

## Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: May 7, 2012

For the Community Development Committee meeting of May 20, 2013

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**Subject:** Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Acquisition Master Plan, Three Rivers Park District

**District(s), Member(s):** MPOSC District B, Robert Moeller

**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 Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Master Plan, subject to Metropolitan Council approval of the amendment to the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* acknowledging Kingswood Special Recreation Feature as a component of the regional parks system.

### Background

Three Rivers Park District has entered into an agreement with the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (Minnesota Conference) to purchase the former Camp Kingswood in Minnetrista and is proposing to develop it as a special recreation feature. Camp Kingswood offered a faith-based camp which included cabins, lodges, a dining hall, outdoor amphitheater, a ropes course and family campsites. After operating the camp for 65 years, the Minnesota Conference decided to close the camp and contacted Three Rivers Park District regarding the potential sale of the property in 2012. After several months of internal discussions and subsequent negotiations with the Minnesota Conference, Three Rivers Park District entered into a purchase agreement for Camp Kingswood in December 2012.

Three Rivers Park District is proposing to create the Kingswood Special Recreation Feature (SRF) on the site. The long-range vision of Kingswood SRF is to:

*Promote environmental stewardship of Kingswood SRF's high-quality natural resources through instructor-led education and recreation programs focusing on public involvement in the enjoyment, study and management of the resource.*

Three Rivers Park District requested that the Metropolitan Council consider amending the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* (Policy Plan) to add the proposed Kingswood Special Recreation Feature to the regional parks system. A public hearing on the Policy Plan amendment was conducted on April 15, 2013. The Metropolitan Council is scheduled to take action on the proposed amendment to the Policy Plan on June 12, 2013. Three Rivers Park District has submitted the Kingswood SRF acquisition master plan for Metropolitan Council consideration immediately following its action on the Policy Plan amendment.

### Rationale

The Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.

## Funding

The estimated costs to implement the master plan are \$4,078,310 to \$4,153,310, which includes \$2,523,310 for land acquisition and associated costs as well as \$1,555,000-\$1,630,000 for initial 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. Three Rivers Park District has submitted a request for a grant from the Land Acquisition Opportunity Fund to acquire the Camp Kingswood property, which will be considered by the Metropolitan Council under a separate action. Future development funding based on this master plan may be awarded through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Council action is required to approve the CIP and to approve specific grants to Three Rivers Park District.

## Known Support / Opposition

The master plan includes a letter of support from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for the acquisition of the Camp Kingswood property and a resolution of support for the master plan from the City of Minnetrista. There is no known opposition to the master plan.

## Analysis

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

- 1. Boundaries and Acquisition** The Kingswood site is in the community of Minnetrista, which is located in western Hennepin County, as shown in **Figure 1**. The site is generally located north of County Road 15, south of County Road 26, east of County Road 92 and west of County Road 110.

**Figure 1: General Location of the Kingswood Site**



The Kingswood property consists of six parcels, totaling 106.24 acres. Adjacent land uses include large lot single family residences on the north, the Boys and Girls Club/Camp Voyageur on the south, a Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) boat launch on the east and the Minnetonka Sportsmen Club and large lot single family residences on the west. The Kingswood site and proposed boundaries of the special recreation feature are outlined in red on **Figure 2**.

