

# DRAFT 2050 REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS POLICY PLAN

A CHAPTER OF THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT GUIDE, IMAGINE 2050



**IMAGINE**<sup>20</sup><sub>50</sub>  
parks policy plan

# A prosperous, equitable, and resilient region with abundant opportunities for all to live, work, play, and thrive.

## Regional core values

Equity | Leadership | Accountability | Stewardship

## Regional goals

### **Our region is equitable and inclusive**

Racial inequities and injustices experienced by historically marginalized communities have been eliminated; and all people feel welcome, included, and empowered.

### **Our communities are healthy and safe**

All our region's residents live healthy and rewarding lives with a sense of dignity and wellbeing.

### **Our region is dynamic and resilient**

Our region meets the opportunities and challenges faced by our communities and economy including issues of choice, access, and affordability.

### **We lead on addressing climate change**

We have mitigated greenhouse gas emissions and have adapted to ensure our communities and systems are resilient to climate impacts.

### **We protect and restore natural systems**

We protect, integrate, and restore natural systems to protect habitat and ensure a high quality of life for the people of our region.



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

The benefits of parks and trails have been extensively documented, positively contributing to human health and well-being.<sup>1</sup> Benefits to physical well-being include increased physical activity, reduced risk of various chronic illnesses, and obesity. Benefits to psychological well-being include stress reduction, attention restoration, and improved cognitive functioning. Social well-being benefits include increased social capital, family bonding, and social integration. Parks and open space also contribute many environmental benefits including water storage, reducing the effects of urban heat islands, conserving the diversity of flora and fauna in the region, and filtering the air we breathe.<sup>2</sup>

The Regional Parks and Trails System helps to keep the region at the top of national livability rankings. The Twin Cities area's 66 regional parks, park reserves, and special features, plus more than 457 miles of trails open to the public, showcase the unique landscapes of the region and provide year-round recreation. Residents have consistently singled out the region's parks, trails, and natural environment as the most attractive feature of the region. Drawing more than 69 million visits in 2022, the Regional Parks and Trails System provides access to natural space that contributes to physical and emotional well-being.

The Regional Parks and Trails System plays an important role addressing climate change in the region. Conserving, maintaining, and enhancing the Regional Parks and Trails System through proactive planning and asset management can increase the resilience of the region and reduce the impacts associated with climate change. Working with partners, the Met Council is committed to growing these ecological benefits, developing policies that build resilience within the system and across the region.

### *What is the Regional Parks and Trails System?*

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> M.P. White et al. (2020). Blue space, health and well-being: A narrative overview and synthesis of potential benefits. *Environmental Research*, 191, 1-14.

<sup>2</sup> Burrowes, K., Cohen, M., Gwan, P. (2022). The Health Benefits of Parks and their Economic Impacts. Urban Institute, 1-25.

1 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 • 52,519 acres protected
- 5 • 46 regional parks
- 6 • 12 park reserves
- 7 • Eight special features, such as the zoo and conservatory at Como Regional Park
- 8 • 56 regional trails, with 457 miles currently open to the public
- 9 • More than 69 million visits in 2023.

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

19 **Regional Parks** contain a diversity of natural features, either naturally occurring or restored,  
20 and are typically 200-500 acres in size. Regional parks accommodate a variety of outdoor  
21 recreation activities. In 2024, a total of 46 regional parks are open to the public.

22 **Park Reserves**, like regional parks, provide for a diversity of outdoor recreation activities. One  
23 major feature that distinguishes the park reserve from a regional park is its size. The minimum  
24 size for a park reserve is 1,000 acres. Additionally, regional park implementing agencies are  
25 required to manage at least 80% of the park reserve as natural lands that protect the ecological  
26 functions of the native landscape. As of 2024, a total of 12 park reserves were open to the  
27 public.

28 **Regional Trails** The Council has defined two major types of trails to serve the region:  
29 destination or greenway trails and linking trails. Destination or greenway trails typically follow  
30 along corridors with high-quality natural features that make the trail itself a destination. Linking  
31 trails are predominately intended to provide connections between various Regional Parks and  
32 Trails System units. As of 2024, 56 regional trails totaling approximately 457 miles were open  
33 for public use.

34 **Special Features** provide opportunities not generally found in the regional parks, park reserves,  
35 or trail corridors. Special features often require a unique managing or programming effort. As of  
36 2024, there are eight special features open to the public.

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

## 2 *Regional Parks and Trails System management structure*

3 The organizational structure of the Regional Parks and Trails System is built upon a strong partnership  
4 between the Met Council and ten governmental agencies that include cities, counties, and special park  
5 districts. While each agency has a role in the Regional Parks and Trails System, collaboration is its  
6 cornerstone and strength.

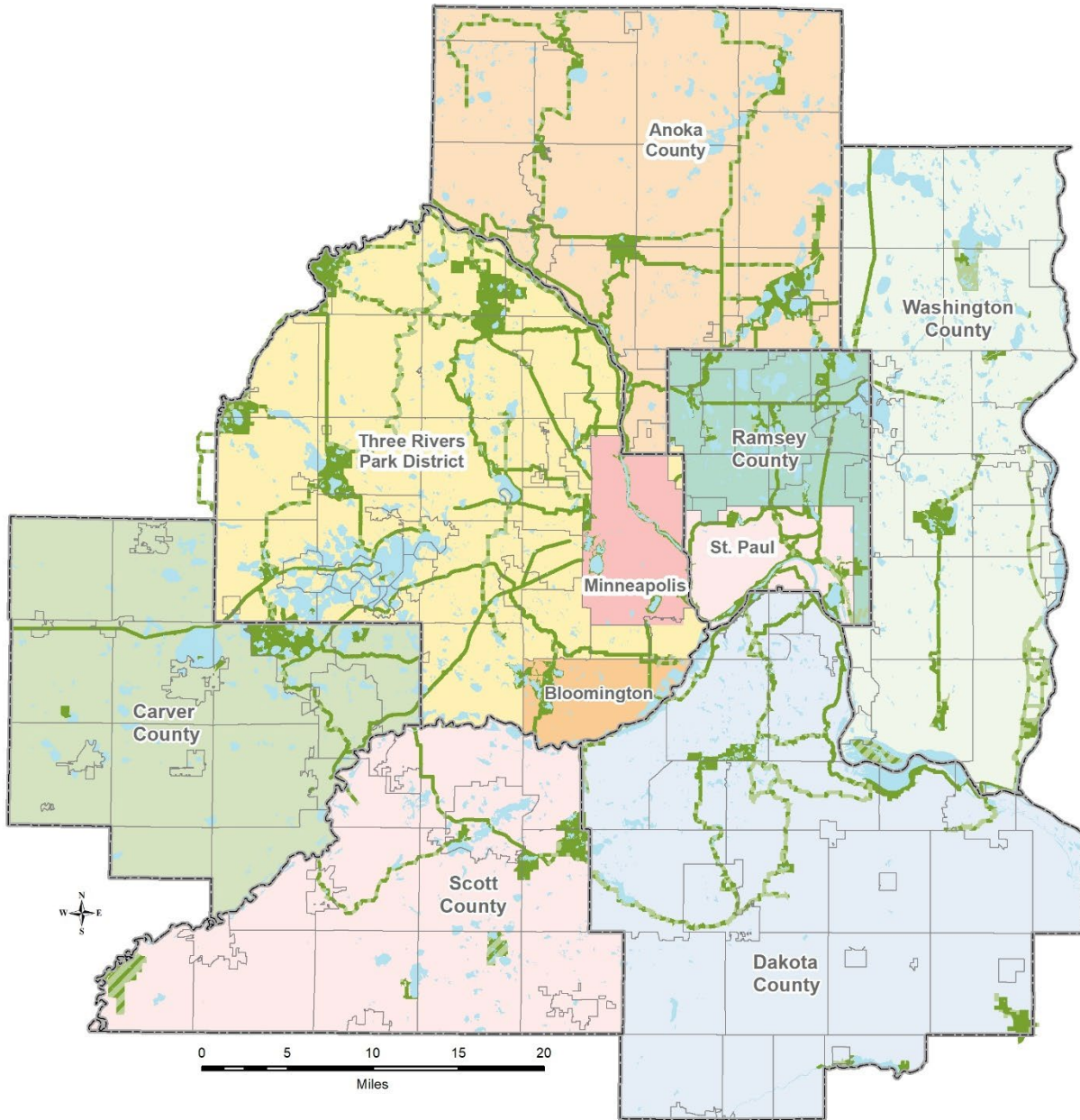
### 7 **The role of regional park implementing agencies**

8 Cities, counties, and special park districts own and operate regional parks and trails (Minn. Stat.  
9 473.351, subd. 1(a)). Once a park or trail becomes part of the Regional Parks and Trails System, the  
10 Council supports it with coordinated regional planning, funding, system protection, research,  
11 information, marketing, and advocacy. The agency partners that own and operate the Regional Parks  
12 and Trails System are called regional park implementing agencies. Figure 1-1 shows a map of the  
13 regional park implementing agency jurisdictions.

14 The regional park implementing agencies are:

- 15 • Anoka County
- 16 • City of Bloomington
- 17 • Carver County
- 18 • Dakota County
- 19 • Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- 20 • Ramsey County
- 21 • City of Saint Paul
- 22 • Scott County
- 23 • Three Rivers Park District
- 24 • Washington County

1 Figure 1-1. Regional park implementing agencies



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

2



1 **Role of the Metropolitan Council**

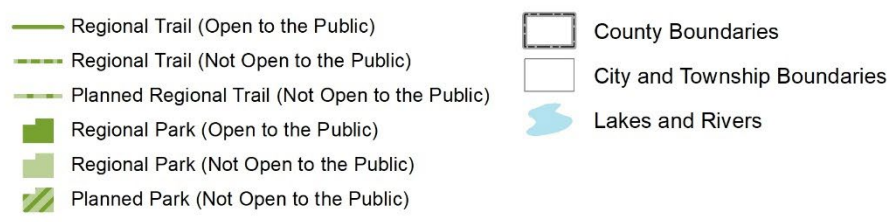
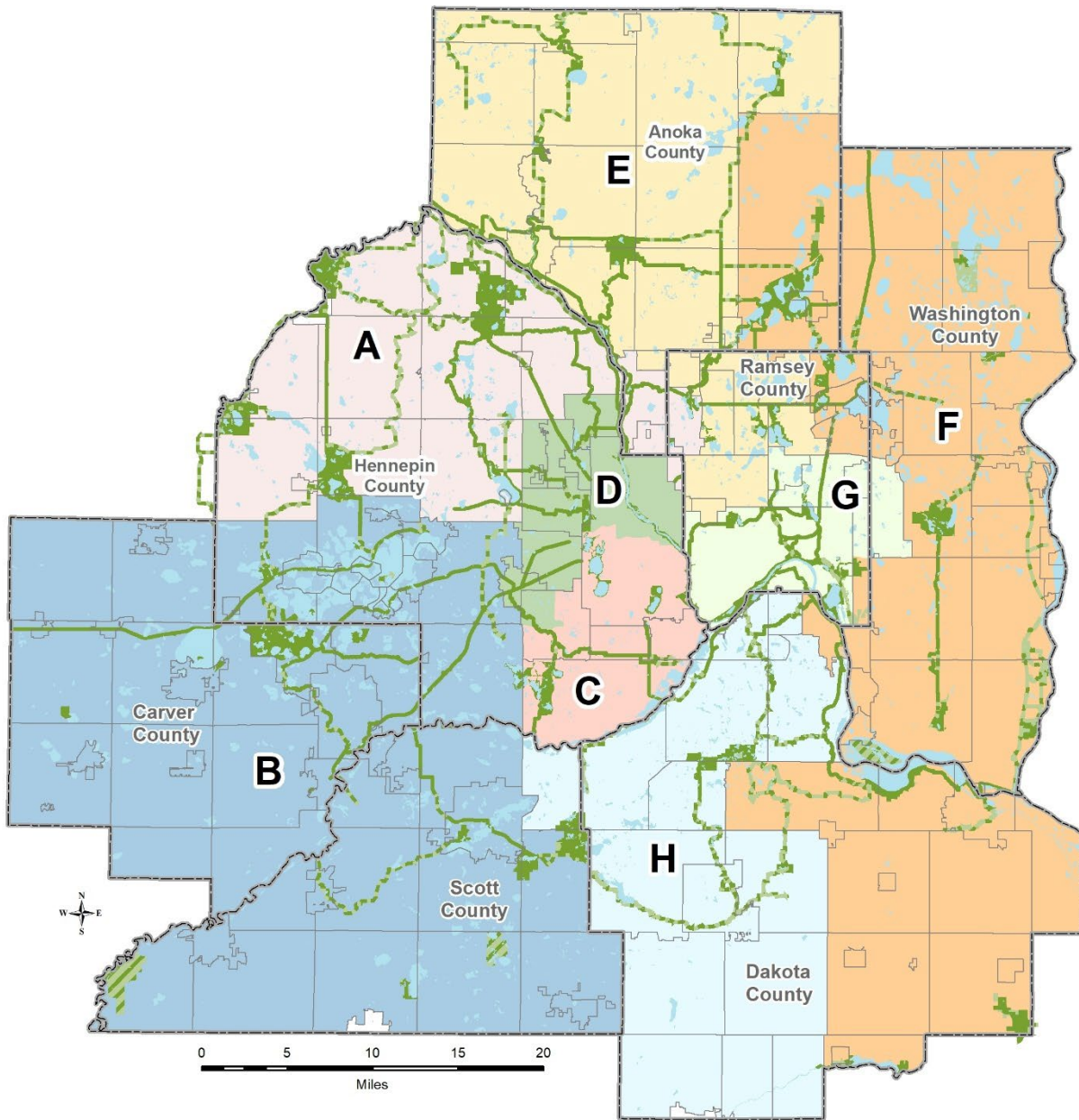
2 Legislation directs the Council to take the lead role in providing for a Regional Parks and Trails System  
3 that will complement the recreational open space opportunities provided in the area by the federal,  
4 state, and local units of government. State law directs the Council to determine which parks and trails in  
5 the seven-county area are included in the Regional Parks and Trails System and to generally identify  
6 areas that should be acquired for the Regional Parks and Trails System. The Met Council is charged  
7 with determining whether these lands are regionally significant and would collectively provide a  
8 balanced system of outdoor recreation for the region. See pages 12-13 for an overview of key  
9 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 and Trails System.

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

13 The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, appointed by the Met Council, uses its expertise  
14 to advise on the review of regional park and trail long-range plans, and grants for land acquisition,  
15 capital improvements, and the advancement of equity. It also provides recommendations on updates  
16 and amendments to the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan. The commission comprises eight  
17 volunteer members, who represent specific districts throughout the region and a chair who is appointed  
18 at large. A map of the districts is shown in Figure 1-2.

1 Figure 1-2. Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission districts



2

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

2 Managing a Regional Parks and Trails System that involves a variety of different local entities, in  
3 addition to the Council, requires coordinated policies and strategies. The 2050 Regional Parks and  
4 Trails Policy Plan lays out objectives and policies for the Regional Parks and Trails System and the  
5 actions designed to meet these objectives and policies.

6 Over the last 50 years, the Regional Parks and Trails System partnership has made significant strides  
7 toward achieving the values articulated by *Imagine 2050* of equity, leadership, accountability, and  
8 stewardship. By protecting high quality natural systems and providing a world-class system of  
9 recreational opportunities, the Regional Parks and Trails System has contributed significantly to the  
10 high quality of life in the region. The policies laid out in the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan  
11 reflect the Council’s ongoing commitment to support and protect the Regional Parks and Trails System.

12 Equity remains an important direction for the Council. The regional park implementing agencies have  
13 various programs and practices to help reach and serve their diverse base of users. The 2050 Regional  
14 Parks Policy Plan strives to build upon the good work that the regional park implementing agencies  
15 have been doing to advance equity.

16 Accountability is a regional core value in *Imagine 2050*, including a commitment to monitor and  
17 evaluate the effectiveness of the policies and procedures governing the Regional Parks and Trails  
18 System. The Met Council will work with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, regional  
19 parks implementing agencies, and other parks stakeholders to develop a set of Regional Parks and  
20 Trails Policy Plan indicators that quantitatively assess progress on the outcomes, goals, and strategies  
21 in this plan. This has been added to the four-year workplan that resides in Section 9.

22 **Planning for 2050**

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

28 Protecting natural systems in the metropolitan area builds on past investments and offers an excellent  
29 opportunity for further investment in the Regional Parks and Trails System as the region grows by  
30 657,000 people from 2020 to 2050.<sup>3</sup> The long-range vision, beyond 2050, for the Regional Parks and  
31 Trails System includes expanding it from nearly 52,519 acres today to nearly 70,000 acres, and nearly  
32 tripling the trail system from 457 miles today to over 1,300 miles.

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<sup>3</sup> Metropolitan Council (2023) The Regional Forecast, Population and employment in the Twin Cities region in 2050, p.1.

1 Now the hard work of planning, acquiring, protecting, and developing these new parks and trails  
2 continues. New regional trails and greenway corridors will link regional parks, park reserves, and  
3 special features with one another as well as connect with population centers.

4 Preserving natural areas with an eye toward the future is critical to the region’s livability, sustainability,  
5 stewardship, and prosperity. The Regional Parks and Trails System represents a major, well-  
6 established conservation effort for land and water resources. The area’s growing population will need  
7 additional large-scale parks and open space lands with interconnected trails in the future. The region  
8 will continue to identify natural systems as well as lands with restoration potential, to be added to the  
9 Regional Parks and Trails System and make plans for their acquisition before the opportunity is lost.

## 10 **System plan**

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

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

## 23 **Amending the policy plan**

24 The Council will amend the *2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan* only for a substantial revision.  
25 A substantial revision is defined by the Council as (1) a proposed revision that is intended to or could  
26 have the effect of changing the direction or intent of adopted Council policy, (2) addition or deletion of a  
27 policy, or (3) addition or deletion of a system element, or a major boundary adjustment as defined in the  
28 Section 5, Action 1, Boundary Adjustment section, with further detail provided in the Regional Parks  
29 and Trails Planning Handbook.

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

## 35 **Updating the policy plan**

36 Minnesota law requires the Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the Regional Parks and  
37 Trails Policy Plan at least every four years (Minn. Stat. 473.147). However, over a four-year period,

1 changes occur in population, acquisition, development, and system use. Updating the data and factual  
2 information to keep the policy current with new trends and conditions is not a substantial revision to the  
3 policy plan and will be accomplished through the ordinary process of consideration and approval by the  
4 Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the Community Development Committee, and the  
5 governing body of the Met Council. The regional park implementing agencies will receive formal notice  
6 of any proposed update prior to consideration by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission.

### 7 ***Regional Parks and Trails System funding***

8 The Council contributes and administers funding to the regional park implementing agencies. Funding  
9 for the Regional Parks and Trails System currently consists of four main grant programs. Each grant  
10 program is intended for different purposes and includes various funding sources. Only regional park  
11 implementing agencies qualify for the grant programs. Each grant program is highlighted briefly below.

12 Additional information is available in the Regional Parks and Trails *Grant Administration Guide*, and in  
13 program specific guidance: [https://metrocouncil.org/Parks/Grants-Funding/Grant-Administration-  
14 Guide/Grant-Administration-Guide.aspx](https://metrocouncil.org/Parks/Grants-Funding/Grant-Administration-Guide/Grant-Administration-Guide.aspx)

### 15 **Equity Grant program**

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

### 23 **Regional Parks Bonding program**

24 The Regional Parks Bonding Program is intended for Regional Parks and Trails System acquisition,  
25 development, and redevelopment projects. Park and trail development should be based on the principle  
26 of providing and maintaining quality public park areas and facilities, primarily for residents of the  
27 metropolitan area. The amount of funds each regional park implementing agency receives is based on  
28 a formula specified in Section 8: Finance.

### 29 **Parks and Trails Legacy Fund program**

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

34 The Met Council administers the Parks and Trails Legacy funds to regional park implementing  
35 agencies. The 25-year *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* provides high-level guidance for use of the funds.

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

1 Each regional park implementing agency’s share of the funds is based on a formula specified in state  
2 statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53, subd 3). This statute requires that 10% of the total Parks  
3 and Trails Legacy appropriations be set aside for land acquisition.

### 4 **Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program**

5 The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program is organized into two separate accounts,  
6 corresponding to different funding sources. The two funding sources are the Parks and Trails Legacy  
7 Fund and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. As noted above, 10% of the Parks and  
8 Trails Legacy Fund appropriations are set aside for land acquisition through the Park Acquisition  
9 Opportunity Fund program. Direct appropriations for land acquisition from the Environment and Natural  
10 Resources Trust Fund, recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources,  
11 are also allocated to the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program.

12 The Council matches every \$3 in state funding from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund with \$2 from  
13 Council bonds for the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program, as required by Minnesota Statutes,  
14 section 85.53, subd. 3. The Met Council has chosen to make the same match for Environment and  
15 Natural Resources Trust Fund funding for park acquisition. The Council’s Park Acquisition Opportunity  
16 Fund program is non-competitive and awarded based on funding availability.

### 17 **Operation and maintenance funds**

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

### 21 **Direct pass-through appropriations**

22 In addition to the five grant programs highlighted above, the Council also administers pass-through  
23 appropriations from the state to regional park implementing agencies and local governments. These  
24 dollars are legislatively earmarked for a particular regional park implementing agency or park and trail  
25 unit.

### 26 **Total system investment**

27 The total investment the state and Met Council have made toward the Regional Parks and Trails  
28 System between state fiscal years 1974 and 2024 totaled \$1.25 billion (Table 1-1).

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

1 **Table 1-1 Regional Parks and Trails System state and regional funding investments, 1974-2024**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Funding source(s)</b>	<b>Investment totals, 1974-2024 (millions)</b>
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)	\$475.2
Parks and Trails Legacy Fund	0.038% general state sales and use tax, as per Minnesota Constitution, Article XI, Section 15	\$234.2
Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund	Parks and Trails Legacy Fund	\$26
	Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund	\$13.2
	Council bonds	\$36.9
Operation and Maintenance	State General Fund and Lottery-in-Lieu of Sales Tax, as per Minnesota Statutes, section 297A.65	\$252.6
Pass-Through Appropriations	Various state funds	\$178.7
Other Investments	State and Council funds	\$31.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1.25 billion</b>

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

1 *The state of the Regional Parks and Trails System*

2 Demographic and economic trends, social issues, relationships, investments, and infrastructure shape  
3 the Regional Parks and Trails System today, as well as its future. To prepare for 2050, the policy plan  
4 identifies these existing conditions as a foundation for future priorities and direction.

5 Through research, agency collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and observation of large-scale  
6 trends, Imagine 2050 identifies four key existing conditions in addition to the broader Landscape of the  
7 Region described earlier in Imagine 2050 and specifics detailed in other policy chapters of Imagine  
8 2050. Understanding these conditions informs System vision, mission, values, objectives, policies, and  
9 actions.

10 **Vital to people and communities**

11 Regional Parks and Trails are important to people for multiple reasons including public health, social  
12 connections, and recreation opportunities. With changing demographics, the Regional Parks and Trails  
13 will need to assess ways to continue being a relevant service for current and future visitors.

14 The Regional Parks and Trails System is a highly valued amenity to the Twin Cities with over 69 million  
15 visitors in 2023<sup>4</sup> (see Figure 1-3 below). Park and trail users generally have a positive experience, with  
16 88% of visitors in 2021 ranking the facilities as “Excellent” or “Very Good.”<sup>5</sup> The system provides many  
17 benefits to its visitors, ranging from simple time in nature to recreational opportunities to increased  
18 happiness to social connectivity.

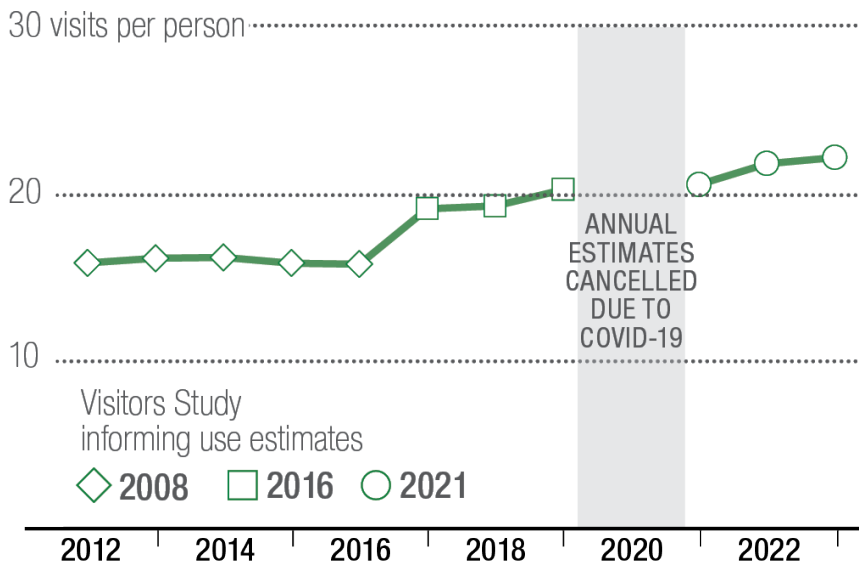
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<sup>4</sup> Metropolitan Council (2024) Visits to the Regional Park System in 2023, p.1.

