



Date: August 19, 2024

Wendall Meyer  
Division Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration  
380 Jackson Street, Suite 500  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-2904

In reply refer to:

De Minimis Determination Notice of Intent Request for Spring Lake Park Reserve  
Minn. Proj. No. To Be Assigned  
S.P. 019-060-006 (Fischer Avenue Trailhead)  
From Pine Bend Trail To Fischer Avenue  
Dakota County

Attn: FHWA Transportation Engineer

Dakota County is requesting that FHWA issue a notice of intent to make a determination that the impact of the above referenced project on Spring Lake Park Reserve would be de minimis.

Information supporting this request is presented below.

**1. General Project Information**

SP: 019-060-006

Federal Project No.: To be assigned

Route: Not applicable

From /To: Pine Bend Trail to Fischer Avenue

Description of Proposed Improvement: The proposed project includes construction of a new trailhead facility on Fischer Avenue at Spring Lake Park Reserve (13580 Fischer Avenue, Hastings, MN). Trailhead amenities include a new parking area with ADA accessible parking stalls and a picnic shelter with restrooms. Additional project components include improvements to Fischer Avenue from Pine Bend Trail to the trailhead site, well and septic connections for the new bathrooms, and constructing a new trail around the north and west sides of the Bison Prairie paddock.

**2. Project Manager**

Name: Yao Xiao

Title: Senior Project Manager, Capital Projects Management

Address: Dakota County Facilities Management, 1590 Highway 55, Hastings, MN 55033

Phone: 651-438-4671 ext. 4671

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**3. Description of the Section 4(f) Property.**

**Figure 1** includes the state location map. **Figure 2** illustrates the location of Spring Lake Park Reserve within Dakota County. **Figure 3** illustrates the project location in Spring Lake Park Reserve. **Figure 4 and Figure 5** show the preliminary site plan and proposed project improvements.

Name: Spring Lake Park Reserve

Total Size (acres): 1,100 acres

Location: Spring Lake Park Reserve is in eastern Dakota County in the City of Rosemount and Nininger Township in Dakota County. Spring Lake Park Reserve is along the south bank of the Mississippi River.

Section 4(f) Property Owner/Manager: Dakota County Parks

Official(s) with Jurisdiction (OWJ):

Niki Geisler, Dakota County Parks Director  
 Western Service Center  
 14955 Galaxie Avenue, Apple Valley, MN 55124-8579  
 Phone: 952-891-7000  
 Email: [niki.geisler@co.dakota.mn.us](mailto:niki.geisler@co.dakota.mn.us)

Type of Section 4(f) Property: Park Reserve

Function of or Available Activities on the Property: **Table 1** summarizes the available activities on the property.

**Table 1. Spring Lake Park Reserve Available Activities**

Park Activities	Resources
Trails	Paved Trails (includes the Mississippi River Greenway) (6.59 miles)
	Accessible Trails (2.78 miles)
	Unpaved Trails (14.16 miles)
Active Recreation	Cross Country Skiing
	Cycling
	Hiking/Walking
	Playground
Passive Recreation	Archery
	Nature Observation
	Geocaching
	Picnicking
	Hunting
Lodging/Centers	Gardening
	Visitor/Event Center

Source: Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan. June 2021. Table 2.1 Project Area Context: Activity Types and Programming within 30-Mile Radius

Description and Location of Existing and Planned Facilities: Chapter 3 of the *Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan* (June 2021) describes existing conditions within the park reserve. **Exhibit 1** lists existing facilities in Spring Lake Park Reserve.

**Exhibit 1. Spring Lake Park Reserve Existing Facilities**

PARK LOCATION	FACILITY / AMENITY	DESCRIPTION	YEAR BUILT
Upper	Schaar’s Bluff Gathering Center	3,500 sq ft, gathering space for 75, lobby with interpretation, kitchen, and restrooms; Net-zero-energy building	2008
Lower	Camp Spring Lake Retreat Center	Overnight , 4-season facility. Lodge, 10 group-campsite, outdoor classroom	1994
Lower	Archery Picnic Shelter & Archery Trails	Restroom, parking, horseshoe pit, grills, archery trails, 150 capacity shelter	1994
Upper	East Picnic Shelter (Small)	150 capacity shelter, electricity, grills, restrooms, picnic tables, parking, fire pit	1980
Upper	West Picnic Shelter (Large)	80 capacity shelter, electricity, grills, restrooms, picnic tables, parking, fire pit	1986
Upper	Community Garden Plots	66 plots	1980
Upper	Playground	Play Equipment, seating, sandbox	1996
Upper	Sand Volleyball Courts		1996
Throughout Park	Mississippi River Trail	5.4 miles with bridge crossings, overlooks, seating	2015
Throughout Park	Softscape Trails	9 miles of trails	1972
Upper	Overlooks	Located on the MRT, interpretive signage	2015
Upper, via Hilary Path	DNR Boat Launch		not available
Lower	Water Trail	Small watercraft water trail traversing the Spring Lake Islands	Established 2012
Abutting Park	Great River Road CR 42	Designated All-American Road,	Initiated 1938

Table 3.1 Spring Lake Park Reserve Facility Inventory

Source: Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan, June 2021, Table 3.1 Spring Lake Park Reserve Facility Inventory.

There are two existing trailheads in Spring Lake Park Reserve along the Mississippi River Greenway. The West Trailhead is along Fahey Avenue at the west end of the park reserve. The East Trailhead is at Schaar’s Bluff Gathering Center at the east end of the park reserve along 127<sup>th</sup> Street.

