

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: August 1, 2019

For the Community Development Committee meeting of August 19, 2019

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of August 28, 2019

Subject: Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan Amendment and Boundary Adjustment, Three Rivers Park District, Review File No. 50032-3

MPOSC District, Member: District B, Robert Moeller

Council District, Member: 3 – Christopher Ferguson

Policy/Legal Reference: Minnesota Statutes § 473.313; Planning Strategy 1, *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

Staff Prepared/Presented: Colin Kelly, Planning Analyst, 651-602-1361

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Three Rivers Park District's Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan Amendment.
2. Approve the boundary adjustment adding 15.95-acres of high-quality, natural resource land on Little Long Lake in the City of Minnetrista.
3. Inform Three Rivers Park District that it must submit the Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Development Master Plan Amendment for Metropolitan Council approval prior to requesting funding for development.

Background

Three Rivers Park District was approached by a willing seller to purchase almost 16 acres of lakeshore property adjacent to Kingswood Special Recreation Feature in the City of Minnetrista. Purchase of this land would enhance protection of Little Long Lake, one of the most pristine water bodies in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, and increase the size of the special recreation feature from 124 acres to 140 acres. Little Long Lake's excellent water quality allows for a two-tier fishery of pan fish and northern pike populations as well as a trout fishery, unusual this far south in Minnesota.

Upon acquisition, the property will be maintained in a natural state and invasive species control and native vegetation restoration will occur as resources allow.

This master plan amendment request modifies the boundaries from the January 2019 Council-approved acquisition master plan for the Kingswood Special Recreation Feature (Business Item 2018-330) and reaffirms the overarching intent of Three Rivers to protect and preserve Little Long Lake and its shoreland for future generations.



Prior to any significant development of the property, Three Rivers must prepare a development master plan to more thoroughly evaluate the park's intent, development and operation plans, and associated costs. The development master plan process will include additional opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement.

Rationale

This amendment to the Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, including Planning Strategy 1 – Master planning, and other Council policies.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan Amendment advances the Thrive outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation. This master plan amendment also advances the Stewardship outcome through responsibly managing the region's finite resources including conserving quality natural resources.

Funding

The tentative acquisition cost for the 15.95-acre property is \$730,000, including \$715,000 for acquisition and \$15,000 for appraisal, closing, and stewardship. The property description for the 15.95-acre parcel is: PIN 053-1511724220005, LOT 002 BLOCK 001 "BAKER GAME FARM ADDITION"

Approval of this acquisition master plan amendment does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. The approval will allow Three Rivers Park District to request acquisition funding as described above. The Council will consider a grant for acquisition of this property on a subsequent action on the same review calendar (Business Item 2019-204). Future development funding will be contingent on a Council-approved development master plan.

Known Support / Opposition

Three Rivers Park District has focused engagement related to its master plan amendment process on the City of Minnetrista to ensure the amendment request is locally supported, consistent with the City's current comprehensive planning efforts, and compliant with zoning laws. The Minnetrista Planning Commission (May 28, 2019), Parks Commission (June 11, 2019), and the City Council (June 17, 2019) all support the proposed master plan amendment.

