

2030 Regional Parks *Policy Plan*

Update Adopted December 8, 2010



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Chapter One: The Regional Parks System

Introduction

Updated December 8, 2010

Every community, large and small, in the seven-county Twin Cities area has parks and open spaces, ranging from toddler play areas to athletic fields to picnic grounds to trails for bikers, walkers, runners, skaters and even skiers.

Many parks, trails and open spaces are used almost exclusively by the residents of the community in which they are located, but some are significant far beyond any one city or county's boundaries. More than five million people visit the Chain of Lakes Regional Park in Minneapolis each year, for example, many of them from other communities. Every major trail draws users from throughout the metro area and beyond.

These parks, trails and open spaces are part of the Regional Parks System, supported by the Metropolitan Council in partnership with cities, counties and special park districts. The regional parks system was established in 1974, in response to state legislation. About 31,000 acres of existing parks were designated as "regional recreation open space." Together, those parks had about five million visits in 1975.

Over the past thirty-five years, the Council, using both regional and state funds, invested \$476 million to help local park agencies develop those first designated parks, as well as to acquire and develop new parks and trails for the growing metropolitan population.

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.

Today, the system includes:

- 54,633 acres open for public use
- 51 regional parks and park reserves
- Seven special recreation features, such as the zoo and conservatory at Como Park
- 38 regional trails, with 231 miles currently open to the public
- 38 million visits each year
- Investment of more than \$476 million of State and Regional grants/appropriations for land acquisition and capital improvement projects
- \$119.5 million of State funds to partially finance operations and maintenance of the regional park system

These 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's evidence of the importance of natural spaces and outdoor recreation to Minnesotans, including those living in the metropolitan area.

Cities, counties and special park districts operate regional parks and trails—the [Chain of Lakes'](#) facilities, paths and activities remain the responsibility of the [Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board](#), for example—but once a park becomes part of the regional system, the Metropolitan Council supports it with planning, funding and advocacy. The responsible regional park implementing agency must develop a master plan for the park, and commit to maintaining the space as a park in the future. This partnership with local agencies is the strength of the regional parks system.

By 2030, the Regional Parks System plans to expand to nearly 70,000 acres and to quadruple the trail system from 231 miles today to almost 1000 miles. New greenways corridors will link regional parks in Scott, Dakota and western Hennepin Counties. Two new regional parks in Carver County and a regional park in the northwest corner of Anoka County—a park that has been proposed since 1974—are planned. The [Silverwood](#) special recreation feature in St. Anthony, with art and environmental education in a natural setting, just opened in 2009. These planned—and recently opened—parks and trail connections will allow residents to have a variety of new park experiences, close to home. As part of the adoption of this Regional Parks Policy Plan in 2010, [The Landing](#) in Shakopee became the seventh special recreation feature in the regional parks system.

Roughly .78% of a household's taxes go to support the regional parks system, part through local property taxes, part through state taxes. State funds pay 9.5 percent of the costs to operate and maintain the system. For the owner of a \$250,000 home in the seven-county metropolitan area, the average annual cost of the regional parks system, including the planned expansions is \$64.38.

Regional Parks Policy Plan

Managing the expansion of a regional parks system that involves a number of different local entities, plus the Metropolitan Council, requires coordinated strategies and policies. The Regional Parks Policy Plan lays out the goals for the expansion of the system, and the strategies designed to meet these goals.

Much of the regional parks system is working well and doesn't need significant changes. The Regional Parks Policy Plan focuses on:

- Existing conditions that can be improved
- New challenges to individual parks or to the system as a whole

The Regional Parks Policy Plan is intended to be the “go-to” document for local agencies in their management of regional parks within the system. The plan's policies guide expansion and development goals of regional parks and trails, as well as lay out policies for appropriate use of parks and trails already within the system. Overall, the policy plan is focused on growth and expansion, but any changes in usage of existing parks and trails in the system must follow the policies laid out in the plan.



Baker Park Reserve, Three Rivers Park District

Regional Parks System Growth



Planning for 2030

Summary: Population in the Twin Cities metropolitan area is expected to grow by nearly a third by 2030. This growth makes preserving land for outdoor recreation and natural spaces more difficult. The Metropolitan Council’s [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) and metropolitan system plans coordinate planning and development for the region, including for the regional park system. Local governments coordinate their planning through the comprehensive planning process, following the policies of the [2030 Regional Development Framework](#).

During the last three decades, the Twin Cities metropolitan area grew by nearly 800,000 people. By the year 2030, the Metropolitan Council forecasts that the region will add another 966,000 people and 471,000 households—or nearly a third of the current population.

Such robust growth is a sign of the region’s economic health and vitality. With this growth will come new jobs, greater ethnic diversity, expanded economic opportunities and increased tax revenues. Accommodating growth is not always easy, however, as the increasing public concern about traffic congestion attests. Although there is still open space and available land in some parts of the region, the additional population and the systems that will serve it—including roads and transportation—will make expanding or even preserving space for parks and trails more challenging.

Table 1-1 Metropolitan Area Growth, 1970–2030

	1970	2000	2030	1970–2000 Increase	2000–2030 Projected Increase
Households	573,634	1,021,454	1,492,000	448,000	471,000
Population	1,874,612	2,642,056	3,608,000	767,000	966,000
Jobs	779,000	1,563,245	2,126,000	784,000	563,000

The metropolitan area has made a substantial investment in conserving green spaces by establishing regional parks, park reserves and trails. Since its creation in 1974, over \$467 million of State and Metropolitan Council grants has been invested in acquiring and improving parkland for the Twin Cities Regional Parks System. Regional parks, encompassing 54,633 acres, draw more than 38 million visits a year. Federal, state and local governments own and manage 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 natural resource lands in the metropolitan area builds on these past investments and offers an excellent opportunity for further investment in the regional park and open space system as the region grows by one million more people in the next 30 years.



The Metropolitan Council and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources have charted highly important natural resources in the seven-county area as part of a region-wide Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment. This inventory and assessment—a geographic database and series of maps—records valuable information about land and water resources that perform significant ecological functions, contain important habitat for animals that are sensitive to habitat fragmentation and destruction, and provides opportunities for people to experience nature and the region’s historical landscapes

The inventory and assessment builds on existing information, such as Minnesota County Biological Survey data, to provide a comprehensive look at natural resources. It’s an information tool that the Metropolitan Council and local governments can use to accommodate growth while protecting the environment by implementing effective land protection and restoration tools.

The inventory and assessment shows that roughly 100,000 (between 75,000 and 120,000) acres of regionally significant natural lands remain unprotected in the metro area, compared to 280,000 acres of total natural lands and 1.9 million acres of land overall. Identifying these remaining natural lands provides a great opportunity to prioritize and coordinate conservation action.

By law (MN Statute 473.147), the Regional Parks System can only include areas that are acquired and managed by counties, cities and special park districts. The regional parks complements what the state provides for outdoor recreation needs in the Metropolitan area. This means that not all regionally important natural resource lands can be part of the regional parks system.

Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

2030 Regional Development Framework

The Metropolitan Council's [2030 Regional Development Framework](#), adopted in January 2004, provides a plan for how the Council and its regional partners can address the challenges of growth. The [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) and accompanying metropolitan system plans—including this Regional Parks Policy Plan—are intended to help ensure the coordinated, orderly and economical development of the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area—consisting of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties ([MN Statute 473.851](#)). These plans seek to carefully integrate regional land-use, transportation, housing and natural resource policies—to achieve regional goals in each area and avoid working at cross-purposes. The forecasts are used in planning and capital improvement programs to assess regional needs, land-use patterns and infrastructure investments that will be needed to serve growth in a timely, efficient and cost-effective way.

The [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) is organized around four policies that help set the parameters for planning carried out at the municipal and, in some cases, county levels:

- **Work with local communities to accommodate growth in a flexible, connected and efficient manner:** Supporting land-use patterns that efficiently connect housing, jobs, retail centers and civic uses. Encouraging growth and reinvestment in centers with convenient access to transportation corridors. Ensuring an adequate supply of developable land for future growth.
- **Plan and invest in multi-modal transportation choices, based on the full range of costs and benefits, to slow the growth of congestion and serve the region's economic needs:** Improving the highway system, removing bottlenecks and adding capacity. Making more efficient use of the highway system by encouraging flexible work hours, telecommuting, ridesharing and other traffic management efforts. Expanding the bus system and developing a network of transitways, based on a thorough cost-benefit analysis.
- **Encourage expanded choices in housing location and types, and improved access to jobs and opportunities:** Allowing market forces to respond to changing market needs, including increased demand for townhomes and condominiums as baby-boomers grow older. Preserving the existing housing stock to help maintain a full range of housing choices and ensure existing local and regional infrastructure is fully utilized. Supporting the production of lifecycle and affordable housing with better links to jobs, services and amenities.
- **Work with local and regional partners to reclaim, conserve, protect and enhance the region's vital natural resources:** Encouraging the integration of natural-resource conservation into all land-planning decisions. Seeking to protect important natural resources and adding areas to the regional parks system. Working to protect the region's water resources.



*Silverwood,
Three Rivers Park District*

The Silverwood special recreation feature in St. Anthony, with art and environmental education in a natural setting, just opened in 2009.

Planning Areas

The [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) identifies an urban area and a rural area, each of which occupies approximately half of the region. Regional natural resource areas, including terrestrial and wetland areas, can help local governments plan development that respects the integrity of natural areas and incorporates environmental features into development projects. Conserving and restoring natural resources of regional or local importance contributes to a healthy natural environment and enhances our quality of life. Connecting regional and local features by natural-resource corridors helps sustain wildlife and plant habitat and shapes how development looks on the ground.

The urban area is divided into two specific geographic planning areas: the Developing Communities and the Developed Communities. The rural area is divided into four specific geographic planning areas: Rural Centers/ Rural Growth Centers, the Diversified Rural Communities, the Rural Residential Areas and the Agricultural Areas. (See Figure 1-1) Approximately 91-95 percent of new growth is forecast to be located in the urban area—in land-use patterns that make efficient use of regional infrastructure—with the rest in the rural area, particularly in small towns designated as Rural Growth Centers. One of the primary differences among these planning areas is the density at which they develop. The Council has established benchmarks indicating the overall densities for planned development patterns in each of the geographic planning areas. The Council negotiates a share of the regional forecasts with each community based on its geographic planning area designation(s), development trends, expected densities, available land, local interests and Council policies.

The cumulative results of the community-negotiated distribution of the forecasts among planning areas becomes the basis for determining the required land supply and for the Council's plans for investments in regional systems such as highways and wastewater service. Decisions relating to transportation, sewers, housing, natural resources and other land uses cannot be made in isolation. Regional parks, transportation and sewers help shape growth patterns; housing location and types affect mobility options and travel patterns.

Unplanned growth can put a strain on natural areas—both regionally significant natural areas and locally designated natural areas, groundwater quality and other resources. The [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) and the metropolitan system plans seek to carefully integrate growth, transportation, housing and natural resource policies—to achieve regional goals in each area and avoid working at cross-purposes.

Developed Communities are cities where more than 85 percent of the land is developed, infrastructure is well established and efforts must go toward keeping it in good repair. These communities have the greatest opportunities to adapt or replace obsolete buildings, improve community amenities, and remodel or replace infrastructure, restore natural areas to increase their economic competitiveness and enhance their quality of life.

Developing Communities are the cities where the most substantial amount of new growth—about 60 percent of new households and 40 percent of new jobs—will occur. The amount of infill and rehabilitation and the way in which new areas are developed directly influence when and how much additional land in Developing Communities will need urban services—services that will call for substantial new regional and local investments.

The flexibility to stage growth locally also offers Developing Communities the opportunity to incorporate natural resources into their local plans. They can build on the regional Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment and updates as new information becomes available, by identifying additional locally important resources. Then staging plans can incorporate these regional and local resources, developing local infrastructure (wastewater systems, roads, parkways, parks and open space, and airports) in a way that conserves natural resources and avoids or protects sensitive natural areas.

Roughly half of the 3,000 square miles in the seven-county Twin Cities area are rural or agricultural. That includes cultivated farmland, nurseries, tree farms, orchards and vineyards, scattered individual home sites or clusters of houses, hobby farms, small towns, gravel mines, woodlands and many of the region's remaining important natural resources. About 5-8 percent of new growth is forecast for the rural and agricultural area.

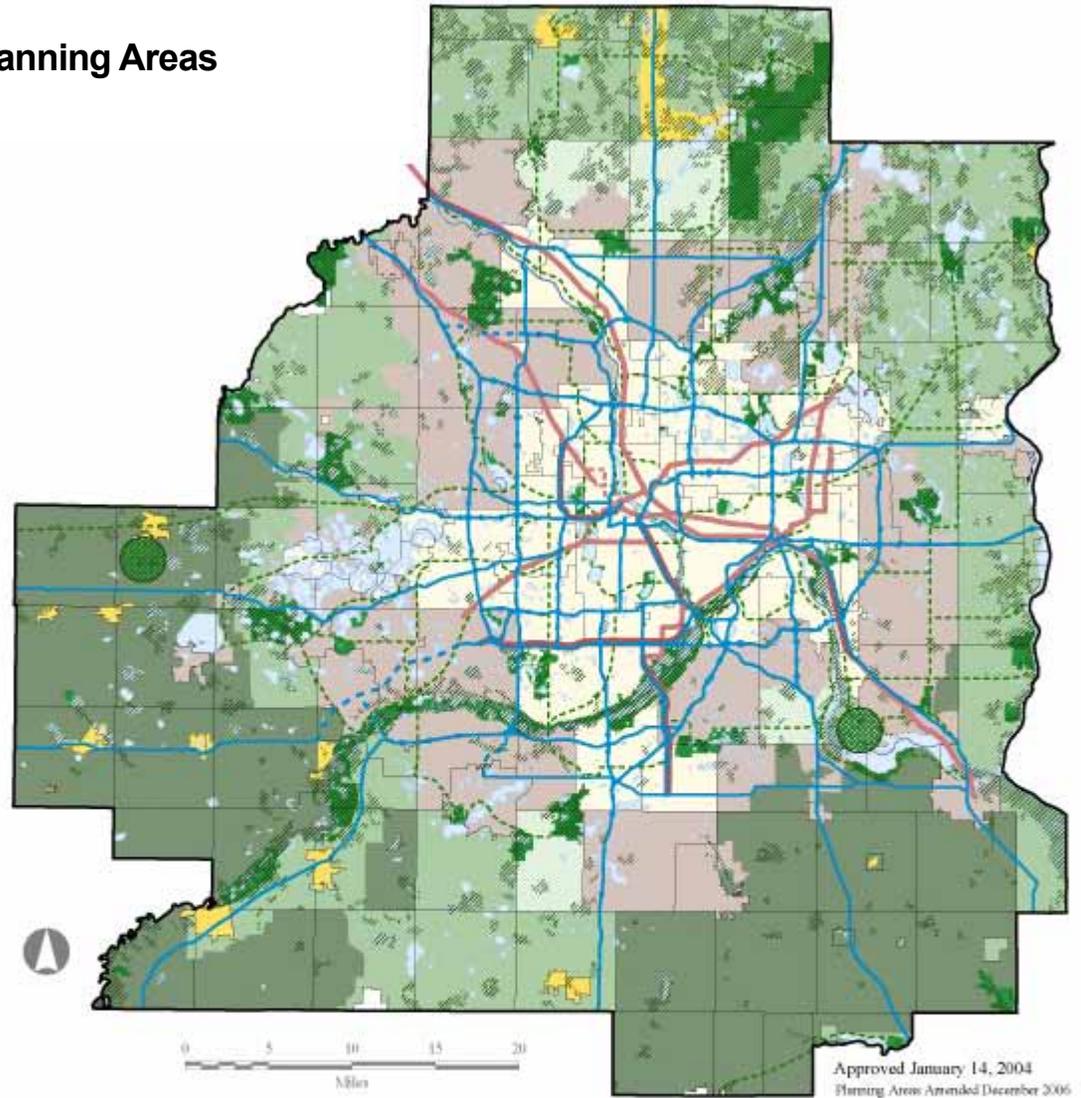
The regional parks and open space system represents a major, well-established conservation effort for land and water resources. The area's growing population will need additional large-scale park and open space lands in the future. Natural areas that could be added to the regional parks system and plans for their acquisition must be made before the opportunity is lost.

As local communities update their comprehensive plans, they can identify locally important natural areas for protection. Together, the region, the regional park implementing agencies, local communities, nonprofit organizations and the private sector can preserve natural areas through acquisition, conservation easements, and conservation-sensitive development practices and conservation strategies.



Bald Eagle-Otter Lakes Regional Park, Ramsey County

Figure 1-1
2030 Framework Planning Areas



NOTE: Please refer to the Comprehensive Plans Composite map or the Regional Systems maps for the most recent information. These maps are available at the Metropolitan Council Data Center (651) 602-1140.

Geographic Planning Areas		Additional Information	
Urban Planning Areas	Rural Planning Areas	Regional Natural Resource Areas (includes Terrestrial and Wetland Areas)	Regional Trail
Developing Area	Rural Center	<small>SOURCE: Metro DNR in coordination with the Metropolitan Council</small>	Transit 2025 Corridor
Developed Area	Agricultural	Regional Park	Principal Arterial
	Diversified Rural	Proposed Regional Park	Open Water
	Rural Residential		



*Keller Regional Park,
Ramsey County*

Comprehensive Planning Process

The [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) was prepared under the authority of state statutes, which direct the Council to:

. . . prepare and adopt . . . a comprehensive development guide for the metropolitan area. It shall consist of a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, programs, and maps prescribing guides for the orderly and economical development, public and private, of the metropolitan area. The comprehensive development guide shall recognize and encompass physical, social, or economic needs of the metropolitan area and those future developments which will have an impact on the entire area including but not limited to such matters as land use, parks and open space land needs, the necessity for and location of airports, highways, transit facilities, public hospitals, libraries, schools, and other public buildings. . . ([MN Statute 473.145](#))

The [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) is the initial “chapter” and the unifying theme of the Council’s Metropolitan Development Guide. The [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) is the umbrella statement of regional policies, goals and strategies that will inform the Council’s metropolitan system plans for transportation, airports, wastewater service and regional parks, as well as other comprehensive development guide chapter policies adopted by the Council.

Under state law, each city and township in the seven-country metropolitan area is required at least every 10 years to review and, if necessary, amend its local comprehensive plan to ensure that the local plan—and local fiscal devices and official controls—are consistent with the Council’s metropolitan system plans ([MN Statute 473.864](#)). The current round of updated local comprehensive plans was due in 2008.

