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## **Parks and Trails Legacy Project**

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# **Public Participation Findings: Final Report**



*Common ground. Common good.*

*Report from the Citizens League to the Parks and Trails Legacy Project,  
Parks and Trails Division of the DNR*

## Preface

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In 2008, voters approved a constitutional amendment, the “Legacy Act,” that increased the sales tax by 3/8 of a percent for investment in environmental and cultural purposes. Fourteen percent of the proceeds, about \$35 million a year in 2010, will accrue in a fund for state and regional parks and trails. The Minnesota Legislature charged the Department of Natural Resources to develop plans for the use of these funds and required the DNR to consult with the public in developing these plans.

On April 13, 2010, the DNR kicked off the public participation process with a “Summit.” At this event, Don Shelby of WCCO radio and television addressed the participants, imploring them to put our collective future in front of our personal desires—“we” before “me.”

Over the next nine months, approximately 4,000 Minnesotans, from all over the state and across all ages, took the time to learn about the Legacy funds and offer their perspectives. In some quarters, there is great skepticism about the usefulness of public input: the data are not scientifically contrived; only the interested participate; people show up just to advance their own interests. The Citizens League understands these arguments, but believes that distrust in citizen input is misplaced: *process, and how citizens are engaged, matters a great deal to the quality of the result.*

Participants recognized this too.

“This workshop was a well done exercise that brought forth strong feelings and opinions, which along with engaged citizens, are the cornerstone of democracy.” – Hennepin Carver participant

“It was good to hear the perspectives of all people. It was also good to see people who care show up to the meeting. It renewed my faith in other advocates.” –Anoka-Washington participant

“I am now able to be more open-minded to other ideas and opinions.” –worksite participant

“Thank you, by the way, for a great exchange, it really made me use my brain for once.” – online participant

In short, Minnesotans took Shelby’s request to heart, and along the way provided important guidance for increasing stewardship of our natural resources and increasing participation in nature-based recreation. This report summarizes their views and advice.

## Introduction

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In 2008, voters approved a constitutional amendment, the “Legacy Act,” that increased the sales tax by 3/8 of a percent for investment in environmental and cultural purposes. Fourteen percent of the proceeds, about \$35 million a year in 2010, will accrue in a fund for state and regional parks and trails. The Minnesota Legislature charged the Department of Natural Resources to develop plans for the use of these funds: 1) a 10-year strategic coordination plan, and 2) a 25 year long range plan. The Legislature also required the DNR to consult with the public in developing these plans.

The DNR partnered with the Citizens League to help design and conduct the process for public engagement and input, and to summarize the results. This report provides an overarching summary of all of the work conducted by the Citizens League and a corollary effort to engage youth and young adults conducted by the DNR. Other reports, the Phase I and Phase II findings, and two youth engagement reports, can be found at [www.citizing.org](http://www.citizing.org).

## Citizens League Charge

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With the passage of the Legacy Act, Minnesotans did something almost unheard of these days—they taxed themselves. In effect, the DNR and the Legislature are the “executors” of these funds for the public, and the first order of business is to accurately understand the public will regarding the Legacy funds. Working with DNR staff and the Steering Team convened to guide the planning process, the Citizens League designed a phased approach that enabled Minnesotans to play a central role in the planning process. Phase I was designed to gain appreciation for Minnesotans’ vision and priorities for the use of the Legacy funds. In Phase II, the public commented and provided feedback on a draft plan and other key ideas.

## Overview of the Process

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### **Phase I: Minnesotans’ Vision & Priorities**

Phase one consisted of three components: seventeen regional public workshops 2) eleven targeted workshops with specific constituencies (high school students; ethnic minorities; university students; and corporate employees) and 3) online input. Activities were structured with the aim of reaching out to Minnesotans in a way that interests them, solicits their meaningful participation and sets the stage for a “common” good approach to the use of the Legacy and other traditional funds (rather than competition between interests).

Participants’ views’ were gathered in four ways at each regional and target group workshop (see the Phase I report for the interactive and written questions).

- *Written responses* were gathered on four questions concerning general insights and nature-based recreation preferences.
- *A live interactive "survey"* was conducted throughout during the workshops with the use of individual response devices. Participants were asked to sit at small tables (4-8 people) with people they did not know, and to discuss their thoughts on a series of questions. At the end of the discussion period, people "voted" by means of a handheld keypad (individual response devices—IDA). The results were then projected instantaneously on a screen. Five questions regarded vision and priorities were handled in this manner.
- *A budget "game"* was played at each table. In this exercise, people at each table were asked to reach consensus on how to allocate Legacy dollars for Parks and Trails. Each table was given \$100 Legacy dollars in \$10 increments and asked to allocate it amongst the following categories: acquisition; development; rehabilitation; operations and maintenance, programming, marketing and awareness; and other.
- *Comments* were taken throughout the workshops to share responses and insights on the question at hand.

Online, participants shared their views through:

- *Introductions* in which people shared their interests.
- *A survey*, which consisted of approximately the same survey questions as those presented at the regional workshops.
- *Discussion* topics started by moderators and participants on topics of interest.

## **Targeted Workshops**

The DNR was determined to hear from all Minnesotans—that is, diverse views, locations across the state, young as well as old, and non-majority populations. Therefore, additional meetings were conducted for specific groups of people. The Citizens League worked with the DNR to conduct eleven (11) meetings, and the DNR themselves conducted several additional workshops. The groups included racial and ethnic minorities (African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Somalis, and Southeast Asians), and young people.

## **Phase II: Feedback on the Draft Plan**

Phase II consisted of four regional meetings and online activities that sought to gather input and feedback on the draft plan. Workshops were held in four locations throughout the state: Mankato (30 attendees), Duluth (27 attendees), Bemidji (52) and Saint Paul (26 attendees) and were held between December 2 and 8, 2010. Participants were asked about the findings to date, the recommendations set forth in the plan, and how the plan should be changed, improved or verified before moving forward.

Input was gathered in several ways during the in-person workshops.

- *Table discussions* were reported out. In small groups, participants discussed questions around each of strategic direction areas laid forth in the plan and reported out for a large group discussion.
- *Written comments* were gathered from participants, who were asked to provide thoughts to the discussions questions in written form, as well as their feedback on additional questions.
- *A priorities exercise* was conducted at each table. Working in small groups, participants used chips (12) to indicate their priorities for each of the four strategic direction areas.

