

PARKS AND TRAILS LEGACY PLAN

Parks and Trails of State and Regional Significance

A 25-year long-range plan for Minnesota



February 14, 2011



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February 14, 2011

It is our pleasure to introduce the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*. Funding created by the Legacy Amendment gives us a unique opportunity to improve and expand Minnesota's parks and trails of state and regional significance. This allows us to look out 25 years to envision a future in which parks and trails play a significant role in the lives of *all* Minnesotans.

Our extensive 18-month public engagement effort allows us to confidently state that this is a parks and trails plan *for* Minnesotans and *by* Minnesotans. This planning effort established an open, transparent, and interactive dialogue with a wide variety of participants. It resulted in high-quality recommendations that are grounded in what Minnesotans expressed as their priorities.

Discussions and planning have taken place during a time of economic hardship. This sometimes made it difficult to look beyond the considerable immediate financial challenges facing the state. Yet, in the end, we succeeded in hosting conversations that looked forward at what could be, rather than focusing solely on today's limitations.

We believe this plan will create something big and enduring. It will enable people to attain the full range of benefits that parks and trails provide: individual, community, environmental and economic. Our hope is that 25 years from now,

Minnesotans will look back and say the Parks and Trails Legacy Amendment accomplished what they hoped for—and more.

The plan recognizes the world-class network of parks and trails Minnesota currently has in place. It proposes to build on this foundation, making user experiences even better. It is based on four strategic directions that together ensure a great future for parks and trails:

- Connect people and the outdoors.
- Acquire land and create opportunities.
- Take care of what we have.
- Coordinate among providers.

Our top priorities are identified throughout this document with a “priority stamp.”



These are recommendations for where work should begin during the first five years of plan implementation.

We strongly recommend continuing regular dialogue with Minnesotans as the Parks and Trails Legacy plan is implemented. This part of the planning effort has been significant and valuable. Continued conversation will ensure that implementation results in a network of parks and trails in Minnesota that truly deserves to be called “a legacy.”

Sincerely,
The Parks and Trails Legacy Steering Committee

Minnesota's Parks and Trails Legacy Plan

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Workgroup Reports and Other Supporting Information

www.legacy.leg.mn/funds/parks-trails-fund/plan

- Benefits Workgroup Report
- Increasing Outdoor Recreation Participation Workgroup Report
- Innovative Examples of Increasing Outdoor Recreation Participation Matrix
- Recreation Opportunities Workgroup Report
- Connected, Integrated Workgroup Report
- Coordination Among Providers Workgroup Report
- Funding Workgroup Report
- Citizens League Public Participation Report
- Youth Outreach Report

Parks and Trails Legacy Planning

Executive Summary

Legislative Mandate

- In 2008, Minnesotans passed the Clean Water Land and Legacy Act (the “Legacy Amendment”). It is funded by a 3/8 percent increase in the state sales tax. State and regional parks and trails receive 14.25 percent of the funds generated from the Amendment.
- The Minnesota State Legislature mandated that the Department of Natural Resources develop a 25-year, long-range Parks and Trails Legacy Plan. It will help guide how the Legacy Funds, as well as other traditional sources of funding, should be spent for parks and trails of state and regional significance.
- The Department of Natural Resources also worked with the University of Minnesota’s Center for Changing Landscapes. The University developed a parks and trails inventory and framework to support and inform this plan.

Extensive Public Outreach is the Foundation of the Plan

- Over 18 months, an extensive public engagement effort was conducted. It included a kick-off summit with recreation and conservation leaders, 17 listening workshops throughout the state, outreach to more than 1,000 youth and young adults, extensive web-based input, targeted meetings with diverse racial and ethnic groups, and four final public review workshops, along with additional web-based review of the draft plan.
- Seven DNR-led teams of recreation and conservation professionals used this public input and developed 10-year strategies for parks and trails of state and regional significance.

A Parks and Trails Vision for Minnesotans

In 2035, our world-class parks and trails connect everyone to the outdoors. They create experiences that inspire a legacy of stewardship for the natural world and they provide fun outdoor recreational opportunities that strengthen friendships, families, health, and spirit, now and into the future.

Minnesotans experience the full range of benefits that outdoor recreation provides, reinforcing our identity as an outdoor culture.

Four Strategic Directions Frame the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan

The following four areas serve as the heart of this 25-year, long-range plan, establishing the future direction for parks and trails of state and regional significance. They are grounded in what we heard from Minnesotans throughout the participation effort.

- **Connect People and the Outdoors:** better develop Minnesota's stewards of tomorrow through efforts to increase life-long participation in parks and trails.
- **Acquire Land, Create Opportunities:** create new and expanded park and trail opportunities to satisfy current customers as well as to reach out to new ones.
- **Take Care of What We Have:** provide safe, high-quality park and trail experiences by regular re-investment in park and trail infrastructure, and natural resource management.
- **Coordinate Among Partners:** enhance coordination across the large and complex network of public, private, and non-profit partners that support Minnesota's parks and trails to ensure seamless, enjoyable park and trail experiences for Minnesotans.

Top Priorities for the First Five Years of Legacy Plan Implementation

Here are the top priorities for each of the four strategic directions. These strategies will be regularly updated (at least every five years) during plan implementation. To learn more about these strategies, and others, go to the Strategic Direction chapters.

Connect People and the Outdoors

- Do more effective marketing. Time and again, Minnesotans expressed a need for better information, including more integrated web-based offerings, to increase awareness of recreational opportunities.
- Provide a welcoming environment with programs and special events to attract first-time visitors to parks and trails. Adapt to Minnesota's changing demographics, which suggest a more diverse and older population.
- Physically connect communities with parks and trails and make them accessible to people of all abilities.

Acquire Land, Create Opportunities

- Accelerate acquisition of private land within a park or trail boundary (private in-holdings).
- Make high-priority trail connections and fill critical gaps.
- Focus on near-home, convenient opportunities in areas projected to grow most rapidly over the coming 25 years, near regional centers, and in areas of shortage.

Take Care of What We Have

- Accelerate rehabilitation of aging park and trail infrastructure, to ensure high-quality experiences.
- Preserve existing high-quality natural resources and restore those that have been degraded. Place a priority on controlling the spread of invasive species.

Coordinate Among Partners

- Provide interested users the ability to find what they want easily. Develop and maintain integrated and standardized information (e.g., website) about parks and trails of state and regional significance.
- Establish a statewide advisory committee to help foster a network of parks and trails with a seamless user experience.
- Enhance coordination among the four Legacy Funds.

Guidelines for Making Parks and Trails Legacy Plan Funding Decisions

- Achieve big, tangible outcomes that make a long-term difference.
- Take a balanced approach to supporting a range of parks and trails needs—from acquisition, to development, to taking care of what we have, to restoration, to programming and marketing.
- Understand regional differences. The needs, priorities, resources, and existing infrastructure vary greatly across Minnesota.

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Introduction

Lakes and rivers, open plains and deep forests, paved trails, horse trails, and off-road areas ... Minnesota has a wealth of parks and trails and we Minnesotans enjoy them. Nearly 60 percent said, in a 2004 survey, that outdoor recreation is very important to their lives. We hike, bike, camp, ski, fish, hunt, go boating, and more.

Every park and trail user knows the benefits of natural outdoor space, but the benefits of our parks, trails, and green spaces extend far beyond those who use them; they touch the lives of every person who lives and works in Minnesota. Improving our physical and psychological health, strengthening our communities, making our state and its cities more attractive places to live and work, protecting the environment ... the benefits of parks and trails are comprehensive for Minnesota residents, communities, the economy, and the environment.

This important part of who we are as a state and its residents faces a number of challenges today: increased usage, limited resources, new kinds of users with a variety of interests, aging infrastructure, competing demands for land use, and a complex network of agencies, organizations, and funding sources.

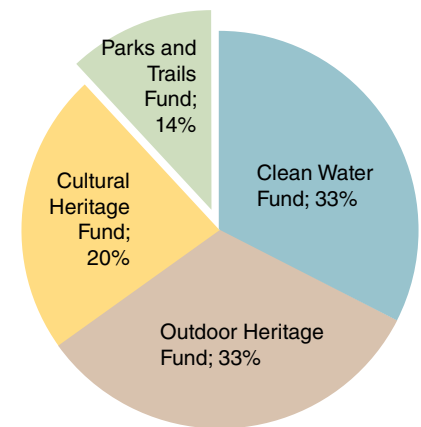
The Legacy Amendment

Minnesotans have shown their commitment to the state's natural resources and its cultural heritage in a dramatic way: They chose to invest in them over the long-term, even in a difficult economic climate. On November 4, 2008, Minnesotans passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, which increased the state sales tax by 3/8 of 1 percent (from 6.5 percent to 6.875 percent) for 25 years, to provide new funding for outdoor preservation, water quality, arts and culture and parks and trails.

The Parks and Trails Fund will receive 14.25 percent of the Legacy Funds, or about \$1.26 billion over 25 years, to support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance. (In FY 2010, the Parks and Trails Fund received about \$35 million; in FY 2011, \$39 million.)

While other states across the nation are limiting their activities and future expectations for parks and trails, the passage of the Legacy Amendment affords Minnesotans the unique opportunity to lay out a vision and direction for how parks and trails will be an integral part of our identified over the next 25 years. This opportunity will provide multiple benefits for the state, ranging from personal and community health benefits to economic development to developing the next generation of stewards for the outdoor resources we value.

Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment Funding



14% = about \$40
million/year

Long-Range Planning Process

The 2009-2010 Minnesota Legislature mandated that the commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources develop a 25-year long-range plan and a 10-year strategic coordination plan for the use of the money in the Parks and Trails Fund and other traditional sources of funding. This *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* encompasses both of these requirements. The 25-year plan includes the vision and guiding principles (p. 4), the four strategic directions (pp. 5-31) and the guidelines for funding (pp. 32-34). The strategies within the four strategic directions constitute the 10-year strategic coordination plan.

In response to this new opportunity and legislative direction, DNR developed a collaborative planning process that relies heavily on citizen involvement to develop and finalize the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*. This ensures that the 25-year vision and plan will be meaningful for Minnesota citizens. The planning process has included four main components:

- Active citizen engagement across the state of Minnesota.
- A collaborative steering committee.
- Focused working groups that developed recommendations.
- Reliance on useful information from the University of Minnesota and other sources.

Citizen engagement is the foundation of the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*. DNR contracted with the Citizens League, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that promotes civic involvement in public policy decisions, to design and conduct meaningful citizen involvement. What we heard from citizens helped shape this plan's vision and recommendations.

DNR also contracted with Conservation Corps Minnesota to design and conduct youth and young adult outreach to obtain input for the plan. Conservation Corps Minnesota is a non-profit organization that provides hands-on environmental stewardship and service learning opportunities to youth and young adults while accomplishing energy conservation, natural resource management, and emergency response work.

A Steering Committee has guided development of the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan. This group has members representing a variety of interests, including state and regional park and trail providers, user groups, tourism, and nonprofits. The Steering Committee ensured that the process was collaborative and included effective public participation. It also integrated citizen input into a meaningful vision and provided direction for the overall plan.

Seven topic-area workgroups made up of recreation and conservation professionals analyzed extensive information, including citizen input and new research. They produced the required legislative deliverables and developed draft recommendations. Full workgroup reports on these topics are available at www.legacy.leg.mn/funds/parks-trails-fund/plan.

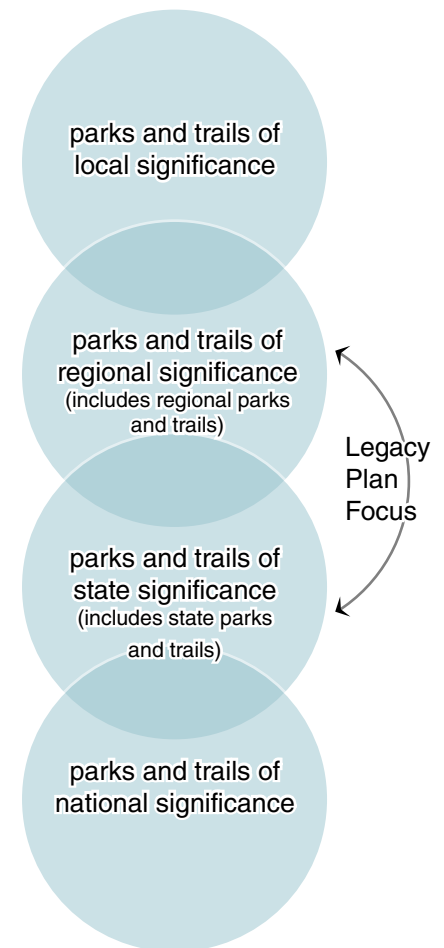
Information from the University of Minnesota and other sources ensured that the plan is up-to-date and based on scientifically sound information. The University's Center for Changing Landscapes developed an inventory of parks and trails by county and an accompanying database that served as a valuable reference for plan development. Information from the inventory and framework was used as it became available during the planning process. The final products will be useful tools for future system planning by park and trail providers. Collaboration among the DNR, the Steering Committee, and the University occurred throughout the planning process. Three other key studies that provided critical information for the plan were the *DNR Division of Parks and Trails Ten-Year Strategic Plan*, the Metropolitan Council's *2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, and the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources' *Greater Minnesota Park Inventory Regional Park Criteria—Final Report, January 2005*.

Scope of the Plan

The *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* guides investment decisions for parks and trails of state and regional significance. The plan includes recommendations for use of Legacy and other traditional sources of funding.

State and regional facilities offer nature-based recreation opportunities. Along the spectrum of facilities from the national to the neighborhood, state and regional facilities occupy a middle ground. For example, state and regional parks are generally not as extensive as national parks, but they are usually larger and offer more natural resource based recreation opportunities than city and other local parks. Examples of natural resource activities include camping, picnicking, hiking, swimming, boating, canoeing, fishing, and nature study. Similarly, state and regional trails tend to offer longer-distance opportunities in more natural settings than city and other local trails.

This plan is meant to serve as an umbrella for all natural resource-based activities that occur on parks and trails of state and regional significance.



A Vision for Minnesotans

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

- Every Minnesotan has a strong connection to natural resource-based parks and trails throughout the state. Young people, families, and seniors are active outdoors and as a result are healthy. Minnesotans who have traditionally not participated at the same levels at parks and trails (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities, including new immigrants) are active outdoors and feel welcome.
- Minnesota's network of parks and trails contributes significantly to our quality of life. All Minnesota communities are connected to parks and trails and take responsibility for their high quality.
- Minnesota's network of parks and trails is a vital part of our state and local economies. It contributes significantly to the state's tourism economy and Minnesota businesses promote it to attract and retain highly skilled workers who want to live here.
- Minnesota's network of parks and trails is a gateway to our lands and waters. It provides recreational opportunities that conserve important natural resources, increases personal connections to the natural world, and builds a culture of love and respect for the outdoors.

Guiding Principles for Parks and Trails Legacy Investments

- **Stewardship.** Build responsibility for Minnesota's natural resources, with a particular emphasis on engaging the next generation of Minnesotans.
- **Focus on children.** Recognize that children are the pathway to increasing participation and environmental stewardship.
- **Inclusiveness.** Support opportunities that welcome all Minnesota's diverse population.
- **Accessibility.** Support opportunities for people of all abilities. Remove constraints between people and the outdoors and enable active lifestyles.
- **Orientation to the future.** Be strategic, and research-and data-driven, and have a sense of priority.
- **Connectedness.** Build an interconnected system with parks, trails, lakes, rivers, and natural areas that are accessible to all Minnesotans.
- **Significance and endurance.** Create opportunities, perhaps intangible, that do not exist today. Build on the current successful network of parks and trails.
- **Supplement, don't replace.** Enhance current parks and trails revenue streams; don't replace them.
- **Partnerships.** Optimize use of Legacy Funds by encouraging coordinated and collaborative approaches.
- **Accountability.** Be transparent and easily understandable to the public.

Legacy Plan Recommendations

Four strategic directions frame the Legacy Plan for Parks and Trails, developed by seven workgroups made up of people representing diverse perspectives and interests and coordinated by a similarly diverse Steering Committee. These strategic directions were informed by extensive public engagement including 17 regional workshops; targeted meetings with racial and ethnic minorities; youth and young adult inputs; and online tools.

