

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: June 6, 2019

For the Community Development Committee meeting of June 17, 2019

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of June 26, 2019

Subject: Hidden Falls – Crosby Farm Regional Park Master Plan, Saint Paul, Review File No. 50214-1

MPOSC District, Member: District G, Anthony Taylor

Council District, Member: District 14, Kris Fredson

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. § 473.313; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* Planning Policy – Strategy 1

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

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Hidden Falls – Crosby Farm Regional Park Master Plan.
2. Require that the City of Saint Paul, prior to initiating any new development of the regional park, send preliminary plans to the Engineering Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division for review in order to assess the potential impacts to the regional interceptor system.

Background

Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks are known to the public as two distinct parks; however, the City of Saint Paul groups them together for the purposes of master planning, management, and reporting with the Metropolitan Council. The total acreage inside the regional park boundary is 612.32 acres. At 131.36 acres, Hidden Falls is the smaller of the two properties that make up this unit. Crosby Farm is 480.96 acres, including 83.63 acres of water. Visitors enjoy the parks for quiet gatherings, hiking, running, walking, biking, bird watching, and boat access to the Mississippi River.

The regional parks comprise five miles of contiguous regional park land along the 17-mile stretch of the Mississippi River within the City of Saint Paul. The regional parks are within Bdote, land with cultural and historic significance to the Dakota Oyate (Nation), and within the Mississippi Flyway, a major migratory route for birds.

Rationale

The Hidden Falls – Crosby Farm Regional Park 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 Hidden Falls – Crosby Farm Regional Park Master Plan advances the Thrive outcome of Livability through increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region.

Funding

The estimated total cost to implement the master plan is \$17,589,000. This includes park-wide (\$3,811,000) and trail and connectivity improvement (\$3,045,000) recommendations, as well as recommendations that focus on sub-areas, including Hidden Falls North (\$7,788,000), Hidden Falls South (\$840,000), West Crosby Farm (\$1,275,000); and East Crosby Farm (\$830,000).

Approval of the master plan does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. The acquisition and development costs based on this master plan may be awarded through the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund, the Regional Parks Bonding Program, and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund. Further Council action is required to approve the Regional Parks Bonding project list, the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund project list, and specific grants to the City of Saint Paul.

Known Support / Opposition

The Saint Paul City Council passed a resolution approving and adopting the master plan on March 27, 2019. There is no known opposition to the Master Plan.

Figure 1: Regional Parks Open to the Public (2018), Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks location

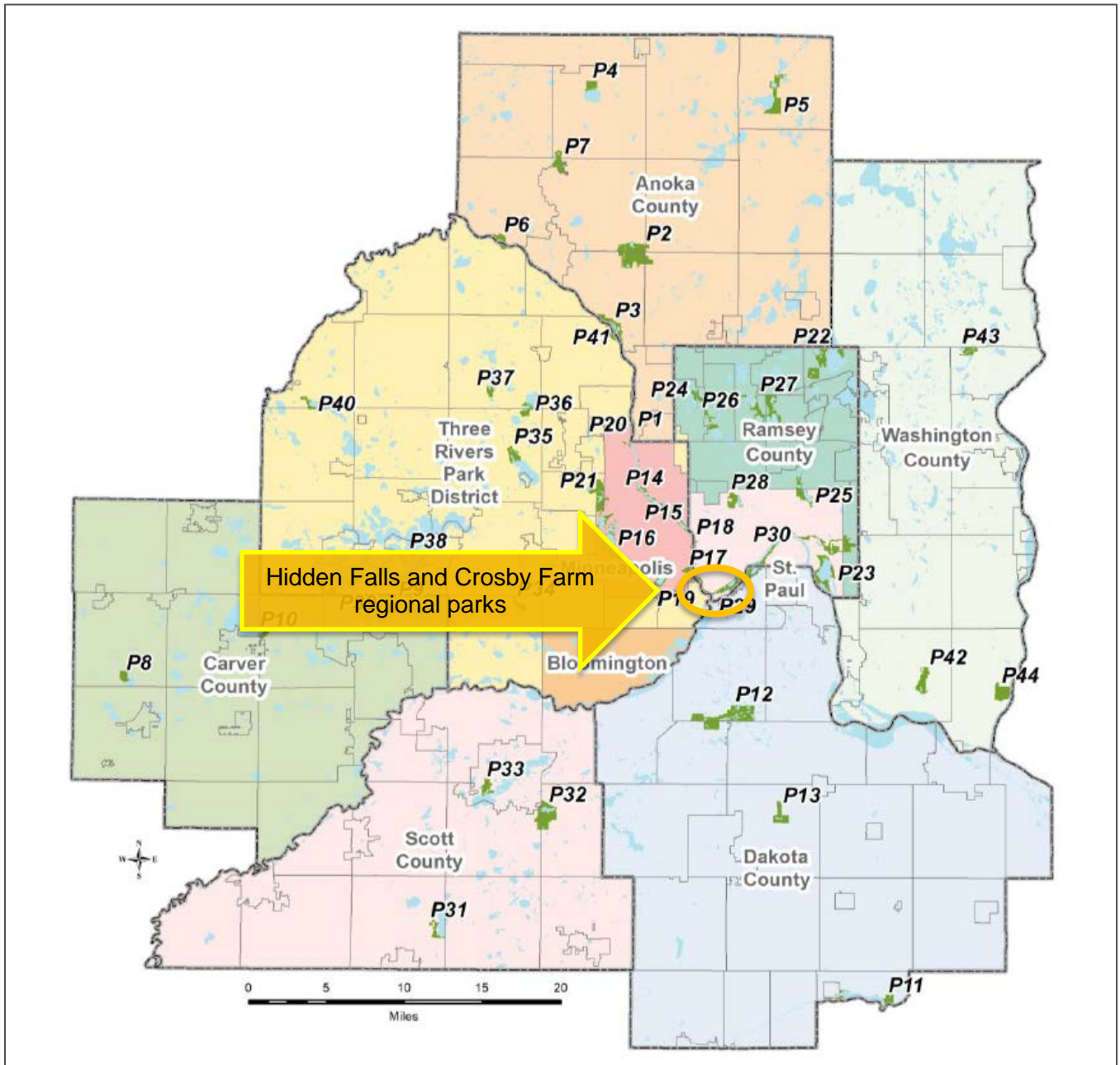


Figure 2: Regional Park System, City of Saint Paul, Ramsey County - Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks location

