



## Increasing Outdoor Recreation Participation and Number of Visitors to State and Regional Parks and Trails

### Why is this important?

The decline in outdoor recreation participation is an alarming trend. Declines in participation reduce the number of Minnesotans who receive the benefits of outdoor recreation that can be attained from parks and trails. These include physical activity, learning benefits for children, social and family bonding, sense of place, community pride and overall quality of life benefits. Declines in participation also reduce positive environmental impacts gained from travel to parks and trails. Engaging with nature helps to produce a citizenry with an appreciation of the natural world that raises social and political support for resource conservation activities; support that may decrease as participation decreases. During the Legacy Plan Public Engagement Workshops, participants clearly emphasized the importance of building Minnesota's next generation of stewards and one of the most effective ways to do that is by increasing outdoor recreation participation.



### Outcome

*Over the next 25 years, the number of visitors per capita to Minnesota's state and regional parks and trails increases by 10 percent. Participation increases result in life-long visitation that fosters a sense of stewardship that is passed on from generation to generation.*

### Key Result Areas

Result Area 1: Welcoming environment

Result Area 2: Quality

Result Area 3: Programming and special events

Result Area 4: Infrastructure and amenities

Result Area 5: Access

Result Area 6: Partnerships

Result Area 7: Marketing

### Target Markets

Different audiences seek different experiences when recreating outdoors. It may be to enjoy nature, spend time with family and friends, get away, relax, have a good time, or feel a sense of accomplishment and exhilaration.<sup>i</sup> They generally would recreate more if they had more time, money, information, and skills.<sup>ii</sup> In order to meet the needs of all Minnesotans, we must seek new ways to reach those not currently using parks and trails, while at the same time ensure that we are still meeting the needs of our current users. Target markets were identified based on statistical research that shows key areas of declining or underrepresented participation in outdoor recreation as well as key areas of growth in Minnesota's population over the next 25 years.

### Families with children

The primary driving factor behind the trend of decreasing participation is a decline in involvement among young adults and their children. While still a large segment of the user base, participation at Minnesota State Parks by the 'under 45' age group fell by 10 percent from 2001 to 2007.<sup>iii</sup> People who participate in outdoor recreation as children – particularly visiting state or national parks, hiking/backpacking and camping – are more likely to continue participating in outdoor recreation activities as adults.<sup>iv</sup> Also, children are most likely to become involved in outdoor recreation if they are introduced to it by their parents. Not surprisingly, families with children place greater importance on programs and other opportunities for children when visiting parks and trails. They look for experiences that will help introduce children to the outdoors, develop outdoor skills and spend time with family. They value “high service” items like programs, special events and equipment rentals. They are more likely than adult-only parties to swim, picnic and fish.<sup>v</sup>

### Youth (<18)

People who become active in the outdoors when they are young are likely to continue being active as adults, but people who are not active in the outdoors as children are much less likely to become active as adults. Meeting the recreational needs of youth helps ensure life-long outdoor recreation participants who are strong stewards that carry on Minnesota's outdoor cultural traditions. Outdoor recreation is also an important source for physical activity. The rapid rise of obesity, especially in youth, over the past two decades is an alarming trend. Introducing physical activity through outdoor recreation at a young age will provide life-long opportunities for health and wellness. Youth generally have the same interests as families with children; however they may be recreating with a youth or school group or on their own rather than with their family. As such, opportunities for safe, controlled and semi-structured activities are appropriate. Field trips and youth group trips are excellent opportunities to expose youth to the outdoors.

### Adults (18-44, generation X and Y)

Adults age 18 to 44 account for about one third of Minnesota's population, but are underrepresented at Minnesota State Parks and Trails.<sup>vi</sup> It appears that adults age 18 to 44 are putting other priorities ahead of outdoor recreation for how they use their free time, such as time spent on the Internet, playing video games, and watching movies. Outdoor recreation providers need to better meet the needs of this target market, recognizing

that they look for opportunities for achievement and stimulation such as taking risks, being active, and feeling exhilarated.<sup>vii</sup>

### Racial and ethnic minorities

As of 2010, non-white and/or Hispanics make up about 16 percent of Minnesota's population and are projected to reach 25 percent of Minnesota's population by 2035.<sup>viii</sup> Yet, racial and ethnic minorities are historically underrepresented at Minnesota parks and trails. For example, just 2 percent of Minnesota state parks and trails visitors are non-white and/or non-Hispanic.<sup>ix</sup> As this segment of the population grows, it is important that we find ways to meet their needs to ensure that we are reaching all Minnesotans, but also to ensure that parks and trails continue to see high visitorship levels. Racial and ethnic minorities report similar obstacles to park attendance as whites; however, they are much more likely to cite distance, lack of information and costs as obstacles. Racial and ethnic minority groups look for opportunities to recreate in large groups, sometimes with extended family members, and enjoy team sport activities.<sup>x</sup>

### New immigrants

New immigrants are a small sub-set of the Minnesota population, but an important group that deserves special attention because their language and culture may differ from that of the majority of Minnesotans. Parks and trails have an opportunity to act as a gateway to the outdoors for this target market by introducing them to the traditional recreational activities of Minnesota and providing recreational opportunities from their own traditions. In this way, we can encourage outdoor recreation by this group and promote cultural understanding among all Minnesotans. New immigrants have similar obstacles for recreation as racial and ethnic minorities; however, they also experience a language barrier. Therefore, providing information in multiple languages may help increase their outdoor recreation participation.

