



# REGIONAL PARKS POLICY PLAN

UPDATED NOVEMBER 2018

NO  
TO





# Thrive MSP

ONE VISION, ONE METROPOLITAN REGION

# 2040





# REGIONAL PARKS POLICY PLAN

Updated November 2018

*The Regional Parks Policy Plan puts forward policy direction to ensure the fulfillment of outdoor recreation benefits for all residents of the metropolitan region, now and into the future.*





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2040



# Chapter One: Planning for the Twin Cities Region



## Thrive MSP 2040

Our region is anchored by three great rivers, dotted by hundreds of lakes, and endowed with wide expanses of green space, giving our residents beautiful landscapes that inspire and renew. Its largest river – the Mississippi – gave birth to two frontier settlements – Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Since then, our region has grown and prospered, and is now well-known for its high quality of life, its strong, resilient economy, and many other assets:

- Vibrant arts, music and theatre communities, and professional sports teams
- Rich cultural diversity
- Abundant parks, recreational trails, conserved open space, fertile agricultural land, and natural resources
- A civic tradition of shared action

Today, the Twin Cities metropolitan area – the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council – is a thriving region of over 3 million people living in 186 communities across the seven counties of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington. The region has emerged as a world-class metropolitan area – a great place to live, work, play, and do business.

As the region plans for the next 30 years, key challenges lie ahead – constrained fiscal resources, new demands stemming from demographic shifts, emerging environmental challenges, new regional planning priorities, and the increasing necessity of regional economic cooperation.

Under state law, the Metropolitan Council is responsible for preparing a comprehensive development guide for the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. *Thrive MSP 2040*, adopted in May 2014, provides a framework for a shared vision for the future of the region over the next 30 years. *Thrive* establishes the policy foundation used by the Council to develop its regional systems and policy plans as well as development policies and implementation strategies. Taken together, these constitute the comprehensive development guide that guides the orderly and economical development of the region. State statute specifies three metropolitan systems plans:

- Transportation Policy Plan (including Aviation)
- Water Resources Policy Plan
- Regional Parks Policy Plan

In addition to the three statutory metropolitan systems plans, the Council has adopted a Housing Policy Plan that provides an expanded policy framework to inform the Council’s review of housing elements and implementation programs in local comprehensive plans as required in statute.

*Thrive* is the result of extensive engagement with the region’s residents; civic, non-profit, and business leaders; and government officials. As a regional plan, *Thrive* addresses issues greater than any one neighborhood, city, or single county can tackle alone to build and maintain a thriving metropolitan region. Using an outcomes-based approach, *Thrive* outlines five outcomes and three principles as the foundation of a prosperous, equitable, and livable region for today and generations to come.



Girl helps plan a rain garden at Como Regional Park



## Thrive Outcomes

*Thrive's* regional vision includes five desired outcomes: stewardship, prosperity, equity, livability, and sustainability. While each outcome is described below, it is important to note that the five outcomes reinforce and support one another to produce greater benefits than any single outcome alone. The outcomes provide policy direction for this *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

Stewardship Prosperity Equity Livability Sustainability



### Stewardship

Stewardship advances the Council's longstanding mission of orderly and economical development by responsibly managing the region's natural and financial resources, and making strategic investments in our region's future. Stewardship means:

- Responsibly managing our region's finite resources, including natural resources—such as lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, groundwater, high quality natural habitats, and agricultural soils—financial resources, and our existing investments in infrastructure
- Pivoting from expanding to maintaining our region's wastewater and highway infrastructure
- Leveraging transit investments with higher expectations of land use

### Prosperity

Prosperity is fostered by investments in infrastructure and amenities that make our region competitive in attracting and retaining successful businesses, a talented workforce, and strong economic opportunities. Regional economic competitiveness results from our strategic, long-term public and private decisions that build on and grow our region's economic strengths relative to other regions. Advancing prosperity includes:

- Fostering conditions for shared economic vitality by balancing major investments across the region
- Protecting natural resources that are the foundation of prosperity
- Planning for and investing in infrastructure, amenities, and quality of life needed for economic competitiveness
- Encouraging redevelopment and infill development

## Equity

Equity means connecting all residents to opportunity and creates viable housing, transportation, and recreation options for people of all races, ethnicities, incomes, and abilities so that all communities share the opportunities and challenges of growth and change. For our region to reach its full economic potential, all our residents must be able to access opportunity. Our region is stronger when all people live in communities that provide opportunities for success, prosperity, and quality of life. Promoting equity includes:

- Using the Council's influence and investments to build a more equitable region
- Creating real choices in where we live, how we travel, and where we recreate for all residents, across race, ethnicity, economic means, and ability
- Investing in a mix of housing affordability along the region's transit corridors
- Engaging a full cross-section of the community in decision-making

## Livability

Livability focuses on the quality of our residents' lives and experiences in the region, and how places and infrastructure create and enhance the quality of life that makes our region a great place to live. With abundant and beautiful open space, an active arts community, a range of housing options, and a reasonable cost of living, the Twin Cities region is widely recognized for its high quality of life. Enhancing livability means:

- Increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation through regional parks and trails
- Providing transportation choices for a range of demographic characteristics and economic means
- Supporting bicycle facilities to promote bicycling for transportation, recreation, and healthy lifestyles
- Aligning resources to support transit-oriented development and walkable places
- Promoting healthy communities and active living through land use, planning, and investments

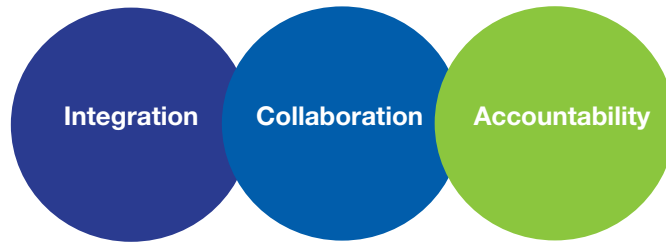
## Sustainability

Sustainability means protecting our regional vitality for generations to come by preserving our capacity to maintain and support our region's well-being and productivity over the long term. The region's investments in prosperity, equity, and livability will fall short over the long term if the region exhausts its resources without investing in the future. Planning for sustainability means:

- Promoting the wise use of water through expanding water conservation and reuse, increasing groundwater recharge, and optimizing surface water and groundwater use
- Providing leadership, information, and technical assistance to support local governments' consideration of climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience
- Operating the region's wastewater treatment and transit systems sustainably

## Thrive Principles

*Thrive* identifies the principles of integration, collaboration, and accountability to carry out the Council's work. These three principles reflect the Council's efforts to integrate policy areas, support local governments and regional partners, and promote and implement the *Thrive* regional vision.



### Integration ●

Integration is the intentional combining of related activities to achieve more effective results and leveraging multiple policy tools to address complex regional challenges and opportunities. The *Thrive* outcomes described above are lofty ideals that cut across the Council's functions and responsibilities. Pursuing them demands that the Council use its full range of authorities and activities in more coordinated ways. Achieving integration involves moving beyond organizational silos and coordinating effectively with partners and stakeholders across and throughout the region.

### Collaboration ●

Collaboration recognizes that shared efforts advance our region most effectively toward shared outcomes. Addressing the region's issues requires collaboration because no single entity has the capacity or authority to do the work alone. For the Council, acting collaboratively means being open to shared strategies, supportive partnerships, and reciprocal relationships. It also represents convening the region's best thinkers, experts, and stakeholders to address complex regional issues beyond the capacity or authority of any single jurisdiction or institution. Additionally, it involves providing technical assistance and enhanced information to support local planning and decision-making.

### Accountability ●

For the Council, accountability includes a commitment to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our policies and practices toward achieving shared outcomes and a willingness to adjust course to improve performance. Acting accountably means: a) adopting a data-driven approach to measure progress, b) creating and learning from *Thrive* indicators, c) providing clear, easily accessible information, and d) fulfilling the Council's mission.



*Baylor Regional Park, Carver County*

## Additional Direction from *Thrive MSP 2040* for the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

*Thrive* articulates a long-range vision for the region. The vision aims to foster and contribute to the five desired outcomes through the use of the three principles described in the previous section. While the focus in *Thrive* is on the overarching vision for the region, *Thrive* provides direction for the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. *Thrive* specifies that the Council will collaborate with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, regional park implementing agencies, and state partners to:

- Expand the Regional Parks System to conserve, maintain, and connect natural resources identified as being of high quality or having regional importance, as identified in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.
- Provide a comprehensive regional park and trail system that preserves high-quality natural resources, increases climate resiliency, fosters healthy outcomes, connects communities, and enhances quality of life in the region.
- Promote expanded multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit network, where appropriate.
- Strengthen equitable use of regional parks and trails by all our region’s residents across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.

## Regional Growth and Demographics

By 2040, the region is projected to be home to more than 3.7 million people, a gain of 888,000 residents from 2010 (Table 1-1.). Such robust growth is a sign of the region’s economic health and vitality.

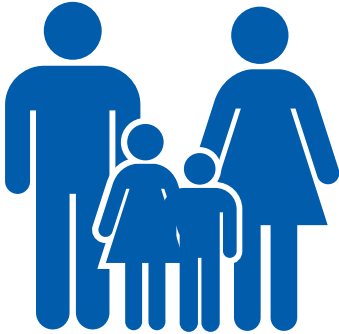
**Table 1-1. Population, Households and Employment for the 7-County Region (2010-2040)**

|            | 2010      | 2020      | 2030      | 2040      |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Population | 2,849,567 | 3,160,000 | 3,459,000 | 3,738,000 |
| Households | 1,117,749 | 1,264,000 | 1,402,000 | 1,537,000 |
| Employment | 1,543,872 | 1,828,000 | 1,910,000 | 2,039,000 |

In addition, the population is changing in ways that will influence how the region develops and redevelops:

- The region is aging rapidly. More than one in five residents will be age 65 and older in 2040, compared to one in nine in 2010.
- The region will gain 419,000 new households by 2040.
- By 2040, 39% of the population will be people of color, compared to 24% in 2010. The share of people of color increases among younger age groups; 53% of residents younger than age 18 will be people of color in 2040.

While the rich and growing racial and ethnic diversity is an asset to continued economic vitality, the region has some of the largest disparities by race and ethnicity of any large metropolitan area in the nation. Importantly, these disparities and shifting demographics have implications for nature-based outdoor recreation providers. Broad based trends consistently indicate that recreation participation is far greater for white and non-Latinx populations within the state and the nation than for people of color. [see Minnesota’s State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2014].



**BY 2040, 40%  
OF THE REGION WILL BE  
PEOPLE OF COLOR**

In addition, SCORP cites several studies showing that involvement in nature-based outdoor recreation among young adults and their children has decreased since the 1990s. The relative participation of different segments of the population in nature-based outdoor recreation, together with their respective population growth rates, create significant challenges ahead in terms of park and trail utilization, as well as, maintaining broad-based public support for park and trail investments.

To this end, the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* incorporates specific aims to strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region’s residents.

### Community Designations

The seven-county region contains a wide range of communities, from agricultural townships to densely developed downtown neighborhoods. Recognizing that one size does not fit all, the Council uses community designations to group communities with similar characteristics to implement regional policy at the local level through comprehensive plans (See Figure 1-1). Community designations fall within two main categories, the Metropolitan Urban Service Area and the Rural Service Area.

#### Metropolitan Urban Service Area

The Metropolitan Urban Service Area constitutes about half of the land in the region, but accounts for more than 90% of the region’s population. The Council supports the Metropolitan Urban Service Area through investments such as regional wastewater services, regional highways, transit service, the Regional Parks System, and programs that support redevelopment. Some of the region’s most popular regional parks are located in the Metropolitan Urban Service Area, including Como Regional Park, Zoo and Conservatory; Minnehaha Regional Park; and Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve. Trails including the Bruce Vento and North Cedar Lake regional trails, connect people to regional parks and local amenities. The Metropolitan Urban Service Area is divided into five community designations:

- Urban Center
- Suburban Edge
- Urban
- Emerging Suburban Edge
- Suburban

*Thrive* forecasts project that over the next 30 years growth and redevelopment will occur throughout the region. Not only will growth continue to occur in the Suburban Edge and Emerging Suburban Edge communities, but the Council also forecasts a significant shift of growth back into Urban and Urban Center communities. Forces driving this change are the region's aging population, new residential preferences among younger households, and increasing interest in sustainable lifestyles. Demographic changes, emerging preferences, and shifting development patterns are elevating the importance of maintaining and expanding regional parks and trails serving the most developed parts of the region.

## Rural Service Area

About half of the land in the Twin Cities region is in the Rural Service Area. This area includes a range of land uses, including cultivated farmland, vineyards, hobby farms, gravel mines, woodlands, small towns, scattered and clustered housing, open spaces, and significant expanses of the region's natural resources. Aside from the Regional Parks System, investments in regional service and infrastructure are limited in the Rural Service Area. The Rural Service Area is divided into four community designations:

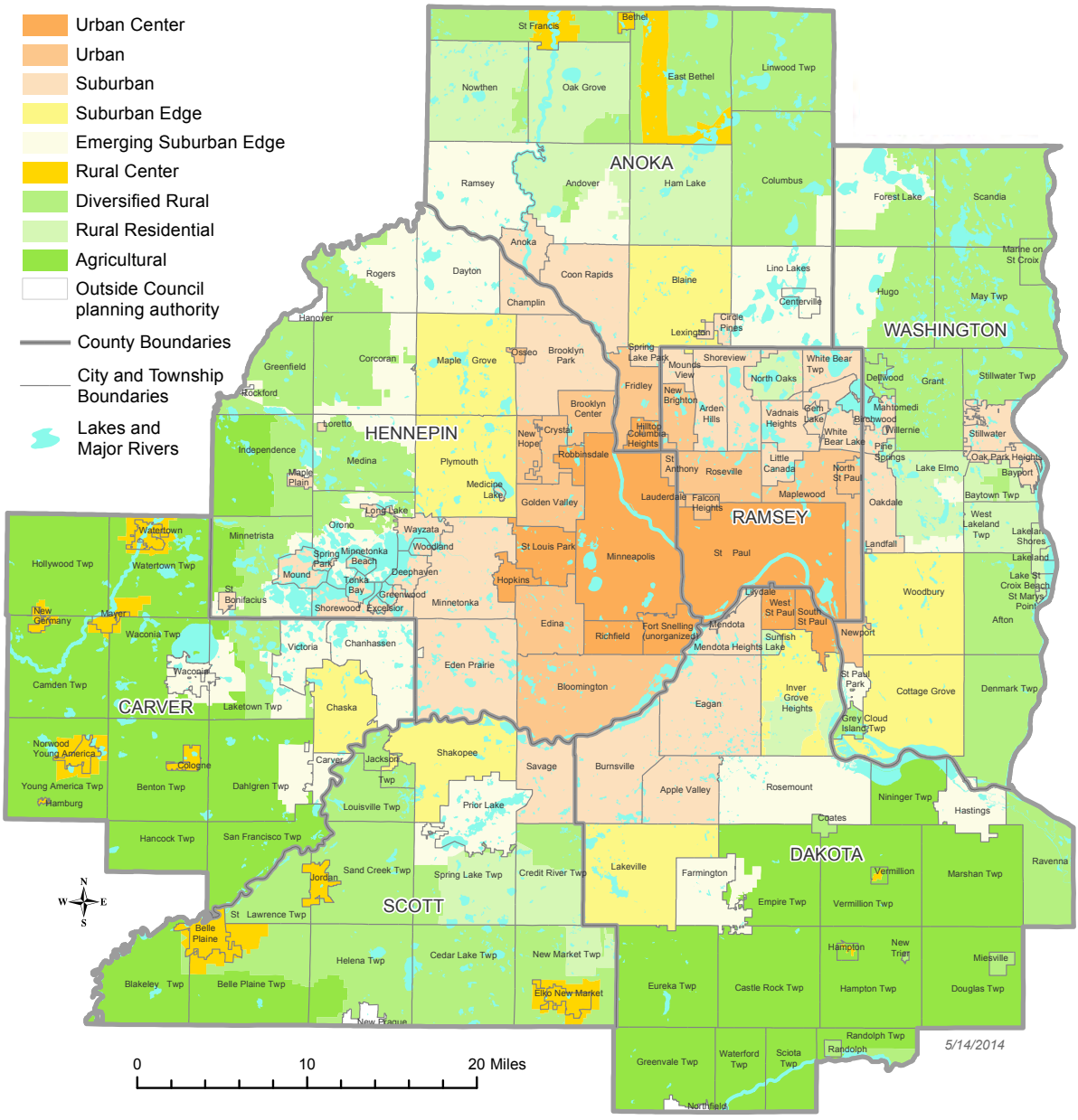
- Rural Center
- Rural Residential
- Diversified Rural
- Agricultural

The Rural Service Area contains some of the Regional Parks System's large park reserves, including Crow Hassan and Big Marine park reserves.



*People walking on the Sam Morgan Trail*

Figure 1-1: Thrive MSP 2040 Community Designations





## Local Comprehensive Plans

The policy direction from *Thrive* and the Council's systems and policy plans – including this *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* – provides guidance to local governments in planning for local growth. Under state law, each county, city, and township in the seven-county metropolitan area must review and, if necessary, amend its local comprehensive plan at least every 10 years to ensure that the local plan, and local fiscal devices and official controls, conform with the Council's metropolitan system plans (Minnesota Statutes 473.864). Following the decennial adoption of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and once the Council issues system statements, as required under the Metropolitan Land Planning Act, local communities have three years to update their local comprehensive plan. If the Council issues system statements based on a future amendment to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, local communities have nine months to amend their comprehensive plans (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.856).

Local comprehensive plans are reviewed by the Council based on three primary criteria:

- Conformance with metropolitan system plans
- Consistency with Council regional policies
- Compatibility with adjacent and affected governmental units

When a plan meets these criteria, the Council authorizes it to be placed into effect. If a plan does not meet the review standards, the Council may require the jurisdiction to modify its plan to conform to the regional system plans.

### Conformance

A local comprehensive plan will conform to the metropolitan system plans if the local plan:

- Accurately reflects the components of the metropolitan system plans
- Integrates public facilities plan components
- Addresses land use policies, plans for forecasted growth, meets density standards, and maximizes the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional systems

In their local comprehensive plans, communities need to acknowledge and plan for the Regional Parks System facilities in their jurisdiction as identified in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. The Council will review local plans to ensure they will not cause detrimental impacts to Regional Parks System facilities and that the plans do not preclude or substantially limit the future acquisition of lands officially identified for the Regional Parks System in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

### Consistency

Consistency is generally achieved if the local plan:

- Addresses the community role for the land use policies contained in Thrive, including:
  - Natural Resource Protection: Conserve, restore, and protect the region’s natural resources to ensure their ongoing availability, to support public health, and to maintain a high quality of life.
  - Access, Mobility and Transportation Choice: Sustain and improve a multimodal transportation system to support regional growth, maintain regional economic competitiveness and provide choices and reliability for the system’s users. To help meet this policy, local communities are encouraged to plan and develop local trail connections to regional trails as identified in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and to plan for and connect to the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network as identified in the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan*, where appropriate.
- Addresses the linkage of local land uses to local parks and open space, as well as the Regional Parks System.
- Includes an implementation plan describing public programs, fiscal devices, and other specific actions (sequencing and staging activities) that implement the comprehensive plan and ensure conformance with regional system plans.
- Addresses official controls and includes a capital improvement program (sewers, parks, transportation, water supply and open space) that supports planned growth and development.

### Compatibility

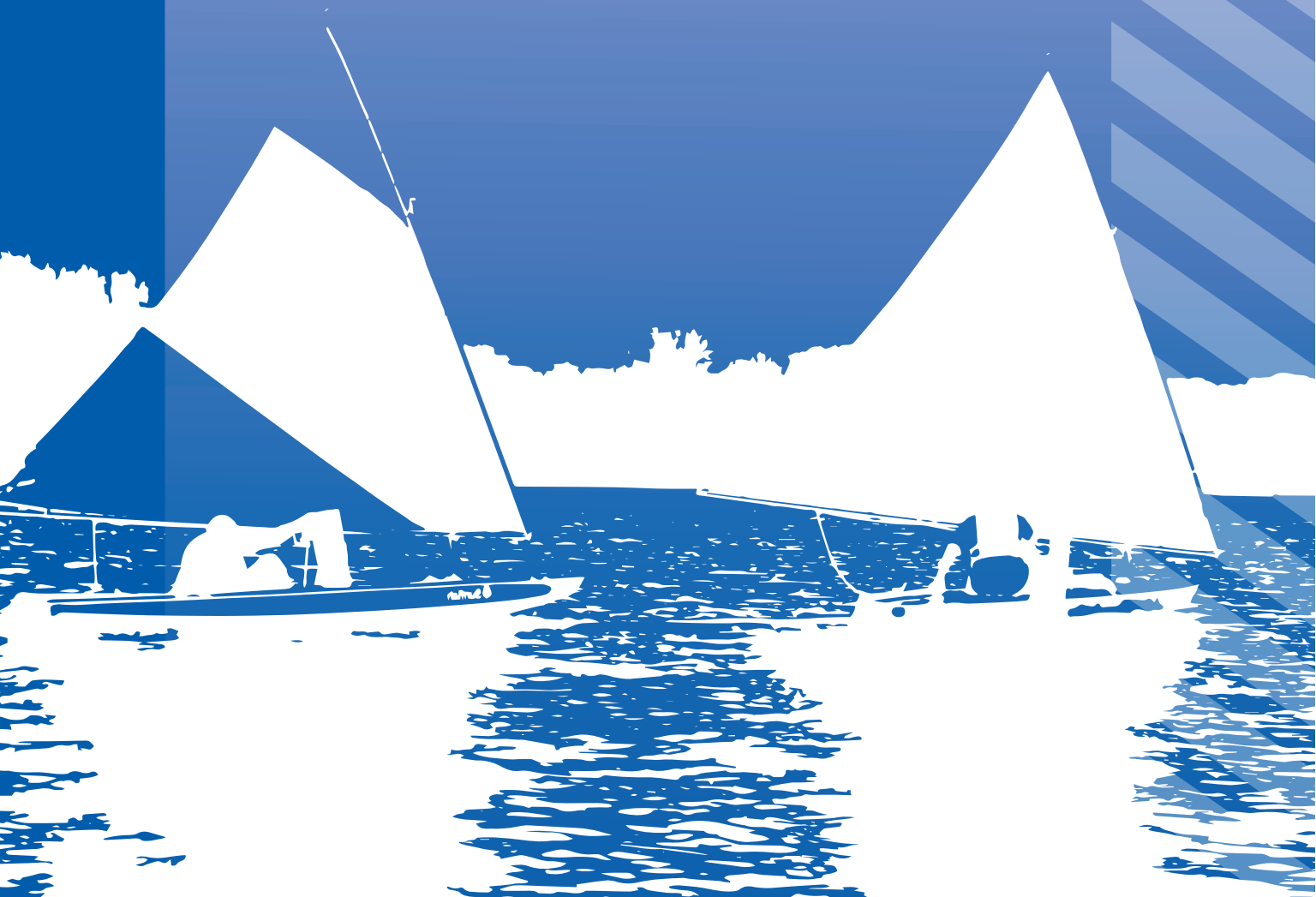
Compatibility with adjacent and affected governmental units is generally achieved if the local plan adequately documents that it has addressed the concern of all adjacent and affected jurisdictions, based on comments or concerns from these entities.

As local communities update their comprehensive plans, the Council encourages them to identify locally important natural areas for protection through acquisition, conservation easements, and conservation-sensitive development practices. In addition to planning for the recreational needs of its residents, the Council encourages communities to plan local trail connections to the Regional Parks System. Together, the region, the regional park implementing agencies, local communities, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector can preserve natural areas and enhance multimodal access to regional parks and trails.





2040



## Chapter Two: Overview of the Regional Parks System and the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan



### Introduction

The benefits of parks have been extensively documented<sup>1</sup>. Parks and open space positively contribute to human health and well-being. Benefits to physical well-being include increased physical activity and reduced risk of various chronic illnesses and obesity. Benefits to psychological well-being include stress reduction, attention restoration, and improved cognitive functioning. Social well-being benefits include increased social capital, family bonding, and social integration. Parks and open green space also contribute many environmental benefits including assisting in the management of stormwater, helping to ameliorate the effects of urban heat islands, conserving the diversity of flora and fauna in the region, and filtering the air we breathe.<sup>2</sup>

The benefits afforded by the Regional Parks System, illustrated above, help to keep the region at the top of national livability rankings. The Twin Cities area's 64 regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features, plus more than 389 miles of regional trails open to the public, showcase the unique landscapes of the region and provide year-round recreation. The region's residents have consistently singled out the region's parks, trails, and natural environment as the most attractive feature of the region. Drawing more than 58 million annual visits in 2017, the Regional Parks System provides access to natural space that contributes to physical and emotional well-being. Many of the region's most well-known and iconic sites are part of the Regional Parks System – the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, Lebanon Hills Regional Park, Bunker Hills Regional Park, Elm Creek Park Reserve, and Lake Elmo Park Reserve.

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* advances the *Thrive MSP 2040* outcomes of Stewardship, Prosperity, Equity, Livability, and Sustainability by striving to:

- Expand the Regional Parks System to conserve, maintain, and connect natural resources identified as being of high quality or having regional importance, thereby improving climate resilience and enhancing the quality of life for the region's residents
- Provide a comprehensive regional park and trail system that balances the conservation and restoration of natural resources with the provision of nature-based recreational opportunities
- Expand access to regional parks and trails by connecting them with local, state, and federal parks, trails, other lands, and transportation networks, including transit, bicycle, and pedestrian systems
- Strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability, inspiring a legacy of stewardship that also strengthens friendships, families, health, and spirit

The Regional Parks System plays a key role in providing parks and open space for the metropolitan area. But by itself, it cannot and was never intended to provide all the metropolitan area’s recreational opportunities. The Regional Parks System is one component of the greater recreation and open space system for the metropolitan area that includes local, state, and federal parks and open space areas, as well as private sector facilities, including new ownership models such as privately owned public spaces. All these other facilities and services complement those of the Regional Parks System.

Additionally, the Regional Parks System plays a role addressing climate change in the region. Conserving, maintaining, and enhancing the Regional Parks System through proactive planning and asset management can increase the resilience of the region and reduce the impacts associated with climate change. The Regional Parks System provides carbon sequestration and other benefits including stormwater management, urban heat island mitigation, biodiversity enhancement and improvements to air and water quality. Working with partners, the Council is committed to quantifying these ecological benefits, as well as developing regional policies that build resilience.

This chapter provides an overview of the Regional Parks System and the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. These concepts are explored in more detail in subsequent chapters of this plan.

### The Regional Parks System

The Regional Parks System, supported by the Council in partnership with cities, counties, and special park districts, was established in 1974. At that time, the Legislature found that:

“The pressure of urbanization and development threatens the most valuable remaining large recreational open spaces in the metropolitan area at the same time as the need for such areas is



Battle Creek & Indian Mounds Regional Park, Ramsey County/Saint Paul

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*“The pressure of urbanization and development threatens the most valuable remaining large recreational open spaces in the metropolitan area at the same time as the need for such areas is increased. Immediate action is therefore necessary to provide funds to acquire, preserve, protect and develop regional recreational open space for public use.”*

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(Minn. Stat. 473.302)

increased. Immediate action is therefore necessary to provide funds to acquire, preserve, protect and develop regional recreational open space for public use.” (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.302)

In response to state legislation, about 31,000 acres of existing parks were designated as “regional recreation open space.” The newly designated regional parks had about 5 million visits in 1975. Over the past 40 years, the Council has invested state and regional funds to help local park agencies develop those first designated regional parks, as well as to acquire and develop new parks and trails for the growing metropolitan population. The Regional Parks System strives to build upon the world class system of interconnected parks and natural areas first established in Minneapolis by such visionaries as Horace Cleveland and Theodore Wirth and to extend that model throughout the region.

The Regional Parks System includes:

- 54,370 acres open for public use
- 56 regional parks and park reserves
- Eight special recreation features, such as the zoo and conservatory at Como Regional Park
- 49 regional trails, with 389 miles currently open to the public
- More than 58 million visits in 2017
- An investment of more than \$658 million in state and regional dollars since inception, with an additional \$163 million of state funds to partially finance operation and maintenance of the Regional Parks System

Regional parks contain significant regional natural resources such as lakeshore, wetlands, hardwood forests, native prairies, and groundwater recharging areas. If you were to visit one regional park, park reserve or special recreation feature each weekend – not even counting the trails, it would take you more than a year to get to them all. It’s an amazing system, one that has few rivals anywhere in the world. It demonstrates the importance of natural spaces and outdoor recreation to Minnesotans, including those living in the metropolitan area. The Regional Parks System is comprised of four main components: regional parks, park reserves, regional trails, and special recreation features.

**56 REGIONAL PARKS  
& PARK RESERVES**

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**49 REGIONAL TRAILS  
WITH 389 MILES OPEN**

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**8 SPECIAL RECREATION  
FEATURES**

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**58 MILLION VISITS  
PER YEAR**

### Regional Parks

Regional parks most notably contain a diversity of nature-based resources, either naturally occurring or human-built, and are typically 200-500 acres in size. Regional parks accommodate a variety of outdoor recreation activities. In 2018, a total of 44 regional parks were open to the public. Examples of regional parks include:

- Battle Creek-Indian Mounds Regional Park (City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County)
- Lake Waconia Regional Park (Carver County)
- Lebanon Hills Regional Park (Dakota County)
- Theodore Wirth Regional Park (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board)
- Spring Lake Regional Park (Scott County)

### Park Reserves

Park reserves, like regional parks, provide for a diversity of outdoor recreation activities. One major feature that distinguishes the park reserve from a regional park is its size. The minimum size for a park reserve is 1,000 acres. Additionally, regional park implementing agencies are required to manage at least 80% of the park reserve as natural lands that protect the ecological functions of the native landscape. As of 2018, a total of 12 park reserves were open to the public. Examples of park reserves include:

- Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve (City of Bloomington and Three Rivers Park District)
- Lake Elmo Park Reserve (Washington County)
- Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve (Anoka County)





## Regional Trails

The Council has defined two major types of trails to serve the region: destination or greenway trails and linking trails. Destination or greenway trails typically follow along routes with high-quality natural resources that make the trail itself a destination. Examples of destination or greenway trails include:

- Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board)
- Rush Creek Regional Trail (Three Rivers Park District)

Linking trails, on the other hand, are predominately intended to provide connections between various Regional Parks System units, most notably regional parks, or park reserves. Examples of linking trails include:

- East Anoka County Regional Trail (Anoka County)
- Highway 96 Regional Trail (Ramsey County)

As of 2018, 49 regional trails totaling approximately 389 miles were open for public use.

## Special Recreation Features

Special recreation features are defined as Regional Parks System opportunities not generally found in the regional parks, park reserves, or trail corridors. Special recreation features often require a unique managing or programming effort. As of 2018, there were eight special recreation features open to the public. Examples of special recreation features include:

- Como Park Zoo (City of Saint Paul)
- Gale Woods Farm (Three Rivers Park District)
- Square Lake (Washington County)

Additional information on Regional Parks System facilities is provided in Chapter 3.



## Regional Parks System Management Structure

The organizational structure of the Regional Parks System is unique. It is built upon a strong partnership among the Council and several governmental agencies, including cities, counties, and special park districts. While each agency has a role in the Regional Parks System, collaboration is the cornerstone and the strength of the Regional Parks System.

### Regional Park Implementing Agencies' Role

Cities, counties, and special park districts own and operate regional parks and trails – the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes' facilities, paths and activities are the responsibility of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, for example – but once a park becomes part of the Regional Parks System, the Council supports it with coordinated regional planning, funding, system protection, information, marketing, and advocacy. The agency partners that own and operate the Regional Parks System are called regional park implementing agencies. A map of the regional park implementing agency areas is shown in Figure 2-1.