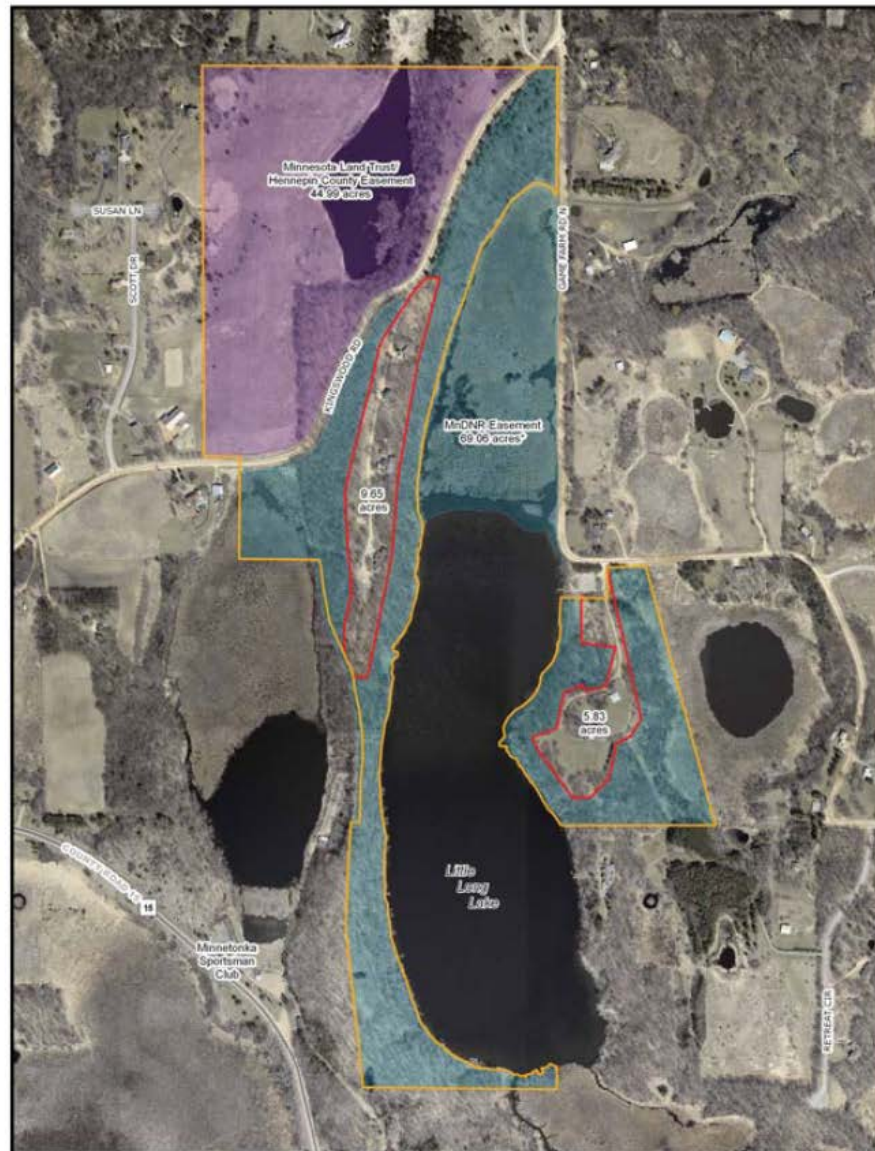
**Figure 2: Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Boundaries**



As part of historical measures taken to preserve the high quality natural resources on the site and protect them from private development, there are conservation easements on the property. The Minnesota Land Trust, in collaboration with Hennepin County, purchased a 45-acre conservation easement on the northwest portion of the property. The easement area includes a remnant portion of the Big Woods, the tamarack bog and managed tall grass prairie. This easement allows unpaved paths or foot trails that may only be used in a manner that does not result in significant erosion, impairment or interference with the natural habitat, water quality or scenic quality of the easement area.

The MnDNR purchased a conservation easement on the property through its Metro Greenways program in 2003. The easement includes 47 acres, 22 acres of which includes the northern bog portion of Little Long Lake, which is not platted in Hennepin County's parcel data. This easement states that trails are not permitted to be established in the easement area except those specifically allowed in the MnDNR *Natural Resources Management Plan*. To accommodate the future recreational intent of the master plan, Three Rivers Park District is collaborating with the MnDNR to amend the easement boundaries to allow for the future development of a trail along the ridgeline of the glacial esker. The master plan includes a letter from the MnDNR expressing its commitment to working with Three Rivers Park District to release a portion of the conservation easement for development of the trail. Both easement areas are depicted in **Figure 3**.

**Figure 3: Kingswood Property Conservation Easements**



**Existing Property Easements**

\*Includes 21.6 acre northern portion of Long Lake which is not currently included as parcel data.

-  Camp Kingswood Boundary
-  Camp Kingswood Property Not in Easement
-  Minnesota Land Trust/Hennepin County Easement
-  MnDNR Easement



Department of Planning  
Map Created: 06/01/2012 - AB  
Revised Date: 9/12/2012 - AB

This map is a compilation of data from various sources and is provided "as is" without warranty of any representation of accuracy, timeliness, or completeness. The user acknowledges and accepts the responsibility of this data, including the fact that data is dynamic and in a constant state of change. Corrections and updates are not guaranteed.

The estimated costs for acquisition of the property and associated costs, including the stewardship of the site described in the following section is approximately \$2,523,310.

**2. Stewardship** Initial stewardship of the property will include the installation of boundary marking signage; removal of existing buildings, utilities and infrastructure on the west side of Little Long Lake; and general site clean-up and restoration of disturbed sites.

