

## Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: August 6, 2013

For the Community Development Committee meeting of August 19, 2013

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**Subject:** Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment, Ramsey County

**District(s), Member(s):** MPOSC District E, Tony Yarusso

**Policy/Legal Reference:** MN Statute 473.313

**Staff Prepared/Presented:** Jan Youngquist, AICP, Planning Analyst (651-602-1029)

**Division/Department:** Community Development, Regional Parks and Natural Resources

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### Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council approve the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment.

### Background

Ramsey County has submitted an amendment to the master plan for the Rice Creek North Regional Trail to expand the trail corridor. The expansion area is located within the former Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP) site in Arden Hills. The amendment adds an additional 60 acres to the wildlife corridor and will facilitate the construction of a trailhead entry driveway from County Road I. A 150 foot wide corridor will also be added that will create a trail connection from the existing trail through the TCAAP site to the Highway 96 Regional Trail. The property will be transferred at no cost from the US Army to Ramsey County through the National Park Service, with the stipulation that Ramsey County complete soil remediation to make the site suitable for recreational development.

### Rationale

The Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment is consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.

### Funding

The estimated cost to implement the master plan amendment is \$3,155,479, which includes \$615,000 in eligible acquisition costs (site demolition and soil remediation) and \$2,540,479 for development.

Approval of this master plan makes the acquisition and development costs eligible for regional parks funding, but does not commit the Council to any funding. Future funding based on this master plan may be awarded through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and the Acquisition Opportunity Fund. Council action is required to approve the CIP and to approve specific grants to Ramsey County.

### Known Support / Opposition

The Ramsey County Board passed a resolution approving the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment. The master plan amendment also includes resolutions of support from the Cities of Arden Hills and Shoreview. There is no known opposition to the master plan amendment.

## Analysis

The 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan requires that destination regional trail master plans address the eleven items listed below.

**1. Boundaries and Acquisition** The Rice Creek North Regional Trail extends 14 miles from the Rice Creek West Regional Trail at Long Lake Regional Park to the Rice Creek Chain of Lake Park Reserve in Anoka County. This master plan amendment proposes to expand the regional trail in the central portion of the trail corridor within Arden Hills, as shown in **Figure 1**.

**Figure 1: Location of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail**



The 1998 Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan identified 113 acres of the former Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP) site to be acquired for the regional trail corridor. The development and operation of the TCAAP site as a federal small arms ammunition plant began in 1941 and lasted until 1976. Between 1974 and 1985, the federal government started decommissioning the property. Production of special munitions continued on a limited basis until 2005. The 113 acres was transferred to Ramsey County through the National Park Service as part of the Federal Lands to Park Program. A trail has been constructed on this property.

An amendment to the Rice Creek North Regional Trail was developed in 2003, which identified an additional 49 acres of the TCAAP property to be acquired as a wildlife corridor. This corridor is a critical link to the 1,500 acre Arden Hills Army Training Site (AHATS) that is east of the TCAAP property.

The current master plan amendment includes the addition of 60 acres of the TCAAP site that will facilitate the construction of a trailhead entry driveway and additional trails near County Road I. Also being added is a 150 foot wide corridor that will provide a trail connection to the Highway 96 Regional Trail. The property will be transferred at no cost from the US Army to Ramsey County through the National Park Service, with the stipulation that Ramsey County complete soil remediation to make the site suitable for recreational development. The estimated cost for site demolition and soil remediation is \$615,000, which is an eligible acquisition cost based on the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant Rules that were adopted by the Metropolitan Council in January 2013 as part of an amendment to the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

**2. Demand Forecast** Ramsey County’s portion of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail had 207,900 visits in 2011 and 216,000 visits in 2012. Surveys conducted by the Metropolitan Council show that the most popular activities in the regional parks system include walking and biking. The use of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail is anticipated to continue to rise due to these urban recreation trends and the projected population growth of communities in the trail service area, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Projected Population of Communities in the Regional Trail Service Area**

Year	Arden Hills	Mounds View	New Brighton	Shoreview
2010	9,552	12,155	21,456	25,043
2030	12,900	13,400	22,800	29,000
<i>Projected Increase 2010-2030</i>	<i>26%</i>	<i>9%</i>	<i>6%</i>	<i>14%</i>

The most significant population growth is projected to occur in the area immediately adjacent to the regional trail amendment area through redevelopment of the TCAAP site. It is anticipated that the site will include a mixture of commercial and residential uses.

