

## METROPOLITAN REGIONAL PARK SYSTEM

The Metropolitan Regional Park system currently open for public use encompasses approximately 51,785 acres of parkland and includes 35 regional parks, 10 park reserves, 4 special recreation features, and 22 regional trails. These park and trail units are owned and operated by 10 regional park implementing agencies -- Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington counties, the Three Rivers Park District, and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, and the cities of St. Paul, and Bloomington. Scott County has a joint powers agreement with Three Rivers Park District.

The Metropolitan Council, with advice from the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC), is responsible for managing the system-wide planning and capital improvement funding process for the metro regional parks system. The Council works with the park implementing agencies to acquire and develop parks and trails to protect natural resources and provide outdoor recreation for public enjoyment. Council bonds provide 40% matching dollars for state bonds, federal TEA-21 grants, and LCMR appropriations for metropolitan regional park development and land acquisition.

In addition to the existing units that are open for public use, the Metropolitan Council and implementing agencies have identified planned units yet to be acquired and/or developed, such as Big Marine Park Reserve in Washington County. An additional 5,164 acres are in these other units. 2,656 acres within those units remains to be acquired.

“Regional recreation open space” means,

*land and water areas, or interests therein, and facilities determined by the metropolitan council to be of regional importance in providing for a balanced system of public outdoor recreation for the metropolitan area including but not limited to park reserves, major linear parks and trails, large recreation parks, and conservatories, zoos, and other special use facilities.*

(Minn. Stat. 473.121 Subd. 14)

Regional parks range in size from 100 acres to 500 acres. They provide a wide-array of outdoor recreation opportunities, including walking, hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, in-line skating, picnicking, camping and nature interpretation. Regional parks tend to be located on rivers or lakes offering resources for boating, fishing and swimming. Golfing is provided at some regional parks, but these golf courses are funded entirely with user fees as “enterprise facilities”. Downhill skiing is also offered in Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve and at Como Regional Park. Like golfing, downhill skiing is financed solely with user fees. (An attachment provides information on visitation and size in acres for each unit in the Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails System.)

Park reserves range in size from 1,000 to over 4,800 acres at Elm Creek Park Reserve. Like regional parks they are expected to provide a diversity of outdoor

recreation activities. The major factor that distinguishes park reserves from regional parks is that 80 percent of park reserves are undeveloped and managed to protect and preserve representative landscapes of the Metropolitan Area. The eight regional landscape types that are used in selecting areas for park reserves are 1) sand plains, 2) St. Croix ground moraine, 3) Des Moines ground moraine, 4) terminal moraine, 5) lightly glaciated area, 6) Mississippi River Valley, 7) Minnesota River Valley and 8) St. Croix River Valley.

Special recreation features, which are called for in MS 473.121, are defined as regional park system opportunities not generally found in the parks, the park reserves or regional trails. Special recreational features often require a unique managing or programming effort on the part of regional park implementing agency. Special recreational features include Gale Woods, the Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, Square Lake, and Noerenberg Floral Gardens. An additional special recreation feature—the former Salvation Army camp on Silver Lake has been acquired but is undergoing development master planning at this time. The Salvation Army has leased the land back and continues to operate it as a camp.

Finally, the metro regional park system contains regional trails that link the regional parks together and also provide linkages to local trail systems comparable to major highways linking local street systems together. Currently there are 22 regional trails covering 151 miles. These trails provide opportunities for walking, cycling and in-line skating.

Examples of metropolitan regional park amenities include:

- 658 RV compatible campsites
- 120 tent-only campsites
- 4 group campsites (155 total capacity)

170 miles of paved regional trails

Trails in regional parks include:

- 244 miles of paved trails
- 177 miles of mowed/dirt trails
- 100 miles of horse trails
- 30 miles of mountain biking trails

- 123 picnic shelters
- 3,576 picnic tables
- 42 parks with playgrounds
- 47 boat launches (ramp)
- 26 boat launches (carry in)
- 902 boat-trailer parking spaces
- 30 fishing piers
- 23 swimming beaches
- 28 interpretive centers
- 27 refreshment stands
- 16 boat rentals

