

Attachment 3.

# 2040 REGIONAL PARKS POLICY PLAN

2020 Amendment



**METROPOLITAN**  
C O U N C I L

December 2020

# 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 rivers – the Mississippi and Minnesota – anchor our region’s two largest cities – Minneapolis and Saint  
6 Paul. These waters serve as a foundation to define our region as a natural-resource rich, outdoors-  
7 connected culture that is well-known for its high quality of life, its strong, resilient economy, and many  
8 other assets:

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

14 Today, the Twin Cities metropolitan area – the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council – is a thriving  
15 region of over 3 million people living in 186 communities across the seven counties of Anoka, Carver,  
16 Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington. The region has emerged as a world-class  
17 metropolitan area – a great place to live, work, play, and do business.

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

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

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

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

34 *Thrive* is the result of extensive engagement with the region’s residents; civic, non-profit, and business  
35 leaders; and government officials. As a regional plan, *Thrive* addresses issues greater than any one  
36 neighborhood, city, or single county can tackle alone to build and maintain a thriving metropolitan

1 region. Using an outcomes-based approach, *Thrive* outlines five outcomes and three principles as the  
2 foundation of a prosperous, equitable, and livable region for today and generations to come.

### 3 *Thrive Outcomes*

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

### 8 **Stewardship**

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

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

### 17 **Prosperity**

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

22 Advancing prosperity includes:

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

### 29 **Equity**

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

## Chapter One: Planning for the Twin Cities Region

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

### 6 **Livability**

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

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

### 19 **Sustainability**

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

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

### 29 *Thrive Principles*

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



1 **Integration**

2 Integration is the intentional combining of related activities to achieve more effective results and  
3 leveraging multiple policy tools to address complex regional challenges and opportunities. The *Thrive*  
4 outcomes described above are lofty ideals that cut across the Council’s functions and responsibilities.  
5 Pursuing them demands that the Council use its full range of authorities and activities in more  
6 coordinated ways. Achieving integration involves moving beyond organizational silos and coordinating  
7 effectively with partners and stakeholders across and throughout the region.

8 **Collaboration**

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

16 **Accountability**

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

22 ***Additional Direction from Thrive MSP 2040 for the 2040 Regional Parks Policy***  
23 ***Plan***

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

- 29 • Expand the Regional Parks System to conserve, maintain, and connect natural resources  
30 identified as being of high quality or having regional importance, as identified in the *2040*  
31 *Regional Parks Policy Plan*.
- 32 • Provide a comprehensive regional park and trail system that preserves high-quality natural  
33 resources, increases climate resiliency, fosters healthy outcomes, connects communities, and  
34 enhances quality of life in the region.
- 35 • Promote expanded multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit network,  
36 where appropriate.

- Strengthen equitable use of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.

### Regional Growth and Demographics

By 2040, the region is projected to be home to more than 3.7 million people, a gain of 803,000 residents from 2010 according to Metropolitan Council's 2019 *Twin Cities Regional Forecast to 2040* (Table 1-1). Additionally, the region will add 472,000 jobs by 2040. Employment and economic opportunities attract new residents to the region more than other factors.

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

	2010	2020	2030	2040
Population	2,850,000	3,168,000	3,451,000	3,653,000
Households	1,118,000	1,237,000	1,351,000	1,447,000
Employment	1,544,000	1,803,000	1,900,000	2,016,000

In addition, the population is changing in ways that will influence how the region develops and redevelops:

- By 2040, two in every five Twin Cities residents will be people of color. The region's population of color will more than double during the forecast period, going from 676,000 in 2010 to 1,453,000 in 2040. In contrast, the region's White population will level off in the late 2020s, and then decline slightly after 2030. People of color will become a greater share of our region's population: from 24% in 2010 to 40% in 2040.
- By 2040, one in every five Twin Cities residents will be age 65 or older. The Twin Cities region's older adult population will double between 2010 and 2030, and will continue to grow, from 307,000 older adults in 2010 to 760,000 in 2040—a 148% increase.
- By 2040, people living alone will account for a third of all households. The Metropolitan Council's forecast expects 1,447,000 households in the region in 2040, up 29% from the 1,118,000 households counted in the 2010 Census.

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

In addition, SCORP cites several studies showing that involvement in nature-based outdoor recreation among young adults and their children has decreased since the 1990s. The relative participation of different segments of the population in nature-based outdoor recreation, together with their respective

1 population growth rates, create significant challenges ahead in terms of park and trail utilization, as well  
2 as, maintaining broad-based public support for park and trail investments. To this end, the *2040*  
3 *Regional Parks Policy Plan* incorporates specific aims to strengthen equitable usage of regional parks  
4 and trails by all our region's residents.

## 5 *Community Designations*

6 The seven-county region contains a wide range of communities, from agricultural townships to densely  
7 developed downtown neighborhoods. Recognizing that one size does not fit all, the Council uses  
8 community designations to group communities with similar characteristics to implement regional policy  
9 at the local level through comprehensive plans (See Figure 1-1). Community designations fall within  
10 two main categories, the Metropolitan Urban Service Area and the Rural Service Area.

### 11 **Metropolitan Urban Service Area**

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

- 20 • Urban Center
- 21 • Urban
- 22 • Suburban
- 23 • Suburban Edge
- 24 • Emerging Suburban Edge

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

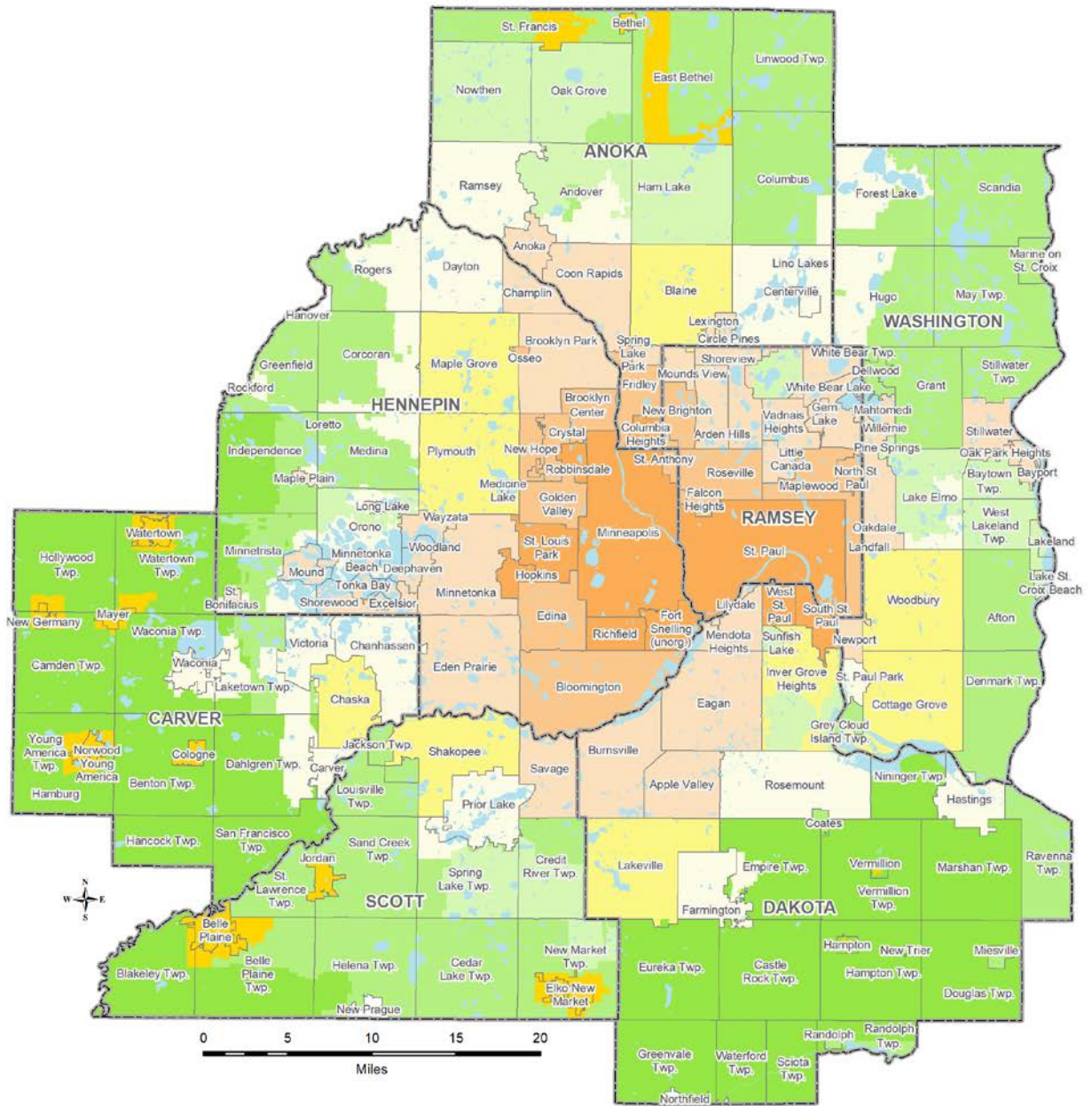
### 32 **Rural Service Area**

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

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- 1       • Rural Center
- 2       • Rural Residential
- 3       • Diversified Rural
- 4       • Agricultural
- 5       The Rural Service Area contains some of the Regional Parks System's large park reserves, including
- 6       Crow Hassan and Big Marine park reserves.

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



**Thrive MSP 2040 Community Designations**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#4CAF50; border:1px solid black;"></span> Agricultural           | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#FF9800; border:1px solid black;"></span> Urban            |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#C8E6C9; border:1px solid black;"></span> Rural Residential      | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#FF5722; border:1px solid black;"></span> Urban Center     |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#A5D6A7; border:1px solid black;"></span> Diversified Rural      | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; border:1px solid black;"></span> Outside Council planning authority         |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#FFEB3B; border:1px solid black;"></span> Rural Center           | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; border:2px solid black;"></span> County Boundaries                          |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#FFF9C4; border:1px solid black;"></span> Emerging Suburban Edge | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; border:1px solid black;"></span> City and Township Boundaries               |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#FFF176; border:1px solid black;"></span> Suburban Edge          | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#ADD8E6; border:1px solid black;"></span> Lakes and Rivers |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#FFCC80; border:1px solid black;"></span> 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, conform with the Council's metropolitan system plans  
7 (Minnesota Statutes 473.864). Following the decennial adoption of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy*  
8 *Plan* and once the Council issues system statements, as required under the Metropolitan Land  
9 Planning Act, local communities have three years to update their local comprehensive plan. If the  
10 Council issues system statements based on a future amendment to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy*  
11 *Plan*, local communities have nine months to amend their comprehensive plans (Minnesota Statutes,  
12 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 regional 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 regional 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.

## Chapter One: Planning for the Twin Cities Region

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

### 15 **Compatibility**

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

19          As local communities update their comprehensive plans, the Council encourages them to identify  
20          locally important natural areas for protection through acquisition, conservation easements, and  
21          conservation-sensitive development practices. In addition to planning for the recreational needs of its  
22          residents, the Council encourages communities to plan local trail connections to the Regional Parks  
23          System. Together, the region, the regional park implementing agencies, local communities, nonprofit  
24          organizations, and the private sector can preserve natural areas and enhance multimodal access to  
25          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 documented<sup>1</sup>. 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 and obesity. Benefits to psychological well-being include stress  
7 reduction, attention restoration, and improved cognitive functioning. Social well-being benefits include  
8 increased social capital, family bonding, and social integration. Parks and open green space also  
9 contribute many environmental benefits including assisting in the management of stormwater, helping  
10 to ameliorate the effects of urban heat islands, conserving the diversity of flora and fauna in the region,  
11 and filtering the air we breathe.<sup>2</sup>

12 The benefits afforded by the Regional Parks System, illustrated above, help to keep the region at the  
13 top of national livability rankings. The Twin Cities area's 64 regional parks, park reserves, and special  
14 recreation features, plus more than 415 miles of regional trails open to the public, showcase the unique  
15 landscapes of the region and provide year-round recreation. The region's residents have consistently  
16 singled out the region's parks, trails, and natural environment as the most attractive feature of the  
17 region. Drawing more than 63 million annual visits in 2019, the Regional Parks System provides access  
18 to natural space that contributes to physical and emotional well-being. Many of the region's most well-  
19 known and iconic sites are part of the Regional Parks System – the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, Como  
20 Park Zoo and Conservatory, Lebanon Hills Regional Park, Bunker Hills Regional Park, Elm Creek Park  
21 Reserve, and 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, thereby improving climate  
26 resilience 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

- 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 • Strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents across age,  
5 race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability, inspiring a legacy of stewardship that also  
6 strengthens friendships, 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, as  
11 well as private sector facilities, including new ownership models such as privately-owned public spaces.  
12 All these other facilities and services complement those of the Regional Parks System.

13 Additionally, the Regional Parks System plays a role addressing climate change in the region.  
14 Conserving, maintaining, and enhancing the Regional Parks System through proactive planning and  
15 asset management can increase the resilience of the region and reduce the impacts associated with  
16 climate change. The Regional Parks System provides carbon sequestration and other benefits  
17 including stormwater management, urban heat island mitigation, biodiversity enhancement and  
18 improvements to air and water quality. Working with partners, the Council is committed to quantifying  
19 these ecological benefits as well as developing regional policies that build resilience.

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

### 22 *The Regional Parks System*

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

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

29 In response to state legislation, about 31,000 acres of existing parks were designated as “regional  
30 recreation open space.” The newly designated regional parks had about 5 million visits in 1975. Over  
31 the past 40 years, the Council has invested state and regional funds to help local park agencies  
32 develop those first designated regional parks, as well as to acquire and develop new parks and trails for  
33 the growing metropolitan population. The Regional Parks System strives to build upon the world class  
34 system of interconnected parks and natural areas first established in Minneapolis by such visionaries  
35 as Horace Cleveland and Theodore Wirth and to extend that model throughout the region.

36 The Regional Parks System includes:

- 37 • 54,465 acres open for public use

- 1 • 56 regional parks and park reserves
- 2 • Eight special recreation features, such as the zoo and conservatory at Como Regional Park
- 3 • 55 regional trails, with 415 miles currently open to the public
- 4 • More than 63 million visits in 2019
- 5 • An investment of more than \$658 million in state and regional dollars since inception, with an
- 6 additional \$163 million of state funds to partially finance operation and maintenance of the
- 7 Regional Parks System

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

## 15 **Regional Parks**

16 Regional parks most notably contain a diversity of nature-based resources, either naturally occurring or  
17 human-built, and are typically 200-500 acres in size. Regional parks accommodate a variety of outdoor  
18 recreation activities. In 2020, a total of 44 regional parks were open to the public. Examples of regional  
19 parks include:

- 20 • Battle Creek-Indian Mounds Regional Park (City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County)
- 21 • Lake Waconia Regional Park (Carver County)
- 22 • Lebanon Hills Regional Park (Dakota County)
- 23 • Theodore Wirth Regional Park (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board)
- 24 • Spring Lake Regional Park (Scott County)

## 25 **Park Reserves**

26 Park reserves, like regional parks, provide for a diversity of outdoor recreation activities. One major  
27 feature that distinguishes the park reserve from a regional park is its size. The minimum size for a park  
28 reserve is 1,000 acres. Additionally, regional park implementing agencies are required to manage at  
29 least 80% of the park reserve as natural lands that protect the ecological functions of the native  
30 landscape. As of 2020, a total of 12 park reserves were open to the public. Examples of park reserves  
31 include:

- 32 • Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve (City of Bloomington and Three Rivers Park  
33 District)
- 34 • Lake Elmo Park Reserve (Washington County)
- 35 • Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve (Anoka County)



## 1 **Regional Trails**

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

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

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

- 10 • East Anoka County Regional Trail (Anoka County)
- 11 • Highway 96 Regional Trail (Ramsey County)

12 As of 2020, 55 regional trails totaling approximately 415 miles were open for public use.

## 13 **Special Recreation Features**

14 Special recreation features are defined as Regional Parks System opportunities not generally found in  
15 the regional parks, park reserves, or trail corridors. Special recreation features often require a unique  
16 managing or programming effort. As of 2020, there were eight special recreation features open to the  
17 public. Examples of special recreation features include:

- 18 • Como Park Zoo (City of Saint Paul)
- 19 • Gale Woods Farm (Three Rivers Park District)
- 20 • Square Lake (Washington County)

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

## 22 *Regional Parks System Management Structure*

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

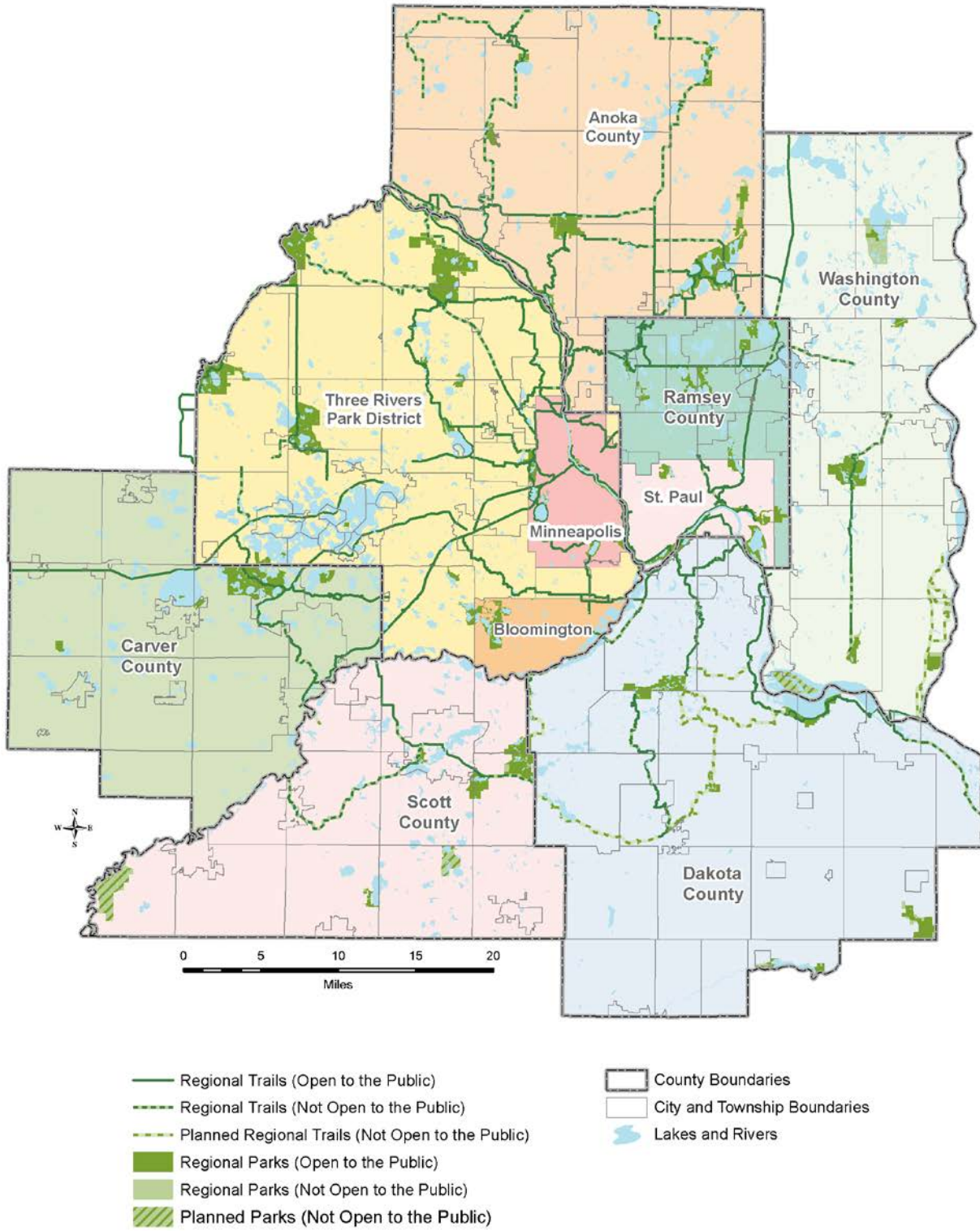
## 27 **Regional Park Implementing Agencies' Role**

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

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

- 1 The regional park implementing agencies are:
- 2     • Anoka County
- 3     • City of Bloomington
- 4     • Carver County
- 5     • Dakota County
- 6     • Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- 7     • Ramsey County
- 8     • City of Saint Paul
- 9     • Scott County
- 10    • Three Rivers Park District
- 11    • Washington County

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



2

1 **Metropolitan Council Role**

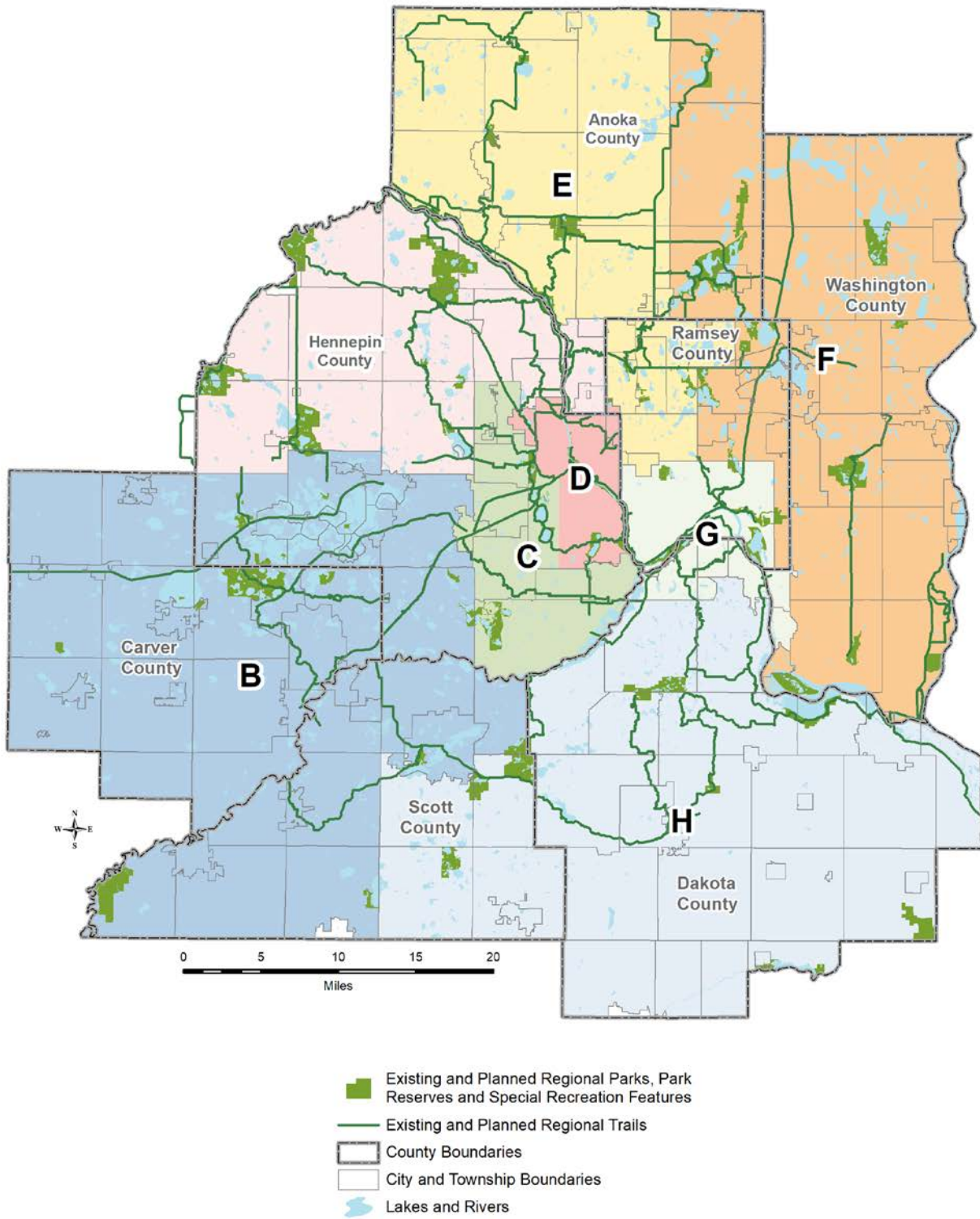
2 Regional Parks System legislation directs the Council to take the lead role in providing for a Regional  
3 Parks System that will complement the recreational open space opportunities provided in the area by  
4 the federal, state, and local units of government. State law directs the Council to determine 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 2923 later in this chapter for an overview of key Minnesota  
9 legislation.

