

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks & Trails Commission

STRATEGIC PLAN

District 2
Northwest

District 1
Northeast

District 3
West Central

District 4
East Central

Metro

District 5
Southwest

District 6
Southeast





It is the intent of the Commision that this strategic plan be a dynamic working document that will evolve over time.

Acknowledgements

- Governor Tim Walz
- Senator Carrie Ruud – Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Legacy Finance - Chair
- Representative Leon Lillie – Legacy Finance Division - Chair

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- Rick Anderson, Vice Chair (District 5)
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The Commission would like to extend our appreciation to the legislators, members of the District Planning Committees, local government agencies who create the regional system, the Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Metropolitan Council Regional Parks, Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails, and all of the park and trail users who have supported, guided, and challenged us to be our very best.



Greater Minnesota is graced to have many natural resource-based parks offering a wide variety of outdoor recreational opportunities.



Tom Ryan, GMRPTC Chair

DEAR FRIENDS,

It is with great pleasure that the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission presents this update to our Strategic Plan. Over the past decade, many people have worked hard to build a system of regional Legacy parks and trails that all Minnesotans can be proud of. This plan is an evolution of the excellence handed to us by those who champion our cause.

Minnesotans have always had an appreciation for quality parks and trails which serve as both a resource for, and an escape from, their daily lives. The good citizens of this state saw fit to tax themselves, through the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment, for something more than basic road and water infrastructure. We steward those funds to provide them with a quality system of regional parks and trails unparalleled in the United States. That was their aspiration; that is our mission.

Over time we are creating a seamless outdoor recreation system that integrates with those of our partners at the Department of Natural Resources and Metropolitan Council Regional Parks. Implementation of this plan creates opportunities to strengthen our collaboration with, and the capacity of, our city and county partners. Strong ties at the planning level are producing results for outdoor recreation across Minnesota. This plan lays out our next steps.

Sincerely,

Thomas Ryan, Chair
Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

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Section I – Introduction

Legislature and Legacy Purpose

Minnesotans deeply value their outdoor heritage and recognize the need to protect our natural resources for now and for future generations. In 2008, the citizens of Minnesota passed an amendment to the constitution named the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. The Legacy Amendment has a wide-ranging charter: to protect drinking water sources; to protect, enhance and restore wetlands, prairies, forests and fish, game and wildlife habitat; to preserve arts and cultural heritage; to support parks and trails; and protect, enhance and restore lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater.

The Legacy Amendment increased Minnesota sales tax by three-eighths of one percent beginning on July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2034. The tax revenue is directed into four funds: 33% to the Clean Water Fund, 33% to the Outdoor Heritage Fund, 19.75% to the Arts and Culture Fund and 14.25% to the Parks and Trails Fund. Legacy funding for Regional Parks and Trails is distributed by formula between the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Metropolitan Council’s Regional Parks Department, and the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission.

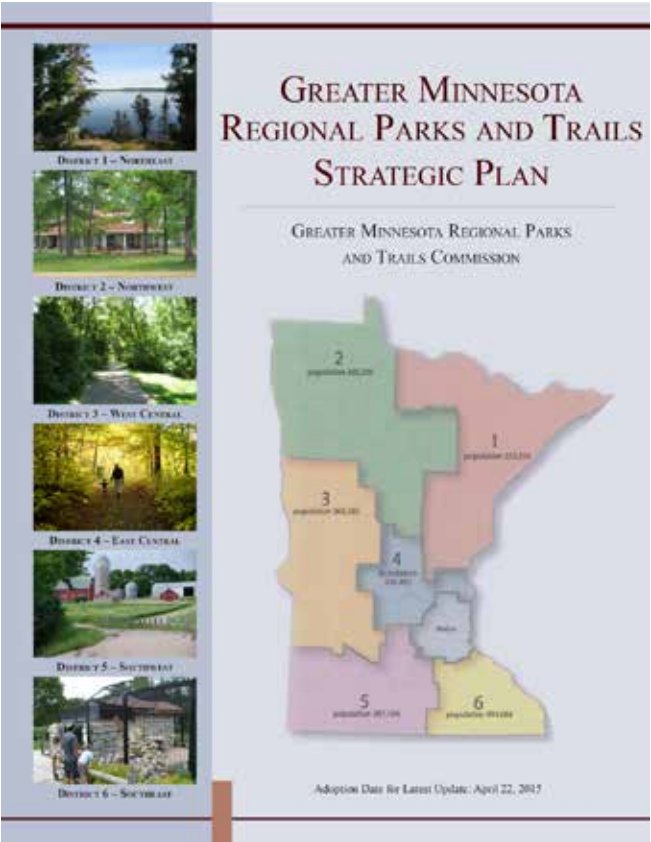
Prior to 2013 there was no formal structure for a regional parks and trails system throughout Greater Minnesota. The dedication of a coalition of individuals who saw the need to establish a consistent funding source worked tirelessly to ensure the needs of Greater Minnesota would be recognized. Their passion and perseverance resulted in formation of the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission and with that, a place within the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund.

The enabling legislation for the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission is established in the 2013 Minnesota Statutes 85.536 as follows:

Establishment; purpose. The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission is created to undertake system planning and provide recommendations to the legislature for grants funded by the parks and trails fund to counties and cities outside of the seven-county metropolitan area for parks and trails of regional significance.

The Commission includes 13 members appointed by the governor, with two members from each of the six regional parks and trails districts, plus one at-large member, who serve on a staggered term schedule.

Through the adoption of this plan, the Commission fulfills its obligation to “develop a strategic plan and criteria for determining parks and trails of regional significance that are eligible for funding from the parks and trails fund and meet the criteria under subdivision 6.”



GMRPTC Strategic Plan, Cover, 2014-2015

Plan Update Background and Process

The Commission created and adopted its original Strategic Plan in 2014 with an update in 2015. Since that time, the Greater Minnesota regional system has continued to grow and develop using the guidance from that Strategic Plan. Additional documents, guidance, systems, and capabilities have been developed to ensure a high-quality outdoor recreation experience for all users.

This Strategic Plan update is designed to capture the improvements to the system and the Commission’s operating environment since 2015. Significant resources and time have been spent exploring the challenges and opportunities available and setting the stage for continued system improvement.

Several documents and tools have been a critical to the development of the regional system and this plan update. The core documents outlined here, along with analysis of the regional system, development of Geographic Information Systems and other analytical tools, and continuous stakeholder and public engagement, helped to guide the Commission’s strategic thinking.

- **Parks and Trails Legacy Plan** – 25-year long-range plan for parks and trails of state and regional significance (2011)
- **Minnesota State Parks and Trails: Directions for the Future** – DNR’s strategic 10-year plan
- **Metropolitan Council’s Regional Park Policy Plan** – strategic plan for metro-area parks and trails (2018)
- **State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)** – is Minnesota’s outdoor recreation policy plan (2019)
- **Legacy 10-Year Celebration Report** – a summary of public engagement from a series of public celebration workshops across the state (2019)

A deliberate process was created to facilitate the development of this plan update. Appropriate discussion with the Commission’s statewide Evaluation Team and District Planning Committees helped capture issues,

opportunities, and provide feedback on the development of the plan. Where additional public engagement opportunities to listen to the general or topic-specific needs of various constituencies arose, they were taken. The planning steps are generally outlined below.

- **October 2018** – The Commission met with the Evaluation Team to evaluate the state of the system and explore areas in need of further development.
- **January 2019** – The Commission established a series of subcommittees, each dealing with a different strategic “Theme” related to system development. Their work would continue through 2019 with regular committee reports to and discussions with the Commission.
- **Spring 2019** - District Workshops were held for the general public. Additional discussions with strategic partners helped inform key topics.
- **September 2019** – An update and discussion on the major themes and issues involved in the plan update were provided to the District Planning Committees for discussion.
- **October 2019** – The Evaluation Team discussed the Strategic Plan direction with the Commission.
- **January 2020** – The Commission held a planning workshop to draft strategies for key organizational topics not covered by the theme subcommittees. Staff began to compile the plan document.
- **May 2020** - The Commission established a draft content creation and review process.
- **February 2021** – Draft plan contents were approved.
- **April 2021** – The Strategic Plan was formally adopted.

History and Districts

The 2013 legislation, Minnesota Statute 85.536 creating the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission, was the product of a long-fought effort to bring recognition to Greater Minnesota as a partner in the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. It is not enough however, to simply recognize the outcome. It is critical to understand the long road to establishing the statute, and with it the access to Legacy funds. Recognition of the Commission as a serious body, readily willing and able to shoulder the responsibility of park and trail designations in Greater Minnesota is essential.

Leading the Commission’s creation was a thoughtful, determined body of recreation professionals that understood the game change Legacy funds would bring. They were passionate about obtaining a portion of the funding so that parks and trails of regional significance in Greater Minnesota could grow, improve, and continue serving residents of the area, visitors from across Minnesota and across the region. Many involved in the challenge also served on the committee that envisioned and wrote the 25-Year Legacy Plan.

Hence, the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Coalition was formed, intent on being an organized force to lobby for equity, which they did with great success. A name change ensued, the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission was established, and the former coalition organization went on to become Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails (GMPT). As a partner to the Commission, GMPT’s mission is to “improve the quality of life for the citizens of Minnesota by providing areas for recreational opportunities and

promoting legislative support, funding opportunities, and networking for regional parks and trails throughout Greater Minnesota”.

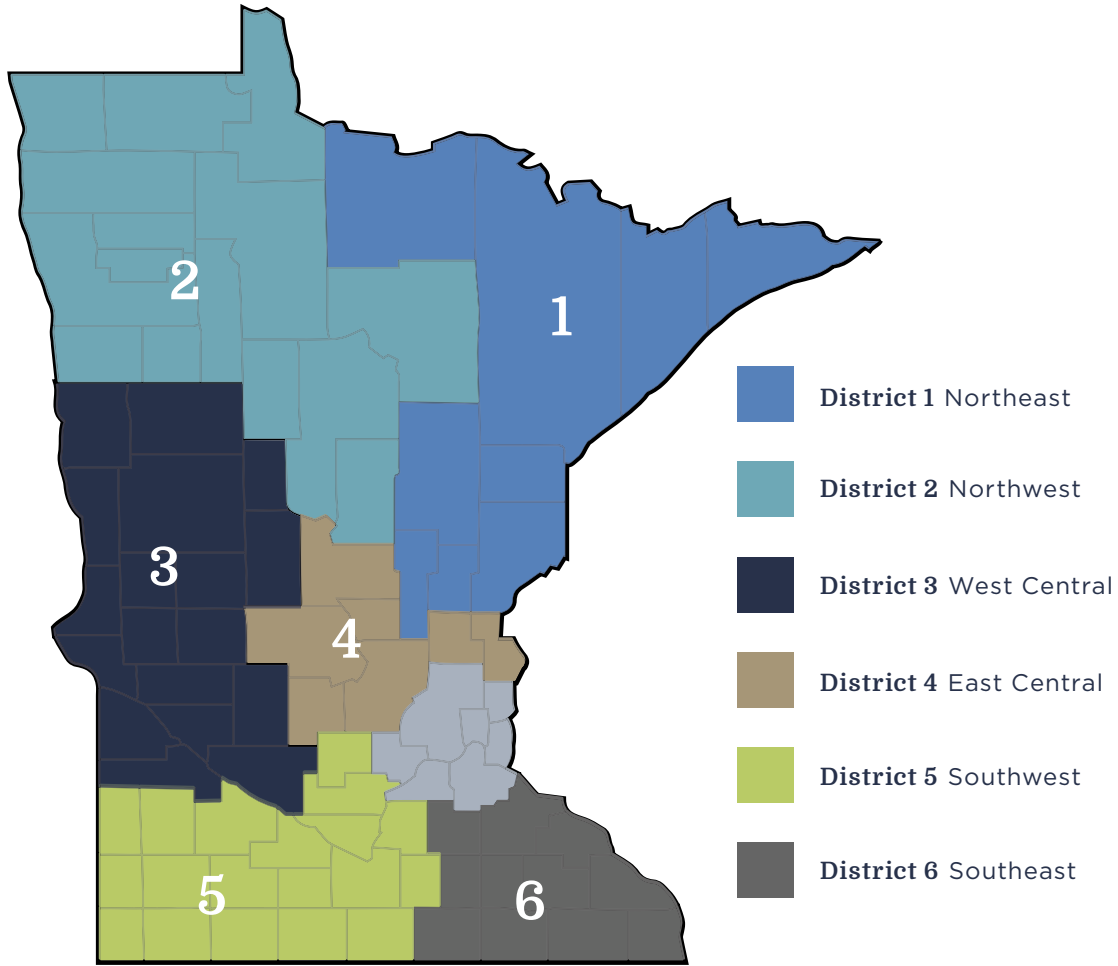


Figure I-1

As the accompanying map indicates, the state is divided into six districts. Although these geographic boundaries are different than those used by the DNR, strategic alignment between the Commission and the agency on planning issues and funding priorities remains important.

Organizing itself into districts also allows the Commission to accomplish two key items: Better understand Greater Minnesota. While often referred to as one entity, the landscape across the state varies dramatically. Even within Districts, there are often distinct regions with unique geography, land uses, demographics, and recreation opportunities.

Connect with constituents. By consciously organizing public engagement at the district or sub-district level, the Commission can do a better job reaching a wide variety of constituencies and understanding their needs.

Commission Structure

Appointed by the Governor, the Commission has 13 members, two from each of the six districts and one at-large member.

Commissioners have the general power to manage and control the affairs of the organization. Their role, by majority vote, is to adopt rules and policies governing the actions of the organization. This includes:

- Operating the organization, directly or through the Executive Director as noted under the Administrative Structure section.
- Ensuring that the interests of all regions within Greater Minnesota are well-represented on the Commission and committees.
- Ensuring that the public has adequate opportunity to participate in defining regional park and trail needs and the interests of residents within the six Districts of the state.
- Understanding factors influencing planning decisions and outcomes, including trends on a statewide and regional basis.
- Oversight of developing, applying and refining the:
 - » Classification system for Greater Minnesota regional parks and trails
 - » Process for formally designating a park or trail as regionally significant, including its merit ranking and level of priority against established criteria
 - » Funding priority lists, as defined in the Operating Guidelines and Funding Criteria and Guidelines.
- Oversight of the granting process, including final selection of projects each year.

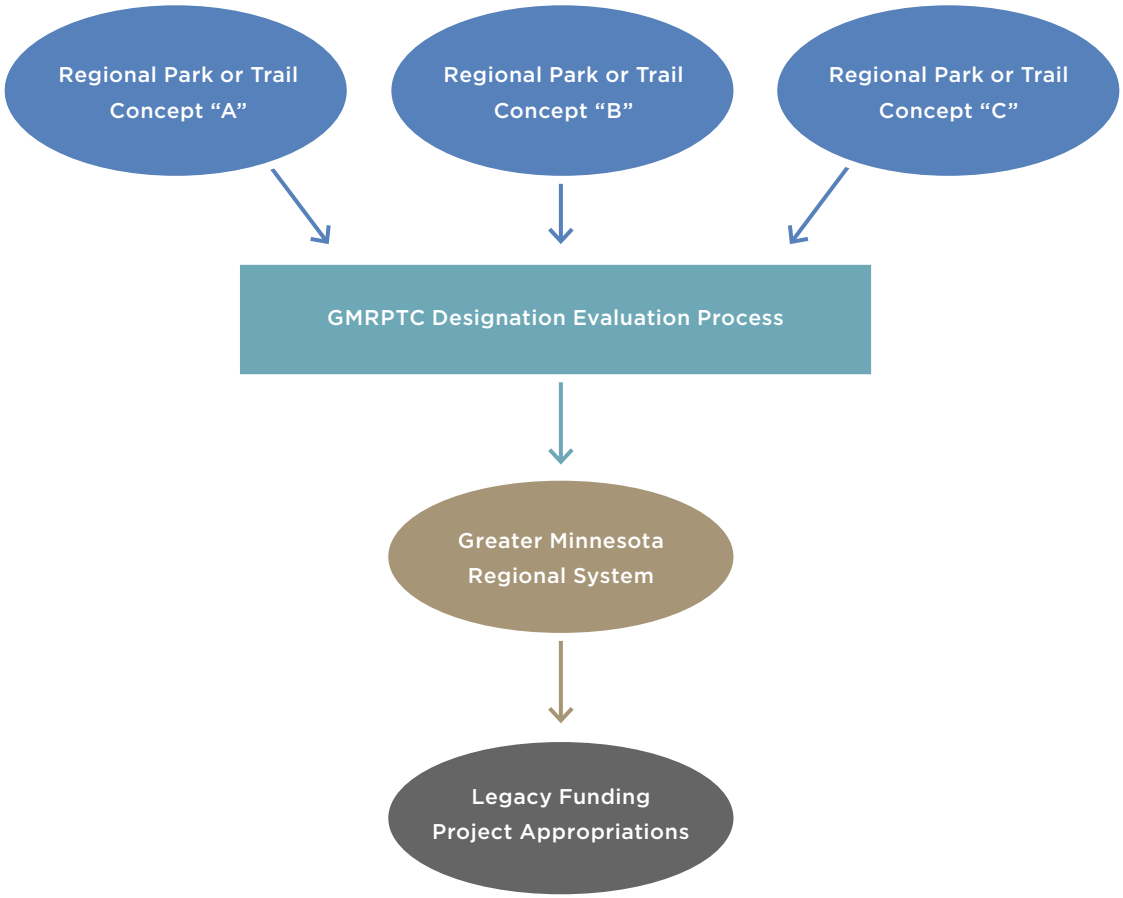
Additional committees or task forces may be created as necessary. Those groups may include additional outside representation or partners as needed, as long as the leadership and purpose is clearly established by the Commission

Evaluation Team (ETeam) – To maintain the credibility of the vetting process, individual park and trail proposals submitted for regional consideration will be evaluated by the ETeam made up of selected professionals without any connection to, or a vested interest in, outcomes. The protocol for selecting ETeam members is included in the Regional Park and Trails Project Proposal Evaluation Team Application Form that is available from the Commission.

The core focus of the ETeam is evaluating park and trail proposals against the established criteria, along with recommending any modifications/updating of protocols and criteria based on changing circumstances. The team may also assist with evaluating grant applications from designated facilities and advising on overall funding allocations for consideration.

As defined under this plan, the Commission will evaluate, rank, and determine funding recommendations for regionally significant projects of highest merit. As the following graphic illustrates, all regional park and trail projects will flow through the Commission’s evaluation process to ensure consistency with the protocol and criteria defined under this plan.

Figure I-2: Regional System Development Process



As the above illustration highlights, the vetting process defined and implemented by the Commission is the only route to Legacy or other funding sources as related to regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota. This authority is critical to the Commission being successful in carrying out its responsibilities – the most important of which is ensuring that the physical system plan that emerges over time only reflects park and trails that are well-vetted and formally recognized as being regionally-significant and essential to meeting regional needs.

Interagency Relationships

The GMRPTC does not operate in a vacuum. Several partner agencies and organizations play key collaborative roles in ensuring the best use of Minnesota’s available Legacy Parks and Trails funds.

Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee – created as an element in the implementation of the 25-Year Parks and

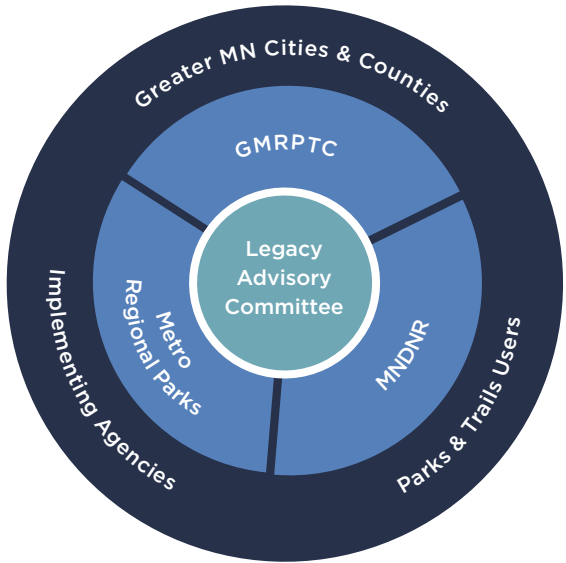


Figure I-3: Interagency Relationships

Trails Legacy Plan. A pillar of the 25-Year Plan calls for coordination among partners to create a seamless network of state and regional parks and trails. The Metropolitan Council, Department of Natural Resources and the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission each appoint three members to the committee along with eight ad hoc members.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – administers grants awarded by the Commission to parks and trails of regional significance outside the seven-county metropolitan area as well as its own statewide system. The DNR is a valued partner in collaboration and a shared understanding of the need of Minnesotans to have access to a system of parks and trails that promote the benefits and healthy lifestyle of outdoor activity.

