

# 2040 REGIONAL PARKS POLICY PLAN



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

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

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## Chapter One: Planning for the Twin Cities Region

### *Thrive MSP 2040*

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

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

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

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

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

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

In addition to the three statutory metropolitan systems plans, the Council is developing a Housing Policy Plan. The Housing Policy Plan will provide an expanded policy framework to inform the Council's review of the housing elements and housing implementation programs of local comprehensive plans required in statute.

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

## Thrive Outcomes

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

### Stewardship

Stewardship advances the Council's longstanding mission of orderly and economical development by responsibly managing the region's natural and financial resources, and making strategic investments in our region's future. The region enjoys a bounty of natural resources including three major rivers, over 900 lakes, extensive wetlands, native prairie, woodland habitats, and an abundant groundwater system. The rich natural assets are a part of our regional identity, enhancing our quality of life and supporting a strong economy. However, challenges to the quality and extent of natural resources abound.

### Prosperity

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

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

### Equity

Equity means connecting all residents to opportunity and creates viable housing, transportation, and recreation options for people of all races, ethnicities, incomes, and abilities so that all communities share the opportunities and challenges of growth and change. Promoting equity includes:

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

## Livability

Livability focuses on the quality of our residents' lives and experiences in the region, and how places and infrastructure create and enhance the quality of life that makes our region a great place to live.

Enhancing livability means:

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

## Sustainability

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

## *Thrive Principles*

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

## Integration

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

## Collaboration

Collaboration recognizes that shared efforts advance our region most effectively toward shared outcomes. Addressing the region's issues requires collaboration because no single entity has the capacity or authority to do the work alone. For the Council, acting collaboratively means fostering shared strategies, supportive partnerships, and reciprocal relationships. It also represents convening the region's best thinkers, experts, and stakeholders to address complex regional issues beyond the

capacity or authority of any single jurisdiction or institution. Additionally, it involves providing technical assistance and enhanced information to support local planning and decision-making.

## Accountability

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

## *Thrive's Additional Directives for the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*

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

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

## *Regional Growth and Demographics*

By 2040, our region is projected to be home to almost 3.7 million people, a gain of 824,000 residents from 2010. Such robust growth is a sign of the region's economic health and vitality. With this growth will come new jobs, greater racial and ethnic diversity, expanded economic opportunities and increased tax revenues. Accommodating growth poses challenges, however, as the increasing public concern about traffic congestion demonstrates. 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 will make expanding or even preserving space for parks and trails more challenging.

	2000	2010	2040
Population	2,642,062	2,849,567	3,673,660
Households	1,021,456	1,117,749	1,509,170
Employment	1,606,263	1,543,872	2,094,380

In addition, our population is changing in ways that will influence how we develop and redevelop:

- Our region is aging rapidly. More than one in five residents will be age 65 and older in 2040, compared to one in nine in 2010.
- The region will gain 391,000 new households by 2040.
- By 2040, 40% of the population will be people of color, compared to 24% in 2010. The share of people of color increases among younger age groups; 54% of residents under age 18 will be people of color in 2040.

While the rich and growing racial and ethnic diversity is an asset to our continued economic vitality, our region has some of the largest disparities by race and ethnicity of any large metropolitan area in the nation. Importantly, these disparities and shifting demographics have implications for nature-based outdoor recreation providers. Broad based trends consistently indicate that recreation participation is far greater for white and/or non-Hispanic populations within the state and the nation than for people of color. [see Minnesota’s State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), 2014]. In addition, SCORP cites several studies showing that involvement in nature-based outdoor recreation among young adults and their children has decreased since the 1990s. The relative participation of different segments of the population in nature-based outdoor recreation, together with their respective population growth rates, create significant challenges ahead in terms of park and trail utilization, as well as maintaining broad-based public support for park and trail investments. To this end, the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* incorporates specific aims to strengthen equitable usage of our regional parks and trails by all our region’s residents.

### *Community Designations*

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

### **Metropolitan Urban Service Area**

The Metropolitan Urban Service Area constitutes about half of the land in the region, but accounts for more than 90% of the region’s population. The Council supports the Metropolitan Urban Service Area

through investments such as regional wastewater services, regional highways, transit service, the Regional Parks System, and programs that support redevelopment. Some of the region's most popular regional parks are located in the Metropolitan Urban Service Area, including Como Regional Park, Zoo and Conservatory; Minnehaha Regional Park; and Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve. Trails including the Bruce Vento and North Cedar Lake Regional Trails; connect people to regional parks and local amenities. The Metropolitan Urban Service Area is divided into five community designations:

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

*Thrive* forecasts project that over the next 30 years growth and redevelopment will occur throughout the region. Not only will growth occur in the suburban communities; the urban communities will continue to redevelop. Forces driving this change are our aging population, new residential preferences among younger households, and increasing interest in sustainable lifestyles. Demographic changes, emerging preferences, and shifting development patterns will increase our need to expand multimodal access to our regional parks, regional trails and transit system.

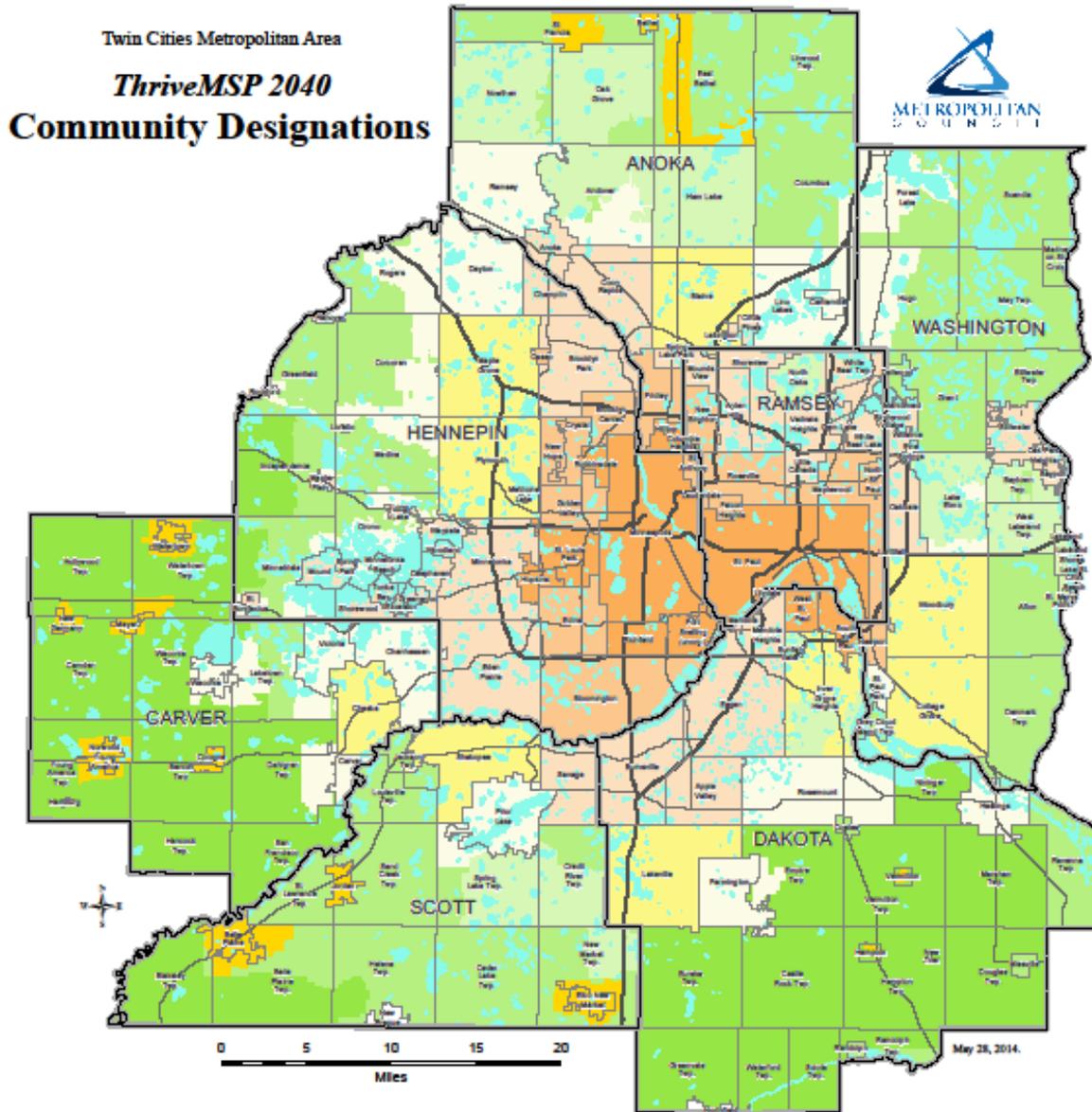
## Rural Service Area

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

- Rural Center
- Rural Residential
- Diversified Rural
- Agricultural

The Rural Service Area contains some of the Regional Parks System's large park reserves, including Crow Hassan and Big Marine Park Reserves. In addition to providing passive recreation opportunities, the park reserves also preserve, maintain, and connect high quality or regionally important natural resources.

Figure 1-1. Thrive MSP 2040 Community Designations



**Community Designations**

**Urban Service Areas**

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

**Rural Service Areas**

- Rural Center
- Diversified Rural
- Rural Residential
- Agricultural

**Highways**

- Interstate Highways
- State, US Highways and County Roads
- County Boundaries
- City and Township Boundaries
- Lakes and Rivers

Hanover, New Prague, Northfield, and Rockford are outside the Council's planning authority.

## Local Comprehensive Plans

The policy direction from *Thrive* and the Council's systems and policy plans – including this *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* – provides guidance to local governments in developing their comprehensive plans. Under state law, each county, city and township in the seven-county metropolitan area must review and, if necessary, amend its local comprehensive plan at least every 10 years to ensure that the local plan – and local fiscal devices and official controls – conforms with the Council's metropolitan system plans (Minn. Stats. 473.864).

Following the adoption of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and once the Council issues system statements, as required under the Metropolitan Land Planning Act, local communities have three years to update their local comprehensive plan. If the Council issues system statements based on a future amendment to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, local communities have nine months to amend their comprehensive plans.

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

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

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

### Conformance

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

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

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

### Consistency

Consistency is generally achieved if the local plan:

1. Addresses the community role for the land use policies contained in *Thrive*, including:

Natural Resource Protection: Conserve, restore, and protect the region's natural resources to ensure their ongoing availability, to support public health, and to maintain a high quality of life.

Access, Mobility and Transportation Choice: Sustain and improve a multimodal transportation system to support regional growth, maintain regional economic competitiveness and provide choices and reliability for the system's users. To help meet this policy, local communities are encouraged to plan and develop local trail connections to regional trails as identified in the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan and to plan for and connect to the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network as identified in the 2040 Transportation Policy Plan, where appropriate.

2. Addresses the linkage of local land uses to local parks and open space as well as the Regional Parks System.
3. Includes an implementation plan describing public programs, fiscal devices and other specific actions (sequencing and staging activities) that implement the comprehensive plan and ensure conformance with regional system plans.
4. Addresses official controls and includes a capital improvement program (sewers, parks, transportation, water supply and open space) that accommodates planned growth and development.

## Compatibility

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

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

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

### *Introduction*

The benefits of parks have been extensively documented<sup>1</sup>. Parks and open green space positively contribute to human health and well-being. Benefits to physical well-being include increased physical activity, reduced risk of various chronic illnesses, as well as obesity. Benefits to psychological well-being include stress reduction, attention restoration, and improved cognitive functioning. Social well-being benefits include increased social capital, family bonding, and social integration. Parks and open green space also contribute many environmental benefits including biodiversity conservation, air and water purification, erosion control, climate regulation, carbon dioxide sequestration, among other ecosystem services.<sup>2</sup>

Benefits afforded by the Regional Parks System, such those illustrated above, help to keep our region at the top of national livability rankings. The Twin Cities area's 62 regional parks, park reserves, and special recreation features, plus more than 340 miles of regional trails, showcase the unique landscapes of the region and provide year-round recreation. Our residents have consistently singled out the region's parks, trails and natural environment as the most attractive feature of the region.<sup>1</sup> Drawing over 47 million annual visits in 2013, the Regional Parks System provides access to natural space that contributes to physical and emotional well-being. Many of our region's most well-known and iconic sites are part of the Regional Parks System – the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, Como Zoo and Conservatory, Lebanon Hills Regional Park, Bunker Hills Regional Park, Elm Creek Park Reserve, and Lake Elmo Park Reserve.

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

- Expand the Regional Parks System to conserve, maintain, and connect natural resources identified as being of high quality or having regional importance, as identified in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*
- Provide a comprehensive regional park and trail system that preserves high-quality natural resources, increases climate resiliency, fosters healthy outcomes, connects communities, and enhances quality of life in the region
- Promote expanded multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit network, where appropriate

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<sup>1</sup> Dinnie, E., Brown, K.M., Morris, S. (2013). Negotiating the social well-being benefits of urban green space. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 112, 1-9.

Wolch, J.R., Byrne, J., & Newell, J.P. (2014). Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities 'just green enough'. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 125, 234-244.

<sup>2</sup> Gómez-Baggethun, E. & Gren, A. (2013). Urban ecosystem services. In T. Elmqvist et al. (eds.), *Urbanization, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Challenges and Opportunities: A Global Assessment*, pp. 175-251.

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

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

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

## *The Regional Parks System*

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

*“The pressure of urbanization and development threatens the most valuable remaining large recreational open spaces in the metropolitan area at the same time as the need for such areas is increased. Immediate action is therefore necessary to provide funds to acquire, preserve, protect and develop regional recreational open space for public use.”*  
(Minn. Stat. 473.302)

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

### **As of 2014, the Regional Parks System includes:**

- 54,286 acres open for public use
- 54 regional parks and park reserves
- Eight special recreation features, such as the zoo and conservatory at Como Regional Park
- 40 regional trails, with 340 miles currently open to the public
- Over 47 million visits each year
- An investment of more than \$658 million in state and regional dollars since inception, with an additional \$163 million of state funds to partially finance operations and maintenance of the regional park system

Regional parks contain significant regional natural resources such as lakeshore, wetlands, hardwood forests, native prairies and groundwater recharging areas. If you were to visit one regional park, park reserve or special recreation feature each weekend – not even counting the trails, it would take you more than a year to get to them all. It’s an amazing system, one that has few rivals anywhere in the

world. It demonstrates the importance of natural spaces and outdoor recreation to Minnesotans, including those living in the metropolitan area. The Regional Parks System is comprised of four main components: regional parks, park reserves, regional trails, and special recreation features.

## Regional Parks

Regional parks most notably contain a diversity of nature-based resources, either naturally occurring or human-built, and are typically 200-500 acres in size. Regional parks accommodate a variety of outdoor recreation activities. In 2014, a total of 42 regional parks were open to the public. Examples of regional parks include:

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

## Park Reserves

Park reserves, like regional parks, provide for a diversity of outdoor recreation activities. One major feature that distinguishes the park reserve from a regional park is its size. The minimum size for a park reserve is 1,000 acres. An additional characteristic of park reserves is that they are required to manage at least 80% of the park reserve as natural lands that protect the ecological functions of the native landscape. As of 2014, a total of 12 park reserves were open to the public. Examples of park reserves include:

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

The Council's 2008 Regional Park System Visitor Survey found the most popular activities in regional parks and park reserves included: 1) walking, 2) swimming, 3) biking, 4) picnicking, and 5) playground use.

## Regional Trails

The Council has defined two major types of trails to serve the region: 1) destination or greenway trails and 2) linking trails. Destination or greenway trails typically follow along routes with high-quality natural resources that make the trail itself a destination. Examples of destination or greenway trails include:

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

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

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

As of 2014, 40 regional trails totaling approximately 340 miles were open for public use.

### **Special Recreation Features**

Special recreation features are defined as Regional Parks System opportunities not generally found in the regional parks, park reserves or trail corridors. Special recreation features often require a unique managing or programming effort. As of 2014, there were eight special recreation features open to the public. Examples of special recreation features include:

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

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

### *Regional Parks System Management Structure*

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

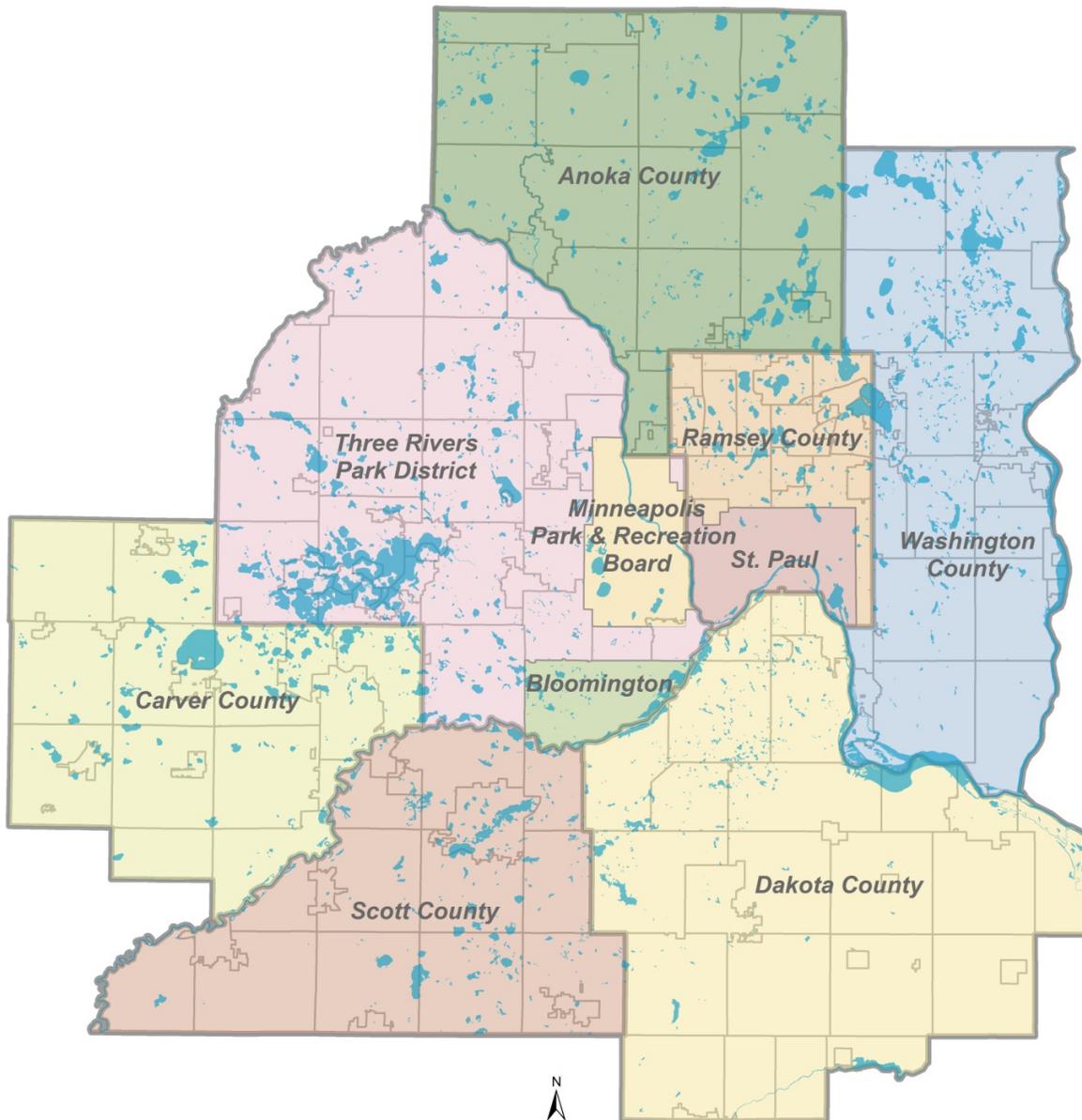
### **Regional Park Implementing Agencies Role**

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

The regional park implementing agencies are:

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

Figure 2-1. Regional Park Implementing Agencies



0 5 10 20 Miles

December 2014

## **Metropolitan Council Role**

Regional Parks System legislation directs the 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. State law gives the Council the authority to determine which parks and trails in the seven-county area are included in the Regional Parks System and to generally identify areas that should be acquired for the Regional Parks System. The Council is charged with determining whether these lands are regionally important and would collectively provide a balanced system of outdoor recreation for the region. See page 24 for an overview of key Minnesota legislation.

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

## **Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Role**

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



## *Regional Parks System Funding*

As previously noted, the Council contributes and administers funding to the regional park implementing agencies. Funding for the Regional Parks System funding currently consists of four main grant programs. Each grant program is intended for different purposes and is comprised of various funding sources. Only regional park implementing agencies, listed above, qualify for the grant programs. Each grant program is highlighted briefly below. Additional detailed information can be found in Chapter 5.

### **Capital Improvement Program**

The Council's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is intended for Regional Park System acquisition, development, and redevelopment projects. The fund is financed by state (60%) and Council (40%) bonds. The amount of funds each regional park implementing agency receives is based on a formula specified in Chapter 5.

### **Parks and Trails Legacy Fund Program**

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

The Council administers the Parks and Trails Legacy funds to regional park implementing agencies. The Parks and Trails Legacy Plan, which is described in Chapter 5, was developed to guide the use of the funds. Each regional park implementing agency's share of the funds is based on a formula specified in state statute (Minn. Stat. 85.53, subd 3). Also stipulated in state statute is the requirement that 10% of the total Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations be set aside for land acquisition. Appropriations from the Parks and Trails Legacy funds for acquisition are made available to regional park implementing agencies through the Council's Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant Program, described below.

### **Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant Program**

The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant program is organized into two separate programs, corresponding to different funding sources. The two programs are the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund (PTLF) and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). As noted above, 10% of the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations are set aside for land acquisition, which are used for the PTLF acquisition opportunity grant program. The ENRTF acquisition opportunity grant fund is comprised of appropriations received by Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) for land acquisition. The Council matches every \$3 of PTLF or ENRTF appropriations with \$2 of Council bonds. Both programs in the Council's Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant program are non-competitive and awarded based on funding availability among other considerations detailed in subsequent chapters.

### **Operations and Maintenance**

The Council administers pass-through funds from the state to regional park implementing agencies to pay for a portion of their operations and maintenance costs. The share each regional park implementing agency receives is based on a formula specified in state statute (Minn. Stat. 423.351).

In addition to the four grant programs highlighted above, the Council also provides additional funds and administers other investments. For example, the Council administers pass-through grants from the state to regional park implementing agencies. These dollars are legislatively earmarked for a particular regional park implementing agency or park and trail unit. Additionally, the Council provides other funding investments not included above. For example, legislation created a special fund for North Mississippi Regional Park. In another example, Council bonds have been issued to pay for acquisitions without state matching funds. In sum, the total investment the state and Council have made toward the Regional Parks System between 1974 and 2014 totals \$821 million (Table 2-1).

