

# Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

## Designation Application

### General Section

Designation Application #: 14-003D      Date Submitted: 09/07/2015

Park or Trail Name: Northland Regional Sports Park

District #: 2      Map Coordinates (Latitude and Longitude): Latitude: 47.5512 Longitude: -95.0225

#### Location Description:

The location and construction of the Northland Regional Sports Park {NRSP} has been a topic of discussion since 1990 when a small group of advocates for such a facility started a focus group called the Headwaters Shooting Sports Association. Of course at that time, there was practically no reason for collaboration among the various outdoor recreationist groups because everyone had their own space, membership and financial capacity but the members envisioned an uncertain future. How times have changed! All required actions and reasonable efforts were undertaken to make certain the NRSP is appropriate for this location. The present site location was suggested very early on by the Beltrami County Land Commissioner as were two other sites in close proximity. Of the three sites, this location: had an appropriate size, was in close proximity to the City of Bemidji and is accessible by State Highways, is located with public land on all four sides and the State and County Forestry Departments use of the public land guaranteed that there would be no commercial or residential development in the foreseeable future. This park location itself would be contained within a well managed coniferous plantation thus enhancing the sense of a quality outdoor experience for park visitors and afford no visibility from passersby on the highway on the east or the gravel roads on the north or south. The soils, water table and water run-off analysis all indicated that the structures to be constructed should be done so with best management practices ensuring "resilient sustainability". There are several wetland areas that are in close proximity but they will also remain unaffected by the park's construction. The development of a park facility in this location was presented to the community for comment as a part of the planning process. There were open houses conducted by the Headwaters RDC where comments were solicited and questions answered, surveys were conducted and results reviewed. Advocates attended Eckles Township Board meetings to answer questions posed by residents. The results of these efforts favored the development of a park in this location with only a few dissenting comments. The Beltrami County Board of Commissioners approved the adoption of a Recreational Facilities Park Plan developed by their own Park and Recreation Manager in January 2008. This action then set in motion a special use permit request from Beltrami County to the State of Minnesota for the transfer of 360 acres of tax forfeit land to be used for a multi-use sports park with a focus on the shooting sports. The state deeded the land in question to Beltrami County as requested. {See uploaded Beltrami County Shooting Sports Park Facility Master Plan Report, Sections 1.0, 2.0, 3.0} The development and design of the NRSP as a multi-use regional park facility has always been a part of the vision. The reason for this is that Bemidji is the regional hub for this part of the state, boasting a regional airport, DNR and MNDOT Headquarters, is home of Bemidji State University and the retail market population of the greater Bemidji area is over 90,000. The fact that the location allows access to trails of "regional significance", the size of the park, it's multi-use design and that some of the facility provided access to recreational

activities that could not be found within a 100 to 140 mile radius identifies it as a park with regional capacity. Another significant aspect in the decision to locate the NRSP in the Bemidji region, is that this community will support this park not only financially but also with the operations, management and maintenance by non-profit organizations. {See uploaded letters of support} The financial support of several local non profit foundations, contributions of local major donors, small businesses and individuals providing support, are a real demonstration of what a great location Bemidji is for a regional park with special features. The first upload is a Google image with nothing but the outline of the park carved out of the forest and a road into the range area from Highway 89. The legal description of the image is: \*N1/2 of NE1/4; NE1/4NW1/4; North 900 feet of the S1/2 of NE1/4; and the North 900 feet of the SE1/4 of NW1/4 Section 17, Township 147N, Range 34 West, Beltrami County, Minnesota. In summary, the location description is just more than it's physical placement. The NRSP is located here not only because it would be accessible to and used by diverse user groups, is safely designed, well managed and maintained by non profits but because the local and regional community will support it as well.