Comments and feedback were also solicited online. In addition, four (4) weeks of structured activities were conducted to dive deeper into key ideas and issues. Participants provided their feedback in several ways.

- *Weekly activities* consisted of a quick poll and discussions on specific topics. Participants answered a survey question or two and provided comments if they wished. Additionally, participants discussed a question on the same topic in greater depth.
- *Discussions* of the draft plan provided comments on each of the major plan components, as well as for the overall plan.
- *Email* comments were submitted to either the DNR, or via CitiZing. (Note: participants did not need to be a CitiZing member to submit comments to CitiZing via email.)

## **DNR Youth Engagement Activities**

To complement and enhance the Citizens League outreach efforts, the DNR Parks and Trails Legacy Project conducted its own youth engagement activities. The objective of the youth outreach was to increase the number of young people providing input into the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan. Meetings and discussions were held in a variety of formal and non-formal environments including schools, youth centers and other social places. The participants responded through dialogue, writing and drawing their responses individually and in small groups.

## **Students Speak Out**

Citizens League Students Speak Out, an online platform targeted at teens, hosted six weeks of dialogue from mid-November 2010 to early January 2011. The specific charge was to approach teenaged citizens to further flesh out ideas and questions raised in the DNR's Draft Legacy Plan as well as to further examine ideas gathered from the DNR's youth engagement activities. To accomplish this goal, the Citizens League posted, publicized and moderated six weekly discussions online at [www.studentsspeakout.org](http://www.studentsspeakout.org) (hosted on the CitiZing civic engagement platform). Four of these discussions incorporated quick polls to get participants thinking more deeply about the topics. Participation was sought through Citizens League networks (Facebook, Twitter, broadcast email) and Students Speak Out networks (Facebook, Twitter, various contacts). In addition, a number of schools and youth organizations, focusing on those with an environmental focus, were contacted.

## **The Validity of the Process and Credibility of Subsequent Findings**

In some quarters, there is great skepticism about the usefulness of public input: the data are not scientifically contrived; only the interested participate; people show up just to advance their own interests. The Citizens League understands these arguments, but believes that distrust in citizen input is misplaced: *process, and how citizens are engaged, matters a great deal to the quality of the result.* Appendices I and II address two specific questions about this process and the findings. Appendix I discusses the extent of online participation, and Appendix II the credibility of the findings.

## **Who Participated**

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During Phase I, approximately 1,000 people attended the regional and target workshops. More than 1,500 people visited the CitiZing project website. On CitiZing, 125 people took an online survey version of the in-person questions. Participants also logged a total of 147 comments in discussion areas of the site.

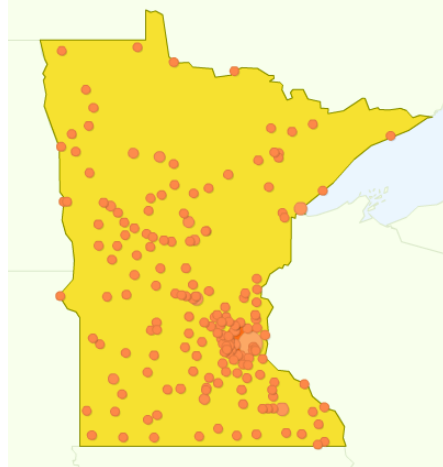
Participation in the regional workshops and online was fairly-well represented across most demographic categories, except race and ethnicity; therefore the desire for the targeted meetings. Not surprisingly, nearly all of the participants take an active interest in nature-based recreation.

### Demographics of Participants

	In-person meetings	Online
total number of respondents	994	125
<i>gender:</i>		
Male	60%	44%
Female	40%	56%
<i>age:</i>		
Under 18	1%	2%
19-35	13%	33%
36-50	24%	31%
51-65	45%	30%
66+	17%	5%
<i>children:</i>		
Children under 18 at home	25%	30%
No children under 18 at home	75%	70%
<i>ethnicity:</i>		
White	94%	96%
Non-white	4%	2%
Multiracial	2%	2%
<i>location:</i>		
St. Paul/Mpls	13%	32%
suburbs	20%	18%
Greater MN- regional center	23%	29%
Greater MN- rural	45%	21%
<i>affiliations:</i>		
Environmental organization	20%	42%
Recreational organization	43%	29%
Arts and culture	4%	5%
Other civic organization	9%	15%
Government	14%	0%
Other	3%	9%
None	7%	0%
<i>favorite two outdoor activities :</i>		
Hunting or fishing	14%	
Hiking, biking, skiing, canoeing, etc.	32%	
Camping	19%	
Nature observation	13%	
Motorized sports	12%	
Horseback riding	5%	
Driving for pleasure	4%	

During the four Phase II workshops, 135 Minnesotans participated in the in-person meetings. Also during this phase, CitiZing hosted more than 900 unique visitors who viewed an average of 5 pages and spent nearly 5 minutes on the site. For those who actively logged in to participate, 373 people to date have joined the project. Of those, 209 submitted surveys and 146 total comments were logged.

Overall, CitiZing boasted 373 members throughout the various project phases who signed on using their full names. Online participants came from all over, as shown on the following map:

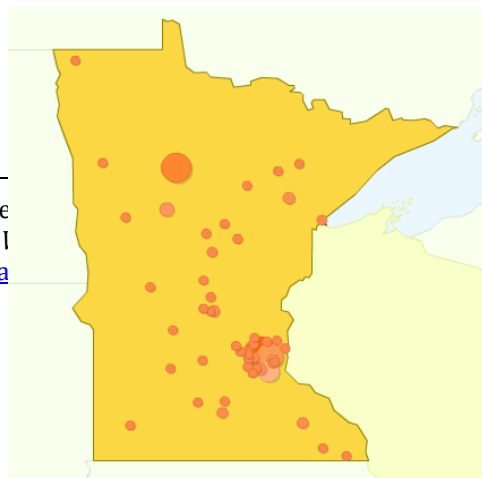


The DNR youth engagement activities attracted 1,060 participants in twenty-eight meetings aimed at youth ages 10 to 15, youth ages 15 to 18 and young adults ages 18-40. Youth participation took place at elementary, middle and high schools and youth programs; young adults came from technical colleges, universities and the Conservation Corps Minnesota Young Adult Program. Although economic and ethnic diversity was not specifically targeted, there was an attention to collecting information from diverse communities, including a rural high poverty community and economically distressed urban neighborhoods. In addition there was an emphasis on diverse geographic areas of the state of Minnesota. Further detail can be found in the DNR Youth Engagement Report.

