



## Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

**Minutes for June 23, 2021**

Meeting held Virtually

**APPROVED**

**Commissioners Present:** Rick Anderson, Ted Suss, Jonathan Wolf, Tom Stoa, Bryan Pike, Barry Wendorf, Beth Pierce, Jen Foley, Brad Bonk, Tom Ryan, Tim Engrav

**Commissioners Absent:** Peg Furshong, Matthew Hill

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

**1. Meeting Called to Order by Chair Ryan at 10:01am**

*Chair Ryan* asked *Vice Chair Anderson* for an update as he's been unavailable the last few weeks. *Anderson* said the workshops went well. *Czapiewski* noted the workshops were in some cases well attended but we need to do more on outreach to connect with a larger audience that may have attended in our in person workshops. Thanked the Commissioners for their support and attendance at the workshops.

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

No one from the public in attendance.

**3. Approval of Agenda for June 23, 2021, Minutes from May 26, 2021 and Treasurer's Report through May 2021**

**Motion** by Foley

**Second** by Suss

**Motion Approved**

**4. Executive Director's Report**

Nothing more to report other than the written report

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

Discussed the Evaluation Team meeting that was held last week with four team members in place. We may see an email from Red Lake River Corridor asking for a resolution to have a change of project scope for a part of the grant. *Ryan* asked if we had feedback from any of the workshop attendees about the Zoom workshops. A few did relate they are weary of Zoom meetings. Generally, people prefer to be in the same room and have the personal interaction. But it was noted that attendees thought the content of the workshops was helpful. *Pike* asked about the contract maintenance agreement with Karen Umphress for work updating the contacts and information in the DMS. *Czapiewski* clarified what the project entails.

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

*Pike* -nothing

*Stoa* – nothing

*Bonk* – spent the weekend in the Minnesota River Valley. Went to Alexander Ramsey Park, very impressive sidewalk project that was funded through Legacy. Also visited Memorial Park, which was full, saw the new nature based playground which is fantastic, and many were fishing on the river.

*Wendorf* – had an ad hoc meeting with some parks directors in the state at Sherburne County Oak Savannah Park. Met some of the new park directors he had not previously met. Discussed the Great Northern Trail with Gina Hugo of Sherburne County. It's been paved from Elk River to Zimmerman and they are having a public input session regarding the alignment of the trail all the way to Milaca. This has been a goal of District 4 and we should expect to see this as a designation application in the future.

*Anderson* – he has been asked to be more involved with the Casey Jones Trail. At the annual meeting met with Kent Skaar, engineer from DNR who does trail planning and there seems to be a move to get this trail done. Working to get the state's oldest designated trail developed.

*Wolf* – nothing

*Foley* – good site visit with Joe at Big Elk Lake Park in Sherburne County.

*Suss* – participated in the regional workshop for District 5. Was recently at Lake Benton, Hole in the Mountain Park at a community celebration. Every camping site in the park was full as was the horse camping area. Had good feedback from community members about the new master plan, people are very excited about the plan. The county has appropriated \$100,000 for a match for their grant application.

*Pierce* – nothing

*Ryan* – Zumbro Water Trail project continues to make progress. They did acquire funding for a consultant and that person has sent out a use interest survey related to what types of recreation activities people would use on that river corridor. It's a

hundred mile riparian waterway on the Zumbro River in Southeast Minnesota. *Ryan* and *Mattson* attended the groundbreaking at the Oxbow Nature Center.

## 7. New Business:

### 7.1 Designation and Master Plan Discussion

#### 21-001D Waabizheshikana The Marten Trail Designation

*Czapiewski*, Duluth is seeking to extend a trail in the far Western part of town along the St. Louis River. It will be a 10-miles trail, currently a 3.3-mile trail. It includes access points to the river and neighborhoods. ETeam ranked this application High. It is at the base of Spirit Mountain Recreation Area. *Stoa* asked where the Munger Trail is in relation to this trail. *Anderson* asked if this was near the Chambers Grove Park, it is. *Pike* asked if this is a paved trail and how much will be built. It will be a natural surface trail and it will be an additional 7.4 miles of trail.

