

## Visits to the Regional Park System in 2022

### KEY FINDINGS

- An estimated 69 million visits were made to the Regional Parks System in 2022. This represents a 6.4% increase over 2021 and the most visits on record.
- Minneapolis Chain of Lakes was the most-visited regional park with more than 7.5 million visits, followed by Como Regional Park, Zoo, and Conservatory with nearly 3.8 million visits.
- Trail visits grew 14% compared to 2021. The regional system includes 415 miles of trails, with annual trail use exceeding 20 million visits.
- Special events attendance began to rebound from COVID-19 pandemic lows. Special events visits increased 676,122 from 2021 but remain below 2019 numbers.

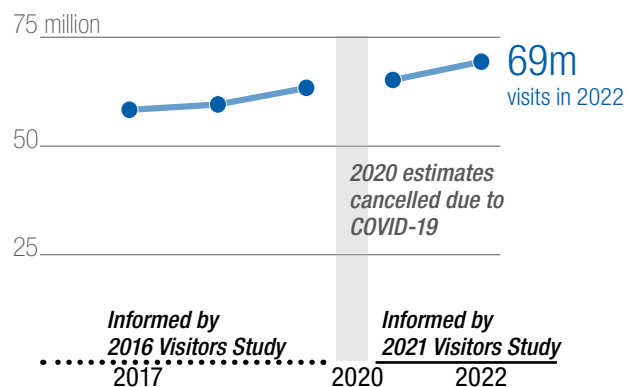
The Metropolitan Council produces estimates for visits to the Regional Parks System. We collaborate with 10 partner agencies—including cities, counties, and special parks districts—to estimate the number of visits to the system annually. Partner agencies work with the Council to protect natural systems and connect the public to nature. The Council provides long-range system planning, investment, and regional coordination.

The Regional Parks System comprises regional parks and trails that are nationally renowned for their beauty, size, and wide range of features. With 44 regional parks, 12 park reserves, eight special recreation features and more than 400 miles of regional trails, the system offers visitors ample opportunities for gathering, contemplation, recreation, and fun. It also preserves significant green space and wildlife habitat.

This report highlights key learnings from the 2022 use estimate. Park agencies collect visitation data from each park and trail during the summer (Memorial Day to Labor Day), then we use the results to produce annual estimates.<sup>1</sup>

An estimated 69 million visits were made to the Regional Parks System in 2022—the most visits on record (Figure 1). This represents a 6.4% increase over 2021, when visits were estimated at 64.9 million. Visitation grew at a similar pace between 2018 and 2019 at 6.3%, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

**FIGURE 1 - VISITS CONTINUE UPWARD TREND IN 2022**  
Annual visits to the Regional Parks System



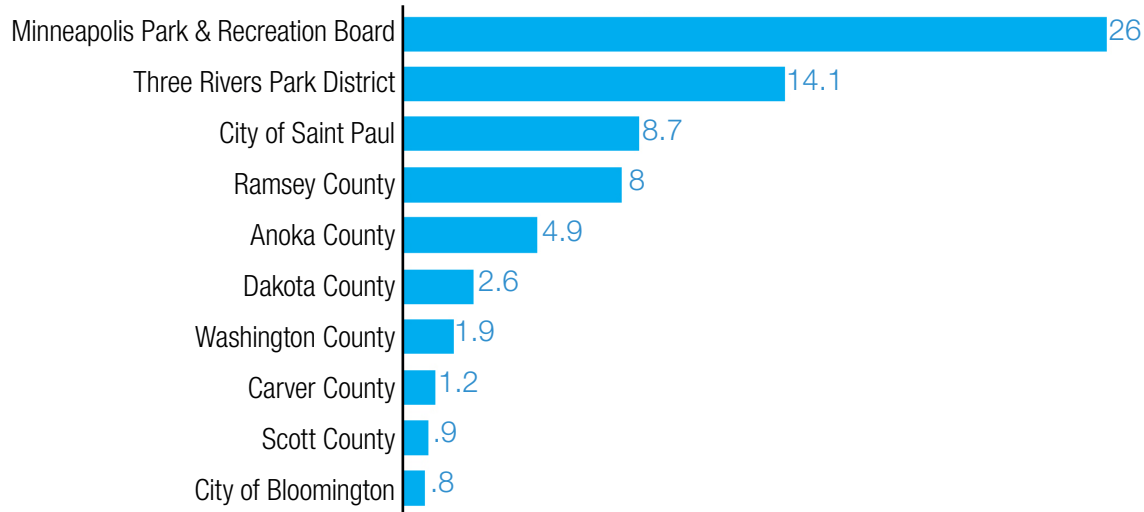
Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks use estimates (July 2023).