Following the adoption of this Regional Parks Policy Plan and the issuance of system statements as required under the [Metropolitan Land Planning Act](#) (MLPA), local communities have nine months to amend their local comprehensive plan. These plans are reviewed by the Council for conformance with metropolitan system plans, consistency with Council policies and compatibility with adjacent and affected governmental units.

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

1. Accurately incorporates and integrates the components of the metropolitan system plans as required by [MN Statute 473.851](#) to 473.871.
2. Integrates public facilities plan components described in [MN Statute 473.859](#), subd. 3:
3. Integrates development policies and compatible land uses to accommodate forecasted growth at appropriate densities and to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional system.

Consistency: A local comprehensive plan generally will be consistent with Council policies and statutory requirements if the local plan:

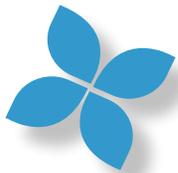
1. Addresses community role strategies contained in the Framework, including conservation strategies to protect regional important natural resource areas and wildlife corridors.
2. Addresses the linkage of local land uses to local and regional park and open space systems.
3. Includes an implementation plan that describes public programs, fiscal devices and other specific actions for sequencing and staging to implement the comprehensive plan and ensure conformance with regional system plans, described in [MN Statute 473.859, subd. 4.](#)
4. Addresses official controls:
 - Includes a capital improvement program (sewers, parks, transportation, water supply and open space) that accommodates planned growth and development.

Compatibility: A local comprehensive plan is compatible with adjacent and affected governmental units, based on comments or concerns, or lack thereof, from these entities. In order to be determined compatible, a community must adequately document that it has addressed the concern(s) of all adjacent and affected governmental units.



Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

2030 Regional Parks *Policy Plan*



Chapter Two: Policies and Strategies

Introduction

The policies presented in this document are the Metropolitan Council's priorities for the kind of regional recreation open space facilities and services it would like to see acquired, developed and operating in the future. The policies give definition and meaning to ongoing efforts to develop and operate 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 particular sets of conditions. Other strategies are directed to various levels of government involved in implementation of the plan. The strategies are incremental actions; each makes a small contribution in moving toward achievement of the Council's policies. The strategies indicate the general nature of action-oriented decisions. Guidelines for implementation and administration are found in the Management Procedures portion of the Policy Plan.

This section of the Regional Parks Policy Plan lists the overall policies for siting and acquisition, finance, recreation activities and facilities, planning and system protection. Strategies for accomplishing each policy are stated briefly, explained in more detail, and followed by the history and development of each strategy.

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.



*Clifton French Regional Park,
Three Rivers Park District*

Siting and Acquisition Strategy 1: Lands with natural resource features and/or access to water will have priority over other proposed park land.

Future Metropolitan Council designation of lands for the regional parks system should stress important natural resource features, access to water bodies and natural resource features that enhance outdoor recreation. Geographic balance or proportionate distribution tied to population distribution patterns can be given weight when natural resource features can be provided through restoration.

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.” ([MN Statute 473.147, subd. 1](#))

Regional recreation open space is defined 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.” ([MN Statute 473.121, subd. 14](#))

Water is a major attraction in almost every unit of the regional parks system and an amenity along many regional trails. Most surface water is public, with the waterbeds owned by the state; it is appropriate to provide access to these water bodies through the regional parks system.

Major considerations in deciding which lands should be acquired for the regional parks system are:

- Natural qualities most desirable for the 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; helping to protect or improving water quality; or habitat for protected or endangered species.
- Assuring that regional park facilities are evenly distributed around the metropolitan area or distributed in proportion to the existing and forecasted urban development.



*Baylor Regional Park,
Carver County*

The legislative directive is clear that the land should be of “regional importance.” Regional importance is not directly defined in the law, but the legislative directive requires that the 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 only serve a municipality or neighborhood would not be of “regional importance.”

Past acquisition activity has tended to favor lands with high-quality natural resources over even geographic distribution. This has produced a regional parks system with more lands and facilities in the west and southwest portions of the metropolitan area than in other sectors.

This geographic imbalance in the regional parks system is considerably ameliorated by the presence of state parks in the St. Croix Valley and at Fort Snelling and by the existence of a high-quality highway system with most of the regional facilities within a drive of 30 minutes or less from the urbanized area. National standards for regional parks assume a one-hour driving time as acceptable. The rehabilitation of urban areas that include natural resource features (for example, Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park and Cedar Lake Regional Trail) have provided opportunities to create regional park sites or regional trails that also address the geographic balance issue.

Siting and Acquisition Strategy 2: Funding will follow priorities set by park implementing agencies in approved master plans.

The priority rating for acquiring park and park reserve lands identified in Metropolitan Council approved master plans is 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 regional natural resource-based outdoor recreation service potential as defined in the Council’s Regional Parks system plan and the park unit’s master plan.

Matching non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds to acquire land and the donation of land or sale at a discounted price is encouraged. Capital improvement program requests for funding that leverage non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds, including the value of any donation, will be given higher priority for funding than similar projects that do not leverage non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds.

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 an approved master plan boundary are “inholdings” 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



*Anoka County Riverfront
Regional Park, Anoka County*

are made to acquire these parcels because every time the land is sold to another private party, the land continues to remain unavailable for regional parks system purposes. If once-vacant land is developed for housing or other uses, it becomes unreasonably expensive to acquire and is essentially lost to the regional parks system.

The Metropolitan 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 undergone development 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 regional natural resource-based outdoor recreation service potential 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, 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 within the regional parks system should be given a very high priority. The high demand and rapidly escalating value of water frontage will only make those lands more costly 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 water frontage to public use after it's been fully developed is politically difficult and very expensive.

Siting and Acquisition Strategy 3: New trails, or trail segments, that serve a regional audience are a significant priority for the regional parks system.

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, and should not duplicate an existing trail. 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 where the trail treadway will have no adverse impact on the natural resource base, and/or it links two or more units of the regional recreation open space system.

New Linking Regional Trails should be located within the developing or developed area of the region. 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. For Destination Regional Trails or Greenways, there should be no spacing minimums or maximums; instead, the decision to locate the trail should be based on the availability of existing high-quality natural resources or the opportunity for natural resources restoration, enhancement and protection. Areas within the urban and urbanizing portion of the metropolitan area that are not within 3 miles of a regional trail should be identified as search sites for new regional trails.

Destination Regional Trails or Greenways should be located to reasonably maximize the amount of high-quality natural resources within the trail corridor boundaries. 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, and areas of infill and redevelopment.

Although there is still open space and available land in some parts of the regions, the additional population and the systems that will serve it—including roads and transportation—will make expanding or even preserving space for parks and trails more challenging.

Funding priority for individual parcels of land within a trail corridor is to:

- Lands essential to protect the trail corridor and make it usable to the public as planned.
- Lands considered essential for the trail corridor to reach its full regional service potential as defined in the Council’s system plan.

Matching non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds to acquire land and the donation of land or sale at a discounted price is encouraged. Capital improvement program requests for funding that leverage non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds, including the value of any donation, will be given higher priority for funding than similar projects that do not leverage non-state and non-Metropolitan Council funds.

The [Minnesota Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#) (SCORP) notes that trail recreation is becoming increasingly important; the interest and demand for more trails are being felt at all levels of government. This increased interest in trail recreation reflects the fact that it is a healthful form of exercise for people of all age groups, is suitable for all levels of physical conditioning, can be carried out by families, groups or individuals, and is often available close to home. It’s also relatively inexpensive: There’s no need to buy special equipment or supplies and usually there are no fees for trail use by individuals and families.

Demographic forecasts further accentuate the growing importance of trail recreation. The 45–65 age group is expected to grow significantly during the 2000–2010 period. Although many of these people would not or could not participate in more vigorous contact sports, the vast majority of them can walk, hike or ride a bicycle along a trail. Promotion of exercising and keeping fit well into advanced age also will stimulate trail development.

There are local trails in the metropolitan area, and a number of well-developed trails and walkways are within the confines of larger regional parks and park reserves. In 2000, there were 17 regional trails developed or in some stage of acquisition/construction in each of the seven counties and the two central cities.

The visitor origin data from the 1998-99 regional trail 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.

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 regional trail. 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.

Trail corridors planned and operated mainly to provide bicycle transportation such as trips to work, shopping, etc., are not emphasized as a part of this policy plan—the emphasis is on recreational trail activities—but new regional trails that are projected to serve both recreation and commuting uses are desirable as part of the regional trail system. Some regional trails also function as bicycle transportation corridors and have been funded in part with federal transportation funds. The selection, development and operation of bicycle transportation arteries

are covered as a component of the Council's transportation plan. The commuter on a regional trail typically enjoys a more scenic travel experience compared to the experience offered on road-based bicycle transportation lanes, so commuting trips taken on regional trails have an inherent recreation component. Increased commuting opportunities by locating new regional trails benefit the region through reduced congestion and the health benefits associated with physical activity. Examples of existing regional trails that provide multiple benefits include the Southwest LRT Regional Trails, Cedar Lake Regional Trail, the Mississippi River Regional Trail, the Big Rivers Regional Trail and the Bruce Vento Regional Trail.



*Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park,
Washington County*

User surveys indicate that recreation trails draw heavily from nearby areas, so the priority is to concentrate on the acquisition of more trail corridors in the metropolitan urban service area, where more than 90 percent of the population lives. In this urbanized area, attention should be given to both high-quality natural resources and, in the fully built-up areas, to major human-built or developed resources. The interesting human-built developed 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.

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. This system is complemented by shorter, local trails, which may eventually feed into units of the regional trail system. The opportunities for interesting trail recreation experiences are substantially enhanced where local trails intersect with or are reached by elements of the regional system. Another priority for designation of regional trails is the existing or likely possibility of intersecting with the local trail system.

When determining the boundaries of regional trail corridors, regional park implementing agencies should consider Natural Resource Inventory 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 railbed, 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 anyway. 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.

Some of the metropolitan area's inner-ring suburbs are not close to regional parks and don't 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 equitable geographic distribution of regional parks system facilities.

If parcels are needed to link trails to each other in a network and they are likely to be developed for residential or other urban uses, acquisition of them should be protected by first-right options to purchase, official mapping, life estates or other means.



Como Zoo, St. Paul

Siting and Acquisition Strategy 4: Special recreation facilities must enhance services and facilities already offered, not compete with or duplicate them.

Special recreation facilities proposed for inclusion in the regional parks system must:

- Be unique and complement or enhance the services already offered by the regional system.
- 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 drain 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 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." The term "other special-use facilities" is not defined in legislation. Discussion in previous Council policy plans suggests that "other special-use facilities," also referred to in the plan as special recreation features (SRF), are those facilities that:

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

As of 2010, there are seven special recreation features:

- [Como Zoo](#)
- [Square Lake](#)
- [Silverwood](#)
- [Como Conservatory](#)
- [Gale Woods Farm](#)
- [The Landing](#)
- [Noerenberg Gardens](#)

The Como facilities are found within Como Regional Park. [Noerenberg Gardens](#) was given to Three Rivers Park District with the understanding that it was a unique and regional-level attraction. [Square Lake](#) provides beach and boat access to the clearest lake in the metropolitan area. The land encompassing [Gale Woods Farm](#) was originally proposed as a regional park. [Silverwood](#) is a former Salvation Army camp on Silver Lake that was acquired in 2001. It is programmed for environmental education to serve urban populations. [The Landing](#) was added to the regional parks system as a special recreation feature through adoption of this update to the 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan.

*The 2030
Regional Development
Framework and the
metropolitan system
plans seek to carefully
integrate growth,
transportation, housing
and natural
resource policies*

Finance

Policy: Provide adequate and equitable funding for the acquisition, rehabilitation and development of regional parks system units and facilities in a manner that provides the greatest possible benefits to the citizens of the region.

Finance Strategy 1: Only projects included in capital improvement programs will be funded.

Council-administered funds for acquisition and development go only to projects included and ranked by priority in an adopted capital improvement program (CIP). Funding will be consistent with the established CIP priorities. Projects are eligible for inclusion in a CIP only if they are included in a master plan that has been found to be consistent with the policy plan.

Finance Strategy 2: Funds will be granted only to regional park implementing agencies.

Any funds provided by or through the Metropolitan Council for regional parks system acquisition, development and operations/maintenance will be granted only to regional park implementing agencies for projects consistent with Council-authorized master plans, capital improvement programs or state law. The regional park implementing agencies are:

- [Anoka County Parks and Recreation](#)
- [City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation](#)
- [Carver County Parks](#)
- [Dakota County Parks](#)
- [Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board](#)
- [Ramsey County Parks and Recreation](#)
- [City of St. Paul Parks and Recreation](#)
- [Scott County](#)
- [Three Rivers Park District](#)
- [Washington County Parks and Recreation](#)



Finance Strategy 3: Investment should be balanced between acquisition and development.

Whenever possible, a balance should be struck between investing in acquisition and investing in development. If a decision on fund allocations must be made, the priorities for those allocations are to:

- Acquire those lands essential to protect the natural resource that defines a park, park reserve or trail and to make it usable to the public as planned.
- Develop new or rehabilitated facilities or increase the capacity of existing facilities in places where there is a documented existing or projected high level of use and where the natural resource base will be protected.

If the metropolitan area, over the long run, is to have a fully usable regional parks system, it is necessary to make investments in both the acquisition of land and in the development of facilities that are used to deliver recreational services. Long-term focus exclusively on either acquisition or development makes little sense. If the region focuses all of its money and attention on acquiring thousands of acres of land and makes only minimal improvements, we will not have a usable system. Likewise, if only minimal land acquisitions are made and vast amounts of money are spent on improving this land, the end result may be an overdeveloped landscape that offers little opportunity for the individual outdoor recreational activities the regional system intends to provide.

One of the most important development and investment policies expressed in the Council's [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) is to maintain existing facilities in good operating condition and to give priority to investing in new or improved facilities intended to serve the existing population.



Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve, Bloomington & Three Rivers Park District



Finance Strategy 4: Any development should primarily benefit citizens of the metropolitan area.

Development in regional parks system units should be based on the principle of providing and maintaining quality public park areas and facilities primarily for citizens of the metropolitan area. The individual master plan process will balance the need to provide facilities in the park with the impacts of those facilities and their use on the natural resources in the park. The eligibility criteria (not in any priority order) for development and rehabilitation of regional park reserves, parks, trails and special facilities are:

- Projects that provide new facilities, rehabilitate facilities or increase capacity where there is documented existing or projected high use, and where there will be no adverse effect on the natural resource base.
- 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 where there will be no adverse effect on the natural resource base.
- Regional trails that connect to other trails or regional facilities or extend existing trails.
- Natural resource restoration, invasive species control and other types of resource restoration and protection projects.
- Matching non-state and non-Metropolitan 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.

Implementing agencies are responsible for development and rehabilitation needs for their units in the regional parks system. The individual master-plan process will balance the need to provide facilities in the park with the impacts of those facilities on the natural resources in the park. Each 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 not adversely affect the natural resource base that justifies the park or trail's regional designation. Park implementing agencies need to balance the carrying capacity of the recreational facilities against the carrying capacity of the park or trail corridor.

Since its creation in 1974, over \$467 million of State and Metropolitan Council grants has been invested in acquiring and improving parkland for the Twin Cities Regional Parks System.

With regard to regional trails, implementing agencies are encouraged to connect existing trails to other trails or regional facilities or extend existing trails. Implementing agencies are encouraged to negotiate with local communities and landowners to provide fencing or vegetative screening to meet safety and local community concerns. Fencing and screening may be grant-eligible development costs. The Metropolitan Council and Commission will consider such costs when reviewing trail development master plans and trail development funding requests. Excessive screening or fencing beyond a reasonable minimum should be cost-shared with the adjacent landowner since the additional cost provides no benefit to the trail-using public.

Finance Strategy 5: Some emergency funding requests will be considered.

The Metropolitan Council may consider “emergency requests” to finance capital improvement projects for regional parks system land acquisition and development that are not financed in the currently adopted regional parks system capital improvement program, if:

- The project is consistent with a Metropolitan Council-approved park or trail master plan.
- The regional park implementing agency can demonstrate that the opportunity for funding the project would be lost if action is not taken now compared to deferring it to a future biennium. For example, the opportunity to acquire land may be lost if funds were not provided at that time versus waiting for funding in a future capital improvement program.
- The delivery of outdoor recreation services would be severely affected if action is not taken now.

If all criteria can be met, the Council may reallocate grant funds of the requesting regional park implementing agency and/or use any interest earnings on park grant funds on park projects consistent with state law.

If land acquisition financing or additional matching TEA-21 grants would be disbursed to another state if not obligated in Minnesota, the Council may use unmatched Council bonds from the previous biennial capital improvement program to finance up to 40 percent of eligible project costs.

If the Metropolitan Council approves funding for the emergency request by following the criteria stated above, it may amend the regional parks system capital improvement program without holding a public hearing in order to expedite the decision-making process for the funds.

The Metropolitan Council authorizes grant funds for land acquisition and development capital improvements based on its adopted regional parks system capital improvement program (CIP). Occasionally, regional park implementing agencies ask the Metropolitan Council to finance land acquisition or development projects that were not part of the adopted CIP and were not budgeted in the CIP because there was no need for funding them at the time it was prepared. For example, land may come up for sale in a park after the CIP was adopted. Or, a disaster such as a fire or flood may call for funding to replace structures at a cost beyond that covered by insurance.



*Big Rivers Regional Trail,
Dakota County*

When an existing grant is reallocated to another project, one of two outcomes is possible:

- A portion of a project that was originally planned may be deferred. The regional park implementing agency recognizes that it is more cost-effective to defer some work and do other work with the funds available. For example, acquiring land that would otherwise be lost to development or be much more expensive to acquire in the future would be a better use of grant funds.
- The regional park implementing agency may have been able to complete the originally planned project for less money and thus wants to maximize the benefit of the entire grant by doing more capital improvements consistent with a Council-approved park or trail master plan. For example, estimates for the original project may be much higher than actual costs. The regional park implementing agency may be able to do more work with the existing funds for that park and utilize the current contractor on site with a change order in the work to be accomplished.

In both cases, the “emergency project” needs to be consistent with a Metropolitan Council-approved master plan for the park/trail unit involved. Due to the timing needed for funds in these cases, criteria are appropriate to allow the Council to amend its capital improvement program without an additional public hearing.

Finance Strategy 6: The Metropolitan Council may reimburse implementing agencies for the costs of acquiring some lands before they have been made part of the regional parks system.

Reimbursement will be considered for early acquisition of land currently designated as regional recreation open space by the Metropolitan Council in the 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan if the acquisition is in full agreement with a Council-approved master plan as required under [MN Statute 473.313](#) and the regional park implementing agency received Council approval prior to undertaking the acquisition.

