

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: September 8, 2015

For the Community Development Committee meeting of September 21, 2015

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of October 14, 2015

Subject: Highway 96 Regional Trail Snail Lake Marsh Master Plan Amendment, Ramsey County

District(s), Member(s): MPOSC District E, Michael Kopp

Policy/Legal Reference: MN Statute 473.313

Staff Prepared/Presented: Michael Peterka, Intern (651-602-1361)

Jan Youngquist, AICP, Planning Analyst (651-602-1029)

Division/Department: Community Development, Regional Parks and Natural Resources

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Highway 96 Regional Master Plan Amendment to include development plans for the Snail Lake Marsh.
2. Require that prior to initiating development, preliminary plans must be sent to Scott Dentz, Interceptor Engineer Manager at Metropolitan Council Environmental Services, for review in order to assess the potential impacts to the regional interceptor system.

Background

Ramsey County has submitted an amendment to the master plan for the Highway 96 Regional Trail, to include development plans for the area known as Snail Lake Marsh, which is located along the regional trail corridor. Snail Lake Marsh was acknowledged in the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* as a master plan boundary adjustment for the Highway 96 Regional Trail to add trails and interpretation opportunities. The current regional trail master plan was approved by the Metropolitan Council in 1996.

The existing trail travels 8.5 miles across the width of Ramsey County from Old Highway 8 in New Brighton to Highway 61 in White Bear Lake. The Highway 96 Regional Trail currently provides connections to Long Lake Regional Park, Lexington Parkway Regional Trail, Birch Lake Regional Trail, and the Bruce Vento Regional Trail. Ramsey County's proposed development plans will not require any land acquisition, as the 47 acre area is already owned by the County and has been incorporated into the regional trail corridor. The planned development for Snail Lake Marsh will include a mix of paved and natural surface trails, small gathering areas, and interpretive signage that will allow visitors to enjoy the natural environment.

Rationale

The Highway 96 Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment 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 Highway 96 Regional Trail Amendment 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 amendment is between \$994,250 and \$1,994,250 in development costs. The large variance in implementation costs is due the unknown extent to which improvements and restoration of wetlands is needed.

Approval of this master plan amendment makes the development 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 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and the Acquisition Opportunity Fund. Council action is required to approve the CIP and to approve specific grants to Ramsey County.

Known Support / Opposition

Ramsey County and the City of Shoreview have adopted resolutions of support for the amendment. There is no known opposition to the master plan amendment.

