

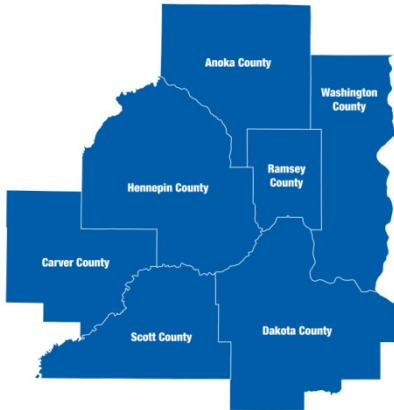
2040 REGIONAL PARKS POLICY PLAN



The Council's mission is to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous metropolitan region

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The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization for the seven-county Twin Cities area. The Council operates the regional bus and rail system, collects and treats wastewater, coordinates regional water resources, plans and helps fund regional parks, and administers federal funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The 17-member Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the governor.

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1 Chapter One: Planning for the Twin Cities Region

2 *Thrive MSP 2040*

3 Our region is anchored by three great rivers, dotted by hundreds of lakes, and endowed with wide
4 expanses of green space, giving our residents beautiful landscapes that inspire and renew. Its largest
5 river – the Mississippi – gave birth to two frontier settlements – Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Since then,
6 our region has grown and prospered, and is now well-known for its high quality of life, its strong,
7 resilient economy, and many other assets:

- 8 • Vibrant arts, music and theatre communities and professional sports teams
- 9 • Rich cultural diversity
- 10 • Abundant parks, recreational trails, conserved open space, fertile agricultural land, and natural
11 resources
- 12 • A civic tradition of shared action

13 Today, the Twin Cities metropolitan area – the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council – is a thriving
14 region of over three million people living in 186 communities across the seven counties of Anoka,
15 Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington. The region has emerged as a world-class
16 metropolitan area – a great place to live, work, play and do business.

17 As we plan for our next 30 years, key challenges lie ahead – constrained fiscal resources, new
18 demands stemming from demographic shifts, emerging environmental challenges, new regional
19 planning priorities, and the increasing necessity of regional economic cooperation.

20 Under state law, the Metropolitan Council is responsible for preparing a comprehensive development
21 guide for the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Council's *Thrive MSP 2040*, adopted in
22 May 2014, provides a framework for a shared vision for the future of the region over the next 30 years.
23 *Thrive* establishes the policy foundation used by the Council to develop its regional systems and policy
24 plans, as well as development policies and implementation strategies. Taken together, these constitute
25 the comprehensive development guide that guides the orderly and economical development of the
26 region. State statute specifies three metropolitan systems plans:

- 27 • Transportation Policy Plan (including Aviation)
- 28 • Water Resources Policy Plan
- 29 • Regional Parks Policy Plan

30 In addition to the three statutory metropolitan systems plans, the Council has adopted a Housing Policy
31 Plan that provides an expanded policy framework to inform the Council's review of housing elements
32 and implementation programs in local comprehensive plans as required in statute.

33 *Thrive* is the result of extensive engagement with the region's residents, civic, non-profit, and business
34 leaders, and governmental officials. As a regional plan, *Thrive* addresses issues greater than any one
35 neighborhood, city, or single county can tackle alone to build and maintain a thriving metropolitan
36 region. Using an outcomes-based approach, *Thrive* outlines five outcomes and three principles as the
37 foundation of a prosperous, equitable, and livable region for today and generations to come.

1 *Thrive Outcomes*

2 *Thrive's* regional vision includes five desired outcomes: stewardship, prosperity, equity, livability, and
3 sustainability. While each outcome is described below, it is important to note that the five outcomes
4 reinforce and support one another to produce greater benefits than any single outcome alone. The
5 outcomes provide policy direction for this *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

6 **Stewardship**

7 Stewardship advances the Council's longstanding mission of orderly and economical development by
8 responsibly managing the region's natural and financial resources, and making strategic investments in
9 our region's future. Stewardship means:

- 10 • Responsibly managing our region's finite resources, including natural resources—such as lakes,
11 rivers, streams, wetlands, groundwater, high quality natural habitats, and agricultural soils—
12 financial resources, and our existing investments in infrastructure.
- 13 • Pivoting from expanding to maintaining our region's wastewater and highway infrastructure.
- 14 • Leveraging transit investments with higher expectations of land use.

15 **Prosperity**

16 Prosperity is fostered by investments in infrastructure and amenities that make our region competitive
17 in attracting and retaining successful businesses, a talented workforce, and strong economic
18 opportunities. Regional economic competitiveness results from our strategic, long-term public and
19 private decisions that build on and grow our region's economic strengths relative to other regions.
20 Advancing prosperity includes:

- 21 • Fostering conditions for shared economic vitality by balancing major investments across the
22 region
- 23 • Protecting natural resources that are the foundation of prosperity
- 24 • Planning for and investing in infrastructure, amenities, and quality of life needed for economic
25 competitiveness
- 26 • Encouraging redevelopment and infill development

27 **Equity**

28 Equity means connecting all residents to opportunity and creates viable housing, transportation, and
29 recreation options for people of all races, ethnicities, incomes, and abilities so that all communities
30 share the opportunities and challenges of growth and change. For our region to reach its full economic
31 potential, all our residents must be able to access opportunity. Our region is stronger when all people
32 live in communities that provide opportunities for success, prosperity, and quality of life. Promoting
33 equity includes:

- 34 • Using the Council's influence and investments to build a more equitable region

Chapter One: Planning for the Twin Cities Region

- 1 • Creating real choices in where we live, how we travel, and where we recreate for all residents,
2 across race, ethnicity, economic means, and ability
- 3 • Investing in a mix of housing affordability along the region's transit corridors, and
- 4 • Engaging a full cross-section of the community in decision-making

5 **Livability**

6 Livability focuses on the quality of our residents' lives and experiences in the region, and how places
7 and infrastructure create and enhance the quality of life that makes our region a great place to live.
8 With abundant and beautiful open space, an active arts community, a range of housing options, and a
9 reasonable cost of living, the Twin Cities region is widely recognized for its high quality of life.

10 Enhancing livability means:

- 11 • Increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation through regional parks and trails.
- 12 • Providing transportation choices for a range of demographic characteristics and economic
13 means.
- 14 • Supporting bicycle facilities to promote bicycling for transportation, recreation, and healthy
15 lifestyles.
- 16 • Aligning resources to support transit-oriented development and walkable places.
- 17 • Promoting healthy communities and active living through land use, planning, and investments.

18 **Sustainability**

19 Sustainability means protecting our regional vitality for generations to come by preserving our capacity
20 to maintain and support our region's well-being and productivity over the long term. The region's
21 investments in prosperity, equity, and livability will fall short over the long term if the region exhausts its
22 resources without investing in the future. Planning for sustainability means:

- 23 • Promoting the wise use of water through expanding water conservation and reuse, increasing
24 groundwater recharge, and optimizing surface water and groundwater use.
- 25 • Providing leadership, information, and technical assistance to support local governments'
26 consideration of climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.
- 27 • Operating the region's wastewater treatment and transit systems sustainably.

28 ***Thrive Principles***

29 *Thrive* identifies the principles of integration, collaboration, and accountability to carry out the Council's
30 work. These three principles reflect the Council's efforts to integrate policy areas, support local
31 governments and regional partners, and promote and implement the *Thrive* regional vision.

32 **Integration**

33 Integration is the intentional combining of related activities to achieve more effective results and
34 leveraging multiple policy tools to address complex regional challenges and opportunities. The *Thrive*

1 outcomes described above are lofty ideals that cut across the Council’s functions and responsibilities.
2 Pursuing them demands that the Council to use its full range of authorities and activities in more
3 coordinated ways. Achieving integration involves moving beyond organizational silos and coordinating
4 effectively with partners and stakeholders across and throughout the region.

5 **Collaboration**

6 Collaboration recognizes that shared efforts advance our region most effectively toward shared
7 outcomes. Addressing the region’s issues requires collaboration because no single entity has the
8 capacity or authority to do the work alone. For the Council, acting collaboratively means being open to
9 shared strategies, supportive partnerships, and reciprocal relationships. It also represents convening
10 the region’s best thinkers, experts, and stakeholders to address complex regional issues beyond the
11 capacity or authority of any single jurisdiction or institution. Additionally, it involves providing technical
12 assistance and enhanced information to support local planning and decision-making.

13 **Accountability**

14 For the Council, accountability includes a commitment to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our
15 policies and practices toward achieving shared outcomes and a willingness to adjust course to improve
16 performance. Acting accountably means: a) adopting a data-driven approach to measure progress, b)
17 creating and learning from *Thrive* indicators, c) providing clear, easily accessible information, and d)
18 fulfilling the Council’s mission.

19 ***Thrive’s Additional Direction for the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan***

20 *Thrive* articulates a long-range vision for the region. The vision aims to foster and contribute to the five
21 desired outcomes through the use of the three principles described in the previous section. While the
22 focus in *Thrive* is on the overarching vision for the region, *Thrive* provides direction for the *2040*
23 *Regional Parks Policy Plan*. *Thrive* specifies that the Council will collaborate with the Metropolitan
24 Parks and Open Space Commission, regional park agencies, and state partners to:

- 25 • Expand the Regional Parks System to conserve, maintain, and connect natural resources
26 identified as being of high quality or having regional importance, as identified in the *2040*
27 *Regional Parks Policy Plan*.
- 28 • Provide a comprehensive regional park and trail system that preserves high-quality natural
29 resources, increases climate resiliency, fosters healthy outcomes, connects communities, and
30 enhances quality of life in the region.
- 31 • Promote expanded multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit network,
32 where appropriate.
- 33 • Strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region’s residents, such as
34 across race, ethnicity, income, and ability.

1 *Regional Growth and Demographics*

2 By 2040, our region is projected to be home to over 3.7 million people, a gain of 888,000 residents from
3 2010 (Table 1-1.). Such robust growth is a sign of the region’s economic health and vitality.

4 *Table 1-1. Population, Households and Employment for the 7-County Region (2010-2040)*

	2010	2020	2030	2040
Population	2,849,567	3,160,000	3,459,000	3,738,000
Households	1,117,749	1,264,000	1,402,000	1,537,000
Employment	1,543,872	1,828,000	1,910,000	2,039,000

5

6 In addition, our population is changing in ways that will influence how we develop and redevelop:

- 7 • Our region is aging rapidly. More than one in five residents will be age 65 and older in 2040,
8 compared to one in nine in 2010.
- 9 • The region will gain 419,000 new households by 2040.
- 10 • By 2040, 39% of the population will be people of color, compared to 24% in 2010. The share of
11 people of color increases among younger age groups;53% of residents under age 18 will be
12 people of color in 2040.

13 While the rich and growing racial and ethnic diversity is an asset to our continued economic vitality, our
14 region has some of the largest disparities by race and ethnicity of any large metropolitan area in the
15 nation. Importantly, these disparities and shifting demographics have implications for nature-based
16 outdoor recreation providers. Broad based trends consistently indicate that recreation participation is far
17 greater for white and non-Latinx populations within the state and the nation than for people of color.
18 [see Minnesota’s State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), 2014].

19 In addition, SCORP cites several studies showing that involvement in nature-based outdoor recreation
20 among young adults and their children has decreased since the 1990s. The relative participation of
21 different segments of the population in nature-based outdoor recreation, together with their respective
22 population growth rates, create significant challenges ahead in terms of park and trail utilization, as well
23 as, maintaining broad-based public support for park and trail investments. To this end, the *2040*
24 *Regional Parks Policy Plan* incorporates specific aims to strengthen equitable usage of our regional
25 parks and trails by all our region’s residents.

26 *Community Designations*

27 The seven-county region contains a wide range of communities, from agricultural townships to densely
28 developed downtown neighborhoods. Recognizing that one size does not fit all, the Council uses
29 community designations to group communities with similar characteristics to implement regional policy

1 at the local level through comprehensive plans (See Figure 1-1). Community designations fall within
2 two main categories, the Metropolitan Urban Service Area and the Rural Service Area.

3 **Metropolitan Urban Service Area**

4 The Metropolitan Urban Service Area constitutes about half of the land in the region, but accounts for
5 more than 90% of the region's population. The Council supports the Metropolitan Urban Service Area
6 through investments such as regional wastewater services, regional highways, transit service, the
7 Regional Parks System, and programs that support redevelopment. Some of the region's most popular
8 regional parks are located in the Metropolitan Urban Service Area, including Como Regional Park, Zoo
9 and Conservatory; Minnehaha Regional Park; and Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve. Trails
10 including the Bruce Vento and North Cedar Lake Regional Trails, connect people to regional parks and
11 local amenities. The Metropolitan Urban Service Area is divided into five community designations:

- 12 • Urban Center
- 13 • Urban
- 14 • Suburban
- 15 • Suburban Edge
- 16 • Emerging Suburban Edge

17 *Thrive* forecasts project that over the next 30 years growth and redevelopment will occur throughout the
18 region. Not only will growth continue to occur in the Suburban Edge and Emerging Suburban Edge
19 communities, but the Council also forecasts a significant pivot of growth back into Urban and Urban
20 Center communities. Forces driving this change are our aging population, new residential preferences
21 among younger households, and increasing interest in sustainable lifestyles. Demographic changes,
22 emerging preferences, and shifting development patterns are elevating the importance of maintaining
23 and expanding regional parks and trails serving the most developed parts of our region.

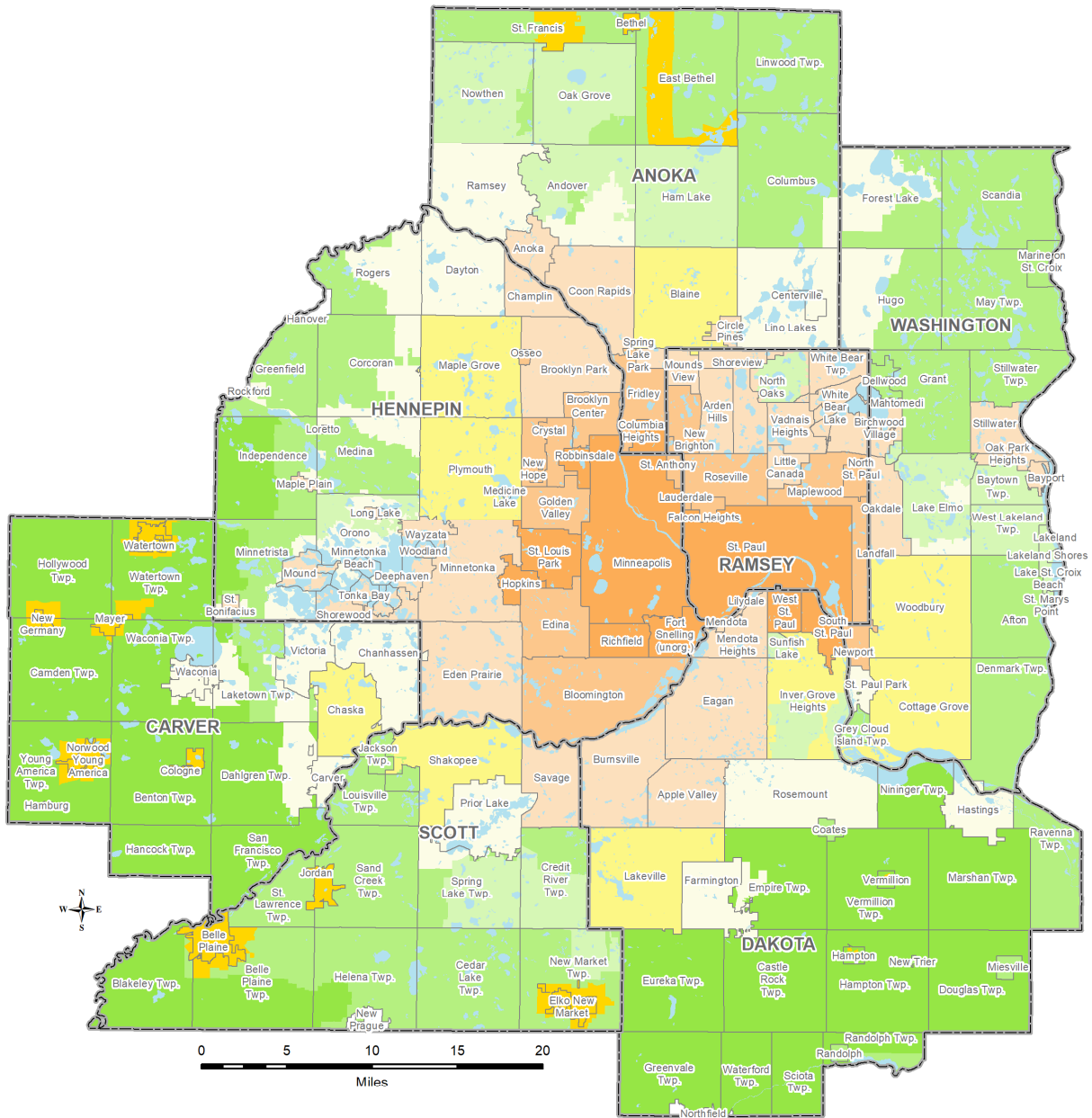
24 **Rural Service Area**

25 About half of the land in the Twin Cities region is in the Rural Service Area. This area includes a range
26 of land uses, including cultivated farmland, vineyards, hobby farms, gravel mines, woodlands, small
27 towns, scattered and clustered housing, open spaces, and significant expanses of the region's natural
28 resources. Aside from the Regional Parks System, investments in regional service and infrastructure
29 are limited in the Rural Service Area. The Rural Service Area is divided into four community
30 designations:

- 31 • Rural Center
- 32 • Rural Residential
- 33 • Diversified Rural
- 34 • Agricultural

35 The Rural Service Area contains some of the Regional Parks System's large park reserves, including
36 Crow Hassan and Big Marine Park Reserves.

1 *Figure 1-1. Thrive MSP 2040 Community Designations*



Thrive MSP 2040 Community Designations

- | | |
|---|---|
| Agricultural | Urban |
| Rural Residential | Urban Center |
| Diversified Rural | Outside Council planning authority |
| Rural Center | County Boundaries |
| Emerging Suburban Edge | City and Township Boundaries |
| Suburban Edge | Lakes and Rivers |
| Suburban | |

1 *Local Comprehensive Plans*

2 The policy direction from *Thrive* and the Council's systems and policy plans – including this *2040*
3 *Regional Parks Policy Plan* – provides guidance to local governments in planning for local growth.
4 Under state law, each county, city, and township in the seven-county metropolitan area must review
5 and, if necessary, amend its local comprehensive plan at least every 10 years to ensure that the local
6 plan – and local fiscal devices and official controls – conforms with the Council's metropolitan system
7 plans (Minnesota Statutes 473.864). Following the decennial adoption of the *2040 Regional Parks*
8 *Policy Plan* and once the Council issues system statements, as required under the Metropolitan
9 Land Planning Act, local communities have three years to update their local comprehensive
10 plan. If the Council issues system statements based on a future amendment to the *2040*
11 *Regional Parks Policy Plan*, local communities have nine months to amend their
12 comprehensive plans (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.856).
13 Local comprehensive plans are reviewed by the Council based on three primary criteria:

- 14 • Conformance with metropolitan system plans
- 15 • Consistency with Council policies
- 16 • Compatibility with adjacent and affected governmental units.

17 When a plan meets these criteria, the Council authorizes it to be placed into effect. If a plan does not
18 meet the review standards, the Council may require the jurisdiction to modify its plan to conform to the
19 Council's system plans.

20 **Conformance**

21 A local comprehensive plan will conform to the metropolitan system plans if the local plan:

- 22 • Accurately reflects the components of the metropolitan system plans
- 23 • Integrates public facilities plan components
- 24 • Addresses land use policies, plans for forecasted growth, meets density standards, and
25 maximizes the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional systems

26 In their local comprehensive plans, communities need to acknowledge and plan for the Regional Parks
27 System facilities in their jurisdiction as identified in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. The Council
28 will review local plans to ensure they will not cause detrimental impacts to Regional Parks System
29 facilities and that the plans do not preclude or substantially limit the future acquisition of lands officially
30 identified for the Regional Parks System in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

31 **Consistency**

32 Consistency is generally achieved if the local plan:

- 33 • Addresses the community role for the land use policies contained in *Thrive*, including:
 - 34 ○ Natural Resource Protection: Conserve, restore, and protect the region's natural
 - 35 resources to ensure their ongoing availability, to support public health, and to maintain a
 - 36 high quality of life.
 - 37 ○ Access, Mobility and Transportation Choice: Sustain and improve a multimodal
 - 38 transportation system to support regional growth, maintain regional economic

- 1 competitiveness and provide choices and reliability for the system’s users. To help meet
2 this policy, local communities are encouraged to plan and develop local trail connections
3 to regional trails as identified in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and to plan for and
4 connect to the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network as identified in the *2040*
5 *Transportation Policy Plan*, where appropriate.
- 6 • Addresses the linkage of local land uses to local parks and open space as well as the Regional
7 Parks System.
 - 8 • Includes an implementation plan describing public programs, fiscal devices, and other specific
9 actions (sequencing and staging activities) that implement the comprehensive plan and ensure
10 conformance with regional system plans.
 - 11 • Addresses official controls and includes a capital improvement program (sewers, parks,
12 transportation, water supply and open space) that supports planned growth and development.

13 **Compatibility**

14 Compatibility with adjacent and affected governmental units is generally achieved if the local plan
15 adequately documents that it has addressed the concern(s) of all adjacent and affected jurisdictions,
16 based on comments or concerns from these entities.

17 As local communities update their comprehensive plans, the Council encourages them to identify
18 locally important natural areas for protection through acquisition, conservation easements, and
19 conservation-sensitive development practices. In addition to planning for the recreational needs of its
20 residents, the Council encourages communities to plan local trail connections to the Regional Parks
21 System. Together, the region, the regional park implementing agencies, local communities, nonprofit
22 organizations, and the private sector can preserve natural areas and enhance multimodal access to
23 regional parks and trails.

1 **Chapter Two: Overview of the Regional Parks System and the 2040** 2 **Regional Parks Policy Plan**

3 *Introduction*

4 The benefits of parks have been extensively documented¹. Parks and open space positively contribute
5 to human health and well-being. Benefits to physical well-being include increased physical activity and
6 reduced risk of various chronic illnesses, as well as obesity. Benefits to psychological well-being
7 include stress reduction, attention restoration, and improved cognitive functioning. Social well-being
8 benefits include increased social capital, family bonding, and social integration. Parks and open green
9 space also contribute many environmental benefits including assisting in the management of storm
10 water, help to ameliorate the effects of urban heat islands, conserve the diversity of flora and fauna in
11 the region, and filter the air we breathe.²

12 The benefits afforded by the Regional Parks System, illustrated above, help to keep our region at the
13 top of national livability rankings. The Twin Cities area's 63 regional parks, park reserves, and special
14 recreation features, plus more than 389 miles of regional trails, showcase the unique landscapes of the
15 region and provide year-round recreation. Our residents have consistently singled out the region's
16 parks, trails, and natural environment as the most attractive feature of the region. Drawing over 58
17 million annual visits in 2017, the Regional Parks System provides access to natural space that
18 contributes to physical and emotional well-being. Many of our region's most well-known and iconic sites
19 are part of the Regional Parks System – the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, Como Park Zoo and
20 Conservatory, Lebanon Hills Regional Park, Bunker Hills Regional Park, Elm Creek Park Reserve, and
21 Lake Elmo Park Reserve.

22 The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* advances the *Thrive MSP 2040* outcomes of Stewardship,
23 Prosperity, Equity, Livability, and Sustainability by striving to:

- 24 • Expand the Regional Parks System to conserve, maintain, and connect natural resources
25 identified as being of high quality or having regional importance, improving climate resilience,
26 and enhancing the quality of life for the region's residents.
- 27 • Provide a comprehensive regional park and trail system that balances the conservation and
28 restoration of natural resources with the provision of nature-based recreational opportunities.

¹ Dinnie, E., Brown, K.M., Morris, S. (2013). Negotiating the social well-being benefits of urban green space. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 112, 1-9.

Wolch, J.R., Byrne, J., & Newell, J.P. (2014). Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities 'just green enough'. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 125, 234-244.

² Gómez-Baggethun, E. & Gren, A. (2013). Urban ecosystem services. In T. Elmqvist et al. (eds.), *Urbanization, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Challenges and Opportunities: A Global Assessment*, pp. 175-251.

- 1 • Expand access to regional parks and trails by connecting them with local, state, and federal
2 parks, trails, other lands, and transportation networks, including transit, bicycle, and pedestrian
3 systems.
- 4 • Promote equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region’s residents across race,
5 ethnicity, income, and ability, inspiring a legacy of stewardship that strengthens friendships,
6 families, health, and spirit.

7 The Regional Parks System plays a key role in providing parks and open space for the metropolitan
8 area. But by itself, it cannot and was never intended to provide all the metropolitan area’s recreational
9 opportunities. The Regional Parks System is one component of the greater recreation and open space
10 system for the metropolitan area that includes local, state, and federal parks and open space areas,
11 private sector facilities, as well as new ownership models such as privately-owned public spaces. All
12 these other facilities and services complement those of the Regional Parks System.

13 This chapter provides an overview of the Regional Parks System and the *2040 Regional Parks Policy*
14 *Plan*. These concepts are explored in more detail in subsequent chapters of this plan.

15 *The Regional Parks System*

16 The Regional Parks System, supported by the Council in partnership with cities, counties, and special
17 park districts, was established in 1974. At that time, the Legislature found that:

18 “The pressure of urbanization and development threatens the most valuable remaining large
19 recreational open spaces in the metropolitan area at the same time as the need for such areas is
20 increased. Immediate action is therefore necessary to provide funds to acquire, preserve, protect and
21 develop regional recreational open space for public use.” (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.302)

22 In response to state legislation, about 31,000 acres of existing parks were designated as “regional
23 recreation open space.” The newly designated regional parks had about five million visits in 1975. Over
24 the past 40 years, the Council has invested state and regional funds to help local park agencies
25 develop those first designated regional parks, as well as to acquire and develop new parks and trails for
26 the growing metropolitan population. The Regional Parks System strives to build upon the world class
27 system of interconnected parks and natural areas first established in Minneapolis by such visionaries
28 as Horace Cleveland and Theodore Wirth and extend that model throughout the region.

29 As of 2018, the Regional Parks System includes:

- 30 • 54,370 acres open for public use
- 31 • 55 regional parks and park reserves
- 32 • Eight special recreation features, such as the zoo and conservatory at Como Regional Park
- 33 • 51 regional trails, with 389 miles currently open to the public
- 34 • Over 58 million visits in 2017

- 1 • An investment of more than \$658 million in state and regional dollars since inception, with an
2 additional \$163 million of state funds to partially finance operations and maintenance of the
3 Regional Parks System

4 Regional parks contain significant regional natural resources such as lakeshore, wetlands, hardwood
5 forests, native prairies, and groundwater recharging areas. If you were to visit one regional park, park
6 reserve or special recreation feature each weekend – not even counting the trails, it would take you
7 more than a year to get to them all. It’s an amazing system, one that has few rivals anywhere in the
8 world. It demonstrates the importance of natural spaces and outdoor recreation to Minnesotans,
9 including those living in the metropolitan area. The Regional Parks System is comprised of four main
10 components: regional parks, park reserves, regional trails, and special recreation features.

11 **Regional Parks**

12 Regional parks most notably contain a diversity of nature-based resources, either naturally occurring or
13 human-built, and are typically 200-500 acres in size. Regional parks accommodate a variety of outdoor
14 recreation activities. In 2018, a total of 43 regional parks were open to the public. Examples of regional
15 parks include:

- 16 • Battle Creek-Indian Mounds Regional Park (City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County)
- 17 • Lake Waconia Regional Park (Carver County)
- 18 • Lebanon Hills Regional Park (Dakota County)
- 19 • Theodore Wirth Regional Park (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board)
- 20 • Spring Lake Regional Park (Scott County)

21 **Park Reserves**

22 Park reserves, like regional parks, provide for a diversity of outdoor recreation activities. One major
23 feature that distinguishes the park reserve from a regional park is its size. The minimum size for a park
24 reserve is 1,000 acres. Additionally, regional park implementing agencies are required to manage at
25 least 80% of the park reserve as natural lands that protect the ecological functions of the native
26 landscape. As of 2018, a total of 12 park reserves were open to the public. Examples of park reserves
27 include:

- 28 • Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve (City of Bloomington and Three Rivers Park
29 District)
- 30 • Lake Elmo Park Reserve (Washington County)
- 31 • Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve (Anoka County)

32 **Regional Trails**

33 The Council has defined two major types of trails to serve the region: 1) destination or greenway trails
34 and 2) linking trails. Destination or greenway trails typically follow along routes with high-quality natural
35 resources that make the trail itself a destination. Examples of destination or greenway trails include:

- 1 • Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board)
- 2 • Rush Creek Regional Trail (Three Rivers Park District)

3 Linking trails, on the other hand, are predominately intended to provide connections between various
4 Regional Parks System units, most notably regional parks, or park reserves. Examples of linking trails
5 include:

- 6 • East Anoka County Regional Trail (Anoka County)
- 7 • Highway 96 Regional Trail (Ramsey County)

8 As of 2018, 51 regional trails totaling approximately 389 miles were open for public use.

9 **Special Recreation Features**

10 Special recreation features are defined as Regional Parks System opportunities not generally found in
11 the regional parks, park reserves, or trail corridors. Special recreation features often require a unique
12 managing or programming effort. As of 2018, there were eight special recreation features open to the
13 public. Examples of special recreation features include:

- 14 • Como Park Zoo (City of Saint Paul)
- 15 • Gale Woods Farm (Three Rivers Park District)
- 16 • Square Lake (Washington County)

17 Additional information on Regional Parks System facilities is provided in Chapter 3.

18 *Regional Parks System Management Structure*

19 The organizational structure of the Regional Parks System is unique. It is built upon a strong
20 partnership among the Council and several governmental agencies, including cities, counties, and
21 special park districts. While each agency has a role in the Regional Parks System, collaboration is the
22 cornerstone and the strength of the Regional Parks System.

