REGIONAL PARKS FOR MINNESOTA'S OUTSTATE URBAN COMPLEXES

PREPARED FOR:

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Community Growth Institute created the maps of the proposed Regional Recreation Resource Districts.

REGIONAL PARKS FOR MINNESOTA'S NEW OUTSTATE URBAN COMPLEXES

- This project has identified the most scenic places in the fastest growing counties of Minnesota.
- Population in the identified outstate urban complexes will account for 1/3 of all of the projected population growth in Minnesota between 2000 and 2030.
- These complexes are Minnesota's new cities and they will need a wide array of urban services, one of the most important being a regional recreation open space system equal in quality to the metropolitan regional park system.
- To acquire and develop a high quality park system that can adequately serve these new cities, Minnesota will have to invest approximately $250,000,000.
- A new management structure is the best way to maintain the value and quality of these areas as open space assets for attracting tourism, sustained development, recreation, agricultural investment, employers, and residents.
- This structure requires the ability to comprehensively manage private land uses and vertically integrate public land management to ensure that these areas maintain their competitiveness in a global marketplace as treasure worthy of investment.
- It is the goal of this report to generate the needed public discussion on what our new urban areas should look like, the public role in their management, and how to make them competitive with the new high amenity cities being created in other parts of the U.S. This discussion must begin NOW.

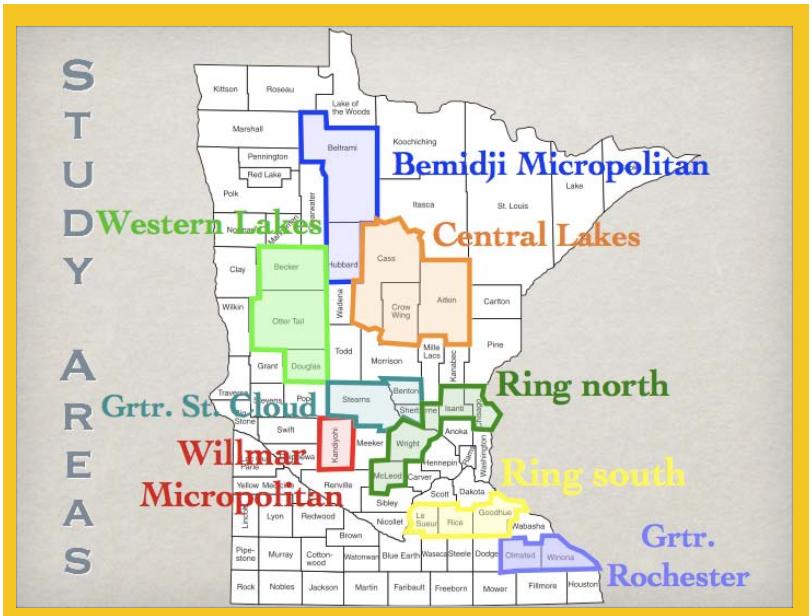
Introduction

Background

From the end of World War II until 1970, most population growth in Minnesota was in the seven county metropolitan area, and in regional trade centers like St. Cloud and Mankato. Beginning in about 1970 a new era of urbanization based on electronics and communication has created a new pattern of population growth and a new set of challenges for policy makers. The personnel computer, internet, and low cost phone service are making it possible for individuals in remote sites to have nearly the same access to information and communication as an individual living and working in a large metropolitan area. This technological change has given many workers the ability to live where they traditionally just vacationed. Longer and healthier lifespans have made it possible for retirees to also make this move to outstate amenity areas. These factors have created a new pattern of urbanization in Minnesota, and the growth of these new urban complexes has accounted for much of the above average population growth of the state.

The population in almost one quarter of rural Minnesota is growing at over ten percent per decade, and this growth is projected to continue. This growth is predominately amenity related and is concentrated in hilly-forested-lake regions.

Modern amenity-related growth has resulted in the development of new urban complexes. Six of these urban complexes and two smaller "micropolitan" areas are included in this study. Duluth and the Iron Range are not included because of the relatively light population growth and the wealth of recreational facilities.



According to the State Demographer's projections these study areas will absorb 1/3 of Minnesota's projected population growth between 2000 and 2030. (See Table 8 in Appendix A).

