Grounded and Growing: A Living History of Our Region's Parks and Trails

Community Development Committee

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April 21, 2025

Why a historical cultural study?

- The 2020 Amendment to the Regional Parks Policy Plan committed the Council to conducting a cultural-historical study that describes and documents the inequitable policies that have shaped the development of the Regional Parks and Trails System

- The desire behind this commitment was to better understand how we arrived at our current day conditions to create a more welcoming and equitable system moving forward

Project scope and goals

Formerly referred to as "historical cultural study"

- **Scope**: Understand how racism and racist practices shaped parks and trails system and the experiences of communities of color. Stories highlight range of experiences and intersectionality
    - American Indian/indigenous
    - Immigration
    - Disabilities and health status
    - Age
    - Gender identity and sexual orientation
- **Goals**: Build a more inclusive Regional Parks and Trails System through
    - Education (facts, data)
    - Building empathy (personal stories; differences and commonalities)

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External collaborators

Historical information gathering

- Hess, Roise and Company (consultant)

Engagement

- Zan Associates (consultant)

Partner Taskforce (agency staff)

- Helped to refine project scope
- Engaged with consultants
- Guided work through feedback, deliverable review

Emphasize engagement and stories

Methods: Focus groups and interviews

- Centered voices of historically marginalized communities

- Asked to describe experiences...
  - Park and trail use
  - Access and barriers
  - Safety and belonging
  - Parks programs
  - Ideas to create more inclusive and welcoming system

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Deliverable design pivot

What we heard from Taskforce

- Prefer flexible formats; "chunks" of information
- Build on consultant work
- Create an actionable connection between past and present
- Develop opportunities for ongoing information updates and story collection ("Living history")

Our solutions

- Multimedia suitable for use in a variety of ways
- Interaction with historical information (sort, filter)
- Collect stories (with spatial relationship/data)
- Context of why visitation disparities matter

Five themes connect past and present

1. **Access**
   - General awareness; getting there/around; amenities and programs
2. **Feeling safe**
   - Personal experiences and perceptions of physical safety and well-being
   - Built environment and interactions with others
3. **History of our lands**
   - Our region is the ancestral and present-day home of the Dakota Oyate
   - Land ownership and control, including build-out of system
4. **Sense of belonging**
   - Personal experiences and perceptions of inclusion, welcoming
   - Built environment and interactions with others
5. **Outdoor experience**
   - Personal experiences with nature, recreation
   - Cultural and spiritual connections and practices

Grounded and Growing
A living history of our region's parks and trails

Grounded and Growing is an ongoing multimedia project launched by the Metropolitan Council in 2025 to better understand people's experiences of parks and trails over the past 50 years.

By pairing key moments from history with present-day experiences of those from marginalized communities, we seek to surface root causes of visitation disparities and ground efforts to advance equity in shared understanding.

Interactive dashboard—Past

WELCOME

Explore historic information and visitation trends in our interactive dashboard.

ACCESS
PAST | PRESENT

FEELING SAFE
PAST | PRESENT

HISTORY OF OUR LANDS
PAST | PRESENT

SENSE OF BELONGING
PAST | PRESENT

OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES
PAST | PRESENT

metrocouncil.org/parkslivinghistory

Historical timeline

- Sourced events from 18th century to present day, including
  - Government action or legislation
  - Quotes/documents/images
  - Events/moments
  - Movements

