

District Planning Committee (DPC) Operating Guidelines

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

Revised 2/25/2015

Overview: These guidelines operationalize the *Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan* (Strategic Plan) at the district planning level. The Strategic Plan is the guiding document for establishing a regional system in Greater Minnesota and should be referred to for additional detail on the provisions covered under these guidelines. Any discrepancy between these guidelines and the Strategic Plan will be resolved at the discretion of the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (Commission).

The guidelines consist of five parts:

- Part 1: Commission and District Planning Committee Roles, Responsibilities and Selection
- Part 2: District Planning Committee Role in Regional Parks and Trails Designation Process
- Part 3: Evaluation Process for Regional Parks and Trails
- Part 4: Public Outreach
- Part 5: Annual Adoption of a System Plan for Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails

The following considers each of these parts in greater detail.

Part 1: Commission and District Planning Committee Roles, Responsibilities and Selection

The Commission is appointed by the Governor's office consistent with the enabling legislation. The Commission has full oversight and final authority on all matters considered within and affected by the Strategic Plan and these guidelines. The District Planning Committees (DPCs) are advisory to the Commission. The following defines the roles and responsibility of these committees, along with selection criteria for DPC members.

Planning District Boundaries

As illustrated in Exhibit A (attached), there are a total of six districts in Greater Minnesota. Each district is represented by two Commissioners and a DPC. (Note: The Commission also has an at-large member, who may, at his/her discretion, participate in the activities of any or all districts.)

Commission Roles, Responsibilities and Selection

Commission oversees all planning functions across Greater Minnesota, with the following roles and responsibilities:

- Understanding factors influencing planning decisions and outcomes, including trends on a statewide and regional basis
 - Oversight of developing, applying, and refining the:
 - Classification system for Greater Minnesota regional parks and trails, including weighting of each criteria
 - Process for *formally designating a park or trail unit as regionally significant*, including its merit ranking and level of priority against established criteria
 - *Funding priority list*, as defined under *Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Funding Program* in the Strategic Plan
- Oversight of the granting process, including final selection of projects each year

Commission Annual Meeting Schedule and Key Activities:

- January 1 through March 31 – Commission formally submits updated system plan and funding recommendations to state legislature (by January 15); Commission and DPCs annual review of the strategic plan (esp. classifications, evaluation criteria, and weighting); all DPC work completed by end of February to allow time for final Commission review, posting, and updating of application forms by March 31
- April 1 through June 30 – open submittal period for applications for Regional designation; no applications will be considered after due date; Commission considers applications for DPC membership
- July 1 through July 31 – *Project Proposal Evaluation Team* (ETeam) review period for all Regional designation applications; work includes general review of system and district master plans to identify gaps in service and define other planning issues for consideration by the Commission and DPCs
- August 1 through December 31 – Commission and DPCs review and Commission takes action on unit proposals; funding applications for regionally significant facilities are accepted and vetted; system and district master plans updated as warranted; package is prepared for submittal to state legislature; all review work to be completed by DPCs by September 30 and Commission by October 31 to allow time at end of year for final Commission adoption and packaging for legislative review

District Planning Committees (DPC) Roles, Responsibilities and Selection

Each of the six DPCs will have a minimum of seven and a maximum of 13 members, including the two Commissioners from that district. All other members will be appointed by the Commission following the selection protocol included in these guidelines. Roles and responsibilities of members include:

- Understanding factors influencing planning decisions and outcomes, especially district-level trends
- Participating in an advisory role in applying and refining the classification system

- Clarifying and prioritizing the meaning of “regional” for that District
- Making recommendations on regional funding priorities, as defined under *Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Funding Program* in the Strategic Plan
- Making recommendations on selection of projects each year for funding
- Promoting local jurisdiction involvement in the Regional Parks and Trails system planning process, as appropriate

Each DPC will coordinate regional planning and development efforts with Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Metro Regional Parks (in contiguous districts) to ensure that district system master plans are complementary to state and metro-regional parks and trails within a given region of the state. In all districts, correspondence between DPCs and DNR will be through a district liaison appointed by DNR to coordinate the agency’s planning efforts with each of the DPCs. In districts abutting the metro area, correspondence between DPCs and Metro Regional Parks will be through a district liaison appointed by Metro Regional Parks to coordinate planning. Where Commission districts abut more than one Metro Regional Park implementing agency, additional liaisons may be appointed by Metro Regional Parks to avoid gaps in planning coordination.

