

Grounded and Growing: A Living History of Our Region's Parks and Trails

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Jessica Lee, Krysten Ryba-Tures, Raven McKnight

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Where we started

Original project scope and goals

- Formerly referred to as “historical cultural study”
- **Scope:** Understand how racism and racist practices shaped parks and trails system and the experiences of communities of color. Stories highlight range of experiences and intersectionality
 - American Indian/indigenous
 - Immigration
 - Disabilities and health status
 - Age
 - Gender identity and sexual orientation
- **Goals:** Build a more inclusive Regional Parks and Trails System through
 - Education (facts, data)
 - Building empathy (personal stories; differences and commonalities)

Project collaborators



Historical information gathering

- Hess, Roise and Company

Engagement

- Zan Associates

Partner Taskforce

- Implementing agency staff
- Helped to refine project scope
- Engaged with consultants
- Guided work through feedback, deliverable review

Emphasis on engagement and stories

Focus groups, interviews

- Centered voices of historically marginalized communities
- Asked to describe experiences...
 - Park and trail use
 - Access and barriers
 - Safety and belonging
 - Parks programs
 - Ideas to create more inclusive and welcoming system



Design process



Strategy and Product Design Team

- Within Community Development Research (2022)
- User experience (UX) design principles
- Data visualization and interaction expertise

Our role and approach

- Develop digital deliverables that center how Agencies want to use the information
- Build on consultant work
- Actionable connection between past and present
- Create opportunities for ongoing data and story collection (“Living history”)

Five themes to connect past and present

1. Access

- General awareness; getting there/around; amenities and programs

2. Feeling safe

- Personal experiences and perceptions of physical safety and well-being
- Built environment and interactions with others

3. History of our lands

- Our region is the ancestral and present-day home of the Dakota Oyate
- Land ownership and control, including build-out of system

4. Sense of belonging

- Personal experiences and perceptions of inclusion, welcoming
- Built environment and interactions with others

5. Outdoor experience

- Personal experiences with nature, recreation
- Cultural and spiritual connections and practices



Grounded and Growing

A living history of our region's parks and trails

Grounded and Growing is an ongoing multimedia project launched by the Metropolitan Council in 2025 to better understand people's experiences of parks and trails over the past 50 years.

By pairing key moments from history with present-day experiences of those from marginalized communities, we seek to surface root causes of visitation disparities and ground efforts to advance equity in shared understanding.

Interactive dashboard—Past

WELCOME

Explore historic information and visitation trends in our interactive dashboard.

ACCESS
[PAST](#) | [PRESENT](#)

FEELING SAFE
[PAST](#) | [PRESENT](#)

HISTORY OF OUR LANDS
[PAST](#) | [PRESENT](#)

SENSE OF BELONGING
[PAST](#) | [PRESENT](#)

OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES
[PAST](#) | [PRESENT](#)



metro council.org/parkslivinghistory

Historical timeline

- Sourced events from 18th century to present day, including
 - Government action or legislation
 - Quotes/documents/images
 - Events/moments
 - Movements
- Filter by theme, Parks Agency, National/statewide/regional, topics
- “Submit an event” form to continue collaboration

Interactive dashboard—Present

WELCOME

Explore historic information and visitation trends in our interactive dashboard.