Students Speak Out Parks and Trails Project engaged 137 students online. Over the six weeks of dialogue, SSO hosted 500 unique visitors (not all visitors are members, but teens tell us that “visiting” ought to be recognized as learning and participating).<sup>1</sup> The average time visitors spent on the site was 12 minutes, 30 seconds. The average number of page views per visit was 17.

Participants posted a total of 132 comments (6 weekly discussions), and took polls 129 times (we offered polls 4 times over the 6 weeks).

The participation map below indicates participants’ geographic locations throughout Minnesota. The large circle to the north is Bemidji, MN, (school not known) and one of the large circles in the metro area is from Apple Valley, MN (School of Environmental Science). Students in these areas were participating from their schools, at the encouragement of peers and/or teachers. This influenced large numbers of sign-ups from these areas.



<sup>1</sup> Farris-Berg, K. and Alexandre  
*Participation Strategies That Work*  
<http://www.citizing.org/data>

*Civic Problem-Solving Online:*  
[Civic Problem-Solving-Online.pdf](#)



## Summary of Findings

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### **Phase I: Minnesotans' Vision & Priorities**

The initial phase of working with the public consisted of three components: seventeen regional public workshops; 2) three targeted workshops with specific constituencies (high school ethnic minorities; university students; and corporate employees, with additional workshops being scheduled); and 3) online input.

Across the workshops and online activities, a number of common themes emerged. These are described below (in no particular order) and illustrated with results from the voting/online survey, budget game and written comments. It would be inaccurate to conclude that there is unanimity around these themes; indeed many viewpoints were represented. However, just as poll data rarely (if ever) yield unanimity, it is possible to take away key themes and findings. The following nine themes were voiced repeatedly throughout the workshops and online.

*Theme One. Minnesotans are truly passionate about nature and parks and trails.* Perhaps Minnesotans' love of nature should not be surprising, given the margin by which the Legacy Amendment was approved by the voters. However, their support for parks and trails as a component of our legacy was not a forgone conclusion. While most voters cited reasons such as clean water and preserving nature as their primary reasons for voting "yes", the feedback received from the public affirmed that parks and trails are a valuable asset to life in Minnesota. The comments of participants indicate the depth of Minnesotan's connection to nature:

"I am part plant."—High School for the Recording Arts student participant

"Being in nature gives me a feeling of being one with "energy." There is a spiritual dimension to nature. Being outside is the greatest form of entertainment." – University of Minnesota participant

"We must stop thinking about "preserving nature" and start realizing that nature preserves us!" –online participant

“People really have a passion for trails and connectivity to key destinations throughout the state. People understand the importance in developing the next generation of environmental stewards. You only protect what you love. If future generations have no connection to nature they will not protect it.” –Saint Paul-Ramsey participant

Theme Two. Participants expect something big and lasting from the use of Legacy dollars.

It was expressed more than once that no state has done what Minnesota has in passed the Legacy Amendment; now we must do something as remarkable with the money. It is incumbent on us to create something (perhaps intangible) that does not exist today. The Legacy funds are a means toward a materially different Minnesota.

“It would be tragic if nothing tangible comes from this new source of funding. It should not just be eaten up in more bureaucracy and red tape i.e. more staff in the Twin Cities. We must do what is best for the whole state, not just for special interests or pet projects.” –Brainerd participant

“If the Legacy Amendment is an extraordinary thing nation-wide, then we need to do extraordinary things with it.” –University of Minnesota participant

Theme Three. In terms of an overarching vision, most participants focused on protecting natural resources and creating a next generation of stewards.

Many comments pertaining to the meaning of Legacy focused on the next generation and natural resources:

“A system of resources that attracts-while it reverses the trend of apathy toward environmental stewardship- and draws future generations into the outdoors and establishes a cultural appreciation for the outdoors.” –Brainerd participant

“As life gets busier, I find it is more important than ever that the parks exist. Staying active and healthy is very important to me and I see the parks as a way to promote that for my future and the future of my children.” -Anoka-Washington participant

The table below shows a break down of the voting at the workshops and online. Of note, is that women were more likely to view their legacy as protecting natural resources, while men were more likely to prefer more recreational opportunities. The top choice for both men and women, however, was the same: developing the next generation of stewards.

**Table 2. Minnesotans' Vision**

	total responses	Connected trails	More recreational opportunities	Protect natural resources	Develop next generation stewards	Minimize travel time	Maximize economic impact	Quality
<i>Workshops and online (participants had two response choices)</i>								
men	1099	21%	16%	15%	23%	11%	5%	9%
women	740	18%	11%	24%	25%	13%	5%	6%

Not everybody identified natural resource protection and stewardship as their top priorities. There exists a significant difference of opinion between those who indicated that non-

motorized activities are their favorite recreational activity as opposed to motorized activities. Half of those who prefer motorized activities cited “connected trails” or “more recreational opportunities” as their primary priority, compared to 30% of those who prefer non-motorized activities. Likewise, nearly half of those who prefer non-motorized activities cited “protect natural resources” or “develop the next generation of stewards” compared to 21% of participants who prefer motorized activities.

*Theme four. Children and youth are seen as the pathway to increasing participation and environmental stewardship.* When asked what got them interested in nature-based recreation, many people spoke of memories from their youth. Love of nature is often instilled at a young age. Even younger adults (18-25 years old) would refer to memories of growing up on a farm, or camping with their families, for example.

“We must find a way to get children involved in outdoor activities or this Legacy will be ignored.”

“Places for children to play, learn, grow and develop a lifelong passion for the outdoors.” –Detroit Lakes participant

“There is a disconnect between older citizens and the youth. There is even anger at the younger generation for not enjoying the parks. It should be recognized that the youth have other interests and parks should gear some programs and facilities to respond to these interests.” –Hennepin Carver participant

“We want to go to parks to learn something.” –High School for the Recording Arts student participant

“Education and exposure to nature for our youth is important; stay strong in this issue.” –Mankato participant

*Theme five. Participants advocated for a balanced, pragmatic approach to using Legacy dollars,* in that they felt that a viable parks and trails system does not focus on certain expenditures to the exclusion of others—acquisition, development, operations and maintenance, programming, marketing and rehab-- all require funding. Of the 135 groups that participated in the budget game, 115 (85%) allocated Legacy dollars to four or more funding categories (from a total of six plus an additional “other” category that was rarely used.)