**3. Development** Recreational development in the 60 acre trail corridor expansion area will include:

- Bituminous trail
- Natural surface trail for hiking
- Trailhead building with restrooms
- Parking (100 stalls)
- Site amenities
- Entry drive from County Road I
- Improved trail connections to Rice Creek
- Habitat restoration
- Wayfinding signage
- Potential cross-country ski trails in conjunction with the development of ski trails on the AHATS property
- Canoe/kayak access to Rice Creek

A new bituminous trail will link the proposed trailhead and parking area to County Road I. An at-grade crossing will be needed at County Road I for pedestrian and bicyclist safety.

Approximately 9,000 linear feet of natural surface trail is proposed to create a walking/cross-country skiing loop that will connect into a future cross-country trail system within the AHATS property. This will be accomplished through working with AHATS and supported by the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission. The natural surface trail will allow users to walk and ski through restored prairie and Rice Creek wetlands.

The master plan amendment also includes the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Connection, which will extend 1.5 miles from the existing wildlife area to Highway 96. This trail will cross a proposed service road to access a future electrical substation. This will be an at-grade crossing. Signage along the trail and the road will notify drivers and trail users to use caution at the intersection. In order to connect this trail to the Highway 96 Regional Trail, which is located on the south side of Highway 96, a future signalized intersection will be coordinated with TCAAP development planning.

The estimated development costs for the regional trail amendment area are approximately \$2,540,479, as shown in **Figure 3**.