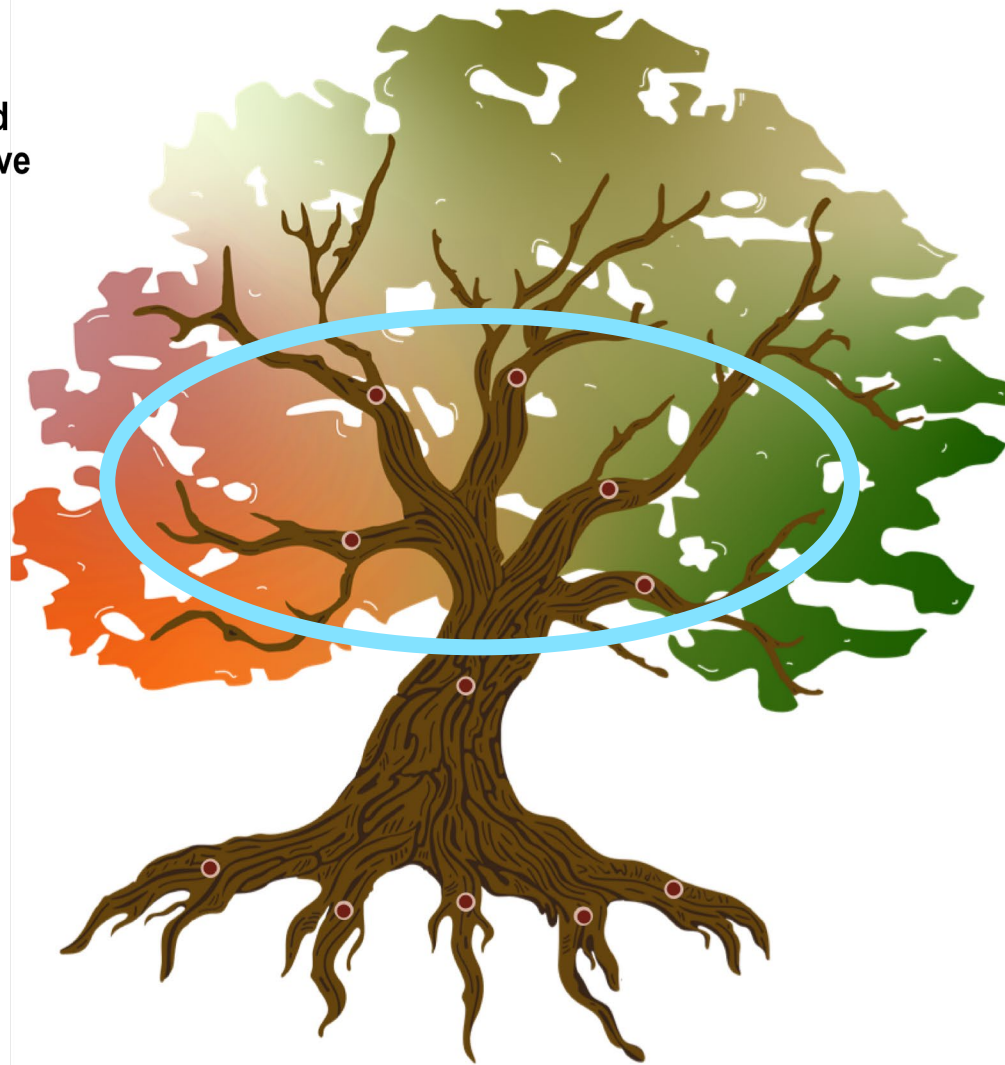
ACCESS
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Visitation trends (“present”)

- By Park Agency
 - Park use estimates
 - Population characteristics
 - Coming soon: Acquisitions
- Region/system-wide
 - Visitor demographics
 - Forecasts to 2050
- Key message: Strengthening equitable use of parks and trails is vital to future of our public investment.

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Interactive dashboard—Present

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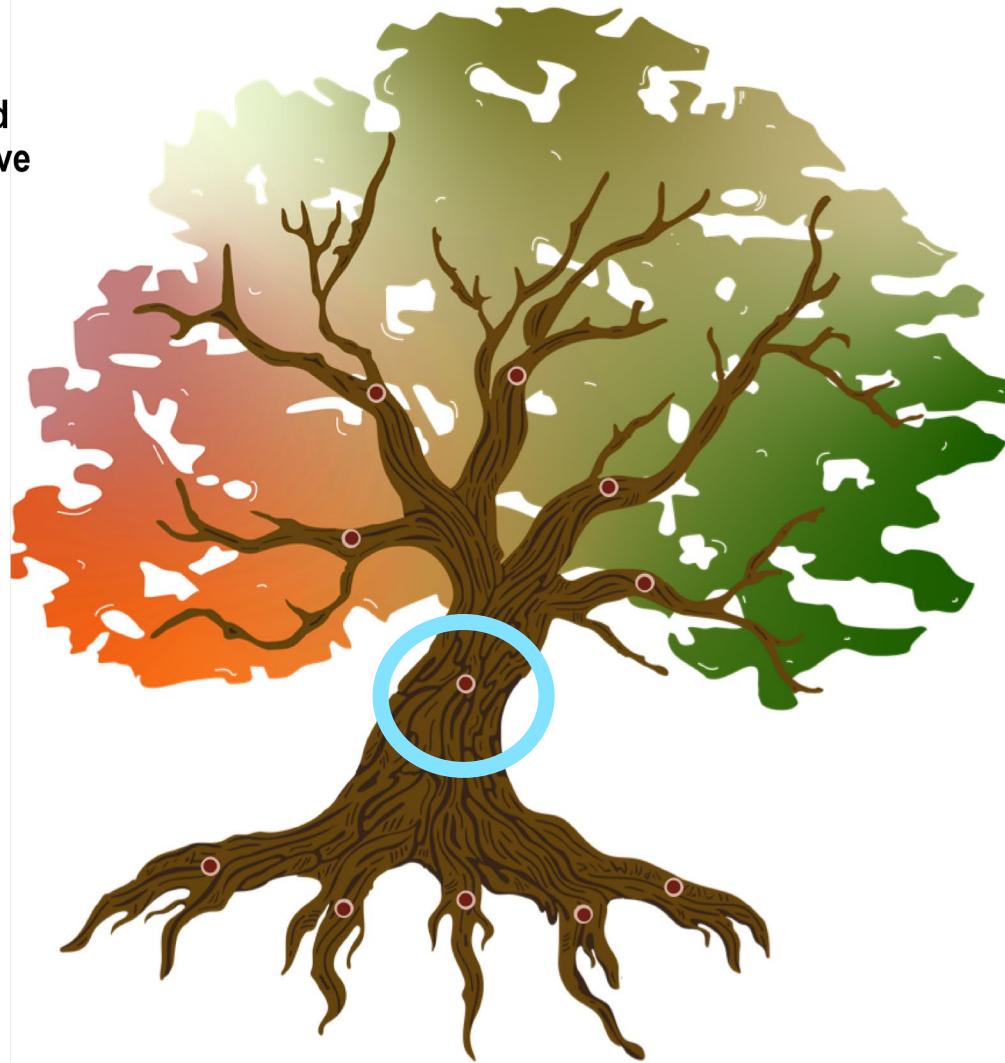
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Gathering voices