The protocol for selecting DPC members is included in the *District Planning Committee Application Form* that is available from the Commission. All prospective members must go through the application process to ensure a cross-section of interests, backgrounds, and geographic representations are accommodated on the DPCs. The application is available *on the Commission’s website* (legacy.leg.mn/gmrptc).

Application Schedule:

- The deadline for applications to serve on DPC is May 1
- New members will be selected by the Commission by June 30
- Unfilled seats can be filled by the Commission on an as-needed basis each year

DPC Annual Meeting Schedule/Key Activities:

- Annual meeting schedule and key activities of the DPCs will be consistent that of the Commission’s (as defined on page 2)
- A minimum of three meetings per year is anticipated, although each DPC will coordinate with the Commission on any additional meetings necessary to complete district planning work
- The minimum meeting schedule will include one January/February meeting to review the system plan, one April/May public workshop for potential new Regional designation applicants, and one August/September meeting to review the ETeam outcomes, funding applications, and update district priorities

Regional Park and Trails Project Proposal Evaluation Team (ETeam)

To maintain the credibility of the vetting process, individual park and trail proposals submitted for regional consideration are initially evaluated by the ETeam, which is made up of select individuals without any connection to, or a vested interest in, outcomes. The protocol for selecting ETeam members is included in the *Regional Park and Trails Project Proposal Evaluation Team Application Form* that is available from the Commission. The work schedule for the ETeam dovetails with the schedules of the DPCs and the Commission, as defined in these guidelines.

Annual Meeting Schedule:

- July 1 through July 31 – *Project Proposal Evaluation Team* (ETeam) review period for all Regional designation applications; work includes general review of system and district master plans to identify gaps in service and define other planning issues for consideration by the Commission and DPCs
- August 15 – September 30 – ETeam may also weigh in on funding applications submitted for approved parks and trails of regional significance.

Part 2: District Planning Committee (DPC) Role in Regional Parks and Trails Designation Process

Section 4 of the Strategic Plan provides a full description of the protocol for designating regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota. Specifically, the *Protocol for Formalizing Regional and Park and Trail Designation* highlights the steps in the overall process. *The following defines the role of the District Planning Committee in each of these steps!*

Step 1: Annual Review of Classifications, Evaluation Criteria, and Weightings

- DPC annually reviews classifications, evaluation criteria and weightings in context of regional needs; this review will occur during the first quarter of each calendar year
- Commissioners representing each district make recommendations, based on the DPC review, to the Commission as it pertains to the district they represent
- Commission formally reviews and adopts updates prior to the application period for the next year

Annual Schedule:

- Deadline for DPCs refinement recommendations to the Commission is February 28
- Deadline for the Commission to finalize any changes or related actions is March 31

Step 2: Regional Park and Trail Designation Applications Submitted by Public Entities in Greater Minnesota

- Commission's application process must be used by all applicants to ensure consistency in defining and evaluating projects
- Part 3 of this document addresses the particular requirements of the application process, review process, and associated timeframes
- DPC members actively work within each district to publicize the application process, and actively participate in discovering regional opportunities through various forms of public outreach (as defined in Part 4 of this document)

Annual Schedule:

- Commission makes applications for Regional designation available by April 1 each year; applications will include any adopted updates made by the Commission
- Deadline for applications to be submitted to the Commission is June 30
- All applications are submitted on the Commission's web based information management system, where they are then initially reviewed by the evaluation team

Step 3: ETeam Reviews and Ranks Initiatives against Set Classifications and Criteria

- All applications are evaluated by the ETeam; to avoid potential for conflict of interest, DPC members do not directly score park and trail proposals
- After ETeam review, each of the DPC's receives a summary of the applications and evaluation results.