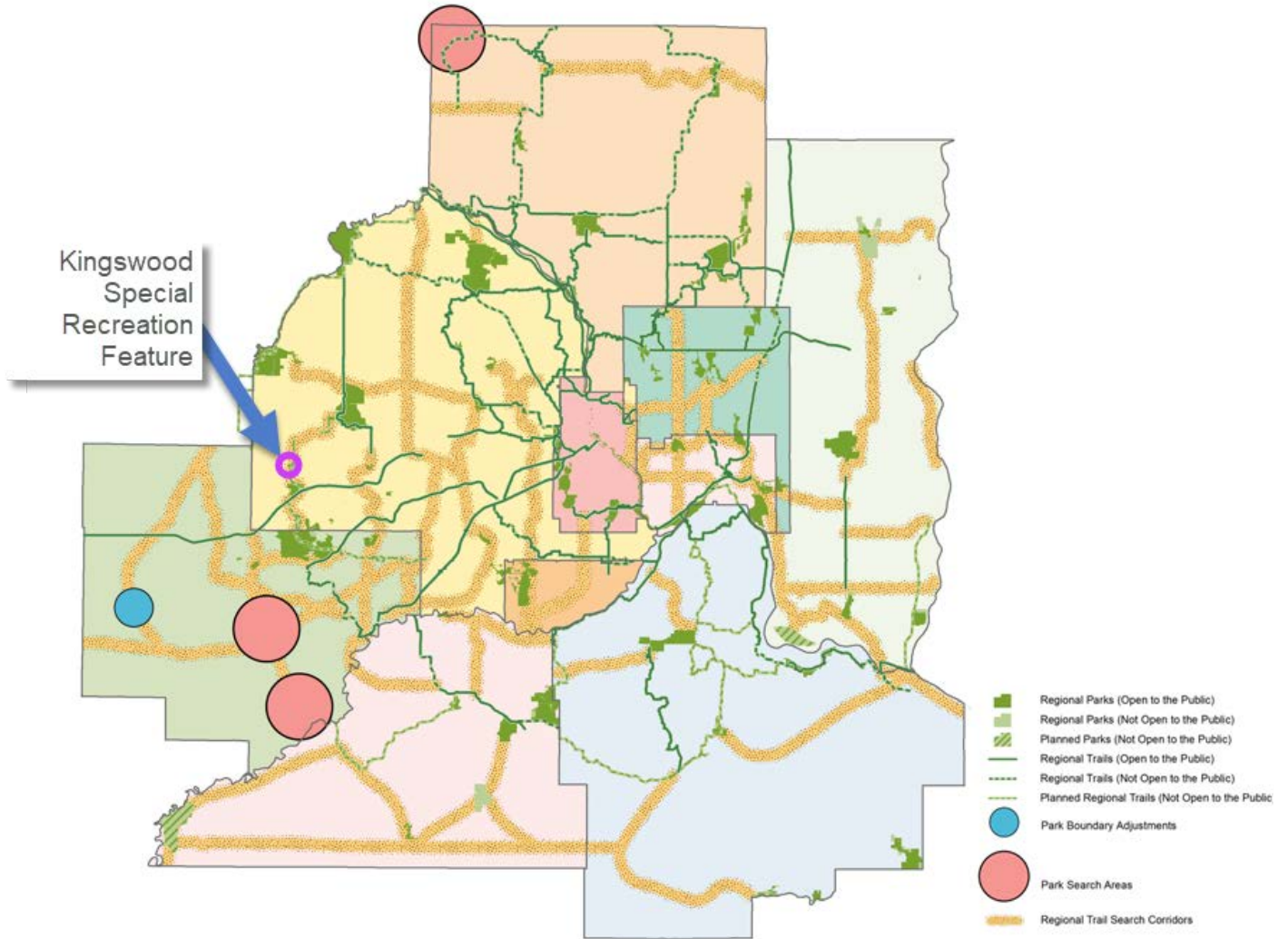
Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that master plans for regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features address each of the 12 items listed below.

Boundaries and Acquisition

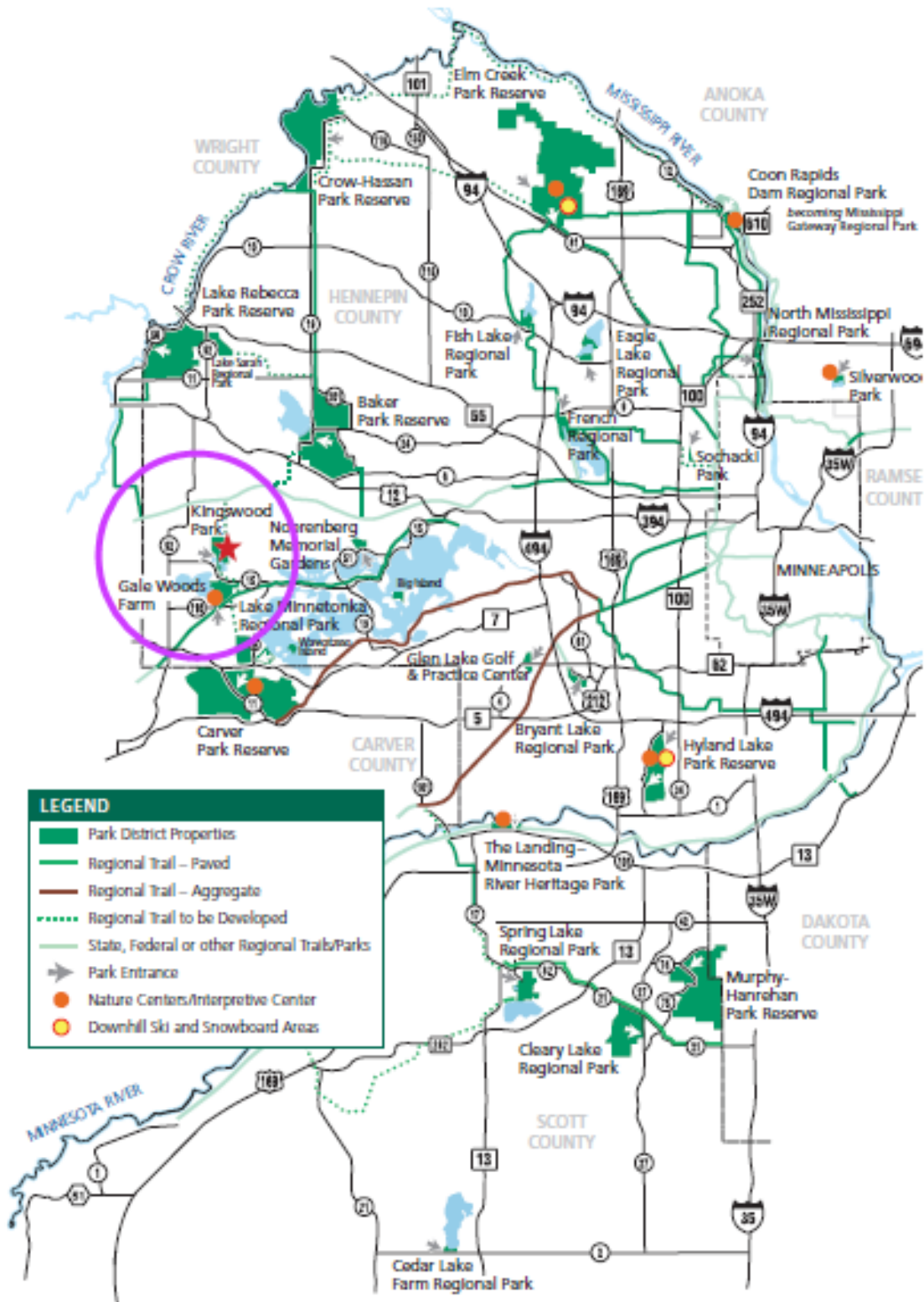
Kingswood Special Recreation Feature resides within the Three Rivers Park District System, located in western Hennepin County in the City of Minnetrista (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Location of the Kingswood Special Recreation Feature within the Regional Park System