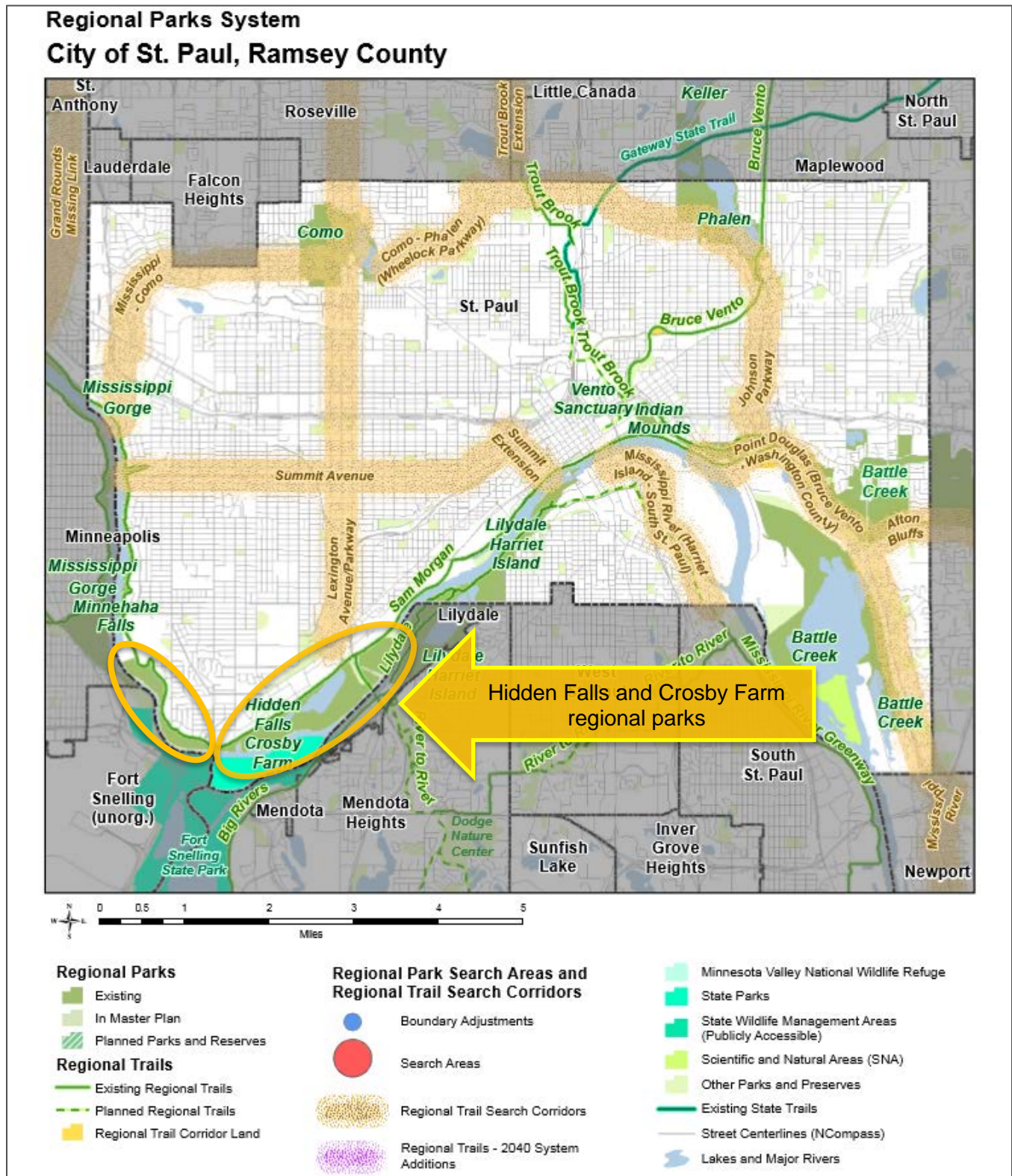


Figure 3: Local Context: Hidden Falls - Crosby Farm Regional Park



Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that master plans for regional parks address the eleven items listed below.