If land is acquired or protected under an option to purchase by a regional park implementing agency, or an entity under contract with that agency while the Metropolitan Council considers adding the land to the Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan via a public hearing process, the Council will consider reimbursing the park agency for the costs to acquire or protect the land via an option to purchase under the following conditions:

- The Council is informed in writing of the land acquisition or option to purchase before it occurs.
- The Council makes a preliminary finding via staff analysis that the proposed regional park unit is consistent with Strategy 1 (a): siting criteria for units of the Regional Park System, and the size/service area requirements for the applicable regional park system unit are met.
- The Council conducts a public hearing to designate the acquired land as regional recreation open space based on a draft acquisition master plan containing the acquired land or land held under an option to purchase. The hearing is conducted under the requirements of [MN Statute 473.147](#).
- Based on the findings/conclusions of the public hearing, the Council designates the land as regional recreation open space and approves an acquisition master plan that contains the acquired land or land held under an option to purchase.



*Baylor Regional Park,
Carver County*

If these conditions are met as required by [MN Statutes 473.147](#), and [473.313](#) the Council will consider reimbursing the park agency via a grant as permitted under [MN Statute 473.315](#) for the following costs:

- Appraisal costs incurred by the acquiring park agency or entity under contract with the agency.
- Surveying costs incurred by the acquiring park agency or entity under contract with the agency.
- Legal fees incurred by the acquiring park agency or entity under contract with the agency.
- Fees for service provided by an entity under contract by the park agency to negotiate and purchase the land or obtain an option to purchase.
- Principal payments made towards the purchase price including principal payments on a contract for deed or bond, or payments made on an option to purchase.
- 180 percent of township or city taxes due on the parcel at the time of closing as required by [MN Statute 473.341](#).

Since the acquisition of the land will primarily benefit the acquiring agency, to comply with [MN Statute 16A.695](#) requirements on the expenditure of State bonds, to minimize the total costs of acquisition and to be consistent with reimbursements made on other projects, these costs are not grant eligible:

- Acquisition costs incurred to acquire a local park, which is later designated a regional park.
- Interest incurred by the acquiring agency or entity under contract with the agency on bonds it issued to buy the land, or interest incurred on a contract for deed payment.
- Projected investment revenue lost by the acquiring agency or entity under contract with the agency, based on what it might have earned on funds it spent to acquire the land or to buy an option to purchase the land.
- Interest on inter-agency or intra-agency loans used to finance the acquisition payment(s) or option to purchase.

Reimbursement will be considered based on whether the development or rehabilitation project fits the criteria—not on how the implementing agency plans to spend the reimbursement grant. However, agencies should state how they would spend the reimbursement grant so that State funds as well as Council bonds can be used when possible. This would eliminate any need for amendments to the Council's Unified Capital Budget since the CIP would accurately reflect how the funds were being spent and inform the public and elected officials how the funds will be spent.

If an agency chooses to spend reimbursement grant funds on a Phase 1 project, the subsequent Phase 2 or continuing phased project request should not be ranked with other Phase 2 or continuing phased projects, but be ranked along with other unphased projects in the parks CIP. Additional phases should be outlined in the first phase request and the Council must concur that this is one project versus several projects that could stand on their own.



*Central Mississippi
Riverfront Regional Park,
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board*

Since Council bonds are limited to financing only 40 percent of the total biennial CIP, the following steps will be taken when considering reimbursement requests in a biennial CIP:

- Park agencies should submit their CIP funding requests with the understanding that reimbursement grants should not exceed 40 percent of an agency's biennial CIP allocation.
- If the total requests for reimbursement grants exceeds 40 percent of the total biennial CIP, agencies should submit plans to the Metropolitan Council as to how they intend to spend the reimbursement grant, in order to ascertain whether or not State bonds can also be used to finance the reimbursement grant in addition to Council bonds. If the amount of reimbursements requiring Council bond funding exceeds the amount of Council bonds available for that biennial CIP, park agencies will be asked to reduce their CIP requests for reimbursements for that biennium and request funds to finance new project(s).
- If the adjusted requests for reimbursements that require Council bonds still exceed the amount of available Council bonds for that biennium, the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission will rank reimbursement requests according to the ranking criteria in place at that time.

The Metropolitan Council will use best efforts to implement this reimbursement policy as described above. However, the Council does not, under any circumstances, represent or guarantee that reimbursement will be granted, and expenditure of local funds never entitles a park agency to reimbursement.

Finance Strategy 7: Trails that may be used for transit in the future should only be acquired if it is clear they will be used as trails 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. In cases where trail recreation is to be a permanent partner with light-rail transit, busways or other uses in the use of the corridor, regional parks system funds will be used only for that part of acquisition and development attributable to trail use.

Occasionally, existing linear space previously used for railroad or road transportation becomes 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 at present are recreational trails, light-rail transit and busways.

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 the available corridor traverses an area with high-quality natural resources, or if it constitutes part of a link in a more extensive regional trail system, there is interest in acquiring the trail for use as part of the regional trail system. In some cases, available corridors do not provide any linkages or offer any potentially interesting trail recreation experience. In these cases, the regional parks system has little interest in acquisition or use of the corridor.



*Hardwood Creek Regional Trail,
Washington County*

However, where either the linkage or natural resources criterion or both are met, two potential problem situations occur. First is a situation where the surplus corridor is wide enough to accommodate permanent use both as a light-rail/busway transit right-of-way and for trail recreational purposes. Such areas are of substantial interest to the regional parks system. It is hoped that differences between the transportation use and the recreation use can be resolved so that both types of activity can become permanent, valuable additions to the metropolitan area. Planning, development and management arrangements, however, will have to be worked out among the various interests involved.

The trail use of rights-of-way owned by regional rail authorities is allowed as an interim use under agreements between the regional rail authority/transit provider and regional park implementing agencies. Signs on these trails inform the public of that fact and that trail use may be displaced or shared with transit in the future. In recognition of these conditions, an additional classification of regional trails is depicted—"interim trail use subject to shared use or displacement with transit use of this right-of-way."

A more difficult situation occurs when the corridor right-of-way, on a permanent basis, can accommodate either light-rail/busway transit or trail recreation, but not both. Since light-rail/busway transit is in the early planning and implementation stages, it may be years or even decades before light-rail transit is actually constructed in a particular corridor. It is fairly common to suggest that, in the interim, the corridor be used for recreational trail purposes. The possibility always exists that the eventual conversion of the corridor to light-rail/busway transit will not occur and, presumably, the corridor will be available for permanent recreational uses.

However, it is also possible that light-rail/busway transit will eventually claim the facility after a period of several years. If the facility has been used as a recreational trail, it's entirely possible that the trail will become popular and be viewed as a permanent part of the regional trail system. The regional parks system will experience a substantial dislocation and deprivation if one of its links is suddenly removed from the system. Public opposition over conversion from recreation to transportation use is likely. If the regional trail system and the transit system are to take this risk, it must be done with the clear-cut understanding that trail recreation may only be a temporary use. No significant long-term recreation investment will be made in the facility unless it will be in operation for its useful design life. As defined by the Federal Highway Administration, the useful design life of a trail is 10 years or more. Bridges have a useful design life of 50 years.

"Minnesota Abandoned Railroad Corridor Preservation Process" describes how railroad rights-of-way can be preserved for a variety of public uses. If regional railroad authorities decide to divest themselves of rights-of-way, this procedure should be used to determine future public uses of the right-of-way, including regional trails if the rights-of-way can generally meet regional trail criteria.



*The mission of the
Regional Parks
Foundation is to
improve, protect and
grow the system of
parks and trails in the
seven county
metropolitan region.*

Finance Strategy 8: The Council will support the activities of its non-profit partner, the Regional Parks Foundation of the Twin Cities in order to raise awareness of the regional parks system and to raise private funds to help acquire lands planned as part of regional park system.

Although deciding what lands should be purchased for the regional parks system has been carefully determined through individual park and trail master plans and prioritized for regional funding, the ability to acquire the land is dependent on having enough funds available when landowners are ready to sell. Regional park agencies have had to estimate how much money to budget to buy the land, not knowing when it will be available and what land prices will be. In several instances, regional park agencies have not had sufficient regional acquisition grant funds to meet the demand for funds and have had to use their own funds to acquire the land and then seek reimbursement with regional grants in the future.

These reimbursement grants are financed with Metropolitan Council bonds because state bonds cannot be used to reimburse a local government for land that has already been purchased. In other cases, if the regional park implementing agency did not have sufficient funds, the land was sold on the private market and homes or other structures were built or rebuilt on the land. It then became unreasonably expensive to acquire and was lost for park or trail purposes.

In order to have sufficient funds on hand when needed to acquire regional parks system land, the [Regional Parks Foundation of the Twin Cities](#) was formed in 2008. The mission of the Regional Parks Foundation is to raise awareness of the regional park system, and to help raise private funds to supplement and leverage public resources for the acquisition of regional parks and trails.

Finance Strategy 9: The Council actively will seek funding from the state and other sources.

The Council will seek continued state funding for acquisition, development and rehabilitation of all elements in the regional parks system. The Council will also pursue other sources of funding where appropriate. Continued State supplemental support to finance 40 percent of operation and maintenance costs of the regional system will also be sought.

The regional parks system has been funded through a combination of state and local funding sources over the last 30 years. Funding for operations and maintenance of the regional system has been provided primarily by 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 implementing agencies to help fund their O&M costs. [MN Statute 473.351, subd. 3](#), states that:

- Each regional park implementing agency must receive no less than 40 percent 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 including the preceding, the implementing agencies will share the available money in proportion to the amounts they would otherwise be entitled to under the formula.

Any changes in the formula used to distribute state funds for operations and maintenance will require legislative action.

Planning

Policy: Promote master planning and help provide integrated resource planning across jurisdictions.

Planning Strategy 1: Acquisition and improvement projects must be part of approved master plans, or their amendments. Importance of accurate master plans, and for local government to guide land shown within master plan boundary as intended for future park use.



*Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes
Park Reserve, Bloomington &
Three Rivers Park District*

The basic unit of Council control is at the master-plan level for the allocation of regional acquisition and development funding. As a condition to request development funding in the first biennium of the regional parks capital improvement program (CIP), regional park implementing agencies must assess and report to the Metropolitan Council whether sufficient information on the cost of the facility has been provided in the master plan or subsequent amendments and that the facility's construction can begin if funds are provided. Alternatively, the regional park implementing agency may choose to request capital improvement funds to finance the final design/engineering of the facility in the first biennium of the CIP and a separate grant for the facility's construction in the second biennium of the CIP. The amount of the construction grant will be based on the results of the final design/engineering phase.

If a master plan amendment is needed prior to funding construction of a facility, the regional park implementing agency must provide the general public and agencies that have an effect on the particular park or trail an opportunity to participate in the process. The opportunity for public input must also be provided in the final design/engineering phase of any project.

[MN Statute 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, trail and special recreation feature. Master plans prepared by the 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 and Council's estimates of use and costs. The master plan process allows other units of government and citizens to know what is planned for a park and how it affects them. Collectively, these master plans form the implementing agencies' part of the regional system plan. For a regional park implementing agency to receive a Council grant for acquisition or development, the proposed project must be consistent with a Council-approved master plan.

Master plans will be reviewed and approved by the Council for consistency with this and other Council policy plans. Inconsistent plans will be returned with comments to the regional park implementing agency, which must revise and resubmit the plan to be eligible for Council funding.

[MN Statute 473.313](#) provides for the state mandate on master plans; however, it does not provide guidance on timeliness of revisions/updates. A plan is revised/updated when the regional park implementing agency submits a plan amendment to the Metropolitan Council to change its original proposal for acquisition and/or development, or when it has developed significant additional detail. The Metropolitan Council may approve or reject the plan amendment.

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. As a condition for requesting regional parks system development funds in the first biennium of the regional parks capital improvement program (CIP), the Council will require implementing agencies to assess and report to the Council whether sufficient information on the cost of the facility has been provided in the master plan and that the project's construction can begin if funds are provided. Alternatively, the regional park implementing agency may choose to request capital improvement funds to finance the final design/engineering of the facility in the first biennium of the CIP and a separate grant for the facility's construction in the second biennium of the CIP. In either case, the regional park implementing agency must provide an opportunity for the general public and agencies that have an effect on the particular park or trail to participate in the process to amend a master plan or the final design/engineering phase of a facility prior to funding its construction.

The outcome of this assessment, which may result in an amended master plan or separate financing of final design/engineering of a facility, will provide adequate information to determine the proposed facility's consistency with the Council's policy plan and help justify the priority and timing of funding in the regional parks capital improvement program.



Fish Lake Regional Park, Three Rivers Park District



*Mississippi Gorge Regional Park,
Minneapolis Park and
Recreation Board & St. Paul*

Master Plan Content Requirements and Funding Process

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 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, including schedule and cost estimates for each project and the approximate capacity of each facility. Conflicts between recreational and natural-resource management needs in developing the park/trail unit should be addressed and resolved. Amendments to an acquisition-phase master plan should be made prior to funding recreation and visitor support facilities if there is insufficient detail on the scale and cost of the facility. Alternatively, the final design/engineering phase of a proposed facility should be funded first, with construction funding provided in a separate capital improvement grant.
- **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.
- **Operations:** Rules, regulations or ordinances affecting the site, including estimated operations 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.
- **Citizen participation:** A process to involve affected municipalities and the general public in the master planning. The process must include, but not be limited to, timely notice to the affected municipality with an opportunity for the public to be heard. The master plan should include a summary of comment received, with emphasis on issues raised.
- **Public awareness:** Plans for making the public aware of services available when the regional park is open.



*Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park,
Washington County*

- **Accessibility:** A plan that identifies special populations to be served by the facility and addresses accessibility, affordability and other measures designed to ensure that the facility can be used by members of special population groups.
- **Natural resources:** As part of the master plan, there should be a natural-resource management component that includes:
 - 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 data in a GIS (Geographic Information System). The natural resource inventory should include native plant communities mapped in the Minnesota County Biological Survey and listed (rare, endangered, and threatened) species documented in the Natural Heritage Information System. The natural resource inventory may include other land-based information. The Metropolitan Council has created the [Natural Resources Digital Atlas \(NRDA\)](#)--an easy to use mapping application designed to assist communities and other organizations and users in the Twin Cities metropolitan area to identify and protect locally or regionally significant natural resources. Using consistent, region-wide information based on the above data or tool will assure compatibility with other natural resource inventories that have been completed or will be done in the metropolitan region.
 - 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. 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 Council's model ordinance 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.
 - Each regional park implementing agency is responsible for preparing a master plan for each regional system park that it owns or operates. The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned amendments to affected local units of government, as well as local, state and federal recreation providers with facilities within the primary service area of the park or trail, and address their concerns prior to submitting the plan to the Metropolitan Council. (The primary service area of a park or trail is the area in which 75 percent of the unit's visitors come from.) The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised.

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 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 and the approximate capacity of the trail.
- **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 operations and maintenance costs and sources of revenue to operate and maintain the trail.
- **Citizen participation:** A process to involve affected municipalities and the general public in the master planning of the trail. The process must include, but not be limited to, timely notice to the affected municipality with an opportunity for the public to be heard. The master plan should include a summary of comment received, with emphasis on issues raised.

• **Public awareness:** A process to involve affected municipalities and the general public in the master planning of the trail. The process must include, but not be limited to, timely notice to the affected municipality with an opportunity for the public to be heard. The master plan should include a summary of comment received, with emphasis on issues raised.

• **Accessibility:** A process to involve affected municipalities and the general public in the master planning of the trail. The process must include, but not be limited to, timely notice to the affected municipality with an opportunity for the public to be heard. The master plan should include a summary of comment received, with emphasis on issues raised.

Each regional park implementing agency is responsible for preparing a master plan for each regional system park or trail assigned to it by this policy plan. The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned amendments to affected local units of government, as well as local, state and federal recreation providers with facilities within the primary service area of the park or trail, and address their concerns prior to submitting the plan to the Metropolitan Council. (The primary service area of a park or trail is the area in which 75 percent of the unit's annual visitors come from.) The master plan submitted to the Metropolitan Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised.



*Dakota Rail Regional Trail,
Three Rivers Park District*

Master plans for regional destination trails or greenways:

Master plans for regional destination trails or greenways shall include all of 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:
 - 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 data. Using the same NRI format will assure 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 (rare, endangered, and threatened) species 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. 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 with minimal adverse impact on that habitat.
 - 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 Metropolitan Council’s model ordinance 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.
 - Each regional park implementing agency is responsible for preparing a master plan for each regional system park or trail that it owns or operates. The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned amendments to affected local units of government, as well as local, state and federal recreation providers with facilities within the primary service area of the park or trail, and address their concerns prior to submitting the plan to the Metropolitan Council. (The primary service area of a park or trail is the area in which 75 percent of the unit’s annual visitors come from.) The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised.



*Rice Creek West Regional Trail,
Anoka County & Ramsey County*

Planning Strategy 2: Joint-powers agreements for regional trails are encouraged.

Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to enter into joint-powers agreements with local governments regarding the acquisition and operations/maintenance of regional trails. The joint-powers agreements should address who has control over the trail right-of-way and how that control is exercised, and who will operate and maintain the trail and how operations and maintenance will be accomplished.

The trail must be available to all users (not restricted by residence) with only controls on the type of use and timing/season of the permitted use(s).

The duration of the joint-powers agreements should last the expected life of the trail and should be included in the trail master plans submitted to the Metropolitan Council as an assurance that any funds provided by the Council for the trail would be spent consistent with the Council-approved trail master plan.

Regional trails generally extend through several communities. Unlike regional parks, where the regional park implementing agency owns the park and usually deals with one or two local governments, regional trails affect several local governments and may not be “owned” by the regional park implementing agency. The regional park implementing agency may lease the trail land and manage it with a local government through a joint-powers agreement.

Joint-powers agreements need not be identical, but regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to negotiate arrangements that deal with the primary issue of how trail land ownership is controlled and how the trail is going to be managed, and that insure the trail will be open to all people (not restricted by residence). The trail should be treated as a truly regional facility, since regional and state funds are or will be used to finance its acquisition, development and operations/maintenance.

Including these joint-powers agreements in trail master plans assures the Metropolitan Council that any funds it provides or passes on for the trail’s acquisition, development or operations/maintenance will be consistent with Council-approved trail master plans.



*Long Lake Regional Park,
Ramsey County*

Planning Strategy 3: Projects may share costs, if they are consistent with a master plan.

