

# Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

## Designation Application

### General Section

Designation Application #: 16-014D      Date Submitted: 04/28/2016

Park or Trail Name: Robbins Island Regional Park

District #: 3      Map Coordinates (Latitude and Longitude): Latitude: 45.1315 Longitude: -95.0345

#### Location Description:

Robbins Island Regional Park is located on the north side of Willmar, Kandiyohi County. This 120 acre park complex is surrounded by Foot and Willmar Lakes.

Lead Applicant Organization: City of Willmar

Lead Contact First Name: Casey      Last Name: Hagert

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Joint Applicant #1 Organization:

Joint Applicant #2 Organization:

Joint Applicant #3 Organization:

Joint Applicant #4 Organization:

#### Describe other project supporters:

Willmar Convention and Visitors Bureau Mid-Minnesota Development Commission Kandiyohi County Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center Kandiyohi Soil and Water Conservation Members of Minnesota House of Representatives Member of State of Minnesota Senate

### Description Section

Regional Significance Statement: With its premier natural beauty, Robbins Island is located where the lakes begin. This gem of a park serves the area's needs for picnicking, fishing, swimming, bird watching and many other outdoor activities. This park provides Minnesotans the opportunity to enjoy the 4 seasons and all they have to offer. From small family gatherings to large community festivals, Robbins Island is utilized by thousands of users from Willmar, Kandiyohi County and beyond.

Classification: Natural Resource Based Regional Park

Total proposed acreage: 120

Overview/Description of Park or Trail:

Located on the shores of Foot and Willmar Lakes and spanning over 120 acres, Robbins Island Regional Park (figure 1) is the crown jewel of the Willmar Park System. Formed over 25,000 years ago during the Wisconsin glaciation period, settlers used the land as a refuge from prairie fires and their enemies. Artifacts dating over 3,000 years old have been found here. Today, with the lakes, its hardwood forests and rolling hills, Robbins Island is a regional destination for leisure and recreation. With the land mass to accommodate thousands of users at a single time, West Central Minnesota residents have and continue to utilize Robbins Island park for their recreational needs. Stocked with popular game fish, the park is frequented by both summer and winter anglers alike (figure 2). Two boat accesses (figure 3) along with two piers (figure 4 & 5) provide an abundance of fishing opportunities in boats and on shore. Many users of these lakes enjoy paddling canoes and kayaks along with simply enjoying the two waterways for other recreational usages. A beach (figure 6) with changing/restroom facilities provides another opportunity for park goers to enjoy the waters of Robbins Island. Other amenities include 3 open air shelters (figure 7), 4 closed shelters, an 18-hole disc golf course and an open space for soccer and other activities. The shelters are often used for small family gatherings but also host many regional activities like; 5K runs (figure 8), school groups and movies in the park. The largest activity, Willmar Fest Community Celebration, hosts activities such as a water ski show (figure 9), concert, and a beach party concluding with a Fireworks Show. New this year, Rockin' Robbins Concert Series will provide music, food, games, arts/crafts and many other fun activities for attendees. Future plans capitalize on the natural setting and beauty of the park to create more meaningful outdoor recreation experiences. As part of the natural rehabilitation of the park, the east side would become a restored wetlands complete with an elevated boardwalk that would allow for a park naturalist to provide program opportunities. Several new picnic shelters, an overhauled beach and a nature-based destination playground will create a unique environment. To further engage and promote use of the lakes, canoe, kayak and paddleboard rentals will be available. When the future enhancements are complete, Robbins Island will be a year round regional destination. Users will find winter entertainment such as an ice skating rink, a sledding hill as well as snowshoe and cross country skiing trails, along with equipment rentals for all visitors to enjoy the beauty of this park. Located on the DNR approved trail extension of the Glacial Lake State Trail, trail users have access to the city of Willmar as well as 30 miles of trail leading to three county parks and Sibley State Park. With its rich history and variety of natural resource based recreation, Robbins Island is a premier park destination in West Central Minnesota.