The four strategic directions are:

- Connect People and the Outdoors.
- Acquire Land, Create Opportunities.
- Take Care of What We Have.
- Coordinate Among Partners.

The plan presents priorities for parks and trails of state and regional significance, including identifying gaps and making recommendations to address them. For each of the strategic directions, it describes the desired outcome, the importance of that outcome and strategies for achieving it. Workgroups reports were used to inform strategy development. For more information regarding each strategic direction, please see: www.legacy.leg.mn/funds/parks-trails-fund/plan



MNDNR



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City of St. Paul

Connect People and the Outdoors

Why is This Important?

The decline in outdoor recreation participation is an alarming trend. A smaller percentage of Minnesotans is taking part in outdoor recreation, which means fewer who receive—and understand—the benefits those activities bring, everything from physical activity to social and family bonding to education for children. People who engage with nature are more likely to have an appreciation of the natural world—and to want to support and maintain it for future generations. Participants in the Legacy Plan Public Engagement Workshops emphasized the importance of building Minnesota's next generation of stewards for the state's natural areas. One of the most effective ways to do that is by increasing outdoor recreation participation.



Sampling maple syrup at Lake Maria State Park.

Deborah Rose, MNDNR

Desired Outcome

Over the next 25 years, the state's population is projected to increase by 19 percent; the number of visits to Minnesota's parks and trails of state and regional importance should increase by at least this much. This increase would encourage life-long visitation by individuals and families and foster a sense of stewardship passed on from generation to generation.

How to Get There

People are more likely to take part in outdoor recreation if they feel welcome, can get to outdoor areas easily, know what's available, and have good experiences. Seven key strategies are designed to retain existing users as well as create increased participation by a broad range of Minnesotans and new visitors of different ages, ethnicities, physical abilities, and interests.

The seven key strategies are:

- Welcoming environment
- Access
- Marketing
- Quality
- Programming and special events
- Partnerships
- Infrastructure and amenities

Benchmarks for Desired Outcomes

In order to determine progress, providers should measure the following:

- Visits to Minnesota's parks and trails of state and regional significance.
- Visits from youth and young adults to Minnesota state parks and trails.
- Visits from youth and young adults to regional parks and trails.

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. If we're to successfully increase outdoor recreation participation, there is a need to develop strategies geared towards addressing the needs of these groups.

Target markets include:

- Youth
- Young adults
- Families w/children
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- New immigrants
- Older adults

Welcoming environment

Everyone should feel welcome, safe and comfortable in parks and on trails, even if they have not had much experience in the outdoors.



Strategies:

1. Mentor, recruit, and hire employees and volunteers who reflect the population of the users they serve.

- 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.
- Expand volunteer, internship, and employment opportunities for youth (e.g., grounds maintenance, lifeguards, program leaders).
- Expand internship, on-the-job training, and entry-level job opportunities that can transition into careers for young adults.
- Create and support mentor and volunteer programs that engage older adults and community leaders to serve as mentors and volunteers.
- Create and support ambassadorship programs for minority groups, in which park and trail providers connect with communities by working within their culture.
- Include youth and young adults in planning processes for facility and program development.
- Expand service-learning opportunities to help young people develop knowledge and skills through hands-on work at parks and trails.

2. Provide ongoing diversity training to Minnesota state and regional parks and trails employees.

- Assess existing organizational values and attitudes as they relate to diversity.
- Provide training to employees on customs and expectations of visitors.

3. Help visitors, through education efforts, understand expectations and rules of parks and trails.

- Create programs, interpretive media, and educational materials that celebrate past and present cultures in Minnesota and their unique heritage and values related to outdoor recreation.
- Recognize new and emerging cultures to Minnesota (e.g., Somali and Hispanic), as well as more established cultures in Minnesota (e.g., Native American and Scandinavian).
- Develop publications, signs, and other materials in multiple languages.
- Host cultural/ethnic celebration events, especially targeting first-time visitors to Minnesota parks and trails.



Conservation Corps Minnesota

Conservation Corps Minnesota is a non-profit that provides hands-on environmental stewardship and service learning opportunities to young people while accomplishing conservation and emergency-response work.

Access

Minnesotans should have parks and trails they can get to easily, with amenities they can use and afford.



Strategies:

1. **Design and redevelop parks and trails so that they can accommodate varying forms of transportation to sites (e.g., driving, walking, biking, ATV riding).**
 - When feasible, parks and trails should be within reasonable distance to homes or public transportation so that people can access them without cars.
2. **Provide transportation to programs and special events tailored as first experience (trial) opportunities.**
 - Prioritize increased transportation options in areas with low transit opportunities.
 - Partner with organizations that will transport people to parks and trails (e.g., community centers, schools, senior centers).
3. **Design, develop, rehabilitate, and manage park and trail facilities to encourage use by people with all abilities.**
 - Provide information that allows users and potential users to decide if a park or trail meets their interests and abilities.
 - Meet the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines.
 - Conduct trail assessments to help trail users determine which trails meet their interests and abilities and provide facility managers with information about investments that would improve accessibility.
4. **Continue to keep costs for parks and trails affordable.**
 - Keep user fees affordable.
 - Strategically offer programming and equipment rentals at little to no charge where it will encourage first experience trials.
 - Address the perception of affordability in marketing communications.



Stearns County

Access for people of all abilities,
Lake Wobegon Trail.



Marketing

Connection strategies create links with Minnesota residents and tourists that inform, persuade and remind the target audience about parks and trails. These strategies engage and motivate the target audiences to become involved in outdoor recreation.

Strategies:

1. **Promote the experiences, programs, and activities that visitors may have at parks and trail facilities, so that potential and current users are aware of and motivated to use state and regional parks and trails.**
 - Market Minnesota's various parks and trails as a collective network.
 - Develop marketing strategies that cross-promote parks and trails throughout the state.
 - Develop measures to evaluate available capacity and the success of marketing campaigns.
 - Work to incorporate the promotion of parks and trails into existing destination promotion (e.g. Chamber of Commerce, convention & visitor bureaus)
2. **Maintain ongoing marketing research to better understand our target markets' preferred ways of receiving information, motivations, attitudes, and beliefs.**
 - Conduct park and trail use and satisfaction research.
 - 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.**
 - Strive to adopt "latest and greatest" information technology to attract early adopters and to ensure preparedness for mainstream technology expectations.
 - Develop online learning technologies that can be utilized by schools.
 - Research the technology demands and expectations of our target markets and provide service accordingly.
 - 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.**
5. **Update and expand loyalty marketing programs to retain current users and to encourage more frequent use.**

Quality

Visitors who have a good experience in parks or on trails will return—and bring others with them. Parks and trails must provide quality experiences, and that means making wise use of resources.

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.**
 - 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.
 - Design and provide superior programming, led by exceptional staff, that engages audiences and fosters excitement and enthusiasm for natural resources and nature-based recreation.
 - Design and update interpretive media to enhance the visitor experience.
2. **Timely repair and maintenance of high-demand facilities.**
 - Establish maintenance schedules and standards to ensure facilities are well maintained and expectations are met across systems.
 - Prioritize the cleanliness and availability of restrooms. Provide access to drinking fountains.
3. **Invest in professional development practices that lead to exceptional Minnesota parks and trails staff.**
 - Develop standards and best practices for customer service. Require customer service training for staff interacting with parks and trails visitors.
 - 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.
 - 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.**
 - Conduct research to better understand how our target markets define quality.
 - Implement standards and best practices based on how our target markets define quality.

“The higher the quality and greater the quantity of services and amenities included in the park [or trail]: (1) the more people will be attracted, (2) the longer people will stay in the park [or trail], (3) the more money people will spend in the community and (4) the more income and jobs people will create.”

(Measuring the Economic Impact of Park and Recreation Services, Crompton, 2010)



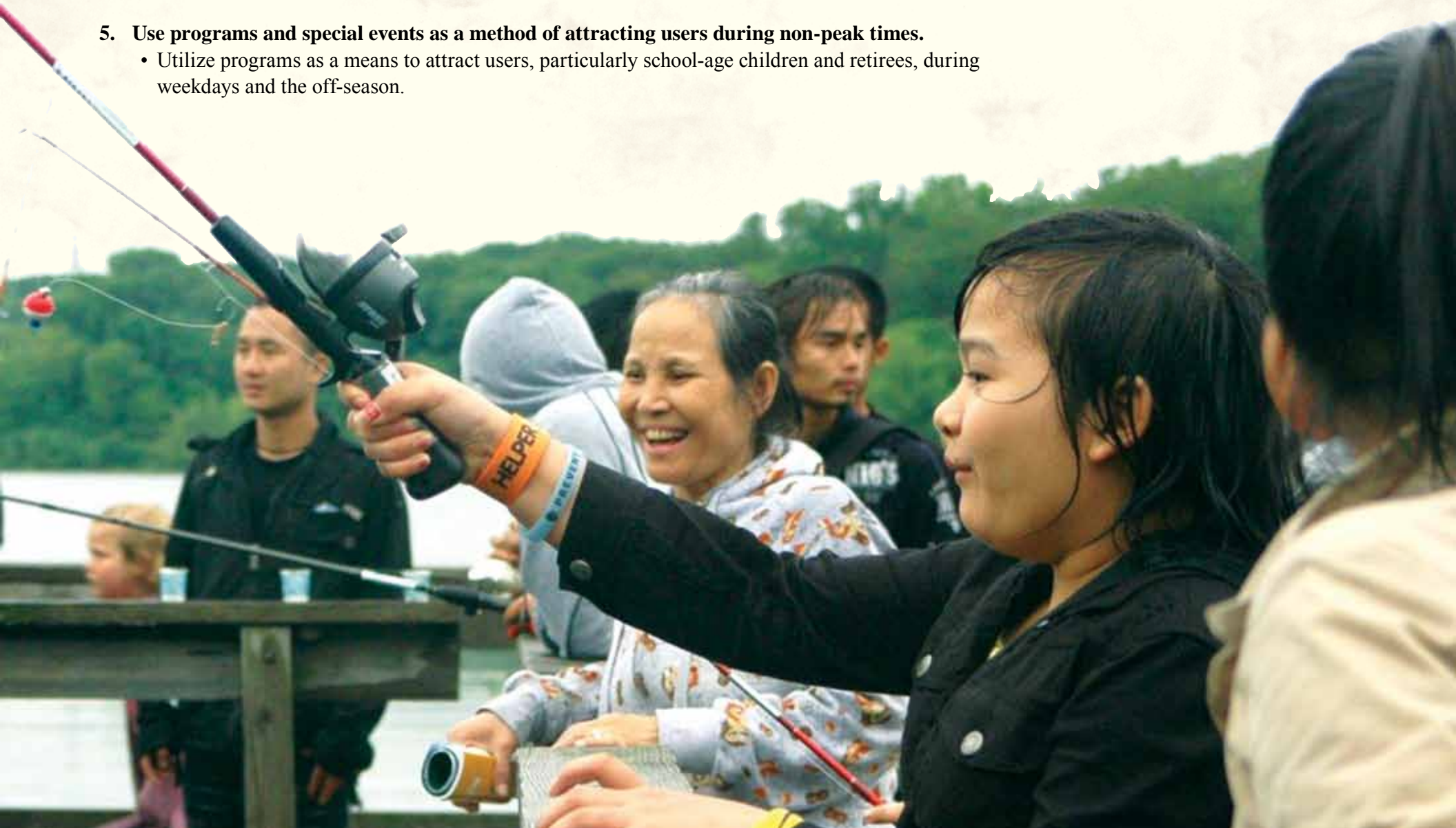
Programming and special events

Programs and special events help those who are new to parks and trails understand and enjoy them, whatever their background. At the same time, they should also serve those who are familiar with outdoor recreation. Programs and special events engage program participants to foster lifelong participation.

Strategies:

1. **Expand introductory experience programs to attract new users and provide intermediate and advanced experience programs to retain existing users.**
 - Expand introductory experience, skill-building programs, especially family oriented courses (e.g., introductory “I Can Camp!” overnight workshops).
 - 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).
 - Expand programs featuring new and emerging outdoor recreation (e.g., geocaching, kayaking, zip lines).
 - Create an “Outreach to New Park and Trail 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.
 - Expand opportunities to connect people with similar outdoor recreation interests through programs and special events.
2. **Recruit and welcome organizations and businesses that wish to conduct programs at Minnesota parks and trails.**
 - 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).
 - Build partnerships with organizations that have established relationships with potential visitors to provide targeted programs and services (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs of Minnesota, Children and Nature Network, communities of faith).
3. **Be responsive hosts who welcome private events in parks and trails. Make a positive and lasting impression on visitors to these events.**
 - Promote Minnesota parks and trails as venues for wedding ceremonies and receptions, work events, race events, or other gatherings.
 - 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 that programming and special events cater to our visitors' interests and needs.**
 - Conduct target studies that help us better understand the types of programs and experiences wanted by current and potential visitors.
 - Evaluate current programming to ensure that it is reaching and appeals to current and potential visitors.
5. **Use programs and special events as a method of attracting users during non-peak times.**
 - Utilize programs as a means to attract users, particularly school-age children and retirees, during weekdays and the off-season.



Introductory fishing programs provide an opportunity for kids to learn about fish and aquatic ecology at the MN DNR Take a Day Off event.

Partnerships

Through partnerships, we can reach more people, provide more services, and maintain higher quality facilities than we could do on our own.

Strategies:

1. **Build relationships with organizations and community leaders that help us better reach our target markets.**
 - Develop long-lasting, trusting relationships with new immigrant and racial and ethnic minority group organizations and community leaders. Devote ongoing staff resources to these interactions.
 - 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.
 - Reach out to faith-based organizations as a means to reach our target markets.
 - Reach out to senior centers and group tour operators in order to maintain visitorship by older adults.
 - Support interconnections between parks and trails and wildlife watching opportunities (e.g. Minnesota's birding trails).
2. **Develop partnerships with “friends of” groups that will help maintain, promote, and support Minnesota parks and trails.**
 - “Friends of” groups can help increase the quality of a facility—and so increase visitorship—by maintaining or helping to maintain the buildings and grounds.
 - “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.
 - “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.**

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

Parks & Trails Legacy
Plan Public Workshop
Participant

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.

- See detailed strategies in the Acquire Land, Create Opportunities Strategic Direction, development/redevelopment section.



Sleams County

Lake Wobegon covered bridge.

Acquire Land, Create Opportunities

Why is this important?

Minnesotans are avid outdoor recreators. Just over half of residents visit natural park areas near their homes each year and just over two thirds use paved trails for walking, hiking, skating, and biking. Other park and trail facilities are also used frequently. Yet Minnesotans who use these parks and trails often say they have too few options available to them near their homes. New and expanded park and trail opportunities will be needed to satisfy current users, as well as to create opportunities for new users.

Desired Outcome

Land needed to meet the nature-based outdoor recreation needs of Minnesotans will be acquired and/or developed.

How to Get There

To create outdoor recreation opportunities for today's users and for the users of the future, strategic land acquisition and development needs to focus on where the need for parks and trails is greatest: in areas of concentrated population, near regional centers that don't have nearby parks or trails, and tourist destinations.

Benchmarks for Desired Outcomes



In order to determine progress, providers should measure the following:

- New park and trail opportunities developed near regional centers that have few, if any, opportunities now.
- New park and trail opportunities acquired and developed in Minnesota's densely populated and rapidly growing parts of the state.
- Additional miles of trails developed near population centers and user concentrations.
- Acres of private in-holdings acquired in state parks, metro regional parks, and a sample of greater Minnesota regional parks.
- New trail connections to communities, parks and to other trails.

Strategic acquisition

Priority for acquisition should be in parts of the state that have the fewest park opportunities per person now and projected into the future, particularly densely settled and growing areas; regional centers that have no parks or trails of state or regional significance nearby (a number have none within 10 miles); private in-holdings in existing parks; trail connections; and parks and trails that serve tourists and local residents.