Lead Applicant Organization: Beltrami County

Lead Contact First Name: \*Shawn Last Name: Morgan

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Joint Applicant #1 Organization:

Joint Applicant #2 Organization:

Joint Applicant #3 Organization:

Joint Applicant #4 Organization:

Describe other project supporters:

Beltrami County Parks and Rec Department Headwaters Shooting Sports Association, Inc Bemidji Trap and Skeet Club, Inc. Bemidji Area Shooters Association, Inc. Beltrami County Sheriff's Department Voyageurs Area Boy Scouts Council North Country Snowmobile Club Northwood's Riders OHV Club MDHA/Bemidji Chapter Whitetails Unlimited/Bemidji Chapter

### Description Section

Classification: Special Recreational Feature Park

Total proposed acreage:

Overview/Description of Park or Trail:

The Northland Regional Sports Park (NRSP) development aligns perfectly with Legacy priorities: it will connect people and the outdoors; it will create opportunities for unique outdoor recreation activities for future generations; the work to date clearly demonstrates that coordination among partners and local

user groups both public and private non-profit is possible. The NRSP is scheduled to start construction of a phased project that has been eight (8) years in planning this fall is proof that collaboration works. In 2006 Beltrami County Parks and Recreation received the National Alliance of Counties (NACO) award for excellence for its Recreational Trails Plan. This in turn lead the County Parks and Rec manager to a "parks/use areas" planning effort with the Headwaters RDC. This park is a direct result of that collaboration. (See Beltrami County Recreational Facilities Plan) The NRSP will be situated on 360 acres of county-owned land, located in Eckles Township. The park can be accessed from Highway 89, about 6 miles northwest of Bemidji. In 2008, Beltrami County designated this parcel of land to be developed into a multi-use park . At the time, this area was tax forfeit land, managed by Beltrami County Land Department. The county applied for a special use permit from the State of Minnesota and it was approved for the purpose of developing a shooting sports park. (see Beltrami Co. 2008 resolution) Beltrami County completed much of the necessary planning and groundwork for the project. Since 2008, the county has funded the construction of an access road, a site-engineering plan with Phase I\* and Phase II\* signed plans, a sound study, and has removed merchantable fiber from the areas that needed to be cleared for the construction of the range areas (see uploaded Google Earth Image). The Headwaters Shooting Sports Association, a local partner, has contracted for the development of an Environmental Stewardship Plan\* that will be used to maintain MPCA compliance within the range areas and had an environmental assessment that includes a phase 1, archaeology survey to ensure that the site is not of cultural significance and is on a location that is appropriate for it's intended use. The modified construction plans for Phase One call for the development of three major physical spaces within the park: (A) General areas that include parking and range buildings and a recently added pollinator planting; (B) the Rifle-Pistol Area that includes; a covered 100 yard small bore range, a covered 50 yard bullseye handgun range and a 50 yard practical pistol range; and (C) the Shotgun Area that includes; six trap fields (initially only four were planned), one combination trap/skeet field and one skeet field with a "5 stand clays" overlay. Plans will also include a main entrance sign and orientation station and perimeter fencing with signage. Future development (Phase II) will include construction of a training and education center, an indoor shooting range, expanded skeet ranges and expanded rifle ranges. \* These documents will be uploaded as attachments as part of the "Master Plan" section.

What is the Acquisition and Development Status?

New Park or Trail (no land acquired or developed)

Existing Park or Trail

Land Acquisition

Status: Tax forfeit land deeded to Beltrami County

Percentage of Land Acquired: 100%

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
Roads and Parking Areas, At the present time the area for the shooting range facilities is cleared and a county road is installed from Highway 89 to the range areas.	Camping-cross-section of camper types, Electric/water/sewer RV sites, Picknicking and picnic shelters, Hiking Trails (natural), Horseback Riding Trails (natural), Visitor Center, Archery/Shooting ranges, Restrooms/sanitation building, Roads and Parking Areas, Trap, skeet, rifle and pistol shooting facility w/ parking lots, range buildings that have sewer, water and electrical service and ADA compliant walkways. There will be a multi-use trail head w/ parking lot that connections directly and/or indirectly to trails of regional significance. The trail head area will provide a shelter and toilet facility initially and could be upgraded to include other amenities. At the park entrance there will be a general orientation area with signage and parking.