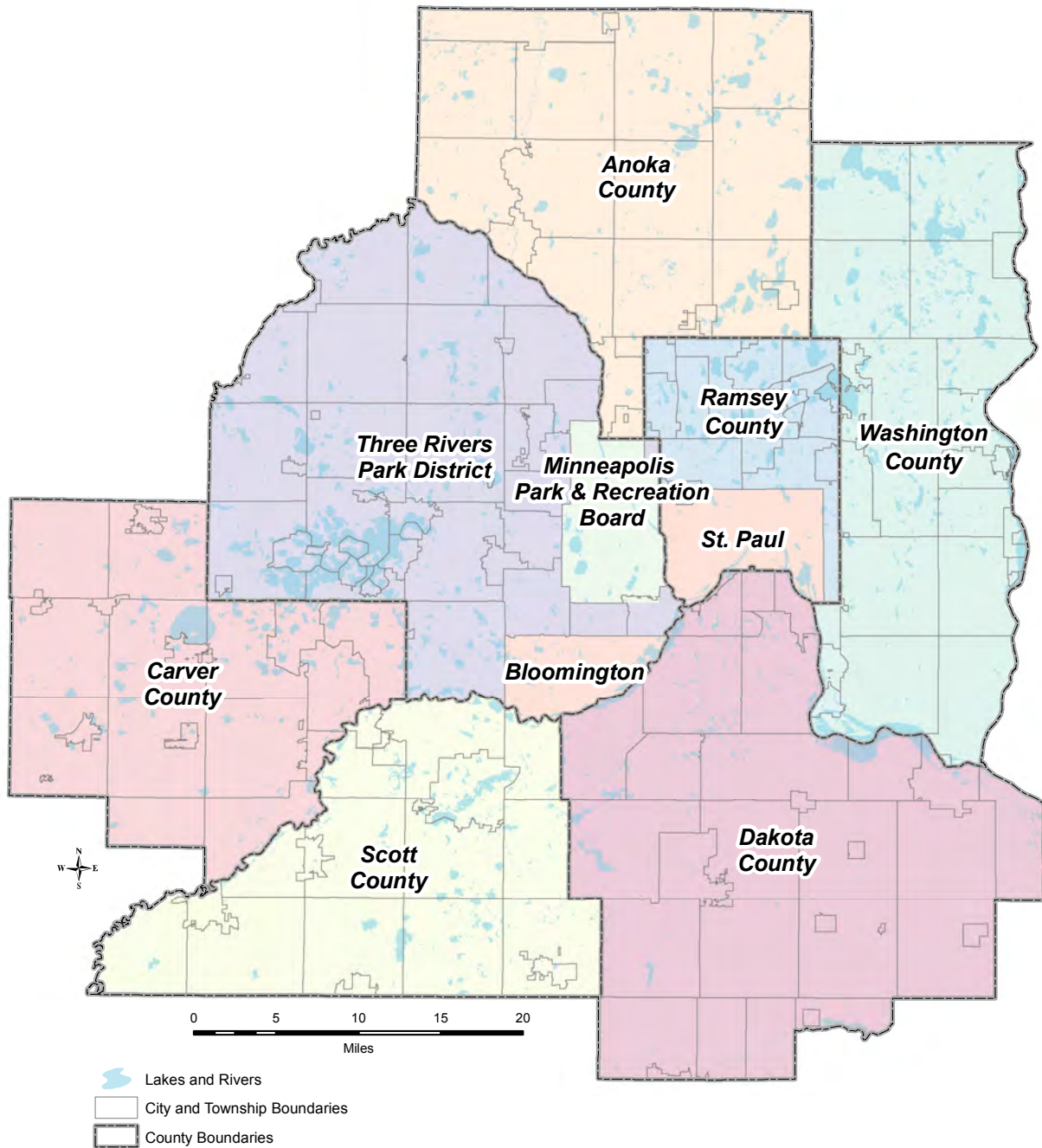
The regional park implementing agencies are:

- Anoka County
- City of Bloomington
- Carver County
- Dakota County
- Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- Ramsey County
- City of Saint Paul
- Scott County
- Three Rivers Park District
- Washington County



*Battle Creek & Indian Mounds Regional Park, Ramsey County/Saint Paul*

**Figure 2-1: Jurisdictions of Regional Park Implementing Agencies**



### Metropolitan Council Role

Regional Parks System legislation directs the Council to take the lead role in providing for a Regional Parks System that will complement the recreational open space opportunities provided in the area by the federal, state, and local units of government. State law directs the Council to determine which parks and trails in the seven-county area are included in the Regional Parks System and to generally identify areas that should be acquired for the Regional Parks System. The Council is charged with determining whether these lands are regionally important and would collectively provide a balanced system of outdoor recreation for the region. See page 29 later in this chapter for an overview of key Minnesota legislation.

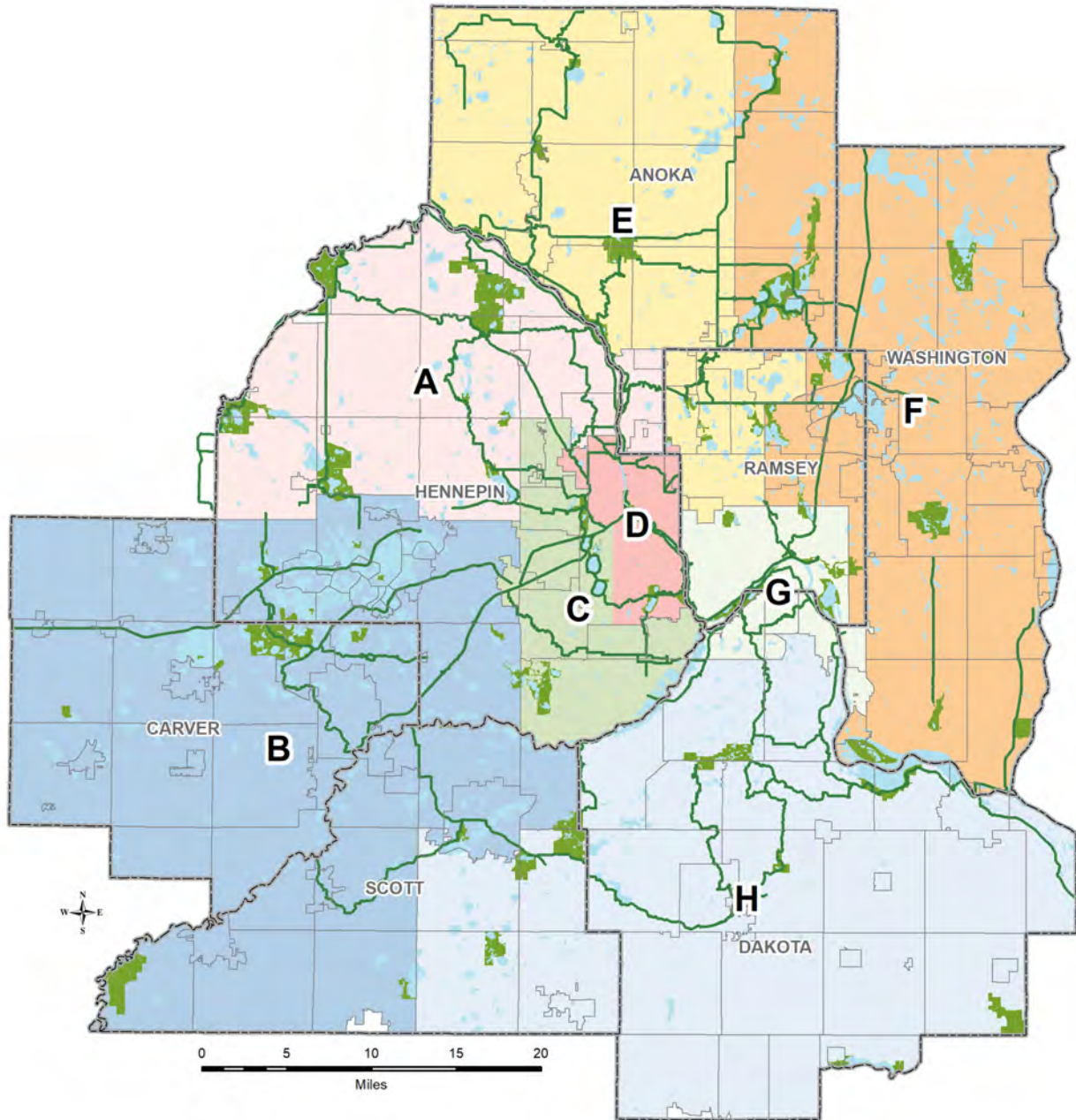
As described in the next section, the Council also contributes and administers funding to the regional park implementing agencies to acquire, develop, and operate the Regional Parks System.

### Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Role

The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, appointed by the Council, uses its expertise to advise the Council on the review of regional park and trail master plans, and grants for land acquisition and capital improvements. It also provides recommendations on updates and amendments to the Regional Parks Policy Plan. The commission consists of eight volunteer members, who represent specific districts throughout the region and a chair who is appointed at large. A map of the districts is shown in Figure 2-2.



Figure 2-2: Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Districts



- Existing and Planned Regional Parks, Park Reserves and Special Recreation Features
- Existing and Planned Regional Trails
- County Boundaries
- City and Township Boundaries
- Lakes and Rivers

## Regional Parks System Funding

As previously noted, the Council contributes and administers funding to the regional park implementing agencies. Funding for the Regional Parks System currently consists of four main grant programs. Each grant program is intended for different purposes and is composed of various funding sources. Only regional park implementing agencies, listed above, qualify for the grant programs. Each grant program is highlighted briefly below. Additional information is in the Regional Parks System Fund Distribution Policy, adopted annually by the Council upon the recommendation of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. More detailed information and instructions on eligible costs, processes, terms, schedules and procedures for each grant program will be in the Regional Parks System sub-recipient administrative guide to be developed in 2019.

### Regional Parks Bonding Program

The Regional Parks Bonding Program is intended for Regional Parks System acquisition, development, and redevelopment projects. The fund is financed by state bonds and Council funds; the Council matches every \$3 of state bonds with \$2 of Council funds. The amount of funds each regional park implementing agency receives is based on a formula specified in Chapter 8: Finance – Strategy 2.

In addition to its Regional Parks Bonding Program, the Council is committed to creating a grant program using Council bonds to promote equitable use of regional parks and trails. Because of existing constraints on Council bonds, the bond-funded grants will provide funding for acquisition, development, or redevelopment projects in the Regional Parks System.

### Parks and Trails Legacy Fund Program

The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund program was created after the statewide passage of the Minnesota's Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment in 2008. Along with state and Greater Minnesota regional parks and trails, the Council receives a portion of the Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations for the Regional Parks System.

The Council administers the Parks and Trails Legacy funds to regional park implementing agencies. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* provides high-level guidance for use of the funds.

Each regional park implementing agency's share of the funds is based on a formula specified in state statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53, subd 3). This statute requires that 10% of the total Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations be set aside for land acquisition.

## Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program

The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program is organized into two separate accounts, corresponding to different funding sources. The two funding sources are the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. As noted above, 10% of the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations are set aside for land acquisition through the first Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund sub-program. Direct appropriations for land acquisition from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, which are made by Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources, are allocated to the second Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund account.

The Council matches every \$3 in state funding from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund with \$2 from Council bonds for the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program, as required by Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53, subd. 3. For consistency, the Council has chosen to make the same match for Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund funding for park acquisition. Additional information is in the Regional Parks System Fund Distribution Policy, adopted annually by the Council upon the recommendation of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission.

The Council's Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program is non-competitive and awarded based on funding availability.

## Operation and Maintenance

The Council administers state funds to regional park implementing agencies to pay for a portion of their operation and maintenance costs. The share each regional park implementing agency receives is based on a formula specified in state statute (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351).

## Direct Pass-through Appropriations

In addition to the four grant programs highlighted above, the Council also administers pass-through appropriations from the state to regional park implementing agencies and local governments. These dollars are legislatively earmarked for a particular regional park implementing agency or park and trail unit.

## Total System Investment

In sum, the total investment the state and Council have made toward the Regional Parks System between state fiscal years 1974 and 2017 totals \$910 million (Table 2-1).

**Table 2-1:** 40-year Regional Parks System State and Regional Funding Investments, 1974-2017

| Program                           | Funding source(s)   | Investment totals, 1974-2017 (millions) |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Regional Parks Bonding            | State and Council bonds, Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, interest (through 1984)  | \$422.5                                 |
| Parks and Trails Legacy Fund      | 0.038% general state sales and use tax, as per Minnesota Constitution, Article XI, Section 15   | \$115.9                                 |
| Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund | Parks and Trails Legacy Fund  | \$12.9                                  |
|                                   | Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund  | \$10.0                                  |
|                                   | Council bonds   | \$26.0                                  |
| Operation and Maintenance         | State General Fund and Lottery-in-Lieu of Sales Tax, as per Minnesota Statutes, section 297A.65 | \$188.3                                 |
| Pass-Through Appropriations       | Various state funds   | \$120.1                                 |
| Other Investments                 | State and Council funds   | \$14.3                                  |
| Totals                            |   | \$910.0                                 |

About 0.7% of the total state and local taxes paid by a household in the region go to support the Regional Parks System. For the owner of a \$250,000 home in the seven-county metropolitan area, the average annual cost of the Regional Parks System is \$70 – including \$19 in state income and sales taxes and \$51 in regional and local property taxes.

The investments and funding sources described above are not the only funding sources for the Regional Parks System. Each regional park implementing agency provides its own mix of funding for their respective regional parks and trails. Other funding sources also exist, including federal grants, public-private partnerships, and private donations.





## Role of the Regional Parks Policy Plan

Managing a Regional Parks System that involves a number of different local entities, in addition to the Council, requires coordinated policies and strategies. The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* lays out the goals for the development of the Regional Parks System and the strategies designed to meet these goals.

Over the past 40 years, the Regional Parks System partnership have made significant strides toward achieving the *Thrive* outcomes of stewardship, prosperity, livability, and sustainability. By protecting high quality natural resources and providing a world-class system of recreational opportunities, the Regional Parks System has contributed significantly to the high quality of life in the region. The policies laid out in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* reflect the Council's commitment to support and protect the Regional Parks System.

The equity outcome as described in *Thrive* remains an important direction for the Council. The regional park implementing agencies have various programs and practices to help reach and serve their diverse base of users. The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* strives to build upon the good work that the regional park implementing agencies have been doing to advance equity. The Council seeks to strengthen equitable usage of the Regional Parks System, which is a key theme of this plan.

Results matter. For the Council, accountability, a core principle adopted with *Thrive MSP 2040*, includes a commitment to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the policies and procedures governing the Regional Parks System. Prior to the adoption of the next update to the Regional Parks Policy Plan, the Council will work with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the regional parks implementing agencies, and other parks stakeholders to develop a set of Regional Parks Policy Plan indicators that quantitatively assess progress on the outcomes, goals, and strategies in this plan. Which policies are working well? How might we revise policies where performance is lower than expectations? Indicators might address key priorities such as strengthening equitable usage, managing natural resources within the Regional Parks System, and the contributions of the Regional Parks System toward climate resilience. The Council will then work with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the regional parks implementing agencies, and other parks stakeholders to use the Regional Parks Policy Plan indicators as a foundation for continuous improvement and public accountability, as well as a source of insight for future policy updates. These conversations could include convenings on how the partners in the Regional Parks System collectively work together to move the trajectory of specific indicators.

## Planning for 2040

The metropolitan area has historically made a substantial investment in conserving green spaces by establishing regional parks, park reserves, and trails. Federal, state, and local governments have invested in parks, natural areas, and wildlife refuges that provide additional habitat and recreational activities. Local communities have invested millions of dollars in community and neighborhood parks and recreation areas.

Protecting remaining high quality natural resource lands in the metropolitan area builds on past investments and offers an excellent opportunity for further investment in the Regional Parks System as the region grows by 888,000 more people from 2010 to 2040. To that end, the vision for the Regional Parks System includes expanding it to nearly 70,000 acres and tripling the trail system from 389 miles today to more than 1,100 miles by 2040. New regional trails and greenway corridors will link regional parks and park reserves. Also proposed are two additional regional parks in Carver County and a regional park in the northwest corner of Anoka County – an area that has been identified as a potential park since 1974. These planned regional parks and trails will enable residents to enjoy a variety of new park experiences throughout the region.

In the 1880s, Horace Cleveland, a founding father of the Minneapolis parks system, said:

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*“Look forward for a century, to the time when the city has a population of a million, and think what will be their wants. They will have wealth enough to purchase all that money can buy, but all their wealth cannot purchase a lost opportunity, or restore natural features of grandeur and beauty, which would then possess priceless value...”*

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This sentiment still rings true. Preserving natural areas with an eye toward the future is critical to the region’s livability, sustainability, stewardship, and prosperity. The Regional Parks System represents a major, well-established conservation effort for land and water resources. The area’s growing population will need additional large-scale park and open space lands with interconnected trails in the future. The region needs to identify natural areas that could be added to the Regional Parks System and make plans for their acquisition before the opportunity is lost.

## System Plan

The Council has the responsibility to prepare a system plan for the Regional Parks System. The system planning process begins with the Council identifying “generally the areas which should be acquired,” as required by the 1974 Metropolitan Parks Act. The Regional Parks Policy Plan includes the system plan, which identifies the regional parks and trails that are included in the Regional Parks System.

The Council reviews the system plan portion of the Regional Parks Policy Plan every four years as part of the policy plan revision process and may add or delete planned elements to the system. Additions or deletions to the system proposed outside the regular plan review process are substantial revisions to the policy plan. Identification of specific boundaries and detailed planning for individual units of the system are addressed in master plans for each unit. The master plans are prepared by the regional park implementing agencies.

### Amending the Policy Plan

The Council will amend the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* only for a substantial revision. A substantial revision is defined by the Council as (1) a proposed revision that is intended to or could have the effect of changing the direction or intent of adopted Council policy, (2) addition or deletion of a policy, or (3) addition or deletion of a system element.

An amendment request initiated by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission should include documentation to substantiate that it constitutes a substantial revision as defined here. A Council decision to amend the plan on its own initiative or that of the Commission will be preceded by a finding that a substantial revision is proposed. When amending the policy plan, the Council will conduct a public hearing in accordance with Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147 and adopted Council policy.

### Updating the Policy Plan

Minnesota law requires the Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the Regional Parks Policy Plan at least every four years (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147). However, over a four-year period, changes occur in population, acquisition, development, and system use. Updating the data and factual information to keep the policy current with new trends and conditions is not a substantial revision to the policy plan and will be accomplished through the ordinary process of consideration and approval by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the appropriate Council committee, and the full Council. The regional park implementing agencies will receive formal notice of any proposed update prior to consideration by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission.

### Key Minnesota Legislation for the Regional Parks System

#### Regional Recreation Open Space System (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.302)

“The legislature finds that the pressure of urbanization and development threatens valuable recreational open space areas in the metropolitan area at the same time as the need for such areas is increased. Immediate action is therefore necessary to provide funds to acquire, preserve, protect and develop regional recreational open space for public use.”

#### Regional Recreation Open Space (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subd. 14)

“‘Regional recreation open space’ means land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities determined by the Metropolitan Council to be of regional importance in providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area, including but not limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use facilities.”

**Regional Recreation Open Space System Policy Plan (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1)**

“The policy plan shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities which, together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development.”

“The policy plan shall include a five-year capital improvement program, which shall be revised periodically, and shall establish criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds for such acquisition and development.”

**Grants for Recreation Open Space (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.315, subd. 1)**

“The Metropolitan Council with the advice of the commission may make grants, from any funds available to it for recreation open space purposes, to any implementing agency, as defined in section 473.351, to cover the cost, or any portion of the cost, of acquiring or developing regional recreation open space in accordance with the policy plan; and all such agencies may enter into contracts for this purpose or rights or interests therein.”

**Metropolitan Area Regional Parks Funding (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351, subd. 1a.)**

“‘Implementing agency’ means the counties of Anoka, Washington, Ramsey, Scott, Carver, Dakota, the city of Saint Paul, the city of Bloomington, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, and the Three Rivers Park District.”

**Park and Trails Fund (Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53)**

“Grants funded by the parks and trails fund must be implemented according to section 16B.98”

**Grant Management Process (Minnesota Statutes, section 16B.98, subd.6)**

“A granting agency shall diligently administer and monitor any grant it has entered into.”

**Metropolitan Parks Interest Earnings (Laws of Minnesota 2015, First Special Session, Chapter 4, Article 4, Section 138)**

“...the Metropolitan Council shall use the interest earnings in Laws 1985, First Special Session chapter 15, section 5, subdivision 2, for the use and betterment of all regional recreational open space lands under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council.”

Session law also provides important directives. For instance, the Omnibus Legacy Bill, updated biennially, provides additional guidance and requirements related to Parks and Trails Legacy Fund spending.

**Applicable Funding Formulas**

**Parks and Trails Fund (Minnesota Statutes, section 85.53, subd. 3)**

“(1) 45% of the money must be disbursed according to the allocation formula in section 473.351, subdivision 3, to each implementing agency; (2) 31.5% of the money must be distributed based on each implementing agency’s relative share of the most recent estimate of the population of the metropolitan area; (3) 13.5% of the money must be distributed based on each implementing agency’s relative share of nonlocal visits based on the most recent user visitation survey conducted

by the Metropolitan Council; and (4) 10% of the money must be distributed as grants to implementing agencies for land acquisition within Metropolitan Council approved regional parks and trails master plan boundaries under the council's park acquisition opportunity grant program.”

### Operation and Maintenance Funds (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351, subd. 3)

“The Metropolitan Council shall distribute the operation and maintenance money as follows: (1) 40% based on the use that each implementing agency's regional recreation open space system has in proportion to the total use of the metropolitan regional recreation open space system; (2) 40%

based on the operation and maintenance expenditures made in the previous year by each implementing agency in proportion to the total operation and maintenance expenditures of all the implementing agencies; and (3) 20% based on the acreage that each implementing agency's regional recreation open space system has in proportion to the total acreage of the metropolitan regional recreation open space system.”



2040



## Chapter Three: System Plan



### Introduction

The overarching outdoor recreation system in the region consists of lands owned or managed by federal, state, and local governments, as well as lands privately owned by nonprofit or for-profit agencies. All play an important role in supporting and protecting the outdoor recreation system. The system is designed to meet the recreational needs and the natural resources protection goals of the region. The outdoor recreation system consists of a wide range of facilities, from state parks to regional trails to neighborhood playgrounds to private nature centers. The Regional Parks System is one part of this well-rounded system of outdoor recreation.

The Regional Parks System primarily consists of lands located in a high-quality natural resource setting that are contiguous to lakes, rivers, or other water bodies. Natural resource restoration and protection is a key objective in the Regional Parks System. Regional parks and park reserves include large areas of land or water that often extend into multiple political jurisdictions. Regional trails may traverse several communities and provide connections between regional parks, park reserves, and the greater trail network in the region. Regional parks and trails draw visitors from across the region and beyond.

Recreational parks and open space provided by the federal and state government generally serve similar recreational demands as the Regional Parks System. Local recreational open space facilities provide active recreation, such as playgrounds, athletic fields, courts, and aquatic centers. Private operations also make substantial contributions to the development of facilities and the provision of services and include golf courses, riding facilities, marinas, day camps, and downhill ski areas, as well as privately owned public spaces.

## National Parks and Federal Lands

The Twin Cities region includes the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge as well as two national parks--the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

### Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

The Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge is a corridor of land and water along the Minnesota River that stretches from Bloomington to Henderson and is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The refuge was established in 1976 to provide habitat for many migratory waterfowl, fish, and other wildlife species threatened by commercial and industrial development, and to provide environmental education, wildlife recreational opportunities, and interpretive programming for Twin Cities residents.

### Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

The 54,000-acre Mississippi National River and Recreation Area was established in 1988 and is a unit of the National Park Service. The National Park Service owns very little land within its borders but partners with local governments, state agencies, and organizations to protect the significant resources along the 72-mile stretch of river running through the region. Several regional parks and trails, which are owned and operated by regional park implementing agencies, are located within the corridor. Additionally, 72 miles of the Mississippi River and four miles of the Minnesota River have been designated as the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area Water Trail, a national recreational amenity.

### St. Croix National Scenic Riverway

A portion of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is within the region. The St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is a unit of the National Park Service located on the St. Croix River and the Namekagon River in Wisconsin. The National Riverway includes the two rivers and their riparian areas and occupies the boundary between Wisconsin and Minnesota. The St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is maintained and managed by the National Park Service and the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources.

## State Parks, Lands, and Trails

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages state parks, lands and trails in the region, including Afton, Fort Snelling, and William O'Brien state parks; the Minnesota Valley State Recreation Area; and the Brown's Creek, Gateway, Luce Line, and Minnesota Valley state trails. The DNR also provides wildlife management areas for hunting, trapping, fishing, wildlife viewing and other compatible recreational uses. Scientific and natural areas are open to the public for nature observation and education, but are not meant for intensive recreational activities.

There are six state water trails and their attendant system of boat and canoe launches that travel through the metropolitan area along the Cannon, Crow, Minnesota, Mississippi, St. Croix, and Rum rivers. The DNR and its local unit of government partners actively manage the state water trails for canoeing, kayaking, boating and camping.



## Planning Protections for National and State Parks

Federal and state agencies are encouraged, but not required, to submit master plans for recreational open space units within the seven-county region to the Council for its review. To the extent these master plans indicate that facilities will fulfill regional recreation open space objectives and are consistent with the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, the Council will provide these lands protection under the Metropolitan Significance Review regulations and the Metropolitan Land Planning Act, as described in the System Protection Policy found in Chapter 6. However, the Council does not grant regional funds to state or federal agencies for capital improvements or for operation and maintenance of these facilities. Figure 3-1 depicts the national, federal and state recreation lands and corridors in the region.

### Local Parks

Local recreational open space facilities provide for a very large number and variety of recreational activities that occur in the metropolitan area. Local parks are often more intensely developed than regional parks and provide facilities for active recreation, such as playgrounds, athletic fields, courts, and aquatic centers. Local parks are designed to serve a neighborhood or community and are frequently located in residential areas.

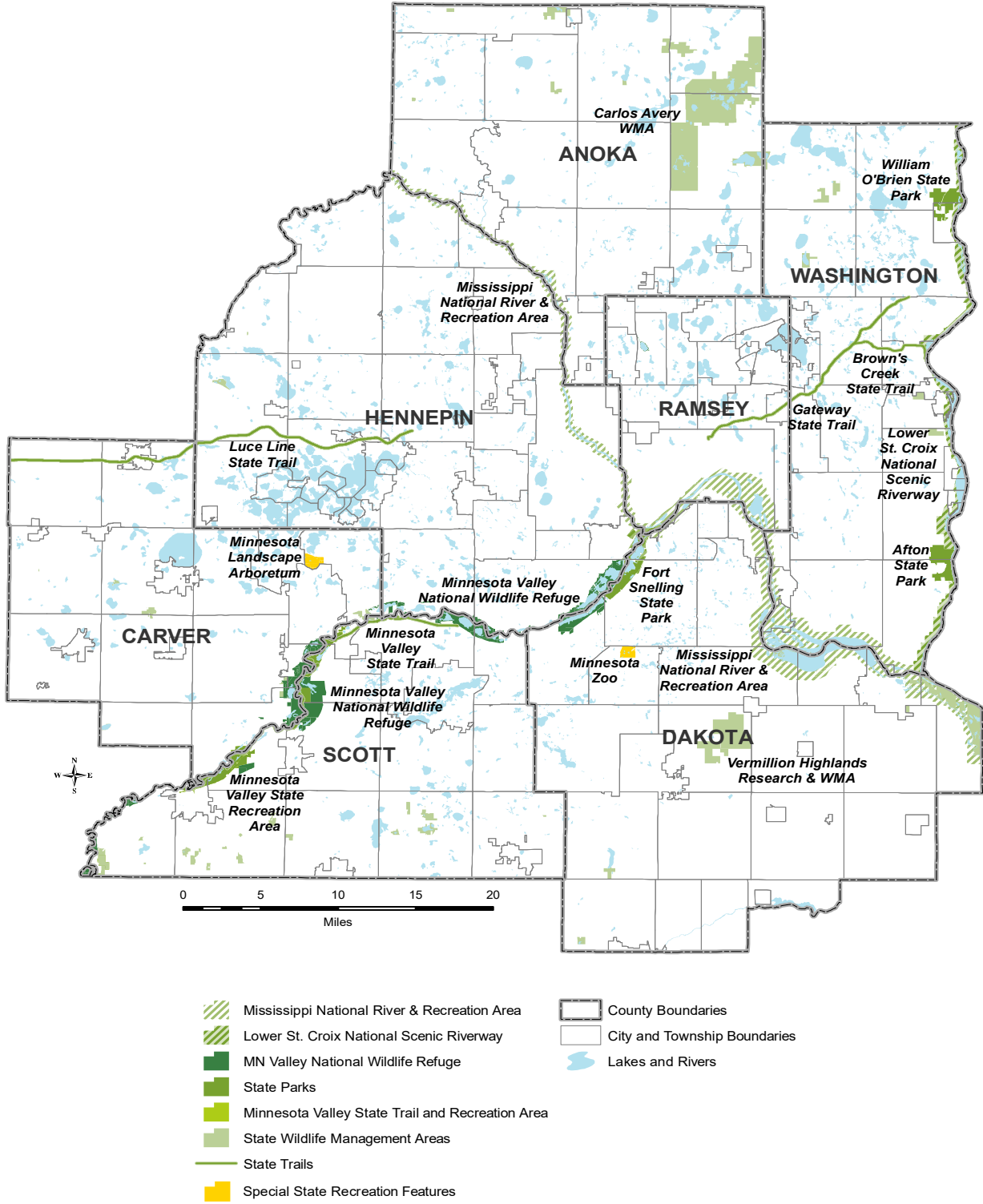
Local parks are usually much smaller than regional parks and are located and designed to serve the local population, rather than primarily based on natural resource amenities. Local trails typically provide connections between community destinations, such as schools, libraries, and community centers. Although local recreational open space areas are not covered by this plan, the facilities and services they offer are taken into consideration when master plans of the regional system are prepared and reviewed.

### Private Recreation

Public recreational open space facilities do not meet all the demands for such recreation required by the area's residents. Private operations also make substantial contributions to the development of facilities and the provision of services. The most prominent facilities provided by the private sector are golf courses, riding facilities, gun clubs, marinas, day camps, and downhill ski areas. There are also multiple recreational open space areas owned and operated by corporations, employees' associations, benevolent associations, and nonprofit social agencies. These private facilities reduce the burden on the public sector, provide additional opportunities, and help to preserve thousands of acres of land in open space. They complement activities and experiences offered by the public sector.



Figure 3-1. National, Federal, and State Recreation Lands in the Region



## Components of the Regional Parks System

Not all recreation facilities warrant regional status. Table 3-1 provides a classification system for local and regional facilities.