**3. Demand Forecast** Three Rivers estimated the demand for Kingswood SRF based on the current usage of the region's seven existing special recreation features. Kingswood SRF will be the most comparable to Gale Woods Farm and Square Lake special recreation features as Gale Woods Farm offers instructor-led programs in a semi-rural area and Square Lake offers similar outstanding water quality. Square Lake had an estimated 55,100 visits in 2011; Gale Woods Farm had approximately 99,300 visits. Based on this information, Kingswood SRF should have between 55,000 and 100,000 annual visits, not including the proposed regional trail that will travel through the park. The Minnetrista Regional Trail is projected to generate approximately 138,000 visits each year.

Kingswood SRF will focus on educating and involving the public in the management of the park's natural resources. The *2012 Report on Volunteerism* published by the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency that engages citizens in service through Senior Corps, AmeriCorps and the Service Innovation Fund programs, indicates that volunteerism is growing and that Minnesota ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation in volunteerism. Three Rivers has an active volunteer corps of 1,800 people. Many of these people are baby boomers, although there has been a rise in youth volunteerism, especially as part of formal school curriculums. Over the last five years, integrated service/education opportunities with Three Rivers Park District have increased over 30 percent. Kingswood SRF, with its planned nature-based serving learning programs, will serve the growing demand for volunteerism opportunities.

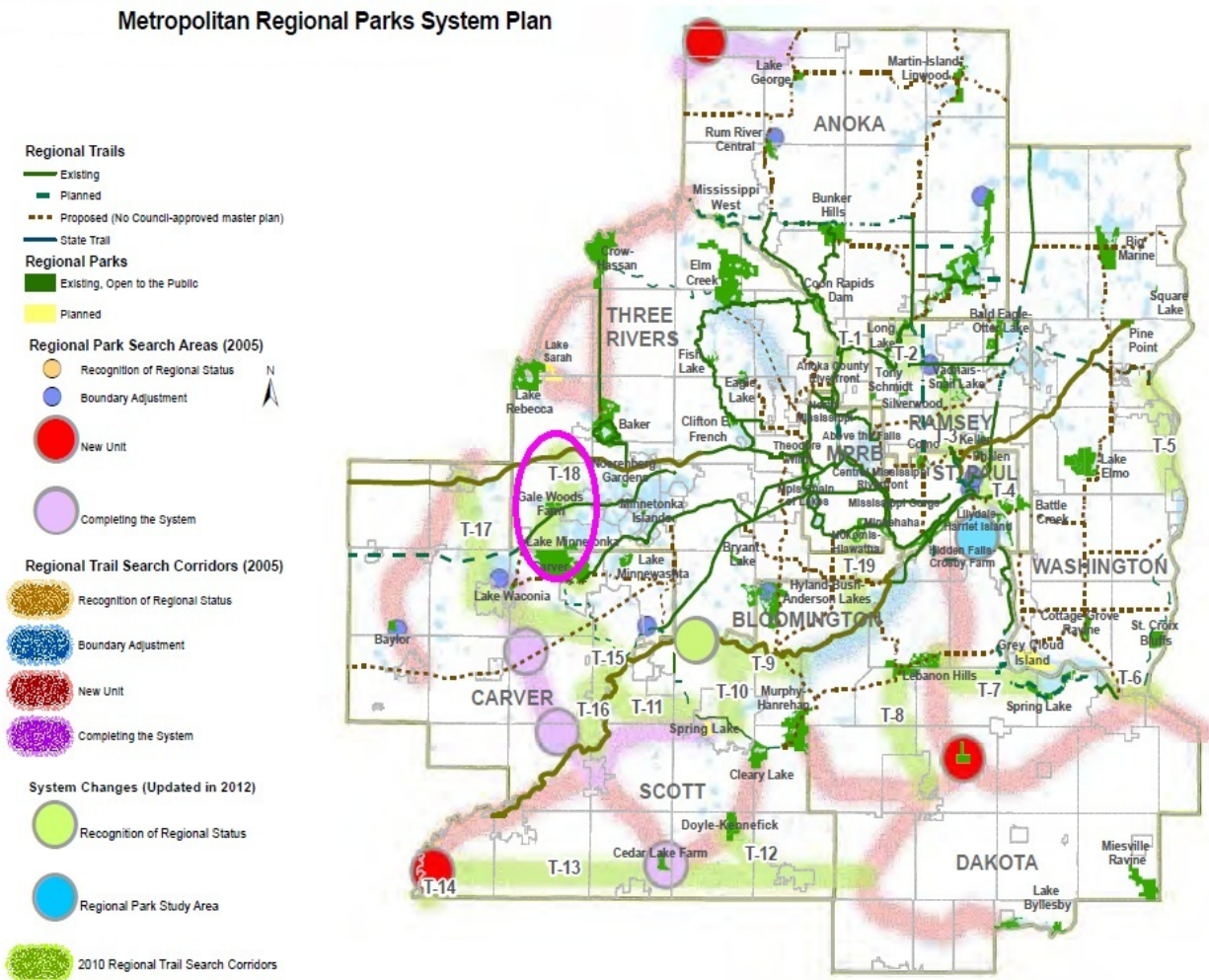
**4. Development Concept** After the initial stewardship of the property is complete, the first phase of development focuses on resource stabilization and enhancement, limited program-based environmental education and service-learning opportunities, and utilization of the existing interpretive trail network. After removing the buildings and associated infrastructure on the west side of the property, Three Rivers intends to provide a basic level of service by opening this area for low-impact use of the existing trails. In preparation for this area being open to the public, Three Rivers will initiate nature-based service learning opportunities, which may include sustainable trail development/maintenance and invasive species control. Three Rivers will evaluate whether to rehabilitate or remove the picnic shelter on the east side of the park and construct a small gravel parking lot. The estimated costs for this phase are \$55,000 to \$130,000.

