

2015 GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS SYSTEM PLAN AND WORK PLAN

GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION



DISTRICT 1 – NORTHEAST



DISTRICT 2 – NORTHWEST



DISTRICT 3 – WEST CENTRAL



DISTRICT 4 – EAST CENTRAL

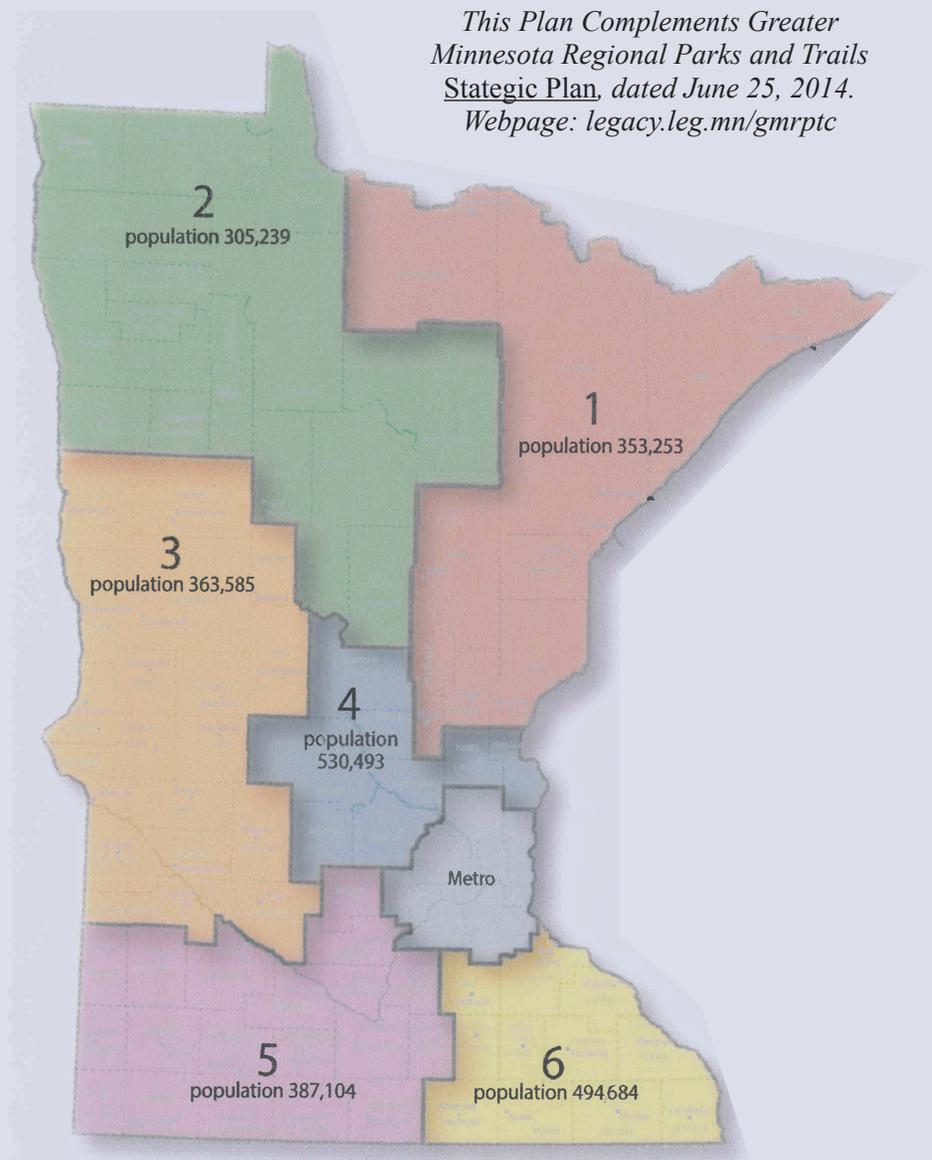


DISTRICT 5 – SOUTHWEST



DISTRICT 6 – SOUTHEAST

*This Plan Complements Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan, dated June 25, 2014.
Webpage: legacy.leg.mn/gmrptc*



Adopted: December 17, 2014

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REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS
SYSTEM PLAN AND WORK PLAN

GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS
AND TRAILS COMMISSION

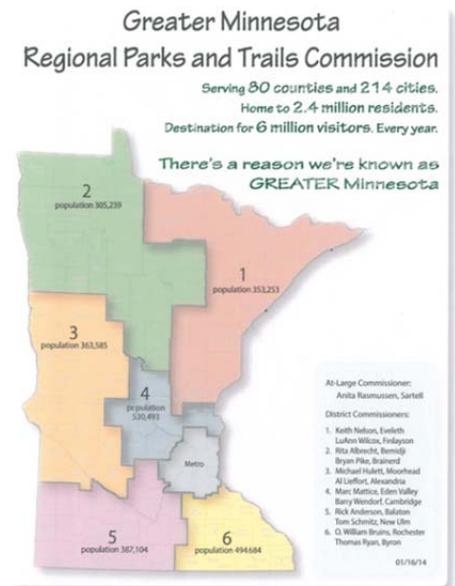
Executive Summary

2015 Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails System Plan and Work Plan Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (Adopted 12/17/14)

Overview: The first-ever *System Plan* prepared by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (Commission) since its initial meeting in October, 2013 is completed. The plan describes the work effort and accomplishments to date, and outlines the *2015 Work Plan*.