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

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

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

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



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 composed 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 information is available in the Regional Parks System Fund  
7 Distribution Policy, .and in program specific guidance.

8 **Regional Parks Bonding Program**

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

13 In addition to its Regional Parks Bonding Program, the Council is committed to creating a grant  
14 program 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 Program**

29 The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program is organized into two separate accounts,  
30 corresponding to different funding sources. The two funding sources are the Parks and Trails Legacy  
31 Fund and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. As noted above, 10% of the Parks and  
32 Trails Legacy Fund appropriations are set aside for land acquisition through the first Park Acquisition  
33 Opportunity Fund sub-program. Direct appropriations for land acquisition from the Environment and  
34 Natural Resources Trust Fund, which are made by Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota  
35 Resources, are allocated to the second Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund account.

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

1 The Council matches every \$3 in state funding from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund with \$2 from  
2 Council bonds for the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program, as required by Minnesota Statutes,  
3 section 85.53, subd. 3. For consistency, the Council has chosen to make the same match for  
4 Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund funding for park acquisition. Additional information is in  
5 the Regional Parks System Fund Distribution Policy.

6 The Council's Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program is non-competitive and awarded based on  
7 funding availability.

### 8 **Operation and Maintenance**

9 The Council administers state funds to regional park implementing agencies to pay for a portion of their  
10 operation and maintenance costs. The share each regional park implementing agency receives is  
11 based on a formula specified in state statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351).

### 12 **Direct Pass-through Appropriations**

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

### 17 **Total System Investment**

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

1 *Table 2-1: 40-year Regional Parks System State and Regional Funding Investments, 1974-*  
 2 *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	0.038% 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

3

4 About 0.7% of the total state and local taxes paid by a household in the region go to support the  
 5 Regional Parks System. For the owner of a \$250,000 home in the seven-county metropolitan area, the  
 6 average annual cost of the Regional Parks System is \$70 – including \$19 in state income and sales  
 7 taxes and \$51 in regional and local property taxes.

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

12 *Role of the Regional Parks Policy Plan*

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

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

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

6 Results matter. For the Council, accountability, a core principle adopted with *Thrive MSP 2040*,  
7 includes a commitment to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the policies and procedures  
8 governing the Regional Parks System. Prior to the adoption of the next update to the Regional Parks  
9 Policy Plan, the Council will work with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the  
10 regional parks implementing agencies, and other parks stakeholders to develop a set of Regional Parks  
11 Policy Plan indicators that quantitatively assess progress on the outcomes, goals, and strategies in this  
12 plan. Which policies are working well? How might we revise policies where performance is lower than  
13 expectations? Indicators might address key priorities such as strengthening equitable usage, managing  
14 natural resources within the Regional Parks System, and the contributions of the Regional Parks  
15 System toward climate resilience. The Council will then work with the Metropolitan Parks and Open  
16 Space Commission, the regional parks implementing agencies, and other parks stakeholders to use the  
17 Regional Parks Policy Plan indicators as a foundation for continuous improvement and public  
18 accountability as well as a source of insight for future policy updates. These conversations could  
19 include convenings on how the partners in the Regional Parks System collectively work together to  
20 move the trajectory of specific indicators.

## 21 **Planning for 2040**

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

27 Protecting remaining high-quality natural resource lands in the metropolitan area builds on past  
28 investments and offers an excellent opportunity for further investment in the Regional Parks System as  
29 the region grows by 888,000 more people from 2010 to 2040. To that end, the vision for the Regional  
30 Parks System includes expanding it from nearly 54,500 acres today to nearly 70,000 acres, and more  
31 than tripling the trail system from 415 miles today to 1,300 miles by 2040. With the added expansion of  
32 the 2020 System Addition designation process, the Regional Parks System has reached these  
33 landmark goals. Now the hard work of planning, acquiring, protecting, and developing these new parks  
34 and trails continues. New regional trails and greenway corridors will link regional parks and park  
35 reserves with one another as well as with population centers. Also proposed are two additional regional  
36 parks in Carver County, two in western Hennepin County by Three Rivers Park District, and three in  
37 Anoka County, one of which has been identified as a potential park since 1974. These planned regional  
38 parks and trails will enable residents to enjoy a variety of new park experiences throughout the region.

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

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

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

## 11    **System Plan**

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

16          The Council reviews the system plan portion of the Regional Parks Policy Plan every four years as part  
17          of the policy plan revision process and may add, modify, or delete planned elements to the system.  
18          Additions, including major boundary adjustments, or deletions to the system proposed outside the  
19          regular plan review process are substantial revisions to the policy plan, and as such require an  
20          amendment to the policy plan. Identification of specific boundaries and detailed planning for individual  
21          units of the system are addressed in master plans for each unit. The master plans are prepared by the  
22          regional 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, or a major boundary adjustment as defined in the  
28          Chapter 5, Strategy 1, Boundary Adjustment section.

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

## 34    **Updating the Policy Plan**

35          Minnesota law requires the Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the Regional Parks Policy  
36          Plan at least every four years (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147). However, over a four-year period,  
37          changes occur in population, acquisition, development, and system use. Updating the data and factual  
38          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% 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% of the money must be distributed based on each implementing agency’s  
19 relative share of nonlocal visits based on the most recent user visitation survey conducted by the  
20 Metropolitan Council; and (4) 10% of the money must be distributed as grants to implementing  
21 agencies for land acquisition within Metropolitan Council approved regional parks and trails master plan  
22 boundaries under the council’s park acquisition opportunity grant program.”

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

24 “The Metropolitan Council shall distribute the operation and maintenance money as follows: (1) 40%  
25 based on the use that each implementing agency’s regional recreation open space system has in  
26 proportion to the total use of the metropolitan regional recreation open space system; (2) 40% based on  
27 the operation and maintenance expenditures made in the previous year by each implementing agency  
28 in proportion to the total operation and maintenance expenditures of all the implementing agencies; and  
29 (3) 20% based on the acreage that each implementing agency’s regional recreation open space system  
30 has in proportion to the total acreage of the metropolitan 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 active recreation, such as playgrounds, athletic fields, courts, and aquatic centers. Private  
19 operations also make substantial contributions to the development of facilities and the provision of  
20 services and include golf courses, riding facilities, marinas, day camps, and downhill ski areas, as well  
21 as privately owned public spaces.

### 22 **National Parks and Federal Lands**

23 The Twin Cities region includes the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge as well as two national  
24 parks--the 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 was established in 1988 and is a unit  
34 of the National Park Service. The National Park Service owns very little land within its borders but  
35 partners with local governments, state agencies, and organizations to protect the significant resources  
36 along the 72-mile stretch of river running through the region. Several regional parks and trails, which

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

### 5 *St. Croix National Scenic Riverway*

6 A portion of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is within 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 a system of boat and canoe launches that travel through the  
20 metropolitan area along the Cannon, Crow, Minnesota, Mississippi, St. Croix, and Rum rivers. The  
21 DNR and its local unit of government partners actively manage the state water trails for canoeing,  
22 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 operation and maintenance  
31 of these facilities. Figure 3-1 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.

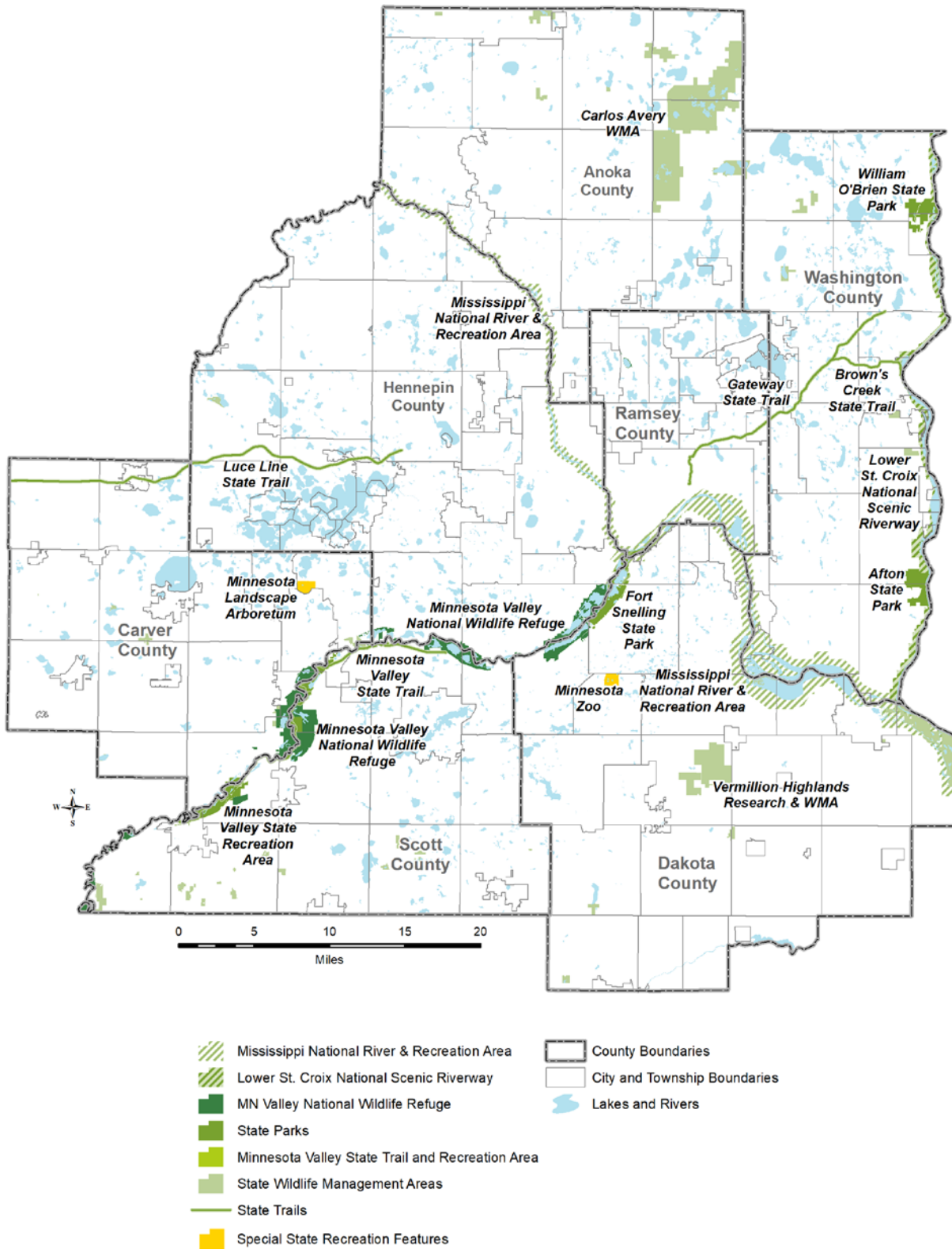
### 16 **Nonprofit Partners**

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 to 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

*Components of the Regional Parks System*

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

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

<b>Local Facilities</b>					
<b>Component</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Site Attributes</b>	<b>Site Location</b>
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, 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.

<b>Local Facilities</b>					
<b>Component</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Site Attributes</b>	<b>Site Location</b>
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 developing 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.

<b>Local Facilities</b>					
<b>Component</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Site Attributes</b>	<b>Site Location</b>
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.
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.

<b>Regional Facilities</b>					
<b>Component</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Service Area</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Site Attributes</b>	<b>Site Location</b>
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 - 1000 acres (100-acre minimum)	Complete natural setting contiguous to water bodies or watercourses where possible.	Where natural resource occurs-- particularly water.
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	1,000+ 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 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.



Regional Facilities					
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 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, a linking trail 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.
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.

Elements of the Regional Parks System are categorized into four major types: 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 1000 acres of land. Occasionally, because of the quality of the natural 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 2020, there are 44 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 (2020)*

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park	Map #
Anoka County	Anoka County Riverfront Regional Park	P1
Anoka County	Bunker Hills Regional Park	P2
Anoka County	Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park	P3
Anoka County	Lake George Regional Park	P4
Anoka County	Martin-Island-Linwood Lakes Regional Park	P5
Anoka County	Mississippi West Regional Park	P6
Anoka County	Rum River Central Regional Park	P7
Carver County	Baylor Regional Park	P8
Carver County	Lake Minnewashta Regional Park	P9
Carver County	Lake Waconia Regional Park	P10
Dakota County	Lake Byllesby Regional Park	P11
Dakota County	Lebanon Hills Regional Park	P12
Dakota County	Whitetail Woods Regional Park	P13
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Above the Falls Regional Park	P14
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park	P15
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minneapolis Chain-of-Lakes Regional Park	P16

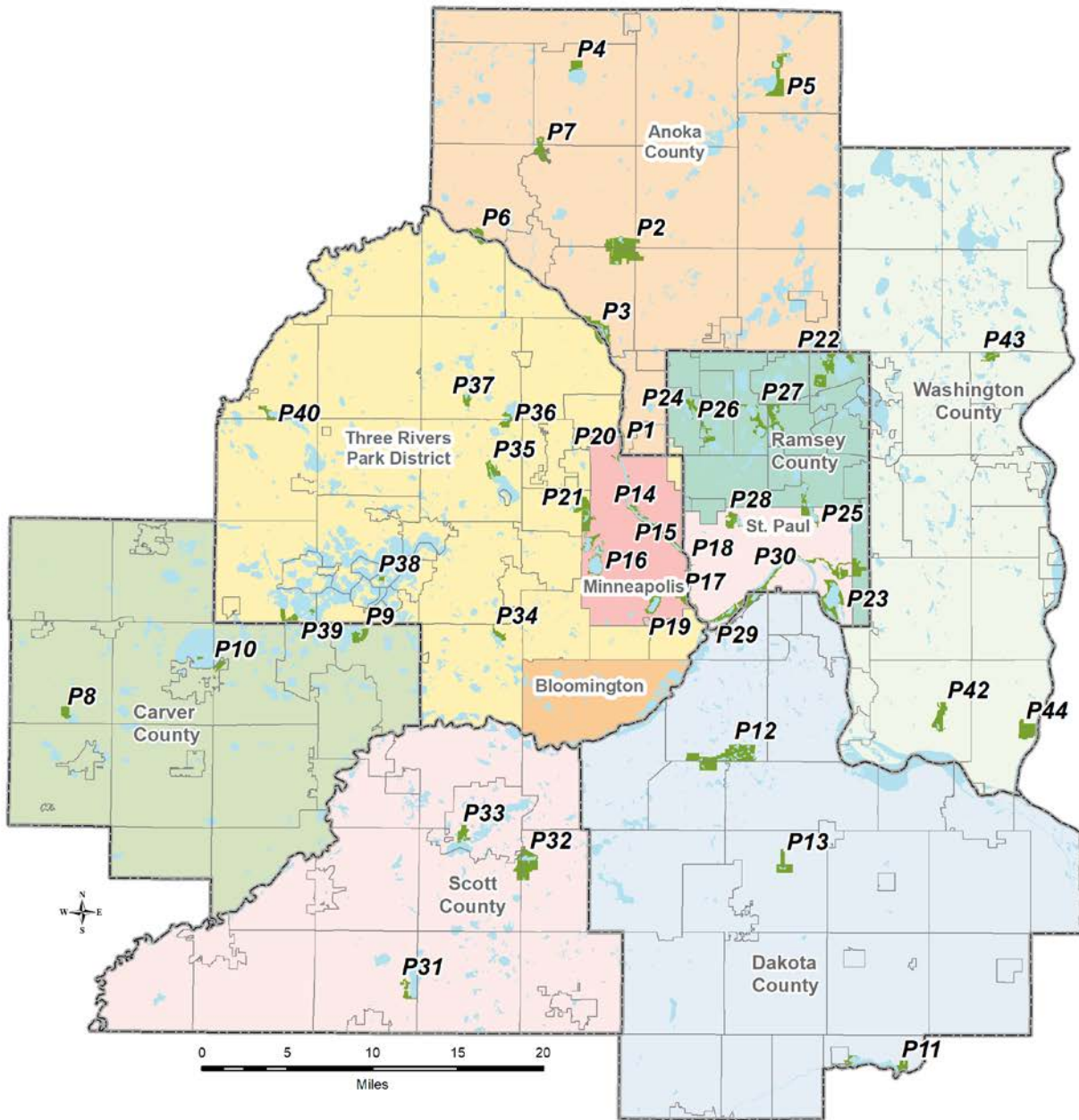
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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park	Map #
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minnehaha Regional Park	P17
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board/Saint Paul	Mississippi Gorge Regional Park	P18
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park	P19
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers Park District	North Mississippi Regional Park	P20
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Theodore Wirth Regional Park	P21
Ramsey County	Bald Eagle-Otter Lake Regional Park	P22
Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Battle Creek & Indian Mounds Regional Park	P23
Ramsey County	Long Lake Regional Park	P24
Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Phalen-Keller Regional Park	P25
Ramsey County	Tony Schmidt Regional Park	P26
Ramsey County	Vadnais-Snail Lake Regional Park	P27
Saint Paul/Ramsey County	Battle Creek & Indian Mounds Regional Park	P23
Saint Paul	Como Regional Park	P28
Saint Paul	Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm Regional Park	P29
Saint Paul	Lilydale-Harriet Island & Cherokee Heights Regional Park	P30
Saint Paul/Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Mississippi Gorge Regional Park	P18
Saint Paul/Ramsey County	Phalen-Keller Regional Park	P25
Scott County	Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park	P31
Scott County/Three Rivers Park District	Cleary Lake Regional Park	P32
Scott County	Spring Lake Regional Park	P33
Three Rivers Park District	Bryant Lake Regional Park	P34
Three Rivers Park District/Scott County	Cleary Lake Regional Park	P32
Three Rivers Park District	Clifton E. French Regional Park	P35
Three Rivers Park District	Eagle Lake Regional Park	P36
Three Rivers Park District	Fish Lake Regional Park	P37
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka Islands Regional Park	P38
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka Regional Park	P39
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Sarah Regional Park	P40

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park	Map #
Three Rivers Park District	Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park/Mississippi Gateway Regional Park	P41
Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	North Mississippi Regional Park	P20
Washington County	Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park	P42
Washington County	Pine Point Regional Park	P43
Washington County	St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park	P44

Figure 3-2: Regional Parks Open to the Public (2020)



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 require adequate space to protect and manage diverse natural resources and provide for 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. Up to 20% of a park reserve may be developed for compatible recreational activities.

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

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

As of 2020, 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.

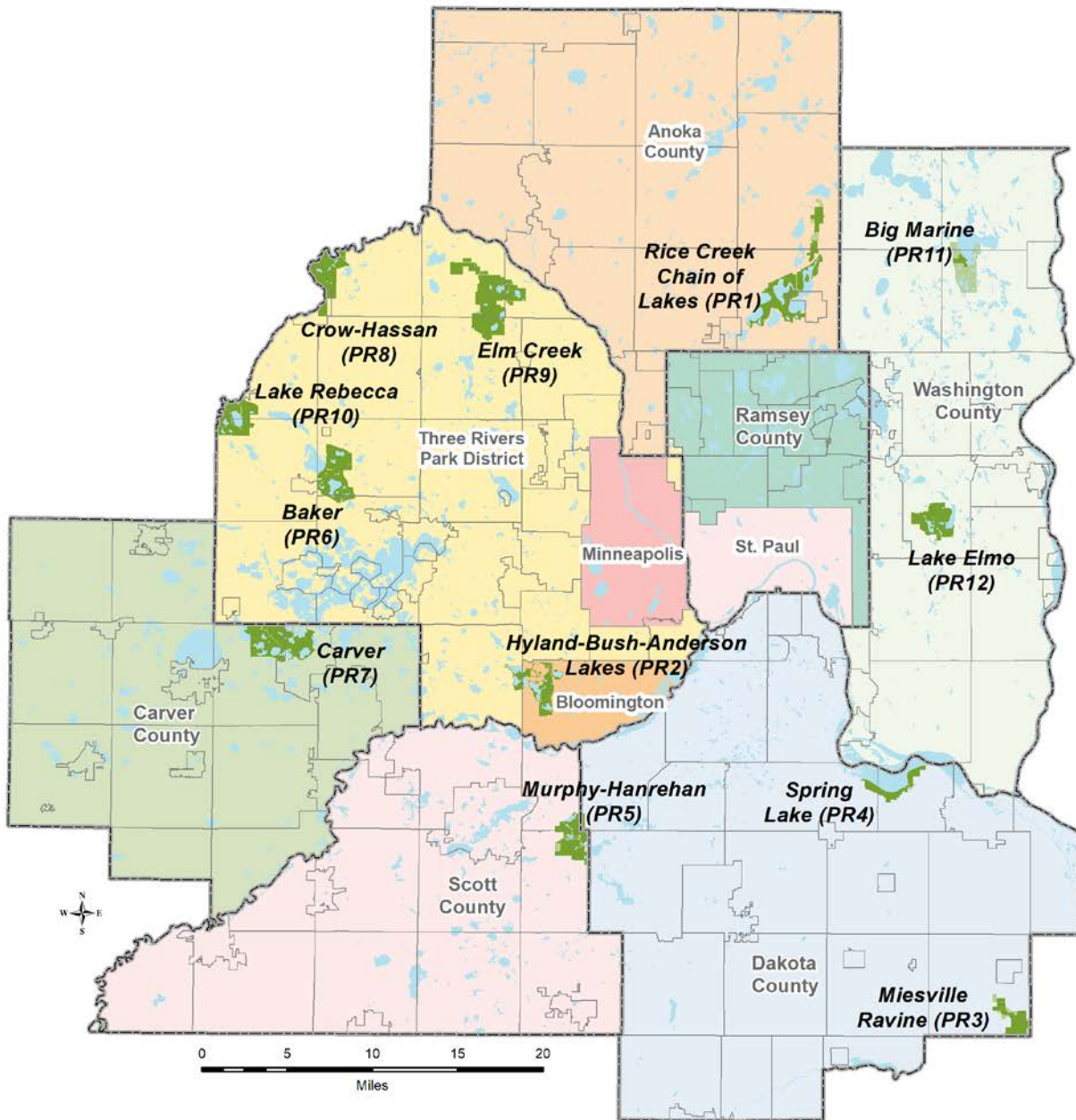
*Table 3-3: Park Reserves Open to the Public (2020)*

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Park Reserves	Map #
Anoka County	Rice Creek Chain-of-Lakes Park Reserve	PR1
Bloomington/Three Rivers Park District	Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve	PR2
Dakota County	Miesville Ravine Park Reserve	PR3
Dakota County	Spring Lake Park Reserve	PR4
Scott County/Three Rivers Park District	Murphy-Hanrehan Park Reserve	PR5
Three Rivers Park District	Baker Park Reserve	PR6
Three Rivers Park District	Carver Park Reserve	PR7
Three Rivers Park District	Crow-Hassan Park Reserve	PR8
Three Rivers Park District	Elm Creek Park Reserve	PR9
Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington	Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve	PR2
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Rebecca Park Reserve	PR10

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Three Rivers Park District/Scott County	Murphy-Hanrehan Park Reserve	PR5
Washington County	Big Marine Park Reserve	PR11
Washington County	Lake Elmo Park Reserve	PR12

Figure 3-3: Park Reserves Open to the Public (2020)



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 of the Regional Parks System. Regional parks and park reserves offer important services  
 9 to the trail, including providing places for picnicking and other desirable activities, parking, restrooms,  
 10 and drinking water. Linking trails may also connect to other local, state, and federal recreational  
 11 facilities as well as other significant natural resource areas and population centers.

12 Regional trails also are selected for their ability to intersect with local trail networks, with the regional  
 13 trails functioning much like regional highways that interconnect with more local arterials and local  
 14 streets. Parts of the regional trail network, especially in the urban areas, may serve as commuting  
 15 routes for bicyclists in addition to serving recreational purposes. As the regional trail and transit  
 16 systems expand, opportunities to provide connections between these forms of travel should be  
 17 explored. People can ride the bus or light rail to access a regional trail, and conversely, people can use  
 18 regional trails to access 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 trail users are more likely to visit a regional trail alone than park  
 23 visitors are to visit a regional park alone (63% visit trails alone versus 45% visit parks alone). Trails had  
 24 a higher frequency of visits across seasons and significantly higher summer visits than parks, but less  
 25 time spent per visit.