The largest new urban complex in Minnesota is comprised of the counties surrounding the Seven County Metropolitan Area. It is now the second largest urban concentration in Minnesota. Most of this urban complex has been built since 1970, and it is a low density city-in-the-country. Its neighborhoods are clustered around lakes, forests, hills, and highway intersections. Similar settlement patterns are occurring in the other new urban complexes.

Greater St. Cloud and Greater Rochester are also growing rapidly and much of their growth is populating high amenity sites within 30 miles of these centers.

The most dramatic new urban complex to emerge since 1970 is the Central Lakes Urban Complex centered on Baxter/Brainerd. This lake-oriented complex now has 100,000 permanent residents, most of whom are clustered around the major lakes of the area.

The newest urban complex is the Western Lakes Region, which extends from Alexandria to Detroit Lakes. The micropolitan areas of Bemidji and Willmar are experiencing rapid growth, which is also linked to the high amenities of their respective areas.

Within these new urban complexes the automobile and expansive road network allow people to cover large distances to get to work, home, and play, resulting in sprawl based development, and the high consumption of open space. This rapid consumption of land is causing open space which historically provided valued visual amenities and outdoor recreation opportunities, to disappear. These amenity and recreation areas become unusable, and if the resource survives it is of diminished quality. As an amenity area becomes developed, new development moves to other less developed amenities. This is observed as most high quality lakeshore becomes developed, new development moves to the edge of pubic open space. This "ringing" of natural resource amenities can diminish the value of the initial public investment made to preserve the open space. This is a special problem around public hunting areas, and is increasingly observed and discussed in relation to areas such as Carlos Avery Wildlife Management Area.

This project assumes that our new urban areas will need similar kinds and quality of urban infrastructure as our established large urban areas, but at a lower density and in a different pattern. This study concentrates on the open space and recreation component of the needed urban systems. Other projects will need to address other urban systems such as water supply, waste management, transportation etc. To have an effective and functioning system of open space and recreation infrastructure, the planning and investment must be made early. Once the region is developed it is too late to acquire and connect the assets needed to provide a high-quality open space resource.

In determining the raw acreage and investment necessary to make each outstate urban complex equitable with the open space systems Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, the current, and projected, populations of the urban areas were used as a basis for the calculation. Equity between the new outstate urban complexes and the Metro is the basic principle used in determining the amount of park space needed in each study area.

THE STUDY AREAS:

- The Ring (Northern Section: Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, McLeod, Wright and eastern Sherburne counties. Southern Section: Goodhue, LeSueur, and Rice counties.)
- The Greater St. Cloud Region (Benton, Stearns, and western Sherburne counties.)
- The Greater Rochester Region (Olmsted and Winona counties.)
- The Central Lakes Region (Aitkin, Cass, and Crow Wing counties.)
- The Western Lakes (Becker, Otter Tail, and Douglas counties.)
- Two Micropolitan Areas
  - Greater Willmar (Kandiyohi County)
  - Greater Bemidji (Beltrami and Hubbard counties)

The amount of needed Regional Recreation Parkland was determined for each region by applying the current and projected population for each region to a formula designed to calculate the amount of land needed to make park distribution equitable with the present Metropolitan Regional Park standards. That number was then subtracted by all "Potential Regional Parklands" as identified by previous LCMR studies to determine the needed acreage. Even assuming that ALL potential regional parklands are incorporated into the New Outstate Regional Park System, by 2030 all of the study areas will be deficient in Regional Recreation open space.

OUTSTATE PARKLAND NEEDS TO REACH EQUITY WITH THE SEVEN COUNTY METRO:

- The Ring is currently deficient more than 4,000 acres of regional parklands. This deficiency will increase to over 8,450 acres by 2030 if more lands are not incorporated into the system.
- The St. Cloud Region is currently deficient by 2,674 acres which will increase to nearly 4,500 acres of needed lands by 2030.
- The Greater Rochester Study Region is currently in need of more than 1,050 acres and will need nearly 2,400 acres by 2030 to maintain equity with the Twin Cities Metro Area.
- The Central Lakes Region currently requires almost 2,000 new acres to satisfy the needs of its permanent and seasonal residents, and will need an additional 4,500 acres by 2030.
- The Western Lakes is severely deficient and currently needs over 4,000 acres to maintain equity of parkland distribution with the Metro, and will need nearly 5,700 acres by 2030.
- Bemidji has sufficient *potential* parkland, but this acreage must be developed to provide the high-quality assets that are needed.
- Willmar currently has no potential regional parklands and needs over 1,000 acres for the present population.

