

Business Item

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission



Community Development Committee Meeting: August 5, 2024

Metropolitan Council: August 14, 2024

Business Item: 2024-168

Dakota County, Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-Range Plan

District(s), Member(s):	District H, Amanda Duerr District 12, Sue Vento
Policy/Legal Reference:	Minn. Stat. § 473.313; <i>2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan</i> : Chapter 5, Planning Policy Strategy 1, Master Plans
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Tracey Kinney, Senior Planner (651-602-1029)
Division/Department:	Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-Range Plan.
2. Approve the boundary adjustment removing 22-acres of private inholdings and adding 77-acres of Dakota County-owned parkland within the Miesville Ravine Park Reserve boundary.
3. Advise the County to consider implementing the recommendations for solar resources and the Minnesota DNR in the Advisory Comments section of the business item.

Background

Dakota County's Miesville Ravine Park Reserve is located in the southeast corner of the Regional Park System and Dakota County (Figures 1 and 2). The Park Reserve is located just east of Lake Byllesby Regional Park and adjacent to the Wild and Scenic Cannon River.

The focus of this plan is to update the long-range vision for the park reserve, guide improvements for the next ten or more years, and adjust the park's boundary. The updated plan is very similar to the 2005 plan with a focus on natural resource restoration, limited trail expansion, two new rustic trailheads, and safer Cannon River access. (Figures 3 - 5).

Rationale

As described in the Analysis section of this report, the Miesville Ravine Park Reserve is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (RPPP) including Chapter 5, Planning Policy Strategy 1, Master Plans.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Miesville Ravine Park Reserve advances the Thrive outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region.

Funding

The total cost to develop and improve the natural resources of the Miesville Ravine Park Reserve long-range plan is approximately \$15.1 million which includes \$3.7 million for the first 10-years of implementation.

The total cost for operations and maintenance of the park reserve's 10-year plan is \$498,700 annually.

Funding sources for the plan activities will come from a variety of sources, including sources from the Council which will be subject to future Council actions.



Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that long range plans for park reserves address 13 items: boundaries, acquisition costs, demand forecast, development concept, conflicts, public services, operations, partner engagement, public engagement and participation, equity analysis, public awareness, accessibility, and natural resources. The following summary analyzes the long-range plan against these requirements.

Boundaries

Miesville Ravine is a Park Reserve located in the southeast corner of Dakota County, just east of Lake Byllesby Regional Park and adjacent to the Wild and Scenic Cannon River.

This plan recommends removing one 22-acre inholding from the existing boundary and adding two parcels that total 77-acres, which were identified as stewardship inholdings in the 2005 plan. The 22-acres to be removed are an inholding and located in Goodhue County. This parcel is separated from most of the park by Orlando Trail and has minimal recreational value. The two added parcels on the east side of the park boundary are currently owned and operated by Dakota County.

With these boundary changes, the total acreage of the park is 1,850 acres including 1,519 acres of Dakota County-owned land and 309 acres of private inholdings (Figure 3).

Acquisition Costs

The Plan identifies 17 inholding parcels, including the one proposed for removal as part of this update (Figure 3). The total estimated market value of all 309-acre inholding parcels is \$5,100,000. This cost includes the total estimated value of the parcel and buildings, even when the recommendation would be only to acquire a portion of it.

Stewardship Plan

Dakota County intends to restore and manage natural resources in the entire park with restoration of an additional 300 acres over the next 10 years. This additional restoration would change the total percentage of the park habitat that is restored from 40 percent today to 60 percent.

Traditional cultural properties and culturally sensitive areas exist throughout the park reserve and necessitate ongoing coordination with Indigenous communities. As Dakota County implements different aspects of the long-range plan, they will work together with representatives of associated Indigenous tribes and nations, to address protection, use, and impacts on the park reserve. Dakota County will work with a wide variety of interested groups to interpret the landscape, allowing for multiple truths and world views to shape future storylines to be shared in the Park Reserve.

Demand Forecast

The Metropolitan Council's 2021 Annual Use Estimate shows that Lebanon Hills Regional Park, River-to-River Greenway Regional Trail, and Mississippi River Regional Trail are the most visited regional parks and trails in Dakota County. While Miesville Ravine Park Reserve is the least visited Dakota County Park, it has robust natural and cultural resources, providing a unique experience to the Regional Parks and Trails System not easily found elsewhere. The current population estimate of Dakota County according to the U.S. Census Bureau is nearly 442,000, which has increased more than 10 percent since 2010. According to Met Council forecasts, Dakota County's population will grow to 522,280 by 2040 which is a 0.9% increase since 2022. Based on projected demographics for Dakota County, Miesville Ravine Park Reserve visitors are expected to be older guests, more diverse, with varying household incomes. The Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-Range Plan improves facilities for better service to both current and future visitors.

Development Concept

The Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-Range Plan includes a long-term development concept for the Park Reserve, and it creates a vision for improvements to take place over the next several years. The lifespan of this Plan is at least 10 years. Improvements to the Park Reserve are reasonably



expected to be accomplished over this time period, based on historic funding levels (Figures 4 and 5).

As a regional park reserve, no more than 20 percent of Miesville Ravine’s area is allowed to be developed for active recreation, and 80 percent of the land must be devoted to preservation and restoration of the natural environment. The long-term plan increases developed land from 2.1 to 3.4 percent of the park reserve’s total acreage of 1,850 and the plan seeks to site new development in ways that minimizes impacts to sensitive areas.

