



Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission
Nisswa Community Center
25628 Main Street, Nisswa 56468
Minutes for July 28, 2021

APPROVED

Commissioners Present: Rick Anderson, Ted Suss, Jonathan Wolf, Tom Stoa, Bryan Pike, Barry Wendorf, Beth Pierce, Jen Foley, Tom Ryan, Tim Engrav, Peg Furshong, Matthew Hill

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Commissioners Absent: Brad Bonk

Consultants Present: Renee Mattson, Executive Director, Joe Czapiewski, System Plan Coordinator, Tess Dandrea, Administrative Assistant

- 1. Meeting Called to Order by Chair Ryan at 10:01 am**
- 2. Acknowledge Members of the Public in Attendance**
Roger Landers, former District 2 Planning Committee member
Rob Mason, East Gull Lake city Administrator
Amber Moon Peterson, Nisswa Parks and Recreation Director. Amber welcomed the Commissioners to Nisswa.
Welcomed Senator Carrie Ruud who joined Commissioners during the lunch break.
Senator Ruud was complimentary of the Commission's work.
- 3. Approval of Agenda for July 28, 2021, Minutes from June 23, 2021 and Treasurer's Report through June 2021**
Motion by Suss
Second by Engrav
Motion Approved motion carried
- 4. Executive Director's Report**
Nothing beyond written report

5. System Plan Coordinator's Report

Funding application review underway, the portal closes on July 30, 2021, at midnight. Information for site visits will be sent to Commissioners as the schedule develops. All are invited to site visits in their districts and all others if there is an interest. Thus far there are 21 applications in process.

6. Items from Members and Letters to the Commission

Suss, received a request for information from Henderson for a trail project from Renville to Hortonville. Thanks to Joe for the quick response to the MN Valley Trail inquiry.

Wolf, nothing

Hill, nothing

Anderson, groups asking for information related to COVID funds. City Administration asking if can use funds for small projects

Furshong, opposition from homeowners with railroad right of way to building trails on the right of way. Rural water infrastructure being addressed.

Stoa, nothing

Ryan, nothing

Pierce, why would the Commission want an applicant to receive funding from another source? If an applicant is looking to LCCMR funding isn't that funding that should come through the Commission? Discussion followed about how funding differs and the need to have all applicants look to other funding sources outside the Commission to ensure their projects receive funding. Commission typically receives requests for three times more funding than we have available to grant. LCCMR has much greater resources and can be a good source to apply to. It's a competitive process but many of our Greater Minnesota parks and trails are successful.

Wendorf, Sherburne County had a public input session on the Great Northern Trail from Elk River to Zimmerman. A designation application could be coming to us at a later date.

Pike, regarding the Gull Lake Trail LCCMR application, Marla did a great job on the application and the presentation. Pike will conduct a tour of trail following the meeting.

Engrav, nothing to report but has been very busy with fire season and deployed out of state.

Foley, nothing

7. New Business:

7.1 Strategic Planning Session with facilitator Ted Schick

See separate notes from Planning Session

8. Old Business:

Nothing to report

9. Approval of July Expenses

Commission Expenses	\$3,345.86
<u>Consultant Expenses</u>	<u>\$21,654.79</u>
Total for July	\$25,000.65

Motion by Furshong

Second by Suss

Motion Approved

10. Next Meeting and Agenda Items

Bertram Chain of Lakes Park – Chalet building, August 25

Adjourned 2:51pm

Strategic Planning

July 28, 2021

Ted Schick Introduction

Commission Roles:

- Servant leadership
- Stewards of State Resource

Major Themes Emerging from Assessments

1. Inventory of the Greater Minnesota Assets. Check in with HIGH ranked facilities that have not moved forward in designation process.
2. Marketing – tell our story, bring awareness, promote Legacy information/history. Think about renewal of the Legacy amendment
3. Team Building – Get to know each other better
4. More Evaluation Team interaction with Commissioners
5. Funding Source Transparency
6. Diversity Equity and Inclusion
7. Maintenance of parks and trails (ongoing)
8. Commission “Awareness” Marketing/Branding/SIGNAGE
9. Staffing - marketing consultant/outreach
10. Develop Committees – allow Commissioners more involvement in the process
11. Tribal Communities – liaisons
12. Pandemic – what did we learn and what can we use going forward

