

# Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

## Designation Application

### General Section

Designation Application #: 15-019D      Date Submitted: 05/27/2015

Park or Trail Name: Chester Woods Park

District #: 6      Map Coordinates (Latitude and Longitude): Latitude: 43.9928 Longitude: -92.3150

#### Location Description:

Chester Woods Park is located 8 miles east of Rochester, MN on US Highway 14 in Marion Township, Olmsted County.

Lead Applicant Organization: Olmsted County

Lead Contact First Name: Tom      Last Name: Ryan

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Joint Applicant #1 Organization: Olmsted County Board of Commissioners

Joint Applicant #2 Organization:

Joint Applicant #3 Organization:

Joint Applicant #4 Organization:

#### Describe other project supporters:

Submitted for County Board action: Resolution Form for Public Entities - Request for Designation as a Regional Park or Trail in Greater Minnesota

### Description Section

Classification: Natural Resource Based Regional Park

Total proposed acreage:

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

In Timothy Engrav's 2005 book entitled: County Parks of Minnesota, Chester Woods Park was rated 4th under the section entitled: 25 Favorite County Parks. Chester Woods Park consists of 1335 acres of diverse natural systems associated with the best that Southeastern Minnesota has to offer. The natural features present include, but are not limited to mature upland forest, oak Savannah, both natural and restored prairies, bluff lands, wooded valleys and bluff valley streams. Of specific note is the presence of several threatened and endangered flora and fauna in the park that have been recorded and

categorized and listed with the Department of Natural Resources Natural History Database. In addition, the 125 acre reservoir is a welcome amenity to the region due to it's DNR sponsored fish management program, which includes a reduced bag limit to insure extended opportunities for the fishing public. Olmsted County is one of only four counties in Minnesota that does not have a natural lake within it's boundary, highlighting the importance of the reservoir as a great resource for Southeastern Minnesota. A comprehensive resource management plan, actively pursued, tracks and monitors resource management applications on the myriad Eco-types present in the park land, and the data-base allows for comprehensive understanding of the benefits of different land use activities related to species protection and propagation. Chester Woods Park visitation exceeds 150 thousand annual visitors and the park serves the 12 county region of Southeastern Minnesota, Western Wisconsin, and Northern Iowa. Chester Woods Park not only hosts out of state guests, but also serves local visitors and groups that include (illustrative only): boy scouts, boys and girls club, high school cross country and cross country ski groups, grade schools, senior citizens, church organizations, family YMCA, organized orienteering and trail race activities, and ice fishing events designed for youth and families. Park amenities include a 52 unit campground with 37 electrical hook-ups, two of which are ADA accessible, one camper cabin with one to be built in 2015, a modern shower/restroom facility centralized in the campground, six separate and distinct picnic areas with shelters, a paved boat launch, two sets of modern playground equipment and a Natural Playscape, and approximately 15 miles of trails that provide both pedestrian and equine access. Additional amenities include a swimming beach, modern changing and shower facilities, and two ADA accessible fishing piers. Boat rentals are available featuring kayaks, canoes, and paddle boats. Public Programs are featured at Chester Woods Park and a full-time naturalist is employed there. Interpretive programs are offered year-round by staff and volunteers in serving both the campground and regular park visitors. Special operational programs implemented are the following: A resource management-based controlled deer hunt, a youth turkey hunt, and a Disabled American Veterans Deer Hunt. All of these special programs are collaborative and draw on partners in the community, the DNR, the Veterans Service Office of Olmsted County, The Blufflands White-tail Association, The Wild Turkey Federation and others.

What is the Acquisition and Development Status?

- New Park or Trail (no land acquired or developed)
- Existing Park or Trail
  - Land Acquisition
    - Status:
    - Percentage of Land Acquired:
  - Development Status
    - No Development
    - Some Development, but more Proposed
    - New Facilities Proposed

- Existing Facilities to be Upgraded
- Fully Development

Facility Listing Section

Classification: Natural Resource Based Regional Park	
Existing Facility List	Proposed Facility List
<p>Camping-cross-section of camper types, Electric campsites, Non-electric campsites, Tent only sites, Camper Cabins, Picknicking and picnic shelters, Walking Trails (paved), Hiking Trails (natural), Cross-country Skiing Trails, Horseback Riding Trails (natural), Swimming, Lake Access for power boats, Canoeing Facilities, Fishing Piers, Nature Center/Interpretation Trails, Play areas, Outdoor Amphitheater, Restrooms/sanitation building, Roads and Parking Areas, Presently, a Department of Natural Resources section of trail is being constructed on the Parks Western border in anticipation of linking Chester Woods Park with the City of Rochester's Bicycle/Pedestrian Trail System. Once completed, this trail system will further link with cities, towns and trails in District 6 to the east of the Park. This linkage will eventually include additional state trail links and close access to the Whitewater River Valley.</p>	<p>Visitor Center</p>

Master Plan Status Section

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

Describe Other Supportive Information:

The completion of Chester Woods Park, including the protective dam and reservoir, designed as part of Rochester's Flood Control Mitigation project, had a development price of nearly 3 million dollars. The annual operating costs at Chester Woods in 2014 was \$483,000.00. Future improvement concepts include a Performing Arts venue for acoustic music, single-act plays and presentations, and a visitor center planned to accommodate our expanding environmental and social programming.