The investments needed are significant and Tables "A" and "B" demonstrate the acreage and dollar requirements to provide for current needs (2000) and projected needs (2030). The State will need to invest between 89 and 133 million dollars to meet the current needs, and between 161 and 241 million dollars to meet the future needs. These tables assume that ALL identified potential regional parks are incorporated into the system but does not estimate the cost of making those lands Regional Parks. While the numbers in the following tables are large, they are a best-case scenario and are in today's dollars.

Table A

Current Regional Park Acquisition and Development Investment Needs for Outstate Minnesota Urban Complexes (HIGH estimate)*

Study Area	Total Acreage Needed to Meet Standard	New Acreage Needed to Meet Standard	Land Acquisition Costs ($6000 per acre)	Development Cost of Acquired Land ($3000 per acre)	Total Investment per Study Area	Percent of Total Investment per Study Area
Metro Ring North	6,413	2,983	$17,898,000	$8,949,000	$26,847,000	20%
Metro Ring South	3,155	1,023	$6,138,000	$3,069,000	$9,207,000	7%
St. Cloud Region	4,689	2,674	$16,044,000	$8,022,000	$24,066,000	18%
Rochester / Winona	4,357	1,078	$6,468,000	$3,234,000	$9,702,000	7%
Central Lakes**	4,625	1,910	$11,460,000	$5,730,000	$17,190,000	13%
Western Lakes**	4,499	4,114	$24,684,000	$12,342,000	$37,026,000	28%
Bemidji Micropolitan**	2,176	0	$0	$0	$0	0%
Willmar Micropolitan	1,030	1,030	$6,180,000	$3,090,000	$9,270,000	7%
TOTALS	30,944	14,812	$88,872,000	$44,436,000	$133,308,000	100%

*This Estimate DOES NOT INCLUDE the cost to bring existing potential regional parklands up to the Outstate Regional Recreation Park standard. **The acreage needs for these areas are based on a seasonally adjusted population, as explained in the report.

Table B

Projected 2030 Regional Park Acquisition and Development Investment Needs for Outstate Minnesota Urban Complexes (HIGH estimate)*

Study Area	Total Acreage Needed to Meet Standard	New Acreage Needed to Meet Standard	Land Acquisition Costs ($6000 per acre)	Development Cost of Acquired Land ($3000 per acre)	Total Investment per Study Area	Percent of Total Investment per Study Area
Metro Ring North	9,943	6,513	$39,078,000	$19,539,000	**$58,617,000**	24%
Metro Ring South	4,075	1,943	$11,658,000	$5,829,000	**$17,487,000**	7%
St. Cloud Region	6,511	4,496	$26,976,000	$13,488,000	**$40,464,000**	17%
Rochester / Winona	5,666	2,387	$14,322,000	$7,161,000	**$21,483,000**	9%
Central Lakes**	7,144	4,429	$26,574,000	$13,287,000	**$39,861,000**	17%
Western Lakes**	6,061	5,676	$34,056,000	$17,028,000	**$51,084,000**	21%
Bemidji Micropolitan**	3,114	114	$684,000	$342,000	**$1,026,000**	0%
Willmar Micropolitan	1,192	1,192	$7,152,000	$3,576,000	**$10,728,000**	4%
TOTALS	43,706	26,750	$160,500,000	$80,250,000	**$240,750,000**	100%

*This Estimate DOES NOT INCLUDE the cost to bring existing potential regional parklands up to the Outstate Regional Recreation Park standard. **The acreage needs for these areas are based on a seasonally adjusted population, as explained in the report.

The report has also developed cost projections based on an acquisition cost of $4000 per acre and a development cost of $2000 per acre. Tables containing these projections are included in Appendix A.