*Table 2-1. 40-year Regional Park System State and Regional Funding Investments, 1974-2014*

Capital Improvement Program  (State and Council Funds)	Parks and Trails Legacy Fund  (State Funds)	Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant Program  (State and Council Funds)		Operations and Maintenance  (State Funds)	Pass-Through Grants  (State Funds)	Other Investments  (State and Council Funds)
		ENRTF <sup>1</sup>	PTLF <sup>2</sup>			
\$414.1 M	\$84.1M	\$15.1 M	\$15.6 M	\$163.0 M	\$104.7M	\$25.1 M

<sup>1</sup> Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund acquisition account

<sup>2</sup> Parks and Trails Legacy Fund acquisition account

About eight /tenths of a percent (0.82%) of the total state and local taxes paid by a household in the region go to support the Regional Parks System. For the owner of a \$250,000 home in the seven-county metropolitan area, the average annual cost of the Regional Park System is \$67 – including \$26 in state income and sales taxes and \$41 in regional and local property taxes.

The investments and funding sources described above are not the only funding sources for the Regional Park System. Each regional park implementing agency provides their own mix of funding for their respective regional parks and trails. Other funding sources also exist, including federal grants, public-private partnerships, and private donations. In addition to the four grant programs highlighted above, the Council is committed to creating a set-side competitive grant program that is specifically targeted to enhance equitable usage of regional parks and trails. This grant program, tentatively called the Park Equity grant program, will be created using Council bonds and funded on an annual basis. Because of existing constraints on Council bonds, the grant program will provide funding only for acquisition, development, or redevelopment projects in the Regional Park System. Additional details of the new grant program are described in Chapter 4.

## *Regional Parks Policy Plan*

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

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

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

## **Planning for 2040**

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

Protecting remaining high quality natural resource lands in the metropolitan area builds on past investments and offers an excellent opportunity for further investment in the Regional Parks System as the region grows by 824,000 more people in the next 25 years. To that end, the vision for the Regional Parks System includes expanding it to nearly 70,000 acres and tripling the trail system from 340 miles today to more than 1,100 miles by 2040. New regional trails and greenway corridors will link regional parks and park reserves. Also proposed are two additional regional parks in Carver County and a regional park in the northwest corner of Anoka County – an area that has been identified as a potential park since 1974. These planned regional parks and trails will enable residents to enjoy a variety of new park experiences throughout the region.

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

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

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

### **Key Minnesota Legislation for the Regional Parks System**

***Regional Recreation Open Space System (Minn. Stat. 473.302)***

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

***Regional Recreation Open Space (Minn. Stat. 473.121, subd. 14)***

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

***Regional Recreation Open Space System Policy Plan (Minn. Stat. 473.147, subd. 1)***

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

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

***Grants for Recreation Open Space (Minn. Stat. 473.315, subd. 1)***

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

***Metropolitan Area Regional Parks Funding (Minn. Stat. 473.351, subd. 1a.)***

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

***Park and Trails Fund (Minn. Stat. 85.53)***

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

***Grant Management Process (Minn. Stat. 16B.98, subd.6)***

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

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

## *Applicable Funding Formulas*

### ***Parks and Trails Fund (Minn. Stat. 85.53, subd. 3):***

“(1) 45 percent of the money must be disbursed according to the allocation formula in section 473.351, subdivision 3, to each implementing agency; (2) 31.5% of the money must be distributed based on each implementing agency’s relative share of the most recent estimate of the population of the metropolitan area; (3) 13.5 percent of the money must be distributed based on each implementing agency’s relative share of nonlocal visits based on the most recent user visitation survey conducted by the Metropolitan Council; and (4) ten percent of the money must be distributed as grants to implementing agencies for land acquisition within Metropolitan Council approved regional parks and trails master plan boundaries under the council’s park acquisition opportunity grant program.”

### ***Operations and Maintenance Funds (Minn. Stat. 473.351, subd. 3)***

“The Metropolitan Council shall distribute the operations and maintenance money as follows: (1) 40 percent based on the use that each implementing agency’s regional recreation open space system has in proportion to the total use of the metropolitan regional recreation open space system; (2) 40 percent based on the operation and maintenance expenditures made in the previous year by each implementing agency in proportion to the total operation and maintenance expenditures of all the implementing agencies; and (3) 20 percent based on the acreage that each implementing agency’s regional recreation open space system has in proportion to the total acreage of the metropolitan regional recreation open space system.”

## Chapter Three: System Plan

### *Introduction*

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

The Regional Parks System primarily consists of lands located in a high-quality natural 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. Regional parks and trails draw visitors from across the region and beyond.

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

### **National Parks and Federal Lands**

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

#### *Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge*

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

#### *Mississippi National River and Recreation Area*

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

### *St. Croix National Scenic Riverway*

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

### **State Parks, Lands, and Trails**

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

There are six state water trails and their attendant system of boat and canoe launches that travel through the metropolitan area along the Cannon, Crow, Minnesota, Mississippi, St. Croix, and Rum rivers. The DNR and its local unit of government partners actively manage the state water trails for canoeing, kayaking, boating and camping. Additionally, 72 miles of the Mississippi River and four miles of the Minnesota River have been designated as the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area Water Trail, a national water trail.

Federal and state agencies are encouraged, but not required, to submit master plans for recreational open space units within the seven-county region to the Council for its review. To the extent these master plans indicate that facilities will fulfill regional recreation open space objectives and are consistent with the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, the Council will provide these lands protection under the Metropolitan Significance Review regulations and the Metropolitan Land Planning Act, as described in the System Protection Policy found in Chapter 4. However, the Council does not grant regional funds to state or federal agencies for capital improvements or for operations and maintenance of these facilities. Figure 3-1 depicts the national, federal and state recreation lands and corridors in the region.

### **Local Parks**

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

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

they offer are taken into consideration when master plans of the regional system are prepared and reviewed.

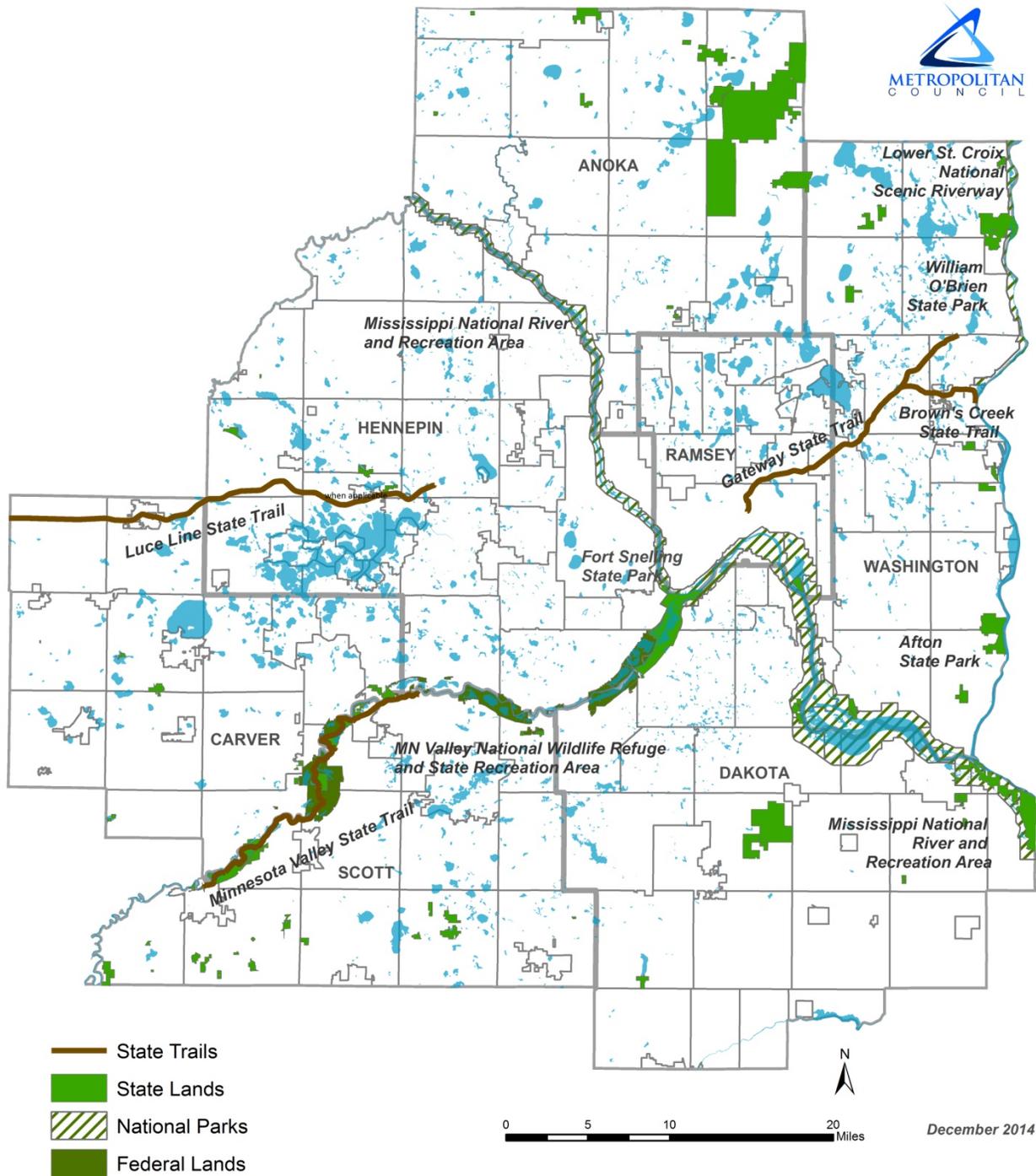
### **Private Recreation**

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

### **Nonprofit Partners**

Nonprofit organizations, such as the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, the Trust for Public Land and the Nature Conservancy, have a long history of supporting the outdoor recreation system in the region by protecting and restoring natural areas and wetlands, helping acquire park land, and advocating for the importance of recreation and open space.

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



### Components of the Regional Parks System

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

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

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

## Classification System for Local Facilities

Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
<b>Local Facilities</b>					
Conservancy lands	Area of natural quality such as watercourses and wetlands that are preserved for environmental or aesthetic benefits to the community and/or because of the negative environmental or economic effects of development in them.	Municipality, township, county	Variable, based on extent of resources	Natural resources that merit preservation and that would be negatively affected by development.	Where resource occurs.
Local linear parks, trail, corridors and parkways	Area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, canoeing and driving.	A neighborhood or several neighborhoods in a city or township	Contained within one city or township. Width and length minimums vary by locality.	On or off-road trails that may or may not traverse scenic areas while assuring the trail treadway has no adverse effect on the natural resource base.	Where needed to link neighborhoods to components of the local or regional recreation system and/or community facilities such as schools, libraries, commercial areas and to link to adjacent municipalities.
County linear parks, trail, corridors and parkways	Area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, canoeing and driving.	Several cities and/or townships in a county.	Traverses one or more municipalities. Width and length minimums vary by county.	On or off-road trails that may or may not traverse scenic areas while assuring the trail treadway has no adverse effect on the natural resource base.	Often found adjacent to major roadways within the county. Other locations where needed to link cities to components of the local or regional recreation system and/or community facilities such as schools, libraries, commercial areas and to link to adjacent counties.

## Classification System for Regional Facilities

Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
<b>Regional Facilities</b>					
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.
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.

## Classification System for Regional Facilities

Component	Use	Service Area	Size	Site Attributes	Site Location
<b>Regional Facilities</b>					
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.
Special recreation feature	Area that preserves, maintains, and provides specialized or single-purpose recreational activities, such as nature center, marina, zoo, conservatory, arboretum, display gardens, hunter training education facilities, downhill ski area, sites of historic or archeological significance, and bridging facilities. Bridging facilities are specialized or single-purpose facilities that are intended to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks System.	Regional- (metropolitan area)	Specific standard applicable to desired feature.	Appropriate to particular special recreation feature.	Where most advantageous for the special recreation feature and the overall park system.

Components of the Regional Parks System are categorized 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 natural resources and the ability to provide adequately for a wide range of natural resource-related recreational opportunities. Access to water bodies suitable for recreation – such as swimming, boating and fishing – is particularly important and most of the regional parks are focused on lakes, rivers or streams.

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

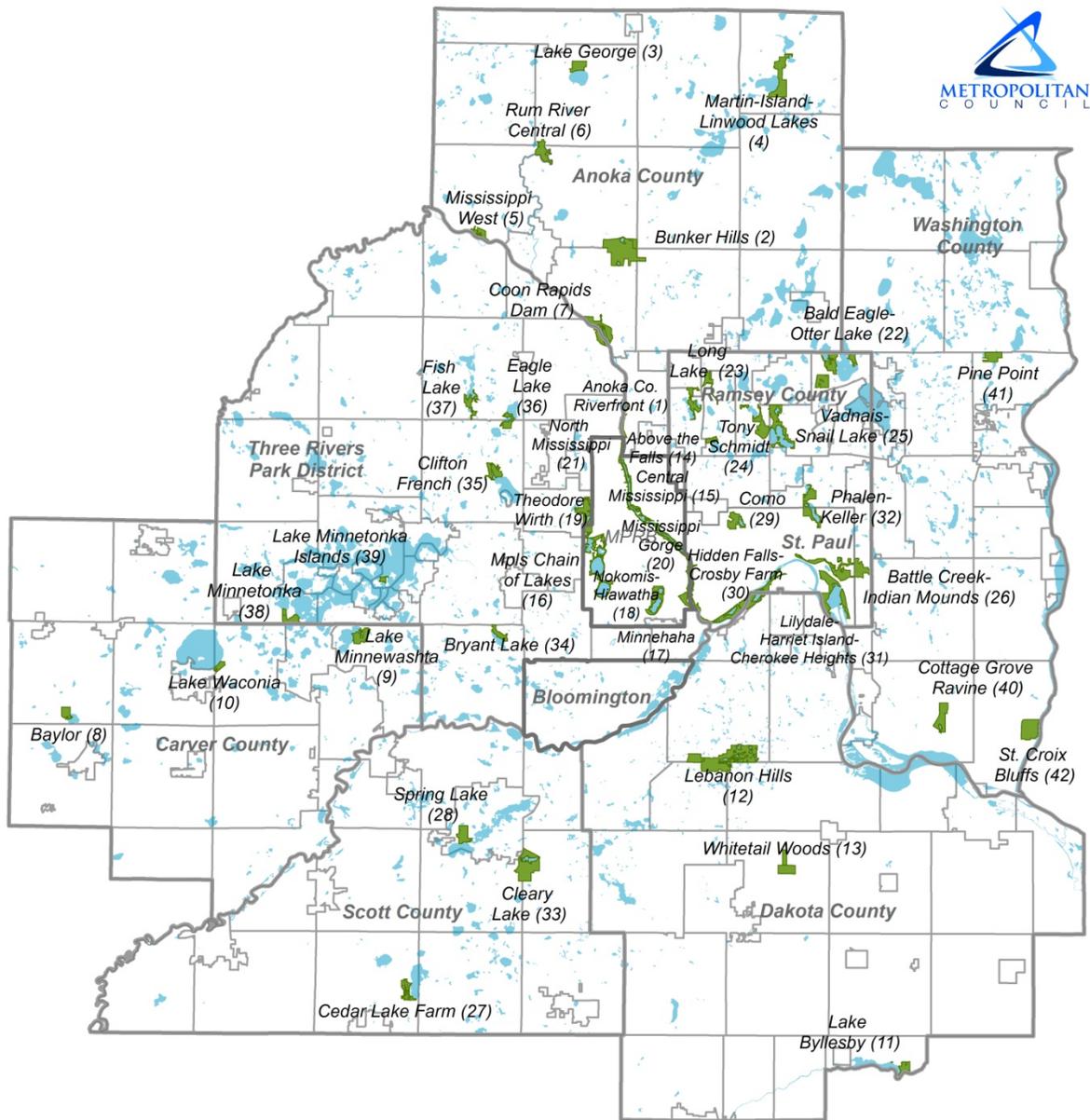
As of 2014, there are 42 regional parks developed and open to the public. These regional parks are listed in Table 3-2 and shown on Figure 3-2.

*Table 3-2. Regional Parks Open to the Public (2014)*

<u>Regional Parks</u>	<u>Regional Park Implementing Agency</u>
1 Anoka County Riverfront Regional Park	Anoka County
2 Bunker Hills Regional Park	Anoka County
3 Lake George Regional Park	Anoka County
4 Martin-Island-Linwood Lakes Regional Park	Anoka County
5 Mississippi West Regional Park	Anoka County
6 Rum River Central Regional Park	Anoka County
7 Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park	Anoka County/Three Rivers
8 Baylor Regional Park	Carver County
9 Lake Minnewashta Regional Park	Carver County
10 Lake Waconia Regional Park	Carver County
11 Lake Byllesby Regional Park	Dakota County
12 Lebanon Hills Regional Park	Dakota County
13 Whitetail Woods Regional Park	Dakota County
14 Above the Falls Regional Park	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
15 Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
16 Minneapolis Chain-of-Lakes Regional Park	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
17 Minnehaha Regional Park	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
18 Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
19 Theodore Wirth Regional Park	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
20 Mississippi Gorge Regional Park	Minneapolis/Saint Paul

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

Figure 3-2. Regional Parks Open to the Public (2014)



Numbers correspond to the regional parks listed in Table 3-2



December 2014

## Park Reserves

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

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

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

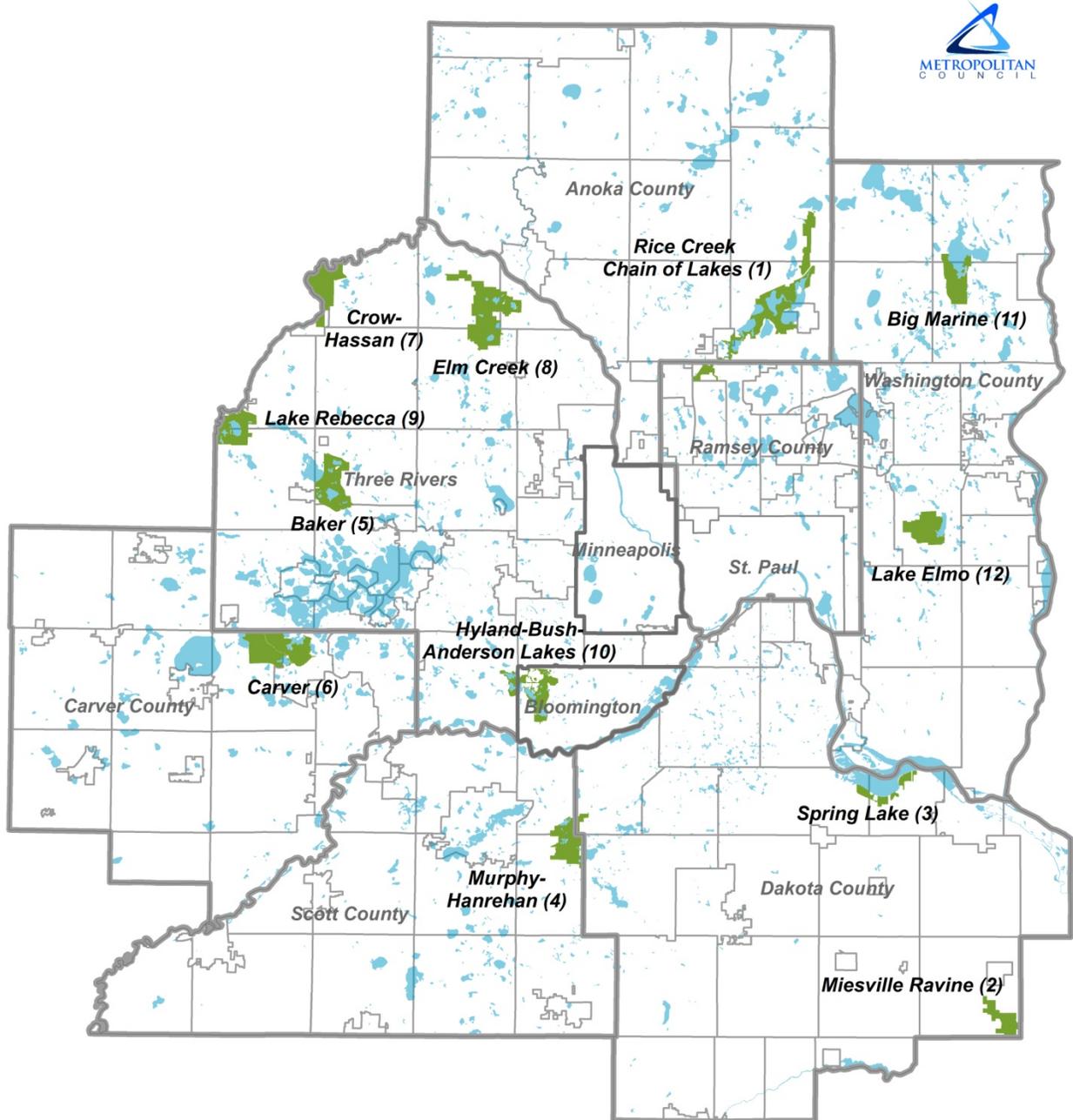
Sand plains	Lightly glaciated area
St. Croix ground moraine	Mississippi River Valley
Des Moines ground moraine	Minnesota River Valley
Terminal moraine	St. Croix River Valley

As of 2014, the Regional Parks System included 12 park reserves developed and open to the public, which are listed in Table 3-3 and shown in Figure 3-3.

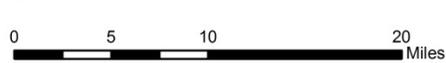
*Table 3-3. Park Reserves Open to the Public (2014)*

<b><u>Park Reserves</u></b>	<b><u>Park Agency</u></b>
1 Rice Creek Chain-of-Lakes Park Reserve	Anoka County
2 Miesville Ravine Park Reserve	Dakota County
3 Spring Lake Park Reserve	Dakota County
4 Murphy-Hanrehan Park Reserve	Three Rivers (Scott County)
5 Baker Park Reserve	Three Rivers Park District
6 Carver Park Reserve	Three Rivers Park District
7 Crow-Hassan Park Reserve	Three Rivers Park District
8 Elm Creek Park Reserve	Three Rivers Park District
9 Lake Rebecca Park Reserve	Three Rivers Park District
10 Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve	Three Rivers/Bloomington
11 Big Marine Park Reserve	Washington County
12 Lake Elmo Park Reserve	Washington County

Figure 3-3. Park Reserves Open to the Public (2014)



Numbers correspond to the park reserves listed in Table 3-3



December 2014

## Regional Trails

Regional trail corridors are intended to provide for recreational travel along linear pathways throughout the metropolitan area. Ideally, 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 components in the Regional Parks System. The regional 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 local streets. The regional trail network, especially in the urban areas, serves as commuting routes for bicyclists in addition to serving recreational purposes. As the regional trail and transit systems expand, opportunities to provide connections between these forms of travel should be explored. People can ride the bus or light rail to access a regional trail, and conversely, people can use regional trails to access transit.