The *Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan* (June 2021) identifies the planned near-term (next five and 10 years) improvements and long-term vision for the park. Improvements in the Upper Park area (Schaar’s Bluff) include picnicking and play areas, the Gathering Center (indoor warming space and equipment rentals), community gardens, parking, water access, trails, and natural community restoration areas. New features include the Farm and the Schaar’s Bluff River Access and Use areas. Improvements in the Lower Park (Mississippi Discovery Zone) include hike-in campsites, river access points and overlooks, outdoor classrooms, pavilions, interactive interpretation, an interpretive center, trail extensions, and natural community restoration areas.

**Figure 6** shows the long-term development plan for Spring Lake Park Reserve. **Figure 7** shows the Spring Lake Park Reserve phasing plan.

Access: Vehicle access to Spring Lake Park Reserve is available at several entry points along the south and east sides of the property. **Figure 8** illustrates the park entry points and project location. Spring Lake Park Reserve is accessible by boat/canoe/kayak from the Mississippi River. Spring Lake Park Reserve is also accessible for pedestrians and bicyclists. The Mississippi River Greenway runs through Spring Lake Park Reserve and is accessible at the east and west ends of the property.

Other Features or Attributes Important to the Section 4(f) resource: The following list summarizes other features or attributes important to the Section 4(f) resource.

- **Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.** Spring Lake Park Reserve is within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA). MNRRA is a park overlay district operated by the National Park Service (NPS).
- **Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area.** Spring Lake Park Reserve is within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA). The MRCCA is a state critical area designed to protect natural, cultural, and scenic values through development standards administered through local land use plans and zoning ordinances. Spring Lake Park Reserve is within the MRCCA's Rural and Open Space District. MRCCA rules limit public recreation uses in a 200-foot setback from the Mississippi River and 100-foot setback in the Bluff Impact Zone.
- **Great River Road Scenic Byway.** The Great River Road is a national scenic byway and includes a network of state and local roads following the Mississippi River from Minnesota to Louisiana. The Great River Road Scenic Byway follows Trunk Highway (Hwy) 55 and County Road 42 along the south side of Spring Lake Park Reserve.

#### 4. Impacts to the Section 4(f) Property.

Amount of land impacted (acres): The amount of land impacted in Spring Lake Park Reserve by the proposed project is approximately 9 acres. This area includes reconstruction of the existing Fischer Avenue from a gravel roadway to a paved (bituminous) roadway.

Permanent R/W Acquisition/Easements: 0 acres. The proposed project does not require permanent right-of-way acquisition or easements.

Temporary Easements: 0 acres. The proposed project does not require temporary easements.

Functions/Activities Affected: The proposed project does not affect functions or activities in Spring Lake Park Reserve. The proposed project is consistent with the long-term development plan identified in the *Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan* (June 2021). The proposed project will complement the nearby bison paddock by providing an area for park visitors to view bison.

Facilities Affected: The proposed project does not affect existing facilities in Spring Lake Park Reserve. The existing bison paddock south of the proposed trailhead will be maintained. The existing Mississippi River Greenway alignment through the project study area will be maintained. A new trail will connect the proposed trailhead to the Mississippi River Greenway.

Access Affected: The proposed project does not affect access to Spring Lake Park Reserve. The existing access to Spring Lake Park Reserve from Pine Bend Trail along Fischer Avenue will be improved with the proposed project (see preliminary site plan in **Figure 4**).

Other Features or Attributes Affected: There are no other features or attributes affected by the proposed project.

**5. Considerations in consultation with the OWJ.**

Impact avoidance: The proposed trailhead location is south of the Mississippi River bluff and is outside of the bluff impact zone. The proposed trailhead location also avoids culturally sensitive areas along the Mississippi River and southeast of the project site along Pine Bend Trail (see preliminary site plan in **Figure 4**).

Planning to minimize harm: The proposed trailhead location is consistent with the *Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan* (June 2021). Access to the proposed trailhead from Pine Bend Trail uses an existing gravel roadway (Fischer Avenue) and driveway along the north side of the Bison paddock. The location for the proposed trailhead uses a site that was previously disturbed by three home sites and avoids impacts to high quality, restored prairie habitat to the west.

Mitigation: Not applicable.

Enhancement: Enhancement measures include reseeding disturbed areas with native vegetation. Rain gardens will provide water quality treatment for stormwater runoff from the trailhead area (see preliminary site plan in **Figure 5**). The project includes a trail connection to the Mississippi River Greenway and a trail loop around the bison paddock, enhancing opportunities for park users to observe bison activity.

**6. Coordination with Responsible Official with Jurisdiction (OWJ) Over the Section 4(f) Property:**

**Table 2** summarizes coordination activities with the Official with Jurisdiction (OWJ) over Spring Lake Park Reserve.

**Table 2. OWJ Coordination Activities**

Date	Agency/Organization, Personnel, and their Position	Discussion description	Conclusions
Agency Meeting (June 21, 2024)	Dakota County Parks, MnDOT State Aid, MnDOT Office of Environmental Stewardship (OES), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Consultant staff	Evaluation of site location for proposed trailhead and potential for adverse effects determination to federally listed species under Section 7, Endangered Species Act (ESA).	The trailhead facility location was shifted to the east to a former homestead site within Spring Lake Park Reserve to avoid high quality habitat and minimize impacts to listed species.

