



# Dakota County 2030 Park System Plan:

Great Places  
Connected Places  
Protected Places

Adopted April 2008, Dakota County Board of Commissioners



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# Dakota County 2030 Park System Plan

## *Great Places, Connected Places, Protected Places:*

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# Dakota County Park System Plan Executive Summary

In many ways, the 2008 Dakota County Park System Plan marks a departure from business as usual. Dakota County has a young and evolving park system that can do more and be more for residents and visitors. This plan is about finding new opportunities to realize the potential of one of Dakota County's most remarkable resources — its wonderful park system.

The Dakota County Park System Plan is organized into seven chapters:

1. **Introduction**
2. **System Overview, Research Findings**
3. **System Vision for 2030**  
*Great Places, Connected Places, Protected Places*
4. **Ten-Year Implementation Priorities**
5. **Delivering the Vision**
6. **Funding the Vision**
7. **Performance Measures**

## Why this system plan was prepared... three questions

1. **Where are we now?** As Dakota County's Park System turns 40, it was a great time to look comprehensively at the park system, and listen to what people want and expect from their parks. The outcome – a picture of the current park system with clear needs and opportunities.
2. **Where should we go?** The message came through – people love their parks, but want more things to do, convenient access to parks and trails, and more protection of the County's best resources. In response, a strong and compelling vision for the park system has been developed to define the preferred system and reinforce the Parks Mission: *To enrich lives by providing high quality recreation and education opportunities in harmony with natural resource preservation and stewardship.*
3. **How do we get there?** With a reinvigorated vision, the third step was building a bridge from the current picture to the desired future. New approaches were explored for resource management, funding, recreation, visitor services, and other areas. The plan also identifies priorities for the next 10 years to answer the question "Where do we start?"

## Parks are an integral part of a high quality community

Well-planned, developed, and maintained park systems are essential hallmarks of the best places to live. Parks are hard-working members of the community; they enhance quality of life for residents and make communities healthy and attractive places to live, work, and visit. Parks do everything from teaching young people about the natural world, to infiltrating and cleansing water, to enhancing property values. A good park system provides benefits not just to individual park users, but also to the community as a whole.

### Parks Provide Many Essential Benefits...



- ✓ **Vital Green Space**
- ✓ **Healthy Physical Activity**
- ✓ **Stress Relief**
- ✓ **Social Interaction**
- ✓ **Education**
- ✓ **Structured Recreation**
- ✓ **Wildlife Habitat**
- ✓ **Landscape and Ecosystem Preservation**
- ✓ **Enhanced Water Quality**
- ✓ **Economic Growth and Vitality**
- ✓ **Framework for Development**
- ✓ **Public Open Space Tradition**

## Thinking broadly: how the Park System Plan fits with other planning efforts

This plan was prepared in coordination with other plans and reflects strategic goals from these initiatives:

### **DC2030: Planning for the Future**

#### **Dakota County Comprehensive Plan, DC2030**

This Parks System Plan is a chapter of the Dakota County 2030 Comprehensive Land Use Plan, which prepares for orderly growth and change in the County. Community stakeholders developed Five Guiding Principles as ideals that should shape the future of Dakota County. These principles also guided the Park System Plan:

***Promote Sustainability***  
***Connect***  
***Collaborate***  
***Stimulate Economic Vitality***  
***Grow and Nurture People***



#### **Active Living Goals:**

Many people don't meet the U.S. Surgeon General's recommendation for 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week and our built environments are part of the problem. Dakota County's collaborative Active Living study is challenging this trend in two ways:

- 1) Identify barriers that impede walking or biking
- 2) Incorporate standards into local plans that remove barriers to walking and biking, rather than promoting reliance on cars

The Park System Plan's proposed greenways and trails remove barriers to physical activity in key greenway corridors that link popular destinations, such as schools, parks, and athletic complexes.

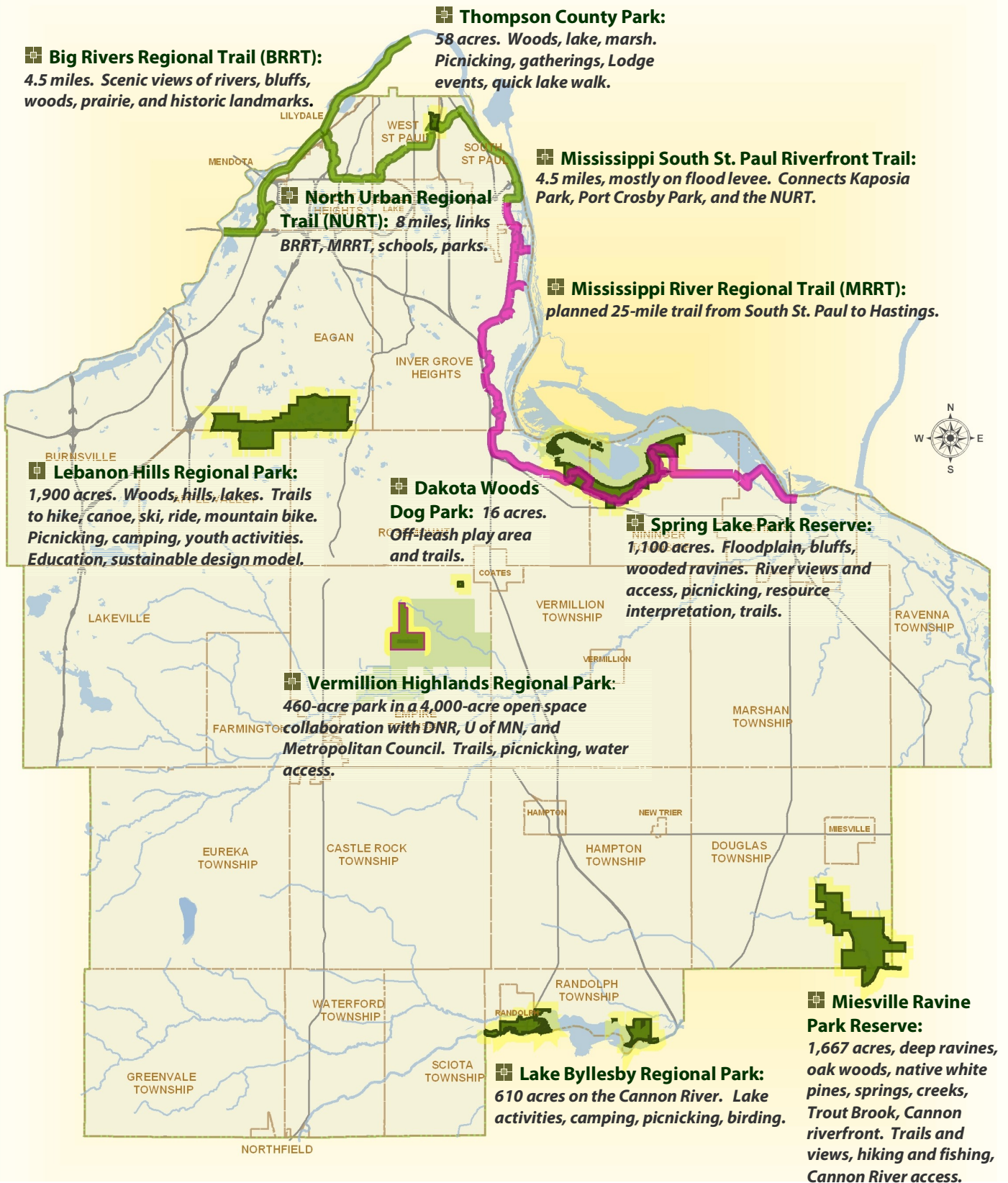
#### **Dakota County Aging Initiative:**

The average age of Dakota County's population is increasing, a trend that influences how the County should provide services. The Park System vision proposes investment into recreation facilities like shorter paved trail loops that improve accessibility for people of all ages and abilities.

#### **Farmland and Natural Areas Program, Green Infrastructure Plan, Vermillion River Corridor Plan:**

All three efforts seek long-term protection of the County's natural resources and natural infrastructure in advance of ongoing land use change and development. These efforts are essential partners for the Park System vision of long-term protection of Dakota County's southern stream and natural resource corridors.

## Inventory of Dakota County Parks and Trails



## Dakota County Park System research highlights

### **Park Geography:**

- ♦ Residents request more regional trails and better trail access to parks.
- ♦ Dakota County's population is growing and expected to increase 45 percent by 2030.
- ♦ Dakota County has fewer regional park acres per capita than other regional agencies.
- ♦ Few large natural parks exist in northern Dakota County; few opportunities remain.
- ♦ One regional park (Lebanon Hills) is in the urban area where most residents live.
- ♦ There are opportunities to add paved trails around lakes in Dakota County; very few exist now.
- ♦ Most parks in Dakota County (city and county) currently are not interconnected.

### **Natural and Cultural Resources:**

- ♦ Dakota County has outstanding landscape and ecosystem variety because of its location at the convergence of three of Minnesota's major ecosystems and two of its major rivers.
- ♦ Parks have some of the County's best resource lands, but also have degraded landscapes needing restoration. Few landscapes have been managed due to limitations; new approaches are needed.
- ♦ Invasive species are a threat; new strategies are needed.
- ♦ All parks have flooding and water quality issues.
- ♦ Park boundaries often do not adequately protect natural features (ravines, streams).
- ♦ Residents strongly support natural resource protection.
- ♦ Scenic views are important to visitors and should be protected.
- ♦ Opportunities exist for cultural resource interpretation.

### **Recreation and Visitation:**

- ♦ Dakota County residents want more things to do in Dakota County Parks.
- ♦ The most popular regional park activities include walking and hiking, scenic views, biking, swimming, picnicking, fishing, and education opportunities.
- ♦ Dakota County Parks have fewer paved trails and picnicking facilities than most regional parks.
- ♦ Dakota County has lower park visitation than expected.
- ♦ Residents express interest in park events: concerts, festivals, and community events.

### **Park Operations:**

- ♦ Some residents are not aware of the County Park System. Marketing efforts have been limited.
- ♦ Dakota County has expanded services and facilities over the past few years, resulting in new staffing roles and needs. Staffing should be comprehensively evaluated and addressed.

### **Park Funding:**

- ♦ Dakota County has faced challenges in funding planned improvements and park operations.

## Dakota County Vision for Parks, Greenways, and Trails

The message came through – people enjoy their parks, but want **more things to do, convenient access to parks and trails**, and **more protection of the County's best resources**. It was time to rethink how parks are provided and the result is a new three-fold vision that builds on the things people requested most:

**Great Places, Connected Places, and Protected Places**



# 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

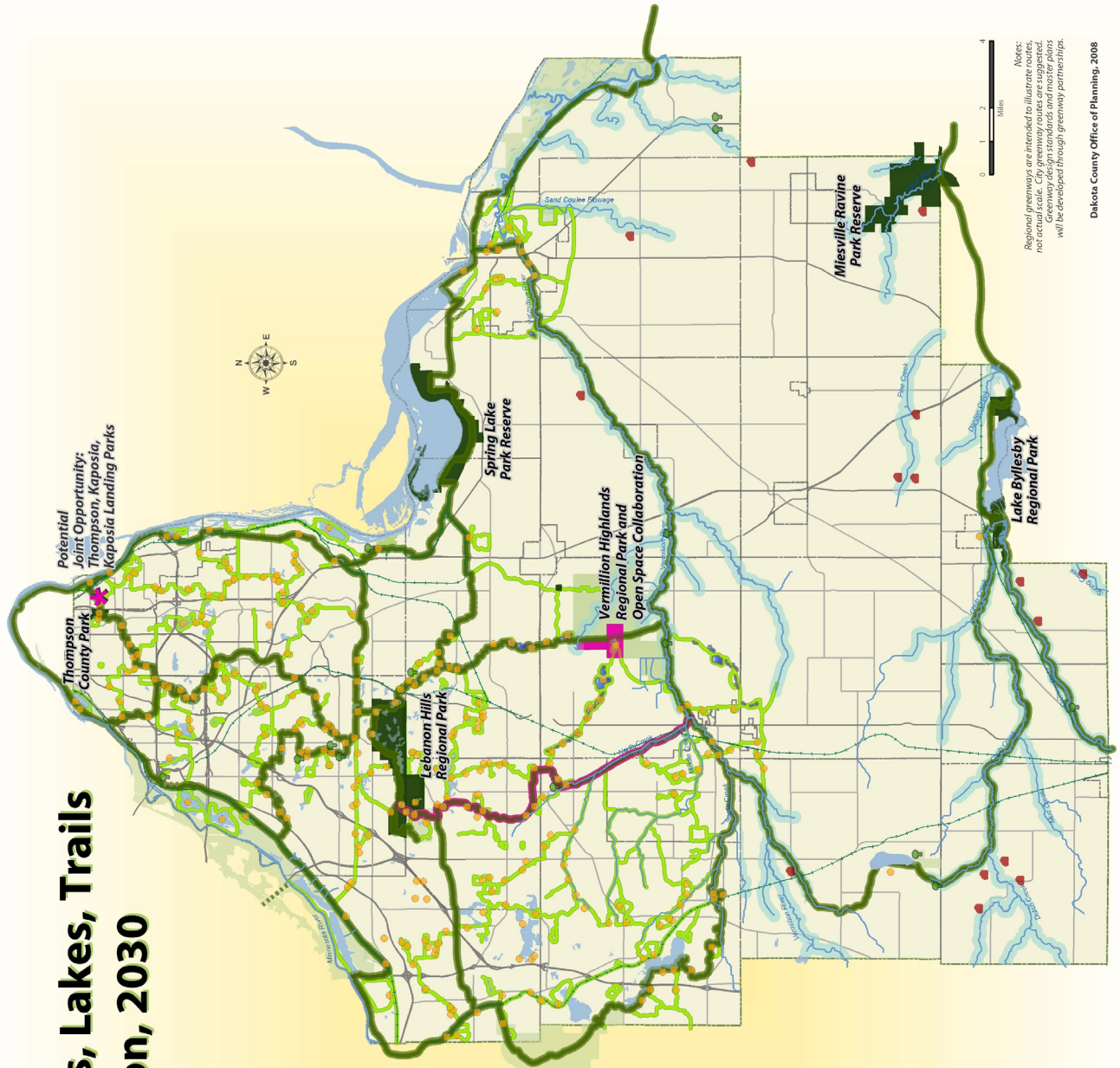
- \* "Bring parks to people" --- Linear parks connect parks, schools, lake trails, playgrounds, libraries, and the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers.
- \* Walking, biking, and in-line skating
- \* Public agencies work together to create 200 miles of greenways using mostly publicly-owned land.

### 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 (FNAP)
- Private/Public Protected Natural Areas (FNAP)
- Potential Rail to Trail Opportunities



Notes:  
 Regional greenways are intended to illustrate routes, not actual scale. City greenway routes are suggested.  
 Greenway design standards and master plans will be developed through greenway partnerships.

## Great Places:

*More to see and do at Dakota County's remarkable parks*

*Adding a new great place to the system —  
Vermillion Highlands Regional Park*



Priorities for the next 10 years include:

### Getting back to the basics

Add more of the most popular nature-based recreation to all parks, including:

- ♦ Walking, including shorter paved loops
- ♦ Hiking and trailheads
- ♦ Biking to and through parks
- ♦ Picnicking
- ♦ Places to sit and enjoys views, watch the world go by
- ♦ Signs to get people where they want to go



### Activities that build on memorable places

Add signature activities that harmonize with the setting:

- ♦ Winter activity area
- ♦ Places to celebrate and gather for festivals and community events
- ♦ River canoe launch and river access docks
- ♦ Swimming and water play areas
- ♦ History and archaeology interpretive trail



### New Regional Park, new partnerships

- ♦ Vermillion Highlands, the planned 460-acre new park in Empire Township, is part of an innovative 4,000-acre open space partnership with the U of MN, and the DNR.
- ♦ More opportunities – South St. Paul and Dakota County will discuss possible benefits of collaborating on a regional park that includes Thompson County Park, Kaposia Park, Port Crosby, and parts of two regional trails.



### Great services, great information

- ♦ People can't enjoy the parks if they don't know about them, so Dakota County is doing more to get the word out about their remarkable parks, activities, and events.
- ♦ Streamlined service for facility rentals, classes, and permits.



## Connected Places:

*Collaborative city and county greenways can “bring parks to people.”*

*Greenways connect and enhance habitat, stream corridors, and natural areas.*



### “Park meets trail” in the Greenway concept —linear parks

- ♦ **Greenways connect people and places:** parks, schools, athletic complexes, libraries, lake loop trails, and scenic areas along the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers. By the numbers, regional and city greenways could connect
  - More than 100 ponds and small lakes
  - 67 schools and their grounds
  - 115 parks
  - More than 320 open space places
- ♦ Greenways can deliver the activities that people most often request– **hiking, walking, biking, inline skating** – in a convenient highly accessible network.



**Greenways Connect Places  
Where People Want to Go**

### Greenways provide many benefits but require little land

- ♦ **Greenways can protect natural areas, habitat, stream corridors, and water quality.** As green corridors landscaped with native plants, greenways offer a more natural experience than traditional roadside trails.
- ♦ **Greenways can borrow big views:** the Big Rivers Regional Trail (Eagan to Lilydale) uses fewer than 20 acres of land, but offers wide vistas of thousands of acres along the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers and their confluence.
- ♦ **Greenways are a great way to “bring parks to people”** in developed areas, where opportunities for large regional parks may no longer exist.



## Greenways are a collaborative effort

- ♦ Dakota County will **collaborate with cities, schools, and townships** to build a greenway network much like the road hierarchy (city greenways, regional greenways).
- ♦ **Greenways are efficient:** 78% of the land needed for the example greenway system is already in public ownership (schools, parks, ponding areas, right of way).
- ♦ A Greenway Collaborative with Dakota County, cities, townships, school districts, and others can develop a **model for greenway operations and funding** and prepare a master plan.
- ♦ Dakota County's priorities include **52 miles of regional greenways over the next 10 years.** The entire system (city and regional) could include more than 200 miles of greenways over time.



## Protected Places:

Protect and manage natural and cultural resources in Dakota County's parks.

Collaborate on "green infrastructure" — stream corridors, connected natural areas and open space.



## Priorities for the next 10 years include:

### A healthier mosaic of ecosystems and waterways in Dakota County Parks

- ♦ **Restore landscapes near visitor areas on 500 acres**, where people will see it.  
Lake Byllesby (50 acres), Lebanon Hills (350 acres), Spring Lake (100 acres)
- ♦ **Improve quality on 1,200 acres**, to stabilize and maintain.  
Restore cropland (500 acres)  
Restore remnant oak savanna, prairie, wetland, and forest (500 acres)  
Manage savannas and prairies that have already been restored (227 acres)
- ♦ **Protect natural diversity and heritage sites on 170 acres**, to protect the irreplaceable.  
Manage 6 uncommon and rare habitat sites  
Manage 15 cultural heritage sites for preservation, interpretation
- ♦ **Manage resources sustainably**, to protect investments and target highest needs.  
Manage newly restored lands, up to 2,000 acres over 10 years  
Minimally manage areas with low potential for restoration (up to 3,325 acres)

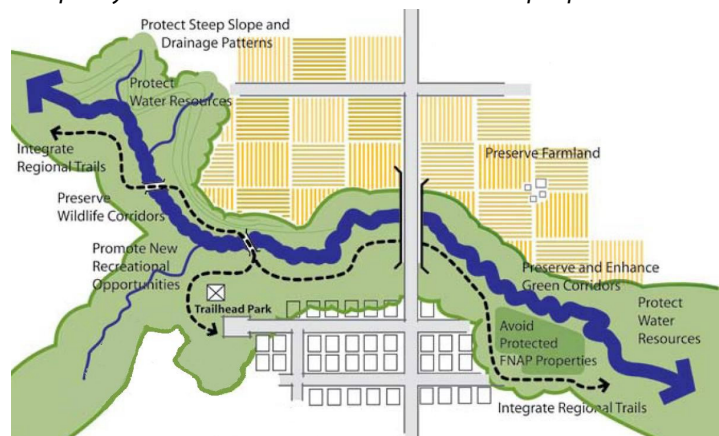
### Collaborating with others to protect Dakota County's "Green Infrastructure"

- ♦ **What is Green Infrastructure?** The Conservation Fund and USDA Forest Service's Green Infrastructure Work Group defines green infrastructure as follows:

*"Green infrastructure is our nation's natural life support system — an interconnected network of waterways, wetlands, woodlands, wildlife habitats, and other natural areas; greenways, parks and other conservation lands; working farms, ranches and forests; and wilderness and other open spaces that support native species, maintain natural ecological processes, sustain air and water resources and contribute to the health and quality of life for America's communities and people."*

- ♦ **Dakota County will work with others to:**

- 1) Identify high quality public-value lands that contribute to a healthy green infrastructure
- 2) Develop resources and approaches to continue working with public and private landowners.



## Vision for Park System Operations

### High Priority: Complete a marketing plan to build awareness, inform and engage the public

**Awareness:** residents know Dakota County Parks as a park system worth visiting

**Information:** Just as greenways bring parks to people and create “a park system you bump into,” information on parks, events, and activities should be right in front of people – accessible and easy to find.

**Public Engagement:** Dakota County will inclusively and regularly engage residents and park visitors to address their needs and interests. Engagement will further welcome those who wish to lend their support through advocacy, volunteerism, and fundraising.

### High Priority: Complete an operations plan to build greater capacity as a park agency, with

**Well-defined roles, expectations, procedures, and priorities**

**Efficient organizational structure:** resources, skills, and staffing

**Improved operating processes**

**Timely communication** and staff engagement

**Sustainability, leadership, innovation, continuous learning, and networking**

**Flexibility** to accommodate change and realize opportunities

## Funding the Park System

Estimated costs for the system vision are \$98M. Park system goals were prioritized to answer the question, “Where should the park system be by its 50<sup>th</sup> year?” Estimated costs for 10-year priorities are \$52M.

	Recreation	Regional Trails	Parkland Acquisition	Natural Resource Restoration	Operations
<b>Ten-Year Priority Costs, Estimated Total: \$52M</b>	\$19.8M	\$6.7M (County) \$13.6M (Federal, Local)	\$19.7M	\$5.9M	To be determined
<b>Park System Vision Costs, Estimated Total: \$98M</b>	\$43.5M	\$10.1M (County) \$22.9M (Federal, Local)	\$35.2M	\$9.1M	To be determined

### Funding the Dakota County Park System in three ways:

- ♦ **Increase Dakota County investment** to advance the Park and Open Space System
- ♦ **Develop and expand strategic partnerships** to advance the Park and Open Space System
- ♦ **Increase external revenues** to advance the Park and Open Space System

Existing funding accommodates 40 percent of the 10-year costs. Increased County investment strategies could fund an additional 35 percent of the vision, and will be reviewed during annual budgeting processes. Approximately 25 percent of the 10-year vision is unfunded. More strategies will be considered for narrowing the funding gap, including state bonding and state dedicated funding for conservation.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

### Why this system plan was prepared...

The purpose of this update to the Dakota County Park System Plan was to answer three questions:

- 1. Where are we now?** The first step evaluated the direction, performance, and needs of the Dakota County Park System. This checkup looked at all aspects of the system, from natural resource health to park visitation, and identified clear needs and new opportunities. The evaluation yielded a picture of the current system and described how well it is meeting public expectations.
- 2. Where should we go?** The second step was establishing a strong and compelling vision for the park system, based on public interests and realities and opportunities identified during evaluation. This vision defines the preferred system and reinforces the Parks Mission:

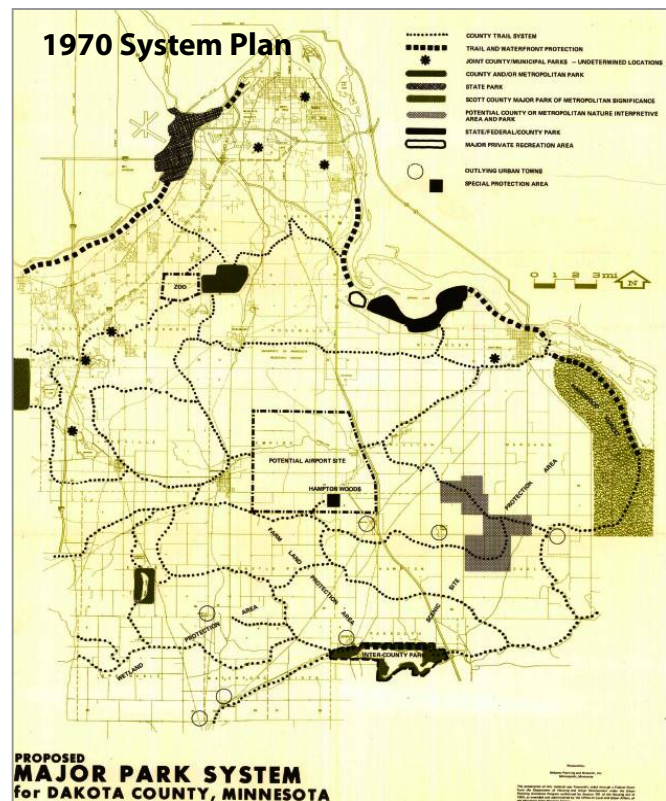
*To enrich lives by providing high quality recreation and education opportunities in harmony with natural resource preservation and stewardship.*

- 3. How do we get there?** With a reinvigorated vision, the third step was constructing strategies to build a bridge from the current picture to the desired future. New ideas and approaches were explored for resource management, funding, recreation, visitor services, and other areas. The plan also identifies priorities for the next 10 years to answer the question “Where do we start?”

### Dakota County Parks in its 40<sup>th</sup> year ... where should it be at age 50?

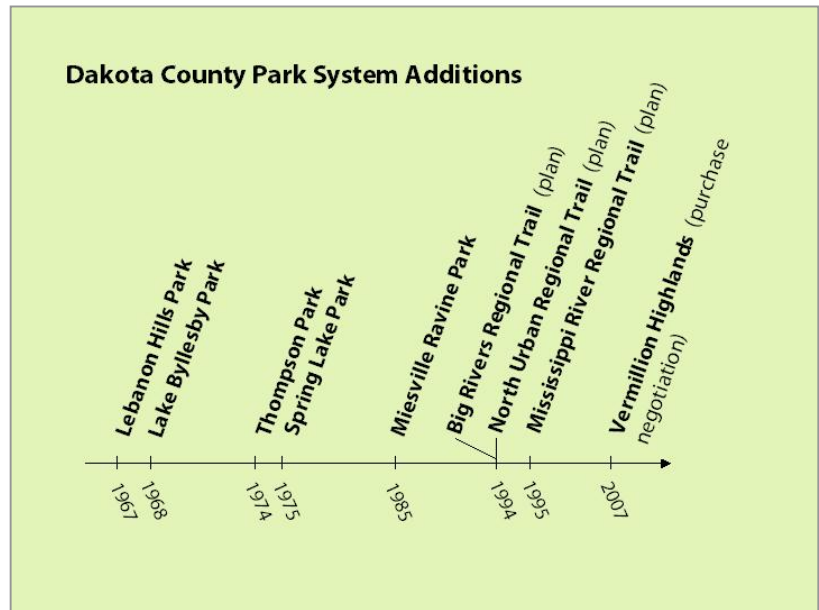
Dakota County has a young park system that acquired its first 82 acres of parkland at Holland-Jensen Lakes in 1967. The first Park System Plan was prepared in 1970 to identify new parks and set a vision for a true park system that would protect open space and the County's highest quality natural areas. By 1970, several cities in Dakota County had established park systems; Minneapolis and St. Paul already had been designing and operating parks for a century. Suburban Hennepin Parks (now Three Rivers Park District) had acquired and restored nearly 21,000 acres of parkland and was developing recreation facilities.

Dakota County's parks now include 4,600 acres, five parks, and three regional trails. More than half of County residents live within three miles of a County park. Vermillion Highlands Regional Park is planned in Empire Township. All park master plans have been updated within the past six years, and plan implementation has begun or progressed at several parks.



Close to 900,000 park visits take place each year, 40 years after Dakota County's first parkland acquisition.

As the Park System turns 40, it is a good time to ask if the park system is meeting public expectations now and re-evaluate how well the system will serve future residents. In a time of increasing demands on County services, funding constraints, growing pains, and planned park improvements, it also is timely to develop realistic strategies to create the desired parks system with adequate operating capacity and protection of past investments in the system.



### **Evolution and progress since the 2001 Park System Plan**

Although parks project a timeless quality, they are evolving systems that change over time and mirror change in their communities. The last park system plan was written in 2001 to evaluate new needs related to Dakota County's rapid growth and to guide the first round of master plan updates for each park in the system.

The 2001 plan recommended a *balanced* system, with good geographic distribution and connectivity to improve park and trail access for all residents. Balance also means that each park and trail should offer the most popular kinds of nature-based recreation as well as unique activities that reflect the landscapes and special qualities of each place. The 2001 plan set a clear vision for each park to reinforce its character and role in the system and identified key goals for the park system as a whole.

The 2001 plan has served its primary purpose; all park master plans have been updated to provide a contemporary vision for each park. Clear progress also has been achieved on several major system recommendations:

#### **→ Serve a growing County population and more regional visitors**

##### **Progress since 2001:**

New visitor facilities have been added:

- ♦ Lebanon Hills Visitor Center, a sustainably designed "green" building, home base for education programs.
- ♦ Dakota Lodge and Senior Center, in partnership with West St. Paul.
- ♦ Spring Lake Gathering Center, a sustainably designed "green" building and visitor area that celebrates the rich cultural heritage of the park.



*Lebanon Hills Visitor Center*



→ **Include new parks to meet demand**

**Progress since 2001:**

- ♦ An innovative collaboration to protect about 4,000 acres of open space on the Vermillion River was planned by Dakota County, the DNR, the University of MN, and Metropolitan Council. The 460-acre Vermillion Highlands Regional Park is part of this partnership.
- ♦ Dakota Woods Dog Park opened in 2004.



*Vermillion Highlands Park Property*

→ **Consider water management implications in all parks**

**Progress since 2001:**

- ♦ Dakota County and partnering cities are implementing the Lebanon Hills Stormwater Management Plan under a joint powers agreement.
- ♦ Water management issues were considered in all park master plan updates.



*Flooding at Lebanon Hills*

→ **Build and connect planned trails, bikeways, and parks**

**Progress since 2001:**

- ♦ Funding is secured for 15 of the 20 miles of the Mississippi River Regional Trail and the first segments will be built in 2008.
- ♦ The Big Rivers Regional Trail was extended south to I-494 and north through Lilydale Regional Park with the City of St. Paul and National Park Service.
- ♦ Two segments of the North Urban Regional Trail were built; a final segment remains



*River View from MRRT corridor*

→ **Complete parkland acquisition**

**Progress since 2001:**

- ♦ 234 acres of parkland have been acquired; 747 acres remain to be acquired.



*Acquisition at Miesville*

→ **Provide education and self-guided interpretation**

**Progress since 2001:**

- ♦ Dakota County's Outdoor Education program launched in 1999. Since 2001 more than 30,000 participants have attended a program in Dakota County Parks.
- ♦ The Gathering Center in Spring Lake Park Reserve includes a cultural interpretive trail highlighting 8,000 years of human visitation to the area.

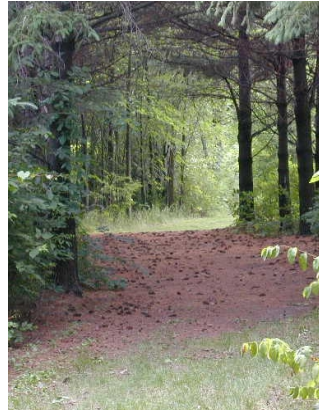


*Lakeshore learning*

## ***Parks are an integral part of high quality community***

Well-planned, developed, and maintained park systems are essential hallmarks of the best places to live. Parks are hard-working members of the community, fulfilling many important roles that enhance quality of life for residents and make communities healthy and attractive places to live, work, and visit. Parks do everything from teaching young people about the natural world, to infiltrating and cleansing water, to enhancing property values. The benefits of parks accrue not just to individual park users, but also to the community as a whole.

### **Parks Provide Many Essential Benefits...**



- ✓ Vital Green Space
- ✓ Healthy Physical Activity
- ✓ Stress Relief
- ✓ Social Interaction
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Structured Recreation
- ✓ Wildlife Habitat
- ✓ Landscape and Ecosystem Preservation
- ✓ Enhanced Water Quality
- ✓ Economic Growth and Vitality
- ✓ Framework for

Dakota County's mission is to provide efficient, effective, responsive government that achieves the following vision for Dakota County:

***a premier place in which to live and work.***

Many things contribute to making a premier place to live and work, but the truly defining elements of great places comprise a shorter list. Vibrant, healthy park systems are on the short list of defining elements.

“There are no great cities in North America or elsewhere in the world which do not have great park, recreation, and cultural systems.”

*John Crompton  
Texas A & M University*

## ***How this Park System Plan fits with other contemporary planning efforts***

This plan was prepared in coordination with other plans and reflects the strategic goals from the following initiatives:

### **DC2030: Planning for the Future**

#### **Dakota County Comprehensive Plan, DC2030**

This Parks System Plan is a chapter within the Dakota County 2030 Comprehensive Land Use Plan, which is undergoing a 10-year update to prepare for orderly growth and change in the County. An extensive Comp Plan visioning process in 2006 identified a desired direction for land use, transportation, housing, environment, natural resources, open space, and recreation. To frame the DC2030 visioning process, an Advisory Panel with public and private sector leaders from across the County developed five overarching **Guiding Principles** as key ideals that should shape the future of Dakota County. These principles also form the foundation of the Park System Plan and are interwoven throughout this plan.

## DC2030 Guiding Principles:

**Promote Sustainability:** People live comfortably in friendly, clean, and healthy communities without placing environmental, economic, and social burdens on current and future generations.

### ***Sustainability in the Dakota County Park System***

- ♦ Sustainability is fundamental in facility design, maintenance, and operations. Examples include sustainable (non-eroding) trails, green buildings at Spring Lake and Lebanon Hills, and a wind turbine at Spring Lake.
- ♦ Greenways will enhance natural systems (water, ecosystems, open space, carbon storage) and make it easier for Dakota County residents to choose walking and bicycling.

**Connect:** Economic, social, and natural systems are interconnected and our natural systems should be managed with as much thought and effort that is given to human-made infrastructure.

