

Information Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Meeting Date: April 4, 2024

Topic

2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, Draft Policies and Actions

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stats. §§ 473.145 and 473.147

Staff Prepared/Presented: Emmett Mullin, Manager (651-602-1360)
Kevin Phan, Planner (651-602-1333)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Parks

Proposed Action

Information item; no action is proposed at this time.

Background

The Council continues its work on developing the 2050 Regional Development Guide, *Imagine 2050*. The current Regional Development Guide, *Thrive MSP 2040*, along with the Council's system and policy plans, help guide the orderly growth and development of the Twin Cities metropolitan region. The four policy plans include the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan*, the *2040 Water Resources Policy Plan*, and the *2040 Housing Policy Plan*.

At the April 4, 2024, Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) meeting, Council staff will share revised regional parks and trails objectives (Figure 1), and emerging ideas on policies and actions (Figures 2-8). The draft policies and actions have been the result of extensive discussions with Regional Park Implementing Agencies, the Metropolitan Council's Committee of the Whole, and the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission.

The intent for *Imagine 2050* is to integrate each of the Council's four policy areas, Parks, Transportation, Water Resources, and Housing into a single cohesive Regional Development Guide. Parks staff are working closely with other system planners to ensure a coordinated approach.

Additionally, Parks staff are carefully reviewing the existing Regional Parks Policy Plan content to ensure it is fundamentally oriented to objectives, policies, and actions. Content that is considered to be contextual, procedural, or includes more detailed requirements, is proposed to be moved into a Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook. Staff will share emerging thinking about this proposal with MPOSC at the April meeting.

Council staff will continue to revise and refine regional parks and trails objectives, policies, and actions, as well as the organization of regional parks content within *Imagine 2050* and the proposed Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook, because of this and future discussions with Regional Park Implementing Agencies, Council committees, and others.

The April 4, 2024, MPOSC meeting continues a series of focused discussions on the Regional Parks Policy Plan that began last Spring. At the most recent MPOSC meeting on March 7, 2024,

Council staff shared feedback from Regional Park Implementing Agencies, previous MPOSC meetings, and the Council’s Committee of the Whole (Figures 9-11). These discussions with stakeholders have resulted in key takeaways that helped Council staff further refine and shape their draft policies and actions. Some overarching themes mentioned were:

- The need to address key issues such as safety, affordability, water quality, and the Regional Parks and Trails’ role in combatting climate change.
- The desire to explore new ideas and terms such as “cultural landscapes” and how they fit into the regional parks and trails system.
- General support for moving procedural content and requirements into the Parks and Trails Planning Handbook to streamline the Policy Plan into a more visionary and aspirational document.
- Continue to acknowledge the Council’s role as a convener.

Additionally, Council staff shared the contents of existing Policy Plan’s Chapters 1-6 and discussed proposed changes, content shifts, and emerging topics that are being considered for inclusion (Figures 12-17).

At the March 2023 MPOSC meeting, staff shared Council-endorsed values and vision statements for the Regional Development Guide. Staff also shared a summary of the Regional Parks Policy Plan update work to-date, including a project timeline and a plan for working directly with Regional Park Implementing Agencies via a series of workgroups.

At the April 2023 MPOSC meeting, Council staff led small group activities focused on developing vision, mission, and value statements for the regional parks and trails system. An Implementing Agency-Council workgroup continued this work.

In June 2023, Council staff sought MPOSC’s advice on developing shared regional goals and policy area objectives. Policy area objectives connect regional goals to policies and actions.

In August 2023, Council staff sought MPOSC’s feedback and advice on community engagement activities, and regional parks and trails system vision, mission, and values. Staff also shared updates on regional goals and the launch of two additional parks policy plan workgroups.

In November 2023, Council staff shared outcomes of the most recent Agency-Council workgroups and draft regional parks and trails objectives. MPOSC provided feedback and advice on draft parks objectives.

