

Visits to the Regional Parks and Trails System in 2023

KEY FINDINGS

- An estimated 69.4 million visits were made to the Regional Parks and Trails System in 2023, a slight decrease from 2022.
- Minneapolis Chain of Lakes was the most visited regional park with more than 7.5 million visits, followed by Mississippi Gorge Regional Park with over 3.8 million visits.
- The regional system includes 523 miles of trails, with annual trail use exceeding 20 million visits. Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail was the most visited regional trail with almost 2.9 million visits, followed by Lake Links Regional Trail with over 1.1 million visits.

The Regional Parks and Trails System is nationally renowned for its beauty, size, and wide range of features. With 44 regional parks, 12 park reserves, eight special recreation features and more than 500 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.

The Metropolitan Council produces estimates for visits to the Regional Parks and Trails System. We collaborate with 10 partner agencies—including cities, counties, and special parks districts—to estimate the number of visits to the system annually. Park agencies collect visitation data from each regional park and trail during the summer (Memorial Day to Labor Day) then we use those results, and data collected from the latest Parks and Trails Visitors Study, to calculate annual estimates.¹ Annual use estimates allow us to monitor trends over time and inform grant funding formulas for each partner agency. This report highlights key learnings from the 2023 use estimates.

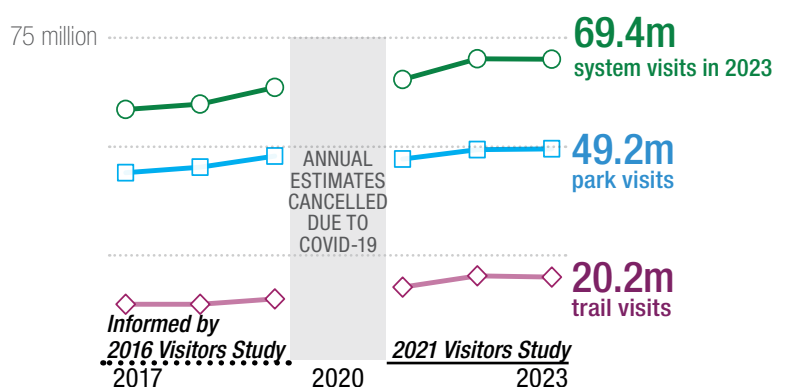
An estimated 69.4 million visits were made to the Regional Parks and Trails System in 2023 (Figure 1). This represents a 0.2% decrease from 2022, when visits were estimated at 69.5 million.

Last year, the regional trail system expanded by 14 miles for a total of 523 miles. However, overall trail use dipped slightly by 1.4%, primarily driven by the long-term temporary closure of the Minneapolis Kenilworth Regional Trail due to Southwest Light Rail construction (Figure 1). Without the effect of this closure, trail visits would have increased by over 490,000 visits, contributing another 2.4% over current estimated visits in 2023. Trail use continues to grow across the system.

Visits to regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features increased slightly at 1.4% between 2022 and 2023.