- Filter by theme, Parks Agency, national/regional, topics

- "Submit an event" form to continue collaboration

Interactive dashboard—Present

WELCOME
Explore historic information and
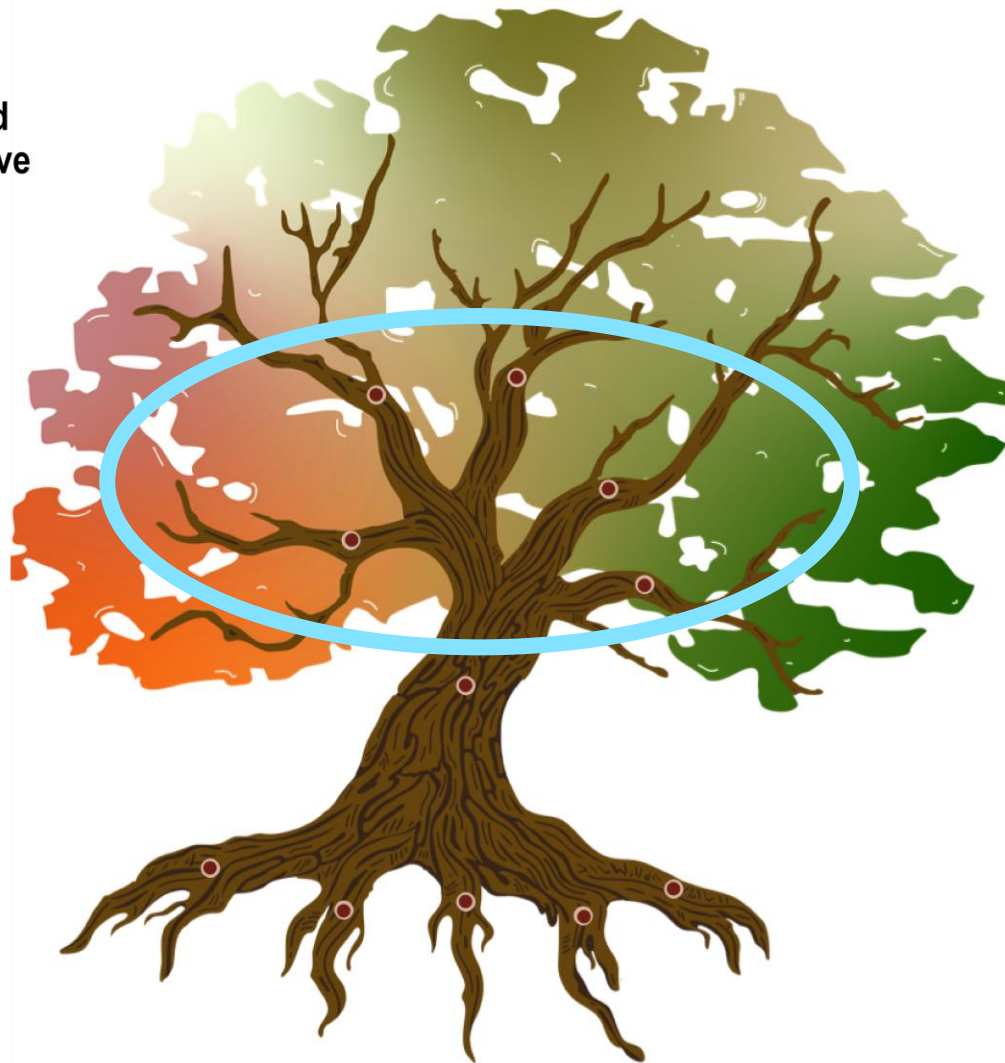visitation trends in our interactive
dashboard.

ACCESS
PAST | PRESENT

FEELING SAFE
PAST | PRESENT

HISTORY OF OUR LANDS
PAST | PRESENT

SENSE OF BELONGING
PAST | PRESENT

OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES
PAST | PRESENT

metrocouncil.org/parkslivinghistory

Visitation trends ("present")

- By Park Agency
  – Park use estimates
  – Population characteristics
  – Visitor and resident demographics
- Regional forecast to 2050
- Key message: Strengthening equitable use of parks and trails is vital to future of our public investment.

WELCOME
Explore historic information and visitation trends in our interactive dashboard.