Strategies:

1. **Place a priority on near-home acquisition of natural resource-based lands for parks and trails in densely settled and rapidly growing areas.** 
 - The corridor reaching from Rochester to St. Cloud, including the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area, contains about 70 percent of the state's population and is expected to account for 80 percent of the state's projected population growth over the next 25 years.
2. **Place a priority on natural resource-based lands near regional centers that lack a near-home park or trail.**
 - A regional center is defined as a city with a population of 8,000 or more; 95 percent of Minnesota residents live within 30 miles of a regional center.
 - Currently 15 regional centers lack a park and/or trail within 10 miles.
3. **In support of strategies 1 and 2, the Minnesota DNR is developing a general site analysis tool that combines land use and land cover information with recreation lake and river locations and land ownership patterns to identify search areas for potential new regional park locations.**
4. **Accelerate the acquisition of private in-holdings and add lands to existing parks to enhance resource protection and recreational opportunities.** 
 - As an example, 9 percent of planned acreage of State Parks is in private ownership.
5. **Focus acquisition of new state parks on high-quality natural resource areas, particularly where ecological subsections are not represented by the state park system or substitute.**

“Buy land for preservation and protection of resource quality for the future.”

Parks & Trails Legacy
Plan Public Workshop
Participant



6. Focus on acquiring priority trail segments according to established criteria:

- Connects to communities (schools, work opportunities, central business districts).
- Connects with existing state trails and/or regional trails.
- Connects with high-quality natural resources or recreation areas.
- Connects to multiple destinations.
- Fills a critical gap in an area with a recreation opportunity shortage.
- Secures a critical piece of a trail system.
- Secures a unique opportunity or experience.
- Has a financial commitment from the agency or organization proposing the investment.
- Fills a critical gap for commuting.

7. Place a priority on new trail opportunities that are closer to the concentration of users—including snowmobilers, off-highway vehicles, riders, horseback riders, and canoers/kayakers. The highest concentration of which is in and around the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

8. Acquire permanent trail easements within critical grant-in-aid trail corridors so they are not lost to development or other land use changes.

9. Acquire exceptional one-time opportunities of unique, high-quality natural resources that meet critical needs outside of regional centers.

10. Acquire the land needed for support facilities for trail systems (e.g., accesses, portages, rest areas, trail heads). Facilities that serve multiple interests are priorities.

11. Place a priority on protecting important water resources including lakes, rivers, wetlands, shorelands, and critical watersheds.



MNDNR

Development and redevelopment

As with acquisition, development and redevelopment should focus on densely populated areas, underrepresented areas, and areas that serve tourists as well as local residents.

Strategies:

1. **Place a priority on park and trail development in the densely settled and rapidly growing parts of the state that have the least opportunities per person at present and projected into the future.**
2. **Place a priority on regional centers that lack a near-home park or trail.**
3. **Design, develop, and redevelop parks and trails facilities that meet the differing outdoor recreation needs for people of all abilities.**
 - Recognize the importance of a natural setting to visitors for a high-quality experience.
 - Use a context-sensitive approach to design that takes into consideration flexibility along with universal design, community involvement, visual quality, and stewardship.
 - Redevelop camping facilities so that there are more campsites for larger groups, more separation and privacy between sites, and higher quality natural surroundings to meet expectations of current and future users. Separate tent camping and RV camping.
 - Develop and renovate swimming beaches, where suitable, that are clean, well kept, family-friendly, and accessible to people of all abilities.
 - Design paved trails with high quality corridors and connections and maintain high-quality surfaces.
4. **Create an environment that is open and flexible to accommodate new and emerging nature-based recreation uses.**
 - Design facilities that support numerous activities and proactively adapt to new and emerging nature-based recreation activities (e.g. geocaching, skijoring, pet-friendly parks and trails, archery, and shooting sports)
 - Develop and maintain large open play areas that can be used for impromptu activities (e.g. picnicking, catch, kite flying).



Children playing disc golf at Phalen Regional park.

5. Develop infrastructure and amenities that meet the lifestyles of our target markets.

- Develop visitor center areas with a comfortable “coffee house” feel (e.g. couches, fireplace) where visitors can relax and enjoy nature. Consider large picture windows for nature observation and wildlife watching.
- Develop group-based opportunities such as group campsites, group picnic areas, and gathering spaces.
- Offer amenities that meet the lifestyles of our target markets (e.g. wireless internet, playgrounds, family bathrooms).

6. Establish sustainable trail systems to provide high-quality opportunities for specialized trail interests, e.g., Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area Mountain Bike system, Zumbro Bottoms State Forest horse trail system, Iron Range Off-highway Vehicle State Recreation Area, Clifton E. French Regional Park cross-country ski trails.

7. Design and construct sustainable and resilient infrastructure. Use energy-efficient, easy-to-maintain and recycled/recyclable materials. Conserve the use of water at facilities. Design facilities to contain water on-site.



MNDNR

At Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area, 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 to the site.

Take Care of What We Have

Why Is This Important?

Minnesota has invested, and continues to invest, in the development of parks and trails of state and regional significance. Once a park or trail is established, regular reinvestment is needed to ensure safe, high-quality experiences for current and future users.

Today, a lack of funding, aging infrastructure, and intensive use have led to a backlog of preservation, rehabilitation and renewal work. For example: More than 100 of the 296 bridges in the state trail system are more than 100 years old and will need to be rehabilitated or replaced.

Desired Outcome

Minnesota parks and trails of state and regional significance are well maintained and up-to-date. They meet current needs and provide high-quality recreation opportunities for a variety of users with different interests, needs, and abilities. Rehabilitation is accelerated beyond current levels; this work includes the built infrastructure and natural resource management.

How to Get There

The public's current and future investment in parks and trails must be protected; to do that, funds need to be available to restore aging facilities and to adapt facilities to today's needs and lifestyles. But not only built facilities need to be maintained; natural resources themselves also must be maintained and protected. The three key areas for results are: protecting public investment in infrastructure, maintaining the quality of natural resources, and looking at options for marginally performing parks and trails.

Benchmarks for Desired Outcomes

In order to determine progress, providers should measure the following:

- Number of facilities and historic structures restored within parks and trails.
- Acres of natural areas preserved, restored, and reconstructed at parks and trails.
- Number of parks and trails mapped for terrestrial invasive plants.



MNDNR

Rehabilitating bridges is essential to a safe and contiguous trail network. This trestle was located on the Heartland State Trail and has recently been replaced.

Protect the public's investment in built infrastructure and natural resources

To meet current standards for park and trail facilities, state and regionally significant parks and trails need more funds set aside for development, restoration and redevelopment.

Strategies:

1. Accelerate investment in capital asset management projects that reinvest in existing infrastructure to ensure high-quality and safe experiences.



- Restore worn out, degraded facilities (e.g., roof replacement, structural replacement, trail resurfacing).
- Bring facilities up to modern codes and standards. When improvements to facilities are made, ensure that they meet accessibility standards (e.g., entrances, walking surfaces, building lighting, and restrooms). Make it easy for everyone to access and enjoy parks and trails.
- Adapt use to today's needs and lifestyles, such as providing for the increasing need for access to electricity.

2. Share and refine capital asset management schedules to ensure protection and full utilization of facilities for the entirety of their useful life.

- Share good examples of maintenance/capital asset management schedules with Minnesota's park and trail providers.
- Set aside specific funding to cover capital asset management costs.
- A schedule of capital asset preservation, rehabilitation, and renewal needs should be projected into the future with specific funding to support them. For example, DNR has a governance system that requires funds be set aside in a facilities management account that focuses on building-related capital needs.

3. When proposing new acquisitions and facilities to decision makers, communicate operational, maintenance, and capital management costs based on lifecycles of assets.

- Help decision makers understand that if the goal is providing high-quality opportunities, protecting natural resources, and ensuring the best value for the public's investment, then these costs are inseparable. For example: DNR determined that a fully funded capital asset management program for its buildings would require 2.8 percent of the facilities' replacement value annually.



MNDNR

Historic structures in parks and trails are in need of preservation and renewal. For example, Seppman Mill in Minneopa State Park, built in 1864, is one of the oldest buildings in the state park system. The windmill blades need to be replaced and work is needed on the roof, windows, and interior.

Maintain the quality of natural resources in parks and trails of state and regional significance

Natural resources are the foundation for parks and trails of state and regional significance and natural settings are very important to parks and trails visitors. High-quality natural areas and water resources must be preserved and, in areas where they already have been degraded, they should be restored.

Strategies:

1. Preserve existing high-quality natural areas and water resources. It is far more cost-effective to preserve existing communities than it is to restore or reconstruct them.

- Preserving intact natural communities requires active monitoring and management to insure that they are not degraded over time by impacts such as: fragmentation, introduction of invasive species, changes in hydrology, or lack of natural disturbance.
- Coordinating planning efforts with adjacent landowners and prescribed burning are two examples of actions that can be used to preserve existing native plant communities.
- Prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species. Design and manage parks and trails to help visitors prevent the unintended spread of invasive species.

**5 YEAR
PRIORITY**

2. Restore natural communities that have been degraded.

- Natural communities are most often degraded through the introduction and spread of invasive species. Invasive species are currently considered the second most significant threat to biodiversity in the United States, affecting about half of all rare species.
- Another significant factor is lack of natural disturbance in fire-dependent communities such as prairies and savannas. Control of invasive plant species, re-introduction of fire, and inter-planting to restore diversity are regularly used strategies to improve the quality of degraded natural areas.

**5 YEAR
PRIORITY**

3. Reconstruct natural communities that have been lost due to impacts of past agricultural or development activities.

- Today, less than 1 percent of Minnesota's native prairie remains and only 2 percent of the Big Woods natural community still exists. Reconstructing these natural communities on public lands where they can be appropriately protected and managed provides habitat for rare species that depend on these communities.



Minnesota state parks protect some of the state's rarest plants and animals, including the prairie fringed orchid.

MNDNR

Consider options for marginally performing parks and trails

When a park or trail becomes “marginal,” meaning that it may not be used or is not meeting the purpose for which it was created, options for managing the park differently, transferring it to another entity, or selling or leasing it should be explored. Participants in the workshops overwhelmingly stated that selling a park or trail should be a last resort.

Strategies:

1. **Cluster state and regional parks and trails with other larger, nearby parks and trails to be managed either by staff at these facilities or by seasonal managers.**
 - Satellite parks and trails save money through consolidation of as much administrative and managerial responsibilities as possible. In this manner available staff can focus on customer support and day-to-day operations. These facilities continue to be open to the public and maintain their status as state or regional parks and trails. There may be times when they do not have staff on hand for the public. Appropriate signage and directions must be in place for these parks to operate successfully.
2. **Close parks or trails temporarily. Temporary closure reduces operational costs by taking parks and/or trails out of use for a period of time while preserving the units for future use.**
 - This approach primarily results in operating cost savings, as there will continue to be some maintenance and resource management costs. Generally speaking, users would not be allowed to enter the park or ride on the trail during this period.
3. **Transfer to local government management. Parks or trails that serve mostly a local population, and do not otherwise meet the criteria for state and regional parks or trails may be transferred to management by local governments.**
 - There have been a number of state parks transferred to local governments, and they have remained open to the public, despite fear that lands transferred out of state administration may not be preserved for public recreation in a natural environment. In addition, these resources retain their local support as an amenity, and may even result in better meeting local recreational needs. This may or may not result in a savings of operational costs. It is possible that the change results simply in a transfer of costs from the state level to the local.
 - There are a number of options for transferring state parks and trails management to local governments. Among them would be to contract with local governments for management of state parks, which is permitted by M.S. 471.67. This would allow for maintaining the visibility of the park or trail on state maps while promoting lower-cost management.

- Another approach would be to provide grants to local governments to enable them to assume management of parks that have been removed from state park or trail status. After the initial support, local governments may decide to pick up the cost of operating the parks or trails, or negotiate a subsidy from the state that could be phased out over time. In either case, the cost to the state would be reduced over the longer term.
 - In order to find the best approach for transferring parks to local governments, the Department of Natural Resources and/or regional park and trail providers should work with local government officials as well as local citizens to learn of their concerns and ensure that the transfer successfully meets all interests involved.
- 4. Transfer or merge a state park or trail with another state recreation unit designation. If the primary value of a particular unit is to provide plant or animal habitat, M.S. 86A.05 gives the Department of Natural Resources several options in addition to managing them as state parks, trails, or recreation areas.**
- State forests, state scientific and natural areas, state wilderness areas, and state wildlife management areas provide a variety of resource protection and recreation options that cost the state less money because they require less maintenance, provide fewer amenities, and offer a different set of recreational opportunities.
- 5. Sell or lease a portion or all of a park or trail. The option of closing a park or trail and selling the land may be, in some rare instances, a useful alternative. However, this strategy should only be considered when the park or trail has truly lost its value to Minnesotans and no longer provides for the purposes under which it was created. Participants in the workshops overwhelmingly stated that selling a park or trail should be a last resort.**
- Legally, the action of selling park or trail land can be very difficult. If, for instance, Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars were used to purchase the park or trail—which is the case for well over half the state parks, many regional parks, and some trails—then there is a requirement to replace the land if it is converted to non-recreational purposes. Such an action would require federal level approval and a substantial investment of funds.
 - Leasing the property to another entity, public or private, may be a more viable alternative. This change most likely would involve changing the types of recreational opportunities or activities to some degree, in order to increase use.

Coordinate Among Partners

Why Is This Important?

The state and regional parks and trails system is made up of many parts, with different providers in different parts of the state, funded by a number of different sources. This complex network poses a vexing challenge to state and regional providers interested in meaningful coordination, as well as end users, who seek high quality, connected, and accessible opportunities. Coordination is essential to achieve the vision laid out in this plan and to ensure that the principles the public developed for the use of Legacy Funds are achieved. Effective coordination results in wise use of funds and may result in cost savings. Efficiency and effectiveness are enhanced through coordination.

Desired Outcome

Minnesotans and visitors see parks and trails of state and regional significance as a seamless network; they may not know what agency is responsible for management of the natural area they are enjoying—and they don't need to. Emphasis is on the user experience. Outdoor recreation providers work together to provide recreation users with easy-to-use coordinated information and world-class outdoor recreation opportunities.

How to Get There

Coordination and cooperation are needed to do everything from providing information to park and trail users to ensuring that park and trail shortages are addressed. While agencies and organizations can do a great deal of coordination and cooperation on their own, an advisory body will encourage the coordinated development of a network of parks and trails. Results are needed in five key areas:

- Information for park and trail users.
- A statewide advisory body.
- Coordination at regional and site levels.
- Coordination among the four Legacy Funds.
- Coordination with other agencies, organizations and nonprofits.

Benchmarks for Desired Outcomes

In order to determine progress, providers should measure the following:

- Number of park and trail providers participating in the coordinated park and trail website.
- Number of unique visitors to the coordinated website.
- Established and operational statewide advisory body.
- Number of projects that leverage two or more of the Legacy or other traditional sources of funding.

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

Parks & Trails
Legacy Plan
Public Workshop
Participant

Enhanced, integrated and accessible information for park and trail users



People interested in visiting parks and trails should be able to go to one coordinated website for information to plan their trips and activities. Marketing efforts, everything from printed materials to signage to social media, will be more effective if done jointly.

Strategies:

- 1. Develop and maintain a comprehensive, integrated, standardized, and accessible database of state and regional parks and trails, using the inventory information from the University of Minnesota's Center for Changing Landscapes as the starting point.**
- 2. Develop and maintain a comprehensive and integrated website that includes essential information on state and regional parks and trails. Provide users the ability to do trip planning, create customized maps, use print-on-demand services, and interface with their smartphones.**
- 3. Incentivize joint marketing and promotion efforts, including common signage, printed materials, and use of social media.**



Enhanced coordination of Minnesota's seamless network of state and regional parks and trails through a statewide advisory body

A statewide advisory body will promote and coordinate the implementation of the 25-year *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*.

Purposes of the advisory body include:

- 1. Promote and coordinate the implementation of the 25-year long-range *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*.**
 - Encourage the coordinated development of a network of parks and trails.
 - Work together on issues of common interest, such as: efforts to increase participation; make strategic connections, additions and expansions; and develop a way to share best practices.
 - Involve youth in the advisory committee planning efforts in order to build ownership in Minnesota's parks and trails.
 - The Parks and Trails Legacy Plan Steering Committee will advise the DNR Commissioner on the establishment of the advisory body.
 - Identify benchmarks, design methods and collection systems, and report on progress.
- 2. Define the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Regional Network.**
 - Help guide and support its development, creating agreement on how it best relates to the state parks and trails system as well as the metro-regional park and trail system.
 - Build on the recommendations and criteria laid out in this plan.
- 3. Encourage state and regional park and trail providers to connect regularly with their local and federal counterparts, ensuring that all systems work as a coordinated whole.**
 - Foster the continuation of the work among park and trail providers to create a seamless network of parks and trails that began during the Legacy planning process.
 - Use the Minnesota Recreation and Park Association network, as well as other established networks, to help facilitate these conversations.
 - Support statewide discussions to identify the barriers to creating a seamless system and work to overcome them.