23 **Regional Park Implementing Agencies' Role**

24 Cities, counties, and special park districts own and operate regional parks and trails – the Minneapolis
25 Chain of Lakes' facilities, paths and activities are the responsibility of the Minneapolis Park and
26 Recreation Board, for example – but once a park becomes part of the Regional Parks System, the
27 Council supports it with coordinated regional planning, funding, system protection, information,
28 marketing, and advocacy. The agency partners that own and operate the Regional Parks System are
29 called regional park implementing agencies. A map of the regional park implementing agency areas is
30 shown in Figure 2-1.

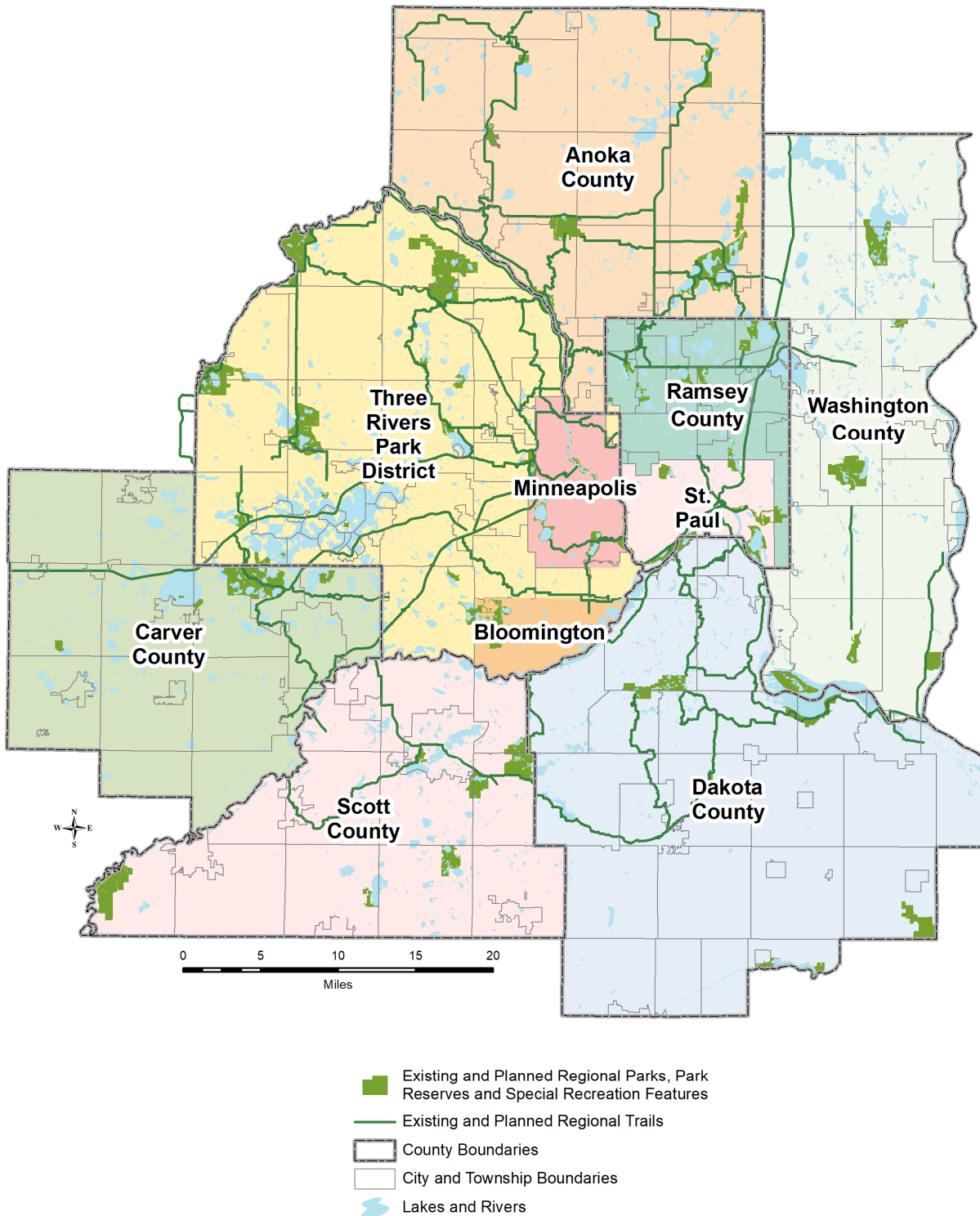
31 The regional park implementing agencies are:

- 32 • Anoka County
- 33 • City of Bloomington
- 34 • Carver County

Chapter Two: Overview of the Regional Parks System and the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

- 1 • Dakota County
- 2 • Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- 3 • Ramsey County
- 4 • City of Saint Paul
- 5 • Scott County
- 6 • Three Rivers Park District
- 7 • Washington County

1 *Figure 2-1. Regional Park Implementing Agencies*



2
3

1 **Metropolitan Council Role**

2 Regional Parks System legislation directs the Council to take the lead role in providing for a Regional
3 Parks System that will complement the recreational open space opportunities provided in the area by
4 the federal, state, and local units of government. State law directs the Council to determine which parks
5 and trails in the seven-county area are included in the Regional Parks System and to generally identify
6 areas that should be acquired for the Regional Parks System. The Council is charged with determining
7 whether these lands are regionally important and would collectively provide a balanced system of
8 outdoor recreation for the region. See page 25 for an overview of key Minnesota legislation.

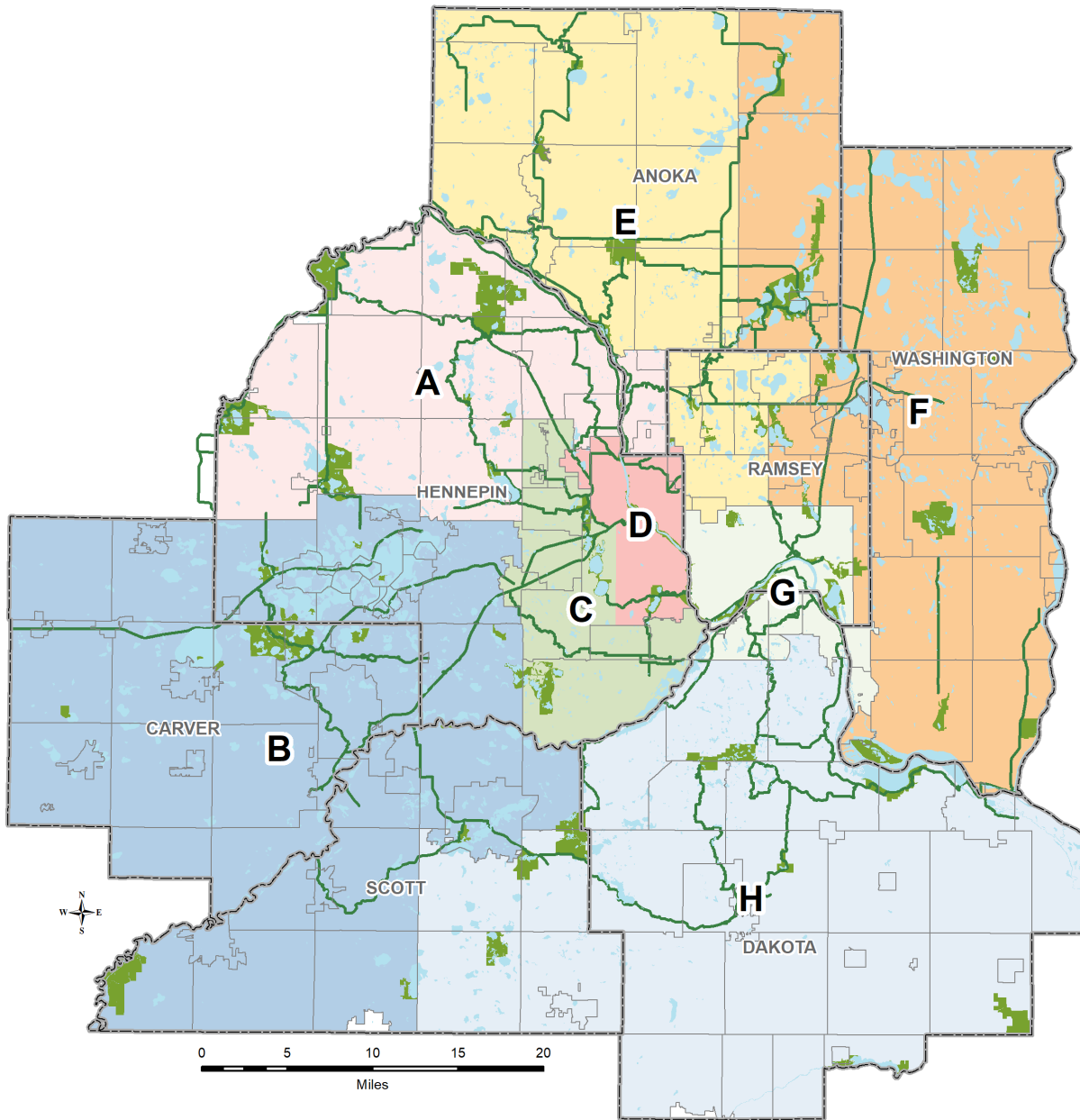
9 As described in the next section, the Council also contributes and administers funding to the regional
10 park implementing agencies to acquire, develop, and operate the Regional Parks System.

11 **Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Role**

12 The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, appointed by the Council, uses its expertise to
13 advise the Council on the review of regional park and trail master plans, and grants for land acquisition
14 and capital improvements. It also provides recommendations on updates and amendments to the
15 Regional Parks Policy Plan. The commission consists of eight volunteer members, who represent
16 specific districts throughout the region and a chair who is appointed at large. A map of the districts is
17 shown in Figure 2-2.

18

1 *Figure 2-2. Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Districts*



- Existing and Planned Regional Parks, Park Reserves and Special Recreation Features
- Existing and Planned Regional Trails
- County Boundaries
- City and Township Boundaries
- Lakes and Rivers

2
3

1 **Regional Parks System Funding**

2 As previously noted, the Council contributes and administers funding to the regional park implementing
3 agencies. Funding for the Regional Parks System currently consists of four main grant programs. Each
4 grant program is intended for different purposes and is comprised of various funding sources. Only
5 regional park implementing agencies, listed above, qualify for the grant programs. Each grant program
6 is highlighted briefly below. Additional detailed information can be found in the Program Guide, a grant
7 administration manual for regional park implementing agencies that accompanies this plan.

8 **Regional Park Bonding Program**

9 The Regional Park Bonding Program is intended for Regional Parks System acquisition, development,
10 and redevelopment projects. The fund is financed by state and Council bonds; the Council matches
11 every \$3 of state bonds with \$2 of Council bonds. The amount of funds each regional park
12 implementing agency receives is based on a formula specified in Chapter 8.

13 In addition to its Regional Park Bonding Program, the Council is committed to creating a grant program
14 using Council bonds to promote equitable use of regional parks and trails. Because of existing
15 constraints on Council bonds, the bond-funded grants will provide funding for acquisition, development,
16 or redevelopment projects in the Regional Parks System.

17 **Parks and Trails Legacy Fund Program**

18 The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund program was created after the statewide passage of the
19 Minnesota’s Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment in 2008. Along with state and Greater
20 Minnesota regional parks and trails, the Council receives a portion of the Parks and Trails Legacy
21 appropriations for the Regional Parks System.

22 The Council administers the Parks and Trails Legacy funds to regional park implementing agencies The
23 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources’ *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* provides high-level
24 guidance for use of the funds.

25 Each regional park implementing agency’s share of the funds is based on a formula specified in state
26 statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53, subd 3). This statute requires that 10% of the total Parks
27 and Trails Legacy appropriations be set aside for land acquisition.

28 **Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant Program**

29 The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund (PAOF) Grant program is organized into two separate
30 programs, corresponding to different funding sources. The two programs are the Parks and Trails
31 Legacy Fund (PTLF) and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). As noted
32 above, 10% of the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations are set aside for land acquisition
33 through the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant Program (PAOF). The ENRTF acquisition
34 opportunity grant fund is comprised of direct appropriations received by Legislative-Citizen Commission
35 on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) for land acquisition.

1 The Council matches every \$3 in state funding with \$2 from Council bonds for the PAOF program.
 2 Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53, subd. 3 requires the match for acquisition funding from the Parks
 3 and Trails Legacy Fund; the Council has chosen to match ENRTF funding for consistency. The
 4 Council’s Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant program is non-competitive and awarded based on
 5 funding availability, among other considerations detailed in subsequent chapters.

6 **Operations and Maintenance**

7 The Council administers state funds to regional park implementing agencies to pay for a portion of their
 8 operations and maintenance costs. The share each regional park implementing agency receives is
 9 based on a formula specified in state statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 423.351).

10 In addition to the four grant programs highlighted above, the Council also administers pass-through
 11 appropriations from the state to regional park implementing agencies. These dollars are legislatively
 12 earmarked for a particular regional park implementing agency or park and trail unit.

13 **Total System Investment**

14 In sum, the total investment the state and Council have made toward the Regional Parks System
 15 between state fiscal years 1974 and 2017 totals \$910 million (Table 2-1).

16 *Table 2-1. 40-year Regional Parks System State and Regional Funding Investments, 1974-*
 17 *2017*

Program	Funding source(s)	Investment totals, 1974-2017 (millions)
Regional Parks Bonding	State and Council bonds, Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, interest (through 1984)	\$422.5
Parks and Trails Legacy Fund	.038% general state sales and use tax, as per Minnesota Constitution, Article XI, Section 15	115.9
Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund	Parks and Trails Legacy Fund	12.9
	Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund	10.0
	Council bonds	26.0
Operation and Maintenance	State General Fund and Lottery-in-Lieu of Sales Tax, as per Minnesota Statutes, section 297A.65	188.3
Pass-Through Appropriations	Various state funds	120.1
Other Investments	State and Council funds	14.3
	Totals	\$910.0

18
 19 About eight/tenths of a percent (0.82%) of the total state and local taxes paid by a household in the
 20 region go to support the Regional Parks System. For the owner of a \$250,000 home in the seven-
 21 county metropolitan area, the average annual cost of the Regional Parks System is \$67 – including \$26

1 in state income and sales taxes and \$41 in regional and local property taxes {This information will be in
2 the final draft}.

3 The investments and funding sources described above are not the only funding sources for the
4 Regional Parks System. Each regional park implementing agency provides their own mix of funding for
5 their respective regional parks and trails. Other funding sources also exist, including federal grants,
6 public-private partnerships, and private donations.

7 *Role of the Regional Parks Policy Plan*

8 Managing a Regional Parks System that involves a number of different local entities, in addition to the
9 Council, requires coordinated policies and strategies. The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* lays out the
10 goals for the development of the Regional Parks System and the strategies designed to meet these
11 goals.

12 Over the past 40 years, the Regional Parks System partnership have made significant strides toward
13 achieving the *Thrive* outcomes of stewardship, prosperity, livability, and sustainability. By protecting
14 high quality natural resources and providing a world-class system of recreational opportunities, the
15 Regional Parks System has contributed significantly to the high quality of life in the region. The policies
16 laid out in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* reflect the Council’s commitment to support and protect
17 the Regional Parks System.

18 The equity outcome as described in *Thrive* remains an important direction for the Council. The regional
19 park implementing agencies have various programs and practices to help reach and serve their diverse
20 base of users. The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* strives to build upon the good work that the
21 regional park implementing agencies have been doing to advance equity. The Council seeks to
22 enhance equitable usage of the Regional Parks System, which is a key theme of this plan.

23 **Planning for 2040**

24 The metropolitan area has historically made a substantial investment in conserving green spaces by
25 establishing regional parks, park reserves, and trails. Federal, state, and local governments have
26 invested in parks, natural areas, and wildlife refuges that provide additional habitat and recreational
27 activities. Local communities have invested millions of dollars in community and neighborhood parks
28 and recreation areas.

29 Protecting remaining high quality natural resource lands in the metropolitan area builds on past
30 investments and offers an excellent opportunity for further investment in the Regional Parks System as
31 the region grows by 888,000 more people from 2010 to 2040. To that end, the vision for the Regional
32 Parks System includes expanding it to nearly 70,000 acres and tripling the trail system from 389 miles
33 today to more than 1,100 miles by 2040. New regional trails and greenway corridors will link regional
34 parks and park reserves. Also proposed are two additional regional parks in Carver County and a
35 regional park in the northwest corner of Anoka County – an area that has been identified as a potential
36 park since 1974. These planned regional parks and trails will enable residents to enjoy a variety of new
37 park experiences throughout the region.

1 In the 1880s, Horace Cleveland, a founding father of the Minneapolis parks system, said:

2 “Look forward for a century, to the time when the city has a population of a million, and think what will
3 be their wants. They will have wealth enough to purchase all that money can buy, but all their wealth
4 cannot purchase a lost opportunity, or restore natural features of grandeur and beauty, which would
5 then possess priceless value...”

6 This sentiment still rings true. Preserving natural areas with an eye toward the future is critical to our
7 region’s livability, sustainability, stewardship, and prosperity. The Regional Parks System represents a
8 major, well-established conservation effort for land and water resources. The area’s growing population
9 will need additional large-scale park and open space lands with interconnected trails in the future. The
10 region needs to identify natural areas that could be added to the Regional Parks System and make
11 plans for their acquisition before the opportunity is lost.

12 **System Plan**

13 The Council has the responsibility to prepare a system plan for the Regional Parks System. The system
14 planning process begins with the Council identifying “generally the areas which should be acquired,” as
15 required by the 1974 Metropolitan Parks Act. The Regional Parks Policy Plan includes the system plan,
16 which identifies the regional parks and trails that are included in the Regional Parks System.

17 The Council reviews the system plan portion of the Regional Parks Policy Plan every four years as part
18 of the policy plan revision process and may add or delete planned elements to the system. Additions or
19 deletions to the system proposed outside the regular plan review process are substantial revisions to
20 the policy plan. Identification of specific boundaries and detailed planning for individual units of the
21 system are addressed in master plans for each unit. The master plans are prepared by the regional
22 park implementing agencies.

23 **Amending the Policy Plan**

24 The Council will amend the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* only for a substantial revision. A
25 substantial revision is defined by the Council as (1) a proposed revision that is intended to or could
26 have the effect of changing the direction or intent of adopted Council policy, (2) addition or deletion of a
27 policy, or (3) addition or deletion of a system element.

28 An amendment request initiated by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission should
29 include documentation to substantiate that it constitutes a substantial revision as defined here. A
30 Council decision to amend the plan on its own initiative or that of the Commission will be preceded by a
31 finding that a substantial revision is proposed. When amending the policy plan, the Council will conduct
32 a public hearing in accordance with Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147 and adopted Council policy.

33 **Updating the Policy Plan**

34 Minnesota law requires the Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the Regional Parks Policy
35 Plan at least every four years (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147). However, over a four-year period,
36 changes occur in population, acquisition, development, and system use. Updating the data and factual
37 information to keep the policy current with new trends and conditions is not a substantial revision to the

1 policy plan and will be accomplished through the ordinary process of consideration and approval by the
2 Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the appropriate Council committee, and the full
3 Council. The regional park implementing agencies will receive formal notice of any proposed update
4 prior to consideration by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission.

5 **Key Minnesota Legislation for the Regional Parks System**

6 *Regional Recreation Open Space System (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.302)*

7 “The legislature finds that the pressure of urbanization and development threatens valuable recreational
8 open space areas in the metropolitan area at the same time as the need for such areas is increased.
9 Immediate action is therefore necessary to provide funds to acquire, preserve, protect and develop
10 regional recreational open space for public use.”

11 *Regional Recreation Open Space (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subd. 14)*

12 “Regional recreation open space’ means land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities
13 determined by the Metropolitan Council to be of regional importance in providing for a balanced system
14 of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area, including but not limited to park reserves, major
15 linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use
16 facilities.”

17 *Regional Recreation Open Space System Policy Plan (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, 18 subd. 1)*

19 “The policy plan shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to
20 provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal
21 facilities which, together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the
22 people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development.”

23 “The policy plan shall include a five-year capital improvement program, which shall be revised
24 periodically, and shall establish criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds for such acquisition and
25 development.”

26 *Grants for Recreation Open Space (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.315, subd. 1)*

27 “The Metropolitan Council with the advice of the commission may make grants, from any funds
28 available to it for recreation open space purposes, to any implementing agency, as defined in section
29 473.351, to cover the cost, or any portion of the cost, of acquiring or developing regional recreation
30 open space in accordance with the policy plan; and all such agencies may enter into contracts for this
31 purpose or rights or interests therein.”

32 *Metropolitan Area Regional Parks Funding (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351, subd. 1a.)*

33 “Implementing agency’ means the counties of Anoka, Washington, Ramsey, Scott, Carver, Dakota, the
34 city of Saint Paul, the city of Bloomington, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, and the Three
35 Rivers Park District.”

1 *Park and Trails Fund (Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53)*

2 “Grants funded by the parks and trails fund must be implemented according to section 16B.98”

3 *Grant Management Process (Minnesota Statutes, section 16B.98, subd.6)*

4 “A granting agency shall diligently administer and monitor any grant it has entered into.”

5 *Metropolitan Parks Interest Earnings (Laws of Minnesota 2015, First Special Session, Chapter*
6 *4, Article 4, Section 138)*

7 “...the Metropolitan Council shall use the interest earnings in Laws 1985, First Special Session chapter
8 15, section 5, subdivision 2, for the use and betterment of all regional recreational open space lands
9 under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council.”

10 Session law also provides important directives. For instance, the Omnibus Legacy Bill, updated
11 biennially, provides additional guidance and requirements related to Parks and Trails Legacy Fund
12 spending.

13 *Applicable Funding Formulas*

14 **Parks and Trails Fund (Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53, subd. 3):**

15 “(1) 45 percent of the money must be disbursed according to the allocation formula in section 473.351,
16 subdivision 3, to each implementing agency; (2) 31.5% of the money must be distributed based on
17 each implementing agency’s relative share of the most recent estimate of the population of the
18 metropolitan area; (3) 13.5 percent of the money must be distributed based on each implementing
19 agency’s relative share of nonlocal visits based on the most recent user visitation survey conducted by
20 the Metropolitan Council; and (4) 10 percent of the money must be distributed as grants to
21 implementing agencies for land acquisition within Metropolitan Council approved regional parks and
22 trails master plan boundaries under the council’s park acquisition opportunity grant program.”

23 **Operations and Maintenance Funds (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351, subd. 3)**

24 “The Metropolitan Council shall distribute the operations and maintenance money as follows: (1) 40
25 percent based on the use that each implementing agency’s regional recreation open space system has
26 in proportion to the total use of the metropolitan regional recreation open space system; (2) 40 percent
27 based on the operation and maintenance expenditures made in the previous year by each
28 implementing agency in proportion to the total operation and maintenance expenditures of all the
29 implementing agencies; and (3) 20 percent based on the acreage that each implementing agency’s
30 regional recreation open space system has in proportion to the total acreage of the metropolitan
31 regional recreation open space system.”

1 **Chapter Three: System Plan**

2 *Introduction*

3 The overarching outdoor recreation system in the region consists of lands owned or managed by
4 federal, state, and local governments, as well as lands privately owned by nonprofit or for-profit
5 agencies. All play an important role in supporting and protecting the outdoor recreation system. The
6 system is designed to meet the recreational needs and the natural resources protection goals of the
7 region. The outdoor recreation system consists of a wide range of facilities, from state parks to regional
8 trails to neighborhood playgrounds to private nature centers. The Regional Parks System is one part of
9 this well-rounded system of outdoor recreation.

10 The Regional Parks System primarily consists of lands located in a high-quality natural resource setting
11 that are contiguous to lakes, rivers, or other water bodies. Natural resource restoration and protection is
12 a key objective in the Regional Parks System. Regional parks and park reserves include large areas of
13 land or water that often extend into multiple political jurisdictions. Regional trails may traverse several
14 communities and provide connections between regional parks, park reserves, and the greater trail
15 network in the region. Regional parks and trails draw visitors from across the region and beyond.

16 Recreational parks and open space provided by the federal and state government generally serve
17 similar recreational demands as the Regional Parks System. Local recreational open space facilities
18 provide facilities for active recreation, such as playgrounds, athletic fields, courts, and aquatic centers.
19 Private operations also make substantial contributions to the development of facilities and the provision
20 of services and include golf courses, riding facilities, marinas, day camps, and downhill ski areas, as
21 well as privately-owned public spaces.

22 **National Parks and Federal Lands**

23 Our region includes the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge as well as two national parks--the
24 Mississippi National River and Recreation Area and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

25 *Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge*

26 The Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge is a corridor of land and water along the Minnesota
27 River that stretches from Bloomington to Henderson and is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife
28 Service. The refuge was established in 1976 to provide habitat for many migratory waterfowl, fish, and
29 other wildlife species threatened by commercial and industrial development, and to provide
30 environmental education, wildlife recreational opportunities, and interpretive programming for Twin
31 Cities residents.

32 *Mississippi National River and Recreation Area*

33 The 54,000-acre Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) was established in 1988
34 and is a unit of the National Park Service. The National Park Service owns very little land within its
35 borders but partners with local governments, state agencies, and organizations to protect the significant
36 resources along the 72-mile stretch of river running through the region. Several regional parks and

1 trails, which are owned and operated by regional park implementing agencies, are located within the
2 MNRRA corridor. Additionally, 72 miles of the Mississippi River and four miles of the Minnesota River
3 have been designated as the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area Water Trail, a national
4 recreational amenity.

5 *St. Croix National Scenic Riverway*

6 A portion of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is in the region. The St. Croix National Scenic
7 Riverway is a unit of the National Park Service located on the St. Croix River and the Namekagon River
8 in Wisconsin. The National Riverway includes the two rivers and their riparian areas and occupies the
9 boundary between Wisconsin and Minnesota. The St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is maintained
10 and managed by the National Park Service and the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural
11 Resources.

12 **State Parks, Lands, and Trails**

13 The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages state parks, lands and trails in the
14 region, including Afton, Fort Snelling, and William O'Brien State Parks; the Minnesota Valley State
15 Recreation Area; and the Brown's Creek, Gateway, Luce Line, and Minnesota Valley State Trails. The
16 DNR also provides wildlife management areas for hunting, trapping, fishing, wildlife viewing and other
17 compatible recreational uses. Scientific and natural areas are open to the public for nature observation
18 and education, but are not meant for intensive recreational activities.

19 There are six state water trails and their attendant system of boat and canoe launches that travel
20 through the metropolitan area along the Cannon, Crow, Minnesota, Mississippi, St. Croix, and Rum
21 rivers. The DNR and its local unit of government partners actively manage the state water trails for
22 canoeing, kayaking, boating and camping.

23 *Planning Protections for National and State Parks*

24 Federal and state agencies are encouraged, but not required, to submit master plans for recreational
25 open space units within the seven-county region to the Council for its review. To the extent these
26 master plans indicate that facilities will fulfill regional recreation open space objectives and are
27 consistent with the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, the Council will provide these lands protection
28 under the Metropolitan Significance Review regulations and the Metropolitan Land Planning Act, as
29 described in the System Protection Policy found in Chapter 6. However, the Council does not grant
30 regional funds to state or federal agencies for capital improvements or for operations and maintenance
31 of these facilities. Figure 4 depicts the national, federal and state recreation lands and corridors in the
32 region.

33 **Local Parks**

34 Local recreational open space facilities provide for a very large number and variety of recreational
35 activities that occur in the metropolitan area. Local parks are often more intensely developed than
36 regional parks and provide facilities for active recreation, such as playgrounds, athletic fields, courts,
37 and aquatic centers. Local parks are designed to serve a neighborhood or community and are
38 frequently located in residential areas.

1 Local parks are usually much smaller than regional parks and are located and designed to serve the
2 local population, rather than primarily based on natural resource amenities. Local trails typically provide
3 connections between community destinations, such as schools, libraries, and community centers.
4 Although local recreational open space areas are not covered by this plan, the facilities and services
5 they offer are taken into consideration when master plans of the regional system are prepared and
6 reviewed.

