June 24, 2026
Thumper Pond Resort
300 Thumper Lodge Road
Ottertail, MN 56571
Minutes for June 24, 2026
APPROVED

Commissioners Present: Rick Anderson, Rob Mason, Jonathan Wolf, Jen Foley, Peg Furshong, Tim Engrav, Karlin Ziegler, Barry Wendorf, Tom Stoa, Brad Bonk, Tom Schmitz and Beth Pierce

Commissioners Absent: Reid Huttunen

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

1. **Call to Order** – Chair Anderson 10:07 am
   Meeting Goals – to conduct a timely and efficient meeting

2. **Acknowledge Members of the Public in Attendance**
   Kevin Fellbaum, Ottertail County Parks and Trails Director gave an overview of the county's parks and trails. He detailed the department's progress since its establishment in 2021, highlighting major restoration work at Phelps Mill Park including a foundation repair project completed in 2022, current Phase 1 prairie and wetland restoration work funded by LCCMR and GMRPTC grants. Fellbaum also discussed plans for Phase 2 improvements at Phelps Mill Park, including new trail connections, a natural playground, and fishing stations, as well as the development of Echo Bay Park and ongoing trail projects including the Heart of the Lakes Trail system.

3. **Approval of Agenda for June 24, 2026, Minutes from April 22, 2026 and Treasurer's Report through April 2026.**
   Motion by Schmitz
   Second by Mason
   Motion Approved

4. **Executive Director's Report**

Many changes in DNR grant staffing, only one person left in the department that we work with after the departure of Erin Foley who worked in trails, Jenni Bubke and Charlie Davie. They are in the hiring process but that always takes many weeks. Mattson gave a budget update indicating approximately $55,000 will remain from the current year's $500,000 budget after we close out the fiscal year on June 30. This means we have a significant reserve given what we were working from is from the prior year's allocation, so any special projects we choose to do will not be a burden on current finances.

5. **System Plan Coordinator's Report**

Czapiewski will research alternative data collection methods to Placer AI and present a proposal to the commission by February. He and Mattson attended the National Outdoor Recreation Conference in Duluth and made some good connections. He highly recommends continuing to attend this biennial event for the education sessions, site visits and hands on workshops and the great connections with people across the US and Canada.

6. **Items from Members and Letters to the Commission**

Mason – The Gull Lake Trail, Lake City bridge segment through the wetlands was not able to be completed during the winter when the piers would be put in, so the bridge segments are in storage until the fall freeze.

Pierce – The Mesabi Trail will have a grand opening celebration in Tower and all will receive invitations. It's been 30 years since the trail was started and it's now 164 miles completed.

*Foley - n*o

Furshong- There have been a lot of improvements in the local parks in the area with the distribution of money from the transfer of the land at Upper Sioux Agency State Park. The news about the improvements has been very quiet, but what's been done is very nice. Unfortunately, there has been a lot of negative energy about the transaction. The money being invested in the parks is good, the improvements have been badly needed.

Bonk – MNPAiR work from 2025 is being continued at Lake Brophy Park with a recent Legacy access grant. The 2026 program kicks off today with the same artists doing the work as last time. They'll be there every Wednesday, Thursday, Friday through August. The work will be a glass mosaic tile project in the outdoor covered area at the visitor center. Other work will be plein air painting and Roku pottery. Kensington Rune Stone Park they're working on an RFP for an updated master plan.

Wolf – Finished his fifth Lake Wobegon Marathon. He inspected 26 miles of the trail and reports it's in good condition.

Ziegler - no

Wendorf – For the October Commission meeting in Isanti County the location will be finalized soon.

Stoa – no

Schmitz – The city of Mankato is putting the historic Kern Bridge over the Blue Earth River this year and it will link Land of Memories Park on one side with Sibley Park on the other. This is a multi-million dollar project and we funded a little over a million of it with a Legacy grant. In New Ulm the Hermann monument is being deconstructed and reconstructed, big multi-year project that is still looking for funding to complete. The Minnesota River Parkway will be coming in for designation at some time. In Brown County, the new chairperson of the Brown County parks commission is very engaged and the county board has approved $80,000 for an updated master plan for Lake Hanska County Park, it will be done early next year, and they'll be going for a regional designation. It's the largest of the four Brown County parks and has a large campground on Lake Hanska. The county also approved a full-time, professional park manager for the county after the retirement of the Lake Hanska caretaker.