The long-term plan includes improved circulation, accessibility, trailheads, and comfort amenities. It focuses on carefully expanding the trail system to better accommodate visitors with a range of abilities, providing access to more of the park reserve’s vast landscape and establishing a direct connection to the Cannon Valley Trail that will make Miesville Ravine Park Reserve an easy-to-reach destination for visitors exploring the Cannon River Valley. One new trailhead is planned to be added to the three established trailheads with new amenities planned for all of the trailheads offering convenient starting points to explore different areas of the park reserve. Each will offer parking, wayfinding, and screened portable restrooms.

The 10-year plan focuses on expanding upon what exists today, improving accessibility, clarifying circulation, adding complementary amenities, and improving the visitors’ experience. The addition of one trailhead, North Trout Brook Trailhead, to two existing trailheads establishes access to the northern portion of the park. Enhancements made to the park reserve along the Cannon River will create an inviting and inclusive recreational experience for guests, while an expanded trail network will enable visitors to explore a greater diversity of the park reserve’s habitats.

Conflicts

Miesville Ravine Park Reserve is bordered by single-family homes, agricultural land, and roadways. Residential uses are generally compatible with the park, and this plan minimizes recreational use near the park’s edges. Land uses, particularly agriculture, within the Trout Brook Watershed impacts the habitat and water quality within the park and views from the park.

Dakota County, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the North Cannon River Watershed Management Organization are working with individual landowners to address land conservation and water quality within the larger Trout Brook watershed. Since recreational activities will impact the park’s sensitive natural and cultural landscape, increased access and recreation recommended in this plan have been carefully considered. Recreation is sited to minimize impacts, and sustainable trail design will be utilized. Minimizing impacts to the natural and cultural landscape will continue to be a priority as recreation and access features are developed.

Public Services

Miesville Ravine Park Reserve is currently served by vault toilets and existing electricity. There is a plan to develop future on-site wells for water. There currently is no sanitary sewer or septic services within the park. Water will be provided at the Cannon River Trailhead and other trailheads as they are developed, sourced from on-site wells. Power line 711, a 69KB transmission line exists within Miesville Ravine Park Reserve and connects to the Welch Substation. The line runs directly through the Cannon River Trailhead, picnic, and river access area and detracts from the park reserve’s aesthetics and visitor experience. Long-term, Dakota County would like to see the lines relocated or the current double pole design transitioned to a mono pole design to reduce impacts. Dakota County staff will continue to discuss long-term relocation or line burial if there are opportunities for expansion, decommissioning, or changes in area service.

Operations

The annual cost for Dakota County to operate and maintain the Miesville Ravine Long-Range Plan is approximately \$498,700.

Partner Engagement



Partner engagement occurred during the two engagement periods in Fall 2022 and Winter 2023. Partner agencies include Douglas Township, Minnesota DNR, Cannon Valley Trail, Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District, North Cannon River Watershed Management Organization, and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers for Dakota Tribes located within Minnesota. All partner agency comments shaped the plan and are supportive of it.

Public Engagement and Participation

Dakota County involved the public throughout the development of the plan. The project team engaged the public through online interactive planning and questionnaires, pop-up tabling, open houses, and meetings. Key themes emerged:

- Increase natural resource management, Trout Brook restoration, and access to more of the park (open houses, online questionnaire, online comments).
- Expand wildlife viewing and river recreation (HACER Resource Fair).
- Expand trail-based recreation (HACER Resource Fair, online questionnaire).
- Balance the amount of recreation development (open houses, online questionnaire).
- Add mountain biking (online questionnaire).
- Add improved boat launch access (open houses, Welch Mill Outfitters, Cannon River Canoe and Bike Rental, Minnesota DNR, online questionnaire).
- Better wayfinding including signage that clarifies winter-use rules and better wayfinding from the Cannon River (online questionnaire, Cannon River Canoe and Bike Rental, Welch Mill Outfitters). (online questionnaire).
- Continued Indigenous people's involvement and engagement with the park planning and development, and concern for Dakota County's accountability with this process (online questionnaire).

Equity Analysis

Dakota County conducted an equity analysis as part of the long-range plan. The advice heard during the planning process shaped the long-range plan.

Project Data: People of color, people with disabilities, seniors, and those with lower household income comprise a smaller share of park visitors than would be predicted by their proportion of the general resident population. Demographic information is listed below:

- Race: Demographics of those living within three miles of the park reserve in 2019 include: white (97%), Black (2%), multiracial (1%), Asian (0.00%), American Indian (0.00%), and Hispanic (0.00%). Demographics in the larger, 20-minute drive service area are more diverse with white (74.9%), Black (8%), multi-racial (7.40%), Asian (5.50%), American Indian (0.60%), and Hispanic (8.50%).
- Income: Median income in the three-mile service area is \$106,728, and 8% of households are 185% of the federal poverty level or below.
- Age: 16% of the population living within the three-mile service area are over 65 years old, and 20 percent are under 15 years old.

Current reasons for under-representation in park visitation include distance from home, lack of awareness, time, and transportation options. In addition, safety concerns, language barriers, weather, cultural or religious insensitivity and discrimination, and lack of desired recreation facilities.

The historic reasons for this inequity in park visitation among certain groups are numerous. Many Dakota people living in the area were sent into exile after the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Government programs and policies have enabled white settlement and discouraged people of color from living in the rural areas. In addition, government policies, institutional racism, and personal discrimination have discouraged generations of people of color from visiting parks and trails.