### Adults (45+)

Adults 45 and older currently comprise more than one-third (39%; 2010) of the Minnesota population and are well-represented at parks and trails. By 2035, this same group will grow to 44 percent of the population with adults 65 or older accounting for the bulk of that growth.<sup>xi</sup> As adults age, their recreation needs and interests change. They place a greater emphasis on learning and interpretive related experiences.<sup>xii</sup>

## **Result Area 1: Welcoming environment**

State and regional parks and trails are a welcoming environment that represent and value all residents of Minnesota.

### **Why is this important?**

We all need to feel welcome, safe, and comfortable in our environment. This is especially true in wide-open spaces such as parks and trails where there may not be ready access to the things that make us feel safe, like shelter, phones (or other ways to reach people in an emergency), and other people nearby for support. New visitors to parks and trails may feel especially vulnerable because they don't know much about the facility and may lack information and outdoor skills.<sup>xiii</sup>

*"Design spaces and places that live in the world for generations – make parks and trails welcoming and accessible to all."*

*"We need to focus efforts on developing the next generation of stewards and recreational users."*

*"Youth who see people like them feel more comfortable using parks and trails"*

*– Parks and Trails Legacy Plan Public Workshop Participants*

One way to develop a welcoming facility is with friendly, knowledgeable staff who can relate to visitors and who can share their own knowledge and enthusiasm of outdoor recreation. Mentoring, recruiting and hiring youth and young adults from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds will help foster a sense of stewardship and environmental enthusiasm, as well as help reflect the population of the communities served.

A welcoming environment is especially important for new immigrants and racial and ethnic minority groups who more often report obstacles such as not feeling welcome, believing facilities are uncomfortable places to be and a lack of information.<sup>xiv</sup> To ensure the needs of this target market are met, we need to expand the availability of information, signage and interpretation that is available in multiple languages. This not only will help non-English speakers feel more welcome but will help the user population as a whole recognize that Minnesota parks and trails are a place for everyone.

## **Priority Investment Strategies**

1. Mentor, recruit and hire employees and volunteers that reflect the population of the users they serve.
  - a. Promote staff diversity. Hire staff knowledgeable and experienced with various racial and ethnic cultures in Minnesota. Hire staff members who are multi-lingual, focusing on second languages spoken by racial and ethnic minorities living in Minnesota.
  - b. Expand volunteer, internship and employment opportunities for youth (e.g., grounds maintenance, lifeguards, program/day camp leaders).
  - c. Expand internship, on-the-job training and entry-level job opportunities that can transition into careers for young adults.
  - d. Create and support mentor and volunteer programs in which older adults, particularly retired individuals, can serve as mentors and volunteers.

## **Additional Important Strategies**

2. Provide ongoing diversity training to Minnesota state and regional parks and trails employees and education to potential visitors within the target markets.
  - a. Assess existing organizational values and attitudes as they relate to diversity.
  - b. Provide training to employees on customs and expectations of current and potential visitors.
  - c. Help visitors – through education efforts – understand expectations and rules of parks and trails.
3. Create programs, interpretive media and educational material that celebrate past and present cultures in Minnesota and their unique heritage and values related to outdoor recreation.
  - a. Recognize new and emerging cultures to Minnesota (e.g., Hmong, Somali and Hispanic), as well as more established cultures in Minnesota (e.g., Native American and Scandinavian).
  - b. Develop publications, welcome and interpretive signs, and other materials in multiple languages.
  - c. Host cultural/ethnic celebration events, especially targeting first time visitors to Minnesota parks and trails.

## What We're Doing

### Youth Employment and Educational Programs

Remember when typical summer jobs for kids were paper routes, mowing lawns or painting the neighbor's fence? Fast forward to today where teens are re-establishing native plants along the Mississippi River, beautifying city streets, and creating nature play areas for children.

Summer jobs in urban and suburban park systems have changed. They provide a variety of opportunities to introduce youth from areas of increasing diversity and population growth to regional parks and trails. While racial and ethnic minorities comprise about 14 percent of the total Minnesota population, they account for a quarter of K-12 education enrollments in Minnesota and over 30 percent of enrollments in Minneapolis and St. Paul.<sup>xv</sup> Therefore, mentoring, recruiting and hiring programs that partner with schools directly impact our ability to reach youth as well as racial and ethnic minorities.

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's Teen Teamworks program provides summer employment and educational programming for youth ages 14-18. Participants earn a wage and are eligible to retake the Minnesota Basic Skills Test and may earn high school elective credit for successfully completing the program. In addition, through projects such as carp cleanup, invasive species removal and gardening, participants learn how to leave their own "green" footprint on the environment.



*"During my two years with the Mississippi River Green Team, I learned a lot about the Mississippi River and its surroundings; like how native plants can purify water. With the invasive and non-native plants surrounding the natives, the water gets less purified," said Pashie Vang.*

The Blooming Saint Paul Horticulture Academy and EcoRanger Academy programs also combine jobs with education and environmental stewardship. Participants work throughout the city on beautification and restoration projects such as planting, weeding, and invasive species removal. Associated curriculum includes plant anatomy and identification, entomology, ecology and landscape design. Youth who successfully complete either academy graduate with a certificate and references from their crew leaders and are eligible to earn school credit.

Youth who are involved in environmental education programs, such as these, walk away with an early understanding of the natural world and a greater sense of stewardship. These experiences shape their worldview and inspire a lifelong connection to the outdoors which leads to enjoyment of nature, healthier living and environmental advocacy that they in turn pass on to their family and friends.





## **Result Area 2: Quality**

Parks and trails make wise use of available resources to produce the highest quality experiences within their capacity.