Master Plan Status Section

Master Plan Status: Master Plan meeting requirements of strategic plan is available

Describe Other Supportive Information:

Beltrami County Board motion and Resolution Eckles Township Resolution Beltrami County Recreational Facilities Plan FONSI, SHPO letters, MN DNR, Army Corps of engineers and County NRM letters Beltrami County Shooting Sports Park Facility Master Plan Environmental Stewardship Plan Beltrami County Environmental Services letter Beltrami County NRSP Phase I Engineer's Biding Plans (from KE and SAPES) Beltrami County NRSP Phase II Engineering Plans (from KE and SAPES) Northland Regional Shooting Sports Fund News Release Northland Regional Shooting Sports Fund Area Infrastructure Map and info (2-sided)

Classification Details Section

Classification: Special Recreational Feature Park

Criteria #1 Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience: Beltrami County has designated a 360-acre parcel of land in Eckles Township for the development of a multiuse park called the Northland Regional Sports Park. The project is one that has broad community support and exemplifies the best of public-private partnerships. The thorough planning and engineering that has already been done by the county lays out a site design that makes the best use of acreage, exemplifies stewardship, and enables the safe and simultaneous use of the park by these diverse user groups. The development is broken into two phases. Phase I includes: construction of basic facility-wide park infrastructure (access, water, sewer, electricity, parking and walkways) and the development of two shooting areas, (shotgun and rifle/pistol ranges). The resulting development will accommodate activities of multiple user groups, including: smallbore shooting activities, bullseye pistol shooting activities and practical pistol shooting activities, hunter education training, law enforcement training, hunter sight in activities, trail hiking & cycling, trap shooting activities, including High School Clay Target match shooting, skeet shooting activities and 5-stand sporting clays shooting. Phase II includes: the construction of a trailhead hub that will connect to Regional trail systems that will allow motorized and non-motorized trail riders access, highpower rifle shooting activities, bench rest shooting activities, "indoor to outdoor" smallbore and centerfire handgun range, expanded skeet fields (2), The park will provide facilities that address several scarce recreation resources, including a trailhead hub, shooting ranges and an education and training facility. It is a fact that at this time; Bemidji does have any outdoor rifle - handgun ranges; that the existing trap shooting facility exists on the regional airport and faces imminent closure as does the only existing indoor range in Bemidji; and there is no education and training center presently available for use.

Criteria #2 Provides a Natural and Scenic Setting Offering a Compelling Sense of Place: The NRSP is located west and north of Bemidji and is surrounded by views of large forests, wetlands, and Grant Creek (located to the west of the site). The property is bordered on the east by Highway 89 and on the north by Jackpine Road but these roads are not visible from a majority of the park. The park is heavily forested with a variety of tree species including Aspen, White Pine, Jack Pine, and Red Pine. The park site does not contain any old growth trees, having been logged off and replanted approximately 30-40 years ago. The standing fiber that was located in the portion of the park designated for shooting range development has been harvested and cleared by Beltrami County, using best management practices in natural resource management. There are three different types of wetlands located to the west of the park, outside of the park boundaries along Grant Creek. These three wetlands connect to Grant Creek and provide a tranquil view to the west. The park is significant in size, encompassing 360 acres. Perhaps of equal importance to the park's size, is its relation to other public land. It is surrounded by approximately 3,800 acres of state-owned and tax forfeited (managed by Beltrami County, NRM Department) lands. These lands are open to the public and have a multi-state recreational draw. The placement of the park in the center of these tremendous natural resources makes the park even more significant. The park is the hub from which the public can access literally thousands of acres of land with the many trail systems in the county (including the Paul Bunyan State Trail) effectively connecting people to the outdoors and creating opportunities for enjoyment of our state's rich natural resources.