Regional trails can also be developed as greenways, or linear parks, where the trail itself is a destination. These greenways typically include wide corridors that provide opportunities for improving wildlife habitat, protecting natural resources, and providing recreational opportunities. People tend to prefer trails that are relatively close to where they live. Surveys conducted by the Metropolitan Council show that more than 75% 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.

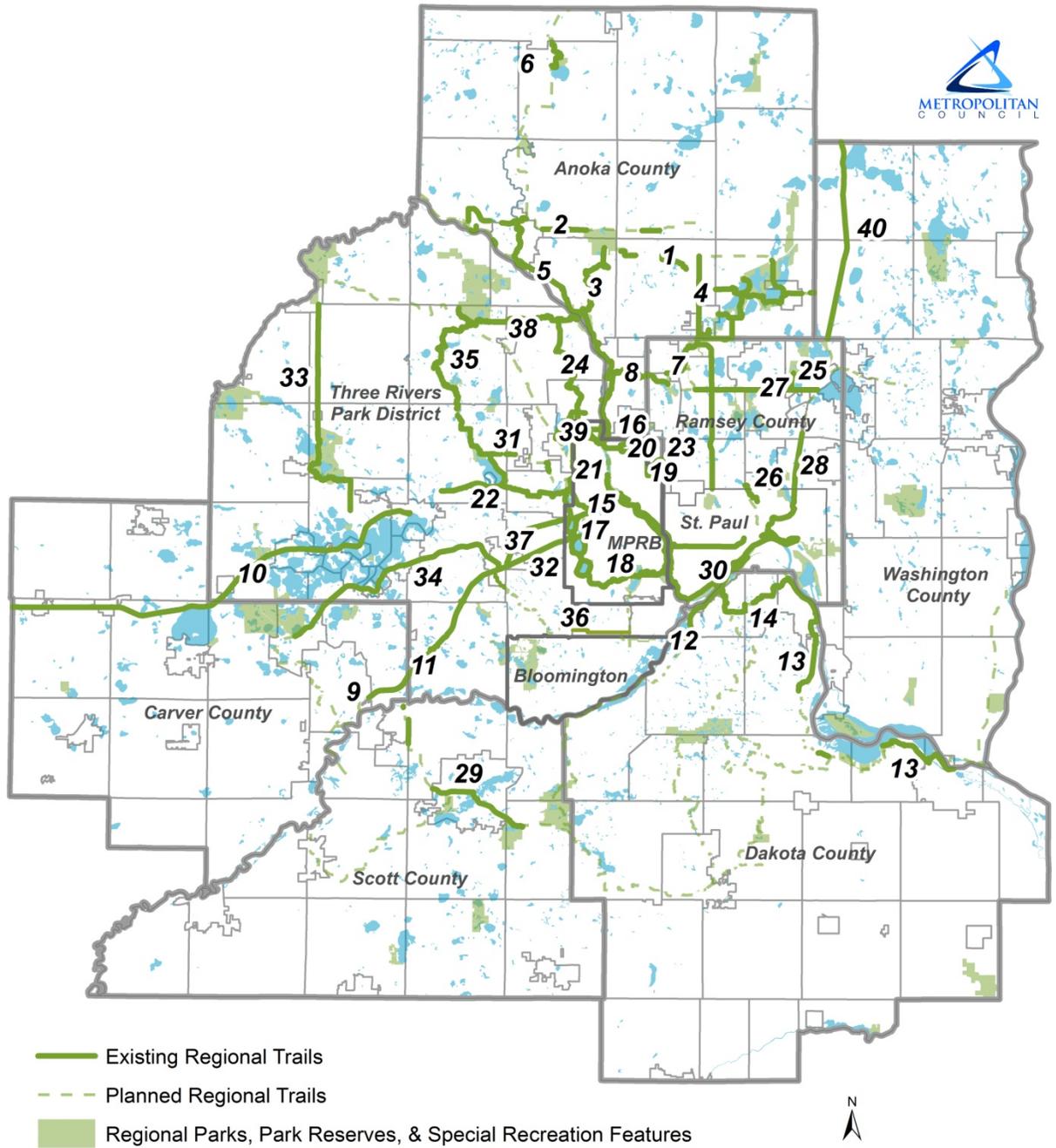
As of 2014, there were 40 regional trail corridors, with a total of 340 miles open to the public, listed in Table 3-4 and Figure 3-4. Many trails are constructed in phases, some as part of roadway improvement projects or local development. Therefore, although a trail is listed as being open, some portions of the trail corridor may be developed in the future and are not yet open to the public.

*Table 3-4. Regional Trails Open to the Public (2014)*

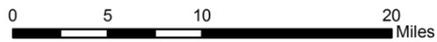
<b><u>Regional Trails</u></b>	<b><u>Park Agency</u></b>
1 Bunker Hills-Chain of Lakes Regional Trail	Anoka County
2 Central Anoka Regional Trail	Anoka County
3 Coon Creek Regional Trail	Anoka County
4 East Anoka County Regional Trail	Anoka County
5 Mississippi River Regional Trail (Anoka Co)	Anoka County
6 Rum River Regional Trail	Anoka County
7 Rice Creek North Regional Trail	Anoka County/Ramsey County
8 Rice Creek West Regional Trail	Anoka County/Ramsey County
9 Southwest Regional Trail	Carver County
10 Dakota Rail Regional Trail	Carver County/Three Rivers
11 Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail	Carver County/Three Rivers

12	Big Rivers Regional Trail	Dakota County
13	Mississippi River Regional Trail (Dakota Co)	Dakota County
14	North Urban Regional Trail	Dakota County
15	Cedar Lake Regional Trail	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
16	Columbia Parkway Regional Trail	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
17	Kenilworth Regional Trail	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
18	Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
19	Ridgway Parkway Regional Trail	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
20	St. Anthony Parkway Regional Trail	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
21	Victory Memorial Parkway Regional Trail	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
22	Luce Line Regional Trail	Minneapolis/Three Rivers
23	Northeast Diagonal Regional Trail	Minneapolis/Three Rivers
24	Shingle Creek Regional Trail	Minneapolis/Three Rivers
25	Birch Lake Regional Trail	Ramsey County
26	Trout Brook Regional Trail	Ramsey County
27	Highway 96 Regional Trail	Ramsey County
28	Bruce Vento Regional Trail	Ramsey County/St. Paul
29	Scott County Regional Trail	Scott County
30	Samuel Morgan Regional Trail	Saint Paul
31	Bassett Creek Regional Trail	Three Rivers Park District
32	Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail	Three Rivers Park District
33	Lake Independence Regional Trail	Three Rivers Park District
34	Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail	Three Rivers Park District
35	Medicine Lake Regional Trail	Three Rivers Park District
36	Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail	Three Rivers Park District
37	North Cedar Lake Regional Trail	Three Rivers Park District
38	Rush Creek Regional Trail	Three Rivers Park District
39	Twin Lakes Regional Trail	Three Rivers Park District
40	Hardwood Creek Regional Trail	Washington County

Figure 3-4. Regional Trails Open to the Public (2014)



Numbers correspond to the regional trails listed in Table 3-4



December 2014

## Special Recreation Features

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

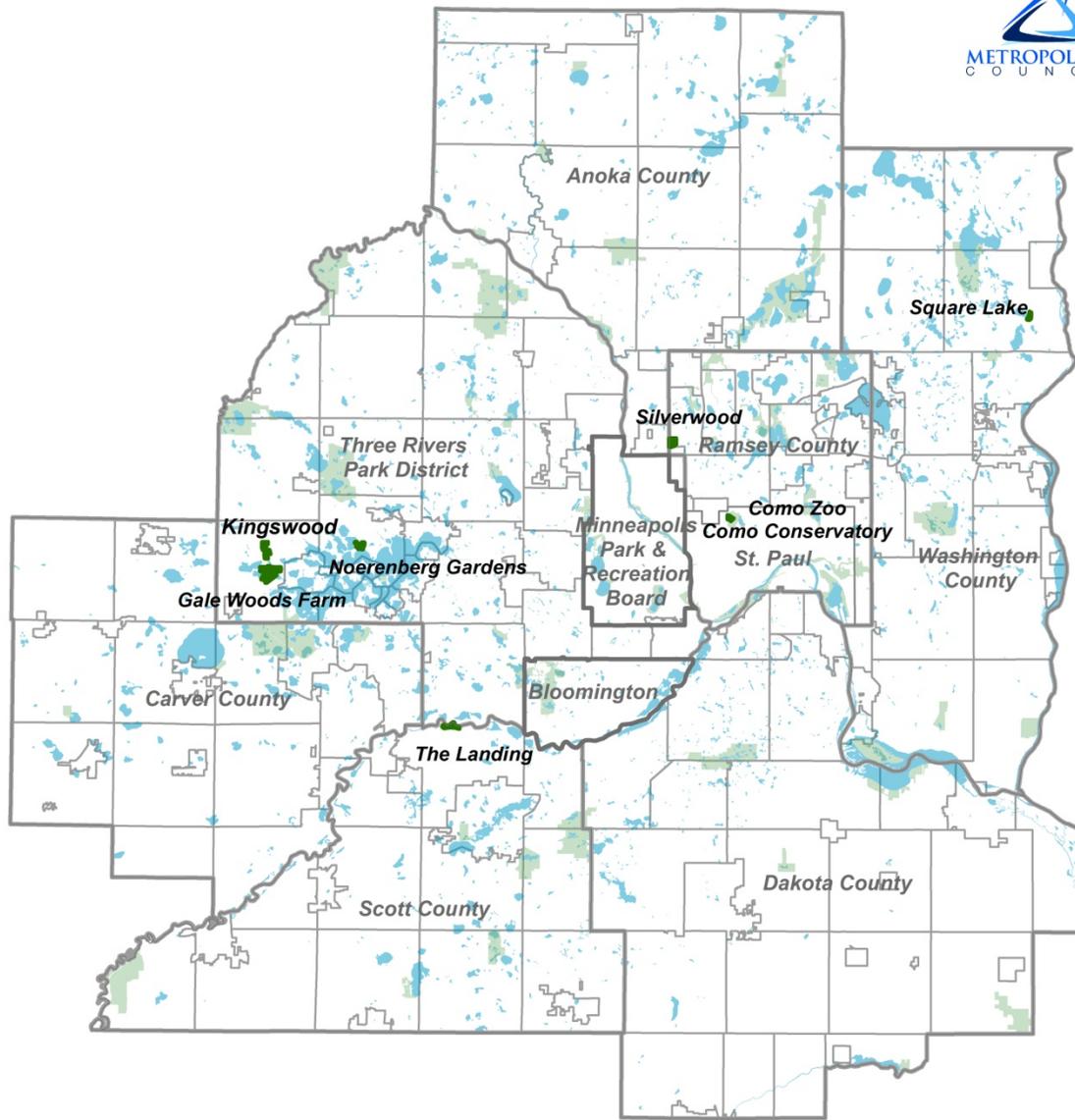
**As of 2014, there are eight special recreation features developed and open to the public:**

- Como Park Zoo at Como Regional Park in Saint Paul
- Marjorie McNeely Conservatory at Como Regional Park, in Saint Paul
- Gale Woods Farm on the shore of Whaletail Lake in Minnetrista
- Kingswood, on the shore of Little Long Lake in Minnetrista
- The Landing, along the Minnesota River in Shakopee
- Noerenberg Gardens on the northwest side of Lake Minnetonka
- Silverwood on the shore of Silver Lake in the City of St. Anthony
- Square Lake in Washington County.

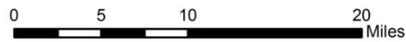
The Como Zoo and Marjorie McNeely Conservatory are managed within Como Regional Park. Gale Woods Farm provides opportunities for visitors to learn about agriculture, food production, and land stewardship. Kingswood provides nature-based service learning programs to preserve the unique and significant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

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

Figure 3-5. Special Recreation Features Open to the Public (2014)



-  Special Recreation Features
-  Regional Parks and Park Reserves



December 2014

## *Regional Parks System Plan*

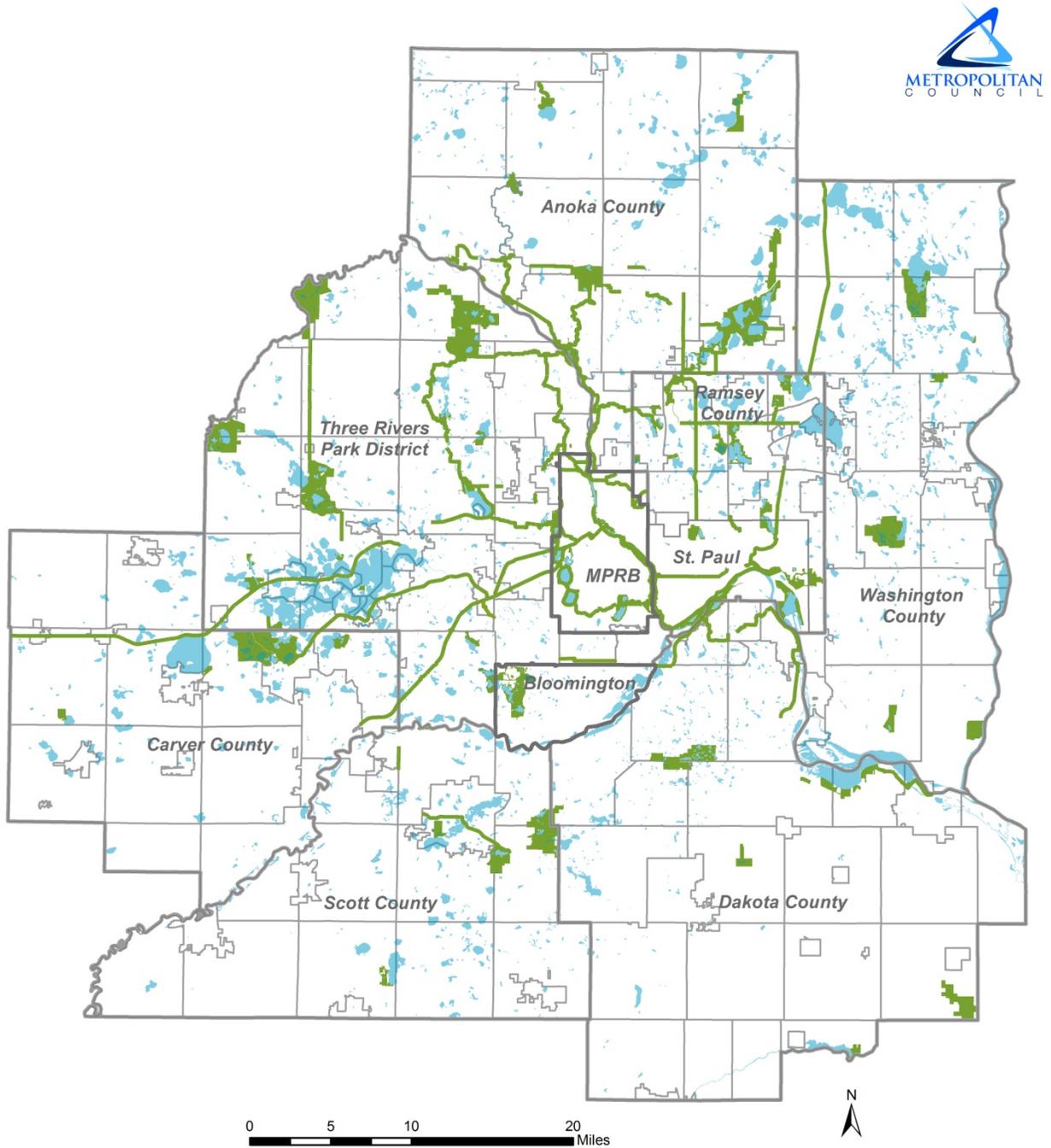
There are six components that make up the System Plan, which all together comprise the vision for the Regional Parks System in 2040:

- Existing Regional Parks System facilities
- Planned Regional Parks System facilities that are not yet open to the public
- Regional Parks System Boundary Adjustments
- Regional Park Search Areas
- Regional Trail Search Corridors
- 2040 System Additions

### **Existing Regional Parks System Facilities**

As described in the previous section, the Regional Parks System as of 2014 includes 42 regional parks, 12 park reserves, 40 regional trails, and 8 special recreation features that are open for public use. These Regional Parks System facilities have a total land area of about 54,286 acres that have been acquired by the regional park implementing agencies, with 4,789 acres of inholdings within the boundaries of these parks and trails that have not yet been acquired. Figure 3-6 shows the Regional Parks System facilities that are open to the public as of 2014.

Figure 3-6. Regional Parks System Facilities Open to the Public (2014)



June 2014

## Planned Regional Parks System Facilities

In addition to the facilities that are open to the public, there are three regional parks and one park reserve that have Council-approved master plans, but have not yet been developed. These facilities are listed in Table 3-5 and shown in Figure 3-7. Approximately 1,353 acres have been acquired for these four planned Regional Parks System facilities, with an additional 3,767 acres to be acquired in the future.

*Table 3-5. Planned Regional Parks Not Open to the Public*

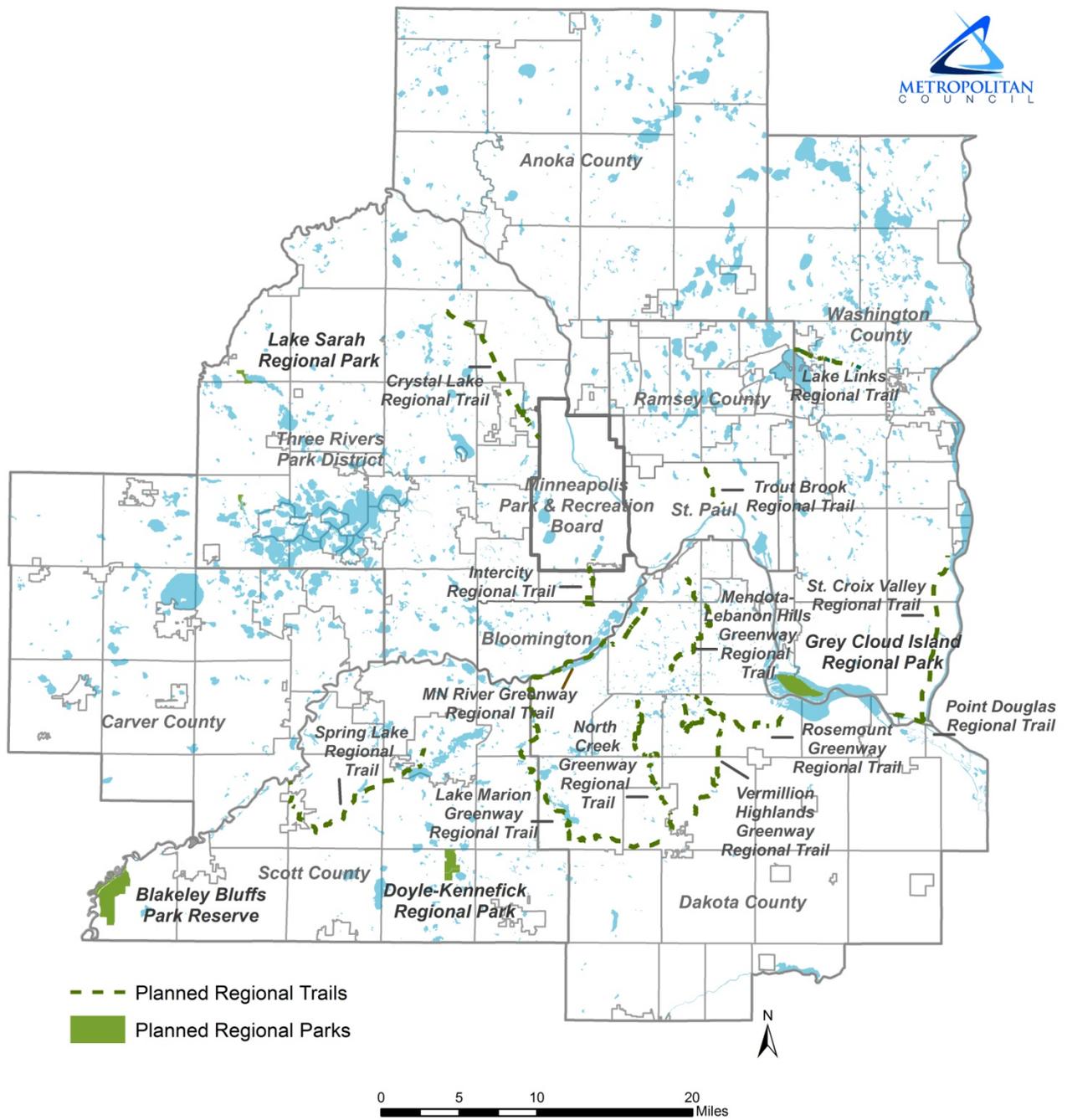
Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park or Regional Trail
Scott County	Doyle-Kennefick Regional Park
Scott County	Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve
Three Rivers Park District	Lake Sarah Regional Park
Washington County	Grey Cloud Island Regional Park

Thirteen regional trails, totaling 147 miles, have Council-approved master plans, but are not yet developed or open to the public, as listed in Table 3-6 and shown in Figure 3-7.

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

Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Park or Regional Trail	Trail Mileage
Dakota County	Lake Marion Greenway RT	20
Dakota County	Mendota-Lebanon Hills Greenway RT	8.5
Dakota County	Minnesota River Greenway RT	17
Dakota County	North Creek Greenway RT	14
Dakota County	Rosemount Greenway RT	13
Dakota County	Vermillion Highlands Greenway RT	13
Ramsey County/Washington County	Lake Links RT	5
Scott County	Spring Lake RT	13.5
Saint Paul	Trout Brook RT	4
Three Rivers Park District	Crystal Lake RT	11
Three Rivers Park District	Intercity RT	5
Washington County	Point Douglas RT	2
Washington County	St. Croix Valley RT	20.5

Figure 3-7. Planned Regional Parks and Trails Not Yet Open to the Public



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## Regional Park Boundary Adjustments

The 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan recommended Master Plan Boundary Adjustments for five regional parks, one park reserve, and seven regional trails. The proposed adjustments to existing regional parks and trails were identified to protect areas of high-quality natural resources or to provide recreation. Some of the boundary adjustments were achieved through a master plan amendment, such as the addition of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary to the Bruce Vento Regional Trail in Saint Paul.