**Motion** by *Pike* to accept the ETeam rank of High

**Second** by *Bonk*

**Motion Approved**

#### 21-006D Wannigan Regional Park Designation

*Czapiewski*, have not acquired the property yet but are talking with the property owner. It is a joint project by Frazee and Becker County. It connects the Otter Tail State Water Trail, Heartland State Trail Extension and the North Country National Scenic Trail. *Ryan* asked if there is an issue with the land not being in their ownership yet? It is an eligibility issue now as we are just discussing the rank of High. *Anderson* asked if there is an issue with the Commission giving a High rank and causing the property negotiations to become more difficult? The property sale is based on the mandated appraisal under the State guidelines. *Pike* asked how many acres this park will be? 157 acres is the proposed total package. *Stoa* asked if they are successful for designation will they be looking for land acquisition. We believe so. *Pierce* asked about the ETeam member who ranked low. *Czapiewski* noted that the final decision is a consensus decision of the evaluation team, as are the consensus comments.

**Motion** by *Anderson* to accept the ETeam rank of High

**Second** by *Foley*

**Motion Approved**

#### 21-007D Phelps Mill County Park Designation

*Czapiewski*, key features are the historic mill and dam, bridge, General Store and homestead. Recreation focuses on river/dam, campsites, basic system of trails and day use areas. There was a master plan submitted but it does not meet the standards of even our current strategic plan. *Bonk* spoke with Otter Tail County representatives this week and discussed the process they went through with their consultant. The mill is one of the oldest standing facilities of its kind and in very good condition, best preserved not

only in the state but the country. This river is one of the cleanest rivers in this area, good water quality and is probably the most used recreational river in Western Minnesota. *Pike* has visited this park and toured the facility. It is unique mill and historic. How many acres is this facility? It is 127 acres. They did apply for designation several years ago and in the meantime have acquired many more acres for activity, and acquisition is complete. *Bonk* also noted they have recently hired a park superintendent in addition to their newly created park department. Master plan requires additional work before they can be designated.

**Motion** by *Pike* to accept the ETeam rank of High with the stipulation that the master plan needs additional work before we would consider designation of the facility.

**Second** by *Bonk*

**Motion Approved**

### **21-002D Nielsen Memorial Preserve Designation**

*Czapiewski*, 88-acre Special Feature ranked Medium by the ETeam. Site is documented as very high in botanical and geological significance. Concern was raised over the number of active amenities proposed, particularly in phases 2 and 3. Providing some of the amenities listed, such as the ropes course, mountain biking, etc., run counter to the preservation theme and also contrary to some of the public input that focused on preservation, low impact use and education. *Stoa* was surprised at the rank of Medium, he was very impressed with the tour and the park. *Suss* asked if the primary objective is the preservation of the unique flora and fauna, it seems that we would be looking to support an accessible trail through the park to protect the endangered species in the park. Would not support adding amenities to the park. Embrace what the land has. *Pike* suggested it become a scientific and natural area to complement Nerstrand Big Woods State Park to the North. *Anderson* feels that if we look at this as a Special Feature application, 88-acres is large enough. But this is a nuance that fits into our Strategic Plan and maybe this should be the Commission's first scientific and natural area. This could move up to a High if they look at the Master Plan as an interpretive area, with the flora and fauna resources. *Bonk* notes that there was a discussion a year ago about it in the realm of prairie preserves and changing criteria. Likes the idea of an SNA, every park doesn't need to have recreational amenities, what's in front of us to consider is a Medium ranking. *Ryan* notes he is a proponent of flexibility in working with our partners for the greater good. If we do not want to consider ranking it High in potential that doesn't mean they don't achieve designation, that means they go back to work further on their application. *Pike* wants to honor the ETeam work with their thorough evaluation and rank of Medium. *Suss* feels that it could be we have set an expectation that a facility must have a wealth of amenities in order to achieve designation. We should support them in making this a regional attraction that the public could explore for its unique and interesting geology, not added amenities.

**Motion** by Pike to accept the ETeam rank of Medium, with communication to the applicants as to why the rank of Medium

**Second** by Stoa

**Motion Approved**

**20-004D Greater Mankato River Valley Trail System Master Plan**

*Czapiewski*, 22-miles of non-motorized trail scored 450 by the ETeam. Lead agency is Blue Earth County in conjunction with the city of Mankato. *Pike* noted not many facilities score as high as 450, and the score speaks loudly for the opportunities this trail will provide in that area.