Date	Agency/Organization, Personnel, and their Position	Discussion description	Conclusions
Design Meeting (July 8, 2024)	Dakota County Parks, Consultant staff	Review of preliminary site plans for locating the trailhead facility at the former homestead site.	Dakota County Parks staff agreement with preliminary site plan with modifications. Present site concept to County Board at end of August.
Design Meeting (July 23, 2024)	Dakota County Parks, Consultant staff	Review of preliminary site plan updates. Confirm location of parking lot and building. Confirm direction of building in relation to bison paddock. Review of on-site utilities.	Preliminary site plan layout at the former homestead location meets requirements of Dakota County Parks. See <b>Figure 4.</b>

If after consideration of the information presented in this letter, FHWA intends to make a de minimis determination, conditioned upon consideration of any comments received during the required 14-day public comment period, please indicate by signature below. Dakota County will transmit a copy of this signed letter to the OWJ as notice of FHWA’s intent to make a de minimis finding.

This de minimis determination notice of intent request will be made available for public review and comment. A notice of availability will be published in the local newspaper and on the Dakota County webpage. The anticipated timeframe for the public comment period is September 2024. The de minimis process, including correspondence related to FHWA’s intent to make a de minimis determination, comments received on the notice of FHWA’s intent to make a de minimis determination, FHWA’s final de minimis determination, and the OWJ’s final concurrence will be reported in the Categorical Exclusion document.

Sincerely,



Yao Xiao

Senior Project Manager, Capital Projects Manager

- Attachments:
- Figure 1 State Location Map
  - Figure 2 Spring Lake Park Reserve Location Within Dakota County
  - Figure 3 Project Location in Spring Lake Park Reserve
  - Figure 4 Fischer Avenue Trailhead Preliminary Site Plan
  - Figure 5 Fischer Avenue Trailhead Preliminary Site Plan (Trailhead Details)

Figure 6 Spring Lake Park Reserve Long-Term Development Plan  
Figure 7 Spring Lake Park Reserve Phasing Plan  
Figure 8 Spring Lake Park Reserve Entry Points

I Concur:

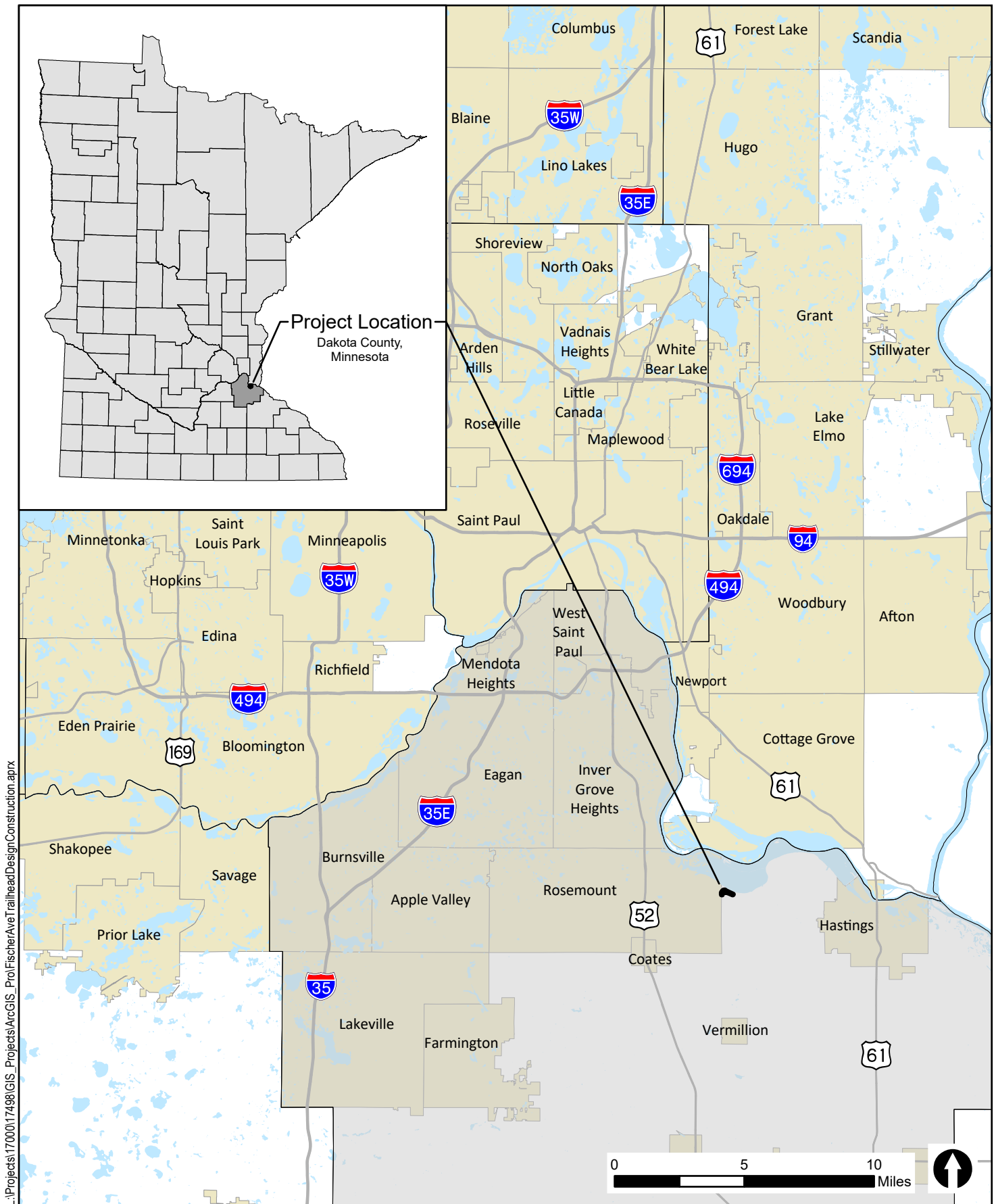
DSAE                     Dan Erickson                     Digitally signed by Dan Erickson  
Date: 2024.08.26 14:30:55 -05'00' **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

