

Parks and Trails Legacy Funds
Phase I Executive Summary
Report from the Citizens League to the Parks and Trails Division of the DNR
August 17, 2010

The Minnesota Legislature charged the Department of Natural Resources to develop a 10-year strategic coordination plan and a 25 year long range plan for the use of Parks and Trails legacy funds. 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 that summary for the initial phase of the process. A summary of each workshop and online survey and discussion results can be found at www.citizing.org

The initial phase of working with the public consisted of three components: 1) 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. Approximately 1,000 people attended the regional and target workshops. An additional 224 people have participated online, by signing in with their full names, of whom 125 took a survey version of the questions presented at the regional workshops. Participants' views were gathered in four ways at each regional and target group workshop: written responses; a live survey, a budget game and oral comments.

Participation was fairly-well represented across most demographic categories, except race and ethnicity, as shown at the end of this document. (*Note: this will be revised as more of the targeted-group meetings take place.*) Not surprisingly, nearly all of the participants take an active interest in nature-based recreation.

General Themes

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. The appropriate interpretation is that these 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, but their support for parks and trails 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

"[We need] an interconnected system of parks, open spaces and trails that provides a spectrum of recreation settings." (Anoka Washington)

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

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

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 participant 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

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%	