<sup>5</sup> Metropolitan Council (2021) 2021 Parks and Trails Visitor Study, p. 3.



1 **Figure 1-3: Regional parks and trails system visitation trends**



2

3

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Source: Metropolitan Council’s annual population estimates and annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024). Park use estimates are calculated using a multiplier factor that is collected during the Metropolitan Council’s Visitors Study (typically completed once every five years). We recommend caution comparing use estimates informed by different Visitors Studies.

7

Access to parks and trails reduces medical costs, increases community trust, and provides mental health benefits. It increases positive emotions like calmness, joy, and creativity. Connection to nature is a low-cost public health measure compared to conventional medical interventions.<sup>6</sup> Thousands of articles and four decades of peer-reviewed research publications lead to one general conclusion: Time outdoors will improve anyone’s physical and mental health. When people get outdoors – into the parks and on the trails – health care is moved “upstream,” from curing sickness in the medical system to preventing it.

13

14

As the system continues to grow and change, regional parks and trails must continually adapt to new challenges. For example, parks may be a potential solution to public health emergencies. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, people gathered in parks as a form of recreation and sanctuary when many other options were unavailable. In a 2023 post-pandemic survey from the National Recreation and Parks Association, 80% of park and recreation professionals across the country reported that current visitation levels were higher than pre-pandemic levels.

“Community gatherings are in parks, and this is a way to get to know neighbors. ... People meet friends in parks.”  
(Youth leader, Roseville)

24

The system can also help address loneliness and social isolation. Social isolation and loneliness affect millions of Americans and comes with harmful health impacts. In a recent US Surgeon General’s advisory, loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of premature death by 26% and 29%

26

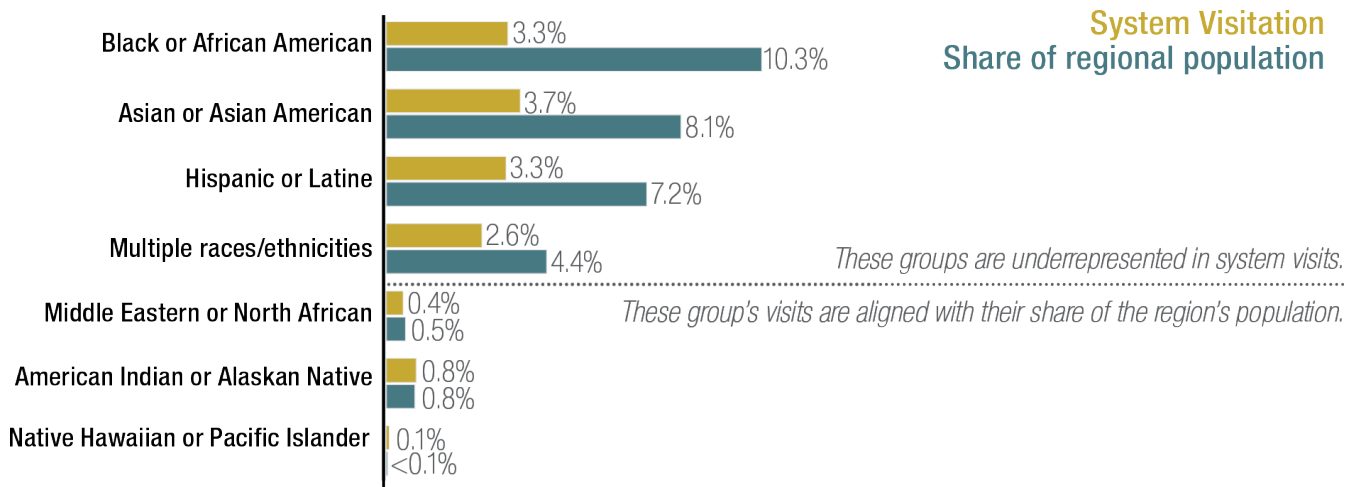
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<sup>6</sup> Metropolitan Council (2021) Adventure Close to Home: Connecting Youth to the Regional Park System (1):3.

1 respectively. Regional parks and trails can help reverse this trend by providing social spaces for the  
 2 region and building greater social connections.

3 While regional parks and trails are a highly valued amenity for our region, for some communities they  
 4 are out of reach due to a variety of reasons. In the 2021 parks and trails visitor study, Black,  
 5 Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and young people were underrepresented as a proportion of  
 6 visitors to the system (see Figure 1-4). Among communities of color, the most common barriers to  
 7 access are lack of awareness, time constraints, safety concerns, and transportation barriers. In the  
 8 2021 Youth and Parks report, the top barriers identified for young people were safety concerns, a lack  
 9 of opportunity to learn necessary skills, and racism and exclusion.

10 **Figure 1-4. BIPOC residents are underrepresented in regional park and trail system visits**



12 Source: Metropolitan Council Regional Parks and Trails System 2021 Visitors Study.

13 It is crucial that the regional parks and trails system works to identify, address, and reduce these  
 14 barriers to these underserved communities, especially because the region will only become more  
 15 diverse in the future. It is expected that in 2050, 45 percent of the region will be Black, Indigenous, and  
 16 People of Color, and 22 percent of the population will be 65 years or older. With a significant change in  
 17 population, the regional parks and trails must continually change and improve to best meet the needs of  
 18 the Twin Cities region.

19 **History of inequitable development**

20 Through partnership and coordination, the Regional Parks and Trails System developed into the  
 21 expansive system we recognize today. However, systemic racism has played a role in shaping the use  
 22 and development of these recreational spaces.

23 The land that the Regional Parks and Trails System sits on is the ancestral land of the Dakota and the  
 24 Ojibwe, which was stolen from them through a series of ill-intentioned treaties that were often done  
 25 under pressure from the U.S. government. With continued growth of the Twin Cities and harsh  
 26 punishments resulting from the U.S. – Dakota War of 1862, the Dakota were ultimately pushed out of  
 27 their homelands and forced to reside on small reservations throughout Minnesota and elsewhere. The  
 28 resulting displacement also separated the Dakota from the Bdote, the confluence of the Mississippi and

1 Minnesota Rivers. These places are sacred and provide deep connection to the Dakota people as the  
2 place of their origin stories. Nearby places hold significant cultural and spiritual meaning. The  
3 Owámniyomni Okhódayapi organization writes of efforts to reconnect American Indian communities to  
4 the Bdote and other cultural treasures, “Native communities are still fighting to resurrect and protect  
5 their culture, language and history. We can help restore this story disrupted.”<sup>7</sup> With the regional parks  
6 and trails being on American Indian lands, the system must address a way forward to respect the land  
7 and the people who have had deep ties to these spaces.

8 Regional parks and trails are also influenced by racist policies in housing development. Redlining and  
9 racial covenants created in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century restricted neighborhoods to only certain white  
10 communities. Combined with housing developers’ efforts to ensure parks were built near their  
11 investments, these Progressive Era policies had the impact of racially segregating those who visited  
12 lakeside parks in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Today, there is strong evidence of a connection between  
13 these earlier redlining practices and areas with increased temperature, decreased tree canopy, and  
14 more impervious surfaces.<sup>8</sup>

15 Today, the legacy of inequity continues to persist in overburdened communities as seen with the large  
16 gaps in visitation demographics, especially among Black residents. White residents comprise 68% of  
17 the region’s population but account for 84% of regional park visits. Meanwhile, Black residents  
18 comprise 10% of the region, but only account for 4% of regional park visits.<sup>9</sup> Some common barriers to  
19 access include a lack of awareness, time and safety concerns. The creation of the Regional Parks and  
20 Trails System started with a desire to collaborate and protect the natural beauty of the Twin Cities, but it  
21 also comes from a government that was associated with systemic racism. To move forward to 2050, it  
22 will be critical to address the legacy of racial inequity and work toward creating a more desirable future.

## 23 **The climate is changing**

24 Climate change has already begun to impact life in the Twin Cities region with intensifying weather,  
25 warming winters, and summer heat. The Regional Parks and Trails System is a key tool in mitigation  
26 and adaptation strategies (See Figures 1-5 and 1-6 below).

27 To adequately prepare for 2050, the Regional Parks and Trails System plans to mitigate climate  
28 change while adapting to the on-the-ground impacts to the region. With average annual temperatures in  
29 the Twin Cities region warming by nearly 3 degrees Fahrenheit since 1895<sup>10</sup>, the impacts of climate  
30 change to recreation and natural systems are already being felt. Regional parks and trails are greatly  
31 impacted from these changes, resulting in new realities such as habitat loss for native species, shorter  
32 winters, earlier ice outs, and increased frequency of extreme heat and poor air quality. It is also  
33 important to note that low-income and communities of color are more vulnerable to the effects of

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<sup>7</sup> Owamniyomni Okhodayapi, [www.owamniyomni.org](http://www.owamniyomni.org), *About* section, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Hoffman JS, Shandas V, Pendleton N. (2020) The effects of historical housing policies on resident exposure to intra-urban heat: a study of 108 US urban areas. *Climate* 8(1):12.

<sup>9</sup> Metropolitan Council (2021) 2021 Parks and Trails Visitor Study, pp.13-14

<sup>10</sup> Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Climate trends. Climate change and Minnesota.

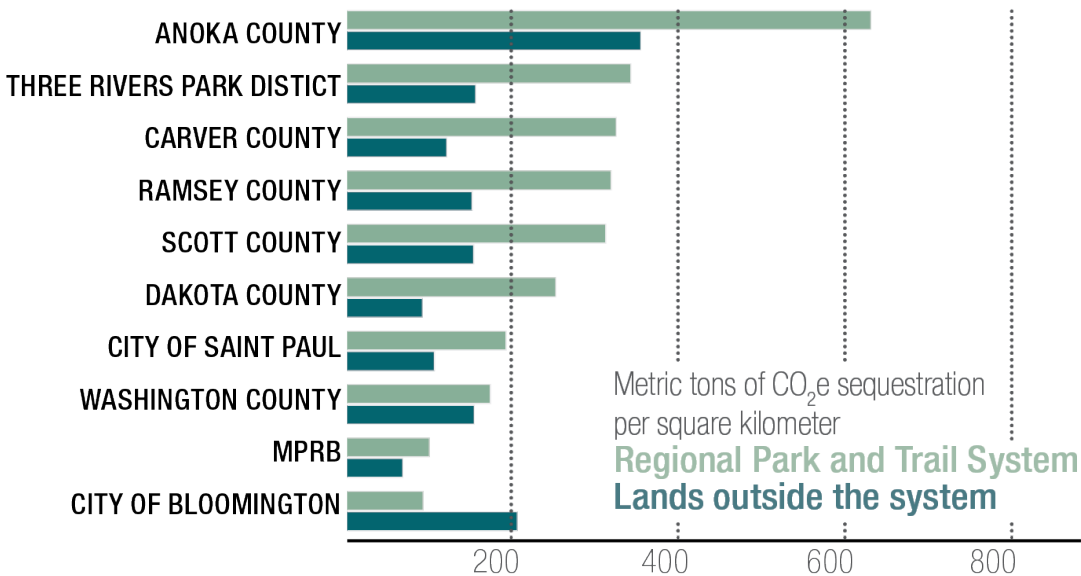
[https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/climate/climate\\_change\\_info/climate-trends.html](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/climate/climate_change_info/climate-trends.html)

1 climate change. For example, areas in Minneapolis that had racial covenants (properties that could only  
 2 be sold to whites) have temperatures that are on average 3.71 degrees Fahrenheit cooler than the rest  
 3 of the City.<sup>11</sup> Racial covenants were outlawed by the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and are no longer  
 4 enforceable, but the effects of these covenants can still be seen and felt today.

5 Another aspect of climate change is the impact it has on water quality. Throughout the central and  
 6 metro areas of Minnesota, only 54% of lakes meet water quality standards for recreation.<sup>12</sup> Due to algal  
 7 blooms, littering, and pollution the recreational opportunities for park visitors have slightly diminished.

8 While climate change is already being felt around the region, parks and trails can provide many  
 9 environmental benefits as they break up and ameliorate the effects of urban heat islands, improve air  
 10 quality, sequester carbon, and provide flood storage benefits. Parks and trails also protect natural  
 11 habitats, providing increased biodiversity while maintaining healthy ecosystems.

12 **Figure 1-5. Lands within the regional parks and trails system sequester carbon at much higher rates per square kilometer than the**  
 13 **lands outside of it**



14  
 15 Source: Metropolitan Council analysis of the USGS National Land Cover Database and primary literature sequestration rates within census  
 16 municipality boundaries and regional park boundaries. MPRB refers to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

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

- Restoring lands to native plant communities or species resilient to new climates

<sup>11</sup> Walker, R.H., Keeler, B.L., Derickson, K.D. (2024) The impacts of racially discriminatory housing policies on the distribution of intra-urban heat and tree canopy: A comparison of racial covenants and redlining in Minneapolis, MN, *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 245.

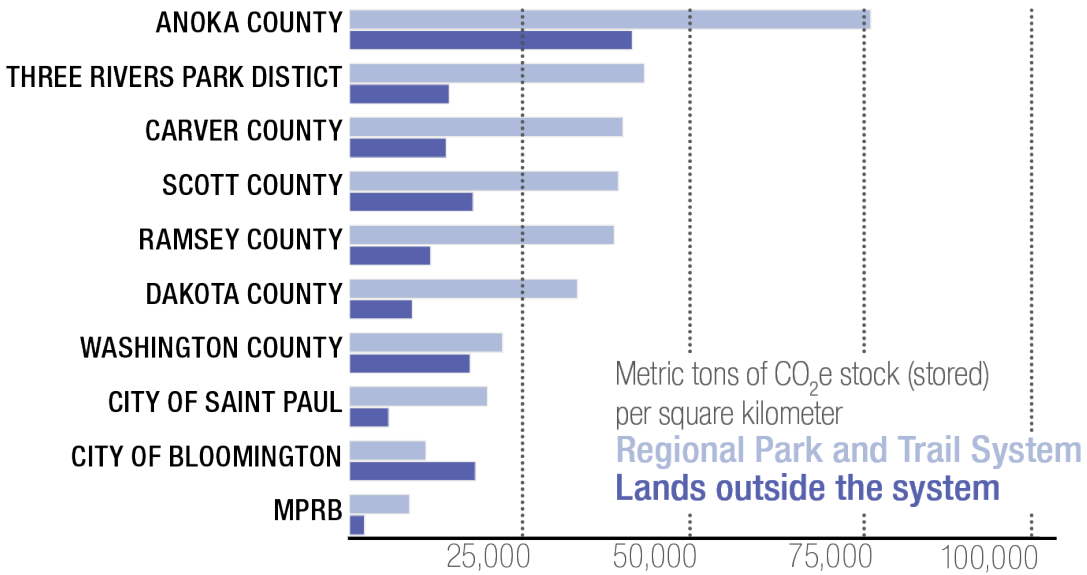
<sup>12</sup> Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Lake water quality. Water quality. <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/air-water-land-climate/lake-water-quality>

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

- 1 • Protecting large areas of land to provide habitat for native species like bison and the rusty
- 2 patched bumblebee
- 3 • Adapting recreational opportunities like adjusting open hours to allow for more recreation in
- 4 cooler evening hours.

5 As implementing agencies continue efforts to build a more resilient future, it is important that the Met  
6 Council continues to support this work, while also striving to think of new ways to address this  
7 challenge.

8 **Figure 1-6. Lands within the regional parks and trails system have higher carbon storage potential than the lands outside of it**



9

10 Source: Metropolitan Council analysis of the USGS National Land Cover Database and primary literature carbon stock potential within census  
11 municipality boundaries and regional park boundaries. MPRB refers to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

## 12 **Growing pains**

13 The Regional Parks and Trails System has experienced rapid growth over the past few years,  
14 especially regional trails. This expansion must be balanced with the need to secure adequate funding  
15 for regular maintenance.

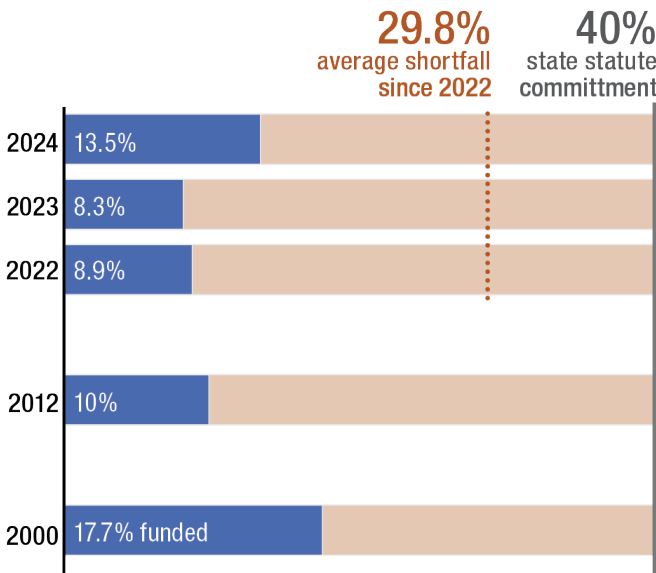
16 Since the creation of the Regional Parks and Trails System in 1974, it has grown substantially, totaling  
17 almost 53,000 acres of park land and almost 560 miles of regional trails. This has been achieved due to  
18 the investment of over \$1 billion in state and regional dollars and an additional \$244 million of state  
19 funds for operations and maintenance funding (2024 figures) in addition to hundreds of millions of  
20 dollars invested in operations, programming, and capital improvements by the implementing agencies  
21 themselves.

22 The overall success of a large parks and trails system in the Twin Cities region has led to an  
23 expectation of high-quality amenities in good condition. In the 2021 Regional Parks Visitor Study,  
24 respondents were asked to suggest recommendations that would improve their experience in regional  
25 parks and trails. The most common recommendations for improvement were maintenance (20%) for  
26 regional parks and better surface conditions for regional trails (23%). Despite the high demand for

1 improved and well-maintained amenities, the regional park implementing agencies are facing a gap in  
2 funding for operations and maintenance. When it comes to financing the system’s operations and  
3 maintenance costs, the state has historically invested significantly less than its statutorily required 40%  
4 of total operational costs, instead appropriating on average 9% of these costs (see Figure 1-7).

5 In addition to the regular demands of maintaining and upgrading infrastructure, there is also a desire to  
6 continue expanding the system, to improve access to underserved communities, and protect natural  
7 areas, and plan for developing areas and the growing population.

8 **Figure 1-7. State of Minnesota funding for regional parks and trails operations and maintenance**



9  
10 Source: Metropolitan Council analysis of Operations and Maintenance appropriations and park agency annual expenditures.

### 11 *Regional Parks and Trails System vision, mission, values, and objectives*

12 The Regional Parks and Trails System Vision, Mission, and Values are intended to nest within and  
13 complement the Regional Vision, Values, and Goals articulated at the beginning of the regional  
14 development guide.

15 The Regional Parks and Trails System is grounded in a unique partnership between the ten regional  
16 park implementing agencies and the Met Council.

### 17 **Vision for the Regional Parks and Trails System**

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

### 20 **Mission**

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

1 **Values**

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

11 **Objectives**

12 The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan advances the Imagine 2050 regional goals and the  
13 regional core values of equity, leadership, accountability, and stewardship by striving to:

- 14 • **Foster equity and belonging:** Connect people with nature, community, and cultural  
15 landscapes to better support their physical, mental, and emotional well-being
- 16 • **Take care of what we have:** Reinvest in existing regional parks and trails to maintain and  
17 enhance visitor experiences
- 18 • **Protect and restore:** Protect and restore natural systems to safeguard the well-being of all  
19 living things
- 20 • **Adapt and mitigate:** Increase the region’s resilience to climate change through land  
21 stewardship practices that mitigate greenhouse gases and adapt to future climates
- 22 • **Meet future needs:** Meet the growing demand for regional parks and trails through strategic  
23 and timely land acquisition and development.

24 Additional description of the five objectives is below:

25 **Objective 1- Foster equity and belonging:** Connect people with nature, community, and cultural  
26 landscapes to better support their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

27 *Objective 1 Measure: To be developed.*

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

35 The partnership that makes up our Regional Parks and Trails System acknowledges this troubled  
36 history and is committed to reparative solutions through advancing equity and belonging in our work.

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

1 We are committed to addressing and undoing structural and programmatic inequities across the  
2 metropolitan region. We believe in working with impacted communities to co-create solutions and  
3 shape a future where all people have a seat at the table to shape our collective future. We recognize  
4 that there is a lot of work to do, and we are committed to building a Regional Parks and Trails System  
5 where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

6 **Objective 2 - Take care of what we have:** Reinvest in existing regional parks and trails to maintain  
7 and enhance visitor experiences.

8 *Objective 2 Measure: To be developed.*

9 The Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails System, made up of the ten regional park implementing  
10 agencies and supported by the Met Council, has a large and mature system of parks and trails. Once  
11 an agency establishes a park or trail, they also establish a regular reinvestment plan to ensure that the  
12 facility is maintained for high-quality visitor experiences.

13 In 2022, the most recent year for operational expenditure data, the ten regional park implementing  
14 agencies' operational expenditures exceeded \$130 million. While the state contributes to this critical  
15 function, historically their investment has been about 9% of the total annual operating costs. This  
16 means the vast majority of costs are borne by the regional park implementing agencies. If funding does  
17 not keep up with growing demand and maintenance, the system will experience deterioration.

18 To protect our current and future investments in the Regional Parks and Trails System, the State of  
19 Minnesota, and Met Council must prioritize and accelerate reinvestment in the existing system from all  
20 available funding sources, in partnership with the ten regional park implementing agencies. A synopsis  
21 of Key Minnesota Legislation for the Regional Parks and Trails System and Applicable Funding  
22 Formulas can be found on pages 12-13, including Minnesota Statute 473.351 that indicates regional  
23 park implementing agencies should receive at least 40 percent of their actual operations and  
24 maintenance costs from state funding to operate and maintain the Regional Parks System.

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

27 *Objective 3 Measure: To be developed.*

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

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

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



1 **Objective 4 - Adapt and mitigate:** Increase the region’s resilience to climate change through land  
2 stewardship practices that mitigate greenhouse gases and adapt to future climates.

3 *Objective 4 Measure: To be developed.*

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

9 Our regional trail network serves as the arterial backbone of our region’s active transportation system,  
10 in coordination with the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, local trail networks, and other  
11 important trail connections. Additionally, regional parks and trails provide wildlife pathways and  
12 migratory routes. Agencies are working to reduce or eliminate barriers to wildlife movement by  
13 improving connectivity and ensuring all living things can find food, water, and suitable habitat.

14 By working together, the Council and Agencies can anticipate and address climate change impacts and  
15 utilize climate tolerant species that adapt to our wetter and warmer region. By making proactive park  
16 and trail modernization investments and anticipating future weather conditions that put in place more  
17 durable infrastructure and climate-adapted species, our system will be able to survive more frequent  
18 storms, freeze-thaw cycles, floods, wildfires, and other natural disasters. The Council and regional park  
19 implementing agencies are committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and energy use and  
20 providing for carbon capture. Whether through increased use of renewable energy, electrification of  
21 fleets, or investing in smart infrastructure, we share a common commitment to shrink our carbon  
22 footprint. The Council is committed to providing regionwide climate data and other requested  
23 information and technical assistance.

24 **Objective 5 - Meet future needs:** Meet the growing demand for regional parks and trails through  
25 strategic and timely land acquisition and development.

26 *Objective 5 Measure: To be developed.*

27 As our region’s population continues to grow toward the 2050 projection of nearly 4 million inhabitants,  
28 the use of our Regional Parks and Trails System will grow, too. In 2023, our Regional Parks and Trails  
29 System had more than 69 million visits. While this level of use reflects the high value residents place on  
30 the system, it also illustrates the tremendous daily pressure on the system that agencies must support  
31 to meet visitor needs.