Metropolitan Council Regional Parks – is a partner with the Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee and shares the perspective that users of parks and trails in Minnesota do not recognize county boundaries when choosing to recreate. They distribute their share of Legacy Amendment funding across the Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails System.

Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails – is a membership-based nonprofit and promotes legislative support, education and outreach to recreation professionals, local officials and interested parties throughout the state.

Cities and Counties – conceive, develop, and maintain regional and local facilities in Greater Minnesota. As the GMRPTC neither owns property or manages facilities, actual creation of the regional system can only be accomplished in a partnership between local partner agencies and the Commission.

The Commission is committed to working with these partners, and others, to ensure overall system plans are complementary and focus on meeting priority needs across Greater Minnesota. For instance, the Commission is committed to ensuring that regional parks in Greater Minnesota complement the established state park and recreation area classifications, as defined by the Department of Natural Resources and Metropolitan Council.

The distinction between state and regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota is important for planning purposes, with the presumption being that the state system will have a strong “destination” orientation that appeals to a statewide audience and tourists.

It is understood that users often know no distinction between state, regional or metropolitan when using the systems, even when transiting from one system to the next. Therefore, it is important that designs, standards, and transitions where possible feel seamless and reflect a quality investment for all users.

It is important that designs, standards, and transitions between state and regional systems feel seamless and reflect a quality investment for all users.

From a practical standpoint, the regional system will most often respond to the state trail system since the latter is reasonably accepted as the higher-level system given its focus on meeting statewide needs. To ensure that both state and regional trails are properly classified and ranked according to merit, the Commission will work with the DNR and Metro Regional Parks (where the system interface occurs) to evaluate how proposed regional trails fit into the overall system.

Where valuable, the Commission will actively foster and support public partnerships formed to address regional park and trail needs. This includes, for example, partnerships between cities, townships, and counties to plan, develop, operate, manage, maintain, and program individual or systems of parks and trails. The goal is to use these types of regional partnerships to help define regional opportunities and priorities consistent with the principles and criteria set forth in this plan. Note that the Commission will require partnerships between public entities to be formally defined through joint powers or other forms of agreements before any projects will be eligible for funding.

The Commission will also, at its discretion, foster partnerships with established regional advocacy, planning, and/or development entities when it serves a defined purpose and is in the best interest of achieving organizational goals.

Administrative Structure

The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission is supported by a small team of consultants. The Commission does not have permanent staff, a deliberate decision made to ensure grants take the highest priority and operating dollars are kept to a minimum. With a lean organization, the Commission values partner agencies for input, review and collaboration. The Minnesota DNR provides support and contracting for grants awarded through the Commission. Currently St. Louis County serves as the fiscal agent for the Commission.

Executive Director - The administrative duties of the Commission are led by an Executive Director, hired at the discretion of the Commission. The Director’s role is to interface with partner agencies, work closely

with Legacy legislative committees, budgeting and financial oversight, administration, grant funding review and contracting.

System Plan Coordinator – The System Plan Coordinator’s role is to oversee the development of the regional system. This includes developing and overseeing the application process, conducting the evaluation process, and providing support for applicants, fund application analysis and technical services and liaison with local partners and advocates.

Administrative Assistant – The meeting minutes and transcription are done by the Administrative Assistant to ensure an accurate public record of Commission meetings.

Additional consultants are hired as necessary to perform key functions. Examples include development of the Commission’s data management, GIS, and other electronic systems, performing public engagement, and performing technical services.

Location – Since the Commission does not operate out of a physical structure and can meet anywhere, the GMRPTC is in many ways a “virtual” organization. All key systems of the Commission are conducted through its website, www.gmrptcommission.org. This includes Commission management and functions such as email, data storage and file sharing, and evaluation; general public communication such as newsletters, public documents and meeting notices; and the Data Management System, which houses the application system for all regional Designation Applications, Master Plans, and Funding Applications.

Section II – Regional System Development

One of the hardest challenges for any organization operating across Greater Minnesota is to define what “regional” means to that organization. Whether looking to create structure, distribute funds, or even define the population and economic centers of a region, every organization’s needs are unique. The Commission is no different.

While the 25 Year Legacy Plan has provided guidance on this topic, reality on the ground has proven more challenging. This section seeks to further define what “regional” means to the Commission, how to evaluate it, and how it applies to the Greater Minnesota regional system.

Defining “Regional”

A key to determining the structure and extent of the Greater Minnesota Regional system is to understand the meaning of “regional”. Over the past several years, the Commission has been successful in building a system of regional parks and trails that is defined by its regional characteristics. Existing parks or trails that have been long recognized for their regional significance were the typically first ones to apply. The Commission’s public outreach and funding opportunities helped encourage additional cities and counties to bring forward their best ideas for their region.

Several documents provided guidance as the Commission developed Greater Minnesota’s definition of regional. These documents shaped the planning context and ensure that outcomes take into consideration broader planning issues and strategic direction. In particular, the documents included:

- **Parks and Trails Legacy Plan** - 25 year long-range plan for parks and trails of state and regional significance (2011)
- **Minnesota State Parks and Trails: Directions for the Future** – DNR’s strategic 10 year plan
- **Metropolitan Council’s Regional Park Policy Plan** – strategic plan for metro-area parks and trails (2018)
- **Legacy 10-Year Anniversary Report of Legacy Amendment Impact on Minnesota’s Parks and Trails** – a summary of public engagement from a series of public celebration, education and listening workshops across the state (2019)
- **Regional Parks for Minnesota’s Outstate Urban Complexes** – A report prepared for the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (2007)

The documents listed above provided an extensive foundation of factors defining the regional system, as noted in the 2015 Strategic Plan. Since then, many of these plans have been updated or provided additional guidance. The Commission continues to look to these documents and many others for planning context and direction where appropriate.

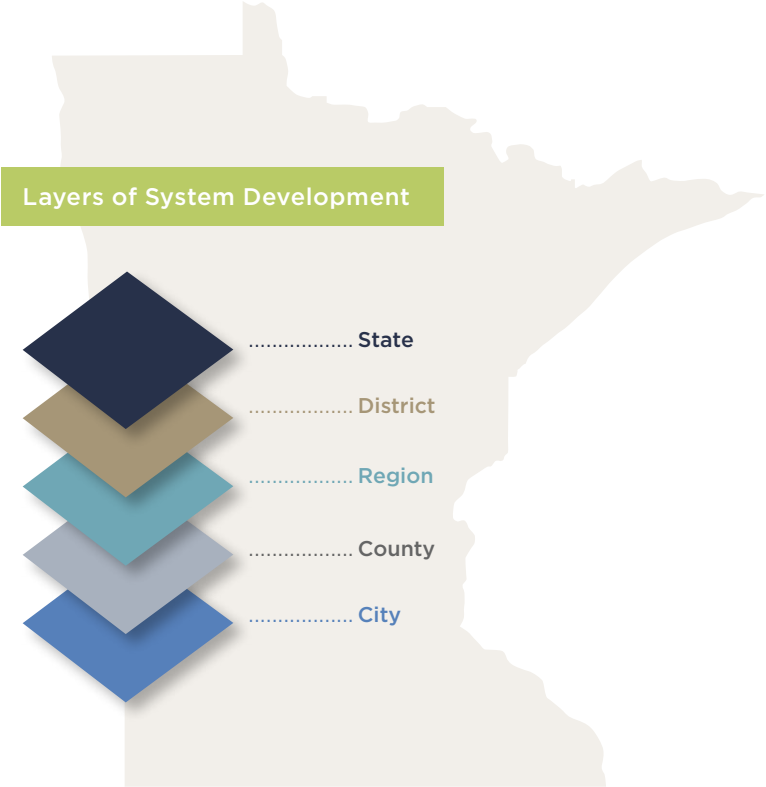


Figure II-1 : Layers of System Development

Just as important as planning documents for understanding the regions of the state is the Commission’s own experience. Designation Applications and Master Plans have come in from all corners of the state and reflect their own regional situations. The Commission has worked with Planning Committees made up of individuals within each District, who help it understand what is unique and defining for each region. Patterns have emerged as the system has developed.

Large, sparsely populated regions out west can be fundamentally different than small, densely settled regions near the Metro. Geography and land cover or use can vary significantly even within one District. Travel and development patterns affect how residents and visitors think about the time and distance it takes to get to a

park or trail. For some regions, the economic center of activity is even located in a neighboring state! One size, or definition, does not fit all. It is clear that there is no one easy definition of region or regional center that fits the entire state.

Over time, the ease of defining a park or trail as regional will become even more complicated. New park and trail concepts will be developed as opportunity and demand shifts. Regional population and travel patterns will evolve. The system itself has developed, providing facilities that meet a regional population density or service need. Evaluating facilities based on their regional impact has become more nuanced, requiring more careful articulation of what the region is.

See Section V for more information about District and Regional visions and characteristics

Based on guidance from the above documents and experiences, there are two basic categories that define the regional nature of a given park or trail:

- **Demographic/Economic Center:** Based on the population and man-made infrastructure built to support it.
- **Existing or Emerging Destination Center:** Draws visitors from outside the region to an area based on current or clearly burgeoning natural/ environmental and recreation features.

An applicant for regional designation must be clear which category is their primary reason for being regional, although it could be both.

The Commission further defines a regional facility as one that is a draw for people in and to the area, exhibiting:

- A stable or growing population
- The facility adds to the “regional-ness,” or enhances existing features (improves or develops access to outdoor recreation)
- Is special or unique on an at least sub-district region.

The nexus between a facility having a regionally significant population within reach and the ability to draw them in is critical to its success as a regional park or trail.

Regional trails in particular must meet primary criteria of a) a regionally desirable setting and b) a high quality opportunity and use. Additional criteria that must be addressed include adequate length, connections, how it differs from other opportunities within the same area, and scarcity of trail resources.

Evaluating Context of Regional and Local Differences

As summarized in the Legacy Plan, one of the major themes that emerged from the public conversation is that citizens support a statewide approach to investing Legacy funds, but one that recognizes that regional priorities and needs differ. As defined in accompanying Legacy Plan reports, “regional differences stem from the significant size and complexity of Minnesota and the existing network of parks and trails of state and regional significance.” There are differences in the natural resource base, demographics, supply of recreation opportunities, age of infrastructure, demand for recreation opportunities, the role of tourism, and satisfaction of visitors. Investment of Legacy funds should reflect these nuances.

More specifically, recommendations for investment of Legacy and other funding sources call for:

- A balanced approach; flexibility
- Fairness and equity
- Recognizing differences and playing to the strengths of each outdoor recreation provider

Implicit in these recommendations is the need to recognize regional differences and respond to them following a structured approach that retains a built-in capacity to respond to regional needs and collaborative opportunities.

Each applicant for regional designation will be responsible for telling the story of why their facility meets regional standards.

The following (inexhaustive) characteristics or indicators help identify a community or area as “regional” for designation purposes.

REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC/ECONOMIC CENTER

- It is at a major crossroads, e.g. Hwy 2 and Hwy 71
- It is the largest city/center within 50-100 miles
- It draws from the communities around it, particularly for core community or economic services
- It has a stable or growing population
- It has a university or 2-year college/technical school
- It draws from distant urban/metro areas

EXISTING OR EMERGING DESTINATION CENTER

- It is a “Destination,” e.g. Cuyuna Mountain Bike Trail System, Duluth Traverse, Itasca State Park, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, Mississippi River Bluff Country.
- It has offerings that are unique and not available at another nearby place. e.g. natural feature lake, river, rapids, mountain, rare plants, interesting wildlife, birding opportunities; or man-made amenity: harbor, dam, roadside statue/attraction, e.g. Paul Bunyan and Babe, Forestville Mystery Cave State Park, Gooseberry Falls, Pipestone National Monument, Douglas County Kensington Park.
- It is the only one of its kind nearby, e.g. Detroit Mountain Recreation Area, Northland Regional Sports Park, Big Falls Campground and Horse Park, Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Split Rock Lighthouse State Park, Duluth Aerial Lift Bridge.
- It has a concentration of trails and parks, e.g., GIA snowmobile trails and multi-modal trails that provide access into areas that are not accessible otherwise;
- It provides opportunities for people to explore more than one kind of recreation, e.g. walking, hiking, swimming, biking, camping, fishing, skiing, birding, e.g. Irving and John Anderson Park, He Mni Can Park, Spirit Mountain Recreation Area, Mesabi Trail, Lyons County Twin Lakes Park.
- It is in an area isolated from a traditional regional center may be considered regionally significant if it provides a recreational opportunity that is not otherwise available in that isolated area and draws visitors from across that isolated region as well as from more distant population centers, e.g. Hole in the Mountain Park, Northerly Park, Lake Vermilion Trail, Jay C. Hormel Nature Center.

EVALUATING REGIONAL PARK AND TRAIL CONTEXT

Evaluating regional parks and trails continues to rely on the form and function of a particular facility within its region and setting. One way to define the form is by how well a park or trail captures the best natural resource features of the region (topography, land use, cover type, scenic views, etc.) in its recreation experience. Defining the function of an outdoor recreation-based facility is based on understanding its accessibility to the population as well as its priority in the region’s system.

Each applicant for regional designation will be responsible for telling the story of why their facility meets functional regional standards. As will be noted in Section IV, both Designation Applications and Master Plans must show an appropriate level of analysis in narrative and map/graphic formats.

Designation Applications can indicate a base level of analysis through:

- An accurate and succinct Regional Significance Statement that defines the intent, audience, amenities, and setting of the facility.
- Showing an understanding of how the General Site Characteristics fit into the broader landscape.
- Indicating proximity to the relevant population or tourism center in the response to Criteria #3.
- Describing the emerging draw of a park or trail that is geographically isolated or located in an underserved area in the response to Criteria #4.

Master Plans must prove the regional significance of a facility through several key components of the Master Plan. Below are indicators that can help an applicant show that their facility rises to the level of regional. Additional indicators and metrics are encouraged if they support the analysis.

REGIONAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS INDICATORS

- Distance to regional economic or destination centers. Identify how that distance meets this Strategic Plan’s guidance.
- Relevance of those regional centers. Identify how those centers meet the indicators of being a center for their region.
- Distance to other state, regional, or potentially regional parks or trails, and what recreation amenities are available in those parks or trails.
- Types and qualities of access routes (roads, trails) that lead from the applicant facility to the identified regional centers or state or regional recreation facilities.

REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION INDICATORS

The Commission acknowledges that demographic and recreation trends continue to evolve. The Commission remains flexible in its approach and can embrace innovative responses as local applicants propose new facilities encompassing new ideas. The release of the 2020 US Census and state demographic updates over the course of the coming months and years will also highlight changes that may not be anticipated today. The context of the proposed regional center within the region is a critical part of showing how that center rises to the level of regional. Regional applicants are also encouraged to support the Commission and Legacy Plan ideals of accessibility, diversity and inclusion in the populations they serve.

- Overall size and characteristics of the appropriate regional population base
- Trends in population over time
- Information about age groups, emerging populations, income levels and trends, etc.
- Indicators of local health, recreation facility use, etc.
- Results of relevant studies, such as SHIP Outdoor Activity Studies or regional health or demographic analysis studies

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES INDICATORS

- Relevant economic characteristics for the appropriate region
- For intrinsic economic development, identify statistics such as average household income, major industries and size, size of relative property tax or sales tax base, etc.
 - » For tourism economics, identify statistics such as seasonal/vacation property ratios, resort or campground density, etc.
 - » Lodging occupancy
 - » Tourism sector employment
- Measurable seasonal population and business fluctuations
- Trends in economic growth or weakness
- Sales Tax impacts and trends; Hospitality Tax impacts and trends
- Local investment levels in recreation resources
- Use statistics from other nearby recreation facilities, events, etc.
- Results of relevant economic or tourism development studies

The Commission reserves the right to conduct an independent analysis of the region around an applicant park or trail. Applicants would be well advised that their own analysis matches or exceeds what the Commission will identify for nearby facilities and population centers. This will help match the facility’s development plans and proposed investments with realistic user base opportunities.



Chisago County Sunrise Prairie Trail Ribbon Cutting
(credit Joe Sausen)

Section III – Classifications, Criteria and Evaluation

Introduction

Of all the sections of this plan, Section III has proven to be the most valuable to both applicants and evaluators contributing to the creation of the Greater Minnesota system. Going beyond concepts, it lays out the specific classifications and criteria for the designation of the regional system.

This version of the Strategic Plan provides some notable modifications to the classification and criteria system in use since the creation of the Commission. These changes were carefully explored and vetted by the Commission over an extended period of time, done in response to lessons learned as the previous Strategic Plan was implemented.

Overall, the structure of the evaluation system detailed here still contains classifications and their criteria with specific ranking metrics. Some items, like the number of classifications and the variety of criteria, were simplified. Where needed in response to the developing system, additional components, metrics and clarifications are provided.

These changes may provide opportunities for some previously low or medium ranking facilities to improve their concept. For others, it may provide an opportunity that did not exist before or remove an opportunity that experience has proven to be unworkable. In any case, this system is dynamic and will continue to evolve in the future.

Alignment with 25-Year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan

As was intended by the Legislature, the Legacy Plan serves as a foundational document to this plan. The four strategic directions defined under that plan are central to guiding the use of Legacy funds over time.

The four strategic directions as cited are:

- 1 **Connect People and the Outdoors** – better develop Minnesota’s stewards of tomorrow through efforts to increase life-long participation in parks and trails
- 2 **Acquire Land, Create Opportunities** – create new and expanded park and trail opportunities to satisfy current customers as well as to reach out to new ones
- 3 **Take Care of What We Have** – provide safe, high-quality park and trail experiences by regular re-investment in park and trail infrastructure, and natural resource management.
- 4 **Coordinate Among Partners** – enhance coordination across the large and complex network of public, private and non-profit partners that support Minnesota’s parks and trails to ensure seamless, enjoyable park and trail experiences for Minnesotans.



As with this plan, the Legacy Plan emphasizes the importance of providing quality experiences. This is especially the case with non-traditional users, where understanding their needs and providing a quality experience at parks and trails is essential to turning non-users into frequent users.

Relative to Greater Minnesota, the Legacy Plan specifically calls for defining a cohesive and well-considered “Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Regional Network,” including creating agreement on its interrelationship and coordination with state and the metro regional park and trail system.

One of the goals of this plan is to be in alignment with the strategic directions laid out in the Legacy Plan, as the forthcoming criteria for determining the merit of a regional park or trail project reflect.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES/THEMES

Although tailored for Greater Minnesota, the forthcoming principles/themes are in general alignment with those defined in the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan and updated for this generation of the Strategic Plan. Underlying all of these is the reality that even with Legacy and other funding sources, public resources for parks and trail project across Greater Minnesota will be limited, reinforcing the importance of selecting parks and trails of highest discernible public good.

Principle/Theme #1 – Support Merit-Based Projects Most Relevant to and Valued by Residents of, and Visitors to, Greater Minnesota.

Places a priority on near-home park and trail projects in areas that are more densely settled, rapidly growing, and/or an established regional center. Also includes placing a priority on projects that will address emerging recreational needs and/or serve an under-served segment of the population. The underlying goal is to maintain confidence that top ranked projects are in alignment with what people really value.

Principle/Theme #2 – Supports Projects Emphasizing High Quality Outdoor Experiences and Healthy/Active Lifestyles

Places a priority on parks and trails in settings that will result in high quality, memorable experiences and will entice visitors to return time and again. For trails, this relates to placing a priority on “destination” type trails that are located in a safe, convenient, and scenic natural setting. For parks, this relates to developing facilities with a keen focus on quality natural resource-based outdoor recreation, education, health, cultural, scenic, and historic interpretation experiences.

Principle/Theme #3 – Support Projects Emphasizing Near-Home Access and Connectivity

Places a priority on filling gaps in regional-level trail systems and connecting accessible parks, recreation areas, and/or significant destinations with communities that are within a reasonable distance.

Principle/Theme #4 – Support Projects that Protect Threatened/Exceptional Areas of High Quality Natural Resources

Places a priority on selecting new park areas, in-holdings, and boundary adjustments where development pressures and/or risk of opportunity lost is highest and requires nearer-term action to protect a threatened or high-quality natural area.

Principle/Theme #5 – Support Projects that Foster Economic Development in Greater Minnesota Cities and Counties

Places a priority on parks and trails that foster economic growth due to increased access to high quality outdoor recreational opportunities that bring new residents and tourists to regions in Greater Minnesota while also supporting the other principles.

LEGACY PLAN DEFINITION FOR REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT PARKS AND TRAILS IN GREATER MINNESOTA

The Legacy Plan provides a baseline definition for regionally significant parks and trails as applicable to Greater Minnesota, as follows:

- Parks must have natural resource-based settings and activities and serve multiple communities**; other factors may include size, special features, and recreation opportunities not available elsewhere in the area.
- Trails must be in desirable settings and offer high quality opportunities and use by users in the region and beyond; other factors may include length, connections to other trails, and lack of other trails in the area.