Criteria #3 Well-located to Serve a Regional Need and/or Tourist Destination: The park site is six miles from Bemidji, and located within Beltrami County. With 2,505 square miles, Beltrami County is one of

the largest in the state and its population is growing rapidly: from 2000 to 2010, the county population grew by 12.1%.<sup>1</sup> The county has over 116,000 acres of lakes, 459,000 acres of state forest land and 147,000 acres of tax forfeit land. Bemidji serves as a growing regional center for all of Northern Minnesota. While the city proper has a population of just over 14,000, the greater Bemidji area (which includes much of southern Beltrami County and northern Hubbard County) has a combined population of 40,000. It serves a retail market population in northern Minnesota of 90,000. There are more than 80,000 residents in Bemidji (45-mile) secondary market area including 14 small cities, two of which are county seats and nearly 350,000 in its (90-mile) tertiary market area, including an additional 17 small cities, 4 of which are county seats. The Bemidji Regional Airport represents one of the busiest regional airports in the state, with nearly 30,000 enplanements annually. Bemidji is home to Bemidji State University (a four year university), Northwest Technical College, and Oak Hills Christian College, with a combined enrollment of approximately 7,000 students. Bemidji is located near many popular recreational destinations, including Itasca State Park, Lake Bemidji State Park, state forest areas, and the Chippewa National Forest, making it a true tourism hub. There are 400 fishing lakes within 25 miles of the city. The Bemidji-area has over 500 miles of snowmobile trails and 160 kilometers of cross-country ski trails, providing abundant winter recreational opportunities. During the summer, more than 25,000 visitors a month stop to take pictures at the iconic statues of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox. <sup>1</sup> Source: 2010 U.S. Census

Criteria #4 Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within the Region: The NRSP will provide a trailhead where users of a variety of OHV and non-motorized forms of recreational riding can park, unload and reload their equipment. There are few all-terrain vehicle trails in the county and this trailhead will connect directly to Wilton Trails Northwest and indirectly to the Paul Bunyan Trail. The range areas of the NRSP will create and make available facilities designed to provide for the education and training in the safe use of firearms and will offer a safe, controlled location for competitive events and recreational use of firearms. Historically, informal shooting ranges were established in old gravel pits and were not available for general public use. In recent years, most of these have been closed due to safety, liability, and environmental concerns. The MN High School Clay Target League has expanded rapidly and needs a regional location for their competitions. This spring the Bemidji Trap and Skeet Club hosted an Invitational Regional Trap match with (20) area high school teams in active competition. The growth of this sport has brought a need for an improved/larger regional facility. It should be mentioned that the Bemidji area has no rifle-pistol range. It currently has a trap range, but it is only a matter of time until the range will be closed due to its location adjacent to the Bemidji Airport and the airport's expansion plans. The County's 4H smallbore shooting team, with many regional, state and national championships, trains in the City of Bemidji's old LEC facility and it too faces closure. While there are a few shooting ranges in the region, very few have public access and there are no facilities within the northern half of the state that offer the shooting community a similar level of amenities and regional capability which the NRSP will offer.

Attachment List Section (only lists up to 10 documents)

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
Location Map	Location map added from general tab
Other	Northland Regional Shooting Sports Fund News Release
Other	Beltrami County Board's motion adopting Recreational Facilities Plan
Other	NRSP Phase II Engineering Plans
Master Plan	Master plan added from master plan tab
Other	Promotional document (2-sided) of the Northland Regional Shooting Sports Park and fund showing infrastructure to be constructed starting Sept. 2015
Resolution	Beltrami County Board resolution, page 1
Resolution	Beltrami County Board Resolution, page 2
Other	Beltrami County Environmental Services letter
Letters of Support	Whitetails Unlimited Headquarters letter of support