26 As of 2020, there were 55 regional trail corridors, with a total of 415 miles open to the public, listed in  
 27 Table 3-4 and Figure 3-4. Many trails are constructed in phases, some as part of roadway improvement  
 28 projects or local development. Therefore, although a trail is listed as being open, some portions of the  
 29 trail corridor may be developed in the future and are not yet open to the public.

30 *Table 3-4: Regional Trails Open to the Public (2020)*

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trails	Map #
Anoka County	Bunker Hills-Chain of Lakes Regional Trail	T1
Anoka County	Central Anoka Regional Trail	T2
Anoka County	Chain of Lakes-Otter Lake Regional Trail	T3
Anoka County	Coon Creek Regional Trail	T4
Anoka County	East Anoka County Regional Trail	T5

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trails	Map #
Anoka County/Dakota County	Mississippi River Regional Trail/Mississippi River Greenway Regional Trail	T6
Anoka County/Ramsey County	Rice Creek North Regional Trail	T7
Anoka County/Ramsey County	Rice Creek West Regional Trail	T8
Anoka County	Rum River Regional Trail	T9
Anoka County	Sugar Hills Regional Trail	T10
Bloomington/Three Rivers Park District	Nokomis-Minnesota River Regional Trail	T11
Carver County/Three Rivers Park District	Dakota Rail Regional Trail	T12
Carver County	Highway 5 Regional Trail	T13
Carver County/Three Rivers Park District	Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail/Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail	T14
Carver County	Southwest Regional Trail	T15
Dakota County	Big Rivers Regional Trail	T16
Dakota County	Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway, Highway 62 Segment	T17
Dakota County	Minnesota River Greenway	T18
Dakota County/Anoka County	Mississippi River Greenway Regional Trail/Mississippi River Regional Trail	T6
Dakota County	North Creek Greenway Regional Trail	T19
Dakota County	River to River Greenway	T20
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers Park District	Cedar Lake Regional Trail	T21
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Columbia Parkway Regional Trail	T22
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Kenilworth Regional Trail	T23
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers Park District	Luce Line Regional Trail	T24
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail	T25
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers Park District	Northeast Diagonal Regional Trail	T26
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Ridgway Parkway Regional Trail	T27
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board/Three Rivers Park District	Shingle Creek Regional Trail	T28
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	St. Anthony Parkway Regional Trail	T29
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail	T30
Ramsey County	Birch Lake Regional Trail	T31
Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Bruce Vento Regional Trail (w/Vento Sanctuary)	T32

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trails	Map #
Ramsey County	Highway 96 Regional Trail	T33
Ramsey County/Washington County	Lake Links Regional Trail	T34
Ramsey County/Anoka County	Rice Creek North Regional Trail	T7
Ramsey County/Anoka County	Rice Creek West Regional Trail	T8
Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Trout Brook Regional Trail	T35
Saint Paul/Ramsey County	Bruce Vento Regional Trail (w/Vento Sanctuary)	T32
Saint Paul	Robert Piram Regional Trail	T36
Saint Paul	Samuel Morgan Regional Trail	T37
Saint Paul/Ramsey County	Trout Brook Regional Trail	T35
Scott County	Scott West Regional Trail (formerly Scott County Regional Trail)	T38
Scott County	Spring Lake Regional Trail	T39
Three Rivers Park District	Baker-Carver Regional Trail	T40
Three Rivers Park District	Bassett Creek Regional Trail	T41
Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Cedar Lake Regional Trail	T21
Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington	CP Rail Regional Trail - Segment A	T42
Three Rivers Park District	Crow River Regional Trail	T43
Three Rivers Park District	Crystal Lake Regional Trail	T44
Three Rivers Park District/Carver County	Dakota Rail Regional Trail	T12
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Independence Regional Trail	T45
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail	T46
Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Luce Line Regional Trail	T24
Three Rivers Park District	Medicine Lake Regional Trail	T47
Three Rivers Park District/Carver County	Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail/Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail	T14
Three Rivers Park District	Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail	T48
Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington	Nokomis-Minnesota River Regional Trail	T11
Three Rivers Park District	North Cedar Lake Regional Trail	T49
Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Northeast Diagonal Regional Trail	T26
Three Rivers Park District	Rush Creek Regional Trail	T50

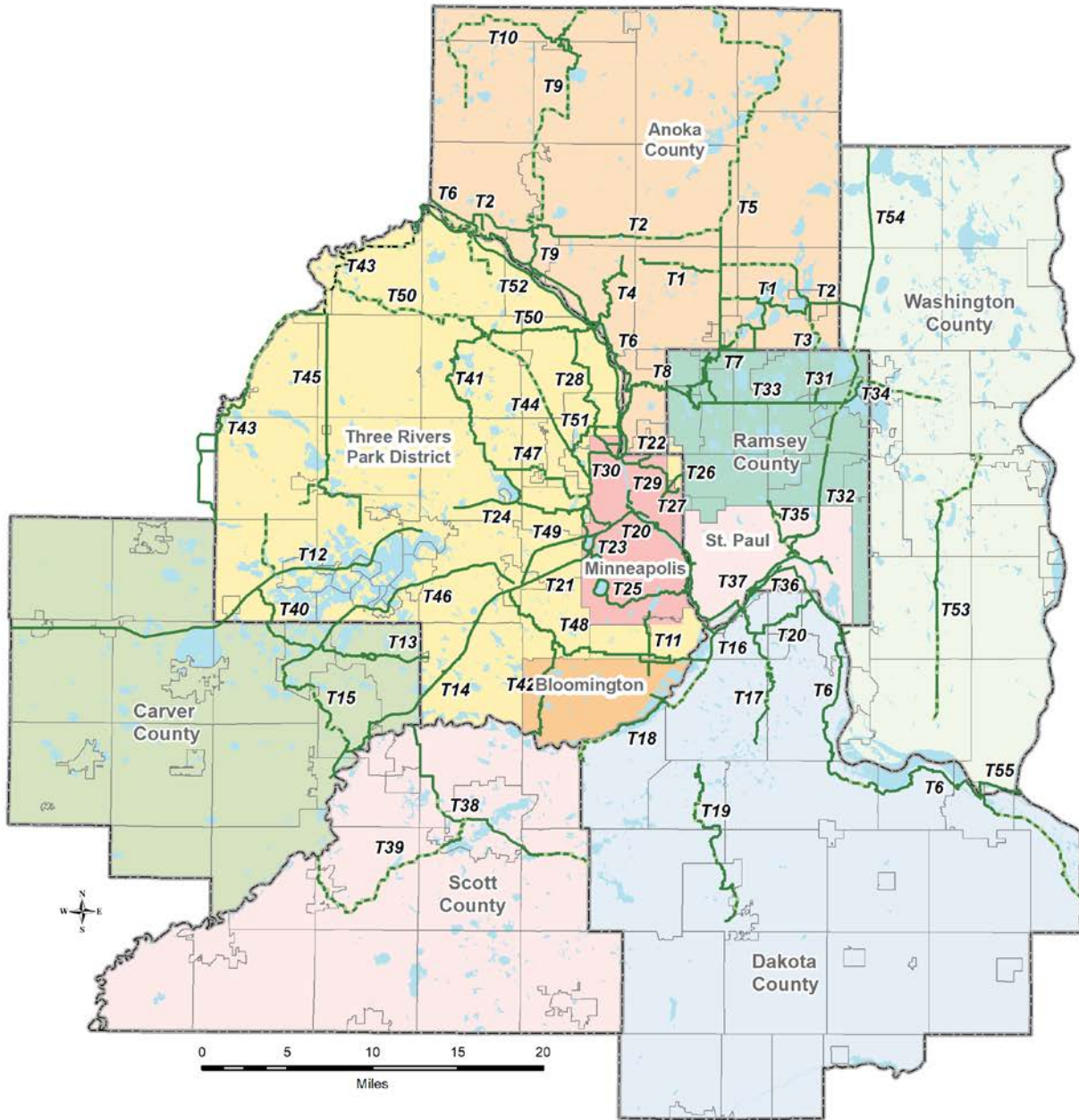


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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trails	Map #
Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Shingle Creek Regional Trail	T28
Three Rivers Park District	Twin Lakes Regional Trail	T51
Three Rivers Park District	West Mississippi River Regional Trail	T52
Washington County	Central Greenway Regional Trail – South and Central Lake Elmo Segments	T53
Washington County	Hardwood Creek Regional Trail	T54
Washington County/Ramsey County	Lake Links Regional Trail	T34
Washington County	Point Douglas Regional Trail	T55

1

1 *Figure 3-4: Regional Trails Open to the Public (2020)*



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

2  
3  
4

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 parks,  
 4 park reserves or trail corridors. Special recreational features often require a unique managing or  
 5 programming effort on the part of the regional park implementing agency.

6 There are eight special recreation features developed and open to the public (Table 3-5).

7 *Table 3-5: Special Recreation Features Open to the Public*

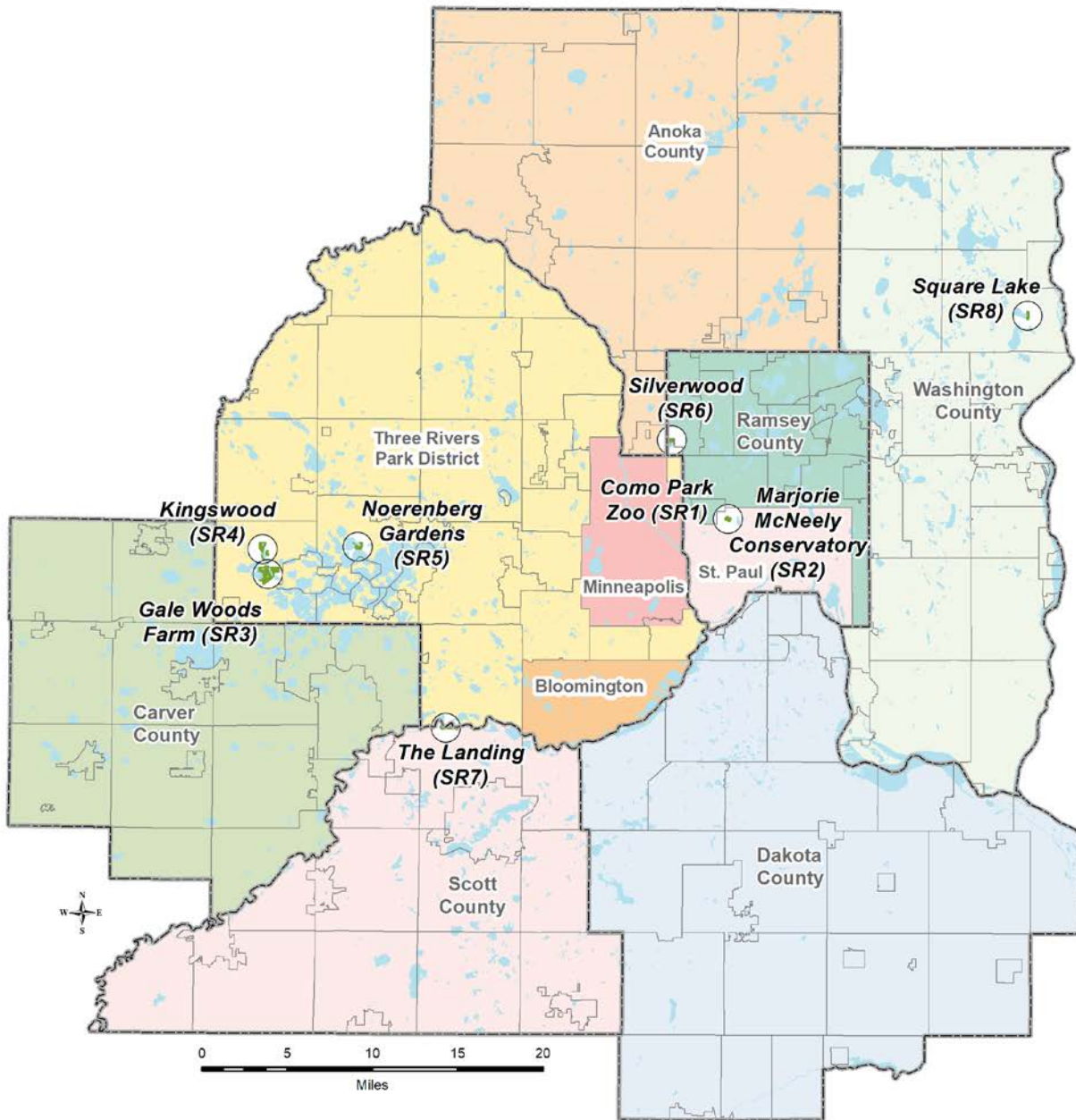
Regional Park Implementing Agency	Special Recreation Feature	Map #
Saint Paul	Como Park Zoo	SR1
Saint Paul	Marjorie McNeely Conservatory	SR2
Three Rivers Park District	Gale Woods Farm	SR3
Three Rivers Park District	Kingswood	SR4
Three Rivers Park District	Noerenberg Gardens	SR5
Three Rivers Park District	Silverwood	SR6
Three Rivers Park District	The Landing	SR7
Washington County	Square Lake	SR8

8

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

18 New special recreation features need to be complementary to the rest of the Regional Parks System  
 19 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 (2020)*



Numbers Correpond to List in Table 3-5

-  Special Recreation Features Open to the Public
-  County Boundaries
-  City and Township Boundaries
-  Lakes and Rivers

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:

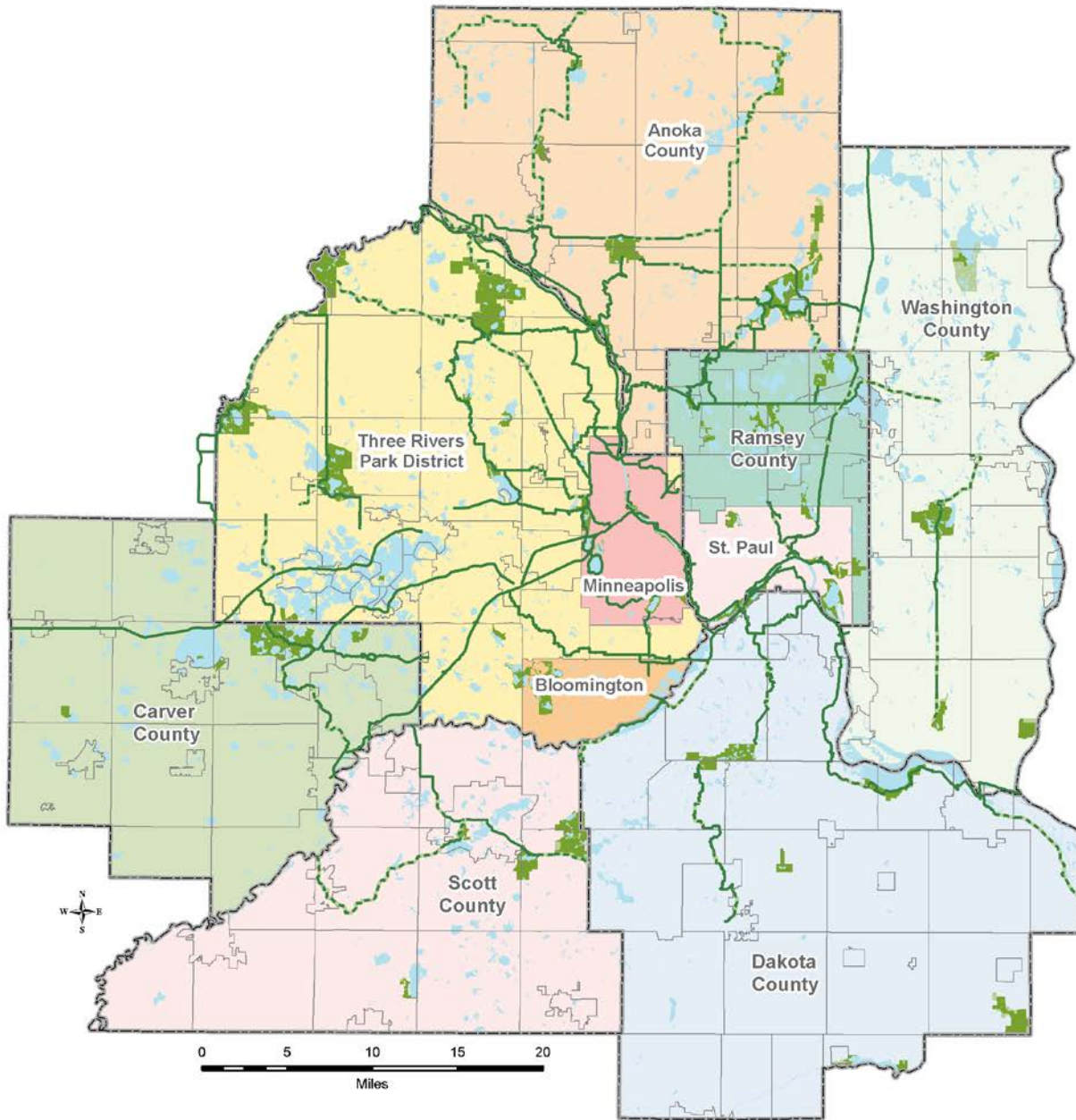
- 4 • Existing Regional Parks System facilities
- 5 • Planned Regional Parks System facilities that are not yet open to the public
- 6 • Regional Parks System boundary adjustments
- 7 • Regional Park search areas
- 8 • Regional Trail search corridors
- 9 • 2040 system additions

10 **Existing Regional Parks System Facilities**

11 As described in the previous section, the Regional Parks System as of 2020 includes 44 regional parks,  
12 12 park reserves, 55 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 54,465 acres that have been  
14 acquired by the regional park implementing agencies, with 3,441 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 2020.



1 *Figure 3-6: Existing Regional Parks System Facilities (2020)*



Numbers Correspond to Existing Regional Park System Facilities in Tables 3-2, 3-3, 3-4, 3-5

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

2

3



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 in  
 4 Table 3-6 and shown in Figure 3-7. Approximately 1,513 acres have been acquired for these three  
 5 planned Regional Parks System facilities, with an additional 3,393 acres to be acquired in the future.

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

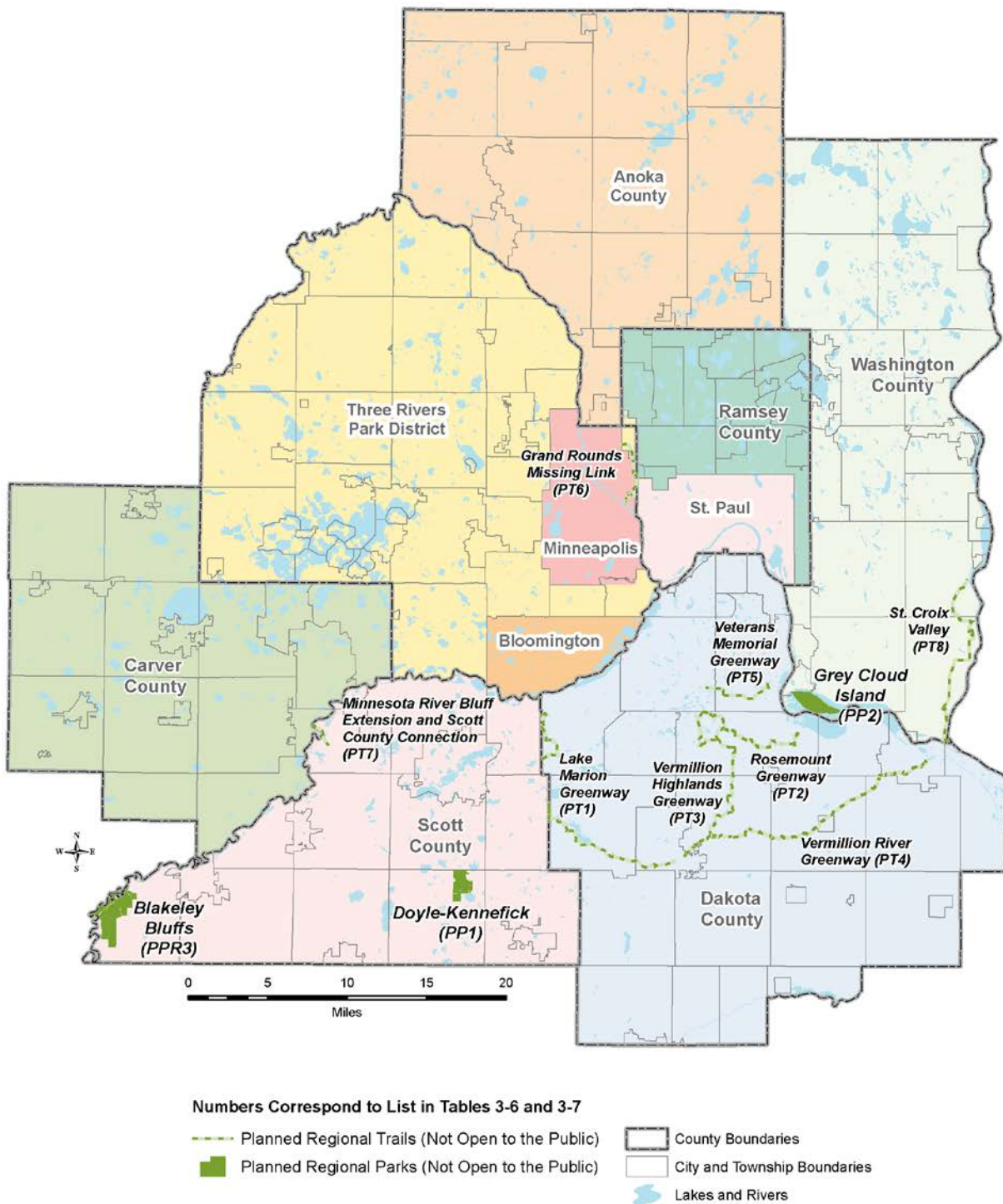
Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park	Map #
Scott County	Doyle-Kennefick Regional Park	PP1
Washington County	Grey Cloud Island Regional Park	PP2
Regional Park Implementing Agency	Park Reserve	Map #
Scott County	Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve	PPR3

7 Eight regional trails, totaling 80 miles, have Council-approved master plans, but are not yet developed  
 8 or open to the public, as listed in Table 3-7 and shown in Figure 3-7.

9 *Table 3-7: Planned Regional Trails Not Open to the Public*

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park or Regional Trail	Trail Mileage	Map #
Dakota County	Lake Marion Greenway Regional Trail	20	PT1
Dakota County	Rosemount Greenway Regional Trail	13	PT2
Dakota County	Vermillion Highlands Greenway Regional Trail	13	PT3
Dakota County	Vermillion River Greenway Regional Trail	5.35	PT4
Dakota County	Veterans Memorial Greenway Regional Trail	5	PT5
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Grand Rounds Missing Link Regional Trail	5	PT6
Scott County	Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail	2	PT7
Washington County	St. Croix Valley Regional Trail	17.4	PT8

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



2

3

1 **Boundary Adjustments**

2 The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* recommends master plan boundary adjustments for three  
 3 regional parks, one park reserve, and one special recreation feature to protect high-quality natural  
 4 resources and provide recreational opportunities.

5 The proposed boundary adjustments are included in the 2040 System Plan and described in Table 3-8  
 6 and Figure 3-8. All of these boundary adjustments have been designated as part of the regional system  
 7 through the 2020 system additions process with the exception of Carver County’s Baylor Regional Park  
 8 boundary adjustment which was previously included. In future updates to the system plan, this section  
 9 will be reserved for major boundary adjustments, as described in Chapter 5, Strategy 1, *Boundary*  
 10 *Adjustments*.