**Table 3-1:** Classification System for Local and Regional Park Facilities

### Local Facilities

| Component                    | Use  | Service Area   | Size           | Site Attributes  | Site Location  |
|------------------------------|--|--|----------------|--|--|
| Mini-park                    | Specialized facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population or specific group such as tots or senior citizens                           | Less than 1/4-mile radius  | < 1 acre       |  | May be publicly or privately owned and/or incorporated into a development site, such as apartment, townhouse, or condominium complexes, or commercial centers. |
| Neighborhood park/playground | Area for intense recreational activities such as field games, court games, crafts, apparatus area, skating, and neighborhood centers.              | ¼ to ½ mile radius to serve a population of 4,000 – 5,000 (one neighborhood) | < 25 acres     | Physical geography suited for intense development.                 | Proximity to elementary schools or residential neighborhoods.  |
| Community playfield          | Area for intense recreational facilities such as athletic fields and swimming pools; could include a neighborhood use.                             | 3 - 5 neighborhoods or one community   | 25 - 50 acres  | Physical geography suited for intense development.                 | Proximity to secondary schools and other public facilities.  |
| Community park               | Area of natural or ornamental quality for outdoor recreation such as walking, viewing, sitting, picnicking; could have some field and court games. | 3 - 5 neighborhoods or one community   | 25 - 100 acres | Affords natural features with varied physical geographic interest. | Proximity to community facilities and resources.   |
| County park                  | Area of natural or ornamental quality for outdoor recreation such as walking, viewing, sitting, picnicking; could have some field and court games. | County   | 25 - 100 acres | Affords natural features with varied physical geographic interest. | Proximity to community facilities and resources and/or where resource occurs.  |

**Table 3-1: continued:** Classification System for Local and Regional Park Facilities**Local Facilities**

| Component   | Use  | Service Area  | Size   | Site Attributes   | Site Location   |
|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| Conservancy lands                                   | Area of natural quality such as watercourses and wetlands that are preserved for environmental or aesthetic benefits to the community and/or because of the negative environmental or economic effects of development in them. | Municipality, township, county                                | Variable, based on extent of resources   | Natural resources that merit preservation and that would be negatively affected by development.   | Where resource occurs.  |
| Local linear parks, trail, corridors, and parkways  | Area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, canoeing, and driving.   | A neighborhood or several neighborhoods in a city or township | Contained within one city or township. Width and length minimums vary by locality. | On or off-road trails that may or may not traverse scenic areas while assuring the trail treadway has no adverse effect on the natural resource base.                       | Where needed to link neighborhoods to components of the local or regional recreation system and/or community facilities such as schools, libraries, commercial areas and to link to adjacent municipalities.  |
| County linear parks, trail, corridors, and parkways | Area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, canoeing, and driving.   | Several cities and/or townships in a county.                  | Traverses one or more municipalities. Width and length minimums vary by county.    | On or off-road trails that may or may not traverse scenic areas while mitigating impacts to assuring the trail treadway has no adverse effect on the natural resource base. | Often found adjacent to major roadways within the county. Other locations where needed to link cities to components of the local or regional recreation system and/or community facilities such as schools, libraries, commercial areas and to link to adjacent counties. |
| Regional park                                       | Area of natural or ornamental quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, camping, and trail uses.  | 3 - 5 communities   | 200 - 500 acres (100 minimum)  | Complete natural setting contiguous to water bodies or watercourses where possible.   | Where natural resource occurs-particularly water.   |

**Table 3-1: continued:** Classification System for Local and Regional Park Facilities

| <b>Regional Facilities</b> |  |                                |   |  |  |
|----------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Component</b>           | <b>Use</b>   | <b>Service Area</b>            | <b>Size</b>   | <b>Site Attributes</b>   |  |
| Regional park reserve      | Area of natural quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation such as viewing and studying nature, wildlife habitat, conservation, swimming, picnicking, hiking, boating, camping, and trail uses.  | County, multi-county area      | 1,000+ acres; sufficient area to encompass the resource envisioned for preservation.  | Diversity of unique resources, such as topography, lakes, streams, marshes, flora, fauna.  | Where natural resource occurs.   |
| Regional destination trail | Area developed for one or more varying modes of nonmotorized recreational travel such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and canoeing.   | The entire metropolitan region | Sufficient corridor width to protect natural resources and can safely accommodate trail use. Sufficient length to be a destination itself, or to serve as a link between Regional Parks System units. | When feasible, off-road trails that utilize human made and/or natural linear resources such as utility corridors, railroad and highway rights of way, stream / river valleys, or at the edges of forest or prairie. On-road trails are acceptable when off-road trails are not feasible. | Preferably adjacent to high quality natural areas. The trail treadway should be placed where it has no adverse impact on the natural resource base.  |
| Regional linking trail     | Area developed for one or more varying modes of nonmotorized recreational travel such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and canoeing.   | The entire metropolitan region | Sufficient corridor width to protect natural resources and can safely accommodate trail use. Sufficient length to link Regional Parks System units.   | When feasible, off-road trails that utilize human made and/or natural linear resources such as utility corridors, railroad and highway rights of way, stream / river valleys, or at the edges of forest or prairie. On-road trails are acceptable when off-road trails are not feasible. | Linkages between components of the Regional Parks System. When feasible, linking trails should attempt to connect to population, economic and social centers along its route. The trail treadway should be placed where it will have no adverse impact on the natural resource base. |
| Special recreation feature | Area that preserves, maintains, and provides specialized or single-purpose recreational activities, such as nature center, marina, zoo, conservatory, arboretum, display gardens, hunter training education facilities, downhill ski area, sites of historic or archeological significance, and bridging facilities. | Regional-(metropolitan area)   | Specific standard applicable to desired feature.  | Appropriate to particular special recreation feature.  | Where most advantageous for the special recreation feature and the overall park system.  |

Elements of the Regional Parks System are categorized into four major types: regional parks, park reserves, regional trails, and special recreation features.

### Regional Parks

Areas selected for regional parks should contain a diversity of nature-based resources, either naturally occurring or human-built. The recreational quality of a regional park is measured by the presence or absence of outstanding natural resources and the ability to provide adequately for a wide range of natural resource-related recreational opportunities. Access to water bodies suitable for recreation – such as swimming, boating, and fishing – is particularly important and most of the regional parks are focused on lakes, rivers, or streams.

A regional park should be large enough to accommodate a variety of activities, preserve a pleasant natural aspect, and buffer activity areas from each other and from surrounding areas. This is interpreted as requiring 200 to 500 acres of land. Occasionally, because of the quality of the resource, an exception may be made, and a regional park may be as small as 100 acres. Experience has shown this to be the minimum size acceptable for the range and type of activities expected to be accommodated.

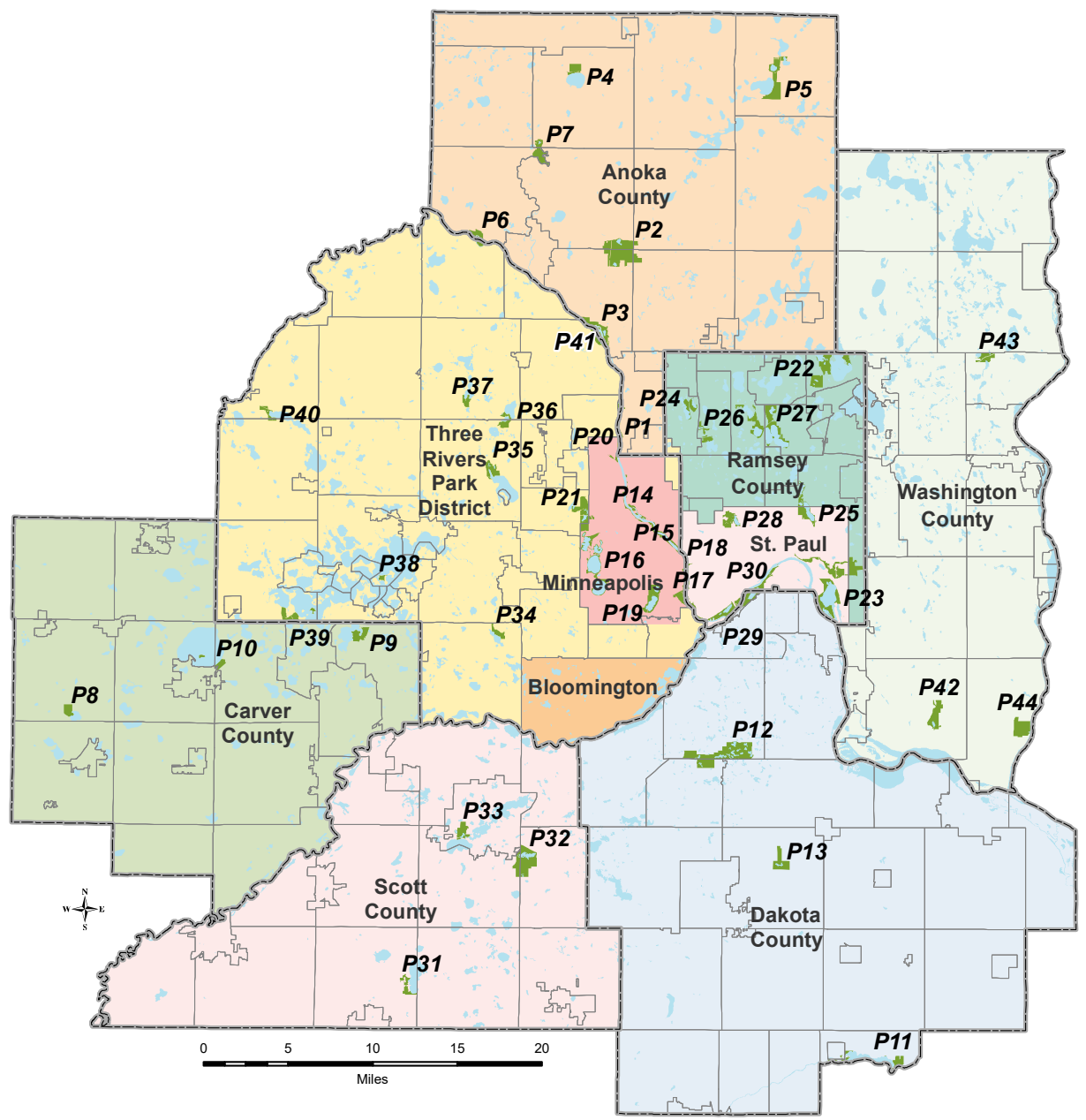
As of 2018, there are 44 regional parks developed and open to the public. These regional parks are listed in Table 3-2 and shown on Figure 3-2.







**Table 3-2:** Regional Parks Open to the Public (2018)

| Regional Park Implementing Agency                              | Regional Park   | Map # |
|--|---|-------|
| Anoka County   | Anoka County Riverfront Regional Park                           | P1    |
| Anoka County   | Bunker Hills Regional Park                                      | P2    |
| Anoka County   | Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park                                   | P3    |
| Anoka County   | Lake George Regional Park                                       | P4    |
| Anoka County   | Martin-Island-Linwood Lakes Regional Park                       | P5    |
| Anoka County   | Mississippi West Regional Park                                  | P6    |
| Anoka County   | Rum River Central Regional Park                                 | P7    |
| Carver County  | Baylor Regional Park  | P8    |
| Carver County  | Lake Minnewashta Regional Park                                  | P9    |
| Carver County  | Lake Waconia Regional Park                                      | P10   |
| Dakota County  | Lake Byllesby Regional Park                                     | P11   |
| Dakota County  | Lebanon Hills Regional Park                                     | P12   |
| Dakota County  | Whitetail Woods Regional Park                                   | P13   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                            | Above the Falls Regional Park                                   | P14   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                            | Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park                    | P15   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                            | Minneapolis Chain-of-Lakes Regional Park                        | P16   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                            | Minnehaha Regional Park   | P17   |
| Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board/Saint Paul               | Mississippi Gorge Regional Park                                 | P18   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                            | Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park                                  | P19   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers Park District | North Mississippi Regional Park                                 | P20   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                            | Theodore Wirth Regional Park                                    | P21   |
| Ramsey County  | Bald Eagle-Otter Lake Regional Park                             | P22   |
| Ramsey County/Saint Paul                                       | Battle Creek & Indian Mounds Regional Park                      | P23   |
| Ramsey County  | Long Lake Regional Park   | P24   |
| Ramsey County/Saint Paul                                       | Phalen-Keller Regional Park                                     | P25   |
| Ramsey County  | Tony Schmidt Regional Park                                      | P26   |
| Ramsey County  | Vadnais-Snail Lake Regional Park                                | P27   |
| Saint Paul/Ramsey County                                       | Battle Creek & Indian Mounds Regional Park                      | P23   |
| Saint Paul   | Como Regional Park  | P28   |
| Saint Paul   | Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm Regional Park                          | P29   |
| Saint Paul   | Lilydale-Harriet Island & Cherokee Heights Regional Park        | P30   |
| Saint Paul/Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                 | Mississippi Gorge Regional Park                                 | P18   |
| Saint Paul/Ramsey County                                       | Phalen-Keller Regional Park                                     | P25   |
| Scott County   | Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park                                   | P31   |
| Scott County/Three Rivers Park District                        | Cleary Lake Regional Park                                       | P32   |
| Scott County   | Spring Lake Regional Park                                       | P33   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                     | Bryant Lake Regional Park                                       | P34   |
| Three Rivers Park District/Scott County                        | Cleary Lake Regional Park                                       | P32   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                     | Clifton E. French Regional Park                                 | P35   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                     | Eagle Lake Regional Park  | P36   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                     | Fish Lake Regional Park   | P37   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                     | Lake Minnetonka Islands Regional Park                           | P38   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                     | Lake Minnetonka Regional Park                                   | P39   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                     | Lake Sarah Regional Park  | P40   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                     | Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park/Mississippi Gateway Regional Park | P41   |
| Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board | North Mississippi Regional Park                                 | P20   |
| Washington County  | Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park                              | P42   |
| Washington County  | Pine Point Regional Park  | P43   |
| Washington County  | St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park                                  | P44   |

Figure 3-2: Regional Parks Open to the Public (2018)



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-2

-  Regional Parks Open to the Public
-  County Boundaries
-  City and Township Boundaries
-  Lakes and Rivers



## Park Reserves

Park reserves, like regional parks, are expected to provide for a diversity of outdoor recreational activities. The major feature that distinguishes the park reserve from a regional park is that the park reserve is also intended to provide, protect, and manage representative areas of the original major landscape types in the metropolitan area and enable appreciation and enjoyment of the natural resources that influenced the region's development.

Park reserves are substantially larger than regional parks because they are to contain a diversity of natural resources with adequate space to protect and manage natural resources and provide for the compatible outdoor activities. The minimum size for a park reserve is 1,000 acres, but larger park reserves are desirable. To establish and maintain an uncompromised sense of nature and protect high-quality natural resources, at least 80% of each park reserve should be managed as wild lands that protect the ecological functions of the native landscape. This would permit up to 20% of a park reserve to be developed for compatible recreational activities.

The eight regional landscape types that have been used in selecting areas for park reserves are:

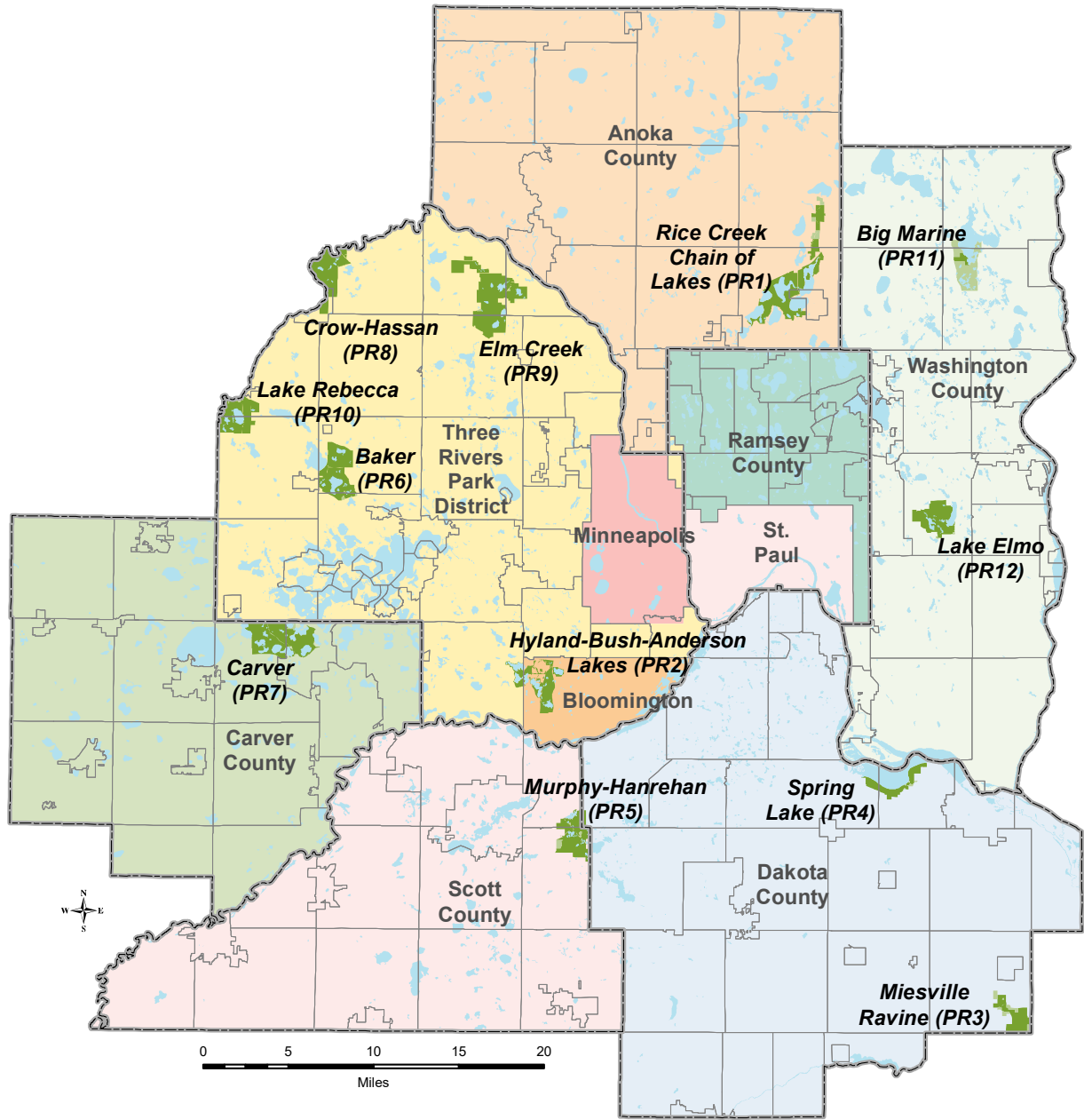
|                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Sand plains               | Lightly glaciated area   |
| St. Croix ground moraine  | Mississippi River Valley |
| Des Moines ground moraine | Minnesota River Valley   |
| Terminal moraine          | St. Croix River Valley   |

As of 2018, the Regional Parks System included 12 park reserves developed and open to the public, which are listed in Table 3-3 and shown in Figure 3-3.



**Table 3-3:** Park Reserves Open to the Public (2018)

| Regional Park Implementing Agency       | Park Reserves                           | Map # |
|---|---|-------|
| Anoka County                            | Rice Creek Chain-of-Lakes Park Reserve  | PR1   |
| Bloomington/Three Rivers Park District  | Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve | PR2   |
| Dakota County                           | Miesville Ravine Park Reserve           | PR3   |
| Dakota County                           | Spring Lake Park Reserve                | PR4   |
| Scott County/Three Rivers Park District | Murphy-Hanrehan Park Reserve            | PR5   |
| Three Rivers Park District              | Baker Park Reserve                      | PR6   |
| Three Rivers Park District              | Carver Park Reserve                     | PR7   |
| Three Rivers Park District              | Crow-Hassan Park Reserve                | PR8   |
| Three Rivers Park District              | Elm Creek Park Reserve                  | PR9   |
| Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington  | Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve | PR2   |
| Three Rivers Park District              | Lake Rebecca Park Reserve               | PR10  |
| Three Rivers Park District/Scott County | Murphy-Hanrehan Park Reserve            | PR5   |
| Washington County                       | Big Marine Park Reserve                 | PR11  |
| Washington County                       | Lake Elmo Park Reserve                  | PR12  |

Figure 3-3: Park Reserves Open to the Public (2018)



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-3

-  Park Reserves (Open to the Public)
-  Park Reserves (Not Open to the Public)
-  County Boundaries
-  City and Township Boundaries
-  Lakes and Rivers

## Regional Trails

Regional trail corridors provide recreational opportunities along linear pathways throughout the metropolitan area. There are two broad types of regional trails: destination trails (also known as greenway trails) and linking trails. Destination trails provide high-quality natural resource-based experiences. They provide a scenic setting and a compelling sense of place. They often follow natural or linear features that traverse areas of scenic appeal and/or historical, architectural, and developmental interest. Linking trails are selected to pass through or provide connections among components in the Regional Parks System. Regional parks and park reserves perform the important function of providing places for parking, comfort facilities and safe water supplies. Linking trails may also connect to other local, state, and federal recreational facilities as well as other significant natural resource areas

Trails also are selected for their ability to intersect with local trail networks, with the regional trails functioning much like regional highways that interconnect with more local arterials and local streets. Parts of the regional trail network, especially in the urban areas, may serve as commuting routes for bicyclists in addition to serving recreational purposes. As the regional trail and transit systems expand, opportunities to provide connections between these forms of travel should be explored. People can ride the bus or light rail to access a regional trail, and conversely, people can use regional trails to access transit.

Regional trails can also be developed as greenways, or linear parks, where the trail itself is a destination. These greenways typically include wide corridors that provide opportunities for improving wildlife habitat, protecting natural resources, and providing recreational opportunities.

The 2016 Visitor Study found that trail users are more likely to visit a regional trail alone than park visitors are to visit a regional park alone (63% visit trails alone versus 45% visit parks alone). Trails had a higher frequency of visits across seasons and significantly higher summer visits than parks, but less time spent per visit.

As of 2018, there were 49 regional trail corridors, with a total of 389 miles open to the public, listed in Table 3-4 and Figure 3-4. Many trails are constructed in phases, some as part of roadway improvement projects or local development. Therefore, although a trail is listed as being open, some portions of the trail corridor may be developed in the future and are not yet open to the public.

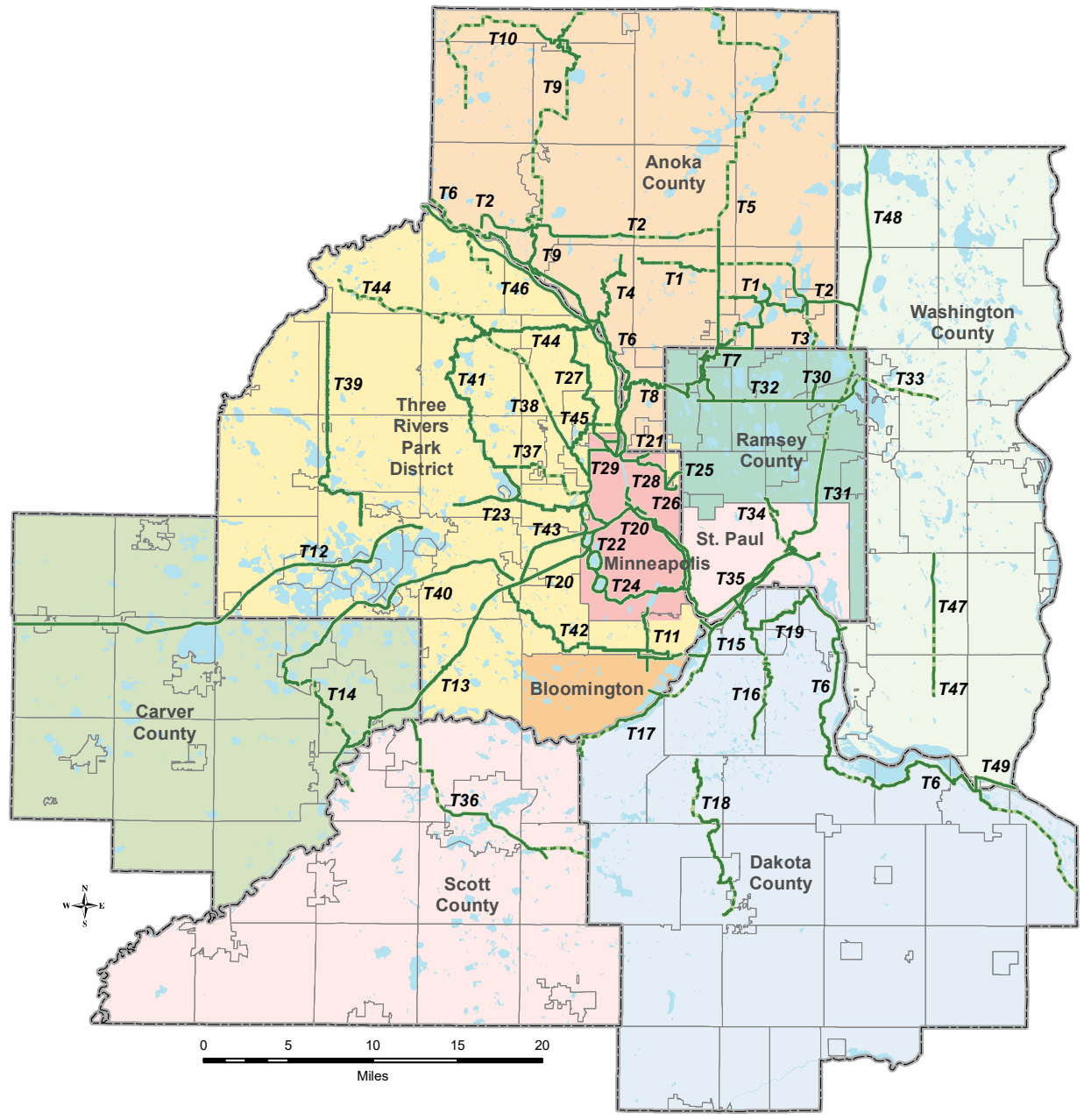
**Table 3-4:** Regional Trails Open to the Public (2018)

| Regional Park Implementing Agency                                   | Regional Trails   | Map # |
|---|---|-------|
| Anoka County  | Bunker Hills-Chain of Lakes Regional Trail  | T1    |
| Anoka County  | Central Anoka Regional Trail  | T2    |
| Anoka County  | Chain of Lakes-Otter Lake Regional Trail  | T3    |
| Anoka County  | Coon Creek Regional Trail   | T4    |
| Anoka County  | East Anoka County Regional Trail  | T5    |
| Anoka County/Dakota County  | Mississippi River Regional Trail  | T6    |
| Anoka County/Ramsey County  | Rice Creek North Regional Trail   | T7    |
| Anoka County/Ramsey County  | Rice Creek West Regional Trail  | T8    |
| Anoka County  | Rum River Regional Trail  | T9    |
| Anoka County  | Sugar Hills Regional Trail  | T10   |
| Bloomington/Three Rivers Park District                              | Nokomis-Minnesota River Regional Trail  | T11   |
| Carver County/Three Rivers Park District                            | Dakota Rail Regional Trail  | T12   |
| Carver County/Scott County/Three Rivers Park District               | Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail/<br>Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail | T13   |
| Carver County   | Southwest Regional Trail  | T14   |
| Dakota County   | Big Rivers Regional Trail   | T15   |
| Dakota County   | Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway, Highway 62<br>Segment                               | T16   |
| Dakota County   | Minnesota River Greenway  | T17   |
| Dakota County/Anoka County  | Mississippi River Regional Trail  | T6    |
| Dakota County   | North Creek Greenway Regional Trail   | T18   |
| Dakota County   | River to River Greenway   | T19   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers<br>Park District   | Cedar Lake Regional Trail   | T20   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                                 | Columbia Parkway Regional Trail   | T21   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                                 | Kenilworth Regional Trail   | T22   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers<br>Park District   | Luce Line Regional Trail  | T23   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                                 | Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail  | T24   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board/Three Rivers<br>Park District   | Northeast Diagonal Regional Trail   | T25   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                                 | Ridgway Parkway Regional Trail  | T26   |
| Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board/Three Rivers<br>Park District | Shingle Creek Regional Trail  | T27   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                                 | St. Anthony Parkway Regional Trail  | T28   |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board                                 | Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail   | T29   |
| Ramsey County   | Birch Lake Regional Trail   | T30   |
| Ramsey County/Saint Paul  | Bruce Vento Regional Trail (w/Vento Sanctuary)                                      | T31   |






**Table 3-4:** Regional Trails Open to the Public (2018)

| Regional Park Implementing Agency                                | Regional Trails   | Map # |
|--|---|-------|
| Ramsey County  | Highway 96 Regional Trail   | T32   |
| Ramsey County/Washington County                                  | Lake Links Regional Trail   | T33   |
| Ramsey County/Anoka County                                       | Rice Creek North Regional Trail   | T7    |
| Ramsey County/Anoka County                                       | Rice Creek West Regional Trail  | T8    |
| Ramsey County/Saint Paul   | Trout Brook Regional Trail  | T34   |
| Saint Paul/Ramsey County   | Bruce Vento Regional Trail (w/Vento Sanctuary)                                      | T31   |
| Saint Paul   | Samuel Morgan Regional Trail  | T35   |
| Saint Paul/Ramsey County   | Trout Brook Regional Trail  | T34   |
| Scott County/Three Rivers Park District/Carver County            | Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail/<br>Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail | T13   |
| Scott County   | Scott County Regional Trail   | T36   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                       | Bassett Creek Regional Trail  | T37   |
| Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board | Cedar Lake Regional Trail   | T20   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                       | Crystal Lake Regional Trail   | T38   |
| Three Rivers Park District/Carver County                         | Dakota Rail Regional Trail  | T12   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                       | Lake Independence Regional Trail  | T39   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                       | Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail  | T40   |
| Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board | Luce Line Regional Trail  | T23   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                       | Medicine Lake Regional Trail  | T41   |
| Three Rivers Park District/Carver County/Scott County            | Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail/<br>Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail | T13   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                       | Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail  | T42   |
| Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington                           | Nokomis-Minnesota River Regional Trail  | T11   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                       | North Cedar Lake Regional Trail   | T43   |
| Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board | Northeast Diagonal Regional Trail   | T25   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                       | Rush Creek Regional Trail   | T44   |
| Three Rivers Park District/Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board | Shingle Creek Regional Trail  | T27   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                       | Twin Lakes Regional Trail   | T45   |
| Three Rivers Park District                                       | West Mississippi River Regional Trail   | T46   |
| Washington County  | Central Greenway Regional Trail – South Segment                                     | T47   |
| Washington County  | Hardwood Creek Regional Trail   | T48   |
| Washington County/Ramsey County                                  | Lake Links Regional Trail   | T33   |
| Washington County  | Point Douglas Regional Trail  | T49   |

Figure 3-4. Regional Trails Open to the Public (2018)



**Numbers Correspond to Regional Trails Listed in Table 3-4**

-  Regional Trails (Open to the Public)
-  Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
-  County Boundaries
-  City and Township Boundaries
-  Lakes and Rivers

## Special Recreation Features

Special recreation features, which are called for in state legislation (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subd. 14), are defined as Regional Parks System opportunities not generally found in the parks, the park reserves or the trail corridors. Special recreational features often require a unique managing or programming effort on the part of the regional park implementing agency.

There are eight special recreation features developed and open to the public:

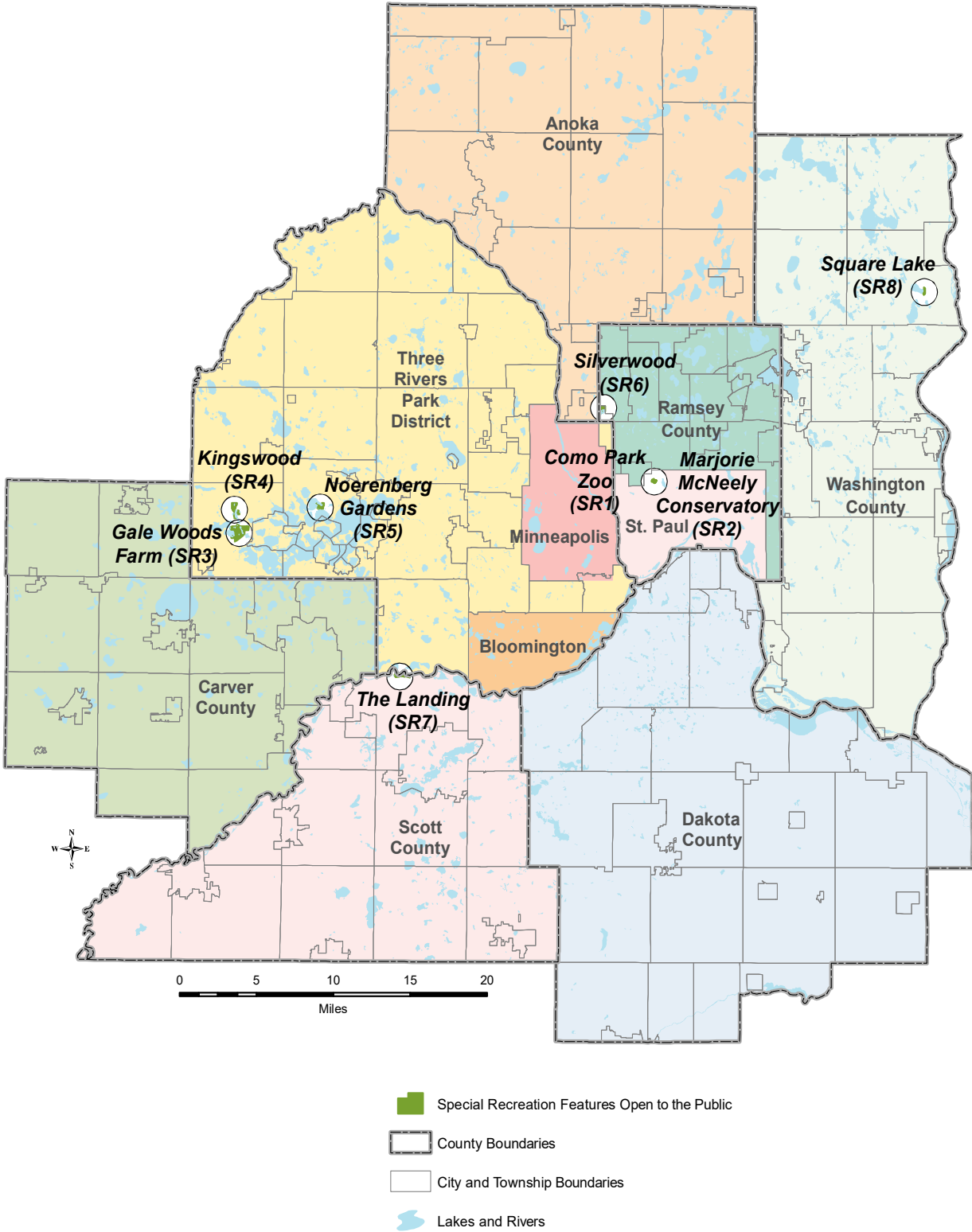
| Regional Park Implementing Agency | Special Recreation Feature    | Map # |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------|
| Saint Paul                        | Como Park Zoo                 | SR1   |
| Saint Paul                        | Marjorie McNeely Conservatory | SR2   |
| Three Rivers Park District        | Gale Woods Farm               | SR3   |
| Three Rivers Park District        | Kingswood                     | SR4   |
| Three Rivers Park District        | Noerenberg Gardens            | SR5   |
| Three Rivers Park District        | Silverwood                    | SR6   |
| Three Rivers Park District        | The Landing                   | SR7   |
| Washington County                 | Square Lake                   | SR8   |

The Como Park Zoo and Marjorie McNeely Conservatory are managed within Como Regional Park. Gale Woods Farm provides opportunities for visitors to learn about agriculture, food production, and land stewardship. Kingswood provides nature-based service learning programs to preserve the unique and significant natural resources of the site. The Landing provides a historical representation of life in a river town in the 1800s. Noerenberg Gardens was given to Three Rivers Park District with the understanding that it was a unique and regional-level attraction with stunning floral gardens. Silverwood integrates arts, environmental education, and gardens to serve as a center for arts and the environment. Square Lake provides beach and boat access to one of the clearest lakes in the metropolitan area and attracts scuba divers from across the region.