Classification Details Section

Classification: Natural Resource Based Regional Park

Criteria #1 Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience: Park amenities include a 52 unit campground with 37 electrical hook-ups, two of which are ADA accessible, one camper cabin is

operational in 2015, with one to be built by the end of the year. In 2014, 2615 camping nights were registered in the campground. Based on an estimate of 3.5 campers per site, over 9000 customers experienced a night of camping at Chester Woods. A modern shower/restroom facility is centralized in the campground. Six separate and distinct picnic areas with shelters, a paved boat launch, two sets of modern playground equipment, a Natural Playscape, and approximately 15 miles of trails provide both pedestrian and equine access to the park's interior. Winter sports activities include: over 5 miles of groomed ski trails, both traditional and skate-style are offered, along with snowshoe trails. In season a swimming beach, modern changing and shower facilities, and two ADA accessible fishing piers provide access to the lake shore for fishing, bird watching, etc. Boat rentals are available featuring kayaks, canoes, and paddle boats. Public Programs are featured at Chester Woods Park and a full-time naturalist is employed there. Interpretive programs are offered year around by staff and volunteers in serving both the campground and regular park visitors. Environmental Education Class participation in 2014 at Chester Woods Park was 6074 attendees. Special operational programs implemented are the following: A resource management-based controlled deer hunt, a youth turkey hunt, and a Disabled American Veterans Deer Hunt. All of these special programs are collaborative and draw on partners in the community, the DNR, the Veterans Service Office of Olmsted County, The Disable American Veterans Chapter 28, The Blufflands White-tail Association, The Wild Turkey Federation and others.

Criteria #2 Preserves a Regionally-Significant and Diverse Natural or Historic Landscape: A comprehensive resource management plan, actively pursued, tracks and monitors resource management applications on the myriad Eco-types present in the park land. A data-base allows for comprehensive understanding of the benefits of different land use activities related to species protection and propagation. Over 90 separate resource management zones are delineated in the park, and rare and endangered species are located and managed accordingly. Further, county staff and volunteers participate in intensive exotic species control, seed collection, propagation of additional prairie areas, and timber management. A great portion of the 1335 acre park has been left in it's natural state, with the primary development of guest service facilities centrally located, and bracketed by the lake on three sides. The lightly developed portion of the park affords visitors nearly a thousand acres of diverse wild land representing landscapes, vegetation types, wildlife, and features that represent the best that Southeastern Minnesota has to offer. A comprehensive trail system allows access to the park's interior and enables guests to experience the ecological diversity of their park. The natural features present include, but are not limited to mature upland forest, oak Savannah, both natural and restored prairies, bluff lands, wooded valleys and bluff valley streams. Of specific note, is the presence of several threatened and endangered flora and fauna in the park that have been recorded and categorized and listed with the Department of Natural Resources Natural History Database (see attached map). Park staff are trained in prescription burning, timber stand improvement, chemical application methods, species identification and other resource-based specialties. Olmsted County is one of only four counties in Minnesota without a natural lake. Chester Lake Reservoir, stocked and collaboratively managed with the DNR, provides a productive, dynamic fishery for visitors in both summer and winter.

Criteria #3 Well-located and Connected to Serve Regional Population and/or Tourist Destination: It is estimated that Chester Woods Park visitation exceeds 150 thousand annual visitors and the park serves the 12 county region of Southeastern Minnesota, Western Wisconsin, and Northern Iowa. Chester

Woods Park is located 8 miles east of Rochester, MN; a rapidly growing destination due to the proximity the world renowned, Mayo Clinic and it's new initiative, Destination Medical Center. The District 6 population exceeds 490,000. The 2014 census of Olmsted County indicates 150,000 citizens reside in Olmsted County. The park is easily accessible from US Highway 14 and the Chester Woods Trail will eventually connect to the Rochester Trail System with future links planned to connect to other communities in District 6. According to Woods & Poole Economics, 2013 the population growth rate is expected to increase in Rochester by 1.30% from 2010-2020 and 1.21% from 2010-2040. Historical data shows that the City of Rochester hosted 142,650 residents in 1990 and is projected to host 229,430 by 2025.

Criteria #4 Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within the Region: The contiguous, 1335 acreage encompassing Chester Woods Park fills a vital need in Region Six relative to it's size, it's proximity to an urban center that exceeds 100 thousand citizens, and for the direct park services offered to our users from County Staff and volunteers. Chester Woods Park, a mere 8 miles away from the city limits of Rochester is the largest, natural resource based park within 30 miles of Rochester's core. Further, the educational outreach and recreational opportunities that county park staff and volunteers facilitate for the region and our world-wide visitors represents a permanent, protected tract of land for generations to come. The park's amenities as described in this document and the inclusion of the 125 acre Chester Lake represent a comprehensive recreational facility for all residents of Region Six, greater Minnesota, and our neighboring states.

Attachment List Section (only lists up to 10 documents)

Type	Description
Location Map	Location map added from general tab
Other	Chester Woods Rare Species Map 2015
Master Plan	The development of Chester Woods Park has been a continuous goal of Olmsted County and the Soil Conservation Service for many years. The project now provides benefits to the surrounding area addressing flood control needs, as well as providing recreational resources. Chester Woods Park Master Plan was completed in 1988.
Resolution	
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