Engrav - no

Anderson – Was at the Hummingbird Trail Grand Opening in Henderson and reconnected with former Commissioner Ted Suss. The trail is beautiful and will be a great asset to the area.

7. New Business:

7.1 Designation Application 25-011D Songbird Trail

Approval to accept a high ranking from the ETeam for a trail from Freeborn County, city of Albert Lea to Waseca County and the city of Waseca. What is not in yet is the small area in the north in LeSueur County. They aren't ready to come in yet because the trail is a long way from completion to LeSueur. Even without that small section the designation is for 49.5 miles of trail, one of the longest we've seen in some years. The trail connects two counties, two regional cities and 12 miles of the land for the trail are already owned. The trail will connect two trails on each end and a state park. The required Memorandum of Understanding is in place for the three parties to the trail.

Motion by Engrav to accept the evaluation team ranking of high

Second by Schmitz

Motion Approved

7.2 Master Plan Submission 25-011D Songbird Trail

Trail scored 403.75 and was graded A by the evaluation team

Motion by Wolf to approve the Songbird Trail for regional designation.

Second by Furshong

Motion Approved

7.2.5 Phase II Environmental Archeological Grant for Lincoln County Hole in the Mountain Park for $50,000

Motion by Schmitz to approve the $50,000 grant to Lincoln County
Second by Foley
Motion Approved

7.3 Executive Director Search/Transition

The meeting closed to enter a discussion about the hiring process to find a new Executive Director.

7.4 Preview of the new GIS Funding Map

A new GIS mapping tool, now labeled the *Impact Map*, was presented that provides detailed information on all currently designated facilities, 85 at this time, including Legacy funding details, project locations, and community investments across the six districts.

7.5 Minnesota Recreation and Park Association

Commissioner Bonk discussed the fall membership meeting for Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails. This meeting has typically been held at one of our designated facilities. The MRPA Conference will be in Duluth October 20 – 23, and the GMPT meeting will be held in conjunction with that conference. There will be no additional charge to attend the MRPA meeting for GMPT attendees once our business meeting has concluded. There will be a room available for GMPT to host an education session to the attendees of both groups. The joint meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 21. The first session of the day is an MPRA keynote, followed by the GMPT meeting. Then there is an opportunity for GMRPTC to host a session. Discussion followed about what type of informational session we should host. Much to choose from, Impact Map, access, MNPAiR, etc. All agreed there are many good subjects to highlight.

8. Old Business:

8.1 DNR Administration Fee Letter

It was agreed that Mattson will send a letter to DNR proposing the Commission pay $280,000 annually for administrative services, which would save the commission $45,000-$60,000 per year by not using the 2.5% formula we currently pay.
Motion by Schmitz
Second by Mason
Motion Approved

8.2 Placer ai Renewal

The Commission approved the decision to renew the Placer ai subscription for one more year at $35,240 while planning to develop alternative data collection methods.

Motion by Engrav
Second by Schmitz
Motion Approved
Nay Commissioner Stoa

8.3 Approval of MNPAiR 2.0 Locations
Three applications to host Minnesota Parks Artist in Residence were approved, District 1, Mesabi Trail, District 2, Northland Arboretum in Brainerd and District 5, Lyon County Garvin Park and Twin Lakes Park.
Motion by Schmitz
Second by Foley
Abstention by Chair Anderson
Motion Approved

9. Approval of May and June 2026 Expenses

May

Consultants	$28,543.19
Total	$28,793.19

June

Consultants	$25,773.63
Commissioners	$ 6,500.44
Total	$32,274.38

Motion by Wendorf
Second by Schmitz
Motion Approved

10. Next Meeting and Agenda Items
July 22 meeting will be hosted in Lake City at Hok Si La Park

11. Meeting Adjourned