### **Why is this important?**

Quality – whether it be of natural resources, programming, facilities or simply the overall experience – is one of the most important factors influencing participation. A quality product provides a positive experience that encourages visitors to return and to tell their family and friends about their positive experience, influencing family and friends’ decisions to visit. People are met with an abundance of opportunities for how to spend their free time while, at the same time, their free time seems to be dwindling. When faced with these choices people simply will not spend time on an inferior product. As such, Minnesota parks and trails must make wise use of available resources to produce the highest quality products within their capacity. This may require tradeoffs (e.g., 30 miles of high-quality trail vs. 40 miles of mediocre trail) but these tradeoffs are a necessary step towards increasing outdoor recreation participation over the next 25 years.

### **Priority Investment Strategies**

1. Provide high-quality experiences to visitors through thoughtful design, programming, and interpretation. Visitors will feel *well cared for and as if the park or trail was designed just for them*.
  - a. Establish baseline standards and best practices for facility design that consider the needs and wishes of park visitors and potential visitors within the target markets.
  - b. Design and provide superior programming, led by exceptional staff, that engages audiences and fosters excitement and enthusiasm for natural resources and nature-based recreation.
  - c. Design and update interpretive media to enhance the visitor experience.

*“Legacy means making a sustainable system to manage and acquire park and trail land in Minnesota. Develop a maintenance program that is self-sustaining to manage resources.”*

*“The natural resource protection, maintenance, and enhancement and management is key to everything. The quality of the resources is what draws people to the outdoors.”*

*“Keep facilities clean and trails well groomed.”*

*– Parks and Trails Legacy Plan Public Workshop Participants*

### **Additional Important Strategies**

2. Timely repair and maintain high-demand facilities.
  - a. Establish maintenance schedules and standards to ensure facilities are well-maintained and expectations are met across systems.
  - b. Prioritize the cleanliness and availability of restrooms and drinking water.
3. Invest in professional development practices that lead to exceptional Minnesota parks and trails staff.
  - a. Develop standards and best practices for customer service. Require customer service training for staff interacting with parks and trails visitors.
  - b. Encourage and make available training for interpretive and experiential programming, environmental education and relevant topics that can enhance staff ability to improve the parks and trails visitor experience.
  - c. Establish a culture of exceeding visitor expectations and going above and beyond to ensure an outstanding experience. Establish a means to recognize and reward exceptional staff when they do so.
4. Ensure that a quality product, as defined by our target markets, is delivered.
  - a. Conduct research to better understand how our target markets define quality.
  - b. Implement standards and best practices based on how our target markets define quality.

## ***What We're Doing***

### **Creating a State-of-the-Art Mountain Bike Trail System – Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area**

***It's not just about meeting requirements; it's about exceeding expectations and, anticipating future needs!***

With its mine pits and debris stockpiles from an earlier era of mining and its proximity to high-quality natural resources, Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area offered a unique and compelling landscape for development of a mountain bike trail system. As one of Minnesota's newest state recreation areas, Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area was mostly undeveloped until the construction of the 22-mile mountain bike trail system (completed in late 2010 and open to the public in 2011).

From the project's inception, the design and construction team placed paramount importance on quality, with the explicit intent to create a facility that appeals to beginner through expert riders to entice new participants to take up the sport and experienced mountain bikers to return time and again to the site.

To achieve a high-quality outcome, the design and construction team committed to baseline principles to guide development:

- **Quality is more important than quantity** – 22 trail miles were developed that go beyond meeting basic requirements to exceed expectations of all trail users.
- **Bring the best design ideas to the table** – All project participants (ranging from the consultant team and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, local biking advocates, the general contractor, and others) were encouraged to provide design ideas.
- **Commit to win-win outcomes** – The spirit of collaboration and flexibility was central to the working relationship of all contributors.
- **Pay attention to details** – Designers worked directly with machine operators and field crews to ensure design nuances were realized.



### **Result Area 3: Programming and special events**

Programming and special events attract new users and retain existing users to Minnesota state and regional parks and trails by engaging users through their interests and teaching outdoor recreation skills in engaging and meaningful ways.

#### **Why is this important?**

Programs and special events are an effective way both to increase visitorship among current parks and trails users as well as attract new users to parks and trails.

Programs and special events give people who do not currently visit Minnesota parks and trails a tangible reason to visit. A program or special event may heighten their interest and excitement in visiting. It can also increase their comfort level.

A program or special event helps them make a decision. Choosing from among hundreds of parks and trails about which they know little to nothing can be a daunting task. Instead of being on their own to choose from among many parks and trails, they have a criterion for choosing one.

It encourages them to place a higher priority on this activity, because (unless done spontaneously) it requires them to “put it on their calendar” and *make* time for it instead of the idea of “We’ll visit *someday*.” People are more likely to follow through on an activity to which they have made a commitment. Because a program or special event requires a set date, it instills a sense of urgency—“If I don’t do it now, I’ll miss out.”

Skill-building programs overcome the obstacle of an individual feeling he or she does not possess the skills necessary to participate.<sup>xvi</sup> Since equipment is often provided, it also overcomes the obstacles of individuals not owning the equipment.

### **Priority Investment Strategies**

1. Expand introductory experience programs to attract new users and provide intermediate and advanced experience programs to retain existing users.
  - a. Expand introductory experience, skill-building programs, especially family oriented courses (e.g., introductory “I Can Camp!” overnight workshops, “I Can Climb!” workshops).
  - b. Expand intermediate experience, skill-building programs that are designed to increase visitorship among current users and encourage a repeat visit by introductory course participants (e.g., intermediate “I Can Camp!” overnight workshops).
  - c. Expand programs featuring new and emerging outdoor recreation (e.g., geocaching, kayaking, zip lines).
  - d. Create an “Outreach to New Park Users” pilot project within the seven-county metropolitan area with an array of partners including the Minnesota DNR, metro regional park and trail providers, the National Park Service, and other organizations.

