

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: August 4, 2015

For the Community Development Committee meeting of August 17, 2015

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of August 26, 2015

Subject: Lebanon Hills Regional Park Master Plan, Dakota County
District(s), Member(s): MPOSC District H, Todd Kemery
Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statute 473.313
Staff Prepared/Presented: Jan Youngquist, AICP, Manager (651-602-1029)
Division/Department: Community Development, Regional Parks and Natural Resources

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Lebanon Hills Regional Park Master Plan.
2. Require Dakota County to submit information regarding the location and estimated costs for the relocation and development of Camp Sacajawea and the maintenance facility to the Metropolitan Council for approval prior to seeking regional parks funding for these projects.

Background

Dakota County has submitted a master plan for Lebanon Hills Regional Park for Council review and approval, which replaces the 2001 master plan for the park. The original master plan for the regional park was prepared in 1980. Lebanon Hills Regional Park is located in southern Eagan and northern Apple Valley. The regional park consists of almost 2,000 acres and more than 120 water basins, with 13 lakes and ponds. Lebanon Hills is known for its trails for hiking, running, skiing, horse riding and mountain biking. The park also has a campground and Camp Sacajawea, which is a retreat center.

The master plan includes priorities for natural resources restoration and recreational development. Some of the improvements proposed in the master plan include adding picnic areas, enhancing the campground, providing opportunities for park visitors to access the lakeshores, and the addition of an accessible paved trail for year-round walking and biking. The proposal for a 6 mile paved trail through the park generated a lot of concern with local residents.

In response to the public comments on the draft master plan, the Dakota County Board of Commissioners formed a Citizen Panel to further review and comment on the draft plan. The panel met ten times between May and December 2014 and the Lebanon Hills Regional Park Master Plan Citizen Panel Final Report was published in January 2015. The Dakota County Board approved the master plan in March 2015, with modifications based on public comment, as shown in Attachment A.

The Council's role in reviewing regional park master plans is to ensure that the master plan is consistent with the Regional Parks Policy Plan and Council policies, and does not negatively impact the Council's other systems—Transportation, Aviation, and Wastewater Services. As long as the master plan meets the criteria in the Regional Parks Policy Plan, the type of development within a regional park is determined through the regional park implementing agency's master planning process and subsequent approval by its governing board.

Rationale

The Lebanon Hills Regional Park Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies. The master plan requirements outlined in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* have an effective date of July 1, 2015. The Lebanon Hills Regional Park Master Plan was submitted to the Council prior to July 1, 2015, so it was reviewed subject to the requirements outlined in the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

Funding

The estimated cost to implement the master plan is \$27,519,451, which includes \$7,197,300 for land acquisition, \$8,088,556 for natural resource stewardship, and \$12,233,595 for development.

Approval of this master plan makes the costs eligible for regional parks funding, but does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. Future funding based on this master plan may be awarded through the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund, the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund. Council action is required to approve specific grants to Dakota County.

Known Support / Opposition

The Dakota County Board of Commissioners adopted the master plan on March 17, 2015 subject to modifications, as shown in Attachment A. As of July 22, 2015, the Metropolitan Council received 144 comment statements in opposition to the master plan, one comment statement of clarification, and two comment statements in support of the master plan, which are included in Attachment B.

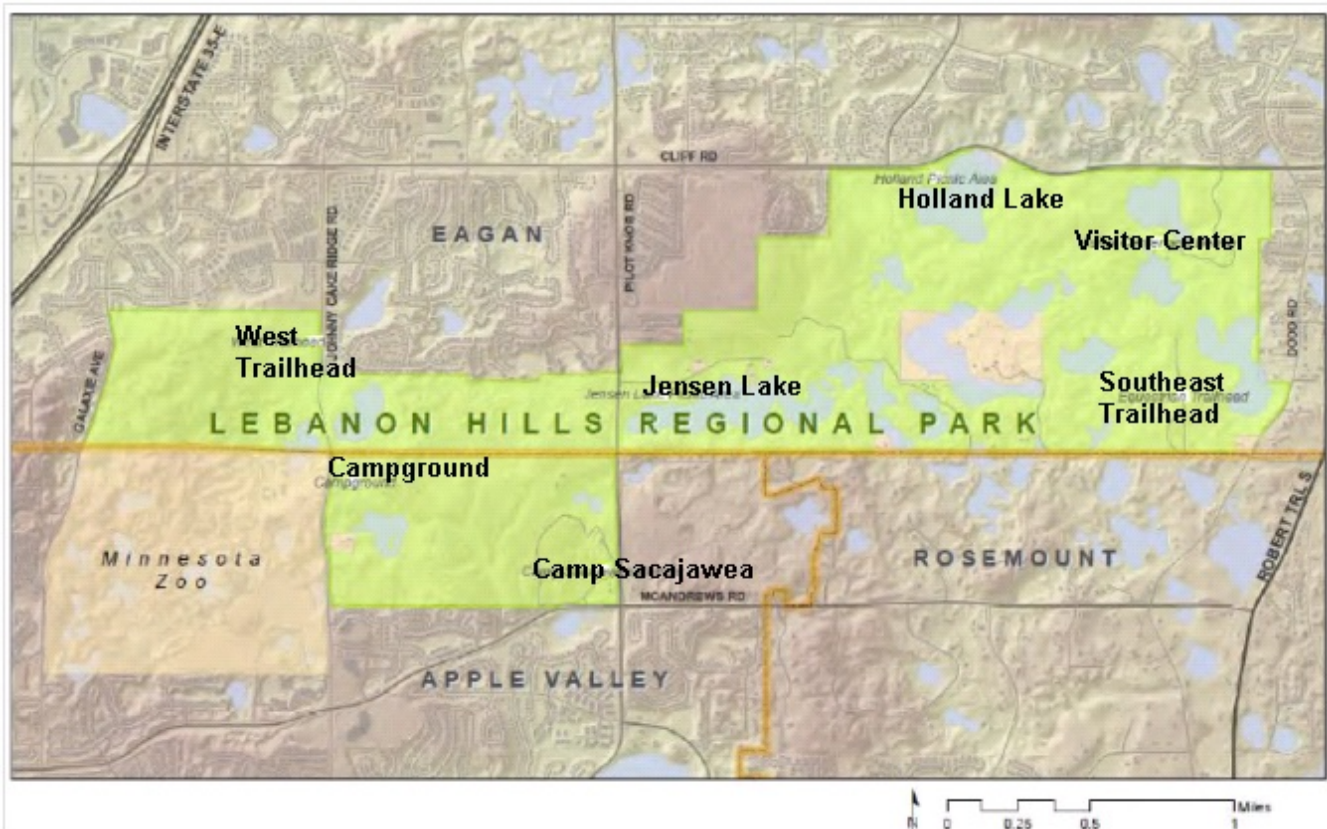
Analysis

The effective date for the master plan requirements outlined in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* is July 1, 2015 in acknowledgement of master plan planning processes that were already underway when the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* was adopted, on February 11, 2015. Because the Lebanon Hills Regional Park Master Plan was submitted to the Council prior to July 1, 2015, it was reviewed subject to the requirements outlined in the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that regional park master plans address the items listed below.

Boundaries and Acquisition

Lebanon Hills Regional Park is located in southern Eagan and northern Apple Valley. The regional park is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Lebanon Hills Regional Park



Acquisition of land for Lebanon Hills began in 1967, with 80 acres around Jensen Lake, east of Pilot Knob Road. At that time, much of the land inside and around the park area was minimally developed and active or retired farmland. More than 40 separate land purchases have occurred over time, bringing the current park size to 1,869 acres. Approximately 90 percent of the park area was acquired in the late 1970s, although acquisition of smaller parcels still continues.

There are ten properties that are within, or partially within, the regional park boundary that are considered inholdings and are planned for future acquisition, as shown on Figure 2. The estimated acquisition costs for these inholdings are \$7,197,300. Figure 3 provides additional information regarding the inholdings, including location, assessed value, and priority status for acquisition.

Figure 2: Lebanon Hills Regional Park Boundaries and Inholdings

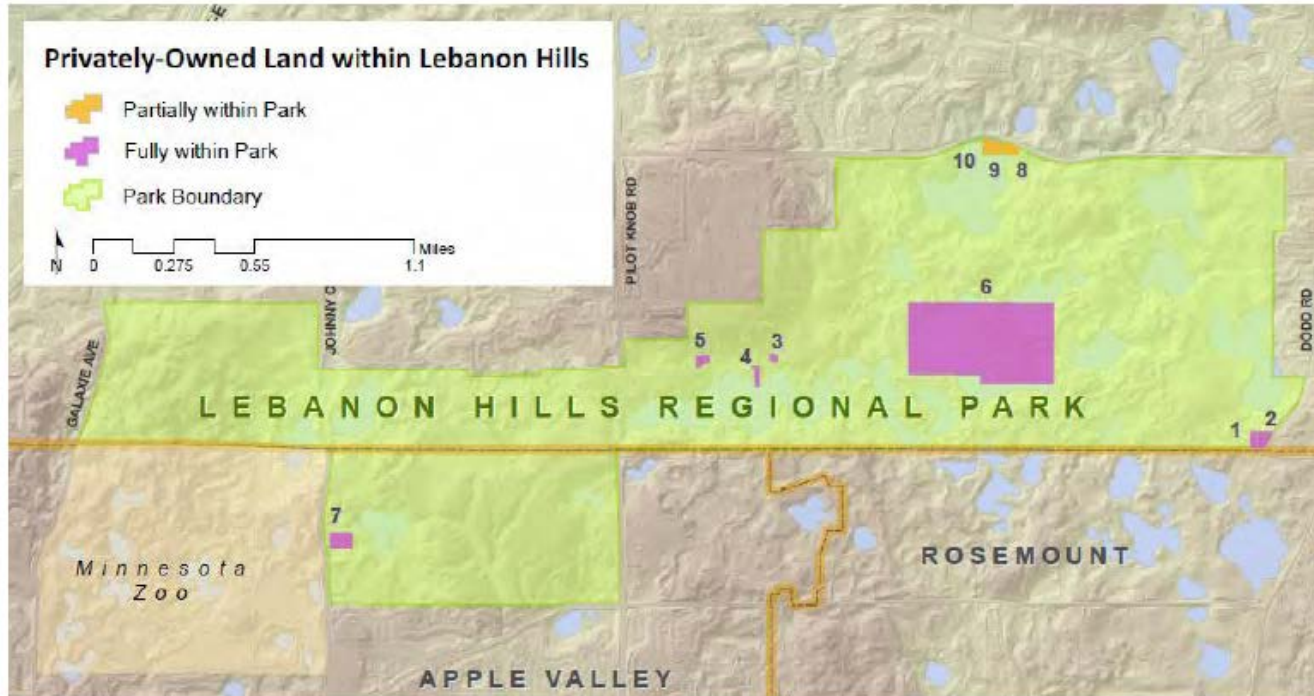


Figure 3: Lebanon Hills Regional Inholding Information

Map #	Property Address, Description, Assessed Value	Priority Status for Acquisition
1, 2	2835 120th Street, Rosemount: 2 parcels, 2.3 Acres, AV \$118,200	Medium
3	1252 Carriage Hills Drive, Eagan: Built 1975, 1 parcel, 0.49 Acres, AV \$222,000	High, as opportunities arise based on proposed Jensen Lake picnic area expansion. Acquisition of #4 could improve lake trail opportunities.
4	1284 Carriage Hills Drive, Eagan: Built 1960, 1 parcel, 0.24 Acres, AV \$276,000	
5	1319 Carriage Hills Drive, Eagan: Built 1982, 1 parcel, 1.0 Acres, AV \$235,500	
6	945 Butwin Road, Camp Butwin: Built 2006, 3 parcels, 55.7 Acres, AV \$6,248,200	Low, based on current use. Large parcel in heart of park with compatible nature-based recreation use. Acquisition would become a very high priority if owners choose to sell.
7	12294 Johnny Cake Ridge Road, Apple Valley: Built 1915, 1 parcel, 3.0 Acres, AV \$97,400	Medium, based on location of Wheaton Trailhead with new campground contact station.
8	995 Cliff Road, Eagan	High, based on proposed Holland trail link to Connector trail. Partial parcels of interest for acquisition or easement – only the portions south of Cliff Road with Holland lake frontage.
10	1007 Cliff Road, Eagan	
11	1015 Cliff Road, Eagan	

Stewardship Plan

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that a master plan include a plan for managing land prior to developing the property for recreation purposes. Since most of Lebanon Hills is an established park, as inholdings are acquired, they will be managed in accordance with other parkland, as described in the Operations section of this staff report (beginning on page 20).