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), Swimming, Lake Access for power boats, Fishing Piers, Restrooms/sanitation building, Roads and Parking Areas, Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Asphalt paved trail (less than 10 feet), Aggregate surfaced trail (10 feet or more), Aggregate surfaced trail (less than 10 feet), Aggregate surfaced trail, Natural-surfaced trail - user created, Natural-surfaced trail - purpose built for specific use, Underdeveloped natural-surfaced trail - user created, Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Trailhead restrooms, Benches along trail, Picnic shelters at trailhead, , Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Asphalt paved trail (less than 10 feet), Aggregate surfaced trail (10 feet or more), Natural-surfaced trail - user created, Natural-surfaced trail - purpose built for specific use, Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Trailhead restrooms, Benches along trail, Picnic shelters at trailhead	Picnicking and picnic shelters, Walking Trails (paved), Biking trails (paved), Cross-country Skiing Trails, Canoeing Facilities, Visitor Center, Nature Center/Interpretation Trails, Play Areas, with an outdoor theme, Outdoor Amphitheater, Climbing (natural/man-made), Zip Lines, Restrooms/sanitation building, Roads and Parking Areas, Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Aggregate surfaced trail (10 feet or more), Aggregate surfaced trail, Designated natural-surfaced trail - purpose built for specific us, Natural-surfaced trail - purpose built for specific use, Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Trailhead restrooms, Benches along trail, Picnic shelters at trailhead, Asphalt paved trail (10 feet or more), Aggregate surfaced trail (10 feet or more), Natural-surfaced trail - purpose built for specific use, Trailhead parking, Trailhead information kiosks, Trailhead restrooms, Benches along trail, Picnic shelters at trailhead

Master Plan Status Section

Master Plan Status: Existing Master Plan is Available (but needs to be updated to meet strategic plan)

Describe Other Supportive Information:

1. Letters of Support
2. City of Willmar Resolution of Support
3. Location Map
4. Park Photos
5. City of Willmar - Master Park Plan

## Classification Details Section

Classification: Natural Resource Based Regional Park

Criteria #1 Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience: The Park's unique setting has a large shore presence on two high quality recreational lakes, connected by a channel. Foot Lake (544 acres) and Willmar Lake (636 acres) are both aerated, and stocked with a variety of fish. The park offers many access points for the best shoreline fishing in the region. The various fishing docks and two 12'x20' fishing platforms providing anglers a variety of options. The diverse natural setting of this park complex, combined with a great location, provides the region an ideal environment for diverse cultural events and family gatherings. Events such as Movies in the Park, Rockin' Robbins Concert Series and a number of regional charitable walks and runs use this park as its home-base. Family reunions/gatherings utilize open/enclosed shelters in a variety of locations within the park. The Park is a large natural area that provides popular amenities such as a large swimming beach, boat launches, playgrounds, trails, excellent bird watching, and peaceful areas to take in nature and reflect. An 18 hole disc golf course encompasses the natural features of this park creating a unique and challenging play environment. The Master Park Plan proposes new amenities such as an outdoor amphitheater, a large inclusive natural playground area, and canoe/paddleboat/kayak rentals. The plan also calls for a variety of winter activities such as skating, nordic skiing, snowshoeing and a sledding hill. To maximize usage year round there will be 4 season shelters with an interconnected trail system.

Criteria #2 Preserves a Regionally-Significant and Diverse Natural or Historic Landscape: The primary focus for Robbins Island Regional Park is the prominent water features including Foot and Willmar Lakes, ponds and the wetlands that surround the island. Fishing, swimming, kayaking, canoeing, bird watching and the nature trail (figure 10) are some of the amenities that attract people to this park. The peaceful and natural landscape provides a great setting for individuals, families and large groups to enjoy regardless of the season. The park preserves large tracts of land for natural habitat for a variety of birds and wildlife. A unique feature of Robbins Island is the oak tree covered rolling hills in the middle of the island. The amenities in this park (trails, picnic shelters, disc golf) have been designed to incorporate these natural features. The park complex has a strong historical past. For thousands of years Native Americans used Robbins Island as a refuge from prairie fires and enemy attacks. Artifacts, including a copper projectile point from approximately 3,000 years ago have been found on this site. The Swan Swanson family took refuge on Robbins Island from the Dakota/Sioux tribes during the 1862 uprising. A historical marker discusses this history at the park. There are a couple of structures built in the park by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). A statue at the park complex dedicated in 2006 honors the legacy of the CCC. The Flags of Honor and Veterans Memorial (figure 11) on the Northeast side honors those that have served our country. Robbins Island not only enjoys a rich history honoring the community/areas past, but also is a gem of a park with its natural beauty and lakes. The amenities currently in place and those identified for future development make Robbins Island the ideal destination for West Central Minnesota.