At the January 4, 2024, meeting, Council staff shared a proposal for engaging MPOSC for the first five months of 2024 (Table 1) and sought advice on a revised set of draft parks objectives. Staff intends to present an overview of a 60% draft plan to MPOSC and CDC in May.

At the February 1, 2024, meeting, Council staff shared a revised set of draft parks objectives based on the input of MPOSC and Regional Park Implementing Agencies. Again, MPOSC provided advice on priorities to achieve draft parks objectives.

Minnesota law requires the Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the Regional Parks Policy Plan at least every four years (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147). The policy plan was last updated in December 2020. Completion of the policy plan update, as an integrated part of *Imagine 2050*, is expected in late 2024 or early 2025.



Figure 1: Revised Regional Parks and Trails Objectives (pushpins indicate recent updates)

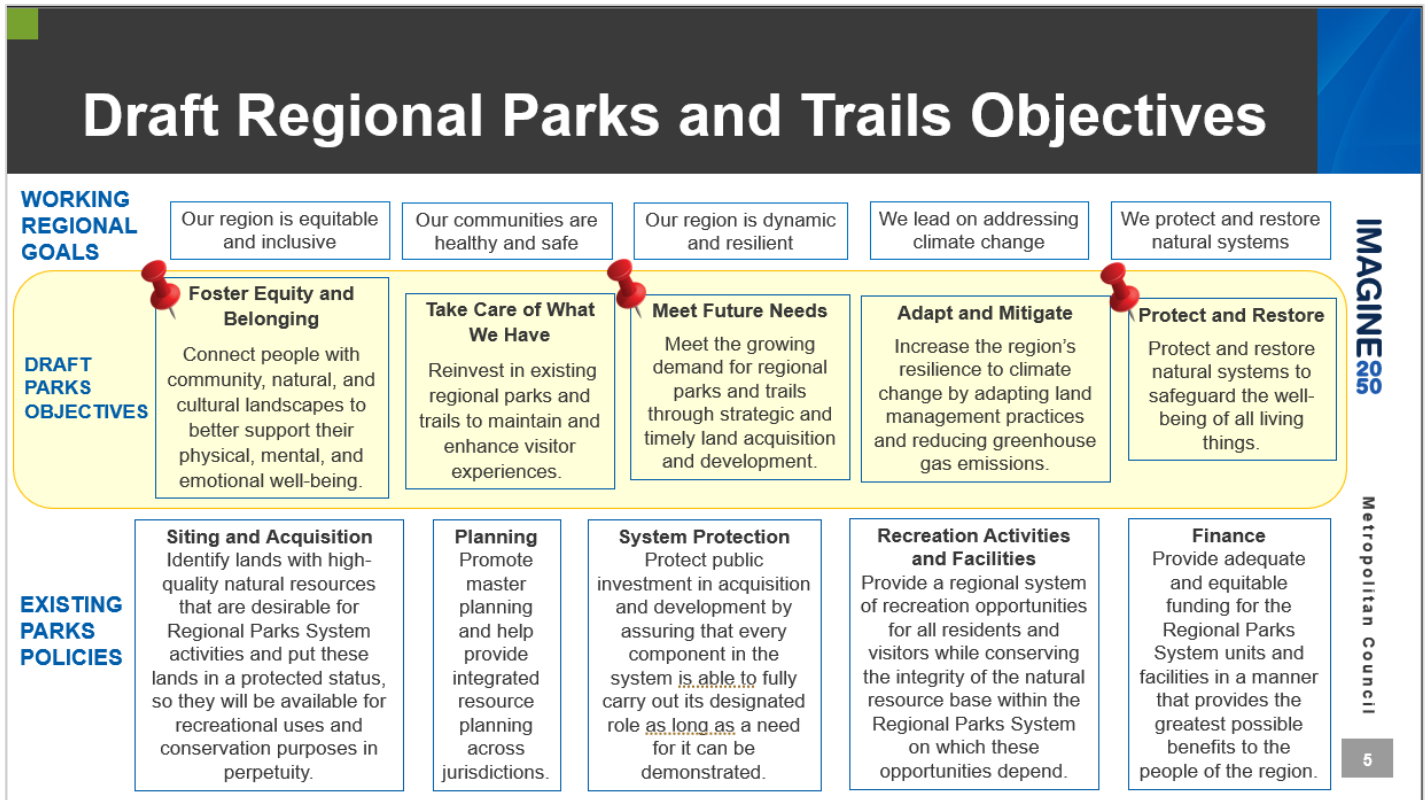


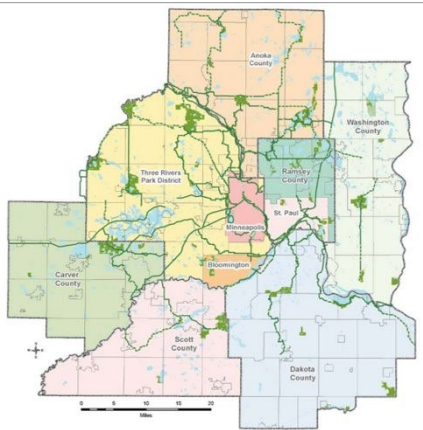
Figure 2: Draft Regional Parks Policy Plan Policies and Actions for Section Two: System Plan

Section Two: System Plan

Policy: Maintain a robust and current set of data, maps, plans, processes, and applications to support regional parks and trails planning

Draft Actions

- On the four-year Parks Policy update schedule, review and update the system plan and evaluate the regional park and trail classifications to determine what is relevant and necessary.
- Explore quantitative and qualitative research to further define and understand current and future regional park and trail issues and needs.
- Annually update map datasets to reflect the most current status of the system in coordination with the data “owners”, our ten regional park implementing agency partners.



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Figure 3: Draft Regional Parks Policy Plan Policies and Actions for Section Three: Climate and Natural Systems

Section Three: Climate and Natural Systems

Natural Systems Policy: Identify, protect, restore, and maintain lands with high -quality natural features, access to water, and/or restoration potential as part of the Regional Parks and Trails System

