

# Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

## Designation Application

### General Section

Designation Application #: 15-120D      Date Submitted: 06/30/2015

Park or Trail Name: Plum Creek Park

District #: 5      Map Coordinates (Latitude and Longitude): Latitude: 44.2105 Longitude: -95.4939

#### Location Description:

Plum Creek Park is resides approximately 5 miles southwest of Walnut Grove, MN which is located in Redwood County MN. The physical address is 14160 Co. Hwy 5, Walnut Grove, MN 56180. Attached are the location map and topographical map that clearly identifies the Plum Creek Park Complex.

Lead Applicant Organization: Redwood County

Lead Contact First Name: Vicki      Last Name: Knobloch

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Joint Applicant #1 Organization:

Joint Applicant #2 Organization:

Joint Applicant #3 Organization:

Joint Applicant #4 Organization:

Describe other project supporters:

### Description Section

Regional Significance Statement:

Classification: Special Recreational Feature Park

Total proposed acreage:

#### Overview/Description of Park or Trail:

Located at 14160 County Hwy 5, Walnut Grove Minnesota, Plum Creek Park recreational area is the second largest and only county park in the southwestern corner of Redwood County that offers public facilities for camping, picnicking, hiking and fishing recreational activities. Named after the Plum Creek

in which County Commissioners and Soil and Water conservation people were studying for a watershed program, including impoundment of creek water and creation of a recreational area, a new star arose over the rolling wooded prairie near Walnut Grove Minnesota in the early 1970s. Beginning in 1969 through 2002, the county purchased 205 acres with County and the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation funding for the development of playgrounds, picnic areas, roads, restrooms, shower buildings, and campsites. Beginning in 1970, and by May, 1973, local citizens, 4-H clubs, and school students planted over 30,000 seedlings of ponderosa pines, black walnut and pine. In 1977, an earth fill dam was constructed creating Lake Laura. The park is located five miles southwest of Walnut Grove and was designed in two sections, Upper and Lower. The Upper Park boasts Lake Laura, including a swimming beach, bathhouse, concessions building, walking trails, playground, campground and a 9-hole Frisbee Disc course. Throughout the upper campground, wifi internet is available to its 70 campsites. The Lower Park includes a shelter house, picnic tables, a softball park, volleyball court, and trails for hiking, and skiing. Of special recognition is the effort of former local Walnut Grove School teacher Burton W. Tellefsen for his love of the environment. Over the years, he dedicated hundreds of hours to planting non-native trees and prairie plants at Plum Creek Park. To continue his legacy, "When the Prairie Whispers", a walking tour of Lower Plum Creek Park was created to highlight his work. This tour is based upon Tellefsen's recounting of local history, flora and fauna during many extended walks through the park. As told by the locals, when breezes would sweep across the tall grasses and through the trees, Burt would often remark, "When the prairie whispers, it's a soothing sound." Plum Creek Park provides lake activities to a region with no close lake access. Camping draws visitors from across the United States and over 30 foreign countries to partake of Laura Ingalls Wilder pageant which is within walking distance of the campsites. Future park plans include acquiring additional land to expand the camping sites; paved walking trails, canoe launches and an hiking/biking trail to connect Plum Creek Park to the City of Walnut Grove targeting bicyclists, walkers and hikers. The DNR is also planning the Casey Jones Trail along Plum Creek from Walnut Grove to Redwood Falls. This multi-use trail would offer residents and visitors the opportunity to explore Redwood County in a way few experience it today. Great potential exists to capitalize on this and other trail corridors to expand the economic benefit of recreation and tourism.

What is the Acquisition and Development Status?