“Land acquisition, development, maintenance, and public awareness of facilities are all integral parts in increasing the number and usage rate of Minnesota’s natural recreational areas.” –Anoka-Washington participant

“You have got to plan for the future because every year new opportunities are presented. You have also got to keep it in shape for people to use. This requires a balance of funding.” –Hennepin Carver participant

### Budget Game Results

n=135 tables (excludes St. Cloud and Rochester)

	% tables allocating at least \$I	average allocation \$\$	median allocation \$\$
Acquisition	81%	\$20.66	\$20.00
Development	81%	\$17.59	\$20.00
Redevelopment	76%	\$14.15	\$10.00
Operations and maintenance	90%	\$20.94	\$20.00
Marketing	87%	\$15.97	\$20.00
Programming	67%	\$9.21	\$10.00
Other	9%	\$1.48	\$0.00

Participants repeatedly stated that it makes no sense to acquire more land if the resources are not available to maintain what we already have. At the same time, many advocated for having the ability to acquire land when important opportunities arise, perhaps by putting aside “opportunity funds.” Others noted that land acquisition is important in the shorter term because it may not be available for purchase in the longer term.

“We cannot create new things that we are not able to maintain. I would like to see the money spent to maintain what we have. Why build new parks and trails while letting the existing ones fail and close. This doesn’t make sense.” –Baudette participant

“While the fund is about our natural resources’ future, don’t forget about the ‘now.’ Tomorrow is not guaranteed to any of us. Finish incomplete parks and trails before moving forward with the rest of the plan.” –Brainerd participant

“It’s all about land – if we don’t have that, we won’t have anything in the future. I’d rather reduce maintenance etc., and be sure we have plenty of protected land. The money available for maintenance and extension of trails can always be raised in the future.” –Duluth participant

Theme six. Connections are a top priority. Participants want connections! They want an interwoven network for both themselves and for our ecosystems – trails that mesh together across the state - creating an alternative transportation system that invites recreation participation at multiple scales.. Participants emphasized linking important places, population centers, commercial destinations, as well as important natural resources like lakes and other parks and trails. Connections also serve another important role—accessibility.

“I hate trails that go nowhere.” –University of Minnesota student participant

"In terms of the Legacy, the single most important long-term (dare I say perpetual) outcome should be re-establishing ecological connectivity throughout the state, utilizing trail corridors and parks." –St. Cloud participant

"No one wants to have to strap their bikes onto their car and drive to a park in order to bike. I think we should be on the forefront of making bicycling a viable transportation alternative by extending our bike paths outward." –online participant

Theme seven. Participants urged attention to a full range of recreational opportunities: hiking, biking, horseback riding, water trails, snowmobile and ATV trails. While some felt strongly that Legacy funds should **not** be used for motorized recreation, others acknowledged a broad range of recreational interests.

"Everyone is included and no one is forgotten. Kids enjoying nature." –Willmar participant

"Stress investments that have multiuse features vs. facilities or trails that only support or draw narrow interests groups." –Brainerd participant

"Try to balance the demands, wants, and needs of all citizens." –Anoka Washington participant

Theme eight. Participants supported a statewide approach, but one that recognizes that regional priorities and preferences differ. In many cases, participants were forthright about their regional interests, but also expressed sensitivity to the interests of other areas throughout the state. Participants see the Legacy funds as the opportunity to advance a statewide vision, as articulated and interpreted at the regional or local level. Some participants advocated for a regional approach to making funding decisions.

"Regionalize the allocations of the Legacy fund so the various regions can decide the priorities." –Baudette participant

"A statewide plan is not reasonable for such a diverse population and state. The plan must have a more regional focus with regional priorities." –Their River Falls participant

Theme nine. Participants expect the use of Legacy funds to be optimized. Participants clearly regard their contribution of sales tax to the environment as an investment. Throughout the workshops, a number of comments stressed the importance of maximizing the results of Participants' investment by strategic use of the Legacy funds, and provided numerous suggestions for doing so.

"I voted "YES" because of the guarantee that these dollars would supplement the current budget, not to take the place of current funds or become the primary funding mechanism." –Detroit Lakes

"Please consider setting aside 5% of the Legacy Funds to a "trust account" to be used after the 25 year period. (Spend only the interests and dividends.)" –Duluth participant

“It would be very beneficial to encourage local matching funds.” –Grand Rapids participant

## **Targeted workshops**

The Citizens League worked with the DNR to conduct eleven targeted meetings to ensure that we heard from a diverse group of Minnesotans. In general, the ideas and themes that emerged were consistent with those of the regional workshops, although the emphasis varied somewhat.

*Build better relationships with ethnic and racial communities.* Members of racial and ethnic minority communities do not currently feel a strong connection with parks and trails, nor, to a large degree, do they currently feel welcome and/or a connection there. Before they will or want to use the parks and trails, they need to feel like parks and trails are a place for them. Making parks and trails more welcoming for these communities may include anything from culturally relevant facilities and opportunities to signage in other languages to ensuring real and perceived safety.

*Take a broad view of recreation.* The concept and understanding of “recreation” needs to be re-thought to include non-traditional activities, particularly those culturally relevant to diverse communities. Many targeted groups spoke about the importance of nature to their culture and their desire to use parks and trails for particular activities. These activities could range from family gatherings to cultural ceremonies to activities popular with a particular culture.

*Create opportunities.* Many communities noted that they often sought “something to do”, and that parks and trails could provide opportunities for them to meet their needs and desires for recreation activities. Feeling welcome and safe, in addition to having a host of activities or opportunities relevant to their communities, would help to bring non-traditional users into parks. This sentiment was heard loud and clear among young people, as well as other groups, like Hispanics. That said, other barriers, described next, must be overcome for these groups to be able to take advantage of opportunities.

*Expand access points and avenues and reduce barriers.* Many groups noted that parks and trails could be difficult to access. This could be due to transportation to get there, the cost associated with using amenities, or the know-how and skills to be able to engage in outdoor recreation activities. Providing clear and easy access points and reducing barriers to parks and trails is key to attracting non-traditional users.