Public Engagement: Dakota County conducted engagement events for demographic groups that are underrepresented in park visits. These efforts are listed below:

- Latino Visitors: Walk with Caminatas Domingueras; walk with Huellas Latinas; Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment Through Research (HACER) resource fair pop-up input.
- Youth Visitors: Outdoor Career Success input session.
- People Living with Disabilities: Project Healing Waters meeting.
- Dakota Communities: Dakota County contracted with the Upper Pezihutazizi / Oyate Upper Sioux Community Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) to conduct a Traditional Cultural Places (TCP) survey for the park and invited the THPOs from the four Dakota Tribes to a meeting to discuss draft plan recommendations (12/13/23).

Engagement Themes: Recurring themes expressed throughout the process are listed below.

- Preserving and protecting natural resources (Tribal groups and Latino visitors)
- Increasing access to the Cannon River (Disabled community, Older individuals, and Parents, Families)
- Providing access to more of the park with low-impact natural surface trails (Latino visitors)
- Improving accessibility (Disabled community, Older individuals, Parents, and Families)
- Cultural Landscape Preservation and Interpretation (THPOs)

Evaluation Summary

Transparency: The advice received at the various engagement efforts resulted in a list of key findings that guided development of the plan. Input from demographic groups underrepresented in park visits has resulted in recommendations that focus on increasing the park's accessibility, providing more to do, improving trail wayfinding, reducing impact to Traditional Cultural Places, and including amenities such as additional restrooms and drinking water.

Accountability: The long-range plan addresses park activities and amenities that may result in increased park use among underrepresented audiences and sets a goal of creating a park that is welcoming to people of all abilities, races, and backgrounds. Dakota County staff recognize that additional efforts will be needed to address equity. Community feedback included a request that the park increase park staff or law enforcement presence to improve safety for park visitors. Barriers to park use among demographic groups underrepresented in park visits include lack of awareness of the park and its distance from most of the County's residents. Dakota County efforts, such as the Parks Awareness and Promotion Plan and the Marketing Plan, recommend strategies to raise park system awareness.

Public Awareness

Dakota County has a robust program for building awareness of Miesville Ravine Park Reserve including a newsletter, website, listserv, Facebook page, limited advertising for fee-based rentals, and news releases. The "Forever Wild" brand distinguishes Dakota County's parks as a unique system. Dakota County also employs a wide variety of approaches to reach underrepresented populations and secondarily on increasing awareness among the public. Over the next 10 years, enhanced outreach to Cannon Valley communities and recreation partners is envisioned to establish the area as a cohesive destination within this popular recreational corridor.

Accessibility

Dakota County is committed to offering universal accessibility at park facilities consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the US Forest Service's Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines for outdoor developed areas. The plan's long-term development concept will include enhanced ADA accessibility including trailheads, 1.25-miles of ADA-accessible paths and trails featuring the Cannon River loop trail, accessible parking, and an accessible watercraft launch, footbridges, overlooks, and platforms.



Natural resources

A Natural Resource Management Plan for Miesville Ravine Park Reserve was undertaken concurrently with this plan. Current Park Reserve vegetation includes some remnants of the historical vegetation such as a couple of large bluff prairies and forests that were too steep or rocky to cultivate and dry enough to resist woody encroachment. Twelve land cover types were identified by the Natural Resource Management Plan. These land cover types vary in condition from near-excellent ecological integrity (remnant bluff prairies) to sites that have been altered to the point that they no longer resemble native plant communities. The County has restored many formerly cultivated areas and old pastures so that their current condition is on a trajectory toward resembling a more native plant community. Today, the County and partners manage and implement many activities and projects directly in the park reserve and indirectly on private lands in the surrounding watershed (Figure 6).

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA): The Miesville Ravine Park Reserve is not located within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area. The planning, design, and implementation requirements of the MRCCA will not apply to this recommended portion of the Regional Park System.

Wild and Scenic Cannon River: The Cannon River is one of six rivers in Minnesota to be designated as a Minnesota Wild and Scenic River. Miesville Ravine Park Reserve's boundary borders the river and features one mile of shoreline with a public water access site. The Cannon River is also a State Water Trail extending more than 80 river miles from Waterville to Red Wing. Wild and Scenic Rivers and State Water Trails programs are administered by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources through Minnesota Rules, chapter 6105.1550–6105.1700. Protection of the river is provided through voluntary stewardship by landowners and river users and through regulation and programs of federal, state, local, and tribal governments.

Other Council Policies and Systems – Advisory Comments

MN Department of Natural Resources - Cannon River's Wild and Scenic River Designation (Taylor Huinker, (651-259-5790)

Generally, it is strongly encouraged to avoid disturbances to steep slopes and bluffs in order to maintain bluff stability. Various other Wild and Scenic rules are listed under [MN Rules, Chapter 6105](#). DNR Staff will likely have additional comments down the road once detailed plans for park improvements are available.

Community Development – Solar Resources and Access Protection – (MacKenzie Young-Walters, 651-602-1373)

Council staff appreciate the commitment to minimizing lighting, using timers/motion, and using warm color lights. In addition to preserving dark skies and reducing energy consumption, these practices can reduce the negative impact of lights on nocturnal insects and wildlife.

While the park has ready access to the electrical grid at trailheads, Council staff encourage consideration of small solar energy systems (roof or amenity mounted) to reduce the reserve's usage of non-renewable energy. Similarly, Council staff encourage stand-alone systems for areas where electricity is desired but connections to the grid are not readily available. Both practices would help advance the principals from Dakota County's 2009 Energy Management Plan that are listed on page 119 of the Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-Range Plan.