### ***Connectedness in the Dakota County Park System***

- ♦ Greenways link public open space and bring people to popular places: local parks, athletic fields, schools, lakes, ponds, neighborhoods, regional parks, and regional trails.
- ♦ Today's children are tomorrow's stewards of our priceless natural world, yet many have little direct contact with natural settings. Outdoor and environmental education programs provide children with hands-on experience with nature, to provide them opportunities they may not otherwise have, and to build their connection to nature.

**Collaborate:** The public and private sectors coordinate their efforts toward natural resource, open space, and recreation goals. Limited resources are maximized through increased collaboration.

### ***Collaboration in the Dakota County Park System***

- ♦ Multi-agency collaboration is the foundation of the greenway network, shared resource protection, regional trails, and park programming.

**Stimulate Economic Vitality:** A high quality environment with functioning natural systems and public open space contributes to a community's identity and overall desirability. Recognize interrelationships between economic growth and protection of natural resources, open spaces, and recreation.

### ***Economic Vitality in the Dakota County Park System***

- ♦ Large regional parks, new parks, and greenways contribute directly to economic vitality by enhancing community attractiveness and property values.
- ♦ Economic benefits from green infrastructure planning include water management, direction of growth to the most suitable areas, and protection of irreplaceable natural resources.

**Grow and Nurture People:** Preserve, enhance, and create environments where people of all ages, incomes, and backgrounds can thrive — physically, intellectually, socially, and economically.

**Growing and Nurturing People in the Dakota County Park System**

- ♦ Parks provide much needed nature experiences, especially for today’s and tomorrow’s children.
- ♦ Park improvements will increase accessibility and appeal to more people.
- ♦ Education programs enhance appreciation of the natural world and healthy recreation, inspiring stewardship of self, natural resources, and the environment.
- ♦ Greenways encourage active lifestyles by bringing parks close to where people live and work.



**Active Living Partnership:**

Many people are not meeting the U.S. Surgeon General’s recommendation for 30 minutes of physical activity five days a week; health issues related to sedentary lifestyles are on the rise. Our built environments are a major part of the problem. Congested multi-lane roads, lack of sidewalks, and unsafe or uninviting pedestrian environments combine with busy lifestyles to discourage the simple act of taking a walk. Inactivity comes with a price; for the first time in U.S. history, today’s generation of children is predicted to have shorter life expectancies than their parents. The Active Living study is challenging this trend in two ways:

- 1) Identify barriers that prevent people from walking or biking
- 2) Incorporate physical standards into local plans that remove these barriers to encourage walking and biking rather than promoting reliance on cars

The Park System Plan’s proposed greenways and trails remove barriers to physical activity in key greenway corridors that link common and popular destinations, such as schools, parks, and athletic complexes.

**Dakota County Aging Initiative:**

The average age of Dakota County’s population is increasing, a trend that influences how the County should provide services. The Park System vision proposes additional investment into “basic” recreation facilities, such as short paved trail loops in parks and other amenities that improve accessibility and usability for people of all ages and abilities. Dakota County is also considering outdoor and environmental education programs designed for older adults.

**Farmland and Natural Areas Program, Green Infrastructure Plan, Vermillion River Corridor Plan:**

All three efforts seek long-term protection of the County’s natural resources and natural infrastructure in advance of ongoing land use change and development. These efforts are essential partners for the Park System vision of long-term protection and potential recreation opportunities in Dakota County’s southern stream corridors.

## Chapter 2. Overview of the Dakota County Park System

### The Dakota County Park System:



#### **Regional Parks**

- Lebanon Hills
- Lake Byllesby
- Vermillion Highlands
- (Planned addition)

#### **Park Reserves**

- Spring Lake
- Miesville Ravine

#### **County Parks**

- Thompson
- Dakota Woods Dog Park

#### **Regional Trails**

- Big Rivers
- Mississippi River
- North Urban

Dakota County's regional parks are larger than 200 acres and offer nature-based activities. Reserves play a similar role, with an emphasis on resource quality and a development limitation of 20 percent of park acreage. County parks are smaller than 200 acres and are not part of the regional system.

## **The Dakota County Parks Mission:**

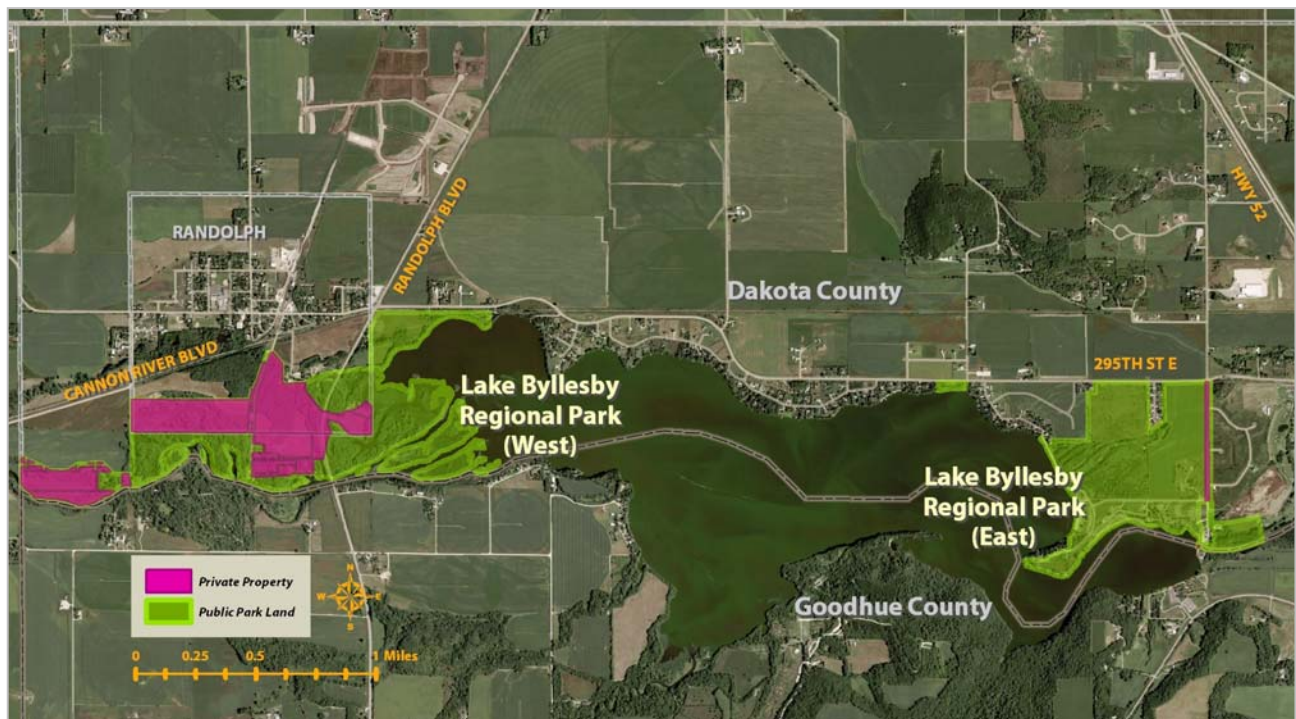
*To enrich lives by providing high quality recreation and education opportunities  
in harmony with natural resource preservation and stewardship.*

## **Dakota County's Parks:**

### **Lake Byllesby Regional Park:**

Lake Byllesby Park is on Dakota County's southern border on the shores of Lake Byllesby and the Cannon River. Lake Byllesby is the largest water body in the south metro and has been a recreational resource since its formation in 1910 by the Byllesby Dam. The hydroelectric dam on the Cannon River is on park property and still produces power.

Lake Byllesby Park has two noncontiguous sections, on the east and west ends of the lake. The east park is near Cannon Falls and is developed and intensively used. Its most notable feature is Echo Point, a peninsula extending westward into Lake Byllesby. The east park is relatively flat except for the river gorge just below the dam. The west park is south of the City of Randolph and not been developed. The west park contains wetlands, floodplain forests, and small areas of native prairie. Topography in the west park also is relatively flat, although mining in the early 1900s created small areas of irregular, rolling landscape. The west park has mill ruins dating back to the nineteenth century, when the town of Cascade was platted but not developed.



**2006 Visitation: 90,100**

**Park Size: 462 acres acquired  
148 acres yet to acquire**

**Recreation:** Facilities and activities include:

- Boat launch
- Cross-country skiing and ski skating
- Fishing and ice fishing
- Hiking and nature trails
- Picnic areas with water and bathrooms
- Playground
- Swimming beach and beach house
- Tent and RV campground



*View of Bluffs from Echo Point,  
East Lake Byllesby*

**2005 Master Plan Theme and Future Facilities:**

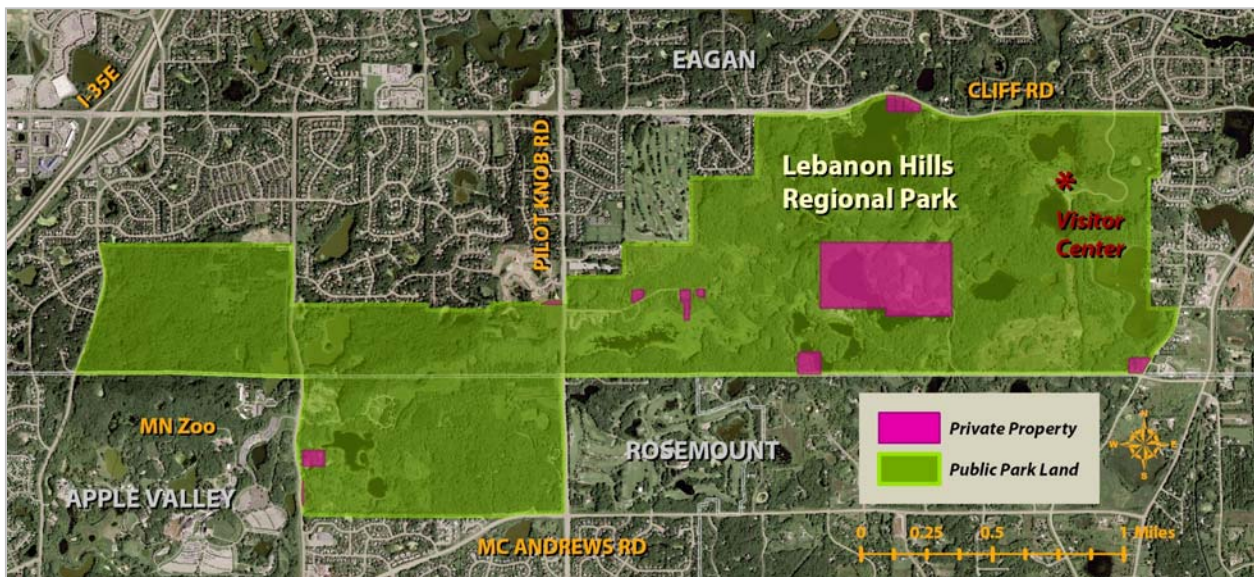
**Lakeside Park** — With a bridge connection between the park’s planned segment of the Mill Towns Trail and the Cannon Valley Trail, Byllesby Park will be a recreational base for the Cannon River Valley. The master plan emphasizes the east park, with lake and lakeside activities, group recreation, and diverse activities to appeal to overnight campers. Camping is popular in the park, and it will remain a predominant and visible use.

Activity centers planned for the east park include an inland swimming lagoon and/or splash pad, more picnicking on Echo Point (pavilion, small shelters), boat launch area near the dam, campground, day activities (disc golf, mini golf), and a future Visitor Center. The west park is the “quiet side,” with opportunities for nature immersion, exploration, and interpretation. A Mill Towns trailhead, picnic grounds, canoe takeout, and residential learning center are planned activity centers for the west park.

**Park-Defining Recreational Activities:** Lake-based activities (viewing, boating, swimming, wading), camping, biking, picnicking on the point.

**Lebanon Hills Regional Park:**

Lebanon Hills is in Eagan and Apple Valley adjacent to the Minnesota Zoo. Park landscapes are predominantly oak woodland, with smaller areas of open prairie, shrubland, floodplain forest, upland hardwoods, and tamarack bog. The park has 10 lakes covering more than 10 acres as well as dozens of smaller ponds. Deer and other wildlife are abundant in the park. Geologically, Lebanon Hills has a terminal moraine landscape and gently rolling terrain.



**2006 Visitation:** 460,800

**Park Size:** 1,842 acres acquired  
101 acres yet to acquire

**Recreation:** Facilities and activities include:

- Canoe trail and non motorized boating
- Cross-country skiing and ski skating
- Discovery interpretive trail
- Fishing and ice fishing
- Hiking and nature trails
- Horseback trails
- Mountain biking trail
- Picnic areas and playground
- Retreat lodge with camping and ropes course
- Sustainably designed Visitor Center
- Swimming beach
- Tent and RV campground



*Lebanon Hills Visitor Center  
Green Roof with late summer colors*

**2001 Master Plan Theme and Activities:**

**Urban Natural Retreat** — Sustainably designed, urban natural retreat offers a variety of passive activities, emphasizing trails and programming. A rustic setting of glacial lakes and woods alternates with restored savanna and prairie. The master plan used reserve standards with development in less than 20 percent of the park. Major activity centers include the “green” Visitor Center-beach campus, picnic area at Jensen Lake, an extensive mountain bike course, campgrounds, and Camp Sacajawea retreat lodge.

**Park-Defining Recreational Activities and Facilities:** Primitive woodland and water trails – for hiking, walking, lake loops, canoeing, skiing, skating, riding, mountain biking. Trail uses will expand to include bicycling. The Visitor Center is the base for outdoor and environmental education and programming activities for the system, and is a teaching model for sustainable building design. Large group picnicking occurs at Jensen Lake. Lebanon Hills also offers camping and youth group opportunities.

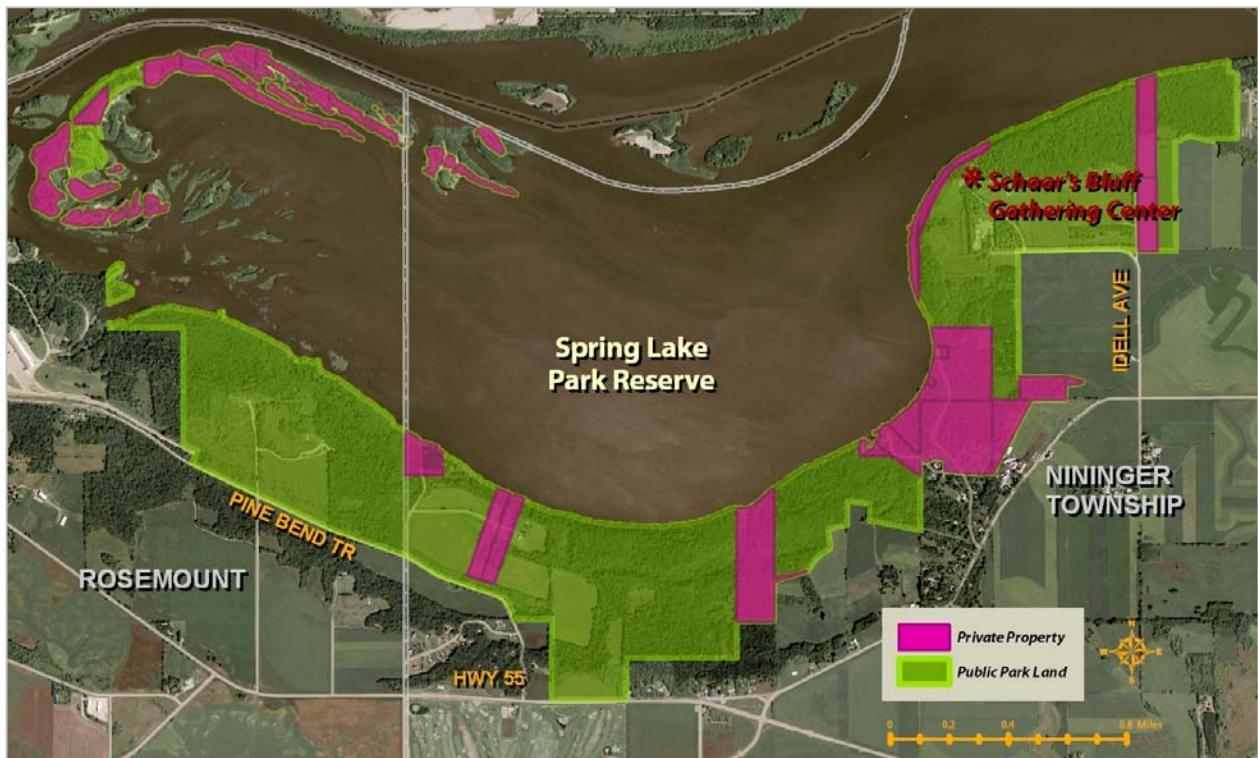
**Spring Lake Park Reserve:**

Spring Lake Park Reserve is on the south shore of the Mississippi River in Nininger Township between Rosemount and Hastings, on a river stretch that flows west to east. Construction of Lock and Dam No. 2 in the 1930s expanded Spring Lake from a floodplain wetland to a major water body. River terrace topography varies from lower terrace bottomlands in the west park to upper terrace bluffs overlooking Spring Lake in the east. Wooded ravines occur throughout the park. Because of its north facing slopes, Spring Lake Park Reserve contains rare and unique ecosystems and species. Spring Lake is an excellent example of the Mississippi River Valley landscape type and contains river bluff and oak forest communities. Archaeological sites within the park document 8,000 years of human use of this area. The Science Museum of Minnesota recorded several landmark archaeological discoveries during 1950s-era research in the Spring Lake area.

*River valley landscape  
at Spring Lake*







**2006 Visitation:** 109,000

**Park Size:** 957 acres acquired, 202 acres yet to acquire

**Recreation:** Sixteen percent of Spring Lake Park Reserve has been developed for facilities or trails. As a reserve, no more than 20 percent can be developed.

Facilities and activities include:

- Archery trail
- Boat launch (MN DNR-managed)
- Cross-country skiing and ski skating
- Cultural resource trail (2008)
- Hiking and nature trails
- Picnic shelters and grounds with river views
- Playground
- Schaar's Bluff Gathering Center (2007)
- Youth lodge and campground



*Fires Along the Shoreline  
Cultural Trail Alcove*

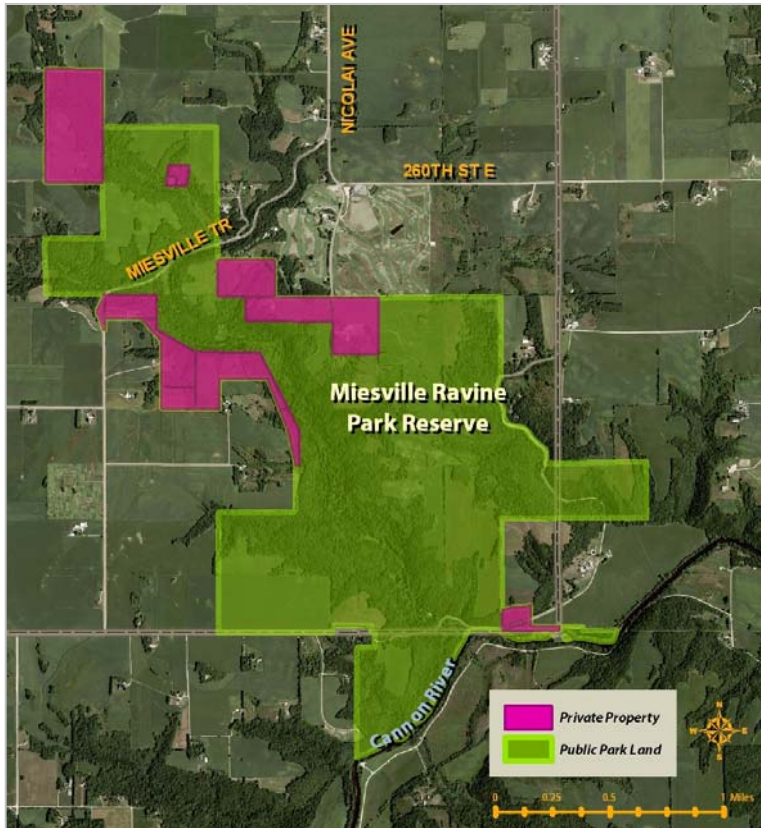
**2003 Master Plan Theme and Activities:**

**Mississippi River Park** — Richly varied ecological resources and cultural resources frame well-balanced recreation opportunities that draw on the Mississippi River, history, and a notion of discovery. Major activity centers include a sustainably designed Gathering Center, a Mississippi River Regional Trail segment, and new general use at the west end of the park. Open landscape areas are suitable for community events.

**Park-Defining Recreational Activities:** Scenic views of the River valley and rolling farmland are attractive, memorable features of this park. Defining activities include picnicking on Schaar's Bluff, river views and river access, cultural and natural resource interpretation, trails.

## Miesville Ravine Park Reserve:

Miesville Ravine is in Douglas Township in southeastern Dakota County along its border with Goodhue County. The park is named for a spectacular 200-foot deep ravine, through which the pristine Trout Brook flows to the Cannon River. The park includes several bluffs, side ravines, and Cannon River frontage. The park landscape is defined as lightly glaciated, characteristic of the high-relief terrain of southeastern Minnesota bluff country and unique in the metro area. The park has a rich natural diversity, ranging from oak forests to open grassy areas, dry rocky hillsides to wet floodplain, and small spring-fed creeks to sections of navigable river. The park has abundant and diverse wildlife populations and an impressive natural stand of white pines near the center of the park on the west side of the large ravine. Trout Brook supports a naturally reproducing population of brook trout.



**2006 Visitation:** 15,200

**Park Size:** 1,405 acres acquired  
262 acres to acquire in future

**Recreation:** Facilities and activities include:

- Picnic area with rustic shelters, bathrooms
- Canoe launch
- Hiking trails
- Fishing



*Trout Brook in winter*

**2005 Master Plan Theme and Future Facilities:**

**Wilderness Park** — Miesville Ravine will continue to have a minimal human footprint with rustic visitor facilities. The park is about open and protected views, preserving the highest quality resources in the Park System, river and stream activities, and wilderness experiences (hiking, picnicking, primitive camping).

Activity centers include a loosely connected complex with the main trailhead, picnic grounds, rustic stone shelters, and the Cannon River access area. Planned improvements include enhancement to the current main trailhead, a new trailhead in the uplands, potential Cannon River event grounds on the eastern edge of the park (not acquired), and a bicycle bridge link to the Cannon Valley Trail in Goodhue County.



*Restored bluff prairie at Miesville Ravine*

**Park-Defining Recreational Activities:** Trails and views, Trout Brook hiking and fishing, Cannon River access, natural resource appreciation.

**Thompson County Park:**

Thompson County Park is in West St. Paul, in the fully developed part of northern Dakota County. The park is named for Thompson Lake, a 10-acre water body with a picturesque shoreline free from urban development. Thompson Park provides a peaceful, natural setting in an urbanized area. The park is in a hilly portion of the St. Croix Glacial Moraine, with mixed hardwood forest, oak woodland, cattail marsh, grasslands, and open areas along Thompson Lake. The North Urban Regional Trail bridge over Trunk Highway 52 connects the park with Kaposia Park and the South St. Paul Riverfront Trail.



**2006 Visitation:** Estimated at 80,000

**Park Size:** 58 acres

**Recreation:** Facilities and activities include:

- Cross-country ski trails
- Dakota Lodge and Senior Center
- Hiking and bicycling trails
- Picnic area and shelter
- Playground
- Segment of the North Urban Regional Trail



*Fall colors at Thompson Lake*

**2005 Master Plan Theme and Future Facilities:**

**Urban Oasis** — A park for all seasons that provides a stage for community life and celebration, in the most densely populated and most culturally diverse area of the County. Thompson Park is the only park in the system that delivers a highly visible “quick walk” and a paved bike trail that connects well to places outside the park. The master plan includes a highly designed, pastoral landscape in active park areas that transitions to woodland towards the south. The master plan brings more activities and uses to the park in small but varied settings that are well connected by the park trail system.

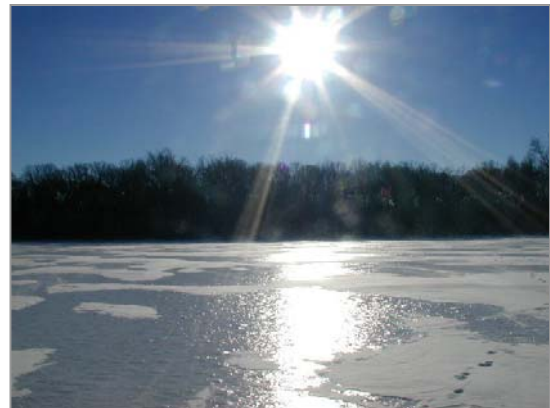
Major activity centers currently include a shelter-lake trail-pier-parking lot complex, the bike bridge to Kaposia Park, Dakota Lodge, and the playground off the Lodge. Dakota Lodge generally is inaccessible to the casual visitor, but is well used for senior activities, meetings, and celebrations. New activity centers will include a new picnic shelter and picnic areas, an expanded event and social area near the lodge, a skating pond, an art walk with symbolic farm ruins, and park entrance improvements.

**Park-Defining Recreational Activities:** Picnicking and group gatherings, events at Dakota Lodge (public and private), convenient quick walk around the lake.

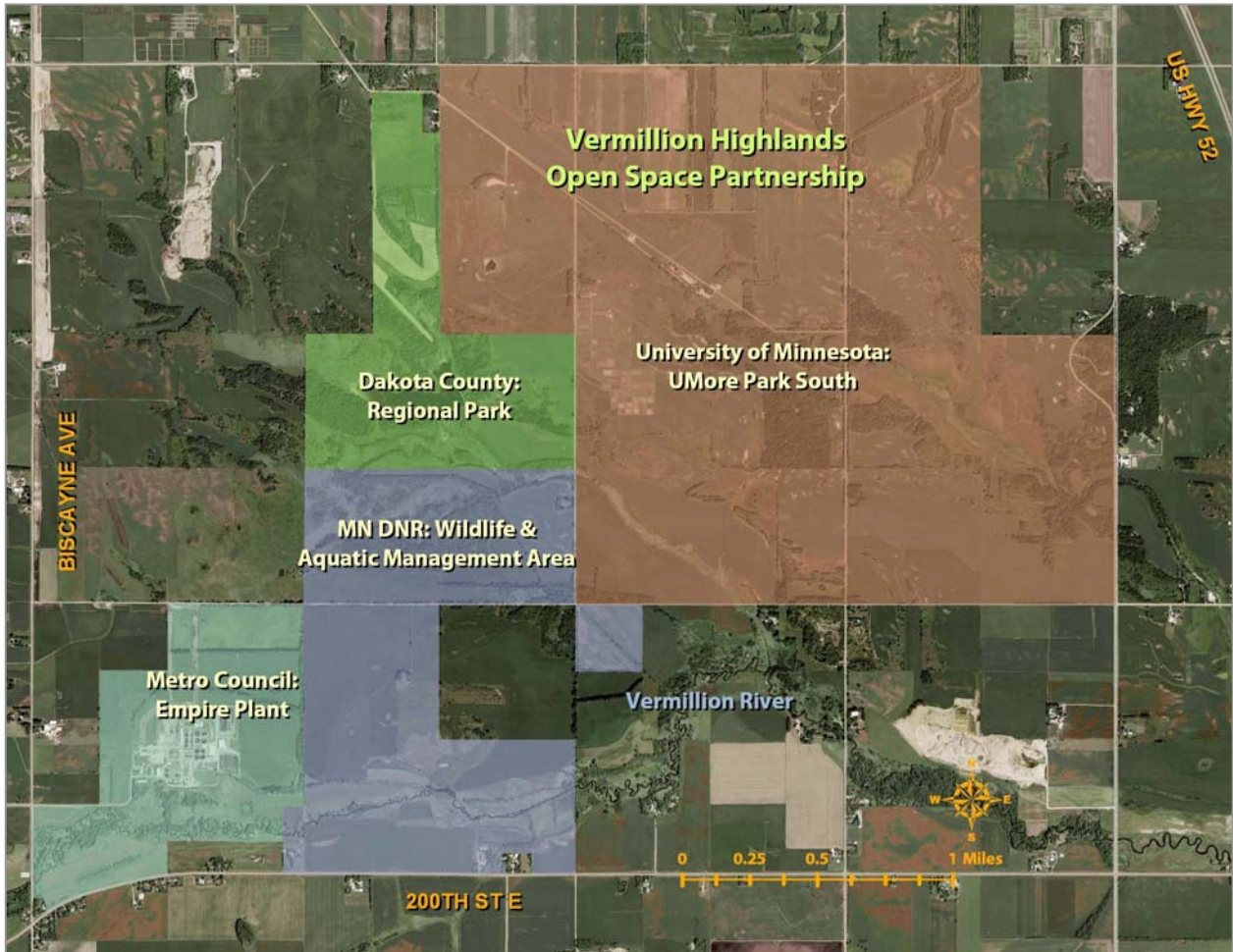
**Vermillion Highlands Regional Park** (*acquisition in progress*):

Vermillion Highlands is the newest park in the Dakota County system, planned in a model open space collaboration among the MN DNR, the University of Minnesota, and the Metropolitan Council. A collaborative master plan for the larger 8,000-acre open space area began in 2007, and will include a Wildlife Management Area (WMA), an Aquatic Management Area (AMA) on the Vermillion River, nearly 2,000 acres of open space on the University’s UMore property, and a new 460-acre County park. The park area was selected during a 2002 study to site a new Dakota County Park to serve Farmington, Lakeville, and Rosemount.

To prepare the park for visitation, priority improvements would include basic popular amenities: trails, picnicking, and water access. As of early 2008, the property under negotiation for the regional park and the northern portion of the WMA is in private ownership and not open to public use. The remainder of the WMA and AMA property has been acquired.



*Lake in winter, Vermillion Highlands*



**Park Size:**                    **Regional Park to be 460 acres (not acquired)**

**Recreation:** Facilities and activities include:  
 Lone Rock Trail, an 11-mile hiking, skiing, and riding trail on the UMore South property  
 Lake and dam  
 Additional new activities will be defined in the development of a park master plan.



*Wetlands on Vermillion park property*

## Dakota Woods Dog Park:

Dakota Woods Dog Park is in Empire Township, south of County Road 46 on Blaine Avenue, adjacent to the University of Minnesota's UMore Park.

Dakota County's first off-leash dog area began as a pilot study in 2004. The dog park has proven to be a popular amenity. Residents have expressed appreciation for its comparatively large size (16 acres), woodland trails, open play area, and the lack of open water (dogs don't get muddy). CAPERs, a volunteer group, has assisted with ongoing maintenance of the area. Because of its overall success as a self-supporting facility, Dakota Woods recently was approved as an ongoing feature of the Dakota County Park System. Additional sites for off-leash areas will be evaluated within the park system.



**2006 Visitation:** 13,500

**Park Size:** 16 acres

**Recreation:** Park facilities and activities include

- Open play area
- Parking lot
- Picnicking area
- Walking trails



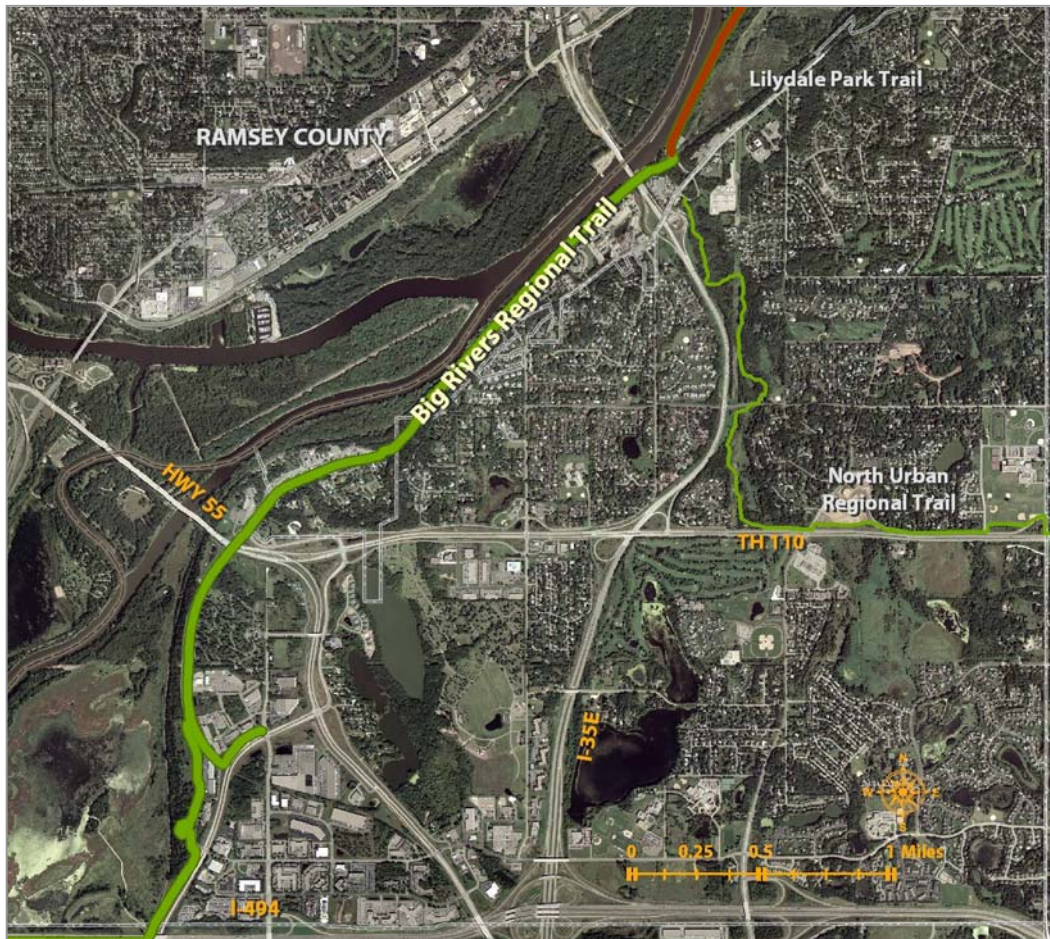
*Dakota Woods Dog Park*

## **Dakota County's Trails:**

### **Big Rivers Regional Trail (BRRT):**

The Big Rivers Regional Trail spans 4.5 miles from Lilydale Road in Lilydale to I-494 in Eagan. In Mendota Heights, the trail connects to a County bikeway at Pilot Knob Road and a Civilian Conservation Corps scenic overlook. A connection to the new I-35E Bridge in Lilydale was built in 2004, with a link to the North Urban Regional Trail in Valley Park (Mendota Heights). The City of St. Paul, working with Dakota County and the National Park Service, built a link in 2005 that extends from BRRT northward through Lilydale Regional Park, allowing BRRT riders to continue their trip to Harriet Island in downtown St. Paul.