Enhanced coordination of Minnesota's state and regional parks and trails at the regional level and site levels



Encourage effective coordination where it makes sense to cross jurisdictional boundaries.

Strategies:

- 1. Provide matching grant funding for multi-jurisdictional regional planning to achieve a seamless system.**
 - Help groups see the rewards for effective coordination, while acknowledging that not all plans and projects have to cross jurisdiction boundaries.
- 2. Require strengthened criteria in the regional parks and trails grant programs to encourage better coordination and stronger partnerships among recreation providers and users.**
- 3. Develop Best Practices for enhancing coordination, e.g., technical information about how to set up joint powers agreements that support coordination efforts.**
 - Share examples of successful coordination with park and trail providers.
- 4. Incentivize coordination and cooperation among providers.**
- 5. Provide technical assistance for developing parks and trails grant proposals.**
- 6. Provide funding for research and monitoring to measure progress according to the benchmarks.**

Enhanced coordination among the four Legacy Funds

Share goals and coordinate timelines for application and allocation of all Legacy Funds to make sure they are used effectively.

Strategies:

1. **Share the goals and strategies of the four Legacy Funds with park and trail providers and others, so they can find overlapping opportunities.**
2. **Coordinate the timelines for application and allocation with the other Legacy Funds. Work toward a common application process.**
3. **Encourage individual Legacy Funds to work together at the landscape and project levels.**




Wilderness Inquiry

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

Enhanced coordination with other agencies, organizations and nonprofits

A number of government agencies, as well as private and nonprofit organizations, have a stake in parks and trails, everything from the Minnesota Department of Transportation to health providers to parks and trails “friends” groups to local communities. Coordination with these other bodies will ensure that Legacy Funds are used where and when they can be most effective.

Strategies:

1. **Develop a parks and trails roundtable that convenes regularly with the broad interests of Minnesota’s parks and trails. Share information on implementation of the plan, provide feedback, and establish a forum to discuss issues, concerns, and recommendations for future action.** 
2. **Continue partnering with organizations interested in Minnesota’s culture and heritage. State and regional parks and trails contain significant historic and cultural resources that should be preserved and interpreted.**
3. **Continue partnering with transportation interests (e.g., Minnesota Department of Transportation, including the Bicycle Modal Plan), regional and local transportation authorities, to support access to parks and trails as well as expand opportunities to develop new trails, enhance trail use, and increase access to transit.**
4. **Continue partnering with health agencies, health maintenance organizations, and providers (e.g., Minnesota Department of Health, community health boards, interested health providers).**
 - Support the promotion of healthy lifestyles through developing joint programs that incentivize recreating in parks and trails and recreation areas.
 - Support efforts like the Active Living Advisory Committee, a coalition of state level and private interests that support and promote healthy lifestyles.
5. **Build stronger relationships with schools and increase the level of service provided to schools. Parks and trails are an important resource for schools for teaching lifelong recreation skills, and environmental stewardship.**
6. **Continue partnering with tourism, chambers of commerce, and other local tourism providers (e.g., Explore Minnesota Tourism). They play a key role in providing information about park and trail opportunities and can enhance the capacity of recreation providers to promote park and trail opportunities.**
7. **Continue partnering with grant-in-aid groups and local communities that are actively promoting outdoor recreation opportunities.**

Guidelines for Investing Legacy and other Traditional Sources of Funding

There are several existing funding sources available to parks and trails in Minnesota. While the new Legacy Parks and Trails Fund is a significant and exciting addition to these resources, it must be viewed within the broad context of the full range of funding sources available.

A variety of sources may be used to fund parks and trails of state and regional significance. The table at the end of this section identifies funding sources, their historical use, eligible recipients, and the future outlook. If the State Legislature can leverage the full range of funds in a complementary manner, Minnesota will achieve a larger, more significant legacy.

The current economic recession creates a difficult context in which to plan for the future. This creates a challenge to ensure that legacy funding supplements rather than supplants other revenue sources.

Guidelines

- 1. A balanced approach.** Legacy Funds should be invested in the four strategic directions of this report: connect people to the outdoors; buy land, create opportunities; take care of what we have; and coordinate among partners. A viable parks and trails system requires supporting a variety of activities: acquisition, development, redevelopment, restoration, operations and maintenance, as well as programming and marketing. Daily maintenance, such as trash removal and cleaning bathrooms, is not recommended for use of Legacy Funds.
- 2. Flexibility.** Recognize that state and regional parks and trails characteristics and needs vary widely throughout the state and that they will likely change significantly over the coming decades. Outdoor recreation providers should be able to respond in a timely manner as unexpected or one-time opportunities arise. Major demographic, cultural, economic, environmental, and social changes are taking place that will influence how, when, where, and why people participate in outdoor recreation activities. Flexibility in the use and distribution of Legacy Funds will be an important factor in determining how well we are able to adapt to these changes.
 - Don't establish a set distribution formula for parks and trails Legacy Funds; recognize that funding levels may fluctuate across parks and trails of state and regional significance as well as across the four strategic directions over time to meet changing and evolving needs.
 - Take advantage of exceptional, one-time opportunities that may require larger-than-normal fund allocations in a timely manner.
 - Create an opportunity fund for acquisition projects that require immediate action.

“Try to balance the demands, wants, and needs of all Minnesotans. Use the funds wisely, efficiently, and judiciously.”

Parks & Trails
Legacy Plan
Public Workshop
Participant

- 3. Fairness and equity.** Distribute Legacy Funds in a manner that will be viewed by the citizens of Minnesota as reasonable. Geography, population, and funding sources should be taken into consideration.
- Ensure that Legacy funding supplements existing sources of funding to accelerate support for Minnesota's parks and trails of state and regional significance. This fund must not replace other sources.
 - Establish minimum funding levels for parks and trails of state and regional significance (a funding floor) to ensure that all park and trail systems receive at least a minimum allocation on a regular basis. This allows for flexibility in funding across state and regional parks and trails over time. Do not lock funding allocations into a set formula.
 - Over time, achieve at least a reasonable degree of equity of funding among parks and trails of state and regional significance. This does not suggest equal funding amounts for each system.
 - Provide regional park and trail providers in Greater Minnesota with grant opportunities to assist their efforts to connect people with the outdoors through marketing and programming.
 - Build strong relationships among the providers of parks and trails of regional significance. Encourage development and support of the complementary facilities and discourage duplicative ones.
 - Ensure reasonable access for Minnesotans of all abilities. Help users make informed choices to meet their interests and needs.
- 4. Recognize differences and play to the strengths of each outdoor recreation provider.** The needs, priorities, resources, and existing infrastructure vary greatly across state and regional parks and trails. These differences will evolve and change over time. The investment guidance should recognize and embrace these differences and avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.
- 5. Be strategic in complementing other funding sources.** Legacy Funds must supplement existing sources of funding so as to increase the overall effort for making Minnesota's state and regional parks and trails better. Legacy Funds should attract and leverage other sources of funding, allowing for an increase in the extent and quality of the existing state and regional systems.
- Use Legacy Funds to leverage other funding sources so as to maximize the benefits of the Parks and Trails Fund investment.
 - Coordinate the timing and amount of investments from all funding sources for state and regional parks and trails in ways that maximize the strengths and benefits that each source can provide.
 - Optimize all available sources of parks and trails funding. Don't rely on the Legacy Fund to carry the parks and trails load.
 - Legacy Fund investments must be strategic and provide high-quality recreational opportunities that benefit a wide variety of people.
 - Evaluate parks and trails Legacy investments, ensuring that they are cost-effective and meet visitor needs.

- 6. Encourage local contribution.** Local contribution is a concrete expression of commitment to a proposed project. It also can increase local ownership of the park or trail project. Local contribution extends parks and trails funding, including Legacy funding, to have a greater total impact. Local contribution is challenging for some communities; innovative approaches to raising local contribution will help these communities reach their parks and trails goals.
- Work to standardize matching requirements for related state funding sources to a 25 percent local match.
 - Encourage leveraging funding from multiple sources, including other local sources, state, federal, private, and foundations.
 - Recognize in-kind matching contributions. These contributions add real value other than cash and include materials, equipment services, staff time, or other professional services. They allow local communities to demonstrate their commitment to a project in a meaningful and affordable way.



Credit: Scott Country

Enjoying the fresh air at Cedar Lake Farm Regional Park

Sources of Funding

Fund Type	Historical Use	Eligible System Recipients	Outlook
Parks and Trails Legacy funding	acquisition, development, redevelopment, operations, and maintenance	state or regional park and trail providers	Legacy Funds should complement traditional sources of funding, accelerating support of the parks and trails network.
Other Legacy funding	acquisition, restoration	state or regional park and trail providers	We need a better understanding of how Legacy Funds should complement one another when interests intersect.
General Fund	acquisition, development, redevelopment, operations, and maintenance	state, regional, local park and trail providers	General funds are not anticipated to be a significant source of funding for parks and trails due to competing budget priorities.
Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund	acquisition, development, natural resource redevelopment (restoration)	state, regional, local park and trail providers	The trust fund should continue to accelerate acquisition, development and redevelopment of parks and trails, including restoration of natural resources.
State bonding	acquisition, development, redevelopment	state or regional park and trail providers	Bonding should continue to be a source for large-scale capital projects, land acquisition, development, and rehabilitation. Short-term, focus may be on rehabilitation and development.
Land and Water Conservation Fund (stateside)	acquisition, development, natural resource redevelopment (restoration)	state, regional, local park and trail providers	The future of this federal program is uncertain. Current funding levels are significantly lower than in the past.
Federal Trail Funds	acquisition, development	state, regional, local park and trail providers	May continue to be a significant source of trail funding for MN but the future of these federal programs is uncertain.
Minnesota Future Resources Fund	acquisition, development, redevelopment	state, regional, local park and trail providers	Once a significant source of funding for parks and trails. Currently it is not; revenue has been redirected to general fund.
Local funding (e.g., property taxes, sales tax, bonding)	acquisition, development, redevelopment, operations, and maintenance	regional and local park and trail providers	Historically, local governments have provided significant park and trail funding. Now they are facing significant budget issues.
User fees	acquisition, development, redevelopment, operations and maintenance	state, regional, local park and trail providers	Continue to be an important source of funds. The importance to the funding mix may continue to grow.
Grant-in-Aid	acquisition, development, redevelopment, and maintenance	state, regional, local park and trail providers	Will continue to support a variety of trail activities.
Lottery-in-Lieu	acquisition, development, redevelopment, and maintenance	state, regional, local park and trail providers	Will continue to provide funds for maintenance for state and seven-county metro parks and trails.
Water Recreation Account	acquisition, development, redevelopment, operations, and maintenance	state, regional, local park and trail providers	Will continue to be a significant source for recreation, clean water, and habitat projects.

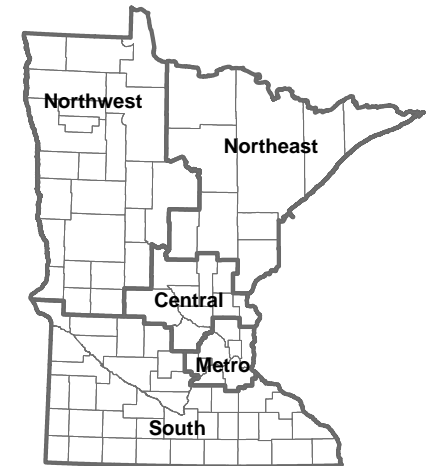
Implications of Regional Differences for Funding

One of the major themes that emerged from the public participation process is that citizens support a statewide approach to investing Legacy Funds, but one that recognizes regional priorities. Regional differences stem from the significant size and complexity of Minnesota and the existing network of parks and trails of state and regional significance. There are differences in the natural resource base, demographics, supply and demand of recreation opportunities, age of infrastructure, tourism, and satisfaction of visitors. Investment of Legacy Funds should reflect these nuances.

The theme of regional differences is linked to the plan through the “Recommendations for Investment of Legacy and other Traditional Sources of Funding” section. Specifically, recommendations call for: a balanced approach, flexibility, fairness and equity, and recognizing differences and playing to the strengths of each outdoor recreation provider. Implicit in these recommendations is the need to recognize regional differences.

As a major component of the Legacy planning process, the DNR conducted public workshops throughout the state. Participants of these workshops offered numerous high-level examples of regional differences in Minnesota. While these examples are not necessarily representative of Minnesotans, they do offer some valuable insight for recognizing regional differences. In Northern Minnesota, where public land is abundant, general land acquisition was not identified as a priority. However, strategic land acquisition for trail connections, acquiring permanent trail easements, and maintaining, improving, and upgrading existing facilities were all identified as high priorities. In Southern Minnesota, where public land is not as abundant, land acquisition for parks and trails was a high priority. The Twin Cities Metro region and Central Minnesota are expected to experience the greatest population growth in the next 25 years. As such, land acquisition prior to rapid development to preserve key natural resource and recreation opportunities was identified as a high priority. Also, since the metro and central regions are more densely populated than the rest of Minnesota, a focus on close-to-home opportunities with alternative transportation options and programming to attract new visitors were also identified as high priorities.

Regional differences and commonalities were examined in a 2006 Minnesota DNR facility adequacy survey of Minnesota residents. Survey respondents were asked to judge the adequacy of near-home facility supply for 55 outdoor facilities. The facilities most frequently perceived to be in short supply are similar throughout Minnesota and are the types of facilities that are provided in parks, such as swimming facilities (e.g. beach, pool), wildlife and nature observation areas, shorefishing facilities, and sledding hills. Some major differences among the regions are for natural parks and open spaces, and for non-motorized trails for biking, walking, and skating. These natural parks and trails are more frequently judged in short supply in the southern regions of the state (Central, Metro, and South) than in the Northeast or Northwest regions. Perhaps this results from the fact that the northern regions have more park acres and trail miles (on a per person basis) than the southern regions.



Public Expectations for Minnesota's Parks and Trails Legacy

What We Heard

The Minnesota State Legislature directed the Parks and Trails Legacy planning effort to be a “collaborative process” involving interested people throughout Minnesota. From the start, public expectations for engagement have been high. These expectations may stem from the decision Minnesotans made when they voted to pass the Legacy Amendment and raise their taxes. They believed in the importance of increasing the investment into our parks and trails, clean water, habitat and arts and culture—and they did this in one of the worst recessions in our nation’s history.

In very clear terms, the citizens of Minnesota told park and trail providers to make sure that this new source of funding has a significant and lasting impact. At the culmination of the 25-year funding period, they want tangible evidence of sound investments. People want a network of parks and trails that provides users with seamless experiences.

Regional Workshops and Online Participation

More than 1,000 people across the state participated in regional workshops, and another 1,500 unique visitors participated in the Citizing.org website. The Citizens League identified common themes that emerged during this public engagement process. It also notes that it would be inaccurate to conclude that there is unanimity around these themes; many—sometimes conflicting—viewpoints were represented. But these nine themes were voiced repeatedly throughout the workshops and online.

1. 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.

2. 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 passing 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.



Mark Themig

Participants of the 18 public workshops worked in small groups to share their vision for parks and trails.

3. 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. For example, a Brainerd participant said, “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.”

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

5. Participants advocated for a balanced, pragmatic approach to using Legacy dollars.

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. “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,” said an Anoka-Washington participant.

6. Connections are a top priority.

Participants want connections! They want an interwoven network for 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, and commercial destinations, as well as important natural resources like lakes and other parks and trails. Connections also serve another important role: accessibility.

7. Participants urged attention to a full range of recreational opportunities: hiking, biking, horseback riding, water trails, snowmobile and ATV trails.

“Try to balance the demands, wants, and needs of all citizens” (Anoka-Washington workshop participant). While some felt strongly that Legacy Funds should not be used for motorized recreation, others believe it should support a broad range of recreational interests, including motorized.