*** In the Greater Minnesota context, “serving multiple communities” relates to meeting more than just a local need. This may take on various forms: a) serving two nearby cities; b) serving a city and township(s); c) serving a city, townships(s), and county(s); and d) some combination thereof.*

The Legacy Plan definition also recognizes the following:

- Unique role parks and trails of regional significance play in Minnesota’s outdoor recreation system, for both their recreational benefits and their economic impacts.
- Importance of understanding regional differences across Minnesota.
- “Regional significance” as an accepted category of parks and trails in Greater Minnesota, distinct from local, state or federal significance as defined by the Legacy Plan.

Parks of Regional Significance

Parks of regional significance in Greater Minnesota must meet the following criteria:

- **Natural resource-based settings and range of activities offered.** The park should provide a natural setting and offer outdoor recreation facilities and activities that are primarily natural resource-based.
- **Regional use:** Evidence that the park serves at least a regional clientele; other related factors include evidence that the facility currently or potentially draws tourists and generates economic impact from outside the local area.

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

- **Size:** The park should be significant in size; in southern Minnesota, a park of 100 acres is significant, and in northern Minnesota, the acreage should generally be larger.
- **Special Features:** Unique or unusual landscape features, historically or culturally significant sites, or parks containing distinctive characteristics of regional or statewide significance.
- **Scarcity of recreational resources:** The park provides public natural resource-based recreational opportunities that are not otherwise available within a reasonable distance appropriate for that class or region.

Trails of Regional Significance

Trials of regional significance in Greater Minnesota must meet the following criteria:

- **Regionally desirable setting:** The trail is located in a regionally desirable setting.
- **High-quality opportunity and use:** The trail serves as a destination, providing high-quality recreational opportunities, attracts a regional clientele (multiple communities), potentially may draw tourists, and generates an economic impact from outside the local area.

Trails of regional significance in Greater Minnesota must also address other criteria in their aggregate, including **adequate length, connections, and scarcity of trail resources.**

Importance of Land and Water Resources When Considering Designation

Per the State’s 25-Year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan, parks should be significant in size. In southern Minnesota, a park of 100 acres is significant. In northern Minnesota, the acreage should generally be larger. Trails provide at least an hour of outdoor recreation opportunity or connects to other facilities that can provide at least an hour of recreation total.

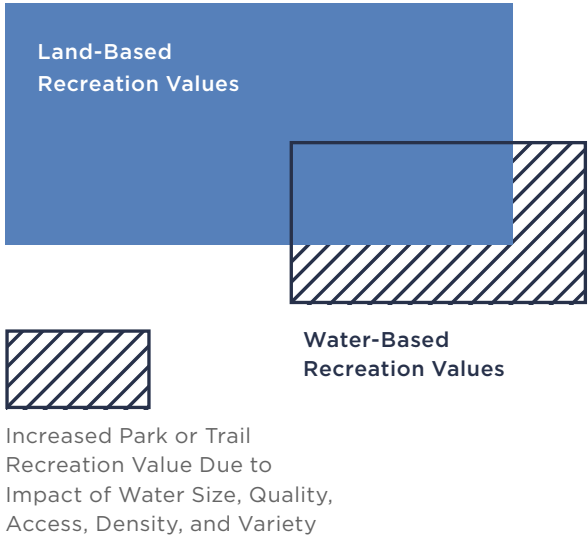


Figure III-1 : Water/Land Recreation Values Concept

The Commission continues to adhere to the general size guidelines outlined in the Legacy Plan. It is also important to recognize that some park and trail facilities have enhanced recreational values based on the recreation available on an adjacent body of water which may not be calculated in the size of the land-based park or trail.

For instance, a regional land-based park located adjacent to a lake may be more valuable than a landlocked park because of the beach, swimming, fishing, and canoeing opportunities available on that lake. Or a trail riding experience may be heightened

because of the significant views provided over a wetland or along an adjacent river. Examples of these enhancements can be found throughout Greater Minnesota. In fact, the abundance of water resources is all the more reason to be careful and disciplined in evaluating the impact of a water body on a particular park or trail.

Outdoor recreation in Minnesota is often about the water. While not every facility has access to water, and not all water resources add regionally-significant recreational value, it is important to recognize that the water-based recreation resources can be an extension of the recreation features found on the adjacent park or trail. Therefore, the Commission is providing flexibility and room within its guidelines to deviate from the land-based size requirements if water recreation features add appropriate value to the land-based recreation values for a given site.

Here are the guidelines for evaluating water recreation amenities in relation to the associated land-based facility. The Evaluation Team and Commission should consider the following factors and values when evaluating a proposed facility’s eligibility and scoring metrics. The location within the state or region, particularly the scarcity of quality water recreation resources, can enhance their evaluation, while abundance reduces its importance. In any case, an acre of water does not equate to an acre of land-based recreation. Significant water recreation features can help elevate a park or trail that could be considered regional except for a minor shortfall in size or length that affects its recreation resource base. The size guidelines from the Legacy Plan are still respected.

WATER RECREATION VALUE CRITERIA

Evaluators should consider the following impacts when evaluating the improved recreation value of a water body on a given park or trail.

- **SIZE** - A variable relationship between the size of the lake and land to equal a regional experience – the water is either the main feature that land-based support facilities are created around, or it supports the larger land-based amenities as an added amenity.
- **QUALITY** - Water recreation value is impacted by the health or impairment of the water quality itself.
- **ACCESS** – Public accessibility of the water from the park or trail, both in quantity and quality.
- **DENSITY** – The value of the water-based amenities is higher when there is a regional lack of water recreation opportunities compared to the population served.
- **VARIETY** – The water body supports more rather than fewer recreation amenities or values.

Classifications and Criteria

The definitions provided in the Legacy Plan as previously summarized provide a basis for more detailed and specific categories, or classifications, for parks and trails of regional significance in Greater Minnesota. The intent is to refine the broader statements of the Legacy Plan into a limited set of classifications tailored to the varying needs and opportunities in Greater Minnesota. The following provides an overview of the classification system.

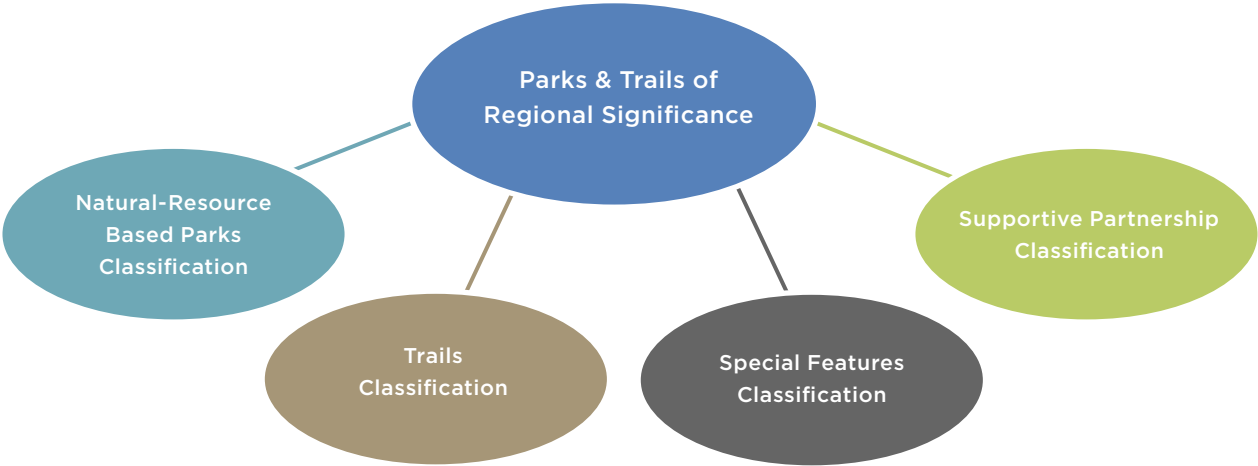


Figure III-2 : Classification Chart

Note that these classifications are specific to the regional park and trail needs of Greater Minnesota. Although the classifications complement those used for state and metro regional parks and trails, the definitions and especially the evaluation criteria are shaped around what is most pertinent to the unique needs of Greater Minnesota.

An overview of each classification is provided below, followed by the specific criteria for potential regional system designees.



Wright County Bertram Chain of Lakes Park Chalet



Rochester Quarry Hill Park Prairie House

NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED PARKS

Overview: The primary emphasis under this classification is providing high quality outdoor recreational opportunities in a natural and scenic setting. Preserving a unique natural resource not otherwise available in the region is also an important consideration.

Recreational features must be in keeping with the natural setting and includes, but not limited to:

- Camping – cross section of non-seasonal camper and tent types, including camper cabins
- Picnicking and picnic shelters
- Walking trails (paved)
- Hiking trails (natural)
- Biking trails (paved)
- Mountain biking trails (natural)
- Cross-country skiing trails
- Horseback riding trails (natural)

- Swimming (natural and man-made if befitting of the setting)
- Lake access for boats
- Canoeing/kayaking facilities
- Fishing piers
- Visitor center
- Nature center/interpretation trails
- Naturescape play areas
- Outdoor amphitheater, if befitting the setting
- Dog parks
- Archery/shooting ranges (select locations)
- Climbing (natural/man-made)
- Zip lines

Support facilities must relate to supporting a recreational feature and include items such as:

- Restrooms/sanitation buildings
- Landscaping
- Roads and parking areas
- General complementary site amenities

A related measure is the range of these activities accommodated within the park, with having a broad array of recreational opportunities preferred in order to attract a wide range of user groups and populations. Note that with the focus being on nature-based recreation, amenities such as outdoor athletic facilities, indoor areas/pools, etc. are not emphasized and are considered local park facilities.

Although the acreage requirements are flexible, the land area must be large enough to accommodate the proposed facilities/amenities without diminishing the natural character and sense of place of the park setting. Buffering activity areas from each other and from surrounding areas is also important.

Typically, this means a land area of 100 acres is needed since anything smaller limits the site’s potential to accommodate a cross-section of recreational opportunities while still preserving open space. Optimally, parks should be over 200 acres to provide enough space for facilities.

Although providing a common set of offerings remains important, introducing new, unique, or innovative facilities and amenities is also emphasized to explore new ways to expand participation in outdoor recreation – either by building upon an existing success or fostering new or innovative projects that support changing trends and fills a definable gap in service.

Subclassifications include but are not limited to Park Reserves and Park Preserves.



LeSueur County Lake Washington Park Campground



Duluth Hartley Park Rock Knob

TRAILS

Overview: The primary emphasis is on providing high quality recreational trail experiences that are readily accessible from an already populated or growing regional center or tourism destination. Must serve a regional population.

Priority is given to “destination trails,” which are typically located within a designated trail corridor separated from vehicular traffic. In addition to emphasizing recreational value, trails that enhance connectivity/continuity within and between regional centers and other regional or state-level park or trail systems are a priority.

Trail design is an important factor in creating high quality and sustainable trails. Developing well-designed purpose-built trails using sustainable trail building techniques is a priority and will factor into evaluating trail proposals for regional designation. Paved non-motorized trails, for instance, must be wide enough (minimum of 10 feet) and designed to provide a high quality and safe recreational experience. The extent to which environmental impacts are minimized or mitigated is also an important factor in evaluating proposals.

Note: Designation of all trails at the regional level will be closely coordinated and documented with the DNR to ensure that all regional trails augment and do not duplicate state-wide trail planning efforts. Close coordination is also required to ensure any regional funding does not supplant other dedicated funding sources.

The following conceptually illustrates the interrelationship between local, regional and state trails, particularly paved non-motorized trails. Defining the function for an outdoor recreation trail is based on understanding the accessibility of a trail to the population as well as the priority of the trail in the region’s system and along the state/regional/local functional continuum.



Mesabi Trail Floating Boardwalk



Cannon Valley Trail Anderson Memorial Rest Area

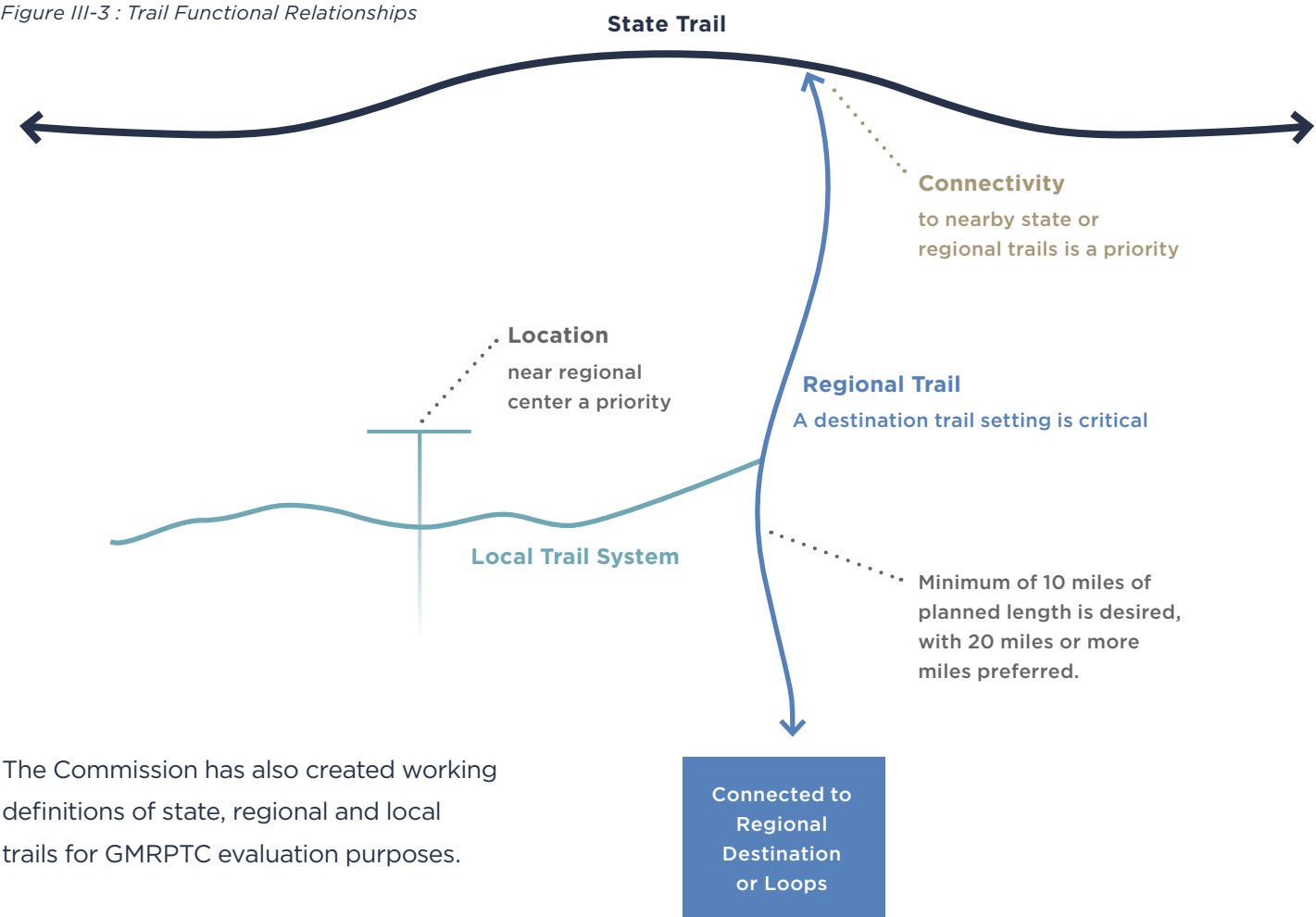


Detroit Lakes Detroit Mountain Mountain Bike Trail Bridge



Big Falls Horse Camp and Campground

Figure III-3 : Trail Functional Relationships



The Commission has also created working definitions of state, regional and local trails for GMRPTC evaluation purposes.

State Trail: Typically owned and operated by the state. Connects multiple population destination centers and recreation nodes with a long (several hour to multi-day bike ride), linear corridor emphasizing both its major node connectivity and superior ride qualities. Provides a consistent, fairly low-interruption ride.

Regional Trail: Typically owned and operated by a county, city or joint powers. Provides a mid-level length (one to several hour) bike ride emphasizing a nature-based recreational ride experience. Terminates at or near population or tourism destination centers with a low to medium ride interruption experience.

Local Trail: Typically owned and operated by a county, city, township, or private entity. Provides access to and through population centers and tourism destination areas, emphasizing connectivity and access over ride quality. Expect a medium to high level of interruption in the ride experience.

It is important to understand that a single trail will likely not have a consistent experience across its entire length. For instance, a trail may provide premium “nature-based” experiences in some sections, while transiting more urban or road-based “access” sections with many design interruptions (i.e. road and driveway crossings, adjacent or on-road sections, etc.) in order to get the user there. Distinguishing the difference between regional recreation and local “access” sections will be a key evaluation step. If the local “access” sections are necessary

but not the majority of the user experience, they may be considered as a part of the regional system. The Commission does not typically fund on-road or sidewalk sections of trail, even if designated.

Subclassifications include paved non-motorized, motorized, or mixed-use (motorized and non-motorized) trails that typically occupy a specifically-designed, narrow linear corridor. Long linear facilities in a park-like setting, such as for mountain bike facilities or inclusive river greenways, would typically fall into the Special Feature classification.

In select circumstances, there may be situations where non-motorized and motorized uses occur along the same corridor and/or on the same public property. The most likely, but not exclusive, example of this may be a snowmobile corridor that parallels or overlays a paved trail.

Minimizing the potential for conflicts between motorized and non-motorized uses will be a consideration in evaluating proposals for regional designation.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Overview: This classification relates to new, unique or innovative “special feature” outdoor recreational facilities of regional significance.



Crow Wing County Milford Mine Boardwalk



Duluth Traverse Cave Entrance

A natural and scenic setting remains important to qualifying as a regional park, but serving a regional recreational need is more of a factor in determining merit. Examples include, but are not limited to, developing:

- A public lakefront area for public access and recreation where the land may be less than 100 acres.
- A specialized recreational facility that has regional-significance even as a standalone facility – such as a mountain bike trail system, shooting/archery range, outdoor amphitheater, conservatory, climbing wall, or unique outdoor learning facility.

In general, the listing of recreational features defined under Natural Resource-Based Regional Park classification remain valid here as well. However, this classification purposefully offers more flexibility to explore unique ideas and find new ways to expand participation in outdoor recreation – by either building upon a past success and fostering new or innovative projects that support changing needs and fills a definable gap in service. Note that features still must be consistent with an outdoor theme in a natural setting, and still excludes facilities common at the local level, such as athletic complexes, neighborhood parks, and so forth.

Importantly, a high level of evaluation is required under this classification to confirm the viability of the proposed project and/or recreational use(s) – including working with partnering agencies (DNR, Metro Regional Parks, University of Minnesota, Explore Minnesota Tourism, etc.) that can add insights into the viability of a project and how it may complement what other providers might be offering. Special recreational features often require a unique managing or programming effort on the part of the implementing agency, which will also need to be addressed in the master plan.



Sandstone Robinson Park Rock Climbers
(photo by Janet Rith-Najarian)



Olmsted County Oxbow Park & Zollman Zoo (Credit Olmsted County)

SMALLER-SCALE/SINGLE PURPOSE SPECIAL FEATURES

The diversity of recreational facility needs in Greater Minnesota is expected to be quite broad, and in some cases regional needs will best be met by smaller-scale or single-purpose facilities. In these instances, extra scrutiny will be warranted to ensure that proposals are in fact regionally significant and consistent with the core principles defined in this plan while being scored against the established criteria. Nonetheless, one of the stated purposes of this classification is to find “diamond in the rough” opportunities that take advantage of unique opportunities.

SUPPORTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Overview: This classification relates to regional-quality city and county facilities that support large, diverse key recreation resources that are owned or controlled by non-eligible entities or units of government, such as federal, state, or non-profit organizations.