New special recreation features need to be complementary to the rest of the Regional Parks System and not be a financial burden to the system. Special recreation features are highlighted in Figure 3-5.



Figure 3-5: Special Recreation Features Open to the Public (2018)





## Regional Parks System Plan

There are six components that make up the System Plan, which all together comprise the vision for the Regional Parks System in 2040:

- Existing Regional Parks System facilities
- Planned Regional Parks System facilities that are not yet open to the public
- Regional Parks System boundary adjustments
- Regional Park search areas
- Regional Trail search corridors
- 2040 system additions

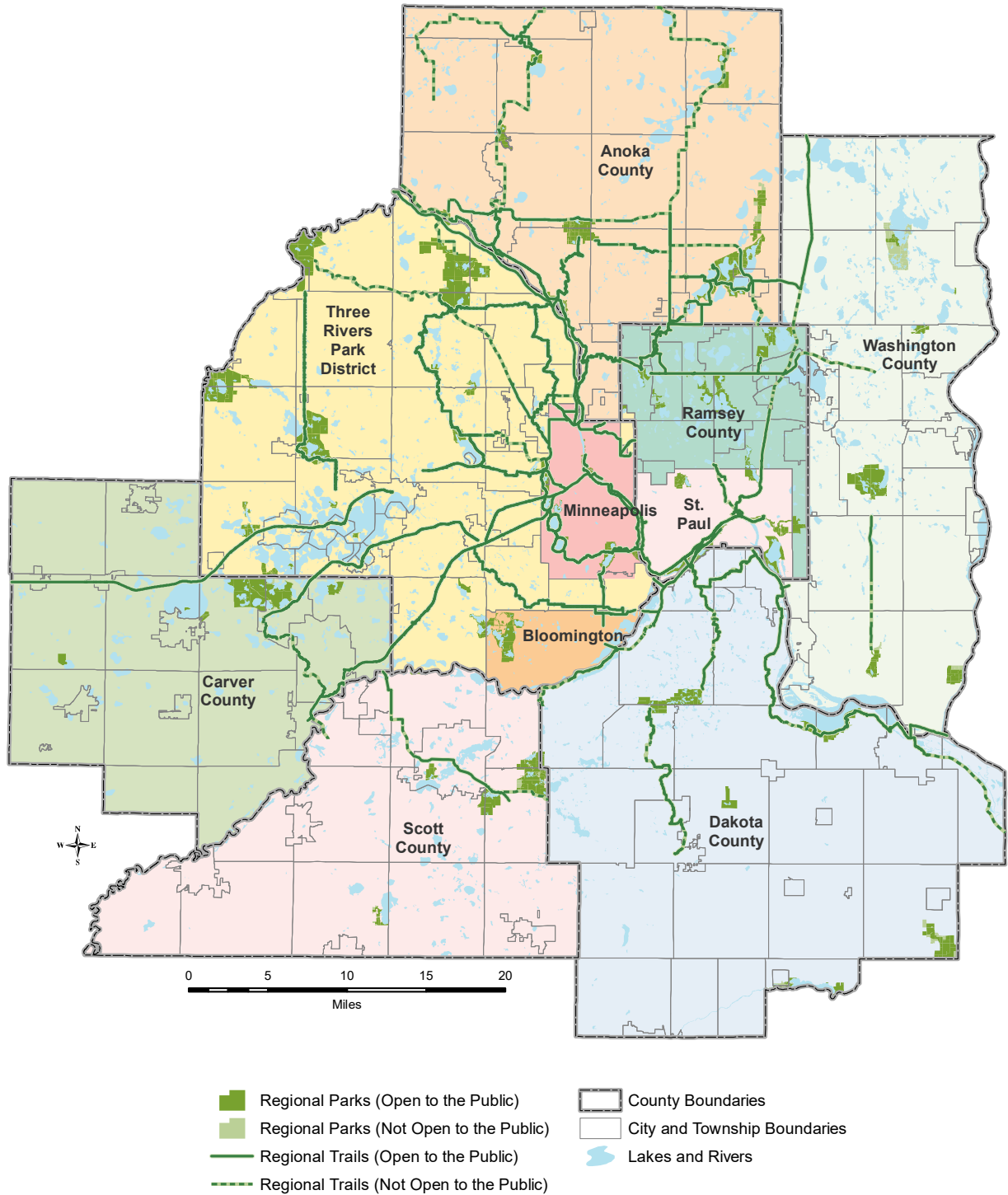
### Existing Regional Parks System Facilities

As described in the previous section, the Regional Parks System as of 2018 includes 44 regional parks, 12 park reserves, 49 regional trails, and 8 special recreation features that are open for public use. These Regional Parks System facilities have a total land area of about 54,370 acres that have been acquired by the regional park implementing agencies, with 4,541 acres of inholdings within the boundaries of these parks and trails that have not yet been acquired. Figure 3-6 shows the Regional Parks System facilities that are open to the public as of 2018.



*Walkers walking near river in St. Paul*

Figure 3-6: Existing Regional Parks System Facilities (2018)



## Planned Regional Parks System Facilities

In addition to the facilities that are open to the public, there are two regional parks and one park reserve that have Council-approved master plans, but have not yet been developed. These facilities are listed in Table 3-5 and shown in Figure 3-7. Approximately 1,414 acres have been acquired for these three planned Regional Parks System facilities, with an additional 3,529 acres to be acquired in the future.

**Table 3-5:** Planned Regional Parks and Park Reserves Not Open to the Public

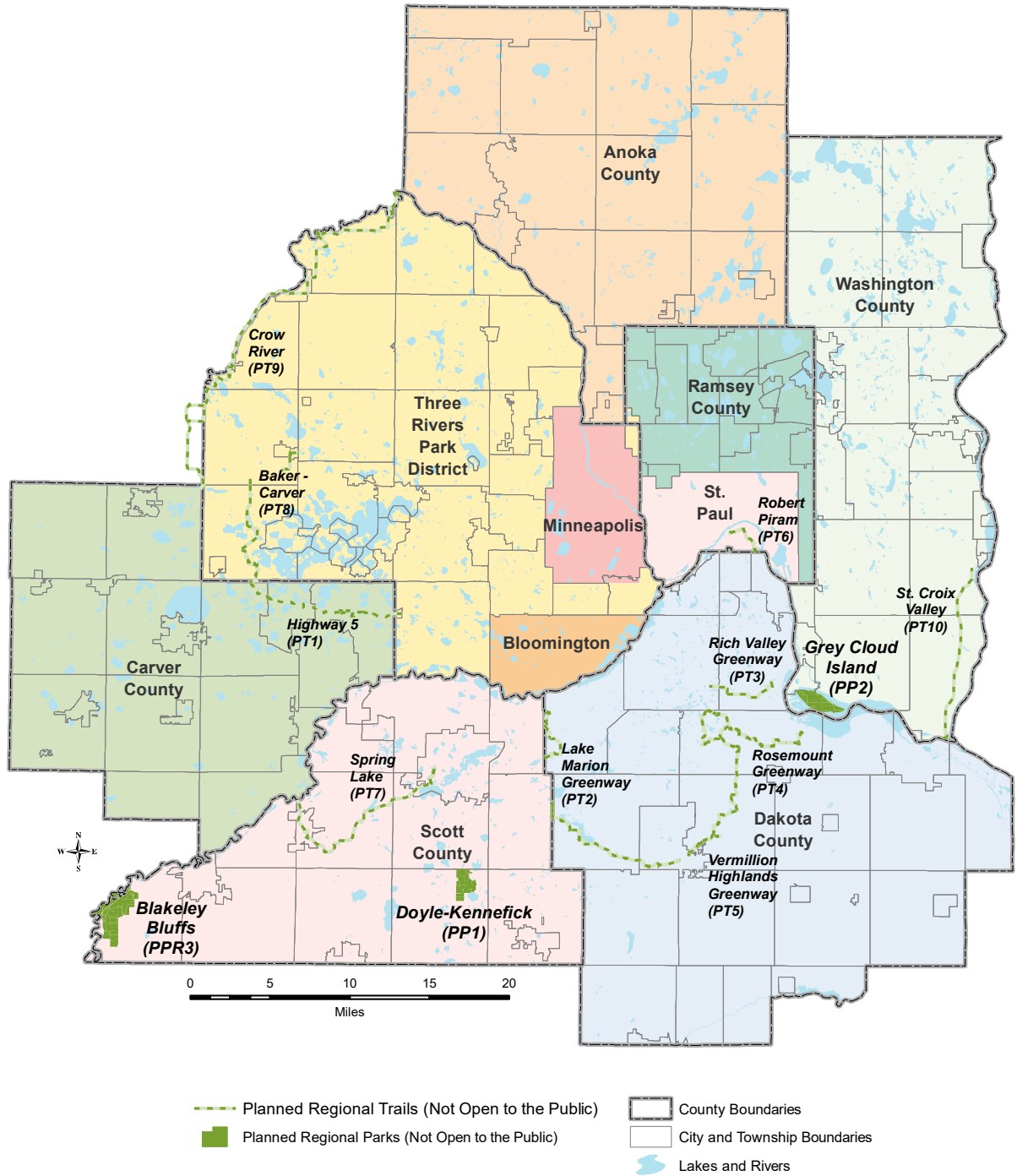
| Regional Park Implementing Agency | Regional Park                   | Map # |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|
| Scott County                      | Doyle-Kennefick Regional Park   | PP1   |
| Washington County                 | Grey Cloud Island Regional Park | PP2   |
| Regional Park Implementing Agency | Park Reserve                    | Map # |
| Scott County                      | Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve    | PPR3  |

Ten regional trails, totaling 116 miles, have Council-approved master plans, but are not yet developed or open to the public, as listed in Table 3-6 and shown in Figure 3-7.

**Table 3-6:** Planned Regional Trails Not Open to the Public

| Regional Park Implementing Agency | Regional Park or Regional Trail              | Trail Mileage | Map # |
|-----------------------------------|--|---------------|-------|
| Carver County                     | Highway 5 Regional Trail                     | 8.9           | PT1   |
| Dakota County                     | Lake Marion Greenway Regional Trail          | 20            | PT2   |
| Dakota County                     | Rich Valley Greenway Regional Trail          | 5             | PT3   |
| Dakota County                     | Rosemount Greenway Regional Trail            | 13            | PT4   |
| Dakota County                     | Vermillion Highlands Greenway Regional Trail | 13            | PT5   |
| Saint Paul                        | Robert Piram Regional Trail                  | 3.4           | PT6   |
| Scott County                      | Spring Lake Regional Trail                   | 12.5          | PT7   |
| Three Rivers Park District        | Baker-Carver Regional Trail                  | 11.4          | PT8   |
| Three Rivers Park District        | Crow River Regional Trail                    | 11.6          | PT9   |
| Washington County                 | St. Croix Valley Regional Trail              | 17.4          | PT10  |

**Figure 3-7:** Planned Regional Parks and Trails Not Yet Open to the Public (2014)



## Regional Park Boundary Adjustments

The 2040 *Regional Parks Policy Plan* recommends master plan boundary adjustments for one regional park to protect high-quality natural resources and provide recreational opportunities.

The proposed boundary adjustment is included in the 2040 System Plan and described in Table 3-7.

**Table 3-7:** Master Plan Boundary Adjustments

| Regional Park Implementing Agency | Regional Parks System Unit | Estimated Acreage | Description   | Map # |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|---|-------|
| Carver County                     | Baylor Regional Park       | 100               | Acquire approximately 100 acres of land adjacent to Eagle Lake, including lakeshore | BA1   |

## Regional Park Search Areas

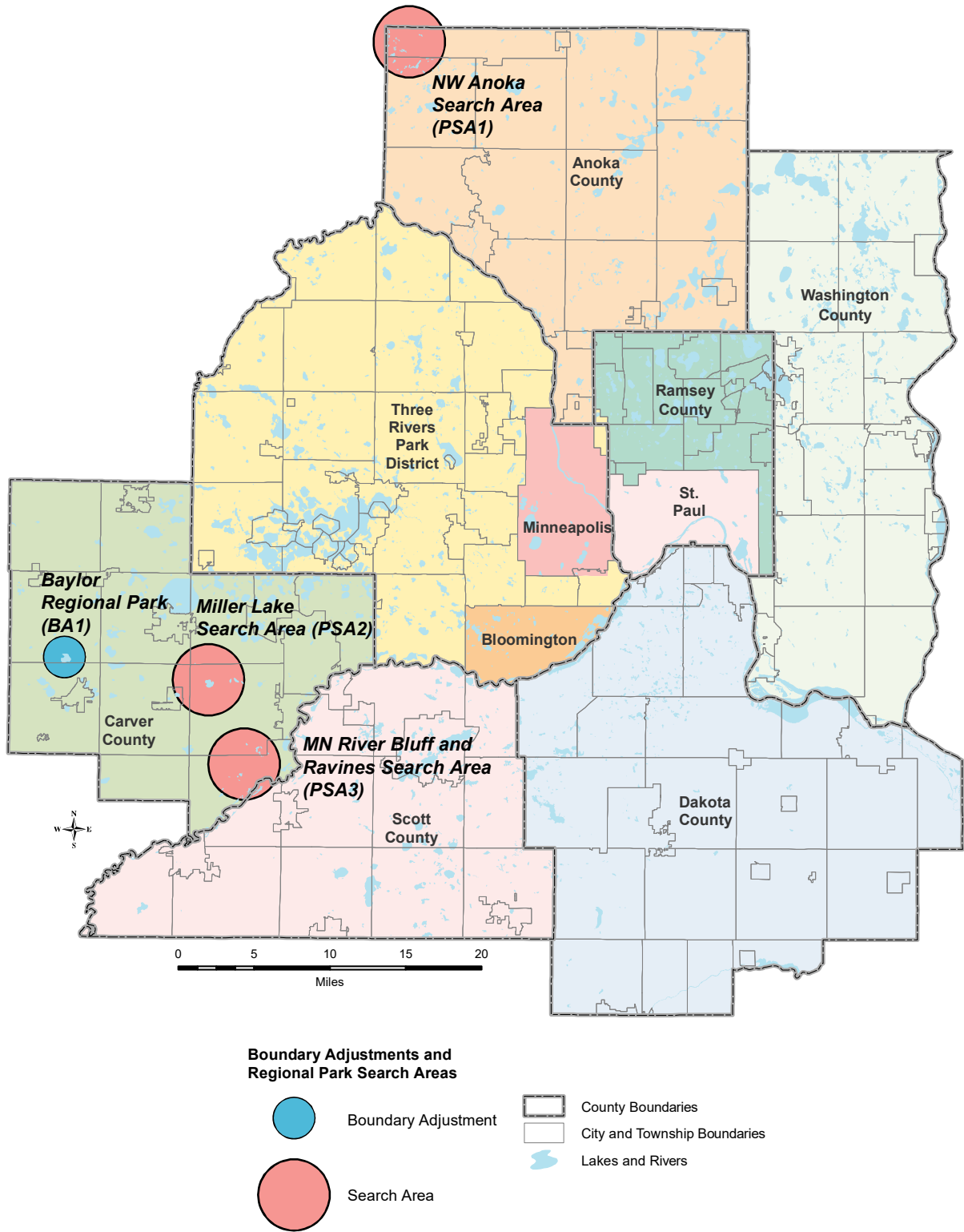
Three regional park search areas, totaling approximately 3,200 acres, are described in Table 3-8. Figure 3-8 shows a map of the regional park boundary adjustment and regional park search areas.

**Table 3-8:** Regional Park Search Areas

| Regional Park Implementing Agency | Regional Park Search Area                              | Estimated Acreage | Description  | Map # |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------|--|-------|
| Anoka County                      | Northwest Anoka County Regional Park Search Area       | 2,500             | Very high-quality natural resource area unique in Anoka County.                          | PSA1  |
| Carver County                     | Miller Lake Regional Park Search Area                  | 200               | Very attractive lake resource and appropriate setting for a regional park                | PSA2  |
| Carver County                     | Minnesota Bluffs and Ravines Regional Park Search Area | 500               | Large areas of regionally significant natural resources, excellent recreation potential. | PSA3  |



**Figure 3-8:** Regional Park Boundary Adjustments and Search Areas



## Regional Trail Search Corridors

There are 45 proposed regional trails without Council-approved master plans that identify the trail alignments. Many of these trails have been considered part of the Regional Parks System for several years and were mapped in previous Regional Parks Policy Plans as proposed trails showing a tentative alignment. Since alignments for these trails have not yet been approved by the Council as part of a master plan and are therefore not eligible for Regional Parks System funding for acquisition and development, they are being shown as regional trail search corridors. The estimated mileage of these regional trail search corridors is 525 miles. Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to prepare master plans for these trails. The regional trail search corridors are listed in Table 3-9 and shown in Figure 3-9.



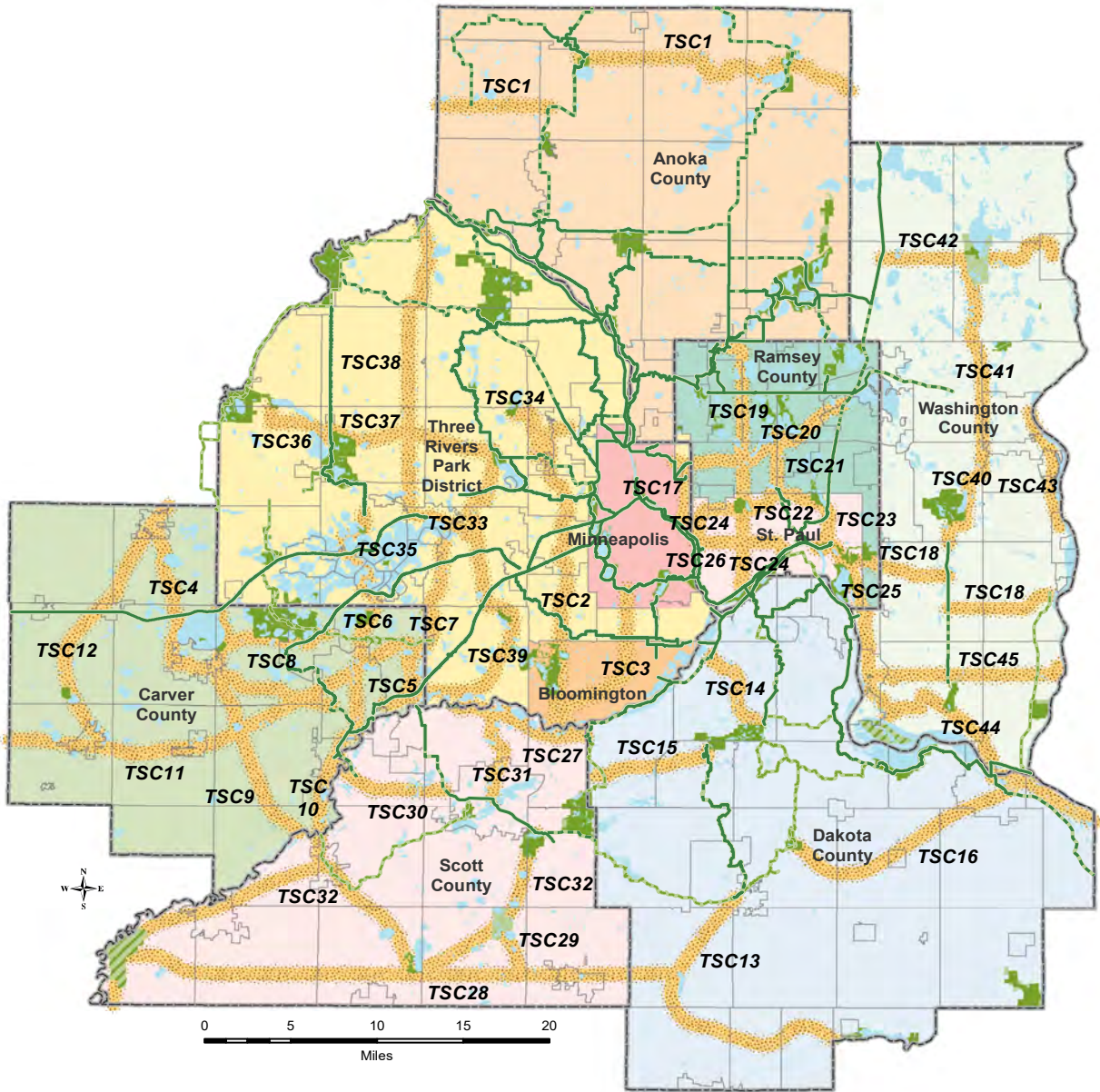
*Bruce Vento Regional Trail, Ramsey County/Saint Paul*

**Table 3-9: Regional Trail Search Corridors**








| Regional Park Implementing Agency        | Regional Trail Search Corridor                      | Est. Miles | Map # |
|--|---|------------|-------|
| Anoka County                             | North Anoka County                                  | 30         | TSC1  |
| Bloomington/Three Rivers Park District   | CP Rail   | 5          | TSC2  |
| Bloomington/Three Rivers Park District   | Progressive Rail                                    | 9          | TSC3  |
| Carver County                            | County Road 10                                      | 19         | TSC4  |
| Carver County                            | County Road 61                                      | 1          | TSC5  |
| Carver County                            | Highway 41  | 3          | TSC6  |
| Carver County/Three Rivers Park District | Highway 101   | 2          | TSC7  |
| Carver County                            | Lake Waconia  | 6          | TSC8  |
| Carver County                            | Lake Waconia-Carver                                 | 17         | TSC9  |
| Carver County                            | Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Extension                | 6          | TSC10 |
| Carver County                            | Twin Cities & Western                               | 25         | TSC11 |
| Carver County                            | Western Carver County                               | 17         | TSC12 |
| Dakota County                            | Chub Creek Greenway                                 | 20         | TSC13 |
| Dakota County                            | Lebanon Hills-Big Rivers Greenway                   | 7          | TSC14 |
| Dakota County                            | Lebanon Hills-Lake Marion Greenway                  | 7          | TSC15 |
| Dakota County                            | Vermillion River Greenway                           | 17         | TSC16 |
| Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board      | Grand Rounds Missing Link                           | 4          | TSC17 |
| Ramsey County/Washington County          | Afton Bluffs  | 3          | TSC18 |
| Ramsey County/Saint Paul                 | Lexington Avenue/Parkway                            | 9          | TSC19 |
| Ramsey County                            | St. Anthony RR Spur                                 | 10         | TSC20 |
| Ramsey County                            | Trout Brook Extension                               | 4          | TSC21 |
| Saint Paul                               | Como-Phalen (Wheelock Parkway)                      | 6          | TSC22 |
| Saint Paul                               | Johnson Parkway                                     | 2          | TSC23 |
| Saint Paul/Ramsey County                 | Lexington Avenue/Parkway                            | 6          | TSC19 |
| Saint Paul                               | Mississippi-Como                                    | 4          | TSC24 |
| Saint Paul                               | Point Douglas (Bruce Vento-Washington Co)           | 4          | TSC25 |
| Saint Paul                               | Summit Avenue                                       | 1          | TSC26 |
| Scott County                             | Big Rivers Extension                                | 5          | TSC27 |
| Scott County                             | Elko New Market-Blakeley-Doyle Kennefick            | 32         | TSC28 |
| Scott County                             | Elko New Market-Doyle Kennefick                     | 5          | TSC29 |
| Scott County                             | Louisville  | 5          | TSC30 |
| Scott County                             | Prior Lake Outlet                                   | 6          | TSC31 |
| Scott County                             | Southern Scott                                      | 35         | TSC32 |
| Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington   | CP Rail   | 21         | TSC2  |
| Three Rivers Park District               | Dakota Rail Extension                               | 2          | TSC33 |
| Three Rivers Park District               | Eagle Lake-Bassett Creek                            | 4          | TSC34 |
| Three Rivers Park District/Carver County | Highway 101   | 5          | TSC7  |
| Three Rivers Park District               | Lake Independence Extension                         | 7          | TSC35 |
| Three Rivers Park District               | Lake Sarah  | 6          | TSC36 |
| Three Rivers Park District               | Lake Sarah Extension                                | 10         | TSC37 |
| Three Rivers Park District               | North-South 1                                       | 28         | TSC38 |
| Three Rivers Park District               | North-South 2                                       | 20         | TSC39 |
| Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington   | Progressive Rail                                    | 10         | TSC3  |
| Washington County/Ramsey County          | Afton Bluffs  | 10         | TSC18 |
| Washington County                        | Central Greenway Regional Trail – Lake Elmo Segment | 8          | TSC40 |
| Washington County                        | Central Greenway Regional Trail – North Segment     | 16         | TSC41 |
| Washington County                        | Glacial Hills                                       | 12         | TSC42 |
| Washington County                        | Middle St. Croix Valley                             | 8          | TSC43 |
| Washington County                        | Mississippi River                                   | 17         | TSC44 |
| Washington County                        | Prairie View  | 9          | TSC45 |






Figure 3-9: Regional Trail Search Corridor Map



Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-9

-  Regional Trail Search Corridors
-  Regional Parks (Open to the Public)
-  Regional Parks (Not Open to the Public)
-  Planned Parks (Not Open to the Public)
-  Regional Trails (Open to the Public)
-  Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
-  Planned Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)

-  County Boundaries
-  City and Township Boundaries
-  Lakes and Rivers

## Revisions to the Regional Parks System Plan

Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1, states that:

The Metropolitan Council, after consultation with the [Metropolitan] Parks and Open Space Commission...and after appropriate public hearings, shall prepare and adopt a long-range system policy plan for regional recreation open space as part of the Council's Metropolitan Development Guide...The policy plan shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development.

Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subd. 14 defines "regional recreation open space" as:

...land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities determined by the Metropolitan Council to be of regional importance in providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area, including but not limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use facilities.

Consistent with these laws, the Council will evaluate proposed additions to the Regional Parks System to determine whether the general areas are of regional importance and will help provide a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area. Additionally, the proposed additions must meet the applicable criteria described in Chapter 4 for regional parks, park reserves, special recreation features, or regional trails.

### Regional Park Study Areas

Typically, new regional parks are proposed as search areas that have been identified based on high-quality natural resources located in portions of the region where population growth is expected. However, there are times when a regional park implementing agency may want to propose including existing parks into the Regional Parks System. In an effort to make an informed decision, further study is required to assess whether the proposed addition is of regional significance. The proposed area for consideration is called a Regional Park Study Area. Designation as a Regional Park Study Area does not guarantee that a park will become part of the Regional Parks System. It acknowledges that studies would need to be conducted to determine whether the facility warrants regional status. Once these studies are complete, the information would be presented to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Council for evaluation.

The Council conducts regularly scheduled visitor use studies to understand, among other things, visitor use patterns. The most recent study conducted in 2016 shows that the number of non-local visits (visits to regional parks made by people who do not live in the jurisdiction of the respective regional park implementing agency where the park is located) are declining. The Council will watch this important trend in the coming years. For now, study areas must meet a 40% non-local visitor threshold to qualify for regional park designation. Non-local visitation is determined through collecting data from existing visitors in the proposed park.

## 2040 Regional Parks System Plan Summary

As Figure 3-11 illustrates, the updated 2040 System Plan includes:

- Regional Parks System facilities open to the public (2018)
  - 44 regional parks
  - 12 park reserves
  - 8 special recreation features
  - 49 regional trails, consisting of 389 miles
- Planned Regional Parks System facilities that are not yet open to the public
  - 2 regional parks
  - 1 park reserve
  - 10 regional trails, consisting of approximately 116 miles
- Regional Parks System boundary adjustments
  - 1 regional parks
  - Regional Park search areas
  - 3 regional park search areas
- Regional Trail search corridors
  - 45 regional trail search corridors, with approximately 525 miles
- 2040 Update system additions<sup>3</sup>
  - System additions were not considered as part of this update

<sup>m</sup> 2040 Update System Additions may be added at a later date with consultation from partners and community stakeholders.



*Cedar Lake, Minneapolis*

# Introduction to the Policy and Strategy Framework of the Regional Parks System

- Chapter Four: Siting and Acquisition
- Chapter Five: Planning
- Chapter Six: System Protection
- Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities
- Chapter Eight: Finance

The next five chapters provide the policy and strategy framework under which the Regional Parks System operates. These chapters identify the kind of regional recreation open space facilities and services the region needs to acquire, develop, and operate in the future. The policies provide direction to ongoing efforts to plan, develop, operate, and protect the system.

The strategies are short- to medium-term actions that will advance the policies. Some of the strategies represent actions that the Council will take in developing the system or responding to conditions. Other strategies are directed to the regional park implementing agencies involved in implementation of the plan. The strategies are accumulative actions; each contributes to achieving the Council’s policies. Additional information about the Regional Parks System funding is in the Regional Parks System Fund Distribution Policy, adopted annually by the Council upon the recommendation of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission.





2040



## Chapter Four: Siting and Acquisition Policy and Strategies



### Siting and Acquisition Policy

Identify lands with high-quality natural resources that are desirable for Regional Parks System activities and put these lands in a protected status, so they will be available for recreational uses and conservation purposes in perpetuity.

#### Process and Criteria Overview for System Additions

The legislative charge to the Council is to prepare a policy plan that “...shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development” ([Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1](#)).

Adding a unit to the Regional Parks System, outside of a Regional Parks Policy Plan update, requires that the Council conduct a formal Regional Parks Policy Plan amendment process that includes a public hearing conducted under the requirements of Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147. In 2019, the Council will convene a region-wide discussion about system additions.

The Council’s role in this effort is to convene an evaluation process where the proposed idea may be considered within a larger regional context, recognizing that all system additions increase the total cost to complete the Regional Parks System, as outlined in Chapter 8: Finance – Strategy 9.

The following Regional Parks System criteria provide an overview of the decision-making framework to use when considering an addition to the system. The framework is broad enough to cover the predominant factors critical to each of the Regional Parks System units – Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Regional Trails, and Special Recreation Features – yet it is limited enough to be manageable and focus the conversation on the critical elements that matter most.

