



## **Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission**

Hartley Nature Center – 3001 Woodland Avenue

Duluth, MN 55803

**Minutes for September 27, 2023**

**APPROVED**

**Commissioners Present:** Rick Anderson, Jen Foley, Brad Bonk, Jonathan Wolf, Reid Huttunen, Beth Pierce, Tim Engrav (virtual), Rob Mason, Tom Stoa, Barry Wendorf, Peg Furshong, Karlin Ziegler, Tom Schmitz

**Consultants Present:** Renee Mattson - Executive Director, Joe Czapiewski – System Plan

### **1. Call to Order Chair Anderson at 10:01am**

### **2. Acknowledge Members of the Public in Attendance**

Tom O'Rourke – Hartley Nature Center Executive Director, Brandon Wagenfeld (virtual) – interested citizen, Kathy Bergen and Dennis Fink – Evaluation Team members and Randolph Briley (virtual) - Outdoor Industry Recreation Partnership

Tom O'Rourke welcomed Commissioners and guests to Hartley Nature Centre. The park is 660 acres in the heart of Duluth with connections through trails to UMD and surrounding neighborhoods. Hartley serves more than 30,000 park visitors annually, including 10,000 school children who participate in field trips, camps, Hartley Preschool, special events and public programs. Hartley has been the recipient of two Legacy grants, one for the nature center expansion and more recently for a track wheelchair purchase. There are 11 miles of trail with 2.5 miles of adaptive trails.

### **3. Approval of Agenda for September 27, 2023, Minutes from August 23, 2023 and Treasurer's Report through August 2023**

**Motion** Schmitz

**Second** Bonk

**Motion Approved**

**4. Executive Director's Report**

Additional discussion about the recent meeting with DNR staff about the 2.5% administrative charge for grant oversight and contracting. Additional items to review and pass resolutions for Detroit Mountain Recreation Area, Resolution #028 and a resolution to amend the operating budget for the GMRPTC for and additional \$20,832.50 for funds granted out of the wrong account by DNR, Resolution #029.

**Motion** by Wendorf to approve the Detroit Mountain Recreation Area grant to remove the land acquisition from the project scope

**Second** by Schmitz

**Motion Approved**

**Motion** by Furshong to amend the GMRPTC operating budget and increase the amount by \$20,832.50

**Second** by Bonk

**Motion Approved**

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

Nothing beyond written report.

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

**Wolf** – nothing

**Pierce** – nothing

**Schmitz** – nothing

**Stoa** – nothing

**Foley** – nothing

**Anderson** – nothing

**Mason** – nothing

**Engrav** – nothing

**Huttunen** - nothing

**Wendorf** – In the two designated parks in Isanti County they just completed the Annual Fall Festival at Irving and John Anderson County Park and had attendance of around 100 people. The event included kite flying, pumpkin painting and the and the first ever bird calling contest. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Disc Golf Tournament for the year was held at Springvale County Park with less attendance than the first one this year. Next scheduled event is the Annual Freezer Burn Fat Bike Race in January.

**Furshong** – The Mayor of Granite Falls has passed away recently, and he was the Mayor for 20 years, he has been very instrumental in the development of Memorial Park. There may be opportunities for a land acquisition or a bike trail at Granite Falls with the discussions at DNR about the land transfer at Upper Sioux State Park. Furshong attended the DNR meeting in Granite Falls along with Joe and Renee and there may be some future for Memorial Park. Bonk noted that Renville County has some beautiful parks, none of which are in our system. There is a Minnesota River Valley Corridor, much of which is completed, but also

much not, with big gaps that runs from Ortonville to the Twin Cities. There are easement issues. Bonk feels the Minnesota River Valley Corridor is the most underused recreational resource in Minnesota and with the state park closure maybe there is an opportunity to create something else in that corridor. In addition to the Memorial Park update there was a big tree taken out at the park and the art piece in the park is a carving of eagles to the remaining parts of the tree. The tree is in the entrance to the camping area near the bath house. She has also been working with Renee on the Art in the Park project.

