

DRAFT 2050 REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS POLICY PLAN

A CHAPTER OF THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT GUIDE



**METROPOLITAN
COUNCIL**

May 2024

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 trails, 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 Section One: Overview of the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

2 *Introduction*

3 The benefits of parks have been extensively documented¹. Parks and open space positively contribute
4 to human health and well-being. Benefits to physical well-being include increased physical activity and
5 reduced risk of various chronic illnesses and obesity. Benefits to psychological well-being include stress
6 reduction, attention restoration, and improved cognitive functioning. Social well-being benefits include
7 increased social capital, family bonding, and social integration. Parks and open space also contribute
8 many environmental benefits including water storage, reducing the effects of urban heat islands,
9 conserving the diversity of flora and fauna in the region, and filtering the air we breathe.²

10 The benefits of the Regional Parks and Trails System help to keep the region at the top of national
11 livability rankings. The Twin Cities area's 65 regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation
12 features, plus more than 496 miles of regional trails open to the public, showcase the unique
13 landscapes of the region and provide year-round recreation. Our region's residents have consistently
14 singled out the region's parks, trails, and natural environment as the most attractive feature of the
15 region. Drawing more than 69 million annual visits in 2022, the Regional Parks System provides access
16 to natural space that contributes to physical and emotional well-being.

17 The Regional Parks and Trails System plays a key role in providing parks and open space for the
18 metropolitan area. But by itself, it cannot and was never intended to provide all the metropolitan area's
19 recreational opportunities. The Regional Parks and Trails System is one component of the greater
20 recreation and open space system for the metropolitan area that includes local, state, and federal parks
21 and open space areas, as well as private sector facilities. All these facilities and services complement
22 those of the Regional Parks and Trails System.

23 The Regional Parks and Trails System plays an important role addressing climate change in the region.
24 Conserving, maintaining, and enhancing the Regional Parks and Trails System through proactive
25 planning and asset management can increase the resilience of the region and reduce the impacts
26 associated with climate change. Working with partners, the Council is committed to quantifying these
27 ecological benefits as well as developing regional policies that build resilience in the system and across
28 the region.

¹ 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.

² Gómez-Baggethun, E. & Gren, A. (2013). Urban ecosystem services. In T. Elmquist et al. (eds.), *Urbanization, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Challenges and Opportunities: A Global Assessment*, pp. 175-251.

1 *Relationship of the Regional Vision, Values and Goals to Regional Parks and*
2 *Trails System Vision, Mission, Values, Objectives, Policies, and Actions*

3 The Regional Parks and Trails System Vision, Mission, and Values are intended to nest within and
4 complement the Regional Vision, Values, and Goals articulated at the beginning of the Regional
5 Development Guide.

6 The Regional Parks and Trails System plays a critical role in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area
7 providing high-quality nature-based outdoor recreation all within the close proximity of the seven-county
8 metropolitan area. This system is grounded in a unique partnership between the ten Regional Park
9 Implementing Agencies and the Council. As such, the partnership collectively developed a vision,
10 mission, and values for this special system. The Regional Parks and Trails System Vision, Mission, and
11 Values are written from the perspective of the partnership between the Council and agencies.

12 Other Council systems and policy areas have taken similar approaches, developing unique vision and
13 mission statements. Again, these statements are meant to complement overarching Regional Vision,
14 Values, and Goals.

15 *Regional Parks and Trails System Vision, Mission, Values, and Objectives*

16 **Vision**

17 Together, growing community connections and inspiring health and healing through exceptional
18 outdoor experiences and high-quality natural areas.

19 **Mission**

20 A partnership committed to an interconnected, nature-based parks and trails system, where everyone
21 belongs.

22 **Values**

- 23 • **Collaboration:** Recognizing that we are one part of a broader community working together to
24 create regional parks and trails for all. Building strong partnerships is vital to sustaining and
25 living out our values.
- 26 • **Belonging:** Committed to offering processes, spaces and programming that are inclusive,
27 welcoming, safe, and accessible to all individuals seeking experiences in the outdoors.
- 28 • **Stewardship:** Caring for the natural environment today and for future generations.
- 29 • **Well-being:** Knowing that the outdoors is vital for personal and community health.
- 30 • **Adaptability:** Challenging ourselves to grow, by creating a culture of innovation.
- 31 • **Education:** Inspiring learning about culture, history, and natural systems.

Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

1 **Objectives**

2 The *2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan* advances the *Imagine 2050* regional goals and the
3 regional core values of Equity, Leadership, Accountability, and Stewardship by striving to:

- 4 • **Foster Equity and Belonging:** Connect people with nature, community, and cultural
5 landscapes to better support their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.
- 6 • **Take Care of What We Have:** Reinvest in existing regional parks and trails to maintain and
7 enhance visitor experiences.
- 8 • **Protect and Restore:** Protect and restore natural systems to safeguard the well-being of all
9 living things.
- 10 • **Adapt and Mitigate:** Increase the region’s resilience to climate change by retooling land
11 management practices to mitigate greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and adapt to future
12 climates.
- 13 • **Meet Future Needs:** Meet the growing demand for regional parks and trails through strategic
14 and timely land acquisition and development.

15 Additional description of the five objectives is below:

16 **Objective 1- Foster Equity and Belonging:** Connect people with nature, community, and cultural
17 landscapes to better support their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

18 The Twin Cities Metropolitan Region has a world-renowned system of Regional Parks and Trails that
19 span the seven-county Metropolitan Region. The history of our region is complex and marred by
20 systemic racism that at one time overtly limited certain people’s ability to choose where they live, work,
21 and even recreate. The legacy of this history has had a profound impact on the people of our region
22 and the implications of this racist past persist today. This reality has profoundly informed who uses our
23 regional parks and trails system today and whether impacted communities feel welcome and a sense of
24 belonging.

25 The partnership that makes up our Regional Parks and Trails System acknowledges this troubled
26 history and is committed to reparative solutions through advancing equity and belonging in our work.
27 We are committed to addressing and undoing structural and programmatic inequities across the
28 metropolitan region. We believe in working with impacted communities to co-create solutions and
29 shape a future where all people have a seat at the table and an ability to shape our collective future.
30 We recognize that there is a lot of work to do and we are committed to building a parks and trails
31 system where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

32 **Objective 2 - Take Care of What We Have:** Reinvest in existing regional parks and trails to maintain
33 and enhance visitor experiences.

34 The Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails System, made up of the ten Regional Park Implementing
35 Agencies and supported by the Met Council, has a large and mature system of parks and trails. Once
36 an agency establishes a park or trail, they also establish a regular reinvestment plan to ensure that the
37 facility is maintained for high-quality visitor experiences.

Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

1 In 2022, the most recent year for operational expenditure data, the ten Regional Park Implementing
2 Agencies' operational expenditures exceeded \$130 million. While the state contributes to this critical
3 function, historically their investment has been about 9% of the total annual operating costs. This
4 means the vast majority of costs are borne by the Regional Park Implementing Agencies. If an agency
5 is unable to keep up with the demands of its reinvestment schedule, then higher costs result or the
6 system deteriorates.

7 In order to protect our current and future investments in the Regional Parks and Trails System, the ten
8 agencies, State of Minnesota, and Council must prioritize and accelerate reinvestment in the existing
9 system from all available funding sources.

10 **Objective 3 - Protect and Restore:** Protect and restore natural systems to safeguard the well-being of
11 all living things.

12 Our Metropolitan region's natural systems – our lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, and uplands - serve
13 as the foundation on which our Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails System was created.

14 Our Regional Parks and Trails System are the crown jewels of our region's natural systems, providing
15 access to the outdoors for everyone, ensuring healthy habitats and landscapes, and increasing
16 ecological resilience. Preserve these high-quality natural systems for today's residents and for future
17 ones. In the parts of our regional system that are degraded, invest in restoration.

18 The health of our natural systems is intertwined with the health of our region. Encourage work across
19 sectors to protect, restore, and connect natural systems with one another. Provide access and
20 opportunities for people to be outdoors, for happiness, health, and well-being.

21 **Objective 4 - Adapt and Mitigate:** Increase the region's resilience to climate change by retooling land
22 management practices to mitigate greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and adapt to future climates.

23 The Regional Parks and Trails System provides our region important ecological services to combat
24 climate change. The most critical role natural systems play in climate change mitigation is sequestering
25 carbon in soils and organisms. Additional services will help the region adapt to future climates,
26 including shade and cooling benefits, water storage, and protecting critical habitat that provides refuge
27 for all living things.

28 Our regional trail network serves as the arterial backbone of our region's active transportation system,
29 in coordination with the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, local trail networks, and other
30 important trail connections. Additionally, regional parks and trails provide wildlife pathways and
31 migratory routes. Agency managers are working to reduce or eliminate barriers to wildlife movement by
32 improving connectivity and ensuring all living things are able to find food, water, and suitable habitat.

33 By working together, the Council and Agencies can prepare climate-ready action plans that anticipate
34 and address climate change impacts and utilize climate tolerant species that adapt to our wetter and
35 warmer region. By making proactive park and trail modernization investments and anticipating future
36 weather conditions that put in place more durable infrastructure and climate-adapted species, our
37 system will be able to survive more frequent storms, freeze-thaw cycles, floods, and other natural

Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

1 disasters. The Council and Regional Park Implementing Agencies are committed to reducing
2 greenhouse gas emissions and energy use and providing for carbon capture. Whether through
3 increased use of renewable energy, electrification of fleets, or investing in smart infrastructure, we
4 share a common commitment to shrink our carbon footprint. The Council is committed to supporting
5 Agency Climate Action Plans by providing regionwide climate data and other requested information and
6 technical assistance.

7 **Objective 5 - Meet Future Needs:** Meet the growing demand for regional parks and trails through
8 strategic and timely land acquisition and development.

9 As our region's population continues to grow toward the 2050 projection of nearly 4 million inhabitants,
10 the use of our Regional Parks and Trails System will grow, too. In 2022, our Regional Parks and Trails
11 System had more than 69 million visits. While this level of use reflects the high value residents place on
12 the system, it also illustrates the tremendous daily pressure on the system that agencies must support
13 to meet visitor needs. To meet growing demands for our highly valued system, we will work together to
14 continue to grow it.

15 To prepare for the projected growth and use, the Council will work closely with our ten Regional Park
16 Implementing Agencies to acquire existing park and trail in-holdings, and we will identify new
17 opportunities for future expansion. As our population becomes more diverse and the proportionate
18 share of the population over 65 years nearly doubles, we must adapt our facilities and park offerings, to
19 remain relevant to changing expectations and needs. A relatively new idea to the regional system,
20 bridging facilities are intended to attract and introduce new visitors to our regional parks and trails. This
21 type of facility may become more prevalent as we continue to innovate to meet new needs.

22 In areas with limited land availability, protecting and preserving natural systems will become more
23 challenging and will require more creativity. Some of the best conservation opportunities may include
24 protecting regional "greenway" corridors that provide natural systems benefits for people and wildlife.
25 Finding corridors that connect larger landscapes will increase their natural systems value, but with
26 limited opportunities, our approaches will need to adapt and will require more partnerships across
27 public and private sectors and new sources of funding. Parks and trails professionals will need to reach
28 beyond their current relationships and knowledge base, to innovate and grow as we collectively strive
29 to meet our region's challenging and exciting future.

30 *Regional Parks and Trails System Existing Conditions*

31 Demographic and economic trends, social issues, relationships, investments, and infrastructure shape
32 the Regional Parks and Trails System today, continuing into the future. To prepare for 2050, the Policy
33 Plan strives to incorporate understanding of these existing conditions to inform future priorities.

34 Through Council research, implementing agency collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and
35 observation of large-scale trends, plan writers identified four key existing conditions. Understanding of
36 these conditions informs System vision, mission, values, objectives, policies, and actions. This section
37 is intended to complement existing conditions outlined for the region and other Council systems at the
38 beginning of *Imagine 2050*.

1 **History of Inequitable Development**

2 **Through partnership and coordination, the Regional Parks and Trails developed into the**
3 **expansive system we recognize today. However, systemic racism has shaped the use and**
4 **development of these spaces.**

5 The Regional Parks and Trails System was established in 1974 with the passage of the Metropolitan
6 Regional Parks Act, a new law that stated the need for a regional parks and trails system, defined the
7 authorities and roles of the Metropolitan Council, and identified the Regional Park Implementing
8 Agencies. This system was created to proactively counter the pressures of urbanization and
9 development in the Twin Cities by authorizing the Metropolitan Council to fund local acquisition of lands
10 with high-quality natural resources. The Council was charged to work in partnership with the ten
11 implementing agencies to operate and maintain the lands acquired, ultimately creating the system that
12 is well recognized today. With 65 regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features and
13 almost 500 miles of trails, the regional parks and trails system reaches millions of visitors annually.

14 While this system has achieved substantial growth and visitation, it is necessary to elevate the full
15 history of the land, practices and intentions of the regional parks and trails system, and to understand
16 its past of racism, genocide, and displacement. The land that the regional parks and trails system sits
17 on is the ancestral land of the Dakota, which was stolen from them through a series of ill-intentioned
18 treaties that were often done under pressure from the U.S. government. With continued settlement of
19 the Twin Cities and harsh punishments resulting from the U.S. – Dakota War of 1862, the Dakota were
20 ultimately pushed out of their homelands and forced to reside on small reservations throughout
21 Minnesota and elsewhere. The resulting displacement also separated the Dakota from the Bdote, or
22 confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. These places are sacred and provide deep
23 connection to the Dakota people as the place of their origin stories. Nearby places hold significant
24 cultural and spiritual meaning. The Owámniyomni Okhódayapi organization writes of efforts to
25 reconnect Indigenous communities from the Bdote and other cultural treasures, “Native communities
26 are still fighting to resurrect and protect their culture, language and history. We can help restore this
27 story disrupted.” With the regional parks and trails being on Indigenous lands, the system must address
28 a way forward to respect the land and the people who have had deep ties to these spaces.

29 Regional parks and trails are also influenced by racist policies in housing development. Redlining and
30 racial covenants created in the early 20th Century restricted neighborhoods to only certain white
31 communities. Combined with housing developers’ efforts to ensure parks were built near their
32 investments, these Progressive Era policies racially segregated lakeside parks in Minneapolis and
33 Saint Paul. Today, there is strong evidence of a connection between these earlier redlining practices
34 and areas with increased temperature, decreased tree canopy, and more impervious surfaces.

35 Today, the legacy of inequity continues to persist in overburdened communities. This is seen with the
36 large gaps in visitation demographics, as the White population is only 68 percent of the region’s
37 population but makes up 84 percent of park visits. Meanwhile, the Black community makes up 10
38 percent of the region and is only 4 percent of regional park visits. Some common barriers to access
39 include a lack of awareness and time and safety concerns, with a focus group participant saying, “If
40 there’s not a lot of people, it’s a little bit scary.” The creation of the Regional Parks and Trails System
41 came from a desire to collaborate and protect the natural beauty of the Twin Cities, but it also comes

Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

1 from a government that was associated with systemic racism. To move forward to 2050, it will be critical
2 to address the legacy of racial inequity, and work toward creating a more desirable future.

3 **Vital to People and Communities**

4 **Regional Parks and Trails are important to people for multiple reasons including public health,**
5 **social connection, and recreation opportunities. With changing demographics, the Regional**
6 **Parks and Trails will need to assess ways to continue being a key service for current and future**
7 **visitors.**

8 Regional parks and trails are a highly valued amenity to the Twin Cities. The system received around
9 69 million visitors in 2022. Park and trail users generally have a positive experience, with 88 percent of
10 visitors in 2021 ranking the facilities as “Excellent” or “Very Good”. The System provides many benefits
11 to its visitors, ranging from simple time in nature to recreational opportunities to increased happiness to
12 social connectivity. As one youth stated in Council’s *Youth & Parks* research project, “Parks are really
13 fun, [especially] when you’re with other people trying to make friends with them.”

14 Access to parks and trails reduces medical costs, increases community trust, and provides mental
15 health benefits. It increases positive emotions like calmness, joy, and creativity. Connection to nature is
16 a low-cost public health measure compared to conventional medical interventions. Thousands of
17 articles and four decades of peer-reviewed research publications lead to one general conclusion: Time
18 outdoors will improve anyone’s physical and mental health. When the community gets outdoors – into
19 the parks and on the trails – health care is moved “upstream,” from curing sickness in the medical
20 system to preventing it.

21 As the System continues to grow and change in the future, regional parks and trails must continually
22 adapt to new challenges that the region will face. A recent change has been viewing parks as a
23 potential solution to public health emergencies. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020,
24 people gathered in parks as a form of recreation when no other options were available. In a 2023 post-
25 pandemic survey from the National Recreation and Parks Association, 80 percent of park and
26 recreation professionals across the country reported that current visitation levels were higher than pre-
27 pandemic levels.

28 The System also has the opportunity to address the loneliness epidemic and social isolation, a rapidly
29 emerging trend. Social isolation and loneliness affect millions of Americans and comes with harmful
30 health impacts. In the US Surgeon General’s advisory, loneliness and social isolation can increase the
31 risk of premature death by 26 and 29 percent respectively. With increasing social isolation in the United
32 States, regional parks and trails can help reverse this trend by providing social spaces for the region
33 and building greater social connection.

34 While regional parks and trails are a highly valued amenity for our region, for some communities they
35 are out of reach due to a variety of reasons. In the 2021 parks and trails visitor study, Black,
36 Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and young people were frequently underrepresented as a
37 proportion of visitors to the system. Among communities of color, the most common barriers to access
38 are lack of awareness, time constraints, safety concerns, and transportation barriers with a focus group
39 participant saying, “I don’t know how to get here. I’m scared to get lost.” In the 2021 Youth and Parks
40 report, the top barriers identified for young people were safety concerns, a lack of opportunity to learn
41 necessary skills, and racism and exclusion. In one conversation, a participant voiced concerns around

Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

1 safety saying, “We don’t go to [certain counties] for programming because of the danger with ICE
2 [Immigration and Customs Enforcement]. Families don’t want to go there because the sheriff works with
3 ICE.”

4 It is crucial that the regional parks and trails system works to address and reduce these barriers to
5 these underserved demographics, especially in a region that will be more diverse in the future. It is
6 expected that in 2050, 45 percent of the region will be BIPOC and 22 percent of the population will be
7 65 years or older. With a drastic change in population, the regional parks and trails must continually
8 change and improve to best fit the needs of the Twin Cities region.

9 **Climate is Changing**

10 **Climate change has already begun to impact life in the Twin Cities with intensifying weather and**
11 **increased heat in the region. The Regional Parks and Trails could be a tool in mitigation and**
12 **adaptation strategies.**

13 To adequately prepare for 2050, the Regional Parks and Trails System plans to mitigate climate
14 change while adapting to the on-the-ground impacts to the region. With average annual temperatures in
15 the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area warming by nearly 3 degrees Fahrenheit since 1895, the impacts of
16 climate change to recreation and natural systems are already being felt. Regional parks and trails are
17 greatly impacted from these changes, resulting in new realities such as habitat loss for native species,
18 shorter winters, earlier ice outs, and increased frequency of extreme heat and poor air quality. It is also
19 important to note that low-income and communities of color are more vulnerable to the effects of
20 climate change. For example, areas in Minneapolis that had racial covenants (properties that could only
21 be sold to whites) have temperatures that are on average 3.71 degrees Fahrenheit cooler than the rest
22 of the City.

23 Another aspect of climate change is the impact it has on water quality. Throughout the Central and
24 Metro areas of Minnesota, only 54 percent of lakes meet water quality standards for recreation. Due to
25 algal blooms, littering, and pollution the recreational opportunities for park visitors have slightly
26 diminished. One participant in the Youth in Parks research study recalled a time she went fishing and
27 said, “I looked at the water and it was so dirty. There was a bunch of food wrappers and then I found a
28 needle.”

29 While climate change is already being felt around the region, parks and trails have the ability to provide
30 many environmental benefits as they break up urban heat islands, improve air quality, and provide flood
31 storage benefits. Parks and trails also protect natural habitats, providing increased biodiversity and
32 maintaining healthy ecosystems.

33 Throughout the Regional Parks and Trails System, work is underway to increase the environmental
34 benefits that were previously mentioned. A 2021 work group made up of implementing agency and
35 Council staff identified the following efforts:

- 36 • Restoring lands to pre-settlement native plant communities or species resilient to new climates
- 37 • Protecting large areas of land to provide habitat for native species like bison and the rusty
38 patched bumblebee
- 39 • Adapting recreational opportunities like adjusting open hours to allow for more recreation in
40 cooler evening hours

Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

1 As implementing agencies continue efforts on building a more resilient future, it is important that the
2 Metropolitan Council continues to support this work, while also striving to think of new ways to address
3 this challenge.

4 **The System Faces Growing Pains**

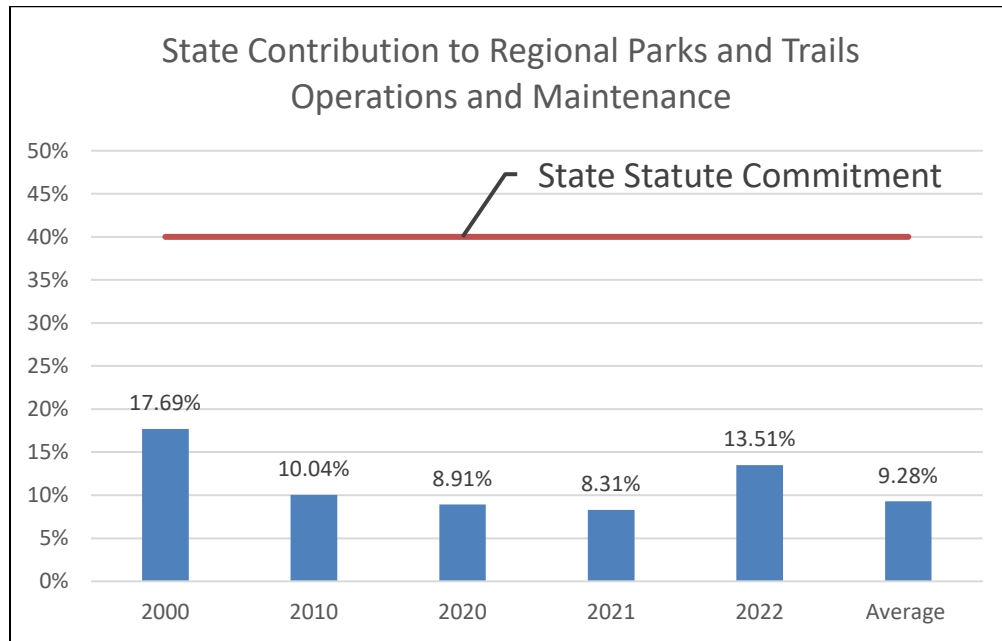
5 **Regional Parks and Trails have experienced rapid growth over the past few years, especially**
6 **Regional Trails. This expansion must be balanced with the need to secure adequate funding for**
7 **regular maintenance.**

8 Since the creation of the Regional Parks and Trails in 1974, the System has grown substantially,
9 totaling almost 60,000 acres of park land and almost 500 miles of regional trails. This has been
10 achieved due to the investment of over \$658 million in state and regional dollars and an additional \$163
11 million of state funds for operations and maintenance funding (2020 figures).

12 The general success of a large parks and trails system in the Twin Cities has led to an expectation of
13 high-quality amenities in good condition. In the 2021 Regional Parks Visitor Study, respondents were
14 asked to suggest recommendations that would improve their experience in regional parks and trails.
15 The most common recommendations for improvement were maintenance (20%) for regional parks and
16 better surface conditions for regional trails (23%). Despite the high demand for improved and well-
17 maintained amenities, the Regional Park Implementing Agencies are facing a gap in funding for
18 operations and maintenance. When it comes to financing the System's operations and maintenance
19 costs, the state has historically invested significantly less than its statutorily required 40 percent of total
20 operational costs, instead appropriating on average 9 percent of these costs.

21 In addition to the regular demands of maintaining and upgrading infrastructure, there is also desire to
22 continue expanding the system, to improve access to underserved communities and connect
23 fragmented ecosystems. Communities throughout the metropolitan area are expressing a desire to
24 protect their natural areas. For example, a participant in the Young Leaders Collaborative said, "I think
25 our city is lacking a lot of biodiversity, there's so much development and such little trees."