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

It is possible that a regional park implementing agency may wish to make improvements that substantially differ in type, size, scale or cost from those in the approved master plan and the adopted CIP, in order to meet expanded local recreational demands or satisfy above-average quality standards. Two conditions must be satisfied before such activity can be approved: First, the responsible regional park implementing agency must request an amendment to the master plan to reflect the new proposal; then the Council must review and, if in accord, accept the amendment.

If a new master plan is adopted, there also must be 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 users of regional funds, it is necessary to limit the amount to what is necessary to cover average improvements that will deliver adequate services, and not to pay for excessively ornate or elaborate facilities.

A master plan amendment followed by final Council approval for regional park implementing agency action is required, 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 improvements are to be put on regional system lands that are 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 park, park reserves and trails, irrespective of who pays the development bill.

The regional park implementing agency may be required to pay the full amount or the extra portion of the project cost when a 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.

- Projects funded by cost sharing must meet the same requirements of master planning and Council approval as any other regional recreation system projects.
- Costs incurred by the regional park implementing agency as the local share of the project are not reimbursable.
- The Council will not consider the availability of local funds in establishing the ranking of projects by priorities in the CIP.
- 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.



*Clifton French Regional Park,
Three Rivers Park District*

Recreation Activities and Facilities

Policy: Provide a regional system of recreation opportunities for all residents, while maintaining the integrity of the natural resource base within the regional parks system.

Recreation Activities and Facilities Strategy 1: Activities in regional parks must be tied to the natural resources of the parks, but not impact them negatively.

[MN Statute 473.147](#) requires the Metropolitan 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.”

[MN Statute 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.”

Based on the legislative directive and definition of “regional recreation open space,” activities in the regional parks system should:

- Be strongly tied to high-quality natural resources and to the distribution of these resources around the area.
- Require land and acquisition efforts generally found at the regional level.
- Be reasonably, feasibly and safely accommodated without detriment to existing uses as determined through master plans for facility improvements to accommodate the use, or through regional park implementing agency policy board decisions on park/trail use management issues.
- Be protective of the environment/ecology of the site and not negatively impact its natural resources.

Recreation includes many different kinds of activities and pursuits, some of which can be done individually and alone, and others that involve many people. Some activities are inexpensive—or even free—needing little more than sensible clothing and shoes. Others require a substantial personal outlay of funds. A number of activities can and do take place on lands and in facilities usually provided at public expense. Others are provided on a for-profit basis and require admission and user charges.

Activities that should be accommodated in the regional parks system include:

- Picnicking
- Nature interpretation
- Hiking/walking
- Camping
- Fishing
- Bicycling
- Swimming
- Boating
- Horseback riding
- Conservations
- Ski-touring
- Snowmobiling, in some cases

This list does not include unique activities such as those offered by the [Como Park Zoo and Marjorie McNeely Conservatory](#), because these two facilities are, by law, to be included in the regional parks system.

The regional activities selected 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 towns.

When the regional system was being developed in the 1970s, several existing parks were included that had activities not currently considered appropriate for inclusion in the regional system. Many of these activities continue to operate legitimately today, but they are not eligible for regional funding for improvement or expansion.

Land is acquired at the regional level for inclusion in the system with the intent that it may eventually be developed in a way that provides for the recreational activities listed above. Adherence to this basic list of activities has served the regional system well over the years and has helped to fend off efforts to acquire and develop regional parks system lands for other ventures.



Marjorie McNeely Conservatory, St. Paul



*Lebanon Hills Regional Park,
Dakota County*

Other uses, described as follows, for parks and trails should be considered by regional park implementing agencies when determining whether to accommodate them in trail development master plans.

- In-line skating. This activity requires a wider trail treadway (wider than 8 feet) if pedestrian, bicycling and in-line skaters are on the same treadway and going in two directions. In-line skating also requires a smoother/harder surface than bicycling and pedestrian uses. In-line skating is more popular on flat-terrain trails, such as abandoned railroads, than on hilly terrain trails going cross-country. In-line skating seems to be more popular on looped in-park trails than on long-distance park-to-park trails. However, skaters will go out and back on linear trails at a distance that meets their physical conditioning. Based on these factors, in-line skating could be added as a primary use on a regional trail if:
 - The trail treadway was or could reasonably be made sufficiently wide, smooth and flat to safely accommodate skaters, pedestrians and bicyclists.
 - Few or no other in-line skating opportunities were being provided nearby on regional trails (in-park or inter-park) or could not be provided on non-regional trails (in-park or inter-park).
- Mountain biking. Challenging, hilly terrain is attractive to mountain bicyclists, but the trail treadway must be designed to minimize soil erosion. In some cases, mountain biking on turf trails may be permitted only during drier times of the year if the underlying soil and slopes isn't able to withstand mountain bike use when it is seasonally wet. Mixing mountain biking and pedestrian users on the same trail treadway should be carefully evaluated during the trail design process. Trail user rules may be needed to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for both kinds of users. Mountain bike trail terrain is best provided in closed loop trails within regional parks or park reserves rather than in cross-country trails between parks. Mountain biking (off-road, nonpaved trails) could be added as a primary use on a regional trail if:
 - During drier seasonal time periods, mountain-bike use can be accommodated if the trail treadway surface and design permits it without causing excessive erosion.
 - The trail treadway can safely accommodate either bicyclists alone or a mix of pedestrians and bicyclists through appropriate trail design and/or trail user rules.
- Night trail use. Opening trails at night allows those who work during the weekdays to use them more frequently. Walking and cross-country skiing at night increases trail uses during the off-peak spring, fall and winter seasons. Trail lighting projects are encouraged where appropriate, especially on trails with high demand. When considering lighted trails, however, it's important to assess lighting's impact on adjacent land uses.

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 use public participation processes to develop solutions to any multi-use trail conflicts.



*Minnehaha Regional Park,
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board*

Trail uses such as motorized wheelchairs or three-wheel bicycles should be reasonably accommodated to serve persons with mobility impairments wherever possible.

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 (MASC) 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 MASC, not the Metropolitan 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.

When new recreational activities become popular, parks implementing agencies need to see if it's appropriate to accommodate them on regional parks system lands. For example, in the last 10 years, field archery, ski-joring, paint ball, BMX biking, skate parks, dog exercise areas and dressage have become increasingly popular. These activities may preclude the use of an area for other uses, but this doesn't mean they are unacceptable within regional parks system lands in all cases. To accommodate new recreation activities on regional parks system lands, the regional park implementing agency must first assess how well the proposed activity meets the standards for recreational activities and then incorporate any physical changes to the regional parks system landscape through a master plan revision process that includes significant public input.

In some instances, there may be no need for any physical change to the park or trail unit, but a change in visitor or park management rules or policies, as might be required for allowing off-leash dog use on a trail, for example. Another management issue might be permitting a limited controlled hunt as a means of maintaining the health of a park's deer herd. In both cases, there are no physical changes to the park/trail unit requiring capital improvements, simply a change in how the park/trail unit is used or managed. Such park/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 park's environment, park users and adjacent property.

Some new recreation open-space uses may be compatible with the long-range basic mission of the regional park and open-space program. In some instances, new uses may enhance the viability of the regional system and expand the range of opportunities available in the parks, park reserves and trails. Other recreation open-space uses may substantially reduce the ability of the regional facilities to carry out their planned roles or may diminish the quality of the recreational experience.

Off-road vehicles (ORVs) are defined as all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-road motorcycles (ORMs) and four-wheel-drive vehicles being used off designated roads. For the purpose of this policy plan, snowmobiles are not considered to be ORVs. 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 which link to other trails outside the seven county Metropolitan Area.

The number of ORVs is expected to continue to increase, eventually creating significant demand for ORV recreation facilities within the metropolitan area. ORV use has been shown to have negative impacts on the experiences of those taking part in outdoor recreation without motorized vehicles when both activities occur in the same area. ORV use also can cause environmental damage such as soil erosion, inappropriate use in wetland areas and stream crossings, noise and air pollution. ORVs—other than snowmobiles—are inappropriate in regional parks, park reserves and regional trails because of their adverse impact on existing recreational activities and the natural environment.

The Metropolitan Council acknowledges that the [Minnesota Department of Natural Resources](#) (DNR) has statutory authority under [MN Statute 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 seven-county Metropolitan 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.

The initial decision on whether a new activity can and should be accommodated is up to the regional park implementing agency responsible for the park, park reserve and trail. The Council will become involved if the regional park implementing agency decides it would like to accommodate a new activity but finds that a master plan amendment is necessary before it can act.



Carver Park Reserve, Three Rivers Park District



*Central Mississippi Riverfront
Regional Park,
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board*

Recreation Activities and Facilities Strategy 2: Most heavy recreational use should be in the more urban regional parks.

The development of facilities that attract many users, which require larger capacity roads and connection to a municipal sewage treatment system, should be confined to parks and park reserves located in the urban and urbanizing area of the region 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 more rural areas, 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.

When feasible, transit system elements should be developed to provide access to regional parks system units. Transit planners should prepare specific transit system elements that are sensitive to parks, park users, park development plans and local agencies' rules and regulations.

The metropolitan urban area is the land already urbanized or planned to accommodate urban development in the next 20 years. This area has or will receive a full complement of regional and local services, such as central sewers, transit, parks and playgrounds, a dense road network, and full-time fire and police protection. People and the businesses in the urban area that will receive these services are also the ones who will pay for their development and delivery.

The rural area consists of lands that are to be retained for agriculture, natural resource conservation and related recreation and other low-density types of uses. Its residents can do without urban services and normally will not receive them. They are not expected to pay for the facilities that will deliver services to people in the urban area. The rural area contains 50 percent of the total land acreage in the metropolitan area and, of necessity, must contain some facilities intended primarily to deliver services to people living within the urban area. Several regional parks, park reserves and trails are located in the rural area.

This is because the presence of a high-quality natural resource base has long been a major criteria for the definition of lands to go into the regional park and park reserve system. The distribution of high-quality natural resources bears little or no resemblance to the designated urban and rural areas. In order to build up a large recreational land reserve to be used for future populations, it has been necessary to acquire land in the rural area.

The [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) integrates plans for regional parks, park reserves and trails in the rural area. These regional parks and trails should primarily serve the demands of residents of the urban area; they should not interfere with agricultural activities or natural resource conservation and hunting, and should be planned in a way that discourages urban-density developments from occurring around their peripheries.

Much of the regionally generated demand for recreational facilities, especially those that attract large numbers of users, can be adequately accommodated at properties in the urban area. Some activities, such as nature study, camping and water recreation, because of their resource demand, will likely be accommodated at parks or park reserves located in the rural area. Intense developments at parks and park reserves in the rural area should be the exception rather than the rule and should be considered on a property-by-property basis. Developments intended to enhance the protection and preservation of natural resources, whether in the rural area or the urban area, advance the strong conservation role of park reserves.



*Miesville Ravine Park Reserve,
Dakota County*

Recreation Activities and Facilities Strategy 3: Regional parks facilities and programs should encourage use by special populations.

The regional park implementing agencies should act to remove or reduce barriers to use of the regional system by special populations. Barriers may include safety problems, 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 special populations. Capital improvement funding requests should include strategies for meeting the needs of special populations.

Metro Transit and other transit providers are urged to work with the regional park implementing agencies to identify any transportation barriers for special populations and design programs to increase the level of access to the regional parks system.

The regional parks system has been designed and developed to provide services for all of the residents of the metropolitan area, with facilities and services geared to meet the demands and abilities of the general population. A 1989 study, *Recreational Interests and Needs of Special Need Groups*, which surveyed regional park use by special populations, indicated that some 30 percent of the metropolitan area's population are members of special population groups. Special population groups identified in the study were: people with physical and mental disabilities, those with low incomes, racial-ethnic minorities, single parents and elderly people. Findings from that study were reconfirmed in the 2008 *Regional Parks Visitor Study*, which found that racial-ethnic minorities underuse the regional system.

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 now include extensive ADA review. Therefore, barriers to persons with disabilities have been reduced since the original 1989 study. Additionally, implementing agencies are encouraged to provide physically challenged participants with similar park/trail experiences through adaptive programs.

The Council further defined potential barriers to participation for racial-ethnic minorities in the second half of 2004. Members of these special populations were part of focus group meetings that helped identify barriers to participation. Further work needs to be done to address this issue.



*Spring Lake Park Reserve,
Dakota County*

Recreation Activities and Facilities Strategy 4: Bicycle and pedestrian access and trails must be part of the regional parks system.

Safe, high-quality, continuous, barrier-free bicycle and pedestrian systems shall be developed, maintained and improved to function as integral parts of the region's transportation and recreation systems.

Regional trails may serve a transportation function as well as a recreation function—especially for bicycle commuting. Where bicycling can safely be accommodated with pedestrian traffic, it will be allowed. The selection, development and operation of bicycle transportation arteries is covered as a component of the [Council's 2030 Transportation Policy Plan](#) rather than the Regional Parks Policy Plan.

The [Metropolitan Council's 2030 Transportation Policy Plan](#), adopted in November 2010, contains a policy and related strategies that address these issues. That policy has been included in this plan, since it is an important consideration when planning for the regional parks system. For the purposes of this plan, the policy has been updated to recognize recreational use of trails.

The regional trails system will provide primarily these bicycle facilities:

- Off-road facilities, which are paths within the roadway rights-of-way but separated from the roadway surface. They may be used for hiking and in-line skating as well as bicycling.
- Independent trails, such as trails using abandoned railroad corridors or utility easements that exist in their own independent rights-of-way.

These facilities are intended to serve:

- Group B bicyclists, who are casual or new adult and teenage riders who prefer comfortable access, preferably by a direct route, on low-speed or low-traffic streets where having the right-of-way as a moving vehicle is not critical. Group B bicyclists are most comfortable on designated bikeways, off-road facilities and independent trails.
- Group C bicyclists, who are pre-teen riders whose roadway use is usually accompanied by a parent. They need access to local schools, libraries, recreation facilities, shopping or other residential areas. They need separation of bicycles and motor vehicles through off-road facilities or independent trails, or access to streets with low vehicle speeds and volumes.

In addition to Group B and C bicyclists, the regional trail system may occasionally serve Group A bicyclists, who are experienced riders, including regular bicycle commuters, messengers and racers/trainers who can operate under most traffic conditions. They want direct access to destinations at maximum speed with minimum delays. Group A bicyclists primarily rely on the road system for routes and value having the right-of-way like other vehicles, but occasionally enjoy independent trails if they are relatively continuous and not overly crowded.

The majority of regional trail miles should be off-road. However, in some instances it may be necessary for a short stretch of trail to be adjacent to or on a road in order to bypass natural or man-made barriers or private property.

These portions of trails should be designed to safely accommodate Group C bicyclists.

Regional parks system funds and federal transportation enhancement grants may be used to finance parts of the regional trail system where the system serves a transportation function as well as a recreation function. Transportation funds for highway and bridge construction/reconstruction should be used to provide on-road and off-road facilities, including striped bike lanes that exist within the extent of the actual road surface and bicycle/pedestrian bridge lanes to provide safe routes over rivers, freeways or railroad tracks to provide continuity to the regional trail system. The appropriate sources of funding for local trails are the local tax base and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Local Trails Grant Program.

A comprehensive network of trails that serves both recreation and transportation needs is desirable. This network links state, regional, county and local trails, and integrates the trail system with other transportation modes such as the bus and light-rail transit systems. Regional trails are primarily recreation trails, though some of the urban regional trails also have important commuter functions. County and local trails serve as recreation and transportation routes for the immediate local population. They may also serve as “feeder” trails into the larger regional system of trails. To help integrate the network, the Council is responsible for reviewing the comprehensive plans of all cities and townships within the metropolitan area. This review includes an assessment of local trails and their relationship to the regional trail and transit systems. Enhanced dialogue between recreation providers at all levels will be promoted by the Council and should result in a well-designed comprehensive system of trails throughout the metropolitan area.

The Metropolitan Council is responsible for regional transportation planning, including bicycle transportation facilities. Since regional trails also serve non-motorized commuters, it is important that the regional trail system and the regional transportation system work in unison when developing trail and transportation plans. Regional trail projects that would serve transportation needs qualify for additional funding with transportation enhancement grants.



Phalen Regional Park, St. Paul



*Lake Elmo Park Reserve,
Washington County*

System Protection

Policy: Protect public investment in acquisition and development by assuring that every element 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 implementing agencies must receive Council approval before proceeding with any activities inconsistent with the existing approved master plan.
- **Restrictive covenants:** Implementing agencies are required to place restrictive covenants on lands purchased with regional funds, to ensure that all land in the system remains in regional recreation open space use unless a change is agreed to by the Council.
- **Land Planning Act:** Proposed plans of local governments that have a substantial effect on or represent a substantial departure from the regional parks system plan will be subject to a required modification by the Council to ensure that the system is protected.
- **Metropolitan significance:** Proposed development projects that have a substantial effect 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 year's 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.



*Vadnais-Snail Lakes Regional Park,
Ramsey County*

System Protection Strategy 1: 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 Metropolitan Council may require plan modifications to local comprehensive plans, updates or amendments that 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, or 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 element of this policy plan. Local governments will be notified of any changes to the regional recreation open space system 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 are protected from land uses or projects that represent substantial departures from the Council's adopted policy plan or that are likely to have a substantial impact on the regional parks system.

Substantial departures from or impacts on the Council's adopted regional recreation open space system plan 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 park system users; projects that impair the use and enjoyment of the park system unit due to excessive noise, air pollution or water pollution; and projects that interfere with the operation and maintenance of the park 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 Metropolitan Council-approved local comprehensive plan is exempt from metropolitan significance reviews for metropolitan system effects.

In accordance with the Council's [2030 Regional Development Framework](#) principles, 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 Metropolitan 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.



*Bruce Vento Regional Trail,
St. Paul*

System Protection Strategy 2: Release of restrictive covenants.

Restrictive covenants are placed on regional parks system lands, trails, and greenways to ensure that these lands are available for regional park uses, and that the regional investment in these lands is protected. Under certain exceptional circumstances, the Metropolitan Council will release restrictive covenants on regional park land, if an equally valuable land or facility is added in exchange for the released park land.

“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) and the land has comparable or better natural resource characteristics and 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 that replacement land has comparable or better natural resource characteristics and comparable or better recreation opportunities than the land being converted, where 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 in 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.

When land is acquired for the regional parks system, restrictive covenants on that land ensure that it is used only for regional parks system purposes. These covenants cannot be broken or amended unless the Metropolitan Council approves. 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. The Metropolitan Council will consider land exchanges for other uses only if the exchanges will not harm the regional parks system.