Criteria #3 Well-located and Connected to Serve Regional Population and/or Tourist Destination: Robbins Island Regional Park is located in the City of Willmar, which serves as the primary regional center for a large area of West Central Minnesota. Willmar is the regional center for business,

healthcare, government, technology, shopping, and recreation that increases our daily population to over 40,000. Ridgewater College provides educational opportunities for numerous persons from throughout the area. Tourism plays an important part in the economy in the county and city. According to the Willmar Lakes Area Convention and Tourism Bureau annual sales contributed to tourism in the county top \$76 million, and 1,638 persons are employed in tourism-related jobs,. The City of Willmar and Kandiyohi County have seen steady growth, demonstrated by being recognized as the fastest growing multicultural city outside the Twin Cities metro area. Robbins Island is located right off business 71, a four lane parkway that allows easy access for all visitors, locals and visiting guests. The park is also situated on the Glacial Ridge Trail Scenic Byway. The park is readily accessible to the Glacial Lakes State Trail, and the city's extensive trail network. Robbins Island acts as a trailhead allowing trail users to explore Willmar, as well as adjacent towns including Spicer, New London into Paynesville 30 miles away. The Yellow Bike Share Program provides connectivity to Robbins Island for locals as well as visitors for those that do not own a bike or have one with them on their visit to Willmar. Accessible by pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle routes, Robbins Island is easy to get to for not only the 20,000+ residents of Willmar but also the 45,000 residents of Kandiyohi County and the entire state of Minnesota.

Criteria #4 Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within the Region: With its natural beauty and amenities, Robbins Island is like no other park in the region. The Park's unique setting along two lakes offers one of the best shoreline fishing opportunities in the state. Proposed canoe, kayak, paddleboard and paddleboat rentals are not located elsewhere in the region and will allow easy access for park visitors to enjoy the lakes of Robbins Island Park. Extended families, corporations, and organizations hold picnics and other events in the park. A planned amphitheater will be yet another unique feature for the area that will attract persons from the region for various music and other special events such as weddings and reunions. The Park is used by numerous persons as a trailhead for the Glacial Lakes State Trail. Plans call for a new trail segment that will extend the state trail to Sibley State Park, which is approximately 20 miles to the north of Willmar. This will provide an even greater opportunity for the two parks to complement each other's unique recreational attributes. Lastly, the Park's large size provides a variety of natural wildlife and plant habitat. It provides a beautiful setting for both residents and visitors alike to come and enjoy nature at it's best. Whether you are looking to be active or just want to have a picnic, Robbins Island will provide the ideal setting to visitors of the park. Once the called for improvements are made Robbins Island will become a four season destination for the region that will be unmatched for our area. Many parks will have some of the opportunities that are available at Robbins Island but not many in the state will have the number of diverse natural opportunities available all in one location, Robbins Island Regional Park!

Attachment List Section (only lists up to 10 documents)

Type	Description
Letters of Support	Convention and Visitors Bureau
Letters of Support	Representative Dave Baker

Letters of Support	Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center
Letters of Support	Representative Dean Urdahl
Letters of Support	DNR
Letters of Support	Sibley State Park
Letters of Support	Senator Lyle Koenen
Letters of Support	Mid-Minnesota Development Commission
Letters of Support	Kandiyohi Soil & Water Conservation
Location Map	Figure 1: Robbins Island Map