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Source: FY 2024 Funds Distributed to Regional Parks Implementing Agencies for Operations and Maintenance Report

Regional Growth and Demographics

Some information included in Regional Existing Conditions (to-be-located near the beginning of the Regional Development Guide) may be referenced in this space; to be updated for the 90% draft plan

Regional Parks and Trails System Research and Engagement Summary

Along with existing conditions, recent research and engagement focused on the regional parks and trails system inform the development of vision, mission, values, objectives, policies, and actions. This section summarizes three sets of research and engagement findings, including:

- Adventure Close to Home: Connecting Youth to the Regional Park System (2021)
- Regional Parks and Trails Visitor Study (2021)
- Community and targeted engagement about Regional Parks and Trails (2020-2024)

This content is meant to complement research and engagement summarized for the region and other Council systems at the beginning of *Imagine 2050*. Links to reports, where available, will be provided. Specific connections between research and engagement and parks and trails policies and actions will be called out in different sections of this chapter.

Connecting Youth to the Regional Park System (2021)

The regional parks and trails system protects valuable natural features, preserves wildlife habitat, and offers opportunities to enjoy nature close to home. Connecting teens with these outdoor opportunities contributes to a healthy, equitable region and offers an opportunity to strengthen support for the regional parks and trails system in the future.

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1 Young people of color in the Twin Cities region will account for 53% of residents under age 18 by 2040.
2 Connecting these youth to the outdoors deserves high priority – for future support of the regional parks
3 and trails system and for providing equitable access to outdoor experiences.

4 Research by the Met Council has examined the needs and preferences of multicultural and multiracial
5 youth and identified potential opportunities for the Regional Park Implementing Agencies to pursue. The
6 Met Council was lead partner of the research team, which included members of youth-serving
7 community organizations, and professional staff of the park implementing agencies.

8 The project entailed engaging members of affected communities and involved an engagement process
9 that connected youth organizations to the park implementing agencies. Project researchers used
10 qualitative methods that included a multifaceted field experience, interview data, analysis of photos
11 taken by youth, conversations with youth to validate the data, focus groups, and youth-led discussion
12 groups.

13 The findings and recommendations cover a broad range of issues and preferences of youth and other
14 community members, including learning outdoor skills, the issue of in-park racism and cultural climate
15 of the parks, a broad range of park activities preferred by youth, and time constraints and transportation
16 obstacles in accessing the parks.

17 The recommendations focus on investments of attention, time, and resources for three sectors of the
18 regional park and trail system: Regional Park Implementing Agency administration (e.g., funding,
19 policies, and planning), programming and outreach staff, and the Metropolitan Council (e.g., convening
20 action, long-range plan approval, and research). The recommendations reach toward four outcomes:

- 21 • Develop partnerships with affinity groups and constituent-led organizations.
- 22 • Develop, adapt, and implement models that overcome obstacles to the youth-park connection.
- 23 • Invest in inclusivity through staffing, programming, research, capacity-building and dialogue.
- 24 • Develop, adapt, and implement programming and outreach models that value youth's prior
25 experiences.

26 The connection of youth to parks is essential to achieving the goals of strengthening equitable usage,
27 conserving high-quality natural systems, and providing a comprehensive regional park and trail system.
28 The system needs young people, even as young people need access to nature-based parks and trails.

29 The full “Adventure Close to Home” report can be found here:

30 [https://metro council.org/Parks/Publications-And-Resources/PARK-USE-REPORTS/YOUTH-AND-
PARKS-REPORT/Youth-and-Parks-Report-Summary.aspx](https://metro council.org/Parks/Publications-And-Resources/PARK-USE-REPORTS/YOUTH-AND-
31 PARKS-REPORT/Youth-and-Parks-Report-Summary.aspx)

32 **Regional Parks and Trails Visitor Study (2021)**

33 The 2021 Metropolitan Council Park and Trail Visitor Study presents findings from a Met Council survey
34 of visitors to the regional park and trail system in the seven-county Twin Cities area. The survey was
35 developed to:

- 36 • Help inform planning, policy, and management

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- 1 • Evaluate and strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails in accordance with the
- 2 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan
- 3 • Update data in funding formulas to help determine where funding goes for parks and trails

4 The survey asked visitors about their reasons for visiting, activities they participated in at the site,
5 information used and desired for planning their visit, how they got to the site, group size, seasonal
6 visitation, and demographic information.

7 *Are visitors satisfied with their experiences? What improvements do they suggest?*

8 For parks and trails systemwide, 89% of visitors reported that the facilities on the day of their visit were
9 “excellent” or “very good.” Visitor satisfaction was similar across parks and trails. Satisfaction was
10 slightly lower in mature systems with older facilities (Minneapolis and Saint Paul).

11 Visitors were asked to name one thing that would improve their visit. For parks, the top suggestions
12 were all issues related to “general maintenance” (20%), followed by “nothing at all” (16%). The most
13 popular suggestions were basic improvements like bathrooms and drinking water access, trail
14 conditions, and improved signage/information. Reflecting on the data, park agencies discussed the
15 need for adequate funding to provide the basic amenities the public needs and how bathroom and
16 water access are key to making new and underserved visitors comfortable in the regional park system.

17 *Who visits regional parks and trails?*

18 Systemwide, 38% of visitors are from outside the geographic area of a given park agency (“nonlocal”)
19 and 62% are visiting from within the park agency’s boundaries.

20 New and infrequent visitors represented 18% of parks visitors and 6% of trail visitors. These visitors’
21 answers can help us understand how to attract people who have not before visited the park and trail
22 system.

23 Adults ages 45 to 64 are the largest share of visitors. Teens, young adults, and adults older than 75 are
24 underrepresented in park and trail visitation. On trails, adults age 25-44 are also underrepresented.
25 Ramsey, Dakota, and Scott counties have the greatest disparities in young people’s visitation, with
26 Bloomington, Three Rivers Park District (Suburban Hennepin County), and Anoka County having the
27 smallest disparities.

28 Throughout the region, Asian American, Black, and Latino system visitors are underrepresented
29 relative to the regional population. Visitors ages 18-24 were more racially/ethnically diverse than older
30 visitor groups. Carver, Anoka, and Washington counties have the smallest racial/ethnic disparities
31 relative to population, while Dakota County, Minneapolis, Three Rivers, and Bloomington have the
32 greatest. Trail disparities are higher than for parks, but both are large.

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1 *How do visitors travel to regional parks and trails?*

2 Visitors traveled to parks mostly in cars (59%), but they traveled to trails via mostly people-powered
3 methods (81% by bike or foot). Urban core regional parks and trails have higher rates of people
4 powered transportation compared with other parts of the region.

5 *What do people do in parks and trails?*

6 Primary activities are those reported by visitors as the main reason they visited on that day. The top five
7 primary activities of summer day visitors to the regional parks are walking/hiking (33%), dog
8 walking/dog park (13%), biking (10%), swimming (6%), and jogging/running (5%).

9 The top five primary activities of summer day visitors to the regional trails are biking (48%),
10 walking/hiking (25%), jogging/running (9%), dog walking/dog park (6%), and commuting (4%).

11 The five most popular activities (when visitors could report all the activities they were doing) in the
12 regional park system are hiking/walking (55%), relaxing/doing nothing (27%), observing nature (27%),
13 biking (22%), and meeting up with family or friends (18%).

14 The five most popular activities on regional trails are biking (54%), hiking/walking (41%), dog
15 walking/dog park (16%), jogging/running (16%), and observing nature (15%).

16 All visitors, regardless of social characteristics, enjoyed a diverse range of activities. However, analysis
17 of differences in activity patterns among underserved users may help identify how to better serve these
18 communities at parks and trails.

19 The full “2021 Parks and Trails Visitor Study” can be found here:

20 [https://metro council.org/Parks/Publications-And-Resources/PARK-USE-REPORTS/VISITOR-STUDY-
21 REPORTS/2021-Parks-and-Trails-Visitor-Study/2021-Parks-and-Trails-Visitor-Study.aspx](https://metro council.org/Parks/Publications-And-Resources/PARK-USE-REPORTS/VISITOR-STUDY-REPORTS/2021-Parks-and-Trails-Visitor-Study/2021-Parks-and-Trails-Visitor-Study.aspx)

22 **Community and Targeted Engagement (2020-2024)**

23 Since 2020, the Council staff have attended and hosted many community engagement events as a
24 commitment to fostering relationships with the many stakeholders of the regional parks and trails
25 system, such as Regional Park Implementing Agencies and partners, local organizations, and the
26 residents of the region. As park and trail use inequities persist, a focus on underserved communities is
27 essential, consistent with the Council’s community-centered engagement framework. Engagement
28 events include participation at fairs and festivals, hosting focus groups, and supporting research
29 studies.

30 Like existing conditions and research, engagement informs regional parks and trails system vision,
31 mission, values, objectives, policies, and actions. As noted previously, specific connections between
32 engagement and parks and trails policies and actions will be called out in different sections of this
33 chapter. Community and targeted engagement summarized in this space include:

- 34 • Future Forest: Love Letters to Regional Parks

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- 1 • Monarch Festival
- 2 • LGBTQ+ Perspectives in Parks
- 3 • Young Leaders Collaboration

4 For brevity, this summary does not include all of community or targeted engagement conducted since
5 the last Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan update.

6 *Future Forest: Love Letters to Regional Parks*

7 At the 2020 Art Shanty event on Lake Harriet in Minneapolis, Council staff invited the general public to
8 write a love letter to a regional park and chat with naturalists about tree canopy and climate change.
9 For every five letters written, a tree would be planted. Visitors wrote over 4,000 letters expressing their
10 love for their favorite regional parks.

11 Key themes included:

- 12 • Human Connection
- 13 • Connection to Place
- 14 • Natural Resources
- 15 • Mental Health/Feelings and emotions
- 16 • Physical Health
- 17 • Recreation

18 *Monarch Festival*

19 Met Council staff have staffed a table at the Monarch Festival at Lake Nokomis in Minneapolis annually
20 since 2020. Typically staff engage with visitors by asking an applicable question in exchange for a
21 reward. The festival celebrates the Monarch's migration from Minnesota to Mexico and embraces
22 Latinx culture.

23 In 2020 and 2021, Council staff invited participants to find their “naturehood” on regional parks maps,
24 raising awareness of where regional parks are located and activities you can do at regional parks. In
25 2021, Council staff asked also people, “What do you love about parks?”

26 In 2022, Council staff asked visitors, “What do you like to do in nature?” and “I feel at home or
27 comfortable in nature when ___”. Themes from 2022 included:

- 28 • Felt at home while doing an activity
- 29 • Cleanliness is important
- 30 • Knowing the area is important (signs)
- 31 • People feel at home when they are connected to certain aspects of nature (Trees, space,
32 flowers, lakes)

33 In 2023, Council staff asked visitors, “What can a butterfly teach us about the land we all share?” to
34 inspire ideas about the connections between butterflies, humans, and land. Themes from 2023
35 included:

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- 1 • Borders of land are a human construct
- 2 • Interconnectedness between humans and the environment
- 3 • It is our duty as humans to nurture our natural systems
- 4 • Large appreciation and connection to the wrapped *We Are on Dakota Land* bus

5 *LGBTQ+ Perspectives in Parks*

6 At the urging of Regional Park Implementing Agencies, Council staff hosted three focus groups to
7 better understand perspectives within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus (LGBTQ+)
8 community on representation, possible barriers, and visions for the future of parks. The participating
9 organizations were Urban Bird Collective, Solcana Fitness, and Macalester College Outing Club. Each
10 group is run by LGBTQ+ leaders with members from across the region.

11 Recommendations include:

- 12 • Create more affinity group programs across the region.
- 13 • Provide resources to build confidence and a desire to return.
- 14 • Have naturalists and outreach staff that reflect the community.
- 15 • Listen to and support LGBTQ+ staff's experience.
- 16 • Use more inclusive language and comprehensive information.

17 A highly visual, graphic-rich storymap discussing takeaways from these focus groups is available here:
18 <https://arcgis.metc.state.mn.us/portal/apps/storymaps/stories/b0421951338244429d643021412934f0>

19 *Young Leaders Collaboration*

20 Young leaders from the Environmental Stewardship Institute and other regional organizations
21 participated in a Met Council workshop series where they designed and conducted research of diverse
22 youth in the region to create parks policy recommendations. Interviews of young people combined with
23 discussion and analysis resulted in the creation of recommendations sorted by chapters in the *2040*
24 *Regional Parks Policy Plan*. Below are the "Directives for the *2050 Regional Parks Policy Plan*":

- 25 • Parks are safe for everyone regardless of gender, race, or ability.
- 26 • Our parks are accessible and safe for the youth of the region.
- 27 • Our parks are biodiverse, clean, and well-kept; Our parks and trails receive adequate funding to
28 maintain them free of litter or pollution.
- 29 • Our parks facilitate the need for relaxation for the busy youth of this region.

30 A fourteen-page memo describing in-depth advice from young leaders is in, "Regional Parks Policy
31 Advice from Young Leaders Collaboration," is available here: [Add link](#)

32 *Words Matter: Changing How We Refer to Regional Park and Trail Plans and* 33 *Other Language Changes in Imagine 2050*

34 Several words and phrases that commonly appeared in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* have
35 been modified for *Imagine 2050*. The primary example is "master" plans or planning. Since the last
36 Regional Parks Policy Plan update, as universities, organizations, and government institutions have

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1 begun to grapple with their role in institutional and systemic racism, Council staff explored the
2 possibility of changing how these park and trail plans are referred to. The term “master,” which is often
3 defined as commanding control or being eminently skilled, has been identified as a word to remove in
4 certain contexts due to its connection with the history of masters and slavery in the United States. Other
5 professional sectors, including information technology and real estate, have moved away from using
6 this terminology to describe different facets of their work. Regional Park Implementing Agency staff
7 expressed support of the change. As a result, this chapter of the Regional Development Guide replaces
8 “master” plans with “long-range” plans in all instances but statutory references.

9 Another important change is how the regional system is referred to. Previously, the *2040 Regional*
10 *Parks Policy Plan* referred to all components of the system in a general way; as the “Regional Parks
11 System.” Recognizing the critical role that regional trails play in the system, the Council has extended
12 the name of the system to be more inclusive of this important component; to the “Regional Parks and
13 Trails System.”

14 A third terminology change focuses on how we refer to the foundation of the Regional Park and Trail
15 System; natural systems. The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* focused significant attention on the
16 conservation and restoration of natural *resources*, but there has been an intentional shift to natural
17 *systems* in the process to develop *Imagine 2050*. The Council aims to move away from the extractive
18 language of “resources” and instead place a greater focus on the interconnections and the ecosystem
19 services which help sustain healthy communities throughout the region. A natural systems framework
20 focuses on all landscapes at all scales, including within the urban environment; not exclusively high-
21 quality “resources” that must be “preserved.” Habitat restoration and regeneration of ecological
22 connectivity are important aspects of a natural systems orientation, to foster ecosystem and human
23 health.

24 Other terminology changes and definitions will be found in individual sections of the Regional Parks and
25 Trails chapter.

26 *The Regional Parks and Trails System Quick Facts*

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

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

33 In response to state legislation, about 31,000 acres of existing parks were designated as “regional
34 recreation open space.” The newly designated regional parks had about 5 million visits in 1975. Over
35 the last nearly 50 years, the Council has invested state and regional funds to help local park agencies
36 develop those first designated regional parks, as well as to acquire and develop new parks and trails for
37 the growing metropolitan population. The Regional Parks and Trails System strives to build upon the

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1 world class system of interconnected parks and natural areas first established in Minneapolis by such
2 visionaries as Horace Cleveland and Theodore Wirth and to extend that model throughout the region.

3 The Regional Parks and Trails System includes:

- 4 • 59,115 acres open for public use
- 5 • 57 regional parks and park reserves
- 6 • Eight special recreation features, such as the zoo and conservatory at Como Regional Park
- 7 • 58 regional trails, with 496 miles currently open to the public
- 8 • More than 69 million visits in 2022
- 9 • An investment of more than \$658 million in state and regional dollars since inception, with an
10 additional \$163 million of state funds to partially finance operation and maintenance of the
11 Regional Parks System

12 Regional parks contain significant regional natural resources such as lakeshore, wetlands, hardwood
13 forests, native prairies, and groundwater recharging areas. If you were to visit one regional park, park
14 reserve, or special recreation feature each weekend – not even counting the trails, it would take you
15 more than a year to get to them all. It is an amazing system, one that has few rivals anywhere in the
16 world. It demonstrates the importance of natural spaces and outdoor recreation to Minnesotans,
17 including those living in the metropolitan area, and the value of a collaborative and coordinated
18 approach to planning for and developing the system across the region. The Regional Parks and Trails
19 System is comprised of four main components: regional parks, park reserves, regional trails, and
20 special recreation features.

21 **Regional Parks**

22 Regional parks contain a diversity of natural features, either naturally occurring or restored, and are
23 typically 200-500 acres in size. Regional parks accommodate a variety of outdoor recreation activities.
24 In 2024, a total of 45 regional parks were open to the public.

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 2024, a total of 12 park reserves were open to the public.

31 **Regional Trails**

32 The Council has defined two major types of trails to serve the region: destination or greenway trails and
33 linking trails. Destination or greenway trails typically follow along routes with high-quality natural
34 resources that make the trail itself a destination. Linking trails are predominately intended to provide
35 connections between various Regional Parks System units, most notably regional parks or park
36 reserves.

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1 As of 2024, 58 regional trails totaling approximately 496 miles were open for public use.

2 **Special Recreation Features**

3 Special recreation features are defined as Regional Parks and Trails System opportunities not
4 generally found in the regional parks, park reserves, or trail corridors. Special recreation features often
5 require a unique managing or programming effort. As of 2024, there were eight special recreation
6 features open to the public.

7 Additional information on Regional Parks and Trails System facilities is provided in Section Two.

8 *Regional Parks and Trails System Management Structure*

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

13 **The Role of Regional Park Implementing Agencies**

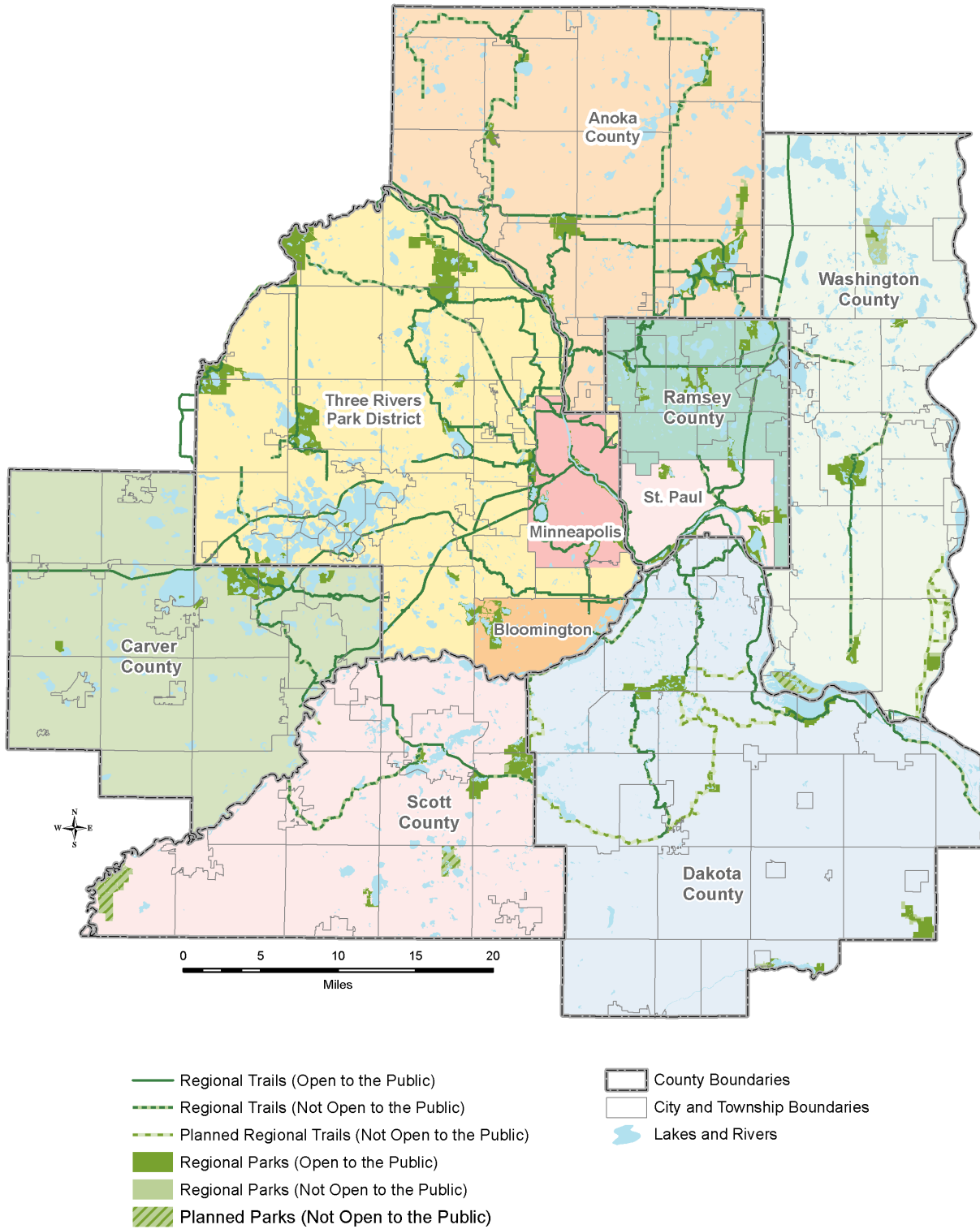
14 Cities, counties, and special park districts own and operate regional parks and trails – the Minneapolis
15 Chain of Lakes’ facilities, paths and activities are the responsibility of the Minneapolis Park and
16 Recreation Board, for example – but once a park becomes part of the Regional Parks System, the
17 Council supports it with coordinated regional planning, funding, system protection, information,
18 marketing, and advocacy. The agency partners that own and operate the Regional Parks System are
19 called Regional Park Implementing Agencies. A map of the Regional Park Implementing Agency areas
20 is shown in Figure 1-1.

21 The Regional Park Implementing Agencies are:

- 22 • Anoka County
- 23 • City of Bloomington
- 24 • Carver County
- 25 • Dakota County
- 26 • Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- 27 • Ramsey County
- 28 • City of Saint Paul
- 29 • Scott County
- 30 • Three Rivers Park District
- 31 • Washington County

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



2

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1 **Metropolitan Council Role**

2 Regional Parks and Trails System legislation directs the Council to take the lead role in providing for a
3 Regional Parks and Trails System that will complement the recreational open space opportunities
4 provided in the area by the federal, state, and local units of government. State law directs the Council to
5 determine which parks and trails in the seven-county area are included in the Regional Parks and Trails
6 System and to generally identify areas that should be acquired for the Regional Parks System. The
7 Council is charged with determining whether these lands are regionally important and would collectively
8 provide a balanced system of outdoor recreation for the region. See pages 28-30 26 for an overview of
9 key Minnesota legislation.