7 **Private Recreation**

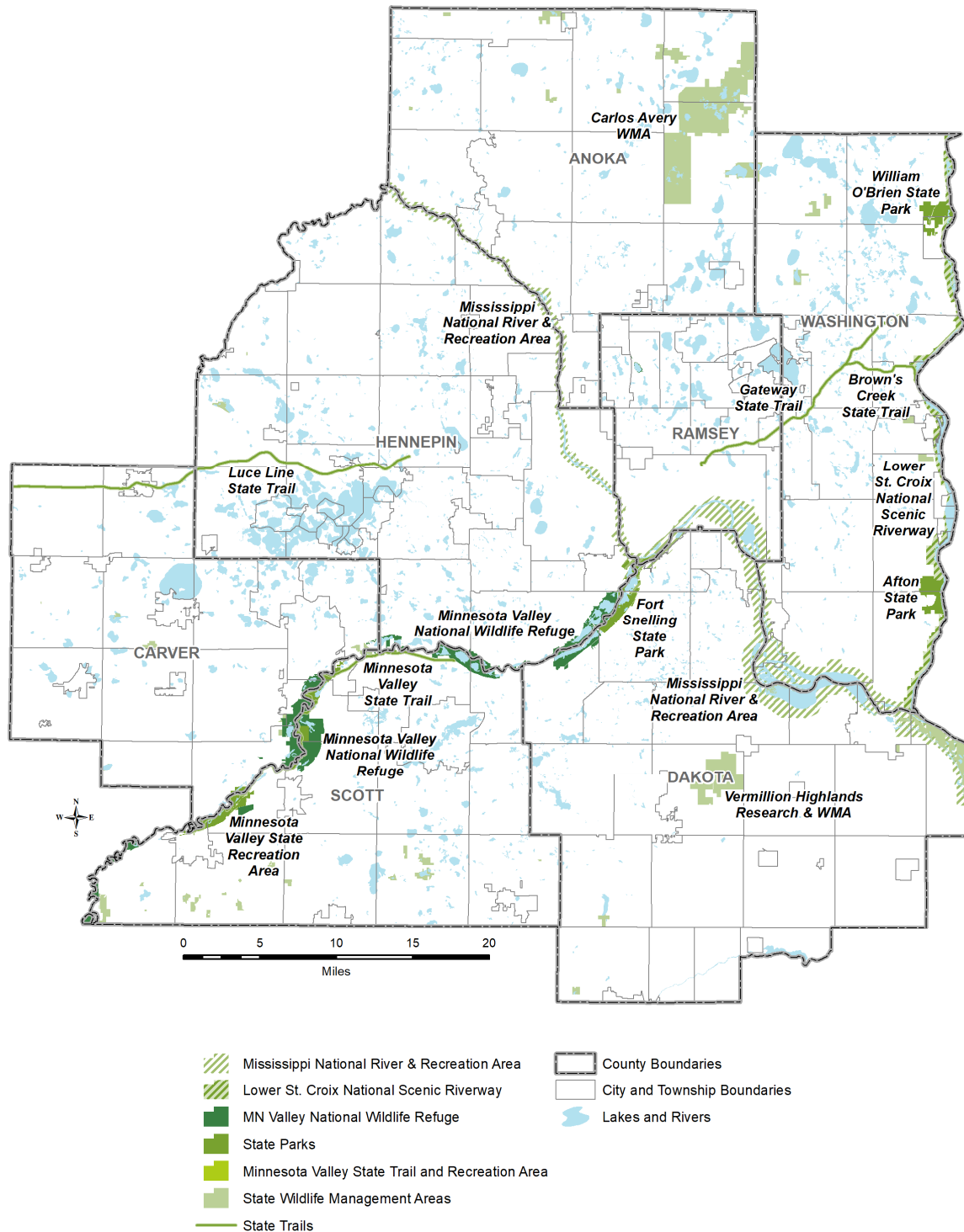
8 Public recreational open space facilities do not meet all the demands for such recreation required by
9 the area's residents. Private operations also make substantial contributions to the development of
10 facilities and the provision of services. The most prominent facilities provided by the private sector are
11 golf courses, riding facilities, gun clubs, marinas, day camps, and downhill ski areas. There are also
12 multiple recreational open space areas owned and operated by corporations, employees' associations,
13 benevolent associations, and nonprofit social agencies. These private facilities reduce the burden on
14 the public sector, provide additional opportunities, and help to preserve thousands of acres of land in
15 open space. They complement activities and experiences offered by the public sector.

16 **Nonprofit Partners**

17 Nonprofit organizations, such as the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, the Trust for Public Land
18 and the Nature Conservancy, have a long history of supporting the outdoor recreation system in the
19 region by protecting and restoring natural areas and wetlands, helping acquire park land, and
20 advocating for the importance of recreation and open space.

21

1 *Figure 3-1. National, Federal, and State Recreation Lands in the Region*



2

3 *Components of the Regional Parks System*

4 Not all recreation facilities warrant regional status. Table 3-1 provides a classification system for local
 5 and regional facilities.

Table 3-1. Classification System for Local and Regional Park Facilities

Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
Local Facilities					
Mini-park	Specialized facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population or specific group such as tots or senior citizens	Less than 1/4 mile radius	< 1 acre		May be publicly or privately owned and/or incorporated into a development site, such as apartment, townhouse, or condominium complexes, or commercial centers.
Neighborhood park/playground	Area for intense recreational activities such as field games, court games, crafts, apparatus area, skating, and neighborhood centers.	¼ to ½ mile radius to serve a population of 4,000 – 5,000 (one neighborhood)	< 25 acres	Physical geography suited for intense development.	Proximity to elementary schools or residential neighborhoods.
Community playfield	Area for intense recreational facilities such as athletic fields and swimming pools; could include a neighborhood use.	3 - 5 neighborhoods or one community	25 - 50 acres	Physical geography suited for intense development.	Proximity to secondary schools and other public facilities.

Chapter Three: System Plan

Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
Community park	Area of natural or ornamental quality for outdoor recreation such as walking, viewing, sitting, picnicking; could have some field and court games.	3 - 5 neighborhoods or one community	25 - 100 acres	Affords natural features with varied physical geographic interest.	Proximity to community facilities and resources.
County park	Area of natural or ornamental quality for outdoor recreation such as walking, viewing, sitting, picnicking; could have some field and court games.	County	25 - 100 acres	Affords natural features with varied physical geographic interest.	Proximity to community facilities and resources and/or where resource occurs.
Conservancy lands	Area of natural quality such as watercourses and wetlands that are preserved for environmental or aesthetic benefits to the community and/or because of the negative environmental or economic effects of development in them.	Municipality, township, county	Variable, based on extent of resources	Natural resources that merit preservation and that would be negatively affected by development.	Where resource occurs.
Local linear parks, trail, corridors, and parkways	Area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, canoeing, and driving.	A neighborhood or several neighborhoods in a city or township	Contained within one city or township. Width and length minimums vary by locality.	On or off-road trails that may or may not traverse scenic areas while assuring the trail treadway has no adverse effect on the natural resource base.	Where needed to link neighborhoods to components of the local or regional recreation system and/or community facilities such as schools, libraries, commercial areas and to link to adjacent municipalities.

Chapter Three: System Plan

Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
County linear parks, trail, corridors, and parkways	Area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, canoeing, and driving.	Several cities and/or townships in a county.	Traverses one or more municipalities. Width and length minimums vary by county.	On or off-road trails that may or may not traverse scenic areas while mitigating impacts to assuring the trail treadway has no adverse effect on the natural resource base.	Often found adjacent to major roadways within the county. Other locations where needed to link cities to components of the local or regional recreation system and/or community facilities such as schools, libraries, commercial areas and to link to adjacent counties.

Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
Regional Facilities					
Regional park	Area of natural or ornamental quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, camping, and trail uses.	3 - 5 communities	200 - 500 acres (100 minimum)	Complete natural setting contiguous to water bodies or watercourses where possible.	Where natural resource occurs-- particularly water.

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Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
Regional park reserve	Area of natural quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as viewing and studying nature, wildlife habitat, conservation, swimming, picnicking, hiking, boating, camping, and trail uses.	County, multi-county area	1000 + acres; sufficient area to encompass the resource envisioned for preservation.	Diversity of unique resources, such as topography, lakes, streams, marshes, flora, fauna.	Where natural resource occurs.
Regional destination trail	Area developed for one or more varying modes of nonmotorized recreational travel such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and canoeing.	The entire metropolitan region	Sufficient corridor width to protect natural resources and can safely accommodate trail use. Sufficient length to be a destination itself, or to serve as a link between Regional Parks System units.	When feasible, off-road trails that utilize human made and/or natural linear resources such as utility corridors, railroad and highway rights of way, stream / river valleys, or at the edges of forest or prairie. On-road trails are acceptable when off-road trails are not feasible.	Preferably adjacent to high quality natural areas. The trail treadway should be placed where it has no adverse impact on the natural resource base.

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Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
Regional linking trail	Area developed for one or more varying modes of nonmotorized recreational travel such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and canoeing.	The entire metropolitan region	Sufficient corridor width to protect natural resources and can safely accommodate trail use. Sufficient length to link Regional Parks System units.	When feasible, off-road trails that utilize human made and/or natural linear resources such as utility corridors, railroad and highway rights of way, stream / river valleys, or at the edges of forest or prairie. On-road trails are acceptable when off-road trails are not feasible.	Linkages between components of the Regional Parks System. When feasible, linking trails should attempt to connect to population, economic and social centers along its route. The trail treadway should be placed where it will have no adverse impact on the natural resource base.

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Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
Special recreation feature	Area that preserves, maintains, and provides specialized or single-purpose recreational activities, such as nature center, marina, zoo, conservatory, arboretum, display gardens, hunter training education facilities, downhill ski area, sites of historic or archeological significance, and bridging facilities.	Regional- (metropolitan area)	Specific standard applicable to desired feature.	Appropriate to particular special recreation feature.	Where most advantageous for the special recreation feature and the overall park system.

Components of the Regional Parks System are categorized into four major components. These four components are regional parks, park reserves, regional trails, and special recreation features.

Regional Parks

Areas selected for regional parks should contain a diversity of nature-based resources, either naturally occurring or human-built. The recreational quality of a regional park is measured by the presence or absence of outstanding natural resources and the ability to provide adequately for a wide range of natural resource-related recreational opportunities. Access to water bodies suitable for recreation – such as swimming, boating, and fishing – is particularly important and most of the regional parks are focused on lakes, rivers, or streams.

A regional park should be large enough to accommodate a variety of activities, preserve a pleasant natural aspect, and buffer activity areas from each other and from surrounding areas. This is interpreted as requiring 200 to 500 acres of land. Occasionally, because of the quality of the resource, an exception may be made, and a regional park may be as small as 100 acres. Experience has shown this to be the minimum size acceptable for the range and type of activities expected to be accommodated.

As of 2018, there are 43 regional parks developed and open to the public. These regional parks are listed in Table 3-2 and shown on Figure 3-2.

Table 3-2. Regional Parks Open to the Public (2018)

Regional Park Implementing Agency		Regional Park
1	Anoka County	Anoka County Riverfront Regional Park
2	Anoka County	Bunker Hills Regional Park
3	Anoka County	Lake George Regional Park
4	Anoka County	Martin-Island-Linwood Lakes Regional Park
5	Anoka County	Mississippi West Regional Park
6	Anoka County	Rum River Central Regional Park
7	Anoka County/Three Rivers	Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park
8	Carver County	Baylor Regional Park
9	Carver County	Lake Minnewashta Regional Park
10	Carver County	Lake Waconia Regional Park
11	Dakota County	Lake Byllesby Regional Park
12	Dakota County	Lebanon Hills Regional Park
13	Dakota County	Whitetail Woods Regional Park
14	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Above the Falls Regional Park

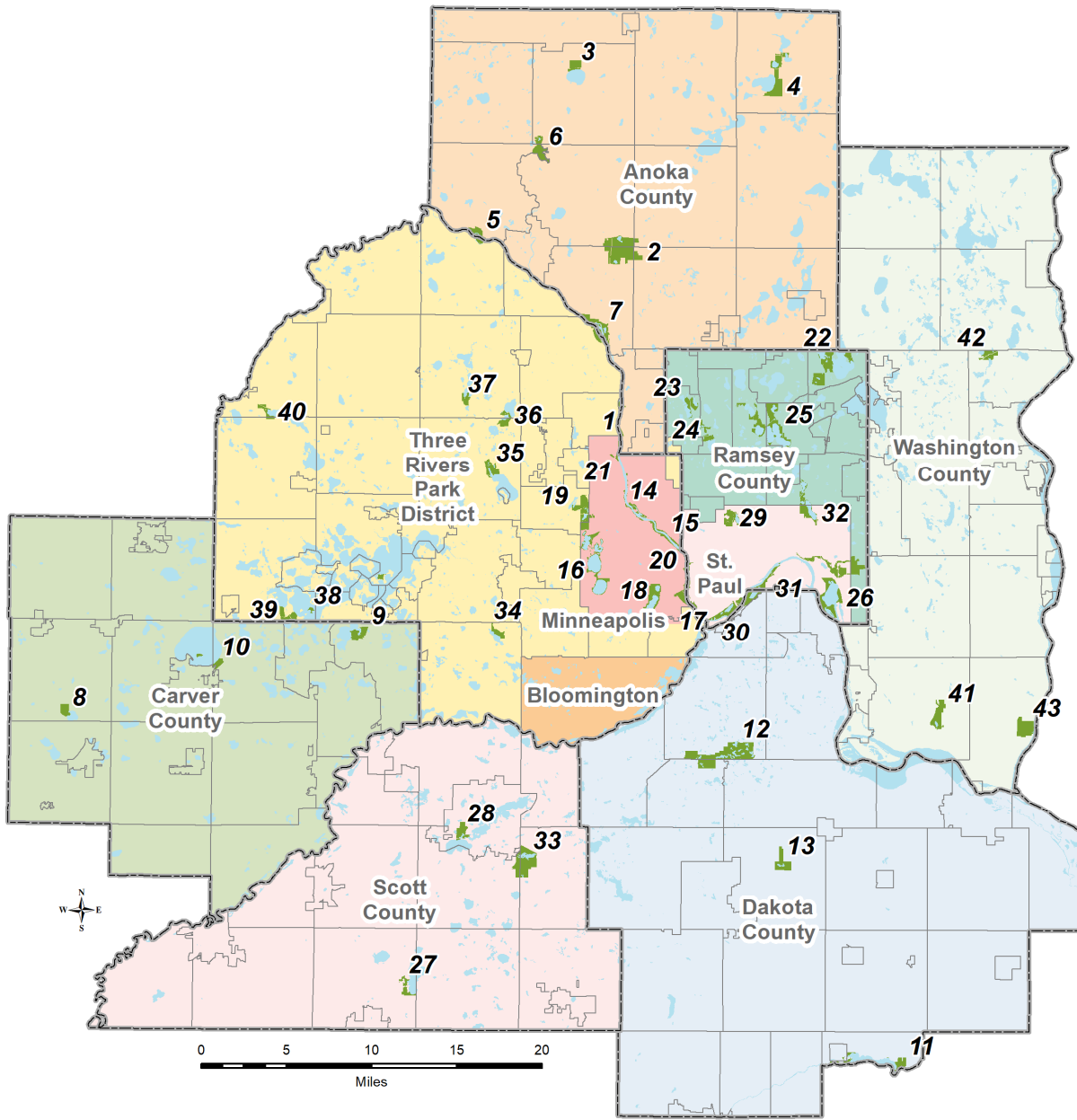
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Regional Park Implementing Agency		Regional Park
15	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park
16	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minneapolis Chain-of-Lakes Regional Park
17	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minnehaha Regional Park
18	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park
19	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Theodore Wirth Regional Park
20	Minneapolis/Saint Paul	Mississippi Gorge Regional Park
21	Minneapolis/Three Rivers	North Mississippi Regional Park
22	Ramsey County	Bald Eagle-Otter Lake Regional Park
23	Ramsey County	Long Lake Regional Park
24	Ramsey County	Tony Schmidt Regional Park
25	Ramsey County	Vadnais-Snail Lake Regional Park
26	Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Battle Creek & Indian Mounds Regional Park
27	Scott County	Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park
28	Scott County	Spring Lake Regional Park
29	Saint Paul	Como Regional Park
30	Saint Paul	Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm Regional Park
31	Saint Paul	Lilydale-Harriet Island & Cherokee Heights Regional Park
32	Saint Paul/Ramsey County	Phalen-Keller Regional Park
33	Three Rivers (Scott County)	Cleary Lake Regional Park
34	Three Rivers Park District	Bryant Lake Regional Park
35	Three Rivers Park District	Clifton E. French Regional Park
36	Three Rivers Park District	Eagle Lake Regional Park
37	Three Rivers Park District	Fish Lake Regional Park
38	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka Islands Regional Park
39	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka Regional Park
40	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Sarah Regional Park
41	Washington County	Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park
42	Washington County	Pine Point Regional Park


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Regional Park Implementing Agency		Regional Park
43	Washington County	St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park

Figure 3-2. Regional Parks Open to the Public (2018)



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-2

-  Regional Parks Open to the Public
-  County Boundaries
-  City and Township Boundaries
-  Lakes and Rivers

Park Reserves

Park reserves, like regional parks, are expected to provide for a diversity of outdoor recreational activities. The major feature that distinguishes the park reserve from a regional park is that the park reserve is also intended to provide, protect, and manage representative areas of the original major landscape types in the metropolitan area and enable appreciation and enjoyment of the natural resources that influenced the region’s development.

Park reserves are substantially larger than regional parks because they are to contain a diversity of natural resources with adequate space to protect and manage natural resources and provide for the compatible outdoor activities. The minimum size for a park reserve is 1,000 acres, but larger park reserves are desirable. To establish and maintain an uncompromised sense of nature and protect high-quality natural resources, at least 80% of each park reserve should be managed as wild lands that protect the ecological functions of the native landscape. This would permit up to 20% of a park reserve to be developed for compatible recreational activities.

The eight regional landscape types that have been used in selecting areas for park reserves are:

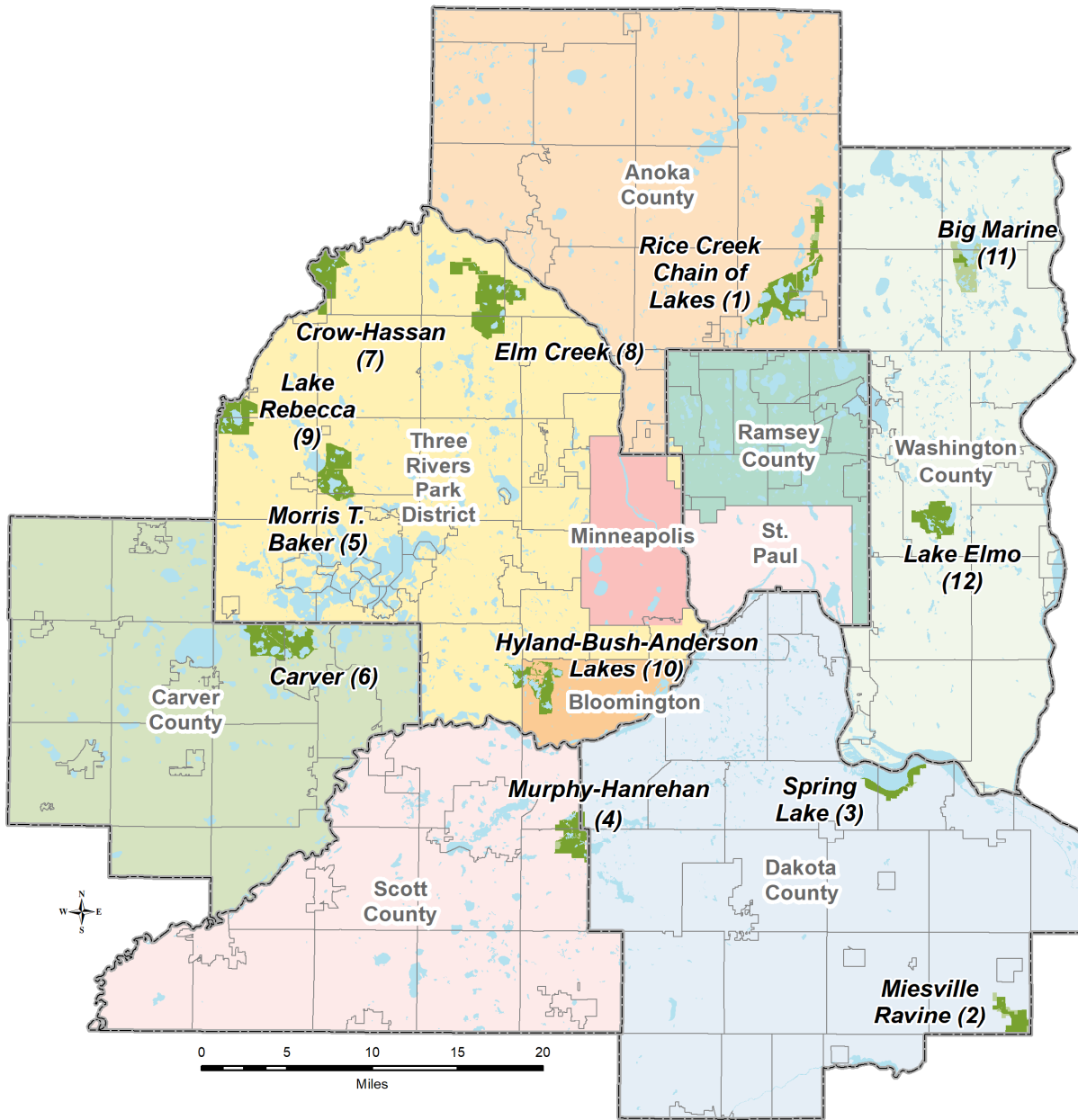
- Sand plains
- St. Croix ground moraine
- Des Moines ground moraine
- Terminal moraine
- Lightly glaciated area
- Mississippi River Valley
- Minnesota River Valley
- St. Croix River Valley

As of 2018, the Regional Parks System included 12 park reserves developed and open to the public, which are listed in Table 3-3 and shown in Figure 3-3.

Table 3-3. Park Reserves Open to the Public (2018)

Regional Park Implementing Agency		Park Reserves
1	Anoka County	Rice Creek Chain-of-Lakes Park Reserve
2	Dakota County	Miesville Ravine Park Reserve
3	Dakota County	Spring Lake Park Reserve
4	Three Rivers (Scott County)	Murphy-Hanrehan Park Reserve
5	Three Rivers Park District	Baker Park Reserve
6	Three Rivers Park District	Carver Park Reserve
7	Three Rivers Park District	Crow-Hassan Park Reserve
8	Three Rivers Park District	Elm Creek Park Reserve
9	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Rebecca Park Reserve
10	Three Rivers/Bloomington	Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve
11	Washington County	Big Marine Park Reserve
12	Washington County	Lake Elmo Park Reserve

Figure 3-3. Park Reserves Open to the Public (2018)



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-3

- Park Reserves (Open to the Public)
- Park Reserves (Not Open to the Public)
- County Boundaries
- City and Township Boundaries
- Lakes and Rivers

1 **Regional Trails**

2 Regional trail corridors provide recreational opportunities along linear pathways throughout the
 3 metropolitan area. There are two broad types of regional trails: destination trails (also known as
 4 greenway trails) and linking trails. Destination trails provide high-quality natural resource-based
 5 experiences. They provide a scenic setting and a compelling sense of place. They often follow natural
 6 or linear features that traverse areas of scenic appeal and/or historical, architectural, and
 7 developmental interest. Linking trails are selected to pass through or provide connections among
 8 components in the Regional Parks System. Regional parks and park reserves perform the important
 9 function of providing places for parking, comfort facilities and safe water supplies. Linking trails may
 10 also connect to other local, state, and federal recreational facilities as well as other significant natural
 11 resource areas

12 Trails also are selected for their ability to intersect with local trail networks, with the regional trails
 13 functioning much like regional highways that interconnect with more local arterials and local streets.
 14 Parts of the regional trail network, especially in the urban areas, may serve as commuting routes for
 15 bicyclists in addition to serving recreational purposes. As the regional trail and transit systems expand,
 16 opportunities to provide connections between these forms of travel should be explored. People can ride
 17 the bus or light rail to access a regional trail, and conversely, people can use regional trails to access
 18 transit.

19 Regional trails can also be developed as greenways, or linear parks, where the trail itself is a
 20 destination. These greenways typically include wide corridors that provide opportunities for improving
 21 wildlife habitat, protecting natural resources, and providing recreational opportunities.

22 The 2016 Visitor Study found that visits to trails were significantly more solitary than for parks (63% go
 23 alone vs. 45% for parks). Trails had a higher frequency of visits across seasons and significantly higher
 24 summer visits than parks, but less time spent per visit.

25 As of 2018, there were 51 regional trail corridors, with a total of 389 miles open to the public, listed in
 26 Table 3-4 and Figure 3-4. Many trails are constructed in phases, some as part of roadway improvement
 27 projects or local development. Therefore, although a trail is listed as being open, some portions of the
 28 trail corridor may be developed in the future and are not yet open to the public.

29 **Table 3-4. Regional Trails Open to the Public (2018)**

Regional Park Implementing Agency		Regional Trails
1	Anoka County	Bunker Hills-Chain of Lakes Regional Trail
2	Anoka County	Central Anoka Regional Trail
3	Anoka County	Chain of Lakes-Otter Lake Regional Trail
4	Anoka County	Coon Creek Regional Trail
5	Anoka County	East Anoka County Regional Trail
6	Anoka County	Mississippi River Regional Trail (Anoka Co)
7	Anoka County	Rum River Regional Trail

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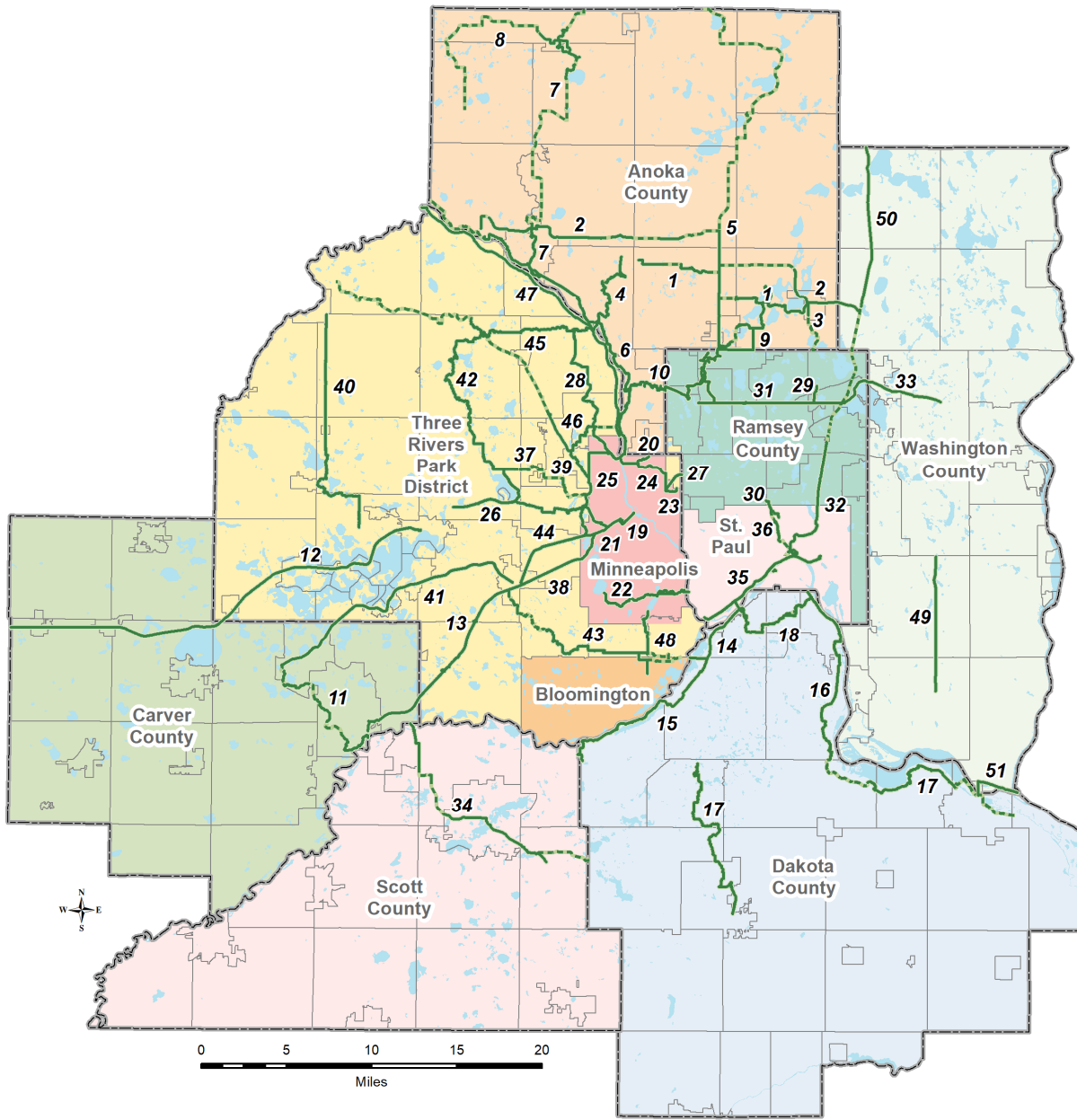
Regional Park Implementing Agency		Regional Trails
8	Anoka County	Sugar Hills Regional Trail
9	Anoka County/Ramsey County	Rice Creek North Regional Trail
10	Anoka County/Ramsey County	Rice Creek West Regional Trail
11	Carver County	Southwest Regional Trail
12	Carver County/Three Rivers	Dakota Rail Regional Trail
13	Carver County/Three Rivers	Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail
14	Dakota County	Big Rivers Regional Trail
15	Dakota County	Minnesota River Greenway
16	Dakota County	Mississippi River Regional Trail (Dakota Co)
17	Dakota County	North Creek Greenway Regional Trail
18	Dakota County	River to River Greenway North Urban Regional Trail
19	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Cedar Lake Regional Trail
20	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Columbia Parkway Regional Trail
21	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Kenilworth Regional Trail
22	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail
23	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Ridgway Parkway Regional Trail
24	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	St. Anthony Parkway Regional Trail
25	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail
26	Minneapolis/Three Rivers	Luce Line Regional Trail
27	Minneapolis/Three Rivers	Northeast Diagonal Regional Trail
28	Minneapolis/Three Rivers	Shingle Creek Regional Trail
29	Ramsey County	Birch Lake Regional Trail
30	Ramsey County	Trout Brook Regional Trail
31	Ramsey County	Highway 96 Regional Trail
32	Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Bruce Vento Regional Trail (w/Vento Sanctuary)
33	Ramsey County/Washington County	Lake Links Regional Trail
34	Scott County	Scott County Regional Trail
35	Saint Paul	Samuel Morgan Regional Trail
36	Saint Paul	Trout Brook Regional Trail
37	Three Rivers Park District	Bassett Creek Regional Trail
38	Three Rivers Park District	Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail
39	Three Rivers Park District	Crystal Lake Regional Trail
40	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Independence Regional Trail
41	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail
42	Three Rivers Park District	Medicine Lake Regional Trail
43	Three Rivers Park District	Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail
44	Three Rivers Park District	North Cedar Lake Regional Trail

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Regional Park Implementing Agency		Regional Trails
45	Three Rivers Park District	Rush Creek Regional Trail
46	Three Rivers Park District	Twin Lakes Regional Trail
47	Three Rivers Park District	West Mississippi River Regional Trail
48	Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington	Nokomis-Minnesota River Regional Trail
49	Washington County	Central Greenway Regional Trail – South Segment
50	Washington County	Hardwood Creek Regional Trail
51	Washington County	Point Douglas Regional Trail

1

1 *Figure 3-4. Regional Trails Open to the Public (2018)*



Numbers Correspond to Regional Trails Listed in Table 3-4

- Regional Trails (Open to the Public)
- - - Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
- County Boundaries
- City and Township Boundaries
- Lakes and Rivers

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1 **Special Recreation Features**

2 Special recreation features, which are called for in state legislation (Minnesota Statutes, section
3 473.121, subd. 14), are defined as Regional Parks System opportunities not generally found in the
4 parks, the park reserves or the trail corridors. Special recreational features often require a unique
5 managing or programming effort on the part of the regional park implementing agency.