New Park or Trail (no land acquired or developed)

Existing Park or Trail

Land Acquisition

Status: 205 acres purchased, approximately 25 more for expansion

Percentage of Land Acquired: 90

Development Status

No Development

Some Development, but more Proposed

New Facilities Proposed

- Existing Facilities to be Upgraded  
 Fully Development

Facility Listing Section

Classification: Special Recreational Feature Park	
Existing Facility List	Proposed Facility List
Camping-cross-section of camper types, Electric/water/sewer RV sites, Electric/water campsites, Electric campsites, Non-electric campsites, Tent only sites, Picnicking and picnic shelters, Hiking Trails (natural), Mountain Biking Trails (natural), Swimming, Canoeing Facilities, Fishing Piers, Visitor Center, Play areas, Restrooms/sanitation building, Roads and Parking Areas	Camping-cross-section of camper types, Electric/water/sewer RV sites, Camper Cabins, Walking Trails (paved), Biking trails (paved), Canoeing Facilities, Nature Center/Interpretation Trails, Play Areas, with an outdoor theme

Master Plan Status Section

Master Plan Status: No Master Plan is Available

Describe Other Supportive Information:

The Plum Creek Park project was a high priority in the county’s Comprehensive Plan from 1970. According to the State Recreation Plan of 1968, on page 126, Region 6 (Redwood County) is deficient in camping areas, picnic areas, horseback riding trails and space for field games. The Plum Creek facility will help alleviate those deficiencies. The Redwood County Comprehensive Plan from 2007, reflects priorities and decisions of its stakeholders. Enjoyment of the natural environment is a key component and because Redwood County is an extensive agricultural area, unaltered, natural areas are limited in Redwood County. The vast majority of land has been drained to accommodate agriculture. Practically all that remains of the natural environment is the Plum Creek Park area and Minnesota River Valley and other water-related environments along other rivers, streams and creeks. It is these well-hydrated areas that will provide environments where trees and forests can thrive and wildlife can sustain. The DNR is also planning the Casey Jones Trail along Plum Creek from Walnut Grove to Redwood Falls. The County Commissioners recognize the importance of preserving and expanding the park and are committed to that goal. In 2014, a new Park and Trails committee was established enlisting county residents from each commissioner district to participate in the planning of expanding the parks and establishing trails in conjunction with the objectives of the County’s Comprehensive plan.

Classification Details Section

Classification: Special Recreational Feature Park

Criteria #1 Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience: Plum Creek Park serves as a destination place for the 15,000 annual visitors that make the pilgrimage to experience nature and the

prairie while they participate in the outdoor Wilder Pageant. Without a doubt, this is the most famous activity that attracts visitors from around the world wishing to see the real-life inspiration for Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House stories, and the TV show inspired by them. The pageant is performed on the banks of Plum Creek in a natural amphitheater which is within walking distance from Plum Creek Park. This quality experience draws visitors back time and again. and while waiting for the performance, visitors enjoy an enhanced view of Lake Laura on the observation deck overlooking the lake and beach area. The park offers 48 sites with water/electricity; 17 electric only and 5 offer the camper a rustic experience with non-electric tent sites. Activities include When the Prairie Whispers walking trail is a self-guided walking/hiking tour of the many varieties of native trees; a unique professionally developed Frisbee Golf course is available; water activities at Lake Laura such as swimming, canoeing, kayaking, and fishing, playgrounds for children; and shelters with a large fireplace for picnicking in the peaceful areas of the park. In 2012, Plum Creek Park was named one of the "Best Campgrounds in Minnesota" by CBS Minnesota. "If you are looking for a little history lesson in addition to your scenery when you go camping, look no further than Walnut Grove's Plum Creek Park. This is definitely a family oriented camping area, but well worth the extra drive for anyone who ever enjoyed reading (or watching) "Little House on the Prairie".