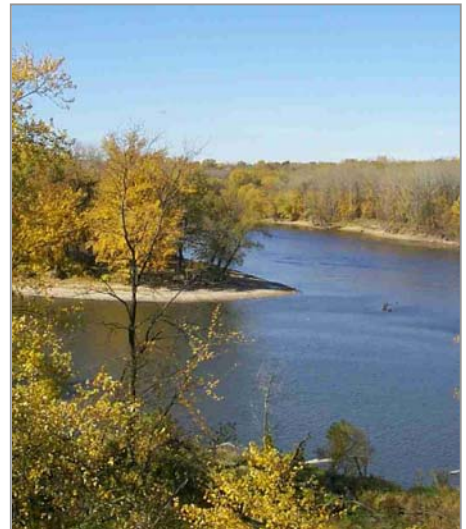
The BRRT highlights significant natural and historical features, with scenic views of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers confluence, high limestone bluffs, floodplain, woodlands, and prairie. Built on the bed of one of the oldest railroads in Minnesota, the trail passes many historical and cultural features, including railroad structures and landmarks in the historic town of Mendota, one of Minnesota's first territorial cities. Historic points of interest nearby include the Sibley House, Faribault House, St. Peter's Church, and a WPA work camp. BRRT also demonstrates change over time, passing by modern businesses and industrial land uses.



**2006 Visitation: 133,900**

**Recreation:** Facilities and activities include:

- Parking areas
- Trail activities: hiking, bicycling, inline skating
- Scenic overlooks with benches



*BRRT view of Mississippi - Minnesota Confluence*

### **The Mississippi River Regional Trail – South St. Paul Riverfront:**

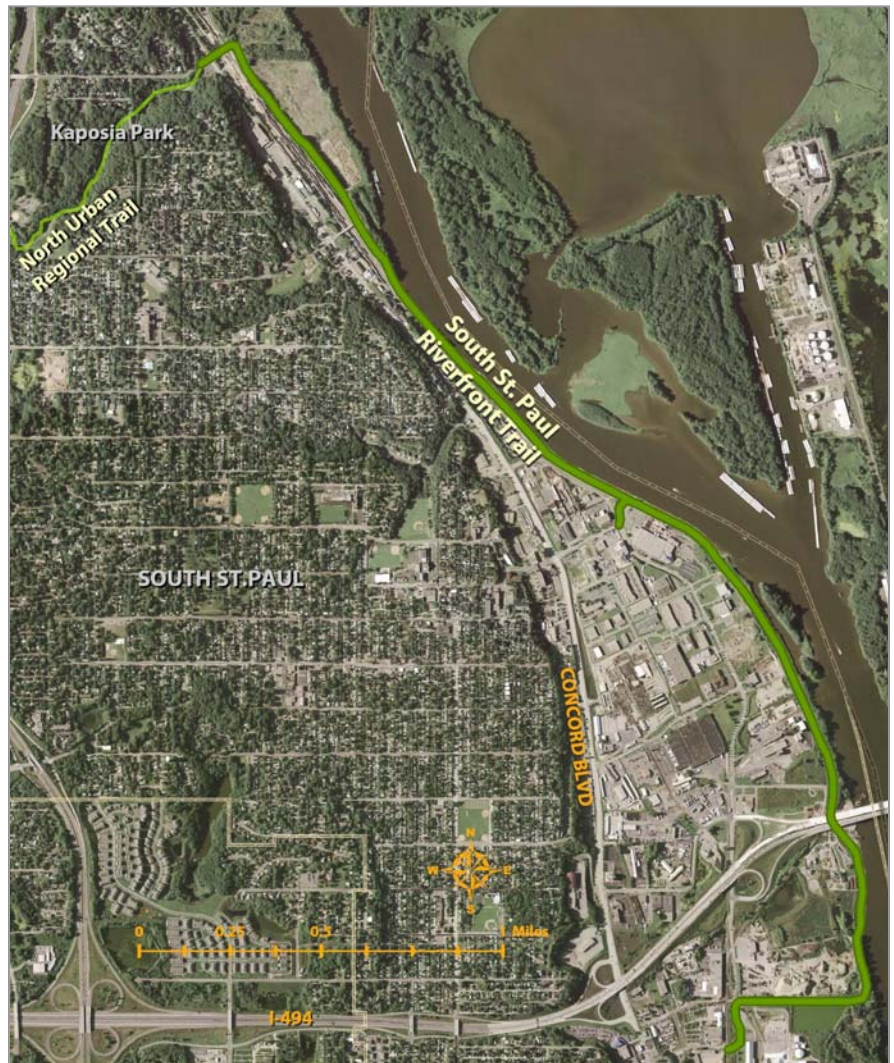
The trail is 4.5 miles long and on the South St. Paul flood levee for much of its length. The trail extends from Concord Blvd and Butler Avenue to the I-494 Bridge. The trail's north end connects to Kaposia Park, the planned Port Crosby Park, and the eastern segment of the North Urban Regional Trail in Kaposia Park. The trail also intersects the planned Gateway Corridor, linking to the city's business district.

Dakota County and South St. Paul worked under a joint powers agreement to acquire and build the trail. South St. Paul will continue to maintain the trail until Dakota County accepts it as a regional facility, likely after completion of the adjacent Mississippi River Regional trail segment to Inver Grove Heights.

**2006 Visitation:** 21,800

**Recreation:** Facilities and activities include:

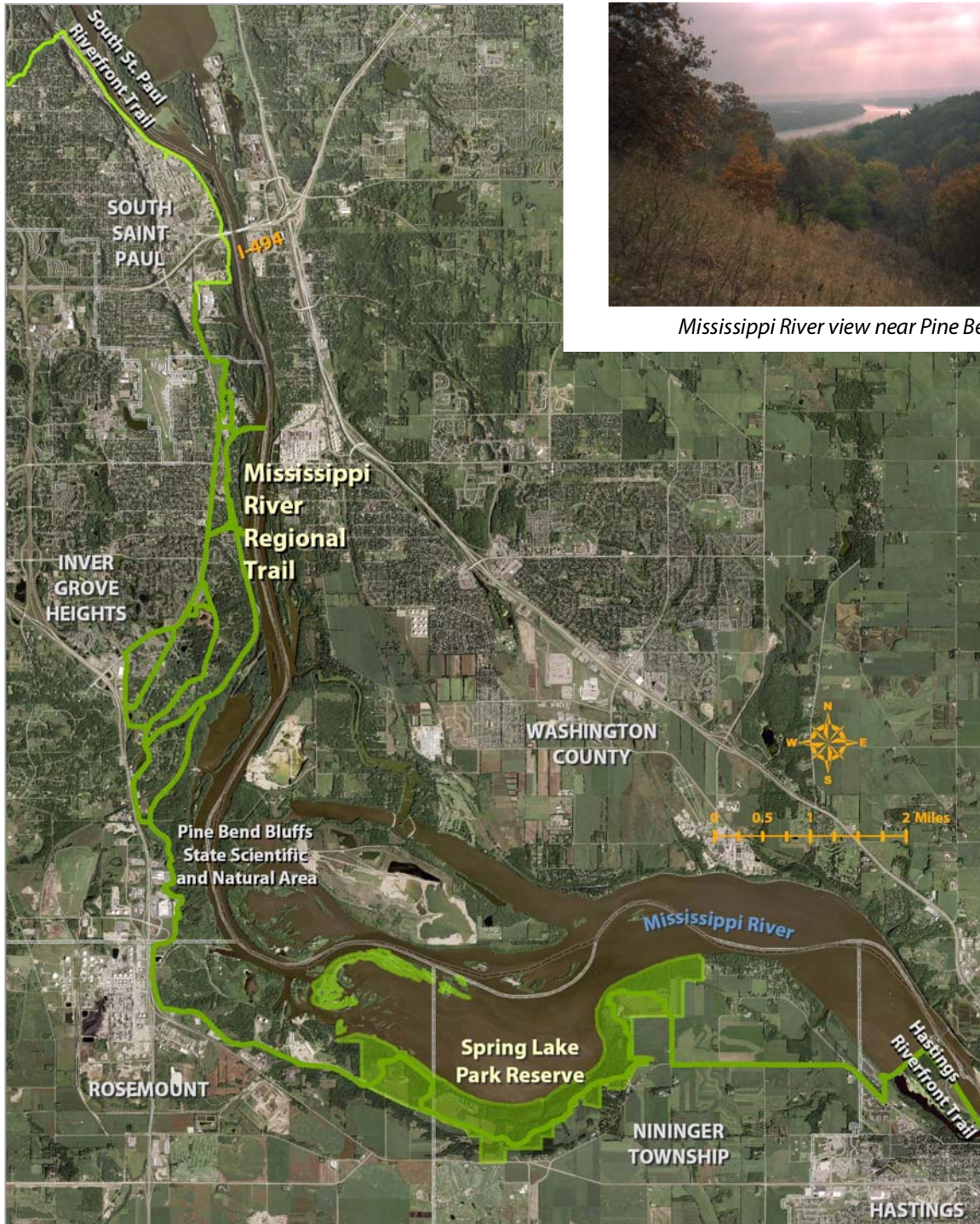
- Parking area
- Scenic overlooks with benches
- Trail activities: hiking, bicycling, inline skating





## The Mississippi River Regional Trail (MRRT):

The Mississippi River Regional Trail is a planned 25-mile route to connect the South St. Paul Riverfront Trail through Inver Grove Heights, Rosemount, Nininger Township, and Hastings. The MRRT will access the Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area and Spring Lake Park Reserve. The map below shows alternative MRRT alignments adopted in the 1999 trail master plan. Actual alignments are being determined as segments become funded and engineered. The first MRRT segments will be built in 2008.



*Mississippi River view near Pine Bend Bluffs*

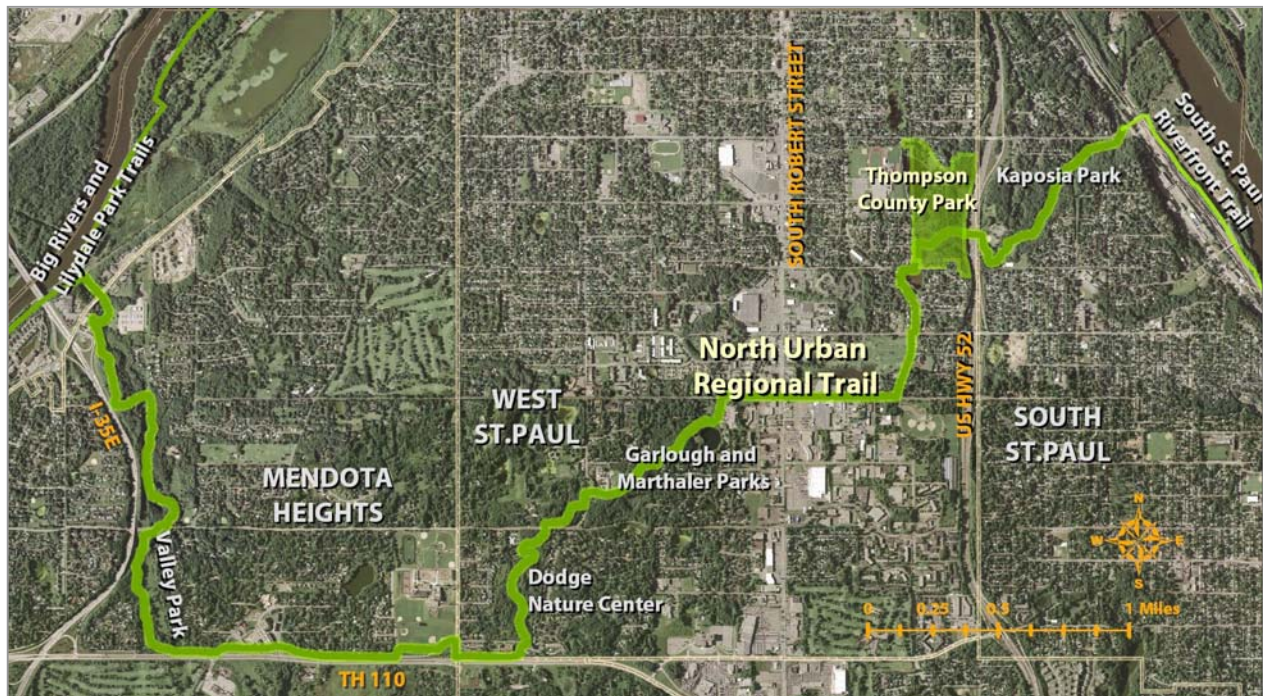
**Recreation:** Facilities and activities will include:

- Parking and trailhead areas
- Scenic overlooks with benches
- Trail activities: hiking, bicycling, inline skating

Potential amenities along the MRRT route include the Inver Grove Swing Bridge, a historic 1890s double-decker rail and vehicle bridge that could provide interpretive opportunities with adaptive reuse of its western pier.

### **North Urban Regional Trail (NURT):**

The North Urban Regional Trail is eight miles, crossing northern Dakota County through the cities of South St. Paul, West St. Paul, and Mendota Heights. The City of South St. Paul built a trail segment through Kaposia Park with a pedestrian bridge over Concord Boulevard to access the Riverfront Trail. Another pedestrian-bicycle bridge over US Hwy 52 connects Kaposia Park to Thompson County Park. The segment along TH 110 from Dodd Road to Charlton Street was constructed in 2007 and passes through Henry Sibley High School property. Other portions of the NURT currently exist as city park trails or bikeways. The final NURT segment is funded for construction in 2012 and will connect from Charlton Street and TH 110 to Wentworth Avenue near Robert Street. This segment will pass through portions of the Dodge Nature Center property in West St. Paul. Staff have received comments on potential new names for this route, including Kaposia-Mendota Regional Trail, to honor the Dakota villages that once marked the ends of this corridor.



**Recreation:** Facilities and activities include:

- Parking area
- Trail activities: hiking, bicycling, inline skating

## Planned and Proposed Trails:

Several trail alignments were proposed in the last Park System Plan or recommended by the Metropolitan Council. Not all routes shown on the map have been planned in detail, funded, or given an official name.



### Future Trails:

1. Cannon Valley Regional Trail Link
2. Eagan Greenway Regional Trail
3. Rosemount River Access Greenway Regional Trail
4. Highline Greenway Regional Trail
5. Lake Marion Greenway Regional Trail
6. Minnesota River Greenway Regional Trail
7. Mississippi River Regional Trail: Hastings to Red Wing
8. North Creek Greenway Regional Trail
9. Rich Valley Greenway Regional Trail
10. Terrace Oaks Greenway Regional Trail
11. Vermillion Highlands Greenway Regional Trail
12. Chub Creek Greenway Regional Trail
13. Vermillion River Greenway Regional Trail



## ***Highlights from Systems-Based Research: What Did We Learn?***

The 2007 Park System Plan used a systems-based approach to evaluate progress, needs, and opportunities in the following areas:

- 1. Park Geography: Locations and Connectivity***
- 2. Park Natural and Cultural Resources: Status and Management***
- 3. Park Recreation: Planned Uses & Park Visitation: Frequency and Use Patterns***
- 4. Park Operations: Capacity and Growth***
- 5. Park System Funding: Sources and Needs***

The following summary presents research highlights.

### ***1. Parks Geography:***

**Geographic Assets:** Dakota County has outstanding landform and ecosystem variety. Located at the convergence of several major Minnesota ecosystems (big woods, oak savanna, tall grass prairie), Dakota County has more ecosystem variety than any other county in the state. Dakota County also is bounded and traversed by rivers of varied sizes and character. The Mississippi River is of world significance and forms the County's north and northeastern boundary. The Minnesota River includes extensive public recreational landholdings and forms the County's northwestern boundary. The Cannon River in the southern rural area of the County offers visual beauty. The Vermillion River flows west to east through the central portion of the County and is essentially "Dakota County's river" — almost entirely within the County's borders. Scenic "bluff country" begins in southeastern Dakota County's lightly glaciated landscape. The county also has unique historic areas offer that glimpses into the past, such as Hastings and Mendota, two of Minnesota's first cities.

Dakota County's large regional parks already have preserved some of the best land in the County with high quality ecosystems and scenic vistas. Rapid development has yielded parks dedication funds for cities, whose well-developed park systems provide a strong complement to County parks. Adjacent regional and state parks (Lilydale-Harriet Island, Fort Snelling State Park) serve northern Dakota County where there are few county facilities. Opportunities for large parks may still exist in rural Dakota County, where there has been relatively little large-lot rural residential development.

**Geographic Issues for Parks:** While glacial geology in northern Dakota County created hills and small lakes, southern Dakota County is riverine, with few lakes that could offer water-based recreation and the "lake experience."

Regional parks weren't pursued in the urbanized northern part of Dakota County nor in some areas identified in the 1970 County Parks System plan (Alimagnet, Crystal, and Marion lakes — now city parks). County parks are absent along the suburban Mississippi riverfront. Several major industries are clustered in the highly scenic Pine Bend stretch of the Mississippi River.

**Population Growth and Change:** Dakota County's population has been projected to increase 45 percent between 2000 and 2030. The fastest population growth in Dakota County will be in Lakeville, Farmington, and Rosemount. Much of the County's projected growth will be along the Highway 3 corridor. Dakota County's population also is changing (increasing average age and becoming more ethnically diverse), which has implications for provision of parks and recreation in the County.

**Overall Park Acres and Trail Miles – Are There Enough?** Dakota County currently has the second lowest regional per capita park acreage of the seven metro counties (12.7 acres/1,000 people). The metro average is 18.9 regional park acres per 1,000 people. Dakota County is home to 14 percent of the metro population, yet has 9 percent of the regional park acres, and 5 percent of the regional trail miles.

To meet the needs of a growing population with even the current levels of parkland provision, Dakota County would need to nearly double its park acres by 2030.

<b>Dakota County Comparison to Metro System</b>				
	<b>Metro Area</b>	<b>Dakota County 2006, Actual</b>	<b>Dakota County 2006, Based on 14% Share</b>	<b>Dakota County Projected 2030 Share</b>
<b>Population</b>	2,821,779	391,613 = 14%	391,613	520,010 = 14.4%
<b>Acres</b>	52,000	5,000	7,280	9,828
<b>Parks</b>	47	4	6.58	8.88
<b>Special Features</b>	6		0.84	1.13
<b>Regional Trails</b>	22	3	3.08	4.16
<b>Trail Miles</b>	170	8	23.8	32.13
<b>Annual Visits</b>	33,171,200	830,800	4,643,968	5,935,160

**Park and Trail Locations:** Dakota County has only one of its four regional park units (Lebanon Hills Regional Park) in the urbanized portion of the County, where 95 percent of residents live. Spring Lake and the proposed Vermillion Highlands Park will serve areas projected to grow by 2030. Lake Byllesby and Miesville Ravine are “destination parks” — distant from current population and areas projected to grow by 2030.

Murphy Hanrehan Park Reserve (eastern Scott County) is nearby but has no facilities/entry points oriented toward Dakota County. The park serves western Dakota County residents (Burnsville, Lakeville).

Dakota County has more than 350 city parks and about 74 percent of households are within ¼ mile of some type of park. City and County parks generally do not form connected greenway systems: few linear parks and parkways exist.

Dakota County has an extensive bikeway system along roads and 67 percent of households are within ¼ mile of a roadside trail. Although they are essential components of the transportation system, bikeways generally do not provide the high quality recreational experience of regional trails.

Dakota County has few off-road trails in natural areas, except the Big Rivers Regional Trail, portions of the North Urban Regional Trail, Highline Trail, and Mississippi River Regional Trail.

Dakota County has few hard surface trails around lakes, one of the most popular features of other regional park systems.



**Opportunities for Parks and Trails:** The proposed new Vermillion Highlands Regional Park is a high priority for the County and has received \$6 million in legislative funding. A regional park at Chub Lake was identified in the 1970 Dakota County Parks System Plan, and is also a recommended park addition in the Metropolitan Council's 2030 Parks and Open Space Plan, to complete the system beyond 2030.

Almost 20 lakes in Dakota County have unsubdivided shoreline and could offer paved trails around the lake. Several of these lakes are inside County park boundaries.

Few natural areas remain for locating a large regional park in northern Dakota County, where the need is greatest. There may be opportunities to locate smaller parks, perhaps with linear trails at Marcott Lakes and River Lake (Inver Grove Heights), and the Minnesota River Valley (Burnsville and Egan). The riparian stream pattern in southern Dakota County provides opportunities for linear parks, buffered waterways, and recreational corridors; the Vermillion River is a prime example.

Several low-volume railroad corridors are potential rail-to-trail routes, and utility corridors potentially could be placed underground in exchange for regional trail alignments.

## **2. Park Natural and Cultural Resources:**

**Park Resource Assets:** County parks include resources and landscapes representative of the County's natural diversity. MN DNR's County Biological Survey has identified many significant sites within Dakota County's parks. The system includes abundant oak woods in Lebanon Hills, Spring Lake, and Miesville Ravine; unique waters (trout lake, brook trout stream); significant bird refuge areas; and many prehistoric and historic sites at Spring Lake.

**Current Resource Management Efforts** include prairie restoration and deer management programs at three parks. Logging, lumber milling, and house rentals have stopped. Cropland rental for conventional agriculture will be phased out. A water management plan has been developed for Lebanon Hills Park and is being implemented under a joint powers agreement with adjacent cities.

Dakota County is using sustainable non-eroding trail design and has developed construction expertise. Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District is assisting Parks on offsite erosion issues.



*Restored Bluff Prairie at Miesville Ravine*

### **Greatest Resource Issues for Parks:**

The six greatest resource issues include invasive species, water, park boundaries, viewsheds, cultural resource needs, and determining an appropriate level of management:

#### ***Invasive Species***

- ◆ Vegetation diversity was severely damaged by pre-park agriculture in large areas of the system.
- ◆ Native trees are absent in many park woodlands, even though conditions are ideal for them.
- ◆ Buckthorn and degraded forest systems are displacing native woodlands.
- ◆ Only one-third of parklands are in healthy ecological condition.
- ◆ Alternatives are needed for "buckthorn busting" on large acreages. Invasive species control must establish and maintain vegetation that can compete with recolonizing invasives.

### **Water**

- ♦ Water quality and/or flooding problems exist in all parks. Baseline water quality data is lacking.
- ♦ Holland Lake in Lebanon Hills is the only high quality fishing lake in the system.
- ♦ No aquatic management projects are underway.
- ♦ Obstacles to addressing off-parkland water issues include funding, staffing, and a lack of formal coordination and assistance programs.

### **Park Boundaries and Adjacent Land Use**

- ♦ Park boundaries are derived from property boundaries that often don't follow or fully enclose natural features such as ravines and waterways.
- ♦ Park resources are dramatically affected by off-park uses that result in water runoff, quality issues, and erosion.
- ♦ Private in-holdings further constrain management efforts.
- ♦ Encroachment and unauthorized motor vehicles are ongoing problems that damage resource quality.

### **Viewsheds**

- ♦ Park viewsheds encompass land inside the park but often extend well beyond park boundaries.
- ♦ Views are a defining park characteristic, whether internal or external to a park.
- ♦ In a 2006 resident survey about the park system, respondents identified features and activities they desired in parks; scenic views ranked second overall, just behind walking and hiking trails.
- ♦ Viewshed protection benefits parkland through protection of natural resources and also benefits the community, providing it with a sense of pride and setting it apart from other places.
- ♦ Viewshed planning and partnership approaches with landowners and cities should be explored.

### **Cultural Resources**

- ♦ Many unique and notable cultural resource sites exist in the system, although these sites currently add little to visitors' experiences due to limited funding for interpretive activities.
- ♦ Of prime importance, the County must understand its legal responsibilities regarding the discovery, handling, and interpreting of cultural resources in the parks.
- ♦ To advance the goal of cultural resource protection and interpretation, it is essential to partner and consult with experts to identify best management practices. Experts include the National Park Service, state parks, state and local historical societies, MN Science Museum, and others.

### **Level of Management Effort**

- ♦ Parkland typically is more difficult to manage than private land because it often includes poor soil, steep slopes, floodplains, and other limitations.
- ♦ Completed park restoration projects include 84 acres of planted prairie, with 80 more in progress.
- ♦ Restoration is labor intensive. Staffing and resources for accelerating restoration efforts have been limited.
- ♦ Less than 10 percent of park wild lands are managed for resource restoration and preservation.
- ♦ Alternative approaches to natural resource management could include:

**Demonstration approach:** Restore examples of high-quality sites near park visitor areas.

**Economics-ecological returns approach:** Restore sites with positive economic and ecological returns on the investment.

**Minimal management approach:** Apply only basic management to areas with low potential for visitor use or low potential for ecological improvement.



**Opportunities for Natural and Cultural Resources:** Program opportunities include cultural and environmental programming as part of the Schaar’s Bluff Gathering Center project at Spring Lake Park Reserve, implementing the Lebanon Hills Stormwater Management Plan, implementing an Agricultural Exit Strategy, adding interpretative components to ongoing stewardship plans, systematically tracking activities at each resource management site, and partnerships to provide habitat for migrating species.

Improved resource quality can attract greater park visitation. Sustainable design principles, such as trails, can be adapted to other recreational uses.

Small-scale agricultural parks should be evaluated for opportunities to create economic, social and environmental value at the urban/rural edge. Parks could contain grassland, tree plantations or other vegetation to produce biomass for renewable energy projects. Such parks would demonstrate agriculture that results in neutral or beneficial effects to adjacent land while protecting and enhancing viewsheds.

### 3. Recreation and Visitation:

**Current Recreation:** Dakota County Parks traditionally has provided for activities described as passive, nature-based recreation, similar to the state park system. Activities that use muscles instead of motors (canoeing), the “quiet sports” (cross country skiing), nature appreciation, and contemplation (relaxing in a natural setting) are what people have come to expect from Dakota County’s parks. Providing for sports that require specialized facilities generally is seen as a role of city park systems or schools. Similarly, providing for large social gatherings, community events, and people watching has not been a mainstay of Dakota County’s parks.

Dakota County offers a broad range of seasonal and year-round activities, with variety at each park:

<b>All Parks</b>	Hiking Trails	<b>Single Park</b>	Archery
	Outdoor Education Programs		Biking
	Picnicking		Boating
<b>Several Parks</b>	Camping		Community Gardening
	Canoeing		Horse Riding
	Cross Country Skiing		Ice Skating
	Fishing		Model Airplane Flying
	Horseshoes, Playgrounds		Mountain Biking
	Snowshoeing		Sailing
	Swimming		Sand Volleyball
<b>Reg. Trails</b>	Bicycling, Inline Skating, Walking		Skijoring, Dogsledding
<b>Off Leash</b>	Off Leash Dog Area		Water Skiing

**Master Plan Activities:** All park master plans were updated in the past five years and recreation options will increase at each park. The table shows new activities planned, but not yet available for each park.

Planned New Activities (not yet implemented)	New Educ. programs	Bicycling	Mountain Biking	Disc Golf	Visitor Center	Camping	Canoeing	Ice-Skating	Sledding	Public Art	Historic Interpret.	Mini Golf	Retreat - Residential Learning
Lake Byllesby	X	X		X							X	X	X
Lebanon Hills	X	X	X						X				X
Miesville Ravine	X	X				X					X		
Spring Lake	X	X			X	X	X				X		
Thompson	X	X						X		X			

**Survey - Park Needs:** In a 2006 survey mailed to all County households, 65 percent of respondents said they would like more activities to do in Dakota County Parks. The second most requested system-wide change was to add paved trail connections between neighborhoods and parks.

**Current Use and Visitation of Dakota County Parks:** The Metropolitan Council estimates 830,800 people visited Dakota County's parks in 2006. Lebanon Hills received the most visits, and is near the county's geographic center of population.

Park	2006 Visits
Lebanon Hills RP	460,800
Spring Lake PR	109,000
Big Rivers RT	133,900
Lake Byllesby RP	90,100
Miesville Ravine PR	15,200
Mississippi River RT	21,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>830,800</b>

**Where Dakota County Parks Visitors Originate:** According to the last Metropolitan Council visitor origin data, the large majority of Dakota County's park visitors were Dakota County residents (70.9 percent). Non-resident visitors come from Minneapolis, St. Paul, out-state, and out of state.

**Dakota County Parks Visitation Compared to Other Metro Regional Systems:** Total visitation to Dakota County's Parks has increased at a rate faster than population growth in recent years, although Dakota County's overall share of regional visitation has stayed constant at about 2.6 percent, lower than expected given that Dakota County is home to about 13 percent of the metro population. Compared to counties of comparable population, Dakota County's park visitation is 25 to 50 percent of what could be expected. The chart below compares regional visits and population for Metro Regional Park agencies.

Metro Regional Park Agency	2006 Visits (1,000's)	% Total System Visitation	% Regional Population, 2006 est.
Minneapolis Park Board	13,881.9	41.8%	13.8%
City of St Paul	5,860.1	17.7%	10.2%
Three Rivers Park District – Hennepin Co.	5,191.1	15.7%	40.8%
Ramsey County	2,866.1	8.6%	18.3%
Anoka County	2,479.4	7.5%	11.7%
Washington County	949.3	2.9%	8.0%
Dakota County	830.8	2.5%	13.9%
City of Bloomington	561.4	1.7%	3.0%
Carver County	251.5	0.7%	3.0%
Three Rivers Park District – Scott Co.	233.9	0.7%	4.2%
Scott County	65.9	0.2%	4.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33,171.2</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

**Regional Park System Visits By Dakota County Residents:** According to the last compilation of Metropolitan Council visitor origin data for Regional Parks, Dakota County residents made more than twice as many visits to regional parks outside of Dakota County than to regional parks in Dakota County. In simple terms, Dakota County "exported" roughly 68 percent of its regional park visits to neighboring systems. Of 10 regional park agencies, Dakota County had the second highest park visit "export" rate. Given the relative constancy of Dakota County's visit share (typically 2.6 percent of all regional park visits), there is little reason to assume that the park visitation patterns of County residents have changed.

**Where County Residents Visit:** Parks in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Three Rivers Parks (Hennepin and Scott counties), state parks, and city parks in Dakota County.

20 Parks Identified as Favorites, 2006 Survey

1. Lebanon Hills Regional Park	11. Big Rivers Regional Trail
2. Spring Lake Park Reserve	12. Lake Byllesby Regional Park
3. Minneapolis Lakes, Minneapolis	13. Dakota Woods Off-Leash Area
4. Minnehaha Falls, Minneapolis	14. Thompson County Park
5. Hyland-Bush Anderson, Bloomington	15. Theodore Wirth Park, Minneapolis
6. Afton State Park, Afton	16. Terrace Oaks, Burnsville
7. Como Park, St. Paul	17. Ritter Farm Park, Lakeville
8. Murphy-Hanrehan, Three Rivers-Scott	18. Lake Elmo, Washington Co.
9. Cleary Lake, Scott, Three Rivers-Scott	19. Alimagnet, Burnsville
10. Fort Snelling State Park, Mpls	20. Three Rivers Parks (non-specific)

**Why They Visit:** Survey respondents said why they visit parks they identified as favorites including: **activities** (biking around lakes), **social activities** (concerts, people-watching), **park amenities** (Como Zoo), **park style, landscape beauty** (lawns, rose gardens), and **connections** (social and family ties).

**What Visitors Want in Dakota Parks:** Respondents to the 2006 park survey identified activities they would like in Dakota County's Parks. Their top 25 choices are in the following table. Shaded activities are not available in Dakota County's regional parks and can be seen as "gaps."

<u>Most Popular Activities, 2006</u>	<u>%</u>
Hiking and walking trails	81%
Scenic views	69%
<b>Loop trails around lakes</b>	<b>67%</b>
Canoeing	65%
Swimming beaches	63%
Nature education programs	63%
Natural area visits	60%
Cross-country skiing	60%
Picnicking in shelters	58%
Fishing	57%
Bird watching	55%
Camping in tents	51%
Children's playground	51%
<b>Sledding, winter tubing</b>	<b>51%</b>
Rentals (skis, canoes)	50%
<b>Paved trails</b>	<b>48%</b>
Env. Stewardship prog.	46%
Recreation programs	46%
Ice skating outdoors	44%
<b>Short loop trails</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Public gardens</b>	<b>42%</b>
Mountain bike trails	39%
<b>Festivals and concerts</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>Community events</b>	<b>38%</b>
Culture & history prog.	35%

**How Well Do Dakota County Parks Provide for the Metro Regional Top 12 Activities?**

Metropolitan Council reports that the top 12 activities in the Metro Regional Park System are:

1. **Hiking** (nature trails), **Walking** (surfaced trails)
2. **Biking** (surfaced trails)
3. **Swimming and Wading**
4. **Picnicking**
5. **Relaxing**
6. **Jogging and Running**
7. **Playground Use**
8. **Sunbathing**
9. **Inline Skating**
10. **Fishing**
11. **Dog-walking**
12. **Zoo Visits** (Como Park)

Dakota County looked at its 1) nature trails, 2) paved trails, and 3) picnic areas — facilities that support the most popular activities in the metro regional park system. Compared to other county-based regional agencies, Dakota County has and will have lower provision levels of these facilities, even with implementation of the updated park master plans.

**Nature Trails:** Based on its population and compared to other regional park agencies, Dakota County is low on park nature trail miles. Completion of all nature trails in park master plans will address this shortfall, giving Dakota County more than 46 miles of nature trails. Dakota County will have a very high per capita provision of nature trails in parks, compared to other regional park agencies.

**Paved Trails** are important to welcome park visitors of all ages and abilities, including seniors, people with physical limitations, and the very young. Among all Metropolitan Regional Park System agencies, Dakota County ranks the lowest in per capita provision of paved park trails. While Dakota County's parks have emphasized a more natural design than other park systems, some degree of paved trails is necessary to serve the basic needs of County residents.

**0.2** = Miles of paved trail in Dakota County Parks (0.005 trail miles per 10,000 County residents)  
**12.4** = Miles of paved trail provided in Dakota park master plans (0.31 miles per 10,000 residents)  
**23.5** = Miles to match a typical Metro Regional county park agency, based on population (0.60)  
**34.8** = Miles to match the overall Metro Regional Parks average, based on population (0.89)

Dakota County should complete all paved regional or connector trail segments identified in park master plans (Lebanon, Byllesby, Thompson, Spring Lake), and provide regional trail links (Miesville). Completing paved trails identified in master plans and adding a short paved loop to major visitor areas would meet the needs of more park visitors, where it matters most. Three short loops at Lebanon Hills, two at Spring Lake, and one each at Lake Byllesby, Miesville Ravine, and Thompson would raise Dakota County's total to **20.44 miles**, or 0.52 paved trail miles per 10,000 residents. Dakota County also should add at least one lake loop to all parks that can accommodate it.