Draft Actions

- Identify and acquire lands with natural features, access to water, and/or restoration potential for conservation, recreation, and protection through the use of research and data.
- Identify new regional park and trail lands in areas not well served by our current system.
- Assess tree canopy along all regional trail corridors and “grow shade” where it is needed.
- Develop, restore, and maintain native habitat types across the Regional Parks and Trails System.
- Partner with other agencies and organizations to identify, protect, restore, and maintain natural systems within regional parks and trails.
- Coordinate efforts between implementing agencies to identify additional sources of funding for acquisition.



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Figure 4: Draft Regional Parks Policy Plan Policies and Actions for Section Three: Climate and Natural Systems continued

Section Three: Climate and Natural Systems *continued*

Climate Resilience Policy: Adapt and enhance the Regional Parks and Trails System to promote resilience to climate change, including the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions

Draft Actions

- Inventory the level of carbon sequestration from restoration work completed and estimate the potential level of carbon sequestration of future restoration work.
- Inventory greenhouse gas emissions of park agencies and department operations.
- Collect data that measures the positive impact that regional parks and trails have on climate mitigation and adaptation.
- Convene Implementing Agencies to increase the public's awareness of the Regional Parks and Trails System's role in climate mitigation and adaptation through partnerships and storytelling.
- Develop strategies to involve community in data collection, climate work, and education regarding regional parks and trails.
- Incorporate equity into the climate conversation by gathering diverse perspectives and shaping it into future actions.
- Convene agencies to develop multi-jurisdictional climate action plans.
- Promote further coordination between implementing agencies to improve operational efficiency and emerging strategies to adapt to climate change.

