



## Enjoying the regional park system: Visitor satisfaction and activities

### Vast majority of visitors are satisfied with park and trail facilities

Visitors across the region express high levels of satisfaction with regional parks and trails throughout the system (Table 1). For parks and trails systemwide, 88% of visitors reported that the facilities on the day of their visit were “excellent” or “very good.” Satisfaction was slightly lower in historic systems with older facilities.

Park agency	% of visitors rating facilities ‘Excellent’ or ‘Very Good’
Three Rivers, Dakota and Washington counties	>95%
Anoka, Carver, Ramsey, and Scott counties, City of Bloomington	90-95%
Minneapolis and Saint Paul	80-85%

Table 1: Percent of visitors rating park or trail facilities on the day of visit as “excellent” or “very good,” by park agency

### Visitors desire better general maintenance, improved facilities

Visitors were asked, “What is one thing that could be better at this park today?” Open-ended questions were coded first by Wilder Research, then into general (“collapsed”) categories by Met Council staff based on park agency staff feedback. 73% of visitors responded. Systemwide answers disaggregated by parks (Table 2) and trails (Table 3) show that 10-15% of visitors felt no need for improvement, while others would like changes such as better general and trail maintenance, more and better bathroom access, additional amenities, and water access.

Across park agencies, one of the most popular answers to this question was “everything is already good.” Top five answers in individual park agencies (Table 4) also included trash and litter cleanup, need for dog owners to follow rules, desire to extend trails to specific destinations, ending construction hassles, make existing bathrooms/water fountains accessible, and better water quality.



*Suggestions made by 10% or greater of visitors include better trail conditions, maintenance, nothing/general satisfaction, additional amenities, bathrooms, and water access.*

<b>Recommended park improvements</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Maintenance (litter, repair, etc.)</b>	20%
<b>Nothing or general satisfaction</b>	16%
<b>Additional amenities</b>	15%
<b>Improved bathrooms and bathroom access</b>	9%
<b>Water access (more fountains, access to water for people and dogs)</b>	5%
<b>Signage and information</b>	5%
<b>Safety, etiquette, rule following/enforcement</b>	5%
<b>Care of natural resources</b>	4%
<b>Better trail conditions</b>	4%
<b>More trails</b>	3%
<b>Outdoor conditions (heat, bugs, smoke, etc.)</b>	3%
<b>Food/concessions</b>	2%
<b>Additional desired activities</b>	1%
<b>Keep different use types separate</b>	1%
<b>Other</b>	8%
<b>Grand Total, Parks</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2: Top recommendations for improvement to the day’s visit, parks



Categories with similar factors were combined for this analysis.

<b>Recommended trail improvements</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Better trail conditions (repair, paving, cleared, rough, branch hazards)</b>	23%
<b>Nothing or general satisfaction</b>	11%
<b>Bathrooms</b>	10%
<b>Maintenance (litter, repair, etc.)</b>	9%
<b>Amenities</b>	8%
<b>Water access (more fountains, access to water for people and dogs)</b>	8%
<b>Safety, etiquette, rule following/enforcement</b>	7%
<b>More trails</b>	6%
<b>Signage and information</b>	5%
<b>Care of natural resources</b>	4%
<b>Outdoor conditions (heat, bugs, smoke, etc.)</b>	2%
<b>More or different activities</b>	1%
<b>Parking</b>	1%
<b>Other</b>	7%
<b>Grand Total, Trails</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3: Top recommendations for improvement to the day’s visit, trails

Categories with similar factors were combined for this analysis.



*Visitors suggest trail condition improvement, basic amenities, relief from heat. Many reported no changes needed.*

Park Agency	Most mentioned	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
<b>Anoka County</b>	Better trail conditions	Nothing/all good	More bathroom facilities	More water/drinking fountain access	More trashcans/litter issues
<b>Bloomington</b>	Nothing/all good	Less garbage/litter, better trash service	Better water quality	Water/drinking fountain access	More trails; longer/extended trails
<b>Carver County</b>	Nothing/all good	More shade/more trees	Better trail conditions	More trashcans	Enforce rules for pets in parks (leash, pick up)
<b>Dakota County</b>	Nothing/all good	More/better signage	Water/drinking fountain access	More trails; longer/extended trails	Construction
<b>Minneapolis</b>	Better trail conditions	Bathroom access	Water/drinking fountain access	Water fountains turned off	Nothing/all good
<b>Ramsey County</b>	Better trail conditions	Nothing/all good	Litter/trash/animal waste	More trails; longer/extended trails	More/better signage
<b>Saint Paul</b>	Nothing/all good	Better trail conditions	Litter/trash	More shade/more trees	Bathrooms cleaner
<b>Scott County</b>	Nothing/all good	More trash cans	Better trail conditions	Better water quality	Separate paths for bikes and pedestrians
<b>Three Rivers</b>	Nothing/all good	Better trail conditions	Water/drinking fountain access	More/better signage	More shade/more trees
<b>Washington County</b>	Nothing/all good	More bathrooms	More/better signage	Better trail conditions	Water/drinking fountain access

Table 4: Top five visitor suggestions to improve the park/trail on their day of visit, by park agency (categories disaggregated)



## Park agencies reflect on visitor satisfaction data

“Resources are [the] biggest thing. Having more funding opportunities, including long-term funding opportunities for the maintenance piece on facilities. Operations funding is chronically underfunded. Statute says the state should provide 40%, and in actuality the legislature only provides 8-9%. Last session, there was no bonding bill. This lack of investment compounds operational needs. Knowing about maintenance problems informs the conversation about sustainable funding.”

-Park agency workshop participant, summer 2022

Park agency staff are the experts on their systems. Their ideas about the findings add important context to understand the visitor study data (Figure 1). They observed that bathrooms and water access are an important equity issue. They have learned through their own engagement that new and underserved users value reliable, clean access to these necessities. Agency staff identified the need for adequate funding for maintenance of trails, as well as policy efforts to support trail maintenance. Finally, they noted that there are areas for agency improvement, and they also acknowledged that the public is very satisfied with the regional park and trail system.

“Are there gender-neutral bathrooms? Is there space [in bathrooms] for needed amenities? Some factors are out of our control – finance and budget. Is there enough money to create the bathrooms and facilities that everyone needs?”

“One of the things we are dealing with is sustainable trails. We know what to do, we’ve taken the sustainable trail courses. But we don’t have the staff or the funding.”

“People are happy with facilities they are visiting. We zoom into what we need to do better, but it’s also notable that people generally seem very happy. There’s a high level of positivity.”

“The public values well-maintained and high-quality facilities. To get people out to the parks, we need everything to be safe and in good repair, such as walking paths, bathrooms and drinking fountains. When we talk to parents, women, and people who haven’t visited very often, they tell us that these basic amenities are important. Bathrooms and shade are not glamorous, but they are an equity issue.”

“Maintenance in general is not a finding surprising to me. We have some pretty bad spots on some of our trails...Our asset management staff are working to enhance level of service and life-cycle trends. Our ability to improve bad spots will improve. Climate change is something we don’t have total control over. This factors into our quality of trails along rivers and creeks. Increased funding from the Council to do innovative solutions in this area would be really helpful.”

Figure 1: Park agency analysis of improvement suggestions