**Picnicking:** Among regional park agencies, Dakota County rank low in providing picnic tables and shelters for its resident population. Dakota County would need to double its picnic tables to match other metro counties, or triple its number of tables to match the average regional level of provision.

Dakota County has less than half the regional average picnic shelter capacity (measured as total shelter capacity per 1,000 residents). In addition, a facility to host large groups (300 or more people) is a common request that Dakota County cannot meet at this time. Park master plans will double the overall number of shelters in the system (from 8 to 16), which includes everything from small sun shelters to pavilions. Facility design must ensure that overall capacity, individual shelter sizes, and the quality of facilities meet public expectations.

Other top 12 activities that could be expanded in Dakota County Parks include fishing and swimming, although both activities are dependent on what a park landscape has to offer.

**Opportunities for Recreation** exist in improving the basics — the Top 12 regional park activities, water and bathrooms, orientation and signage, paved lake trails, short trail loops, better accessibility, picnicking areas, and some facilities that are less strenuous. Other opportunities include large group facilities (e.g., class of 120 children), more parking, year-round camping, improved swimming, and more activities at campgrounds.

More opportunities exist in activities that build on the character of Dakota County Parks: self-guided interpretation, rustic entertainment, back country camping, unique camping such as yurts and cabins, big tent entertainment, marathons, bird watching, service days, volunteer events, more for Scouts at retreat centers, outdoor-themed book clubs, packaged programs for groups, active trend spotting, and more partnership efforts for outdoor music events, day camps, and adventure activities.

#### 4. Park Operations:

Excellent park systems require excellent operations: seeing to visitor needs, providing public information, maintenance, resource management, and public safety. Research highlights are provided on **Service Delivery**, **Staffing**, and **Marketing**.

##### Service Delivery:

Services that support recreation in a natural environment were evaluated; strengths and possible improvements were identified.

**Visitor Information:** Current maps and program catalogs are widely available at County facilities and online. The Lebanon Hills Visitor Center has improved communication with park visitors. Park kiosks provide basic information and many could use renovation and updating.

**Park Orientation:** Entrance and trail wayfinding signs could be improved. Trail reconfiguration at Lebanon Hills has been an issue when appropriate signage is lacking.

**Reservations and Facility Rentals:** Program registration is available online or via mail, phone, or fax. The online option has limitations. Several services are currently available only by phone.

**Comments, Requests, Complaints:** Comprehensive visitor satisfaction surveys are not offered at this time.

**Evaluation of Needs:** Dakota County should regularly evaluate the public value of and demand for specific activities, services, and recreational facilities.

##### Staffing:

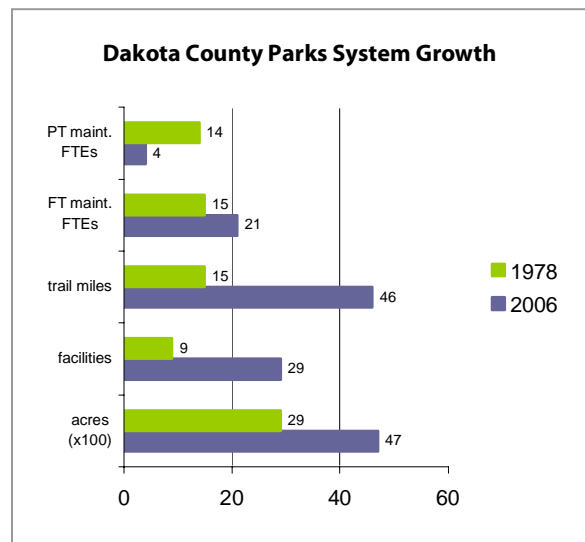
The Dakota County Parks Department includes three units:

- Maintenance & Resources:** Planning, facility maintenance, and resource management
- Visitor Services:** Rentals, facility operation, education, volunteer coordination, communication and marketing
- Administration:** Overall system management, operation, and finance

The department has 33 permanent FTE and 10 temporary (seasonal) FTE positions. Staff are experienced and dedicated. Turnover is low, average staff tenure is 10 years, and hiring is infrequent.

**Maintenance/Natural Resources:** Dakota County has doubled its park acres and tripled its facilities and trail miles over the last 28 years, yet the number of parkkeepers has declined by 4 FTEs. In 1978, parks maintenance included 15 full-time and 14 temporary FTEs to manage 2,923 acres, 9 public facilities, 15 miles of trail and Byllesby Dam. Currently 21 full-time and 4 temporary FTEs manage 4,698 acres, 29 public facilities, 46 miles of trail, Byllesby Dam, and support the growing education and volunteer programs.

**Visitor Services** have expanded as the system has grown. In 1984, Visitor Services included one full-time coordinator and temporary staff at the beach and the



campgrounds. Visitor Services now includes 2 full-time operations staff, 2.5 education staff, a Visitor Center coordinator, a communications coordinator, and a volunteer coordinator.

**Determination of Staffing Needs:** A variety of methods for determining staffing needs was explored to answer two questions:

- 1) Are current staffing levels adequate to maintain and operate Dakota County's parks?
- 2) What staffing levels will be needed as the system expands and adds services?

Benchmarking to other park systems can be an apple-orange comparison if services and facilities are not directly comparable. For example, other metro systems include golf courses, wave pools, ice arenas, and other high maintenance facilities that are not in the Dakota County system. Comparison to other systems at different states of maturity also can be misleading; Dakota County's system is young in terms of land acquisition, resource restoration, and development needs. Benchmarking also has limitations if other systems are short staffed.

The best method may be "starting from the ground up" with a level of service analysis that measures public expectations for particular services, then quantifies staffing and resource needs to provide service at the expected level.

**Marketing:**

Marketing efforts currently are limited to facilities, programs, and events. Dakota County currently does not comprehensively market the park system as a whole. In the 2006 park system Survey, 55 percent of respondents said that Dakota County should do more to increase awareness of the parks system.

Dakota County needs a recognizable identity for its parks, a comprehensive marketing approach, and a regular communication vehicle.

## 5. Park System Funding:

Funding is an essential foundation for an excellent park system. The following research highlights are provided on **Revenue Sources and Funding Gaps**.

### Revenue Sources:

#### **Annual Planning:**

Dakota County's park fiscal needs are met through two financial programs that are updated annually:

- \$3.8 million**      **2006 Parks Operation and Maintenance (O & M) Budget** is largely derived from County property tax (2 percent of the levy total). The Parks O&M budget also includes charges and fees, Metropolitan Council funds, Dakota County Environmental funds (used for operating the Lebanon Hills Visitor Center).
  
- \$21.2 million**      **2006-2010 Parks Capital Improvement Plan (CIP):** Provides funding for acquisition, development and resource projects. Primarily derived from non-County sources, including legislative funds, Metropolitan Council funding, deed tax, and hydropower proceeds. Dakota County increased its Parks CIP funding in 2006 to address shortfalls for park projects.

#### **Traditional County Revenue Sources:**

- ♦ County Property Tax Levy
- ♦ County Program Aid
- ♦ General Fund Balance
- ♦ County Bonding

#### **Non-County Revenue Sources and Opportunities:**

- ♦ **Metropolitan Council Parks CIP:** Generally \$600,000 per year. \$1.5M was approved for 2006. Metro CIP funding has declined over time and not met target allocations for regional park agencies.
- ♦ **Metropolitan Council Parks Acquisition Opportunity Fund:** Option 1 provides up to \$1M, with a 60 percent local match that may be reimbursed through the CIP. Option 2 provides up to \$1.7 million, with a 25 percent local match that cannot be reimbursed through the CIP.
- ♦ **Metropolitan Council Park Future Reimbursement Policy:** Reimburses CIP improvements that occur prior to metro allocations. Dakota County has advanced \$3M and has funds to continue this practice.
- ♦ **Metropolitan Council Parks O&M Appropriations:** Enabling legislation requires the state to finance at least 40 percent of the Regional System's O&M costs. The 40 percent obligation has not been provided since the law was enacted in 1985. Funding has declined annually from 17 percent in 2000 to 9.7 percent in 2007.
- ♦ **Grants:** Dakota County has received TEA-21 trail grants and other grants. Currently, grant applications are not systematically pursued in a comprehensive approach.
- ♦ **State Legislative Requests:** Dakota County received \$6M in 2006 and has two requests in 2008.
- ♦ **Dedicated Conservation and Parks Funding:** State and metro general obligation bond funds for parks have declined over the past 10 years. Since 2000, legislative initiatives for conservation funding through various sales tax revenue formulas have been discussed but not approved.
- ♦ **Donations, Sponsorships and Naming Rights:** Potential opportunities exist for further exploration.
- ♦ **Foundations:** Dakota County currently has no official friends group or parks foundation.
- ♦ **Partnerships:** Dakota County has leveraged partnerships that improve service delivery and share costs, and will seek more partnership opportunities in the future.
- ♦ **Enterprise Facilities:** Dakota County has no profit-driven facilities such as golf courses.

**Funding Gaps:**

Dakota County's vision for its park system cannot be realized based on historic and traditional funding.

***Estimated Park System Costs:***

\$21.6M	Acquisition (does not include Vermillion Highlands)
\$24M	Natural Resource Management
\$45M	Parks Development (per master plans)
<u>\$20M</u>	<u>Regional Trails and Greenways</u>
<b>\$110.6M</b>	<b>Total</b>

***Historic Revenues:***

\$0.50M	Acquisition (Metropolitan Council Parks Acquisition Opportunity Funds)
\$0.17M	Natural Resource Management (Metropolitan Council Parks O&M, Deed Tax)
<u>\$0.84M</u>	<u>Parks, Regional Trail, and Greenways Development</u>
<b>\$1.51M/YR</b>	<b>Total</b>

***Based on historic revenues, it would take over 70 years to fund the park system.*** Funding gaps are related to the following:

**Declining Metropolitan Council Parks CIP Funds:** Over-reliance on regional funds to grow the park system is problematic. Funding levels are inadequate to realize the vision, acquire inholdings, expand the system, and protect park resources.

Dakota County has received \$4.8 M from the regional parks CIP over the past 7 years, which is 60 percent of the \$8.2M target. Dakota County's target allocation dropped from \$3M to \$1.8M per biennium in 2007, which decreases the County's annual CIP target by \$1.2M per biennium.

**Timing of Metropolitan Council Parks CIP Funds:** Biennial allocation does not provide timely funding for projects scheduled for an off year, e.g. TEA-21 trail grants. Reduced state appropriations can result in partial metro CIP allocations, which can delay projects for a two-year funding cycle.

**Declining Metropolitan Council Parks O&M Funds:** Metropolitan Council Parks O&M funds are the funding mainstay for the park resource management program. This program is under funded.

**Partial Metropolitan Council Parks O&M Appropriations:** Enabling legislation requires the state to finance at least 40% of the Regional Park System's O&M costs. The 40% obligation has never been provided since the law was enacted in 1985. Funding has declined annually from a high of 17% in 2000 to 9.7% in 2007. In 2007, Dakota County received \$475,000 of O&M funds.

**Past County Investment in Parks CIP:** The County Parks Department's CIP has averaged \$275,400 per year, which is inadequate to realize the vision, acquire inholdings, expand the system, and protect park resources.

**Past County O&M Funding:** The Parks Operations Budget has not always matched development of new facilities and services. As the system grows, there is a need to strategically grow the O&M support.



**Parkland Acquisition Illustrates the Challenges in Addressing Funding Gaps:**

The current estimate to acquire 747 acres of planned parkland is \$21.6 million — substantially higher than estimates included in recent park master plans due to inflation, past use of tax-assessed values, and assumption of fee title acquisition of entire parcels.

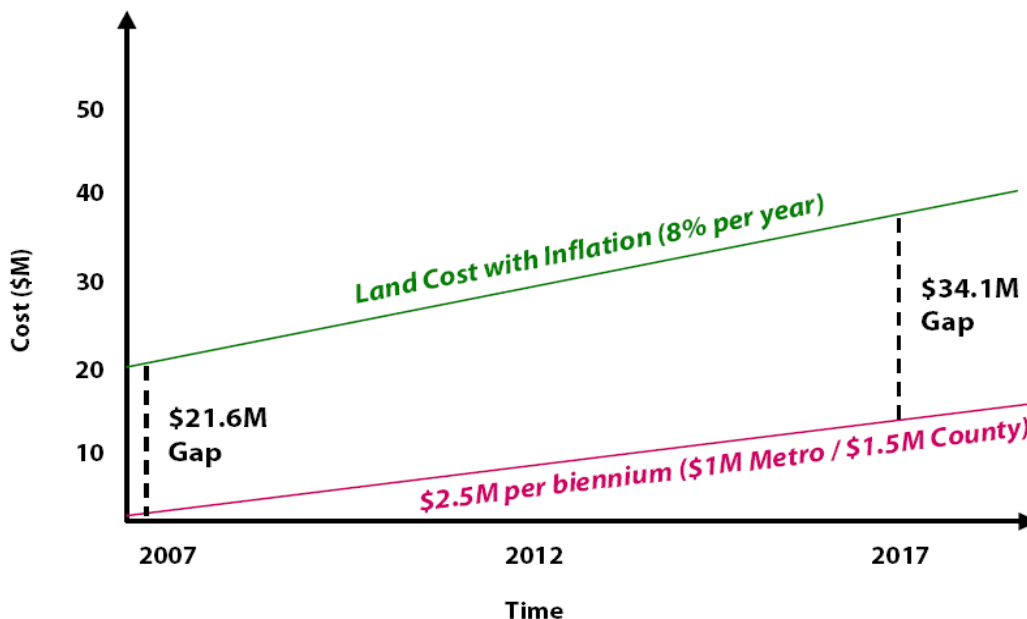
<b>Parkland Acquisition: Summary of Needs</b>				
	<b>Acres Acquired</b>	<b>Acres to Acquire</b>	<b># Parcels</b>	<b>Cost</b>
<b>Lake Byllesby</b>	462	148	24	\$4.9 M
<b>Lebanon Hills</b>	1,842	101	12	\$6.4M
<b>Miesville Ravine</b>	1,405	262	16	\$4.7M
<b>Spring Lake</b>	928	231	31	\$5.0M
<b>Thompson</b>	58	5	2	\$0.6M
	<b>4,695</b>	<b>747</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>\$21.6M</b>

**Predicted Funding Gap:** The decision to use limited Metropolitan Council Parks CIP for other priorities and rely on the Metropolitan Council Parks Acquisition Opportunity Funds (AOF) for acquisition does not adequately address current land protection needs and creates larger future funding gaps. The AOF provides funding under two options.

Option 1 provides up to \$1M AOF funds per biennium as a 40 percent match on net purchase price; the local match of 60 percent (or more, depending on purchase price) may be reimbursed through future CIP allocations.

Option 2, introduced in 2007, provides up to \$1.7M per biennium as a 75 percent match on net purchase price; the local match is not reimbursable up to 25 percent of the net purchase price. Implementing agency investment beyond 25 percent of net purchase price will be eligible for reimbursement through CIP funding.

**The Growing Gap in Acquisition Funding, Option 1**



**Additional Findings on Acquisition Funding:**

**Enhanced Acquisition Cost:** Research by the Wilder Foundation documents increased property values for residential property near a large or linear park. While that is good for local tax base, it also means that the inholding properties will continue to increase disproportionately in value.

**Delayed inholding acquisition ultimately increases costs and limits recreation:** Natural resource management is limited and opportunities to protect the property are lost.

**New park units are difficult to fund:** Land costs for the Vermillion River Regional Park have significantly increased and are likely to exceed \$13 million.

## Chapter 3, Dakota County Parks, Greenways, and Trails Vision for 2030

### The Vision Incorporates Three Elements that People Requested

#### **Great Places: Improved Parks, New Parks**

Serve County residents and park visitors by enhancing the overall park experience. Make parks great destinations by realizing the potential and unique qualities of these remarkable settings:

##### **Improve Recreation and Services:**

- ♦ Offer more activities, more choices.
- ♦ Fill gaps in popular “basic” recreation.  
(biking, picnicking, trails, shorter paved trail loops)
- ♦ Enhance delivery of recreation services.
- ♦ Promote awareness of recreation opportunities.
- ♦ Plan and open Vermillion Highlands Regional Park.
- ♦ Explore opportunities with South St. Paul for a regional park combining Thompson County Park, Kaposia Park, and Port Crosby Park.



#### **Connected Places: Collaborative Greenways with Regional Trails Link Parks and Popular Destinations**

- ♦ Plan greenways with trails to link open space in partnership with other landowners and agencies.
- ♦ Build greenways in a hierarchical network modeled after the transportation system:
  - ♦ **Regional greenways** connect regional parks and regional trail with adjacent cities.
  - ♦ **City greenways** provide local connections to regional trails and local destinations.
- ♦ Develop operating partnerships with local governments similar to County bikeways.
- ♦ Work with the public and private sectors to provide more paved trails around lakes.



#### **Protected Places: Green Infrastructure Includes Parks, Greenways, Open Space, and Natural Areas**

##### **Healthier Natural Systems Countywide**

- ♦ Collaborate with agencies and landowners to protect, enhance, and connect parks, open space, and natural systems in a larger, more ecologically sound framework.
- ♦ Preserve stream corridors in undeveloped areas by working with public and private landowners to protect land and help shape future growth into the most suitable areas.
- ♦ Provide a recreational “voice at the table,” to seek opportunities for recreation over the long term, and near-term recreation in designated public areas only.



##### **Healthier Park Landscapes:**

- ♦ Improve ecology and visual quality.
- ♦ Use a comprehensive and strategic approach to managing park resources.



# 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

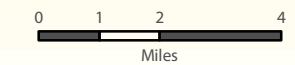
- \* Enhance and protect park resources
- \* Protect stream corridors in public/private partnerships
- \* Protect natural areas and open space in public/private partnerships

### 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 (FNAP)
- Private/Public Protected Natural Areas (FNAP)
- Potential Rail to Trail Opportunities

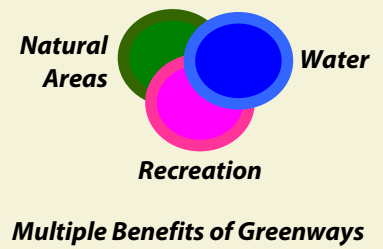


Notes:  
Regional greenways are intended to illustrate routes, not actual scale. City greenway routes are suggested. Greenway design standards and master plans will be developed through greenway partnerships.



Dakota County Office of Planning, 2008

## Concepts for Greenways



Nested Trail Loops, Trails around Lakes



Greenways Connect Places Where People Want to Go



## ***Great Places: Improve Parks as Destinations***



Parks are the “home bases” of the Dakota County Park System and many factors contribute to making them great places. Recreation is the cornerstone of a great park visitor experience and County residents have asked for more recreational things to do in their parks. All park master plans were updated between 2001 and 2005 to provide a unique and contemporary vision for each park, with expanded recreation opportunities. As plan implementation continues for some parks and begins for others, what other actions should Dakota County initiate to strengthen its parks as great places and desired destinations?

***Great Places*** focuses on prioritized improvements to deliver **high quality balanced recreation and education opportunities** with excellent visitor service delivery and park information, in a setting of healthy park landscapes.

### ***Vision for Recreation and Education in Dakota County Parks***

*Dakota County is known as a leader in providing exceptional nature-based recreation, with the following hallmarks:*

- Balanced variety of quality, popular, year-round activities to promote healthy lifestyles
- Welcoming to visitors of all backgrounds and abilities to a conveniently accessed network of parks, trails, and greenways
- Innovative, sustainably-designed recreation to protect our natural legacy
- Quality education that builds appreciation of natural and cultural resources and inspires greater stewardship
- Exceptional service delivery and excellent public awareness

## ***Policies for Providing High Quality Recreation and Education in Parks***

- Policy 1:** Strategically plan for development of the park system and individual parks.
- Policy 2:** Provide a balanced range of popular nature-based recreation with appropriate availability of activities throughout the system. Identify and fill gaps in the most popular recreation activities through park master plan amendments.
- Policy 3:** Develop recreation in the system through plan implementation and by prioritizing recreation improvements, with consideration of:
- ♦ Broad popularity, inclusiveness, and anticipated use.
  - ♦ “Signature” facilities that reinforce unique park qualities and master plan themes.
  - ♦ Highly requested facilities, including specialized uses.
  - ♦ Available funding for specific facilities.
- Policy 4:** Establish and use sustainable design standards for facility improvements.
- Policy 5:** Provide high quality park visitor orientation throughout the system.
- Policy 6:** Provide staff adequate resources to support recreation programs and services.

## ***Recreation and Education Goals and Strategies (Goals 1 - 5):***

**Goal 1** *Provide a balanced variety of high-quality, popular, year-round activities to promote healthy active lifestyles*

### **Objective 1.1**

***Balance recreational offerings to ensure that the most popular and inclusive nature-based activities are available at all Dakota County Parks.***

### **Strategies**

- 1.1.1 Use a “menu” approach to provide recreation with system wide good availability of the most popular general uses, and selective availability of specialized or exclusive uses:
- Basic – the most popular general activities to provide at all parks.
  - Common – popular general and specialized activities to provide at many parks, as opportunity allows.
  - Unique – “niche” activities offered at single parks, to contribute to the individual park’s unique character, resources, and identity.
- 1.1.2 Identify gaps in the most popular activities through level of service and other analyses and fill gaps through master plan amendments.
- 1.1.3 Prioritize recreation capital improvements based on
- ♦ Broad popularity, inclusiveness, and anticipated use.
  - ♦ “Signature” facilities to reinforce unique park qualities and master plans.
  - ♦ Highly requested facilities, including specialized uses.
  - ♦ Available funding for specific facilities and the availability of outside funding and volunteers to assist with specialized or exclusive uses.



## **Park Activities and Recreation Facilities Menu** *(existing, planned, and potential facilities)*

**1) Basic Activities and Facilities:** All parks. The most popular activities, expected in any park. Service area may be irrelevant. Master plan themes\* inform how the activity is provided (quality and character).

**Biking** and/or Access to Trail or Greenway  
**Birdwatching**  
**Fishing:** Shore or Pier  
**Hiking:** Nature Trails, Winter Trails  
**Interpretation:** Self-Guided  
**Natural Area Visits**

**Packaged Programs** for Groups  
**Picnicking:** Tables and Shelters  
**Programming:** Nature, Recreation, Culture/History, Healthy Living, Stewardship  
**Scenic Views:** Viewing Areas, Overlooks, Benches  
**Walking:** Paved Paths, especially around lakes

**2) Common Activities and Facilities:** Multiple parks. Popular activities to provide throughout the system where suitable landscapes and resources are present. Service area and theme may be relevant.

**Adventure Programming**  
**Boat Launch:** Non-Motorized and Motorized  
**Camping:** Back Country, Cabin, Yurt, Group, RV, Tent, Day Camping  
**Canoeing and Kayaking**  
**Cross Country Skiing:** Classic, Skate  
**Disc Golf**  
**Dogsledding**  
**Equipment Rental**  
**Events:** Signature, Festivals, Concerts, Rentals  
**Food and Beverage Sales**  
**Gardens:** Community, Public Display  
**Geocaching**  
**Horseshoes**  
**Hunting** (deer management)  
**Ice Fishing**  
**Ice Skating**  
**Interpretive Centers**  
**Meeting and Retreat Space**

**Mountain Bike Trails**  
**Off Leash Dog Area**  
**Open Area:** Flexible Use, Programmable, Rentable  
**Orienteering**  
**Outdoor Performance Area**  
**Packaged Services** with Rentals  
**Paddleboats**  
**Picnicking:** Large (400+) Rental Space with Shelter  
**Play Area:** Natural, Unique  
**Playground:** Standard  
**Public Art**  
**Sand Volleyball**  
**Skijoring**  
**Sledding,** Tubing Hill  
**Snowshoeing**  
**Swimming:** Beach, Pool, Lagoon  
**Treehouses**  
**Wildlife Viewing Areas**

**3) Unique Activities and Facilities:** Single park. Unique activities that could contribute to a park's overall identity and master plan theme. Service area concept may or may not be relevant.

**Archery** (Spring Lake)  
**Climbing Wall**  
**Golf-Mini** (Lake Byllesby)  
**Farmers Market**  
**Horse Trails** (Lebanon Hills)  
**Houseboat Camping** (Spring Lake)  
**Ice Climbing**

**Maze**  
**Sustainable Perennial Agriculture Display**  
**Restaurant**  
**Ropes/Adventure Course** (Lebanon Hills)  
**Sailing** (Lake Byllesby)  
**Snowmaking, Lit Ski Trails**

### **\*Park Master Plan Themes:**

**Lebanon Hills:** Urban area natural oasis, varied activities with emphasis on trails. Up North experience, glacial lakes and woods.

**Spring Lake:** Rich ecological and cultural resources frame balanced recreation opportunities. Discovery, history, Mississippi River.

**Lake Byllesby:** Group recreation based on diverse activities and overnight camping. Emphasis on lake activities. Base for recreation in the Cannon River Valley.

**Miesville Ravine:** Pristine trout stream ecosystem with rustic visitor facilities. Protected views, wilderness experience; hike, picnic, camp in a dramatic landscape with remarkable resources.

**Thompson:** Urban oasis for all seasons that provides a stage for community life and celebration. Highly designed, pastoral landscape in active park areas transitions to woodland.

**Objective 1.2**

***Enhance and improve the availability of year-round recreation opportunities.***

**Strategies**

- 1.2.1 Broaden the palette of winter recreation, including skating and sledding, adapting master plans as needed.
- 1.2.2 Evaluate a winter use area with lighted ski trails and environmentally friendly snowmaking.

**Objective 1.3**

***Trails are the recreational backbone of Dakota County's parks. Provide a trail system that exceeds expectations with improved accessibility within parks and enhanced trail access to parks.***

**Strategies**

- 1.3.1 Continue to expand and improve the park nature trail system, as the recreational backbone of Dakota County Parks.
- 1.3.2 Develop accessible and shorter paved trail loops in all parks, in an environmentally sensitive manner. Amend master plans as needed, with opportunities for public engagement.
- 1.3.3 Build all planned regional trail segments through parks and build trail connections to parks, to improve park access by walking and bicycling.
- 1.3.4 Ensure that visitors feel safe and well-guided when using trail system through timely trail maintenance, excellent orientation signs, and increased patrol presence on trails.

**Goal 2**     ***Welcome visitors of all backgrounds, interests, and abilities to their parks.***

**Objective 2.1**

***Expand park opportunities for visitors of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.***

**Strategies**

- 2.1.1 Continue scholarships and seek additional ways to offer affordable recreation.
- 2.1.2 Provide one facility that could accommodate large events to serve 500+ visitors. Plan one or two major events per year that have public appeal, reinforce the identity of the Dakota County Park System, and welcome new visitors.
- 2.1.3 Offer community events that support the parks mission, including cultural and arts events, such as acoustic concerts.
- 2.1.4 Add public art to selected parks, including seasonal displays with natural and cultural themes.
- 2.1.5 To meet interests of an aging population, develop senior and elder hostel programs.
- 2.1.6 Develop creative, unstructured, nature-oriented play for all visitors, especially youth.
- 2.1.7 Develop natural play structures as existing equipment is retired. Explore opportunities for interactive nature-themed art.
- 2.1.8 Evaluate opportunities for a nature-based preschool.
- 2.1.9 Increase park appeal to youth and young adults with adventure-based opportunities, e.g., climbing wall, river canoe/kayak experiences, backpacking, and rock climbing.

**Objective 2.2**

***Improve the overall park recreation experience by enhancing basic visitor safety, hospitality, and support facilities.***

**Strategies**

- 2.2.1 Increase the presence of the Dakota County Parks, Lakes and Trails Patrol in parks to enhance visitor security and sense of safety.
- 2.2.2 Provide high-quality visitor orientation throughout the system with a consistent signage hierarchy. Signage should be adaptable to accommodate new programs and policies.
- 2.2.3 Provide easily identifiable information centers at major trailheads to provide visitors with information on their location and the rest of the system.
- 2.2.4 Provide basic comforts with good quantity and quality (e.g., benches, restrooms, drinking water).

**Goal 3** ***Exemplify sustainability and innovation as recreation trademarks of Dakota County Parks.***

**Strategies**

- 3.1 Expand development and promotion of sustainable recreation design standards for trails and other facilities.
- 3.2 Incorporate sustainability and innovation in the design and delivery of basic, common, and unique recreation activities.
- 3.3 Explore innovative, sustainable recreation opportunities that enhance the park system identity and the unique character of individual parks. Examples:
  - Unique camping: yurts, cabins, tree houses, remote sites with scenic views, sites along canoe routes, houseboat camping on the Mississippi River.
  - Programs and facilities that demonstrate local healthful food production and healthful outdoor cooking classes that use sustainability principles.
  - Park restaurant based on themes of nature, health, and sustainability.

**Goal 4** ***Enhance provision of quality outdoor and environmental education.***

**Objective 4.1**

***Increase visitors' understanding and enjoyment of Dakota County's natural and cultural resources, sustainability, and healthful outdoor recreation with high-quality staff-led and self-guided education opportunities.***

**Strategies**

- 4.1.1 Expand staff-led programs to audiences with demonstrated interest, such as family and adult education, preschool nature, free family activities, and nature-themed scout and birthday events.
- 4.1.2 Design and provide interpretive trails, brochures, and exhibits that visitors can experience on their own at any time.
- 4.1.3 Provide education services to current park visitors, such as fee-based nature programs for retreat center guests, or free programs at popular general use areas (beaches or campgrounds).

- 4.1.4 Market and promote park education programs to increase public awareness of opportunities.
- 4.1.5 Expand education opportunities beyond Lebanon Hills to other parks in the system and design new programs for new facilities, such as the Schaar's Bluff Gathering Center at Spring Lake Park Reserve.
- 4.1.6 Consider partnership opportunities to expand education to greenways.
- 4.1.7 Expand efforts to document and share cultural history and significant stories associated with the parks.

**Objective 4.2**

***Through education opportunities and key messages, inspire visitors to practice stewardship of natural resources, the environment, and self through healthful activity.***

**Strategies**

- 4.2.1 Expand the role for Dakota County Parks in countering the effects of sedentary and unhealthful lifestyles.
- 4.2.2 Identify ways to make it easier to fit Dakota County Parks and programs into busy lifestyles.
- 4.2.3 Provide expanded opportunities for children to connect with the natural world.
- 4.2.4 Reinforce messages related to sustainability in park information, displays, and programs; provide strong examples of sustainable practices through facility design and maintenance.

**Goal 5** ***Provide exceptional service delivery and build public awareness of recreation opportunities.***

**Objective 5.1**

***Provide service excellence through an integrated service model.***

**Strategies**

- 5.1.1 Provide visitors and customers with integrated service delivery that efficiently addresses their needs through a single point of contact.
- 5.1.2 Develop “complete experience” services, with packaging and expanded partnerships. Examples:
  - ♦ Full-service retreat center, residential learning center.
  - ♦ Rental equipment at campgrounds.
  - ♦ Packaged activities and services with facility rentals.
  - ♦ Packaged opportunities for volunteers, using park retreat centers as lodging.
- 5.1.3 Give park visitors the opportunity to express their level of satisfaction on a regular basis through staff contact, on-site comment cards, online surveys, focus groups, and other methods.

**Objective 5.2**

***Improve visitor and public awareness of parks, recreational opportunities, and services.***

**Strategies**

- 5.2.1 Provide visitors and the public with a clear and easily recognized identity for the Park System through branding studies. Incorporate this identity into all visitor and public communications (e.g., logos, taglines, publications).
- 5.2.2 Provide a family of brochures and maps using the brand identity at various locations in the parks and other County facilities.
- 5.2.3 Regularly share park news using news releases, listservs, and County Web site.
- 5.2.4 Provide information on park facilities and events through regular advertising.
- 5.2.5 Host a signature annual event to celebrate the park system and welcome new visitors.



## ***Connected Places:***

### ***Interconnect Parks and Places with Greenways for Many Benefits***



**green-way** [ˈgrēn-wā], *noun*:  
a corridor of undeveloped land  
preserved for public recreation  
and environmental protection

**Connected Places** is a collaborative new concept for recreation in Dakota County that seeks to build a network of greenways through partnerships among the County, cities, townships, school districts, and the private sector. By interconnecting popular destinations such as parks, schools, open space, civic spaces, new development, and businesses with a greenway trail system, Dakota County residents can walk and bike in a linear park setting close to where they live and work. Convenient walking and biking access to desirable places is at the heart of the Active Living concept; if communities provide a quality environment for walking and biking, many people can choose to leave the car at home and pursue a more healthful option that helps them get recommended daily exercise.

Findings from the **Active Living** project, funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota, illustrate a need for trails, sidewalks, and greenways to support healthful daily activities. Among County residents, as many as 60 percent are clinically overweight or obese. Among Dakota County children in grades 6 through 12, fewer than 50 percent get 30 minutes of exercise at least 5 days a week. That's only half of the amount recommended for children and teens. In 2000, \$94 million in health care costs was spent on Dakota County residents for treatment of obesity-related problems that are preventable with adequate levels of physical activity and healthy diets.

Winter is often a snowy reality in Minnesota, although other places with wintry climates have demonstrated that year-round use of greenways is possible and even demanded. The City of Boulder, Colorado, not only maintains its trails and greenways for winter use, but also snow removal from trails is its first priority after snowstorms.

Greenways provide added benefits such as water management, shade and cooling, carbon storage, and habitat for native species. Greenways also promote community identity and can help shape future growth and development in an orderly pattern that protects and interconnects valuable open space. In areas that already have urbanized, large natural parks may no longer be an option and greenways can connect the islands of existing open space. Greenways can enhance the overall quality and attractiveness of communities as well as individual property values.

The proposed greenway concept for Dakota County is collaborative in nature and would use land that is mostly publicly owned. No single entity acting alone would be able to provide the same public benefits as the multi-agency approach recommended in this plan.

**Greenways Vision:**

Create a seamless and interconnected greenway framework of parks, natural areas, lakes, and rivers, from which to provide convenient and high quality recreation for our citizens and protect and restore Dakota County's natural systems.