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Figure 5: Draft Regional Parks Policy Plan Policies and Actions for Section Four: Planning

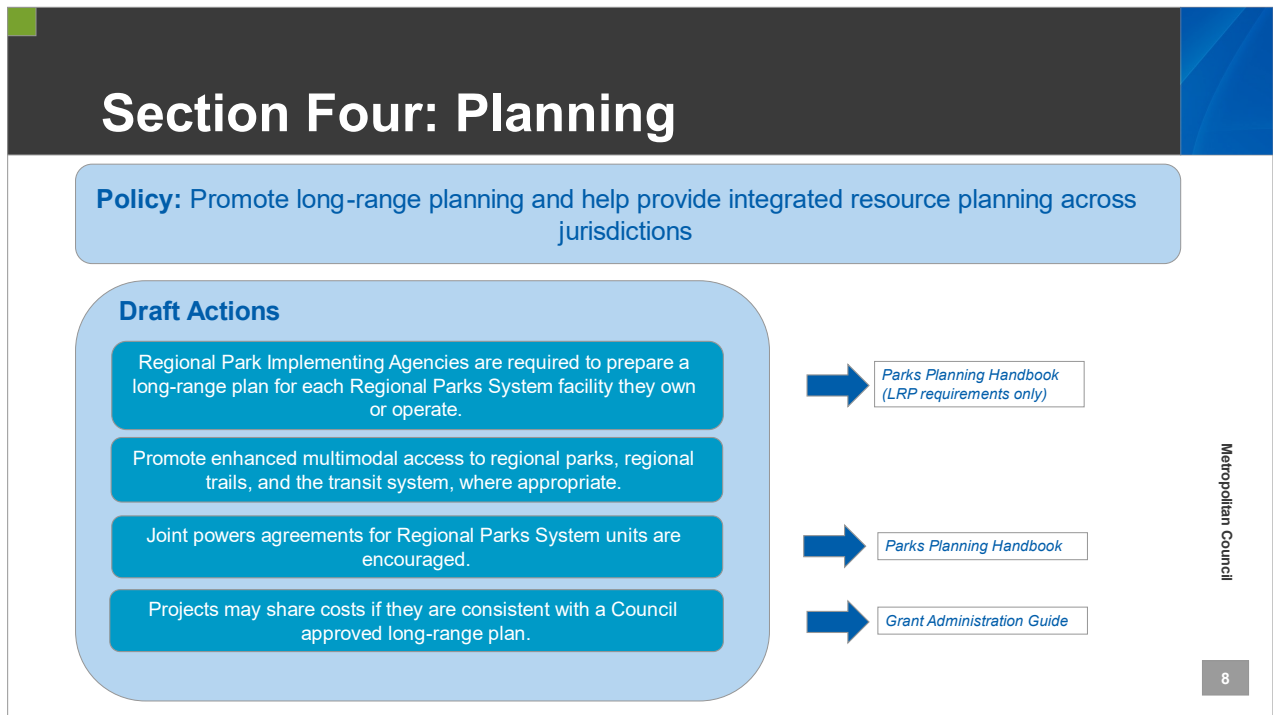


Figure 6: Draft Regional Parks Policy Plan Policies and Actions for Section Five: System Protection