<sup>1</sup> For our full methodology on annual park use estimates and detailed estimates by unit type, please visit <https://metrocouncil.org/parkestimates>.

<sup>2</sup> We caution against direct comparisons across sets of annual use estimates informed by different Visitor Studies.

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board had the highest visitation among the 10 agencies in 2022 with approximately 26 million visitors, followed by Three Rivers Parks District (14.1 million), and the City of Saint Paul (8.7 million), as shown in Figure 2.

**FIGURE 2 - 2022 VISITS BY PARKS AGENCY**  
(in millions)

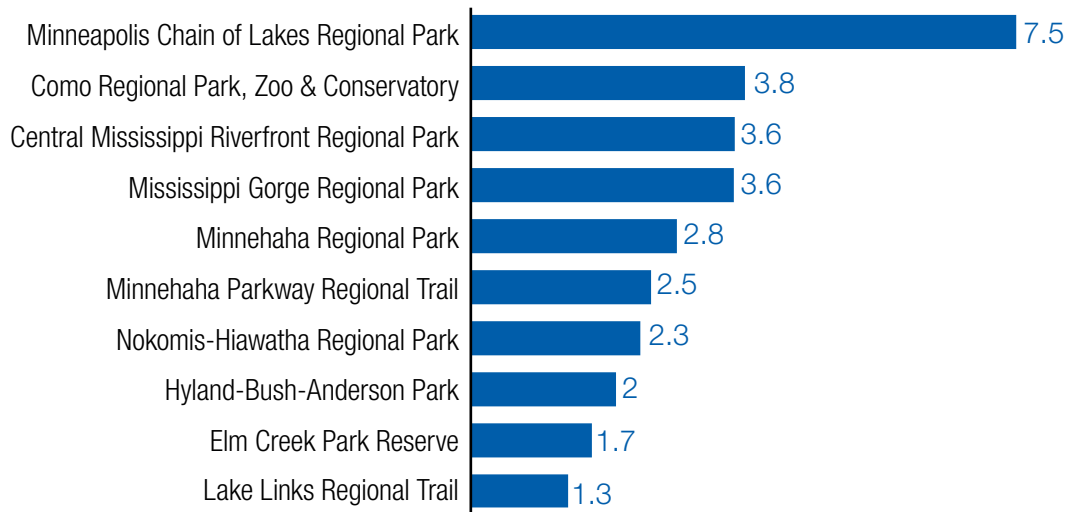


Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks use estimates (July 2023).



The most-visited regional park was Minneapolis Chain of Lakes with about 7.5 million visits, followed by Como Regional Park, Zoo & Conservatory with almost 3.8 million visits and Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park with 3.6 million visits (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3 - MOST VISITED REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS IN 2022**  
(in millions)