Others have been removed from the System Plan because they have been acquired for other recreational purposes. For example, a portion of the Seminary Fen that was proposed to be added to the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail in Carver County was acquired by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Additionally, land designated as a proposed boundary adjustment area for Rum River Central Regional Park was purchased by Anoka County using non-regional funds. This area became the Cedar Creek Conservation Area, which is not part of the Regional Parks System. Four boundary adjustment areas are included in the 2040 System Plan, which are described in Table 3-7.

*Table 3-7. Master Plan Boundary Adjustments*

<b>Regional Park Implementing Agency</b>	<b>Regional Parks System Unit</b>	<b>Estimated Acreage</b>	<b>Description</b>
Carver County	Baylor RP	100	Acquire approximately 100 acres of land adjacent to Eagle Lake, including lakeshore
Carver County	Lake Waconia RP	30	Add Coney Island to the regional park. Includes a great blue heron nesting colony and maple-basswood forest. Potential boundary expansion provides opportunity for preservation, interpretation and compatible recreation.
Ramsey County	Highway 96 RT	47	Adds Snail Lake Marsh to the Highway 96 Regional Trail to provide area for trail facilities and interpretation.

## Regional Park Search Areas

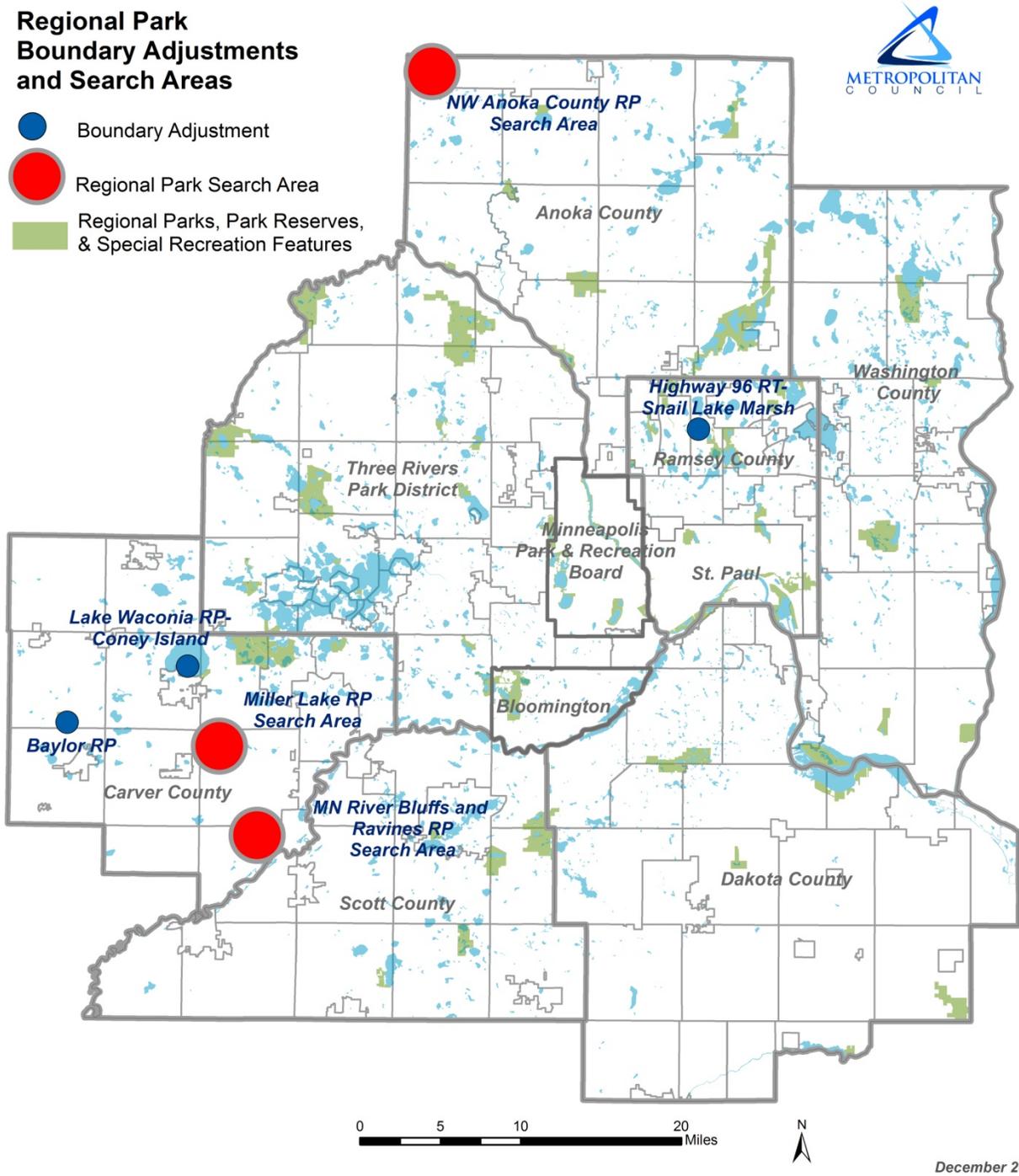
The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, updated in 2010, identified six regional park search areas in the region. Two of the search areas, one in Dakota County and one in Scott County, have been planned, acquired, developed, and are now open to the public as Whitetail Woods Regional Park and Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park, respectively. Another search area has been shaped into the planned Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve, for which Scott County has been acquiring land.

Three regional park search areas, totaling approximately 1,700 acres remain, which are described in Table 3-8. Figure 3-8 shows a map of the regional park boundary adjustment and regional park search areas.

*Table 3-8. Regional Park Search Areas*

<b>Regional Park Implementing Agency</b>	<b>Regional Park Search Area</b>	<b>Estimated Acreage</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Anoka County	NW Anoka County RP Search Area	1,000	Very high-quality natural resource area unique in Anoka County.
Carver County	Miller Lake RP Search Area	200	Very attractive lake resource and appropriate setting for a regional park
Carver County	Minnesota Bluffs and Ravines RP Search Area	500	Large areas of regionally significant natural resources, excellent recreation potential.

Figure 3-8. Regional Park Boundary Adjustments and Search Areas



## Regional Trail Search Corridors

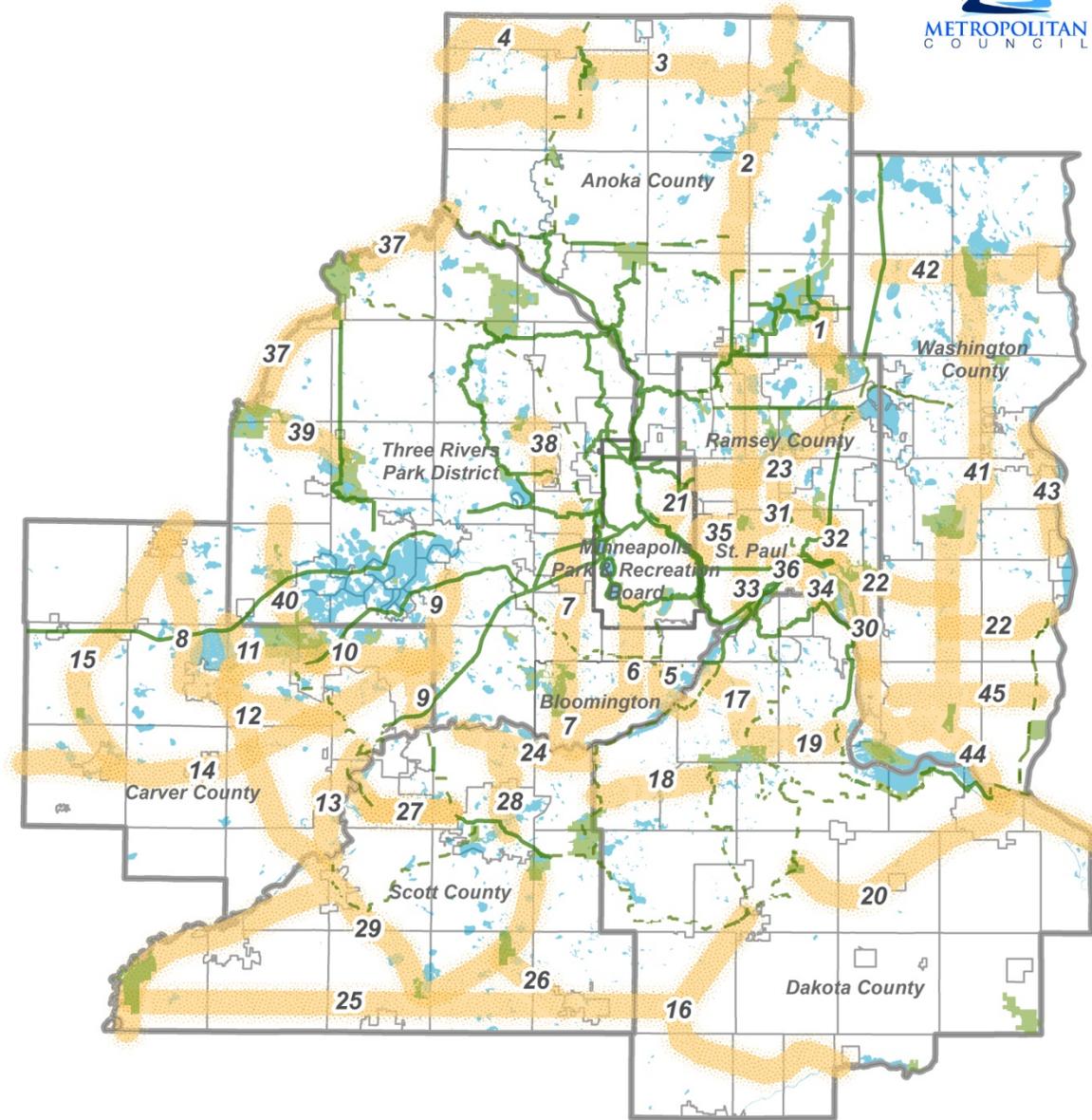
There are 45 proposed regional trails without Council-approved master plans that identify the trail alignments. Many of these trails have been considered part of the Regional Parks System for several years and were mapped in previous Regional Parks Policy Plans as proposed trails showing a tentative alignment. Since alignments for these trails have not yet been approved by the Council as part of a master plan, and are therefore not eligible for Regional Parks System funding for acquisition and development, they are being shown as regional trail search corridors. The estimated mileage of these regional trail search corridors is 488 miles. Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to prepare master plans for these trails. The regional trail search corridors are listed in Table 3-9 and shown in Figure 3-9.

*Table 3-9. Regional Trail Search Corridors*

Map Designation	Regional Park Implementing Agency	Regional Trail Search Corridor	Est. Miles
1	Anoka County	Chain of Lakes-Otter Lake	3
2	Anoka County	East Anoka County Regional Trail Extension	14
3	Anoka County	North Anoka County	22
4	Anoka County	Sugar Hills	14
5	Bloomington	Intercity Extension	2
6	Bloomington	South Hennepin East (CP Rail)	9
7	Bloomington & Three Rivers Park District	South Hennepin West (CP Rail)	14
8	Carver County	County Road 10	19
9	Carver County & Three Rivers Park District	Highway 101	9
10	Carver County	Highway 5	7
11	Carver County	Lake Waconia	6
12	Carver County	Lake Waconia-Carver	13
13	Carver County	Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Extension	6
14	Carver County	Twin Cities & Western	25
15	Carver County	Western Carver County	17
16	Dakota County	Chub Creek Greenway	20
17	Dakota County	Lebanon Hills-Big Rivers	7
18	Dakota County	Lebanon Hills-Lake Marion	7
19	Dakota County	Lebanon Hills-Mississippi	5
20	Dakota County	Vermillion River Greenway	17
21	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	Grand Rounds Missing Link	3.5
22	Ramsey County, Saint Paul & Washington County	Afton Bluffs	17
23	Ramsey County	Trout Brook Extension	3.5

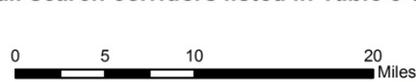
24	Ramsey County & Saint Paul	Lexington Avenue/Parkway	16
25	Scott County	Big Rivers Extension	5
26	Scott County	Elko New Market-Blakeley-Doyle Kennefick	32
27	Scott County	Elko New Market-Doyle Kennefick	5
28	Scott County	Louisville	5
29	Scott County	Prior Lake Outlet	6
30	Scott County	Southern Scott	35
31	Saint Paul	Point Douglas (Bruce Vento-Washington County)	4
32	Saint Paul	Como-Phalen (Wheelock Parkway)	6
33	Saint Paul	Johnson Parkway	2
34	Saint Paul	Mississippi River (Harriet Island-South St. Paul)	3
35	Saint Paul	Mississippi-Como	4
36	Saint Paul	Summit Extension	1
37	Three Rivers Park District	Crow River	17
38	Three Rivers Park District	Eagle Lake-Bassett Creek	4
39	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Sarah	5.5
40	Three Rivers Park District	Minnetrasta	9
41	Washington County	Central Greenway	26
42	Washington County	Glacial Hills	12
43	Washington County	Middle St. Croix Valley	8
44	Washington County	Mississippi River	13
45	Washington County	Prairie View	9

Figure 3-9. Regional Trail Search Corridor Map



- Regional Parks, Park Reserves, Special Recreation Features
- Existing Regional Trails
- Planned Regional Trails
- Regional Trail Search Corridors

*Numbers correspond to the regional trail search corridors listed in Table 3-9*



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## Revisions to the Regional Parks System Plan

Minn. Stat. 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.

Minn. Stat. 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.

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

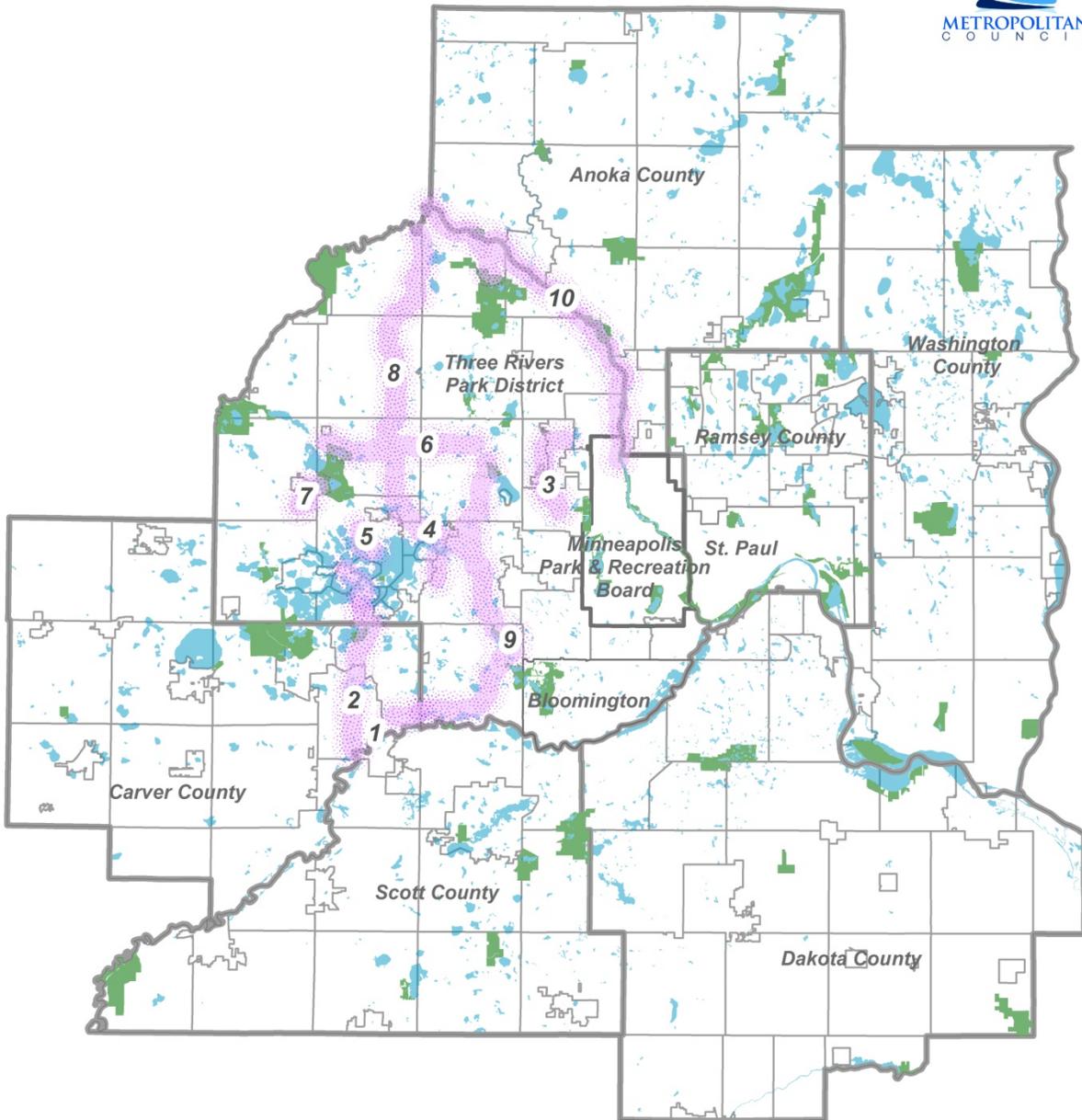
### *2040 Regional Trail Search Corridor Additions*

As part of the development of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* in 2014, the Council provided an opportunity for regional park implementing agencies to propose additions to the Regional Parks System. Carver County and Three Rivers Park District submitted requests to consider several regional trail search corridors. The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Council's Community Development Committee reviewed the proposed regional trail search corridors based on state law described above and the criteria for regional trails described in Chapter 4. Ten regional trail search corridors, totaling approximately 111 miles, met the criteria and are recommended as System Additions to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. These System Additions are described in Table 3-10 and shown in Figure 3-10.

*Table 3-10. Regional Trail Search Corridor System Additions*

<b>Map Designation</b>	<b>Regional Park Implementing Agency</b>	<b>Regional Trail Search Corridor</b>	<b>Estimated Mileage</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Carver County	County Road 61	1	Connects MN River Bluffs RT, MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Seminary Fen and North-South 2 RT System Addition
2	Carver County	Highway 41	7.5	Connects Southwest RT, MN River Bluffs RT, MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge and State Recreation Area, Twin Cities & Western RT Search Corridor, Hwy. 5 RT Search Corridor, Lake Minnewashta RP
3	Three Rivers Park District	CP Rail Extension	5.5	Extension of existing CP Rail RT Search Corridor north between the Luce Line RT and Crystal Lake RT
4	Three Rivers Park District	Dakota Rail Extension	2	Connects eastern terminus of the Dakota Rail RT to North-South 2 RT System Addition
5	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Independence Extension	7	Extension of existing Lake Independence RT south to connect with Luce Line State Trail, Dakota Rail RT, Lake Minnetonka LRT RT to Hwy. 41 RT Search Corridor in Carver County
6	Three Rivers Park District	Lake Sarah Extension	10	Extension of existing Lake Sarah RT Search Corridor east to connect Baker PR to Medicine Lake RT
7	Three Rivers Park District	Minnetrista Extension	2.2	Extension of existing Minnetrista RT Search Corridor north to connect Luce Line State Trail to Baker PR
8	Three Rivers Park District	North-South 1	28	Connects Crow River RT Search Corridor, Rush Creek RT, Luce Line State Trail, Dakota Rail RT, Lake Minnetonka LRT RT and Hwy. 101 RT Search Corridor
9	Three Rivers Park District	North-South 2	20	Connects Medicine Lake RT, French RP, Luce Line RT, Lake Minnetonka LRT RT, MN River Bluffs LRT RT, Bryant Lake RP and County Rd. 61 RT System Addition
10	Three Rivers Park District	West Mississippi River	28	Connects Crow River RT Search Corridor, Elm Creek PR, Rush Creek RT, Coon Rapids Dam RP, Twin Lakes RT, North Mississippi RP

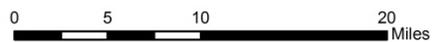
Figure 3-10. Additions to the Regional Parks System



 2040 System Additions

 Regional Parks, Park Reserves & Special Recreation Features

Numbers correspond to the regional trail search corridors listed in Table 3-10



December 2014

## *Regional Park Study Areas*

Typically, new regional parks are proposed as search areas that have been identified based on high-quality natural resources located in portions of the region where population growth is expected. However, there are times when a regional park implementing agency may want to propose including existing parks into the Regional Park System. In an effort to make an informed decision, further study is required to assess whether the proposed addition is of regional significance. The proposed area for consideration is called a Regional Park Study Area. Designation as a Regional Park Study Area does not guarantee that a park will become part of the Regional Parks System. It acknowledges that studies would need to be conducted to determine whether the facility warrants regional status. Once these studies are complete, the information would be presented to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Council for evaluation. The Council's 2008 Regional Parks and Trails Survey shows that at least 40% of visits to most regional parks are made by people who do not live in the jurisdiction of the respective regional park implementing agency where the park is located. Therefore, the benchmark applied for qualifying as a regional distribution of visitation is 40% non-local visits in evaluating a regional park study area.

## *Deletion of a Proposed Regional Park Study Area*

The *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan* included a regional park study area in northern Dakota County. Dakota County proposed evaluating the feasibility of combining Thompson County Park in West St. Paul with Kaposia Park and Kaposia Landing, two local parks in South St. Paul, into one regional park unit. Council staff worked with Dakota County to conduct visitor origin surveys at these parks in 2012. The results of the study determined that 16.7 percent of visits were non-local and that the Thompson Kaposia Study Area did not meet the regional visitation distribution criteria. The Thompson-Kaposia Regional Park Study Area has been removed from the System Plan Map as part of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan.