Organizational Development and Related Accomplishments:

- **Enabling Legislation** – under 2013 Minnesota Statutes 85.536, the Minnesota State Legislature created the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (Commission)
- **Appointment of the Commission** – includes 13 members appointed by the governor (two from each district); 16 formal meetings held (through end of 2014), and currently meets once each month
- **Adoption of First-Ever Strategic Plan and Supportive Documents** – on June 25, 2014
- **Establishment of District Planning Committees (DPCs)** – to work on system planning within each of the districts; each DPC has seven to 13 members
- **Establishment of the Evaluation Team** – to evaluate individual park and trail proposals against established criteria



District Planning-Level Findings:

- **Regional Trails** – are the highest perceived priorities in many districts, with “connectivity” and “well located” criteria as high priorities; trail connectivity in modes other than non-motorized paved trails was a key subject
- **Natural Resource-based Regional Parks** – focusing on providing high quality facilities was the top criteria in almost all districts
- **Special Recreational Feature Regional Park** – viewed as a high priority because it was considered best able to meet the needs of niche user groups, which is very attractive in Greater Minnesota from a tourism development standpoint
- **Ranking and Weighting of Criteria at District Level** – to accommodate regional differences, the DPCs weighted the criteria for each classification relative to district needs and priorities

Regional Designation Process and Initial Outcomes: The Commission has taken the first step in implementing its *Strategic Plan* to determine which of the multitude of potential regional parks and trails across 80 counties in Greater Minnesota warrant formal regional designation. Highlights include:

- **Timeline for Legacy Grant Program Transition from MN DNR to the Commission** – to allow enough time for the Commission to build its organizational capacity, MN DNR remained the granting authority for FY 2014 and 2015; starting with FY 2016 (July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016), funding priority setting, project selection and recommendations to the legislature will be made by the Commission
- **Regional Designation Process and Initial Outcomes** – Over 90 applications were submitted during the inaugural application process undertaken in 2014; *initial* focus is on fully vetting top proposals (across all classifications) for regional designation and first-round funding appropriations; list will expand after the 2015 application cycle is complete, and will continue to do so as new applications are evaluated in forthcoming years

Examples of existing and emerging high-quality regional park, trail and outdoor recreational features found across Greater Minnesota after only one round of applications!



Lake Wobegon Trail



Quarry Hill Park



Robinson Special-Feature Park



Emerging needs: Quality facilities for mountain biking and motorized trails.



The top three photos highlight high-quality proposals for regional parks and trails received in 2014. The bottom two photos highlight the need for the Commission to accommodate emerging or growing activities – such as providing well-designed systems and facilities for mountain biking and a range of motorized uses.

- **Magnitude of Funding Challenge is Becoming Very Clear** – even with just one cycle of applications completed, the lack of investment in regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota over the past decades is becoming clear to the Commission; initial assessment of funding needed for just the top 15 of the 2014 proposals already exceeds \$18 -- \$20 million; as many or more applications are expected in 2015 (and beyond), and it is clear that current Legacy funding allocations directed toward Greater Minnesota will fall far short of the need – in both the short and long term; funding challenge reinforces the Commission’s commitment to being disciplined in vetting proposals and funding projects that are of the highest quality and most enduring value to Minnesotans

2015 Work Plan: Continuing to evolve as the *Strategic Plan* is implemented and planning issues needing the Commission’s attention are discovered; at the forefront of the work plan are: 1) **refinement of the proposal application process**; and 2) **improving methods for managing information** (both web-based systems); other items included in the Commission’s 2015 work plan:

- **Undertaking Planning Initiatives Needed to Support Implementation of Strategic Plan**
 - *State-Wide Plan for Mountain Bike Facilities* – working collaboratively with MN DNR, Metro Regional Parks and advocacy groups
 - *State-Wide Plan for Motorized Facilities* – working collaboratively with MN DNR and advocacy groups
 - *Clarification of Classifications for Regional and State Trails* – working collaboratively with MN DNR
- **Developing Research and Performance Measurement Tools** – includes working with partners on developing forward-looking tools to gain insights into the demand for various types of outdoor recreational facilities; includes establishing new protocols to ensure research reliability

Administrative Needs and Other Organizational Development Pursuits: Commission has made great strides in getting the organization up and running, creating a strategic plan, and taking the first steps in implementing it. All of this was done on a very limited two-year budget of \$403,000. As the organization moves from startup to an enduring professional organization, establishing a stable, long-term funding source is a top priority for the Commission as part of this work plan. The *Strategic Plan* lays out the key support functions necessary to manage the organization, plan the system, and provide oversight of funding allocations. The Commission’s budget for FY 2016 and FY 2017 are \$367, 875 and \$387,270, respectively. (This is approximately 4.5% of the Legacy grant funding allocated to Greater Minnesota.) An additional 2.5% of Legacy grant funding allocated to Greater Minnesota will be needed to support grant administration by MN DNR’s for FY 2016 and FY 2017.

2015 Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails System Plan and Work Plan

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (Adopted 12/17/14)

Plan Overview

This is the first-ever *System Plan* prepared by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (Commission) since its initial meeting in October, 2013. The plan describes the work effort and accomplishments since the inception of the Commission. This includes highlighting the results of the initial request for applications for regional park and trail designation across Greater Minnesota. The plan also outlines the Commission's *2015 Work Plan* (i.e., next steps).

Major components of the plan include:

- Organizational Development and Related Accomplishments (page 1)
- District Planning-Level Findings (page 4)
- Regional Designation Process and Initial Outcomes (page 5)
- Timeline for Legacy Grant Program Transition from MN DNR to Commission (page 8)
- 2015 Work Plan (page 9)
- Administrative Needs and Other Organizational Development Pursuits (page 12)

Corresponding Documents and Webpage

This plan is complemented by several key strategic and policy-level documents:

- *Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan)*
- Greater Minnesota Regional Park and Trails Commission's *Procedures*

The Commission has established a webpage (legacy.leg.mn/gmrptc) for posting its procedures, proceedings, documents, agendas and meeting minutes – including the documents listed above and throughout the report.

Organizational Development and Related Accomplishments

Enabling Legislation

Under 2013 Minnesota Statutes 85.536, the Minnesota State Legislature created the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (Commission). Under the statute, the Commission “*is created to undertake system planning and provide recommendations to the legislature for grants funded by the parks and trails fund to counties and cities outside of the seven-county metropolitan area for parks and trails of regional significance.*”

Appointment of the Commission

The commission includes 13 members appointed by the governor, with two members from each of the six regional parks and trails districts. Appointments were made in mid-2013 and formalized at the initial Commission meeting held at the State Capital in October 2013.