Annual Schedule:

- All reviews and recommendations by the ETeam will be forwarded to the Commission and DPCs by July 31

Step 4: DPCs Consider Evaluations/Rankings and Make Recommendations to the Commission

- DPCs review findings and consider rationale for outcomes and pose questions to the Commission through the System Plan Coordinator and District Commissioners about proposals to ensure scoring is fair and well-reasoned, and that all initiatives are fully vetted and consistently ranked against the criteria
- DPCs review, comment, and make recommendations to the Commission as related to the Regional designation list and district prioritization for project funding; DPCs also provide comments and recommendations on overall findings

Annual Schedule:

- August 1 through September 30

Step 5: Commission Makes Final Determination on Evaluations and Rankings

- Commission reviews findings and considers input and recommendations from evaluation team and DPCs
- After determining that evaluations were fair and well-reasoned, the Commission decides which initiatives meet the criteria and warrant being included in the regional park and trail system in Greater Minnesota, along with providing any qualifying statements

Annual Schedule:

- October 1 through October 31 for primary review of project proposals, with November and December set aside for final decisions and packaging recommendations for legislative action

Step 6: Park and Trail Initiatives of Regional Significance Formally Approved by the Commission and Added to Greater Minnesota Regional Park and Trail System Plan

- Commission formally approves projects to be added to the regional system, which triggers formalizing agreements with responsible public entities – which could be a city, township, or county, or some combination thereof
- All agreements must receive final approval of the Commission to be formally included in the regional system *and become eligible for funding*

Annual Schedule:

- Completed by December 31, with final recommendations to the state legislature by January 15

Step 7: Park and Trail Initiatives Included in Funding Program as Formally Approved by the Commission

- Parks and Trails of Regional significance submit a funding plan and application for review
- Once a park, trail, or recreational facility becomes part of the district system master plan, each of the DPCs prioritize them, based on district demands and opportunities, for the Commission's funding determination
- Commission determines funding eligibility and priorities each year, and updates the 10 year funding program on an annual basis

Annual Schedule:

- Funding applications are submitted no later than August 15 each year
- Any needed DPC and ETeam review of funding plans and applications is completed by September 30.
- Commission review and funding plan completed by December 31, with final recommendations to the state legislature by January 15

Part 3: Application and Evaluation Process for Individual Regional Park and Trail Units

Section 3 of the Strategic Plan should be referenced for a complete description of the park and trail classifications and evaluation criteria. These criteria are used as the primary basis for determining whether or not any given park or trail meets regional designation requirements. The Commission's web-based *Request for Designation as a Regional Park or Trail in Greater Minnesota Application* complements the Strategic Plan and further defines specific and detailed requirements for seeking regional status for any given unit.

The application process gives all local units of government in Greater Minnesota equal opportunity to submit initiatives for evaluation and ranking. Only Counties and Cities are eligible to receive funding grants from the Commission. *Irrespective of the initiator, all requests will be required to follow the same application process and all facilities will be evaluated using a set process.* Cities, townships and counties may join together in submitting facilities for consideration, as detailed in the application.

Discovering and/or introducing possible park and trail units to any of the six DPCs may come from any agency and/or person or persons in Greater Minnesota. However, formal application must come from the city, township or county (or combination thereof) that will be responsible for ownership, operation, maintenance, and programming of the unit. Over time as this planning process matures, the Commission itself may, at its discretion, introduce parks and trails for consideration to address gaps in the system or address recognized inequities.

Steps in the Evaluation Process

The evaluation process entails three steps, which takes a project proposal from initial screening through formal listing and ranking (assuming criteria are adequately met). The following defines the requirements and outcomes of each of these steps. Note: The process for reviewing individual facility applications dovetails into the overall process/timeline as defined under *Part 2: District Planning Committee Role in Regional Parks and Trails Designation Process*, as defined above.