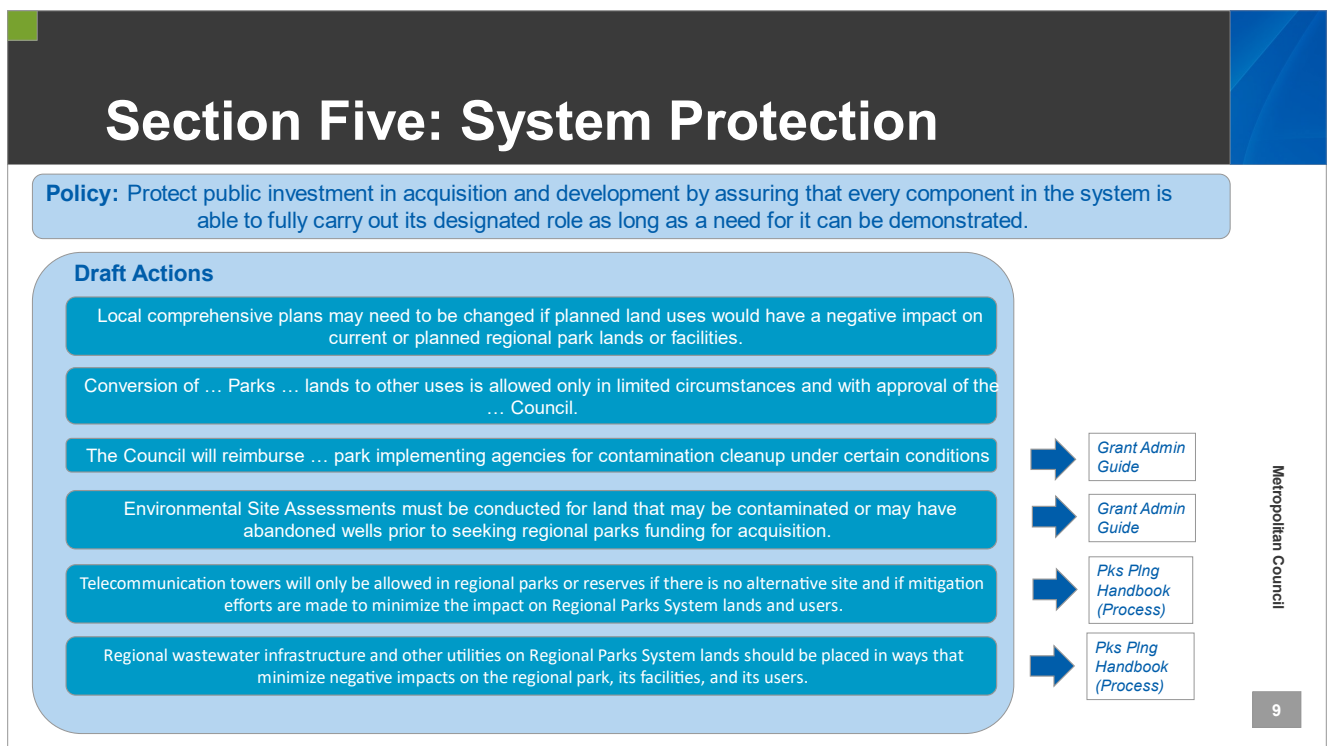


Figure 7: Draft Regional Parks Policy Plan Policies and Actions for Section Six: Recreation, Facilities and Programming

Section Six: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming

Policy: Foster a sense of belonging by providing a wide spectrum of leisure and play opportunities while balancing the needs of people, places, and the natural world.

Draft Actions

- Develop opportunities, programs, and spaces that strive to uplift community connections to the outdoors while counteracting barriers and harm placed on communities of color, LGBTQ2S+ people, people with disabilities, low-income households, and teenagers.
- Support the conservation and restoration of natural systems, alongside leisure, play, and creative opportunities in ways that connect people to each other and the outdoors.
- Provide a wide spectrum of connections and partnerships in the outdoors through recreation, arts, programming, transit, public health, and community.
- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be coordinated between the Regional Parks System and the transportation system.




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Figure 8: Draft Regional Parks Policy Plan Policies and Actions for Section Seven: Finance

Section Seven: Finance

Policy: Administer state and regional funding to the ten regional park implementing agencies in support of the regional parks and trails system.

Draft Actions

- Strengthen equitable use and access in the regional system:
 - Equity Grant Program
- Parks Acquisition Opportunity Fund:
 - Increase cap to \$2M for Legacy and \$3M for Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
 - Explore increasing Council match to state funds 1:1
- The Council will actively seek, and support agencies in seeking, funding from other sources.
- Parks Bonding: The Council will distribute the Regional Parks Bonding program funds based on the following formula:
 - 70% population
 - 30% non-local visits
- Regional trail corridors that may be used for transit in the future are only eligible for funding if the trail will remain a regional trail for at least 10 years.