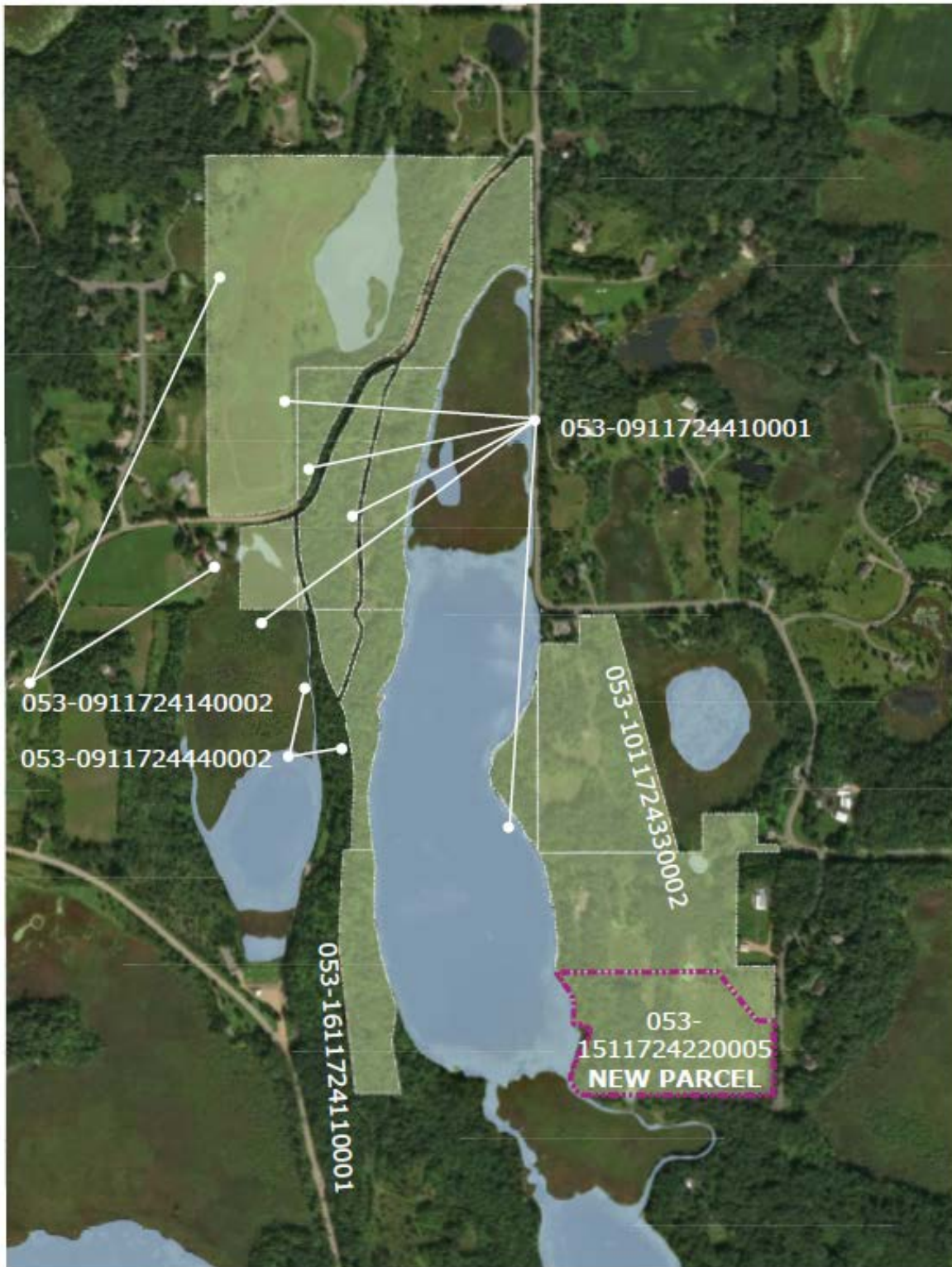
Kingswood Special Recreation Feature is north of Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature in the western part of Hennepin County (Figure 2). Both special recreation features are planned to be connected by the 2015 Council-approved Baker-Carver Regional Trail.