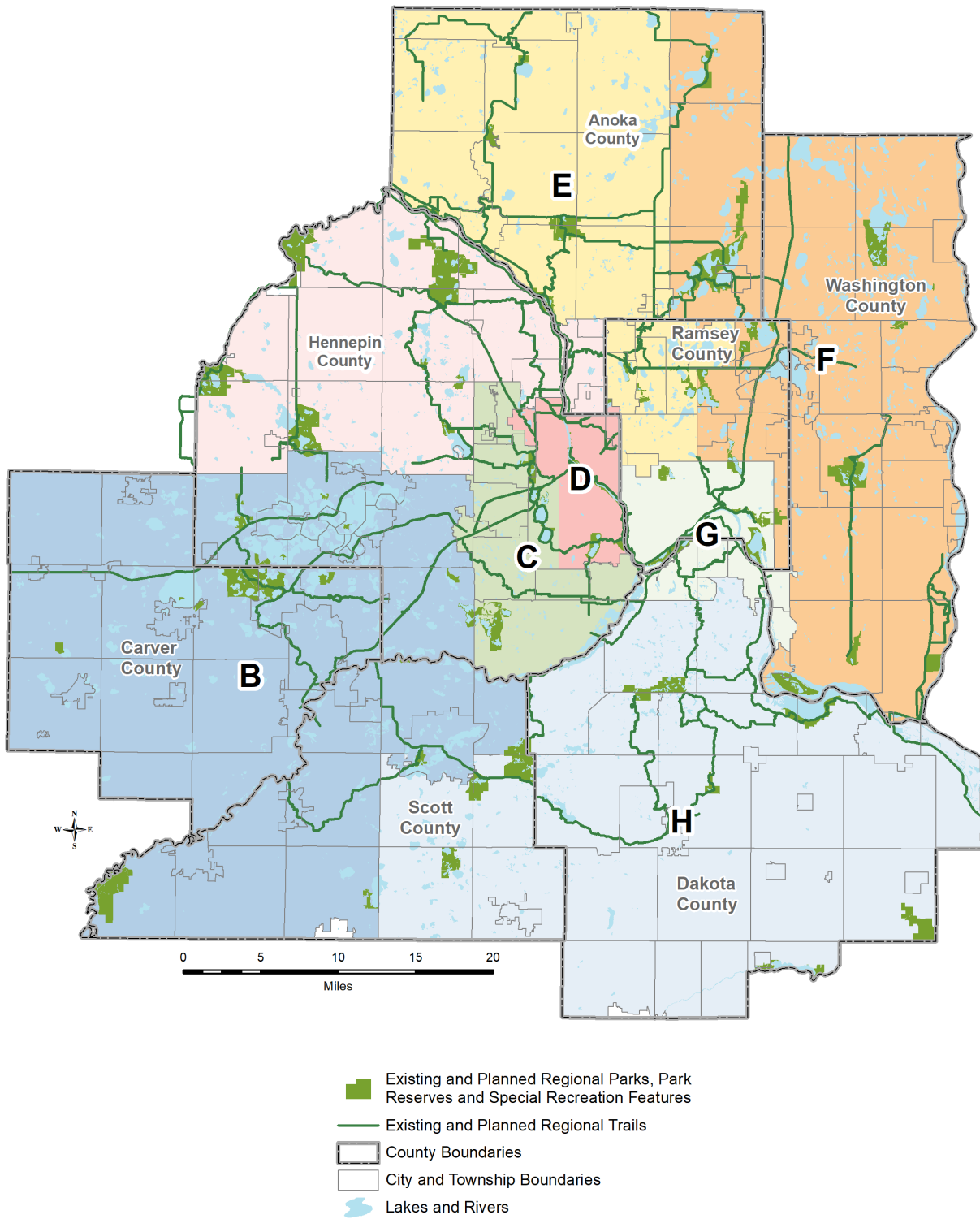
10 As described in the next section, the Council also contributes and administers funding to the Regional
11 Park Implementing Agencies to acquire, develop, and operate the Regional Parks System.

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 long-range plans, and grants for land
15 acquisition and capital improvements. It also provides recommendations on updates and amendments
16 to the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan. The commission consists of eight volunteer members,
17 who represent specific districts throughout the region and a chair who is appointed at large. A map of
18 the districts is shown in Figure 1-2.

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



1 ***Regional Parks and Trails System Funding***

2 The Council contributes and administers funding to the Regional Park Implementing Agencies. Funding
3 for the Regional Parks and Trails System currently consists of four main grant programs. Each grant
4 program is intended for different purposes and is composed of various funding sources. Only Regional
5 Park Implementing Agencies, listed above, qualify for the grant programs. Each grant program is
6 highlighted briefly below. Additional information is available in the Regional Parks and Trails *Grant*
7 *Administration Guide*, and in program specific guidance: [https://metro council.org/Parks/Grants-](https://metro council.org/Parks/Grants-Funding/Grant-Administration-Guide/Grant-Administration-Guide.aspx)
8 [Funding/Grant-Administration-Guide/Grant-Administration-Guide.aspx](https://metro council.org/Parks/Grants-Funding/Grant-Administration-Guide/Grant-Administration-Guide.aspx)

9 **Equity Grant Program**

10 The Council created a grant program using Council bonds to promote equitable use of regional parks
11 and trails in 2019. Bond-funded grants provided funding for acquisition, development, or redevelopment
12 projects in the Regional Parks and Trails System. In 2021 the Council dedicated the use of Parks
13 Interest Earnings to provide additional funding for the Equity Grant Program. Interest earnings may be
14 used for non-capital as well as capital projects. The 2024 Equity Grant Program continued this
15 combination of Council bonds and parks interest earnings to fund both capital and programming
16 projects.

17 **Regional Parks Bonding Program**

18 The Regional Parks Bonding Program is intended for Regional Parks and Trails System acquisition,
19 development, and redevelopment projects. The fund is financed by state bonds and Council funds; the
20 Council matches every \$3 of state bonds with \$2 of Council funds. The amount of funds each Regional
21 Park Implementing Agency receives is based on a formula specified in Section 8: Finance.

22 **Parks and Trails Legacy Fund Program**

23 The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund program was created after the statewide passage of Minnesota's
24 Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment in 2008. Along with state and Greater Minnesota regional
25 parks and trails, the Council receives a portion of the Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations for the
26 Regional Parks and Trails System.

27 The Council administers the Parks and Trails Legacy funds to Regional Park Implementing Agencies.
28 The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* provides high-level
29 guidance for use of the funds.

30 Each Regional Park Implementing Agency's share of the funds is based on a formula specified in state
31 statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53, subd 3). This statute requires that 10% of the total Parks
32 and Trails Legacy appropriations be set aside for land acquisition.

33 **Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program**

34 The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program is organized into two separate accounts,
35 corresponding to different funding sources. The two funding sources are the Parks and Trails Legacy

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1 Fund and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. As noted above, 10% of the Parks and
2 Trails Legacy Fund appropriations are set aside for land acquisition through the first Park Acquisition
3 Opportunity Fund sub-program. Direct appropriations for land acquisition from the Environment and
4 Natural Resources Trust Fund, which are made by Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota
5 Resources, are allocated to the second Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund account.

6 The Council matches every \$3 in state funding from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund with \$2 from
7 Council bonds for the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program, as required by Minnesota Statutes,
8 section 85.53, subd. 3. For consistency, the Council has chosen to make the same match for
9 Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund funding for park acquisition. The Council's Park
10 Acquisition Opportunity Fund program is non-competitive and awarded based on funding availability.

11 **Operation and Maintenance**

12 The Council administers state funds to Regional Park Implementing Agencies to pay for a portion of
13 their operation and maintenance costs. The share each Regional Park Implementing Agency receives
14 is based on a formula specified in state statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351).

15 **Direct Pass-through Appropriations**

16 In addition to the four grant programs highlighted above, the Council also administers pass-through
17 appropriations from the state to Regional Park Implementing Agencies and local governments. These
18 dollars are legislatively earmarked for a particular Regional Park Implementing Agency or park and trail
19 unit.

20 **Total System Investment**

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

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1 *Table 1-1: Regional Parks and Trails System State and Regional Funding Investments, 1974-*
 2 *2017*

3 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

Program	Funding source(s)	Investment totals, 1974-2023 (millions)
Equity Grant Program	Council bonds and Parks Interest Earnings	\$4.4
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

4

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

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

13 *Role of the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan*

14 Managing a Regional Parks System that involves a number of different local entities, in addition to the
 15 Council, requires coordinated policies and strategies. The *2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan*
 16 lays out objectives and policies for the Regional Parks System and the actions designed to meet these
 17 objectives and policies.

18 Over the last 50 years, the Regional Parks and Trails System partnership has made significant strides
 19 toward achieving the values articulated by *Imagine 2050* of equity, leadership, accountability, and
 20 stewardship. By protecting high quality natural systems and providing a world-class system of

Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

1 recreational opportunities, the Regional Parks and Trails System has contributed significantly to the
2 high quality of life in the region. The policies laid out in the *2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan*
3 reflect the Council's commitment to support and protect the Regional Parks and Trails System.

4 The equity value remains an important direction for the Council. The Regional Park Implementing
5 Agencies have various programs and practices to help reach and serve their diverse base of users. The
6 *2050 Regional Parks Policy Plan* strives to build upon the good work that the Regional Park
7 Implementing Agencies have been doing to advance equity. The Council seeks to strengthen equitable
8 usage of the Regional Parks and Trails System, which is a key theme of this plan.

9 Results matter. The Council has identified accountability as a regional core value in *Imagine 2050*,
10 including a commitment to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the policies and procedures
11 governing the Regional Parks and Trails System. To that end, the Council will work with the
12 Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the regional parks implementing agencies, and other
13 parks stakeholders to develop a set of Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan indicators that
14 quantitatively assess progress on the outcomes, goals, and strategies in this plan. This has been added
15 to the four-year workplan that resides in Section 8. Which policies are working well? How might we
16 revise policies where performance is lower than expectations? Indicators might address key priorities
17 such as strengthening equitable usage, managing natural systems within the Regional Parks and Trails
18 System, and the contributions of the Regional Parks and Trails System toward climate resilience. The
19 Council will then work with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the regional parks
20 implementing agencies, and other parks stakeholders to use the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan
21 indicators as a foundation for continuous improvement and public accountability as well as a source of
22 insight for future policy updates. These conversations could include convenings on how the partners in
23 the Regional Parks and Trails System collectively work together to move the trajectory of specific
24 indicators.

25 **Planning for 2050**

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

31 Protecting natural systems in the metropolitan area builds on past investments and offers an excellent
32 opportunity for further investment in the Regional Parks and Trails System as the region grows by
33 392,000 more people from 2020 to 2050. To that end, the vision for the Regional Parks and Trails
34 System includes expanding it from nearly 54,500 acres today to nearly 70,000 acres, and more than
35 tripling the trail system from 415 miles today to 1,300 miles by 2040. Following the 2020 system
36 additions process, the Regional Parks and Trails System has reached these landmark goals. Now the
37 hard work of planning, acquiring, protecting, and developing these new parks and trails continues. New
38 regional trails and greenway corridors will link regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation
39 features with one another as well as with population centers. Also proposed are two additional regional
40 parks in Carver County, two in western Hennepin County by Three Rivers Park District, and three in

Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

1 Anoka County, one of which has been identified as a potential park since 1974. These planned regional
2 parks and trails will enable residents to enjoy a variety of new park experiences throughout the region.

3 In the 1880s, Horace Cleveland, one of the founders of the Minneapolis parks system, said:

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

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

14 **System Plan**

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

20 The Council reviews the system plan portion of the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan every four
21 years as part of the policy plan revision process and may add, modify, or delete planned elements to
22 the system. Additions, including major boundary adjustments, or deletions to the system proposed
23 outside the regular plan review process are substantial revisions to the policy plan, and as such require
24 an amendment to the policy plan. Identification of specific boundaries and detailed planning for
25 individual units of the system are addressed in long-range plans for each unit. The long-range plans are
26 prepared by the Regional Park Implementing Agencies.

27 **Amending the Policy Plan**

28 The Council will amend the *2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan* only for a substantial revision.
29 A substantial revision is defined by the Council as (1) a proposed revision that is intended to or could
30 have the effect of changing the direction or intent of adopted Council policy, (2) addition or deletion of a
31 policy, or (3) addition or deletion of a system element, or a major boundary adjustment as defined in the
32 Chapter 5, Strategy 1, Boundary Adjustment section.

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

1 **Updating the Policy Plan**

2 Minnesota law requires the Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the Regional Parks and
3 Trails Policy Plan at least every four years (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147). However, over a
4 four-year period, changes occur in population, acquisition, development, and system use. Updating the
5 data and factual information to keep the policy current with new trends and conditions is not a
6 substantial revision to the policy plan and will be accomplished through the ordinary process of
7 consideration and approval by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the appropriate
8 Council committee, and the full Council. The Regional Park Implementing Agencies will receive formal
9 notice of any proposed update prior to consideration by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space
10 Commission.

11 **Key Minnesota Legislation for the Regional Parks and Trails System**

12 *Regional Recreation Open Space System (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.302)*

13 “The legislature finds that the pressure of urbanization and development threatens valuable recreational
14 open space areas in the metropolitan area at the same time as the need for such areas is increased.
15 Immediate action is therefore necessary to provide funds to acquire, preserve, protect and develop
16 regional recreational open space for public use.”

17 *Regional Recreation Open Space (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subd. 14)*

18 “Regional recreation open space’ means land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities
19 determined by the Metropolitan Council to be of regional importance in providing for a balanced system
20 of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area, including but not limited to park reserves, major
21 linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use
22 facilities.”

23 *Regional Recreation Open Space System Policy Plan (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147,
24 subd. 1)*

25 “The policy plan shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to
26 provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal
27 facilities which, together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the
28 people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development.”

29 “The policy plan shall include a five-year capital improvement program, which shall be revised
30 periodically, and shall establish criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds for such acquisition and
31 development.”

32 *Grants for Recreation Open Space (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.315, subd. 1)*

33 “The Metropolitan Council with the advice of the commission may make grants, from any funds
34 available to it for recreation open space purposes, to any implementing agency, as defined in section
35 473.351, to cover the cost, or any portion of the cost, of acquiring or developing regional recreation

Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

1 open space in accordance with the policy plan; and all such agencies may enter into contracts for this
2 purpose or rights or interests therein.”

3 *Metropolitan Area Regional Parks Funding (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351, subd. 1a.)*

4 “Implementing agency’ means the counties of Anoka, Washington, Ramsey, Scott, Carver, Dakota, the
5 city of Saint Paul, the city of Bloomington, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, and the Three
6 Rivers Park District.”

7 *Park and Trails Fund (Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53)*

8 “Grants funded by the parks and trails fund must be implemented according to section 16B.98”

9 *Grant Management Process (Minnesota Statutes, section 16B.98, subd.6)*

10 “A granting agency shall diligently administer and monitor any grant it has entered into.”

11 *Metropolitan Parks Interest Earnings (Laws of Minnesota 2015, First Special Session, Chapter*
12 *4, Article 4, Section 138)*

13 “...the Metropolitan Council shall use the interest earnings in Laws 1985, First Special Session chapter
14 15, section 5, subdivision 2, for the use and betterment of all regional recreational open space lands
15 under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council.”

16 Session law also provides important directives. For instance, the Omnibus Legacy Bill, updated
17 biennially, provides additional guidance and requirements related to Parks and Trails Legacy Fund
18 spending.

19 *Applicable Funding Formulas*

20 **Parks and Trails Fund (Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53, subd. 3)**

21 “(1) 45% of the money must be disbursed according to the allocation formula in section 473.351,
22 subdivision 3, to each implementing agency; (2) 31.5% of the money must be distributed based on
23 each implementing agency’s relative share of the most recent estimate of the population of the
24 metropolitan area; (3) 13.5% of the money must be distributed based on each implementing agency’s
25 relative share of nonlocal visits based on the most recent user visitation survey conducted by the
26 Metropolitan Council; and (4) 10% of the money must be distributed as grants to implementing
27 agencies for land acquisition within Metropolitan Council approved regional parks and trails master plan
28 boundaries under the council’s park acquisition opportunity grant program.”

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

30 “The Metropolitan Council shall distribute the operation and maintenance money as follows: (1) 40%
31 based on the use that each implementing agency’s regional recreation open space system has in
32 proportion to the total use of the metropolitan regional recreation open space system; (2) 40% based on
33 the operation and maintenance expenditures made in the previous year by each implementing agency

Section One: Overview of the Regional Parks and Trails System and the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

- 1 in proportion to the total operation and maintenance expenditures of all the implementing agencies; and
- 2 (3) 20% based on the acreage that each implementing agency's regional recreation open space system
- 3 has in proportion to the total acreage of the metropolitan regional recreation open space system."

DRAFT

1 **Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions**

2 *System Plan Policy*

3 **Maintain a robust and current set of data, maps, plans, processes, and applications to** 4 **support regional parks and trails planning.**

5 The Council is responsible for preparing a system plan for the Regional Parks and Trails System. The
6 Regional Parks and Trails System Plan includes the current regional parks and trails that are open-to-
7 the-public, planned, and search areas and corridors. The Regional Parks and Trails System primarily
8 consists of lands located in high-quality natural settings that are contiguous to lakes, rivers, or other
9 water bodies. Natural area restoration and protection are a key objective in the Regional Parks System.
10 Regional parks and park reserves include large areas of land or water that often extend into multiple
11 political jurisdictions. Regional trails may traverse several communities and provide connections
12 between regional parks, park reserves, and the greater trail network in the region. Regional parks and
13 trails draw visitors from across the region and beyond.

14 The Regional Parks and Trails System is part of the overarching outdoor recreation system in the
15 region consisting of lands owned or managed by federal, state, and local governments, as well as lands
16 privately owned by nonprofit conservancies or for-profit organizations. All play an important role in
17 supporting and protecting the outdoor recreation system. The system is designed to meet the
18 recreational needs and the natural resources protection goals of the region. The outdoor recreation
19 system consists of a wide range of facilities, from state parks to regional trails to neighborhood
20 playgrounds to private nature centers. The Regional Parks and Trails System is a critical part of this
21 well-rounded system of outdoor recreation.

22 Publicly owned lands and open space areas administered by the federal and state government play an
23 important and complementary role to the Regional Parks and Trails System. Local recreational open
24 space facilities provide active recreation, such as playgrounds, athletic fields, courts, and aquatic
25 centers. Private operations also make substantial contributions to the development of facilities and the
26 provision of services and include golf courses, riding facilities, marinas, day camps, and downhill ski
27 areas, as well as privately owned public spaces.

28 The desired outcomes for maintaining the System Plan are to:

- 29
- 30 • Meet the recreational needs and the natural systems protection goals of the region.
 - 31 • Support and protect the regional outdoor recreation system in coordination with federal, state,
32 and local governments, as well as with lands privately owned by nonprofit or for-profit agencies.
33 *Refer to the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook for more information about*
34 *Minnesota's outdoor recreation system.*
 - 35 • Provide timely and accurate decision making related to comprehensive planning, regional park
36 and trail long-range plans and amendments, and other system protection activities.
 - 37 • Determine eligibility for regional funding through the Met Council for planned and existing
regional parks and trails.

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 Maintaining the System Plan is critical to a number of Met Council responsibilities including system
2 protection, planning for the future, and funding eligibility.

3 **System Plan - Action 1: Review and Update System Plan, Classifications**

4 ***On the four-year Parks Policy update schedule, the Council will review and update the***
5 ***system plan and evaluate the regional park and trail classifications to determine what***
6 ***is relevant and necessary in partnership with the Regional Parks and Trails***
7 ***Implementing Agencies.***

8 The Council reviews the System Plan portion of the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Chapter in
9 partnership with the Regional Park Implementing Agencies every four years as part of the policy plan
10 revision process and may add, modify, or delete planned elements to the system. Additions, including
11 major boundary adjustments, or deletions to the system proposed outside the regular plan review
12 process are substantial revisions to the policy plan, and as such require an amendment to the policy
13 plan. Identification of specific boundaries and detailed planning for individual units of the system are
14 addressed in long-range plans for each unit. The long-range plans are prepared by the Regional Park
15 Implementing Agencies. *Refer to the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook for more*
16 *information on amending the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, the Systems Addition Process, and*
17 *Long-Range Plan Amendment requirements.*

18 **Regional Parks and Trails Classifications**

19 Elements of the Regional Parks System are categorized into four major types: regional parks, park
20 reserves, regional trails, and special recreation features. As part of the *Imagine 2050* process, two
21 additional classifications are being considered including the cultural landscape and open space/natural
22 systems classifications.

23

1 **Regional Parks**

2 Regional Parks, typically 200-500 acres in size, are
3 areas of natural or ornamental quality for nature-oriented
4 outdoor recreation such as picnicking, boating, fishing,
5 swimming, camping, and trail uses. Access to water
6 bodies suitable for recreation – such as swimming,
7 boating, and fishing – is particularly important and most
8 of the regional parks are focused on lakes, rivers, or
9 streams.

<p>Regional Parks at a Glance</p> <p>Existing: 44 regional parks</p> <p>Planned: 2 regional parks; 1 regional park boundary adjustment</p> <p>Search: 7 regional park search areas</p>
--

10 **Regional Park Attributes**

11 **Use:** Regional parks accommodate a variety of outdoor recreation activities. The recreational quality of
12 a regional park is measured by the presence or absence of outstanding natural areas and the ability to
13 provide for a wide range of natural area-related recreational opportunities. Regional parks and park
14 reserves offer important amenities and services to regional trails, including providing places for
15 trailheads, picnicking, parking, restrooms, and drinking water.

16 **Service Area:** 3 - 5 communities

17 **Site Attributes:** Regional Parks are located in natural settings contiguous to water bodies or
18 watercourses whenever possible. Regional parks contain significant regional natural habitats including
19 lakeshore, rivers, streams, wetlands, uplands, forests, prairies, and groundwater recharging areas.

20 **Size:** Typically, 200-500 acres. A regional park should be large enough to accommodate a variety of
21 activities, preserve a pleasant natural aspect, and buffer activity areas from each other and from
22 surrounding areas. To accomplish these objectives, regional parks need to have 200 to 1000 acres of
23 land. Occasionally, because of the quality of the natural area, an exception may be made, and a
24 regional park may be as small as 100 acres.

25 **Site Location:** Regional parks are located where high-quality natural areas occur --particularly next to
26 lakes and rivers, and where people live or where growth is expected to occur.

27 **Parks Served by Transit:** Regional parks that are served by transit should promote transit information
28 and schedules to encourage use, in coordination with transit providers. Agencies should coordinate
29 with local jurisdictions to identify and plan for local trail connections with regional parks and trails and
30 the transit system, as well as to help visitors with last mile connections.

31 **Regional Parks located within the Metropolitan Urban Service Area:** Regional parks that attract
32 high volumes of visitors should be located in the region’s Metropolitan Urban Service Area for large
33 capacity roads and connections to a municipal sewage treatment system.

34 **Regional Parks located in the Rural Service Area:** Many regional parks, park reserves, and regional
35 trails are located in the Rural Service Area for proximity to high-quality natural areas. Locating regional
36 parks, park reserves, and regional trails in Rural Service Areas helps to have land available for future
37 population growth.

1 **Park Reserves**

2 Park reserves, like regional parks, include large areas of land or
3 water and provide for a diversity of outdoor recreation activities such
4 as viewing and studying nature, conservation, swimming, picnicking,
5 hiking, boating, camping and trail uses. What distinguishes park
6 reserves from a regional park is the larger size and higher emphasis
7 on conservation and preservation.

<p><i>Park Reserves at a Glance</i></p> <p>Existing: 12 park reserves open to the public</p> <p>Planned: 1 park reserve</p> <p>Search: 0 park reserve</p>
--

8 **Park Reserve Attributes**

9 **Use:** Park Reserves are typically used for a variety of nature-oriented outdoor recreational activities. Park Reserves are also intended to provide, protect, and manage the many natural landscapes and systems present in the region. Park reserves offer important services to trails, including providing places for trailheads, picnicking, and other desirable activities, parking, restrooms, and drinking water.

13 **Service Area:** County, multi-county area

14 **Site Attributes:** Park Reserves are large areas of land or water that extend into multiple jurisdictions and offer a diversity of unique resources, such as topography, lakes, streams, marshes, and flora or fauna.

17 **Size:** At least 1,000 acres or a sufficient area to encompass the resource envisioned for preservation. While Park Reserves have a minimum required size of 1,000 acres, larger reserves are preferred.

19 **Site Location:** Park Reserves are located where high-quality natural areas occur. Due to their large acreage requirement, these are usually in places outside of the Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA). Park Reserves also aim to protect the following landscapes:

- 22 • Anoka Sand plains
- 23 • St. Croix ground moraine
- 24 • Des Moines Ground Moraine
- 25 • Terminal moraine
- 26 • Lightly glaciated area
- 27 • Mississippi River Valley
- 28 • Minnesota River Valley
- 29 • St. Croix River Valley

30 **Capacity and Infrastructure Considerations:** Many regional parks and park reserves are located in the Rural Service Area because undeveloped high-quality natural resources, a major criterion for determining lands that are appropriate for the Regional Parks System, are more common in the less developed parts of the region.

34

1 **Regional Trails**

2 Regional trail corridors provide recreational opportunities
3 along linear pathways throughout the metropolitan area.
4 Generally regional trails connect units of the Regional Parks
5 System and draw visitors from across the seven-county
6 area. Parts of the regional trail network may serve as
7 commuting routes for bicyclists in addition to serving
8 recreational purposes.

Regional Trails at a Glance

Existing: 55 trails, with 415 miles open to the public

Planned: 8 trails, est. to span 80 miles

Search: 53 trail search corridors, est. to span 588 miles

9 The Council has defined two types of trails to serve the region: destination or greenway trails and
10 linking trails. **Destination** trails typically follow routes with high-quality natural resources that make the
11 trail itself a destination. They provide a scenic setting and a compelling sense of place. They often
12 follow natural or linear features that traverse areas of scenic appeal and/or historical, architectural, and
13 developmental interest. These greenways typically include wide corridors that provide opportunities for
14 improving wildlife habitat, protecting natural resources, and providing recreational opportunities.