Demand Forecast

The master plan discusses four key demographic trends that were considered in the development of the master plan:

- Continuing population growth
- Aging of the population
- Increasing racial and ethnic diversity
- Economic impacts of the recession

Continuing population growth: Dakota County's population grew to nearly 400,000 in the 2010 census, an increase of 11 percent from 2000. The Council's population forecasts show that Dakota County will grow by approximately 30 percent between 2010 and 2040. The highest growth rates are projected for the northern portion of the County, including West St. Paul, Mendota Heights, Inver Grove Heights, and Eagan. Historically, park visitation in Dakota County has increased at a faster rate than population growth. While the population grew by 11 percent from 2000-2010, visitation to the County's parks grew by 61 percent and visitation to Lebanon Hills grew by more than 100 percent, from 267,400 visits to 542,900 visits. Based on the forecasts for continuing population growth, more people will likely be visiting Lebanon Hills Regional Park in the future. Visitation to Lebanon Hills is expected to grow faster than other County parks because of its location in the urban area of the county as well as its range of recreational activities.

Aging of the population: As the Baby-Boom generation grows older, the average age of Dakota County's population increases. Seniors made up 10 percent of the County's population in 2010 and are projected to be more than 20 percent of the County's population by 2030. As the population ages, the master plan recommends that park planning should consider:

- Facility design to meet accessibility standards and mobility needs
- Services and programs that take into account physical needs, such as print size on materials, or benches and resting spots along trails
- Programs tailored for older adult audience interests and needs

Increasing racial and ethnic diversity: Dakota County is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. In the 2010 census, six percent of the County's population identified their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino, more than double the number in 2000. The percentage of residents identifying themselves as Black or African American doubled in that time period, and significant increases were noted for residents of Asian background.

Dakota County's percentage of foreign born population is also increasing. Between 1990 and 2000, the foreign born population in Dakota County increased 187 percent and increased another 75 percent between 2000 and 2010 to 31,611 people. Almost 8 percent of the total population in the County identified themselves as foreign born in 2010.

Dakota County has the second highest number of non-English languages spoken in the homes of school aged children (98 languages) in the metropolitan area, just behind Hennepin County. Census figures show that 11.2 percent of Dakota County households speak a language other than English at home.

As racial and ethnic diversity in the County continues to increase, park visitors will represent a greater diversity of cultural perspectives, sensitivities and preferences related to recreation, services, and programs. Examples of these preferences include design of picnic shelters to better accommodate extended family gatherings, or multi-language information and programs. The master plan indicates that there may be a need for more targeted outreach and activity-specific introductory programs for cultural groups that are less familiar with outdoor and nature-based recreation opportunities.

Economic impacts of the recession: Real income among County residents has declined over the last decade. The inflation-adjusted median household income level of \$72,324 in 2010 is less than it was in 1989 (\$72,991). Dakota County's household poverty level rose to 4.6 percent. The poverty level for County residents is 7.1 percent, with 10 percent of children under the age of 17 in the County living in poverty. Immigrants, persons of color, and families with children are disproportionately poor within the County. The master plan recommends exploring expanded transit service to the park and providing reduced costs for park programs and equipment rentals for people with limited financial resources.

Development Concept

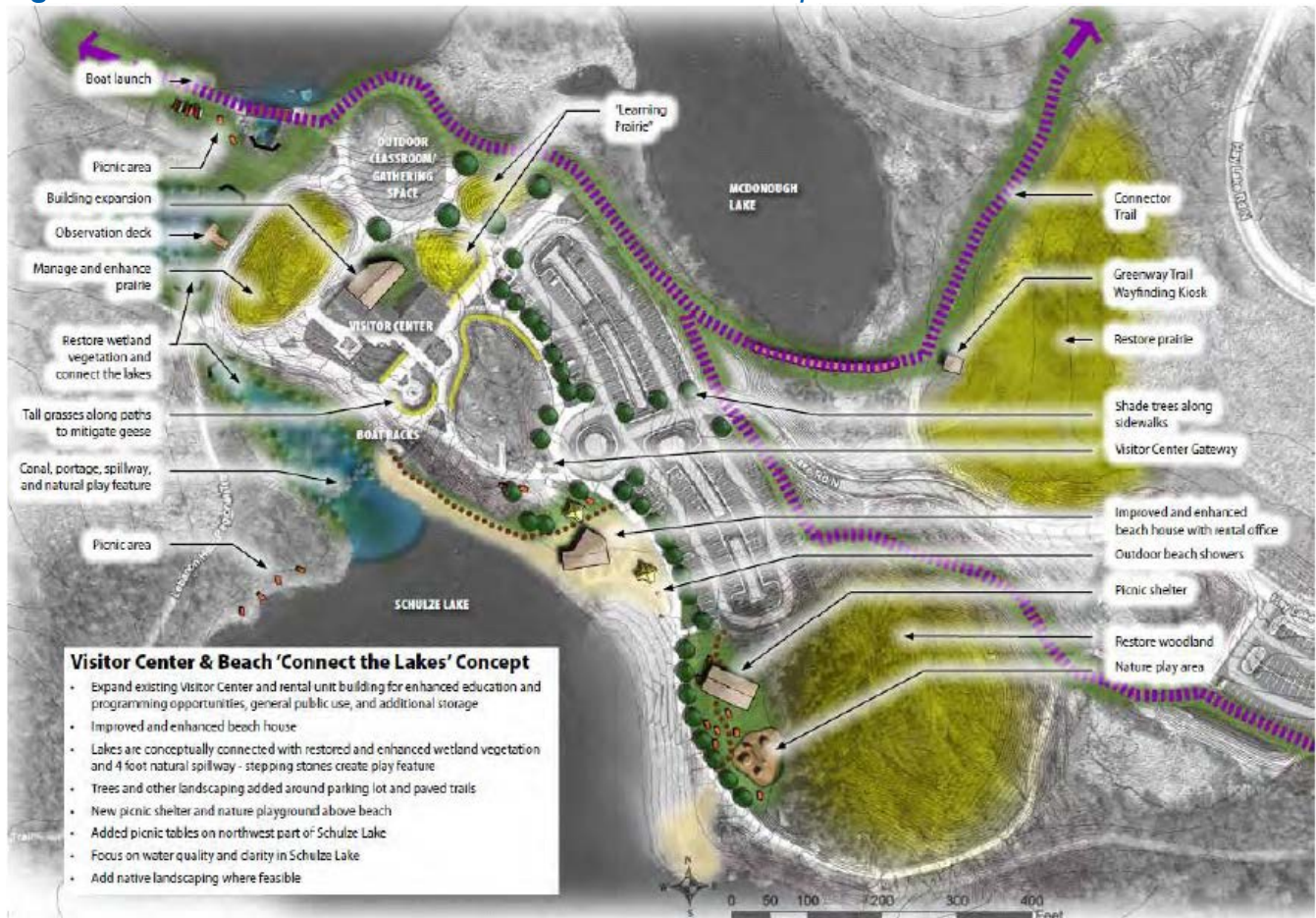
The proposed recreational development plans focus on improving or modestly expanding existing park destinations including the Visitor Center, trailheads, campground and Camp Sacajawea, as well as trails. The locations of the main recreational destinations in the regional park are labeled in Figure 1.

Visitor Center: Located between Schulze and McDonough lakes in the northeast portion of the park, the Visitor Center area is the most visited area of the park and currently includes a LEED certified visitor center, Schulze Lake beach and beach house, picnic grounds, nature displays, parking, trails, and sidewalks. The master plan proposes to:

- Visually connect McDonough and Schulze Lakes with restored wetlands, environmental learning and access to the water's edge
- Expand the Visitor Center and rental building for education, programming, public use and equipment storage,
- Improve the beach house
- Host more picnicking with a new shelter and scattered sites
- Expand the existing beach along the lakeshore
- Add opportunities to paddle McDonough Lake, with boat rental racks and a put-in location
- Add to the existing outdoor classroom/gathering space at the edge of McDonough Lake
- Add opportunities for a variety of play (nature, water, and open area) and benches throughout the campus

Estimated costs for the Visitor Center, including small-area stewardship projects associated with the development are \$1,961,400. Figure 4 shows the Visitor Center and Beach Concept.