District 1 Representatives:

- Keith Nelson (Eveleth, MN) – term ends January 4, 2016
- LuAnn Wilcox (Finlayson, MN) – term ends January 5, 2015

District 2 Representatives:

- Rita Albrecht (Bemidji, MN) – term ends January 4, 2016
- Bryan Pike (Brainerd, MN) – term ends January 5, 2015

District 3 Representatives:

- Michael Hulett (Moorhead, MN) – term ends January 5, 2015
- Al Lieffort, Chair (Alexandria, MN) – term ends January 4, 2016

District 4 Representatives:

- Marc Mattice (Eden Valley, MN) – term ends January 4, 2016
- Barry Wendorf (Zimmerman, MN) – term ends January 5, 2015

District 5 Representatives:

- Rick Anderson (Balaton, MN) – term ends January 5, 2015
- Tom Schmitz (New Ulm, MN) – term ends January 4, 2016

District 6 Representatives:

- William Bruins (Rochester, MN) – term ends January 5, 2015
- Thomas Ryan (Byron, MN) – term ends January 4, 2016

At-Large Representative:

- Anita Rasmussen (Sartell, MN) – term ends January 4, 2016

Since its inception in October, 2013, the Commission has had 16 formal meetings (through end of 2014). The Commission’s current schedule is to meet once each month, typically the 4th Wednesday. Commissioners routinely work on a variety of sub-committees and planning projects between formal meetings.

Adoption of First-Ever Strategic Plan and Supportive Documents

On June 25, 2014, the Commission formally adopted its *Strategic Plan*. This fulfilled the Commission’s obligation under the enabling legislation to “develop a strategic plan and criteria for determining parks and trails of regional significance that are eligible for funding from the parks and trails fund and meet the criteria under subdivision 6.”

The strategic plan is supported by a variety of documents and materials associated with operating the commission and implementing the strategic plan. These include, but are not limited to:

- District Planning Committee (DPC) Operating Guidelines
- Request For Designation as a Regional Park or Trail in Greater Minnesota Application
- District Planning Committee (DPC) Application Form
- Project Proposal Evaluation Team Application Form
- Spreadsheets for Rating Park and Trail Proposals against Established Criteria
- District Planning PowerPoint Presentation
- GoMN Web-Based Information Management System (initial development)

Many of these are available for review on the Commission’s webpage (legacy.leg.mn/gmrptc).

Establishment of the District Planning Committees (DPCs)

Consistent with the *Strategic Plan*, the Commission established six DPCs to work on system planning within each of the districts. This includes supporting the Commission in defining differences, nuances and opportunities related to regional park and trail needs and priorities. Each of the six DPCs has a minimum of seven and a maximum of 13 members, including the two Commissioners from that district. All members were appointed by the Commission through a defined selection protocol. The Commission was successful in assembling highly qualified DPCs with individuals offering diverse experiences and backgrounds.

Committee members for each district include (“C” denotes the District Commissioners):

District 1:

LuAnn Wilcox (C) (Finlayson)
Keith Nelson (C) (Eveleth)
Richard Baker (Princeton)
Greg Bernu (Carlton)
Patrick Christopherson (Mora)
Nate Eide (Two Harbors)
Nathan Johnson (Pine City)
Bob Manzoline (Eveleth)
Joe Alberio (DNR Liaison)

District 2:

Rita Albrecht (C) (Bemidji)
Bryan Pike (C) (Brainerd)
Myles Hogenson (Roosevelt)
Charles Parson (Puposky)
Susan Bruns (Bemidji)
Erick Hedren (Hackensack)
Steven Bommersbach (Twin Valley)
Mark Kavanaugh (Brainerd)
Les Ollila (Grand Rapids)
Troy Schroeder (Warren)
Roger Landers (Nisswa)
Lyle Grindy (Roseau)
Sam Christenson (Blackduck)
Phil Leversedge (Bemidji)
Lance Crandall (DNR Liaison)

District 3:

Mike Hulett (C) (Moorhead)
Al Lieffort (C) (Alexandria)
Brad Bonk (Willmar)
John Young, Jr. (Hawley)
Gary E. Swenson (Starbuck)
Steve Plaza (Fergus Falls)
Jason Artley (Moorhead)
Lindsey Knutson (Appleton)
Kim Schroeder (Parkers Prairie)
Bruce Imholte (Detroit Lakes)
Don Rasmussen (Long Prairie)
Melody Webb (DNR Liaison)

District 4:

Marc Mattice (C) (Eden Valley)
Barry Wendorf (C) (Zimmerman)
Karen Fuglie (Sartell)
Ben Montzka (Wyoming)
Maurice Anderson (Stacy)
Tom Johnson (Buffalo)
Chris Kudrna (St. Cloud)
Kurt Franke (St. Cloud)
Jeff Bertram (Paynesville)
Tim Edgeton (DNR Liaison)

District 5:

Rick Anderson (C) (Balaton)
Tom Schmitz (C) (New Ulm)
Annette Bair (Slayton)
Drew Campbell (Mankato)
Rob Anderson (Mountain Lake)
Byron Jost (Mankato)
Tom Engstrom (Mankato)
Deb Nelson (Pipestone)
Paul Hansen (DNR Liaison)

District 6:

Tom Ryan (C) (Byron)
Bill Bruins (C) (Rochester)
Theresa Coleman (Lanesboro)
Greg Isakson (Red Wing)
Sue Howe (La Crescent)
Andru Peters (Lake City)
Roberta Kurth (Elgin)
Carlos Espinosa (Winona)
Tim Madigan (Faribault)
E. Jeff Robertson (Rochester)
Aaron Wunrow (DNR Liaison)

The initial meetings of the DPCs were in the summer and fall of 2014. Key accomplishments include:

- Establishing a baseline understanding of regional park and trail needs in each district
- Developing an initial listing of influencing factors, key opportunities and baseline priorities for regional-level outdoor recreation in the various parts of the state
- Establishing an initial ranking and weighting of the criteria associated with each classification in response to district opportunities and priorities

Establishment of the Evaluation Team (ETeam)

To ensure the credibility of the vetting process, the Commission established the ETeam to evaluate individual park and trail proposals against established criteria (as defined in the *Strategic Plan*). The ETeam is made up of selected professionals without any connection to, or a vested interest in, outcomes. All of the members were appointed by the Commission through a defined selection protocol. The highly qualified team of well-seasoned professionals from across the state includes Bob Bierschied, Dennis Fink, Wayne Sames, George Watson and Kurt Wayne.