ACCESS
PAST | PRESENT

FEELING SAFE
PAST | PRESENT

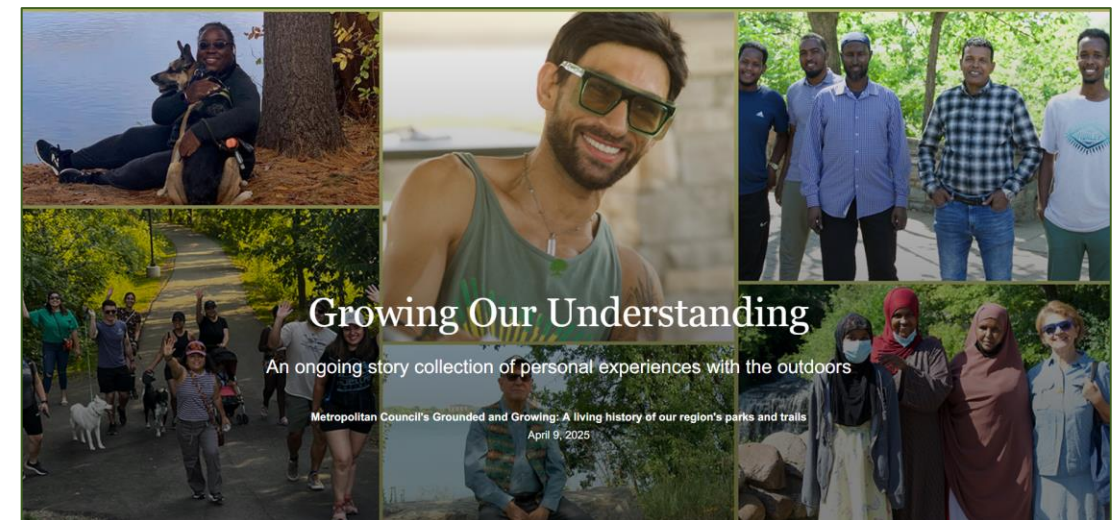HISTORY OF OUR LANDS
PAST | PRESENT

SENSE OF BELONGING
PAST | PRESENT

OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES
PAST | PRESENT

metrocouncil.org/parkslivinghistory

Growing our understanding

- Interactive map
  - Submit personal stories; reviewed before publicly posted
  - Map of stories and their locations

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1 Story submissions
metrocouncil.org/addmyvoice

2 Browse stories
metrocouncil.org/parkslivinghistory

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Where did this outdoor experience take place?*

Zoom to a specific location on the map below, then double-tap to drop a pin to connect experience you want to share with a location.

Tip: You may need to zoom in further if you can't drop the pin (be as specific about the location as possible). Use the house icon to reset the map.
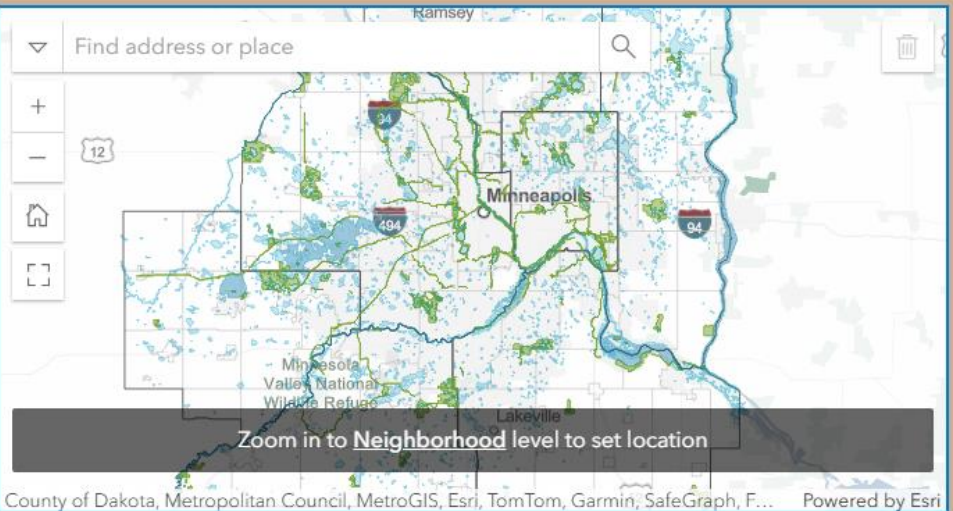
Find address or place

Zoom in to Neighborhood level to set location

County of Dakota, Metropolitan Council, MetroGIS, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, F...   Powered by Esri

Describe your outdoor experience.*

Tell us about your outdoor experience in as much detail as you feel comfortable sharing in the box below.

