

Information Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting Date: July 13, 2023

Community Development Committee: August 7, 2023

Topic

Regional Parks System 2022 Annual Use Estimate

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. §§ 85.53, subd. 3 and 473.351, subd. 3; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

Staff Prepared/Presented: Darcie Vandegrift, Principal Researcher (651-602-1669)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

Information item; no action is proposed at this time.

Background

The Metropolitan Council has prepared annual use estimates for the Regional Park System since 1995 in partnership with the ten regional park implementing agencies.

The Council bases its estimate of park visits on counts of visitors entering regional parks and trails from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The count is a collaboration between all ten regional parks implementing agencies, whose staff conduct the summer counts, and Council staff who complete the analysis.

An estimated 69 million visits were made to the Regional Parks system in 2022 representing a 6.4% increase from 2021. This increase was due to an increase in special events, large increases in Ramsey County and Carver County visitation, and continued increase in trail visits. 70% of the visits were to regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features. The rest were to regional trails. The most visited regional park was Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, with 7.5 million visits. Other highly visited parks include Como Regional Park, Zoo, and Conservatory, Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park, and Mississippi Gorge Regional Park.

The Council uses a four-year rolling average of counts to ensure a representative sample of each park and each trail. Off-season visits (winter, spring, and fall) are based on a survey asking visitors how often they visit during off-season months. The most recent survey was completed in 2021 and incorporated into the estimates for the first time this year.

At the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission meeting, staff will provide a more detailed explanation of the methodology and findings for the 2022 use estimate.

Rationale

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

Thrive Lens Analysis

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

Funding

The use estimate is conducted annually with staff time from Community Development Division's budget.