*Provide a quality experience.* Particularly for non-traditional users, a quality experience at parks and trails will be essential to turning non-users into users. Participants noted that the experiences need to be high-quality – clean facilities, variety of relevant activities, good programming, etc. – for them to come back and make parks and trails part of their everyday lives. In addition to the examples listed, this likely also includes information on *how* to participate in various activities (e.g. how to camp, fish, go geocaching, etc.).

*Recognize the importance of culture and heritage.* Many communities have a long history and cultural connection to nature, something that parks and trails can capitalize on. Parks and trails connect people with nature and have the potential to provide both the opportunities for communities to use them for their own culturally-specific activities (e.g. family gatherings, ceremonies, etc.), as well as provide the “glue” to connect everyone to nature and the other Legacy funds. The Legacy amendment passed in part because of Minnesotans’ desire to preserve a future for the state that includes nature and the outdoors; the parks and trails fund has the unique opportunity to connect people to that purpose.

## **Phase II workshops and online**

Seeking input on the draft plan, the Citizens League and DNR worked together to host a series of four workshops throughout the state, and to conduct a breadth of online activities, including those targeted to teens through Students Speak Out. Minnesotans from all over provided their input and ideas on how to amend and improve the draft plan and its recommendations, as well as provided their support for various components. A full report of findings can be found in the Phase II report.

The draft plan focused on four strategic direction areas, and citizen input was designed to gather feedback accordingly. The feedback generally affirmed the strategic direction areas, but provided deeper insight into how those strategic directions might be made more robust. A summary of reactions to the draft plan includes:

1. General agreement that the plan is on the right track.
2. Improve the plan’s understanding of the role of local parks and trails, and think about the link between these and regional and state parks and trails in efforts to increase participation.
3. To increase participation, focus on more numerous and different users of nature-based recreation, not more use by the same users.
4. Place a greater priority on youth, and rethink ways they might get engaged.
5. Consider and address more explicitly the needs of lower income individuals.
6. Be clearer about the opportunities for coordination, collaboration and connecting services, and make this way of operating a hallmark of how we do things.
7. Rethink the definition of regionalism.
8. Be transparent about how the funds are used and find ways to keep the public involved.
9. Disagreement about the use of Legacy funds for motorized recreation remains.

Participants were asked which of the strategic direction areas should be given highest priority. In small groups, they divided 12 chips into each of the 4 strategic direction areas to identify where they think the focus of Legacy efforts (funds, staff time, local groups, etc.) should go. The following table shows a summary of the results by location. Generally, the strategic direction concerning land acquisition and develop solicited the greatest support, and the direction concerning coordinating with partners, the least.

	Connect People & the Outdoors	Acquire Land, Develop Opportunities	Take Care of What We Have	Coordinate With Partners
Mankato	4	5	2	1
Duluth	2	5	4	1
Bemidji	2	3	5	2
Metro	3	4	3	2
<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>1.5</b>

### Strategic Direction One: Connect People with the Outdoors

Provide close-to-home, easy access opportunities that can help to build a culture of stewardship. The importance of opportunities close to home was affirmed by participants at each of the four workshops and online. These nearby places and activities provide an easy-to-access place for people where they can connect with the outdoors, thereby building a culture of stewardship and appreciation for the outdoors. Local parks are an important part of this, because while they are beyond the scope of the Legacy funds, they provide a key link to building participation in the regional and state systems. When asked online “how important do you think local parks and trails are to increasing participation in state and regional parks,” 84% of respondents answered either “critical” or “important”.

“Studies have shown a strong connection between availability of nearby green space for exploration by children and an increase in interest in outdoor recreation activities. So if the target market is kids, more open space in the neighborhood geared towards unstructured exploration would be a viable way to increase long-term participation in outdoor recreation activities.” –online participant

Rethink what it means to “participate” at a park or trail. As our culture continues to evolve, so do our forms of recreation. Parks and trails must keep up with – and should strive to be on the cutting edge – of these trends. If few people stargaze but many play disc golf, then those activities and opportunities should be reflected in our parks and trails. We must embrace new forms of recreation to continue to be relevant to and attract new users to parks and trails.

Target youth by developing appropriate and attractive opportunities for them and connecting with them where they are. As in Phase I, youth were again recognized as an essential component to increasing participation. To attract them to parks and trails, and indeed, to make parks and trails relevant to our new and changing lifestyles, participants recommended instituting activities and opportunities attractive to our current lifestyles. Some examples include better integrating technology (e.g. mobile app’s), introducing and expanding new recreational activities (e.g. geocaching), and providing modern amenities (e.g. wifi). Participants also spoke about the importance of partnering with schools, clubs and other groups comprised primarily of youth. They also noted the need for adults to lead the way for youth.

Youth and young adults agreed. Uninvolved youth want to “do something besides just staying inside.” The youth who were not part of a structured program that involved or



exposed them to nature still long for involvement in something that relates to their personal interests. The types of interesting opportunities described by uninvolved youth with parks and trails do not necessarily result from a structured nature based program, but more often take the structure of young people 'hanging out' with an adult or other young person who may share their common interest in nature based recreation.

Teen comments made clear that teens aren't necessarily *disinterested* in parks and trails; they're just not sure about how to use them and if they'll be welcomed. It would help to clarify and publicize what they'll do, what they will be allowed to do, and how well they'll be received when they arrive (legally and socially speaking).

"If the parks developed programs or group activities, such as a canoeing class or a hiking day, [or 'teen days' where teens could try things in the parks free of charge,] then it would be easier for people to get together and develop more of a community surrounding their park experience." – SSO teen

"I think it would be really great if the DNR tried to get more involved directly with schools. If we are always learning about what the DNR does and how we can help, then students will be more informed and would probably seek out the DNR more for opportunities to help out." – SSO teen

*Create connections (not necessarily physical) between spaces.* To increase participation and foster stewardship, it is not just enough to get people using one park or trail. Ideally, parks and trails become part of their way of life-- something they use frequently, throughout the state and beyond. To help make the leap between one's near-home park or trail and others throughout the state and region, it's important to create connections (not just physical ones) between the spaces. Physical connections aside, these could include interpretation, activities, information, marketing, education, outreach, transportation and more. Connections between non-outdoor places are also important. These could be schools, community centers, clubs, churches, etc.