Figure 4: Lebanon Hills Visitor Center and Beach Concept



Visitor Center & Beach 'Connect the Lakes' Concept

- Expand existing Visitor Center and rental unit building for enhanced education and programming opportunities, general public use, and additional storage
- Improved and enhanced beach house
- Lakes are conceptually connected with restored and enhanced wetland vegetation and 4 foot natural spillway - stepping stones create play feature
- Trees and other landscaping added around parking lot and paved trails
- New picnic shelter and nature playground above beach
- Added picnic tables on northwest part of Schulze Lake
- Focus on water quality and clarity in Schulze Lake
- Add native landscaping where feasible

Holland Lake: Holland Lake is located in the north-central portion of the park just south of Cliff Road and is a popular trailhead, picnic area, and fishing spot. The trailhead has a picnic shelter with restrooms, a lakeside deck, parking, and trails. Proposed improvements include:

- Improved amenities for shelter users, including a natural play area and a fire ring
- A larger pier to accommodate more lake-side visitors, people fishing, and programs
- Boat rental racks and a launch for non-motorized watercraft near the pier
- A rocky beach/shoreline to allow people to get closer to the water and sit and dip one's toes
- A small pier and bird observation blind in the northwest corner of the lake
- A soft surface loop trail around the lake using part of an abandoned driveway on the east side of the lake and part of the planned Connector Trail
- An ADA-accessible path from the trailhead parking area to the main pier
- New natural surface trails provide access to the shore

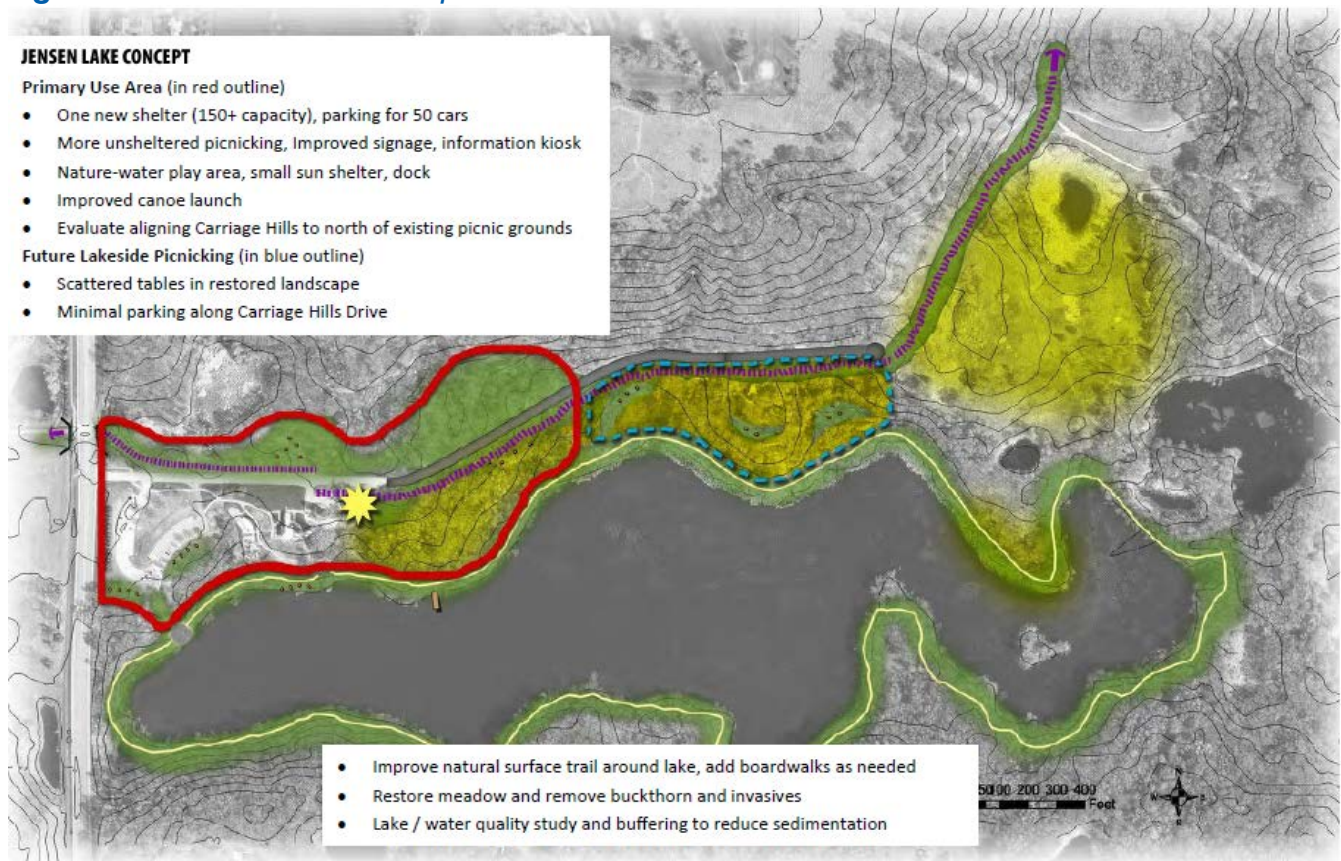
Figure 5 shows the Holland Lake Concept and Figure 6 shows the Holland Lake Loop Trail Concept. Estimated costs for the Holland Lake Concept, including small-area stewardship projects associated with the development are \$1,839,500.

Jensen Lake: Jensen Lake is located in the central portion of the park, just east of Pilot Knob Road, and is a primary picnic area in the park. The Jensen picnic shelter accommodates 100 people under the roof and an additional 50 people on a patio area. The area also includes a north picnic grounds with unsheltered tables, a children’s playground, fire rings, a shoreline overlook and parking. Jensen Lake area serves as a trailhead with access to trails east and west of Pilot Knob Road, the popular Jensen Lake loop trail, and the canoe route between Jensen Lake and Schulze Lake. Proposed improvements include:

- A new picnic shelter with restrooms and parking near the existing shelter in the primary use area
- A small sun shelter and nature play area in the primary use area
- Scattered, simple picnic table sites along Carriage Hills Drive/Jensen Lake
- Completing boardwalks and improving the Jensen Lake natural surface loop trail
- Improving the canoe launch on the west side of lake

Figure 7 shows the Jensen Lake Concept. Estimated costs for the Jensen Lake Concept, including small-area stewardship projects associated with the development are \$1,839,500.

Figure 7: Jensen Lake Concept



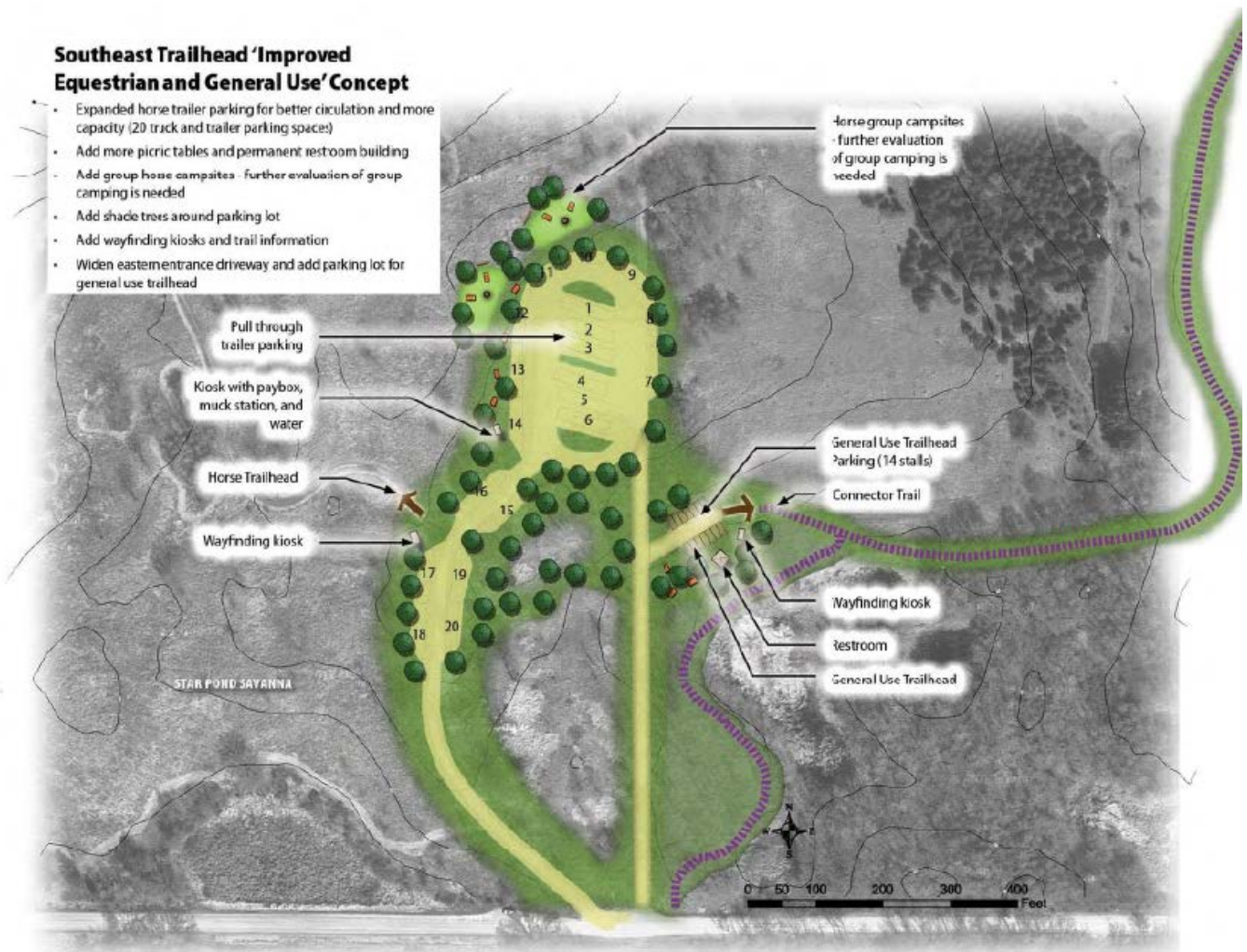
Southeast Trailhead: The existing trailhead located in the southeast portion of the park is used primarily by equestrians for access to horse trails. The trailhead has a gravel surface horse trailer parking lot, picnic tables, a portable toilet and a fire ring. The intent of the concept plan is to improve the trailhead for

equestrian use while adding basic trailhead facilities for visitors arriving from the south. Proposed improvements include:

- Expand the horse trailer parking lot for better circulation and capacity
- Add a gravel parking lot for general use and a permanent restroom building
- Add picnic tables and drinking water
- Add high tie lines, a muck station, and other amenities for equestrians
- Potentially add equestrian group campsites, with further discussion and refinement with equestrian groups
- Improve wayfinding kiosks and trail information

Figure 8 shows the Southeast Trailhead Concept. Estimated costs for the Visitor Center, including small-area stewardship projects associated with the development are \$507,600.