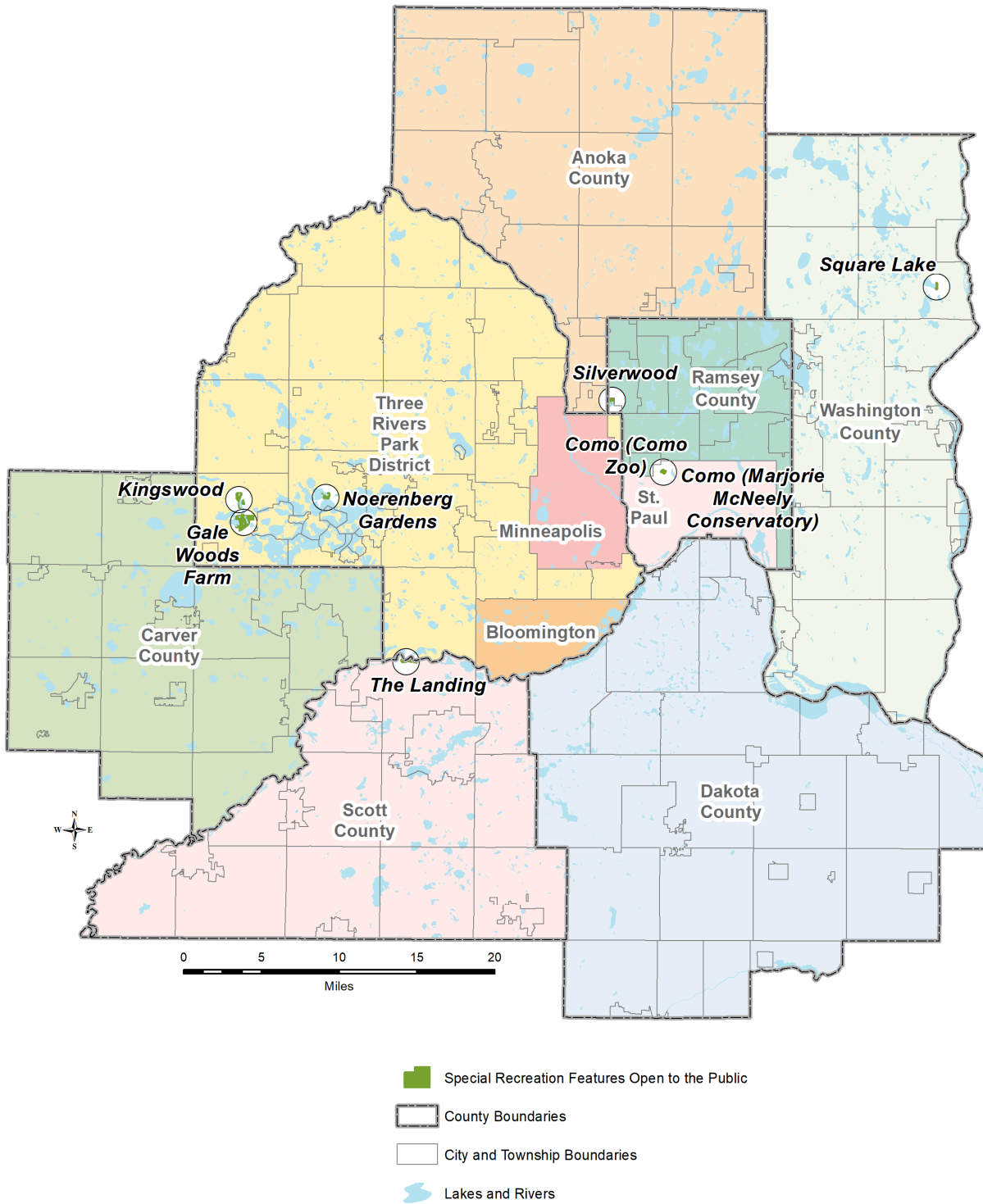
6 As of 2018, there are eight special recreation features developed and open to the public:

- 7 • Como Park Zoo at Como Regional Park in Saint Paul
- 8 • Marjorie McNeely Conservatory at Como Regional Park, in Saint Paul
- 9 • Gale Woods Farm on the shore of Whaletail Lake in Minnetrista
- 10 • Kingswood, on the shore of Little Long Lake in Minnetrista
- 11 • The Landing, along the Minnesota River in Shakopee
- 12 • Noerenberg Gardens on the northwest side of Lake Minnetonka
- 13 • Silverwood on the shore of Silver Lake in the City of St. Anthony
- 14 • Square Lake in Washington County.

15 The Como Park Zoo and Marjorie McNeely Conservatory are managed within Como Regional Park.
16 Gale Woods Farm provides opportunities for visitors to learn about agriculture, food production, and
17 land stewardship. Kingswood provides nature-based service learning programs to preserve the unique
18 and significant natural resources of the site. The Landing provides a historical representation of life in a
19 river town in the 1800s. Noerenberg Gardens was given to Three Rivers Park District with the
20 understanding that it was a unique and regional-level attraction with stunning floral gardens. Silverwood
21 integrates arts, environmental education, and gardens to serve as a center for arts and the
22 environment. Square Lake provides beach and boat access to one of the clearest lakes in the
23 metropolitan area and attracts scuba divers from across the region.

24 New special recreation features need to be complementary to the rest of the Regional Parks System
25 and not be a financial burden to the system. Special recreation features are highlighted in Figure 3-5.

1 *Figure 3-5. Special Recreation Features Open to the Public (2018)*



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1 *Regional Parks System Plan*

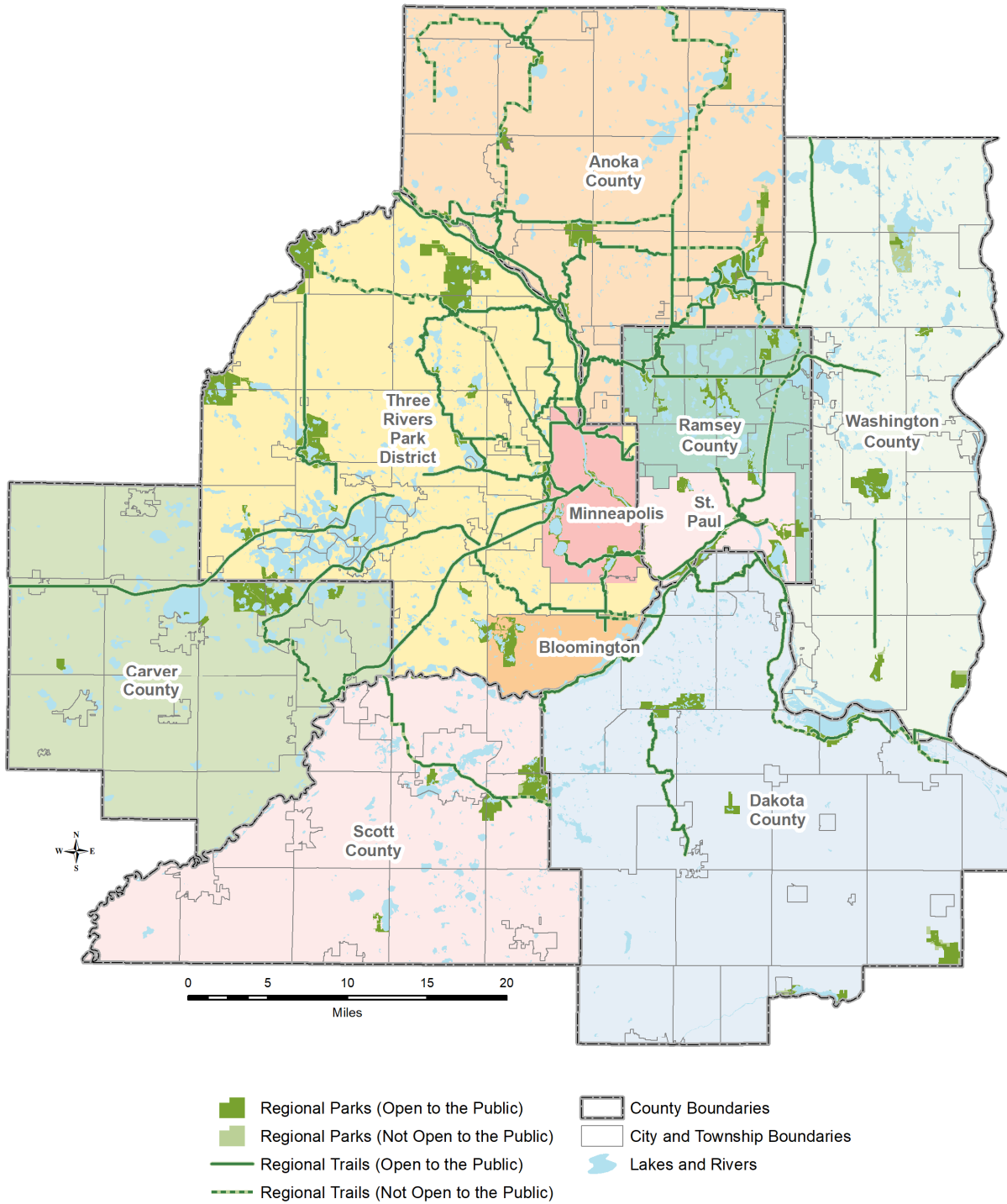
2 There are six components that make up the System Plan, which all together comprise the vision for the
3 Regional Parks System in 2040:

- 4 • Existing Regional Parks System facilities
- 5 • Planned Regional Parks System facilities that are not yet open to the public
- 6 • Regional Parks System Boundary Adjustments
- 7 • Regional Park Search Areas
- 8 • Regional Trail Search Corridors
- 9 • 2040 System Additions

10 **Existing Regional Parks System Facilities**

11 As described in the previous section, the Regional Parks System as of 2018 includes 43 regional parks,
12 12 park reserves, 51 regional trails, and 8 special recreation features that are open for public use.
13 These Regional Parks System facilities have a total land area of about 54,370 acres that have been
14 acquired by the regional park implementing agencies, with 4,541 acres of inholdings within the
15 boundaries of these parks and trails that have not yet been acquired. Figure 3-6 shows the Regional
16 Parks System facilities that are open to the public as of 2018.

1 *Figure 3-6. Existing Regional Parks System Facilities (2018)*



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1 **Planned Regional Parks System Facilities**

2 In addition to the facilities that are open to the public, there are two regional parks and one park reserve
 3 that have Council-approved master plans, but have not yet been developed. These facilities are listed
 4 in Table 3-5 and shown in Figure 3-7. Approximately 1,414 acres have been acquired for these three
 5 planned Regional Parks System facilities, with an additional 3,529 acres to be acquired in the future.

6 *Table 3-5. Planned Regional Parks and Park Reserves Not Open to the Public*

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park or Regional Trail
Scott County	Doyle-Kennefick Regional Park
Scott County	Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve
Washington County	Grey Cloud Island Regional Park

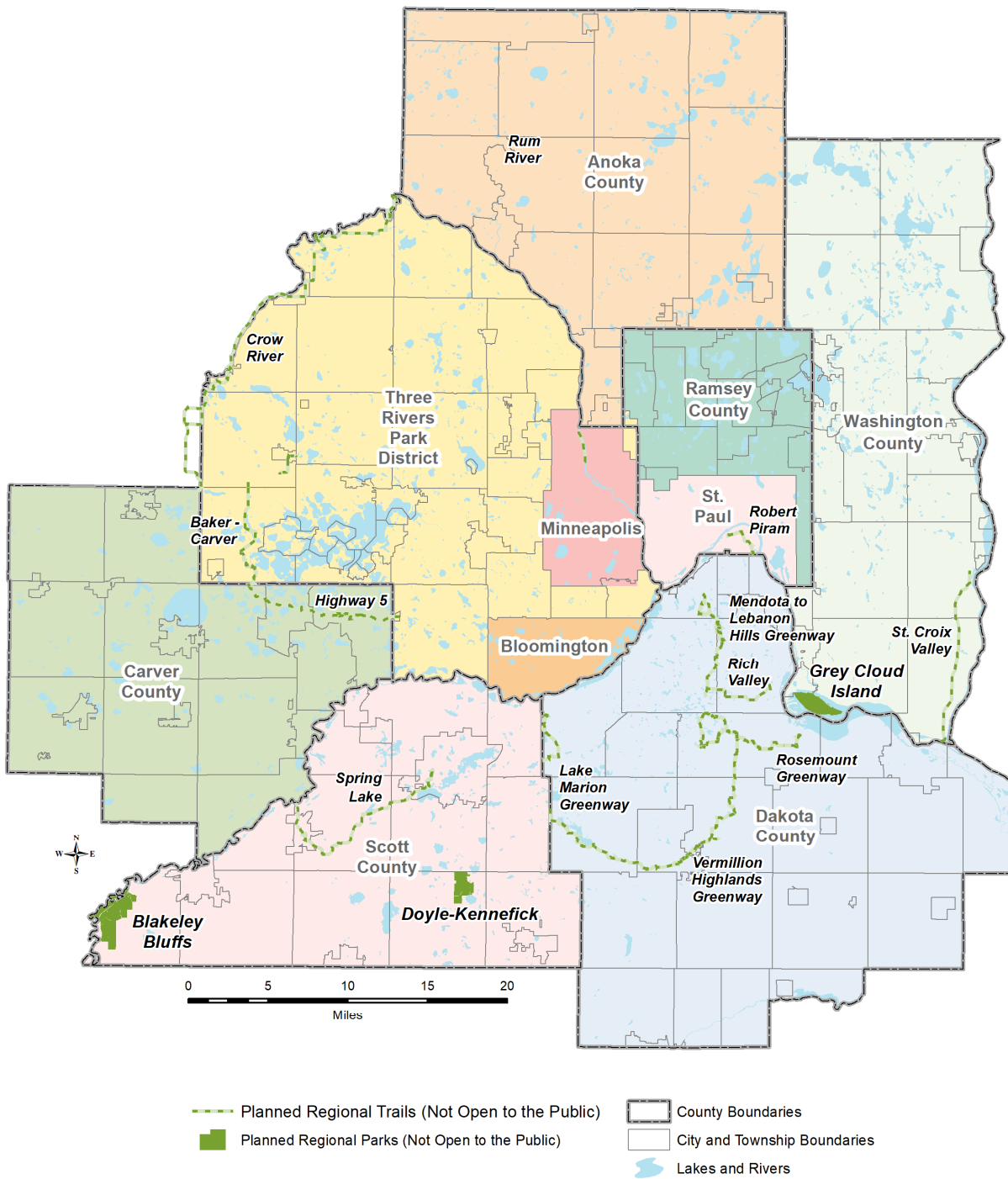
7 Eleven regional trails, totaling 155 miles, have Council-approved master plans, but are not yet
 8 developed or open to the public, as listed in Table 3-6 and shown in Figure 3-7.

9 *Table 3-6. Planned Regional Trails Not Open to the Public*

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park or Regional Trail	Trail Mileage
Carver County	Highway 5 Regional Trail	8.9
Dakota County	Lake Marion Greenway Regional Trail	20
Dakota County	Rich Valley Regional Trail	5
Dakota County	Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway Regional Trail	8.5
Dakota County	Rosemount Greenway Regional Trail	13
Dakota County	Vermillion Highlands Greenway Regional Trail	13
Scott County	Spring Lake Regional Trail	13.5
Saint Paul	Robert Piram Regional Trail	3.4
Three Rivers Park District	Baker-Carver Regional Trail	17
Three Rivers Park District	Crow River Regional Trail	32
Washington County	St. Croix Valley Regional Trail	20.5

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 11

1 *Figure 3-7. Planned Regional Parks and Trails Not Yet Open to the Public*



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1 **Regional Park Boundary Adjustments**

2 The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* recommends Master Plan Boundary Adjustments for one park
 3 reserve, one regional park, and one regional trail. The proposed adjustments to existing regional parks
 4 and trails were identified to protect areas of high-quality natural resources and/or provide recreational
 5 opportunities.

6 These proposed boundary adjustment areas are included in the 2040 System Plan and described in
 7 Table 3-7.

8 *Table 3-7. Master Plan Boundary Adjustments*

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Parks System Unit	Estimated Acreage	Description
Anoka County	Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve	250	Add area adjacent to the northeast side of the park reserve that includes wetland that could be protected
Carver County	Baylor Regional Park	100	Acquire approximately 100 acres of land adjacent to Eagle Lake, including lakeshore
Ramsey County	Rice Creek North Regional Trail	7	Add 6.8 acres of land to the trail corridor that is adjacent to the Minnesota Department of Transportation Training and Conference Center in Arden Hills to help buffer Rice Creek and the adjacent floodplain.

9

10

1 **Regional Park Search Areas**

2 Three regional park search areas, totaling approximately 3,200 acres, are described in Table 3-8.
 3 Figure 3-8 shows a map of the regional park boundary adjustment and regional park search areas.

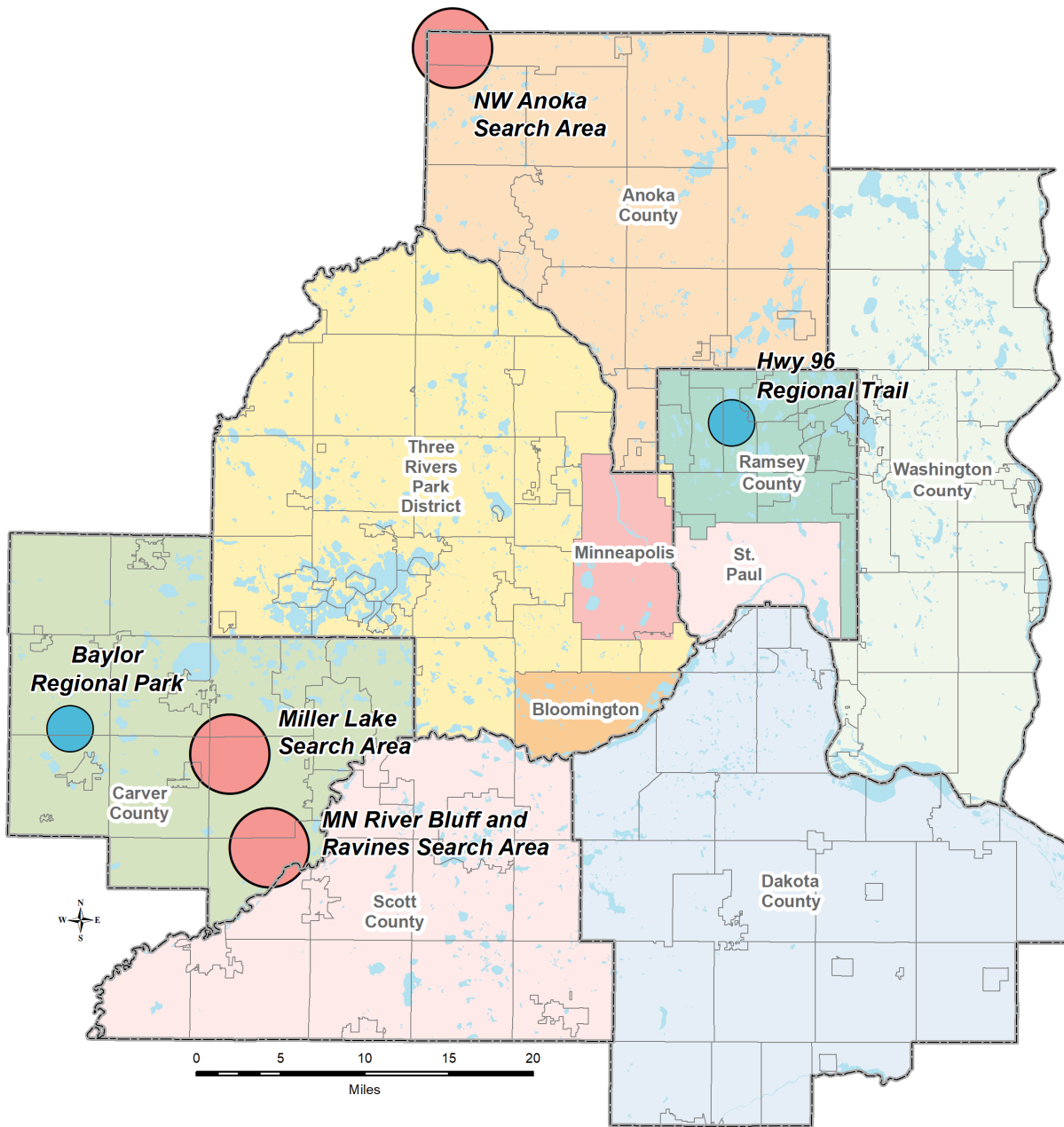
4 *Table 3-8. Regional Park Search Areas*

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park Search Area	Estimated Acreage	Description
Anoka County	Northwest Anoka County Regional Park Search Area	2,500	Very high-quality natural resource area unique in Anoka County.
Carver County	Miller Lake Regional Park Search Area	200	Very attractive lake resource and appropriate setting for a regional park
Carver County	Minnesota Bluffs and Ravines Regional Park Search Area	500	Large areas of regionally significant natural resources, excellent recreation potential.

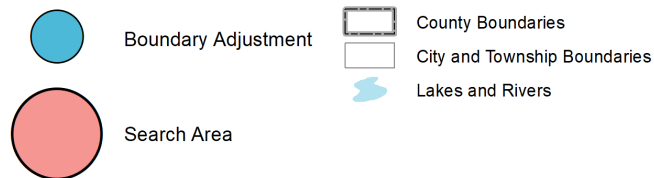
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1 *Figure 3-8. Regional Park Boundary Adjustments and Search Areas*



Boundary Adjustments and Regional Park Search Areas



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1 **Regional Trail Search Corridors**

2 There are 48 proposed regional trails without Council-approved master plans that identify the trail
 3 alignments. Many of these trails have been considered part of the Regional Parks System for several
 4 years and were mapped in previous Regional Parks Policy Plans as proposed trails showing a tentative
 5 alignment. Since alignments for these trails have not yet been approved by the Council as part of a
 6 master plan and are therefore not eligible for Regional Parks System funding for acquisition and
 7 development, they are being shown as regional trail search corridors. The estimated mileage of these
 8 regional trail search corridors is 514 miles. Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to
 9 prepare master plans for these trails. The regional trail search corridors are listed in Table 3-9 and
 10 shown in Figure 3-9.

11 *Table 3-9. Regional Trail Search Corridors*

	Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles
1	Anoka County	North Anoka County	22
2	Bloomington	South Hennepin East (CP Rail)	9
3	Bloomington & Three Rivers Park District	South Hennepin West (CP Rail)	14
4	Carver County	County Road 10	19
5	Carver County	County Road 61	1
6	Carver County	Highway 41	7.5
7	Carver County	Lake Waconia	6
8	Carver County	Lake Waconia-Carver	13
9	Carver County	Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Extension	6
10	Carver County	Twin Cities & Western	25
11	Carver County	Western Carver County	17
12	Carver County & Three Rivers Park District	Highway 101	9
13	Dakota County	Chub Creek Greenway	20
14	Dakota County	Lebanon Hills-Big Rivers	7
15	Dakota County	Lebanon Hills-Lake Marion	7
16	Dakota County	Vermillion River Greenway	17
17	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Grand Rounds Missing Link	3.5
18	Ramsey County	St. Anthony RR Spur	10.24
19	Ramsey County	Trout Brook Extension	3.5
20	Ramsey County & Saint Paul	Lexington Avenue/Parkway	16

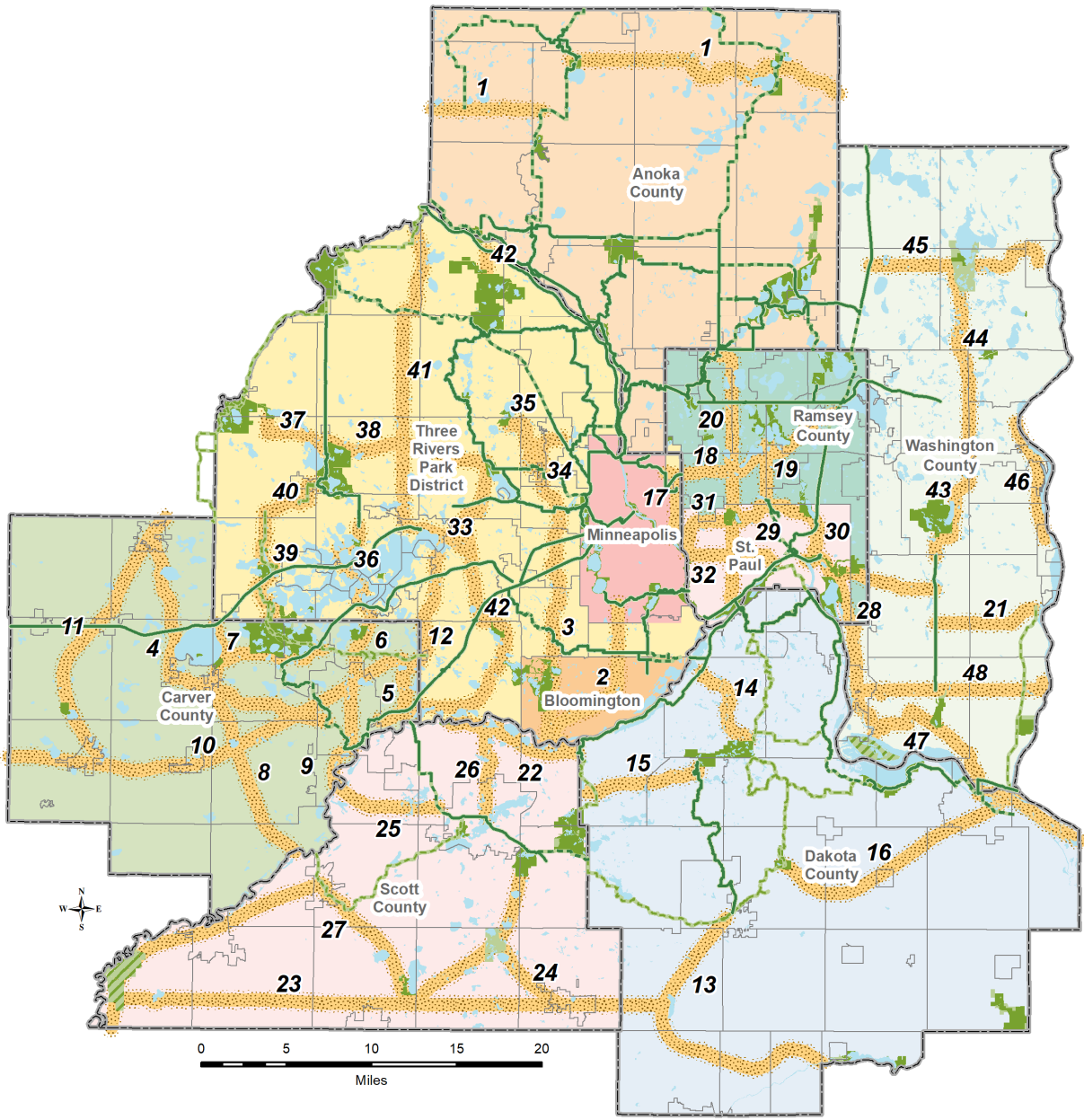
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	Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles
21	Ramsey County& Washington County	Afton Bluffs	17
22	Scott County	Big Rivers Extension	5
23	Scott County	Elko New Market-Blakeley-Doyle Kennefick	32
24	Scott County	Elko New Market-Doyle Kennefick	5
25	Scott County	Louisville	5
26	Scott County	Prior Lake Outlet	6
27	Scott County	Southern Scott	35
28	Saint Paul	Point Douglas (Bruce Vento-Washington County)	4
29	Saint Paul	Como-Phalen (Wheelock Parkway)	6
30	Saint Paul	Johnson Parkway	2
31	Saint Paul	Mississippi-Como	4
32	Saint Paul	Summit Ave.	4.9
33	Three Rivers Park District	Dakota Rail Extension	2
34	Three Rivers Park District	CP Rail Extension	5.5
35	Three Rivers Park District	Eagle Lake-Bassett Creek	4
36	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Independence Extension	7
37	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Sarah	5.5
38	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Sarah Extension	10
39	Three Rivers Park District	Minnetrista	9
40	Three Rivers Park District	Minnetrista Extension	2.2
41	Three Rivers Park District	North-South 1	28
42	Three Rivers Park District	North-South 2	20
43	Washington County	Central Greenway Regional Trail – Lake Elmo Segment	7.7
44	Washington County	Central Greenway Regional Trail – North Segment	12
45	Washington County	Glacial Hills	12
46	Washington County	Middle St. Croix Valley	8
47	Washington County	Mississippi River	13
48	Washington County	Prairie View	9











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2

1 *Figure 3-9. Regional Trail Search Corridor Map*



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-9

-  Regional Trail Search Corridors
-  Regional Parks (Open to the Public)
-  Regional Parks (Not Open to the Public)
-  Planned Parks (Not Open to the Public)
-  Regional Trails (Open to the Public)
-  Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
-  Planned Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
-  County Boundaries
-  City and Township Boundaries
-  Lakes and Rivers

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3

1 **Revisions to the Regional Parks System Plan**

2 Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1, states that:

3 The Metropolitan Council, after consultation with the [Metropolitan] Parks and Open Space
4 Commission...and after appropriate public hearings, shall prepare and adopt a long-range system
5 policy plan for regional recreation open space as part of the Council’s Metropolitan Development
6 Guide...The policy plan shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency
7 to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal
8 facilities, which together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the
9 people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development.

10 Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subd. 14 defines “regional recreation open space” as:

11 ...land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities determined by the Metropolitan Council to be
12 of regional importance in providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the
13 metropolitan area, including but not limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large
14 recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use facilities.