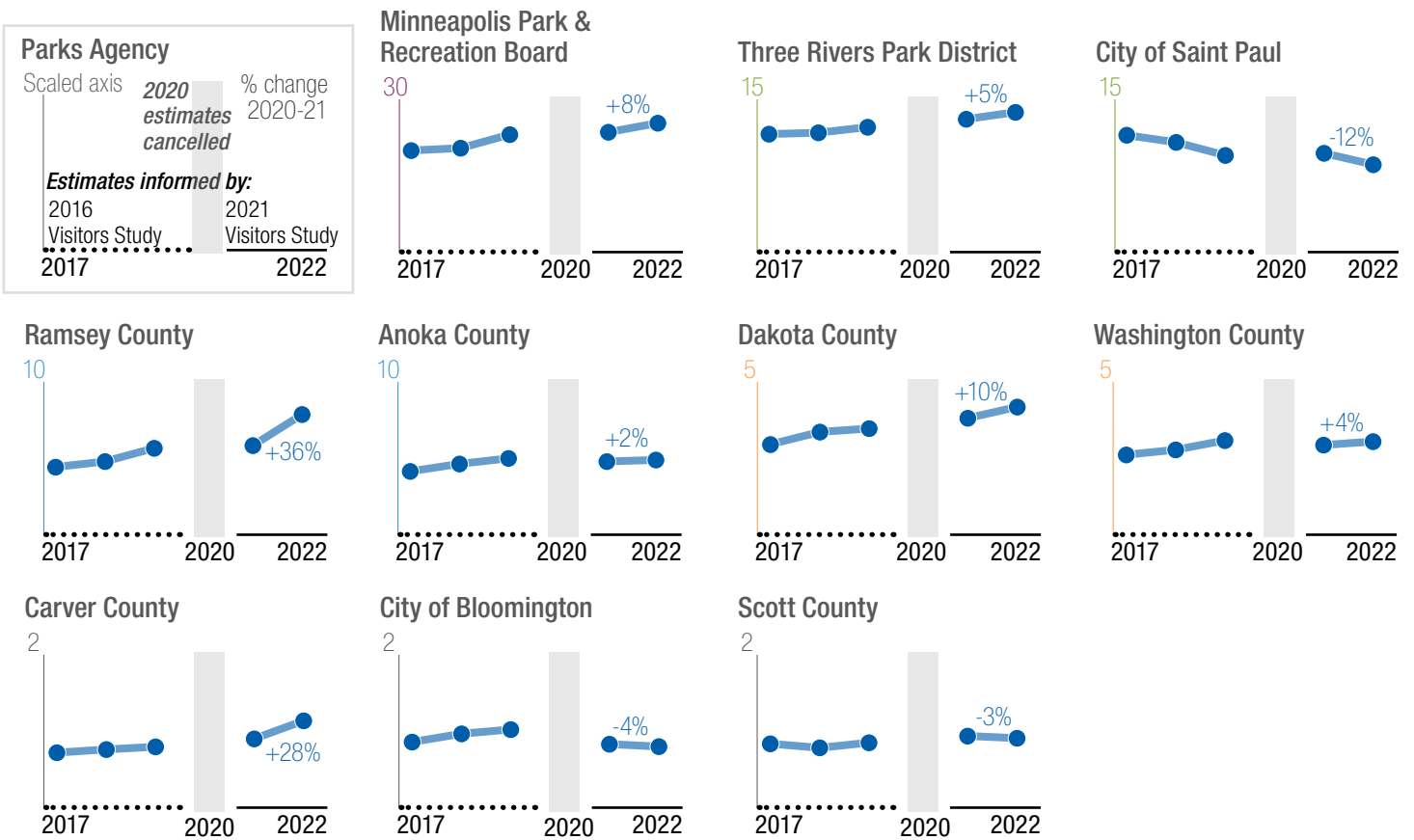
Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks use estimates (July 2023).



Ramsey County showed the largest increase in visitation with 2.1 million more visits in 2022 compared with 2021 (Figure 4) due to new trail investments, the opening of features previously closed for construction, and additional entrances to existing park and trail units. Carver County also had a large visitation increase (almost 250,000 more visits), partly due to a new trail and upgrades to Lake Waconia Regional Park. Anoka, Dakota, and Washington Counties also had increased visitation compared to 2021, as did Minneapolis. Scott County and the Cities of Bloomington and Saint Paul had decreased visitation.