<b>Policies for Collaborative Greenways</b>	
Policy 1:	Create a countywide greenway network in collaboration with cities, schools, and other agencies to enhance and connect existing parks, popular destinations, and trails.
Policy 2:	Work within an intergovernmental partnership/committee approach to develop a shared park and greenway model that addresses planning, funding, implementation, and management.
Policy 3:	Prepare a joint development master plan for proposed greenway regional trails with the intergovernmental committee.

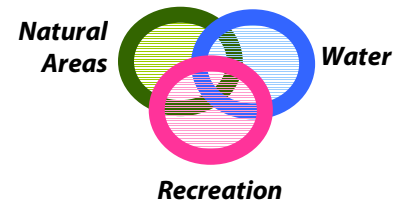
**Greenway Goals and Strategies (Goals 6 - 8):**

**Goal 6** *Protect, restore, and connect Dakota County's urban natural areas and open space (green infrastructure), using recreational greenways as a building block.*

**Objective 6.1**  
*Improve water management and water quality with a collaborative network of multipurpose greenways.*

**Strategies**

- 6.1.1 Buffer urban stream corridors with a greenway network.
- 6.1.2 Buffer and connect infiltration and stormwater ponds within a greenway network.
- 6.1.3 Design and restore greenway areas to improve water infiltration.



**Multiple Benefits of Greenways**

**Objective 6.2**  
*Contribute to improved habitat for native species a collaborative network of multipurpose greenways.*

**Strategies**

- 6.2.1 Connect natural areas and public open space to form greenway corridors.
- 6.2.2 Restore greenway corridors with native species to improve habitat quality for birds and other wildlife.



**Objective 6.3**

***Connect recreational open space via a collaborative network of multipurpose greenways.***

**Strategies**

- 6.3.1 Plan new regional trails as greenways to expand green infrastructure benefits.
- 6.3.2 Connect existing city and county parks, open space and stream corridors with greenways.
- 6.3.3 “Borrow” views with greenway corridors through or adjacent to scenic natural areas.



**Goal 7** ***Provide convenient and accessible recreational open space.***

**Objective 7.1**

***Bring parks to people; improve connectivity to recreation where people live, work, and want to go with a collaborative network of multipurpose greenways.***

**Strategies**

- 7.1.1 Work collaboratively to plan new regional trails as a hierarchical system of greenways that serve as linear parks.
  - ♦ City greenways connect neighborhoods with local destinations and also connect to regional trails.
  - ♦ County greenways connect regional parks, regional trails, and adjacent cities.
- 7.1.2 Increase connectivity to popular destinations such as regional parks, regional trails, city parks, cultural and historic sites, recreation centers, athletic complexes, community centers, lakes, schools, libraries, and shops.
- 7.1.3 Provide more regional recreation opportunities in northern Dakota County’s communities through greenways with paved trails for walking, biking, jogging, inline skating.
- 7.1.4 Build on existing investments in open space and public lands.



**Objective 7.2**

***Provide more of the popular recreational amenities that people want.***

**Strategies**

- 7.2.1 Work collaboratively through trail and greenway design to add ***paved trails around lakes*** for walking, biking, jogging, in-line skating.
- 7.2.2 Use ***nested loop trails*** to provide variety in trail lengths and experiences, improve overall access to trails, and develop trail hierarchy.



**Goal 8**     ***Create a Greenway Collaborative to achieve mutual objectives for greenways and trails.***

**Objective 8.1**

***Form an intergovernmental partnership/committee to develop a shared greenway model that addresses planning, funding, cost sharing, implementation, and operations.***

**Strategies**

- 8.1.1 Explore collaboration models and roles, including securing land and sharing costs.
- 8.1.2 Consider innovative approaches, such as a greenway incentive fund for city and county greenways.
- 8.1.3 Consider collaborative practices that strategically use parks dedication.
- 8.1.4 Develop an operations and management model to ensure adequate resources for proper maintenance and winter accessibility.

**Objective 8.2**

***Prepare a joint development master plan for proposed greenway regional trails with the Greenway Collaborative.***

**Strategies**

- 8.2.1 Plan an overall hierarchy of greenway trails and identify potential new routes.
- 8.2.2 Jointly determine greenway trail implementation priorities and assemble funding and needed land.
- 8.2.3 With the intergovernmental committee, develop and promote greenway standards for native plant landscaping, corridor beautification, provision of interpretive information, and uniform and distinctive signage.
- 8.2.4 Develop, plan, and adopt regional trail alignments and seek Metropolitan Council parks funding for trail development.

**Objective 8.3**

***Work with school districts to promote and enhance safe opportunities for children to walk to school using greenways and trails.***

**Strategies**

- 8.3.1 Collaborate with school districts to enhance connectivity through Safe Routes to School funding.
- 8.3.2 Collaborate with school districts to promote and use greenways, such as “walking school buses” with parent supervision.

## ***Protected Places:***

### ***Collaborate on a Healthy Green Infrastructure in Dakota County***



***Protected Places*** is both an old and new concept for the Dakota County's Park System. Parks are a traditional means of land protection, and parks were Dakota County's vanguard in acquiring and protecting high quality natural areas and open space. Within the County's existing parks, ***Protected Places*** seeks to strategically restore vibrant, healthy park landscapes and complete priority parkland acquisition. Parks and recreational greenways are key building block of the Green Infrastructure network.

***Protected Places*** also goes beyond traditional parks. Collaborating with other agencies and landowners to protect and connect open space and natural systems will enhance Dakota County's Green Infrastructure network. Green Infrastructure planning "knits together" undeveloped lands, fragments of natural land, parks, greenways, and working lands such as farms, to protect high quality resources and enhance healthy natural surface and groundwater systems. As a broad collaborative, Green Infrastructure planning pays the same level of attention to our network of natural systems as society pays to built infrastructure networks (transportation, storm sewers, utility corridors).

Dakota County recognizes the need to coordinate this effort with local jurisdictions, public agencies, and private landowners, to preserve resource corridors and stream systems in undeveloped areas of the County before growth and development occurs. Coordination with other efforts, such as the Farmland and Natural Areas Program and the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization, will be essential.

Resource protection in these areas is the top priority to improve water quality and help direct future growth to the most suitable areas. Although there may be more opportunities for public recreation over the long term, near-term recreation will be provided in designated areas only.

This section presents visions, policies, goals, and strategies for:

- 1. Vibrant healthy park landscapes***
- 2. Parkland acquisition and protection***
- 3. Collaborating in a Green Infrastructure approach***

#### ***1. Vibrant and Healthy Park Landscapes***

Quality natural and cultural resources are the foundation for the Dakota County Park System and a primary reason why these lands were protected as parks. The health of park resources and landscapes influences the quality of the visitor experience and can directly enable or impede recreation. Two problematic resource issues in Dakota County Parks provide cases in point:

- Areas colonized by buckthorn and other woody invasives can be inaccessible to visitors.
- In summer, excess nutrients from upstream runoff trigger large algal blooms in Lake Byllesby making the water unacceptable for swimming.

Right now only a small percentage of County parklands are actively managed for resource quality. Without active management, park resources will continue to decline due to invasive species, loss of key species, past disturbance, erosion, flooding, and threats to water quality.

Recognizing the complexity of the problems, the very costly nature of restoring degraded lands, and that extensive work is needed, a systemwide strategic management approach has been developed to ensure the following:

1. Protection of the most intrinsically valuable natural resources
2. Positive economic and ecologic returns on restoration investments
3. Recreation enhancement and public demonstration value
4. Long-term sustainable management of park resources.

The following vision, goals, and strategies reflect revised thinking on resource protection, restoration, and management.

***Vision for Park Resources:***

- A healthy and biologically diverse mosaic of resilient landscapes and waterways that represents the natural heritage of Dakota County and supports a range of nature-based recreation activities.
- Cultural resource management that preserves the irreplaceable and increases understanding of our collective past.

***Policies for Park Natural and Cultural Resources***

*Policy 1:* Develop and maintain an inventory of natural and cultural resources in system.

*Policy 2:* Preserve significant high quality ecosystems, cultural resource areas, and scenic landscapes and viewsheds.

*Policy 3:* Strategically restore native landscapes where:

1. Good ecological and financial return on the restoration investment is feasible,
2. Visitors will be able to see and appreciate representative high quality ecosystems.

*Policy 4:* Use sustainable land management techniques, facility siting, and facility design.

*Policy 5:* Protect and enhance water resource quality, manage stormwater quantity.

*Policy 6:* Ensure adequate funding to meet priority resource management needs and partner with others to coordinate and expand resource management efforts.

## **Park Resource Goals and Strategies (Goals 9 – 13):**

**Goal 9**     *Develop a comprehensive, strategic park natural resource management approach to:*

- 1) *Preserve the highest quality resources***
- 2) *Restore targeted areas that bring economic and ecological value***
- 3) *Enhance visitor experiences***
- 4) *Enter all parkland into appropriate and sustainable management regimes.***

### **Objective 9.1**

***Identify and preserve the highest quality park resource areas to enhance natural diversity.***

#### **Strategies**

- 9.1.1     Protect uncommon and rare habitat sites, including old-growth timber stands identified by park plans and the County Biological Survey. Remove competition by young degraded woodlands.
- 9.1.2     Protect and enhance high quality lakes and streams, e.g., the lakes in Lebanon Hills Regional Park and Trout Brook in Miesville Ravine.
- 9.1.3     Reintroduce priority native plant and animal species that are absent from ecologically suitable park locations.

### **Objective 9.2**

***Identify and strategically restore targeted park areas that provide economic and ecological returns on investment.***

#### **Strategies**

- 9.2.1     Implement the Lebanon Hills Stormwater Management Plan under the joint powers agreement with Eagan and Rosemount.
- 9.2.2     Discontinue renting land for conventional agriculture. Restore low fertility and highly erodible cropland to oak savanna, control invasive species along field edges.
- 9.2.3     Restore and enhance existing remnant oak savanna, prairie, wetland, and forest areas.
- 9.2.4     Explore sustainable and innovative interim management strategies: sustainable perennial agriculture, sustainable timber management, sustainable biomass production.
- 9.2.5     Restore ecosystems identified in park master plans, e.g., restoration of the Hubbard Sand Terrace in Spring Lake Park Reserve to a large continuous oak savanna.

### **Objective 9.3**

***Manage resources to enhance park visitor experiences, using a demonstration approach.***

#### **Strategies**

- 9.3.1     Identify and restore priority demonstration sites near existing and high priority visitor areas. Examples include:
  - Schulze Lake and Holland Lake near the Lebanon Hills Visitor Center
  - Savanna and prairie areas near the new Schaar's Bluff Cultural Center
  - Renaturalizing xeric trees, shrubs, and grasses at east Lake Byllesby Park.

**Objective 9.4**

***Enter all parkland into appropriate, sustainable, long-term management regimes to prevent further degradation and protect past investment.***

**Strategies**

- 9.4.1 Maximize efficiency and ecological benefit with large management units.
- 9.4.2 Manage previously restored areas to protect past investment.
- 9.4.3 Strategically control invasive plants with efficient, effective methods such as controlled prescribed burns.
- 9.4.4 Control soil erosion by identifying erosion-prone areas and establishing suitable ground cover, adding stormwater ponds, and working with upstream landowners.
- 9.4.5 Minimally manage low potential, low return areas.

**Goal 10** ***Protect, design, and maintain scenic park viewsheds to enhance visitor experience.***

**Objective 10.1**

***Identify high priority park viewsheds for protection and enhancement, e.g., the Trout Brook Valley viewshed.***

**Strategies**

- 10.2.1 Evaluate methods for characterizing high quality viewsheds and prioritizing protection.

**Objective 10.2**

***Develop and employ an effective range of techniques to protect priority viewsheds and opportunities for visitors to appreciate them.***

**Strategies**

- 10.2.1 Use trees and shrub plantings on park boundaries help screen development and conventional agriculture on adjacent private land.
- 10.2.2 Plan park facilities with consideration of the “view from the water.” Adhere to Mississippi River Critical Area standards for park developments in the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) corridor.
- 10.2.3 Use collaborative opportunities and land protection measures to preserve scenic views on nearby land.
- 10.2.4 Design park facilities to offer views.

**Goal 11** ***Protect park cultural resources and offer appropriate opportunities for visitors to experience them.***

**Objective 11.1**

***Map and classify cultural resource sites according to sensitivity and protection needs, restoration needs and potential, and suitability for public access and direct interpretive opportunities.***

**Strategies**

- 11.1.1 Incorporate cultural resource inventories from the State Historic Preservation Office and cultural resource assessments completed with park master plan updates.
- 11.1.2 Prepare a cultural resource assessment for Lebanon Hills Regional Park (not prepared with master plan update).
- 11.1.3 Determine the cultural resource potential for Twentieth Century agricultural sites.
- 11.1.4 Identify sites with good potential for interpretive programming.

**Objective 11.2**

***Develop stewardship plans to protect sensitive cultural resources.***

**Strategies**

- 11.2.1 Abide by all Section 106 requirements for park development projects to avoid disturbance of sensitive cultural resources.
- 11.2.2 Manage natural resources to avoid disturbance of cultural resource sites.

**Goal 12** ***Design and maintain park facilities sustainably, to reduce and avoid negative environmental impacts.***

**Objective 12.1**

***Minimize the impact of park infrastructure.***

**Strategies**

- 12.1.1 Improve parking lots and roads with adjoining rain gardens, earthen berms, and appropriate trees and shrubs to shade and screen motor vehicles.
- 12.1.2 Remove park buildings and structures that are no longer needed.
- 12.1.3 Relocate maintenance facilities to minimize environmental impact.

**Objective 12.2**

***Design sustainable, ecologically appropriate park use areas and facilities.***

**Strategies**

- 12.2.1 Expand use of sustainable design standards to more park facilities and use areas.
- 12.2.2 Develop and manage the Schaar's Bluff Gathering Center as a showcase for environmental quality and sustainability.
- 12.2.3 Continue annual reviews of mowed lawn areas to replace turf with native species. Where lawn areas are essential, test no-mow, no-fertilize grass species.
- 12.2.4 Plant low native shrubs in lawn areas to discourage Canada geese.

**Goal 13** ***Expand resource management partnerships to leverage skills, policies, and access.***

**Objective 13.1**

***Jointly manage floodwater and improve water quality in parks and at locations upstream from parks.***

**Strategies**

- 13.1.1 Work with watershed management organizations on water issues.
- 13.1.2 Work with owners of environmentally essential properties in upstream watershed areas to reduce runoff.

**Objective 13.2**

***Collaborate on opportunities for ecologically friendly new development and land uses adjacent to parks.***

**Strategies**

- 13.2.1 Continue to strengthen working relationships with adjacent landowners, city and township governments, and state and federal agencies involved with resource management.
- 13.2.2 Collaborate to help enroll appropriate land in conservation programs such as the Farmland and Natural Areas Program and Conservation Reserve Program.
- 13.2.3 Evaluate opportunities to work with adjacent farmland owners on effective biomass production in appropriate park boundary areas. Assist in determining appropriate sites for planting sustainable biofuel crops and coordinate efficient biomass management and harvest.

**Objective 13.3**

***Explore partnerships to provide or improve habitat for migrating species.***

**Strategies**

- 13.3.1 Conduct annual meeting with agencies and resource organizations to coordinate habitat improvement projects.
- 13.3.2 Identify key feeding and resting sites and protect from recreational development.
- 13.3.3 Manage vegetation at key feeding and resting sites to optimize their value for migrating species.

***2. Parkland Acquisition and Protection***

Within the existing Dakota County Park System, 747 acres of planned parkland are left to acquire. Costs of completing acquisition are estimated at \$21.6 million (2007 dollars). Given funding limitations and Dakota County's preferred approach of working with willing sellers, acquisition will need to be pursued in a more strategic manner that prioritizes land purchases based on park use, access, and resource protection needs.

***Vision for Parkland Acquisition and Protection:***

Acquisition and protection is focused on parklands with high quality natural resources, priority planned recreational areas, and enhancing connectivity of parks.



### ***Policies for acquiring a premier system of parks***

- Policy 1: Acquire, protect, and connect high quality parkland for public and environmental benefit. Develop partnership approaches for acquisition and protection, as applicable.
- Policy 2: Acquire park property from willing sellers and increase the appeal of selling private property for parkland through various land purchase and protection techniques.
- Policy 3: Consider condemnation of privately held land within parks if private land use:
1. Interferes with park operations, park security, or user safety.
  2. Impedes park use or development or threatens quality for future park uses.
  3. Degrades or threatens natural resources.
  4. Jeopardizes acquisition or development funds because of grant expiration.
  5. Significantly changes intensity of property use.
- Policy 4: Prioritize all park inholdings according to need for recreational development, resource protection, and uniting bisected park areas.
- Policy 5: Minimize future private development on remaining parcels to be purchased within park boundaries.

### ***Parkland Acquisition Goals and Strategies (Goals 14 – 15):***

**Goal 14** *Acquire and protect parklands and regional trail right of way through a strategic and comprehensive approach.*

#### **Objective 14.1**

*Develop and maintain a prioritized inventory of park inholdings and regional trail needs.*

#### **Strategies**

- 14.1.1 Document all park inholding needs in a central land database.
- 14.1.2 Prepare new master plans for all regional trails and develop comprehensive updated parcel or easement information with estimated market values.
- 14.1.3 Continually update park in-holder and trail easement land database with current acquisition cost data.
- 14.1.4 Prioritize all acquisition of parklands and trail easements based on planned use and development timeframes, resource protection, available funding, and other factors.

#### **Objective 14.2**

*Develop new tools and alternative approaches to facilitate parkland and trail acquisition and protection.*

#### **Strategies**

- 14.2.1 Research the feasibility and benefits of a countywide Transfer of Development Rights Program.

- 14.2.2 Obtain “first rights of refusal” and other land protection options from owners of strategic private lands.
- 14.2.3 Work with local governments to evaluate the feasibility of transferring development rights from new parkland acquisitions and allowing the County to sell these rights as a commodity.
- 14.2.4 Establish a minimum staffing and funding standard for acquisition and protection of new park and regional trail lands.
- 14.2.5 Evaluate the potential application and benefits of an Official Mapping Ordinance.

**Goal 15    *Develop and enhance collaborations that advance County parkland acquisition and protection.***

**Strategies**

- 15.1.1 Invest staff resources into existing and new strategic partnerships with public, private, and non-profit organizations for increased land protection and stewardship.
- 15.1.2 Promote a shared vision with aligned policies among local governments, the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Areas Program, the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization, and others to accommodate and fiscally support the Parks and Open Space vision.
- 15.1.3 Develop new partnerships with corporations and local businesses to create a land protection and stewardship fund.
- 15.1.4 Foster partnerships with local units of government or private organizations on coordinated and shared land protection goals and funding.
- 15.1.5 Create a strategic alliance with other metropolitan park implementation agencies to increase state and regional funding for land protection and stewardship.
- 15.1.6 Research the potential for developing carbon trading relationships with residential developers, businesses and industries.

***3. Collaborating in a Green Infrastructure Approach***

What is Green Infrastructure? The Conservation Fund and USDA Forest Service coordinated a multi-agency Green Infrastructure Work Group, who define green infrastructure as follows:

“Green infrastructure is our nation’s natural life support system — an interconnected network of waterways, wetlands, woodlands, wildlife habitats, and other natural areas; greenways, parks and other conservation lands; working farms, ranches and forests; and wilderness and other open spaces that support native species, maintain natural ecological processes, sustain air and water resources and contribute to the health and quality of life for America’s communities and people.”

Green Infrastructure planning is intrinsically about collaboration among public and private landowners to protect shared resources that no single entity can fully protect on their own.

***Green Infrastructure Vision:***

Through a unique intergovernmental and public/private partnership model, a comprehensive and interconnected system of parks, natural areas and other lands in Dakota County will be protected and sustained to provide multiple economic, ecological and social benefits for current and future residents.

### ***Policies for Protecting, Connecting and Enhancing Green Infrastructure***

- Policy 1: Acquire and/or protect and connect high quality scenic and resource lands for public and environmental benefit. Develop partnership approaches for acquisition and /or protection of resource lands, as applicable.
- Policy 2: Establish a collaborative County role in protecting stream corridors and other resource corridors in the undeveloped portions of Dakota County:
- 1) Participate in protecting land in major stream and regional trail corridors (Vermillion, Chub, Cannon) and build trails as opportunity allows.
  - 2) Collaborate with cities and townships on protection and/or recreation for local rural greenways and conservation corridors.

### ***Green Infrastructure Goals and Strategies (Goal 16):***

***Goal 16 Protect public-value lands through a strategic and comprehensive approach.***

#### ***Objective 16.1***

***Identify high quality public-value lands with resources, connectivity, and qualities that contribute to green infrastructure.***

#### ***Strategies***

- 16.1.1 Develop and maintain countywide data on natural areas, resource corridors, and sensitive lands.
- 16.1.2 Identify areas of development pressure on undeveloped resource lands and natural systems.
- 16.1.3 Develop priorities for land and natural system protection.

#### ***Objective 16.2***

***Identify key partnerships to advance green infrastructure benefits.***

#### ***Strategies***

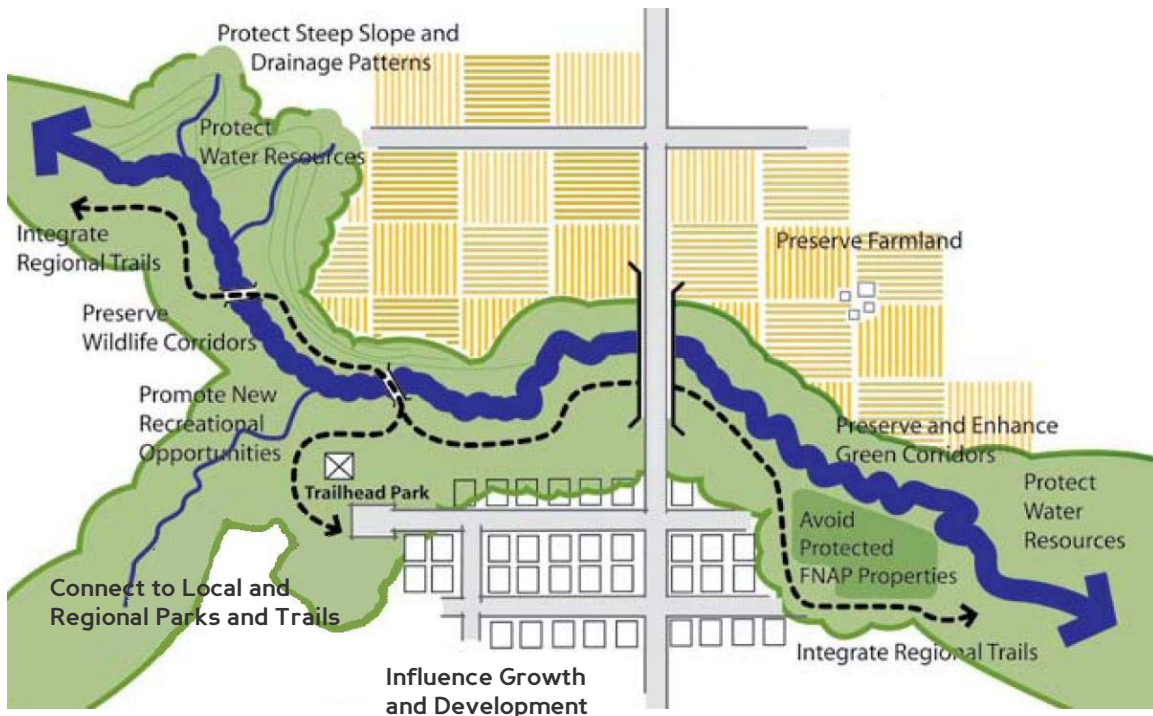
- 16.2.1 Promote a shared Green Infrastructure vision with aligned policies and funding among local governments, the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Areas Program, the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization, and others.
- 16.2.2 Foster partnerships with local governments or private organizations to coordinate goals and share funding for land protection.
- 16.2.3 Build and enhance strategic partnerships with public, private, and non-profit organizations to enhance land protection and ensure ongoing land stewardship.
- 16.2.4 Develop partnerships with corporations and local businesses to create a fund for land protection and stewardship.

#### ***Objective 16.3***

***Develop a collaborative green infrastructure map with parks and greenways at its core and appropriate implementation tools.***

### **Strategies**

- 16.3.1 Develop a countywide land protection prioritization policy and plan.
- 16.3.2 Increase the County's capacity, resources and skills to facilitate and provide incentives for the creation of an interconnected, countywide, public/private system of parks, natural areas, public-value lands and working lands.
- 16.3.3 Work with local governments to evaluate transferring development rights from new land acquisitions and allowing the County to sell the rights as a commodity.
- 16.3.4 Research the feasibility and benefits of a Countywide Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program. Strive to ensure that TDR is applied in a locally equitable manner that is consistent with local community plans.
- 16.3.5 Obtain "first rights of refusal" and other land protection options from owners of strategic private lands.
- 16.3.6 Collaboratively develop resource restoration and management guidelines.
- 16.3.7 Leverage and develop additional technical assistance on resource management for participating private landowners.
- 16.3.8 Research the potential for developing carbon-trading relationships with residential developers, businesses, and industries
- 16.3.9 Evaluate the potential application and benefits of an Official Mapping Ordinance.



## Chapter 4, Near Term Implementation, Ten-Year Priorities

### Great Places: Start with Priority Park Enhancements

**Prioritize park recreation improvements that focus on basic activities and popular activities:**



Visitors would like more to do in Dakota County Parks and updated master plans will deliver new activities. To establish ten-year priorities for recreation, master plan projects across the system were evaluated using three near-term objectives:

**Ten-Year Objective 1: Provide Popular Basics at all parks**, similar to county park agencies in the region. These activities include the most popular forms of recreation in the regional park system:

*Walking*  
*Hiking*

*Biking*  
*Picnicking*

*Fishing*  
*Interpretation*

*Programming*  
*Events*

**Rationale:** Dakota County's parks are short on some of the popular basics. Current trail miles and picnicking will not support major visitation increases. Recent master plans may not provide enough popular basics at all parks. The lack of short paved loops limits park accessibility for all potentially interested visitors and County residents.

**Strategies** to fill gaps in selected basics:

- ♦ Prioritize projects that offer the basics
- ♦ To all parks, add at least one easy short paved loop near major visitor areas and a lake loop, as feasible, to welcome visitors of all abilities
- ♦ Complete regional trails through each park
- ♦ Add a major picnicking area or smaller areas to Lebanon Hills, Spring Lake, and Lake Byllesby
- ♦ Amend master plans to address gaps and engage the public in the process



**Ten-Year Objective 2: Provide Popular Opportunity-Based Recreation** based on water features, terrain, and seasonal conditions:

- ♦ Canoeing and kayaking
- ♦ Cross-country skiing
- ♦ Swimming, wading, and splashing areas
- ♦ Other uses with demonstrated popularity and demand on a case-by-case basis, such as off-leash dog areas

**Rationale:** Although these activities cannot be provided at all parks, or perhaps on a year-round basis, many are top reasons for park visits and can contribute to peak use in different seasons.

**Strategies:**

- ♦ Prioritize projects with popular opportunity-based activities.
- ♦ Add areas for uses with demonstrated popularity through master plan amendments.



**Ten-Year Objective 3: Add or expand “Signature” Use Recreation** to build on master plan themes and the memorable qualities of each park. Signature uses reflect the park’s natural resources, location, and scenic qualities. These uses may be provided at one park or at all parks, delivered in a unique way.

**Rationale:** Signature uses help define parks:

**Lebanon Hills:** *Sustainably designed, urban natural retreat*

- ♦ Trails (hike, walk, canoe, ski, skate, ride, bike)
- ♦ Education, programming, and events

**Spring Lake:** *Rich resources framing balanced recreation based on the river, history, and discovery*

- ♦ Scenic river views and river access
- ♦ Picnicking on Schaar’s Bluff
- ♦ Trails with natural and cultural resource Interpretation

**Lake Byllesby:** *Recreation base in the Cannon River Valley*

- ♦ Lake and water activities (view, boat, swim, wade)
- ♦ Camping
- ♦ Biking (link to Cannon Valley Trail)
- ♦ Picnicking on Echo Point

**Miesville Ravine:** *Pristine trout stream ecosystem within dramatic Cannon Valley*

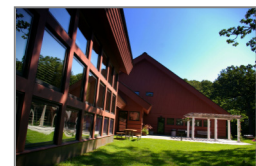
- ♦ Trails with scenic views, natural resource appreciation
- ♦ Trout Brook hiking and fishing
- ♦ Cannon River access

**Thompson County Park:** *All-season urban oasis and stage for community life*

- ♦ Picnicking and group gatherings
- ♦ Events: community and private
- ♦ Convenient quick walk around the lake

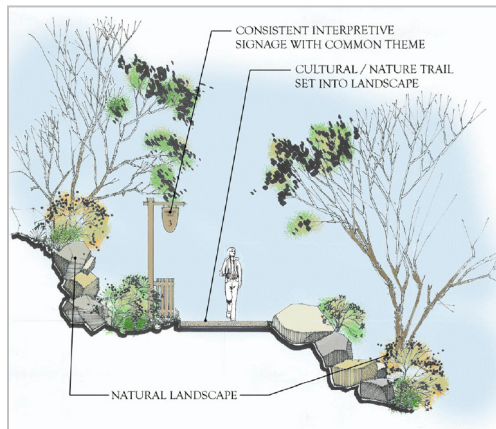
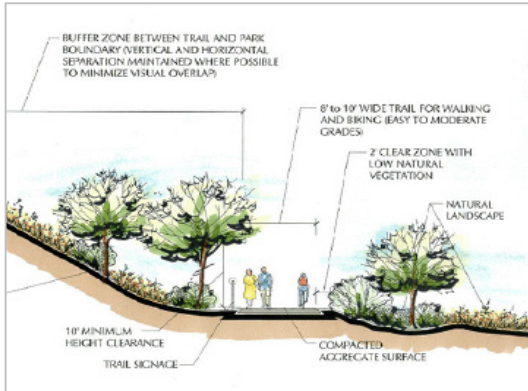
**Strategy:**

- ♦ Prioritize at least one master plan project based on a signature use at each park



## Great Places: Ten-Year Recreation Priorities, Park by Park

Based on the objectives and system evaluation, the following projects emerged as ten-year priorities for recreation in Dakota County Parks. Gaps will be filled through master plan amendments.



### Lebanon Hills Recreation Priorities:

**Connector-Regional Trails** suitable for biking  
**Schulze Lake & Beach** improvements  
**Nature Trails:** also for skiing and winter hiking  
**Trailheads:** Wheaton Pond, Johnny Cake, Visitor Center  
**Camp Sacajawea** enhancement  
**Campground** improvements

*Fill Gap:* 2 to 3 paved loops, 1 mile or less, at major use areas, on lake when possible

*Fill Gap:* New picnic areas, with shelter and grouped tables

*Fill Gap:* Winter Use Area: lit ski / hiking trails, snowmaking

*Fill Gap:* Kiosks and entry signs

*Fill Gap:* Large gathering area for events

*Evaluate:* Potential off leash area

**Estimated total=\$9M**

### Spring Lake Recreation Priorities:

**Mississippi River Regional Trail Segment:** 7.1 miles paved trail with trailhead

**Cultural Trails** with trailhead, amenities, interpretive info

**Nature Trails** through park with footbridges, trailhead, amenities, winter skiing

**Riverside Day-Use Area:** Stairs from cultural center to river, docks, picnicking

**West End River Use and Picnic Area**

*Fill Gap:* Two 1-mile paved loops, at major use areas

*Fill Gap:* Additional picnic area, based on population needs

*Fill Gap:* Kiosks and entry signs

**Estimated total=\$3M**

### Lake Byllesby Recreation Priorities:

**Echo Point Area:** Great lawn, pavilion, piers, picnicking, parking, landscaping

**Cannon River Ped/Bike Bridge:** Cannon Valley Trail link

**Mill Towns Trail:** from bridge to park entrance

**Splash Pad at Beach:** zero-depth, interim substitute for swimming lagoon

**Shoreline Paved Trail:** 1.4 mi. paved trail (adjust for current campsites)

*Fill Gap:* One easy 1-mile paved trail loop in park, at major use area

*Fill Gap:* Additional picnic area in park

*Fill Gap:* Kiosks and entry signs

**Estimated total=\$4M**



**Miesville Ravine Recreation Priorities:**

**Cannon River Canoe/Tube Launch:** Landing, picnic area, drinking water, restrooms, phone

**Ridgeline Trail:** Rustic trail, connects to Trout Brook trail

**Trout Brook Trail:** Rustic trail, forms loop with Ridgeline

*Fill Gap:* One easy 1-mile paved trail loop in park, off major use area

*Fill Gap:* Additional picnic improvements in park, preferably on river

*Fill Gap:* Kiosks and entry signs

**Estimated Total=\$1M**



**Thompson Park Recreation Priorities:**

**Main Entry:** Road realignment with water quality pond, paved trail lake loop, entry sign

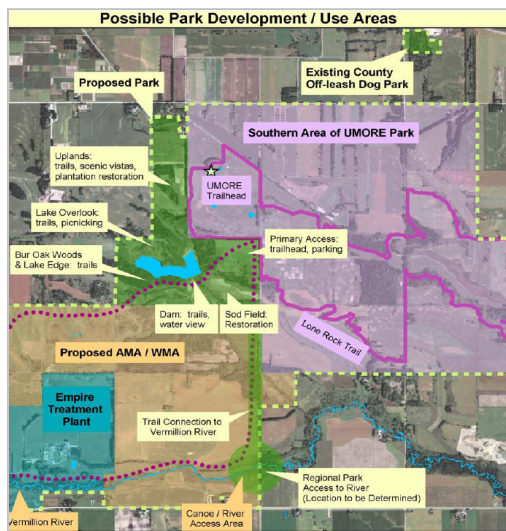
**Main Picnic Area:** Large shelter, small shelter, playground, splash pad, parking reconfiguration

**Dakota Lodge Area:** Event space, plaza expansion, lake overlook, landscaping

**South Connection:** Paved trails, kiosk, benches, small parking lot, landscaping

*Fill Gap:* Additional kiosks and entry signs

**Estimated total=\$2M**



**Vermillion Highlands Recreation Priorities:**

**Main Entry Parking and Trailhead Area:** Picnic shelters and grounds, paved lake trail, hiking trail loop

**Water Access:** Carry-in access at lake

**River Connection:** One mile paved trail with satellite picnic and general use area at Vermillion River

**Signs:** Entry and orientation

**Estimated Total=\$1.5M**

**Total Estimated Costs for Ten-Year Park Recreation Priorities = \$19.8M**



## Great Places: Evaluate, Plan, and Prepare New Parks over the Next Ten Years

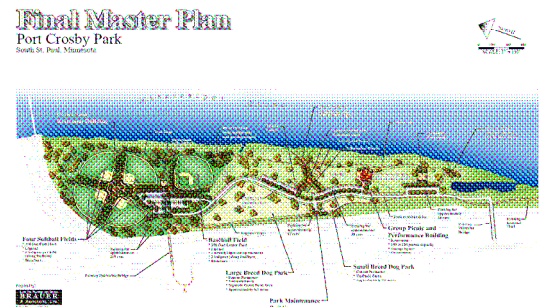
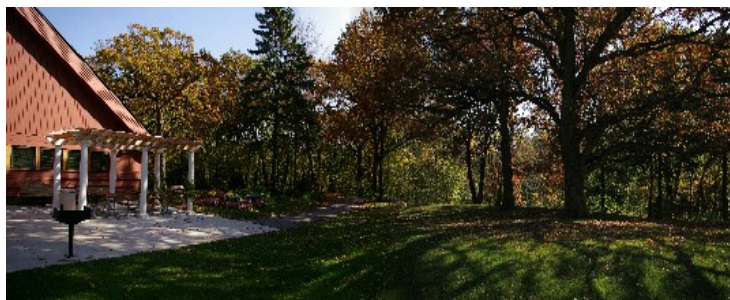
### **Open Vermillion Highlands Regional Park with popular basic improvements (upon acquisition)**

*Prepare for visitation with trails, access, and parking.  
Prepare area master plan with MN DNR and the U of MN.  
Provide for basic popular activities.*



### **Consider opportunities for Thompson, Kaposia, and Port Crosby Parks as a joint regional park unit**

*All three parks are connected by regional trails.  
Regional status could provide regional  
and local park benefits.  
Explore feasibility and benefits  
with South St. Paul and Metropolitan Council.*



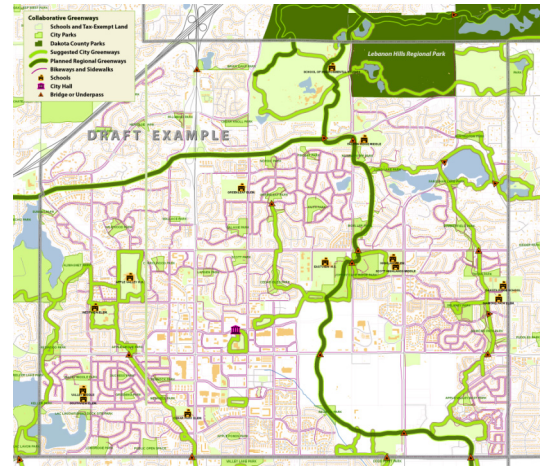
Dakota County Parks have fewer park acres per resident compared to other regional agencies. Vermillion Highlands is a planned addition that will address part of the shortfall. This plan also recommends discussion between the City of South St. Paul and Dakota County on a regional facility composed of Thompson County Park, and Kaposia and Port Crosby Parks (city parks) to provide a regional park in northern Dakota County.