The Metropolitan area has developed a regional park system based on large tracts of contiguous public ownership averaging about 1,000 acres in size. Duplicating this type of a system in outstate urban complexes will be challenging without the use of eminent domain and strong local zoning. These tools are not universally used in outstate urban complexes, so the creation of large contiguous tracts may be difficult. Further complicating creation of large open space parks is the development pattern of these new urban areas. Even though there are large amounts of open space, development tends to cluster in and around high amenity areas (hills, trees, and water), which are the same resources needed for regional parks.

To adequately describe the park system proposed in this report, it was necessary to develop maps of actual park locations. Several statewide data bases were utilized: water resources, topography, land cover, and existing public ownership. From these databases several maps were developed to identify scenically attractive areas and existing public ownership. The "scenically attractive" series of maps combines topography, surface water resources, and forest vegetation. The resulting maps shows the areas in Minnesota that have the most relief, are near surface water and are forested, when combined with knowledge of where the highest population growth will be occurring an outline of prime candidate locations for regional recreation parks is generated.

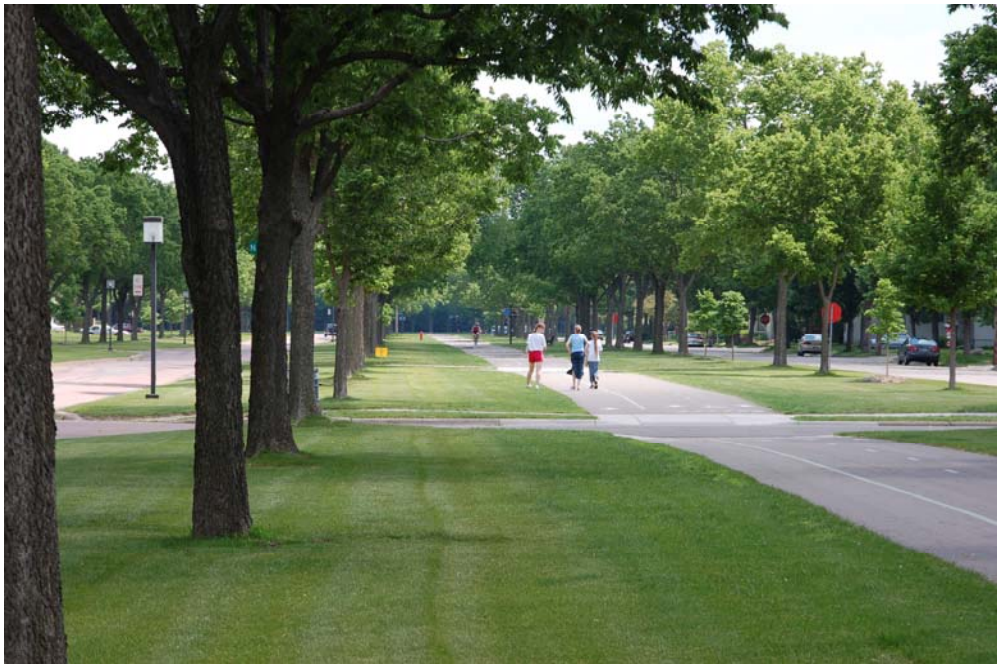
Upon completing the mapping it became apparent that the acreage needed, while sufficient for recreational purposes, was not sufficient to maintain the character of the study areas, much less maintain the services that the traditional open spaces provide. People are attracted to, and spend large sums of money to experience the character of the "North Woods or Lake Woebegone Countryside," but the acreage that this project identifies for preservation in these areas is not sufficient to protect its invaluable character.

The challenges presented in this study necessitated development of an expanded definition of regional parks to include a new management unit called a "Regional Recreation Resource District." This concept is built to compliment the Recreation State Park component of the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation System. This new concept draws from tried and tested conservation schemes such as New York's Adirondack Park District, the English Lake District National Park northwest of London, and the Deep Portage Conservation Reserve of Cass County Minnesota. Within a Regional Recreation Resource Districts key tracts of regional parkland can be purchased and developed with adjoining private land protected by strong zoning. Compatible development on private land within the Regional Recreation Resource District can be encouraged through zoning and economic development incentives that are managed by a governing board. Other public land management units can be included in the District where compatible with the

District's goals and coordinated by the governing board.