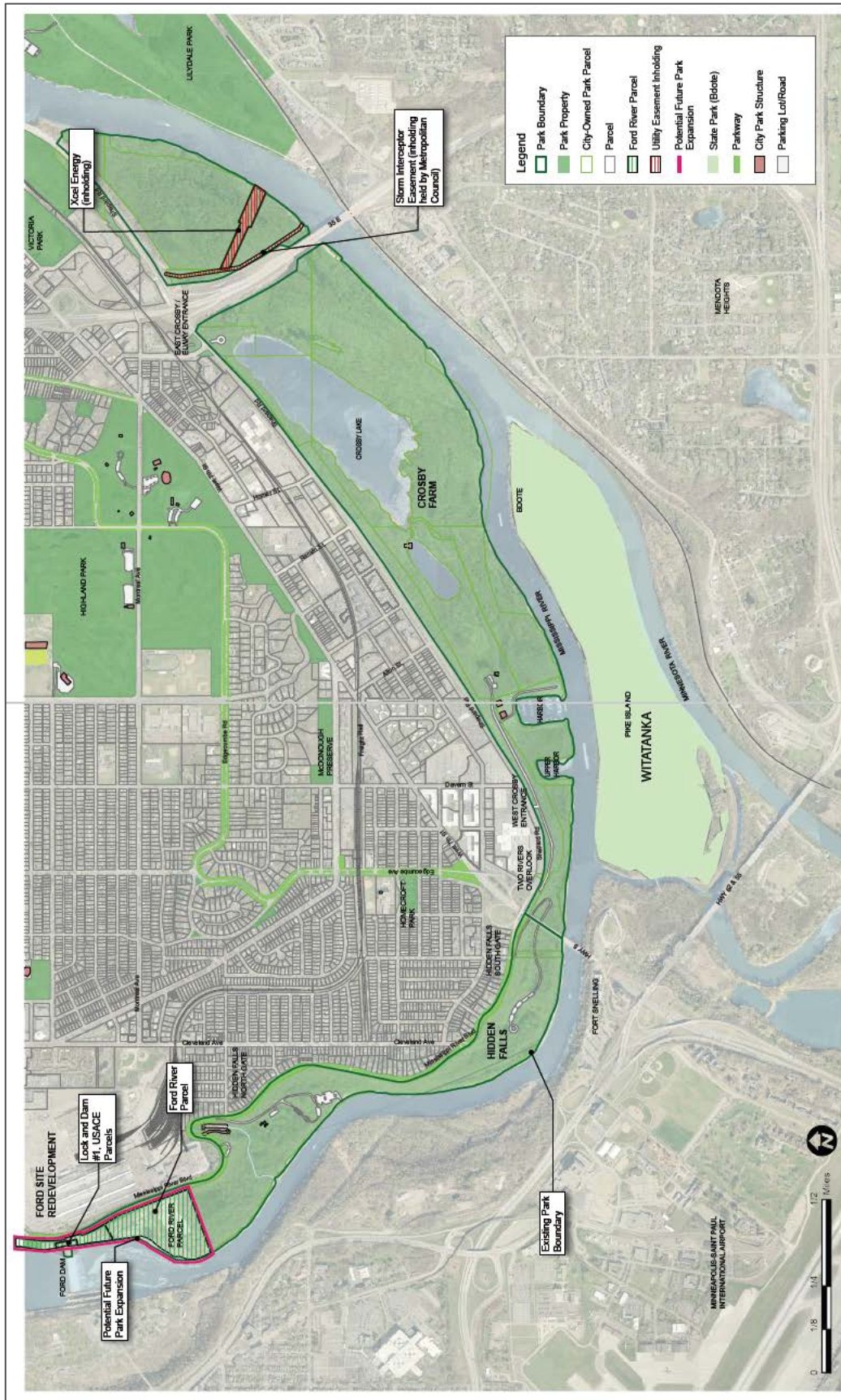
Boundaries and Acquisition

Hidden Falls Regional Park is located downstream from Lock and Dam #1 and is bordered by a parcel currently owned by the Ford Motor Company to the north, by the Mississippi River Boulevard and Shepard Road to the east, by the Mississippi River to the West, and abuts Crosby Farm Regional Park. A portion of Hidden Falls Regional Park is beneath the Highway 5 Bridge over the Mississippi River.

Crosby Farm Regional Park is bordered by Hidden Falls Regional Park to the west, by Shepard Road and the Sam Morgan Regional Trail to the north, and by the Mississippi River to the south and east. A portion of Crosby Farm Park is beneath and east of the Interstate 35-E bridge over the Mississippi River. Within Crosby Farm Regional Park is the Watergate Marina site with 160 privately leased boat slips. A private entity handles all marina operations through a contract with the City of Saint Paul. Within the park boundary, a linear corridor splits the east side of Crosby with a parcel owned by Xcel Energy company. A Metropolitan Council easement for a wastewater interceptor is located just east of Interstate 35-E.

Acquisition of additional land north of Hidden Falls Regional Park and west of Mississippi River Boulevard toward the Ford Bridge is proposed for future park expansion as parcels become available. This would ensure a contiguous green corridor that would provide ecological and recreational connectivity. The Ford River parcel includes approximately 21.55 acres owned currently by the Ford Motor Company. The site was a former waste disposal area. Acquisition of this parcel is estimated to be \$3.5 million and does not include clean-up costs of the site.

Figure 4: Boundaries and Acquisition



Stewardship Plan

The challenge of stewarding Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks lies in balancing the needs for human activities with the need to minimize interference with natural systems, meanwhile caring for a place that offers a unique, safe, and restorative experience within the city. While it is nearly impossible to restore the land to a pre-settlement condition, there are opportunities to enhance the park environment with targeted stewardship efforts to protect resources.

Vegetation

The City has established longstanding partnerships with organizations that assist in the maintenance and management of the ecological systems within the park. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides grants through the Conservation Partners Legacy Grant Program and others to fund work that restores, protects, and enhances wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game and wildlife.

The City of Saint Paul will continue to manage and maintain the vegetation and habitat areas within the park, working through available grants, volunteer opportunities, and partnerships. Beginning this year, Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks will include an adaptive silviculture test plot to explore vegetation adaptations due to climate change. This effort is being led by a partnership with Colorado State University, US Forest Service and Northern Institute for Applied Climate Science, and Mississippi Park Connection.

Wildlife

Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks provide significant habitat for numerous bird and animal species. The park is a part of the Mississippi flyway, which hosts migratory habitat for many birds, including waterfowl and raptors. The park also provides habitat for mammals including white tail deer, otter, coyotes, red fox, raccoons, and beavers.

Water Resources

The Capitol Region Watershed district completed a management plan for Crosby Lake in 2010 through a grant funded by the Minnesota Clean Water Partnership Program. The plan assessed the current water quality, and proposed management goals and implementation activities to protect and improve the lake's water quality and minimize polluted runoff to the Mississippi. Since the development of the plan, the Natural Resources Division within the Department of Parks and Recreation has worked toward carrying out recommendations.

The Capital Region Watershed District partnered with the City of Saint Paul to develop a plan and proposal for the Hidden Falls Creek restoration. The work completed in the 2014 report informs and guides priority projects to restore the creek and the falls.

Historic and Cultural Resources

The area around and including Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks is of utmost importance to the Dakota Nation, to whom it is known as the Bdote. The significance of this site to indigenous peoples should be considered as projects are identified and built. Additionally, the history of these parks provides interesting context of the expansion of the neighborhood, city, and state over time. Stories and interpretive signage can be added to the park to educate the public about the sacredness of this area next to the Mississippi River, and providing historical context regarding those who previously inhabited the land. State and federal requirements for protecting cultural resources, including those not yet identified, apply to the management and stewardship plan of the park.

Recreation

Watergate Marina is leased out to a private management group that is working to renew a contract for additional years of operation (until approximately 2021). The marina currently manages 160 private slips for boat owners. The contract includes providing all security for the marina site.

Demand Forecast

Data indicate that over half a million people (530,000) visit Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks annually (Metropolitan Council 2017 Annual Park Use Estimate). This suggests that currently the parks see 1,452 visits per day on average.

Between 2017 and 2040, regional population is projected to increase by 21.5% and Saint Paul's population is projected to increase by 11.3%. Taking Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks' latest published share of local (73%) and non-local (27%) visitation into account, the parks are projected to experience a 14% increase in visitation to 2040. Projected annual use in 2040 is 604,200 (a 14% increase).

Of the 12 regional parks or park reserves on the Mississippi River, the current annual use estimated at Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks is in the "middle of the pack." See Table 1.

Table 1: Annual Estimated Use of Regional Parks and Park Reserves on the Mississippi River

Regional Park, Park Reserve	Agency	Est. Use
Central Mississippi Riverfront	Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board (MPRB)	2,782,800
Minnehaha	MPRB	2,051,000
Mississippi Gorge	MPRB	1,189,000
Lilydale – Harriet Island	Saint Paul	1,122,800
Coon Rapids Dam	Anoka County	618,000
Hidden Falls – Crosby Farm	Saint Paul	530,000
Cherokee Heights	Saint Paul	458,400
North Mississippi	MPRB	441,400
Above the Falls	MPRB	313,200
Anoka County Riverfront	Anoka County	205,800
Spring Lake	Dakota County	115,200
Mississippi West	Anoka County	35,000

Development Concept

The goal of the master plan is to enhance access and safety to and through the urban floodplain "wilderness" along this stretch of the Mississippi River while protecting the cultural heritage and providing recreational opportunities as a regional park.