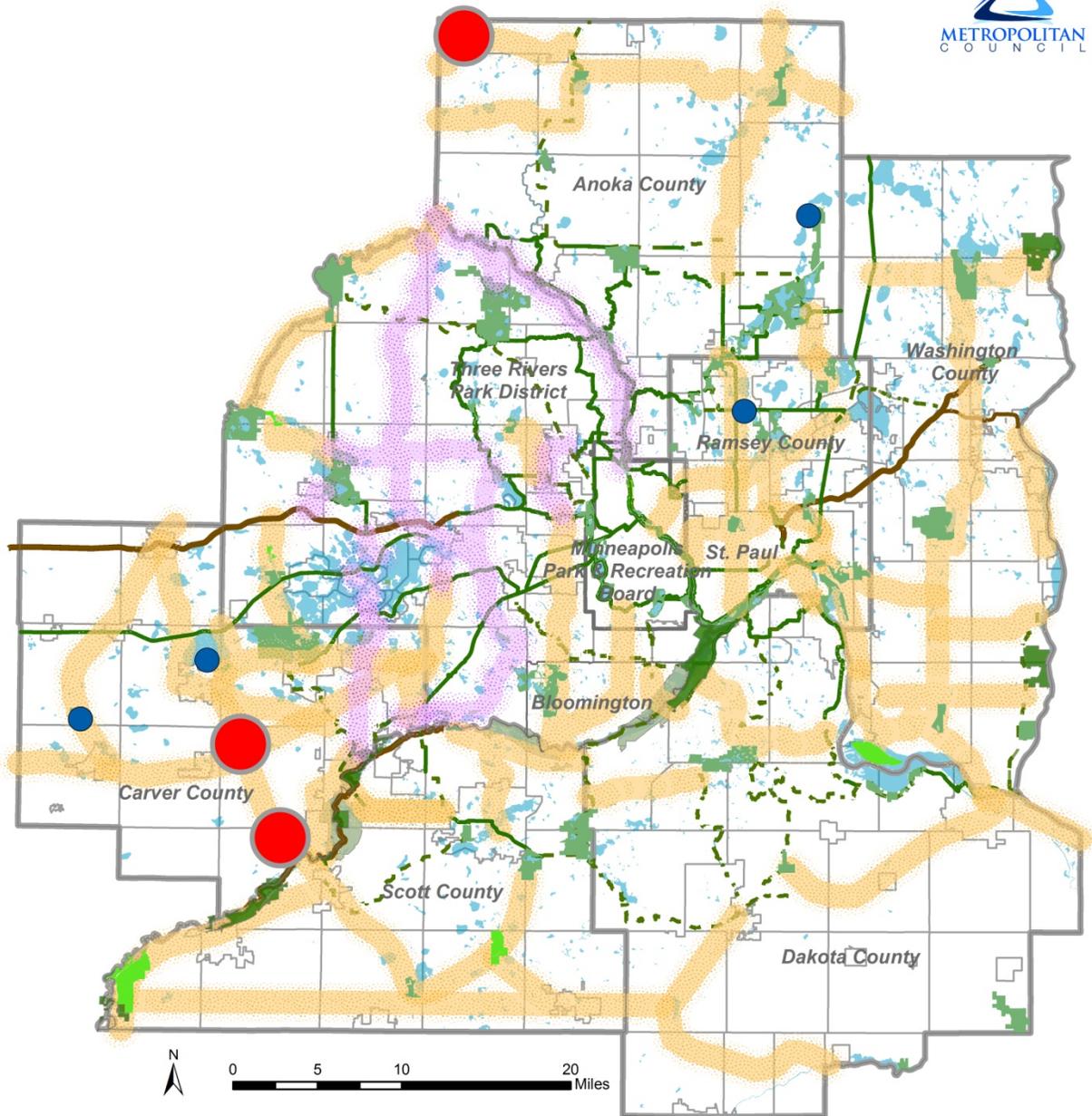
## *2040 Regional Parks System Plan Summary*

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

- Existing Regional Parks System facilities (2014)
  - 42 regional parks
  - 12 park reserves
  - 8 special recreation features
  - 40 regional trails, consisting of 340 miles
- Planned Regional Parks System facilities that are not yet open to the public
  - 4 regional parks
  - 1 park reserve
  - 12 regional trails, consisting of 147 miles
- Regional Parks System Boundary Adjustments
  - 2 regional parks
  - 1 park reserve

- 1 regional trail corridor
- Regional Park Search Areas
  - 3 regional park search areas
- Regional Trail Search Corridors
  - 45 regional trail search corridors, with approximately 488 miles
- 2040 System Additions
  - 10 regional trail search corridors, with approximately 111 miles

Figure 3-11. 2040 Regional Parks System Plan Map



**Regional Parks-Park Reserves  
Special Recreation Features**

- Existing
- Planned
- Boundary Adjustment
- Regional Park Search Area

**Regional Trails**

- Existing
- Planned
- Regional Trail Search Corridors
- 2040 System Additions

**State and Federal**

- State Trails
- State Lands
- Federal Lands

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## Chapter Four: Policies and Strategies

### *Introduction*

The policies presented in this document are the Council's objectives for the kind of regional recreation open space facilities and services the region needs to acquire, develop, and operate in the future. The policies provide direction to ongoing efforts to plan, develop, operate, and protect the system.

The strategies are short- to medium-term actions that will advance the policies. Some of the strategies represent actions that the Council will take in developing the system or responding to particular conditions. Other strategies are directed to the regional park implementing agencies involved in implementation of the plan. The strategies are incremental actions; each contributes to achieving the Council's policies. 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 recreation activities and facilities, planning, siting and acquisition, finance, and system protection for the Regional Park System. Strategies for accomplishing each policy are stated briefly, explained in more detail, and followed by the history and development of each strategy.

### *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 adversely affect them.**

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

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

Based on the legislative 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 balanced distribution of these resources around the area.
- Require land acreage to serve a regional scale audience

- Be reasonably, feasibly, and safely accommodated without detriment to existing uses as determined through master plans or through policy board decisions of regional park implementing agencies.
- Protect the environment/ecology of the site and not negatively impact its natural resources.

Based on the criteria above, activities that should be accommodated in the Regional Parks System include:

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

This list 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 as Special Recreation Features.

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 townships.

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

Land is acquired for the Regional Parks 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 last 40 years and has helped to fend off efforts to acquire and develop Regional Parks System lands for other ventures.

Regional park agencies should consider various factors when determining whether other uses, described below, should be accommodated in regional parks and trails and included in regional park or trail master plans.

- Inline skating and roller skiing. These activities require a treadway wider than eight feet if pedestrians, bicyclists and inline skaters are on the same treadway and traveling in opposite directions. Inline skating and roller skiing also require a smoother/harder surface than bicycling and pedestrian uses. Inline skating and roller skiing are more popular on flat-terrain trails, such as abandoned railroads, than on hilly terrain trails going cross-country.

Inline skating seems to be more popular on looped park trails than on long-distance regional trails. However, skaters will go out and back on linear trails at a distance that meets their physical conditioning. Inline skating can be added as a primary use on a regional trail if the trail treadway is or could reasonably be made sufficiently wide, smooth and flat to safely accommodate skaters, pedestrians and bicyclists.

- 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 dry times of the year if the underlying soil and slopes are not 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. Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to consider sustainable design standards, such as those provided by the International Mountain Biking Association, during the trail design process.
- 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 the lighting's impact on nocturnal wildlife as well as 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 engage the public to develop solutions to any multi-use trail conflicts.

To accommodate trail users of all abilities, 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 Council. Such athletic field complexes do not require a high-quality natural-resource land base; they are easier to develop on formerly disturbed lands. As such, athletic field complexes are inappropriate for development on Regional Parks System lands. However, informal ball fields that can be used for a variety of pickup games are encouraged. The concept of an informal ball field encourages recreational use in this manner, but is not intended for programmed or league sports, since those services are offered in other recreational settings.

When new recreational activities become popular, regional park implementing agencies need to see if it is appropriate to accommodate them on Regional Parks System lands. For example, in the last 10 years, adventure racing, kayaking, standup paddle boarding, triathlons, and windsailing have become

increasingly popular (Outdoor Foundation, 2013). 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 amendment process that includes significant public engagement.

In some instances, there may be no need for any physical change to the regional park or trail unit, but a change in visitor or park management rules or policies may be necessary, such as allowing off-leash dog use on a trail, for example. 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 regional park's environment, users, and the adjacent property.

Some new recreation open-space uses may be compatible with the long-range basic mission of the Regional Parks System. 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 2040 Regional Parks 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 that link to other trails outside the region.

The Council acknowledges that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has statutory authority under Minn. Stat. 84.03 to provide for regulated use of off-road vehicles through its management of several legislatively dedicated accounts that contain license receipts and a portion of Minnesota gas tax revenues from the use of these vehicles. Siting and managing an off-road vehicle use area in the region that doesn't adversely affect nearby land uses and natural resources will require cooperation between the affected local unit of government and the DNR. Regional park implementing agencies may participate in siting an off-road vehicle use area, but the lead responsibility for siting and funding the area will be provided by the DNR under the authority it is granted in statute.

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

In summary, the initial decision on whether a new activity can and should be accommodated is up to the regional park implementing agency responsible for the regional park, park reserve, special recreation feature, and regional trail. The Council will become involved if the regional park implementing agency decides it would like to accommodate a new activity but the Council deems the use incompatible with the nature-based system or finds that a master plan amendment is necessary before the new activity can be accommodated.

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

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

When feasible, the transit system should be planned to provide access to Regional Parks System units. Transit planners should consider routes and facilities that are sensitive to parks, park users, park development plans, and local agencies' rules and regulations.

Many regional parks and park reserves are located in the Rural Service Area because a high-quality natural resource base has long been a major criterion for determining lands that are appropriate for the Regional Parks System. Many of the rural park reserves were existing parks that were designated as regional recreation open space when the Regional Parks System was established in 1974. In order to build up a large recreational land reserve to be used for future populations, it has been necessary to acquire land in the Rural Service Area.

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

### **Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 3: Strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails among all residents, across race, ethnicity, income, and ability.**

The regional park implementing agencies provide outstanding facilities, amenities, staffing, and programming to offer a welcoming environment. Activities hosted within the Regional Parks System include a breadth of opportunities for visitors, such as movies and music in the park, day camps, festivals, nature programming, among others. The benefits of park use are numerous, including

improvements to physical health, well-being, learning, family bonding, and community building. Therefore, it is imperative that all residents have the opportunity to enjoy the bountiful resources the Regional Parks System provides.

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

Metro Transit and other transit providers are encouraged to work with the regional park implementing agencies to identify any transportation barriers 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 outdoor recreation opportunities for all of the residents of the area, with facilities and services geared to meet the demands and abilities of the general population. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed by the U.S. Congress in 1990, has created specific requirements for development and rehabilitation projects in the Regional Parks System. All new projects and updated master plans for the system include ADA review. Regional Park Implementing agencies are encouraged to use U.S. Access Board guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas as a minimum standard of accessibility on all new or substantially altered capital projects within the Regional Parks System. Additionally, regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to provide physically challenged participants with similar park/trail experiences through adaptive programs.

Findings from the 2008 Regional Parks Visitor Study found that people of color underuse the regional system. In 2014, the Council released its research findings on Regional Parks System use among select communities of color. A total of 16 focus groups were held throughout the metropolitan region to assess recreational preferences, barriers to recreation participation, and suggestions to enhance participation. In sum, 263 individuals participated in the focus groups and self-reported diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Study findings revealed the most preferred outdoor recreational activities included walking, picnicking or barbequing, and playground use. In terms of barriers to using the Regional Parks System, the most frequently identified barriers were lack of awareness, available time, fear or safety concerns, language barriers, and weather. Focus group participants identified key suggestions to enhance park use, including:

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

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

several strategies to enhance equitable use. While the strategies are highlighted briefly below, each bulleted summary is further described in the associated policy and strategy section that follows. To summarize, in an effort to enhance equitable usage of the Regional Park System, the Council will:

- Create a set-aside competitive Park Equity grant program for capital projects, specifically targeted toward projects that would enhance equitable usage of the Regional Parks System.
- The Metropolitan Council and regional park implementing agencies will work together to ensure the 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan's intent to "connect people to the outdoors" is achieved.
- Work with regional park implementing agencies to prioritize funding requests, using equity as a key factor.
- Conduct studies to inform Regional Parks System planning and management. Such efforts will include:
  - A region-wide visitor survey every five years to monitor changes in Regional Parks System use.
  - Targeted studies to better understand and provide for the outdoor recreational needs and preferences across social classes, age groups, racial, ethnic, and educational backgrounds, and ability status.
- Create a Regional Parks System ambassador program to assist with expanding awareness of the Regional Parks System and bring parks to the people.
- Convene stakeholder meetings with regional park implementing agencies, partners, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups to enhance knowledge and continuous improvement.
  - Information shared will be systematically collected and shared electronically
- Require regional park implementing agencies to incorporate a public engagement process that includes involvement from individuals representing diverse races, ethnicities, classes, ages, abilities, and national origin when developing a regional park or trail master plan.
  - To that end, the Council will provide staff assistance, where appropriate.
- Encourage regional park and trail design that conforms to changing recreational preferences. Examples of recreational preferences include:
  - Amenities suited for the aging population and those with limited mobility.
  - Non-fee picnic areas that accommodate mid-sized groups (for example, 15-25 people).
  - Clustering of amenities for multigenerational family gatherings.
  - Informal ball fields for pick-up games.

#### **Recreation Activities and Facilities – Strategy 4: Bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be coordinated between the Regional Parks System and the transportation system.**

Safe, high-quality, continuous, barrier-free bicycle and pedestrian systems shall be developed, maintained, and improved to function as integral parts of the Council's Regional Parks System and

transportation system. The Council is responsible for regional transportation planning, including bicycle transportation facilities. Since regional trails also serve commuters, it is important that the Regional Parks System and the transportation system work together when developing trail and transportation plans.

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

Regional trails are primarily multi-use recreation trails, although some regional trails also serve bicycle commuter functions. The majority of regional trail miles should be developed so they are off or away from roadways. However, in some instances it may be necessary for a short stretch of trail, to be adjacent to or on a road in order to bypass natural or man-made barriers or private property.

**Regional trails will primarily consist of these types of facilities:**

- Off-road facilities, which are paths within or adjacent to the road rights-of-way but separated from the roadway surface. They may be used for walking and inline 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.

**In addition to pedestrians and inline skaters, regional trails are intended to serve:**

- Casual or new adult and teenage bicyclists who prefer comfortable access, preferably by a direct route on low-speed or low-traffic streets. These bicyclists are most comfortable on designated bikeways, off-road facilities and independent trails, or having access to streets with low vehicle speeds and volumes.
- Pre-teen bicyclists whose roadway use is usually accompanied by a parent. They need access to local schools, libraries, recreation facilities, shopping, or other residential areas. These bicyclists have a strong preference for separation of bicycles from motor vehicles through off-road facilities or independent trails.

Regional trails may also serve the most experienced bicyclists, who want direct access to destinations at maximum speed with minimum delays. Highly experienced bicyclists primarily rely on the road system for routes, and value using roads like other vehicles for commuting, but occasionally enjoy independent trails if they are relatively continuous and not overly crowded.

### *Regional Bicycle Transportation Network*

In preparing the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan*, the Council conducted a Regional Bicycle System Study in 2013-2014. The purpose of the study was to develop a more complete understanding of how the region's on-street bikeways and off-road trails interact and how they serve regional transportation trips by bicycle. The primary outcome of the study was to identify a Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, which defined a two-tiered network for planning and implementation. The Tier 1 (high priority) network was identified where bicycle travel was greatest, population and job densities were highest, and where there were the most opportunities to connect regional job concentrations and activity centers

with population centers and the regional transit system. Figure 4-1 shows the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network corridors.

The intent of the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network is to encourage planning and implementation of future bikeways by cities, counties, park agencies, and the state that will integrate a seamless network of on-street bikeways and off-road trails to most effectively improve conditions for bicycle transportation region-wide. The Regional Bicycle Transportation Network corridors are intended to serve as the “backbone” arterial system for biking in the region. Figure 4-2 shows existing and planned regional trails with regard to the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network corridors and also highlights the overlap between bicycle recreation and bicycle transportation networks.

Existing regional trails or segments of regional trails that serve a transportation function were included in the proposed Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, such as the Cedar Lake Regional Trail, the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail, and portions of the Luce Line Regional Trail.

For more information on the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network, please refer to the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan*. *(insert link to Regional Bicycle Transportation Network section of 2040 TPP in the final version of the 2040 RP3)*.

Figure 4-1. Regional Bicycle Transportation Network Corridors

### Regional Bicycle Transportation Network Vision

**RBTN Alignments**

-  Tier 1 Alignments
-  Tier 2 Alignments

**RBTN Corridors (Alignments Undefined)**

-  Tier 1 Priority Regional Bicycle Transportation Corridor
-  Tier 2 Regional Bicycle Transportation Corridors

**Other Trail Systems**

-  Regional Trails (Regional Parks Policy Plan)
-  Mississippi River Trail (US Route 45)
-  State Trails (DNR)

**Regional Destinations**

-  Metropolitan Job Centers
-  Regional Job Centers
-  Subregional Job Centers
-  Large High Schools
-  Colleges & Universities
-  Major Sport & Entertainment Centers
-  Highly Visited Regional Parks

**Reference Items**

-  Principal Arterial Roads
-  Lakes and Rivers
-  City Boundary
-  County Boundary
-  2040 Municipal Urban Service Area MPO Area

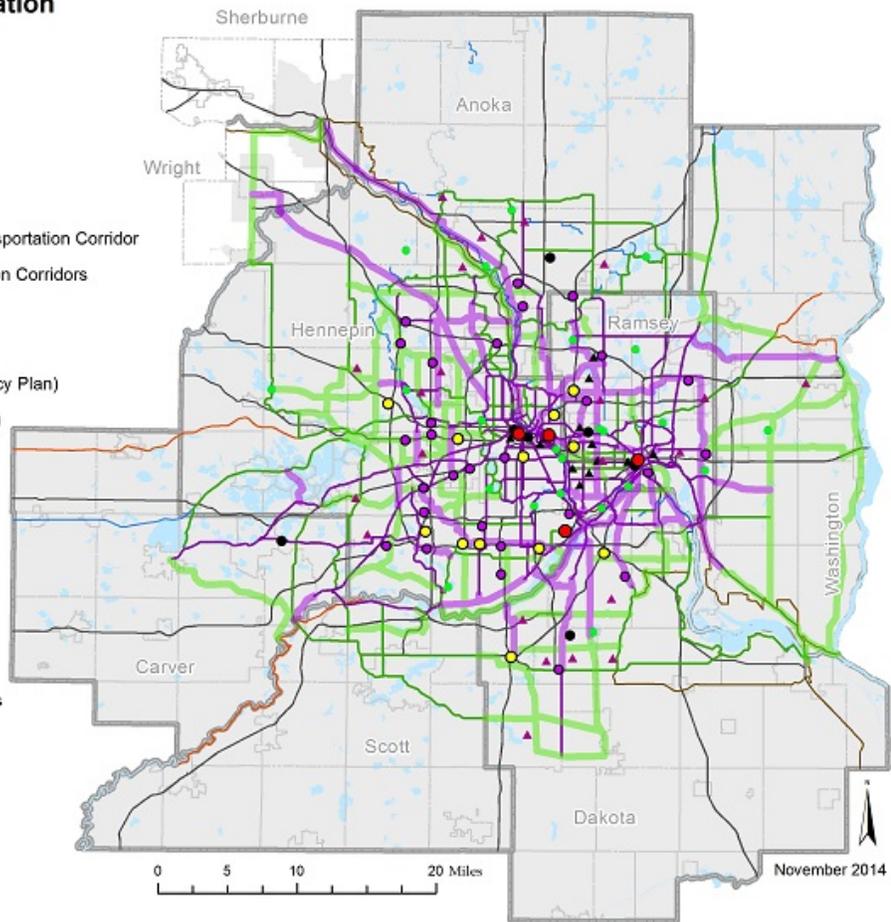
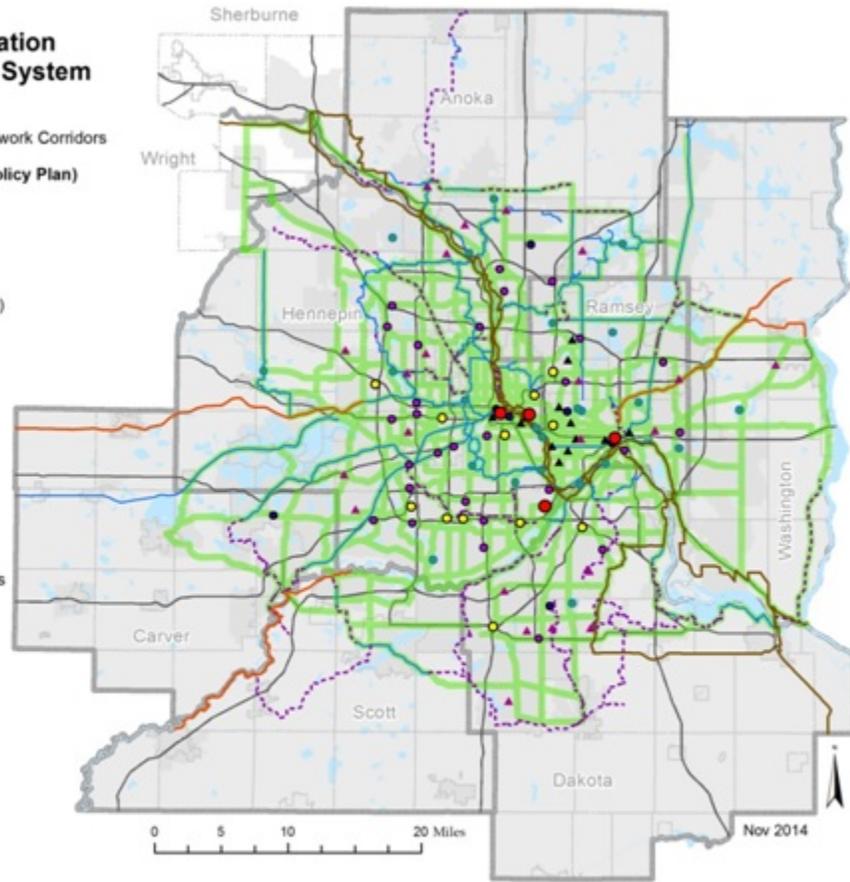


Figure 4-2. Regional Bicycle Transportation Network Corridor and Regional Trails

### Regional Bicycle Transportation Network and Regional Trail System

- Regional Bicycle Transportation Network Corridors
- Regional Trail System (Regional Parks Policy Plan)**
  - Regional Trails
  - ⋯ Planned Regional Trails
- Other Trail Systems**
  - Mississippi River Trail (US Route 45)
  - State Trails (DNR)
- Regional Destinations**
  - Major Job & Activity Centers
  - Regional Job & Activity Centers
  - Subregional Job & Activity Centers
  - ▲ Large High Schools
  - ▲ Colleges & Universities
  - Major Sport & Entertainment Centers
  - Highly Visited Regional Parks
- Reference Items**
  - Principal Arterial Roads
  - Lakes and Rivers
  - City Boundary
  - County Boundary
  - 2040 Municipal Urban Service Area MPO Area



### *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.

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

Future Council designation of lands for the Regional Parks System should emphasize important natural resource features, access to water bodies, and natural resource features that enhance outdoor recreation. 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” (Minn. Stat. 473.147, subd. 1).