**Bonk** – the Brophy Park grant closeout happened last week and the park is now mostly complete.

**Ziegler** – Annual GMPT Membership Meeting is next week at Oxbow Park and Nature Center. All are welcome.

**Evaluation Team** were asked for their input on our Funding Application Process. Fink discussed the construction practices for trails and suggested there is a vast difference as to how trails are constructed and that issue was brought to light with recent applications of two trails for reconstruction funds. One trail, Mesabi, had a trail that lasted 25-years, the other, Soo Line, lasted only 15-years. Discussion continued around the construction and rehabilitation of trails. Joe will research the issue and report back about construction practices. Wendorf suggested we have a minimum standard for trail construction. Joe stated our guidelines follow the DNR construction guidelines and the MNDOT standards. There are also some underlying issues with Soo Line that Joe has discussed with the county engineer and some friends who are engineers.

Fink also noted the new strategic plan we're currently working under for applications is working well.

Bergen noted that grant applicants need to think about climate change more now than in past years and plan for significant climate events that are impacting our parks and trails.

**7. New Business:**

**7.1 Randolph Briley – Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership**

Briley provided a power point overview of the work and responsibilities of the Outdoor Recreation Industry Partnership. Question and answer followed.

**7.2 Biwabik Recreation Area Designation Application 23-004D**

**Motion** by Bonk to accept the ETeam rank of Low for the application

**Second** by Schmitz

**Motion Approved**

**8. Old Business:**

**8.1 FY25 Funding Applications**

Czapiewski reviewed the 20 eligible applications with the Commissioners.

**8.2 Commission Response to DNR Administration Cost**

Discussion about the letter to the DNR regarding the 2.5% administrative fee and requesting details as to how the charges are allocated to arrive at the exact amount of the funds available each biennium. All Commissioners signatures will be on the letter, with primary signature by Chair Anderson.

**Motion** by Stoa

**Second** by Wolf

**Motion Approved with a unanimous roll call vote**

**9. Approval of September 2023 Expenses**

Consultants and other expenses	\$25,192.92
<u>Commissioner expenses</u>	<u>\$ 6,485.85</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$31,678.77</b>

**Motion** by Foley

**Second** by Furshong

**Motion Approved**

**10. Next Meeting and Agenda Items**

October 25 Luverne – Trailhead Facility, 601 East Main Street

**Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission  
Director's Report for September 2023**

Partner Meetings

- GMPT Newsletter Article
- PTLAC Liaison's Calls
- GMPT Communications Committee

Funding Application Process FY25

Joe and I wrapped up the in person visits in August after many, many miles, quite a few unexpected animals in the road and a lot of beautiful scenery. September has been reviewing our notes, reading the applications for a second (or third) time and two meetings with the Evaluation Teams to hear their thoughts on the projects. While they do not score the applications their input is always valuable and with five more sets of eyes on the applications there is insight to be shared.

DNR Administration Fee Follow Up

I was finally able to meet with the appropriate DNR staff to discuss how the "actual" costs of issuing and monitoring the grant costs are assigned. The meeting didn't shed much light on how these costs are accounted for. More of this topic at the meeting on September 27.

Project Close Out Tours/DNR Grant Staff Status

Fall is typically a busy time with project close out visits and this past week was a busy one. On September 15 one of the new DNR grant managers, Sarah Wennerberg, and I visited Lake Brophy Park which was busy with a school day outing. Lots of kids enjoying their day and having a great time at the play area. Sarah is going to be a great addition to the team. Next up on Friday was a visit to the new and repaved sections in St. Cloud of the Beaver Island Trail with DNR grant manager Dan Golner. This grant was extended in the past legislative session and is now complete. We saw where the new St. Cloud section will meet up with the Stearns County section.

Two new DNR grant managers are also on board, Jennifer Bubke, who will be taking most of Greater Minnesota it seems, and Jessica Lee who comes from Metropolitan Council will be starting on October 3, the day Audrey Mularie officially retires.

