

Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails System

Operations and Maintenance Funding

Dear Honorable Legislators:

On behalf of the 10 implementing agencies that make up the Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails System, **we are writing to request your support for SF2114 | HF1564** which includes \$11.05 million in general fund and \$8.95 million from the natural resources fund (lottery-in-lieu) in FY26 and \$21.5 million in general fund and \$8.95 million from the natural resources fund (lottery-in-lieu) in FY27 **for operations and maintenance for Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails.**

Since 1998, state funding has averaged 9% of operation and maintenance costs annually, while state law calls for no less than 40%. With a 9% annual state funding level, this expense falls disproportionately on local taxpayers. The requested approach gradually increases funding to the state commitment of 40% by 2030.

The structure, visitation, and funding of the regional parks and trails makes this a system of regional and statewide significance. The Metropolitan Regional Parks System was established by the Legislature in 1974 to preserve and protect the last great places for outdoor recreation in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Because 93% of state parks and recreation areas are located outside of the Twin Cities, the regional parks function as the state parks of the Metro Area by providing comparable natural settings and recreational opportunities.

Our visitation is also far greater than that of the state park system. More than 69 million visits were made to the system in 2023, and the number continues to grow annually. The need for investment has never been greater, as our parks and trails are being “loved to death.”

With 46 regional parks, 12 park reserves, 8 special recreation features, and over 500 miles of regional trails, it takes more than \$133 million each year to keep the whole system in good order. Funding covers the costs of facility maintenance, repair and restoration, trail maintenance and upkeep and forestry and groundskeeping. When the state funds operations and maintenance for metropolitan regional parks and trails, it’s investing in the people who call this region home – creating high-quality spaces to connect in the outdoors, places that build health, and assets that drive our economy.

We thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our request.

Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails System

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