Is this a memory from your past or did it take place more recently, maybe even right now? What did you see, hear, or smell? What kinds of activities did you do? Are you alone or with others? What inspired this time outside? How do/did you feel about the experience?
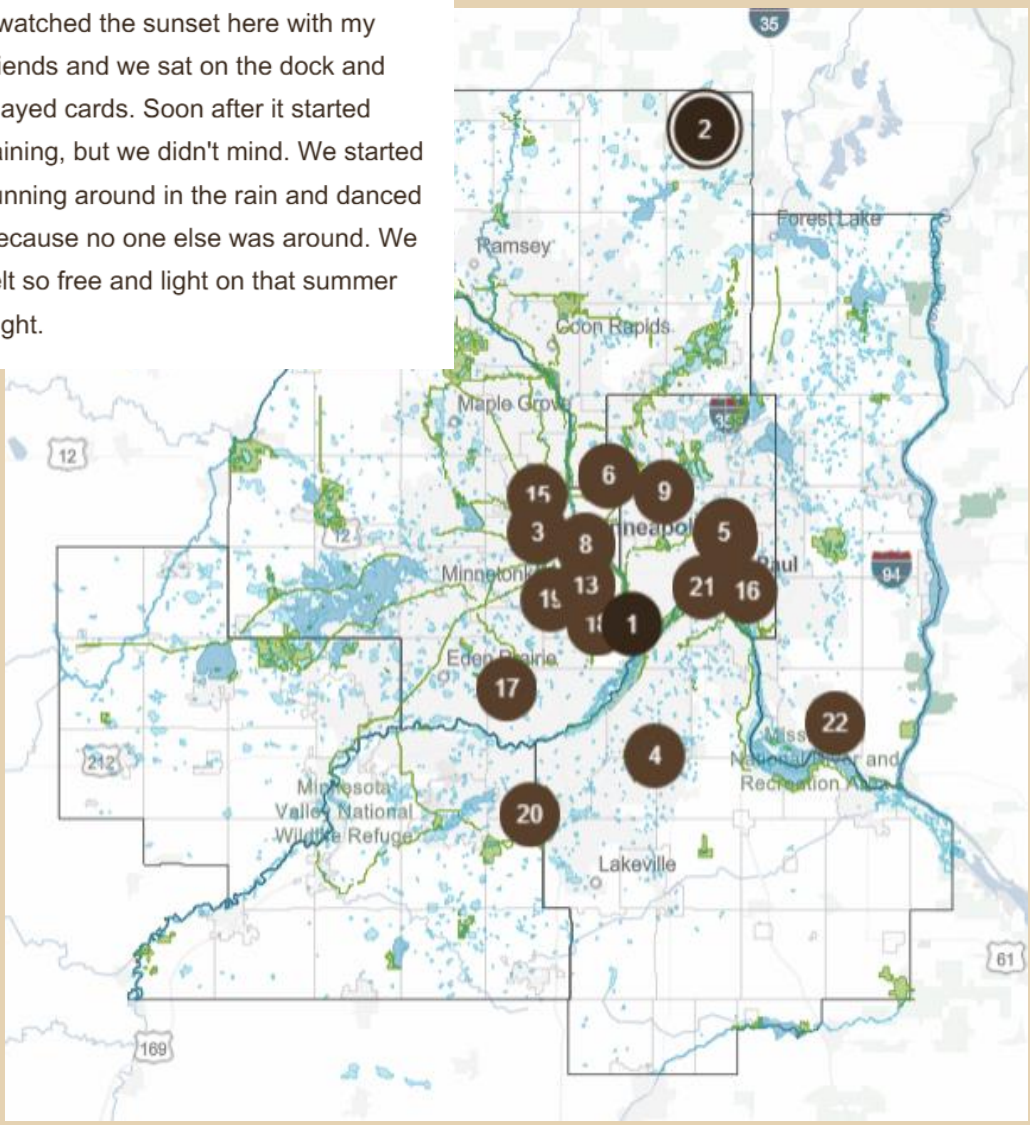

I watched the sunset here with my friends and we sat on the dock and played cards. Soon after it started raining, but we didn't mind. We started running around in the rain and danced because no one else was around. We felt so free and light on that summer night.

Story formats

Videos

- Shorter (<5 min) for themes on project home page
- Full interviews of personal stories available on YouTube playlist on Met Council's channel

Quotes and written stories

- Creating slides, documents
- Paired with still photos (when available)

> " I haven't been to this park in three years. I was afraid. The last time I was here, it was the 4th of July, and someone shot a firecracker in my face and hurt me very badly. They yelled something terrible at me and ran away. I would like to feel safe at the park because it is so beautiful here.
>
> - Saad

Access

Recommendations from participants

Access

- To increase awareness, amplify culturally specific marketing and outreach:
    - Multilingual
    - Intergenerational
    - New and old media
- Partner with assistive technology service providers
- Improved trail/transportation connections

Safety & Belonging

- Diversity of agencies' staff, volunteers, and decision-makers should reflect communities they serve; representation matters
- Visible promotion (signage, posted policies) of welcoming all and respectful conduct
- Infrastructure like lighting, emergency assistance

History of our land

- Remove outdated laws/policies restricting cultural practices and traditions
- More educational markers and programming; honor traditional names
- Programming and investment strategies align with legacies of environmental injustices, displacement, unmet needs

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Next steps

"Growing" the content itself ("living history")

- Submit historical information (online form)
- Build outdoor experience story collection
    - Share periodic analysis with agencies
- Update visitation data
    - Annual park and trail use estimates
    - Demographics of residents and visitors

"Growing" use of the content

- Convene Park Agencies – workshops, training
    - Met Council Park Ambassador Program
- Explore new partnerships (historical orgs, affinity groups, other agencies)
- Highlight responses and outcomes

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