Public ownership maps were combined with the above described amenity data to identify potential locations for the Regional Recreation Resource Districts. Existing public ownership in the proposed districts highlights opportunities for interagency cooperation or land trading to further the regional recreation needs of the outstate urban complexes. This cooperation can reduce public investment costs for land acquisition, eliminate facility duplication, and increase the overall quality of experiences offered in the New Regional Parks and Recreation Resource Districts.

This current proposal contains sixteen Regional Recreation Resource Districts distributed throughout the eight outstate urban complexes. These proposed Districts contain about 2 million acres which is approximately 4% of the State. The proposed Districts represent the highest amenity locations in fastest growing outstate urban complexes.



Weber Parkway in North Minneapolis.

Table C

Regional Recreation Resource District Size and Location

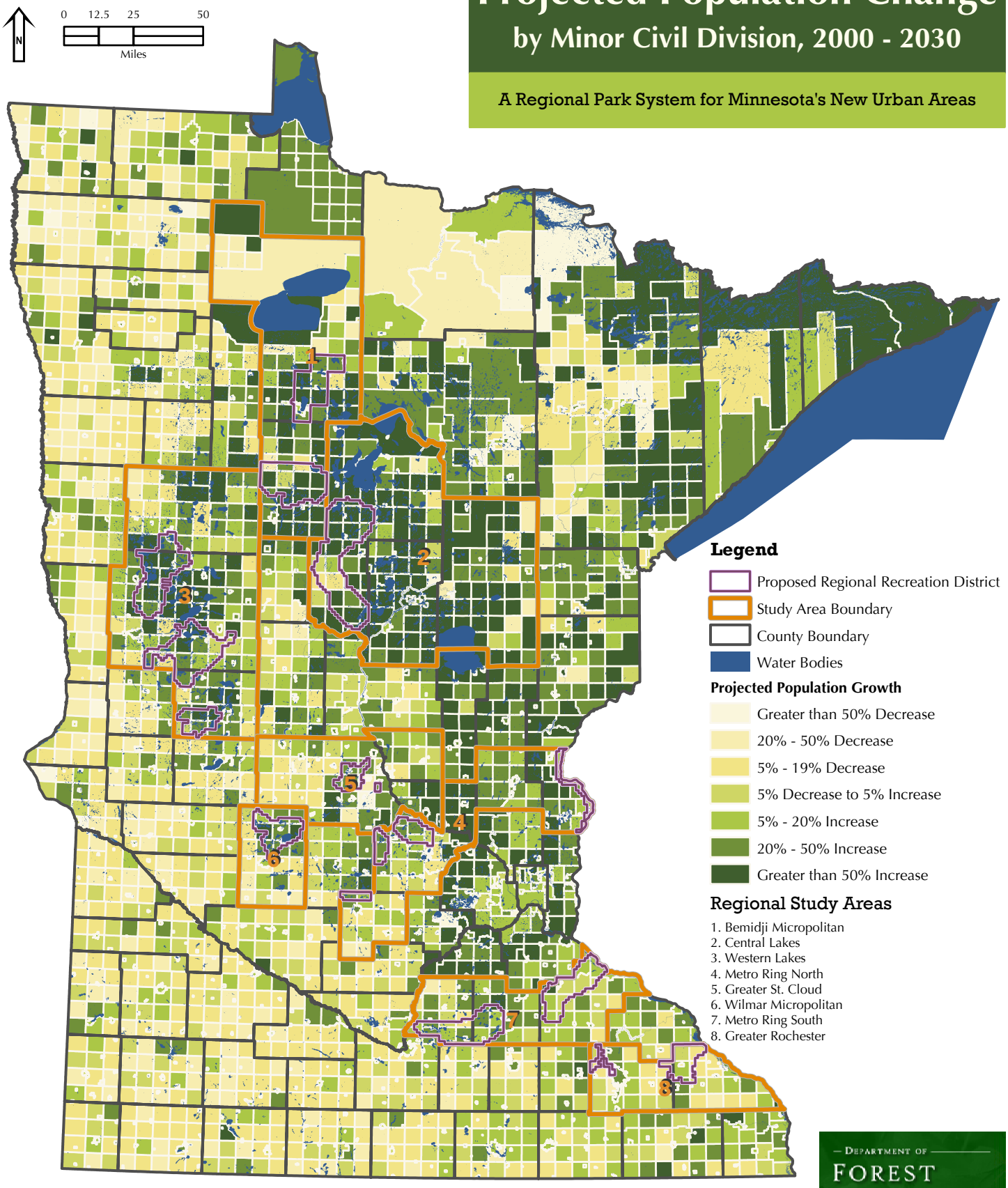
Urban Complex	Location	Name ?	Square Miles	Acres
Metro Ring North	Northwestern Wright	?	53	33,741
Metro Ring North	Northern Wright		96	61,169
Metro Ring North	Northern McLeod		32	20,525
Metro Ring North	St. Croix Valley - Chisago		63	40,173
Metro Ring South	Southern LeSueur / Western Rice		264	169,245
Metro Ring South	Northern Goodhue		227	145,421
Greater St. Cloud	Eastern Stearns		81	51,914
Greater St. Cloud	Eastern Stearns		6	3,817
Central Lakes	Central Cass		540	345,812
Western Lakes	Becker / Otter Tail		319	204,121
Western Lakes	Southern Otter Tail - Northern Douglas		343	219,532
Western Lakes	Alexandria Area		110	70,250
Rochester	Western Olmsted		30	19,057
Greater Rochester	Whitewater		134	85,665
Willmar Micropolitan	Willmar		170	108,957
Bemidji	Bemidji		554	354,874
		TOTALS	3,022	1,934,273