To begin, the Great River Passage (GRP) served as the basis of this plan. The GRP Master Plan proposed specific improvements at Hidden Falls Park – Crosby Farm Regional Park and developed a priority list. The proposed improvements and priorities were re-visited and then reviewed, sorted, and reorganized based on priorities received from the focus groups and the community engagement committee. Structured like the GRP Master Plan, the priorities are divided into five categories:

- Management (renamed to Policy and Programming)
- Construction: Recreation improvements/use areas
- Construction: Road and Trails
- Construction: Structures and related improvements
- Construction: Landscape Improvements

The master plan also outlines acquisition and development projects by location, including both parkwide recommendations as well as that of subareas within Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm. See Table 2. The numbers in these lists above correspond to the Key in Tables 3 and 4 on pages

Table 2: Location/focus area and cost estimates

#	Location/focus area	Estimated costs
1	Parkwide Recommendations	\$3,811,000
2	Trails and Connectivity Improvement	\$3,045,000
3	Hidden Falls North	\$7,788,000
4	Hidden Falls South	\$840,000
5	West Crosby Farm	\$1,275,000
6	East Crosby Farm	\$830,000
	Total estimated costs	\$17,589,000

Table 3: Project Priorities – Policy and Programming, Recreation Improvements, Landscape Improvements

Policy and Programming			HF = Hidden Falls, CF = Crosby Farm
Priority Level	Project Title	Key	Description of Priority
High	Invasive Species Management	1F	Increase budget for invasive species management and coordination throughout. Continue to selectively manage invasive vegetation in passive activity areas. [both]
High	Cultural Events	1A	Continue to program cultural events such as "Barebones Halloween Puppet Show." [both]
High	Enforce Pet Policy	1C	Address the off-leash dog problem by signs and education. [both]
Medium-High	Ford River Parcel Acquisition	3A	Acquire adjacent riverfront land and inholdings to expand the park. [both]
Medium-High	Bluff-top Land Acquisition	3B	Explore addition of bluff-top land to the park, from Ford Site by curve at Mississippi River Blvd. [HF]
Medium-High	Park Security	1D	Increase park surveillance to increase actual and perceived safety through a variety of methods. [both]
Medium-High	River Learning Center	5A	Support development of a River Learning Center at Watergate location, with partners including the National Park Service, Mississippi Park Connection, Friends of the Mississippi River, Capitol Region Watershed District, and Wilderness Inquiry. [CF]
Medium	Water Safety Programming	1E	Add programming and signage on boating and water safety. [both]
Low	Improve Public Transit Access	2G	Improve transit access by encouraging stops closer to the park and promoting use. [both]
Construction: Recreation Improvements/Use Areas			HF = Hidden Falls, CF = Crosby Farm
Priority Level	Project Title	Key	Description of Priority
High	Indigenous Community Gathering Area	3E	Add gathering area with fire pit designed to accommodate and recognize Native American heritage and culture. [HF]
High	Develop a Natural Surface Trail System	2E	Develop linear mountain bike trails using International Mountain Bicycling Association best practices in areas that are most suitable to handle this activity. [both]
Medium-High	Develop Cross Country Ski Trails	2F	Add Cross Country (XC) skiing trails for classic style skiing (use grooming equipment from park system). If feasible, design to be multi-use natural surface trails. [both]
Medium-High	Boat Ramp Area Improvements	3I	Add signs for trailer parking, add boat safety kiosks, consider additional parking improvements [HF]
Medium-High	Improve Picnic Lawn and Open Space	3F	Improve meadow near Hidden Falls Pavilion to natural habitat and updating picnic facilities for small group gatherings [HF]
Medium	Nature-Inspired Play Area	3D, 5B	Construct new non-traditional, nature-based, or woody play area. [both]
Medium	Add a Canoe/Kayak Launch	3C, 5C	Add (2) canoe/kayak landing areas (separate from boat ramp at Hidden Falls North Gate and Crosby). [both] *Could be combined when River Learning Center is built
Low-Medium	Managed Group Camping	5D	Develop managed, rustic group tent camping area for permitted events, with a potable water source. [CF] * Only feasible when River Learning Center is built
Not Ranked	Explore Ice Climbing	6A	Study feasibility of allowing and improving access for ice climbing
Construction: Landscape Improvements			HF = Hidden Falls, CF = Crosby Farm
Priority Level	Project Title	Key	Description
High	Expand Forest Canopy; Habitat Improvements	1G, 4A	Reduce lawn area, plant trees, and remove some parking at Hidden Falls South. Use this as an area for Cottonwood regeneration. Expand and bolster forest canopy throughout park, where appropriate [HF]
Medium-High	Erosion Mitigation	1I	Address erosion at bluff-top, following Natural Resources Inventory guidelines (stable materials for trails that will diffuse water flow, resist compaction and disintegration, and redirect water away from trails). Re-vegetate slopes where feasible. [both]
Medium	Tree Management / Remove Fallen Trees	1H	Remove fallen trees from trails, manage trees for safety, and pursue partnerships for tree canopy management. [both]
Medium	Water Quality Management	1J	Restore native floodplain and wetland areas, and address erosion near stormwater outfalls to improve water quality. [both]
Low	Restore Hidden Falls Creek	3G	Restore Hidden Falls Creek to incorporate water quality treatment and habitat enhancement in coordination with Ford site redevelopment. [HF]

Priority Key

↑ High - near term, very important
 Med-High - within 7 years (+/-), significant
 Medium - within 10 years (+/-), desired

↓ Low-Med - within 12 to 15 years (+/-), preferred
 Low - must be sequenced with other improvements
 Not ranked - needs further study, priority added in this planning process but not fully explored

Table 4: Project Priorities - Roads and Trails, Structures and Related Improvements