Certain recreation activities or resources lend themselves to large land bases or corridors, such as thru-hiking, canoeing, off-road motorized travel, and more. These land bases are possible due to historic ownership patterns, legislative decree, or patchwork cooperation between a variety of organizations. In many cases, Greater Minnesota Legacy-eligible cities or counties are not in a position to create, develop or maintain these core facilities, in whole or significant part. However, other larger jurisdictions often have that capability but lack the resources or ability to take full advantage of them. Examples include:

- State water trails
- State ATV trails
- Federal OHV trails
- Federal Hiking Trails
- State Birding Trail



Red Lake River Corridor Crookston Launch



Lake County Mountain Bike and All Terrain Vehicle Trails at Superior Hiking Trail Trialhead

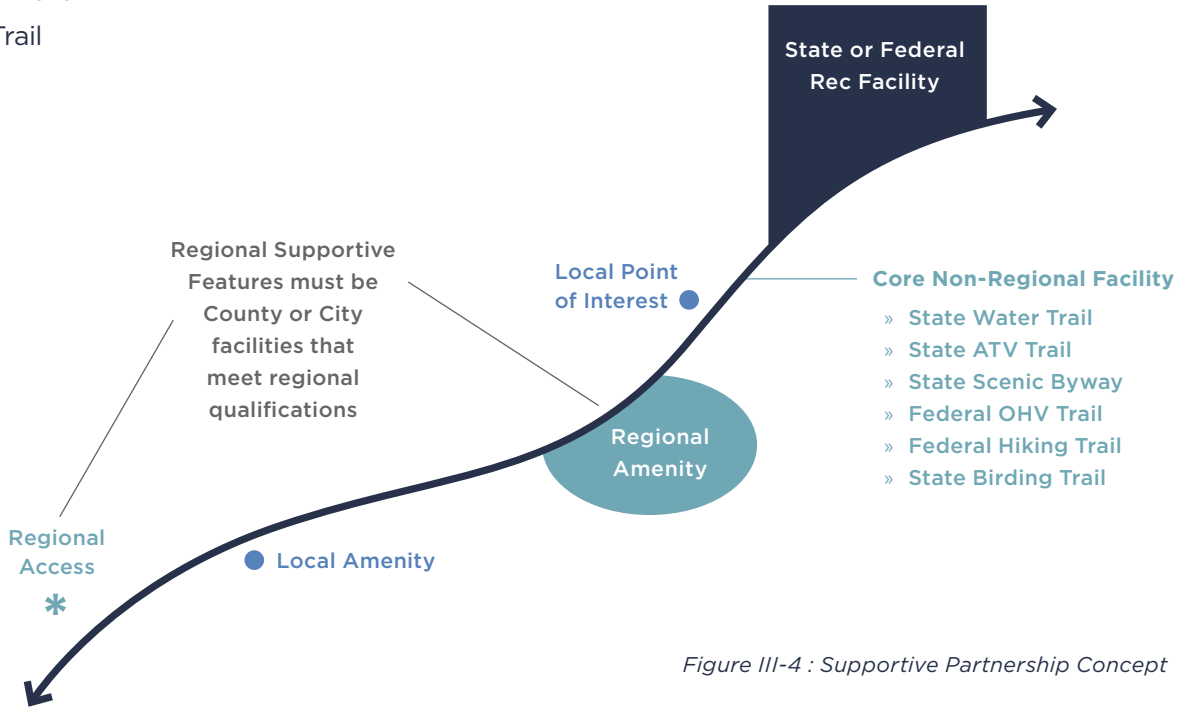


Figure III-4 : Supportive Partnership Concept

The purpose of this classification is not to designate those core recreation resources as regionally significant, but to designate city or county-owned supportive features that can make the core facility more user friendly and economically viable. Regional-level support facilities must enhance the core facility, be in the jurisdiction of an eligible city or county, and not otherwise be feasible. Examples of regional facilities that support partner facilities may include:

- Restrooms/sanitation buildings
- Campgrounds or picnic areas
- Access roads and staging/parking areas
- Boat and canoe launches
- Fishing piers
- Day use areas that relate to the core facility
- Facilities or amenities that improve access to the core facility
- Visitor Centers
- General complementary site amenities

Supportive city and county features must be individually regionally significant in their size, setting, quality, and appropriate level of service; several supportive facilities coordinating along one core facility strengthens the case for designation even more. Coordination with the core facility's or other publicly available services is critical to ensure there is no unnecessary duplication of services. That said, a smaller facility may be viable as a supportive regional feature if it provides critically needed services and draws visitors from a regional or larger area. *A qualified Master Plan must detail how the regionally significant support facilities tie into a system that adds significant value to the core recreation resource.*

Extra scrutiny will be warranted to ensure that proposals are in fact regionally significant and consistent with the core principles defined in this plan. Just because a wide variety of facilities are proposed to support a state- or federal-level facility does not mean that every amenity will achieve regional designation as a part of a Master Plan.

Special consideration should also be given to the proposed core facility itself. Not all state or federal level outdoor recreation facilities are appropriate under Legacy “regional” guidelines; nor are all core facilities situated such that partnerships with cities and counties is critical to success. Any proposal under this classification should be centered around a core facility that meets at a minimum the following two criteria before being considered for inclusion in the regional system. Additional criteria may be considered as the situation warrants.

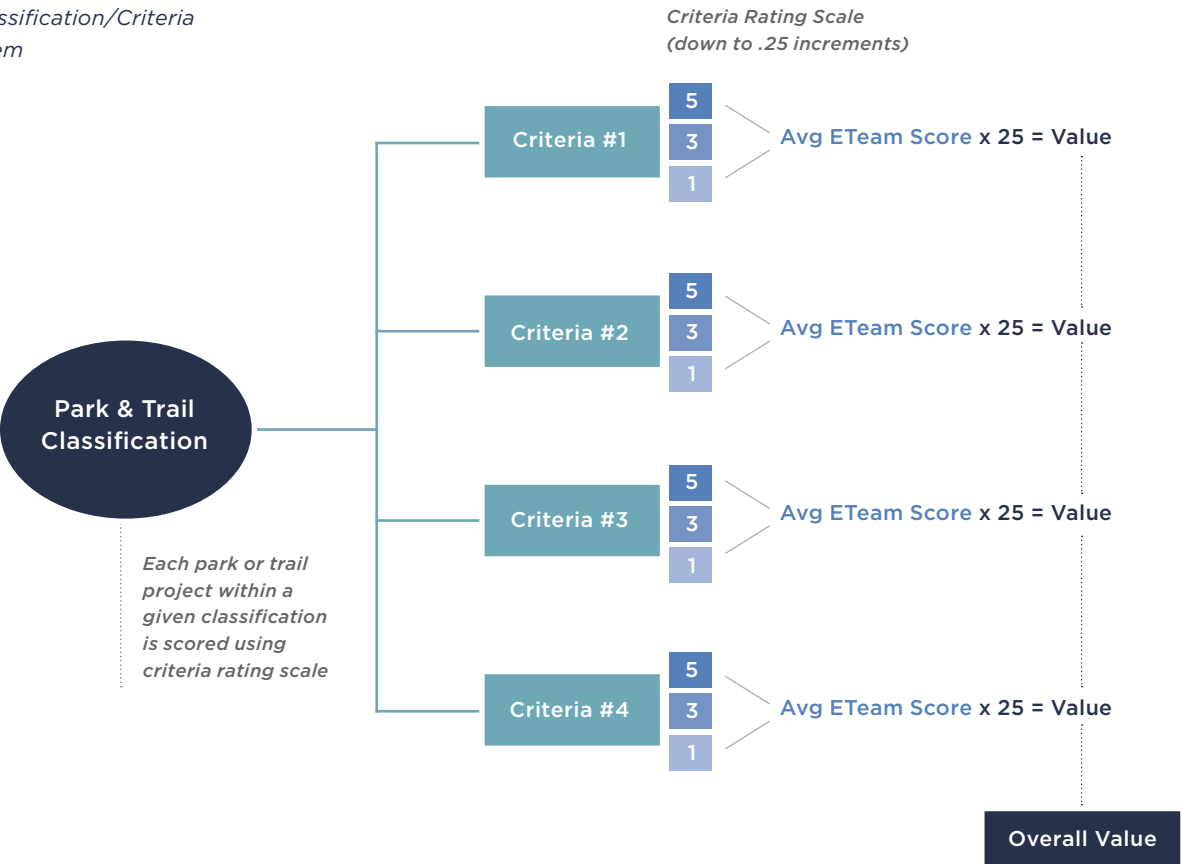
- 1 The state, federal or jointly-managed core facility has achieved some form of permanent status and is managed for one of the owning agency’s highest levels of service.
- 2 The quality, size and draw of the core facility is such that it would likely quality for regional designation if it was owned by a city or county in Greater Minnesota.

****This classification specifically excludes paved non-motorized trails.****

Evaluation Criteria for Regional Parks and Trails

Below are the evaluation criteria for the four classifications defined above. In each case, the goal is to ensure that the evaluation criteria are broad enough to cover the predominant factors in decision making yet limited enough to be manageable and keep the focus on what really matters in vetting and ranking projects.

Figure III-5 : Classification/Criteria Evaluation System



These criteria have been redeveloped to a consistent standard of criteria across all classes. The rating scales for each class include general (all classes) as well as specific (one class only) rating points.

The evaluation criteria, which include both general and class-specific components, focus on establishing the overall merit of a park or trail relative to key value indicators. The provided or proposed amenities must be consistent with, or expand upon, the general description for the classification. The ETeam is responsible to evaluate park and trail proposals against these established criteria using a statewide scoring system.

Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience

Overview: Places a priority on providing facilities/amenities that are relevant to the core facility’s user groups and also serves to broaden the appeal of outdoor recreation to new or expanded populations. The facility is a destination unto itself and contains regionally significant features that attract regional users and potentially draw visitors from a distance outside the region. Premium is placed on quality of experience to encourage visitors to return time and again. Features should reflect the landscape of the given area as well as enhance the typical use of the core facility with convenient access, continuity of use and appropriate support services.



Provides a High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience

All – Rating Scale for Criteria #1		
5 Points	3 Points	1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Closely fulfills the intent and specifications of the facility’s chosen classification overview.• Located in a highly scenic and natural setting that innately appeals to visitors; standout features are present that make the facility an appealing destination unto itself.• Well-designed facilities (relative to the most current, sustainable design standards) that meet the contemporary needs of targeted user groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Significantly fulfills the intent and specifications of the facility’s classification, with some deviation.• Still located in a scenic and natural setting, with a nice but not unique character; still has a general appeal that will innately draw visitors.• Facilities still well-designed to meet the needs of targeted user groups, but level of exclusivity is less (i.e. natural-surface trails for multiple uses).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports the intent of the facility’s classification with limited support for the class specifications.• Located in a scenic and natural setting, but nothing really out of the ordinary for the region.• Facilities well designed, but generally of a smaller scale and/or limited miles of trails to meet the needs of targeted user groups.

Trail – Rating Scale for Criteria #1		
5 Points	3 Points	1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minimal disruption to travel, such as roadway crossings.• Rail-to-trail corridor appropriate; the corridor exhibits strong, regionally-relevant scenic quality with minimal disruptions to travel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Still limited disruption to travel, such as roadway crossings. May at times skirt along an adjacent roadway corridor due to land constraints; if so, the roadway corridor must offer its own scenic qualities to retain this rating.• Enough separation between trail and roadway is maintained to ensure the trail experience is still pleasant and not unduly compromised by visual impacts and noise associated with traffic; roads with lower traffic volume preferred.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Still exhibits limited disruption to travel, but roadway crossings may be more frequent due to setting. Often in a roadway right-of-way, which must be wide enough to allow for reasonable separation between the trail and road.• Provides more of a linking trail experience, but still has enough appeal to entire users to come back.

Natural Resources – Rating Scale for Criteria #1		
5 Points	3 Points	1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall uniqueness is a “cut above” other parks in the region, in terms of sense of place.• Provides a very robust cross-section of recreational facilities/features (consistent with the overview) that will attract a wide-range of user groups and populations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall sense of place is consistent with expectations for a regional park, but not necessarily anything that stands out as being especially unique or a “cut above” other parks in the region.• Still provides a solid cross-section of recreational facilities/features (consistent with the overview) that will attract a range of user groups and populations, but some facilities will be scaled back or not as robust due to site limitations and other constraints.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall sense of place is consistent with expectations for a regional park, but nothing really special either.• Provides enough different type of recreational facilities/features to attract defined user groups and populations, but not as extensively as other regional-level parks due to site limitations and other constraints.

Special Feature – Rating Scale for Criteria #1		
5 Points	3 Points	1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Even though smaller in acreage than a natural resource-based park, provides a “standout” feature that makes the park an appealing place to recreate.• Provides a very select and even unique set of recreational facilities/features well-suited to the site that will attract targeted user group(s) or population(s).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Still located in a scenic and natural setting, with a nice but not unique character beyond the near region; still has a general appeal that will innately draw visitors.• Provides a select set of recreation facilities/features well suited to the site that will attract a particular argeted user group(s) or population(s), but would not be considered a unique type of facility; although overall uniqueness may not be as clearly discernible, it still stands out as being a regionally significant special recreation feature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Located in a scenic and natural setting, but nothing really out of the ordinary for the region.• Provides enough of a special recreational feature focus to attract defined user groups or populations, but is somewhat limited due to the site limitations and other constraints.

Provides a Natural and Scenic Setting Offering a Compelling Sense of Place

Overview: Places a priority on providing a natural and scenic setting offering a compelling sense of place. Preserves regionally important landscapes with unique land features that have value and character. Access to water and/or historically/culturally significant features is also emphasized. Lands must be suitable for and large enough to accommodate desired recreational uses without undue impacts to the land resource. Lands stewarding ecologically rare plant communities and high-quality wildlife habitat are a priority. Continuity and connectivity with natural landscapes and habitats extending beyond the facility into a larger open space context, especially those that may be protected by other means, is also an important added value to strive for.

Provides a Natural and Scenic Setting Offering a Compelling Sense of Place

All – Rating Scale for Criteria #2		
5 Points	3 Points	1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none">A notable mix of these features must be present, in an amount or variety appropriate for the type of facility. Both “signature” and secondary features provide a truly inspiring/unique and high quality regional park or trail setting: Regionally-important natural landscape with unique land features that add value and character to the site - i.e. interesting landforms, geology, rock outcroppings, etc.; water features; ecologically rare plant communities; high quality wildlife habitat; historically/culturally-significant lands; extensive continuity and connectivity of natural lands that extend beyond the park itself into a larger open space context; man-made features - i.e. restored quarry sites and naturally-shaped ponds - if unique and in keeping with an outdoor recreation theme; enough acres to accommodate desired recreational uses while preserving sense of place and protecting the natural features.Exhibits man-made features - i.e. restored quarry sites, naturally shaped ponds, etc. - if unique and in keeping with an outdoor recreation theme.Enough size or length to accommodate desired recreational uses while preserving sense of place and protecting the natural features.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A signature feature along with some additional secondary features, as appropriate for the type of facility, along with some additional secondary feature sto create a compelling park or trail setting that is representative of the regional landscape: see relevant attributes listed previously.Man made features are well designed but not unique, in keeping with an outdoor recreation theme.The size or length of the facility accommodates most desired recreational uses but may not have enough space or the appropriate design to fully protect the sense of place or natural features.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Although no signature feature may be present, the parcel or trail exhibits a reigonally-impotant natural landscape that makes it an appealing site for the proposed recreational uses.Man made features are largely in keeping with an outdoor recreation theme.The facility accommodates most desired uses and sense of place, but significant compromises in quality are made to fit both in.



Big Falls Horse Camp & Campground



Luverne Loop/Blue Ox Trail



Douglas County Lake Brophy Park

Special Feature – Rating Scale for Criteria #2		
5 Points	3 Points	1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Exhibits a regionally-important natural anchor feature that establishes character of the site - i.e. interesting landforms, geology, water feature, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Multi-year sponsors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Although no “signature” feature may be present, the site still exhibits a natural landscape that makes it an appealing site for the proposed recreation uses.

Supportive Partnerships – Rating Scale for Criteria #2		
5 Points	3 Points	1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Regionally supportive amenities mirror and complement the natural and scenic setting of the core facility, with a majority share of the amenities actively contributing to the sense of place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A significant share of regionally supportive amenities contribute to the core facility’s sense of place. Across all supportive facilities, there is a mix of either complementing the setting or providing functional access or support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Regionally supportive facilities primarily serve the core facility with functional access or support while only occasionally contributing to the sense of place.



Red Wing He Mni Can Park

Well-located to Serve a Regional Need and/or Tourism Destination

Overview: Places a priority on features and facilities that are readily accessible to a populated, rapidly growing and/or an established regional center or visitor destination. Connections to additional regional or state-level facilities add value. Using a radius approach is of limited value in many cases since natural (e.g. rivers, lakes) and built (e.g. roadway systems) land features greatly affect the ease of access. However, a reasonable level of service for approach routes is critical for support facilities (trail heads, parking lots, boat launches, etc.) that provide access to the core facility. Other features may be intended to only be accessible from the core facility itself (i.e. hike-in campsites), excepting emergency and maintenance requirements. Those facilities, while probably located due to high value features, should still be accessible to regional-level populations under ordinary circumstances. Rating scale relates primarily to the location of the facility relative to the population being served.



Duluth Traverse



Willmar Robbins Island Park

Well-located to Serve a Regional Need and/or Tourism Destination

All – Rating Scale for Criteria #3		
5 Points	3 Points	1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Park or trail is located in a densely settled, growing, and/or an established regional center or well-established tourist destination - with most residents in the area not having to travel very far (within 5 to 10 miles driving distance) to get there.• Park or trail is readily accessible by some combination of local, regional, or state trail from nearby neighborhoods and communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Park or trail is located in or close to densely settled, growing, and/or an established regional center or well established tourist destination - although residents in the area may have to travel a bit further to get there. (original said 10-15 miles)• Park or trail is still accessible by local, regional, or state trail from nearby neighborhoods and communities, and some areas further away from the park might have to drive or bike on some roads.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Park or trail is located near a densely settled, growing, and/or an established regional center or well established tourist destination - but most residents in the area hav eto travel further to get there. (original said 15+ miles)• Park or trail has limited access by local, regional, or state trails from nearby neighborhoods and communities, and bikers will need to use some combination of trals and roads to get there.



Winona Bluffs Traverse



Moorhead River Corridor Trail

Trail – Rating Scale for Criteria #3		
5 Points	3 Points	1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More than 10 miles of standalone trail length, with either a connection to another trail to provide over 20 miles of continuous trail or provides a loop route of at least 10 miles.• Must achieve some level of all three: 1) Connects to/ complements state trails and/or othe regional trails; 2) Connects to multiple local, regional, and state park, recreational facilities, and natural resource areas; 3) Connects to multiple public interest destinations (schools, work locations, tourist areas, business districts, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must achieve some level of at least two of these: 1) Connects to/ complements state trails and/or othe regional trails; 2) Connects to multiple local, regional, and state park, recreational facilities, and natural resource areas; 3) Connects to multiple public interest destinations (schools, work locations, tourist areas, business districts, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must achieve some level of at least one of these: 1) Connects to/ complements state trails and/or othe regional trails; 2) Connects to multiple local, regional, and state park, recreational facilities, and natural resource areas; 3) Connects to multiple public interest destinations (schools, work locations, tourist areas, business districts, etc.)

Special Partnerships – Rating Scale for Criteria #3		
5 Points	3 Points	1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional-level supporting facilities that are accessible from outside the core facility (i.e. public roads, state or regional trails) can be easily found, have stable, year round access, and are adequately sized for the targeted regional population.• Regional-level supporting facilities that are accessible from the core facility's internal routes or features (i.e. rivers, ATV trails, etc.) can be easily found, are within reasonable distance for daily use by a regional population, and are adequately sized for the targeted regional population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional-level supporting facilities that are accessible from outside the core facility are available but may have barriers such as significant distance, poor wayfinding, seasonal use, unstable surfacing or inadequate capacity.• Regional-level supporting facilities that are accessible from the core facility's internal routes or features (i.e. rivers, ATV trails, etc.) can be easily found but may be too far or small for regular, daily use by the targeted regional population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional-level supporting facilities are accessible but present significant barriers for regional users.• Internally-accessed Regional-level supporting facilities are accessible but present significant barriers for regional users.

Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity Within the Region

Overview: Places a priority on regions that are lacking in regional-level facilities, particularly those of a similar nature to this facility. If, for example, proposals associated with various regional service areas were equally rated relative to criteria #1, #2, and #3, this criteria would allow those with the least amount of access to regional or higher level facilities to score higher, thus helping ensure that all regions will have at least baseline access to regional facilities. Complements (and does not duplicate) or provides access to recreational opportunities available in the region, especially those provided by associated state or federal facilities.

Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity Within the Region

All – Rating Scale for Criteria #4		
5 Points	3 Points	1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none">No regional or state level parks or trails offering regional-type recreational facilities exist near enough to the location of this park to meet the need, and a clear gap in service exists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Recreational facilities being proposed complement those provided at other regional and state level parks in the region to more fully address a gap in service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Overall access to regional facilities would be enhanced, but there are other regional or state level options available to help meet regional needs.



LeSueur County Lake Washington Park



Mesabi Trail



Beltrami County Northland Sports Park



Redwood County Plum Creek Park

Section IV – Developing the Regional Facility Story

Every applicant for regional designation has a story to tell. Whether a park or trail has been around for a century or has been an idea for a month, there is a story about where it came from, what it is today and what it can become for future parks and trails users.