There was a retirement party for Audrey at the DNR offices on September 18 which I attended on behalf of the GMRPTC. With 35 years of experience, she will certainly be missed! Audrey, as anyone who has ever worked with her knows, is an amazing resource and someone who believes in solving an issue or problem rather than letting it stop a project. She's been an absolute joy to work with and I will miss her both personally and professionally.

### COGGS Executive Director

I had the opportunity to meet with the new Executive Director of COGGS, Cyclists of Gitchi Gummi Shores, Ansel Schimpff and learn about the work they have on the agenda for the long term. They've had paid EDs in the past and gone back and forth on the staff model. Ansel started the position in June, and I think will be a good force for the group. He also talked about an adaptive trail loop they built at Hartley Nature Center. Hopefully we can take a look at the project after our meeting.

### Grand Openings

Sunday, September 24 was a Community Celebration at Rochester, Cascade Lake Park for the new expanded playground area (Legacy Grant) as well as the new amphitheater, community building and restrooms (bonding). There was a great turnout, sunny day, lots of kids in the playground and the plenty of activities for the whole family. This urban park is a real gem in the Greater Minnesota system and it's been fun to watch it develop from raw land in a former sand mining operation to this beautiful and well used park.

The community celebration at Goodhue County Lake Byllesby Park scheduled for Saturday, September 23 was postponed until spring due to bad weather. Joe will be at two openings in Moorhead, one for the Midtown Trail and one for the CPO project of the new dock. Fun to see projects getting done and the public enjoying the opportunities they offer for outdoor recreation.

**GMRPTC**  
**System Plan Coordinators Report**  
**September 2023**

**Reviews**

The ETeam completed their review of the Designation Application for Biwabik. That report will be presented at this month's meeting and is available for review in the DMS.

**Technical Assistance**

Thankfully, designation and master plan T/A was fairly light this month as we completed funding application reviews and adjustments. Cook County has a new recreation director, who I brought up to speed as he wants to complete the Master Plan for Sawtooth Bluffs. A number of current designees and previous grant recipients continue to reach out for clarification on project needs and potential changes. Most issues are minor – ones of any significance are of course brought to the Commission when they require contract amendments or policy discussion.

**Funding Application Review**

We completed site visits for all funding applications before the end of August! Thank you to everyone who participated in the visits during the sometimes-harried travel schedule. As noted in the presentation, two applications (Willmar and Hermantown) were disqualified due to improper resolutions. A few applications received scores that reflected missing information. Overall, the pool of applications is great!

The ETeam spent a number of hours plus two meetings reviewing the funding applications and providing their assessments to Renee and myself. This supported our scoring of the applications in a few key areas, particularly viability, quality of information, support for pillars, and connection to the Master Plan.

As always, there is a flurry of clarifications and modifications to the applications as we complete our reviews. In several cases we asked for better mapping or design work, if it was available. A few cases had budget clarifications, including one significant one we will cover during the presentation. Overall, the system worked well. Renee and I are discussing a number of potential changes to the scoring system we think could improve the process next year, which we will discuss once this year's cohort is ranked.

**District and Partner Outreach**

We are planning for our presentations to the MN APA conference in St. Cloud in October. If you are interested in attending on Thursday, 10/5/23 at the St. Cloud Conference Center, registration for the day is required at <https://minnesota.planning.org/conferences-and-meetings/>.

Renee and I attended a DNR-led meeting in Granite Falls about visioning changes to the outdoor recreation system in that area now that the Upper Sioux Agency State Park will be transferred to the Upper Sioux Community.

We also welcome a flurry of ribbon cutting and project closing events this time of year, wishing we had time and ability to attend all of them! Commissioners are invited to attend events in their districts with us as available – we will share that information as we receive it.

**Consultant Projects**

Jillian and I are exchanging spreadsheets of information and working on creating the new online GIS system you approved last month.