

**SUMMARY OF GREATER MINNESOTA
REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS SURVEY
Summer 2003**

Who was surveyed and who responded?

Surveys were sent to 36 counties and cities on the list of city- and county-operated regional parks compiled by the Outdoor Recreation Grant Program staff in Department of Natural Resources and an ad hoc group of county and city parks staff. Of the counties and cities surveyed, 18 (50%) completed the survey. (See the attached list.)

Park visitation information

Twelve of the counties and cities responding provided estimates of park visitation for some of the more heavily used parks for either 2002 or 2001. (See attached spreadsheet.) Visitation was based on the number of campers at a park, number of vehicles entering the park, parking fees collected, or general estimates. One Nicollet County uses a pavement tube counter to estimate visitors at its Seven Mile Creek Park.

**How much are operations and maintenance costs for regional parks?
How are O&M costs financed?**

The attached spreadsheet contains county and city responses to how much it costs to operate and maintain regional parks. O&M costs range from \$1,000 in Sherburne County where maintenance consists of mowing and trail grooming to \$720,000 in Stearns County. The average for O&M costs was about \$157,000 in 2002.

When asked how they financed regional park operating and maintenance costs, 15 (or 88%) responded that they used general local tax revenues, 4 (or 24%) used other revenues, predominantly donations or grants, 12 (or 71%) relied on user fees primarily from camping, picnic shelter rentals.

How many counties and cities use annual vehicle or daily parking permits for their non-metropolitan regional parks?

Of the counties and cities responding to the survey, three charged an entrance fee to specific high-use parks in their jurisdiction:

1. Chisago County charges \$15 for an annual vehicle permit and \$3 for a daily parking fee on weekends and holidays for Fish Lake Park only.

2. Olmsted County charges entrance fees for Chester Woods Park only. An annual vehicle permit costs \$15 (\$10 for seniors) and the daily parking fee costs \$3.
3. Stearns County charges \$14 for an annual vehicle permit, \$4 for daily parking, and \$15 for buses to enter Quarry Park and Nature Preserve.

Other revenue generating activities / facilities [edit]

Most of the counties and cities generate revenue from camping and the rental of picnic shelters. Of the 11 counties and cities provide camping in their regional parks, camping fees range from \$5 to \$16 per night for primitive campsites to \$10.50 to \$20 per night for campsites with electricity and water.

Chisago, Meeker, and Stearns counties are the only entities to use concessionaires to provide soft drinks, candy, and snacks at their regional parks.

Anticipated changes in fees

The entrance fees for Quarry Park in Stearns County were increased effective July 1, 2003, along with fees for renting picnic shelters and the nature center. Four other jurisdictions also anticipate changes in user fees and charges, including:

1. Chisago County may add days during the week when a daily parking fee is required at Fish Lake Park.
2. Lyon County is looking at raising camping fees in 2004 from \$7 to \$10 for primitive camp site and from \$10 to \$12 for electrical sites.
3. Meeker County may increase picnic shelter rental rates to help offset costs.
4. Olmsted County will probably increase vehicle entry permits for Chester Woods Park \$5 to \$25; camping rates will probably increase from \$12 to \$15 per night without electricity (from what) and from \$15 to \$18 per night with electricity.

What jurisdictions have regional trails?

Eight counties and cities responding to the survey identified regional trails, listed below.

Blue Earth County	Red Jacket Trail	5.6 miles
	South Route Trail	8 miles
Chisago County	Sunrise Prairie Trail	16 miles
Douglas County	Central Lakes Trail	36 miles
Goodhue County	Cannon Valley Trail	19.7 miles
	Goodhue Pioneer Trail	4 miles
Lancaster / Kittson Co.	Wayside Park Trail	2 miles
Austin / Mower County	Shooting Star Trail	8 miles
Stearns County	Lake Wobegon Trail	46 miles
	Sauk River Canoe Route	90 miles
Todd County	Lake Wobegon Trail	7.6 miles

How much are O&M costs for trails? How are O&M costs financed?

The attached spreadsheet contains county and city responses to how much it costs to operate and maintain the regional trails. O&M costs range from \$11,500 in Blue Earth County to \$135,000 in Goodhue County.

O&M costs are financed with a combination of general local tax levies (4 responses), government aid (1), state trail funds (2), and user fees (1).

Trail Visitation Data and Fees

The Cannon Valley Trail in Goodhue County and the Lake Wobegon Trail in Stearns County are the only trails with visitation information. In Goodhue County visitor counts are based on wheel pass sales and volunteers who count trail users. Stearns County uses infrared beam trail traffic counters and volunteers.

Of the jurisdictions responding to our survey, Goodhue County is the only one that uses a "wheel pass" or permit for trail access. The permit costs \$3 per day or \$12 per season for use of the Cannon Valley Trail. Permits are enforced by checking individual riders for a pass and spot checks by the County Sheriff's Department and conservation officers.