The ETeam met four times in the summer and fall of 2014, plus spent many hours of individual time evaluating proposals. Key accomplishments include:

- Undertaking first-ever evaluation of request for designation proposals, which included reviewing over 90 proposals from the six districts
- Providing initial unweighted scored rating for top proposals
- Providing feedback and recommendations on refinement of the application and rating process

District Planning-Level Findings

The initial meetings of the DPCs began in June of 2014. The following summarizes the key overall findings from the *DPC Discussion Highlights* report. The report is on the webpage (legacy.leg.mn/gmrptc) and should be referred to for additional findings of the DPC meetings, including district-level details regarding regional demographics, district priorities, and the rankings and weighting of evaluation criteria associated with each of the regional park and trail classifications.

DPC Discussion Highlights (Across Districts)

DPC discussion highlights associated with *Regional Trail* classification include:

- Trails are the highest perceived priority classification in many districts
- Fairly consistent ranking of “connectivity” and “well located” criteria as high priorities
- Trail connectivity in modes other than non-motorized paved trails was a key subject; examples of discussion points include:
 - Recognizing the need for off-road motorized trails, which is a very high priority in northern Minnesota (with regional funding perhaps helping communities to meet match requirements for other sources of dedicated funding)
 - Emerging forms of recreation, such as fat tire bicycling, are continually evolving and gaining in popularity, requiring new types of facilities
 - Improving facilities to access stream and river recreation routes
 - Defining additional opportunities for long distance hiking trails, such as the Superior Hiking Trail
- Acquisition of trail easements is a challenge in all districts, but particularly in southern Minnesota and more developed areas
- Connecting local trails and neighborhoods to regional trails and parks is a critical factor in the success of regional facilities

Key DPC discussion highlights associated with *Natural Resource-based Regional Park* classification include:

- Providing a high quality facility was the top criteria in almost all districts
- Recognizing that large, flexible facilities will be needed to meet changing recreational uses and populations
- Recognizing that the user population is aging; a bright spot in some districts is signs of increased park use by young families, which perhaps opens the door for creating new constituencies
- Expanding on an already fairly sophisticated (but varied) approach to either: 1) creating high quality parks that may or may not be near population centers; versus 2) placing accessible parks near population centers, even if the park may not be of the highest quality; this discussion brought to the forefront regional perceptions about the quantity of large, high-quality holdings in or near developed areas and the willingness of locals to travel various distances to get to a park
- Recognizing that increasing the number of young park and trail users is as much a function of programming (facilitating the introduction to outdoor activities) as it is the facilities themselves; however, the quality of facilities plays a major role in whether or not users will return
- Developing park master plans as a part of the application process was identified as critical for success, but also poses a major barrier for smaller jurisdictions

Key DPC discussion highlights associated with *Special Recreational Feature Regional Park* classification include:

- Most DPCs viewed this classification as a higher overall priority than *Natural Resource Park* due to the scarcity of large park resources and features; this classification was also considered best able to meet the needs of niche user groups, which is very attractive in Greater Minnesota from a tourism development standpoint
- A strong consensus that *Criteria #1 – Provides a Special High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience* was the highest ranked criteria for this classification since it focuses on providing special or one of a kind features
- Conversely, filling a gap was typically viewed as least important because this type of facility is going to happen where landscape features dictate where an outdoor activity can occur (such as climbing), not necessarily proximity to population centers

Ranking and Weighting of Criteria at District Level

To accommodate regional differences, the *Strategic Plan* allows each district to weight the criteria for each classification relative to district needs and priorities. This allows the Commission to consider unweighted and weighted scores as proposals are considered for regional designation and funding allocations within each district.

The following tables summarize the ranking and weighting of criteria for each of the classifications. The weighted values (totaling 100 points) reflect the DPC weighting of the criteria. (Note: The ETeam used unweighted values in scoring proposals.)

Natural Resources-Based Regional Park Classification Criteria	District 1		District 2		District 3		District 4		District 5		District 6	
	Rank	Weight										
#1 - High Quality Outdoor Recreational Experience	1	34	2	30	1	30	1	36	4	17	1	33
#2 - Preserves a Regionally-Significant Landscape	4	18	1	38	1	31	2	28	2	28	2	30
#3 - Well-Located and Connected	3	21	3	20	4	18	3	18	1	32	3	20
#4 - Fills a Gap	2	27	4	12	3	21	3	18	3	23	4	17

Regional Trails Classification Criteria	District 1		District 2		District 3		District 4		District 5		District 6	
	Rank	Weight										
#1 - High Quality Destination Trail Experience	3	25	1	36	3	19	4	14	4	17	2	26
#2 - Well-Located to Serve Regional Population	2	26	3	20	4	19	1	37	1	35	2	24
#3 - Enhances Connectivity	1	30	2	29	1	34	2	26	2	25	4	18
#4 - Fills a Gap	4	19	4	15	2	28	3	23	3	23	1	32

Special Recreational Feature Regional Park Classification Criteria	District 1		District 2		District 3		District 4		District 5		District 6	
	Rank	Weight										
#1 - Special High Quality Recreational Experience	1	35	2	28	1	34	1	36	1	35	2	25
#2 - Provides a Natural and Scenic Setting	3	21	1	35	2	29	2	29	2	31	2	25
#3 - Well-Located to Serve a Regional Population	2	26	3	22	3	20	3	22	3	19	4	21
#4 - Fills a Gap	4	18	4	15	4	17	4	13	4	15	1	29

Re-evaluation of the weighting will be a yearly assignment of the DPCs to ensure that changing needs and priorities within each district are recognized and accommodated in the evaluation process. This will be especially important as funding priorities within each district are determined by the Commission.

The DPCs will continue their work starting in the first quarter in 2015. Key points of focus will be on refining operational processes, expanding outreach, and refining definitions and weighting of evaluation criteria.

Regional Designation Process and Initial Outcomes

The Commission has taken the first step in implementing its *Strategic Plan* to determine which of the multitude of potential regional parks and trails across 80 counties in Greater Minnesota warrant formal regional designation. This is no small challenge in that previous studies have identified well over 150 parks and trails that may warrant consideration. The magnitude of this challenge is reinforced with over 90 applications being submitted during the inaugural application process undertaken in 2014. Feedback from across Greater Minnesota suggests that many more applications will be submitted in forthcoming years as awareness increases and the application process is refined.