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

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

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

- Acquiring lands with 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; help protect or improve water quality, or provide a larger 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

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 regional parklands, plus state facilities, should reasonably meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area. Therefore, lands of “regional importance” would be comparable in size, draw users from rather large geographic areas, and contain natural resources similar to the state parks and trails in the metropolitan region. Lands that serve only a municipality or neighborhood would not be considered to have “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 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. The restoration of urban areas that include natural resource features (for example, Above the Falls Regional Park and the Bruce Vento Regional Trail and Nature Sanctuary) have provided opportunities to create regional park sites or regional trails that also address the emerging redevelopment of the Urban Centers.

### **Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 2: Priorities for land acquisition are set by regional park implementing agencies in Council-approved master plans.**

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

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

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

All privately owned parcels within a Council-approved master plan boundary are "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 are made to acquire these parcels because every time the land is sold to another private party, the land remains unavailable for Regional Parks System purposes. If once-vacant land is developed for housing or other uses, it may become unreasonably expensive to acquire and is essentially lost to the Regional Parks System.

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

Because of strong public attraction to water resources, acquisition of any additional public water frontage identified in a Council-approved master plan should be given a very high priority. The high demand and rapidly escalating value of water frontage will only make those lands 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 land with water frontage to public use after it’s been fully developed is politically difficult and very expensive.

**Siting and Acquisition – Strategy 3: New regional trails must serve a regional audience and provide connections between regional parks, park reserves, and regional trails without duplicating an existing trail.**

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

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

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 Parks System.

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

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

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

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

linear elements, areas along rivers and streams or chains of lakes are excellent candidates for incorporation into the regional trail system.

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

**Linking Regional Trails** should be located within the Metropolitan Urban Service Area and may be located in the Rural Service Area of the region, as defined in Chapter 1. For linking regional trails, any two trails running parallel to each other, and not separated by natural or human-built barriers, should be at least 1.5 miles apart so as not to overlap the localized service area of those trails. Whenever possible, linking regional trails should be located to reasonably maximize inclusion of high-quality natural resources and connections to local trails, areas of lifecycle and affordable housing, the transit network, and areas of infill and redevelopment.

Visitor origin data from the Council's *2008 Regional Parks and Trails Survey* indicate that regional trails in the metropolitan area are used most by people who live nearby or can reach the trail in a short bicycle trip or drive. Therefore, a priority is to develop trail corridors in the Metropolitan Urban Service Area, where more than 90% of the population lives. 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 geographic balance of Regional Parks System facilities.

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

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

Regional trails may pass through local parks along their route. The regional trails can enhance access to these local parks, and the parks may provide amenities for trail users. Because of this synergy, there may be a desire to incorporate these local parks into the regional trail corridor. However, these local parks may not be regionally significant and may only serve a local audience. In determining whether an

existing local park should become part of the regional trail corridor, the Council will evaluate the request in terms of its regional importance and whether the park itself serves a regional or local audience.

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

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

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

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

- Be unique and complement or enhance the services already offered by the regional system
- 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 tied to natural resources
- Be approved by the Council through the master plan process

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

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Nature center                                   | Marina                               |
| Zoo   | Downhill ski area                    |
| Conservatory                                    | Arboretum                            |
| Display gardens                                 | Hunter training education facilities |
| Sites of historic or archeological significance | Bridging facilities*                 |

\*Bridging facilities are specialized or single-purpose facilities that are intended to attract and introduce new outdoor recreation users to the Regional Parks System.

Furthermore, special recreation features must:

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

As of 2014, there are eight special recreation features open to the public:

Como Zoo	Kingswood	Silverwood
Como Conservatory	The Landing	Square Lake
Gale Woods Farm	Noerenberg Gardens	

### *Planning Policy:*

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

#### **Planning – Strategy 1: Regional park implementing agencies are required to prepare a master plan for each Regional Parks System facility it owns and/or operates.**

Minn. Stat. 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 regional park implementing agencies are critical in defining the specifics of acquisition, development and operation of regional facilities.

The plans include the regional park implementing agency's estimates of use and costs. The master plan process allows residents to participate in the development of the plan and other units of government to know what is planned for a park and how it affects them. Collectively, these master plans form the regional park implementing agencies' part of the regional system plan. For a regional park implementing agency to receive a grant for acquisition or development through the Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program, the proposed project must be consistent with a Council-approved master plan.

Master plans will be reviewed 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 be revised, resubmitted, and approved by the Council to be eligible for Council funding.

Minn. Stat. 473 313 provides for the state mandate on master plans; however, it does not provide guidance on timeliness of revisions. A plan is revised when the regional park implementing agency submits a master plan amendment to the Council to change its original proposal for acquisition and/or development, or when it has developed significant additional detail. The Council may approve or reject

the master plan amendment for cause and return the plan to the regional park implementing agency for revisions to address the Council's concerns.

### *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, potential contamination based on data from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and other conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the boundaries.
- **Stewardship plan:** A program for managing park property, including activities, expenses and anticipated revenue prior to developing the property for recreation purposes. Planned non-recreation uses and disposition of revenue from such use should be detailed.
- **Demand forecast:** The recreational demand to be met by the site as identified by the Council, the regional park implementing agency, or other sources.
- **Development concept:** A plan for recreational development and natural resource management that should include:
  - Description and location of planned development and natural resources management projects.
  - Approximate capacity of each facility.
  - Mapping of existing and planned local and regional trail connections to the site and information on how they relate to development within the park.
  - Wayfinding signage plan, indicating the types of signs and general locations within the park.
  - Information on the source and location of drinking water that is adequate for the recreational uses of the park.
  - Schedule and cost estimates for each project.
  - Conflicts between recreational and natural-resource management needs in developing the park/trail unit should be addressed and resolved. 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.

- **Public engagement and participation:** A process to engage the public and involve affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state, and federal recreation providers in the development of the master plan. The public engagement process must seek to mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural or linguistic barriers and include people of diverse races, ethnicities, classes, ages, abilities and national origin. A master plan must include the public engagement plan and describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned above. The process must include opportunity for the public to be heard and to have influence over the contents in the master plan. The Council will provide staff assistance, where appropriate.

Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to include transportation and transit planners in the development of a master plan, when appropriate.

The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned amendments to all affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state and federal recreation providers and address their concerns prior to submitting the plan to the Council. The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised and content resulting from engagement efforts.

- **Public awareness:** Plans for making the public aware of services available when the regional park is open, including how to access the park by transit, if applicable.
- **Accessibility:** A plan that addresses accessibility, affordability, and other measures designed to ensure that the facility can be used by people with limited mobility.
- **Natural resources:** As part of the master plan, there should be a natural-resource management component that includes:
  - A Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) as a part of the master plan process. An NRI should include a land cover inventory that is consistent with the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the MetroGIS – a consortium of government entities in the region that create, manage and share digital geographic-based data in a geographic information system (GIS). The natural resource inventory should include native plant communities mapped in the Minnesota County Biological Survey and listed species (rare, endangered, and threatened) that are documented in the Natural Heritage Information System. The natural resource inventory may include other land-based information.

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

- Information on how surface water and groundwater resources in the unit, including wetlands, will be protected. This should include standards and requirements that are consistent with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's best management practices for stormwater management. The master plan should include provisions to, first, avoid wetland impacts; second, minimize impacts; and, finally, mitigate impacts when no other options are available.
- Information on how vegetation will be managed.

The effective date for these master plan requirements is July 1, 2015 in acknowledgement of regional park implementing agency planning processes that may be underway when the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan is adopted. Master plans submitted to the Council prior to this date will be reviewed subject to the requirements outlined in the 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan.

#### *Master plans for regional linking trails:*

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

- **Boundaries and acquisition costs:** A list of parcels to be acquired and the estimated total cost and schedule for their acquisition, and information on natural resources, site suitability, special assessments, potential contamination based on data from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and other conditions that affect acquisition of the site or location of the boundaries
- **Demand forecast:** The recreational demand to be met by the trail, as identified by the Council, the regional park implementing agency, or other sources
- **Development concept:** A plan for development, including schedule and cost estimates for the project. The plan should include:
  - Mapping of existing and planned local and regional trail connections to the trail corridor
  - Wayfinding signage plan, indicating the types of signs and general locations along the trail corridor
- **Conflicts:** Identification of conflicts with other existing or proposed projects or land uses affecting the park/trail unit, including steps necessary for their resolution
- **Public services:** A description of any non-recreational public services and facilities, such as roads or sewers, needed to accommodate the proposed trail, including the timing of these services and the arrangements necessary to provide them.
- **Operations:** Rules, regulations or ordinances affecting the trail, including estimated operations and maintenance costs and sources of revenue to operate and maintain the trail.
- **Public engagement and participation:** : A process to engage the public and involve affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state, and federal recreation providers in the

development of the master plan. The public engagement process must seek to mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural or linguistic barriers and include people of diverse races, ethnicities, classes, ages, abilities and national origin. A master plan must include the public engagement plan and describe the process undertaken to engage those mentioned above. The process must include opportunity for the public to be heard and to have influence over the contents in the master plan. The Council will provide staff assistance, where appropriate.

Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to include transportation and transit planners in the development of a master plan, when appropriate.

The regional park implementing agency shall present the master plan and planned amendments to all affected agencies, local units of government, and local, state and federal recreation providers and address their concerns prior to submitting the plan to the Council. The master plan submitted to the Council shall include a summary of comments received that identifies issues raised and content resulting from engagement efforts.

- **Public awareness:** Plans for making the public aware of services available when the regional trail is open, including how to access the trail by transit, if applicable.
- **Accessibility:** A plan that addresses accessibility, affordability, and other measures designed to ensure that the facility can be used by people with limited mobility.

The effective date for these master plan requirements is July 1, 2015 in acknowledgement of regional park implementing agency planning processes that may be underway when the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan is adopted. Master plans submitted to the Council prior to this date will be reviewed subject to the requirements outlined in the 2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan.

#### *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:

- A Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) as a part of the master plan process. An NRI should include a land cover inventory that is consistent with the Minnesota Land Cover Classification system developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Metro GIS – a consortium of government entities in the region that create, manage and share digital geographic-based data in a geographic information system (GIS).

Using the same NRI format will ensure compatibility with other natural resource inventories that have been completed or will be done in the metropolitan region. The natural resource inventory should include native plant communities mapped in the Minnesota County Biological Survey and listed species (rare, endangered, and threatened) that are documented in the Natural Heritage Information System.

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

### *Design Considerations for Master Plans*

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

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

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

#### **Promote expanded multimodal access:**

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

#### **Strengthening equitable usage:**

- Provide amenities suited for the aging population and/or those with limited mobility, such as:
  - Siting picnic areas or short, looped trails close to parking lots or points of access
  - Providing benches as appropriate intervals along trails
- Designing non-fee picnic areas that accommodate mid-sized groups (for example, 15-25 people), which would allow for spontaneous gatherings:

- Does not need to be a formal picnic shelter – could be a number of picnic tables grouped together
  - Would not require an advance reservation
  - Does not replace picnic areas that require reservations – both options may be offered
- Clustering of amenities for multigenerational family gatherings, such as picnic areas near playgrounds and open ball fields

### *Funding Process for Capital Projects*

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 regional park 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 affected by 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.

If a master plan amendment is needed before funding the construction of a facility, the regional park implementing agency must provide the general public and affected local units of government an opportunity to participate in the process, as outlined the master plan requirements described above.

### **Planning – Strategy 2: Promote enhanced multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails and the transit system, where appropriate.**

The Regional Parks System plays a key role in advancing the livability of the region by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, thereby supporting healthy lifestyles and active living. The Council has a unique opportunity to help achieve this objective, through its roles in planning and operating the transit system, as well as planning for the Regional Parks System.

In 2014, Council staff conducted a stakeholder work session that included regional park implementing agency representatives, transportation and transit planners, land use planners, and park planning partners to discuss ideas to support this strategy. The ideas generated in the work session are classified into concepts that regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to consider and projects or discussions that the Council will pursue.

In addition to design considerations for master plans discussed in the previous section, regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to:

- Provide transit schedules and information at regional parks that are served by transit

- Include information on how to access a regional park or trail by transit on their agency’s website, where applicable
- Improve wayfinding signage
- Promote regional trails with existing Transportation Management Organizations (TMOs). A TMO is public-private partnership that provides marketing and advocacy to promote multi-modal options for daily commutes
  - Commute Solutions: serves Anoka County
  - Commuter Connection: serves downtown Minneapolis
  - Commuter Services: serves Bloomington, Eden Prairie, Edina, Minnetonka, and Richfield along the Interstate 494 corridor
  - Smart Trips: serves Saint Paul
- Coordinate with local jurisdictions to identify and plan for local trail connections to regional parks and trails as well as last mile connections from transit
- Collaborate with bike-share programs to site bike stations near regional parks and trails

The Council will explore the following projects:

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

### **Planning – Strategy 3: 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.

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

- address the primary issue of how trail land ownership is controlled and how the trail is going to be managed, and
- ensure that the trail will be open to all people (not restricted by residence). The trail should be treated as a truly regional facility, since it will be eligible for regional and state funds to finance

its acquisition, development and operations/maintenance once the Council has approved a master plan for the regional trail

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 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 usually extend through several communities. Unlike regional parks, where the regional park implementing agency owns the park and usually coordinates with one or two local governments, regional trails affect several local governments and the land on which the regional trail travels may not be owned by the regional park implementing agency. The regional park implementing agency may lease the trail land and manage it through a joint-powers agreement with a local jurisdiction.

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

#### **Planning – Strategy 4: Projects may share costs, if they are consistent with a Council-approved master plan.**

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

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 Council-approved master plan and the adopted CIP, in order to meet expanded local recreational demands or satisfy above-average quality standards. These improvements are subject to Council approval of an amended master plan.

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

Even if all of the improvement funds come from regional park implementing agency sources or are raised through cost-sharing arrangements with other governments or the private sector, the regional park implementing agency must secure Council approval of a master plan amendment. The improvements are to be developed on Regional Parks 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 regional parks, park reserves, and trails, regardless of how the development was funded.

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

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

### *Finance Policy:*

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

### **Finance – Strategy 1: Funds will be granted only to regional park implementing agencies.**

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

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

### **Finance – Strategy 2: Capital Improvement Program funds are used for acquisition, development, and redevelopment of Regional Parks System units.**

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

- Projects that provide new facilities, rehabilitate facilities, or increase capacity where there is documented existing or projected high use, 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.
- Acquisition of parkland parcels or reimbursement for parkland parcels.
- Matching non-state and non-Council funds to develop/rehabilitate recreation facilities or restore natural resource areas is encouraged.
- Projects that provide essential facility improvements and natural resource enhancements to allow for the initial public use of a regional park once there is adequate demand and acquisition base to support the development.

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

Regional park implementing agencies are responsible for the development and rehabilitation needs for their units in the Regional Parks System. Each regional park implementing agency ranks its proposed development and rehabilitation projects for possible inclusion in the capital improvement program of the Council. All of the proposed development and rehabilitation projects may be desirable, but some – due to their location, their existing use or intended use – tend to be more valuable from a regional standpoint than others.

Adding recreational facilities to Regional Parks System units must not adversely affect the natural resource base that justifies the park or trail's regional designation. Regional park implementing agencies need to balance the carrying capacity of the recreational facilities against the carrying capacity of the park or trail corridor.

For regional trails, regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to connect existing trails to other Regional Parks System units, most notably regional parks and park reserves. Regional park 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 along new or existing regional trails may be grant-eligible development costs. The Council and the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space 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 3: Ensure Parks and Trails Legacy Funds are spent in a manner that conforms to the statewide Parks and Trails Legacy Plan.**

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

The Parks and Trails Legacy Plan, described in greater detail in Chapter 5, specify four strategic directions:

- *Connect people and the outdoors*
- *Acquire land, create opportunities*
- *Take care of what we have*
- *Coordinate among partners*

The four strategic directions parallel the policy direction put forward in Minnesota’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP, 2014). Most notably, SCORP, citing changing population demographics and declining per-capita participation in nature-based outdoor recreation, emphasizes the importance of connecting people to the outdoors.

While regional park implementing agencies do a great deal to connect people to the outdoors, and their efforts should not be diminished, the additional funds made available by the Legacy Amendment enable them to do more in this regard. The additional funding allows for the enhancement of what is already being done and be innovative and creative in trying to capture and serve a broader and more diverse population.

Considering the statewide significance of connecting people to the outdoors, a percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy Fund dollars should be used for that purpose. In 2015, the Council – in close collaboration with regional park implementing agencies, Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee, and other partners and stakeholders – will identify a minimum percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations that should be used to “connect people and the outdoors.” Once determined and approved by the Council, the Council will require regional park implementing agencies to adhere to the determined minimum level of spending as it pertains to their annual share of the Parks and Trails Fund appropriations. It is important to note this in no way alters the funding formula that is applied to the overall Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriation. The minimum level of spending would be initiated during the 2018-2019 biennium, which begins on July 1, 2017.

### **Finance – Strategy 4: Investments to be funded by the Capital Improvement Plan and Parks and Trails Legacy Fund must be included on the legislatively authorized project list.**

To access its share of grant funds from the Capital Improvement Program and Parks and Trails Legacy Fund, a regional park implementing agency must have the proposed project included on the

appropriate legislatively authorized project list. In certain circumstances, projects can be amended and the process for such an event is described in subsequent content.

### **Finance – Strategy 5: Where appropriate, equity will be a consideration in Regional Parks System funding and investment.**

*Thrive MSP 2040* states the Council will “strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region’s residents, such as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability”. *Thrive MSP 2040* also states that the Council will use equity as a lens to evaluate its operations, planning, and investments. An equity lens, otherwise called an equity analysis toolkit or equity impact assessment, is a tool government agencies use to collect information related to their major activities. Many government agencies throughout the country are using an equity lens to inventory, monitor, and institutionalize equity principles. Typically, an equity lens consists of a short series of open-ended questions that clarify both the positive and adverse impacts a project may have on equity. As of 2014, the Council does not have an equity lens developed.

The Council, in collaboration with external partners and stakeholders, will develop a Council-wide equity lens to use to evaluate its operations, planning, and investments. The developed equity lens will serve as a base for creating an equity lens specific to the Regional Parks System, which will be called a Regional Parks System equity toolkit. The Council and the Regional Parks and Natural Resources unit staff will work in close collaboration with regional park implementing agencies, partners, community based organizations, advocacy groups, and other stakeholder groups to develop a Regional Parks System equity toolkit in 2015. Similar to the Council-wide equity lens, the Regional Parks System equity toolkit will be a short series of open-ended questions. Once approved by the Council, the Regional Parks System equity toolkit will be used by regional park implementing agencies and the Council in specific ways described in the following paragraphs.

*Using the Regional Parks System equity toolkit, the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and Council will be involved in the prioritization of the project list proposed for funding for the Capital Improvement Program and Parks and Trails Legacy Fund.*

As noted previously, for both the Capital Improvement Program and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund, a list of projects must be provided to the state for legislative approval on a predetermined schedule. While regional park implementing agencies possess the greatest knowledge of the needs of their respective park and trail units, the Council has a role in reviewing and assessing the ranked list of proposed projects, from both a regional and fiscal perspective, before it is submitted to the state.

The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Council will evaluate the project lists using the Regional Parks System equity toolkit. Therefore, the regional park implementing agencies will be required to respond to questions included in the Regional Parks System equity toolkit for each proposed project on their respective project list. To evaluate the proposed list of projects submitted by the regional park implementing agencies, the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Council will discuss and evaluate the proposed projects based on the benefit a particular project may provide to all the region’s residents, the needs and preferences of specific under-served populations, and the unintended consequences of the project. On occasion, based on the Council’s evaluation, the Council may elect to recommend shifting the order of the prioritized list. Reprioritization will in no way apply to regional park implementing agency projects that serve as a match to Federal or State funds.

Given the state funding cycle for each fund source, the process outlined above would take effect at different times. For Parks and Trails Legacy Fund dollars, the process would be initiated during the 2018-2019 biennium funding cycle (beginning on July 1, 2017). For Capital Improvement Program dollars, the process would be initiated for 2019 fiscal year (beginning on July 1, 2018).

It is important to note that the review of proposed projects will in no way alter an agency's share of funding received from either the Capital Improvement Program or the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund.

*Require regional park implementing agencies to complete a Regional Parks System equity toolkit in grant applications.*

The Regional Parks System equity toolkit, once adopted, will also be completed by regional park implementing agencies when they submit grant applications. The Regional Parks System equity toolkit will not be used for screening purposes or to determine eligibility of funding, but will provide the Council a mechanism to track and monitor progress toward strengthening equitable use of the Regional Parks System.

*Using Council bonds, the Council will create, fund, and administer a set-aside competitive grant program for capital projects explicitly aimed to strengthen equitable usage of the Regional Parks System.*

The Council will levy Council bonds annually to fund a competitive grant program that is used solely to strengthen equitable use of the Regional Parks System. Considering existing limitations on Council bonds, the grant program will only provide funding for acquisition, development, or redevelopment projects in the Regional Park System.

To develop this grant program, the Council will work in close collaboration with regional park implementing agencies, partners, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and other stakeholder groups in 2015 to formulate criteria and measures for awarding grants to regional park implementing agencies for capital projects aimed to strengthen equitable use.

The amount available for the grant program would vary annually. The amount available is primarily determined by four factors: 1) the Council's \$40 million limit on outstanding park bond debt at any given time (Minn. Stat. 473.325), 2) the Council's policy to limit park bond levying to \$7 million annually, 3) the amount required to fulfill Council's obligated match to state funds, as it pertains to other Regional Parks System grant programs, and 4) Council approval to levy bonds.

**Finance – Strategy 6: The Council may reimburse regional park implementing agencies for the costs of acquiring some lands before they have been made part of the Regional Parks System or for development projects undertaken before they can be financed through the Metropolitan Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program.**

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

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

If 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 Council considers adding the land to the Regional Parks Policy Plan via a public hearing process, the Council will consider reimbursing the regional park implementing 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 through staff analysis that the proposed regional park unit is consistent with Siting and Acquisition Strategy 1 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 Minn. Stat. 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.