11 *Table 3-8: Master Plan Boundary Adjustments*

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Parks System Unit	Estimated Acreage	Description	Map #
Carver County	Baylor Regional Park	100	Acquire approximately 100 acres of land adjacent to Eagle Lake, including lakeshore	BA1
Ramsey County	Battle Creek Regional Park	265	Expansion areas will provide a more diverse range and protection of natural resources	BA2
Three Rivers Park District	Crow-Hassan Park Reserve	180	The additional acreage will provide protection and public access along the Crow River.	BA3
Three Rivers Park District	Gale Woods Special Recreation Feature	33	Additional acreage is needed for natural resource protection and management	BA4
Washington County	Pine Point Regional Park	170	The additional acreage will protect and enhance important natural resources found in the park.	BA5

12 **Regional Park Search Areas**

13 Seven regional park search areas, totaling approximately 3,776 acres, are described in Table 3-9.  
 14 Figure 3-8 shows a map of the boundary adjustments, regional park search areas, and special  
 15 recreation feature bridging facility search areas. Regardless of estimated acreages, regional park

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1 search areas are depicted with the same size symbols in Figure 3-8. Regional park search areas are  
 2 meant to denote general areas and do not specify exact locations at this scale. Future master planning  
 3 work by regional park implementing agencies will determine specific boundaries for these regional park  
 4 search areas.

5 *Table 3-9: Regional Park Search Areas*

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park Search Area	Estimated Acreage	Description	Map #
Anoka County	Coon Lake County Park Regional Park Search Area	190	Park amenities on Anoka County's largest lake, Coon Lake, a 1500-acre recreation and fishing lake.	PSA1
Anoka County	Northwest Anoka County Regional Park Search Area	2,500	Very high-quality natural resource area unique in Anoka County.	PSA2
Anoka County	Rum River Regional Park Search Area	Additional acres 86	Three parks connected by the Rum River, a Wild and Scenic River.	PSA3
Carver County	Miller Lake Regional Park Search Area	200	Very attractive lake resource and appropriate setting for a regional park.	PSA4
Carver County	Minnesota Bluffs and Ravines Regional Park Search Area	500	Large areas of regionally significant natural resources, excellent recreation potential.	PSA5
Three Rivers Park District	Minnetonka/Minnehaha Creek Regional Park Search Area	100	A linear, creek-based regional park/greenway along the Minnehaha Creek corridor within Hennepin County.	PSA6
Three Rivers Park District	Rogers-Corcoran Regional Park Search Area	200	Rich in wetlands, rolling hills and scenic vistas.	PSA7

6

7

1 **Special Recreation Feature Search Area**

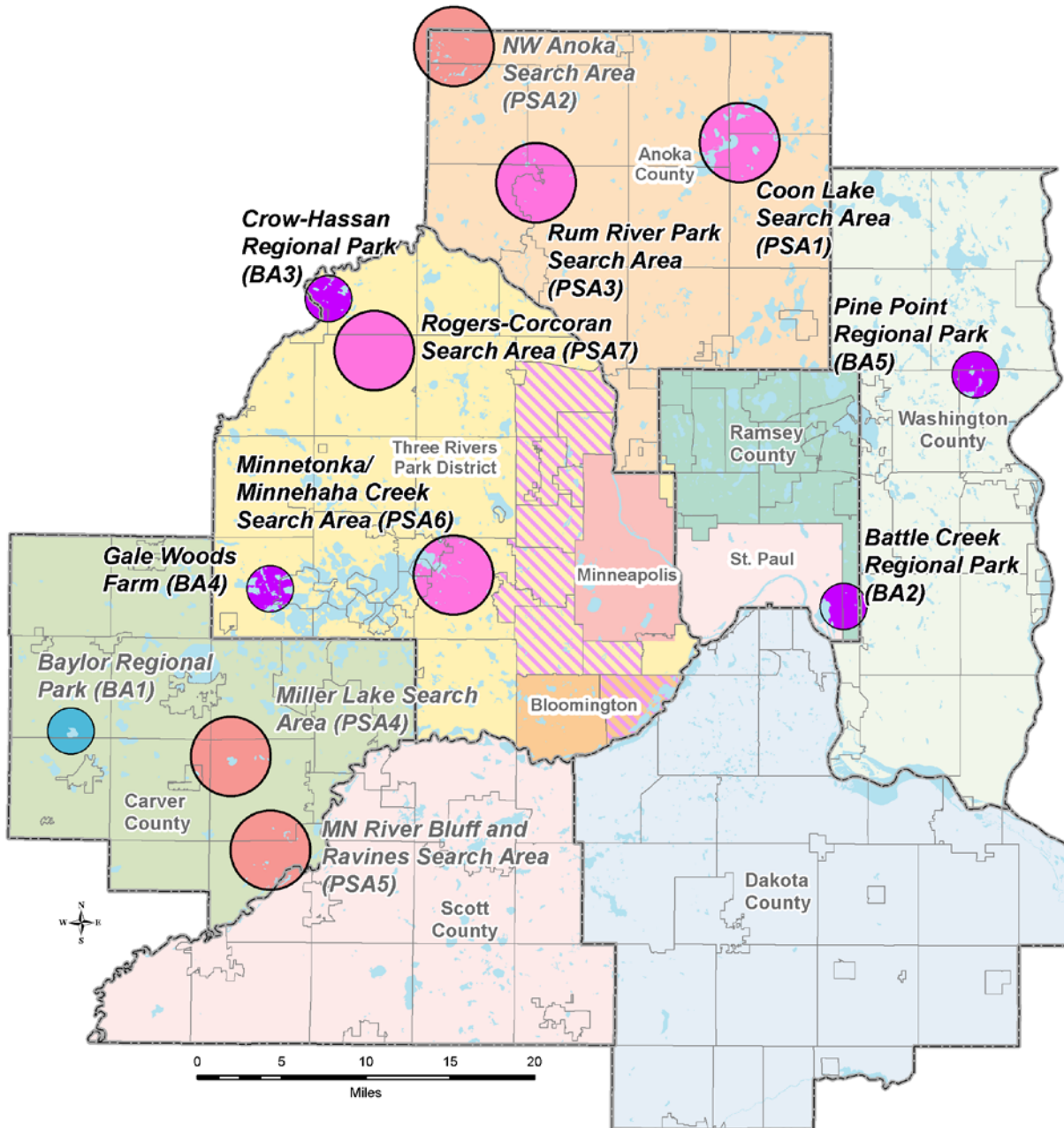
2 One special recreation feature bridging facility search area, spanning 11-cities, is described in Table 3-  
3 10. Figure 3-8 shows a map of the boundary adjustments, regional park search areas, and special  
4 recreation feature bridging facility search areas.

5 *Table 3-10: Special Recreation Feature Search Area*

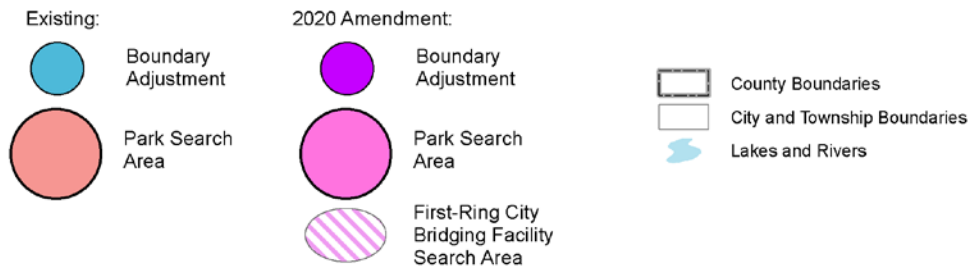
Regional Park Implementing Agency	Special Recreation Feature Search Area	Description	Map #
Three Rivers Park District	First-Ring Cities Bridging Facility Search Area	A set of several unique proposed bridging facilities spread across the cities.	SPF1

6

1 *Figure 3-8: Boundary Adjustments and Regional Park and Special Recreation Feature Search Areas*  
 2



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-7, 3-8, 3-9, and 3-10





1 **Regional Trail Search Corridors**

2 There are 53 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 588 miles. Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to  
 9 prepare master plans for these trails. The regional trail search corridors are listed in Table 3-11 and  
 10 shown in Figure 3-9.

11 *Table 3-11: Regional Trail Search Corridors*

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles	Map #
Anoka County	North Anoka County	30	TSC1
Bloomington/Three Rivers Park District	Progressive Rail	9	TSC2
Carver County	County Road 10	19	TSC3
Carver County	County Road 61	1	TSC4
Carver County	Highway 11	4	TSC5
Carver County	Highway 41	3	TSC6
Carver County/Three Rivers Park District	Highway 101	4.8	TSC7
Carver County	Lake Waconia	6	TSC8
Carver County	Lake Waconia-Carver	17	TSC9
Carver County	Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Extension	6	TSC10
Carver County	Twin Cities & Western	25	TSC11
Carver County	Western Carver County	17	TSC12
Dakota County	Chub Creek Greenway	20	TSC13
Dakota County	Lebanon Hills-Big Rivers Greenway	7	TSC14
Dakota County	Lebanon Hills-Lake Marion Greenway	7	TSC15
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Midtown Greenway	6	TSC16
Ramsey County/Washington County	Afton Bluffs	3	TSC17

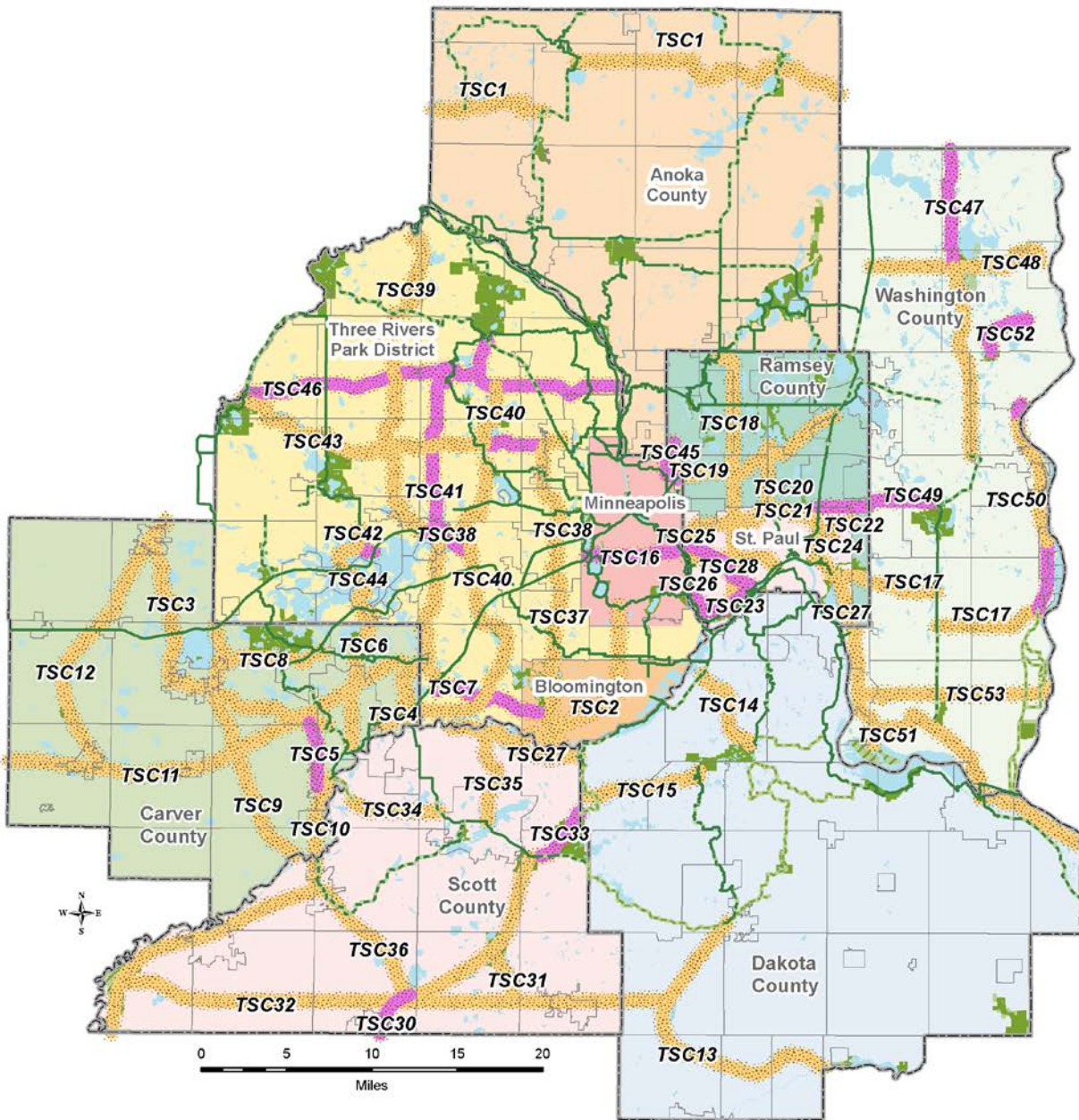
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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles	Map #
Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Lexington Avenue/Parkway	9	TSC18
Ramsey County	St. Anthony RR Spur	10	TSC19
Ramsey County	Trout Brook Extension	4	TSC20
Saint Paul	Como-Phalen (Wheelock Parkway)	6	TSC21
Saint Paul	Grand Round - Lake Elmo Park Reserve	6.8	TSC22
Saint Paul	Hidden Falls Regional Park to Samuel Morgan Regional Trail / "Ford Spur"	4.7	TSC23
Saint Paul	Johnson Parkway	2	TSC24
Saint Paul/Ramsey County	Lexington Avenue/Parkway	6	TSC18
Saint Paul	Mississippi-Como	4	TSC25
Saint Paul	Mississippi Gorge Regional Park (Saint Paul) to Samuel Morgan Regional Trail / Midtown Greenway Extension	5.7	TSC26
Saint Paul	Point Douglas (Bruce Vento-Washington Co)	4	TSC27
Saint Paul	Summit Avenue	1	TSC28
Scott County	Big Rivers Extension	5	TSC29
Scott County	Cedar Lake Farm to New Prague	6	TSC30
Scott County	Elko New Market-Blakeley-Doyle Kennefick	32	TSC31
Scott County	Elko New Market-Doyle Kennefick	5	TSC32
Scott County	Lake Marion to Scott West	6	TSC33
Scott County	Louisville	5	TSC34
Scott County	Prior Lake Outlet	6	TSC35
Scott County	Southern Scott	35	TSC36
Three Rivers Park District	CP Rail - Segments B – F	15.38	TSC37
Three Rivers Park District	Dakota Rail Extension	2	TSC38

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles	Map #
Three Rivers Park District	Diamond Lake (formerly North-South 1)	20	TSC39
Three Rivers Park District	Eagle – Bryant Lake (formerly North-South 2 and 5-mile extension to Elm Creek Park Reserve)	21	TSC40
Three Rivers Park District	Grey's Bay (formerly part of North-South 1; 9.5-mile extension)	10.5	TSC41
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Independence	2.6	TSC42
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Sarah (4-mile extension)	18	TSC43
Three Rivers Park District	Mid-Lake (formerly apart of Lake Independence Extension)	4	TSC44
Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington	Progressive Rail	10	TSC2
Three Rivers Park District/Carver County	Purgatory Creek (Formerly Highway 101; (6-mile extension)	14	TSC7
Three Rivers Park District	Silverwood Connector	2	TSC45
Three Rivers Park District	Weaver Lake	23	TSC46
Washington County/Ramsey County	Afton Bluffs	10	TSC17
TSC40 Washington County	Central Greenway Regional Trail – North Segment (6.8-mile extension)	18.5	TSC47
Washington County	Glacial Hills	12	TSC48
Washington County	Lake Elmo Park Reserve to Phalen-Keller Regional Park	7.6	TSC49
Washington County	Middle St. Croix Valley (6.8-mile system addition proposal)	14	TSC50
Washington County	Mississippi River	17	TSC51TSC44
Washington County	Pine Point Regional Park to Square Lake Special Recreation Feature	4.3	TSC52
Washington County	Prairie View	9	TSC53TSC45

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



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-11

-  2020 Amendment Regional Trail Search Corridor
-  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

2

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 3-10 illustrates, the updated 2040 System Plan includes:

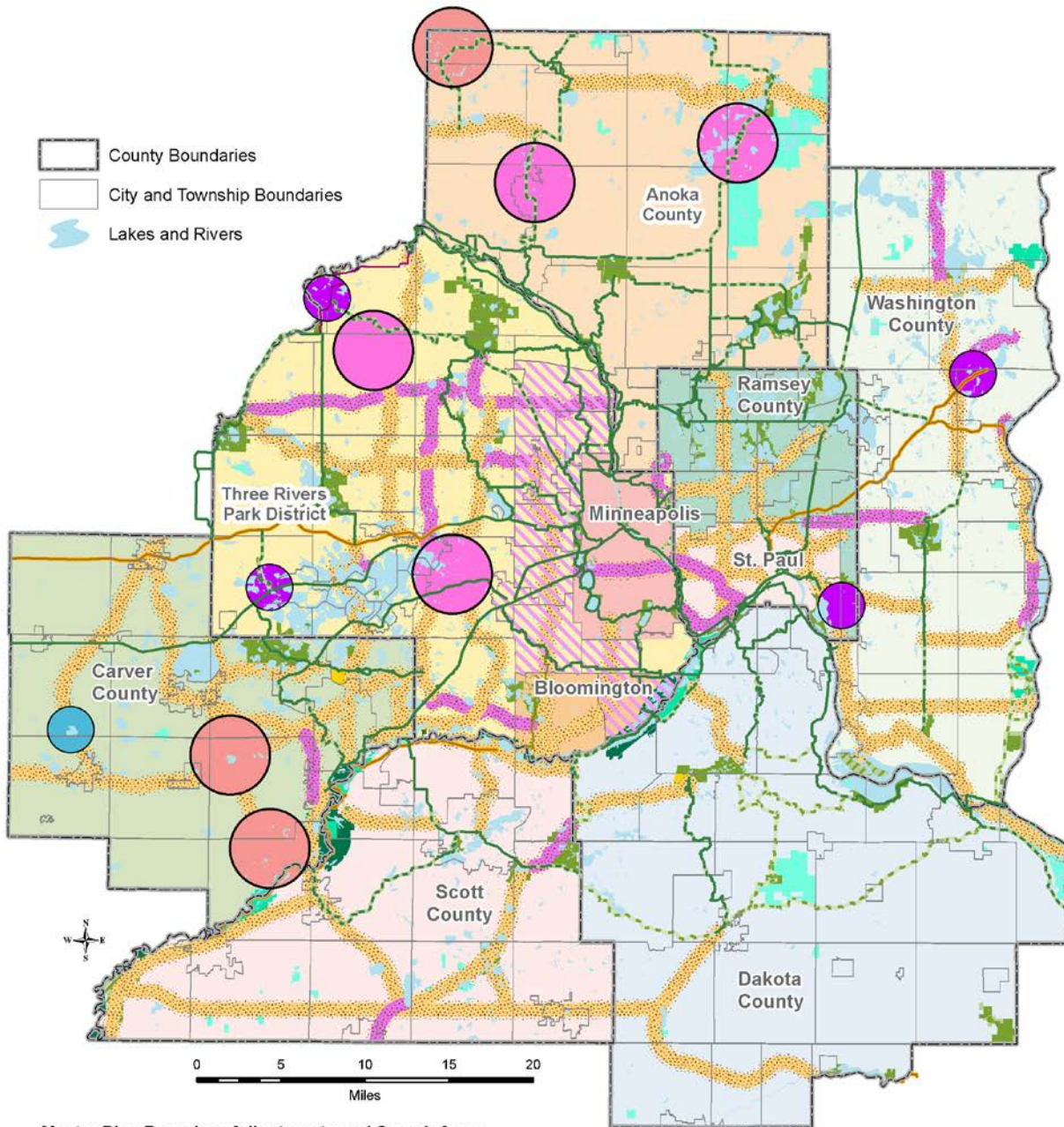
- 3 • Regional Parks System facilities open to the public (2020)
  - 4 – 44 regional parks
  - 5 – 12 park reserves
  - 6 – 8 special recreation features
  - 7 – 55 regional trails, consisting of 415 miles
- 8 • Planned Regional Parks System units that are not yet open to the public
  - 9 – 2 regional parks
  - 10 – 1 park reserve
  - 11 – 8 regional trails, consisting of approximately 80 miles
- 12 • Regional Parks System boundary adjustments
  - 13 – 3 regional parks
  - 14 – 1 park reserve
  - 15 – 1 special recreation feature
- 16 • Regional park search areas
  - 17 – 7 regional park search areas
- 18 • Special recreation feature search area
  - 19 – 1 location siting multiple unique bridging facilities
- 20 • Regional trail search corridors
  - 21 – 53 regional trail search corridors, with approximately 588 miles
- 22 • 2020 System additions process: 26 System additions and expansions were considered as part  
23 of this update including four boundary adjustments, five search areas including four regional  
24 parks and one special recreation feature bridging facility search area, and 17 regional trail  
25 search corridor additions or extensions.
  - 26 – *Boundary adjustments (four):*
    - 27 ▪ Ramsey County’s Battle Creek Regional Park Boundary Adjustment
    - 28 ▪ Three Rivers Park District’s Crow-Hassan Park Reserve Boundary Adjustment,  
29 and Gale Woods Farm Special Recreation Feature Boundary Adjustment
    - 30 ▪ Washington County’s Pine Point Regional Park Boundary Adjustment
  - 31 – *Regional park and special recreation feature search areas (five):*
    - 32 ▪ Anoka County’s Coon Lake Regional Park Search Area and Rum River Regional  
33 Park Search Area



## Introduction to the Policy and Strategy Framework of the Regional Parks System

- 1                   ▪ Three Rivers Park District's Rogers-Corcoran Regional Park Search Area,  
2                   Minnetonka & Minnehaha Creek Corridor Regional Park Search Area, and First-  
3                   Ring Special Recreation Feature Park, Bridging Facility Search Area
  
- 4                   – *Regional trail search corridor additions or extensions (17):*
  
- 5                   ▪ Carver County's County Road 11 Regional Trail Search Corridor
- 6                   ▪ Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's Midtown Greenway Regional Trail  
7                   Search Corridor
- 8                   ▪ Three Rivers Park District's Weaver Lake Regional Trail Search Corridor, Eagle  
9                   Lake to Bryant Lake Regional Trail Extension Search Corridor, Gray's Bay  
10                  Regional Trail Extension Search Corridor, Silverwood Regional Trail Connector  
11                  Search Corridor, Purgatory Creek Regional Trail Extension Search Corridor, and  
12                  Lake Sarah Regional Trail Extension Search Corridor
- 13                  ▪ Scott County's Cedar Lake Farm to New Prague Destination Regional Trail  
14                  Search Corridor and Lake Marion to Scott West Regional Trail Search Corridor
- 15                  ▪ Saint Paul's Midtown Greenway Extension Regional Trail Search Corridor, CP  
16                  Rail Spur Regional Trail Search Corridor, and Union Pacific Railroad's Altoona  
17                  Subdivision Regional Trail Search Corridor
- 18                  ▪ Washington County's Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail Search Corridor  
19                  Extension, Central Greenway Regional Trail Search Corridor Extension, Lake  
20                  Elmo Park Reserve to Phalen-Keller Regional Park Regional Trail Search  
21                  Corridor, and Pine Point Regional Park to Square Lake Special Recreation  
22                  Feature Regional Trail Search Corridor
- 23

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



**Master Plan Boundary Adjustments and Search Areas**

- |           |   |                 |   |
|-----------|---|-----------------|---|
| Existing: |   | 2020 Amendment: |   |
|           | Boundary Adjustment                           |                 | Boundary Adjustment                           |
|           | Park Search Area                              |                 | Park Search Area                              |
|           |   |                 | First-Ring City Bridging Facility Search Area |
|           | 2020 Amendment Regional Trail Search Corridor |                 |   |
|           | Regional Trail Search Corridors               |                 |   |

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

2

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 Additional information about the Regional Parks System funding is in the Regional Parks System Fund  
18 Distribution Policy.

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 or substantially modifying a master plan boundary (for  
 13 more information, see Chapter 5, Strategy 1, Boundary Adjustments section), outside of a Regional  
 14 Parks Policy Plan update, requires the Council to conduct a formal Regional Parks Policy Plan  
 15 amendment process that includes a public hearing conducted under the requirements of Minnesota  
 16 Statutes, section 473.147.