Construction: Roads and Trails			HF = Hidden Falls, CF = Crosby Farm
Priority Level	Project Title	Key	Description of Priority
High	Develop a Natural Surface Trail System	2E	Add natural surface trails, including the mid-bluff trail, that provide a varied experience and connect to the shoreline. [both]
High	Trail Accessibility Assessment	2A	Assess the trail network, improve accessibility (in compliance with codes) throughout, and provide clear signage to trail heads. [both]
High	Trail to Victoria Park via East Crosby	6B	Develop trail connections using and improving existing underpasses.
High	Trail to Hidden Falls	3H	Improve the trail from the Hidden Falls pavilion to the falls area. [HF]
High	Redesign Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails at Entry Roads	2D	Redesign bike and pedestrian trails along entry roads. [both]
High	Shepard Road Entrance Safety	6C	Improve Shepard Rd. crossings for improved neighborhood access. [CF]
High	Pedestrian Access Improvements	2C	Improve all pedestrian access points at all vehicular and the historic WPA stairs and improve connections to the neighborhood
Medium	Mississippi River Blvd. / Park Entrance Safety	3J, 4B	Improve safety and sight lines at Mississippi River Boulevard entrances for improved neighborhood access including the Ford Site Redevelopment. [HF]
Medium	Boardwalk and Pier	5F	Improve boardwalk and pier. [CF]
Low	Improve Hidden Falls North Parking	3K	Improve parking areas at Hidden Falls (especially near pavilion, which is not emergency vehicle accessible). [HF]
Low	Improve Hidden Falls South Parking	4C	Reduce pavement by reconfiguring parking along both entrance roads to Hidden Falls. [HF]

Construction: Structures and Related Improvements			HF = Hidden Falls, CF = Crosby Farm
Priority Level	Project Title	Key	Description
High	Interpretive Signage - Indigenous Presence	1B	Add interpretive signage for cultural history of Native American presence. [both]
High	Wayfinding	2B	Implement comprehensive wayfinding systems in Crosby Farm and Hidden Falls and develop short, signed walking tour with clear and easy to follow signs. [both]
High	New Restroom Near Boat Launch	3M	Add a year-round, minimal maintenance bathroom near the boat launch (composting if floodplain rules allow; consider temporary facilities in near term). [HF]
High	Bicycle Parking and Bike Share Programs	2H	Update existing and add new bike racks, coordinate and promote bike share with partners. [both]
Medium	Entrance Kiosk	4D	Add a kiosk to mark the entry point to Hidden Falls South. [HF]
Medium	Build a Mid-Bluff Trail	2I	Renovate the existing mid-bluff trail in Crosby Farm and add a pedestrian access stairway parallel to Rankin St. [CF]
Medium	Hidden Falls Pavilion and Restrooms	3N	Improve Hidden Falls pavilion to make restrooms accessible, and add storage space. [HF]
Low-Medium	Boat Storage Area	3O	Construct two small boat storage areas at Hidden Falls Park. [HF]
Low	Construct a Weather Shelter	3L	Build a weather shelter for summer groups. [HF] * Can be eliminated from priorities when the River Learning Center is built
Low	Trail Extension on Ford River Parcel	2J	Extend natural surface trails through Ford River Parcel when (or if) the land is acquired. [HF]
Low	Year-Round Restroom	5G, 6D	Install year-round restrooms if feasible. [CF]
Not ranked	Pump Track for Bicycles	4E	Install a pump track - a bicycle facility for skill development at Hidden Falls South, off the entrance road. [HF]

Priority Key

↑ High - near term, very important
 Med-High - within 7 years (+/-), significant
 Medium - within 10 years (+/-), desired

↓ Low-Med - within 12 to 15 years (+/-), preferred
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Figure 5: Parkwide Recommendations