15 Consistent with these laws, the Council will evaluate proposed additions to the Regional Parks System
16 to determine whether the general areas are of regional importance and will help provide a balanced
17 system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area. Additionally, the proposed additions must
18 meet the applicable criteria described in Chapter 4 for regional parks, park reserves, special recreation
19 features, or regional trails.

20 *Regional Park Study Areas*

21 Typically, new regional parks are proposed as search areas that have been identified based on high-
22 quality natural resources located in portions of the region where population growth is expected.
23 However, there are times when a regional park implementing agency may want to propose including
24 existing parks into the Regional Parks System. In an effort to make an informed decision, further study
25 is required to assess whether the proposed addition is of regional significance. The proposed area for
26 consideration is called a Regional Park Study Area. Designation as a Regional Park Study Area does
27 not guarantee that a park will become part of the Regional Parks System. It acknowledges that studies
28 would need to be conducted to determine whether the facility warrants regional status. Once these
29 studies are complete, the information would be presented to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space
30 Commission and the Council for evaluation.

31 The Council conducts regularly scheduled visitor use studies to understand, among other things, visitor
32 use patterns. The most recent study conducted in 2016 shows that the number of non-local visits (visits
33 to regional parks made by people who do not live in the jurisdiction of the respective regional park
34 implementing agency where the park is located) are declining. The Council will watch this important
35 trend in the coming years. For now, study areas must meet a 40% non-local visitor threshold to qualify
36 for regional park designation. Non-local visitation is determined through collecting data from existing
37 visitors in the proposed park.

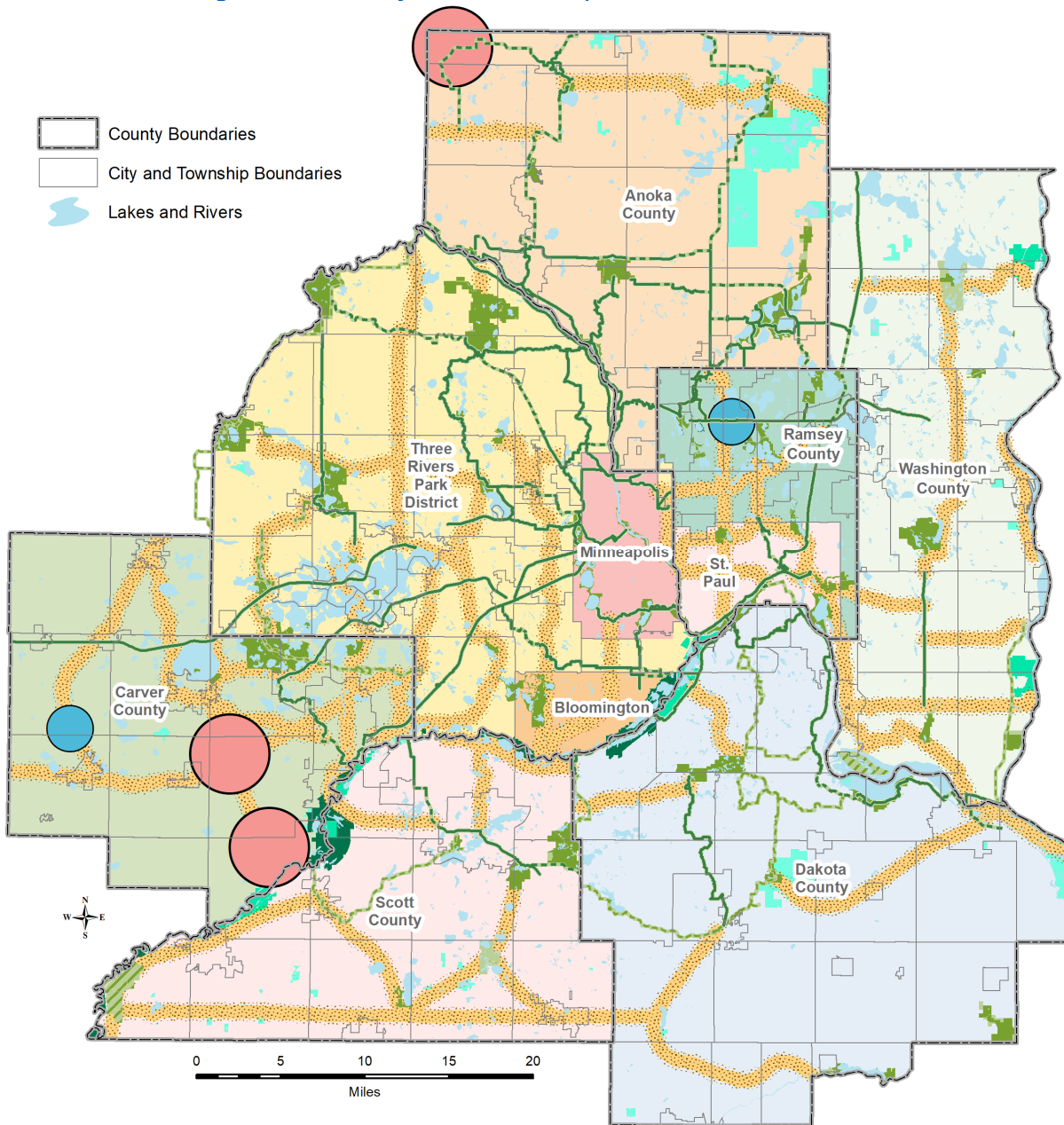
1 *2040 Regional Parks System Plan Summary*

2 As Figure 3-11 illustrates, the updated 2040 System Plan includes:




- 3 • Regional Parks System facilities open to the public (2018)
 - 4 – 43 regional parks
 - 5 – 12 park reserves
 - 6 – 8 special recreation features
 - 7 – 51 regional trails, consisting of 389 miles
- 8 • Planned Regional Parks System facilities that are not yet open to the public
 - 9 – 2 regional parks
 - 10 – 1 park reserve
 - 11 – 11 regional trails, consisting of approximately 155 miles
- 12 • Regional Parks System Boundary Adjustments
 - 13 – 1 regional parks
 - 14 – 1 park reserves
 - 15 – 1 regional trail corridor
- 16 • Regional Park Search Areas
 - 17 – 3 regional park search areas
- 18 • Regional Trail Search Corridors
 - 19 – 48 regional trail search corridors, with approximately 514 miles
- 20 • 2040 Update System Additions³
 - 21 – System additions were not considered as part of this update
 - 22

³ 2040 Update System Additions may be added at a later date with consultation from our partners and community stakeholders.

1 *Figure 3-10. 2040 Regional Parks System Plan Map*



Regional Park Search Areas and Regional Trail Search Corridors

-  Park Boundary Adjustments
-  Park Search Areas
-  Regional Trail Search Corridors

-  Regional Parks (Open to the Public)
-  Regional Parks (Not Open to the Public)
-  Planned Parks (Not Open to the Public)
-  Regional Trails (Open to the Public)
-  Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
-  Planned Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
-  State Wildlife Management Areas
-  State Parks
-  MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge
-  Minnesota Valley State Trail and Recreation Area

1 **Introduction to the Policy and Strategy Framework of the Regional Parks**
2 **System**

- 3
4 Chapter Four: Siting and Acquisition
5 Chapter Five: Planning
6 Chapter Six: System Protection
7 Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities
8 Chapter Eight: Finance

9 The next five chapters provide the policy and strategy framework under which the Regional Parks
10 System operates. These chapters identify the kind of regional recreation open space facilities and
11 services the region needs to acquire, develop, and operate in the future. The policies provide direction
12 to ongoing efforts to plan, develop, operate, and protect the system.

13 The strategies are short- to medium-term actions that will advance the policies. Some of the strategies
14 represent actions that the Council will take in developing the system or responding to conditions. Other
15 strategies are directed to the regional park implementing agencies involved in implementation of the
16 plan. The strategies are accumulative actions; each contributes to achieving the Council's policies.
17 Guidelines for implementation and administration are found in the new Grant Program Guide that is the
18 operational companion to this Policy Plan.

1 **Chapter Four: Siting and Acquisition Policy and Strategies**

2 *Siting and Acquisition Policy*

3 ***Identify lands with high-quality natural resources that are desirable for Regional Parks***
 4 ***System activities and put these lands in a protected status so they will be available for***
 5 ***recreational uses and conservation purposes in perpetuity.***

6 *Process and Criteria Overview for System Additions*

7 The legislative charge to the Council is to prepare a policy plan that "...shall identify generally the areas
 8 which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space
 9 comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which, together with state facilities, reasonably
 10 will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area and shall establish
 11 priorities for acquisition and development" (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1).

12 Adding a unit to the Regional Parks System, outside of a Regional Parks Policy Plan update, requires
 13 that the Council conduct a formal Regional Parks Policy Plan amendment process that includes a
 14 public hearing. In 2019, the Council will convene a region-wide discussion about system additions.

15 The Council's role in this effort is to convene an evaluation process where the proposed idea may be
 16 considered within a larger regional context.

17 The following Regional Parks System criteria provide an overview of the decision making framework to
 18 use when considering an addition to the system. The framework is broad enough to cover the
 19 predominant factors critical to each of the Regional Parks System units – Regional Parks, Park
 20 Reserves, Regional Trails, and Special Recreation Features – yet it is limited enough to be
 21 manageable and focus the conversation on the critical elements that matter most.

22 *Table 4.1 Regional Parks System: General Criteria*

Regional Parks Units must meet all criteria	Park Reserves Units must meet all criteria	Special Recreation Features * Required
Draws visitors from across the region	Draws visitors from across the region	Draws visitors from across the region
Provides for geographic balance	Provides for geographic balance	Provides for geographic balance
Conserves a diversity of high-quality natural resources, either naturally occurring or human built, that support outdoor recreation activities	Conserves a diversity of high quality natural resources that support outdoor recreation activities	* Provides a unique high-quality outdoor recreation experience
At least 100 acres; typically, 200-500 acres	At least 1000 acres	* Provides a natural resource-based and scenic setting offering a compelling sense of place

Chapter Four: Siting and Acquisition Policy and Strategies

Regional Parks Units must meet all criteria	Park Reserves Units must meet all criteria	Special Recreation Features * Required
Accommodates a variety of outdoor recreation activities	80% of unit managed as natural lands that protect the ecological functioning of a native landscape	* Demonstrates the existence or potential for drawing a regional audience
		Serves as a bridging facility, intended to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks System
		Has a unique managing or programming effort
		* Complements the Regional Parks System

1

2 *Figure 4.2 Regional Parks System: Regional Trails Criteria*

Regional Trails: General * Required	Regional Trails: Destination (also known as Greenways) * Required	Regional Trails: Linking * Required
* Serves a regional audience based on visitor origin and service-area research on regional trails	* Provides high-quality natural resource-based “destination” trail experience	Links two or more units of the Regional Parks System
* Benefits the regional trail system and does not duplicate an existing trail	* Highly scenic and/or natural setting	Links to or complements national, state, regional, and/or other local trails
Connects two or more units of the Regional Parks System	* Extensively visually separated from road system (more than 50% off-road)	Links to or complements federal, state, regional, or multiple local parks, recreation facilities, and natural resource areas
Serves as backbone to local trail network, with regional trail functioning much like regional highway that interconnects with more local arterials and local streets	No spacing minimums	* Should be at least 1.5 miles apart so as not to overlap the localized service area of those trails. There are times when meandering linking trails will come in closer proximity to one another, but broadly speaking are not parallel
* Fills a gap in the regional recreation system	* Provides opportunities to conserve, enhance, or restore natural resources	May be on-road separated treadway

Regional Trails: General * Required	Regional Trails: Destination (also known as Greenways) * Required	Regional Trails: Linking * Required
Connects to multiple public interest destinations such as schools, job centers, tourist destinations, historical, cultural, and architectural buildings and sites, and commercial districts	May contain natural features in the greenway or adjacent to the trail treadway that provides important ecological services	
May utilize surface rights of utility corridors such as large sewer lines		

1 **Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 1: Priorities**

2 ***Lands with natural resource features, access to water, and/or restoration potential will***
 3 ***be a priority for the Regional Parks System.***

4 Future Council designation of lands for the Regional Parks System should emphasize important natural
 5 resource features, access to water bodies, and natural resource features that enhance outdoor
 6 recreation.

7 Water is a major attraction in almost every park unit of the Regional Parks System and an amenity
 8 along many regional trails. Most surface water is publicly held, with the waterbeds owned by the state,
 9 so it is a critical function of the Regional Parks System to provide this access.

10 Major considerations in deciding which lands should be brought into the Regional Parks System are:

- 11 • Acquiring lands with natural qualities most desirable for the outdoor recreational activities
- 12 • Protecting an important natural resource feature, such as linking other natural resource areas or
 13 water bodies together, which in turn provide a larger natural habitat opportunity; help protect or
 14 improve water quality, or provide habitat for protected or endangered species

15 Ensuring regional park facilities are evenly distributed around the metropolitan area or distributed in
 16 proportion to the existing and forecasted urban development Past acquisition activity has tended to
 17 favor lands with high-quality natural resources over even geographic distribution. As the Regional Parks
 18 System matures, and available land with high-quality natural resources becomes more scarce,
 19 acquisition of lands with restoration potential have increased in importance. For example, lands with
 20 restoration potential include agricultural lands that were formerly prairie and naturalizing channelized
 21 streams.

22 The restoration of urban areas that include natural resource features (for example, Above the Falls
 23 Regional Park and the Bruce Vento Regional Trail and Nature Sanctuary) have provided opportunities
 24 to create regional park sites or regional trails in urban areas that have been home to a range of uses,
 25 including industrial ones.

1 **Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 2: Geographic balance**

2 ***Geographic balance or proportionate distribution tied to population distribution***
3 ***patterns shall be a consideration when exploring system additions.***

4 Geographic balance or proportionate distribution tied to population distribution patterns will be an
5 important consideration when exploring system additions. There are other considerations that factor
6 into system additions, including supply of regional recreation opportunities, access to natural amenities,
7 among other things.

8 Regional recreation open space is defined as "...land and water areas, or interests therein, and
9 facilities determined by the Council to be of regional importance in providing for a balanced system of
10 public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area, including but not limited to park reserves, major
11 linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use facilities"
12 (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subd. 14).

13 The legislative directive is clear that regional parklands should be of "regional importance." Regional
14 importance is not directly defined in the law, but the legislative directive requires that regional
15 parklands, plus state facilities, should reasonably meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of
16 the metropolitan area. Therefore, lands of "regional importance" would be comparable in size, draw
17 users from rather large geographic areas, and contain natural resources similar to the state parks and
18 trails in the metropolitan region. Lands that serve only a municipality or neighborhood are not
19 considered to have "regional importance."

20 **Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 3: Council-approved master plans**

21 ***Priorities for land acquisition are set by regional park implementing agencies in***
22 ***Council-approved master plans.***

23 Priorities for acquiring park and park reserve lands identified in Council-approved master plans are
24 lands that are available for purchase now, which would be lost to the Regional Parks System if timely
25 action is not taken, and that are:

- 26
- Essential to protect the natural resources that define a park or park reserve and make it usable
27 to the public as planned.
 - Essential for the park or park reserve to reach its full-service potential for regional natural
28 resource-based outdoor recreation as defined in the Council's Regional Parks System plan and
29 the park unit's master plan.
30

31 Most master plans provide for a range of recreational activities and developments that require lands in
32 addition to those strictly needed to protect and enjoy the prime natural resource base. The full intent of
33 the master plan will not be realized until these additional lands have been acquired for the system.

34 All privately-owned parcels within a Council-approved master plan boundary are "inholdings" until they
35 are acquired. Some parcels have homes on them and are called "residential inholdings." The
36 acquisition of inholding parcels – especially those containing homes or those likely to be developed for
37 residential or other urban uses – should be protected by first-right options to purchase, official mapping,

1 life estates or other means. It is imperative that efforts are made to acquire these parcels because
2 every time the land is sold to another private party, the land remains unavailable for Regional Parks
3 System purposes. If once-vacant land is developed for housing or other uses, it may become
4 unreasonably expensive to acquire and is essentially lost to the Regional Parks System.

5 The Council, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, will work with
6 regional park implementing agencies to systematically review inholding parcels that have been
7 developed to determine whether the land is essential to protect the natural resources that define the
8 park and make it usable to the public as planned, or whether the land is essential for the park or park
9 reserve to reach its full service potential for regional natural resource-based outdoor recreation as
10 defined in this policy plan and the park unit's master plan. The results of that review may conclude that
11 some parcels or a portion of a parcel no longer meet those requirements and should be removed from
12 the park's boundary through a master plan amendment. For example, historically small parcels with
13 homes on the edge of parks have either been removed from the park boundary or subdivided, with the
14 undeveloped land acquired for the park and the home removed from the park boundary.

15 Because of strong public attraction to water resources, acquisition of any additional public water
16 frontage identified in a Council-approved master plan should be given a very high priority. The high
17 demand and rapidly escalating value of water frontage will only make those lands costlier in the future.
18 The priority is to acquire water frontage lands when they are most affordable – when they are
19 undeveloped or, at least, developed with less expensive homes. Trying to convert land with water
20 frontage to public use after it has been fully developed can be difficult and expensive.

21 **Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 4: New regional trails**

22 ***New regional trails must serve a regional audience and provide connections between***
23 ***regional parks, park reserves, and regional trails without duplicating an existing trail.***

24 To qualify for regional trail status, an existing or proposed trail:

- 25 • must serve a regional audience, based on visitor origin and service-area research on regional
- 26 trails,
- 27 • should not duplicate an existing trail,
- 28 • should connect two or more units of the Regional Parks System, and/or
- 29 • should connect state or federal recreational units

30 The trail may include part of an existing county or local trail if it is a destination itself, providing a high-
31 quality recreation experience that traverses significant natural resource areas, and it links two or more
32 units of the Regional Parks System.

33 The regional trail system in the metropolitan area is like the highway system, with regional and local
34 components. The regional component consists of trails in the regional trail system and state
35 administered trails. These trails are complemented by shorter, local trails, which may eventually feed
36 into units of the regional trail system. The opportunities for interesting regional trail recreation

1 experiences are substantially enhanced where local trails intersect with or are reached by elements of
2 the regional system.

3 Visitor origin data from the Council's *2016 Regional Parks and Trails Survey* indicate that regional trails
4 in the metropolitan area are used most by people who live nearby or can reach the trail in a short
5 bicycle trip or drive. With more than 90% of the region's population living inside the Metropolitan Urban
6 Service Area, the priority is to develop trail corridors in this area. Some of the metropolitan area's inner-
7 ring suburbs are not close to regional parks and do not have large tracts of land that would be available
8 for future development of parks for the regional system. Regional trail development should be pursued
9 in these suburbs when the need has been identified, to help achieve geographic balance of Regional
10 Parks System facilities.

11 Occasionally, existing corridors previously used for railroad or road transportation become available for
12 new uses. This is particularly true of railroad rights-of-way that are no longer required for service. The
13 most likely new uses for these corridors are either recreational trails or transitways such as light-rail
14 transit, commuter rail, or bus rapid transit.

15 The availability of these corridors may offer excellent opportunities for the regional trail system to
16 expeditiously acquire links that would otherwise have to be assembled on a parcel-by-parcel basis. All
17 surplus corridors put on the market should be evaluated for their suitability as additions to the regional
18 trail system. If an available corridor traverses an area with high-quality natural resources, or if it
19 constitutes part of a link in the regional trail system, the corridor should be considered for trail use as
20 part of the Regional Parks System. In some cases, available corridors do not provide any linkages or
21 offer any potentially interesting trail recreation experience. In these cases, the corridors are not suitable
22 for inclusion in the Regional Parks System.

23 If a surplus corridor is wide enough to accommodate permanent use both as a transitway and for
24 recreational trail purposes, both uses should be explored. If a corridor can accommodate either transit
25 or trail recreation, but not both, then recreational uses should be explored on a temporary basis.
26 However, no significant long-term recreation investment will be made in the facility unless it will be in
27 operation for its useful design life of 10 years or more.

28 The Council has defined two major types of trails to serve the region: 1) destination or greenway trails
29 and 2) linking trails. Destination or greenway trails typically follow along routes with high-quality natural
30 resources, which make the trail itself a destination. Linking trails, on the other hand, are predominately
31 intended to provide linkages between various Regional Parks System units, most notably regional
32 parks, or park reserves, as well as other regional trails, state, and federal lands.

33 **Destination Regional Trails or Greenways** should be located to reasonably maximize the amount of
34 high-quality natural resources within the trail corridor boundaries. For destination regional trails or
35 greenways, there should be no spacing minimums or maximums between them; instead, the decision
36 to locate the trail should be based on the availability of existing high-quality natural resources or the
37 opportunity to restore, enhance, protect, or re-create natural resources.

38 The main criterion used to define regional parks and park reserves – the presence of high-quality
39 natural resources – is also relevant to the location of a destination regional trail or greenway. Attractive

Chapter Four: Siting and Acquisition Policy and Strategies

1 settings contribute strongly to the quality of trail recreational experience. Since trails or greenways are
2 linear elements, areas along rivers and streams or chains of lakes are excellent candidates for
3 incorporation into the regional trail system.

4 Natural features in the greenway or adjacent to the trail treadway serve ecological and environmental
5 educational purposes, too. Restoration and management practices emphasizing native species can
6 maintain and enhance the aesthetic, habitat, and other resource values of these areas.

7 **Linking Regional Trails** connect Regional Parks System units with each other, with other regional
8 trails, state and federal lands, and with other regional destinations. As such, linking trails are more likely
9 to be located within the Metropolitan Urban Service Area, as described in Chapter 1. Linking trails often
10 overlap with the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, as described in the Recreation Activities and
11 Facilities Chapter, as they may serve an important transportation function. For linking regional trails,
12 any two trails running parallel to each other, and not separated by natural or human-built barriers,
13 should be at least 1.5 miles apart so as not to overlap the localized service area of those trails.
14 Whenever possible, linking regional trails should be located to reasonably maximize inclusion of high-
15 quality natural resources and connections to local trails, areas of lifecycle and affordable housing, the
16 transit network, and areas of infill and redevelopment.

17 In the Metropolitan Urban Service Area, the siting of linking regional trails should consider both high-
18 quality natural resources and to major human-built or developed resources in the fully developed areas.
19 Interesting human-built resources include historical and architectural buildings and sites, education
20 facilities, cultural facilities, and major public and private buildings. Utilizing the surface rights of
21 underground utility corridors, such as large sewers, for trail purposes protects the utility for
22 access/maintenance and provides a linear corridor for the trail.

23 When determining the boundaries of regional trail corridors, regional park implementing agencies
24 should consider high-quality natural resource lands adjacent to the trail treadway to enhance the
25 natural resource values of the trail. This is especially appropriate when the trail treadway is primarily an
26 abandoned rail bed, in a power line corridor, or along a highway. These pockets of natural areas not
27 only enhance the recreational experience of the trail user but also enhance the values of the primary
28 land near the entire trail. Retaining these areas in their natural condition is the best use of the land,
29 especially if it would be difficult to develop them for other land uses. An example would be including
30 wetlands adjacent to the trail within the trail boundary. The wildlife habitat, water-quality values, plus the
31 aesthetic values of the wetlands enhance the trail user's experience and encourage best land-use
32 practices, since the wetland could not be developed economically compared to "dry" land.

33 Regional trails may pass through local parks along their route. The regional trails can enhance access
34 to these local parks, and the parks may provide amenities for trail users. Because of this synergy, there
35 may be a desire to incorporate these local parks into the regional trail corridor. However, these local
36 parks may not be regionally significant and may only serve a local audience. In determining whether an
37 existing local park should become part of the regional trail corridor, the Council will evaluate the request
38 in terms of its regional importance and whether the park itself serves a regional or local audience.

39 As described in Chapter 3, the 2040 Regional Parks System Plan Map includes over 700 miles of
40 planned regional trails and regional trail search corridors throughout the region. Regional trails are one

1 component of a more comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian network, which serves recreation and
2 transportation purposes. To that end, future regional trail proposals need to be evaluated within a
3 comprehensive, region-wide framework, most notably within the context of the Regional Bicycle
4 Transportation Network. This framework will ensure that regional facilities are not duplicated.

5 The Council will work with all the regional park implementing agencies to better integrate the regional
6 trail network across jurisdictions and to assess the role of proposed regional trails with respect to the
7 Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. Additionally, efforts will include a comprehensive evaluation
8 of funding for the regional trail system.

9 **Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 5: Special recreation features**

10 ***Special recreation features must enhance services and facilities already offered, not***
11 ***compete with, or duplicate them.***

12 Special recreation features proposed for inclusion in the Regional Parks System must:

- 13 • Be unique and complement or enhance the services already offered by the regional system
- 14 • Provide a natural resource-based and scenic setting offering a compelling sense of place
- 15 • Be capable of functioning within the existing management structure of the Regional Parks
16 System
- 17 • Not duplicate or compete with recreation facilities adequately provided by the public or private
18 sector
- 19 • Not deplete funds from other facilities in the system either because they have an existing or
20 committed financial base or because a prior agreement for a public subsidy has been reached
21 that is in the public’s interest
- 22 • Demonstrate the existence or potential for drawing a sizable number of people from throughout
23 the metropolitan area
- 24 • Be approved by the Council through the master plan process

25 Regional Parks System legislation indicates that the system should contain parks, park reserves and
26 trails, and zoos, conservatories, and “other special-use facilities” (Minn. Stat, 473.121, subd. 14). The
27 term “other special-use facilities” is not defined in legislation. This policy plan refers to them as a
28 special recreation feature, which is defined to be a facility that preserves, maintains, and provides
29 specialized or single-purpose recreational activities, such as:

Nature centers	Marinas
Zoos	Downhill ski areas
Conservatories	Arboretums
Display gardens	Hunter training education facilities
Sites of historic or archeological significance	Bridging facilities

30 Bridging facilities are specialized or single-purpose special recreation features that are intended to
31 attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks System. As of 2018, there are

Chapter Four: Siting and Acquisition Policy and Strategies

1 no bridging facilities in the Regional Parks System. As such, this may be an area for innovation,
2 creativity and partnership for the Council, regional park implementing agencies, and community
3 members. Bridging facilities may offer an opportunity to prototype a new idea that advances equitable
4 usage of the system by focusing on groups who are underusing the Regional Parks System.

5 Furthermore, special recreation features must:

- 6 • Contribute to the inventory of available and needed recreation opportunities
- 7 • Contain distinctive developments and/or unique natural landscapes not commonly found in the
8 parks, park reserves, and trails
- 9 • Require special programming or management

10 As of 2018, there are eight special recreation features open to the public:

Como Park Zoo	Kingswood	Silverwood
Como Conservatory	The Landing	Square Lake
Gale Woods Farm	Noerenberg Gardens	

11

1 Chapter Five: Planning Policy and Strategies

2 *Planning Policy*

3 *Promote master planning and help provide integrated resource planning across*
4 *jurisdictions.*

5 **Planning – Strategy 1: Master plan requirements**

6 *Regional park implementing agencies are required to prepare a master plan for each*
7 *Regional Parks System facility they own and/or operate.*

8 Minnesota Statutes, section 473.313 requires a master plan to be developed by each regional park
9 implementing agency in consultation with all affected municipalities. While the statute requires only one
10 master plan per regional park implementing agency, the Council requires individual master plans for
11 each regional park, park reserve, regional trail, and special recreation feature. Master plans prepared
12 by the regional park implementing agencies are critical in defining the specifics of acquisition,
13 development, and operation of regional facilities.

14 The plans include the regional park implementing agency's estimates of use and costs. The master
15 plan process allows residents to participate in the development of the plan and other units of
16 government to know what is planned for a park and how it affects them. Collectively, these master
17 plans form the regional park implementing agencies' part of the regional system plan. The Council
18 reviews master plans for consistency with this Regional Parks Policy Plan and other Council policy
19 plans. Inconsistent plans will be returned with comments to the regional park implementing agency,
20 which must revise and resubmit their plans to the Council. For a regional park implementing agency to
21 receive a grant for acquisition or development through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement
22 Program, the proposed project must be consistent with a Council-approved master plan.

23 *Master Plan Content Requirements*

24 Each master plan for regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features must include
25 information for each of these items:

- 26 • **Boundaries and acquisition costs.** A list of parcels to be acquired and the estimated total cost
27 and schedule for their acquisition, and information on natural resources, site suitability, special
28 assessments, potential contamination based on data from the Minnesota Pollution Control
29 Agency and other conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the boundaries.
- 30 • **Stewardship plan:** A program for managing park property, including activities, expenses, and
31 anticipated revenue prior to developing the property for recreation purposes. Planned non-
32 recreation uses and disposition of revenue from such use should be detailed.
- 33 • **Demand forecast:** The recreational demand to be met by the site as identified by the Council,
34 the regional park implementing agency, or other sources.
- 35 • **Development concept:** A plan for recreational development and natural resource management
36 that should include:

- 1 ○ Description and location of planned development and natural resources management
2 projects.
- 3 ○ Approximate capacity of each facility.
- 4 ○ Mapping of existing and planned local and regional trail connections to the site and
5 information on how they relate to development within the park.
- 6 ○ Wayfinding signage plan, indicating the types of signs and general locations within the
7 park.
- 8 ○ Information on the source and location of drinking water that is adequate for the
9 recreational uses of the park.
- 10 ○ Schedule and cost estimates for each project.
- 11 ○ Conflicts between recreational and natural-resource management needs in developing
12 the park/trail unit should be addressed and resolved. Amendments to an acquisition-
13 phase master plan should be made prior to funding recreation and visitor support
14 facilities if there is insufficient detail on the scale and cost of the facility. Alternatively, the
15 final design/engineering phase of a proposed facility should be funded first, with
16 construction funding provided in a separate capital improvement grant.
- 17 ● **Conflicts:** Identification of conflicts with other existing or proposed projects or land uses
18 affecting the park/trail unit, including steps necessary for their resolution.
- 19 ● **Public services:** A description of any non-recreational public services and facilities, such as
20 roads or sewers, needed to accommodate the proposed recreational use, including the timing of
21 these services and the arrangements necessary to provide them. Regional park implementing
22 agencies are encouraged to include transportation and transit planners in the development of a
23 master plan.
- 24 ● **Operations:** Rules, regulations or ordinances affecting the site, including estimated operations
25 and maintenance costs and sources of revenue to operate and maintain recreation facilities and
26 to manage natural resources in the park/trail unit. The operations plan should indicate how
27 energy to operate and maintain the park unit is being managed and conserved. The plan should
28 also state how solid waste from park users is recycled and disposed of consistent with
29 applicable laws.
- 30 ● **Partner engagement:** A process to involve affected agencies, local units of government, and
31 local, state, and federal recreation providers in the development of the master plan or plan
32 amendment. A master plan must describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned
33 above. The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned
34 master plan amendments to all affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state,
35 and federal recreation providers and address their concerns prior to submitting the plan to the
36 Council. The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments
37 received that identifies issues raised and content resulting from engagement efforts.
- 38 ● **Community engagement and participation:** A process to engage the public in the
39 development of the master plan or plan amendment. The public engagement process must seek
40 to mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic barriers and include people of diverse
41 races, ethnicities, classes, ages, abilities, and national origins. A master plan must include the
42 community engagement plan and describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned

1 above. The process must include opportunity for the public to be heard and to have influence
2 over the contents in the master plan. The Council will provide staff assistance, where
3 appropriate, providing agencies with population distributions for their jurisdictions by race,
4 ethnicity, ability, and income, thereby helping identify those communities who may be
5 underserved by the Regional Parks System. The regional park implementing agency shall
6 address public concerns prior to submitting the plan or amendment to the Council. The master
7 plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies
8 issues raised and content resulting from engagement efforts.