Figure 8: Southeast Trailhead Concept



Campground: The Lebanon Hills Campground is located in the west portion of the park, across Johnny Cake Ridge Road, and east from the Minnesota Zoo. The campground is popular because of its convenient location, facilities, and access to a natural setting. The campground includes an RV loop with water, sewer, and electrical services; an east loop with electrical service only; and a primitive north loop without utility hook ups. The campground has bathroom and shower facilities, a store, laundry, and a children’s playground. Proposed improvements include:

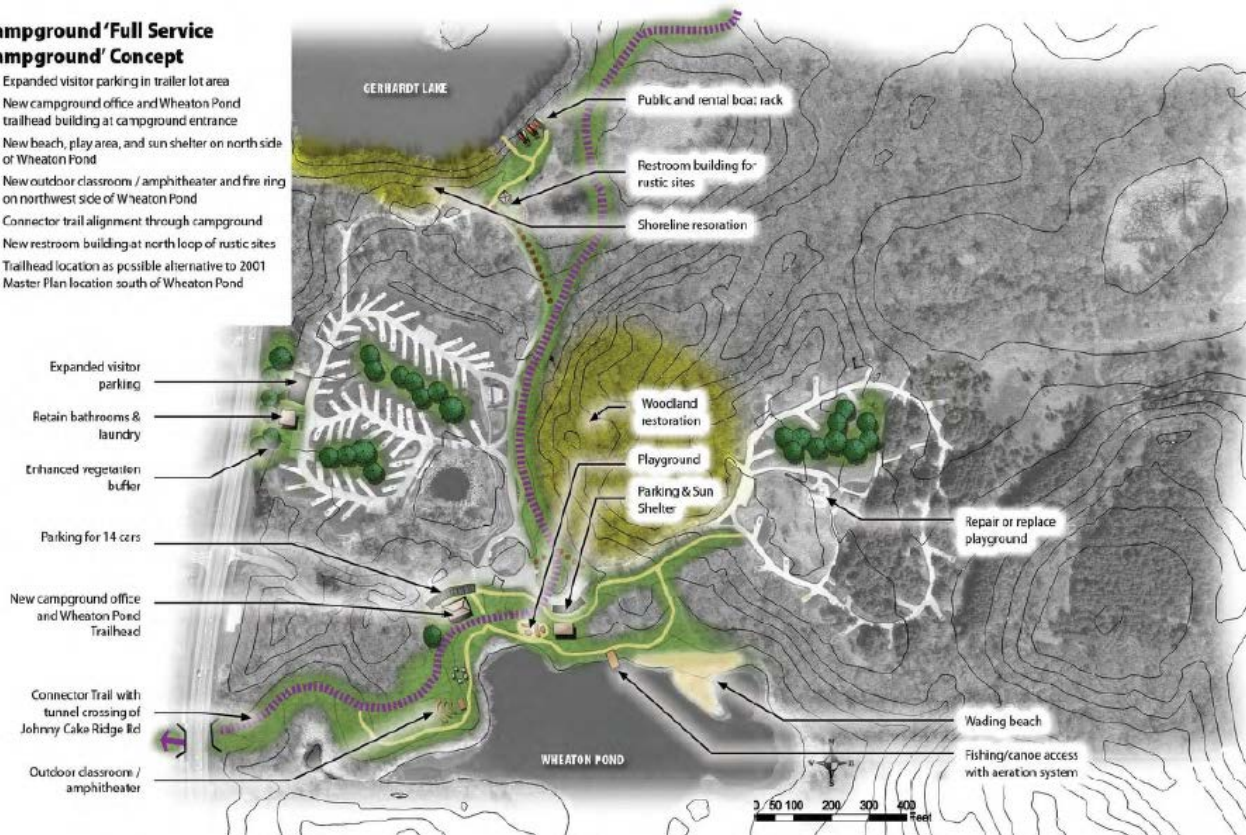
- New campground contact station and trailhead off the entry road, with a front office, small back office, utility room, restrooms, storage, winter warming space, and rental equipment, such as bicycles
- Visitor parking expansion
- New wading beach, play area, pier, boat rental docks, sun shelter, outdoor classroom, and fire ring on the north side of Wheaton Pond
- Connector trail access along the edge of the campground
- New restroom building serving north loop rustic sites

Figure 9 shows the Campground Concept. Estimated costs for the Campground Concept, including small-area stewardship projects associated with the development are \$2,111,375.

Figure 9: Campground Concept

Campground 'Full Service Campground' Concept

- Expanded visitor parking in trailer lot area
- New campground office and Wheaton Pond trailhead building at campground entrance
- New beach, play area, and sun shelter on north side of Wheaton Pond
- New outdoor classroom / amphitheater and fire ring on northwest side of Wheaton Pond
- Connector trail alignment through campground
- New restroom building at north loop of rustic sites
- Trailhead location as possible alternative to 2001 Master Plan location south of Wheaton Pond



Camp Sacajawea: Camp Sacajawea is located in the south portion of the park, just west of Pilot Knob Road. Camp Sacajawea is a reserved-use retreat center with a small lodge that accommodates 50 people, group camp, adventure skills course, outdoor classroom, parking, and trails. The planned improvements would improve its capacity as a full-service retreat center, by:

- Updating and expanding the Lodge with a larger gathering room, improved kitchen and storage space, a porch, and exterior-access restrooms
- Adding an outdoor gathering area and fire ring by the Lodge
- Potentially adding three bunkhouses south of the Lodge in the future
- Improving the group camp with a common shelter and cooking areas at each site
- Formalizing nature trails in the area using sustainable design, complete a paved trail between the classroom and Lodge, and add a link to the Connector Trail
- Updating and enhancing the adventure course

However, the master plan recommends the following additional evaluation before any improvements are undertaken:

- 1) Market and level of service analyses to better define the roles of retreat centers in Dakota County Parks.
- 2) Further study should be done in relocating the maintenance facility and possibly relocating Camp Sacajawea to the current maintenance site or elsewhere in the park. The current Camp Sacajawea site lacks lake access, limiting recreation options for visitors. The 2001 master plan called for the relocation of the Parks maintenance facility from O'Brien Lake to the northeast corner of the park. The O'Brien Lake site is highly scenic and could provide a better location for Camp Sacajawea.
- 3) The County is evaluating its maintenance operations and this study may influence the level of park-based maintenance infrastructure that is needed at Lebanon Hills.

Figure 10 shows the Camp Sacajawea Concept. Estimated costs for the Camp Sacajawea Concept, including small-area stewardship projects associated with the development are \$1,482,300.

Figure 10: Camp Sacajawea Concept



West Trailhead: The West Trailhead serves the mountain bike, cross country ski, and hiking trails west of Johnny Cake Ridge Road. The Lebanon Hills mountain bike trails are among the most popular in Minnesota.

A new trailhead building with restrooms, paved parking lot, and mountain bike skills course was just constructed in 2012, so proposed enhancements to the trailhead are minor and mostly in response to the popularity of this area. Proposed improvements include:

- Improving the former gravel parking area
- Enhancing the area east of new parking lot for event use
- Adding picnic tables to the west of the new parking lot
- Continuing to work with MORC (Minnesota Off-Road Cyclists) in general enhancements
- Resolving emerging issues with traffic flow through the site, potentially adding a trail link from parking to the course around the buildings

Figure 11 shows the West Trailhead Concept. Estimated costs for the West Trailhead Concept, including small-area stewardship projects associated with the development are \$184,250.

Figure 11: West Trailhead Concept



Maintenance facility: The maintenance facility is Dakota County's northern base for park maintenance operations and currently serves Lebanon Hills, Big Rivers Regional Trail, and Thompson County Park. The facility is located in a highly scenic natural area that would be best used for open space, visitor, and trail purposes. The master plan indicates that the new facility should be sited to provide efficient access to park use areas, roads that access the park, and other areas covered by the maintenance facility. The new location should minimize interference with other park uses, be of lower ecological value, and be designed

to minimize adverse impact. The new location should accommodate sufficient security, including control of the entry. Room for potential future expansion is also desirable.

Based on the above criteria, the 2001 Master Plan recommended a location in the northeast corner of the park, off the relocated park entrance road. The final location for this facility will require additional evaluation to ensure that it still meets the siting criteria and does not detract from the main park entrance experience.

Portage Canoe Course: Lebanon Hills Regional Park offers a portage trail canoe course, which provides a wilderness experience with 2.6 miles of water trail through nine lakes and ponds connected by portages. The master plan proposes to keep a rustic approach to the course and providing clear, yet unobtrusive, signage. The estimated cost for site preparation and basic amenities is \$47,700.

Trails: Trails are a defining feature of Lebanon Hills Regional Park and are almost exclusively natural surface trails. The master plan proposes improvements to soft surface trails. In the east park, new hiking links will be added around Holland Lake, and in prairie and restored savanna areas. Some equestrian trail segments in the southeast park will become shared soft-surface equestrian-hiking trails to bring hikers to scenic areas that are currently inaccessible.

Sustainably-designed loops will be created in the middle park, some designed to be shared by both equestrians and hikers. New trails are planned for the campground and Camp Sacajawea, where unmarked informal trails now exist. A dead-end equestrian trail in the middle park is eliminated, replaced with a new more sustainable loop.

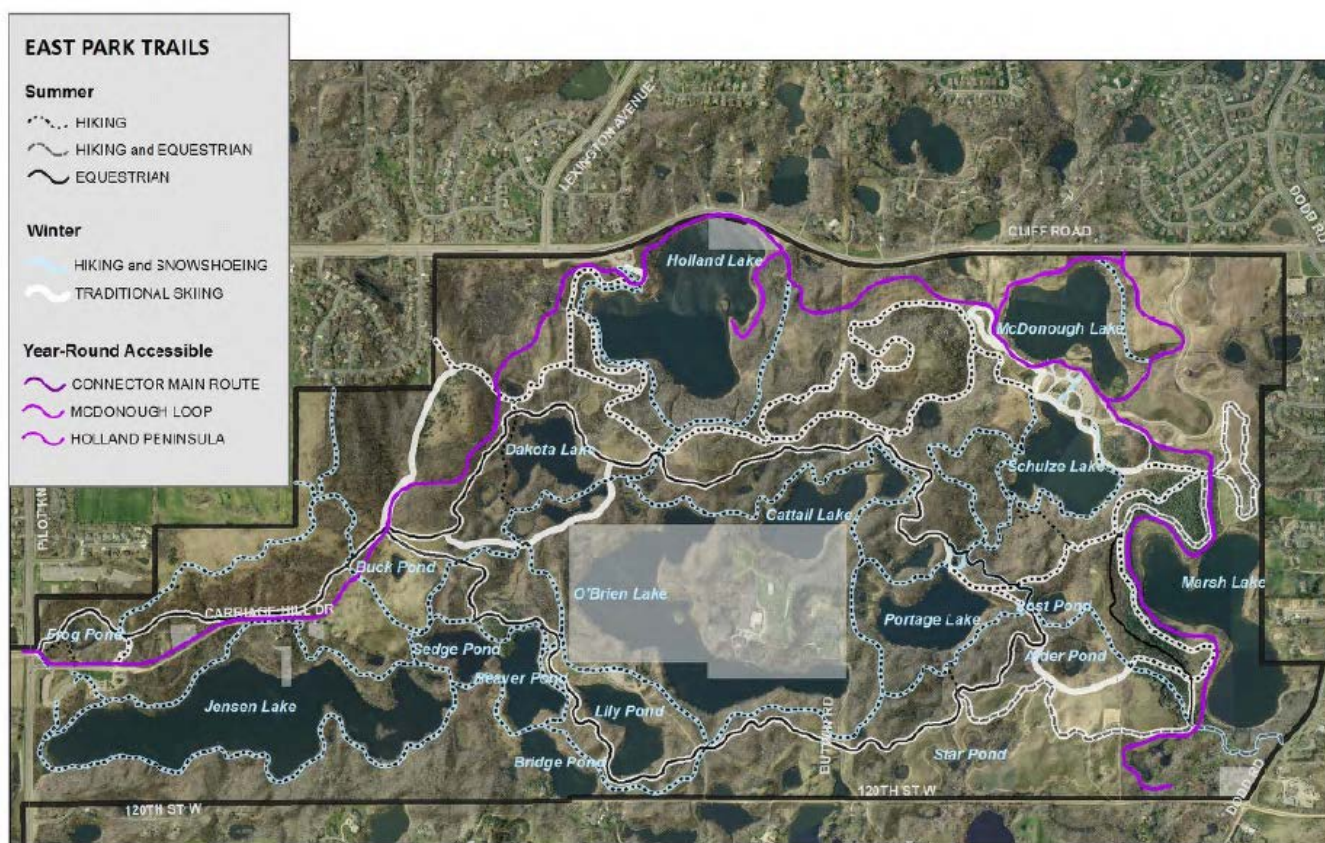
A 6-mile paved Connector Trail is also proposed to improve accessibility and connectivity within the regional park. The Connector Trail will link the park's main recreation destinations with a stable-surface, multi-use, all-season trail. Although not typically part of a master planning process, Dakota County conducted pre-engineering studies of the Connector route to ensure that it can meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) trail standards. The Visitor Center will serve as the primary Connector trailhead with amenities including parking, water, restrooms, and orientation. Other destinations will also function as trailheads for park trails, and the Connector Trail. The Connector route follows terrain and minimizes conflicts with existing trails.