**Motion** by Suss to approve designation with the score of 450

**Second** by Pike

**Motion Approved**

**20-014D Big Elk Lake Park Master Plan**

*Czapiewski*, 430-acre Natural Resource Park, scored 435. Sherburne County is in discussion with the landowners for the purchase of the property. Extensive historical and cultural resources exist on the property. Much of the original master plan has changed due to the sensitive cultural resources at the site. The park is close to the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. All trails will be natural surface. *Foley* was on the tour and was very impressed with the site as well as Gina Hugo's knowledge and abilities.

**Motion** by Anderson to approve the designation

**Second** by Wendorf

**Motion Approved**

**8. Old Business:**

Nothing for old business

**9. Approval of Expenses for June**

Consultants Expenses for June	\$21,161.52
Commission Expenses for June	<u>\$326.96</u>
Total	\$21,488.48

**Motion** by Bonk to approve the June expenses

**Second** by Engrav

**Motion Approved**

**10. Next Meeting and Agenda Items**

July 28 in Nisswa for Strategic Planning

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

*Partner Meetings/Media*

- GMPT Communications Committee
- GMPT Membership Committee
- PTLAC Liaisons Monthly Meeting
- PTLAC Benchmarks Committee Call – GMRPTC is creating a mock-up for what a joint Benchmarks Report might look like.
- GMPT article for monthly newsletter
- Interview with Michael Goldberg from Action Media about Regional Trails

*Legislative*

Monitoring House and Senate meetings on the Omnibus Legacy and Environment bills. Progress was finally made late Saturday evening when the House passed Legacy off the floor 87-40, this coming after a long debate and many proposed amendments. The Senate will take up the bill on Monday, June 21. The Environment bill is still a work in progress and

*Streetlight Project*

Raven McKnight started work on June 14 and will be getting up to speed for a few weeks. As planned, the work will begin with parks, then move into the trail counts. We're having monthly updates as part of our PTLAC Liaisons meetings but will have updates on a more regular basis once the project has started.

*Mountain Bike Count and User Survey Project*

The trail counters have been installed, as you know from meeting Andrew Oftedal at our May meeting at DMRA. In Duluth, the Parks and Recreation Department provided a counter from their fleet, so we have one additional reference location on the Duluth Traverse near Hartley Nature Center. All permanent counters were install by May 27. Short-duration counts are also underway, currently at Detroit Mountain.

The visitor survey data collection will begin this weekend (June 25), which is a week later than planned, but hiring and training took longer than anticipated. There is still ample time to finish the collections on time. Parks and Trails Council will cover shifts internally to keep on schedule and I've volunteered to work shifts in Duluth this weekend and will fill in as needed in both Duluth and Cook County for the duration of the count, likely one or two days each week/weekend. So that will change my work schedule for Commission business as I adjust for the survey needs. The QA/QC Plan is attached here for your information.

*Site Visits and Partner Calls*

- Otter Tail County Phelps Mill 5/26
- Goodhue County Nielsen Memorial Preserve 5/28

- Big Falls Campground and Horse Camp grant close out inspection 6/16
- Superior Hiking Trail Call with new director, Lisa Luokkala
- Duluth Parks and Recreation CPO call with manager Jessica Peterson
- Call with Elicia Kortus and Rick Anderson about the Casey Jones Trail
- Working with University of Minnesota to promote information about their MNBikeand GO map

#### DMS Phase V

The proposal from the Full Circle Group for the Phase V work is coming into focus. We're pleased about creating a more robust CRM component of the DMS, which is sorely lacking. Also, the ability to produce targeted emails out of the DMS.

#### District Workshops/Strategic Plan Mailings

I've participated in the six district workshops that have been held so far, with the final workshop taking place June 22. Attendance has been strong at a few and unfortunately thin at more of them. But the plan has been widely distributed with 120 copies direct shipped from the printer, 24 that I have mailed so far, and 21 copies hand delivered during various site visits, for a total of 165 printed copies delivered.

#### Evaluation Team Call

Joe and I had a good call with the ETeam last week to discuss the designation applications and master plans coming before the Commission at Wednesday's meeting.