Step 1: Initial Application Screening for Regional Consideration

The purpose of this step is to determine if a given park or trail unit meets the basic requirements for *consideration* of being regionally significant. The goal is to give entities in Greater Minnesota an opportunity to verify the completeness and potential competitiveness of a proposal before seeking a more complete (and involved) evaluation and formal ranking. This step includes an initial or baseline screening of the completeness of information provided by the applicant by Commission staff. Following submission of a complete proposal, the ETeam will complete a baseline evaluation of the application against the defined criteria to determine the potential merit of the facility and where it might rank on a

tiered basis (high, medium, low). The result of the evaluation allows proposers to determine if an initiative will likely reach a minimal threshold to be considered regionally significant.

Submittal of the Commission's web-based *Request for Designation as a Regional Park or Trail in Greater Minnesota Application* is required for all project proposals. Proposers should provide as much information as possible (such as inventory inputs into the GoMN system), including a Program Statement as defined by the Commission. Applicants under this step are not required to provide an approved/adopted *Unit Master Plan* and fully executed agreements or commitments from proposing agency(s). *Note: Proposers that have an adopted unit master plan that meets all the requirements defined in the Strategic Plan or any agreements or commitments are encouraged to include that information in their application, as that may speed evaluation under Step 2.*

Submittal Deadlines:

- Applications for *initial application screening* of a facility may be submitted any time prior to June 30 to be reviewed by staff for completeness. That review will be conducted in the order in which they are received, as time and resources allow. Early submittal does not guarantee review; earlier submittals have a better chance of receiving feedback.
- Applications for initial screening for regional consideration by the ETeam are due June 30.

Outcome:

- Commission staff reviews each application for completeness of each of the components of the application. Applicants may then complete or improve their application prior to the Step 1 June 30 submittal deadline, if time allows.
- Commission (through the ETeam) makes an initial determination of regional significance, including providing an initial ranking of high, medium, or low so that proposer has a sense of the general merit of the initiative. For low ranking projects, the Commission informs proposer that the park or trail unit is not likely to qualify for regionally-significant status, and include the rationale for making that determination.

Step 2: Detailed Evaluation/Formal Recognition as Regional Park or Trail

The purpose of this step is to formally evaluate a given park, trail, or recreational facility application that was determined to be complete and ranked highly against the criteria under Step 1. For this to occur, proposers must meet all of the detailed information requirements defined in the application – the most important of which is providing an approved/adopted unit master plan and a statement as to the initiator's commitment to fulfill its obligations/role as the implementing agency.

Submittal Deadlines:

- Applications for *detailed evaluation/formal recognition* of a facility are generally due June 30. Based on a number of factors, the Commission may accept Step 2 applications from high-ranking Step 1 facilities at its discretion throughout the year.
- Step 1 applications that are ranked highly by the ETeam in that step and contain all of the necessary Step 2 information may be simultaneously scored under Step 2.

Outcome:

- For high and select medium ranking facilities from Step 1, the ETeam will complete a full scoring evaluation of the proposal against the criteria. The Commission will then determine which facilities merit Step 3 consideration, based on the scoring and other factors at the discretion of the Commission. The Commission then informs proposer whether the park and trail unit will or will not likely qualify as being regionally significant, and include the rationale for making that determination.

Step 3: Formal Listing in System Plan and Funding Program

Under this step, the Commission works with the proposers of the highest scoring facilities within each of the districts to include their facilities in a formal *Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Funding Program*. Initiators of approved park and trail facilities that score highly (as determined by the Commission annually) are required to work with the Commission to define options on project phasing, cost sharing, etc., as needed.

Outcome:

- Inclusion of selected facilities in an adopted *Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trail Funding Program*.

Part 4: Public Outreach

Section 6 of the Strategic Plan provides a framework for public outreach and engagement tools. Each year, the Commission develops a public outreach strategy that includes specific outreach requirements within each district. At the district level, these include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **At least one district-wide meeting/open house** – in reasonably central/convenient location so that interested citizens can give input related to their areas of interest or concern
- **Focus groups on as-warranted basis** – to gain input from select stakeholder groups, hard-to-reach populations (e.g., minority groups, youth), and those currently disenfranchised or not otherwise involved in other public meetings or interviews
- **Structured interviews on as-warranted basis** – to aid in facilitating input from defined groups and individual stakeholders in a non-threatening setting

In addition to district-level outreach, the Commission will, at its discretion, undertake additional outreach and research to define trends and demands.