The Connector Trail is generally closer to the park perimeter, except in locations where it would conflict with existing trails or have greater impact on more sensitive natural resources. The nature trail system and the Connector together can provide additional loops and new trail experiences.

The master plan describes the trails in three sections of the regional park: the east park, middle park, and west park.

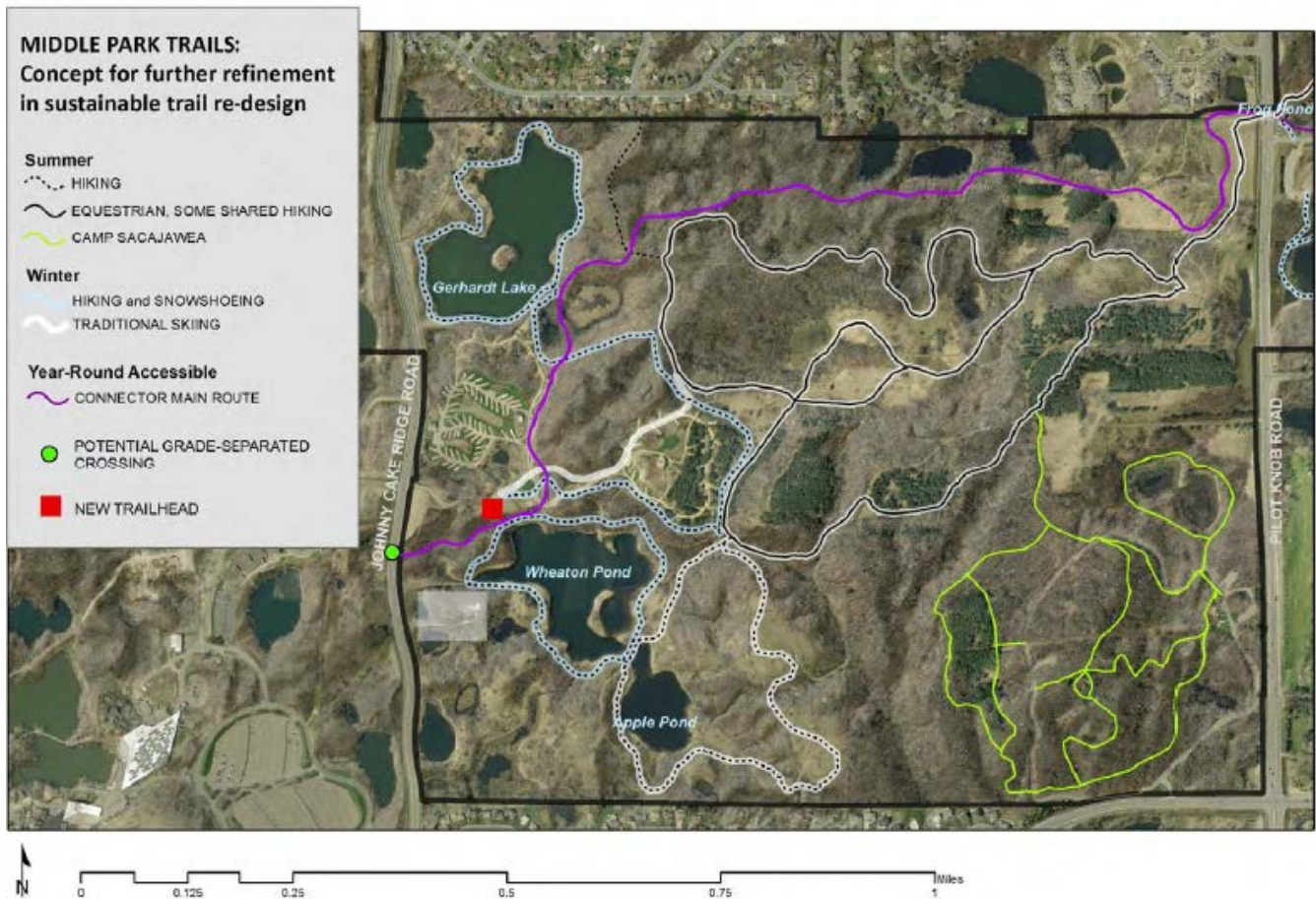
East Park Trails: At the east portion of the park, a paved loop around McDonough Lake near the Visitor Center will provide more walking options for stroller and wheelchair users, while increasing visitor’s access to the lake. In this portion of the regional park, the Connector Trail passes through the northern edge, from the Cliff Road entrance, to the Visitor Center, Holland Lake, Jensen Lake picnic area and the Pilot Knob Road underpass. The Connector passes through previously disturbed areas and minimizes crossings with ski trails. The original draft master plan called for a paved loop around Holland Lake. However, a 2014 Citizen Panel, described in the Citizen Participation section of this report beginning on page 21, reached consensus on a .5 mile ADA-accessible spur off the Connector Trail that provides access to a scenic peninsula on the east side of Holland Lake, rather than a paved trail around the entire lake. New soft-surface trails are proposed in the prairie area north of Jensen Lake. New trail segments would create loops around Dakota Lake as well as Beaver and Lily ponds. Figure 12 shows the east park trails. The paved Connector Trail and Spur are shown in purple. All other trails will be soft surface.

Figure 12: East Park Trails



Middle Park Trails: The trail plan for the park’s middle section addresses the lack of hiking loops and the erodible condition of all existing trails, and adds the Connector Trail in a short direct route across this park section. A sustainable trail re-design is proposed for the middle park. Figure 13 shows the middle park trails. The paved Connector Trail is shown in purple. All other trails will be soft surface.

Figure 13: Middle Park Trails



West Park Trails: The west park is mostly for mountain biking. The Lebanon Hills course is regarded as one of the best in the Twin Cities. Hiking loops and a separate skate ski trail co-exist with the network of biking trails. The existing hiking trails are not configured based on sustainable trail design principles, and are subject to erosion as they cross over hills rather than hugging contours. Skate skiing is a minor use at Lebanon Hills and the existing course is highly challenging. The plans for the west park trails include continuing to work with MORC on management and improvement of the mountain bike trail as well as other west park trails, enhancing the hiking trail, and further evaluating improvement needs and use of the ski skate trail. The west park trails are depicted in Figure 14. No paved trails are planned for this portion of the regional park.

Figure 14: West Park Trails



The master plan describes the character and design standards for the various types of trails within Lebanon Hills Regional Park. It should be noted that the Connector Trail was originally proposed to be 10 feet wide and designed for speeds of 20 mph, but the Dakota County Board of Commissioners adopted the master plan with the following modifications regarding the Connector Trail:

- Strike language throughout the document regarding a 20 mph design speed for the connector trail
- Removal of Greenway language when speaking about the connector trail within the park; Greenway is to come to the park but not through the park
- Reduce width of connector trail to eight feet throughout document
- Replace the term "bikeway" with "connector trail" in sections of the document referring to the connector trail

The master plan proposes a net increase of 3 miles of soft surface summer use trails, 3.5 miles of winter use trails, and 6.5 miles of paved all-season trails, which include the Connector Trail and Holland Lake Spur. Figure 15 shows the current, proposed, and net miles of trails by season.

Figure 15: Existing and Planned Trails by Season

TRAIL TYPE/USE	CURRENT MILES	PROPOSED MILES	NET CHANGE MILES
Summer Use, soft surface	40.0	43.0	+ 3.0
Winter Use	32.3	35.8	+ 3.5
Connector and Lake Loops	0	6.5	+ 6.5

The estimated development cost for the trails and associated amenities is \$3,966,200.

Conflicts

Approximately 80 percent of the land adjacent to Lebanon Hills Regional Park consists of single family residential neighborhoods and high and low volume roadways. Up to 20 percent of the adjacent land could see future development, either from a change in housing density or unpaved rural roads becoming paved urban roads. The area that presents the greatest opportunity for change is along the southeast corner of the park in Rosemount.

The Minnesota Zoo and Valleywood Golf Course are the primary large open spaces that border the park. The former Parkview Golf Course that was adjacent to the north end of the park is currently being redeveloped for residential uses.

Visual screening and buffering is desirable in locations where park trails or facilities are close to the park boundary and there is little to no screening on the adjacent private property.

The creation of unofficial park access trails, physical encroachments, and after-hours park use can occur in park areas that are close residential neighborhoods. Dakota County generally relies on clear boundary signage and enforcement. In select situations, a physical barrier such as a fence may be warranted. This also applies to informal foot paths that can cause maintenance and access control concerns.

A network of local and county roads provides vehicular access to the park, but also impact wildlife, habitat, and human use. Johnny Cake Ridge Road and Pilot Knob Road run north-south through the park, dividing it into three sections and creating barriers to human and wildlife movement. An existing underpass at Pilot Knob Road facilitates connectivity between the east and middle sections of the park. The master plan recommends a grade-separated trail crossing of Johnny Cake Ridge Road to safely connect the middle and west sections of the park.

Noise from high speed/high traffic volume roads is apparent within the park. The master plan recommends noise buffering through the use of native plants and earth berms for:

- East side of Johnny Cake Ridge Road next to the campground
- West side of Pilot Knob Road by the Camp Sacajawea Lodge
- East side of Pilot Knob Road near the Jensen Lake trailhead
- South edge of Cliff Road at Holland Lake
- South edge of Cliff Road at McDonough Lake

Vehicular access to the park at Cliff Road, Pilot Knob Road, and Johnny Cake Ridge Road occurs mostly at uncontrolled intersections, with the exception of a signalized access at the intersection of Lexington Avenue and Cliff Road. The master plan recommends evaluation of improvements at the intersection of the main park entrance road and Cliff Road when park traffic increases or in conjunction with the planned expansion of Cliff Road west of Lexington Avenue.