Environmental Services – Wastewater Services (Roger Janzig, 651-602-1119)

The City of Miesville is not served by a municipal sewer system. Wastewater treatment utilizes individual or subsurface sewage treatment systems (ISTs or SSTs); therefore, there is no impact to the Metropolitan Disposal System.

Figure 1. Miesville Ravine Park Reserve location in the Regional Parks System

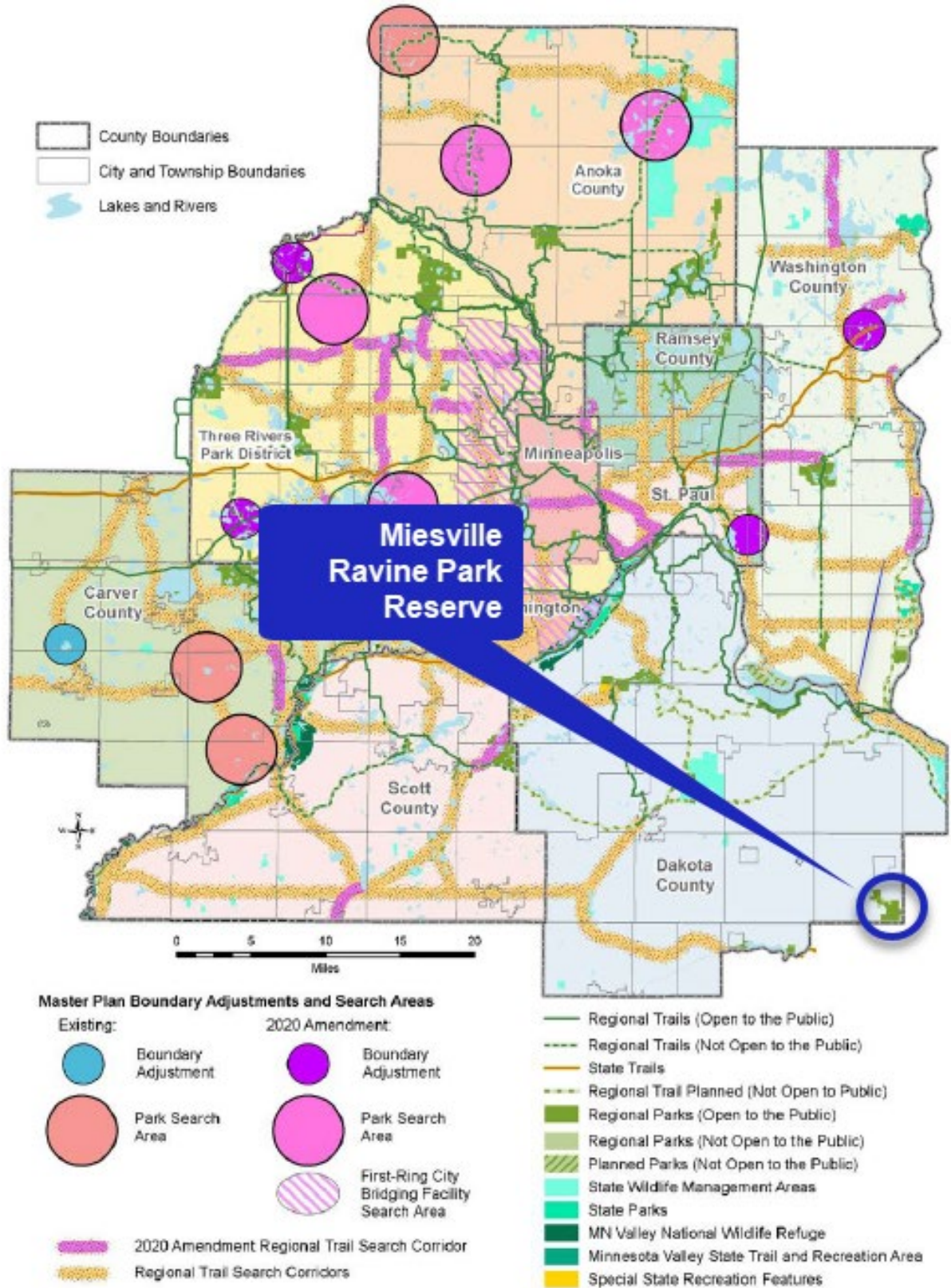


Figure 2. Miesville Ravine Park Reserve location in Dakota County

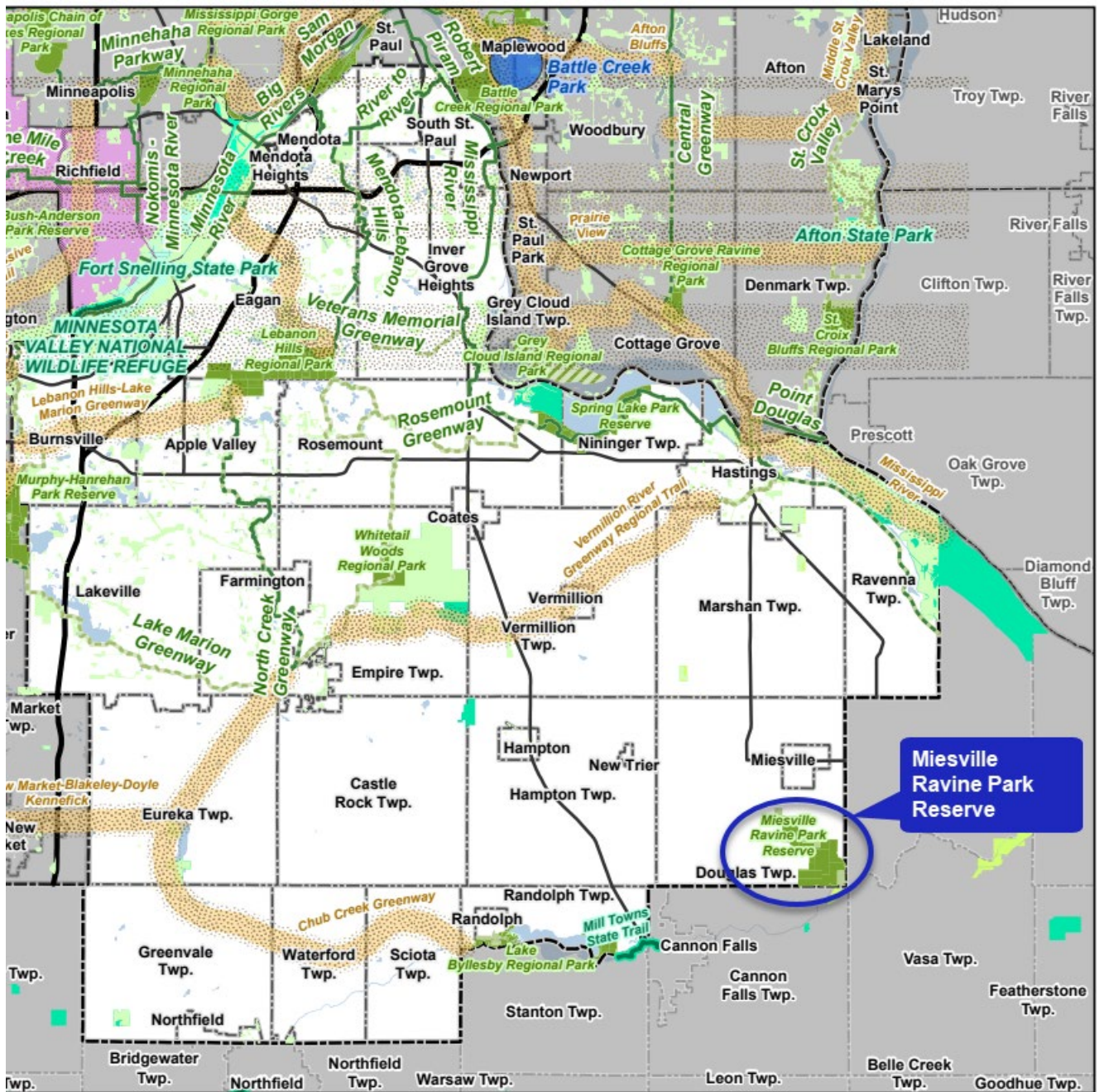


Figure 3: Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Boundary, Acquisitions, and Removal