32 To prepare for the projected growth and use, the Met Council will work closely with our ten regional  
33 park implementing agencies to acquire existing park and trail in-holdings, and we will identify new  
34 opportunities for future expansion. As our population becomes more diverse and the proportionate  
35 share of the population over 65 years nearly doubles, we must adapt our facilities and park offerings, to  
36 remain relevant to changing expectations and needs. A relatively new idea to the regional system,  
37 bridging facilities, are intended to attract and introduce new visitors to our regional parks and trails. This  
38 type of facility may become more prevalent as we continue to innovate to meet new needs.

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

1 In areas with limited land availability, protecting and preserving natural systems will become more  
2 challenging and will require more creativity. Some of the best conservation opportunities may include  
3 protecting regional “greenway” corridors that provide natural systems benefits for people and wildlife.  
4 Finding corridors that connect larger landscapes will increase their natural systems value, but with  
5 limited opportunities, our approaches will need to adapt and will require more partnerships across  
6 public and private sectors and new sources of funding. Parks and trails professionals will need to reach  
7 beyond their current relationships and knowledge base, to innovate and grow as we collectively strive  
8 to meet our region’s challenging and exciting future.

1 **Section Two: Regional Parks and Trails System Plan**

2 *Regional Parks and Trails System Plan policy*

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

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

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

23 As a part of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system, the Twin Cities Regional Parks and Trails System  
24 fulfills a special niche that distinguishes it from local and state recreation opportunities. Criteria outlined  
25 in the 25-Year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan help determine what makes a unit "regionally  
26 significant."<sup>13</sup> The following criteria provide the key considerations for regional significance for the  
27 Regional Parks and Trails System:

- 28
- 29 • A nature-based setting and substantial acreage (i.e., 100-acre minimum, but usually significantly  
30 larger)
  - 31 • Offers a range of high-quality activities and experiences
  - 32 • Serves multiple communities
  - 33 • Is consistent with the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan, a chapter of Imagine 2050
  - Provides recreational opportunities in areas that currently lack these amenities.

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<sup>13</sup> Parks and Trails Legacy Plan, Parks and Trails of State and Regional Significance, A 25-year long-range plan for Minnesota, State of Minnesota, Department of Natural Resources, 2011, [www.legacy.mn.gov/minnesota-state-and-regional-parks-and-trails-legacy-plan](http://www.legacy.mn.gov/minnesota-state-and-regional-parks-and-trails-legacy-plan)

## Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 Publicly owned lands and open space areas administered by the federal and state government play an  
2 important and complementary role to the Regional Parks and Trails System. In general, local  
3 recreational open space facilities provide active recreation, such as athletic fields, courts, and aquatic  
4 centers. Private operations also make substantial contributions to the development of facilities and the  
5 provision of services and include golf courses, riding facilities, marinas, day camps, and downhill ski  
6 areas, as well as privately owned public spaces.

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

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

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

### 19 *System Plan - Action 1: Review and update system plan, classifications*

20 **The Met Council reviews and updates the system plan and evaluates the regional park and trail**  
21 **classifications every four years to determine what is relevant and necessary in partnership with**  
22 **the regional park implementing agencies.**

23 The Met Council reviews the System Plan portion of the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Chapter in  
24 partnership with the regional park implementing agencies every four years as part of the policy plan  
25 revision process and may add, modify, or delete planned elements to the system. Additions, including  
26 major boundary adjustments, or deletions to the system proposed outside the regular plan review  
27 process are substantial revisions to the policy plan, and as such require an amendment to the policy  
28 plan. Identification of specific boundaries and detailed planning for individual units of the system are  
29 addressed in long-range plans for each unit. The long-range plans are prepared by the regional parks  
30 and trails implementing agencies.

### 31 **Regional parks and trails classifications**

32 Elements of the Regional Parks and Trails System are categorized into four major types: regional  
33 parks, park reserves, regional trails, and special features. As part of the *Imagine 2050* process, three  
34 additional sub-classifications are being considered for the special features classification:

- 35 • Cultural Landscape sub-classification
- 36 • Historical Landscape sub-classification
- 37 • Open Space/Natural Systems sub-classification.

## Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 The Historical Landscape and Open Space/Natural Systems sub-classifications need further discussion  
2 before moving them into active use and implementation. See Section 9, Workplan. Only the Cultural  
3 Landscape sub-classification is proposed for inclusion in the system plan at this time.

### 4 **Regional Parks**

5 Regional parks, typically 200-500+ acres in size, are  
6 areas of natural or ornamental quality for nature-based  
7 outdoor recreation such as picnicking, boating, fishing,  
8 swimming, camping, and trail uses. Access to water  
9 bodies suitable for recreation – such as swimming,  
10 boating, and fishing – is particularly important. Most  
11 regional parks are adjacent to lakes, rivers, or streams.

#### *Regional Parks at a glance*

**Existing:** 46 regional parks

**Planned:** 1 regional parks; 1 regional  
park boundary adjustment

**Search:** 6 regional park search areas

### 12 *Regional Park attributes*

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

18 **Service area:** 3 - 5 communities

19 **Site attributes:** Regional parks are located in natural settings contiguous to water bodies or  
20 watercourses whenever possible. They contain significant regional natural habitats including lakeshore,  
21 rivers, streams, wetlands, uplands, forests, prairies, and groundwater recharging areas; as well as  
22 lands which could be restored to provide critical habitat and access to nature.

23 **Size:** Typically, 200-500 acres. A regional park should be large enough to accommodate a variety of  
24 activities, preserve a pleasant natural aspect, and buffer activity areas from each other and from  
25 surrounding areas. Regional parks typically need to have 200 to 1000 acres of land. Acreage for  
26 regional parks is likely higher in rural/suburban areas than urban areas but may be as small as 100  
27 acres.

28 **Site location:** Regional parks are located where high-quality natural systems occur or have potential to  
29 occur. For example, land with restoration potential, areas where there is a demonstrated regional  
30 recreation need, particularly next to lakes and rivers, and/or where growth is expected to occur.

31

## 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 regional parks is the larger size, and the emphasis on  
7 preservation and ecological integrity.

8 Park reserves are substantially larger than regional parks because  
9 they require adequate space to protect and manage diverse natural systems and provide for compatible  
10 outdoor activities. The minimum size for a park reserve is 1,000 acres, but larger park reserves are  
11 desirable. To establish and maintain an uncompromised sense of nature and protect high-quality  
12 natural resources, at least 80% of each park reserve should be managed as wild lands that protect the  
13 ecological functions of the native landscape. Up to 20% of a park reserve may be developed for  
14 compatible recreational activities.

### 15 *Park reserve attributes*

16 **Use:** Park reserves are typically used for a variety of nature-based outdoor recreation activities. They  
17 provide, protect, and manage the many natural landscapes and systems of the region. Park reserves  
18 often provide important services for trail use and access including trailheads, parking, restrooms,  
19 drinking water, and space for picnicking, along with other activities.

20 **Service area:** The entire metropolitan region.

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

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

26 **Site location:** Park reserves are located where high-quality natural areas occur. Due to their large  
27 acreage requirement, these are usually in places outside of the Metropolitan Urban Service Area. Park  
28 reserves aim to protect significant portions of one or more eight regional landscape types including:

- 29 • **Anoka Sand Plains:** Located in the northern metropolitan area and along the Mississippi River,  
30 this area consists of flat, sandy lake plains, defined by small dunes, sandy soils, kettle lakes,  
31 and tunnel valleys. Pre-settlement vegetation was mostly oak barrens, floodplain forests, and  
32 brushland. Significant portions of Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve are representative of  
33 the Anoka Sand Plain.
- 34 • **St. Croix Ground Moraine:** These landscapes have a rolling countryside and are located on  
35 sandy, well-drained soils. Other features of the St. Croix Ground Moraine include deciduous  
36 forests, marshes, and conifer bogs.
- 37 • **Des Moines Ground Moraine:** Defined by gently rolling countryside on stony or clay soils, small  
38 shallow lakes, potholes, and lowlands with hummocks and knobs. Prominent vegetation

### *Park Reserves at a glance*

**Existing:** 12 park reserves  
open to the public

**Planned:** 1 park reserve

**Search:** 0 park reserve  
search areas

## Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 includes big woods forests, wetlands, marshes, and shrubby swamps. Significant portions of  
2 Carver and Hyland-Bush-Anderson park reserves are representative of the Des Moines Ground  
3 Moraine.

- 4 • Terminal Moraine: The terminal moraine contains some of the roughest topography in the  
5 metropolitan area, with rocky glacial deposits forming steep cone-shaped hills and deep lakes.  
6 Common vegetation in this landscape is oak savannas, aspen-oak lands, marshes and shrubby  
7 swamps. Significant portions of Murphy-Hanrehan and Big Marine park reserves are  
8 representative of Terminal Moraine.
- 9 • Lightly Glaciated Areas: Mainly flat uplands with deep soils formed by decomposed bedrock and  
10 ancient glacial deposits; deeply dissected stream and river valleys and a few lakes or wetlands.  
11 Predominantly vegetated by tall grass prairies, oak-savannas, deciduous forests, cedar glades  
12 and floodplain forest clumps. Parks with these features include Lake Byllesby Regional Park  
13 and Miesville Ravine Park Reserve.
- 14 • Mississippi River Valley: The Mississippi River Valley has multiple distinct areas with differing  
15 landscapes:
  - 16 ○ Upstream of St. Anthony Falls: Upstream of St. Anthony Falls, the surrounding area has  
17 narrow floodplains, low banks, and a flat valley top. Common vegetation includes  
18 floodplain forests, marshes and shrubby swamps, prairies, oak-savannas and aspen-  
19 oak.
  - 20 ○ St. Anthony Falls to the mouth of the Minnesota River: Defined by deep gorges and  
21 steep-sided bluffs, vegetation is similar to the upstream segments of the river.
  - 22 ○ Below the mouth of the Minnesota River: This area is defined with wide floodplain  
23 wetlands with lakes and marshes, floodplain terraces, and steep slopes. Vegetation is  
24 primarily floodplain forests, shrubby swamps, big woods forests, cedar glades, and oak-  
25 savannas. Spring Lake Park Reserve is a good example of this landscape type.
- 26 • Minnesota River Valley: Known for steep-sided bluffs and a wide meandering river, other  
27 features of this landscape include floodplains with extensive lakes, wetlands, and some dry  
28 lands. Floodplain forests, fens, bogs, and prairies are common in this area. Significant portions  
29 of Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve are representative of the Minnesota River Valley landscape  
30 type.
- 31 • St. Croix River Valley: The St. Croix River Valley features a deep valley with steep bluff walls,  
32 sandy shorelines, and small floodplains with islands. Predominant vegetation includes floodplain  
33 forests, shrubby swamps, prairies, big woods forests, and deciduous forests.

### 34 Regional Trails

35 Regional trail corridors provide recreational opportunities  
36 along linear pathways throughout the metropolitan area.  
37 Generally regional trails connect units of the Regional Parks  
38 System and draw visitors from across the seven-county  
39 area and beyond. Regional trails play a prominent role  
40 alongside the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network  
41 (RBTN), providing recreation and transportation services.

42 The Council has defined two types of regional trails:  
43 destination (or greenway) trails and linking trails.

#### *Regional Trails at a glance*

**Existing:** 56 trails, with over 457 miles open to the public

**Planned:** 17 trails

**Search:** 49 trail search corridors

## Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 **Destination** trails typically follow routes with high-quality natural systems that make the trail itself a  
2 destination. These routes may also include important cultural resources. Additionally, destination trails  
3 are often closely aligned with the RBTN. They provide a scenic setting, a compelling sense of place,  
4 and they often support bicycle commuting options. Usually, they follow natural or linear features that  
5 traverse areas of scenic appeal and/or historical, architectural, and developmental points of interest.  
6 They typically include wider corridors that improve wildlife habitat, protect natural features, and provide  
7 recreational opportunities beyond the trail itself.

8 **Linking** trails provide vital connections between Regional Parks and Trails System units, the RBTN,  
9 state and federal lands, significant natural areas, schools, shopping, and other regional destinations.  
10 Regional parks and park reserves along the trail route offer important services to trail visitors, including  
11 places for picnicking and other desirable activities, parking, restrooms, and drinking water.

### 12 *Regional Trail attributes*

13 The use, service area, and site attributes for both destination and linking trails are the same. Size and  
14 site location have minor differences.

15 **Use:** Trails may be developed for one or more varying modes of nonmotorized recreational travel  
16 including hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and canoeing. In general, e-bikes are  
17 allowed on regional trails. Trail use must be consistent with individual implementing agency rules and  
18 ordinances.

19 With respect to bicycling, regional trails serve:

- 20 • Pre-teen bicyclists who are often accompanied by a parent and need access to local schools,  
21 libraries, recreation facilities, shopping, and neighborhoods. These bicyclists have a strong  
22 preference for separation from motor vehicles on protected bikeways and trails.
- 23 • Adult and teenage bicyclists who may ride regularly for transportation but prefer comfortable  
24 access by a direct route on lower-speed or low-traffic streets. These bicyclists are more  
25 comfortable on designated bikeways such as roadway-adjacent or independent trails.
- 26 • Bicyclists who are willing to travel along most roadways but prefer the more natural  
27 surroundings that regional trails can offer. They value direct access to destinations and can ride  
28 at higher speeds than average cyclists. This group will often rely on roads for transportation but  
29 will use trails when they are direct and enjoyable.
- 30 • Experienced bicyclists who want direct access to destinations with minimum delays. These  
31 bicyclists primarily rely on the road system for routes and value using roads for commuting, but  
32 occasionally enjoy independent trails if they are relatively direct and continuous and/or create a  
33 time advantage over parallel on-road routes by avoiding traffic lights.

34 **Service area:** 3-5 communities for both Destination and Linking Trails.

35 **Site attributes:** When feasible, off-road trails should utilize natural linear and/or human-made corridors  
36 such as stream or river valleys, along the edges of forests or prairies, utility corridors, railroad corridors,  
37 and highway rights of way. On-road bikeways should only be allowed for short segments where no



## Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 other off-road solutions are reasonable/viable. Trails may still be within the road right-of-way but need  
2 to be physically separated from vehicle traffic by raised curbs, large planters, or other permanent  
3 vertical barriers.

4 Regional trails primarily consist of these types of facilities:

- 5 • Roadway-separated, independent trails include trails that run along abandoned railroad  
6 corridors, or utility or private easements, and exist in their own independent rights-of-way.  
7 These trails are categorized as destination trails.
- 8 • Road-adjacent, multiple-use trails that run along and are adjacent to public roadways, but not on  
9 the roadway itself. In urban areas these would be above the street curb. These trails are  
10 categorized as linking trails.
- 11 • Occasional on-road protected bikeways designed exclusively for bicycles along streets, below  
12 the curb and separated by a barrier from vehicle traffic. These trails are categorized as linking  
13 trails.

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

21 **Size:** Regional trails should provide sufficient corridor width to protect and/or connect with natural  
22 and/or cultural resources and safely accommodate trail use. It should also be of sufficient length to *be a*  
23 *destination itself* or it may link between Regional Parks System units and/or link where people live to  
24 regional parks or trails.

25 **Site location:** The trail treadway should be placed where it minimizes impacts to natural systems. For  
26 destination trails, the site location is preferably adjacent to high quality natural areas or areas of public  
27 interest. Linking trails should connect where people live with the units of the Regional Parks System.  
28 Linking trails should be at least 1.5 miles apart and not overlap the localized service area or other  
29 regional trails, unless significant barriers exist such as highways, rivers, or other natural or human-  
30 made features that restrict access. Linking trails often connect people to population centers, schools,  
31 shopping areas, or other parks and trails along the route.

32 Additional site qualities for linking and destination trails may:

- 33 • Serve as a backbone to the local trail network
- 34 • Fill a gap in the regional recreation system
- 35 • Pass through local parks and trails, utilizing service amenities along the route
- 36 • Not duplicate an existing trail.

## 1 **Special Features**

2 Special features are named in state legislation (Minnesota  
3 Statutes, 473.121, subd. 14) and provide specialized or single-  
4 purpose recreational activities generally not found in regional  
5 parks, park reserves, or trail corridors. Some special features  
6 require unique management approaches and include specific  
7 programming efforts. Special features may include zoos,  
8 conservatories, arboretums, unique ecological areas, display  
9 gardens, bridging facilities, or cultural landscapes.

*Special Features and Bridging  
Facilities at a glance*

**Existing:** 8 Special Features

**Search:** 1 Bridging Facility

10 **Use:** Special features provide a unique high-quality outdoor recreation and/or nature-based experience  
11 and may require special programming or management. Special features complement the Regional  
12 Parks and Trails System and do not duplicate or compete with recreational facilities adequately  
13 provided by the public or private sector.

14 **Service area:** The entire metropolitan region.

15 **Site attributes:** Special features provide unique natural and/or cultural services within a natural area-  
16 based scenic setting that offers a compelling sense of place.

17  
18 **Size:** The size of a special feature or bridging facility is dependent on the feature itself.

19 **Site location:** Special features are located where unique natural and/or cultural conditions exist  
20 offering a compelling sense of place.

21 **Funding:** Special features require a long-range plan that is approved by the Met Council to qualify for  
22 regional funding.

### 23 *Bridging facilities sub-classification*

24 **Bridging facilities** are a sub-classification within the special feature category. They may be nested  
25 within a regional park, park reserve, or trail. They seek to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation  
26 users to the Regional Parks and Trails System. Their purpose is to help address inequities that  
27 contribute to lower participation rates among prioritized communities.

28 Bridging facilities have a clear and unique purpose. Bridging facilities are not designed as a one-size-  
29 fits-all approach. They introduce new visitors to the Regional Parks and Trails System across race,  
30 ethnicity, national origin, income, ability, and age; as well as encourage greater participation by the  
31 future stewards of our region's natural and recreation resources -- young adults, teenagers, and  
32 children.

33 **Use:** Bridging facilities are designed to prototype new ideas that advance equitable usage, focusing on  
34 underserved groups in the Regional Parks and Trails System. These facilities engage people with the  
35 wide array of opportunities that exist across the system through interests, innovative strategies, and  
36 collaboration. Bridging facilities seek to build on community strengths, establishing partnerships with  
37 the communities they intend to better serve.

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1 **Service Area:** Bridging Facilities serve a specific community or communities. For example, a city or a  
2 specific group. When planning for bridging facilities, implementing agencies will identify the  
3 population(s) to be better served and the inequity(ies) that will be addressed, working directly with the  
4 community to create, design, and develop them.

5 **Site Attributes:** Bridging facilities may:

- 6 • Be a stand-alone facility or network of facilities, located in an area not currently well-served by  
7 existing regional parks, park reserves, and trails. “Stand-alone” bridging facilities that exist  
8 outside of a regional park, park reserve, special feature, or trail, are eligible for Regional Parks  
9 System funding, as permitted through the appropriate state laws and statutes.
- 10 • Be nested within an existing regional park, park reserve, special feature, or trail, welcoming new  
11 users to the unit and then connecting them with the opportunities that the broader facility  
12 provides.
- 13 • Have a mobile element to allow outreach to extend beyond the existing boundaries of the  
14 Regional Parks and Trails System, going into communities that have been historically  
15 underserved. Mobile bridging programming must be connected to a base regional park or trail  
16 system facility and will need to articulate, track, and report their results.
- 17 • Include a programmatic element embedded in a partner facility, such as a school or non-profit  
18 organization, allowing the implementing agency to access and build on the organization’s  
19 existing relationships with communities.

20 **Size:** The size of a bridging facility is dependent on the feature itself.

21 **Site location:** Bridging facilities are located close to their target audience, which includes historically  
22 underserved communities.

23 **Funding:** Bridging facilities must have a long-range plan that is approved by the Met Council to request  
24 funding. Implementing agencies proposing a bridging facility will:

- 25 • Provide a clear statement of purpose for what it is intended to accomplish, consistent with the  
26 above defined purpose, recognizing that these facilities will differ within and across agencies,  
27 and must evolve and change over time, in order to stay relevant and effective
- 28 • Include a plan for an awareness-building, programming, or marketing component, to promote  
29 regional parks and trails to users facing obstacles to access the Regional Parks and Trails  
30 System
- 31 • Provide a programming plan through park agency staff or through a partnership arrangement.
- 32 • Not to be included in the annual Regional Parks and Trails System use estimate. If designed to  
33 meet their purpose of attracting new users and connecting them to regional parks and trails, a  
34 facility’s success will be reflected in increased visitation in future annual regional park and trail  
35 use estimates.

### 36 *Cultural Landscape sub-classification*

37 **Cultural Landscapes** recognize lands with significant cultural value to American Indian Tribes,  
38 organizations, and communities. Cultural landscapes of significance:

- 39 • Recognize and protect culturally significant landscapes including American Indian burial  
40 grounds

## Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

- 1 • Help interpret and educate visitors on the significance of the cultural landscape
- 2 • Do not require that recreation be part of the unit.
- 3 • May be designed to protect areas of significant cultural or sacred meaning to groups. This
- 4 includes protecting these spaces and designing them to limit public access and foot traffic.

5

DRAFT

1 **Regional Parks and Trails System Plan**

2 There are four implementation status categories described in the System Plan. Together these  
 3 categories make up the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails System:

- 4 • Existing and open Regional Parks and Trails System units
- 5 • Planned Regional Parks and Trails System units that are not yet open to the public
- 6 • Regional Parks and Trails System boundary adjustments
- 7 • Regional Park search areas and Regional Trail search corridors.

8 *Existing Regional Parks and Trails System facilities*

9 As described in the previous section, the Regional Parks System as of 2025 includes 46 regional parks,  
 10 12 park reserves, 56 regional trails, and 8 special features that are open for public use. The Regional  
 11 Parks and Trails System includes 52,519 acres of land in a protected status.

12 *Existing Regional Parks, Park Reserves, and Special Features*

13 As of 2025, there are 66 regional parks, park reserves, and special features developed and open to the  
 14 public. These units are listed in Tables 2-1, 2-2, and 2-3 and shown in Figures 2-1 and 2-3.

