

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: August 7, 2018

Subject: Regional Parks System Annual Use Estimate

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53, subdivision 3; Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351, subdivision 3; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

Staff Prepared/Presented: Raintry Salk, Research Analyst (651-602-1669)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

None; information and discussion only.

Background

The Metropolitan Council has prepared annual use estimates for the Regional Park System since 1995 in partnership with regional park implementing agencies. The Council bases its estimate of park visits on counts of visitors entering regional parks and trails from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The Council uses a four-year rolling average of counts to ensure a representative sample of each park and each trail. Off-season visits (winter, spring, and fall) are based on a survey asking visitors how often they visit during off-season months. The most recent survey was completed in 2016 and incorporated into the estimates for the first time this year.

An estimated 58.3 million visits were made to the [Regional Parks System in 2017](#). This is a 22% increase from 2016. Most of this growth comes from this year's update of the seasonal inputs for fall, winter, and spring visitation, which had not been updated since the 2008 survey. The new survey data show that off-season visitation is higher than previously believed. Over three-quarters of the visits were to regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features. The rest were to regional trails. The most visited regional park was Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, with 7.1 million visits.

Minnesota Statutes (85.53, Subdivision 3 and Statute 473.351, Subdivision 3) and the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* specify visits to the Regional Parks System as a component in determining each regional park implementing agency's share of the Regional Parks System grant program dollars.

At the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting, staff will provide a more detailed explanation of the methodology and findings for 2017.

Thrive Lens Analysis

As a key factor in determining grant program dollars for the Regional Parks System, the annual use estimate impacts the *Thrive MSP 2040* outcome of Stewardship. The estimate is used to ensure allocation of grant dollars are spent in a manner proportional with regional park and trail visits. The annual use estimate also provides an indication of the popularity of the Regional Parks System, which can serve as a proxy to the Thrive outcome of Livability.