

# Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

## Designation Application

### General Section

Designation Application #: 15-063D      Date Submitted: 06/30/2015

Park or Trail Name: Woodland Trails Park

District #: 4      Map Coordinates (Latitude and Longitude): Latitude: 45.3830 Longitude: -93.6804

#### Location Description:

Located on County Road 1 two miles north of US Highway 10. The park main entrance is located next to the Elk River Golf Club main entrance. Physical Address: 20135 Elk Lake Rd. Elk River, MN 55330

Lead Applicant Organization: City of Elk River Parks and Recreation Department

Lead Contact First Name: Michael      Last Name: Hecker

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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: Natural Resource Based Regional Park

Total proposed acreage:

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

Woodland Trails is a 427-acre park located in the heart of the Elk River and is the crown jewel of the Elk River Park system because of its dynamic forested topography and superb trail system. The City of Elk River 2015 Parks and Recreation Master Plan survey identified it as the most visited park in Elk River. The park was acquired in phases over the past 30 years with the use of park dedication funding, federal

Land and Conservation Fund proceeds, and general tax levy funds. Woodland Trails includes the Great Northern Trail, a 4.75 mile, paved, regional trail that begins at County Road 1 and runs through the park before continuing north to the city corporate limit. The Great Northern Trail is planned to extend beyond the county line. Woodland Trails was recently expanded to include the 32-acre Big Tooth Ridge Park following a recommendation from the city Parks and Recreation Commission and the 2015 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The natural open space at Woodland consists of rolling woodland forests, wetlands, and restored tall-grass prairie. The upland hills create a topography of 150 feet of elevation change with slopes ranging from 3% to 35%. The park includes a trail system with over seven miles of mowed green paths and nearly eight miles of paved trails, including the Great Northern Trail. The Great Northern Trail was constructed on a rail-to-trail corridor functioning as the trail system spine, connecting local trails, neighborhoods, schools, parks, and eventually, to its south to downtown Elk River. It is in a scenic natural setting defined as a greenway perfect for walkers, hikers, bikers, skaters, and cross country skiers. Connectivity to regionally significant destinations to the north of Elk River is one of the priority strategies for the trail in the recent master plan. Elk River is collaborating with Sherburne County, Livonia Township, and the Cities of Zimmerman and Princeton to extend the trail north which would include a connection to the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge and the Sand Dunes State Forest. During the winter months as the trails become covered with snow, crews of volunteers led by the Woodland Trails Park Steward, groom ski trails using the four city-provided snowmobiles. Woodland Trails Park has a regional reputation as one of the best groomed ski facilities well known by skiers of central Minnesota, including the metro area. In all, there are over nine miles highly groomed trails with three miles of trail groomed for snowshoe and walking trails and two miles are groomed for combined ski and walking trails. The official Park Trail Steward, Dave Anderson, has also enlisted volunteers to clear trees and non-native brush to enhance the overall trail system. In all, they built and continue to maintain over 15 miles of trails. Dave and his volunteer crew log over 2,500 hours annually ensuring safe and accessible trails that are maintained at the highest levels.

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
Picnicking and picnic shelters, Walking Trails (paved), Hiking Trails (natural), Biking Trails (paved), Cross-country Skiing Trails, Archery/Shooting ranges, Roads and Parking Areas	Picnicking and picnic shelters, Biking trails (paved), Cross-country Skiing Trails, Visitor Center, Nature Center/Interpretation Trails, Play Areas, with an outdoor theme, Restrooms/sanitation building, Roads and Parking Areas

Master Plan Status Section

Master Plan Status:

Describe Other Supportive Information:

Classification Details Section

Classification: Natural Resource Based Regional Park

Criteria #1 Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience: Woodland Trails Park provides visitors with opportunities for a variety of outdoor recreation experiences in a range of landscapes, encourages appreciation and better understanding for nature and ecology and increases the depth and range of human experience and enjoyment of the natural environment all year long. Its natural landscapes provide a very strong cross-section of trails to enjoy the parks natural beauty and wildlife making it an appealing destination unto itself attracting visitors from a 30-mile radius. The Great Norther Trail constructed on a rail-to-trail corridor is a 4.75 mile paved trail popular for bikers, hikers, skaters and skiers. The trail begins at mile marker 0 located at County Road 1 and the Meadowvale Elementary School and then extends north to the tunnel under County Road 30 where it continues to its current terminus at the city/county line mile marker 4 ¾. The trail has finely finished concrete mile markers completed by an Eagle Scout project and benches installed intermittently along the trail for rest and nature enjoyment. Trail crossings at two of the main roads, including the tunnel, has solar powered lighting and signaled trail crossings. The trail meets all of the American Disabilities Act specifications. Recreational activities provided at Woodland Trails Park include the following: - Just as its name implies, Woodland Trails is the place to see deer, owls, woodpeckers and other wildlife that inhabit the forest. - Unique and well-maintained prairie plantings and diversity throughout. - Hiking is pleasurable and because of the flat terrain along the paved trails, the Park attracts elderly/handicapped visitors. - The green grassy trails have variable and some challenging elevations perfect for the cross country skier, snowshoer and runner.