15 **Table 2-1. Regional parks open to the public**

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
Anoka County	Coon Lake Regional Park	P8
Carver County	Baylor Regional Park	P9
Carver County	Lake Minnewashta Regional Park	P10
Carver County	Lake Waconia Regional Park	P11
Dakota County	Lake Byllesby Regional Park	P12
Dakota County	Lebanon Hills Regional Park	P13
Dakota County	Whitetail Woods Regional Park	P14
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Above the Falls Regional Park	P15
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park	P16

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park	Map #
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minneapolis Chain-of-Lakes Regional Park	P17
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minnehaha Regional Park	P18
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board/Saint Paul	Mississippi Gorge Regional Park	P19
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park	P20
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers Park District	North Mississippi Regional Park	P21
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Theodore Wirth Regional Park	P22
Ramsey County	Bald Eagle-Otter Lake Regional Park	P23
Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Battle Creek & Indian Mounds Regional Park	P24
Ramsey County	Long Lake Regional Park	P25
Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Phalen-Keller Regional Park	P26
Ramsey County	Tony Schmidt Regional Park	P27
Ramsey County	Vadnais-Snail Lake Regional Park	P28
Saint Paul/Ramsey County	Battle Creek & Indian Mounds Regional Park	P24
Saint Paul	Como Regional Park	P29
Saint Paul	Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm Regional Park	P30
Saint Paul	Lilydale-Harriet Island & Cherokee Heights Regional Park	P31
Saint Paul/Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Mississippi Gorge Regional Park	P19
Saint Paul/Ramsey County	Phalen-Keller Regional Park	P26
Scott County	Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park	P32
Scott County/Three Rivers Park District	Cleary Lake Regional Park	P33
Scott County	Doyle-Kennefick Regional Park	P34
Scott County	Spring Lake Regional Park	P35
Three Rivers Park District	Bryant Lake Regional Park	P36
Three Rivers Park District/Scott County	Cleary Lake Regional Park	P33
Three Rivers Park District	Clifton E. French Regional Park	P37
Three Rivers Park District	Eagle Lake Regional Park	P38
Three Rivers Park District	Fish Lake Regional Park	P39
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka Islands Regional Park	P40
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka Regional Park	P41
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Sarah Regional Park	P42

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park	Map #
Three Rivers Park District	Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park/Mississippi Gateway Regional Park	P43
Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	North Mississippi Regional Park	P21
Washington County	Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park	P44
Washington County	Pine Point Regional Park	P45
Washington County	St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park	P46

1 Table 2-2. Park reserves open to the public

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

2 Table 2-3. Special features open to the public

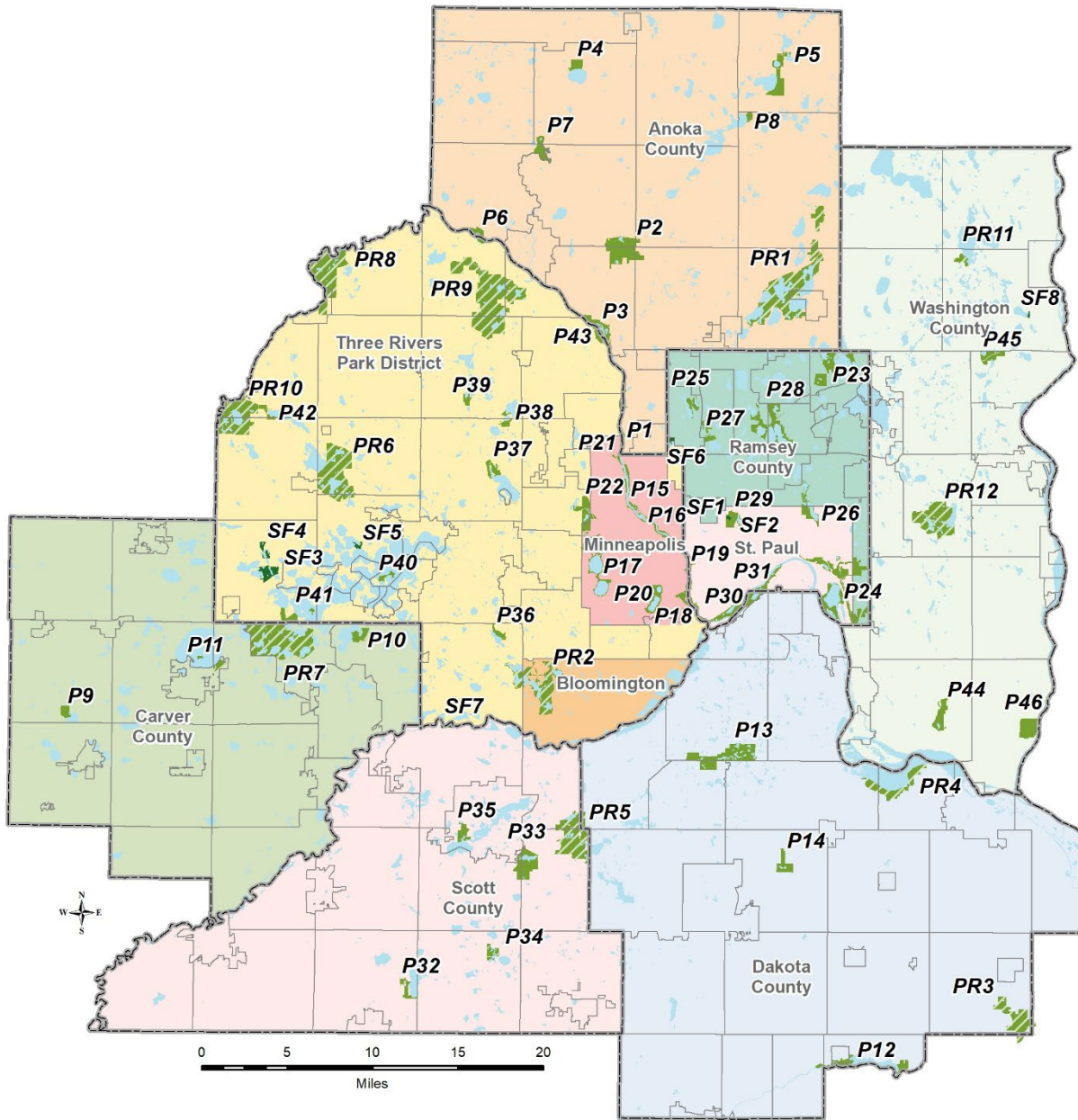
Regional Park Implementing Agency	Special Recreation Feature	Map #
Saint Paul	Como Park Zoo	SF1
Saint Paul	Marjorie McNeely Conservatory	SF2
Three Rivers Park District	Gale Woods Farm	SF3
Three Rivers Park District	Kingswood	SF4
Three Rivers Park District	Noerenberg Gardens	SF5
Three Rivers Park District	Silverwood	SF6
Three Rivers Park District	The Landing	SF7
Washington County	Square Lake	SF8

3

4

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 Figure 2-1. Regional parks, park serves, and special features open to the public



Numbers Correspond to List in Tables 2-1, 2-2, and 2-3

**Regional Park**

Regional Park (Open to the Public)

**Park Reserve**

Park Reserve (Open to the Public)

**Special Recreation Feature**

Special Recreation Feature (Open to the Public)

County Boundaries

City and Township Boundaries

Lakes and Rivers

2



Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 *Existing Regional Trails*

2 As of 2025, there are 56 regional trail corridors, with a total of 457 miles open to the public, listed in  
 3 Table 2-4 and Figures 2-2 and 2-3. Many trails are constructed in phases, some as part of roadway  
 4 improvement projects or local developments. Therefore, although a trail is listed as being open, some  
 5 portions of the trail corridor may be developed in the future and are not yet open to the public.

6 **Table 2-4. Regional trails open to the public**

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	CP Rail Regional Trail – Segment A	T11
Bloomington/Three Rivers Park District	Nokomis-Minnesota River Regional Trail	T12
Carver County/Three Rivers Park District	Dakota Rail Regional Trail	T13
Carver County	Highway 5 Regional Trail	T14
Carver County/Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka Regional Trail	T15
Carver County/Three Rivers Park District	Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail	T16
Carver County	Southwest Regional Trail	T17
Dakota County	Big Rivers Regional Trail	T18
Dakota County	Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway, Highway 62 Segment	T19
Dakota County	Minnesota River Greenway	T20
Dakota County/Anoka County	Mississippi River Greenway Regional Trail/ Mississippi River Regional Trail	T6
Dakota County	North Creek Greenway Regional Trail	T21
Dakota County	River to River Greenway	T22
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers Park District	Cedar Lake Regional Trail	T23

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trails	Map #
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Columbia Parkway Regional Trail	T24
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Kenilworth Regional Trail	T25
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers Park District	Luce Line Regional Trail	T26
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail	T27
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers Park District	Northeast Diagonal Regional Trail	T28
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Ridgway Parkway Regional Trail	T29
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board/Three Rivers Park District	Shingle Creek Regional Trail	T30
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	St. Anthony Parkway Regional Trail	T31
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail	T32
Ramsey County	Birch Lake Regional Trail	T33
Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Bruce Vento Regional Trail	T34
Ramsey County	Highway 96 Regional Trail	T35
Ramsey County/Washington County	Lake Links Regional Trail	T36
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	T37
Saint Paul/Ramsey County	Bruce Vento Regional Trail	T34
Saint Paul	Grand Round North Regional Trail	T38
Saint Paul	Robert Piram Regional Trail	T39
Saint Paul	Samuel Morgan Regional Trail	T40
Saint Paul/Ramsey County	Trout Brook Regional Trail	T37
Scott County	Big Woods Regional Trail (formerly Scott West Regional Trail)	T41
Scott County	Spring Lake Regional Trail	T42
Three Rivers Park District	Baker-Carver Regional Trail	T43
Three Rivers Park District	Bassett Creek Regional Trail	T44
Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Cedar Lake Regional Trail	T23
Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington	CP Rail Regional Trail - Segment A	T11
Three Rivers Park District	Crow River Regional Trail	T45
Three Rivers Park District	Crystal Lake Regional Trail	T46

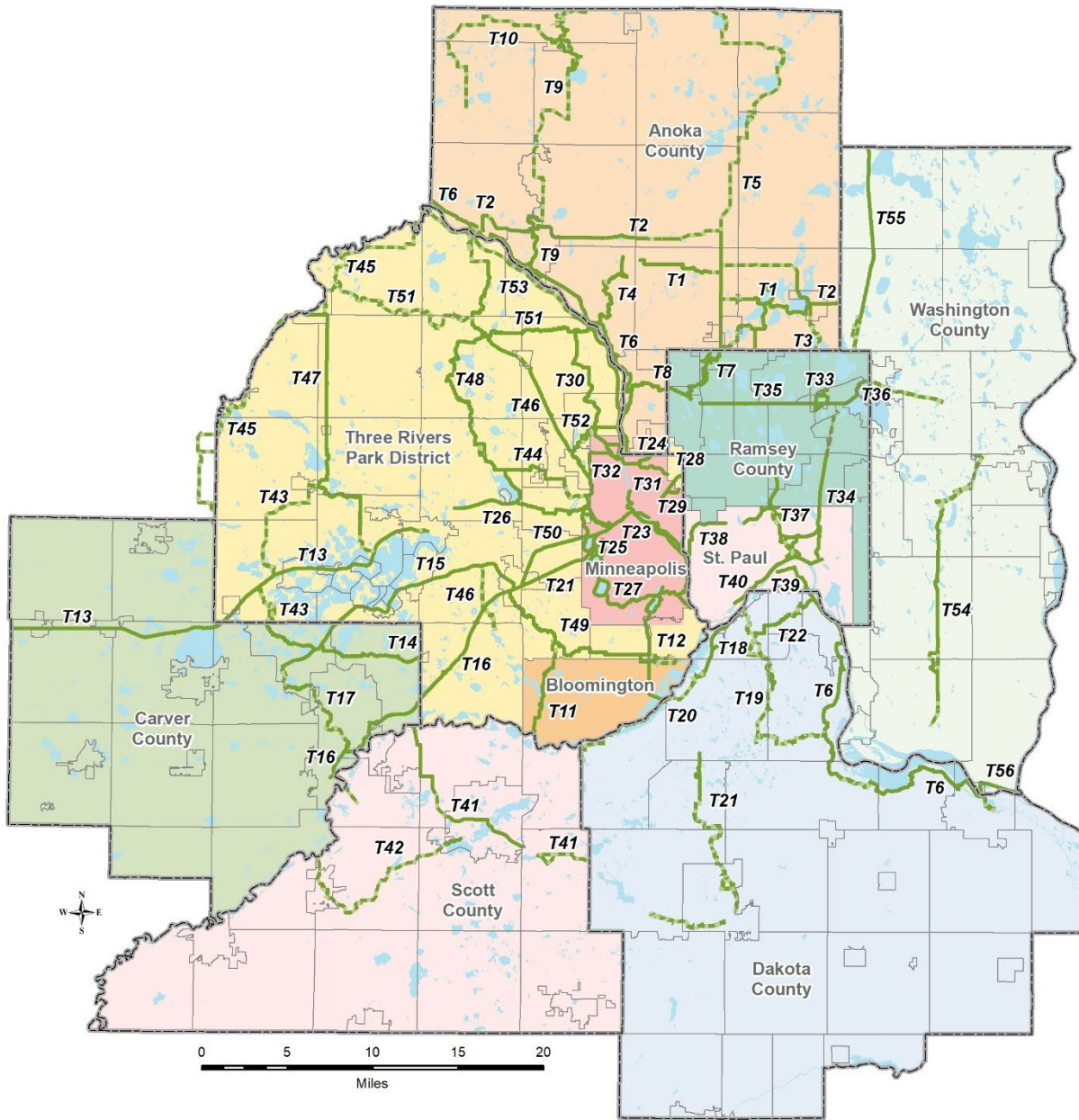
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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trails	Map #
Three Rivers Park District/Carver County	Dakota Rail Regional Trail	T13
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Independence Regional Trail	T47
Three Rivers Park District/Carver County	Lake Minnetonka Regional Trail	T15
Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Luce Line Regional Trail	T26
Three Rivers Park District	Medicine Lake Regional Trail	T48
Three Rivers Park District/Carver County	Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail	T16
Three Rivers Park District	Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail	T49
Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington	Nokomis-Minnesota River Regional Trail	T12
Three Rivers Park District	North Cedar Lake Regional Trail	T50
Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Northeast Diagonal Regional Trail	T28
Three Rivers Park District	Rush Creek Regional Trail	T51
Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Shingle Creek Regional Trail	T30
Three Rivers Park District	Twin Lakes Regional Trail	T52
Three Rivers Park District	West Mississippi River Regional Trail	T53
Washington County	Central Greenway Regional Trail – South and Central Lake Elmo Segments	T54
Washington County	Hardwood Creek Regional Trail	T55
Washington County/Ramsey County	Lake Links Regional Trail	T36
Washington County	Point Douglas Regional Trail	T56

1

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 Figure 2-2. Regional trails open to the public



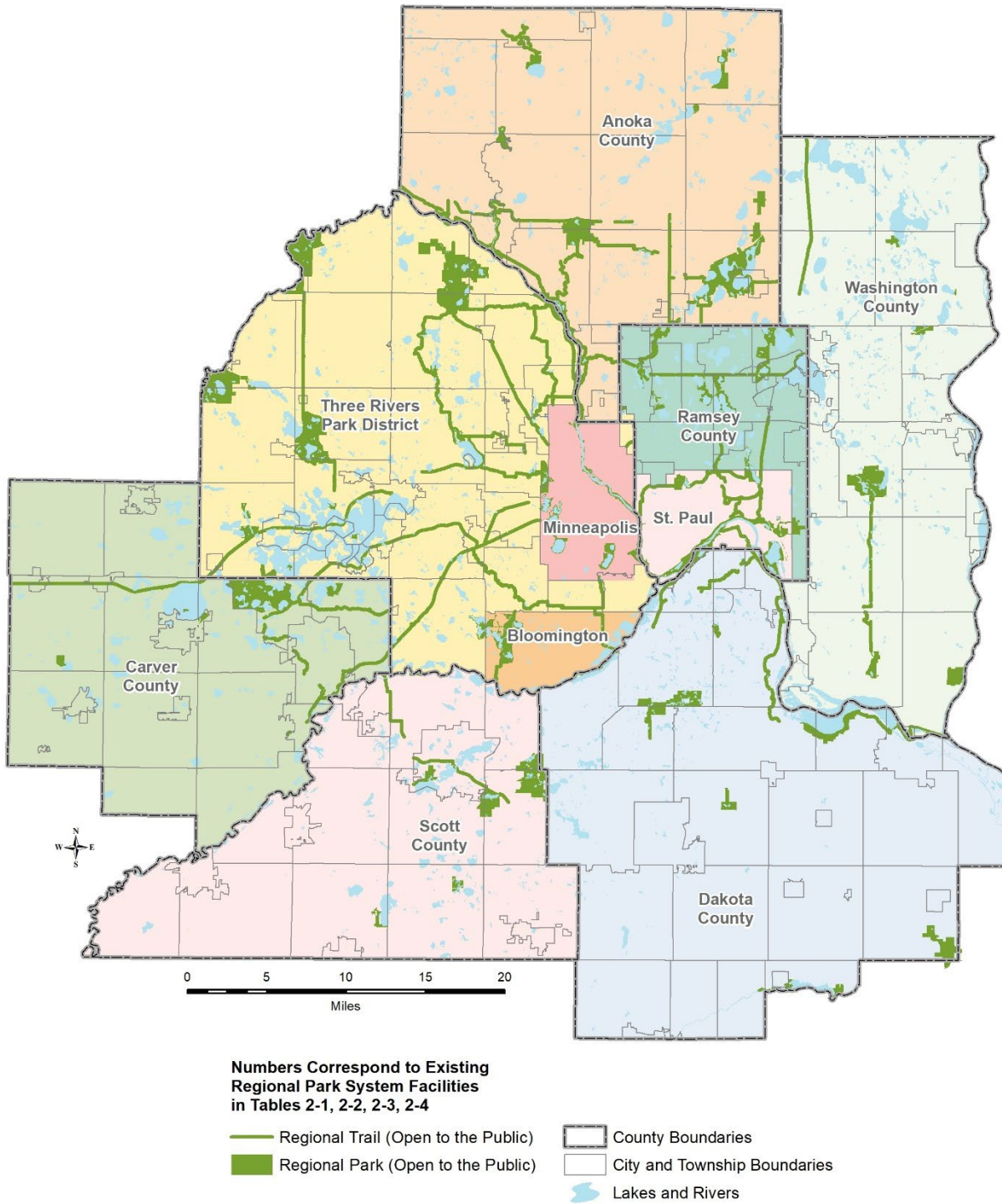
**Numbers Correspond to Regional Trails Listed in Table 2-4**

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

2  
3  
4

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 **Figure 2-3. Existing regional parks and trails system facilities**



2

3

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 *Planned regional parks system facilities*

2 In addition to the facilities that are open to the public, there is one regional park and one park reserve  
 3 that have Council-approved long-range plans but have not yet been developed. These facilities are  
 4 listed in Tables 2-5 and 2-6 and shown in Figure 2-4.

5 **Table 2-5. Planned regional parks and park reserves not open to the public**

<b>Regional Park Implementing Agency</b>	<b>Regional Park</b>	<b>Map #</b>
Washington County	Grey Cloud Island Regional Park	PP1
<b>Regional Park Implementing Agency</b>	<b>Park Reserve</b>	<b>Map #</b>
Scott County	Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve	PPR1

6 Seventeen regional trails have Council-approved long-range plans but are not yet developed or open to  
 7 the public, as listed in Table 2-6 and shown in Figure 2-4.

8 **Table 2-6. Planned regional trails not open to the public**

<b>Regional Park Implementing Agency</b>	<b>Regional Trail</b>	<b>Trail Mileage</b>	<b>Map #</b>
Dakota County	Lake Byllesby Greenway Regional Trail	3	PT1
Dakota County	Lake Marion Greenway Regional Trail	20	PT2
Dakota County	Rosemount Greenway Regional Trail	13	PT3
Dakota County	Vermillion Highlands Greenway Regional Trail	13	PT4
Dakota County	Vermillion River Greenway Regional Trail	5.35	PT5
Dakota County	Veterans Memorial Greenway Regional Trail	5	PT6
Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board	Grand Rounds Missing Link Regional Trail	5	PT7
Saint Paul	Point Douglas Regional Trail (formerly Point Douglas (Bruce Vento-Washington Co))	4	PT8
Saint Paul	Summit Avenue Regional Trail	5.4	PT9
Scott County	Merriam Junction Regional Trail (formerly Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail)	2	PT10

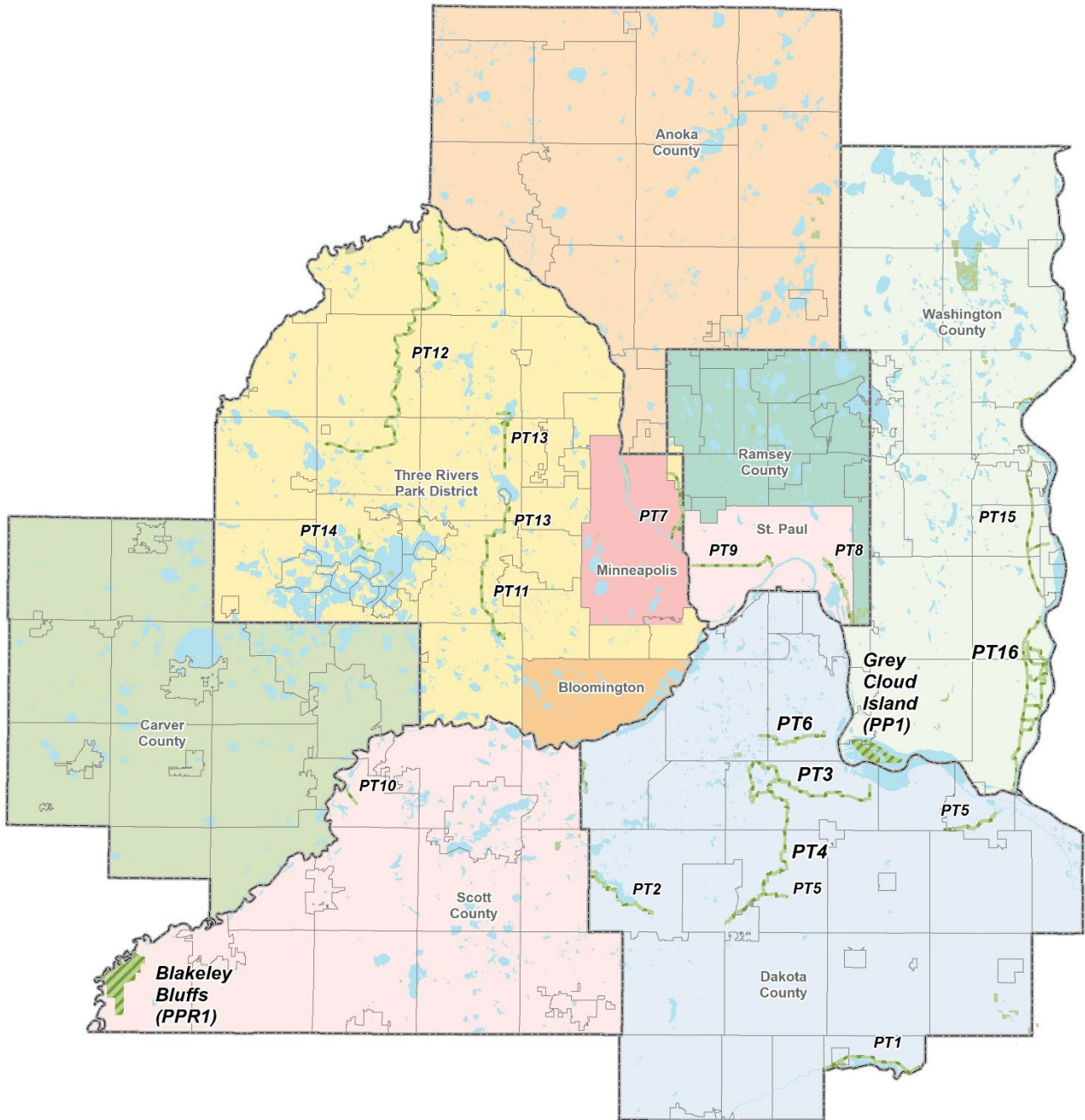
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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail	Trail Mileage	Map #
Scott County	Shallow Waters Regional Trail (formerly a part of the Southern Scott Trail Search Corridor)	17	PT11
Three Rivers Park District	Bryant Lake Regional Trail (formerly Eagle-Bryant Lake Trail Search Corridor)	4.7	PT12
Three Rivers Park District	Diamond Lake Regional Trail (formerly Diamond Lake Trail Search Corridor)	28.1	PT13
Three Rivers Park District	Eagle Lake Regional Trail (formerly Eagle-Bryant Lake Trail Search Corridor)	12.3	PT14
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Independence Regional Trail	2.6	PT15
Washington County	Middle St. Croix Valley Regional Trail (formerly Middle St. Croix Valley Search Corridor)	14	PT16
Washington County	St. Croix Valley Regional Trail	17.4	PT17

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1 Figure 2-4. Planned regional parks and trails not yet open to the public



2





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1 *Boundary adjustments*

2 The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Area recommends a long-range plan boundary adjustment  
 3 for Carver County’s Baylor Regional Park to protect high-quality natural resources and provide  
 4 recreational opportunities.

5 The proposed boundary adjustment is included in the 2050 System Plan and described in Table 2-7  
 6 and Figure 2-5.

7 **Table 2-7. Long-range plan boundary adjustments**

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Parks System Unit	Estimated Acreage	Description	Map #
Carver County	Baylor Regional Park	100	Acquire approximately 100 acres of land adjacent to Eagle Lake, including lakeshore	BA1

8 *Regional park search areas*

9 Six regional park search areas, totaling approximately 3,586 acres, are described in Table 2-8. Figure  
 10 2-5 shows a map of the boundary adjustments, regional park search areas, and special feature bridging  
 11 facility search areas. Regardless of estimated acreages, regional park search areas are depicted with  
 12 the same size symbols in Figure 2-5. Regional park search areas are meant to denote general areas  
 13 and do not specify exact locations at this scale. Future long-range planning work by regional park  
 14 implementing agencies will determine specific boundaries for these regional park search areas.