For those changes that represent a potential system impact, the Council will use a process comparable to the review period for plan amendments with a potential impact on the regional system. For conversions such as small exchanges of land to provide right-of-way for access, an expedited review comparable to the 10-day waiver will be used. The following criteria will be used to determine whether regional parks system land may be exchanged for other parkland.

Before releasing a restrictive covenant, the Metropolitan Council will make findings with respect to the existing park system unit which consider the following factors:

- Whether the park system unit can continue to meet Council site and site attribute standards established for the particular type of park system unit (regional park, park reserve, trail greenway or special recreation feature)
- Whether the park system unit will continue to function as originally planned
- Whether environmental features (wildlife habitat, water quality) will be adversely affected
- 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 need for the conversion, as in the instance of transportation improvements, is generated by the recreational park system unit

Before releasing a restrictive covenant, the Metropolitan Council will make findings with respect to the transportation alternatives which consider the following factor:

- Whether the proposed project of greater benefit to the region than continuance of the regional parks system unit

Lands in the regional parks system may be subject to use-conversion proposals 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, 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.

The Council has long indicated it considers lands intended for outdoor recreation activities to be in their highest and best permanent use. The Council requires restrictive covenants to be put on all lands acquired with regional funds. The covenants ensure nondiscriminatory regional parks system use is continued in the future.

System Protection Strategy 3: The Council will reimburse implementing agencies for contamination cleanup only when there is no real alternative for the park or trail function.

The Metropolitan Council will not consider funding soil contamination cleanup or capping abandoned wells that have contaminated their ground water aquifer on regional park land unless all of the following criteria are met:

- The land is already under regional park implementing agency ownership or control via a joint powers agreement or lease, and was acquired or was under the park implementing agency's control before Phase 1 environmental audits 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 vitality consistent with the [2030 Regional Development Framework](#). The cost of cleanup is not eligible to receive 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.



Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board



*Spring Lake Park Reserve,
Dakota County*

System Protection Strategy 4: Phase 1 environment site assessments must be done for land that may be contaminated or that may have abandoned wells on it.

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 of the master planning process. The Phase 1 environmental site assessments 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 master plan submitted to the Metropolitan Council.

The cost of the Phase 1 environmental site assessments is eligible for reimbursement as an acquisition cost.

Prior to the Council determining whether the contaminated land, including lands with abandoned wells, should be part of the proposed park or trail, 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 park or trail would provide.
- If the Council concludes that the land should be added to the regional parks system, this does not imply that the Council will use park funds to clean up the site or cap abandoned wells. Park funds will only be used for contaminated soil cleanup or capping abandoned wells if the four preceding conditions have been met.

System Protection Strategy 5: 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 park lands and users.

Antennae towers for telecommunication services and the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System are generally prohibited on lands within the Metropolitan Council-approved master plan boundaries of regional parks system land already acquired and land proposed to be acquired unless:

- The communication system is not able to function without placement of the tower on regional parks system land. Before locating any tower on park system land, however, 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 satisfy this criterion in requesting Metropolitan Council and regional park implementing agency approval 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, but the tower placement must meet 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 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 already affected by park/trail development and 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 reserves should be dedicated to the park agency, which owns the park or reserve for operations and maintenance of its regional parks system units.

Regional park implementing agencies can submit a park/trail master plan amendment to the Commission and Metropolitan Council for review/approval that would propose a tower placement. The park/trail master plan amendment should state how the conditions listed above have been met. The 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.

If the land for the tower's location has a restrictive covenant on it (required for land acquired with Metropolitan Council acquisition grants), 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



*Minnehaha Regional Park,
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board*

to the Metropolitan 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. The communication service provider shall pay the cost of amending the covenant.

If a regional park implementing agency believes that a tower should not be placed on regional park 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. Any lease revenues for the tower easement must be used by the regional park implementing agency to further the acquisition, redevelopment, development or operations/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 Metropolitan 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 park land.

The growth in cellular telephone, personal communication system (PCS) telephone business and implementation of the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System has resulted in requests that regional parks system land be leased for antennae towers or that towers be located near regional parks system lands.

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 the impact on a facility's wildlife populations or habitats (migration routes, breeding sites, plant communities). When applying this standard, the Council will evaluate visual obstructions created by telecommunication towers that are not screened from park visitor view.

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 Recreation Open Space Policy Plan.

With increasing expansion of telecommunication markets and the implementation of the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System network, there may be situations in which regional parks system land will be proposed for antennae tower placement. Each of these radio frequency communication systems relies on a grid placement of towers. Co-location of antennae 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. As a partner in the planning and financing of the regional parks system, the Metropolitan Council has a policy position on telecommunication towers.

System Protection Strategy 6: Regional wastewater conveyance facilities and other utilities on park lands should be placed in ways that minimize negative impact on the 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 Metropolitan 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.

For wastewater conveyance facilities located in existing park system units, the Metropolitan Council, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, shall have the option to purchase an easement (property right) or to accept a permit (license). For new regional parks system units, the Metropolitan Council reserves the option to include an easement for a future regional wastewater conveyance corridor as a condition of a Council grant used to acquire land for the new park system unit provided the conveyance is consistent with the approved new park unit's master plan. If the Council requires an easement for a future regional wastewater conveyance corridor as a condition of its park acquisition grant, the Council will waive the Sewer Availability Charge for that park unit.

In order to distribute electricity, natural gas, oil and drinking water, it may be necessary to place underground conduits/pipes or aboveground transmission poles/towers on regional parks system lands. Such utilities may be needed to serve visitors at that park system unit, and to serve other land. Regional park agencies should collaborate with the utility provider to determine where these utilities should be placed that minimizes impacts on the park 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.

Park agencies may either sell or grant an easement (property right), or sell or grant a permit (license) to the utility provider that spells out where the utility may be located, conditions for access to the utility, how impacts to the park for 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 park system unit.



Chapter Three: System Plan

Introduction

Regional parks system legislation directs the Metropolitan Council to take the leading 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. The regional parks system is one part of a total park, recreation and open space system in the metropolitan region.

[MN Statute 473.147](#) limits the Council's regional park system planning and capital improvement funding to lands acquired and managed by counties, cities and special park districts, which together with State facilities will reasonably meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the Metropolitan Area.

The regional parks system plays an essential role in providing parks and open space for the metropolitan area, but is just one component of the greater recreation and open space system of the metropolitan area. The regional system alone cannot, and was never intended to, provide all of the metropolitan area's recreational facilities and services. Local, state and federal parks and open space areas complement the regional parks system to meet the recreational needs and natural resources protection goals of the region.

The regional parks system is primarily based around lands in a high-quality natural resources 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 regional trail network. Popular activities in regional parks and park reserves include picnicking, boating, swimming, fishing and camping as well as trail uses such as walking, biking and inline skating. The regional parks system draws visitors from throughout the region and beyond.



*Theodore Wirth Regional Park,
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board*

The recreational open space provided by the federal and state government in the area generally serves similar recreational demands as the regional parks system. The Council provides these lands protection under the Metropolitan Significance Review regulations and the [Metropolitan Land Planning Act](#) when applicable. 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 plans indicate that facilities will fulfill regional recreation open space objectives and are consistent with this policy plan, the Council recognizes these areas as providing experiences equivalent to those offered by the regional system. However, the Council does not grant regional funds to state or federal agencies for capital improvements or for operations and maintenance of these facilities.

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 in size than regional parks and are population-based, rather than primarily natural resources based. Local trails typically provide connectivity between community destinations, such as schools, libraries and community centers. The Council encourages local trail connections to the regional trail network where appropriate. While the local recreational open space areas are not covered in this plan, the facilities and services they offer are taken into consideration when master plans of the regional system are prepared and reviewed.

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, 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 are complementary to the public sector.



*St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park,
Washington County*

Regional System Components

Not all recreation facilities warrant regional status. Table 2 provides a classification system for local and regional facilities. The regional parks system with its primary focus on high-quality natural resources and on providing facilities that require substantial areas of land and/or water are subdivided into four major components. These four components are 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 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 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.

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 reserve is also intended to provide, protect and manage representative areas of the original major landscape types in the metropolitan area to permit appreciation and enjoyment of the natural resources that influenced the region's development.

Park reserves are substantially larger than the parks because they are to contain a diversity of natural resources with adequate space for protection and management of natural resources and for the pursuit of 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 percent 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 percent 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
- St. Croix ground moraine
- Des Moines ground moraine
- Terminal moraine
- Lightly glaciated area
- Mississippi River Valley
- Minnesota River Valley
- St. Croix River Valley



Regional Trails

Trail corridors are intended to provide for recreational travel along linear pathways throughout the metropolitan area. They are selected to follow natural or linear features that traverse areas of scenic appeal and/or historical, architectural and developmental interest while assuring that the trail treadway will have no adverse effect on the natural resource base. The regional trails are selected to pass through or provide connections between elements in the regional parks system. The parks and park reserves perform the important function of providing places for parking, comfort facilities and safe water supplies. 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 collector streets. The regional trail network, especially in the urban areas, serves as commuting routes for bicyclists. 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.

People tend to prefer trails that are relatively close to where they live. Surveys conducted by the Metropolitan Council show that more than 75 percent of trail visitors live within 3 miles of the trails they used. However, trail users are traveling from one city or county to another. It is this inter-jurisdictional trail length that makes these trails regionally significant.



Kenilworth Regional Trail, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

Special Recreation Features

The special recreation features, which are called for in state legislation, 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.

As of 2010, there are seven special recreation features in the system:

- [Como Park Zoo](#), and
- [Marjorie McNeely Conservatory at Como Park](#), both managed as a part of Como Regional Park;
- [Square Lake](#) in Washington County;
- [Noerenberg Gardens](#) on the northwest side of Lake Minnetonka;
- [Gale Woods Farm](#) on the shore of Whaletail Lake in Minnetrista;
- [Silverwood](#), on the shore of Silver Lake in the City of St. Anthony.
- [The Landing](#), along the Minnesota River in Shakopee

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.



Gale Woods Farm, Three Rivers Park District

Table 3-1 Classification System for Local and Regional Facilities

Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
Local Facilities					
Mini-park	Specialized facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population or specific group such as tots or senior citizens; may be in locations such as apartment complexes, townhouse developments or commercial centers.	Less than 1/4 mile radius	< 1 acre		
Neighborhood park/playground	Area for intense recreational activities such as field games, court games, crafts, apparatus area, skating, neighborhood centers.	¼ to ½ mile radius to serve a population of 4,000 – 5,000 (one neighborhood)	< 25 acres	Physiography suited for intense development.	Proximity to elementary schools.
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	Physiography 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 physiographic 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 physiographic interest.	Proximity to community facilities and resources and/or where resource occurs.
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.

Table 3-1 Classification System for Local and Regional Facilities

Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
Local linear parks, trail, corridors and parkways	Area developed for on 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 neural 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 on 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 assuring the trail treadway has no adverse effect on the neural 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 Facilities					
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.
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	1000 + 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.

Table 3-1 Classification System for Local and Regional Facilities

Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
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 has no adverse impact on the natural resource base.

Regional Parks System Size and Composition as of 2010

The regional parks system as of 2010 includes 39 regional parks, 12 park reserves, 38 regional trails, and 6 special recreation features that are open for public use. These regional park facilities have a total land area of about 54,633 acres that have been acquired by the regional park implementing agencies, with approximately 3,600 acres of inholdings within the boundaries of these parks and trails that have not yet been acquired.

In addition to the facilities that are open to the public, there are 6 regional parks and 4 regional trails that have Council-approved master plans, but have not yet been developed. Approximately 1,895 acres have been acquired for the 6 planned regional parks, with an additional 1,630 acres to be acquired in the future.

There are 20 proposed regional trails that do not have Council-approved master plans identifying the trail alignments, therefore the total land area to be acquired for these trails is not known. However, many of these trails will be developed on existing public rights-of-way or acquired in cooperation with municipal governments using their parkland dedication authority. Parkland dedication authority allows the municipality to obtain land at no cost as part of the municipality's approval for residential development.

These existing, planned and proposed regional parks system facilities are shown in Tables 3-2 through 3-5.

	Park Agency	Regional Park	Status
1	Anoka County	Anoka County Riverfront RP	Open
2	Anoka County	Bunker Hills RP	Open
3	Anoka County	Lake George RP	Open
4	Anoka County	Martin-Island-Linwood Lakes RP	Open
5	Anoka County	Rum River Central RP	Open
6	Anoka County/Three Rivers Park District	Coon Rapids Dam RP	Open
7	Carver County	Baylor RP	Open
8	Carver County	Lake Minnewashta RP	Open
9	Carver County	Lake Waconia RP	Open
10	Dakota County	Lake Byllesby RP	Open
11	Dakota County	Lebanon Hills RP	Open
12	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Above the Falls RP (partially open)	Open
13	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Central Mississippi Riverfront RP	Open
14	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minneapolis Chain of Lakes RP	Open
15	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minnehaha RP	Open
16	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Nokomis-Hiawatha RP	Open
17	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Theodore Wirth RP	Open
18	MPRB/St. Paul	Mississippi Gorge RP	Open
19	MPRB/Three Rivers Park District	North Mississippi RP	Open

Table 3-2 Regional Parks Open to the Public

	Park Agency	Regional Park	Status
20	Ramsey County	Bald Eagle-Otter Lakes RP	Open
21	Ramsey County	Long Lake RP	Open
22	Ramsey County	Tony Schmidt RP	Open
23	Ramsey County	Vadnais-Snail Lake RP	Open
24	Ramsey County/St. Paul	Battle Creek -Indian Mounds RP	Open
25	Scott County	Cedar Lake Farm RP	Open
26	St. Paul	Como RP	Open
27	St. Paul	Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm RP	Open
28	St. Paul	Lilydale-Harriet Island-Cherokee Heights RP	Open
29	St. Paul/Ramsey County	Phalen-Keller RP	Open
30	Three Rivers Park District	Bryant Lake RP	Open
31	Three Rivers Park District	Clifton E. French RP	Open
32	Three Rivers Park District	Eagle Lake RP	Open
33	Three Rivers Park District	Fish Lake RP	Open
34	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka Islands RP	Open
35	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka RP	Open
36	Three Rivers Park District/Scott County	Cleary Lake RP	Open
37	Washington County	Cottage Grove Ravine RP	Open
38	Washington County	Pine Point RP	Open
39	Washington County	St. Croix Bluffs RP	Open

Table 3-3 Regional Park Reserves Open to the Public			
	Park Agency	Park Reserve	Status
1	Anoka County	Rice Creek Chain of Lakes PR	Open
2	Dakota County	Miesville Ravine PR	Open
3	Dakota County	Spring Lake PR	Open
4	Three Rivers Park District	Baker PR	Open
5	Three Rivers Park District	Carver PR	Open
6	Three Rivers Park District	Crow Hassan PR	Open
7	Three Rivers Park District	Elm Creek PR	Open
8	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Rebecca PR	Open
9	Three Rivers Park District/Bloomington	Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes PR	Open
10	Three Rivers Park District/Scott County	Murphy-Hanrehan PR	Open
11	Washington County	Big Marine PR	Open
12	Washington County	Lake Elmo PR	Open

Table 3-4 Special Recreation Features Open to the Public			
	Park Agency	Special Recreation Feature	Status
1	St. Paul	Como Zoo	Open
2	St. Paul	Marjorie McNeely Conservatory (Como)	Open
3	Three Rivers Park District	Gale Woods Farm	Open
4	Three Rivers Park District	Noerenberg Gardens	Open
5	Three Rivers Park District	Silverwood Park	Open
6	Three Rivers Park District	The Landing	Open
7	Washington County	Square Lake	Open

Table 3-5 Regional Trails Open to the Public

	Park Agency	Regional Trail	Status*
1	Anoka County	Bunker-Chain of Lakes RT	Open
2	Anoka County	Central Anoka County RT	Open
3	Anoka County	Coon Creek RT	Open
4	Anoka County	East Anoka County RT	Open
5	Anoka County	Mississippi River RT	Open
6	Anoka County	Rum River RT	Open
7	Anoka County/Ramsey County	Rice Creek North RT	Open
8	Anoka County/Ramsey County	Rice Creek West RT	Open
9	Dakota County	Big Rivers RT	Open
10	Dakota County	Mississippi River RT	Open
11	Dakota County	North Urban RT	Open
12	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Cedar Lake RT	Open
13	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Columbia Parkway RT	Open
14	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Kenilworth RT	Open
15	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Minnehaha Parkway RT	Open
16	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Ridgeway Parkway RT	Open
17	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	St. Anthony Parkway RT	Open
18	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Victory Memorial Parkway RT	Open
19	MPRB/Three Rivers Park District	Luce Line RT	Open
20	MPRB/Three Rivers Park District	Northeast Diagonal RT	Open
21	MPRB/Three Rivers Park District	Shingle Creek RT	Open
22	Ramsey County	Birch Lake RT	Open
23	Ramsey County	Highway 96 RT	Open
24	Ramsey County/St. Paul	Bruce Vento RT	Open
25	Ramsey County/St. Paul	Trout Brook RT	Open
26	St. Paul	Sam Morgan RT	Open
27	St. Paul	Summit Avenue RT	Open
28	Scott County	Scott County RT	Open
29	Three Rivers Park District	Bassett Creek RT	Open
30	Three Rivers Park District	Cedar Lake LRT RT	Open

Table 3-5 Regional Trails Open to the Public			
	Park Agency	Regional Trail	Status*
31	Three Rivers Park District	Dakota Rail RT	Open
32	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Independence RT	Open
33	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Minnetonka LRT RT	Open
34	Three Rivers Park District	Medicine Lake RT	Open
35	Three Rivers Park District	Minnesota River Bluffs LRT RT	Open
36	Three Rivers Park District	North Cedar Lake RT	Open
37	Three Rivers Park District	Rush Creek RT	Open
38	Washington County	Hardwood Creek RT	Open

* Many trails are constructed in phases as part of roadway improvement projects or local development. Therefore, although a trail is listed as being open, some portions of the corridor may be developed in the future and are not yet open to the public.



*Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park,
Scott County*

2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan System Changes Adopted in 2005

The system changes that were adopted in 2005 as part of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* were organized into four categories:

Master Plan Boundary Adjustments

Master plan boundary adjustments were proposed for 5 regional parks, 1 park reserve and 7 regional trails. The purpose of these proposed adjustments was to protect areas of quality natural resources or recreation potential adjacent to regional parks and to help complete the regional trail system.

Recognition of Regional Status

Two county parks and three local trails were recognized to be included in the regional parks system.