*“We need programs that get people using parks and trails.”*

*“When kids get to experience parks and trails its transformative – magical things happen. “*

*“Provide educational programs for all ages but especially for young children and low-income families.”*

*– Parks and Trails Legacy Plan Public Workshop Participants*

## **Additional Important Strategies:**

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2. Recruit and welcome organizations and businesses who wish to conduct programs at Minnesota parks and trails.
  - a. Partner with outside organizations to offer a greater variety of programming (e.g., a canoe club may offer an introductory canoe class or a studio may offer a landscape painting course).
  - b. Build partnerships with organizations that have already established relationships with the target markets to provide programs and services (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs of Minnesota).
3. Be “responsive hosts” who welcome visitors attending a private event that utilizes the park or trail as a venue. Make a positive and lasting impression on these visitors.
  - a. Promote Minnesota parks and trails as a venue for wedding ceremonies and receptions, work events, race events, or other gatherings to increase visitorship.
  - b. Ensure a personal interaction with these potential repeat visitors. This requires a commitment by staff and volunteers to ensure a memorable first experience.
4. Ensure programming and special events cater to our target markets’ interests and needs.
  - a. Conduct target studies that help us better understand the types of programs and experiences wanted by the target markets.
  - b. Evaluate current programming to ensure that it is reaching and appeals to the desired target markets.
5. Utilize programs and special events as a method of attracting users during non-peak times.
  - a. Utilize programs as a means to attract users, particularly school-age children and retirees, during weekdays and the off-season.

## ***What We’re Doing***

### **Take a Day OFF! – Innovative Programming That Gets People Outdoors**

Take a Day OFF (outdoor family fun) events are aimed at introducing youth and their families to outdoor recreation and showing them that this fun is close to where they live. The events utilize previously established Minnesota DNR education and recreational programs to create awareness and appreciation of natural resources and promote the benefits of participation in outdoor recreation.



The events provide hands-on help with outdoor activities that attendees may have been hesitant to try on their own. Participants borrow GPS units to go on a high-tech treasure hunt, learning to geocache; get up close with live native fish and learn about fishing; and target shoot on the Lasershot range while learning about firearms safety and shooting techniques.

Take a Day OFF attracts youth from ethnic and racial groups that are historically underrepresented at Minnesota parks and trails. Participants have included Burmese youth from Maplewood, Vietnamese youth from Blaine, kids from the Ramsey County Sheriff’s Literacy Program and children and moms from the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women. For many, it was their first visit to a state park and their first time exploring the outdoors.

Take a Day OFF brings hundreds of new visitors to parks, but it also brings people back again on their own. Just ask the father of two boys who busily rattled off a list of the fun activities they did throughout the day: “And there’s one more thing we’re going to do before we leave,” said the dad. “We’re going to drive around the campground to pick out a campsite for next weekend!”



## **Result Area 4: Infrastructure and amenities**

Minnesota parks and trails facilities are designed, developed and redeveloped to support numerous experiences and activities and can readily adapt to new and emerging nature-based recreation activities.

### **Why is this important?**

The primary factor behind the trend of decreasing outdoor recreation participation is a decline in involvement among young adults and their children. We need to develop facilities and provide amenities that are attractive to this target market to motivate them to visit Minnesota parks and trails more often.

Over the next 25 years Minnesota's population will become older and more diverse and with those demographic shifts will come changes in outdoor recreation participation. It is important that we design our facilities so that they can adapt and continue to remain relevant far into the future.

Even without demographic shifts, people's interests naturally change as new activities emerge. With the fast pace of technology growth and our global culture we ought to create facilities that anticipate these changes and adapt as they emerge.

*"Update the parks with amenities to bring young people and kids to the parks."*

*"Design facilities that offer diversity of use and users while not impacting natural beauty."*

*"We need access to technology at visitor centers"*

*– Parks and Trails Legacy Plan Public Workshop Participants*

## **Priority Investment Strategies**

1. Design, develop and redevelop parks and trails facilities that meet the differing outdoor recreation needs of our target markets.
  - a. Redevelop camping facilities so that there are more group campsites, more separation and privacy between sites, and higher quality natural surroundings. Separate tent-camping and RV camping.
  - b. Develop and renovate swimming beaches, where suitable, that are clean, well-kept and family-friendly.
  - c. Design paved trails with high quality corridors and connections and maintain high quality surfaces.
  - d. Design facilities that enhance the natural setting, which is very important to visitors for a high quality experience.

## **Additional Important Strategies**

2. Create an environment that is open and flexible to accommodate new and emerging nature-based recreation uses.
  - a. Design facilities that support numerous activities and proactively adapt to new & emerging nature-based recreation activities (e.g. Geocaching, Skijoring, zip lines, pet-friendly areas)
  - b. Develop and maintain large open play areas that can be used for impromptu activities (e.g. picnicking, catch, kite flying).
3. Develop infrastructure and amenities that meet the lifestyles of our target markets.
  - a. Develop visitor centers with a comfortable "coffee house" feel (e.g., couches, fireplace) where visitors can relax, enjoy nature, read and play games. Consider large picture windows for nature observation and wildlife watching.
  - b. Develop group based opportunities such as group campsites, group picnic and cooking areas and gathering spaces.
  - c. Offer amenities that meet the lifestyles of our target markets (e.g., wireless internet service, playgrounds, family restrooms).
  - d. Integrate sustainability into Minnesota parks and trails (e.g., recycling, LED lighting, solar power, geothermal technology).