FIGURE 1. VISITS ESSENTIALLY FLAT IN 2023

Annual visits to the Regional Parks and Trails System



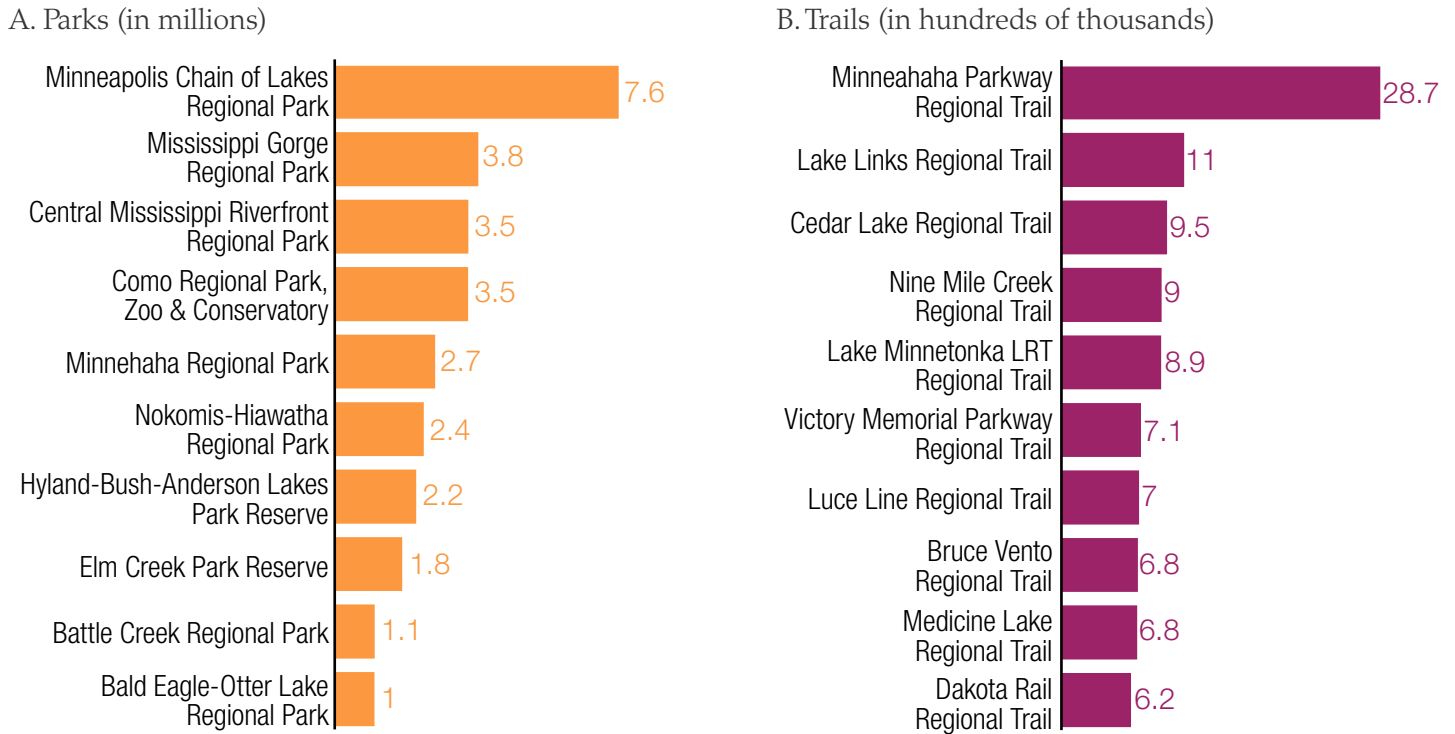
Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024).

¹ The full methodology for annual park use estimates and detailed estimates by unit type is available at <https://metrocouncil.org/parkestimates>.

The most visited regional park in 2023 was Minneapolis Chain of Lakes with about 7.6 million visits, followed by Mississippi Gorge Regional Park with 3.8 million visits. Both Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park and Como Regional Park, Zoo & Conservatory hosted 3.5 million visits. (Figure 2a).

The regional trail system continues to add miles open to the public. The most visited regional trail was the Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail with about 2.9 million visits, followed by Lake Links Regional Trail with 1.1 million visits and Cedar Lake Regional Trail with 947,000 visits. (Figure 2b).

FIGURE 2. MOST VISITED REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS IN 2023



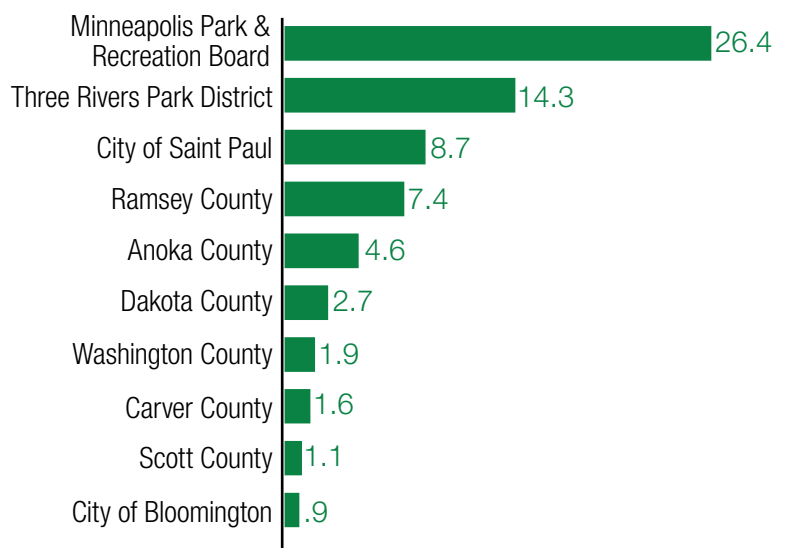
Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024).



Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board had the highest visitation among the 10 agencies in 2023 with 26.4 million visitors, followed by Three Rivers Parks District (14.3 million), and the City of Saint Paul (8.7 million), as shown in Figure 3.

Carver County showed the largest increase in visitation with over 400,000 more visits in 2023 compared with 2022, explained by the increased popularity of new Lake Waconia facilities upgrades and trail investments (Figure 4). Anoka and Ramsey Counties along with Three Rivers (suburban Hennepin County) had decreased visitation, mostly due to sample variations across count years. All other agencies had increases of between 2% and 18% compared with 2022. These changes can be understood as the increase in trail investments as well as sample variations across count years.

FIGURE 3. VISITS IN 2023 BY PARKS AGENCY
(in millions)



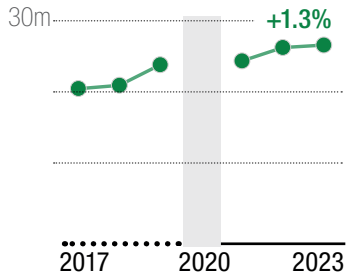
Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024).



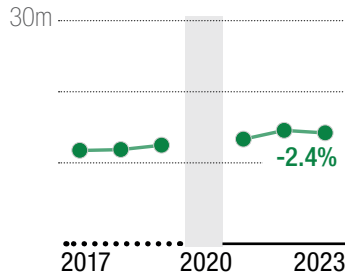
FIGURE 4. VISITS INCREASE IN SEVEN OF TEN AGENCIES

Recent visit trends by parks agency (in millions)

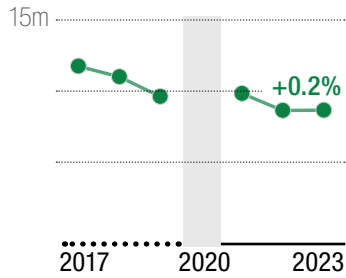
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board



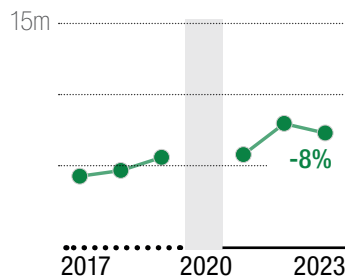
Three Rivers Park District



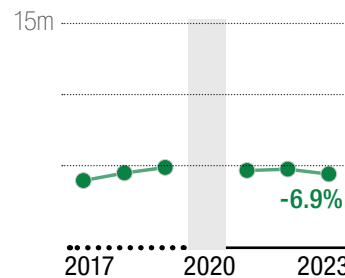
City of Saint Paul



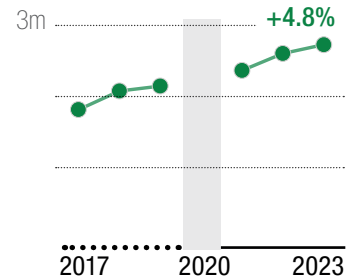
Ramsey County



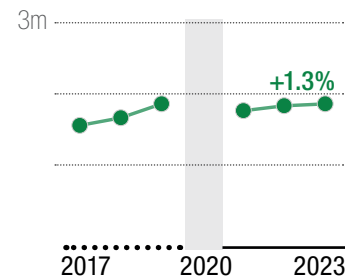
Anoka County



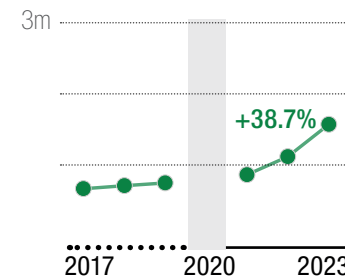
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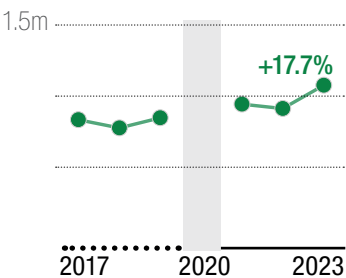
Washington County



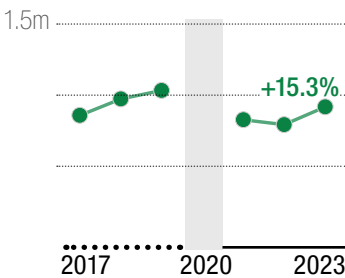
Carver County



Scott County



City of Bloomington



Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2024).

