Parks Research Update: 2023 Annual Use Estimates & 2025 Visitor Study

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Use Estimates Background

• Produced annually since 1995.
• Used in formulas to calculate each implementing agency’s share of Regional Parks & Trails System grant program dollars
• Allows for monitoring trends over time
• One of two ongoing research responsibilities: Other is Visitor Study, approximately every 5 years
2023 Annual Use Estimates

- The estimates include data from 128 regional parks, trails, park reserves and special recreation features.
- Third year of multipliers from the 2021 Visitor Study
- Annual estimated visitation is one way to demonstrate the value of the Regional Park System. Others include climate mitigation and public health benefits
Calculating Annual Use Estimates

**Raw Counts**
- Parks staff count all people entering all parks and trails at designated locations.
- Schedule has randomized times, days, and entrances, Memorial Day to Labor Day.

**Expansion**
- Averaged with previous three years to account for weather, flooding.
- Counts are “expanded” to apply to all days and entrances.

**Special Events / Camping**
- Agency-submitted special event, camping use is added in.
- Estimated non-summer use based on 2021 Visitor Study multipliers.
Annual Visits to the Regional System

Number of estimated visits

- 75 million
- 69.4m system visits in 2023
- 49.2m park visits
- 20.2m trail visits

Note: We caution against making direct comparisons across sets of estimates.

Source: Metropolitan Council’s annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024).
Why was visitation flat in 2023?

• Typical variation in sample counts from year to year
• Poor air and weather conditions in 2023
• Variations across agencies – some up, some down. This is typical.
• Effects of more years with lower vehicle multipliers from 2021 Visitor Study
2023 Visits by Parks Agency

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board: 26.4
Three Rivers Parks District: 14.3
City of Saint Paul: 8.7
Ramsey County: 7.4
Anoka County: 4.6
Dakota County: 2.7
Washington County: 1.9
Carver County: 1.6
Scott County: 1.1
City of Bloomington: 0.9

(in millions)

Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks use estimates (July 2024).
2023 Most Visited Parks in the System

- Minneapolis Chain of Lakes RP: 7.6 million visits
- Mississippi Gorge RP: 3.8 million visits
- Central Mississippi Riverfront RP: 3.5 million visits
- Como Regional Park, Zoo & Conservatory: 3.5 million visits
- Minnehaha RP: 2.7 million visits
- Nokomis-Hiawatha RP: 2.4 million visits
- Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes PR: 2.2 million visits
- Elm Creek PR: 1.8 million visits
- Battle Creek RP: 1.1 million visits
- Bald Eagle-Otter Lake RP: 1 million visits

RP: Regional park
PR: Park reserve
(in millions)

Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024).
2023 Most Visited Trails in the System

Minnehaha Parkway: 28.7
Lake Links: 11
Cedar Lake: 9.5
Nine Mile Creek: 9
Lake Minnetonka: 8.9
Victory Memorial Parkway: 7.1
Luce Line: 7
Bruce Vento: 6.8
Medicine Lake: 6.8
Dakota Rail: 6.2

(in hundreds of thousands)

Source: Metropolitan Council’s annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024).
Visitor Study Purpose

• Help inform planning, policy, and management
• Evaluate and strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails in accordance with Imagine 2050 Parks and Trails Policy Plan
• Update data in funding formulas to help determine where funding goes for parks and trails
2025 Visitor Survey Process

- LTAC, study design, and recruit consultant
  Summer 2024-Winter 2025
- Pilot study and summer survey
  Spring/Summer 2025
- Data analysis and workshops with IAs, new multipliers
  Fall 2025
- Completed study publication
  Winter/Spring 2026