Criteria #2 Preserves a Regionally-Significant and Diverse Natural or Historic Landscape: Woodland Trails Park is a dynamic piece of property from a biological and topographic perspective. The plant diversity is relatively high due to the fact that most of Woodland Trails has never been tilled. However it has been pastured and logged. According to the map of the original vegetation of Minnesota better known as Marchners Map completed by Francis J Marchner, the property was historically Oak Openings and Barrens and Aspen-Oak Land. In the Minnesota Biological Survey of 1993 much of Woodland Trails was identified as a naturally significant Oak Forest Dry Subtype and a small portion as a Mixed Hardwood Swamp. The portion of the park called Big Tooth has a similar landscape with Big Tooth Aspen on both ends of the park. Since 1993 this forest has changed dramatically due to Oak Wilt, European Buckthorn, human activity and the deer herd. Some of the original flora and fauna still exist today for the benefit of visitors who come to the park. From a topography perspective, the property is one of the most dynamic pieces in central Minnesota. Woodland Trails is part of an end moraine with some eskers and kettle wetlands. The lower elevations of this natural landscape are approximately 950 feet and the highest elevations approximately 1100 feet. Hikers and cross country skiers alike love to reach the highest elevation point in the park called Top of the World<sup>®</sup> that can provide a magnificent view of the area. The adjacent region north of the park has over 2,500 acres with similar topography that are currently being mined for aggregate. Therefore Woodland trails will, in the very near future (20 years) be one of the only sites in this region preserving the original glacial geology.

Criteria #3 Well-located and Connected to Serve Regional Population and/or Tourist Destination: Woodland Trails Park is located in the middle of Elk River in Sherburne County with the park's main entrance and parking lot located off County Road 1 about two miles north of US Highway 10. It is adjacent to the Elk River Golf Club just outside of the Elk River urban service district. The park is only a few miles from Wright, Anoka and Hennepin counties; it is just outside of the 7-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. It is easily accessed by US Highway 10, Highway 101, and only six miles from Interstate 94. The Elk River Golf Club is an 18-hole Championship course open to the public. The Golf Club main entrance and restaurant are next to the Woodland Trails main entrance. A portion of the golf course becomes available during the winter months for cross country skiing. Visitors travel to this part of Minnesota to enjoy its unique landscape, Elk River downtown and Elk River park system including access to the Mississippi and Elk Rivers. Recent acquisitions to the Elk River park system are the Bailey Point Nature Preserve and the William H. Houlton Conservation Area. Both are less than two miles from Woodland Trails Park with wildlife natural areas located on opposite sides of the Elk River at the confluence of the Mississippi and Elk Rivers. The 336-acre William H. Houlton Conservation Area scheduled to open fall 2016 has over three miles of Mississippi River frontage. It was purchased for the city in collaboration with the Trust for Public Lands to be managed as native habitat for wildlife. The DNR hopes that the property will become a model for native habitats adjacent to residential areas and a destination location for the region.

Criteria #4 Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within the Region: Trail-hiking, snowshoeing, cross country skiing and biking are currently the most popular recreational offerings at Woodland Trails Park. While many of these activities are allowed and encouraged at parks throughout the Elk River park system and nearby county parks, Woodland Trails is able to offer a unique experience because of its dynamic forested topography and superb trail system. The highly groomed ski trails maintained by the

city and volunteer crew, the Elk River Nordic Ski Club, has a regional reputation as a premium activity during the winter months. These trails have become a hot-spot for fantastic skiing in the North Metro region. Trails are largely wooded over rolling terrain, but some sections have good climbs and descents. Trails consist of several interconnected loops aptly named and marked with signage on all the trails. The Great Northern Trail is part of the groomed ski trail system offered in the park. All of the trails throughout the park are well marked by directional signs built by Eagle Scouts and maintained by the city. Be sure to check out the Top-of-the-World location which is located at the parks highest point. The park also has a biathlon range used each winter for a biathlon event. The range is a 10-minute walk from the main parking lot.

Attachment List Section (only lists up to 10 documents)

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
Location Map	Location map added from general tab
Master Plan	Master plan added from master plan tab
Location Map	Location map added from general tab
Resolution	
Location Map	Location map added from general tab
Master Plan	Parks and Recreation Master Plan was adopted by City Council on June 1, 2015. It includes a plan for Woodland Trails on page 49.
site_map_uploads_2	2016 Sherburne County Park, Trail and Active Living Plan Priority Network Corridor
site_map_uploads_2	Map locating Woodland Trails Park within the Elk River Park System
regional_map	Project Area Context showing 30-mile radius
site_map_uploads_2	Woodland Trails Park map showing existing summer trails