Figure 2: Location of the Kingswood Special Recreation Feature within the Three Rivers Park District System



The boundary for the proposed Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan Amendment includes 124.21 acres currently owned by Three Rivers and 15.95 acres currently held by a private party, but subject to a future purchase agreement with Three Rivers. The property is located in the City of Minnetrista generally north of County Road (CR) 15, south of CR 26, east of CR 92 and west of CR 110 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Boundaries and Acquisition Location



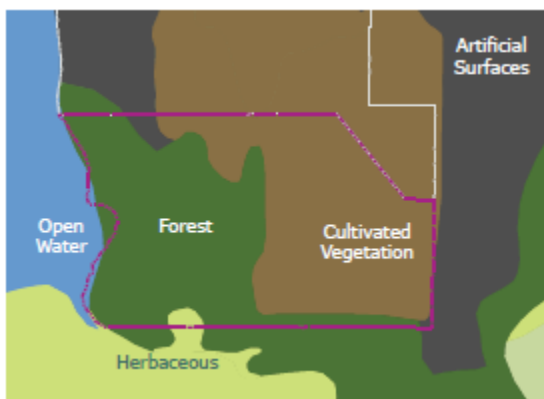
Land Use

The 15.95-acre property is located immediately adjacent to recently acquired parkland to the north, which will be returned to a natural state in 2019. The property to the south was recently subdivided and development of single-family homes is likely in the next five years. Little Long Lake is located to the west of the property at the foot of a steep embankment, and to the east are large lot, single family homes. The long-term land use and zoning plans indicate that significant changes in the immediate area are unlikely in the near future.

Land Cover

The Minnesota Land Cover Classification System designates approximately half of the property as high-quality forest and the other half as “cultivated vegetation,” although onsite inspection reveals this area to be predominately open field with buckthorn starting to take hold. The long-term natural resource plan for the property is to maintain the Big Woods and either expand the plant community west into the open field or restore it to prairie. (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Land Cover



The long-term natural resource plan for the property is to restore it to vegetation characteristic of the Big Woods ecological subsection, where oak woodland and maple-basswood forest are the most common vegetation types. To facilitate this restoration, the existing red pine plantation would be harvested.

Significant Resources

Figure 5 identifies approximately half of the subject property with a regionally significant terrestrial and wetland area ranking of three. This rank is considered to have the highest natural resource significance in the state. Often areas ranked three are larger in size and surrounded by complementary land cover and uses, more ecologically diverse or may be an isolated native plant community with outstanding biodiversity significance as classified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey.