Current Process (Question #2)

- Layers justified or not? By layers, consultants and Evaluation Team
 - Can we rely on Layers? Good experts but should we add another outside layer? Should a minimum level of scoring be required before designation is considered? Can/should the designation score be tied to funding in some way? Looking at a host of data, particularly the designation score may be of value in future funding recommendations
- What if we run have more money to grant than good applications to grant to?
- We have always wanted a way to provide funding for smaller agencies that need a consultant to help developing Master Plans. It would take an outside funding source or grantor to do that. We’ve discussed the Commission being that grantor, continue to discuss this topic/issue. Large communities have more resources, even the playing field to allow smaller communities to bring ideas to fruition. May need to change, adapt. Small towns/parks see themselves as significant.
- We are the new state park system
- How many parks do we want? At 66 currently, at what point do we stop building out the system?
- When is it enough per area?

- What is the Commission's role in statewide planning for maintenance and operations for trails that have no user fees?
- Every designated park or trail should have a sign noting it is a Greater Minnesota regionally designated facility for greater public awareness. This is a value, provide the signs to the facilities for posting.
- Add an events tab to our website where one can go to learn about events at our facilities. Provide more value to our partners, above the MN Great Outdoors website.
- We need an onboarding process for new Commissioners

What do we want to Achieve in the next 18-24 Months? (Question #3)

- How are we using technology? User data. Counting. Virtual meetings.
- What is the long-term future of the Regional Park system and how can we help? They need to be sustainable when Legacy funds are not available.
- Discuss the future of designations and where the gaps occur. Some districts have regional clusters of facilities. Is there an overabundance of regional facilities in some areas?
- Legacy renewal. Our biggest supporters are the 66 designated regional facilities. More engagement with them and more recognition of Legacy within their park/trails for the public to learn more.
- PTLAC needs to be working on the 2034 renewal plan NOW. We need to lead the effort.
- More marketing outreach
- More staffing
- Committees, what does a committee structure look like?
- Succession planning. Deeper bench.
- Review of our policies and procedures
- Create an ongoing program to help parks and trails administrators think BIG when planning their regional parks.
- Develop a statewide map of recreational opportunities and identify deserts. Then work to eliminate those deserts.
- Passport system for park/trail visits. This integrates all facilities as well as future facilities into a whole, bigger than its parts.
- Programming templates that can be shared with our system facilities
- Keep focus on our core mission
- Tribal partnerships
- More Commissioner review of funding applications for better awareness and oversight of the process.
- What is the future of the Commission if Legacy is not extended through 2034? Much comment on how to raise public awareness and that of our facilities as well.

**Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission
Director's Report for July 2021**

Partner Meetings/Media

- GMPT Communications Committee
- GMPT Membership Committee
- PTLAC Liaisons Monthly Meeting
- GMPT article for monthly newsletter
- GMP&T Membership Meeting – Update to the Membership
- PTLAC Statewide Trails Committee Meeting
- PTLAC Inclusion Committee Meeting
- PTLAC Meeting – Full Group
- LCCMR interview monitoring

Mountain Bike Count and User Survey Project

The trail counters have been installed and the count and survey are fully underway. Attached is a VERY preliminary report of the work to date. None of the findings are a huge surprise so far, other than the Household Income question, which is quite a lot higher than I expected. There also seems to be an anomaly in the Trail Count in Duluth for two Thursday's. The count is unusually high those two days. Andrew will be delving into this to determine if there is an issue with the counters on those days or if in fact there was just a huge number of riders on the trail.

FY23 Funding Applications

With only five days left until the deadline for submissions we are at 20 applications and 14 that have entered at least preliminary project amounts, for a total of \$14,342,127. We have \$12,201,546 to grant. The Gull Lake Trail – Fairview Township request of \$2,300,000 has also been submitted for an LCCMR grant, and they have scored very well and were one of 99 proposals selected to make a presentation to the committee. On August 26 the LCCMR will make the final selection and funding allocation decisions, so we will know by then if that funding request remains with the Commission or moves to LCCMR.

Site Visits and Partner Calls

- MN Geo call for MN Great Outdoors website update, including Karen Umphress in the call so she can start the process of updating information in the DMS.
- Daily calls for help with FY23 funding applications and for more information about the Connecting People with the Outdoors set aside.