By retaining the natural character and integrity of certain areas of the state these areas become, recreation, tourism, natural resource showcases that are easily accessible to many people. The working value of the land is sustained, the ecosystem services are preserved and Minnesota has outdoor amenities that can(compete nationally and internationally for jobs, investment, and tourism. On the following maps (2 and 2A) the land that meets this need is outlined in purple. The identified land is the highest amenity value land in the areas of highest population growth.

MAP 2 OF 20

Projected Population Change
by Minor Civil Division, 2000 - 2030

A Regional Park System for Minnesota's New Urban Areas



Legend

- Proposed Regional Recreation District
- Study Area Boundary
- County Boundary
- Water Bodies

Projected Population Growth

- Greater than 50% Decrease
- 20% - 50% Decrease
- 5% - 19% Decrease
- 5% Decrease to 5% Increase
- 5% - 20% Increase
- 20% - 50% Increase
- Greater than 50% Increase

Regional Study Areas

1. Bemidji Micropolitan
2. Central Lakes
3. Western Lakes
4. Metro Ring North
5. Greater St. Cloud
6. Wilmar Micropolitan
7. Metro Ring South
8. Greater Rochester

Prepared April 2007
Data Sources: Minnesota State Demographer's Office, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Council

Funding provided by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR)

Community Growth Institute

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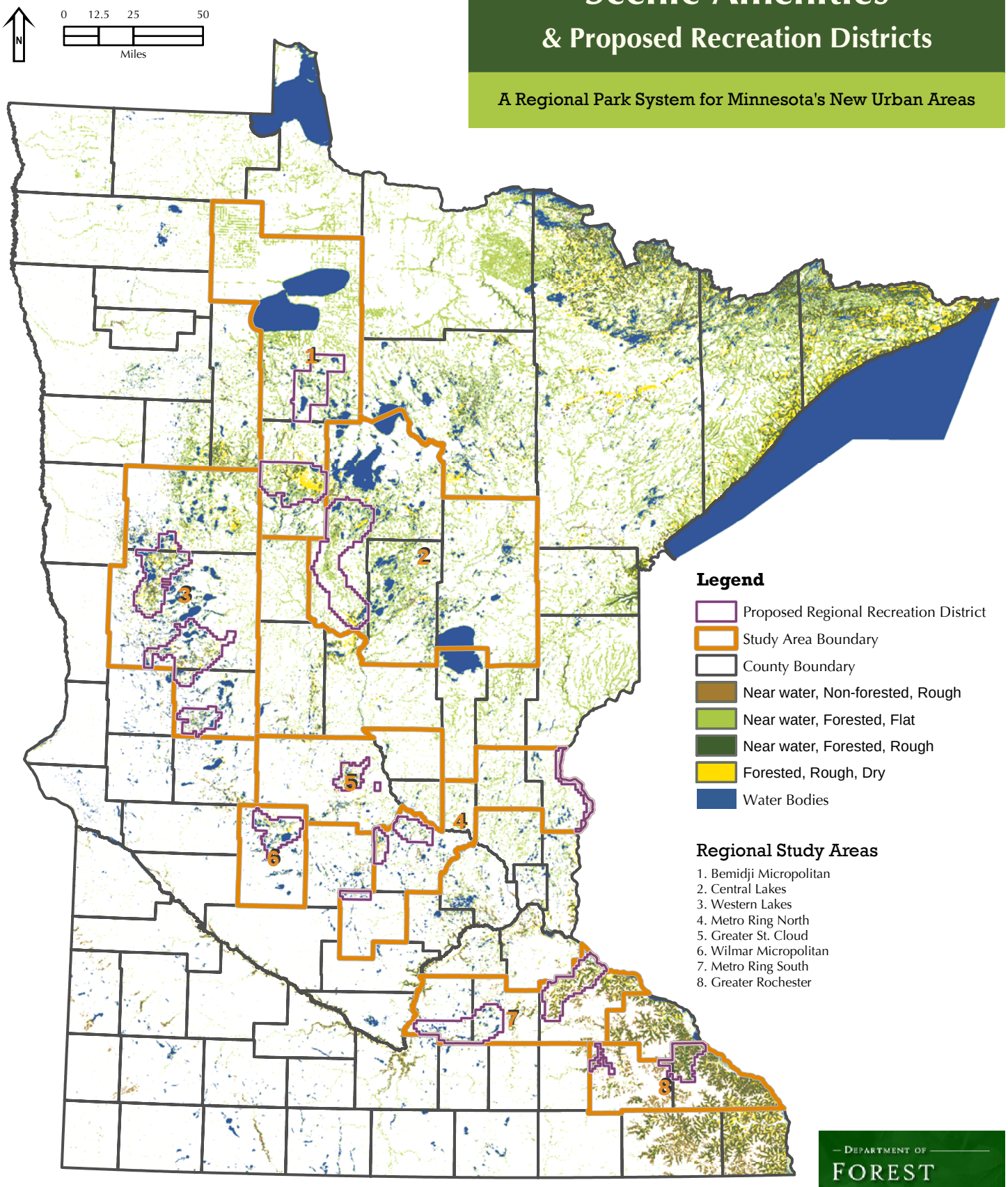
University of Minnesota

MAP 2A OF 20

Scenic Amenities
& Proposed Recreation Districts

A Regional Park System for Minnesota's New Urban Areas



Prepared March 2007
Data Sources: Minnesota State Demographer's Office, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Council