Clearly, *all* parks and trails across Greater Minnesota have important outdoor recreational value. The Commission recognizes that limited funding requires making hard choices in determining which of these are the most viable for regional designation. In real terms, this means the Commission is carefully managing the growth of the regional system to ensure that each and every park or trail added over time is well-vetted and of enduring value to Minnesotans.

Rollout of the 2014 Application Process

Starting in 2014, the Commission has been implementing a structured application process that is open to all interested LGUs across Greater Minnesota. The process is rigorous to ensure that all of the parks and trails that receive regional designation are of high quality and that funding will be directed toward projects of highest merit and most value to Minnesotans. In real terms, this means that of the over 90 applications submitted in 2014, less than a third made it through the initial screening and are being further considered for regional designation. And of those, only proposals that scored well against the criteria and meet all of the requirements defined in the *Strategic Plan* will be formally designated as a regional park or trail and eligible for funding in future years.

Importantly, *all* applicants can review the results of the Commission’s evaluations and get feedback on the merit or shortcomings of their proposal. After considering these results, applicants can resubmit a refined proposal if desired in future years. This is a significant provision in that there are any number of reasons that a proposal may have been set aside by ETeam evaluators and Commission. The most common ones discovered thus far include:

- Park or trail proposal did not match up well against the evaluation criteria *based on the information provided or the way the project was positioned*
- Application was incomplete or lacked enough information to determine the merit of a proposal
- Uncertainty as to whether or not a proposal best fits under a regional or state designation, or if a singular application is best “packaged” as part of a larger master plan; this is especially the case with non-motorized trails, where the line between what is a local, regional or state trail needs more consideration by the Commission and MN DNR.
- Lack of alignment with an established classification; this is especially the case with motorized uses that currently do not fall under any of the current regional classifications

Although 60+ of 2014 applications did not get past the initial screening, a number of the proposals clearly warrant refinement and reconsideration in future years. The Commission is committed to funding the highest quality, most relevant projects across Greater Minnesota, and it does not want the inherent limitations of any application process to inhibit discovering where those opportunities lie.

Listing of High Scored 2014 Proposals for Regional Designation

The following tables identify the 2014 park and trail proposals that received the highest scores.

Natural Resources-Based Regional Park Classification	Unweighted Score (ETeam)	Weighted Score (DPC)	District	Classification
Stearns Co Quarry Park	450	457	4	NR Park
Redwood Falls Alexander Ramsey Park	425	423.5	5	NR Park
Wright Co Bertram Park	387.5	386	4	NR Park
Rochester Quarry Hill Park	387.5	383.25	6	NR Park
Douglas Co Kensington Park	362.5	396.25	3	NR Park
Granite Falls Memorial Park	337.5	335	3	NR Park
Stearns Co Rockville Park	337.5	341	4	NR Park
Stearns Co Warner Lake Park	312.5	304	4	NR Park
Rochester Gamehaven Park	306.3	304.25	6	NR Park
Wright Co Robert Ney Park	300	309	4	NR Park
Rochester Cascade Lake Park	300	294.75	6	NR Park
Baseline for 2016 Project Availability				
Milaca Regional Park	293.8	293.75	1	NR Park
Meecker Co Koronis Park	293.8	297	4	NR Park
Isanti Co Springvale Park	287.5	277	4	NR Park
Isanti Co Irving & John Anderson Park	275	268	4	NR Park
Morrison Co Belle Prairie Park	268.8	271	4	NR Park
Wright Co Clearwater/Pleasant Park	250	25805	4	NR Park
Isanti Vegsund Park	231.3	213.5	4	NR Park

Regional Trails Classification	Unweighted Score (ETeam)	Weighted Score (DPC)	District	Classification
Stearns Co Lake Wobegon Trail	400	406.5	4	Trail
St. Cloud Beaver Island Trail	381.3	388.5	4	Trail
Chisago Co Swedish Immigrant Trail	381.3	378.5	4	Trail
Chisago Co Sunrise Prairie Trail	362.5	386	4	Trail
Mille Lacs Co Plains to Port Trail	325	323.5	1	Trail
Baseline for 2016 Project Availability				
Stearns Co Dairyland Trail	256.3	242	4	Trail

Special Recreational Feature Regional Park Classification	Unweighted Score (ETeam)	Weighted Score (DPC)	District	Classification
Sandstone Robinson Park	393.8	402.5	1	SU Park
Detroit Lakes Detroit Mountain	362.5	359	3	SU Park
Winona Aghaming Park	362.5	360.5	6	SU Park
Beltrami Co Northland Sports Park	300	293	2	SU Park

As the tables illustrate, the top 20 listed proposals (across all classifications) have initial scores of 300 or more (out of a possible 500). These are the proposals that the Commission is *initially* focusing on for regional designation and first-round funding appropriations. This list will undoubtedly expand after the 2015 application cycle is complete, and will continue to do so over time as new applications are submitted and evaluated in forthcoming years. The most important point is that the Commission is establishing a high standard for creating the Greater Minnesota system plan to ensure that each and every park or trail added to the system over the next 20+ years is of high qualitative merit.

As intended in the *Strategic Plan*, comparing the unweighted and weighted scores for the top listed proposals is proving useful in helping the Commission understand and respond to the needs of individual districts. The score differences are enough to highlight distinct and sometimes subtle differences in district needs and priorities, yet stable enough to avoid concerns about excessively skewing the unweighted scoring results. The weighted scores will be especially important to fine-tune funding priorities and strategies within each of the districts.

Additional Steps Being Taken in the Regional Designation Process for Listed Proposals

Consistent with the *Strategic Plan*, each of the top proposals listed in the previous table are going through additional vetting as part of the evaluation process. This includes requiring applicants to:

- Submit an up-to-date adopted master plan (meeting the requirements defined in the *Strategic Plan*)
- Submit resolutions defining the level of local support by LGUs for the proposed park or trail initiative, especially as it relates to local funding match and ongoing operations, maintenance and programming
- Define development phasing possibilities (for larger projects)

2015 Proposal Application Cycle

The Commission will be undertaking its second proposal application cycle starting in mid-2015. With increased awareness of the Commission and refinements to the application process, it is anticipated that a substantial number of proposals will again be submitted.

