



Review of Park System, Visitor Services, and Natural Resource Management System Plans and Input on Topics for Plan Update

Niki Geisler, Parks Director

Lil Leatham, Principal Planner

Tom Lewanski, Parks Natural Resources Manager

1

Overview



- Accomplishments and challenges
 - 2008 Park System Plan
 - 2017 Visitor Services Plan
 - 2017 Natural Resource Management System Plan
- Plan update process
- Discussion: what topics are important to you that we address as part of the plan update process?

The update of these three plans relates to the County Board's 2023-2024 strategic priority on the role of government

2

2008 Park System Plan Vision



Dakota County Parks, Lakes, Trails and Greenways Vision, 2030

What's New?

GREAT PLACES: Destination Parks

- * New Vermillion Highlands Park
- * More things to do in parks
 - Winter activity area
 - Gathering and celebration areas
 - Swimming and water play areas
- * More popular "park basics"
 - Enhanced picnicking
 - Biking and accessible trail loops

CONNECTED PLACES: Greenway Trails

- * "Bring parks to people" - Linear parks connect parks, schools, lake trails, playgrounds, libraries, and the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers.
- * Walking, biking, and in-line skating
- * Public agencies work together to create 200 miles of greenways using mostly publicly-owned land.

PROTECTED PLACES: Green Infrastructure

- * Enhance and protect park resources
- * Protect stream corridors in public/private partnerships
- * Protect natural areas and open space in public/private partnerships

DAKOTA COUNTY PARK SYSTEM and COLLABORATIVE OPEN SPACE PROTECTION

- Dakota County Parks
- Planned Vermillion Highlands Regional Park
- Federal, State, and Other Regional Open Space
- Existing and Planned Regional Greenways
- Proposed Greenway (will seek regional status)
- Example City Greenways (route concepts)
- Stream Conservation Corridors and Greenways
- Destinations: City Parks, Schools, Lakes, Libraries
- Privately-Owned Protected Farmland (FMAP)
- Private/Public Protected Natural Areas (PNAP)
- Potential Rail to Trail Opportunities



Concepts for Greenways

New
Old
Rethinking Trails as Greenways

Natural Areas
Water
Recreation
Multiple Benefits of Greenways

Nested Trail Loops
Trails around Lakes

Parks
Schools
Town Centers
Athletic Fields
Greenways Connect Places Where People Want to Go

3

System Growth



	2006	2022	% Change
County Population	391,613	442,038	12%
Parks	6	7	17%
Park Acres	4,750	6,280	32%
Park Conservation Areas	0	4	New
Park Conservation Area Acres	0	140	New
Greenways	3	10	233%
Greenway Trail Miles	14	46	229%
Annual Visits	911,000	2,919,323	220%

4

Accomplishments



Great Places

- Park development
- More popular activities
- More winter activities
- Unique experiences
- Visitor Services Plan

Connected Places

- Greenway network established

Protected Places

- Natural Resource Management System Plan
- Land Conservation Plan

The 2008 Park System Plan contains 32 goals and 275 strategies. Significant progress has been made on all goals.

5

Challenges



- Some parks are located far from the population base
- Recreation trends are changing
- System growth has outpaced staff growth
- Climate change is affecting recreation service, water quality, natural resource management
- Reliance on external funding that is inconsistent
- Parks, greenways, and natural areas maintenance

6

Visitor Services Plan Accomplishments

Dakota
COUNTY

Awareness & Outreach

Goal:

Build awareness across all communities

Progress to Plan:

- Visitation increased by 63% = 2,919,323
- Outreach program participation increased by 243% = 5,800 people



7

Accomplishments

Dakota
COUNTY

Outdoor Education

Goal:

Serve more people through OE programming throughout more of the park system, focus on school partnerships and self-guided interpretation.

Progress to Plan:

- Participation increased by 86% to 8,636 participants
- School partnerships rebuilding



8

Accomplishments



Events

Goal:

Add events, celebrate unique parks and communities they serve

Progress to Plan:

- Event participation increased by 133% to 7,000 participants
- # of events increased by 180% to 14 events



9

Accomplishments



Volunteers

Goal:

Engage more people who want to contribute to parks

Progress to Plan:

Volunteers hours increased by 46% to 6,000 volunteer hours



10

Accomplishments



Facility Rentals

Goal:
Optimize rentals for public use


Progress to Plan:

- Facility rentals increased by 77% to 2,250 rentals




11





Accomplishments



Equipment Rentals

Goal:
Support recreation at more venues

Progress to Plan:
Rentals remained consistent and slightly below the high in 2019 when rentals increased by 71% to 13,589 equipment rentals

12

Challenges



- Increasing demand for programs and services
- Aligning system growth with staffing levels
- Removing barriers to participation in programs
- Ensuring parks and greenways are inclusive and accessible to all
- Operating growing greenway system