If these conditions are met as required by Minn. Stat. 473.147, and 473.313, the Council will consider reimbursing the regional park implementing agency via a grant as permitted under Minn. Stat. 473.315 for the following costs:

- Appraisal costs incurred by the acquiring regional park implementing agency or entity under contract with the agency
- Surveying costs incurred by the acquiring regional park implementing agency or entity under contract with the agency
- Legal fees incurred by the acquiring regional park implementing agency or entity under contract with the agency
- Fees for service provided by an entity under contract by the regional park implementing agency to negotiate and purchase the land or obtain an option to purchase
- Principal payments made toward the purchase price including principal payments on a contract for deed or bond, or payments made on an option to purchase
- 180% of township or city taxes due on the parcel at the time of closing as required by Minn. Stat. 473.341

In order to comply with Minn. Stat. 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 regional park implementing 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 regional park implementing 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 for development projects undertaken before they can be financed through the Capital Improvement Plan*

Reimbursement will be considered for development projects provided that:

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

State funds are not eligible to be used for reimbursement grants when the regional park implementing agency uses the reimbursement to pay off its bonds or an account that was used to initially finance the project. In those cases, only Council bonds may be used. In cases where the regional park implementing agency uses the proceeds from the reimbursement grant to finance new capital projects, state funds as well as Council bonds may be used to finance the grant.

The Council will consider reimbursing the implementing agency based on whether the development or rehabilitation project meets the criteria – not on how the regional park implementing agency plans to spend the reimbursement grant. However, regional park implementing 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 Regional Parks Capital Improvement Program (CIP) would accurately reflect, and inform the public and elected officials, how the funds will be spent.

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

- Regional park implementing agencies should submit their CIP funding requests with the understanding that reimbursement grants should not exceed 40% of a regional park implementing agency's biennial CIP allocation.

- If the total requests for reimbursement grants exceeds 40% of the total biennial CIP, regional park implementing agencies should submit plans to the Council as to how they intend to spend the reimbursement grant. This information is necessary to ascertain whether or not state bonds can also be used to finance the reimbursement grant in addition to Council bonds. If the total dollar amount of requests for reimbursement requiring Council bond funding exceeds the amount of Council bonds available for that biennial CIP, regional park implementing agencies will be asked to modify their CIP requests for reimbursements for that biennium so that the amount requested for reimbursement does not exceed the amount available.

The 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 regional park implementing agency to reimbursement.

**Finance – Strategy 7: Regional trail corridors that may be used for transit in the future are eligible for Regional Parks System funding if it is clear the corridor will be used as a trail for at least 10 years.**

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

Occasionally, existing corridors 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 are either recreational trails or transitways such as light-rail transit, commuter rail, or bus rapid transit.

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

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 transitway and for recreational trail purposes. 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 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 that trail use may be displaced or shared with transit in the future.

A more difficult situation occurs when the corridor can accommodate either transit or trail recreation, but not both. In the interim, the corridor can be considered for recreational trail purposes. It is possible that the eventual conversion of the corridor to transit will not occur and, presumably, the corridor will be available for permanent recreational uses.

However, it is also possible that transit will eventually claim the corridor after several years. If the facility has been used as a recreational trail, it's possible that the trail will become popular and be viewed as a permanent part of the Regional Parks 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 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 of 10 years or more.

### **Finance – Strategy 8: The Council will actively seek funding from the state and other sources.**

The Council will seek continued state funding for acquisition, development, and rehabilitation of all components in the Regional Parks System. The Council will also pursue other sources of funding where appropriate.

The Regional Parks System has been funded through a combination of state and local funding sources over the last 40 years. Funding for operations and maintenance of the regional system has been provided primarily by regional park implementing agencies through local taxes available to them and, to a lesser extent, user fees. Since 1985, the state has provided some supplemental funding to regional park implementing agencies to help fund their operations and maintenance costs. Minn. Stat. 473.351, subd. 3, states that:

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

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

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

### *System Protection Policy:*

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

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

- **Master plans:** The master plan defines acceptable activities within a system unit. The regional park implementing agencies must receive Council approval before proceeding with any activities inconsistent with the existing Council-approved master plan.
- **Restrictive covenants:** Regional park implementing agencies are required to record restrictive covenants on lands purchased with regional funds, to ensure that the land remains in regional recreation open space use unless the Council agrees to a change.
- **Land Planning Act:** Proposed plans of local governments that have a substantial effect on or represent a substantial departure from the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* may 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 *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* may be required to undergo a review for metropolitan significance, with up to a one year delay in development if the project is found to adversely affect the system.

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

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

**System Protection – Strategy 1: Local comprehensive plans may need to be changed if planned land uses would have a negative impact on current or planned regional park lands or facilities.**

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

- will more likely than not have adverse and substantial impacts on the current or future intended uses of the Regional Parks System lands or facilities, 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 section of this policy plan. Local governments will be notified of any changes to the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* following Council adoption of the changes and will be given nine months to bring local plans and ordinances into conformance with the Council's plan.

The Council will review local comprehensive plan amendments and environmental documents to ensure that Regional Parks System sites and facilities are protected from land uses or projects that:

- represent substantial departures from the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, or
- are likely to have a substantial impact on the Regional Parks System

Substantial departures from the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan or impacts on the Regional Parks System may include, but are not limited to:

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

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

In accordance with the Council's *Thrive* 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 Council will work cooperatively with local governments

to help ensure urban development and land uses in areas adjacent to Regional Parks System units occur in ways that preserve the integrity of the Regional Parks System.

## **System Protection – Strategy 2: Conversion of Regional Parks System lands to other uses**

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

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

- is contiguous to the Regional Parks System unit containing the land proposed to be exchanged (within the same park/trail unit)
- has comparable or better natural resource characteristics, 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:

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

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

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

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

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

- Whether the park system unit benefits from a facility in exchange for the parkland
- Whether the need for the conversion, as in the instance of transportation improvements, is generated by the recreational park system unit

*Issues with respect to the alternative use:*

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

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

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

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

*Restrictive covenants:*

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

The only restrictive covenant amendments approved by the Council in which no land was exchanged were for small strips of land needed for public highway improvements. The land was needed to make

roads safer and there was no alternative. These projects also improved access to the adjacent regional parks system unit.

### **System Protection – Strategy 3: The Council will reimburse regional park implementing agencies for contamination cleanup under certain conditions.**

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

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

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

- The land is already under ownership or control of a regional park implementing agency through a joint powers agreement or lease, and was acquired or was under the regional park implementing agency's control before Phase 1 environmental assessments were required.
- The land is essential to make the regional park or trail function as intended according to a Council-approved master plan, and no reasonable alternative exists to relocate the park or trail facilities elsewhere.
- The park or trail is essential in contributing to strengthening neighborhood livability consistent with *Thrive MSP 2040*.
- The cost of cleanup 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.

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

A regional park implementing agency may request a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant to partially finance soil contamination cleanup (remediation) or capping abandoned wells that have contaminated their ground water aquifer on land that is proposed for acquisition. See Park Acquisition Grant Fund rules in Chapter 5 for further information.

### **System Protection – Strategy 4: Phase 1 Environment Site Assessments must be conducted for land that may be contaminated or that may have abandoned wells prior to seeking regional parks funding for acquisition.**

Regional park implementing agencies must conduct Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments on land that is suspected to be contaminated or land suspected to have abandoned wells as part its due diligence process for land acquisition. The Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment will determine the

likelihood of soil contamination or abandoned wells, including the likelihood of contaminated groundwater aquifers. The findings of the site assessments should be included in the grant request submitted to the Council.

The cost of the Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment 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 regional park or trail corridor, the Council will make findings of fact regarding the following factors:

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

If the Council concludes that the land should be added to the Regional Parks System, this does not imply that the Council will use Regional Parks System funds to clean up the site or cap abandoned wells. Regional Parks System 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 Regional Parks System lands and users.**

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. 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.

Antennae towers for telecommunication services and the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System are generally prohibited on lands within the Council-approved master plan boundaries of a Regional Parks System unit unless:

- The communication system is not able to function without placement of the tower on Regional Parks System land. All other alternatives must be considered for placement within the grid in order to avoid placing any tower on Regional Parks System land. The communication service

provider must demonstrate that this criterion is satisfied in requesting approval by the Council and regional park implementing agency to place a tower on Regional Parks System land. The only exception to this condition is that a tower for the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System may be placed on Regional Parks System land even if it could be placed on private land instead, upon meeting the following mitigation conditions:

- If there is no feasible alternative to placing the tower on park land, the tower's impact on the Regional Parks System land must be minimized.
  - The tower must be screened from view of regional park/trail users as much as possible through tower placement and design features agreed to by the regional park implementing agency.
  - The tower must be located on land that has already undergone regional park or trail development and is accessible through the existing park road system. Land in park reserves or regional parks conserved for habitat restoration and interpretation must be avoided.
- Co-location of antennas on one tower is preferred over constructing several towers if co-location has less visual and other environmental impacts on Regional Parks System land. The only exception to this condition is if co-location would result in frequency interference between antennas.
  - Payments for placing telecommunication towers in regional parks or park reserves should be dedicated to the regional park implementing agency that owns the land for acquisition, redevelopment, development, or operations and maintenance of its Regional Parks System units.

Regional park implementing agencies must submit a master plan amendment to the Council for review that proposes a tower placement. The master plan amendment should state how the conditions listed above have been met. The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and 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 Council bonds), the regional park implementing agency shall amend the covenant to recognize the temporary use of the tower with any conditions required for the tower's lease and submit the amended covenant to the Council as part of the master plan amendment.

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

Tower placement on Regional Parks System land shall be considered a temporary non-recreation use. As stated previously, any lease revenues for the tower easement must be used by the regional park implementing agency to further the acquisition, redevelopment, development or 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 Council

and how the revenues were spent if they exceed \$2,500 per year. Regional park implementing agencies are encouraged to charge “at cost” fees for public safety radio equipment on towers located on Regional Parks System land.

**System Protection – Strategy 6: Regional wastewater conveyance facilities and other utilities on Regional Parks System lands should be placed in ways that minimize negative impact on the regional park, its facilities and its users.**

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

For wastewater conveyance facilities located in existing Regional Parks System facilities, the Council, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, shall have the option to purchase an easement or a license.

For new Regional Parks System facilities, the 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, provided that the conveyance is consistent with the Council-approved 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 regional park system facility.

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 Regional Parks System unit, and to serve other land. Regional park implementing agencies should collaborate with the utility provider to determine where these utilities should be placed that minimizes impacts on the Regional Parks System unit’s natural resources and on its existing and future recreation and visitor support facilities, while providing reasonable access to the utility line for repair and maintenance.

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

## Chapter Five: Finance

### *Financing the Metropolitan Regional Park System*

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

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

Minn. Stat. 473.315 authorizes the Council, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, to make grants from any funds available to it to the regional park implementing agencies to cover the cost, or any portion of the cost, of acquiring and developing the regional park system in accordance with the parks policy plan. Following are summaries of how these grants are funded and managed:

### **Capital Improvement Program**

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

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 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 people who live outside the seven-county metropolitan region visit and 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 people living within the region, and those who live outside the region.

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 within the jurisdiction of each park implementing agency compared to the region’s total population. This factor is weighted 70%.
- The number of visits a park agency hosted from people 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. Using non-local visits as a factor recognizes that these regional parks serve a regional and state-wide population. Therefore, a combination of both factors is accounted for in the Regional Parks CIP formula.

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

As noted above, the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan must include a five-year capital improvement program plan (Table 5-1). The intent is to outline the funding strategy for the relative near term, such that regional park implementing agencies can use the information in their planning. These figures are subject to change based upon legislative action.

*Table 5-1. Metropolitan Council Six-Year Parks Capital Improvement Plan, 2014-2019 (dollars in 1,000s)*

Sources of Funds	Years						Total
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
State <sup>1</sup>	\$ 31,026	\$ 35,833	\$ 23,325	\$ 25,060	\$ 23,630	\$ 24,107	\$ 162,981
Regional <sup>2</sup>	\$ 9,061	\$ 8,068	\$ 6,083	\$ 7,000	\$ 7,000	\$ 7,000	\$ 44,212
Other <sup>3</sup>	\$ 80	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 80
<b>Total Sources</b>	<b>\$ 40,167</b>	<b>\$ 43,901</b>	<b>\$ 29,408</b>	<b>\$ 32,060</b>	<b>\$ 30,630</b>	<b>\$ 31,107</b>	<b>\$ 207,273</b>

**Uses of Funds**

Preservation (Redevelopment)	\$ 13,034	\$ 15,792	\$ 10,947	\$ 12,737	\$ 12,216	\$ 12,438	\$ 77,164
Expansion (Land Acquisition)	\$ 10,600	\$ 9,113	\$ 7,356	\$ 7,409	\$ 7,464	\$ 7,520	\$ 49,462
Improvements (Development)	\$ 16,533	\$ 18,996	\$ 11,105	\$ 11,914	\$ 10,950	\$ 11,149	\$ 80,647
<b>Total Uses</b>	<b>\$ 40,167</b>	<b>\$ 43,901</b>	<b>\$ 29,408</b>	<b>\$ 32,060</b>	<b>\$ 30,630</b>	<b>\$ 31,107</b>	<b>\$ 207,273</b>

<sup>1</sup> Funds include general obligation bonds issued by the state, Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations, and Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund appropriations.

<sup>2</sup> Funds include Council general obligation bonds issued by the Council.

<sup>3</sup> Interest earned by the Council. Interest earned must be granted to North Mississippi Regional Park (Laws of Minnesota 1985, First Special Session, Chap. 15, Sec. 5, Subd. 2(b) and Laws of Minnesota 1987, Chapter 384, Article 3, Sec. 45).

The revision of the Council's five-year capital improvement program plan is considered to be a substantial revision to the policy plan and will follow the Council's administrative procedures on amending a policy plan.

## Parks and Trails Legacy Fund

In November 2008, Minnesota citizens approved a constitutional amendment, commonly called the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. The amendment created a new 3/8ths cent sales tax to be collected from July 2009-June 2034. Revenue from the sales tax is placed into four dedicated accounts. One of those accounts is called the Parks and Trails Fund.

The constitutional amendment states:

“...the parks and trails fund...may be spent only to support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance.... The dedicated money under this section must supplement traditional sources of funding for these purposes and may not be used as a substitute.” (Minn. Constitution, art. 11, sec. 15)

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

In 2011, the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* was released, outlining the Parks and Trails vision for Minnesotans. The vision states:

*“In 2035, our world class parks and trails connect everyone to the outdoors. They create experiences that inspire a legacy of stewardship for the natural world and they provide fun outdoor recreational opportunities that strengthen friendships, families, health, and spirit, now and into the future. Minnesotans experience the full range of benefits that outdoor recreation provides, reinforcing our identity as an outdoor culture.”*

The Parks and Trails Legacy Plan specifies four strategic directives:

- Connect People and the Outdoors
  - Develop stewards of tomorrow through efforts to increase life-long participation in parks and trails.
- Acquire Land, Create Opportunities
  - Create new and expanded opportunities to serve current and future users.
- Take Care of What We Have
  - Provide safe, high-quality experiences through regular re-investment in infrastructure and natural resource management.
- Coordinate among Partners
  - Enhance coordination among the network of public, private, and nonprofit park and trail partners.

The strategic directions serve as the guidepost for how Parks and Trail Fund dollars should be invested. The Parks and Trails Legacy Plan should be consulted for additional information, specifically regarding particular activities (for example, investments) that are viewed as priorities to implement the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan. As the fiscal agent for the funds, the Council has the responsibility to ensure regional park implementing agencies target the funds to projects that capture the strategic direction outlined in the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan.

To that end, as previously noted in Chapter 4, the Council will identify a *minimum* percentage of Parks and Trails Legacy appropriations that should be used to “connect people and the outdoors.” Once determined and approved by the Council, the Council will require regional park implementing agencies to adhere to the determined minimum level of spending as it applies to their annual share of the Parks and Trails Fund appropriations.

## **Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund**

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

The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund consists of two accounts:

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

### *Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant Rules*

#### **Qualifying Lands**

All properties to be acquired must be within Council-approved master plan boundaries.

ENRTF acquisition requests must be intended for acquisitions of undeveloped land with high natural resource values, to comply with Minnesota Constitution art. XI, sec. 14 and Minn. Stat. Ch.116P.

PTLF acquisition requests do not have any restrictions on the condition of lands within Council-approved master plan boundaries.

#### **Qualifying Land Acquisition Costs**

The following items are eligible in calculating the total costs of the acquisition:

- a. Appraisal cost for the acquiring regional park implementing agency or as part of a condemnation settlement/award consistent with applicable provisions of Minn. Stat. ch. 117;
- b. Appraisal review cost needed to verify the value of a land donation, or the value of land obtained via parkland dedication ordinance and subsequently transferred to the regional park implementing agency when other land is obtained from the same landowner;
- c. Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment;
- d. Environmental contamination remediation costs if consistent with the conditions specified in the “Special Circumstances” section below;
- e. Legal services and closing costs to the park agency for costs associated with the purchase or condemnation settlement/award including attorney’s fees, litigation expenses, appraisal fees and

other expert fees consistent with Minn. Stat., sec. 117.031, that the park agency must pay as part of a condemnation action;

- f. State deed tax/Conservation Fee;
- g. Title Insurance;
- h. Pro-rated share of all property taxes/assessments due on the parcel at the time of closing that is borne by the park agency;
- i. 1.8 times the city or township property tax due on the parcel in the year the land is acquired. This is the property tax equivalency payment, which is paid to the city or township at closing pursuant to Minn. Stat., sec. 473.341;
- j. Negotiated purchase price for the parcel or condemnation settlement/award consistent with applicable provisions of Minnesota Statute ch. 117;
- k. Relocation costs to the seller consistent with Minn. Stat. sec. 117.52 and Minn. Stat. sec. 473.315;
- l. Land stewardship costs defined as follows: costs for 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 structures that will be re-used for park purposes; removal of unneeded structures, dangerous land forms or attractive nuisances including capping abandoned wells as required under Minn. Stat., sec. 103I.301; and closing unneeded road(s) that provided access to the acquired land;
- m. Development of the land to provide minimal access to it for public recreational use as reviewed and approved by the Council in consideration of the grant. Such development must be consistent with the applicable Council-approved master plan and may include the cost of an access road and/or trail, parking lot, and signage;
- n. Interest costs to acquire the land can be counted as part of the park agency's 25% match to the grant. However, the interest costs are not eligible for reimbursement as part of that park agency's share of a future regional parks capital improvement program;
- o. Holding costs incurred by an outside third party that purchased the property to hold on behalf of the park implementing agency; and
- p. Other expenses not listed above that are directly related to the land acquisition.

All costs shall be documented with appropriate information/data and submitted to the Council with the grant request.

### **Grant Request Finance Amounts**

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

Special circumstances may apply that could alter the amounts delineated above. "Special Circumstances," below, provides additional information.

### **Park Implementing Agency 25% Local Match**

The regional park implementing agency local match may be one or a combination of the following:

- a. Non-state funds and non-Council funds provided by the regional park implementing agency. Regional Park CIP if the cash contribution is financed with a regional park implementing agency money (that is, the agency's general fund or other account), but not with a grant from another entity such as a watershed district or local government aid provided by the state of Minnesota, that contribution is eligible for reimbursement as part of that park agency's share of a future regional parks capital improvement program. Based on this rule, if the maximum grant of \$1.7 million was awarded and the park agency provided a match of \$566,667, any costs incurred by the park agency above the \$566,667 and paid for with park agency funds for grant-eligible expenses, are also eligible for reimbursement consideration from that park agency's share of future metropolitan regional parks capital improvement programs.
- b. The value of a land donation by the seller. The value of the donation is the difference between the agreed upon purchase price based on a certified appraised value of the property and the lower amount the seller agrees to accept as payment for the land.

The certification of the appraised value of the property will be based on a third-party review appraisal, where the third-party appraiser will perform a field review of the appraisal and determine if the appraisal met the requirements of the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraising Practice (USPAP). Both the appraisal and the review appraisal must be submitted to the Council as part of the grant request. The cost of the third-party appraisal review is a grant-eligible item.

- c. The value of land that is obtained by a municipality under its park land dedication ordinance and transferred to a regional park implementing agency under a fee title or permanent easement agreement at the same time that the regional park implementing agency acquires additional land for that park or trail from the same landowner.

The value of the dedicated land is based on a certified appraisal of the property. The certification of the appraised value will be based on a third-party review appraisal, where the third-party appraiser will perform a field review of the appraisal and determine if the appraisal met the USPAP requirements. Both the appraisal and the review appraisal must be submitted to the Council as part of the grant request. The cost of the third-party appraisal review is a grant-eligible item.

### **Grant Term**

The effective term of the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant is no more than 12 months or the expiration date of the state appropriation that finances the grant, whichever is less. A grant may be extended beyond the initial term of 12 months for cause. However the length of the extension cannot exceed the availability of the state funds financing the grant.

## **Special Circumstances**

### *Lack of Available Acquisition Opportunity Funds*

If funds are not available to fully fund a grant during a given fiscal year, up to 60% of the next fiscal year's appropriation and matching Council bonds for Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund accounts will be used to reimburse park agencies for up to 75% of the grant-eligible acquisition costs or \$1.7 million – whichever is less – the park agency incurred to buy land that would have qualified for a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant under the rules.

The park agency must request reimbursement consideration from the Council by providing all data required for a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant required by the rules and obtain Council approval before it acquires the land. The 25% match is not grant-eligible for reimbursement from the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund accounts. However, the park agency may request reimbursement of that match as part of its share of future park capital improvement programs.

### *Third-party Acquisitions*

When funds are not available in the Acquisition Opportunity Fund accounts, park implementing agencies may choose to work with third parties to acquire Council-approved master plan acquisitions, for which reimbursement from the Council would be pursued when funds are available. In this instance, the Council may consider acquisition with a bonafide deferred closing.

### *Excess of Available Acquisition Opportunity Funds*

One year before the expiration of the state appropriation to each Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Grant account (that is, PTLF and ENRTF), the Council – in consultation with the regional park implementing agencies and the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission – will conduct a review of these rules to determine if additional steps should be taken to increase the likelihood that the balance of the expiring state appropriation will be granted and spent before its expiration date.

An example of such a step would be to allow a park agency that has received the maximum amount allowed – \$1.7 million from the ENRTF account or \$1.7 million from the PTLF account in a state fiscal year, July 1 to June 30 to be eligible to receive an additional grant. Another step could be that 60 days before a state appropriation's expiration date, that grants are awarded to partially reimburse the local match of grants awarded from the applicable acquisition account that were initially financed with that state appropriation and matching Council bonds.

The total amount of these reimbursement grants would consume the remaining state appropriation and applicable Council bond match. The amount of each reimbursement grant should be proportionate to the local match amount initially funded by each park agency – not with other funding sources the park agency used as their match. These reimbursement grants would only be for grants initially financed from that soon-to-expire state appropriation and applicable Council bond match. If there were still funds remaining, reimbursement grants for the local matches on other acquisitions could be considered that were initially financed from that acquisition account but from an earlier appropriation.