15 **Table 2-8. Regional park search areas**

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park Search Area	Estimated Acreage	Description	Map #
Anoka County	Rum River Regional Park Search Area	Additional acres 86	Three parks connected by the Rum River, a Wild and Scenic River.	PSA1
Anoka County	Sugar Hills Regional Park Search Area (formerly Northwest Anoka County)	2,500	Very high-quality natural resource area unique in Anoka County.	PSA2
Carver County	Miller Lake Regional Park Search Area	200	Very attractive lake resource and	PSA3

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			appropriate setting for a regional park.	
Carver County	Minnesota Bluffs and Ravines Regional Park Search Area	500	Large areas of regionally significant natural resources, excellent recreation potential.	PSA4
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.	PSA5
Three Rivers Park District	Rogers-Corcoran Regional Park	200	Rich in wetlands, rolling hills and scenic vistas	PSA6

1 *Special feature search area*

2 One special feature bridging facility search area, spanning 11-cities, is described in Table 2-9. Figure 2-  
 3 5 shows a map of the boundary adjustments, regional park search areas, and special feature bridging  
 4 facility search areas.

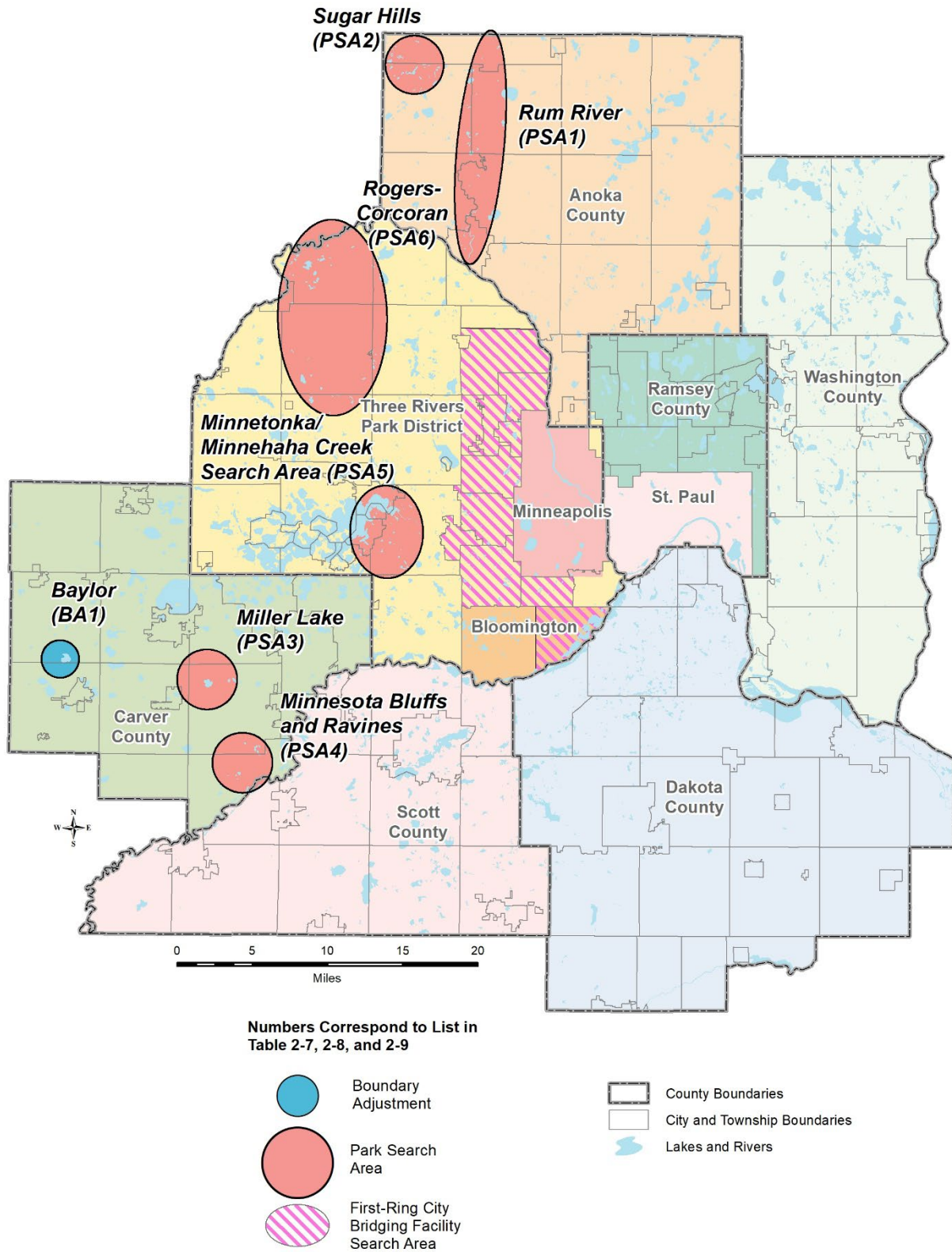
5 **Table 2-9. Special feature search area**

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

6

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1 Figure 2-5. Boundary adjustments and regional park and special feature search areas



Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 *Regional trail search corridors*

2 There are 49 proposed regional trails without Council-approved long-range plans that identify the trail  
 3 alignments. Many of these trails have been considered part of the Regional Parks System for several  
 4 years and were mapped in previous Regional Parks Policy Plans as proposed trails showing a tentative  
 5 alignment. Since alignments for these trails have not yet been approved by the Council as part of a  
 6 long-range plan and are therefore not eligible for Regional Parks System funding for acquisition and  
 7 development, they are being shown as regional trail search corridors. The regional trail search corridors  
 8 are listed in Table 2-10 and shown in Figure 2-6.

9 **Table 2-10. Regional trail search corridors**

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles	Map #
Anoka County	North Anoka County	30	TSC1
Bloomington/Three Rivers Park District	Progressive Rail	9	TSC2
Carver County	County Road 10	19	TSC3
Carver County	County Road 61	1	TSC4
Carver County	Highway 11	4	TSC5
Carver County	Highway 41	3	TSC6
Carver County/Three Rivers Park District	Highway 101	4.8	TSC7
Carver County	Lake Waconia	6	TSC8
Carver County	Lake Waconia-Carver	17	TSC9
Carver County	Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Extension	6	TSC10
Carver County	Twin Cities & Western	25	TSC11
Carver County	Western Carver County	17	TSC12
Dakota County	Chub Creek Greenway	20	TSC13
Dakota County	Lebanon Hills-Lake Marion Greenway	7	TSC14
Dakota County	Lebanon Hills-Minnesota River Greenway (formerly Lebanon Hills-Big Rivers Greenway)	7	TSC15
Dakota County	Vermillion River Greenway	12.2	TSC16
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Midtown Greenway	6	TSC17
Ramsey County/Washington County	Afton Bluffs	3	TSC18

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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles	Map #
Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Bruce Vento	0.5	TSC19
Ramsey County/Saint Paul	Lexington Avenue/Parkway	9	TSC20
Ramsey County	St. Anthony RR Spur	10	TSC21
Ramsey County	Trout Brook Extension	4	TSC22
Saint Paul	Grand Round - Lake Elmo Park Reserve	6.8	TSC23
Saint Paul	Hidden Falls Regional Park to Samuel Morgan Regional Trail / "Ford Spur"	4.7	TSC24
Saint Paul/Ramsey County	Lexington Avenue/Parkway	6	TSC20
Saint Paul	Mississippi Gorge Regional Park (Saint Paul) to Samuel Morgan Regional Trail / Midtown Greenway Extension	5.7	TSC25
Scott County	Big Rivers Extension	5	TSC26
Scott County	Cedar Lake Farm to New Prague	6	TSC27
Scott County	Elko New Market-Blakeley-Doyle Kennefick	32	TSC28
Scott County	Elko New Market-Doyle Kennefick	5	TSC29
Scott County	Lake Marion to Scott West	6	TSC30
Scott County	Merriam Junction (Formerly Louisville)	5	TSC31
Scott County	Prior Lake Outlet	6	TSC32
Scott County	Shallow Waters (a portion of the Southern Scott)	17	TSC33
Scott County	Southern Scott	18	TSC34
Three Rivers Park District	Bryant Lake (formerly Eagle-Bryant Lake Trail Search Corridor)	10	TSC35
Three Rivers Park District	CP Rail - Segments B – D	15.38	TSC36
Three Rivers Park District	Dakota Rail Extension (terminus refinement)	3.6	TSC37

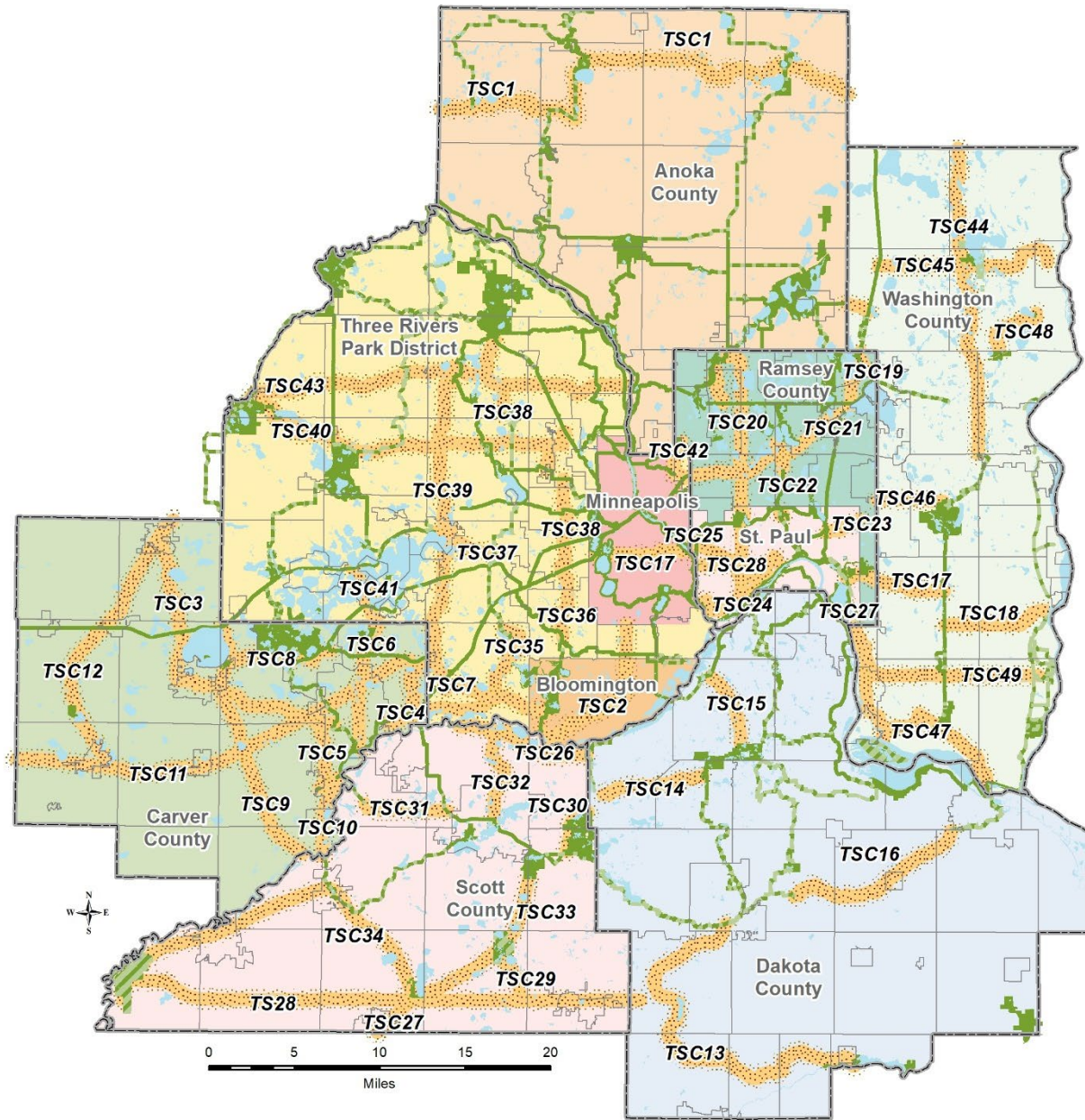
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Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles	Map #
Three Rivers Park District	Eagle Lake (formerly Eagle-Bryant Lake Trail Search Corridor)	5.2	TSC38
Three Rivers Park District	Grey's Bay (formerly part of North-South 1; 9.5-mile extension)	10.5	TSC39
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Sarah (4-mile extension)	18	TSC40
Three Rivers Park District	Mid-Lake (formerly apart of Lake Independence Extension)	4	TSC41
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	TSC42
Three Rivers Park District	Weaver Lake	23	TSC43
Washington County/Ramsey County	Afton Bluffs	10	TSC18
Washington County	Central Greenway Regional Trail – North Segment (6.8-mile extension)	18.5	TSC44
Washington County	Glacial Hills	12	TSC45
Washington County	Lake Elmo Park Reserve to Phalen-Keller Regional Park	7.6	TSC46
Washington County	Mississippi River	17	TSC47
Washington County	Pine Point Regional Park to Square Lake Special Recreation Feature	4.3	TSC48
Washington County	Prairie View	9	TSC49

1

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1 Figure 2-6. Regional trail search corridors



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 2-10

- Regional Trail (Open to the Public)
- - - Regional Trail (Not 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 Park (Not Open to the Public)
- Regional Trail Search Corridor
- 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 As Figure 2-7 illustrates, the updated 2050 System Plan includes:

- 3 • Regional Parks System facilities open to the public (2025)
  - 4 ○ 46 regional parks
  - 5 ○ 12 park reserves
  - 6 ○ 8 special features
  - 7 ○ 56 regional trails
- 8 • Planned Regional Parks System units that are not yet open to the public
  - 9 ○ 1 regional park
  - 10 ○ 1 park reserve
  - 11 ○ 17 regional trails
- 12 • Regional Parks System boundary adjustments
  - 13 ○ 1 regional park
- 14 • Regional park search areas
  - 15 ○ 6 regional park search areas
- 16 • Special recreation feature search area
  - 17 ○ 1 location siting multiple unique bridging facilities
- 18 • Regional trail search corridors
  - 19 ○ 49 regional trail search corridors

20 The total park acreage and trail mileage for each implementation phase is listed below:

- 21 • Open to the Public
  - 22 • Regional parks, park reserves, and special features: 52,519 acres
  - 23 • Regional trails: 457 miles
- 24 • Planned
  - 25 • Regional parks, park reserves and special features: 17,945 acres



## Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

- 1           • Regional trails: 393 miles
- 2           • Search
- 3           • Regional parks, park reserves and special features: 3,586 acres
- 4           • Regional trails: 534 miles

### 5 *System level changes*

6 The 2025 system-level changes reflect Implementing Agency proposed modifications to existing units  
7 within the Regional Parks and Trails System; as well as future 2028/2029 system addition candidates.  
8 These 11 changes to the Regional Parks and Trails System include 6 name changes, 2 trail  
9 refinements, and three 2028/2029 system addition candidates. The changes are listed below in further  
10 detail.

- 11           • Unit name changes (six):
  - 12           • Anoka County:
    - 13           • “Northwest Search Area” changed to “Sugar Hills Search Area”
  - 14           • Dakota County:
    - 15           • “Lebanon Hills-Big Rivers Greenway Trail Search Corridor” changed to “Lebanon  
16           Hills-Minnesota River Greenway Trail Search Corridor”
  - 17           • Scott County:
    - 18           • “Scott West Regional Trail” changed to “Big Woods Regional Trail”
    - 19           • “Minnesota River Bluffs Extension and Scott County Connection Regional Trail”  
20           changed to “Merriam Junction Regional Trail”
    - 21           • “Louisville Trail Search Corridor” changed to Merriam Junction Regional Trail”
    - 22           • Portion of “Southern Scott Trail Search Corridor” changed to “Shallow Waters  
23           Regional Trail”
- 24           • Trail refinements (two):
  - 25           • Three Rivers Park District’s Dakota Rail Regional Trail Search Corridor Extension  
26           moving the trail terminus from Highway 494 to Minnetonka City Hall
  - 27           • Three Rivers Park District is transferring a portion of the Lake Minnetonka Regional Trail  
28           to Carver County
  - 29
  - 30

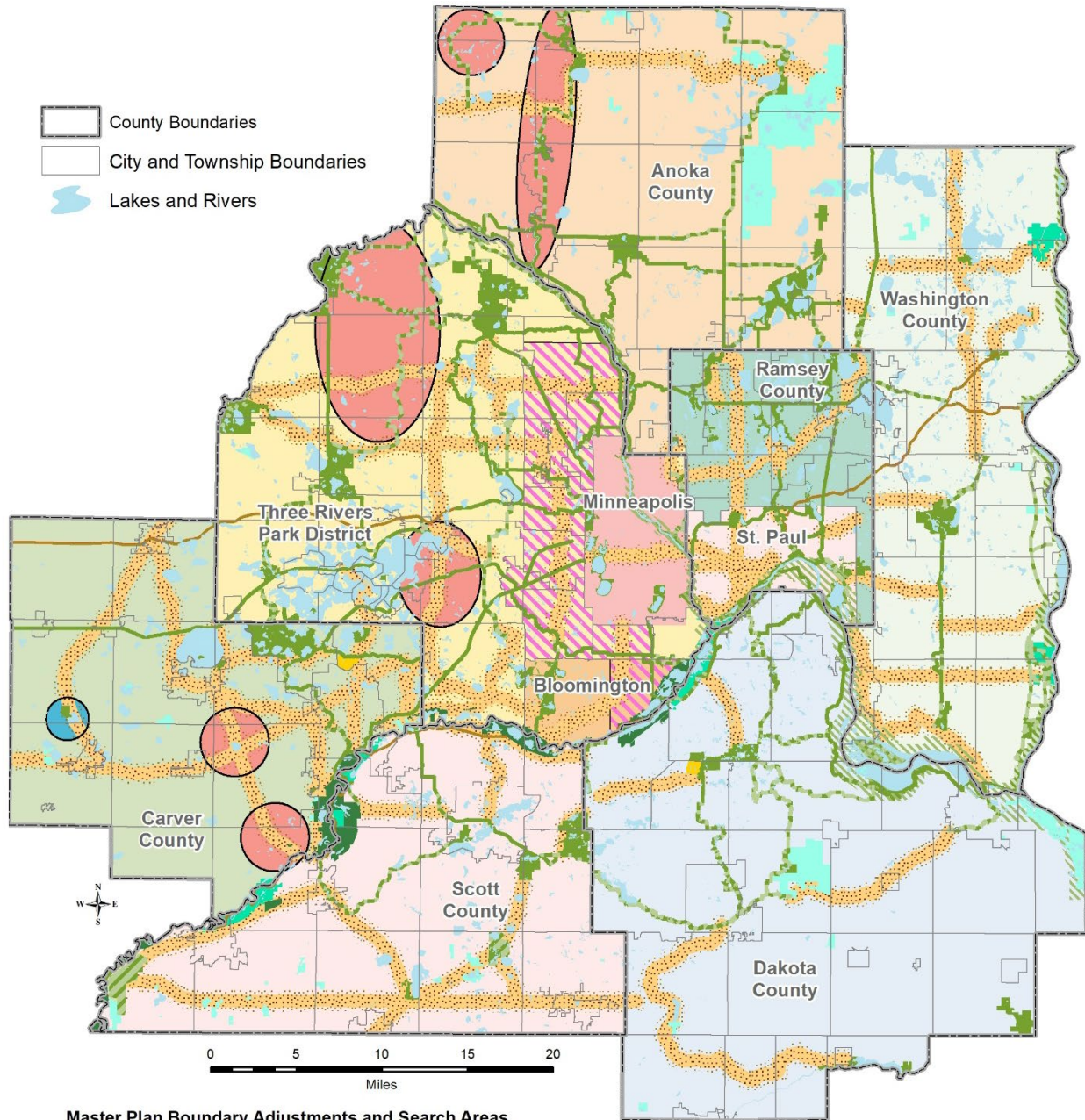
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- 1 • Future 2028/2029 System Additions Process candidates (three):
  - 2 • Ramsey County's Rice Creek North Regional Trail Boundary Adjustment adding 2,407
  - 3 acres to the current 792 acres at former Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant
  - 4 • Three Rivers Park District's 5.5-mile West Minnehaha Creek Trail Corridor Study Area
  - 5 • Dakota County's 58-acre Thompson County Park Study Area in West St. Paul serving
  - 6 the outdoor recreational needs of the more than 50,000 residents who live in the
  - 7 northern portion of Dakota County

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1 Figure 2-7. 2050 Regional Parks and Trails System Plan Map



Master Plan Boundary Adjustments and Search Areas

- Boundary Adjustment
- Park Search Area
- First-Ring City Bridging Facility Search Area
- Regional Trail Search Corridor
- Regional Trail (Open to the Public)
- Regional Trail (Not 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 Park (Not Open to the Public)
- State Trails
- Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway
- Mississippi National River & Recreation Area
- State Wildlife Management Areas
- State Parks
- MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge
- Minnesota Valley State Trail and Recreation Area
- Special State Recreation Features

2

1 *Estimated cost to complete the system*

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

6 The estimated cost to complete the existing Regional Parks and Trails System is \$2.99 billion, including  
 7 \$1.08 billion in acquisition costs and \$1.91 billion in development costs (Table 2-11).

8 **Table 2-11. Estimated acquisition and development costs to complete the Regional Parks and Trails System**

Category	Acquisition Cost	Development Cost	Total Cost
Unbuilt portions of existing regional parks and trails	\$777,429,177	\$986,715,467	<b>\$1,764,144,644</b>
Planned regional parks and trails	\$87,447,480	\$146,053,135	<b>\$233,500,616</b>
Boundary Adjustments, Park Search Areas and Corridors	\$140,021,314	\$104,500,000	<b>\$244,521,314</b>
Regional Trail Search Corridors	\$72,168,128	\$671,241,125	<b>\$743,409,253</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,077,066,100</b>	<b>\$1,908,509,728</b>	<b>\$2,985,575,827</b>

9 *Purpose and use*

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

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

14 *Methodology*

15 The Met Council refined the approach from the 2020 update to use the most recent and available data  
 16 related to cost estimates within the Regional Parks and Trails System. The Met Council worked with  
 17 implementing agency staff to identify and confirm the cost components, data sources, assumptions and  
 18 results.

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

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

1 **Acquisition costs**

2 Land acquisition costs were calculated by summarizing the county assessor’s total estimated market  
3 value for properties that are identified as inholding parcels. Where individual parcel data was not  
4 available, such as parks search areas and trail search corridors, average per-acre costs were used for  
5 parcels inside the Metropolitan Urban Services Area (MUSA) and outside the MUSA. The provision of  
6 wastewater service is not the only factor contributing to higher land values in the region’s core. Other  
7 locational attributes that matter for land values are spatial situation (centrally located or remote),  
8 accessibility to employment centers and other destinations, proximity to lakes and rivers, neighborhood  
9 amenities, and other urban services (for example, high frequency transit service).

10 **Development costs**

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

17 Development costs for search areas and corridors were estimated by respective implementing  
18 agencies.

19 **Limitations**

20 The estimate is intended for use only at a region-wide level. Application to an individual project or single  
21 implementing agency is inappropriate. Actual costs for individual projects will vary depending on the  
22 location and complexity of each project. Refer to long-range plans, project funding applications, and  
23 recent construction for more information on project costs. Lastly, this calculation is completed with  
24 current cost estimates and market values. Factors such as changing long range plan timelines,  
25 inflation, and market drivers affect the actual cost of future development and acquisition.

26

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 **Analysis**

2 Total acquisition and development costs to complete the Regional Parks and Trails System is nearly \$3  
 3 billion including \$1.76 billion for the unbuilt portions of the existing parks and trails, \$234 million for  
 4 planned units, and \$988 million for search areas and corridors (Figure 2-8). Table 2-12 shows acreage,  
 5 mileage and costs associated with each category.