Analysis

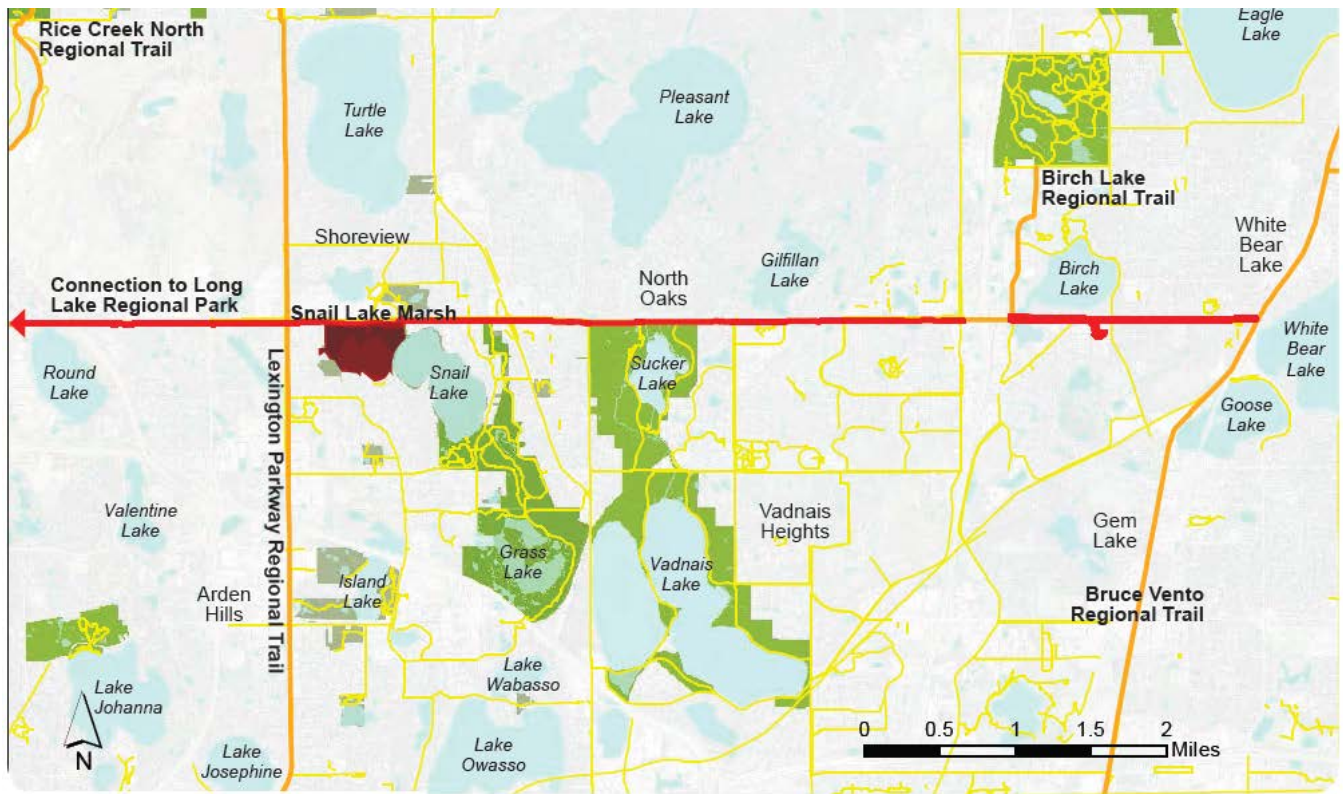
The effective date for the master plan requirements outlined in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* is July 1, 2015 in acknowledgement of master plan planning processes that were already underway when the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* was adopted, on February 11, 2015. Because the Highway 96 Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment 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

The Highway 96 Regional Trail parallels State Highway 96 for 8.5 miles across the width of Ramsey County, beginning at Old Highway 8 in New Brighton and ending at Highway 61 in White Bear Lake. The Highway 96 Regional Trail currently provides connections to Long Lake Regional Park, Lexington Parkway Regional Trail, Birch Lake Regional Trail, Bruce Vento Regional Trail, and several local parks and trails. The existing trail can be seen in *Figure 1*.

The amendment to the Highway 96 Regional Trail Master Plan outlines the development plans for Snail Lake Marsh, a 47-acre area which is already owned by Ramsey County. As a result, the amendment does not require any land acquisition. Snail Lake Marsh is bordered by residential uses to the east, south and west; Snail Lake to the southeast; and Highway 96 to the north. Snail Lake Marsh can be accessed from the regional trail, through a tunnel underpass beneath Highway 96, and at a controlled crossing at Victoria Street. A detailed view of Snail Lake Marsh can be seen in *Figure 2*.

Figure 1: Highway 96 Regional Trail Overview



- Highway 96 Regional Trail
- Amendment Area
- Multi-use Trails
- Other Regional Trails
- Water Bodies
- Regional Parks
- Other Parks

Figure 2: Snail Lake Marsh Overview



Natural Resources

The native habitat of Snail Lake Marsh consisted of a large wetland with a cattail and shrub swamp surrounded by oak woods. Current vegetation includes degraded oak woods on the east side, while the north side consists of fallow farmland reverting to its natural state. While there are some significant oak trees in the woods, buckthorn is a problem. The wetland area historically contained open water. Currently, much of the wetland has been invaded by hybrid and narrow-leaf cattails. The fallow farmland contains little vegetation of significance, with patches of *Miscanthus sinensis* and *Euphorbia esula*, along with widespread nuisance weeds.

The wetland is connected to Snail Lake, the dominant natural feature in the area, and has 1,000 feet of shoreline along the northwest border. The lake is stocked with walleye and has both a boat launch and a swimming beach.

The topography of the amendment area generally slopes downward to the south where water is collected in the marsh, ponds, and lake. This topography, along with existing and proposed trails, provides great views of Snail Lake, two small ponds, and the Snail Lake Marsh.