I Concur:

State Aid Engineer                     Dale Gade                     Digitally signed by Dale Gade  
Date: 2024.08.27 12:54:57  
-05'00' **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**FHWA Intent to Make a De Minimis Determination conditioned on results of public notice and comment period:**

FHWA Engineer                                          Digitally signed by WILLIAM R  
LOHR  
Date: 2024.09.09 07:55:13 -05'00' **Date** \_\_\_\_\_



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### State Location Map

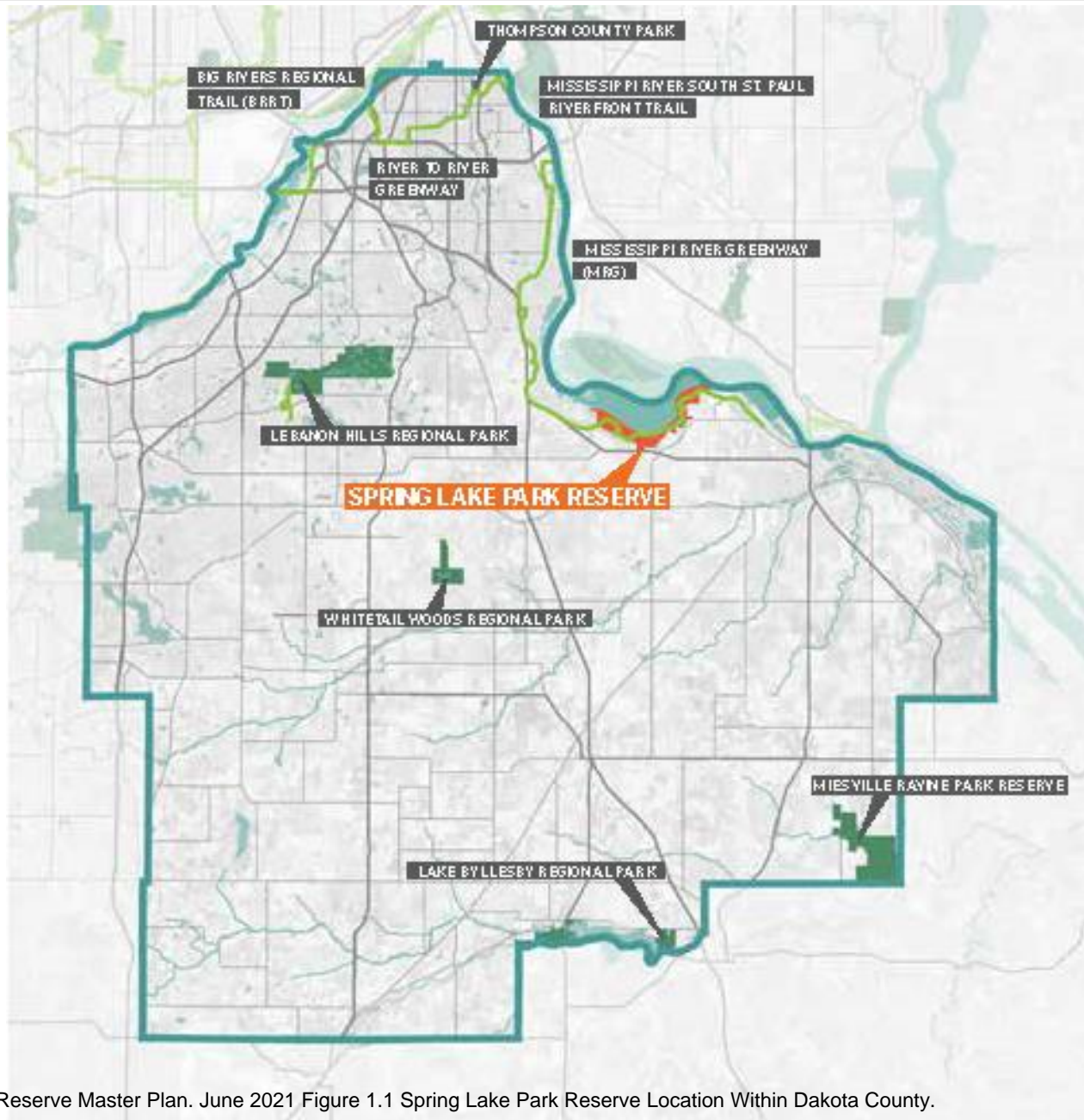
Fischer Ave Trailhead