- Interactive map
 - Submit personal stories; reviewed before publicly posted
 - Map of stories and their locations

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Story submissions

metro council.org/addmyvoice



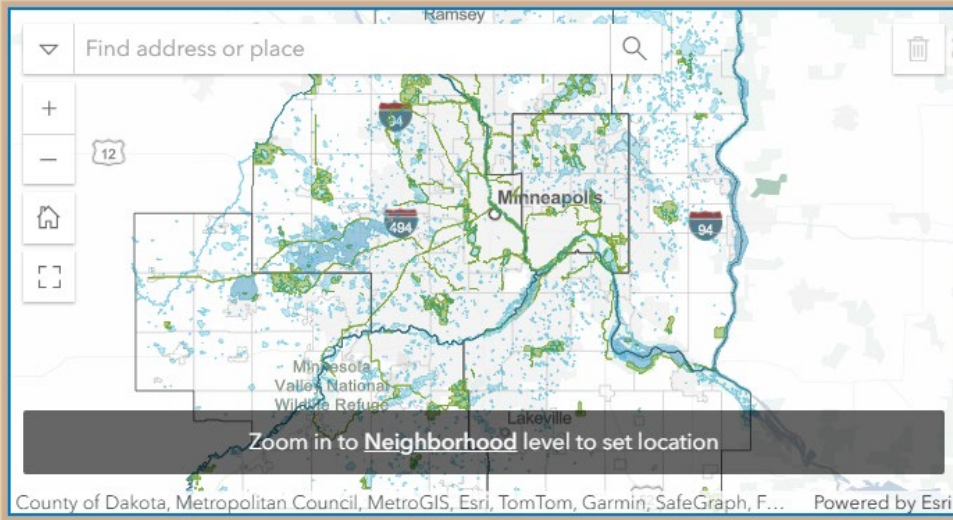
Grounded and Growing

A living history of our region's parks and trails

Where did this outdoor experience take place?*

Zoom to a specific location on the map below, then double-tap to drop a pin to connect experience you want to share with a location.

Tip: You may need to zoom in further if you can't drop the pin (be as specific about the location as possible). Use the house icon to reset the map.



Describe your outdoor experience.*

Tell us about your outdoor experience in as much detail as you feel comfortable sharing in the box below.

Is this a memory from your past or did it take place more recently, maybe even right now? What did you see, hear, or smell? What kinds of activities did you do? Are you alone or with others? What inspired this time outside? How do/did you feel about the experience?