**Table 4-1: Regional Parks System: General Criteria**

| Regional Parks<br>Units must meet all criteria   | Park Reserves<br>Units must meet all criteria  | Special Recreation Features<br>* Required  |
|--|--|--|
| Draws visitors from across the region  | Draws visitors from across the region  | Draws visitors from across the region  |
| Provides for geographic balance  | Provides for geographic balance  | Provides for geographic balance  |
| Conserves a diversity of high-quality natural resources, either naturally occurring or human built, that support outdoor recreation activities | Conserves a diversity of high quality natural resources that support outdoor recreation activities | * Provides a unique high-quality outdoor recreation experience   |
| At least 100 acres; typically, 200-500 acres   | At least 1,000 acres   | * Provides a natural resource-based and scenic setting offering a compelling sense of place                                |
| Accommodates a variety of outdoor recreation activities  | 80% of unit managed as natural lands that protect the ecological functioning of a native landscape | * Demonstrates the existence or potential for drawing a regional audience  |
|  |  | Serves as a bridging facility, intended to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks System |
|  |  | Has a unique managing or programming effort  |
|  |  | * Complements the Regional Parks System  |

**Table 4-2: Regional Parks System: Regional Trails Criteria**

| Regional Trails: General<br>* Required  | Regional Trails: Destination (also known as Greenways)<br>* Required   | Regional Trails: Linking<br>* Required   |
|---|--|--|
| Draws visitors from across the region   | Draws visitors from across the region  | Draws visitors from across the region  |
| * Benefits the regional trail system and does not duplicate an existing trail   | * Provides high-quality natural resource-based “destination” trail experience  | Links two or more units of the Regional Parks System   |
| Connects two or more units of the Regional Parks System   | * Highly scenic and/or natural setting   | Links to or complements national, state, regional, and/or other local trails   |
| Serves as backbone to local trail network, with regional trail functioning much like regional highway that interconnects with more local arterials and local streets                        | * Extensively visually separated from road system (more than 50% off-road)   | Links to or complements federal, state, regional, or multiple local parks, recreation facilities, and natural resource areas   |
| * Fills a gap in the regional recreation system   | No spacing minimums  | * Should be at least 1.5 miles apart so as not to overlap the localized service area of those trails. There are times when meandering linking trails will come in closer proximity to one another, but broadly speaking are not parallel |
| Connects to multiple public interest destinations such as schools, job centers, tourist destinations, historical, cultural, and architectural buildings and sites, and commercial districts | * Provides opportunities to conserve, enhance, or restore natural resources  | May be on-road separated treadway  |
| May utilize surface rights of utility corridors such as large sewer lines   | May contain natural features in the greenway or adjacent to the trail treadway that provides important ecological services |  |



## Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 1: Priorities

Lands with natural resource features, access to water, and/or restoration potential will be a priority for the Regional Parks System.

Future Council designation of lands for the Regional Parks System should emphasize important natural resource features, access to water bodies, and natural resource features that enhance outdoor recreation.

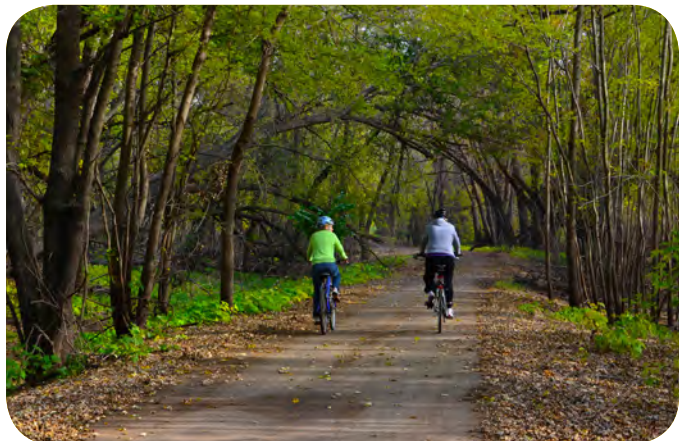
Water is a major attraction in almost every park unit of the Regional Parks System and an amenity along many regional trails. Most surface water is publicly held, with the waterbeds owned by the state, so it is a critical function of the Regional Parks System to provide this access.

Major considerations in deciding which lands should be brought into the Regional Parks System are:

- Acquiring lands with natural qualities most desirable for outdoor recreational activities
- Protecting an important natural resource feature, such as linking other natural resource areas or water bodies together, which in turn provide a larger natural habitat opportunity; help protect or improve water quality, or provide habitat for protected or endangered species
- Ensuring regional park facilities are evenly distributed around the metropolitan area or distributed in proportion to the existing and forecasted urban development

Past acquisition activity has tended to favor lands with high-quality natural resources over even geographic distribution. As the Regional Parks System matures, and available land with high-quality natural resources becomes more scarce, acquisition of lands with restoration potential have increased in importance. For example, lands with restoration potential include agricultural lands that were formerly prairie and naturalizing channelized streams.

The restoration of urban areas that include natural resource features (for example, Above the Falls Regional Park and the Bruce Vento Regional Trail and Nature Sanctuary) have provided opportunities to create regional park sites or regional trails in urban areas that have been home to a range of uses, including industrial ones.



*Carver Park Reserve, Three Rivers Parks District*

**Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 2: Geographic balance**

Geographic balance or proportionate distribution tied to population distribution patterns shall be a consideration when exploring system additions.

Geographic balance or proportionate distribution tied to population distribution patterns will be an important consideration when exploring system additions. There are other considerations that factor into system additions, including supply of regional recreation opportunities, access to natural amenities, among other things.

Regional recreation open space is defined as “...land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities determined by the Council to be of regional importance in providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area, including but not limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use facilities” (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subd. 14).

The legislative directive is clear that regional parklands should be of “regional importance.” Regional importance is not directly defined in the law, but the legislative directive requires that regional parklands, plus state facilities, should reasonably meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area. Therefore, lands of “regional importance” would be comparable in size, draw users from rather large geographic areas, and contain natural resources similar to the state parks and trails in the metropolitan region. Lands that serve only a municipality or neighborhood are not considered to have “regional importance.”

**Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 3: Council-approved master plans**

Priorities for land acquisition are set by regional park implementing agencies in Council-approved master plans.

Priorities for acquiring park and park reserve lands identified in Council-approved master plans are lands that are available for purchase now, which would be lost to the Regional Parks System if timely action is not taken, and that are:

- Essential to protect the natural resources that define a park or park reserve and make it usable to the public as planned
- Essential for the park or park reserve to reach its full-service potential for regional natural resource-based outdoor recreation as defined in the Council’s Regional Parks System plan and the park unit’s master plan

Most master plans provide for a range of recreational activities and developments that require lands in addition to those strictly needed to protect and enjoy the prime natural resource base. The full intent of the master plan will not be realized until these additional lands have been acquired for the system.

All privately owned parcels within a Council-approved master plan boundary are “in-holdings” until they are acquired. Some parcels have homes on them and are called “residential inholdings.” The acquisition of inholding parcels – especially those containing homes or those likely to be developed for residential or other urban uses – should be protected by first-right options to purchase, official mapping, life estates or other means. It is imperative that efforts are made to acquire these parcels because every time the land

is sold to another private party, the land remains unavailable for Regional Parks System purposes. If once-vacant land is developed for housing or other uses, it may become unreasonably expensive to acquire and is essentially lost to the Regional Parks System.

The Council, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, will work with regional park implementing agencies to systematically review inholding parcels that have been developed to determine whether the land is essential to protect the natural resources that define the park and make it usable to the public as planned, or whether the land is essential for the park or park reserve to reach its full service potential for regional natural resource-based outdoor recreation as defined in this policy plan and the park unit's master plan. The results of that review may conclude that some parcels or a portion of a parcel no longer meet those requirements and should be removed from the park's boundary through a master plan amendment. For example, historically small parcels with homes on the edge of parks have either been removed from the park boundary or subdivided, with the undeveloped land acquired for the park and the home removed from the park boundary.

Because of strong public attraction to water resources, acquisition of any additional public water frontage identified in a Council-approved master plan should be given a very high priority. The high demand and rapidly escalating value of water frontage will only make those lands costlier in the future. The priority is to acquire water frontage lands when they are most affordable – when they are undeveloped or, at least, developed with less expensive homes. Trying to convert land with water frontage to public use after it has been fully developed can be difficult and expensive.

### Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 4: New regional trails

New regional trails must serve a regional audience and provide connections between regional parks, park reserves, and regional trails without duplicating an existing trail.

To qualify for regional trail status, an existing or proposed trail:

- Must serve a regional audience, based on visitor origin and service-area research on regional trails
- Should not duplicate an existing trail
- Should connect two or more units of the Regional Parks System
- Should connect state or federal recreational units

The trail may include part of an existing county or local trail if it is a destination itself, providing a high-quality recreation experience that traverses significant natural resource areas, and it links two or more units of the Regional Parks System.

The regional trail system in the metropolitan area is like the highway system, with regional and local components. The regional component consists of trails in the regional trail system and state administered trails. These trails are complemented by shorter, local trails, which may eventually feed into units of the regional trail system. The opportunities for interesting regional trail recreation experiences are substantially enhanced where local trails intersect with or are reached by elements of the regional system.

Visitor origin data from the Council's *2016 Regional Parks and Trails Survey* indicate that regional trails in the metropolitan area are used most by people who live nearby or can reach

the trail in a short bicycle trip or drive. With more than 90% of the region's population living inside the Metropolitan Urban Service Area, the priority is to develop trail corridors in this area. Some of the metropolitan area's inner-ring suburbs are not close to regional parks and do not have large tracts of land that would be available for future development of parks for the regional system. Regional trail development should be pursued in these suburbs when the need has been identified, to help achieve geographic balance of Regional Parks System facilities.

Occasionally, existing corridors previously used for railroad or road transportation become available for new uses. This is particularly true of railroad rights-of-way that are no longer required for service. The most likely new uses for these corridors are either recreational trails or transitways such as light-rail transit, commuter rail, or bus rapid transit.

The availability of these corridors may offer excellent opportunities for the regional trail system to expeditiously acquire links that would otherwise have to be assembled on a parcel-by-parcel basis. All surplus corridors put on the market should be evaluated for their suitability as additions to the regional trail system. If an available corridor traverses an area with high-quality natural resources, or if it constitutes part of a link in the regional trail system, the corridor should be considered for trail use as part of the Regional Parks System. In some cases, available corridors do not provide any linkages or offer any potentially interesting trail recreation experience. In these cases, the corridors are not suitable for inclusion in the Regional Parks System.

If a surplus corridor is wide enough to accommodate permanent use both as a transitway and for recreational trail purposes, both uses should be explored. If a corridor can accommodate either transit or trail recreation, but not both, then recreational uses should be explored on a temporary basis. However, no significant long-term recreation investment will be made in the facility unless it will be in operation for its useful design life of 10 years or more.

The Council has defined two major types of trails to serve the region: 1) destination or greenway trails and 2) linking trails. Destination or greenway trails typically follow routes with high-quality natural resources, which make the trail itself a destination. Linking trails, on the other hand, are predominately intended to provide linkages between various Regional Parks System units, most notably regional parks, or park reserves, as well as other regional trails, and state and federal lands.

**Destination Regional Trails or Greenways** should be located to reasonably maximize the amount of high-quality natural resources within the trail corridor boundaries. For destination regional trails or greenways, there should be no spacing minimums or maximums between them; instead, the decision to locate the trail should be based on the availability of existing high-quality natural resources or the opportunity to restore, enhance, protect, or re-create natural resources.

The main criterion used to define regional parks and park reserves – the presence of high-quality natural resources – is also relevant to the location of a destination regional trail or greenway. Attractive settings contribute strongly to the quality of trail recreational experience. Since trails or greenways are linear elements, areas along rivers and streams or

chains of lakes are excellent candidates for incorporation into the regional trail system.

Natural features in the greenway or adjacent to the trail treadway serve ecological and environmental educational purposes, too. Restoration and management practices emphasizing native species can maintain and enhance the aesthetic, habitat, and other resource values of these areas.

**Linking Regional Trails** connect Regional Parks System units with each other, with other regional trails, state and federal lands, and with other regional destinations. As such, linking trails are more likely to be located within the Metropolitan Urban Service Area, as described in Chapter 1. Linking trails often overlap with the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, described in the Recreation Activities and Facilities Chapter, as they may serve an important transportation function. For linking regional trails, any two trails running parallel to each other, and not separated by natural or human-built barriers, should be at least 1.5 miles apart so as not to overlap the localized service area of those trails. Whenever possible, linking regional trails should be located to reasonably maximize inclusion of high-quality natural resources and connections to local trails, areas of lifecycle and affordable housing, the transit network, and areas of infill and redevelopment.

In the Metropolitan Urban Service Area, the siting of linking regional trails should consider both high-quality natural resources and to major human-built or developed resources in the fully developed areas. Interesting human-built resources include historical and architectural buildings and sites, education facilities, cultural facilities, and major public and private buildings. Utilizing the surface rights of underground utility corridors, such as large sewers, for trail purposes protects the utility for access/maintenance and provides a linear corridor for the trail.

When determining the boundaries of regional trail corridors, regional park implementing agencies should consider high-quality natural resource lands adjacent to the trail treadway to enhance the natural resource values of the trail. This is especially appropriate when the trail treadway is primarily an abandoned rail bed, in a power line corridor, or along a highway. These pockets of natural areas not only enhance the recreational experience of the trail user but also enhance the values of the primary land near the entire trail. Retaining these areas in their natural condition is the best use of the land, especially if it would be difficult to develop them for other land uses. An example would be including wetlands adjacent to the trail within the trail boundary. The wildlife habitat, water-quality values, plus the aesthetic values of the wetlands enhance the trail user's experience and encourage best land-use practices, since the wetland could not be developed economically compared to "dry" land.

Regional trails may pass through local parks along their route. The regional trails can enhance access to these local parks, and the parks may provide amenities for trail users. Because of this synergy, there may be a desire to incorporate these local parks into the regional trail corridor. However, these local parks may not be regionally significant and may only serve a local audience. In determining whether an existing local park should become part of the regional trail corridor, the Council will evaluate the request in terms of its regional importance and whether the park itself serves a regional or local audience.

As described in Chapter 3, the 2040 Regional Parks System Plan Map includes more than 700 miles of planned regional trails and regional trail search corridors throughout the region. Regional trails are one component of a more comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian network, which serves recreation and transportation purposes. To that end, future regional trail proposals need to be evaluated within a comprehensive, region-wide framework, most notably within the context of the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. This framework will ensure that regional facilities are not duplicated.

The Council will work with all the regional park implementing agencies to better integrate the regional trail network across jurisdictions and to assess the role of proposed regional trails with respect to the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. Additionally, efforts will include a comprehensive evaluation of funding for the regional trail system.

**Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 5: Special recreation features**

Special recreation features must enhance services and facilities already offered, not compete with, or duplicate them.

Special recreation features proposed for inclusion in the Regional Parks System must:

- Be unique and complement or enhance the services already offered by the regional system
- Provide a natural resource-based and scenic setting offering a compelling sense of place
- Be capable of functioning within the existing management structure of the Regional Parks System
- Not duplicate or compete with recreation facilities adequately provided by the public or private sector
- Not deplete funds from other facilities in the system either because they have an existing or committed financial base or because a prior agreement for a public subsidy has been reached that is in the public’s interest
- Demonstrate the existence or potential for drawing a sizable number of people from throughout the metropolitan area
- Be approved by the Council through the master plan process

Regional Parks System legislation indicates that the system should contain parks, park reserves and trails, and zoos, conservatories, and “other special-use facilities” (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subd. 14). The term “other special-use facilities” is not defined in legislation. This policy plan refers to them as a special recreation feature, which is defined to be a facility that preserves, maintains, and provides specialized or single-purpose recreational activities, such as:

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Nature centers                                  | Marinas                              |
| Zoos  | Downhill ski areas                   |
| Conservatories                                  | Arboretums                           |
| Display gardens                                 | Hunter training education facilities |
| Sites of historic or archeological significance | Bridging facilities                  |

Bridging facilities are specialized or single-purpose special recreation features that are intended to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks System. As of 2018, there are no bridging facilities in the Regional Parks System. As such, this may be an area for innovation, creativity and partnership for the Council, regional park implementing agencies, and community members. Bridging facilities may offer an opportunity to prototype a new idea that advances equitable usage of the system by focusing on groups who are underusing the Regional Parks System.

Furthermore, special recreation features must:

- Contribute to the inventory of available and needed recreation opportunities
- Contain distinctive developments and/or unique natural landscapes not commonly found in the parks, park reserves, and trails
- Require special programming or management

As of 2018, there are eight special recreation features open to the public:

Como Park Zoo

Kingswood

Silverwood

Como Conservatory

The Landing

Square Lake

Gale Woods Farm

Noerenberg Gardens



*Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, Anoka County/Three Rivers*

2040





## Chapter Five: Planning Policy and Strategies



### Planning Policy

**Promote master planning and help provide integrated resource planning across jurisdictions.**

#### Planning – Strategy 1: Master plan requirements

Regional park implementing agencies are required to prepare a master plan for each Regional Parks System facility they own and/or operate.

Minnesota Statutes, section 473.313 requires a master plan to be developed by each regional park implementing agency in consultation with all affected municipalities. While the statute requires only one master plan per regional park implementing agency, the Council requires individual master plans for each regional park, park reserve, regional trail, and special recreation feature. Master plans prepared by the regional park implementing agencies are critical in defining the specifics of acquisition, development, and operation of regional facilities.

The plans include the regional park implementing agency's estimates of use and costs. The master plan process allows residents to participate in the development of the plan and other units of government to know what is planned for a park and how it affects them. Collectively, these master plans form the regional park implementing agencies' part of the regional system plan. The Council reviews master plans for consistency with this Regional Parks Policy Plan and other Council policy plans. Inconsistent plans will be returned with comments to the regional park implementing agency, which must revise and resubmit their plans to the Council. For a regional park implementing agency to receive a grant for acquisition or development, the proposed project must be consistent with a Council-approved master plan.

To inform demand forecasts, public engagement and equity analyses, the Council will provide agencies contextual information such as demographic data for the region and their jurisdictions, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, household income, ability, age, educational attainment, and gender. This information will help identify communities who may be underserved by the Regional Parks System.

## Master Plan Content Requirements

Each master plan for regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features must include information for each of these items.

- **Boundaries and acquisition costs:** A list of parcels to be acquired and the estimated total cost and schedule for their acquisition, and information on natural resources, site suitability, special assessments, potential contamination based on data from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and other conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the boundaries.
- **Stewardship plan:** A program for managing park property, including activities, expenses, and anticipated revenue prior to developing the property for recreation purposes. Planned non-recreation uses and disposition of revenue from such use should be detailed.
- **Demand forecast:** The recreational demand to be met by the site as identified by the Council, the regional park implementing agency, or other sources.
- **Development concept:** A plan for recreational development and natural resource management that should include:
  - Description and location of planned development and natural resources management projects
  - Approximate capacity of each facility
  - Mapping of existing and planned local and regional trail connections to the site and information on how they relate to development within the park
  - Wayfinding signage plan, indicating the types of signs and general locations within the park
  - Information on the source and location of drinking water that is adequate for the recreational uses of the park
- Schedule and cost estimates for each project
- Conflicts between recreational and natural-resource management needs in developing the park/trail unit should be addressed and resolved
- **Conflicts:** Identification of conflicts with other existing or proposed projects or land uses affecting the park/trail unit, including steps necessary for their resolution.
- **Public services:** A description of any non-recreational public services and facilities, such as roads or sewers, needed to accommodate the proposed recreational use, including the timing of these services and the arrangements necessary to provide them. Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to include transportation and transit planners in the development of a master plan.
- **Operations:** Rules, regulations or ordinances affecting the site, including estimated operation and maintenance costs and sources of revenue to operate and maintain recreation facilities and to manage natural resources in the park/trail unit. The operations plan should indicate how energy to operate and maintain the park unit is being managed and conserved. The plan should also state how solid waste from park users is recycled and disposed of consistent with applicable laws.
- **Partner engagement:** A process to involve affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state, and federal recreation providers in the development of the master plan or plan amendment. A master plan must describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned above. The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned master plan amendments to all affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state, and federal recreation providers and address their

concerns prior to submitting the plan to the Council. The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised and content resulting from engagement efforts.

- **Public engagement and participation:**

A process to engage the public in the development of the master plan or plan amendment. The public engagement process must seek to mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic barriers and include people of diverse ages, races, ethnicities, incomes, national origins, and abilities. A master plan must include the public engagement plan and describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned above. The process must include opportunity for the public to be heard and to have influence over the contents in the master plan. The regional park implementing agency shall address public concerns prior to submitting the plan or amendment to the Council. The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised and content resulting from engagement efforts.

- **Equity analysis:** An examination of who benefits and who is affected by the development of the resource considering race, ethnicity, national origin, income, ability, age and other pertinent characteristics, to identify communities that may be underserved by the Regional Parks System, and the impacts on these communities. In 2019, Council staff will convene a collaborative process that includes implementing agency staff, equity partners and advisors to define tools and approaches for the master plan equity analysis.

- **Public awareness:** Plans for making the public aware of services available when the regional park is open, including how to access the park by transit, if applicable.

- **Accessibility:** A plan that addresses accessibility, affordability, and other measures designed to ensure that the facility can be used by people with limited mobility. All new and updated master plans for the Regional Parks System must address compliance with ADA. As stated in Chapter 7, Recreation Activities and Facilities, regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to use U.S. Access Board guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas as a minimum standard of accessibility on all new or substantially altered capital projects within the Regional Parks System.

- **Natural resources:** As part of the master plan, there should be a natural-resource management component that includes:
  - A Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) as a part of the master plan process. An NRI should include a land cover inventory that is consistent with the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the MetroGIS – a consortium of government entities in the region that create, manage, and share digital geographic-based data in a geographic information system (GIS). The natural resource inventory should include native plant communities mapped in the Minnesota County Biological Survey and listed species (rare, endangered, and threatened) that are documented in the Natural Heritage Information System. The natural resource inventory may include other land-based information.
  - The Natural Resource Inventory should be a basis for projects/proposals to restore degraded resources and maintain high-quality natural resource features, including the estimated capital costs of natural resource restoration projects. Regional park implementing agencies should consult with natural

resource professionals in the design and final construction of park facilities, especially trails, that are adjacent to or cross over natural resource areas. The final design and construction should allow the public to view and enjoy these natural habitats with minimal adverse impact on that habitat.

- Information on how surface water and groundwater resources in the unit, including wetlands, will be protected. This should include standards and requirements that are consistent with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s best management practices for stormwater management. The master plan should include provisions to, first, avoid wetland impacts; second, minimize impacts; and, finally, mitigate impacts when no other options are available.
- Information on how vegetation will be managed.
- For regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features located in part or wholly within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA), master plans must also address the following:
  - Acknowledge the purposes of the MRCCA designation as detailed in Minnesota Statutes, section 116G.15, subd. 1

- Acknowledge the standards and criteria for the preservation, protection, and management of lands within the MRCCA in Minn. Rule Chapters 6106.0010 – 6106.0180
- Map the location of the parkland and its relationship with the MRCCA boundary
- Recognize that the design and construction of park facilities must comply with the standards contained in Minn. Rules 6106.0130
- Plan, design, and construct facilities and projects in a manner that protects primary conservation areas and public river corridor views identified by local units of government in their comprehensive plans

The effective date for these master plan requirements is May 1, 2019, in acknowledgement of regional park implementing agency planning processes that may be underway when the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* is adopted.



## Master plans for regional linking trails:

Each master plan for a regional linking trail must include information for each of these items.

- **Boundaries and acquisition costs:** A list of parcels to be acquired and the estimated total cost and schedule for their acquisition, and information on natural resources, site suitability, special assessments, potential contamination based on data from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and other conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the boundaries
- **Demand forecast:** The recreational demand to be met by the trail, as identified by the Council, the regional park implementing agency, or other sources.
- **Development concept:** A plan for development, including schedule and cost estimates for the project. The plan should include:
  - Mapping of existing and planned local and regional trail connections to the trail corridor
  - Wayfinding signage plan, indicating the types of signs and general locations along the trail corridor
- **Conflicts:** Identification of conflicts with other existing or proposed projects or land uses affecting the park/trail unit, including steps necessary for their resolution.
- **Public services:** A description of any non-recreational public services and facilities, such as roads or sewers, needed to accommodate the proposed trail, including the timing of these services and the arrangements necessary to provide them.
- **Operations:** Rules, regulations or ordinances affecting the trail, including estimated operation and maintenance costs and sources of revenue to operate and maintain the trail.
- **Partner engagement:** A process to involve affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state, and federal recreation providers in the development of the master plan or plan amendment. A master plan must describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned above. The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned master plan amendments to all affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state, and federal recreation providers and address their concerns prior to submitting the plan to the Council. The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised and content resulting from engagement efforts.
- **Public engagement and participation:** A process to engage the public in the development of a master plan or plan amendment. The public engagement process must seek to mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic barriers and include people of diverse ages, races, ethnicities, incomes, national origin, and abilities. A master plan must include the public engagement plan and describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned above. The process must include opportunity for the public to be heard and to have influence over the contents in the master plan. The regional park implementing agency shall address public concerns prior to submitting the plan or amendment to the Council. The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised and content resulting from engagement efforts.
- **Equity analysis:** An examination of who benefits and who is affected by the development of the resource considering race, ethnicity, national origin, income, ability, age and other pertinent

characteristics, to identify communities that may be underserved by the Regional Parks System, and the impacts on these communities. In 2019, Council staff will convene a collaborative process that includes implementing agency staff, equity partners and advisors to define tools and approaches for the master plan equity analysis.

- **Public awareness:** Plans for making the public aware of services available when the regional trail is open, including how to access the trail by transit, if applicable.
- **Accessibility:** A plan that addresses accessibility, affordability, and other measures designed to ensure that the facility can be used by people with limited mobility.
- **Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area:** For linking trails located in part or wholly with the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area master plans must also address the requirements outlined in below in the destination trail master plan section. The effective date for these master plan requirements is May 1, 2019 in acknowledgement of regional park implementing agency planning processes that may underway when the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan is adopted.

### Master plans for regional destination trails or greenways:

Master plans for regional destination trails or greenways shall include all the elements outlined above for regional linking trails, as well as a stewardship plan and natural resource inventory:

- **Stewardship plan:** A program for managing the surrounding greenway areas and natural resource features.
- **Natural resources:** As part of the master plan, the natural resource management component should include:
  - A Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) as a part of the master plan process. An NRI should include a land cover inventory that is consistent with the Minnesota Land Cover Classification system developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Metro GIS – a consortium of government entities in the region that create, manage, and share digital geographic-based data in a geographic information system (GIS). Using the same NRI format will ensure compatibility with other natural resource inventories that have been completed or will be done in the metropolitan region. The natural resource inventory should include native plant communities mapped in the Minnesota County Biological Survey and listed species (rare, endangered, and threatened) that are documented in the Natural Heritage Information System.

- The Natural Resource Inventory should be a basis for projects/proposals to restore degraded resources and maintain high-quality natural resource features, including the estimated capital costs of natural resource restoration projects. Regional park implementing agencies should consult with natural resource professionals in the design and final construction of the trail/greenway that are adjacent to or cross over natural resource areas. The final design and construction should allow the public to view and enjoy these natural habitats, balancing conservation of natural resources with the provision of recreational opportunities.
- Information on how surface water and groundwater resources in the unit, including wetlands, will be protected. If appropriate, this should include standards and requirements that are consistent with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's best management practices for stormwater management. The master plan should include provisions to, first, avoid wetland impacts; second, minimize impacts; and, finally, mitigate impacts when no other options are available.
  - Information on how vegetation will be managed.

- For trails located in part or wholly within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area, master plans must also address the following:
  - Acknowledge the purposes of the MRCCA designation as detailed in Minnesota Statutes, section 116G.15, subd. 1
  - Acknowledge the standards and criteria for the preservation, protection, and management of lands within the MRCCA
  - Map the location of the trail corridor and its relationship with the MRCCA designation
  - Recognize that the design and construction of trail facilities must comply with the standards contained in Minn. Rules 6106.0130
  - Plan, design, and construct facilities and projects in a manner that protects primary conservation areas and public river corridor views identified by local units of government in their comprehensive plans

The effective date for these master plan requirements is May 1, 2019, in acknowledgement of regional park implementing agency planning processes that may underway when the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* is adopted.



Lake Rebecca Park Reserve, Three Rivers Park District

## Acquisition Master Plans

In some cases, a regional park implementing agency has an opportunity to acquire – or protect under an option to purchase – land that is not currently designated as regional recreation open space by the Council in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. In addition to informing the Council in writing of the land acquisition or option to purchase before it occurs, the regional park implementing agency is responsible for drafting an acquisition master plan or master plan amendment that focuses solely on the land required to establish the unit or adjust an existing Council-approved master plan boundary. The Council must approve the acquisition master plan prior to acquisition. Acquisition master plans shall include:

- A demonstration of the proposed regional park system unit’s consistency with Chapter 4: Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 1, including size/service area requirements
- Boundaries and acquisition costs: A list of parcels to be acquired and the estimated total cost and schedule for their acquisition, and information on natural resources, site suitability, special assessments, potential contamination based on data from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and other conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the boundaries

Before any development occurs or the Council provides any other financial assistance to the new or existing regional park system unit, agencies must gain a Council-approved development master plan that includes all of the additional required elements outlined above.

## Design Considerations for Master Plans

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* incorporates the policy direction provided by *Thrive MSP 2040* to:

- Promote expanded multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit network, where appropriate
- Strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region’s residents, such as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability

To respond to these goals, regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to consider the following design elements in a regional park or trail master plan.

Promote expanded multimodal access:

- Provide connections to transit stops or park-and-rides when designating the alignment of a regional trail, where appropriate
- Provide bike racks and lockers located near activity areas in regional parks so visitors can safely store their bikes as they recreate
- Design multiple entrance points to a regional park to make it easier for bicyclist or pedestrian to access the park, where appropriate



*Mississippi Gorge Regional Park, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board*



### Strengthening equitable usage:

- Provide amenities suited for the aging population and/or those with limited mobility, such as:
  - Siting picnic areas or short, looped trails close to parking lots or points of access
  - Providing benches as appropriate intervals along trails
- Designing non-fee picnic areas that accommodate mid-sized groups (for example, 15-25 people), which would allow for spontaneous gatherings.
  - Does not need to be a formal picnic shelter – could be several picnic tables grouped together
  - Would not require an advance reservation
  - Does not replace picnic areas that require reservations – both options may be offered
- Clustering of amenities for multigenerational family gatherings, such as picnic areas near playgrounds and open ball fields

### Amending a master plan

*Minnesota Statutes, section 473.313* requires master plans be developed by the park implementing agencies consistent with this plan; however, it does not specify when revisions are necessary. The regional park implementing agency will submit a master plan amendment to the Council to change its original proposal for acquisition and/or development, or when the agency has developed significant additional details that needs to be reflected in the master plan. The Council may approve or reject the master plan amendment for cause and return the plan to the regional park implementing agency for revisions to address the Council's concerns.

Regional park implementing agencies must provide an opportunity for the general public and affected local units of

government nearby the particular park or trail to participate in the process to amend a master plan. With regard to financing the construction of recreation and visitor support facilities proposed in a master plan, it is important that there is sufficient detail about the facility in the master plan and that the regional park implementing agency is ready to construct the facility when funds become available. If a master plan amendment is needed before funding the construction of a facility, the regional park implementing agency must provide the general public and affected local units of government an opportunity to participate in the process, as well.

There are several reasons when master plan amendments are required to demonstrate how changes to the Regional Parks System remain consistent with the Council's expectations as outlined in this plan.

They include:

- Improvements that substantially differ in type, size, scale or cost from those in the Council-approved master plan and the adopted capital improvement program to meet expanded local recreational demands or satisfy above-average quality standards (see Planning – Strategy 4, later in this chapter)
- Changes to a park or trail boundary
- Significant changes or additions to a regional park concessioners agreement (see Chapter 7: Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 1)
- Proposals for placement of telecommunications towers on Regional Parks System land (see Chapter 6: System Protection – Strategy 5)

The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and Council will then review the master plan amendment for consistency with the conditions of this policy and either approve, modify, or reject the master plan amendment.

**Planning – Strategy 2: Enhanced multimodal access**

Promote enhanced multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit system, where appropriate.

The Regional Parks System plays a key role in advancing the livability of the region by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, thereby supporting healthy lifestyles and active living. The Council has a unique opportunity to help achieve this objective, through its roles in planning and operating the transit system as well as planning for the Regional Parks System. In addition to design considerations for master plans discussed in the previous section, regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to:

- Provide transit schedules and information at regional parks that are served by transit
- Include information on how to access a regional park or trail by transit on their agency’s website, where applicable
- Improve wayfinding signage
- Promote regional trails with existing Transportation Management Organizations (TMOs). A TMO is a public-private partnership that provides marketing and advocacy to promote multi-modal options for daily commutes.
  - Commute Solutions: serves Anoka County
  - Commuter Connection: serves downtown Minneapolis
  - Commuter Services: serves Bloomington, Eden Prairie, Edina, Minnetonka, and Richfield along the Interstate 494 corridor

- Coordinate with local jurisdictions to identify and plan for local trail connections to regional parks and trails as well as last mile connections from transit
- Collaborate with bike-share programs to site bike stations near regional parks and trails

The Council will explore the following projects:

- Collaborate with local agencies to develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Wayfinding Best Practices Guide
- Collaborate with Metro Transit or local transit providers to determine the feasibility of the following actions:
  - Promoting regional parks at bus stops
  - Exploring options for siting new park-and-rides near or adjacent to regional parks, or new regional trails near park-and-rides or fixed-route transit lines
  - Promoting a transit day pass or family pass to regional parks
  - Providing free rides to large special events in regional parks
  - Adding transit stops that are convenient to regional parks and trails



Lake Waconia Regional Park, Carver County

## Planning – Strategy 3: Joint powers agreements

### Joint powers agreements for regional parks system units are encouraged.

Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to enter into joint powers agreements with local governments regarding the acquisition, use, and operation and maintenance for focused improvements within regional parks system units.