15 **Linking** trails are predominately intended to provide connections between various Regional Parks
16 System units, as well as state and federal lands and other regional destinations. Regional parks and
17 park reserves offer important services to the trail, including providing places for picnicking and other
18 desirable activities, parking, restrooms, and drinking water. Linking trails may also connect to other
19 local, state, and federal recreational facilities as well as other significant natural resource areas and
20 population centers.

21 **Regional Trail Attributes**

22 The Uses, Service Area, and Site Attributes for both regional trail types are the same. Size and Site
23 Location have minor differences.

24 **Use:** Area developed for one or more varying modes of nonmotorized recreational travel such as
25 hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and canoeing.

26 **Service Area:** The entire metropolitan region.

27 **Site Attributes:** When feasible, off-road trails that utilize human made and/or natural linear resources
28 such as utility corridors, railroad and highway rights of way, stream / river valleys, or at the edges of
29 forest or prairie. On-road trails are acceptable when off-road trails are not feasible.

30 **Size:** Sufficient corridor width to protect natural resources and safely accommodate trail use. Sufficient
31 length to *be a destination itself*, or to serve as a link between Regional Parks System units. (*Italicized*
32 *text only for destination trails*)

33 **Site Location:** The trail treadway should be placed where it has a minimal impact on the natural
34 resource base. For destination trails, the site location is preferably adjacent to high quality natural
35 areas. Linking trails should connect components of the Regional Parks System. When feasible, a
36 linking trail should attempt to connect to population, economic and social centers along its route.

1 **Special Recreation Features**

2 Special recreation features provide specialized or single-
3 purpose recreational activities generally not found in the
4 regional parks, park reserves, or trail corridors and often
5 require a unique managing or programming effort.
6 These may consist of nature center, marina, zoo,
7 conservatory, arboretum, display gardens, hunter
8 training education facilities, downhill ski area, sites of
9 historic or archeological significance, and bridging
10 facilities.

<p><i>Special Recreation Features and Bridging Facilities at a Glance</i></p> <p>Existing: 8 special recreation features</p> <p>Planned: 1 special recreation feature boundary adjustment</p> <p>Search: 1 Bridging Facility</p>

11 **Bridging Facilities:** Bridging facilities are a type of special recreation feature, or embedded within one,
12 that are intended to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks and Trails
13 System. Their purpose is to help address inequities that contribute to lower participation rates.

14 Bridging facilities have a clear and unique purpose. Bridging facilities are not designed as a one-size-
15 fits-all approach. They encourage greater participation by the future stewards of our region’s natural
16 and recreation resources -- young adults, teenagers, and children.

17 **Special Recreation Feature and Bridging Facility Attributes**

18 **Use:** Special Recreation Features provide a unique high-quality outdoor recreation experience and
19 requires special programming or management. Bridging facilities are designed to prototype new ideas
20 that advance equitable usage, focusing on underserved groups in the Regional Parks System. These
21 facilities engage people with the wide array of opportunities that exist across the system through
22 innovative strategies and collaboration. Bridging facilities seek to build on community strengths,
23 establishing partnerships with the communities they intend to better serve.

24 **Service Area:** The entire metropolitan region. Bridging Facilities serve a specific community or
25 communities.

26 **Site Attributes:** Special recreation features provide and conserve a high-quality natural area-based
27 scenic setting that offers a compelling sense of place. Bridging facilities may:

- 28 • Be a stand-alone facility, located in an area not currently well-served by existing regional parks,
29 park reserves, and trails. “Stand-alone” bridging facilities that exist outside of a regional park,
30 park reserve, special recreation feature, or trail, are eligible for Regional Parks System funding,
31 as permitted through the appropriate state laws and statutes.
- 32 • Be nested within an existing regional park, park reserve, special recreation feature, or trail,
33 welcoming new users to the unit and then connecting them with the opportunities that the
34 broader facility provides.
- 35 • Have a mobile element, to allow outreach to extend beyond the existing boundaries of the
36 Regional Parks System, going into communities that have been historically underserved. Mobile
37 bridging programming must be connected to a base Regional Park System facility and will need
38 to articulate, track, and report their results.

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

- 1 • Include a programmatic element embedded in a partner facility, such as a school or non-profit
2 organization, allowing the implementing agency to access and build on the organization's
3 existing relationships with communities (5).

4 **Size:** The size of a special recreation feature or bridging facility is dependent on the feature itself.

5 **Site Location:** Special recreation features are located where unique conditions exist and are
6 advantageous for the feature itself and the overall park system. Bridging facilities are located close to
7 their target audience, which include historically underserved communities.

8 **Cultural Landscape Classification**

9 **Cultural Landscapes** are historically significant properties that show evidence of human interaction
10 with the physical environment (*U.S. National Park Service*). This classification serves to recognize a
11 range of culturally important areas within the Regional Parks and Trails System and future
12 consideration of additional properties.

13 This classification will be developed in partnership with the Regional Park Implementing Agencies,
14 some of whom are currently working in partnership with Tribal groups to define this proposed
15 classification as part of our collective work on indigenous reconciliation. This classification will be
16 further developed in the 90% plan in August 2024.

17 **Open Space/Natural Areas Classification**

18 **Open Space/Natural Areas** provide ecosystem services, support wildlife, trees and vegetation, may
19 promote natural system connectivity, and may offer opportunities for recreation. This classification
20 includes high-quality natural areas as well as areas with restoration potential. This classification
21 recognizes the importance of protecting natural areas and open space as an important tool to adapt
22 and mitigate climate change.

23 This classification is being considered in partnership with the Regional Park Implementing Agencies,
24 who have been working on natural area management since before the establishment of the Regional
25 Parks and Trails System in 1974. This classification will be further developed in the 90% plan in August
26 2024.

1 **Regional Parks and Trails System Plan**

2 There are six components that make up the System Plan, which all together comprise the 2050
3 Regional Parks and Trails System Plan:

- 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 **Existing Regional Parks System Facilities**

10 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

11 As described in the previous section, the Regional Parks System as of 2025 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.

17 As of 2025, there are 44 regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features developed and
18 open to the public. These units are listed in Tables 2-1, 2-2, and 2-3 and shown on Figure 2-1.

19 *Table 2-1: Regional Parks Open to the Public*

20 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park	Map #
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
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

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park	Map #
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
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

1

2 *Table 2-2: Park Reserves Open to the Public*

3 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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
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

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 *Table 2-3: Special Recreation Features Open to the Public*

2 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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

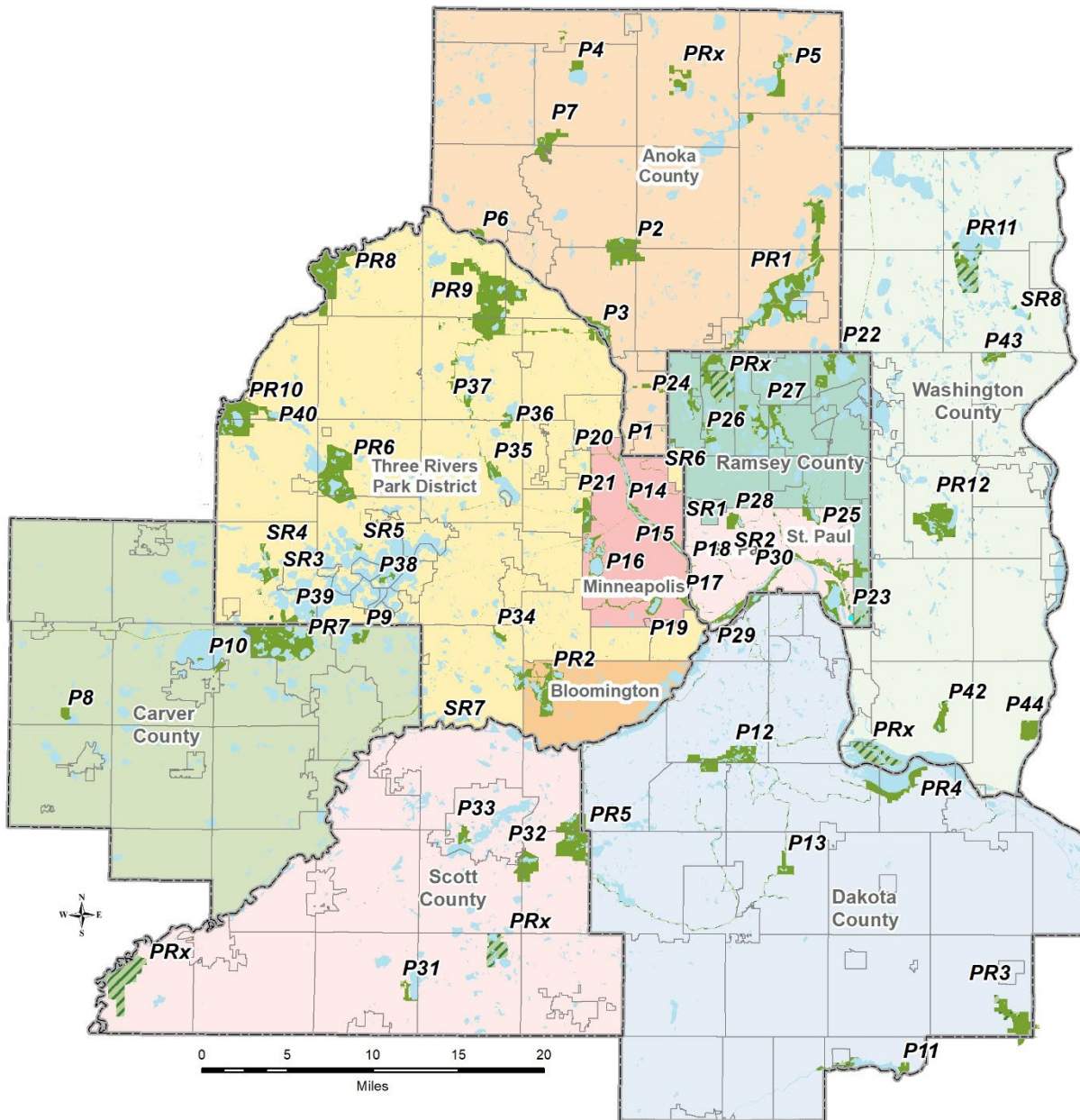
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Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

- 1 *Figure 2-1: Regional Parks, Park Reserves, and Special Recreation Features Open to the Public (Draft 2024 map)*
- 2



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-2

- Open to the Public
- Not Open to the Public
- Planned Parks (Not Open to the Public)
- County Boundaries
- City and Township Boundaries
- Lakes and Rivers

3

4

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

- 1 *Table 2-4: Regional Trails Open to the Public*
- 2 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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
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

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trails	Map #
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
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

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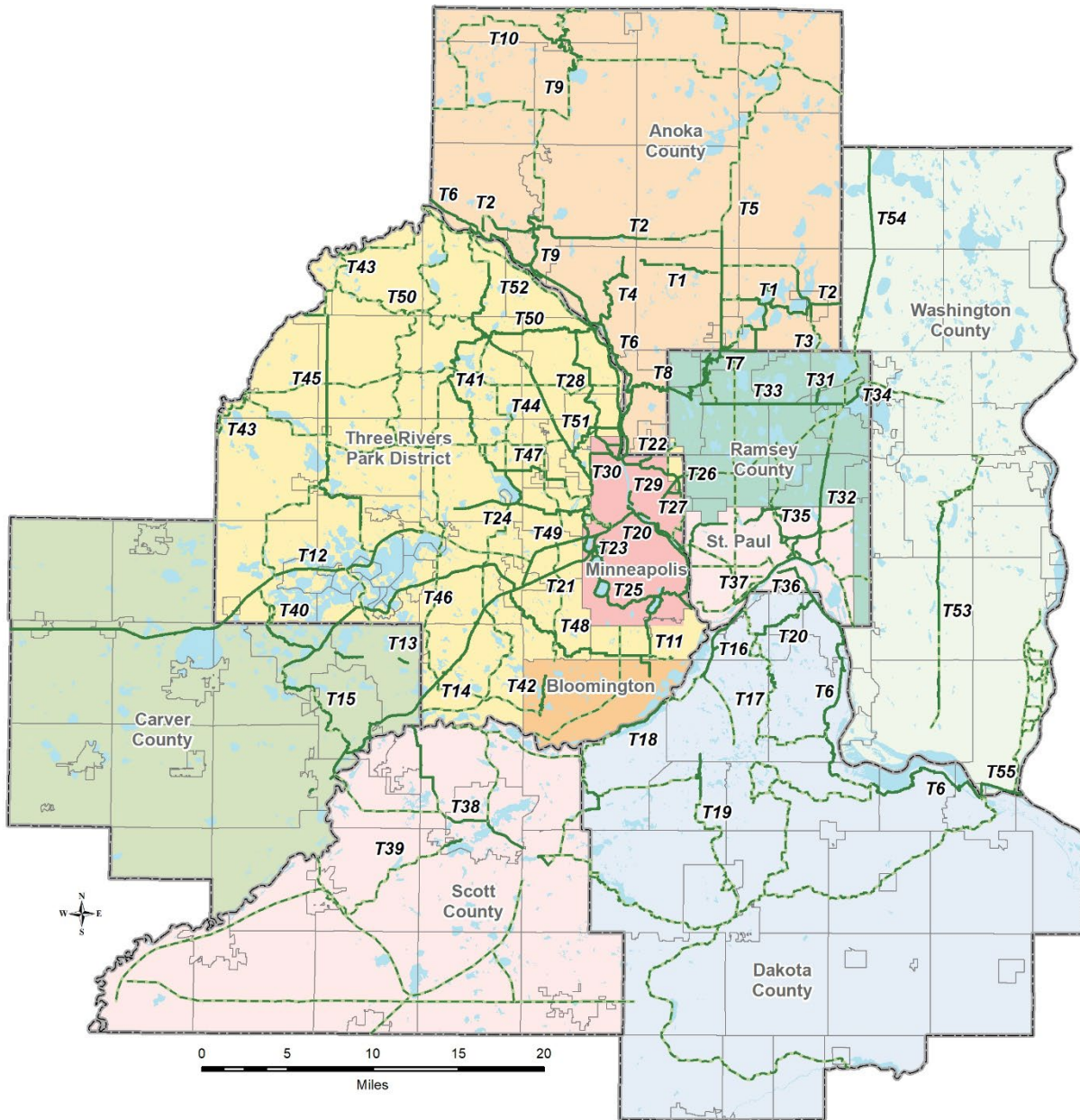
Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trails	Map #
Three Rivers Park District/Carver County	Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail/Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail	T14
Three Rivers Park District	Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail	T48
Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington	Nokomis-Minnesota River 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
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

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Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 *Figure 2-2: Regional Trails Open to the Public (Draft 2024 map)*



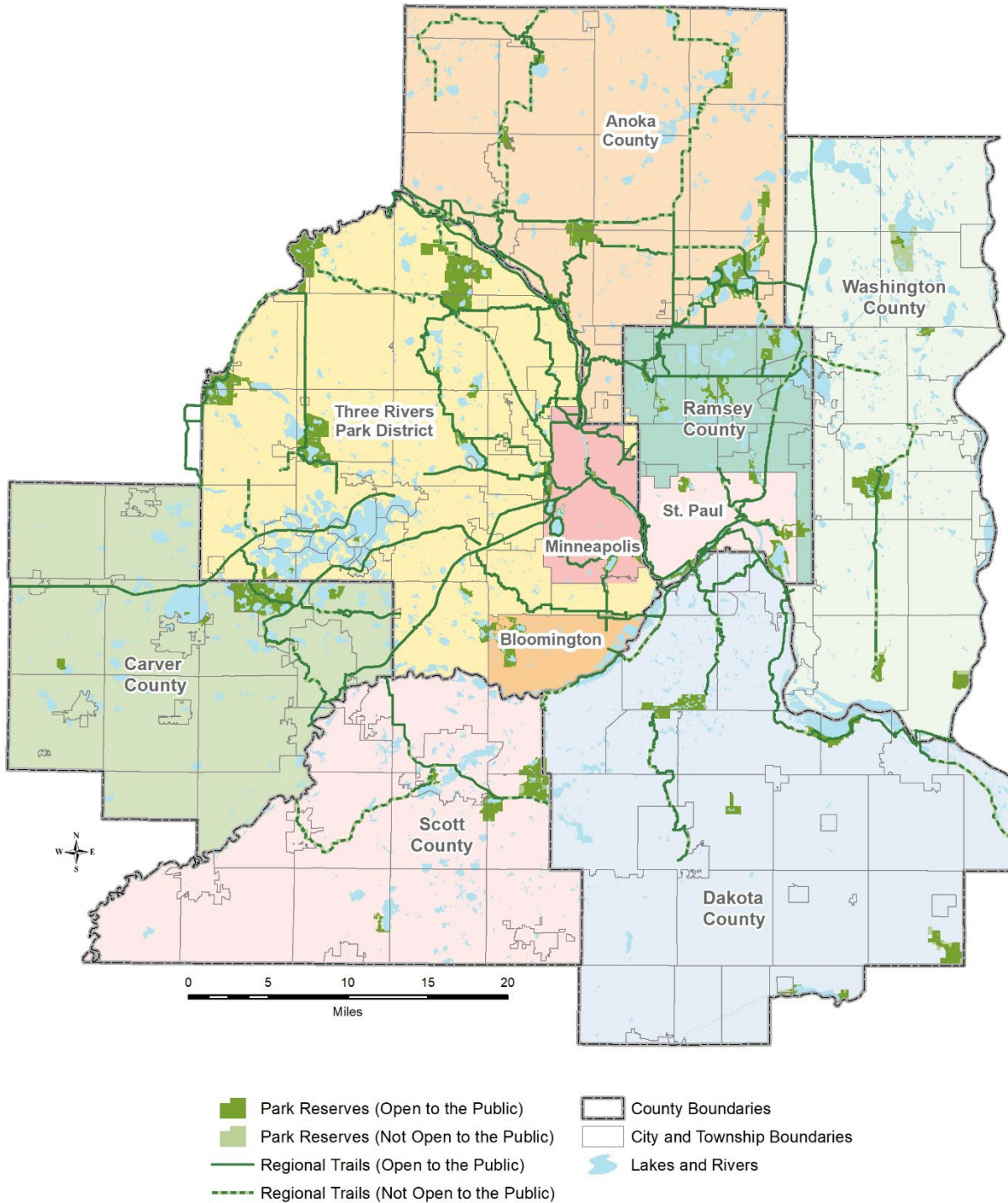
Numbers Correspond to Regional Trails Listed in Table 3-4

- Regional Trail (Open to the Public)
- - - Planned Regional Trail (Not Open to the Public)
- County Boundaries
- City and Township Boundaries
- ~ Lakes and Rivers

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Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 **Planned Regional Parks System Facilities**

2 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

3 In addition to the facilities that are open to the public, there are two regional parks and one park reserve
 4 that have Council-approved long-range plans but have not yet been developed. These facilities are
 5 listed in Table 2-5 and shown in Figure 2-4. Approximately 1,513 acres have been acquired for these
 6 three planned Regional Parks System facilities, with an additional 3,393 acres to be acquired in the
 7 future.

8 *Table 2-5: Planned Regional Parks and Park Reserves Not Open to the Public*

9 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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

10 Eight regional trails, totaling 80 miles, have Council-approved long-range plans, but are not yet
 11 developed or open to the public, as listed in Table 2-6 and shown in Figure 2-4.

12 *Table 2-6: Planned Regional Trails Not Open to the Public*

13 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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

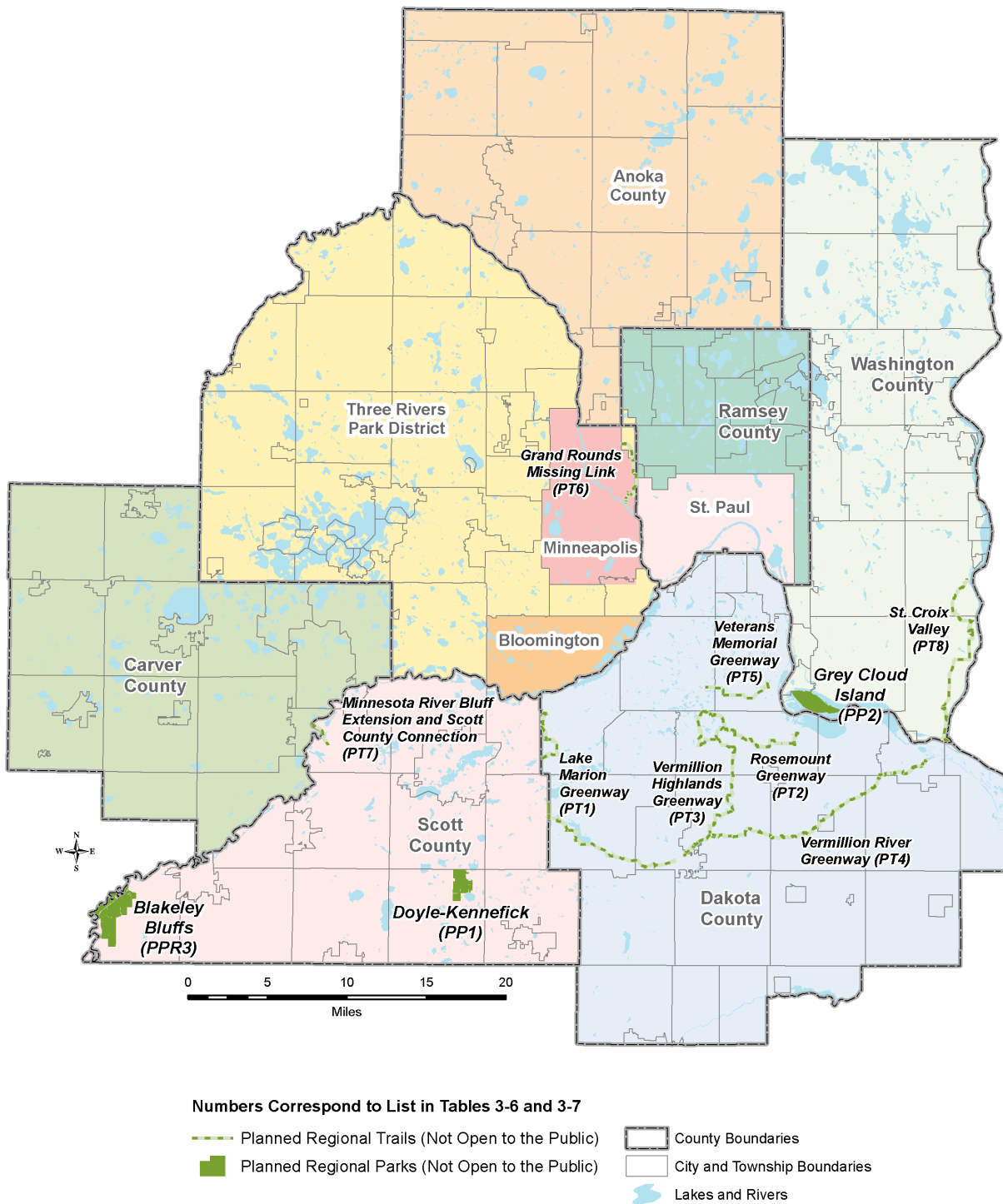
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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park or Regional Trail	Trail Mileage	Map #
Scott County	Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail	2	PT7
Washington County	St. Croix Valley Regional Trail	17.4	PT8

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1 *Figure 2-4: Planned Regional Parks and Trails Not Yet Open to the Public (Draft 2024 map)*



2

3

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 **Boundary Adjustments**

2 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

3 The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Area recommends long-range plan boundary adjustments
 4 for three regional parks, one park reserve, and one special recreation feature to protect high-quality
 5 natural resources and provide recreational opportunities.

6 The proposed boundary adjustments are included in the 2050 System Plan and described in Table 2-7
 7 and Figure 2-5. All of these boundary adjustments have been designated as part of the regional system
 8 through the 2020 system additions process with the exception of Carver County’s Baylor Regional Park
 9 boundary adjustment which was previously included. In future updates to the system plan, this section
 10 will be reserved for major boundary adjustments, as described in Section 4, Action 1, *Boundary*
 11 *Adjustments*.