**FIGURE 4 - VISITS INCREASE IN SEVEN OF TEN PARKS AGENCIES**

Recent visit trends by parks agency (in millions)



Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks use estimates (July 2023).

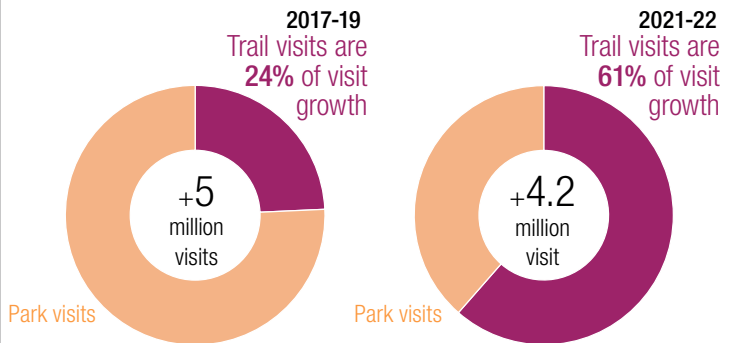
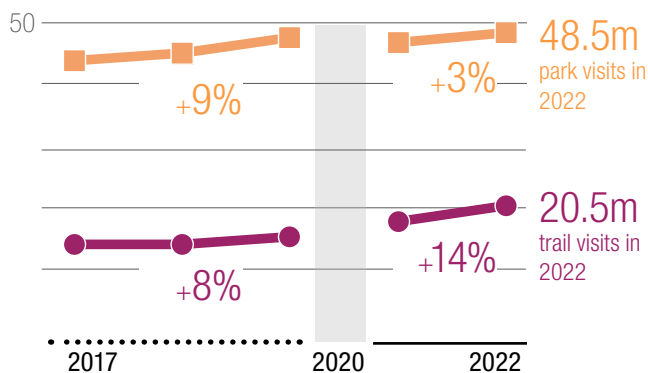


Trails expanded from about 350 miles in 2016 to more than 400 miles in 2022; 15 miles since 2019. With trails opening and expanding across the regional system, the share of visits at trails has increased in both sets of annual use estimates (Figure 5a). Almost a third (30%) of all visits in 2022 were at trails, a visitation trend that has increased slowly since 2017. Over half of the growth (61%) in visits system-wide between 2021 and 2022 (4.2 million) came from trail visits, a significant shift from the previous estimates period (2017-19), when only a quarter of visitation growth came from visits at trails (Figure 5b). These trends will continue to be monitored in future annual use estimates.

**FIGURE 5 - VISITS TO TRAILS ARE UP, DRIVING OVERALL VISITATION GROWTH TO THE REGIONAL PARK SYSTEM**

A. Number of visits by type (in millions): *parks\** or *trails*

B. Share of visitation growth by visit type: *parks\** or *trails*



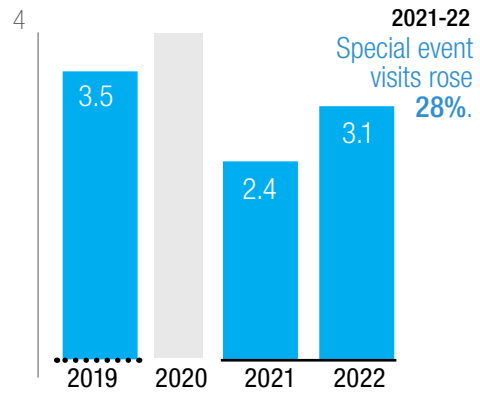
Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks use estimates (July 2023). \*Parks also includes visits to park reserves and special recreation features.



2022 saw a recovery in the number of special events in seven of 10 parks agencies after a decline in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 6). After a loss of more than a million visits in 2021, 2022 special events attendance rose by over 676,000 visits or 28%.

**FIGURE 6 - SPECIAL EVENT VISITS ARE REBOUNDING**

*Number of special events visits (in millions)*



Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks use estimates (July 2023).