17 The Council's role in this effort is to convene an evaluation process where the proposed idea may be  
 18 considered within a larger regional context, recognizing that all system additions increase the total cost  
 19 to complete the Regional Parks System, as outlined in Chapter 8: Finance – Strategy 9.

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

25 *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

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
At least 100 acres; typically, 200-500 acres	At least 1,000 acres	* Provides a natural resource-based and scenic setting offering a compelling sense of place
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 *Table 4-2: Regional Parks System: Regional Trails Criteria*

Regional Trails: General * Required	Regional Trails: Destination (also known as Greenways) * Required	Regional Trails: Linking * Required
Draws visitors from across the region	Draws visitors from across the region	Draws visitors from across the region
* Benefits the regional trail system and does not duplicate an existing trail	* Provides high-quality natural resource-based “destination” trail experience	Links two or more units of the Regional Parks System
Connects two or more units of the Regional Parks System	* Highly scenic and/or natural setting	Links to or complements national, state, regional, and/or other local trails
Serves as backbone to local trail network, with regional trail functioning much like regional highway that interconnects with more local arterials and local streets	* 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



Regional Trails: General * Required	Regional Trails: Destination (also known as Greenways) * Required	Regional Trails: Linking * Required
* Fills a gap in the regional recreation system	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
Connects to multiple public interest destinations such as schools, job centers, tourist destinations, historical, cultural, and architectural buildings and sites, and commercial districts	* Provides opportunities to conserve, enhance, or restore natural resources	May be on-road separated treadway
May utilize surface rights of utility corridors such as large sewer lines	May contain natural features in the greenway or adjacent to the trail treadway that provides important ecological services	

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 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
- 16 distributed in proportion to the existing and forecasted urban development



1 Past acquisition activity has tended to favor lands with high-quality natural resources over even  
2 geographic distribution. As the Regional Parks System matures, and available land with high-quality  
3 natural resources becomes scarcer, acquisition of lands with restoration potential have increased in  
4 importance. For example, lands with restoration potential include agricultural lands that were formerly  
5 prairie and naturalizing channelized streams.

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

## 10 **Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 2: Geographic balance**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 35 • Essential to protect the natural resources that define a park or park reserve and make it usable  
36 to the public as planned

- 1 • Essential for the park or park reserve to reach its full-service potential for regional natural  
2 resource-based outdoor recreation as defined in the Council’s Regional Parks System plan and  
3 the park unit’s master plan

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

7 All privately-owned parcels within a Council-approved master plan boundary are “in-holdings” until they  
8 are acquired. Some parcels have homes on them and are called “residential inholdings.” The  
9 acquisition of inholding parcels – especially those containing homes or those likely to be developed for  
10 residential or other urban uses – should be protected by first-right options to purchase, official mapping,  
11 life estates or other means. It is imperative that efforts are made to acquire these parcels because  
12 every time the land is sold to another private party, the land remains unavailable for Regional Parks  
13 System purposes. If once-vacant land is developed for housing or other uses, it may become  
14 unreasonably expensive to acquire and is essentially lost to the Regional Parks System.

15 The Council, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, will work with  
16 regional park implementing agencies to systematically review inholding parcels that have been  
17 developed to determine whether the land is essential to protect the natural resources that define the  
18 park and make it usable to the public as planned, or whether the land is essential for the park or park  
19 reserve to reach its full service potential for regional natural resource-based outdoor recreation as  
20 defined in this policy plan and the park unit’s master plan. The results of that review may conclude that  
21 some parcels or a portion of a parcel no longer meet those requirements and should be removed from  
22 the park’s boundary through a master plan amendment. For example, historically small parcels with  
23 homes on the edge of parks have either been removed from the park boundary or subdivided, with the  
24 undeveloped land acquired for the park and the home removed from the park boundary. If a parcel  
25 adjacent to the park becomes available that is not within a current master plan boundary, a boundary  
26 adjustment may be considered (see Chapter 5, Strategy 1, Boundary adjustments).

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

### 33 **Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 4: New regional trails**

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

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

- 37 • Must serve a regional audience, based on visitor origin and service-area research on regional  
38 trails
- 39 • Should not duplicate an existing trail

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- 1 • Should connect two or more units of the Regional Parks System
- 2 • Should connect state or federal recreational units

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

6 The regional trail system in the metropolitan area is like the highway system, with regional and local  
7 components. The regional component consists of trails in the regional trail system and state  
8 administered trails. These trails are complemented by shorter, local trails, which may eventually feed  
9 into units of the regional trail system. The opportunities for interesting regional trail recreation  
10 experiences are substantially enhanced where local trails intersect with or are reached by elements of  
11 the regional system.

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

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

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

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

37 The Council has defined two major types of trails to serve the region: 1) destination or greenway trails  
38 and 2) linking trails. Destination or greenway trails typically follow routes with high-quality natural  
39 resources, which make the trail itself a destination. Linking trails, on the other hand, are predominately

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1 intended to provide linkages between various Regional Parks System units, most notably regional  
2 parks, or park reserves, as well as other regional trails, and state and federal lands.

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

8 The main criterion used to define regional parks and park reserves – the presence of high-quality  
9 natural resources – is also relevant to the location of a destination regional trail or greenway. Attractive  
10 settings contribute strongly to the quality of trail recreational experience. Since trails or greenways are  
11 linear elements, areas along rivers and streams or chains of lakes are excellent candidates for  
12 incorporation into the regional trail system.

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

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

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

32 When determining the boundaries of regional trail corridors, regional park implementing agencies  
33 should consider high-quality natural resource lands adjacent to the trail treadway to enhance the  
34 natural resource values of the trail. This is especially appropriate when the trail treadway is primarily an  
35 abandoned rail bed, in a power line corridor, or along a highway. These pockets of natural areas not  
36 only enhance the recreational experience of the trail user but also enhance the values of the primary  
37 land near the entire trail. Retaining these areas in their natural condition is the best use of the land,  
38 especially if it would be difficult to develop them for other land uses. An example would be including  
39 wetlands adjacent to the trail within the trail boundary. The wildlife habitat, water-quality values, plus the

1 aesthetic values of the wetlands enhance the trail user’s experience and encourage best land-use  
2 practices, since the wetland could not be developed economically compared to “dry” land.

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

9 As described in Chapter 3, the 2040 Regional Parks System Plan Map includes more than 700 miles of  
10 planned regional trails and regional trail search corridors throughout the region. Regional trails are one  
11 component of a more comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian network, which serves recreation and  
12 transportation purposes. To that end, future regional trail proposals need to be evaluated within a  
13 comprehensive, region-wide framework, most notably within the context of the Regional Bicycle  
14 Transportation Network. This framework will ensure that regional facilities are not duplicated.

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

### 19 **Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 5: Special recreation features**

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

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

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

35 Regional Parks System legislation indicates that the system should contain parks, park reserves and  
36 trails, and zoos, conservatories, and “other special-use facilities” (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121,  
37 subd. 14). The term “other special-use facilities” is not defined in legislation. This policy plan refers to

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1 them as a special recreation feature, which is defined to be a facility that preserves, maintains, and  
2 provides 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

3 Furthermore, special recreation features must:

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

8 As of 2020, 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	

9 **Bridging facilities** are a type of special recreation feature that are intended to attract and introduce  
10 new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks System’s parks and trails. Their purpose is to help  
11 address inequities that contribute to lower participation rates. As of 2020, there are no existing or  
12 planned bridging facilities in the Regional Parks System. This is an area for innovation and creativity for  
13 the Council, regional park implementing agencies, partner organizations, and community members.

14 Bridging facilities are designed to prototype new ideas that advance equitable usage, focusing on  
15 underserved groups in the Regional Parks System. Bridging facilities further *Thrive MSP 2040’s*  
16 outcome of equity and the 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan’s goal to connect people to the  
17 outdoors by strengthening equitable use of the Regional Parks System.

18 Bridging facilities are different from local parks and community centers because their purpose is  
19 implicitly tied to introducing new visitors to the Regional Parks System across race, ethnicity, national  
20 origin, income, ability, and age. These facilities engage people with the wide array of opportunities that  
21 exist across the system through innovative strategies and collaboration. Bridging facilities seek to build  
22 on community strengths, establishing partnerships with the communities they intend to better serve.

23 Bridging facilities have a clear and unique purpose. They are sited close to their target audience, which  
24 include historically underserved communities. Bridging facilities are not designed as a one-size-fits-all  
25 approach. They encourage greater participation by the future stewards of our region’s natural and  
26 recreation resources -- young adults, teenagers, and children.

27 The following criteria will be used to evaluate bridging facility proposals for the Regional Parks System.



## Chapter Four: Siting and Acquisition Policy and Strategies

### 1 Bridging facilities will:

- 2 • Require a Council-approved master plan, whether it is a stand-alone facility or part of an  
3 existing regional park, park reserve, special recreation feature, or trail.
- 4 • Provide a clear statement of purpose for what it is intended to accomplish, consistent with the  
5 above defined purpose, recognizing that these facilities will differ within and across agencies,  
6 and must evolve and change over time, in order to stay relevant and effective.
- 7 • Identify the population to be better served and the inequity that will be addressed, working  
8 directly with the community to create, design, and develop them.
- 9 • Be sited close to the desired population (e.g., within the defined service area).
- 10 • Include a plan for an awareness-building, programming, or marketing component, to promote  
11 regional parks and trails to users facing obstacles to access the Regional Parks System.
- 12 • Include programming as an essential component of the design, such as outdoor skill-building or  
13 natural resources stewardship education. It may include active and/or passive programming  
14 approaches.
- 15 • Provide a programming plan through park agency staff or through a partnership arrangement.
- 16 • Not be included in the annual Regional Parks System use estimate. If designed to meet their  
17 purpose of attracting new users and connecting them to regional parks and trails, a facility's  
18 success will be reflected in increased visitation in future annual regional park and trail use  
19 estimates.

### 20 Bridging facilities may:

- 21 • Be a stand-alone facility, located in an area not currently well-served by existing regional parks,  
22 park reserves, and trails. "Stand-alone" bridging facilities that exist outside of a regional park,  
23 park reserve, special recreation feature, or trail, are eligible for Regional Parks System funding,  
24 as permitted through the appropriate state laws and statutes.
- 25 • Be nested within an existing regional park, park reserve, special recreation feature, or trail,  
26 welcoming new users to the unit and then connecting them with the opportunities that the  
27 broader facility provides.
- 28 • Have a mobile element, to allow outreach to extend beyond the existing boundaries of the  
29 Regional Parks System, going into communities that have been historically underserved. Mobile  
30 bridging programming must be connected to a base Regional Park System facility and will need  
31 to articulate, track, and report their results.
- 32 • Include a programmatic element embedded in a partner facility, such as a school or non-profit  
33 organization, allowing the implementing agency to access and build on the organization's  
34 existing relationships with communities.

## 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, the proposed project must be consistent with a Council-  
22 approved master plan.

23 To inform demand forecasts, public engagement and equity analyses, the Council will provide agencies  
24 contextual information such as demographic data for the region and their jurisdictions, disaggregated  
25 by race and ethnicity, household income, ability, age, educational attainment, and gender. This  
26 information will help identify communities who may be underserved by the Regional Parks System.

### 27 *Master Plan Content Requirements*

28 Each master plan for regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features must include  
29 information for each of these items.

- 30 • **Boundaries:** A map showing the administrative boundary for the unit that includes owned acres  
31 and private inholdings that together represent the desired boundary of the proposed parkland  
32 managed by the agency.
- 33 • **Acquisition Costs:** A list of parcels or real property to be acquired, estimated total cost, and  
34 schedule for their acquisition. A description of the natural resources, site suitability, special  
35 assessments, potential contamination based on data from the Minnesota Pollution Control

- 1 Agency, and other conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the boundaries. A  
2 description of the agency ownership and management arrangement.
- 3 • **Stewardship plan:** A program for managing park property, including activities, expenses, and  
4 anticipated revenue prior to developing the property for recreation purposes. Planned non-  
5 recreation uses and disposition of revenue from such use should be detailed.
  - 6 • **Demand forecast:** The recreational demand to be met by the site as identified by the Council,  
7 the regional park implementing agency, or other sources.
  - 8 • **Development concept:** A plan for recreational development and natural resource management  
9 that should include:
    - 10 ○ Description and a map showing the location of planned development and natural  
11 resources management projects
    - 12 ○ Approximate capacity of each facility
    - 13 ○ Mapping of existing and planned local and regional trail connections to the site and  
14 information on how they relate to development within the park
    - 15 ○ Wayfinding signage plan, indicating the types of signs and general locations within the  
16 park
    - 17 ○ Information on the source and location of drinking water that is adequate for the  
18 recreational uses of the park
    - 19 ○ Schedule and cost estimates for each project
    - 20 ○ Conflicts between recreational and natural-resource management needs in developing  
21 the park/trail unit should be addressed and resolved
  - 22 • **Conflicts:** Identification of conflicts with other existing or proposed projects or land uses  
23 affecting the park/trail unit, including steps necessary for their resolution.
  - 24 • **Public services:** A description of any non-recreational public services and facilities, such as  
25 roads or sewers, needed to accommodate the proposed recreational use, including the timing of  
26 these services and the arrangements necessary to provide them. Regional park implementing  
27 agencies are encouraged to include transportation and transit planners in the development of a  
28 master plan.
  - 29 • **Operations:** Rules, regulations or ordinances affecting the site, including estimated operation  
30 and maintenance costs and sources of revenue to operate and maintain recreation facilities and  
31 to manage natural resources in the park/trail unit. The operations plan should indicate how  
32 energy to operate and maintain the park unit is being managed and conserved. The plan should  
33 also state how solid waste from park users is recycled and disposed of consistent with  
34 applicable laws.
  - 35 • **Partner engagement:** A process to involve affected agencies, local units of government, and  
36 local, state, and federal recreation providers in the development of the master plan or plan  
37 amendment. A master plan must describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned  
38 above. The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned  
39 master plan amendments to all affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state,  
40 and federal recreation providers and address their concerns prior to submitting the plan to the  
41 Council. The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments  
42 received that identifies issues raised and content resulting from engagement efforts.

- 1       • **Public engagement and participation:** A process to engage the public in the development of  
2 the master plan or plan amendment. The public engagement process must seek to mitigate  
3 existing racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic barriers and include people of diverse ages, races,  
4 ethnicities, incomes, national origins, and abilities. A master plan must include the public  
5 engagement plan and describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned above. The  
6 process must include opportunity for the public to be heard and to have influence over the  
7 contents in the master plan. The regional park implementing agency shall address public  
8 concerns prior to submitting the plan or amendment to the Council. The master plan submitted  
9 to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised and  
10 content resulting from engagement efforts.
- 11       • **Equity analysis:** A process to examine who benefits and who is affected by the development of  
12 the resource in terms of race, ethnicity, national origin, income, ability, age and other pertinent  
13 characteristics. The analysis will identify communities that may be underserved by the Regional  
14 Parks System and the impacts on these communities. The master plan submitted to the Council  
15 must include a summary of the public engagement process, advice heard, and how the advice  
16 shaped the master plan. This requirement will be met through a response to the following  
17 questions related to project data, public engagement and participation, and evaluation  
18 summary.
- 19           1. **Project Data:**
- 20           a. **Scope:** What are the boundaries and demographics of the public engagement  
21 area? Please consider neighborhoods adjacent to the park or trail, travel sheds,  
22 and agency/regional boundaries.
- 23           b. **Context:** What is known about future stakeholders, underserved populations,  
24 and how the region’s history created present-day inequitable outcomes?
- 25           2. **Public Engagement and Participation:**
- 26           a. **Participants:** Which stakeholders discussed in 1b contributed to the planning  
27 effort? The following list is illustrative of stakeholders to consider including youth,  
28 Black, indigenous, and people of color communities, people with disabilities, low-  
29 income populations, populations age 60 and over, and neighborhood/regional  
30 groups that participated as planning staff, community advisory committee  
31 members, outreach liaisons, and the general public.
- 32           b. **Engagement:** What engagement, outreach, and communication was conducted  
33 for stakeholders described in 2a? Please identify the level of public impact on the  
34 *International Association for Public Participation’s* Public Participation Spectrum  
35 and requisite engagement strategies for each stakeholder group. Please  
36 consider culturally competent and community representative staffing, training,  
37 locations, times, public awareness, and input approaches.
- 38           c. **Public Participation:** What did you learn from the engagement conducted in 2b?  
39 Please summarize the advice you heard into themes and identify the contributing  
40 stakeholder.
- 41           3. **Evaluation Summary:**
- 42           a. **Transparency:** How did the public participation from 2c impact the decisions and  
43 policies made? Please consider input that advances, supports, coincides, and  
44 diverges from the master plan.

- 1                   **b.        Accountability:** How will the planning effort create better outcomes? Please  
2                   consider outcomes related to regional and local access, quality of experience,  
3                   facility rules/policy, and reporting back about 3a to stakeholders discussed in 2a.
- 4                   •       **Public awareness:** Plans for making the public aware of services available when the regional  
5                   park is open, including how to access the park by transit, if applicable.
- 6                   •       **Accessibility:** A plan that addresses accessibility, affordability, and other measures designed  
7                   to ensure that the facility can be used by people with limited mobility. All new and updated  
8                   master plans for the Regional Parks System must address compliance with ADA. As stated in  
9                   Chapter 7, Recreation Activities and Facilities, regional park implementing agencies are  
10                  encouraged to use U.S. Access Board guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas as a minimum  
11                  standard of accessibility on all new or substantially altered capital projects within the Regional  
12                  Parks System.
- 13                 •       **Natural resources:** As part of the master plan, there should be a natural-resource management  
14                 component that includes:
- 15                         ○       A Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) as a part of the master plan process. An NRI  
16                         should include a land cover inventory that is consistent with the Minnesota Land Cover  
17                         Classification System developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources  
18                         and the MetroGIS – a consortium of government entities in the region that create,  
19                         manage, and share digital geographic-based data in a geographic information system  
20                         (GIS). The natural resource inventory should include native plant communities mapped  
21                         in the Minnesota County Biological Survey and listed species (rare, endangered, and  
22                         threatened) that are documented in the Natural Heritage Information System. The  
23                         natural resource inventory may include other land-based information.
- 24                         The Natural Resource Inventory should be a basis for projects/proposals to restore  
25                         degraded resources and maintain high-quality natural resource features, including the  
26                         estimated capital costs of natural resource restoration projects. Regional park  
27                         implementing agencies should consult with natural resource professionals in the design  
28                         and final construction of park facilities, especially trails, that are adjacent to or cross over  
29                         natural resource areas. The final design and construction should allow the public to view  
30                         and enjoy these natural habitats with minimal adverse impact on that habitat.
- 31                         ○       Information on how surface water and groundwater resources in the unit, including  
32                         wetlands, will be protected. This should include standards and requirements that are  
33                         consistent with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s best management practices for  
34                         stormwater management. The master plan should include provisions to, first, avoid  
35                         wetland impacts; second, minimize impacts; and, finally, mitigate impacts when no other  
36                         options are available.
- 37                         ○       Information on how vegetation will be managed.
- 38                         ○       For regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features located in part or  
39                         wholly within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA), master plans must  
40                         also address the following:
- 41                                 ▪       Acknowledge the purposes of the MRCCA designation as detailed in Minnesota  
42                                 Statutes, section 116G.15, subd. 1

- 1                   ▪ Acknowledge the standards and criteria for the preservation, protection, and  
2                   management of lands within the MRCCA in Minn. Rule Chapters 6106.0010 –  
3                   6106.0180
- 4                   ▪ Map the location of the parkland and its relationship with the MRCCA boundary
- 5                   ▪ Recognize that the design and construction of park facilities must comply with the  
6                   standards contained in Minn. Rules 6106.0130
- 7                   ▪ Plan, design, and construct facilities and projects in a manner that protects  
8                   primary conservation areas and public river corridor views identified by local units  
9                   of government in their comprehensive plans

10 The effective date for these master plan requirements is May 1, 2019, in acknowledgement of regional  
11 park implementing agency planning processes that may be underway when the *2040 Regional Parks*  
12 *Policy Plan* is adopted.

13 *Master plans for regional linking trails:*

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

- 15           • **Boundaries:** A map showing the administrative boundary that includes agency-owned acres  
16           and anticipated private inholdings associated with the trail route that together establish the  
17           desired management boundary of the land to be managed by the agency.
- 18           • **Acquisition costs:** A list of anticipated parcels or real property to be acquired when known,  
19           and their estimated total acquisition cost. A description of the natural resources, site suitability,  
20           special assessments, potential contamination based on data from the Minnesota Pollution  
21           Control Agency, and other conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the  
22           boundaries should be included for those parcels. A description of the ownership and  
23           management arrangement.
- 24           • **Demand forecast:** The recreational demand to be met by the trail, as identified by the Council,  
25           the regional park implementing agency, or other sources.
- 26           • **Development concept:** A plan for development, including schedule and cost estimates for the  
27           project. The plan should include:
  - 28               ○ A map showing the regional trail alignment in relation to the roadway or other land uses,  
29               intersection crossings, and other regional and local parks and trails.
  - 30               ○ A section graphic showing the trail separation from the road.
  - 31               ○ Wayfinding signage plan, indicating the types of signs and general locations along the  
32               trail corridor
- 33           • **Conflicts:** Identification of conflicts with other existing or proposed projects or land uses  
34           affecting the park/trail unit, including steps necessary for their resolution.
- 35           • **Public services:** A description of any non-recreational public services and facilities, such as  
36           roads or sewers, needed to accommodate the proposed trail, including the timing of these  
37           services and the arrangements necessary to provide them.
- 38           • **Operations:** Rules, regulations or ordinances affecting the trail, including estimated operation  
39           and maintenance costs and sources of revenue to operate and maintain the trail.



- 1       • **Partner engagement:** A process to involve affected agencies, local units of government, and  
2 local, state, and federal recreation providers in the development of the master plan or plan  
3 amendment. A master plan must describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned  
4 above. The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned  
5 master plan amendments to all affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state,  
6 and federal recreation providers and address their concerns prior to submitting the plan to the  
7 Council. The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments  
8 received that identifies issues raised and content resulting from engagement efforts.
- 9       • **Public engagement and participation:** A process to engage the public in the development of a  
10 master plan or plan amendment. The public engagement process must seek to mitigate existing  
11 racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic barriers and include people of diverse ages, races,  
12 ethnicities, incomes, national origin, and abilities. A master plan must include the public  
13 engagement plan and describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned above. The  
14 process must include opportunity for the public to be heard and to have influence over the  
15 contents in the master plan. The regional park implementing agency shall address public  
16 concerns prior to submitting the plan or amendment to the Council. The master plan submitted  
17 to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised and  
18 content resulting from engagement efforts.
- 19       • **Equity analysis:** A process to examine who benefits and who is affected by the development of  
20 the resource in terms of race, ethnicity, national origin, income, ability, age and other pertinent  
21 characteristics to the analysis will identify communities that may be underserved by the  
22 Regional Parks System, and the impacts on these communities. The master plan submitted to  
23 the Council must include a summary of the public engagement process, advice heard, and how  
24 the advice shaped the master plan. This requirement will be met through a response to the  
25 following questions related to project data, public engagement and participation, and evaluation  
26 summary.
- 27       1. **Project Data:**
- 28           a. **Scope:** What are the boundaries and demographics of the public engagement area?  
29           Please consider neighborhoods adjacent to the park or trail, travel sheds, and  
30           agency/regional boundaries.
- 31           b. **Context:** What is known about future stakeholders, underserved populations, and  
32           how the region's history created present-day inequitable outcomes?
- 33       2. **Public Engagement and Participation:**
- 34           a. **Participants:** Which stakeholders discussed in 1b contributed to the planning effort?  
35           The following list is illustrative of stakeholders to consider including youth, Black,  
36           indigenous, and people of color communities, people with disabilities, low-income  
37           populations, populations age 60 and over, and neighborhood/regional groups that  
38           participated as planning staff, community advisory committee members, outreach  
39           liaisons, and the general public.
- 40           b. **Engagement:** What engagement, outreach, and communication was conducted for  
41           stakeholders described in 2a? Please identify the level of public impact on the  
42           *International Association for Public Participation's* Public Participation Spectrum and  
43           requisite engagement strategies for each stakeholder group. Please consider

1 culturally competent and community representative staffing, training, locations, times,  
2 public awareness, and input approaches.

