**Designation Protocol for Parks and Trails of Regional Significance**

The application process has been designed to provide ***all*** cities and counties in Greater Minnesota an equal opportunity to submit projects for evaluation and ranking. The process steps ensure consistent evaluations and have been specifically created to avoid conflict of interest in ranking and scoring projects.

STEP 1 – Initial Screening and Baseline Evaluation for Regional Significance

* Application for designation as a regional park or trail by a city or county
* Initial determination is made on the merit of the application

The purpose of Step 1 is determining whether an application meets the basic requirements for consideration as being regionally significant, before resources are invested in a project that may not be highly scored.

STEP 2 – Detailed Evaluation and Formal Recognition as a Regionally Significant Park or Trail

* Submittal of application for designation
* An approved park or trail Master Plan that meets the requirements set forth by the Commission. (Reference page 61 of Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan)
* Completed inventory and site features

The purpose of Step 2 is formal evaluation and scoring of a park or trail by an Evaluation Team; professionals with no connection to, or interest in, the outcome of the process.

**Evaluation Criteria to Achieve Regionally Significant Designation**

The criteria have been established to ensure parks and trails of ***highest merit*** become part of the regional system. The criteria are intended to be dynamic and change as needs evolve to build out the system.

Criteria for Parks of Regional Significance

* Natural resource based settings and a range of activities offered
* Regional use that will draw visitors and generate an economic impact on the area

Parks of regional significance must also meet at least one of the following criteria:

* Significant in size
* Unique or unusual landscape features, historically or culturally significant sites or characteristics of regional or statewide significance
* Provides natural resource based recreational opportunities not otherwise available in the region

Criteria for Trails of Regional Significance

* The trail is located in a regionally desirable setting
* The trail is a destination that attracts regional users by providing a high quality recreational opportunity

Other factors considered for regional trail designation are length, connections to other parks and/or trails and the lack of other trails in the area.

For the comprehensive list of definitions and evaluation criteria, refer to Section 3 in the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan, pages 27-47.