At the core of the regional designation process is the Master Plan. Successful applicants will use the master planning process and document (application) to build and tell their story: what their facility offers and who will come to use it. Having a Master Plan is vital to affirming that a park or trail is well-vetted, inclusive, regionally significant and merits formal regional designation. It also ensures that the applicant understands its own obligations and responsibilities, especially for funding, ongoing operations, maintenance and programming.

The Commission evaluates each facility based on its vision and potential as described by its plan, regardless of current development status.

This section outlines the evaluation process and the required components of each facility’s story, contained in the Designation Application and Master Plan. While this process may at times seem prescriptive, applicants are encouraged to use the online tools and instructions to help them create a complete story that fits their local circumstances and needs.

The Commission expects that there will be variations not only in park and trail stories, but in exactly how applicants use these tools to tell that story. Online applications provide a way to elevate all applicant agencies to a base level of excellence. Using the resources they have at hand, applicants are encouraged to find new and creative ways to show and tell their story and create new opportunities for Greater Minnesota parks and trails users.

Overview of the Evaluation Process

Evaluating parks and trails for regional significance follows a well-defined process. The process takes a park or trail concept from initial review through the designation decision and, ultimately, funding allocations for successful applicants. The process is structured to ensure consistency in evaluations and avoid conflicts of interest.



Figure IV-1: Three Step Legacy Funding Process

The Commission’s goal is to provide enough due diligence in the vetting process to ensure that the best park and trail prospects for regional designation emerge, while at the same time making sure that it does not become too onerous for cities, counties and their partners across Greater Minnesota to participate. This section can help clarify what the Commission is looking for, reducing the guesswork for applicants.

All applications are completed using the online Data Management System (DMS) on the Commission’s website. Tutorials, handouts and other tools provide additional detail beyond this document. Note that since the application form and instructions are routinely updated, DMS provisions will take precedence over those defined here. Irrespective of the initiator or the status of a facility’s designation within any non-GMRPTC system, all requests are required to follow the same application process and will be evaluated following the same steps and set of criteria. Designation to the Greater Minnesota Legacy Parks and Trails system is the exclusive decision of the GMRPTC.

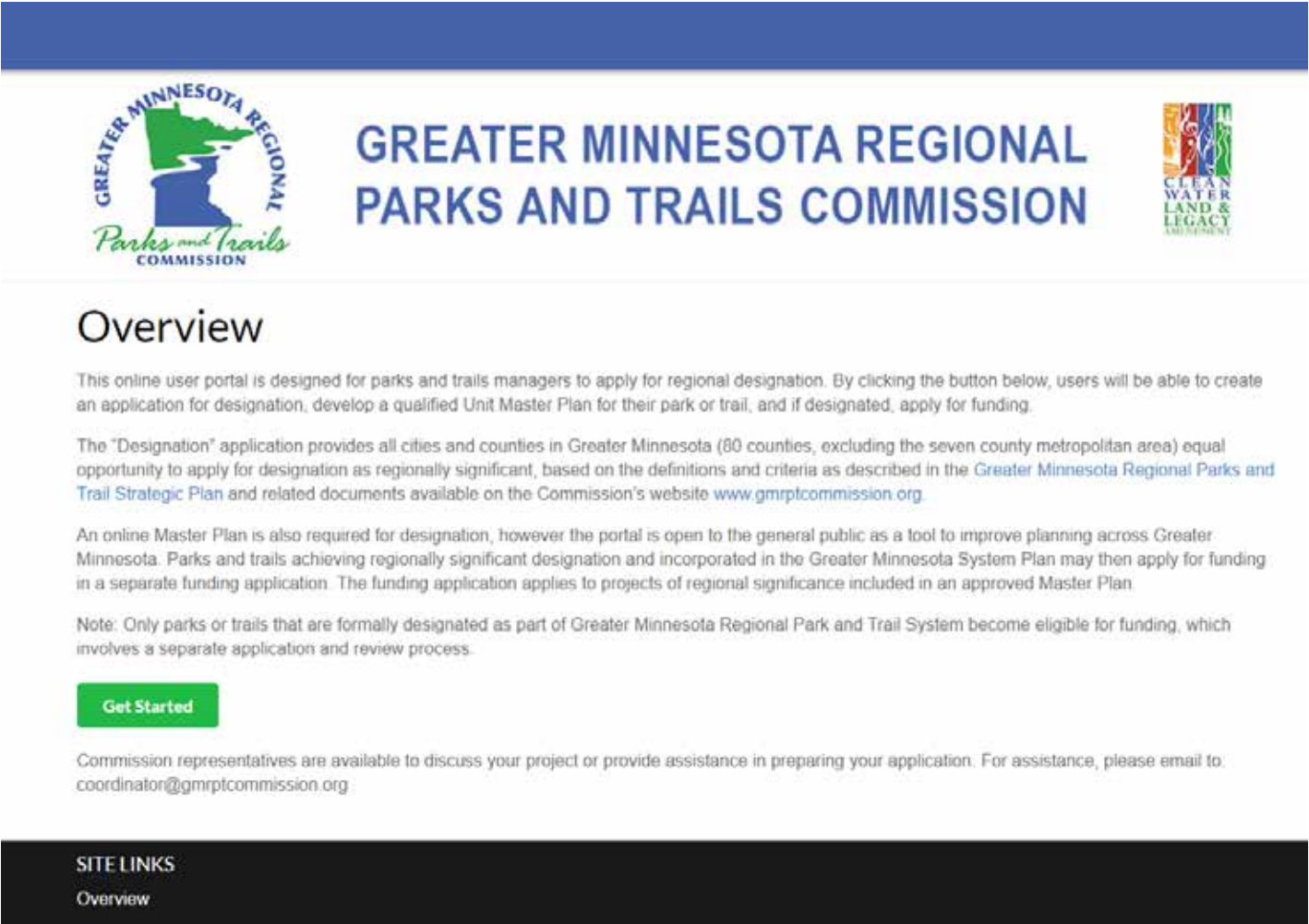


Figure IV-2: Screenshot of the Data Management System (DMS)

STEP 1

An initial **Designation Application** is ranked on a High/Medium/Low basis by the Evaluation Team (ETeam) against the base Designation Criteria listed in Section III of this plan. The Commission makes the final determination on ranking. If determined to rank High against the criteria, the applicant facility then becomes eligible for designation to the regional system and allows proposers to determine if a project will likely reach at least a minimal threshold to be considered regionally significant. Medium or Low rankings may be encouraged to adjust their concept and re-apply. Note: Re-applying does not guarantee an improvement in ranking.

STEP 2

Full evaluation of the **Master Plan** is completed in a multi-pronged process. All components provide different tools used by the Commission to determine final regional system status. This evaluation can occur simultaneous with Step 1, provided a High ranking is achieved.

Staff review and site visit – Commission consultants review the Master Plan for completeness and eligibility. A formal site visit is completed to verify the assumptions, status, practicality and realism of the plan, which is then provided to the Commission in a report.

ETeam review of Master Plan document – The Evaluation Team will conduct a simultaneous evaluation of the Master Plan on two tracks:

Track One: Designation Criteria Scoring – This is the traditional evaluation tool based on the Designation Criteria listed in Section III, providing a score reflecting the facility’s merit as a regional outdoor recreation facility. While there is no minimum score set to achieve regional designation, the Track One score is the final gauge of quality of the facility when considering designation and should reflect regional-level outcomes.

Track Two: Plan Readiness Grading – An evaluation tool will grade each of the Master Plan components to measure completeness and the agency’s readiness for implementation success. A total grade above a certain level is needed to pass the plan, as well as passing scores for each of the individual components. Standards for those components are included in this section. Plans or components that fail Track Two will be sent back to the applicant for improvement. They will then be re-evaluated by the ETeam before final Commission consideration.

Public comment – The Commission may seek feedback from the public, public representing groups or partner agencies where feasible and appropriate. Typical concerns for review may be the overall consistency and fit of a particular facility within that District’s vision (see Section V), within the overall Greater Minnesota Strategic Plan, or with adjoining jurisdictions or facilities. Public communication and feedback is important to achieve consistency with adjoining jurisdictions or facilities in a region.

Commission Determination – All of the above information, as well as other items deemed necessary from time to time, will be deliberated by the Commission. If determined to fit this plan, the applicant facility may then be designated as a part of the Greater Minnesota Regional System.

Special Note on Master Plan Updates: Over the course of time, Master Plans need to be updated to reflect changing conditions and use patterns. The online Data Management System (DMS) is designed to help make updates easier by modifying the document only where necessary. Annual changes to reflect recent projects, rearranged phasing or updated management practices are not items worthy of a Master Plan update. However, when significant changes in vision, design, or implementation become necessary (typically on a 4-10 year basis), the Commission must be notified of a potential Master Plan update. When completed, an updated Master Plan making notable changes to the regional story will be re-evaluated per Step 2 procedures. It is rare that such an evaluation would modify a facility’s designation status; however, that evaluation information is important for maintaining standards and informing funding choices.

STEP 3

Annual **Funding Applications** are submitted by agencies requesting Legacy funding for regionally impactful components of their designated facilities. GMRPTC consultants review the applications, conduct site visits with each district’s Commissioners (where available), and score the applications according to the Commission’s criteria. The ETeam provides additional review, if requested by the consultant team. The Commission is responsible for determining the priority list of funded projects for submission to the Legislature.



St. Cloud Beaver Island Trail

Designation Application Purpose and Contents

A relatively simple Designation Application provides enough story to determine if a given recreational facility meets the basic requirements for consideration of regional significance. The goal is to give entities in Greater Minnesota an opportunity to determine the viability of their park or trail’s story before committing the resources to a more complete (and detailed) Master Plan.

This step includes an initial or baseline evaluation of the information provided by the applicant against the regional context (Section II) and defined criteria (Section III). Applicants should refer to those sections while developing their application.

Requirements:

- Submittal of the Commission’s Application for Designation as a Regional Park or Trail in Greater Minnesota through the Commission’s online Data Management System.
- Proposers should provide as much information as possible, but under this step are not required to provide an approved/adopted Unit Master Plan. Thorough use of narrative, photos and maps is encouraged.
- A fully executed Designation Application Resolution must be submitted with the application for each qualified partner agency.

Proposers should provide as much information as possible, including narrative, maps, pictures, and other information that clearly explains the facility to reviewers.

Application information must include the following components:

- General Facility Information: includes facility location information, contact information, and applicant information.
- Regional Significance Statement: A brief description of the regional significance of the park or trail, focusing on the intent, audience, amenities, and setting of the facility.
- Classification
- Description, including setting, land characteristics, special features, overview of users, provided facilities and programs, and how those characteristics fit into the basic regional context (see Section II of Strategic Plan).
- Size, development, and ownership status
- Listing of the current and proposed recreation facilities/amenities
- Site characteristics, particularly landforms or unique features (with maps and photographs)
- Classification criteria responses (see Section III of Strategic Plan) (with photographs)

The Commission reserves the right to return incomplete applications to the applicant for additional information. A regional context analysis of the facility may be completed by the Commission if determined necessary to inform the evaluation.



Outcome: Commission makes an initial determination of regional system eligibility – including providing an initial ranking of High/Medium/Low – so that the proposer has a sense of the general merit of the project. For Low ranking projects, the Commission informs proposer that the park or trail unit is not likely to be regionally significant and includes the rationale for making that determination.

For medium ranking projects, the Commission informs the proposer that the park and trail unit has some merit or potential for being regionally significant with summary comments about the facility’s suitability or areas of weakness. The applicant is encouraged to apply again with an updated or improved concept and information for possible (but not guaranteed) improved ranking.

A High-ranking facility is deemed “Eligible for Designation” to the regional system upon successful evaluation of a qualified unit Master Plan.

High ranking facilities are **eligible for designation** and may submit a Master Plan, which builds upon the information in the Application. Plan submission can be done at the pace necessary for the agency to complete in a reasonable fashion. Should the agency so choose, the Master Plan can be submitted concurrently with the Application for simultaneous evaluation if the Designation Application ranks High.



Goats performing invasive species removal, Austin Jay C. Hormel Nature Center

Master Plan Purpose and Contents

The main focus of a Master Plan should be on clearly describing the regional-level purpose and compelling features of the park or trail, along with what makes it a place that people will want to go to time and again. Specifically describing exceptional features and how the park or trail will provide a high-quality outdoor experience not otherwise available in the area is especially encouraged. A Master Plan also helps the public and decision-makers understand what their long-term goals and commitments will be before capital investments are made.

Outcome: A qualified Unit Master Plan for an eligible facility is necessary to fully evaluate the facility’s regional suitability in line with the scoring criteria in Section III of this plan. A “Track One” evaluation, completed by the Evaluation Team, is based on those Section III criteria critical to vetting the regional outcomes of the Master Plan. The “Track Two” evaluation of the Master Plan gets into the specific and detailed plan requirements beyond the regional designation criteria, including factors related to feasibility, commitment of partners, reasonableness of planning assumptions, sustainability, etc. that are important for a project and facility to be successful. This evaluation may also factor into deciding the viability and timing of project funding should the facility achieve designation. Plans or components that fail Track Two would be sent back to the agency for improvement. They would then be re-evaluated by the ETeam before final consideration by the Commission.



Figure IV-3: Two Track Master Plan Evaluation Process

MASTER PLAN COMPONENTS

For Track Two evaluation purposes, the components are grouped into the following required categories.

1. Proposer/Implementing Agency
2. Regional Significance Statement, Introduction/Overview, Site Information
3. Setting, Regional Context
4. Vision, Trends, Public Values, Public Input/Participation
5. Development Master Plan, Implementation Plan
6. Management Plan, Operational Sustainability Plan, Natural Resource Sustainability Plan, Programming, Marketing, Research and User Metrics

Track Two Master Plan development and evaluation standards are as follows:

Component 1: Proposer/Implementing Agency

- This information is largely the same between the Designation Application and the Master Plan. The lead applicant organization must be clearly defined as either a City or County in Greater Minnesota. There can be more than one city or county jointly partnering on a facility. Any joint, similarly qualified applicants must also be listed, along with official resolutions for each applicant.

Component 2: Regional Significance Statement, Introduction/Overview, and Site Information

- The regional significance statement is the agency’s headline description of the facility. This should be concisely written so that an audience of reviewers, legislators, marketers, and users can quickly understand the purpose, highlights, and regional nature of the facility. Think in terms of a short “high-level view” or “elevator speech”.
- An introductory overview of the facility should expand on the regional significance statement to provide broad details on the amenities, targeted users, programming, history, and future growth of the facility. Think in terms of a “ground-level view”.
- Specific site information, including maps and pictures, should clearly define the current and potential future boundaries, natural land forms and other physical characteristics, development status, current and future amenities, site limitations, and other conditions affecting acquisition or development.



Figure IV-4: Sample Site Map

Component 3: Setting and Regional Context

- Describe the location of the site, whether it is part of a city or county system, and adjacent land use and transportation patterns or systems.
- A regional context analysis should include maps and descriptions of other federal, state, regional, potentially regional, and significant local recreation facilities within at least a 30-mile radius (preferably more). Show how this facility fits in to the outdoor recreation mix in your region, including an analysis of each facility’s notable amenities and how the proposed facility would complement or duplicate those amenities. See Section II for guidance on regional indicators.

Carefully consider the regional background and indicators contained in Section II when developing the regional context in this component or the trends in the next component.