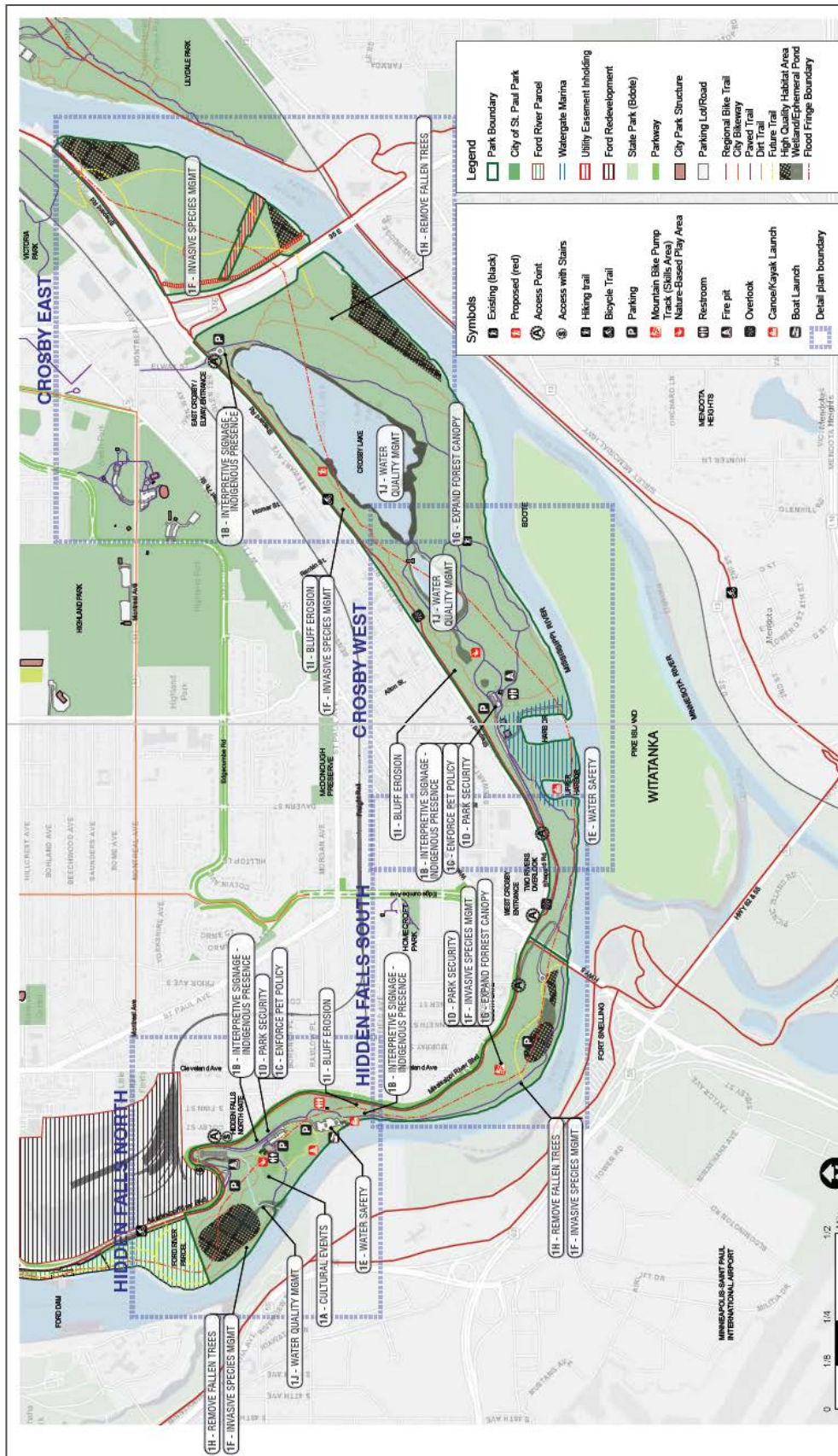
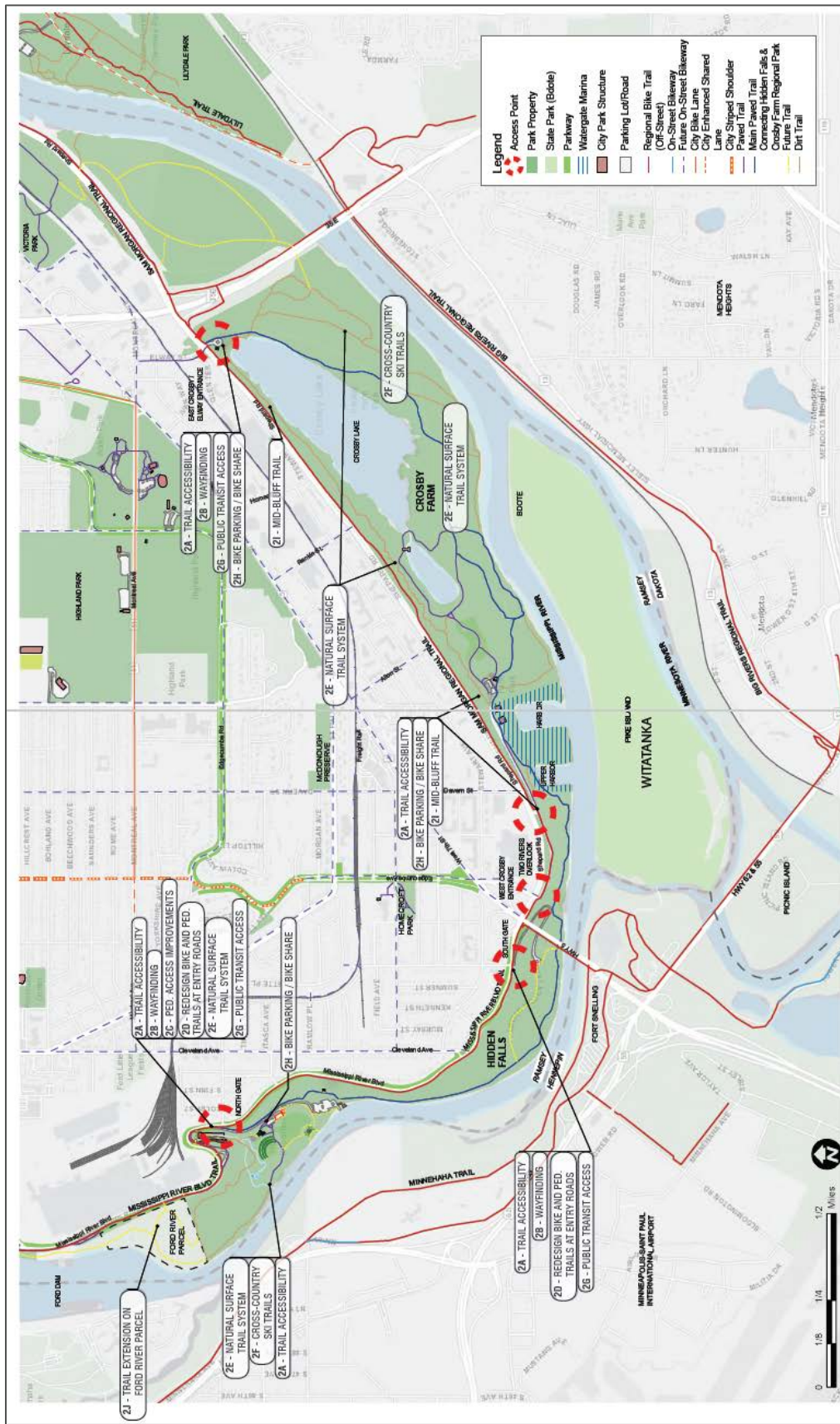


Figure 6: Trails and Connectivity Recommendations



Conflicts

The park land includes steep bluffs, an expansive river and is bordered by busy roads including Shepard Road and Mississippi River Boulevard. Therein lies a challenge to ensure safety of all park users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles at key intersections and access points to the park, as well to clearly delineate use areas in the park.

As land use change occurs locally over time with the Ford site and the proposed River Learning Center, there will likely be an increase in park visitors. Maintaining the balance of human recreational uses and activities in this natural urban park will require continual monitoring and adjustment to protect the natural resources, plant communities and habitat, as well as managing adaptation for climate change. This requires placing limits on some of the uses (i.e., off leash dogs, boat launch areas, and protecting high-quality natural areas). The plan proposes to improve the boat launch area and separate motorized boats and non-motorized boats to reduce conflicts. Delineated zones for each use will allow boaters to access water in a safer way. If trails are developed and more heavily used for mountain biking, cross country skiing, or other high-speed uses, they should be clearly marked to avoid conflict with slower paced walking and hiking groups.

Future development will need to recognize the areas of cultural and historic significance and minimize disturbance to those areas. This area's proximity to the Bdote should be acknowledged as future park projects move towards realization. Engaging with the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC), local tribal leaders, and the indigenous community will be important throughout the stages of every project. The Design and Construction Division of the Department of Parks and Recreation is working on a plan to engage with indigenous communities to develop a communication methodology to better understand, recognize, and protect the cultural resources within the park.

Public Services

The City of Saint Paul's recommendations for Hidden Falls Regional Park includes park entrance safety improvements at the intersections of Mississippi Boulevard and park roads. According to the master plan, the North Entrance to Hidden Falls, at Mississippi River Boulevard near Magoffin Avenue, is the busiest entry in the regional park. However, it is difficult for park users to navigate, requiring a hairpin turn if approaching from the south. Further, sight lines are limited due to a retaining wall and gate and the curving road. Similar issues may be encountered at the South Entrance. The plan proposes working with the City's Public Works Department to improve both intersections' safety.

One of the recommendations for Crosby Farm Regional Park includes Shepard Road Entrance Safety. According to the master plan, pedestrian access to the park is hazardous. Shepard Road is four lanes wide with a large number of vehicles many of which travel above the posted speed limit. The plan proposes working with the City's Public Works Department to improve the safety of the intersections at Gannon Road, Davern Street, Alton Street, Rankin Street, Homer Street, and Elway Street.