- 3 c. **Public Participation:** What did you learn from the engagement conducted in 2b?  
4 Please summarize the advice you heard into themes and identify the contributing  
5 stakeholder.

6 **3. Evaluation Summary:**

- 7 a. **Transparency:** How did the public participation from 2c impact the decisions and  
8 policies made? Please consider input that advances, supports, coincides, and  
9 diverges from the master plan.  
10 b. **Accountability:** How will the planning effort create better outcomes? Please  
11 consider outcomes related to regional and local access, quality of experience, facility  
12 rules/policy, and reporting back about 3a to stakeholders discussed in 2a.

- 13 • **Public awareness:** Plans for making the public aware of services available when the regional  
14 trail is open, including how to access the trail by transit, if applicable.  
15 • **Accessibility:** A plan that addresses accessibility, affordability, and other measures designed  
16 to ensure that the facility can be used by people with limited mobility.  
17 • **Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area:** For linking trails located in part or wholly with the  
18 Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area master plans must also address the requirements  
19 outlined in below in the destination trail master plan section.

20 The effective date for these master plan requirements is May 1, 2019 in acknowledgement of  
21 regional park implementing agency planning processes that may underway when the *2040*  
22 *Regional Parks Policy Plan* is adopted.

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

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

- 26 • **Stewardship plan:** A program for managing the surrounding greenway areas and natural  
27 resource features.  
28 • **Natural resources:** As part of the master plan, the natural resource management component  
29 should include:  
30 ○ A Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) as a part of the master plan process. An NRI  
31 should include a land cover inventory that is consistent with the Minnesota Land Cover  
32 Classification system developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and  
33 Metro GIS – a consortium of government entities in the region that create, manage, and  
34 share digital geographic-based data in a geographic information system (GIS).  
35 Using the same NRI format will ensure compatibility with other natural resource  
36 inventories that have been completed or will be done in the metropolitan region. The  
37 natural resource inventory should include native plant communities mapped in the  
38 Minnesota County Biological Survey and listed species (rare, endangered, and  
39 threatened) that are documented in the Natural Heritage Information System.

1 The Natural Resource Inventory should be a basis for projects/proposals to restore  
2 degraded resources and maintain high-quality natural resource features, including the  
3 estimated capital costs of natural resource restoration projects. Regional park  
4 implementing agencies should consult with natural resource professionals in the design  
5 and final construction of the trail/greenway that are adjacent to or cross over natural  
6 resource areas. The final design and construction should allow the public to view and  
7 enjoy these natural habitats, balancing conservation of natural resources with the  
8 provision of recreational opportunities.

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

29 The effective date for these master plan requirements is May 1, 2019, in acknowledgement of regional  
30 park implementing agency planning processes that may underway when the *2040 Regional Parks*  
31 *Policy Plan* is adopted.

### 32 *Acquisition Master Plans*

33 Once the Council designates a unit to be a part of the Regional Parks System, the next step is usually  
34 the regional park implementing agency conducts a master planning process, as described above.  
35 There are times when a regional park implementing agency has an opportunity to acquire – or protect  
36 under an option to purchase – land that does not yet have a development concept, which is one of the  
37 requirements for master planning. In these situations, the regional park implementing agency may  
38 choose to develop an acquisition master plan, to establish the master plan boundary or to adjust an  
39 existing Council-approved master plan boundary. The acquisition master plan or amendment may focus  
40 solely on the land under option to purchase. The Council must approve the acquisition master plan prior  
41 to acquisition. Acquisition master plans shall include:

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- 1 • A demonstration of the proposed regional park system unit's consistency with Chapter 4: Siting  
2 and Acquisition – Strategy 1, including size/service area requirements.
- 3 • Boundaries: A map showing the parcels to be added to the master plan boundary in relation to  
4 the existing administrative and management boundaries of the park or trail. Additionally, a  
5 description of the ownership and management arrangement.
- 6 • Acquisition costs: A list of parcels to be acquired and the estimated total cost and schedule for  
7 their acquisition, and information on natural resources, site suitability, special assessments,  
8 potential contamination based on data from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and other  
9 conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the boundaries.
- 10 • A demonstration of implementing agency board approval and other support from partner  
11 agencies.

12 Before any development occurs and before the Council provides any financial assistance for  
13 development to the new or existing regional park system unit, agencies must gain a Council-approved  
14 development master plan that includes all of the additional required elements outlined in the Master  
15 Plan Content Requirements section above.

### 16 *Boundary Adjustments*

17 When a regional park implementing agency has an opportunity to add, modify, or remove land holding  
18 from one of its units, it must change its master plan's boundary. These changes happen for a variety of  
19 reasons. For instance, the regional park implementing agency may better understand the land needed  
20 to implement the master plan vision, a previously unwilling landowner may become ready to sell  
21 property adjacent to the unit, or land may be donated to the agency.

22 Major boundary adjustments are handled through the system additions process, which requires  
23 amending the Regional Parks Policy Plan. This process occurs on an approximately four-year cycle. If  
24 an opportunity for a major boundary adjustment arises off-cycle, the Council may consider a focused  
25 Policy Plan Amendment, which will determine whether the addition should be brought into the system.

26 Extensions for existing and planned Regional Trails and Regional Trail Search Corridors are major  
27 boundary adjustments addressed during the System Additions process, which occurs on a four-year  
28 cycle, as discussed above.

29 Minor boundary adjustments are additions or removals of smaller acreages of land, usually from a  
30 single property owner, to an existing Council-approved master plan boundary. Minor boundary  
31 adjustments are handled by updating a Council-approved master plan or an acquisition master plan.

32 Realignment for existing and planned regional trails are considered minor boundary adjustments and  
33 are handled through the master plan amendment process.

34 Minor boundary adjustments for additions to regional park or trail master plans must meet one of the  
35 following two criteria, whichever is greater:

- 36 1. Affect less than a total of 100 acres

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1           2. Affect less than 20% of the area within the Council-approved master plan administrative  
2           boundary

3 Concurrent with a master plan or acquisition master plan amendment process, minor boundary  
4 adjustment proposals must also include the following:

- 5           1. A description of the purpose for the change and the extenuating circumstances.
- 6           2. A map identifying the current boundary and the proposed boundary.
- 7           3. A demonstration of the proposal's consistency with the general siting and acquisition criteria,  
8           located Chapter Four of the Regional Parks Policy Plan, tables 4-1 and 4-2, and other  
9           applicable strategies in Chapter Four.

10 As stated above, minor boundary adjustments are considered concurrent with a master plan  
11 amendment or acquisition master plan amendment. Requests should include a description of the above  
12 criteria along with the master plan or acquisition master plan requirements in Chapter 5, Strategy 1,  
13 Master Plan Requirements. If the Council approves the boundary adjustment, then the new parcel will  
14 be eligible for applicable regional funding sources.

### 15 *Design Considerations for Master Plans*

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

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

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

23 Promote expanded multimodal access:

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

30 Strengthening equitable usage:

- 31           • Provide amenities suited for the aging population and/or those with limited mobility, such as:
  - 32               ○ Siting picnic areas or short, looped trails close to parking lots or points of access
  - 33               ○ Providing benches as appropriate intervals along trails
- 34           • Designing non-fee picnic areas that accommodate mid-sized groups (for example, 15-25  
35           people), which would allow for spontaneous gatherings.

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- 1           o Does not need to be a formal picnic shelter – could be several picnic tables grouped
- 2           together
- 3           o Would not require an advance reservation
- 4           o Does not replace picnic areas that require reservations – both options may be offered
- 5       • Clustering of amenities for multigenerational family gatherings, such as picnic areas near
- 6       playgrounds and open ball fields

### 7    *Amending a master plan*

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

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

23 There are several reasons when master plan amendments are required to demonstrate how changes to  
24 the Regional Parks System remain consistent with the Council's expectations as outlined in this plan.  
25 They include, but are not limited to:

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

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



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

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

4 The Regional Parks System plays a key role in advancing the livability of the region by increasing  
5 access to nature and outdoor recreation, thereby supporting healthy lifestyles and active living. The  
6 Council has a unique opportunity to help achieve this objective, through its roles in planning and  
7 operating the transit system as well as planning for the Regional Parks System. In addition to design  
8 considerations for master plans discussed in the previous section, regional park implementing agencies  
9 are encouraged to:

- 10 • Provide transit schedules and information at regional parks that are served by transit
- 11 • Include information on how to access a regional park or trail by transit on their agency’s website,  
12 where applicable
- 13 • Improve wayfinding signage
- 14 • Promote regional trails with existing Transportation Management Organizations (TMOs). A TMO  
15 is a public-private partnership that provides marketing and advocacy to promote multi-modal  
16 options for daily commutes.
  - 17 ○ Commute Solutions: serves Anoka County
  - 18 ○ Commuter Connection: serves downtown Minneapolis
  - 19 ○ Commuter Services: serves Bloomington, Eden Prairie, Edina, Minnetonka, and  
20 Richfield along the Interstate 494 corridor
- 21 • Coordinate with local jurisdictions to identify and plan for local trail connections to regional parks  
22 and trails as well as last mile connections from transit
- 23 • Collaborate with bike-share programs to site bike stations near regional parks and trails

24 The Council will explore the following projects:

- 25 • Collaborate with local agencies to develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Wayfinding Best Practices  
26 Guide
- 27 • Collaborate with Metro Transit or local transit providers to determine the feasibility of the  
28 following actions:
  - 29 ○ Promoting regional parks at bus stops
  - 30 ○ Exploring options for siting new park-and-rides near or adjacent to regional parks, or  
31 new regional trails near park-and-rides or fixed-route transit lines
  - 32 ○ Promoting a transit day pass or family pass to regional parks
  - 33 ○ Providing free rides to large special events in regional parks
  - 34 ○ Adding transit stops that are convenient to regional parks and trails

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

2 ***Joint powers agreements for Regional Parks System units are encouraged.***

3 Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to enter into joint powers agreements with local  
4 governments regarding the acquisition, use, and operation and maintenance for focused improvements  
5 within Regional Parks System units.

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

- 8
- 9 • Address who owns, controls, and manages the land under the parks system unit improvement
  - 10 • Ensure that the parks system unit improvement will be open to all people (not restricted by residence)

11 The parks system unit improvement should be a truly regional facility since it will be eligible for regional  
12 and state funds to finance its acquisition, use, development, and operations/maintenance once the  
13 Council has approved a master plan for the parks system unit.

14 The duration of the joint powers agreements should last the expected life of the parks system unit  
15 improvement and should be included in the parks system unit master plans submitted to the Council as  
16 an assurance that any funds provided by the Council for the park unit improvement would be spent  
17 consistent with the Council-approved master plan.

18 Regional trails usually extend through several communities requiring coordination for segment  
19 implementation. Regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features may coordinate with  
20 one or two local governments on specific facility improvements to enhance a Council-approved master  
21 plan. If an improvement to a Regional Parks System unit occurs on land owned by a local government  
22 instead of the regional park implementing agency, the regional park implementing agency may lease  
23 the park unit land and manage it through a joint powers agreement with the local jurisdiction.

24 Regional park implementing agencies should include a copy of any joint powers agreements as part of  
25 the Regional Parks System unit master plan. This assures the Council that any funds it provides or  
26 passes on for the parks system unit's acquisition, development, use, or operation and maintenance will  
27 be consistent with the Council-approved master plan.

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

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

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

## Chapter Five: Planning Policy and Strategies

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

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

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

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

- 20 • The project must meet the same requirements of master planning and Council approval as any  
21 other Regional Parks System projects.
- 22 • Costs incurred by the regional park implementing agency as the local share of the project are  
23 not reimbursable.
- 24 • Where funds are available from private sources or sources other than the regional park  
25 implementing agency to share in project costs, the Council will work directly with the affected  
26 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 its 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 following plan guidelines are used to  
22 determine a substantial impact 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
- 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:

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

## Chapter Six: System Protection Policy and Strategies

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

6 In exceptional circumstances, the Metropolitan Council may accept as equally valuable land the  
7 addition of land to another unit of the Regional Parks System where:

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

12 **“Equally valuable facility”** is defined as an exchange of land for facilities when recreational benefits  
13 and/or natural resource benefits are increased as a result of the exchange. For example, some land  
14 within a regional trail corridor may be exchanged to widen a highway if a highway department  
15 constructs a trail overpass or underpass of the widened road at no cost to the regional park  
16 implementing agency.

17 The Metropolitan Council will consider conversion of regional park land to other uses only if the  
18 conversion will not harm the Regional Parks System. The Council will review land conversion requests  
19 using the criteria below. If the Council approves the conversion request, then the master plan boundary  
20 will be updated in the System Plan and the Council’s land records system, to reflect the changed  
21 boundary.

22 The following criteria will be used to determine whether Regional Parks System lands may be  
23 exchanged for other land or a facility.

### 24 *Issues with respect to the existing park system unit:*

- 25 • Whether the regional park system unit can continue to function as originally planned, meeting
- 26 Council standards for sites and site attributes established for the particular type of park system
- 27 unit (regional park, park reserve, trail greenway or special recreation feature)
- 28 • Whether environmental features (wildlife habitat, water quality) will be adversely affected and
- 29 can be protected with the new use
- 30 • Whether the loss of site or function will be made up through acquisition of a site with
- 31 comparable characteristics adjacent to or in the immediate area of the current location

### 32 *Issues with respect to the alternative use:*

- 33 • The land area needs of the proposed project
- 34 • Whether the specific site requirements for the proposed project are unique to the area proposed
- 35 for conversion
- 36 • Whether the proposed project is consistent with Council policies
- 37 • Whether the proposed project is of greater benefit to the region than having the regional park
- 38 system unit remain in place



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

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

#### 14 *Restrictive covenants:*

15 The Metropolitan Council requires that a restrictive covenant be recorded on all land that has been  
16 acquired for the Regional Parks System using regional funds. The restrictive covenant ensures the  
17 parkland is used in perpetuity for Regional Parks System purposes and ensures that there is no sale,  
18 lease, mortgage of the parkland or other conveyance, restriction or encumbrance filed against the  
19 property unless the Council approves the action in writing and the Council's approval is recorded  
20 on/with the parkland.

21 The only instance that the Council will consider a consent to easement or land conversion in which no  
22 land was required to be exchanged, is if the:

- 23 • Council approved masterplan continues to operate as planned after the improvement
- 24 • Proposed change does not change the above-ground use from regional recreation open space  
25 nor does it adversely impact the quality or function of the natural resources.

26 The Council reserves the right to determine if the magnitude of the conversion proposal warrants an  
27 equally valuable exchange or a master plan amendment. Additionally, this provision does not exempt  
28 the proposal of requirements from other funding sources.

#### 29 **System Protection – Strategy 3: Reimbursement for contamination**

##### 30 *The Council will reimburse regional park implementing agencies for contamination* 31 *cleanup under certain conditions.*

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

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 groundwater aquifer on land that is proposed for acquisition. More detailed  
23 information about eligible costs and procedures are available in program specific guidance.

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

25 ***Environmental 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. More detailed information about eligible costs and procedures is available in  
37 program specific guidance.

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 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 operation and maintenance of its Regional Parks System units.

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

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

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

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

1 **System Protection – Strategy 6: Placement of utilities**

2 *Regional wastewater infrastructure and other utilities on Regional Parks System lands*  
3 *should be placed in ways that minimize negative impacts 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 If the Council is maintaining regional wastewater infrastructure on existing Regional Parks System land  
11 without an easement, the Council shall have the option to negotiate the terms of an easement. For new  
12 Regional Parks System facilities, the Council reserves the option to include an easement for a future  
13 regional wastewater infrastructure as a condition of a Council grant used to acquire land, provided that  
14 the conveyance is consistent with the Council-approved master plan.

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

22 Regional park implementing agencies may either sell or grant an easement or a license to the utility  
23 provider that specifies where the utility may be located, conditions for access to the utility, how impacts  
24 to the park by placement, repair or relocation of the utility will be mitigated and any time limit on the  
25 easement or permit. The utility provider may have to pay for the easement or permit based on the  
26 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**  
4 **conserving the integrity of the natural resource base within the Regional Parks System**  
5 **on which these opportunities 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 age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability



## Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies

1 The above criteria provide a framework to ensure the Regional Parks 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 This list of activities describes primary activities of the Regional Parks System. Secondary or support  
7 activities and/or facilities should complement the primary use. Support facilities could serve specific  
8 users and communities, enhancing the desirability of the primary facility. Water-based facilities are an  
9 example of this relationship. Swimming is a primary activity in the Regional Parks System.  
10 Development of a water feature support facility could meet a targeted need while, if planned, designed,  
11 and implemented well, maintaining the integrity of the system. The Metropolitan Council will further  
12 study and develop performance criteria for secondary or support facilities with input from regional park  
13 implementing agencies, other partners, and stakeholders. This work should encourage innovation to  
14 meet future emerging activity and facility needs while preserving the natural character of the system.

15 The regional activities listed above tend to require large tracts of land and/or land endowed with unique  
16 natural resources. The land needs are easier to meet at the regional level than at the municipal level,  
17 and the associated activities are more likely to be developed or provided at a regional level than by  
18 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 Regional park implementing agencies are responsible for the initial evaluation as to whether a new  
28 activity not included in this plan's list of primary activities can and should be accommodated in the  
29 Regional Parks System. When considering whether to accommodate a new activity, the regional park  
30 implementing agency must first assess how well the proposed activity meets the criteria described  
31 above. To accommodate new recreation activities that meet these standards, the agency will need to  
32 assess whether to incorporate any needed physical changes to the Regional Parks System landscape,

## Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies

1 which requires a master plan amendment (see Chapter 5: Planning – Strategy 1). For example, mixing  
2 motorized and non-motorized trail uses, such as snowmobiling and hiking, requires appropriate trail  
3 design and possibly speed controls and signage to safely accommodate both uses. Regional park  
4 implementing agencies are encouraged to engage the public to develop solutions to any multi-use trail  
5 conflicts. In some instances, there may be no need for any physical change to the regional park or trail  
6 unit, but a change in visitor or park management rules or policies may be necessary. Such park and  
7 trail management issues should be resolved by the regional park implementing agency’s policy board  
8 after appropriate public input and consideration of how these management changes affect the regional  
9 systems park unit’s environment, users, and the adjacent property.

10 If including a new activity in the Regional Parks System requires physical changes or facility  
11 construction beyond adjustments to visitor or park management rules or policies, the regional park  
12 implementing agency shall pursue one of two paths: 1) For a new activity or facility proposal not in the  
13 current Regional Parks System master plan, amend the unit master plan or 2) ) For a new activity or  
14 facility proposal included in a master plan updated within the last three years, an implementing agency  
15 may seek Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) and Metropolitan Council  
16 approval of the proposed design through a formal request including:

- 17 • Description of the request
- 18 • How the request fits within the park or trail unit and overall Regional Parks System
- 19 • How request meets the above criteria for recreation activities and facilities
- 20 • Detailed development concept and schematic design
- 21 • Identification of conflicts and steps necessary for their resolution
- 22 • Community engagement
- 23 • Equity analysis
- 24 • Known opposition

25 MPOSC and the Council may approve the proposal, require improvements, or reject the proposal. If  
26 both MPOSC and the Council find the proposed new activity or facility consistent with the above criteria  
27 and Regional Parks System character, then the Council will approve the master plan/request without  
28 conditions. If either MPOSC or the Council finds the activity or facility incompatible with the above  
29 criteria and the character of the Regional Parks System, the Council may ask the regional park  
30 implementing agency to go back to modify or improve the approach or design. If both MPOSC and the  
31 Council ultimately deem a new activity or facility incompatible with the above criteria and the character  
32 of the Regional Parks System, then the Council reserves the right to exclude the activity or facility from  
33 regional funding, including calculations of the annual parks use estimates and the agency’s acreage  
34 total, similar to the treatment of incompatible facilities that pre-dated the Regional Parks System.

35 There has been a demand for organized amateur athletic facilities that serve several municipalities or  
36 organized league play within a municipality. Municipal recreation departments and/or school districts  
37 provide these athletic field complexes. The Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission is responsible for  
38 elevating the social and economic benefits of sports to enrich the lives of all Minnesotans. Grants for  
39 such facilities go through the sports commission, not the Council. Such athletic field complexes do not  
40 require a high-quality natural-resource land base; they are easier to develop on formerly disturbed  
41 lands. As such, athletic field complexes are inappropriate for development on Regional Parks System  
42 lands. However, informal ball fields that can be used for a variety of pickup games are encouraged in

1 the Regional Parks System. The concept of an informal ball field encourages recreational use in this  
2 manner, but is not intended for programmed or league sports, since those services are offered in other  
3 recreational settings.

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

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

25 Regional parks, park reserves, and special features may contain enterprise-fund recreation facilities  
26 that are compatible with the natural-resource base of the unit and do not conflict with the primary  
27 recreation uses of the park unit. Enterprise-fund recreation facilities include any facility that is expected  
28 to generate sufficient revenues to pay its own costs, such as golf courses, downhill ski areas, and water  
29 parks. These facilities are not eligible for regional park funds from the Council because enterprise-fund  
30 recreation facilities are expected to raise money for their development and operation in the same way  
31 as their private sector counterparts.

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

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

37 The Regional Parks System offers a range of recreational opportunities that support a wide array of  
38 user experiences from active pursuits like bicycling and swimming to more passive activities like bird  
39 watching and nature study. The residents of the region are best served when the individual units that  
40 make up the system play to their strengths rather than trying to be all things to all people. Facilities that

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

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

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

### 23 **Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 3: Equitable use**

24 ***Strengthen equitable use of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such***  
25 ***as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.***

26 The regional park implementing agencies provide outstanding facilities, amenities, staffing, and  
27 programming to offer a welcoming environment. Activities hosted within the Regional Parks System  
28 include a breadth of opportunities for visitors, such as movies and music in the park, day camps,  
29 festivals, nature programming, among others. The benefits of park use are numerous, including  
30 improvements to physical health, well-being, learning, family bonding, and community building, inspiring  
31 a legacy of stewardship that strengthens friendships, families, health, and spirit. All residents should  
32 have the opportunity to enjoy the bountiful resources the Regional Parks System provides.

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

38 The Regional Parks System has been designed and developed to provide outdoor recreation  
39 opportunities for all the residents of the region, with facilities and services geared to meet the demands

## Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies

1 and abilities of the general population. To accommodate people of all abilities, regional park  
2 implementing agencies should construct facilities using universal design principles to ensure  
3 reasonable access. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed by the U.S. Congress in 1990,  
4 has created specific requirements for development and rehabilitation projects in the Regional Parks  
5 System. All new projects and updated master plans for the system include ADA review. Regional park  
6 implementing agencies should use U.S. Access Board's *Final Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas*  
7 as a minimum standard of accessibility on all new or substantially altered capital projects within the  
8 Regional Parks System. Additionally, regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to provide  
9 participants with physical, cognitive, hearing, or visual disabilities similar park and trail experiences  
10 through better design, accessible facilities, and adaptive programs.

11 Findings from the 2016 Regional Parks Visitor Study found that the relative proportion of visits from  
12 people of color to the Regional Parks System increased since the 2008 study. However, more work  
13 remains and the Council and regional park implementing agencies are committed to continue  
14 increasing the equitable use of system. The next Visitor Study is scheduled for 2021.

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

- 24 • Increasing awareness
- 25 • Addressing safety
- 26 • Enhancing capacity of gathering spaces
- 27 • Creating a regional park ambassador program
- 28 • Increasing and diversifying programming
- 29 • Providing more events in regional parks
- 30 • Creating a welcoming environment

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

35 In 2017-2018, the Council conducted additional community engagement to inform this *2040 Regional*  
36 *Parks Policy Plan* update. Engagement included a) follow up conversations with nine equity advocates  
37 and park partners who informed the plan in 2014, b) focus groups with a total of 67 individuals from  
38 communities underrepresented in regional parks, and c) surveys of 92 current parks visitors. Findings  
39 from the focus groups and surveys support findings on preferred activities from the 2014 study and  
40 provide additional information to inform policies on recreational activities and spending priorities.

## Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies

1 Walking remains the most frequently mentioned favorite activity for both groups. Notably, hiking/trails,  
2 camping, and dog walking were rarely mentioned by focus group members—the group from  
3 underrepresented communities—who more frequently named a desire for water activities, child-friendly  
4 spaces, playgrounds, family gathering and organized play spaces, and promotions and discounts to  
5 attract users.

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

- 10 • Create a set-aside competitive equity grant program for capital projects before the end of 2019,  
11 specifically targeted toward projects that would enhance equitable usage of the Regional Parks  
12 System
- 13 • Continue working together with regional park implementing agencies to achieve the Parks and  
14 Trails Legacy Plan's intent to "connect people to the outdoors"
- 15 • Work with regional park implementing agencies to understand and document how funding  
16 requests advance equitable usage
- 17 • Conduct studies to inform Regional Parks System planning and management, including:
  - 18 ○ A region-wide visitor survey every five years to monitor changes in Regional Parks  
19 System use with the next Visitors Study in 2020
  - 20 ○ Targeted studies to better understand and provide for the outdoor recreational needs  
21 and preferences across social classes, age groups, racial, ethnic, and educational  
22 backgrounds, and ability status
- 23 • Continue implementation of the Regional Parks System ambassador program to assist with  
24 expanding awareness of the Regional Parks System and bring parks to the people
- 25 • Continue and expand convening stakeholder meetings with regional park implementing  
26 agencies, partners, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups to enhance  
27 knowledge and continuous improvement
  - 28 ○ Information shared will be systematically collected and shared electronically
- 29 • Require regional park implementing agencies to incorporate a public engagement process that  
30 includes involvement from individuals representing diverse ages, races, ethnicities, incomes,  
31 national origins, and abilities when developing or amending master plans for regional parks or  
32 regional trails
  - 33 ○ To that end, the Council will provide technical assistance and capacity-building
- 34 • Encourage regional park and trail design that meets changing recreational preferences,  
35 including:
  - 36 ○ Amenities suited for the aging population and those with limited mobility
  - 37 ○ Provide free-of-charge picnic areas that accommodate mid-sized groups (for example,  
38 15-25 people)
  - 39 ○ Clustering of amenities for multigenerational family gatherings
  - 40 ○ Informal ball fields for pick-up games
  - 41 ○ Playgrounds, restrooms and water activities suitable for families with small children



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

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

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

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

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

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

- 18 • Roadway-separated, independent trails include trails that run along abandoned railroad  
19 corridors, or utility or private easements, and exist in their own independent rights-of-way –  
20 these trails are also known as the Regional Parks System’s Destination Trails.
- 21 • Road-adjacent, multiple-use trails that run along and are adjacent to public roadways, but not on  
22 the roadway itself. In urban areas these would be above the street curb – these trails are also  
23 known as the Regional Parks System’s Linking Trails.
- 24 • Occasional on-road protected bikeways designed exclusively for bicycles along streets, below  
25 the curb and separated by a barrier from vehicle traffic – these trails are also known as the  
26 Regional Parks System’s Linking Trails.

27 With respect to bicycling, regional trails serve:

- 28 • Pre-teen bicyclists who are often accompanied by a parent and need access to local schools,  
29 libraries, recreation facilities, shopping, and neighborhoods. These bicyclists have a strong  
30 preference for separation from motor vehicles on protected bikeways and trails.
- 31 • Adult and teenage bicyclists who may ride regularly for transportation but prefer comfortable  
32 access by a direct route on lower-speed or low-traffic streets. These bicyclists are more  
33 comfortable on designated bikeways such as roadway-adjacent or independent trails.
- 34 • Bicyclists who are willing to travel along most roadways but prefer the more natural  
35 surroundings that regional trails can offer. They value direct access to destinations and can ride  
36 at higher speeds than average cyclists. This group will often rely on roads for transportation but  
37 will use trails when they are direct and enjoyable.

- Highly experienced bicyclists who want direct access to destinations at maximum speed with minimum delays. These bicyclists primarily rely on the road system for routes, and value using roads like other vehicles for commuting, but occasionally enjoy independent trails if they are relatively continuous and not overly crowded.

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

### *Regional Bicycle Transportation Network*

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

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

Figure 7-1 shows the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network.

Many regional trails are included in the network such as the Cedar Lake, Samuel Morgan, Lake Minnetonka, and Bruce Vento Regional Trails. Figure 7-2 shows regional trails and the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network together to illustrate the overlap between bicycle recreation and bicycle transportation networks.

A more integrated and collaborative approach to regional trails and bicycle transportation planning is needed by the Council and its agency partners. Council staff will work to define opportunities for increased collaboration involving transportation and park agency’s bicycle professionals and stakeholders and will incorporate those opportunities into future planning and implementation activities of the regional bicycle and regional trails networks.

## Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies

1 Developers of trails that are included in both networks may need to resolve competing considerations  
2 such as design speed, needs of expected users, or protection of natural features.

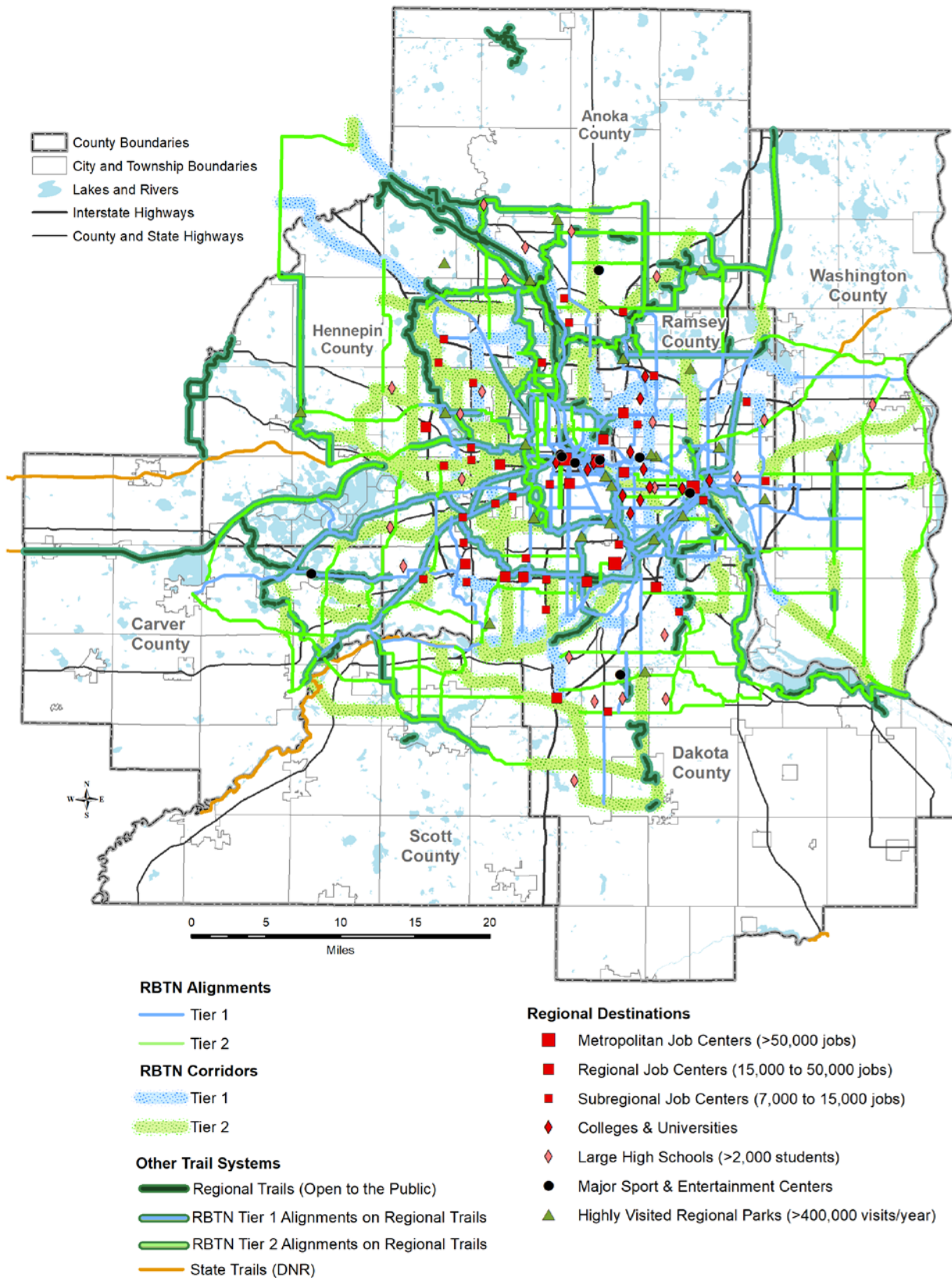
3 For more information on the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, please refer to the *2040*  
4 *Transportation Policy Plan* updated in 2018.

### 5 *Relationship to Other Technical Guidance*

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

9

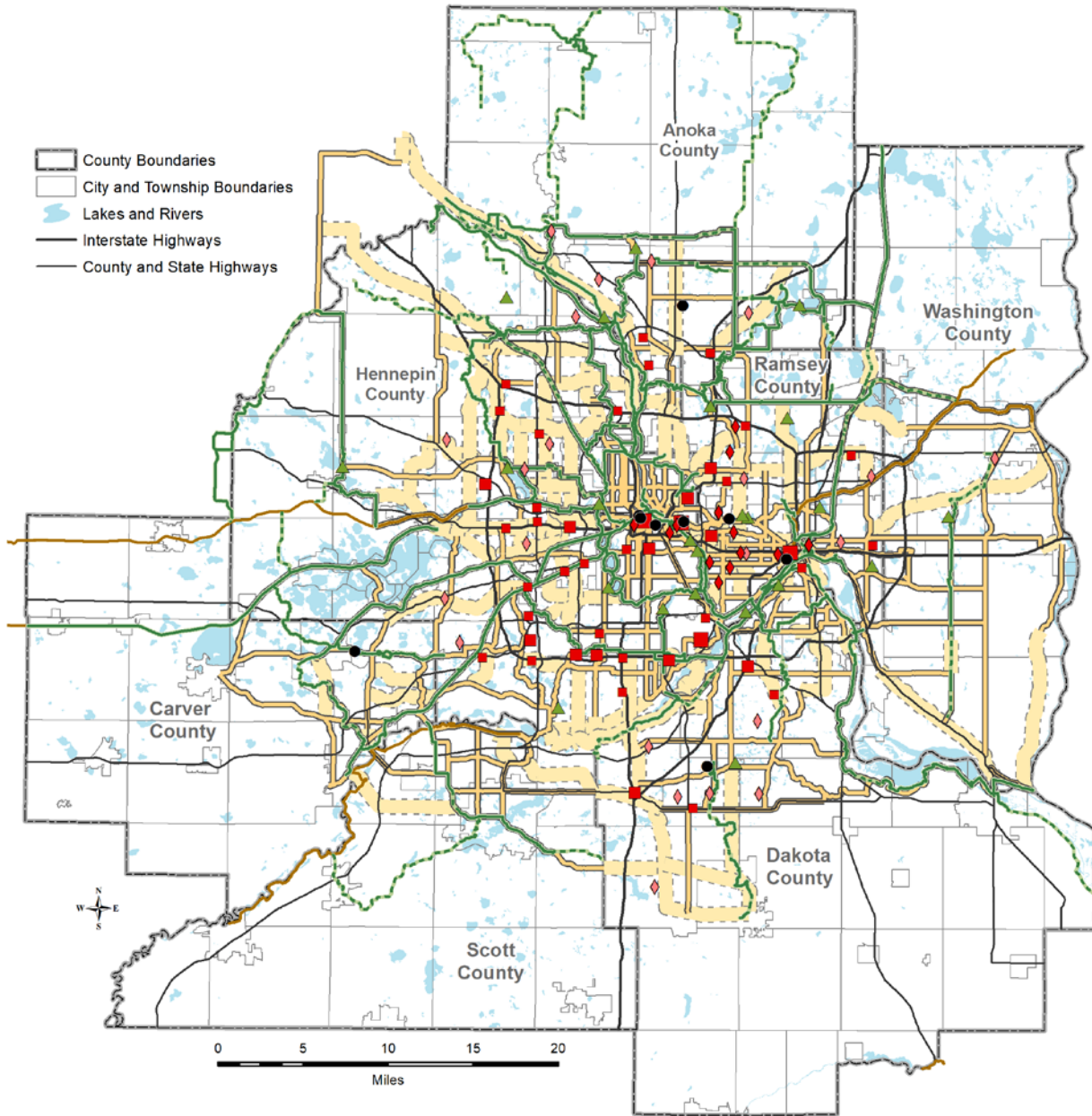
1 *Figure 7-1: Regional Bicycle Transportation Network Designations*



2



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



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> RBTN Alignments</li> <li> RBTN Corridors (Alignments Undefined)</li> <li><b>Other Trail Systems</b></li> <li> Regional Trails (Open to the Public)</li> <li> Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)</li> <li> Planned Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)</li> <li> State Trails (DNR)</li> </ul> | <p><b>Regional Destinations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Metropolitan Job Centers (&gt;50,000 jobs)</li> <li> Regional Job Centers (15,000 to 50,000 jobs)</li> <li> Subregional Job Centers (7,000 to 15,000 jobs)</li> <li> Colleges &amp; Universities</li> <li> Large High Schools (&gt;2,000 students)</li> <li> Major Sport &amp; Entertainment Centers</li> <li> Highly Visited Regional Parks (&gt;400,000 visits/year)</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

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



## Chapter Eight: Finance Policy and Strategies

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

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

37 Adding recreational facilities to Regional Parks System units must be balanced with the  
38 conservation of natural resources, avoiding or minimizing adverse environmental effects and  
39 restoring and enhancing environmental quality.

## Chapter Eight: Finance Policy and Strategies

1 The Regional Parks Bonding Program must, in accordance with Minnesota Statutes, section  
2 473.147, include “criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds.” Capital projects proposed for  
3 funding must be consistent with a Council-approved master plan. Projects proposed by each  
4 regional park implementing agency are prioritized by that agency. Each regional park  
5 implementing agency has unique capital needs, which that agency can best determine.

### 6 *Regional and State Bond Funds*

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

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

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

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

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

### 32 *Capital Improvement Plan*

33 As noted above, the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* must include a five-year capital  
34 improvement plan (Table 8-1). The intent is to outline the funding strategy for the relative near  
35 term, such that regional park implementing agencies can use the information in their planning.  
36 These figures are subject to change based upon legislative action. The projections are provided  
37 by the Agencies in their plans and are based on their current estimate of funding levels.

1 **Table 8-1: Metropolitan Council Five-Year Parks Capital Improvement Plan, 2018-2022**

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

2

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

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

4 ***Parks and Trails Legacy Funds spending must conform to the statewide Parks***  
 5 ***and Trails Legacy Plan.***

6 In November 2008, Minnesota citizens approved a constitutional amendment, commonly called  
 7 the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. The amendment created a new 3/8ths cent  
 8 sales tax to be collected from July 2009-June 2034. Revenue from the sales tax is placed into  
 9 four dedicated accounts. One of those accounts is the Parks and Trails Fund. The constitutional  
 10 amendment states: "...the parks and trails fund...may be spent only to support parks and trails  
 11 of regional or statewide significance.... The dedicated money under this section must  
 12 supplement traditional sources of funding for these purposes and may not be used as a  
 13 substitute." (Minn. Constitution, art. 11, sec. 15)

14 The Council is the fiscal agent responsible for administering appropriations from the Parks and  
 15 Trails Legacy Fund to the regional park implementing agencies. In this role, the Council will  
 16 ensure the Parks and Trails Legacy dollars are spent in the intended manner. To that end, the  
 17 Council will ensure regional park implementing agencies target the funds to projects that  
 18 capture the strategic direction outlined in the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan.

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

- 20
- Connect People and the Outdoors

## Chapter Eight: Finance Policy and Strategies

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

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

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

- 19       • 45% based on the operation and maintenance formula in Minnesota Statutes 473.351,  
20       provided in the section above
- 21       • 31.5% based on each agency's proportion of the population of the region
- 22       • 13.5% based on each agency's proportion of total non-local visits to the Regional Parks  
23       System
- 24       • 10% is allocated to land acquisition for the Regional Parks System

### 25 **Finance – Strategy 4: Equity considerations**

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

27 *Thrive MSP 2040* states the Council will “strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails  
28 by all our region’s residents, such as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and  
29 ability.” *Thrive MSP 2040* also states that the Council will use equity as a lens to evaluate its  
30 operations, planning, and investments. An equity lens, also known as an equity toolkit, is a tool  
31 government agencies use to collect information related to their major activities. Many  
32 government agencies throughout the country are using an equity lens to inventory, monitor, and  
33 institutionalize equity principles. An equity lens consists of a short series of open-ended  
34 questions that clarify both the positive and adverse impacts a project may have on equity.

35 The Council is strengthening requirements for incorporation of equity considerations in master  
36 plans. Planning – Strategy 1 requires that all master plans and master plan amendments  
37 include both inclusive community engagement and participation as well as an equity analysis  
38 that explicitly defines who is expected to benefit and be affected by the development of a

## Chapter Eight: Finance Policy and Strategies

1 Regional Parks System unit. Finance – Strategy 1 states that Regional Parks System funding  
2 will be granted only for projects consistent with Council-approved master plans. As a result,  
3 projects requesting Regional Parks System funding and investment will have gone through an  
4 extensive equity analysis as part of the master planning process.

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

15 Using Council bonds, the Council will create, fund, and administer a set aside, competitive  
16 equity grant program for projects explicitly aimed to strengthen equitable usage of the Regional  
17 Parks System. The purpose of this grant program is to strengthen equitable use of the Regional  
18 Parks System. To develop this grant program, the Council will work in close collaboration with  
19 regional park implementing agencies, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and  
20 other partners to formulate criteria and measures for awarding grants to regional park  
21 implementing agencies for capital projects for development and redevelopment aimed to  
22 strengthen equitable use.

### 23 **Finance – Strategy 5: Reimbursement limitations**

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

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

30 Reimbursement will be considered for early acquisition of land that is not currently designated  
31 as regional recreation open space by the Council in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* under  
32 certain conditions.

33 If an agency or an entity under contract with that regional park implementing agency has  
34 incurred costs to acquire land or protect it under an option to purchase while the Council  
35 considers adding the land to the Regional Parks System, the Council will consider reimbursing  
36 the agency for acquisition costs after the Council designates the land as regional recreation  
37 open space through a plan amendment and approves an acquisition master plan. For additional  
38 information about this practice, please see the section on future reimbursement consideration in  
39 the Regional Parks System Fund Distribution Policy.

1 *Reimbursement for development projects undertaken before they can be financed*  
2 *through the Parks Bonding Program*

3 Reimbursement will be considered for development projects provided that:

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

9 For additional information about this practice, please see the section on future reimbursement  
10 consideration in the Regional Parks System Fund Distribution Policy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

28 The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund consists of two accounts:

- 29 • The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund acquisition account, which is  
30 financed with 60% state appropriations from the Environment and Natural Resources  
31 Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota  
32 Resources. The remaining 40% of the account is financed with Council funds.
- 33 • The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund acquisition account, which is financed with 60%  
34 Parks and Trails Fund appropriations from the Land and Legacy Amendment. The  
35 remaining 40% is financed with Council bonds.



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

## 6 **Finance – Strategy 8: Use of Operation and Maintenance**

7 ***The Council will distribute Operation and Maintenance appropriations to***  
8 ***agencies.***

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

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

16 In 1985, legislation was enacted that allowed state appropriations from the general fund to be  
17 disbursed to regional park implementing agencies to supplement funding for operating and  
18 maintaining their portion of the Regional Parks System (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351).

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

- 21 • 40% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system visits
- 22 • 40% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system operation and  
23 maintenance expenditures in the previous calendar year
- 24 • 20% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system acreage, with park  
25 reserve resource management lands divided by four

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

## 32 **Finance – Strategy 9: Other funding**

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

34 The Council will seek continued state funding for acquisition, development, rehabilitation, and  
35 restoration and management of natural resources for all components in the Regional Parks  
36 System. In partnership with the 10 regional park implementing agencies and partners, the

## Chapter Eight: Finance Policy and Strategies

1 Council will pursue other sources of funding where appropriate for the benefit of the entire  
2 Regional Parks System. The Regional Parks System has been funded through a combination of  
3 state and local funding sources over the last 40 years.

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

6 The Council will work in partnership with the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota  
7 Resources to explore expanding the use of the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund  
8 beyond the current acquisition of high-quality natural resources to include acquisition of lands  
9 with restoration potential.

10

11 Funding for operation and maintenance of the regional system has been provided primarily by  
12 regional park implementing agencies through local taxes available to them and, to a lesser  
13 extent, user fees. Since 1985, the state has provided some supplemental funding to regional  
14 park implementing agencies to help fund their operation and maintenance costs. Minnesota  
15 Statutes, section 473.351, subd. 3, states that:

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

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

26 Importantly, any changes in the formula used to distribute state funds for operation and  
27 maintenance will require legislative action

### 28 **Estimated Costs to Complete the System**

29 State law requires that the *Regional Parks Policy Plan* estimate the cost of the recommended  
30 acquisitions and development of the park system, including an analysis of what portion of the  
31 funding is proposed to come from the state and Council levies, and other local government units  
32 (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1). The following analysis is an estimate of funding  
33 required to complete the system.

34 The estimated cost to complete the existing Regional Parks System is \$2.1 billion, including  
35 \$486 million in acquisition costs and \$1.6 billion in development costs (Table 8-2).

1 *Table 8-2: Estimated Acquisition and Development Costs to Complete the Regional*  
 2 *Parks System*

Category	Acquisition Cost	Development Cost	Total Cost
Unbuilt portions of existing regional parks and trails	\$231,622,473	\$769,721,193	\$1,001,343,666
Planned regional parks and trails	\$65,201,038	\$223,758,800	\$288,959,838
Boundary Adjustments, Park Search Areas and Corridors	\$123,481,756	\$119,730,000	\$243,211,756
Regional Trail Search Corridors	\$65,675,013	\$524,803,400	\$590,478,413
Total	\$485,980,280	\$1,638,013,392	\$2,123,993,673

3 ***Purpose and Use***

4 This estimate is intended to fulfill the state requirement for a metro-wide cost to complete the  
 5 Regional Parks System. It should also be useful to support overall discussion of financial  
 6 aspects of the Regional Parks System, including:

- 7 • Availability and sources of funding for acquisition, development, and ongoing operation  
 8 and maintenance
- 9 • Implications of adding new units to the system
- 10 • The value of regional parks to the region

11 The estimate is not intended to indicate costs for any single project or implementing agency.

12 ***Methodology***

13 The Council developed a new approach to the estimate for the 2018 update, intended to be  
 14 transparent and replicable over time. The 2020 update builds on the 2018 approach and reflects  
 15 updated costs associated with the newly proposed system additions and 2019 land values. The  
 16 Council worked with implementing agencies to identify and confirm the cost components, data  
 17 sources, assumptions and results.

18 The Regional Parks System Plan includes regional parks, park reserves, special recreation  
 19 features, and regional trails in various degrees of completion:

## Chapter Eight: Finance Policy and Strategies

- 1 • Already in use (which may include additional unbuilt or unacquired elements)
- 2 • Planned or acquired but not yet open to the public
- 3 • Search areas yet to be acquired and developed

4 The estimate uses the following components to accommodate this variety: acreages, acquisition  
5 costs, and development costs. These assumptions were developed in cooperation with  
6 implementing agency staff and compared to recent projects and master plans. Regional park  
7 implementing agencies provided and verified many of the underlying data in the estimate  
8 including:

- 9 • Data for total acres within the Council-approved master plan, acquisition acreage  
10 needed, trail miles needed, and the percentage of development completed for each  
11 Council-approved master plan
- 12 • Refinements to boundary adjustments, park search areas, and regional trail search  
13 corridors
- 14 • Real-time development cost minimums and maximums for regional parks and trails
- 15 • Field-verified regional trail corridor width minimums and maximums

### 16 *Acreages*

17 For parks and trails with Council-approved master plans, Council staff used acreages taken  
18 directly from those plans and confirmed with implementing agency staff.

19 For park and trail search areas where acreages are unknown, assumptions were applied. Trail  
20 corridors were assumed to be 30 feet wide and implementing agencies provided park acreages.