“I love the beauty of the tall pine trees; knowing wildlife is thriving there. Wild mushrooms, blueberries, wild flowers. I want all this available to future generations.”

Parks & Trails Legacy Plan Public Workshop Participant



MNDNR

Early opportunities to learn about and care for nature create lifelong stewards.

8. 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.

9. 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," said a participant in Detroit Lakes.

Targeted Meetings

The Citizens League and Department of Natural Resources conducted a series of targeted meetings among diverse communities throughout Minnesota to better understand what these underrepresented populations would find most valuable in parks and trails. Several themes were clearly visible from the meetings.

Build better relationships with ethnic and racial communities. Many participants in the targeted meetings do not currently feel a strong connection with parks and trails, nor, to a large degree, do they currently feel welcome. Before they will use or will want to use the parks and trails, they need to feel that 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. It may also include ongoing relationship building among recreation providers and community groups.

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. Other barriers also 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 can be difficult to access. This could be due to lack of transportation to get there, the cost associated with using amenities, or missing 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 needed 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.

“What good
is a legacy if
there is no one
to carry it on.”

Students Speak Out
Participant

Youth and Young Adult Outreach

There were two major efforts to conduct outreach with youth and young adults for the planning effort: Conservation Corps Minnesota and the Citizens League Students Speak Out. The Conservation Corps Minnesota assisted in conducting outreach to youth ages 10 to 18 and young adults ages 19 to 40. Over 1,000 individuals from a variety of diverse geographic areas across Minnesota were involved. Meetings and discussions were held in a variety of formal and non-formal environments including elementary, middle and high schools, technical colleges, universities, and parks. The Citizens League Students Speak Out hosted an online discussion with teens about parks and trails to further enhance this outreach. This work will ensure that the voices of young people directly inform the Parks and Trails Legacy plan. Meetings and discussions revealed the following themes:

- **Parents and family members play a critical role in getting youth involved at an early age.**

Young adults described how as children they ended up in activities their parents were involved in (“My dad went camping a lot and introduced me to this, and we would just hike around and camp at different places, and after this I joined a program that went camping a lot.”).

- **Youth and young adults want strong partnerships with neighborhoods, schools, and community organizations that increase their involvement with outdoor nature based recreation.**
They would like to see these partnerships well established in their communities and prefer that these relationships continue over extended time periods rather than one-time opportunities.
- **Youth want opportunities to get outdoors with peers and engaging adults.**
Youth and young adults want to be with their friends and connect with adults and peers who are passionate about their common interests, such as camping or fishing. This finding suggests that organizations need to pay particular attention to identifying those adults with interests in nature-based recreation who can help young people get outdoors.
- **Youth and young adults want to have more opportunities to socialize and connect with peers who share their interests during outdoor activities.**
Youth and young adults seek similar experiences for socialization at parks and trails, mainly opportunities that provide unstructured environments to relax and visit with friends. The types of interesting opportunities desired by young adults with parks and trails do not necessarily result from a structured nature-based program, but more often result from unstructured opportunities to be physically active with peers who share their common interest in nature-based recreation.
- **Implement and create significant employment and mentoring opportunities for youth and young adults.**
Youth and young adults want direct involvement in hands-on projects with real world applications. This is identified as a beneficial aspect for them to increase their knowledge and experiences with parks and trails. They would like to see their participation as an integral part of learning, community planning, and problem solving in parks, trails, and nature-based recreation.
- **Youth and young adults want to know more about opportunities with nature-based recreation in parks and trails.**
Even though youth expressed satisfaction with their involvement and time spent in nature-based recreation, many claimed not knowing about opportunities, what they will do when they get there, or how they will be received when they arrive at parks and trails. Youth suggested providing greater access to information through outreach and social media that young people use. They identified social media as an important aspect to increasing participation with state and regional park and trail providers.



Conservation Corps Minnesota

Students from the youth and young adult outreach effort tell us what types of activities they like to do at parks and trails.

Additional Guidelines for Improving Trails of State and Regional Significance

The needs of trail networks are complex and multi-faceted. In addition to the recommendations preceding this section, below are further recommendations for various trail categories. Priorities across and within each of these trail categories vary significantly. However, one thing that all have in common can be summed in one word: connections.

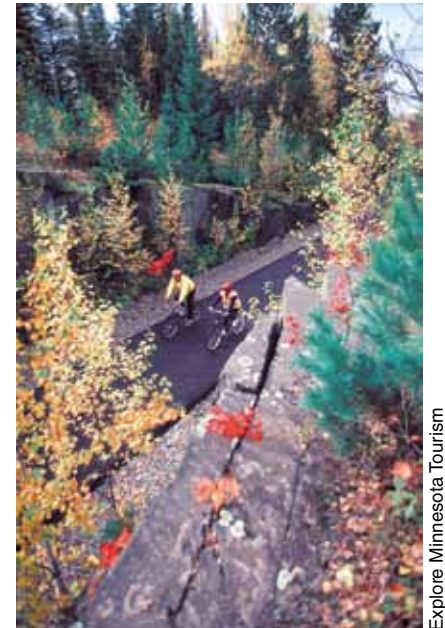
Criteria for Making Trail Investments

These criteria should be used to prioritize acquisition, development, and expansion investment in trails:

- Connects to communities (schools, work opportunities, central business districts).
- Connects with existing state or regional trails.
- Connects with high-quality natural resources or recreation areas.
- Connects to multiple destinations.
- Fills a critical gap in an area with a recreation opportunity shortage.
- Secures a critical piece of a trail system.
- Secures a unique opportunity or experience.
- Has a financial commitment from the agency or organization proposing the investment.
- Fills a critical gap for commuting.

Strategies across multiple trail networks:

1. Place a priority on new trail opportunities that are closer to the concentration of registered users, including snowmobiles, off-highway vehicles, horseback riders, and paddlecraft that are in and about the Twin Cities metropolitan area.
2. Acquire permanent trail easements within critical grant-in-aid trail corridors so they are not lost to development or other land-use changes.
3. Acquire the land needed for support facilities for trail systems (e.g., accesses, portages, rest areas).



Explore Minnesota Tourism

Enjoying the fall colors along the Mesabi Trail.

Strategies for trails of state and regional significance:

1. Focus acquisition and development of state trails on segments that meet the above criteria.

According to the Budget Analysis completed by the DNR, completing the state trail system at the current rate acquisition and development is occurring will take many years. There also are additional segments that should be added to complete the picture of the ideal legislatively authorized system. Using the above criteria will focus resources on effective investments.

2. Focus acquisition and development of trails of regional significance on segments that meet the established criteria above.

3. Develop or refine existing regional trail system plans to create a seamless system of trails that meet the needs of users and address priorities of the state and region.

4. Increase the amount of funding for the regional trail grant program.

5. Develop a system plan for trails of state significance in coordination with the existing and developing regional trail plans.

Trails for Specific Uses

During the planning process, user groups for different trail systems discussed their priorities for trails that accommodate the uses important to them. The following priorities are not comprehensive, but they identify some needs for each of the listed user groups.

State Water Trails Network

1. Rehabilitate and maintain existing State Water Trail facilities on a schedule that keeps pace with the needs of the system and of the public.

Much of the State Water Trails system's facility development (campgrounds, accesses, portages, signage, rest areas) occurred from the 1970s to the mid-1990s. In recent years, rehabilitation and maintenance activities have not kept pace with the needs of the aging infrastructure or with the expectations of the public.

2. Acquire and develop facilities (i.e. accesses, campgrounds, portages, rest areas) according to priority needs.

State Water Trails with priority development needs include the following rivers: Metro Mississippi, Blue Earth, Otter Tail, Red, Sauk, South Fork of the Crow, Redwood, Long Prairie, Red Lake, and Minnesota.



MN DNR

Snowmobiling on the Northshore.



3. **Provide technical and financial assistance to local units of government and user groups that are developing local Water Trails, and/or making improvements to State Water Trails.**
4. **Coordinate user groups to provide support for the State Water Trails program.**
5. **Secure and manage stable sources of funding and ensure transparency of fund accountability and integrity for water recreation programs and facilities.**

Snowmobile Network

1. **Continue to maintain the existing system.**

Because permits are obtained on a year-to-year basis, system connectivity is always an issue. Often, a change in ownership will result in a permit not being given for the snowmobile trail and the system is severed. The difficult process of finding a reroute is necessary in order to maintain system integrity.

2. **Secure permanent corridors for the trail system.**
3. **Continue to make system improvements needed to support the network.**



Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Network (includes all-terrain vehicles, off-highway motorcycles, and off-road vehicles)

1. **In state forests, connect existing roads and trails into a system.**

First, connecting trail segments need to be identified, the corridor secured, and the trail developed. The grant-in-aid program is working with landowners to make these connections. Second, existing segments need to be maintained and rehabilitated to ensure they are sustainable.

2. **Acquire and develop opportunities near regional population centers.**

There are no riding opportunities near major population centers. Opportunities are limited due to land use issues. Opportunities are not distributed equally around the state.

3. **Connect riding opportunities to communities, support facilities, and other trails.**

Connections to campgrounds, communities, and services like gas stations, food, and lodging are needed. Signed managed routes are needed to ensure safe secure connections to get riders where they want and need to go.



4. Continue to invest in user education that supports safe and appropriate riding behaviors.

The Off-Highway Vehicle program has invested heavily in safety training. The OHV Safety and Conservation Volunteer Program (a.k.a., Trail Ambassador Program) is currently in its third year. Trained volunteers meet and greet trail users, provide information, report inappropriate behaviors, monitor maintenance and signage needs, and report invasive species.

5. Partner with other trail groups to make acquisitions that benefit multiple user groups.

Horse Trails Network



1. Rehabilitate existing trails so they are more sustainable.

This includes rebuilding eroded treadways and rerouting inappropriate trail alignments. Sustainable trails protect natural resources and can be maintained on an annual basis.

2. Maintain existing trails to provide safe, high-quality trail riding experiences.

Annual maintenance is a long-term investment in trail resources.

3. Provide horse trails that meet equestrian needs. This includes:

- A combination of both single-track and wider, more developed treadways.
- Trails of sufficient length for a quality day-use or overnight destination experience.
- Trails that are located in quality natural resource areas.
- Trails that meet a variety of equestrian skill levels.

4. Develop new support facilities and upgrade/redevelop existing facilities. This includes:

- Adding electricity to horse campsites.
- Providing larger camping spurs and parking areas to accommodate large horse campers and trailers.
- Providing toilet and shower facilities.
- New or upgraded wells where needed.
- Improved kiosk and trail orientation signs.

5. Acquire additional trail corridors.

Acquisitions are especially important in geographic areas where existing facilities cannot meet the demand.

6. Increase enforcement of existing horse trail pass requirements.

- On lands administered by the DNR, a horse pass is required. Compliance rates should be monitored.

- 7. Continue to work with equestrians and equestrian advocacy groups to meet the needs of horseback riders.**
 - Ongoing communication between trail riders and trail providers is the best way to address equestrian issues, manage equestrian facilities, and meet equestrian trail user needs.
 - The Minnesota DNR should continue to work with the Equestrian Advisory Group in managing the horse pass program, discussions on statewide equestrian issues, and assistance in resolving local or regional issues.
- 8. Manage and promote a statewide system of equestrian trails and equestrian support facilities.**
 - There are many providers of equestrian trails and facilities. A comprehensive approach includes consideration for all facilities in planning, marketing, and development.
- 9. Explore and support opportunities for expanding equestrian facilities within the existing authorized state system.**
 - The state has authorized many additional miles of state trail and there are many private in-holdings within park boundaries that may be acquired in the future. Acquisitions or easements in areas that could support new equestrian trails should be supported.
 - State Forests may have additional opportunities for horse trails on existing state lands.

Mountain Biking Trail Network

- 1. Acquisition and/or development should focus on three or four high-quality mountain bike trail systems. Once those systems are built, expansions should be considered. This approach will help ensure quality trails that will attract the mountain bike community and be heavily used. With success, and increasing demand, expansion of additional sites can be justified.**
- 2. The minimum mileage for a mountain bike trail system should be at least 10 miles, with 20 to 30 optimal at full build-out.**
- 3. Providers should work very closely with a local mountain bike community, such as Minnesota Off Road Cyclists (MORC), on all trail development projects. These organizations can help define what mountain bike riders want in the trail system and assist in determining desirable locations and developing a top quality trail system. They'll also be aware of changing trends.**
- 4. Providers and the local mountain bike community should work together to determine the desired qualitative experience for each trail system developed. Classifications for different types of trails is suggested (e.g., Cuyuna is perhaps a “destination mountain bike trail”).**



5. Working together with the local mountain biking organization will help determine what trail type, riding experience, and skills group each trail system should be designed to attract on a given site. The local mountain biking organization can also assist determining what facilities are needed at each trail system (e.g. skills area, trail head facility type, parking, quantity of trails, and trail system difficulty level).
6. Providers and the local mountain biking organization should work together to secure funding to construct the designated trail system. By focusing on quality outcomes, riders will return to ride.

Hiking Network

1. Using a citizen model like the Superior Hiking Trail and the North Country National Scenic Trail, develop a system of Minnesota hiking trails that offers both longer term backpacking outings and various dayhiking opportunities. In addition, a Kettle River Trail and a Dorer Mississippi Bluffland Trail should be considered for addition to the Minnesota hiking trail system.
 - Solicit ideas for other possible trails to be future parts of this Minnesota hiking trail system.
2. Provide technical and financial assistance to local units of government and non-profit groups that are developing hiking trails, especially for building new or making improvements to existing hiking trails located on state-owned lands.
3. Acquire and develop facilities (e.g., trailheads, backcountry campsites, loop/side trails, interpretation) according to priority needs. Hiking trails with priority development needs include: Superior Hiking Trail, Border Route Trail, Kekekabic Trail, and North Country National Scenic Trail.
4. Rehabilitate existing trails so they are more sustainable and user-friendly. This includes rebuilding eroded treadways, rerouting inappropriate trail alignments, and enhancing trail conditions (e.g. major maintenance projects on hiking trails in the BWCAW). Sustainable trails protect natural resources and can be maintained on an annual basis.
5. Secure permanent corridors for the hiking trail systems.



State and Regional Paved Trail Network (bicycle, walking, in-line skating, and wheelchair)

1. Place a priority on acquisition in the densely settled and rapidly growing parts of the state that have the least opportunities per person at present and projected into the future.
2. Place a priority on regional centers that lack a near-home trail.

3. **Focus on acquiring and developing priority segments according to established criteria.**
4. **Design, develop, and redevelop parks and trails facilities that meet the differing outdoor recreation needs of our target markets.**
5. **Accelerate the rehabilitation of existing state and regional trails.**
6. **Increase the maintenance of state and regional trails.**
7. **Invest in support facilities.**
8. **Consider use of the road system as either interim or permanent connectors in the bicycle system.**
 - In some cases, land may not be available to make connections for many years. Or, it may not be feasible to develop an off-road trail on the site due to physical limitations. Upgrading a roadway connection to serve as a bikeway is a useful temporary or permanent measure.

Cross-Country Ski Trails

1. **Focus on quality and consistent grooming as a priority.**
2. **Provide enhancements to overcome barriers to participation such as trail head facilities, lighting, and artificial snow.**
3. **Provide education programs to teach children, youth, and young adults cross-country skiing skills and techniques.**
4. **Increase enforcement of the Minnesota Ski Pass to ensure broad compliance.**
5. **Ensure that quality cross-country ski trails are located within a reasonable distance of regional centers.**



Commuting

The state and regional trail network supports commuting and inspires development and expansion of the commuter network, including both separated and on-street trails. Commuting can take a number of forms: bicycling, walking, ATV riding, snowmobiling, and other uses. For example, in Northern Minnesota, a significant number of people commute by ATV and snowmobile.

The most common form of commuting is by bicycle, which yields benefits for the environment and the individual commuter. Improved air quality results from reduced emissions and traffic congestion is reduced. The commuter saves money on fuel and parking and is healthier.