Magnitude of Funding Challenge is Becoming Very Clear

Even with just one cycle of applications completed, the lack of investment in regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota over the past decades is becoming clear to the Commission. Initial assessment of funding needed for *just the top 15 of the 2014 proposals* (listed in the previous table) already exceeds *\$18 – \$20 million*. With the Commission expecting as many or more applications in 2015 (and beyond), it is equally clear that current Legacy funding allocations directed toward Greater Minnesota will fall far short of the need – in both the short and long term.

This funding challenge is the key reality facing the Commission. It reinforces the Commission’s commitment to being disciplined in vetting proposals and funding projects that are of the highest quality and most enduring value to Minnesotans.

Additional Reference Material

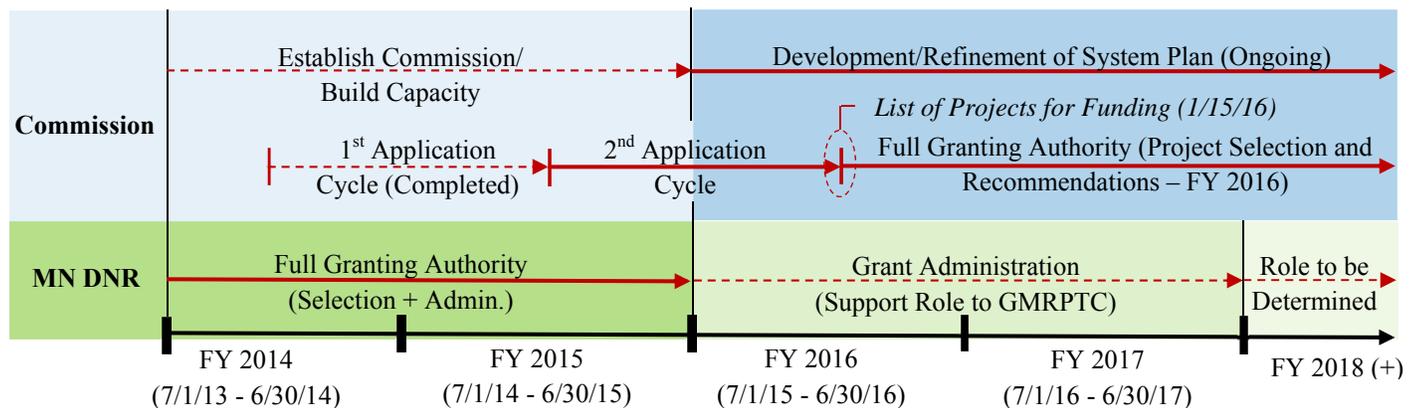
In addition to the *DPC Discussion Highlights* report, a number of other documents related to the 2014 proposal evaluation process are available for review on the Commission’s webpage. These include:

- Request For Designation as a Regional Park or Trail in Greater Minnesota Application
- Evaluation Team Report (October 17, 2014)
- ETeam Evaluation Issue Overview (October 22, 2014)

Timeline for Legacy Grant Program Transition from MN DNR to Commission

Prior to the establishment of the Commission, MN DNR has been the granting authority for Legacy grants directed at Greater Minnesota. To allow enough time for the Commission to build its organizational capacity, MN DNR remained the granting authority for FY 2014 and 2015. *Starting with FY 2016 (July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016), funding priority setting, project selection and recommendations to the legislature will be made by GMRPTC.* By mutual agreement, MN DNR’s role for FY 2016 and FY 2017 will transition to grant administration, and the agency will not be directly involved in project selection. The following timeline illustrates the transition of granting roles from MN DNR to the Commission.

Timeline and Transitioning of Role for Greater Minnesota Legacy Grant Program



This timeline gives the Commission two application cycles to determine and submit a specific list of fully vetted projects to the legislature for FY 2016 funding appropriation. The first cycle was completed in the fall of 2014, and the second cycle will start in July 2015 and be completed by October 2015. A formal project funding recommendations list will be submitted to the legislature by January 15, 2016 for FY 2016 appropriation.

2015 Work Plan

The Commission's work plan for 2015 is continually evolving as the *Strategic Plan* is implemented and new planning issues are discovered. At the forefront of the work plan are: 1) refinement of the proposal application process and 2) improving methods for managing information. Both of these are central to building the Commission's capacity to:

- Foster well-conceived and well-presented proposals from across Greater Minnesota
- Structure information outputs and analyze information in a variety of ways to inform planning decisions
- Recognize patterns in the types of proposals being submitted, define gaps, and determine how district planning efforts are performing

The following outlines a variety of items that are currently being worked on and are otherwise part of the Commission's 2015 work plan.

Information Management System (IMS) Related Elements

Since October 2013, the Commission has made significant strides in developing tools to manage information and make it available to the public. Key work efforts to-date include:

- Development of Commission's initial website – which is increasingly used as the repository for all work products and information
- Development and initial testing of the GoMN mapping and inventory system – which is an essential part of the IMS as it relates to identifying the location and physical characteristics of parks and trails (that are designated and seeking designation)
- Development of operating procedures and various applications – to ensure that the Commission runs efficiently and effectively and that all interested parties have the same access to information

In 2015, the major IMS emphasis will be on developing a web-based proposal application that is directly linked to the GoMN system. The intent is to refine the application process (and improve information management) to ensure that proposers, ETeam evaluators, DPCs and Commission all have direct access to easily understood information about any given proposal. This includes being able to easily determine where a proposal is in the evaluation "pipeline" from application through formal designation and funding priority.