Joint powers agreements need not be identical, but regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to negotiate arrangements that:

- Address who owns, controls, and manages the land under the parks system unit improvement
- Ensure that the parks system unit improvement will be open to all people (not restricted by residence)

The parks system unit improvement should be a truly regional facility since it will be eligible for regional and state funds to finance its acquisition, use, development, and operations/maintenance once the Council has approved a master plan for the parks system unit.

The duration of the joint powers agreements should last the expected life of the parks

system unit improvement and should be included in the parks system unit master plans submitted to the Council as an assurance that any funds provided by the Council for the park unit improvement would be spent consistent with the Council-approved master plan.

Regional trails usually extend through several communities requiring coordination for segment implementation. Regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features may coordinate with one or two local governments on specific facility improvements to enhance a Council-approved master plan. If an improvement to a regional parks system unit occurs on land owned by a local government instead of the regional park implementing agency, the regional park implementing agency may lease the park unit land and manage it through a joint powers agreement with the local jurisdiction.

Regional park implementing agencies should include a copy of any joint powers agreements as part of the regional parks system unit master plan. This assures the Council that any funds it provides or passes on for the parks system unit's acquisition, development, use, or operation and maintenance will be consistent with the Council-approved master plan.



*Spring Lake Park Reserve, Dakota County*

## Planning – Strategy 4: Cost sharing

Projects may share costs, if they are consistent with a Council-approved master plan.

A regional park implementing agency may wish to make improvements that substantially differ in type, size, scale, or cost from those in the Council-approved master plan and the adopted capital improvement program, to meet expanded local recreational demands or satisfy above-average quality standards. These improvements are subject to Council approval of an amended master plan.

Projects that are consistent with a Council-approved master plan, but exceed regional need as determined by the Council may proceed on a cost-sharing basis. Regional park implementing agencies must obtain Council approval in advance of undertaking cost-shared developments.

The master plan must include a funding proposal under which regional funds will be used only for the regional service facilities, not for facilities intended to serve local needs. In fairness to other regional park implementing agencies, it is necessary for the Council to limit funds to what is necessary to cover average improvements that will deliver adequate services, and not to pay for excessively ornate or elaborate facilities.

Even if all of the improvement funds come from regional park implementing agency sources or are raised through cost-sharing arrangements with other governments or the private sector, the regional park implementing agency must secure Council approval of a master plan amendment. All Regional Parks System lands must be committed to specific long-term planned uses. These lands must be protected from the intrusion of activities and developments

that are incompatible with the planned uses of the regional parks, park reserves, and trails, regardless of how the development was funded.

The regional park implementing agency may be required to pay the full amount or the extra portion of the project cost when the regional park implementing agency wants to develop a facility sooner than the Council has determined that it is needed to meet regional demand, or at a scale greater than regional demand warrants, or at a higher cost than the Council finds necessary to serve the regional interest. The following conditions apply to projects funded on a cost-sharing basis.

- The project must meet the same requirements of master planning and Council approval as any other Regional Parks System projects.
- Costs incurred by the regional park implementing agency as the local share of the project are not reimbursable.
- Where funds are available from private sources or sources other than the regional park implementing agency to share in project costs, the Council will work directly with the affected regional park implementing agency.



2040



## Chapter Six: System Protection Policy and Strategies



### System Protection Policy

Protect public investment in acquisition and development by assuring that every component in the system is able to fully carry out its designated role as long as a need for it can be demonstrated.

The Council has in place several mechanisms that protect the integrity of the Regional Parks System and of individual parts of the system.

- **Master plans:** The master plan defines acceptable activities within a system unit. The regional park implementing agencies must receive Council approval before proceeding with any activities inconsistent with the existing Council-approved master plan.
- **Restrictive covenants:** Regional park implementing agencies are required to record restrictive covenants on lands purchased with regional funds, to ensure that the land remains in regional recreation open space use in perpetuity, unless the Council agrees to a change.
- **Metropolitan Land Planning Act:** Proposed plans of local governments that have a substantial impact on or represent a substantial departure from the Regional Parks System Plan may be subject to a required plan modification by the Council to ensure that the system is protected.
- **Metropolitan significance:** Proposed development projects that have a substantial impact on or represent a substantial departure from the Regional Parks System Plan may be required to undergo a review for metropolitan significance, with up to a one-year delay in development if the project is found to adversely affect the system.

These standards in the metropolitan significance rules and in the plan amendment guidelines are currently used to determine an effect on or a substantial departure from the Regional Parks System:

- Impacts on the use of Regional Parks System facilities include, but are not limited to traffic, safety, noise, visual obstructions (for example, to scenic overlooks), impaired use of the facilities or interference with the operation or maintenance of the facilities.
- Impacts on natural resources include, but are not limited to, the impact on the level, flow, or quality of a facility's water resources (lakes, streams, wetlands, groundwater) and impact on a facility's wildlife populations or habitats (migration routes, breeding sites, plant communities).
- A proposed project is considered to have an impact on the system if it may preclude or substantially limit the future acquisition of land in an area identified in the system plan of the Council's Regional Parks Policy Plan.

## System Protection – Strategy 1: Local Comprehensive Plans

Local comprehensive plans may need to be changed if planned land uses would have a negative impact on current or planned regional park lands or facilities.

The Council may require plan modifications to local comprehensive plans, updates, or amendments if they:

- Will more likely than not have adverse and substantial impacts on the current or future intended uses of the Regional Parks System lands or facilities
- Are likely to have adverse and substantial impacts on lands that are officially recommended for acquisition in an adopted policy plan

There is a strong case for intervention in situations where potentially adverse land uses are proposed after a site for a Regional Parks System facility has been adopted by the Council in the System Plan section of this policy plan. Local governments will be notified of any changes to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* following Council adoption of the changes and will be given nine months to bring local plans and ordinances into conformance with the Council's plan.

The Council will review local comprehensive plan amendments and environmental documents to ensure that Regional Parks System sites and facilities are protected from land uses or projects that represent substantial departures from the Regional Parks System Plan, or are likely to have a substantial impact on the Regional Parks System.

Substantial departures from the Regional Parks System Plan or impacts on the Regional Parks System may include, but are not limited to:

- Plans that don't acknowledge the presence of the Regional Parks System unit
- Projects that create safety issues for Regional Parks System users
- Projects that impair the use and enjoyment of the Regional Parks System unit due to excessive noise, air pollution or water pollution, and
- Projects that interfere with the operation and maintenance of the Regional Parks System unit

Where appropriate, the Council will initiate or accept for initiation a metropolitan significance review of specific projects if it is necessary to help protect the Regional Parks System. A project that is consistent with a Council-approved local comprehensive plan is exempt from metropolitan significance reviews for metropolitan system effects.

In accordance with the Council's *Thrive* approach, increasing population densities in urban areas is preferable to scattered developments throughout the rural and agricultural areas of the metropolitan region. Increasing population densities adjacent to urban Regional Parks System units is not a detriment to those units if the urban development is designed in ways that are sensitive to areas that enjoy scenic views and the natural features of the Regional Parks System unit, and do not interfere with the operation and maintenance of the unit. The Council will work cooperatively with local governments to help ensure urban development and land uses in areas adjacent to Regional Parks System units occur in ways that preserve the integrity of the Regional Parks System.



## System Protection – Strategy 2: Conversions

Conversion of Regional Parks System lands to other uses is allowed only in limited circumstances and with approval of the Metropolitan Council.

Lands in the Regional Parks System will only be converted to other uses if approved by the Metropolitan Council through an equally valuable land or facility exchange as defined below:

**“Equally valuable land”** is defined as land that:

- Is contiguous to the Regional Parks System unit containing the land proposed to be exchanged (within the same park/trail unit)
- Has comparable or better natural resource characteristics
- Could provide comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land being released from the covenant

In exceptional circumstances, the Metropolitan Council may accept as equally valuable land the addition of land to another unit of the Regional Parks System where:

- The replacement land has comparable or better natural resource characteristics
- The replacement land has comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land being converted
- No other reasonable alternative exists and where all other provisions of this policy can be met

**“Equally valuable facility”** is defined as an exchange of land for facilities when recreational benefits and/or natural resource benefits are increased as a result of the exchange. For example, some land within a regional trail corridor may be exchanged to widen a highway if a highway department constructs a trail overpass or underpass of the widened road at no cost to the regional park implementing agency.

The Metropolitan Council will consider conversion of regional park land to other uses only if the conversion will not harm the Regional Parks System. The following criteria will be used to determine whether Regional Parks System lands may be exchanged for other land or a facility.

### Issues with respect to the existing park system unit

- Whether the regional park system unit can continue to meet Council standards for sites and site attributes established for the particular type of park system unit (regional park, park reserve, trail greenway or special recreation feature)
- Whether the regional park system unit will continue to function as originally planned
- Whether environmental features (wildlife habitat, water quality) will be adversely affected and can be protected with the new use
- Whether the loss of site or function will be made up through acquisition of a site with comparable characteristics adjacent to or in the immediate area of the current location
- Whether the regional park system unit benefits from a facility in exchange for the parkland
- Whether the need for the conversion, as in the instance of transportation improvements, is generated by the recreational park system unit

**Issues with respect to the alternative use**

- The land area needs of the proposed project
- Whether the specific site requirements for the proposed project are unique to the area proposed for conversion
- Whether the proposed project is consistent with Council policies
- Whether the proposed project is of greater benefit to the region than having the regional park system unit remain in place



For those changes that represent a potential system impact, the Council will use a process comparable to the review period for policy plan amendment that have a potential impact on the regional system. The Council will use an expedited review for conversions such as small exchanges of land to provide right-of-way for access.

Lands in the Regional Parks System may be subject to proposals for converting their use for a number of reasons. Some very limited conversions may be accommodated and still not affect the ability of the remaining area to offer the facilities and services planned. A well-designed transit waiting station, or a properly located and operated yard waste compost site could be of positive value to the regional system and can be worked out between the proposing parties, the implementing agencies, and the Council in accordance with the system management guidelines.

However, most conversions are likely to detract from the ability to provide the type and quality of outdoor recreation experiences promised in the master plan. Some of the undesirable conversion impacts will be obvious and direct, such as unsightly landscapes or structures, barriers to movement, loud noises, and night light or obnoxious odors. Other conversion impacts are more indirect, such as those that affect water quality and plant and animal life. In addition to adversely affecting the Regional Parks System’s ability to deliver service, removal of lands for non-recreation open space uses also sets a bad precedent.

**Restrictive covenants:**

The Metropolitan Council requires that a restrictive covenant be recorded on all land that has been acquired for the Regional Parks System using regional funds. The restrictive covenant ensures the parkland is used in perpetuity for Regional Parks System purposes and ensures that there is no sale, lease, mortgage of the parkland or other conveyance, restriction or encumbrance filed against the property unless the Council approves the action in writing and the Council’s approval is recorded against the parkland.

The only restrictive covenant amendments approved by the Council in which no land was exchanged were for small strips of land needed for public highway improvements. The land was needed to make roads safer and there was no alternative. These projects also improved access to the adjacent Regional Parks System unit.

### System Protection – Strategy 3: Reimbursement for contamination

The Council will reimburse regional park implementing agencies for contamination cleanup under certain conditions.

The Council will consider using Regional Parks System funds for soil contamination cleanup (remediation) or capping abandoned wells that have contaminated their groundwater aquifer on Regional Parks System land.

#### For lands already under regional park implementing agency control:

A regional park implementing agency may use its share of regional park capital improvement funds for financing soil contamination remediation or capping abandoned wells that have contaminated their ground-water aquifer on regional park land if the following conditions are met:

- The land is already under ownership or control of a regional park implementing agency through a joint powers agreement or lease, and was acquired or was under the regional park implementing agency's control before Phase 1 environmental assessments were required.
- The land is essential to make the regional park or trail function as intended according to a Council-approved master plan, and no reasonable alternative exists to relocate the park or trail facilities elsewhere.
- The park or trail is essential in contributing to strengthening neighborhood livability consistent with *Thrive MSP 2040*.
- The cost of cleanup does not qualify for federal or state soil contamination cleanup funds or abandoned well-capping funds from any other program, or funding has been denied.
- The regional park implementing agency has an agreement with the party that will remediate/clean up the contamination or cap an abandoned well that absolves the regional park implementing agency from any future liability of pollution caused by the contaminated soil or contaminated groundwater.

#### For lands proposed to be acquired by a regional park implementing agency:

A regional park implementing agency may request a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant to partially finance soil contamination cleanup (remediation) or capping abandoned wells that have contaminated their groundwater aquifer on land that is proposed for acquisition. More detailed information about eligible costs and procedures will be in the Regional Parks System sub-recipient administrative guide to be developed in 2019.



Lake Elmo Park Reserve, Washington County

### System Protection – Strategy 4: Environmental Site Assessments

Environment Site Assessments must be conducted for land that may be contaminated or may have abandoned wells prior to seeking regional parks funding for acquisition.

Regional park implementing agencies must conduct Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments on land that is suspected to be contaminated or land suspected to have abandoned wells as part its due diligence process for land acquisition. The Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment will determine the likelihood of soil contamination or abandoned wells, including the likelihood of contaminated groundwater aquifers. The findings of the site assessments should be included in the grant request submitted to the Council. If the results of the Phase 1 Site Assessment identify a need for further investigation, it may be necessary for the park implementing agency to proceed to a Phase 2 Environmental Site Assessment.

The costs of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 Environmental Site Assessments are eligible for reimbursement as an acquisition cost. More detailed information about eligible costs and procedures will be in the Regional Parks System sub-recipient administrative guide to be developed in 2019.

Prior to the Council determining whether the contaminated land, including lands with abandoned wells, should be part of the regional park or trail corridor, the Council will make findings of fact regarding the following factors:

- The likelihood and extent of the contamination
- Whether the land is essential to make the regional park or trail function as intended according to a Council-approved master plan and the existence of a reasonable alternative to relocate the park or trail facilities elsewhere
- Whether responsible parties have been identified who will remediate the site
- Whether the estimated costs to clean up the contamination or cap the abandoned well(s) outweigh the need versus the recreational, economic, and social benefits the regional park or trail would provide

If the Council concludes that the land should be added to the Regional Parks System, it does not guarantee that the contamination remediation will be funded through the Regional Parks System funding.



## System Protection – Strategy 5: Telecommunication towers

Telecommunication towers will only be allowed in regional parks or reserves if there is no alternative site and if mitigation efforts are made to minimize the impact on Regional Parks System lands and users.

The growth in wireless cellular and broadband systems and implementation of the regional public safety radio system has resulted in requests that Regional Parks System land be leased for antenna towers or that towers be located on or near Regional Parks System lands. Each of these radio frequency communication systems relies on a grid placement of towers. Co-location of antennas on fewer towers is not always possible, however, because the size of a particular grid varies from one system to another. In addition, co-location of antennas on one tower may not be possible if it causes frequency interference between the antennas. Federal laws allow local governments to regulate the placement of towers as long as there is no ban preventing reasonable market access for that communication system.

Antenna towers for telecommunication services and the regional public safety radio system are generally prohibited on lands within the Council-approved master plan boundaries of a Regional Parks System unit unless:

- The communication system is not able to function without placement of the tower on Regional Parks System land. All other alternatives must be considered for placement within the grid in order to avoid placing any tower on Regional Parks System land. The communication service provider must demonstrate that this criterion is satisfied in requesting approval by the Council and regional park implementing agency to place a tower on Regional Parks System land. The only exception to this condition is that a tower for the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System may be placed on Regional Parks System land even if it could be placed on private land instead, upon meeting the following mitigation conditions:
  - If there is no feasible alternative to placing the tower on park land, the tower's impact on the Regional Parks System land must be minimized.
  - The tower must be screened from view of regional park/trail users as much as possible through tower placement and design features agreed to by the regional park implementing agency.
  - The tower must be located on land that has already undergone regional park or trail development and is accessible through the existing park road system. Land in park reserves or regional parks conserved for habitat restoration and interpretation must be avoided.
- Co-location of antennas on one tower is preferred over constructing several towers if co-location has less visual and other environmental impacts on Regional Parks System land. The only exception to this condition is if co-location would result in frequency interference between antennas.
- Payments for placing telecommunication towers in regional parks or park reserves should be dedicated to the regional park implementing agency that owns the land for acquisition, redevelopment, development, or operation and maintenance of its Regional Parks System units.

Regional park implementing agencies must submit a master plan amendment to the Council for review that proposes a tower placement. The master plan amendment should state how the conditions listed above have been met. The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Council will then review the master plan amendment for consistency with the conditions of this policy and either approve, modify, or reject the master plan amendment.

If the land for the tower’s location has a restrictive covenant on it (required for land acquired with regional funds), the regional park implementing agency shall amend the covenant to recognize the temporary use of the tower with any conditions required for the tower’s lease and submit the amended covenant to the Council as part of the master plan amendment.

The Council will consider the master plan amendment and the restrictive covenant amendment concurrently and either approve or disapprove them, based on whether the tower will negatively affect the Regional Parks System unit. If a regional park implementing agency believes that a tower should not be placed on Regional Parks System land because the tower could not meet the conditions of this policy, the regional park implementing agency has the authority to deny the application.

Tower placement on Regional Parks System land shall be considered a temporary non-recreation use. As stated previously, any lease revenues for the tower easement must be used by the regional park implementing agency to further the acquisition, redevelopment, development, or operation and maintenance of that regional park implementing agency’s portion of the Regional Parks System. The regional park implementing agency must report the annual lease revenues to the Council and how the revenues were spent if they exceed \$2,500 per year. Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to charge “at cost” fees for public safety radio equipment on towers located on Regional Parks System land.



*Vadnais-Snail Lake Regional Park, Ramsey County*

## System Protection – Strategy 6: Placement of utilities

Regional wastewater infrastructure and other utilities on Regional Parks System lands should be placed in ways that minimize negative impacts on the regional park, its facilities, and its users.

To provide sanitary sewer services to Regional Parks System facilities and/or to implement the regional wastewater system plan, the Council's Environmental Services Division will work cooperatively with regional park implementing agencies to locate regional wastewater conveyance facilities on Regional Parks System lands in a manner that minimizes the impact on existing and planned park system facilities and natural resources.

If the Council is maintaining regional wastewater infrastructure on existing Regional Parks System land without an easement, the Council shall have the option to negotiate the terms of an easement. For new Regional Parks System facilities, the Council reserves the option to include an easement for a future regional wastewater infrastructure as a condition of a Council grant used to acquire land, provided that the conveyance is consistent with the Council-approved master plan.

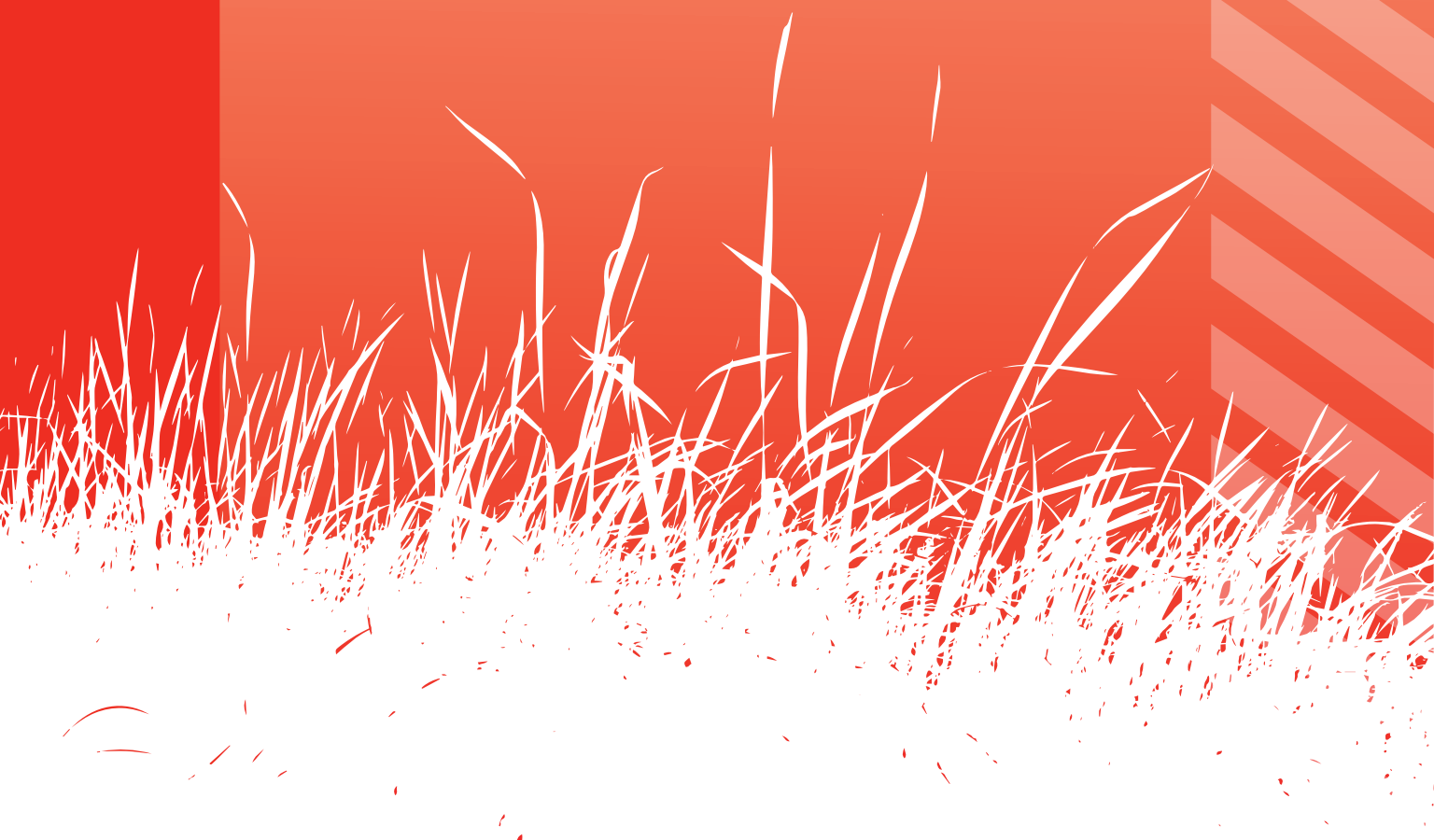
To distribute electricity, natural gas, oil, drinking water, and other utilities, it may be necessary to place underground conduits/pipes or above ground transmission poles/towers on Regional Parks System lands. Such utilities may be needed to serve visitors at that Regional Parks System unit, and to serve other land. Regional park implementing agencies should collaborate with the utility provider to determine where these utilities should be placed that minimizes impacts on the Regional Parks System unit's natural resources and on its existing and future recreation and visitor support facilities, while providing reasonable access to the utility line for repair and maintenance.

Regional park implementing agencies may either sell or grant an easement or a license to the utility provider that specifies where the utility may be located, conditions for access to the utility, how impacts to the park by placement, repair or relocation of the utility will be mitigated and any time limit on the easement or permit. The utility provider may have to pay for the easement or permit based on the benefit the utility provides to the Regional Parks System unit.



*Phalen-Keller Regional Park, Saint Paul/Ramsey County*

2040





## Chapter Seven: Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy and Strategies



### Recreation Activities and Facilities Policy

Provide a regional system of recreation opportunities for all residents and visitors while conserving the integrity of the natural resource base within the Regional Parks System on which these opportunities depend.

#### Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 1: Balance conservation and recreation

Activities in regional parks should balance the conservation and restoration of natural resources with the provision of recreational opportunities.

[Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147](#) requires the Council to prepare a policy plan that “...shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which, together with state facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development.”

[Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subd. 14](#) defines regional recreation open space as “...land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities determined by the Council to be of regional importance in providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area, including but not limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use facilities.”

Based on the legislative direction and definition of “regional recreation open space,” activities and facilities in the Regional Parks System should meet the following criteria:

- Be tied to high-quality natural resources and to the balanced distribution of these resources around the area
- Require land acreage to serve a regional scale audience
- Avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects and restore and enhance environmental quality
- Be compatible with the other uses and activities, minimizing user conflicts and preserving user experiences – these uses should be consistent with current master plan or other regional park implementing agency policy board decisions
- Help conserve, enhance, and/or restore the natural-resource base while balancing user access through facility development
- Remove or reduce barriers that prevent use of the regional system such as safety and access concerns, cost, transportation, and lack of information about programming and facilities

- Meet the changing recreational preferences to increase use of the Regional Parks System by all the residents of the region, across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability

The above criteria provide a framework to ensure the Regional Parks System can remain responsive to changing recreational needs while protecting the underlying character of each unit’s natural environment.

The following activities meet the above criteria and have served as the base of the Regional Parks System’s activities since its inception in the early 1970’s:

|                                       |                              |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Boating                               | Horseback riding             |
| Bicycling                             | Nature appreciation          |
| Camping                               | Picnicking                   |
| Cross country skiing                  | Snowshoeing                  |
| Cultural or historical interpretation | Snowmobiling (in some cases) |
| Fishing                               | Swimming                     |
| Hiking/walking/trail running          | Wildlife viewing             |

This list of activities describes primary activities of the regional parks system. Secondary or support activities and/or facilities should complement the primary use. Support facilities could serve specific users and communities, enhancing the desirability of the primary facility. Water-based facilities are an example of this relationship. Swimming is a primary activity in the Regional Parks System. Development of a water feature support facility could meet a targeted need while, if planned, designed, and implemented well, maintain the integrity of the system. The Metropolitan Council will further study and develop with input from regional park implementing agencies, other partners, and stakeholders performance criteria for secondary or support activities. This work should encourage innovation to meet future emerging activity and facility needs while preserving the natural character of the system.

The regional activities listed above tend to require large tracts of land, or land endowed with unique natural resources, or both. The land needs are easier to meet at the regional level than at the municipal level and the associated activities are more likely to be developed or provided at a regional level than by cities and townships.

When it was established in the 1970s, the Regional Parks System included several existing parks that had activities not currently considered appropriate for inclusion in the regional system. Many of these activities continue to operate legitimately today, such as ball diamonds and tennis courts, but they are not eligible for regional funding for improvement or expansion.

The regional park implementing agencies acquire land for the Regional Parks System with the intent that it may eventually be developed to provide for the recreational activities listed above. The list of activities above has served the regional system well over the last 40 years and has helped to fend off efforts to acquire and develop Regional Parks System lands for other ventures.

Regional park implementing agencies are responsible for the initial evaluation as to whether a new activity not included in this plan’s list of primary activities can and should be

accommodated in the Regional Parks System. When considering whether to accommodate a new activity, the regional park implementing agency must first assess how well the proposed activity meets the criteria described above. To accommodate new recreation activities that meet these standards, the agency will need to assess whether to incorporate any needed physical changes to the Regional Parks System landscape, which requires a master plan amendment (see Chapter 5: Planning – Strategy 1). For example, mixing motorized and non-motorized trail uses, such as snowmobiling and hiking, requires appropriate trail design and possibly speed controls and signage to safely accommodate both uses. Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to engage the public to develop solutions to any multi-use trail conflicts. In some instances, there may be no need for any physical change to the regional park or trail unit, but a change in visitor or park management rules or policies may be necessary, such as allowing off-leash dog use on a trail, for example. Such park and trail management issues should be resolved by the regional park implementing agency’s policy board after appropriate public input and consideration of how these management changes affect the regional systems park unit’s environment, users, and the adjacent property.

If including a new activity in the Regional Parks System requires physical changes or facility construction beyond adjustments to visitor or park management rules or policies, the regional park implementing agency shall pursue one of two paths: 1) For a new activity or facility proposal not in the current Regional Parks System master plan, amend the unit master plan or 2) For a new activity or facility proposal included in a master plan updated within the last three years, an implementing agency may seek Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) and Metropolitan Council approval of the proposed design through a formal request including:

- Description of the request
- How request fits within the Regional Parks System and unit
- How request meets the above criteria for recreation activities and facilities
- Detailed development concept and schematic design
- Identification of conflicts and steps necessary for their resolution
- Community engagement
- Equity analysis
- Known opposition

MPOSC and the Council may approve the proposal, require improvements, or reject the proposal. If both MPOSC and the Council find the proposed new activity or facility consistent with the above criteria and Regional Parks System character, then the Council will approve the master plan/request without conditions. If either MPOSC or the Council finds the activity or facility incompatible with the above criteria and the character of the Regional Parks System, the Council may ask the regional park implementing agency to go back to modify or improve the approach or design. If both MPOSC and the Council ultimately deem a new activity or facility incompatible with the above criteria and the character of the Regional Parks System, then the Council reserves the right to exclude the activity or facility from regional funding, including calculations of the annual parks use estimates and the agency’s acreage total, similar to the treatment of incompatible facilities that pre-dated the Regional Parks System.

There has been a demand for organized amateur athletic facilities that serve several municipalities or organized league play within a municipality. Municipal recreation departments and/or school districts provide these athletic field complexes. The Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission is responsible for elevating the social and economic benefits of sports to enrich the lives of all Minnesotans. Grants for such facilities go through the sports commission, not the Council. Such athletic field complexes do not require a high-quality natural-resource land base; they are easier to develop on formerly disturbed lands. As such, athletic field complexes are inappropriate for development on Regional Parks System lands. However, informal ball fields that can be used for a variety of pickup games are encouraged in the Regional Parks System. The concept of an informal ball field encourages recreational use in this manner, but is not intended for programmed or league sports, since those services are offered in other recreational settings.

Off-road vehicles are defined as all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-road motorcycles and four-wheel-drive vehicles being used off designated roads. For this *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, snowmobiles are not considered to be off-road vehicles. Snowmobiles have been permitted on regional trails and in some regional parks when local ordinances and the regional park implementing agency have authorized such use. Local units of government in the rural areas of the region also work with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and snowmobile clubs to provide rights-of-way for snowmobile trails that link to other trails outside the region. The Council acknowledges that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has statutory authority under Minnesota Statutes, section 84.03 to provide for regulated use of off-road vehicles through its management of several legislatively dedicated accounts that contain license receipts and a portion of Minnesota gas tax revenues from the use of these vehicles. Siting and managing an off-road vehicle use area in the region that doesn't adversely affect nearby land uses and natural resources will require cooperation between the affected local unit of government and the DNR. Regional park implementing agencies may participate in siting an off-road vehicle use area, but the lead responsibility for siting and funding the area will be provided by the DNR under the authority it is granted in statute.

Regional park concessioners may operate within the Regional Parks System if the appropriate approvals from the regional park implementing agency have been obtained, as each agency may have different policies and procedures in place. Concessioners must provide park related amenities and services to park visitors without negatively impacting the natural resources of the regional park. Regional park implementing agencies must contact the Council to determine whether a master plan amendment is required to accommodate the concessioners.

Regional parks, park reserves, and special features may contain enterprise-fund recreation facilities that are compatible with the natural-resource base of the unit and do not conflict with the primary recreation uses of the park unit. Enterprise-fund recreation facilities include any facility that is expected to generate sufficient revenues to pay its own costs, such as golf courses, downhill ski areas, and water parks. These facilities are not eligible for regional park funds from the Council because enterprise-fund recreation facilities are expected to raise money for their development and operation in the same way as their private sector counterparts.

## Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 2: Range of recreation opportunities

The Regional Parks System provides a range of outdoor recreation opportunities, from developed to rustic. Regional park implementing agencies should focus heavy recreational use in the more developed parts of the system and lower impact uses in the more natural parts of the system.

The Regional Parks System offers a range of recreational opportunities that support a wide array of user experiences from active pursuits like bicycling and swimming to more passive activities like bird watching and nature study. The residents of the region are best served when the individual units that make up the system play to their strengths rather than trying to be all things to all people. As part of the upcoming system addition discussion that will commence in 2019, the Council will work with the 10 regional park implementing agencies and other stakeholders to explore the potential benefits of a classification system to help ensure the region meet the evolving needs of the residents while continuing to conserve the natural resources that serve as the foundation of the system. A classification system would help differentiate the Regional Parks System units by more clearly articulating how different units provide different kinds of amenities and opportunities, ranging from more natural experiences to more developed and programmed parks. This richer understanding of the variation available should optimize the recreational options available to the residents of the region and the advantages of having a truly regional system.