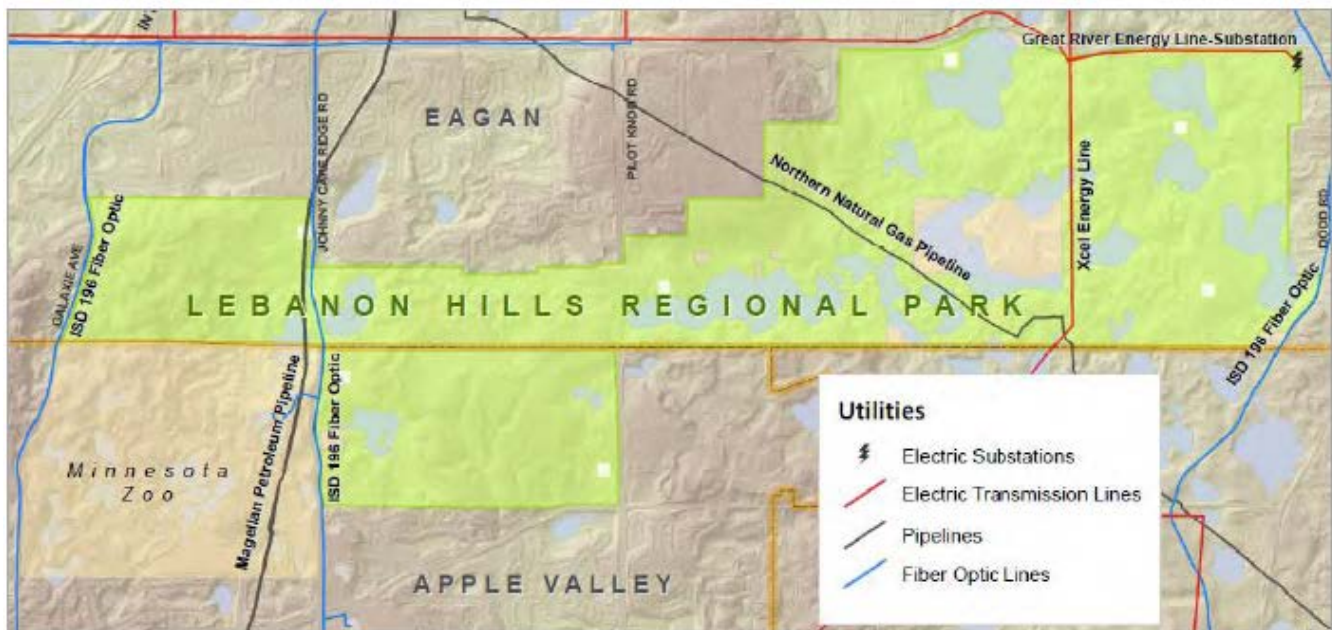
Public Services

Natural gas and petroleum pipelines cross Lebanon Hills Regional Park and have impacts to the park landscapes. There can be limitations on the type of park facilities that can cross or be adjacent the line, depending on the type of line and safety requirements. The eastern portion of the park is traversed by the Northern Natural Gas Company's Rosemount Junction to Minneapolis line, which runs diagonally through the park. Northern Natural Gas maintains its pipeline easement to be free of trees and other tall woody vegetation. Magellan Pipeline Company operates a petroleum pipeline that runs north-south across the western portion of the park, near the West Trailhead. This corridor is kept free of large woody vegetation, with limits on the types of structures than can cross or be on top of the line.

Power lines run north-south through the eastern portion of the park. Xcel Energy maintains the easement corridor to be clear of trees and other woody vegetation. Great River Energy operates an overhead power line on the Cliff Road edge of the eastern portion of the park as well as a substation sited along the northeast portion of the park.

Fiber optic lines owned by Independent School District 196 run along the park boundaries under Dodd Road, Johnny Cake Ridge Road, and Galaxie Avenue. The Lebanon Hills campground is served by one of the lines. Figure 16 shows the electric substation, pipelines, power lines, and fiber optic lines that run through or adjacent to the regional park.

Figure 16: Utility Lines within and adjacent to Lebanon Hills Regional Park



Sanitary sewer: The Visitor Center campus, Holland Trailhead, Campground, Jensen Trailhead, and West Trailhead are on city sanitary sewer service. The remaining park facilities currently have septic systems.

Water: The Visitor Center campus, Campground, Camp Sacajawea, Jensen Trailhead, and West Trailhead are on city water service.

Stormwater: Portions of the park receive surface water drainage from outside the park. The master plan indicates that it is important to maintain viable ecological buffers along the park edge to slow down stormwater runoff, capture micro-nutrients, and infiltrate surface water before it reaches water bodies

within the park. It is also important for the County to continue to work with cities and the watershed district to address stormwater before it enters the park.

Utility service needs: New public service and utility needs will likely be minimal, and mostly related to the relocation of the park maintenance facility. Expansion of the picnic area at Jensen Lake will require extension of utility services from the existing developed area. Expansion of the southeast equestrian trailhead area to include amenities, including restrooms, will likely rely on a septic system and well.

Operations

The Dakota County park system is governed by Ordinance No. 107, which was adopted by the County Board of Commissioners on June 3, 1997. The Ordinance addresses public use; general conduct; general parkland operation; protection of property, structures, and natural resources; recreation activity; and motorized vehicles, traffic, and parking.

Administration oversees all park operations, budgeting, staffing and capital facility development. The Parks Director has direct oversight of primary business units including Visitor Services, Capital Facility Development, and Natural Resources.

Visitor Services manages recreation provision, outdoor education, events, rentals, and reservations. Rentals throughout the year include canoes, kayaks, and stand-up paddleboards in summer, as well as cross country skis, kick sleds, and snowshoes in winter. Several venues can be rented for private events, including Camp Sacajawea Retreat Center, two picnic shelters and lakeside deck, and the Discovery Room within the Visitor Center.

Dakota County's Outdoor Education Program is based out of the Lebanon Hills Visitor Center. The program includes parent and child fishing events, kayak and canoe lessons, prairie hikes, stargazing, cross country skiing, and moonlight snowshoe hikes. An Outdoor Education Coordinator plans and oversees outdoor education programming in the parks. In the past decade, the program has generated more than \$275,000 in revenue, while providing free or low-cost activities for families.

The Facilities Management Director oversees a staff of 14 permanent employees and 18 seasonal staff for maintenance, including

- Building and public restroom custodial services
- Rental facility custodial and setup services
- Snow removal & trail grooming
- Shelter rental custodial and setup services
- Collection of trash and recycling
- Natural resource maintenance
- Preventive maintenance and repairs of park infrastructure and equipment
- Deferred maintenance
- Assisting other departments and service areas with events, programs, and projects
- Capital improvement program assistance
- Grounds maintenance
- Emergency response

Signs and kiosks throughout the park provide information to visitors about park hours, trails, permitted and prohibited activities, fees, and directions. The Dakota County Sheriff's Office educates visitors, enforces the Ordinance when necessary, and patrols the park. A volunteer ski patrol maintains a presence on the ski trails. Local law enforcement and the Sheriff's Department respond to emergencies and criminal complaints.

The 2015 Operations Budget for Visitor Services, Natural Resources and Maintenance totals \$3,832,876 of which \$1,400,087 is estimated for Lebanon Hills Regional Park. It is estimated an additional \$704,622 is needed to fund operational expenses associated with the proposed improvements within the master plan. The predominant revenue source for operational expenses is from Dakota County funds. Revenue is also received from the State of Minnesota as part of the Operations and Maintenance Fund allocation administered by the Metropolitan Council

2015 revenues generated from fee-based facilities and services at Lebanon Hills Regional Park are estimated to total \$397,830, as follows:

- Campground	\$255,400
- Camp Sacajawea Rental	\$ 22,000
- Visitor Center Building Rental	\$ 5,500
- Visitor Center Equipment Rental	\$ 45,000
- Outdoor Education	\$ 29,750
- Special Permits	\$ 1,250
- Picnic Shelter Rental	\$ 13,930
- Equestrian Trail Pass	\$ 2,500
- Cross Country Ski Pass	\$ 22,500

Citizen Participation

As part of the preparation of the master plan, Dakota County solicited feedback from the public through a number of methods, including a questionnaire, surveys, focus groups, and open houses.

Questionnaire: The County initiated planning for the Lebanon Hills Regional Park Master Plan in 2012 with an online open questionnaire/survey, which received 492 responses. The survey drew strongly from current users and several specialized recreation interest groups. The natural character of the park was identified as its single most important asset. The two survey elements that evoked the strongest positive response were the scenic qualities of the park and its extensive soft surface trails for hiking and trail running. The three user groups that weighed in strongly on the survey were mountain bikers, trail hikers/runners, and equestrians.

Surveys: The 2013 Dakota County Resident Survey was scientifically sampled and provided a statistically representative snapshot of County resident opinions. The survey asked residents about the importance of eight activities and services in the County's parks, with the three highest ranking responses being (in order):

1. Protecting/restoring woods, prairies, lakes, ponds, and wetlands
2. Trail networks for hiking, biking, or skiing
3. Gathering spaces in picnic grounds and shelters

Results from the 2008 Dakota County Resident Survey indicated that respondents enjoy the natural setting and convenient location of the County's parks (81.7 percent and 70.1 percent, respectively). When

asked about trails people would like to use in the County's parks, 87.5 percent chose hiking/walking trails, 72.2 percent chose loop trails around lakes, and 51.3 percent chose paved trails.

Picnicking in shelters was important to 75.3 percent of respondents and 68.4 percent said their preferred direction for the Dakota County Park System was to keep parks mostly natural, but add more facilities for physical activities such as hiking, canoeing, and skiing.

The 2005 Park Master Plan Survey that was conducted for three parks, including Miesville Ravine Park Reserve, Lake Byllesby Regional Park and Thompson County Park indicated that the top five activities that respondents would like to do in Dakota County Parks are:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1. Hiking/walking | 80% |
| 2. Loop trails around a lake | 66% |
| 3. Picnicking/open tables | 63% |
| 4. Visit natural area | 62% |
| 5. Festivals or concerts | 58% (tie with biking on paved trails) |
| 5. Biking on paved trails | 58% (tie with festivals) -- 46% of respondents identified paved trails as clearly lacking |

Focus Group Sessions: Small focus group sessions with various groups were held in July 2012 to gather information on how the groups use the park, any negative issues they encounter, and opportunities for improving the park or their activities. Focus group sessions were held with staff from Apple Valley, Eagan, and Rosemount; mountain bikers; equestrians; general trail users; and naturalists.

Open Houses: Open houses were held during the project research phase; with presentation of draft park concepts; and twice after releasing the draft plan for public comment and review. The master plan provided a link to the comments received during the open house. The master plan generated a lot of controversy; many comments were received related to concerns regarding the Connector Trail.

Citizen Panel: After the draft plan public review and comment period closed in January 2014, the Dakota County Board of Commissioners responded to public comments by forming a Citizen Panel to further review and comment on the draft plan. The Board passed a resolution directing a Citizen Panel to review and comment on sections on natural resources, trails, and recreational user areas. Prospective Panel members applied for to be appointed by the County Board to the twenty-member body. Each of the seven County Board members appointed two panel members, with the balance of the panel appointed at-large. Panel members were selected to represent a diversity of interests and backgrounds, encompassing existing park users, potential park users, natural resource protection, and accessibility interests. The panel met ten times between May and December 2014. As directed by the Board, the Panel reported *consensus* comments (areas of general agreement, not necessarily unanimity) as well as areas where no consensus was reached and the reasons why, when possible.

In discussing an overarching philosophy for Lebanon Hills, the Citizen Panel developed and tested several statements to further define what kind of a park Lebanon Hills should be in the future and how the balance of natural resource preservation and recreation provision at Lebanon Hills could be struck. The following represent consensus statements of the Panel, meaning that most Panel members support or could accept each statement, and no more than two Panel members disagreed with the statement.