Planning Initiatives Needed to Support Implementation of Strategic Plan

Evaluation of 2014 proposals brought to light the need for several planning initiatives to clearly define the statewide demand for certain types of outdoor recreation, and to clarify the Commission's role in addressing that demand. Given the multi-jurisdictional context, each of these initiatives inherently involves collaborating with MN DNR and Metro Regional Parks (to varying degrees). *The following outlines the initiatives that the Commission will pursue with its partners in 2015, assuming a funding source can be secured.*

Statewide Plan for Mountain Bike Facilities

Context: A number of promising proposals were received for mountain biking trails, but none of them were evaluated due to lack of information about the demand for facilities and uncertainty about optimal geographical distribution. Many of the proposals received were geographically clustered in the Northeast, and the ETeam and Commission have concerns about how many facilities are needed in that region, and how to best define what a quality facility entails. This made it difficult to score proposals against the evaluation criteria.

Outline of Planning Study:

- Evaluate the demand for *destination* mountain bike trail facilities on a statewide basis, with the focus being on determining the role of regional and state-level providers in meeting the demand; how local trail projects integrate into the larger statewide system would also be defined
- Define optimal geographical distribution of destination mountain bike facilities at the regional and state level

- Establish design standards to ensure that high quality facilities are being built
- Establish funding priorities to “build-out” the system to ensure that funding allocations at the regional and state-level are well coordinated and complementary; the goal is to continue to build on Minnesota’s growing reputation as a nationally-recognized mountain bike destination

Anticipated Partners:

- Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission
- MN DNR
- Metro Regional Parks
- Advocacy Groups

Statewide Plan for Motorized Facilities

Context: A number of proposals were received that directly or tangentially related to various forms of motorized uses. None of these applications were evaluated for the following reasons:

- Lack of information about the demand for facilities and uncertainty about optimal geographical distribution
- Lack of a motorized classification within the *Strategic Plan*
- Lack of clarity on regional versus state-level roles in meeting the demand for motorized trails

Although this issue appears most prevalent in the northern parts of the state, the ETeam and Commission have concerns about the extent of demand for these facilities in all regions of the state. As with mountain biking, how to best define what a quality facility entails is an important issue.

Outline of Planning Study:

- Evaluate the demand for motorized trail facilities on a statewide basis, with the focus being on determining the role of regional and state-level providers in meeting the demand; note that “motorized” includes snowmobiles, ATVs, OHM, ORV, etc.
- Define optimal geographical distribution of destination motorized trails at the regional and state levels
- Establish clearly-defined classifications for regional and state-level motorized trails; this includes standalone classifications for OHV, as well as more clearly defining the extent to which motorized uses (i.e., snowmobiles) can be integrated into non-motorized trail corridors (an especially common issue in the northern part of the state)
- Define the desired design standards to ensure that facilities that are built are of the highest quality
- Establish funding priorities to “build-out” the system to ensure that funding allocations at the regional and state-level are well coordinated and complementary

Anticipated Partners:

- Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission
- MN DNR
- MRTUA

Clarification of Classifications for Regional and State Trails

Context: A number of proposals were received that related to interconnections with or extensions of state-designated trails. Although some proposals were of promising regional value, these applications were reviewed but not scored by the ETeam due to lack of clarity on regional versus state-level classifications, and the role that Greater Minnesota versus MN DNR play in developing these trails.

Outline of Planning Study:

- Define how the regional trail classification (defined in Greater Minnesota’s *Strategic Plan*) interfaces with MN DNR’s definition for a state-level trail; this inherently requires addressing some fundamental questions about regional and state roles in providing longer-distance trails, and whether or not currently designated state trails warrant reclassification, or some “hybrid” approach be developed

- For specific trails, more clearly defined or updated master plans are needed to better define the extent of the trail, its classification, development parameters and funding responsibilities (at the local, regional and state-level)
- Addressing the funding issue is of particular concern, with much uncertainty as to who can and/or should fund these trails
- Based on the 2014 applications, trails of immediate concern to the Commission include the Heartland, Soo Line, Minnesota River, Glacial Lakes State Trails, Superior Hiking Trail and North Country Hiking Trail

Anticipated Partners:

- Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission
- MN DNR
- District Planning Committees
- Advocacy Groups

Research and Performance Measurement Related Elements

As defined in the *Strategic Plan*, the Commission sees working with partners on developing forward-looking research and performance measurements tools to gain insights into the demand for various types of outdoor recreational facilities as a top priority. This includes gaining insights as to how quality and other factors play a role in increasing participation in outdoor recreation. It also needs to take into consideration changing demographics, futuristic think-tank approaches, and the “science of human nature.”

Under this work plan, the Commission’s goal is to work with MN DNR and Metro Regional Parks to develop a first-step roadmap outlining key elements of a common research and performance measurement plan to guide future collective action. Implementing more robust and reliable methods for tracking participation and measuring the use of parks and trails (i.e., visitor counts) than currently available is a key priority for the Commission. Key outcomes of the roadmap plan include:

- Assessing the availability and reliability of current research tools being used
- Assessing the extent to which new research initiatives are being developed or implemented, and how those fit into the roadmap
- Outlining the types of research and performance measurement tools that are needed, and establishing implementation priorities
- Establishing new protocols to ensure research reliability – including potentially establishing a third-party entity to oversee and undertake the research program to ensure unbiased collection and reporting of results

Key potential partners include:

- Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission
- MN DNR
- Metro Regional Parks
- Universities and colleges with research capabilities
- Private industry research specialists
- Non-profit organizations with connection to outdoor recreation industry (i.e., Park and Trails Council of Minnesota)

Administrative Needs and Other Organizational Development Pursuits

Since its inception, the Commission has made great strides in getting the organization up and running, creating a strategic plan, and taking the first steps in implementing it. All of this was done on a very limited budget that the Commission carefully allocated to complete defined work tasks. As shown in *Appendix A – Commission Budget Summary*, the Commission has stayed within its total budget of \$403,000, as set by the state legislature for the two fiscal years ending July 30, 2015.

To make the budget work, Commissioners, DPC members, and ETeam all have put in considerable and largely volunteer time and effort to get the organization off the ground. Through this work effort, the Commission is well positioned and fully capable of responsibly allocating Legacy funding starting in FY 2016.