## Connected Places: Organize a Collaborative Approach and Plan Greenways

- 1) **Initiate greenways and trails network with a multi-partner collaborative and**
- 2) **Co develop a greenway master plan and a greenway CIP**

With cities, townships, schools, utilities, developers, MN Zoo

- ♦ Develop a model for planning, funding, and operations.
- ♦ Plan the network — hierarchy, standards, and routes.



Regional trails are among the most popular recreation facilities in the metro area. Greenways connecting public open space are a cost effective way to provide regional trails within linear parks and maximize recreation opportunities in developed and developing communities.

**Ten-Year Objective 1:** Develop the Greenway Collaborative with cities, and other partners. Develop a funding model.

**Ten-Year Objective 2:** Complete regional trails along the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers.

**Ten-Year Objective 3:** Complete other priority regional trails that are destinations.

**Ten-Year Objective 4:** Complete priority regional trails with time-limited windows of opportunity.



**Rationale Used in Identifying Priority Regional Trails** — the following characteristics were considered:

*High visitor potential*  
*Cost-share partners*  
*Master plan completed*  
*Threatened by development*

*Grant funding in hand*  
*Grant funding potential*  
*Provides a destination location*  
*Fills a gap*

## Connected Places: Ten-Year Priorities for Regional Greenway Trails



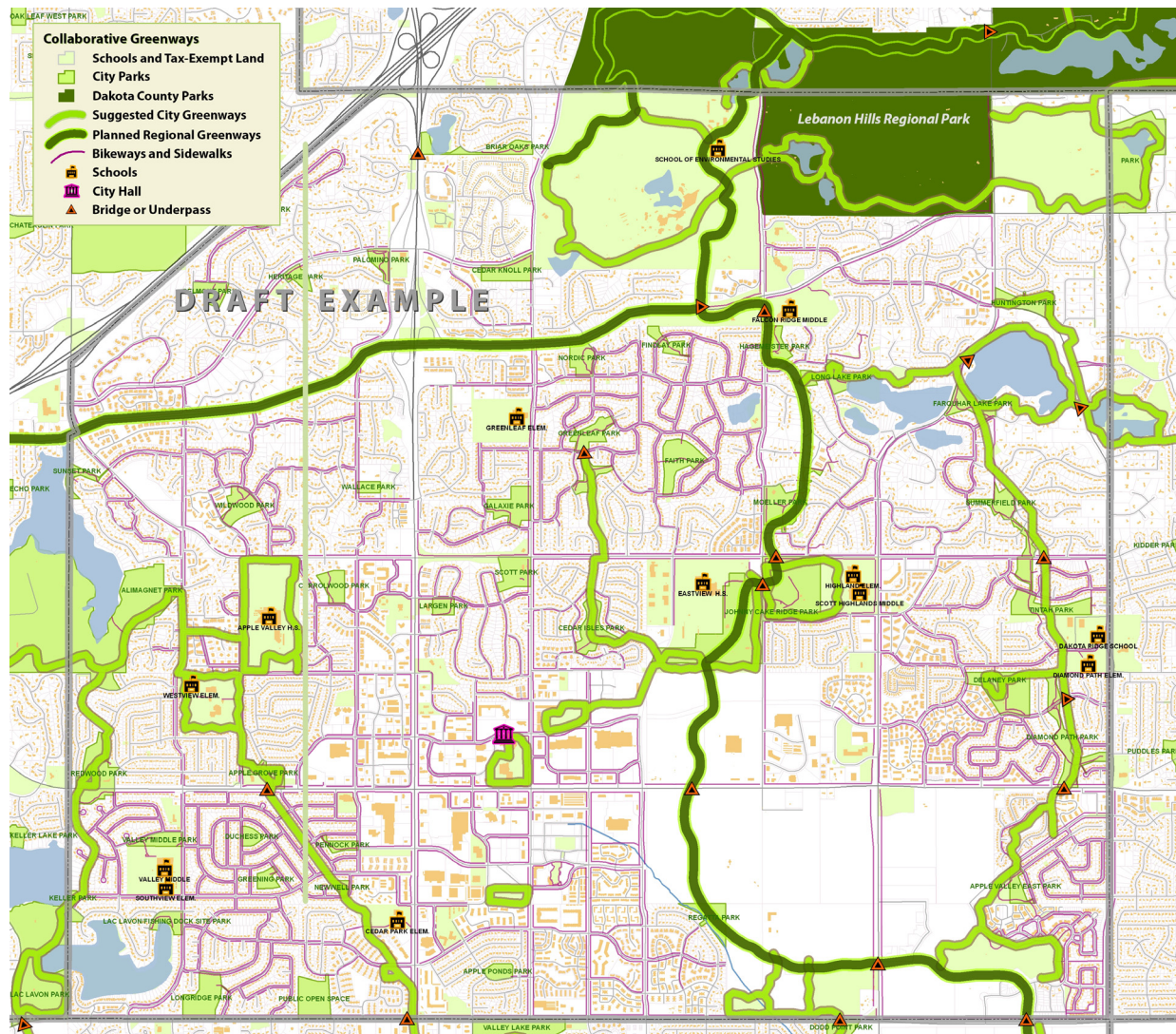
### Priority Regional Greenway Trails for the Next Ten Years

1. Mississippi River Regional Trail (MRRT) – Inver Grove Heights to Hastings	14 miles
2. North Urban Regional Trail – final segment	1 mile
3. Minnesota River Regional Trail – Savage to 494	7 miles
4. Rosemount River Access Greenway Regional Trail – Rosemount to MRRT	5 miles
5. Mississippi River Regional Trail – South St. Paul to St. Paul	1 mile
6. Cannon Valley Regional Trail – Byllesby East to Cannon Falls	1 mile
7. North Creek Greenway (seeking regional status) – MN Zoo to Vermillion River	9 miles
8. Lake Marion Greenway Regional Trail – Lake Marion to Cedar Avenue	7 miles
9. Vermillion River Greenway Regional Trail – Cedar Ave. to Vermillion Park	6 miles
<b>Total = 51 miles</b>	

## Connected Places: A Closer Look at City and County Collaborative Greenway Planning

The example below shows Apple Valley with concept city greenways connecting city parks, schools, lakes, and adjacent cities of Burnsville, Lakeville, and Rosemount. Regional greenways link to Lebanon Hills Regional Park and the Vermillion River Greenway to the south. All greenways also connect to sidewalks and bikeways to provide a complete system. The proposed Greenway Collaborative will identify routes and develop detailed greenway plans with each city.

The example greenways use land that is predominantly in public ownership. Retrofitting may be needed in older areas, and the Collaborative will work with developers to plan greenways in new developments.



### Estimated Costs for Priority Regional Trail Greenways:

The Greenway Collaborative will develop a cost-sharing and in-kind model for securing land and developing greenways. Projected costs for ten-year priority greenways are estimated at \$20.3M in combined City and County funding, assuming federal trail funding. A City-County cost share and in-kind assumption similar to County bikeways would yield the following local cost estimate.

<i>Ten year priority greenway trails:</i>	<b>\$6.7M County</b>	<b>\$13.6M Federal &amp; Local</b>	<b>\$20.3M Total</b>
<i>Long range (2030) greenway trails:</i>	<b>\$10.1M County</b>	<b>\$22.9M Federal &amp; Local</b>	<b>\$33.0M Total</b>

## ***Protected Places: Restoring Park Resources***

### ***Restore park resources for:***

- ♦ ***Demonstration value***
- ♦ ***Economic and ecological returns on investment***



Quality natural and cultural resources are the foundation for the park system — a primary reason these lands were protected as parks. Only 10 percent of County parklands are actively managed for resource quality. Without active management, resource quality will continue to be undermined by invasive species, loss of key species, past disturbance, erosion, flooding, and threats to water quality.

Recognizing that extensive work is needed, a system wide management approach has been developed maximizing economic and ecologic returns on investment and public demonstration value. These approaches have been integrated into the following ten-year objectives.

### **Ten-Year Objective 1:**

#### **Better Quality**

Substantially improve resource quality to prevent loss.

#### **Priorities:**

- ♦ Restore 500 acres of remnant oak savanna, prairie, wetland, and forest.
- ♦ Economically convert 240 cropped and 260 retired acres to stable plant communities.
- ♦ Manage the 225 acres already restored.
- ♦ Manage viewsheds for recreation and reduced conflicts.



### **Ten-Year Objective 2:**

#### **Natural and Cultural Heritage Diversity**

Represent diverse natural heritage of the park system, including uncommon, rare, and protected species. Manage cultural resources.

#### **Priorities:**

- ♦ Manage 6 sites in 3 parks totaling 150 acres for uncommon and rare habitats.
- ♦ Manage 15 cultural heritage sites in 5 parks totaling 20 acres for preservation and interpretation.



### **Ten-Year Objective 3:**

#### **Public Use**

Manage resources for recreational and educational use. Improve recreation experience through resource restoration.

#### **Priorities:**

- ♦ Priority recreation and education areas: 350 acres at Lebanon Hills, 100 acres at Spring Lake, and 50 acres at Lake Byllesby.
- ♦ Development standards will be innovative and will protect resources.



### **Ten-Year Objective 4:**

#### **Sustainable Management**

Use sustainable, cost effective, and innovative management approaches to protect County investment in resource lands.

#### **Priorities:**

- ♦ Maximize efficiency and ecological benefit with large management units.
- ♦ Use biologically required methods: controlled burning.
- ♦ Explore innovative interim strategies: perennial agriculture, timber management, biomass production.
- ♦ Minimally manage parklands with limited restoration potential and/or very high costs, roughly 2,200 acres system wide.



**Ten-Year Resource Management Priority Costs:** based on the system approaches and near-term objectives. Over the next ten years, more than 1,700 acres of parkland would be restored.

<i>Description</i>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Costs</b>
<b>1) Better Quality</b>	<b>1,227</b>	<b>\$2.1M</b>
Manage previously restored sites to protect past investment	227	\$0.1M
Restore cropped agricultural land	240	\$0.5M
Restore retired cropland	260	\$0.5M
Restore remnant oak savanna, prairie, wetland, and forest	500	\$1.0M
<b>2) Natural Diversity</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>\$0.1M</b>
Manage 6 uncommon and rare habitat sites in 3 parks	150	
Manage 15 cultural heritage sites in 5 parks for preservation, interpretation	20	
<b>3) Public Use</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>\$3.0M</b>
Restore priority demonstration sites, for existing and planned priority visitor recreation and education areas. Lake Byllesby, 50 acres Lebanon Hills, 350 acres                  Spring Lake, 100 acres		
<b>4) Sustainable Management</b>	<b>varies</b>	<b>\$0.7M</b>
Minimal management on low potential, low return areas (up to 3,325 acres)	varies	\$0.1M
Manage newly restore lands (figure is mid-term average for 10 years)	1,000	\$0.6M
	<b>Total</b>	<b>varies</b>
		<b>\$5.9 M</b>

**Protected Places: Prioritize acquisition of parkland**

***Prioritize land acquisition needs  
and partner with others to acquire land***



The following ten-year objectives were set for acquisition of priority parkland:

**Ten-Year Objective 1:**

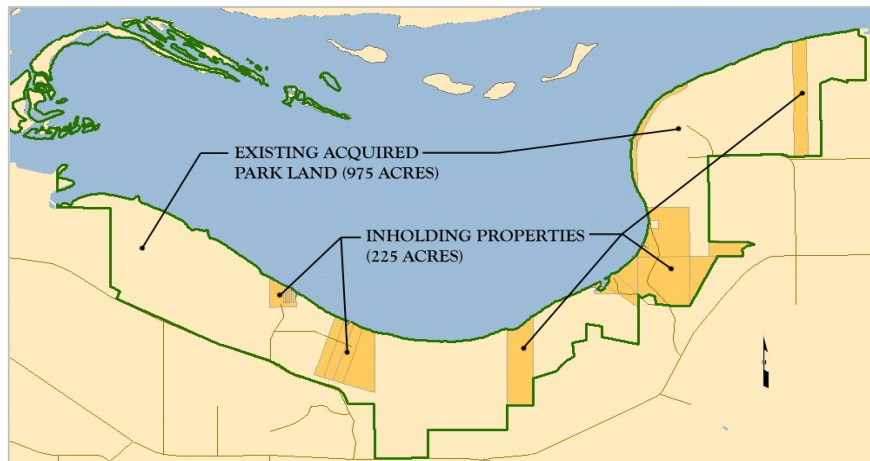
Acquire inholdings or easements for priority, near-term recreation needs

**Ten-Year Objective 2:**

Acquire inholdings or easements for priority resource protection (e.g., lake, river)

**Ten-Year Objective 3:**

Acquire inholdings or easement to unite bisected park areas



All park inholdings were evaluated to create the list of priority acquisitions on the following page.



**Near-Term Park Acquisition Priorities** on a park-by-park basis:

**Lebanon Hills**

Land required for priority recreation, trails, and trailheads: 3 properties **\$1.0M**  
Land required for priority shoreline protection: 3 properties **\$0.1M**

***Spring Lake Park Reserve***

Land required for priority recreation, trails, and trailheads: 5 properties **\$1.8M**  
Land required for priority shoreline protection (and recreation): 4 properties **\$1.3M**

***Lake Byllesby***

Near-term acquisition will be driven by opportunity only.

***Miesville Ravine Park Reserve***

Land required for priority recreation, trails, and trailheads: 4 properties **\$2.0M**

***Thompson County Park***

Land required for priority recreation, trails, and trailheads: 1 property **\$0.3M**

***Subtotal for existing parks***

**\$6.5M**

**Vermillion Highlands Regional Park**

**\$13.2M**

**Total Near-Term Priority Acquisitions **\$19.7M****

**Total Park System-wide Acquisitions (near-term and long-term) **\$35.2M****



## **Chapter 5. Delivering the Vision – Park System Operations**

A clear future vision for the Dakota County Park System addresses part of its overall need. Strategies to efficiently operate, fund, and grow the Park System toward that future vision are equally important. The Park System Plan was intended to define the destination and also build strategies to help Dakota County Parks navigate to its destination while operating an evolving park system. This chapter broadly addresses operations – the care, maintenance, resource management, planning, program and service delivery, and administration that are required, not only to “keep the park system doors open to the public,” but also to ensure that visitor expectations are met in the quality of experiences at Dakota County’s parks.

The vision and strategies are both outgrowths of a 2006 Park System assessment that identified strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities throughout all aspects of Dakota County Parks (Chapter 3). The following mix of positive and negative findings from this assessment and public surveys has direct implications for park system operations:

- ✓ Phenomenal resources and places
- ✓ Growing emphasis on sustainable design
- ✓ Low public awareness of Dakota County’s Park System
- ✓ Lower than expected visitation
- ✓ Gaps in basic popular park activities
- ✓ Demand for more regional trails and greater connectivity
- ✓ Recent park master plans to implement
- ✓ A young and evolving park system
- ✓ Changing staff roles and needs related to system evolution
- ✓ A need for more partnerships
- ✓ Funding needs, now and future

Funding and setting near-term priorities for the system is important, but more is still needed. As a park agency, Dakota County Parks will further refine its operations to meet public expectations, now and as the system grows. Dakota County Parks must build operating capacity. To address these needs, Dakota County will prepare a comprehensive park operations plan to guide its efforts.

In addition to the operations plan, Dakota County will also prepare a strategic marketing plan to build awareness of the park system and develop new channels of communication with its most important constituents — County residents and park visitors.

This chapter presents policies, goals, and strategies for the following areas:

### **1. Build Awareness, Inform and Engage the Public**

### **2. Identify Needs, Set Expectations, and Build Capacity as a Park Agency**

- ♦ Develop Service Level Models
- ♦ Identify Operating Needs
- ♦ Identify Revenue and Fundraising Targets
- ♦ Refine Structure and Processes to Move Forward
- ♦ Exemplify Sustainability
- ♦ Enhance Leadership, Innovation, Learning, and Networking
- ♦ Develop and Enhance Partnerships

## **1) Build Awareness, Inform and Engage the Public**

Recent resident surveys show that many residents are not aware of the Dakota County Parks System and its individual parks. The bottom line is that some residents are missing out on the great places and recreational opportunities that the County park system offers. This is their park system and Dakota County will be working to build residents' awareness about the outdoor recreation resource that exists right here. Beyond generally knowing about the park system, residents also need timely and well-placed information about specific events and services at Dakota County Parks.

Public engagement is all about providing residents and visitors with more opportunities to influence the park system for the better, whether by expressing opinions on park system needs or satisfaction with services, or by getting more directly involved through advocacy, volunteer projects, or fundraising.

### **Public Awareness, Information, and Engagement Vision:**

**Awareness:** Dakota County Parks builds a clear identity as a park system worth visiting and develops "household name" recognition

**Information:** Just as the physical form of the system brings parks to people and becomes "a system you bump into," specific information on the park system, events, and activities also are right in front of people – widely accessible and easy to find.

**Public Engagement:** Dakota County inclusively engages County residents and other park visitors to build good information on the needs and interests of a diverse and broad-based constituency. This level of engagement is essential to developing great plans and services. Engagement further welcomes those who wish to help advance the Parks mission and vision, through advocacy, volunteerism, and fundraising.

### **Policies on Building Awareness, Providing Information, and Engaging the Public**

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Policy 1: | Regularly evaluate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>♦ Public interests in recreation</li><li>♦ Recreational trends</li><li>♦ New recreation needs related to County growth and change</li><li>♦ Benchmark comparisons to other park and recreation providers</li><li>♦ Dakota County's role in providing recreation within its mission</li></ul> |
| Policy 2: | Cooperate and collaborate with other park agencies to identify public interests to plan and provide outdoor recreation.  |
| Policy 3: | Engage the public in park planning efforts through inclusive public participation and outreach programs.   |
| Policy 4: | Develop and use a comprehensive marketing plan and approach to build awareness of Dakota County Parks and market its services.   |
| Policy 5: | Increase fiscal and staff resources to advance the vision through enhanced fundraising and volunteerism.   |

## **Public Awareness, Information, and Engagement Goals and Strategies (Goals 17-19)**

### **Goal 17 Build awareness of the Park System**

#### **Objective 17.1**

***Develop a consistent identity for the system.***

#### **Strategies**

- 17.1.1 Complete a branding study to define the park system identity through the Dakota County Communications Office.

#### **Objective 17.2**

***Prepare a comprehensive Parks Marketing Plan that incorporates the new brand identity and introduces the public to it through basic park information and interactions with staff.***

#### **Strategies**

- 17.2.1 Use the new brand identity to develop brochures, maps, and other basic information for posting or distribution through parks, County facilities, events, new resident information packets, and other modes.
- 17.2.2 Ensure that the website provides basic orientation information on the system and reinforces the system identity.
- 17.2.3 Ensure that visitors feel well informed and valued at Dakota County parks, with complete park signage, information kiosks, and friendly and helpful staff.
- 17.2.4 Provide high quality customer service for all permit check-ins and checkouts.

### **Goal 18 Enhance public access to timely and specific park information, including safety recommendations, recreational activities, park resources, events, programs, projects, and services.**

#### **Objective 18.1**

***Within the Parks marketing plan, address and guide all targeted awareness, marketing, and public information efforts.***

#### **Strategies**

- 18.1.1 Develop and implement a communications plan using press releases, list serves, cable television, and the County web site to routinely deliver park news in a timely manner.
- 18.1.2 Design and implement an advertising schedule for park facilities, events, and services.
- 18.1.3 Strategically market services, programs, and events to specific audiences.

**Objective 18.2**

***Provide park visitors with information that promotes their safety and enhances their sense of safety in Dakota County Parks.***

**Strategies**

- 18.2.1 Address visitors' safety concerns and encourage proactive risk avoidance with appropriate education including: conversations with staff, signs, web information, permit information, and kiosk materials.
- 18.2.2 Balance safety education efforts with visitors' desire for independence.
- 18.2.3 Include timely public health education information related to outdoor recreation (e.g., Lyme disease, water-borne illness).

**Goal 19** ***Engage the public in meaningful and diverse ways.***

**Objective 19.1**

***Engage the public regularly to identify and evaluate emerging park, recreation, and service needs.***

**Strategies**

- 19.1.1 Create an ongoing program to gather feedback with user satisfaction surveys, project-based focus groups, and visitor comments. Use public comments to refine programs and services and provide assurance to the public that their feedback makes a difference.
- 19.1.2 Develop inclusive public engagement objectives and processes for all major planning and programming initiatives to inform the development of plans, facilities, programs, and services.
- 19.1.3 "Meet people where they are" by proactively seeking intercept event opportunities in collaboration with other event organizers.
- 19.1.4 Track inquiries from visitors and customers when they request activities and services that are not currently provided.

**Objective 19.2**

***Build ongoing mutually beneficial relationships with park advocates through a new Dakota County Park System Friends Group.***

**Strategies**

- 19.2.1 Work with existing groups and park supporters to develop a new, broadly based parks advocacy group (Park Friends Group).
- 19.2.2 Work with the Park Friends Group to generate broader interest, share information, and build membership.
- 19.2.3 Work with the Park Friends Group to develop roles that provide meaningful engagement for members and assist in advancing the Parks mission and vision.
- 19.2.4 Coordinate actions by the Park Friends Group through involvement in planning processes, volunteerism, event planning, and fundraising.

**Objective 19.3**

***Expand opportunities for volunteerism in the Volunteer in Parks (VIP) Program.***

**Strategies**

- 19.3.1 Offer more varied volunteer activities that can engage people of all ages, backgrounds, skills, and interests. To expand the range of volunteer opportunities, research other volunteers programs and work with staff and existing volunteers.
- 19.3.2 Offer short-term opportunities to introduce new volunteers to the VIP program, such as large service events and small-scale clean ups (limited number) in un-adopted parks. Pair volunteers seeking a one-time engagement with Adopt-a-Park participants.
- 19.3.3 Market volunteer opportunities within an overall Parks marketing plan. Strategically market the Adopt-a-Park program to groups that likely would benefit.
- 19.3.4 Encourage current Park Adopters to spread the work and encourage other groups to adopt parks.
- 19.3.5 Evaluate ways to expand volunteer opportunities to include greenways.
- 19.3.6 Seek volunteer groups to assist in provision and operation of specialized recreation activities before adding more of these areas to the system. Successful examples include the Lebanon Hills Mountain Bike Course and Dakota Woods Dog Park.
- 19.3.7 Continue to support the volunteer ski patrol.
- 19.3.8 Establish a volunteer water-monitoring program.

**Objective 19.4**

***Enhance volunteers' sense of community, parks advocacy, and accomplishment.***

**Strategies**

- 19.4.1 Provide volunteers what they need: orientation, training, materials, coordination, supervision, and clear and timely communication. Maintain up-to-date policies and procedures in the VIP handbook.
- 19.4.2 Help volunteers stay connected to the park system through ongoing communication, education and awareness. Provide an avenue for volunteer communication, to promote opportunities, build membership and share success (newsletter, website).
- 19.4.3 Ensure that volunteers are placed in meaningful and engaging opportunities based on their interests and park needs.
- 19.4.4 Consistently recognize volunteers in a variety of ways.
- 19.4.5 Focus on building long-term relationships with volunteers.
- 19.4.6 Develop and promote a "volunteer niche" or trademark.

**Objective 19.5**

***Develop opportunities to engage supporters with a Dakota County Parks Foundation.***

**Strategies**

- 19.5.1 Work with the Park Friends Group to establish a charitable foundation to assist with fundraising efforts aligned with the Parks Department. (Under State statute, the County cannot create its own foundation; another group must establish it.)
- 19.5.2 Work with the new Parks Foundation to develop comprehensive fundraising, which may include annual giving campaigns, targeted projects, signature events, and corporate donations. Work with the Metropolitan Council's Foundation on fundraising for parkland acquisition.

## **2) Identify Operating Needs, Set Expectations, and Build Capacity as a Park Agency**

### **Operations Vision:**

**For visitors,** Dakota County Parks provide a safe, sustainable, and well-maintained park system that ensures high quality recreational experiences, with service delivery that anticipates and meets customer expectations.

**As a park agency,** Dakota County Parks Department operates with a clear customer focus, within an environment of:

- 1. Well-defined roles, expectations, procedures, and priorities**
- 2. Efficient organizational structure, with appropriate allocation of resources, skills, and staffing**
- 3. Ongoing and shared optimization of operating processes**
- 4. Timely communication and staff engagement**
- 5. Sustainability, leadership, innovation, continuous learning, and networking**
- 6. Flexibility to accommodate change and realize opportunities**

### **Policies for Dakota County Park Operations**

- Policy 1:**        **Develop and use a comprehensive operations plan to ensure efficient system operations and maintenance.** Identify operating and staffing needs by developing level of service guidelines that reflect public expectations. Identify opportunities for partnerships and revenue goals.
- Policy 2:**        **Protect visitor safety and security** through an adequately staffed park patrol unit of the County Sheriff's Office and an up-to-date and enforced parks ordinance.
- Policy 3:**        **Provide adequate staffing** through County resources and partnerships to protect user safety, provide high quality visitor services, and to properly maintain park facilities and equipment.
- Policy 4:**        **Regularly evaluate fee structure** for special services, reservations, special park uses, equipment rental, and programs. Consider new fees in light of appropriateness, costs of providing the service, citizen ability to pay, and corresponding public and private sector fees.
- Policy 5:**        **Encourage appropriate commercial uses** that benefit park users by providing a service that complements the park mission and/or reduces costs of providing services. Require permits and charge fees for authorized commercial uses.
- Policy 6:**        **Prohibit inappropriate commercial uses** that:
1. Are incompatible with general park use, natural resource protection, ordinances, park plans, policies or mission.
  2. Pose a safety hazard or place the County at unacceptable legal risk.
  3. Reflect any unapproved endorsement by the County, through projects or advertising.



## **Operations Goals and Strategies (Goals 20-27):**

The first goal, preparing a comprehensive operations plan, is an overarching goal for operations. The remaining goals in this chapter are preliminary and will be fully addressed in the operations plan effort.

**Goal 20** *Prepare a Comprehensive Operations Plan to identify needs, set expectations, and build capacity as a park agency.*

### **Objective 20.1**

*Define an appropriate operations plan scope that addresses primary needs and covers areas directed by the County Board*

### **Objective 20.2**

*Develop an effective process and timeframes for the operations plan*

### **Objective 20.3**

*Engage the right people in developing the operations plan*

**Goal 21** *As part of the Comprehensive Operations Plan, develop service level guidelines that address how the Parks Department will provide for essential park needs and meet public expectations in suggested key operations areas:*

- Recreation Provision
- Education and Park Event Programming
- Facility Rentals
- Communications, Marketing, and Development
- Parks, Lakes, and Trails Patrol
- Maintenance of Outdoor Park Use Areas and Indoor Facilities

### ***What are Level of Service (LOS) Guidelines?***

Park agencies frequently develop Level of Service (LOS) guidelines to define the type, amount, and location of services that they offer, and to further help refine services to adequately meet the community's needs. LOS guidelines are most commonly prepared for park maintenance, to establish how frequently specific maintenance tasks should occur.

LOS studies are flexible and adaptable to a range of park issues. Park agencies can also develop LOS standards for provision of parks and some recreational facilities to determine how many parks or facilities are needed. LOS can also be developed for recreation and programming to help identify needs and evaluate possible programming directions. A community-driven LOS could also help park agencies focus their marketing efforts and make other service delivery improvements.

In addition to helping agencies define needs, LOS guidelines can be developed to track expenses and improvement costs and measure outcomes of service. Finally, LOS guidelines can include financial and participation goals to assess the success of services provided.

<b>OVERVIEW: a Simplified Level of Service (LOS) Model</b>	
<b>What Are Our Essential Services?</b>	<b>Identify fundamental core services</b> in each key operations area. Include potential new value-adding public services. Further evaluate any services that are not considered core or essential; consider if they should be discontinued or handed over to someone else.
<b>What's Needed to Provide Them?</b>	For each core service, <b>identify all required tasks and "inputs"</b> -- quantify staff hours, frequency, facilities or other meaningful ratios to summarize what is required to accomplish the task or provide the service at a baseline (professionally acceptable) level of quality.
<b>Does the Public Expect More?</b>	<b>Evaluate public preferences for service levels and adjust</b> tasks and ratios if public preference is higher than baseline quality. Identify new service requests from the public, and develop information on tasks and requirements for providing the service.
<b>What Do Other Park Agencies Do?</b>	<b>Research best practices</b> for opportunities to improve tasks and processes. <b>Benchmark with other park agencies</b> to validate findings or identify any Dakota County requirements that appear markedly above or below the general norm.
<b>Adjust and Project</b>	For key operations areas, <b>project total requirements for each core service</b> by applying tasks and related requirement ratios (staffing, frequency) to all relevant park locations in the system.

**Goal 22** *Identify system-wide operating needs to provide public services at the desired levels: staffing, roles, skills, budget, and additional resources.*

**Objective 22.1**

*From the LOS analyses, identify and provide appropriate staffing levels for each key operations area and for providing core public services.*

**Strategies**

- 22.1.1 Address any current staffing shortages revealed by LOS analyses.
- 22.1.2 Increase the personnel budget to address current staffing shortages.
- 22.1.3 Evaluate ongoing provision of non-core services, i.e., operations that do not serve essential park needs or provide public service.

**Objective 22.2**

***Develop and use LOS guidelines to ensure adequate staffing as the park system grows and new services and facilities are added.***

**Strategies**

- 22.2.1 In master and other planning processes, include operational cost projections for new facilities, trails, acres, projects, and programs.
- 22.2.2 In development processes, seek funding resources in initial approval phase of new facilities, trails, acres, projects, and programs.
- 22.2.3 Increase the personnel budget annually to appropriately address new initiatives.

**Objective 22.3**

***Align departmental roles and skills to ensure that all essential core services are adequately provided.***

**Strategies**

- 22.3.1 Periodically evaluate primary skills needed for delivery of core services and identify new skills needed for emerging services.
- 22.3.2 Regularly ensure that departmental program areas can address workloads, especially core service delivery, in an efficient manner.
- 22.3.3 Consider reassignment and re-prioritization of non-core services.

**Objective 22.4**

***Address ongoing equipment and material needs through the CEP, budgeting, and cost-sharing processes.***

**Strategies**

- 22.4.1 Regularly document and track equipment and material needs for all areas of operations. Track ongoing “routine” needs and highlight one-time needs related to short-term initiatives.
- 22.4.2 Plan for the long-range replacement of facility furnishings, e.g., floor coverings, appliances, and other amenities.
- 22.4.3 Increase the CEP and operations budget as needed to address any shortages.
- 22.4.4 Evaluate technology investments and cost-sharing that can increase effectiveness as the system and visitation grows. An example is providing the Parks, Lakes, and Trails Patrol’s Unit with laptop computers in vehicles, enhanced communications, and improved facility security technology.

**Goal 23**     ***Identify revenue and fundraising targets.***

**Objective 23.1**

***Balance private rental uses with general public use for all facilities in the system that have rental potential.***

**Strategies**

- 23.1.1 Develop an appropriately balanced mix for each facility of the following uses:

- 1) Private event rentals (retreats, weddings)
- 2) Public fee-based events
- 3) General free public use

- 23.1.1 Consider current use patterns, current demand, and programming potential in developing guidelines.
- 23.1.2 Explore opportunities to expand fee-based programs and events that are open to the general public.
- 23.1.3 Set revenue targets for each facility for rentals and fee-based public events.