Facilities that attract many users require large capacity roads and connection to a municipal sewage treatment system. These facilities should be confined to regional parks and park reserves located in the region's Metropolitan Urban Service Area, as defined in Chapter 1, unless the demands for heavily used services cannot be adequately met at Regional Parks System units in those areas. If facilities need to be developed in the Rural Service Area, the master plan should justify facilities that will attract large numbers of users and indicate how support services and facilities, such as roads and sewers, will be provided.

Many regional parks and park reserves are located in the Rural Service Area because undeveloped high-quality natural resources, a major criterion for determining lands that are appropriate for the Regional Parks System, are more common in the less developed parts of the region. Many of the rural park reserves were existing parks that were designated as regional recreation open space when the Regional Parks System was established in 1974. In order to build up a large recreational land reserve to be used for future population growth, the Regional Parks System has acquired land in the Rural Service Area.

Much of the demand for recreational facilities, especially those that attract large numbers of users, can be adequately accommodated at properties in the Metropolitan Urban Service Area. Some activities, such as nature study, camping, and water recreation, are more likely at parks or park reserves located in the Rural Service Area. Intense developments at parks and park reserves in the Rural Service Area should be the exception rather than the rule and should be considered on a project by project basis. Developments intended to enhance the protection and preservation of natural resources, whether in the Metropolitan Urban Service Area or the Rural Service Area, advance the strong conservation role of the Regional Parks System, particularly park reserves.

## Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 3: Equitable use

Strengthen equitable use of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.

The regional park implementing agencies provide outstanding facilities, amenities, staffing, and programming to offer a welcoming environment. Activities hosted within the Regional Parks System include a breadth of opportunities for visitors, such as movies and music in the park, day camps, festivals, nature programming, among others. The benefits of park use are numerous, including improvements to physical health, well-being, learning, family bonding, and community building, inspiring a legacy of stewardship that strengthens friendships, families, health, and spirit. All residents should have the opportunity to enjoy the bountiful resources the Regional Parks System provides.

The regional park implementing agencies should act to remove or reduce barriers which prevent use of the regional system. Barriers may include safety concerns, cost, transportation, and lack of information about programming and facilities. If needed, new facilities and/or programs (including marketing programs) should be designed to increase use of the Regional Parks System by all the residents of the region, across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.

The Regional Parks System has been designed and developed to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for all the residents of the region, with facilities and services geared to meet the demands and abilities of the general population. To accommodate people of all abilities, regional park implementing agencies should construct facilities using universal design principles, to ensure reasonable access. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed by the U.S. Congress in 1990, has created specific requirements for development and rehabilitation projects in the Regional Parks System. All new projects and updated master plans for the system include ADA review. Regional park implementing agencies should use U.S. Access Board's *Final Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas* as a minimum standard of accessibility on all new or substantially altered capital projects within the Regional Parks System. Additionally, regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to provide participants with physical disabilities similar park and trail experiences through better design, accessible facilities, and adaptive programs.

Findings from the 2016 Regional Parks Visitor Study found that the relative proportion of visits from people of color to the Regional Parks System increased since the 2008 study. However, more work remains and the Council and regional park implementing agencies are committed to continue increasing the equitable use of system.

In 2014, the Council released its research findings on Regional Parks System use among select communities of color. The Council held 16 focus groups throughout the metropolitan region to assess recreational preferences, barriers to recreation participation, and suggestions to enhance participation. In sum, 263 individuals participated in the focus groups and self-reported diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Study findings revealed the most preferred outdoor recreational activities included walking, picnicking or barbecuing, and playground use. In terms of barriers to using the Regional Parks System, the most frequently identified barriers were lack of awareness, available time, fear or

safety concerns, language barriers, and weather. Focus group participants identified key suggestions to enhance park use, including:

- Increasing awareness
- Addressing safety
- Enhancing capacity of gathering spaces
- Creating a regional park ambassador program
- Increasing and diversifying programming
- Providing more events in regional parks
- Creating a welcoming environment

In addition to the study noted above, the Council invited feedback from around the region to identify strategies that would have the greatest impact on strengthening equitable use of the Regional Parks System. Based on the insights provided by more than 400 individuals, the Council identified and began to implement a suite of strategies to enhance equitable use.

In 2017-2018, the Council conducted additional community engagement to inform this *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* update. Engagement included a) follow up conversations with nine equity advocates and park partners who informed the plan in 2014, b) focus groups with a total of 67 individuals from communities underrepresented in regional parks, and c) surveys of 92 current parks visitors. Findings from the focus groups and surveys support findings on preferred activities from the 2014 study and provide additional information to inform policies on recreational activities and spending priorities. Walking remains the most frequently mentioned favorite activity for both groups. Notably, hiking/trails, camping, and dog walking were rarely mentioned by focus group members—the group from underrepresented communities—who more frequently named a desire for water activities, child-friendly spaces, playgrounds, family gathering and organized play spaces, and promotions and discounts to attract users.

Findings from 2017-2018 community engagement informed staff and policymaker review of the suite of strategies to enhance equitable use. Findings were also incorporated in an updated list of strategies, highlighted below. Each bulleted item is further described in the Finance Chapter 8 section that follows. To summarize, to enhance equitable usage of the Regional Parks System, the Council will:

- Create a set-aside competitive equity grant program for capital projects before the end of 2019, specifically targeted toward projects that would enhance equitable usage of the Regional Parks System
- Continue working together with regional park implementing agencies to achieve the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan’s intent to “connect people to the outdoors”
- Work with regional park implementing agencies to understand and document how funding requests advance equitable usage
- Conduct studies to inform Regional Parks System planning and management, including:
  - A region-wide visitor survey every five years to monitor changes in Regional Parks System use with the next Visitors Study in 2020
  - Targeted studies to better understand and provide for the outdoor recreational needs and preferences across social classes, age groups, racial, ethnic, and educational backgrounds, and ability status

- Continue implementation of the Regional Parks System ambassador program to assist with expanding awareness of the Regional Parks System and bring parks to the people
- Continue and expand convening stakeholder meetings with regional park implementing agencies, partners, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups to enhance knowledge and continuous improvement
  - Information shared will be systematically collected and shared electronically
- Require regional park implementing agencies to incorporate a public engagement process that includes involvement from individuals representing diverse ages, races, ethnicities, incomes, national origins, and abilities when developing or amending master plans for regional parks or regional trails
  - To that end, the Council will provide technical assistance and capacity-building
- Encourage regional park and trail design that meets changing recreational preferences, including:
  - Amenities suited for the aging population and those with limited mobility
  - Provide free-of-charge picnic areas that accommodate mid-sized groups (for example, 15-25 people)
  - Clustering of amenities for multigenerational family gatherings
  - Informal ball fields for pick-up games
  - Playgrounds, restrooms and water activities suitable for families with small children

#### **Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 4: Trail System Coordination**

**Bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be coordinated between the Regional Parks System and the transportation system.**

Safe, high-quality, continuous, barrier-free bicycle and pedestrian facilities shall be developed, maintained, and improved to function as integral parts of the Regional Parks System and transportation system. The Council is responsible for planning regional transportation, including bicycle transportation facilities. Since many regional trails also serve as commuter bikeways, it is important that Regional Parks and transportation planners work together when developing trail and transportation plans.

A comprehensive network of trails and bikeways that serve both recreation and transportation needs is desirable. This network should link state, regional, county and local trails, and should be integrated with other transportation modes and networks, including the transit system.

Regional trails are primarily multi-use recreation trails. They may be used for walking in small or large groups, jogging, bicycling, and for other wheeled, human-powered activities (e.g., skateboards, in-line skates, roller skis). Most regional trails should be developed so they are off or away from roadways. However, in some instances it may be necessary for a short stretch of trail to be on, or adjacent to, a road to bypass natural or artificial barriers or private property.

Regional trails will primarily consist of these types of facilities:

- Roadway-separated, independent trails include trails that run along abandoned railroad corridors, or utility or private easements, and exist in their own independent rights-of-way – these trails are also known as the Regional Parks System’s Destination Trails.

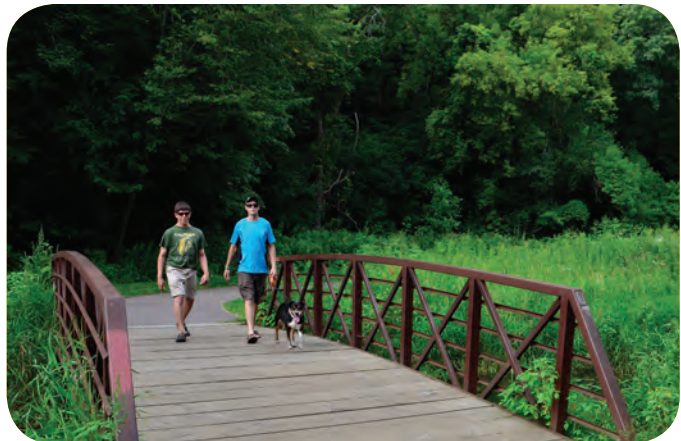


- Road-adjacent, multiple-use trails that run along and are adjacent to public roadways, but not on the roadway itself. In urban areas these would be above the street curb – these trails are also known as the Regional Parks System’s Linking Trails.
- Occasional on-road protected bikeways designed exclusively for bicycles along streets, below the curb and separated by a barrier from vehicle traffic – these trails are also known as the Regional Parks System’s Linking Trails.

With respect to bicycling, regional trails serve:

- Pre-teen bicyclists who are often accompanied by a parent and need access to local schools, libraries, recreation facilities, shopping, and neighborhoods. These bicyclists have a strong preference for separation from motor vehicles on protected bikeways and trails.
- Adult and teenage bicyclists who may ride regularly for transportation but prefer comfortable access by a direct route on lower-speed or low-traffic streets. These bicyclists are more comfortable on designated bikeways such as roadway-adjacent or independent trails.
- Bicyclists who are willing to travel along most roadways but prefer the more natural surroundings that regional trails can offer. They value direct access to destinations and can ride at higher speeds than average cyclists. This group will often rely on roads for transportation but will use trails when they are direct and enjoyable.
- Highly experienced bicyclists who want direct access to destinations at maximum speed with minimum delays. These bicyclists primarily rely on the road system for routes, and value using roads like other vehicles for commuting, but occasionally enjoy independent trails if they are relatively continuous and not overly crowded.

*Minnesota Rules Chapter 8820* apply to a regional trail project if the implementing agency receives state or federal transportation funding. This rule requires that specific design standards be used, including variables such as design speed and expected users. When regional trails pass through a regional park, recreational standards should be given higher priority due to the natural and recreational context. Implementing agencies should examine each situation carefully, identify potential conflicts between recreational and transportation needs, and engage interested stakeholders, including transportation planners and the larger community to come to a common solution.



*Battle Creek & Indian Mounds Regional Park, Ramsey County/Saint Paul*

## Regional Bicycle Transportation Network

The Regional Bicycle Transportation Network established in the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan*, is intended to serve as a “backbone” arterial network for accommodating daily bicycle transportation needs by establishing an integrated and seamless network of on-street bikeways and off-road trails. The network prioritizes corridors and alignments for regional planning and transportation investment. Cities, counties, park agencies and the state are encouraged to plan and implement future bikeways and trails in support of the network vision.

The regional bicycle network is based on a *Regional Bicycle System Study* analysis and prioritization of potential bicycle corridors. The study incorporated factors such as bicycle trip demand, network connectivity, social equity, population density, regional job centers, major destinations (including highly visited regional parks), and connections to transit. Alignments are defined where there are existing or planned bikeways, or a consensus of which roadways and planned trails would most effectively meet the regional corridor’s intent. Corridors are named where alignments have not yet been identified. The presence of corridors allows for local bike plans to determine an effective alignment that follows the corridor’s orientation and uses on-street bikeways and off-road trails to achieve an efficient facility route. Tier 1 corridors and alignments (highest priority) are planned in locations where they can attract the most riders and most effectively enhance mode choice in favor of biking, walking, and transit over driving alone.

Figure 7-1 shows the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network.

Many regional trails are included in the network such as the Cedar Lake, Samuel Morgan, Lake Minnetonka, and Bruce Vento Regional Trails. Figure 7-2 shows regional trails and the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network together to illustrate the overlap between bicycle recreation and bicycle transportation networks.

A more integrated and collaborative approach to regional trails and bicycle transportation planning is needed by the Council and its agency partners. Council staff will work to define opportunities for increased collaboration involving transportation and parks agency bicycle professionals and stakeholders and will incorporate those opportunities into future planning and implementation activities of the regional bicycle and regional trails networks.

Developers of trails that are included in both networks may need to resolve competing considerations such as design speed, needs of expected users, or protection of natural features.

For more information on the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, please refer to the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan* updated in 2018.

## Relationship to Other Technical Guidance

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* should be used in conjunction with the current versions of the *MnDOT Bikeway Facility Design Manual* and DNR’s *Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines*.

Figure 7-1: Regional Bicycle Transportation Network Designations

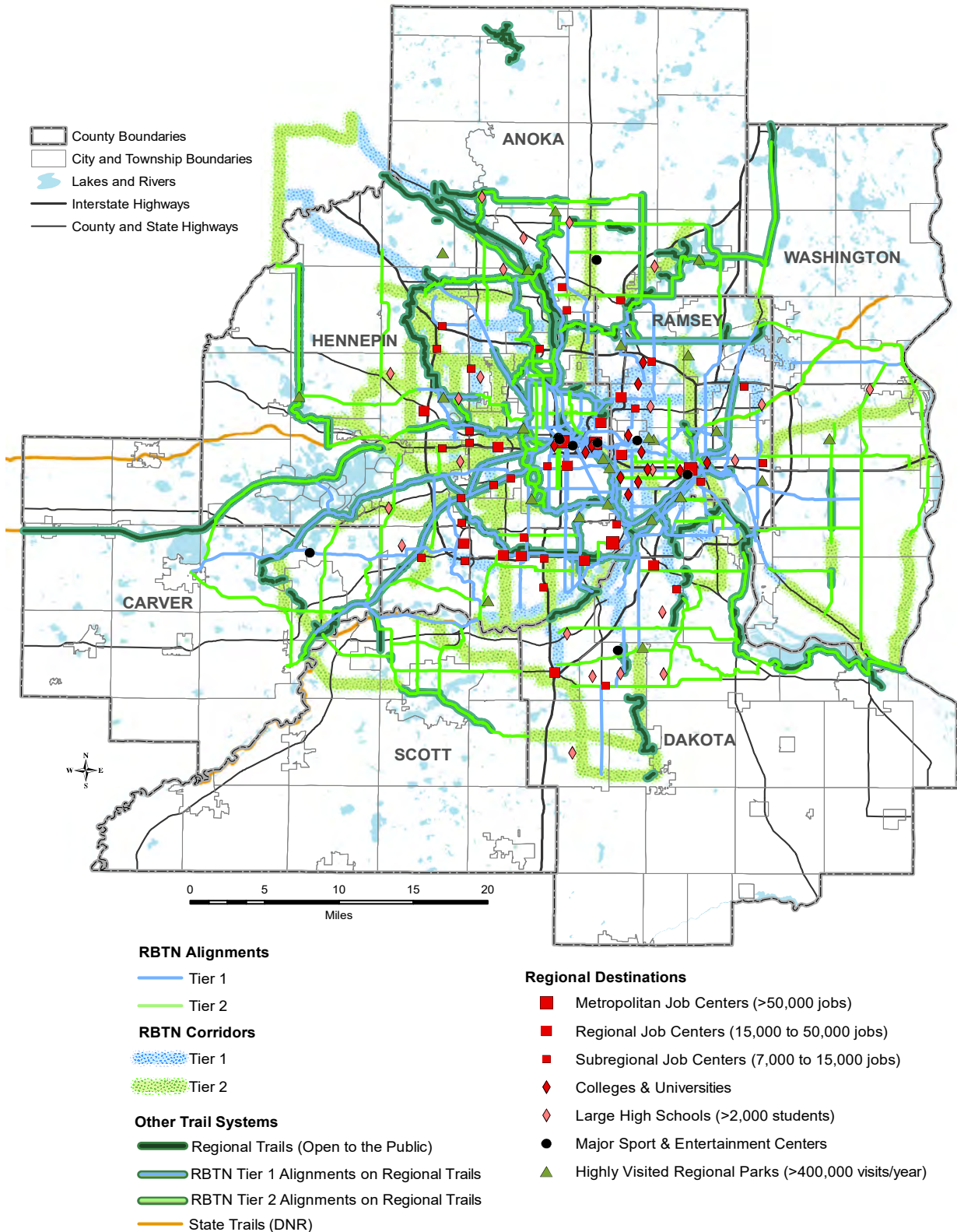
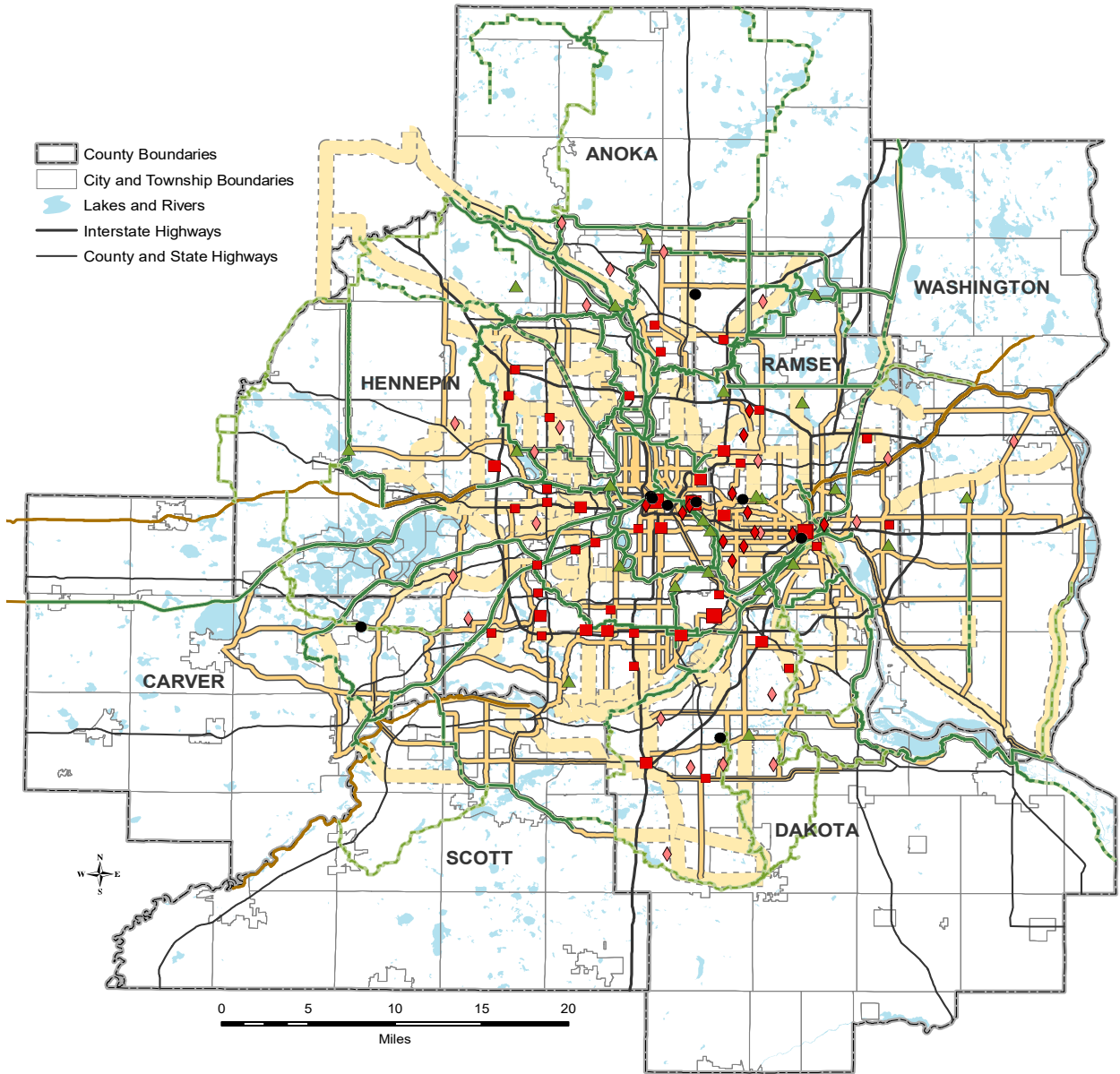


Figure 7-2: Regional Bicycle Transportation Network and Regional Trail System



- RBTN Alignments
- RBTN Corridors (Alignments Undefined)

**Other Trail Systems**

- Regional Trails (Open to the Public)
- - - Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
- - - Planned Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
- State Trails (DNR)

**Regional Destinations**

- Metropolitan Job Centers (>50,000 jobs)
- Regional Job Centers (15,000 to 50,000 jobs)
- Subregional Job Centers (7,000 to 15,000 jobs)
- ◆ Colleges & Universities
- ◆ Large High Schools (>2,000 students)
- Major Sport & Entertainment Centers
- ▲ Highly Visited Regional Parks (>400,000 visits/year)



2040



## Chapter Eight: Finance Policy and Strategies



### Finance Policy

**Provide adequate and equitable funding for the Regional Parks System units and facilities in a manner that provides the greatest possible benefits to the people of the region.**

Minnesota Statutes, section 473.315 authorizes the Council, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, to make grants from any funds available to it to the regional park implementing agencies to cover the cost, or any portion of the cost, of acquiring and developing the Regional Parks System in accordance with the parks policy plan.

#### **Finance – Strategy 1: Limited distribution of funds**

**Funds will be granted only to regional park implementing agencies.**

Any funds provided by or through the Council for the Regional Parks System will be granted only to regional park implementing agencies for projects consistent with Council-approved master plans, capital improvement programs, or state law. As previously noted in Chapter 2, and defined by Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351, the regional park implementing agencies are:

- Anoka County
- City of Bloomington
- Carver County
- Dakota County
- Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
- Ramsey County
- City of Saint Paul
- Scott County
- Three Rivers Park District
- Washington County

## Finance – Strategy 2: Uses of bond funds

Bond funds are used for acquisition, development, redevelopment, and natural resource restoration within Regional Parks System units.

Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1, requires the Council – after consultation with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, municipalities, park districts and counties in the metropolitan area – to prepare and adopt a system policy plan for regional recreation open space as part of the Council’s development guide. The law also requires the Council to include a five-year capital improvement program plan in the parks policy plan, which should be revised periodically, and to establish criteria and priorities for allocating funds from the capital improvement program – referred to as the “Regional Parks CIP.”

Development in Regional Parks System units should be based on the principle of providing and maintaining quality public park areas and facilities primarily for residents of the metropolitan area. The eligibility criteria (not in any priority order) for development, rehabilitation and restoration of regional parks, park reserves, trails, and special recreation features are:

- Projects that provide new facilities, rehabilitate facilities, or increase capacity where there is documented existing or projected high use
- Projects continuing a phased high-priority project or one of relatively high priority that is timed with other public improvement projects to achieve significant economies in cost of construction
- A project providing a specific facility that meets a documented need, is currently not available, or is significantly under-represented in the system
- Regional trails that connect to other trails or regional facilities or extend existing trails
- Natural resource restoration, including transforming degraded lands into lands with more representative native species and historic vegetation patterns. (For example, this work may entail the removal of invasive species, restoration of pastureland, or transforming industrial lands into a more diverse natural landscape.)
- Acquisition of parkland parcels or reimbursement for parkland parcels
- Matching non-state and non-Council funds to develop/rehabilitate recreation facilities or restore natural resource areas is encouraged
- Projects that provide essential facility improvements and natural resource enhancements to allow for the initial public use of a regional park once there is adequate demand and acquisition base to support the development

Early efforts of the Regional Parks System program focused on acquiring desirable tracts of land and incorporating existing park facilities that are valuable to the region. Since the lands in question were being used, or were intended to be used, for some form of recreation, it was recognized that eventually the new lands would require development and the facilities in the older parks would have to be redeveloped through replacement or reconstruction.

Regional park implementing agencies are responsible for the development and rehabilitation needs for their units in the Regional Parks System. Each regional park implementing agency ranks its proposed development and rehabilitation projects for possible inclusion in the capital improvement program of the Council. All of the proposed development and



rehabilitation projects may be desirable, but some – due to their location, their existing use or intended use – tend to be more valuable from a regional standpoint than others.

Adding recreational facilities to Regional Parks System units must be balanced with the conservation of natural resources, avoiding or minimizing adverse environmental effects and restoring and enhancing environmental quality.

The Regional Parks Bonding Program must, in accordance with Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, include “criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds.” Capital projects proposed for funding must be consistent with a Council-approved master plan. Projects proposed by each regional park implementing agency are prioritized by that agency. Each regional park implementing agency has unique capital needs, which that agency can best determine.

## Regional and State Bond Funds

State bonds have been appropriated to the Council since 1976 to help finance the Regional Parks System’s capital plans. Since 1994, the Council has financed the parks capital plans with a combination of state bonds and Council bonds; the Council matches every \$3 of state bonds with \$2 of Council funds. The premise for this mix of state and regional bonds is that people who live outside the seven-county metropolitan region visit and use the Regional Parks System and should therefore help finance its capital costs. Taxes collected statewide and within the region to pay off the bond debt are proportional to the share of visits to the park system made by people living within the region, and those who live outside the region. Additional information is in the Regional Parks System Fund Distribution Policy, adopted annually by the Council upon the recommendation of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission.

Minnesota Statutes, section 473.325 allows the Council to issue general obligation bonds for the acquisition and betterment of the Regional Parks System. No more than \$40 million of bond debt can be outstanding at any point in time. Since 1994, the Council has issued on average \$7 million per year of short-term bonds (5 to 10 years) for grants to regional park implementing agencies for land acquisition and capital improvements to the park system.

Since 2008, the Metropolitan Council has used a formula to determine how much of the state and regional bonds would be allocated to each regional park implementing agency. The formula balances two factors:

- The population within the jurisdiction of each park implementing agency compared to the region’s total population. (This factor is weighted 70%)
- The number of visits a regional park implementing agency hosted from people who live outside the agency’s jurisdiction (non-local visits — This factor is weighted 30%.)

The population factor recognizes the need to provide funds for park capital improvements to serve every person in the region relatively equally. Using non-local visits as a factor recognizes that these regional parks serve a regional and statewide population. Therefore, a combination of both factors is accounted for in the Regional Parks Bonding formula.

## Capital Improvement Plan

As noted above, the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* must include a five-year capital improvement plan (Table 8-1). The intent is to outline the funding strategy for the relative near term, such that regional park implementing agencies can use the information in their planning. These figures are subject to change based upon legislative action. The projections are provided by the Agencies in their plans and are based on their current estimate of funding levels.

**Table 8-1:** Metropolitan Council Five-Year Parks Capital Improvement Plan, 2018-2022

| Use of Funds | 2018         | 2019         | 2020         | 2021         | 2022         | Total         |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Expansion    | \$4,079,180  | \$3,400,000  | \$3,400,000  | \$3,400,000  | \$3,400,000  | \$17,679,180  |
| Improvements | \$29,875,435 | \$25,449,002 | \$20,280,861 | \$24,004,993 | \$21,723,831 | \$121,334,122 |
| Preservation | \$2,784,980  | \$903,120    | \$2,445,000  | \$690,000    | \$2,110,000  | \$8,933,100   |
| Total        | \$36,739,595 | \$29,752,122 | \$26,125,861 | \$28,094,993 | \$27,233,831 | \$147,946,402 |

| Funding Source | 2018         | 2019         | 2020         | 2021         | 2022         | Total         |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Other          | \$7,910,783  | \$2,993,361  | \$4,373,980  | \$4,707,613  | \$9,489,434  | \$29,475,171  |
| Regional       | \$4,508,227  | \$2,741,476  | \$2,210,924  | \$3,496,360  | \$1,222,800  | \$14,179,787  |
| State          | \$24,320,585 | \$24,017,285 | \$19,540,957 | \$19,891,020 | \$16,521,597 | \$104,291,444 |
| Totals         | \$36,739,595 | \$29,752,122 | \$26,125,861 | \$28,094,993 | \$27,233,831 | \$147,946,402 |

### Finance – Strategy 3: Uses of Parks and Trails Legacy Funds

Parks and Trails Legacy Funds spending must conform to the statewide Parks and Trails Legacy Plan.

In November 2008, Minnesota citizens approved a constitutional amendment, commonly called the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. The amendment created a new 3/8ths cent sales tax to be collected from July 2009-June 2034. Revenue from the sales tax is placed into four dedicated accounts. One of those accounts is called the Parks and Trails Fund. The constitutional amendment states: "...the parks and trails fund...may be spent only to support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance.... The dedicated money under this section must supplement traditional sources of funding for these purposes and may not be used as a substitute." (Minn. Constitution, art. 11, sec. 15)

The Council is the fiscal agent responsible for administering appropriations from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund to the regional park implementing agencies. In this role, the Council will ensure the Parks and Trails Legacy dollars are spent in the intended manner. To that end, the Council will ensure regional park implementing agencies target the funds to projects that capture the strategic direction outlined in the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan.

The Parks and Trails Legacy Plan specifies four strategic directions:

- Connect People and the Outdoors
  - Develop stewards of tomorrow through efforts to increase life-long participation in parks and trails
- Acquire Land, Create Opportunities
  - Create new and expanded opportunities to serve current and future users

- Take Care of What We Have
  - Provide safe, high-quality experiences through regular re-investment in infrastructure and natural resource management
- Coordinate among Partners
  - Enhance coordination among the network of public, private, and nonprofit park and trail partners

The strategic directions serve as the guideposts for how Parks and Trail Fund dollars should be invested. The Parks and Trails Legacy Plan should be consulted for additional information, specifically regarding particular activities (for example, investments) that are viewed as priorities to implement the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan.

Legislation enacted in 2009 directs how money appropriated from the Parks and Trails Fund to the Council is distributed to the regional park implementing agencies under a formula in the legislation (Laws of Minn. 2009, ch. 172, art. 5, sec. 6, subd. 3) The Council awards grants to the regional park implementing agencies based on that formula:

- 45% based on the operation and maintenance formula in Minnesota Statutes 473.351, provided in the section above
- 31.5% based on each agency's proportion of the population of the region
- 13.5% based on each agency's proportion of total non-local visits to the Regional Parks System
- 10% is allocated to land acquisition for the Regional Parks System

## Finance – Strategy 4: Equity considerations

### Equity is a consideration in Regional Parks System funding and investment.

*Thrive MSP 2040* states the Council will “strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region’s residents, such as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.” *Thrive MSP 2040* also states that the Council will use equity as a lens to evaluate its operations, planning, and investments. An equity lens, also known as an equity toolkit, is a tool government agencies use to collect information related to their major activities. Many government agencies throughout the country are using an equity lens to inventory, monitor, and institutionalize equity principles. An equity lens consists of a short series of open-ended questions that clarify both the positive and adverse impacts a project may have on equity.

The Council is strengthening requirements for incorporation of equity considerations in master plans. Planning – Strategy 1 requires that all master plans and master plan amendments include both inclusive community engagement and participation as well as an equity analysis that explicitly defines who is expected to benefit and be affected by the development of a regional parks system unit. Finance – Strategy 1 states that Regional Parks System funding will be granted only for projects consistent with Council-approved master plans. As a result, projects requesting Regional Parks System funding and investment will have gone through an extensive equity analysis as part of the master planning process.

The Council developed an equity toolkit for projects during 2016, in collaboration with external partners and stakeholders, including the regional park implementing agencies. The purpose of this equity toolkit is to raise questions of equity in conversation with the regional park implementing agencies and their boards as they select and prioritize projects. The toolkit includes a short series of questions that regional park implementing agencies complete as a core part of their Parks and Trails Legacy project proposals, and bonding project proposals. The toolkit helps identify populations that the project seeks to better serve. While the Council will not use these questions for project prioritization, the information provides the Council with a mechanism to track and monitor efforts and progress toward strengthening equitable use of the Regional Parks System.