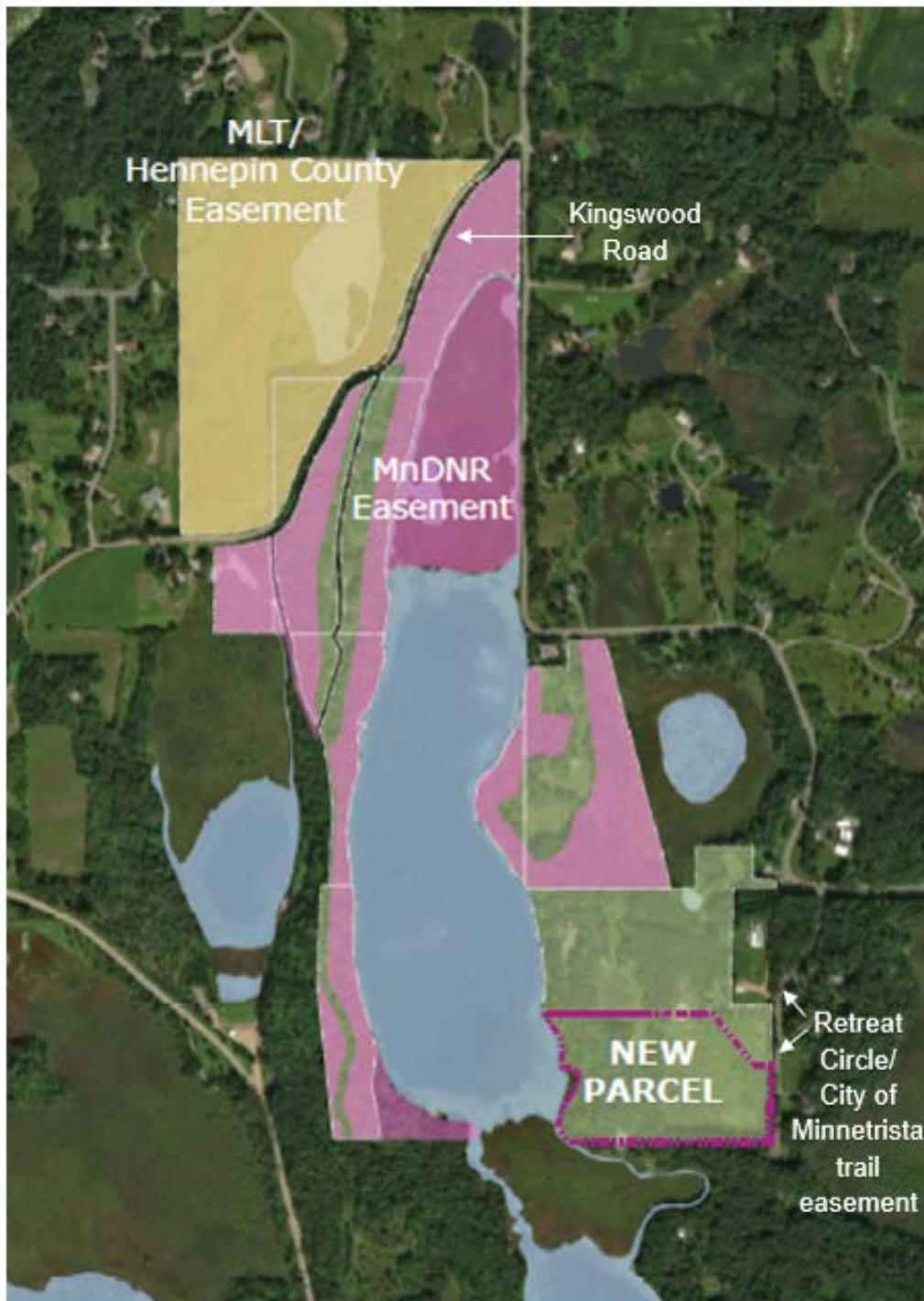
Figure 5: Natural Resource Significance



Easements

Of the approximately 140 acres that will be within the special recreation feature boundary following this acquisition master plan amendment, approximately 90 acres reside under conservation easement. The Minnesota Land Trust (MLT), in partnership with Hennepin County, has an easement on approximately 45 acres northwest of Kingswood Road. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) has an easement on about half of the remaining property southeast of Kingswood Road measuring approximately 45 acres. Approximately 50 acres are not associated with an MLT or MnDNR conservation easement, including the property proposed for addition in this acquisition master plan.

Figure 6: Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Easements



A small north-south trail easement, less than one-acre in size, is located along the Retreat Circle right-of-way on existing parkland in the southeastern portion of the special recreation feature and is anticipated for the new 15.95-acre parcel as well. This trail easement is held by the City of Minnetrista and is viewed as minor; it does not prohibit Three Rivers from achieving the long-term vision of the property. In fact, a trail easement is complementary to the use of the property as public parkland and may help provide non-motorized access to the park at a future date.