SP 019-060-006

Dakota County

Figure 1



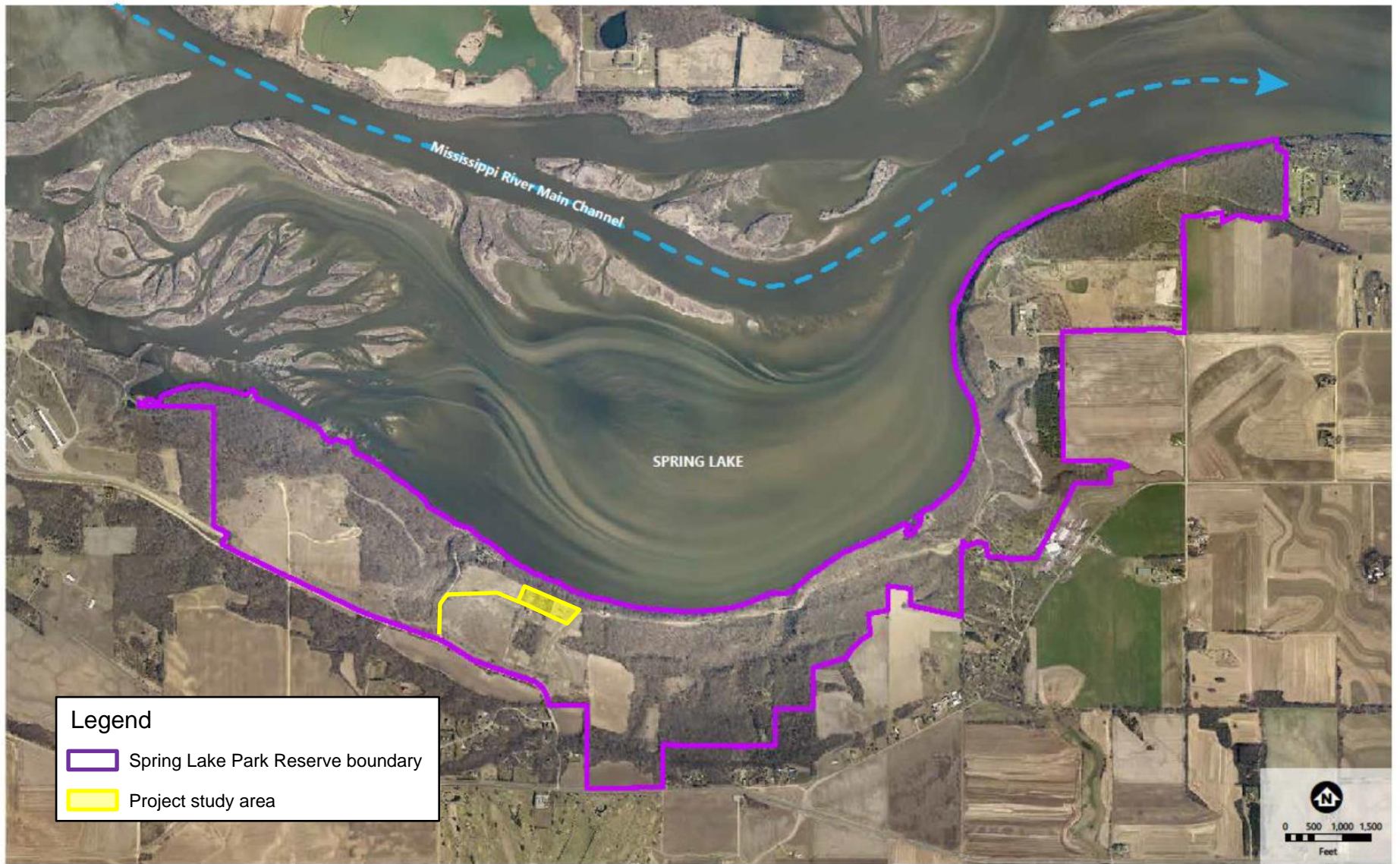


Source: Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan. June 2021 Figure 1.1 Spring Lake Park Reserve Location Within Dakota County.

## Spring Lake Park Reserve Location Within Dakota County

Fischer Avenue Trailhead Project  
Dakota County (SP 019-060-006)

Figure 2



Source: Spring Lake Park Reserve Natural Resources Management Plan. June 2021 Figure 3-1 Mississippi River and Spring Lake.

## Project Location in Spring Lake Park Reserve

Fischer Avenue Trailhead Project  
Dakota County (SP 019-060-006)