## ***What We're Doing***

### **Creating a Park to Meet the Lifestyle of Our Park Guests**

Silverwood Park, located in St. Anthony, MN, is Three Rivers Park District's newest recreation feature. The concept that guided park development was that of integrating environmental art into unique recreation features and active education opportunities. Silverwood Park serves as an outdoor classroom, provides inspiration for the creation of art, and supports a wide variety of recreational pursuits. In its first full year of operation park attendance exceeded 200,000.

A major contributor to Silverwood's success is the emphasis on sustainability and high quality amenities within the visitor center. While Silverwood is a park in the classic sense, with paved bike/hike trails, a fishing pier, and picnic shelters, it is also an art center with many gardens, a performing arts stage, gallery space, and changing environmental artwork. The visitor center amenities include a small coffee shop, a lounge with a large fireplace, and expansive windows with views of Silver Lake. This inviting setting combined with changing exhibitions in the art gallery generates a high level of repeat visits. A great hall adjacent to a patio overlooking the lake has been enormously popular as a wedding venue and rental revenue offsets a significant portion of park operating costs.

An emphasis on sustainable design has also proven to be an attraction that is well received by park visitors. The park utilizes geothermal technology, rain gardens, permeable pavers, storm water retention for irrigation reuse, and super insulation as examples of Three Rivers Park District's commitment to a sustainable future.



## **Result Area 5: Access**

All Minnesotans have convenient and affordable access to state and regional parks and trails.

### **Why is this important?**

Access consists of three major components: 1) a means to physically get to the park or trail, 2) accessibility and access to amenities in the park or trail for all ages, and 3) affordability.

During the Legacy public workshops, citizens consistently stated that they want close-to-home recreation opportunities, especially opportunities that can be accessed by walking and biking paths or public transportation.<sup>xvii</sup> Correspondingly, research findings show that people most often participate in outdoor recreation close to home.<sup>xviii</sup> A thoughtfully designed system that links parks and trails to communities and considers alternative modes of transportation can enhance and increase visitorship.

Parks and trails should be built with universal design principles that provide access to the natural resources and recreation opportunities within the park. Family restrooms, ramps, low counters, easy to access viewing areas and other universal design characteristics that benefit the young and old will increase accessibility of the park and overall enjoyment for all park visitors.

*“We need to cater more to our diverse populations so they have an easier time accessing parks and trails.”*

*“Parks need local and easy access for biking, hiking, nature walk and different education programs for all ages.”*

*“Improve accessibility with public transportation and location of parks and trails”*

*– Parks & Trails Legacy Plan Public Workshop Participants*

Affordability, or the perception of affordability, is a common constraint to recreation. Minnesota state and regional parks and trails already offer a wide variety of no-cost and low-cost experiences. These opportunities need to be promoted so that potential users are aware and inspired to try new things with little financial investment. For low-income groups, where cost is truly a concern, we need to ensure that fees that do exist do not unreasonably prevent access. We need to recognize that cost includes equipment and transportation to and

from a park or trail. Including equipment in programs and removing transportation expenses by offering transportation for trial experiences or thoughtfully designing parks for alternative transportation modes may help mitigate cost concerns.

### **Priority Investment Strategies:**

1. Design and redevelop parks and trails so that they can accommodate varying forms of transportation to sites (i.e. driving, walking, biking, etc.).
  - a. When feasible, parks and trails should be within reasonable distance to homes or public transportation outlets that people can access them without cars. Creating trails that connect communities to parks is an important strategy to pursue.
2. Provide transportation to programs and special events tailored as first experience (trial) opportunities.
  - a. Prioritize focus in areas with known low mobility.
  - b. Partner with organizations that will transport people to parks and trails (e.g., community centers, schools, senior centers).

### **Additional Important Strategies:**

3. Design, develop, rehabilitate, and manage park and trail facilities to encourage use by people with disabilities.
  - a. Minnesota state and regional parks and trails providers should conduct the Universal Trail Assessment Process in order to help trail users determine which trails meet their interests and abilities and to provide facility managers with information about investments that would improve accessibility.
  - b. Facilities should meet the ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities.
  - c. Provide information that allows users and potential users to decide if a park or trail meets their interests and abilities.
4. Continue to keep costs for parks and trails affordable.
  - a. Keep user fees affordable.
  - b. Strategically offer programming and equipment rentals at little to no charge where it will encourage first experience trials.
  - c. Address the perception of affordability in marketing communications.