The area hosts a diverse array of wildlife, which includes nesting songbirds, waterfowl, and raptors. There are also larger mammals, including white-tailed deer, red fox, beaver, and raccoons.

Stewardship Plan

The Snail Lake Marsh Master Plan Amendment Area will continue to be managed according to the 2008 Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Natural Resource Management Plan until the restoration of the area can be implemented. At that point, management of the area may need to be reassessed.

Vegetation in the Snail Lake Marsh Area will be restored and managed to maintain the natural character of the site. The master plan recommends that Buckthorn and other invasive species should be removed as resources become available.

The area’s deer population is annually surveyed. If needed, the deer herd will be managed with special hunts under the Ramsey County Cooperative Deer Management Plan in partnership with the City of Shoreview. However, no management activities are anticipated due to the area’s small size.

If eligible under the Wetland Conservation Act rules, Ramsey County will partner with the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District and other regulatory agencies to improve the wetland area.

Demand Forecast

The expansion of the Highway 96 Regional Trail to include the Snail Lake Marsh will enhance recreational opportunities and is anticipated to increase visitor demand. In 2013, the Highway 96 Regional Trail was the third-most used regional recreation amenity in Ramsey County, and the highest used regional trail with an estimated 588,600 annual visits. The use of the Highway 96 Regional Trail is anticipated to increase due to predicted future urban recreation trends and the anticipated population growth in adjacent communities (*Table 1*).

Table 1: Projected Population of Communities near the Regional Trail

	2010	2030	% Change
Arden Hills	9,552	12,900	26%
North Oakes	4,400	5,900	25%
Vadnais Heights	13,800	16,800	18%
Shoreview	25,046	29,000	14%
New Brighton	21,456	22,800	6%
White Bear Lake Township	13,100	13,500	3%
White Bear Lake	27,000	26,600	-1%

Development Concept

The addition of Snail Lake Marsh to the Highway 96 Regional Trail will provide enhanced access to natural habitat areas and expand opportunities for natural resource based recreation. The development concept for the area includes:

- A 10 foot wide, bituminous trail loop through the park that is 2,300 feet in length.
- Over 2,300 feet of natural surface trails that will be between 3 and 6 feet in width.
- A trailhead area with seating, signage, enhanced landscaping, and public art.
- Informal seating areas throughout the park with interpretive signage.
- Nature observation areas
- Upland, shoreland, and woodland restoration

The Snail Lake Marsh is accessible along the south side of Highway 96 by the Highway 96 Regional Trail. Visitors approaching from the north side of Highway 96 may cross at a controlled crosswalk at Victoria Street or travel through an underpass that connects to the Shoreview Community Center. There is no proposed lighting for the Snail Lake Marsh Amendment Area, as lighting along the Highway 96 Regional Trail has been limited to the trail's intersection of the Shoreview City Campus and the Highway 10 overpass area. Wayfinding will also be incorporated to assist visitor navigation throughout the amendment area. The existing Highway 96 Regional Trail Master Plan and Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Master Plan will be utilized to allow for wayfinding consistency with other regional parks and trails. *Figure 3* provides an overview of development concept for the amendment area. There is no specific timing that has been identified for the implementation of the master plan amendment.

The estimated total development cost for Snail Lake Marsh is between \$994,250 and \$1,994,250 as shown in *Table 2*. The large variance in implementation costs is due to the unknown extent to which improvements and restoration of wetlands are needed.

Figure 3: Development Concept for Snail Lake Marsh Amendment Area



HIGHWAY 96 REGIONAL TRAIL - SNAIL LAKE MARSH MASTER PLAN

RAMSEY COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT
DATE: 4/17/2015



KEY	
 Upland Restoration	 Informal Seating Area with interpretive signage
 Shoreland Restoration	 Trailhead Rest Area
 Woodland Restoration	 Snail Lake Marsh Overlook
 Bituminous Trail	 Nature Observation Area
 Natural Surface Trails	 Park Boundary
 Future Trail Connection	

Table 2: Snail Lake Marsh Estimated Development Costs

Description	Estimate
Bituminous Trail	\$172,500
Natural Surface Trail	\$80,750
Improvements to Existing Overlook	\$20,000
Trailhead Rest Area	\$100,000
Nature Observation Area	\$20,000
Informal Seating Areas (with interpretative signage)	\$20,000
Upland Restoration/Transition Zone	\$27,000
Woodland Restoration	\$44,000
Wetlands Improvements/Restoration	\$500,000 to \$1.5 Million
Total	\$994,250 to \$1,994,250

Conflicts

No major conflicts will affect the viability of the master plan amendment recommendations. Adjacent residential land uses are separated from proposed trails by natural areas.