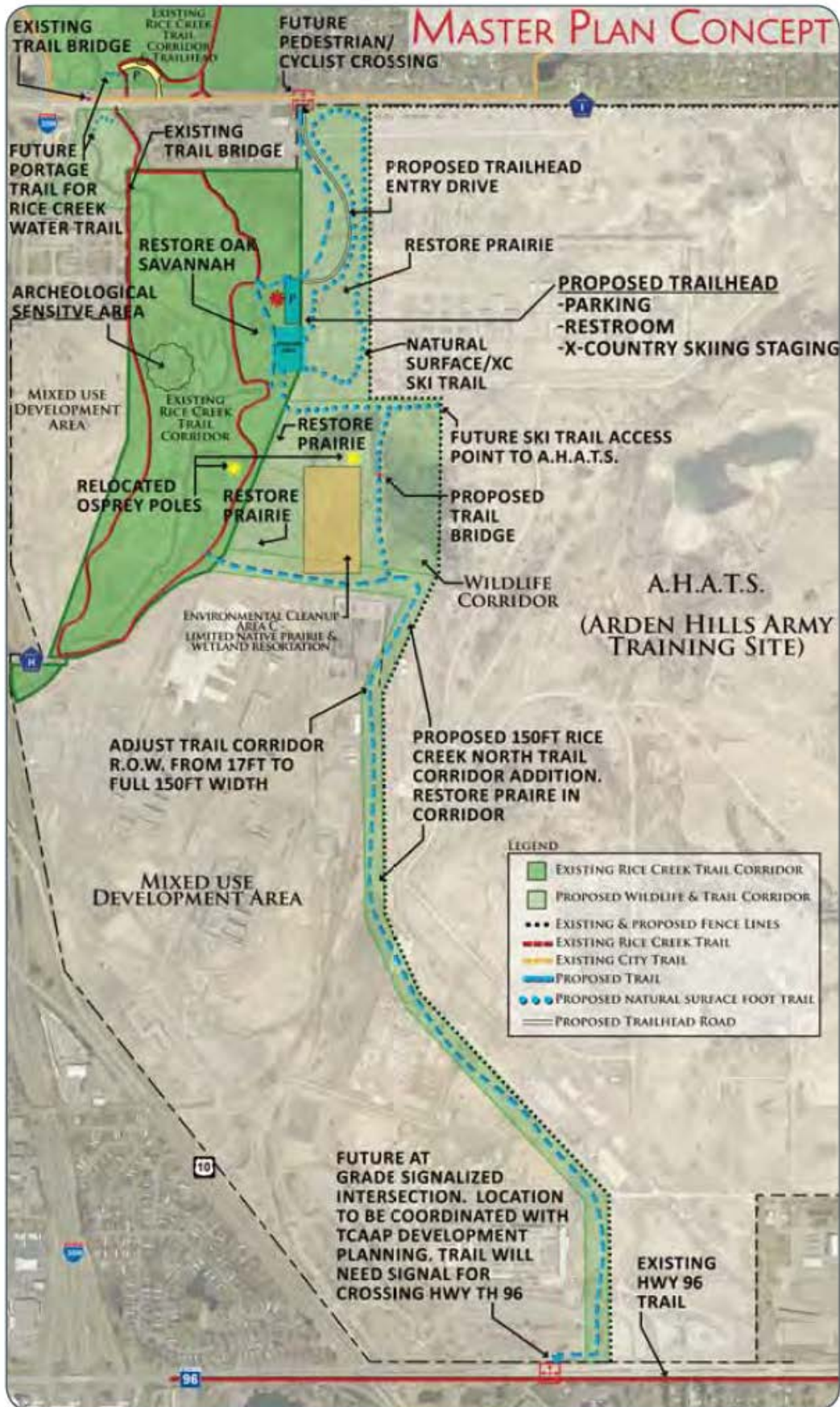
**Figure 3: Estimated Development Costs of the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Amendment**

Description	Estimated Cost
Parking lot reconstruction (100 cars)	\$151,732
Entrance Road	\$256,342
Trail connections (12,700 linear feet)	\$362,010
Landscape restoration	\$276,100
Site amenities (benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, signage)	\$27,940
Trailhead building	\$275,000
Utility extension	\$572,000
Other site improvements (remove existing bituminous, fencing)	\$619,355
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,540,479</b>

The master concept plan is shown in **Figure 4**.



Figure 4: Master Concept Plan



**4. Conflicts** There are no major conflicts that will affect development of regional trail. Adjacent land uses include the future mixed-use development area of the TCAAP property to the west and south and the Arden Hills Army Training Site (AHATS) to the east. A fence will separate the regional trail corridor from the AHATS property. Power lines will be collocated along a portion of the trail corridor. An access road to a substation will be necessary, which will be managed to have a minimal impact on trail use.

**5. Public Services** No significant new public services are needed for the development concept that is outlined in the master plan. Once the trail corridor is established and visitor use increases, there may be a need for intersection improvements at the access to County Road I. Water and sanitary sewer services are planned to serve the restrooms at the trailhead area. All existing sewer and water mains to the existing buildings on the site are planned to be abandoned. It is anticipated that sewer and water lines will be extended from existing mains on County Road I.

**6. Operations** The use of Ramsey County's parks and trails is controlled by "An Ordinance for the Control and Management of Park, Recreation and Open Space Areas and Facilities under the Jurisdiction of the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners." The ordinance was adopted in 1992 and amended in 2007. Enforcement, first aid and security along the trail will be provided by the Ramsey County Parks in conjunction with the County Sheriff's Department. Fire services will be provided by the Lake Johanna Fire Department.