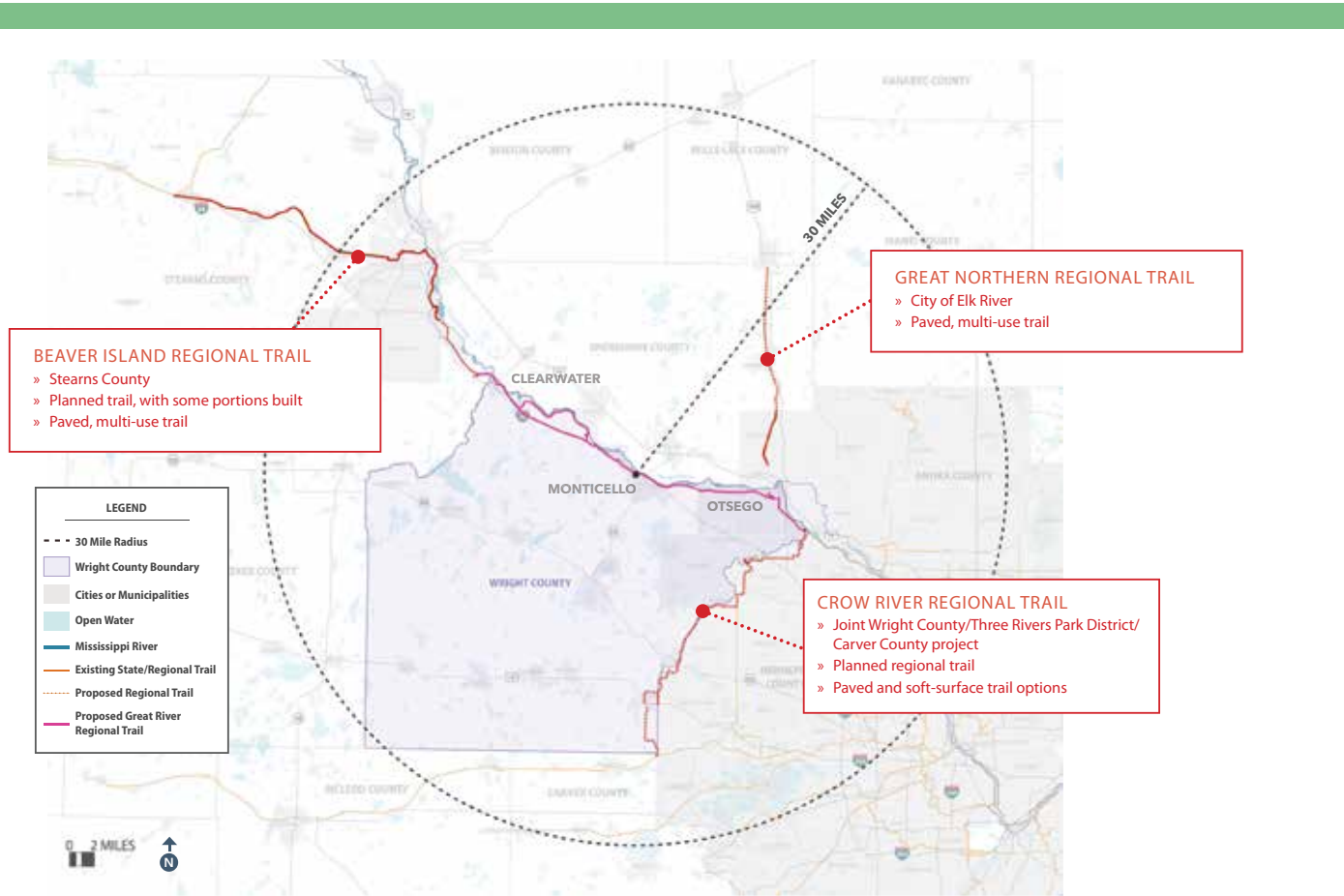


FIGURE 1. REGIONAL TRAILS CONTEXT MAP

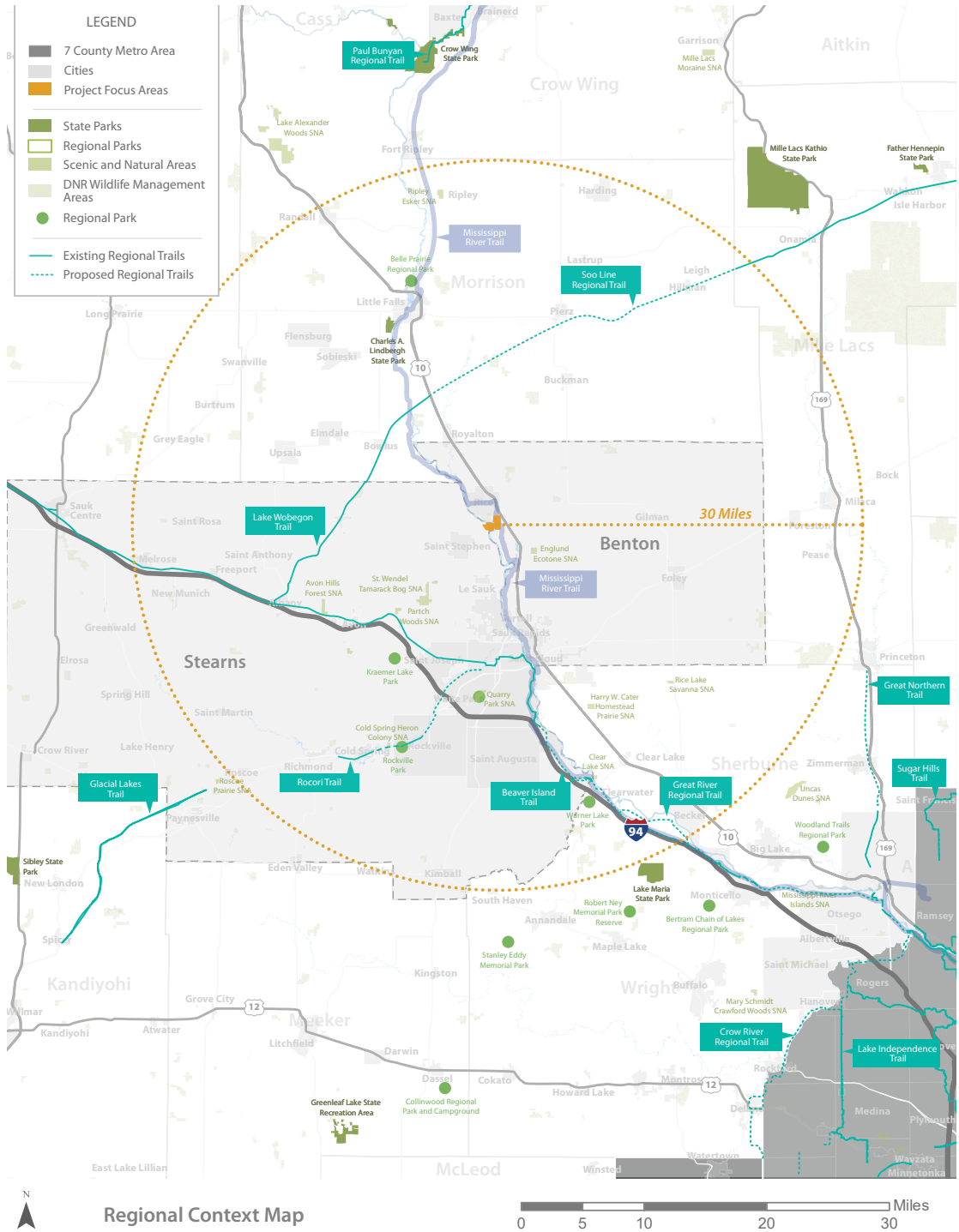


Figure IV-6: Sample Regional Park Context Analysis

Figure IV-5: Sample Regional Trail Context Analysis

Component 4: Vision, Trends, Public Health Values and Public Engagement

- This section summarizes the public input, demographics, recreational trends, public values and economic opportunities that influence a defined vision for the facility – the WHY of the facility story. As such, a clearly defined, concise vision that defines the “why” is important.
- Data should support a regional story as defined in Section II of this document. Demographic, economic, public health values, recreational trend data and public engagement outcomes all work together to create a regional base story in support of a particular facility’s regional impact. It will be rare that any one agency has a full complement of data across all areas. As long as there is a significant foundation of public engagement to support the regional story and all areas are addressed to the best of the applicant’s ability, weakness in one or two data areas will not be discounted against this entire component.
- Recreation trends should be supported primarily by data with a reasonable connection to the proposed facility. For instance, a nationwide study of trail users may be relevant only if there is some form of reasonably current local or regional data that is included in the study or if narrow local data can be sufficiently interpreted to mimic the larger study’s findings. The Commission supports and encourages local agency data collection efforts; however, it recognizes that those efforts may still be in development. Basic user data such as vehicle or trail counts, rental information, campsite use statistics, and more may be complemented by documented anecdotal data where those sources complement or support each other.
- Public health values are another way to focus the story of a particular facility towards its end user’s highest priority (including underserved and non-traditional users). A basic list of five values noted here can be prioritized and described through public engagement, with the resulting recreation amenities reflecting that priority.

Public Health Values

- Promotes physical activity
- Promotes healthy lifestyle
- Connects all community members to the outdoors
- Enhances mental health
- Encourages social interaction

- A summary of the public engagement process and outcomes used in the creation of the Master Plan. Public engagement is critical for successfully understanding which audiences desire what amenities at various levels of demand. As such, public engagement processes that are well designed with the end in mind should invite broad participation using a variety of in-person and virtual methods and share the results with the public for confirmation. Documentation of engagement results should show both the concepts and stories heard, as well as the number and mix of users who participated. The Commission does not set a minimum number of people engaged to be a valid process. However, it is expected that the process used will be proactively inclusive of all potential user groups (including ethnic, racial, mobility- and economically-challenged and other underserved communities), listen and respond carefully, and achieve broad and significant response volume.

Component 5: Development Master Plan and Implementation Plan

- The acquisition and development master plan or concept should describe proposed features/development on two levels. An overview of the proposed features should create a clear “WHAT” to support the vision’s “WHY”. This will typically include a narrative description, development concept maps, aerial photography and other supporting graphics.
- Development details for specific amenities should include a basic concept drawing or pictures, brief narrative descriptions, site plans, and other data to support the use, recreational value and cost of the existing or proposed item, area or trail segment.
- Accessibility must be addressed in the development master plan by addressing how a proposed design will meet accessibility standards and the needs of all users. Applicants must demonstrate an understanding and commitment to meeting and exceeding minimal accessibility requirements. Detailed design and construction-level drawings are not required.
- Implementation plans describe the implementation strategy and development priorities. A clear strategy for which components or use areas are the top priority should be outlined in narrative or some similar format. A variety of realistic alternative funding sources must be identified, as Legacy funding cannot and should not be the only funding source for a particular facility.
- All amenities slated for improvement are typically grouped into phases, which may be by short/medium/long term approach, by specified timelines, or some other system that supports the implementation strategy. Maps may depict the phasing graphically.
- A phased budget, broken down by implementation phase with a cost estimate for all proposed improvements, needs to be included. Cost estimates are based on a Master Plan-level professional evaluation, supported by the development details for each particular item.
- The Commission recognizes that the actual order of construction, detailed plans and cost estimates will likely vary once projects are assembled into funding proposals. As long as there is consistency and reasonable, professional support for the estimates provided, the plan can support the funding application cycle. Master Plans do not need to be updated annually or on short cycles simply to reflect changes in phasing or cost estimates that occur in the natural project development process.



Figure IV-7: Sample Development Concept

Component 6: Management, Operational Sustainability, Natural Resource Sustainability, Programming, and Marketing Plans, and Research and User Metrics

- A joint management plan for the facility should clarify roles and responsibilities for construction, maintenance, programming and all other master plan components. In jointly operated or developed facilities, this information is particularly critical and must be supported by a formal agreement, which can be in joint powers agreement, memorandum, resolution, or other form that is officially adopted by the relevant party’s governing bodies. Similarly, any rules, regulations or ordinances affecting the site should be described.
- An operational sustainability plan and budget should provide a reasonable basis for maintenance and operations costs and sources of funding at a Master Plan level. That basis may be derived based on past agency experience, professional analysis or similar assessment. In addition to listing current management and operation expenses, the expected increase in operating expenses associated with the implementation of each development phase (or some similar benchmarking) should be presented.
- The natural resources sustainability plan should show that the agency understands the unique natural resources in the facility and the challenges for managing them. This section should also describe the approach used to foster environmentally sustainable infrastructure design, construction or operations. Broad strategies for addressing the top priority challenges should be included in this section, with the costs included in either the capital Implementation Plan or the Management/Sustainability plan.
- Planning for programming will outline activities that will engage park or trail users and keep them coming back. “Connecting People to the Outdoors” is a pillar in the 25-Year Legacy Plan and is taken seriously. Programming is critical to proactively attracting a broad spectrum of users your facility, including new, non-traditional, and marginalized users that have been historically underserved. Cost estimates and funding sources (including programming revenue) must be included.
- Marketing plans outline the various marketing, advertising and outreach strategies and partnerships that will be used to ensure that local and regional users are made aware of the park or trail. Agencies are encouraged to explore both traditional (free and paid advertising, websites, tourism agency partnerships, etc.) and non-traditional (event partnerships, direct outreach to user groups, social media, etc.) approaches that have the realistic potential to achieve a regional level of use. Cost estimates and funding sources must be included.
- Research and user metrics are critical to understanding use patterns (quantitative) and user satisfaction (qualitative). Collecting and evaluating user metrics in outdoor recreation is a fairly new but developing area of interest that must be taken seriously for the purposes of future iterations of the master plan as well as supporting funding applications. Each facility will have opportunities to take part in GMRPTC system-wide data collection efforts and should provide a statement agreeing to participate. Describe any other local or joint research or data management initiatives the agency is planning to use for its own purposes. A timeline and process for evaluating the outcomes of the Master Plan itself should be outlined.

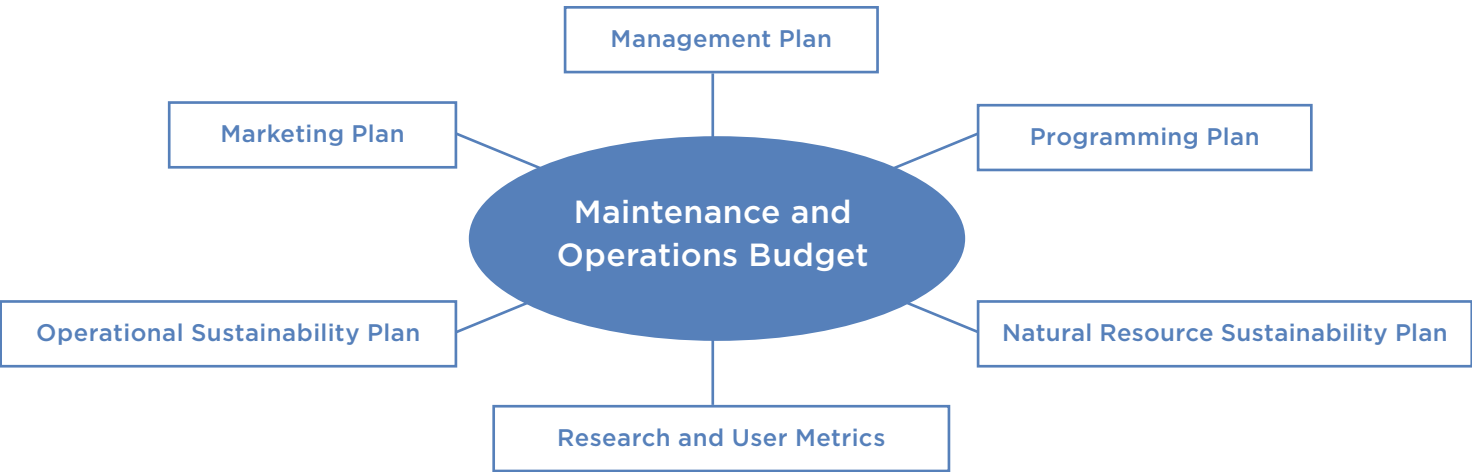


Figure IV-8: Management Plan Components and Budget



Stearns County Warner Lake Park



Wright County Stanley Eddy Park Reserve

Funding Application Purpose and Contents

Once a facility has been designated as a part of the Greater Minnesota Regional System, it is then eligible to apply for Parks and Trails Legacy funding. Only regionally-designated facilities are eligible for funding; being designated, however, is no guarantee of GMRPTC Legacy funding.

Funding applications are completed online by eligible agencies on an annual timeline determined by the Commission. Once submitted, each application is evaluated in a Funding Recommendation Selection Process, outlined below. Specific criteria, as determined by the Commission, will help the Commission to select a prioritized list of recommended projects. Additional public engagement may also be solicited to augment the Commission’s understanding of local and regional funding needs.

Funding Recommendation Selection Process

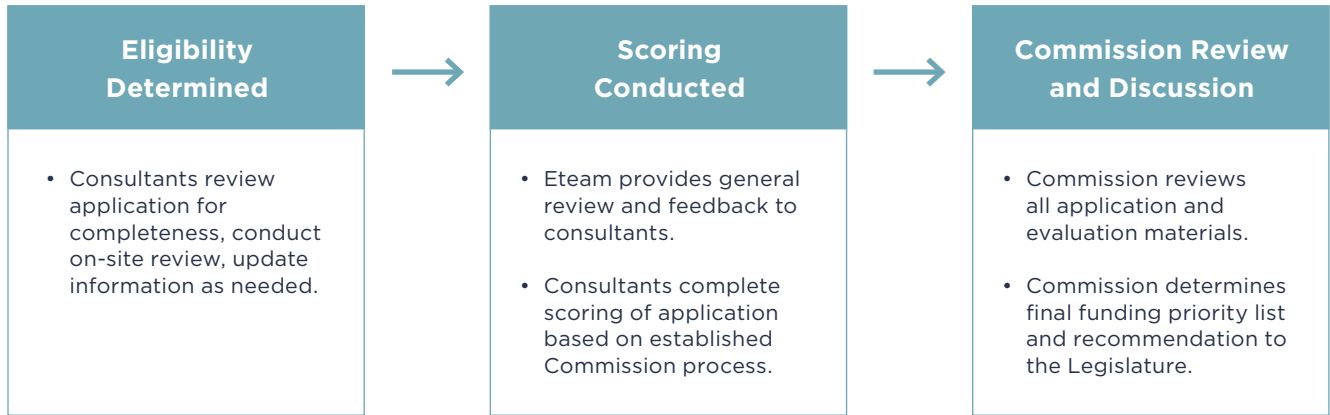


Figure IV-9: Funding Recommendation Selection Process

Focusing on quality outcomes is one of the central principles of this strategic plan. The annually updated Funding Application Criteria and Guidelines provide a clear statement by the Commission as to its Legacy funding priorities for serving the best interests of Greater Minnesota, consistent with the spirit of the Legacy Amendment, the 25-Year Legacy Plan and the provisions of this plan.

Requirements for the application include:

- Describing how the project completes a regionally substantial or impactful component of the Master Plan.
- Relevance to the four pillars of the 25-Year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan.
- A detailed project budget.
- A plan for evaluating project outcomes/deliverables.

Applicants are strongly encouraged not to replicate the regional story told in their Master Plan – that story has already proven itself through regional designation. Instead, Funding Applications are designed to describe a project/action in detail and show how it supports the Master Plan’s outcomes.

Outcome: A report is submitted annually to the Legislature on January 15 that includes the recommended funding list, the process and criteria used for selection, and a recap of the Commission’s annual achievements and plans.

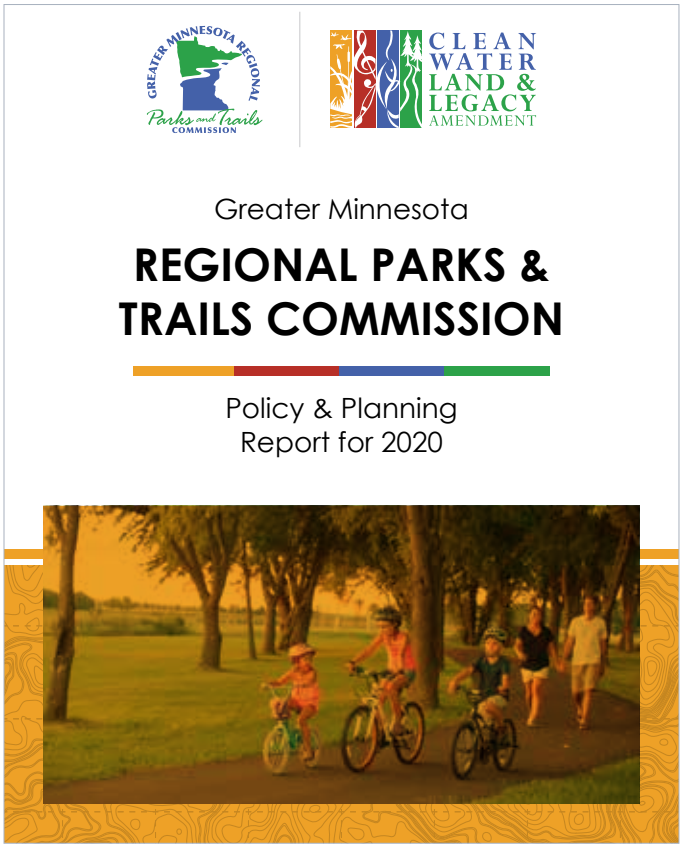


Figure IV-10: 2020 Policy and Planning Report Cover



Crow Wing County Milford Mine Memorial Park



Rochester Cascade Lake Park

Section V – System Development

Introduction

As the organizational structure of the Commission indicates, the state is divided into six districts. Understanding each district, and even regions within each district, is important for understanding the needs and opportunities of different areas of the state. “Greater Minnesota” is sometimes characterized as one geographic unit, which does not reflect reality. This section highlights its many differences in people, features, communities, and recreation.

Creating District Visions And Priorities

The Commission has focused on engaging directly with the districts in a meaningful way since its launch in 2013. Starting in 2014, a District Planning Committee (DPC) was created in each district, made up of seven to thirteen residents including the District Commissioners. Their role was to help the Commission better understand the nuances in each district, to connect with agencies and the public, and generally help influence system development.

Since that time, a robust network of local and regional engagement has been developed. Local agencies have submitted hundreds of Designation Applications and Master Plans for review. Annual workshops in each district have provided opportunities for public feedback and ideas. Online engagement tools such as blogs, video tutorials and surveys have broadened reach. Finally, regular communication with partner agencies, user groups and advocacy organizations has become routine.

All of that engagement provided the foundation for the DPC’s to draft the vision, values and priorities that make sense for their regions. Each District Overview in this chapter, drafted by its DPC, provides an evaluation tool for the Commission when reviewing applications and plans. Understanding how a facility fits into a district’s priorities can be critical to maximizing its recreational value and targeting investment appropriately.

Each District Overview in this chapter provides an evaluation tool for the Commission when reviewing applications and plans.

Each District Vision is expected to evolve over time as local understanding, needs and opportunities mature. While the DPC’s will not be involved in that process going forward, the Commission appreciates their role in helping to establish its knowledge and presence on a local and regional level. The Commission will continue to explore new partnerships and engagement opportunities as it builds the regional system in the future.



Stearns and Benton County Great River Park Complex



Morrison County Belle Prairie Park

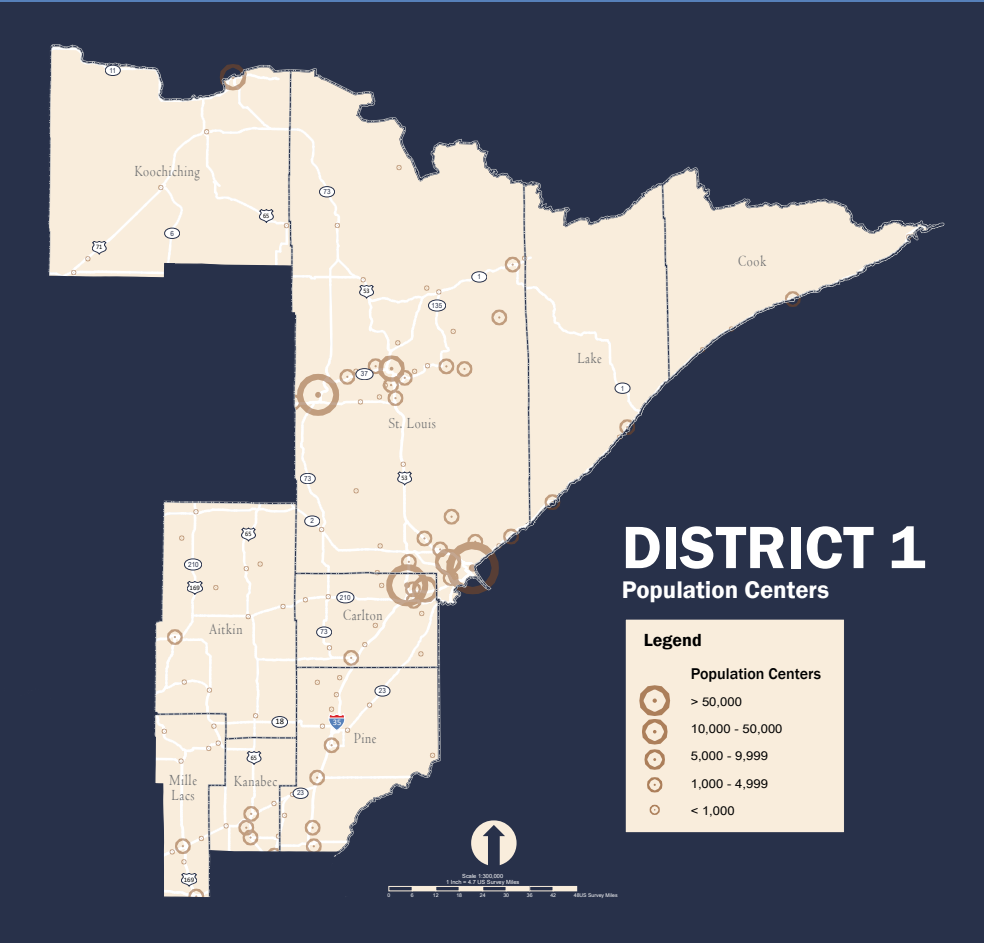
Geographic Information Systems

As has been established in previous sections, the GMRPTC’s Data Management System (DMS) is critical for managing the growth of the Greater Minnesota Regional System. A robust Geographic Information System (GIS) complement to the DMS has been built and assists with the evaluation of new opportunities. All Greater Minnesota partners are encouraged to participate and share their information with the system where possible, including the required data files needed for all regionally designated facilities.