12 **Table 2-7: Long-range Plan Boundary Adjustments**

13 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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

1 **Regional Park Search Areas**

2 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

3 Seven regional park search areas, totaling approximately 3,776 acres, are described in Table 3-9.
 4 Figure 3-8 shows a map of the boundary adjustments, regional park search areas, and special
 5 recreation feature bridging facility search areas. Regardless of estimated acreages, regional park
 6 search areas are depicted with the same size symbols in Figure 3-8. Regional park search areas are
 7 meant to denote general areas and do not specify exact locations at this scale. Future long-range
 8 planning work by Regional Park Implementing Agencies will determine specific boundaries for these
 9 regional park search areas.

10 *Table 2-8: Regional Park Search Areas*

11 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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

1 **Special Recreation Feature Search Area**

2 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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

6 *Table 2-9: Special Recreation Feature Search Area*

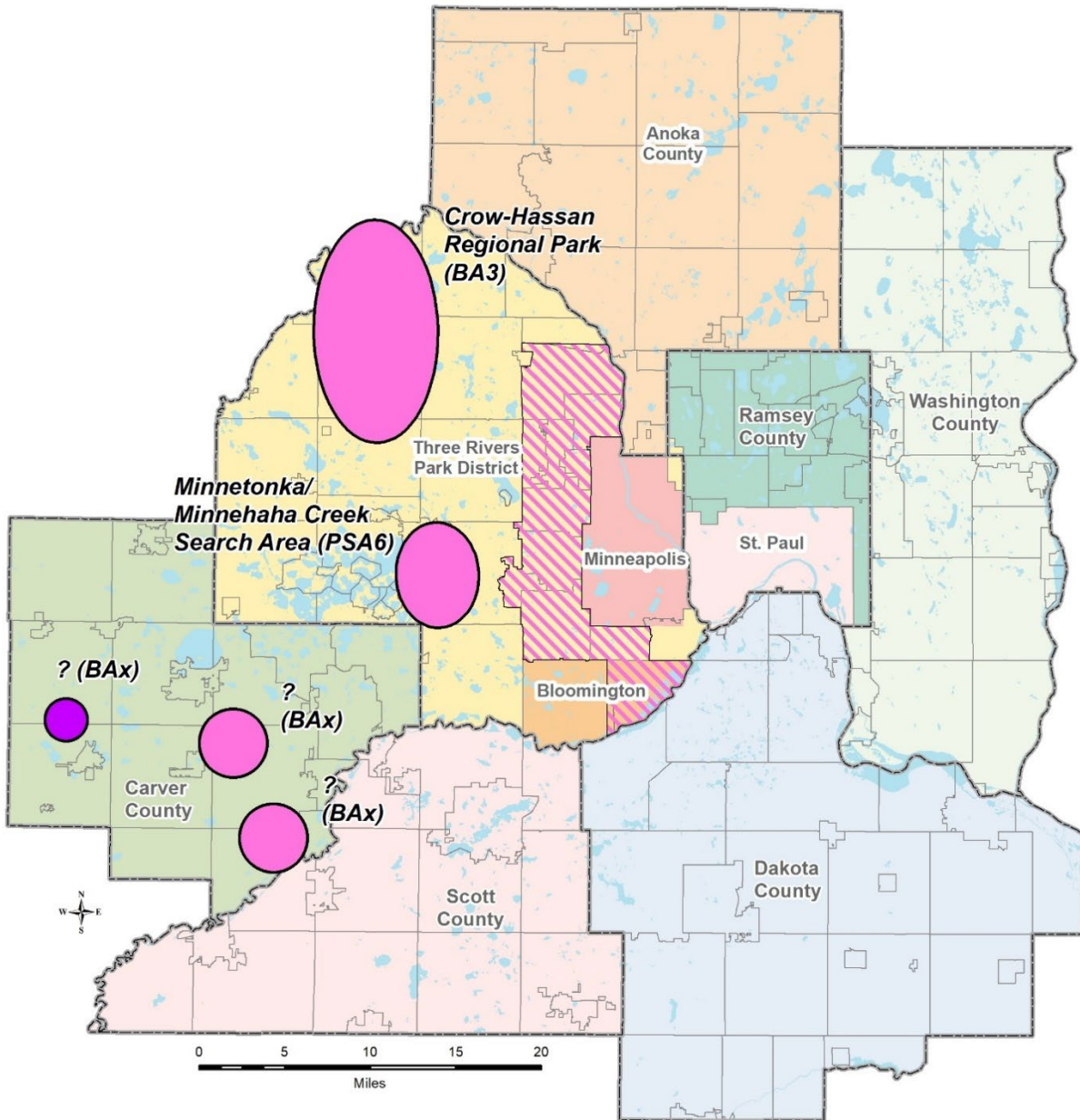
7 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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

8

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- 1 *Figure 2-5: Boundary Adjustments and Regional Park and Special Recreation Feature Search Areas(Draft 2024 map)*
- 2



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

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|------------------------------|
| | Boundary Adjustment | | County Boundaries |
| | Park Search Area | | City and Township Boundaries |
| | First-Ring City Bridging Facility Search Area | | Lakes and Rivers |

1 **Regional Trail Search Corridors**

2 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

3 There are 53 proposed regional trails without Council-approved long-range plans that identify the trail
 4 alignments. Many of these trails have been considered part of the Regional Parks System for several
 5 years and were mapped in previous Regional Parks Policy Plans as proposed trails showing a tentative
 6 alignment. Since alignments for these trails have not yet been approved by the Council as part of a
 7 long-range plan and are therefore not eligible for Regional Parks System funding for acquisition and
 8 development, they are being shown as regional trail search corridors. The estimated mileage of these
 9 regional trail search corridors is 588 miles. Regional Park Implementing Agencies are encouraged to
 10 prepare long-range plans for these trails. The regional trail search corridors are listed in Table 3-11 and
 11 shown in Figure 3-9.

12 *Table 2-10: Regional Trail Search Corridors*

13 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles	Map #
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Midtown Greenway	6	TSC16
Ramsey County/Washington County	Afton Bluffs	3	TSC17
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

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles	Map #
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
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

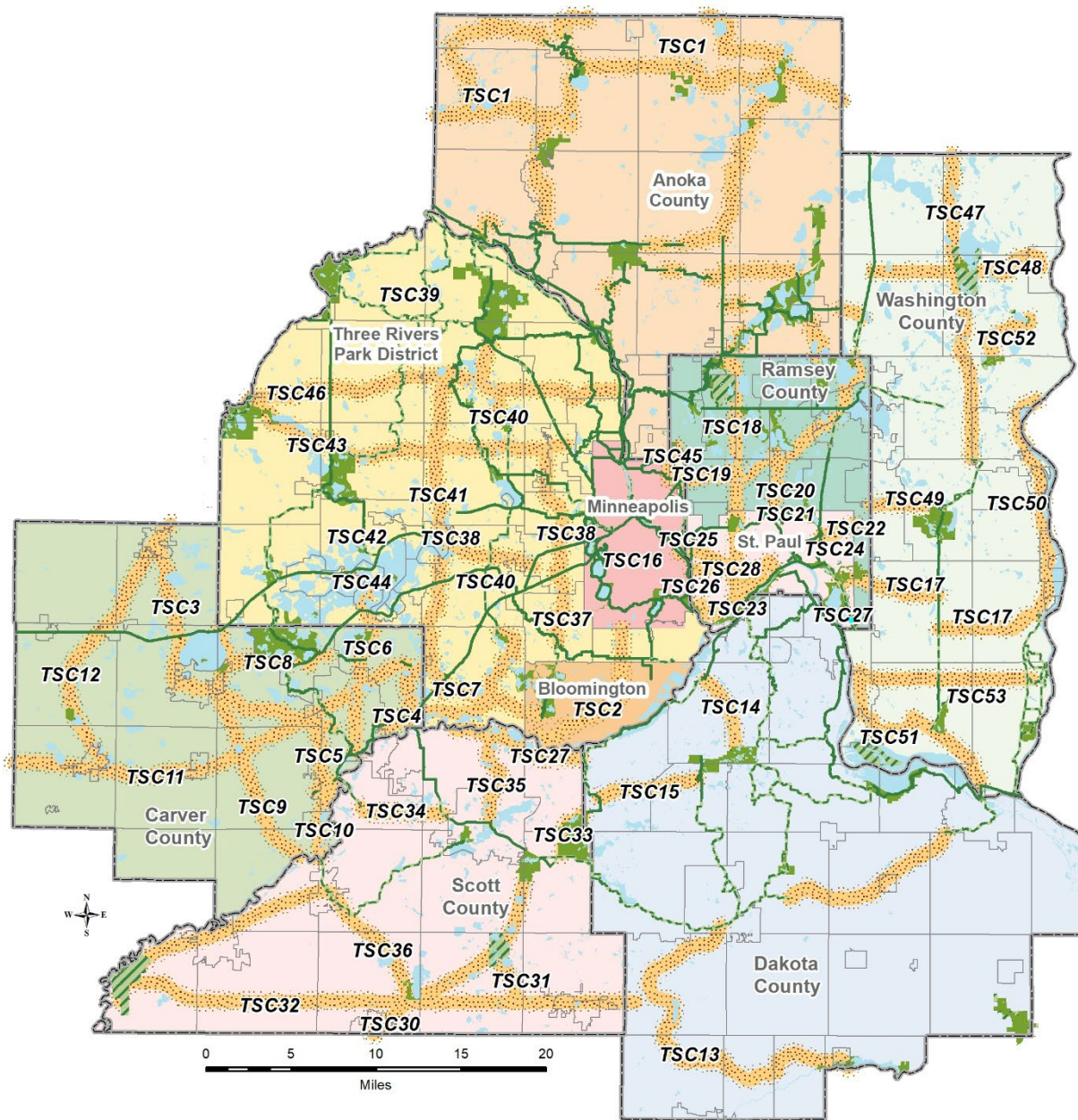
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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles	Map #
Washington County	Mississippi River	17	TSC51TSC44
Washington County	Pine Point Regional Park to Square Lake Special Recreation Feature	4.3	TSC52
Washington County	Prairie View	9	TSC53TSC45

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1 *Figure 2-6: Regional Trail Search Corridor Map (Draft 2024 map)*



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-11

-  Regional Trail Search Corridor
-  Regional Trail (Open to the Public)
-  Planned Regional Trail (Not Open to the Public)
-  Regional Park (Open to the Public)
-  Regional Park (Not Open to the Public)
-  Planned Regional Park (Not Open to the Public)
-  County Boundaries
-  City and Township Boundaries
-  Lakes and Rivers

2

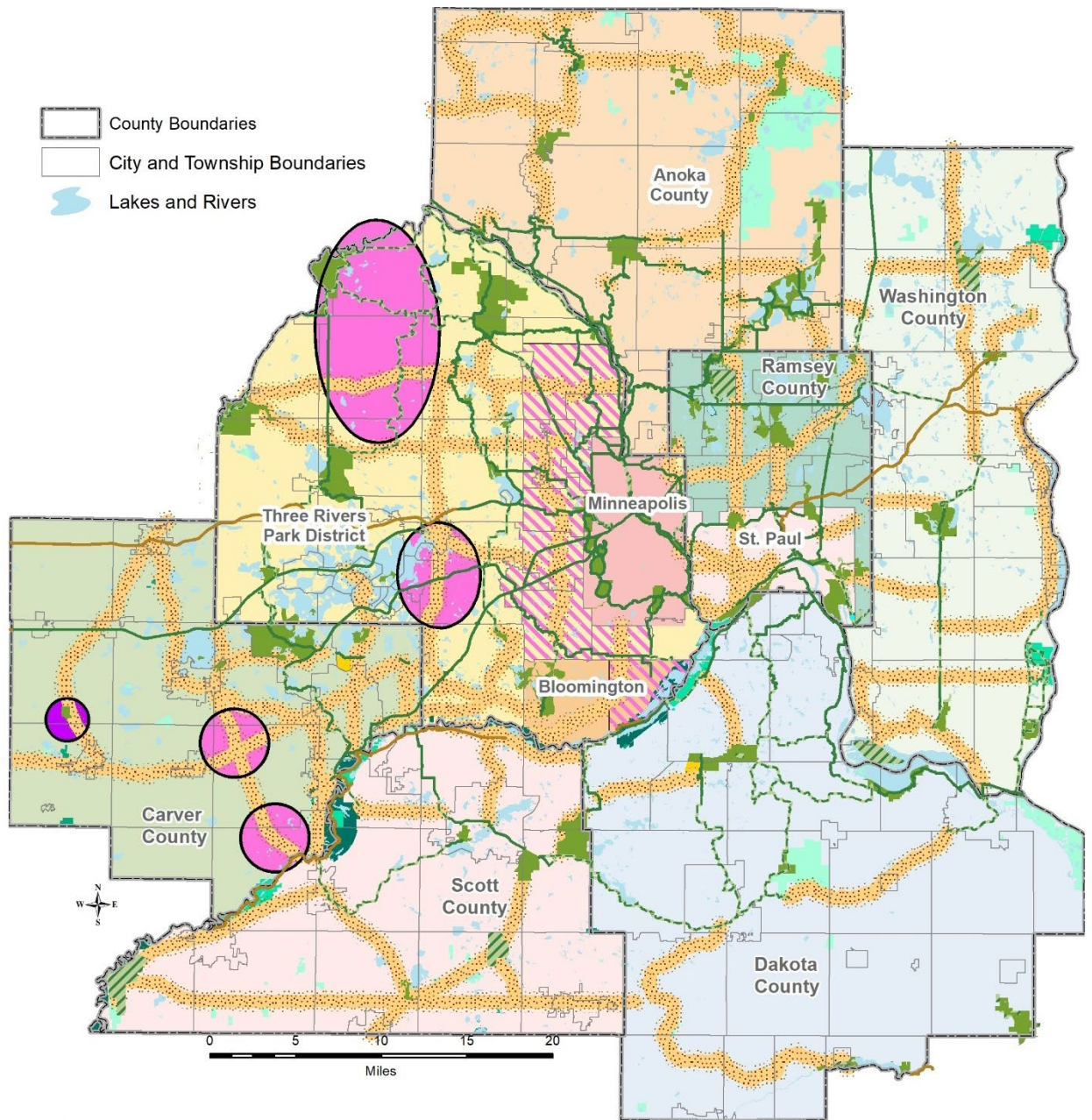
Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

- 1 *2050 Regional Parks and Trails System Plan Summary*
- 2 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan*
- 3

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Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 *Figure 2-7: 2040 Regional Parks and Trails System Plan Map (Draft 2024 map)*



Master Plan Boundary Adjustments and Search Areas

-  Boundary Adjustment
-  Park Search Area
-  First-Ring City Bridging Facility Search Area
-  Regional Trail Search Corridor

-  State Trails
-  Regional Trail (Open to the Public)
-  Planned Regional Trail (Not Open to the Public)
-  Regional Park (Open to the Public)
-  Regional Park (Not Open to the Public)
-  Planned Regional Park (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 **System Plan – Action 2: Identify and conduct research**

2 *Identify and conduct research to inform park policy, funding, and operations. Study results will*
3 *contribute to understanding of visitors' needs, systems additions criteria, estimated visitation,*
4 *equitable use, natural systems, and emerging issues.*

5 Research provides evidence to guide high quality decisions through statutory efforts such as the
6 Annual Use Estimates and the twice per decade Park and Trail Visitor Survey. Additionally, research
7 findings are valuable information to guide decisions around parks policy (including systems additions),
8 funding, and supporting agency partners in their operations, programming, and natural systems
9 care. Emerging issues identified by park agency and Council staff as well as external trends can be
10 more effectively addressed through spatial data, quantitative analysis, and qualitative research.

11 **Purpose:** Evidence-based decision making is central to the Regional Park and Trail System. The
12 following research activities are planned for the period 2024 to 2030:

13 **Annual Use Estimates.** This annual study is mandated by state statute and completed in partnership
14 with the Regional Park Implementing Agencies. This product estimates the number of people who visit
15 parks and trails in each implementing agency based on a methodology relying on sample counts. The
16 results are used in formulas to calculate each agency's share of Met Council-awarded grant program
17 dollars. The estimates also allow monitoring of trends over time.

18 **Park and Trail Visitor Surveys.** Mandated by state statute and completed every five years. A sample
19 of visitors answer survey questions as they visit a park or trail during the summer of the study. The
20 results provide information about visitor satisfaction, preferred activities, suggestions for improvement,
21 barriers to visit, information seeking, new visitor experiences and visitor demographics. The study
22 identifies the proportion of local vs nonlocal visitors, the mean number of people per vehicle, and the
23 ratio of summer visits to other seasons. These three findings are used in the annual use estimates. The
24 next Visitor Study will be done in 2025.

25 **Climate and Natural Systems.** Climate and Natural Systems. Beginning in 2024, the Council will
26 provide research in response to requests from Implementing Agencies regarding identification of
27 regionally significant ecological areas and data regarding climate resilience and risk mitigation.
28 Proposed work includes: (1) analysis of return on investment (ROI) of natural systems inventories, (2)
29 climate resiliency mapping and strategy planning, (3) demonstration of system-wide linkages of
30 species/habitat (e.g. wildlife corridors), (4) calculation of total regional numbers for prairie and oak
31 savanna restoration, (5) comparison of our regional park system with other systems nationwide, and (6)
32 estimation of carbon footprint from park operations. Additionally, qualitative and survey research could
33 be planned to identify how communities of color, youth, and other key populations frame climate
34 change for better inclusion of perspectives and activities.

35 **Use of relevant Council and external research.** Council staff will respond to requests by Council and
36 implementing agency staff to support their work. This includes technical assistance in applying existing
37 research findings to policy, funding, and other key topics. The Council has completed research projects
38 dedicated to building a more equitable system in response to the goals articulated in *Thrive 2040* and
39 *Imagine 2050*. The 2021 Youth and Parks study identified obstacles to visitation, developed a model for

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 welcoming new users, showed the most desired areas of skills-learning, and explored the activities
2 young people, predominantly youth of color, want to do in the parks. The Young Leaders Collaboration
3 (2023-2024) brought recommendations from young people across the region regarding the ways parks
4 and trails mattered in their lives and their recommendations for protecting natural systems. Analysis of
5 engagement with agency staff around climate actions and visitor study results provide in-depth
6 understanding of how implementing agencies approach these topics and what they need from the
7 Council. This research continues to have vital importance in creating evidence-based policy and
8 funding decisions.

9 **New research in response to emerging topics.** Research is needed to support the needs of
10 implementing agency partners and the goals outlined in *Imagine 2050*. Council Research staff will
11 regularly consult with Council Parks staff and park agency staff to identify emerging issues requiring
12 additional research.

13 **System Plan – Action 3: Annually update map datasets**

14 *Annually update map datasets to reflect the most current status of the system in coordination*
15 *with the data “owners”, our ten Regional Park Implementing Agency partners.*

16 Regional Parks and Trails geographic information systems (GIS) data is housed within the Metropolitan
17 Council for implementing agency and Metropolitan Council processes. The Implementing Agencies and
18 Metropolitan Council have been working in partnership to establish an annual update process for
19 Regional Parks and Trails GIS Data for timely and accurate data. The Met Council leads a data request
20 that is updated when needs arise collaboratively with the Regional Park Implementing Agencies. The
21 desired outcomes are:

- 22 • Accurate GIS data that is consistent with the Regional Parks and Trails System Plan and
- 23 regional Parks and Trails long-range plans.
- 24 • Use of the GIS data for Operations and Maintenance funding requests.
- 25 • Use of the GIS data as a record on file for regional park and trails with old or no long-range
- 26 plans on file.

27
28

1 **Section Three: Natural Systems Policy and Actions**

2 *Natural Systems Policy*

3 **Identify lands with high-quality natural features 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 preservation purposes in perpetuity.**

6 Regional Parks and Trails are primarily a nature-based recreation system that focuses on protecting
7 high-quality natural areas for regional recreation opportunities. The protection, restoration, and
8 enhancement of these natural systems is a key objective for the Regional Parks and Trails System. The
9 Council has a responsibility to collaborate with Regional Park Implementing Agencies to strategically
10 locate and acquire lands with high-quality natural features, to create an interconnected regional system
11 of recreation. More details of the criteria used to identify lands for incorporation into the Regional
12 System can be found in the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

13 The desired outcomes in natural systems protection are listed below.

- 14 • Protection of lands across the region that have been identified as having high-quality natural
15 features or recreational opportunities.
- 16 • Improved access to the Regional Parks and Trails System for all communities.
- 17 • Greater collaboration between implementing agencies to carry out restoration work and
18 maintenance of restored lands.
- 19 • More robust data that can be used to develop acquisition and development strategies.

20 **Natural Systems – Action 1: Locating and Acquisition Priorities**

21 ***Work with Implementing Agencies to locate and acquire lands with natural features,***
22 ***access to water, or restoration potential for conservation, recreation, and protection.***

23 Future Council designation of lands for the Regional Parks and Trails System should emphasize
24 important natural resource features, access to water bodies, and natural resource features that
25 enhance outdoor recreation. Water is a major attraction in almost every park unit of the Regional Parks
26 and Trails System and an amenity along many regional trails. Most surface water is publicly held, with
27 the waterbeds owned by the state, so it is a critical function of the Regional Parks and Trails System to
28 provide this access.

29 Major considerations in deciding which lands should be brought into the Regional Parks and Trails
30 System are:

- 31 • Acquiring lands with natural qualities most desirable for outdoor recreational activities
- 32 • Protecting critical ecosystem services, such as linking other natural resource areas or water
33 bodies together, which in turn provide a larger natural habitat opportunity; help protect or
34 improve water quality; efficiently sequester carbon; or provide habitat for protected or
35 endangered species

Section Three: Natural Systems Policy and Actions

- 1 • Ensuring regional park facilities are evenly distributed around the metropolitan area or
2 distributed in proportion to the existing and forecasted urban development

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

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

12 All privately-owned parcels within a Council-approved long-range plan boundary are “in-holdings” until
13 they are acquired. Whenever possible, the Regional Park Implementing Agencies will pursue the
14 acquisition of these “in-holdings” on a willing-seller basis. Additional details about the acquisition
15 process are outlined in the Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

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

22 **Natural Systems – Action 2: Equity and Geographic Balance**

23 ***Identify new regional park and trail lands in areas not well served by our current*** 24 ***system.***

25 Another key consideration for expanding the Regional Parks and Trails System is the opportunity to
26 improve equitable access to the regional system and ensure that the system is geographically
27 balanced. With the objective of fostering equity and belonging in the parks and trails system, it is
28 important to consider service gaps within the region. To fully define “areas not well served,” Council
29 staff will utilize a variety of resources and consider factors such as underrepresented communities,
30 recreational opportunities available, and distance to regional parks and trails.

31 The legislative directive is clear that regional parklands should be of “regional importance.” Regional
32 importance is not directly defined in the law, but the legislative directive requires that regional
33 parklands, plus state facilities, should reasonably meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of
34 the metropolitan area. Therefore, lands of regional importance would be comparable in size, draw users
35 from rather large geographic areas, and contain natural resources similar to the state parks and trails in
36 the metropolitan region. Lands that serve only a single municipality or neighborhood are not considered
37 to have regional importance.

1 **Natural Systems – Action 3: Natural Systems Research**

2 *Provide the Regional Park and Trail Implementing Agencies with research and data that*
3 *will better inform restoration and protection of Natural Systems.*

4 Data-informed strategies are important to the Regional Parks and Trails System as it ensures that the
5 investments into the system are effective, efficient, and wanted by local communities and implementing
6 agencies. Since a lot of this research crosses into multiple jurisdictions, the Council intends to lead this
7 effort and provide the data to the implementing agencies.

8 In addition to the research areas identified in Section Two, Action 2, the Council plans to further
9 research on the following topics:

- 10 • **Tree Canopy:** The Council aims to continue the success of the “Growing Shade” tool and use
11 tree canopy data to inform which parts of the Regional Parks and Trails System need additional
12 vegetation.
- 13 • **Regionally Significant Ecological Areas (RSEA):** Work on updating the RSEA and aim to use
14 this data to identify areas that need protection. More details can be found in the Work Plan.
- 15 • **Water Monitoring:** Work with Environmental Services to pilot a water monitoring project on
16 lakes within Regional Parks.