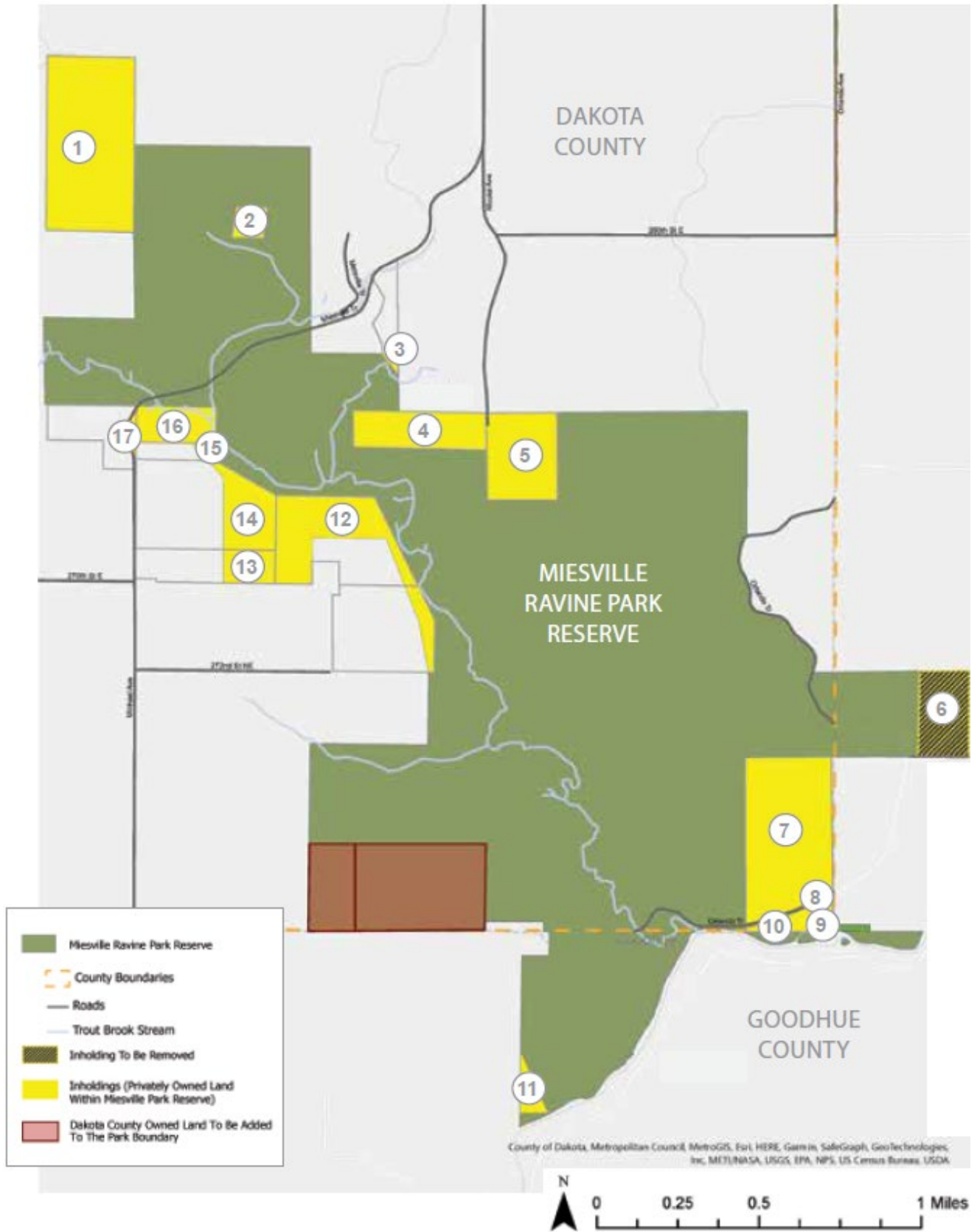


Figure 4: Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-Term Development Concept