Public Services

The master plan amendment does not identify any additional public services or facilities needed to accommodate the proposed trail.

Operations

Operations of the current Highway 96 Regional Trail Corridor and the amendment area are the responsibility of the Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department. The current Highway 96 Regional Trail operations and maintenance costs are approximately \$42,500 per year. This amount is anticipated to increase by \$9,000 to \$12,000 when the plan is implemented. The additional funds will go towards bituminous and natural surface trail repair and natural resource area maintenance.

The public use and enjoyment of the Ramsey County park system is controlled by “An Ordinance for the Control and Management of Park, Recreation, and Open Space Areas and Facilities under the Jurisdiction of the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners.” This Ordinance will govern the conduct of the public during their use of the regional trail corridor, its facilities, and resources. Ramsey County Parks along with the Ramsey County Sheriff’s Department will provide appropriate education and ordinance enforcement along the trail. The Ramsey County Sheriff will be responsible for enforcement of park hours. The County’s regional parks and trails general operation hours are from ½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunset. Fire services as needed are provided by the Lake Johanna Fire Department.

Citizen Participation

Over the course of several years the public and the City of Shoreview have been engaged in the Snail Lake Marsh Amendment process. Initial concepts were also reviewed by the City of Shoreview City Council, the Bikeways and Trails Commission, and City Staff.

Once a refined concept was developed, it was presented to the community at a meeting in January 2015 in which over 50 residents attended. The concept was also posted on the Ramsey County website. The County received more than 15 written comments in response to the master plan amendment. Most comments were supportive of restoring the natural area, removing invasive species, and increasing accessibility of the area. However, many residents expressed concern with the potential impacts that proposed trails would have on the area's natural resources.

Ramsey County considered the comments and developed a revised concept. The revised plan converted some proposed paved trails to natural surfaces. It also modified the gathering areas within Snail Lake Marsh to incorporate small, informal seating throughout the development area. This City of Shoreview and Ramsey County have both passed resolutions of support for the master plan amendment.

Public Awareness

Ramsey County will use a number of tools to promote awareness and use of this addition to the regional trails system. These tools include websites, trail maps, wayfinding, brochures, email notification, Twitter, Facebook, and press releases to local newspapers.

Accessibility

Ramsey County is committed to providing universal accessibility to all trail facilities. Care will be taken to design facilities that meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as principles for universal accessibility to provide all visitors with a meaningful experience.

Review by Other Council Divisions

Transportation/Aviation Planning (Russ Owen 651-602-1705) – No Comments

Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) – No Comments

Environmental Services – Sewers (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – *This project extends 8.5 miles west-east across Ramsey County. The construction of any new or updating of existing trails may have an impact on multiple Metropolitan Council Interceptors in multiple locations. To assess the potential impacts to our interceptor system, prior to initiating any proposed project, preliminary plans should be sent to Scott Dentz, Interceptor Engineering Manager (651-602-4503) at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services for review and comment.*

Metro Transit (Steve Baisden 612-349-7361) – No Comments

Conclusions

1. The Highway 96 Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment is consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.
2. The regional trail is located in the vicinity of several Metropolitan Council Environmental Services facilities. Any construction may have an impact on these MCES Interceptors. In order to maintain the integrity of the regional sewer interceptor system, preliminary development plans for the regional trail should be submitted to the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services for review and comment.
3. The estimated cost to implement the master plan is between \$994,250 and \$1,944,250 for development. The Snail Lake Marsh is owned by Ramsey County, so there are no acquisition costs associated with the master plan amendment.
4. Approval of this master plan makes the development 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 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund. Council action is required to approve specific grants to Ramsey County.