**Objective 23.2**

***Regularly evaluate opportunities to expand revenue generation from non-basic recreation activities.***

**Strategies**

- 23.2.1 Compare fee rates to other regional park agencies.
- 23.2.2 Regularly evaluate fee structure.
- 23.2.3 Periodically assess new activities and events that could be fee based.

**Objective 23.3**

***Define cost recovery goals for education programs, fee-based public events, and fee-based recreational uses to develop appropriate revenue generation guidelines.***

**Strategies**

- 23.3.1 Conduct cost recovery analysis to develop a model that assigns costs to appropriate operations areas within the Parks Department.
- 23.3.2 Establish realistic cost recovery goals for each operations area.
- 23.3.3 Define participation goals for programs and events to identify revenue targets.

**Objective 23.4**

***Consider future opportunities for enterprise facilities that fit well within the Parks Mission and Vision, meet public demand, and can be operated in a cost effective manner.***

**Objective 23.5**

***Work with a new Parks Foundation to establish a fundraising program to include a general fund for all park purposes, as well as targeted funds.***

**Goal 24** ***Refine operating structure and processes to build capacity and move forward.***

**Objective 24.1**

***Improve public service through an integrated service delivery model.***

### **Strategies**

- 24.1.1 Develop an integrated service delivery model to be used by all staff. Use level of service analyses, public feedback, and other methods to comprehensively evaluate and systematically improve service delivery for all visitors.
- 24.1.2 Continually seek opportunities to streamline service processes and implement good ideas more rapidly.
- 24.1.3 Measure visitor satisfaction on a regular basis to identify service improvement needs. Identify broadly based and targeted areas to evaluate through onsite visitor surveys, online surveys, focus groups, and other methods.
- 24.1.4 Schedule rentals with adequate time between user groups to allow facility clean up and preparation.

### **Objective 24.2**

***Improve and document operations processes.***

### **Strategies**

- 24.2.1 Document staff knowledge of current procedures by creating Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Manuals for relevant positions.
- 24.2.2 From LOS analyses refine custodial standards for all facilities and train staff on their use.
- 24.2.3 Develop an orientation program for new staff to acquaint them with the world of Dakota County Parks.
- 24.2.4 Plan ahead in hiring to enable outgoing staff to train new hires.
- 24.2.5 Develop a staff guide to working with volunteers to document and explain policies, roles, and expectations.
- 24.2.6 Define staff roles and volunteer placement process for each volunteer area (i.e. ongoing volunteers, Eagle Scout Projects, Adopt-a-Park).

### **Objective 24.3**

***Engage the right staff and expertise in planning and design.***

### **Strategies**

- 24.3.1 Include education as an integral component of planning, design, natural resource management, and development. Develop interpretive plans and programs in early stages of park and facility design.
- 24.3.2 Engage Parks, Lakes, and Trails Patrol in the planning, design, and renovation of facilities to ensure that security and public safety are optimized. Identify probable safety and security issues (e.g., crime, vandalism, severe weather) and mitigate their effects through appropriate design.

## **Goal 25** ***Exemplify sustainability.***

### **Objective 25.1**

***Incorporate sustainable choices in daily park system operations and communicate the value of sustainable choices to the public.***

### **Strategies**

- 25.1.1 Incorporate life-cycle considerations into all routine material and supply purchases. Life-cycle considerations take into account:
- ♦ Materials used in manufacturing the purchased products (e.g., recycled or new materials)
  - ♦ Resources consumed in shipping the purchased products (e.g., produced locally or at a distant location)
  - ♦ Product value, durability, and quality
  - ♦ Ultimate disposal of the product, including recycling potential.
- Examples include choosing paving materials generated from recycled asphalt shingles.
- 25.1.2 Promote zero-waste and waste reduction concepts by planning low-waste public events.
- 25.1.3 Evaluate paints and any chemical products used for custodial services, invasive species eradication, and pest control; continue converting to the use of environmentally preferred products.
- 25.1.4 Continue sustainable redevelopment of trails.
- 25.1.5 Evaluate equipment options that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as reducing the use of two-cycle engines.
- 25.1.6 Incorporate energy conservation and renewable energy choices into building operations, such as solar panels.
- 25.1.7 Train all staff on the correct use and operation of sustainable building features to optimize their benefits, such as thermal mass stoves and motion sensor-operated lighting.

### **Objective 25.2**

#### ***Promote sustainable choices to the public.***

- 25.2.1 Encourage visitors to practice sustainable behaviors through recycling. Provide adequate recycling containers in all visitor areas.
- 25.2.2 Incorporate zero-waste, waste reduction, and recycling concepts into education programming.
- 25.2.3 Promote transit connectivity to parks to reduce fuel consumption.
- 25.2.4 Increase pedestrian and bicycle connections to parks to promote healthy active choices and reduce car trips.

## **Goal 26    *Build capacity by enhancing leadership, innovation, learning, and networking.***

### **Objective 26.1**

#### ***Build leadership among Parks Department staff.***

### **Strategies**

- 26.1.1 Support and recognize staff efforts to elevate and maintain Dakota County as the “leading edge” in unique and innovative land protection, stewardship, sustainable design, and recreation.
- 26.1.2 Support and recognize staff efforts to promote volunteerism and the Volunteer in Parks (VIP) program.

**Objective 26.2**

***Promote innovation and learning among all staff.***

**Strategies**

- 26.2.1 Encourage professional development opportunities for all staff and make it a financial priority to provide adequate funding for staff training and education.
- 26.2.2 Promote and recognize workplace learning, learning from experience, and ongoing process improvement.
- 26.2.3 Encourage, recognize, and reward innovation among staff.

**Objective 26.3**

***Build relationships and exchange information with others.***

**Strategies**

- 26.3.1 Encourage staff networking with other areas of County government, cities, other agencies, and allied professionals to build relationships, share knowledge, and share/benefit from collective experience and expertise.
- 26.3.2 Organize and facilitate a Best Management Leadership Forum among governments and agencies to share best land management practices from across the nation.
- 26.3.3 Continue participation in the Do the Parks collaborative with city recreation providers.

**Goal 27** ***Develop and enhance partnership approaches for land protection, recreation provision, and operations.***

**Objective 27.1**

***Expand mutually beneficial partnerships for recreation and education services.***

**Strategies**

- 27.1.1 Continue to seek recreation and education partnership opportunities with the public and private sectors.
- 27.1.2 Develop new partnerships for recreation and education services as program offerings expand.
- 27.1.3 Seek appropriate opportunities to partner with organized event sponsors for community events at Dakota County Parks.

**Objective 27.3**

***Continue the partnership agreement with the Dakota County Sheriff's Office for the services of the Parks Lakes and Trails Patrol Unit.***

**Strategies**

- 27.3.1 Continue with Parks, Lakes, and Trails partnership, with periodic evaluation of the partnership terms.
- 27.3.2 Ensure that Parks, Lakes and Trails Patrol Unit has a well-defined role under this partnership through co-development of a Patrol Service Delivery Plan with Dakota County Parks Department.

**Objective 27.4**

***Explore and expand partnerships that can increase the Parks Lakes and Trails Patrol Unit's effectiveness while encouraging public engagement in parks.***

**Strategies**

- 27.4.1 Explore opportunities with the Sheriff Office's Volunteer Horse Patrol.
- 27.4.2 Continue partnership with the Volunteer Ski Patrol.
- 27.4.3 Continue partnership at Dakota Woods Dog Park with CAPERs. If off-leash use is expanded within the Dakota County park system, expand the partnership with CAPERs or other groups.
- 27.4.4 Continue or expand other formal and informal partnerships that have proven effective, such as collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
- 27.4.5 Explore the possibility of a neighborhood watch program to engage residents around Dakota County Parks.
- 27.4.6 Explore opportunities for collaboration with local law enforcement agencies.



## Chapter 6, Funding the Vision

The final element needed to attain the park system vision is adequate funding for system improvements and operations. This chapter outlines policies, goals and strategies that build a solid funding foundation for the Dakota County Park System.

### ***Vision for Parks Funding***

To amply fund Dakota County's Park and Open Space System providing for strategic:

- Protection and stewardship of parklands, resources, and facilities
- Service delivery to our citizens and visitors that is valued
- Growth that is responsive and responsible.

### ***Policies for Park System Funding***

- Policy 1: Use County funds for park acquisition, development, and operations as part of a diverse funding program.
- Policy 2: Aggressively seek regional funding for acquisition and development of regional units.
- Policy 3: Actively pursue grants and other funding that correspond with the system and master plan visions for acquisition and development.
- Policy 4: Accept gifts of personal and real property, materials, or funds if consistent with park plans, park policy, or in County's best interest. Gifts that do not meet these criteria will be accepted if they benefit the County by producing income or use in trade or sale.

### ***Parks Funding Goals and Strategies (Goals 28-32):***

**Goal 28** ***Increase Dakota County derived funding and investment to advance the Parks and Open Space System.***

#### **Comments**

Dakota County will continue to invest in its park system and consider expanded funding to overcome shortfalls associated with reliance on external funding. The matrix on the following page identifies funding required to attain the park system vision, with overall and ten-year needs for recreation, regional trails and greenways, acquisition, and natural resource restoration.

The matrix also summarizes potential County-derived funding options for different park systems needs, as identified by the County Board's Physical Development Committee at its Park System Plan workshops.

Parks funding will continue to be addressed during annual preparation of the County's comprehensive budget and its five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The potential funding options below have been identified for future consideration during these processes. Potential strategies follow each County-derived funding option.

**Potential County-Derived Funding Options for Parks**

	Recreation	Regional Trails	Acquisition	Natural Resource Restoration	Operations
<b>Near-Term Priority Expense, Estimated Total: \$52M</b>	\$19.8M	\$6.7M (County) \$13.6M (Local)	\$19.7M	\$5.9M	TBD
<b>Park System Vision Expense, Estimated Total: \$98M</b>	\$43.5M	\$10.1M (County) \$22.9M (Local)	\$35.2M	\$9.1M	TBD
<b>General Fund Balance</b>	\$	\$	\$	\$	
<b>Environmental Fund Balance</b>			\$	\$	
<b>CIP Bonds</b>	\$	\$	\$		
<b>Operations Levy</b>					\$
<b>CIP Levy</b>					
♦ Contingency Fund	\$	\$		\$	
♦ Intermodal Fund					
<b>County Sales Tax</b>	<i>Not at Present</i>	<i>Not at Present</i>	<i>Not at Present</i>	<i>Not at Present</i>	

**Objective 28.1**

**Evaluate use of General Fund Balance during annual funding processes.**

**Strategies**

- 28.1.1 Provide a \$2 to 5M time-limited appropriation over the next 5 years to provide basic and popular facilities in all parks and regional trails.
- 28.1.2 In 2008, use the fund to pay for 2 big-ticket items (Lebanon Water Management and Thompson County Park improvements).
- 28.1.3 Continue to fund large CIP items for Parks.
- 28.1.4 Continue to provide the local match for Met Council Emergency Acquisition funding.

- 28.1.5 Continue to augment under-funded Parks CIP projects.

**Objective 28.2**

***Evaluate use of the Environmental Fund during annual funding processes.***

**Strategy**

- 28.2.1 Provide a one-time appropriation of \$1M to fund park acquisition and natural resource restoration.
- 28.2.2 Use funds for environmental testing and remediation on parklands.

**Objective 28.3**

***Evaluate use of CIP Bonds during annual funding processes.***

**Strategies**

- 28.3.1 In 2008, increase the CIP levy by \$400,000 for debt service on a one-time limited general obligation bond of approximately \$3.75M to provide basic and popular facilities in all parks, acquire priority inholdings and improve regional trails/greenways.
- 28.3.2 In 2009-2013, increase the CIP levy by an additional 0.1 - 0.3 percent (\$120,000 - \$360,000) annually for debt service for general obligation bond of approximately \$1.2M to \$3.6M to provide basic and popular facilities in all parks, acquire priority inholdings and improve regional trails/greenways.

**Objective 28.4**

***Evaluate use of Operation Levy during annual funding processes.***

**Strategy**

- 28.4.1 Increase operations funding concurrently with CIP growth, using the CIP Operational Set Aside budget approach.

**Objective 28.5**

***Evaluate use of CIP Levy during annual funding processes.***

**Strategies**

- 28.5.1 Maintain the annual Parks Contingency Fund and historic intermodal CIP appropriation to fund natural resource restoration, greenways/trails, and recreation.
- 28.5.2 Use County funding to provide the entire local share for all regional trail grants beyond 2010.
- 28.5.3 Add funding to accommodate planning and CIP improvement priorities established by the County Board during the budget process.

**Goal 29** ***Develop and expand strategic partnerships to advance the Dakota County Parks and Open Space System.***

**Strategies**

- 29.1 Partner with the Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization to fund acquisition and natural resource protection along multi-purpose river corridors.

- 29.2 Partner with the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Areas Program to fund protection of greenways, regional trail corridors, and optional parkland.
- 29.3 Establish a fiscal model to incentivize local units of government to have private development projects fund and construct regional trail segments and greenways.
- 29.4 Work with the Transportation Department and Regional Rail Authority to fund multi-modal corridors that support regional trail development.
- 29.5 Establish and maintain a Dakota County Parks Foundation.
- 29.6 Evaluate either a regional or LGU/County parks dedication fee.
- 29.7 Offer opportunities for sponsorships and naming rights.
- 29.8 Subsidize programs via an “Adopt-A-Program” or service initiative.
- 29.9 Establish enhanced partnerships with school districts involving education programming, stewardship, volunteerism, and trail access.
- 29.10 Establish partnerships with faith communities involving educational programming, volunteerism, and stewardship.
- 29.11 Improve partnerships with other park agencies, e.g. Vermillion Highlands.
- 29.12 Establish a private foundation and funding initiative to enlist local businesses to donate a percentage of their revenue for the protection of parks and open space.

**Goal 30**    ***Increase external revenues to advance the Park and Open Space System.***

**Strategies**

- 30.1 Advance regional, state and federal legislative initiatives:
  - ♦ State 40 percent O&M
  - ♦ State dedicated funding for conservation
  - ♦ State contribution to the Metro Regional Parks CIP
  - ♦ State LCCMR appropriation to regional park acquisition
  - ♦ State allocation to Dakota County bonding requests
  - ♦ Federal Transportation Enhancement Grants
  - ♦ Federal community trails funding
- 30.2 Advocate for increased Metropolitan Regional Parks O&M and CIP.
- 30.3 Continue to seek grant funding, using a comprehensive, systematic, and strategic approach.

**Goal 31**    ***Establish fiscal standards and policies to advance the Parks and Open Space System.***

**Strategies**

- 31.1 Fund all O&M and deferred maintenance prior to the addition of new parkland, facilities and services, e.g. staff, funding.
- 31.2 Establish a minimum FTE and O&M funding standard for new facilities, parkland and open space acres.
- 31.3 Align policies that support donations, grants, volunteerism and partnerships.
- 31.4 Align LGU, FNAP, VRWJPO and others policies to accommodate and fiscally support the Parks and Open Space vision, e.g. FNAP/provide trail access, VRWJMO/ purchase greenway along Vermillion River, LGU’s/ parks dedication for greenways and regional trail corridors.
- 31.5 Establish cost recovery standards and goals for applicable services and programs.

31.6 Develop a policy to determine the use of enterprise and revenue funds.

**Goal 32** *Maintain open, accessible, and accurate fiscal processes for high accountability and integrity.*

**Strategies**

32.1 Establish a resource development group with staff, public, and business participants.

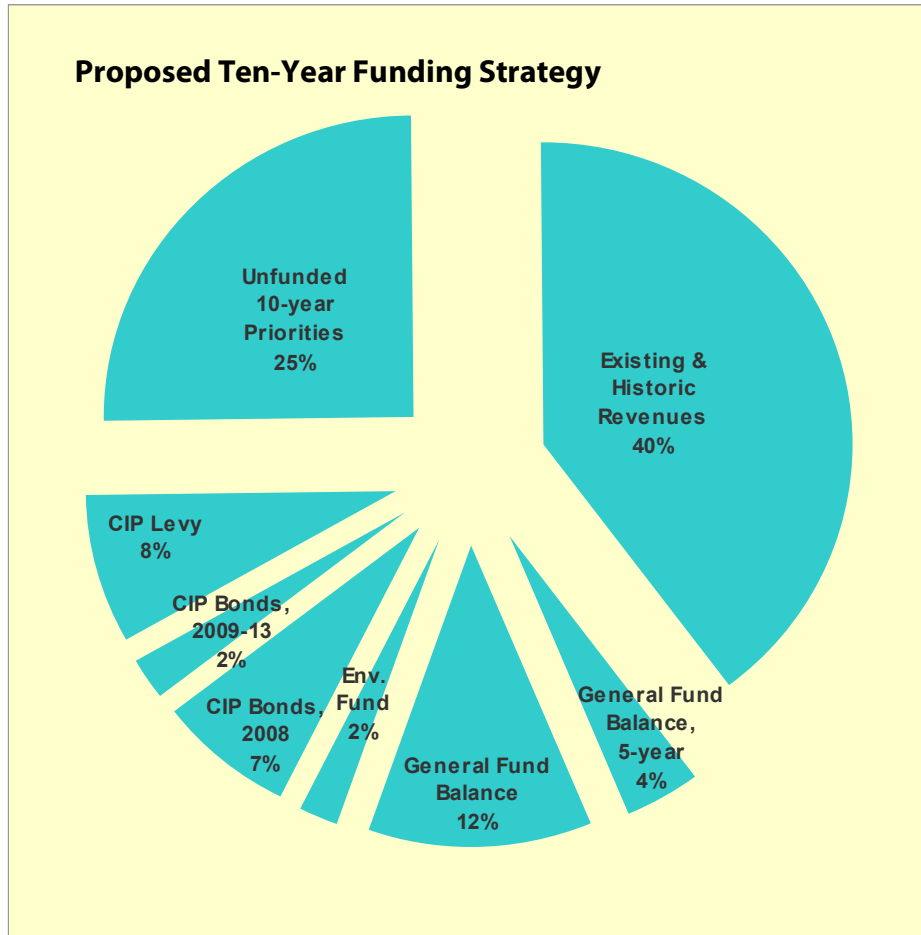
Also refer to **Chapter 5, Operations**, page 5.9, for the following goal, objectives, and strategies related to revenue generation:

**Goal 23** *Identify revenue and fundraising targets.*

## Ten-Year Funding Strategy Summary

Estimated costs for the ten-year vision are \$52M. Existing funding can accommodate 40 percent of these costs. The proposed County-derived strategies could fund an additional 35 percent of the vision and will be evaluated during annual budgeting processes. Approximately 25 percent of the vision is unfunded.

Various internal and external funding opportunities will be considered to narrow the 25 percent funding gap, including state bonding and state dedicated funding for conservation.



FUNDING STRATEGY ITEM	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE
Existing and Historic Revenues	\$20.7M	40%
<i>Proposed Funding Options</i>		
General Fund Balance: five-year limited appropriation for basic recreation facilities	\$2.0M	4%
General Fund Balance: match to Metro Acquisition Opportunity Funds for parkland	\$6.1M	12%
Environmental Fund: one-time appropriation for acquisition and resource restoration	\$1.0M	2%
CIP Bonds 2008: for basic and popular recreation, acquisition, and greenways	\$3.75M	7%
CIP Bonds 2009-2013: for basic and popular recreation, acquisition, and greenways	\$1.2M	2%
CIP Levy: match federal trail grants beyond 2010	\$4.2M	8%
Unfunded Balance: assemble additional funds	\$13.2M	25%

## Chapter 7, Tracking Progress

The Dakota County Park System Plan is intended to be a living document – used in preparing annual budgets, Capital Improvement Plans, and staff work plans. Progress measures will be used to regularly track the status of vision goals. These measures will also provide a base for reporting ongoing needs and accomplishments.

### Suggested Progress Measures:

- ✓ Completion of basic and signature park recreation facilities
- ✓ Number of paved trails and nature trails around lakes
- ✓ Number of cultural resource opportunities
- ✓ Miles of nature trails completed in parks
- ✓ Miles of regional trail / greenway built by Dakota County
- ✓ Miles of regional trail / greenway built by others
- ✓ Number of festivals, community events, and the number of participants
- ✓ Restoration of 2,200 acres over the next ten years
- ✓ Restoration of sub-watersheds that influence parklands
- ✓ Acquisition of top priority inholdings
- ✓ Increased awareness of Dakota County Park System
- ✓ Increased visitor satisfaction in all aspects of the Park System
- ✓ Increased public engagement opportunities
- ✓ Increased visitation
- ✓ Master plans are evaluated/updated every ten years
- ✓ Retention of Parks staff
- ✓ Increased volunteer hours and opportunities
- ✓ Staff capacity and adequate FTEs obtained to implement the ten-year vision
- ✓ Receipt of annual financial targets to implement the ten-year vision
- ✓ Increased leveraging of outside funds
- ✓ Number of park system donors and dollars raised





## **Appendix A. Plan Contributors**

### **Technical Advisory Committee Participants**

Advisors on parks, recreation, local trends, and public needs generously shared their time and expertise through the project's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). TAC members participated in workshops held on July 12 and October 18, 2006. The project team thanks:

John VondeLinde	Anoka County Parks Department
Randy Oppelt	Burnsville Parks and Recreation
Judy Fairbrother	DARTs
Sue Skinner	DARTs
Chad Roberts	Dakota County Historical Society
Sam O'Connell	Dakota County Office of Transit
Elizabeth Witt	Dakota County Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee
Patrick Stieg	Dakota County Public Health
Mary Montagne	Dakota County Public Health
John Jaschke	Dakota County Water Resources
Juli Johnson	Eagan Parks and Recreation
Dorothy Peterson	Eagan Parks Commission
Radny Distad	Farmington Parks and Recreation
Barry Bernstein	Hastings Parks and Recreation
Steve Michaud	Lakeville Parks and Recreation
Jake Sedlacek	Mendota Heights
Jan Youngquist	Metropolitan Council, Parks and Open Space System
Barb Schmidt	Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Committee
Kate Drewry	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Metro Greenways
Jade Templin	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Parks Planning
Scott Anfinson	Minnesota State Archaeologist
Susan Overson	National Park Service MNRRA
Don Begalle	Recreational Equipment Inc., REI
Dan Schultz	Rosemount Parks and Recreation
Chris Esser	South St. Paul Parks and Recreation
Barbara Fisher	Three Rivers Park District
Jonathan Vlaming	Three Rivers Park District
Harvey Feldman	University of Minnesota, Recreation and Leisure Studies
John Koepke	University of Minnesota, Department of Landscape Architecture

### **City and Township Workshop Participants**

Staff and representatives of cities and townships in Dakota County participated in a July 25, 2006 workshop and also met with staff several times over the course of the project. Their time and ideas are appreciated and the project team thanks:

Randy Johnson	Apple Valley Parks Director
Russ DeFauw	Apple Valley Parks and Recreation Committee
Randy Oppelt	Burnsville Parks Director
Dorothy Peterson	Eagan Parks Commission
Paul Olson	Eagan Parks and Recreation
Randy Distad	Farmington Parks Director
Timothy Skog	Hampton Mayor and Parks Director
Ken Vraa	Inver Grove Heights Acting Parks Director

Kim Kuenzi	Inver Grove Heights Parks and Recreation
Howard Merriam	Northfield Planning
Dan Schultz	Rosemount Parks Director
Eric Johnson	Rosemount Parks and Recreation
Chris Esser	South St. Paul Parks Director
John Dudley	Waterford Township Board Chair
Doug Fromm	West St. Paul Parks Commission

***Dakota County Staff Teams***

Staff from several County divisions participated in workshops, on research teams, and with coordination to assist this project. Their work was invaluable and the project team thanks:

Kathryn Scott	Dakota County Attorney's Office
Mary Dalaska	Dakota County Communications Department
Lisa Mueller	Dakota County Farmland and Natural Areas Program
Tom Edstrom	Dakota County Financial Services
Stacy Reilly	Dakota County Financial Services
John Mertens	Dakota County Office of Planning
Dan Patterson	Dakota County Office of Planning
Stan Smiley	Dakota County Office of Planning
Daren Nyquist	Dakota County Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Development
Jane Vanderpoel	Dakota County Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Development
Heidi Welsch	Dakota County Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Development
Mike Adams	Dakota County Parks Department
Barb Banks	Dakota County Parks Department
Brad Deitner	Dakota County Parks Department
Johnny Forrest	Dakota County Parks Department
Doug Gross	Dakota County Parks Department
Katie Hoeschen	Dakota County Parks Department
Craig Johnson	Dakota County Parks Department
Beth Landahl	Dakota County Parks Department
Stephanie LeGros	Dakota County Parks Department
Dave Peterson	Dakota County Parks Department
Krista Prokosch	Dakota County Parks Department
Terry Vikla	Dakota County Parks Department
Chris Haars	Dakota County Parks, Lakes, and Trails Patrol
Brian McGinn	Dakota County Parks, Lakes, and Trails Patrol
Maureen Martin	Dakota County Physical Development Division Administration
Wanda Rodriguez	Dakota County Physical Development Division Administration
Joan Radke	Dakota County Physical Development Division Administration
Peggy Seliga	Dakota County Physical Development Division Administration
Sharon Weiler	Dakota County Physical Development Division Administration
John Jaschke	Dakota County Water Resources

***Dakota County Senior Management***

Senior managers at Dakota County provided insight and guidance; the project team thanks:

Brandt Richardson	Dakota County Administrator
Rick Neumann	Dakota County Financial Services
Michelle Beeman	Dakota County Environment and Natural Resources Director
Gregory Konat	Dakota County Physical Development Division Administration
Lynn Thompson	Dakota County Physical Development Division Administration

## **Appendix B. Park System Planning Process Overview**

Planning consisted of four phases, with public engagement throughout the process.

**Phase 1 — Systems-Based Research and Issue Identification:** identified major needs and opportunities within the Park System. A systems-based approach looked at the geography of the park system, parkland acquisition, natural resources, recreation, visitation, visitor services, park operations, and funding. Chapter 3 presents highlights of the research phase.

**Engagement, information gathering, and reporting included:**

- General public surveys
- Web updates and online survey
- Discussions with city park directors
- Community events (e.g., Eagan Home and Garden Show)
- Parks staff workshops and idea sessions
- Workshop with Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which included some of the best local thinkers on parks, recreation, and trails
- Dakota County Park and Recreation Advisory Committee (PARAC) update
- Workshop with the Physical Development Committee of the County Board

**Phase 2 — Visioning:** considered what the park system should be 10 years from now and by 2030. Research led to three visions for the park system, which were presented for public comment. The refined "hybrid" vision combines elements of all three options and emerged as the preferred direction for Dakota County Parks. Chapter 4 presents the future vision for the Dakota County Park System, in the context of three vision themes: *Great Places, Connected Places, and Protected Places*.

**Engagement, idea testing, and reporting included:**

- Workshop with the Park System Plan TAC
- Web updates and online survey
- Open houses
- Town meetings
- Community events (e.g., Farmington Expo)
- Rotary and Chamber of Commerce presentations
- Focus group and interview sessions
- Parks staff workshops and idea sessions
- Discussions with city park directors
- Review of Park System Plan draft goals with the DC2030 Advisory Panel
- Dakota County PARAC update
- Workshop with the Physical Development Committee of the County Board

**Phase 3 — Strategies and Priorities:** As a clear vision emerged, so did the need for effective strategies to ensure that the vision becomes reality. Best practice information, public comments, and staff ideas all fed into the pool of strategies. System priorities were developed based on the clear needs identified during the research phase, opportunities to better serve the public, and logical sequencing. Chapter 4 presents system strategies for attaining the vision, Chapter 5 highlights priorities for the next 10 years, and Chapter 6 presents operations strategies.

**Engagement, strategy testing, and reporting included:**

- Discussions with city park directors
- Parks staff workshops and idea sessions
- Dakota County PARAC update
- Physical Development Committee of the County Board

**Phase 4 — Plan Drafting:** synthesized the research information, ideas, and direction into this draft document.

**Engagement, opinion gathering, and reporting includes:**

Dakota County PARAC update, recommendations to release the draft plan  
Physical Development Committee of the County Board, release of draft plan  
Web updates  
Listserv items  
Open houses  
General review of the plan by the public, cities, and planning participants  
Review of draft plan comments by PARAC

## Appendix C. Survey Summary

The Parks System Plan Survey was mailed to all residences in Dakota County with the Spring 2006 County Update newsletter and also made available online. This summary is based on 973 responses (5.2%-faxed, 14.3% completed at events and the Lebanon Hills Visitor Center, 38.5% mailed, 41.9% online).

### 1. Respondent information

#### 1.A. Where respondents live:

County	#	%
Dakota County	848	87%
Dakota County (urban)	811	83%
Dakota County (rural)	37	4%
Hennepin County	30	3%
Ramsey County	25	3%
Scott County	8	1%
Wisconsin	4	<1%
Washington County	3	<1%
Carver County	2	<1%
Anoka County	1	<1%
Crow Wing County	1	<1%
Goodhue County	1	<1%
McLeod County	1	<1%
Rice County	1	<1%
St. Louis County	1	<1%
Wright County	1	<1%
Skipped this question	44	4.5%

#### 1.B. How long they've lived in Dakota County:

Nonresident	8.7%
Less than 5 years	15.1%
5-9 years	15.6%
10 or more years	57.9%
Skipped this question	2.5%

#### 1.C. Their gender:

Female	51.1%
Male	46.1%
Skipped this question	2.7%

#### 1.D. Their age:

Under 18	7.9%
18-24	3.4%
25-44	39.3%
45-64	39.1%
65 and older	8.3%
Skipped this question	2.0%

Dakota County Jurisdictions	#	%
Eagan	195	20%
Apple Valley	123	13%
Rosemount	99	10%
Lakeville	90	9%
Burnsville	71	7%
Inver Grove Heights	64	7%
Hastings	42	4%
West Saint Paul	37	4%
Mendota Heights	31	3%
Farmington	27	3%
South Saint Paul	26	3%
Dakota County	6	1%
Hampton City or Township	6	1%
Nininger Township	4	<1%
Lilydale	3	<1%
Randolph City or Township	3	<1%
Ravenna Township	3	<1%
Sunfish Lake	3	<1%
Vermillion City or Township	3	<1%
Coates	2	<1%
Greenvale Township	2	<1%
Marshan Township	2	<1%
Waterford Township	2	<1%
Castle Rock Township	1	<1%
Empire Township	1	<1%
Eureka Township	1	<1%
Vermillion Township	1	<1%

#### 1.E. Their ethnicity:

American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.7%
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.6%
Black	0.8%
Hispanic	0.5%
Multi-Racial	1.5%
White	91.9%
Skipped this question	3.9%

#### 1.F. Their household size:

1 person	12.7%
2 people	33.5%
3 people	13.8%
4 people	22.6%
5 or more people	15.3%
Skipped this question	2.2%

**2. Which Dakota County Parks they visit:**

<b>Dakota County Parks and Trails</b>	<b>4 or more times/year</b>	<b>1-3 times/year</b>	<b>Don't Visit</b>	<b>Skipped Question</b>
Lebanon Hills Regional Park	35.8%	36.8%	25.9%	1.5%
Spring Lake Park Reserve	9.8%	24.9%	63.8%	1.5%
Big Rivers Regional Trail	10.2%	18.8%	69.5%	1.5%
Lake Byllesby Regional Park	4.5%	21%	73%	1.5%
Thompson County Park	8.4%	15.9%	74.1%	1.5%
Miesville Ravine Park Reserve	1.7%	12.9%	83.8%	1.5%
Dakota Woods Off-Leash Area	5.9%	6.5%	86.1%	1.5%

**3.A. Why they visit Dakota County Parks:**

Convenient location	63.7%
Familiarity, know the park	41.5%
Enjoy activities and facilities	40.6%
Natural wilderness setting	74.2%
Special events, gatherings	17.9%
Part of health routine	22.5%
Other (generally a specific activity)	23.8%
Skipped question	9.1%

**3.B. Why they don't visit County Parks:**

Inconvenient location, too far	11.6%
Unaware of park locations, facilities	23.5%
Not enough activities they like	5.1%
Not physically able to visit	1.3%
Not a priority for their leisure time	9.6%
Don't feel safe or comfortable	2.6%
Other (many different reasons)	10.5%
Skipped this question	58.4%

*Note: Respondents could select more than one item for questions 3.A. and 3.B*

**4.A. Activities they would like in Dakota County Parks:**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
1.	Hiking and walking trails	792	81%
2.	Scenic views	668	69%
3.	Loop trails around lakes	653	67%
4.	Canoeing	636	65%
5.	Swimming beaches	613	63%
6.	Nature education programs	609	63%
7.	Natural area visits	584	60%
8.	X-country ski trails	579	60%
9.	Picnicking in shelters	569	58%
10.	Fishing	559	57%
11.	Bird watching	536	55%
12.	Camping in tents	501	51%
13.	Children's playground	501	51%
14.	Sledding and winter tubing	495	51%
15.	Rentals (skies, canoes)	485	50%
16.	Paved trails	464	48%
17.	Environmental stewardship programs	445	46%
18.	Recreation programs	443	46%
19.	Ice-skating outdoors	426	44%
20.	Short loop trails	417	43%
21.	Public gardens	411	42%
22.	Mountain bike trails	381	39%
23.	Festivals and concerts	375	39%

24.	Community events	369	38%
25.	Culture and history programs	340	35%
26.	Volunteer opportunities	322	33%
27.	Community gardens	319	33%
28.	Off-leash pet areas	315	32%
29.	Healthy living programs	290	30%
30.	Ropes and adventure course	282	29%
31.	Orienteering	280	29%
32.	Meeting and retreat space	273	28%
33.	Climbing wall	260	27%
34.	Disc golf	257	26%
35.	Group camping	247	25%
36.	Food and beverage sales	229	24%
37.	Large group gatherings	197	20%
38.	Geocaching	196	20%
39.	Camping in cabins	190	20%
40.	Horseback trails	189	19%
41.	Public art	183	19%
42.	Camping in RVs	181	19%
43.	Archery trails	153	16%
44.	Memorial areas	129	14%
45.	Motorized boat access	121	12%

**4.B. Other Activities They Would Like:**

Other desired activities and facilities not listed in the survey but identified by respondents include:

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| Archery range                             | Recycling      |
| ATV trails                                | Rental bikes   |
| Basic comfort (water, restrooms, benches) | Seniors        |
| Basketball                                | Skatepark      |
| GPS                                       | Skijoring      |
| Horseshoes                                | Snowshoe       |
| Hunting                                   | Soccer         |
| Long trails                               | Swimming pool  |
| Paintball                                 | Tennis         |
| Photography classes                       | Transit access |
| Programming for Disabled Teens            |                |

**5.A. What they want as the future direction(s) for Dakota County Parks:**

Keep parks mostly natural and do not create more recreational facilities or paved trails	21.1%
Keep parks mostly natural, but add more facilities for physical activities (e.g., hiking, canoeing, skiing)	64.6%
Keeps parks mostly natural, but provide for more social activities (e.g., gatherings, concerts, festivals)	21.9%
Add more paved trail connections between parks, neighborhoods	31.3%
“I think our park system should...” (See detail below*)	37.0%
Skipped this question	5.4%

*Note: respondents could select more than one item, including the open-ended statement.*

**5.B.\* I think our park system should:**

Open-ended comments were sorted into general themes:

<b>General Theme</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Preserve natural open space	93
Offer a variety of activities and places	21
Be accessible to everyone	19
Expand, add acres	17
Add mountain bike trails	15
Trails – loops, paved trails, loops around lakes	13
Add more off leash dog areas	12
Offer more recreation	12
Demonstrate balance among uses	11
Fee-related – no fees, or user fees instead of general tax use	10
Do more marketing of the system	8
Focus on families with children	8
Add disc golf	6
Educate visitors	6
Provide horse trails	6
Increase connectivity	6

*Less frequently identified themes and single comments pertained to: safety, camping, comfort facilities, funding, lighting, the Minnesota River, specific parks, water quality, and other specific recreational uses.*

**6. Their preference for funding the Parks system:**

Partnerships with other agencies, non-profits	55.0%
Establish a Parks Foundation (fundraising)	49.3%
Allocate more of County levy to parks	35.9%
Corporate sponsorship, with naming and advertising rights	32.6%
Raise fees on permit uses (e.g., rentals, camping)	27.4%
Seek bonding with a referendum	16.3%
Establish a Parks District with taxing authority	16.1%
Classify more activities as fee-based	15.9%
Maintain current funding levels	13.0%
Collect admission fees from all park visitors	12.2%
Skipped this question	10.5%

*Note: Respondents could select more than one item for this question.*

**7. How they prefer to receive information on Dakota County Parks:**

County mailings	51.1%	Word of mouth	17.0%
Local newspaper	47.1%	Dakota County E-News	27.0%
County website	40.0%	Parks staff	5.3%
Park visits	36.1%	Skipped this question	6.3%

*Note: Respondents could select more than one item for this question.*

**8. Do they think Dakota County should do more to more to increase awareness of their parks?**

Yes	55.3%
No	25.9%
Skipped this question	18.8%

**9. Their favorite parks in the Metropolitan area:**

<b>Park</b>	<b># Responses</b>
Lebanon Hills Regional Park	323
Spring Lake Park Reserve	69
Minneapolis Chain of Lakes	50
Minnehaha Falls	40
Hyland-Bush Anderson	40
Afton State Park	36
Como Park	34
Murphy-Hanrehan	34
Cleary Lake	33
Fort Snelling State Park	32
Big Rivers Regional Trail	29
Lake Byllesby Regional Park	27
Dakota Woods Off-Leash Area	24
Thompson County Park	22
Theodore Wirth Park	20
Terrace Oaks, Burnsville	19
Ritter Farm Park	16
Lake Elmo	15
Alimagnet, Burnsville	14

Three Rivers Parks (non-specific)	14
Miesville Ravine Park Reserve	13
Kaposia Park, South St. Paul	12
Battle Creek	11
Cannon Valley Trail	11
Elm Creek Park Reserve	11
Thomas Lake, Eagan	11
Minnesota Valley Wildlife Refuge	9
North & South Valley Parks, IGH	9
French Regional	8
Nerstrand Big Woods State Park	8
Blackhawk Park	7
Harriet Island	7
Crosby Farm / Hidden Falls	6
Jaycee Park	5
Patrick Eagan Park	5
St. Croix Bluffs	5
UMore Park trail	5
William O'Brien State Park	5

*Parks with fewer than 5 responses are not displayed.*



**9.B. Why they like these parks:**

Survey respondents commented why they visit the parks identified as favorites. Predominant themes included:

Specific physical activities they enjoy (biking around lakes, mountain biking)

Social activities (concerts, people-watching)

Specific park amenities (Como Zoo and Conservatory, Lake Harriet Bandshell),

Park style, landscape beauty (lawns, rose gardens)

Connections (social and family ties, traditions)

**Parks-Related Findings from the 2006 Residential Survey**

The Dakota County Residential Survey was administered by phone to a representative sample of 700 residents from March 1 to March 23, 2006. A total of 100 surveys were completed in each of seven County Commissioner Districts. The response rate was 15%. The following questions specifically addressed parks, or included parks in a range of other features or services.