- 9 • **Public awareness:** Plans for making the public aware of services available when the regional
10 park is open, including how to access the park by transit, if applicable.
- 11 • **Accessibility:** A plan that addresses accessibility, affordability, and other measures designed
12 to ensure that the facility can be used by people with limited mobility. All new and updated
13 master plans for the Regional Parks System must address compliance with ADA. As stated in
14 Chapter 7, Recreation Activities and Facilities, regional park implementing agencies are
15 encouraged to use U.S. Access Board guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas as a minimum
16 standard of accessibility on all new or substantially altered capital projects within the Regional
17 Parks System.
- 18 • **Natural resources:** As part of the master plan, there should be a natural-resource management
19 component that includes:
 - 20 ○ A Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) as a part of the master plan process. An NRI
21 should include a land cover inventory that is consistent with the Minnesota Land Cover
22 Classification System developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
23 and the MetroGIS – a consortium of government entities in the region that create,
24 manage, and share digital geographic-based data in a geographic information system
25 (GIS). The natural resource inventory should include native plant communities mapped
26 in the Minnesota County Biological Survey and listed species (rare, endangered, and
27 threatened) that are documented in the Natural Heritage Information System. The
28 natural resource inventory may include other land-based information.
29 The Natural Resource Inventory should be a basis for projects/proposals to restore
30 degraded resources and maintain high-quality natural resource features, including the
31 estimated capital costs of natural resource restoration projects. Regional park
32 implementing agencies should consult with natural resource professionals in the design
33 and final construction of park facilities, especially trails, that are adjacent to or cross over
34 natural resource areas. The final design and construction should allow the public to view
35 and enjoy these natural habitats with minimal adverse impact on that habitat.
 - 36 ○ Information on how surface water and groundwater resources in the unit, including
37 wetlands, will be protected. This should include standards and requirements that are
38 consistent with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s best management practices for
39 storm water management. The master plan should include provisions to, first, avoid
40 wetland impacts; second, minimize impacts; and, finally, mitigate impacts when no other
41 options are available.
 - 42 ○ Information on how vegetation will be managed.

- For regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features located in part or wholly within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA), master plans must also address the following:
 - Acknowledge the purposes of the MRCCA designation as detailed in Minnesota Statutes, section 116G.15, subd. 1.
 - Acknowledge the standards and criteria for the preservation, protection, and management of lands within the MRCCA in Minn. Rule Chapters 6106.0010 – 6106.0180.
 - Map the location of the parkland and its relationship with the MRCCA boundary
 - Recognize that the design and construction of park facilities must comply with the standards contained in Minn. Rules 6106.0130.
 - Plan, design, and construct facilities and projects in a manner that protects primary conservation areas and public river corridor views identified by local units of government in their comprehensive plans.

The effective date for these master plan requirements is November 28, 2018, in acknowledgement of regional park implementing agency planning processes that may be underway when the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* is adopted.

Master plans for regional linking trails:

Each master plan for a regional linking trail must include information for each of these items:

- **Boundaries and acquisition costs:** A list of parcels to be acquired and the estimated total cost and schedule for their acquisition, and information on natural resources, site suitability, special assessments, potential contamination based on data from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and other conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the boundaries
- **Demand forecast:** The recreational demand to be met by the trail, as identified by the Council, the regional park implementing agency, or other sources
- **Development concept:** A plan for development, including schedule and cost estimates for the project. The plan should include:
 - Mapping of existing and planned local and regional trail connections to the trail corridor
 - Wayfinding signage plan, indicating the types of signs and general locations along the trail corridor
- **Conflicts:** Identification of conflicts with other existing or proposed projects or land uses affecting the park/trail unit, including steps necessary for their resolution
- **Public services:** A description of any non-recreational public services and facilities, such as roads or sewers, needed to accommodate the proposed trail, including the timing of these services and the arrangements necessary to provide them.
- **Operations:** Rules, regulations or ordinances affecting the trail, including estimated operations and maintenance costs and sources of revenue to operate and maintain the trail.
- **Public engagement and participation:** A process to engage the public and involve affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state, and federal recreation providers in the

1 development of the master plan. The public engagement process must seek to mitigate existing
2 racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic barriers and include people of diverse races, ethnicities,
3 classes, ages, abilities, and national origin. A master plan must include the public engagement
4 plan and describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned above. The process must
5 include opportunity for the public to be heard and to have influence over the contents in the
6 master plan. The Council will provide staff assistance, where appropriate.

7 Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to include transportation and transit
8 planners in the development of a master plan, when appropriate.

9 The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned amendments
10 to all affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state, and federal recreation
11 providers and address their concerns prior to submitting the plan to the Council. The master
12 plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies
13 issues raised and content resulting from engagement efforts.

- 14 • **Public awareness:** Plans for making the public aware of services available when the regional
15 trail is open, including how to access the trail by transit, if applicable.
- 16 • **Accessibility:** A plan that addresses accessibility, affordability, and other measures designed
17 to ensure that the facility can be used by people with limited mobility.

18 The effective date for these master plan requirements is November 28, 2018 in acknowledgement of
19 regional park implementing agency planning processes that may underway when the 2040 Regional
20 Parks Policy Plan is adopted.

21 *Master plans for regional destination trails or greenways:*

22 Master plans for regional destination trails or greenways shall include all the elements outlined above
23 for regional linking trails as well as a stewardship plan and natural resource inventory:

- 24 • **Stewardship plan:** A program for managing the surrounding greenway areas and natural
25 resource features.
- 26 • **Natural resources:** As part of the master plan, the natural resource management component
27 should include:
 - 28 ○ A Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) as a part of the master plan process. An NRI
29 should include a land cover inventory that is consistent with the Minnesota Land Cover
30 Classification system developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and
31 Metro GIS – a consortium of government entities in the region that create, manage, and
32 share digital geographic-based data in a geographic information system (GIS).

33 Using the same NRI format will ensure compatibility with other natural resource
34 inventories that have been completed or will be done in the metropolitan region. The
35 natural resource inventory should include native plant communities mapped in the
36 Minnesota County Biological Survey and listed species (rare, endangered, and
37 threatened) that are documented in the Natural Heritage Information System.

38 The Natural Resource Inventory should be a basis for projects/proposals to restore
39 degraded resources and maintain high-quality natural resource features, including the
40 estimated capital costs of natural resource restoration projects. Regional park

1 implementing agencies should consult with natural resource professionals in the design
2 and final construction of the trail/greenway that are adjacent to or cross over natural
3 resource areas. The final design and construction should allow the public to view and
4 enjoy these natural habitats, balancing conservation of natural resources with the
5 provision of recreational opportunities.

- 6 ○ Information on how surface water and groundwater resources in the unit, including
7 wetlands, will be protected. If appropriate, this should include standards and
8 requirements that are consistent with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's best
9 management practices for storm water management. The master plan should include
10 provisions to, first, avoid wetland impacts; second, minimize impacts; and, finally,
11 mitigate impacts when no other options are available.
- 12 ○ Information on how vegetation will be managed.
- 13 ○ For trails located in part or wholly within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area,
14 master plans must also address the following:
 - 15 ▪ Acknowledge the purposes of the MRCCA designation as detailed in Minnesota
16 Statutes, section section 116G.15, subd. 1.
 - 17 ▪ Acknowledge the standards and criteria for the preservation, protection, and
18 management of lands within the MRRCA.
 - 19 ▪ Map the location of the trail corridor and its relationship with the MRCCA
20 designation.
 - 21 ▪ Recognize that the design and construction of trail facilities must comply with the
22 standards contained in Minn. Rules 6106.0130.
 - 23 ▪ Plan, design, and construct facilities and projects in a manner that protects
24 primary conservation areas and public river corridor views identified by local units
25 of government in their comprehensive plans.

26 The effective date for these master plan requirements is November 28, 2018, in acknowledgement of
27 regional park implementing agency planning processes that may underway when the 2040 Regional
28 Parks Policy Plan is adopted.

29 *Design Considerations for Master Plans*

30 The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* incorporates the policy direction provided by *Thrive MSP 2040* to:

- 31 • Promote expanded multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit network,
32 where appropriate
- 33 • Strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such as
34 across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability

35 To respond to these goals, regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to consider the
36 following design elements in a regional park or trail master plan.

37 Promote expanded multimodal access:

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- 1 • Provide connections to transit stops or park-and-rides when designating the alignment of a
2 regional trail, where appropriate
- 3 • Provide bike racks and lockers located near activity areas in regional parks so visitors can
4 safely store their bikes as they recreate
- 5 • Design multiple entrance points to a regional park to make it easier for bicyclist or pedestrian to
6 access the park, where appropriate

7 Strengthening equitable usage:

- 8 • Provide amenities suited for the aging population and/or those with limited mobility, such as:
 - 9 ○ Siting picnic areas or short, looped trails close to parking lots or points of access
 - 10 ○ Providing benches as appropriate intervals along trails
- 11 • Designing non-fee picnic areas that accommodate mid-sized groups (for example, 15-25
12 people), which would allow for spontaneous gatherings:
 - 13 ○ Does not need to be a formal picnic shelter – could be several picnic tables grouped
14 together
 - 15 ○ Would not require an advance reservation
 - 16 ○ Does not replace picnic areas that require reservations – both options may be offered
- 17 • Clustering of amenities for multigenerational family gatherings, such as picnic areas near
18 playgrounds and open ball fields

19 *Amending a master plan*

20 *Minnesota Statutes, section 473.313* requires master plans be developed by the park implementing
21 agencies consistent with this Plan; however, it does not specify when revisions are necessary. The
22 regional park implementing agency will submit a master plan amendment to the Council to change its
23 original proposal for acquisition and/or development, or when the agency has developed significant
24 additional details that needs to be reflected in the master plan. The Council may approve or reject the
25 master plan amendment for cause and return the plan to the regional park implementing agency for
26 revisions to address the Council's concerns.

27 Regional park implementing agencies must provide an opportunity for the general public and affected
28 local units of government nearby the particular park or trail to participate in the process to amend a
29 master plan. With regard to financing the construction of recreation and visitor support facilities
30 proposed in a master plan, it is important that there is sufficient detail about the facility in the master
31 plan and that the regional park implementing agency is ready to construct the facility when funds
32 become available. If a master plan amendment is needed before funding the construction of a facility,
33 the regional park implementing agency must provide the general public and affected local units of
34 government an opportunity to participate in the process, as well.

35 There are several reasons when master plan amendments are required to demonstrate how changes to
36 the Regional Parks System remain consistent with the Council's expectations as outlined in this Plan.
37 They include:

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- 1 • Improvements that substantially differ in type, size, scale or cost from those in the Council-
- 2 approved master plan and the adopted capital improvement program in order to meet expanded
- 3 local recreational demands or satisfy above-average quality standards (see Planning – Strategy
- 4 4, later in this chapter).
- 5 • Changes to a park or trail boundary.
- 6 • Significant changes or additions to a regional park concessioners agreement (see Chapter 7:
- 7 Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 1)
- 8 • Proposals for placement of telecommunications towers on Regional Parks System land (see
- 9 Chapter 6: System Protection – Strategy 5)

10 The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and Council will then review the master plan
11 amendment for consistency with the conditions of this policy and either approve, modify, or reject the
12 master plan amendment.

13 **Planning – Strategy 2: Enhanced multimodal access**

14 *Promote enhanced multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit*
15 *system, where appropriate.*

16 The Regional Parks System plays a key role in advancing the livability of the region by increasing
17 access to nature and outdoor recreation, thereby supporting healthy lifestyles and active living. The
18 Council has a unique opportunity to help achieve this objective, through its roles in planning and
19 operating the transit system as well as planning for the Regional Parks System.

- 20 • In addition to design considerations for master plans discussed in the previous section, regional
- 21 park implementing agencies are encouraged to:
- 22 • Provide transit schedules and information at regional parks that are served by transit
- 23 • Include information on how to access a regional park or trail by transit on their agency’s website,
- 24 where applicable
- 25 • Improve wayfinding signage
- 26 • Promote regional trails with existing Transportation Management Organizations (TMOs). A
- 27 TMO is public-private partnership that provides marketing and advocacy to promote multi-modal
- 28 options for daily commutes
 - 29 ○ Commute Solutions: serves Anoka County
 - 30 ○ Commuter Connection: serves downtown Minneapolis
 - 31 ○ Commuter Services: serves Bloomington, Eden Prairie, Edina, Minnetonka, and
 - 32 Richfield along the Interstate 494 corridor
- 33 • Coordinate with local jurisdictions to identify and plan for local trail connections to regional parks
- 34 and trails as well as last mile connections from transit
- 35 • Collaborate with bike-share programs to site bike stations near regional parks and trails

36 The Council will explore the following projects:

- 1 • Collaborate with local agencies to develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Wayfinding Best Practices
2 Guide
- 3 • Collaborate with Metro Transit or local transit providers to determine the feasibility of the
4 following actions:
 - 5 ○ Promoting regional parks at bus stops
 - 6 ○ Exploring options for siting new park-and-rides near or adjacent to regional parks, or
7 new regional trails near park-and-rides or fixed-route transit lines
 - 8 ○ Promoting a transit day pass or family pass to regional parks
 - 9 ○ Providing free rides to large special events in regional parks
 - 10 ○ Adding transit stops that are convenient to regional parks and trails

11 **Planning – Strategy 3: Joint powers agreements**

12 ***Joint powers agreements for regional trails are encouraged.***

13 Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to enter into joint-powers agreements with local
14 governments regarding the acquisition and operations/maintenance of regional trails.

15 Joint-powers agreements need not be identical, but regional park implementing agencies are
16 encouraged to negotiate arrangements that:

- 17 • address the primary issue of how trail land ownership is controlled and how the trail is going to
18 be managed, and
- 19 • ensure that the trail will be open to all people (not restricted by residence). The trail should be
20 treated as a truly regional facility, since it will be eligible for regional and state funds to finance
21 its acquisition, development, and operations/maintenance once the Council has approved a
22 master plan for the regional trail

23 The duration of the joint-powers agreements should last the expected life of the trail and should be
24 included in the trail master plans submitted to the Council as an assurance that any funds provided by
25 the Council for the trail would be spent consistent with the Council-approved trail master plan.

26 Regional trails usually extend through several communities. Unlike regional parks, where the regional
27 park implementing agency owns the park and usually coordinates with one or two local governments,
28 regional trails affect several local governments and the land on which the regional trail travels may not
29 be owned by the regional park implementing agency. The regional park implementing agency may
30 lease the trail land and manage it through a joint-powers agreement with a local jurisdiction.

31 Regional park implementing agencies should include a copy of any joint-powers agreements as part of
32 the regional trail master plan. This assures the Council that any funds it provides or passes on for the
33 trail's acquisition, development or operations/maintenance will be consistent with the Council-approved
34 master plan.

1 **Planning – Strategy 4: Cost sharing**

2 ***Projects may share costs, if they are consistent with a Council-approved master plan.***

3 A regional park implementing agency may wish to make improvements that substantially differ in type,
4 size, scale, or cost from those in the Council-approved master plan and the adopted capital
5 improvement program, to meet expanded local recreational demands or satisfy above-average quality
6 standards. These improvements are subject to Council approval of an amended master plan.

7 Projects that are consistent with a Council-approved master plan, but exceed regional need as
8 determined by the Council may proceed on a cost-sharing basis. Regional park implementing agencies
9 must obtain Council approval in advance of undertaking cost-shared developments.

10 The master plan must include a funding proposal under which regional funds will be used only for the
11 regional service facilities, not for facilities intended to serve local needs. In fairness to other regional
12 park implementing agencies, it is necessary for the Council to limit funds to what is necessary to cover
13 average improvements that will deliver adequate services, and not to pay for excessively ornate or
14 elaborate facilities.

15 Even if all of the improvement funds come from regional park implementing agency sources or are
16 raised through cost-sharing arrangements with other governments or the private sector, the regional
17 park implementing agency must secure Council approval of a master plan amendment. All Regional
18 Parks System lands must be committed to specific long-term planned uses. These lands must be
19 protected from the intrusion of activities and developments that are incompatible with the planned uses
20 of the regional parks, park reserves, and trails, regardless of how the development was funded.

21 The regional park implementing agency may be required to pay the full amount or the extra portion of
22 the project cost when the regional park implementing agency wants to develop a facility sooner than the
23 Council has determined that it is needed to meet regional demand, or at a scale greater than regional
24 demand warrants, or at a higher cost than the Council finds necessary to serve the regional interest.
25 The following conditions apply to projects funded on a cost-sharing basis:

- 26 • The project must meet the same requirements of master planning and Council approval as any
27 other Regional Parks System projects.
- 28 • Costs incurred by the regional park implementing agency as the local share of the project are
29 not reimbursable.
- 30 • Where funds are available from private sources or sources other than the regional park
31 implementing agency to share in project costs, the Council will work directly with the affected
32 regional park implementing agency.

1 **Chapter Six: System Protection Policy and Strategies**

2 *System Protection Policy*

3 *Protect public investment in acquisition and development by assuring that every*
4 *component in the system is able to fully carry out its designated role as long as a need*
5 *for it can be demonstrated.*

6 The Council has in place several mechanisms that protect the integrity of the Regional Parks System
7 and of individual parts of the system:

- 8 • **Master plans:** The master plan defines acceptable activities within a system unit. The regional
9 park implementing agencies must receive Council approval before proceeding with any activities
10 inconsistent with the existing Council-approved master plan.
- 11 • **Restrictive covenants:** Regional park implementing agencies are required to record restrictive
12 covenants on lands purchased with regional funds, to ensure that the land remains in regional
13 recreation open space use in perpetuity, unless the Council agrees to a change.
- 14 • **Metropolitan Land Planning Act:** Proposed plans of local governments that have a substantial
15 impact on or represent a substantial departure from the Regional Parks System Plan may be
16 subject to a required plan modification by the Council to ensure that the system is protected.
- 17 • **Metropolitan significance:** Proposed development projects that have a substantial impact on
18 or represent a substantial departure from the Regional Parks System Plan may be required to
19 undergo a review for metropolitan significance, with up to a one-year delay in development if the
20 project is found to adversely affect the system.

21 These standards in the metropolitan significance rules and in the plan amendment guidelines are
22 currently used to determine an effect on or a substantial departure from the Regional Parks System:

- 23 • Impacts on the use of Regional Parks System facilities include, but are not limited to traffic,
24 safety, noise, visual obstructions (for example, to scenic overlooks), impaired use of the facilities
25 or interference with the operation or maintenance of the facilities.
- 26 • Impacts on natural resources include, but are not limited to, the impact on the level, flow, or
27 quality of a facility's water resources (lakes, streams, wetlands, groundwater) and impact on a
28 facility's wildlife populations or habitats (migration routes, breeding sites, plant communities).
- 29 • A proposed project is considered to have an impact on the system if it may preclude or
30 substantially limit the future acquisition of land in an area identified in the system plan of the
31 Council's Regional Parks Policy Plan.

32 **System Protection – Strategy 1: Local Comprehensive Plans**

33 *Local comprehensive plans may need to be changed if planned land uses would have a*
34 *negative impact on current or planned regional park lands or facilities.*

35 The Council may require plan modifications to local comprehensive plans, updates, or amendments if
36 they:

Chapter Six: System Protection Policy and Strategies

- 1 • Will more likely than not have adverse and substantial impacts on the current or future intended
2 uses of the Regional Parks System lands or facilities, or
- 3 • Are likely to have adverse and substantial impacts on lands that are officially recommended for
4 acquisition in an adopted policy plan.

5 There is a strong case for intervention in situations where potentially adverse land uses are proposed
6 after a site for a Regional Parks System facility has been adopted by the Council in the System Plan
7 section of this policy plan. Local governments will be notified of any changes to the *2040 Regional*
8 *Parks Policy Plan* following Council adoption of the changes and will be given nine months to bring
9 local plans and ordinances into conformance with the Council's plan.

10 The Council will review local comprehensive plan amendments and environmental documents to
11 ensure that Regional Parks System sites and facilities are protected from land uses or projects that:

- 12 • Represent substantial departures from the Regional Parks System Plan, or are likely to have a
13 substantial impact on the Regional Parks System

14 Substantial departures from the Regional Parks System Plan or impacts on the Regional Parks System
15 may include, but are not limited to:

- 16 • Plans that don't acknowledge the presence of the Regional Parks System unit
- 17 • Projects that create safety issues for Regional Parks System users
- 18 • Projects that impair the use and enjoyment of the Regional Parks System unit due to excessive
19 noise, air pollution or water pollution, and
- 20 • Projects that interfere with the operation and maintenance of the Regional Parks System unit

21 Where appropriate, the Council will initiate or accept for initiation a metropolitan significance review of
22 specific projects if it is necessary to help protect the Regional Parks System. A project that is consistent
23 with a Council-approved local comprehensive plan is exempt from metropolitan significance reviews for
24 metropolitan system effects.

25 In accordance with the Council's Thrive approach, increasing population densities in urban areas is
26 preferable to scattered developments throughout the rural and agricultural areas of the metropolitan
27 region. Increasing population densities adjacent to urban Regional Parks System units is not a
28 detriment to those units if the urban development is designed in ways that are sensitive to areas that
29 enjoy scenic views and the natural features of the Regional Parks System unit, and do not interfere with
30 the operation and maintenance of the unit. The Council will work cooperatively with local governments
31 to help ensure urban development and land uses in areas adjacent to Regional Parks System units
32 occur in ways that preserve the integrity of the Regional Parks System.

33 **System Protection – Strategy 2: Conversions**

34 ***Conversion of Regional Parks System lands to other uses is allowed only in limited***
35 ***circumstances and with approval of the Metropolitan Council.***

36 Lands in the Regional Parks System will only be converted to other uses if approved by the
37 Metropolitan Council through an equally valuable land or facility exchange as defined below:

1 **“Equally valuable land”** is defined as land that:

- 2 • Is contiguous to the Regional Parks System unit containing the land proposed to be exchanged
- 3 (within the same park/trail unit)
- 4 • Has comparable or better natural resource characteristics, and
- 5 • Could provide comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land being released from
- 6 the covenant

7 In exceptional circumstances, the Metropolitan Council may accept as equally valuable land the

8 addition of land to another unit of the Regional Parks System where:

- 9 • The replacement land has comparable or better natural resource characteristics
- 10 • The replacement land has comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land being
- 11 converted, and
- 12 • No other reasonable alternative exists and where all other provisions of this policy can be met

13 **“Equally valuable facility”** is defined as an exchange of land for facilities when recreational benefits

14 and/or natural resource benefits are increased as a result of the exchange. For example, some land

15 within a regional trail corridor may be exchanged to widen a highway if a highway department

16 constructs a trail overpass or underpass of the widened road at no cost to the regional park

17 implementing agency.

18 The Metropolitan Council will consider conversion of regional park land to other uses only if the

19 conversion will not harm the Regional Parks System. The following criteria will be used to determine

20 whether Regional Parks System lands may be exchanged for other land or a facility:

21 *Issues with respect to the existing park system unit:*

- 22 • Whether the park system unit can continue to meet Council standards for sites and site
- 23 attributes established for the particular type of park system unit (regional park, park reserve, trail
- 24 greenway or special recreation feature)
- 25 • Whether the park system unit will continue to function as originally planned
- 26 • Whether environmental features (wildlife habitat, water quality) will be adversely affected and
- 27 can be protected with the new use
- 28 • Whether the loss of site or function will be made up through acquisition of a site with
- 29 comparable characteristics adjacent to or in the immediate area of the current location
- 30 • Whether the park system unit benefits from a facility in exchange for the parkland
- 31 • Whether the need for the conversion, as in the instance of transportation improvements, is
- 32 generated by the recreational park system unit

33 *Issues with respect to the alternative use:*

- 34 • The land area needs of the proposed project
- 35 • Whether the specific site requirements for the proposed project are unique to the area proposed
- 36 for conversion
- 37 • Whether the proposed project is consistent with Council policies

- 1 • Whether the proposed project is of greater benefit to the region than having the Regional Parks
2 System unit remain in place

3 For those changes that represent a potential system impact, the Council will use a process comparable
4 to the review period for policy plan amendment that have a potential impact on the regional system.
5 The Council will use an expedited review for conversions such as small exchanges of land to provide
6 right-of-way for access.

7 Lands in the Regional Parks System may be subject to proposals for converting their use for a number
8 of reasons. Some very limited conversions may be accommodated and still not affect the ability of the
9 remaining area to offer the facilities and services planned. A well-designed transit waiting station, or a
10 properly located and operated yard waste compost site could be of positive value to the regional
11 system and can be worked out between the proposing parties, the implementing agencies, and the
12 Council in accordance with the system management guidelines.

13 However, most conversions are likely to detract from the ability to provide the type and quality of
14 outdoor recreation experiences promised in the master plan. Some of the undesirable conversion
15 impacts will be obvious and direct, such as unsightly landscapes or structures, barriers to movement,
16 loud noises, and night light or obnoxious odors. Other conversion impacts are more indirect, such as
17 those that affect water quality and plant and animal life. In addition to adversely affecting the Regional
18 Parks System's ability to deliver service, removal of lands for non-recreation open space uses also sets
19 a bad precedent.

20 *Restrictive covenants:*

21 The Metropolitan Council requires that a restrictive covenant must be recorded on all land that has
22 been acquired for the Regional Parks System using regional funds. The restrictive covenant ensures
23 the parkland is used in perpetuity for Regional Parks System purposes and ensures that there is no
24 sale, lease, mortgage of the parkland or other conveyance, restriction or encumbrance filed against the
25 property unless the Council approves the action in writing and the Council's approval is recorded
26 against the parkland.

27 The only restrictive covenant amendments approved by the Council in which no land was exchanged
28 were for small strips of land needed for public highway improvements. The land was needed to make
29 roads safer and there was no alternative. These projects also improved access to the adjacent
30 Regional Parks System unit.

31 **System Protection – Strategy 3: Reimbursement for contamination**

32 ***The Council will reimburse regional park implementing agencies for contamination*** 33 ***cleanup under certain conditions.***

34 The Council will consider using Regional Parks System funds for soil contamination cleanup
35 (remediation) or capping abandoned wells that have contaminated their groundwater aquifer on
36 Regional Parks System land.

37

1 **For lands already under regional park implementing agency control:**

2 A regional park implementing agency may use its share of regional park capital improvement funds for
3 financing soil contamination remediation or capping abandoned wells that have contaminated their
4 ground-water aquifer on regional park land if the following conditions are met:

- 5 • The land is already under ownership or control of a regional park implementing agency through
6 a joint powers agreement or lease, and was acquired or was under the regional park
7 implementing agency's control before Phase 1 environmental assessments were required.
- 8 • The land is essential to make the regional park or trail function as intended according to a
9 Council-approved master plan, and no reasonable alternative exists to relocate the park or trail
10 facilities elsewhere.
- 11 • The park or trail is essential in contributing to strengthening neighborhood livability consistent
12 with *Thrive MSP 2040*.
- 13 • The cost of cleanup does not qualify for federal or state soil contamination cleanup funds or
14 abandoned well-capping funds from any other program, or funding has been denied.
- 15 • The regional park implementing agency has an agreement with the party that will
16 remediate/clean up the contamination or cap an abandoned well that absolves the regional park
17 implementing agency from any future liability of pollution caused by the contaminated soil or
18 contaminated groundwater.

19 **For lands proposed to be acquired by a regional park implementing agency:**

20 A regional park implementing agency may request a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant to
21 partially finance soil contamination cleanup (remediation) or capping abandoned wells that have
22 contaminated their ground water aquifer on land that is proposed for acquisition. See the Program
23 Guide for further information.

24 **System Protection – Strategy 4: Environmental Site Assessments**

25 ***Environment Site Assessments must be conducted for land that may be contaminated***
26 ***or may have abandoned wells prior to seeking regional parks funding for acquisition.***

27 Regional park implementing agencies must conduct Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments on land
28 that is suspected to be contaminated or land suspected to have abandoned wells as part its due
29 diligence process for land acquisition. The Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment will determine the
30 likelihood of soil contamination or abandoned wells, including the likelihood of contaminated
31 groundwater aquifers. The findings of the site assessments should be included in the grant request
32 submitted to the Council. If the results of the Phase 1 Site Assessment identify a need for further
33 investigation, it may be necessary for the park implementing agency to proceed to a Phase 2
34 Environmental Site Assessment.