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* identifies the Minnetrista Regional Trail Search Corridor, which will connect the Luce Line State Trail in Independence to the Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail in Victoria. Along its route, the regional trail will provide connections to several regional parks system facilities, including Gale Woods Farm, Dakota Rail Regional Trail, Lake Minnetonka Regional Park and Carver Park Reserve. The Minnetrista Regional Trail Search Corridor is labeled T-18 and circled in pink on **Figure 4**.

The Kingswood property will serve as a critical segment of this proposed regional trail. Within Kingswood SRF, the regional trail will include vistas over the lake and of the rural landscape as well as opportunities to access nature. The trail will run along the ridge of the glacial esker. The estimated cost for developing this regional trail segment and stabilizing existing erosion concerns along the ridgeline of the esker are approximately \$1,500,000.

Additional development of Kingswood SRF will be evaluated as part of a future planning process for a development master plan.

**Figure 4: Minnetrista Regional Trail Search Corridor**



**5. Conflicts** The City of Minnetrista has guided the future land use of the Kingswood property for Rural Land Use and has zoned it as Agriculture, both of which allow parks and recreational trails as permitted uses. Therefore, there is no conflict between the City’s long term plans and the property being preserved as a special recreation feature.

**6. Public Services** No public services are needed for the development concept outlined in the acquisition master plan. If public services are needed as part of future recreational development plans, they will be addressed in a subsequent development master plan and coordinated with the appropriate providers.

**7. Operations** Kingswood SRF will be operated under Three Rivers Park District’s adopted ordinances that define the rules and regulations for the use of its regional parks and trails. Information regarding the park hours, permitted and prohibited uses, fees, maps and emergency phone numbers will be posted throughout the facility.

Much of the equipment and tools for maintenance of the park are already in place through the cost savings associated with Three Rivers Park District’s work cluster program. When the acquisition master plan is fully implemented, the annual routine maintenance costs are estimated to be \$10,000 for first phase of development and an additional \$5,000 after development of the regional trail.

Natural resource management costs are not anticipated for the initial stewardship activities. Once the park is open to the public, an additional \$10,000 in annual operational costs is anticipated for monitoring of Little Long Lake, prairie burns, invasive species control and deer hunts.

Annual operating costs are funded through Three Rivers Park District's general fund budget, which receives its funding from property taxes and from the State of Minnesota as part of the Operations and Maintenance Fund allocation administered by the Metropolitan Council. Some rehabilitation costs may also be funded from Three River's Park Maintenance and Rehabilitation Fund.

**8. Citizen Participation** Three Rivers Park District included outreach to the affected agencies and the general public in identifying the Kingswood site as a special recreation feature and in developing the acquisition master plan. A general stakeholder meeting was held in August 2012, which was attended by staff from Hennepin County Environmental Services, Minnesota Land Trust, City of Minnetrista, Metropolitan Council and the Boys and Girls Club/Camp Voyageur.

A draft copy of the Kingswood SRF acquisition master plan was added to Three Rivers' website in January 2013, and copies were distributed to stakeholders, affected public agencies, local libraries, Gale Woods Farm SRF and Lowry Nature Center at Carver Park Reserve. An open house was hosted on February 5, 2013. Approximately 45 people attended the open house. Comments received from the public included suggestions ranging from providing an off-leash dog area and providing horse trails on the site, to leaving the property as natural as possible with no horse trails.