One of the overall recommendations is to Improve Public Transit Access. Currently no public transportation directly accesses the park. There is a bus stop across Shepard Road from the West Crosby Farm Park entrance at Gannon Street. Other bus stops are three to five blocks away from the other park entrances. In the master plan, the City of Saint Paul suggests that transit access could be improved by working with Metro Transit, the National Park Service's Alternative Transportation program, and adjacent neighborhoods to consider adding closer stops and wayfinding to park entrances, a trolley or park circulator.

Operations

Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks are currently maintained and operated by the City of Saint Paul, Department of Parks and Recreation. Funding for general Operations and Maintenance (O&M) comes from the City of Saint Paul General Fund and Special Fund allocated each year by the Mayor of Saint Paul, and funding is based on the system as a whole rather than being park specific. Operations and maintenance efforts are provided at a level appropriate for the current use of each park and are distributed across the park system. The budget for Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks, currently, is limited and as use of the park increases, new sources of funding will need to be identified to keep up with the maintenance needs of the park.

In addition, the annual park maintenance costs are approximately \$105,000 for Hidden Falls and \$80,000 for Crosby Farm.

As City of Saint Paul parks, Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm are controlled by the Department of Parks and Recreation rules and regulations for public safety and use.

The City of Saint Paul is a participant in the National Flood Insurance Policy (NFIP). Under 44 CFR 60.3(a)(2), Saint Paul is required to ensure, prior to issuing a building or grading permit for a development in the "Special Flood Hazard Area," that an Applicant is in compliance with local and NFIP regulations. As defined in City Ordinance Section 60.205 of the City of Saint Paul Zoning Code, developments in the floodplain include any change in the use or appearance of any structure or land including, but not limited to, structural changes to buildings or alterations to the shore or bank of a body of water. Site plan review is necessary for any development in the floodplain regardless of the change. Development within the Flood Fringe will be reviewed differently than development in the Floodway. Flood maps can be reviewed at the City of Saint Paul Department of Safety and Inspections zoning office or online at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) website.

Three full-time staff in the Natural Resources Department manage all natural areas across the city. They provide a great deal of support at Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks and rely on grants and partnerships for supporting the environmental management work in this park. A rough cost estimate is approximately \$250/acre for Natural Resource Management.

Currently, there are no recycling facilities in these regional parks. Some events have recycling receptacles for the duration of the event. If a future budget allows for additional labor and vehicle time, the City of Saint Paul recommends providing the option for recycling and compost facilities to give visitors the ability to responsibly handle waste generated in the parks.

Public Engagement and Participation

Saint Paul Parks and Recreation took a multi-faceted approach in planning engagement for this master plan. The project team attended local events to raise awareness of the project, offered an online survey, held meetings with connected groups and partners, ran public meetings, and shared information on the project website. The project team was available for input at events and via phone or email. The following is a summary of the engagement efforts to date. More detail can be found in the appendix.

The engagement and outreach for Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks builds on the engagement conducted for Great River Passage in 2011 and 2012, which included 28 public meetings and 5 focus groups. The City's Great River Passage initiative, managed within the Parks and Recreation Department, advocates for projects identified in the Great River Passage Master Plan.

A community advisory committee of volunteers from the community was formed to advise the master plan process. This group consisted of nearby residents, passionate park users, representatives from the District Councils, and engaged citizens of the Metropolitan region. Two community advisory committee meetings were held to review goals and give input for the project, give feedback on priority projects, and discuss proposed ranking and timeline for implementation. One public open house was held to summarize the master plan process and the project priorities.

Public Awareness

Notices are posted to the facilities websites when park closures occur. Occasionally, park facilities or trails may be closed due to a permitted event.

The south gate of Hidden Falls Regional Park is frequently closed due to flooding, snow, or ice on the steep entrance road. Whenever the Operations staff deem the south gate, or any park entrance, is a safety hazard, the gate will be closed and a notice will be posted on the facility website.

This master plan recommends a system for public communications if the park is closed due to flooding or weather-related events; in the future, park users could subscribe to updates through the City of Saint Paul's Parks and Recreation website.

Accessibility

In a 2010 vision plan for Saint Paul Parks and Recreation, the areas surrounding Hidden Falls – Crosby Farm Regional Park were characterized as “low mobility,” meaning that the census tracts nearest the park had a higher proportion of non-driving age children, elderly people, and households without cars. Discussions with residents from several affordable housing communities in the immediate vicinity indicated the parks are not accessible. Residents also described physical barriers to accessing the park due to the steep entrance roads and lack of Metro Transit service to the river bottom.

Accessibility assessments and improvements are proposed in the master plan. A trail accessibility assessment, wayfinding, and pedestrian access improvements are all indicated as high priorities in the Trails and Connectivity Improvement recommendations. A goal of trail accessibility assessment is to “improve accessibility in compliance with codes throughout” and provide clear signage to trail heads. The master plan goes on to say that the hard surface trail throughout the park needs rehabilitation to meet the requirement that the surface be free of obstructions and large cracks and, that “an accessible trail system will increase the safety, comfort and usability for all visitors.”

Improved wayfinding is another need identified in the master plan at Hidden Falls – Crosby Farm Regional Park. The parking areas at the four vehicular entrances serve as trail heads for the visitors, but there are few if any wayfinding signs or maps of the trail system there or at trail intersections. The master plan says, “the wayfinding system should include: trail system maps or kiosks at the trailheads, indications of allowed uses on every trail, a system of number or naming intersections or trails, ‘you are here’ maps, distance markers, and an indication of accessibility features.”

Pedestrian access improvements are also a high priority. Pedestrian access exists at the four vehicular entrances to the park and via the staircase adjacent to Hidden Falls Creek, but there are no crosswalks across Mississippi River Boulevard at any of the Hidden Falls access points. Furthermore, the Works Progress Administration (WPA)-era staircase at Hidden Falls is steep and not easily found from Mississippi River Boulevard. The plan proposes to “improve all pedestrian access points and road crossings to encourage non-motorized park access for neighborhood residents, future Ford Site residents, and to improve safety for bicyclists and pedestrians. Options for road crossings include high visibility crossing markings, advance warning crossing signs, stop bars for vehicles, adding signals where there are none; improving curb cuts to accessibility standards, and adding lights.”

Natural Resources

For the purposes of this master plan, the City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation engaged Great River Greening to create a Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) of Hidden Falls Park, the contents of which are summarized below. Saint Paul Natural Resources staff compiled an updated NRMP for Crosby Farm Park.

Hidden Falls Park is comprised of floodplain forest and bluff land, and is within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA). The park is a refuge for many native wildlife species and attracts thousands of visitors per year.