DMS Phase V

We have been waiting to receive the Phase V proposal and cost estimate. The plan was to have this information the week prior to the July 28 meeting so Joe and I could review and present to Commissioners well in advance. The proposal has not arrived as expected. Hopefully for the August meeting we will have the necessary information to enable us to move forward.

Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee Meeting

July 22 was the first in person PTLAC meeting since February 2020. Needless to say, it was a pretty exciting day and proved again the value of in person meetings compared to virtual meetings. Committees that have been stalled out suddenly took great strides forward and side conversations generated good ideas for future work.

The July PTLAC meeting was hosted by Greater Minnesota, so we met at Bertram Chain of Lakes Park in the Chalet, where the Commission will meet in August. The campground was having a soft opening the evening prior, in advance of the weekend full opening. Part of the fun for in person meetings is the opportunity to tour parks and trails that have received Legacy funding and everyone enjoyed the Bertram tour.

GMRPTC
System Plan Coordinators Report
July 2021

Funding Application 2021

Funding applications have proceeded as they typically do this time of year, with increased velocity of action as we get closer to the July 30 deadline. We have provided technical assistance to most of the 19 to 20 applicants that are likely to submit a proposal. That includes phone calls, emails, and early “unofficial” reviews of a handful of applications. Right now it looks like we will have more than adequate requests to cover our unusually large pool of funds, as well as our Connecting People to the Outdoors incentive. Two applications have officially been submitted as of this writing.

Renee and I are setting up the funding application site visit calendar for August and will be releasing it to you shortly. It will include a couple of extra stops for grant close-out reviews and Master Plan site visits. There will be a couple of applications for sites we have recently visited and reviewed, which we will likely just follow-up on via Zoom. The schedule will be updated regularly and sent to you by email. Funding applications will be placed in the portal as soon as we can complete our technical desk review and approve them as complete and qualified. We strongly encourage Commissioners to participate in the site visits for their Districts – please just let us know if you want to attend and we will get you any details!

On-Site Reviews and Technical Assistance

I only conducted one site visit this past month, which was to Big Falls for the community celebration of their previous grant. They had a great turnout of about 75 people at its peak – not bad for a town of 200. Just as we like to see for a regional park, there were people in attendance from the entire Highway 72 corridor – including our past Commissioner Rita Albrecht, who is originally from International Falls! I did get a tour of their next project idea with local officials.

In addition to occasional email assistance, we have provided Designation Application or Master Plan assistance over the phone to the following:

Warroad – Point Park’s team is starting work on their Master Plan and circled back to make sure they are up to date on our process and their approach. We clarified a lot of information – unfortunately they did not attend the workshops.

Lake of the Woods – Northerly Park’s Master Plan is coming along. We are pushing for them to complete it before the new content standards are fully enforced. We also hope to conduct a site visit soon, as the border is opening.

Pine Island – The City is looking to create a new trail from their downtown, along the Zumbro River, connecting with a county road south of town. While an interesting concept and likely great ride, it is a short trail. We recommended they get in touch with the Zumbro River Watershed, which is working on their Master Plan, for possible partnership.

Henderson – The County is rebuilding a county highway from the city north, connecting to a new Metro Regional Park. This has some potential, provided some additional connections can be made (we have an eligible regional park nearby).

Other new facility ideas we have been approached about include a Mower County Cedar River Water Trail and a City park in Lonsdale.

Partnerships and Outreach

I attended two GMPT events this month – their regular monthly forum, and their annual summer meeting! Both were a great chance to get Zoom time with many partners and advocates, as well as meet or become aware of some communities that we haven't heard from before.

Next month I will be presenting to a subgroup of Regional Development Commission staff from across the state. This is an important group for our outreach efforts, as they are specifically listed in our outreach plan. As you know, our new Strategic Plan metrics include, in part, a need to have significant new outreach if we want to be successful. If you know of or have contacts with other organizations, such as government collaborations, broad user groups, or advocacy organizations, that we should be in contact with, please let Renee or myself know!

DMS Updates

No significant update here.

Partner Contact Maintenance Contract

This project has started slowly, as the part of the contract regarding updates to the Great Minnesota Outdoors website depends on our partners at MNIT. We finally have a contact there and are hoping to gain some traction soon.