Such variances to the rules for these situations would be considered by the Council without undertaking a public hearing process since the vetting of the changes is made by the park agencies affected by the

proposed change, and the change is only in effect until the expiration of the applicable appropriation for that account.

### *Acquisition Funds Delineated in Capital Improvement Fund*

The requesting regional park implementing agency must use any available acquisition funds from its share of a regional parks capital improvement program provided by the Council or a line-item appropriation of state funds to buy land for a regional park/trail before it can request a grant from the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund. A park agency's capital improvement program share that finances a reimbursement grant for the 25% local match to a previous Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant is excluded. The Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant may finance 75% of the gap between the total cost of an acquisition and the amount financed by the park agency's available acquisition funds from its share of a regional parks capital improvement program and/or a line item appropriation of state funds used for that parcel's acquisition.

### *Eminent Domain*

Occasionally a park agency may need to acquire land by exercising its power of eminent domain by initiating a condemnation proceeding. When land is acquired through the condemnation process, a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant may be awarded; however, a grant is awarded at the end of the condemnation proceeding that is based on 75% of the final settlement/award and associated grant-eligible costs under applicable provisions of Minn. Stat., ch. 117, to acquire the land and within the agency maximum for the fiscal year when the grant is awarded. The park agency should notify the Council prior to filing its petition in condemnation with the district court that it is acquiring land through condemnation and will be requesting a Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grant when the final award is determined. The notification to the Council should be in a letter that contains the park agency's authorization to file its petition and the accompanying documents containing its appraisal of the land. In condemnation matters, the final settlement/award and final certificate should be submitted to the Council in lieu of a signed purchase agreement.

### *Environmental Contamination*

Soil contamination remediation necessary to correct pre-existing environmental contamination known at the time of purchase, the remediation effort to the level needed to allow the land to be used for park and recreation purposes, and/or capping abandoned wells that have contaminated their groundwater aquifer are grant-eligible land acquisition expenses under the following conditions:

- 1) The aggregate cost of acquiring the land and remediation does not exceed the certified appraised value of the land at the time of purchase. The certification of the market value of the property will be based on a third-party field review of the appraisal. The appraisal review must determine that the appraisal followed USPAP. The appraisal review must be submitted to the Council.

The cost of the third-party appraisal review is a grant-eligible item. In addition to the certification of the market value of the parcel, the park agency must submit documentation of the costs for remediation as listed below. The difference between the actual acquisition and remediation costs compared to the certified market value of the land prior to clean up may be applied towards the park agency's local match requirement.

- 2) The regional park implementing agency has an agreement with the party that will remediate/clean up the contamination or cap an abandoned well. The agreement will include mutually agreed upon environmental assurances from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency limiting future liability for pollution caused by the contaminated soil or contaminated groundwater and follow guidance set by the Minnesota Department of Health for sealing unused wells, if appropriate.

Grant-eligible expenses for soil remediation and well capping include:

- a. Costs to prepare Phase 1 and Phase 2 Environmental Site Assessments, the Quality Assurance Project Plan, Remediation Action Plan and the Environmental Engineer's Estimate
- b. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) Voluntary Investigation Cleanup (VIC) service charges
- c. Costs to implement the remediation action plan and secure appropriate assurances from the MPCA, and
- d. Other costs not listed above which are directly related to soil remediation or well capping

Documentation of these remediation costs plus other costs associated with the acquisition must be submitted to the Council as part of the grant request.

#### *Subdivision of Lots*

For parcels that can be subdivided into lots and the value of those lots is used to determine the fair market value of the parcel, such acquisitions may qualify for financing from both the ENRTF account and PTLF account. For example, lot(s) must contain high-quality natural resources without structures to qualify for ENRTF financing, and lot(s) that do not contain high-quality natural resources or have structures on them qualify for PTLF financing. The amount from each account shall be proportional to the appraised market value of the lots. However, the Council may grant additional funds from the PTLF account to finance a portion of the costs of land that qualifies for financing from the ENRTF account if there is not sufficient money in the ENRTF account to fully fund the grant.

#### **Operations and Maintenance**

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

In 1985, legislation was enacted that allowed state appropriations from the General Fund to be disbursed to regional park implementing agencies to supplement funding for operating and maintaining their portion of the Regional Parks System (Minn. Stat. 473.351).

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

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

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

Table 5-2 illustrates the amount of appropriations disbursed to the regional park implementing agencies in relation to the total costs to operate and maintain the Regional Parks System from 1985 to 2013.

### Pass-through Grants Financed with State Bonds

Some state bonding legislation appropriates funds for specific capital improvements to the regional park system that are passed-through the Council to the specified 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.

*Table 5-2. Percent of Regional Park System Operations and Maintenance (O & M) Expenses Covered by State Appropriations, 1985-2013*

<b>Calendar Year (State Fiscal Year)</b>	<b>O &amp; M Appropriation</b>	<b>Park Agency's O &amp; M Expenses (1985-2013)</b>	<b>Percent of O &amp; M Expenses Covered by State Appropriation</b>
1985/(1986)	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 19,091,548	10.5%
1986/(1987)	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 22,656,187	8.8%
1987/(1988)	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 24,595,929	8.1%
1988/(1989)	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 26,461,148	7.6%
1989/(1990)	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 29,294,759	6.8%
1990/(1991)	\$ 2,817,000	\$ 31,107,785	9.1%
1991/(1992)	\$ 2,759,000	\$ 32,076,220	8.6%
1992/(1993)	\$ 2,356,000	\$ 33,453,546	7.0%
1993/(1994)	\$ 2,238,000	\$ 35,646,465	6.3%
1994/(1995)	\$ 2,238,000	\$ 37,928,496	5.9%
1995/(1996)	\$ 2,238,000	\$ 40,158,254	5.6%
1996/(1997)	\$ 2,238,000	\$ 41,322,602	5.4%
1997/(1998)	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 44,338,618	6.8%
1998/(1999)	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 49,242,255	6.1%
1999/(2000)	\$ 4,500,000	\$ 50,748,152	8.9%

2000/(2001)	\$ 9,695,105	\$ 54,801,219	17.7%
2001/(2002)	\$ 7,865,716	\$ 60,595,484	13.0%
2002/(2003)	\$ 8,009,857	\$ 63,587,498	12.6%
2003/(2004)	\$ 7,452,000	\$ 66,825,266	11.2%
2004/(2005)	\$ 7,353,000	\$ 70,124,610	10.5%
2005/(2006)	\$ 7,870,000	\$ 77,584,716	10.1%
2006/(2007)	\$ 7,870,000	\$ 80,326,028	9.8%
2007/(2008)	\$ 8,620,000	\$ 85,009,472	10.1%
2008/(2009)	\$ 8,620,000	\$ 85,230,866	10.1%
2009/(2010)	\$ 8,794,000	\$ 86,239,884	10.2%
2010/ (2011)	\$ 8,854,000	\$ 88,223,782	10.0%
2011/ (2012)	\$ 8,540,000	\$ 95,286,344	9.0%
2012/ (2013)	\$ 8,540,000	\$ 95,988,444	8.9%
2013/ (2014)	\$ 8,540,000	\$ 94,485,576	9.0%
<b>Totals / Average Percent</b>	<b>\$ 154,007,678</b>	<b>\$ 1,622,431,153</b>	<b>9.5%</b>

### 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 Regional Parks System. Foundations of several park implementing agencies and “friends of parks or trails” organizations 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 now defunct Regional Parks Foundation of the Twin Cities

### Estimated Costs to Complete the System

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

Table 5-3 provides cost estimates for existing regional parks and trails open to the public, planned regional parks and trails, regional park search areas, regional trail search corridors, and 2040 additions to the system. The associated estimated costs for each are described below.

The cost estimate for existing regional parks and trails open to the public include costs associated with acquisition of inholdings and future development. In order to produce the estimates, data were gathered from Council-approved master plans. In 2014, a total of 2,407 acres and 29 trail miles were inholding properties. The estimate to acquire inholding properties for both parks and trails total \$59.3 million, while development costs total \$187.7 million. A total estimate for future acquisition and development of existing regional parks and trails opened to the public totals \$247 million.

The cost estimate for planned regional parks or trails – those park or trail units that have a Council-approved master plan but are not open to the public as of 2015 – include costs associated with acquisition of inholdings and future development. In order to produce the estimates, data were gathered from Council-approved master plans. In 2014, inholding properties totaled 2,739 acres and 222 trail miles. The estimate to acquire inholding properties for both parks and trails total \$36.4 million, while development costs total \$227.8 million. A total estimate for future acquisition and development of planned regional parks or trails totals \$264.2 million.

The cost estimate for regional park search areas also includes costs associated with acquisition of inholdings and future development. The estimates for these were gathered from the *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. Inholding properties totaled 7,546 acres, with an associated acquisition cost of \$38.5 million. The estimated costs to develop the regional park search areas total \$26.3 million. A total estimate for future acquisition and development of regional parks search areas is \$64.8 million.

The cost estimate for regional trail search corridors were also gathered from *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*. Inholding properties totaled 1,745 acres and 479 trail miles, with an associated acquisition cost of \$19.4 million. The estimated costs to develop the Regional Park Search Areas total \$211.8 million. A total estimate for future acquisition and development of regional trail search corridors is \$231.2 million.

The cost estimate for the 2040 additions to the system were calculated based on data provided by the regional park implementing agencies. The new trail search corridors, comprising 111 miles, will require approximately 400 additional acres. The cost to acquire the land is estimated to be \$4.6 million, while development costs total \$49.6 million. In sum, the cost to acquire and develop the 2040 additions to the system is estimated to total \$54.2 million.

The entire system as completed – including inholdings, planned regional parks and trails, regional park search areas, and regional trail search corridors – would require an additional 14,836 acres to be acquired and 850 trail miles. The associated costs are estimated to be \$158.2 million for acquisition and \$703.3 million for development, totaling \$861.4 million to complete the system.

*Table 5-3. Estimated Acquisition and Development Costs for Regional Parks System 2015-2040 (2014 dollars)*

<b>Category</b>	<b>New Acreage</b>	<b>New Trail Mileage</b>	<b>Acquisition Cost</b>	<b>Development Cost</b>	<b>Total Cost</b>
Existing Regional Parks and Trails Open to the Public (acquisition of inholdings and future development) <sup>a</sup>	2,407	39	\$59.3 M	\$187.7 M	\$247.0 M
Planned Regional Parks and Trails (Council-approved master plan, not yet open to the public) <sup>a</sup>	2,739	222	\$36.4 M	\$227.8 M	\$264.2 M
Regional Park Search Areas [Update from 2010 plan] <sup>b</sup>	7,546	N/A	\$38.5 M	\$26.3 M	\$ 64.8 M
Regional Trail Search Corridors <sup>c</sup>	1,745	479	\$19.4 M	\$211.8 M	\$ 231.2 M
2040 Additions to the System (Regional Trail Search Corridors) <sup>d</sup>	400	111	\$4.6 M	\$49.6 M	\$54.2 M
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>14,836</b>	<b>851</b>	<b>\$158.2 M</b>	<b>\$703.3 M</b>	<b>\$861.4 M</b>

M=million

Data Source:

<sup>a</sup> Master plans.

<sup>b</sup> 2030 Parks Policy Plan for "New Units" and "Completing the System".

<sup>c</sup> Master plans of comparable trails.

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

## Chapter Six: Management Procedures

### *Amending the Policy Plan*

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

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

### *Updating the Policy Plan*

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

### *System Plan*

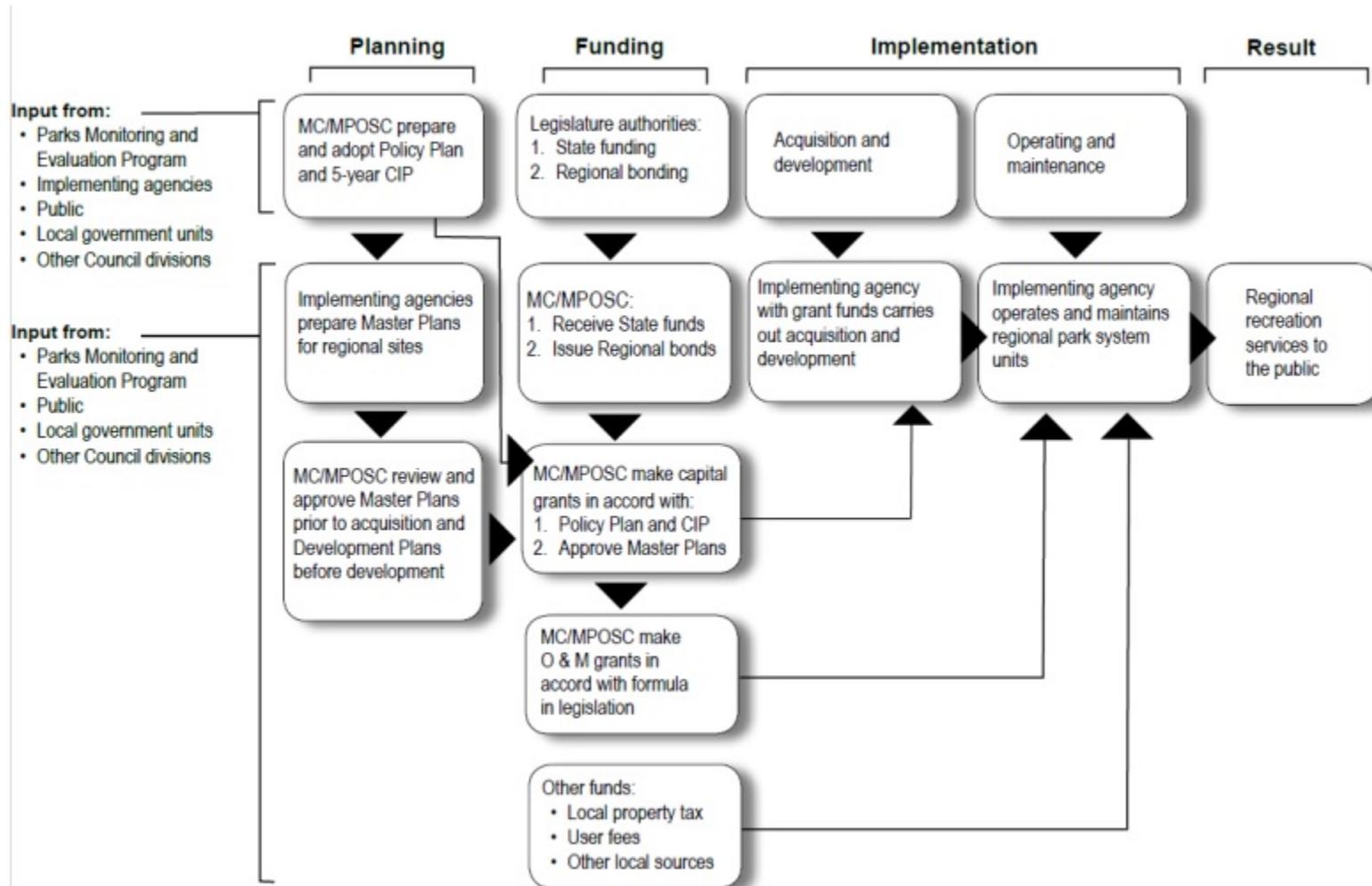
The Council has the responsibility to prepare a system plan for the Regional Parks System. The system planning process begins with the Council identifying “generally the areas which should be acquired,” as required by the 1974 Metropolitan Parks Act. The Regional Parks Policy Plan includes the system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

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

Minn. Stat. 473.351 limits regional parks funding to regional park implementing agencies and defines them to be as the counties of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Ramsey, Scott and Washington; the City of St. Paul, the City of Bloomington, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board; and the Three Rivers Park District.

Figure 6-1 shows the Regional Parks System process. Regional park implementing agencies prepare a master plan for each Regional Parks System component within their respective jurisdiction consistent with the Council's Regional Parks 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.

**Figure 6-1. Regional Parks System Process**



## *Regional Parks System Capital Improvement Program Process*

The Regional Parks CIP is one component of the Council's unified Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The unified CIP process includes several elements. It ranks projects across the system based on three factors: first, consistency with Council finance policy and strategies outlined in this policy plan; second, relationship to applicable state law regarding the allocation of funds among the regional park agencies; and third, ranking of those projects within each regional park agency's allocation.

The ranked project list in the CIP then serves as the basis for requesting legislative funding for the biennium. A draft funding request for state bonds is due in June and a final request is due in September preceding the second year of the legislative biennium.

The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, working with the regional park implementing agencies, initiates the annual process of revising the CIP. The Commission reviews requests from the regional park implementing agencies based on consistency with policies in this policy plan, applicable state law regarding the allocation of funds among the regional park agencies, and the relative share of each regional park implementing agencies share the funding request. The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission will recommend a ranked list of projects to approve as a funding request for the Regional Parks portion of the Unified CIP, which is the capital improvement program for the entire Council.

After state bond appropriations have been authorized, the Council adopts amendments to the current year of the Council's Unified Capital Budget (CB), which award grants proposed for funding in the Unified CIP. Projects financed with state bonds and matched with Metropolitan Council bonds will follow applicable rider language of that appropriation and applicable Council policy requirements in the finance section of this plan.

The amendment to the Unified CB identifies which projects from the CIP are funded and the level of funding by revenue source. Adopting amendments to the Unified CB to award grants that had been proposed in the Unified CIP is not a substantial revision to the policy plan provided that all projects are consistent with the Unified CIP. Projects that are not consistent with the Unified CIP (for example, a project that was not in the CIP and is proposed to replace one that is, or to change the funding level from one project to another) will be reviewed by the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission based on the project's consistency with the finance policy and strategies outlined in this policy plan and applicable state law and subsequently make a recommendation to the Council.

## *Regional Parks System Parks and Trails Legacy Fund Process*

The process for distributing appropriations from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund follows a process similar to that described above. There are important distinctions to make, however. First, a funding request for Park and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations is due to the state in October preceding the first year of the legislative biennium. Projects financed with appropriations from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund will follow applicable rider language of that appropriation and Council policy requirements in the finance section of this plan. Similar to

Capital Improvement Program dollars, the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations are incorporated into the Unified Capital Budget and Unified Capital Improvement Plan.

### *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. Whenever possible, regional park implementing agencies must make negotiated purchases based on appraisals by qualified appraisers to minimize the need for condemnation.

### *State Bond Declarations*

The commissioner of Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB), through an order dated August 26, 2010, requires a state bond declaration to be recorded on the land that is acquired or improved with the state bonds. The declaration states that any lease or sale of the improved land must be approved by the commissioner of MMB while the declaration is in effect.

The declaration must be in effect for 125% of the useful life of the improvement on the land that was financed with the state bonds. For example, if state bonds were used to build a picnic shelter, and the picnic shelter has a useful life of 20 years, the declaration on the land where the picnic shelter is located would be in effect for 125% of 20 years, which is 25 years. If the land is to be sold before the state bonds are paid off that financed the improvement, the MMB will ask for a pro-rated refund of the state bonds that financed the grant.

To comply with the law, the Council will work with regional park implementing agencies on drafting declarations for each grant and will record them with the applicable land records office. A copy of the recorded bond declaration will be part of the Council's land records and part of MMB's records. A portion of the bond proceeds for the grant will pay the recording fee since this is a stipulation of using the state bonds and is ultimately the responsibility of the Council to ensure compliance with the law.

### *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 reestablishing 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 Parks System. Such assessments are legitimate and grant-eligible when they are for benefits

conferred on the park that are consistent with the Council-approved master plan. To encourage prompt payment of special assessments by the regional park implementing agency, regional funds will not be used for 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 Minn. Stat. 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 Minn. Stat. 435.19.

If a regional park implementing agency challenges a special assessment to determine the measure of benefit to the regional park unit, regional funds may be used to pay 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.

### *Payment in Lieu of Local Property Taxes*

Under the provisions of Minn. Stat. 473.341, 180% 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 city or township for the loss of tax base. The payment in lieu of taxes is an eligible land acquisition grant expenditure.

### *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 nonrecreational 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 Council-approved master plan. Revenue that regional park 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 Council-approved 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 a Council-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.

Regional park 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 park funds from the Council because enterprise-fund recreation facilities are expected to raise money for their development and operation in the same way as their private sector counterparts.

### *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 Council-approved master plan.

### *Design Plans*

When master plans are first approved by the Council, 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 consideration in a future CIP by following the reimbursement policy in this policy plan. The remainder of the grant will be used to construct the project after the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission has reviewed the nature, scope and cost of the project for consistency with the Council-approved master plan and the regional CIP.

The Council will make development grants to regional park 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 park 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 ensure the development does not adversely affect the park system unit's natural resource features.
- The Council may approve development grants before the preparation of construction documents for a project. Construction of such a project will not proceed until the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission has been made fully aware of the nature, scope and estimated complete cost as determined in the design development phase of the process.
- Agency-wide improvements by regional park implementing agencies are grant-eligible expenses. When such eligible improvements are also used for other than regional park purposes, the regional funding will be on a negotiated, pro-rated basis.

### *Closing Grants*

Financial transactions of Regional Parks System grants are reported through grant reimbursement forms requesting funds to reimburse the park agency for grant eligible expenses, which are audited by the Council. A final report is generated by the regional park implementing agency. A final audit is conducted 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. If there are any unspent funds from the grant after the project is completed, the regional park implementing agency must contact the Council to determine whether the scope of the grant can be amended. This does not apply to Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund grants.

The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission will review the grant scope amendment request for consistency with the Council-approved master plan for that project and/or other Council policy applicable to the request. Council approval is required to amend the scope of a grant. Legislative approval may be required to amend the scope of a Parks and Trails Legacy grant.

It is in the interest of the Council and the regional park implementing agencies to close out completed projects in a timely manner and free up unspent funds for other projects within the timeline of the state appropriation that initially funded the grant or a portion of the grant. Any unspent state funds and matching Council bonds that financed the grant are no longer available for the project. The undisbursed funds are retained by the state or the Council.

### *Executing Minor Amendments to Grant Agreements*

To maximize the efficiency of the work of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission and the Council, the Council has authorized its regional administrator or his/her designee 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 *2040 Regional Parks 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 within the timeline permitted under the applicable funding source for the grant.
- 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 2040 Regional Parks 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 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 Minn. 2009, ch. 172, art. 3, sec. 3(b) requires the Council to submit an annual report on the use and expenditure of Parks and Trails Fund appropriations it receives by March 1. The annual report must detail the outcomes, which are identified and specified in grant applications. The outcomes identified shall be relevant to the type of project undertaken and the associated Parks and Trails Legacy Plan four strategic pillars, previously discussed.



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