"I was planning a trip to do some winter activities at a park reserve up in Maple Grove earlier this week. I heard about the park by word of mouth. I had difficulties locating a database online for the parks in the metro area. There was no good way to compare the facilities and pricing for all the parks nearby to find an optimal park for what I was looking for. Each park had a very nice individual Web site, but there was no good 'parent' site." –SSO teen

"A lot of teenagers simply don't know about of state parks and the benefits of visiting them. More marketing, such as internet and phone applications, can increase awareness. A Facebook page or phone app would be something teenagers would use more frequently than a regular Web site and could provide information about all the great things to be done at a particular park, how to get there, and what it will cost to visit." –SSO teen

*Be clear about who should make up the proposed increase in users; it shouldn't just be the same people using parks and trails more.* While there was general agreement that increasing participation is a good goal, participants urged leaders to more specifically identify where that increase should come from. It shouldn't just be current users using

parks and trails more frequently, but rather, new users. These targets should be made explicit and strategies identified to reach each. A number of participants felt the plan needed to better address and recognize the challenges low-income families might have, such as user fees and lack of transportation.

## **Strategic Direction Two: Acquire Land, Develop Opportunities**

Distribute funds throughout the state, not just based on population. Many participants felt passionate that investments should not be made solely on the basis of population; this was particularly true in Greater Minnesota. Participants at the Greater Minnesota meetings strongly stressed the need to re-think how “regional centers” are defined. The current definition seemingly places disproportionate emphasis on the metro area, which isn’t necessarily keeping with the idea of regionalism. Funds should be distributed throughout the state, with a focus on geography and nature, in addition to population.

Participants also underscored the need to respect the various needs of different parts of the state. What is needed in northwest Minnesota (trails) may not be the top priority for the southern part of the state (where land acquisition may be more important right now). This was echoed online when almost half of survey responders identified “projects that reflect each region’s unique needs will be underway” as the primary milestone by which to judge short-term progress and success with the Legacy funds.

Focus on both natural resource protection/conservation and recreational opportunities. Consistent with the findings from Phase I, participants emphasized that Legacy dollars should not be spent only on recreational opportunities, but should also focus on natural resources protection and preservation. Part of the mission of parks and trails is to preserve the natural environment, so Legacy dollars should also support those ends.

Related to this is a strong consensus to *never sell land*. In response to the legislature’s request to address decommissioning of parks, participants overwhelmingly and adamantly spoke against selling existing public land. Other measures – like recruiting volunteers to help care for the facilities, turning management over to another agency, or raising taxes to collect the needed revenue, among others – all were preferred to selling the land.

“I find it very disturbing that closure of parks is even considered in the plan.” –online participant

Develop the trail system so that it builds a useful network. provide access and opportunities to more people, and creates connections between opportunities. Greater Minnesota participants, in particular, noted the importance of further developing the trails system. Trails provide valuable connections between spaces, including parks and other nature-based recreational opportunities. Trails are a relatively easy way to provide near-home opportunities for many in Greater Minnesota while also increasing their access to other spaces and opportunities. On CitiZing, participants were asked how funding for trails should

be prioritized. The majority of respondents chose connecting with existing trails. Other top vote-getters were filling a critical gap in recreation opportunity shortages, securing a critical piece of a trail system, and connecting to communities.

*There must be a "legacy" component to each project.* Some participants noted a potential difference in the intent of the Legacy funds and Minnesotans' vision for the funds. Some want the focus of the funds to be primarily on acquisition and other tangible projects, while youth in particular noted the importance of programming and information. Regardless of what is funded, participants stressed the need for each project to be "legacy worthy", to help create something lasting and meaningful.

Teens expressed support for the long-lasting nature of legacy projects, but were more apt to regard "long-lasting" as the transmission of cultural values across generations. For them, short-term efforts to engage teens are a key to longer-term increases in participation.

"Long-term spending is where the majority of the funds should be allocated, but short term investment is necessary to give Minnesota's Legacy Project a boost... If participation is a major issue, acquiring land or investing in other long term projects won't solve it, regardless of how necessary they may be. To build lasting connections while expanding the park service in any respect, the DNR has to reach out in some capacity." –SSO teen

"Long-term goals are important, but they become useless if connections between Minnesota citizens and their local or favorite distant parks aren't being made (what good is a legacy if there is no one to carry it on?)." –SSO teen

"Marketing [of] activities would also encourage many young people to use these state parks. If we want people to use the state parks in future generations, we need to get young people involved. These young people will then create a legacy for others in the future." –SSO teen

### **Strategic Direction Three: Take Care of What We Have**

*Legacy funds should not be used for day-to-day maintenance and operations.* Participants agreed, nearly unanimously, that Legacy dollars should not be used for day-to-day maintenance. However, their views varied somewhat on what kinds of operations and maintenance *should* be eligible for Legacy funds, recalling that a major priority emerging from Phase I was to take care of what we have. Some want Legacy funds to focus primarily on "legacy worthy" projects like acquisition and tangible projects that develop and maintain opportunities for public use. This often means that the focus should be on larger, capitol projects, rather than many smaller ones. Regardless of project type (acquisition, development, programming, etc.), the funds should be used in a way that truly leaves a legacy and doesn't fritter away the funds.

Several participants noted that we shouldn't "reward" poor maintenance on existing facilities by handing out Legacy funds to improve them. However, this was a major discussion point as participants recognized the need to take care of what we have and get the most bang-

for-our-buck from the money spent. For development projects, the suggestion was made to identify the useful life of a facility and provide the funding to support that lifespan.

Legacy" must support – not supplant – current funding. Participants echoed many in Phase I who stressed that Legacy funding must support, not supplant, current funding practices.

#### **Strategic Direction Four: Coordination Among Partners**

Provide an accessible avenue for small groups and communities to follow the funding process, connect to broader activities and access funding. Participants indicated a desire for stronger connections to and support for local groups. Many spoke of how difficult it was to follow the process for how funds were allocated, and to connect into these efforts. Transparency and access will be important to consider as Legacy funds are allocated in the future.

"Investing in local ownership is critical with each element. Ownership meant to mean: participation, understanding, part of decision process."

"Regular public forums and continued input from the public. Annual reports on funded projects should be developed."

"If recommendations made by citizens are respected, and not over ridden by the legislature, then we will know that the process is working."