The Hidden Falls Regional Park Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP) was developed to identify opportunities for managing native plant communities within the park, and to provide recommendations to City of Saint Paul staff for restoration and enhancement projects.

The most intact plant community within Hidden Falls Regional Park is the floodplain forest along the Mississippi River. Much of the remaining parkland within the floodplain is considered altered and consists of minimal to no intact native habitat. The bluff area of the park is primarily comprised of oak forest or altered deciduous forest. The habitat in these areas tends to be overgrown and has a considerable amount of invasive species present. All native habitat types within the park rely on a disturbance regime, flooding, fire, and/or grazing. These disturbances have either been suppressed or are being altered by outside conditions such as changing weather patterns.

Management and enhancement of Hidden Falls Regional Park will be guided by an analysis of the conditions and constraints imposed due to its location along the bluffs and floodplain of the Mississippi River in a dense urban area. The disturbance factors inherent with Hidden Falls' location have caused varying levels of degradation and invasion by nonnative species over time. Plant communities typical of the area at the time of European settlement have been altered due to development, suppression of natural disturbance regimes (fire and grazing), alteration of the hydrologic regime (damming), and the introduction of invasive species. Using these historic pre-settlement conditions as models for moving forward with the restoration and enhancement of future plant communities may not be desirable given the likelihood of ongoing disturbance and limitations to implementing appropriate disturbance regimes as needed in the future to maintain a given plant community. The restoration effort should instead target as outcomes, plant communities that are diverse (when that is a reasonable outcome), resilient, and sustainable.

Crosby Farm Park is the largest natural park within the City of Saint Paul, encompassing floodplain forests, bluffland, oak woodlands, lakes, and marshes. Crosby Farm Park is also a significant natural area within the state of Minnesota, Mississippi River Critical Area Corridor, and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA). The park is a refuge for a broad diversity of native wildlife species and attracts thousands of visitors per year.

Figure 7: Habitat Ranking



The 2019 amendment to the management plan reviews the original recommendations, describes progress made to address these from 2005 to 2018, and provides future (post-2019) recommendations based on current site conditions. In the decade since the 2005 plan was published, management activities have been implemented based on the 2005 recommendations as well as new research and practices in natural resources restoration. The amendment addresses overarching natural resources management objectives and strategies that span multiple plant communities and those unique to specific plant communities. In some cases, updated recommendations are included in place of outdated management strategies. Specific information is included on invasive species management, mitigation of slope and trail erosion, shelterwood harvesting, planting, seeding, and management of several different grants to complete those activities.

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area

The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) is a State-designated land corridor along 72 miles of the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, including 17 miles of river and 26 miles of shoreline in Saint Paul. The MRCCA is an overlay of special regulations to guide planning and development in the river corridor in a way that preserves and enhances the quality of the river corridor. Per State Rules MR 6106.0010 – 6106.0180, local governments in the corridor must complete a MRCCA plan as part of their comprehensive plans. The City of Saint Paul is in the process of completing its MRCCA chapter as part of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The language of the MRCCA chapter within the Comprehensive Plan, together with this report, will serve as the legal guidance for planning, design and maintenance activities within Hidden Falls - Crosby Farm Parks. If MRCCA is more restrictive than other legal protections, MRCCA serves as law. When a landscape protection measure is put into law within the MRCCA corridor that is more restrictive than MRCCA, then the more restrictive legal protection serves as law. An understanding of what legal protections are in force within the Mississippi River corridor matter in any discussion about future projects at Hidden Falls – Crosby Farm Regional Park.

Review by Other Council Divisions

Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) – Two proposed Plan projects identified as having less than ‘high’ priority ranking - the ‘11 - Erosion Mitigation’ and ‘3G - Restore Hidden Falls Creek’ projects currently have significant and wide-ranging impacts upon the long-term health of the Park. Council environmental review staff recommend that these projects be reclassified as high priority projects for the Park.

The upper two-thirds of Hidden Falls Creek watershed, consisting of the decommissioned Ford Motor Company Plant (Ford) site, is expected to undergo significant changes in the next several years as it is redeveloped. The planned Ford site stormwater management system that is proposed will have significant direct impacts upon the stability and health of Hidden Falls Creek in the lower third of the watershed. It will be much more expedient and cost-effective to carry out restoration of the lower reach of the Creek when access from the upper reach is available from the Ford site. Having the entire Creek restored and stabilized will also improve the effectiveness of all other proposed vegetation and habitat restoration and management Plan projects within the Park.

Environmental – Sewer (Roger Janzig 612-602-1119) – A Metropolitan Council easement for a wastewater interceptor is located just east of Interstate 35-E. Prior to initiating any new development of these regional parks, the City of Saint Paul needs to send preliminary plans to the Engineering Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council’s Environmental Services Division for review in order to assess the potential impacts to the regional interceptor system.

Metro Transit (Scott Thompson 612-349-7774) – The master plan references a need for more frequent Metro Transit service to Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks. However, given the variability of trips on any given day, and the seasonal nature of the travel demand to these regional parks, it would be challenging for Metro Transit to efficiently serve these parks more frequently. Another alternative could be for the City of Saint Paul to contract this service through one of the regional private operators.

Transportation Planning (Russ Owen 651-602-1724) – The Samuel Morgan Regional Trail, which traverses Hidden Falls and Crosby Farm regional parks, is a designated Tier 1 alignment in the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN). Under this designation in the regional Transportation Policy Plan, Tier 1 alignments are considered the “highest priority for transportation funding” through the biannual Regional Solicitation under the “Trails and Multiuse Bicycle Facilities” category. Trails and bikeways that directly connect the RBTN to local bikeway networks are also a priority for federal transportation funding. The City of Saint Paul should consider acknowledging the RBTN in the text and include this RBTN alignment on maps of Existing Conditions (Map 1, Ch. 2) and Trails & Connectivity Recommendations (Map 2, Ch. 4).

Local Planning Assistance – Land Use (Patrick Boylan 651-602-1330) – Regarding this master plan, there were no issues with the City of Saint Paul’s comprehensive plan. No other questions or concerns.

Local Planning Assistance – Solar Access Protection and Development (Cameran Bailey 651-602-1212) – In response to the master plan’s Policy and Programming goal to “Increase park surveillance to increase actual and perceived safety through a variety of methods,” Council staff recommends the consideration of stand-alone, solar photovoltaic (PV) and battery storage lighting installations for facilities in the regional park, where new lighting is being considering as a method to support this goal.

Additionally, Council staff recommends the consideration of stand-alone and grid-connected solar PV and solar PV and battery storage systems for planned or existing facilities where installing electrical wiring may be cost-prohibitive, or electric service is undesirably disrupted by natural events.

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 and trails.