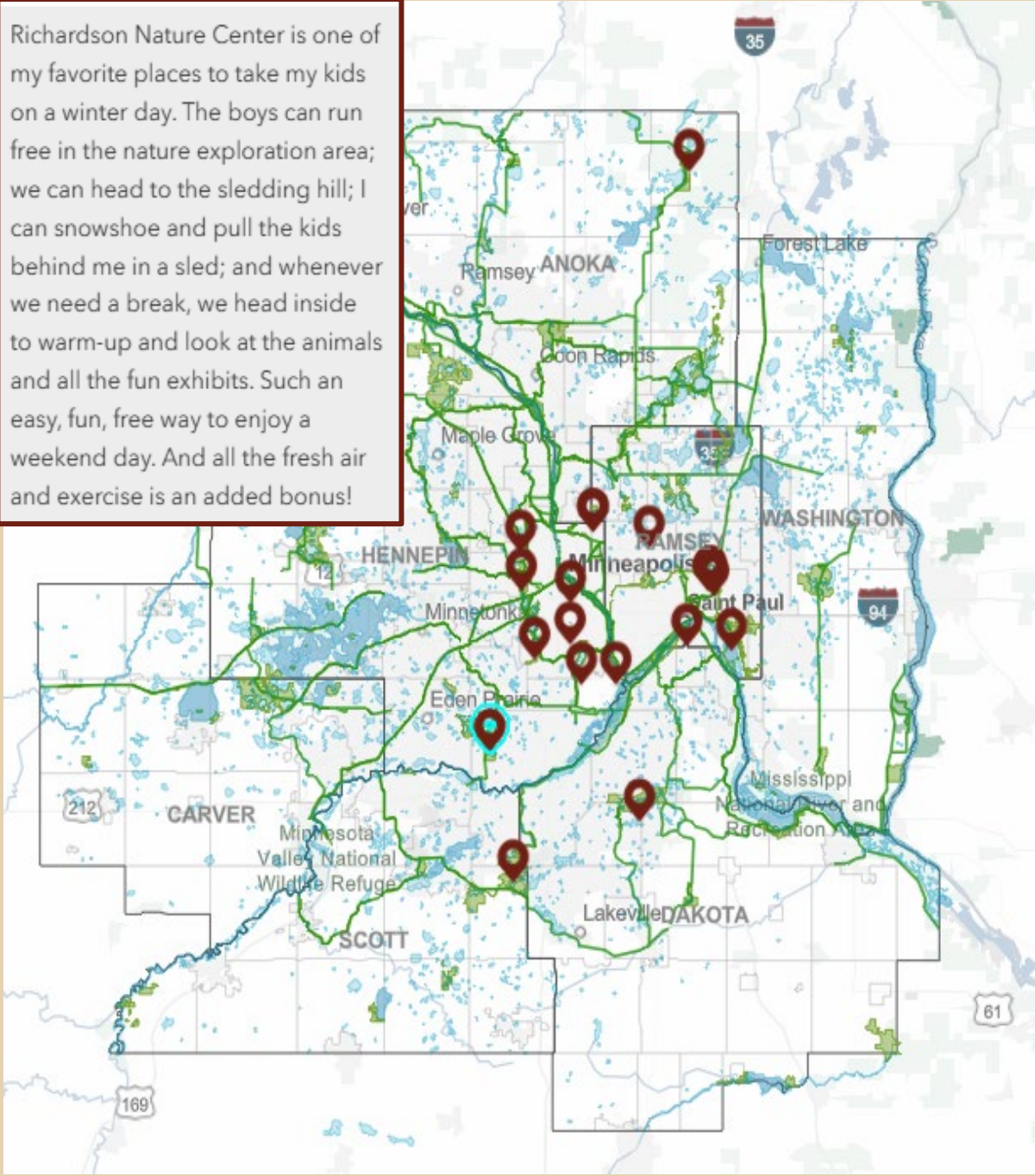
Remember, this will be public. We recommend excluding personal details that may identify you or others.

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Browse stories

metro council.org/parkslivinghistory

Richardson Nature Center is one of my favorite places to take my kids on a winter day. The boys can run free in the nature exploration area; we can head to the sledding hill; I can snowshoe and pull the kids behind me in a sled; and whenever we need a break, we head inside to warm-up and look at the animals and all the fun exhibits. Such an easy, fun, free way to enjoy a weekend day. And all the fresh air and exercise is an added bonus!



Stories' media formats

Videos

- Shorter (<5 min) for themes on project home page [metro council.org/parksliving history](https://metro council.org/parkslivinghistory)
- Full interviews of personal stories available on [YouTube playlist on Met Council's channel](#)

Written stories

- Linked as images (with alt text) or documents, depending on length
- Stories on interactive map



“Living history”—Opportunities

Build on historical information

- Submittal form (ongoing)
- New partnerships
- Internship potential

Ongoing story collection

- Campaigns to actively seek story collection
- Periodic review, summaries shared with Partner Agencies

Feature Agencies’ ongoing work, data

- Relate to themes
- Results of relevant grants, projects
- Update visitation trends
- Align with AIAC commitments

Engagement process

Brigitte Bjorklund

Director of Education and Equity, Zan Associates

- Interview approach
- Importance
- Next steps



What's Next—Sharing this work

Upcoming presentations

- April 3 - MPOSC - April 3
- April 17 – Parks Agency partner meeting
- May 5 – Community Development committee

Ongoing collaboration

- Outreach, engagement events in 2025
 - “Add your voice” campaigns to build story collection
- Support Agencies in use, training
- Update resources



Jessica Lee

Planning Analyst, Regional Parks and Trails

jessica.lee@metc.state.mn.us

Krysten Ryba-Tures

Research Manager, Community Development

krysten.ryba-tures@metc.state.mn.us

Raven McKnight

Data Visualization Specialist,

Community Development Research

raven.mcknight@metc.state.mn.us