New Units by 2030

Three new regional park search areas were identified in Anoka, Dakota and Scott counties. Seven regional trail search corridors connecting regional parks system elements together were also identified in Carver, Dakota, Hennepin and Scott counties. Dakota County has since acquired the 456 acre “Empire Wetlands” site for a future regional park.

Completing the System

Four regional park search areas and 3 regional trail search corridors were identified in Anoka, Carver, Dakota and Scott counties and classified as “completing the system” or “saving the last best places.” These facilities may or may not be developed prior to 2030; however, acquisition of land is encouraged as land becomes available and before those opportunities are lost to development forever.

As of 2010, Scott County has acquired 230 acres of the [Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park](#) property. About 60 acres of land within the master plan boundary of the park are still privately owned. The County acquired 173 acres at no cost through a parkland dedication that was required for an adjacent residential development. Additionally, a subsequent acquisition of approximately 7 acres consisted in part of a donation of \$100,000 of land value through the Regional Parks Foundation of the Twin Cities.

A listing of these system changes and their status as of 2010 are shown in Table 3-6 through 3-9.

Table 3-6 Master Plan Boundary Adjustments

Park Agency	Park Unit	Description	Status
Anoka County	Rice Creek Chain of Lakes PR	Add Columbus Lake Headwaters to park reserve boundary	Identified as a possible future boundary addition in the County's 2006 System Plan. A master plan has not been prepared as of 2010.
Anoka County	Rum River Central RP	Add additional land along the Rum River	The County's 2006 System Plan identified three potential future acquisitions to adjust the park boundary. A master plan has not yet been prepared.
Bloomington	Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes PR	Add 87 acres of adjacent publicly owned land to the park reserve.	The updated master plan proposes to add about 17 acres of land to the park reserve. The remaining acreage is comprised of the Warren Conservation Area. Bloomington opted not to propose inclusion of this property into the park reserve.
Carver County	Baylor RP	Acquire approximately 100 acres of land adjacent to Eagle Lake.	A master plan has not been prepared as of 2010.
Carver County	Lake Waconia RP	Add Coney Island to the regional park	A master plan has not been prepared as of 2010, although the comprehensive plans of Carver County and Waconia identify this property as proposed future regional parkland.
Carver County	LRT South RT (now known as MN River Bluffs LRT RT)	Add Seminary Fen to trail corridor	The DNR acquired about 106 acres of the Seminary Fen in 2008. Carver County would like to retain this as a proposed boundary adjustment area in the Regional Parks Policy Plan to keep options open for additional potential future acquisition.
Dakota County	Big Rivers RT	Extend current regional trail to the Scott County border.	A master plan has not been prepared as of 2010. Referenced as the Minnesota River Greenway RT in Dakota County's Park System Plan.
Dakota County	Mississippi River RT	Extend trail from Hastings to Goodhue County	In 2009, the Parks and Trails Council of MN commissioned a master plan for a trail from Hastings to Red Wing in cooperation with Dakota and Goodhue Counties, as well as the cities of Hastings and Red Wing.
Minneapolis Park Board	St. Anthony Parkway RT	Trail extension to complete the regional trails associated with the Grand Rounds.	A master plan for the regional trail has been prepared, but has not yet been approved by the Metropolitan Council.

Table 3-6 Master Plan Boundary Adjustments

Park Agency	Park Unit	Description	Status
Ramsey County	Highway 96 RT	Add Snail Lake Marsh	Area has been added to the regional trail corridor. A master plan has not been prepared, since the County is not seeking funds for acquisition or development. Boundary adjustment designation removed from 2010 Parks Policy Plan map.
St. Paul	Battle Creek RP	Add Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary	In 2008, the Metropolitan Council approved a master plan to add the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary to the Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor (instead of Battle Creek RP, which is managed by Ramsey County). Boundary adjustment designation removed from 2010 Parks Policy Plan map.
St. Paul	Bruce Vento RT	Add trail access facilities and ties trailhead to other regional trails	In 2008, the Metropolitan Council approved a master plan to add Eastside Heritage Park and trail connectors to the Bruce Vento Regional Trail. Boundary adjustment designation removed from 2010 Parks Policy Plan map.
Three Rivers Park District	Crystal-Robbinsdale RT	Extend proposed Crystal-Robbinsdale RT from Crystal to Elm Creek Park Reserve.	Planning for this regional trail alignment is dependent upon transportation planning for the Bottineau Transitway. A master plan has not yet been prepared.

Table 3-7 Recognition of Regional Status

Park Agency	Park Unit	Description	Status
Ramsey County	Tony Schmidt RP	Recognize as a regional park	In 2007, the Metropolitan Council approved a master plan for the regional park.
Ramsey County/St. Paul	Lexington Parkway RT	Recognize as a regional trail and extend trail to Sam Morgan RT in St. Paul	Trail shown as a proposed trail from Como RP south through St Paul to the Sam Morgan RT.
Ramsey County/St. Paul	Trout Brook RT	Recognize as a regional trail and extend trail to Sam Morgan RT in St Paul	In 2010, the Metropolitan Council approved a master plan for the St. Paul portion of the regional trail. Trail is now shown as a planned regional trail on the 2010 Parks Policy Plan map.
St. Paul	Summit Avenue RT	Recognize as a regional trail and extend trail to Sam Morgan RT in St. Paul	Bike lane is shown as an existing trail along Summit Avenue and shown as a search corridor for the connection to the Sam Morgan RT.
Washington County	Pine Point RP	Recognize as a regional park	A master plan has not been prepared as of 2010. Washington County may receive O&M funding, but is not eligible for CIP funds until the Metropolitan Council approves a master plan for this park.

Table 3-8 New Units by 2030

Park Agency	Park Unit	Description	Status
Anoka County	NW Anoka County RP Search Area	Acquire land for new regional park	Remains a regional park search area.
Carver County/ Three Rivers Park District	Crow River RT Search Corridor	New regional trail along the Crow River, connecting the Mississippi River, Crow Hassan PR, Lake Rebecca PR, Luce Line State Trail, Dakota Rail RT, Baylor RP and the proposed Twin Cities & Western RT.	Remains a regional trail search corridor.
Dakota County	Dakota East-West RT Search Corridor	New regional trail connecting Murphy Hanrehan PR, Empire Wetlands RP and the Mississippi River RT	Remains a regional trail search corridor. Referenced as the Vermillion River Greenway RT and Lake Marion Greenway RT in Dakota County's Park System Plan.
Dakota County	Dakota North-South RT Search Corridor	New regional trail connecting the North Urban RT, Lebanon Hills RP, Empire Wetlands RP, and proposed Mills Town State Trail.	Remains a regional trail search corridor. Referenced as the Rich Valley Greenway RT, the Vermillion Highlands Greenway RT and Chub Creek Greenway RT in Dakota County's Park System Plan.
Dakota County	Empire Wetlands RP	Acquire land for new regional park	In 2005, the Metropolitan Council approved an acquisition master plan for the park. Dakota County acquired the entire park acreage in 2008. Area is now shown as a planned park on the 2010 Parks Policy Plan map.
Scott County	Blakeley RP Search Area	Acquire land for new regional park	Remains a regional park search area.
Scott County	Southern Scott RT Search Corridor	New regional trail connecting the Blakeley Search Area, city of Jordan, Cedar Lake RP Search Area and Cleary Lake RP.	Remains a regional trail search corridor.

Table 3-9 Completing the System

Park Agency	Park Unit	Description	Status
Anoka County	NW Anoka RT Search Corridor	New regional trail connecting	Remains a regional trail search corridor. Referenced as the Sugar Hills RT in Anoka County's 2006 Parks System Plan
Carver County	Carver County North-South RT Search Corridor	New regional trail connecting Lake Waconia RP, Miller Lake RP Search Area, MN River Bluffs RP Search Area and crossing to Scott County.	Remains a regional trail search corridor.
Carver County	Miller Lake RP Search Area	Acquire land for new regional park	Remains a regional park search area.
Carver County	Minnesota Bluffs and Ravines RP Search Area	Acquire land for new regional park	Remains a regional park search area.
Dakota County	Southwest Dakota RP Search Area	Acquire land for new regional park	Dakota County's Park System Plan did not include this area as a future regional park. It is being removed as a park search area as part of the 2010 Regional Parks Policy Plan update.
Scott County	Cedar Lake RP Search Area	Acquire land for new regional park	In 2007, the Metropolitan Council approved a master plan for the park. The park opened in 2009.
Scott County	Spring Lake RT Search Corridor	New regional trail connecting Carver County, the Southern Scott County RT Search Corridor and Spring Lake RP.	Remains a regional trail search corridor.



*Lake Minnewashta Regional Park,
Carver County*

System Analysis Background

[MN Statute 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. The policy plan shall estimate the cost of the recommended acquisitions and development, including an analysis of what portion of the funding is proposed to come from the state, metropolitan council levies, and cities, counties and towns in the metropolitan area respectively. In preparing or amending the policy plan the Council shall consult with and make maximum use of the expertise of the Commission. 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.

Subd. 2 of the law states:

...At least every four years the Council shall engage in a comprehensive review of the policy plan...capital improvement programs...which have been adopted by the Council.

In response to this law, the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission has completed an analysis of the proposed system changes. The Commission has reviewed and recommended changes to the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* to: "generally identifying the areas which should be acquired ...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."

As noted above, a comprehensive review of the Regional Parks Policy Plan occurs every four years. Therefore, the plan will be modified to respond to conditions as they change over time. After the results of the 2010 United States Census have been released, the Council will update its [2030 Regional Development Framework](#), which will set the stage for the next review of the *Regional Parks Policy Plan*.



*The Landing,
Three Rivers Park District*

Process for Determining System Changes

State law requires that every ten years, each city, county and township in the metropolitan region review and update its comprehensive plan to ensure that the local plan conforms to the Metropolitan Council's system plans, including the *Regional Parks Policy Plan*. ([MN Statute 473.864](#)) The latest round of local comprehensive plans was due to the Metropolitan Council in 2008 for review. These comprehensive plans were required to acknowledge and plan for the regional parks system facilities identified in the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*.

Regional park implementing agencies underwent extensive planning processes to prepare their parks system plans, which were incorporated into their jurisdiction's comprehensive plan. As part of their planning processes, some implementing agencies identified potential changes to the regional parks system. Council staff advised the agencies that the proposed additions could not be considered regional facilities unless they were identified in the Council's *Regional Parks Policy Plan* and recommended that the agencies seek regional status for their proposals when the Council updates its policy plan. The proposed system changes from Carver, Dakota, Scott and Washington counties as well as St. Paul came from their local comprehensive plans. The proposed additions from Three River Park District and Anoka and Ramsey counties were initiated as part of this policy plan update.

Regional Parks System Changes

The regional parks system changes primarily focus on new regional trail search corridors and boundary adjustments to existing regional trails. A total of 17 regional trails have been proposed by Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties as well as St. Paul. These trails will provide connections between local and regional recreational facilities and meet the criteria for regional trails outlined in this policy plan. The regional trail system changes are shown in Table 3-10.

There are two system changes for regional parks—the addition of a special recreation feature and the deletion of a regional park search area identified in the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. A new category of Regional Park Study Area is also being presented.

Special Recreation Feature Addition

As part of this update to the 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan, [The Landing](#), which is a park that provides a historical perspective of life in a river town in the 1800s, has been added to the regional parks system as a special recreation feature. [The Landing](#) focuses on environmental education concepts in a historical setting. Several key buildings on the site are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Visitor origin information provided by Three Rivers Park District shows that about 68% of visits are non-local. The Park District owns and operates [The Landing](#), so there would be no acquisition costs to the region. Acknowledgement as a special recreation feature would entitle the Park District to regional operations and maintenance funding, and upon Council approval of a master plan, [The Landing](#) would be eligible for regional capital improvement funding for development.

Table 3-10 Regional Trail Additions

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Map Designation	Site Name	Type	Conversion Acres	Trail Length (miles)	Notes
Anoka County	T-	Rice Creek West RT	Regional Trail Boundary Adjustment	15		Amends the boundary of the Rice Creek West RT to include Manomin County Park into the trail corridor. The park serves as a trailhead and recreation node for the regional trail.
Carver County	T-15	Union Pacific Corridor	Regional Trail Search Corridor	3		Trail will follow the Union Pacific rail line, connect to the MN River Bluffs RT extension and provide a river crossing to proposed regional trails in Scott County.
Carver County	T-16	Minnesota River Bluffs LRT RT extension	Regional Trail Search Corridor		17.5	Trail will extend the MN River Bluffs RT from Chaska to Carver along the Minnesota River and potentially to Belle Plain (after 2030).
Carver County	T-1	County Road 10 RT	Regional Trail Search Corridor			Trail will connect the SW Regional Trail Connection in Chaska to the proposed Twin Cities and Western RT, the Carver County North-South RT Search Corridor, Dakota Rail RT and the Luce Line State Trail in Watertown.
Dakota County	T-7	Rosemount River Access Trail	Regional Trail Search Corridor		5	Trail will connect Vermillion Highlands Greenway RT in Rosemount to the Mississippi River RT.
Dakota County	T-8	North Creek Greenway Trail	Regional Trail Search Corridor		9	Trail will connect the MN Zoo to the Vermillion River Greenway RT.
Ramsey County	T-2	Rice Creek South Trail	Regional Trail Search Corridor		2	Trail will connect Rice Creek North RT to Highway 96 RT and provide access to the Arden Hills Army Training Site for winter cross country ski use.
Ramsey County	T-3	Trout Brook RT extension	Regional Trail Boundary Adjustment		3.5	Trail extension will connect Lake McCarrons County Park to Vadnais Snail Lakes Regional Park. It will involve bridge crossings at Highway 36 and I-694. NPS is providing technical support in evaluating alignment alternatives.
Scott County	T-10	Prior Lake Outlet RT Search Area	Regional Trail Search Corridor		6	Trail will connect the Minnesota River to Lower Prior Lake, following the general alignment of the Prior Lake channel.
Scott County	T-11	Louisville RT Corridor Search Area	Regional Trail Search Corridor		8	Trail will connect the Scott Co. West RT to the Union Pacific rail line river crossing to Carver Co.

Table 3-10 Regional Trail Additions

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Map Designation	Site Name	Type	Conversion Acres	Trail Length (miles)	Notes
Scott County	T-12	Elko New Market-Blakeley --Doyle Kennefick Connection Trail	Regional Trail Search Corridor		4	This proposed trail will provide a connection between Doyle-Kennefick RP and the Elko-New Market-Blakeley RT
Scott County	T-13	Elko New Market-Blakeley RT Search Corridor	Regional Trail Search Corridor		32	Trail will connect Blakeley Bluffs RP Search Area to Cedar Lake Farm RP and the Chub Creek Greenway RT in Dakota Co. will require short RT search area for connection in Dakota Co.
Scott County	T-14	Blakeley Bluffs RT Extension	Regional Trail Search Corridor		2	Trail extension will connect Blakeley Bluffs RP Search area to the border of Scott Co where it will connect with Ney Nature Center in Le Sueur County.
Scott County	T-9	Big Rivers RT extension	Regional Trail Boundary Adjustment		5	Trail will be an extension of the Big Rivers RT along the Minnesota River to the boundary with Scott County.
St. Paul	T-4	Johnson Parkway	Regional Trail Search Corridor		2.15	Trail is part of St Paul's Grand Rounds system, and is the only component of the Grand Rounds that is not within the regional parks system.
Washington County	T-5	Middle St. Croix Valley Trail	Regional Trail Search Corridor		8	Trail will connect the proposed Brown's Creek State Trail along the Zephyr Line in Stillwater to Lakeland, with potential local trail access to the St. Croix Valley RT.
Washington County	T-6	Point Douglas Trail	Proposed Regional Trail		2	Washington County owns the corridor. It will be a destination trail along the Mississippi River that will link the Mississippi River RT and the St. Croix Valley RT to trails in Wisconsin.

Deletion of a Regional Park Search Area

A regional park search area was designated in the southwest portion of Dakota County as a “Completing the System” component of the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* adopted in 2005. This search area was identified based on the presence of one of the few large lakes in southern Dakota County as well as Regionally Significant Natural Resource Areas as mapped by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Metropolitan Council. The 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan indicated that the regional park search area was subject to the outcome of the *Dakota County Park System Plan*, which was completed in 2008 and was incorporated into the County’s comprehensive plan.

The County completed an extensive planning process to develop its *Park System Plan*; a regional park in this area was not a component of the plan. The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* included a regional trail search corridor in this area. The County’s *Park System Plan* expanded its trail planning to incorporate a comprehensive greenway system, which serves as a linear park and provides for protection of natural resources. The *Park System Plan* identified a regional greenway corridor along the west side of Chub Lake, which is in the general “Completing the System” regional park search area. Therefore, the objectives of the park search area may still be met with the development of a greenway. As part of the update to the 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan this regional park search area has been deleted from the regional parks system.

Regional Park Study Area

Typically, new regional parks are proposed as search areas that have been identified based on high quality natural resources in portions of the region where population growth is expected. As part of the review process for updating this policy plan, Dakota County proposed to evaluate the feasibility of incorporating Thompson County Park, Kaposia Park and Kaposia Landing into one regional park unit. Information was not available regarding the annual visits and the regional distribution of visits to these parks. Therefore, this proposal has been categorized as 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 will be presented to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Council for evaluation. Council staff will work with Dakota County to conduct visitor origin surveys at these parks. The Council’s [2008 Regional Parks and Trails Survey](#) shows that at least 40 percent of visits to most regional parks are non-local. Therefore, the benchmark applied for qualifying as a regional distribution of visitation should be 40 percent non-local visits in evaluating this regional park study area.

The proposed regional parks changes are listed in Table 3-11.

Table 3-11 Regional Parks Changes

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Map Designation	Site Name	Type	Conversion Acres	Trail Length (miles)	Notes
Dakota County	P-1	Thompson-Kaposia-Port Crosby (local parks)	Regional Park Study Area	230	-	Studies to be conducted to determine the feasibility of combining three local parks that are connected by North Urban and Mississippi River RTs as a joint regional park unit.
Three Rivers Park District	P-2	The Landing	Proposed Special Recreation Feature	86		Recognition as a Special Recreation Feature as a historic site that introduces visitors to environmental education concepts.
Dakota County	DELETION	Proposed deletion of SW Dakota County Regional Park Search Area	Proposed Deletion of a Regional Park Search Area	-400		The Regional Parks Policy Plan (2005) indicated that this regional park search area was subject to the outcome of the County's Park System Plan. The System Plan did not include this search area.