6 **Table 2-12. Combined total costs for the system completion**

Category	Park Acreage	Trail Acreage	New Trail Mileage	Acquisition Cost	Development Cost	Total Cost
Unbuilt Portions of Existing Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Features, and Regional Trails (Figure 2-9) <sup>a.</sup>	2,785	2,621	250	\$777 million	\$987 million	\$1.76 billion
Planned Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Features, and Regional Trails (Council-approved long-range plan, not yet open to the public) (Figure 2-10) <sup>a.</sup>	3,383	248	122	\$87 million	\$146 million	\$234 million
Regional Park Search Areas and Boundary Adjustments (Figure 2-11) <sup>b,c.</sup>	3,586	N/A	N/A	\$140 million	\$105 million	\$245 million
Regional Trail Search Corridors (Figure 2-11) <sup>b,c.</sup>	N/A	896	534	\$72 million	\$671 million	\$743 million
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>9,754</b>	<b>3,765</b>	<b>906</b>	<b>\$1.08 billion</b>	<b>\$1.91 billion</b>	<b>\$2.99 billion</b>

7 Data Sources:

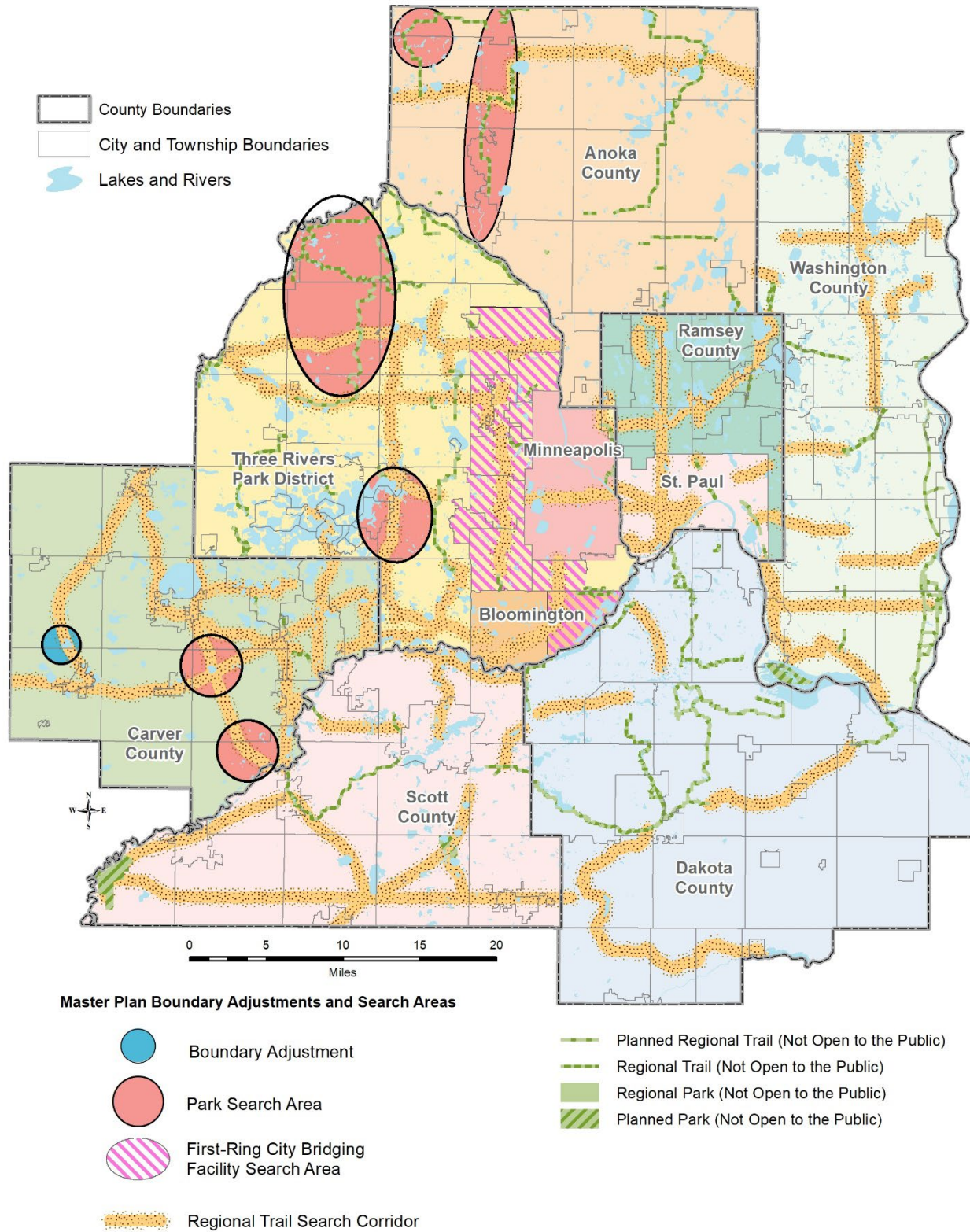
8 <sup>a</sup> Council approved long-range plans

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

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

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1 Figure 2-8. Unbuilt portions of the regional parks and trails system including existing, planned, and search



2

Section Two: System Plan Policy and Actions

1 *Capital improvement plan*

2 As directed by Minn. Stat. 473.147, subd. 1, the regional parks policy plan must include a five-year  
 3 capital improvement plan (Table 2-13). These figures are subject to change based upon legislative  
 4 action. The projections are provided by the Agencies and are based on their current estimate of funding  
 5 levels.

6 **Table 2-13. Regional Parks and Trails System Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan, 2025-2029 (in millions)**

<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2026</b>	<b>2027</b>	<b>2028</b>	<b>2029</b>	<b>Total</b>
Regional	\$12.0	\$2.6	\$9.3	\$3.0	\$9.0	\$35.8
State	\$73.9	\$43.7	\$102.6	\$42.8	\$99.4	\$362.3
Other <sup>a</sup> .	\$52.4	\$25.5	\$46.1	\$20.3	\$33.1	\$177.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$138.2</b>	<b>\$71.8</b>	<b>\$158.0</b>	<b>\$66.1</b>	<b>\$141.5</b>	<b>\$575.6</b>

7 **Table 2-14. Use of Funding for the System Capital Improvement Plan, 2025-2029 (in millions)**

<b>Use of Funds</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2026</b>	<b>2027</b>	<b>2028</b>	<b>2029</b>	<b>Total</b>
Expansion	\$8.7	\$7.6	\$7.9	\$7.6	\$7.9	\$39.8
Improvements	\$76.6	\$36.1	\$63.9	\$25.3	\$49.6	\$251.4
Preservation	\$52.9	\$28.1	\$86.2	\$33.1	\$84	\$284.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$138.2</b>	<b>\$71.8</b>	<b>\$158.0</b>	<b>\$66.1</b>	<b>\$141.5</b>	<b>\$575.6</b>

8 <sup>a.</sup>"Other" includes all other sources of funding invested in the system by implementing agencies including local,  
 9 federal, etc.



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 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 between 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 visits to parks and  
15 trails in each implementing agency based on a methodology relying on sample counts. The results are  
16 used in formulas to calculate each agency's share of Met Council-awarded grant program dollars. The  
17 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. The Met Council will continue to explore the possibility of data  
25 collection across four seasons as well as at the park and trail level within funding constraints.

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

36 **Use of relevant Met Council and external research.** Met Council staff will respond to requests to  
37 support their work. This includes technical assistance in applying existing research findings to policy,  
38 funding, and other key topics. The Council has completed research projects dedicated to building a  
39 more equitable system in response to the goals articulated in *Thrive 2040* and *Imagine 2050*. The 2021

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

10 **New research in response to emerging topics.** Research is needed to support the needs of  
11 implementing agency partners and the goals outlined in *Imagine 2050*. Implementing agencies continue  
12 to need additional quantitative data about non-users in the general regional population and more  
13 extensive visitor data valid at the park and trail level. The Council will continue to explore options within  
14 funding constraints. The Met Council will identify emerging issues requiring additional research.

### 15 *System Plan – Action 3: Annually update map datasets*

16 **The Met Council will annually update map datasets to reflect the most current status of**  
17 **the system in coordination with the data “owners,” our ten regional park implementing agency**  
18 **partners.**

19 Regional Parks and Trails System geographic information systems (GIS) data is housed within the Met  
20 Council for implementing agency and Met Council processes. The Implementing Agencies and Met  
21 Council have been working in partnership to establish an annual update process for regional parks and  
22 trails GIS data for timely and accurate information. The Met Council initiates a data request that is  
23 updated when needs arise collaboratively with the regional park implementing agencies. The desired  
24 outcomes are:

- 25 • Accurate GIS data that is consistent with Met Council’s Regional Parks and Trails system plan  
26 and regional parks and trails long-range plans from implementing agencies
- 27 • Use of the GIS data for Operations and Maintenance funding requests. Use of the GIS data as  
28 the ‘document of record’ for regional park and trails with old or no long-range plans on file.  
29 These regional parks and trails existed within the system at its inception in 1974, making them  
30 eligible for investment in their current state and use.

1 **Section Three: Natural Systems policy and actions**

2 *Natural Systems policy*

3 **Identify lands with high-quality natural features and/or with high restoration potential that are**  
4 **desirable for Regional Parks and Trails System activities and put these lands in a protected**  
5 **status, so they will be available for recreational uses and preservation purposes in perpetuity.**

6 The Regional Parks and Trails System is primarily nature-based and focuses on protecting and  
7 restoring high-quality natural areas for regional recreation opportunities. The protection, restoration,  
8 and enhancement of these natural systems is a foundational objective for the Regional Parks and Trails  
9 System. The Met Council collaborates with regional park implementing agencies to strategically locate  
10 and acquire lands with high-quality natural features or potential for restoration to create an  
11 interconnected regional recreation system. More details of the criteria used to identify lands for  
12 incorporation into the regional system can be found in the Regional Parks and Trails Planning  
13 Handbook.

14 Desired outcomes in natural systems protection:

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

21 *Natural Systems – Action 1: Locate and acquire land*

22 **The Met Council partners with regional park implementing agencies to locate and acquire lands**  
23 **with natural features, access to water, or restoration potential for conservation, recreation, and**  
24 **protection.**

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

30 Major considerations when deciding what lands should be brought into the Regional Parks and Trails  
31 System are organized around three primary factors:

- 32 • **Natural systems foundation:** Acquiring lands that protect and restore natural features, help  
33 protect or improve water quality, provide wildlife habitat, and/or offer opportunities for outdoor  
34 recreation

## Section Three: Natural Systems Policy and Actions

- 1 • **Geographic distribution:** Ensuring regional park and trail facilities are evenly distributed  
2 around the metropolitan area or distributed in proportion to the existing and forecasted  
3 population growth and development
- 4 • **Equity:** The ability to strengthen equitable use of regional parks and trails by all our region's  
5 residents, such as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.

### 6 **Natural Systems Foundation**

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

12 The restoration of urban areas that include natural resource features (for example, Above the Falls  
13 Regional Park and Bruce Vento Regional Trail) have provided opportunities to create regional parks  
14 and trails in urban areas that have been home to a range of uses, including cultural and industrial ones.

15 All privately-owned parcels within a Council-approved long-range plan boundary are “in-holdings” until  
16 they are acquired. Whenever possible, the regional park implementing agencies will pursue the  
17 acquisition of these “in-holdings” on a willing-seller basis. Additional details about the acquisition  
18 process are outlined in the Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

19 Because of strong public attraction to water resources, acquisition of any additional public water  
20 frontage identified in a Council-approved long-range plan should be given a high priority. The high  
21 demand and rapidly escalating value of water frontage will only make these lands costlier in the future.  
22 Trying to convert land with water frontage to public use after it has been developed is difficult and  
23 expensive.

### 24 **Geographic Distribution**

25 As the region continues to grow, it is important to regularly assess whether the residents of the region  
26 are being adequately served by the Regional Parks and Trails System. As such, it is important to  
27 strategically locate and acquire park and trail lands that are regionally significant. Regional significance  
28 means that the unit offers a natural setting, is significant in size, and serves multiple communities.  
29 Additionally, it provides regional recreational opportunities that are currently lacking in these areas.  
30 Geographic distribution helps the Council prioritize where new additions to the system would be most  
31 beneficial and it ensures that regional parks and trails are well distributed spatially, in proportion to  
32 population growth, development, and in recreational offerings available.

### 33 **Equity**

34 With the objective of fostering equity and belonging in the Regional Parks and Trails System, it is  
35 important to consider service gaps across the region. The Council is committed to identifying areas that  
36 are not well served by using a variety of resources and factors such as understanding of where  
37 underrepresented communities have historically lived, available recreational opportunities, and distance  
38 to regional parks and trails.

1 *Natural Systems – Action 2: Research natural systems*

2 **The Met Council provides regional park implementing agencies with research and data that will**  
3 **better inform restoration and protection of natural systems.**

4 Both qualitative and quantitative data-informed strategies are important to the Regional Parks and  
5 Trails System as it ensures that the investments into the system are effective, efficient, and desired by  
6 local communities and implementing agencies. The Council will play a lead role convening  
7 conversations among regional park implementing agencies, providing data and research, and inviting in  
8 interested parties. The Council will need the assistance of implementing agencies to understand local  
9 context and issues. The Council will explore funding opportunities to help support these efforts.

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

- 12 • **Tree canopy:** The Council aims to continue the success of the “Growing Shade” tool and use  
13 tree canopy data to inform which parts of the Regional Parks and Trails System need additional  
14 vegetation.
- 15 • **Regionally significant ecological areas:** Work on updating the regionally significant ecological  
16 areas and use data to identify areas that need protection.
- 17 • **Water monitoring:** Collaborate with Met Council’s Environmental Services division to pilot a  
18 water monitoring project on lakes within regional parks.

19 *Natural Systems – Action 3: Coordinate support for natural systems*

20 **The Met Council coordinates efforts with regional park and trail implementing agencies and**  
21 **external partners to protect, restore, and maintain natural systems across the Regional Parks**  
22 **and Trails System.**

23 While the Council does not own or operate any land within the Regional Parks and Trails System, the  
24 Council has the ability to convene the ten regional park implementing agencies and coordinate efforts  
25 around protection and restoration work. The Council will collaborate with the implementing agencies to  
26 both expand and protect natural areas while enhancing lands already in the system, to deliver a wide  
27 range of desired outcomes, including:

- 28 • **Find additional funding sources:** Identify additional sources of funding for acquisition and  
29 maintenance. For more information, please see Section Eight: Finance, Action 5
- 30 • **Foster external partnerships:** Partner with local organizations to advance the work of  
31 restoration, protection, enhancement, and education
- 32 • **Strengthen collaboration with existing partners:** Continue to work with other state agencies  
33 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 climate**  
4 **change, including the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions.**

5 Climate change and its effects are a high priority for the foreseeable future. The Met Council recognizes  
6 the crucial role that the Regional Parks and Trails System plays in efforts to mitigate climate change,  
7 while adapting to its impacts on the region. Regional park implementing agencies are already doing  
8 work to counteract the effects of climate change. Regional parks and trails provide a central opportunity  
9 for educating visitors about climate change impacts in the region and how the parks and trails system is  
10 both mitigating and adapting to those impacts. It is the Met Council’s responsibility to support this work  
11 while finding areas to create innovative solutions and achieve desired outcomes including:

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

18 *Climate Resilience – Action 1: Advance climate action*

19 **The Met Council supports regional park implementing agencies’ efforts to advance climate work**  
20 **through partnership and collaboration.**

21 One of the Met Council’s primary roles is to convene the regional park implementing agencies to  
22 coordinate efforts at a regional scale. The Met Council will work in partnership with the regional park  
23 implementing agencies to identify common goals and collaboration opportunities that would benefit  
24 from a coordinated, regional effort. By supporting and coordinating climate work at a regional scale,  
25 agencies may share learnings and resources with one another, and the Regional Parks and Trails  
26 System may be better positioned to seek additional funding resources. Other areas that the Met  
27 Council will explore include:

- 28 • **Long-Range Planning:** Continue to work with implementing agencies as the Met Council  
29 explores the addition of climate resiliency dimensions to the long-range Plan requirements listed  
30 in the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook
- 31 • **Operations:** Convene frontline parks staff (operations, maintenance, naturalists) from the  
32 implementing agencies to share best management practices, lessons learned, and coordinate  
33 climate work across agency boundaries. Other efforts may include developing regional  
34 initiatives to improve operations and exploring workforce development opportunities for  
35 naturalists.

1 *Climate Resilience – Action 2: Research climate impacts*

2 **The Met Council partners with regional park implementing agencies to research the Regional**  
3 **Parks and Trails System’s impacts on climate change.**

4 Prioritize research that accurately quantifies the Regional Parks and Trails System’s impact on  
5 mitigating and adapting to climate change. This research will help regional park implementing agencies  
6 identify aspects of the system that are working well and areas for improvement. Conduct research to  
7 capture a wide range of data, including:

- 8 • Greenhouse gas emissions inventory from facilities and operations
- 9 • Inventory that calculates the level of carbon sequestration from completed restoration and  
10 potential sequestration of future restoration work
- 11 • Measurable metrics that show the positive impact regional parks and trails have on climate  
12 mitigation and adaptation (flood control, cooling, etc.)
- 13 • Exploring additional opportunities for tracking water quality in regional parks and trails.
- 14 • Monitoring the effects on emissions of actions taken by implementing agencies such as land  
15 restoration and efficiency improvements made in buildings and facilities.

16 *Climate resilience – Action 3: Drive awareness*

17 **The Met Council will partner with regional park implementing agencies to develop strategies to**  
18 **share stories that increase public awareness of the importance of the Regional Parks and Trails**  
19 **System’s role in climate mitigation and adaptation.**

20 One of the Met Council’s primary roles is to convene the regional park implementing agencies to  
21 coordinate efforts at a regional scale. The Council will work with implementing agencies to discuss  
22 communication strategies to build awareness of the Regional Parks and Trails System’s role in climate  
23 change. In addition to highlighting the adaptation and mitigation capabilities of the system, we will also  
24 provide accurate information that explains the long-term benefits of certain actions, including:

- 25 • **Water quality and quantity:** Work with Environmental Services and implementing agencies to  
26 educate the public about the impact of algal blooms and water pollution
- 27 • **Habitat restoration:** Explain native habitat restoration, its benefits, and how controlled burns  
28 contribute to the ecosystem
- 29 • **Adaptation:** Educate people about the many ways parks can be used to adapt to climate  
30 change through flood control, planting drought resistant vegetation, and growing shade
- 31 • **Programming:** Focus on increasing awareness and involvement of communities through  
32 coordinating climate-oriented programming, such as data collection, restoration work, and  
33 education.

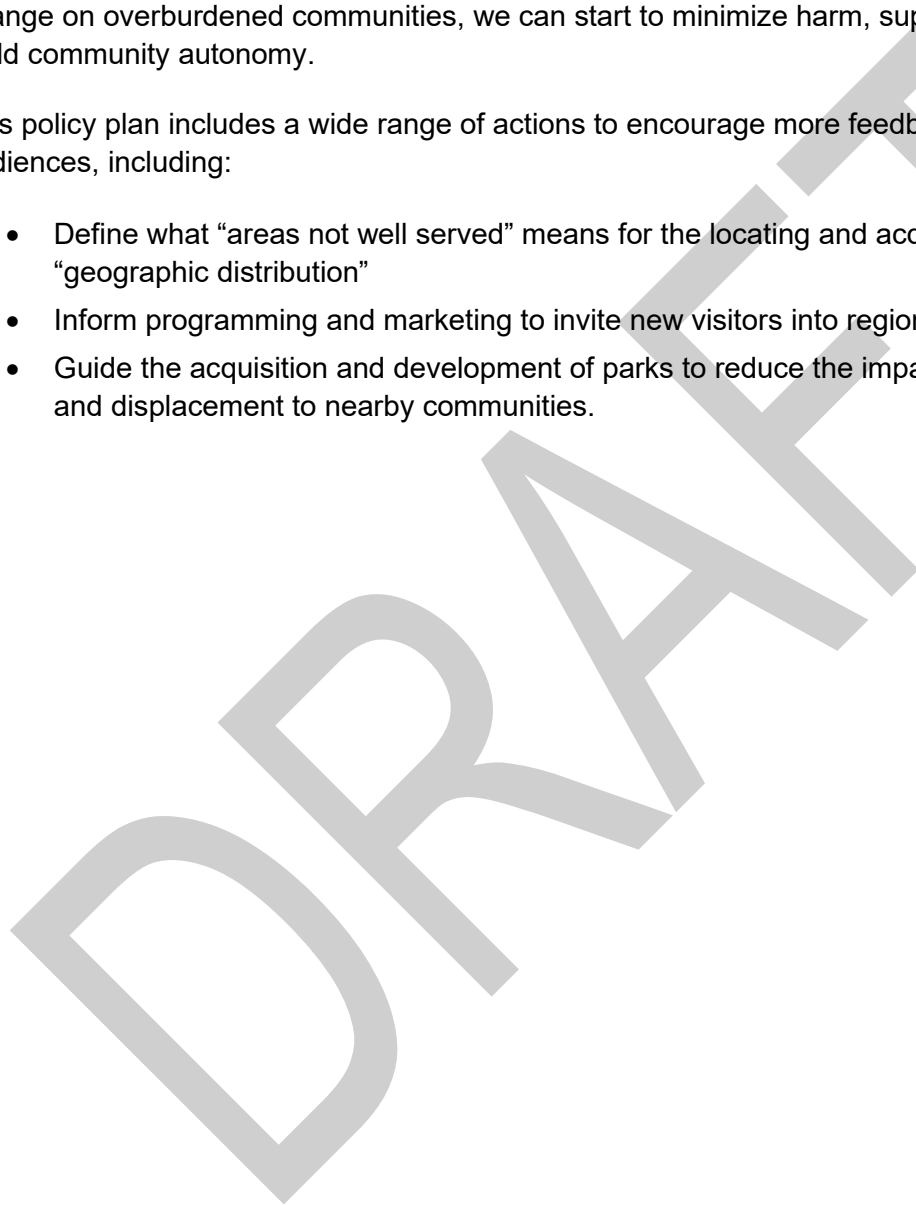
1 *Climate Resilience – Action 4: Climate and environmental justice*

2 **The Met Council will incorporate equity into the climate change conversation by gathering**  
3 **perspectives from historically underserved communities and shaping it into future actions.**

4 The Met Council will incorporate more diverse voices into climate work, identifying areas of  
5 improvement for the Regional Parks and Trails System. By focusing more on the impacts of climate  
6 change on overburdened communities, we can start to minimize harm, support reparative action, and  
7 build community autonomy.

8 This policy plan includes a wide range of actions to encourage more feedback from more diverse  
9 audiences, including:

- 10 • Define what “areas not well served” means for the locating and acquisition priority of  
11 “geographic distribution”
- 12 • Inform programming and marketing to invite new visitors into regional parks and trails
- 13 • Guide the acquisition and development of parks to reduce the impacts of green gentrification  
14 and displacement to nearby communities.





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 outdoors.**

5 Long range planning plays a key role in implementing the policies and actions identified in this plan.  
6 Long range plans identify not just the boundaries or corridor alignment, but also define the  
7 implementing agencies' approach to providing recreational opportunities and maintaining, conserving,  
8 and restoring the natural environment, in response to engagement with current and future visitors, local  
9 units of government, and other stakeholders. The plans are also the basis for the Met Council's funding  
10 distribution and protection of the system.

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

12 **Regional park implementing agencies are required to prepare a long-range plan for each**  
13 **Regional Parks and Trails System unit they own and/or operate.**

14 Minn. Stat. 473.313 requires a long-range plan to be developed by each regional park implementing  
15 agency in consultation with all affected municipalities. While the statute requires only one long-range  
16 plan per regional park implementing agency, the Met Council requires individual long-range plans for  
17 each regional park, park reserve, regional trail, and special feature. Long-range plans prepared by the  
18 regional park implementing agencies are critical in defining the specifics of acquisition, development,  
19 and operation of regional facilities.

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

27 Long-range plan requirements are grouped into three major areas and include a subset of required  
28 content areas, which will be detailed below:

- 29 • Engagement
  - 30 ○ Demand Forecast
  - 31 ○ Public Awareness
  - 32 ○ Engagement, Participation, and Equity Analysis
- 33 • Development Concept
  - 34 ○ Boundaries
  - 35 ○ Acquisition Costs
  - 36 ○ Development Concept
  - 37 ○ Accessibility
  - 38 ○ Operations

## Section Five: Planning Policy and Actions

- 1           ○ Public Services
- 2       • Natural Systems
- 3           ○ Stewardship Plan
- 4           ○ Natural Resources
- 5           ○ Mississippi Corridor Critical Area

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

8 Collectively, these long-range plans form the regional park implementing agencies' part of the regional  
9 system plan. The Council reviews long-range plans for consistency with this Regional Parks and Trails  
10 Policy Plan and other Council policy plans. Inconsistent plans will be returned with comments to the  
11 regional park implementing agency. Next, the agency must revise and resubmit their plans to the  
12 Council. For a regional park implementing agency to receive a grant for acquisition or development, the  
13 proposed project must be consistent with a Council-approved long-range plan.