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Table 1: Proposed Early 2024 Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Engagement

Timing	Proposed Topics, Focus
January 4, 2024	<p>Imagine 2050: Latest timeline, organizational approach.</p> <p>Focus: Priorities (policies and actions) to achieve objectives.</p>
February 1, 2024	<p>Imagine 2050: Emerging regional parks policies and actions.</p> <p>Focus: Demographic changes, climate adaptation and mitigation.</p>
March 7, 2024	<p>Imagine 2050: Updated regional parks policies and actions.</p> <p>2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan: Chapters 1-6, including Overview, System Plan, Siting and Acquisition, Planning, and System Protection policies.</p> <p>Focus: Proposals to reorganize content, develop a Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook</p>
April 4, 2024	<p>Imagine 2050: Updated regional parks policies and actions.</p> <p>2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan: Chapters 7 and 8, including Recreation Activities and Facilities and Finance policies.</p> <p>Possible focus: Operations and maintenance challenge, completing the system.</p>
May 2, 2024	<p>Focus: Present overview of 60% draft plan and Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.</p>



Figure 9: Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Feedback

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Advice



- Feb. 1, 2024**
 - Address **water quality** and **availability**.
 - **Rethink regional trails** as more than just a place to bike.
 - **Joint promotion** of regional park and trail opportunities could **unlock economic benefits** for local communities.
 - **Climate and natural systems** content seems to be **elevated**. That is important.
- March 7, 2024**
 - Consider including **quantitative goals** for number of trails developed, acres protected, etc.
 - **Safety** is critical. Let's be sure this is addressed appropriately.
 - Really like proposal to **move procedural items** to a handbook.
 - *Imagine 2050* should be **visionary** and **aspirational**.
 - Looking out to 2050, **water may be a real limiting factor**.
 - Consider an **executive summary**.
 - Propose **approving handbook first**, before *Imagine 2050*.

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Figure 10: Implementing Agency Partner Advice

Implementing Agency Partner Advice



- Jan. 18, 2024**
 - Strengthen tribal relationships, **co-management** of parks and trails.
 - New **cultural landscape** classification idea
 - New **natural system/open-space** classification idea
 - Create multi-jurisdictional **Climate Action Plans**
 - Expand **allowable activities and facilities** in regional parks and trails to meet emerging needs
- Feb. 15, 2024**
 - Co-management is too specific an action at system level. Consider **indigenous reconciliation**.
 - Like new classification ideas. Consider using existing classifications. **Define cultural landscapes**.
 - Council should be a **convenor, not imposer**.
 - **Don't diminish regional status** by adding more local amenities.

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Figure 11: February Committee of the Whole Advice

Committee of the Whole Advice

February 21, 2024

- Agree with shifting **siting and acquisition** to an action.
- Appreciate emerging policy space for **cultural landscapes**.
- Protect and provide access to **natural areas** in **suburban and rural contexts** too. Restoration of industrial landscapes is too narrow a focus.
- How do we assess **access and availability** of regional parks throughout the metropolitan area?
- Appreciate the **“take care of what we have”** objective. This is critical.
- Appreciate reframing of policy to **equitable recreation activities and facilities**.
- Appreciate the existing policy plan’s orientation to **community engagement**. This is meaningful.



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Figure 12: Existing Content and Proposed Changes for Chapter One

Chapter One: Planning for the Twin Cities Region

Existing Content	Proposed to be Moved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive MSP 2040 • Thrive Outcomes • Thrive Principles • Additional Direction from Thrive MSP 2040 for the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan • Regional Growth and Demographics • Community Designations • Local Comprehensive Plans 	<p>Proposed update and move to Regional Development Guide “front matter”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive MSP 2040 • Thrive Outcomes • Thrive Principles • Regional Growth and Demographics • Community Designations • Local Comprehensive Plans

High-Level Changes:

- Most content from Chapter One will be integrated into the Regional Development Guide
- Proposal to add remaining content to Chapter Two (Section One)