Acquisition Needs

The tentative acquisition cost for the 15.95-acre property is \$730,000, including \$715,000 for acquisition and \$15,000 for appraisal, closing, and stewardship. The property description for the 15.95-acre parcel is: PIN 053-1511724220005, LOT 002 BLOCK 001 “BAKER GAME FARM ADDITION”

There are several additional properties located near the northeast area of the lake that are not directly on the lake, but within the lake’s watershed. If or when any of these properties are for sale, Three Rivers may consider acquiring them and will work with the City of Minnetrista for support. In addition, Three Rivers will remain open to working with the City and property owners on other ways to protect and improve the area within the watershed boundary.

Stewardship Plan

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that a master plan describe how park property will be managed prior to development. The stewardship plan for Kingswood focuses on restoring the developed portions of the property to a natural state, managing the native plant communities for invasive species and overall health, and providing basic public access in limited areas of the park.

No additional, immediate, or significant stewardship activities are proposed for the 15.95-acre parcel upon acquisition as it is already undeveloped and public access is not yet proposed. Prior to any significant development, Three Rivers will produce and seek approval of a development master plan. The development master plan process will include public engagement and a thorough evaluation of recreational needs, complementing development opportunities and cost analysis.

Demand Forecast

The approach used for estimating demand is based on current use at the metro system’s seven existing special recreation features (Table 1). Of those seven, Square Lake and Gale Woods Farm are the most comparable to Kingswood, with Square Lake offering similar outstanding water quality in a semi-rural area, and Gale Woods Farm offering instructor-led programs in a semi-rural area. Using this approach and if fully developed as envisioned, Kingswood should experience between 55,000 to 100,000 visits each year, not including visits associated with the planned Baker-Carver Regional Trail.

Table 1. Existing Special Recreation Features and Annual Use

Existing Special Recreation Feature	Focus	Annual Use (2017)	Notes
Gale Woods Farm	Farm education	128, 600	-
Noerenberg Gardens	Gardens	55,700	-
Square Lake	Water clarity	151,600	-
The Landing	History	16,800	-
Silverwood	Environment and arts	397,100	
Como Park Zoo	Zoo	5,367,400*	Use estimate includes Regional Park, Zoo, and Conservatory
Marjorie McNeely Conservatory at Como Regional Park	Gardens	5,367,400*	Use estimate includes Regional Park, Zoo, and Conservatory

Development Concept

Generally, the development concept of Kingswood Special Recreation Feature may be divided into two phases. Phase One focuses on stewardship in the near-term. Phase Two focuses on regional trail development in the longer-term.

Phase One

Three Rivers Park District may develop portions of the special recreation feature in accordance with existing conservation easements and a future development master plan upon approval by the Council. The areas of the park where the majority of a former camp existed will remain closed to public access while restoration efforts take hold.

Three Rivers Park District’s interim use includes a gravel parking lot on Kingswood Road that serves as a short trail through the restored prairie and an adjacent maple-basswood forest and picnic shelter. Depending on future demand for and condition of the picnic shelter, it may be rehabilitated, replaced, or removed and replaced with a small viewing area over Kingswood Pond. In any event, improved Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access to this site is envisioned as part of the interim use of the property.

Three Rivers may also consider other non-paved trail use within specified areas of Kingswood and within the constraints of existing conservation easements.

Three Rivers intends to initiate nature-based service-learning opportunities and nature-based recreation programs as part of the interim phase. Examples of service-learning opportunities may include sustainable trail development and maintenance, and invasive species control.

Upon completion of the interim phase, the west side of the property will be open to low-impact trail use and the east side of the property will remain closed to the public except during staff-led programs and events, which may occur on a limited basis. Development will improve access to this area during this phase and is estimated to cost \$150,000.

Phase Two

In addition, the Baker-Carver Regional Trail is planned through the west side of the special recreation feature, linking Baker Park Reserve, the Luce Line regional and state trail, Dakota Rail Regional Trail, Lake Minnetonka Regional Park, Carver Park Reserve and the Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail

through the cities of Medina, Independence and Minnetrista. Kingswood Special Recreation Feature provides a critical segment for this regional trail corridor.

The regional trail corridor through the park follows an existing cartway that runs north-south on the western edge of the property along the top of the esker ridge. Use of the cartway minimizes impacts on the existing natural resources and provides an opportunity for natural and cultural resource education.

Wayfinding

Kingswood Special Recreation Feature has wayfinding information located adjacent to the small parking lot on Kingswood Drive and along existing trails. Additional wayfinding measures are anticipated to be incorporated at key park locations and trail intersections.