2030 Regional Parks *Policy Plan*



Chapter Four: Finance

Financing land acquisition and capital improvements of the Metropolitan Regional Park System

[MN Statute 473.147](#), Subdivision 1 requires the Metropolitan Council, after consultation with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC), 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 (CIP) in the parks policy plan, which should be revised periodically, and to establish criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds from the capital improvement program –hereafter referred to as the “parks CIP”.

[MN Statute 473.325](#) allows the Metropolitan Council to issue general obligation bonds for the acquisition and betterment of the Metropolitan Regional Park System. No more than \$40 million of bond debt can be outstanding at any point in time. Since 1994, the Metropolitan 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. Half of the bonds (\$3.5 million per year) are used for land acquisition grants under a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant program (which will be described below). The other half is used to partially finance grants in the parks CIP.

State bonds have been appropriated to the Council since 1976 to help finance the parks CIP. Since 1994, the Council has financed the parks CIP with a combination of State bonds and Metropolitan Council bonds. State bonds finance 60% of the parks CIP and Council bonds finance 40%. The premise for this mix of State and regional bonds is that persons who live outside the seven county metropolitan region visit/use the regional park 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 persons living within the region, and those who live outside the region.



Como Regional Park, St. Paul

[MN Statute 473.315](#) authorizes the Metropolitan Council with the advice of the MPOSC 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 park system in accordance with the parks policy plan. Following are summaries of how these grants are funded and managed:

Land Acquisition

In 2001, the Metropolitan Council established a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant program to assist regional park agencies in acquiring land for the Metropolitan Regional Park System. Land that is acquired must be within Metropolitan Council approved master plan boundaries for that particular park or trail unit.

The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund is comprised of two accounts:

- The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Acquisition Account is used to purchase land with high quality natural resource characteristics. No residential structures or other buildings associated with the parcel can be acquired with this account. Sixty percent of this account is financed with 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 bonds issued by the Metropolitan Council.
- The Parks and Trails Fund Acquisition Account is used to purchase land and any related structures – typically a parcel with a house or other buildings. Sixty percent of this account is financed with Parks and Trails Fund appropriations from the Land and Legacy Amendment, and 40% is financed with Metropolitan Council bonds.

Grants from the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund are awarded under a set of rules that were approved by the Council on June 24, 2009 as follows:

- Grants from the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund may only be awarded to finance a portion of the cost to acquire land within Metropolitan Council-approved master plan boundaries, and only after the requesting regional park implementing agency has used available acquisition grant funds previously provided by the Metropolitan Council.
- Any interest cost on a contract for deed or other timed payment plan is not eligible for grant funding. The value of a discounted sale (i.e. the difference between the appraised value and a reduced sale price) is not counted as part of the cost to acquire land and is not included as part of a local match to the grant.
- Grants from the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund may finance a portion of the actual cost to acquire land after deducting any Metropolitan Council grants and other grants used to finance a portion of the cost as follows:
 - The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant finances 75% of the net cost of acquiring the land which is defined as the purchase price—not the appraised value; legal fees, appraisal costs and other closing costs incurred by the park agency; the property tax equivalency payment due to the city or township; and stewardship costs.



*Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park,
Anoka County & Three Rivers
Park District*

- A contribution of 25% of the net cost of acquiring the land up to \$567,000 that is financed by regional park implementing agency funds or other sources is not eligible for reimbursement consideration by the Metropolitan Council. Seventy-five percent (75%) of a contribution above \$567,000 that is financed with regional park implementing agency funds only is eligible for reimbursement consideration by the Metropolitan Council.

The maximum grant(s) available to a park agency is \$1.7 million during the July 1 to June 30 time period.

Capital Improvements financed with State bonds and Metropolitan Council bonds

The Parks CIP must, in accordance with [MN Statute 473.147](#), include “criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds”. Capital projects proposed for funding must be consistent with Metropolitan Council approved regional park or trail master plans. Projects proposed by each regional park implementing agency are prioritized by that agency. Each park agency has unique capital needs, which that park agency can best determine.

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

- The population of each park implementing agency compared to the region’s population. This factor is weighted 70%.
- The amount of visits a park agency hosted from persons who live outside the park 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. The non-local visits factor recognizes that these regional parks serve a regional and state-wide population. Therefore a combination of both factors is accounted for in the CIP formula.

The results of this formula determine the amount each regional park implementing agency could request/receive from the CIP. For example if Anoka County’s share of the CIP is 10%, then 10% of appropriations for the CIP would be granted to Anoka County for its projects in the CIP.

Capital Improvements financed with State bonds as pass-through grants

Some State bonding legislation appropriates funds for specific capital improvements to the regional park system that are passed-through the Metropolitan Council to the appropriate regional park implementing agency. These appropriations are typically for projects that have state-wide significance, for example appropriations to improve the [Como Zoo and Marjorie McNeely Conservatory](#). Capital Improvements and non-capital expenditures financed with Parks and Trails Fund

In November 2008, 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."

[\[MN Constitution, Article 11, Section 15\]](#).

Legislation enacted in 2009 directs how money appropriated from the Parks and Trails Fund to the Metropolitan Council is distributed to the regional park implementing agencies under a formula in the legislation [\[Laws of MN 2009, Chap. 172, Article 5, Section 6, Subd. 3\]](#). The Metropolitan Council awards grants to the park agencies based on that formula for projects which support the regional park system. These can include grants for land acquisition, capital projects and non-capital projects such as hiring staff to conduct environmental education programs at regional parks.

The [first annual report](#) on on expenditures from the Parks and Trails Fund was submitted to the legislature on March 1, 2010.

Donations from Private Sector

Private sector donations have been critical to match and leverage public sector financing of land acquisition and capital improvements for the Metropolitan Regional Park System. Foundations of several park implementing agencies, 'friends of parks or trails' organizations, and the recently created [Regional Parks Foundation of the Twin Cities](#) were the facilitator of these donations. No estimate of those donations is provided here. However, some examples include:

- Donation by Marjorie McNeely for capital improvements and a maintenance endowment for the Como Conservatory, which was renamed the [Marjorie McNeely Conservatory](#) in her honor
- Donations by individuals and corporations for improvements to [Harriet Island Regional Park](#). Bricks and plaques honor those contributors
- Donation of land for [Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park](#) facilitated by the [Regional Parks Foundation of the Twin Cities](#)

Financing operations and maintenance of the Metropolitan Regional Park System

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

- Fees collected by persons 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 to operate and maintain their portion of the Metropolitan Regional Park System. [\[MN Statute 473.351\]](#).

State appropriations for regional park system operations and maintenance are distributed to park implementing agencies according to the following formula:

- 40 percent based on each agency's proportion of total regional system visits;
- 40 percent based on each agency's proportion of total regional system operation and maintenance expenditures in the previous calendar year; and,
- 20 percent 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 [\[MN Statute 297A.94, \(e\) \(3\)\]](#). The Metropolitan Council disburses the appropriations from these two sources to the regional park implementing agencies based on the results of the formula contained in [MN Statute 473.351](#).

Table 4-1 illustrates the amount of appropriations disbursed to the park agencies in relation to the total costs to operate and maintain the Metropolitan Regional Park System from 1985 to 2009.

**Table 4-1 Regional Park Operations and Maintenance (O & M)
Grant Appropriations—1985 to 2009**

Calendar Year/ (State Fiscal Year)	O & M Grant Appropriation	Park Agency's O & M Actual Costs (1985- 2008) and Budgeted Costs 2009/(FY 2010)	Percent of O & M Costs Covered by State Grant
1985/(1986)	\$2,000,000	\$ 19,091,548	10.50%
1986/(1987)	\$2,000,000	\$ 22,656,187	8.80%
1987/(1988)	\$2,000,000	\$ 24,595,929	8.10%
1988/(1989)	\$2,000,000	\$ 26,461,148	7.60%
1989/(1990)	\$2,000,000	\$ 29,294,759	6.80%
1990/(1991)	\$2,817,000	\$ 31,107,785	9.10%
1991/(1992)	\$2,759,000	\$ 32,076,220	8.60%
1992/(1993)	\$2,356,000	\$ 33,453,546	7.00%
1993/(1994)	\$2,238,000	\$ 35,646,465	6.30%
1994/(1995)	\$2,238,000	\$ 37,928,496	5.90%
1995/(1996)	\$2,238,000	\$ 40,158,254	5.60%
1996/(1997)	\$2,238,000	\$ 41,322,602	5.40%
1997/(1998)	\$3,000,000	\$ 44,338,618	6.80%
1998/(1999)	\$3,000,000	\$ 49,242,255	6.10%
1999/(2000)	\$4,500,000	\$ 50,748,152	8.90%
2000/(2001)	\$9,695,105	\$ 54,801,219	17.70%
2001/(2002)	\$7,865,716	\$ 60,595,484	12.90%
2002/(2003)	\$8,009,857	\$ 63,587,498	12.60%
2003/(2004)	\$7,452,000	\$ 66,825,266	11.20%
2004/(2005)	\$7,353,000	\$ 70,124,610	10.50%
2005/(2006)	\$7,870,000	\$ 77,584,716	10.10%
2006/(2007)	\$7,870,000	\$ 80,326,028	9.80%
2007/(2008)	\$8,620,000	\$ 85,009,472	10.10%
2008/(2009)	\$8,620,000	\$ 85,230,866	10.10%
2009/(2010)	\$8,794,000	\$ 93,105,808	9.45%
Totals /Average Percent	\$119,463,678	\$1,255,312,931	9.52%

Estimated Acquisition Costs for the Proposed Additions to the System



State law requires that the *Regional Recreation Open Space 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 Metropolitan Council levies, and other local government units ([MN Statute 473.147, Subd. 1](#)). The following analysis is an estimate proposed to be funded with state appropriations, Metropolitan Council bonds, and federal Transportation Enhancement grants. Local government spending for capital improvements has been limited to partially financing land acquisitions in which 25% of the cost is borne by the regional park agency requesting a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant. Public costs may be further reduced through private donations of land or cash to leverage public funds.

The Metropolitan Council has provided grants to regional park implementing agencies to finance 75% of actual land acquisition costs after deducting any donations of value under its Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant program. The remaining 25% of actual costs is provided by the park agency—from its own local funding or other non-State sources including watershed districts and federal sources. The tables which follow indicate the total estimated costs of land acquisition. A second amount in parentheses () shows the 75% which may be funded from Metropolitan Council and State funding sources.

The estimated total acquisition costs for the proposed changes range from \$49.2 million to \$59 million (\$36.9 million to \$44.3 million) in Table 4-2. Acquisition costs were calculated based on data provided by regional park implementing agencies. In some cases no estimate could be determined so this is a conservative estimate.

The acquisition costs listed in Table 4-2 are only for the proposed system changes. In addition to those acquisition costs, another \$148 million (\$111 million) is estimated to be needed to complete the acquisition of inholdings (privately owned land) within approved master plan boundaries of open and planned park system units in Table 4-3. The estimate was derived from park master plan data and consultation with park implementing agencies. There is no maximum or minimum range because an exact amount of land is known. However, some acreage may not be acquired if its public benefit is not supported by the cost of acquisition. For example, parcels at the edges of park units that were developed with a home or business and would be very expensive to acquire relative to their public recreational benefit have been deleted from park boundaries. Furthermore, it is possible that some of the inholdings may not be available for acquisition until after 2030. Therefore, the total area of inholdings expected to be acquired by 2030 is 2,500 acres at an estimated costs of \$74 million (\$55.5 million).

Some land may be donated or partially donated through sale at below market value. Finally, private sector donations may be used to reduce the amount of State and Metropolitan Council funds needed to acquire land.

The total amount of land proposed for acquisition to 2030 which includes up to 2,500 acres of inholdings ranges from 5,431 to 12,346 acres. The estimated total cost to acquire this land is between \$49 million to \$133 million (\$37 million to \$99.8 million) in 2010 dollars in Table 4-4. (No inflationary factor is projected in this estimate since the timing of the acquisition can't be predicted.)

To put this proposal in context, since the inception of the regional parks system in 1974, about 22,800 acres has been acquired with \$176 million of State and Metropolitan Council funds from 1974-2010 (Table 4-5).

Table 4-2: Estimated Acquisition Costs of Proposed Changes to the Regional Parks System (2010 dollars)

Category	Acres Added (excludes trails)	Estimated Natural Resource Inventory acres	Estimated Trail Length (miles)	Minimum Cost	Maximum Cost
A) Master plan boundary adjustments or trail extensions	93		8.5	\$2,650,000	\$2,915,000
B) Recognition of regional status of existing park land (no future acquisition cost)	90			Already acquired	Already acquired
C) New units based on 2030 needs analysis update	4,465 to 7,630	2,400 to 4,200	62.5	\$32,245,000	\$35,469,500
D) New units needed beyond 2030 analysis update (completing the system)	873 to 2,123	600 to 1,250	57	\$14,285,000	\$20,715,000
E) Study Area which may be added to the Park System based on outcome of study	230			\$0	\$0
TOTAL	5,751 to 10,166	3,000 to 5,450	128	\$49,180,000	\$59,099,500
75% of Total which may be funded with State and Metropolitan Council grants				\$36,885,000	\$44,324,625

Table 4-3 Estimated Acquisition Costs for the Regional Parks System Plan Inholdings (2010 dollars)

Regional Park Agency	Acres of Inholdings	Cost	Cost Source
Anoka County	350	\$1,659,900	Agency estimate
City of Bloomington	18	\$10,725,870	Agency estimate
Carver County	19	\$3,000,000	Agency estimate
Dakota County	798	\$13,545,200	Agency estimate
Three Rivers (including Cleary Lake RP & Murphy-Hanrehan PR in Scott Co.)	436	\$18,544,800	Agency estimate
Scott County	375	\$3,706,230	Agency estimate
Minneapolis Park & Rec. Board	80	\$38,835,000	Agency via master plan data
Ramsey County	15	\$3,024,940	Agency
City of St. Paul	7	\$5,375,000	Agency via master plan data
Washington County	2,966	\$49,567,400	Agency estimate
TOTAL	5,064	\$147,984,340	
75% of Total which may be funded with State and Metropolitan Council grants		\$110,988,255	

Note: Not all inholding acres will be available for purchase before 2030. Acquisitions occur from willing sellers. An assumption is made in Table 4-4 that 2,500 acres is acquired by 2030 at an estimated cost of \$74 million. Seventy-five percent of that cost is \$55.5 million.



*Elm Creek Park Reserve,
Three Rivers Park District*

Estimated Rehabilitation and Development Costs

When the Metropolitan Council adopted its first *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* in 1974, it designated 31,000 acres of existing park land as “regional recreation open space.” About \$176 million has been granted from 1974 to 2010 to acquire an additional 22,807 acres. Plus, 1,473 acres has been added to the Regional Park System via land donation, designating existing parks and trails as “regional” and via legislation for a grand total of 56,242 acquired acres. Not all of this land is currently open for public use. The “developed/open” acreage is 54,633 acres.

About \$349 million of State and Metropolitan Council-financed grants have been authorized to rehabilitate and develop recreation facilities on the 54,633 acres from 1974-2010. The annual average cost for rehabilitation and development was \$9,688,218. The cost per acre was \$6,388 over that 36 year time period. Applying that cost per acre for a 20 year period (2010-2030) is \$3,549.

The estimated cost to rehabilitate and develop the existing 56,242 acres of acquired land and the proposed additional lands (5,751 to 12,666) ranges from \$280 million to \$393 million.

Estimated Total Annual Costs

The estimated total costs for acquisition plus rehabilitation and development ranges from \$280 million to \$393 million from 2010 to 2030 in Table 4-6. The annual average cost is \$14 million to \$19.7 million in Table 4-7. To put the estimated annual costs into context, the average annual appropriation of state and Metropolitan Council funds to acquire 22,807 acres plus rehabilitate and develop facilities on that land and portions of 31,000 acres of existing regional parks from 1974 to 2010 was \$14.6 million. (Table 4-5).

The estimates are in 2010 dollars. They do not include any assumption concerning the effect of inflation on costs over the next 20 years, or assume any private sector donations. Therefore, these are conservative estimates. It is understood that additional funds from the public and private sectors will be needed to finance actual costs over this time period. Estimates will be considered again and refined every four years when this policy plan must undergo a comprehensive review required in [MN Statute 473.147](#).

Most of the expenditures would be on acquiring lands within existing parks along with rehabilitation and development of existing parks and trails (between 63 and 79 percent). Up to 16 percent would be spent on acquiring and developing parcels within existing park boundaries (inholdings). About 1 percent for rehabilitation and development of lands added to existing parks and trails under boundary adjustments and less than 1 percent for nonregional parks and trails that are converted to regional status. About 14 percent would be spent for acquiring and developing new parks and trails to meet forecasted growth to 2030 and up to 6 percent for acquiring and possibly developing parks and trails that would be needed after 2030. If the regional park study is added to the Regional Park System in the future, their development/rehabilitation cost would be less than 1 percent of the total expenditures during this 20-year period (Table 4-7).

Decisions on financing such costs will be made annually based on negotiated land purchases and specific rehabilitation and development projects. All projects are refined to fit the budgeted appropriation and other fiscal constraints.