Using Council bonds, the Council will create, fund, and administer a set aside, competitive equity grant program for projects explicitly aimed to strengthen equitable usage of the Regional Parks System. The purpose of this grant program, anticipated to be available no later than 2019, will be to strengthen equitable use of the Regional Parks System. To develop this grant program, the Council will work in close collaboration with regional park implementing agencies, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and other partners to formulate criteria and measures for awarding grants to regional park implementing agencies for capital projects for development and redevelopment aimed to strengthen equitable use.

#### **Finance – Strategy 5: Reimbursement limitations**

The Council may reimburse regional park implementing agencies for the costs of acquiring some lands before they have been made part of the Regional Parks System or for development projects undertaken before they can be financed through the Parks Bonding Program.

#### **Reimbursement for acquisition of land not currently designated in the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan**

Reimbursement will be considered for early acquisition of land that is not currently designated as regional recreation open space by the Council in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* under certain conditions.

If an agency or an entity under contract with that regional park implementing agency has incurred costs to acquire land or protect it under an option to purchase while the Council considers adding the land to the Regional Parks System, the Council will consider reimbursing the agency for acquisition costs after the Council designates the land as regional recreation open space through a plan amendment and approves an acquisition master plan. For additional information about this practice, please see the section on future reimbursement consideration in the Regional Parks System Fund Distribution Policy.

## Reimbursement for development projects undertaken before they can be financed through the Parks Bonding Program

Reimbursement will be considered for development projects provided that:

- The project is consistent in timing, scale, type, and cost with a Council-approved master plan
- All information required for the development grant is submitted to the Council prior to the regional park implementing agency undertaking the project
- The Council approves the project

For additional information about this practice, please see the section on future reimbursement consideration in the Regional Parks System Fund Distribution Policy.

### Finance – Strategy 6: Transit corridors

Regional trail corridors that may be used for transit in the future are eligible for Regional Parks System funding if it is clear the corridor will be used as a trail for at least 10 years.

Regional Parks System funds should only be used to acquire or develop a corridor identified for future transit use in a Council-approved transit implementation plan when there is a guarantee that the trail facility will be operational for its useful design life, as negotiated by the transit provider and the regional park implementing agency. As defined by the Federal Highway Administration, the useful design life of a trail is 10 years or more. In cases where trail recreation is to be a permanent partner with transitways, within the corridor, Regional Parks System funds will be used only for that part of acquisition and development attributable to trail use.

### Finance – Strategy 7: Use of Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund

The Council will use the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund as funding mechanism for the acquisition of Regional Park lands.

In 2001, the Council established the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund program to assist regional park implementing agencies in acquiring land for the Regional Parks System.

The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund consists of two accounts:

- The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund acquisition account, which is financed with 60% state appropriations from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. The remaining 40% of the account is financed with Council funds.
- The Parks and Trails Legacy Fund acquisition account, which is financed with 60% Parks and Trails Fund appropriations from the Land and Legacy Amendment. The remaining 40% is financed with Council bonds.

The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant may finance up to 75% of the costs to acquire land and related costs, or up to \$1.7 million per acquisition account for each state fiscal year (July 1 to June 30). The regional park implementing agency must finance at least 25% of the acquisition costs as a local match to the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant. See the Regional Parks Fund Distribution Policy for more information.

## Finance – Strategy 8: Use of Operation and Maintenance

The Council will distribute Operation and Maintenance appropriations to agencies.

Regional park implementing agencies raise funds to finance the costs to operate and maintain their portion of the Regional Parks System through the following sources:

- Fees collected from people using their parks. Examples include vehicle entrance fees, picnic shelter rentals, recreational equipment rentals, room rentals at visitor centers, and tuition for educational programs
- Local property taxes
- Local Government Aid payments from the State of Minnesota

In 1985, legislation was enacted that allowed state appropriations from the general fund to be disbursed to regional park implementing agencies to supplement funding for operating and maintaining their portion of the Regional Parks System (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351).

State appropriations for Regional Parks System operation and maintenance are distributed to regional park implementing agencies according to the following formula:

- 40% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system visits
- 40% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system operation and maintenance expenditures in the previous calendar year
- 20% based on each agency's proportion of total regional system acreage, with park reserve resource management lands divided by four

In 2000, legislation was enacted that directed a portion of state lottery proceeds into a "natural resources fund," with the stipulation that a portion of the receipts deposited "may be spent only on metropolitan park and trail grants." This funding source is commonly called "lottery in lieu of sales tax" revenue (Minnesota Statutes, section 297A.94(h)(3)). The Council disburses the appropriations from these two sources to the regional park implementing agencies based on the results of the formula contained in Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351).

## Finance – Strategy 9: Other funding

The Council will actively seek funding from the state and other sources.

The Council will seek continued state funding for acquisition, development, rehabilitation, and restoration and management of natural resources for all components in the Regional Parks System. In partnership with the 10 regional park implementing agencies and partners, the Council will pursue other sources of funding where appropriate for the benefit of the entire Regional Parks System. The Regional Parks System has been funded through a combination of state and local funding sources over the last 40 years.

The Council will work with the park implementing agencies to ensure that all sources of funding are used appropriately and in accordance with all legal requirements.

The Council will work in partnership with the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources to explore expanding the use of the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund beyond the current acquisition of high-quality natural resources to include acquisition

of lands with restoration potential. Additionally, the Council will explore other potential uses of this fund, including development, redevelopment and restoration.

Funding for operation and maintenance of the regional system has been provided primarily by regional park implementing agencies through local taxes available to them and, to a lesser extent, user fees. Since 1985, the state has provided some supplemental funding to regional park implementing agencies to help fund their operation and maintenance costs. Minnesota Statutes, section 473.351, subd. 3, states that:

Each regional park implementing agency must receive no less than 40% of its actual operation and maintenance expenses to be incurred in the current calendar year budget as submitted to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. If the available operation and maintenance money is less than the total amount determined by the formula, the implementing agencies will share the available money in proportion to the amounts they would otherwise be entitled to under the formula.

Between 1985 and 2014, state funding to support the operation and maintenance of the Regional Parks System has funded, on average, only 9.5% of the overall cost for operation and maintenance. Continued state supplemental support to finance 40% of operation and maintenance costs of the regional system will also be sought.

Importantly, any changes in the formula used to distribute state funds for operation and maintenance will require legislative action

### Estimated Costs to Complete the System

State law requires that the *Regional Parks Policy Plan* estimate the cost of the recommended acquisitions and development of the park system, including an analysis of what portion of the funding is proposed to come from the state and Council levies, and other local government units (Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1). The following analysis is an estimate of funding required to complete the system.

The estimated cost to complete the existing Regional Parks System is \$2.1 billion, including \$540 million in acquisition costs and \$1.6 billion in development costs (Table 8-2).

**Table 8-2:** Estimated Acquisition and Development Costs to Complete the Regional Parks System

| Category   | Acquisition Cost | Development Cost | Total Cost      |
|--|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Unbuilt portions of existing regional parks and trails | \$274,634,196    | \$717,038,793    | \$991,672,989   |
| Planned regional parks and trails                      | \$137,600,067    | \$255,077,600    | \$392,677,667   |
| Boundary Adjustments, Park Search Areas and Corridors  | \$121,948,200    | \$99,000,000     | \$220,948,200   |
| Regional Trail Search Corridors                        | \$6,259,614      | \$482,944,800    | \$489,209,414   |
| Total  | \$540,442,077    | \$1,554,061,193  | \$2,094,503,270 |

## Purpose and Use

This estimate is intended to fulfill the state requirement for a metro-wide cost to complete the Regional Parks System. It should also be useful to support overall discussion of financial aspects of the Regional Parks System, including:

- Availability and sources of funding for acquisition, development, and ongoing operation and maintenance
- Implications of adding new units to the system
- The value of regional parks to the region

The estimate is not intended to indicate costs for any single project or implementing agency.

## Methodology

The Council developed a new approach to the estimate for the 2018 update, intended to be transparent and replicable over time. The Council worked with implementing agencies to identify and confirm the cost components, data sources, assumptions and results. Previous Regional Parks Policy Plans provided estimated costs to complete the System, but the underlying assumptions and calculations were unclear.

The Regional Parks System Plan includes regional parks, park reserves, special recreation features, and regional trails in various degrees of completion:

- Already in use (which may include additional unbuilt or unacquired elements)
- Planned or acquired but not yet open to the public
- Search areas yet to be acquired and developed

The estimate uses the following components to accommodate this variety: acreages, acquisition costs, and development costs. These assumptions were developed in cooperation with implementing agency staff and compared to recent projects and master plans. Regional park implementing agencies provided and verified many of the underlying data in the estimate including:

- Data for total acres within the Council-approved master plan, acquisition acreage needed, trail miles needed, and the percent complete each Council-approved master plan is developed
- Refinements to boundary adjustments, park search areas, and regional trail search corridors
- Real-time development cost minimums and maximums for regional parks and trails
- Field-verified regional trail corridor width minimums and maximums

## Acreages

For parks and trails with Council-approved master plans, Council staff used acreages taken directly from those plans and confirmed with implementing agency staff.

For park and trail search areas where acreages are unknown, assumptions were applied. Trail corridors were assumed to be 30 feet wide and implementing agencies provided park acreages.



## Acquisition Costs

Land acquisition costs were taken from a 2016 Council analysis of land values throughout the metropolitan area. Two costs were used: inside the Metropolitan Urban Services Area, or MUSA (\$256,750 per acre), and outside the MUSA (\$36,950 per acre). See Figure 8-1. This analysis likely understates the actual cost of land with prime natural features and is noted as a topic for future refinement.

## Development Costs

Development costs include the cost of the facilities created on acquired land (such as buildings, parking, trails, and natural restoration and planting).

Average development costs for parks (\$30,000 per acre) were derived from recent (2013 to 2018) Council-approved master plans and compared with actual recent construction costs.

Average development costs for trails (\$256,000 per acre, or \$920,000 per mile) were also derived from recent (2013-2018) Council-approved master plans and compared with actual recent construction costs. The higher per-acre cost of trails than parks is due to their smaller acreage and greater percentage of built elements.

For existing parks and trails that are partially completed, implementing agencies provided an estimated percentage of completion to calculate remaining development costs. The average development costs listed above were multiplied by the percentage to be completed.

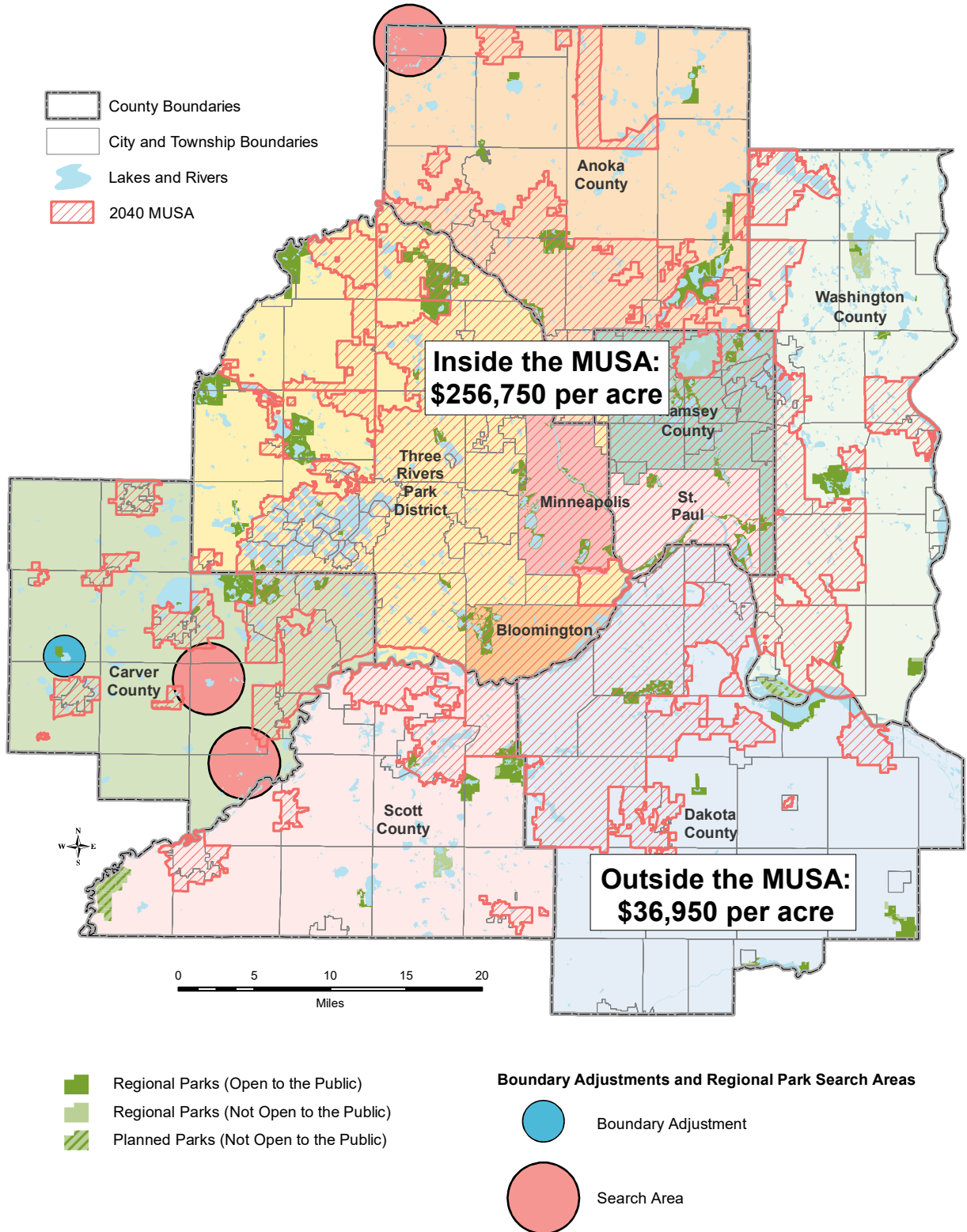
## Limitations

The estimate is intended for use only at a region-wide level. Because it uses average per-acre costs, application to an individual project or single implementing agency is inappropriate. Actual costs for individual projects will vary depending on the location and complexity of each project. The method likely underestimates costs in highly-developed areas of the region and overestimates costs in less-developed areas of the region. Refer to master plans, project funding applications, and recent construction for more information on project costs.

The estimate assumes that all needed land will be purchased at market value.

Park search areas, park boundary adjustments, and regional trail search corridors are shown in the plan for planning purposes only. The data provided by the implementing agencies varied from agency to agency.

**Figure 8-1:** Assumed Land Costs for Regional Parks System Acquisition, by Metropolitan Urban Services Area (MUSA) Location



## Analysis

Total acquisition and development costs to complete the Regional Parks System is \$2.1 billion including slightly less than \$1 billion for the unbuilt portions of the existing parks and trails (Figure 8-2), slightly less than \$400 million for planned units (Figure 8-3), and slightly more than \$700 million for search areas and corridors (Figure 8-3). Table 8-3 shows acreage, mileage and costs associated with each category.

**Table 8-3:** Combined Total Costs for System Completion (Existing Parks and Trails, Planned Units, and Search Areas and Corridors)

| Category  | Park Acreage | Trail Acreage | New Trail Mileage | Acquisition Cost     | Development Cost     | Total Cost           |
|---|--------------|---------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Unbuilt Portions of Existing Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Recreation Features, and Regional Trails (Figure 8-2)                                       | 3,006        | 140           | 173               | \$275 million        | \$717 million        | \$992 million        |
| Planned Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Recreation Features, and Regional Trails (Council-approved master plan, not yet open to the public) (Figure 8-3) | 3,529        | 70            | 116               | \$138 million        | \$255 million        | \$393 million        |
| Regional Park Search Areas and Boundary Adjustments (Figure 8-4) <sup>b,c</sup>   | 3,300        | N/A           | N/A               | \$122 million        | \$99 million         | \$221 million        |
| Regional Trail Search Corridors (Figure 8-4) <sup>b,c</sup>   | N/A          | 24            | 525               | \$6 million          | \$483 million        | \$489 million        |
| <b>GRAND TOTAL</b>  | <b>9,835</b> | <b>234</b>    | <b>814</b>        | <b>\$540 million</b> | <b>\$1.6 billion</b> | <b>\$2.1 billion</b> |

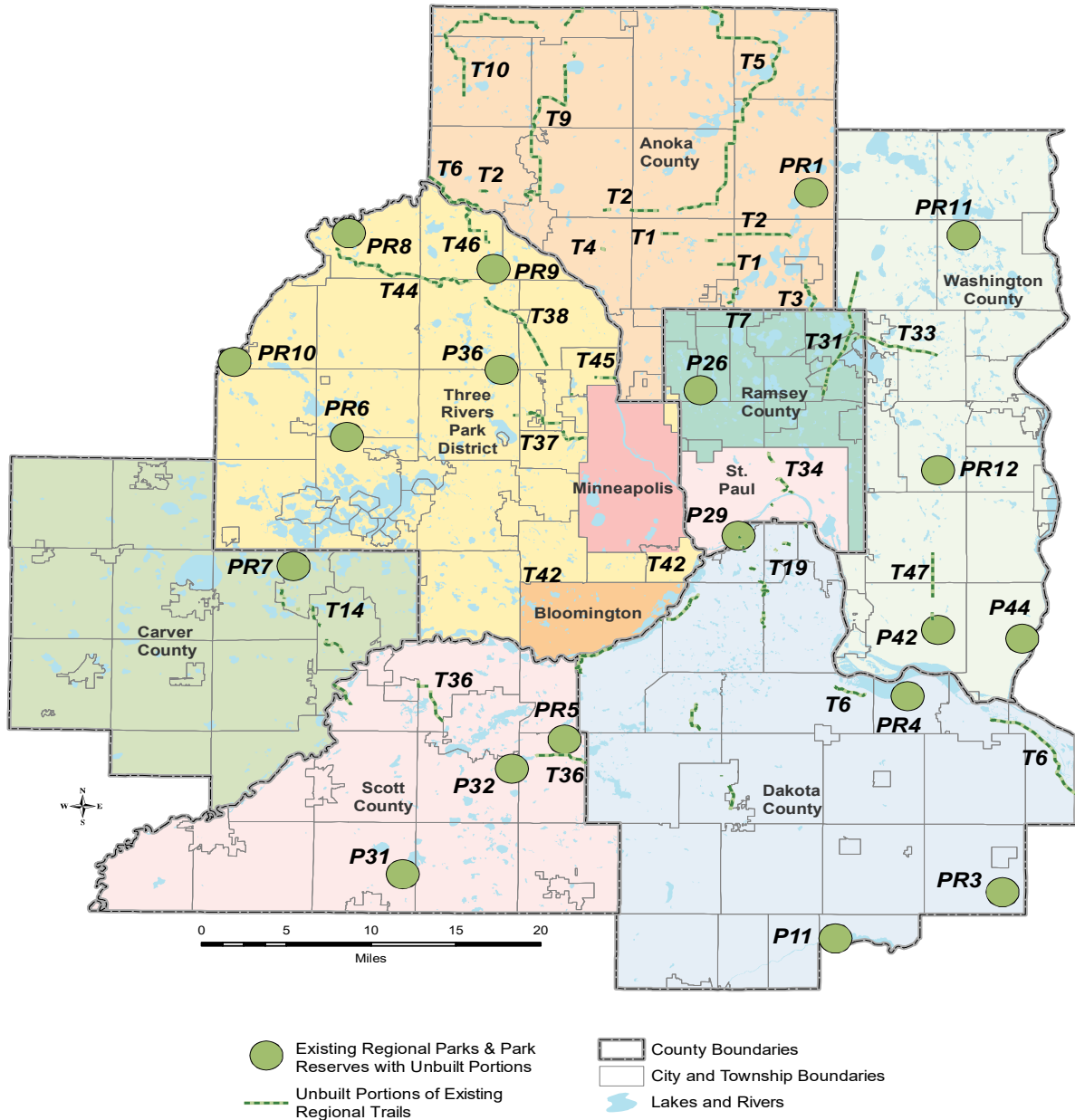
Data Source:

<sup>a</sup> Council approved master plans

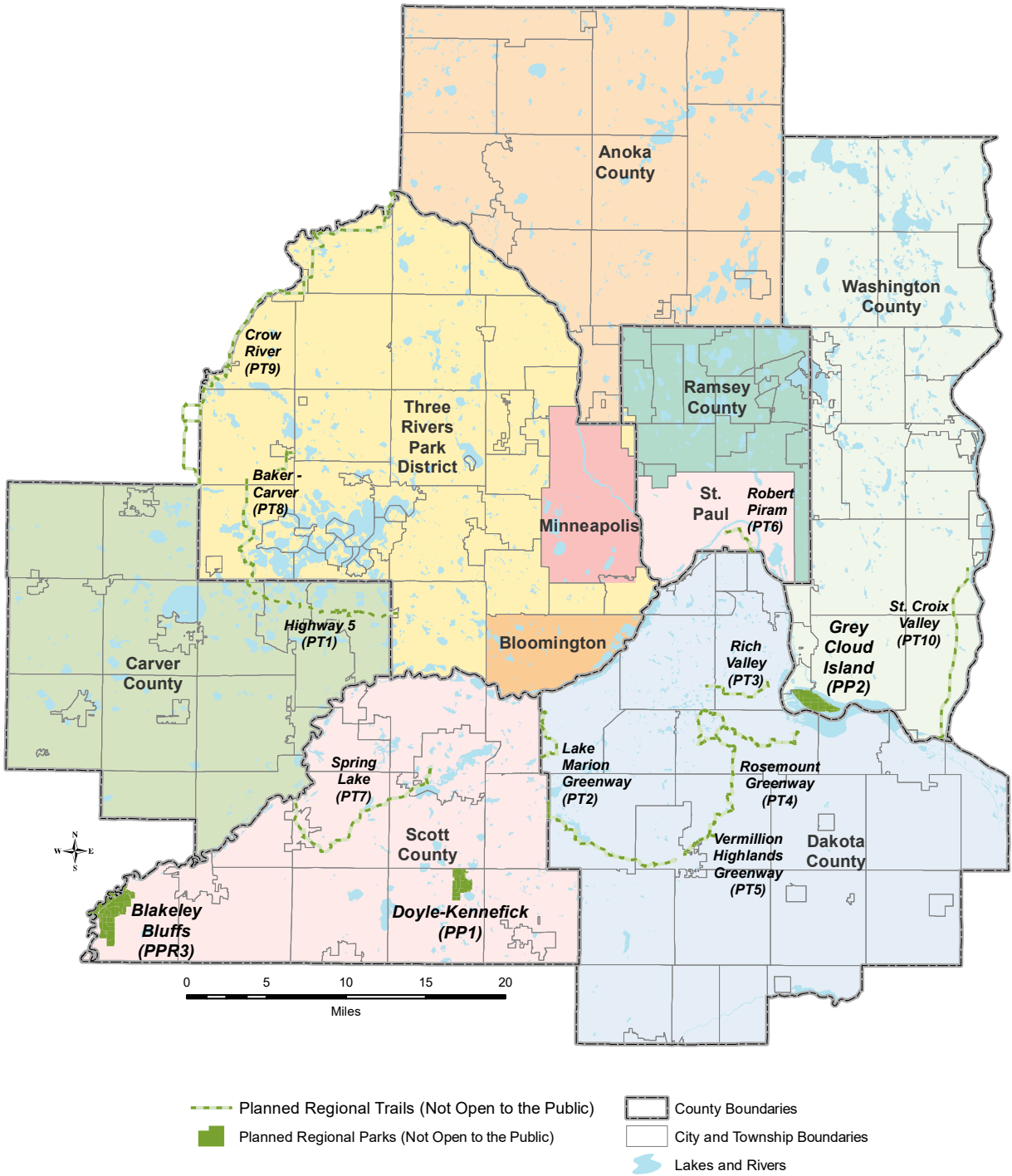
<sup>b</sup> 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan (2015)

<sup>c</sup> Estimates from regional park implementing agencies

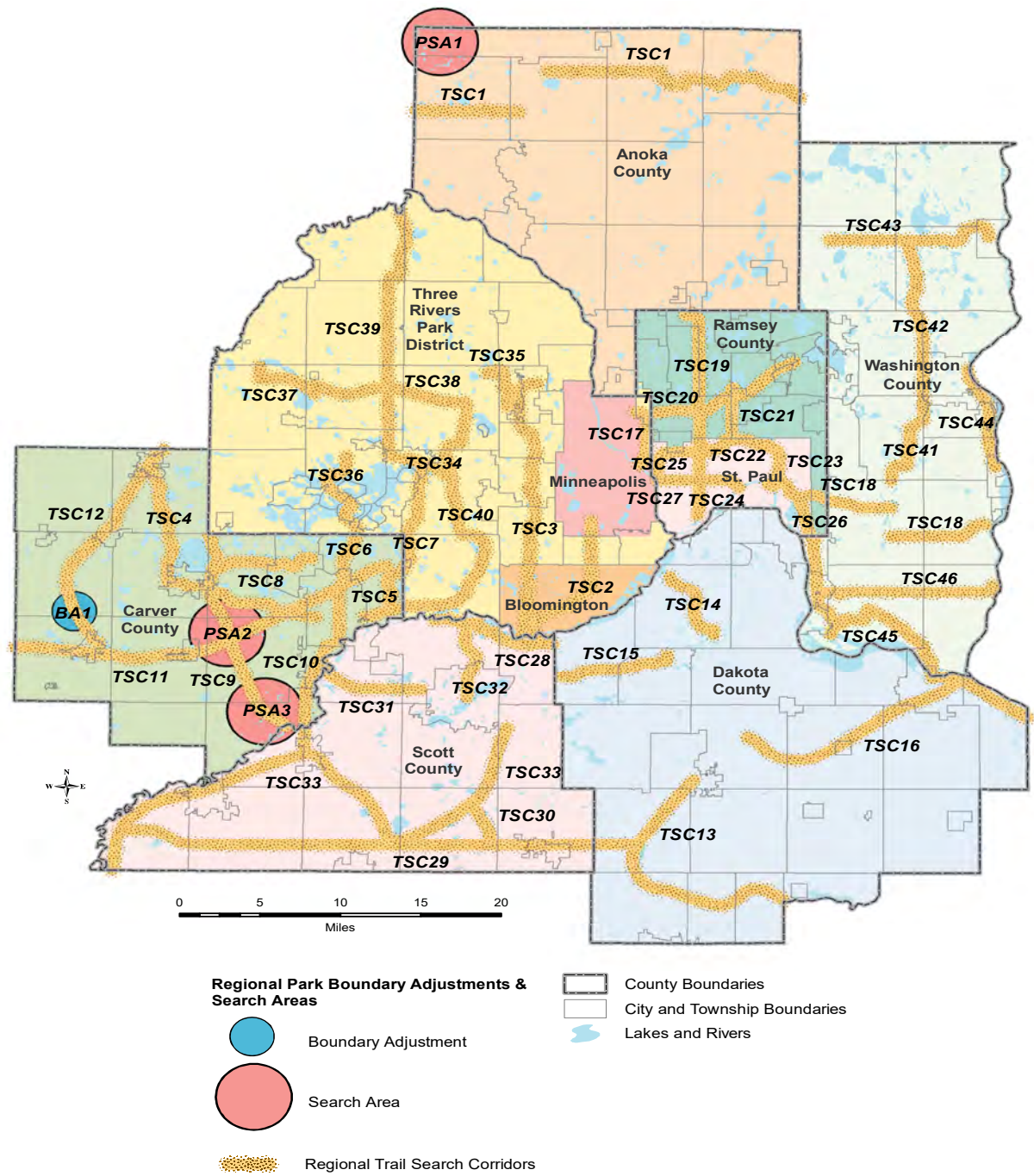
**Figure 8-2:** Unbuilt Portions of Existing Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Recreation Features, and Regional Trails



**Figure 8-3:** Planned Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Recreation Features, and Regional Trails (Council-approved master plan, not yet open to the public)



**Figure 8-4:** Regional Park Search Areas, Regional Park Boundary Adjustments, and Regional Trail Search Corridors Map



## Changes in the 2018 Estimate

The 2018 estimate to complete the Regional Parks System is significantly higher than the estimate in the 2015 plan. The change in the estimate comes from a higher level of accuracy, data refinement, and a consistent approach that involved staff from the regional park implementing agencies.

A higher level of accuracy was achieved through working with park and trail master plans and including the regional park implementing agencies on real-time development costs and average acreage costs for trails and search corridors.

Data refinement included working with the regional park implementing agencies on accurate search area, corridors and boundary adjustments. Search units are at the beginning stages of planning and are subject to changes based on factors including development climate, long-term planning, and political will.

And finally, a consistent approach to determining acquisition and development costs was taken to achieve continuity between projects with grand visions and projects with modest goals. This approach applied the same set of cost average figures for land acquisition and development across the entire metro.

## Funding the System

The Regional Parks System receives funding from local governments, State of Minnesota, Metropolitan Council, the U.S government, and private donors. Since the Regional Parks System was created in 1974, the Regional Parks System has received state bond funds that were matched with Council funds. The state provides funds to earmarked projects, a portion of Clean Water Land and Legacy Act Amendment funds and Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund dollars. Over the years the fund mix has changed from state bonds and Council funds (prior to 2008) to use of Legacy funds, earmarks and Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund dollars. State and Council funds vary yearly and are not guaranteed to be granted.

The policy plan includes a five-year capital improvement budget to outline a funding strategy for the relative near term, so regional park implementing agencies can use the information in their planning. Since these figures are subject to change based upon legislative action, agencies are conservative in their reporting.

Minnesota Statutes, section 473.147, subd. 1 also requires an analysis of what portion of the funding is proposed to come from the state and Council levies, and other local government units. This analysis is yet forthcoming in 2019 as part of a broader assessment of the funding for the Regional Parks System.





## Chapter Nine: 2019 – 2022 Workplan for the Regional Parks Policy Plan



The following workplan summarizes commitments made by the Metropolitan Council in the earlier chapters of this update to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. These items will evolve and change as the Council works with regional park implementing agencies, other partners, and stakeholders on implementation.

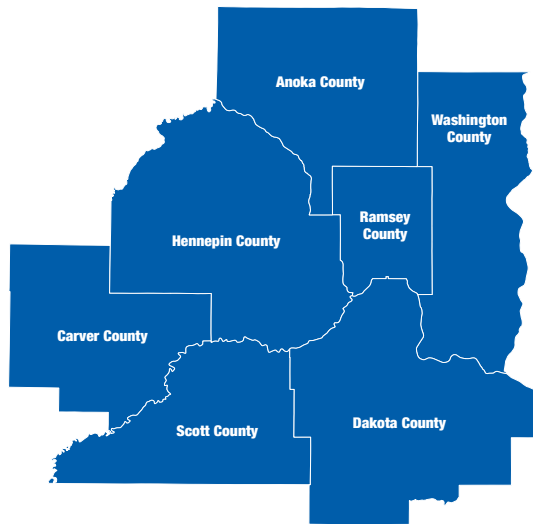
**Table 9-1:** 2019 – 2022 Workplan for the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

| Project   | Timeframe                            | Location in Policy Plan                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Develop Regional Parks System indicators   | 2020                                 | Chapter 2                                    |
| 2. Develop the Regional Parks System sub-recipient administrative guide   | 2019                                 | Chapter 2                                    |
| 3. Determine how to use Regional Parks System interest earnings and amend appropriate policy documents as necessary   | 2019 and potentially annually beyond | Chapter 2                                    |
| 4. Convene system addition discussion, including defining geographic balance and assessing the value of establishing a Regional Parks System classification system. | 2019-2020                            | Chapter 4, Strategy 2; Chapter 7, Strategy 2 |
| 5. Develop equity analysis tool for use with Regional Parks System master planning  | 2019                                 | Chapter 5, Strategy 1                        |
| 6. Develop performance criteria for secondary or support facilities   | 2020-2021                            | Chapter 7, Strategy 1                        |
| 7. Develop and implement Equity Grant Program   | 2019                                 | Chapter 7, Strategy 3; Chapter 8, Strategy 4 |
| 8. Begin discussion of long-term sustainable funding for the Regional Parks System  | 2019                                 | Chapter 8, Strategy 9                        |
| 9. Update the methodology for and implement the 2020 Regional Parks System Visitor Study  | 2019-2020                            | Not included                                 |

# The Council’s mission is to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous metropolitan region

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The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization for the seven-county Twin Cities area. The Council operates the regional bus and rail system, collects and treats wastewater, engages communities and the public in planning for future growth, coordinates regional water resources, plans and helps fund regional parks, and administers federal funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The 17-member Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the governor.

390 Robert Street North  
Saint Paul, MN 55101-1805

651.602.1000  
TTY 651.291.0904  
public.info@metc.state.mn.us  
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TTY 651.291.0904  
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