17 **Natural Systems – Action 4: Maintenance of Natural Systems**

18 *The Council will coordinate efforts with implementing agencies and external partners to*
19 *protect, restore, and maintain natural systems across the Regional Parks and Trails*
20 *System.*

21 Despite not owning or operating any land within the Regional Parks and Trails System, the Council has
22 the ability to convene the implementing agencies and coordinate efforts around restoration work. The
23 Council aims to collaborate with Regional Park Implementing Agencies to both expand and protect
24 natural areas while enhancing lands already in the system. Desired outcomes are listed below.

- 25 • **Additional Funding Sources:** Coordinating with agencies to identify additional sources of
26 funding for acquisition and maintenance. For more information, please see Section Eight:
27 Finance, Action 5.
- 28 • **Fostering External Partnerships:** The Council hopes to foster greater collaboration with local
29 organizations to further the work of restoration, protection, enhancement, and education.
- 30 • **Strengthened Collaboration with Existing Partners:** Continue to work with other state
31 agencies and Council divisions to carry out protection and restoration efforts.

1 **Section Four: Climate Resilience Policy and Actions**

2 *Climate Resilience Policy*

3 **Adapt and enhance the Regional Parks and Trails System to promote resilience to**
4 **climate change, including the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions.**

5 Climate change and its effects are going to be a high priority for the foreseeable future. As a Regional
6 Goal and Parks Objective, the Council recognizes the crucial role that Regional Parks and Trails will
7 play in the region's efforts to mitigate climate change, while adapting to its impacts. Regional Park
8 Implementing Agencies are already doing work to counteract the effects of climate change and it is the
9 responsibility of the Council to support their work, while finding areas to create innovative solutions and
10 grow these efforts. The desired outcomes are listed below.

- 11 • Build public awareness of the climate work being done in the Regional Parks and Trails System
12 and encourage communities to become involved in the work.
- 13 • Foster an equitable parks and trails system and landscapes within the system that can
14 withstand the impacts of climate change.
- 15 • Develop innovative solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while thinking of ways to
16 connect recreation and adaptation.

17 **Climate Resilience – Action 1: Climate Research**

18 *Council Parks staff in partnership with its ten implementing agencies will collaborate*
19 *with its research team to conduct research on the Regional Parks and Trails System's*
20 *role in climate change.*

21 Efforts to research the relationship between climate change and the Regional Parks and Trails System
22 have yet to occur. By working with the Council's research team, the Regional Parks and Trails will
23 prioritize research that accurately quantifies the system's impact on the region's efforts to mitigate and
24 adapt to climate change. This research would then be provided to implementing agencies to identify
25 what aspects of their system are working well and what could be improved further.

- 26 • An inventory of implementing agency's greenhouse gas emissions from facilities and
27 operations.
- 28 • An inventory that calculates both the level of carbon sequestration from completed restoration
29 and potential sequestration of future restoration work.
- 30 • Data that measures the positive impact that regional parks and trails have on climate mitigation
31 and adaptation (flood control, cooling, etc.).

1 **Climate Resilience – Action 2: Coordination of Climate Awareness**

2 *Convene Regional Park Implementing Agencies and other Council Divisions to develop*
3 *strategies for increasing public awareness of the Regional Parks and Trails System’s*
4 *role in climate mitigation and adaptation through partnerships and storytelling.*

5 One of the Council’s primary roles is to convene the Regional Park Implementing Agencies to
6 coordinate efforts at a regional scale. The Council will work with implementing agencies to discuss
7 communication strategies to build awareness of the Regional Parks and Trails System’s role in climate
8 change. In addition to highlighting the adaptation and mitigation capabilities of the System, this action
9 will also work to provide accurate information that explains the long-term benefits of certain actions,
10 such as controlled burning and prairie restoration.

- 11 • **Water Quality and Quantity:** Work with Environmental Services and implementing agencies to
12 educate the public about the impact of algal blooms and water pollution on recreation.
- 13 • **Habitat Restoration:** Develop a communication approach to explaining native habitat
14 restoration, the benefits of prairie, and how controlled burns contribute to the ecosystem.
- 15 • **Adaptation:** Strategize ways to educate the public about the many ways parks can be used to
16 adapt to climate change through flood control, planting drought resistant vegetation, and
17 growing extra shade.

18 **Climate Resilience – Action 3: Citizen Science**

19 *Develop strategies to involve community members in data collection, climate work, and*
20 *education regarding the Regional Parks and Trails System*

21 Increasing the public’s awareness about climate change and the Regional Parks and Trails System’s
22 role is important, and another way to spread awareness and build trust among communities is through
23 the incorporation of citizen science. The Council intends to convene the Implementing Agencies to
24 develop approaches to getting more community members involved in climate action by collecting data,
25 attending educational programming, and working in the regional parks and trails. Some agencies are
26 already doing this work by hosting prairie seed collection events or crowd sourcing data, and the
27 Council will continue supporting these efforts.

28 **Climate Resilience – Action 4: Climate and Environmental Justice**

29 *Incorporate equity into the climate change conversation by gathering diverse*
30 *perspectives and shaping it into future actions.*

31 The Council will work with its research team to incorporate more diverse voices into climate work, with
32 the hope of using this data to identify areas of improvement for the Regional Parks and Trails System.
33 By considering overburdened communities when it comes to planning for climate change, the region
34 can ensure that future actions from the Council or its implementing agencies do not perpetuate harm,
35 ensure reparative action, and uplift communities.

Section Four: Climate Resilience Policy and Actions

1 These perspectives will be used for many aspects of the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan,
2 including the items below.

- 3 • Defining what “areas not well served” means in the Natural Systems Policy, Action 2
- 4 • Inform targeted programming and marketing to bring new visitors to the parks and trails.
- 5 • Guide the acquisition and development of parks to reduce the impacts of green gentrification
6 and displacement to nearby communities.

7 **Climate Resilience – Action 5: Climate Action Plan Support**

8 *Support implementing agency efforts in climate work by coordinating the*
9 *implementation of their Climate Action Plans.*

10 The Council will work in partnership with the Regional Park Implementing Agencies to identify common
11 goals and implementation steps in their local Climate Action Plans to find projects that can be
12 coordinated at a regional level. By supporting and coordinating climate implementation at a regional
13 scale, agencies can share resources with one another, and the Regional Parks and Trails System could
14 be better positioned to seek additional funding sources as a regional system. The Council encourages
15 Regional Park Implementing Agencies who have not created a Climate Action Plan to do so.

16 **Climate Resilience – Action 6: Operations and Efficiency**

17 *Promote further coordination between implementing agencies to improve operational*
18 *efficiency and emerging strategies to adapt to climate change.*

19 The Council will convene operations staff from the Regional Park Implementing Agencies to discuss
20 best management practices across agency boundaries and to coordinate work in restoration, climate
21 action, and park operations. Other opportunities include the exploration of sharing equipment needed to
22 mitigate greenhouse gas emissions or developing regional initiatives to improve operations across the
23 region.

1 **Section Five: Planning Policy and Actions**

2 *Planning Policy*

3 **Promote long-range planning and help provide integrated resource management across**
4 **jurisdictions in order to create a seamless system that connects everyone to the**
5 **outdoors.**

6 **Planning – Action 1: Long-range plan requirements**

7 *Regional Park Implementing Agencies are required to prepare a long-range plan for*
8 *each Regional Parks and Trails System facility they own and/or operate.*

9 Minnesota Statutes, section 473.313 requires a long-range plan to be developed by each Regional
10 Park Implementing Agency in consultation with all affected municipalities. While the statute requires
11 only one long-range plan per Regional Park Implementing Agency, the Council requires individual long-
12 range plans for each regional park, park reserve, regional trail, and special recreation feature. Long-
13 range plans prepared by the Regional Park Implementing Agencies are critical in defining the specifics
14 of acquisition, development, and operation of regional facilities.

15 Among other components, long-range plans must include boundary information, a development
16 concept, estimates of future use and costs, and summaries of partner and community engagement,
17 including an equity analysis. Accessibility and public awareness are also key components, including
18 how people may be able to access the regional park or trail via transit. In addition, long-range plans
19 should address the protection and restoration of natural systems, as well as climate adaptation and
20 mitigation. Long-range plans must also address other state laws where applicable, such as the
21 Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area.

22 Specific long-range plan requirements for regional parks, park reserves, regional trails, and special
23 recreation features now reside in the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

24 Collectively, these long-range plans form the Regional Park Implementing Agencies' part of the regional
25 system plan. The Council reviews long-range plans for consistency with this Regional Parks and Trails
26 Policy Plan and other Council policy plans. Inconsistent plans will be returned with comments to the
27 Regional Park Implementing Agency. Next, the agency must revise and resubmit their plans to the
28 Council. For a Regional Park Implementing Agency to receive a grant for acquisition or development,
29 the proposed project must be consistent with a Council-approved long-range plan.

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

1 *Acquisition Long-range Plans*

2 Once the Council designates a unit to be a part of the Regional Parks and Trails System, the next step
3 is usually the Regional Park Implementing Agency conducts a long-range planning process, as
4 described above. There are times when a Regional Park Implementing Agency has an opportunity to
5 acquire – or protect under an option to purchase – land that does not yet have a development concept,
6 which is one of the requirements for long-range planning. In these situations, the Regional Park
7 Implementing Agency may choose, in consultation with Council staff, to develop an acquisition long-
8 range plan, to establish the long-range plan boundary or to adjust an existing Council-approved long-
9 range plan boundary. The acquisition long-range plan or amendment may focus solely on the land
10 under option to purchase.

11 *Boundary Adjustments*

12 When a Regional Park Implementing Agency has an opportunity to add, modify, or remove land holding
13 from one of its units, it must change its long-range plan’s boundary. These changes happen for a
14 variety of reasons. For instance, the Regional Park Implementing Agency may better understand the
15 land needed to implement the long-range plan vision, a previously unwilling landowner may become
16 ready to sell property adjacent to the unit, or land may be donated to the agency.

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

22 Extensions for existing and planned regional trails and regional trail search corridors are major
23 boundary adjustments addressed during the system additions process, which typically occurs on a four-
24 year cycle.

25 Minor boundary adjustments are additions or removals of smaller acreages of land, usually from a
26 single property owner, to an existing Council-approved long-range plan boundary.

27 *Amending a long-range plan*

28 *Minnesota Statutes, section 473.313* requires long-range plans be developed by the park implementing
29 agencies consistent with this plan; however, it does not specify when revisions are necessary. As
30 discussed earlier in this Plan, the Regional Park Implementing Agency will submit a master plan
31 amendment to the Council to change its original proposal for acquisition and/or development, or when
32 the agency has developed significant additional details that needs to be reflected in the master plan.
33 The Council may approve or reject the master plan amendment for cause and return the plan to the
34 Regional Park Implementing Agency for revisions to address the Council’s concerns.

35 Regional Park Implementing Agencies must provide an opportunity for the public and affected local
36 units of government nearby the particular park or trail to participate in the process to amend a master
37 plan. With regard to financing the construction of recreation and visitor support facilities proposed in a
38 master plan, it is important that there is sufficient detail about the facility in the master plan and that the

Section Five: Planning Policy and Actions

1 Regional Park Implementing Agency is ready to construct the facility when funds become available. If a
2 master plan amendment is needed before funding the construction of a facility, the Regional Park
3 Implementing Agency must provide the general public and affected local units of government an
4 opportunity to participate in the process, as well.

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

- 8 • Improvements that substantially differ in type, size, scale, or cost from those in the Council-
9 approved long-range plan and the adopted capital improvement program to meet expanded
10 local recreational demands or satisfy above-average quality standards (see Planning – Strategy
11 4, later in this chapter)
- 12 • Changes to a park or trail boundary (see Section 5: **Boundary Adjustments**)
- 13 • Significant changes or additions to a regional park concessioners' agreement (see Section 7:
14 Recreation, Facilities, and Programming – **Action 1**)
- 15 • Proposals for placement of telecommunications towers on Regional Parks and Trails System
16 land (see Section 6: System Protection – **Action 5**)

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

20 *Focused Long-Range Plan Amendment*

21 Occasionally Regional Park Implementing Agencies seek to make minor changes to a long-range plan
22 that may only impact a subset of long-range plan requirement areas. For example, an agency may be
23 interested in integrating a new plan for natural systems management within the boundaries of the unit
24 or proposes to make minor changes to only one part of a much larger park unit. In those instances,
25 Regional Park Implementing Agency staff should discuss the scope of the desired plan amendment
26 with Council Parks and Trails staff prior to commencing the amendment process to determine the
27 required subset of long-range plan requirements. Focused long-range plan amendments are
28 considered through the Metropolitan Council Committee process that typically has a 60-day duration.

29 For more information on the process for focused long-range plan amendments, please visit the
30 Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

31 *Administrative Process for Minor Long-Range Plan Amendments*

32 Occasionally, plan amendments are done to address minor changes or proposals that have no material
33 change to the regional park or trail. Examples of amendment candidates for the administrative process
34 may include minor corrections, changes to natural area management or trail implementation that result
35 in no material change to the park or trail, and/or underground utility improvements. Amendments
36 reviewed administratively must meet all of the relevant criteria adopted by the Metropolitan Council.
37 Administrative reviews of minor long-range plan amendments are conducted by Council staff with
38 delegated authority granted by the Met Council, and they are not required to be presented to the

Section Five: Planning Policy and Actions

1 regular Council committees for review and approval. There may be instances when Council staff direct
2 minor amendment proposals to the regular Council Committees, due to political sensitivity or other
3 contextual factor. Administrative review is proposed to be completed within 15 business days once the
4 long-range plan amendment has been deemed complete.

5 For more information on the administrative process for minor long-range plan amendments, please visit
6 the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

7 **Planning – Action 2: Enhanced multimodal access**

8 ***Promote enhanced multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit*** 9 ***system, where appropriate.***

10 The Regional Parks System plays a key role in advancing the livability of the region by increasing
11 access to nature and outdoor recreation, thereby supporting healthy lifestyles and active living. The
12 Council has a unique opportunity to help achieve this objective, through its roles in planning and
13 operating the transit system as well as planning for the Regional Parks and Trails System. In addition to
14 design considerations for long-range plans discussed in the previous section, Regional Park
15 Implementing Agencies are encouraged to:

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

30 The Council will explore the following projects:

- 31 • Collaborate with local agencies to develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Wayfinding Best Practices
32 Guide
- 33 • Collaborate with Metro Transit or local transit providers to determine the feasibility of the
34 following actions:
 - 35 ○ Promoting regional parks at bus stops

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- 1 ○ Exploring options for siting new park-and-rides near or adjacent to regional parks, or
- 2 new regional trails near park-and-rides or fixed-route transit lines
- 3 ○ Promoting a transit day pass or family pass to regional parks
- 4 ○ Providing free rides to large special events in regional parks
- 5 ○ Adding transit stops that are convenient to regional parks and trails

6 **Planning – Action 3: Cost sharing**

7 ***Projects may share costs, if they are consistent with a Council-approved long-range***

8 ***plan.***

9 A Regional Park Implementing Agency may wish to make improvements that substantially differ in type,
10 size, scale, or cost from those in the Council-approved long-range plan and the adopted capital
11 improvement program, to meet expanded local recreational demands or satisfy above-average quality
12 standards. These improvements are subject to Council approval of an amended long-range plan.

13 Projects that are consistent with a Council-approved long-range plan but exceed regional need as
14 determined by the Council may proceed on a cost-sharing basis. Regional Park Implementing Agencies
15 must obtain Council approval in advance of undertaking cost-shared developments.

16 The long-range plan must include a funding proposal under which regional funds will be used only for
17 the regional service facilities, not for facilities intended to serve local needs. In fairness to other
18 Regional Park Implementing Agencies, it is necessary for the Council to limit funds to what is necessary
19 to cover average improvements that will deliver adequate services, and not to pay for excessively
20 ornate or elaborate facilities.

21 Even if all of the improvement funds come from Regional Park Implementing Agency sources or are
22 raised through cost-sharing arrangements with other governments or the private sector, the Regional
23 Park Implementing Agency must secure Council approval of a long-range plan amendment. All
24 Regional Parks and Trails System lands must be committed to specific long-term planned uses. These
25 lands must be protected from the intrusion of activities and developments that are incompatible with the
26 planned uses of the regional parks, park reserves, special recreation features, and trails, regardless of
27 how the development was funded.

28 The Regional Park Implementing Agency may be required to pay the full amount or the extra portion of
29 the project cost when the Regional Park Implementing Agency wants to develop a facility sooner than
30 the Council has determined that it is needed to meet regional demand, or at a scale greater than
31 regional demand warrants, or at a higher cost than the Council finds necessary to serve the regional
32 interest. The following conditions apply to projects funded on a cost-sharing basis.

- 33 • The project must meet the same requirements of long-range planning and Council approval as
- 34 any other Regional Parks and Trails System projects.
- 35 • Costs incurred by the Regional Park Implementing Agency as the local share of the project are
- 36 not reimbursable.

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- 1 • Where funds are available from private sources or sources other than the Regional Park
- 2 Implementing Agency to share in project costs, the Council will work directly with the affected
- 3 Regional Park Implementing Agency.

DRAFT

1 **Section Six: System Protection Policy and Actions**

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 and Trails
7 System and its individual parts of the system.

- 8 • **Long-range plans:** The long-range plan defines acceptable activities within a system unit. The
9 Regional Park Implementing Agencies must receive Council approval before proceeding with
10 any activities 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 and Trails System Plan
16 may be subject to a required plan modification by the Council to ensure that the system is
17 protected.
- 18 • **Metropolitan significance:** Proposed development projects outside of the Regional Parks and
19 Trails System that have a substantial impact on or represent a substantial departure from the
20 Regional Parks and Trails System Plan may be required to undergo a review for metropolitan
21 significance (Minn. Stat. 473.173, Minn. R. Ch. 5800), with up to a one-year delay in
22 development if the project is found to adversely affect the system.

23 These standards in the metropolitan significance rules and in the following plan guidelines are used to
24 determine a substantial impact on or a substantial departure from the Regional Parks and Trails
25 System:

- 26 • Impacts on the use of Regional Parks and Trails System facilities include, but are not limited to
27 traffic, safety, noise, visual obstructions (for example, to scenic overlooks), impaired use of the
28 facilities or interference with the operation or maintenance of the facilities.
- 29 • Impacts on natural systems include, but are not limited to, the impact on the level, flow, or
30 quality of a facility's water resources (lakes, streams, wetlands, groundwater) and impact on a
31 facility's wildlife populations or habitats (migration routes, breeding sites, plant communities).
- 32 • A proposed project is considered to have an impact on the system if it may preclude or
33 substantially limit the future acquisition of land in an area identified in the Regional Parks and
34 Trails System Plan.

1 **System Protection – Action 1: Local Comprehensive Plans**

2 *Local comprehensive plans may need to be changed if planned land uses would have a*
3 *negative impact on current or planned regional park lands or facilities.*

4 The Council may require plan modifications to local comprehensive plans, updates, or amendments if
5 they:

- 6 • Will more likely than not have adverse and substantial impacts on the current or future intended
7 uses of the Regional Parks and Trails System lands or facilities
- 8 • Are likely to have adverse and substantial impacts on lands that are officially recommended for
9 acquisition in an adopted policy plan

10 There is a strong case for intervention in situations where potentially adverse land uses are proposed
11 after a location for a Regional Parks and Trails System facility has been adopted by the Council in the
12 System Plan section of this policy plan. Local governments will be notified of any changes to the *2050*
13 *Regional Parks and Trails Policy Chapter* following Council adoption of the changes and will be given
14 nine months to bring local plans and ordinances into conformance with the Council's plan.

15 The Council will review local comprehensive plan amendments and environmental documents to
16 ensure that Regional Parks and Trails System locations and facilities are protected from land uses or
17 projects that represent substantial departures from the Regional Parks and Trails System Plan or are
18 likely to have a substantial impact on the Regional Parks and Trails System. For more information
19 about the Council's review methodology of comprehensive plans please refer to the Regional Parks
20 and Trails Planning Handbook.

21 Substantial departures from the Regional Parks and Trails System Plan or impacts on the Regional
22 Parks System may include, but are not limited to:

- 23 • Plans that do not acknowledge the presence of the Regional Parks or Trails System unit
- 24 • Projects that create safety issues for Regional Parks and Trails System users
- 25 • Projects that impair the use and enjoyment of the Regional Parks and Trails System unit due to
26 excessive noise, air pollution, or water pollution
- 27 • Projects that interfere with the operation and maintenance of the Regional Parks and Trails
28 System unit

29 Where appropriate, the Council will initiate or accept for initiation a metropolitan significance review of
30 specific projects if it is necessary to help protect the Regional Parks and Trails System. A project that is
31 consistent with a Council-approved local comprehensive plan is exempt from metropolitan significance
32 reviews for metropolitan system effects.

33 In accordance with the Council's *Imagine 2050* approach, increasing population densities in urban
34 areas is preferable to scattered developments throughout the rural and agricultural areas of the
35 metropolitan region. Increasing population densities adjacent to urban Regional Parks and Trails
36 System units is not a detriment to those units if the urban development is designed in ways that are
37 sensitive to areas that enjoy scenic views and the natural features of the Regional Parks and Trails
38 System unit, and do not interfere with the operation and maintenance of the unit. The Council will work

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1 cooperatively with local governments to help ensure urban development and land uses in areas
2 adjacent to Regional Parks System units occur in ways that preserve the integrity of the Regional Parks
3 System.

4 **System Protection – Action 2: Conversions**

5 ***Conversion of Regional Parks and Trails System lands to other uses is allowed only in***
6 ***limited circumstances and with approval of the Metropolitan Council.***

7 Park and trail land conversions are rare instances where competing conditions occur within regional
8 park and trail boundaries that require regional park or trail land to be used for something other than
9 parkland. An example of a land conversion is removing park land for a transportation interchange
10 improvement. Land conversions are challenging for the Regional Park Implementing Agency because
11 they are complex and often originate from reasons outside of the agency's parks department. The
12 Council reviews land conversion requests in relation to the regional park or trail's long-range plan; as
13 well as, for consistency with this land conversation action and other Council systems and policies.

14 Lands in the Regional Parks and Trails System will only be converted to other uses if approved by the
15 Metropolitan Council through an equally valuable land or facility exchange as defined below:

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

- 17 • Is contiguous to the Regional Parks and Trails System unit containing the land proposed to be
18 exchanged (within the same park/trail unit)
- 19 • Has comparable or better natural resource characteristics
- 20 • Could provide comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land being released from
21 the covenant

22 In exceptional circumstances, the Metropolitan Council may accept as equally valuable land the
23 addition of land to another unit of the Regional Parks and Trails System where:

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

28 **“Equally valuable facility”** is defined as an exchange of land for facilities when recreational benefits
29 and/or natural resource benefits are increased as a result of the exchange. For example, some land
30 within a regional trail corridor may be exchanged to widen a highway if a highway department
31 constructs a trail overpass or underpass of the widened road at no cost to the Regional Park
32 Implementing Agency.

33 The Metropolitan Council will consider conversion of regional park land to other uses only if the
34 conversion will not harm the Regional Parks System. Refer to the Regional Parks and Trails Planning
35 Handbook for park implementing agency land conversion criteria.

1 *Restrictive covenants*

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

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

- 10 • Council approved long-range plan continues to operate as planned after the improvement
- 11 • Proposed change does not change the above-ground use from regional recreation open space
12 nor does it adversely impact the quality or function of the natural area.

13 The Council reserves the right to determine if the magnitude of the conversion proposal warrants an
14 equally valuable exchange or a long-range plan amendment. Additionally, this provision does not
15 exempt the proposal of requirements from other funding sources.

16 **System Protection – Action 3: Telecommunication towers**

17 *Telecommunication towers will only be allowed in regional parks or reserves if there is*
18 *no alternative location and if mitigation efforts are made to minimize the impact on*
19 *Regional Parks and Trails System lands and users.*

20 The growth in wireless cellular and broadband systems and implementation of the regional public safety
21 radio system has resulted in requests that Regional Parks and Trails System land be leased for
22 antenna towers or that towers be located on or near Regional Parks System lands. Each of these radio
23 frequency communication systems relies on a grid placement of towers. Co-location of antennas on
24 fewer towers is not always possible, however, because the size of a particular grid varies from one
25 system to another. In addition, co-location of antennas on one tower may not be possible if it causes
26 frequency interference between the antennas. Federal laws allow local governments to regulate the
27 placement of towers as long as there is no ban preventing reasonable market access for that
28 communication system.