Annual Schedule:

- Formal district-wide application workshops/open houses should occur each calendar year to inform the DPC and Commission planning process tasks, typically in April or May
- All other types of public outreach can be undertaken at the discretion of the DPCs and the Commission as needed to inform decisions

Part 5: Annual Adoption of an Updated System Plan for Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails

At the end of each cycle (by December 31), the Commission adopts an updated Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails System Plan that includes all parks, trails, and recreational facilities determined to be regionally-significant. This long-range plan will be used to define the overall magnitude of the regional system in Greater Minnesota at a given point in time, along with helping define the investments needed to fully realize the plan. Note, however, that year-to-year listings and maps depicting the system should not be construed as being complete or representing the full extent of regionally-significant parks and trails that may exist in Greater Minnesota. Realistically, determining the optimal extent of the system will take several years to complete and fully understand.

Exhibit A

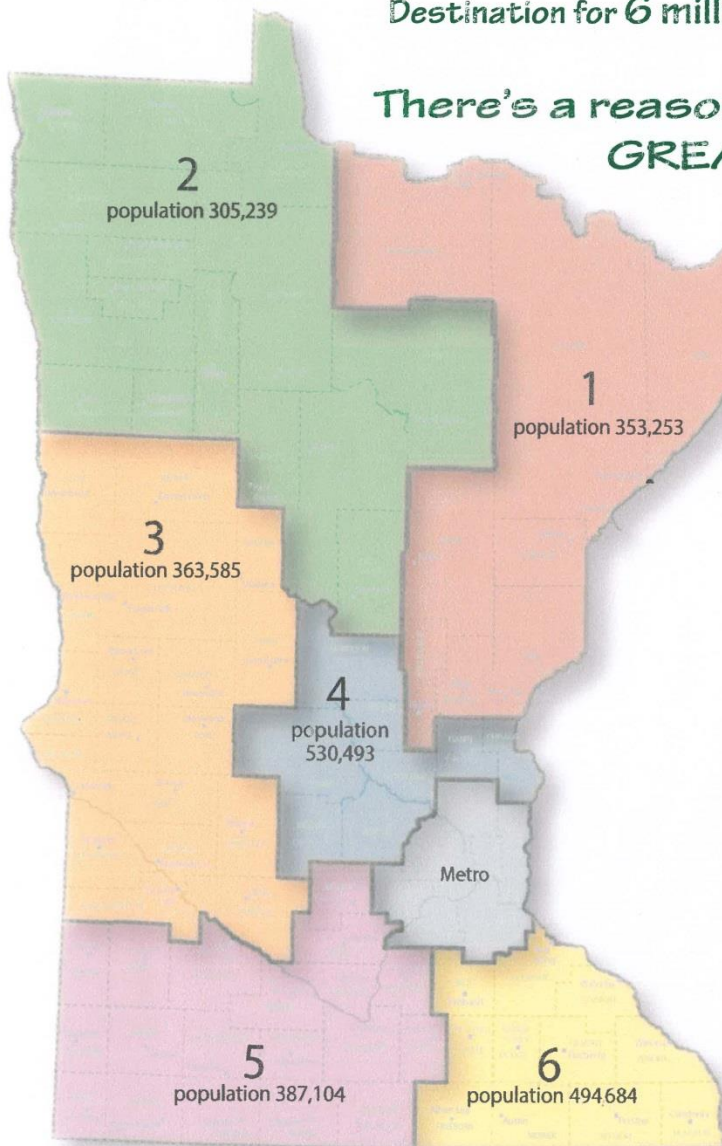
Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

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Home to 2.4 million residents.

Destination for 6 million visitors. Every year.

*There's a reason we're known as
GREATER Minnesota*



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3. Michael Hulett, Moorhead
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