The master plan was presented to the City of Minnetrista Parks and Recreation Commission, Planning Commission and City Council during February and March 2013. The City of Minnetrista subsequently provided a resolution of support for the master plan.

#### **9. Public Awareness**

Three Rivers Park District's Marketing Communications Department uses a number of tools to inform the public about its regional parks, including distributing a District-wide map, website, direct mail, press releases, brochures and on-site promotion. Three Rivers also works with the State Office of Tourism and the Metropolitan Council to create awareness and visibility.

**10. Accessibility** All facilities described in the master plan will be developed in accordance with ADA standards and guidelines. Three Rivers has programs designed to assist people for whom cost could be a barrier to participation. Its "Parks for All People" program provides free passes for swimming and cross country skiing to qualified recipients of Hennepin County economic assistance programs. Discounted camping, equipment rental and educational programs are available. Three Rivers does not charge entrance fees to its regional parks, park reserves or regional trails. Three Rivers also works with special-interest organizations such as the Courage Center and Wilderness Inquiry to encourage participation in activities and the use of park facilities. Interpreters and alternative forms of printed material can be made available at programmed events.

**11. Natural Resources** The Kingswood site offers a unique high quality natural resource landscape, including a sizable patch of maple-basswood forest, tamarack bog, glacial esker, prairie and the suburb water quality of Little Long Lake. The site has been identified by the MnDNR and the Metropolitan Council as a Regionally Significant Ecological Area of outstanding quality.

Little Long Lake is one of the most pristine lakes in the metropolitan region. The Metropolitan Council began a comprehensive lake water quality monitoring program for the

Twin Cities metropolitan area in 1980 to enable cities, counties, and watershed management organizations to make better informed lake management decisions. To date, the quality of 369 different lakes has been evaluated and tracked through the 2011 April-to-October monitoring season. Little Long Lake has consistently ranked within the upper 10th percentile of all metropolitan area lakes in terms of water quality characteristics.

The geology of the Kingswood property created a small and well-contained watershed of approximately 150 acres, which is one of the primary reasons for the excellent water quality of Little Long Lake. A tall and steep esker with slopes as much as 25 to 35 percent is located along the west side of the lake. The hills and slopes in the area resulted in limited farming and clearing of forested lands within the watershed, which benefits the water quality of the lake and has preserved historical vegetation.

Vegetation in the area prior to European settlement was characterized by Big Woods, which is scientifically defined as a mixed deciduous hardwood forest. Much of the Big Woods in Minnesota was cleared for lumber and farming; less than two percent of the Big Woods remain in the Minnesota landscape. The Kingswood property includes a large patch of Big Woods on the west side of the lake. The sugar maple and basswood Big Woods is contiguous to an adjacent native vegetation complex that includes tamarack swamp and cattail sedge marsh.

The vegetation surrounding Little Long Lake is one of the most diverse emergent communities found in Hennepin County. While hybrid cattail is present, it is not monotypic as it is elsewhere. Sedges and wetland wild flowers are common among the cattails. Wild rice grows on the lake margins when water levels are high.

The Kingswood site contains a diversity of wildlife. Because of the excellent water quality, Little Long Lake supports a two-story fishery, which means that the near-surface volume of the lake supports a warm water bass/panfish/northern pike fish community and the deeper waters of the lake are cold and well-oxygenated enough to support trout. The MnDNR has annually stocked rainbow trout in the lake since 1987.

Terrestrial wildlife includes beavers, otters, mink and muskrats. White-tailed deer and coyotes are common; red and gray foxes have been seen occasionally. The diversity of vegetation attracts a wide variety of birds. Ospreys that nest at Gale Woods Farm use the lake for fishing. Belted kingfishers, great blue herons and little green herons are seen regularly. Many types of songbirds and edge species such as robins, goldfinches and sparrows are also common.

## **Review by Other Council Divisions**

**Environmental Services – Sewers** (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) This master plan does not propose regional wastewater service; and therefore, will not have an impact on the Metropolitan Disposal System.

**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 Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and other Council policies.
2. The estimated costs to implement the master plan are \$4,078,310 to \$4,153,310, which includes \$2,523,310 for land acquisition and associated costs as well as \$1,555,000-\$1,630,000 for initial development. Additional development of the site will be evaluated and planned as part of a future development master plan.
3. Approval of the Kingswood Special Recreation Feature Master Plan is contingent upon Metropolitan Council approval of the amendment to the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* acknowledging the proposed Kingswood SRF as a component of the regional parks system.