The existing annual operations and maintenance costs for the Rice Creek North Regional Trail are \$30,000. Once fully developed, the annual operations and maintenance costs are estimated to be \$58,000. The master plan amendment states that operation and maintenance services will be provided at a level that is appropriate for the designated use and consistent with the current phase of development. Annual operating costs are funded through County tax revenue and supplemented by a State appropriation that is administered by the Metropolitan Council.

**7. Citizen Participation** Ramsey County presented the master plan concept in conjunction with the City of Arden Hills as part of an informational meeting that also included discussion on the demolition and remediation of the TCAAP site. Approximately 200 people attended the meeting held on May 7, 2013. The master plan concept was posted on Ramsey County's website from May 13 to July 8, with the opportunity for public comment. The plan was also distributed to the Cities of Arden Hills and Shoreview for review and comment. The plan was presented to the Arden Hills City Council on June 24, to the Shoreview Parks and Recreation Commission on June 27, and to the Shoreview City Council on July 1.

The Cities of Arden Hills and Shoreview passed resolutions of support for the master plan amendment. Additionally, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved the Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment on June 25, 2013.

**8. Public Awareness** Ramsey County Parks and Recreation promotes public awareness of its regional parks and trails through maps, websites, social media, email notification, brochures and press releases. Information about the Rice Creek North Regional Trail will also be listed on Go Ramsey Communities, a web-based mapping application that allows users to locate opportunities to be active.

**9. Accessibility** The facilities will meet the requirements of the American with Disabilities Act and principles for universal accessibility. Ramsey County is a part of the Ramsey County Active Living Communities partnership, which works to support making physical activity safer and easier. There will not be a fee for use of the regional trail, which eliminates economic barriers for trail users.

**10. Natural Resources** Existing land cover includes a mix of floodplain, grasslands with patches of deciduous forest, and woodlands. Much of the natural vegetation has been highly degraded by past use of the site as an army munitions plant and the channelization of Rice Creek. Invasive species have become widespread. Some portions of the expansion area include restored prairies.

Rice Creek is the predominant natural feature of the regional trail corridor. The creek originates in Clear Lake, which is south of the City of Forest Lake and flows 28 miles southwest to the Mississippi River in Fridley. During times of high water flow, the creek provides an excellent watercourse for canoeing. Sections of the creek in the amendment area have been straightened. Further upstream in Shoreview, the creek has been re-meandered.

The Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor includes a 49-acre wildlife corridor, which provides an important wildlife connection between the AHATS property and Rice Creek. This area also provides important habitat for birds, small animals, and invertebrates; it also includes several osprey nesting sites.

**11. Stewardship Plan** The Rice Creek North Regional Trail corridor has been identified as a priority area to restore a combination of wetland, prairie and savannah habitats. Prairies will be maintained with prescribed fire and invasive species will be controlled with herbicides and bio-control. Bio-control is done in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and Department of Natural Resources.

The deer population is surveyed annually. If needed, the deer herd will be managed with special hunts based on the Ramsey County Cooperative Deer Management Plan in cooperation with local communities.

The Rice Creek Watershed District identifies restoration of Middle Rice Creek as a capital improvement project. The project would include re-meandering of the creek to increase recreational use as a water trail and to reverse the effects of past channelization. Implementation of the project would be a joint effort between the Rice Creek Watershed District, Anoka County, Ramsey County, the National Park Service and the Friends of the Mississippi River.

## **Review by Other Council Divisions**

**Environmental Services – Sewers** (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – No comments.

**Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management** (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) – No comments.

**Transportation Planning** (Ann Braden 651-602-1705) – No comments.

## **Conclusions**

1. The Rice Creek North Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment is consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.
2. The estimated cost to implement the master plan amendment is \$3,155,479, which includes \$615,000 in eligible acquisition costs (site demolition and soil remediation) and \$2,540,479 for development.
3. Approval of this master plan does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. Future development funding based on this master plan would be done through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and Land Acquisition Opportunity Fund. Council action is required to approve the CIP and to approve specific grants to Ramsey County.