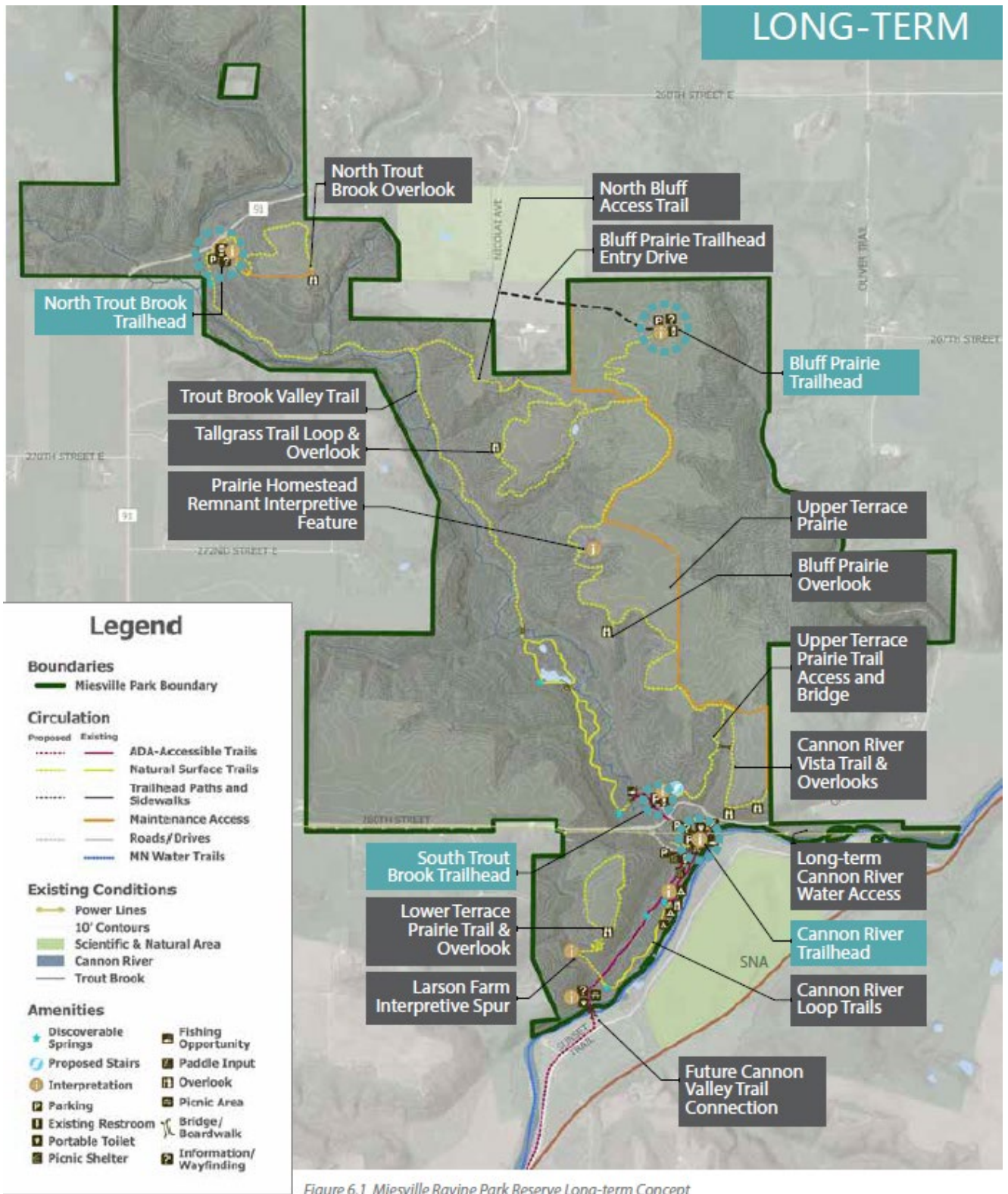


Figure 6.1 Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-term Concept