Criteria #2 Provides a Natural and Scenic Setting Offering a Compelling Sense of Place: Plum Creek Park, a true gem of the prairie, consists of the Upper and Lower Park. The natural beauty of this area, with its rolling hills and groves of walnut, maple, oak and pine trees offer a compelling sense of uniqueness as one enjoys the scenic overlook to Lake Laura in the upper park and walking bridge to stop and listen to the gentle and peaceful sounds of Plum Creek in the lower park. Currently there are only two lakes in Redwood County, and both are man-made. Lake Laura, located in the Upper Park, was developed in a natural area of the park as a water reservoir under the Minnesota River Basin Area II guidance. The lake has a depth of 21 feet with a shoreline length of 1/8 mile. Lake Laura has shoreline access through the park and non-gas powered boat access is by portage only. The lake is managed for largemouth bass, black crappie and yellow perch. Park visitors are naturally drawn to the stately gazebo overlooking the beautiful view of the lake and can take in the breath-taking scenery of the prairie grasses and flowers swaying in the gentle breeze, gaze up into the sky at the graceful soaring eagles and enjoy the delightful laughter of children as they frolic on the shoreline beach and swim in the lake. Agricultural lands within the park have been restored with native grasses, flowers and trees offering educational experiences related to the plant and animal life, glacial history and the environment.

Criteria #3 Well-located to Serve a Regional Need and/or Tourist Destination: Plum Creek Park is located on Redwood County Highway 5 in the southwestern portion of Redwood County. A major tourist attraction to the area is the Laura Ingalls Wilder Pageant. Plum Creek Park serves Walnut Grove and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Pageant summer venue by providing tourists from around the world a place to stay and camp at Plum Creek Park. The campground is within walking distance to the outdoor amphitheater and is at capacity July. The Pageant draws in excess of 5,000 patrons annually and the area swells to over 15,000 patrons visiting the park, Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum, and those attending the pageant. Plum Creek Park attendants estimate over 5,000 patrons visit the park annually. In early 1999, there was an interest expressed by several counties and the Southwest Economic Development Professional in trails planning as an opportunity to enhance tourism and economic development in Southwest

Minnesota. The Southwest Regional Development Commission developed The Regional Trailhead and Potential Corridor Map through a public process. Potential Corridors for Pedestrian/Bicycle or multi-use trails/routes identified in the planning process included Plum Creek Park to the City of Walnut Grove and to develop additional trails within the Plum Creek Park. Plan included a paved trail, 3 miles in length with termini at Plum Creek Park and the museum in Walnut Grove, targeting bicyclists, walkers and hikers. Potential attractions is nature and would connect the current walking trail within the Park. This plan would eventually lead to access of the State Authorized Casey Jones Trail, Chief Sleepy Eye Trail and the Minnesota River Trail. The vision for the future shows Plum Creek Park as destination hub to access three State Trail systems fortifying its rank as a regional park.

Criteria #4 Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within the Region: Since Plum Creek Park is home to only one of two lakes within Redwood County, the park serves the region with water activities such as swimming, canoeing, kayaking, and fishing that are otherwise only available by driving a considerable distance. There are many opportunities for watching birds and other wildlife, nature trails for hiking, fields for baseball and sand volleyball and a 9-hole Disc Golf Course designed by the Professional Disc Golf Association's veteran Chuck Kennedy. With nine holes and an overall length of about 2,000 feet on the park's rolling prairie, Kennedy said the course will integrate two sets of tee boxes in order to facilitate both picnic Frisbee players as well as disc players. The Plum Creek Park Disc Golf Course is listed on the PDGA's website at [www.pdga.com](http://www.pdga.com). In conjunction with the Wilder Pageant, Black Powder enthusiasts are able to participate in the Plum Creek Rendezvous with a black powder shoot. Plum Creek Park fills a large gap of providing amenities expected to be found in the State Park system without daily use fees. The nearest state/regional parks in the area are Fort Ridgley State Park (60 miles) and Alexander Ramsey Park, Redwood Falls (45 miles).

Attachment List Section (only lists up to 10 documents)

Type	Description
Location Map	Location map added from general tab
Location Map	Location map added from general tab
Other	Frisbee/Disc Golf Course Article
Other	Links to websites in support of Plum Creek Park activities
Other	Article on Best Campgrounds in Minnesota
Other	Wilder Pageant information
Photo	Plum Creek Park entrance sign
Photo	Lake Laura Gazebo/overlook
Photo	Fishing at Lake Laura
Photo	Campers at upper Plum Creek Park campground