Recent studies have shown that the development of trails increases commuting. Additional factors include publicizing the new facilities, utility of routes, and connectivity of the trail network. Following are strategies to enhance trails of state and regional significance for commuting:

1. Support Existing State and Regional Trails To Better Serve Commuters

- Portions of the existing state and regional trail system serve commuters. The Gateway, Douglas, Luce Line, and Paul Bunyan state trails are used by commuters. The Cedar Lake Trail and Midtown Greenway in Minneapolis, and the Bruce Vento Trail in St. Paul, are regional trails that serve commuters. Over the last five years, Minneapolis has made a number of high-priority connections to its commuting system that enable easier access to a wider variety of destinations, including connections to Target Field. They are successful commuter trails because they link residential neighborhoods to downtowns, they link people to businesses, and/or they link colleges and universities to residential neighborhoods and business centers.

2. Expand Existing State and Regional Trails as well as Develop New Trails to Better Serve Commuters.

- Prioritize development and expansion of state and regional trail networks for use by commuters in regional centers with populations greater than 50,000 inhabitants (Metropolitan Planning Organizations, MPO): Twin Cities, Duluth/Superior, Grand Forks/East Grand Forks, Rochester, St. Cloud, Fargo Moorhead, LaCrosse/LaCrescent. MPOs consider trails for commuters in their transit plans. Supporting implementation of these plans would foster higher commuting levels and expand the state and regional trail system.
- Recognize and support development of state and regional trails for commuting in Minnesota's other regional centers, including ones with tourist populations.

3. When redeveloping bridges and roads, accommodate commuter access wherever feasible. Examples include: Trunk Highway 371 bridge over Mississippi River in Baxter, Gateway Trail Bridges over high volume roads, Highway 110 Minnesota River Crossing, including Pilot Knob Historic Overlook.

"When bicycle commuters in Minneapolis are able to incorporate a bike ride through a park as part of their daily commute, WOW, it is so fantastic—the air is clean, it is much safer in terms of traffic interactions, it is quiet and pleasant, and usually much faster because there are few at-grade intersections that require stopping."

Tim Springer, Midtown Greenway Coalition

4. **Ensure state and regional trails are part of a statewide network to maximize their value for commuting.** Encourage development of regional plans with DNR, regional planning entities, and other critical partners. Planning and developing a community-wide trail plan will facilitate this use.
5. **Link state and regional trails to transit opportunities, including buses, park and rides, light and commuter rail.** Provide support facilities such as bike lockers and bike racks on buses and in stations.
6. **Develop closer cooperation and understanding between transportation and recreation staff, including cross-training and cooperative projects.**
7. **Partner with local trail providers to promote commuting opportunities.**
 - Co-promote recreational opportunities of neighboring communities, regardless of administrative level (e.g., local might promote regional or state, and vice versa).
 - Encourage development of jointly managed trailhead facilities that provide support facilities to an array of users.
 - Integrate trail signage across jurisdictions.
 - Encourage development of trailhead/trailside maps that display a wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities across jurisdictions.



Three Rivers Park District

Cross-country skiing at Baker Park Reserve.

Implementation and Benchmarks for Measuring Success

Implementation

The broad array of agencies, organizations, and governments that manage parks and trails of state and regional significance in Minnesota will implement the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*, including the Department of Natural Resources, Metropolitan Council, counties, cities, and nonprofit providers, along with their partners. The strategies identified in this plan will be implemented through a variety of means, including agency work planning, budgeting, and operational policies and procedures. Strategic partnerships will be an important part of the implementation.

Broadly speaking, Legacy funding requests should be clearly tied to one or more of the four strategic directions and their associated strategies, as described in the plan. Projects funded by Legacy grants also should be tied to achieving results in the four key areas.

Benchmarks for Measuring Success

The plan identifies outcomes to be measured for each of the strategic directions, but to track whether investment of the Legacy Funds is successful, specific goals and targets are needed. The goals and targets listed here are not a complete list of all of the activities or projects that will take place during the 25 years of Legacy Amendment funding; but rather key indicators that will help Minnesotans understand how progress is made and measured. As parks and trails of state and regional significance develop over the next 25 years and new, more appropriate benchmarks emerge, these goals and targets may be revised or replaced.

Legacy Plan 25-Year Goals and Targets

These targets and goals, organized by strategic direction, will measure the success of the Legacy Funds and other traditional sources of funding over the next 25 years.

Connect People and the Outdoors

Goal: Increase the number of visits to parks of state and regional significance

Target: Minnesota State Parks will host 10.8 million visits annually and Metro regional parks will host 34.6 million visits annually. For Minnesota State Parks, this will amount to a 19 percent increase—an additional 1.7 million visits per year—by 2035. For regional parks in the seven-country Metro region, this will amount to a 16 percent increase—an additional 4.8 million visits per year—by 2035.

Acquire Land, Create Opportunities

Goal: Acquire land needed to meet the nature-based outdoor recreation needs of Minnesotans.

Target: Metropolitan Regional Parks will acquire 14,000 more acres to reach their systemwide goal of 70,000 acres by 2035. If Greater Minnesota regional parks are to have the same number of park acres per person by 2035, they will need to add 17,000 acres by this same time. Greater Minnesota and Metropolitan regional parks have the same amount of acres per person today (19 acres per 1,000 people).

Target: Regional trails (Metro Regional and Greater Minnesota Regional combined) will acquire an additional 1,300 miles of paved bike trails. This will nearly triple the miles of paved bike trail from about 600 miles in 2009 to 1,900 miles in 2035.

Target: Minnesota State Parks will acquire and develop five new state parks or state recreation areas (SRAs), and continue the acquisition and development of existing state parks and SRAs.

Target: Minnesota State Trails will acquire and develop 600 miles of state trails.

Target: A park or trail of state or regional significance will be added near each of the 15 regional centers that currently lack a park or trail within 10 miles.

Goal: Acquire priority trail segments that connect communities to Minnesota's parks and trails.

Target: Minnesota State Parks and Trails will connect 10 state parks to state trails.

Take Care of What We Have

Goal: Protect the public's investment in built infrastructure.

Target: Minnesota State Parks and Trails will rehabilitate 250 miles of state trails.

Target: Minnesota State Parks and Trails will upgrade or renew 625 facilities in state park, state recreation area, and state forest overnight and day use areas.

Goal: Maintain the quality of natural resources in parks and trails of state and regional significance.

Target: Minnesota State Parks and Trails will reconstruct 40,000 acres of natural resources on state park, state recreation area, or state trail lands.

Target: Minnesota State Parks and Trails will enhance 325,000 acres of natural resources on state park, state recreation area, or state trail lands.

Coordinate Among Partners

Goal: Enhanced coordination of Minnesota's seamless network of state and regional parks and trails through a statewide advisory body.

Target: A statewide advisory board will be established by the DNR Commissioner and will meet on a quarterly basis beginning in 2011.

Goal: Enhanced coordination with other agencies, organizations, and nonprofits.

Target: A roundtable event will occur once every biennium to share information on implementation of the plan, provide feedback, and establish a forum to discuss issues, concerns, and recommendations.



Horseback riding at the Lake Elmo Park Reserve

Metropolitan Council

Defining Regional and State Significance for Minnesota Parks and Trails

Regional Significance

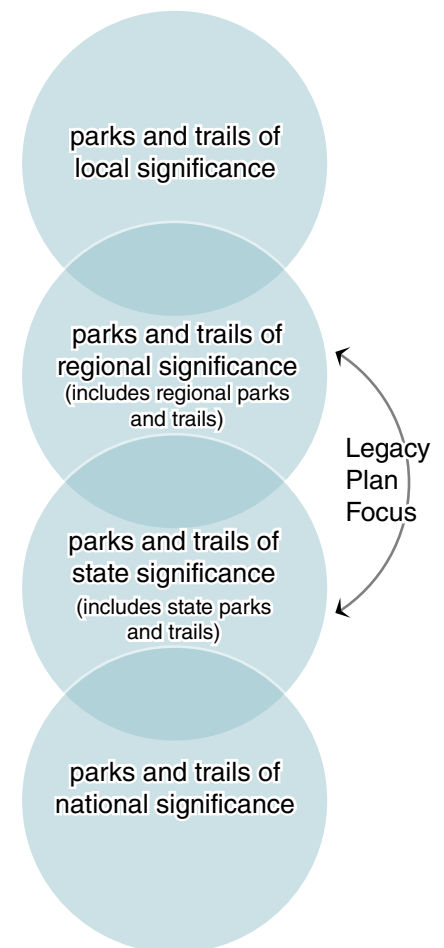
To be considered of regional significance, a park must have natural resource-based settings and activities and must serve multiple communities. In the Seven-County Metro Area, parks of regional significance must be consistent with the Metropolitan Council's Regional Parks Policy Plan. Other factors considered in determining regional significance may include size, special features, and recreation opportunities not available elsewhere in the area.

Trails of regional significance are in desirable settings and offer high-quality opportunities and use by users in the region and beyond. In the Metro area, they must be consistent with the Metropolitan Council's *Regional Parks Policy Plan*. Other factors considered in determining regional significance include length, connections to other trails, and lack of other trails in the area.

The 2009 Minnesota State Legislature passed a law that requires “a proposed definition of parks and trails of regional significance” as part of the 10- and 25-year Legacy Plan. Using the definitions from the Metropolitan Council (authorized by Minnesota Statute 473.121, Subd. 14) and the DNR-administered regional park and trail grant programs as well as input from the public planning effort, the Legacy Plan developed a definition that recognizes:

- The unique role parks and trails of regional significance play in Minnesota's outdoor recreation system, for both their recreational benefits and their economic impacts.
- The importance of understanding regional differences across Minnesota.
- Regional significance as an accepted category of parks and trails, distinct from local, state or federal significance.

(Minnesota Statute 86A defines the criteria for State Parks and State Trails.)



Parks of Regional Significance

Parks of regional significance must meet the first two criteria described below. Regional parks in the Seven-County Metropolitan Area must also meet the third criterion. Parks must also meet at least one of the criteria listed 4-6.

- 1. Natural Resource-Based Settings and Range of Activities Offered:** The park should provide a natural setting and offer outdoor recreation facilities and activities that are primarily natural resource-based. Examples include camping, picnicking, hiking, swimming, boating, canoeing, fishing, and nature study. A related measure is the range of these activities accommodated within the park (e.g., a park with a beach, campground, and boat launch facilities is more likely to attract a regional clientele than a park with only one of these facilities).
- 2. Use:** Evidence that the park serves at least a regional clientele (multiple communities). Other related factors may include evidence that the facility currently or potentially may draw tourists and generate economic impact from outside the local area.
- 3. Consistency:** In the Seven County Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, the proposed park must be consistent with the Metropolitan Council's *Regional Parks Policy Plan* or go through the proscribed amendment process. If the managing entity is applying for a Legacy Parks grant, the proposed park project must be part of a site plan, as required in the grant application, in addition to having formal approval of the relevant governing body.
- 4. Size:** The park should be significant in size. In southern Minnesota, a park of 100 acres is significant. In northern Minnesota, the acreage is generally larger.
- 5. Special Features:** Unique or unusual landscape features, historically or culturally significant sites, or parks containing characteristics of regional or statewide significance.
- 6. Scarcity of Recreational Resources:** The park provides public natural resource based recreational opportunities that are not otherwise available within a reasonable distance. Examples include water-based activities, such as swimming, fishing and boating; interpretive nature trails; public campgrounds; etc.

Trails of Regional Significance

Trails of regional significance must meet the first two criteria described below. Regional trails in the Seven-County Metropolitan Area must also meet the third criterion. Trails must also address the other criteria, not to be understood in isolation, but in their aggregate.

- 1. Regionally desirable setting:** The trail is located in a regionally desirable setting. Criteria include attractive, unusual, and/or representative landscapes, important destinations, or high-quality natural areas.
- 2. High-quality opportunity and use:** The trail serves as a destination, providing high-quality recreational opportunities, attracts a regional clientele (multiple communities), potentially may draw tourists, and generates an economic impact from outside the local area. The trail should be developed and maintained to include easy access, secure parking, access to drinking water and other necessary services, and is wide enough or designed in such a way to avoid user conflict and provide a safe experience.
- 3. Adequate length:** The trail provides at least an hour of outdoor recreation opportunity, or connects to other facilities that can provide at least an hour of recreation in total.
- 4. Connections:** The trail currently or potentially will link to an existing trail of regional or statewide significance. This includes providing connections between significant trails, or connecting communities/ community facilities to these trails. The regional trail cannot be entirely contained within a regional park unit.
- 5. Scarcity of Trail Resources:** The trail provides a high-quality recreational opportunity not otherwise available within a reasonable distance.
- 6. Consistency:** For the Seven-County Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, the proposed trail must be consistent with the Metropolitan Council's *Regional Parks Policy Plan* or must go through the proscribed amendment process. If the managing entity is applying for a Legacy Trails grant, the proposed trail project must be part of a site plan, as required in the grant application, in addition to having formal approval of the relevant governing body.

State Significance

Minnesota State Statutes, Chapter 86A, defines Minnesota's State Outdoor Recreation System, including State Parks, State Recreation Areas, and State Trails. The criteria established in this chapter provide the foundation for defining state significance. The overview described below provides a high-level summary. Interested readers should review this statute for further information. While State Parks, State Recreation Areas, and State Trails are of state significance, there are also other parks, trails, and recreation areas in Minnesota that meet this standard. Examples include Pilot Knob Natural Area, managed by the city of Mendota Heights. It is on the National Register of Historic Places because of its traditional importance to the Dakota people and its geographic significance in Minnesota history. There are numerous trails in Minnesota that meet the criteria for state significance, yet are not state trails. Examples include the Superior Hiking Trail which runs 282 miles, following the rocky ridgeline above Lake Superior from Duluth to the Canadian border, and the North Country National Scenic Trail, which runs 4,600 miles across seven states, including Minnesota.

Parks of State Significance

Parks of state significance shall be for aesthetic, cultural, and educational purposes, and shall not be designed to accommodate all forms or unlimited volumes of recreational use. Physical development shall be limited to those facilities necessary to complement the natural features and the values being preserved. Parks of state significance should substantially satisfy the following criteria:

1. Exemplify the natural characteristics of the major landscape regions of the state, in essentially unspoiled or restored condition or in a condition that will permit restoration in the foreseeable future.
2. Contain natural resources sufficiently diverse and interesting to attract people from throughout the state.
3. Be sufficiently large to permit protection of the plant and animal life and other natural resources that give the park its qualities and provide for a broad range of opportunities for human enjoyment of these qualities.



Wilderness Inquiry

Recreation Areas of State Significance

Recreation areas of state significance shall be established to provide a broad selection of outdoor recreation opportunities in a pleasing natural setting that may be used by large numbers of people. They should substantially satisfy the following criteria:

1. Contain natural or artificial resources that provide outstanding outdoor recreational opportunities that will attract visitors from beyond the local area.
2. Contain resources that permit intensive recreational use by large numbers of people.
3. May be located in areas that have serious deficiencies in public outdoor recreation facilities.

Trails of State Significance

Trails of state significance shall provide a recreational travel route through areas with minimum disturbance of the natural environment, recognize other multiple land use activities, and provide facilities for the rest and comfort of trail users. They should substantially satisfy the following criteria:

1. Permit travel in an appropriate manner that connects areas or points of natural, recreational, scientific, cultural, and historic interest; possess outstanding scenic beauty; connect units of the outdoor recreation system or the national trail system; reestablish travel along historically prominent travel routes; or provide commuter transportation.
2. Utilize to the greatest extent possible public lands and already established rights-of-way.
3. Provide for the appreciation, conservation, and enjoyment of significant scenic, historical, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which the trail may pass.
4. Take into consideration predicted public demand and future use.

Background Information

Legacy Amendment

On November 4, 2008, Minnesotans passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, which increased the state sales tax by $\frac{3}{8}$ of 1 percent (from 6.5 percent to 6.875 percent) for 25 years, to provide new funding for outdoor preservation, water quality, arts and culture and parks and trails.

A third of the money raised through the increased sales tax goes to the Outdoor Heritage Fund, a third to the Clean Water Fund, 14.25 percent to the Parks and Trails Fund and 19.75 percent to the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

The amendment requires that the funding be used to supplement state funding for these purposes, not to replace it.

Minnesota Constitution, Article XI: Appropriations and Finances

Sec. 15. Outdoor heritage, clean water, parks and trails, and arts and cultural heritage; sales tax dedicated funds.