Figure 3



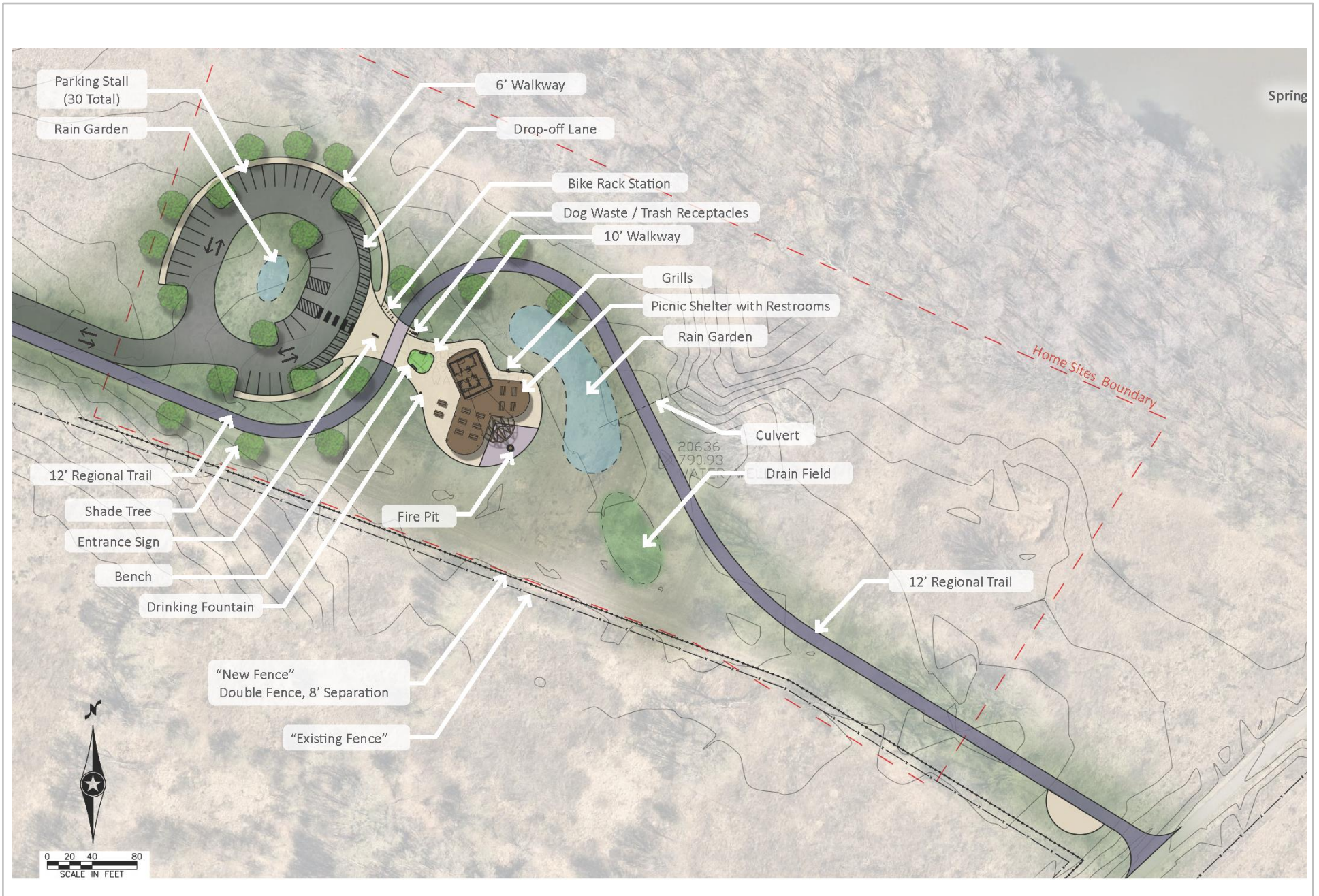


## Fischer Avenue Trailhead Preliminary Site Plan

Fischer Avenue Trailhead Project  
 Dakota County (SP 019-060-006)

Figure 4





**Fischer Avenue Trailhead Preliminary Site Plan (Trailhead Details)**

Fischer Avenue Trailhead Project  
 Dakota County (SP 019-060-006)