13

Natural Resource Management System Plan Accomplishments



Vegetation — Five-year goal: 1,434 acres restored

- **Progress to Goal – 2,079 acres (145%)**



14

Dakota
COUNTY

Accomplishments

Wildlife Five-year goal: 3-5 species at 15 sites



Bison



Wildlife tunnel on Cliff



Regal fritillary



Blanding's turtle

Progress to Goal – 35 species at 15+ sites

15

Dakota
COUNTY

Accomplishments

Water: Five-year goal: 19 projects



SLPR Ravine Stabilization



Iron Enhanced Sand Filter at LHRP

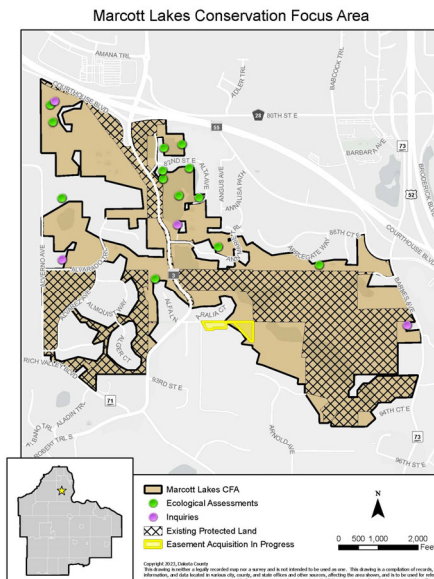
Progress to Goal – 30 water quality projects

16

Accomplishments



Land Conservation Plan— Focus Areas



17

Accomplishments



Greenways: Progress to Goals

1. Control Invasive species
 - Five-year goal: 180 acres
 - Progress to goal: 127 acres
2. Vegetation Management
 - Five-year goal: 180 acres
 - Progress to goal: 77 acres
3. Natural Resource Management Plans
 - Five-year goal: All greenways
 - Progress to goal: Five completed or in process



Native planting along Mississippi River Greenway

18

Accomplishments



Volunteers: 2023 estimated hours – 3,431

Volunteers assist with:

- Controlling invasive plants
- Native seed collection
- Native plant production at hoophouse
- Installing native plants in parks
- Surveying wildlife
- Landscape stewards



Native seed collection



Native plant installation



Native plant production

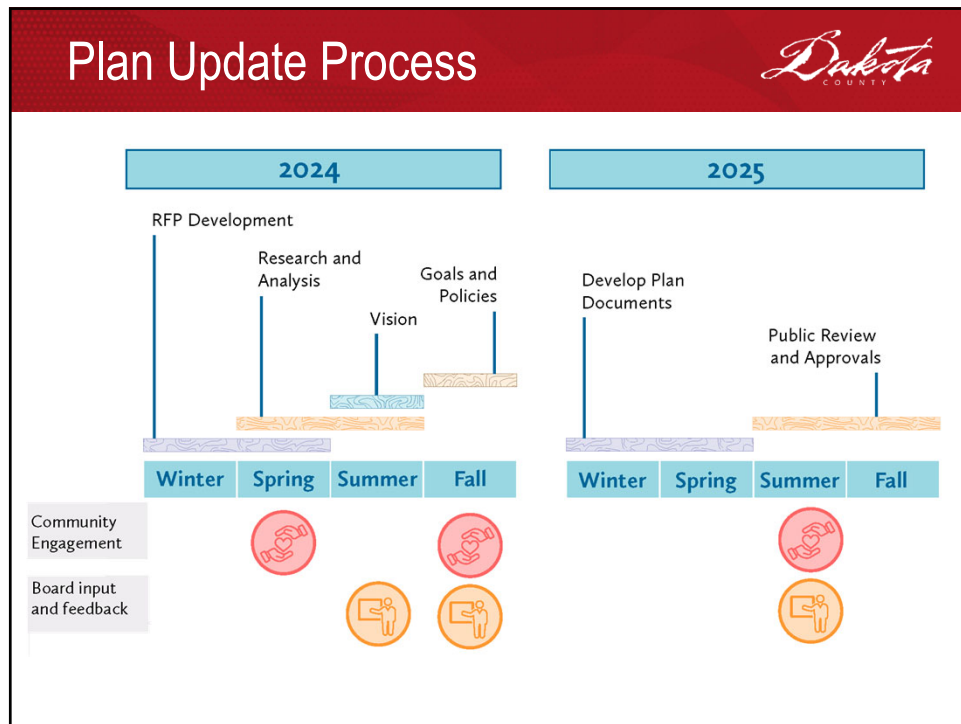
19

Challenges



- Aligning system growth with staffing levels
- Maintaining parks, greenways, and natural areas
- Managing exotic invasive species
- Contractor labor shortage
- Rising prices

20



21

Discussion



What topics are you interested in addressing as part of the Park System Plan, Visitor Services Plan, and Natural Resource Management System Plan updates?



22