Beginning July 1, 2009, until June 30, 2034, the sales and use tax rate shall be increased by three-eighths of one percent on sales and uses taxable under the general state sales and use tax law. Receipts from the increase, plus penalties and interest and reduced by any refunds, are dedicated, for the benefit of Minnesotans, to the following funds: 33 percent of the receipts shall be deposited in the outdoor heritage fund and may be spent only to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife; 33 percent of the receipts shall be deposited in the clean water fund and may be spent only to protect, enhance, and restore water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams and to protect groundwater from degradation, and at least five percent of the clean water fund must be spent only to protect drinking water sources; 14.25 percent of the receipts shall be deposited in the parks and trails fund and may be spent only to support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance; and 19.75 percent shall be deposited in the arts and cultural heritage fund and may be spent only for arts, arts education, and arts access and to preserve Minnesota's history and cultural heritage. An outdoor heritage fund; a parks and trails fund; a clean water fund and a sustainable drinking water account; and an arts and cultural heritage fund are created in the state treasury. The money dedicated under this section shall be appropriated by law. The dedicated money under this section must supplement traditional sources of funding for these purposes and may not be used as a substitute. Land acquired by fee with money deposited in the outdoor heritage fund under this section must be open to the public taking of fish and game during the open season unless otherwise provided by law. If the base of the sales and use tax is changed, the sales and use tax rate in this section may be proportionally adjusted by law to within one-thousandth of one percent in order to provide as close to the same amount of revenue as practicable for each fund as existed before the change to the sales and use tax.

[Adopted, November 4, 2008]

Legislative Mandate

The Minnesota Legislature passed a law in 2009 that requires the commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources to develop a long-range plan for the use of Legacy Funds, with significant involvement from citizens, user groups and local and regional organizations. The plan must have a vision for parks and trails, goals and measurable outcomes.

Minnesota Laws 2009, Ch. 172, Art. 3, Sec. 6

Subd. 2. State and regional parks and trails plan. (a) The commissioner of natural resources shall participate in a collaborative project to develop a 25-year, long-range plan for the use of the money available in the parks and trails fund under the Minnesota Constitution, article XI, section 15, and other traditional sources of funding. The collaborative project shall consist of a joint effort between representatives of the commissioner of natural resources, the Office of Explore Minnesota Tourism, the Metropolitan Council and its implementing agencies, the Central Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Coordinating Board, and regional parks and trails organizations outside the metropolitan area. The members shall prepare a ten-year strategic parks and trails coordination plan and develop a 25-year, long-range plan for use of the funding that includes goals and measurable outcomes and includes a vision for Minnesotans of what the state and regional parks will look like in 25 years.

(b) In developing the plans, the members shall utilize a process, including Web site survey tools and regional listening sessions, to be staffed by the commissioner, that ensure that citizens are included in development and finalization of the final plans. The commissioner, office, council, and board shall provide for input from user groups and local and regional park and trail organizations.

(c) The plans must consider the framework and inventory developed by the University of Minnesota Center for Changing Landscapes and must include, but is not limited to:

1. A proposed definition of “parks and trails of regional significance.”
2. A plan to increase the number of visitors to state and regional parks.
3. Assessment of the need for new or expanded regional outdoor recreation systems to preserve and connect high-quality, diverse natural resources in areas with concentrated and increasing populations.
4. Budgeting for ongoing maintenance.
5. Decommissions.
6. A plan for trails that takes into account connectivity and the potential for use by commuters.
7. Requirements for local contribution.
8. Benchmarks.

(d) The commissioner shall submit the ten-year strategic plan and 25-year long-range plan to the legislature as provided in Minnesota Statutes, section 3.195, by February 15, 2011.

Changes in Minnesota Demographics

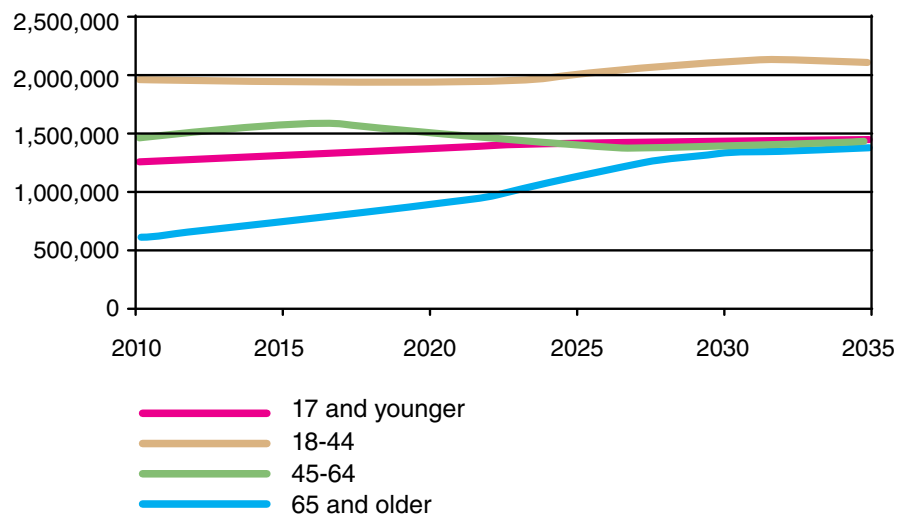
By 2035, Minnesota's population is projected to grow by about 20 percent, to 6.5 million residents. This growth will be characterized by an increasingly more diverse, older, and urban population. In addition to changing demographics, the state also is seeing a smaller percentage of residents taking part in outdoor recreation for a number of reasons, including an increasingly sedentary lifestyle for many residents.

Among the three age-based target markets for this plan, youth (17 and younger) and young adults (18-44) are projected to grow by 15 and 9 percent, respectively. The greatest growth will come from the older adults (45 and older); in particular the number of adults 65 and older will double, while that of adults 45-64 will change little.

Minnesota's total population of racial and ethnic minorities in 2010 is about 16 percent; by 2035, this is expected to reach 25 percent. This growth will largely come in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, although all regions of the state will become more diverse.

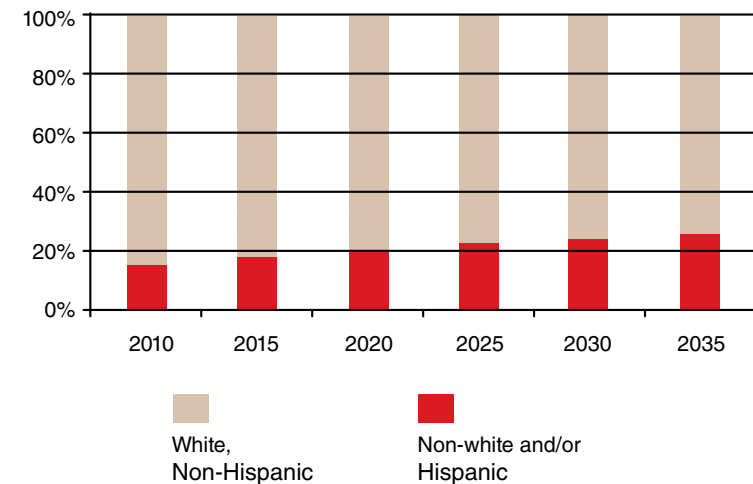
Minnesota population projections, 2010 to 2035

Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2007



Race and ethnicity, by percent of population, 2010 to 2035

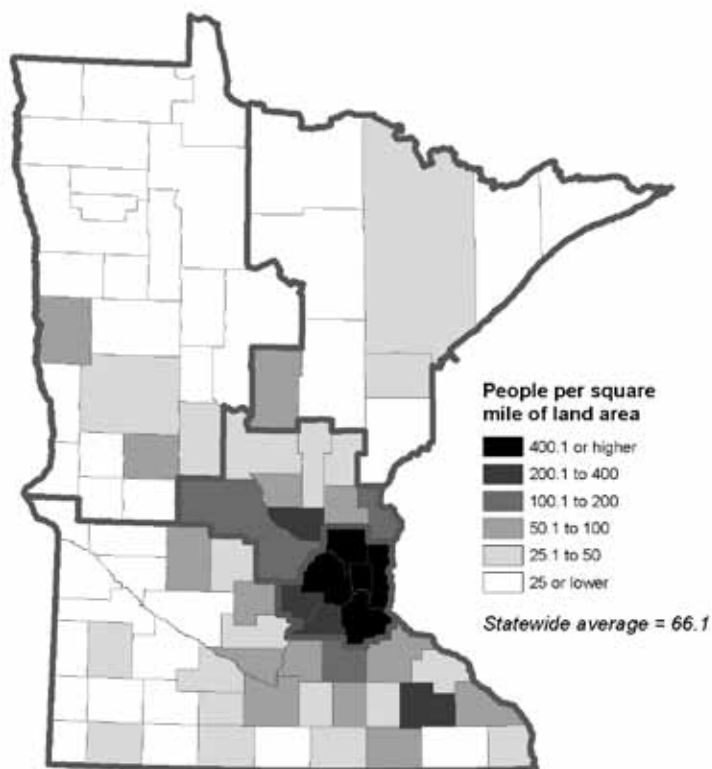
Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2009



Population growth in Minnesota will concentrate in the already densely settled areas of the state, particularly the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and surrounding counties. Nearly half of the population change will come from the metro area and another one-third will come from central Minnesota. The southern, northwest, and northeast regions will see more moderate population growth.

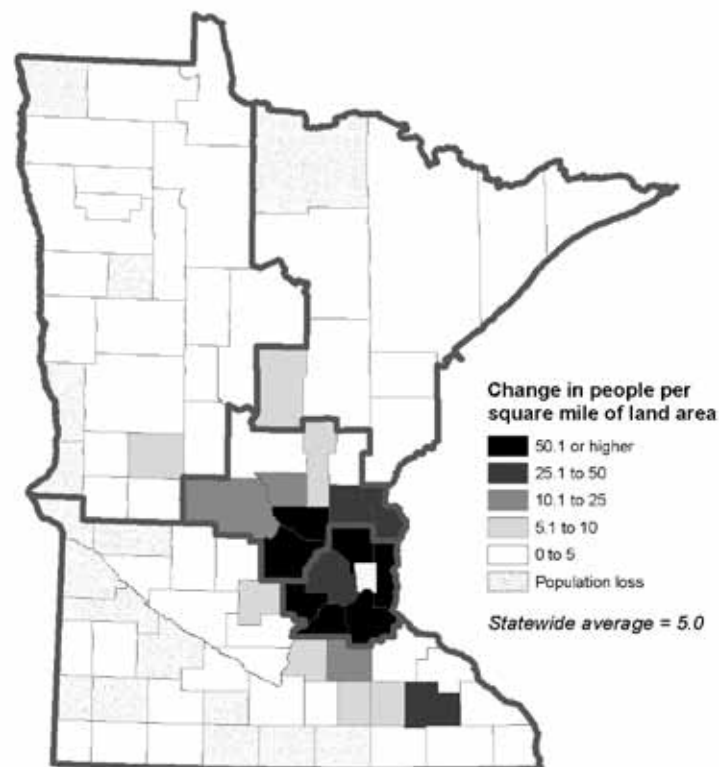
County Population Density, 2009

(Source: US Bureau of the Census; population derived from 2009 estimate figures)



Projected County Population Density Change, 2010 to 2035

(Source: MN State Demographer; population change derived from 2010 and 2035 projected figures, and change put on a 10-year basis)



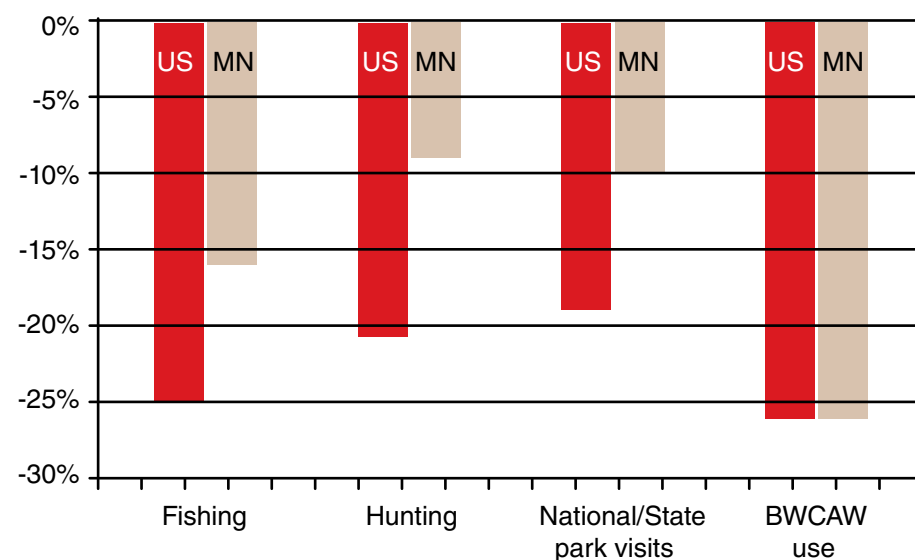
Changes in Outdoor Recreation Participation

Minnesota is not escaping a broad trend—evident since the 1990s—of declining per-capita participation in nature-based outdoor recreation. This is a national trend that impacts national parks, national trails, state parks, state trails and other outdoor recreational facilities. It includes activities such as hunting, fishing, boating, wildlife watching, and wilderness use. The primary driving factor behind this trend is a decline in involvement among young adults and their children. Today's young adults and youth are not as engaged in traditional nature-based activities as older generations.

A number of secondary factors also contribute to the decline in participation rates for traditional nature-based outdoor recreation activities. Research shows that participation is lower for older adults, urban individuals and communities of color. As our state ages, residents increasingly reside in urban areas and demographics shift toward increasing diversity, our states participation in outdoor recreation activities has declined. Park and trail providers will continue to monitor these trends. Additionally, they will continue their significant efforts to maintain existing visitors and reach out to new ones.

Per-capita change in numbers of participants or visitation/use, US and Minnesota, 1996-2006

Sources: MNDNR, USFWS, USFS and United States Census Bureau



Rise of Obesity in Minnesota

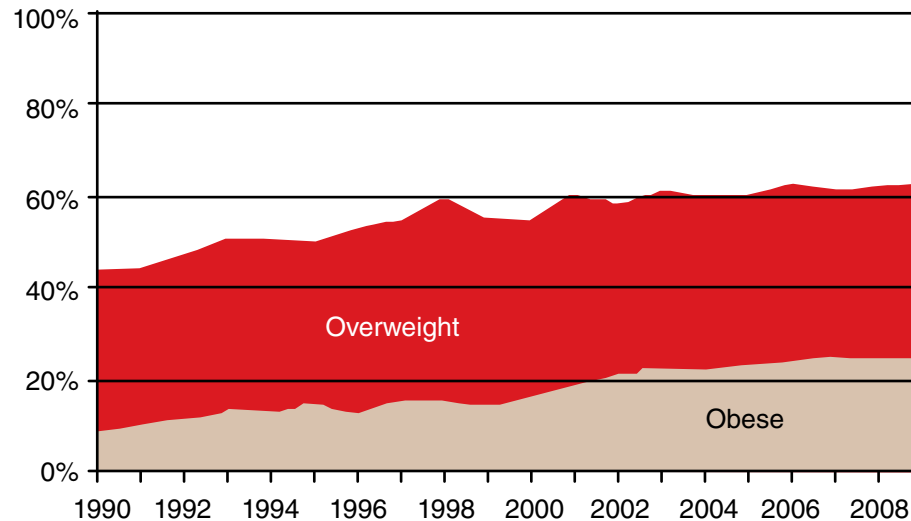
The replacement of vigorous outdoor activities with sedentary, indoor lifestyles has far-reaching negative consequences for our physical and mental health, for our economy, and for natural resources.

Six of 10 adult Minnesotans are overweight or obese and an estimated 17 percent of children and adolescents aged 2-19 years are also obese. In addition, 34 percent of Minnesotans have high cholesterol, 22 percent have high blood pressure, and 6 percent have diabetes. The economic cost to society is tremendous, \$1.3 billion in 2004 from obesity alone.

These statistics are troubling from a physical health and economic standpoint, and they also negatively impact people's mental health and quality of life. Since children often learn habits and lifestyle choices from their parents, these troubling health statistics do not bode well for the coming 25 years.