#### Funding Application Work with DNR for FY22

The DNR information necessary to issue contracts for the FY22 grants is complete. While the Legacy bill still isn't finished, we can move ahead to start the contracting process. Audrey Mularie has distributed the grants among staff and she, Mai Neng Moua and Dan Golner will start reaching out to their grantees in the next week.

**GMRPTC**  
**System Plan Coordinators Report**  
**June 2021**

**Funding Application 2021**

There are currently ten funding applications started in the system, an increase from four last month. Several others are in development but have not started their online application yet. I have had in-depth conversations with several potential applicants this month, including a couple that are currently in the Master Plan review process for designation. We are encouraging all applicants, including those who have minimal match, are completing previous phases, or are new to the idea of Connecting People to the Outdoors projects.

**On-Site Reviews and Technical Assistance**

The ETeam was finally able to meet for a full review session via Zoom on June 17. Four members attended, while the fifth was able to provide their comments and rank/score in the system. In addition to the reviews provided in advance of this month's Commission meeting, ETeam members were prepared to score Master Plans for two other facilities that were subsequently determined to be ineligible. We do not expect the ETeam to meet again until funding application reviews in August or early September.

21-001D Designation Application for Duluth Waabizhishikana Trail, ranked High

21-006D Designation Application for Frazee Wannigan Park, ranked High. This is their second application, previously ranked Medium.

21-007D – Designation Application for Otter Tail County Phelps Mill Park, ranked High. An unqualified Master Plan was submitted but not scored for this facility. A site visit was completed.

21-002D – Designation Application for Goodhue County Nielsen Memorial Preserve, ranked Medium. This is their second application, previously ranked Medium. A qualified Master Plan was submitted but was ineligible for scoring due to Medium ranking. A site visit was completed.

20-004D - Master Plan for Mankato River Valley Trail System, score 450. A site visit was completed.

20-014D – Master Plan for Sherburne County Big Elk Lake Park, score 435. A site visit was completed.

I also completed a site visit for Detroit Mountain (after last month's Commission meeting) and Elk River Woodland Trails Park, which had their funding project wrap up recently. Renee and I will also be conducting a Zoom call with representatives from Mille Lacs County between now and the Commission meeting.

**DMS Updates**

Renee and I met with Full Circle Group about the next phase of Data Management System development. After discussion, specific tasks listed in the work plan include:

- Implement CMR (Customer Management) platform
- Integrate a GIS interface overlay (for future integration with our GIS system)
- Create a user/facility survey tool, based on DMS items as well as outside questions, that may autopopulate/update the DMS. (This will help keep the system updated)



- Create a Master Plan export tool from the Admin portal
- Add or update several items based on 2021 GMRPTC Strategic Plan:
  - Re-order categories and items to match new guidance
  - Add new Track 2 Evaluation for ETeam
  - Update Export reports on the Evaluation side
  - Update the Master Plan export
  - Re-order Designation Application inputs and export as needed to match the Master Plan update

We hope to have a firm cost proposal to you soon, even by the June meeting so that work can begin on time with our Strategic Plan implementation guidance.

**Partner Contact Maintenance Contract**

We have conducted training with Karen Umphress of UP! Outside to complete our Contact Maintenance project. Timeline for this project is late summer completion.

**District Workshops**

Here is a summary of the workshops so far, for the record. Number of attendees does not include Commissioners or staff consultants.

- D1: June 15, 1:00pm    4 signed up/1 attended
- D2: June 8, 1:00pm    8 signed up/8 attended
- D3: June 15, 10:00am   11 signed up/10 attended
- D4: June 2, 1:00pm    4 signed up/4 attended
- D5: June 2, 10:00am    4 signed up/3 attended
- D6: June 22, 1:00pm    11 signed up/attendance TBD
- At Large: June 10, 6:30 pm    1 signed up/0 attended

While attendance has been significantly lower than past in-person workshops, those attending the workshops have had great interaction. Several follow-up conversations about new or existing facilities or projects are either underway or will begin soon. The response to the plan has been very positive so far. Renee and I sincerely appreciate not only your attendance, but your active participation in the presentation! Commissioner feedback on these workshops will be important for determining future formats.