As the organization moves from startup to an enduring professional organization, establishing a stable, long-term funding source is a top priority for the Commission as part of this work plan. The *Strategic Plan* lays out the key support functions necessary to manage the organization, plan the system, and provide oversight of funding allocations. *Appendix A – Commission Budget Summary* establishes the Commission’s budget for FY 2016 and FY 2017. As illustrated, budget allocations for FY 2016 and FY 2017 are \$367, 875 and \$387,270, respectively. (This is approximately 4.5% of the Legacy grant funding allocated to Greater Minnesota.)

Key budget categories include:

- General organizational functions – costs associated with running the Commission, ETeam, DPC meetings and related costs
- Hosting website and building IMS capacity
- Fiscal agent costs
- Professional services – especially an executive director to manage the organization
- System planning support – consultants to help plan the system and update the plan each year
- Communications – includes more robust public outreach and implementing a variety of communication tools

An additional 2.5% of Legacy grant funding allocated to Greater Minnesota will be needed to support grant administration by MN DNR’s for FY 2016 and FY 2017.

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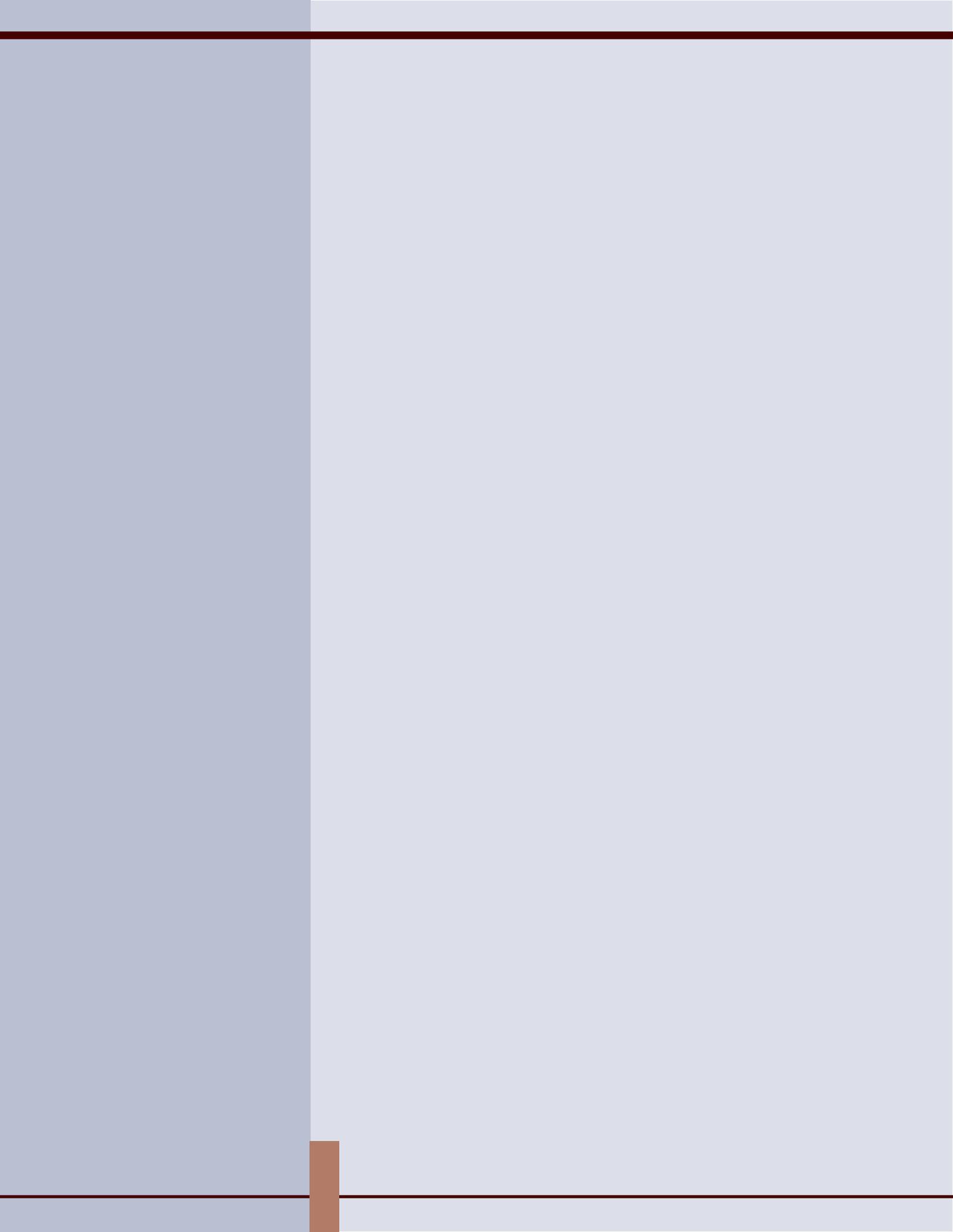
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Appendix A – Commission Budget Summary

Commission Budget Summary for FY 2016 FY 2017*

Forecasted Amount for Greater MN from the Parks & Trails Legacy Fund:				
FY-2016 20% (est 8/1/14)	\$8,175,000.00			
FY 2016 - 4.5 %	\$367,875			
FY-2017 20% (est 8/1/14)	\$8,606,000.00			
FY 2017 - 4.5%	\$387,270.00			
		Budget Item	Budgeted Amount FY 2016	Budgeted Amount FY 2017
		Commission Meetings	\$29,430.00	\$30,981.60
		E-Team	\$25,751.25	\$27,108.90
		DPC meetings	\$11,036.25	\$11,618.10
		Website Hosting	\$22,072.50	\$23,236.20
		Fiscal Agent	\$18,393.75	\$19,363.50
		Professional Services	\$103,005.00	\$108,435.60
		System Plan Updates	\$88,290.00	\$92,944.80
		Planned Communications	\$69,896.25	\$73,581.30
			\$367,875.00	\$387,270.00
* Note: This budget reflects funding needed to manage the organization, plan the system and provide oversight of funding allocations.				
This is approximately 4.5% of the Legacy grant funding allocated to Greater MN.				
E-Team refers to the 5 member Project Proposal Evaluation Team. DPC refers to the six District Planning Sub-Committees. Each DPC has between 7 and 13 members.				



2015 GREATER MINNESOTA
REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS
SYSTEM PLAN AND WORK PLAN

GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS
AND TRAILS COMMISSION

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