### 21 *Acquisition Costs*

22 Land acquisition costs were taken from a 2020 Council analysis of 2019 assessed market land  
23 values throughout the metropolitan area. The 2020 analysis built on the 2018 Council analysis  
24 with a more granular approach that resulted in decreased land values. Two costs were used:  
25 inside the Metropolitan Urban Services Area, or MUSA (\$253,364 per acre), and outside the  
26 MUSA (\$17,773 per acre). See Figure 8-1. The provision of wastewater service is not the only  
27 factor contributing to higher land values in the region's core. Other locational attributes that  
28 matter for land values are spatial situation (centrally located or remote), accessibility to  
29 employment centers and other destinations, proximity to lakes and rivers, neighborhood  
30 amenities, and other urban services (for example, high frequency transit service).

### 31 *Development Costs*

32 Development costs include the cost of the facilities created on acquired land (such as buildings,  
33 parking, trails, and natural restoration and planting).

34 Average development costs for parks (\$30,000 per acre) were derived from recent (2013 to  
35 2018) Council-approved master plans and compared with actual recent construction costs.

## Chapter Eight: Finance Policy and Strategies

1 Average development costs for trails (\$256,000 per acre, or \$920,000 per mile) were also  
2 derived from recent (2013-2018) Council-approved master plans and compared with actual  
3 recent construction costs. The higher per-acre cost of trails than parks is due to their smaller  
4 acreage and greater percentage of built elements.

5 For existing parks and trails that are partially completed, implementing agencies provided an  
6 estimated percentage of completion to calculate remaining development costs. The average  
7 development costs listed above were multiplied by the percentage to be completed.

### 8 ***Limitations***

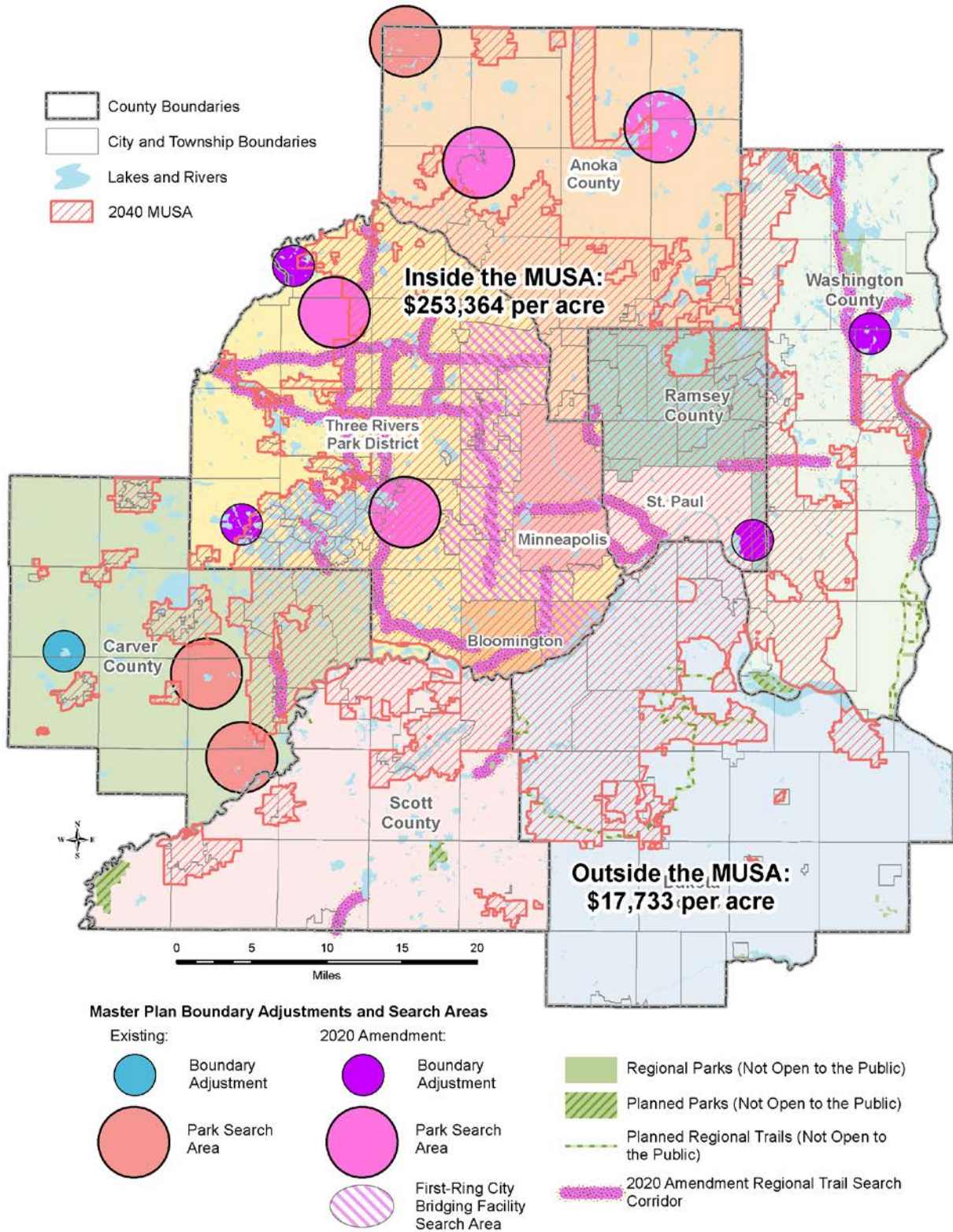
9 The estimate is intended for use only at a region-wide level. Because it uses average per-acre  
10 costs, application to an individual project or single implementing agency is inappropriate. Actual  
11 costs for individual projects will vary depending on the location and complexity of each project.  
12 The method likely underestimates costs in highly developed areas of the region and  
13 overestimates costs in less-developed areas of the region. Refer to master plans, project  
14 funding applications, and recent construction for more information on project costs.

15 The estimate assumes that all needed land will be purchased at market value.

16 Park search areas, park boundary adjustments, and regional trail search corridors are shown in  
17 the plan for planning purposes only. The data provided by the implementing agencies varied  
18 from agency to agency.



1 *Figure 8-1: Assumed Land Costs for Regional Parks System Acquisition, by*  
 2 *Metropolitan Urban Services Area (MUSA) Location*



3

4



1 *Analysis*

2 Total acquisition and development costs to complete the Regional Parks System is \$2.1 billion  
 3 including slightly less than \$1 billion for the unbuilt portions of the existing parks and trails  
 4 (Figure 8-2), \$289 million for planned units (Figure 8-3), and \$834 million for search areas and  
 5 corridors Figure 8-4). Table 8-3 shows acreage, mileage and costs associated with each  
 6 category.

7 *Table 8-3: Combined Total Costs for System Completion (Existing Parks and Trails,*  
 8 *Planned Units, and Search Areas and Corridors)*

Category	Park Acreage	Trail Acreage	New Trail Mileage	Acquisition Cost	Development Cost	Total Cost
Unbuilt Portions of Existing Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Recreation Features, and Regional Trails (Figure 8-2)	3,176	264	219	\$232 million	\$770 million	\$1 billion
Planned Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Recreation Features, and Regional Trails (Council-approved master plan, not yet open to the public) (Figure 8-3)	4,964	257	80	\$65 million	\$224 million	\$289million
Regional Park Search Areas and Boundary Adjustments (Figure 8-4) <sup>b.c.</sup>	4,365	N/A	N/A	\$123 million	\$120 million	\$243 million
Regional Trail Search Corridors (Figure 8-4) <sup>b.c.</sup>	N/A	2,163	588	\$66 million	\$525 million	\$590 million
GRAND TOTAL	12,505	2,684	887	\$486million	\$1.6 billion	\$2.1 billion

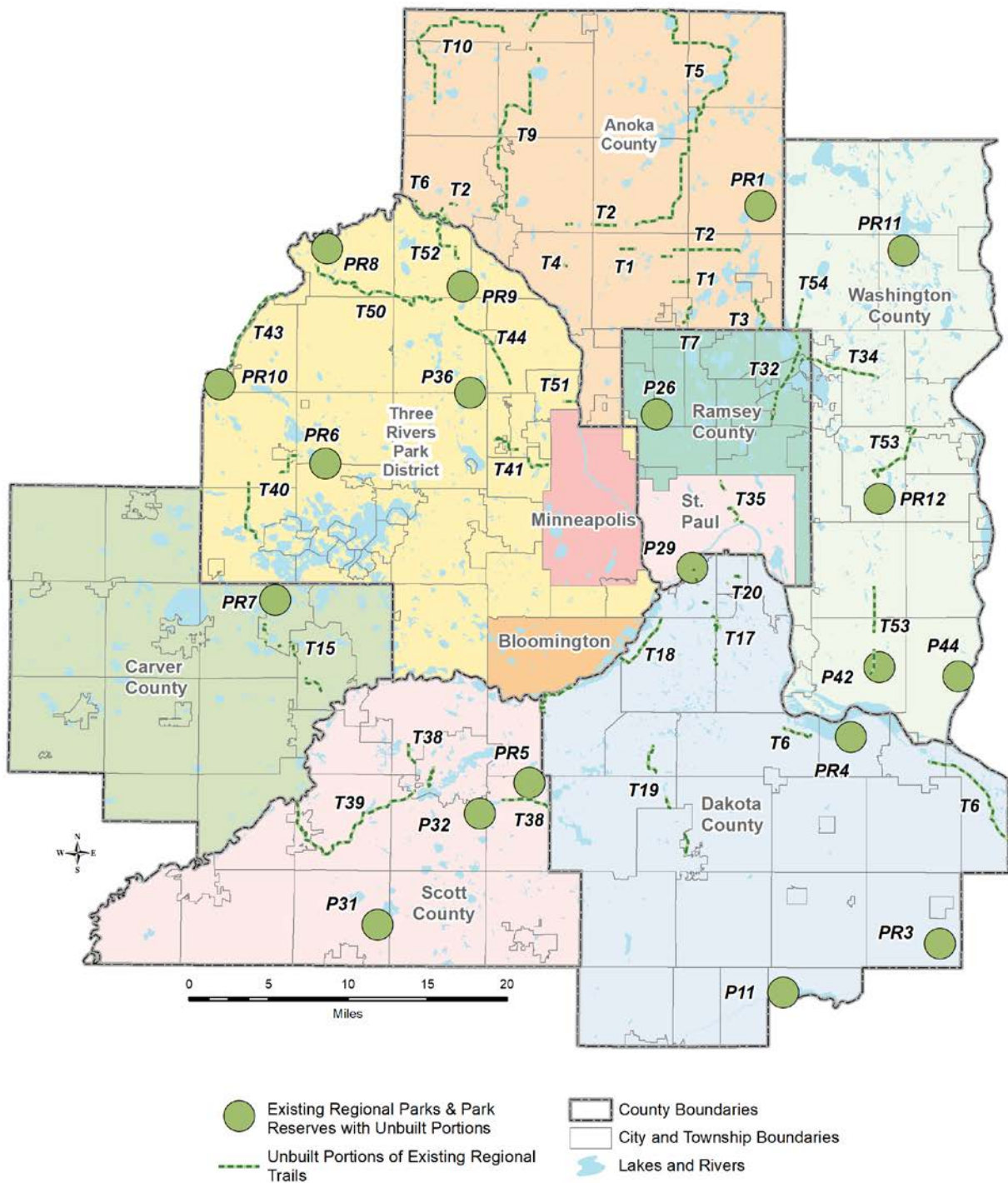
9 Data Source:

10 <sup>a</sup> Council approved master plans

11 <sup>b</sup> 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan (2018)

12 <sup>c</sup> Estimates from regional park implementing agencies

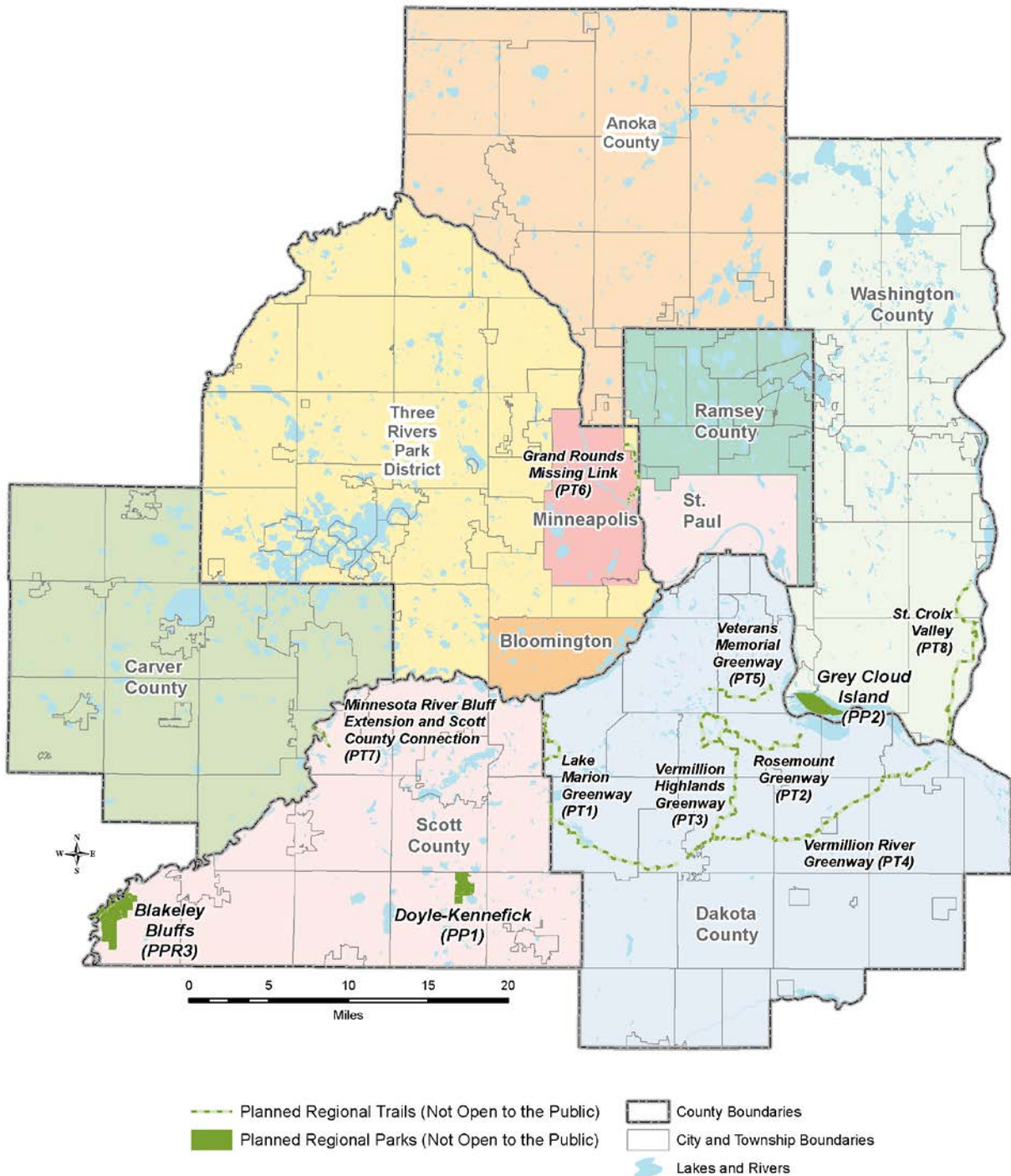
1 *Figure 8-2: Unbuilt Portions of Existing Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special*  
 2 *Recreation Features, and Regional Trails*



3

4

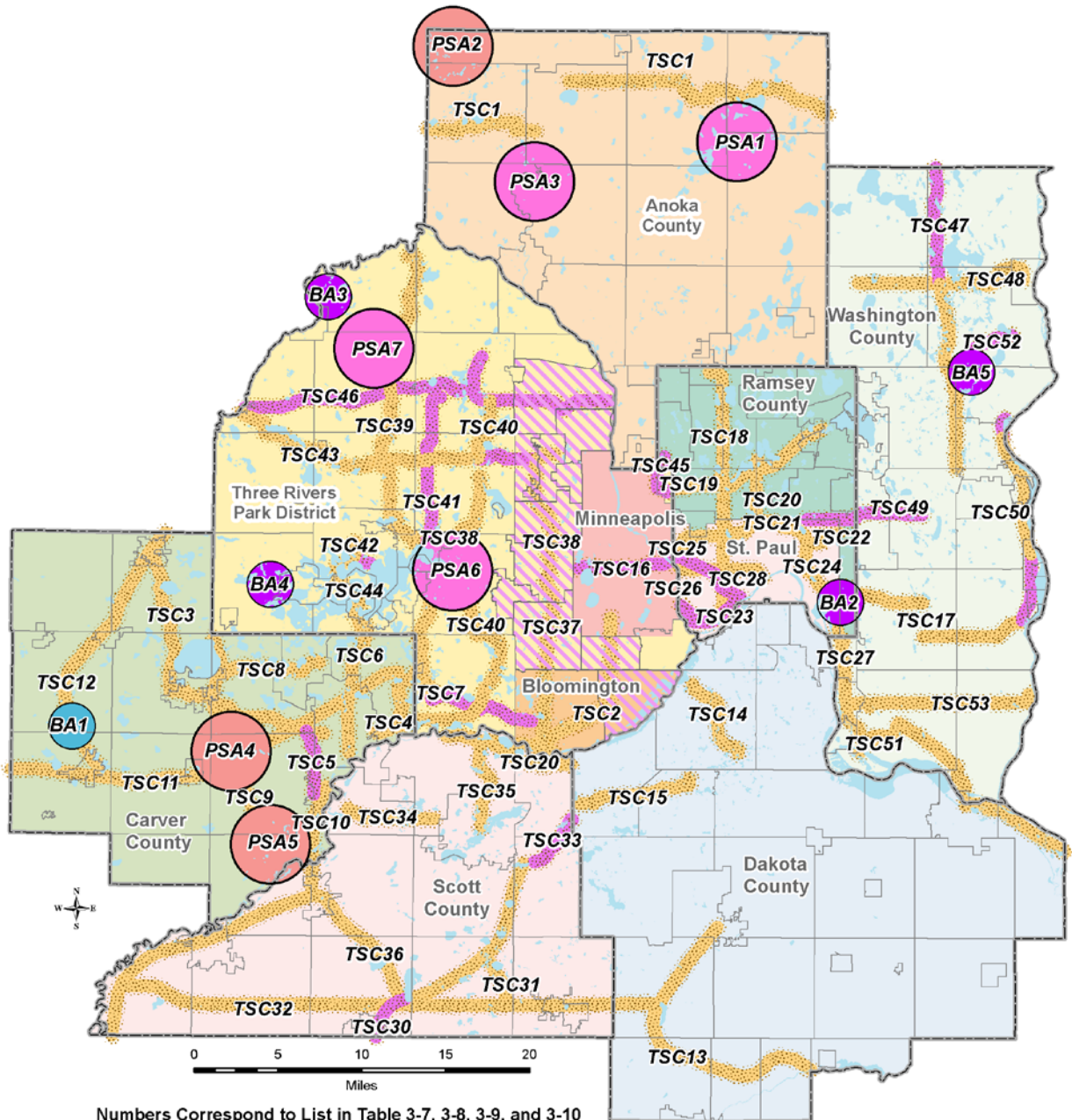
1 *Figure 8-3: Planned Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Recreation Features, and*  
 2 *Regional Trails (Council-approved master plan, not yet open to the public)*



3  
4



1 *Figure 8-4: Regional Park and Special Recreation Feature Boundary Adjustments and*  
 2 *Search Areas and Regional Trail Search Corridors Map*



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-7, 3-8, 3-9, and 3-10



3

4

1 *Changes in the 2020 Estimate*

2 The 2020 estimate to complete the Regional Parks System remained the same as the 2018  
3 estimate total of \$2.1 billion. The estimate reflects the 2020 regional designation additions that  
4 features a number of park search areas, boundary adjustments and regional trail search  
5 corridors and reduced acquisition costs reflecting refinements applied to the 2020 land value  
6 analysis. The 2020 estimate also reflects changes with parks and trails as the units are master  
7 planned and eventually constructed. These implementation changes focus on regional trails that  
8 have segments that are open to the public or have been planned.

9 The 2018 estimate to complete the Regional Parks System was significantly higher than the  
10 estimate in the 2015 plan. The change in the estimate comes from a higher level of accuracy,  
11 data refinement, and a consistent approach that involved staff from the regional park  
12 implementing agencies.

13 A higher level of accuracy was achieved through working with park and trail master plans and  
14 including the regional park implementing agencies on real-time development costs and average  
15 acreage costs for trails and search corridors.

16 Data refinement included working with the regional park implementing agencies on accurate  
17 search area, corridors and boundary adjustments. Search units are at the beginning stages of  
18 planning and are subject to changes based on factors including development climate, long-term  
19 planning, and political will.

20 And finally, a consistent approach to determining acquisition and development costs was taken  
21 to achieve continuity between projects with grand visions and projects with modest goals. This  
22 approach applied the same set of cost average figures for land acquisition and development  
23 across the entire metro.

24 *Funding the System*

25 The Regional Parks System receives funding from local governments, State of Minnesota,  
26 Metropolitan Council, the U.S government, and private donors. Since the Regional Parks  
27 System was created in 1974, the Regional Parks System has received state bond funds that  
28 were matched with Council funds. The state provides funds to earmarked projects, a portion of  
29 Clean Water Land and Legacy Act Amendment funds and Environment and Natural Resource  
30 Trust Fund dollars. Over the years the fund mix has changed from state bonds and Council  
31 funds (prior to 2008) to use of Legacy funds, earmarks and Environment and Natural Resource  
32 Trust Fund dollars. State and Council funds vary yearly and are not guaranteed to be granted.

33 The policy plan includes a five-year capital improvement budget to outline a funding strategy for  
34 the relative near term, so regional park implementing agencies can use the information in their  
35 planning. Since these figures are subject to change based upon legislative action, agencies are  
36 conservative in their reporting.

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- 1 Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1 also requires an analysis of what portion of the
- 2 funding is proposed to come from the state and Council levies, and other local government
- 3 units. This analysis is yet forthcoming in 2019 as part of a broader assessment of the funding for
- 4 the Regional Parks System.



1 **Chapter Nine: 2020 – 2023 Workplan for the Regional Parks Policy**  
 2 **Plan**

3 The following workplan summarizes specific topic areas that the Metropolitan Council intends to  
 4 cover over the next several years. These items will evolve and change as the Council works  
 5 with regional park implementing agencies, other partners, and stakeholders on implementation,  
 6 particularly as we engage with the development of the 2050 metropolitan development guide.

7 *Table 9-1: 2020 – 2023 Workplan for the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

Project	Timeframe	Location in Policy Plan
1. Work with stakeholders to develop a set of Regional Parks System indicators as a foundation for continuous improvement and public accountability to address key priorities such as strengthening equitable usage, managing natural resources within the system, and contributing to climate resilience.	2021-2022	Chapter 2
2. Determine how to use Regional Parks System interest earnings and amend appropriate policy documents as necessary	2020 and potentially annually beyond	Chapter 2
3. Develop performance criteria for secondary or support facilities	2021-2022	Chapter 7, Strategy 1
4. Begin discussion of long-term sustainable funding for the Regional Parks System	2020	Chapter 8, Strategy 9
5. Update the methodology for and implement the 2021 Regional Parks System Visitor Study	2019-2021	Not included
6. Conduct a cultural-historical study that describes and documents the impacts inequitable policies have had on the development of the Regional Parks System. As part of this study, explore the development of a land acknowledgement that recognizes and respects Indigenous residents and the histories of the land where our regional parks and trails are located.	2020-2024	Not included
7. Explore expansion of the Regional Park Classification to include, “Regional Water Trail Parks,” to provide paddling opportunities, camping, and more. This may be a sub-classification or an entirely new one.	2021	Chapter 3
8. Develop a long-term vision for Regional Trails that explores geographic balance, spacing, equity, character, and natural resource values.	2021-2024	Chapter 3

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390 Robert Street North  
Saint Paul, MN 55101-1805

651.602.1000  
TTY 651.291.0904  
public.info@metc.state.mn.us  
metro council.org

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