35 The costs of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 Environmental Site Assessments are eligible for reimbursement
36 as an acquisition cost. For more information about eligibility and associated acquisition costs, see the
37 Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund section of the Program Guide.

1 Prior to the Council determining whether the contaminated land, including lands with abandoned wells,
2 should be part of the regional park or trail corridor, the Council will make findings of fact regarding the
3 following factors:

- 4 • The likelihood and extent of the contamination
- 5 • Whether the land is essential to make the regional park or trail function as intended according to
6 a Council-approved master plan and the existence of a reasonable alternative to relocate the
7 park or trail facilities elsewhere
- 8 • Whether responsible parties have been identified who will remediate the site
- 9 • Whether the estimated costs to clean up the contamination or cap the abandoned well(s)
10 outweigh the need versus the recreational, economic, and social benefits the regional park or
11 trail would provide

12 If the Council concludes that the land should be added to the Regional Parks System, it does not
13 guarantee that the contamination remediation will be funded through the Regional Parks System
14 funding.

15 **System Protection – Strategy 5: Telecommunication towers**

16 *Telecommunication towers will only be allowed in regional parks or reserves if there is*
17 *no alternative site and if mitigation efforts are made to minimize the impact on Regional*
18 *Parks System lands and users.*

19 The growth in wireless cellular and broadband systems and implementation of the regional public safety
20 radio system has resulted in requests that Regional Parks System land be leased for antenna towers or
21 that towers be located on or near Regional Parks System lands. Each of these radio frequency
22 communication systems relies on a grid placement of towers. Co-location of antennas on fewer towers
23 is not always possible, however, because the size of a particular grid varies from one system to
24 another. In addition, co-location of antennas on one tower may not be possible if it causes frequency
25 interference between the antennas. Federal laws allow local governments to regulate the placement of
26 towers as long as there is no ban preventing reasonable market access for that communication system.

27 Antenna towers for telecommunication services and the regional public safety radio system are
28 generally prohibited on lands within the Council-approved master plan boundaries of a Regional Parks
29 System unit unless:

- 30 • The communication system is not able to function without placement of the tower on Regional
31 Parks System land. All other alternatives must be considered for placement within the grid in
32 order to avoid placing any tower on Regional Parks System land. The communication service
33 provider must demonstrate that this criterion is satisfied in requesting approval by the Council
34 and regional park implementing agency to place a tower on Regional Parks System land. The
35 only exception to this condition is that a tower for the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System
36 may be placed on Regional Parks System land even if it could be placed on private land
37 instead, upon meeting the following mitigation conditions:
 - 38 ○ If there is no feasible alternative to placing the tower on park land, the tower's impact on
39 the Regional Parks System land must be minimized.

Chapter Six: System Protection Policy and Strategies

- 1 ○ The tower must be screened from view of regional park/trail users as much as possible
- 2 through tower placement and design features agreed to by the regional park
- 3 implementing agency.
- 4 ○ The tower must be located on land that has already undergone regional park or trail
- 5 development and is accessible through the existing park road system. Land in park
- 6 reserves or regional parks conserved for habitat restoration and interpretation must be
- 7 avoided.
- 8 ● Co-location of antennas on one tower is preferred over constructing several towers if co-location
- 9 has less visual and other environmental impacts on Regional Parks System land. The only
- 10 exception to this condition is if co-location would result in frequency interference between
- 11 antennas.
- 12 ● Payments for placing telecommunication towers in regional parks or park reserves should be
- 13 dedicated to the regional park implementing agency that owns the land for acquisition,
- 14 redevelopment, development, or operations and maintenance of its Regional Parks System
- 15 units.

16 Regional park implementing agencies must submit a master plan amendment to the Council for review
17 that proposes a tower placement. The master plan amendment should state how the conditions listed
18 above have been met. The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Council will then
19 review the master plan amendment for consistency with the conditions of this policy and either approve,
20 modify, or reject the master plan amendment.

21 If the land for the tower's location has a restrictive covenant on it (required for land acquired with
22 regional funds), the regional park implementing agency shall amend the covenant to recognize the
23 temporary use of the tower with any conditions required for the tower's lease and submit the amended
24 covenant to the Council as part of the master plan amendment.

25 The Council will consider the master plan amendment and the restrictive covenant amendment
26 concurrently and either approve or disapprove them, based on whether the tower will negatively affect
27 the Regional Parks System unit. If a regional park implementing agency believes that a tower should
28 not be placed on Regional Parks System land because the tower could not meet the conditions of this
29 policy, the regional park implementing agency has the authority to deny the application.

30 Tower placement on Regional Parks System land shall be considered a temporary non-recreation use.
31 As stated previously, any lease revenues for the tower easement must be used by the regional park
32 implementing agency to further the acquisition, redevelopment, development, or
33 operations/maintenance of that regional park implementing agency's portion of the Regional Parks
34 System. The regional park implementing agency must report the annual lease revenues to the Council
35 and how the revenues were spent if they exceed \$2,500 per year. Regional park implementing
36 agencies are encouraged to charge "at cost" fees for public safety radio equipment on towers located
37 on Regional Parks System land.

1 **System Protection – Strategy 6: Placement of wastewater facilities**

2 *Regional wastewater infrastructure and other utilities on Regional Parks System lands*
3 *should be placed in ways that minimize negative impact on the regional park, its*
4 *facilities, and its users.*

5 To provide sanitary sewer services to Regional Parks System facilities and/or to implement the regional
6 wastewater system plan, the Council’s Environmental Services Division will work cooperatively with
7 regional park implementing agencies to locate regional wastewater conveyance facilities on Regional
8 Parks System lands in a manner that minimizes the impact on existing and planned park system
9 facilities and natural resources.

10 For new Regional Parks System facilities, the Council reserves the option to include an easement for a
11 future regional wastewater infrastructure as a condition of a Council grant used to acquire land,
12 provided that the conveyance is consistent with the Council-approved master plan. If the Council
13 requires an easement for a future regional wastewater infrastructure as a condition of its park
14 acquisition grant, the Council will fairly compensate the regional park implementing agency. For
15 wastewater infrastructure located in existing Regional Parks System facilities, the Council shall have
16 the option to purchase an easement or a license.

17 To distribute electricity, natural gas, oil and drinking water, it may be necessary to place underground
18 conduits/pipes or aboveground transmission poles/towers on Regional Parks System lands. Such
19 utilities may be needed to serve visitors at that Regional Parks System unit, and to serve other land.
20 Regional park implementing agencies should collaborate with the utility provider to determine where
21 these utilities should be placed that minimizes impacts on the Regional Parks System unit’s natural
22 resources and on its existing and future recreation and visitor support facilities, while providing
23 reasonable access to the utility line for repair and maintenance.

24 Regional park implementing agencies may either sell or grant an easement or a license to the utility
25 provider that specifies where the utility may be located, conditions for access to the utility, how impacts
26 to the park by placement, repair or relocation of the utility will be mitigated and any time limit on the
27 easement or permit. The utility provider may have to pay for the easement or permit based on the
28 benefit the utility provides to the Regional Parks System unit.

1 **Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies**

2 *Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy*

3 *Provide a regional system of recreation opportunities for all residents and visitors while conserving the*
4 *integrity of the natural resource base within the Regional Parks System on which these opportunities*
5 *depend.*

6 **Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 1: Balance conservation and recreation**

7 **Activities in regional parks should balance the conservation and restoration of natural**
8 **resources with the provision of recreational opportunities.**

9 [Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147](#) requires the Council to prepare a policy plan that “...shall identify
10 generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional
11 recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which, together with
12 state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area
13 and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development.”

14 [Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121](#), subd. 14 defines regional recreation open space as “...land and
15 water areas, or interests therein, and facilities determined by the Council to be of regional importance in
16 providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area, including but not
17 limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos,
18 and other special use facilities.”

19 Based on the legislative direction and definition of “regional recreation open space,” activities and
20 facilities in the Regional Parks System should meet the following criteria:

- 21 • Be tied to high-quality natural resources and to the balanced distribution of these resources
22 around the area.
- 23 • Require land acreage to serve a regional scale audience
- 24 • Avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects and restore and enhance environmental
25 quality
- 26 • Be compatible with the other uses and activities, minimizing user conflicts and preserving user
27 experiences. These uses should be consistent with current master plan or other regional park
28 implementing agency policy board decisions.
- 29 • Help conserve, enhance, and/or restore the natural-resource base while balancing user access
30 through facility development.
- 31 • Remove or reduce barriers that prevent use of the regional system such as safety and access
32 concerns, cost, transportation, and lack of information about programming and facilities.
- 33 • Meet the changing recreational preferences to increase use of the Regional Parks System by all
34 the residents of the region, across race, ethnicity, income, and ability.

Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies

1 The above criteria provide a framework to ensure the Regional Park System can remain responsive to
2 changing recreational needs while protecting the underlying character of each unit's natural
3 environment.

4 The following activities meet the above criteria and have served as the base of the Regional Parks
5 System's activities since its inception in the early 1970's:

Boating	Horseback riding
Bicycling	Nature appreciation
Camping	Picnicking
Cross country skiing	Snowshoeing
Cultural or historical interpretation	Snowmobiling (in some cases)
Fishing	Swimming
Hiking/walking/trail running	Wildlife viewing

6

7 This list of activities describes primary activities of the regional parks system. Secondary or support
8 activities and/or facilities should complement the primary use. Support facilities could serve specific
9 users and communities, augmenting the desirability of the primary facility. Water-based facilities are an
10 example of this relationship. Swimming is a primary activity in the regional parks system. Development
11 of a water feature support facility could meet a targeted need while, if planned, designed, and
12 implemented well, maintain the integrity of the system. Further study and development of performance
13 criteria to encourage both innovation and preservation of character is an ongoing commitment by
14 Metropolitan Council staff in coordination with park agencies, other partners and stakeholders.

15 The regional activities listed above tend to require large tracts of land, or land endowed with unique
16 natural resources, or both. The land needs are easier to meet at the regional level than at the municipal
17 level and the associated activities are more likely to be developed or provided at a regional level than
18 by cities and townships.

19 When it was established in the 1970s, the Regional Parks System included several existing parks that
20 had activities not currently considered appropriate for inclusion in the regional system. Many of these
21 activities continue to operate legitimately today, such as ball diamonds and tennis courts, but they are
22 not eligible for regional funding for improvement or expansion.

23 The regional park implementing agencies acquire land for the Regional Parks System with the intent
24 that it may eventually be developed to provide for the recreational activities listed above. The list of
25 activities above has served the regional system well over the last 40 years and has helped to fend off
26 efforts to acquire and develop Regional Parks System lands for other ventures.

27 When considering whether to accommodate a new activity, the regional park implementing agency
28 must first assess how well the proposed activity meets the criteria described above. To accommodate
29 new recreation activities that meet these standards, the agency will need to assess whether to
30 incorporate any needed physical changes to the Regional Parks System landscape, which requires a
31 master plan amendment (see Planning Chapter 5). For example, mixing motorized and non-motorized
32 trail uses, such as snowmobiling and hiking, requires appropriate trail design and possibly speed

Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies

1 controls and signage to safely accommodate both uses. Regional park implementing agencies are
2 encouraged to engage the public to develop solutions to any multi-use trail conflicts. In some instances,
3 there may be no need for any physical change to the regional park or trail unit, but a change in visitor or
4 park management rules or policies may be necessary, such as allowing off-leash dog use on a trail, for
5 example. Such park and trail management issues should be resolved by the regional park
6 implementing agency's policy board after appropriate public input and consideration of how these
7 management changes affect the regional park's environment, users, and the adjacent property.

8 There has been a demand for organized amateur athletic facilities that serve several municipalities or
9 organized league play within a municipality. Municipal recreation departments and/or school districts
10 provide these athletic field complexes. The Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission (MASC) is
11 responsible for elevating the social and economic benefits of sports to enrich the lives of all
12 Minnesotans. Grants for such facilities go through the MASC, not the Council. Such athletic field
13 complexes do not require a high-quality natural-resource land base; they are easier to develop on
14 formerly disturbed lands. As such, athletic field complexes are inappropriate for development on
15 Regional Parks System lands. However, informal ball fields that can be used for a variety of pickup
16 games are encouraged in the Regional Parks System. The concept of an informal ball field encourages
17 recreational use in this manner, but is not intended for programmed or league sports, since those
18 services are offered in other recreational settings.

19 Off-road vehicles (ORVs) are defined as all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-road motorcycles (ORMs) and
20 four-wheel-drive vehicles being used off designated roads. For this *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*,
21 snowmobiles are not considered to be ORVs. Snowmobiles have been permitted on regional trails and
22 in some regional parks when local ordinances and the regional park implementing agency have
23 authorized such use. Local units of government in the rural areas of the region also work with the
24 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and snowmobile clubs to provide rights-of-way for
25 snowmobile trails that link to other trails outside the region. The Council acknowledges that the
26 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has statutory authority under Minnesota Statutes,
27 section 84.03 to provide for regulated use of off-road vehicles through its management of several
28 legislatively dedicated accounts that contain license receipts and a portion of Minnesota gas tax
29 revenues from the use of these vehicles. Siting and managing an off-road vehicle use area in the region
30 that doesn't adversely affect nearby land uses and natural resources will require cooperation between
31 the affected local unit of government and the DNR. Regional park implementing agencies may
32 participate in siting an off-road vehicle use area, but the lead responsibility for siting and funding the
33 area will be provided by the DNR under the authority it is granted in statute.

34 Regional park concessioners may operate within the Regional Parks System if the appropriate
35 approvals from the regional park implementing agency have been obtained, as each agency may have
36 different policies and procedures in place. Concessioners must provide park related amenities and
37 services to park visitors without negatively impacting the natural resources of the regional park.
38 Regional park implementing agencies must contact the Council to determine whether a master plan
39 amendment is required to accommodate the concessioners.

40 In summary, the initial decision as to whether a new activity can and should be accommodated is
41 determined by the regional park implementing agency responsible for the regional park, park reserve,
42 special recreation feature, and regional trail. The Council will become involved if the regional park

1 implementing agency decides it would like to accommodate a new activity, but the Council deems the
2 use incompatible with the nature-based system or finds that a master plan amendment is necessary
3 before the new activity can be accommodated.

4 **Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 2: Range of recreation opportunities**

5 *The Regional Parks System provides a range of outdoor recreation opportunities, from*
6 *developed to rustic. Regional park implementing agencies should focus heavy*
7 *recreational use in the more developed parts of the system and lower impact uses in the*
8 *more natural parts of the system.*

9 Facilities that attract many users require large capacity roads and connection to a municipal sewage
10 treatment system. These facilities should be confined to regional parks and park reserves located in the
11 region's Metropolitan Urban Service Area, as defined in Chapter 1, unless the demands for heavily
12 used services cannot be adequately met at Regional Parks System units in those areas. If facilities
13 need to be developed in the Rural Service Area, the master plan should justify facilities that will attract
14 large numbers of users and indicate how support services and facilities, such as roads and sewers, will
15 be provided.

16 Many regional parks and park reserves are located in the Rural Service Area because undeveloped
17 high-quality natural resources, a major criterion for determining lands that are appropriate for the
18 Regional Parks System, are more common in the less developed parts of the region. Many of the rural
19 park reserves were existing parks that were designated as regional recreation open space when the
20 Regional Parks System was established in 1974. In order to build up a large recreational land reserve
21 to be used for future population growth, the Regional Parks System has acquired land in the Rural
22 Service Area.

23 Much of the demand for recreational facilities, especially those that attract large numbers of users, can
24 be adequately accommodated at properties in the Metropolitan Urban Service Area. Some activities,
25 such as nature study, camping, and water recreation, are more likely at parks or park reserves located
26 in the Rural Service Area. Intense developments at parks and park reserves in the Rural Service Area
27 should be the exception rather than the rule and should be considered on a project by project basis.
28 Developments intended to enhance the protection and preservation of natural resources, whether in the
29 Metropolitan Urban Service Area or the Rural Service Area, advance the strong conservation role of the
30 Regional Parks System, particularly park reserves.

31 **Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 3: Equitable use**

32 *Promote equitable use of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such as*
33 *across race, ethnicity, income, and ability.*

34 The regional park implementing agencies provide outstanding facilities, amenities, staffing, and
35 programming to offer a welcoming environment. Activities hosted within the Regional Parks System
36 include a breadth of opportunities for visitors, such as movies and music in the park, day camps,
37 festivals, nature programming, among others. The benefits of park use are numerous, including
38 improvements to physical health, well-being, learning, family bonding, and community building, inspiring

Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies

1 a legacy of stewardship that strengthens friendships, families, health, and spirit. All residents should
2 have the opportunity to enjoy the bountiful resources the Regional Parks System provides.

3 The regional park implementing agencies should act to remove or reduce barriers which prevent use of
4 the regional system. Barriers may include safety concerns, cost, transportation, and lack of information
5 about programming and facilities. If needed, new facilities and/or programs (including marketing
6 programs) should be designed to increase use of the Regional Parks System by all the residents of the
7 region, across race, ethnicity, income, and ability.

8 The Regional Parks System has been designed and developed to provide outdoor recreation
9 opportunities for all the residents of the area, with facilities and services geared to meet the demands
10 and abilities of the general population. To accommodate people of all abilities, regional park
11 implementing agencies should construct facilities using universal design principles, to ensure
12 reasonable access. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed by the U.S. Congress in 1990,
13 has created specific requirements for development and rehabilitation projects in the Regional Parks
14 System. All new projects and updated master plans for the system include ADA review. Regional park
15 implementing agencies should use U.S. Access Board's *Final Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas*
16 as a minimum standard of accessibility on all new or substantially altered capital projects within the
17 Regional Parks System. Additionally, regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to provide
18 participants with physical disabilities similar park and trail experiences through better design, accessible
19 facilities, and adaptive programs.

20 Findings from the 2016 Regional Parks Visitor Study found that the relative proportion of visits from
21 people of color to the Regional Parks System increased since the 2008 study. However, more work
22 remains and the Council and regional park implementing agencies are committed to continue
23 increasing the equitable use of system.

24 In 2014, the Council released its research findings on Regional Parks System use among select
25 communities of color. The Council held 16 focus groups throughout the metropolitan region to assess
26 recreational preferences, barriers to recreation participation, and suggestions to enhance participation.
27 In sum, 263 individuals participated in the focus groups and self-reported diverse racial, ethnic, and
28 cultural backgrounds. Study findings revealed the most preferred outdoor recreational activities
29 included walking, picnicking or barbequing, and playground use. In terms of barriers to using the
30 Regional Parks System, the most frequently identified barriers were lack of awareness, available time,
31 fear or safety concerns, language barriers, and weather. Focus group participants identified key
32 suggestions to enhance park use, including:

- 33 • Increasing awareness
- 34 • Addressing safety
- 35 • Enhancing capacity of gathering spaces
- 36 • Creating a regional park ambassador program
- 37 • Increasing and diversifying programming
- 38 • Providing more events in regional parks

Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies

1 In addition to the study noted above, the Council invited feedback from around the region to identify
2 strategies that would have the greatest impact on strengthening equitable use of the Regional Parks
3 System. Based on the insights provided by more than 400 individuals, the Council identified and began
4 to implement a suite of strategies to enhance equitable use.

5 In 2017-2018, the Council conducted additional community engagement to inform this 2040 Regional
6 Parks Policy Plan update. Engagement included a) follow up conversations with 9 equity advocates and
7 park partners who informed the plan in 2014, b) focus groups with a total of 67 individuals from
8 communities underrepresented in regional parks, and c) surveys of 92 current parks visitors. Findings
9 from the focus groups and surveys support findings on preferred activities from the 2014 study and
10 provide additional information to inform policies on recreational activities and spending priorities.
11 Walking remains the most frequently mentioned favorite activity for both groups. Notably, hiking/trails,
12 camping, and dog walking were rarely mentioned by focus group members—the group from
13 underrepresented communities—who more frequently named a desire for water activities, child-friendly
14 spaces, playgrounds, family gathering and organized play spaces, and promotions and discounts to
15 attract users.

16 Findings from 2017-2018 community engagement informed staff and policymaker review of the suite of
17 strategies to enhance equitable use. Findings were also incorporated in an updated list of strategies,
18 highlighted below. Each bulleted item is further described in the Finance Chapter 8 section that follows.
19 To summarize, to enhance equitable usage of the Regional Park System, the Council will:

- 20 • Create a Park Equity grant program for capital projects before the end of 2019, specifically
21 targeted toward projects that would enhance equitable usage of the Regional Parks System.
- 22 • Continue working together with regional park implementing agencies to achieve the Parks and
23 Trails Legacy Plan's intent to "connect people to the outdoors".
- 24 • Work with regional park implementing agencies to understand and document how funding
25 requests advance equitable usage.
- 26 • Conduct studies to inform Regional Parks System planning and management. Such efforts will
27 include:
 - 28 ○ A region-wide visitor survey every five years to monitor changes in Regional Parks
29 System use with the next Visitors Study in 2020.
 - 30 ○ Targeted studies to better understand and provide for the outdoor recreational needs
31 and preferences across social classes, age groups, racial, ethnic, and educational
32 backgrounds, and ability status.
- 33 • Continue implementation of the Regional Parks System ambassador program to assist with
34 expanding awareness of the Regional Parks System and bring parks to the people.
- 35 • Continue and expand convening stakeholder meetings with regional park implementing
36 agencies, partners, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups to enhance
37 knowledge and continuous improvement.
 - 38 ○ Information shared will be systematically collected and shared electronically
- 39 • Require regional park implementing agencies to incorporate a public engagement process that
40 includes involvement from individuals representing diverse races, ethnicities, classes, ages,

1 abilities, and national origin when developing or amending master plans for regional parks or
2 regional trails.

- 3 ○ To that end, the Council will provide technical assistance and capacity-building.
- 4 ● Encourage regional park and trail design that meets changing recreational preferences.
5 Examples of recreational preferences include:
 - 6 ○ Amenities suited for the aging population and those with limited mobility.
 - 7 ○ Provide free-of-charge picnic areas that accommodate mid-sized groups (for example,
8 15-25 people).
 - 9 ○ Clustering of amenities for multigenerational family gatherings.
 - 10 ○ Informal ball fields for pick-up games.
 - 11 ○ Playgrounds, restrooms and water activities suitable for families with small children.

12 **Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 4: Trail System Coordination**

13 ***Bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be coordinated between the Regional Parks*** 14 ***System and the transportation system.***

15 Safe, high-quality, continuous, barrier-free bicycle and pedestrian facilities shall be developed,
16 maintained, and improved to function as integral parts of the Regional Parks System and transportation
17 system. The Council is responsible for planning regional transportation, including bicycle transportation
18 facilities. Since many regional trails also serve as commuter bikeways, it is important that Regional
19 Parks and transportation planners work together when developing trail and transportation plans.

20 A comprehensive network of trails and bikeways that serve both recreation and transportation needs is
21 desirable. This network should link state, regional, county and local trails, and should be integrated with
22 other transportation modes and networks, including the transit system.

23 Regional trails are primarily multi-use recreation trails. They may be used for walking in small or large
24 groups, jogging, bicycling, and for other wheeled, human-powered activities (e.g., skateboards, in-line
25 skates, roller skis). Most regional trails should be developed so they are off or away from roadways.
26 However, in some instances it may be necessary for a short stretch of trail to be on, or adjacent to, a
27 road to bypass natural or artificial barriers or private property.

28 Regional trails will primarily consist of these types of facilities:

- 29 ● Roadway-separated, independent trails include trails that run along abandoned railroad
30 corridors, or utility or private easements, and exist in their own independent rights-of-way.
31 These trails are also known as the Regional Parks System’s Destination Trails.
- 32 ● Road-adjacent, multiple-use trails that run along and are adjacent to public roadways, but not on
33 the roadway itself. In urban areas these would be above the street curb. These trails are also
34 known as the Regional Parks System’s Linking Trails.
- 35 ● Occasional on-road protected bikeways designed exclusively for bicycles along streets, below
36 the curb and separated by a barrier from vehicle traffic. These trails are also known as the
37 Regional Parks System’s Linking Trails.

1 With respect to bicycling, regional trails serve:

- 2 • Pre-teen bicyclists who are often accompanied by a parent and need access to local schools,
3 libraries, recreation facilities, shopping, and neighborhoods. These bicyclists have a strong
4 preference for separation from motor vehicles on protected bikeways and trails.
- 5 • Adult and teenage bicyclists who may ride regularly for transportation but prefer comfortable
6 access by a direct route on lower-speed or low-traffic streets. These bicyclists are more
7 comfortable on designated bikeways such as roadway-adjacent or independent trails.
- 8 • Bicyclists who are willing to travel along most roadways but prefer the more natural
9 surroundings that regional trails can offer. They value direct access to destinations and can ride
10 at higher speeds than average cyclists. This group will often rely on roads for transportation but
11 will use trails when they are direct and enjoyable.
- 12 • Highly experienced bicyclists who want direct access to destinations at maximum speed with
13 minimum delays. These bicyclists primarily rely on the road system for routes, and value using
14 roads like other vehicles for commuting, but occasionally enjoy independent trails if they are
15 relatively continuous and not overly crowded.

16 *Minnesota Rules Chapter 8820* apply to a regional trail project if the implementing agency receives
17 State or Federal Transportation funding. This rule requires that specific design standards be used,
18 including variables such as design speed and expected users. When regional trails pass through a
19 regional park, recreational standards should be given higher priority due to the natural and recreational
20 context. Implementing Agencies should examine each situation carefully, identify potential conflicts
21 between recreational and transportation needs, and engage interested stakeholders, including
22 transportation planners and the larger community to come to a common solution.

23 *Regional Bicycle Transportation Network*

24 The Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN), established in the *2040 Transportation Policy*
25 *Plan*, is intended to serve as a “backbone” arterial network for accommodating daily bicycle
26 transportation needs by establishing an integrated and seamless network of on-street bikeways and off-
27 road trails. The network prioritizes corridors and alignments for regional planning and transportation
28 investment. Cities, counties, park agencies and the state are encouraged to plan and implement future
29 bikeways and trails in support of the RBTN vision.

30 The RBTN is based on a *Regional Bicycle System Study* analysis and prioritization of potential bicycle
31 corridors. The study incorporated factors such as bicycle trip demand, network connectivity, social
32 equity, population density, regional job centers, major destinations (including highly-visited Regional
33 Parks), and connections to transit. RBTN alignments are defined where there are existing or planned
34 bikeways, or a consensus of which roadways and planned trails would most effectively meet the
35 regional corridor’s intent. RBTN corridors are named where alignments have not yet been identified.
36 The presence of corridors allows for local bike plans to determine an effective alignment that follows the
37 corridor’s orientation and uses on-street bikeways and off-road trails to achieve an efficient facility
38 route. Tier 1 corridors and alignments (highest priority) are planned in locations where they can attract
39 the most riders and most effectively enhance mode choice in favor of biking, walking, and transit over
40 driving alone.

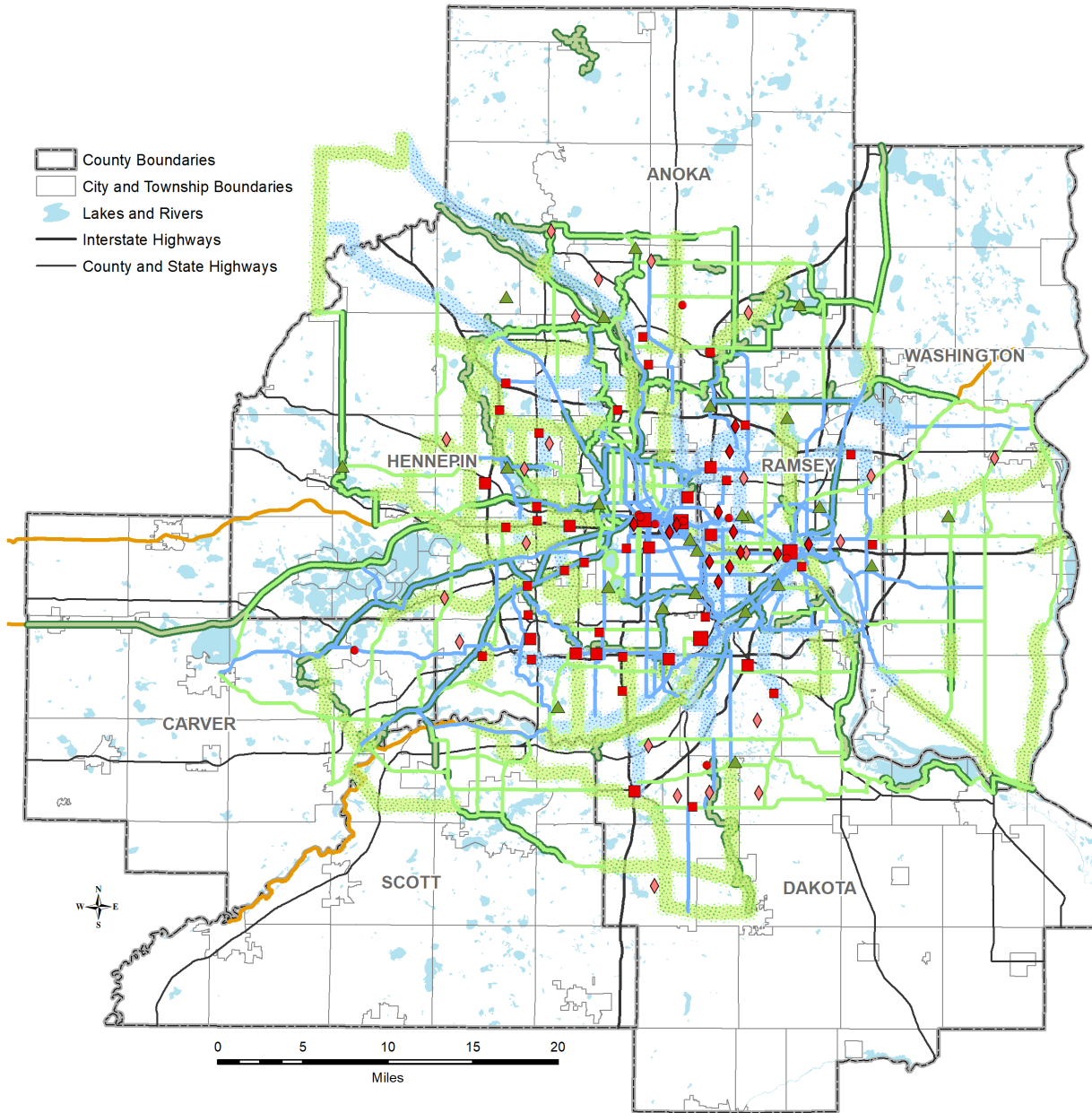
- 1 Figure 4-1 shows the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network.
- 2 Many regional trails are included in the RBTN, such as the Cedar Lake, Samuel Morgan, Lake
3 Minnetonka, and Bruce Vento Regional Trails. Figure 4-2 shows regional trails and the Regional
4 Bicycle Transportation Network together to illustrate the overlap between bicycle recreation and bicycle
5 transportation networks.
- 6 A more integrated and collaborative approach to regional trails and bicycle transportation planning is
7 needed by the Council and its agency partners. Council staff will work to define opportunities for
8 increased collaboration involving transportation and parks agency bicycle professionals and
9 stakeholders and will incorporate those opportunities into future planning and implementation activities
10 of the RBTN and regional trails networks.
- 11 Developers of trails that are included in both networks may need to resolve competing considerations
12 such as design speed, needs of expected users, or protection of natural features.
- 13 For more information on the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, please refer to the *2040*
14 *Transportation Policy Plan* updated in 2018.