## ***What We're Doing:***

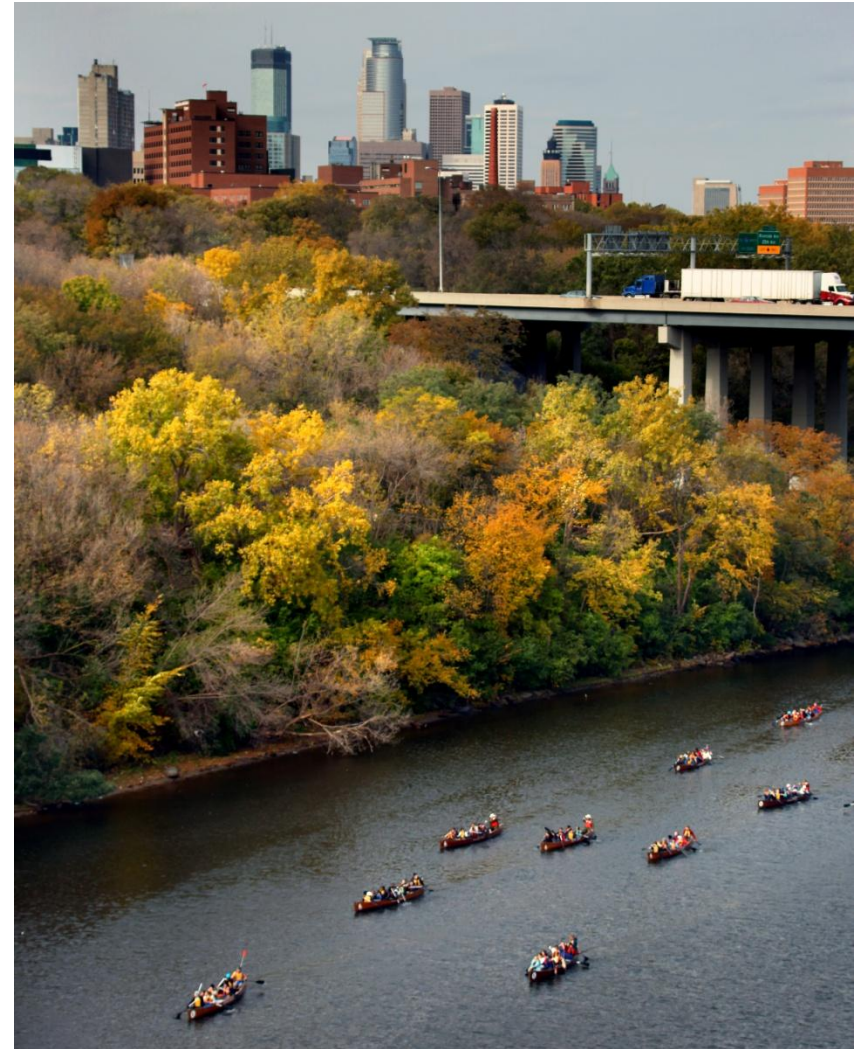
### **Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures – Creating Access to the Outdoors**

Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures (UWCA) is a unique partnership that connects urban youth to the outdoors by providing access to outdoor recreation experiences.

Spearheaded by Wilderness Inquiry, the National Park Service, and many other organizations, the UWCA is working with Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools, as well as other youth organizations, to introduce youth to the Mississippi River, the National Park, Fort Snelling State Park and city, county and municipal parklands. UWCA leads urban youth on day-long and overnight canoe trips on the Mississippi River through the heart of the Twin Cities. The program is curriculum based and is intended to help students graduate. For students in summer school, the UWCA helps with credit recovery. The UWCA is fully accessible for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. The pilot season of the UWCA brought more than 4,000 kids out on the river in 2009 and their goal is to reach more than 10,000 youth and their families annually—encouraging outdoor recreation and environmental stewardship as life-long pursuits.

In addition to introducing youth to public lands and stewardship, the UWCA is seeking to address what has been described as the “summer learning loss” that is a major culprit in the achievement gap. Recently, the UWCA was recognized by the President's “America’s Great Outdoors” initiative and awarded a grant by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Funding for the UWCA comes from multiple sources, including the Mississippi River Fund, the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, various private sources, fee for service and in-kind donations.

For more information: <http://www.wildernessinquiry.org/uwca>





## **Result Area 6: Partnerships**

Minnesota state and regional parks and trails strategically utilize partnerships that expand our capacity to increase outdoor recreation participation.

### **Why is this important?**

Minnesota parks and trails simply do not have enough personnel and financial resources to meet the ever-expanding recreation needs of a growing population with such diverse outdoor recreation demands that Minnesotans have. However, through partnerships we can reach more people, provide more services and maintain higher quality facilities than we could ever do on our own.

Often times, partnerships have been used as a strategy to accomplish short-term objectives, but our public workshops have reinforced that long-term relationship building over brief one-time collaboration is the key to successful partnership building.<sup>xix</sup> Therefore, we are undergoing a paradigm shift in which a priority is placed on building long-term relationships and partnerships as a means to increase outdoor recreation participation. This is particularly true with new immigrant and racial and ethnic minority groups who are historically underrepresented at parks and trails.

*“Long range strategies and relationships need to be developed if you want to get input from racial and ethnic minorities. You need to develop communication strategies with minorities.”*

*“Visionary leadership is partnering with organizations and citizen groups to make sure the parks and trails are used, valued and maintained.”*

*“A lot of accomplishments have happened due to partnerships and volunteer efforts and will continue to be important in the future.”*

*– Parks and Trails Legacy Plan Public Workshop Participants*

### **Priority Investment Strategies:**

1. Build relationships with organizations and community leaders that help us better reach our target markets.
  - a. Develop long-lasting, trusting relationships with new immigrant and racial and ethnic minority group organizations and community leaders. Devote ongoing staff resources committed to these interactions.
  - b. Invest in relationship building with schools, recreation centers and youth groups in order to reach youth and young adults. Promote opportunities for field trips, site visits and summer camps.
  - c. Reach out to faith-based organizations as a means to reach our target markets, particularly racial and ethnic minorities.
  - d. Reach out to senior centers and group tour operators in order to maintain visitorship by older adults.