Conflicts

There are no known conflicts regarding the acquisition of the 15.95-acre property. The City of Minnetrista's (City) 2040 Future Land Use guides the majority of Kingswood Special Recreation Feature as Park, Public & Semi Public. The recently acquired 17.97-acre parcel and proposed 15.95-acre parcel have a future land use of Rural. Both land use classifications allow parks and recreation as permitted uses. Similarly, the City's most recent Zoning Map designates the entire park, including the 15.95-acre parcel, as Agriculture which also allows the property to be used for parks and recreational trails and paths. Therefore, no conflict exists between the City's long-term plans and Three Rivers' plans to preserve the property as a special recreation feature.

Public Services

No public services are needed as part of the acquisition master plan preliminary recreation development concept. If public services are needed as part of future recreation development plans, they will be addressed and coordinated as part of a development master plan and with the appropriate providers.

Operations

Kingswood Special Recreation Feature will be operated under Three Rivers' ordinances and policies. Kingswood will be overseen by professional public safety operations and maintenance staff. Services and maintenance staffing levels will increase or decrease as needed and as funding permits through the employment of seasonal staff. Park Police Officers and volunteer trail patrol members will provide public safety services.

Public Engagement and Participation

Three Rivers Park District established a planning process that involved affected agencies and the general public during the development of the original acquisition master plan in 2013. Due to the minor nature of this acquisition master plan amendment and sensitive nature of acquisition proceedings and negotiations, the master plan amendment process focused its efforts on working with the City of Minnetrista to ensure the master plan amendment request was locally supported, consistent with their current comprehensive planning efforts and compliant with zoning laws.

Prior to any significant development of the property, Three Rivers will prepare a development master plan to more thoroughly evaluate the park's intent, development and operation plans and associated costs. The development master plan process will include a public engagement process.

Public Awareness

Three Rivers Park District manages a centralized marketing communications function that oversees Three Rivers' website, public relations, marketing, media relations, social media, brand management, event planning and promotion. A number of effective marketing and outreach tools are used to promote Three Rivers Park District, including events calendars, maps, digital and social media, direct mail, press

releases, a centralized reservation system, brochures, advertising and on-site promotion. Promotional pieces often highlight how to get to the park via foot, bike, transit and car.

Three Rivers collaborates with a wide array of community, business and government organizations to promote its facilities, programs and services, and to educate the public about its resources. Three Rivers also works with the Council, the State Office of Tourism and other partners to leverage shared opportunities for creating awareness and visibility. Additionally, a focus is placed on developing partnerships and programming opportunities that allow Three Rivers to better serve all residents of suburban Hennepin County, especially those with less access to its facilities and programs.

Accessibility

Three Rivers Park District is committed to providing access and recreational opportunities to all people, including people of all races, ethnicities, incomes, and abilities. Three Rivers meets this commitment through appropriate facility design and programming considerations, and by actively addressing potential barriers to participation. All facilities described in the master plan will be developed in accordance with ADA standards and guidelines.

Three Rivers has several programs designed to assist in obtaining access for persons for whom cost could be a barrier to participation. The “Parks for All People” program is designed to provide free passes for swimming and cross-country skiing to qualified recipients of Hennepin County economic assistance programs. Discounted camping, equipment rental and educational programs are available. Three Rivers does not charge entrance fees to its regional parks, park reserves, special recreation features or regional trails.

Three Rivers pursues promotional outreach activities and works with special-interest organizations such as the Courage Center and Wilderness Inquiry to further encourage participation in activities and use of park facilities. If arrangements are made in advance, interpreters and alternative forms of printed material are available at programmed events.

Natural Resources

Three Rivers Park District has a district-wide ecological stewardship and natural resource management program focusing on natural resource preservation and restoration. Each park and trail undergo a natural resource assessment and has a specific preservation and restoration plan to meet existing conditions and Three Rivers goals.

Vegetation

The Kingswood Special Recreation Feature and surrounding watershed contain a unique assemblage of plant communities and a surprising diversity of wildlife for such a small area.

The pre-European settlement vegetation (pre-1800s) of the Kingswood property was characterized by Big Woods, defined scientifically as a mixed deciduous hardwood forest composed primarily of oak, maple, basswood, and hickory trees. Much of Minnesota’s Big Woods landscape was cleared to encourage farming and drive the lumber industry. By the 1930s, farmers had converted most of the Big Woods to cropland leaving a patchwork of widely scattered wood lots. Today, less than two percent of the Big Woods remain within the Minnesota landscape.

The Kingswood property includes a sizable patch of Big Woods, extending south along the west side of Little Long Lake. This patch of Big Woods is contiguous with an adjacent native vegetation complex to the south and southeast that includes tamarack swamp and cattail sedge marsh.