Table 4-4: Range of Total Estimated Acquisition Costs for the Regional Parks System Plan, 2010-2030 (2010 dollars)

Category	Park Minimum Acreage	Park Maximum Acreage	Estimated Trail Length (miles)	2010 Estimated Minimum Cost	2010 Estimated Maximum Cost
Inholdings within currently approved parks/trails. Note: Some acreage may not be acquired if its public benefit is not supported by the cost of acquisition. Some land may be donated or partially donated by sale at below market value.	0	2,500	N/A	\$0	\$74,000,000
A) Master plan boundary adjustments or trail extensions	93	93	8.5	\$2,650,000	\$2,915,000
B) Recognition of regional status of existing park land (no future acquisition cost)	90	90	2	Already Acquired	Already Acquired
C) New units based on 2030 needs analysis update from 2005 plan	4,465	7,630	62.5	\$32,245,000	\$35,469,500
D) New units needed beyond updated 2030 analysis from 2005 plan (completing the system)	873	2,123	57	\$14,285,000	\$20,715,000
E) Study Area which may be added to the Park System based on outcome of study (no future acquisition cost)	230	230	N/A	Already Acquired	Already Acquired
Total proposed for acquisition (excludes acres of existing parks or trail miles in Category B and Category E).	5,431	12,346	129		
TOTAL	5,751	12,666	131	\$49,180,000	\$133,099,500
75% of Total which may be funded with State and Metropolitan Council grants				\$36,885,000	\$99,824,625

Table 4-5: 1974-2010 State and Metropolitan Council-Funded Regional Parks System Capital Improvement Appropriations

Item	Acquisition	Rehabilitation & Development	Total
1974-2010 appropriations (actual dollars)	\$176,223,268	\$348,775,837	\$524,999,105
Percent of total appropriations	34%	66%	
Average annual amount appropriated, 1974-2010 (actual dollars)	\$4,895,091	\$9,688,218	\$14,583,308

Table 4-6: Combined Estimated Acquisition and Development Costs for the Regional Parks System, 2010-2030 (2010 dollars)

Category	Acres		Estimated Acquisition Cost		Estimated Development Cost		Total Estimated Acquisition and Development Cost	
	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Existing system	0	0	\$0	\$0	\$223,569,447	\$248,896,177	\$223,569,447	\$248,896,177
Inholdings	0	2,500	\$0	\$55,500,000	\$0	\$8,720,000	\$0	\$64,220,000
A) Boundary adjustments	93	93	\$1,987,500	\$2,186,250	\$324,384	\$324,384	\$2,311,884	\$2,510,634
B) Conversions	90	90	\$0	\$0	\$313,920	\$313,920	\$313,920	\$313,920
C) New units to 2030	4,465	7,630	\$24,183,750	\$26,602,125	\$15,573,920	\$26,613,440	\$39,757,670	\$53,215,565
D) Completing the system	873	2,123	\$10,713,750	\$15,536,250	\$3,045,024	\$7,405,024	\$13,758,774	\$22,941,274
E) Study Area which may be added to Park System	230	230	\$0	\$0	\$802,240	\$802,240	\$802,240	\$802,240
TOTAL	5,751	12,666	\$36,885,000	\$99,824,625	\$243,628,935	\$293,075,185	\$280,513,935	\$392,899,810

Table 4-7: Estimated Annual Average Costs Over 20 Years (2010 dollars)

Category	Total Estimated Acquisition and Development Cost		Estimated Annual Cost 2010 to 2030		Percent of Annual Costs by Category	
	Maximum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Existing system	\$223,569,447	\$248,896,177	\$11,178,472	\$12,444,809	79%	63%
In-holdings	\$0	\$64,220,000	\$0	\$3,211,000	0%	16%
A) Boundary adjustments	\$2,311,884	\$2,510,634	\$115,594	\$125,532	1%	1%
B) Conversions	\$313,920	\$313,920	\$15,696	\$15,696	0%	0%
C) New units to 2030	\$39,757,670	\$53,215,565	\$1,987,884	\$2,660,778	14%	14%
D) Completing the system	\$13,758,774	\$22,941,274	\$687,939	\$1,147,064	5%	6%
E) Study Area which may be added to Park System	\$802,240	\$802,240	\$40,112	\$40,112	1%	0%
TOTAL	\$280,513,935	\$392,899,810	\$14,025,697	\$19,644,911	100%	100%

2030 Regional Parks *Policy Plan*



Chapter Five: Management Procedures

Amending the Policy Plan

The Metropolitan Council will amend the *Regional Parks Policy Plan* only if a substantial revision is proposed. 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 the Council decides to amend the policy plan, [MN Statute 473.147](#) will be followed.

Updating the Policy Plan

Minnesota law requires the Council to conduct a comprehensive review of the *Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* at least every four years. 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 appropriate Council committee and the full Council. The Commission and the implementing agencies will receive formal notice of any proposed updating 30 days prior to final action by the appropriate Council committee.



System Plan

The Metropolitan 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 policy plan includes the system plan.

The Council reviews the system 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.

By statute, any municipality, park district or county located wholly or partially within the metropolitan area could function as a regional park implementing agency and receive Council grants. The Council believes that larger governmental entities are more likely to have the expertise and resources to carry out park development and operation on a regional scale. Therefore, the Council will confine grants to the present 10 implementing agencies.

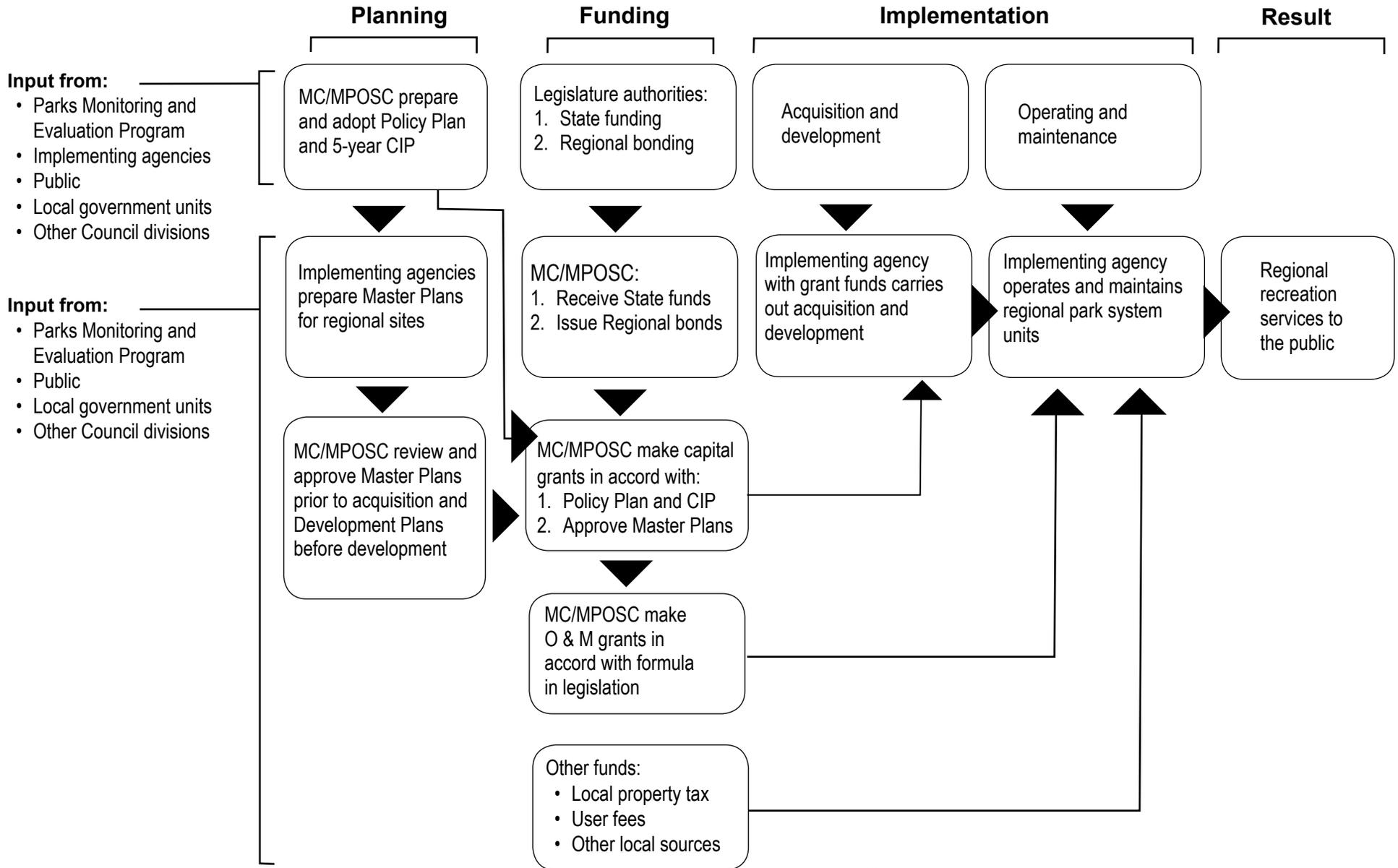
Implementing agencies will be limited to [Anoka](#), [Carver](#), [Dakota](#), [Ramsey](#), [Scott](#) and [Washington](#) counties; the [Three Rivers Park District](#); the [Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board](#); the [City of St. Paul](#) and the [City of Bloomington](#) (for its portion of the Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve only).

Figure 5-1 shows the regional parks system process. Implementing agencies prepare a master plan for each regional parks system component within their respective jurisdiction consistent with the Council’s policy plan. These master plans are reviewed by the Council for consistency with the system plan and, when approved by the Council, constitute an element of the system plan.



Mississippi Gorge Regional Park, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board & St. Paul

Figure 5-1 Regional Parks System Process





*Bunker Hills Regional Park,
Anoka County*

Capital Improvement Program

One important use of master plan information is preparing the capital improvement program (CIP) for the regional system. The CIP has two roles: it ranks projects across the system based on priorities in the policy plan and it provides the basis for requesting legislative funding for the biennium. The CIP is completely revised every two years to correspond with the legislative biennium.

The Commission, working with the implementing agencies, initiates the biennial process of revising the CIP. The Commission reviews requests from the implementing agencies against Council priorities and recommends a ranked list of projects to the Council for action. The revision of the CIP is considered to be a substantial revision to the policy plan and will follow the Council's administrative procedures on amending a policy plan.

Backup Acquisition

Master plans are the basis for granting funds for acquisition of regional parks system lands. The 1974 Metropolitan Parks Act, [MN Statutes 473.301-473.341](#), provides the procedure by which land is acquired in the regional system. In general, the implementing agencies buy land with Council funds. Occasionally, a regional park implementing agency has been unwilling to proceed with acquisition. The law provides a backup procedure for acquisition that involves the Council's offer of a grant to a second regional park implementing agency if the first regional park implementing agency does not initiate acquisition within 60 days of being offered the grant or has not acquired the land within 12 months. The second regional park implementing agency must initiate acquisition within 30 days of being offered the grant or complete acquisition within six months. If acquisition does not proceed under these conditions, the Council may direct the Commission to acquire the land. The Council has no power of eminent domain and can only acquire land from a willing seller.

The Metropolitan Council may approve funds for acquisition without an approved master plan when the responsible regional park implementing agency has failed to prepare an adequate master plan for Council review. If the regional park implementing agency offered the grant fails to proceed, the Council will follow the acquisition procedure outlined in [MN Statute 473.333](#). Before acquiring land under this procedure, the Council will, with assistance of the Commission, prepare and adopt a plan for the site that meets the information requirements of a master plan. This plan will be prepared with appropriate public and local government participation.

Negotiated Purchase

Acquisition of land is costly and limited public funds must be used wisely. It is sometimes necessary to acquire land through condemnation, which can be a long and costly process. Implementing agencies must make negotiated purchases based on appraisals by qualified appraisers wherever possible to minimize the need for condemnation.



Stewardship



Use of Council grant funds is limited to the costs of acquisition and/or development of the regional parks system unit consistent with the Council-approved master plan. Grants for acquisition pay for the cost of real estate, relocation assistance, special assessments existing at the time land was designated for the regional system, land stewardship and legal fees and appraisals. Land stewardship is defined as boundary fencing or marking; stabilizing or rehabilitating natural resources to aid in the reestablishment of threatened natural resources or to prevent non-natural deterioration thereof; preventing the deterioration of existing structures; removal of unneeded structures, dangerous land forms or attractive nuisances; maintaining or closing existing roads; and developing the unit to support minimal recreational use, including access roads, parking lots, signage and restrooms until capital improvement funds are available to develop the regional parks system unit.

Special Assessments

Special assessments may be levied against parkland after its designation for the regional system. Such assessments are legitimate and grant-eligible when they are for benefits conferred on the park that are consistent with the approved master plan. To encourage prompt payment of such assessments by the regional park implementing agency, regional funds will not be used for special-assessment late-payment penalties and interest charges resulting from late payments unless the regional park implementing agency has requested funds from the Council to pay the special assessments and did not receive them.

Under the provisions of [MN Statute 473.334](#):

...the governing body [charging the assessment] shall not consider any use of the property other than as regional recreation open space property at the time that the special assessment is determined. The Metropolitan Council shall not be bound by the determination of the governing body of the city but may pay a lesser amount, as agreed upon by the Metropolitan Council and the governing body of the city, as they determine is the measure of benefit to the land for the improvement.

This statute does not pertain to assessments on Bald Eagle-Otter Lake Regional Park land located in White Bear Township. Special assessments on that park are governed by [MN Statute 435.19](#). Once a final decision has been made on a challenged assessment, regional funds may be used for the assessment and for any penalties and interest incurred during the time of challenging the assessment, as well as for the regional park implementing agency's legal costs in challenging the assessment if agreed to previously by the Council.





*Big Marine Park Reserve,
Washington County*

Payment in Lieu of Local Property Taxes

Under the provisions of [MN Statute 473.341](#), 180 percent of the property taxes due to the city or township are paid when land is acquired for the regional parks system. This provides a financial cushion to the loss of that tax base to the city or township. The payment in lieu of taxes is an eligible land acquisition grant expenditure.

The Metropolitan Council will make acquisition grants to implementing agencies to include land costs, relocation assistance, land stewardship, special assessments and fees for appraisal and legal services and payment in lieu of taxes under the conditions stated above.

Revenue from Nonrecreational Uses

Lands acquired with regional funds are to be used for regional parks system purposes. On occasion, usually during, but not limited to, a period prior to development, land may be used in various other ways. The Council has defined the following nonrecreation uses as consistent with regional parks system purposes:

- Sale of buildings, equipment or materials acquired with land;
- Rent or lease of buildings to protect structures or secure services for the park; and
- Rent or lease of land for park benefits.

All uses of this kind must be consistent with the approved master plan. Revenue that implementing agencies receive from such uses may be used in regional park lands for land stewardship or for the capital costs of providing recreation opportunities; otherwise, they will be returned to the Council. Any other use requires prior Council consent.

Revenue from recreation uses in regional parks system units consistent with the master plan shall be used for park purposes as determined by the regional park implementing agency. Revenues generated by nonrecreational uses in regional park lands, consistent with an approved master plan, shall be used in regional park lands either for stewardship or for the capital costs of providing regional recreation opportunities, unless the Council consents to another use. Implementing agencies shall make an annual report of such revenues when their revenues exceed an amount determined by the Council (\$2,500 per year). Unused nonrecreational revenues will be returned to the Council by the end of the year succeeding the one in which they are earned.



Enterprise Activities

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 parks system funds from the Metropolitan Council for the following reasons:

- Enterprise-fund facilities are expected to generate sufficient revenues to pay their own costs. Such enterprise-fund recreation facilities should raise money for their development and operation in the same way as their private sector counterparts.
- The Minnesota Amateur Sport Commission provides funds for amateur sport facilities. Therefore, no regional parks system funds should be used to develop amateur athletic facilities since they have their own sources of public and private funding.

Equal Access

Development financed with regional funds and subsequent park operation must be carried out in a manner consistent with this policy plan, whether the land was acquired with regional funds or not. Development grant contract agreements require the regional park implementing agency to operate and maintain the facility so as to provide access to all persons in the region as described in the approved master plan.



Carver Park Reserve, Three Rivers Park District



Design Plans

When master plans are first approved, it is often true that large or complex recreation facilities are only conceptually described. When development of a particular recreation facility within a regional system component is imminent and when funds allocated in the CIP are available, the regional park implementing agency may request a grant. Upon Council approval, the regional park implementing agency may use an agreed-upon portion of the allocated amount to prepare construction documents through what is generally defined as the design development phase of the project. If preferred, the regional park implementing agency may proceed with design in advance of a grant and request reimbursement. The remainder of the grant will be used to construct the project after the Commission has reviewed the nature, scope and cost of the project for consistency with the approved master plan and the regional CIP.

The Metropolitan Council will make development grants to implementing agencies as follows:

- Development grants will be made for improvements such as recreational buildings, utilities, roads, parking and landscaping in regional parks, park reserves, trail corridors and special-use areas.
- Development grants may be made for natural resource rehabilitation within peak reserves and conservation zones of regional parks.
- The costs of preparing and executing construction documents for development are grant-eligible, including consultations with natural resource professionals to insure the development does not adversely affect the park system unit's natural resource features.
- The Council may approve development grants prior to the preparation of construction documents for a project. Construction of such a project will not proceed until the Commission has been made fully aware of the nature, scope and estimated complete cost as determined in the design development phase of the process.
- Regional park implementing agency wide improvements are grant-eligible expenses. When such eligible regional park implementing agency-wide facilities are also used for other than regional park purposes, the regional funding will be on a negotiated, pro-rated basis.



Closing Grants and Conditions for Returning Grant Funds to the Metropolitan Council

Financial transactions of regional parks system grants are reported quarterly over a year's time and audited. A final report is completed and given a final audit when the project is completed. Under the terms of the agreements, grant agreements are to be "closed" once all grant-eligible work has been completed and paid for with grant funds. Any unexpended grant funds held by the regional park implementing agency must be returned to the Council when the grant is closed. It is in the interest of the Council and the implementing agencies to close out completed projects in a timely manner and free up unexpended funds for other projects. To ensure that completed grants are closed, unexpended grant funds shall be returned to the Metropolitan Council when grant agreements are closed or under the following procedure:

- There has been no financial activity reported for the grant over an 18-month period.
- The Metropolitan Council will notify the regional park implementing agency of the lack of activity on the grant and give the regional park implementing agency six months to complete any grant-eligible work or to close the grant immediately and refund any unexpended grant funds.
- If the regional park implementing agency needs more than six months to complete the work, it must request an extension and explain the need for the extension. Extensions will be given under the authorization of the Metropolitan Park and Open Space Commission.



Mississippi Gorge Regional Park, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board



Executing Minor Amendments to Grant Agreements

To maximize the efficiency of the work of the Commission and the Metropolitan Council, the Council has authorized its regional administrator to execute minor amendments to regional parks system grant agreements if such amendments meet at least one of the following criteria:

- The amendment is consistent with the Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan.
- The amendment does not change the intent of the grant agreement in any essential respect.
- The amendment extends the duration of the grant agreement.
- The amendment clarifies the Council's intent in entering the agreement.
- The amendment does not change the total amount of the grant.
- The amendment reflects changes officially adopted by the Council in the Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan.
- The amendment is required under terms of the contract the Council has with the state agency that transmits state funds for the grant agreements.
- The amendment reflects changes officially adopted by the Council in Council policies or procedures (for example, changes in affirmative action plans or grant management procedures).
- The amendment executes restrictive covenants on land acquired with regional parks system funds or releases restrictive covenants to permit another land use compatible with the park (for example, widening a county road that also provides access to the adjacent park).

Annual Legislative Reports on Parks and Trails Fund Expenditures

[Laws of MN 2009, Chapter 172](#), Article 3, Section 3(b) require the Metropolitan Council to submit an annual report on the use and expenditure of "Parks and Trails Fund" appropriations it receives by March 1st. The annual report must detail the outcomes in terms of additional use of parks and trails resources, user satisfaction surveys, and other appropriate outcomes. The [first annual report](#) on expenditures from the Parks and Trails Fund was submitted to the legislature on March 1, 2010.





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