**Figure 5**



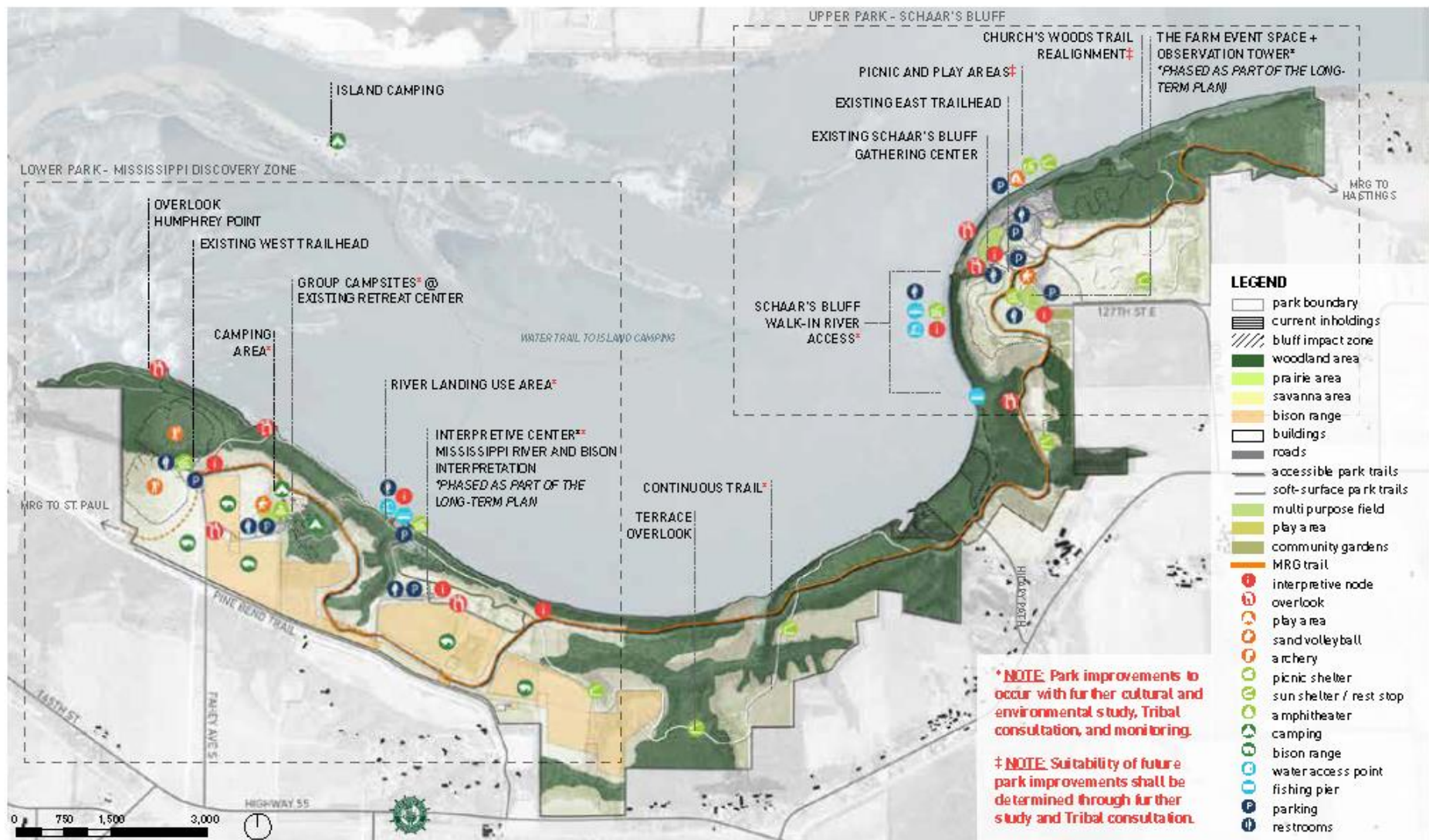


Figure 5.2 Site-wide Concept Plan, Long-Term Development Plan

Source: Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan. June 2021 Figure 5.2 Site-wide Concept Plan, Long-Term Development Plan.

## Spring Lake Park Reserve Long-Term Development Plan

Fischer Avenue Trailhead Project  
Dakota County (SP 019-060-006)

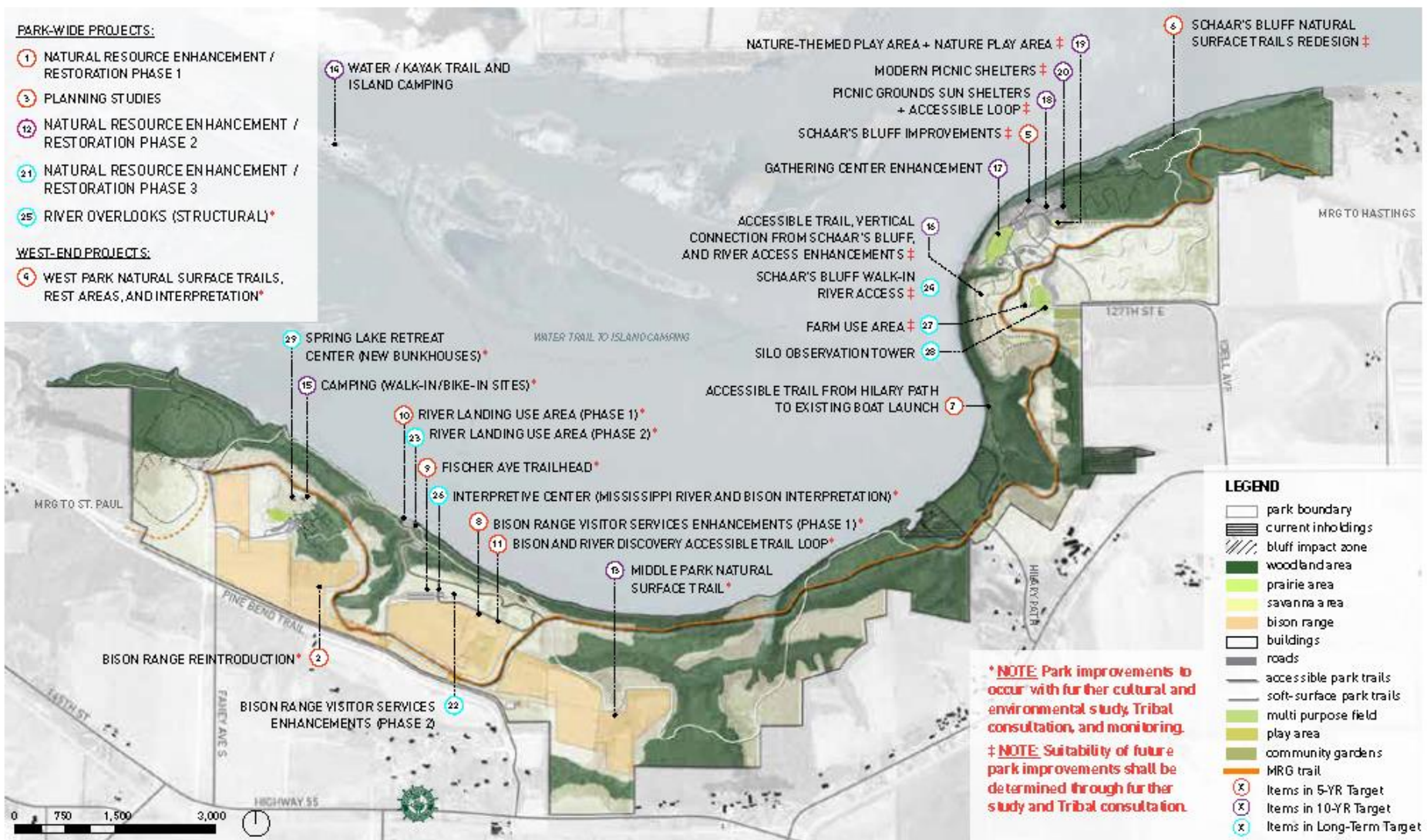


Figure 6.1 Phasing Key Plan

Source: Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan. June 2021 Figure 6.1 Phasing Key Plan.