### **Additional Important Strategies:**

2. Develop partnerships with “friends of” groups that will help maintain, promote and support Minnesota parks and trails.
  - a. “Friends of” groups can help increase the quality of a facility – and hence increase visitorship – by maintaining the buildings and grounds.
  - b. “Friends of” groups’ commitment to a specific park or trail can be one of the best forms of promotion as they generate word-of-mouth advertising.
  - c. “Friends of” groups may be able to hold fundraisers or otherwise support particular activities or events at parks and trails that will increase participation (e.g., scholarships for programs or equipment)
3. Develop partnerships with private industry; partner with companies that share goals and/or target markets and enhance the image of the park or trail provider. Partner with the lodging industry.

## ***What We're Doing***

### **The "Outdoor Heritage Lab" – Partnering**

The "Outdoor Heritage Lab" is a cooperative program operated by the Anoka County Parks and Recreation Department in conjunction with 11 local school districts and a variety of private schools. The program operates at a location on Peltier Lake in the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve, in Lino Lakes. The program provides hands-on educational opportunities for elementary age students to experience life as it was on the prairie during the time of settlement. Since 1989, the program has been funded through a generous donation from Connexus Energy, a local electric utility. In that time, nearly 520,000 students have benefited from this unique partnership, with Connexus contributions exceeding \$500,000.

A more recent partnership at the Heritage Lab began in the summer of 2010. After exploring several sites in the east metro area, the YMCA of Greater St. Paul entered into an agreement with Anoka County to use the Heritage Lab for their summer day camp. To provide a quality camp experience, the YMCA contracts with the Wargo Nature Center staff to provide environmental and recreational programs. In its initial year, the partnership brought more than 1,000 youth to the park, including kids from the core urban areas of St. Paul.



Long term plans include upgrading of permanent facilities that can be used by the YMCA and Anoka County Parks throughout the year. Additional opportunities are being sought for use of the site by local communities and the general public.



## **Result Area 7: Marketing**

Connect Minnesota residents and tourists to high quality information which informs them of available opportunities and inspires them to use parks and trails.

### **Why is this important?**

Some of the major reasons people say they do not recreate more often, or at all, is because they don't have enough information or they lack the time.<sup>xx</sup> Through marketing and promotion, we can improve the quality and availability of information.

When faced with a lack of time, one of the key strategies state park visitors employ is to plan ahead for the park visit.<sup>xxi</sup> Trip planning requires extensive information on the park or trail. We need to improve the information available and make it easier to access.

A lack of time is also a surrogate for priority. If something is a priority, than people find time for it. We need to establish parks and trails as a priority for both users and non-users through promotion, advertising, education, public relations and communication. We need to appeal to their priorities and demonstrate how parks and trails align with those.

### **Priority Investment Strategies**

1. Promote Minnesota's parks and trail facilities, programs and activities so that potential and current users are aware of and motivated to use what Minnesota state and regional parks and trails have to offer.
  - a. Market Minnesota's various parks and trails as a collective network.
  - b. Develop a detailed marketing campaign that cross-promotes parks and trails throughout the state.
  - c. Develop measures to evaluate available capacity and the success of marketing campaigns.
  - d. Work to incorporate the promotion of parks and trails into existing destination promotion (e.g. chamber of commerce, convention & visitor bureaus)

### **Additional Important Strategies:**

2. Maintain ongoing marketing research to better understand our target markets' preferred ways of receiving information, motivations, attitudes and beliefs.
  - a. Conduct a statewide outdoor recreation participation survey about once every five years.
3. Utilize technology to deliver timely and relevant messages regarding Minnesota state and regional parks and trails.
  - a. Strive to adopt "latest & greatest" information technology to attract "early adopters" and to ensure preparedness for mainstream technology expectations.
  - b. Develop online learning technologies that can be utilized by schools.
  - c. Research the technology demands and expectations of our target markets and provide information accordingly.
  - d. Continue to develop virtual tours of parks and trails that can be accessed on websites, through mobile applications, and other emerging technologies.
4. Base marketing plans on the "marketing mix" to ensure marketing efforts are comprehensive, addressing all elements of the marketing mix: "product, price, promotion, and place (distribution)." (Appendix xx).
5. Update and expand loyalty marketing programs to retain current users and to encourage more frequent use.

*"Enhance the marketing and awareness of the opportunities for use."*

*"Marketing and awareness are the key to successfully bringing the next generation to the parks."*

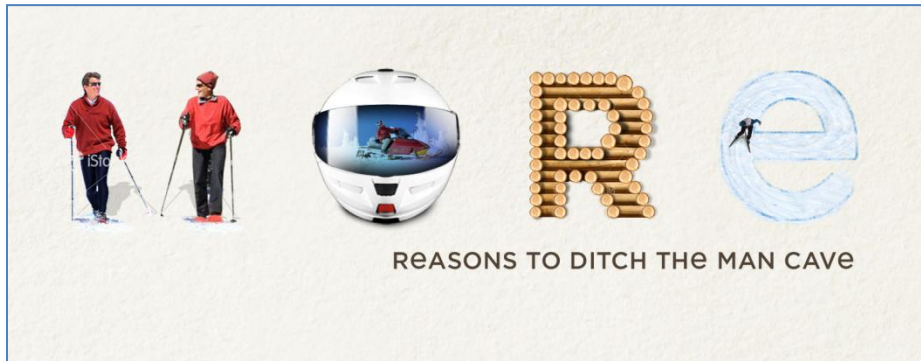
*"Promote parks and trails in schools and community based organizations."*

*– Parks and Trails Legacy Plan Public Workshop Participants*



## What We're Doing

### "More to Explore" – Marketing the State as One



The 2010 "More to Explore" campaign by Explore Minnesota Tourism promotes statewide tourism highlights by appealing to audiences most inclined to travel in Minnesota. The overall strategy centers on active and experiential travel. The campaign features different travel ideas, versus specific destinations, businesses, or attractions. It plants ideas that relate to the key travel interests of target consumers in the seasons they are most likely to travel. These messages can be invitations for consumers to find their perfect park or trail or to explore other attractions and events during their travels.