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

### 18 **Acquisition long-range plans**

19 Once the Council designates a unit to be a part of the Regional Parks and Trails System, the next step  
20 is for the regional park implementing agency to conduct a long-range planning process, as described  
21 above. There are times when a regional park implementing agency has an opportunity to acquire – or  
22 protect under an option to purchase – land that does not yet have a development concept, which is one  
23 of the requirements for long-range planning. In these situations, the regional park implementing agency  
24 may choose, in consultation with Council staff, to develop an acquisition long-range plan, to establish  
25 the long-range plan boundary or to adjust an existing Council-approved long-range plan boundary. The  
26 acquisition long-range plan or amendment may focus solely on the land under option to purchase.

### 27 **Boundary adjustments**

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

33 Major boundary adjustments are handled through the system additions process, which requires  
34 amending the Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan. This process happens on an approximately four-  
35 year cycle. If an opportunity for a major boundary adjustment arises off-cycle, the Council may consider  
36 a focused policy plan amendment, which will determine whether the addition should be brought into the  
37 system.

## Section Five: Planning Policy and Actions

1 Extensions for existing and planned regional trails are major boundary adjustments addressed during  
2 the system additions process, which typically occurs on a four-year cycle.

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

### 5 **Amending a long-range plan**

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

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

21 There are several reasons when long-range plan amendments are required to demonstrate how  
22 changes to the Regional Parks and Trails System remain consistent with the Met Council's  
23 expectations as outlined in this plan. They include, but are not limited to:

- 24 • Improvements that substantially differ from the original intentions of the Council-approved long-  
25 range plan
- 26 • Changes to a park or trail boundary
- 27 • Significant changes or additions to a regional park concessioners' agreement (see Section 7:  
28 Recreation, Facilities, and Programming – Action 2)
- 29 • Proposals for placement of telecommunications towers on Regional Parks and Trails System  
30 land (see Section 6: System Protection – Action 3).

31 The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and Council will then review the long-range plan  
32 amendment for consistency with the conditions of this policy and either approve, modify, or reject the  
33 long-range plan amendment.

### 34 **Focused long-range plan amendments**

35 Occasionally regional park implementing agencies seek to make minor changes to a long-range plan  
36 that may only impact a subset of long-range plan requirement areas. For example, an agency may be  
37 interested in integrating a new outdoor recreation facility (e.g., several miles of new mountain bike

1 trails) that is outside of the scope of the original vision or development concept or proposes to make  
2 minor changes to only one part of a much larger park unit. In those instances, regional park  
3 implementing agency staff should discuss the scope of the desired plan amendment with Met Council  
4 staff prior to commencing the amendment process to determine the required subset of long-range plan  
5 requirements. Focused long-range plan amendments are considered through the Met Council  
6 committee process that typically has a 60-day duration.

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

### 9 **Administrative process for minor long-range plan amendments**

10 Occasionally, plan amendments are made to address minor changes or proposals that have no  
11 material change to the regional park or trail. Examples of amendment candidates for the administrative  
12 process may include minor corrections, changes to natural area management or trail implementation  
13 that result in no material change to the park or trail, and/or underground utility improvements.  
14 Amendments reviewed administratively must meet all the relevant criteria adopted by the Met Council,  
15 which may be amended from time to time outside of this regional plan. Administrative reviews of minor  
16 long-range plan amendments are conducted by Council staff with delegated authority granted by the  
17 Met Council, and they are not required to be presented to the regular Council committees for review  
18 and approval. There may be instances when Council staff direct minor amendment proposals to the  
19 regular Met Council committees, due to political sensitivity or other contextual factors. Administrative  
20 review is proposed to be completed within 15 business days once the long-range plan amendment has  
21 been deemed complete.

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

### 24 *Planning – Action 2: Enhanced multimodal access*

#### 25 **The Met Council will promote enhanced multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, 26 and the transit system.**

27 The Regional Parks and Trails System plays a key role in advancing the livability of the region by  
28 increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, thereby supporting healthy lifestyles and active  
29 living. The Council has a unique opportunity to help achieve this objective, through its roles in operating  
30 the transit system as well as planning for the Regional Parks and Trails System. In addition to design  
31 considerations for long-range plans discussed in the previous section, regional park implementing  
32 agencies are encouraged to:

- 33 • Provide transit schedules and information at regional parks that are served by transit
- 34 • Include information on how to access a regional park or trail by transit on their agency's website,  
35 where applicable
- 36 • Improve wayfinding signage

## Section Five: Planning Policy and Actions

- 1 • Promote regional trails with existing transportation management organizations that provide  
2 marketing and advocacy to promote multi-modal options for daily commutes.
- 3 • Coordinate with local jurisdictions to identify and plan for local trail connections to regional parks  
4 and trails as well as last mile connections from transit
- 5 • Collaborate with bike-share programs to locate bike stations near regional parks and trails.

6 The Council will explore the following projects:

- 7 • Collaborate with local agencies to develop strategies for improving wayfinding across agency  
8 boundaries to include the following:
  - 9 ○ Use GIS data to provide the public with information about trail connections
  - 10 ○ Explore additional funding opportunities to help with regional connectivity
  - 11 ○ Collaborate with agencies on developing minimum requirements for signage.
- 12 • Collaborate with Metro Transit and local transit providers to determine the feasibility of the  
13 following actions:
  - 14 ○ Promote regional parks and trails at bus stops
  - 15 ○ Explore options for locating new park-and-rides near or adjacent to regional parks, or  
16 new regional trails near park-and-rides or fixed-route transit lines
  - 17 ○ Promote a transit day pass or family pass to regional parks
  - 18 ○ Provide free rides to large special events in regional parks
  - 19 ○ Add transit stops that are convenient to regional parks and trails.

1 **Section Six: System Protection policy and actions**

2 *System Protection policy*

3 **Protect public investments in acquisition and development by assuring that every**  
4 **component in the system is able to fully carry out its designated role.**

5 The Council has in place several mechanisms that protect the integrity of the Regional Parks  
6 and Trails System and its individual parts of the system.

- 7 • **Long-range plans:** The long-range plan defines acceptable activities within a system  
8 unit. The regional park implementing agencies must receive Council approval before  
9 proceeding with any activities inconsistent with the existing Council-approved long-range  
10 plan.
- 11 • **Restrictive covenants:** Regional park implementing agencies are required to record  
12 restrictive covenants on lands purchased with Met Council funds, to ensure that the land  
13 remains in regional recreation open space use in perpetuity, unless the Council agrees  
14 to a change.
- 15 • **Metropolitan Land Planning Act:** The Metropolitan Land Planning Act was passed in  
16 1976 and requires local governments in the seven-county region to develop  
17 comprehensive plans for their communities every ten years. These plans help ensure  
18 that the Regional Parks and Trails System is protected from system impacts. Any  
19 potential substantial impacts to the Regional Parks and Trails System plan may be  
20 subject to a required plan modification by the Council, to ensure that the system is  
21 protected. Local governments are critical partners in protecting and promoting the  
22 Regional Parks and Trails System.
- 23 • **Metropolitan significance:** Proposed development projects outside of the Regional  
24 Parks and Trails System that have a substantial impact on or represent a substantial  
25 departure from the Regional Parks and Trails System plan may be required to undergo a  
26 review for metropolitan significance (Minn. Stat. 473.173; Minn. R. Ch. 5800), with up to  
27 a one-year delay in development if the project is found to adversely affect the system.

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

- 31 • Impacts on the use of Regional Parks and Trails System facilities include, but are not  
32 limited to traffic, safety, noise, visual obstructions (for example, to scenic overlooks),  
33 impaired use of the facilities or interference with the operation or maintenance of the  
34 facilities
- 35 • Impacts on natural systems include, but are not limited to, the impact on the level, flow,  
36 or quality of a facility's water resources (lakes, streams, wetlands, groundwater) and  
37 impact on a facility's wildlife populations or habitats (migration routes, breeding sites,  
38 plant communities)

## Section Six: System Protection Policy and Actions

- 1 • A proposed project is considered to have an impact on the system if it may preclude or  
2 substantially limit the future acquisition of land in an area identified in the Regional Parks  
3 and Trails System Plan.

### 4 *System Protection – Action 1: Local comprehensive plans*

#### 5 **Local comprehensive plans may need to be changed if planned land uses would have a** 6 **negative impact on current or planned regional park lands or facilities.**

7 The Met Council may require plan modifications to local comprehensive plans, updates, or  
8 amendments if they:

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

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

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

25 Substantial departures from the Regional Parks and Trails System plan or impacts on the  
26 Regional Parks and Trails System may include, but are not limited to:

- 27 • Plans that do not acknowledge the presence of the Regional Parks or Trails System unit
- 28 • Projects that create safety issues for Regional Parks and Trails System users
- 29 • Projects that impair the use and enjoyment of the Regional Parks and Trails System unit  
30 due to excessive noise, air pollution, or water pollution
- 31 • Projects that interfere with the operation and maintenance of the Regional Parks and  
32 Trails System unit
- 33 • Projects or plans that ultimately prohibit or significantly reduce the realization (i.e.,  
34 acquisition, development, and operation) of Met Council approved long-range park and  
35 trail plans.

## Section Six: System Protection Policy and Actions

1 Where appropriate, the Met Council will initiate or accept for initiation a metropolitan significance  
2 review of specific projects if it is necessary to help protect the Regional Parks and Trails  
3 System.

4 In the implementation of local comprehensive plans, local governments shall not adopt any  
5 official controls, such as park dedication and subdivision ordinances, that permit activity in  
6 conflict with the metropolitan system plans—including the *Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan*  
7 (Minn. Stat. 473.858, subd. 1). When a new subdivision is created, the local government must  
8 include land for a planned regional trail or be in conflict with the *Regional Parks and Trails*  
9 *Policy Plan* and state statute.

10 In accordance with the Met Council's *Imagine 2050* approach, increasing population densities in  
11 urban areas is preferable to scattered developments throughout the rural and agricultural areas  
12 of the metropolitan region. Increasing population densities adjacent to urban Regional Parks  
13 and Trails System units is not a detriment to those units if the development is designed in ways  
14 that ensures:

- 15 • Natural features and systems, as well as scenic views of the Regional Parks and Trails  
16 System unit, are not impacted
- 17 • Public access is provided to the regional park and trail
- 18 • Current residents are considered before, during, and after the park or trail has been  
19 improved
- 20 • Operation and maintenance of the unit can be completed without interference.

21 The Met Council will work cooperatively with local governments to help ensure urban  
22 development and land uses in areas adjacent to Regional Parks System units occur in ways  
23 that preserve the integrity of the Regional Parks and Trails System.

### 24 *System Protection – Action 2: Conversions*

25 **Conversion of Regional Parks and Trails System lands to other uses is allowed only in**  
26 **limited circumstances and with approval of the Met Council.**

27 Park and trail land conversions are rare instances where competing conditions occur within  
28 regional park and trail boundaries that require regional park or trail land to be used for  
29 something other than parkland. An example of a land conversion is removing park land for a  
30 transportation interchange improvement. Land conversions are challenging for the regional park  
31 implementing agency because they are complex and often originate from reasons outside of the  
32 agency's scope of work. The Met Council reviews land conversion requests in relation to the  
33 regional park or trail's long-range plan, as well as, for consistency with this land conversation  
34 action and other Council systems and policies.

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

37



## Section Six: System Protection Policy and Actions

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

- 2           • Is contiguous to the Regional Parks and Trails System unit containing the land proposed
- 3           to be exchanged (within the same park/trail unit). This approach is the preferred option.
- 4           • Has comparable or better natural systems or features
- 5           • Could provide comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land being
- 6           released from the covenant.

7    In exceptional circumstances, the Met Council may accept as equally valuable land the addition  
8    of land located in another unit of the Regional Parks and Trails System. This approach is a less  
9    desirable option than securing contiguous land in the same unit. It is viewed as the second-best  
10   option where:

- 11           • The replacement land has comparable or better natural systems or features
- 12           • The replacement land has comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land
- 13           being converted
- 14           • No other reasonable alternative exists and where all other provisions of this policy can
- 15           be met.

16   An **“Equally valuable facility exchange”** is defined as an exchange of land for facilities when  
17   recreational benefits and/or natural system benefits are increased as a result of the exchange.  
18   For example, some land within a regional trail corridor may be exchanged to widen a highway if  
19   a highway department constructs a trail overpass or underpass of the widened road at no cost  
20   to the regional park implementing agency. This approach is the third best option, less desirable  
21   than the above two.

22   The Met Council will consider conversion of regional park or trail land to other uses only if the  
23   conversion will not harm the Regional Parks and Trails System.

24   The Council will review land conversion requests using the criteria below. If the Council  
25   approves the conversion request, then the long-range plan boundary will be updated in the  
26   System Plan and the Geographic Information System dataset, to reflect the changed boundary.  
27   Any removals or replacements that are outside of the current park or trail boundary will require a  
28   boundary adjustment. This may be accomplished through a secondary Council action.

### 29    *Land Conversion Criteria*

30   The following criteria will be used to determine whether Regional Parks and Trails System lands  
31   may be exchanged for other land or a facility.

32   Issues with respect to the existing park system unit:

- 33           • Whether the regional park system unit can continue to function as originally planned,
- 34           meeting Council standards for sites and site attributes established for the particular type
- 35           of park system unit (regional park, park reserve, trail greenway or special feature)

## Section Six: System Protection Policy and Actions

- 1 • Whether environmental features (e.g., wildlife habitat, water quality) will be adversely  
2 affected and can be protected or mitigated with the new use
- 3 • Whether the loss of land or function will be made up through acquisition of a site with  
4 comparable characteristics adjacent to or in the immediate area of the current location.

5 Issues with respect to the replacement land or facility-for-land exchange:

- 6 • The land area needs of the proposed project or facility exchange is desirable
- 7 • The specific site requirements for the proposed project are unique to the area proposed  
8 for conversion
- 9 • Whether the proposed project is consistent with Council policies
- 10 • Whether the proposed project is of greater benefit to the region than having the regional  
11 park system unit remain in its current state.

### 12 *Restrictive covenants*

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

### 19 *Land Conversion Proposals with no Equally Valuable Exchange*

20 The only instance in which the Met Council will consider a consent to easement or land  
21 conversion where no land is required to be exchanged is if the:

- 22 • Proposed change is a benefit to the regional park or trail
- 23 • The Met Council approved long-range plan continues to be able to operate as planned,  
24 or is in a better state after the improvement
- 25 • The proposed change does not change the above-ground use from regional recreation  
26 open space, nor does it adversely impact the quality or function of the natural area
- 27 • The proposed project does not have the potential for a cumulative or material impact on  
28 the regional park or trail's recreational opportunities, natural areas, or cultural resources.

29 The Met Council reserves the right to determine if the magnitude of the conversion proposal  
30 warrants an equally valuable exchange or a long-range plan amendment. Additionally, this  
31 provision does not exempt the proposal of requirements from other funding sources. Refer to  
32 the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook for more information about funding  
33 requirements.

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

2 **Telecommunication towers will only be allowed in regional facilities if there is no**  
3 **alternative location and if mitigation efforts are made to minimize the impact on Regional**  
4 **Parks and Trails System lands and users.**

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

14 Generally, antenna towers for telecommunication services and the regional public safety radio  
15 system are prohibited on park and trail lands within Council-approved long-range plan  
16 boundaries unless certain criteria are met. Regional park implementing agencies must prepare  
17 a focused long-range plan amendment on the proposed tower placement for the Council's  
18 review and approval. For more information about the process and requirements related to  
19 including telecommunication towers within a regional park and trail boundary, refer to the  
20 Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

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

22 ***Regional wastewater infrastructure***

23 Regional wastewater conveyance facilities are sometimes located in regional parks or trails to  
24 serve the unit and/or other areas. The Met Council works cooperatively with regional park  
25 implementing agencies to locate facilities when needed. In situations where the Met Council  
26 establishes a new wastewater utility or needs to repair existing infrastructure in the regional park  
27 or trail, they will work to restore the park or trail to a similar or better condition than they found it.  
28 Collaborative opportunities between the Council and regional park implementing agencies to  
29 educate visitors about the importance and benefits of the Regional Wastewater System are  
30 encouraged.

31 To provide sanitary sewer services to Regional Parks and Trails System facilities and/or to  
32 implement the regional wastewater system plan, the Met Council will work cooperatively with  
33 regional park implementing agencies to locate regional wastewater conveyance facilities on  
34 Regional Parks and Trails System lands in a manner that minimizes the impact on existing and  
35 planned park system facilities and natural resources.

36 If the Met Council is maintaining regional wastewater infrastructure on existing Regional Parks  
37 and Trails System land without an easement, the Met Council shall have the option to negotiate  
38 the terms of an easement. For new Regional Parks and Trails System facilities, the Met Council

## Section Six: System Protection Policy and Actions

1 reserves the option to include an easement for a future regional wastewater infrastructure as a  
2 condition of a Met Council grant used to acquire land, provided that the conveyance is  
3 consistent with the Met Council-approved long-range plan.

### 4 *Other utilities*

5 To distribute electricity, natural gas, oil, drinking water, and other utilities, it may be necessary to  
6 place underground conduits/pipes or above ground transmission poles/towers on Regional  
7 Parks and Trails System lands. Such utilities may be needed to serve visitors at that Regional  
8 Parks and Trails System unit, as well as to serve the greater community.

9 Utilities should be placed in a way that minimizes impacts on the Regional Parks and Trails  
10 System unit's natural systems and on its existing and future recreation and visitor support  
11 facilities, while providing reasonable access to the utility line for repair and maintenance. The  
12 Met Council will consider utility easements through the land conversion program discussed in  
13 Action 2 of this section.

### 14 *Easement Criteria*

15 Regional park implementing agencies may either sell or grant a utility conveyance (an  
16 easement, conditional use permit, or a license) to the utility provider. The utility provider may  
17 have to pay for the easement, conditional use permit, or permit based on the benefit the utility  
18 provides to the Regional Parks and Trails System unit. Agencies must follow the System  
19 Protection Process for land conversions described earlier in this section for Council  
20 consideration of utility easement conveyances. Utility conveyances should specify the following  
21 information:

- 22 • The location of the utility, access to it, and time limit of the conveyance
- 23 • How the project area will be improved to a similar or better state
- 24 • How the long-range plan will continue to be implemented.

1 **Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming policy and**  
2 **actions**

3 *Recreation, Facilities, and Programming policy*

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

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

8 **The Met Council develops opportunities, programs, and spaces that strive to uplift**  
9 **community connections to the outdoors while counteracting barriers and harm placed on**  
10 **underrepresented communities.**

11 To create a Regional Parks and Trails System that welcomes all residents of the region to its  
12 range of amazing opportunities, it is imperative to identify and understand the barriers to  
13 participation, as well as recognize the harm that has been placed on underrepresented  
14 communities. Engagement with these specific communities can reveal the harms and barriers  
15 that exist and offer opportunities to co-create durable solutions for a better future.

16 Below are examples of how to carry out Action 1. These are not requirements, but rather  
17 examples of approaches that emerged during recent community engagement, research, and  
18 work group discussion. They illustrate what our partnerships strive for in a changing region. A  
19 static list of eligible activities no longer sufficiently encompasses the needs of our future  
20 Regional Parks and Trails System. To remain relevant and equitable, our system must continue  
21 to evolve.

22 Desired outcome examples:

- 23 • Honor cultural considerations across diverse communities in our regional system
  - 24 ○ Continue engaging across all communities of color and other prioritized
  - 25 communities around their specific and personal cultural connections to parks and
  - 26 trails.
  - 27 ○ Remove barriers to American Indian cultural activities within parks and trails.
    - 28 ▪ Provide access to sacred sites
    - 29 ▪ Strive to support American Indian ceremonies in welcoming, private, and
    - 30 obtainable ways
    - 31 ▪ Provide foraging opportunities for traditional cultural practice.
  - 32 ○ Recognize the historic exclusion of American Indian and Tribal groups from parks
  - 33 and trail systems, educate parks and trails staff and decision makers to center
  - 34 American Indian communities in parks and trails management.
  - 35 ○ Amplify American Indian perspectives through programming and interpretation.
  - 36 ○ Prioritize the development and use of accurate and inclusive historical and
  - 37 cultural information.

## Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions

- 1     • Equitable Infrastructure:
  - 2         ○ Use universal design in regional park and trail facility designs.
  - 3         ○ Create gender neutral bathrooms.
    - 4             ▪ During the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus ([LGBTQ+](#))
    - 5             [Perspectives on Parks Focus Group \(2023\)](#), participants stated that
    - 6             having access to restrooms, specifically gender-neutral restrooms in the
    - 7             parks is important for making people feel more secure. Particularly,
    - 8             making sure that park patrons have access to detailed information to
    - 9             comfortably plan their outing into parks and trails. This is particularly
    - 10            important for individuals with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder,
    - 11            Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and other neurodivergent conditions.
    - 12            ○ Ensure bathrooms with running water are available throughout regional parks
    - 13            and trails system.
    - 14            ○ Along regional trails, provide more benches and improved lighting.
- 15     • Enhance wayfinding across the Regional Parks and Trails System, making it easier for
- 16     visitors to navigate within and across systems. This includes information that is
- 17     accessible to blind and low-vision visitors.
- 18     • Create design practices that increase equity and inclusion, reflect the diversity of our
- 19     region’s cultures and ethnicities, and promote social cohesion:
  - 20         ○ Create signs that use Indigenized and non-Western design elements developed
  - 21         in consultation with American Indian people, youth, and historically excluded
  - 22         communities.
  - 23         ○ Invite artists into park design processes, to emphasize the importance of cultural
  - 24         and racial representation in the Regional Parks and Trails System. For an
  - 25         example, see the Ramsey County and Met Council partnership project that
  - 26         invited five artists representing different racial and ethnic backgrounds to develop
  - 27         art that creates a sense of belonging for all and advances racial equity and
  - 28         inclusion: [https://www.ramseycounty.us/content/parks-recreation-unveils-new-](https://www.ramseycounty.us/content/parks-recreation-unveils-new-park-signage)
  - 29         [park-signage](https://www.ramseycounty.us/content/parks-recreation-unveils-new-park-signage).
- 30     • Develop park programming in partnership with affinity groups centering safety and
- 31     belonging.
  - 32         ○ Affinity groups are invitational spaces that provide safety for individuals that have
  - 33         been historically excluded such as LGBTQ+ or Black, Indigenous, and People of
  - 34         Color communities
  - 35         ○ Affinity groups are an integral strategy in the Regional Parks System, such as
  - 36         programs developed exclusively for children or women. Develop programs that
  - 37         are specifically geared to LGBTQ+ and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
  - 38         communities as an effective strategy to prioritize equity and belonging in our
  - 39         system.
    - 40             ▪ The findings from the *LGBTQ+ Perspectives on Parks Focus Group*
    - 41             (2023) recommend creating more affinity groups across the region. This
    - 42             approach increases a sense of connection, belonging, and safety for
    - 43             LGBTQ+ park users.
- 44     • Use Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-led media outlets to create awareness and
- 45     spread the word about regional parks and trails in communities of color.

## Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions

- 1           ○ Encourage new approaches that deliver information and marketing to Black,  
2           Indigenous, and People of Color communities, especially those that do not speak  
3           English.
- 4           ● Hire more diverse staff and intentionally listen to them for insights and guidance on how  
5           to increase welcoming and belonging.
- 6           ○ Encourage opportunities for support, innovation, and growth among staff that are  
7           Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.
- 8           ○ Involve youth as leaders and decision-makers.

9           Implementing agencies who wish to propose new Regional Parks and Trails System activities  
10          should consult the “Recreational Activities Evaluation Process” and “Process for including New  
11          Activities” sections of the Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

### 12          *Recreation, Facilities, and Programming – Action 2: Build relationships* 13          *between people and natural systems*

14          **The Met Council supports the conservation and restoration of natural systems, alongside**  
15          **leisure, play, and creative opportunities in ways that connect people to each other and**  
16          **the outdoors.**

17          The Regional Parks and Trails System is made up of many unique natural spaces that serve a  
18          wide variety of needs and desires for visitors and the environment.

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

- 21           ● Formal ball fields, diamonds, and organized athletic complexes
- 22           ● Tennis courts
- 23           ● Golf facilities
- 24           ● Amateur athletic facilities
- 25           ● Off-road vehicle areas are not eligible for regional funding (ATV, Off-Road Motorcycle,  
26           and 4X4 Truck opportunities, and snowmobiles), as the Minnesota DNR provides and  
27           supports these opportunities.

28          These activities remain ineligible for regional funding, as they more closely align with the  
29          responsibilities of local jurisdictions. Additional information and criteria can be found in the  
30          Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook and Grant Administration Guide.

31          Desired outcome examples:

32          The examples listed below are not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather as inspiration for  
33          implementing agencies as they plan for future programming and activity needs.

## Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions

- 1 • Our Regional Parks and Trails System is made up  
2 of a wide array of unique and complementary  
3 opportunities.
- 4 ○ Not all parks and trails need to encompass  
5 the same activities, facilities, or natural  
6 areas.
- 7 ○ Encourage place-based appropriateness.  
8     ▪ Example: Turning underutilized  
9 parking lot into a pop-up skatepark
- 10 ○ Provide a geographic distribution of activities and protection systemwide.
- 11 • Stacked functions are the future:
- 12 ○ Nature and people can share space
- 13 ○ Promote flexible spaces that support a variety of activities. Examples include:
- 14     ▪ Open, grass fields in a floodplain provide space for games, fun, and water  
15 storage
- 16     ▪ Pop-up programming
- 17     ▪ Plant forests of fruits and nuts for foraging
- 18     ▪ Community gardens
- 19     ▪ Reuse of hard surfaces for skate parks or pop-up programming,
- 20     ▪ Culturally specific programs or facilities to meet shifting demographic  
21 needs.
- 22 • Programming is key to connecting:
- 23 ○ Support and provide leisure, educational, and programming opportunities that  
24 recognize the way people interact with our system
- 25 ○ Prioritize and program activities that are more contemplative, restful, socially or  
26 spiritually focused, or non-equipment based.
- 27 ○ Support recreation activities that resonate with communities of color and age  
28 groups that have not been well served in the past, such as teenagers
- 29 ○ Hire more diverse programming staff that reflect the community.
- 30 • Moving from protecting to restoring:
- 31 ○ Invite park and trail visitors to learn more about the natural world through  
32 storytelling, educational opportunities, and other programming
- 33 ○ Increase understanding of the role parks and trails play in creating a resilient  
34 natural environment
- 35     ▪ Examples: Heat island mitigation, water storage, carbon capture.
- 36 ○ Incorporate American Indian practices
- 37     ▪ Examples: Reintroducing bison, using prescribed fire on the landscape,  
38 and promoting foraging.
- 39 ○ Improve storytelling around the benefits parks and trails provide to increase  
40 region's climate resilience.

"I was really stressed out  
before I came to the park.  
Now I feel calm."  
(High School Student, St.  
Paul)

41 Based on this legislative direction and definition of "regional recreation open space," the  
42 activities and facilities in the Regional Parks and Trails System should align with the system's  
43 vision, mission, and values listed in Section One *and* meet criteria below:

- 44 • All proposed activities and facilities for regional parks and trails should be consistent with  
45 the community engagement findings of the Agency-led long-range planning processes



## Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions

- 1 • Serve a regional audience
- 2 • Should not duplicate neighborhood parks and trails systems
- 3 • Should connect and support the system's nature-based foundation
- 4 • Be compatible with the other uses and activities, minimize user conflicts, and preserve
- 5 user experiences
- 6 • Are consistent with the expectations of the Council's review and approval process
- 7 • Enterprise facilities, including regional park concessioners, may operate within the
- 8 Regional Parks and Trails System if consistent with the rules of the regional park
- 9 implementing agencies. There are several types of enterprise-fund facilities. Some are
- 10 expected to generate sufficient revenues to pay their own costs, while others require
- 11 some level of public subsidy to exist.

### 12 *Recreation, Facilities, and Programming – Action 3: Establish and broaden*

### 13 *cross-sector opportunities*

14 **The Met Council provides a wide spectrum of connections and partnerships in the**

15 **outdoors through recreation, arts, programming, transit, public health, education,**

16 **stewardship, and community.**

17 Parks and trails have a large capacity to support community through a broad array of

18 partnerships around the region. They play an important role in our physical, social, emotional,

19 spiritual, and mental health. Their value goes beyond their “existence value” because they bring

20 deep importance to people's quality of life. They are a critical tool for combatting America's

21 loneliness epidemic as they provide spaces for community connections and well-being.

22 Expanding and strengthening our cross-sector partnerships will increase parks and trails

23 impacts and open new revenue streams and imagination for what is possible in parks and trails.

24 Below are ideas that emerged during engagement, research, and agency collaboration

25 discussions.

26 Desired outcomes examples:

- 27 • Promote parks and trails to play an important role in sustaining mental and physical
- 28 health.
  - 29 ○ Shape nature-based programs to increase human connections and combat
  - 30 loneliness
  - 31 ○ Design quiet spaces for spiritual connections, creating a sense of awe in nature
  - 32 ○ Create places and programming for multigenerational play
  - 33 ○ Partner with public health departments to co-create and fund mental health
  - 34 programming
  - 35 ○ Use social media as a promotional tool. For example:
    - 36 ■ St. Paul Parks hosts “Mental Health Mondays.” Their social media posts
    - 37 highlight how nature can increase health and happiness.
- 38 • Promote our transportation system as a viable way to connect people to parks and trails.
  - 39 ○ Prioritize public transportation to nature in partnership with Metro Transit
  - 40 ○ Strengthen active transportation connections to parks and trails with improved
  - 41 biking and walking access

## Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions

- 1           ○ Create better maps and signage to highlight the transit and trail connections.
- 2       • Use arts and culture to bring people to parks and trails and enhance belonging
- 3           ○ Find ways for parks and trails to honor, hire, and pay more artists to bring people
- 4           to parks for music, dance, festivals, and more.
- 5       • Inventory current memorials in parks and trails and clarify whose history is being told.
- 6       Hire artists to imagine new ways of telling broader and more inclusive histories
- 7           ○ For example, support projects like Cloud Man Village at Bde Maka Ska, including
- 8           Dakota language sidewalk stamps.
- 9       • Encourage agencies to make art and culture plans, to examine how to use existing and
- 10       new art to better connect people to the outdoors.
- 11           ○ Explore new funding sources for art.
- 12       • Support programming to increase visitation, visibility, and connection to parks and trails.
- 13       Fund programs and programmers to dream big in cross-sector ways.
- 14           ○ Create environmental education programming as a way to connect the next
- 15           generation to parks and trails, creating the future stewards of the system
- 16           ○ Continue to grow stewardship programs to connect community to parks through
- 17           actively caring for them and allowing deeper relationships and love for these
- 18           spaces.

### 19 *Recreation, facilities, and programming – Action 4: Raise awareness*

#### 20 **Expand how we connect people to regional parks and trails with a focus on**

#### 21 **underrepresented communities through intentional outreach.**

22 The Regional Parks and Trails System is a vast and unique system that stretches across the

23 Twin Cities region, and yet many residents do not know it exists. Creating outreach initiatives

24 that invite communities, especially those that have been excluded from the benefits of the

25 system in the past, is a pivotal step to creating a more equitable region. For example, the

26 Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board found that Black communities living near Theodore

27 Wirth Regional Park do not experience the benefits as compared to other communities, even

28 though the Black communities live in the neighborhoods that surround much of the park. As our

29 region's racial diversity grows, the Regional Parks and Trails System should experiment and

30 collaborate on ways to genuinely and effectively raise awareness, particularly among

31 underrepresented communities.

32 Desired outcome examples:

- 33       • Support, create, and provide space for affinity groups and affinity-focused programming
- 34       to continue growing connections between agencies and communities.
- 35           ○ Regional park implementing agencies continue to grow genuine relationships and
- 36           financially support the knowledge, expertise, and lived experience that affinity
- 37           groups are bringing to our system.
- 38           ○ Find more ways to support affinity groups whose mission is to build trust and
- 39           bring disenfranchised groups to parks and trails. Find creative ways to financially
- 40           support these groups and expand this work.
- 41           ○ Create more programs focused on specific communities.

## Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions

- 1                                   ▪ For example, find ways to support programming for Black people,  
2                                   Indigenous people, and People of Color and LGBTQ+ communities, as  
3                                   part of regular programming efforts.
- 4       • Build trust and relationships with communities of color, especially community leaders of  
5       color.
- 6       • Develop intentional communication strategies and marketing materials that center racial  
7       justice and demonstrate sensitivity to overburdened communities.
- 8       • Promote programming that increases awareness of opportunities and creates welcoming  
9       spaces.
  - 10           ○ Hire staff that reflect the racial make-up of desired audiences
  - 11           ○ Provide staff cultural competency training
  - 12           ○ The details of programming matters. Consult community members on matters of  
13           program times, costs, and other factors to ensure that programs are accessible
  - 14           ○ Ensure that programs and engagement are done in ways that demonstrate  
15           respect and appreciation. Avoid transactional, one-time interactions.
- 16       • Art amplifies awareness. Hire artists that look like the community members Agencies are  
17       trying to better serve.
  - 18           ○ Incorporate non-western design practices into art and culture in regional parks.

### 19 *Recreation, Facilities, and Programming – Action 5: Trail system* 20 *coordination*

#### 21 **Bicycle and pedestrian facilities will be coordinated between the Regional Parks and** 22 **Trails System and the transportation system.**

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

29 A comprehensive network of trails and bikeways that serve both recreation and transportation  
30 needs is an important priority for the Met Council. This network should link state, regional, and  
31 local trails and should be integrated with other transportation modes and networks, including the  
32 regional transit system. It should connect population centers with important regional  
33 destinations, including economic hubs, schools, shopping, parks, and trails.

34 In practice, the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN), regional trails, and all local  
35 trail and bikeway networks complement each other to serve the overall bicycle transportation  
36 and recreation needs of the region. All of these elements serve to provide an integrated and  
37 cohesive system that supports all forms of bicycling and the full range of bicycle trip needs.

38 Developing a more integrated and collaborative planning approach between regional trails and  
39 the RBTN is needed by the Council and its implementing agency partners. Met Council staff will  
40 work to define these opportunities for increased collaboration involving transportation and

## Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions

1 regional park implementing agencies' bicycle professionals and stakeholders and will  
2 incorporate those opportunities into future planning and implementation efforts. For more  
3 information about this future work, see Section 9, 2025-2028 Workplan and Section 7 in the  
4 Regional Parks and Trails Planning Handbook.

5 With over 450 miles of multiple-use trail facilities open to the public, regional trails support a  
6 wide range of activities. From recreational pursuits to commuting to work and school, regional  
7 trails play a vital role in the lives of our region's residents. E-bikes are a growing trend on the  
8 regional trail system as well as across the region and country. They take the form of electric,  
9 pedal-assist bicycles and are generally allowed on regional trails. While e-bikes are gaining  
10 acceptance on trails across the country, concerns about speed and safety are topics that need  
11 further study (see Section 9, 2025-2028 Workplan).

12 In general, regional trails should be developed away from roadways. However, in some  
13 instances it may be necessary for a short stretch of trail to be located on, or adjacent to, a road  
14 to bypass natural or artificial barriers or private property.

15 The RBTN, established in the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan*, is intended to serve as a  
16 "backbone" arterial network for accommodating daily bicycle transportation needs by  
17 establishing an integrated and seamless network of on-street bikeways and off-road trails. The  
18 network prioritizes corridors and alignments for regional transportation investment. Cities,  
19 counties, park agencies and the state play an important role in planning and implementing  
20 future bikeways and trails in support of the network vision.

21 The RBTN is based on a Regional Bicycle System Study analysis and prioritization of potential  
22 bicycle corridors<sup>14</sup>. The study incorporated factors such as bicycle trip demand, network  
23 connectivity, social equity, population density, regional job centers, major destinations (including  
24 highly visited regional parks), and connections to transit. Alignments are defined where there  
25 are existing or planned bikeways, or a consensus of which roadways and planned trails would  
26 most effectively meet the regional corridor's intent. Corridors are retained where alignments  
27 have not yet been identified. The presence of corridors allows for local bike plans to determine  
28 an effective alignment that follows the corridor's orientation and uses on-street bikeways and  
29 off-road trails to achieve an efficient facility route. Tier 1 corridors and alignments (highest  
30 priority for transportation investment) are planned in locations where they can attract the most  
31 riders and most effectively enhance mode choice in favor of biking, walking, and transit over  
32 driving alone. Tier 2 corridors and alignments (second highest priority for transportation  
33 investment) also provide transportation connectivity and they serve to support the Tier 1  
34 corridors and alignments.

35 Regional Trails were an important input during the development of the original RBTN and many  
36 regional trails have been identified as important alignments within it. These include Cedar Lake,  
37 Samuel Morgan, Lake Minnetonka, and Bruce Vento regional trails, to name a few.

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<sup>14</sup> Regional Bicycle Transportation Study, [www.metrocouncil.org](http://www.metrocouncil.org), *Transportation Policy Plan*, 2014.

## Section Seven: Recreation, Facilities, and Programming Policy and Actions

1 Increasing the coordination and communication between the regional trail system and the RBTN  
2 will result in a stronger and more connected overall system. Both regional trails and the RBTN  
3 seek to support active lifestyles, connecting people with where they want to go.

4 The regional trail system was originally envisioned as an off-road system that sought to connect  
5 regional parks, park reserves, special features, and regional trails by providing safe and  
6 separated opportunities to serve recreation and transportation purposes. While these goals  
7 remain vital, it is important to recognize that regional trails serve as transportation corridors,  
8 connecting important local and regional destinations. Also, they serve as a “backbone” for  
9 connecting and supporting local bicycle networks. This is evidenced by the significant overlap  
10 between the regional trail system and the RBTN corridors and alignments.

11 The RBTN is planned to facilitate daily bicycling for transportation that includes commute trips to  
12 work and school, shopping trips, trips to entertainment venues, medical-related trips, and social  
13 trips. The RBTN focuses on connecting its designated regional destinations to and between  
14 local bicycle networks by integrating on-street bikeways and off-road trails that offer the most  
15 direct and efficient routes.

16 An integrated system of regional trails and the RBTN requires a collaborative approach to  
17 regional trail and bicycle transportation planning by the Met Council and its implementing  
18 agency partners. For example, one of the strengths of the regional trail system is the wealth of  
19 trails serving exurban and rural areas. These trails, like Carver County’s Minnesota River Bluffs  
20 Regional Trail, connect visitors to needed amenities and destinations important for daily work  
21 and living. Met Council staff will continue to seek opportunities to enhance collaboration and  
22 coordination among transportation and parks agency planners to maintain and build upon a  
23 cohesive and integrated regional system overall.

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

27 For more information on the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, please refer to the draft  
28 2050 Transportation Policy Plan, Bicycle Investment Chapter (draft for public comment to be  
29 released in August 2024).

### 30 **Relationship to other technical guidance**

31 The 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan should be used in conjunction with the current  
32 versions of the *MnDOT Bikeway Facility Design Manual* and DNR’s *Trail Planning, Design, and*  
33 *Development Guidelines*. There are also other important design and development resources  
34 available.

## 1 **Section Eight: Finance policy and actions**

### 2 *Finance policy*

3 **The Met Council administers and provides financial oversight of the state and regional**  
4 **funding to the ten regional park implementing agencies in support of the regional parks**  
5 **and trails system.**

### 6 **Finance – Statutory requirements: Distribution of funds**

7 **Funds will be granted only to regional park implementing agencies.**

8 Any funds provided by or through the Met Council for the Regional Parks and Trails System will  
9 be granted only to regional park implementing agencies for projects consistent with Council-  
10 approved long-range plans, capital improvement programs, or state law. As previously noted in  
11 Chapter 2, and defined by Minn. Stat. 473.351, the regional park implementing agencies are:

- 12 • Anoka County
- 13 • City of Bloomington
- 14 • Carver County
- 15 • Dakota County
- 16 • Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- 17 • Ramsey County
- 18 • City of Saint Paul
- 19 • Scott County
- 20 • Three Rivers Park District
- 21 • Washington County

### 22 **Finance – Statutory requirements: Regional and State Bond Funds**

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

25 Capital projects proposed for funding must be consistent with a Council-approved long-range  
26 plan. Projects proposed by each regional park implementing agency are prioritized by that  
27 agency. Each regional park implementing agency has unique capital needs, which that agency  
28 can best determine.

### 29 *Regional and State Bond Funds*

30 State bonds have been appropriated to the Council since 1976 to help finance the Regional  
31 Parks and Trails System's capital plans. Since 1994, the Council has financed the parks capital  
32 plans with a combination of state bonds and Council bonds; the Council matches every \$3 of  
33 state bonds with \$2 of Council funds. The premise for this mix of state and regional bonds is

## Section Eight: Finance Policy and Actions

1 that people who live outside the seven-county metropolitan region visit and use the Regional  
2 Parks and Trails System and should therefore help finance its capital costs. Taxes collected  
3 statewide and within the region to pay off the bond debt are proportional to the share of visits to  
4 the park and trail system made by people living within the region, and those who live outside the  
5 region. Minn. Stat. 473.325 allows the Council to issue general obligation bonds for the  
6 acquisition and betterment of the Regional Parks and Trails System. No more than \$40 million  
7 of bond debt can be outstanding at any point in time.

### 8 **Finance – Statutory requirements: Operation and maintenance**

#### 9 **The Council will distribute Operation and Maintenance appropriations to agencies.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

33

1 **Finance – Statutory requirements: Parks and Trails Legacy Funds**

2 **Parks and Trails Legacy Funds spending must conform to the statewide Parks and Trails**  
3 **Legacy Plan.**

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

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

- 15 • Connect people and the outdoors
  - 16 ○ Develop stewards of tomorrow through efforts to increase life-long participation in
  - 17 parks and trails
- 18 • Acquire land, create opportunities
  - 19 ○ Create new and expanded opportunities to serve current and future users
- 20 • Take care of what we have
  - 21 ○ Provide safe, high-quality experiences through regular re-investment in
  - 22 infrastructure and natural resource management
- 23 • Coordinate among partners
  - 24 ○ Enhance coordination among the network of public, private, and nonprofit park
  - 25 and trail partners

26 Legislation enacted in 2009 directs how money appropriated from the Parks and Trails Fund to  
27 the Met Council is distributed to the regional park implementing agencies under a formula  
28 codified in Minnesota Statute 85.53. The Council awards grants to the regional park  
29 implementing agencies based on that formula:

- 30 • 45% based on the operation and maintenance formula in Minnesota Statutes 473.351,  
31 provided in the section above
- 32 • 31.5% based on each agency’s proportion of the population of the region
- 33 • 13.5% based on each agency’s proportion of total non-local visits to the Regional Parks  
34 and Trails System

35



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

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

3 Since 2008, the Met Council has used a formula to determine how much of the state and  
4 regional bonds would be allocated to each regional park implementing agency. The formula  
5 balances two factors:

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

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

14 *Finance – Action 2: Improve equitable use of the Regional Parks and Trails  
15 System*

16 **Equitable usage is an important consideration in Regional Parks System funding and  
17 investment.**

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

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

31

1 *Finance – Action 3: Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund*

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

4 In 2001, the Met Council established the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program to assist  
5 regional park implementing agencies in acquiring land for the Regional Parks and Trails  
6 System.

7 The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund consists of two accounts:

- 8 • The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund acquisition account, which is  
9 financed with 60% state appropriations from the Environment and Natural Resources  
10 Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota  
11 Resources. The remaining 40% of the account is financed with Council funds.
- 12 • The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund acquisition account, which is financed with 60%  
13 Parks and Trails Fund appropriations from the Land and Legacy Amendment. The  
14 remaining 40% is financed with Council bonds.

15 The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant may finance up to 75% of the costs to acquire land  
16 and related costs, up to \$2 million from the Parks and Trails Legacy and Council bonds account,  
17 and up to \$3 million from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund and Council  
18 bonds account, for each state fiscal year (July 1 to June 30). The regional park implementing  
19 agency must finance at least 25% of the acquisition costs as a local match to the Park  
20 Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant.

21 *Finance – Action 4: Regional funding commitment*

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

24 The Met Council will continue to provide funding for the regional system through statutorily  
25 required match to state funds. The Council will also continue to allocate funds to the Equity  
26 Grant Program. In addition, the Council is committed to examining the current capital  
27 improvement program (CIP) strategy to explore opportunities and flexibility in providing  
28 additional funds to the regional system within the current \$40 million bonding cap, as outlined in  
29 Minnesota Statute 473.325. The Council will also continue to pursue legislative initiatives that  
30 would provide increased flexibility in raising funds for the regional system, in addition to the  
31 authorization to issue bonds.

32

1 *Finance – Action 5: Other funding*

2 **The Met Council will actively seek funding opportunities from the state and other**  
3 **sources.**

4 The Met Council will seek continued state funding for acquisition, development, rehabilitation,  
5 operations and maintenance, programming, and restoration and management of natural  
6 resources for all components in the Regional Parks and Trails System. In partnership with the  
7 10 regional park implementing agencies and partners, the Council will pursue other sources of  
8 funding where appropriate for the benefit of the entire Regional Parks and Trails System. The  
9 system has been funded through a combination of state and local funding sources over the last  
10 40 years.

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

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

16 *Finance – Action 6: Transit corridors*

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

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

1 **Section Nine: 2025 – 2028 Work Plan for the Regional Parks and Trails**  
 2 **Policy Plan**

3 The following work plan summarizes specific topic areas that the Met Council intends to cover  
 4 over the next several years. These items will evolve and change as the Council works with  
 5 regional park implementing agencies, other partners, and stakeholders on implementation,  
 6 particularly as we engage with the development of the 2050 metropolitan development guide.  
 7 *{This workplan will be updated as the policy conversations continue throughout the public*  
 8 *comment period, ahead of plan adoption.}*

9 **Table 9-1. 2025-2028 Work Plan for the 2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan**

Project	Timeframe	Location in Policy Plan
1. Develop a process to create a small set of measures at the Objective level to measure progress toward our key Regional Parks and Trails System priorities.	2025-2026	Section 1
2. Explore establishment of a Special Feature – Historical Landscape subclassification.	2026-2027	Section 2, Action 1
3. Explore establishment of a Special Features – Open Space/Natural Systems subclassification.	2026-2027	Section 2, Action 1
4. Convene regional park implementing agencies to develop a cultural resources inventory requirement for long-range planning. Continue to engage American Indian Tribes and communities for guidance and direction.	2025-2026	Section 5, Action 1; Planning Handbook
5. Continue to convene a trail coordination workgroup, supporting the development of a more coordinated, integrated, and connected regional trails system and Regional Bicycle Transportation Network.	2025-2027	Section 7, Action 5
6. Create regional guidelines for e-bike use on regional trails.	2025-2027	Section 7, Action 5
7. Explore system-wide wayfinding and signage minimum requirements	2025-2027	Section 7, Action 5
8. Explore scoping and development of a system-wide Asset Preservation Plan, or similar.	2025-2028	Section 8
9. Continue to pursue Pay-Go for greater flexibility to fund a wider range of activities and programs.	2025-2028	Section 8
10. Explore changing/reducing the local match requirement for the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program, as state rules allow.	2025-2028	Section 8
11. Continue discussion of strategic funding for the Regional Parks and Trails System	2025-2028	Section 8, Actions 5-6
12. Implement the 2025 Regional Parks and Trails System Visitor Study	2024-2026	Not included

1 **Appendix 1: Key Minnesota legislation for the Regional Parks and**  
2 **Trails System**

3 *Statutory Direction*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

26 “The Met Council with the advice of the commission may make grants, from any funds available  
27 to it for recreation open space purposes, to any implementing agency, as defined in section  
28 473.351, to cover the cost, or any portion of the cost, of acquiring or developing regional  
29 recreation open space in accordance with the policy plan; and all such agencies may enter into  
30 contracts for this purpose or rights or interests therein.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 *Applicable funding formulas*

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

15 “(1) 45% of the money must be disbursed according to the allocation formula in section 473.351,  
16 subdivision 3, to each implementing agency; (2) 31.5% of the money must be distributed based  
17 on each implementing agency’s relative share of the most recent estimate of the population of  
18 the metropolitan area; (3) 13.5% of the money must be distributed based on each implementing  
19 agency’s relative share of nonlocal visits based on the most recent user visitation survey  
20 conducted by the Met Council; and (4) 10% of the money must be distributed as grants to  
21 implementing agencies for land acquisition within Met Council approved regional parks and  
22 trails master plan boundaries under the council’s park acquisition opportunity grant program.”

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

24 “The Met Council shall distribute the operation and maintenance money as follows: (1) 40%  
25 based on the use that each implementing agency’s regional recreation open space system has  
26 in proportion to the total use of the metropolitan regional recreation open space system; (2) 40%  
27 based on the operation and maintenance expenditures made in the previous year by each  
28 implementing agency in proportion to the total operation and maintenance expenditures of all  
29 the implementing agencies; and (3) 20% based on the acreage that each implementing  
30 agency’s regional recreation open space system has in proportion to the total acreage of the  
31 metropolitan regional recreation open space system.”

32

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