Figure 5: Miesville Ravine Park Reserve 10-year Development Concept

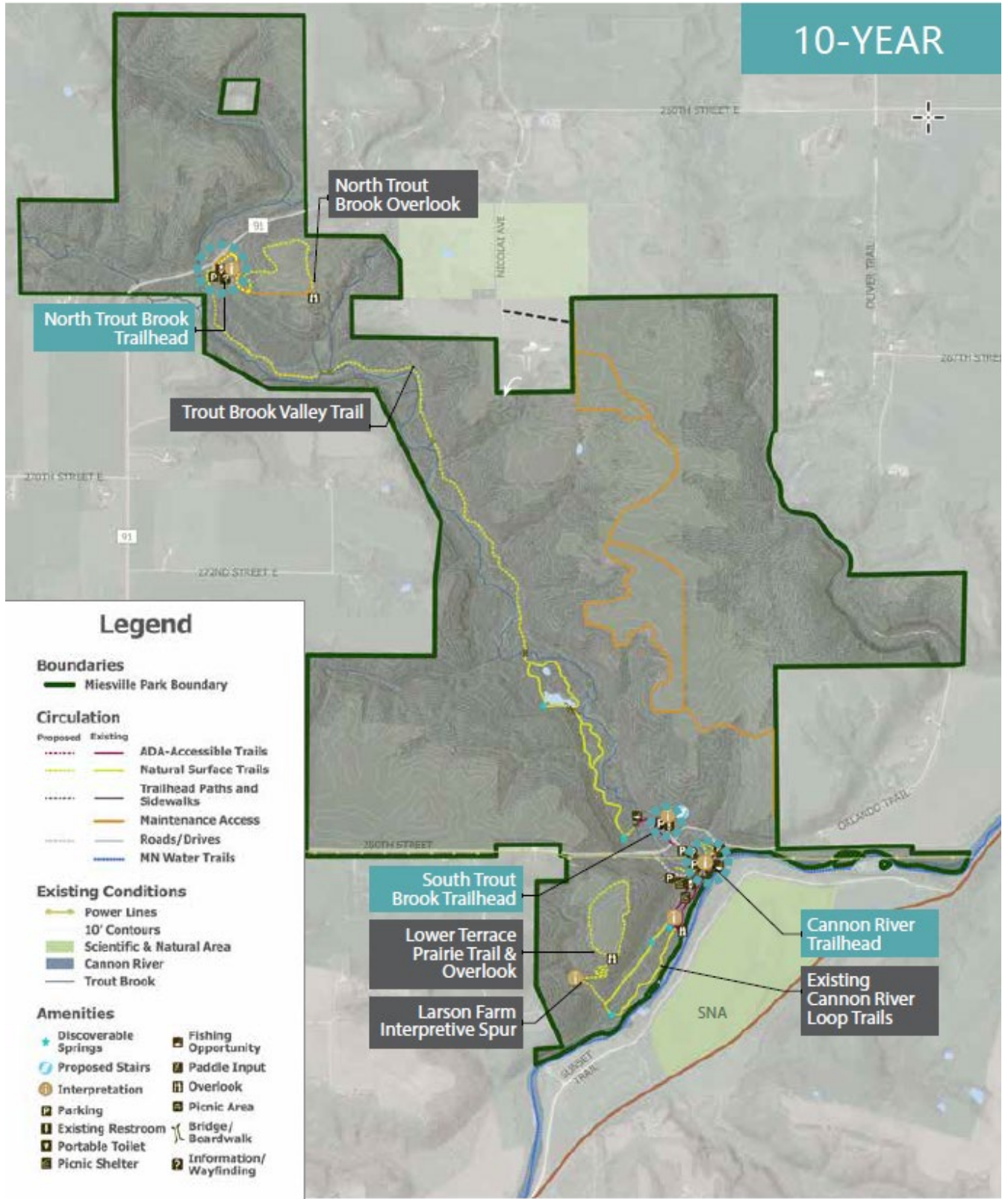
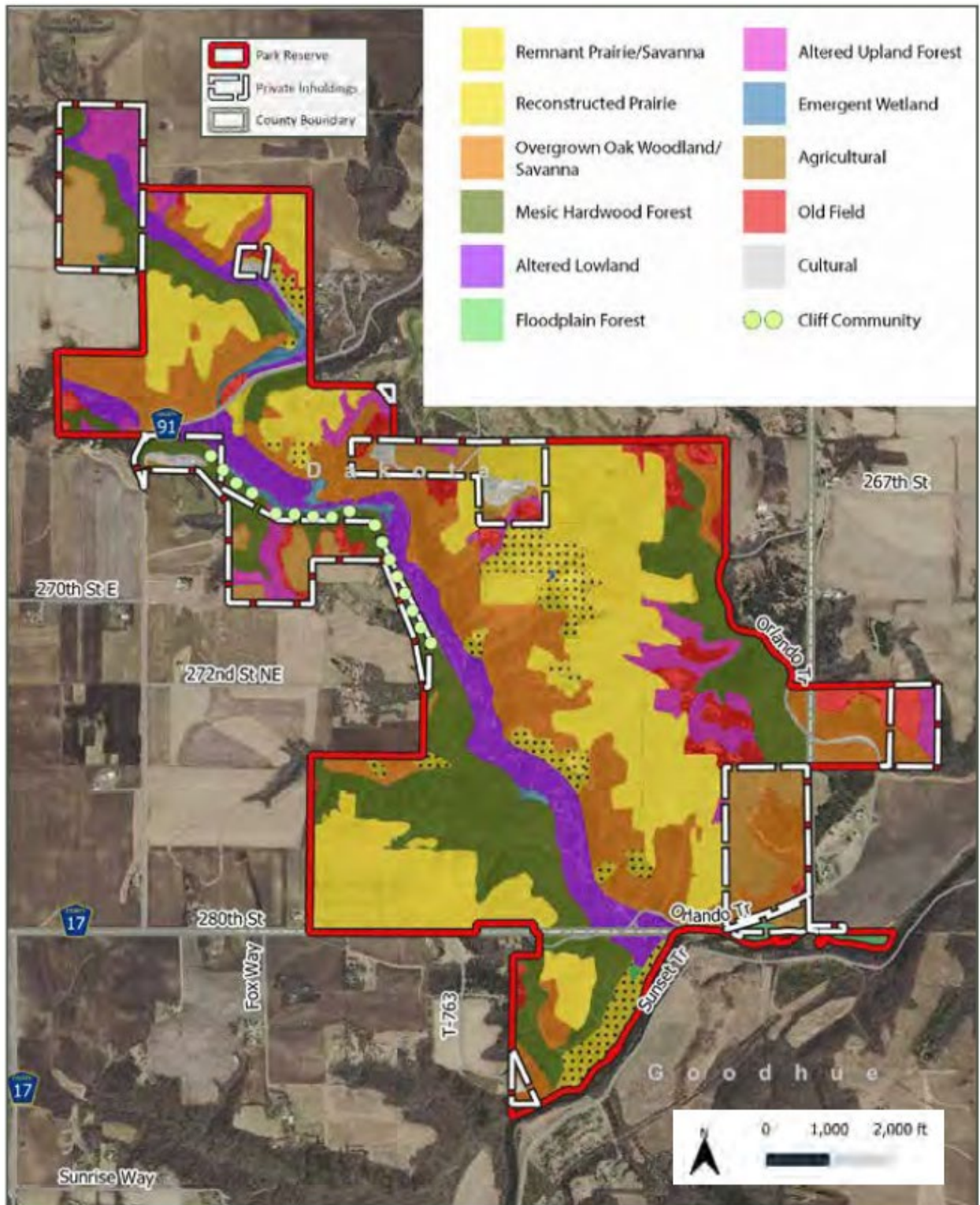