Feedback on the creation of an advisory body was mixed. With limited time at each workshop, there was seldom the opportunity to talk in-depth about the creation of an advisory body for the Legacy funds. However, in the brief conversations that participants did have, there was not clear agreement on whether or not this would be a good thing; some participants loved the idea, others did not like it. Generally, the emphasis seemed to be on the need transparency on how the Legacy funds are used, and on continued public involvement. For example, one person said, "Don't get a new board. Just periodically hold a review with all people who have a stake in it."

#### **Motorized Recreation**

During the first round of 17 regional meetings, there appeared a sharp divide between some who favor and look to expand trails and opportunities for motorized recreation, and those who feel that motorized recreation is incompatible with the intent of the Legacy amendment. These opposing sentiments surfaced during the plan review period as well, both in the written comments provided at the meetings and online. People in both groups are very passionate in their opinions, illustrated by the comments below, and those who are most passionate show few if any inclinations to make concessions.

"The suggestion that ATVers should not be eligible for legacy funds because we have an "exclusive fund" for our trails is incredibly selfish and short-sighted. The reason ATVers have an "exclusive fund" is because we pay gas taxes and vehicle registrations. We also pay the legacy fund sales tax. So we are being taxed three

times for MN trails. As a bicyclist and hiker, I pay nothing. When I ride my ATV, I pay over & over and the DNR should recognize that.” –online participant

“What would we like our land to look like in seven generations? Probably not what I've seen after ATV users have destroyed wetlands in one "fun" summer afternoon.”  
–online participant

“Regarding your comment about disrespectful riding -- "e.g. riding routinely off your trails, riding routinely in wetlands, riding routinely on designated non-motorized trails...believe me, no one is more upset by this behavior than the majority of ATVers. We know there is a small minority of idiots that don't follow the rules. However, the majority of us are respectful and do our best to police the rowdy folks.”  
–online participant

“Those of us who really understand how this will work know that it will take cooperation from all sides to make it happen. There is room and money enough for all.” –online participant

One participant commented on the need for basic, non-biased fact-finding as a means of bridging these viewpoints.

## Conclusion

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Minnesotans appreciated the opportunity to have input into the development of the Legacy plan, and they did not take the opportunity lightly. Many came away appreciating the complexity of the decisions involved.

“This is a complicated but important issue; especially in looking at how to get the next generation involved.” –Grand Rapids participant

“Allocating funds to parks and trails covering the entire state will be a huge challenge and the public participation workshops are a good idea. Use the information wisely.”  
–Minneapolis participant

“Lots of complexity involved...very interesting discussion.” –Brainerd participant

“It would be tragic if nothing tangible comes from this new source of funding. It should not just be eaten up in more bureaucracy and red tape i.e. more staff in the Twin Cities. We must do what is best for the whole state, not just for special interests or pet projects.” –Brainerd participant

In short, what did Minnesotans tell us? They regard the Legacy funds as our generation's opportunity to make a lasting imprint on the culture of Minnesota. To do this, they look to preserving nature and drawing more people to active participation in the outdoors. Key to this is attending to the needs and interests of our young people; making stronger

connections to outdoor activities—whether it be trails to trails, adults to youth, or schools to the DNR; recognizing regional priorities and differences; and cost-effective purchase and development of land.

Above all, Minnesotans demonstrated that our Legacy is about “we”, not just in the sense of collective aspirations, but in the cumulative actions Minnesotans take as individuals to become part of the Legacy. As one participant stated,

“The onus of developing respect for nature, etc. shouldn’t fall on the shoulders of those planning this. There needs to be a collaborative effort to increase awareness and appreciation for nature in general.”

# Appendix I

## Gauging the Success of Online Activities

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### Memorandum

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To: DNR  
From: Citizens League staff  
Subj: Online Activities  
Date: January, 2011

How do we know whether the online activities for Parks and Trails were successful? The Citizens League's approach to public participant is novel—by treating the public as instrumental to problem-solving we hope to produce more meaningful opportunities for the public and more useful input for public officials. We appreciate the opportunity to address this question.

#### Usage & Successes

We believe that CitiZing has been successful, particularly given the time and resources dedicated to these online activities. While participation can be increased and we continually strive to improve, more people in the Parks and Trails Legacy project were engaged in Phase I activities via CitiZing than the in-person meetings. Some key site statistics for the project reveal the depth and breadth of how the public has interacted with CitiZing.

- **4,996 total visits with 2,462 unique visitors.** This indicates that not only did we have nearly 2,500 people visit the CitiZing project, many of them came back multiple times. Of those visitors, 373 joined the project. The total number of comments posted by users was 293, and the number of surveys taken was 338. We can extrapolate from this that people wanted to stay tuned in to discussions and activities, whether or not they actively “participated” in them. While “participation” can be defined in a variety of ways, this can be interpreted as a high level of engagement.
- **29,876 total page views with an average of 5.98 page views per visit.** Many – if not most – sites like ours only receive a couple of page views (the number of pages visited while on the site) per visit, as users find the information they are seeking and leave. Having an average of nearly 6 page views per visit means that people engaged deeply in the information and activities and clicked through several pages to further information.
- **Average time on site: 5 minutes, 30 seconds.** These numbers are nearly two-fold above industry benchmarks for typical websites. The high amount of time users spent on CitiZing shows that they took their time reading and engaging with the information and activities provided. They did not simply click through many pages quickly and leave. They stuck around to read and learn.
- **29.9% bounce rate.** The bounce rate refers to the proportion of visitors who visit a single page and immediately leave without clicking on anything else. Most sites similar to ours typically experience bounce rates of 50% and higher. Here, 70% of project visitors stuck around to look at and interact with further information.

#### Comments

Here are some additional thoughts based on lessons we have learned about citizen participation.

1. **Perhaps we need to rethink what “participation” means.** At an in-person meetings, we don’t count only those who talk in front of the large group as its only attendees; we count all who come to the meeting, whether they speak up or not. Many people attend in-person meetings to learn more about the issue and better understand how they can offer input if they so desire. As we experienced in our regional meetings, only a fraction of participants spoke up loudly and publically, and many of those only did so when specifically asked by one of the facilitators. Similarly, online we must have the same expectations. Many people come to look, read and learn while only a few actually speak up. Like Facebook or Twitter, organizations and efforts may have many “fans”, “likes” or “followers” of people who read and engage with updates regularly, while only a small handful actually post comments or send direct messages. It would be incorrect to assume that those who interact passively are not “participants” in these efforts.