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Programs and Services Coordinated by Regional Recreation Resource Districts

Regional Recreation Resource Districts

Scope of Authority

To be effective, the Entity charged with running the Regional Recreation Resource Districts (RRRD) must have the ability to coordinate a broad range of governmental programs and departments. It is essential to vertically integrate the public programs and services to ensure that they are providing the needed resource. Those resources may include; wildlife, timber, scenic, recreational, etc.
Beyond vertically integrating public assets, the Entity should also have the capacity to assist with private commercial and economic development. This assistance will be in the form of grant allocation, education, zoning, etc.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

National Forests

Waterfowl Production Areas

Waterfowl Production Easements

National Wildlife Refuges

STATE GOVERNMENT

State Parks

State Recreation Area

Historic Sites

State Trails

Grant in Aid Trails

Public Water Access

State Park Road Grants

State Forests

State Forest Roads

Scientific and Natural Areas

Wildlife Management Areas

Greenways

Land Acquisition and Development Grant Programs

BWSR Programs

Highways in Scenic Areas

State Zoning (Shoreland and Floodplain)

Lake Management

New Programs: Heritage Fishing, Leased Public Access Areas

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

County Memorial Forest

County Tax Forfeit Land

County Parks

City Parks

Township Parks

Trails

Scenic Roads

LOCAL ZONING

Environmental Education

School District Recreation Areas

PRIVATE

Conservation For Non Profits (Ducks Unlimited, Trust For Public Land, Nature Conservancy, Minnesota Land Trust, etc)

Game Farms

Restaurants

Forest / Agricultural Production Areas

Water-parks

Lodging (bed and breakfasts, Motels, RV Parks, Campgrounds)