## **AUTHORIZING LEGISLATION**

The Metropolitan Council's initial authority to prepare a Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan is the 1967 legislation that created the Metropolitan Council. Minn. Statute 473.145 states:

*The Metropolitan Council shall prepare and adopt, after appropriate study and such public hearings as may be necessary, a comprehensive development guide for the metropolitan area. It shall consist of a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, programs and maps prescribing guides for an orderly and economic development, public and private, of the metropolitan area. The comprehensive development guide shall recognize and encompass physical, social, or economic needs of the metropolitan area and those future developments which will have an impact on the entire area including but not limited to such matters as land use, parks and open space land needs, the necessity for and location of airports, highways, transit facilities, public hospitals, libraries, schools, and other public buildings. (Emphasis added.)*

In 1974, more specific park and open space legislation came into being with the passage of the Metropolitan Parks Act (Minn. Statute 473.147) which states:

*Subdivision 1. The metropolitan council after consultation with the parks and open space commission, municipalities, park districts and counties in the metropolitan area, and after appropriate public hearings, shall prepare and adopt a long-range system policy plan for regional recreation open space as part of the metropolitan council's development guide. The plan shall substantially conform to all policy statements, purposes, goals, standards, and maps in development guide sections and comprehensive plans as developed and adopted by the council pursuant to the chapters of the Minnesota Statutes directly relating to the council. The policy plan shall identify generally the areas which should be acquired by a public agency to provide a system of regional recreation open space comprising park district, county and municipal facilities, which together with State facilities, reasonably will meet the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan area and shall establish priorities for acquisition and development. In preparing and amending the policy plan the council shall consult with and make maximum use of the expertise of the commission. The policy plan shall include a five-year capital improvement program, which shall be revised periodically, and shall establish criteria and priorities for the allocation of funds for such acquisition and development. The legislature in each bonding measure shall designate an anticipated level of funding for this acquisition and development for each of the two succeeding bienniums.*

*Subd. 2. Before adopting the policy plan, the council shall submit the proposed plan to the parks and open space commission for its review, and the commission shall report its comments to the council within 60 days. The council shall hold a public hearing on the proposed policy plan at such time and place in the metropolitan area as it shall determine. Not less than 15 days before the hearing, the council shall publish a notice thereof in a newspaper or newspapers having general circulation in the metropolitan area, stating the date, time and place of hearing, and the place where the proposed policy plan and commission comments may be examined by any interested person. At any hearing interested*

*persons shall be permitted to present their views on the policy plan, and the hearing may be continued from time to time. After receipt of the commission's report and hearing, the council may revise the proposed plan giving appropriate consideration to all comments received, and thereafter shall adopt the plan by resolution. An amendment to the policy plan may be proposed by the council or the parks and open space commission. At least every four years the council shall engage in a comprehensive review of the policy plan, development guide sections, comprehensive plans, capital improvement programs and other plans in substantial conformance with the requirements of subdivision 1 which have been adopted by the council.*

The Metropolitan Parks Act, (Minn. Statute 473.147), plus a 1974 companion act creating a Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (Minn. Statute 473.301-351), established the basis for Council management of a planning and funding process directed at building a regional park system for the metropolitan area. The Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan helps guide and fulfill the legislative purpose of the regional recreation open space system as stated in Minn. Statute 473.302:

*The legislature finds that the pressure of urbanization and development threatens valuable recreational open space areas in the metropolitan area at the same time as the need for such areas is increased. Immediate action is therefore necessary to provide funds to acquire, preserve, protect and develop regional recreational open space for public use.*

## **ESTIMATED VISITATION**<sup>1</sup>

- There were an estimated 30 million visits to the Metropolitan regional park system in 2002. (This amount does not include visits for golfing). Visitation increased three percent, or about 998,000 visits, over the 2001 estimate.
- The annual visitation estimate is based on a four-year average of counts of visitors taken during the summer months for 1999 through 2002, with the exception of St. Paul. The St. Paul estimate is based on 1998 through 2001 data due to data collection problems experienced in 2002.
- Most park use occurred during the summer season (45 percent), followed by fall and spring (22 percent each). Special events accounted for 4 percent of usage.
- Non-summer visitation estimates for 2002 are based on data collected and analyzed in 1998 and 1999. Previous to 1999, non-summer visitation estimates were based on data collected in 1982. The updated information shows that there has been a significant increase in the amount of visits to the regional park system during the non-summer months over the last 20 years.
- Twenty-two percent of all 2002 visits were to regional trails. Seventy-eight percent were visits to regional parks, park reserves and special recreation features.
- The five most visited regional park and trail units in 2002 were:

<b>Park/Reserve</b>	<b>2002 Visits</b>
1. Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park	5,554,600
2. Mississippi Gorge Regional Park ( <i>Minneapolis &amp; St. Paul</i> )	2,407,700
3. Como Regional Park , Zoo and Conservatory SRF	2,218,400
4. Minnehaha Parkway Regional Trail	2,187,700
5. Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park	1,260,600

- Sixty-two percent of all visits were to regional parks and trails within Minneapolis and St. Paul.
- Fifty-nine percent of all visits to regional parks and trails are considered “local” visits. A local visit is defined as a visit to a park/trail by a person who lives within the jurisdiction of the park agency which owns/manages that regional park or trail.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Metropolitan Council, Annual Use Estimate of the Metropolitan Regional Park System for 2002, April 2003.

- Thirty-four percent of all visits are “regional” visits. Regional visits are the non-local visits by persons living within the metropolitan area. Three percent of all visits are from residents of Minnesota who live outside of the metropolitan area. Over three percent of all visits are from people who live in other states or countries.
- Walking is the top activity in the regional park system (35 percent of all visits involved walking), followed by biking (20 percent), swimming (17 percent) and picnicking (13 percent).

Much more park visitation and use information is available upon request from the Metropolitan Council.

**FINANCING**<sup>2</sup> -- preliminary data, additional financial data will be available at a future meeting

Capital Funding: Capital funding has primarily come from three sources:

1. Regional bonding by the Metropolitan Council;
2. State bonding and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund;
3. Interest income; and
4. Local funding from the park implementing agencies.

Detailed information on the capital funding from these sources for the metro regional park system will be available at a future meeting.

Operations and Maintenance: Under the partnership concept, the Council has been responsible for system-wide planning, while local implementing agencies have been responsible for owning, operating and maintaining the regional system and financing these activities. Implementing agencies fund these costs from local revenue sources, primarily property taxes and park system user fees.

In 1985, the Legislature enacted legislation (*Minn. Stat. §473.351*) calling for State funding of at least 40 percent of the operations and maintenance costs of the implementing agencies. State General Fund appropriations have financed between 5 percent and 10 percent of O&M costs. In the 2000 legislative session, a portion of the lottery-in-lieu of sales tax was statutorily dedicated for metropolitan regional park system O&M. See Table 1 for a summary of State General Fund and Lottery-in-Lieu appropriations for O&M costs.

### **PRELIMINARY FEE INFORMATION**<sup>3</sup>

The county, city and special park district implementing agencies use a variety of user fees to support regional park operations and maintenance. Table 2 provides a preliminary summary of the annual and daily permit fees for some of the regional parks. It also highlights the reciprocity arrangements between Anoka, Carver, and Washington counties and the Three Rivers Park District.

In addition to entrance / permit fees, all of the park implementing agencies collect user fees for other activities such as using picnic areas, renting rooms, renting equipment, camping, etc. A comprehensive summary of the fees used will be compiled as the study proceeds.

Tables 3 shows that in 2002 the metropolitan regional park system generated over \$9.6 million in regional park user fees and charges, or about 15 percent of the 2002 O&M costs. When enterprise revenue from non-regional park facilities (such as golf courses, ice arenas) and other non-tax revenue that is used to partially finance regional park O&M is considered this figure increased to 17%.

---

<sup>2</sup> Source: Metropolitan Council, Regional Recreation Open Space Policy Plan, Adopted Sept. 5, 2001, pp. 107-108. Data on financing trends provided by Arne Stefferud, Metropolitan Council Parks Planner.

<sup>3</sup> Source: The information on fees is from the websites for the respective implementing agencies.



<b>Table 2</b> <b>Preliminary Fee Information for Metropolitan Regional Parks</b>
--

See separate handout.
-----------------------