29 **System Protection – Action 4: Placement of utilities**

30 *Regional wastewater infrastructure and other utilities on Regional Parks and Trails*
31 *System lands should be placed in ways that minimize negative impacts on the regional*
32 *park, park reserve, special recreation feature, or regional trail, its facilities, and its*
33 *users.*

34 *Regional Wastewater Infrastructure*

35 To provide sanitary sewer services to Regional Parks and Trails System facilities and/or to implement
36 the regional wastewater system plan, the Council's Environmental Services Division will work

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1 cooperatively with Regional Park Implementing Agencies to locate regional wastewater conveyance
2 facilities on Regional Parks and Trails System lands in a manner that minimizes the impact on existing
3 and planned park system facilities and natural resources.

4 If the Council is maintaining regional wastewater infrastructure on existing Regional Parks and Trails
5 System land without an easement, the Council shall have the option to negotiate the terms of an
6 easement. For new Regional Parks and Trails System facilities, the Council reserves the option to
7 include an easement for a future regional wastewater infrastructure as a condition of a Council grant
8 used to acquire land, provided that the conveyance is consistent with the Council-approved long-range
9 plan.

10 *Other Utilities*

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

1 **Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions**

2 *Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy*

3 **Foster a sense of belonging by providing a wide spectrum of leisure and play**
4 **opportunities while connecting people, places, and the natural world.**

5 **Recreation, Facilities, and Programming – Action 1: Increase equity in programs,**
6 **activities, and places**

7 *Develop opportunities, programs, and spaces that strive to uplift community*
8 *connections to the outdoors while counteracting barriers and harm placed on*
9 *underrepresented communities found in the most recent visitor study.*

10 Below are examples on how to carry out Action 1. These are not requirements, but rather ideas that
11 emerged during recent community engagement, research, and implementing agency-Council
12 workgroups. They illustrate what our partnerships strive for in a changing region. A static list of eligible
13 activities no longer sufficiently encompasses the needs of our future parks and trails system. To remain
14 relevant and equitable, our system should continue to evolve.

15 Desired Outcome Examples:

- 16 • Honor cultural considerations across diverse communities in our regional system
 - 17 ○ Continue engaging across all communities of color around their specific and personal
 - 18 cultural connections to parks and trails.
 - 19 ○ Remove barriers to Indigenous cultural activities within parks and trails.
 - 20 ▪ Provide access to sacred sites.
 - 21 ▪ Strive to support Indigenous ceremonies in welcoming, private, and
 - 22 obtainable ways.
 - 23 ▪ Provide foraging opportunities for traditional cultural practice.
 - 24 • One participant from the Environmental Justice Task Force Engagement
 - 25 workshop (2023) stated, “There is not agreement in the Native community
 - 26 of how ceremonies should occur on public land, because we don’t want
 - 27 non-Native people to have access to the ceremonies. Could we make it
 - 28 so that Native communities can get permits for exclusive access to public
 - 29 spaces for a day to engage in prayer and ceremony?”
 - 30 ○ Recognize the historic exclusion of Indigenous and Tribal groups from parks and trail
 - 31 systems, educate parks and trails staff and decision makers to center Indigenous
 - 32 communities in parks and trails management.
 - 33 ○ Amplify Indigenous perspectives through programming and interpretation.
 - 34 ○ Prioritize the development and use of accurate and inclusive historical and cultural
 - 35 information.
- 36 • Equitable Infrastructure:
 - 37 ○ Use universal design park and trail facility designs.
 - 38 ○ Create gender neutral bathrooms.
 - 39 ▪ During the [*LGBTQ+ Perspectives on Parks Focus Group \(2023\)*](#), participants
 - 40 stated that having access to restrooms, specifically gender-neutral restrooms in

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1 the parks is important for making people feel more secure. Particularly, making
2 sure that park patrons have access to detailed information to comfortably plan
3 their outing into parks and trails. This is particularly important for individuals with
4 ADHD, OCD, and other neurodivergent conditions.

- 5 • "I will never go to the bathroom on a trail. And guess what? I probably
6 won't ever go portaging." - Trans man, Focus Group Participant
- 7 ○ Ensure bathrooms with running water are available throughout regional parks and trails
8 system.
- 9 ○ Trails have more benches and improved lighting.
- 10 • Enhance wayfinding across the Regional Park System, making it easier for visitors to navigate
11 within and across systems. This includes information that is accessible to blind and low-vision
12 visitors.
- 13 • Create design practices that increase equity and inclusion, reflect the diversity of our region's
14 cultures and ethnicities, and promote social cohesion:
 - 15 ○ Create signs that use Indigenized and non-Western design elements developed in
16 consultation with Indigenous people, youth, and historically excluded communities.
 - 17 ○ Invite artists into park design to emphasize the importance of cultural and racial
18 representation in the Regional Parks System. For an example, see the Ramsey County
19 and Metropolitan Council partnership project that invited five artists representing different
20 racial and ethnic backgrounds to develop art that creates a sense of belonging for all
21 and advances racial equity and inclusion: [https://www.ramseycounty.us/content/parks-
22 recreation-unveils-new-park-signage](https://www.ramseycounty.us/content/parks-recreation-unveils-new-park-signage).
- 23 • Develop park programming in partnership with affinity groups centering safety and belonging.
 - 24 ○ Affinity groups are invitational spaces that provide safety for individuals that have been
25 historically excluded such as LGBTQ+ or BIPOC communities
 - 26 ○ Affinity groups are an integral strategy in the Regional Parks System, such as programs
27 developed exclusively for children or women. Develop programs that are specifically
28 geared to LGBTQ+ or BIPOC as an effective strategy to prioritize equity and belonging
29 in our system.
 - 30 ▪ The findings from the *LGBTQ+ Perspectives on Parks Focus Group (2023)*
31 recommend creating more affinity groups across the region. This approach
32 increases a sense of connection, belonging, and safety for LGBTQ+ park users.
33 [https://arcgis.metc.state.mn.us/portal/apps/storymaps/stories/b04219513382444
34 29d643021412934f0](https://arcgis.metc.state.mn.us/portal/apps/storymaps/stories/b0421951338244429d643021412934f0)
- 35 • Use BIPOC media outlets to create awareness and spread the word about regional parks and
36 trails in communities of color.
 - 37 ○ Encourage new approaches that deliver information and marketing to BIPOC
38 communities, especially those that do not speak English.
- 39 • Hire more diverse staff and intentionally listening to them for insights and guidance on how to
40 increase welcoming and belonging:
 - 41 ○ Encourage opportunities for support, innovation, and growth among BIPOC staff.
 - 42 ○ Involve youth as leaders and decision-makers.

1 **Recreation, Facilities, and Programming – Action 2: Build the relationship between**
2 **people and natural systems**

3 *Support the conservation and restoration of natural systems, alongside leisure, play,*
4 *and creative opportunities in ways that connect people to each other and the outdoors.*

5 The Regional Parks and Trails System is made up of many unique natural spaces that serve a wide
6 variety of needs and desires for visitors and the environment. Below are some examples of ways to
7 advance this policy’s desired outcome.

8 Desired Outcome Examples:

- 9 • Our Regional Parks and Trails System is made up of a wide array of unique and complementary
10 opportunities.
 - 11 ○ Not all parks and trails need to encompass the same activities, facilities, or natural
12 areas.
 - 13 ○ Encourage place-based appropriateness.
 - 14 ▪ Example: Turning underutilized parking lot into a pop-up skatepark (picture here
15 of MPRB’s site Bde Maka Ska.)
 - 16 ○ Provide a geographic balance of activities and protection systemwide.
- 17 • Stacked functions are the future:
 - 18 ○ Nature and people can share spaces.
 - 19 ○ Flexible spaces that support a variety of activities.
 - 20 ○ Examples:
 - 21 ▪ Open, grass fields in a floodplain provide space for games, fun, and water
22 storage.
 - 23 ▪ Pop-up programming.
 - 24 ▪ Plant forests of fruits and nuts for foraging.
 - 25 ▪ Community gardens.
 - 26 ▪ Reuse of hard surfaces for skate parks or pop-up programming,
 - 27 ▪ Culturally specific programs or facilities to meet shifting demographic needs.
- 28 • Programing is key to connecting:
 - 29 ○ Support and provide leisure, educational, and programming opportunities that recognize
30 the way people interact with our system.
 - 31 ○ Prioritize, including through programmatic language, activities that are more
32 contemplative, restful, socially or spiritually-focused, or non-equipment based.
 - 33 ▪ A participant from an English as a Second Language Focus Group (2023) stated
34 this value as follows: “I like when you [are] walking on the trail. You are alone,
35 you can relax. I want trails to be places where people can come to relax. Making
36 sure there are areas for activities where people to go, but also making sure that
37 people can be alone in nature.”
 - 38 ○ Support recreation activities that resonate with communities of color and age groups that
39 have not been well served in the past, such as teenagers.
 - 40 ○ Hire more diverse programming staff that reflect the community
- 41 • Moving from protecting to restoring:
 - 42 ○ Invite park and trail visitors to learn more about the natural world through story-telling,
43 educational opportunities, and other programming.

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- 1 ○ Increase understanding of the role parks and trails play in creating a resilient natural
2 environment
- 3 ▪ Examples: Heat island mitigation, water storage, carbon capture.
- 4 ○ Incorporating indigenous practices
- 5 ▪ Examples: Reintroducing bison, using prescribed fire on the landscape, and
6 promoting foraging.
- 7 ○ Improving storytelling around how parks increase our region’s climate resilience

8 The following two Minnesota State Statutes are foundational for defining the role of the Regional Parks
9 and Trails System in our region:

- 10 • Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147 requires the Council to prepare a policy plan that “...shall
11 identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of
12 regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which,
13 together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of
14 the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development.”
- 15 • Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subd. 14 defines regional recreation open space as
16 “...land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities determined by the Council to be of
17 regional importance in providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the
18 metropolitan area, including but not limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large
19 recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use facilities.”

20 Based on this legislative direction and definition of “regional recreation open space,” the activities and
21 facilities in the Regional Parks and Trails System should align with the Regional Parks and Trails vision,
22 mission, and values listed in Section One *and* meet criteria below:

- 23 • All proposed activities and facilities for regional parks and trails should be consistent with the
24 community engagement findings of the Agency-led long-range planning processes.
- 25 • Serve a regional audience.
- 26 • Should not duplicate neighborhood parks and trails systems.
- 27 • Should connect and support the system’s nature-based foundation.
- 28 • Be compatible with the other uses and activities, minimize user conflicts, and preserve user
29 experiences.
- 30 • Are consistent with the expectations of the Council’s review and approval process.
- 31 • Enterprise facilities, including regional park concessioners, may operate within the Regional
32 Parks and Trails System if consistent with the rules of the Regional Park Implementing
33 Agencies. There are several types of enterprise-fund facilities. Some are expected to generate
34 sufficient revenues to pay their own costs, while others require some level of public subsidy to
35 exist.
- 36 • Off-road vehicle areas are not eligible for regional funding (ATV, Off-Road Motorcycle, and 4X4
37 Truck opportunities), as the Minnesota DNR provides and supports these opportunities.

38 When the Regional Parks and Trails System was established in 1974, it included existing parks that
39 had activities not considered eligible for regional funding. These include:

- 40 ○ Formal ball fields, diamonds, and organized athletic complexes.
- 41 ○ Tennis courts.

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- 1 ○ Golf facilities.
- 2 ○ Amateur athletic facilities.

3 These activities remain ineligible for regional funding, as they more closely align with the
4 responsibilities of local jurisdictions. Additional funding criteria can be referenced in the Planning
5 Handbook.

6 **Recreation, Facilities, and Programming – Action 3: Establish and broaden cross-sector** 7 **opportunities**

8 *Provide a wide spectrum of connections and partnerships in the outdoors through*
9 *recreation, arts, programming, transit, public health, education, stewardship, and*
10 *community.*

11 Parks and trails have a large capacity to support community through a broad array of partnerships
12 around the region. Parks play an important role in our physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and mental
13 health. Their value goes beyond solely existing as acres of land but they bring deep importance to
14 people’s quality of life. They are an important tool to combat America’s loneliness epidemic as they
15 provide spaces for community connections and well-being. Expanding and strengthening our cross-
16 sector partnerships will increase parks and trails impacts and open new revenue streams and
17 imagination for what is possible in parks and trails. Below are ideas around innovation suggested
18 through engagement, research, and agency collaboration.

19 Desired Outcomes Examples:

- 20 • Promote parks and trails to play an important role in sustaining mental and physical health.
 - 21 ○ Shape nature-based programs to increase human connections and combat loneliness.
 - 22 ○ Design quiet spaces for spiritual connections, creating sense of awe in nature.
 - 23 ○ Create places and programming for multigenerational play.
 - 24 ○ Partner with public health departments to co-create and fund mental health
 - 25 programming.
 - 26 ○ Use social media as a promotional tool. For example:
 - 27 ■ St. Paul Parks hosts “Mental Health Mondays”, posts that highlight how nature
 - 28 can increase health and happiness.
- 29 • Promote our transportation system as a viable way to connect people to parks and trails.
 - 30 ○ Prioritize public transportation to nature in partnership with Metro Transit
 - 31 ○ Strengthen active transportation connections to parks and trails with improved biking and
 - 32 walking access.
 - 33 ○ Create better maps and signage to highlight the transit and trail connections.
- 34 • Use arts and culture to bring people to parks and trails and enhance belonging.
 - 35 ○ Find ways for parks and trails to honor, hire, and pay more artists to bring people to
 - 36 parks for music, dance, festivals, and more.
- 37 • Inventory current memorials in parks and trails and clarify whose history is being told. Hire
38 artists to imagine new ways of telling broader and more inclusive histories.
 - 39 ○ For example, support projects like Cloud Man Village at Bde Maka Ska, including Dakota
 - 40 language stamps.

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- 1 • Encourage agencies to make art and culture plans, to examine how to use existing and new art
2 to better connect people to the outdoors.
 - 3 ▪ Explore new funding sources for art.
- 4 • Support programming to increase visitation, visibility, and connection to parks and trails. Fund
5 programs and programmers to dream big in cross-sector ways.
 - 6 ○ Create environmental education programming as a way to connect the next generation
7 to parks and trails, creating the future stewards of the system.
 - 8 ○ Continue to grow stewardship programs to connect community to parks through actively
9 caring for them and allowing deeper relationships and love for these spaces.

10 **Recreation, Facilities, and Programming – Action 4: Raising awareness of Regional** 11 **Parks and Trails System**

12 *Expand how we connect people to parks and trails with a focus on underrepresented* 13 *communities through intentional outreach.*

14 The Regional Parks and Trails System is a vast and unique system that stretches across the Twin
15 Cities region, and yet many residents do not know it exists. Creating outreach initiatives that invite
16 communities, especially those that have been excluded from the benefits of the system in the past, is a
17 pivotal step to creating a more equitable region. For example, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation
18 Board found that Black communities living near Theodore Wirth Regional Park do not experience the
19 benefits as compared to other communities, even though the Black communities live just blocks away.
20 As our region's racial diversity grows, the Regional Parks and Trails System should experiment and
21 collaborate on ways to genuinely and effectively raise awareness, particularly among underrepresented
22 communities.

23 **Desired Outcome Examples:**

- 24 • Support, create, and provide space for affinity groups and affinity-focused programming to
25 continue growing connections between agencies and communities.
 - 26 ○ Regional Park Implementing Agencies continue to grow genuine relationships and
27 financially support the knowledge, expertise, and lived experience that affinity groups are
28 bringing to our system.
 - 29 ○ Find more ways to support affinity groups whose mission is to build trust and bring
30 disenfranchised groups to parks and trails. Find creative ways to financially support
31 these groups and expand this work.
 - 32 ○ Create more programs focused on specific communities.
 - 33 ▪ For example, find ways to support programming for BIPOC and LGBTQ+
34 communities, as part of regular programming efforts.
- 35 • Build trust and relationships with communities of color, especially community leaders of color.
- 36 • Develop intentional communication strategies and marketing materials that center racial justice
37 and demonstrate sensitivity to overburdened communities.
- 38 • Promote programming that increases awareness of opportunities and creates welcoming
39 spaces.
 - 40 ○ Hire staff that reflect the racial make-up of desired audiences.
 - 41 ○ Provide staff cultural competency training.

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- 1 ○ The details of programming matters. Consult community members on matters of
- 2 program times, costs, and other factors to ensure that programs are accessible.
- 3 ○ Ensure that programs and engagement are done in ways that demonstrate respect and
- 4 appreciation. Avoid transactional, one-time interactions.
- 5 • Art amplifies awareness. Hire artists that look like the community members Agencies are trying
- 6 to better serve.
- 7 ○ Incorporate non-western design practices into art and culture in regional parks.

8 **Recreation, Facilities, and Programming – Action 5: Trail System Coordination**

9 ***Bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be coordinated between the Regional Parks and***
10 ***Trails System and the transportation system.***

11 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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

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

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

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

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

36 With respect to bicycling, regional trails serve:

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- 1 • Pre-teen bicyclists who are often accompanied by a parent and need access to local schools,
2 libraries, recreation facilities, shopping, and neighborhoods. These bicyclists have a strong
3 preference for separation from motor vehicles on protected bikeways and trails.
- 4 • Adult and teenage bicyclists who may ride regularly for transportation but prefer comfortable
5 access by a direct route on lower-speed or low-traffic streets. These bicyclists are more
6 comfortable on designated bikeways such as roadway-adjacent or independent trails.
- 7 • Bicyclists who are willing to travel along most roadways but prefer the more natural
8 surroundings that regional trails can offer. They value direct access to destinations and can ride
9 at higher speeds than average cyclists. This group will often rely on roads for transportation but
10 will use trails when they are direct and enjoyable.
- 11 • Highly experienced bicyclists who want direct access to destinations at maximum speed with
12 minimum delays. These bicyclists primarily rely on the road system for routes, and value using
13 roads like other vehicles for commuting, but occasionally enjoy independent trails if they are
14 relatively continuous and not overly crowded.

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

22 *Regional Bicycle Transportation Network*

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

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

40 Figure 7-1 shows the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network.

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

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

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

12 For more information on the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, please refer to the
13 Transportation Chapter of *Imagine 2050*.

14 *Relationship to Other Technical Guidance*

15 The *2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan* should be used in conjunction with the current versions
16 of the *MnDOT Bikeway Facility Design Manual* and DNR's *Trail Planning, Design, and Development*
17 *Guidelines*.

18

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

20 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan*

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

22 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan*

1 **Section Eight: Finance Policy and Actions**

2 *Finance Policy*

3 **Administer and provide financial oversight of the state and regional funding to**
4 **the ten Regional Park Implementing Agencies in support of the regional parks**
5 **and trails system.**

6 **Finance – Action 1: Regional and State Bonds Funding Formula**

7 *Regional Parks Bonding Program Funding will be distributed based on a defined*
8 *formula.*

9 Since 2008, the Metropolitan Council has used a formula to determine how much of the state
10 and regional bonds would be allocated to each Regional Park Implementing Agency. The
11 formula balances two factors:

- 12 • The population within the jurisdiction of each park implementing agency compared to the
13 region's total population. (This factor is weighted 70%)
- 14 • The number of visits a Regional Park Implementing Agency hosted from people who live
15 outside the agency's jurisdiction (non-local visits — This factor is weighted 30%.)

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

20 **Finance – Action 2: Equity considerations**

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

22 *Thrive MSP 2040* committed the Council to strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and
23 trails by all our region's residents, such as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin,
24 and ability. To honor this commitment, the Council created and implemented the Regional Parks
25 and Trails System Equity Grant Program in 2019 with a pilot program using Council bonds, and
26 then dedicated additional funding for the 2021 and 2024 grant cycles by using Parks Interest
27 Earnings to fund programming and non-capital projects.

28 Using Council bonds and other available funding, such as Parks Interest Earnings, the Council
29 will continue to fund and administer an equity grant program for projects explicitly aimed to
30 strengthen equitable usage of the Regional Parks and Trails System. The Council will work in
31 close collaboration with Regional Park Implementing Agencies, Metropolitan Parks and Open
32 Space Commissioners, Community Development Committee members, and other partners to
33 refine criteria and measures for each cycle of awarding grants to Regional Park Implementing
34 Agencies for projects aimed to strengthen equitable use.

1 **Finance – Action 3: Transit corridors**

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

5 Regional Parks System funds should only be used to acquire or develop a corridor identified for
6 future transit use in a Council-approved transit implementation plan when there is a guarantee
7 that the trail facility will be operational for its useful design life, as negotiated by the transit
8 provider and the Regional Park Implementing Agency. As defined by the Federal Highway
9 Administration, the useful design life of a trail is 10 years or more. In cases where trail
10 recreation is to be a permanent partner with transitways, within the corridor, Regional Parks
11 System funds will be used only for that part of acquisition and development attributable to trail
12 use.

13 **Finance – Action 4: Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund**

14 *The Council will use the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund to help fund the*
15 *acquisition of Regional Parks and Trails land.*

16 In 2001, the Council established the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program to assist
17 Regional Park Implementing Agencies in acquiring land for the Regional Parks System.

18 The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund consists of two accounts:

- 19 • The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund acquisition account, which is
20 financed with 60% state appropriations from the Environment and Natural Resources
21 Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota
22 Resources. The remaining 40% of the account is financed with Council funds.
- 23 • The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund acquisition account, which is financed with 60%
24 Parks and Trails Fund appropriations from the Land and Legacy Amendment. The
25 remaining 40% is financed with Council bonds.

26 The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant may finance up to 75% of the costs to acquire land
27 and related costs, up to \$2 million from the Parks and Trails Legacy and Council bonds account,
28 and up to \$3 million from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund and Council
29 bonds account, for each state fiscal year (July 1 to June 30). The Regional Park Implementing
30 Agency must finance at least 25% of the acquisition costs as a local match to the Park
31 Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant.

32 **Finance – Action 5: Other funding**

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

35 The Council will seek continued state funding for acquisition, development, rehabilitation,
36 programming, and restoration and management of natural resources for all components in the

Section Eight: Finance Policy and Actions

1 Regional Parks System. In partnership with the 10 Regional Park Implementing Agencies and
2 partners, the Council will pursue other sources of funding where appropriate for the benefit of
3 the entire Regional Parks System. The Regional Parks System has been funded through a
4 combination of state and local funding sources over the last 40 years.

5 The Council will work to assist agencies and provide information for funding opportunities
6 through the Council's Regional Solicitation and any other potential future Council grant program
7 funding opportunities and/or federal funding opportunities.

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

10 **Finance – Action 6: Regional Funding Commitment**

11 ***The Council will actively analyze its regional funding budget strategy and pursue***
12 ***increasing regional funding commitment for the system wherever possible.***

13 The Council will continue to provide funding for the regional system through statutorily required
14 match to state funds. The Council will also continue to allocate funds to the Equity Grant
15 Program. In addition, the Council is committed to examining the current capital improvement
16 program (CIP) strategy to explore opportunities and flexibility in providing additional funds to the
17 regional system within the current \$40 million bonding cap, as outlined in Minnesota Statute
18 473.325. The Council will also continue to pursue legislative initiatives that would provide
19 increased flexibility in raising funds for the regional system, in addition to the authorization to
20 issue bonds.

21 **Finance – Statutory Requirements: Distribution of funds**

22 ***Funds will be granted only to Regional Park Implementing Agencies.***

23 Any funds provided by or through the Council for the Regional Parks System will be granted
24 only to Regional Park Implementing Agencies for projects consistent with Council-approved
25 long-range plans, capital improvement programs, or state law. As previously noted in Chapter 2,
26 and defined by Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351, the Regional Park Implementing Agencies
27 are:

- 28 • Anoka County
- 29 • City of Bloomington
- 30 • Carver County
- 31 • Dakota County
- 32 • Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- 33 • Ramsey County
- 34 • City of Saint Paul
- 35 • Scott County

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- 1 • Three Rivers Park District
- 2 • Washington County

3 **Finance – Statutory Requirements: Regional and State Bond Funds**

4 ***Bond funds are used for acquisition, development, redevelopment, and natural***
5 ***resource restoration within Regional Parks System units.***

6 Capital projects proposed for funding must be consistent with a Council-approved long-range
7 plan. Projects proposed by each Regional Park Implementing Agency are prioritized by that
8 agency. Each Regional Park Implementing Agency has unique capital needs, which that agency
9 can best determine.