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Figure 13: Existing Content and Proposed Changes for Chapter Two

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Chapter Two: Overview of the Regional Parks System and the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan</h2>		
Proposed Title: Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and the 2050 Regional Parks Policy Plan		
Existing Content	New/Emerging Topics	Proposed to be Moved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • The Regional Parks System • Regional Parks System Management Structure • Regional Parks System Funding • Role of the Regional Parks Policy Plan 	<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidation of remaining Chapter 1 content <p>Research and Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing Conditions • Research and Engagement Summary <p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Parks and Trails System Objectives • Connection to Regional Development Guide's goals and park vision, mission, and values 	<p>Consolidation with other chapters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Regional Parks System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of park units (Regional Parks, Regional Trails, etc.) consolidated into the System Plan section

Figure 14: Existing Content and Proposed Changes for System Plan Section

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Chapter Three: System Plan</h2>		
Proposed Title: Section Two: System Plan		
Existing Content	New/Emerging Topics	Proposed to be Moved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Components of the Regional Parks System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Parks • Park Reserves • Regional Trails • Special Recreation Features • Regional Parks System Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing and Planned Regional Parks System Facilities • Boundary Adjustments • Search Areas/Corridors • 2040 Regional Parks System Plan Summary • Introduction to Policy Framework 	<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidation of Regional Park and Trail components (Chapter 2) <p>System Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Landscape and Environmental Open Space Classification 	<p>Proposed move to Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of other parks partners (National, state, local) <p>Proposed move to Regional Development Guide "front matter"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Policy Framework



Figure 15: Existing Content and Proposed Changes for Siting and Acquisition/Natural Systems and Climate Section

Proposed Title: Section Three: Natural Systems and Climate Policy and Actions		
Existing Content	New/Emerging Topics	Proposed to be Moved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 1: Priorities Action 2: Geographic balance Action 3: Council-approved long-range plans Action 4: New regional trails Action 5: Special recreation features 	<p>Natural Systems and Climate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on protecting and restoring natural systems Mitigation Action Adaptation Action 	<p>Proposed move to action level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy: Siting Locating and acquisition <p>Proposed move to another chapter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 3: Council-approved long-range plans (Long-range planning) Action 4: New regional trails (System Plan) Action 5: Special recreation features (System Plan)
<p>High-Level Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structure for Chapter Four is still to be determined (Potential for separate climate and natural system policies) 		

Figure 16: Existing Content and Proposed Changes for Planning Section

Proposed Title: Section Four: Planning Policy and Actions		
Existing Content	New/Emerging Topics	Proposed to be Moved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 1: Long-range plan requirements Action 2: Enhanced multimodal access Action 3: Joint powers agreements Action 4: Cost sharing 	<p>Minor and Administrative Long Range Plan Amendments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes added to Regional Parks and Trails Planner Handbook 	<p>Proposed move to Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 1: Long-range plan requirements (Plan requirements only) Action 3: Joint powers agreements <p>Proposed move to Regional Parks and Trails Grants Administration Guide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 4: Cost sharing
<p>High-Level Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 1 policies will remain in the Regional Parks Policy Plan, but requirements and procedures are proposed to move to the Regional Parks and Trails Planner Handbook 		

Figure 17: Existing Content and Proposed Changes for System Protection Section

Chapter Six: System Protection Policy and Strategies	
Proposed Title: Section Five: System Protection Policy and Actions	
Existing Content	Proposed to be Moved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 1: Local Comprehensive Plans Action 2: Conversions Action 3: Reimbursement for contamination Action 4: Environmental Site Assessments Action 5: Telecommunication Towers Action 6: Placement of utilities 	<p>Propose move to Regional Parks and Trails Grants Administration Guide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 3: Reimbursement for contamination Action 4: Environmental Site Assessments <p>Propose move to Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action 5: Telecommunication Towers (Process) Action 6: Placement of Utilities (Easement Process Only)