## Spring Lake Park Reserve Phasing Plan

Fischer Avenue Trailhead Project  
Dakota County (SP 019-060-006)





1 FAHEY AVE S + PINE BEND TRAIL ENTRY



2 FISHER AVE + PINE BEND TRAIL ENTRY



3 HWY 55 + PINE BEND TRAIL ENTRY



4 HILARY PATH + MISSISSIPPI TRAIL / 42



5 IDELL AVE + MISSISSIPPI TRAIL / 42  
MASTER PLAN

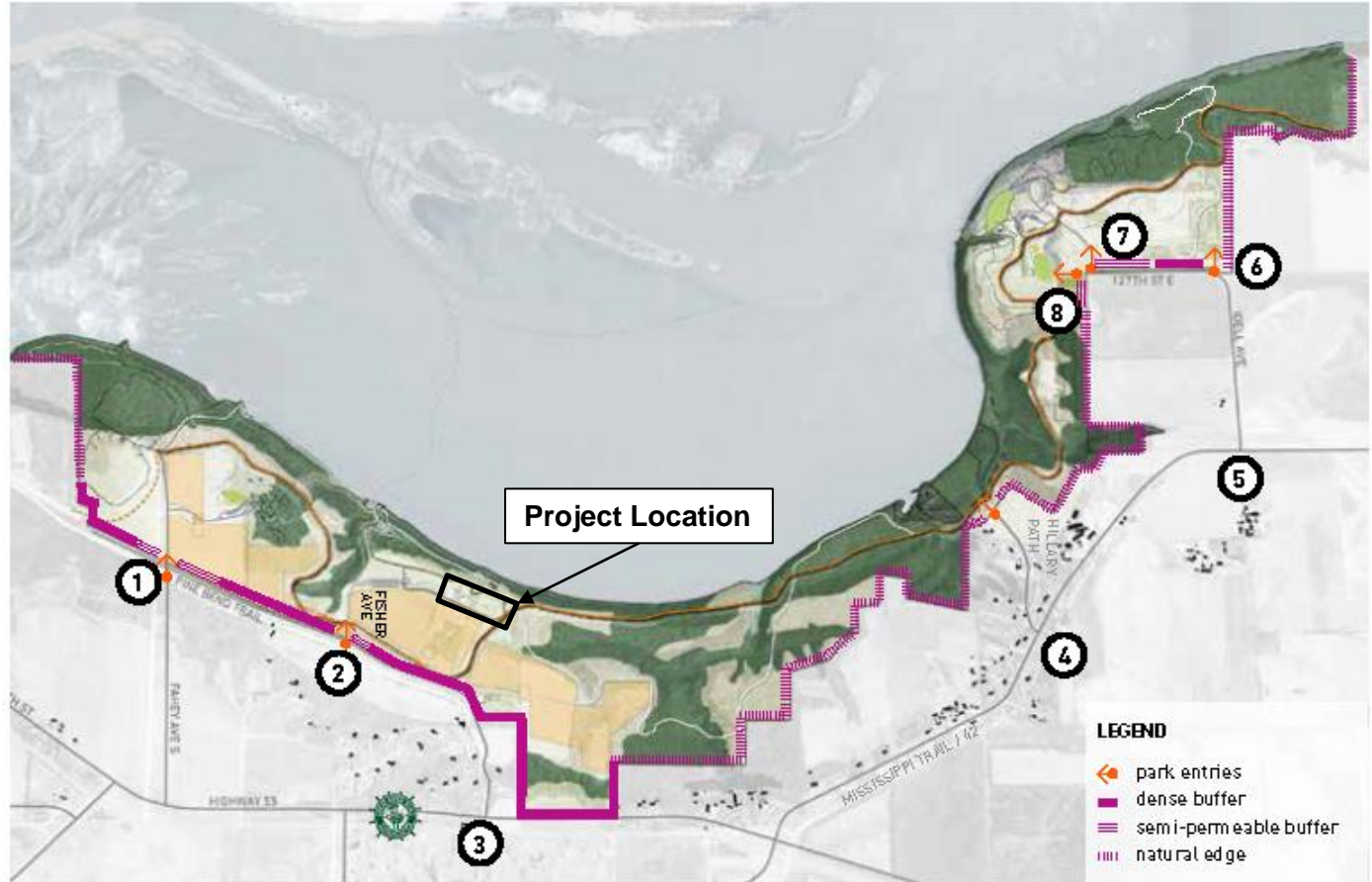


Figure 5.15 Park Setting Plan



6 IDELL AVE ENTRY



7 127TH ST ENTRY



8 127TH ST MAINTENANCE ENTRY

6.22.21 96

Source: Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan. June 2021 Figure 5.15 Park Setting Plan.

## Spring Lake Park Reserve Entry Points

Fischer Avenue Trailhead Project  
Dakota County (SP 019-060-006)

Figure 8