1. It is important to improve Lebanon Hills' natural resources and optimize public use and benefit.
2. Lebanon Hills should provide basic recreation that County residents seek elsewhere now, such as easy walking, jogging, ADA-accessible trails, and recreation biking for all ages and abilities.
3. The plan should offer new recreation opportunities while not displacing existing users.

4. The plan should accommodate popular uses.
5. Natural resource restoration should be funded at a level that will reverse the current downward trend in the quality of the park's natural resources and achieve a sustainable landscape quality. Performance metrics should be developed and applied to ensure progress toward this goal.
6. Ecological stewardship is recognized as a top priority by the 2014 Citizen Panel. Guidelines for funding and implementation of project categories must be established which will assure ecological stewardship will be funded and implemented in a manner which will reverse the downward trend of natural resources in Lebanon Hills.

The Citizen Panel final report was published January 7, 2015 and presented to the Dakota County Board of Commissioners. The final report was included in the master plan submitted to the Council.

The Dakota County Board of Commissioners adopted the master plan on March 17, 2015 subject to modifications, as shown in Attachment A. A local organization, Wilderness in the City, distributed flyers encouraging people to submit comments to the Metropolitan Council, as shown in Attachment C. As of July 22, 2015, the Metropolitan Council received 144 comment statements in opposition to the master plan, one comment statement of clarification and two comment statements in support of the master plan which are included in Attachments B. These comments show that many people are passionate about Lebanon Hills Regional Park.

Many of the concerns expressed in comments sent to the Council were related to the planned paved trail and its potential impact on the natural character of the regional park. Several comments expressed displeasure with the Dakota County approval process. Numerous comments were based on misinformation, such as people believing that horse trails were going to be paved, with only a few miles of horse trails remaining and that the paved trail would go through the middle of the park, rather than near the periphery of the park.

Council staff responded to comments it received by describing that the Council's role in the review of the master plan plans is to ensure that the master plan is consistent with the Regional Parks Policy Plan and Council policies, and does not negatively impact the Council's other systems—Transportation, Aviation, and Wastewater Services. As long as the master plan meets the criteria in the Regional Parks Policy Plan, the type of development within a regional park is determined through the regional park implementing agency's master planning process and subsequent approval by its governing board.

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that with regard to citizen participation, the master plan must include:

“A process to involve affected municipalities and the general public in the master planning. The process must include, but not be limited to, timely notice to the affected municipality with the opportunity for the public to be heard. The master plan should include a summary of comment received, with emphasis on issues raised.”

The process conducted by Dakota County as described in this section satisfies this requirement.

Public Awareness

Dakota County promotes its park system through a number of methods, including a semi-annual newsletter that is mailed to every household in the County, its website, a listserv that has more than 2,000 subscribers, a Facebook page, and news releases. The findings from research that was conducted for the County's 2008 Park System Plan indicate that many County residents were unaware of the park system

and its services. In response, Dakota County developed a marketing strategy and a “Forever Wild” brand for its parks to raise awareness and recognition of the system. The County also prepares an annual internal parks communication plan to ensure that the public receives timely updates on park-related topics and major events.

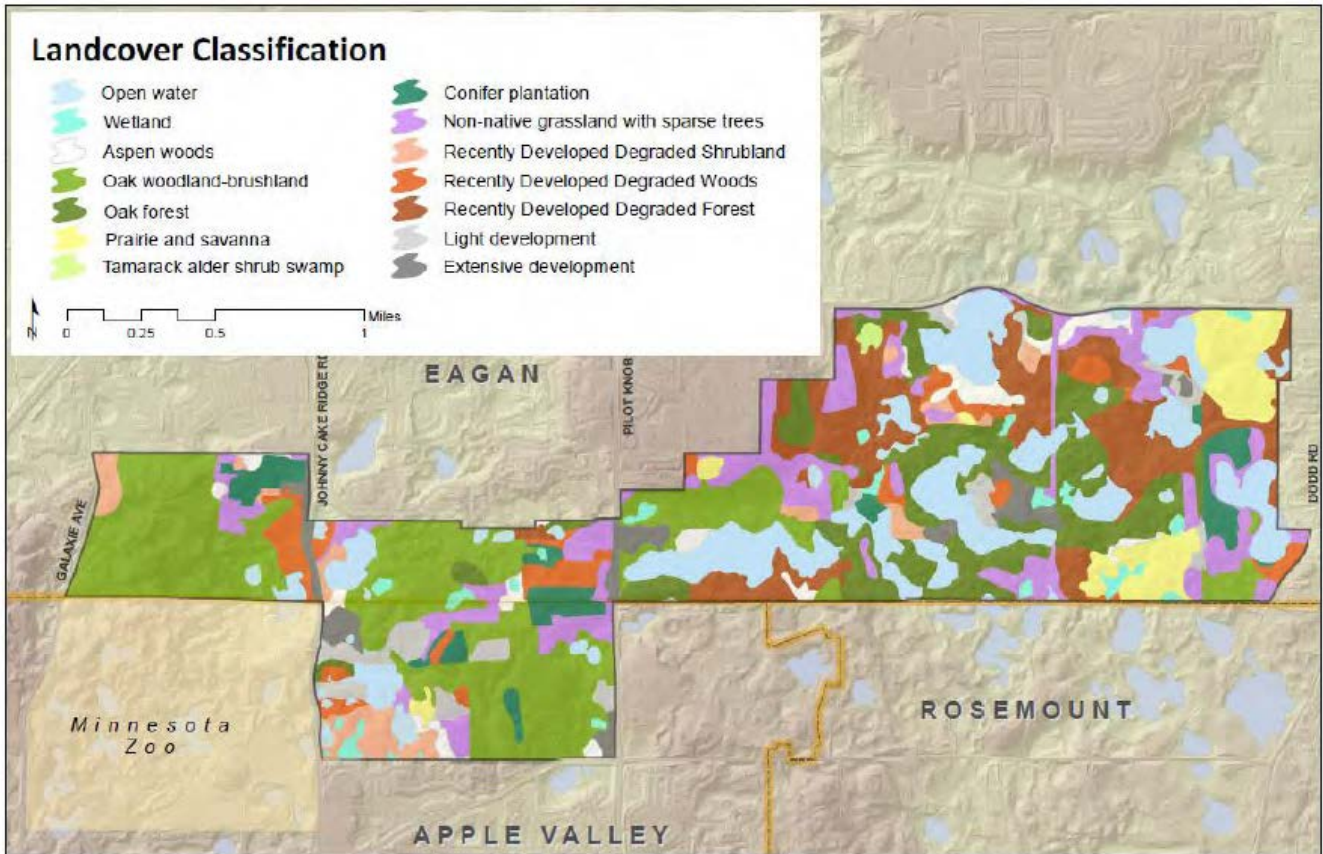
Accessibility

The master plan indicates that Dakota County recognizes the need to provide high-quality recreation opportunities to all visitors, regardless of their physical abilities. Existing visitor destinations within the park, such as the Visitor Center and campgrounds, all have been designed and built to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The master plan recommends ADA-compliant design and construction for two new lake loops and the connector trail, which will link seven visitor destination areas within the park that are ADA compliant. The master plan also recommends that Dakota County monitor the development of new standards for ADA-accessible trails.

Natural Resources

Lebanon Hills Regional Park is set within a glacial moraine landscape, characterized by steep irregular hills and pocket lakes and wetlands. Lebanon Hills has more than 120 water basins, with 13 lakes and ponds each covering more than 10 acres. Dozens of small ponds also are found throughout the park. Dominant vegetation patterns include grasslands, mixed woodlands, and forest with a large number of red oaks. Much of the park was formerly farmland and the resulting vegetation is a mix of native, successional, volunteer, and invasive species. Figure 17 shows the land cover classification of the park.

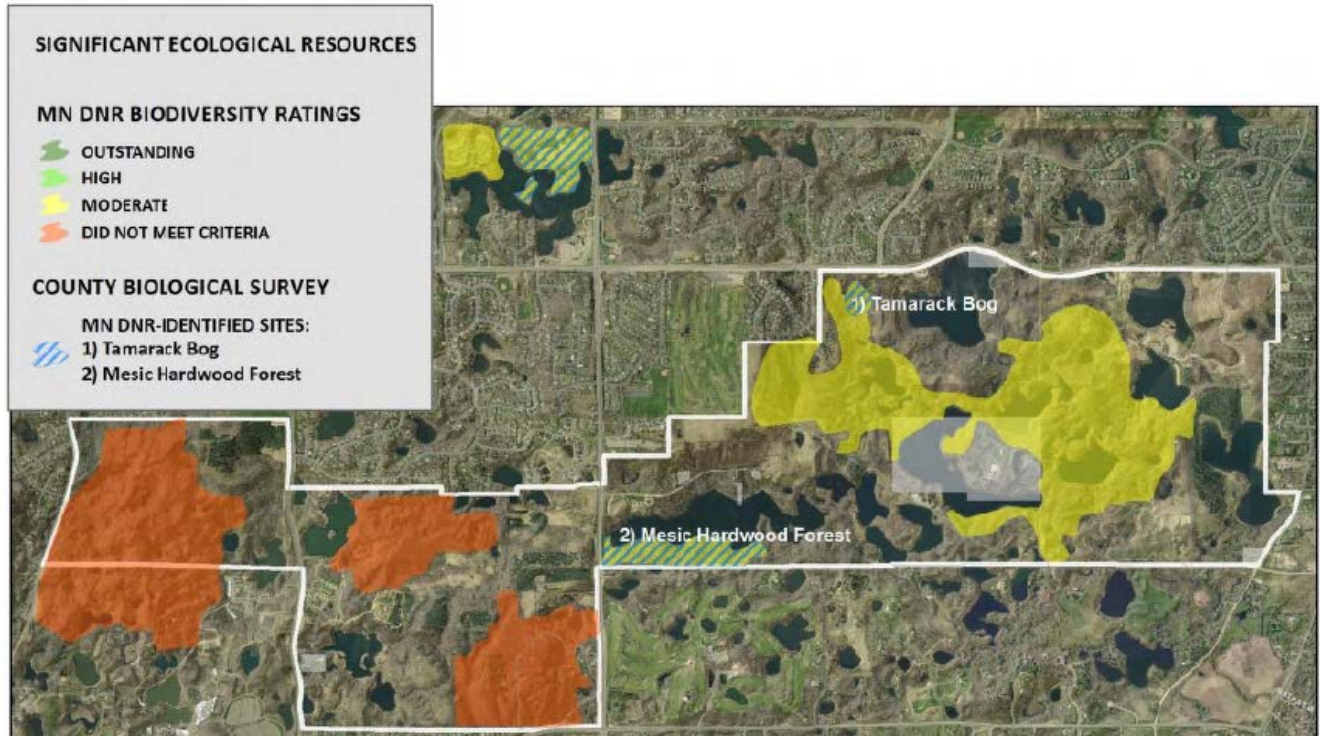
Figure 17: Lebanon Hills Regional Park Land Cover Classification



The master plan contains extensive information on the natural assets within the park including the woodland and forest, upland prairie and grassland, and aquatic systems, as well as a discussion of wildlife and habitat quality.