**1. What Respondents Most Like About Living In Dakota County:** (single choice answers)

<i>What one thing do you most like about living in Dakota County?</i>	Percent of respondents
Location	29%
Parks/lakes	9%
Schools	8%
My neighborhood	5%
Rural	4%
People	4%
Open space	4%
Services	4%
Quality of life in general	4%
Small town feel	4%
Shopping	3%
Quiet	3%
Safe	3%
Home	2%
Transportation system (includes roads and transit)	2%
Peaceful	2%
Libraries	1%
Good economy	1%
Weather	0%
Job opportunities	0%
No reason	2%
Unsure	1%
Other	4%
Total	100%

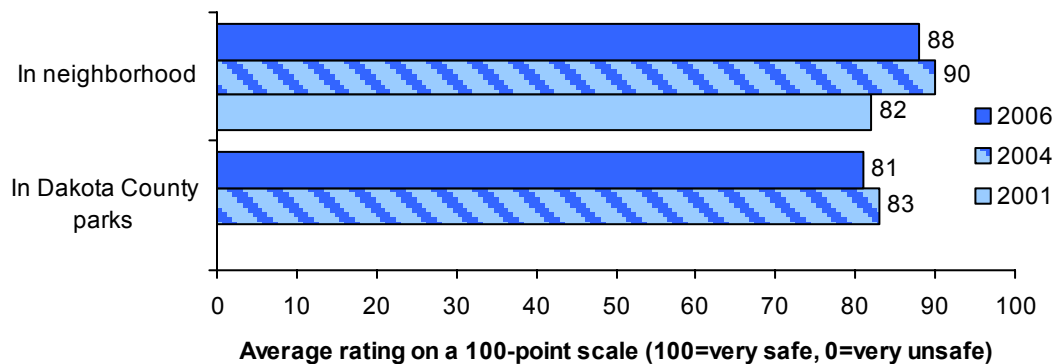
## 2. 2006 Ratings of Community Characteristics

<i>Please tell me if you think each of the following characteristics of Dakota County is excellent, good, fair, or poor.</i>	Percent of respondents					Average rating on the 100-point scale (100=excellent, 0=poor)
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Total	
Access to parks	37%	54%	7%	2%	100%	75
Access to trails	29%	55%	12%	5%	100%	69
Access to open space	18%	51%	26%	6%	100%	60
Access to and availability of affordable, quality health care	18%	53%	17%	12%	100%	59
Access to and availability of affordable, quality childcare	15%	52%	22%	12%	100%	56
Preservation of farmland and natural areas	9%	43%	30%	18%	100%	48
Affordable housing	8%	41%	34%	17%	100%	46
Access to public transportation/transit	11%	38%	27%	24%	100%	46

## 3. Perceptions of Safety in Dakota County Parks

<i>Ratings of Safety in Various Locations</i>						
<i>Do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe . . .</i>	Percent of respondents					Average rating on the 100-point scale (100=very safe, 0=very unsafe)
	Very safe	Somewhat safe	Somewhat unsafe	Very unsafe	Total	
In your neighborhood	69%	26%	4%	1%	100%	88
In Dakota County parks	52%	41%	6%	1%	100%	81
On trails in Dakota County parks	45%	45%	8%	2%	100%	77

### Comparison by Year: Ratings of Safety in Various Locations



#### 4. Service Delivery Ratings

##### *Ratings of Service Delivery*

<i>I'm going to read you a list of services provided by Dakota County. Please tell me whether you would rate the quality of each service as excellent, good, fair, or poor.</i>	Percent of respondents					Average rating on the 100-point scale (100=excellent, 0=poor)
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Total	
County libraries	45%	47%	7%	2%	100%	78
County parks and recreation	35%	53%	11%	1%	100%	74
Trail and bikeway system in Dakota County	29%	54%	15%	3%	100%	70
Sheriff services	26%	61%	12%	1%	100%	70
Snow and ice removal on County roads	28%	51%	14%	6%	100%	67
Public health services	16%	59%	20%	5%	100%	62
Social services to seniors	15%	57%	23%	5%	100%	61
Child protection services	13%	62%	20%	5%	100%	61
Services to youth	15%	55%	24%	6%	100%	60
Environmental protection	13%	59%	20%	8%	100%	59
Condition of County roads	13%	52%	27%	7%	100%	57
Services to low-income residents	10%	48%	29%	14%	100%	51
Public transportation/transit services	11%	39%	29%	21%	100%	47

#### 5. Park Activity Importance Ratings

##### *Importance of Park Activities*

<i>Please tell me if you think each of the following types of park activities are essential, very important, somewhat important or not important at all in Dakota County. How about...?</i>	Percent of respondents					Average rating on the 100-point scale (100=essential, 0=not at all important)
	Essential	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important at all	Total	
Natural resource preservation and recreation, such as bird watching, nature hikes, and nature education	17%	56%	25%	2%	100%	63
Activity-based recreation, such as biking, swimming, hiking, canoeing/kayaking, and cross country skiing	13%	51%	33%	3%	100%	58
Socially-oriented recreation, such as family gatherings, picnics, people-watching, festivals, and concerts	10%	40%	45%	5%	100%	52

**6. Park Activity Provision Ratings**

***How Well Dakota County's Parks Provide for Various Activities***


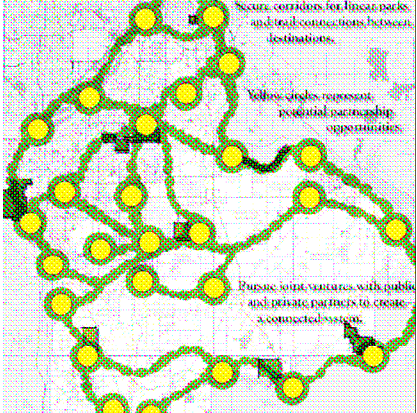
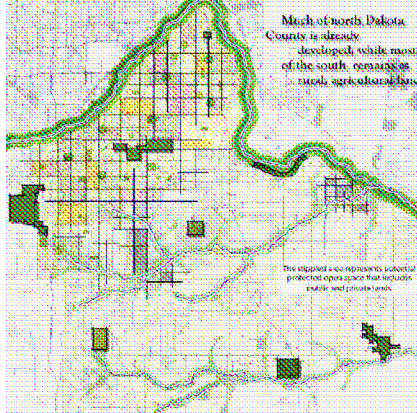
<b><i>How well or poorly do you think Dakota County's parks provide for these types of activities?</i></b>	Percent of respondents					Average rating on the 100-point scale (100=very well, 0=very poorly)
	Very well	Somewhat well	Somewhat poorly	Very poorly	Total	
Activity-based recreation	43%	48%	7%	2%	100%	77
Natural resource preservation and recreation	38%	53%	7%	2%	100%	76
Socially-oriented recreation	33%	59%	7%	2%	100%	74

## Appendix D. Vision Alternatives

### Great Places, Connected Places, Protected Places – Three Fundamental Concepts:

#### Public Response to Three Alternative Visions

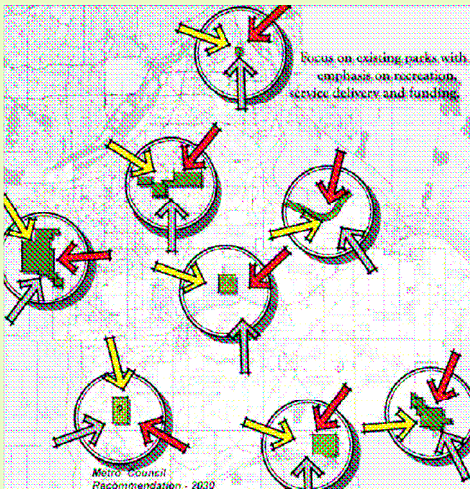
Three vision alternatives were prepared for the Parks System Plan in late 2006 and each vision emphasized a different approach to park system development. The alternatives were: **Great Places**, **Connected Places**, and **Protected Places**. The County Board's Physical Development Committee reviewed the three vision alternatives and recommended an approach to combines elements of all three.

<b>Great Places</b>	<b>Connected Places</b>	<b>Protected Places</b>
<p>Great recreation and service at County Parks: enhanced parks and possible new parks. Finish master plan improvements and fill recreation gaps. Restore park natural areas.</p> <p><b>"Quality over quantity" — make each park a great destination.</b></p>	<p>A green network connects county parks, community activity centers, linear parks, rivers corridors, and recreational trails, all done in collaboration with other agencies.</p> <p><b>"Bring parks to people" — improve access to parks and trails for recreational use, healthy lifestyles, and educational opportunities.</b></p>	<p>Linear parks, trails, and open space line the river valleys. Collaborate with others to preserve southern stream systems with public and private land. Provide recreation in designated areas. Shape future growth.</p> <p><b>"Balance protection and recreation" — long-term resource protection with opportunities for recreation now and in the future.</b></p>
		

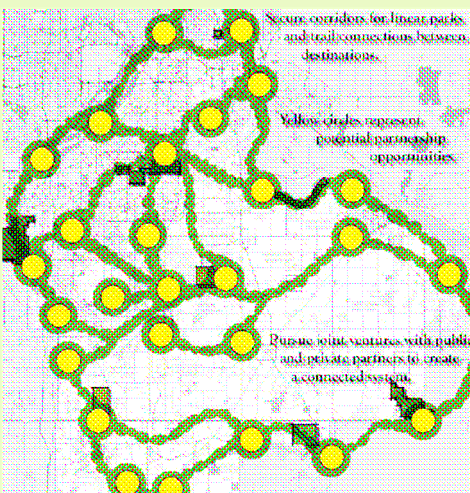
The three alternatives were presented to the public at various venues in early 2007, including:

- ♦ **Open houses**
- ♦ **Town meetings**
- ♦ **Community events (e.g., Farmington Expo)**
- ♦ **County Web updates and online survey**
- ♦ **Rotary meetings**
- ♦ **Focus group and interview sessions**
- ♦ **Discussions with City Park Directors**
- ♦ **PARAC update**
- ♦ **Physical Development Committee**

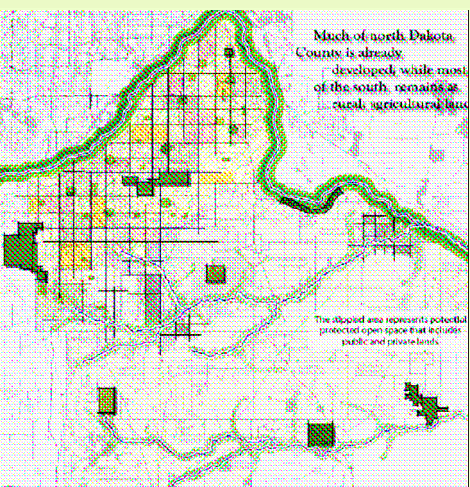
### Alternative 1: Great Places



### Alternative 2: Connected Places



### Alternative 3: Protected Places



### What Did People Like?

Building connectivity through greenways is a newer park approach gaining momentum nationally and locally. Dakota County residents also found greenway connectivity highly desirable, along with resource corridor protection, and park enhancement.

**Public response favored an approach that combines all three alternatives.**

Alternative #2, Connected Places was the most preferred single alternative and included in more “combination” recommendations.

### Alternatives Identified Either as a Preferred Vision or Included in a Hybrid...

<b>Alternative #2</b> (Connected Places)	<b>72%</b>
<b>Alternative #3</b> (Protected Places)	<b>52.7%</b>
<b>Alternative #1</b> (Great Places)	<b>34.6%</b>

### Earlier Comments on Dakota County Parks

- 65%** Prefer natural parks but want more activities in Dakota County Parks (e.g., biking, swimming, skiing, walking)
- 50%** View social events in parks as very important (only 5% viewed social events, such as concerts or community gatherings as unimportant)
- 73%** View natural resource protection and nature-oriented activities as very important

Results from the 2006 Residential Survey and the 2006 Park System Plan Survey

**Appendix E. Public Comments on the Draft Dakota County Park System Plan**

<b>Metropolitan Council</b>
Include all 2030 System Statement elements: 1) Chub Lake park search area on map as completing the system beyond 2030, per Regional System Statement, 2) other non-county regional parks, approved trail extensions.
Do not refer to the North Creek Trail as “Regional” until it has been added to Metropolitan Council Policy Plan (update 2009).
Change references to the “Emergency Opportunity Fund” to “Acquisition Opportunity Fund,” include new policy.
Reference the Metropolitan Council Foundation for regional park acquisition.
Strike Strategy 30.2 related to increasing Metro Parks O&M, CIP funding – set by MN Statute.
<b>City of Bloomington</b>
Add Cedar Avenue Bridge bike connection to map.
<b>City of Burnsville</b>
Move South Urban Regional Trail Greenway route to Mc Andrews, as in Metropolitan Council System Statement. Delete regional greenway connecting Lebanon Hills, Terrace Oaks Park, and the Minnesota River.
Burnsville has planned parks and trails – city is 98% developed and does not foresee acquisition of private land for greenways.
Use City-designated street routes and avoid neighborhoods, Terrace Oaks, Alimagnet shore: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Cross 35E on McAndrews</li> <li>♦ Eliminate loop west of 35 near Buck Hill</li> <li>♦ Eliminate loop west of High School</li> </ul>
<b>City of Rosemount</b>
Revise “Flint Hills Greenway” name to non-corporate name.
Add strategy 8.2.4 “Develop and adopt regional trail alignments and secure funding from the Metropolitan Council for trail development.”
Ensure that any TDR use ensures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Use would not conflict with the land use designations in the adopted City Comprehensive Land Use map.</li> <li>♦ Local equity in use of TDRs to preserve land from being developed and use of TDRs to increase density.</li> <li>♦ Any funds generated through use of TDRs to increase density in a community is available for that community’s use.</li> </ul>
Cost share example cited for greenways is too high for cities. In-kind matches may be more feasible (land dedication from developers). The City cannot support City funding for development or maintenance of the County Parks System.
<b>City of Mendota Heights</b>
Remove greenway segment on east side of Lake Augusta on cemetery property, straighten segment in SE corner of Dodd Rd and TH 110.
<b>Lebanon Hills Regional Park:</b>
County Changes Being Considered for Lebanon Hills The Dakota County Parks Department is considering the addition of paved trails in the park as some surveys and other sources are asking for paved trails to help less capable see the park. Our Answer - the task force addressed this and decided paved trails were inappropriate. Lebanon Hills is one of most used parks in Twin Cities and the preserved nature is one of the reasons. The County wants to increase parking for mountain bike area and possible move it to center of park. We are ok with increasing parking lot but expand it where it is and conserve land space as a centralized parking lot would cut the park up. We question the necessity of spending almost a half of million dollars (\$429,000) on infrastructure while begging for volunteers to maintain the existing trails. Just think of the possibilities of a ½ million dollar improvement to the trails! The county is getting pressure for more dog parks. We encourage the county to keep these stand alone areas as they have successfully done in the past and not in heavily used parks. On another point we would also like to encourage the county to take advantage of volunteer labor and also to look to various groups to focus foundation money on forestry and other issues. We have volunteered to monitor the lakes in the park and that has not been accepted. I have brought hundreds of people in various events to take out buckthorn but we have been turned down for more work. I think we could get foundation money to help with buckthorn and other problems but we need to work with the county. I am the president of a lake association and find there is foundation money available for environmental improvement. - Mike Fedde

Regarding the 2030 Dakota County Park System Plan, I have two question/comments: 1. Page 4.3: Notes that a potential Off-Leash Dog Area will be evaluated at Lebanon Hills Regional Park. This issue was visited extensively during the development of the Lebanon Hills Regional Park Master Plan back in 2000/2001. The consensus among those solicited for comment on this issue was that an OLDA would be too disruptive to the other uses in LHRP and to the residential neighbors, that it would divide the park up in a "checkerboard" manner, and that it would degrade the environment. The most appropriate location for an OLDA is on impacted land that is in turn surrounded by impacted land, which is why the location of the current 16-acre OLDA near UMORE has been so successful.

2. Page 4.8: The trail map on this page depicts a Regional Greenway running up the west side of Gerhardt Lake right up to its northern tip and then turning northwest through the existing Brittany neighborhood. This contradicts the trail maps in the Lebanon Hills Regional Park Master Plan, which show no trail extending further north than about the midpoint of the west side of Gerhardt Lake. That map actually appears right on the cover of the Master Plan. Being very familiar with this area, I can tell you the land between Gerhardt Lake and the adjacent private property to the north is swampy (very possibly a wetland) and very close to the neighboring property lines with no change in elevation at the park side - it is not an appropriate location for a trail. When I first noticed pink flags being located in this area several years back I contacted the Parks Department and I was assured that no trail was being planned for the northern edge of Gerhardt Lake. I would appreciate a confirmation of that assurance. Thank you. - Mike Supina

**General Comments**

I'm glad to see the shortage of paved trails is being addressed. As a senior with brittle bones and bi-focals I need a smooth surface to enjoy our impressive County Parks. I look forward to more opportunities. THANKS

I find the county parks we currently have are sufficient for now and well into the future. When I observe the utilization during park visits I find them to be little used. I know you have all the huge usage numbers but they are not believable and serve only to expand your bureaucratic kingdom. The expansion plans will create fixed costs into the future that are not sustainable without future tax increases or reduced services in more worthy area, roads, bridges and human services. Put a halt to plans that would expand our the county parks system. As far as for bike paths there are more than enough in the state now to cover those few people who go out in the summer anymore. I find it interesting that the county is excited about the 1000 responses to the survey, according to the local paper. This is a pitiful response in is further indication that you are planning in a vacuum. Most people do not care enough to be involved a feature you and your consultants rely on to have government cost creep. According to a recent report in the Pioneer Press park usage is going down especially by younger people. Thanks for ignoring the wishes of the majority of the county residents because it is likely the only people who respond are the 1000 that currently use the parks. Roger Foster

First, I would like to commend the Dakota County Office of Planning, the Dakota County Parks and Open Space Department, and all those involved with the creation of the "2030 Dakota County Park and Open Space System Plan" for a job very well done. The plan is comprehensive, well organized, and clearly written. It will undoubtedly serve as a valuable guide as the visions and goals it contains are realized. Excellent work! With that said, I would like to offer these few suggestions for your consideration as the plan is reviewed and finalized.

1. Preserving and expanding unpaved nature trails  
The plan conveys a recurring theme of making the parks popular destinations in part by adding a plethora of paved trails - around lakes, short loops, interconnections, and so on. There seems to be much less made of preserving and expanding the unpaved nature trails that have become a hallmark of Dakota County parks. Providing visitors access to these unspoiled, natural trail experiences should continue to be a priority moving forward. As such, I suggest adding a strategy under Objective 1.3, "Trails are the recreational backbone..." on Page 3.8 explicitly stating that unpaved nature trails should be preserved and expanded within the park system.
2. Tracking progress - unpaved nature trails  
Since unpaved nature trails are a showcase feature of Dakota County parks, it seems appropriate to include a metric in Chapter 7, "Tracking Progress" relating to them. To that end, I suggest adding a measure to track the number of miles of unpaved nature trails contained within the park system.
3. Defining and differentiating county parks, regional parks, and park reserves  
Park holdings within the Dakota County system have different designations - one is a "county park", some are "regional parks", and others are "park reserves". The plan does not, however, define and differentiate between these designations. Clear definitions of these terms might help guide elements of the plan's strategy and implementation, from recreational development policies to marketing and branding approaches. I suggest defining these terms somewhere in the plan such as Chapter 2, "Overview of the Dakota County Park System".
4. Correcting a typographical error - There is a typographical error in the last sentence of Page 1.1. I believe that the word "have" should be inserted so that the sentence reads: "All park master plans have been updated..."

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share these thoughts and comments. If you have any questions about this feedback or would like to discuss anything further, please feel free to contact me. Sincerely, Jim Guttman

I just read the article in the PPress regarding DC park system. We are campers and love staying at Lake Byllesby, and even Lebanon Hills which is less than 5 miles from home. It is usually difficult to get a camping spot, especially



in L. Byllesby - I know it's expensive, but more campsites close to the metro would be wonderful... For the last 3 seasons we have been at a permanent spot, but really miss the vagabonding to different places, so we shall once again be using the DC campgrounds.... Thanks. Pat and Tom Will

I am sending this after reading about county planning in the paper. A subject that has been on my mind for a number of years is this. Why can't the county invest in building a few Tennis Backboards where a person can practice solo. I've lived in Eagan for almost 14 years and have yet to see even one. The closest to my home (near Johnny Cake Ridge and Cliff) I've found one is actually in Apple Valley in back of their high school. I see many courts and playing fields not being used much of the time so I think a rather small investment could be worthwhile. Please give this matter some consideration. If you'd like to contact me, my name is James W. Pollnow

Editorial: Parks plan could open up new worlds  
BY GRANT BOELTER - SUN NEWSPAPERS  
(Created: Wednesday, February 20, 2008 9:45 PM CST)

The open road leads to a world of endless possibilities, but I would say the same, if not more, about trails.

I prefer trails because when you're traveling by foot or powering the wheels with your own energy, you get more time to take it in and a lot more gratification.

Ever since I was in college at the University of Minnesota, I've made it a habit to explore the trails around the places I've lived. While living in Minneapolis and to a lesser extent when I was living in St. Paul, I've been able to reap the benefits of trail systems that offer endless possibilities of places to explore.

Now that I live near Lake Nokomis in Minneapolis, I've been afforded the luxury of rarely ever having to wander off designated trails to jockey with the larger gas-powered form of traffic. I've been spoiled to the point where I was completely baffled on where to go the other day when construction on Interstate 35W blocked me from continuing on the Minnehaha Creek trail on one of my longer runs. Because I didn't want to backtrack, I was relegated once again to the land of city sidewalks where I had to take care not to slip on un-shoveled sidewalks while also taking multiple breaks to wait for cars to pass. It was a harsh reminder of my running days before I discovered the city's best trails.

This is why I got excited when I saw the trail plan laid out in Dakota County's parks master plan that would aim to connect all the county's communities by trail in the next 10 years. I was already planning to head south on my bike this summer, but if this system takes root, I think it would be a hard place for cyclists to avoid. I'm not sure if I've seen a system with so many options of where to explore anywhere else in the state, at least not in the metro area. But, I digress. I'm not a Dakota County resident and while I'd like to see the trail system happen, it's really not up to me.

However, you do have a say in what your county might do with its park system. Anyone with an interest in the parks and in the outdoors should give the county's plan a glance and give the people at the county offices your input.

The plan is available for viewing on the county's website at [www.co.dakota.mn.us](http://www.co.dakota.mn.us) or if you prefer a more hands-on approach, the county has a couple of open houses planned. Now's your chance to speak up, because the plan will be put in the books shortly after the public comment period ends March 7.

Grant Boelter is the Eagan community editor for Sun Newspapers.

Thank you for putting together a parks draft plan for the future. Unfortunately I wasn't able to provide input sooner (or access the survey). If it is not too late, I would like my input considered in the planning, and decision made by the Board of Commissioners. Option 3/ Protected Places *is the preferred alternative*

Recreation sites and trails can be developed in the future. When the land is gone however, it's gone forever. Acquire undeveloped land abundant in natural resources now, before it is built over. This will make Dakota County known as a more desirable place to live, decades after other Metro counties suffer disinvestment of property (becoming run-down and a host of other problems).

Communities where the residents are engaged thrive, communities where residents don't care about much, don't do so well. It has been demonstrated in other parts of the country that having tracts of open space is very beneficial. The state of Florida has good examples of the contrast between areas where natural spaces have been preserved (like Sanibel Island) and areas that haven't.

Make this investment in the long-term future of Dakota County. I'm impressed with how well our county is run (especially after checking out the county's comprehensive plan from the library). Thank you for all you do. -Denise Louis

#### **Model Airfield Users**

As the current club president of the Minnesota Area RC Electric Enthusiasts (MARCEE) and speaking on behalf of my organization, I wish to express our extreme disappointment with the decision to discontinue the model airfield at the Spring Lake site in Hastings, as described in the Park System Plan and further described to me in a phone conversation with your Mr. Bruce Blair. As I understand it the Spring Lake model airfield is the only model airfield in the metro area that does not require membership in a private club and is open to anyone willing to pay the pass fee.

If there is any way that MARCEE can help to extend the field's operation beyond the 2008-2009 seasons, please contact me. Regards, Dale Case President, MARCEE

User comment: I am greatly disappointed that the new Dakota County Park Plan does not include provision for the existing flying field. I feel that this decision will cause many flyers new and old to use more unapproved sites without rules and safety concerns. I believe the county had a chance to provide a unique opportunity for many RC pilots who will now seek other unapproved places to learn and to fly. My son and I will have to seek other places in the county since we have not been welcome as helicopter pilots at the existing private club sites. Rich Greiner Jr

User comment: I feel that there is a continuing and growing need for a flying field. More and more, "park fliers" are becoming more available. Dakota Co. already has a field that meets those needs. To loose it, would be a step backwards. Mike Warner

User comment: It is with a sense of sadness and disappointment that I read in chapter 3, page 3.7 the "Park Activities and Recreation Facilities Menu" which says "4) Activities and Facilities Provided by Others: Athletic Complexes, ATV Areas, Downhill Skiing, Golf Courses, Model Airfield, Snowmobiling" This is in spite of the county board's motion number 06-322 of August 22nd of 2006 that directed park staff to assist in relocating the model airfield. It appears that this currently provided county facility has been dropped from all public facilities since the current field is the only public model field in the metro area. Model airplane technology has significantly benefited society over the years both in the education of future engineers, "proof of concept" for new developments and the actual transfer of model aircraft technology to commercial civilian and military products. I would suggest that removing this facility from all planning does not constitute "relocating" as directed by the county board. For the benefit of society as a whole, I would ask that provisions be made for the model aircraft facility in some metro area public location, preferably in a Dakota County park. In general this use does not fit well with other uses of city parks, which leaves either county park systems or regional park systems as the logical location of a model airfield. While a model airfield may not be the norm in a county park system there are several other uses being provided for in the current plan that do not normally appear in a county park, thus a model airfield would be no different. The existing model airfield has operated for a number of years at minimal cost and with minimal conflicts with other uses. It is in the best interests of all of the citizens of Dakota County for the decision to drop the model airfield from the plan to be reconsidered. Pat Harvey

The City of Lakeville is in the process of preparing a response to Dakota County draft Park system plan. During our initial review and after receiving phone calls from Lakeville residents concerned about the Spring Lake Park Model airfield I felt it important to contact you immediately to address this item.

As you know many Dakota County residents use the current airfield and are concern about loosing this facility. Nearly two years ago this issue was discussed with County staff and eventually forwarded to The County Board for direction. At the County Board meeting of 8/22/06 motion 06-322 clearly "directs staff to assist in the relocation of the airfield". Citizens were lead to believe that the facility at Spring Lake Park would remain open for use until an alternative County facility could be relocated and developed.

As of this writing, members of the area Model Air plane Club or I are not aware of any efforts or progress to relocate the facility. More importantly the proposed System Plan, now out for review, appears to ignore this specific facility. Further in chapter 3-Park System Vision, page 3.7 item number 4) ACTIVITIES and FACILITIES PROVIDED BY OTHERS: you list Model Airfield. This indicates to me that the plan is not addressing the airfield issue as directed by the County Board.

On this issue would you please answer the following questions?

1. *What is the status to the current airfield facility and how long do you anticipate the current facility to remain open to the public?*
2. *With the recommendation cited above "that the airfield is to be provided by others", who are you referring to?*
3. *What effort has been taken to address the relocation of the airfield since the Board directive on August 22, 2006?*
4. *Other than strong support to keep the airfield at Spring Lake Park, what documentation do you have opposing the facility?*

Your prompt response is greatly appreciated. Best Regards

Gerald S. Michaud  
Parks and Recreation Director  
City of Lakeville

March 7, 2008



Kurt Chatfield  
Principal Planner and Acting Manager  
Western Service Center  
14955 Galaxie Avenue  
Apple Valley, MN 55124-8579

Transmitted via Electronic Mail to kurt.chatfield@co.dakota.mn.us

Re: Comments on Dakota County Park Plan

Dear Mr. Chatfield,

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the excellent plan that Dakota County has put together to guide its Parks toward 2030. The highest compliment that we can pay your staff is to let you know that there is little that we can suggest to improve the fine work that has been put into crafting this thorough plan.

As we agree with the direction that you have set with the key activities and priorities contained on pages 3.1 and 4.11, we would like to use this opportunity to augment and highlight some of your planned direction.

As open space gives way to development, the Dakota County parks and greenways will play an ever-increasing role in providing vital habitat and corridors for wildlife and migrating birds. The Greenway Goals and Strategies section (3.13- 3.14) should indicate an intent to strive for wider corridors with more interior habitat as suggested by the Metro Greenways in their publication "Envision Conservation Corridors."

Given the importance that the park and greenway system will play in the future, we applaud your the plans to restore ecological systems which in turn will help sustain wildlife. We support providing more tent/rustic camping. We agree that the providing system maps and signage for biking greenways would increase usage. Finally, we encourage the efforts to improve marketing and volunteer efforts to promote the parks to the residents of the metropolitan area.

Of course an excellent plan means nothing unless it can be brought to life. Your outstanding document has generated thought and discussion among us on how best to implement your key objectives. We hope that we can continue to partner with Dakota County to help increase citizen participation and involvement to help your plan become a reality.

Sincerely,

/s Frank Jossi

Frank Jossi, Co-Chair  
Land Use and Transportation Committee  
Sierra Club North Star Chapter

/s Sharell Benson

Sharell Benson, Co-Chair  
Land Use and Transportation Committee  
Sierra Club North Star Chapter

Cc: Steve Sullivan  
Mary Jackson  
Al Singer

The Sierra Club is the oldest and largest environmental advocacy organization in the United States.  
**Minnesota's North Star Chapter has 24,000 members, over 2,400 of which are Dakota County Residents.**  
Our goal: "To explore, enjoy, and protect the planet."