Proportion of Minnesota Adults Overweight and Obese

(Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2007, Center for Disease Control and Prevention)



Health and Outdoor Recreation

Decreasing participation in outdoor recreation may contribute to poor health and associated high medical costs. In Minnesota 62.8 percent of adults are either overweight or obese and less than half meet recommended levels of physical activity. Prevalence of obesity among children and adolescents in the United States quadrupled among 6- to 11-year-olds and more than tripled among 12- to 19-year-olds from 1971-1974 to 1999-2000. In 2000, medical costs in Minnesota associated with obesity were \$1.3 billion and medical costs associated with physical inactivity were \$495 million. High-quality parks and trails can help mitigate these costs by providing inexpensive, safe and easy opportunities for physical activity while also improving the health and well-being of adults and children alike.

Overview of Minnesota's Outdoor Recreation System

Minnesota's outdoor recreation system includes lands owned and/or managed by local, regional, state and federal governments, as well as some owned by nonprofit or for-profit entities. State and regional parks and trails are part of this system. More coordination and understanding of the whole system is needed to maximize outdoor recreation opportunities.

Federal, state, regional and local governments, private non-profits, and for-profit entities play different roles in managing and maintaining Minnesota's outdoor recreation system. The system includes everything from a simple neighborhood tot lot to regional parks to state parks to national forests. About one-fourth of the land in Minnesota is in some form of public ownership, and the vast majority is administered by federal, state, or county governments. Almost all of this land provides conservation benefits as well as some level of outdoor recreation opportunities. Managing this land for public benefits is an important responsibility and requires significant resources.

While the focus of this Legacy Plan is on state and regional parks and trails, these resources exist within a broader context of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system. The broader system provides significant recreational, economic, and conservation benefits. Further effort should be made to better understand how the broader system relates to state and regional parks and trails, and how it can work together better to meet the needs of Minnesotans.

Federal government

The Chippewa National Forest, established in 1908, was the first national forest east of the Mississippi River. The Superior National Forest, established in 1909, contains the largest wilderness east of the Rocky Mountains and north of the Everglades. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is the most heavily used of all federal wilderness areas.

In addition to these vast federal forest ownerships, which total more than 3.6 million acres, the federal government manages the relatively large Voyageurs National Park, the very urban Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, and several smaller units.

For more than 45 years, the federal government has had a funding partnership with the state and local governments in Minnesota through the Land and Water Conservation Fund program. The impact of this program on the outdoor recreation system in Minnesota has been significant.



Grand Portage State Park.

MNDNR

Federal transportation funding has contributed significant funding through the years, particularly for state and local trail projects. State fish, wildlife and water access programs have benefited greatly through the years from federal funding programs that help the state acquire, restore and manage fish and wildlife habitat.

State government

Itasca State Park, established in 1891, is one of the earliest state parks in the country. Many other state parks were established during the 1930s with help from the federal government through the Civilian Conservation Corps, Works Progress Administration, and other federal Depression-era programs. There are currently 72 state parks and recreation areas, including the new state park on Lake Vermilion. The first state forest was created in 1900. Today, there are 58 state forests totaling nearly 4 million acres, providing many opportunities for camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, bird-watching, canoeing, boating, and other natural resource-based outdoor recreation. Other outdoor recreation investments in state-owned and managed areas included wildlife management areas, state trails, water access sites, canoe and boating routes, and scientific and natural areas.

In 1963, the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Resources Commission was created to help determine state outdoor recreation needs and guide state investments to meet those needs. A cigarette tax was enacted to help fund outdoor recreation investments through the state Future Resources Fund. The commission later became the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. These commissions have recommended projects and programs for funding to the legislature for the past four decades, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in both state and local outdoor recreation lands and facilities. The outdoor recreation system in Minnesota owes much of its existence to this multi-decade effort. Other major state investments in outdoor recreation acquisition and facilities have come primarily through state bonding and the state Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, which uses a portion of the state lottery proceeds.

Maintaining this historic commitment to outdoor recreation investment by the state is a challenge. The Future Resources Fund, for example, was abolished during a state budget crisis.

Twin Cities Metropolitan Council Regional Government

The Twin Cities seven-county Metropolitan Council coordinates and plans for the major regional outdoor recreation system in the form of regional parks, trails, and park reserves. The Metropolitan Council provides state and regional funding for acquisition and development of the system through grants to ten county and city implementing agencies, which are responsible for operating and maintaining the facilities. The system, begun in 1974, now includes 51 parks and park reserves, seven special recreation areas, 38 regional trails totaling 231 miles, and 53,600 acres of land throughout the seven-county area.

It is generally acknowledged that the real metropolitan area already extends well beyond the statutorily defined seven-county area. Several “ring” counties are actively acquiring and developing regional parks and trails but, with the exception of some joint planning initiatives, they are not currently part of a coordinated regional system.

Local government

Minneapolis and St. Paul have extensive park systems dating back to the 1800s, as do many of the older and larger cities throughout the state. As suburbs arose in the Twin Cities area in the 1950s and beyond, they acquired and developed increasingly extensive park and trail systems. Several counties throughout the state also began to acquire and develop county parks in the last half of the twentieth century.

These facilities primarily provide close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities and often focus more attention on youth-related outdoor recreation, such as playgrounds, athletic fields, community centers, swimming pools, and beaches.

While most of these facilities have been acquired and developed with locally generated funds, a significant number have been assisted by state and federal grants through the years.

Private sector

The private resort industry has been particularly important for water-related recreation such as fishing, canoeing, boating, and swimming. Larger resorts also have added golf courses, tennis courts, and other facilities as amenities. A few offer downhill and cross-country skiing. The private sector—apart from the resort industry—is a major provider of golfing and day-use downhill skiing opportunities. There are a few privately operated hunting reserves, horse riding stables, etc. These private businesses are an important part of the larger tourism industry, one of the most important economic engines of the state.

Non-profit organizations also support outdoor recreation in the state. The Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the state park and state trail systems, dates back to 1954. It has helped the state acquire about \$10 million of state park and trail land. Organizations such as The Trust for Public Land, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, and The Nature Conservancy have played key roles in supporting funding for state, regional and local parks and trails; protection and restoration of natural areas; wetlands protection; water quality; and other natural resource- and outdoor recreation-related purposes.

Network of Existing Parks and Trails of State and Regional Significance

Minnesota's parks and trails of state and regional significance are an important part of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system. This system is extensive and geographically disbursed throughout the state. The existing state and regional park and trail network includes state parks, regional parks, state trails, regional trails, water trails and grant-in-aid trails.

Parks of State and Regional Significance

Parks and trails of state and regional significance include State Parks and State Recreation Areas and Regional Parks.

State Parks and State Recreation Areas

State parks are managed by the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Trails. There are 67 state parks, which encompass 225,000 acres of public land and about 25,000 acres of private in holdings. The most recent park, Lake Vermilion, was added in 2010.

Minnesota law defines the purpose of state parks as protecting and preserving areas of the state that illustrate and exemplify Minnesota's unique natural resources, and providing for the use, enjoyment and understanding of these resources for the enjoyment and recreation of future generations. "Park use shall be primarily for aesthetic, cultural, and educational purposes, and shall not be designed to accommodate all forms or unlimited volumes of recreational use." Some forms of recreation are more appropriate in a state recreation area, a state forest or elsewhere. (Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05 subd. 2c)

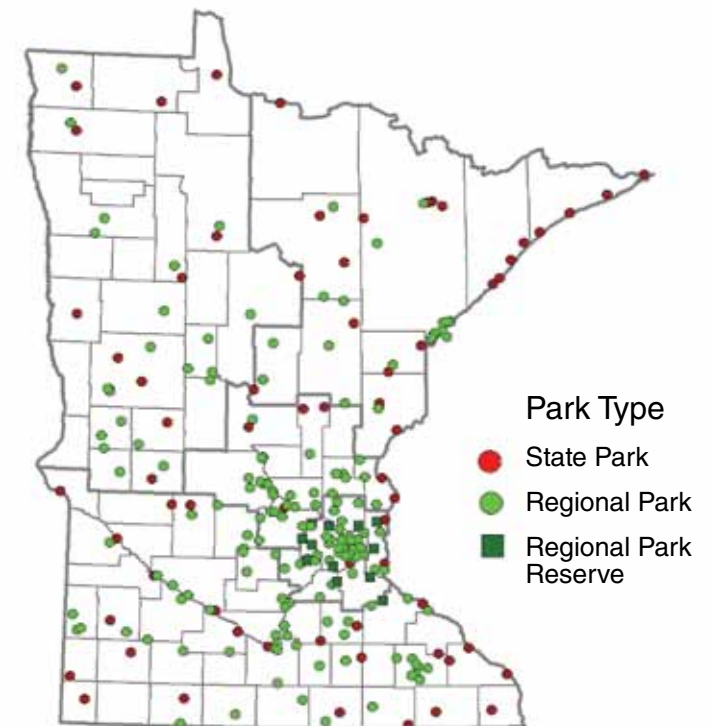
State recreation areas provide a broad selection of outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural setting that may be used by large numbers of people. Currently, there are eight state recreation areas. To be authorized as a state recreation area, a unit must contain resources that permit intensive recreational use by large numbers of people. "Physical development shall enhance and promote the use and enjoyment of the natural recreational resources of the area." (Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05 subd. 3c)

Regional Parks

The collection of regional parks can be described as two systems, the Metropolitan Regional Parks System and the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks System.

State and Regional Parks

(10/22/2010)



Metropolitan Regional Parks System

The Metropolitan Regional Park System is owned and operated by 10 park implementing agencies (Anoka, Ramsey, Washington, Dakota, Scott and Carver counties, cities of St Paul and Bloomington, the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, and Three Rivers Park District, which oversees regional parks in suburban Hennepin County and two units in Scott County). Today, the Metropolitan Regional Park System open for public use includes 53,600 acres of land in 39 regional parks, 12 park reserves, and seven Special Recreation Features. It also includes a 231-mile network of regional trails that link these parks together.

The Metropolitan Council determines which park lands managed by these agencies are of regional significance in its *Regional Parks Policy Plan*. The Council reviews and approves individual park and trail master plans for their consistency with the Council's *Regional Parks Policy Plan*, and provides capital improvement grants financed with State and Metropolitan Council funds to acquire land and develop and rehabilitate regional parks and trails.

Greater Minnesota Regional Park System

The Greater Minnesota system is less formally organized than the Metropolitan Regional Parks System or the state park system, but it plays a major role in providing park experiences in Greater Minnesota. For purposes of this study, the Greater Minnesota regional parks were identified based on the *DNR Greater Minnesota Park Inventory*, *Regional Park Criteria*, *2005 Association of Minnesota Counties Study* and the DNR regional park grant program. A recently formed organization, the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Park and Trail Providers, has formed to advocate for the recognition, development, and funding of this system.

Trails of State and Regional Significance

Trails of state and regional significance include state trails, regional trails, water trails, Grant-in-Aid trails, and long-distance hiking trails.

State Trails

State trails is a statutory designation but not a functional one due to the varying levels of development and authorized use. Minnesota's State Trail system includes 25 legislatively authorized trails in MS85.015, of which 21 are wholly or partially developed. Many state-authorized trails are in varying stages of completion. There are 1,270 miles of multiple-use trails, of which 541 miles are paved. Most of the state trails are on abandoned railroad grades, and accommodate both non-motorized and motorized uses, particularly snowmobiling. The primary spring, summer, and fall uses of state trails are biking, hiking, horseback riding, and in-line skating. During the winter, the primary uses are snowmobiling and cross country skiing. Twelve existing state trails are directly connected to at least one state park; 16 have authorized corridors that will connect to at least one state park.

Regional Trails

There are many Greater Minnesota regional trail providers, including counties, cities, regional rail authorities and nonprofit organizations. These trails provide a variety of opportunities, including paved bicycle trails, ATV riding, snowmobiling, and hiking. Many communities have local or regional trail systems which complement the state trail system, and link communities to parks and trails of state and regional significance.

State and Regional Paved Bicycle Trails were mapped and analyzed together to assess needs and connections. State and regional paved bicycle trails provide similar visitor experiences and often users don't know if they are riding on a state or regional trail. By analyzing the two trail types together, we can better assess need for connections and new trails.

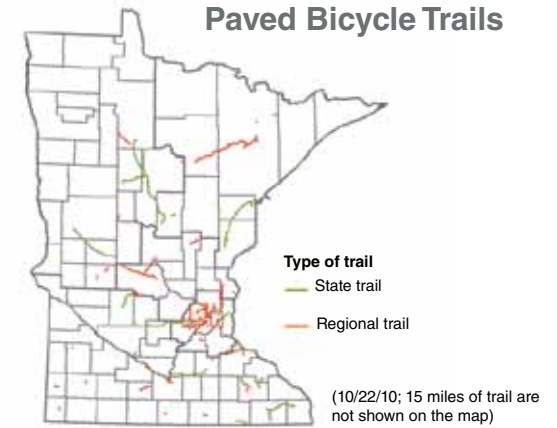
Water Trails

The DNR manages 4,397 miles of “water trails” for canoeing, kayaking, boating, and camping on the North Shore of Lake Superior and on 31 rivers statewide. The division provides and maintains hundreds of facilities related to the water trail system statewide, including 579 public water accesses, 417 campsites, 333 rest areas, and 124 portages. Many of these facilities are managed cooperatively with local units of government that have land holdings on water trails, but most of the remote sites are managed solely by the DNR. Twenty-seven state parks have a water trail adjacent to them, and numerous land-based trails intersect or follow water trails. Seven water trails are also designated wild and scenic rivers.

Grant-in-Aid System

The Grant-in-Aid system is developed and maintained by local clubs with local government sponsors. There are grant-in-aid snowmobile trails, off-highway vehicle trails, and cross-country ski trails. Recreational users provide the source of funding for these trail systems. Minnesota's extensive 22,000-mile grant-in-aid snowmobile trail system has a long and successful history. Grant-in-aid mileage for motorized trails is 1,408 miles of all-terrain vehicle trails, 188 miles of off-highway motorcycle trails and 18 miles of off-road vehicle trails. Funding for the motorized system comes from license fees and a percentage of the gas tax attributed to their recreational use. There are 726 miles of grant-in-aid cross-country ski trails. This system is funded by sales of the ski pass.

State and Regional Paved Bicycle Trails



State Water Trails



Snowmobile Trails



Long Distance Hiking Trails

North Country National Scenic Trail

The North Country National Scenic Trail is part of the National Trails System. The trail crosses New York; western Pennsylvania, Ohio, both peninsulas of Michigan, northern Wisconsin, northern Minnesota, and eastern North Dakota. Significant progress on the trail has been made in Minnesota. There are currently 130 miles on the ground: a segment completed through the Chippewa National Forest, Itasca State Park, Paul Bunyan State Forest, Hubbard, Clearwater and Becker County land, and White Earth. A new segment has just been completed 1.5 miles north of Grand Rapids. In March 2009, a bill was introduced to reroute the North Country Trail to include the Kekekabic Trail, the Border Route Trail, and the Superior Hiking Trail.

Kekekabic Trail

The 40-mile Kekekabic Trail is located in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness between Ely and the Gunflint Trail. In the 1880s, a portion of the trail led from the Gunflint Trail to the Paulson Mines. In the 1930s, it was an access trail for firefighting and forest management. The trail is maintained by the Kekekabic Trail Club volunteers.

Border Route Trail

The Border Route Trail is a 65-mile hiking trail that crosses the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, following the border between Minnesota and Canada. It connects with the Superior Hiking Trail at its eastern terminus and the Kekekabic Trail at its western terminus. The trail can be accessed by spur trails and connecting trails and provides experiences for day hikes and longer backpacking trips. The trail was planned and built in the early 1970s by the Minnesota Rovers club, with the DNR and U.S. Forest Service. Volunteer maintenance is currently managed by the Border Route Trail Association.

Superior Hiking Trail

The Superior Hiking Trail is a 282-mile trail that follows the rocky ridgeline above Lake Superior from Duluth to the Canadian border. The trail is used for day hikes and backpacking trips. The trail connects eight state parks, crosses over numerous creeks and rivers cascading down to Lake Superior, and passes through a variety of forest habitats including the boreal forest of birch, balsam, and aspen and the spectacular maple forest. Trailhead parking is located every 5-10 miles and 82 backcountry campsites are located along the trail. The Superior Hiking Trail Association builds, maintains, and manages the trail with the help of hundreds of volunteers.