Figure 6.2 Miesville Ravine Park Reserve 10-year Concept

Figure 6: Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Natural Resource Inventory



**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
DAKOTA COUNTY, MINNESOTA**

February 27, 2024

Resolution No. 24-091

Motion by Commissioner Slavik

Second by Commissioner Halverson

Adoption Of Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-Range Plan And Natural Resource Management Plan

WHEREAS, Dakota County Parks Department has been updating the Miesville Ravine Park Reserve (MRPR) Long-Range Plan (LP) and the MRPR Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP); and

WHEREAS, by Resolution No. 23-430 (September 28, 2023), the Dakota County Board of Commissioners (County Board) authorized that the MRPR LP and the MRPR NRMP be released for public review; and

WHEREAS, the plans were posted on the Dakota County website with the ability for the public to submit comments September 27–December 25, 2023; and

WHEREAS, notification of opportunities for review was done through a mailing to 300 area residents, postings on Dakota County’s social media accounts, and emails to stakeholders and partners; and

WHEREAS, the plans were presented to Douglas Township Board of Supervisors on November 6, 2023, a virtual open house was held November 8, 2023, an in-person open house was held November 15, 2023, and meetings were also held with agency and stakeholder organizations; and

WHEREAS, the MRPR LP and NRMP have been revised to address staff, stakeholder, and public comments; and

WHEREAS, on January 25, 2024, the Dakota County Planning Commission recommended adoption of the LP and the NRMP and that the LP be submitted to the Metropolitan Council for consideration and approval; and

WHEREAS, estimated Dakota County costs for recreation and natural resource five-year priorities are \$1,809,000; and

WHEREAS, the County Board will determine implementation priorities and funding levels during the annual Parks Capital Improvement Program budget process; and

WHEREAS, the Dakota County Planning Commission recommends adoption of the MRPR LP and the MRPR NRMP and submittal of the MRPR LP to the Metropolitan Council for consideration and approval.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Dakota County Board of Commissioners hereby adopts the Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Long-Range Plan and the Miesville Ravine Park Reserve Natural Resource Management Plan and authorizes staff to submit the Long-Range Plan to the Metropolitan Council as presented to the Physical Development Committee of the Whole on February 20, 2024.

STATE OF MINNESOTA
County of Dakota

	YES		NO
Slavik	<u> X </u>	Slavik	<u> </u>
Atkins	<u> X </u>	Atkins	<u> </u>
Halverson	<u> X </u>	Halverson	<u> </u>
Droste	<u> X </u>	Droste	<u> </u>
Workman	<u> X </u>	Workman	<u> </u>
Holberg	<u> X </u>	Holberg	<u> </u>
Hamann-Roland	<u> X </u>	Hamann-Roland	<u> </u>

I, Jeni Reynolds, Clerk to the Board of the County of Dakota, State of Minnesota, do hereby certify that I have compared the foregoing copy of a resolution with the original minutes of the proceedings of the Board of County Commissioners, Dakota County, Minnesota, at their session held on the 27th day of February 2024, now on file in the Office of the County Manager Department, and have found the same to be a true and correct copy thereof.

Witness my hand and official seal of Dakota County this 27th day of February 2024.



Clerk to the Board