By collaborating as a team across Minnesota and/or partnering with Explore Minnesota Tourism, campaigns like "More to Explore" can bring more people to Minnesota's state and regional parks and trails. Parks and trails offer compelling activities for outdoor enthusiasts and for families looking for value and wholesome entertainment. Marketing as a part of this campaign appeals to these emotional triggers and focuses on the availability of unique parks and trails activities and programs to achieve these outcomes. Marketing minimizes emphasis on the category of park or trail as consumers are more concerned with the experience than the categorical distinctions of the park or trail (state, county, city).

Marketing as a coalition (local, county, regional, state) strengthens parks and trails' overall position. Ultimately, it can give consumers "More to Explore."

For an example of the promotion of hiking, go to:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEE2r6JBI40>



## Marketing Mix (The Four Ps)

The public today is presented with an abundance of choices of how to spend their free time. The marketing mix is a tool that aids in developing marketing plans that are comprehensive and integrated. Basing planning on the marketing mix helps to thoughtfully design parks and trails to attract users and should be a major component of the planning process.

### **Product: A good, service, or idea to satisfy the consumer's needs.**

The product is the parks and trails experience including the facility, the services (including customer service), and programs offered at the facility. The product also includes programs offered by the park or trail system off-site or online. (It does not include information presented online to facilitate a visit—that is considered promotion.)

Of all the elements of the marketing mix, product is the cornerstone. If the product does not satisfy the target market's needs, the other elements of the marketing mix will not be able to overcome this in the long term.

### **Price: What is exchanged for the product.**

Price includes entrance fees, lodging fees (on-site), program fees, equipment rental fees, and other fees charged by the park or trail system.

### **Promotion: A means of communication between the seller and buyer.**

Promotion includes: advertising, personal selling, public relations, sales promotion, and direct marketing. Some marketing managers will also include sponsorship/event marketing as its own element.

### **Place (Distribution): A means of getting the product to the consumer.**

Place involves marketing channels, which consist of individuals and organizations involved in the process of making the product or service available for use or consumption by consumers (or industrial users). It can be compared with a pipeline.

Since Minnesota parks and trails offer mainly experiential products, most of the “use” is done on-site at the parks and trails. Exceptions are programs conducted at locations other than the park or trail, including online programs; permits and passes that are sold at other locations; and merchandise sold through a retail program.

Place (distribution) decisions include:

- Locations to build a park, trail, water trail, fishing pier, boat launch, or safe harbor.
- Setting up agents to sell permits and passes and choosing agents to do so.
- Selecting reservation management companies and systems.
- Selecting off-site locations to provide interpretive programs.
- Online delivery of educational/interpretive programs.
- Locations to sell merchandise.

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<sup>i</sup> Kelly, T. (2008); Metropolitan Council (1998). *Twin Cities Regional Parks 1998 Summer Visitor Study*. Saint Paul, MN: Metropolitan Council.

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Schneider, I.E., Schuweiler, A. & Bipes, T. (2009). *Profile of 2008 Recreation Trail Users*. Saint Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, Department of Forest Resources.

<sup>ii</sup> Kelly, T. (2008); Kelly, T. (2010); Schneider et. al. (2009).

<sup>iii</sup> Kelly, T. (2008); Kelly, T. (2010).

<sup>iv</sup> Kelly, T. (2008)

<sup>v</sup> Kelly, T. (2008)

<sup>vi</sup> Minnesota State Demographic Center (2009). *Minnesota population projections by race and ethnicity, 2005 to 2035*. Saint Paul, MN: Minnesota Department of Administration; Kelly, T. (2008); Kelly, T. (2010)

<sup>vii</sup> Kelly, T. (2008)

<sup>viii</sup> Minnesota State Demographic Center (2009)

<sup>ix</sup> Kelly, T. (2008); Kelly, T. (2010)

<sup>x</sup> Bengston, D.N., & Schermann, M (2000). Hmong Americans: Issues and Strategies Related to Outdoor Recreation. In Allison, M.T., & Schneider, I.E. (Eds). (2000). *Diversity in the Recreation Profession: Organizational Perspectives*. Venture Publishing: State College, PA.

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<sup>xi</sup> Minnesota State Demographic Center (2010). *Minnesota Population Projections by Age and Gender, 2008-2060*. Saint Paul, MN: Minnesota Department of Administration.

<sup>xii</sup> Kelly, T. (2008).

<sup>xiii</sup> Solop, F.I., Hagen, K.I. & Ostergren, D. *Ethnic and Racial Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors, Technical Report*. Flagstaff, AZ: Social Research Laboratory, Northern Arizona University

<sup>xiv</sup> Solop, F.I., Hagen, K.I. & Ostergren, D. *Ethnic and Racial Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors, Technical Report*. Flagstaff, AZ: Social Research Laboratory, Northern Arizona University

<sup>xv</sup> Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc. (2009). *2009 State of Students of Color & American Indian Students – Executive Summary*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc.

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<sup>xix</sup> Laurie Young, Public meeting – proper citation needed.

<sup>xx</sup> Kelly, T. (2008)

<sup>xxi</sup> Kelly, T. (2008)

<sup>xvii</sup> Add Public Participation Report Citation

<sup>xviii</sup> Kelly, T. (2008); Kelly, T. (2010)