We have experienced similar trends in other work. A few years back, the Citizens League posted a web page that provided information to help people decide their vote on school levy referenda. The site had more than 4,000 hits in one week— suggesting that people were eager to participate (in this case, vote) in a meaningful way. Over half said the information did or might influence their vote, and 85% said they learned something, but only about 150 people answered this very brief survey. It would be inappropriate to conclude that the others weren’t “participating.”

In recent focus groups with teenagers, the students emphasized the point about what “participation” means to them. Our main goal, they said, should be to get them thinking, not to increase the number of posts or hits, which they warned can breed inauthentic findings. They appreciate the chance to learn from what is happening online, even if they themselves don’t contribute. To the extent that the opportunity to monitor discussions helps increase awareness and understanding of issues and in doing so, shifts cultural expectations (for example, about participating in recreational opportunities), it would be wrong to discount the significance of the numbers of people who log on but don’t leave a visible mark. Sometimes people just appreciate the transparency, or want to know that things are progressing well—they reserve their comments for times when they really care about the topic don’t like how things are going. Teens also emphasized that the topic choice is important; for instance, they may not care about snowmobiles, and while they enjoyed learning from the discussion, probably wouldn’t participate until asked about a topic they care about, like dog parks.

2. **People are unaccustomed to participating online in this way.** Most online opportunities are simply forums where people express their like or dislike, appreciation or rage at certain policies (see this interesting example: [http://www.linkedin.com/share?viewLink=&sid=s110776460&url=http%3A%2F%2Fow.ly%2F2ARjs&urlhash=x0JW&uid=7a08515f-edb3-4224-8c6c-ca6600e9899d&trk=NUS\\_UNIU\\_SHARE-Ink](http://www.linkedin.com/share?viewLink=&sid=s110776460&url=http%3A%2F%2Fow.ly%2F2ARjs&urlhash=x0JW&uid=7a08515f-edb3-4224-8c6c-ca6600e9899d&trk=NUS_UNIU_SHARE-Ink).) Nowhere that we know of do people actually have the opportunity to constructively engage online in policy solutions. This is a new role for people and the unfamiliarity may keep some people from participating more fully. Recall that people who attended the meetings were likewise surprised by the interactive and problem-solving nature of the discussions.
3. **You get back what you put in.** While we all know of web applications that seem to take off with little effort, the truth is that in their early phases, these applications



were slow to take up, and even slower to earn a group of trusted repeat users. More to the point in our case—people participate and return to participate if it is in their interest. If they think that no one is listening, or they see little activity, or the activity is arduous, they don't participate. In this way it is no different from in-person activities.

4. **Expectations for online participation need to mirror our expectations for in-person participation.** Just as most people wouldn't attend a public meeting weekly or even monthly, we must have commensurate expectations for how frequently people will participate online. Participation can happen more frequently online than in-person, but only at a similar rate and proportion to their interest in the interaction generally. Facebook and Twitter enjoy frequent traffic and use (several times a week) because they mirror interaction – socializing – that people already engage in on a daily basis. Therefore, we must set our expectations for the frequency of and time spent interacting based upon similar expectations for in-person time on similar activities or efforts.

These lessons learned are useful for us in thinking about how to further increase participation and make interactions on CitiZing even more robust.

# Appendix II

## Credibility of the Results

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### Memorandum

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To: DNR  
From: Citizens League staff  
Subj: Online Activities  
Date: December, 2011

DNR staff have asked for some information about the methods used for collecting Minnesotans' views on the use of Legacy funds for Parks and Trails, and how credible the results may be. Our approach aimed to engage citizens in a conversation to gather their input, rather than to conduct quantitative scientific research. This memo outlines our process, and the reasons for selecting the methods we did.

**1. Purpose of the meetings.**

The Legislature required the DNR to conduct "listening sessions" throughout the state. We created a new form of "listening session" that was interactive, involved all participants, and provide a structured form of input to ensure that the DNR received information regarding their most pertinent questions.

**2. Structure of the meetings.**

Part of the DNR's objectives in the meetings was to provide information to citizens, and to help them think through the issues in a way that puts the "we" (i.e., Minnesota) first, not "me". The best way to do this is in an interactive setting, where people are presented with new information and viewpoints other than their own—but feel no pressure to hold any given viewpoints. Providing information and asking people to contemplate views other than their own is not a feature of most "scientific" research, like polling.

**3. Information objectives.**

It was clear from discussions with DNR staff and the Steering Team that they were interested in exploring more deeply people's viewpoints and attitudes. This is a hallmark of qualitative research. The findings from the targeted meetings point this out especially well because of the depth and richness of what was learned.

**4. Validity of findings.**

Given that we were doing "listening sessions" as opposed to a research paper, and that we heard from more than 2,000 people via in-person meetings, there is little reason to quibble with the results. We use the quantitative information we gathered (e.g., the voting and game results) not as an empirical marker, but as a way of ensuring that our own biases do not cloud how we interpreted the findings: do the numbers support what we think we heard?

An interesting way to think about this is, "did we hear very different things as the meetings progressed?" The answer, with the exception of regional differences

(which we reported as a finding), is no. The findings converged over time—another feature of qualitative research.

There is no question that those most interested in Legacy funding are those that showed up to the meetings. But that was inevitable given the charge by the Legislature to conduct listening sessions. Why would someone show up if they don't care? It's important to remember that *even among those who showed up, there were very diverse points of view and that is what makes the findings most credible.*

## **5. Sustainability**

A secondary objective of the DNR, as I understand it, was to create a base of support that could be built on as the Legacy plan is implemented. Comments from the meetings suggest that we went a long way towards accomplishing this goal, precisely because people felt their input mattered and they were given a meaningful opportunity to weigh in. Polling does not accomplish this objective.

## **6. Qualitative vs. quantitative research**

Our charge was not to conduct scientific research, but to engage citizens. Nevertheless, there are advantages and disadvantages of both qualitative and quantitative research. Some comparisons can be found in the links provided below. If you are very concerned about the validity of the findings, the DNR could conduct a poll. If you choose to do so, I would take great care about the wording relative to how we asked the questions (as even polls on the same subject yield different results depending on how they are worded) and understand that people changed their views as a result of our process—something you would not expect to occur with a poll. Moreover, it may interest you to know that in a subsequent project conducted much like the DNR's but with many fewer participants, a followup poll was conducted, and for the most part that poll confirmed our qualitative findings.

<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualdeb.php>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qualitative\\_research](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qualitative_research)