expanded” to apply to all days and entrances

Special Events / Camping
• Agency-submitted special event, camping use is added in
• Estimated non-summer use based on 2021 Visitor Study multipliers
Annual Visits to the Regional System

Number of estimated visits

75 million
69.4m system visits in 2023
49.2m park visits
20.2m trail visits

Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024).

Note:
We caution against making direct comparisons across sets of estimates.
Why was visitation flat in 2023?

• Typical variation in sample counts from year to year
• Poor air and weather conditions in 2023
• Variations across agencies – some up, some down. This is typical.
• Effects of more years with lower vehicle multipliers from 2021 Visitor Study
2023 Visits by Parks Agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Visits (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Rivers Parks District</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Saint Paul</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsey County</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anoka County</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dakota County</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington County</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carver County</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott County</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Bloomington</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks use estimates (July 2024).
2023 Most Visited Parks in the System

Minneapolis Chain of Lakes RP: 7.6
Mississippi Gorge RP: 3.8
Central Mississippi Riverfront RP: 3.5
Como Regional Park, Zoo & Conservatory: 3.5
Minnehaha RP: 2.7
Nokomis-Hiawatha RP: 2.4
Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes PR: 2.2
Elm Creek PR: 1.8
Battle Creek RP: 1.1
Bald Eagle-Otter Lake RP: 1

RP: Regional park
PR: Park reserve

Source: Metropolitan Council’s annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024).
2023 Most Visited Trails in the System

Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024).
Visitor Study Purpose

• Help inform planning, policy, and management
• Evaluate and strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails in accordance with *Imagine 2050 Parks and Trails Policy Plan*
• Update data in funding formulas to help determine where funding goes for parks and trails
2025 Visitor Survey Process

LTAC, study design, and recruit consultant
Summer 2024-Winter 2025

Pilot study and summer survey
Spring/Summer 2025

Data analysis and workshops with IAs, new multipliers
Fall 2025

Completed study publication
Winter/Spring 2026
THANK YOU

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