Lebanon Hills has two areas on the County Biological Survey, including a tamarack bog west of Holland Lake and the Mesic Hardwood Forest south of Jensen Lake. Both are significant features, but are in degraded condition. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has inventoried and characterized natural areas and resource quality throughout the state. In terms of natural area biodiversity, Lebanon Hills includes an area of moderate quality in its eastern sections and areas of initial interest in the middle and west portions of the park, which did not meet criteria upon further evaluation. Lebanon Hills include no areas of high or outstanding biodiversity in the statewide inventory, although restoration efforts could improve biodiversity in the park. In comparison, other regional parks in Dakota County including Spring Lake Park Reserve, Whitetail Woods Regional Park and Miesville Ravine Park Reserve all have areas rated as high biodiversity. Figure 18 maps the Significant Ecological Resources in the park.

Figure 18: Lebanon Hills Regional Park Significant Ecological Resources



The master plan describes four major disruptions that have affected the park's natural systems:

1. Long-term land use change, including farming and abandonment: Removal of native vegetation and farming damaged park ecosystems, through erosion, loss of soil fertility, and loss of the native seed bank. The biology, chemistry, and structure of park soils are degraded from their native state, limiting options for restoration.
2. Removal of natural cycles, such as naturally occurring fire, has allowed colonization by woody plants that convert open grasslands to shade-dominated successional woodlands.
3. Disrupted natural systems: Development around the park changed local hydrology and increased stormwater runoff into lakes and wetlands, with chemicals, nutrients, and sediments.
4. Invasive species degrade ecosystems and prevent regeneration of native red oaks, the park's dominant native tree. As oaks decline, buckthorn and other species will dominate. Buckthorn is well-established and is the major threat.

These disruptions contribute to the degradation of the soils, water, and vegetation in the park through ongoing erosion especially in areas heavily infested with buckthorn, which shades out native ground cover species; continuing sedimentation of shallow lakes, many of which will likely transition to wetlands over time without intervention; and lack of native community and tree regeneration, which eventually results in replacement of native oak forests with buckthorn thickets.

The master plan acknowledges that restoration and stewardship are critically important to reverse the downward trend in the quality of the park's natural resources and recommends a strengthened stewardship program that considers:

- Public preferences in a landscape revered for scenic quality
- Ecological benefits that restore natural systems

- Strategic approaches that optimize efforts
- Fiscal realities and new funding
- Implementation needs for expertise and capacity

The master plan identifies a vision for natural resource restoration to manage and restore the landscapes that define Lebanon Hills, to enhance ecological health. Vision elements include:

1. Healthy oak savanna and prairie in upper watershed and upland areas.
2. Healthy woodland and forest areas: Improve oak woods and convert degraded woods to healthier communities; control buckthorn.
3. Priority lakes, ponds, and wetlands are buffered to reduce nutrient loading, sedimentation, and infill.
4. Restored stream channels are repaired from past storm events and protected from further erosion in the future.
5. Biodiversity is increased by managing the park's rare native woodlands and addition of rare or absent native trees in suitable areas.
6. Rejuvenated conifer plantations enhance habitat and the park experience.
7. Restoration in tandem with recreational improvements, provides maintains natural character, and manages invasive species.

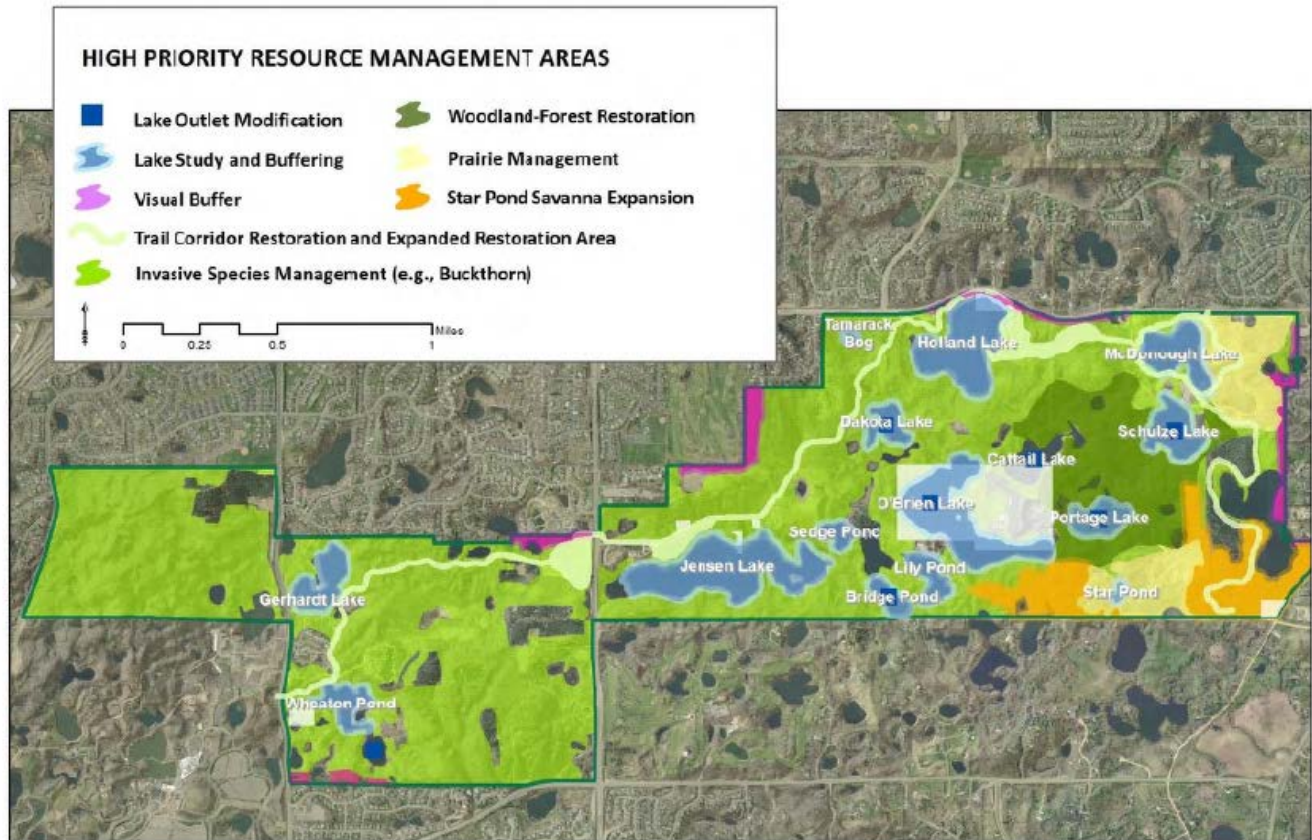
Restoration priorities were identified in the master plan. Because the east side of the park has many water bodies and higher ecological value, it is a higher priority than the middle or west portions. The restoration priorities are shown in Figure 19 and identified below:

- Prepare a comprehensive Natural Resources Management Plan
- Maintain previously restored areas (100 acres)
- Expand oak savanna restoration (77 acres)
- Complete lake outlets and small engineering projects
- Evaluate and buffer high priority water bodies
- Manage invasive species on a park-wide basis (945 acres)
- Manage oak forest near Cattail, Portage, and Schulze lakes (117 acres)
- Restore new trail corridors (30-40 acres, minimum)
- Establish visual buffers (35 acres, minimum)
- Enhance public information, education, engagement, and volunteerism

Medium priorities for large-area restoration projects include stream channel restoration throughout the park (5-10 acres), rare woodland restoration and management (11 acres) and rejuvenation of park conifer plantings (90 acres). The master plan also identifies some small area restoration projects with improvements to visitor facilities.

Estimated costs for natural resource stewardship activities are \$8,088,506. More than half of this total is identified for managing invasive species on approximately 945 acres throughout the regional park

Figure 19: Lebanon Hills Regional Park High Priority Restoration Areas



Review by Other Council Divisions

Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) The stormwater and environmental sections of the master plan are well presented and I do not have any technical comments in those areas.

Environmental Services – Sewers (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – No comments.

Transportation/Aviation Planning (Russ Owen 651-602-1705) – The master plan is consistent with Transportation and Aviation policies.

Local Planning Assistance (Patrick Boylan 651-602-1438) – The master plan appears to be consistent with the adopted comprehensive plans for the cities of Eagan and Apple Valley.

Conclusions

1. The Lebanon Hills Regional Park Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the 2030 *Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.

As of July 22, 2015, the Metropolitan Council received 144 comment statements in opposition to the master plan. The majority of the concerns were regarding the paved trail and the Dakota County approval process. The Council’s role in the review of the master plan is to ensure that it is

consistent with the *Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies and does not negatively impact the Council's other systems—Transportation, Aviation, and Wastewater Services.

The paved trail is consistent with the Regional Parks Policy Plan for the following reasons:

- Hiking/walking and bicycling are activities that “should be accommodated in the regional parks system” (Recreation Activities and Facilities Strategy 1)
- The paved trail was planned to “be reasonably, feasibly, and safely accommodated without detriment to existing uses as determined through the master plans for facility improvements to accommodate the use, or through regional park implementing agency board policy decisions on park/trail management issues.” (Recreation Activities and Facilities Strategy 1)
- The paved trail alignment was planned to avoid the areas of the park identified as Moderate Quality biodiversity as much as feasible. The trail will go through areas that are identified for invasive species management and will provide opportunities for restoration. “Be protective of the environment/ecology of the site and not negatively impact its natural resources.” (Recreation Activities and Facilities Strategy 1)
- Recreation Activities and Facilities Strategy 3 states that “regional parks facilities and programs should encourage use by special populations.” Special populations are defined as “people with physical and mental disabilities, those with low incomes, racial-ethnic minorities, single parents and elderly people.” The paved trail will allow persons with disabilities, families with strollers, people with limited mobility, and the elderly to access portions of the park that are not currently easily accessible.
- Recreation Activities and Facilities Strategy 4 states that “bicycle and pedestrian access and trails must be part of the regional parks system.”

As described in the Citizen Participation section on page 23, the master planning process is consistent with the requirements of the 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan. Technical reviewers on Council staff did not identify any concerns or impacts on Council systems or inconsistency with Council policy.

2. The estimated cost to implement the master plan is \$27,519,451, which includes \$7,197,300 for land acquisition, \$8,088,556 for natural resource stewardship, and \$12,233,595 for development.
3. Approval of this master plan and grant request does not commit the Council to any additional funding at this time. Future funding based on this master plan may be awarded through the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund, Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP), and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund. Council action is required to approve specific grants to Dakota County.
4. The master plan includes a concept plan for improvements to Camp Sacajawea in its current location, yet also discusses the option of moving the maintenance facility and possibly relocating Camp Sacajawea to the current maintenance site or elsewhere in the park, since the current location lacks lake access and limits recreation options for visitors. The master plan recommends that the County conduct additional evaluation before any improvements are undertaken. Dakota County should submit information regarding the location and estimated costs for the relocation and development of Camp Sacajawea and the maintenance facility for approval prior to seeking regional parks funding for these projects.