15 *Relationship to Other Technical Guidance*

- 16 The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* should be used in conjunction with the current versions of the
17 *MnDOT Bikeway Facility Design Manual* and DNR's *Trail Planning, Design, and Development*
18 *Guidelines*.

19

1 *Figure 7-1 Regional Bicycle Transportation Network Vision*



RBTN Alignments

- Tier 1
- Tier 2

RBTN Corridors

- Tier 1
- Tier 2

Other Trail Systems

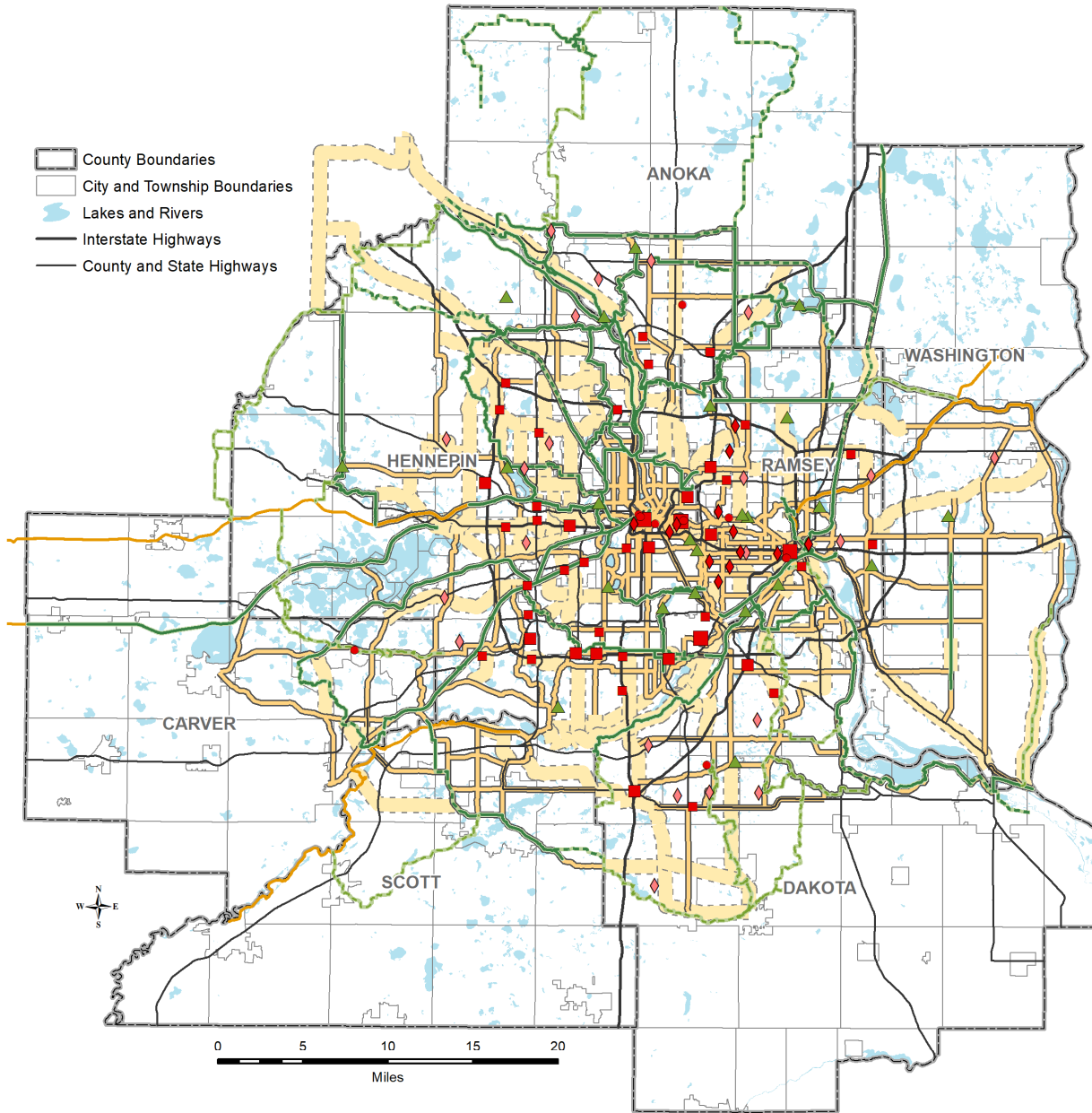
- Regional Trails (Open to the Public)
- State Trails (DNR)

Regional Destinations

- Metropolitan Job Centers (>50,000 jobs)
- Regional Job Centers (15,000 to 50,000 jobs)
- Subregional Job Centers (7,000 to 15,000 jobs)
- ◆ Colleges & Universities
- ◆ Large High Schools (>2,000 students)
- Major Sport & Entertainment Centers
- ▲ Highly Visited Regional Parks (>400,000 visits/year)

2

1 *Figure 7-2 Regional Bicycle Transportation Network and Regional Trail System*



- RBTN Alignments
- RBTN Corridors (Alignments Undefined)
- Other Trail Systems**
- Regional Trails (Open to the Public)
- Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
- Planned Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
- State Trails (DNR)

- Regional Destinations**
- Metropolitan Job Centers (>50,000 jobs)
 - Regional Job Centers (15,000 to 50,000 jobs)
 - Subregional Job Centers (7,000 to 15,000 jobs)
 - ◆ Colleges & Universities
 - ◆ Large High Schools (>2,000 students)
 - Major Sport & Entertainment Centers
 - ▲ Highly Visited Regional Parks (>400,000 visits/year)

2

1 **Chapter Eight: Finance Policy and Strategies:**

2 *Finance Policy*

3 **Provide adequate and equitable funding for the Regional Parks System units and**
4 **facilities in a manner that provides the greatest possible benefits to the people of**
5 **the region.**

6 Minnesota Statutes, section 473.315 authorizes the Council, with the advice of the Metropolitan
7 Parks and Open Space Commission, to make grants from any funds available to it to the
8 regional park implementing agencies to cover the cost, or any portion of the cost, of acquiring
9 and developing the Regional Parks System in accordance with the parks policy plan.

10 **Finance – Strategy 1: Limited distribution of funds**

11 *Funds will be granted only to regional park implementing agencies.*

12 Any funds provided by or through the Council for the Regional Parks System will be granted
13 only to regional park implementing agencies for projects consistent with Council-approved
14 master plans, capital improvement programs, or state law. As previously noted in Chapter 2,
15 and defined by Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351, the regional park implementing agencies
16 are:

- 17 • Anoka County
- 18 • City of Bloomington
- 19 • Carver County
- 20 • Dakota County
- 21 • Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- 22 • Ramsey County
- 23 • City of Saint Paul
- 24 • Scott County
- 25 • Three Rivers Park District
- 26 • Washington County

27 **Finance – Strategy 2: Uses of bond funds**

28 *Bond funds are used for acquisition, development, redevelopment, and natural*
29 *resource restoration within Regional Parks System units.*

30 Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1, requires the Council – after consultation with the
31 Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, municipalities, park districts and counties in
32 the metropolitan area – to prepare and adopt a system policy plan for regional recreation open
33 space as part of the Council’s development guide. The law also requires the Council to include

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1 a five-year capital improvement program plan in the parks policy plan, which should be revised
2 periodically, and to establish criteria and priorities for allocating funds from the capital
3 improvement program – referred to as the “Regional Parks CIP.”

4 Development in Regional Parks System units should be based on the principle of providing and
5 maintaining quality public park areas and facilities primarily for residents of the metropolitan
6 area. The eligibility criteria (not in any priority order) for development, rehabilitation and
7 restoration of regional parks, park reserves, trails, and special recreation features are:

- 8 • Projects that provide new facilities, rehabilitate facilities, or increase capacity where
9 there is documented existing or projected high use.
- 10 • Projects continuing a phased high-priority project or one of relatively high priority that is
11 timed with other public improvement projects to achieve significant economies in cost of
12 construction.
- 13 • A project providing a specific facility that meets a documented need, is currently not
14 available, or is significantly under-represented in the system.
- 15 • Regional trails that connect to other trails or regional facilities or extend existing trails.
- 16 • Natural resource restoration, including transforming degraded lands into lands with more
17 representative native species and historic vegetation patterns. For example, this work
18 may entail the removal of invasive species, restoration of pastureland, or transforming
19 industrial lands into a more diverse natural landscape.
- 20 • Acquisition of parkland parcels or reimbursement for parkland parcels.
- 21 • Matching non-state and non-Council funds to develop/rehabilitate recreation facilities or
22 restore natural resource areas is encouraged.
- 23 • Projects that provide essential facility improvements and natural resource enhancements
24 to allow for the initial public use of a regional park once there is adequate demand and
25 acquisition base to support the development.

26

27 Early efforts of the Regional Parks System program focused on acquiring desirable tracts of
28 land and incorporating existing park facilities that are valuable to the region. Since the lands in
29 question were being used, or were intended to be used, for some form of recreation, it was
30 recognized that eventually the new lands would require development and the facilities in the
31 older parks would have to be redeveloped through replacement or reconstruction.

32 Regional park implementing agencies are responsible for the development and rehabilitation
33 needs for their units in the Regional Parks System. Each regional park implementing agency
34 ranks its proposed development and rehabilitation projects for possible inclusion in the capital
35 improvement program of the Council. All of the proposed development and rehabilitation
36 projects may be desirable, but some – due to their location, their existing use or intended use –
37 tend to be more valuable from a regional standpoint than others.

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1 Adding recreational facilities to Regional Parks System units must be balanced with the
2 conservation of natural resources, avoiding adverse impacts as this is a recreational system that
3 is natural resource-based.

4 The Regional Parks Bonding Program must, in accordance with Minnesota Statutes, section
5 473.147, include “criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds.” Capital projects proposed for
6 funding must be consistent with a Council-approved master plan. Projects proposed by each
7 regional park implementing agency are prioritized by that agency. Each park agency has unique
8 capital needs, which that park agency can best determine.

9 *Regional and State Bond Funds*

10 State bonds have been appropriated to the Council since 1976 to help finance the Regional
11 Parks System’s capital plans. Since 1994, the Council has financed the parks capital plans with
12 a combination of state bonds and Council bonds; the Council matches every \$3 of state bonds
13 with \$2 of Council bonds. The premise for this mix of state and regional bonds is that people
14 who live outside the seven-county metropolitan region visit and use the Regional Parks System
15 and should therefore help finance its capital costs. Taxes collected statewide and within the
16 region to pay off the bond debt are proportional to the share of visits to the park system made
17 by people living within the region, and those who live outside the region.

18 Minnesota Statutes, section 473.325 allows the Council to issue general obligation bonds for the
19 acquisition and betterment of the Regional Parks System. No more than \$40 million of bond
20 debt can be outstanding at any point in time. Since 1994, the Council has issued on average \$7
21 million per year of short-term bonds (5 to 10 years) for grants to regional park implementing
22 agencies for land acquisition and capital improvements to the park system.

23 Since 2008, the Metropolitan Council has used a formula to determine how much of the state
24 and regional bonds would be allocated to each regional park implementing agency. The formula
25 balances two factors:

- 26 • The population within the jurisdiction of each park implementing agency compared to the
27 region’s total population. This factor is weighted 70%.
- 28 • The number of visits a park agency hosted from people who live outside the park
29 agency’s jurisdiction (non-local visits). This factor is weighted 30%.

30 The population factor recognizes the need to provide funds for park capital improvements to
31 serve every person in the region relatively equally. Using non-local visits as a factor recognizes
32 that these regional parks serve a regional and state-wide population. Therefore, a combination
33 of both factors is accounted for in the Regional Parks Bonding formula.

34 *Capital Improvement Plan*

35 As noted above, the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* must include a five-year capital
36 improvement plan (Table 8-1). The intent is to outline the funding strategy for the relative near
37 term, such that regional park implementing agencies can use the information in their planning.

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1 These figures are subject to change based upon legislative action. The projections are provided
 2 by the Agencies in their plans and are based on their current estimate of funding levels.

3 *Table 8-1. Metropolitan Council Five-Year Parks Capital Improvement Plan, 2018-2022*
 4 *(dollars in 1,000s)*

Use of Funds	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Expansion	\$4,079,180	\$3,400,000	\$3,400,000	\$3,400,000	\$3,400,000	\$17,679,180
Improvements	\$29,875,435	\$25,449,002	\$20,280,861	\$24,004,993	\$21,723,831	\$121,334,122
Preservation	\$2,784,980	\$903,120	\$2,445,000	\$690,000	\$2,110,000	\$8,933,100
Total	\$36,739,595	\$29,752,122	\$26,125,861	\$28,094,993	\$27,233,831	\$147,946,402

5

Funding Source	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Other	\$7,910,783	\$2,993,361	\$4,373,980	\$4,707,613	\$9,489,434	\$29,475,171
Regional	\$4,508,227	\$2,741,476	\$2,210,924	\$3,496,360	\$1,222,800	\$14,179,787
State	\$24,320,585	\$24,017,285	\$19,540,957	\$19,891,020	\$16,521,597	\$104,291,444
Totals	\$36,739,595	\$29,752,122	\$26,125,861	\$28,094,993	\$27,233,831	\$147,946,402

6

7 **Finance – Strategy 3: Uses of Parks and Trails Legacy Funds**

8 ***Parks and Trails Legacy Funds spending must conform to the statewide Parks***
 9 ***and Trails Legacy Plan.***

10 In November 2008, Minnesota citizens approved a constitutional amendment, commonly called
 11 the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. The amendment created a new 3/8ths cent
 12 sales tax to be collected from July 2009-June 2034. Revenue from the sales tax is placed into
 13 four dedicated accounts. One of those accounts is called the Parks and Trails Fund. The
 14 constitutional amendment states: "...the parks and trails fund...may be spent only to support
 15 parks and trails of regional or statewide significance.... The dedicated money under this section
 16 must supplement traditional sources of funding for these purposes and may not be used as a
 17 substitute." (Minn. Constitution, art. 11, sec. 15) The Council is the fiscal agent responsible for
 18 administering appropriations from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund to the regional park
 19 implementing agencies. In this role, the Council will ensure the Parks and Trails Legacy dollars
 20 are spent in the intended manner. To that end, the Council will ensure regional park

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1 implementing agencies target the funds to projects that capture the strategic direction outlined in
2 the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan.

3 The Parks and Trails Legacy Plan specifies four strategic directions:

- 4 • Connect People and the Outdoors
 - 5 ○ Develop stewards of tomorrow through efforts to increase life-long participation in
 - 6 parks and trails.
- 7 • Acquire Land, Create Opportunities
 - 8 ○ Create new and expanded opportunities to serve current and future users.
- 9 • Take Care of What We Have
 - 10 ○ Provide safe, high-quality experiences through regular re-investment in
 - 11 infrastructure and natural resource management.
- 12 • Coordinate among Partners
 - 13 ○ Enhance coordination among the network of public, private, and nonprofit park
 - 14 and trail partners.

15 The strategic directions serve as the guideposts for how Parks and Trail Fund dollars should be
16 invested. The Parks and Trails Legacy Plan should be consulted for additional information,
17 specifically regarding particular activities (for example, investments) that are viewed as priorities
18 to implement the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan.

19 Legislation enacted in 2009 directs how money appropriated from the Parks and Trails Fund to
20 the Council is distributed to the regional park implementing agencies under a formula in the
21 legislation (Laws of Minn. 2009, ch. 172, art. 5, sec. 6, subd. 3) The Council awards grants to
22 the regional park implementing agencies based on that formula:

- 23 • 45% based on the Operations and Maintenance formula in Minnesota Statutes 473.351,
24 provided in the section above;
- 25 • 31.5% based on each agency's proportion of the population of the region;
- 26 • 13.5% based on each agency's proportion of total non-local visits to the Regional Parks
27 System.
- 28 • 10% is allocated to land acquisition for the Regional Parks System.

29

30 **Finance – Strategy 4: Equity considerations**

31 ***Equity is a consideration in Regional Parks System funding and investment.***

32 *Thrive MSP 2040* states the Council will “strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails
33 by all our region’s residents, such as across race, ethnicity, income, and ability”. *Thrive MSP*
34 *2040* also states that the Council will use equity as a lens to evaluate its operations, planning,
35 and investments. An equity lens, also known as an equity toolkit, is a tool government agencies
36 use to collect information related to their major activities. Many government agencies throughout

1 the country are using an equity lens to inventory, monitor, and institutionalize equity principles.
2 An equity lens consists of a short series of open-ended questions that clarify both the positive
3 and adverse impacts a project may have on equity.

4 The Council developed an equity toolkit during 2016, in collaboration with external partners and
5 stakeholders, including the regional park implementing agencies. The purpose of this equity
6 toolkit is to raise questions of equity in conversation with the regional park implementing
7 agencies and their Boards as they select and prioritize projects. The toolkit includes a short
8 series of questions that regional park implementing agencies complete as a core part of their
9 Parks and Trails Legacy project proposals, and Bonding project proposals. The toolkit helps
10 identify populations that the project seeks to better serve. While the Council will not use these
11 questions for project prioritization, the information provides the Council with a mechanism to
12 track and monitor efforts and progress toward strengthening equitable use of the Regional
13 Parks System.

14 Using Council bonds, the Council will create, fund, and administer an equity grant program for
15 projects explicitly aimed to strengthen equitable usage of the Regional Parks System. The
16 purpose of this grant program, anticipated to be available no later than 2019, will be to
17 strengthen equitable use of the Regional Parks System. To develop this grant program, the
18 Council will work in close collaboration with regional park implementing agencies, community-
19 based organizations, advocacy groups, and other partners to formulate criteria and measures
20 for awarding grants to regional park implementing agencies for capital projects for development
21 and redevelopment aimed to strengthen equitable use.

22 **Finance – Strategy 5: Reimbursement limitations**

23 ***The Council may reimburse regional park implementing agencies for the costs of***
24 ***acquiring some lands before they have been made part of the Regional Parks***
25 ***System or for development projects undertaken before they can be financed***
26 ***through the Parks Bonding Program.***

27 *Reimbursement for acquisition of land not currently designated in the 2040 Regional*
28 *Parks Policy Plan*

29 Reimbursement will be considered for early acquisition of land that is not currently designated
30 as regional recreation open space by the Council in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* under
31 certain conditions. For additional information about this practice, please see the administrative
32 companion to this plan, the Grant Program Guide.

33 If land is acquired or protected under an option to purchase by a regional park implementing
34 agency, or an entity under contract with that agency while the Council considers adding the land
35 to the Regional Parks Policy Plan via a public hearing process, the Council will consider
36 reimbursing the regional park implementing agency for the costs to acquire or protect the land
37 via an option to purchase. For additional information about this practice, please see the
38 administrative companion to this plan, the Grant Program Guide.

1

2 *Reimbursement for development projects undertaken before they can be financed*
3 *through the Capital Improvement Plan*

4 Reimbursement will be considered for development projects provided that:

- 5 • the project is consistent in timing, scale, type, and cost with a Council-approved master
6 plan
- 7 • all information required for the development grant is submitted to the Council prior to the
8 regional park implementing agency undertaking the project, and
- 9 • the Council approves the project.

10 For additional information about this practice, please see the administrative companion to this
11 plan, the Program Guide.

12 **Finance – Strategy 6: Transit corridors**

13 *Regional trail corridors that may be used for transit in the future are eligible for*
14 *Regional Parks System funding if it is clear the corridor will be used as a trail for*
15 *at least 10 years.*

16 Regional Parks System funds should only be used to acquire or develop a corridor identified for
17 future transit use in a Council-approved transit implementation plan when there is a guarantee
18 that the trail facility will be operational for its useful design life, as negotiated by the transit
19 provider and the regional park implementing agency. As defined by the Federal Highway
20 Administration, the useful design life of a trail is 10 years or more. In cases where trail
21 recreation is to be a permanent partner with transitways, within the corridor, Regional Parks
22 System funds will be used only for that part of acquisition and development attributable to trail
23 use.

24 **Finance – Strategy 7: Use of Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund**

25 *The Council will use the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund (PAOF) as funding*
26 *mechanism for the acquisition of Regional Park lands.*

27 In 2001, the Council established a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant program to assist
28 regional park agencies in acquiring land for the Regional Parks System.

29 The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund consists of two accounts:

- 30 • The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) acquisition account,
31 which is financed with 60% state appropriations from the ENRTF as recommended by
32 the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. The remaining 40% of the
33 account is financed with bonds issued by the Council.

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- 1 • The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund (PTLF) acquisition account, which is financed with
2 60% Parks and Trails Fund appropriations from the Land and Legacy Amendment. The
3 remaining 40% is financed with Council bonds.

4 The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant may finance up to 75% of the costs to acquire land
5 and related costs, or up to \$1.7 million per acquisition account for each state fiscal year (July 1
6 to June 30). The regional park implementing agency must finance at least 25% of the
7 acquisition costs as a local match to the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant. See the
8 Regional Parks Grant Program Guide for more information.

9 **Finance – Strategy 8: Use of Operation & Maintenance**

10 ***The Council will distribute Operation and Maintenance appropriations to*** 11 ***Agencies.***

12 Regional park implementing agencies raise funds to finance the costs to operate and maintain
13 their portion of the Regional Parks System through the following sources:

- 14 • Fees collected from people using their parks. Examples include vehicle entrance fees,
15 picnic shelter rentals, recreational equipment rentals, room rentals at visitor centers, and
16 tuition for educational programs.
- 17 • Local property taxes.
- 18 • Local Government Aid payments from the State of Minnesota.

19 In 1985, legislation was enacted that allowed state appropriations from the General Fund to be
20 disbursed to regional park implementing agencies to supplement funding for operating and
21 maintaining their portion of the Regional Parks System (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351).

22 State appropriations for Regional Parks System operation and maintenance are distributed to
23 regional park implementing agencies according to the following formula:

- 24 • 40% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system visits;
- 25 • 40% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system operation and
26 maintenance expenditures in the previous calendar year; and,
- 27 • 20% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system acreage, with park
28 reserve resource management lands divided by four.

29 In 2000, legislation was enacted that directed a portion of state lottery proceeds into a "natural
30 resources fund," with the stipulation that a portion of the receipts deposited "may be spent only
31 on metropolitan park and trail grants." This funding source is commonly called "lottery in lieu of
32 sales tax" revenue (Minnesota Statutes, section 297A.94(e)(3)). The Council disburses the
33 appropriations from these two sources to the regional park implementing agencies based on the
34 results of the formula contained in Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351.

1 **Finance – Strategy 9: Other funding**

2 ***The Council will actively seek funding from the state and other sources.***

3 The Council will seek continued state funding for acquisition, development, rehabilitation, and
4 restoration and management of natural resources for all components in the Regional Parks
5 System. In partnership with the ten regional park implementing agencies and partners, the
6 Council will pursue other sources of funding where appropriate for the benefit of the entire
7 Regional Parks System. The Regional Parks System has been funded through a combination of
8 state and local funding sources over the last 40 years.

9 The Council will work with the park implementing agencies to ensure that all sources of funding
10 are used appropriately and in accordance with all legal requirements.

11 The Council will work in partnership with the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota
12 Resources (LCCMR) to explore expanding the use of the Environment and Natural Resources
13 Trust Fund beyond the current acquisition of high-quality natural resources to include acquisition
14 of lands with restoration potential. Additionally, the Council will explore other potential uses of
15 this fund, including development, redevelopment and restoration.

16
17 Funding for operations and maintenance of the regional system has been provided primarily by
18 regional park implementing agencies through local taxes available to them and, to a lesser
19 extent, user fees. Since 1985, the state has provided some supplemental funding to regional
20 park implementing agencies to help fund their operations and maintenance costs. Minnesota
21 Statutes, section 473.351, subd. 3, states that:

22 Each regional park implementing agency must receive no less than 40% of its actual
23 operation and maintenance expenses to be incurred in the current calendar year budget
24 as submitted to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. If the available
25 operation and maintenance money is less than the total amount determined by the
26 formula, the implementing agencies will share the available money in proportion to the
27 amounts they would otherwise be entitled to under the formula.

28 Between 1985 and 2014, state funding to support the operation and maintenance of the
29 Regional Parks System has funded, on average, only 9.5% of the overall cost for operations
30 and maintenance. Continued state supplemental support to finance 40% of operation and
31 maintenance costs of the regional system will also be sought.

32 Importantly, any changes in the formula used to distribute state funds for operations and
33 maintenance will require legislative action

34 ***Estimated Costs to Complete the System***

35 State law requires that the *Regional Parks Policy Plan* estimate the cost of the recommended
36 acquisitions and development of the park system, including an analysis of what portion of the
37 funding is proposed to come from the state and Council levies, and other local government units

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1 (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1). The following analysis is an estimate of funding
2 required to complete the system.

3 Cost estimates for regional parks and trails open to the public, planned regional parks and trails,
4 regional park search areas, and regional trail search corridors are described below and shown
5 in Table 5.3. Data was provided by the Council-approved master plans, *2040 Regional Parks*
6 *Policy Plan* (2015), and regional park implementing agencies. Contributing costs related to
7 calculating acquisition and development costs were arrived at with input from the Implementing
8 Agencies. Acquisition costs calculated park acreage to be acquired added with trail miles to be
9 developed multiplied by the average cost to purchase land within or outside the Metropolitan
10 Urban Service Area boundary. Development costs calculated the remaining acres or trail to be
11 developed multiplied by the average park and trail mile development cost.

12 The cost estimate for regional parks and trails open to the public include costs associated with
13 acquisition of inholdings and future development. In order to produce the estimates, data were
14 gathered from Council-approved master plans. In 2018, there is a total 3,146 acres and 173 trail
15 miles. The estimate to acquire inholding properties for both parks and trails total \$406.1 million,
16 while development costs total \$737.6 million. A total estimate for future acquisition and
17 development of regional parks and trails opened to the public totals \$1.1 billion.

18 The cost estimate for planned regional parks or trails – those park or trail units that have a
19 Council-approved master plan but are not open to the public as of 2018 include costs
20 associated with acquisition of inholdings and future development. In order to produce the
21 estimates, data were gathered from Council-approved master plans. In 2018, inholding
22 properties total 3,724 acres and 137 trail miles. The estimate to acquire inholding properties for
23 both parks and trails total \$220 million, while development costs total \$279 million. A total
24 estimate for future acquisition and development of planned regional parks or trails totals \$499
25 million.

26 The cost estimate for regional park search areas includes costs associated with acquisition of
27 inholdings and future development. The estimates for these were gathered from the *2040*
28 *Regional Parks Policy Plan*. Inholding properties totaled 3,300 acres, with an associated
29 acquisition cost of \$121.9 million. The estimated costs to develop the regional park search
30 areas total \$99 million. A total estimate for future acquisition and development of regional parks
31 search areas is \$220.9 million.

32 The cost estimate for regional trail search corridors were gathered from *2040 Regional Parks*
33 *Policy Plan* and provided by the regional park implementing agencies. Inholding properties
34 totaled 1890 acres and 525 trail miles, with an associated acquisition cost of \$275.5 million. The
35 estimated costs to develop the Regional Park Search Areas total \$482.9 million. A total estimate
36 for future acquisition and development of regional trail search corridors is \$758.5 million.

37 System additions were not considered for this update of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.
38 The cost estimate for the 2040 additions to the system will be calculated based on data
39 provided by the regional park implementing agencies.

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1 The entire system as completed – including inholdings, planned regional parks and trails,
 2 regional park search areas, and regional trail search corridors – would require an additional
 3 12,059 acres to be acquired and 835 trail miles. The associated costs are estimated to be \$1
 4 billion for acquisition and \$1.6 billion for development, totaling \$2.6 billion to complete the
 5 system.

Table 5-3. Estimated Acquisition and Development Costs for Regional Parks System 2018 - 2040 (2018 dollars)

Category	New Acreage	New Trail Mileage	Acquisition Cost	Development Cost	Total Cost
Regional Parks and Trails Open to the Public (acquisition of inholdings and future development) ^a	3,146	173	\$406.1 M	\$737.6 M	\$1.1 B
Planned Regional Parks and Trails (Council-approved master plan, not yet open to the public) ^a	3,724	137	\$220 M	\$279 M	\$499 M
Regional Park Search Areas ^{b.c.}	3,300	N/A	\$121.9 M	\$99 M	\$220.9 M
Regional Trail Search Corridors ^{b.c.}	1890	525	\$275.5 M	\$482.9 M	\$758.5 M
GRAND TOTAL	12,059	835	\$1 B	\$1.6 B	\$2.6 B

6

7 M = million

8 B = billion

9 Data Source:

10 ^a Council approved master plans

11 ^b 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan (2015)

12 ^c Estimates from regional park implementing agencies

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