The emergent vegetation surrounding the Little Long Lake is one of the most species-diverse emergent communities found in Hennepin County. While hybrid cattail is present, it is not monotypic as it is

elsewhere. Sedges and wetland wildflowers are common amongst the cattails. Wild rice grows on the lake margins when water levels are high. The diversity of plant species attracts a number of songbirds in summer and seed-eating birds in fall.

The northwest corner of the property has been undergoing prairie restoration efforts. The vegetation composition of the prairie is a mix of both exotic species and native grasses and forbs.

Water Resources

Little Long Lake is approximately 65 acres in surface area and has a maximum depth of 76 feet at the southern end of the lake. Little Long Lake is one of the few lakes in Hennepin County that is not on the Impaired Waters list and provides unique recreational opportunities for swimming, scuba diving, snorkeling, kayaking, paddle boarding, rafting, boating (ten horsepower limit) and fishing.

The lake has long been recognized as an environmental gem due to its superb water quality and possesses an average summer water clarity exceeding four meters. Summer phosphorus concentrations are between 10 and 15 micrograms per liter (ug/l), which is significantly better than any other lake within the Three Rivers system. Further, Little Long Lake's depth, small surface watershed (approximately 150 acres), location at the top of a major watershed divide, and relative lack of watershed land area that could support intensive agricultural operations or urban/suburban development, means that the prospects for sustaining outstanding water quality in the lake are excellent.

Wildlife

Little Long Lake and the surrounding wetlands, woodlands, and open fields provide diverse, high-quality habitat for wildlife. Consequently, many species of wildlife that are rare or uncommon in Hennepin County are found on the lake or the surrounding uplands.

Because of its excellent water quality, Little Long Lake is one of the few in the Twin Cities area capable of supporting a two-tier fishery. This means the near-surface volume of the lake supports a typical warm water bass/panfish/northern pike fish community, while the deeper waters of the lake are both cold and well-oxygenated enough to support trout. In fact, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources manages the lake as a 'put-and-take' trout fishery and has annually stocked rainbow trout since 1987. In addition, a select number of brown trout and brook trout have been stocked in the past.

Beavers have been present on Little Long Lake in one or two lodges for decades. They occasionally plug up the outflow for the lake (a culvert going south under County 15), which raises the water level sufficiently to allow boaters to go between the two water bodies. Otters, mink, and muskrats live in, or adjacent to, the lake. Green frogs are also abundant in this lake and are heard calling in mid-summer.

Ospreys that nest at neighboring Gale Woods Farm use the lake for fishing. Belted kingfishers, great blue herons and little green herons are all seen regularly. The kingfishers nest in the steep bank on the west side of the Kingswood property. This is noteworthy, because nesting sites for kingfishers are becoming a rarity as more and more erosion cuts are re-vegetated. Least bitterns, sora rails, Virginia rails, short-billed and long-billed sedge wrens, swamp sparrows and willow flycatchers have been heard calling from the emergent vegetation. A pair of common loons has occupied in Little Long Lake for decades. They attempt to nest almost every year, but human disturbance usually results in nest failure.

Review by Other Council Divisions

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

Community Development – Forecasts (Todd Graham 651-602-1322) – No additional comments.

Environmental Services – Sewer (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – There are no facilities in the vicinity of this proposed land acquisition; therefore, there is no impact.

Metro Transit (Steve Mahowald 612-349-7775) – No additional comments.

Transportation Planning (Russ Owen 651-602-1724) – No additional comments.

Local Planning Assistance – Land Use (Angela Torres 651-602-1566) – No additional comments.

Local Planning Assistance – Solar Access Protection and Development (Cameran Bailey 651-602-1212) – In response to the 2016 Sustainability Plan goals to “Manage and operate parklands and facilities in a manner that ensures the ecologic, financial and social integrity of the park system in perpetuity,” “Reduce dependence on fossil fuels to minimize greenhouse gas emissions and reduce public expenditures,” and to “Reduce environmental impacts to demonstrate or model Three Rivers’ commitment to sustainable environmental stewardship,” the Council recommends the consideration of stand-alone and grid-connected, solar photovoltaic (PV) and solar PV and battery storage systems for lighting installations for new and existing extensions of the regional park and trail as a potential technological medium to support these goals. Additionally, the Council recommends the consideration of stand-alone and grid-connected solar PV and solar PV and battery storage systems for planned or existing facilities, structures, and amenities where providing electrical service may be cost-prohibitive.

The installation of various solar PV system types is becoming more common in the Upper Midwest Region. Solar PV systems provide the opportunity to reduce short and long-term construction, operation, and maintenance costs, avoid greenhouse gas emissions, serve as a form of public education, and increase the operational resilience of Regional Parks & Trails.