District 1

Overview

District 1 covers the northeast nine counties of the state, including the largest county (St. Louis) and a major metropolitan area (Duluth). Commonly described as the “Arrowhead” region, this district covers the north shore of Lake Superior, the Mesabi and Vermilion Iron Ranges, and the National Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.



The topography and forest cover for the northern and eastern portions of the district include vast pine and hardwood forests over often rocky, hilly to mountainous terrain with extensive wetlands and lakes. Toward the southern and far western reaches of the district, the cover type starts to open up into dedicated hardwoods, wetlands, and flatter terrain.

The population of District 1 in 2019 is 351,353, a decrease of .5% over 2010 (US Census). The largest age cohort according to MN Compass is the 55-64 age bracket, at 15.5% of the population. Ethnicity in this District is 92% white/Caucasian, with 2.2% foreign born and 17.9% having a disability. 12.9% of the population has income below the poverty line, with 18.7% renting their housing.

DISTRICT 1 VISION STATEMENT

The Northeast District will focus on creating environmentally responsible, beautiful outdoor recreation systems that are properly designed, maintained, and meet the needs of users and landowners. These systems will strengthen and connect communities, thereby building economies, improving health, and creating places people want to live. Priority facilities will highlight natural features and follow current trends.



Hermantown-Proctor Munger Trail Spur
(Credit City of Hermantown)



Cook County Mountain Bike Trail

VALUES

- Access to and ability to recreate on water and public land
- Scenic quality
- Family oriented
- Adventure/high adrenaline
- Ruggedness/wildness
- Healthy living
- Simpler living

DISTRICT PRIORITIES

Priority criteria in this district are listed in priority order as:

- Provides a high-quality outdoor recreation experience
- Well located to serve regional population or tourists
- Provides a setting offering a compelling sense of place
- Enhances connectivity to regional destinations
- Fills a gap in the region
- Preserves a regionally significant landscape

NEW FACILITY SEARCH CRITERIA

- Facilities that provide a range of skills building opportunities from beginner to advanced levels.
- Add motorized activities to Pine, Carlton, and Aitkin Counties
- Unique, non-traditional activities
- Water trails in Carlton, Pine, Mille Lacs, and Kanabec Counties
- Additions to six counties of Aitkin, Carlton, Pine, Mille Lacs, Kanabec, and Koochiching



Lake Vermillion Trail



DESIGNATED FACILITIES AS OF 2020

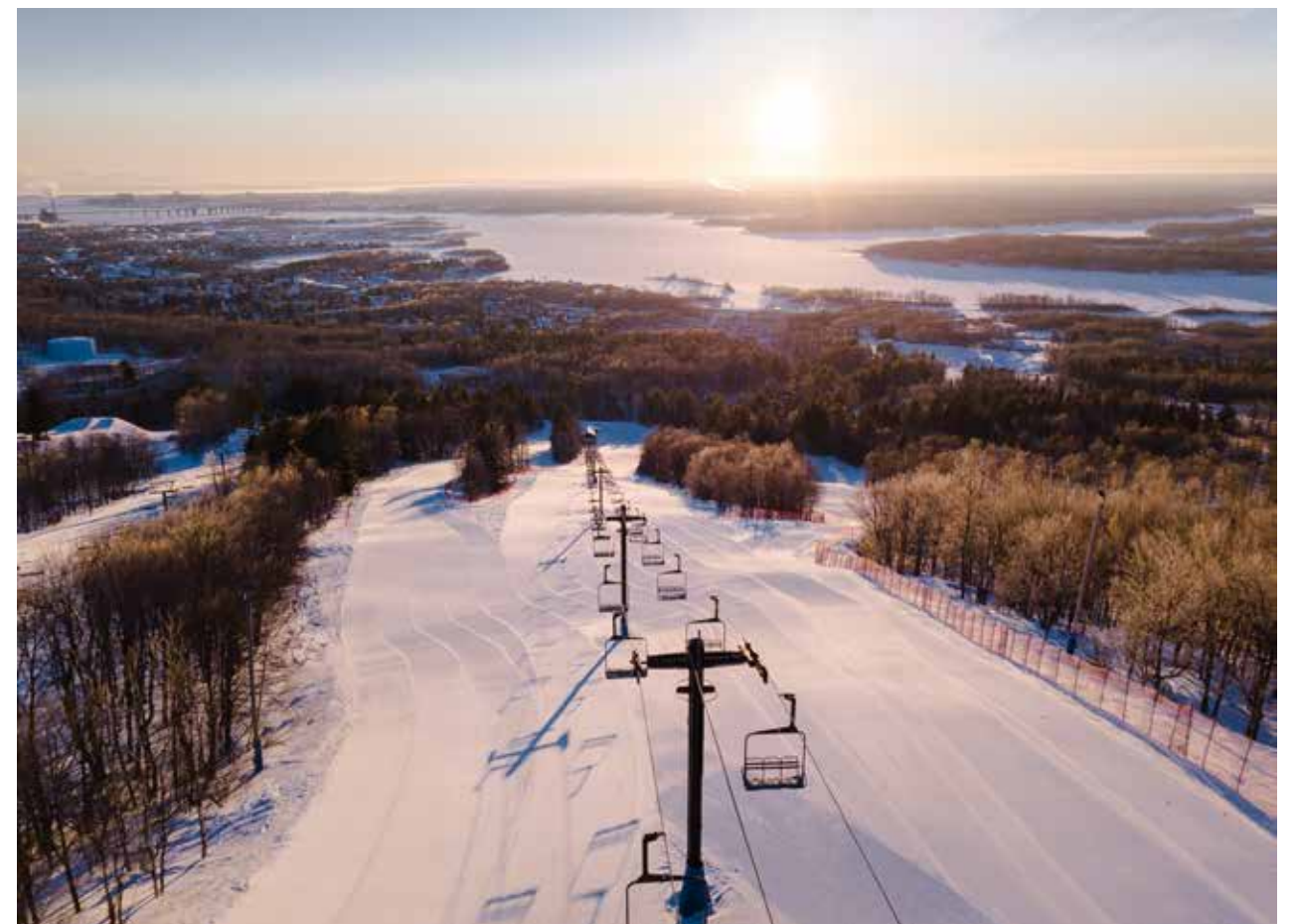
- Mille Lacs County Plains to Port Trail (2014)
- Sandstone Robinson Park (2014)
- Big Falls Campground and Horse Camp (2016)
- Lake County Mountain Bike Trails (2016)
- Duluth Hartley Park (2016)
- Cook County Mountain Bike Trails (2016)
- Proctor Hermantown Munger Trail Spur (2016)
- Aitkin County Northwoods ATV Trail (2016)
- Mesabi Trail (2015)
- Lake Vermillion Trail (2018)
- Duluth Traverse (2018)
- Duluth Spirit Mountain Recreation Area (2018)

ELIGIBLE FOR DESIGNATION

- Milaca Gateway to the North Park
- Lake County Prospector Loop Trail
- Lake County Lake County Trail
- Mille Lacs County Great Northern Trail
- Mille Lacs County Soo Line Trail – South
- Grand Marais Sawtooth Bluffs
- Grand Marais Recreation Area



Aitkin County Northwoods ATV Trail (Credit UP! Outside)



Duluth Spirit Mountain Recreation Area (credit Duluth Spirit Mountain Recreation Area)

District 2

Overview

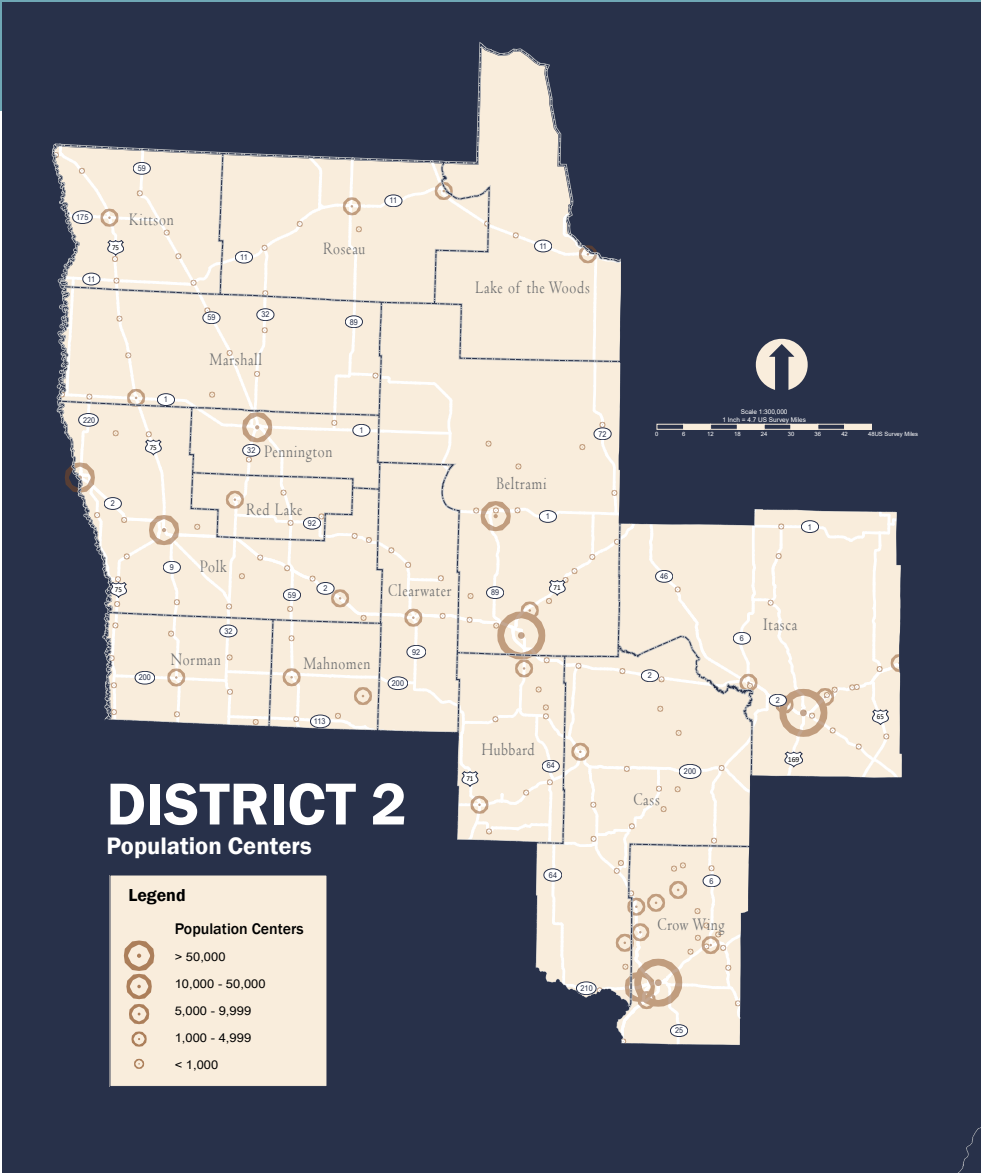
District 2 covers the northwest fifteen counties of the state, including the Grand Forks/East Grand Forks Metropolitan Area. Several medium-sized cities are found on the eastern side of the district, such as Brainerd, Bemidji, and Grand Rapids.

The topography and land cover for the western portions of the district are dominated by flat prairie and industrial agriculture. Toward the southern and eastern areas of the district, the cover type yields to forestland with numerous lakes and wetlands.

The population of District 2 in 2019 is 311,440, an increase of 2.0% over 2010 (US Census). The largest age cohort according to MN Compass is the 55-64 age bracket, at 15.1% of the population. Ethnicity in this District is 88.8% white/Caucasian, with 1.8% foreign born and 16.3% having a disability. 12.7% of the population has income below the poverty line, with 15.8% renting their housing.

DISTRICT 2 VISION STATEMENT

The Northwest District will focus on creating connections that span the landscape by utilizing and enhancing river access and connecting existing trail networks to provide multi-day trips. These systems can provide opportunities for community-building events, encouraging healthy lifestyles and for getting kids involved in the outdoors.



Cohasset Tioga Recreation Area (credit City of Cohasset)

VALUES

- Opportunities in remote areas
- River use
- Motorized trails
- High quality parks

DISTRICT PRIORITIES

Priority criteria in this district are listed in priority order as:

- Fills a gap in the region
- Enhances connectivity to regional destinations
- Provides a high-quality “destination” experience
- Preserves a regionally significant landscape
- Provides a setting offering a compelling sense of place
- Well located to serve regional population or tourists

NEW FACILITY SEARCH CRITERIA

- Collaboration and connectivity of existing resources
- Tying cultural activities into promoting the region
- Connecting historical features with users
- Building a stronger base of facilities across the district



Lake Shore Gull Lake Trail



Red Lake River Corridor

DESIGNATED FACILITIES AS OF 2020

- Beltrami County Northland Regional Sports Park (2014)
- Lake Shore Gull Lake Trail (2015)
- Cohasset Tioga Recreation Area (2016)
- Crow Wing County Milford Mine Memorial Park (2016)
- Red Lake River Corridor (2016)

ELIGIBLE FOR DESIGNATION

- Marshall Kittson Trail
- Lake of the Woods Country Northerly Park
- Fertile Sand Hills Recreation Area

District 3

Overview

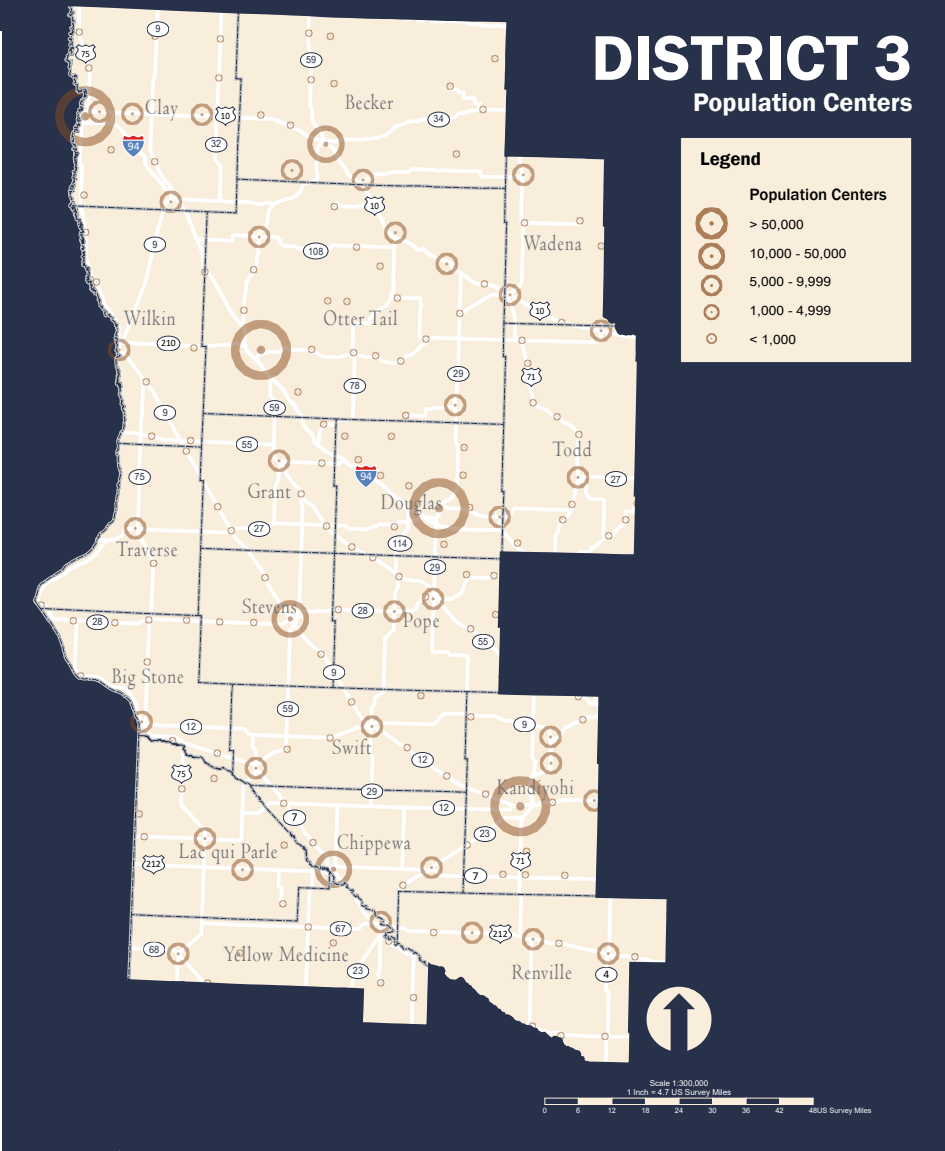
District 3 covers the west-central 18 counties of the state, including the Fargo/Moorhead Metropolitan Area. Key medium-sized cities in this region include Fergus Falls, Alexandria, Willmar, Detroit Lakes and Redwood Falls.

The topography and land cover for District 3 transforms from flat agricultural land along the North and South Dakota border to rolling hills with softwood forests to the east. The north/northeast portions of the District reflect the heart of Minnesota “Lake Country”. Outdoor recreation in the southern part of the District is often centered on the Minnesota River system.

The population of District 3 in 2019 is 370,506, an increase of nearly 1% over 2010 (US Census). The largest age cohort according to MN Compass is the 55-64 age bracket, at 14.5% of the population, with each of the 25-54 year brackets at about 11%. Ethnicity in this District is 92.5% white/Caucasian, with 3.5% foreign born and 14.7% having a disability. 10.5% of the population has income below the poverty line, with 19.8% renting their housing.

DISTRICT 3 VISION STATEMENT

The West-central District will focus on developing an accessible interconnected system of high-quality, year-round outdoor recreation facilities focused on highlighting our natural resources and creating a sense of place.



VALUES

- Family
- Community
- Sustainability
- Anticipate changing needs
- Healthy lifestyles
- Interconnectivity

DISTRICT PRIORITIES

Priority criteria in this district are listed in priority order as:

- Non-motorized trails
- Natural Resource-Based Park

NEW FACILITY SEARCH CRITERIA

- City of Breckenridge
- Along the North Dakota border
- Heartland Trail corridor
- Swift Falls
- Replicate the Red Lake River Corridor system
- Highway bridges – water access points



DESIGNATED FACILITIES AS OF 2020

- Douglas County Kensington Park (2014)
- Granite Falls Memorial Park (2014)
- Detroit Lakes Detroit Mountain (2014)
- Moorhead MB Johnson Park (2015)
- Douglas County Lake Brophy Park (2015)
- Otter Tail County Perham to Pelican Rapids Trail (2015)
- Lac qui Parle County Park (2015)
- Moorhead River Corridor Trail (2016)
- Willmar Robbins Island Park (2016)
- Fergus Falls Glacial Edge Trails (2017)

ELIGIBLE FOR DESIGNATION

- Swift County Appleton OHV Park
- Battle Lake to Ashby Trail



Fergus Falls Glacial Edge Trail

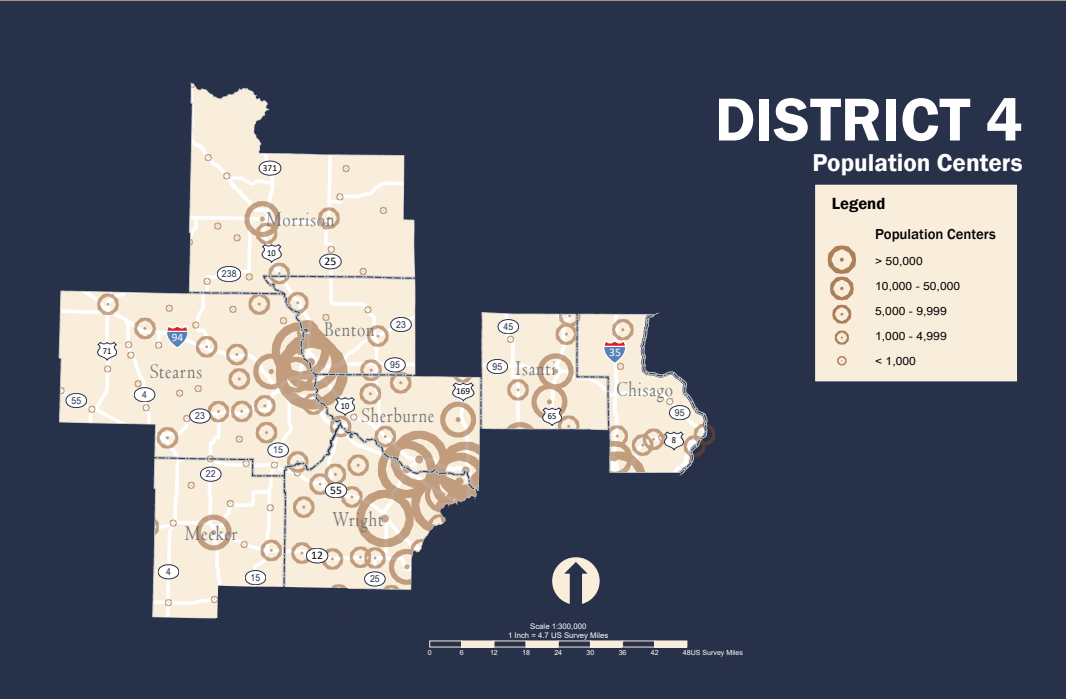


Lac qui Parle County Park (credit Lac qui Parle County)

District 4

Overview

District 4 covers the central eight counties of the state, bordering the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. This is the smallest district geographically, but the largest and fastest growing by population. Several fast-growing communities are located between the Twin Cities Metro and the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area.