10 ***Regional and State Bond Funds***

11 State bonds have been appropriated to the Council since 1976 to help finance the Regional
12 Parks System’s capital plans. Since 1994, the Council has financed the parks capital plans with
13 a combination of state bonds and Council bonds; the Council matches every \$3 of state bonds
14 with \$2 of Council funds. The premise for this mix of state and regional bonds is that people who
15 live outside the seven-county metropolitan region visit and use the Regional Parks System and
16 should therefore help finance its capital costs. Taxes collected statewide and within the region
17 to pay off the bond debt are proportional to the share of visits to the park system made by
18 people living within the region, and those who live outside the region. Minnesota Statutes,
19 section 473.325 allows the Council to issue general obligation bonds for the acquisition and
20 betterment of the Regional Parks System. No more than \$40 million of bond debt can be
21 outstanding at any point in time.

22 **Finance – Statutory Requirements: Capital Improvement Plan**

23 ***Capital Improvement Plan***

24 As directed by Minnesota Statute 473.147, subd. 1, the regional parks policy plan must include
25 a five-year capital improvement plan (Table 8-1). These figures are subject to change based
26 upon legislative action. The projections are provided by the Agencies in their plans and are
27 based on their current estimate of funding levels.

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

29 ***To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content***

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

Section Eight: Finance Policy and Actions

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

1

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

2

3 Finance – Statutory Requirements: Operation and Maintenance

4 *The Council will distribute Operation and Maintenance appropriations to* 5 *agencies.*

6 Regional Park Implementing Agencies raise funds to finance the costs to operate and maintain
7 their portion of the Regional Parks System through the following sources:

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

13 In 1985, legislation was enacted that allowed state appropriations from the general fund to be
14 disbursed to Regional Park Implementing Agencies to supplement funding for operating and
15 maintaining their portion of the Regional Parks System (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351).

16 State appropriations for Regional Parks System operation and maintenance are distributed to
17 Regional Park Implementing Agencies according to the following formula:

- 18 • 40% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system visits
- 19 • 40% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system operation and
20 maintenance expenditures in the previous calendar year
- 21 • 20% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system acreage, with park
22 reserve resource management lands divided by four

23 In 2000, legislation was enacted that directed a portion of state lottery proceeds into a "natural
24 resources fund," with the stipulation that a portion of the receipts deposited "may be spent only

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1 on metropolitan park and trail grants.” This funding source is commonly called “lottery in lieu of
2 sales tax” revenue (Minnesota Statutes, section 297A.94(h)(3)). The Council disburses the
3 appropriations from these two sources to the Regional Park Implementing Agencies based on
4 the results of the formula contained in Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351).

5 **Finance – Statutory Requirements: Parks and Trails Legacy Funds**

6 ***Parks and Trails Legacy Funds spending must conform to the statewide Parks*** 7 ***and Trails Legacy Plan.***

8 In November 2008, Minnesota citizens approved a constitutional amendment, commonly called
9 the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. The amendment created a new 3/8ths cent
10 sales tax to be collected from July 2009-June 2034. Revenue from the sales tax is placed into
11 four dedicated accounts. One of those accounts is the Parks and Trails Fund, which may only
12 be used to support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance. These funds must
13 supplement, not substitute, traditional sources of funding. The Council is the fiscal agent
14 responsible for administering appropriations from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund to the
15 Regional Park Implementing Agencies. The Council will ensure Regional Park Implementing
16 Agencies spend the funds on projects that capture the strategic direction outlined in the Parks
17 and Trails Legacy Plan.

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

- 19 • Connect People and the Outdoors
 - 20 ○ Develop stewards of tomorrow through efforts to increase life-long participation in
 - 21 parks and trails
- 22 • Acquire Land, Create Opportunities
 - 23 ○ Create new and expanded opportunities to serve current and future users
- 24 • Take Care of What We Have
 - 25 ○ Provide safe, high-quality experiences through regular re-investment in
 - 26 infrastructure and natural resource management
- 27 • Coordinate among Partners
 - 28 ○ Enhance coordination among the network of public, private, and nonprofit park
 - 29 and trail partners

30 Legislation enacted in 2009 directs how money appropriated from the Parks and Trails Fund to
31 the Council is distributed to the Regional Park Implementing Agencies under a formula codified
32 in Minnesota Statute 85.53. The Council awards grants to the Regional Park Implementing
33 Agencies based on that formula:

- 34 • 45% based on the operation and maintenance formula in Minnesota Statutes 473.351,
35 provided in the section above
- 36 • 31.5% based on each agency’s proportion of the population of the region
- 37 • 13.5% based on each agency’s proportion of total non-local visits to the Regional Parks
38 System

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- 1 • 10% is allocated to land acquisition for the Regional Parks System
- 2

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1 **Finance – Statutory Requirements: Estimated Costs to Complete the System**

2 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

3 State law requires that the regional parks policy plan estimate the cost of the recommended
 4 acquisitions and development of the park system, including an analysis of what portion of the
 5 funding is proposed to come from the state and Council levies, and other local government units
 6 (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1). The following analysis is an estimate of funding
 7 required to complete the system.

8 The estimated cost to complete the existing Regional Parks System is \$2.1 billion, including
 9 \$486 million in acquisition costs and \$1.6 billion in development costs (Table 8-2).

10 *Table 8-2: Estimated Acquisition and Development Costs to Complete the Regional*
 11 *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

12 **Purpose and Use**

13 This estimate is intended to fulfill the state requirement for a metro-wide cost to complete the
 14 Regional Parks System. This is a high-level estimate that demonstrates the scope of the future
 15 development and acquisition plans for the system.

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

1 **Methodology**

2 The Council refined the approach from the 2020 update to use the most recent and available
3 data related to cost estimates within the Regional Parks and Trails System. The Council worked
4 with implementing agencies to identify and confirm the cost components, data sources,
5 assumptions and results.

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

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

11 **Acquisition Costs**

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

21 **Development Costs**

22 Development costs for parks and trails already in use or planned but not yet open to the public
23 were derived from cost estimates included in long range plans. The cost estimates included in
24 long range plans define the development needs specific to each unit. Cost estimates were
25 updated to current dollars using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Implementing agencies
26 provided an estimated percentage of completion for each park or trail unit. The inverse
27 percentage needed to complete the unit was applied to the long-range plan estimate to
28 calculate future development cost.

29 Development costs for search areas and corridors were estimated by respective implementing
30 agencies.

31 **Limitations**

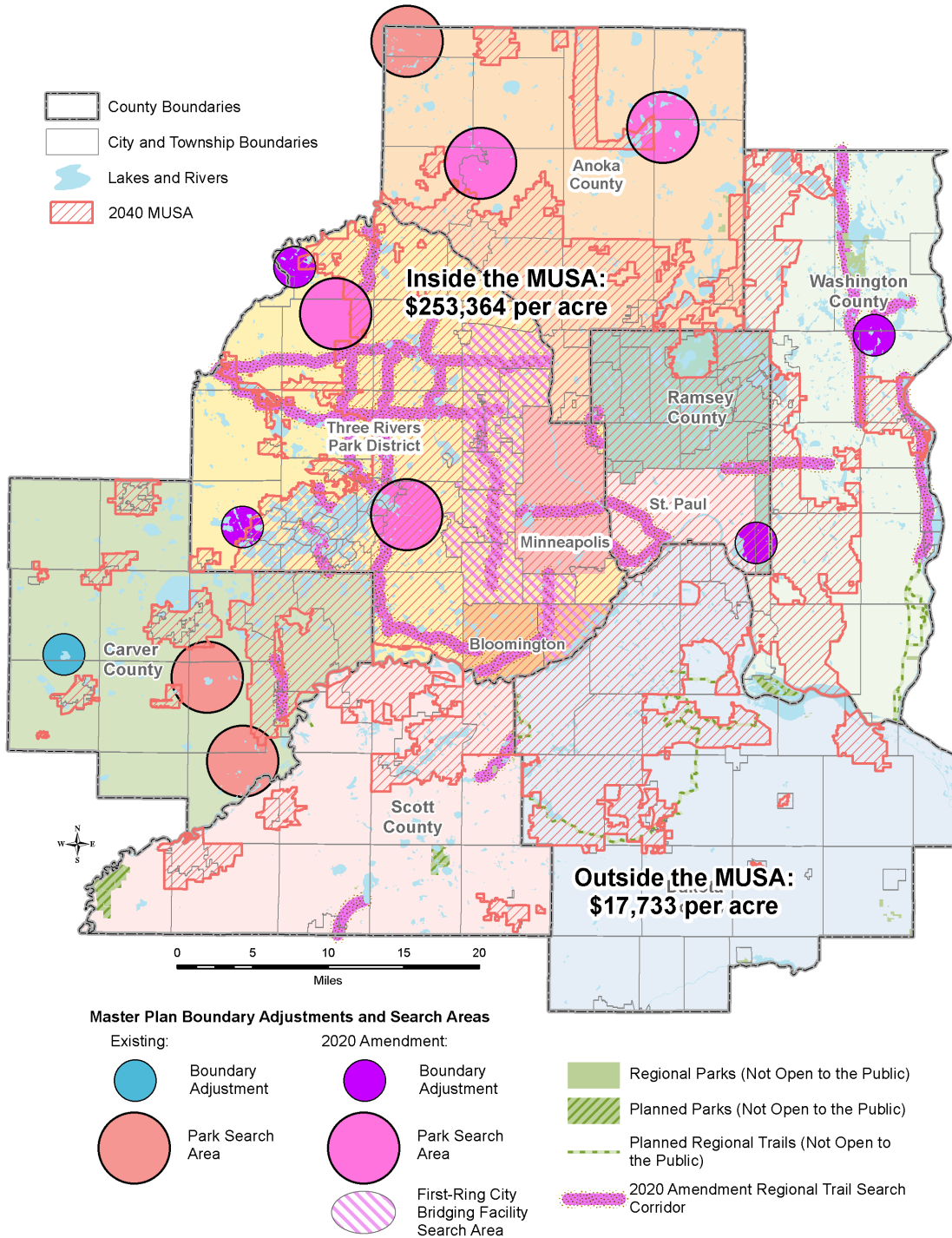
32 The estimate is intended for use only at a region-wide level Application to an individual project
33 or single implementing agency is inappropriate. Actual costs for individual projects will vary
34 depending on the location and complexity of each project. Refer to long-range plans, project
35 funding applications, and recent construction for more information on project costs. Lastly, this
36 calculation is completed with current cost estimates and market values. Factors such as

Section Eight: Finance Policy and Actions

1 changing long range plan timelines, inflation, and market drivers affect the actual cost of future
 2 development and acquisition.

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

5 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*



6

Section Eight: Finance Policy and Actions

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)*

9 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*

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 long-range 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) ^{b.c.}	4,365	N/A	N/A	\$123 million	\$120 million	\$243 million
Regional Trail Search Corridors (Figure 8-4) ^{b.c.}	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

10 Data Source:

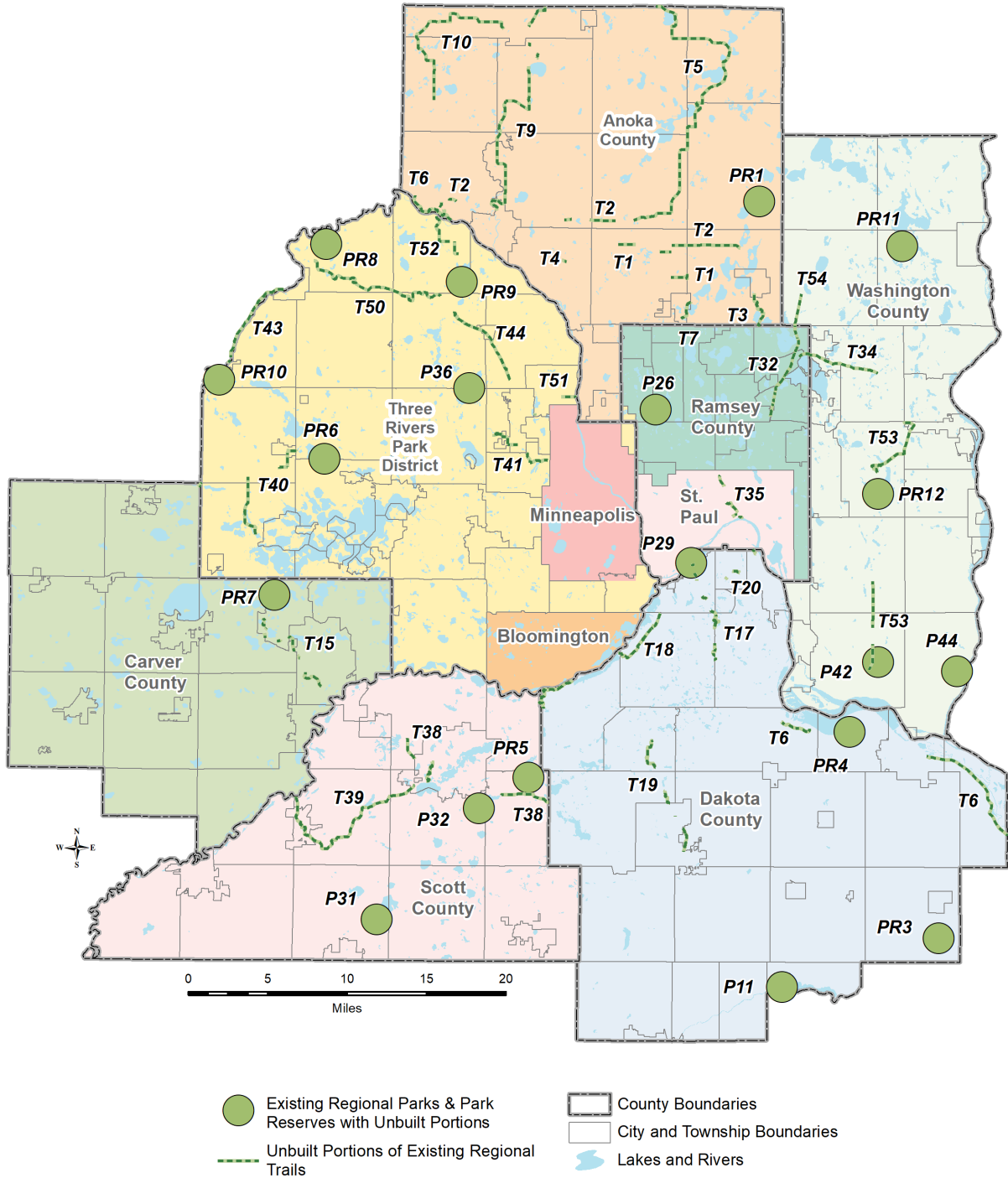
11 ^a Council approved long-range plans

12 ^b 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan (2018)

13 ^c Estimates from Regional Park Implementing Agencies

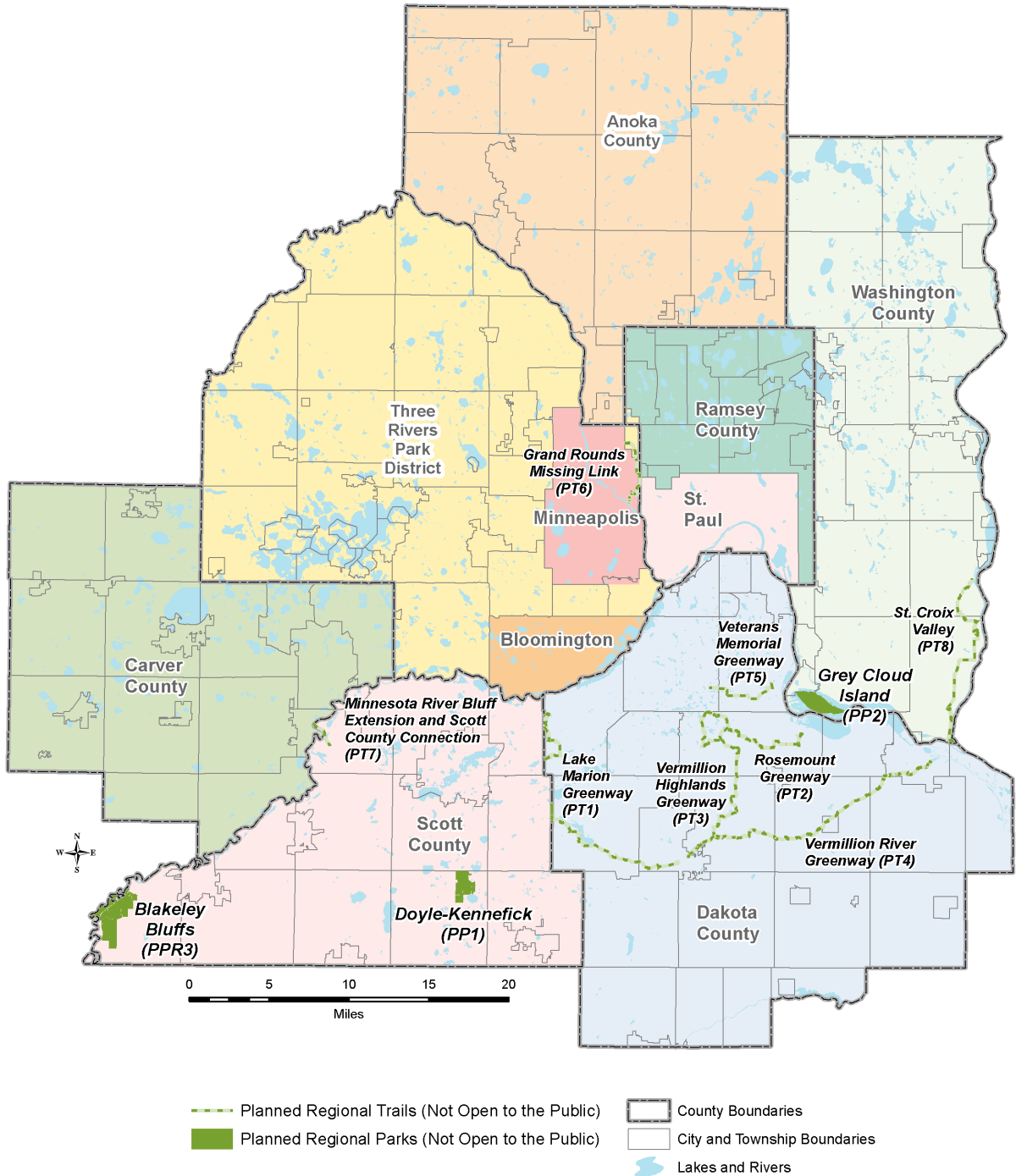
Section Eight: Finance Policy and Actions

- 1 *Figure 8-2: Unbuilt Portions of Existing Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special*
- 2 *Recreation Features, and Regional Trails –*
- 3 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; this is 2020 content*



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- 1 *Figure 8-3: Planned Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Recreation Features, and Regional Trails (Council-approved long-range plan, not yet open to the public)*
- 2 *Figure 8-3: Planned Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Recreation Features, and Regional Trails (Council-approved long-range plan, not yet open to the public)*
- 3 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; currently this is 2020 content*

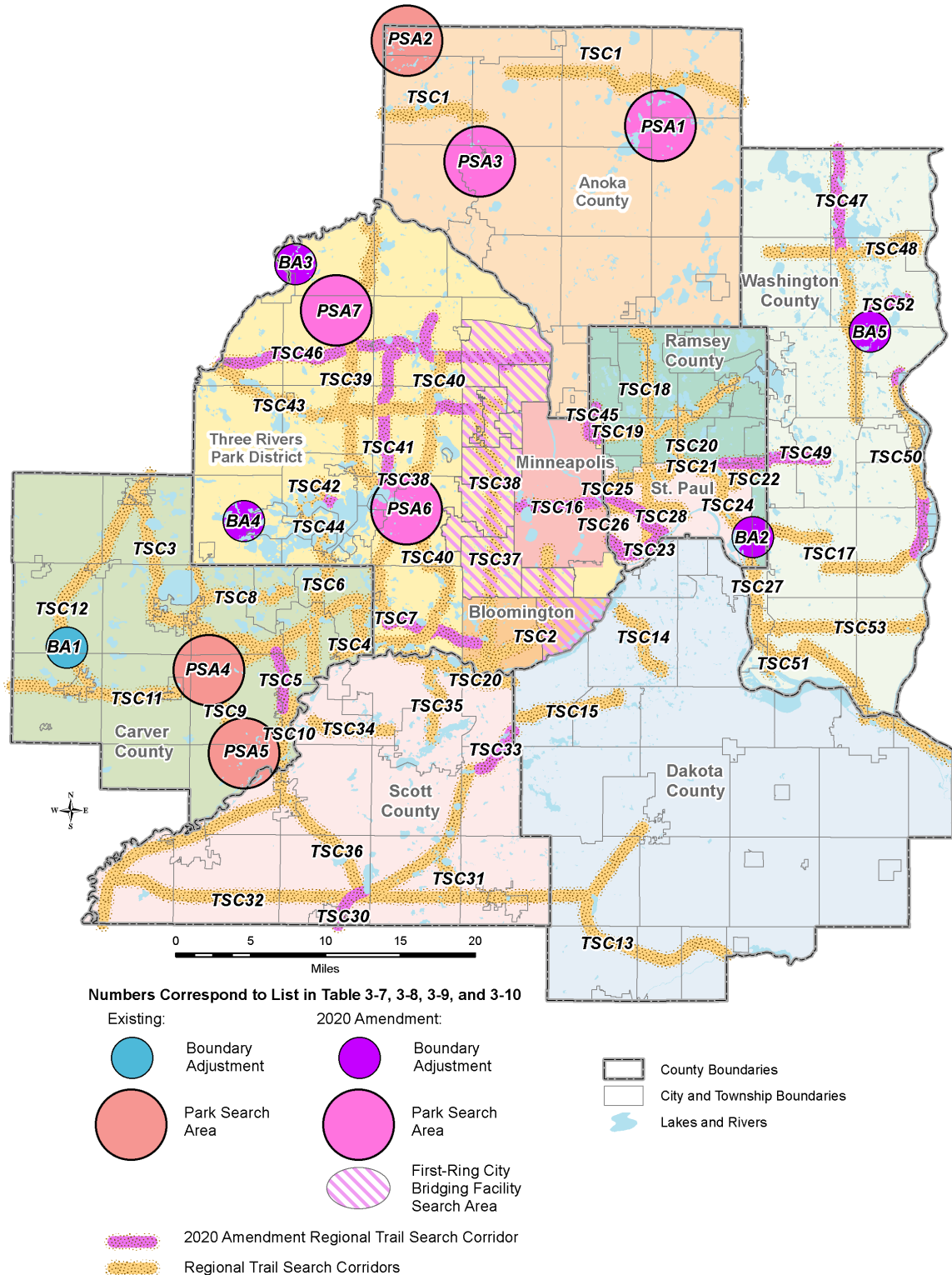


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Section Eight: Finance Policy and Actions

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

3 *To be updated for the 90% draft plan; currently this is 2020 content*



4

5

1 *Funding the System*

2 The Regional Parks System receives funding from local governments, State of Minnesota,
3 Metropolitan Council, the U.S government, and private donors. Since the Regional Parks
4 System was created in 1974, the Regional Parks System has received state bond funds that
5 were matched with Council funds. The state provides funds to earmarked projects, a portion of
6 Clean Water Land and Legacy Act Amendment funds and Environment and Natural Resource
7 Trust Fund dollars.

8

DRAFT

1 **Section Nine: 2025 – 2028 Workplan for the Regional Parks and Trails**
 2 **Policy 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
 6 implementation, particularly as we engage with the development of the 2050 metropolitan
 7 development guide. *{This workplan will be updated as the policy conversations continue*
 8 *throughout the public comment period, Summer 2024, ahead of plan adoption.}*

9 *Table 9-1: 2024 – 2028 Workplan for the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

Project	Timeframe	Location in Policy Plan
1. Develop a process to create a small set of indicators at the Objective level to measure progress toward our key Regional Park and Trail System priorities.	2025-26	Section 1
2. Determine how to use Regional Parks System interest earnings and amend appropriate policy documents as necessary	2025 and beyond	Section 8
3. Explore scoping and development of a system-wide Asset Preservation Plan, or similar.	2025-2028	Section 8
4. Continue to pursue Pay-Go for greater flexibility to fund a wider range of activities and programs.	2025-2028	Section 8
5. Explore changing/reducing the local match requirement for the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program, as state rules allow.	2025-2028	Section 8
6. Update the Regionally Significant Ecological Area priorities and dataset.	TBD	Sections 2 and 3.
7. Continue discussion of strategic funding for the Regional Parks System	2025-2028	Section 8, Actions 5-6
8. Implement the 2025 Regional Parks System Visitor Study	2024-26	Not included
9.		

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