The topography and land use for this district reflects an agricultural heritage of open spaces, rolling hills, rivers and lakes. This district’s regional recreation facilities often balance small forest management with prairie restoration and intense use of its water recreation resources.

The population of District 4 in 2019 was 591,493, an increase of 7.4% over 2010 (US Census). The largest age cohort according to MN Compass is the 45-54 age bracket, at 13.3% of the population. Ethnicity in this District is 92.3% white/Caucasian, with 3.8% foreign born and 12.4% having a disability. 8.3% of the population has income below the poverty line, with 21% renting their housing.

DISTRICT 4 VISION STATEMENT

The Central District will anticipate and shape the needs of our changing community by focusing efforts on developing an interconnected system of high-quality, unique, well-located recreational facilities that highlight and preserve our natural resources for all generations.



Stearns County Lake Wobegon Trail



Stearns County Quarry Park

VALUES

- Water accessibility
- Preservation
- Connectivity
- Diversity of recreational experiences

DISTRICT PRIORITIES

Priority criteria in this district are listed in priority order as:

- Natural Resource-Based Parks
- Non-motorized Trails

NEW FACILITY SEARCH CRITERIA

- Meeker County
- Morrison County
- Isanti County East West Connection
- Great Northern Trail



Chisago County Swedish Immigrant Trail



Elk River Woodland Trails Park Archery Range



DESIGNATED FACILITIES AS OF 2020

- St. Cloud Beaver Island Trail (2014)
- Chisago County Sunrise Prairie Trail (2014)
- Chisago County Swedish Immigrant Trail (2014)
- Stearns County Lake Wobegon Trail (2014)
- Stearns County Rockville Park (2014)
- Wright County Bertram Park (2014)
- Stearns County Quarry Park (2014)
- Wright County Robert New Park (2014)
- Stearns County Warner Lake Park (2014)
- Isanti County Warner Lake Park (2014)
- Elk River Woodland Park (2016)
- Stearns County Kraemer Lake-Wildwood Park (2017)
- Wright County Collinwood Regional Park (2017)
- Morrison County Soo Line Trail (2018)
- Morrison County Belle Prairie Park (2018)
- Wright County Crow River Trail (2018)
- Wright County Stanley Eddy Park Reserve (2019)
- Stearns/Benton Counties Great River Park Complex (2020)
- Wright County Great River Trail (2020)

ELIGIBLE FOR DESIGNATION

- Isanti County Springvale Park
- Stearns County River Bluffs Park



Wright County Collinwood Park



Wright County Crow River Trail



Stearns County
Kraemer Lake Park



Wright County Bertram
Chain of Lakes Santa Visit
(Credit Wright County)



Wright County
Robert Ney Park
(Credit Arne Myrabo)



Wright County Great River Trail at Bridge Park East



Stearns County Rockville Park (Credit Stearns County)



Morrison County Soo Line Trail

District 5

Overview

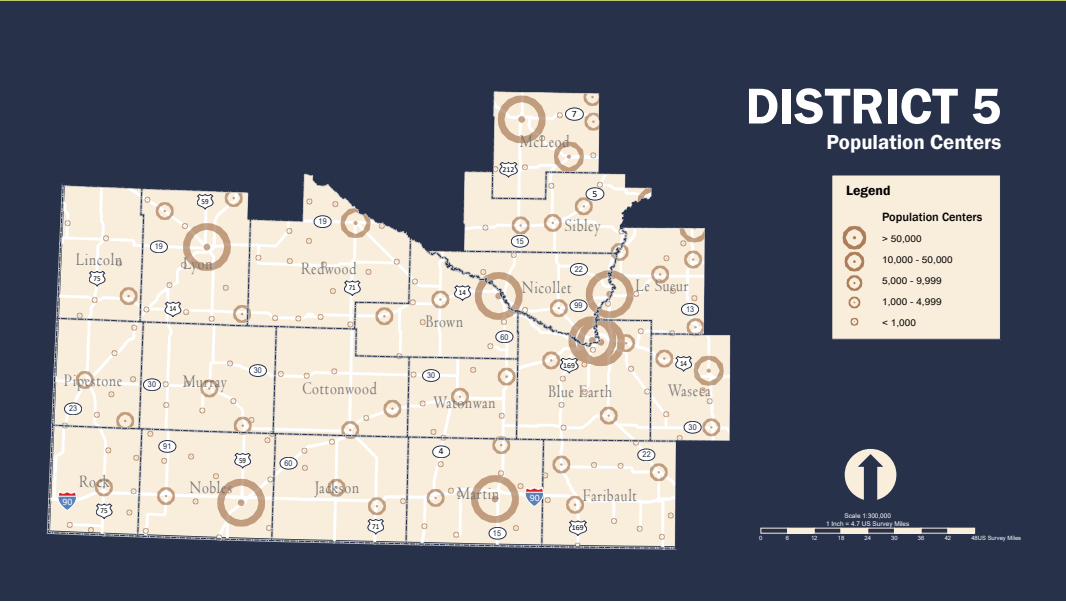
District 5 covers the southwestern-most nineteen counties of the state, with its largest community being the Mankato Metropolitan Area. Development throughout this district is spread among a number of small to medium sized communities (i.e. Marshall, New Ulm, etc.) and a rural farming population. Many recreation visitors to the area are from South Dakota or Iowa.

The topography and land use throughout the District is focused on flat terrain and agricultural use. Natural resource-based recreation is often found along river corridors like the Minnesota River Valley or the Rock River, or on unique features like Pipestone National Monument or Hole in the Mountain Park.

The population of District 5 in 2019 is 385,014, a decrease of .5% over 2010 (US Census). The largest age cohort according to MN Compass is the 55-64 age bracket, at 13.6% of the population. Ethnicity in this district is 91.8% white/Caucasian, with 5.1% foreign born and 13.4% having a disability. 11.5% of the population has income below the poverty line, with 23.3% renting their housing.

DISTRICT 5 VISION STATEMENT

The Southwest District will strive to connect local communities to outdoor recreation areas including those of regional, state, national and international significance. Focus will be on creating accessible facilities that improve the quality of life for everyone who lives in or visits the district. Through parks and trails improvements, unique features of the district will be highlighted along with the agricultural landscape.



Lyon County Garvin Park (credit Lyon County)



Redwood Falls Ramsey Park (Credit City of Redwood Falls)

VALUES

- Coexisting motorized and non-motorized recreational vehicles
- Filling the ATV opportunity gap
- Accessible within a half hour drive
- All season access
- Accessible to centers of commerce
- Connects towns to recreation opportunities
- Equitable:
 - » Affordable
 - » Diversity
 - » Aging population
 - » Minorities
 - » Geographic equity in Designation

DISTRICT PRIORITIES

Priority criteria in this district are listed in priority order as:

- Provides a high-quality “Destination” experience
- Fills a gap in the region
- Well located to serve regional population or tourists
- Preserves a regionally significant landscape
- Provides a setting offering a compelling sense of place
- Enhances connectivity to regional destinations

NEW FACILITY SEARCH CRITERIA

- Mankato area
- Minnesota River
- Southern tier of counties/along I90
- Marshall trails
- Waseca area trails
- New Ulm area
- Sleepy Eye trails
- Spirit Lake Area
- Small, underserved communities



DESIGNATED FACILITIES AS OF 2020

- Redwood Falls Ramsey Park (2014)
- LeSueur County Lake Washington Park (2015)
- Lyon County Twin Lakes Park (2016)
- Lyon County Garvin Park (2016)
- McLeod County Dakota Rail Trail (2016)
- Redwood County Plum Creek Park (2016)
- Luverne Loop & Blue Mound Trail (2016)
- Lincoln County Hole in the Mountain Park (2017)

ELIGIBLE FOR DESIGNATION

- Lyon County Camden Regional Trail



Lyon County Twin Lakes Park



Lincoln County Hole in the Mountain Park



McLeod County Dakota Rail Trail

District 6

Overview

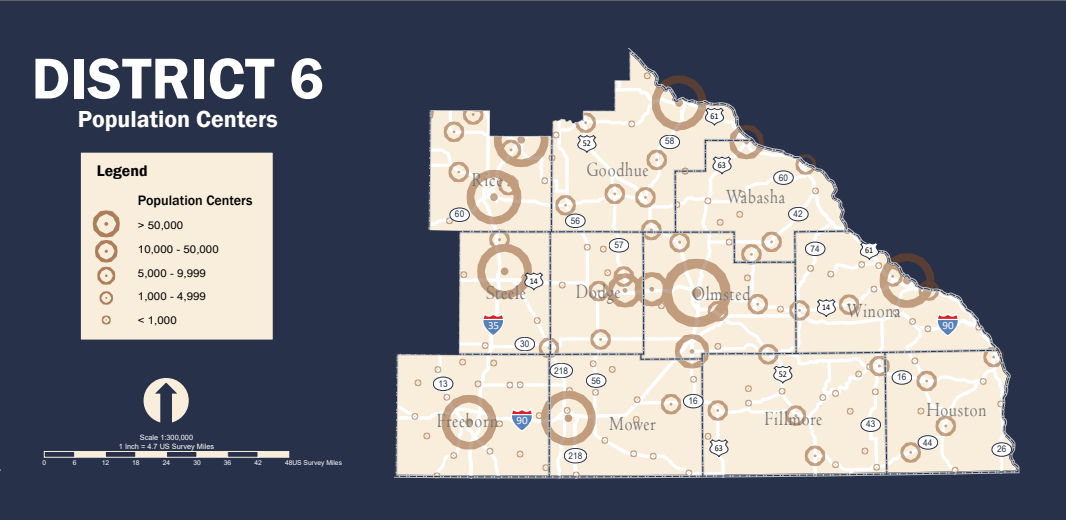
District 6 covers the southeast eleven counties of the state, including the Rochester Metropolitan Area. Bordering the Twin Cities Metro to the north, there are several medium to large communities such as Winona, Austin, Albert Lea, and Red Wing throughout the district. This district also attracts tourists from neighboring Wisconsin and Iowa.

While the relatively rolling terrain of the Rochester area dominates the center of the district, it quickly flattens out into more agricultural land to the west and south towards Iowa. The eastern border with Wisconsin is known for its Mississippi River bluffs.

The population of District 6 in 2019 is 511,309, an increase of 3.4% over 2010 (US Census). The largest age cohort according to MN Compass is the 55-64 age bracket, at 13.7% of the population. Ethnicity in this District is 89.1% white/Caucasian, with 6.9% foreign born and 12.5% having a disability. 9.5% of the population has income below the poverty line, with 23.5% renting their housing.

DISTRICT 6 VISION STATEMENT

The Southeast District will focus on developing a well-integrated, interconnected network of parks and trails which provide a diversity of recreational opportunities and experiences. Priority should be placed on facilities that highlight the most prominent natural features unique to our region: bluffs, karst topography, and rivers. Collaboration and partnerships among neighboring communities, governmental units, and businesses can maximize human and economic value and build high quality, well designed projects in the shortest time frame.



VALUES

- High quality and well designed
- Partnerships and coordination
- Active outdoor lifestyles
- Emerging and non-traditional uses
- Outdoor experiences for youth
- Easily accessible



Rochester Gamehaven Park

DISTRICT PRIORITIES

Priority criteria in this district are listed in priority order as:

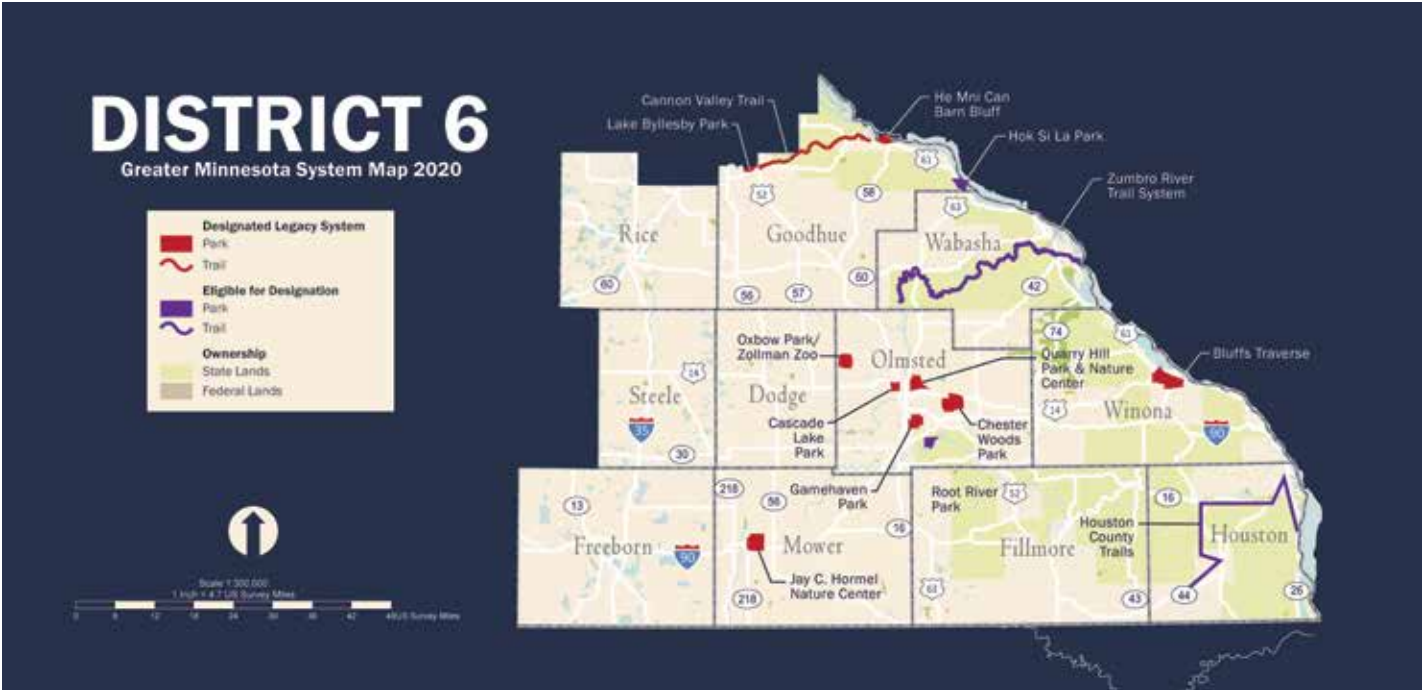
- Fills a gap in the region
- Provides a high-quality outdoor recreation experience
- Provides a setting offering a compelling sense of place
- Preserves a regionally significant landscape
- Enhances connectivity to regional destinations
- Well located to serve regional population or tourists

NEW FACILITY SEARCH CRITERIA

- Under-utilized water resources/river corridors
- Shorter loop trail systems
- Acquisition for resource and recreation protection
- Southern border counties
- Western communities



Rochester Cascade Lake Park (Credit City of Rochester)



DESIGNATED FACILITIES AS OF 2020

- Rochester Quarry Hill ark and Nature Center (2014)
- Rochester Cascade Lake Park (2014)
- Rochester Gamehaven Park (2014)
- Olmsted County Chester Woods Park (2015)
- Cannon Valley Trail (2015)
- Red Wing He Mne Can Park (2015)
- Olmsted County Oxbow Park/Zollman Zoo (2017)
- Goodhue County Lake Byllesby Park (2018)
- Winona Bluffs Traverse (2019)
- Austin Jay C. Hormel Nature Center (2019)



Olmsted County Chester Woods Park (Credit Olmsted County)

ELIGIBLE FOR DESIGNATION

- Olmsted County Root River Park
- LakeCity Hok Si La Park
- Houston County Trails
- Oronoco Zumbro River Water Trail



Austin Jay C. Hormel Nature Center Information Display



Goodhue County Lake Byllesby Park

Section VI – Implementation and Outcomes

Strategic Plan Implementation

Adoption of this Strategic Plan by the Commission is the next step in advancing the Commission’s work. This plan, like the previous version, is a living document subject to improvement and growth as it is being implemented. Contact the Commission for clarification on any item of interest in this document.

Implementation of the plan will take place over time. Professional delivery of Commission systems and actions within known resource restraints will require careful consideration of a phased implementation plan, similar to the implementation plan required for a park master plan. Just like a park implementation plan, adjustments to this implementation timeline may be necessary as circumstances and opportunities change.

The following short-, medium-, and long-term implementation guide indicates when Commissioners, partners and the public can anticipate the indicated actions. Additional detail will be published on the Commission’s website as it is developed.

Short Term *(Immediate)*

- Publication and marketing of plan document.
- Adoption of updated criteria in Section III and Section V District Visions into review processes.
- Begin development and integration of outcome improvement strategies and evaluation into the annual work plan.

Medium Term *(Six Months to One Year)*

- Adoption of updated Section II regional analysis criteria into review processes.
- Creation and implementation of Section IV Track Two Master Plan evaluation process.

Long Term *(Two to Three Years)*

- Conduct a formal review of this Strategic Plan’s outcomes.
- Begin planning process for the next generation of the Strategic Plan.

Interim Strategies

The Commission reserves the right to adopt additional interim strategies that can help guide Strategic Plan implementation and improve outcomes. Interim strategies would serve as a bridge between the concepts laid out in this plan and the Commission’s annual work plan. Publication of annual or multi-year strategies will be included in the GMRPTC’s annual legislative Policy and Planning Report.

STRATEGIC PLAN OUTCOMES

Evaluating the outcomes of this Strategic Plan is necessary for understanding how the Greater Minnesota Regional System is developing in alignment with the 25-Year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan. As noted in “Long Term” item 1 above, the Commission will be deliberate in its review of this plan, just as it is careful in its evaluation of regional park plans.

The following outcomes will serve as the key indicators of this Strategic Plan’s impact and success. Investing administrative resources will be necessary to capture the data needed to complete this outcome review. Internal and external processes will be used as appropriate to make sure the review is accurate and informative.

1 Improved Accessibility for All

A clear expectation from the Legacy Plan is the ability of all Minnesotans and visitors to enjoy the use of their regional parks. This can be accomplished through improved public engagement followed by responsive design and programming.

Measurement: Improved quantitative and qualitative use of all facilities across all users; Measurable improvements in Commission and regional partner public outreach and responsiveness efforts.

2 Improved Descriptions of Facility Regional Context

Section II creates a clearer methodology for applicants to understand and communicate how their facility fulfills a regional need. This outcome complements the Commission’s District Visions by showing how applicants build on that understanding with their own regional story.

Measurement: Improvement in Designation Application review rankings and Track 1 Master Plan Criteria 3 and 4 scoring due to better defined regional fit of applicant facilities.

3 Improved Regional Designee Quality

Section III streamlines and updates the criteria for regional designation, which articulates the merit of a facility in accordance with the principles of the Legacy Plan.

Measurement: Improvement of Master Plan Track 1 scores.

4 Improved Unit Master Plans

This Strategic Plan incorporates many new tools and standards for the creation of Unit Master Plans, particularly in Section IV. Overall, the Commission strives for improved consistency in the quality and completeness of submitted Master Plans for review.

Measurement: Successful Track 2 Master Plan review scores.

5 Refined Understanding of Districts and Regions

Section V represents significant growth in the Commission’s understanding of the unique features and values of each region of the state. Continued public communication and outreach will help the Commission not only to help applicants understand how they fit into their region, but the Commission’s understanding of the regions themselves.

Measurements: Formally updated and improved District Visions informed by local and regional public input.

6 Improved Funding Applications

The most tangible measure of system outcomes is the Legacy fund investments in Greater Minnesota parks and trails. Improved funding application quality is a result of improved planning processes and clear expectations and leads to better user outcomes.

Measurement: Improved Funding Application scores.

